

Role of Trade and Connected Urbanisation in the Rise of State Structure: A Historiographical Study of Cola State

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Abstract: The paper aims to explore the link between the growth of trade and urban centres and changes in the structure of the state. In other words, how the emerging traders and merchants' network affected or altered the state's structure during the Cola period in the view of south Indian scholarships such as R. Champakalakshmi, Meera Abraham, James Heitzmen and Kenneth Hall. All of these studies focus upon the socio-economic and political formation of the so-called golden, imperial and monarchical state of the Cola. The time-frame of the present discussion also would be the Cola period, *i.e.* circa between 9th to 13th centuries A.D. The study of imperial Colas must rely heavily upon the records of pious benefactions inscribed upon the walls of temples, and thus they remain as primary references to study the beneficial relationship between the state and urban and commercial growth during the pre-modern South India.

Keywords: Cola, trade, urbanisation, monarchy, agriculture, rural-urban continuities, historiography

The growth of any super-structure such as state is long-term evolutionary process, which emerges from the interaction of different structures political, social, religious and economic. These structures separately have the role in the development of such super-structure because each structure has different dialectical relationship to each other but internally connected by the past of same historical process. Although we cannot overstress on one structure in such growth but economy as base structure plays some dominant role in changes in other structures. In this way, the growing complexity in material structure synonymously leads to the complex changes in political, religious and social structures that emerged in an integrative complex super-structure practice to control and manage its base structures by many means for the sake of strengthening its position. The degree of success in such task determines the life span of the particular super structure. To put it in other words, the super-structure and the base structure (economy) have continuous conflicts to each other. They are same time cause and effect for themselves for the changes.

Here we can say that there is unanimity among historians in accepting the view that the

economy linked to the growth of state structure. But contradiction occurs on whether economy strengthening or weakening the state structure. Many inseparable factors trade, agriculture, plundering, merchant organizations, various services, etc. construct the economic structure. Here we can also note that these factors also interacted among each other and other structures and resulted in sub-structures. For example trade leads to the urbanization. Urban centers occurs when trade, traders, agriculture, and polity infrastructures evolving at a level of interactive complexity that produced regional political integration. So, the context of the Cola state, the evolution of the Cola relationship with merchants mirrors the rise and fall of Cola state craft during the 9th through the 13th century A.D. Also, long distance trade may be seen both as a cause and effect of state formation depending upon factors other than the trade itself.ⁱ These were all surely interdependent phenomenon the lucrative overseas trade and agriculturists alliance and the development of towns.ⁱⁱ

The focal point of this paper is to explore the link between the growth of trade and urban centres and changes in the structure of the state. In other words, how the emerging traders and merchants' network affected or altered the state's structure during the Cola period in the view of many south Indian scholarships such as Champakalakshmi, Abraham, Heitzmen and Hall. All of these studies focus upon the socio-economic and political formation of the so-called golden, imperial and monarchical state of the Cola. The time-frame of the present discussion also would be the Cola period, *i.e.* circa between 9th to 13th centuries A.D. Any study of imperial Colas must rely heavily upon the records of pious benefactions inscribed upon the walls of temples, and thus they remain as primary references to study the beneficial relationship between the State and urban and commercial growth during the pre-modern South India.

Before step into the objectives of this paper, here, it would be appropriate to briefly discuss the general characterization about the growth of trade and urban centres in the per-modern India. To R. Champakalakshmi the surplus production is essential factor for the growth and survival of trade and urbanization, which can be obtained through expansion of agriculture and a sedentary rural settlement. Because it fulfils the basic needs of non- agricultural groups that operates in urban centres. A possibility for trade is only possible when there is surplus in the production. Therefore, there should be hinterland area, which could generate a surplus production so as to feed the urban centres. This rural-urban continuum is best illustrated in early medieval south India without clear-cut demarcation of rural urban boundaries.ⁱⁱⁱ It was the period when the temple sites emerged as the urban centres in certain core regions, where intensive agriculture and dense peasant settlements permitted the mobilization of a large surplus. Also, a similar nature led to urban growth in other areas of the Colas

although the pace and quantum of growth are differed in various degrees. We have many evidences with regard to *brahmadeya* and *devadāna*^{iv} settlement from 600-1200 A.D., for the purpose to generate surplus production through agriculture expansion and integration with Cola domain.^v It subsequently resulted in development of trade and urbanization of south India and thus leading to integration and centralization of the Cola State.^{vi}

