

# More on Tamil Music

## PADINEN KEEZH KANAKKU

Music had attained a very high status during this period. One of the works, **Nanmanikkadigai** talks of the importance of the proper setting of Pann for the musical composition.

There is a particular reference in **Tirikadugam** that a person who does not know about Pann cannot appreciate Yazh. In fact, the reference quotes that there is no point in listening to yazh when one does not know anything about Pann. A reference in **Sirupanchamulam** says that **Pannisai** must sound good and people should acknowledge it. Pann sounds beautiful to the ear and that too when sung by ladies, it sounds better. Thus there is a reference where ladies have been likened to Panns in the work, **Eladi**. There are many references to different Panns in the work, **Tinaimalai**. The sound emanating from the bees when they sit on flowers is equated to **Sadari Pann**. The sound of bee approaching a Jasmine flower makes a sound of joy and this sound is likened to Pann, **Gandharam**. There are also references to Panns like **Sevvazhi**, **Vilari** and **Palai** in this work. There are very few references to the instruments in this work. There are references to yazh and comparison of yazh with an infant's voice. There are references to **Sevvazhiyazh**, **Makkolyazh**, **Vilariyazh**, and **Palaiyazh** and so on in Tinaimalai. It is also mentioned that the yazh was played in the morning and evening and that the Panns played were different. There are references to flute (**Tinkuzhal**) in **Aintinai**. It is also mentioned that yazh, Kuzhal and Muzhavu were played together. There are many references that talks about the melody of flute and its comparison to bees' humming tone.

Among the percussion instruments, the Parai seems to have been very popular. It was used for conveying messages to the people. The Parai had a loud sound and this was considered to be very auspicious. The **Sapparai**, presently called "Uzhundangottu" was used for during death ceremonies. The Murasu, which was used predominantly in the battlefield, occupied a very respectable status. The sound of Murasu is compared to the sound of the waterfalls. The book, **Kalavazhi narpadu**, hails **Murasu** as **Olimurasu**, **Mamurasu** and **Idimurasu**. Kalavazhi Narpadu refers to **Muzha**, which was also considered to be an important instrument. It is mentioned that this instrument was tuned to a particular pitch. The Muzhavu did not have a loud vibrating sound. **Tudi** was another instrument that was similar to the present day **Udukkai**. This was supposed to have 2 sides but only the right side was used and played upon. Among the musician, only the Panars have been mentioned often. It is mentioned that they sang and played Sevvazhi, Vilari and Palai Panns. The Panars also acted as messengers between the hero, who had an affair with another lady and the heroine.

## SILAPPADIKARAM

This is the foremost of Tamil works, which has a wealth of information on music and dance that prevailed during that period. This was written by **Ilango** somewhere about the first half of 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. This book has 6 chapters on music – **Arangetru Kadai**, **Kanal Vari**, **Venir Kadai**, **Vettuvavari**, **Kunrakuravai** and **Aychiyarkuravai**. The 2 commentaries on Silappadikaram, that of **Adiyarkkunallar** and **Arumpadavurai**, give a lot of information on music, dance and literature contained in this book.

The king, **Senguttuvan**, seems to have been a great patron of music and dance. Recreation in turns of feasts, festivals, music and dance had no dearth. The men and women folk seemed to have taken part without inhibition.

The ancient Tamils recognized and used the scheme of 22 srutis. The terms **alagu** and **mattirai** were used as equivalents to srutis. **Adiyarkunallar**, in his commentary to the **Aychiyarkuravai**, the 7<sup>th</sup> Canto of Silappadikaram gives the number of Srutis and how they were allotted among 7 swaras. The Pann thus arranged was **Sempalai**. The ancient Tamils also knew how to derive new Pannns by the process of modal shift of tonic and by the process of reallocating the srutis of the swaras. An example of this can be seen in **Arangetrukadai**, where the basic arrangement of 22 srutis under 7 swaras of Pann **Mercharupalai** was changed, a new Pann was derived.

The 7 swaras were called “Narambu” or by names, **Kural, Tuttam, Kaikilai, Uzhai, Ili, Vilari** and **Taram**. There are illustrations where the 7 notes are equated to Krishna, Balarama, Nappinai and so on and also to the Constellations, Taurus, Pisces etc, in the system of Vattapalai. The concept of modern Samvaditva has also been mentioned as Kural-Ili relationship where the intervals between the 2 notes are mentioned to be eight steps of swarasthanas and 13 srutis. The scheme of 7 major modes and this enlarging in to the scheme of 103 Pannns is also mentioned. There is a reference to the concepts of Vadi, Samvadi, Anuvadi and Vivadi in Venirkadai. It is mentioned that Madhavi played on yazh paying attention to Inai, Kilai, Pagai and Natpu (which are Tamil words for Vadi, etc). There are references to how a Pann should be sung with proper articulation of sound and modulating the voice in different ways, which have been specified. The four different ways by which ancient Tamils derived and arranged their musical scales is given as Vattapalai, Chaturapalai, Trigonapalai and Ayapalai. From Ayapalai, 14 palais have been derived, while 7 “Perumpannns” or major Pannns and five minor Pannns (Sirupalai) have been derived. The Suddha scale of ancient Tamils was known as Sempalai or Vattapalai and this approximates to the present day Harikamboji mela. In the evolution of notes, Taram (Nishadam) was supposed to have originated first and a reference to this found in Arangetrukadai. The pann was further divided into Tirams (Janya ragas). A Raga having less than 7 swaras was called Tiram. A Pann is equated to a Sampurna raga as Tirattiram. Of the five major Pannns Kurinji, Mullai, Palai, Marudam and Neidal, four were called “Perum Pannns” and Neidal Pann was called Tiranil yazh because it had no derivative Pannns and Tirams to its credit. The classification of Pannns in to four Jatis, Ahanilai, Puranilai, Arugiyal and Perungiyal, has been suggested in the Venir Kadai of Silappadikaram. There is a reference to Madhavi playing Sagodayazh with 14 strings. Tala was then known as Seer, Pani and Thooku. There is a mention in Arangetrukadai of the yazh, Kuzhal and drummer being played to Tala. According to Adiyarkkunallar, Seer or Pani is a combination of 4 Angas, Kottu, Asai, Tukku & Alavu.

- **KOTTU** – The beating of the one hand by the other. Has half the value of Matra.
  - **ASAI** - Raising or waving the hand after the beat value is one Matra.
  - **TUKKU** – Both beat and the wave together. Has 2 matras.
  - **ALAVU** - waiting for 3 matras after beat. Has 3 matras.

According to the commentator, Pani refers to different Talas like Pancha talas, Sixteen Talas, Forty-one Tala and the eleven talas. These Talas are said to belong to Ahakuttu. There is a reference to Madhavi dancing to Maltatala and ending in Eka tala, in Arangetrukadai. The word Tukku is said to be of 7 kinds, Sendukku, Madalitukku, Tunibutukku, Koyirtukku, Nivapputukku, Azhagitukku and Neduntukku. Tukku is also a variety of time measures consisting of two matras. The tempo of a song was known by the name miporul. It was also known as Iyakkam (present day Nadai). This is said to be of 4 kinds, Mudalnadai, Varam, Kudai and Tiral. Of these, Mudalnadai is slow tempo and is equivalent to Vilambita laya. Varnam is medium tempo and Madhya

laya. Kudai is fast tempo and corresponds to Druta laya, which enhances the beauty of sahitya. The last, Tiral, means very fast tempo.

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## SILAPPADIKARAM (Contd...)

In the Silappadikaram, reference is made to two types of instruments. They are “**Midatrukaruvi**” or human voice and “**Kuyilukaruvi**” or musical instruments. **Adiyarkkunallar** gives 5 classifications as “**Tolkaruvi**” or percussion, “**Tulaikaruvi**” or wind instruments, “**Narambukaruvi**” or stringed instruments, “**Midatrukaruvi**” or human voice and “**Kanchakaruvi**” or gangs and cymbals. Among the wind instruments, flute was very popular. It is also mentioned that the cowherds belonging to the ‘Mullai’ region were adept in playing the flute. A vivid description of how flute was made and how it was played are given. The flute was also called “**Vangiyam**”, “**Pullanguzhal**”, “**Veinkuzhal**” and “**Venu**”. There is a mention of “**Vartanai**” which means “Arohanam” – “Avarohanam”. Besides the normal flute, mention is also made of “**Konrai**”, “**Ambal**” and “**Mullai**” Kuzhal, which are made from the respective plants.

**Yazh** seemed to have been the most commonly used stringed instrument. The praises of God were sung to the accompaniment of yazh. The yazh was loved and most revered by all. The great respect to yazh can be seen from the reference to Madhavi taking the yazh from Kovalan after saluting it, in the **Kanalvari** of Silappadikaram. The Perumpanar were said to be experts in playing the Periyazh. There is an elaborate description of the yazh and yazh player in the Arangetrukadai. However, Sagodayazh seems to have been used by the debutante on the stage. The strings of the yazh were tuned to the notes of absolute pitch and the instrument itself was played on open strings. From the term “Narambu”, it is evident that in addition to different types of strings, thick guts must have also been used. The strings of the yazh were named after the notes to which they were tuned. This facilitated the playing of different Ragas or Pannas by the modal shift of tonic. Among other kinds of yazh mentioned are Periyazh and Siriyazh with 21 and 7 strings respectively. These 2 seem to be the most ancient yazhs. Reference to Makarayazh with 17 or 19 strings and Sagodayazh with 14 strings are also found.

