

HISTORY OF KONGUNADU UPTO 1800 AD

UNIT2:

SANHAM AGE POLITICAL CONDITION :

- The period roughly between the **3rd century B.C.** and **3rd century A.D.** in South India (the area lying to the south of river Krishna and Tungabhadra) is known as Sangam Period.
- It has been named after the Sangam academies held during that period that flourished under the royal patronage of the **Pandya kings** of Madurai.
- At the sangams eminent scholars assembled and functioned as the board of censors and the choicest literature was rendered in the nature of anthologies.
- These literary works were the earliest specimens of Dravidian literature.
- According to the Tamil legends, there were **three** Sangams (Academy of Tamil poets) held in the ancient South India popularly called **Muchchangam**.
- The **First Sangam**, is believed to be held at **Madurai**, attended by gods and legendary sages. No literary work of this Sangam is available.
- The **Second Sangam** was held at **Kapadapuram**, only **Tolkappiyam** survives from this.
- The **Third Sangam** was also held at **Madurai**. A few of these Tamil literary works have survived and are a useful sources to reconstruct the history of the Sangam period
- .Political History of Sangam Period
- South India, during the Sangam Age, was ruled by three dynasties-**the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas**. The main source of information about these kingdoms is traced from the literary references of Sangam Period.

Cheras:

The Cheras controlled the central and northern parts of Kerala and the Kongu region of Tamil Nadu. Vanji was their capital and the ports of the west coast, Musiri and Tondi, were under their control. The emblem of Cheras was “**bow and arrow**”. The Pugalur inscription of the 1st century AD has reference to three generations of Chera rulers.

The Cheras owed its importance to trade with the Romans. They also built a temple of Augustus there. The greatest ruler of Cheras was **Senguttuvan, the Red Chera** or the Good Chera, who belonged to the 2nd century A.D. His military achievements have been chronicled in epic Silapathikaram, with details about his expedition to the Himalayas where he defeated many north Indian rulers. Senguttuvan introduced the Pattini cult or the **worship of Kannagi** as the ideal wife in Tamil Nadu. He was the first to send an embassy to China from South India.

Cholas:

The Cholas controlled the central and northern parts of Tamil Nadu. **Their core area of rule was the Kaveri delta, later known as Cholamandalam.** Their capital was Uraiyur (near Tiruchirapalli town) and Puhar or Kaviripattinam was an alternative royal residence and chief port town. **Tiger was their emblem. The Cholas also maintained an efficient navy. King Karikala was a famous king of the Sangam Cholas.** Pattinappalai portrays his life and military conquests. Many Sangam poems mention the Battle of Venni where he defeated the confederacy of Cheras, Pandyas and eleven minor chieftains. Karikala's military achievements made him the overlord of the whole Tamil region of that time. Trade and commerce flourished during his reign. **He founded the port city of Puhar (identical with Kaveripattinam) and constructed 160 km of embankment along the Kaveri River.**

Pandyas:

The Pandyas ruled from Madurai. Korkai was their main port, located near the confluence of Thampraparani with the Bay of Bengal. It was famous for pearl fishery and chank diving. Their emblem was the **"Fish"**. They patronized the Tamil Sangams and facilitated the compilation of the Sangam poems. Rulers kept a regular army. Trade was prosperous and their pearls were famous. Sati, caste, idol worship were common. Widows were treated badly. They adopted the Vedic religion of sacrifice and patronized Brahmin priests. Their power declined with the invasion of a tribe called the Kalabhras. After the Sangam Age, this dynasty lost its significance for more than a century, only to rise once again at the end of the 6th century.

Sangam Society:

- Tolkappiyam refers to the **Five-fold division of lands** – Kurinji (hilly tracks), Mullai (pastoral), Marudam (agricultural), Neydal (coastal) and Palai (desert).

- Tolkappiyam also refers to **four castes** namely arasar(Ruling Class), anthanar, vanigar(carried on trade and commerce) and vellalar(Agriculturists).
- Ancient primitive tribes like Thodas, Irulas, Nagas and Vedars lived in this period.
- A lot of information is available in the Sangam literature to understand the position of women during the Sangam age.
- Women had respect and were allowed intellectual pursuits. There were **women poets like Avvaiyar, Nachchellaiyar, and Kakkaipadiniyar** who flourished and contributed to Tamil literature.
- Women were allowed to choose their life partners. But life of widows was miserable.
- There is also a mention about the practice of Sati being prevalent in the higher strata of society.

Religion:

- The **primary deity of the Sangam period was Murugan**, who is hailed as Tamil God.
- The worship of Murugan was having an ancient origin and the festivals relating to God Murugan was mentioned in the Sangam literature.
- Murugan was honoured with six abodes known as Arupadai Veedu.
- Other gods worshipped during the Sangam period were Mayon (Vishnu), Vendan (Indiran), Varunan and Korravai.
- The **Hero Stone or Nadu Kal worship** was significant in the Sangam period and was erected in memory of the bravery shown by the warriors in the battle.

Economy of the Sangam Age:

- **Agriculture was the chief occupation** where rice was the most common crop.
- The handicraft included weaving, metal works and carpentry, ship building and making of ornaments using beads, stones and ivory.

