

UNIT

5

Evolution of Society in South India

Learning Objectives

- To understand the social and political formation in early South India from the third century BCE to the fifth century CE



Introduction

In the Deccan region, encompassing major parts of present day Telangana, Andhra, Karnataka and Maharashtra, the Satavahanas established a powerful kingdom in the first century BCE. In the south, the three family ruling houses, the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas were their contemporaries, ruling the fertile parts of Tamizhagam. But the Tamil rulers started two centuries earlier as they figure in Ashoka's inscriptions of the third century BCE. There were many common things as well as differences in the polity and society of the Deccan and Tamil regions.

Sources

Archaeological

- The megalithic burial sites of the early historic period.
- Excavated material from ancient sites, including ports, capital towns, with architectural remains, such as in Arikamedu, Kodumanal, Alangulam, and Uraiyur.
- Buddhist sites with **stupas** and **chaityas** located in Andhra and Karnataka regions (Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, etc.)

Numismatic

- Coins of pre-Satavahana chieftains and of the Satavahanas from Andhra-Karnataka region.

Stupas: The stupa is a heap of clay that evolved out of earthen funerary mounds, in which the ashes of the dead were buried. Buddhist stupas evolved out of the burial of the ashes of the mortal remains of the Buddha. Buddhist sacred architecture originated with the eight stupas where the ashes were divided. Hemispherical shape, the stupa symbolizes the universe; and the Buddha represents the emperor of the spiritual universe. The stupa has a path around it for devotional circumambulation.

- The coins issued by the Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas, and the chieftains of the Sangam Age.
- Roman copper, silver and gold coins.

Epigraphic

- The Ashokan inscriptions, written in Prakrit, found in Andhra-Karnataka regions.
- The Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions found in the caves of Tamil Nadu and Kerala such as in Mangulam, Jambai, and Pugalur.
- The Satavahana inscriptions and other Buddhist inscriptions of the Andhra region
- Short inscriptions found on pottery and rings and stones in Tamil Nadu and some sites outside India, like in Berenike, and Quseir al Qadhim (Egypt).

Literary

- Tamil texts including the Sangam and post-Sangam literature.
- *The Arthashastra*, the treatise on economy and statecraft authored by Kautilya.
- The *Puranas* which mention the genealogy of the Andhras/Satavahanas.
- Buddhist Chronicles such as *Mahavamsa*.
- *Gatha Saptasati*, a *Prakrit* text composed by the Satavahana king Hala.

Classical Tamil Literature

The Classical Sangam *corpus* consists of *Tholkappiyam*, the eight anthologies (*Ettuthogai*), Ten Idylls (*Paththupattu*). *Tholkappiyam* is the earliest extant Tamil grammatical text dealing not only with poetry but also the society and culture of the times. The *Pathinen Kilkanakku* (18 minor works) and the five epics belong to post-Sangam times (fourth to sixth century CE) and describe a different social and cultural set-up.

Foreign Notices

The following Greek and Latin sources inform us about the long distance cultural and commercial connections.

- The *Periplus of Erythrean Sea*, an ancient Greek text of the first century CE.
- Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, first century CE
- Ptolemy's *Geography*, second century CE
- A Roman Map called *Peutingerian Table*

Women Poets of the Sangam Age :

Of the over 450 poets who contributed to the corpus of Sangam poetry about thirty are women. They composed more than 150 poems. The most prominent and prolific among them was Avvaiyar. Others include Allur Nanmullaiyaar, Kaakkaipadiniyar, Kavarpendu, Nalvelihaar, Okkur Masaathiyar, and Paarimakalir.

5.1 South India during Mauryan times

The Ashokan edicts (c. 270-30 BCE) present for the first time a picture of the political condition in south India. Rock Edict II lists the Tamil ruling houses Cholas, Pandyas, Keralaputras and Satiyaputra as neighbour rulers, lying beyond his domain, where he is said to have made provision for two types of medical treatment: medical treatment for both humans and animals. The Mauryan empire at that time included northern parts of Karnataka and Andhra, while the Tamil kingdoms were treated as independent neighbours.

After the decline of the Mauryan power, and before the rise of the Satavahanas, many small principalities emerged. Although not much information is available about their rulers, their coins and inscriptions reveal that they were chiefs who controlled small territories.

Ettuthogai and Paththupattu collections have about 2400 poems. These poems, varying in length from 3 to 800 lines, were composed by Panar and pulavar.

