

The Local Self-Government of Chola Dynasty and Modern India; A Comparative Study

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Abstract—Local Self Government institution directly influence the welfare of the people by providing civic, social and economic infrastructure services and facilities in both Urban and Rural areas. Local Self Government in India has a long history. Although the form in which it exists today is different from the system followed in the Ancient and Medieval period, the core idea of transfer of the power to make decision to lower ranks of the political order has not changed. Chola dynasty was one of the important parts in the history of South India. It saw remarkable progress in almost all spheres of life such as polity, culture, and economy. Cholas has built a great system of administration, with authority flowing down from the emperor to local village leaders. The Chola village assembly was democratically elected with wide people participation and enjoyed autonomous power. These were evident from several edicts dated to Chola period. 'Uttaramerur inscription' dated around 920 A.D in the reign of Parantaka Chola throws light on the local administration of the Cholas. In modern India, Local Self Government, both rural and urban, has seen many ups and downs, but after the constitution 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts, 1992 have accorded a constitutional status to these institutions as the third tier of Government. The present study entitled "The Local Self-Government of Chola Dynasty and Modern India; A Comparative Study" examine the similarities and difference in the administrative system of Local Self Government of Chola Dynasty and Modern India.

Keywords: Local self government, Chola dynasty, Democratic, Local administrative system

1. INTRODUCTION

Local self government (LSG) are those bodies that look after the administration of area or small community such as a village, a town or a city. It works at the grassroots level and touching their everyday life. LSG is the management of local affairs by such local bodies who have been directly elected by the local people. This local body provides services to the local community as well as acts as an instrument of democratic self Government. This level of the Government is recognised by the people as they are close to the citizens and involve them in the decision-making process. Local self-Government in India has a long and marvellous history.

In the 8th Century, the Southern part of India was ruled by three prominent kingdoms The Cheras, The 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. Important feature of Chola Administration was 'village autonomy'. 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.

In modern India, that is, India after Independence, the concept of LSG acquired new significance. The first conference for the Local bodies held in 1948, the ministers on LSG in the provinces met under the Chairmanship of Amrit Kaur, the Central Minister for Health. Jawaharlal Nehru who inaugurated the conference expounded the vital role of local Government in free India. He remarked: "Local Self Government is and must be the basic of any true system of democracy. We have got rather into the habit of thinking of democracy at the top and not so much below. Democracy at the top may not be a success unless you build on its foundation from below". Thus, he delineates LSG as 'grass roots of democracy'.

Mahatma Gandhi called villages and village communities the soul of India. His idea of village Swaraj (Gram-Rajya) was that village should be a complete republic governed by a panchayat annually elected by all adults of the village. His

idea was incorporated in Article 40 of Part IV of our Indian Constitution that deals with Directive Principles of our State Policy (DSP). It states that “the state shall take steps to organise village panchayat and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government”.

There were four important committees, Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957), Ashok Mehta Committee (1978), G.V. K. Rao Committee (1985), and L.M. Singhvi Committee (1986) that shaped the formation of present system of LSG in India. The Revolutionary Development in the history of Local Self Government of India is the enactment of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment act in 1992. Since the inauguration of the constitution in 1950; significant changes have taken place in the structure and system of Local Self Government. Based on the report of the study team for Community Development and National Extension Service (1957), a three tier system of Rural Local Government has emerged in most states- Zila Parishad at district level, Panchayat Samithi at the block level and panchayat at the village level. Another important development has been the separation of the Rural Local Government from the Urban Local Government. They are endowed with sufficiently wide power over a large range of functions including development.

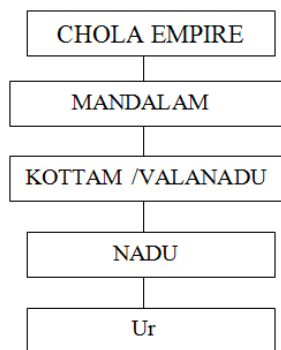
In the fore coming topics, the Administrative system of Local Self Government of Chola Dynasty and Modern India are explained, and a comparative analysis has made.

2. LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT UNDER CHOLA DYNASTY

The history of the Chola Empire belongs, on the whole, to this earlier and happier phase of India’s history, and we shall see that in spite of much that appears primitive and even offensive to us, much greater things were accomplished by corporate and voluntary effort, a greater sense of social harmony prevailed, and a consciousness of active citizenship was more widespread when the Cholas Kings held their sway in Southern India than in more recent times. The period covered by Cholas was over more than four centuries A.D. 850-1270. Cholas came up with an excellent system of governance and administration. There was a serious attempt to decentralize, and provide Self-Government right at the local level. Chola Administration was integrated and not only that Central Administration was very strong, the Local Administration was also given equal importance.

The most striking feature of the administrative system of the Cholas was their autonomous village 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. Chola Empire was divided into 9 provinces known as *Mandalams*. Each province was headed by a viceroy who received orders from the King. The provinces or *Mandalams* were subdivided into number of divisions known as *Kottams* or *Valanadus*. The

next administrative subdivisions of Cholas were the *Nadu*. Each *Nadu* was headed by a *Nattar* while the council of *Nadu* was named *Nattavai*. Each of which again consisted of a few autonomous villages known as *Urs*, unions or groups of villages, playing a vital part in the Chola administration system. Even today, the village in Tamil Nadu is called as ‘Urs’. The total picture of the local government of Chola Dynasty is shown below:



2.1 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 intercaste 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*. The *sabha* had a more complex machinery, which functioned very largely through its committees called the *Variyams*. The *Variyams* such as *Samvatsara-variya*m or annual committee, 12 to the *tottavariya*m or garden committee and 6 to the *erivariya*m or tank committee. Two other committees were equally selected. They were the *Panchaviravariya*m or a standing committee and the *Ponvariya*m or the Gold committee. 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 centres 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.

