

2. SANGAM AGE – THE TAMIL KINGDOMS

Learning Objectives:

1. To Know the historical sources for the Sangam Age.
2. To Know the Tamil Kingdoms of the Sangam period.
3. To Know the glory of the Chera, Chola and Pandya kings.
4. To Know the Local Chieftains of ancient Tamil Nadu.
5. To Know the administration of the Sangam Age.

The history of the Tamil country becomes clear only from the Sangam period. The word **Sangam** means an association. Here, it refers to the **Tamil Sangam**, an association of Tamil poets, which flourished in ancient Tamil Nadu. These Tamil poets had composed the Sangam literature. The period in which these literature were composed is called the Sangam Age in the history of Tamil Nadu. During this age there were three Tamil Kingdoms, namely the Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms in the Tamil country. They were popularly known as **Muvendar**.

Sources:

The historical sources for the Sangam Age may be classified into

1. *Literary Sources*
2. *Archaeological sources and*
3. *Foreign Accounts.*

Literary Sources:

The Sangam literature chiefly consists of **Tolkappiyam**, **Ettuttogai** and **Pattuppattu**. These works provide valuable information to know the history of the Sangam Age. Among these, Tolkappiyam was the earliest.



1. *Sivaka Chinthamani*
2. *Kundalakesi*
3. *Pattupattu*
4. *Valayapathi*
5. *Manimegalai*
6. *Ettuttogai*
7. *Silappathigaram*

Fig. 5. Tamil Goddess

Try to know what are the works in **Ettuthogai** and **Pathupattu**.

During the post-Sangam period, the **Pathinen Kilkanakku** or the Eighteen Works was composed. The twin epics -**Silappathigaram** and **Manimegalai** - also belonged to the post-Sangam period. All these literature help us to know the society, economy and culture of the ancient Tamils.

Archaeological Sources:

The archaeological sources for the Sangam period are limited. They may be classified into (a) Epigraphy (b) Excavations and (c) Coins.

Epigraphy:

Epigraphical information for the Sangam period is scanty. The **Asokan Edicts** refers to the Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms. The **Hathikumba Inscription** of the Kalinga king, **Kharavela** also mentions the three Tamil Kingdoms. The **Kalugumalai** inscriptions help us to know about ancient Tamil scripts called **Tamil Brahmi**. The **Tirukkoyalur** inscriptions refer to the local chieftains and the tragic end of the Tamil Poet, **Kapilar**. The inscriptions at **Tirupparankundrum** mention the gift of cave beds to the Jain monks. The inscriptions found at **Arnattar hills**, near Pugalur belonged to the First Century A.D. and these inscriptions furnish information regarding the Chera kings.

Excavations:

Several monuments of this period have been brought to light by the excavations conducted at various places in Tamil Nadu. **Robert Bruce Foote** conducted excavations at **Adhichanallur** where he had found a large number of articles made of iron, bronze and gold. They depict the life of the ancient Tamils. **Dubreuil** and **Mortimer Wheeler** also made excavations at **Arikkamedu** near Pondicherry. Roman pottery, glass bowls, gems and coins have been found there. These findings confirm the commercial contacts

between the Roman Empire and Tamil country during the Sangam Age. A Buddhist Vihara was found at **Kilaiyur** near **Kaverippumpattinam**. It belonged to the post-Sangam period. Other important sites of excavations are **Uraiyur**, **Kanchipuram** and **Kodumanal**.

The under-water archaeology has also developed recently and excavations have been made under the sea near **Poompuhar**. A shipwreck has been found there. These findings focus much light on the history of the Sangam period.

*Try to know the significance of the excavations made at **Arikkamedu** and **Adhichanallur**.*

Coins:

The study of coins is called numismatics. We get useful historical information from the study of ancient coins. The Tamil Kings of the Sangam period issued gold and silver coins but they are not found in large numbers. However, Roman coins made of gold and silver, are found all over Tamil Nadu. These coins further confirm the trade relations between Tamil country and Rome during the Sangam Age.

Foreign Accounts:

In addition to the Sangam literature, foreign literary accounts remain useful sources for the study of the Sangam Age. Greek and Roman writers had mentioned about the society and economy of the Sangam Tamils in their accounts. **Megasthenes** in his book **Indica** also referred to the three Tamil Kingdoms. Other authors such as **Strabo**, **Pliny** and **Ptolemy** provide valuable information regarding the Sangam Age. The Ceylonese books - **Mahavamsa** and **Dipavamsa** –help us to fix the date of the Sangam.

