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Chola Government: Local Self-Government

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper is to provide an overview of how the Cholas, a Tamil dynasty that controlled much of southern India between the 10th and the 13th centuries, established a system of centralized govt.(government) and a disciplined bureaucracy during that time. The Chola empire may be considered the pinnacle of south Indian history. There is no doubt that the establishment of local self-govt .by the cholas in medieval India was one of the most important elements of the Indian state and also in modern India it played a crucial role. This paper will examine the importance of local self-govt. and also its application In India. Furthermore, in this piece of research, the question will be raised as to whether local self-govt. of this kind exists in India to this day.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Chola govt. was considered one of the most innovative and unique govt. in the world during the imperial period. This was as a result of its unique and innovative policies during that period. The Chola dynasty was the first dynasty in South Asia to try and control all the regions of the subcontinent under the control of one entity, a feat that has never been duplicated since. They succeeded in their endeavors on a large scale. There is no doubt in my mind that the form and protocols of this govt. cannot be compared to those of a contemporary govt. However, the history of the Chola empire represents a time in their history during which the people of that empire lived in a happy age. They accomplished some significant achievements as a result of their govt. and people. A vital feature of the Chola system of administration was that it was highly efficient and well organized in terms of its organization and efficiency. All the power and decisions were handled by the respected Velir ministers appointed by the king. These ministers were the pivot of the administration, and all the authority and decisions were made by him. During the field operations, the operations were taken care of by the Ambalakkarars (local chieftains or panchayat leaders) who were in contact with the respected ministers who were in charge of the operations in the field. The Cholas were successful in establishing the biggest Thalassocratic empire in Indian history, leaving a lasting impact.

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II. THE RISE OF THE CHOLA EMPIRE

²Vijayalaya, a former Pallava feudatory, established the Chola dynasty. Tanjore was conquered by him in the year 850. The Cholas had beaten both the Pallavas of Karachi (Tondaimandalam) and the Pandyas by the end of the ninth century, seizing control of Southern Tamil Nadu. As a result, the Cholas were unable to defend against the Rashtrakutas. As previously reported, Krishna III attacked the Chola monarch and took the Chola kingdom's northern part. This was a huge defeat for the Cholas, but they eventually recovered, especially following Krishna III's death in 965 and the empire's fall.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY

A. The king

In the Chola govt., the king was the most powerful individual. He had complete power, although he was guided by a council of ministers. The monarchs regularly travelled to keep an eye on the administration. The Cholas had a large army made up of elephants, cavalry, and infantry, known as the army's three arms. Soldiers were usually equipped with spears. Most kings had bodyguards who swore to defend them even if it meant putting their lives in danger. When the Venetian explorer Marco Polo visited Kerala in the thirteenth century, he said that when the monarch died, all the troops who were bodyguards burned themselves on the funeral pyre—a charge that may be overstated.

B. Central administration

The King is the head of the Central Govt. The Council of Ministers and Officials actively participated in the ³administration of the Central Govt. The top authorities were known as Peruntaram, while the inferior officials were known as Siruntaram.

C. Provincial administration

The Nadu was the primary administrative entity, consisting of a number of villages with strong familial ties and other personal ties. The number of hill or tribal people who became agriculturists increased as additional lands were brought under agriculture by irrigation works such as ponds, wells, and so on. Grants to Brahmans and temples increased, assisting in the growth of horticulture. They were known as valanadus in the Chola kingdom. The Chola monarchy was divided into four sections, known as mandalas. Princes of

² VIJAYALAYA, <https://prepp.in/news/e-492-vijayalaya-850-ce-important-ruler-of-chola-dynasty-medieval-india-history-notes> LAST VISITED ON 24 .11.2022.

³ ADMINISTRATION, <http://trcollege.edu.in/study-material/26-history/55-chola-administration> LAST VISITED ON 24.11.2022.

the royal dynasty were appointed as governors of provinces on occasion. Officials were frequently paid with revenue-generating lands.

IV. CHOLAMANDALAM

The mandalam was the greatest of the Chola territorial divisions, broken into smaller sections known as nu). Each nadu served as an agricultural production unit, with around 10 villages and potentially one or two cities (nagaram). Raja Raja Chola I established a vaanu) intermediate division to centralise state administration. Chola-mandalam was split into 10 valanadus, which were expanded to fifteen by the early 12th century by bifurcation and reorganisation.

The Chola kingdom was organised into nine mandalams during the height of its dominance, which included conquered countries such as Sri Lanka.

