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Epigraphical Insights into the Political, Social, Economic, and Cultural Landscape of Chola Tamil Nadu: A Study of the Vasishtesvara Temple Inscriptions at Karanthai

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Abstract

This study examines the inscriptions of the *Vasishtesvara Temple* at *Karanthai* in the Thanjavur district, a significant Chola-period monument dated between the 10th and 12th centuries CE. The epigraphs, engraved primarily in Tamil and few words in Grantha scripts, provide multifaceted insights into the political, social, economic, and cultural life of medieval Tamil Nadu. Politically, the inscriptions record the regnal years, administrative divisions, territorial jurisdictions, and royal orders of major Chola rulers including Rajaraja I, Rajendra I, Rajadhiraja II, Rajaraja II, and others. Socially, they reveal the functioning of brahmadeya villages, temple-centred institutions, community assemblies, women's participation, heroic traditions, and the role of scribes and officials. Economically, the records document tax-exempt lands, land sales, revenue systems, irrigation features, and ritual endowments such as perpetual lamps. Culturally, the inscriptions illuminate temple administration, festivals, ritual services, sacred horticulture, artistic practices, and religious pluralism. Through an interdisciplinary analysis combining epigraphy, historical geography, and socio-cultural archaeology, this article reconstructs the political organisation, civic cooperation, legal frameworks, and cultural sophistication of Chola Tamil Nadu as reflected in the Karanthai inscriptions. The study highlights the importance of regional temples as centres of administration, economic management, and cultural continuity.

Keywords: Chola Empire, *Vasishtesvara Temple, Karanthai*, Epigraphy, Temple Economy, Social History, Tamil Nadu.

1. Introduction

The Vasishtesvara Temple at Karanthai (*Karundittaikkudi*), situated in the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu, represents a remarkable centre of Chola architectural, administrative, and religious activity. The inscriptions found on its walls, dated between the 10th and 12th centuries CE, offer valuable first-hand information about medieval Tamil polity, society, economy, and culture. This paper undertakes a comprehensive examination of these epigraphs to reconstruct the historical landscape of the region and evaluate their contribution to the broader framework of Chola history.

Objectives:

1. To document and analyse the inscriptions of the *Vasishtesvara Temple*

2. To interpret the political, social, economic, and cultural data preserved in the epigraphs.
3. To understand the administrative structure and temple-centred economy of Chola Tamil Nadu.

2. Study Area and Source Materials

2.1 Location

The study focuses on the Vasishtesvara Temple located at *Karanthai (Karundittaikkudi)* in the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu. This temple, a significant monument of the Chola period, stands as an enduring example of their architectural mastery, religious patronage, and administrative sophistication.

Location Details:

- **District:** Thanjavur
- **Village/Town:** *Karanthai (Karundittaikkudi)*
- **Monument:** *Vasishtesvara* Temple

2.2 Language, Script, and Chronology

The epigraphs of the *Vasishtesvara Temple* are inscribed primarily in Tamil and belong to the phase of Chola political power and cultural development.

Source Characteristics:

- **Language:** Tamil
- **Script:** Tamil script (with occasional *Grantha* usage for Sanskrit sections)
- **Dynasty:** Chola
- **Period:** 10th–12th century CE

These records provide important insights into Chola rulers, land administration, temple economy, socio-religious life, and local governance.

2.3 Methodology

The methodological approach adopted for this study integrates both epigraphical and historical techniques to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the inscriptions. The primary methods for this study include epigraphical survey, translation and philological analysis, historical contextualisation and comparative study. The epigraphical survey involved physical examination, identification, and documentation of inscriptions found on temple walls. The translation and philological analysis consisted of the critical reading and rendering of Tamil inscriptions into English with attention to grammar, terminology, and historical meanings. Historical contextualisation was undertaken by situating inscriptions within broader Chola political history, socio-economic structures, and cultural developments. Additionally, a comparative study was conducted by cross-referencing with South Indian inscriptional corpora such as, *South Indian Inscriptions* (SII), *Annual Reports on South Indian Epigraphy* (ARE), *Tanjavur Mavatta Kalvettukal (TVK)* and Other published Chola-era inscriptions to ensure accurate corroboration and dating.

