

# Rajaraja I

Rajaraja I (947 CE - 1014 CE), also known as Raja Raja the Great or Raja Raja Chozhan, was a Chola king who ruled from 985 CE to 1014 CE. His birth name was Arunmozhi Varman or Arulmozhi Varman. He is known for re-establishing the Chola dominion and securing its dominance over the Indian Ocean during his time as the most powerful ruler in south India. He ruled over a sizable portion of northern Sri Lanka, the Chera country, and the Pandya country. Additionally, he bought Lakshadweep, the Thiladhunmadulu atoll, and a portion of the Maldives' northerly islands in the Indian Ocean. The Chola Empire was able to go as far as the Tungabhadra River thanks to conquests against the Western Gangas and the Chalukyas. He fought the Chalukyas on the eastern shore for control of Vengi. Being a skilled administrator, Rajaraja I also constructed the enormous Brihadisvara Temple in Thanjavur, the Chola capital. Of all the temples built in the mediaeval south Indian architectural style, this one is recognised as the best. Thirumurai, a compilation of the writings of the Tamil poets Appar, Sambandar, and Sundarar, was assembled and edited during his rule. In the year 1000 CE, he started a massive undertaking of land survey and evaluation that resulted in the division of the nation into distinct divisions known as valanadus. Rajaraja passed away in 1014 CE, and his son Rajendra Chola I succeeded him.

## About Rajaraja I

### Early Life of Rajaraja I

The Chola monarch Parantaka II (also known as Sundara) and his queen Vanavan Mahadevi were the parents of Rajaraja. His given name at birth was Arulmozhi Varman, which can alternatively be transliterated as Arunmozhi and means "blessed tongued," as stated in the Thiruvallangadu copper-plate inscription. On the day of the Sadhayam star, in the Aipassi month, about 947 CE, he was born. Aditya II, his older brother, and Kundavai, his older sister, were his siblings. Following the passing of his great-grandfather Parantaka I, Rajaraja's accession to the throne put an end to a period of conflicting royal claims. His eldest son Gandaraditya succeeded Parantaka I as king. The monarchy was transferred to Parantaka I's younger son Arinjaya because Gandaraditya's son Uttama was an infant at the time of his death. Arinjaya soon passed away, and his son Parantaka II succeeded him. The decision was reached that Uttama would succeed Parantaka II as king; Parantaka II most likely made this choice, despite Rajaraja's son Rajendra I's Thiruvallangadu inscription claiming otherwise. Prior to his ascension to the throne in June or July of 985, Rajaraja's older brother passed away. Previously going by the name Arumoi Varman, he now goes by the title Rajaraja, which implies "King among Kings" in Sanskrit.

### Personal Life of Rajaraja I

Rajaraja wed numerous women, including Vanavan Madevi (also known as Thiripuvana Madeviyar), Dantisakti Vitanki (also known as Lokamadevi), Panchavan Madeviyar, Chola Mahadevi (also known as Trailokya Mahadevi), Lata Mahadevi (also known as Lata Mahadevi), Prithvi Mahadevi, Meenavan Mahadevi. At least three of his daughters exist. He had two sons: Rajendra, who was his older son by Thiripuvana Madeviyar, and Araiyan Rajarajan, who was his younger son (Mother unknown). Kundavai, his first child, was born to him and Lokamadevi. Kundavai wed Vimaladithan, a prince of the Chalukyas. Rajaraja passed away in the Tamil month of Maka in 1014 CE, and Rajendra Chola I replaced him.

## Military Conquests of Rajaraja I

Rajaraja took control of a kingdom that was confined to the ancient Chola domain, which was centred around the Thanjavur-Tiruchirappalli region. The Chola kingdom was still recuperating from the Rashtrakuta assaults in the years before his ascent, and it was still rather small. Rajaraja transformed it into a successfully run empire with a potent army and fleet. The northern Vengi kingdom was annexed by the Cholas under his rule, and the Chola influence on the eastern coast reached as far north as Kalinga. The Thanjavur inscriptions make mention of a number of armies. Each of these regiments possessed its own independence and was free to grant benefactions or construct temples. These regiments were subdivided into elephant troops, cavalry, and infantry.

