

THE SANGAM AGE

The Sangam Age is considered as a landmark in the history of South India. Thus, the Sangam Age refers to the period when bulk of Tamil literature was composed by a body of Tamil scholars and poets in three successive literary gatherings called Sangam.

Sangam meaning confluence, refers to the gatherings of poets and bards. These took place between 1st century BC and 3rd century AD in the kingdom of Pandyas.

The **first Sangam** was attended by Gods and legendary sages, but all its works have perished.

The **second Sangam** attended by several poets, produced a large mass of literature, but only Tolkappiyam by Tolkappiar has survived.

The **third Sangam**, attended by many poets, produced vast literature of which only a fraction has survived.

SOURCES

The primary sources of information about the Sangam Age include the following:

1. Tirukkural: (*Patinenkilkanakku*) of the Sangam literature by Tiruvalluvar, Tamil poet and philosopher. **Tirukkural (or Kural)** is considered as a compound of the teachings of Dharamashastra, the Arthashastra and the Kamasutra.

The 133 chapters are grouped into three sections: (a) Aram (righteousness); (b) Porul (wealth); and (c) Inbam or Kamam (pleasure).

2. Megaliths: These are huge stones found at most burial sites. A box-like structure was erected with the stone slabs, resting on each other without any mortar. Sometimes there was an opening cut into one of the sides. These are also known as **memorial stones.**

Sangam Age with the last phase of the megalithic culture in the Tamil region. The megalithic communities and their large agricultural settlements with the velir (chieftains) and the vellala (peasantry) mentioned in the Sangam poems. This includes a subsistence base consisting of agriculture, cattle rearing and fishing, the use of iron, and a milieu in which warfare and weapons were important.



TAMIL KINGDOMS

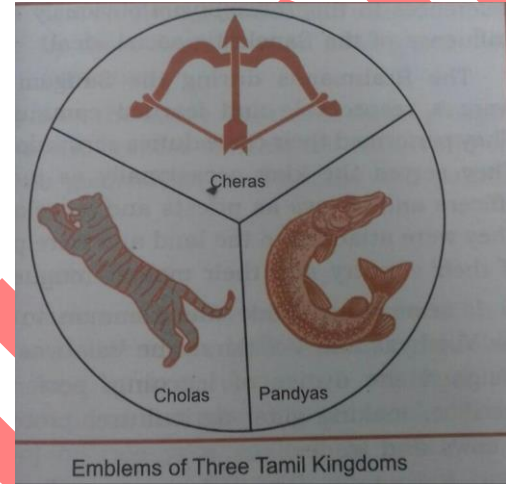
There were three important kingdoms, namely Chera, Chola and Pandya in the Tamil country during the Sangam Age.

CHERA KINGDOM

The territory of the Sangam Cheras mostly comprised the present state of Kerala.

There were two important lines of Chera Kings. The first one started from Udiyan Cheralathan and the second from Irumporai.

Cheran Senguttuvan was the most popular king of the Sangam Cheras. The Sangam works, Padirrupattu and Ahananuru provide a lot of information about him. His brother Ilango Vadigal composed the Tamil Epic, Silappadikaram, which tells about his military achievements. Senguttuvan led an expedition up to the Himalayas. He crossed the river Ganges and defeated his enemies. He reached the Himalayas and hoisted the Chera flag. Pattini cult, that is the worship of Kannagi as the ideal wife, was started by him.



CHOLA KINGDOM

The kingdom of the Sangam Cholas comprised the present Thanjavur and Tiruchirappalli districts.

The Chola kingdom is referred to in the Sangam literature as Chonadu, Kaveri Nadu, Kaveri Soozh Nadu, Neer Nadu and Punal Nadu. These names indicate the rich water resources of the Chola country. The river Kaveri that flowed through the Chola kingdom, made its soil fertile. The capital of the Sangam Cholas was Uraiyur. Their second capital was Kaveripoompattinam and also the chief port of the Cholas. Their symbol was tiger.

The most popular among the Sangam Cholas was Karikalan.

He was a great warrior. He defeated the Chera and the Pandya kings at Venni. In another battle, Karikalan defeated a confederacy of nine princes. He extended his kingdom beyond Kanchipuram.

