



SANGAM AGE – THE TAMIL KINGDOM

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Introduction

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 Tamilnadu. 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 Kindoms, namely the Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms in the Tamil Country. They were popularly known as Moovendar.

Sources

The historical sources for the Sangam Age may classified into

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

Literary Sources

The Sangam literature chiefly consists of Tholkappiyam , Ettuthogai and Pathupattu. These works provide value information to know the history of the Sangam Age. Among the Tholkappiyam was the earliest 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 periodic scanty. The Asokan Edicts refers to the Chera, Chola and pandy kingdom. The Hathikumba inscription of the Kalinga king, Kharavela also mentions the three Tamil Kindoms. The Kalugumalai inscriptions help us to know about ancient Tamil Scripts called Tamil Brahmi. The Tirukkovalar inscriptions refer to the local chieftains and the tragic end of the Tamil Poet, Kapilar the inscriptions at Thirupparankundrum 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 TamilNadu. 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 Arikamedu 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 Bhuddhist Vihara was found at Kilaivur near Kaveripoompattinam. 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.

Coins

The Study of coin 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 Tamilnadu. 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. Megasthanes in his book Indica also referred to the three Tamil Kindoms. Other authors such as Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy provide valuable



information regarding the Sangam age. The Ceylonese book – mahavamsa and Dipavamsa help us to fix the date of the Sangam.

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.

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 Padyan kings had established the Third Sangam at Madurai. Many scholars did not 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 my titles such as Vanavar, Vallavar and Malaiyar. The First one started from Odaiyan Cheralathanand the second from Irumporai. Their Capital was Vanji and their chief port Thondi. Cheran Senguttuvan was the most popular king of the Sangam Chera.

The Sangam works, padhithrupaththu 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 bought stones from where and built a temple in memory of Kannagi. His brother Elango Adigal composed Silappathigaram.

Padirrupattu 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.

Chola Kingdom

The Chola kingdom is referred to in the Sangam Literature as Chonadu, Kaveri Nadu, Kaveri Soozh Nadu, Neer Nadu, and punal Nadu. The Capital of the Sangam Cholas was Uraiyyur.

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 kindom. He was also great warrior. He defeated the Chera and Pandya kings at Venni.

Karikalan had also become popular for the development activities in his kingdom. He had encouraged the tgrowth 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 Kaverippumpattinam or puhar and made it as his capital. It flourished as a great emporium of trade. Merchants from foreign countries visted Puhar. Karikalan was generous towards Tamil poet 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 int 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.



Mudhukudumi Peruvazhthi performed many sacrifices to celebrate his victories. Therefore, he was given the title Palyagasalai. Another Pandyan king Bootha Pandyan was a great warrior and also a parton of Tamil Poets. His wife Perungoppendu was a Poetess. It is referred that she committed self immolation at the death of her husband. Ariyappadaikadantha Nedunchezhiyen was also a famous Pandyan ruler.

Another Important ruler was Thalaiyalanganathu Nedunchezhiyen. He defeated the combined forces of Chera, Chola and other local chieftains at a place called Thalaiyalanganam. He also patronized a number of Tamil poet including Mangudi Maruthanar.

The Pandyan rule disappeared along with that of the Cheras and Cholas in the Third Century A.D. The Kalabharas 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 Tamilnadu. They were known as Velirs. The Sangam literature furnished a lot of information about them. The most famous among the Velirs were called Seven patron or Kadaiyelu Vallalgal. They were Pari, Ori, Malayan, Elini, Pegan, Aay and Nalli.

The local chieftains had extended patronage to the Tamil poets like Kabilar, Avvaiyar, Nallathanar and Perunchithirananar.

For Example, Avvaiyar played the role of a diplomat in the court of Adhiyaman. Another Sangam Poet, Kapilar had taken care of Pari's Daughter after his death these 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 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.

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 a 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 koottram. 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 the features.