

# Sangam Age

From roughly the 6th century BCE to roughly the 3rd century CE, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and parts of Sri Lanka experienced the Sangam Age, more precisely, the third Sangam Period. It was given that name in honour of the illustrious Madurai-based Sangam schools of poets and philosophers. The best work was published in anthologies censored by distinguished thinkers who congregated at the Sangams (academies of Tamil poets). These books were some of the earliest works of Dravidian literature.

Three Sangams, often called Muchchangam in ancient South India, were reportedly held according to Tamil traditions.

- Gods and legendary sages are said to have attended Madurai's First Sangam. There is no published literary work by the First Sangam.
- The solitary remnant of the Second Sangam, which took place at Kapadapuram, is Tolkappiyam.
- Also hosted in Madurai was the Third Sangam. These Tamil literary works, some of which have survived, can be used as sources to piece together the history of the Sangam era.

## Sangam Age: Political History of Chola Chera Pandya

Throughout the Sangam Age, South India was ruled by the Cheras, Cholas, and Pandya kingdoms. The primary source of information about these dynasties is literary references from the Sangam Period.

### Chola

- The Cholas' control over Tamil Nadu's central and northern territories was centred in the Kaveri delta, later known as Cholamandalam.
- Puhar or Kaviripattinam, close to Tiruchirapalli town, served as their main port and alternative royal palace. Uraiyur served as their capital.
- Their logo included a tiger.
- The Cholas also possessed a successful navy.
- Karikala was a well-known Sangam Chola emperor. Through the Pattinappalai, his life and military triumphs are depicted.
- Numerous Sangam hymns make reference to the Battle of Venni, in which Karikala defeated the coalition of Chera, Pandya, and eleven minor chieftains. Due to his military skill at the time, he governed the whole Tamil region.
- Puhar is a harbour city that Karikala built.

### Chera

- The Cheras were in charge of Tamil Nadu's Kongu region and Kerala's central and northern regions.
- Their capital was Vanji, and Musiri and Tondi ports on the west coast were under their control.
- The anthem of Cheras was "Bow and arrow."
- The Pugalur inscription from the first century AD mentions three generations of Chera kings.
- The prominence of the Cheras was aided by trade with the Romans. A shrine dedicated to Augustus was also built.

- The greatest ruler of the Cheras during the second century A.D. was Senguttuvan, often known as the Red Chera or the Good Chera. The epic Silappathikaram described his military prowess.

## Pandya

- The Cheras were in charge of Tamil Nadu's Kongu region as well as Kerala's central and northern regions.
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## Sangam Literature: Insights on Sangam Age

As was already said, the Sangam writings are a gold mine of data for studying Tamilakam's early history. They offer insight into a crucial historical issue. The Sangam literature consists of the epics Silappathikaram and Manimegalai, Tolkappiyam, Pathinenkilkanakku, Ettutogai, and Pattuppattu.

- Tolkappiyam, written by Tolkappiyar, is regarded as the first piece of Tamil literature. Although it is a study of the Tamil language, it also offers insights into the socio-political environment of the day.
- Kuruntogai, Kalittogai, Aingurunooru, Narrinai, Paripadal, Aganaooru, Purananooru, and Padirrupattu are the eight works that makeup Ettutogai (Eight Anthologies).
- Ten pieces make up The Pattuppattu (Ten Idylls), including Kurinjippattu, Pattinappalai, Thirumurugarrupadai, Perumpanarrupadai, Mullaippattu, Nedunalvadai, Maduraikkanji, Porunararrupadai, Sirupanarrupadai, and Malaipadukadam.
- There are eighteen works on ethics and morals in Pathinenkilkanakku. The most significant of these writings is Tirukkural, written by Tamil great poet and philosopher Thiruvalluvar.
- Elango Adigal and Sittalai Sattanar are the authors of the two epics, Silappathikaram and Manimegalai. They also offer important information on Sangam society and politics.

Greek authors like Megasthenes, Strabo, Pliny, and Ptolemy, in addition to the Sangam Literature, point to trade ties between the West and South India.

