

Sangam Period

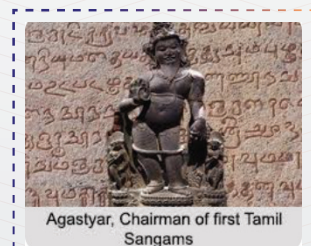
(3rd Century B.C. - 3rd Century A.D.)

The **Sangam Period** refers to the era spanning from the **3rd century B.C.** to the **3rd century A.D.** in **South India**, particularly the region south of the **Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers**. This period is named after the **Sangam assemblies**, where Tamil poets gathered to compose literature.

Sangam Assemblies (Muchchangam)

- According to Tamil legends, three **Sangam assemblies** were held under the patronage of the **Pandya kings** in **Madurai**:

Sangam	Location	Attended By	Key Literary Works
First Sangam	Madurai	Gods and legendary sages, presided over by Agastya (Agattiyar)	No surviving works
Second Sangam	Kapadapuram	Kings and poets, presided over by Tolkappiyar	Tolkappiyam (only surviving text)
Third Sangam	Madurai	Poets and scholars, presided over by Nakkirar	Ettutokai (Eight Anthologies), Pattupattu (Ten Idylls)



Political History of the Sangam Period

The **Sangam Age** saw the rise of three powerful dynasties: **Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas**. These kingdoms, known collectively as **Muvendar**, ruled various regions of South India.



Cheras

- ◆ **Location:** Central and northern Kerala, parts of Tamil Nadu.
- ◆ **Capital:** Vanji; key ports included Musiri and Tondi.
- ◆ **Emblem:** Bow and Arrow.
- ◆ **Famous Ruler:** Senguttuvan (the Red Chera), known for his military exploits, including an expedition to the Himalayas and introducing the Pattini Cult.
- ◆ **Trade:** Significant trade with the Romans.



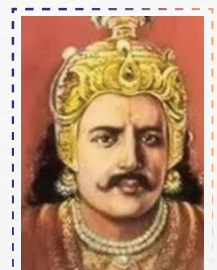
Cholas

- ◆ **Location:** Central and northern Tamil Nadu, especially the Kaveri Delta.
- ◆ **Capital:** Uraiyr (later Puhar).
- ◆ **Emblem:** Tiger.
- ◆ **Famous Ruler:** **Pugalar inscription** refers to three generations of Chera rulers.
 - Pathitru Pathu speaks of eight Chera kings, their territory and their fame.
 - **Karikala Chola**, celebrated for his victory at the **Battle of Venni** and for building the
 - **Kallanai dam**. His reign also saw significant developments in **trade** and **irrigation**.



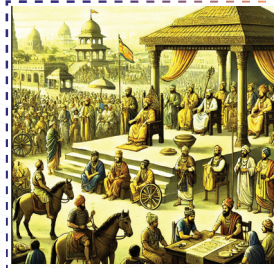
Pandyas

- ◆ **Location:** Southern Tamil Nadu, including **Madurai**.
- ◆ **Capital:** **Madurai**.
- ◆ **Emblem:** Fish.
- ◆ **Famous Ruler:** **Neduncheliyan** (also referenced in **Silappathikaram**), known for military victories and patronizing Tamil culture.



Administrative Structure of the Sangam Kingdom

The **Sangam kingdom** had a **well-organized administration**, systematically divided into different **territorial units** for efficiency:



Territorial Units	Description
Mandalam	Kingdom or larger territory
Ur	Town or urban center
Perur	Large village
Sirur	Small village

*The governance was structured into **three levels of rulers**:*

Rulers	Role
Kizhar	Village leaders or rulers of small territories; later became Nadu chiefs
Velir	Regional chieftains governing hilly and forested areas
Vendar	Kings ruling expansive and fertile regions with significant influence

The **Sangam period** witnessed the establishment of a **hereditary monarchy**. The king ruled with the help of various officials and councils:

Council	Role
Amaichar (Ministers)	Advised the king on governance
Anthanar (Priests)	Performed religious and ritual duties
Thuthar (Envoys)	Handled diplomacy and foreign affairs
Senapathi (Military Commanders)	Led the army
Orrar (Spies)	Monitored internal affairs

Military and Warfare -----

- ♦ The **warrior class** played a significant role in society.
- ♦ Military leaders were given the title of **Enadi**.
- ♦ Military officers belonged mainly to the **Vellalar class**.
- ♦ Each kingdom had a **tutelary tree (Kodimaram)** representing its army.
- ♦ Highways were maintained and guarded day and night to prevent robbery and smuggling.

