

The Chola kingdom Grew Under him into an Extensive and Well-Knit Empire - A Study

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study how The Chola kingdom Grew Under him into an Extensive and Well-Knit Empire **Cholas** who believed to have overthrown the Pallavas in south India became prominent **imperial kingdom** in the 9th century. Vijayalaya's son, Aditya I, Rajendra Chola I conquered Odisha and his armies continued to march further north and defeated the forces of the Pala Dynasty of Bengal and reached the Ganges river in north India.[56] Rajendra Chola I built a new capital called Gangaikonda Cholapuram to celebrate his victories in northern India.[57] Rajendra Chola I successfully invaded the Srivijaya kingdom in Southeast Asia which led to the decline of the empire there.[58] This expedition had such a great impression to the Malay people of the medieval period that his name was mentioned in the corrupted form as Raja Chulan in the medieval Malay chronicle Sejarah Melayu.[59][60][61] He also completed the conquest of the island of Sri Lanka and took the Sinhala king Mahinda V as a prisoner, in addition to his conquests of Rattapadi (territories of the Rashtrakutas, Chalukya country, Talakkad, and Kolar, where the Kolaramma temple still has his portrait statue) in Kannada country.[62] Rajendra's territories included the area falling on the Ganges-Hooghly-Damodar basin,[63] as well as Sri Lanka and Maldives.[49] The kingdoms along the east coast of India up to the river Ganges acknowledged Chola suzerainty.[64] Three diplomatic missions were sent to China in 1016, 1033, and 1077.[49] 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. went on to defeat the Pandyan Kingdom in 885 and the Pallava Kingdom in 897 CE. His son followed up with the conquest of Sri Lanka in 925; by 985, the Chola Dynasty ruled all of the Tamil-speaking regions of southern India. The next two kings, Rajaraja Chola I (r. 985 - 1014 CE) and Rajendra Chola I (r. 1012 - 1044 CE) extended the empire still further. The Cholas ruled for more than 1,500 years, making them one of the longest-ruling families in human history, if not the longest. The Chola Empire was based in the Kaveri River Valley, which runs southeast through Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and the southern Deccan Plateau to the Bay of Bengal. At its height, the Chola Empire controlled not only southern India and Sri Lanka, but also the Maldives. It took key maritime trading posts from the Srivijaya Empire in what is now Indonesia, enabling a rich cultural transfusion in both directions, and sent diplomatic and trading missions to China's Song Dynasty (960 - 1279 CE)

Key words: Cholas, contribution, royal temples, patronage, Asia, Madurai, Tanjore, India

Introduction

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. They also built flourishing port, palace and temple towns. And they left behind several thousand inscriptions in copper plate and stone recorded in the hundreds of temples across their empire. Travellers to Chola ports and towns describe bustling streets, multistoried buildings, gardens and markets filled with traders selling everything from spices to pearls under cool canopies. The master artists of the Chola empire could rival those of the Mughals though their aesthetics were startlingly different. The spectacular Chola bronzes are semi-nude human figures, with sensuous curves and slender limbs. The art of the Mughals have, on the other hand, restraint as a key feature. The vaulted halls of the buildings are spare, the walls profuse with stencil calligraphy, on which light falls like silk. The beauty is pulled off without a single human sculpture in sight.

Objective:

