



Keeladi Findings

For Prelims: Findings of Keeladi, Sangam era.

For Mains: Significance of Keeladi Findings and Sangam Era.

Why in News?

Recently, the [Archaeological Survey of India \(ASI\)](#) has submitted a detailed **report on the findings during the first two phases** of the digging at the [Sangam-era site](#) and their significance.

- Also, **the Keeladi Site Museum** is coming up in Sivaganga that would house significant ones of the **over 18,000 artefacts unearthed so far**.

What are the Keypoints about Keeladi?

- Keeladi is a tiny hamlet in the **Sivaganga district in south Tamil Nadu**. It is about **12 km south-east to the temple city of Madurai** and is located along the Vaigai river.
- The excavations here from 2015 prove that an **urban civilization existed in Tamil Nadu** in the **Sangam age** on the banks of the Vaigai river.

What are the Key Findings?

- In the **eight rounds of excavations**, including the **first three by the ASI**, over **18,000 artefacts** have been unearthed from the site and the unique artefacts will be on display at the museum to be opened soon.
- Unearthing of heaps of pottery suggest the **existence of a pottery making industry**, mostly made of locally available raw materials. Over **120 potsherds containing Tamil Brahmi inscriptions** have been found.
 - Over a thousand inscribed potsherds, found at Keeladi and other sites **clearly suggest the long survival of the script**.
- Spindle whorls, copper needles, terracotta seal, hanging stones of the yarn, terracotta spheres and earthen vessels to hold liquid **suggest various stages of a weaving industry**. There also existed a **dyeing industry and a glass bead industry**.
- Gold ornaments, copper articles, semi-precious stones, shell bangles, ivory bangles and ivory combs **reflect the artistic, culturally rich and prosperous lifestyle** of the Keeladi people.
- Agate and carnelian beads **suggest import through commercial networks** while terracotta and ivory dice, **gamesmen and evidence of hopscotch have been unearthed revealing their pastime hobbies**.

What is the Significance of the Findings?

- **Linkages with Sangam Age:**
 - The Sangam age is a period of history in ancient Tamil Nadu which was believed to be from the **3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE** and derives its name from the renowned

[Sangam assemblies](#) of the poets of Madurai from that time.

- A recent **ASI report has pushed the Sangam age to 800 BCE** based on these archaeological findings.
- Keeladi could also provide crucial evidence for **understanding the missing links of the Iron Age (12th century BCE to sixth century BCE) to the Early Historic Period (sixth century BCE to fourth century BCE)** and subsequent cultural developments.
- **Potential Linkages with Indus Valley:**
 - The unearthed Keeladi artefacts have led academics to describe the site as part of the **Vaigai Valley Civilization**. The findings have also invited **comparisons with the [Indus Valley Civilization](#)** while acknowledging the cultural gap of 1,000 years between the two places.
 - The **gap is filled with Iron Age material in south India**, which serve as residual links.
 - According to Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department (TNSDA) Keeladi has all the **characteristics of an urban civilization, with brick structures, luxury items and proof of internal and external trade**.
 - It comes across as an **industrious and advanced civilization** and has given evidence of urban life and settlements in Tamil Nadu **during the Early Historic Period**.

What was the Controversy Surrounding Keeladi?

- After reports of possible links with the Indus Valley Civilization, there was **“no significant finding” in the third round**, which was **seen as an attempt to play down the excavation findings**.
- On the intervention of the Madras High Court, the **TNSDA has been carrying out excavations since 4th round** instead of ASI to unearth more about the history of Tamil civilization.

Sangam Age

- The word ‘Sangam’ is the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word **Sangha** which means a group of persons or an association.
- The Tamil Sangam was an **academy of poets** who flourished in three different periods and in different places under the patronage of the **Pandyan kings**.
- The **Sangam literature** which was largely consolidated from the **third Sangam**, throws information on conditions of life of people around the beginning of the Christian era.
 - It deals with the **secular matter** relating to the public and social activities like government, war, charity, trade, worship, agriculture, etc.
 - Sangam literature consists of the earliest Tamil works (such as the **Tolkappiyam**), the ten poems (**Pattupattu**), the eight anthologies (Ettutogai) and the eighteen minor works (**Padinenkilkanakku**), and the three epics.

Tamil-Brahmi Script

- The Brahmi script was the earliest script that the Tamils used.
- In the late ancient and early medieval period, they started evolving a new angular script, called the **Grantha script**, from which the modern Tamil is derived.

Vaigai River

- It is an **east-flowing river**.
- The Vaigai river basin is an important basin among the 12 basins lying between the **Cauvery and Kanyakumari**.
- This basin is bounded by the **Cardamom Hills and the Palani Hills** on the West and by **the Palk Strait and Palk Bay** on the East.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQ)

Q. Though not very useful from the point of view of a connected political history of South India, the Sangam literature portrays the social and economic conditions of its time with remarkable vividness. Comment. **(2013)**

Source:TH

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