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Paper : **Indian Polity**
Module : **Polity in Sangam Age**


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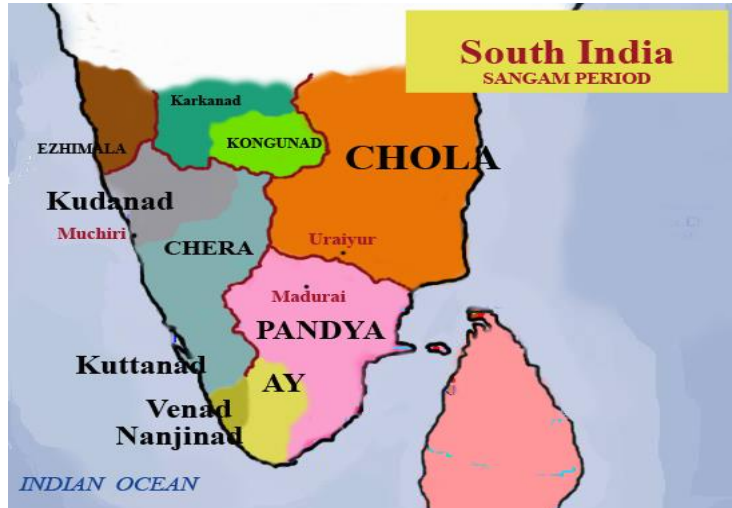
Component-I (B) – Description of module:

Subject Name	Indian Culture
Paper Name	Indian Polity
Module Name/Title	Polity in Sangam Age
Module Id	IC / POLT / 33
Pre requisites	Understand the Early dynastic history of South India
Objectives	To know about the political conditions of the Sangam age based on the literary evidences of the Sangam and post-Sangam period. The literature provides information regarding the nature of Sangam polity, political achievements of the kingdoms, various administrative units and other political conditions of the early Tamils.
Keywords	Sangam Age, Literature, Kingdom, Polity, State

E-text (Quadrant-I) :**1. Introduction**

The Sangam Age is a landmark in the history of south India. The word '*sangam*' is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word '*sangha*', which means a group of persons or an association. The Tamil Sangam was an academy of poets and bards who flourished in three different periods and in different places under the patronage of the Pandyan kings of the Sangam age. It is believed that the first Sangam was attended by gods and legendary sages, and its seat was Then Madurai. All the works of the first Sangam have perished. The seat of the second Sangam was Kapatapuram, another capital of the Sangam Pandyas. It was attended by several poets and produced a large mass of literature, but only Tolkappiyam (the early Tamil grammar work) has survived.

The seat of the third Sangam was the present Madurai. It has also produced vast literature, but only a fraction of it has survived. It is this fraction which constitutes the extant body of Sangam literature. The age of the Sangam is the age to which the Sangam literature belonged. The Sangam literature comprises a mine of information on political, socio-economic and cultural conditions of Tami country around the beginning of the Christian era.



2. Sangam Literature and Other Sources

We have abundant literature from Sangam period (1st century onwards) which contains several references to the Tamil kings and their kingdoms. According to Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, the Sangam literature which combines idealism with realism and classic grace with indigenous industry and strength is rightly regarded as constituting the Augustan age of Tamil literature. It deals with secular matter relating to public and social activity like government, war, charity, trade, worship, agriculture, etc.

Among the poets and thinkers of the Sangam age Tolkappiyar, Tiruvalluvar, Ilango Adigal, Sittalai Sattanar, Nakkirar, Kapilar, Paranan, Auvvaiyar, Mangudi Marudanan and a few others are outstanding. They produced outstanding literary works to the history of south India. These Sangam literatures consists of the earliest Tamil works (such as the *Tolkappiyam*), the ten poems (*Pattupattu*), the eight anthologies (*Ettutogai*) and the eighteen minor works (*Padinenkilkanakku*), and the five epics. The chief merits of the Sangam works is their absolute devotion to standards and adherence to literary conventions



