

Ancient Indian History UPSC CSE

(Prelims + Mains)
Supplementary Study Material

Module 12: South Indian Kingdoms

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•The Megalithic Background

- Up to the second century BC, the upland portions of the peninsula were inhabited by people who are called megalith builders. They are known not from their actual settlements which are rare, but from their funerary structures.
- The graves are called megaliths because they were encircled by large pieces of stone. They contain not only the skeletons of the people who were buried but also pottery and iron objects.
- The megaliths are found in all the upland areas of the peninsula, but their concentration seems to be in eastern Andhra and in Tamil Nadu. The beginnings of the megalithic culture can be traced to c. 1000 BC.

•State Formation and the Development of Civilization

- Cultural and economic contacts between the north and the deep south, known as Tamizhakam, became extremely important from the fourth century BC onwards.
- The route to the south, called Dakshinapatha, was valued by the northerners because the south supplied gold, pearls, and various precious stones. The Pandya state was known to Megasthenes who lived in Pataliputra.
- The earlier Sangam texts are familiar with the rivers Ganges and Son, and also with Pataliputra, the capital of the Magadhan empire. Flourishing trade with the Roman empire contributed to the formation of three states, respectively under the Cholas, Cheras, and Pandyas.

•Three Early Kingdoms

- The southern end of the Indian peninsula situated south of the Krishna river was divided into three kingdoms: Chola, Pandya, and Chera or Kerala.
- The Pandyas are first mentioned by Megasthenes, who says that their kingdom was celebrated for pearls. The Pandya territory occupied the southernmost and the south-eastern portion of the Indian peninsula, and it roughly included the modern districts of Tirunelveli, Ramnad, and Madurai in Tamil Nadu with its capital at Madurai.
- The Chola kingdom, which came to be called Cholanmandalam (Coromandel), in early medieval times, was situated to the north-east of the territory of the Pandyas, between the Pennar and the Velar rivers. Their chief centre of political power lay at Uraiyur, a place famous for cotton trade. A clearer history of the Cholas begins in the second century AD with their famous king Karikala. 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 is coterminous with Kaveripattanam, the Chola capital.
- The Chera or the Kerala country 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 Tamil Nadu.
- The Romans set up two regiments at Muziris, coterminous with Cranganore in the Chera state, to protect their interests. It is said that they also built there a temple of Augustus.
- The history of the Cheras is a continuing battle with the Cholas and Pandyas. According to the Chera poets, their greatest king was Senguttuvan, the Red or Good Chera. The early Tamil poems also mention the weaving of complex patterns on silk. Uraiyur was noted for its cotton trade.
- In ancient times, the Tamils traded with the Greek or Hellenistic kingdom of Egypt and Arabia, on the one hand, and with the Malay archipelago and China, on the other.

•The brahmanas first appear in the Tamil land in the Sangam age. The captains of the army were invested with the title of *enadi* at a formal ceremony. The ruling class was called *arasar*, and its members had marriage relations with the *vellalas*, who formed the fourth caste.

•They held the bulk of the land and thus constituted the cultivating class, divided into the rich and the poor. The rich did not plough the land themselves but employed labourers to undertake this. Agricultural operations were generally the task of members of the lowest class (*kadaiyiar*), whose status appears to have differed little from that of slave. The *pariyars* were agricultural labourers who also worked with animal skins and used them as mats.



- ✓ In the Tamil region, large landowners were known as *vellalar*, ordinary ploughmen were known as *uzhavar*, and landless labourers, including slaves, were known as *kadaiyiar* and *adimai*.
- ✓ In the northern part of the country, the village headman was known as the *grama bhojaka*. The *grama bhojaka* was often the largest landowner. Apart from the *gramabhojaka*, there were other independent farmers, known as *grihapatis*, most of whom were smaller landowners. .
- ✓ And then there were men and women such as the *dasa karmakara*, who did not own land, and had to earn a living working on the fields owned by others.
- ✓ Many crafts persons and merchants now formed associations known as *shrenis*. These *shrenis* of crafts persons provided training, procured raw material, and distributed the finished product. Then *shrenis* of merchants organised the trade. *Shrenis* also served as banks, where rich men and women deposited money.

