

CHOLA LEGACY: HISTORY

NEWS: PM Modi Participates In Aadi Thiruvathirai Celebrations Honouring Rajendra Chola I in Tamil Nadu

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Prime Minister Modi attended the Aadi Thiruvathirai festival at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, celebrating the Chola dynasty's legacy of governance, naval strength, and cultural unity. Key announcements included statues of Chola rulers, a commemorative coin, and emphasis on integrating the Chola model into modern India's development vision.

Prime Minister Modi at Aadi Thiruvathirai Festival – Key Highlights

- **Event Location:** Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Tamil Nadu.
- **Occasion:** Celebrated **Aadi Thiruvathirai**, a significant Shaivaite festival honouring Lord Shiva and the Shaiva Bhakti tradition.
- **Significance of Visit:**
 - Reaffirmed commitment to cultural heritage.
 - Promoted awareness of the **Chola dynasty's contributions** to governance, maritime power, and temple architecture.
 - Aligned the event with **Rajendra Chola's birth star (Thiruvathirai/Ardra)**, beginning July 23.

About Aadi Thiruvathirai Festival

- **Type:** Shaivaite spiritual festival celebrated in the Tamil month of **Aadi**.
- **Deity Worshipped:** Lord Shiva in his cosmic dance form – **Nataraja**.
- **Historical Roots:**
 - Celebrated in Tamil Nadu temples associated with the **Nayanmars**, the 63 Shaivite saint-poets.
 - Reinforces **Shaiva Bhakti** tradition that flourished during Chola rule.
- **Modern Relevance:** Highlights cultural continuity and community identity in Tamil Nadu.

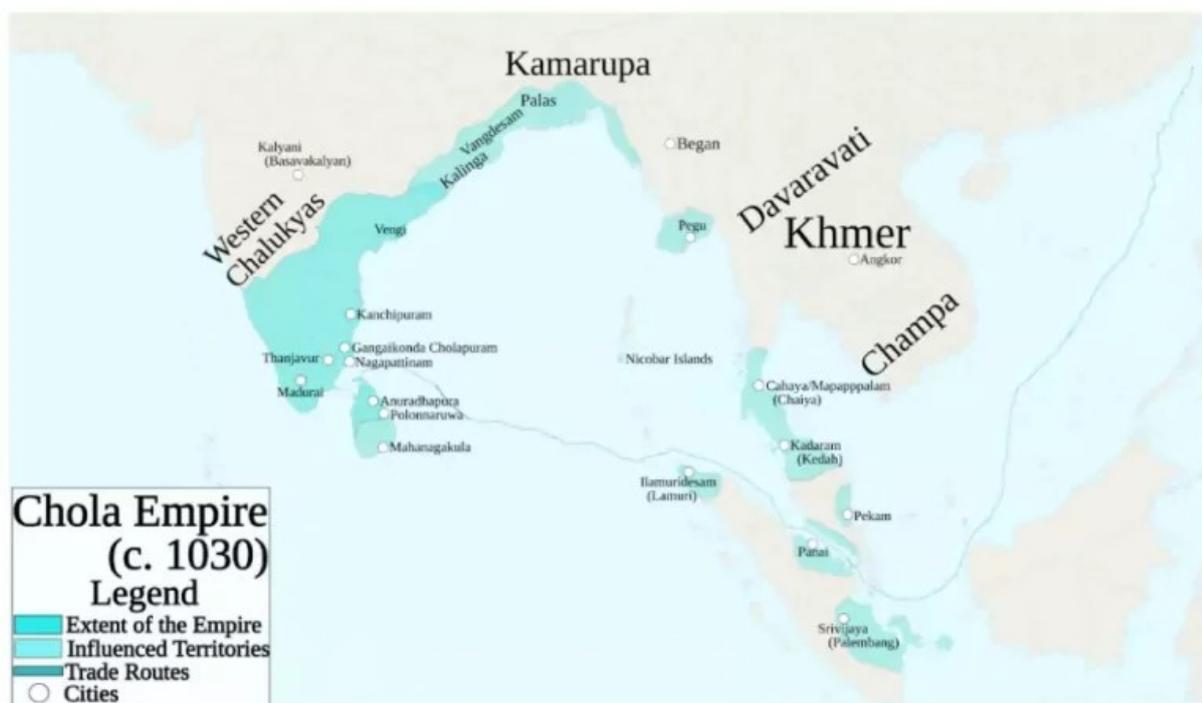
Major Announcements by PM Modi

- **Statues:** To erect statues of **Rajaraja Chola** and **Rajendra Chola I** in Tamil Nadu.
- **Commemorative Coin:** Issued in honour of **Rajendra Chola I**.
- **Artefact Repatriation:**
 - Since 2014, **600+ ancient Indian artefacts** repatriated.

- **36 artefacts from Tamil Nadu** alone, including Chola bronzes.

Who Were the Cholas?

- **Period of Prominence:** Classical Tamilakam period to 13th century CE.
- **Mentioned In:**
 - **Sangam literature** as one of the “Muvendhar” (Three Crowned Kings: Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas).
 - **Ashokan Edicts** – indicating early diplomatic or political presence.
- **Imperial Revival:** Under **Vijayalaya Chola (848–871 CE)**, a former Pallava feudatory.



