

The Chera Dynasty

The Chera dynasty was one of the principal lineages to have ruled over southern India in early history. The Cheras controlled the central and northern parts of Kerala and the Kongu region of Tamil Nadu and was a prosperous kingdom owing to its trade with the Romans.

The Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas were the most powerful three kingdoms to have ruled during the [Sangam Age](#), which was the period between the first century BCE to the end of the second century CE.

The Cheras of Ancient South India

- The **Cheras controlled the central and northern parts of Kerala and the Kongu region of Tamil Nadu**
- **Vanji was their capital** and the ports of the west coast, Musiri and Tondi, were under their control
- The **emblem of the Cheras was 'Bow and arrow'**
- The Chera country was geographically well placed to profit from maritime trade via the extensive Indian Ocean networks. Trade of Indian spices, timber, pearls and gems were common
- The Chera kings were also known as "*Keralaputas*" (sons of Kerala)
- **Uthiyan Cheralathan is the earliest known Chera ruler.** Following him, other important rulers of the kingdom include:
 - **Nedunjeral Adan** - He had defeated seven crowned kings and won the title of "*Adhiraja*"
 - **Senguttuvan** - Believed to be the greatest Chera ruler, he was popularly known as Red Chera
 - **Kudakko Ilanjeral Irumporai** - Believed to be one of the last Chera kings
- A lot of scholars have recently accepted that there were two branches of the Chera family:
 - The Patitrupathu speaks of eight Chera kings, their territory and fame
 - The inscriptions of Pugalur near Karur mention Chera kings of three generations.

The Chera Kingdom - Social, Administration & Political Aspects

- Everything that one knows today about the Cheras is through the texts of Sangam Literature. The most common sources include the *Pathitrapattu*, the *Akananuru*, and the *Purananuru*
- **Copper and lead coins were introduced by the Cheras**, which were inspired by the Roman coins. Most of these coins were found in the Amaravati riverbed and are the biggest source of Chera historiography
- Most of the **coins had bow and arrow engraved on them**, which was the emblem of the Cheras
- Of the inscriptions found which depict the existence of the Chera dynasty is the **Pugalur Tamil Brahmi inscription which mentions three generations of Chera rulers**, including Ko Athan Chel Irumporai, his son Perunkkadungo and his son Elangkadungo

- There is some evidence reference in the Shilappadikaram (also referred to as, Silappatikāram, or Silappathikaram) of the '**king's council**' and the other '**five assemblies**'. The function of the five assemblies during the ancient Chera kingdom is not very well mentioned, but it is probable that they were territorially organized

Religion under Chera Kingdom

- In the domain of religion, the Sangam period witnessed peaceful and close interactions between north India and south Indian traditions
- As per scholars, Dravidian religions were practised during the Chera period, this also included an amalgamation of north and south Indian customs
- At the same time, it is also believed that the main religion followed was Hinduisim, but other religions like [Jainism](#) and Buddhism were also practised

Contemporaries of Cheras

Pandya and Chera Conquests & Alliance

In the south, the three family ruling houses the Cholas, the Cheras and the Pandyas were their contemporaries. There were multiple battles that were fought to take over each other's kingdom during the Sangam Age; discussed below are a few common conquests and alliances:

Between the 7th and 8th century AD, there were repeated conquests by the Pandyas over the Cheras:

- **Jayantavarman**, who was a Pandya ruler and commonly known as Seliyan Sendan, **had extended the Pandya rule to the Chera country**
- It is also believed that the **Pandyas had taken over the Kongu Chera capital, Karur**
- Pandya king, **Parantaka Vira Narayana is believed to have married a Chera princess, Vanavan Maha Devi**
- **Nedunchezhiyan** of the second century BCE, a Pandya ruler, is **praised for his victory over the combined army of the Chera, the Chola and five Velir chieftains**

Chola and Chera Conquests & Alliance

- **Nedunjeral Adan**, one of the most prominent Chera ruler, **had fought a war against the Chola, wherein, Adan and the Chola King, both had died**
- **Karikalan**, son of Ilanjetchenni, is portrayed as the greatest Chola of the Sangam age. His **foremost military achievement was the combined defeat of the Cheras and Pandyas, supported by as many as eleven Velir chieftains at Venni.**