This paper intends to explore and analyze significance of **imperial Cholas** of south India who claim the record for being prominent empire in the ninth century and established a kingdom across SE Asia. The climax in Chola power was achieved under the successor of Parantaka II, Arumolivarman, who crowned himself as Rajaraja I in 985 A D the next thirty years of his rule formed the formative period of Chola imperialism. The Chola kingdom grew under him into an extensive and well-knit empire, efficiently organized and administered and possessing a powerful standing army and navy. Rajaraja began his conquests by attacking the confederation between the rulers of the Pandya and Kerala kingdoms and of Ceylon. Polonnaruva became the capital of Chola province in North Ceylon after the defeat of Mahinda V, the Ceylonese king. He also annexed the Maldives. Elsewhere, several parts of modern Mysore were conquered and annexed which intensified their rivalry with the Chalukyas. Rajaraja built the magnificent Shiva temple of Brihadeshwara or Rajaraja temple at Thanjavur which was completed in 1010. It is considered a remarkable piece of architecture in South Indian style. Rajaraja I also encouraged Sri Mara Vijayottungavarman, the Sailendra ruler of Sri Vijaya to build a Buddhist Vihara at Negapatam. This vihara was called 'Chudamani Vihara' after the father of Sri Mara. Rajaraja was succeeded by his son Rajendra I in 1014 A.D. He ruled jointly with his father for a few years. He also followed a policy of conquest and annexation adopted by his father and further raised the power and prestige of the Cholas. He followed the expansionist policy and made extensive conquests in Ceylon. The Pandya and Kerala country after being conquered was constituted as a viceroyalty under the Chola king with the title of Chola-Pandya. Madurai was its headquarters. Proceeding through Kalinga, Rajendra I attacked Bengal and defeated the Pala ruler Mahipala in 1022 A.D. But he annexed no territory in north India. To commemorate the occasion, Rajendra I assumed the title of Gangaikondachola (the Chola conqueror of Ganga). He built the new capital near the mouth of the Kaveri and called it Gangaikondacholapuram (the city of the Chola conqueror of the Ganga).

With his naval forces, he invaded Malaya Peninsula and Srivijaya Empire that extended over Sumatra, Java and the neighbouring islands and controlled the overseas trade route to China. He sent two diplomatic missions to China for political as well as commercial purposes. Rajendra was succeeded by his son Rajadhiraja I in 1044 A.D. He was also an able ruler. He put down the hostile forces in Ceylon and suppressed the rebellious Pandyas and subjugated their territory. He celebrated his victory by performing Virabhisheka (coronation of the victor) at Kalyani after sacking Kalyani and assumed the title of Vijayarajendra. He lost his life in the battle with the Chalukyan king Someswara I at Koppam. His brother Rajendra II succeeded him. He continued his struggle against Someswara. He defeated Someswara in the battle of Kudal Sangamam. Next came Virarajendra I, he too defeated the Chalukyas and erected a pillar of victory on the banks of Tungabhadra. Virarajendra died in 1070 A.D. He was succeeded by Kulottunga I (1070-1122 A.D.) the great-grandson of Rajaraja I. He was the son of Rajendra Narendra of Vengi and Chola princess Ammangadevi (daughter of Rajendra Chola I). Thus Kulottunga I united the two kingdoms of the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi and the Cholas of Thanjavur. The most important reforms carried out by him in the internal administration was the re-surveyal of land for taxation and revenue purposes. He was also titled Sungam tavirtta (he who abolished tolls). The Chola authority in Ceylon was overthrown by Vijayabahu, the monarch of Ceylon during Kulottunga's reign. He sent a large embassy of 72 merchants to China and also maintained cordial relations with Sri Vijaya. He defeated the rulers of the Pandya kingdom and that of Kerala. The Chola Empire continued for more than a century after him. Weak rulers succeeded him. The Cholas and the later Chalukyas clashed for the overlordship of Vengi, the Tungabhadra doab and the Ganga country. The Chola Empire continued in a flourishing condition during the twelfth century but declined by the end of the thirteenth century. The Pandyan king Sundara rendered the final blow by seizing Kanchi in 1297 A.D. The place of the Cholas was taken over by the Pandyas and the Hoysalas. This marked the end of the Chola power.

The king was the head of the administration of the Cholas and all powers were concentrated in his hands. 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 Gangaikondacholapuram. 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 assist 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). They often advised him on important matters. An elaborate and complicated bureaucracy ran 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.

Revenue Administration:

A well-organised 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, according to N.K. Sastri was the land revenue. There were taxes on profession, mines, forests, salt-pans, etc. Kulottung I abolished tolls. Unpaid labour was frequently employed. 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 intercaste 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 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. 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. We hear of three assemblies called the ur, sabha or mahasabha and nagaram. 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 variyams.