Old Tamil Scripts

The Sangam literature, gives a vivid picture about the political and social life of the early Tamils. Several synchronisms contained in their literature, help us to determine certain historical events. As pointed out by V.Kanakasabhai Pillai in his monumental

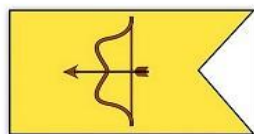
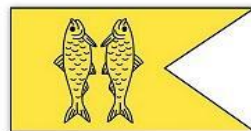
work 'The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago' the Tamil grammar *Tolkappiyam* gives valuable accounts about the life style of the people of Tamilakam. As indicated in this literature there was frequent wars among the different ruling families. But it does not mean that there was no peace in the Tami country. Only such men who were specially engaged were participating in the wars, while others were carrying on agriculture, trade and commerce, art, literature and other peaceful pursuits.

Apart from the Sangam literature we have other source materials to understand the cultural past of the early Tamils. In the northern Indian sources the Asokan inscription, which is the earliest reference speaks about the kingdoms of south India, that is, the regions comprising modern Andhra Pradesh, Madras, Mysore and Kerala as those of the Cholas, Pandyas, Satiyaputras and Keralaputras. The Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela of Kalinga speaks of defeating the Tamil confederacy, which was doubtlessly that of the 'three crowned kings' the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas and their feudatories.

3. Three Kingdoms of the Sangam Age

During the Sangam age, the three empires, the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas ruled in Tamil country. Besides these main three powers we also find references to the number of small chieftains in south Indian history. Wars and tribal clashes were frequent and the king, who was at this stage essentially, a war leader, was primarily concerned with the protection of his tribal kingdom. Though there were constant wars among the rulers of the three kingdoms for dominion of states and territory, they were all promoters of literature and other classical literary works. Under their rule many changes took place in the regional politics, socio-economic and cultural sphere of south Indian history.

THREE ANCIENT TAMIL EMPIRES



Chera Dynasty - Bow & Arrow

Chola Dynasty - Jumping Tiger

Pandyan Dynasty - Twin Fish

3.1. The Cheras

Among the three kingdoms of the Sangam age, the Cheras were prominent, ruled over parts of modern Kerala, which was situated to the west and north of the land of the Pandyas. It included the narrow strip of land between the sea and the mountains and covered portions of both Kerala and Tamilnadu. Their capital was Vanji and important seaports were Tondi and Musiri. They had the Palmyra flowers as their garland. Their royal symbol was bow and arrow. The Cheras were known by several titles such as *Vanavar*, *Villavar* and *Malaiyar*. In the early centuries of the Christian era, the Chera country was as important as the country of the Cholas and the Pandyas. It owed its importance to trade with the Romans.

The Pugalur inscription of the first century A.D. refers to three generations of Chera rulers. One of the Sangam work Padirrupattu also provides information on Chera kings and their political achievements. Udhayan Cheralathan, Imayavaramban Nedum Cheralathan and Cheran Senguttuvan were the famous rulers of this dynasty.

The earliest Chera king was Udhayan Cheralathan, who ruled from the capital city Vanji. He was a great warrior. He is said to have defeated Satakarni II, the Satavahana king. Nedum Cheralathan was the successor of Udhayan Cheralathan. He was called '*Imayavaramban*', he who had the Himalayas as his boundary. He fought a war with the contemporary Chola king in which both the monarchs lost their lives and their queens performed *Sati*. He won a naval victory against a local chieftain on the Malabar Coast. He possessed a large army. With the help of the army he defeated the Yavanas and imprisoned many of them. He built many temples and performed many sacrifices. That shows that Brahmanism had influence in the Chera kingdom.