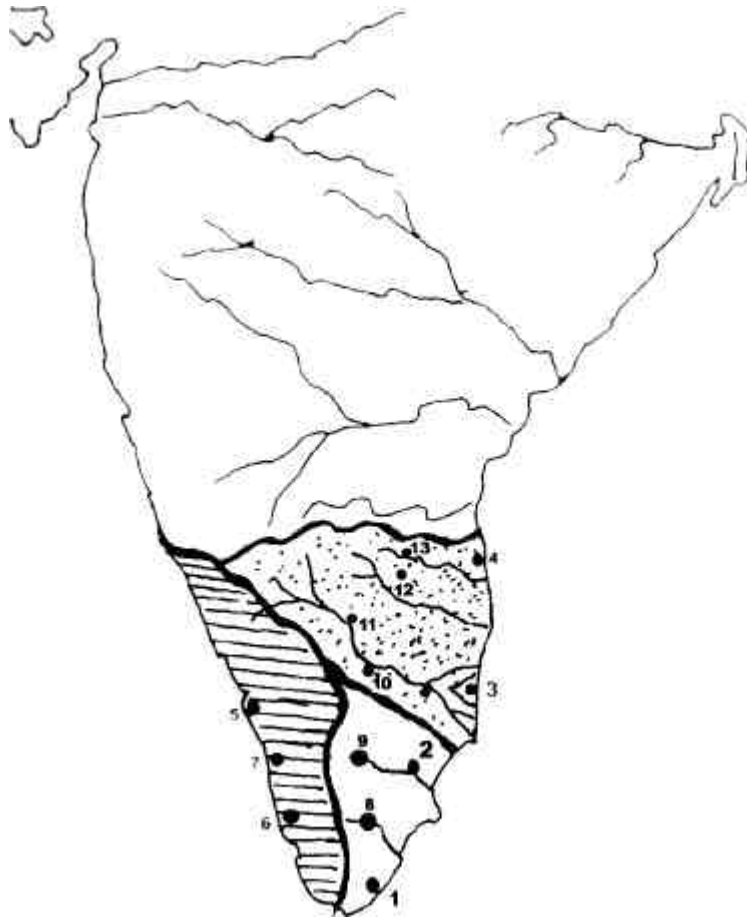


Fig. 6. Map - Ancient Tamil Kingdoms

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Korkai | 2. Madurai |
| 3. Kaverippumpattinam | 4. Mamallapuram |
| 5. Musiri | 6. Thondi |
| 7. Vanchi | 8. River Thamiraparani |
| 9. River Vaigai | 10. Uraiur |
| 11. River Kaveri | 12. River South Pennar |
| 13. River Palar | |

Chronology of the Sangam Age

Chronology means the arranging of the historical events on the basis of the date of happenings. It remains very difficult to find out the exact date of the Sangam period. There are different opinions in fixing the date of the Sangam. It is believed that there existed three Sangams. The First Sangam had flourished at **Then Madurai** and the Second Sangam at **Kapadapuram**. Since these two places were eroded into the Indian Ocean, the Pandyan kings had established the Third Sangam at **Madurai**. Many scholars did not believe the existence of Three Sangams. However, the Sangam literature, which we possess now, might have been composed during the period of the Third Sangam. Hence, the Sangam Age that we come to know denotes only the Third Sangam. Based on the literary, epigraphic and archaeological sources, it is established by scholars that the Sangam Age flourished from Third Century B.C. to Third Century A.D.

Tamil Kingdoms:

There were three important kingdoms, namely **Chera, Chola** and **Pandya** kingdoms in the Tamil country during the Sangam Age. In addition to these three kingdoms, there were also local chieftains. The most famous among the local chieftains were the Seven Patrons, popularly known as **Kadaiyelu Vallalgal**.

Chera Kingdom:

The Chera kings of the Sangam Age were known by many titles such as **Vanavar, Villavar** and **Malaiyar**. There were two important lines of Chera Kings. The first one started from **Odiyan Cheralathan** and the second from **Irumporai**. The kings belonging to these two lines ruled the Chera kingdom. Their capital was **Vanji** and their chief port **Thondi**. Their symbol in the flag was bow and arrow.

Cheran Senguttuvan was the most popular king of the Sangam Cheras. The Sangam works, **Padhithruppattu** and **Ahananuru** provide a lot of information about him. The Tamil Epic **Silappathigaram** also 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. He brought stones from there and built a temple in memory of **Kannagi**. His brother **Elango Adigal** composed **Silappathigaram**.

Padhithruppattu and other Sangam literature give a long list of Chera kings. The most popular among them were **Cheralathan**, **Peruncheral Irumporai** and **Kanaikkal Irumporai**. The territory of the Sangam Cheras mostly comprises the present Kerala state.