Karikalan had become popular for the development activities in his kingdom. He had encouraged the growth of agriculture as well as commerce. He had built the dam called Kallanai across the river Kaveri. Its water was used for irrigation.

PANDYAN KINGDOM

The Pandyan kingdom comprised of districts of Madurai, Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram. Their capital was Madurai and their chief port was Korkai. Their

symbol was *fish*. The Pandyan kings earned *name and fame for their patronage* to the Tamil Sangam.

Mudhukudumi Peruvazhthi performed many sacrifices to celebrate his victories. Ariyappadaikadantha Neduncheliyan was a famous Pandyan ruler. He gave death sentence to the hero of Silappadikaram, Kovalan, by mistake. Another important ruler was Thalaiyalanganathu Nedunchezhiyan. He defeated the combined forces of Chera, Chola and other local chieftains at a place called Thalaiyalanganam.

The Pandya rule ceased along with that of the Cheras and Cholas in the Third century AD.

LOCAL CHIEFTAINS

Apart from the three Tamil kingdoms, a number of local chieftains ruled in different parts of Tamil Nadu. They were known as **Velirs**. The most famous among the Velirs were called Seven Patrons or Kadaiyelu Vallalgal. They were Pari, Ori, Malayan, Elini, Pegan, Aay and Nalli.

SOCIETY

The Sangam literature gives a true picture of the society in the Sangam Age.

SOCIAL CLASSES

The Sangam literature speaks of many tribes and also refers to the traditional castes. This means that *the caste divisions and the tribal arrangement existed side by side*. The Tolkappiyam has mentioned four castes, namely, Brahmanas, kings, traders and farmers.

The Brahmanas during the Sangam Age were a respectable and learned community. They served the king occasionally as judicial officers and always as priests and astrologers. The Vaishyas were assigned the duties of learning, performing sacrifice, making gifts, agriculture, protection of cows and trade. The whole area consisted of five tinai or divisions (viz., hilly backwoods (kurinji), parched zones (palai), pastoral tract (mullai), wet land (marutam) and littoral land (neital).

FOOD AND DRESS

Grain, meat and fish formed the chief articles of food, with vegetables, milk and milk products. Grain was husked in hollows made in the ground, and converted into flakes (aval). **Appam** (apupa) or rice-cake soaked in milk was a luxury. Clothing comprised two pieces of cloth. Women in high society used corsets and hair paste.

ENTERTAINMENT

Music and dance filled a good part of the spare time of men and women. In the villages, cock-fighting and goat-fighting were popular. Gambling was practised widely. Wrestling was a common form of sport enjoyed by the youth though at times it led to the death of one of the contestants.

POSITION OF WOMEN

The status of women in Sangam society was not equal to that of men. The Sangam society consisted of different kinds of women. There were married women who had settled down as dutiful housewives looking after their husbands and children. Women enjoyed freedom of movement in society and the number of women poets of the age is a proof that the women were provided with good education.

MARRIAGE

There is little information about the institution of marriage during the Sangam Age. Later works like the Tolkappiyam and the Kalaviyal say that the Aryans introduced the rituals and ceremonies of marriage (karanam). They refer to the eight forms of marriage known to the Sanskrit Dharmashastras.

ECONOMY

The economy during the Sangam Age was simple and self-sufficient. The people were industrious and they believed in living well by earning wealth. The Sangam literature points to the existence of both the wealthy and the poor people in the society. The poor were either the farm and casual labourers or the wandering minstrels.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture was the main occupation. The main crop was rice while other crops included cotton, ragi, sugarcane, pepper, ginger, cardamom, turmeric, cinnamon, different varieties of fruits, etc. Chera country was noted for its jackfruit, pepper and turmeric. In the Chola country a piece of land yielded much paddy.

OTHER OCCUPATIONS

Next to agriculture, spinning and weaving were the most widely practised crafts. Uraiyur was a major centre of cotton trade. Ship-building, metal-working, carpentry, rope-making, ornament-making, tanning, and making of ivory products were widely practised.

TRADE

The Sangam literature is full of details regarding the commercial activities of the people. Trade, both internal and foreign was well organised and briskly carried on throughout the period. Internal trade was brisk, caravans of merchants with carts and pack-animals carried their merchandise from place to place. These included pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, turmeric, ivory products, pearls, precious stones. The main imports included horses, gold and glass.

OLIR TARUN RUPAN