In the Venirkadai, the parts of a yazh are mentioned. It is also said that the yazh must be protected from heat, wind, rain etc. The strings, it says, should be devoid of 4 defects a) inextricable twist b) tiny hairs sticking to the gut c) Sprayed ends of a gut and d) Murukku or twist. This shows that the strings were gut wired. The Venirkadai also gives reference to the posture of yazh while playing. The exact position and posture of the hands are also mentioned. The four defects of yazh are enumerated. These are a) Sempagai or harsh note heard in the string b) Arppu or excessive sruti of string c) Kudam or dull unpleasant tone d) Atirvu or unnecessary shaking and trembling of svaras. These were considered to be serious mistakes. The 8 methods of tuning the yazh are mentioned in Kanalvari. Some technical terms used in the art of yazh playing are given in Kanalvari.

Numerous percussion instruments and drums are mentioned. They were used for different occasions like battle, sacrifice, wedding, funeral and other festivals. The percussion instruments come under the following heads:

a) **Agamuzhavu** - Maddalam, Edakkai, Sallikai, Karadikai, Berijai, Padagam and Kudamutha.

b) **Agappuramuzhavu** - Tannumai, Tagunishcham and Takkai.

c) **Puramuzhavu**- Kanaparai etc.

d) **Purappura muzhavu** - Neidalparai, etc.

e) **Pannamai muzhavu** - 4 kinds of Viramuzhavu namely, Muran, Nisalam, Tudimai and Timilai.

f) **Nammuzhavu** - Nezhigaiparai.

These have been classified based on the superior, middle and inferior distinction. Mention has been made of **Murasu**, **Palliyam**, **Kalaimurasam** and **Palliezhuchili** murasam. In the dance of hill maiden known as Kunrakuravai, Tondagam Siruparai have been made. The ‘**Antarakottu**’ or orchestral music mentioned in the Arangetrukadai includes to the beating of Maddalam, Kudamuzha, Edakkai and Amantirikai. The 3 octaves of the human voice have been referred to as **Mandanisai**, **Samanisai** and **Vallisai** for Mandra sthayi, Madhya sthayi and Tara Sthayi respectively in Arangetrukadai.

Among the musical forms, Pattu has been mentioned which refers to a musical composition. This is of two types, **Ahanatakam** and **Puranatakam**. Ahanatakam has 28 compositions starting from **Kandam** while Puranatakam has **Devapani**, etc. The 4 sections of a musical composition are referred to as **Ukkiram**, **Duruvai**, **Apogam** and **Prakkalai**. **Vuru** also seems to refer to a musical composition. Silappadikaram also mentions sacred and secular compositions such as **Sendurai**, **Vendurai**, **Perundevapani**, **Sirudevapani**, **Muttakam**, **Peruvannam**, **Atruvarai**, **Kanalvari**, **Virimuran** and **Talaippogumandilam**. The musical compositions of the folk category seem to be of 4 kinds – **Ammanaivari**, **Kandukavari**, **Usalvari** and **Vallaippattu**.

Silappadikaram also gives information on the education of a dancer. The dance teacher was said to be adept in **Desi** (secular), **Margam** (orthodox), **Ahakuthur**, **Purakuthur**, **Santi**, **Vinodam** and a number of **Kuthus** collectively called **Palavagaikuthu**. The teacher also had a sound knowledge of Adal (11 kinds of dances), Padal (songs), Kottu (musical instruments), Pani (Measured beats), Tukku (Time beats) and of various gestures. The characteristics of a music teacher, composer, flautist, drummer, yazh player and stage setting are dealt with elaborately. The description of actual dance is also given. Thus Silappadikaram shows an advanced state of evolution in the art of music.

## Carnatic Music in Tamil Literature

*Written by K.S.S.Ragham. Published in Nadasurabhi Souvenir 2006*

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Two of the most important contributions of South India to the world body of knowledge are Carnatic Music and Tamil literature. Both these fields are ancient, rich and provide intellectual and emotional satisfaction to millions of people.

It is interesting to note that Tamil literature (particularly Iyal, in Prose and poetry form) contains in itself vast amounts of knowledge on Music. Starting from the earliest Tamil Literature available to us today (around 200 BC\*), it is possible to trace the various forms of music (Isai) that had existed in different periods and the way it has transformed into today's Carnatic music, by absorbing techniques from other Indian forms of music.

During the Sangam Age (500 BC to 200 AD\*), there are enormous amounts of Tamil literature produced, most of which are available even today. They are mostly in Verse (Seyyul) form and concern with the rules of righteous living (Aram). There are, however many references of well developed music and musical instruments, even at that stage. The popular “Kuzhal Inidhu Yazh Inidhu” verse of Thiruvalluvar, besides establishing the popular use of the Flute and Veena (Yazh), also indicates that the Flute is an older instrument and the Yazh came later. There are also references to non-musical drums (Parai) that were in use at that time.

The first detailed information on music, in Tamil literature can be found in Silappathikaaram (Middle of 5th Century AD\*). This was written by a Jain Monk, Ilango Adigal. It is also from this time, that Tamil literature blossomed in all its three branches –Mutthamizh, namely Iyal, Isai and Natakam, respectively Prose/Poetry, Music and Stage/Drama.

The roots of today's Carnatic music can clearly be seen in the music and dance forms elaborated in the literature of 5th Century AD. The nomenclature, of course is different. The system based on Ragams (Pann) with unique ascending and descending scales and Saptha Swaras (Ezu padham) were already in place.

Terms in Tamil and Carnatic Music -

*Tamil Music    Carnatic Music*

*Tamil Music    Carnatic Music*

pann	raagam
padham	swaram
thaalam	thaalam
aarochai	aarohanam
amarochai	avarohanam
padham Ezu	saptha swaram
kural	shadjam
thuththam	Rishabham
kaikkilai	gaandhaaram
uzai	madhyamam
ili	panchamam
vilari	dhaivatham
thaaram	nishadham

Silappathikaaram gives fascinating accounts of the details of the musical systems in Aycchiyar Kuravai Kuravaik koothu ,mullait theempaani (presently known as Mohanam).

Sruti Bedham or Griha Bedham: Interesting details are also given as to how one raagam can generate other raagams by a process of shift in the modulation of the tonic . Thus the thuttham of the raagam mullaittheempaani would yield madyamaavathi , the kaikkilai would yield hindolam, ili would give suddhasaaveri and thaaram would yield udayaravichandrika .

The discussion into musical system prevalent in the SilappathikAram period was necessary to emphasize the depth and originality of Tamil authors in the field of music and dance almost 1500 years ago. In these days of narrow

specialization, the holistic approach to literature adopted by Ilango Adigal and others is incredible indeed.

The Bakthi Period: There was a powerful religious renaissance by Hindu Saints and poets between the 5th and 11th Centuries AD\*. This was to counteract the predominance acquired by Buddhism and Jainism during the previous century. This Bakthi movement was spearheaded by great literary work by 63 Saivaite saints called Nayanmaars and 12 Vaishnavaite saints called Azhwaars. The works of the former were compiled in the 11th Century\* as 12 Thirumurais and that of the latter were compiled in the 9th Century\* as Naalayira Divya Prabandam (4000 hymns). This is a body of great devotional literature and the medium of expression was through music and dance. The poems composed by these Hindu saints were carried to the masses with the help of easy musical tunes by singers who were called Paanars (those who were proficient in Pann-Raga) and Oduvaars (those who could recite the musical devotional poems). Even to this day the Oduvaars carry on the tradition of singing the compositions like Thevaaram and Thiruvaachakam in temples. In today's concert stage too, these compositions find an important place. It is worth noting that Ariyakudi Sri Ramanuja Iyengar, who systematized the concert format, sang at least one Thiruppavai song in every concert. This is a composition of Aandal, one of the Aalwaars.

The other important landmark in the history of Tamil literature is the epic – Kamba Ramayanam dated 9th Century AD\*. This is primarily a very large literary work and its devotional content is only incidental. As it was planned to be a “perunkappiyam” (large literary work), the poems shine with different colours and emotional content (navarasam) at different stages. It gives great opportunity to musicians to use the songs in this story, to express emotions like chivalry, sadness, anger, humour, etc., in musical form.

Arunagirinathar who lived in the 15th Century AD, composed more than 1000 songs on Lord Subramanya, which is called Thiruppugazh. This work, besides its devotional and literary value, is greatly significant due to its musical content. The songs cover all the 108 taala-s(rhythmic beats), as per the carnatic tradition. These songs are widely sung in concert stages (although the taala is generally simplified) and they add a special status and flavour to Carnatic music.