Learn the story of Silappathigaram

Chola Kingdom:

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** has flown through the Chola kingdom and made its soil fertile. The capital of the Sangam Cholas was **Uraiur**. Their second capital was **Kaveripoompattinam**. It was also the chief port of the Sangam Cholas. Their symbol was tiger. The Sangam literature also mentions a number of Chola kings. They had surnames like **Killi**, **Valavan**, **Senni** and **Cholan**. The kingdom of the Sangam Cholas comprises the present Tanjore and Tiruchirappalli districts.

The most popular among the Sangam Cholas was **Karikalan**. Both the Sangam works, **Pattinappalai** and **Porunaruatruppadi** give information about Karikalan. Even in his young age, he proved

his extraordinary ability of settling the disputes in his kingdom. He was also a great warrior. He defeated the Chera and Pandya kings at **Venni**. In another battle Karikalan defeated a confederacy of nine princes. He extended his kingdom beyond Kanchipuram in the North.

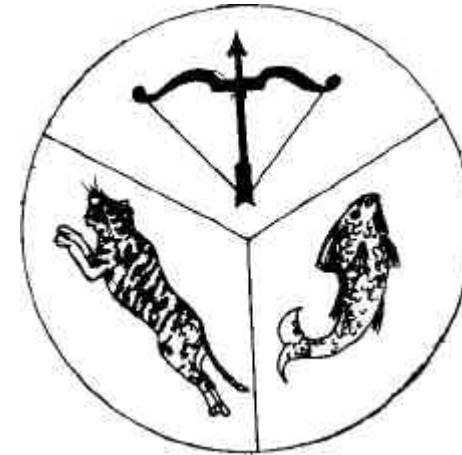


Fig.7. Emblems of three Tamil Kingdoms

Karikalan had also 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** to tame that river and the water was used for irrigation. Karikalan had also fortified the port-city **Kaveripoompattinam** or **Puhar** and made it as his capital. It flourished as a great emporium of trade. Merchants from foreign countries visited Puhar. Karikalan was generous towards Tamil poets and patronized them. **Porunaruatruppadi** gives details about his munificence.

A long line of Chola monarchs succeeded Karikalan and **Nalamkilli**, **Killivalavan** and **Kopperumcholan** were the most famous among them. **Kochenganan** was the last in the line of the Sangam Cholas.

Pandyan Kingdom:

The extent of the Pandyan kingdom during the Sangam Age comprised the present districts of Madurai, Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram. The Pandyan kings were known as **Maran, Valudhi** and **Chezhiyan**. 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. It can be said that their capital Madurai had also remained the capital of Tamil language and literature.

The Sangam literature provides a long list of Pandyan kings. Some of them had become most popular. **Mudhukudumi Peruvazhthi** performed many sacrifices to celebrate his victories. Therefore, he was given the title **Palyagasalai**. Another Pandyan king **Bootha Pandiyan** was a great warrior and also a patron of Tamil poets. His wife **Perungoppendu** was a poetess. It is referred that she committed self-immolation at the death of her husband. **Ariyappadaikadantha Neduncheliyan** was also a famous Pandyan ruler. He gave death sentence to the hero of Silappathigaram, **Kovalan**, by mistake, for which he gave his life when he came to know the truth. Another important ruler was **Thalaiyalanganathu Nedunchezhiyan**. He defeated the combined forces of Chera, Chola and other local chieftains at a place called **Thalaiyalanganam**. He also patronized a number of Tamil poets including **Mangudi Maruthanar**.

The Pandyan rule disappeared along with that of the Cheras and Cholas in the Third century A.D. The **Kalabhras** occupied the Tamil country for another three centuries.

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 Sangam literature furnishes lot of information about them. The most famous among the Velirs were called Seven Patrons or **Kadaiyelu Vallalgal**. They were **Pari, Ori, Malayan, Elini, Pegan, Aay, and Nalli**.

Try to learn the stories depicting the munificence of the Seven Patrons.

The local chieftains had extended patronage to the Tamil poets like **Kabilar, Avvaiyar, Nallathanar** and **Perunchithiranar**. In turn, these poets hailed them for their generosity. They had also extended their help to resolve any disputes between the rulers. For example, **Avvaiyar** played the role of a diplomat in the court of **Adhiyaman**. Another Sangam poet, **Kapilar** had taken care of **Pari's** daughters after his death. These local chieftains made generous donations to the poets, bards and their consorts. Like the Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers, the local chieftains had also played a significant role in the political, social and cultural domains during the Sangam Age.

Administration during the Sangam Age:

The Sangam literature provides details regarding the administration during the Sangam Age. Monarchy was the system of government during this period. The king was called as **Vendan, Ko** and **Irai**. The local chieftains were known as **Velirs**. The law of succession was practiced and the eldest son had enjoyed the right to succeed his father.

