

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF TAMIL CULTURAL HERITAGE WITH REFERENCE TO SANGAM AGE

Dr. R. Rajeshwari

Assistant Professor Department of History Thanthai Periyar Govt. Arts College,

Corresponding Email: rajeshwari12345auhis@gmail.com

Abstract

Over the course of two millennia, Tamil Nadu has amassed a rich cultural history that continues to flourish today. The significant cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu developed under the rule of dynasties that ruled the state at various times throughout history. Tamil Nadu is a representation of the unique Dravidian culture that emerged under the patronage of several kingdoms over the course of history. The social, economic, religious, and cultural activities of the Tamil people throughout the Sangam Age are what make Tamil Nadu and the Sangam Age special. During this time, there was progress across the board. These changes are documented in Sangam literatures and archaeological discoveries. During the Sangam era, Tamil society was split into a number of factions. The Vedic caste system of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, and Sudras did not exist in early Sangam Age Tamil society. This classification may be considered to generally equate to the Vedic Social division; nevertheless, the earliest of the Sangam literature, *Tolkappiyam*, makes reference to the four divisions common in the Sangam society, namely Anthanar, Arasar, Vaislyar, and Vellalar. *Purananuru*, another work from the Sangam, includes references to ancient Tamil tribes including the Thudiyar, Pannan, and Kadamban. The Sangam Age's intricate social structure can be seen in these divisions. Although Tamil Nadu is one of India's most urbanised states, the vast majority of its citizens still reside in rural areas.

Keywords: *Tamil, Sangam, Culture, Heritage*

INTRODUCTION

The Sangam period is a pivotal time in South Indian history. Scholars agree that the age of Sangam was from roughly 300 BCE to 300 CE (Subramanian, 1978). It is said in Tamil literature that the ancient Tamil Nadu region, now known as Muchchangam, was home to not one, but three Sangams (the Academy of Tamil Poets). It was the Pandya kings that provided generous support to these Sangams, allowing them to thrive. While gods and legendary sages were present during the first Sangam, which took place in Madurai, no written record of the event survives. Even if all the written works had been lost by the time of the second Sangam, which was held in Kapatapuram, there was still the *Tolkappiyam*. Mudathirumaran established the Madurai Sangam, the third one. There were many poets present who wrote extensively, but just a handful were still alive today. The history of the Sangam Age can be pieced back together with the help of these surviving works of Tamil literature. Insight into Tamil society's economic and political structures can be gleaned from the Sangam literature. The Sanga kaalam (Sangam era) is often regarded as Tamil literature's Golden Age (Udhaya Nandhini et al., 2016). Numerous livestock are depicted in inscriptions from this time period. Agriculture was heavily reliant on bulls because of their usage in farming. Thousands of cattle, sheep, and buffaloes were given to temples. According to historians and ideologists, the Sangam era was the Tamils' "classical age," comparable to the classical eras of Greece and Rome and the Renaissance era in late European history.

The Sangam period is sometimes referred to as the "Golden Age" of the Tamils because of its significance as a watershed moment in the development of Tamil literature and culture. The political, social, economic, religious, and cultural aspects of the Sangam age people's lives are illuminated by the archaeological sources discovered at various explored or excavated sites.

However, we have access to crucial data in this area because to the discovery of priceless literary artefacts from this time period in a variety of locations across South India. If you want to learn more about the Sangam period, you should start with the Sangam literature. The word "Sangam" implies "confluence" in its literal sense. Pandyan rulers were avid readers and patrons of the arts and sciences, hence the phrase can also be translated as a gathering of scholars. Poets could voluntarily join the Sangam. It was very much like a Round Table Conference, where only genuine poets were given seats. The Sangam poets were part of an academy or gathering of intellectuals that resulted in great literature. The exact beginning of the Sangam age is a point of contention amongst academics. The fundamental reason for this is that scholars cannot agree on how old the Sangam works actually are, despite their immense historical relevance for the study of the Sangam period. K.A.N. Sastri dates the Sangam period, based on literary production, to the second to third century AD. The Tolkappiyam is widely believed to be the earliest surviving Tamil literary work. Tolkappiar, the writer of Tolkappiyam, lived and wrote somewhere around the fourth or third century B.C., according to M. Arokiaswami, hence the same time period can be used to date the work. Through combining literary and archaeological evidence, we are able to date the Sangam period to anywhere between 300 B.C. and 300 A.D.

