

Economy

In the Sangam period, agriculture and trade were the main forces of economic development. The Tamil landform was divided into five tinais. The word tinai means 'land'. The different types of lands were:

- ✓ *kurinji* (mountainous region),
- ✓ *mullai* (forest),
- ✓ *palai* (parched wasteland),
- ✓ *neythal* (seashore) and
- ✓ *marutham* (agricultural lands)

People's occupation depended upon the landform they inhabited.

Agriculture

The Chola country was watered by the River Kaveri. The tanks made by Karikala for irrigation and his embankment along the Kaveri proved to be very useful for agriculture.

Paddy and sugarcane were the two important crops cultivated in large quantities. Other varieties of crops and fruits included gram, beans, sweet potato, jack-fruit, mango, coconut, saffron, pepper and turmeric.

The Sangam poems also mention milk and milk-products, such as curd, butter, ghee and butter milk. The importance of cattle is attested by the cattle raids on enemy countries mentioned in the literary works. Hence, (one of the primary duties of the king was to protect the cattle of his kingdom) (Cattle enhanced the wealth of the farmers.)

Trade

Trade was a very important source of the royal revenue. (The Sangam literature refers to trade and commercial activities, both internal and external.) Internal trade flourished in the region with local networks of trade connecting different urban centres.

[*Silappadikaram* refers to the bazaar streets of Puhar] while [*Maduraikkanji* describes the markets of Madurai, the Pandya capital.] The prominent urban centres were Madurai, Karur, Perur, Kodumanal, Uraiyur, Kanchipuram and others. Caravans of merchants carried their merchandise to different places with carts. Barter system was prevalent. There were markets called angadi in bigger towns.

Archaeological excavations have confirmed the trading relations between the Tamil regions and the countries such as Greece, Rome, Egypt, China, South-east Asia and Sri Lanka. Accounts of foreigners such as Pliny and Ptolemy mention various ports and articles traded during the period. There were three types of vessels in use in South India — small coasting vessels, large coasting vessels and ocean-going ships.

The commodities exported to Rome fetched high profits. (The chief animal products of export included ivory and pearl.) (Plant products like pepper, ginger, cardamom, cloves, nutmegs, coconut, jaggery, teakwood, sandalwood, cotton cloth of special variety called argaru were exported.) Diamonds, steel and semi-precious stones were also exported. (The main articles of import from Rome were coins, coral, wine, lead, tin and jewellery.)

Industry

The Sangam Age also witnessed industrial activities. The occupations were generally hereditary. Some of them are discussed here.

- Many poems refer to various kinds of smiths like goldsmiths, blacksmiths and coppersmiths.
- The art of building reached a high standard during this period. Special

Review

1. What was Indra worshipped for?
2. The Tamil land was divided into five different categories. Name them.
3. Name two important crops which were cultivated in large quantities.

Points to Remember

- The king was called the *ventan*.
- The three great insignias of the king's office were the drum, the sceptre and the white umbrella.
- The three early kingdoms of the Sangam Age were the Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas.
- Nedunjeliam of the Pandya Dynasty had established trade relations with the Roman Empire.
- The Sangam society as described in the *Tolkappiyam* was based on the five classifications of the landform — hills, pastoral, agricultural, deserts and coastal.

references have been made about carpenters who made boats with face of horses, elephants and lions.

- Painters were also in demand. (The walls and roofs of houses, dresses, bedsheets, curtains and many other articles of daily use were painted.)

- Weaving was popular not only among the Tamils but also among the foreigners.

(Garments woven with floral designs have been frequently mentioned in the Sangam literature.) Dresses were made from cotton, silk and wool. (Indian silk was in great demand among the Roman

merchants.) Weaving industry was a domestic industry in which all the

members of the family, especially women, took part.

- The leather-workers, potters and other craftsmen also contributed to the industrial development of the country.

- Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism coexisted in the Tamil region during this period.
- The *Tolkappiyam* refers to four divisions prevalent in the Sangam society. They were that of the *Brahmins*, kings, traders and farmers.
- Agriculture and trade were the main occupations of the Sangam Age.
- Both internal and external trade flourished in this period.
- Industrial activities like building, weaving, leather work, pottery and other crafts flourished.

Answer the following:

1. What do you mean by tinai? Mention all the different types of tinais.
2. Discuss the trading system of the people of Sangam period.
3. State the industrial activities of the Sangam Age.