King and His Duties

During the Sangam period, the powers of the king were unlimited. He was considered as the representative of God. The term **Irai** signifies this theory. At the same time, the king was responsible for the welfare of the people. He was the protector of

the law. In his court the king met the people, heard their grievances and delivered justice. According to the Sangam verses, the rulers of the Sangam Age like **Karikalan**, **Manu Needhi Cholan** and **Porkai Pandyan** were known for their impartiality in delivering justice.

Try to know the parables relating to Manu Needhi Cholan, Porkai Pandyan and Karikalan.

Officials:

In the Sangam Age, there were two councils to assist the king in his day-to-day administration. They were known as **Iyemperumkuzhu** (Committee of the great five) and **Enperayam** (Council of the great eight). There were also other officials to run the administration efficiently.

Army:

The King's army consisted of four divisions, namely, infantry, cavalry, elephants and chariots. Swords, spears, bows and arrows were some of the weapons used by the soldiers. The forts in the capital cities had been highly protected by moats and trenches.

Revenue:

Land revenue and custom duties were the chief sources of income to the government. One sixth of the total produce was collected as land tax. Tolls were also collected. The local chieftains paid tributes and gifts to the king and this income constituted significant part of the government revenue.

Local Administration:

Each kingdom in the Sangam Age was divided into many administrative divisions. These divisions were called as **Mandalam**, **Nadu**, **Valanadu** and **Kuttram**. The council of elders looked after the administration of the villages during the Sangam period. These councils were called as **Manram**, **Podiyil**, **Avai**, and **Ambalam**.

Thus the Sangam administration had been efficiently organized. The later Cholas and Pandyas had followed some of its features.

Learning Outcomes:

- 1. Pupil understands how the Sangam literature can be used as historical sources.*
- 2. Understands the importance of the archaeological sources and develops skill to identify more such sources in their areas.*
- 3. Learnt the administrative abilities of the Moovendhar.*
- 4. Appreciates the Sangam monarchs for their liberal donations to Tamil poets and realises the importance of educational charity.*
- 5. Understands the administration of justice and other local bodies during the Sangam Age.*

SELF - EVALUATION

I. Say True or False:

1. The Sangam Age had lasted from Third Century B.C. to Third Century A.D.
2. The Cave-beds were donated to the Jain monks.
3. Arikamedu was the capital of the Cholas.
4. Cheran Senguttuvan led an expedition up to the Himalayas.
5. During the Sangam period, the Councils, namely, Iimperumkulu and Enperayam assisted the king in his administration.

II. Choose the Correct Answer:

1. The earliest of the Sangam literature
(a) Silappathigaram (b) Ettuthogai (c) Tolkappiyam
2. The capital of the Sangam Cheras
(a) Vanji (b) Korkai (c) Uraiyur
3. Padhittrupaththu refers to
(a) Chera kings (b) Chola kings (c) Pandya kings
4. In the Sangam period, the Kaveri basin comprised the
(a) Chera kingdom (b) Chola kingdom (c) Pandya kingdom
5. The chief port of the Pandyas
(a) Madurai (b) Korkai (c) Musiri

III. Fill in the Blanks:

1. The word Sangam refers to an ----- ..
2. The Chera, Chola and Pandya kings were known as----- .
3. ----- and ----- were called as twin - epics.
4. Megasthenes wrote the book -----.
5. The author of Silappathigaram was ----- .
6. The First Sangam was established at ----- .

IV. Match the Following:

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Ceylonese book | (a) Arikamedu |
| 2. Dubreuil | (b) Cheras |
| 3. Local chieftains | (c) Pattinappalai |
| 4. Karikalan | (d) Dipavamsa |
| 5. Bow and arrow | (e) Velirs |

V. Answer Briefly:

1. How do we classify the sources for the Sangam Age?
2. What are the literary sources for the Sangam period?
3. What are the foreign accounts that furnish information about the Sangam period?
4. What are the titles of the Sangam Cheras?
5. How does the Sangam literature refer the Chola kingdom?
6. Name a few Pandyan kings of the Sangam period.
7. Who are known as the “Seven Patrons”?
8. Mention the divisions of army during the Sangam period.
9. Write about the local administration during the Sangam period.

VI. Answer in Detail:

1. Write about the excavations relating to the history of the Sangam Age.
2. Describe the achievements of Cheran Senguttuvan.
3. Explain the importance of Karikala’s rule.
4. Write about the significance of the local chieftains of the Sangam period.

Practical Exercises

1. Draw the boundaries of the Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms in the map of South India. Identify their capitals and ports in the map.
2. Have a discussion in the class describing the liberal donations made by the Seven Patrons.
3. Visit the Museum and see the excavated materials and coins related to the Sangam period.