Key Chola Rulers and Their Contributions

Vijayalaya Chola (848–871 CE)

- Founder of the **Imperial Chola** dynasty.
- Capital established at **Thanjavur**.
- Built temple for **Nishumbhasudini (Durga)**.
- Laid foundations of urban and religious patronage.

Rajaraja Chola I (985–1014 CE)

- Great conqueror; extended Chola control to:
 - **Northern Sri Lanka, Maldives, Kerala coast.**

- Naval administration:
 - Established **Chola-Pandya, Chola-Ganga, Chola-Lankeswara** viceroyalties.
- Built the **Brihadesvara Temple (Thanjavur)** – UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Encouraged **cultural diplomacy** – funded a **Buddhist Vihara in Java**.

Rajendra Chola I (1014–1044 CE)

- Led successful expeditions up to the **Ganges (Pala Empire)**.
- Founded **Gangaikonda Cholapuram** (meaning “the Chola who conquered the Ganga”).
- Led overseas military campaigns against **Srivijaya (Sumatra, Malaya)**.
- Maritime control: Strengthened India’s presence in Southeast Asia.
- Titles: **Kadaramkondan, Pandita Cholan, Mudikondan**.
- Promoted international trade and naval supremacy.

Kulottunga Chola I (1070–1122 CE)

- Unified **Eastern Chalukyas (Vengi)** with Cholas via bloodline.
- Introduced **land surveys and revenue reforms** (comparable to England’s Domesday Book).
- Patronised **Shaivism**, but also funded **Buddhist shrines (Nagapattinam)**.
- Faced territorial reversals by **Hoysalas, Pandyas**, and internal strife.

Why the Chola Legacy Matters Today

Maritime and Strategic Strength

- **Rajaraja and Rajendra Chola’s naval expeditions:** Early expression of Indian power projection.
- **Modern link:** PM Modi referenced **Operation Sindoor** to underline continuity of naval assertiveness.

Administrative Excellence

- Introduced **decentralised governance** and early electoral practices.
- Pioneered the **Kudavolai system** – local self-governance through democratic methods.

Water Management

- Built **Cholagangam Lake** and many irrigation tanks.
- Ensured sustainable agriculture and civic infrastructure.

Cultural Unity & Diplomacy

- Trade links from **India to Southeast Asia** (Srivijaya, Java).
- Influence seen in temples like **Angkor Wat** and **Borobudur**.
- PM Modi compared this to initiatives like **Kashi Tamil Sangamam** and **Saurashtra Tamil Sangamam**.

Ethical Governance

- Linked to **Tirumular's teaching "Anbe Shivam"** (Love is God).
- Reflected emphasis on **peace, ethics, and ecological balance**.

Kudavolai System – Ancient Electoral Democracy

- **Meaning:** "Ballot Pot" system – first documented electoral practice in India.
- **Evidence:** **Uttaramerur inscriptions**, Tamil Nadu.
- **Process:**
 - Names of qualified candidates written on palm leaves.
 - Leaves placed in a pot; a **young impartial boy** selected one in public view.
- **Transparency & Legitimacy:** Reinforced public trust and participatory governance.

Eligibility Criteria

- **Age:** 35–70 years.
- **Land Ownership:** Must own tax-paying land.
- **Education:** Knowledge of Vedas or administrative records.
- **Moral Standing:** Free from criminal activity, domestic abuse.

Disqualifications

- Alcoholics, defaulters, relatives of current office-bearers.
- Annual audits mandated.
- Proven misconduct → dismissal and fine.
- Example: Inscription No. 24 (Epigraphia Indica) records dismissal of treasury officer for embezzlement.

Chola-Era Local Governance System

Administrative Units

- **Sabha:** Brahmin settlements.
- **Ur:** Non-Brahmin villages.

Powers of Councils

- Collected taxes and ensured irrigation.
- Maintained temples and local justice systems.
- Real decision-making powers, not ceremonial.

Accountability Measures

- **Annual audits** of office-bearers.
- **Dereliction of duty** → ineligibility.
- Moral and ethical standards strictly enforced.

Strategic and Cultural Significance of Chola Rule

Democratic Tradition

- Electoral inscriptions prove India's **early grassroots democracy**.
- Predated Europe's representative governments by centuries.

Integration of Morality in Governance

- Public service based on **merit and ethical behaviour**.
- Stressed **civic responsibility and community trust**.

Decentralisation & Trade Guilds

- Governance included **merchant guilds**: e.g., **Manigramam, Ayyavole**.
- Boosted commerce and civic stability.
- Promoted bottom-up governance and resilience.

Limitations of the Chola System

- **Not fully inclusive**:
 - Women, landless, and labourers excluded.
 - Representation confined to **upper caste landowners**.
- **Power asymmetry**: Hierarchical and exclusionary despite democratic facade.

Source: <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/pm-modi-participates-in-aadi-thiruvathirai-celebrations-honouring-rajendra-chola-i-in-tamil-nadu/>