



## Epigraphy Of Cholas In Bangalore

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### Abstract

Epigraphy which is the study of inscriptions or epigraphs, that are short sentences or phrases on stone/building or statues are some of the important Tangible sources of information about the then society and the kingdoms that ruled the places. Epigraphy overlaps other competences such as numismatics or palaeography which is the study of ancient writing systems and deciphering the dating of historical documents. The Chola dynasty which was one of the longest ruling dynasties in the history of South India had documented its achievements and contributions in the form of various Epigraphs and inscriptions. With the heartland of the fertile valley of Kaveri river, the Cholas ruled a large part of South Asia that stretched from the islands of the Maldives in the South to as far as North to the banks of the Godavari River in the now Andhra Pradesh. More specifically coming to the now Bangalore region, Cholas ruled this place nearly for a century. This paper focuses on the Epigraphies of the Cholas in the Bangalore region and the notable works of them in the Temple inscriptions found in this region.

Key words: Chola, Inscriptions, Temple, Epigraph, Bangalore

### Introduction

In the age of Cholas, which can be termed as the most initial creative period of South Indian history, the whole of South India was for the first time brought under the sway of a single government. In Art, religion and culture, this Kingdom reached heights of excellence in all spheres as in that of the foreign trade and maritime activity too. Though the earlier datable references of the Cholas are in the inscriptions from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE left by Emperor Ashoka as one of the three kingdoms of the Tamilakam, along with the Cheras and the Pandyas, inscriptions of this dynasty come to our aid only from the period of accession of Vijayalaya Chola in the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE.

This present paper “Epigraphy of Cholas in Bangalore” deals with the detailed documentation of the epigraphs found in the region of Bangalore in Karnataka (both Urban and Rural) and the places that are geographically near to the place of Bangalore (as called as Bengaluru). Though the History and the Historicity of the Chola kingdom is well known in terms of Tamil Nadu through the great temples and the architectural monuments that were built by them, and also through the promotion of the art forms that the Cholas did, many don’t know that the now state of Karnataka and especially the Bangalore region have a lot of Chola architectural marvels and especially inscriptions that talk about the great heritage of that period that were well documented by the Cholas of this region.

## **Epigraphy**

Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions or epigraphs as writing. Basically, an epigraph means that which is a short sentence or a phrase on a building or a statue as an introduction or a part of it. A person using the methods of epigraphy is called an epigrapher or epigraphist. Epigraphy overlaps other competences such as numismatics or palaeography, which is the study of ancient writing systems and deciphering the dating of historical documents. When compared to books, most inscriptions are short. The media and the forms of the inscriptions are diverse from engravings in stone or metal, scratches on rock, impressions in wax, embossing on cast metal, cameo or intaglio on precious stones, painting on ceramic or in fresco.

The Chola dynasty was one of the longest ruling dynasties in the history of South India. In Bangalore, the Cholas ruled nearly for a century. The heartland of the Cholas was the fertile valley of the Kaveri River, but they ruled a significantly larger area at the height of their power, including the present-day Bangalore. During the reign of Rajaraja Chola I—around 1004 CE—the Cholas captured Bangalore. During their rule, they built many temples in and around Bangalore. The Cholas ruled over largely the southern parts of Karnataka from 987 to 1118 CE. The reign of kings like Rajaraja I, Rajendra Chola Deva, Rajadhiraja I to Vikrama Chola I is noticed in Karnataka from various inscriptions of those times. The temple building activity of the Cholas was all centred-on Mysore, Chamarajanagara, Ramanagara, Bangalore, Kolar and Mandya districts largely. Temple towns like Hura, Marehalli, Doddamalur, Malurpatna and Kolar thrived in temple building activity during the Cholas administration.

Though extensive and detailed studies have been carried out by various scholars on Hoysala and Chalukyan temples in Karnataka, not much work is available for reference on Chola temples in Karnataka. This paper contains a list of about 35 Chola temples mostly from references to inscriptions, archaeological records. The below are some of the few important temples that have the name of the main deity of the temple and the name mentioned in the bracket is the place in which the temple is located:

Mallikarjunaswamy (Hura), Aprameyaswamy (Doddamalur), Narayanaswamy (Malurpatna), Kolaramma (Kolar), Someshvara (Kurudumale), Vaidyesvaranatha (Talkad), Varadarajaswamy (Maddur), Chokkaperumal Swamy (Domlur, Bangalore), Someshvara (Madivala), Mukthinathesvara (Binnamangala),

Cholesvara (Begur), Kashi Vishvesvara (Kadugodi), Hanumathesvara (Bannur) and Lakshmi Narasimha (Marehalli). All these temples were built in the 11th century CE.