THE TRADITION OF THE THREE SANGAMS

The three Sangam theory demonstrates that events were not simultaneous but rather sequential. Three Sangams (I, II, and III) were held, according to traditional reports of Iraiyanar Ahapporul, and they thrived for a total of 9990 years. Overall, 8598 students participated in these. Agastyar the wise was the first father. Their orderly succession and the deluges that occurred between them are also discussed in the Ahapporul commentary. 197 of the Pandyan rulers supported these Sangams, often known as academies. The first two Sangams of a series of three are said to have occurred in prehistory. Each of the three events took place in Pandya's capital city. The first Sangam was based out of ancient Madurai, but as the capital city moved about, the second academy was established in Kapatapuram. These two urban hubs were swept away by the ocean after a series of floods. In current-day Madurai, you'll find the ruins of the third Sangam. Dates for the first two Sangams can be determined with greater certainty than dates for the third. The first two centuries of the Christian era, and maybe the century before the Christian era, are used to establish this time period. According to conventional wisdom, Tolkappiar lived during the second Sangam era, and the third Sangam era corresponds with the time period of active Indo-Roman trade with Imperial Rome. The testimonies of contemporary Greek writers provide the support for this chronology. Multiple accounts describe international trade between the Mediterranean and the Tamil region. Sangam texts provide further confirmation of this. Thus, a great deal of material still in existence was created during the third Sangam. Like the French Academy in modern Europe, the Sangams sought to preserve the integrity of the language and literary canon. Co-option was the original method of joining the Sangam, but later Lord Siva, who served as its permanent president, would perform miracles to ensure that only he could join.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SANGAM LITERATURE

There is a wealth of knowledge pertaining to the early history of Tamilakam that may be found in the Sangam writings, as was indicated earlier. They accurately portray an issue of crucial historical significance. The earliest known work written in Tamil is Tolkappiyam, a treatise on Tamil grammar and poetry that was likely written during the second Sangam. Whereas it is believed that the third Sangam period saw the creation of the oldest surviving works of Tamil poetry, also known as Sangam poetry. "The Ettutogai (Eight Collections), Pattupattu (Ten Songs), and Patinenkilkanakku (The Eighteen Minor Works) are the only works in verse (prose being of much later origin) that are considered to be part of the Sangam canon, and they were written between 150 and 250 AD. Jivakachintamani, Silappadikaram, Manimekalai, Valayapathi, and Kundalakesi are the so-called 'Five Epics' ('the five great poetry'). It's been decided to put these at a

later time. These final two are extinct. Silappadikaram and Manimekalai are referred to as the 'twin epics' because they tell the story of Kovalan (the wealthy merchant prince of Puhar), Kannagi (Kovalan's chaste wife), Madhavi (the dancer with whom Kovalan lived in wedlock), and Manimekalai, the child of this wedlock, in a single narrative. Silappadikaram was written by Ilango Adigal. Ilango is referenced in the epic as the brother of the current king of the Chera, Senguttuvan. Sathanar penned Manimekalai to spread Buddhist teachings in Tamil. Nonetheless, the urban centres of Madurai, Puhar (Poompuhar/ Kaveripattinam), Vanji (Karur), and Kanchi are the focal points of these literary works, which detail the social, religious, economic, and political climates of Tamilakam. Poems from the above three categories are often thought to have been written during the first three centuries of the Christian era, but they were likely compiled and organised into their present form at a later time." One of the most significant criteria for organising the poems into three categories was their length.