Mahaakavi Subramania Bharathi who lived till the early 20th Century has composed several patriotic and devotional songs in simple Tamil, but still fully

conforming to the complex Grammar rules of the language. Most of the songs have now been set to music and are being sung in carnatic concerts.

There are many later year composers, whose main focus was the musical content of the compositions . Although the value of these compositions to carnatic music is indisputable, it may be difficult for experts to accept them as part of “Tamil Literature”.

Tamil literature also gives details of various musical instruments used at that time. The most important one is the Yazh (similar to today’s veena) .Four types of Yazh are detailed in the Sangam classic. The Makara Yazh with the head of an alligator and canine body and limbs, the Senkottu Yazh shaped like a boat as also the Sagoda Yazh, and the Periyazh also known as Paravai Yazh. The Vil Yazh in the form of a bow points to the origins of the instrument as it was born from the twang of the arrow from the hunter's bow. Paanars (Singers) who could play the yazh were called Yazhppanars. Even today there is a place in Srilanka by name Yazhppanam.

Carnatic music was also widely used in Drama (Naatakam) from olden days till recent times. It is also interesting to note that, when the Movies/ Talkies emerged as an independent entertainment medium, they had borrowed many of their methods from the stage. This resulted in some of the earliest Talkies like Nandanaar and Sivakavi, where it was proudly announced that it contained some 40 or 50 songs, most of which were chaste carnatic compositions!!

The amount of information on carnatic music in Tamil literature is a vast treasure and it needs deep research to bring it out completely. This article is only an attempt to show an outline of the possibilities that exist in this direction.

Some of the ragas of today and their (near) parallel in Tamil Pann-s are also listed below -

<i>pan</i>	<i>raaga</i>
nattapaadai	naattai
Kolli/ kollik kauvaanam	navaros



***pan******raaga***

Indhalam/Cheekaamaram	naadhanaamakriyaa
kurinychi	harikaambhodhi
chenthuruththi	madhyamaavadhi
yaazmoori	ataana
natta raakam	pandhuvaraali
thakkaraakam/ thakkesi	kaambodhi
pazanthakkaraakam	sudhdha saaveri
pazam panychuram	shankaraaparanam
chevvazi	yadhukula kaambhodhi
kaandhaara panychamam	kedhaara gaulai
kausikam	bhairavi
panychamam	aakiri
saadhaari	pandhuvaraali
puraneermai	bhoopaalam
andhaalik kurinychi	saamaa
mekaraakak kurinchi	neelaampari
viyaazak kurinchi	sauraashtram

\*All dates are rough estimates, as different studies contradict each other as to the exact period of the particular literary work.

Courtesy World Wide Web

## **Dhevaram - Tamil Classical Music**

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## About Dhevaram and the legends behind Nalvars (the famous four pillars of Shaivism) and Nayanmars.

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Tamil as a language, must have been handed down through oral tradition from days of yore. The inscription of the letters on [palm leaves](#), barks and parchments with iron nail serving as quill must have come into vogue only a few centuries before Christ.

Tamil literature as such had crystallized much later in the 3rd century B.C. onwards when we come across references to the three **Sangam** periods known as the **Talai Sangam** with Agasthiyar as its head (3c BC) with no surviving literary works, **Idai Sangam** with Tolakappiyar as its head (2c BC) believed to have produced Tolakappiyam (Tamil Grammar) and the **Kadai Sangam** with Nakkirar as its head (1c BC) which saw the emergence of Pathuppattu (Ten Idylls) and Ettuthogai (Eight Anthologies) totaling 18 works (6 to 95AD).

The music of South Indian peninsula, of the pre-Christian era - namely the Sangam period, is called **Tamil music**. This period ranges approximately between 300 BC and 3 AD.

### Tamil literature

Tamil (Thamiz) music is one of the ancient music schemes available. In ancient times, Tamil was divided into **iyal** (prose), **isai** (verse), **natakam** (drama) and each of these flourished on their own. However, today very less is known about the Tamiz isai (verse, music) even among the educated.

Great musical works like **Tholkappiam**, **Ettuthogai** (*Narrinai, Kurun Thogai, Ainkuru nooru, Padirru pattu, Pari padal, Kali thogai, Aga Nnanooru, Pura nanooru*), **Patthupattu** (*Tiru murugarru padal, Prur arru padai, Siru panarru padai, Perum panarru padai, Mullaip paa, Madurai*

*kanchi, Nedu nal vadai, Kurinji paattu, Pattiana palai, Malai padu kadam*) are a wealth of information on ancient Tamil music, believed by many as the mother of Carnatic music. Through these books and other ancient Tamil treatises we know of the existence of different types of music, musical instruments, musical forms, Panns (Pan - the equivalent of Ragas) and so on.

Despite their very creative minds and poetic capabilities, Thamizh poets have traditionally been poor and were dependent on patrons for their livelihood. While asking for charity, a poet in Purananuru appeals to the patron by saying that - ***It is not despicable to ask for alms but to say 'no' is still worse; to donate before asked for is good but to decline when offered is still better.*** The concept of Arrup patai is defined by Tholkappiar as tribute or homage paid by poets to Kings and patrons expecting financial rewards and other gifts. The Thirumurukarrup by Nakkirar, in praise of Murugan - the deity of the kurinji landscape, is an exception. However the differences in the grammar, style and the induction of a deity instead of a human being as the patron, indicate that the Nakkirar who wrote Thirumurukarrup patai was not the one who wrote parts of the patthupattu or the one who wrote the grammatical text, adinul.



The depth at which various subjective and objective topics, human emotions and feelings, have been discussed in the Sangam texts, it appears that the authors were basically concerned with personal and social topics of emotional appeal and the religious thoughts and spiritual analysis and devotional concepts developed at a later time.

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The Sangam period corresponds approximately to the historical landmarks:

- [Gautama Buddha](#) (566-486 B.C.)
- [Alexander](#) his Invasion (327-325 B.C.)
- [Mauryan Dynasty](#) (322-183 B.C.)
- [Satavahana Dynasty](#) in Deccan (50 B.C - 250 A.D.)

The emergence of Buddhism and Jainism posed challenges to traditional Vedic Hinduism. The Tamil land that excelled in the Shaivaite tradition in the ancient times underwent a dark period during 4th, 5th and 6th century A.D., due to the introduction of Buddhism, more specifically Jainism, from North on the Royal throne. These self-punishing religions caused the vibrant Tamil traditions to go to the back burner. Through the Bhakthi movement of the 7th to 12th centuries, Hinduism - Shaivism and Vaishnavism, saw a revival. Dhevaram is an integral part of the Shiva Bhakthi movement.

The word Dhevaram (Thevaram) in Tamil language has evolved from Tamil words Dhe + aram, **Dhe** for Dheyvam, meaning God, and **aram** meaning inisai padal i.e.. sweet songs, together constituting Thevaram (Dhevaram) meaning Sweet songs in praise of the divine Lord, in this context Lord Shiva. Thevaram songs utilise simple Tamil, the language of the common folk rather than Sanskrit the language of the elite, and in a form that is easily understood by common man to sum up and propagate the **Shivaite** philosophies - part of Bhakthi movement later to the sangam period.

The period between 7th and 12th centuries, the period of Bhakthi movement - characterized by intense worship of a single God, saw a revival of Shaivism that gave its Saints - 63 Nayanmars. Among them the efforts of **Naalvar** (four great pillars) of Shaivism, viz. [Thirugnana Sambandhar](#), [Thirunavukkarasar](#), [Sundharar](#), [Manikkavasakar](#) are very important. Despite grave physical threats, they travelled throughout Tamilnadu kindling spiritual resurgence. They are referred to as 'samayakkuravarkal' or '**naalvar**' (the great four). The order in which these four great saints are mentioned is in the order in which they passed away rather than the order in which they were born, as per Shivaite tradition.

This period (7th - 12th centuries - the period of Bhakthi movement) also witnessed resurgence of Vaishnavism through the efforts of the 12 Vaishnavite saints known as **Alvars** (Azvars). They have composed approximately 4000 Tamil verses. Compared to the Shiva devotional poems, the Vaishnava devotional poems make greater use of [akam](#) tradition and less of [puram](#) tradition of the classical period. Some important Vaishnavite saints are Adal,

Kulacekarar, Tirumangky and Nammazvar. The works of the last one are very important and are sometimes referred to as Tamil Vedas. The philosopher-saint Nathamuni recovered these verses from near oblivion and arranged them as the **Dhivya Prabandham** (sacred compositions or Divine Collection), set many of them to music, and rejuvenated the tradition of formally reciting them in temples.

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## **Nayanmars**

The works of the [63 Nayanmars](#) (nayanars, Shiva's slaves) - Shiva devotees - are collectively referred to as 'Thirumurai' . There are 12 volumes containing about 18,000 songs in Tamil, of which first 7 volume constitute the **Thevaram**.

