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LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT UNDER THE CHOLA DYNASTY

1.MRS. M. VANITHA, 2. DR.R.STHANISLAS 3. DR. G. JAYASANKAR

1.Research Scholar& Assistant Professor 2. Associate Professor&Head 3. Associate Professor&Head

1.History 2.History 3. Economics

1.DKM College for Women (Autonomous), Vellore 2. Kalaignar Karunanidhi Govt Arts College, Thiruvannamalai. 3. Muthurangam Government Arts College, Vellore

Abstract: This study has been taken to Explain Kudaivolai system in Tamilnadu under Cholas local self government. The most striking feature of the administrative system of the Cholas was their autonomous village administration (Kudaivolai system) and town administration. The ‘Uttaramerur Inscription’ belonging to the reign of Parantaka-I who belong to 10th century, gives details about the functioning and constitution of the local administration. The efficient Chola Administrative System has been well appreciated by many historians and rulers. Dynasties and Empires have risen and fallen, but Local Self Governments were survived. Thus, the conception of Local Self government is not foreign to the genius of the people of India.

Index Terms: Kudaivolai system, local self government, autonomous, village administration

Introduction

In the 8th Century, the Southern part of India was ruled by three prominent kingdoms The Cheras, Pandyas and the Cholas. Cholas were considered as the most powerful of the three. Chola Dynasty was one of the important parts in the history of South India. The Chola Empire was based in the Kaveri River Valley, which runs south east through Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Southern Deccan Plateau to the Bay of Bengal. Chola kingdom which came to be called as ‘Cholamandalam’. Throughout the Medieval period, however the Cholas had major throne on their side. The Chola kings followed a highly efficient system of Administration. The Cholas had three major administrative division called Central Government, Provincial Government and Local Government. Local self Government was flourished in Chola period. The most striking feature of the administrative system of the Cholas was their autonomous village administration (Kudaivolai system) and town administration. The ‘Uttaramerur Inscription’ belonging to the reign of Parantaka-I who belong to 10th century, gives details about the functioning and constitution of the local administration. The efficient Chola Administrative System has been well appreciated by many historians and rulers. Dynasties and Empires have risen and fallen, but Local Self Governments were survived. Thus, the conception of Local Self government is not foreign to the genius of the people of India.

The two Uttaramerur records of Prantika I of 919 and 921 A.D. contain resolutions passed by the local ‘Mahasabha? On the constitution of the Variyams or executive committees, the second resolution improving on and superseding the first. According to the regulation of 921 A.D.

The Chola administration was functioning on the principles of democracy and the Panchayat system flourished during their reign. The Chola self government was built up on ‘general assemblies’ or ‘sabhas’ or ‘mahasabhas’ of the villages. All aspects of village community life were administered by these general assemblies. The mahasabhas encouraged and accepted endowments from public towards temple functions and services and disposed services as per laid down procedure. In several occasions they exercised their authority in selling the land portions under their jurisdiction to individuals of various villages and towns. They also ascertained the purchase and accepted endowments offered by public. The mahasabha also to accept paddy grains or ghee as well as gold Kalanchu, accrued as interest of the principal, in certain

stipulated measurements. The sabha also accepted gifts from royal king and his family members and the same was registered and documented with care.

The general assembly of Uttaramerur Chaturvedhi Mangalam relating to the Royal orders of Parantaka Chola I issued on the 11th and 14th regnal years on the constitution of the sabha or mahasabha and the 'Pot ticket election procedures' (Kudaivolai system) to be followed for the village general assembly or sabha of Uttaramerur Chaturvedhi Mangalam. The village general assembly met and resolved about the qualification for the members of the sabha, election procedures for the 30 wards of Uttaramerur Chaturvedhi Mangalam.

Village Administration of Cholas

The villages of Cholas had their own Self-Governance. The degree of autonomy at the village level was quite remarkable. Participation of royal officials in village affairs was more as advisory and observers than as administrators. Based on the edicts Cholas had three types of villages.