The length of the poems in the "Eight Collections" varies from three to thirty-one lines, while the range in "Ten Songs" is from 103 to 782 lines. Ethical and instructive writings are included in the 'Eighteen Minor Works'. Most of the educational works, such as the world-famous Tirukkural, are written in stanzas with two to five lines each. There are currently 2279 poems in the Sangam collections, ranging in length from three lines to almost 800 lines. While the Naladiyar is credited to multiple poets, some of the other compositions have sole authors. More than 30,000 lines of Sangam poetry are at our disposal. There are 473 poets listed here, 102 of them are anonymous and 143 of whom are women. Roughly half of the poets were women. Materially, the civilisation shown in these pieces is fairly sophisticated. They also demonstrate that by the Sangam period, Tamil had developed into a sophisticated and potent literary language. It's inevitable that the language would be ancient, but modern Tamil speakers shouldn't have any trouble following along. Scholars have split the Sangam poetry into several different groups based on their topic matter, however there are essentially two types of Sangam poems. There are two types of poems: the brief ode and the extended epic. Historians can learn more from concise odes than they can from lengthy songs. However, regardless of their length, the historical importance of these sources remains the same. There are nine anthologies containing the earliest works. Ahananuru, Purananuru, Kuruntogai, Narrinai, Kalittogai, Paripadal, Aingurunuru, and Patirrupattu are some of the anthologies that compile such works. The aggregate term for these is Ettutogai. Pattupattu, a collection of ten lengthy lyrics or descriptive poetry (ten idylls), is supposedly the ninth set.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

For the first time, the Sangam poetry provide a sketch that reflects the development of the state system in South India. The historical evolution shown in these works shows a time when tribes were smaller in number but still functioning as autonomous units under the leadership of the king. Evidence points to the emergence of a state as a political organisation, even if it was not yet solid. Administration of the time shared the character of the monarchy tempered by the best effects of the democratic principle, even though the democratic vision of the state government had not yet become established.

Economy of the Sangam Age

The agricultural sector was the dominant economic sector during this time period. The staple food of the time was rice. Other crops included ragi, sugarcane, cotton, pepper, ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, and a plethora of fruit. The Chera people were especially fond of jack fruit and pepper. In Chola and Pandya territory, paddy was the most important crop. The classic saying, "Chozha nadu sorudaitu, Chera nadu thandhamudaththu, Panndi nadu muththudaiththu," which translates to "Chola nation has rice meal, Chera country has elephant tusk, and Pandya country has pearls," is mentioned in Sangam literature. Weaving, metalwork, carpentry, shipbuilding, and the adornment of animals and humans with beads, stones, and ivory were all common Sangam era handicrafts. Demand was high since both domestic and international trade were at their highest points. The

Sangam era was notable for the rise in quality of cotton and silk textile production. Cotton clothing is described in the poems as being as flimsy as a wisp of vapour or the slough of a snake. The cotton garments made at Uraiyur were in high demand in the West. The works of Sangam literature show that commerce, both domestic and international, was well-organized and flourished during the Sangam period. Details on this topic can be found in both Greek and Roman writings and archaeological remains. Domestic trade relied heavily on barter, with merchants transporting products on carts and animals. The Greek Kingdoms in South India were the primary trading partners in the region's international economy. When the Roman Empire rose to power, trade with it became increasingly vital. Big ships would bring in priceless items, and the city of Puhar would become a bustling international marketplace.

Tondi, Musiri, Korkai, Arikamedu, and Marakkanam are also busy ports with trade. The author of periplus gives us the most helpful insights about international business. Many gold and silver coins minted by Roman emperors like Augustus, Tiberius, and Nero have been discovered across the state of Tamil Nadu. They provide evidence of the Roman traders' pervasive presence in Tamil territory and the magnitude of the trade that took place there. Cotton fabrics, spices such as pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, and turmeric, ivory products, pearls, and precious stones, were the most popular items sent throughout the Sangam period. The most common imports are gold, horses, and sugar. Additionally, this is supported by evidence from the ancient world. Some of the major commercial centres in the Tami region were once European possessions.