The Eight Anthologies are 1. Natrinai; 2. Kurunthogai; 3. Aingurunuru; 4. Patitruupathu; 5. Paripadal; 6. Kalithogai; 7. Akananuru; 8. Purananuru.

Paththupattu (Ten Idylls): 1. Thirumurugatrupatai; 2. Porunaratrupatai; 3. Sirupanatrupatai; 4. Perumpanatrupatai; 5. Mullaipattu; 6. Maduraikanchi; 7. Nedunalvada; 8. Kurinjipattu; 9. Pattinappalai; 10. Malaipadukadam.

5.2 South India under the Satavahanas

The Satavahanas emerged in the first century BCE in the Deccan region. They ruled over parts of Andhra, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. From recent archaeological evidence it is understood that the Satavahanas started to rule in the Telengana area and then moved to Maharashtra to rule in the Godavari basin with Prathistan (Paithan in Maharashtra) as their capital. Later they moved eastwards to control coastal Andhra also. The work of Pliny talks about 30 walled towns, a large army, cavalry and elephant force in the Andhra country.

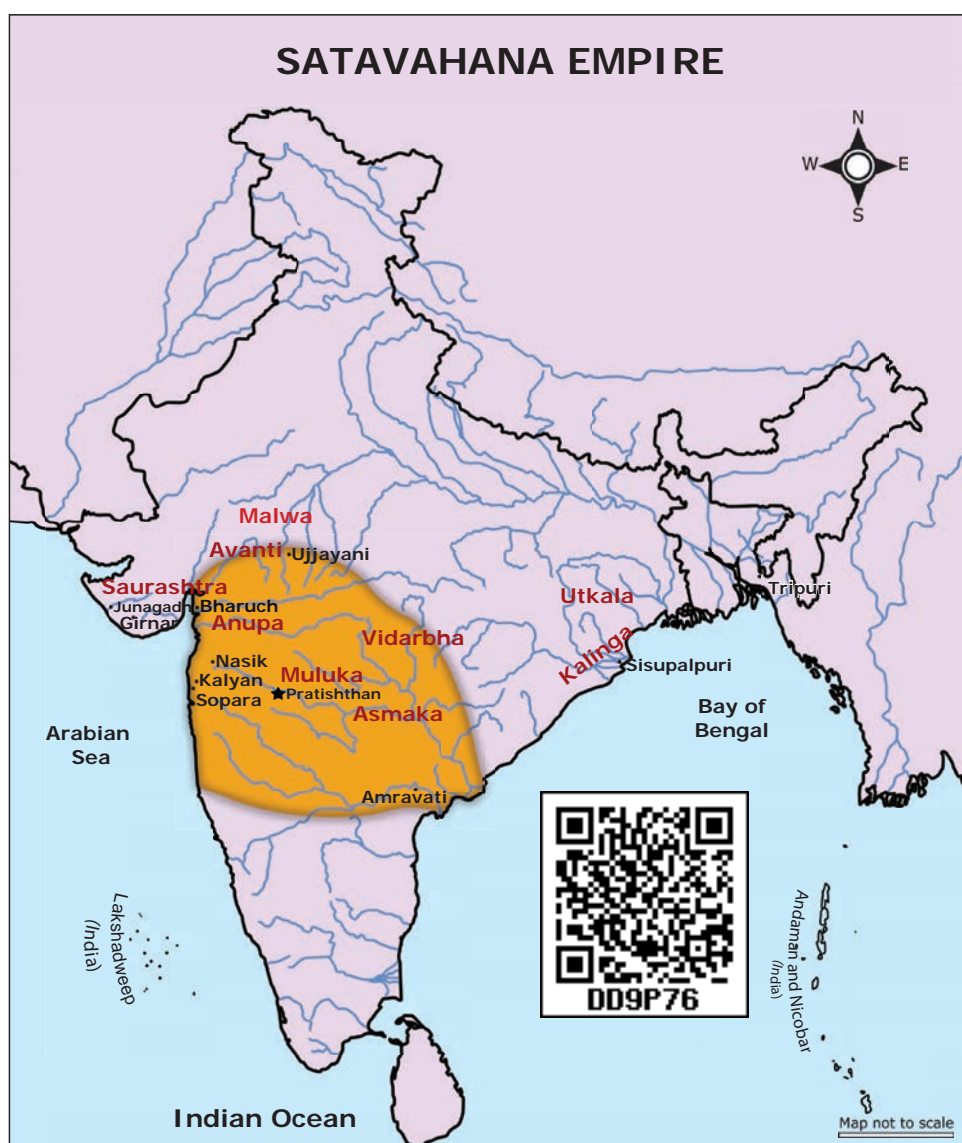
Gautamiputra Satakarni was the greatest of the Satavahana kings. He defeated the Shaka ruler Nahapana and reissued the coins