Sangam Literature

The **Sangam literature** is the primary source for understanding the culture, society, and polity of the period. Major texts include:

Literary Work	Author	Description
Tolkappiyam	Toikappiyar	Earliest Tamil text on grammar and linguistics; provides insights into socio-political and economic conditions.
Ettutogai (Eight Anthologies)	Various	Collection of eight works, including Aingurunooru, Purananooru, and Kuruntogai, depicting love, warfare, politics, and morality.
Pattupattu (Ten Idylls)	Various	Ten long poems detailing Tamil kings' lives and achievements, including Karikala Chola.
Pathinenkilkanakku (Eighteen Ethics Texts)	Various	Focuses on ethics, morality, and values; Tirukkural by Thiruvalluvar is the most renowned.
Silappathikaram (Epic)	Ilango Adigal	Story of Kovalan and Kannagi; provides insights into Sangam society.
Manimekalai (Epic)	Sittalai Sattanar	Story of Manimekalai, a Buddhist nun; highlights religious and cultural aspects.

Types of Sangam Poetry

Category	Focus	Themes
Aham (Agam)	Inner experiences	Love, romance, emotions, feminine themes, personal relationships.
Puram	External, worldly affairs	War, heroism, politics, kingship, virtue, male-dominated themes.

Social Structure of sangam period

The society during the Sangam period was marked by a well-defined social structure, with varying degrees of **gender equality**. It was organized into distinct divisions based on occupation, land type, and social roles.

Ecological Divisions (Panchitanai):

The Tolkappiyam describes a five-fold classification of land, each with its own deity and primary occupation:

Land Type	Chief Deity	Primary Activity	Key Inhabitants
Kurinji (Hilly tracks)	Murugan	Hunting and honey collection	Kuravar, Vetar
Mullai (Pastoral)	Mayon (Vishnu)	Cattle herding and dairy farming	Eyinar, Maravar
Marudam (Agricultural)	Indira	Farming and cultivation	Ayar, Idaiyar
Neydal (Coastal)	Varunan	Fishing and salt production	Ulavar, Vellalar
Palai (Desert)	Koravai	Looting and raiding	Paratavar, Valayar

Society was further divided into **four main classes** with specific roles:

Class	Role
Arasar	Ruling class
Anthanar	Priests, scholars, and advisors
Vanigar	Traders and merchants
Vellalar	Agriculturists

- ◆ **Brahmanas** were present in courts, performing **yajnas** and advising rulers.
- ◆ Additionally, there were landless laborers such as **Kadaisiyar** and **Adimai**, who included slaves, and **Pariyars**, who were agricultural laborers.
- ◆ Tribal groups, like the **Parathavar, Panar, Eyinar, Kadambar, Maravar, Pulaiyar, Thodas, Irulas, Nagas, and Vedars**, also formed part of this society.

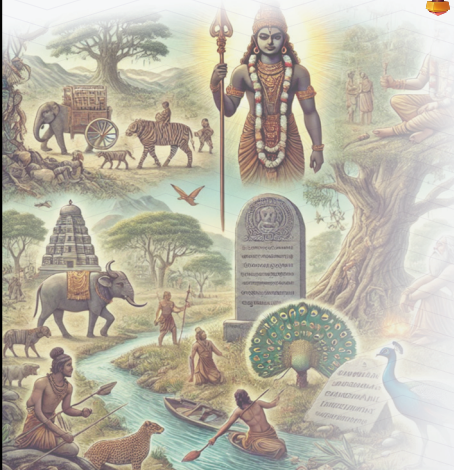
..... Position of Women During the Sangam Age

- ◆ Women enjoyed **respect** and had **greater freedom** compared to other ancient civilizations. They were involved in **literature, music, and dance**.
- ◆ **Famous Women Poets: Avvaiyar, Nachchellaiyar, and Kakkaipadiniyar** contributed immensely to Tamil literature.
- ◆ **Marriage: Love marriages** were common, and women had the autonomy to choose their life partners.
- ◆ **Virtue: Karpu (chastity)** was regarded as the highest virtue for women, emphasizing purity and loyalty.
- ◆ **Widowhood:** Widows faced social ostracism, and the practice of **Sati (Tippayadal)** (self-immolation) was prevalent among the higher classes, though it was not widespread.



Religion in the Sangam Age

- ◆ **Animism and nature worship** were prevalent.
- ◆ **Murugan:** The primary deity, revered as the Tamil god. His worship was widespread, and his six abodes were referred to as Arupadai Veedu.
- ◆ **Other important Deities:** Mayon (Vishnu), Indiran (Vendan), and Varunan were also worshipped.
- ◆ **Hero Stones:** These were erected in memory of warriors who displayed bravery on the battlefield, representing the martial and heroic values of the society.
- ◆ **Ananku:** Concept of sacred power in objects and nature.

