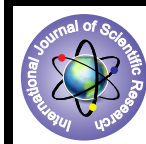


## South Indian Administration during Chola Period



### History

KEYWORDS : :

**Dr. Vijayakumar H. Salimani**

Assistant Professor of History Government First Grade College Chittapur, Dist: Kalaburagi Karnataka

### ABSTRACT

*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 more<sup>1</sup>. 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 China<sup>2</sup>. 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*)<sup>3</sup>. 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 Nayagam*<sup>4</sup>, 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* (Chief Secretary)

and a *Perundaram* before its despatch by the *Vidaiyadhikari* (despatch clerk)<sup>5</sup>. 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 *Sirutanam*<sup>6</sup>. 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. *Peruvalis* (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 Choleshwara still exists proclaiming the once great city.

As stated by Neelakantha Sastri<sup>7</sup>, 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-varitainak* – *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-Mahase-nai*. 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 *Brahmadeva* or *agrahara* villages

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"<sup>8</sup>. 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 adventures<sup>9</sup>.

The uniqueness of the administration of Cholas lies in its autonomy 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 Nagaram<sup>10</sup>. 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 varyams.

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 eligible<sup>11</sup>. The Nagaram was an assembly of merchants and were found more commonly in the trading centers.

#### 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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