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The Chola Dynasty

Syllabus: GS-1; History, Art & Culture

Context

- Prime Minister Modi announces Centre will erect statues of Chola emperors Rajaraja Chola and his son, Rajendra Chola I in Tamil Nadu.

About

- The **Chola Dynasty** (c. 300 BCE–1279 CE) was one of the longest-ruling and most influential dynasties in South Indian history, known for its **administrative efficiency, maritime power, art, architecture, and cultural contributions**. It played a significant role in shaping the political and cultural landscape of South India and Southeast Asia.

1. Origins and Early History

- The Cholas were first mentioned in **Ashoka's edicts (3rd century BCE)** as one of the southern kingdoms.
- The **Sangam literature** (Tamil texts from 300 BCE–300 CE) provides details about early Chola kings like **Karikala Chola** (famous for the **Grand Anicut** dam on the Kaveri River).
- After a decline, the dynasty was revived in the **9th century CE** by **Vijayalaya Chola**, who captured **Thanjavur** (850 CE).

2. Major Rulers of the Imperial Chola Dynasty

a) Vijayalaya Chola (850–871 CE)

- Founder of the **Medieval Chola Dynasty**.
- Established **Thanjavur** as the capital.

b) Aditya I (871–907 CE)

- Defeated the **Pallavas** and expanded Chola territory.

c) Parantaka I (907–955 CE)

- Took the title "**Maduraiyum Elamum Konda Parantaka**" (Conqueror of Madurai and Sri Lanka).
- Lost to the **Rashtrakutas** in the **Battle of Takkolam (949 CE)**.

d) Rajaraja I (985–1014 CE) – The Great

- One of the greatest Chola rulers.
- Military conquests:
 - Defeated **Cheras, Pandyas, and Chalukyas**.
 - Conquered **northern Sri Lanka** and the **Maldives**.
 - Naval expedition to the **Malabar Coast** and **Srivijaya Empire (Indonesia)**.
- Built the **Brihadeeswarar Temple (Thanjavur)**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Introduced **land surveys** and efficient **revenue administration**.

e) Rajendra I (1014–1044 CE) – Peak of Chola Power

- Took the title "**Gangaikonda Chola**" after marching up to the **Ganges**.
- Built **Gangaikonda Cholapuram**, the new capital.
- Naval expeditions to **Srivijaya (Sumatra, Malaysia)** and **Bengal**.
- Defeated the **Pala dynasty** (Mahipala I).

f) Later Notable Rulers

- **Rajadhiraja I (1044–1052 CE)** – Died in the **Battle of Koppam** against Chalukyas.
- **Kulottunga I (1070–1122 CE)** – Maintained a strong empire, abolished tolls, and had trade relations with China.
- **Rajaraja III & Rajendra III (13th century)** – Decline due to **Pandya and Hoysala invasions**.

3. Administration of the Chola Empire

- The Cholas had a **highly centralized and efficient administration**:

a) Central Government

- **Monarchy** with divine kingship.
- Council of ministers (**Perundaram**) and officials (**Uttaramerur inscriptions** detail local elections).

b) Local Self-Government (Unique Feature)

- **Village Assemblies (Sabhas & Urs)** managed local affairs.
- **Variyams** (committees) for irrigation, temples, and justice.

c) Revenue System

- Land tax (**Kadamai**), trade taxes, and tributes.
- **Detailed land surveys** for fair taxation.

d) Military

- Strong **Navy** (controlled Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean trade).
- Well-organized army with **elephant corps, cavalry, and infantry**.

4. Economy and Society

a) Agriculture & Irrigation

- **Kaveri River** was the lifeline; **Grand Anicut (Kallanai)** dam built by Karikala.
- Advanced **irrigation systems** (tanks, canals).

b) Trade & Commerce

- Thriving **maritime trade** with China, Srivijaya, and Arabia.
- Exported **spices, textiles, pearls, and metalwork**.
- **Guilds (Nagaram)** regulated trade.

c) Society

- **Caste system** existed but was less rigid than in the north.
- **Women** had property rights; some were **temple dancers (Devadasis)**.
- **Education** flourished in **temples and mathas**.

5. Art, Architecture & Literature

a) Temples (Dravida Style)

- **Brihadeeswarar Temple (Thanjavur)** – Built by Rajaraja I, **vimana (66m tall)**.
- **Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple** – Built by Rajendra I.
- **Airavatesvara Temple (Darasuram)** – Built by Rajaraja II.

b) Bronze Sculptures

- **Nataraja (Dancing Shiva)** is the finest example of Chola bronze art.

c) Literature

- **Tamil poetry: Kamban's Ramavataram (Tamil Ramayana)**.
- **Nalayira Divya Prabandham** (Vaishnavite hymns).
- **Periya Puranam** (Lives of 63 Shaivite saints).