- The Asokan inscriptions make reference to the Chera, Chola, and Pandya emperors of the Mauryan empire.
- Tamil kingdoms are also mentioned in the Kharavela of Kalinga's Hathikumbha inscription.
- The Tamils' international commerce activities are shown by the excavations at Arikamedu, Poompuhar, Kodumanal, and other sites.

## Sangam Period: Polity and Administration

Hereditary monarchy was the system of government throughout the Sangam era. The Cholas, Pandyas, and Cheras each possessed a unique royal emblem during the Sangam Period: a tiger, a carp or fish, and a bow.

- The king received assistance from a sizable number of officials who were organised into five councils.
- They were envoys (thuthar), ministers (amaichar), priests (anthanar), secret agents (senapathi), and military commanders (orarr).
- Each monarch had a regular army connected to them, and the military government was well-run.
- The state's primary funding source came from land sales, and a customs duty was also imposed on all foreign trade.
- The royal treasury received a substantial amount of revenue from war booty.
- The roads and highways were maintained and guarded to prevent theft and smuggling.

## Society During Sangam Age

The inhabitants of the Tolkappiyam had their own major occupations and deities to worship. Tolkappiyam is the name for the five-fold land division. Aside from the ruling class, tolkappiyam also refers to the four castes of arasar, anthanar, vanigar, and vellalar (Agriculturists).

The five-fold land division was:

- Kurinji (hilly tracks): chief occupation was hunting and honey collection.
- Mullai (pastoral): chief occupation was cattle-rearing and dealing with dairy products.
- Marudam (agricultural): chief occupation was agriculture
- Neydal (coastal): chief occupation was fishing and salt manufacturing.
- Palai (desert): major occupation was of robbery.

Land	Type of land	Chief deity	Chief occupation
Kurunji	Hilly tracts	Murugan	Hunting and honey collection
Mullai	Pastoral	Mayon	Cattle rearing and dealing with dairy products
Marudham	Agricultural	Indira	Agricultural

Neidhal	Coastal	Varunan	Fishing and salt manufacturing
Palai	Desert	Korravai	Robbery

Women were respected and permitted to pursue academic interests. Women poets like Avvaiyar, Nachchellaiyar, and Kakkaiapadiyar flourished and made significant literary contributions to Tamil.

- Women were free to select the life partners they wanted. But widows' lives were wretched.
- The practise of Sati is also mentioned as being common among the upper classes of society.

## Religion During the Sangam Period

Murugan, revered as the Tamil God, served as the main god during the Sangam era. The celebration of God Murugan's festivals is described in Sangam literature, and his worship has a long history.

- Arupadai Veedu, six abodes honouring Murugan, were created.
- During the Sangam era, people also worshipped Mayon (Vishnu), Vendan (Indiran), Varunan, and Korravai.
- The Hero Stone, also known as Nadu Kal worship, was prominent during the Sangam period and was built as a monument to the courage the warriors displayed while engaged in combat.

## Sangam Age Economy

The main occupation was agriculture, with rice being the most popular crop. The handicrafts included weaving, carpentry, metalworking, shipbuilding, and the creation of jewellery out of ivory, stones, and beads. In spinning and weaving cotton and silk clothing, a great level of proficiency was obtained. Particularly for the cotton clothing woven at Uraiyur, these were in high demand in the western world.

- These were in high demand during the Sangam era, when both domestic and international trade peaked.
- Due to the arrival of large ships carrying valuable products, the port city of Puhar developed into a significant hub for international trade.
- Tondi, Musiri, Korkai, Arikamedu, and Marakkanam were additional large ports with significant commercial activity.
- During the Sangam era, cotton textiles, spices including pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, and turmeric, as well as goods made of ivory, pearls, and precious stones, were the main exports.
- Horses, gold, and sweet wine were the main imports for the traders.

At the close of the third century A.D., the Sangam period began to progressively deteriorate. The Kalabhras ruled over Tamil territory for about 250 years. The Kalabhra era is a period about which very little is known. Jainism and Buddhism gained popularity at this time. The Kalabhras were driven out of Tamil Nadu by the northern Pallavas and the southern Pandyas, who thereafter established their rule.