KINGSHIP

The Cholas, with their capital at Uraiyur in the fully irrigated fertile Cauvery (Kaveri) basin, the Pandyas, with their capital at Madurai in the pastoral and littoral parts, and the Cheras, with their capital at Vanji (Karur) in the hilly country in the west, were the three muventars (three crowned monarchs). There are so many monarchs named in the Sangam texts that it is difficult to determine their lineage or place in time. However, several experts have confirmed the family trees of Uruvaphrer Ilanjetchenni, his son Karikala, and Karikala's two sons Nalankilli and Nedunkilli. Muthukudumi Peruvaludi, Ariyapadaikadantha Nedunjeliyan, Verrivercheliyan, and Talayalankanathu are only few of the kings from the other two dynasties. Pandyan Ceruvenra Nedunjeliyan, Cheraimani Cheran Senguttuvan, and Cheraimani Mantaram Cheral Irumporai. The majority of countries had a monarchy system of administration. *ventan* was the name of the so-called king. He presided over the government and society as a whole. Since he was the most senior member of society, he was the one to take the lead at all major celebrations, from the Indra festival to the opening of dance performances. At the time of his coronation, the "king" assumed several new titles. To impart celestial holiness, he was equated with gods.

In ancient Tamil society, the three most prominent symbols of his position were a drum, a sceptre, and a white umbrella. The right to rule was passed from father to son in the Sangam literature. The monarch was answerable to the people for ensuring that the country ran smoothly. He was concerned for the well-being of his subjects, exerted himself for their benefit, and travelled widely to establish order across the land. Throughout his reign, the king also relied on advisors. The term "surram," which refers to the men who constantly advised the king, appears frequently in literary works.

ADMINISTRATION

Let's talk about the Sangam texts' depiction of the government apparatus now. There was a system of checks and balances in the councils that limited the king's power and influence. The *Aimperunkulu* and *Enperayam* councils are referred to as *Silappadikaram*. The ministerial council consisted of the *aimperunkulu*, or five-person council. A total of 8 people made up the *enperayam*, also known as the great assembly (*perayam*) (government officers). This served as the government's administrative apparatus. There were two governmental bodies, the Assembly of the Five and the Assembly of the Eight, but both were primarily consultative in nature. However, the

king almost never disregarded their counsel. According to Maduraikkanji, the aimperunkulu was in control of the court system. Despite the mythology surrounding India's ancient monarchs, the country's administrative philosophy has always leaned toward a restricted or popular monarchy. Even earlier than in the north, and following its own type of government, this is clearly seen in South India. A local assembly oversaw the affairs of every community, no matter how big or tiny or far away it might be. In Sangam literature, this measurement is referred to as both the avai and the manram. Arankuravaiyam is the term for such a gathering, which was renowned for reaching fair decisions. The contemporary day panchayat might be seen as a direct descendant of these.

DEFENCE

A sizable army was always on hand to protect the major governing dynasties and chieftains. Wars occurred often and were waged for a variety of reasons, including self-defense, territorial expansion, and the liberation of oppressed populations in neighbouring kingdoms. Marriage pacts were sometimes a cause of conflict. The mentality of the people was such that practically everyone prepared himself for battle, and potential recruits for the army kept by the king could be found in every corner of the land. Not even monarchs were immune to the benefits of training in such skills. The king maintained chariot, elephant, cavalry, and infantry armies, the four types of military units described in Sangam literature. The Chera navy was so formidable that it prevented foreign ships from entering the harbour. The army's camp on the field of battle is also mentioned in the Sangam scriptures. There was a well-built tent for the monarch, where he slept under his white umbrella with many soldiers, most of whom were disarming themselves. Soldiers' normal encampment were typically constructed with sugarcane leaves on the sides and cut paddy crop on top, with paddy hanging from the structure. Military women of generals and other high-ranking commanders accompanied their husbands on the campaign and stayed in special camps set aside for them. The king would check in on the troops and officers regularly to see how they were doing. He did this through the night and the rain. The warrior was held in high esteem by the Tamil people, and the hero who fell in combat was venerated even more highly. Kings have been known to fast to the point of death after receiving a back wound in battle due to the stigma attached to the injury. Heroes of the past are honoured with these memorial stones. The presence of a prison indicates the existence of the state's apparatus of coercion. Numerous characteristics of Sangam polity might be traced back to North Indian political thought and practise. Many monarchs have looked to ancient sages and gods like Siva and Vishnu in an attempt to discover where they came from and what role they played in their rise to power. Like their North Indian contemporaries, it is stated that several monarchs took part in the Mahabharata conflict. The kings and queens of the Sangam period were also known for their support of the arts and the yajnas they oversaw (sacrifices).

