

Reminiscing the Chola legacy

Historian Chithra Madhavan reflected on the dynasty's contributions



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By Express News Service

On the rich legacy of the three traditional kingdoms in Tamil Nadu, it is popularly said the Cholas nurtured bhakti, the Cheras bravery, and the Pandyas, the Tamil language. However, eminent historian Chithra Madhavan's recent talk on 'Contribution of Cholas' in the city highlighted the all-round contribution of the mighty dynasty of the Cholas, who ruled from Thanjavur and later from Gangaikondacholapuram between the 9th and 13th centuries AD.

"The Cholas contributed to temple art, architecture, irrigation, literature, religion, philosophy and many other spheres," she told the gathering.

Many an irrigation tank and lake, spanning acres, were created by them, the historian pointed out. Citing examples such as the Veeranam Eri, near Chidambaram, and Cholagangam, now known as Ponneri, in Gangaikondacholapuram, she said the tanks in addition to the Cauvery and its tributaries served to irrigate acres of agricultural land which made the Chola area one of the most fertile in India.

"Veeranarayana Eri was named after Veeranarayana, one of the titles of Emperor Parantaka Chola I, who ruled in the 9th century AD."

Pointing to the huge Siva temples in Thanjavur, Gangaikondacholapuram, Darasuram and Tribhuvanam, Chithra said the structures were marvellous examples of the engineering and architectural skill of those times. "Other than these, there are small temples belonging to the 9th and early 10th centuries AD, which have remarkable miniature sculptures of many themes including episodes from the Ramayana," she said. Echoing art historian Fergusson that the 'Cholas conceived like giants and finished like jewellers', she said the bronze images of deities were today known world over for the perfection of form and attention to detail. The inscriptions of the Cholas at Ennayiram, Tribhuvanai and Thirumukkudal reveal that the temples were also educational centres where the Vedas and allied subjects were taught.

On other art forms, the archaeologist said inscriptions showed that dance and music were greatly encouraged. Literature too flourished. The Kamba Ramayanam and Sekkilar's Periya Puranam were written during this time. "The Uttiramerur inscription shows democracy was practised more than 1,000 years ago," she added.

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