

# Chero Archers: Jharkhand archery team pays tribute to legendary warrior clan

The Cheros emerged in what is now Bihar and Jharkhand after the fall of the Pala Empire in the 12th-13th century, with the onset of the Sena dynasty. Eventually, they settled in Palamau, in present-day western Jharkhand.

Written by [Shivani Naik](#)

Mumbai | Updated: September 27, 2025 07:24 AM IST

🕒 4 min read

As Trusted Source on 



The Archers will join the Prithviraaj Yodhas, Kakatiya Knights, Mighty Marathas, Rajputana Royals and Chola Chiefs for the inaugural edition of the APL, set to take place from October 2 to 12. (Tata Steel Press Release)

Their bows were basic, just a bent arc. Yet for the Chero (pronounced Chii-ro) archers of Palamau, the weapons were a symbol of defiance that defines their storied, if less-known, past.

The Chero were forever the 'Davids' of their story, prevailing against the 'Goliath' of the time: first the Mughals, and later, the British. The 17th-century folk hero Medini Rai, after whom Jharkhand's Medininagar city is named, is remembered today as 'Chero Napoleon', according to a Prasar Bharati documentary on the tribes.

That's why the moniker 'Chero Archers' for the Jharkhand franchise of the upcoming Archery Premier League is apt.

The Archers will join the Prithviraaj Yodhas, Kakatiya Knights, Mighty Marathas, Rajputana Royals and Chola Chiefs for the inaugural edition of the APL, set to take place from October 2 to 12.

### **Davids of defiance**

The Cheros emerged in what is now Bihar and Jharkhand after the fall of the Pala Empire in the 12th-13th century, with the onset of the Sena dynasty. Eventually, they settled in Palamau, in present-day western Jharkhand.

The story of their feistiness goes back to Sahbal Rai, a contemporary of Mughal emperor Jahangir, who troubled imperial forces of the Sultanate for years.

According to *The Nagbanshis and Cheros* (1972) by Balmukund Virottam, the retired head of the history department in Ranchi University, Sahbal looted supplies and caravans on the Grand Trunk road in 1613, and took some restraining when captured.

"Sahbal Rai impressed Jahangir by his fine physique and was ordered to fight a tiger for the amusement of the Emperor. He died in this fight with the tiger," Virottam wrote.

The Mughals would never subdue the Cheros. While Man Singh (1589), Sha'ista Khan (1641), Zabardast Khan (1643), and Daud Khan (1660) succeeded militarily, the flaming arrows of the Cheros did not stop stinging the Sultanate.

When Sha'ista Khan, a general of Aurangzeb, marched into the forests around Palamau and tried to cut trees to clear a spot for his camp, Chero arrows rained hell.

The most famous Chero warrior was Medini Rai. His troops evoked praise from 19th-century Scottish historian W W Hunter, who described them as "...People with bare heads and bare feet, and carrying bows with one curve and plenty of arrows..."

In 1660, when Daud Khan, another of Aurangzeb's generals, arrived in Palamau, his armies were equipped with intricately forged bows of the Cupid or Apollo shape (lip-curved), while

the Cheros carried simple curves.

The tribal warriors were surrounded from all sides as they retreated to the hills and forests. Many were killed or wounded. Medini Rai evacuated women, children, and valuables from his fort, and took on the Mughal forces with his band of archers.

### **Famous arrows**

According to Virrotam, the most lethal arrows from Chero quivers were fired in 1730, when they scattered an advance party of Muazzam Khan.

“When Muazzam arrived at Derra, the people of Palamau under Jai Krishna Rai had felled trees and stopped his passage by throwing dust and showering arrows from behind the rocks,” Virrotam wrote.

Muazzam likely died of a wound during such an attack. Fakhruddaula, who was following him, settled for a very unenforceable tributary relationship with the Cheras.

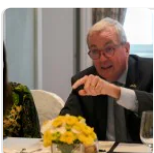
When the British came, it was Cheros of Chitrajit Rai who defied Captain Jacob Camac of the East India Company in 1771. When Camac led a detachment into Silli, the tribespeople used bows and arrows, but “were a very daring people and behaved with greater spirit than any in the Ramgur (Ramgarh) Country,” Virottam wrote.

Even after declarations of extirpation (rooting out) of the Chero dynasty, the resistance constantly used the isolation of the thick forests. Mini insurrections took place between 1817 and 1857.

The Santal Revolt of 1855 saw brothers Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu of Tamar village raid British citadels for armaments, with an arrow left embedded serving as a summoning of supporters. Equally renowned are Chero brothers Nilamber and Pitamber, who led the Chero revolt against the British in 1857.

For the Cheros whose women fight alongside men, and who treat hunting, fishing and river diving as entertainment and sport, the bow and arrow was the first underdog story, they imbibed. Fighting, for them, wasn't about the sophistication of their equipment but the spirit of the archer.

#### **FROM THE HOMEPAGE**



**India-US deal could involve a grand bargain on oil: New Jersey Governor**



**Amid walkouts, Netanyahu says Israel 'must finish job in Gaza', asks Hamas to...**