- These were in great demand in the internal and external trade that was at its peak during the Sangam period.
- A high expertise was attained in spinning and weaving of cotton and silk clothes. These were in **great demand in the western world especially for the cotton clothes woven at Uraiyur.**
- The **port city of Puhar** became an important place of foreign trade, as big ships entered this port containing precious goods.
- Other significant ports of commercial activity were Tondi, Musiri, Korkai, Arikamedu and Marakkanam.
- Many gold and silver coins that were issued by the Roman Emperors like Augustus, Tiberius and Nero have been found in all parts of Tamil Nadu indicating flourishing trade.
- **Major exports of the Sangam age were cotton fabrics and spices** like pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon and turmeric along with ivory products, pearls and precious stones.
- **Major imports** for the traders were **horses, gold, and sweet wine.**

External trade was carried on between South India and Hellenistic kingdom of Egypt and Arabia as well as the Malay Archipelago. The author of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (75 A.D.) gives the most valuable information about the trade between India and the Roman Empire. He mentions the port of Naura (Cannanore) Tyndis (Tondi), Muzuris (Musiri, Cranganore), and Nelcynda as the leading ones on the west coast.

Other ports of South India were Balita (Varkalai), Comari, Colchi, Puhar (Khabaris of Ptolemy), Saliyur, Poduca (Arikamedu) and Sopatma (Markanam). A landmark in the development of communications was the discovery of the monsoon winds by the Greek sailor Hippalus in around A.D. 46-47.

This led to increase in volume of trade. Large vessels made up of single logs called Sangara and very large vessels, called Colondia made voyages. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, written by an anonymous Greek navigator, gives details of Indian exports to the Roman

Empire. The main exports were: pepper, pearls, ivory, silk, spike-nard, malabathrum, diamonds, saffron, precious stone and tortoise shell.

KALABHRAS:

The **Kalabhra dynasty**, also Called *Kalabrar*, *Kalappirar*, *Kallupura* or *Kalvar*,^[12] were rulers of all or parts of Tamil region sometime between the 3rd century and 6th century CE, after the ancient dynasties of the early Cholas, the early Pandyas and Chera. Information about the origin and reign of the Kalabhras is uncertain and scarce.^[13] Their proposed roots vary from southeast region of modern Karnataka, Kalappalars of Vellalar community, to Kalavar chieftains.^[13] The Kalabhra era is sometimes referred to as the "dark period" of Tamil history, and information about it is generally inferred from any mentions in the literature and inscriptions that are dated many centuries after their era ended.

The origin and identity of the Kalabhras is uncertain. One theory states that they were probably hill tribes that rose out of obscurity to become a power in South India.^[7] Other theories state that they were probably from north of Tamil-speaking region (modern southeast Karnataka), or on etymological grounds may have been the Kalappalars of Vellala community or the Kalavar chieftains.

A much-cited and discussed epigraphical evidence for the existence of Kalabhras is the 155-lines-long 8th-century Velvikudi grant copper plate inscription of Nedunjadaiyan.^[16] It was created at least 200 years after the end of the Kalabhras. It opens with an invocation to Shiva and many lines in Sanskrit written in Grantha script, followed by Tamil written in Vatteluttu script. Loaded with myth and exaggerated legends, the inscription has the following few lines about a Kalabhra king and his relatively quick end by Pandya king Kadungon (lines 39–40, translated by H. Krishna Sastri)

Surprisingly, we do not know what happened in the Tamil Lands during this period. So much so that the period of Kalabhara rule is called the dark ages or the Kalabhra interregnum. They left neither artefacts nor monuments, and the only sources of information are scattered mentions in Sangam, Buddhist and Jain literature.

Historians suggest that this was due to the blatant and deliberate black out of this period by the latter day Hindu – Vishnavite chroniclers, due to their animosity towards the Buddhist-

Jainist dynasty. Some Historians further opine that this period was called the “Dark Ages”, not because of any wrong doings of the Kalabhra kings, but only to indicate the non-availability of any historical details of the period.

Patrons of Literature

Although nothing much is known of Tamil history, Kalabharas were patrons of Buddhist and Jain literature. Considerable literary activity took place during this period. Most of these works were grouped under the head, “*The Eighteen Minor works*“.

Also, Silappadhikaram and Manimegalai two of the great epics of Tamil Nadu were also written during this period.

However, the great Tamil lexicographer Vaiyapuri Pillai had ascribed later dates to many of these works. This theory would undermine the link between the Kalabhras and the “*Eighteen Minor works*“

The Kalabhra rule

Kalabhras, by invading the ancient Tamil country, disturbed the prevailing status quo. The Velvikudi inscriptions of the third regnal year of Pandya king Nedunjadaiyan (c.765 – c. 815 C.E.) say that Pandya king Mudukudumi Peruvaludi gave the village of Velvikudi as gift to a Brahmins. It was enjoyed for a long time. Then a king named Kalabhran took possession of the land, driving away many great kings.

Kalabhras fought against Brahmin supremacy and were abused by Brahmin epigraphists after their rule ended. Also the late Kalabhras appear to have been Shivite and Vaishnava.

In the Brahmanical literature, the Kalabhras are “roundly as evil kings (kali-arasar) who uprooted many and abrogated brahmadeya rights”. However, the modern researchers have shown that the Kalabhras were neither nor enemies of civilisation but were a very civilized people and in fact their reign saw the creation of excellent Tamil literature. The primary reason as to why they were ignored or by the brahmins was because they were Buddhists.

The Sangam age was said to have ended when Kalabhras took over the Tamil country from the Chera, Chola and the Pandyas

The Fall of the Kalabhras

The rule of the Kalabhras was ended around 650 AD by the counter-invasions of Pandyas, Chalukyas and Pallavas. There are other references to the Kalabhras in Pallava and Chalukya inscriptions. They were conquered by Simhavishnu Pallava and Kadungon Pandyan