Now I would like to move on whether the trade and concomitant urbanization accompanies the growth and establishment of state structure in Early Medieval South India with special references of work done by R. Champakalakshmi, Kenneth R. Hall, Mira Abraham and James Heitzman. Although all above mentioned scholars accept the trade and concomitant urbanization accompanies the growth of state structure of the Colas but they differ on the nature of its role in structuring the State. According to this we can classify them in two groups. First, who stresses that the trade and urbanization are weakening the Cola state as Kenneth Hall, James Heitzman and Mira Abraham. Second, we can keep R. Champakalakshmi in separate because her hypothesis is that the trade and urbanization are strengthening the state structure.

The understandings of Kenneth Hall,^{vii} Heitzman and Abraham in this direction show their inclination towards the segmentary state theory of the Cola state framed by Burton Stein. This presents a negative role of trade and urbanization in Cola state structure—as it determines and weakens the State. Their view will become clearer once we understand the key elements of the segmentary state of south India as defined by Stein: (1) *nadu* is an autonomous social, economic and political locality that is periphery (2) the absence of an organized central taxation system, war-loot being the major source of the state income (3) absence of a strong centralized army and the presence of caste and guild armies (4) a weakly organized centre exercising ritual sovereignty.

Like Stein, Kenneth R. Hall also opts *nadu* as a key to study the trade and urbanization in the Cola state in his work “*Trade and Statecraft in the Age Colas.*” Here he argues that despite the trade and urban growth are in progressive mode with development of trade, but it is not because of the state’s effort, rather by its own capability. Because the Cola state was not able to control the trade, on the other hand the merchants constantly challenge the central authority of the Colas. Hall emphasizes the high degree of administrative autonomy of the *nadu* that evolved organically in the context of developing peasant economy and he says that its economic functions were prior to all viz. revenue collection, controlling trading activities etc. He little exaggeratedly opines that the Cola’s state has no other option except to adopt this local institution for well administration. However, some strong

Cola kings as Rajaraja I' Rajendra I, Kulothunga I tried to curbe their autonomy by various means such as initiation of *brahmadeya*, *valanadu* and patronage to temple to efficient revenue collection.^{viii} This ultimately weakened the local autonomy of the *nadu*. In order to protect their autonomy, the *nattar* created the *periyannadu*, a supra-*nadu* level cooperation.^{ix} But on the contrary Champakalakshmi argues that it was a multi-ethnic organization of agriculturists which originated in the drier areas north of the Kaveri and was active in the peripheral areas rather than the core areas. Its composition was not however dominated by *velalas*.^x

Hall major concern is the *nagaram*, which in his view a commercial town with delegated rights of administrative autonomy. Each *nadu* has maximum one *nagaram* which serve its nuclear market. But Champakalakshmi proves that many *nadu* have more than one *nagaram* whose number depends upon the size of *nadu*. *Nagaram* one side connects to the local village and other side with itinerant trade organization—that is the reason why it became the point of exchange of local goods as well as exotic goods.

Hall's study of *nagaram* by the Tiruvindaimarudar temple urban centre partly seems to the critics of Stein's segmentary Cola state theory but indirectly it accentuates the more autonomy enjoyed by the *nattar*, in a sense much more than Stein itself.^{xi} He proves that *nagaram* of this urban centre had a collaborative relationship with *Ur* and *Sabha* which enabled it to involve in the local affairs like temple administration.

