

## **Chola Invasion of Southeast Asia**

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**Abstract:** *In 1025 CE, the Chola Emperor Rajendra I launched naval raids on Srivijaya in maritime Southeast Asia, Rajendra's overseas turbulent venture against Srivijaya was an unprecedented event in India's history and its otherwise peaceful relations with the states of Southeast Asia. Several places in present-day Indonesia and Malay Peninsula were attacked by Rajendra I of the Chola dynasty. The Chola invasion all the more led to the expansion of Tamil merchant associations such as the Manigramam, Ayyavole and Ainnurruvar into Southeast Asia. The Cholan attack led to the fall of the Sailendra Dynasty of Srivijaya and the Chola invasion was also at the same time when the return voyage of the great Buddhist scholar Atiśa took place from Sumatra to India and Tibet in 1025 CE. In this paper, the causes of this invasion and its repercussions for India-Southeast Asian countries have been explored.*

**Keywords:** *Southeast Asia, Maritime Trade, India's Relations with Southeast Asian Countries, Hinduism, Buddhism, Cholas, Palas, Silk Trade Routes, SangamAge, TradeGuilds, Colonization*

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### **I. Historical Background**

Throughout most of their shared history, ancient India and Indonesia have enjoyed friendly and peaceful relations, thus making this Indian attack an unparalleled event in the history of Asia. In the 9th and 10th centuries, Srivijaya had maintained close relations with the Pala Empire in Bengal, and an 860 CE Nalanda inscription has presented that Maharaja Balaputra of Srivijaya had dedicated a monastery at the Nalanda Mahavihara in Pala territory. The relations between Srivijaya and the Chola dynasty of southern India were cordial during the regime of Raja Raja Chola I. In 1006 CE a Srivijayan Maharaja from Sailendra dynasty — King Maravijayattunggavarman — built the Chudamani Vihara in the port town of Nagapattinam. However, during the kingdom of Rajendra Chola I the relations took a turn for the worse as the Cholas invaded Srivijayan cities.

The Cholas are known to have gained advantage from both the attacks by the pirates and the foreign trade. Sometimes Chola voyages led to clear cut loot and victory as far as Southeast Asia was concerned. Srivijaya had complete control over his empire two main naval choke points (Malacca and the Sunda Strait) and was at that time a main business empire that did maintain recognizable impressive naval forces. The Malacca Strait's northwest opening was managed from Kedah on the Malay Peninsula side and from Pannai on the Sumatran side, while Malayu (Jambi) and Palembang had sway over its southeast opening and also Sunda Strait. They enjoyed complete domination in naval trade that compelled any trade ships that passed through their waters to be summoned to report at their ports or otherwise were to be robbed and looted.

The reasons of this naval expedition are not comprehensible, the historian Nilakanta Sastri had suggested that the attack was probably caused by Srivijayan efforts to create hurdles in the way of the Chola trade with the East (especially China), or more probably, a simple wish on the part of Rajendra to stretch his digvijaya to the countries across the sea so well known to his subjects at home, and therefore add more brilliance and jewels to his crown. Another theory has presupposed that the reasons for the invasion were most likely inspired by geopolitics and diplomatic relations. King Suryavarman I of the Khmer Empire sought aid from Rajendra Chola I of the Chola dynasty against Tambralinga kingdom. After learning of Suryavarman's political collaboration with Rajendra Chola, the Tambralinga kingdom sought assistance from the Srivijaya king Sangrama Vijayatunggavarman.