of Nahapana with his own royal insignia. The inscription of his mother Gautami Balashri at Nashik mentions him as the conqueror of the Shakas, Pahlavas, and Yavanas. He is also said to have performed the prestigious Vedic *asvamedha* sacrifice.

Vasishthiputra Pulumayi, the successor of Gautamiputra Satakarni, expanded the frontiers of the Satavahana Empire. The coins issued by him are found scattered in many parts of south India. Yagnashri Satakarni was another famous ruler who issued coins with a ship motif, indicating the importance of the overseas trade during his reign.



Vasishthiputra Pulumayi



King Hala is credited with the writing of *Gaha Sattasai*, a collection of 700 love poems. Written in Maharashtri Prakrit dialect, it has themes similar to those found in the Tamil Sangam poetry.

The Satavahana Empire declined around the 3rd century CE and was replaced by the Ikshvakus, followed by Pallavas in Andhra and the Kadambas in northern Karnataka.

Importance of Satavahana Period

Offering land grants was an important development of the Satavahana times. The beneficiaries of these grants were mostly Buddhists and Brahmins. The Naneghat inscription refers to tax exemptions given to the lands granted to Buddhist monks. Thus we notice the beginning of priestly groups attaining higher status. These land donations created a group of people who did not cultivate, but owned land. This led to the development of land-based social hierarchy and divisions in the society.

For the first time a big state covering a major part of the Deccan was established. Several rock-cut caves dedicated to the Buddha sangha bear evidence that they were situated in the trade routes linking the interior to the coastal parts of Konkan region. It was also a period of brisk Indo-Roman trade.



Naneghat inscription

5.3 The Sangam Age

The last three centuries before the common Era and the first three centuries of the Common Era are widely accepted as the Sangam Period.

The details about this period are mainly derived from the Sangam literature. Based on the archaeological evidences apart from the literary sources we can assume that this sangam Era was started atleast two centuries earlier than what we widely believe. Generally this age can be taken as the beginning of historic age in Tamilnadu.

The Muvendar

Though the three Tamil ruling families were known to Ashoka in the third century BCE itself, some individual names are known only from the Sangam poems of the first century and later. Known as *muvendar*, 'the three crowned kings', the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas controlled major agrarian territories, trade routes and towns. But the Satiyaputra (same as Athiyaman) found in the Ashokan inscription along with the above three houses is a Velir chief in the Sangam poems



Karikalan (modern representation)

a succession dispute between the Puhar and Uraiyur branches of the Chola royal family.

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. Vanji is identified with Karur, while some scholars identify it with Tiruvanchaikalam in Kerala. Now it is accepted by most scholars that there were two main branches of the Chera family and the Poraiya branch ruled from Karur of present-day Tamil Nadu.

The *Patitruppathu* speaks of eight Chera kings, their territory and fame. The inscriptions of Pugalur near Karur mention Chera kings of three generations. Cheral Irumporai issued coins in his name. Imayavaramban Neduncheralathan and Chenguttuvan are some of the prominent Chera kings. Chenguttuvan defeated many chieftains and is said to have ensured the safety of the great port Musiri by putting down piracy. But the great north Indian expedition of Chenguttuvan mentioned in *Silappathikaram* is however not mentioned in the Sangam poems. He is said to have ruled for fifty-six years, patronising the orthodox and heterodox religions. Some Cheras issued copper and lead coins, with Tamil-Brahmi legends, imitating Roman coins. There are many other Chera coins with their bow and arrow emblem but without any writing on them.

The Pandyas ruled from Madurai. Korkai was their main port, located near the confluence of Thampraparani with the Bay of Bengal. It was



Cheran Chenguttuvan with Ilango Adigal (modern representation)

famous for pearl fishery and chank diving. Korkai is referred to in the *Periplus* as Kolkoi. Fish was the emblem of the Pandyas. Their coins have elephant

Porunan) at Talayalanganam. He is also given credit for capturing Milalai and Mutthuru (Pudukottai district) two important places from a Vel chief. He is praised as the lord of Korkai, and as the overlord of the southern Paratavar, a martial and fishing community of the Tirunelveli coast.