⁴Cholamandalam, one of the Cholas' primary mandalams, included the present districts of Tanjavur, Tiruchirapalli, and South Arcot. Uraiur, Tanjavur, and Gangaikondacholapuram were Chola capitals at various periods in history.

V. ADMINISTRATION OF THE VILLAGE

A few inscriptions give more information regarding village govt. during the Chola kingdom. Gram Sabha, the local assembly, was solely responsible for ⁵village administration. The village unit was the Chola administration's lowest level. The village assemblies were in charge of the judiciary, education, and temples, as well as tanks, roads, and public ponds. There were two assemblies: the UR and the Sabha or Mahasabha. The UR was the village's general assembly. However, we now have a more in-depth knowledge of how the Mahasabha operates. This was a gathering of adult men from brahman groups called as Agraharams.

These were brahman settlement villages where the majority of the land was free of rent. These villages were highly autonomous. The community's activities were overseen by an executive committee comprised of educated property owners chosen by lot or rotation. These members have to retire every three years. Other committees were created to help with land revenue assessment and collection, law and order preservation, justice, and so on. One of the most prominent committees was the tank committee, which was in charge of transferring water to the fields. Mahasabha may assign a territory and claim ownership over it. It may also levy taxes and make loans to communities.

⁴ CHOLAMANDALAM, <https://www.cholamandalam.com/> LAST VISITED ON 24.11.2022.

⁵ VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION, <https://www.sansarlochan.in/en/chola-kingdom-administration/> LAST VISITED ON 24.11.2022.

VI. VARIYAMS

Village Assemblies managed village governance well with the help of variyams. These⁶ variyams were created by male members of society.

Each hamlet's variyam composition, as well as the requirements and lengths of membership, varies. Variyams were plentiful in every village. Thottavariyam oversaw the flower gardens, while Niyaya variyam oversaw justice. Temples and charities were overseen by the Dharma variyam.

Erivariyam was in charge of the water tanks and supplies. The pon variyam oversaw the finances. The Gramakariya variyam was in charge of overseeing the work of the committees.

These variyams' members were dubbed "Varivaperumakkal." They did their duty to their nation. Local govts. were paid in cash or in kind. The effectiveness of these versions increased the effectiveness of Chola local govt.

VII. REVENUE OF CHOLAS

The Chola emperors ruled over all governmental resources, including finance. The monarch had to create ways and means of collecting enough monies through the revenue department (Variyam committee) to collect taxes and dues for public services while also supporting himself, his palace, and other institutions. The taxes that are collected must be levied in accordance with Sashtra, or Manu's Hindu law. As a result, taxes should be levied after considering people's income and consumption. Every tax should be paid by the people for the least amount possible in excess of what it brings into the state's public purse. Because it controlled all resources, the Treasury was seen as one of the most crucial needs of the state.

Taxation

The monarch, in his full power, acquired the money through several routes.⁷ Taxation was the most effective legal means for the state to generate revenue. According to Dharmasashtras, the king was authorised to levy taxes. Taxation was the principal source of revenue for the state, according to ancient Tamil literature. Taxation was considered a royal prerogative. The monarch had total discretion over his people's taxation. A huge number of evidences provide sufficient information in this regard.

A. Land tax

⁶ VARIYAMS, <https://unacademy.com/content/karnataka-psc/study-material/history/chola-administration/>. LAST VISITED ON 24.11.2022.

⁷ TAXATION, <https://civils360.com/2016/12/26/imperial-cholas/> LAST VISITED ON 24.11.2022.

The Cholas had a well-organized taxation system. The Chola govt. relied heavily on the land tax for revenue. Depending on soil richness, land revenue ranged from one-sixth to one-third. During the Chola dynasty, a water tax was also levied on landowners. It was charged on land when a shared water source was used for irrigation.

B. Incidental revenues

Some taxes were only assessed on specific occasions. During the war years, the people were subjected to an emergency tax in order to defray the expenditures of the struggle. In order to support the army, war taxes were imposed. The Chola has various instances. We uncover inscriptions left by such warfare on persons. Consider a specific war levy. In 945 AD, Parantaka I fined a local assembly 3000 kalanju of gold. Another important source of funds for the Royal Treasury was pillage taken from conquered lands. As tirai tributes, the seized territories were required to pay a specific sum of money to the Chola overlords on a regular basis. Commercial and occupational taxes were also levied.