During the early medieval period, India was actively involved in maritime trade in the Persian Gulf and the South China Sea region, both of these were extremely and virtually apart from the place where India was situated. The Arabs enjoyed monopoly over Asian trade and India was considered as favourite and most suitable as well as desirable commercial destination. The ancient spice and silk trade routes linked India with the external world. Inscriptional records, Indian sources, archaeological sources and travellers' descriptions and memoirs describe and offer evident proof for commercial transactions and commercial ventures between India and Southeast Asia. The Telaga Batu inscription (Indonesia) of the 7<sup>th</sup> century has mentioned a ship captain and the long distance maritime trade. The Kaladi inscription (a collection of Javanese inscriptions) of the 10<sup>th</sup> century has mentioned Dravidians, Kalingas, Sinhalese, etc. as aliens reaching the region. The foreign traders in the Javanese and old Balinese inscriptions have been described as banyaga and business groups as banigrama. From the 5<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries powerful states started emerging in Southeast Asia. They started following

Hinduism and Buddhism and some chose Sanskrit as their official language. But it cannot be asserted that Indian impact was made on Southeast Asia from external areas. There were varied centres of spreading from India and varied centres of striving to join in Southeast Asia. The Malay Archipelago was vital for setting up of this bond.

In the ancient Indian literary works such as the Arthashastra of Kautilya, the Puranas, the Ramayana, the Nidde saint he Khuddaka Nikaya of the Sutta Pitaka (a legitimate work in Pali of Theravada Buddhism), the Milinda-Panha, the Ceylonese record, Mahavamsa, and in Tibetan sources some of the areas in Southeast Asia were signified by terms like: Suvarnabhumi (the land of gold), Suvarndvipa (the island of gold), Yavadvipa, etc. The ancient Greek writings, The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea and Ptolemy's Geography mention the region as Chryse (the Land of Gold) and Chersonesus Aurea respectively. I-tsing, a 7<sup>th</sup> century Chinese excursionist went to the Srivijaya kingdom of Sumatra. Thus Southeast Asia (especially the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia) was in the knowledge of the rest of the world. since times immemorial, due to its strategic geographical location. The Arab writers such as AlBiruni, Haraki, Yakut had also mentioned about both as Suvarnabhumi and Suvarnadvipa due to its advantageous location geographically.

Despite Indian businessmen and religious pundits going to Southeast Asia and residing there permanently, the leading Indian impact was evidently noticeable by this time and that was definitely not due to the result of the Indian colonization as early historians believed it to be. There were no Indian colonies in Southeast Asia and mainly there was no benefit of compelling the people to adopt and absorb (imbibe) Indian elements, there was no use of force on the people to integrate Indian elements. But it has to be admitted that Indian traditions were a vital factor making contribution to the emergence of the civilization in Southeast Asia. The local chieftains of Southeast Asia carefully selected and adopted Indian idea of kingship through the help and assistance of Indian pundits and scholars. Therefore, the rulers and chosen selected persons of the Southeast Asian society became an impressive medium through which Indian rituals and customs were transferred. As the customs and traditions reached the level of common persons, their further adoption and localization was witnessed. Now let us look into various theories concerning Indian expansion in the Southeast Asia.

### **Chola Invasion**

The Cholas reign lasted in the Sangam age from 300BCE to 600CE. In the early medieval period they were reduced to the position of a mere vassal state of the powerful Pallavas. In century 850CE when the political dominance of the Pallavas lost its grip, the Cholas rose again to have their sway and the imperial Chola kingdom spread uncontrollably especially under the rule of Rajaraja Chola and his son, Rajendra Chola. Like his father, Rajendra Chola adopted the policy of stretching the boundaries of his empire. After achieving the victory of the whole of Sri Lanka (which was begun by Rajaraja Chola), Maldives, and Andaman and Nicobar islands, he focused and concentrated on the Malay Archipelago. India's location was enviously at the centre of desirable maritime Silk Route. Attaining complete hold over this prestigious maritime silk route was of great importance for asserting their total control and dominance. Control over the maritime silk route was crucial in establishing their dominance. They wanted to establish their economic machinery comprising of trade guilds (which emerged to be more dominant from the 9<sup>th</sup> century to mid – 14<sup>th</sup> century) that were more suitable in international markets. These trade guilds such as the Manigramam, Nanadesi, Valanjiyar, Ayyahole, Ainnurruvan, etc. were very strong and impactful with the resources. They were money lenders and Chola rulers were the beneficiaries. So, the king was obliged to provide the trade guilds with broader economic avenues. In return, the king was bound to make provision of more spread out economic avenues to these money lending trade guilds.

