

THE CHOLAS (PART-2)

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RISE OF IMPERIAL CHOLA

- Parantaka had anticipated trouble for the kingdom from the north-west and accordingly placed his eldest son Rajaditya in that region, giving him charge of a large army, which also contained the elephant corps. Unfortunately Rajaditya was killed in the ***Battle of Takkolam*** in the same year that he assumed the throne, and the Cholas were forced to cede the northern part of the kingdom to the victorious Rashtrakutas. The Chola throne then fell into the hands of Gandaraditya, who was more religiously oriented than fit to rule a kingdom already in turmoil. By the end of his seven-year rule, in C.E 957, the once illustrious Chola kingdom had been reduced to a small principality. At this stage Krishnaraja III, the Rashtrakuta king, still occupied Tondai Mandalam.

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Gandaraditya was followed by his brother Arinjaya who ruled only for two years. Arinjaya was succeeded by his son Sundara Chola, who was forced to concentrate his military activities to the south because Vira Pandya, the Pandyan king had declared independence with the assistance of Mahinda IV, the king of Ceylon. Sundara Chola defeated Vira Pandya who was killed by the crown prince Aditya Chola II in the course of the second battle of the campaign.

Sundara Chola then invaded Ceylon in C.E 959 although it did not result in any definitive results. Further, the victories over the Pandyas also did not re-establish Chola power. After putting out the rebellion in the south to some

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satisfaction, Sundara Chola turned his attention to the north. Unfortunately he died while preparing to campaign against the Rashtrakutas. At this stage Uttama Chola, the son of Gandaraditya had conspired and assassinated Aditya Chola II and had forced Sundara to declare him heir apparent, instead of Arumolivarman the younger son and next in line for the throne. Uttama became king in C.E 973 and was defeated by the Chalukya Taila II in C.E 980.

- **Rajaraja Chola 'the Great' (c.985-1014 C.E):** In 985, Prince Arumolivarman assumed the throne crowning 'the Great', while some others refute him this status. In any case he put

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an end to the intrigue that was becoming a hallmark of Chola dynastic succession and turned out to be an extremely capable ruler. He reigned for a busy 28 years and towards the end of his reign he was known as the '**Lord Paramount of Southern India**'. At his death the Chola kingdom consisted of the entire Madras region, a large part of Ceylon and a major portion of Mysore.

- **Conquests of Rajaraja's:** Early in his reign Rajaraja destroyed the Chera naval fleet and defeated a confederation of the Pandya, Chera and Ceylon kingdoms in two separate campaigns. He devastated the Pandya kingdom and then went on to conquer the haughty Chera (Kerala) king,

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attacking and laying waste the towns of Kandalur and Villinum. Between C.E 995 and 1000, Vengi the erstwhile Eastern Chalukya kingdom was the Pallavas; Coorg was taken from the Pandyas; and extensive portions of the Deccan tableland brought under direct Chola control. Rajaraja then turned his attention to the trading posts in the West Coast, where Arab traders had been incorporated into the Malabar society and were proving to be competitors to Chola trade in South-East Asia. In a quest to strike at the root of the competition, he invaded and captured the port of Kollam in C.E 1003 from the Cheras. He next conquered Kalinga in the north-east and added it to his domain. Around

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C.E 1005, he embarked on a protracted campaign against Ceylon, annexing the northern part of the island to the Chola holdings. This was his last campaign. By these conquests, the extent of the Chola empire under Rajaraja I included the Pandya,Chera and the Tondaimandalam regions of Tamil Nadu and the Gangavadi, Nolambapadi and the Telugu Choda territories in the Deccan and the northern part of Ceylon and the Maldiv Islands beyond India.

- The last eight years of his reign was peaceful and according to Chola custom his son, the crown prince Rajendra, ruled as equal ruler during this period. Rajendra Chola co-ruled with his father from C.E 1011, although there are minor

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discrepancies in the actual date in different accounts. Since the Cholas had 'inherited' the Pallava lands by this time, the ancient Chalukya-Pallava enmity also came as part of the inheritance taking on the guise of minor internecine wars for almost four years till the final defeat of the Chalukyas, who were by then already subjugated by the Rashtrakutas. Rajaraja maintained a powerful navy, which he used extensively to project Chola power. The last military exploit of Rajaraja was his navy's conquest of Maldives and the Lakadive islands.

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Rajaraja assumed a number of titles like Mummidi Chola, Jayankonda and Sivapadasekara. He was a devout follower of Saivism. He completed the construction of the famous Rajarajeswara temple or Brihadeeswara temple at Tanjore in C.E 1010 C.E. Although the king was a confirmed Shiva worshipper, he was also an enlightened liberal and practised religious tolerance. He had the famous and magnificent Tanjavur (Tanjore) temple built, with its walls engraved with details of his military victories.

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Religious tolerance is one of the hallmarks of medieval Southern rulers and Rajaraja was not an exception. He endowed a Burmese Buddhist temple, which had originally been constructed by Sri Mara Vijayottungavarman the Sailendra ruler of Sri Vijaya, at the port of Nagapatam.

(To be continued)