



SOUTH INDIAN ADMINISTRATION DURING CHOLA PERIOD-A STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

Chola rulers were ruled South India for more than one thousand years. Emperors were supreme during the rule and as the Empire was vast, local administration was significantly emphasized. Land revenue, judiciary, local administration at villages and towns, etc were systematic during Chola period. The local administration was democratic as the representatives were elected by small boys through lot system. It is observed that, Chola administration has become foundation for modern democracy

Introduction: The Chola dynasty was one of the longest-ruling dynasties in the history of Southern India. The earliest datable references to this Tamil dynasty are in inscriptions from the 3rd century BCE left by Ashoka of the Maurya Empire. As one of the Three Crowned Kings, the dynasty continued to govern over varying territory until the 13th century. The long rule of Chola dynasty reveals its popularity among people of South India. In other words, the administration of Chola rulers was best and as such, there was all round development in socio-economic, cultural and such other conditions.

The heartland of the Cholas was the fertile valley of the Kaveri river, but they ruled a significantly larger area at the height of their power from the later half of the 9th century till the beginning of the 13th century. The whole country south of the Tungabhadra was united and held as one state for a period of two centuries and more¹ . Under Raja Raja Chola-I and his successors Rajendra Chola-I, Rajadhiraja Chola, Virarajendra Chola and Kulothunga Chola-I, the dynasty became a military, economic and cultural power in South Asia and South-East Asia. The power of the new empire was proclaimed to the eastern world by the expedition to the Ganges which Rajendra Chola-I undertook and by the occupation of cities of the maritime empire of Srivijaya, as well as by the repeated embassies to China² . The administration was hierarchy based, the details of administration of Chola rulers at different levels are stated as under. Chola Administration: The king was referred to as Chakravartigal (Emperor) and the lord of the three worlds (Tribhuvanachakravarti)³ .

The crown prince began to take part in active administration from the time of Rajaraja and minor princes were appointed as regional governors. The king was the head of the administration of the Cholas and all powers were concentrated in his hands. As such, the king was the supreme commander and a benevolent dictator. His share in the administration consisted of issuing oral commands to responsible officers when representations were made to him. Such orders were



recorded in great detail in the inscriptions, usually on the walls of temples. A special type of official, names Tirumandira Olai Nayagam⁴, who recorded the oral orders immediately on palm leaf manuscripts were responsible of the accurate records of them. The form of the Chola government was hereditary monarchy. The rule of primogeniture generally prevailed. The king generally appointed his Yuvaraja (heir) during his reign. The Chola rulers took high-sounding titles as Gangaikonda Cholapuram.

The royal household also runs on an elaborate scale. The royal priest Rajguru became the close confidant of the royal family. The king had council of ministers to aid and assists him. The king gave verbal orders (tiruvakya-kelvi) which were drafted by the private secretary and confirmed by the Olainayamak. and a Perundaram before its despatch by the Vidaiyadhikari (despatch clerk)⁵. They often advised him on important matters. An elaborate and complicated bureaucracy ran the government. There is no definite evidence of the existence of a council to ministers or of other officers connected to the central government, though the names of individual ministers are found in the inscriptions. A powerful bureaucracy assisted the king in the tasks of administration and in executing his orders.

Due to the lack of a legislature or a legislative system in the modern sense, the fairness of king's orders dependent on the goodness of the man and in his belief in Dharma – sense of fairness and justice. The ancient society did not expect anything more than general security from the government. Even matters of disputes went to the officers of the court only as the last resort. The Chola bureaucracy did not differ much from its contemporaries. However, what distinguished it was its highly organised nature. A careful balance between central control and local independence was maintained and non-interference in local government was sacrosanct. There was a definite hierarchy of the bureaucracy and the tenure of the officials simply dependent on the 'Crown's pleasure'. The officials held various titles such as Marayan and Adigariga. Seniority between the same cadre was indicated by qualifying title such as Perundanam and Sirutanam⁶. One of the important such officers were the Revenue officials responsible for the receipts and expenditures of the government. The officials tended to form a separate class in society. Perundaram were higher officials while Sirutaram were lower officials. Peruvallis (trunk roads) helped in royal tours. The general tendency was to make the officers hereditary.

The officials were paid by assignments of land called jivitas according to their status. The early Cholas had Urayur and Puhar as their capitals. Urayur was still their capital during the interregnum before their revival in the ninth century CE. Vijayalaya Chola defeated the Pandya feudatories Muttarayars and captured the city of Thanjavur, and the city maintained its position as the main city during the reigns of the Chola emperors up to Rajendra Chola-I. Rajendra Chola I established the town of Gangaikonda Cholapuram and made it his capital commemorating his successful expedition to the Ganges in 1023 CE. This town, situated south west of the temple town of



Chidambaram does not exist anymore. It was extensively sacked and destroyed by the Pandyas during the dying days of the Chola empire.