The Srivijaya kingdom had been hurting the Chola's commercial interests in the Malay Archipelago. With the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad. The Abbasids' ships were now substituted by the Fatimids' ships. The latter passed through the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden to the Indian Ocean and reached Indian coasts for trade and then went further to Southeast Asia and China (where the Song dynasty held the reigns). But the Srivijaya rulers motivated the sea robbers in that area to attack the Srivijaya ports. They pestered the Tamil traders. Hence, the Hindu Shaivite Chola rulers in collaboration with the Shaivite Angkor king fought against the Buddhist Srivijaya ruler and its Buddhist companion, Tambralinga. Angkor sought military help from the Cholas against Tambralinga. The Cholas attacked the latter. The Srivijaya came to aid its ally. The Chola navy was technologically more developed. Rajendra Chola in 1025 sent a massive naval fleet against the Srivijayas and the Cholas attained a formidable victory. The Srivijaya ruler was taken as a prison of war. The Chola's attack and looting of the city. Srivijaya along with 12 other port cities on the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, and the Nicobar Islands have been recorded in an inscription at a temple in Tanjavur. The occurrence has also been registered in one of the most important Malay literary works, Sejarah Melayu.

This occurrence of the invasion of Sumatra by Rajendra Chola is interesting. The Srivijayas had cordial relations with the Cholas during the reign of Rajaraja I. The copper plates which are collectively called Leiden copper plates since they are now in the Leiden University (the Netherlands) have marked that Rajaraja Chola I issued a royal order for the upkeep of Chudaman Vihara built by another Srivijaya king, Sri Vijaya

Maravijayattunggavarman, at Nagapattinam. The Anaimangalam village was gifted to the Buddhist Vihara. So what was the exact cause behind the attack of Srivijaya by the royal son of Rajaraja I is yet to be comprehended. Nilkantha Shastri in his work, *The Cholas* had interpreted that possibly it was due to the attempt of Srivijaya to obstruct Chola's trade with the East. Otherwise it could have been because of the digvijay (expansionist policy) of the Cholas. Meera Abraham has shown a straight relation between the merchant guilds and Chola polity. The early medieval period had seen the rise of well managed merchant associations which enjoyed certain degree of autonomy. These guilds were actively involved in the arrangement of trade and commercial acts. The Tamil inscriptions of Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia and Javanese inscriptions have hinted at the strong presence of merchant guilds of Indian origin there. The goods exchanged during this period from Southeast Asia included precious stones, corals, aloe wood, cloves, copper, tin and camphor and from India, they consisted of silk, spices, textiles, pearls, corals, medicinal herbs, etc. It was different from the early commercial interactions, the medieval commercial links were associated with political atmosphere and government policies since taxes were levied on goods of trade that formed a major source of revenue to the state. As a result of the invasion, the Cholas had set up permanent military garrisons in Srivijaya and Angkor regimes to further carry forward Indian commercial interests. There was an coming and powerful emergence of Tamil trade guilds in chief trading centres in Southeast Asia. It also resulted in a matrimonial alliance between the Cholas and the Srivijayas as Rajendra Chola married Onang Kiu, the daughter of Vijay-ottunga varman.<sup>4</sup> The ever enhancing presence of Tamil merchant associations and the matrimonial alliance strengthened and sealed the relations between Srivijaya and the Cholas. The diplomatic missions were commissioned in 1067. Dipankar or Devakala, a Chola prince and the nephew of Rajendra Chola was assigned the task of ambassador to the imperial court of China as a Srivijayan. The prince later sat on the Cholahrone as Kulothunga Chola. In 1068 during the Keddah rebellion, Virarajendra Chola assisted and supported Srivijaya in winning Keddah back by sending a naval fleet.

