

HISTORY

NOBODY TOLD YOU

THE CHOLAS



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VARSHA VARGHESE

 juggernaut

JUGGERNAUT BOOKS
C-128, First Floor, Sangam Vihar, Near Holi Chowk,
New Delhi 110080, India

First published by Juggernaut Books 2026

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Illustrations conceptualized by
Aniket Mridha and Gaurav Pandey

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

P-ISBN: 9789353456566

E-ISBN: 9789353455637

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The boundaries on the map in this book are purported to be neither correct nor authentic by Survey of India.

Typeset in Futura Std by R. Ajith Kumar, Noida

Printed at Thomson Press India Private Limited

I want to acknowledge Lords of Earth and Sea: A History of the Chola Empire by Anirudh Kanisetti, which made writing this book possible. I thank him and other historians and academics for their contributions that have expanded our collective understanding of Chola history.



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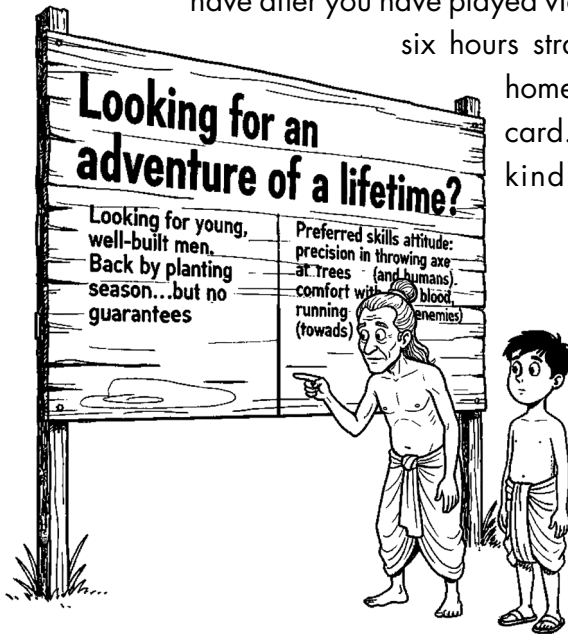
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SETTING THE STAGE

A very long time ago, in present-day Tamil Nadu, there lived a peasant clan. What set them apart from other clans was their ambition. Not the kind of ambition that is annoying, but which well-meaning adults tell you to have after you have played video games for

six hours straight or bring

home a poor report card. This was the kind of ambition



The Cholas

that involved conquering villages and looting (and killing when needed).

By 850 CE, the peasant clan had become so good at winning battles that they grew to become what we know as the Chola Empire and stayed in power for nearly 300 years till the last Chola king disappeared from records in 1279 CE.

But why should we care about an empire from a thousand years ago?

At the height of its power, the Chola Empire was the most powerful and richest in the Indian Subcontinent. Yes, most medieval kings were rich, but Rajaraja Chola was the richest man on earth during his reign! His sister, Princess Kundavai, once gifted an armlet with 441 diamonds, but the gift was to a temple's bronze idol!

The Cholas not only raided the Deccan Plateau but, at one point, had their influence stretching as far as Bengal. One of their most significant successes was their campaign in the Malay Peninsula after a long journey through the Indian Ocean. They shaped the history of southern Karnataka and coastal Andhra, as well as the broader Indian Ocean region.

Here are some of their most spectacular achievements:

