



# Sangam Age

## Introduction

- The period roughly between the **3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.** and **3<sup>rd</sup> 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.
- At the sangams eminent scholars assembled and functioned as the board of censors and the choicest literature was rendered in the nature of anthologies.
- These literary works were the earliest specimens of Dravidian literature.
- 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 a useful sources to reconstruct the history of the Sangam period.

## Sangam Literature: Major source giving details of Sangam Age

The Sangam literature includes Tolkappiyam, Ettutogai, Pattuppattu, Pathinenkilkanakku, and two epics named – Silappathikaram and Manimegalai .

- **Tolkappiyam** was authored by Tolkappiyar and is **considered the earliest of Tamil literary work**. Though it is a work on Tamil grammar but it also provides insights on the political and socio-economic conditions of the time.
- **Ettutogai** (Eight Anthologies) consist of eight works – Aingurunooru, Narrinai, Aganaooru, Purananooru, Kuruntogai, Kalittogai, Paripadal and Padirrupattu.
- **The Pattuppattu** (Ten Idylls) consists of ten works – Thirumurugarruppadai, Porunararruppadai, Sirupanarruppadai, Perumpanarruppadai, Mullaippattu, Nedunalvadai, Maduraikkanji, Kurinjippattu, Pattinappalai and Malaipadukadam.
- **Pathinenkilkanakku** contains eighteen works **about ethics and morals**. The most important among these works is Tirukkural authored by **Thiruvalluvar**, the tamil great poet and philosopher.
- The two epics **Silappathikaram is written by Elango Adigal and Manimegalai by Sittalai Sattanar**. They also provide valuable details about the Sangam society and polity.

**Other Sources** that give details about the Sangam Period are –

- The Greek authors like Megasthenes, Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy mentioning about commercial trade contacts between the West and South India.
- The Ashokan inscriptions mentioned about the Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers to the south of Mauryan empire.
- Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela of Kalinga also has mention of Tamil kingdoms.

## Political History of Sangam Period [//](#)



South India, during the Sangam Age, was ruled by three dynasties-**the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas**. The main source of information about these kingdoms is traced from the literary references of Sangam Period.

## Cheras

- The Cheras controlled the central and northern parts of Kerala and the Kongu region of Tamil Nadu.
- Vanji was their capital and the ports of the west coast, Musiri and Tondi, were under their control.
- The emblem of Cheras was **“bow and arrow”**.
- The Pugalur inscription of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD has reference to three generations of Chera rulers.
- The Cheras owed its importance to trade with the Romans. They also built a temple of Augustus there.
- The greatest ruler of Cheras was **Senguttuvan, the Red Chera** or the Good Chera, who belonged to the 2nd century A.D.
  - His military achievements have been chronicled in epic Silapathikaram, with details about his expedition to the Himalayas where he defeated many north Indian rulers.
  - Senguttuvan introduced the Pattini cult or the **worship of Kannagi** as the ideal wife in Tamil Nadu.
  - He was the first to send an embassy to China from South India.

## Cholas

- The Cholas controlled the central and northern parts of Tamil Nadu.
- Their core area of rule was the **Kaveri delta**, later known as **Cholamandalam**.
- Their capital was Uraiyur (near Tiruchirapalli town) and Puhar or Kaviripattinam was an alternative royal residence and chief port town.
- **Tiger** was their emblem.
- The Cholas also maintained an **efficient navy**.
- **King Karikala** was a famous king of the Sangam Cholas.
  - Pattinappalai portrays his life and military conquests.
  - Many Sangam poems mention the Battle of Venni where he defeated the confederacy of

- Cheras, Pandyas and eleven minor chieftains.
- Karikala's military achievements made him the overlord of the whole Tamil region of that time.
- Trade and commerce flourished during his reign.
- He **founded the port city of Puhar** (identical with Kaveripattinam) and constructed 160 km of embankment along the Kaveri River.

## Pandyas

- The Pandyas ruled from Madurai.
- Korkai was their main port, located near the confluence of Thampraparani with the Bay of Bengal. It was famous for pearl fishery and chank diving.
- Their emblem was the **"Fish"**.
- They patronized the Tamil Sangams and facilitated the compilation of the Sangam poems.
- Rulers kept a regular army.
- Trade was prosperous and their pearls were famous.
- Sati, caste, idol worship were common. Widows were treated badly.
- They adopted the Vedic religion of sacrifice and patronized Brahmin priests.
- Their power declined with the invasion of a tribe called the Kalabhras.
- After the Sangam Age, this dynasty lost its significance for more than a century, only to rise once again at the end of the 6th century.

## 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 (orrrar)**.
- 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

- A lot of information is available in the Sangam literature to understand the position of women during the Sangam age.
- Women had respect and were allowed intellectual pursuits. There were **women poets like Avvaiyar, Nachchellaiyar, and Kakkaipadiniyar** who flourished and contributed to Tamil literature.
- Women were allowed to choose their life partners. But life of widows was miserable.
- There is also a mention about the practice of Sati being prevalent in the higher strata of society.

## Religion

- The **primary deity of the Sangam period was Murugan**, who is hailed as Tamil God.

- The worship of Murugan was having an ancient origin and the festivals relating to God Murugan was mentioned in the Sangam literature.
- Murugan was honoured with six abodes known as Arupadai Veedu.
- Other gods worshipped during the Sangam period were Mayon (Vishnu), Vendan (Indiran), Varunan and Korravai.
- The **Hero Stone or Nadu Kal worship** was significant in the Sangam period and was erected in memory of the bravery shown by the warriors in the battle.

## Economy of the Sangam Age

- **Agriculture was the chief occupation** where rice was the most common crop.
- The handicraft included weaving, metal works and carpentry, ship building and making of ornaments using beads, stones and ivory.
- These were in great demand in the internal and external trade that was at its peak during the Sangam period.
- A high expertise was attained in spinning and weaving of cotton and silk clothes. These were in **great demand in the western world especially for the cotton clothes woven at Uraiyur.**
- The **port city of Puhar** became an important place of foreign trade, as big ships entered this port containing precious goods.
- Other significant ports of commercial activity were Tondi, Musiri, Korkai, Arikamedu and Marakkanam.
- Many gold and silver coins that were issued by the Roman Emperors like Augustus, Tiberius and Nero have been found in all parts of Tamil Nadu indicating flourishing trade.
- **Major exports of the Sangam age were cotton fabrics and spices** like pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon and turmeric along with ivory products, pearls and precious stones.
- **Major imports** for the traders were **horses, gold, and sweet wine.**

## End of Sangam Age

- The Sangam period slowly witnessed its decline towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

[For Mind Map](#)

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