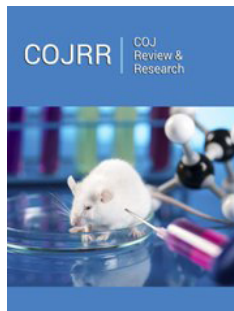


## Tank Committee of Chola Times (9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century CE)

**Chandnibi S\***

Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, India

ISSN: 2639-0590



**\*Corresponding author:** Chandnibi S,  
Department of History, Aligarh Muslim  
University, India

**Submission:** 📅 November 11, 2022

**Published:** 📅 November 25, 2022

Volume 4 - Issue 3

**How to cite this article:** Chandnibi S.  
Tank Committee of Chola Times (9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>  
Century CE). COJ Rev & Res. 4(3). COJRR.  
000590. 2022.

DOI: [10.31031/COJRR.2022.04.000590](https://doi.org/10.31031/COJRR.2022.04.000590)

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### Opinion

The Chola dynasty ruled over major portion of India, Sri Lanka, and most of the present Southeast Asian Islands during their prime time and empowered for nearly five centuries. It was during their time Tanjavu, in the river Cauvery delta region became the “Granary of south India.” This was achieved by maintenance of water bodies both existing and newly created ones. While we lack evidence to understand the system in usual agricultural villages (Velanvagai), but that gap is filled by innumerable epigraphs found mostly on granite walls of the temples. Brahmaeids are a type of special villages meant for the Brahmins, (who are considered as superior by caste based on birth in Indian society) to reside, own land and most of the huge stone temples were founded. From the available stone inscriptions and donative copper plates we try to understand every activity of the empire carried out by the rulers and the ruler. Much has been written by the Chola irrigational system right from the time of Nilakanta Sastry<sup>i</sup>, the authority on Cholas. Here in this paper little effort has been attempted to understand the policy that evolved in the ‘thinking’ of the emperors to facilitate and establish control over their citizens. This is done through a single epigraph as a case study due to the space crunch though an elaborate study is reserved for the future. Brahmaeid villages, the royal creation was administered by Sabha selected by lot system generally referred as kudavolai system<sup>ii</sup> (kudam=pot, Olai=palm leaf) a Tamil term. These members were organized in groups to form various Boards (variyaams) as per requirement and Irrigation Board/ Committee is one such (Eri varyiam). The multiple functions of it were already available in the form of articles in the world of History.

Bahur, presently in Pondicherry a Union Territory was a brahmadeya and was irrigated by a tank<sup>iii</sup> known as Kadamberi. This village/town was also administered by a Sabha and the temple was Mulanatha Mahadevar temple<sup>iv</sup>. This temple contains 45 inscriptions<sup>v</sup> covering nearly ten centuries time frame. The inscription of our interest is of 11<sup>th</sup> century (1027 CE)

<sup>i</sup>Nilakanta Sastri KA (1984) The Colas, University of Madras, India, pp. 495.

<sup>ii</sup>Chandnibi S (2014) Saba under the imperial cholas in south India, Epigraphical reading in the chola history, Random Publications, USA, pp. 1-10.

<sup>iii</sup>South Indian inscriptions volume-VII, No-805, 809, 810.

<sup>iv</sup>Chandnibi S (2006) Bahur-A pre-Pallavan urban centre, urban centers of Pondicherry- through the ages, Icon Publications, India, pp-47-72.

<sup>v</sup>Bahour SK (2006) Vijayavaeugopal G (Eds.) Pondicherry inscriptions, Institute Francais de Pondichery, Pondicherry.

belonging to Rajendra Chola-1<sup>vi</sup>. It tells about an order by the Officer to be engraved on stone relating to functions of tank committee, about periodical desilting. It says that the people of the village and those who come from outside engaged in cultivation are responsible for desilting the tank. All who fall in the age group of ten and eighty can be engaged in this duty of desilting except the untouchables (certain communities performing menial jobs were considered as untouchable). Everyone should remove the mud amounting to a pit whose length and breadth would be two by two of the measuring rod and the depth would be of one in the same rod. The length of the rod should be four saan (saan is a measure equal to 9 inches<sup>vii</sup>). It was made clear that the desilting job was besides the usual tank tax (eri ayam) and to be followed every year. Next are the instructions to the tank committee. The tank committee was asked to supervise the desilting process and should collect a fine of ¼ kalanju of gold from the defaulters. The defaulters would be treated as trespassers of royal order. The committee should collect the fine strictly with no exemption. In case any one member of the tank committee failed to collect then the responsibility would fall on all members of the tank committee and should pay one kalanju of gold as fine. That is four times what a disobeyer was to pay. Further the epigraphic order extends to instruct the committee members that they should collect tax and fine sincerely and the expenses toward maintenance should be made honestly and it should be reasonable. Any form of default and corruption would be treated as disobeying royal order. Thus goes the eleven lines inscription.

Our concern is about the way the royal order was made. What we could see as something peculiar, after crossing nearly a thousand years, in the world of corruption and judiciary being overburdened, too many pending cases, overcrowding of prisons etc is the amount of deep thinking and knowledge was involved.

Certain ideas can be drawn by fully understanding the contents of the epigraph.

- i. A rule was announced for periodical desilting, enabling the emperor to solve the issue permanently.
- ii. The benefiteres were made responsible for the maintenance too.
- iii. Assuming that in such a vast empire there would be some defaulters or even due to previous experiences, punishment was announced in advance to prevent the scape goats.
- iv. The concerned committee members were empowered to supervise check public and they were checked by superior power through penalty simultaneously.
- v. The rules were framed with an advanced thought of preventing corruption at maximum level.
- vi. Cases could be solved by administrative bodies at all levels with no delay. Since punishments were already declared the pressure on judiciary was avoided.
- vii. Since punishments were already declared the pressure on judiciary was avoided.
- viii. Hence averted the wastage of time and money.

So, this is how perhaps in the medieval times, the emperors were able to multi-tasking viz fight battles, annexation, and consolidation of new territories, promote trade and commerce, develop sustainable growth and peace by solving all normal problems that occur in a government in general. Tersely 'one issue one solution' and 'prevention is better than cure' was the policy that went in their thought process.

<sup>vi</sup>Ibid, Bahur, no-23.

<sup>vii</sup>Tamil Lexicon (1982) vol-III, part-1, University of Madras, India, p-1358.