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**The Thirumurais**, 12 in numbers, are grouped into:

- **Thevaram**: The first 7 Thirumurais (3 + 3 + 1).
  - 1st to 3rd Thirumurai by [Thirugnana Sambandhar](#).
  - 4th to 6th Thirumurai by [Thirunavukkarasar](#) (Appar).
  - 7th Thirumurai by [Sundhara moorthi](#)
- **Thiruvagasam**:
  - 8th Thirumurai by [Manikkavasakar](#) and is known as Thiruvagasam (Thiruvachakam).
- 9th Thirumurai consists of:
  - **Thiru-isaippa** - contributions of 9 Nayanmars (Thirumalikai thevar, Kuruvur thevar etc). These are to be sung in Ananda Bhairavi
  - **Thirupallandu** by Senthanaar. These are to be sung in Ananda Bhairavi
- 10th Thirumurai is known as **Tirumandiram** by [Thirumoolar](#).
- 11th one consists of 40 volumes contributed by 12 Asariargal (authors). It includes among others [Kazarirruarivar nayanar](#) (**Cheraman Perumal** - A Chera King of Kodungallur, in present day Kerala, believed to have embraced Islam and migrated to Arabia), [Karaikkal Ammaiyar](#) who produced 2 works

Arputha Tiruantadi and Tiru erattai Mani  
malai, Nakkeerar, etc.

- 12th Thirumurai is known as **Periyapuranam** by  
Sekkizhar Swamigal.

The first 7 Thirumurais together is referred to as '**Thevaram**'.  
The 8th Thirumurai is called 'Thiruvagasam'. The 10th is the  
'Thirumanthiram'. The 12th is the 'Periyapuranam' that  
describes the lives of the Nayanmars.

The other Nayanmars did not produce much literary works,  
though they spearheaded the Bhakrhi movement in the south  
with Shiva as their deity much like the Alwars had Vishnu as  
their Supreme Lord, with extreme devotion.

Besides the above a few other luminaries appeared

Beyond these 12 Thirumurais, there are what is known  
as **Pillaiththamizh** dealing with activities of the deities in  
their infant days, and others viz.

- Sakalakalavalli malai
- Abhirami anandhi and Abhirami padigam by Abhirami  
pattar
- Kandar Alangaram and Kandar Anubhuthi
- Thirupugazh by Arunagirinadhar
- Vazhththu by Kachiyappa munivar
- Vanmugil vazhththupeykai - is a Vazthu i.e. an ending  
song.

and many more. However these are not included in the  
Thirumurais.

All the Thevarams were locked up in a room in  
the [Chidambaram](#) temple for some centuries. When the  
"Shivapadhasekara Thirumuraikanda choza [Emperor](#)  
[Rajarajan](#) traced them out, many of the creations were lost to  
vagaries of time (probably they were written on palm leaves)  
and the pann for many of the padhikams that survived were  
not mentioned. Rajarajan requested Madhanka chula maniyar,  
a lady from the Yazhpanar family, to specify the pan for all the  
padhikams. The padhikams are sung only in that specified pan.

The Tamil musicians are called paanar and the female musicians are called paadiniyar. The musicians were broadly classified in to **Porunar**, **Panar** and **Kuttar**. Porunar were supposed to be well versed in martial music like Parani, and were also able dancers. The Panar were both vocalists and instrumentalists. The Kuttar were dancers who possessed a sound knowledge of the art of dancing and were adept in portraying the feelings and emotions of a character.

The Porunar were further subdivided in to 3 sects:

- **Erkalam Paduvar:** Those who entertained farmers and peasants and were folk musicians.
- **Porkkalam Paduvar:** Those who accompanied kings to the battlefield. They played on instruments and sung music appropriate to the time of battle and also during recess so as to infuse courage in the hearts of the warriors and also to soothe the pains of wounded men. They played on **Tandaripparai**.
- **Parani:** They displayed their musical talents in festivals. They probably sang the valorous deeds of the kings in the battlefields. Once the festival was over in one place, they moved on to another. Parani is also said to be a type of Kuttu or dance. Hence, these Porunar must have also been adept in dancing and must have made their presentations in the form of dance operas.

The Panar had the following subgroups:

- **Isaippanar:** A vocalist.
- **Yazhppanar:** An instrumentalist who was mainly the [Yazh](#) player. There were two subsections in the Yazhppanar. They were the **Perumpanar** who played on the Periyazh and the **Siruppanar** who played on the Seeriyazh.
- **Mandaippanar:** Those who sang with begging bowls.

The main instrument used is [Yazh](#). The city Yapanam in Srilanka gets its name form this instrument. The paanar is the main character in many of the sangam literature, Perumpanarruppdai, Chirupanarruppadaai etc. The references to Tamiz (Tamil) music are there in one of the Ayimperum kappiyangal (five great ancient epics), Silappadhikaram by Ilangovaligal.

## Tamil and Carnatic music systems

Tamil and Carnatic music have plenty of similarities between them. The very famous Carnatic music has its roots shared with / evolved from Tamil music. There is a view that Carnatic music might have originated from Tamil music. One finds that the current Carnatic music has given new names to the ancient Tamil terms, fine tuned and uses the same system.

Another interesting feature is the three composers called the **Tamil Moovar** (Tamil Trinity), who lived about five decades before the Carnatic Trinity (Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri). They were Muthutandavar, [Arunachala Kavirayar](#) and Marimutha Pillai. In fact, the earliest Trinity were the peerless Dhevaram Trinity - Gnanasambandar, Appar and Sundarar - the first three of Naalvar, who were well known for their language and devotion.

The 7 basic notes known by Sanskrit names today were known by pure Tamil names such as, **Kural, Tuttam, Kaikilai, Uzhai, Ili, Vilari** and **Taram**. There are even terms for the notes in different octaves. For example, **Kurai Tuttam** and **Nirai Tuttam** refer to the **Rishabha** in the lower and upper octaves respectively. The ancient Tamil treatises like **Tolkappiam** and **Silappadikaram** mention about '**Pannati**', the equivalent of raga alapana.

### Music terms in Dhevaram and their equivalents in Carnatic

Tamil and Carnatic Terms in music	
Dhevaram (Tamil) terms	Carnatic equivalent terms
pan	<a href="#">ragam</a>
padham	<a href="#">swaram</a>
<a href="#">talam</a>	talam
arochai	arohanam



amarochai	avarohanan
<p>padam ezhu</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• kural</li> <li>• thutham</li> <li>• kaikilai</li> <li>• uzhai</li> <li>• ili</li> <li>• vilari</li> <li>• tharam</li> </ul>	<p>saptha swaram</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shadjam</li> <li>• rishabham</li> <li>• gandharam</li> <li>• madhyamam</li> <li>• panchamam</li> <li>• daivatham</li> <li>• nishadam</li> </ul>
<b>Pann of Dhevaram and its equivalent Raga in Carnatic</b>	
<b>Pann</b>	<b>Raga</b>
Puraneermai	Bhoopalam
Nattapadai	Ghambheera Nattai
Thakkaragam / Thakkesi	Kambothi
Kausikam	Bhairavi
Gandhara panchamam	Kethara Gowlai
Nattai ragam / Sadhari	Panthuvarali
Pazhanthakkaragam	Suththa saveri / Aarabhi
Kurinchi	Harikambodhi
Vyazhakkurinchi	Saurashtram
Megharagakkurinchi	Neelambari
Yazhmuri	Adaana
Indhalam	Nadha Naamakkriya / <a href="#">Mayamalava Gaula</a>
Seekkamaram	Nadha Naamakkriya
Gandaharam / Piyanthaigandharam / Kolli / Kolli Kowvanam	Navaros
Chevvali	Yadukula Kambodhi
Panchamam	Aahiri
Pazham Panchuram	<a href="#">Shankarabharanam</a>

Andhalikkurinchi	Sama
Chenthuruthi (Chenthiram)	Madhyamavathi

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In Thevaram there are 21 pans (It could even be 24 or 27 as some experts say). The entire Thevaram is arranged in sequence with respect to the pans (equivalent to [ragaas](#) of Carnatic). In the 9<sup>th</sup> Thirumurai a pan which is not used in other Thirumurai called salarapani is used.

[Karaikkal Ammaiyar](#), a lady saint who lived during the great Bhakthi revolution that took Tamilnadu to a great elevation was the first to sing songs with ten hymns called 'padhikam' in praise of Lord Shiva. The first three of the four pillars of Shaivaism in Tamilnadu, namely [Sambandhar](#), [Appar](#) (Thirunavukkarasar), [Sundharar](#) composed innumerable songs in padhikam style, rich in music that helped to revamped Shaivaism and the Tamilnadu. The padhikams together called as Thevaram, were so popular that the kings starting from the great Thirumuraikanda Rajaraja chozan appointed musicians in temples across Tamiz land to sing these hymns of music in the specified manner. These musicians are called Odhuvars. Their service continues even today in the temples.

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## Musical instruments

The ancient Tamil treatises like **Tholkappiam** and **Silappadikaram** mention '**Pannati**', the equivalent of raga alapana. Instruments like **Kuzhal** (Flute), [Yazh](#) (Vina / Harp) and **Muzhavu** (percussion) seem to have been the accompaniments for both music and dance.