Hall accepts the flourishing trade in the Cola age which reflected by many commercial centres, overarching merchant organization, itinerant traders etc. The introduction of cola silver and gold coinage are the direct consequence of economic prosperity of colas.^{xii} But he stresses that the Cola state was unable to provide security to merchants and fail to exercise coercive authority since the itinerant traders maintained their own armed troupe to protect their caravan activities.^{xiii} He states also that merchant controlled/maintained the regiments of *velakarara* and other troops, which not only simply associated with trading purpose, but sometime they provided military assistance to the state for its plunder expedition.

Hall shows the height of a strong commercial group's interaction with Cola king by the study of Kanchipuram temple complex.^{xiv} It identifies the representatives of temple, renewal of royal relationship with *nagaram*, having many special privileges^{xv} and collecting taxes on king's behalf etc. In return for such royal favour the Kanchipuram merchant made special contributions to the Cola

treasury and seem even to have helped finance Cola military expedition.

Hall explains that in the late 12th and early 13th century A.D. these powerful and wealthy merchants were established formal alliances with periyannadu at supra-nadu level peasant institution. Therefore, the previous cooperation between the *nadu* and *nagaram*, continued even in the later period but now it was at supra-nadu level. This regained collaboration prevented the centralizing activities of the Cola.^{xvi}

The focal theme of Meera Abraham's study is with two so-called merchant guilds,^{xvii} viz the *manigramam* and the *Ayyavole*^{xviii} operating in South India from 3rd to the mid-14th centuries.^{xix} She draws her primary references from the corpus of stone and copper inscriptions both published and unpublished of Kannada and Tamil speaking area. She describes their role in religion, their relation with the state and the products they traded. Interestingly, the ideas that she puts forward about the urbanisation do not conflict with the description of urban settlement of Hall and Stein.^{xx} She states that from the end of the 12th century AD there is clear evidence of increasing foreign trade in luxury goods as well as a thriving, local internal trade in basic necessities including grain and pulses which is main stimuli for the growth of market towns. Along with this she explores another cause of close link between the local landholder, the *nattar* and traders in the late 12th and the 13th centuries which may have grown as a result of the demanded grain in the developing urban centers, need which only the agriculturists were able to meet.^{xxi} Interestingly Abraham also speculates the reasons for Pudukkottai region became an area of commercial importance under both the Cola and Pandiyas. And that was an actual locale of operation of the *ainnarruvar*.^{xxii} She suggests because (1) it is buffer zone between the Cola and Pandiyas so both regions are easily accessible from here (2) It served as an "entrepot" area from which consignments were distributed together to Cola and Pandiya country. Its large population of *valaiyan* and other warrior people has assumed the duties of protection of trade.

James Heitzman presents a little different kind of explanation for the urbanization and the state structure in the Cola period^{xxiii} because he also supposes that the Cola state was not centralized state so the temple urbanization provides some political and economic integration to this by rituals. With the comparison to *Sangam* period commercial cities or ports (Madurai, Kanchipuram, Pampuhar) the result of long-distance trade, Heitzman views a new type of urban development began under the Pallava dynasty and came to fruition during the subsequent reign of the Colas, when many areas of medieval rites around temple which lay spatially and conceptually at the heart of growing political and commercial networks.

Heitzman opines that the base of this urban development was the religious donations by the rulers that stimulated the construction of large temples as foci for commercial transactions and political activity. The motive behind the large-scale temple endowments was the ritualization of political authority, an attempt of legitimization through the institution of temple. But the direct political actions of the Cola rulers usually remained limited to the official recognition of tax-free status or the alienation of land titles to areas that in many cases may have been relatively underdeveloped or limited in extent.

