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Religion was the part and parcel of the Chola royal women. In fact, they strengthened the hands of their men rulers who traded upon religious polity as one of the means to sustain their power. The Medieval South India of 9th to 12th century, though carried along with it, the feudal characters and imperialistic motives of the rulers of the ancient period, the influence of alien culture and the development of composite culture had a bearing on the role, the contribution and on the changing attitudes of women during the period.

CONCLUSION

In the 9th century C.E., the Sangam Cholas emerged from a long hibernation in the wake of the decline of the Pallava and the Pandya empires. The Chola ruled the Tamil country between the beginning the 9th century C.E. to the half of the 12th century C.E. The '*Chola dynasty*' was one of the longest-ruling dynasties in the history of [southern India](#). After the decline of the Sangam period, the Cholas became feudatories in Uraiyur. Their capital was Tanjore. They also extended their sway in Sri Lanka and the Malay Peninsula. Therefore, they are called as the Imperial Cholas. Thousands of inscriptions

found in the temples, provide detailed information regarding the administration, society, economy and culture of the Chola period.

Tamil society was organised on the basis of caste system. In Tamil country the social division was based not on birth and the caste but on habitat or profession. The occupation was the base for the caste system. Their occupation based society was transformed into birth-based Varna system. In the age of imperial Cholas, the caste became rigid. Caste was a natural product of society in the creation of sub-caste. Many castes were in existence during the time of 10th century. Tamil society was organized this traditional pattern and was characterized by the occupational caste division. It was a social relationship and its socio, economic power was shared by different castes of that society. Chola period, the social system in south India was basically a temple oriented feudal setup. This set up was presided over by Brahmanas who in fact had also left their dominant influence on other aspects of societal activities.

In the Tamil society, the **Brahmanas** held high esteem. The **brahmanas**, the priestly community were the only **dvijas**. **Brahmanas** brought a new culture, which elicited the admiration of some people in Tamil country. The non-Brahmanas also wanted to adopt the brahamanic culture, assuming gotras, wearing the sacred thread and their way of worship. In this scenario, the temple was the most powerful instrument by which the brahmanas acquired social control over the masses and political control over the non-brahmin kings in their capacity as temple priest, **purohits**, **rajagurus**, army commandos and ambassadors. **Bhakti** literary works refer to their spiritual love and their knowledge in Vedas.

Vellalas were originally the dominant group of land owners. They were the nobility and landed aristocracy of the ancient Tamil country. They had maintained close contact with the different royal dynasties. The rich ***Vellalas*** held high official posts under king in the civil and military administration. They acted as the substitute of the monarch and involved in the administrative works. The ***Vellalas*** were prominent in the medieval Tamil Polity, economy and society. They were not only active militarist, administrators and officials but also had strong base as land holders of the fertile paddy growing tracts. The Vellalas officials, who distinguished themselves in the royal services were conferred with many titles ***Sembian muvendavelan, Solavelan*** and ***Muvendavelan***.

Trade and commerce was the traditional profession of the ancient Tamils. It played an essential role in the daily activities of human life. Trading activities were carried on by different caste groups like ***Chettiar, Reddiar, Nagarattar, Nattukottai Chettiar, Umanar***, pearl fishing ***Paravas*** and the foreign merchant. Trading caste group played a multiple role not only in the development of trade and commerce but also for the welfare of the state and society. Kulottunga I personally visited foreign countries along with the embassies and abolished customs duty and was popularly known as ***Sungam thavirtha Cholan***. The ***Kammalas*** were a very important section in the society. They included the goldsmith, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the brazier and the mason. They were Sankritised and considered themselves equal to ***brahmanas***. Their service to the royal family, palaces, temple and society. In the Chola period, the main weaving communities of the Tamil region were the ***Kaikkolar*** and ***Saliyar***. The ***Kaikkolar*** had essentially functioned as a military group under the Cholas. Then they emerged as full-fledged professional weavers in the Tamil country.