According to the Chera poets their greatest king was Cheran Senguttuvan, the 'Red or Good Chera'. He belonged to 2nd century A.D. Among his military achievements, his expedition to the Himalayas was remarkable. He defeated many north Indian monarchs. It is said that he invaded the north and crossed the Ganga. But all this seems to be exaggerated. His younger brother was Ilango Adigal, the author of *Silappathikaram*. Senguttuvan introduced the *Pattini* cult or the worship of Kannagi as the ideal wife in Tamil Nadu. The stone for making the idol of Kannagi was brought by him after his Himalayan expedition. The consecration ceremony was attended by many princes including Gajabhagu II from Sri Lanka.



Cheran Senguttuvan had erected this Kannagi Temple, (known as Kannagi Kottam)

Cheran Senguttuvan was succeeded by his half-brother Perunjeral Adan (180 A.D.), who was a contemporary of the great Chola monarch Karikalan. We learn from the poems Puram and Aham, that while fighting against the Cholas in the battle of Venni, Perunjeral Adan received a wound in the back and expiated the disgrace by starving himself to death on the battlefield.

After the second century A.D. the Chera power declined, and we have nothing of its history until the eighth century A. D. The fame of the Cheras lies in the liberal patronage to Tamil poets and promotion of trade with Romans. The Chera had a number of good ports along the western coast such as Tondi and Musiri or Muziris (Muziris was a great centre of Indo-Roman trade).

3.2. The Cholas

The Chola kingdom of the Sangam period extended from modern Thiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu to southern Andhra Pradesh. The kingdom which came to be called Cholamandalam in early medieval times, was situated to the north-east of the Pandyan territory, between the Pennar and the Vellar Rivers. The capital was Uraiyur and their second capital Puhar (also called Kaverippumpattinam), which was the chief port of the Sangam Cholas. Their royal symbol was tiger. The Cholamandalam is also referred in the Sangam literature as Chonadu, Kaverinadu, Kaveri Cholanadu, Neernadu and Punalnadu. These names indicate the rich water resources of the Chola country. The Chola rulers had surnames like *Killi*, *Valavan*, *Senni* and *Cholan*.

The first Chola king was Ilamjet Senni, who ruled from Uraiyur. He possessed 'many beautiful chariots' and had fabulous wealth. The greatest Chola king of the Sangam age was Karikala Cholan, ruled in 2nd century A.D, who was the son of Ilamjet Senni. The name Karikala means, '*the man with the charred leg*'. He was a contemporary of the Chera king Perunjeral Adan. Karikala was a very competent ruler and a great warrior.



The Sangam works *Pattinappalai* and *Porunarrupadai* portrays his early life and his military conquests. Early in life he was deposed and imprisoned. The way in which he escaped and re-established himself on the throne is well portrayed by the author of *Pattinappalai*, a long poem on the Chola capital Kaveripattinam in the *Pattuppattu*. One of his early achievements was the victory at Venni (15 miles to the east of Tanjavur). In the Battle of Venni he defeated the mighty confederacy consisting of the Cheras, Pandyas and eleven minor chieftains. This event is mentioned in many Sangam poems by different authors. The battle of Venni, thus marked a turning point in the career of Karikala Cholan. Vahaipparandalai was another important battle fought by him in which nine enemy chieftains submitted before him. Karikala's military achievements made him the overlord of the whole Tamil country.

Trade and commerce flourished during his period. He was responsible for the reclamation of forest lands and brought them under cultivation thus adding prosperity to the people. He also built Kallanai across the river Kaveri and constructed many irrigation tanks.

He founded Puhar and constructed 160 km of embankment along the Kaveri River. This was built with the labour of 12,000 slaves who were brought as captives from Sri Lanka. Puhar was a great centre of trade and commerce, and excavations show that it had a large dock. The Cholas maintained an efficient navy.

Under Karikala's successors the Chola power rapidly declined. Two sons of Karikala ruled from two different capitals – the elder from Uraiyur and the younger one from Puhar. The fortunes of the Cholas suffered a serious setback, when, according to a tradition recorded in *Manimegalai* a good part of the port town of Puhar was engulfed by the sea in terrific tidal waves, during the reign of the later Chola king Killivalavan. However, the family survived for over a century with various ups and downs.