R. Champakalakshmi deals with the trade and urbanization to study the nature of state in early medieval south India in a perfect manner with correction and citification in previous studies of the American scholars such as Kenneth Hall, late Burton Stein in her main work '*Trade Ideology and Urbanization*'. She claims that conventional historical works abound in references to urban centres and trade organisations but fail to provide any meaningful framework or relation between agrarian and urban institutions and recognize changes overtime.^{xxiv} She classifies the urban history of Tamilakam in two broad periods up to about 1300 AD. In the early historical period from 300 B.C. to 300 A.D. cities were located at the coast and were the time promoted trade they themselves consumers of luxury goods and they developed ports and collected tolls and customs but in a limited extent. Because this is the time when the formation of state evolving out of a chiefdom level of political formation. In the second period, the Early Medieval from 600 to 1300, temple provided the institutional base for the great cites which is the direct outgrowth of the expansion of empire with basic features of urbanisation.^{xxv} According to Champakalakshmi, there is important contrast between the urbanization in these two periods. In the former; it was a secondary urbanization deriving from internal and external trade. In the later, urbanisation was created by inner (primary) urban growth so it was primary urbanisation.^{xxvi}

In the early medieval period, the institutional base provided by the temple become a centre of political and economic activities. The Cola rulers are also constructing temples or granting *devadana* as a way of legitimizing their position and as an act of religious merit. From the beginning of Bhakti movement, some of these temples become leading political centres and religious and pilgrimage centres and it further evolved in to huge urban complexes. The bhakti ideology and the temples were the main institutional forces through which the Colas brought about socio-political and economic integration.

The major economic activities centering on these temples are reflected through endowment and redistribution in the form of land, cow, sheep, gold and money. These temples had their treasuries, archives and administrative machinery, usually controlled by the landed group, particularly high castes such as Brahmans or *vellalas*. After the king, Temple was also the biggest consumer of trade goods that bring all craftsman, artisans and trader under the temple complex, sometimes the temple also interested to put their money and gold in trade.

Champakalakshmi studies four types of urban settlements as urban among the cluster of *bramadeyas* and *devadana* especially Kudamukku-Palayarai, political centres (Tanjavur, Kanchipuram etc.), religious centres (Chidambaram, Mannargudi) and trade centres like Nagappatinam, but she concludes unlike Hall that it most cases while trade was a secondary factor, religious activity was a dominant and persistent though not necessary the sole factor because it should also be accompanied by major economic activity.^{xxvii} Here it also becomes clear that trade and urbanisation is simultaneous development that was stimulated by political factor.

The emergence and proliferation of the *nagaram* in with the beginning of the Pallava period was certainly base for a well-developed commercial network during the Cola time. Therefore, Champakalakshmi studies the emergence of *nagaram* not as an isolated process like Hall, but in three major phases corresponding to early, middle and late Colas. She says that Hall's model of network-centers like the villages of the *nadu* to *nagaram*, the *nagaram* in turn to *managaram* not existed in early Cola period but in the later Cola period.^{xxviii} *Nagaram* undoubtedly represents potential centres of urban growth connected with itinerant merchants but mostly were common market for the *nadu*. In early phase a greater involvement of the *nagaram* in commercial activity but limited to particular regions. But the middle Cola period is marked by a conspicuous increase in *nagaram* not only in the Cola heartland but also in newly conquered areas. Here Champakalakshmi significantly has argued, unlike Hall, that the *nagaram* were used as much as *brahmadeya* as an interdependent agent of political synthesis under the Colas.^{xxix} The Colas used both *nagaram* and *bramadeyas*, as institutional forces, in newly conquered areas for consolidating their conquest by assimilating these areas in to their administrative patterns.

Now *nagaram* become part of wider network that resulted in the revival of commerce both local and long distance in South India with specialized merchant *nagaram* such as *salia nagarattar* for textile, *vania nagarattar* for oil, *Paraya nagarattar* for seafaring merchant, horse trading merchant etc. And during the 11th century A.D. many powerful merchant organizations came into existence,

for example *ayyavole*, *manigramam*, *anjuvannam*, etc, for controlling and regulating the high profitable commercial network. This intensification in mercantile activity was closely linked to the external policy of the Colas. Now their military expedition aimed at to establish trade links, control lucrative commercial ventures and explore trade route rather than attempt to fight political control.^{xxx} Cola wars in South Karnataka, Srilanka and Srivijaya can be taken in this direction.^{xxxii} The Cola missions to China and Kulottunga's physical presence in Cambodia, his coins, exchange of gifts, grant of lands and village to the Buddhist vihāra at Nagappattinam and abolition of tolls are a part of trade policy of this early medieval dynasty.