3. Historical Significance of the Inscriptions

The epigraphical corpus of the *Vasishtesvara* Temple at *Karanthai*. provides a substantial body of evidence that contributes to reconstructing the political, social, economic, and cultural history of the Chola period. The inscriptions, ranging from the reign of Uthama Chola to that of Rajadhiraja II, not only record administrative procedures and religious endowments but also reflect broader socio-political processes characteristic of medieval South India. The following section synthesizes the historical information derived from these inscriptions and highlights their importance for understanding the regional history of *Karanthai*.

3.1 Political History

Several inscriptions mention the regnal years and official initiatives of Chola rulers such as *Parakesari Varman*, Rajaraja I, Rajendra I, Rajaraja II, and Rajadhiraja II. These references illustrate the continuity, territorial control, and bureaucratic sophistication of Chola administration. Through records of land sales, tax regulations, and temple-endowment procedures, the inscriptions demonstrate how the state exercised authority, implemented revenue systems, and interacted with local institutions. Thus, the *Karanthai* epigraphs serve as critical sources for contextualizing the political landscape of the Chola empire.

3.2 Social Aspects

The inscriptions also provide insights into the social fabric of the time. References to dharma-tanks, annadāna-śālai (feeding houses), charitable foundations, and ritual endowments indicate a society deeply engaged in religious and philanthropic activities. These records underscore the collaborative relationship between royal authority, local elites, and temple institutions. They also reflect the role of women donors and community participation in temple-centered social welfare, demonstrating the inclusiveness of early medieval South Indian society.

3.3 Economic Features

Economic information embedded in the inscriptions includes land grants, donations, tax exemptions, and other financial arrangements. Details of revenue assignments and land administration highlight the economic integration of agricultural production with temple management. The inscriptions reveal the functioning of local markets, valuation practices, and the role of temples as economic hubs. Taken together, these records offer valuable insights into Chola fiscal policy and the socio-economic dynamics of agrarian society in Tamil Nadu.

3.4 Cultural Aspects

Culturally, the inscriptions shed light on temple management, festivals, artistic traditions, educational functions, and ritual practices. Entries documenting the appointment of temple personnel, construction activities, offerings, and festivals demonstrate the sophisticated nature of Chola temple culture. The temple served not only as a religious centre but also as a space for artistic patronage, intellectual activity, and community identity formation. Collectively, the inscriptional evidence from Karanthai is indispensable for understanding the region's historical development and for situating its cultural evolution within the broader framework of Chola history. The following subsections present a detailed analysis of the key inscriptions and their contributions to political, social, economic, and cultural historiography.

4. Political History in the Inscriptions

This section analyses the major Chola rulers mentioned in the inscriptions:

4.1. Rajendra Chola I

In the inscriptions, Rajendra Chola I is referred to with the exalted imperial biruda **"Kopperakesari Varmarāna Śrī Rājēndra Chola Devar"**, which is his formal titular epithet. The records describe him as ruling over the **Tañjāvūr nāḍu**, within which the region of **Purampadi-Karuviṭṭakkudi-valanāḍu** is located. The village of **Karuviṭṭakudi** (present-day **Karundattangudi / Karandai**) appears as the locus of these inscriptions. These references clearly establish the territorial extent and administrative control exercised by the king.

4.2. Parakesari Varman

The Chola ruler known as ***Parakesari Varman*** is eulogized in inscriptions with the traditional commencement the ***"Svasti Śrī Kopperakesari"***. Such invocatory lines are characteristic of early medieval

political epigraphy. His domain is also identified as ***Tañjāvūr nāḍu,*** specifically the ***Purampadi-Karundittaikkudi-valanāḍu,*** which includes the village of **Karundittaikkudi**. These references help map the territorial jurisdiction of his authority.

