

Chola Administration

The Chola kings followed a highly efficient system of administration. The entire Tanjore district, parts of Trichy, Pudukottai and South Arcot districts formed the part of the Chola Mandalam. The Cholas had three major administrative divisions called Central Government, Provincial Government and Local Government. Tanjore was the capital of the Cholas. The efficient Chola administrative system has been well appreciated by many historians and rulers.

King ship:

The king was the head of the administration. The Chola kings and Queens were considered as representatives of God. Their idols were kept in temples. The Chola kingship was hereditary. The Chola royal family followed the principle that eldest son should succeed the king to the Chola throne. The heir apparent was called Yuvaraja, The Chola monarchs enjoyed enormous powers and privileges. The Chola kings took up titles which marked their achievements. They lived in very big royal palaces. Kings were assisted by ministers and officials in their administration. Chola kings had tiger as their royal emblem.

Central Government :

The Central Government under the headship of the King. Council of ministers and officials took active part in running the administration of Central Government. The higher officials were called Peruntaram and the lower officials were called Siruntaram.

Provincial administration:

The Chola Empire was divided into nine provinces. They were also called mandalams. The head of the province was called viceroy. Close relatives of kings were appointed as viceroys. The Viceroys were in constant touch with the Central Government. Viceroys received orders from the king. They sent regular reply to the king. The viceroys had a large number of officials to assist them in the work of administration.

Administrative Divisions:

The success of the Chola administration depended more on the proper functioning of the administrative division us. Generally mandalams were named after the original names or the titles of the Chola kings. Each mandalam was divided into number of Kottams or Valanadus. Each kottam was sub divided into nadu. Each nadu was

further divided into (Urs) villages which form part of the last unit of the administration. Uttaramerur inscriptions speak about the administration of the Cholas.

Revenue :

The land revenue was the main source of income of the Chola Government. Proper land survey was made. Lands were classified as taxable land and non taxable land. There were many grades in the taxable lands. Land revenue differed according to these grades. Generally 1/6 of the land yield was collected as tax either in cash or in kind or both according to the convenience of the farmers. Besides land revenue, there were some other sources of income like customs and tolls. Taxes on mines, ports, forests and salt pans were collected. Professional tax and house tax were also collected. Many other taxes were levied. Tax burden was more on the society. Sometimes due to failure of rain and famine people could not pay tax.

Military :

The Cholas had an efficient army and navy. The Chola army consisted of elephant, cavalry and infantry. Soldiers were given proper training. Commanders enjoyed the ranks of nayaks and senapathis. The army was divided into 70 regiments. The Chola arm had 60,000 elephants. Very costly Arabian horses were imported to strengthen the cavalry. The Chola kings defeated the Cheras at Kandalur salai. The kings of Ceylon and Maldives were also defeated. The Chola navy was formidable one in South India. With the help of their navy the Cholas controlled Coromandal and Malabar coasts. Bay of Bengal became the Chola lake. The Chola army and navy together had 1,50,000 trained soldiers. The armies of the tributary chieftains also joined Chola army at needy times. Generally the Chola army was led by the King or Yuvaraja.

Justice :

The Chola king was the chief justice. The Chola kings gave enough care for the judicial administration. The village level judicial administration was carried on by the village assembly. Minor disputes were heard by the village assembly. Disputes were settled with proper evidences. Village assemblies exercised large powers in deciding local disputes. Punishments were awarded by the judicial officers. The trial of serious offences and major cases were conducted by the king himself.

Chola Local Administration :

The most important feature of the Chola administration was the local administration at districts, towns and villages level. Uttaramerur inscriptions speak much about the Chola administration. Village autonomy was the most unique feature of Chola administrative system.

Nadu :

Nadu was one of the important administrative units of the Cholas. Nadus had representative assemblies. The heads of the nadus were called Nattars. The council of nadu was called nattavai. Representatives of the Nattavais and nattars promoted agriculture. They also took care of the protection of the people and tax collection.

Village Administration :

The entire responsibility of the village administration was in the hands of the village assembly called Grama Sabha. The lowest unit of the Chola administration was the village unit. The village assemblies looked after the maintenance of peace, tanks, roads, public ponds revenue collection, judiciary, education and temples. The village assemblies were in charge of the payment of taxes due from the villages to the treasury. They regulated public markets and helped people at times of famine and flood. Assemblies provided provisions for education. The village assemblies possessed absolute authority over the affairs of villages. They maintained law and order in every village. Brahmin settlement was called Chaturvedi mangalam.

Variyams :

Village Assemblies carried on village administration effectively with the help of variyams. Male members of the society were the members of these variyams. Composition of these variyams, qualification and durations of membership differed from village to village. There were many variyams in every village. Niyaya variyam administered justice, Thottavariyam looked after flower gardens. The Dharma variyam looked after charities and temples. Erivariyam was in charge of tanks and water supply. The pon variyam was in charge of the finance. The Gramakariya variyam looked after the works of all committees. The members of these variyams were known as "Varivaperumakkal They rendered honorary service. The village officials were paid salary either in cash or in kind. Good functioning of these variyams increased the efficiency of the local administration of the Cholas.

The Chola government during the imperial period (850 – 1200 CE) was marked for its uniqueness and innovativeness. 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. Although the form and protocols of that government cannot be compared to a contemporary form of government, the history of the Chola empire belongs to a happy age in their history and great things were achieved by the government and the people.