First, the village with an inter caste population, paying taxes to the King in the form of land revenue. Second, Brahmadeya were villages granted to Brahmins and inhabited entirely by them. They were exemption from taxes. Third, Devadana were villages granted to God. They functioned more or less in the same manner as the first type except that the revenue from these villages was donated to a temple and hence received by the temple authorities and not by the state. The responsibility of the village administration was entrusted to the village assembly called Grama Sabha, the lowest unit of the Chola administration. There are three types of village assemblies in the period of Cholas. They are: Ur, Sabha and Nagaram. The Ur consisted of the taxpaying residents of an ordinary village, but in effect the older members played a more prominent role with some forming a small executive body called as Alunganam.

Election of Village Assembly during Chola period

Uttaramerur inscriptions talk about Kudaivolai system (Lucky draw system). This system was a very notable and unique feature of the village administration of the Cholas. There were 30 wards in each village.

Village ward or Kudumbu

According to the inscriptions, each village was divided into wards or Kudumbu, and each ward or Kudumbu could send one representative to the general assembly. There shall be thirty wards in Uttaramerur Chaturvedimangalam. In all these thirty wards, all people who live in each ward shall gather and shall elect anyone possessing the following qualifications through 'pot-tickets' (Kudai Olai) election system.

Specific qualifications

1. Age
2. Possession of immovable property
3. Education.

Thus, those who wanted to be elected had to be above 35 years of age and below 70 years. Only those who owned land that attracted tax could contest. And such owners had to own a house built on a legally-owned site to qualify for the elections. A person serving in any of the committees could not contest again for the next three terms, each term lasting a year.

- ❖ Must own more than a quarter veli (One Veli = 6.17 acre 6.17) tax-paying land.
- ❖ Must own a house built on a legally - owned site.
- ❖ Must be above 35 years of age and below 70 years.
- ❖ Must have knowledge of 'Mantrabrahmana' (Mantra Text) as well as experience in teaching the same to others.
- ❖ Can own only one - eighth (1 / 8) veli of land and must have learned one Veda and one of the four Bhashyas and experienced in explaining them to others, then he shall be eligible to contest i.e, voters write his name on the pot-ticket (ballot) to be cast into the pot (ballot pot).
- ❖ Must be among those possessing qualifications such as expertise in business and are known for their virtues.
- ❖ Must be among those who possess honest earnings and pure mind.

Disqualification

Are those who have served in any of the committees for the last three years and have not submitted their accounts and all their relatives mentioned in the following classes. The relatives of the defaulter.

- The sons of the younger and elder sisters of defaulter's mother.
- The sons of defaulter's paternal aunt and maternal uncle.
- The uterine brother of defaulter's mother.
- The uterine brother of defaulter's father.
- Defaulter's uterine brother.
- Defaulter's father-in-law.
- The uterine brother of defaulter's wife.
- The husband of defaulter's uterine sister.
- The sons of defaulter's uterine sister.
- The son-in-law who has married defaulter's daughter.
- Defaulter's father.
- Defaulter's son.
- One against whom incest (agamyagamana) or the first four of the five great sins are recorded.
- All defaulters' relations above specified shall not have their names written on the pot-tickets and put into the pot.
- One who is foolhardy?
- One who has stolen the property of another.
- One who has taken forbidden dishes (?) of any kind and who has become pure by performing expiation?
- One who has committed sins and has become pure by performing expiatory ceremonies.
- One who is guilty of incest and has become pure by performing expiatory ceremonies
- All these thus specified shall not to the end of their lives have their names written on the pot-ticket to be put into the pot for any of the committees

Method of Election

- ✓ Excluding all these thus specified. The names shall be written for pot-tickets in the thirty wards
- ✓ Each of the wards in these twelve streets of Uttaramerur shall prepare a separate covering ticket for each of the thirty wards bundled separately. These packets shall be put into a pot.
- ✓ When the pot-tickets have to be drawn, a full meeting of the Great Assembly, including the young and old members, shall be convened.
- ✓ All the temple priests (Nambimar) who happen to be in the village on that day, shall, without any exception whatever, be caused to be seated in the inner hall, where the great assembly meets.
- ✓ In the midst of the temple priest's one of them, who happens to be the eldest, shall stand up and lift that pot looking upwards so as to be seen by all people.
- ✓ One ward, i.e., the packet representing it, shall be taken out by any young boy standing close, who does not know what is inside, and shall be transferred to another empty pot and shaken. From this pot one ticket shall be drawn by the young boy and made over to the arbitrator (madhyastha).
- ✓ While taking charge of the ticket thus given to him, the arbitrator shall receive it on the palm of his hand with the five fingers open.
- ✓ He shall read out the name in the ticket thus received
- ✓ The ticket read by him shall also be read out by all the priests present in the inner hall the name thus read out shall be put down (and accepted). Similarly one man shall be chosen for each of the thirty wards

