

The Sangam Age: Kingdoms and The Social and Economic Conditions

EXERCISES

Question 1.

Name the oldest language of South India. OR Name the oldest Dravidian language.

Answer:

Tamil.

Question 2.

What is known as Sangam literature?

Answer:

The word 'Sangam' means 'Assembly'. According to early tradition, three Sangams or Assemblies of literary men were held at Madurai, the center of great literary activity in the Tamil Country. It is generally accepted that these assemblies lasted from about first century BC to the fifth century AD. Many poets, scholars and bards who gathered there, produced a large volume of excellent Tamil poetry. These literary compositions were collected and compiled into books called the Sangam literature.

Question 3.

Name any two literary sources to reconstruct history of the Sangam age.

Answer:

There is no clear evidence regarding the literary works of the first Sangam. 'Tolkappiyam', written by Tolkappiyar, a disciple of Agastya, is a standard treatise on grammar and it belongs historically to the Second Sangam. Tiruvalluvar, the famous Tamil poet who attended the Third Sangam, wrote 'KuraP. The literary works of the third Sangam constituted the most important part of the Sangam literature and they are the main source of information about the life and traditions of the Tamil people.

Question 4.

Who were 'Tirukurral' ?

Answer:

Tiruvalluvar.

Question 5.

Mention any two archaeological sources to reconstruct history of the Sangam age.

Answer:

1. The Megaliths,
2. Inscriptions in the Brahmi script.

Question 6.

Why are graves of people in the megalithic phase in South India's history called 'Megalithis'?

Answer:

The megalithic culture is mostly known for its burials. The unplanned portions of the peninsula were inhabited by people, whose graves are called 'megaliths', because they were encircled by big pieces of stone.

Question 7.

How do Megaliths suggest that people of Southern India in those times had become familiar with iron?

Answer:

The megaliths contain not only skeletons of people who were buried. Iron tools, arrows, pottery and fragments of rice and other grains have been found, besides the skeletons of the persons buried in these graves. Arrow heads, spearheads and sickles, all made of iron, do show the transition from Copper and Bronze Age Culture to the Iron Age.

Question 8.

Why did Arundhati, a character in Sanskrit literature, become a model for South Indian Women in the Sangam age?

Answer:

Arundhati, for instance, had become a model for women in the South, because she personified the ideal of Chastity.

Question 9.

Name the two agricultural products during the Sangam Age.

Answer:

The two agricultural products during the Sangam Age were jack-fruit, pepper and turmeric.

Question 10.

Name the two prominent ports on India's Western Coast during the Sangam age.

Answer:

The ports of Nelcynda (Kottayam) and Naura (Canhanore) were among the most prominent ports on India's Western Coast.

Question 11.

Name the two deities worshiped by people in the Sangam age.

Answer:

Vishnu and Murugan.

Question 12.

Name the two items of trade referred to in the Tamil literature of the Sangam age.

Answer:

The Tamil literature refers to items of trade like spices, sandalwood, pearls, sea products, semi-precious stones and textiles of various types.

Question 13.

Mention the two views held by scholars regarding the origin of the Dravidians.

Answer:

Scholars hold various theories regarding the origin of the Dravidians. Some are of the view that they were foreigners, probably belonging to the Mediterranean race, who entered through the north-western passes and settled in India, about the beginning of the Neolithic Age. Other scholars believe that they were the original inhabitants of India.

Question 14.

Name any two famous epics of Tamil literature.

Answer:

'Silappadikaram' and Manimekalai' are two famous epics of Tamil literature.

Question 15.

How does the inscription of Kharvela, the ruler of Kalinga, enable us to reconstruct history of the Sangam age?

Answer:

The Inscription of Kharvela (the ruler of Kalinga) says he "destroyed a Confederacy of Tamil states (Tramirdesh Sanghatam)." The same Inscription records that Kharvela brought hundreds of pearls from Pandya kingdom to Kalinga. He also brought horses, elephants, jewels and rubies to his kingdom.

Question 16.

Hero-stone reminds us of an important event. What is the event?

Answer:

Some Tamil poems affirm that there is only one God worthy of being worshiped. The God is the Hero-Stone recalling the fall of a brave warrior on the battle field. A stone was fixed at the place where some big warrior fell dead. Since he died, he became a martyr. Death in battle was held to lead the soldier straight to heaven. The hero-stone gave strength to the people in general and the soldiers in particular.

Question 17.

Mention any two Chera rulers whose names figure in the Sangam literature.

Answer:

Udaiyanjeral (who flourished during the second century AD), Nedunjeral and Senguttuvan.

Question 18.

Who was the greatest among the earliest Chola kings?