Chola's army

In addition to a powerful army, the Cholas also possessed a powerful fleet. There were elephants, cavalry, and infantry in the Chola army, along with chariots. There were well-trained soldiers in the army. A great deal of pride was placed on the ranks of nayaks and senapathis by commanders. Approximately 70 regiments were a part of the army. It is estimated that the⁸Chola army had 60,000 elephants at its disposal. The cavalry was bolstered by expensive Arabian horses that were brought from Europe. The Chola rulers destroyed the Cheras at Kandalur salai. The rulers of Ceylon and the Maldives were deposed as well. The Chola navy was strong in South India. With the support of their fleet, the Cholas governed the Coromandal and Malabar coastlines. The Bay of Bengal was converted into Chola Lake. The Chola army and navy combined had 150,000 trained warriors. In times of crisis, the armies of the tributary chieftains also joined the Chola army. The Chola army was mainly led by the monarch Yuvaraja.

Justice

⁹Justice was mostly a local affair under the Chola Empire, with minor disagreements addressed at the village level. Minor offences were penalised by fines or the requirement that the offender contribute to a charitable fund. There were even penalties for manslaughter and murder. State

⁸ CHOLA'S ARMY, <http://tanvi.mahant.com/the-kingdoms-of-south-india-the-chola-army/> LAST VISITED ON 24.11.2022.

⁹ JUSTICE, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chola-dynasty> LAST VISITED ON 24.11.2022.

offences, like treason, were personally tried and judged by the king, and the typical punishment was either execution or confiscation of property. The people had no choice but to obey the monarch in these instances.

In addressing local problems, village assemblies had substantial power. Small committees called Nyayattar heard disputes that did not come under the jurisdiction of the Most punishments took the form of contributions to temples or other endowments. At Darmaasana, the punishment will be remitted. There isn't much information available on judicial procedures or court records. There was no distinction between civil and criminal offences. Civil conflicts were frequently allowed to persist until they were resolved by time. Theft, adultery, and forgery were all considered serious offences. In most cases, the penance consisted of keeping a steady light burning at a shrine. Murder was subject to a monetary penalty. In one instance, a man attacked an army officer. Responsibility of volunteer village committees. Rajendra Chola II ordered the perpetrator to provide 96 lambs for a light in a nearby temple. Even in cases of first-degree murder, capital punishment was rare. So far, the available papers reveal only one instance of the death penalty.

VIII. REASON FOR EFFECTIVE AND ROBUST ADMINISTRATION

A solid administrative organisation strengthened the Chola monarchy and allowed it to better link with neighbouring estates. The Chola dynasty attempted to combine the numerous provinces of south India under one govt. several times. It was a success due to strong and effective administrative processes. The ¹⁰administration was divided into several sections, including central administration, where the king was regarded as the most influential and significant character in the entire govt. Other administrations include revenue administration, military administration, provincial administration, and local governance. Various administrations were given responsibility for managing their response areas and resolving the issues that arose as a result of them. Thus, the Chola govt. was able to delegate effectively and maintain a fluid flow of system structure.

Is there any form of local self government in modern india?

Yes, Panchayati Raj is a system of local governance in which each village is accountable for its own operations. There is an article in the Indian Constitution that enjoins the state to take measures for the organization of village panchayats and to empower them with the powers and authority that are necessary to enable them to function as units of self-govt. in accordance with

¹⁰ CHOLA KINGDOM, V <https://unacademy.com/content/karnataka-psc/study-material/history/chola-administration/>. LAST VISITED ON 24.11.2022.

the Constitution. Balwant Rai Mehta, widely known as the "Father of Panchayati Raj," was an Indian legislator who is credited with popularizing the concept of Panchayati Raj. Panchayati Raj establishes village local govt., which plays an important role in village development, particularly in areas such as primary education, health, agricultural development, women and child development, and women's involvement in local govt., among others. A Panchayati Raj system exists in all Indian states, union territories, and several other locations with the exception of Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram.

IX. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the Chola govt. was one of the most inventive and evolved empires of ancient India. There were several favorable rules and regulations that the administration adopted, such as the formation of different levels of govt. based on the different stages in the process. During this period of time, the succession system was used to govern the kingdoms that were ruled by this monarch. This was a time when the king was regarded as one of the most important and vital persons in the entire administration of the state. In order to extend the kingdoms and to build the entire dynasty so that it could last for a long time to come, the monarch had to go on state trips in order to be able to build the kingdoms and extend the dynasty. As the study shows, local self-govt. has a significant role to play both in the medieval era as well as in modern India. As part of the process of incorporating democratic ideas and practices into Indian society, self-govt. is necessary. In general, Local Self-govt. unifies people with democracy and encourages them to engage in its operations without bias or prejudice.