6. Decline of the Chola Dynasty

- **Rise of Pandyas & Hoysalas** in the 13th century.

- **Weak later rulers** (Rajaraja III & Rajendra III).
- **Delhi Sultanate invasions** (Malik Kafur, 1311 CE) further weakened the region.

7. Legacy of the Cholas

- **Maritime dominance** influenced Southeast Asia.
- **Temple architecture** set standards for Dravidian style.
- **Local self-governance** inspired modern Panchayati Raj.
- **Tamil culture** flourished under their patronage.

Previous Year Questions (UPSC & KPSC)

1. Discuss the contribution of the Cholas to Indian art and architecture. (UPSC 2021)
2. Evaluate the significance of local self-government under the Cholas. (KPSC 2020)
3. How did the Chola navy contribute to their empire's expansion? (UPSC 2019)

India-Maldives Relations

Syllabus: GS-2: International Relations – Bilateral Relations.

Context:

- In 2025, during PM Modi's official visit to the Maldives, **8 key bilateral agreements** were signed.
- Areas covered: **digital payments, debt relief, fisheries, infrastructure**, and a ₹4,850 crore **Line of Credit**.
- The visit marked a **reset in bilateral relations**, especially after the earlier "India Out" campaign.

India-Maldives Relations: Overview

- Ties based on **ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and geographic proximity**.
- Maldives is vital to India's "**Neighbourhood First**" and **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** policies.
- Strategic location in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** makes Maldives crucial for maritime security.

Key Agreements Signed (2025 Visit)

- **Debt Relief:** 40% reduction in Maldives' annual repayment burden.
- **₹4,850 crore Line of Credit:** For key infrastructure aligned with Maldives' development goals.
- **UPI & RuPay Integration:** Enhanced digital payment connectivity and local currency trade.
- **Fisheries Cooperation:** Strengthening livelihood-based maritime economy.
- **3,300 Housing Units:** Indian-funded housing in Hulhumalé handed over.
- **Security Assistance:** 72 vehicles and defence equipment gifted.
- **Climate & Disaster Resilience:** Joint collaboration on climate adaptation and green energy.
- **Investment Talks:** Agreed to fast-track **Bilateral Investment Treaty** and **FTA**.

Significance of the Visit

- Reversed hostile narrative of "India Out".
- Reaffirmed India's position as **first responder and preferred development partner**.
- Reinforced India's **strategic interests in IOR**.
- Boosted **people-to-people ties** through education, health, and housing.

Historical Milestones

- **1965:** India was the **first to recognize Maldives' independence**.
- **1988:** India intervened to **foil a coup under Operation Cactus**.
- **2004–2020:** Assistance during **tsunami, water crisis, and COVID-19** enhanced trust.

Major Areas of Cooperation

Defence and Security

- Joint exercises: **Ekuverin (Army), Ekatha (Coast Guard), Dosti (Trilateral with Sri Lanka)**.
- Infrastructure projects: **MNDF Training Centre, UTF Harbour, Coastal Radar Network**.

- Over **1,500 MNDF personnel trained** by India.
- Regular **MEDEVAC and HADR** support.

Development Assistance

- Major Projects: Greater Malé Connectivity Project, Hanimaadhoo Airport, IGMH Hospital.
- 47 **High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs)** implemented.

Trade and Investment

- India is **Maldives' largest trading partner (2023)**.
- Trade volume: **\$548 million (2023)**.
- Exports: food, medicine, construction materials.
- Imports: scrap metal, seafood.
- UPI & RuPay to boost **fintech and local currency trade**.

Tourism and Culture

- India was **top tourist source (2021–23)** with over 2 lakh visitors/year.
- Open Skies agreement signed for better air connectivity.

Education and HRD

- Scholarships: **ICCR, ITEC**, teacher exchanges.
- Indian-supported institutions: Police Academy, ICT Centres, Technical Institutes.

Challenges in the Relationship

- **“India Out” Sentiment:**
 - Politically driven nationalism portrayed Indian military as threat to sovereignty.
- **Chinese Leverage:**
 - China's BRI projects have increased **Maldives' debt dependency**.
- **Sovereignty Concerns:**
 - Indian defence presence seen by some as interference.
- **Political Instability:**

- Frequent leadership changes impact bilateral policy continuity.
- **Project Delays:**
 - Administrative bottlenecks slow execution of Indian-funded projects.

