

Southern India

- The country, to the south of river Krishna, is known as the Far South.
- There, three powers—Cholas, Pāṇḍyas, and Cheras, played a major role, and vied for supremacy, since the earliest times.
- Some Pāṇḍya and Chera rulers might have led victorious arms, as far north as the Himalayas.

- The credit for establishing the first contact, between the vedic people of northern India and the Tamils of the Far South, traditionally goes to the vedic *rishi*, Agastya.
- His disciples and followers (including an agricultural population) also arrived from northern India.
- Together, they appear to have worked towards the Aryanization/Sanskritization of southern India.

- In legendary accounts, a number of Choḷa, Pāṇḍya, and Chera kings are said to have 'fed, maintained and conditioned' the rival armies of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, during the Bhārata war.
- Māmūlanār refers to *vamba Moriyar* (Maurya upstart, most probably Chandragupta Maurya) as having sent a large army, with the Vaḍugar forming the vanguard, to assist the Kośar, in their struggle against the chief of Mohūr.
- This would indicate that the Mauryas actively intervened in the politics of the Tamil country.
- Megasthenes, the envoy of Seleukos to the court of Chandragupta Maurya, speaks of Pandaia, a Pāṇḍya queen, as a daughter of Herakles.
- Aśoka mentions Choḍā (the Cholas), Pāḍā (the Pāṇḍyas), and Ketalaputa (the Cheras), speaks of them in the same breath as the Satiyaputa, and treats them at par with Tāmbapaṁṇi (Sri Lanka) and the Hellenistic kingdoms, as objects of *dhammavijaya*.
- According to one view, Khāravela of Kaliṅga destroyed a confederacy of Tamil states, which had existed for a long time.
- He is also said to have received hundreds of pearls, as well as others precious stones, horses, and elephants, from the Pāṇḍya kingdom.

- For the history of the period under study, one has to depend on Śaṅgam literature, which is generally dated to the 'first three or four centuries' of the Christian era.
- This literature refers to a number of Choḷa, Pāṇḍya, and Chera rulers, as also some minor princelings.
- But, as has often been observed, these are mostly unrelated names, a continuous genealogy being available therein only in the case of the Chera kings.

The Cholas

- The Cholas occupied the delta of the river Kaveri, and its adjoining territories.
- Other names used for the Cholas are Kiḷli, Vaḷavan, and Śembiyan.

- The most famous of the early Choḷa rulers was Karikāla, the son of Iḷaṅḡeṭṭchenni.
- He defeated a confederacy, formed against him by the Pāṇḍya and Chera kings, together with 11 minor chieftains.
- He is also said to have established his authority over nine minor princes.
- Nothing definite can be said about the reliability of the tradition, which ascribes to him the conquest of Kāñchī.

- Another major political event of the reign of Karikāla was his invasion of Sri Lanka, in the course of which he attained singular success.
- He laid the foundations of an ambitious project of the construction of a system of canals, which carried the overflow of the river, to irrigate the water-starved regions of Thanjavur.
- He is also remembered as a patron of arts and Tamil literature.
- Towards the end of the Śaṅgam age, there ruled Śeṅgaṇān.
- He is famous for having defeated and captured the Chera king, Kaṇaikkāl Irumporai, in the battle of Por.
- Śeṅgaṇān was a devout Śaiva, and, according to Thirumangai, he built 70 temples, dedicated to Śiva.

The Pāṇḍyas

- The Pāṇḍya country was situated, from coast to coast, to the south of the Choḷa country.
- The river Vallaru formed its northern boundary.
- According to traditional accounts, the Pāṇḍyas were descendants of Śiva and Pārvatī, who were the first king and queen of that royal line.
- The *Maduraikkāñji* of Māṅguḍi Marudan refers to an early Pāṇḍya king, Neḍiyon, who is an almost legendary figure.
- However, in the Velvikūḍi plates, the earliest Pāṇḍya ruler is Paśālai Mudukuḍumi Peruvalūdi, referred to in the inscription as *parameśvara*.
- He was a warlike prince, and also performed a number of vedic sacrifices.
- One of his successors was Neḍuñjeliyan.
- He is said to have defeated an army of some power of northern India.
- This Neḍuñjeliyan is to be distinguished from another Pāṇḍya king of the same name—Neḍuñjeliyan, the victor of the battle of Talaiyālaṅgānam, who ruled in the first half of the third century AD.
- He attained kingship at a young age.
- Shortly after his accession, his kingdom was invaded by the joint forces of the Choḷas, Cheras, and five other minor princes.
- They reached as far as the Pāṇḍya capital of Madurā.
- Neḍuñjeliyan, however, repulsed the attack.

The Cheras

- The Cheras occupied the land along the western coast of India, up to Konkan in the north.
- Their capital, Vañji, has been located, variously, at Karūr near Thiruchchirappalli, or at Thiruvanjikulam near Cochin, on the west coast.
- The earliest reference to the Cheras is, perhaps, to be found in the *Aitareyāranyaka*, which mentions Cherapādāḥ as a people.
- The Chera ruler, Imaiavaramban Neḍuñjeral Ādan, the son of Udiyañjeral, is credited with achieving victory over the Yavanas, whom he carried away captive, and from whom he obtained diamonds and expensive vessels, in profuse quantities, as ransom.
- These Yavanas have been variously identified as Greek or Arab merchants.

- As is indicated by his epithet, Imaiavaramban, ‘He who had the Himālaya for his boundary’, he claims to have ruled over territories, as far north as the Himalayas.
- A son of Imaiavaramban Neḍuñjeral Ādan was Śeṅguṭṭuvan, who was a contemporary of King Gajabāhu I of Siṃhala (Sri Lanka).

The Pallavas

- The origin of the Pallavas of Kāñchī is a matter of intense debate among historians.
- Various scholars ascribe to them a north Indian, and even a foreign (Pahlava) origin.
- They might be associated with the Toṇḍaiyar of Kāñchī.
- The combined testimony of two copperplate grants—the Mayidavolu plates and the Hirahadagalli plates, shows that one of the earliest Pallava kings of note was Śiva-Skandavarman.
- The former inscription refers to him as heir-apparent, clearly indicating that he was not the first ruler of the family.
- The latter inscription mentions his father, simply as *Bappadeva*, ‘revered father’, without specifying his name.
- The kingdom of Śiva-Skandavarman is said to have extended up to the river, Krishna, in the north, and the Arabian Sea in the west.
- He appointed the Kadamba ruler, Mayūraśarman, as the ruler of Vanavāsī.
- The Gaṅga rulers of Mysore, too, seem to have come under Pallava influence.
- Śiva-Skandavarman performed several vedic sacrifices, like the *agnishṭoma*, *vājapeya*, and, most significantly, the *aśvamedha*.
- He is generally dated to the last quarter of the third century AD.
- Vishṇugopa, the Pallava ruler of Kāñchī, who was defeated by Samudragupta, as per the testimony of the Allahabad pillar inscription of that Imperial Gupta ruler, appears to have been a scion of this royal family.