Beginnings of Brahmanism-

Tamil Language and Sangam Literature

•The Sangam was a college or assembly of Tamil poets held probably under the patronage of the chiefs or kings. It is stated in a Tamil commentary of the middle of the eighth century that three Sangams lasted for 9990 years and were attended by 8598 poets, and had 197 Pandya kings as patrons.

•The Sangam literature can roughly be divided into two groups, narrative and didactic. The narrative texts are called *Melkannakku* or Eighteen Major Works. They comprise eighteen major works consisting of eight anthologies and ten idylls. The didactic works are called *Kilkanakku* or Eighteen Minor Works.

Social Evolution from Sangam Texts

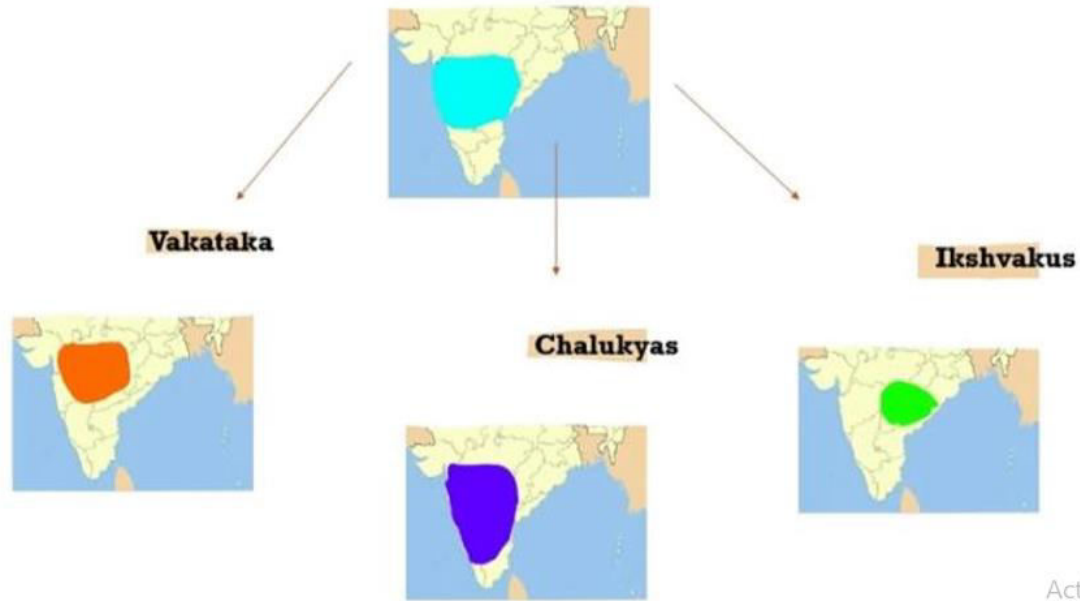
- The texts suggest that war booty was an important source of livelihood. They also state that when a hero dies he is reduced to a piece of stone. This reminds us of the circles of stone that were raised over the graves of the megalithic people.
- This may have led to the later practice of raising hero stones called *virarkal* in honour of the heroes who had died fighting for kine and other things. Many of the Sangam texts, including the didactic ones, were written by the brahmana scholars of Prakrit or Sanskrit.
- A text called *Tolkappiyam*, which deals with grammar and poetics. Another important Tamil text deals with philosophy and wise maxims, and is called *Tirukkural*. In addition, the twin Tamil epics *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*. The two were composed around the sixth century.
- The first is considered to be the brightest gem of early Tamil literature. It deals with a love story in which a dignitary called Kovalan prefers a courtesan called Madhavi of Kaveripattanam to his wedded wife Kannagi from a noble family.
- The other epic, *Manimekalai*, was written by a grain merchant of Madurai. It deals with the adventures of the daughter born of the union of Kovalan and Madhavi.
- Twelve findspots of Ashokan inscriptions in Brahmi script appear in the south, three in Andhra, and nine in Karnataka. Over seventy-five short inscriptions in the Brahmi script dating to about two centuries later have been found in natural caves, mainly in the Madurai region.
- They provide the specimens of the earliest form of Tamil mixed with Prakrit words. They relate to the second–first centuries BC when the Jaina and Buddhist missionaries came to this area.