This period is marked by overarching merchant organisations such as *ayyavole*, *anjuvannam*, *maniagramam*, and *erivirapattinam*. Here Hall argues that these organizations have their own military for protection which reflects the incapability the Cola to control them, but Champakalakshmi stresses that state patronage to the *ayyavole* and other major guilds is increasingly referred in several inscriptions of the Colas.^{xxxiii} It is also reflected by the name of these organisations prefix with the Cola king's name. They were also used as means to regulate trade in the newly conquered areas. Their military mercenary was sanctioned by the king or sometimes on their own in the absence of the recognizable political power.

As earlier mentioned, this revival of commerce centring around the temple made the temple to become as a nucleus of social political and economic activities. This also contributed the growth of state structure in another way, because it accompanied with socio-economic differentiation with the emergence of various social groups like temple functionaries, craftsmen, artisan, agriculturist, in the service of agriculture workers i.e. division of labour. Caste and ritual ranking around the temple were another factor of serial differentiation.^{xxxiiii} The rise of *nagarattar* as a full fledge trading community, crafts groups in the villages and urban localities and new entrants into the agricultural groves came to be organized under the dual right and the left-hand castes which emerged as a paradigmatic division from the twelfth centuries.

To epitomize the above discussion on various works on state and urbanization of the early medieval South India, there are two contradicting points can be noted in these existing studies. First is of Kenneth Hall's view in which he conjectures the relationship between the King and the Merchants as a struggle for supremacy and independence. He advances an idea that the Cola state made a great effort to develop the commerce—it is not only because of their interest in resource mobilization, but it was done as an ostentatious way to dismantle the collaboration between the *nadu*

and *nagaram* institutions, so as to control the local autonomy of the *nattar*. Though the state initiative brought fruitful results at the initial period, it turned to be a risk to the state when the local *nagarattars* collaborated with the itinerant merchants. It led them to a powerful and wealthy position—as much as maintaining their own missionary troops. When these merchant groups tried to free from the taxation of the state, it brought them the natural ally of the *nattar*, who at the time operating at *periya nadu* level, a *supra nadu* level of institution. This alliance culminated in the downfall of the State. Therefore, he concludes that ‘the evolution of the Cola relationship with merchants parallels the development and then the ensuing decline of the Cola statecraft during the ninth through the thirteenth century AD.’ But, secondly, the Champakalakshmi argument is centre around the temple. She tells that for the growth of state system is not necessarily a well-developed trade or urban settlement, but a developed production (agrarian) system to meet the subsistence need with a surplus. She describes how the temple with the initiation of the State became a nodal point for traders and consequently for all other socio, economic and political activities and emerged as urban settlement. This is, to her, a way of legitimizing process of the state, and in which the state ideology operates the entire process. The trade and the growth of urban centres were not contributory factors for establishment of the state, but for the strengthening of the already established state.