CONCLUSION

The image that emerges from this analysis of Sangam literature suggests that this historical period was the first in South India to give rise to the idea of a unified nation. But it was still in the midst of crystallising. The administrative staff system and numerous offices of the Sangam polity were under the direct control of the rulers, as was typical of patriarchal and patrimonial structures. The Brahmanas' oppressive rule in society is also readily apparent. Sangam age India, however, lacked the sharp social divisions that emerged in subsequent epochs. The Sangam economy relied mostly on agriculture. Their economy grew thanks to increased economic operations, particularly with the Mediterranean World. Societal, economic, and cultural aspects were all impacted by the introduction of the alien components. Faith and ritual among the Sangam people give clues to the depth of their religion. In the Sangam period, people practised both animism and idolatry. The customs of the era have been carried on and refined through the ensuing eras, with some practises still in use now. The image that emerges from this analysis of Sangam literature suggests that this historical period was the first in South India to give rise to the idea of a unified nation. It was, nevertheless, in the early stages of crystallisation. The administrative staff system and numerous

offices of the Sangam polity were under the direct control of the rulers, as was typical of patriarchal and patrimonial structures. The dominance of the Brahmanas also highlights the existing social divide. Sangam age India, however, lacked the sharp social divisions that emerged in subsequent epochs. The Sangam economy relied mostly on agriculture. Their economic situation was improved by their trading activity, especially their trade contacts with the Mediterranean world. The intricate structure of the religion followed by the Sangam people is indicative of the many ways in which the foreign factors have influenced their socioeconomic and cultural lives. In the Sangam period, people practised both animism and idolatry. The customs of the era have been carried on and refined through the ensuing eras, with some practises still in use now.

REFERENCES

- 1 K.A.Nilakanda Sashtri, A History of South India.(From Pre-Historic Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar), Madras: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- 2 K.A Nilakanta Sastri The Pandyan Kingdom, From the Earliest Times to the Sixteenth Century, Madras: Swathi Publications, 1972.
- 3 K. A. Nilalakanda Sastri, The Colas, Madras: University of Madras, 1984.
- 4 V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, Origin and Spread of the Tamils, Madras : The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society,1971.
- 5 M.G.S.Narayanan “The of Peasants in the Early History of Tamilagam in South India”, Social scientist,16.
- 6 P.T. Srinivas Iyengar, History of the Tamils, (From the Earliest Times to 600 A.D.), New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1983.
- 7 R. Krishnamurthy, Sangam Age Tamil Coins.Madras: Garnet Publication, 1997.
- 8 K. A. Nilalakanda Sastri, (Ed.), Foreign Notices of South India, Madras: University of Madras, 1972.
- 9 K.V. Raman Some Aspects of Pandyan History in the Light of Recent Discoveries, Madras: University of Madras, 1972.
- 10 Kanakalatha Mukund, The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant. Hyderabad: Orient Longman,1999.
- 11 N. Athiyaman, P.Jayakumar “Ancient anchors off Tamil Nadu coast and ship tonnage analysis”. Current Science.86(9) 2004 pp.1261-1267.
- 12 K.N. Sivaraja Pillai , The Chronology of the Early Tamils.New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.1984.
- 13 Kanakalatha Mukund, The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant.Hyderabad: Orient Longman,1999.
- 14 K.K. Pillay A Social History of the Tamils, Part I, Madras: University of Madras,1969.
- 15 K. A. Nilalakanda Sastri, G. Srinivasachari Advanced History of India. Bombay: Allied Publishers Pvt 1971 p – 553.