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## String instruments

Yazh is the most famous musical instrument for Tamil music, as Veena is to Carnatic music. Yazh is a string instrument like Veena. The Periyazh with 21 strings and Seeriyazh with 7 strings were played by the Perumpanar and Sirupanar respectively. Patthupattu is the earliest of the Sangam works to exhaustively deal with the details of the Yazh. There were four kinds of Yazh. They are:

- Periyazh with 21 strings
- Makarayazh with 19 strings
- Sagodayazh with 14 strings
- Sengottuyazh (Seeriyazh) with 7 strings .

More information on this instrument Yazh can be found in "Yazhnool" written by Swami Vibulanandha. Some of the other music instruments referred in Thirumurai are kokkarai and kudamuzA (thala instruments). Some hymns in "kalladam" describe these instruments.

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## Wind instruments

The flute was the most popular among the wind instruments. The process of making holes in the flute is explained in **Perumpanatruppadai**. The holes were bored on the tube by placing a burning log at required intervals. There is a reference in **Kurinjipattu**, to shepherds playing Ambal Pann on the flute. The twelfth Thirumurai Periya Puranam tells about the making of flute and playing on the flute in Anaya nayanar puranam songs.

The other wind instruments referred to in **Malaippadukadam** are:

- **Pili**, a small trumpet also called **Siruchinnam**
- **Kodu** or **Kombu**
- **Kanvidutumbu** - This has a larger circumference than flute and is supposed to have been as long as the trunk of an elephant
- **Kuruntumbu** - a small flute. The pitch of this was supposed to be **"Ili"** or Panchamam. The ordinary flute also acted as a drone in addition to producing sweet music.

## Percussion instruments

Of the various percussion instruments referred to in Tamizh classical music - Dhevaram, the **Murasu** was the most popular and used on all occasions. During festivals, Murasu was played on all days as it conveyed joy and gaiety. **Muzhavu** accompanied girls when they sang.

There is mention of the **Viraliyar** playing the Seeriyazh and also dancing to the Tala played by the hand on the **Muzhavu** which has **Marcchanai** on the drum face. The **Pormurasu** or war drum was a very important instrument, which was played in the battlefield to frighten enemies and also infuse courage and enthusiasm in the hearts of the warriors. The **Murasu** seemed to have been as important as a national flag as the victorious king always captured the **Murasu** of the defeated king. The selection of wood and method of making **Murasu** is mentioned in **Maduraikanchi**. The construction and tuning of **Murasu** is referred to in **Malaippadukadam**. The sides were covered with skin, which were kept in position by leather straps. The left drum face was tuned to Panchamam (*Ili*) while the right one was tuned to Shadjam (*Kural*). In **Porunaratrappadai**, this instrument is referred to as **Udukkai** with the impression of the palm of the player on the drum face, resembling the dark color of the hood of dancing snake. The Porunar is supposed to have played on this drum with the Tala known as Irattai Talam.

The **Malaippadukadam** refers to **Muzhavu**, **Aguli** or **Siruparai** and **Tattai**. The **Tattai** is also known as **Karadijai**. The sound of this **Parai** is said to resemble the croaking of a frog and also that of the bear. This was a crude folk instrument made out of bamboo stick. Numerous slits were made across the stick and sound was produced on it by striking it on a stone or any other hard surface.

The **Kurinjpattu** refers to this instrument being used by peasant women to scare away the pigeons and parrots from the field along with another drum called **Kulir**. **Malaippadukkadam** refers to a drum called **Ellari**, which was also called **Salli** or **Sallikai**.

The works **Purananuru** and **Ettutogai** refer to a percussion instrument called **Padalai**. Another name for this was **Orukanmakkinai**. The Ghana Vadyam referred to in **Malaippadukadam** in Kancha talam is known by the name **Pandil**, made of bronze. **Paditrupattu** refers to **Kalappai**, where all the instruments were kept and was carried by the singing bards everywhere.

## Audio Renditions by me

A few Dhevaram Audios			
Title	Pann	Nayanar	My rendition
Mangayarkkarasi ...		Thirugnana Sambandhar	<a href="#">Rendition</a> 90 KB
Pidiyadhan ...		Thirugnana Sambandhar	<a href="#">Rendition</a> 26 KB
Poozhiyarkon ...		About Naalvar	<a href="#">Rendition</a> 39 KB
Thodudaiya ...		First song of Sambandhar	<a href="#">Rendition</a> 71 KB
Vetrangi vinnagi ...		Thirunavukkarasar	<a href="#">Rendition</a> 87 KB

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### Acknowledgements:

- <http://carnatica.net>
- [www.shaivam.org](http://www.shaivam.org)
- [www.srivaishnava.org](http://www.srivaishnava.org)
- <http://tamilacademy.com> - article by Dr. R. Narayanaswamy
- [www.chennai-museum.org](http://www.chennai-museum.org)
- [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)

The **ancient Tamil music** is the historical predecessor of the [music of Tamil Nadu](#) during the [Sangam period](#), which evolved into classical [Carnatic music](#) by the 16th century.

Many poems of the classical [Sangam literature](#) were set to music. There are various references to this ancient musical tradition found in the ancient Sangam books such

as [Ettuthokai](#) and [Pattupattu](#). The early narrative poem [Cilappatikaram](#), belonging to the post-Sangam period (5th or 6th century) also mentions various forms of music practiced by the Tamil people.

Music was an integral part of the compositions of the Tamil [Saiva](#) saints such as [Appar](#), [Thirugnana Sambanthar](#) and [Manikkavasagar](#) during the [Hindu](#) revival period between the 6th and the 10th century.

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## [\[edit\]](#) Sangam music

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The Sangam age grammatical work [Tolkappiyam](#) mentions the various music pertaining to the five [landscapes](#) (*thinai*) of the Sangam literature. The five landscapes are associated with a particular mood of the poem and to give colour to these moods, each had a musical mood (*pann*), a melodic instrument (*yaazh*) and a percussion instrument (*parai*). For example, the *neithal* thinai, which dealt with the incidents around the seashore and the theme of elopement, had the musical mood of *sevvazhi*, *Vilari yaazh* as the musical instrument and the *navayapambai* for the percussion. *Tolkappiyam* also mentions the musical form known as *Paattu Vannam* and various types of songs like *Asiriapattu*, *Neduvēn pattu*, *Adivarai*, *Seer*, *Ahaval Osai* and *Vellosai*, which are classified on the basis of the musical quality, metrical structure etc. Most of the Sangam age poetry utilised one or more of these meters in their compositions. Poems of the *Ettuthohai* anthology, such as

the [Natrinjai](#), [Paripaatai](#) and [Kaliththokai](#) are extensively musical in nature and utilise various *panns* to create the mood.<sup>[1]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Musical instruments

Poems of the Sangam literature contain numerous mentions of the various musical instruments such as the *Seerkazhi* , a stringed instrument of the [Veenat](#) type and various percussion instruments such as *murasu* or *muzham*. *Pattupattu* contains a description of the [yazh](#), a stringed instrument. There were two types of *yaazh*, *Periyaazh* or the 'large yaazh' contained 21 strings, whereas its more compact companion *Siriyaazh* had only seven strings. Two other types of *yaazhs*, *Makarayaazh* with 19 strings and *Sakottuyaah* with seven strings are also mentioned in *Pattupattu*. However we have no further information on their actual appearance, mode of playing and the kind of melody generated by these instruments.

The [flute](#) was the most popular wind instrument during the Sangam period. [Perumpanarruppatai](#), one of the *Pattupattu* anthologies, describes the process of making the flute. The holes in the bamboo tube were bored using red-hot embers. The flute is also mentioned in the [Kurincippattu](#) as the instrument on which the shepherds played the *ambal pann*. Among the other wind instruments were the *Pili*, a small trumpet and *Kanvidutumbu* a larger flute ), perhaps producing lower octaves The flute also acted as a drone providing a constant pitch for vocalists and other instrumen('as long as the trunk of an elephant'ts.

The *Murasu*, or the drum was the most popular percussion instrument. During festivals, the sound of Murasu conveyed joy and gaiety. *Muzhavu*, another percussion instrument accompanied singers. The drum was also used as the war-drum, calling people to arms. [Mathuraikkanci](#) mentions that the *murasu* was one of the prized possessions captured from the defeated enemy in the battlefield. [Malaipatukatam](#) describes the method of constructing and tuning the *murasu*. The sides were covered with skin, which were kept in position by leather straps. *Malaipatukatam* also mentions other percussion instruments such as *udukkai*, a palm-sized drum, *Muzhavu*, *Siruparai* and *Tattai*. The sound *tattai* resembled the croaking of a frog. This was a crude folk instrument made using a bamboo stick. Numerous slits were made across the stick and sound was produced on it by striking it on a stone or any other hard surface. In the *Kurincippattu* peasant women use *tattai* to scare the birds from the paddy field. A well-known percussion instrument is the *mridangam*(mathangam). It's a double headed drum used to accompany the *veena*(Yaazh) and the *flute* among other instruments.