The earliest reference to Krishna as a god installed in a temple in Karnataka has been found in a Chola period inscription found at Honganur near Channapatna (Gopalakrishna temple) (see picture 1.1).



Picture 1.1

(Hongalur Gopalakrishna temple, Channapatna)

### **Reign of Chola in Karnataka**

The reign of the imperial medieval Chola began in the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE with the Thanjavur as its capital and stretched till the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The founder was Vijayalaya Chola who was succeeded by Aditya I eventually. The society and the culture saw a massive development in the reign of the Cholas. In the era of the Cholas, temple was the main centre for all social and religious meetings. The surroundings of the temple became schools to teach Vedas and holy scriptures. During the times of warfare and political turmoil, temples were safe places for taking shelter. Art, religion and literature benefitted greatly during this era. Sculptures of gods and goddesses like Shiva, Nataraja, Vishnu, Mahalakshmi were carved out on bronze and serve as a golden reminder of this period. During the reign of Rajaraja Chola I, the Cholas captured Bangalore after defeating the Ganga dynasty. This was around 1004 CE. They built many temples in and around Bangalore. The Chola rule in the Kannada regions existed till the rule of Kulothunga Chola III. And not only the architectural marvels, but the Chola rule was also one of the prime reasons for Shaivism being deep rooted in the South of India in terms of both symbolism and philosophy.

Chola Temples were built in Bangalore, Karnataka between the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, after defeating the Ganga dynasty. The Stone inscriptions found in the temples built by Cholas mentions the names of the respective rulers of that period when those temples were built. Cholas had captured the present-day Southern part of Bangalore and use to call Bangalore as “Nikarila/Nigarilla Cholamandala” during the year circa 1024 CE. The areas now like Kadugodi, Nelamangala, Domlur, Hebbal, Huskur, Kengeri, Vasanthpura, Gangavara, Chowdappanahalli, and other areas in Bangalore still have some temples, and stone inscriptions which were written mainly in the Tamil language that showcases the dominance of Cholas in Bangalore then. Few of the Chola temples still survive in Bangalore with details of those temples and stone inscriptions which is mainly in the Tamil Language, mentions these Chola Emperor names, Rajendra Chola I (1012-1044 CE), Vira Rajendra Chola (1063–1070 CE), Athi Rajendra Chola (1070–1070 CE), Kulothunga Chola I (1070–1120 CE), Vikrama Chola (1118–1135 CE), Kulothunga Chola II (1133–1150 CE), Rajaraja Chola II (1146–1173 CE), Rajadhiraja Chola II (1166–1178 CE), Kulothunga Chola III (1178–1218 CE), Rajaraja Chola III (1216–1256 CE), Rajendra Chola III (1246–1279 CE).



Picture 1.2

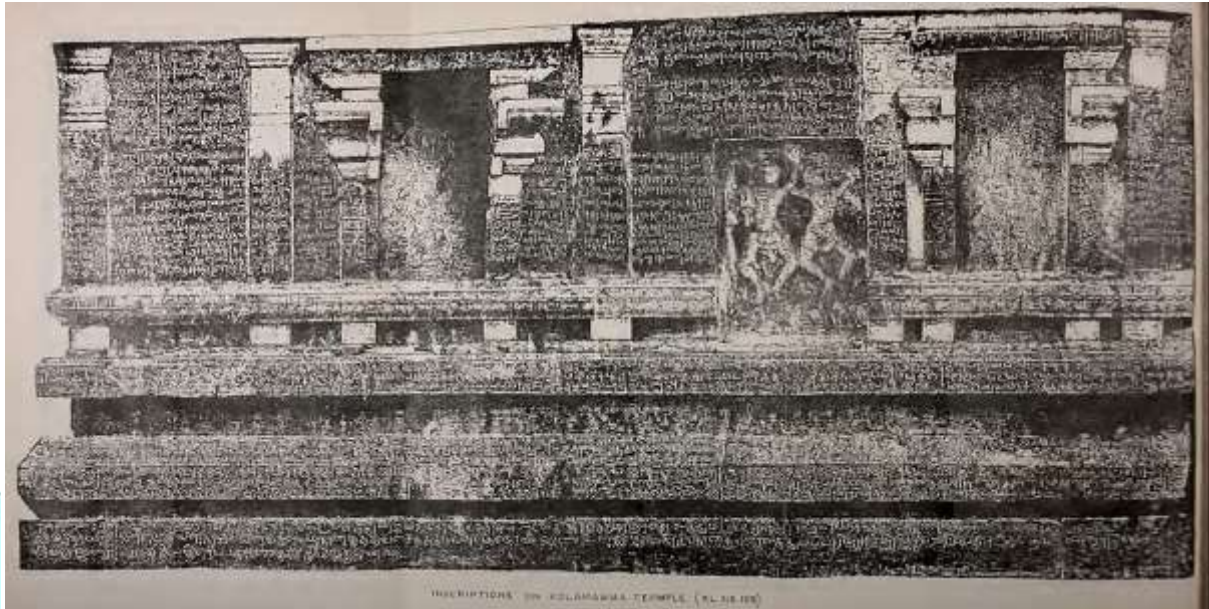
(Photo of the stone inscription taken at Sri Dharmeshwara Swamy temple, Ivvara Kandapura, Hessaraghatta hobli, Bangalore)