5.4 Social Formation in Tamil Eco-zones

Sangam poems help us understand the social formation of the time. According to the *thinai* concept, Tamilagam was divided into five landscapes or eco-regions, Ainthinai namely *Kurinji*, *Mullai*, *Marutam*, *Neythal* and *Palai*. Each region had distinct characteristics – a presiding deity, people and cultural life according to the environmental conditions, as follows:



<i>Kurinji</i>	hilly region: hunting and gathering
<i>Mullai</i>	forested region: pastoralism combined with shifting cultivation
<i>Marutham</i>	riverine tract: agriculture using plough and irrigation.
<i>Neythal</i>	coastal land: fishing and salt making.
<i>Palai</i>	parched land: Unsuitable for cultivation and hence people took to cattle lifting and robbery.

5.5 Tamil Polity

In a way this *thinai* classification is said to reflect the uneven socio-economic developments of the different localities. That is seen in the political forms too. Three levels of rulers are found: 1) Kizhar, 2) Velir, 3) Vendar. *Kizhar* were the heads of the villages or a small territory, later known as *nadu*. They were the chiefs of tribal communities living in specific areas. The Vendar were kings controlling larger, fertile territories.

The Velir, who were many in number, controlled the territories of varied geographical nature, mainly hilly and forest areas, that were in between the *muvedar*'s fertile territories. Chiefs like Athiyaman, Pari, Ay, Evvi and Irungo each commanded a big area, rich in natural resources. They were generous patrons of the poets and bards. They had military power and there were frequent wars among these chiefs on account of capture of cattle. On many occasions they seem to have united and confronted one or other of the three kings.

There are differing views among scholars, with regard to the political organization of the three kingdoms. The earlier and dominant view is that the Sang



- Trade played an important role between the late first century BCE and third century CE.

Political Ascendancy of the Vendar

From the chiefs of the Iron Age (c. 1100-300 BCE) emerged the Vendar of the early historic period. While certain chiefs attained higher status (*vendar*) through the larger and effective control of pastoral and agricultural regions, others in the marginal regions remained as chieftains (*velir*). For example, Athiyamans, mentioned as Satiyaputra in the Ashoka inscriptions, became weak and did not attain the status of kings like the Chola, Pandya and Chera *vendar*.

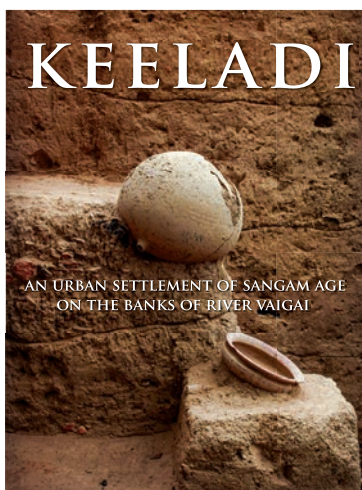
The Vendar subjugated the chieftains and fought with the other two Vendars. For this they mobilized their own warriors, besides seeking the support of some Velir chiefs. The adoption of titles was one of the measures adopted by the Sangam Age Vendar to display their power. Titles such as Kadungo, Imayavaramban and Vanavaramban and PeruVazhuthi distinguished themselves from the ordinary people and the Velirs.

The patronization of bards and poets and entertaining them in their courts (*avaiyam*) was probably a step undertaken by the kings to glorify their name and fame and also their territories and towns. For example, the Chola king Karikalan is said to have offered a huge amount of gold coins to Uruttirankannanar who composed *Pattinappalai*.

5.6 Society and Economy

In the Sangam Age the wars waged by the Vendar were involved in expanding their territorial base by annexing the enemy's territories. Endemic warfare presumably created conditions for social disparities. War captives serving in some cult centres are mentioned. Some references to slaves are also found there. Women were actively engaged in economic production and there were a significant number of women poets in the Sangam Age.