## [\[edit\]](#) Musical notations

Part of a [series](#) on the

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In Tamil music, the [solfege](#) "sa-ri-ga-ma-pa-da-ni" of the Indian classical music were known by their Tamil names *Kural*, *Tuttam*, *Kaikilai*, *Uzhai*, *Ili*, *Vilari* and *Taram*. There are notations for the notes in different octaves. For example, *Kurai Tuttam* and *Nirai Tuttam* refer to the *ri* (*rishabha*) note in the lower and upper octaves respectively.<sup>[1]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Moods

[Raga](#), which defines the mood of the Indian classical music was described by the [Pann](#). Specific *panns* were sung during worship and during religious and royal ceremonies. *Maduraikanchi* refers to women singing *Sevvazhi pann* to invoke the mercy of God during childbirth. In *Tolkappiyam*, the five landscapes of the Sangam literature had an associated *Pann*, each describing the mood of the song associated with that landscape.

The Sangam landscape was classified into five regions to describe the mood of the poem and to describe the intangibles of human emotions. While describing life and romance, the poets employed the background of the natural landscape and used the *pann* specific to that landscape to provide the mood. The *neithal* landscape, which is employed to convey the grief of separation of lovers had the associated *sevvazhi pann* expressing pathos.

## [\[edit\]](#) Post-Sangam music

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### [\[edit\]](#) Evolution of *panns*

Main article: [Pann](#)

The post-Sangam period, between the third and the fifth centuries CE, Tamil music evolved to a different level of sophistication. *Cilappatikaram*, written around the fifth century CE, describes music based on logical, systematic and scientific calculations in the arrangements of the dancers on the stage to represent the notes and *panns*. *Cilappatikaram* contains several chapters dedicated to music and dance, of which the most famous is the *kanal vari* which is a duet between the hero [Kovalan](#) and his lady-love [Madavi](#). *Cilappatikaram* contains musical terminology such as, *azhaku* and *matthirai* referring to the musical pitch and the smallest fraction of an audible sound distinguishable by the human ear. From these evolved the scales. One of the first scales employed by the ancient Tamils was the *mullaippann*, a [pentatonic](#) scale composed of the notes *sa ri ga pa da* equivalent to C, D, E, G and A in the western notations. These fully [harmonic scales](#), constitutes the *raga Mohanam* in the [Carnatic music](#) style. These scales can also be found in many eastern music systems such as the [Chinese traditional music](#).

*Mullaippann* further evolved into *Sempaalai*, a scale based on seven notes. The ancient Tamils also derived new *panns* by the process of modal shift of tonic and by the process of reallocating the pitch and beat of the notes. *Cilappatikaram* has an example of this in the chapter *Arangetrukadai*, where the *Pann Mercharupalai* is changed to derive a new *Pann*. The four original *panns* of *maruthappann*, *kurinchippann*, *sevvazhi* and *sadari* thus evolved into 103 *panns* with varying characterisations. Some of the *panns* and their equivalent Carnatic ragas were:

- *Panchamam* – *Ahiri*
- *Pazham Panchuram* - [Sankarabharanam](#)
- *Meharahkkurinchi* - *Neelampari*
- *Pazhanthakka Ragam* - [Arabhi](#)
- *Kurinchi* - [Malahari](#)
- *Natta Ragam* – [Panthuvarali](#)
- *Inthalam* - *Nathanamakriya*
- *Thakkesi* - [Kambhoji](#)
- *Kausikam* - [Bhairavi](#)
- *Nattappadai* – [Gambheeranaattai](#)

## [\[edit\]](#) Musical instruments

*Cilappatikaram* makes reference to five types of instruments: *Tolkaruvi* (lit. 'skin instruments' = percussion), *Tulaikaruvi* (lit. 'holed instruments' = wind instruments), *Narambukaruvi* (stringed instruments), *Midatrukaruvi* (vocalists) and *Kanchakaruvi* (gongs and cymbals). The flute and the *yaazh* were the most popular instruments, while there were numerous kinds of percussion instruments suited for various occasions. *Cilappatikaram* also contains detailed instructions on the art of tuning and playing the *yaazh*.

## [\[edit\]](#) Devotional period

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Between the fifth and the sixth centuries the Tamil literature was dominated by a moralistic age during which a number of literary works of didactic nature were produced. These poets did not attach much importance to music in their compositions, being more concerned with ethics and morals of the people. However the underlying musical culture was not forgotten. For example [Tirukkural](#) contains numerous allusions to music and the enjoyment of music. One famous example is the *kural* compares unfavourably the sweetness of the flute and the *yaazh* with the voice of children.

## [\[edit\]](#) **Tevaram**

*Main article:* [Tevaram](#)

Tamil music revived with the advent of the Saiva and [Vaishnava](#) saints who composed thousands of religious hymns in popular language to spread their faith among common people. Saivite [nayanmars](#) such as Appar, Thirugnana Sambanthar and [Sundarar](#) used the ancient *panns* to enable people to sing them in Temples. The Saiva [Tevarams](#) and the Vaishna [Naalayira Divyap Prabhandhams](#) were instrumental in the revival and the popularisation of Tamil music. In addition to the *panns* for the melody, the *Tevaram* poems used *santham* (rhythm) such as *thaana-thana-thaana-thana* in their lyrics, providing a complete musical experience to the listener.

The traditional of religious singing continued for many centuries during which singers known as *Othuvars* sang the *Tevaram* songs in temples. The musical knowledge and skills were orally passed on through generations.

## [\[edit\]](#) **Thiruppugazh**

*Main article:* [Thiruppugazh](#)

In the fifteenth century poet Arunagirinathar composed a series of poems known as [Thiruppugazh](#). Arunagirinathar represents a remarkable blend of Tamil literary genius, a high degree of devotion to Murugan and a musical expertise. Arunagirinathar was one of the first poet to set all his compositions to reverberating music in the style of "Santham" which means setting the verses within a certain length to conform with rhythm (*thala*). Arunagirinathar was the pioneer in the art of setting his poems to the sweet sounds of music. Just like the seven octaves in music, Arunagirinathar, is known as *asanthakkavi* – musical poet, utilises certain repetitive phrases rhythmically to achieve movement and colour in his poems. By combining the Tamil hard or soft consonants and long or short vowels in different ways, Arunagirinathar produces hundreds of compound rhythmic words such as, *tatta*, *taatta*, *tantha*, *thaantha*, *thaiya*, *thanna*, *thaana*, *thanana*, etc . At the beginning of each poem in the *Thiruppugazh*, Arunagirinathar gives the rhythm notations.

## [\[edit\]](#) **See also**

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- [Sangam literature](#)
- [Tamil literature](#)
- [History of Tamil Nadu](#)
- [Carnatic music](#)
- [Dance forms of Tamil Nadu](#)
- [Naattupurapaattu](#)

**Pann** ([Tamil](#): பண்) is the melodic mode used by the [Tamil people](#) in [their music](#) since the ancient times. The ancient *panns* over centuries evolved first into a [pentatonic](#) scale and later into the seven note Carnatic [Solfege](#). But from the earliest times, Tamil Music is [heptatonic](#) and known as Ezhisai (ஏழிசை).<sup>[1]</sup>

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- 1 *Panns* in literature
- 2 Evolution of *Panns*
  - 2.1 Development of scales
- 3 *Panns* in Saivite hymns
- 4 See also
- 5 References

## [\[edit\]](#) *Panns* in literature

There are several references to music and *Panns* in the ancient pre-Sangam and [Sangam literature](#) starting from the earliest known work [Tolkappiyam](#) (500 BCE). Among Sangam literature, [Mathuraikkanci](#) refers to women singing *sevvazhi pann* to invoke the mercy of God during childbirth. In [Tolkappiyam](#), the five [landscapes](#) of the Sangam literature had each an associated *Pann*, each describing the mood of the song associated with that landscape. Among the numerous *panns* that find mention in the ancient Tamil literature are, *Ambal Pann*, which is suitable to be played on the flute, *sevvazhi pann* on the *Yazh* (lute), *Nottiram* and *Sevvazhi* expressing pathos, the captivating *Kurinji pann* and the invigorating *Murudappann*.

The [Sangam landscape](#) was classified into five regions to describe the mood of the poem and to describe the intangibles of human emotions. While describing life and romance, the poets employed the background of the natural landscape and used the *pann* specific to that landscape to provide the mood. The *neithal* (seaside) landscape, which is employed to convey the grief of separation of lovers had the associated *sevvazhi pann* expressing pathos. [Malaipatukatam](#) mentions Viraliyar singing *Kurinji pann* when offering worship to the

deities of the mountainous regions. It also refers to Virali singing *Marudappann* before singing the eulogies of kings. Malaippadukadam also refers to the people trying to overcome their fatigue by singing *Marudappann* after working in the fields. There is a very interesting reference to Panns and birds/insects in [Perumpanarruppatai](#). It says that the beetles liked to listen to *Kurinjipann* played on Vilyazh thinking it to be the voice of its own kith and kin, while they hated to listen to *Palaipann* played on flute. There are also references to the Panar taking delight in mastering the *Naivalam pann*.