The temple architecture built by Cholas conveys more than just about the Gods it houses, it also talks about the rulers during the time, customs and traditions- in short, the life that thrived. Bangalore too is home to many Shiva temples. One such temple is the Someshwara temple at Madivala. Dr Meera Iyer, Co-convener, INTACH says that the Someshwara temple is one of the oldest temples in Bangalore.

Next comes the Kolaramma temple (see in picture 1.3) in Kolar area near Bangalore. This temple houses the deity Kolaramma who is an incarnation of Goddess Parvathi, and this temple has a great heritage history. The major achievements of the Cholas would be in architecture, art, local self government and foreign trade, there is a reason why their rule was considered a Golden Age.



One of the largest empires in Indian history, that stretched till Southeast Asia, the Cholas used their immense wealth, in building magnificent temples and structures. It would be an understatement to call the architecture of the Chola period as grand, it was more like grandiose and towering. The sheer size of their temples, the towering vimanas, the sculpted walls, and just every aspect of their monuments displayed grandeur. And of course nothing to beat the Brihadeshwara Temple at Thanjavur, that is a benchmark by itself in architectural excellence.



Picture 1.3

(Inscriptions by Rajaraja Chola are found in the Kolaramma temple in Kolar)

The Chola kings adopted the titles Rajakesarivarman and Parakesarivarman alternatively in their inscriptions. These titles were mentioned and not their proper names right from the time of Vijayalaya to Rajaraja Chola.

The Chokkanathaswamy temple (see picture 1.4) is the oldest in the city and the inscriptions on the temple suggest it belongs to the Chola period. The pilasters in the sanctum sanctorum and the Navaranga walls and the name Chokka Perumal, suggests that the temple is of Chola origin, though there are no such records. The whole of the Chola belongings of Bangalore were in the Illaipakka Nadu (present day Yelahanka) of Rajendra Solavala Nadu (Gangaikonda Chola). Domlur itself is referred to as Tombalur and as Desimanikkapattanam in the inscriptions.

On the door frame dated about 1270 CE, it is written in Tamil that one Alagiyar donated the two door posts. Another Tamil inscription says, one Talaikkattu (maybe a general) and his wife donated as tax-free the temple property, for the God Tripurantaka Perumal, as also the dry and wetlands in the village of Jalapalli, the tank at Vinnamangalam and other lands below the big tank of Tombalur. The charge of the temple was given to Talai Sankurappachariyan.



(Picture 1.4)

(Chokkanatha swamy temple in Bangalore)

The images of Vishnu or Sokka Perumal, his consorts Sri and Bhu in the garbhagriha, are carved from the saligrama stone from Gantikinadi (Nepal), the only place where the sacred stone is found. It was found that one of his consorts Bhudevi had a small chip off her nose. To correct this, the entire figure was scraped and the same was done to the other consort Sridevi too. Just a furlong further down is an Anjaneya temple, and it is said that if a line is to be drawn the head of his deity is positioned beneath the feet of Chokkanathaswamy. Though the oldest among the three old temples in Bangalore, the other two - Gavi Gangadhareswara and Ulsoor Someswara are more well known.

Chokkanatha swamy temple: Shakuntala Keshavachar, whose family manages the temple's trust says that the temple was built by Raja Chola after conquering Yelahanka Nadu (now a part of Bangalore), which was a flourishing town then. But because the Cholas are followers of Shiva, why would he build a Vishnu Temple? There used to be a Shiva Temple earlier, she says. The Vishnu Temple was built for the residents of Yelahanka Nadu who were Vaishnavas (followers of Vishnu), she says.