The regal Cholas had prosperous intercontinental trading relations with the Tang and Song dynasties of China, Srivijaya of Sumatra, the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad and the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt. Rajendra Chola succeeded in eradicating sea robbery in the Malay Archipelago. His navy was extremely well organized with a structure that had ranking based strictly on hierarchy where the king was the Supreme Commander of Navy. However in spite of this, the Cholas were inappropriately (wrongly) named as Srivijaya's vassal state in the official Chinese records. The misunderstanding could have been willingly created by the ambassadors of Srivijaya at the Chinese court since the Srivijayan court was riddled by various factions. This signified that by that time Southeast Asian states were no longer chiefdoms but had emerged as major maritime political powers in the region. They were linked world-wide through strong networks of maritime trade and Srivijaya was eager to safeguard its commercial interest.

On the other hand, the Chola's successful naval adventure brought more commercial occasions to the merchant guilds. Their activities spanned further in the region. The political marriage was not the result of any peaceful dialogue but it was the direct result of Chola's successful attack which later made it possible the Cholas to interfere in the politics of Srivijaya when it was involved in a civil war during the Keddah rebellion and helped the Srivijaya king to suppress it effectively. Though it is to be kept in mind that despite the successful attack, the Cholas did not set up any direct control over the kingdom but they looted the piled up wealth of the Srivijaya which resulted in weakening of their power.

The Chola attack on Srivijaya was a quick campaign that caught Srivijaya off guard. Moreover, during this time in the 11th century, the Chola navy had developed strongly, while Srivijaya's sea power was relatively weak. To sail from India to the Indonesian archipelago, vessels from India sailed eastward across the Bay of Bengal and touched the ports of Lamuri in Aceh or Kedah in Malay peninsula before entering Strait of Malacca. But the Chola Armada reached directly to the Sumatran west coast. The port of Barus in the west coast of North Sumatra at that time was in possession of Tamil trade guilds and served as a port to supply the essentials after crossing the Indian Ocean. The Chola Armada, then continued to sail along Sumatra's west coast southward and sailed into Strait of Sunda. The Srivijaya navy guarded Kedah and the surrounding areas on the northwest opening of the Malacca Strait and did not know at all that the Chola invasion was heading from the Sunda Strait in the south. The first Srivijayan city to be raided was Palembang, the capital of Srivijaya empire. The unexpected attack led the Cholas to sack the city and to plunder the Kadatuan royal palace and monasteries. The Thanjavur inscription has stated that Rajendra captured King Sangrama Vijayottunggavarman of Srivijaya and carried a large heap of treasures including the Vidhyadara Torana, the jeweled 'war gate' of Srivijaya, adorned with great splendor.

The Chola invasion did not result in Chola administration over the defeated cities, as the armies moved fast and looted the Srivijayan cities. The Chola Armada seemed to have taken advantage of the Southeast Asian monsoon for moving from one port to another quickly. The tactic of a fast-moving unexpected attack was probably the secret of Cholan success, since it did not allow the Srivijayan mandala to strengthen their defenses, reorganize themselves, provide help or to back fire to take revenge. The war ended with a victory for the Cholas and major losses for the Srivijaya Empire, thus ending their maritime solo power in the region.

## Repercussions

With the Maharaja Sangrama Vijayottunggavarman having been imprisoned and most of its cities destroyed, the leaderless Srivijaya mandala entered a period of anarchy and uncertainty. The invasion indicated the end of the Sailendra dynasty. According to the 15th-century Malay Annals, Rajendra Chola I after the successful naval raid in 1025 CE married Onang Kiu, the daughter of Sangrama Vijayottunggavarman. This invasion compelled Srivijaya to make peace with Javanese kingdom of Kahuripan. The peace deal was managed by the exiled daughter of Sangrama Vijayottunggavarman, a Srivijayan princess who managed to escape the destruction of Palembang and came to the court of King Airlangga in East Java. She also became the queen consort of Airlangga named Dharma Prasad Ottunga Devi and in 1035 CE, Airlangga constructed a Buddhist monastery named Srivijayasrama dedicated to his queen consort.