### Battle of Kandalur Salai

The earliest records of Rajaraja refer to him as "Kāṇḍalūr śālai Kalam-arutta" ("the one who destroyed Kandalur Salai") and commemorate a significant victory at Kandalur Salai (in modern-day Kerala) in around 988 CE. The Ay chief, a vassal of the Pandya monarch in Madurai, was the original owner of the Salai. It is unclear whether Chera or Pandya warriors took part in this conflict. According to the Thiruvallangadu inscription, Vizhinjam (also known as Vilinam) was taken by Rajaraja's general; this conquest may have been related to the Kandalur Salai campaign. The Chola navy or a joint effort of the navy and the army appears to have been involved in the engagement.

### Conquest of Kerala and the Pandyas

Inscriptions from Rajaraja begin to surface in the early 1000s in Trivandrum district and the CE 990s in Kanyakumari district. Kerala was ruled by the Cholas beginning in the first decade of the 11th century. Rajaraja is said to have devastated the Pandyan capital Madurai and subdued the "haughty rulers" of Kollam (Venad), Kolla-desham (Mushika), and Kodungallur (the Chera Perumal), according to the Senur inscription from 1005 CE. Rajendra Chola, the son of the Chola king Rajaraja I, may have helped his father achieve some of these victories in Malainadu. The Pandya nation became known as "Rajaraja Mandalam" or "Rajaraja Pandinadu" after Rajaraja's victory against them, earning him the moniker Pandya Kulashani ("Thunderbolt to the Race of the Pandyas"). The Thiruvallangadu Grant of Rajendra I mentions the Rajaraja's campaign in trisanku katha (the south) and mentions that he captured some royal Amarabhujanga. Unresolved is whether this prince is a Kongu Chera royal, a Pandya prince, or a general of the Pandya ruler. An account of the Kongu Nadu region called Kongu Desa Rajakkal says that this general later switched his allegiance to Rajaraja and participated in the Chola king's kanakabhisheka ritual. Rajaraja adopted the epithet Mummudi Chola ("the Chola who Wears Three Crowns") after establishing his power in the south, a reference to his dominance over the three historic Tamil nations of the Cholas, Pandyas, and Cheras.

### Conquest of Sri Lanka/Anuradhapura

Rajaraja conquered Sri Lanka, known in Chola records as Ila-mandalam, in 993. Mahinda V of Anuradhapura, who, as per the Chulavamsa chronicle, withdrew to Rohana (Ruhuna) in south-eastern Sri Lanka due to a military insurrection, was most likely in power during the time when this invasion occurred. Anuradhapura was destroyed, and the northern part of Sri Lanka was taken by the Chola army. At the Polonnaruwa military station, the Cholas built a provincial capital that they called Jananatha Mangalam after a Rajaraja title. In the kingdom of Mahatittha (modern Mantota), which was renamed Rajaraja-pura, the Chola official Tali Kumaran built a Shiva temple with the name Rajarajeshvara ("Lord of Rajaraja"). According to the Thiruvallangadu Plates, which compare Rajaraja's mission to the legendary hero Rama's conquest of Lanka:

*"Rama built with the aid of monkeys, a causeway across the sea, and then with great difficulties defeated the king of Lanka by means of sharp edged arrows. But Rama was excelled by this king whose powerful army crossed the ocean by ships and burnt up the king of Lanka."* - **Thiruvallangadu Copper Plates**

Rajendra I, a son of Rajaraja, finished the Chola conquest of Sri Lanka in 1017 CE. The Cholas ruled Sri Lanka until Vijayabahu I beat and drove them out in 1070.

## Conflict with the Chalukyas

Rajaraja conquered the areas of Gangavadi, Nolambavadi, and Tadigaipadi (modern day Karnataka) in 998 CE. When Raja Chola conquered and annexed Nolambavadi, he put an end to the Nolambas, who were Ganga's feudatories. The Rashtrakutas had previously held feudatories in the conquered provinces. The Western Chalukyas' victory over the Rashtrakutas in 973 CE brought about direct conflict with the Cholas. Irvabedanga Satyashraya is identified as a vassal of the Western Chalukyas in an inscription from Dharwar that also acknowledges the Chola invasion. In the same inscription, he accuses Rajendra of invading Donuwara with a 9,55,000 - strong troop and violating the Dharmasastras' prohibitions on immoral behaviour during battle. James Heitzman and Wolfgang Schenkluhn, two historians, make a comparison between the hostility between the Chalukyas of Badami and the Pallavas of Kanchi and say that this conflict revealed the amount of personal antipathy between the kings of the Chola and Chalukya kingdoms. By 1004 CE, Rajaraja had taken control of the Gangavadi region. Both the Chandalvas and the Kongalvas, who controlled the western region of the Gangavadi province and Kodagu, were reduced to vassals. The Arkalgud Yelusuvira - 7,000 territory and the title of Kshatriyasikhamani were given to the Chola general Panchavan Maraya for defeating the Chandalvas in the battle of Ponnasoge and exhibiting distinction in this matter.

