

## HISTORY OF KONGUNADU UPTO 1800 AD

### UNIT1:

#### SOURCES:

There are literary, archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic **sources of ancient Tamil history**. The foremost among these sources is the Sangam literature, generally dated to 5th century BCE to 3rd century CE. The poems in Sangam literature contain vivid descriptions of the different aspects of life and society in Tamilakam during this age; scholars agree that, for the most part, these are reliable accounts. Greek and Roman literature, around the dawn of the Christian era, give details of the maritime trade between Tamilakam and the Roman empire, including the names and locations of many ports on both coasts of the Tamil country.

Archaeological excavations of several sites in Tamil Nadu and Kerala have yielded remnants from the Sangam era, such as different kinds of pottery, pottery with inscriptions, imported ceramic ware, industrial objects, brick structures and spinning whorls. Techniques such as stratigraphy and paleography have helped establish the date of these items to the Sangam era. The excavated artifacts have provided evidence for existence of different economic activities mentioned in Sangam literature such as agriculture, weaving, smithy, gem cutting, building construction, pearl fishing and painting.

Inscriptions found on caves and pottery are another source for studying the history of Tamilakam. Writings in Tamil-Brahmi script have been found in many locations in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka and also in Egypt and Thailand.<sup>[1]</sup> mostly recording grants made by the kings and chieftains. References are also made to other aspects of the Sangam society. Coins issued by the Tamil kings of this age have been recovered from river beds and urban centers of their kingdoms. Most of the coins carry the emblem of the corresponding dynasty on their reverse, such as the bow and arrow of the Cheras; some of them contain portraits and written legends helping numismatists assign them to a certain period.

#### LITERARY SOURCES:

By far, the most important source of ancient Tamil history is the corpus of Tamil poems, referred to as Sangam literature, generally dated from the last centuries of the pre-Christian era to the early centuries of the Christian era.<sup>[2][3][4]</sup> It consists of 2,381 known poems, with a total of over 50,000 lines, written by 473 poets.<sup>[5][6]</sup> Each poem belongs to one of two types: *Akam* (inside) and *Puram* (outside). The *akam* poems deal with inner human emotions such as love and the *puram* poems deal with outer experiences such as society, culture and warfare. They contain descriptions of various aspects of life in the ancient Tamil country. The *Maduraikkanci* by Mankudi Maruthanaar contains a full-length description of Madurai and the Pandyan country under the rule of Nedunj Cheliyan III.<sup>[7]</sup> The *Netunalvatai* by Nakkirar contains a description of the king's palace. The *Purananuru* and *Akananūru* collections contain poems sung in praise of various kings and also poems that were composed by the kings themselves. The Sangam age anthology *Pathirruppaththu* provides the genealogy of two collateral lines for three or four

generations of the Cheras, along with describing the Chera country, in general. The poems in *Ainkurnuru*, written by numerous authors, were compiled by Kudalur Kizhar at the instance of Chera King *Yanaikkatcey Mantaran Ceral Irumporai*. The Chera kings are also mentioned in other works such

as *Akanañūru*, *Kuruntokai*, *Natrinai* and *Purananuru*.<sup>[8]</sup> The *Pattinappaalai* describes the Chola port city of *Kaveripumpattinam* in great detail. It mentions *Eelattu-unavu* – food from *Eelam* – arriving at the port. One of the prominent Sangam Tamil poets is known as *Eelattu Poothanthevanar* meaning Poothan-thevan (proper name) hailing from *Eelam* mentioned in *Akanañūru*: 88, 231, 307; *Kurunthokai*: 189, 360, 343 and *Narrinai*: 88, 366.

## **GEOGRAPHY :**

Tamil Nadu is the Tenth largest state in India and covers an area of 130,058 square kilometres (50,216 sq mi). It is bordered by Kerala to the west, Karnataka to the northwest, Andhra Pradesh to the north, the Bay of Bengal to the east and the Indian Ocean to the south. Cape Comorin (Kanyakumari), the southernmost tip of the Indian Peninsula which is the meeting point of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean.

