

The Chiefs' Claims to Legitimacy

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Abstract: Their career in the political arena probably started in the region of Rodda, as indicated by their epithet Roddada-gova¹ (protector of Rodda), Roddam being a place in Penukonda taluk of Anantpur district. With the changing political situation, the administrative authority expanded a bit further over the neighbouring regions, comprising the Gooty taluk of Anantapur district.

Keywords: Chola, administrative, Chalukya State, Kannada and Tamil inscriptions.

Introduction

From the very inception of their power, the Chola chiefs openly acknowledged their status as the feudatories of the Chalukyas of Kalyana. Their career in the political arena probably started in the region of Rodda, as indicated by their epithet Roddada-gova¹ (protector of Rodda), Roddam being a place in Penukonda taluk of Anantpur district. With the changing political situation, the administrative authority expanded a bit further over the neighbouring regions, comprising the Gooty taluk of Anantapur district, Molakalmuru and Hiriyur taluks of Chitradurga district, Penukonda and Hindupur taluks of Anantapur district, Sira, Pavugada and Madhugiri taluks of Tumkur district.

The chiefs assumed somewhat contradictory titles, namely, Mahamandalesvara² and Maharaja,³ the former indicating a subordinate status while the latter, a regal status. However, the epithet Maharaja is invariably coupled with their dynastic nomenclature, viz., Chola, i.e., Chola Maharaja.⁴ Hence, they were Chola Maharajas. It may be noted that the epithet like Maharaja during the medieval period still stood hierarchically on a lower plane, because titles like Maharajadhiraja

were being assumed by kings claiming imperial status as, for instance, the Chalukyas of Kalyana.

Thus, in the larger administrative set up of the Chalukya State, these Chola chiefs enjoyed a feudal status, which they willingly accepted through out the reign period of the Chalukyas of Kalyana, and after the latter's fall, they were not ready to change their allegiance, in spite of stiff impositions from the Hoysala's of Dvarasamudra, and the Yadavas of Devagiri. The region over which these chiefs exercised their authority was strategically significant, as it formed the south-eastern precincts of the Chalukya State, and as such occupied a position vulnerable to the onslaughts of the Cholas of Tanjavur. It is curious to note that the Chola chiefs never claimed descent from the imperial Cholas. On the other hand, they considered it a matter of pride and legitimacy to have been the descendents of Karikala Chola⁵ of the Sangam fame. Because of their long acquaintance with the region, the chiefs had become culturally part and parcel of that region. This fact becomes obvious when we note that all their inscriptions are in the Kannada language. It is probably for this reason that they would remain allegiant to Chalukya dynasty of Karnataka rather than to the imperial Cholas of Tanjavur. They never tended to be the agents of the imperial Cholas, for it is well-known that wherever the Cholas expanded their empire by new conquests they introduced Tamil language for administrative purposes. They claimed to have belonged to the lineage of Kasyapa and they also claimed Ksatriya status to the solar race. They called themselves Lord of city of Oreyur and boasted of their Simhalanchana (lion crest).⁶

The long support they had extended to the Chalukyas did not go unrewarded. This is demonstrated by the fact that when the Nolamba-Pallava authority came to an end at Henjeru they practically seemed to have exercised almost independent authority in spite of accepting feudal titles. In this connection it may be mentioned that earlier the Chola chiefs were subordinates of the Nolamba Pallavas.⁷ From this point of view it may not be incorrect to describe the area ruled over by these Chola chiefs as an autonomous state or buffer state.

By adopting epithets of the emperors, they apparently claimed imperial sanction to their authority. This is indicated in such titles of Mallideva as Tribhuvanamalla,⁸ Jagadekamalla,⁹ etc. This, on the one hand, confirmed their loyalty to the imperial authority and, on the other, presented them as legitimate representatives of the imperial rulers. They also assumed such high sounding epithets as Aravattunalku Mandalikara Talegonda-ganda¹⁰ (one who had severed the heads of sixty four Mandalikas), Kanchinupurarantakara and Aiyyanankakara¹¹ of Mahamandalesvara, thus projecting their prowess. The epithet karnata-karnaratna-mekhalalankara¹² leaves no doubt as to the fact that they were also claiming native status. This is further supposed by the exclusive use of Kannada in their records. They further broached of investiture of their political authority by the divine grace and this is revealed by their claims to such epithets as 'Born of boon of God Cholesvaradeva'¹³ (Cholesvaradevalabdha-vara-prasada). Perhaps claim to an element of divinity in themselves is also disclosed in the association of gods installed after their names such as Irungolesvara, Mangesvara,¹⁴ etc. Like the imperial Cholas they were ardent believers in Siva and patronised Saivism which added divine sanction to their legitimacy.

They employed the age-old method of making gifts to Brahmanas, priests, ascetics and temples. This helped them to demonstrate their inclinations to Dharmic injunctions prescribed in the Sastras. Thereby they could maintain rapport with priestly class and project their image before the subjects as patrons of the established order.

There are other indications of their aspirations to legitimating their authority. Thus, though they claimed descent from Tamil Chola family of rulers, they employed the vernacular of the region, i.e., Kannada for all the stone inscriptions issued by them. It is significant that, unlike the imperial Chola family which almost imposed Tamil officers in the conquered Kannada areas and issued Tamil inscriptions, the Chola chiefs here used the local Kannada language. Of course, there is a solitary

pillar inscription¹⁵ which is in Tamil and the use of Tamil in this particular inscription may be clearly explained away by the fact that the donor merchants hailed from the Tamil land, then under Chola Kulottunga

References:

- 1.EC XII SI 37
- 2.Ibid.
- 3.ECXI CL16.
- 4.Ibid.
- 5SII IXPart I 152.
- 6.SII IX Part I 146,
- 7,EC XII SI 37
- 8.SI IX 273
- 9.EC XII SI 40
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- 11.EC XII SI 25
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- 14,SI IX PartI 273
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