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. The nagaram was an assembly of merchants and were found more commonly in the trading centers. The Uttaramerur inscriptions of the Chola monarch Parantaka I of 919 A.D. and 921 A.D may be said to constitute a great landmark in the history of the Chola village assemblies. It gives details about the functioning and constitution of the local sabha. There were 30 wards (kudumbus) each nominating members for selections of people with the prescribed qualifications. Elections from each ward was by lot (kudavolai, literally means pot-ticket) for a period of one year. Of the thirty so selected, twelve members who had earlier served in the garden and tank committee and were advanced in age, were assigned to the samvatsarvariya or annual committee, twelve to the Tottavariya or the garden committee and 6 members to the Eri-variya or tank committee Pancha-variya (a standing committee) and Pon-variya (gold committee) were the other two committees. Variyapparumakal were the members of the committee, Perunguri were the members of the Mahasabha; Nyayaffar was the Judicial committee and Madhyasthas, a small staff of paid servants in the village assisted the committees and maintained village records. The Assembly generally met in the temple, or under a tree or near a tank. The sabha possessed proprietary rights over communal lands. It also controlled private lands of the villages. It reclaimed forest and waste land. It aided in the assessment of the produce and land revenue. It collected land revenue and had the power to sell the land in question, in cases of default. It also had the powers of taxation for purposes connected with the village and of remission of taxation for specific reasons.

Social Life:

Rudimentary hierarchy of social groups from classical times according to the Silapadikaram were vellalar-cultivator, kovalar-cowherds and shepherds, vedar-hunters, Padaiyacciar- artisan groups and armed men and valaiyar-fishermen. Worship of deceased rulers and construction of temples as tributes to dead kings was a special feature of the Chola period. Rajaraja Chola's reign marked the emergence of the Chola Empire as a multi-ethnic trading colossus. He pushed the empire's northern boundary out of Tamil lands to Kalinga in the northeast of India and sent his navy to capture the Maldives and the rich Malabar Coast along the subcontinent's southwestern shore. These territories were key points along the Indian Ocean trade routes. The caste system was the basis of the social organization under the Cholas. Society was divided into a number of social groups or castes. Each caste was hereditary and constituted an occupational group. Bramhanas occupied a privilege position in the society. They combined both religious authority and economic power. They were exempted from taxes, owned and enjoyed land with full royal support. Their main duties included learning and teaching of the Vedas and performing rituals and ceremonies. Some of them served as chief priests of the temple. Some of them were more adventurous and engaged themselves in trade. They were given lighter punishments in case of offences committed. The almost total absence of Kshatriya institutions necessitated an alliance between sections of brahmanas and the dominant peasantry. The Nattar was the dominant peasant community, and the cultivators were the subordinate client group of the nattars. The newly assimilated castes from marginal tracts were often combined in mass groupings of Idangai (left handed castes) and Valangai (right handed castes).

Conclusion

It made the Chola empire extraordinarily wealthy. By 1044, Rajendra Chola had pushed the borders north to the Ganges River (Ganga), conquering the rulers of Bihar and Bengal, and he had also taken coastal Myanmar (Burma), the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and key ports in the Indonesian archipelago and Malay Peninsula. It was the first true maritime empire based in India. The Chola Empire under Rajendra even exacted tribute from Siam (Thailand) and Cambodia. Cultural and artistic influences flowed in both directions between Indochina and the Indian mainland. Throughout the medieval period, however, the Cholas had one major thorn in their side. The Chalukya Empire, in the western Deccan Plateau, rose up periodically and tried to throw off Chola control. After decades of intermittent warfare, the Chalukya kingdom collapsed in 1190. The Chola Empire, however, did not long outlast its gadfly. The mind reels to hear that Rajaraja Chola donated more than two hundred kilos of gold and of silver, and sacks of jewels, to the Brahadisvara temple in Tanjore. It was an ancient rival that finally did in the Cholas for good. Between 1150 and 1279, the Pandya family gathered its armies and launched a number of bids for independence in their traditional lands. The Cholas under Rajendra III fell to the Pandyan Empire in 1279 and ceased to exist. The Chola Empire left a rich legacy in the Tamil country. It saw majestic architectural accomplishments such as the Thanjavur Temple, amazing artwork including particularly graceful bronze sculpture, and a golden age of Tamil literature and poetry. All of these cultural properties also found their way into the Southeast Asian artistic lexicon, influencing religious art and literature from Cambodia to Java.

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