3.3. The Pandyas

The Pandyas ruled over the present day southern Tamil Nadu, roughly included the modern districts of Madurai, Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram. Their capital was Madurai and chief port was Korkai. Their royal symbol was fish. The Pandyas are rightly famous for patronizing the poets and scholars of the Tamil Sangams. They had several surnames like *Maran*, *Valudhi* and *Cheliyan*.

The earliest kings of the Pandyan dynasty were Nediyan, Palyagasalai Mudukudumi Peruvaludhi and Mudathirumaran. Mudukudumi Peruvaludhi was a follower of Vedic religion. He constructed many sacrificial altars. It appears that he was a heroic soldier whose fame spread to the north. He might have defeated some petty rival tribes, but his achievements were glorified by the court poets.

The greatest Pandya king of the Sangam age was Neduncheliyan. There were two Neduncheliyans. The first one was known as Aryappadai Kadantha Neduncheliyan (one who won victories over the Aryan forces). He was responsible for the execution of Kovalan for which Kannagi burnt Madurai. The other was Talaiyalanganattu Cheruvendra (He who won the battle at Talaiyalanganam) Neduncheliyan. He was the hero of the *Maduraikkanchi*. He was praised by Nakkirar and Mangudi Maruthanar. He wore this title after defeating his enemies at the Battle of Talaiyalanganam, which is located in the Tanjore district. By this victory Neduncheliyan gained control over the entire Tamil Nadu. *Maduraikkanchi* written by Mangudi Maruthanar describes the political and socio-economic condition of the Pandya country including the flourishing seaport of Korkai. The last famous Pandyan king was Uggira Peruvaludhi. The Pandyan rule during the Sangam Age began to decline due to the invasion of the Kalabhras in the 3rd century A.D.



Temple between hill symbols and elephant coin of the Pandyas Sri Lanka 1st century CE.

The Pandyan kings profited from trade with the Roman Empire and sent embassies to the Roman emperor Augustus. The Pandyan port Korkai was a great centre of trade and commerce, another port was Saliyur. The Brahmins enjoyed considerable influence, and the Pandya kings performed Vedic sacrifices in the early centuries of the Christian era.

3.4. Local Chieftains

Apart from the three major Tamil kingdoms, there were number of local chieftains, ruled in different parts of Tamil country during the Sangam age. They were known by as *Velirs*. The Sangam literature furnishes lot of information about the small chieftains. The most famous among the local chieftains were called 'seven patrons' or '*kadaiyelu vallalkal*'. These seven patrons were Pari, Ori, Malayan, Elini, Pegan, Aay and Nalli. The greatest patron among them was Pari, who ruled over the Parambu.

These local chieftains had extended their patronage to the Tamil poets like Kapilar, Auvvaiyar, Nallathanar and Perunchithiranan. In turn, these poets hailed them for their generosity. They had also extended their help to resolve any disputes between the rulers. The local chieftains made generous donations to the poets, bards as their consorts like the Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers. The chieftains had also played a significant role in the political, social and cultural domains during the Sangam age.

4. Nature of Sangam Polity

The Sangam polity is tribal in nature. The Sangam king was the clan leader as well as its military commander. M.G.S.Narayanan considers the Sangam monarch as just a tribal military chieftain in the process of developing into a regular king with an urban court, legal system and a bureaucratic master. The Sangam ruler organized wars not for territorial conquests, but for plunder and destruction of the enemy's fields and cattle. There are suggestions about the standardization of inter-state relations by the Brahmin ambassadors, but on the whole from a tribal state of culture.

Cattle raiding were an important part of the inter-tribal warfare. There were all sorts of myths, legends and superstitions regarding military heroes and martyrdom. The Sangam poems indicated that each king or chieftain had totem tree and totem flower and they were guarded with almost care and exhibited with great pride. Regular patrilineal succession is noted in all the three kingdoms and marriages between the royal families are mentioned in literature. Territorial sentiment or royalty is not in evidence except in the case of cities and villages, but tribal affinities of the *Ayes*, *Vels*, etc. are celebrated in the poems of the Sangam literature.