There is evidence of craft production such as bronze vessels, beads and gold works, textiles, shell bangles and ornaments, glass, iron smithy, pottery making. Craft production was common in the major urban centres such as Arikamedu, Uraiyur, Kanchipuram, Kaviripattinam, Madurai, Korkai, and Pattanam in Kerala. *Maduraikanchi* speaks about day markets as well as night markets selling several craft goods. Raw materials for the production of various objects and ornaments were not available everywhere. Prec

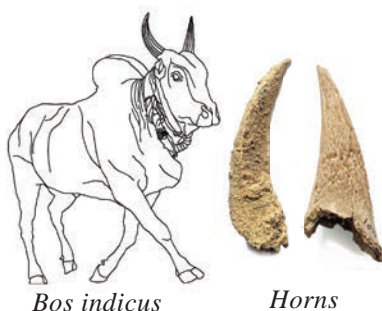


Salient features of the Report on 4th Season of Keeladi Excavations by the Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu.

The six carbon samples collected from the fourth season (2018) of excavations at Keeladi were sent to Beta Analytic Lab at Miami, Florida, USA for AMS dating and the reports have been received. The Report reveals that the sample collected at the depth of 353cm goes back to 580 BCE .

LITERACY

Potsherds inscribed with Tamil-Brahmi script have been unearthed. One of these dated to 580 BCE indicates the high literacy level of Tamil people by sixth century BCE



AGRARIAN SOCIETY AND CATTLE REARING

The Post-graduate and Research Institute, Deccan College, Pune, based on its lab test of 70 samples of animal skeletal fragments, collected from Keeladi, has reported that the species such as Cow/Ox (*Bos indicus*), Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*), Sheep (*Ovis aries*), Goat (*Capra hircus*), Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), Blackbuck (*Antelope cervicapra*), Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) and Peacock (*Pavo cristatus*) were identified.

CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY

The bricks unearthed in Keeladi excavations are similar in sizes to that of other excavated sites of the Sangam Age with the ratio of 1:4:6. This reveals that the Tamils had mastery of the construction technology.





ORNAMENTS AND BEADS



The occurrence of gold ornaments(seven pieces), and copper objects in bits and pieces, beads of semi precious stones and glass, bangles and combs made of ivory and shell, indicates the cultural richness and economic prosperity in the region. The beads accounting to 4,429 include beads of glass, paste, quartz, faience, agate, carnelian and terracotta.

IRON OBJECTS



Iron nails and parts of knives have also been located

TERRACOTTA FIGURINES

Figurines made of terracotta representing human beings(13), animals(3) gamesmen (chessman) and toys (600) and ear ornaments (28) have been found.



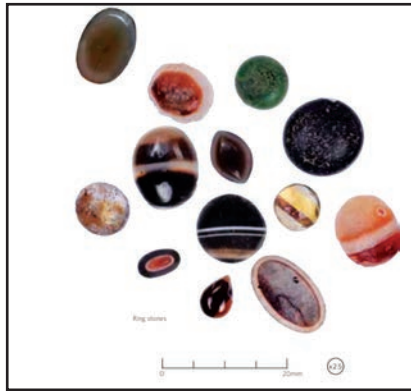
Terracotta Figurines

GAMESMEN AND PASTIMES

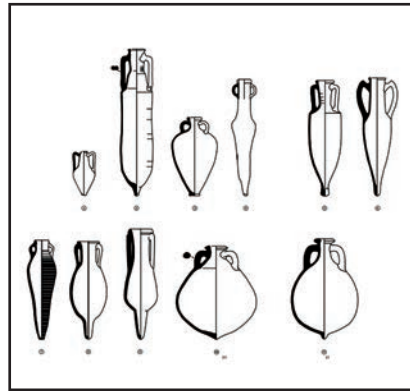


Gamesmen





Stones for ornaments, Pattanam



Roman Amphora



Roman Glass Bowls

and the arrival of foreign merchants is evidenced in archaeology as well as literature. Roman gold and silver coins have been found in many hoards in the Coimbatore region and in many other places in south India.

5.7 Ideology and Religion

The earliest evidence of the appearance of formal religious activities appears in the time of the Ashoka, when Buddhism reached south India and Sri Lanka. Asoka's daughter is considered to have taken a sapling of the Bodhi tree to Sri Lanka. There is a legend associated with the movement of Chandragupta Maurya to Karnataka region before the time of Ashoka. The Satavahanas, Sangam kings and Ikshvahas supported Vedic sacrifices. The evidence for the movement of Brahmins and the performance of Vedic ritual practices is found in the Sangam texts. But the *varnasrama* ideology was yet to take root in the Tamil region.