One of the most ancient temples of Bangalore, and of South India, Ulsoor Someshwara temple (see picture 1.5), it was built during the rule of the Chola dynasty (who reigned between the 9th century to the 13th century). The temple is dedicated to Nandi, Shiva's bull, but what is interesting is that the other gods of the Holy Trinity — Brahma and Vishnu — are also worshipped here. Other deities, Kamakshamma, Arunachaleswara, Bhimeswara, Nanjundeswara and Panchalingeswara, are also worshipped here. Apart from the religious aspect, the temple is a house of the rich and intricate Chola architecture. It stands as a testimony to the aesthetic heights that the Chola dynasty had achieved. While the main temple was built by the Chola kings, the impressive Rajagopuram and the compound of the temple was built by Kempegowda, the founder of Bangalore.



(Picture 1.5)

(Ulsoor Someshwara Temple in Ulsoor, Bangalore)

Vishnu's Dashavatharas (10 forms as incarnations) have been etched on the pillars in front of the temple. The inscriptions are in Kannada, but the language is Tamil. These inscriptions are proof that the temple belongs to the time of Cholas.

Domlur is referred to as Tombalur in the inscriptions! The tale of the sanctum sanctorum is also an interesting one. In the book 'Bengalurina Ithihasa', Sri Sunder Rao says that according to popular belief, the sanctum sanctorum was earlier a cave, and a five-headed snake used to guard its jewels. To keep thieves away, the doors were kept small and it was built such that minimum light was let into it. The temple is rich in Dravidian architecture. The Vijayanagar style Navaranga pillars and the front mandapam are architectural delights. The pillars depict scenes of kolata, the fight between Vali and Sugreeva and demigods. The unique aspect of the temple is that the idols are built using Saligrama stone. The Saligrama is the most sacred stone worshipped by Vaishnavas and is used to worship Vishnu in an abstract form. The stone is found in river Gandaki near Mukti Nath in Nepal. On Vishnu's both sides are Sridevi and Bhodevi along with the Alwars. Another interesting feature is the pranic energy points all over the temple.





(Picture 1.6)

(Kadugodi graveyard in Bangalore)

The Chola period Tamil inscription of Rajendra Chola is located at a graveyard at Kadugodi (see picture 1.6), East Bangalore. The inscription records the construction of the Pattandur Lake with three sluice gates, with the land grants given by Rajendra Chola. Further, the inscription talks about installation of the deities of Shiva, Durga and Ganapathi. There are some words to protect the inscription, cursing anyone who damages with inheriting the sins of all those who died between The Ganges and the Cape Cameron.

At Kalkere lake, an ancient Tamil inscription, supposed to be from the Chola period was found under a sewage canal connecting to Kalkere Lake in East Bangalore. A similar stone was at Kithaganur village nearby and has been installed in a temple. The inscription hasn't been deciphered yet, as it is written in an older form of Tamil.

Marathahalli: Doddanekkundi village, located North of Marathahalli, and much older than Marathahalli, has two ancient inscriptions in Tamil. The first inscription dated 1304 CE, mentions the village name as Nerkundi and talks about the existence of a fort around the village constructed in 1304. The second inscription talks about the Hoysala king Ballala III granting the entire revenue of the Doddanekkundi village to the Shivagange Temple. There is also a Telugu inscription in Marathahalli. According to scholars, this shows the use of Tamil and Telugu in Bangalore, much before the reign of Krishnadeva Raya of the Vijayanagar Kingdom.

Chokkanathaswamy Temple, Domlur: The Chokkanathaswamy Temple, located in Domlur is a 10th-century temple supposedly of Chola origin though there are no such records. There are several Tamil inscriptions in the temple. Domlur is called as Tombalur or Desimanikkapattanam in these inscriptions. Chakravarthi Posalaviraramanatha Deva has left inscriptions with directions to temple authorities of his kingdom. Further some inscriptions record the tributes, taxes and tolls made to the temple by Devaraya II of Vijayanagar Empire, which state the houses, wells, land around Tombalur were offered to the deity Sakkapperumal. Another Tamil inscription dated 1270 talks about 2 door posts being donated



by Alagiyar. Yet another inscription in Tamil details Talaikkattu and his wife donating lands from Jalapalli village and Vinnamangalam tank to the deity. A 1290 CE inscription talks about donation of ten pens from the revenue of Tommalur by Poysala Vira Ramananda.