However, the great Shiva temple Gangaikonda Choleswara still exists proclaiming the once great city. As stated by Neelakantha Sastri⁷, Every village was a self-governing unit. A number of such villages constituted a Korram or nadu or Kottam in different parts of the country. Taniyur was a large village big enough to be a Kurram by itself. A number of Kurrams constituted a Valanadu. Several Valanadus made up one Mandalam, a province. At the height of the Chola empire there were eight or nine of these provinces including Sri Lanka. These divisions and names underwent constant changes throughout the Chola period. An inscription of the eighth century CE, at Uttaramerur temple describes the constitution of the local council, eligibility and disqualifications for the candidates, the method of selection, their duties and delimits their power. It appears that the administration of a common village Ur or Oor was different from that of a village given to Brahmins.

A well-organized department of land revenue, known as the Puravu-varitinaik – katam was in existence. Land revenue was collected in cash or kind. Land was possessed by individuals and communities. The state under Rajaraja demanded 1/3rd of the gross produce. Kadamai or Kudimai was the land revenue. There were taxes on profession, mines, forests, saltpans, etc. Kulottung Chola- I abolished tolls. Unpaid labour was frequently employed. Land tax constituted the single largest source of income of the Chola state. It was generally assessed at one-third of the produce. The village assembly took land tax and local levies. Cattle rearing were a subsidiary occupation. Trade with foreign countries was an important feature of the Cholas mercantile activities. The rulers built a network of royal roads that were useful for trade as well as for the movement of the army. There were gigantic trade guilds that traded with Java and Sumatra. South India exported textiles, spices, drugs, jewels, ivory, horn, ebony and camphor to China. Trade brought considerable prestige and affluence to the Cholas. Kalanju was the currency prevalent in the Chola kingdom.

An extensive resurvey was done around 1089 CE by the Chola king Kulottunga, recording the extents of lands and their assessment, boundaries of villages and the common rights inside the village, including the communal pastures. Revenue officials were responsible for the tax collection. The Chola government was very mindful of the need for the fair and accurate collection of tax to run the state machinery. The revenue records were not manuals of extortion, but carefully maintained records of land rights, based on complete enquired and accurate surveys, and were kept up-to-date by regular surveys. The duties of revenue officials included many other spheres of responsibilities. They also regulated receipts and expenditures of temples. They were also seen to purchase land on behalf of village assemblies. They attested and certified important documents drawn up by local government agencies such as village councils. They were also shown to act as magistrates.



The army consisted of infantry, cavalry and elephants which formed the three limbs of the great army – Mun-rukai-Mahasenai. The Kaikkolas were soldiers armed with strong arms and the Sengundar were armed with spears. The Velaikkarars were the most dependable troops in the royal service and were the bodyguards of the monarch, who defended him with their lives and were ready to immolate themselves on the king's funeral. Attention was given to the training of the army and cantonments, called Kadagams or padaividu, existed. The Cholas paid special attention to their navy. The whole empire was divided into Mandalams or Provinces. Sometimes princes of the royal family were appointed governors of the provinces. Further, they were divided into valanadus (divisions), Nadus (districts) and Kurrams (villages). Village was the basic unit of administration. The villages were mainly of three types. The first type constituted of an inter-caste population where the land was held by all classes of people and paid taxes to the king in the form of land revenue. It was the most frequent type. The second was the Brahmadeya or agrahara Agrahara, which was granted to the Brahmins and was entirely inhabited by them. They were exempted from tax and were prosperous.

The third type of village was the Devadana, which were villages granted to god. The revenues from these villages were donated to a temple. During Cholas the Devadana type of villages gained more popularity as the temples became the centres of life. The Chola Navy comprised the naval forces of the Chola Empire along with several other naval-arms of the country. The Chola navy played a vital role in the expansion of the Chola Empire, including the conquest of the Ceylon islands and naval raids on Sri Vijaya (present-day Indonesia). The navy grew both in size and status during the Medieval Cholas reign.

The Chola Admirals commanded much respect and prestige in the society. The navy commanders also acted as diplomats in some instances. From 900 to 1100, the navy had grown from a small backwater entity to that of a potent power projection and diplomatic symbol in all of Asia, but was gradually reduced in significance when the Cholas fought land battles for subjugating the Chalukyas of Andhra-Kannada area in South India. In the age of the Cholas, the whole of South India was, for the first time ever, brought under a single government. The Cholas' system of government was monarchical, as in the Sangam age. However, there was little in common between the local chiefdoms of the earlier period and the imperial-like states of Rajaraja Chola and his successors.