The territory of Malambai (Coorg) and the title of Kshatriyasikhamani were given to the Kongalvas as a reward for Manya's bravery. Jata Choda Bhima of the Eastern Chalukyas dynasty governed the Vengi kingdom. Rajaraja vanquished Jata Choda Bhima, and Saktivarman was appointed viceroy of the Chola Dynasty and given the kingdom of Vengi. In 1001 CE, Bhima overthrew the Chola army and took control of Kanchi. Before installing Saktivarman I back on the throne of Vengi, Rajaraja drove out and killed the Andhra king known as Bhima. In order to bring about the unification of the Chola Dynasty and the Eastern Chalukya Kingdom and to make sure that his heirs would rule the Eastern Chalukya kingdom in the years to come, Rajaraja offered his daughter Kundavai in marriage to his next viceroy of Vengi Vimaladitya.

## Conflict with the Hoysalas

The Western Chalukyas' vassals, the Hoysalas, also had confrontations with the Cholas. According to a 1006 CE dated inscription from the Gopalakrishna temple in Narasipur, minister Naganna and several Hoysala generals were assassinated by Rajaraja's general Aprameya. Rajaraja's victory over the Hoysalas is also mentioned in an inscription in Channarayana.

## Conquest of Kuda-malai-nadu

There are numerous references to king Rajaraja conquering "Kuda-malai-nadu" (from c. 1000 CE onwards). Some of the inscriptions discovered in Karnataka use the word Kudagu-malai-nadu instead of Kuda-malai-nadu, and this region has typically been associated with Coorg (Kudagu). According to legend, the monarch crossed 18 mountain passes to take control of Malainadu for the sake of messengers in a single day (Vikrama Chola Ula). Rajaraja is described as having burned Udagai and severed 18 heads in Kulottunga Chola Ula. The establishment of Chadaya Nalvizha in Udiyar

Mandalam, the capture of Udagai, and the theft of numerous elephants from that location are all mentioned by Kalingathupparani. Inscription Tiruppalanam (999 CE) describes the presentation of an idol by the king made from loot taken in Malainadu.

## Naval Expedition

The naval conquest of the Maldives islands ("the Ancient Islands of the Sea Numbering 1200") was one of Rajaraja's final triumphs. A display of Chola naval might in the Indian Ocean was made during the naval campaign. With Nagapattinam serving as the primary port, the Cholas ruled over the region surrounding the Bay of Bengal. The invasion of Sri Lanka also had a significant contribution from the Chola Navy. Rajendra Chola was given the opportunity to lead the Chola invasion of Srivijaya thanks to Rajaraja's success, which also allowed him to conduct naval operations in South-East Asia and briefly conquer Kadaram.

*"A naval campaign led to the conquest of the Maldiv Islands, the Malabar Coast, and northern Sri Lanka, all of which were essential to the Chola control over trade with Southeast Asia and with Arabia and eastern Africa. These were the transit areas, ports of call for the Arab traders and ships to Southeast Asia and China, which were the source of the valuable spices sold at a high profit to Europe."* - Romila Thapar

## Administration under Rajaraja I

Prior to Rajaraja I's rule, hereditary lords and princes who had a loose coalition with the Chola kings were in charge of some of the Chola kingdoms. In 1000 CE, Rajaraja began a program of land assessment and survey, which resulted in the division of the empire into valanadus. The hereditary lords and local princes were either displaced or transformed into subordinate officials from Rajaraja I until Vikrama Chola's rule in 1133 CE. As a result, the king was able to exert more control over the various regions of the empire. Rajaraja improved local self-government and put in place a system of audit and control so those village councils and other public organisations could be held accountable while still keeping their independence. He dispatched the first Chola delegation to China in order to boost trade. Kundavai, his older sister, helped him with the administration and maintenance of temples.