4.3. Rajadhiraja Chola II

Rajadhiraja II is glorified in the inscriptions with the distinguished epithet ***"Mukkōkkizhān-aṭigaḷ"***. He is further extolled as a sovereign who protected the **six religious systems** and as one who established imperial authority over the lands encircled by the seas. This depiction emphasizes both his imperial legitimacy and his religious inclusiveness. His jurisdiction encompassed ***Pāṇḍikulasaṇi-valanāḍu,*** ***Tañjāvūr-kūr̲ram,*** and **Tañjāvūr**, highlighting the geographical extent of his rule.

4.4. Rajaraja Chola I

Inscriptions from the **24th and 25th regnal years** of Rajaraja Chola I are found here. His prasastis enumerate victories in ***Kaliṅga, Elām (Sri Lanka)***, ***Kollam***, and ***Kuṭamalai,*** underscoring his military prowess. One inscription notes a **combat scenario involving warriors in the presence of the king**, indicating that martial traditions and judicial duels were conducted under direct royal supervision.

4.5. Rajaraja Chola II

At the beginning of his inscription, Rajaraja Chola II is styled **"Tribhuvana Chakravartigal Śrī Rājārāja Devar."** The inscription was engraved by the royal official **Rājakambhīra Vēḷān**. The administrative divisions mentioned include **Tañjāvūr nāḍu**, **Pāṇḍikulasaṇi-valanāḍu**, **Tañjāvūr-kūr̲ram**, and **Karundittaikkudi**, illustrating how royal orders were disseminated through a well-structured bureaucratic hierarchy.

4.6. Rajakesari Inscription

Another Chola ruler, referred to as ***Rājakesaripanmar***, appears with the simplified as ***"Kopperakesari yāṇḍu."*** Although the full title is not preserved, his regnal year and name are mentioned. The inscription lists places such as ***Mullūr*** *and* ***Sivigaiyār-cēri,*** and the territorial division **Innāḍu** (full name uncertain). The record also states that the royal officer ***Milatturudaiyān Manukula Māṭṭhāṇḍa Mūvēndaveḷān*** delivered a judgment, offering insights into the judicial system and the functioning of administrative officials.

4.7. An Early Chola (Unidentified)

Some inscriptions belonging to the **10th century CE (c. 900–1000 CE)** are attributed broadly to a Chola king. These records mention **Veḷḷānūr**, situated south of a canal and agricultural fields, and the settlement, described as the abode of ***Śrī Rāsanāna Karpakapriyan***. Such locational details provide important clues about the landscape and settlement patterns of the period.

4.8. The *Nonta-vilakku* (perpetual lamp) and Ghee Endowment – Period of Madurantakan Kandaradittan

During the reign of ***Madurantakan Kandaradittan***, an endowment for a **"*Nonta vilakku*"** was established at the ***Mahādevar Temple of Karundittaikkudi***. The king donated **76 sheep**, whose ghee was used to keep the lamp burning continuously. The first year's responsibility was entrusted to ***Amaran Kurumban***, and in the second year, the duty passed to his father and son jointly. The measurement unit **"u̲lakku nei"** (a standard volume measure for ghee) is also recorded. This indicates a hereditary pattern of ritual obligations.

4.9. Royal Order of *Kundavai Piratti*

In the 17th regnal year of Rajaraja Chola I, his sister ***Kundavai Piratti*** purchased land and donated it to the temple. The inscription names the royal officer ***Sāttambi*** as responsible for executing the order. This

reflects both the administrative framework of the Chola state and the significant involvement of royal women in political and religious philanthropy. The inscription lists territorial divisions such as ***Nallūr nāḍu***, ***Nittavinoda-valanāḍu***, and boundary villages including ***Karanthai***, ***Cantanakkudi***, ***Āvūrkuḷam***, *and* ***Cillaikkudi***.

Together, these inscriptions illuminate the political organisation, administrative mechanisms, military traditions, judicial practices, and religious patronage of the Chola Empire. They affirm the vast territorial expanse and the well-structured governance system characteristic of Chola rule. The inscriptions demonstrate a sophisticated administrative machinery composed of hierarchical divisions (nāḍu, kūrram, valanāḍu), officially appointed scribes, and centrally issued royal orders.

