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Tamil was the oldest spoken literary language of south India that is South of Nilgiris. Evidence as it is shows that there was a body of literature in Tamil which has had unbroken development over 20 centuries the first period of that literature is associated with the sangam ara. Tamil tradition refers of three literary Academic (Sangams) which met at Madurai. The first was attended by gods and legendary sages but all its works have perished. Of the second only one survives-Tolkappiyam the earliest surviving Tamil grammar. Munch of the literary writings of this period have perished. Legendry and traditional accounts mention the loss of many texts on the occasion of a deluge. Today's extant body of sangam literature is but a fraction of a vast literature.

The book Agattiyam presumed to be written by St. Agattiyar is present in small shreds of sutras here and there as quoted by medieval commentators.

The second well-known work was Tolkappiyam. It was written by Tolkappiyar who was supposed to be a disciple of Agattiyar along with eleven other scholars. It is a work on Tamil grammar literature tradition and sociology. Tolkapiyam lays down grammatical rules governing the literary compositions. This book is the fountain of all literary conventions in Tamil literature. All later changes and innovations occurred only under the sanction of permissive clauses incorporated indue places in that work.

The poets of the third Sangam worte Ettutogai (eight anthologies) . These anthologies contain well over 2,00 poems ascribed to more than 200 authors.

The other major collection of the Sangam works is the pattuppattu of Ten dyle. They are long poems.

After the period of the eight anthologies Tamil literature reveals the influence of Sanskrit. It also reveals Jaina influence. The classical work revealing these features is Tiru Kurral sometimes called the Bible of Tamil land. It consists of series of metrical proverbs and many aspects of life and religion.

And by the 6th century A. D. Aryan influence had penetrated the whole of Tamil land. Her kings and chiefs worshipped and supported the gods of Hinduism Jainism and Buddhism. Tamil poets book to writing long poems which they called by the Silappadikaram (the Jewelled anklet) . A little later appeared Manimekali attributed to the poet sattanan of Madurai. This book reveals Buddhist influence.

And the books Silappadikaram and Manimekalai belong to the early centuries of the Christian era. They were attributed to Ilango Adigal and Satyanar. The former book has been referred to by King Gajabahu of Ceylon who ruled in the second half of the second century A. D.

Manimekalai abounds in fine poetry and its dramatic element is handled with mastery. Also this book gives us glimpses of the development of fine art in the Sangam age.

Probably Sattanar the author of Manimekalai was a Buddhist. A good deal of social and historical information is found in this work just as in Silappadikaram. Added to this book has a peculiar grace which makes it unique in the books of Tamil literature.

And it is also held by scholars that in the age prior to the imperial Pallavas many Tamil works were written like Kural. The chief quality of the Sangam works is their adherence to standards and literary conventions. Kural by Thiruvalluvar has been translated into many languages both Indian and foreign.

The end of the Sangam era may be said to herald the birth of a new Tamil literature. This new age witnessed devotional poetry on Shiva and Vishnu. The age of the Sangam literature was religious but stranger to the Bhakti cult. The writings of the Alvars and Nayanars in the later period were quite distinct. Both of them began somewhere in the 5th or the 6th century A. D.