The administration of the Imperial Chola Dynasty assumed a high degree of complexity. The order of the King was first communicated by the executive officer to the local authorities. Afterwards the records of the transaction was drawn up and attested by a number of witnesses who were either local magnates or government officers. The king was the central authority assisted by his ministers and other officers. The king visited various parts of his kingdom and always prepared to provide relief to the people. The Chola kingdom was divided into several provinces called Mandalams. Each province was governed by the governors. The provinces were divided into divisions called



Kottams. The divisions were further divided into district called Nadus which were further divided into Tehsil comprising a group of villages.

Thanjavur and later Gangaikonda Cholapuram were the imperial capitals. However, both Kanchipuram and Madurai were considered to be regional capitals in which occasional courts were held. The King was the supreme leader and a benevolent authoritarian. His administrative role consisted of issuing oral commands to responsible officers when representations were made to him. A powerful bureaucracy assisted the king in the tasks of administration and in executing his orders. Due to the lack of a legislature or a legislative system in the modern sense, the fairness of king's orders dependent on his morality and belief in Dharma. The Chola kings built temples and endowed them with great wealth.

The temples acted not only as places of worship but also as centres of economic activity, benefiting the community as a whole. Some of the output of villages throughout the kingdom was given to temples that reinvested some of the wealth accumulated as loans to the settlements. The temple served as a centre for redistribution of wealth and contributed towards the integrity of the kingdom. The Chola administration was of a high standard and well organized. In the words of Dr. V.A. Smith, "The administration of the Chola Kingdom was highly systematized and evidently had been organized in ancient times"⁸. The kings personally appear very rarely in the Chola-period inscriptions. In a few records pious donors instituted rituals producing merit for the well-being or success of the king, indicating that some localities were officially concerned over the ruler's illnesses or military tonomy and self-sufficiency in the field of village administration. The two inscriptions of Uttaramerur (situated in Chingalpet district of Tamil Nadu) issued by the Chola monarch Parantaka I constitute a great landmark in the history of the Local Self-Government of the period.

The inscriptions were issued by Parantaka in different dates viz., on AD 919 and AD 921 at his 12th and 14th regnal years. These are engraved on the wall of Vaikunta temple of Uttaramerur. There was remarkable autonomy at the village level. Chola officials participated in village administration more as observers than as administrators. The Cholas are best known for their local self government at the village level. There were three assemblies called the Ur, Sabha or Mahasabha and Nagaram¹⁰. The Ur was a general assembly of the village. The ur consisted of all the tax-paying residents of an ordinary village.

The Alunganattar was the executive committee and the ruling group of the Ur. The ur open to all male adults but was dominated by the older members. The Sabha was apparently an exclusively Brahmin assembly of the Brahmadeya villages. The Sabha had more complex machinery, which functioned largely through its committees called the varyiams. The Ur was evidently the commoner type of assembly of the normal villages where the land was held by all classes of people who were entitled to membership in the local assembly.



The Ur consisted of the taxpaying residents of an ordinary village. Of the Constitution and functions of the Ur assembly, we are not as well informed as of the Sabha. But we may presume that the role of Ur in local administration was similar to that of Sabha. In a large township like Uttaramerur where the Ur and the Sabha existed side by side, these arose a natural tendency for the Sabha to guide and control the activities of the Ur, and for the Ur to submit willingly to such guidance. The Ur had an executive committee of its own which has called 'Alunganattar', the ruling group. Hence, the Chola administration was based upon democratic principles. Major official activities were executed through Sabhas (Meetings). The members of Sabhas were elected from the people. Election to the executive body and other committees of the Ur and Sabha appears to have been conducted by draw of lots from among those who were eligible¹¹. The Nagaram was an assembly of merchants and were found more commonly in the trading centers.

CHOLA ADMINISTRATION

Central Government The Cholas had an excellent system of administration. The emperor or king was at the top of the administration. The extent and resources of the Chola Empire increased the power and prestige of monarchy. The big capital cities like Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram, the large royal courts and extensive grants to the temples reveal the authority of the king. They undertook royal tours to increase the efficiency of the administration. There was elaborate administrative machinery comprising various officials called perundanam and sirudanam. **Revenue** The land revenue department was well organized. It was called as puravubarithinaikkalam.

All lands were carefully surveyed and classified for assessment of revenue. The residential portion of the village was called urnattam. These and other lands such as the lands belonging to temples were exempted from tax. Besides land revenue, there were tolls and customs on goods taken from one place to another, various kinds of professional taxes, dues levied on ceremonial occasions like marriages and judicial fines.

