Kudavolai System of Cholas

Prelims – *Current events of National and International importance | History of India*

Why in News?

Recently, PM visited the Gangaikonda Cholapuram, highlighted that Chola Empire's democratic method existed centuries before the british Magna carta.

> ***Gangaikonda Cholapuram*** *is a Shiva temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site situated in Ariyalur, Tamil Nadu, built by Rajendra Chola I as his capital.*

- It is a ***method of voting process*** in a democratic way, also known as "ballot pot" election for village assemblies.
- **Process -** The names of eligible candidates were *inscribed on palm leaves* and placed inside a pot.
- A young boy, typically chosen for his impartiality, would draw the lot in full public view.
- This randomized draw was not a game of chance but a civic ritual rooted in transparency, fairness, and collective consent.
- The process was mentioned in the ***Uttaramerur Inscriptions of Kanchipuram.***
- **Eligibility of the candidates**
    - **Possession of Land -** Candidates had to own tax-paying land.
    - **Age criteria** - Between *35 and 70 years* old.
    - **Possessing Vedic Knowledge** – He should have knowledge of Vedic texts or administration.
    - **No crime records –** He should not have no record of crime or domestic abuse.
- **Disqualification criteria**
    - Debt defaulters, alcoholics, and close relatives of sitting members were disqualified.
    - Misappropriation of funds or dereliction of duty could lead to disqualification from future office.
- **Dismissal -** Epigraphia Indica details the dismissal of a treasury officer over embezzlement, followed by a fine.

Administration of Cholas

- The Chola administration was a well-organized and efficient system, characterized by a ***strong central government and a significant degree of local autonomy.***
- The empire was divided into
  - Provinces (Mandalams),
  - Districts (Valanadus and Kottams) and
  - Villages (Naduns).
- **Local Self-Government –** It has two foundational units
  - The Sabha for Brahmin settlements and
  - The Ur for non-Brahmin villages.
- **Powers of local government -** These were not symbolic councils but elected bodies with real powers over revenue, irrigation, temple management, and even justice.
  - Accountability was embedded. Annual audits were mandatory.
- **Decentralised administrative systems -** By empowering merchant guilds such as the Manigramam and Ayyavole, and sustaining local assemblies, the Cholas expanded both trade and legitimacy.
- **Egalitarian Society -** The Chola system was far from egalitarian in the modern sense. It excluded women, labourers, and landless groups.
- **Strategic competence -** The Military Campaigns of Rajendra Chola, the Cholas were masters of strategic signaling through naval conquests.

Reference

[The Indian Express | Gangaikonda Cholapuram & Kudavolai system](#)