## **CLIMATE:**

Tamil Nadu is heavily dependent on monsoon rains, and thereby is prone to droughts when the monsoons fail. The climate of the state ranges from wet rainforests to semi-arid. Tamil Nadu agriculture is a gambling of monsoon. The state has distinct periods of rainfall, which are the advancing monsoon period, South-west monsoon (from June to September) with strong southwest winds, the North-east monsoon (from October to December), with dominant northeast winds, and the Dry season (from January to May). The normal annual rainfall of the state is about 945 mm (37.2 in),<sup>[4]</sup> of which 48% is through the North East monsoon, and 32% through the South West monsoon. Since the state is entirely dependent on rains for recharging its water resources, monsoon failures lead to acute water scarcity and severe drought.

## Prehistoric:

Timeline: The Course of Cultures in Ancient Tamilagam		
Culture	Time Period	Cultural Traits
Palaeolithic Period	Circa. 20,00,000 years to circa. 8,000 BCE	Hand axes, cleavers Hunting and gathering
Mesolithic Period	Circa. 8,000 years to circa. 1,300 BCE	Microlithic tools No knowledge of metal Hunting of animals and birds Gathering of plant food
Neolithic Period	Circa. 2,000 BCE to 1,000 BCE	Polished Stone Axes Microliths Domestication of animals Cultivation of crops Multiplicity of groups Co-existence of hunter-gatherers and pastoral groups
Iron Age	Circa. 1,300 BCE to 500 BCE	Megalithic burial custom Co-existence of hunter-gatherers and pastoral groups Development of chiefdom Knowledge of iron, black and red ware, black ware ceramics Craft specialisation, specialised groups: potters, blacksmiths
Early Historic and Sangam Age	300 BCE to 300 CE	Cultural traits of Iron age Monarchies of Chera, Chola and Pandya Development of hero worship Poetic traditions and literature Trade and exchange by sea

### Palaeolithic Culture:

One of the oldest Stone Age tools in the world made by human ancestors, called **hominins**, had been produced in Tamil Nadu. These stone tools are found near the Chennai region at several sites, especially at Athirampakkam. The **archaeological excavations** at this site and **cosmic-ray exposure dating** of the artefacts suggest that people lived here about 1.5 to 2 million years ago. The Kosasthalaiyar river is one of the major cradles of human ancestors in the world. The people who lived here belonged to the species of *Homo erectus*.

**Archaeological excavation** refers to digging undertaken to recover archaeological evidence such as stone tools, pottery, animal bones and pollens, in order to understand the past lifestyle of humans.

**Cosmic-ray exposure dating** – A method in which exposure to cosmogenic rays is done for dating the samples.

In 1863, Sir Robert Bruce Foote, a geologist from England, first discovered Palaeolithic tools at Pallavaram near Chennai. They are the earliest finds of such tools in India. Hence, the hand axe assemblages were considered the **Madras Stone Tool Industry**. The tools that he discovered are now housed in the Chennai Museum.

The Palaeolithic people hunted wild animals and gathered the naturally available fruits, roots, nuts and leaves. They did not have knowledge of iron and pottery making, which developed much later in history.

Hand axes and cleavers are the important tool types of the Lower Palaeolithic period. These tools fitted with a wooden and bone handle were used for cutting, piercing and digging. The people of this time also used hammer stones and spheroids. The quartzite pebbles and cobbles were chosen as raw materials. The tools are found in the soil deposits and also in the exposed river side. They occur at Pallavaram, Gudiyam cave, Athirampakkam, Vadamadurai, Erumaivettipalayam and Parikulam.

### **Mesolithic Culture**

In many parts of the world, and in some parts of India, the Upper Palaeolithic Culture succeeded the Middle Palaeolithic Culture. There is no evidence for the Upper Palaeolithic Culture in Tamil Nadu. But the people who used **microliths** or small-stone artefacts lived in many parts of Tamil Nadu. Since this cultural period

occurs between Palaeolithic and Neolithic Culture, it is known as Mesolithic Culture or Middle Stone Age.