## [\[edit\]](#) Evolution of *Panns*

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The post-Sangam period, between the third and the fifth centuries CE, Tamil music evolved to a higher sophistication. [Cilappatikaram](#), written around the fifth century CE, describes music based on logical, systematic and scientific calculations in the arrangements of the dancers on the stage to represent the notes and *panns*. *Cilappatikaram* contains several chapters dedicated to music and dance, of which the most famous is the *kanal vari* which is a duet between the hero [Kovalan](#) and his lady-love [Madavi](#). *Cilappatikaram* contains musical terminology such as, *azhaku* and *matthirai* referring to the musical pitch and the smallest fraction of an audible sound distinguishable by the human ear. From these evolved the scales.

## [\[edit\]](#) Development of scales

One of the first scales employed by the ancient Tamils was the *Mullaippann*, a [pentatonic](#) scale composed of the notes *sa ri ga pa da* equivalent to C, D, E, G and A in the western notations. These fully [harmonic scales](#), constitutes the [raga Mohanam](#) in the [Carnatic music](#) style.

*Mullaippann* further evolved into *Sempaalai*, a scale based on seven notes by the addition of two more notes, *ma* and *ni* to the pentatonic scale. *Sempaalai pann* corresponds to the Carnatic raga [Harikambhoji](#). In ancient Tamil, the seven notes were termed as *kural*, *tuttam*, *kaikkilai*, *uzhai*, *ili*, *vilari* and *taaram*. The seven basic notes are then developed into twelve swaras corresponding to the twelve houses of the zodiac.

The ancient Tamils also derived new *panns* by the process of modal shift of tonic and by the process of reallocating the pitch and beat of the notes. *Cilappatikaram* has an example of this in the chapter *Arangetrukadai*, where the *Pann Mercharupalai* is changed to derive a new *Pann*. By the modal shift of the tonic (பண்ணுப்பெயர்த்தல்) the ancient Tamils devised the seven major *palais*. Using the process of the cycle of fifth (called *aaya palai*) or the cycle of fourth, five semitones were developed. For example, if the cycle is started with *kural* (*sa*), the fifth note will yield *iLi* (*pa*), the *sa-pa* relationship. In the cycle of fourth, *kural* (*sa*) will give *uzhai* (*ma*), the *sa-ma* relationship. These five semitones were added to the original seven notes giving 12 notes of the ancient Tamil musical octave. Among the 12 notes, the flats were called *kuRai* (குறை) and the sharps were called *nirai* (நிறை).

The seven major *palais* or parent scales of the music of the ancient Tamils are: *Sempalai* (corresponding to the present *Harikambhoji*), *Padumalai Palai* ([Natabhairavi](#)), *Sevvazhi Palai* ([Hanumatodi](#)), *Arum Palai* ([Dheerasankarabharanam](#)), *Kodi Palai* ([Kharaharapriya](#)), *Vilari Palai* (*Hanumatodi*), and *Merchem Palai* ([Mechakalyani](#)).

The four original *panns* of *maruthappann*, *kurinchippan*, *sevvazhi* and *sadari* thus evolved into 103 *panns* with varying characterisations. In all of these PaNs, Uyir SurangaL (Jeevaswarams: Life Notes) exist. The life note of a PaN is embellished according to the notes that appear immediately before and after. This is called Alangaaram (Gamakkam). Taking into consideration all these special notes, PaN Isai is different from Karnatik Music. Karnatik Music as two variations of each of the variables; Ri, Ga, Ma, Dha and Ni. PaN Isai has 4 variations of each of the 5 variable. Plus the 2 constants; Sa and Pa, there are 22 variations of the 7 basic notes. We all should know what twenty-two over seven is. The ancient name for Raagam is Niram. Mehlakkatha was called ThaaI Niram and Raagams born from there were call Say Niram. The ancient name for ThaaLam is PaaNi. For example, Roobaga ThaaLam was PaaNi MoonDRoththu. Before Sa, Ri, Ga... Tamils used the 12 Tamil Vowels. Looking at a keyboard, they would've used the 5 KuRil (Short Sounds) for the black keys and the 7 NeDil (Long Sounds) for the white keys.

Some of the *panns* and their equivalent Carnatic [ragas](#) were:

- *Panchamam* – *Ahiri*
- *Pazham Panchuram* - *Sankarabharanam*
- *Meharahkkurinchi* - *Neelambari*
- *Pazhanthakka Ragam* - [Arabhi](#)
- *Kurinchi* - [Malahari](#)
- *Natta Ragam* – [Panthuvaraali](#)
- *Inthalam* - *Nathanamakriya*
- *Thakkesi* - [Kambhoji](#)
- *Kausikam* - [Bhairavi](#)
- *Nattappadai* – *Gambhiranaattai*

### [\[edit\]](#) **Panns in Saivite hymns**

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After the Sangam period and during the occupation of the Tamil country by [Kalabhras](#), Tamil music was dormant for a period of a few centuries. With the advent of the [Saivite](#) saints such as ThirumaaNikkavaasagar SwamigaL (100 AD), Sundharamoorthi SwamigaL (900 AD), [Thirunavukkarasar](#) and [Thirugnana Sambanthar](#) (7th century CE) who used the ancient *panns* in their hymns ([Tevaram](#)), Tamil music experienced a revival. Only through these ThirumuRais, hymns by SeerkaaZHi MuthuthaaNDavar, hymn by Maarimuthaa Pillay, AruNagiri Naadhar, Iraamalinga SwamigaL and the hymns of [Vaishnavite Alvars](#) we can still experience the ancient traditions of the Tamil *panns*. Sambanthar used the following

seven *panns*: *nattapaadai*, *Thakka ragam*, *Pazhanthakka ragam*, *Thakkesi*, *Kurinji*, *Viyazhak kurinji*, and *Meharahakkurinji*. Thiru MaaNikkavaasagar SwamigaL used MuLai PaNN (Mohgana Raagam) for the majority of his Thiruvaasagam and Thirukohvaiyaar. There are a few of his hymns where he used BowRi, Mehgaraagakkurinji and Kalyaani. Sundharamoorthi SwamigaL wise widely influenced by Thirunyaanasambandhar SwamigaL and Thirunaavukkarasar 'Appar' SwamigaL, who used PaN Koli quite often. In actual, only Thirunaavukkarasar SwamigaL wrote the Dhehvaaram, which made-up the 4th, 5th and 6th ThirumuRaigaL. Thirunyaanasambandhar SwamigaL wrote the ThirukaDaikaapu, which makes up the 1st, 2nd and 3rd ThirumuRaigaL. Thiru Sundharamoorthi SwamigaL wrote the ThirupaaTTu, which makes up the 7th ThirumuRai. Thiru MaaNikkavaasagar's Thiruvaasagam and Thirukkohvaiyaar makes up the 8th ThirumuRai. There 12 ThirumuRais. Thirumoolar's Thirumandhiram is the 11th ThirumuRai and SekkiZhaar's Thiru ThoNDar, or Periya, PuraaNam is the 12th ThirumuRai. The ThirumuRais are the Devotional works of Saivism and the 14 SaathirangaL (Saathirais) are the philosophical works of Saivism, with Thiruvaluar's ThirukkuRaL accepted as its Vehdhaas.

[\[edit\]](#) **See also**

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- [Ancient Tamil music](#)

[\[edit\]](#) **References**

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The **ancient Tamil music** is the historical predecessor of the [music of Tamil Nadu](#) during the [Sangam period](#), which evolved into classical [Carnatic music](#) by the 16th century.

Many poems of the classical [Sangam literature](#) were set to music. There are various references to this ancient musical tradition found in the ancient Sangam books such as [Ettuthokai](#) and [Pattupattu](#). The early narrative poem [Cilappatikaram](#), belonging to the post-Sangam period (5th or 6th century) also mentions various forms of music practiced by the Tamil people.

Music was an integral part of the compositions of the Tamil [Saiva](#) saints such as [Appar](#), [Thirugnana Sambanthar](#) and [Manikkavasagar](#) during the [Hindu](#) revival period between the 6th and the 10th century.