Way Forward

- Ensure **timely delivery** of infrastructure projects.
- **Institutionalise strategic dialogues** to counter shifting geopolitical dynamics.
- Deepen **blue economy** and **climate resilience** collaboration.
- Promote **youth, education, and civil society** partnerships.
- Anchor Maldives more closely to **Indo-Pacific** vision of peace and stability.

Conclusion

India-Maldives ties are transitioning into a **mature, strategic, and development-driven partnership**. The 2025 visit by PM Modi re-established India's pivotal role in Maldivian development and regional security. **Sustained engagement, trust-building, and people-centric diplomacy** will shape the future trajectory.

Henley Passport Index 2025

Syllabus: GS-2; International Institutions

Context:

As per the Henley Passport Index 2025, **India now has visa-free access to 59 destinations**.

What is Henley Passport Index?

- A **global passport ranking** based on the number of destinations holders can access without a **pre-arranged visa**.
- Measures **travel freedom** and **diplomatic strength** of countries.
- Considered by policymakers, businesses, and travellers globally.

Publisher and Data Source

- **Published by:** Henley & Partners, a global citizenship and residence advisory firm.

- **Data Source:** International Air Transport Association (IATA), supplemented by in-house research.

Criteria Used

- Ranks 199 passports based on access to **227 destinations**.
- Includes:
 - Visa-free access
 - Visa-on-arrival
 - Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA)
- Does **not** include access requiring **prior visa approval**.

Global Highlights (2025)

Top Performers

- **1st:** Singapore – access to **193 countries**
- **2nd:** Japan, South Korea – **190 countries**
- **Top 5** dominated by European nations (Germany, France, Italy).

Major Climbers

- **UAE:** Climbed from 42nd to **8th** in a decade.
- **China:** Jumped from 94th (2015) to **60th** in 2025.
- **Saudi Arabia:** Now has access to 91 countries (↑ by 4 in 2025).

Declining Powers

- **USA:** Dropped to **10th** place.
- **UK:** Ranked **6th**, down from earlier top spots.

Lowest Rank

- **Afghanistan:** Ranked **last**, with access to only **25 countries**.

India's Passport Performance

2025 Status

- **Current Rank:** **77th** (↑ from 85th in 2024).
- **Visa-Free Access:** 59 countries, including:

- Malaysia, Maldives, Thailand, Fiji, Jamaica.
- **Visa-on-Arrival:**
 - Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia, Macau, Laos, Seychelles, etc.

Historical Trend

- **Lowest Rank:** 90th in 2021
- **Highest Rank:** 71st in 2006

Reasons for Improvement

- Strengthened **bilateral and regional diplomacy**
- Increased **global mobility cooperation**
- Growing **economic footprint**
- Adoption of **digital visa systems**

PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana (PM-VBRY)

Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Economy – Social Security.

Context:

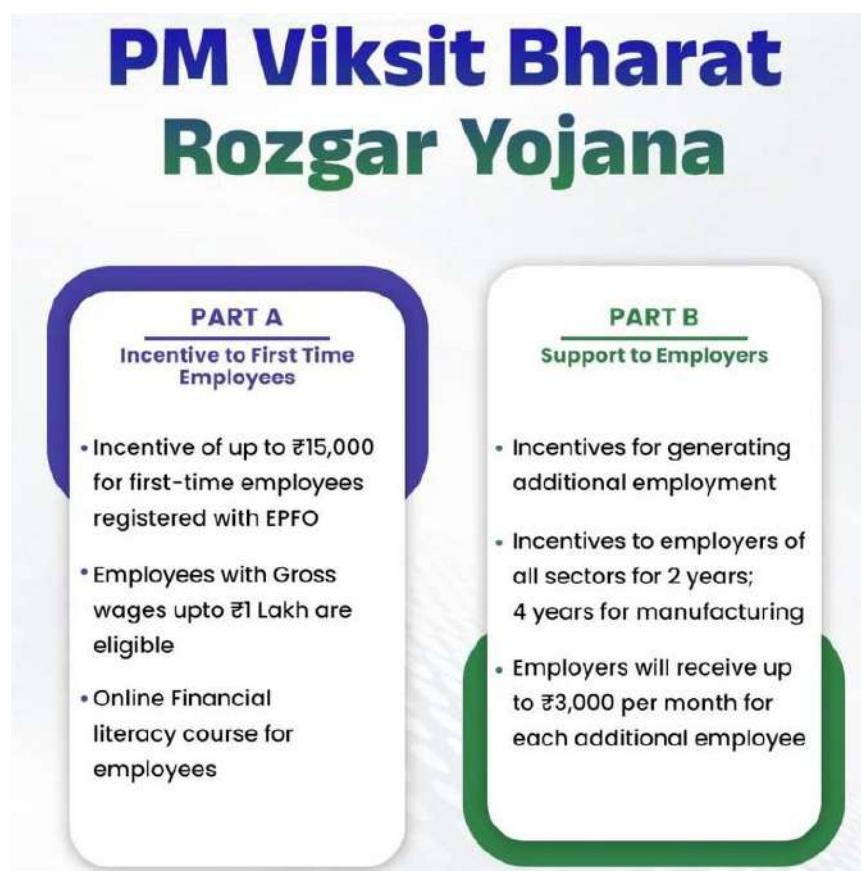
- Comes into effect from **1st August 2025**.
- Replaces the **Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) Scheme**.
- Part of the **Viksit Bharat initiative** to accelerate formal employment generation.