This invasion gravely weakened the Srivijayan supremacy and made it possible to form the regional kingdoms like Kahuripan and its successor, Kediri in Java was based on agriculture rather than coastal and long-distance trade. Sri Deva was made as the new king and the trading activities started again. He sent an embassy to the court of China in 1028 CE. Sanfoqi sent a mission to China in 1028, but this would refer to Malayu-Jambi, not Srivijaya-Palembang. No Srivijayan diplomat messengers came to China between 1028–1077. This indicates that the mandala of Srivijaya had faded. It is quite possible that Srivijaya had collapsed in 1025. In the following centuries, the Chinese chronicles still refer to "Sanfoqi", but this term probably refers to the Malayu-Jambi kingdom, proved by Chinese record of Sanfoqi Zhanbeiguo (Jambi country of Sanfoqi). The last written evidence that mentioned the word "Sriwijaya" or "Srivijaya" came from the Tanjore inscription of the Chola kingdom in 1030 or 1031.

The Chola control over Srivijaya lasted for several decades. Chinese chronicles mentioned Sanfoqi Zhu-nianguo which meant "Chola country of Sanfoqi", in all probability they referred to Kedah. Sanfoqi Zhu-nianguo had sent missions to China in 1077, 1079, 1082, 1088, and 1090 CE. The possibility could have been that the Cholas a crown prince had been installed in the Tamil-dominated area of the Malacca Straits.

Tamil colonization of the Malacca Straits seemed to have lasted for a century. The Cholas left several inscriptions in northern Sumatra and the Malay peninsula. Tamil influence could be found in works of art (sculpture and temple architecture), it had indicated government activity rather than commercial transactions. Further, Chola's grip on the northern Sumatra and the Malay peninsula receded in the 12th century — the Tamil poem Kalingatupparani of ca. 1120 CE had mentioned Kulottungga's destruction of Kadaram (Kedah). After that, Kedah disappeared from Indian sources.

## II. Conclusion

To conclude, the invasion of the South-East Asia by the Cholas had multiple repercussions. This attack on one hand on the Srivijaya's was a turbulent naval venture. Rajendra I attacked several places in Indonesia and Malay Peninsula. First of all it encouraged the Tamil Merchant guilds to expand their mercantile transactions as well as business. It resulted in the fall of Sailendra dynasty. Incidentally, the voyages of Buddhist scholar had taken place at that very time. So the chain of events could be meticulously recorded, these could be useful for the future historians.

The invasion disturbed the peaceful and cordial relations between India and these South-Eastern countries. It is an established fact that trade and commerce blossoms forth in time of peace. Cholas had gained advantage from both the attacks i.e. by pirates and foreign trade. One of the reasons of invasion could have been the obstacles created by Srivijayan ruler.

Till then Indian merchants and pundits had migrated and slowly settled down, infact they had merged with the native population. Rajendra Chola had ambitiously pursued the policy of expanding his territories. As is well known, India was advantageously located on the coveted silk route. Religions differences also precipitated the invasion. Shavites (worshippers of Shiva) were on side and Buddhist believes were on the other side. Cholas did not get control over the land. They quickly looted and went back. The war ended in victory for Cholas and deprived Srivijays from having Solo business power in the region. Tamil colonization of the Halacca states started after the invasion and lasted for a century and the Chola control over Srivijaya lasted for several decades. They were completely weakened.

History has been a witness of many such attacks where human ambition to spread its wings, disturbs peace, causes anarchy, ruffles many feathers and makes the general public suffer.

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