Constitution of the Committee

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 samvatsarvariyaam or annual committee, twelve to the Tottavariyaam or the garden committee and 6 members to the Eri-variyaam or tank committee Pancha-variyaam (a standing committee) and Pon-variyaam (gold committee). These last two committees shall be chosen by showing the Karai.

Panchavariyam and Gold Committees

From these thirty tickets chosen, twenty-four shall be for the Gold committee and the remaining six for the Panchavariyam committee. When drawing pot-tickets for these two committees next year, the wards which have been already represented during the year in question on these committees shall be excluded and the reduction made from the remaining wards by drawing the Karai. One who has ridden on an ass and one who has committed forgery shall not have his name written on the pot-ticket to be put into the pot.

Duration of the Committees

The great men of these three committees thus chosen for them shall hold office for full three hundred and sixty days and then retire.

Removal of Persons Found Guilty

When one who is on the committee is found guilty of any offence, he shall be removed at once. The committee was assisted by paid officials who detected crimes. The Judicial committee 'Nayattar' of the assembly was to settle disputes and award punishment to the guilty. Capital punishment was not given in all cases. The Chola administration of justice was rather lenient. Riding on an ass was a punishment given even for some serious type of crimes.

For appointing the committees after these have retired, the members of the Committee for Supervision of Justice in the twelve streets of Uttaramerur shall convene an assembly kuri with the help of the Arbitrator. The committees shall be appointed by drawing pot-tickets according to this order of settlement.

Qualification of the Accountant

- ❖ Any Arbitrator who possesses honest earnings shall write the accounts of the village.
- ❖ No accountant shall be appointed to that office again before he submits his accounts for the period during which he was in office to the great men of the big committee and is declared to have been honest.
- ❖ The accounts which one has been writing, he shall submit himself and no other accountant shall be chosen to close his accounts.

Implementation

- ❖ The Royal Order shall implement Pot Ticket Procedure (Kudavolai System) from this year and shall continue till the existence of Moon and Sun.

Received From

- ❖ Royal Order received from Devendhran, the Emperor, Sri Viranayana Sri Parantaka Deva (who also assumed the title as) Parakesari varman.

Received and Submitted by Village Assembly Officer

- ✓ Royal Order received and shown (submitted) to the Members of the general assembly of Uttaramerur Chaturvedhi Mangalam by Karanjai Kondaya - Kramavitha bhattan (Brahmin caste title) alias Somasiperumal of Srivanga nagar (name of town) in Purangarambainadu (name of district), of the Chola Nadu (country).

Madhyasthan

Kadadippottan Sivakkuri Rajamallamangalapriyan functioned as the madhyasthan of Uttaramerur Chaturvedimangalam sabha. At the order of the great men, sitting in the assembly, the Arbitrator Kadadippottan Sivakkuri Rajamallamangalapriyan, thus wrote this settlement.

The number of the committees and its members varied from villages to villages and no payment was made for their services. The members of the committee were called Variyapperumakkal and the Mahasabha was called Perunguri and its members Perumakkal. Ordinarily the assembly met in the village temple and occasionally under a tree or in the bank of a pond. Nagaram was found more commonly in trade centers such as cities and towns. The main functions of the village assemblies are to collect the assessed land revenue for the government or the temple. Secondly, they levied additional tax for a particular purpose such as the construction of a water tank. Thirdly, they settled agrarian disputes such as conflicts over tenures and irrigation rights. Fourthly, they maintained records, particularly those pertaining to charities and taxes. The

large assemblies kept a small staff of paid officials, but most of the work was done on a voluntary basis in the smaller assemblies.

Conclusion

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. The Kudavolai system was a very notable and unique feature of the village administration of the Cholas and it has been very systematic, well developed, well organised and efficient thus becoming the first step towards the concept of democracy.

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