REFERENCES

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- ⁱ R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade Ideology and Urbanization*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, p. 36.
- ⁱⁱ Abraham Meera, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1998, p. 118, inscriptions indicates that high profits attached with overseas trade and a wealthy *Ayyavole* traders of Hoysala times dealing in overseas goods was able to pour money into urban settlements.
- ⁱⁱⁱ R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade Ideology and Urbanization, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996*, p. 36, also see Heitzman James, *Gifts of Power: Lordship in an Early Indian State*, Oxford University Press, 1997, chapter 3
- ^{iv} While *brahmadeya* represents land grants to Brahman and *devadana* was land made to the temple. Sometimes whole villages were granted as *devadana*.
- ^v R. Champakalakshmi, State and Economy: South India Circa A.D.400-1300. in Romila Thapar (ed.) *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Bombay, Popular Prakasan, 1995, p. 279 Brahmans are the harbingers of advanced farming methods with irrigation system, management, seasonal crops etc. Also, *brammadeya* and temple integrating many older settlements, virgin land and non-brahmana villages into this new agrarian system.
- ^{vi} R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade Ideology and Urbanization*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, p. 206.
- ^{vii} Kenneth R. Hall, Peasant State and Society in Cola Times: A View from the *Tiruvudaimardur* Urban Complex, *IESHR*, Vol.18, NOS 3 and 4, p. 393.
- ^{viii} Hall Kenneth R. *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of Colas*, Elmira, New York, 1978, Chapter 2.
- ^{ix} Kenneth R. Hall, Peasant State and Society in Cola Times: A View from the *Tiruvudaimardur* Urban Complex, *IESHR*, Vol.18, NOS 3 and 4, p. 408.
- ^x R. Champakalakshmi, State and Economy: South India Circa A.D.400-1300. in Romila Thapar (ed.), *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Bombay, Popular Prakasan, 1995, p. 284.
- ^{xi} Kenneth R. Hall, Peasant State and Society in Cola Times: A View from the *Tiruvudaimardur* Urban Complex *IESHR*, Vol.18, NOS 3 and 4, pp. 397-403
- ^{xii} Kenneth R. Hall, Coinage, Trade and Economy in Early South India and its Southeast Asian Neighbours, *IESHR*, 36, 4 (1999).
- ^{xiii} Hall Kenneth R. *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of Colas*, Elmira, New York, 1978, p. 193.
- ^{xiv} *Ibid*, chap-4
- ^{xv} *Ibid*, such as double conches blown and drums beaten in their honour.
- ^{xvi} Hall Kenneth R. *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of Colas*, Elmira, New York, 1978, p. 206

- ^{xvii} R. Champaklakshmi, *Trade Ideology and Urbanization*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 47-48 and pp. 311-30, she notes that merchant organisations are not really like the European guilds, so the use of term is only a matter of convenience.
- ^{xviii} These merchant originations originated independently related to long distance and local trade. Manigramam was bit regional organization active in Kerala and Tamilnadu especially in Pudukottai. But Ayyavole are overarching organization synonym of *annurruvar*, *nanadesi*, *the five hundred*, *padienen-vishyam* and also included *manigramam*, *anjuvannam* and other local organizations later on. It transacts in 18 *pattinam*, 32 *velapuram* and 64 *kadgatalam* with their rights, duties, dharma, lineage, charter banner and army. For detail see Noboro Karashima edited "Report of the Taisho University Research Project 1997-2000"
- ^{xix} Abraham Meera, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1988
- ^{xx} Ibid, p. 9.
- ^{xxi} Ibid, pp. 117-18.
- ^{xxii} Ibid, pp. 99-109.
- ^{xxiii} Heitzman James, *Gifts of Power: Lordship in an Early Indian State*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997.
- ^{xxiv} R. Champaklakshmi, *Trade Ideology and Urbanization*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, p. 203.
- ^{xxv} Heitzman counts some traits of these cities by which no one can deny these as city. Such as the large and ornate stone temple as monumental structure, occupational specialization, interaction with a wider hinterland, extended networks of communication etc.
- ^{xxvi} R. Champaklakshmi, *Trade Ideology and Urbanization*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 16-18.
25. *ibid*, p356-57
- ^{xxviii} *ibid*, pp-213-15
- ^{xxix} *ibid*, p216
- ^{xxx} *Ibid*, p63
- ^{xxxi} *ibid*, p222
- ^{xxxii} *ibid*, p64
- ^{xxxiii} R. Champaklakshmi essay *State and Economy: South India Circa A.D.400-1300*. in Romila Thapar ed..Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History, Bombay, Popular Prakasan, 1995, p-283