Answer:

Karikal was the greatest among their earliest Chola kings.

Question 19.

What did the Chera region produce in large quantities in the Sangam age?

Answer:

The Chera region was well-known for its buffaloes, jack- fruit, pepper and turmeric.

STRUCTURED QUESTIONS

Question 1.

There are many literary sources to reconstruct history of the Sangam age. In this context explain the literary importance of Tirukurral.

Answer:

Tirukurral: It was written by Tiruvalluvar. It consist of 1330 couplets, dealing with three main topics namely— Aram (Dharma), Porul (Artha) and libam (Kama). It is considered a sacred book by the Tamils and has been translated into many Indian and European languages.

Question 2.

How can the Megaliths help us to reconstruct events of the Sangam age ?

Answer:

Megaliths:

The megalithic culture is mostly known for its burials. The upland portions of the peninsula were inhabited by people, whose graves are called 'Megaliths', because they were encircled by big pieces of stone.

Question 3.

Describe the social conditions that Sangam literature depicts with reference to:

- (a) The Castes
- (b) The Ruling Class and the Class of Warriors

Answer:

(a)

The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas appear as regular castes or Vamas in the Sangam texts. An ideal king was one who never caused an injury to the Brahmins. Many Brahmins were celebrated poets, and as such they were handsomely rewarded by the rulers. Karikel is said to have given one poet 1,600,000 gold coins, but we consider this comment exaggerated. Besides gold, the Brahmins got cash and land grants from the king .and noble families.

(b)

The ruling class was called 'arasar'. The members of this class had marriage relations with the 'Vellalas', the propertied people owning the bulk of the land. War body and

income from trade and agricultural produce enabled the king to maintain professional warriors. The occasions for war were many. According to the Sangam poets, the refusal of one king to give his daughter in marriage to another was a frequent cause of war. In Sangam poetry 'heroes are glorified' and wars and cattle raids very often mentioned.

Question 4.

Describe the social conditions that Sangam literature suggests with reference to:

- (a) Institution of Marriage
- (b) Position of Women

Answer:

(a)

The 'Tolkappiyam', written by Tolkappiyar, states that marriage was an important religious ceremony, accompanied by many rituals. Naturally, the Aryan culture had now much impact on the institution of marriage. Earlier the Tamils had a relatively simple conception of marriage. They regarded it as "the natural coming together of men and women, mainly due to their physical difference."

(b)

The joint family system characterised the society. Few women got good education, their status in society was not equal to that of men. They did not have the right to inherit property. There were ascetics also among women, following the Jain and the Buddhist tradition. The worship of Kannagi or Pattini suggests that the vow of chastity was regarded as the greatest of feminine virtues. In fact, the images of Pattini Devi were being preserved and worshiped by Tamils in their temples until very recently.

Question 5.

The Sangam literature gives a complete and true picture of economic conditions of the age. Describe economic life of the people with reference to:

- (a) Agriculture
- (b) Trade

Answer:

(a)

Agriculture was the main occupation of a large section of the people. Land was held by individuals as well as by the state. The land was fertile and there was plenty of grain, meat and fish. The Chola Country was watered by the river Kaveri. About this country there was a saying that "the space in which an elephant did lie down produced enough grain to feed seven persons." The Chera region was well-known for its buffaloes, jack-fruit, pepper and turmeric. The rich did not plough the land themselves. They hired laborers, called pariyars, for this job. The pariyars belonged to the lowest social class and skinned dead animals also.

(b)

The rulers had big income from trade transactions also. A large number of crafts and occupations are referred in Sangam literature. The epic 'Manimekalai' was written by a grain merchant of Madurai. The Tamil literature refers to items of trade like spices, sandalwood, pearls, sea products, semi-precious stones and textiles of various types. We also have the information that foreigners (yavanas) visited the coastal towns for trade. Metal lamps in different shapes and bottles of wine figure prominently among the articles of trade brought to India by the foreigners.

Question 6.

With reference to economic conditions during the Sangam Age, explain the following:

- (a) Significance of Occupational Guilds
- (b) Socio-economic Inequalities in the Sangam Age.

Answer:

(a)

Guilds had become an important institution in the economy of the Sangam age. The guilds defined rules of work and controlled the quality and prices of the finished product. The guilds also functioned as bankers and financiers. Guilds also carried out welfare activities and services of many kinds.

(b)

The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas appear as regular castes or Varnas in the Sangam texts. An ideal king was one who never caused an injury to the Brahmins. Many Brahmins were celebrated poets, and as such they were handsomely rewarded by the rulers. Karikela is said to have given one poet 1,600,000 gold coins, but we consider this comment exaggerated. Besides gold, the Brahmins got cash and land grants from the king and noble families.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Question 1.