4.1. Monarchy

In the Sangam age, monarchy was the institution of administrative mechanism among the ancient Tamils. In the case of monarchy there are two types: firstly among the Sangam rulers only three rulers alone are mentioned as *muvendar* or three crowned heads and other rulers are referred as small chieftains or '*kurunila mannar*'. The Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers are known as *muvendar* and Pegan, Ori, Pari, Kari, Adiyaman and others are called as '*kurunila mannarkal*' (small chieftains).

Among the *muvendar* the Cholas had control over the fully irrigated fertile Kaveri basin and delta region. The Pandyas ruled over the predominantly pastoral (Mullai region) and the littoral tracts (Neytal region) and the Cheras over the hilly area (Kurunji region) in the West. The extent of territory over which each of three crowned monarchs held sway was never constant. The Tamil classics make explicit reference to the local chieftains not along with the *muvendar* but apart from them. The chieftains ruled independently. Some of them were equal in powers to the *muvendar*. The chieftains were traditionally organized political factors with recognized rights and duties and not a product of monarchical weakness.

Monarchy was the form of the government during the Sangam period. The king was the hereditary head of the state in the ancient Tamil polity. However, he appears to have not been an absolute monarch as his powers were restricted by the existence of five councils or the assemblies. The eldest son of the reigning king generally succeeded his father; and the throne was inherited by him as by right and was called *murai mudal kattil*. The younger princes were known as *Ilango, Ilanjelian Ilanjeral, Ilankosar, Ilaveliman, Ilavichchikkon*. The right of succession was called 'tayam' or 'urimai'. The right of succession to a throne acquired by virtue of conquest was differentiated from the right of succession acquired by birth.

The king had certain basic functions such as: learning, performing sacrifices, giving presents, protecting subjects and punishing the wicked and the guilty. According to Nachinarkkiniar the sacrifices which were prescribed for the kings were *Rajasuyam* and the *Ashvamedha*. The Chola ruler Karikalan is said to have performed many sacrifices. His foremost duty was to protect his followers. The king was equated with god. The garlands and royal umbrella represented the royal dignity. The umbrella of the ruler, people believed would guard them. There was the effort among the people to make the king appear to be a man of extraordinary power and sacred virtue.

The people expected the kings to adhere to a certain decent code of royal behaviours. The king was also expected to uphold dignity of his office by looking after the welfare of the people and maintain law and order. He was also expected to be strong because that king alone could secure the peace of the land.

5. The Royal Court and Council

The royal court was the seat of highest and supreme administration. The king and his council are the members of the royal court. They were constituted by the representatives of the people, like the chief priest, physicians and astrologers. These councils safeguarded the rights and privileges of the people. The priest was looking after the religious ceremonies. The physicians were in charge of the health of the ruler and his subjects. The astrologers were to fix the auspicious hours for public ceremonies and to predict the important events.

The court of the king was called *Avai*, which is known as *irukkai*, 'olakkam' or 'vettava'. The king's court was also called *arasavai*. The king and queen appeared in the court in pompous customs and costly ornaments. The scepter, white umbrella and the throne kept the king separate and in elevated position in the court. The members of the council in theory advised the king but in practice received orders from the king. Yet they never failed to give advice when it was needed. There are number of instances in the Sangam literature that the learned men had warned the king when he taxed the people more and dragged the country to endless warfare.

The royal court was not the law making body. Every command of the king was law. The king respected conventions and usages. He was the guardian of law rather than the maker of it. Generally the royal court held in the capital city of the kingdom.