The broad division of the population of Chola country into *Valangai* (Right hand) and *Idangai* (Left hand) highlighted the social inequality that existed in society. Generally the *Valangai* groups enjoyed certain political, social, economic and religious benefits. But the *Idangai* people were strictly denied to enjoy minimum rights and freedom. The *Valangai* and *Idangai* division among castes appeared originally as a military classification and later on it turned out to be land holding groups. The deep-seated antagonism between these two sections often into open hostilities. It resulted in unlawful activities against the government and high castes. During the reign of Kulottunga I the affected *Idangai* people burnt *Chaturvedamangalam*. The government adopted severe measure to quell their revolt without solving their problems. Sometimes they were treated as robbers and anti-social elements.

Women of the Chola period played a vital role in the society. The women during the medieval period to continued to maintain their respect and social status. They ever involved in public activities and had no evincing interest in the political activities especially in the monarchical form of government. Women were not placed under any restraint in their social life and activities. Women in the upper strata of the society enjoyed equal privileges with men. The queen sat on the throne along with the king and had the right to issue royal orders. The Queen of the great Chola kings had equal power with the kings. The Queen of the great Chola kings had equal power with the kings. They praised in the eulogy of kings and in literary works as “*Pen Perumaal*”, *Anthappura Perumaal*”, and “*Anthappura Chakkravarthi*”.

The woman as wife of the householder was the ultimate pivot of the society. Chastity was considered the most important of all virtues of women. Family life

and rearing of children were considered to be prime duties of a woman, but the royal women had enjoyed freedom and equal partnership with their husbands. Women occupied a most respectable position in society as a mother. The important duty of the mother was to give birth to a child. She played an active role in the upbringing of the child. Marriage had social and religious significance even today, but it was much more of a governing idea in the Chola times. Marriages were conducted on auspicious days with much pomp and show. The celebration of marriage (called *Vivaham or Kalyanam*) was considered by the Tamils as a matter of primary importance. Monogamy was the order of the day; Polygamy was an accepted evil among the higher echelons of society. *Tali*, the sacred thread was tying round the neck of the bride by the bridegroom at the time of marriage.

Sati was encouraged by the upper strata society. Sati originally a Kshatriya customs soon spread to other section of the people. Most *Sati*'s were committed voluntary women's who had children or who were pregnant were exempted from this practice. Endowments were made *Sati*. This customs prevailed among the royal women and it was not widely prevalent among the common people. The Chola queens of Parantaka I, Rajendra I and Rajendra II committed *Sati*. Slavery an inhuman practice was prevalent in the Tamil society. Men and women sold themselves to temple or *mathas* due to severe famine, poverty, dedication or due to religious reasons. The slaves were treated as commodities. The *devaradiyar* were the female slaves of the temples. In most cases women were treated as slaves. These are reference to banded slavery in the *Periyapuranam*. The slavery woman was known. There were different types of slaves such as land slaves, temple slaves, monastic slaves and branded slaves.

The Chola kings brought gold and other materials from the places against which they won their war. These women were given separate houses to stay. That place where the king's rightful women lived is called "***Velam***". Women who were appointed to work for the king, queen and the royal family were called as ***Parivaram***. Separate workers were appointed to work for the king and royal family. This worker group was called as '***Thani Sevagam***'. The woman who guards the entrances was called as '***Puramkaakum Mathar***'. During the Chola rule, not only as palace maids, had women also worked as government officials and village officers. These women were called as "***Athikarichchi***".

Women were large participated in agricultural activities involving irrigation and their wages were fixed. During mercantile activities, mostly bartering deal was in custom. Moreover, they took part in cattle breeding, masonry, weaving and salt culture. The women took part in village activities and served as house-hold servants in royal palace. The food habits varied according to economic status. On the one side we find rich women enjoying a royal cushion and the poor eating green leaves fetched from the garden. The rich women took rich dishes, pulses, fruits and tubers whereas the poor among the society had to rely on mainly on green leaves and millets. Meat and fish were consumed, depending on their way of life (e.g. fishermen in littoral regions and hunters in forests). Ornaments and costumes were used under varying social status. Women of rich family decorated themselves with gold and silver ornaments that were studded with precious stones. The poor women adorned themselves with beads, shells and bones. Sastra even prescribe gold and precious metals to king and the priestly class while the downtrodden were expected to wear ornaments in iron.