**Someshwara Temple, Madivala:** The Someshwara temple at Madivala is one of Bangalore's oldest. There are a few Tamil Grantha inscriptions on the outer walls of the temple. The oldest of these inscriptions' dates to 1247 CE talks about a land grants "below the big tank of Vengalur" by a Veppur (modern Begur) resident. Other inscriptions also talk about other land grants including those done during the reigns of Ballala III. Another inscription dated 1365 talks about land grant at Tamaraikkirai (which translates to 'lotus pond bank' in Tamil), and according to HS Gopala Rao, Secretary of the Karnataka Itihasa Academy refers to the present day Tavarekere suburb.

**Bhoga Nandeeshwara Temple, Nandi:** The Bhoga Nandeeshwara Temple, on Nandi Hills (Nandidurg), 50 km from Bangalore has Chola period Tamil inscriptions on the walls. **Kolaramma Temple, Kolar:** The Kolaramma Temple, at Kolar, 60 km from Bangalore, was built by Rajendra Chola I (A.D.1012-1044) and has his statute and Tamil inscriptions (KL110-KL115) on the walls of the temple. Numerous other Tamil inscriptions are found around Kolar and Bowringpet.

**Mukthi Natheshwara Temple, Binnamangala:** The Mukthi Natheshwara Temple, at Binnamangala, Nelamangala Taluk, 60 km from Bangalore was built by period of Kulothunga Chola - 1 (1069-1120 CE). The inscriptions in Tamil talk about the endowments of surrounding villages to the deity Muththeeswarem Udaiya Mahathevar (Lord Shiva), referring to the place as "Vinmamangalam of Kukkanur Nadu of Vikkrama Chola Mandalam"

**Someshwara Temple, Ulsoor:** The Someshwara Temple, at Ulsoor was originally built by the Cholas, and later renovated during the Vijaynagar Period.

The type of pilasters in the Sanctum and Navaranga walls and the name Chokka Perumal, leads to the belief that the temple is of Chola origin, though there are no records as such. The whole of the Chola belongings of Bangalore were in the Illaipakka nadu (present day Yelahanka) of Rajendra solavala nadu (GangaikondaChola). Domlur itself is referred as Tombalur and as Desimanikkapattanam in the inscriptions. It could have been an important hold even during the reign of the Gangas. Tamil Nadu and Karnataka came into close contact with each other during the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Much Tamil grantha inscriptions have been discovered in Karnataka.

### List of Chola temples in Karnataka

1. Someshwara Temple – Halasuru
2. Prasanna Someshwara Temple – Kengeri
3. Dharmeshwara temple – Kondrahalli
4. Chennakeshwara temple – Hoskote
5. Dharmeshwara Temple – Kandapura
6. Mukthi nateshwara temple – Binnamangala
7. Kashi Vishweshwarayya temple – Nelamangala
8. Kashi Vishweshwarayya temple – Kadugodi
9. Madduramma temple – Huskur
10. Vasantha Vallabha Raya temple – vasantha pura
11. Chokkanatha swamy temple – Domlur
12. Ananda Lingeshwara temple – Hebbal
13. Someshwara temple – Old Madivala
14. Someshwara temple – Hasigala
15. Dharmaraya temple – Thigalarpet
16. Prasanna Someshwara temple – Marathahalli
17. Someshwara Temple – Agara
18. Shiva temple – Gunjur
19. Kamateshwara temple – Nagarathpet
20. Someshwara temple – Hulimavu
21. Someshwara temple – Gangavara

Bengaluru figures in ancient Tamil inscriptions on outer walls of Madivala Someshwara temple. The name Bengaluru throws up interesting revelations time and again. An inscription found on a shrine in Madivala mentions the name of Vengalur in Tamil, which is translated as Bengaluru in Kannada. The “Epigraphia Carnatica” has recorded the inscription as Someshwara temple, at Madiwala is one of the oldest in Bangalore, dating back to the Chola Period. There are several Tamil inscriptions on the outer walls of the temple. The oldest of these dates to 1247 CE that talks about the land grants “below is the big tank of Vengalur” by Veppu (modern day Begur) resident. Other inscriptions also talk about other grants including those done during the reigns of Ballala III and Rajendra Chola. There are about 50 Chola inscriptions in Bangalore of which 10 are in Kannada and rest are in Tamil.

### Conclusions

The epigraphy of the Cholas in Bangalore offers a fascinating window into the past, shedding light on the dynasty's governance, spirituality, and artistic expression. These inscriptions, scattered across the city's temples and monuments, stand as silent witnesses to the Cholas' enduring legacy. As we reflect on the significance of these epigraphs, we are compelled to acknowledge the debt we owe to the Chola rulers, who

have left an indelible mark on Bangalore's cultural landscape. Their story, etched in stone, continues to inspire and educate us today.

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