During the post-Sangam period the king was assisted by the council called *Aimperunkulu* and *Enperayam*. The post-Sangam texts *Silappathikaram* and *Manimekalai* speak about the councils. A detailed description of the constitution, function and powers of those councils are given in the post-Sangam texts. The *Aimperunkulu* according to Nachinarkkiniar consists of *Amaichchar* (Ministers), *Purohitar* (Chief Priests), *Senapati* (Army Chiefs), *Dutar* (Envoys) and *Orrar* (Spies). As for the *Enperayam* Nachinarkkiniar says *Karanathiyalvar, Karumakkarar, Kanakasutram, Kadaikappalar, Nagaramandar, Padaitalaivar, Yanai Veerar* and *Ivuli*

Maravar. We get references to *Narperumkulu*, the four great groups in the *Maduraikkanchi*.

6. Administration during the Sangam Age

6.1. Central Administration

The king was the very centre and embodiment of administration. He was called *Ko*, *Mannan*, *Vendan*, *Korravan* or *Iraivan*. Though hereditary monarchy was the prevailing form of government, disputed successions and civil wars were not unknown. The ideal of the 'conquering king' was accepted and acted on. The King's birthday (*Peruna*) was celebrated every year.

In the central administrative machinery the king was the fountain head. He was assisted by a large body of officials, who were divided into five assemblies (*Aimperumkulu*) namely:

- *Amaichchar* (Minister),
- *Purohitar* (Priest),
- *Senapatiyar* (Army Chief),
- *Dutar* (Envoy) and
- *Orrar* (Spies).

6.1.1. Amaichcher

The *amaichcher* or minister was a very important official looked after the various administrative unit of the state. The king employed many ministers and their duties were advisory. They were present in the court and advised the king in matters on which they were consulted. Thiruvalluvar in his *Thirukkural* calls the ministers as *Amaichchar* and *Ulai Irundar*. Kadiyalur Uruthiram Kannanar calls them as *Amaichchar* and *Sutram*. The post-Sangam works *Silappathikaram* and *Thirukkural* make reference to ministers of various administrative units. The ministers were famed because they were strangers to falsehood. It was their nature to give good and wise advice to the kings. There was no definite commitment that the ministers should be selected from any particular community.

6.1.2. Purohitar

The *Purohitar* of the king's court were called *Asan* or *Karuma Vinainan* or *Andanars*. All the rulers of the Sangam period had *Purohitar* in their court. The kings respected them and seek their advice in the emergency situations. A Chola king who once so far forgot himself to offend such a *Purohitar* promptly expressed his regret and the poet had the good grace to appreciate the character of the prince.

6.1.3. Senapatiyar

The *Senapatiyar* or *Senapati* was important official, who controlled and administered the army force of the state. Under his control the army like infantry, the cavalry, the elephantry, and the chariotry actively participated in warfare for the safeguard of the state. The *Senapati* who rallied the army around the banner and he continued the fight under his leadership. The *Senapaties* were so brave that they did not care even if

arrows fell on them, even if the elephants attacked them. These brave army chief were notable for a great quality and they were very courageous in the battlefield.

6.1.4. Dutar

The *Dutar* or Ambassadors were representatives of one king in the court of another king. The chief qualification of an ideal *Dutar* were pleasing manners, coming of a high family, kindness, expressiveness, a good and stately figure, a good and high standard of education, ability to time his message without betraying fear or showing favour and courage in the face of certain death. *Dutu* was a normal political activity; but they were busy during the war time. Nachinarkkiniar says “the ministers, the priests, the generals, the envoys, and the spies are the five great advisors” were busy in the execution of the central administration. In Sangam literature there are evidences to *Dutar* and their activities. The most familiar instance of *Dutar* in the Sangam period is Auvvai’s *dutu* to Adiyaman Neduman Anji. *Purananuru* gives many instances of Kovurkilar’s attempts to subdue royal anger and bringing about reconciliation. It appears that the Ambassadors were not permanently assigned to foreign courts with regular routine of political activity but were chosen and employed only when and if the need arose.