Evidence for the existence of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers is found at Chennai, North Arcot, Dharmapuri, Salem, Coimbatore, Ariyalur, Tiruchirappalli, Pudukkottai, Madurai, Sivagangai, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari. The teri sites near Thoothukudi have evidence of microlithic artefacts. These sites have red sand dunes called **teris**.

Mesolithic people might have engaged in fishing activities. The microlithic artefacts of southern Tamil Nadu are also found in the coastal regions of Sri Lanka. Geologists argue that the Tamil Nadu region and Sri Lanka remained connected before 5000 BCE when the sea level was low.

The people of this period used small artefacts made of **chert** and **quartz**. The tool types are **scrapers**, **lunates** and **triangles**. These people hunted wild animals and gathered fruits, nuts and roots for their **subsistence**.

### **Neolithic Culture :**

The culture that domesticated animals and cultivated crops is called Neolithic. It is known as the New Stone Age. The Neolithic people used polished stone axes called celts. Cattle rearing

was their main occupation. They lived in small villages with houses made of thatched roof and walls plastered with clay. Evidence of Neolithic village is found at Payyampalli in Vellore district and a few sites in the Dharmapuri region.

Payyampalli is a village in Vellore district of Tamil Nadu. The earliest evidence for the domestication of animals and cultivation of plants is found at this site, which was excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India. Evidence for pottery making and cultivation of horse gram and green gram has been found in this village.

These Neolithic sites were part of the Southern Neolithic Culture of India. They are mainly concentrated in the Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka regions. The Neolithic people used stone axes fitted on a wooden handle. These polished stone axes are worshipped in many village temples of Tamil Nadu even today.

### **Iron Age/Megalithic period:**

The **cultural period** that succeeded the Neolithic is called the Iron Age. As the name suggests, people used iron technology. It preceded the Sangam Age. The Iron Age was a formative period and the foundation for the Sangam Age was laid in this time. During the Iron Age, many parts of Tamil Nadu were occupied by people. An exchange relationship developed among the people.

The people of this age had knowledge of metallurgy and pottery making. They used iron and bronze objects and gold ornaments. They used shell ornaments and beads made of carnelian and quartz. The evidence for Iron Age is found at many sites including Adhichanallur in Tirunelveli district, Sanur near Madhuranthakam and Sithannaval near Pudukkottai. Megalithic burial sites are found in the whole of Tamil Nadu.

### **Megalithic Burial Types:**

The Iron Age is also known as megalithic, since people created burials with large stones for the dead people. Within these burials, the skeletons or a few bones of the dead persons were placed along with grave goods including iron objects, carnelian beads and bronze objects. Some of the burials do not have human bones and they have only the grave goods. They may be called memorial burials.

**Grave goods** are the objects placed in the burials along with the physical remains (bones) of the dead. People may have believed that these would be useful in the after-life. Egyptian pyramids also have similar artefacts.

Similar burials were also built in the early historic period or the Sangam Age. The Sangam literature mentions the various burial practices of the people. The megalithic burials are classified as dolmens, cists, menhirs, rock-cut caves, urn burials and sarcophagus. The burial types of Kodakkal (umbrella stone), Toppikkal (hatstone) and Paththikal (hoodstone) are found in Kerala. Dolmens, table-like stone structures, were erected as funerary monuments. Cists are

stone enclosures buried under the earth. They were created by placing four stone slabs on the sides, one on top of each other. The cists and dolmens have openings called portholes. Urns are pottery jars and were used for burying the dead. Sarcophagi are burial receptacles made of terracotta. They sometimes had multiple legs. Menhirs are pillar-like stones erected as part of the burials or memorials.

**Portholes** are holes found in the cists and dolmens on one side. They may have acted as the entrance to the burials. There is a view that they were meant for the movement of the soul or spirit.

Why did they build using numerous burial types? What is the basis of this variation? There could be several factors influencing the megalithic burial types. For example, social status or the importance of the individuals buried or simply the choice of the relatives of the dead could have been the reasons. Raw material availability is another reason. In the deltaic areas where stones are not available, people used the simple urns made by potters using clay.

The menhirs may have been erected for the heroes in the Iron Age. The tradition of hero stones might have begun in the Iron Age or even before.