What is meant by the term 'the Sangam Age' ?

Answer:

The Sangam Age refers to the period when bulk of Tamil literature was composed by a body of Tamil scholars and poets in three successive literary gatherings called Sangam.

Question 2.

Name the author of Tolkappiyam.

Answer:

The author of Tolkappiyam was Tolkappiar.

Question 3.

Name the three kingdoms mentioned in the Sangam texts.

Answer:

The three kingdoms mentioned in the Sangam texts were Pandyas, Cheras and Cholas.

Question 4.

Name any three Epics mentioned in the Sangam literature.

Answer:

Three Epics mentioned in the Sangam literature are Silappadikaram, Manimegalai and Sivaga Cindamani.

Question 5.

What was the theme of the Aham type of literature ?

Answer:

Aham type of literature discuss about ethical living in private life.

Question 6.

What were the topics of Puram category of poems ?

Answer:

Puram category of poems deals with militarism and hero worship. —

Question 7.

Name the author of Tirukkural.

Answer:

The author of Tirukkural was Tiruvalluvar.

Question 8.

In whose honor were the hero stones erected during the Sangam Age ?

Ans.

In Sangam Age, memorial stones (Nadukal), were erected for the heroes who died for the common cause of their village, country and king.

Question 9.

Name the four castes mentioned in the Tolkappiyam.

Answer:

The Tolkappiyam has mentioned four castes, namely, Brahmanas, kings, traders and farmers.

Question 10.

Name the five physiographic divisions or tinais mentioned in the Sangam literature.

Answer:

Tamil land consisted of five physiographic division viz., kurinji (hilly backwoods), palai (parched zones), mullai (pastoral tract), marutam (wet land), and neital (littoral land).

Question 11.

Who were the Vellalas during the Sangam Age.

Answer:

Vellalas were traders assigned with the duties of learning other than the Vedas, making gifts, agriculture, trade and worship.

Question 12.

Name the chief crops grown during the Sangam Period.

Answer:

The chief crop grown during the Sangam Period was rice, while other crops included

cotton, ragi, sugarcane, pepper, ginger, cardamom, turmeric, cinnamon and different varieties of fruits etc.

Question 13.

Name one center of cotton trade mentioned in the Sangam literature.

Answer:

Uraiyur was a great center of cotton trade.

Question 14.

Name the products exported to foreign lands during the Sangam Age.

Answer:

The products exported to foreign lands during the Sangam Age were pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, turmeric, ivory products, pearls and precious stones.

Question 15.

Name any two ports of the Sangam Age.

Answer:

Saliyur in the Pandya country and Bandar in Chera are among the most two important ports.

II. Structured Questions

Question 1.

With reference to the sources of information about the Sangam Age, explain the significance of the following;

(a) Literary texts (b) Megaliths (c) Hero stones

Ans.

(a) Literary texts — The Sangam literature consists of the great grammatical work, Tolkappiyam, the ten poems Pattuppattu, the eight anthologies Ettuttogai, eighteen minor works Patinenkikariakku and epics, such as, Silappadikaram, Manimegalai and SivagaCindamani.

(b) Megaliths — These are huge stones found at most of burial sites. A box-like structure was erected with the stone slabs, resting on each other without any mortar. Sometimes there was, an opening cut into one of the sides, also known as memorial stones.

(c) Hero stones — The Tamil Sangam literature has many references to monuments raised in memory of such heroes. Hero stones were erected as part of the burial and this has been described by more than 25 Sangam poets.

2. With reference to the Sangam Age, answer the following questions:

Question 2 (a) .

Explain why the Sangam Age is so. called ?

Answer:

The Sangam Age is considered as a landmark in the history of South India. The word

'Sangam' is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit 'Sangha' which means an association. Thus, the Sangam Age refers to the period when bulk of Tamil literature was composed by a body of Tamil scholars and poets in three successive literary gatherings called Sangam. Hence, Sangam meaning confluence, refers to the gatherings of poets and bards.

Question 2 (b) .

Name the three kingdoms that existed during the Sangam Age. Describe the achievements of Chera ruler, Senguttuvan ; and Chola ruler, Karikalan.

Answer:

Three kingdoms that existed during the Sangam Age were Pandyas, Cheras and Cholas.

Achievements of Senguttuvan — Chera Senguttuvan was the most popular king of the Sangam Cheras. The Sangam works, Padirrupattu and Ahananuru provide a lot of information about him. The Tamil Epic Silappadikaram also tells about his military achievements. Senguttuvan led an expedition up to the Himalayas. He crossed the river Ganges and defeated his enemies. He reached the Himalayas and hoisted the Chera flag. He brought stones from there and built a temple in memory of Kannagi.