6.1.5. Orrar

The spies were employed by the king in large numbers. The spies of royal king were called *Orrar* and espionage was called ‘*vevu*’ or ‘*orru*’. The slight distinction between ‘*vevu*’ and ‘*orru*’, the former is the report of the spies and while the later refers to the act of espionage. Mostly the spies were employed during the war time. Not only during war time but also during peace the spies were employed. Espionage was a permanent institution in early Tamil society. The commentator Nachinarkkiniar notes that when spies brought information from enemy ranks they were liberally rewarded. Some times *Dutar* also employed as *Orrar*. It may be maintained that officially the *Dutar* were considered superior to the *Orrar* and that while king looked upon *Dutar* as part of his court he considered the *Orrar* as part of his personal guards and information service.

6.2 Administrative Division

During the Sangam age each kingdom was divided into different administrative units. These divisions were *mandalam*, *nadu*, *valanadu* and *ur*. The entire kingdom was called *mandalam*. There were major *mandalams* viz. the Chola *mandalam*, the Pandya *mandalam* and the Chera *mandalam*, which indicates the geo-political divisions of the Sangam dynasties. Nachinarkkiniar speaks of the four divisions of Tamil country the Chera, Chola, Pandya and Tondai *mandalams*. Below the *mandalam* was a major division was *nadu* (province). The administration of *nadus* was generally carried on by hereditary chiefs. The *ur* was a village which variously described as a big village (*perur*), a small village (*sirrur*) or an old village (*mudur*). *Pattinam* was the name for a coastal town and Puhar was the harbour area. Kaverippattinam was generally known simply as *Pattinam*, which was the most popular coastal town, involved in export and import during the Chola period.

There were many commercial as well as political centres mentioned in the Sangam texts, namely Puhar, Uraiyur, Korkai, Madurai, Musiri, Vanji or Karur, and Kanchipuram. Among these we get detailed account of Puhar, Madurai and Kanchipuram. It can be noted that the account of Madurai in *Maduraikkanchi* and that of Puhar in *Pattinappalai* are all stereotyped and do not much differ from each other.

6.3 Village Administration

The village was the fundamental unit of administration. Generally the village managed its own affairs. Generally the term 'ur' stands for village. The village affairs were managed by *manram*, *podiyil*, *ambalam* and *uravai*. The *manram* (general assembly) and *podiyil* and the *ambalam* seem to synonymous terms; and one understands that the small village met there to transact local business. K.A.Nilakanta Sastri treats the *manram* as a hall and the *podiyil* as a common place. The commentator says *manram* the foot of the tree in the centre of the village for the people to come and sit down and equates *podiyil* with *ambalam*. The word *ambalam* is meaning by a small building on a slightly raised platform.

The term '*podiyil*' is derived from '*podu*' and '*il*', meaning common place. Nachinarkkiniar explains *podiyil* also as a place where anybody could worship. The *podiyil* was cleaned with cow-dung paste and captive women were made to look after the maintenance. It was a village site, generally outside it usually under a tree where people assembled to take rest, to chatter inconsequentially, to talk responsible politics, to constitute the forum for village opinion for politico judicial purposes.

The foot of the Margosa tree supplied an ideal venue for the *manram* as it is well known for its medicinal qualities. The village institutions of *manram* and *podiyil* were concerned mainly with the arbitration of petty disputes arising in the villages. They had more powers because there was no hierarchy of officials to whom appeals could be made and necessarily village elders exercised ample powers. The village elders were not selected or elected. The people chose themselves and as they were aged, influential and perhaps rich the others rarely objected to it.

6.4 Revenue Administration

In the Sangam age, various kinds of taxes were known and collected. Out of that revenue, the king incurred his private and public expenditures. A number of officials were appointed by the king to look after the revenue affairs. The king levied the various taxes according to the customs. Unjust and unusual taxation, the demand for forced gifts, etc. were not approved.

Among the revenue of the state land revenue was the chief source of income. The land tax was called *irai* or *karai*, but the share of the agricultural produces, claimed and collected by the king, is not specified. The land tax was paid in cash or kind. The *ma* and *veli* was the measure of land and *kalam* as measure of grain. It was considered to be the legitimate share of the king. The water charge was also levied from the farmers to whom water was supplied from the reservoirs or canals for irrigation.