## Religious Policy of Rajaraja I

Rajaraja was a follower of the Shaivism school of Hinduism, but he also built a number of Vishnu temples. Rajaraja committed the revenues of the hamlet of Anaimangalam's revenue to the maintenance of this Vihara. Shivapada Shekhara, which translates to "the one who sets his crown at Shiva's feet", is how Rajaraja identified himself.

## Arts and Architecture under Rajaraja I

After hearing brief snippets of Thevaram in his court, Rajaraja set out on a mission to find the hymns. He asked Nambi Andar Nambi for assistance. It is said that Nambi discovered the presence of scripts in the form of cadijam leaves partially consumed by white ants in a room inside the second precinct of Thillai Nataraja Temple, Chidambaram, through the intervention of the divine. The mission was opposed by the Brahmanas (Dikshitaras) in the temple, but Rajaraja intervened by consecrating the saint poets' pictures via Chidambaram's streets. As a result, Rajaraja earned the moniker Tirumurai Kanda Cholan, which means "one who saved the Tirumurai". Nambi refers to King Rajaraja, the best of the race of Abhaya, as Rasarasamannan-Abhayakula-sekharan in his work Nambiyandar Nambi Puranam, also known as Tirumurai Kanda Puranam.



Prior to the arrival of Rajaraja, Shiva temples solely included images of god forms; but, after his arrival, the Nayanar saints' images were also erected inside the temple. Sambandar, Appar, and Sundarar's hymns were arranged by Nambi into the first seven books, followed by Manickavasagar's Tirukovayar and Tiruvacakam in the eighth book, 28 hymns by nine other saints in the ninth book, Tirumandiram of Tirumular in the tenth book, and 40 hymns by 12 other poets in the tenth. The sacred anthathi of the 63 Nayanar saints, Tirutotanar Tiruvanthathi, with his own songs added as the eleventh book. The first seven volumes were afterwards referred to as Tevaram, and the entire Saiva canon, to which Sekkizhar's Periya Puranam (1135) was included as the 12th book, is now referred to as Tirumurai, the holy book. Saiva literature thus spans almost 600 years of intellectual, spiritual, and literary growth. The bronze statue of Rajaraja at the Thanjavur temple is fictitious and of recent origin; neither a picture nor a statue of Rajaraja from his time has survived.

## **Brihadisvara Temple**

Rajaraja constructed the Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur, which is devoted to Lord Shiva, in 1010 CE. The religious and commercial activities were centred in the temple and the capital. Rajarajeswaram, Periya Kovil, and RajaRajeswara Temple are some of their other names. It is one of India's biggest temples and a prime example of Dravidian design from the Chola era. The temple's 1000th anniversary was in 2010. The temple is one of the three "Great Living Chola Temples" that comprise the Gangaikonda Cholapuram and Airavatesvara temples, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The vimanam, or temple tower, is the tallest in the world at 216 feet (66 metres). The temple's Kumbam (the top, bulbous structure) was carved out of a single rock and weighs about 80 tonnes. At the entryway is a sizable statue of the sacred bull Nandi that is made out of a single rock and is about 16 feet long and 13 feet high. Granite, is the material used for the entire temple structure, the source of which can be found 60 kilometres to the west of the temple. One of Tamil Nadu's most popular tourist destinations is this temple.

## **Coins issued by Rajaraja I**

Prior to Rajaraja's reign, Chola coinage had the tiger insignia, as well as the fish and bow symbols of the Pandya and Chera dynasties, on the obverse and the King's name on the reverse. However, under the reign of Rajaraja, a new sort of coins appeared. The new coins featured a standing king on the obverse and a seated goddess on the reverse. The coins travelled throughout South India and were replicated by the kings of Sri Lanka.

## **Inscriptions**

Rajaraja used stones to record major events in his life because he wanted to memorialise his military exploits. An inscription in Tamil from Mulbagal, Karnataka, reveals his achievements as early as the nineteenth year. Rajaraja kept a record of all the donations given to the Thanjavur temple as well as his accomplishments. He also kept track of his predecessors' records. An inscription from his reign discovered in Tirumalavadi commemorates the king's order that the central shrine of the Vaidyanatha temple at the site be rebuilt and that, before demolishing the walls, the inscriptions engraved on them be transcribed in a book. After the rebuilding was completed, the records from the book were re-engraved on the walls. Another inscription from the Southern Arcot district's Gramardhanathesvara temple, written in the 7th year of the ruler, makes reference to the 15th year of his forebear Uttama Choladeva, who is identified as the son of Sembiyan-Madeviyar.