Achievements of Karikalan — The most popular among the Sangam Cholas was Karikalan. Both the Sangam works, Pattinappalai and Porunaruatruppadi give information about Karikalan. Even in his young age, he proved his extraordinary ability of settling the disputes in his kingdom. He was a great warrior. He defeated the Chera and Pandya kings at Venni. In another battle Karikalan defeated a confederacy of nine princes. He extended his kingdom beyond Kanchipuram in the North. Karikalan had also become popular for the development activities in his kingdom. He had encouraged the growth of agriculture as well as commerce. He had built the dam called Kallanai across the river Kavery to tame that river and the water was used for irrigation. Karikalan had also fortified the port-city Kaveripoompattinam or Puhar and made it as his capital. It flourished as a great emporium of trade. Merchants from foreign countries visited Puhar. Karikalan was generous towards Tamil poets and patronised them.

3. With reference to the society that existed during the Sangam Age, answer the following questions:

Question 3 (a) .

Explain briefly the functions of the four castes mentioned in the Tolkappiyam.

Answer:

The Tolkappiyam has mentioned four castes, namely, Brahmanas, kings, traders and farmers. The Brahmanas during the Sangam Age were a respectable and learned community. They performed their caste duties scrupulously. They served the king occasionally as judicial officers and always as priests and astrologers. They were attached to the land and were proud of their country and their mother tongue. Trade was common to both the Vaishyas and Vellalas. The Vaishyas were assigned the duties of learning, performing sacrifice, making gifts agriculture, protection of cows and trade. Vellalas were assigned the duties of learning other than the Vedas, making gifts,

agriculture, trade and worship. So the two communities were known by the profession in which they were engaged for the time being.

Question 3 (b) .

Name the physiographic divisions of the Tamil land and the occupations associated with each one of them.

Answer:

Tamil land consisted of five tinai or physiographical divisions viz., kurinji (hilly backwoods), palai (parched zones), mullai (pastoral tract), marutam (wet land), and neital (littoral land).

The occupations associated with each one of them were:

1. The inhabitants of the hilly areas (kurinji) were hunters and gatherers.
2. In the parched zone, (palai) the inhabitants lived by plunder and cattle lifting.
3. In the pastoral tract (mullai), the inhabitants subsisted on shifting agriculture and animal husbandry.
4. Wet land (marutam) was inhabited by people subsisting on plough agriculture.
5. And finally, the littoral land (neital) was inhabited by those dependent on fishing and salt extraction.

Question 3 (c) .

Explain the position of women.

Answer:

The status of women in Sangam society was not equal to that of men. The Sangam society consisted of different kinds of women. There were married women who had settled down as dutiful housewives. There were female ascetics belonging to Buddhist or Jain tradition like Kaundi Adigal and Manimegalai and also a large number of courtesans.

4. With reference to the economy during the Sangam Age, answer the following questions:

Question 4 (a) .

What was the main occupation of the people and the activities associated with it ? What were the other occupations of the people ?

Answer:

Agriculture was the main occupation. Next to agriculture, spinning and weaving were the most important and widely practised crafts. Spinning and weaving of cotton, and of silk, had attained a high degree of perfection. Spinning was the parttime occupation of women. The weaving of complex patterns on cloth and silk is often mentioned in literature and according to the Periplus. Uraiyur was a great centre of cotton trade. Ship-building, metal working, carpentry, rope-making, ornamentmaking, tanning and making of ivory products were widely practiced.

Question 4 (b) .

Explain the organisation of internal trade.

Answer:

Internal trade was brisk, caravans of merchants with carts and pack-animals carried their merchandise from place to place. Most of the trade was carried on by barter. Paddy constituted the most commonly accepted medium of exchange, specially in the rural areas. Salt was sold for paddy. Paddy was sold by mentioning its price in terms of salt. Honey and roots were exchanged for fish oil. Toddy, sugarcane and rice-flakes were exchanged for attack. There were established markets, called angadi in the bigger towns. Elsewhere, hawkers carried goods to the houses of the people.

Question 4 (c) .

Explain the extent and significance of external trade.

Answer:

There was an extensive trade with foreign countries. According to the Sangam literature, the Tamil land had certain commodities which were in great demand in foreign markets. Those were pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, turmeric, ivory products, pearls, precious stones. The main imports included horses, gold and glass. The great port cities were the emporia of foreign trade. Big ships, entered the port of Puhar and poured out on the beach precious merchandise brought from overseas. The family life of the rich merchants of this city was carried on in the upper floors, while the lower ones were set apart for business. Saliyur in the Pandya country and Bandar in Chera are the most important ports.