



Mains Practice Question

Q. Highlight the socio-political conditions of the Sangam period with special mention of three literary assemblies. (250 words)

25 Nov, 2019 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Mention about the time period of Sangam age and the literary assemblies held during that period.
- Explain the socio-political conditions including Sangam polity, administration, society, the position of women, religion, etc.
- Conclude by mentioning about the decline of Sangam period.

Introduction

The period roughly between the 3rd century B.C. and 3rd century A.D. in South India (the area lying to the south of river Krishna and Tungabhadra) is known as Sangam Period. It has been named after the Sangam academies held during that period that flourished under the royal patronage of the Pandya kings of Madurai.

Body

According to the Tamil legends, there were three Sangams (Academy of Tamil poets) held in the ancient South India popularly called Muchchangam.

- The **First Sangam**, is believed to be held at Madurai, attended by gods and legendary sages. No literary work of this Sangam is available.
- The **Second Sangam** was held at Kapadapuram, only Tolkappiyam survives from this.
- The **Third Sangam** was also held at Madurai. A few of these Tamil literary works have survived and are useful sources to reconstruct the history of the Sangam period.

These academies led to the compilation of Sangam literature including Tolkappiyam, Ettutogai, Pattuppattu, Pathinenkilkanakku, and two epics named – Silappathikaram and Manimegalai. These literary sources highlight the socio-political conditions of that period.

Sangam Polity and Administration

- During the Sangam period **hereditary monarchy** was the form of government.
- Each of the dynasties of Sangam age had a royal emblem – tiger for the **Cholas**, carp/Fish for the **Pandyas**, and bow for the **Cheras**.
- The king was assisted by a wide body of officials who were categorised into five councils. They were ministers (amaichar), priests (anthanar), envoys (thuthar), military commanders (senapathi), and spies (orarr).
- The military administration was efficiently organized and a regular army was associated with each ruler.
- The chief source of state's income was land revenue while a custom duty was also imposed on foreign trade.

- Major source of fulfilling the royal treasury was the booty captured in wars.
- The roads and highways were maintained and guarded to prevent robbery and smuggling.

Sangam Society

- Tolkappiyam refers to the **Five-fold division of lands** - Kurinji (hilly tracks), Mullai (pastoral), Marudam (agricultural), Neydal (coastal) and Palai (desert).
- Tolkappiyam also refers to **four castes** namely arasar(Ruling Class), anthanar, vanigar(carried on trade and commerce) and vellalar(Agriculturists).
- Ancient primitive tribes like Thodas, Irulas, Nagas and Vedars lived in this period.

Position of Women during Sangam Age

- Women had respect and were allowed intellectual pursuits. There were women poets like Avvaiyar, Nachchellaiyar, and Kakkaiyapadiyar who flourished and contributed to Tamil literature.
- Women were allowed to choose their life partners. But life of widows was miserable.
- The practice of Sati was prevalent in the higher strata of society.

Conclusion

- The Sangam period slowly witnessed its decline towards the end of the 3rd century A.D.
- The Kalabhras occupied the Tamil country post-sangam period between 300 AD to 600 AD, whose period was called an interregnum or 'dark age' by earlier historians.

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