The New Phase

The period c. AD 300–750 marks the second historical phase in the regions south of the Vindhyas. It continued some of the processes that had begun in the first historical phase (c. 200 BC–AD 300) of the peninsula.

- The first phase shows the ascendancy of the Satavahanas over the Deccan, and that of the Tamil kingdoms over the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. In that period, northern Tamil Nadu, southern Karnataka, a part of southern Maharashtra, and the land between the Godavari and the Mahanadi broadly owed allegiance to the seats of political authority established outside their areas.
- Eventually, by the beginning of the seventh century, the Pallavas of Kanchi, the Chalukyas of Badami, and the Pandyas of Madurai emerged as the rulers of the three major states. The first historical phase is marked by numerous crafts, internal and external trade, widespread use of coins, and a large number of towns.
- Trade, towns, and coinage seem to have been in a state of decline in the second phase, but in that phase numerous land grants free of taxes were made to the temples and brahmanas.
- Cave inscriptions probably indicate the influence of Jainism and also of Buddhism in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. This phase also marked the beginning of the construction of stone temples for Shiva and Vishnu in Tamil Nadu under the Pallavas, and in Karnataka under the Chalukyas of Badami.
- By the beginning of the second phase, south India had ceased to be the land of megaliths, and towards its end began the process that made it a land of temples.
- Culturally, the Dravidian element seems to have dominated the scene in the first phase, but during the second phase Aryanization and brahmanization came to the fore. This happened because of land grants made by the rulers who were either brahmanas or firm supporters of them.
- The Ashokan inscriptions found in Andhra and Karnataka show that the people knew Prakrit in the third century BC. Also, epigraphs between the second century BC and the third century AD were largely written in Prakrit.
- The Brahmi inscriptions that have been found in Tamil Nadu also contain Prakrit words, but from about AD 400 onwards Sanskrit became the official language in the peninsula and most charters were composed in it.

Satvahanas



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VAKATAKA RULERS

- **Founder: Vistashanti**
- **HARISENA: last important ruler**
- **Brahmanas**
Large number of land granted to Brahmanas
- **Performed vedic sacrifices**
- **Played a major role in the political history of North India**
- **A channel to transmit BRAHMANICAL ideas to south**
- **Contributed towards Art and Architecture: caves of Ajanta**



Satvahanas



Vakataka

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- **Chalukyas of Badami**
- **Claimed as their descent from Brahma or Manu or Moon**
- **They used to say that their ancestors ruled Ayodhya**
- **Seems: local kanarese people**
- **Kingdom: western Deccan**
- **Capital: Vatapi (Badami), Bijapur**
- **The original kingdom divided into various branches**

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Satvahanas



IKSHAVAKUS

- **Seems: local tribe**
- **Built monuments in Nagarkurnool and Dharnikota**
- **Started land grant practice in Krishna Guntur region**

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- **Pallavas=creeper=tondai**
- **A local tribe who established their authority in tondainadu=land of creepers**
- **Capital:Kanchipuram**
- **Other contemporaries:kadambas,Gangas**

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- **Brahmanas were empowered through land grants**
- **The pallavas,Kadambas,Chalukyas of Badami performed vedic sacrifices**
- **It enhanced the prestige of priestly class**
- **Important event in deep south: Kalabhras rule(evil rulers)**
- **The put an end to brahmadeya rights**
- **Patronised Buddhism**
- **The revolt was against the existing political and social orders**

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