

# THE CHOLAS (PART-1)

B.A , PART-2, PAPER-3

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# INTRODUCTION

- The Cholas dynasty was one of the earliest dynasties that ruled in South India. During the Sangam period it maintained its power and prestige. But after that for several centuries it lost its positions. However the Cholas revived their glory in the middle of the 9th century C.E and maintained its supremacy for about four centuries. There were 20 rulers of the dynasty.
- ***Vijayalaya (850-875 C.E)*** was the founder of the dynasty. The most important rulers of the Chola dynasty were Rajaraja Chola, Rajendra Chola and Rajadhiraja Chola. The period of the Cholas was not only remarkable for political integration of South India, but for the development in art, architecture, literature, trade and maritime activities. The Chola Empire included almost the whole of Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, parts of Karnataka, Coorg, and northern part of Ceylon etc.

# EARLY HISTORY

- The illustrious Chola dynasty and the kingdom they ruled was known to Panini and acknowledged by Asoka Maurya the Great as an independent entity. Further, the Mayra records confirm that the northern boundary of the Chola holdings was the River Pennar. In fact the limits of Chola Mandalam, the 'Chola Country', in the north and west are determined by tradition and mark the ethnic difference between different peoples rather than political boundaries. During the period of Pallava ascendancy, the Chola kingdom had been weakened and reduced to a much smaller territorial holding, although the dynasty continued to maintain some semblance of independence.

# EARLY HISTORY

- The Chola dynasty is prominently mentioned in the early Tamil literature as well as in Greek and Roman chronicles. During the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E, ports on the Chola coast, transliterated as the 'Coromandal coast', conducted active trade with the West. The main Chola port at that time was Kaveripattinam located at the northern mouth of the River Kaveri. The port is non-existent now. From here the Chola fleet sailed out across the Bay of Bengal to the mouths of the great Rivers Ganga and Irrawaddy, and then ranged across the Malay Archipelago. During its heydays, the Chola kingdom was one of the most predominant maritime powers of the region. The Cholas are celebrated in the Sangam literature although their power seems to have been in decline from the 3rd century C.E onwards.

# EARLY HISTORY

- There is very limited interpretable information available regarding the Cholas from the 4th to 7th centuries C.E. At this stage the Chinese traveler Hieun Tsang once again comes to the rescue of Indian historical narrative. He visited Kanchi around the year C.E 640 and mentions the kingdom of Chu-li-ya (Chola) that was restricted to an area of a 500-mile circumference and being ruled from a small non-descriptive town located about 200 miles south-west of Amaravati. Essentially this territory would be the larger Cudappah district and the country is reported as being rugged and wild with the scanty indigenous population being fierce warriors. It is obvious that the Chola ruler, whose name is not mentioned in the Hieun Tsang chronicles, was subordinate to the Pallava king.

# EARLY HISTORY

The defeat of the Pallavas by Chalukya Vikramaditya in C.E 740 provided the opportunity for the Chola king to rebel from a position of insignificance and recover the dynastic fortunes. The Chola king, Vijayalaya who claimed descent from the Sun as a Suryavanshi, came to the throne in mid 9th century C.E and wrested control of Tanjore from a local chieftain Muttarayer who was a Pandyan subject. Vijayalaya ruled for 34 years and was succeeded by his son Aditya (c. 880-907 C.E) who went on to defeat Aparajita Pallava, conclusively ending the Pallava supremacy in the region. He also conquered the Kongu country and consolidated the annexed territories into a functioning kingdom. Aditya's son

# EARLY HISTORY

Parantaka I who came to the throne in C.E 907 left behind over 40 stone inscriptions dating from the 3rd to the 41st year of his rule. Thereafter a great deal of accurate information is available regarding the Chola dynasty. Parantaka I, who was married to the daughter of the Chera king Sthanuravi was an ambitious and capable king and warrior. He conquered the Pallava kingdom, and invaded and captured the Pandyan capital of Madurai, sending the Pandyan king into exile. He also invaded Ceylon, although this expedition was not very successful other than in collecting a large amount of war booty. The inscriptions made during his rule provide detailed descriptions of the

# EARLY HISTORY

village administration favoured by the Cholas. On the death of Parantaka in 949, his son Rajaditya assumed the throne. However, he was killed in the Battle of Takkolam by the Rashtrakuta king Krishnaraja III and was followed by five obscure and insignificant rulers which created a turmoil for nearly 30 years in the Chola kingdom.

(To be continued)