Table:1 Political Information in the Chola Inscriptions

No.	Chola Ruler	Biruda / Title	Region / Administrative Division	Key Features / Events
1	Rajendra Chola I	*Kopperakesari Śrī Rājēndra Chola Devar*	Tañjāvūr nāḍu; Purampadi-Karuviṭṭakudi; Karuviṭṭakudi	Formal imperial biruda; clear identification of administrative region
2	Parakesari Varman	*Svasti Śrī Kopperakesari*	Tañjāvūr nāḍu; Purampadi-Karundittaikkudi	Traditional preamble; titular epithet
3	Rajadhiraja Chola II	*Mukkōkkizhān-aṭigaḷ*; Protector of the Six Faiths	Pāṇḍikulasaṇi-valanāḍu; Tañjāvūr-kūrram; Tañjāvūr	Emphasis on imperial status and religious pluralism
4	Rajaraja Chola I	*Śrī Rājārāja Devar*, *Rājarājakesari*	Tañjāvūr nāḍu	Military victories; duel before the king
5	Rajaraja Chola II	*Tribhuvana Chakravartigal Śrī Rājārāja Devar*	Tañjāvūr nāḍu; Pāṇḍikulasaṇi-valanāḍu; Karundittaikkudi	Inscription engraved by Rājakambhīra Vēḷān
6	Rajakesaripanmar	*Kopperakesari yāṇḍu*	Innāḍu; Mullūr; *S*ivigaiyār-cēri	Judgment by officer Manukula Mātthāṇḍa Mūvēndaveḷān
7	Early Chola (?)	—	Veḷḷānūr	10th-century inscription
8	Madurantakan Kandaradittan	—	Karundittaikkudi Mahādevar Temple	Nonta-lamp endowment; hereditary responsibility
9	Rajaraja Chola I (17th year)	*Śrī Rājārāja Devar*	Nallūr nāḍu; Nittavinoda-valanāḍu; Karandai & environs	Land donation by Kundavai Piratti; officer Sāttambi

5. Society Reflected in the Inscriptions

Chola inscriptions not only illuminate political and religious developments but also offer crucial insights into social philosophy, patterns of devotion, administrative competence, and civic cooperation. The inscriptions of this period reveal the functioning of social institutions, the role of *brahmadeya* and *devadāna* settlements, the participation of women, heroic traditions, and the structure of local administration.

5.1. Brahmadeya and Devadāna Settlements

Although the terms *brahmadeya* and *devadāna* do not appear directly in all inscriptions, the frequent use of the phrase ***"iraiyili-nilam"*** (tax-exempt land) suggests that such land was donated to the temple for religious purposes. These lands were meant exclusively for sacred services and economic support of the temple. References to the "*Pērāḷattūr Sabhaiyār*" indicate that the village might have functioned as a *brahmadeya*, administered by a Brahmin assembly (*sabha*). Similarly, inscriptions referring to ***Tottakkudi* as a brahmadeya** confirm the presence of Brahmin settlements and reflect the socio-administrative hierarchy of the period.

5.2. Temple Endowments and Perpetual Lamps

Many inscriptions record land donations made to the temple for specific ritual purposes such as *nandiyāvaṭṭam*, *tirumañjanam*, *villam*, and other sacred services. Particularly significant are the endowments for **perpetual lamps**, including the *nonthā-lamp*, for which a fixed revenue (*pattam onru*) had been arranged. During the period of *Madurāntakan Kaṇḍarāditta*n, **76 sheep were donated for the perpetual lamp (*nonthā-vilakku*)**. Such endowments were hereditary obligations, preserved by succeeding generations.

5.3. Community Groups and Their Social Functions

Several inscriptions highlight collective participation. The phrase **"palavakaiyālum iṭṭār"** ("many contributed in various ways") indicates widespread community involvement in temple functions. Groups such as the **citizens of Thanjavur**, the **residents of *Karuṇṭiṭṭaikkudi*,** and the **people of *Suṅkantavirtta Sōḻanallūr*** participated in measuring, approving, and allocating land resources. This points to the efficiency of local assemblies and the broader village administration. The ***Nārpattueṇṇāyiravar*,** a prominent administrative body, played a major role in managing community affairs and temple responsibilities.