1. They built one of the tallest structures in the world during their time, the grand Brihadeeswara Temple.

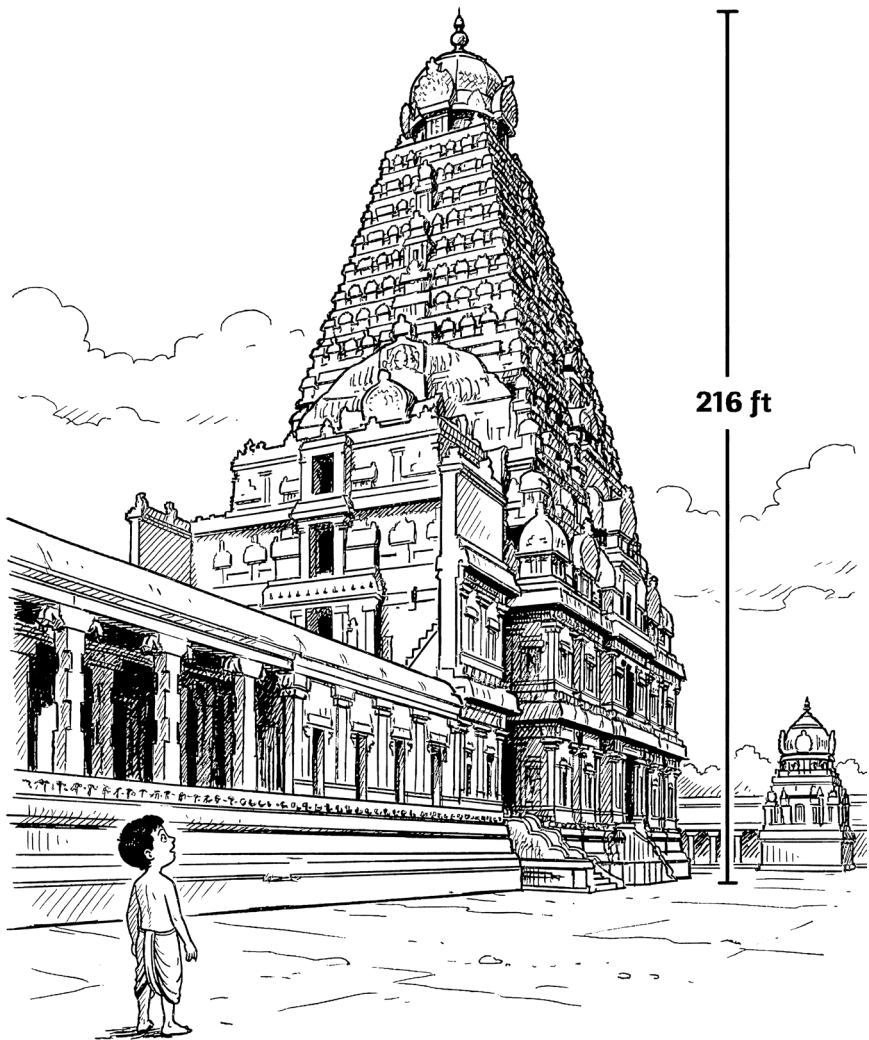


The Cholas

It was not just the largest new building of its time but the second-largest building in the whole world after the Pyramids in Egypt.

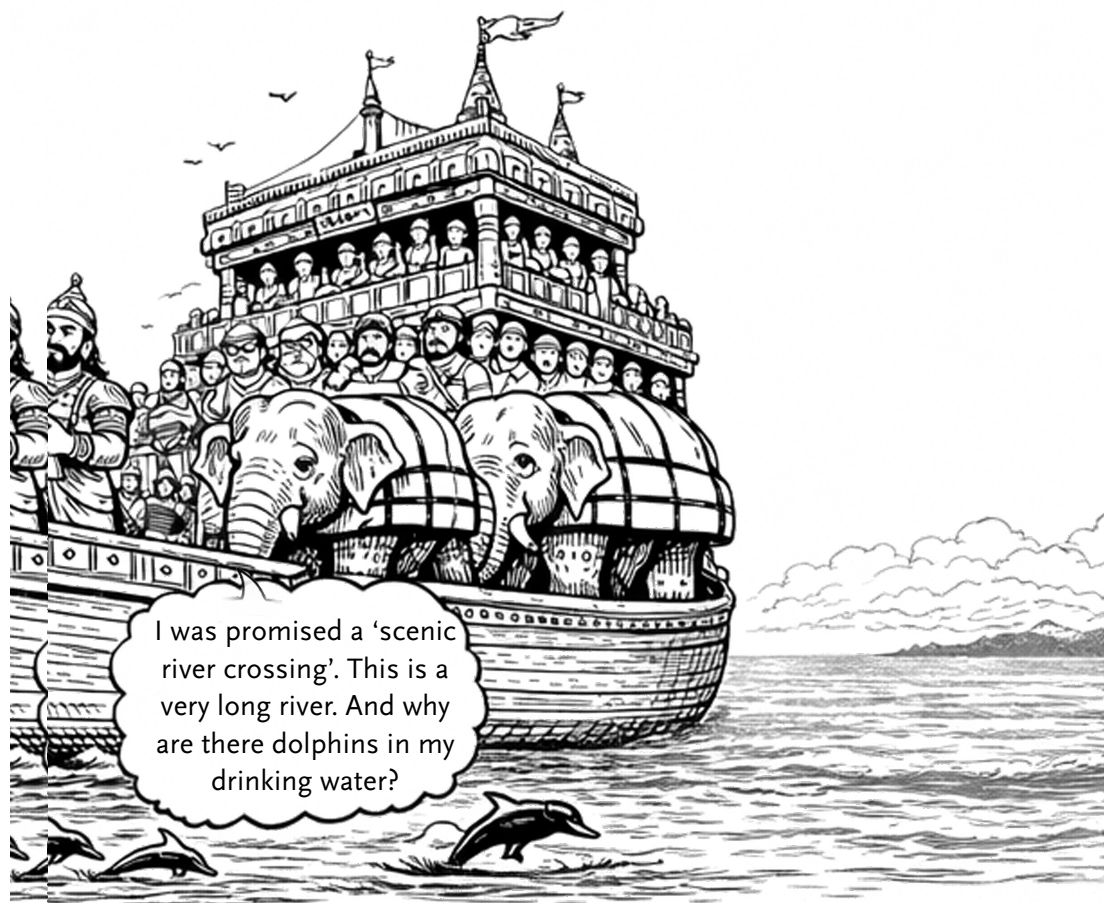
2. By the twelfth century, Chola temple towns were home to tens of thousands of people, making them more populous than Paris and London back in the day.
3. They were the only Indian empire to embark on multiple overseas campaigns against other kingdoms and empires and win!
4. You have very likely seen a photograph or a statue of the dancing Nataraja. It is one of the most recognizable images in Hinduism and is found in every major museum. Chola Queen Sembiyan Mahadevi is credited with introducing Shiva as Nataraja to the world!

A bit more intrigued now?



Your Majesty, we've run out of neighbours to raid on land. We had to start looking at islands. Technically, this is an 'Overseas Business Expansion'.





I was promised a 'scenic river crossing'. This is a very long river. And why are there dolphins in my drinking water?