The women had land rights, and they were involved in many noble activities by utilizing their assets. They were charitable by nature and provided free meals, rice, pulses, meat, greens and even alcoholic substances to guests. Women were fond of all types of ornaments, starting from head running through the body-parts and up to toes. In fact these were rich both in materials and designs. For the apparel, cotton and silk were used. Women wore loin cloth. They dressed their hair. A type of *mai* (collyrium) was applied in the eye-lashes and eye- brows. They had the houses furnished and the cots were decorated with the flowers and tender leaves.

Inscription mention that during the Chola ruled, many women who specialized in music, dance and drama performed such as ‘*Talicheri pendukal*. Temple women (*Devadāsīs*) were taught dances and songs and their dances were called *devadasis attam* or *devadasis isai*. To teach them the arts, teachers were there and those were called as *Talaikoli*. There were several varieties of them, dedicated to temple service such as dancing, singing, making garlands, sweeping temple premises and so on. The inscriptions and literature of the Cholas provide ample for sketching the history of the *devadāsī* system. Delving deeply into the system of *Devadāsīs*, one can easily bring all the matters as greenery scenes in the serene even a frizzle of facts without falling down. The *Devadāsīs*, though performed multifaceted works, they were entirely converged towards cultural and spiritual services. It is clearly known that their lives lay in two strata. Those who were in the upper stratum, lead prestigious life having been paid grants-in-aid with honours and privileges. Whereas those in the low stature less paid and did manual works for daily allowances.

Education during the Chola period was not widespread and universal as it is today. It was fully based on religion and it was the prerogative of rich and well-to-do. Mostly the teaching was oral. *Ghatika, Matha, Guhai, Agrahara, Salai* and Buddhists and Jain monasteries were centers of education. The temples were also served as educational institutions and important informal agencies of learning. The study of medical science was given much importance of during this period. The women education was not given sufficient attention during the medieval Tamil society. The temple had played a role in providing education to the women; Jainism gave all support and encouragement to the promotion of women's education. There were separate institutions specially meant for women's education called '*Penpallis*' at Vedal and Vilappakam.

The royal women's had actively involved in the temple oriented service and made endowments liberally. It is evident from Chola inscriptions that the Chola queens had actively participated in the activities of the society. Even though they were staunch followers of Saivism, they were tolerant enough to construct temples to other religious sects. Notably, the Royal women personally visited temples and granted endowments. Women like Queen Sembiyan Mādēvi, Queen Viman Kuntavai, Kundavai (Daughter of Sundarachola), Queen Pancavan Mādēvi, Queen Vanavan Mādēvi also called as Tribhuvana Mahadevi (who was the mother of king Rajendrachola) had the freedom and property to build temples and made endowments for offerings and maintenance of temple services.

GLOSSARY

<i>Abhisheka</i>	-	Bathing of the deity
<i>Acharyas</i>	-	Are gurus the religious teachers or the authors of the religious texts.
<i>Adimaikal</i>	-	Temple slaves
<i>Alvar</i>	-	One who is deep in meditation on Good Vaishnava saints whose hymns are deemed scriptures is once for all fixed to be twelve.
<i>Archaka</i>	-	Temple priest
<i>Aruntadhi</i>	-	Was the chaste and devoted wife of Vasishta Rishi and later became a star with Vasishta who are proverbial for chastity and sanctity.
<i>Atman</i>	-	Soul
<i>Bali</i>	-	Offering to god of flower, fruits rice
<i>Bhakthi</i>	-	Sanskrit doctrinal principle of salvation through devotion
<i>Brahmanas and Brahmins</i>	-	Vedic portions dealing with performance of sacrifices
<i>Caste</i>	-	Term devised Portuguese to denote several decisions (jatis) in Hindu society its use is confused
<i>Chaturvedimangalam</i>	-	The residential village area of the Brahmins
<i>Chetti</i>	-	Merchant caste
<i>CivakaChinthamani</i>	-	One of the five great epics written by Tiruttakkaevan a Jaina
<i>Dana</i>	-	Charity
<i>Devadana</i>	-	Refers to a gift of land to a temple
<i>Devakanimigal</i>	-	One of the major brahamana groups associated with the temple administration