5.4. The Role of Women

A notable inscription records the donation of land by ***Kundavai Pirāṭṭi*,** sister of Rajaraja I. Her contribution demonstrates the active role of elite women in religious, social, and administrative affairs. Women's participation in temple endowments reflects societal respect and their recognized agency in public matters.

5.5. Heroic Tradition and Social Commemoration

Some inscriptions record the names of warriors and their families. Figures such as ***Araṅgaṉ Kāriyan Sōḻa Viccādhira Mutharaiyan*** and ***Kārigulirvāgai*** engaged in royal archery contests. *Kārigulirvāgai* died in combat. His family members—***Kaṇḍan Kāri (son of Kāriṉakkam), Poṟkāri (daughter of Kārikottram), and Culanthan Kuṭṭi Poṉṉāḍai (their daughter)***—donated a lamp in his memory. This highlights the heroic tradition and the community's reverence for fallen warriors.

5.6. Administrative Cooperation and Civic Responsibility

The phrase **"Mukkōkkizāṉaṭikaḷ"** refers to orders issued during the reign of the three overlords. One inscription mentions that, officials such as ***Valavaṉ Cūṟṟi, Aññṟṟuva Paṭṭaṉ, Kaucchiyan Kaṇapati Cūṟṟi*,**

and the ***Srikoil Udaiyār*** received donations for perpetual lamps and temple services. Expressions such as ***"apattuppaṭṭu niṉṟum," "tiruppaṇi muṭṭāmai," "camarātittavar muṉṉiṉṟu"*** point to legal protection, accountability, and the disciplined administrative framework characteristic of the Chola state.

5.7. Environmental Care, Maintenance, and Sacred Landscapes

An inscription records that in the **second prakāra** of the temple at Karuṇṭiṭṭaikkudi, shrubs and plants were grown for *nandiyāvaṭṭam* and other ritual purposes. This reflects the community's concern for environmental care and sacred horticulture. The ***Nārpattueṇṇāyiravar*** granted tax-free land for this purpose.

5.8. Scribes and Officials Who Issued the Inscriptions

Several inscriptions mention the names of the officials who drafted them. Notably, **Rājakampīra Veḷān of Kurukāṭikkizhān Arayan Vikkirama Chola** appears as the scribe for many records, indicating administrative continuity and the reliability of institutional documentation.

Table:2 Society Reflected in the Inscriptions

No.	Aspect	Key Details
1	Brahmadeya / Devadāna	Tax-free lands (*iraiyili nilam*); sacred use; temple endowments
2	Temple Donations	Lands for lamps, *nandiyāvaṭṭam*, rituals, *tirumañjanam*
3	Community Groups	*Nārpattueṇṇāyiravar*, citizens of Tañjāvūr, residents of *Karuṇṭiṭṭaikkudi*
4	Role of Women	*Kundavai Pirāṭṭi's* land donation; public and religious participation
5	Heroic Tradition	*Kārigulirvāgai's* heroic death; family memorial lamp
6	Administrative Cooperation	Royal orders; officials managing donations and services
7	Ritual Services	Funds allocated (*pattam onru*) for lamps and festivals
8	Scribes / Officials	*Rājakampīra Veḷān* as inscription writer
9	Environmental Care	Sacred horticulture in the temple prakāra

6. Economic Aspects in the Inscriptions

6.1. Taxes and Tax Exemptions

Indirect Mention of Taxes

Although many inscriptions do not explicitly mention taxes, terms like *iraiyili* clearly indicate tax-exempt land.

Tax-Exempt Lands

- *"Iraiyiliyāka aḷikkappattathu"* – land granted with tax exemption.
- *"Iraiyili uṇṇapperuvārāka"* – the beneficiaries were exempt from paying taxes.