During the hard times, there were remission of taxes and Kulottunga I became famous by abolishing tolls and earned the title – SungamTavirtta Cholan. The main items of government expenditure were the king and his court, army and navy, roads, irrigation tanks and canals. **Military Administration** The Cholas maintained a regular standing army consisting of elephants, cavalry, infantry and navy. About seventy regiments were mentioned in the inscriptions. The royal troops were called Kaikkolaperumpadai.

Within this there was a personal troop to defend the king known as Velaikkarar. Attention was given to the training of the From the persons duly nominated, one was to be chosen for each ward by kudavolai system for a year. The names of eligible persons were written on palm-leaves and put into a pot. A young boy or girl would take out thirty names each for one ward. They were divided into six variyams such as samvatsaravariyam,erivariyam, thotta variyam, pancha variyam,



pon variyam and puravuvuri variyam to take up six different functions of the village administration. The committee members were called variyapperumakkal. They usually met in the temple or under a tree and passed resolutions. The number of committees and ward members varied from village to village. Socio-economic life Caste system was widely prevalent during the Chola period. Brahmins and Kshatriyas enjoyed special privileges. The inscriptions of the later period of the Chola rule mention about two major divisions among the castes – Valangai and Idangai castes. However, there was cooperation among various castes and sub-castes in social and religious life. The position of women did not improve. The practice of 'sati' was prevalent among the royal families.

The devadasi system or dancing girls attached to temples emerged during this period. Both Saivism and Vaishnavism continued to flourish during the Chola period. A number of temples were built with the patronage of Chola kings and queens. The temples remained centres of economic activity during this period. The mathas had great influence during this period. Both agriculture and industry flourished. Reclamation of forest lands and the construction and maintenance of irrigation tanks led to agricultural prosperity. The weaving industry, particularly the silk-weaving at Kanchi flourished. The metal works developed owing to great demand of images for temples and utensils. Commerce and trade were brisk with trunk roads or peruvazhis and merchant guilds. Gold, silver and copper coins were issued in plenty at various denominations. Commercial contacts between the Chola Empire and China, Sumatra, Java and Arabia were extensively prevalent. Arabian horses were imported in large numbers to strengthen the cavalry. Education and Literature Education was also given importance.

Besides the temples and mathas as educational centres, several educational institutions also flourished. The inscription GOLD COIN OF RAJARAJA CHOLA Apart from the Vedas and Epics, subjects like mathematics and medicine were taught in these institutions. Endowment of lands was made to run these institutions. The development of Tamil literature reached its peak during the Chola period. Sivakasintamani written by Thiruthakkadevar and Kundalakesi belonged to 10th century. The Ramayana composed by Kamban and the Periyapuranam or iruttondarpuranam by Sekkilar are the two master-pieces of this age. Jayankondar's Kalingattupparani describes the Kalinga war fought by Kulotunga I.

The Moovarula written by Ottakuthar depicts the life of three Chola kings. The Nalavenba was written by Pugalendi. The works on Tamil grammar like Kalladam by Kalladanar, Yapperungalam by Amirhasagarar, a Jain, Nannul by Pavanandhi and Virasoliyam by Buddhaitra were the products of the Chola age. Art and Architecture The Dravidian style of art and architecture reached its perfection under the Cholas. They built enormous temples. The chief feature of the Chola temple is the vimana. The early Chola temples were found at Narthamalai and Kodumbalur in Pudukottai district and at Srinivasanallur in Tiruchirappalli district.



The Big Temple at Tanjore built by Rajaraja I is a master-piece of South Indian art and architecture. It consists of the vimana, ardhmandapa, mahamandapa and a large pavilion in the front known as the Nandimandapa. Another notable contribution made by the Cholas to temple architecture is the Siva temple at Gangaikondacholapuram built by Rajendra I. The Airavathesvara temple at Darasuram in Tanjore District and the Kampaharesvaratemple at Tribhuvanam are examples of later Chola temples. The Cholas also made rich contributions to the art of sculpture. The walls of the Chola temples such as the Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram temples contain numerous icons of large size with fine execution. The bronzes of the Chola period are world-famous. The bronze statues of Nataraja or dancing Siva are master pieces. The Chola paintings were found on the walls of Narthamalai and Tanjore temples

Conclusion:

To conclude, though Chola kings were supreme in all the matters, to a greater extent the powers of the administration was decentralized during Chola period. The taxation was efficient through development of whole State through development of local areas. The area administered by Chola rulers revealed that these rulers are ambitious and good administrators. As they were invaded and ruling many areas, they may have thought that they can't rule villages and talukas directly. As such, they have formed local government. Chola rulers were to be remembered due to their significant contributions towards hierarchical local administration based on democratic principles.

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