Evidence of Buddhism is widely found in south India. The Krishna and Godavari delta of Andhra had many important Buddhist centres. Archaeological excavations conducted in Amaravathi, Nagarjunakonda, etc. show how deep-rooted was Buddhism. In Tamil Nadu, Kaveripattinam and Kanchipuram have evidence of Buddhist Stupas. But compared to Jainism, the evidence for Buddhism is restricted to a few sites in Tamil Nadu. The numerous cave shelters with Tamil Brahmi inscriptions found in Tamil

5.8 Age of Kalabhras - Post Sangam Period

The period between the Sangam Age and the Pallava-Pandya period, roughly between c. 300 CE and 600 CE, is known as the age of Kalabhras in the history of Tamizhagam. As the three traditional kingdoms disappeared in this interval due to the occupation of their territory by a warlike group called the Kalabhras, this period was called an interregnum or 'dark age' by earlier historians. It was also supposed that many good traits of earlier Tamil culture disappeared in this interval. This idea of the Kalabhra interregnum is no more accepted as correct.

Rather this is the time when the greatest Tamil work *Tirukkural* was written along with many other works grouped as the eighteen minor works. The epics *Silappathikaram* and *Manimekalai* also belong to this period. As this was the time when the non-orthodox religions, Jainism and Buddhism became more influential, the scholars of the orthodox Vedic-Puranic school seem to have created the impression that the ruling Kalabhras of the time were evil in nature.

The recent interpretation of the period takes it as a period of transition leading to enlarged state societies under the Pallavas ruling over northern Tamilnadu and the Pandyas in the south from the sixth century onwards. To start with, the rulers of these new states were patrons of the Jain and Buddhist religions and gradually they came under the spell of the orthodox Vedic-Puranic religion emerging in the form of the Bhakti cults of Saivism and Vaishnavism. But the influence of Jain and Buddhist religions on the general society was so strong as to evoke much aversion from the Bhakti saints.

A group of inscriptions found at Pulangurichi in Sivagangai district datable to about the middle of the fifth century, name two kings. They are Chendan and Kurran. Though there is no mention about their family or dynasty name, some scholars identify them as Kalabhra rulers. The Kalabhra kingdom seems to have been uprooted by Pandyas around the third quarters of sixth century CE.

SUMMARY

- The history of south India can be traced clearly from about the third century BCE, as script was adopted for writing Tamil, and written evidence in the form of inscriptions and literature are available.
- The Cheras, the Cholas, and the Pandyas, who were at the level of chiefdoms in the Iron Age, became kings with the title of Vendar in the Sangam Age.
- The Satavahanas who ruled Andhra, Karnataka and Maharashtra regions were contemporary rulers.
- Buddhism and Jainism had a strong presence in south India. Vedic ideas started to influence the ruling class.
- Sea-borne trade in the Indian Ocean regions and with the Roman world developed.
- The idea of Kalabhra interregnum is contested as cultural activities continued as before this period.

4. Ikshvakus wielded power in _____.

- (a) Andhra-Karnataka region
- (b) Odisha
- (c) Deccan region
- (d) Banavasi

5. Read the following and pick out the wrong statement

- (i) Kalabhras were Saivites
 - (ii) Kalabhras defeated Pallavas and Pandyas
 - (iii) Ikshvakus supported vedic sacrifices
 - (iv) Salt merchants were called *umanar*.
- (a) (i) and (ii) (b) (ii) and (iii)
- (c) (i) and (iii) (d) (iii) and (iv)

II. Write Brief Answers

1. Explain Barter System.
2. What do you know from Madurai Kanchi?
3. Identify Adukotpattu Cheralathan.

III. Write Short Answers

1. The five eco-zones of Tamil land during Sangam Age
2. Karikala as the greatest of early Chola rulers.
3. Achievements of Gautamiputra Satakarni.
4. Distinction between Khizhar and Velir.

IV. Answer the following in detail

1. Sangam polity should be considered pre-state chiefdom. Give your reasons in support of or against this statement?
2. Describe the administrative structure in the kingdom of Muvendar.

3. Who were the Kalabhras? What do we know about them from Pulankurichi inscriptions.

4. Attempt an account of traders and their long distance trade during the Sangam and the immediate post-Sangam period.

Activity

1. Deliberations on various ideas articulated in Thirukkural
2. Visit to ancient port-towns in the neighbourhood to compile an