Basic Details

- **Type:** National employment-linked incentive scheme.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Labour and Employment.
- **Total Outlay:** ₹99,446 crore.
- **Duration:** 2025 to 2027.
- **Target:** Create over **3.5 crore jobs**, including **1.92 crore first-time employees**.

Objectives

- Promote **formal job creation**, especially in **manufacturing**.
- Encourage **first-time entry** into the formal workforce.
- Provide **financial incentives** to employers and employees.
- Encourage **saving habits** and **financial literacy**.



Structure of PM-VBRY

Part A: Incentives for First-Time Employees

- **Eligibility:** New EPFO-registered employees with monthly salary \leq ₹1 lakh.
- **Incentive:** Equivalent to **one-month EPF wage** (up to ₹15,000), paid in 2 instalments:
 - **1st instalment:** After 6 months of continuous service.
 - **2nd instalment:** After 12 months + completion of financial literacy training.

- **Savings Component:** Part of incentive locked in a **deposit account** for future withdrawal.

Part B: Incentives for Employers

- **Focus:** All sectors, with **special focus on manufacturing**.
- **Eligibility Criteria:**
 - For establishments with **<50 employees**: Must hire **at least 2** additional employees.
 - For establishments with **≥50 employees**: Must hire **at least 5** additional employees.
- **Wage-Based Monthly Incentive (per new employee):**
 - ₹1,000 for wages ≤ ₹10,000
 - ₹2,000 for wages ₹10,001 – ₹20,000
 - ₹3,000 for wages ₹20,001 – ₹1,00,000
- **Tenure of Support:**
 - **2 years** for all sectors
 - **4 years** for **manufacturing sector**

Payment Mechanism

- **For First-Time Employees:** Direct Benefit Transfer via **Aadhaar Bridge Payment System (ABPS)**.
- **For Employers:** Direct transfer to **PAN-linked bank accounts**.

Significance

- Boosts **formalization of the economy**.
- Supports **inclusive growth** by bringing unorganized workers into formal sector.
- Enhances **employer participation** in nation-building through incentives.
- Aligns with **Amrit Kaal vision** and **Viksit Bharat @2047 goals**.

National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC)

Syllabus: GS-3: Disaster Management – Institutions and Organisations.

Context:

- The government has **constituted the NCMC** under the newly **amended Disaster Management Act, 2025**.

What is NCMC?

- **Apex body** for coordination and implementation of **relief and rescue operations** in case of major disasters with **national implications**.

Statutory Backing

- **Established under:** Section 8A of the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**.

Nodal Ministry

- Ministry of Home Affairs

Composition

- **Chairman:** Cabinet Secretary
- **Members:**
 - Union Home Secretary
 - Defence Secretary
 - Secretary (Coordination), Cabinet Secretariat
 - Head of Department, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)

Inclusion of Experts

- Chairperson can **designate experts or officers** from **central/state governments** or **any organisation**, depending on the **nature of the crisis**.

Key Functions

- **Evaluate Preparedness:** Assess readiness to tackle threatening disaster situations.
- **Coordinate & Monitor:** Liaise with ministries, departments, state governments, NDMA, NGOs, etc.
- **Issue Guidelines:** Provide **directions** for effective disaster management and monitoring.