Legal Nature of Exemptions

Such tax remissions were granted through royal orders and therefore held legal authority.

6.2. Units and Measurements

Gold and Weight Units

- Terms like *"twenty kazhanchu"* and *"nine pon"* denote units of gold and monetary valuation.
- *Kazhanchu* refers to an ancient unit of gold measurement.

Land Measurements

- Units such as *nāḷ*, *mukkāṇi*, and *araikāṇi* frequently appear in inscriptions.
- *Nāḷ* refers to the size of land required for a day's ploughing.
- Units like *mukkāṇi* and *araikāṇi* could represent area as well as land quality.

Lamp Measurements

- Phrases like *"half lamp"* and *"full lamp"* denote the scale or intensity of lamp-lighting services.

6.3. Irrigation

Indirect Reference

Many inscriptions do not directly describe irrigation features.

Mention of Canals and Tanks

- Words like *"vāykkālukkū"* (for the canal) indicate the existence of irrigation channels.
- Terms such as *tirumanjaṉa-kuṭam* suggest water management and distribution systems.

6.4. Agriculture

Land for Agricultural Use

- Land grants imply that most donated lands were intended for cultivation.
- Terms like *villam* and *vaṭṭam* may denote types of agricultural land.

Classification of Land Quality

- Phrases like *thalai nilam, idai nilam, kadai nilam* represent classifications based on soil quality and agricultural productivity.

6.5. Royal Orders and Legal Framework

Issuance of Royal Orders

- Kings such as Rajendra Chola issued royal decrees through which land, titles, and tax exemptions were granted.

Transfer of Land Ownership

- The phrase *"with the consent of the three assemblies"* indicates that land sales required both social and administrative approval.

Legal Validity

- Expressions such as *"cīpātam enthalai mēlatu"* signify the binding legal authority of royal edicts.

6.6. Endowments and Temple Economy

Religious Endowments

- Donations were made to maintain perpetual lamps, such as offerings given after the death of a person named *Karikulirvāgai* by his relatives.

Perpetual Endowments

- The phrase *"muṭṭāmai seyyā ninrum"* suggests that the endowment was to function perpetually without interruption.

Financial Resources

- Items like ghee, lamps, and the responsibility for lighting the lamp reflect a self-sustaining temple economy.

6.7. Administrative Practices

Land Transactions

- Inscriptions record complete details of land sales, including price, seller, buyer, and witnesses.

Land Boundaries

- References such as *Mullaṅkāl land* or *Vellaṉūr land* indicate boundary markers.

- Phrases like *east: granary; west: canal* describe the precise boundaries.

6.8. Ancient Economic Structure

Self-Sustaining Systems

- Donated sheep provided ghee, which was used for lighting lamps, showing an economically self-sufficient model.

Social Economic Obligations

- After the donor's death, the heirs were required to continue fulfilling the economic obligations associated with the endowment.

Inscriptions reveal the multifaceted economic system of the Chola period. They reflect a highly organized structure concerning land management, taxation, endowments, irrigation, agriculture, legal procedures, and temple finance. These records stand as crucial evidence for understanding the economic and cultural history of Tamil Nadu.

Table:3 Economic Aspects in the Inscriptions

S. No.	Topic	Summary
1	Taxes and Exemptions	Tax-free lands indicated by *iraiyili*; exemptions granted through royal orders.
2	Units and Measurements	Land units: *nāḷ, mukkāṇi, araikāṇi*; Monetary units: *kazhanchu, pon, kācu*; Lamp units: half/full lamp.
3	Irrigation	Indirect references; terms like canal (*vāykkāl*) and tank (*kuṭam*) show irrigation systems.
4	Agriculture	Lands used for cultivation; soil classified as *thalai, idai,* and *kadai nilam*.
5	Royal Orders and Law	Land and exemptions granted through royal edicts; consent of local assemblies mentioned.
6	Endowments & Temple Economy	Donations for perpetual lamps; continuous financial obligations noted.
7	Administrative Practices	Full details of land sale recorded; boundaries clearly mentioned.
8	Ancient Economic Structure	Self-sustaining temple economy; heirs continued endowment responsibilities.

