Imperial Cholas and their Administration in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The Cholas were the first dynasty who tried to bring the entire South India under a common rule and to a great extent succeeded in their efforts. The Tamil kingdom was divided their land into administrative units called kuttam. These units were compared to the districts of the present day. King Karikala divided the Chola kingdom into kuttams. Each village was organized under the leadership of a village official called the gramakeya or mutada, who was accepted as the village elder and acted as an intermediary between the government and the village. As the leader of the village, it was his duty to safeguard the interests of the village community. Further the system of taxes, obligations and trade activities among the members of the village community were all regulated by some sort of a collective organization. The mantram was considered assan important centre of gathering and it served as a public place for more serious actions.

Key Words: Administration, Government, Mandalams Assembly, Viceroys

Introduction

The Chola administration gave priority to the smallest unit of the administration, the village. The village administration of the Cholas was based mainly on democratic lines. Each village or ur was administered by a council known as village council known as urar. The systems adopted in the local administration of Cholas, revealed an excellent democratic system which prevailed in the Tamil Country.

Rajaraja Chola I popularly known as Rajaraja the Great, is one of the greatest emperors of the Chola dynasty, who ruled between 985 and 1014 A.D. the present Karnataka formely known as coorg and Gangabadi were annexed by Rajaraja and the Chola empire expanded up to river Krishna. Rajaraja's period is known as the golden age of the Imperial Cholas.

The central government functioned under the headship of the king, who was assisted by council of ministers and officials taking active part in running the administration. For administrative convenience the Chola empire was divided into nine provinces. They were also called mandalams. The head of the province was called viceroy and the close relatives of kings were appointed as viceroys. The viceroys were in constant touch with the central government and they received orders from the king. They sent regular reply to the king every day. The viceroys had a large number of officials to assist them in the work of administration. In the beginning the Chola empire consisted of two important units. One unit was the Chola territory, the original kingdom and the other was conquered areas. The Chola territory and the conquered territory were united together and the new province was joined with Chola territory. The units seemed to have emerged as mandalams. Each mandalam was divided into a number of valanadus. The valanadus were divided into nine divisions. Each valanadu was administered by an assembly known as nattar, which look after the affairs of valanadu. Each valanadu was divided into a number of nadus. Each nadu was divided into ambadinmelagaram or units of fifty villages. Each ambadinmelagaram was again divided into agaram or mangalam. Each mangalam or agaram was divided into villages known as pidagais. The periyanadu which was an important administrative division, generally consisted of more agriculture areas. The periyanattar collected the agricultural tax known as nattanmai and remitted it into the state granary. The state granary was known as Pandaram.

King Karikala divided the Chola kingdom into kuttams. The Chera

kingdom was divided into valanadu and kuttam. The nattar was a supra – village land body of land holders which played a greater role in the administration of the nadu localities. Each village was organized under the leadership of a village official called the gramakeya or mutada, who was accepted as the village elder and acted as an intermediary between the government and the village. Lands were donated by the Chola kings especially to the Brahmins. Such villages or lands were known as brahmadeyam. One such example was chathurvedimangalam. The chathurvedimangalam was a brahmadeyam exclusively meant for the Brahmins. There mangalams were administered by the Brahmin bodies which were known as sabha.

Kudavolai System

The members of the kudumbus assembled under a tree or in a common place and wrote down in tickets the names of those whom they wanted to be elected. The tickets were collected and put in a pot. A boy who could not distinguish any one of the members was asked to draw the tickets from the pot one by one. The tickets are drawn in such a manner that 12 members are elected to a particular variyam representing one member from each seri.

Central Government

The central government functioned under the headship of the king, who was assisted by council of ministers and officials taking active part in running the administration. The royal household comprised numerous servants of various descriptions including body-guards of all sorts. Several groups of Parivaras are mentioned and distinguished from one another by their individual names formed from the surnames of the kings. The king, his queens and their numerous relatives set the example, of erecting temples and endowing them on a liberal scale, and spending considerable sums of money on the reclamation of land, promotion of irrigation works, maintenance of schools and hospitals and other useful works. A

numerous and powerful bureaucracy assisted the king in the tasks of administration, which were those of controlling, supervising and regulating an existing order, changing it, if at all, only by imperceptible steps. One of the important such officials was the revenue officer responsible for the receipts and expenditures of the government. The activities of the officials of the bureaucracy were under constant audit and scrutiny.

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Temple Administration

The Pallavas, the Chola kings were great patrons of temples. The Chola temple architecture has been appreciated for its magnificence as well as delicate workmanship, ostensibly following the rich traditions of the past bequeathed to them by the Pallava dynasty. Temples were constructed by the kings and their subordinates usually on account of their religious favour and sometimes to commemorate their military successes. The temple during the medieval period afforded good opportunity for the needy, talented and trustworthy people to prosper, besides contributing to the nourishment of the culture of the times, deeply set in the strong belief system based on God and religion. The temple is known as devalaya or an abode of God. In India it helps in the preservation of Hindu traditions, moulding the society and keeping the bond of unity in a country where there is so many diversity of traditions, customs, dress and language .

Military Administration

The Cholas maintained a regular standing army consisting of elephants, cavalry, infantry and navy. The royal troops were called kaikkolaperumpadai. The soldiers were given proper training and generally the Chola army was led by the king or yuvaraja. The king was the commander - in - chief of the army and navy which acted under his instructions and the army helped the king in the protection of temples and revenue collection in addition to participation in war.

The Chola army had a traditional regimental system of military administration. The Chola army resembles the modern army and had a highly involved war machine in its non-material and strategic segments. The government owns sixty thousand war elephants, every one seven or eight feet high. When fighting those elephants carry on their backs houses, and those houses were full of soldiers who fight with spears at close quarters. The land tenure system was based on feudal class structure of warriors, farmers, artisans and merchants where the distinctions between the caste status of the constituent classes were strictly enforced. The kings and the royal family members were gifted with the training in horse riding. Cavalry forces were supplied to the Imperial forces by the local chieftains in times of war. The Cholas paid special attention to the navy and it comprised the naval forces of the Chola empire along with several other naval arms of the country. The Tamil king Rajendra Chola also had the honour of establishing the first Indian merchant naval fleet. He transformed the naval fleet and thereby established trade from India to the south east Asia and even the China.

Revenue Administration

During the period of the Imperial Cholas trade highly developed and the economy of the Chola kingdom seemed to have well advanced. During the period when barter system was prevalent, the Chola coins were received with high expectation

by the people who brought materials from abroad. Taxes on imports and exports were known as sungam. The Imperial Cholas imposed taxes on those goods which were exported and imported. Through those customs taxes the Cholas had a lot of income. The taxes had been collected and deposited in the Imperial treasury.

Architecture

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 Tiruttondarpuranam 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 Amirthasagarar, a Jain, Nannul by Pavanandhi and Virasoliyam by Buddhamitra were the products of the Chola age.

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, ardhamandapa, 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 Kampaharesvara temple at Tribhuvanam are examples of later Chola temples.

Conclusion

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. Thus Cholas made a rich contribution not only in the field of administration, but also in the field of art, architecture and literature

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