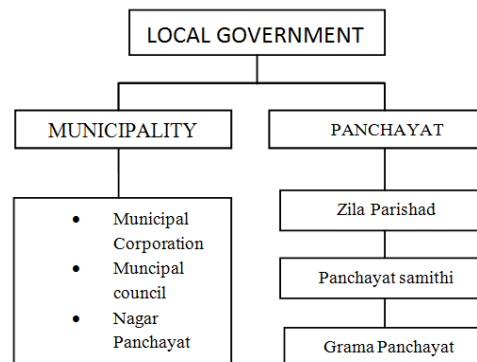
2.1.1 Election of Village Assembly during Chola period

Uttaramerur inscriptions talk about *Kudavolai* 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. A representative for each ward was elected through *Kudavolai* system. Names of the contestants from whom one could be chosen were written on palm leaf tickets. These palm leaves were put into a pot and shuffled. A small boy picked up palm leaves one by one from the pot. Persons whose name tickets were picked up by the boy were declared elected. Like that 30 members for thirty wards were elected. This kind of peculiar election system was called *Kudavolai* system. Out of the thirty elected members, twelve members were appointed to the *Samvatsara variyam*, twelve members were appointed as the members of the *Totta-variya*m and six members to the *Erivariya*m.

Members of the *Panchaviravariyam* and a *Ponvariya*m were also elected. Qualification of the members was given. A person who could be chosen through *Kudavolai* system must have age from 35 to 70. He should possess one veli land and of a house built in a taxable land on his own site. He should have knowledge about Vedas and Mantras. Persons who killed Brahmins or women or cow or children were disqualified. Thieves, drunkards and people who had undergone punishments were also disqualified from contesting election from *Kudavolai* system. Chola village assembly was democratically elected.

3. LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN MODERN INDIA

The institution of Local Self-Government has flourished in India since time immemorial. The independence of the country in 1947 ushered in a new period in the history of Local Self-Government in India. The Revolutionary Development in the history of Local Self-Government of India is the enactment of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992. There are mainly two types of Local Self-Government in India. They are: Village/Rural local self-government, Municipal/Urban local self-government. The total picture of the present system of local government in India is shown below:



3.1. Functions of the Local Self-Government

The rural area also needs a system to enable the people to carry out developmental tasks, create opportunities, provide guidance and administer justice. Consequently the passing of the 73rd constitutional amendment led to the introduction and insertion of eleventh schedule which enlists the role and functions of Panchayats in rural areas. The main functions are: they prepare plans for economic development and social justice, implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice, agricultural extension, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation. Other functions such as minor irrigation, water management and watershed development, small scale industries, including food processing industries, rural housing, drinking water, roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, water ways and other means of communication, rural electrification, including distribution of electricity. The Act provides for a five-year term of office to the Panchayat at every level.

The state legislature may endow the municipalities with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of Self-Government. Many functions are carried out by the municipalities some of the functions are urban planning including town planning, planning for economic and social development, urban poverty alleviation, and vital statistics including registration of births and deaths and so on. The state legislature may make provision with respect to the maintenance of accounts by municipalities and auditing of such accounts. There 8 types of urban local bodies. They are divided based on the area, occupation and location. These local bodies will be authorities such as the council, standing committee, commissioners, Mayors and chief executive officer. Each of them has collective and individual responsibility.

3.1.1 Election of Members and Chairpersons

Members of Panchayati Raj is elected directly by the people. Democratic form of election is conducted. The Chairpersons of the Panchayats at the Samiti and Zila level is elected indirectly by and from the elected members. In urban local bodies the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation electoral rolls and the conduct of all elections to

the municipalities is vested in the state election commission. The elected members of the local government perform their functions. The state finance commission that allocates the funds to the local governments for their functioning. The funds are not the sole source of revenue as the constitution confers some provisions that enable the local bodies to collect revenue from some other state approved sources. These sources are as follows:

- They may be authorized by the State Legislature to levy, collect taxes, duties, tolls and fees in accordance with the procedure and subject to limits.
- They may be allocated a share in the taxes, duties, fees and tolls levied and collected by the State Government.
- They may also receive grants in aid as an additional source from the Consolidated Fund of the State.

4. ANALYSIS OF ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT OF CHOLA DYNASTY AND MODERN INDIA

Cholas had a primitive local Administrative system but that was considered to be far ahead Local Self-Government to the contemporary of those period. Whereas our present Indian Local administrative system is well systematic and developed. The main feature of Cholas was village administration was given autonomy. There was no administrative interference of the central government. In present India there is some interference of state government in the local bodies. The elections of local bodies were conducted by *Kudavolai* system (lucky draw method) which was considered to be a unique feature of Cholas. At present in India direct people voting is followed where people can select their Heads for the village or cities. There are different boards and committees to maintain the functions of the local bodies. During Cholas there were *Variyams* to perform the functions of the village. Present local administrative system in India prevails as an example for many other countries. Local bodies are the basic unit of the Indian Administrative System. Local Self-Government helps the people in the local bodies to receive the welfare schemes of the Central Government.

5. CONCLUSION

The social welfare activities are ensured at the grass root level without red tapism by Local Self-Government. The functions and responsibilities of the local bodies signify the importance they possess for the efficient working of a society. The importance is apparent from the intrusion of these bodies into almost every aspect, required for better human functioning including health, sanitation, education, medical aid, economic development etc. The Panchayat Raj system under Cholas one of the important component for the development of modern Panchayat Raj System. The Local Self-government of Cholas and present India is an inevitable part of this democratic administrative system. Strong local bodies can build a strong country. Cholas had well efficient local administration and so they were considered to important up to date.

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