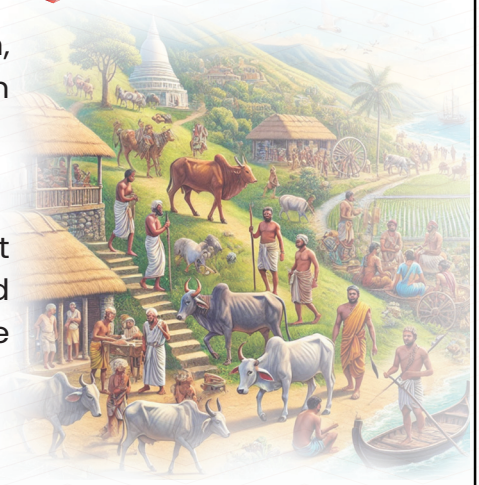


Economy of the Sangam Age

The economy of the Sangam period was primarily agrarian, supported by a robust handicraft industry and active trade, both internal and external.

Agriculture:

Agriculture was the chief occupation, with **rice** being the most common crop. **Paddy** was the main crop in the **Chola** and **Pandya** regions, while **jackfruit** and **pepper** were famous in the **Chera** country.



Handicrafts:

The Sangam economy was also marked by skilled handicraft production:

- ◆ **Weaving** (of cotton and silk fabrics)
- ◆ **Metalworking** and **carpentry**
- ◆ **Shipbuilding**
- ◆ **Ornament-making** using beads, stones, and ivory.

Uraiyur was particularly renowned for its high-quality cotton textiles, in great demand in the Western world.

Trade:

Internal Trade:

- ◆ Markets operated on a barter system, with places like **Maduraikanchi** holding day and night markets selling craft goods.

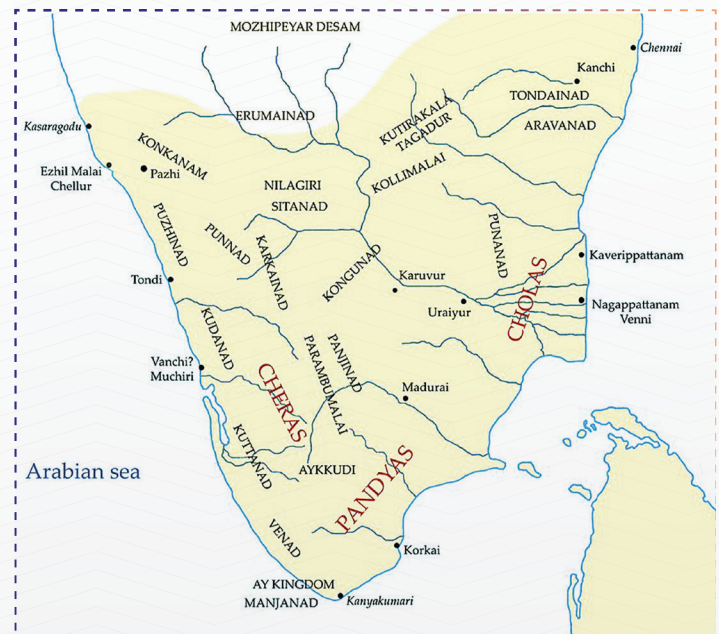
External Trade:

- ◆ Trade flourished between South India and the Greek kingdoms, facilitated by major ports such as **Puhar**, **Tondi**, **Musiri**, **Korkai**, **Arikkamedu**, and **Marakkanam**.

Exports included:

- ◆ **Cotton fabrics**
- ◆ **Spices** like **pepper**, **ginger**, **cardamom**, **cinnamon**, and **turmeric**
- ◆ **Ivory products**
- ◆ **Pearls** and **precious stones**

Imports included: Gold, Horses and Sweet wine.



Coins issued by Roman Emperors (e.g., **Augustus**, **Tiberius**, **Nero**) found throughout Tamil Nadu indicate the thriving trade relations.

Trade-Related Terms

Term	Meaning
Vanikan	Merchant or trader
Chattan, Nigama, Umanar	Priests, scholars, and advisors
Chattu	Traveling or itinerant merchants

Revenue and Taxes:

Land revenue was the primary source of state income, supplemented by customs duties on foreign trade. The **Pattinappalai** mentions customs officials in the port city of **Puhar**. Additionally, war booty contributed to the royal treasury.



Tax-Related Terms

Term	Meaning
Karai	Tax on land
Ulgu	Customs duty
Iravu	Compulsory gifts or additional demands
Irai	Tribute paid by vassals
Variyar	Tax collection officer


Decline of the Sangam Age

The **Kalabhras invasion** marked the decline of the Sangam Age. Their rule over the Tamil region for approximately **two and a half centuries** disrupted the **social and political stability** of South India, leading to the collapse of Sangam-era governance.







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