Other important sources of income of the state were tolls and customs duties, which were called as *ulgu* or *sungam*. The tolls and the customs were levied at all the seaports. Mainly the tolls were collected on the trunk roads and at the frontiers of the kingdom. The tributes paid by the vassal chiefs and princes, the booty obtained during expeditions and the profits out of the forests, fisheries, and elephants of the state also formed the income of the state. Booty captured in wars was also a major income to the royal treasury. Roads and highways were well maintained and guarded night and day to prevent robbery and smuggling.

A well-known unit of territory yielding tax was a *variya* (*vari* meant tax) and an officer in-charge of collecting the tax from that unit of land was called a *Variyar*. The *Pattinappalai* refers to the custom officials employed in the seaport of Puhar.

6.5 Administration of Justice

The king was the repository of all secular power and was therefore the source of justice. He meted out justice with the help of the ministers and *Purohitars*. It appears that the courtyard of the palace where the king's official court met, also served as a court of justice. Complaints were heard and enquired into and cases were decided. The Tamils of the Sangam age had most of the simple paraphernalia required to maintain a judicial system.

There was sense of justice and administration of justice during the Sangam period. There was defined institution for the discharge of justice, which is known as *arakkalam*, the place of justice administration. The king's court was called *avai*, which was the highest court of justice. In the king's court learned men were assisted the king in judicial administration. The village court of justice was *manram*, where the village level problems were settled by the elders of the society.

A clear division was made between civil and criminal cases. The criminal cases were decided with the aid of witness. The procedure was simple and justice was accessible to the entire population. The primitive system of trial by ordeal existed. Though it is not appealing to modern reasoning, it was applied on the firm faith in supernatural help or participation.

The punishments were very severe. It was disciplinary in nature. Exclusion and similar punishments were very common. Death penalty was given even for theft. Imprisonments and fines were minor punishments. This system though cruel in nature was effective in results. The threat of severe punishments is a standing warning, where voluntary submission to law is paucity.

7. Warfare

Warfare was a major occupation of the ruling classes of the Sangam period. Generally war started with the well known incident cattle-fighting. The incident was both a protest and a justification. There was no dearth of wars in the Sangam age. The kings maintained armies and weapons necessary for it. The art of warfare was fairly advanced. Methods of attack and defense were many and well-defined, well-understood and well-practiced. The army was the mainstay of the royal might. The king was an integral part of the army. They spend their most of their revenue for the maintenance of the army.

Apparently out of the taxes collected from the peasantry and other sources, the state maintained a rudimentary army and it consisted of chariots drawn by oxen, of elephants, cavalry and infantry. Elephants played an important part in war. Horses were imported by sea into the Pandyan kingdom.

The institution of *virakkal* or *nadukal* (hero-stone), which was a practice of erecting monuments for the dead soldiers and worshipping them, was prevalent at that time. The institution of *Kavalmaram* or *Kadimaram* was also prevalent. Under it, each ruler had a great tree in his palace as a symbol of power.



8. Summary

The political history of the ancient Tamilakam starts from the Sangam period. The three ancient Tamil empires the Chera, the Chola and the Pandya ruled Tamilakam roughly from the third century B.C. to the third century A.D. Together they ruled over the Tamil land with unique culture and language, contributed to the growth of some of the oldest extant literature in the world. These three dynasties were in constant struggle with each other vying for hegemony over the land. The entry of the Khalabhras during the third century A.D. disturbed the traditional order of the day by displacing the three ruling kingdoms. From about 300 A.D. to 600 A.D., there is an almost total lack of information regarding occurrences in the Tamil land. The Khalabhras are described in the latter literature as 'evil rulers' who overthrew the established Tamil kings and got a stronghold of the country. The tradition about the evils of the Khalabhra inroads has been interpreted as a social crisis, which led to the disappearance of the characteristic institutions of the time.