<i>Devaradiyars</i>	-	Servants of God
<i>Dharma</i>	-	Tenant under the temple or holding temple lands
<i>Garbhagriha</i>	-	Shrine cell or sanctum, sanctorum or cella
<i>Ghana</i>	-	Knowledge
<i>Ghatika</i>	-	Sanskrit centre for advanced studies some as Tamil salai
<i>Gopura</i>	-	Main gateway the storyed structure over the entrance or entrance through the enclosing walls to the premises of a temple palace or city
<i>Gotras</i>	-	Family, especially applied to Brahmins
<i>Grama</i>	-	Village
<i>Irai</i>	-	The most general term denoting tax.
<i>Iraiylil</i>	-	Tax free favourable tenure
<i>Kadamani</i>	-	Duty
<i>Kaikolas</i>	-	Weavers
<i>Kalam</i>	-	A grains measure equal to 13 marrkals used all over the Chola empire
<i>Kalanju</i>	-	Weight measurement of gold
<i>Kalingattuparani</i>	-	A literary work written by Jayankondar a court poet of Kulottunga I
<i>Koil</i>	-	Temple, palace
<i>Kshatriya</i>	-	Second the four main divisions in Hindu society warriors and rulers
<i>Kuli</i>	-	Land measurement
<i>Kuttu</i>	-	Tamil term for dance.
<i>Madapalli</i>	-	Temple kitchen
<i>Mandapa</i>	-	a large open hall
<i>Mantra</i>	-	Hindu innovation hymn or prayer

<i>Markalai</i>	-	Month of December – January
<i>Mukthi</i>	-	As moksha
<i>Mulai. Vilai</i>	-	Certain amount of money given to bride by the bridegroom at the time of marriage. Now it is called parisam in some parts of Tamil Nadu
<i>Muvar Ula</i>	-	Is a Tamil poetical work written by Ottakkutan. It describes the birth and achievements of the three successive Chola rulers - VikramaChola, KulottungaChola II, Raja RajaChola II.
<i>Nadu</i>	-	A territorial assembly of the division consisting possibly of the representatives of the <i>Sabhas</i> and <i>Urs</i> within the division
<i>Nagara</i>	-	A primary assembly of merchants confined to the important towns.
<i>Nalayira Divya Prabandham</i>	-	Means the four thousand auspicious hymns. They are in Tamil and composed by the twelve Alvars.
<i>Namam</i>	-	Name the caste mark of the Sri Vaishnavite
<i>Pandaram</i>	-	Temple treasury
<i>Parai</i>	-	Musical instruments
<i>Pendugal</i>	-	Female singers in the temple
<i>Penpalli</i>	-	Women's education
<i>Pooja</i>	-	Ritual worship, services for the deity
<i>Prakara</i>	-	One of the circuits round the sanctum.
<i>Ratha</i>	-	Chariot
<i>Sabha</i>	-	An Aryan institution in Brahmin villages.
<i>Sala</i>	-	Trident Mark
<i>Salai</i>	-	May stand for road steed, hall of learning school, feeding house etc., Salai may also be called calai

<i>Sati</i>	-	Hindu widow who immolates herself on her husband's pyre believed sign of virtue and source of power
<i>Sridhana</i>	-	Land, money, jewels and other things given to a woman at the time of marriage as a gift.
<i>Talichcheri</i>	-	Residential areas the people connected to a temple
<i>Tevaram</i>		Sacred hymns sung by Appar, Sambandar, and Sundarar
<i>Timilai</i>	-	Drum
<i>Tirunamattukani and Tiruvidaiyattam</i>	-	Lands granted to Siva and Vishnu temples.
<i>Tulabara</i>	-	The King was weighed against gold, pearls and such other precious materials.
<i>Upanayam</i>	-	The sacred thread ceremony which was performed to initiate a person into the Vedic, studies.
<i>Ur</i>	-	Village assembly of a village Urar or Uravar villagers
<i>Ursabhai</i>	-	The assembly usually found in non - Brahmadeya villages.
<i>Uvachan</i>	-	One drummer
<i>Vanigar</i>	-	Merchants
<i>Vari</i>	-	Tax
<i>Varna</i>	-	Division
<i>Veli</i>	-	Land measurement
<i>Vellala</i>	-	A major agricultural community in Tamil Nadu

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