7. Cultural Features Reflected in the Inscriptions

The ancient Tamil inscriptions are significant documents that record the social, religious, and cultural life of the people of the past. These inscriptions not only mention temples but also provide information on place names, worship practices, artistic traditions, social structures, and cultural continuity. Historically valuable inscriptions serve as primary sources that reveal the cultural evolution and social organisation of sacred centres. The inscriptions found in the *Vasishtesvara* Temple at *Karanthai* vividly reflect the cultural framework of Chola-period Tamil society, including its religious, social, artistic, and administrative dimensions.

7.1. Temples and Worship Traditions

Temple References:

The inscriptions specifically mention *Vasishtesvara*, *Mahādevar, Piṭāriyammān and Nandimākāḷi* temples,

indicating that these were prominent centres of Śaiva worship in the region.

Worship Practices:

Offerings such as *porpū* (gold flowers), *kaṇmaṇi* (precious beads), and *neriñcippu* reflect daily ritual procedures. References to the "*nontha lamp"* (perpetual lamp) and the "sacred ablution pot" (*tirumañjana kuṭam*) highlight the centrality of purity and sanctity in worship.

Donations and Religious Merit:

Donations of lamps in memory of warriors who died in battle reveal that heroism and dharmic obligations carried religious and social value in the community.

7.2. Social Structures and Village Names

Distribution of Settlements:

Villages such as *Karuntittaikkudi* (modern Karantai), *Cholanallur, Sivikaiyār Cēri, and Mullur* are mentioned in the inscriptions. These names help trace the geographical extent and administrative stability of the Chola period.

Social Groups:

The inscriptions refer to Śiva-brāhmaṇas, religious functionaries, donors, and temple administrators, indicating the presence of a diverse and organised social structure.

7.3. Artistic Traditions and Temple Architecture

Artistic Practices:

Activities such as gold ornament crafting, floral decoration, and ritual offering reflect the interconnection of art and religion in daily life.

Architectural Elements:

Structures such as the *prākāra* (circumambulatory passage), *Nandi enclosure*, and *villam* (granary/storehouse) are directly mentioned, demonstrating the architectural sophistication and administrative planning of Chola temples.

Community Patronage:

One inscription records that a person named Kuppamuthu constructed the large prākāra platform through funds raised by *yāsakam* (religious solicitation), showing that temple construction was carried out through collective community support.

7.4. Cultural Position of Women

Respect for Women:

Descriptive terms such as "*inpura neṭunti yal*" and "*sīrtani celvi*" reveal that women were valued for their virtue and cultural refinement, with recognised roles in society and religious life.

Worship of Female Deities:

References to goddesses like "Āṭavallār Nampiṟāṭṭiyār Mahāparameśvari" indicate the significance of Śakti worship in the Chola religious tradition.

7.5. Heroic Tradition and Memorial Culture

Valorisation Practices:

Lighting lamps in memory of warriors who died in battle illustrates the fusion of *dharma*, *heroic culture*, and *devotion*, affirming the community's respect for courage and sacrifice.

7.6. Administrative Systems and Legal Elements

Temple Administration:

The phrase "*Śrī-koyil-uṭaiyōm*" (custodians of the temple) refers to the temple management committee responsible for land rights and donation administration.

Legal Orders and Resolutions:
The inscriptions preserve the orders issued by state officials, confirming that temples functioned as centres where administrative and legal decisions were recorded and implemented.

7.7. Yāsakam and Public Contribution
The inscription mentions that Kuppamuthu raised funds through *yāsakam* (public solicitation for religious work) to construct the large prākāra platform. This emphasises the role of public contribution in temple upkeep and development.

7.8. Language, Literary Tradition, and Poetic Elements
Literary References:
Opening verses such as "*Nar-kaṭal cūḻ puviy-eḻum*" and "*Āḻi Śrī Tirumaḻal pōl…*" reflect the influence of classical Tamil literary style, showing that inscriptions incorporated poetic richness.

