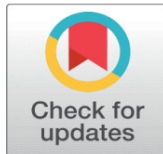
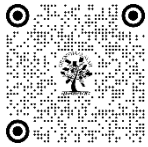


CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS DURING THE CHOLA DYNASTY

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ABSTRACT

The Chola Dynasty was a Tamil Thalassocratic empire in southern India, and it was one of the world's longest-ruling dynasties. Vijayalaya established a powerful empire in the middle of the ninth century. The Chola monarchs instituted a series of social reforms for the benefit of the people as a whole at the beginning of the 10th century. The kingdom was divided into provinces. Hindus ruled over the Cholas. They continued the Pallava tradition by enforcing the Varnasiramadharmam in their country.

Keywords: Cholas, Contribution, Royal Women, Patronage, Donate

1. INTRODUCTION

Charitable institutions in During the Chola Dynasty were primarily centered around temples, mutts, and religious organizations, but also included royal endowments, public inns, and guild-sponsored philanthropy. These institutions provided vital services like food, shelter, healthcare, education, and support during times of crisis, playing a significant role in maintaining the social fabric of Tamil Nadu and ensuring that the poor and needy were cared for. The tradition of charity was deeply embedded in the religious and cultural ethos of the time, ensuring that it was considered both a moral and civic duty. Below is an exploration of charitable institutions during the Chola period, accompanied by historical references from inscriptions, texts, and scholarly sources.

2. TEMPLES AS CENTERS OF CHARITY

Temples were the focal points of charitable activities in the Chola period. They played a central role not only in religious practices but also in supporting the local economy, education, and welfare of the people. **Annadhanam (Free Feeding):** Temples provided free meals to the poor, pilgrims, and those in need through a practice known as **annadhanam**. Large temples, such as the **Brihadeeswarar Temple** in Thanjavur, regularly organized large-scale feeding programs. Inscriptions from the **Brihadeeswarar Temple** record endowments made by kings and nobles for

food distribution. For instance, Raja Raja Chola I made substantial donations for annadhanam to be continued as a daily practice.

3. DEVADANA LANDS

Temples were granted **devadana** lands by the Chola kings and wealthy patrons. The revenue generated from these lands was used for various charitable activities, including feeding the poor, maintaining temple infrastructure, and funding educational and healthcare facilities. The **Uttaramerur Inscription** of Parantaka I (10th century) details land grants made to temples, specifying the use of revenue from these lands for social welfare activities, including the feeding of the poor.

4. VAIDYASALAS (MEDICAL CENTERS)

Some temples and religious institutions under the Cholas maintained **vaidyasalas**, which were traditional medical centers providing healthcare services. **Free Medical Care:** Vaidyasalas offered free or subsidized medical treatment to the sick, especially in temples that had large endowments. These centers followed **Ayurveda** and **Siddha** medicine practices, which were prevalent in Tamil Nadu. Inscriptions from the **Chidambaram Temple** mention endowments made specifically for supporting physicians and healthcare centers.

5. EDUCATIONAL CHARITIES

The Cholas were patrons of education, and their temples were key centers of learning. Educational charity was a significant part of their donations to temples and other religious institutions. **Ghatikas and Salais (Learning Centers):** Temples maintained **ghatikas** (religious and educational institutions), where free instruction was provided in the Vedas, literature, philosophy, and other subjects. Many of these centers were open to students from Brahmin and other scholarly communities. The **Uttaramerur Inscriptions** mention that education was provided free of cost in many of the ghatikas supported by royal and temple endowments.

6. SCHOLARSHIPS AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Wealthy patrons and kings made endowments for providing financial support to teachers and students. These funds ensured that the intellectual community was maintained, with special provisions for students from poor families. Inscriptions at the **Thiruvallangadu Temple** mention endowments for supporting the education of students.

Dharmasalas (Rest Houses)

Dharmasalas were charitable rest houses established for travelers, pilgrims, and the poor. They provided shelter, food, and other necessities. These institutions were often located along pilgrimage routes and near major temples. They were funded by royal endowments or donations from wealthy patrons and served as a place of refuge for those on religious pilgrimages. The **Tirumukkudal Inscription** mentions the establishment of rest houses along with provisions for free food and shelter.

7. PUBLIC WORKS AND IRRIGATION

The Cholas were renowned for their large-scale public works, particularly in the field of irrigation. These projects had a direct impact on improving agricultural productivity and, by extension, alleviating poverty. **Irrigation Projects:** The Cholas built extensive irrigation systems, including canals, reservoirs, and tanks. These projects were not only aimed at improving agricultural output but also provided employment opportunities for the local population, especially during times of drought or famine. The **Kallanai Dam (Grand Anicut)**, originally built during the early Chola period, was expanded during the reign of Rajendra Chola I, with specific mention of its role in increasing agricultural productivity and providing relief during famine.

8. MUTTS AND RELIGIOUS MONASTERIES

In addition to temples, religious monasteries or **mutts** played a crucial role in providing charity during the Chola period. These institutions were centers of spiritual learning but also provided food, shelter, and healthcare services to the poor. **Shaivite and Vaishnavite Mutts**: Mutts associated with Shaivism and Vaishnavism were prominent charitable institutions during the Chola period. They provided free food, shelter, and educational services, especially during times of famine or hardship. Inscriptions from **Thiruvallangadu** mention endowments for maintaining Shaivite mutts that served the poor and scholars.

9. ROYAL ENDOWMENTS AND CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS

The Chola kings themselves were active patrons of charitable institutions, establishing foundations and making generous donations to support temples, educational institutions, and public works.

10. GRANTS FOR PUBLIC WELFARE

Kings like **Raja Raja Chola I** and **Rajendra Chola I** are known for their extensive land grants to temples, which were used to fund feeding programs, education, and healthcare services. These grants ensured the sustainability of charitable activities in the empire. Inscriptions from the **Brihadeeswarar Temple** provide detailed accounts of the endowments made by Raja Raja Chola I for charity.

11. CONCLUSION

The Chola Dynasty's charitable institutions were deeply rooted in their religious, political, and social structures. Temples, mutts, educational institutions, and public works served as the backbone of welfare activities in Tamil Nadu during this period. Through royal endowments and community contributions, these institutions helped support the poor, provide education, and maintain public infrastructure, creating a long-lasting legacy of charity that is reflected in Tamil culture today.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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