

NEW KINGS AND KINGDOMS MODULE –3/3

Splendid Temples and Bronze Sculpture, Agriculture and Irrigation and The Administration of the Chola Empire

HANDOUT

This module focuses on three topics, viz, splendid temples and bronze sculpture in the Chola period, agriculture and irrigation and the administration of the Chola empire. The big temples of Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram were built by Rajaraja and Rajendra Chola. Chola temples often became the nuclei of settlements and were centres of craft production. Temples were endowed with land by rulers and the produce of this land went into maintaining all the specialists who worked at the temple like priests, garland makers, cooks, sweepers, musicians, dancers etc. Temples not only the places of worship; but also the hub of economic, social and cultural life.

Most of the achievements of the Cholas were possible through the new developments in agriculture. The river Kaveri branched off into several small channels before falling into the Bay of Bengal. These channels overflow frequently, depositing fertile soil on their banks. Water from the channels also provides the necessary moisture for agriculture, particularly the cultivation of rice. Forests had to be cleared in some regions. The land got levelled in other areas. Large embankments were built to prevent flood and canals were constructed to carry water to the fields. In the field of irrigation many methods were adopted like- wells were dug and huge tanks were constructed to collect rain water.

The administration of the Chola Empire was well organized. The spread of irrigation agriculture led to the prosperity of Settlements of peasants, known as *ur*. Groups of such villages formed larger units called Nadu The Chola kings gave some rich landowners titles like *muvendavelan* (a *velan* or peasant serving three kings), *araiyar* (chief), etc. as markers of respect, and entrusted them with important offices of the state at the centre. Brahmanas received a large number of land grants or *brahmadeya* and grants of land were looked after by an assembly or *sabha*. The *sabha* was a powerful administrative unit and. had separate committees to look after irrigation works, gardens, temples, etc.