Royal Eulogies:
Praising kings or donors by comparing them to divine beings shows continuity with the ancient *meykkīrtti* (laudatory) tradition of Tamil literature.

Summary
The inscriptions of the *Vasishtesvara* Temple at *Karanthai* show that the temple functioned as a religious, social, administrative, and cultural centre. Elements such as worship practices, social participation, heroic tradition, women's roles, administrative systems, and literary heritage are intricately recorded. These inscriptions serve as essential sources for understanding the cultural identity of the Tamil people of the Chola period.

Table:4 Cultural Elements in the *Karanthai Vasishtesvara* Temple Inscriptions

S. No.	Theme	Sub-theme	Description
1	Temples & Worship Traditions	Temple Names	Vasiṣṭheśvara, Mahādevar, Piṭāri, Nandimākāḷi – centres of Śaiva worship.
		Ritual Practices	*Porpū*, *kaṇmaṇi*, *neriñcippu*, perpetual lamp (*nontha lamp*), *tiru-mañjana kuṭam*.
		Donations	Lamps donated in memory of warriors – link between society and religion.
2	Social Organisation	Village Names	Karuntittaikkudi, Cholanallur, Mullur, Sivikaiyār Cēri – regional identities.
		Social Groups	Śiva-brāhmaṇas, yāsaka functionaries, donors – multi-layered society.
3	Artistic Traditions & Architecture	Arts	Floral decoration, offerings, gold-crafting traditions.
		Architecture	*Prākāra*, Nandi enclosure, *villam* – temple architectural components.
		Community Patronage	Yāsakam by Kuppamuthu for constructing prākāra platform.
4	Status of Women	Honourific Terms	"*Inpurra neṭunti yal*", "*Sīrtani celvi*" – honour accorded to women.

		Female Deities	"Āṭavallār Nampiṟāṭṭiyār Mahāparameśvari" – Śakti worship.
5	Heroic Tradition	Memorial Acts	Lighting lamps for those killed in battle – hero-veneration.
6	Administration	Administrative Body	"Śrī-koyil-uṭaiyōm" – temple administration, legal authority.
		Legal Orders	State officials' instructions concerning land and rituals.
7	Yāsakam & Public Contribution	Fundraising	Kuppamuthu's yāsakam contributing to temple construction.
8	Language & Literature	Literary Elements	Classical Tamil poetic style and royal laudations.

8. Geographical Landscape details in Inscription

The inscriptions provide clear geographical descriptions of land donated to the temple, including boundaries and irrigation features. The recorded boundaries are:

Table:5 Geographical Landscape

Boundary	**Description**
West	Land belonging to Vellānūr
East	*Kiṭangil* (possibly a storage area or granary)
South	*Icceyke Puḵuṇapparaka* canal
North	Land belonging to Vellānūr

These descriptions indicate that the donated land had good irrigation facilities, especially due to the canal flowing along the southern boundary. Thus, the inscription records the economic value and agricultural suitability of the land, reflecting the precision of Chola land measurement and administration.

8.1 Dates and Chronology in the Inscription

The inscription provides chronological details using multiple calendar systems:

- **Śaka Era:** 1764 + 78 = **1842**
- **Common Era (CE): 1842**
- **Tamil Year:** *Subhakṛtu*

Based on these, the event recorded in the inscription took place in **1842** states that *Kuppamuthu,* son of *Māriyappa Vandaivār*, constructed the large *prākāra* platform of the *Vasishtesvara* Temple using funds collected through *yāsakam*. This reflects community participation, devotion, and the cultural value attributed to temple construction and maintenance.

9. Conclusion

The inscriptions of the *Vasishtesvara* Temple at Karanthai serve as a rich repository of historical information on Chola Tamil Nadu. They offer vital evidence on political authority, administrative structure, social organisation, economic functioning, and cultural practice. The temple emerges not merely as a religious centre but as an institution of governance, economic management, social cohesion, and

cultural production. This study underscores the significance of regional epigraphical corpora in reconstructing the multidimensional history of medieval South India.

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