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# [\[edit\]](#)Sangam music

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The Sangam age grammatical work [Tolkappiyam](#) mentions the various music pertaining to the five [landscapes](#) (*thinai*) of the Sangam literature. The five landscapes are associated with a particular mood of the poem and to give colour to these moods, each had a musical mood ([pann](#)), a melodic instrument (*yaazh*) and a percussion instrument (*paraḷ*). For example, the *neithal* thinai, which dealt with the incidents around the seashore and the theme of elopement, had the musical mood of *sevvazhi*, *Vilari yaazh* as the musical instrument and the *navayapambai* for the percussion. *Tolkappiyam* also mentions the musical form known as *Paattu Vannam* and various types of songs like *Asiriapattu*, *Neduvēn pattu*, *Adivarai*, *Seer*, *Ahaval Osai* and *Vellosai*, which are classified on the basis of the musical quality, metrical structure etc. Most of the Sangam age poetry utilised one or more of these meters in their compositions. Poems of the *Ettuthohai* anthology, such as the [Natrinaḷ](#), [Paripaatal](#) and [Kaliththokai](#) are extensively musical in nature and utilise various *panns* to create the mood.<sup>[1]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#)Musical instruments

Poems of the Sangam literature contain numerous mentions of the various musical instruments such as the *Seerkazhi* , a stringed instrument of the [Veenat](#) type and various percussion instruments such as *murasu* or *muzham*. *Pattupattu* contains a description of the [yazh](#), a stringed instrument. There were two types of *yaazh*, *Periyaazh* or the 'large yaazh' contained 21 strings, whereas its more compact companion *Siriyaazh* had only seven strings. Two other types of *yaazhs*, *Makarayaazh* with 19 strings and *Sakottuyaah* with seven strings are also mentioned in *Pattupattu*. However we have no further information on their actual appearance, mode of playing and the kind of melody generated by these instruments.



The [flute](#) was the most popular wind instrument during the Sangam period. [Perumpanarruppatai](#), one of the *Pattupattu* anthologies, describes the process of making the flute. The holes in the bamboo tube were bored using red-hot embers. The flute is also mentioned in the [Kurincippattu](#) as the instrument on which the shepherds played the *ambal pann*. Among the other wind instruments were the *Pili*, a small trumpet and *Kanvidutumbu* a larger flute ), perhaps producing lower octaves The flute also acted as a drone providing a constant pitch for vocalists and other instrumen('as long as the trunk of an elephant'ts.

The *Murasu*, or the drum was the most popular percussion instrument. During festivals, the sound of Murasu conveyed joy and gaiety. *Muzhavu*, another percussion instrument accompanied singers. The drum was also used as the war-drum, calling people to arms. [Mathuraikkanci](#) mentions that the *murasu* was one of the prized possessions captured from the defeated enemy in the battlefield. [Malaipatukatam](#) describes the method of constructing and tuning the *murasu*. The sides were covered with skin, which were kept in position by leather straps. *Malaipatukatam* also mentions other percussion instruments such as *udukkai*, a palm-sized drum, *Muzhavu*, *Siruparai* and *Tattai*. The sound *tattai* resembled the croaking of a frog. This was a crude folk instrument made using a bamboo stick. Numerous slits were made across the stick and sound was produced on it by striking it on a stone or any other hard surface. In the *Kurincippattu* peasant women use *tattai* to scare the birds from the paddy field. A well-known percussion instrument is the *mridangam*(mathangam). It's a double headed drum used to accompany the *veena*(Yaazh) and the *flute* among other instruments.

## [\[edit\]](#) Musical notations

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In Tamil music, the [solfege](#) "sa-ri-ga-ma-pa-da-ni" of the Indian classical music were known by their Tamil names *Kural*, *Tuttam*, *Kaikilai*, *Uzhai*, *Ili*, *Vilariand Taram*. There are notations for the notes in different octaves. For example, *Kurai Tuttam* and *Nirai Tuttam* refer to the *ri* (*rishabha*) note in the lower and upper octaves respectively.<sup>[1]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Moods

[Raga](#), which defines the mood of the Indian classical music was described by the [Pann](#). Specific *panns* were sung during worship and during religious and royal ceremonies. *Maduraikanchi* refers to women singing *Sevvazhi pann* to invoke the mercy of God during childbirth. In *Tolkappiyam*, the five landscapes of the Sangam literature had an associated *Pann*, each describing the mood of the song associated with that landscape.

The Sangam landscape was classified into five regions to describe the mood of the poem and to describe the intangibles of human emotions. While describing life and romance, the poets employed the background of the natural landscape and used the *pann* specific to that landscape to provide the mood. The *neithal* landscape, which is employed to convey the grief of separation of lovers had the associated *sevvazhi pann* expressing pathos.

## [\[edit\]](#) Post-Sangam music

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### [\[edit\]](#) Evolution of *panns*

Main article: [Pann](#)

The post-Sangam period, between the third and the fifth centuries CE, Tamil music evolved to a different level of sophistication. *Cilappatikaram*, written around the fifth century CE, describes music based on logical, systematic and scientific calculations in the arrangements of the dancers on the stage to represent the notes and *panns*. *Cilappatikaram* contains several chapters dedicated to music and dance, of which the most famous is the *kanal vari* which is a duet between the hero [Kovalan](#) and his lady-love [Madavi](#). *Cilappatikaram* contains musical terminology such as, *azhaku* and *matthirai* referring to the musical pitch and the smallest fraction of an audible sound distinguishable by the human ear. From these evolved the scales.

One of the first scales employed by the ancient Tamils was the *mullaippann*, a [pentatonic](#) scale composed of the notes *sa ri ga pa da* equivalent to C, D, E, G and A in the western notations. These fully [harmonic scales](#), constitutes the raga [Mohanam](#) in the [Carnatic music](#) style. These scales can also be found in many eastern music systems such as the [Chinese traditional music](#).

*Mullaippann* further evolved into *Sempaalai*, a scale based on seven notes. The ancient Tamils also derived new *panns* by the process of modal shift of tonic and by the process of reallocating the pitch and beat of the notes. *Cilappatikaram* has an example of this in the chapter *Arangetrukadai*, where the *Pann Mercharupalai* is changed to derive a new *Pann*. The four original *panns* of *maruthappann*, *kurinchippann*, *sevvazhi* and *sadari* thus evolved into 103 *panns* with varying characterisations. Some of the *panns* and their equivalent Carnatic ragas were:

- *Panchamam* – Ahiri
- *Pazham Panchuram* - [Sankarabharanam](#)
- *Meharahkkurinchi* - Neelampari
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- *Natta Ragam* – [Panthuvarali](#)
- *Inthalam* - Nathanamakriya
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## [\[edit\]](#) Musical instruments

*Cilappatikaram* makes reference to five types of instruments: *Tolkaruvi* (lit. 'skin instruments' = percussion), *Tulaikaruvi* (lit. 'holed instruments' = wind instruments), *Narambukaruvi* (stringed instruments), *Midatrukaruvi* (vocalists) and *Kanchakaruvi* (gongs and cymbals). The flute and the *yaazh* were the most popular instruments, while there were numerous kinds of percussion instruments suited for various occasions. *Cilappatikaram* also contains detailed instructions on the art of tuning and playing the *yaazh*.

## [\[edit\]](#) Devotional period

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Between the fifth and the sixth centuries the Tamil literature was dominated by a moralistic age during which a number of literary works of didactic nature were produced. These poets did not attach much importance to music in their compositions, being more concerned with ethics and morals of the people. However the underlying musical culture was not forgotten. For

example [Tirukkural](#) contains numerous allusions to music and the enjoyment of music. One famous example is the *kural* compares unfavourably the sweetness of the flute and the *yaazh* with the voice of children.

## [\[edit\]](#) **Tevaram**

*Main article:* [Tevaram](#)

Tamil music revived with the advent of the Saiva and [Vaishnava](#) saints who composed thousands of religious hymns in popular language to spread their faith among common people. Saivite [nayanmars](#) such as Appar, Thirugnana Sambanthar and [Sundarar](#) used the ancient *panns* to enable people to sing them in Temples. The Saiva [Tevarams](#) and the Vaishna [Naalayira Divyap Prabhandhams](#) were instrumental in the revival and the popularisation of Tamil music. In addition to the *panns* for the melody, the *Tevaram* poems used *santham* (rhythm) such as *thaana-thana-thaanaa-thanaa* in their lyrics, providing a complete musical experience to the listener.

The traditional of religious singing continued for many centuries during which singers known as *Othuvars* sang the *Tevaram* songs in temples. The musical knowledge and skills were orally passed on through generations.

## [\[edit\]](#) **Thiruppugazh**

*Main article:* [Thiruppugazh](#)

In the fifteenth century poet Arunagirinathar composed a series of poems known as [Thiruppugazh](#). Arunagirinathar represents a remarkable blend of Tamil literary genius, a high degree of devotion to Murugan and a musical expertise. Arunagirinathar was one of the first poet to set all his compositions to reverberating music in the style of "Santham" which means setting the verses within a certain length to conform with rhythm (*thala*). Arunagirinathar was the pioneer in the art of setting his poems to the sweet sounds of music. Just like the seven octaves in music, Arunagirinathar, is known as a *santhakkavi* – musical poet, utilises certain repetitive phrases rhythmically to achieve movement and colour in his poems. By combining the Tamil hard or soft consonants and long or short vowels in different ways, Arunagirinathar produces hundreds of compound rhythmic words such as, *tatta*, *taatta*, *tantha*, *thaantha*, *thaiya*, *thanna*, *thaana*, *thanana*, etc . At the beginning of each poem in the *Thiruppugazh*, Arunagirinathar gives the rhythm notations.

## [\[edit\]](#) **See also**

- 
- [Sangam literature](#)

- [Tamil literature](#)
- [History of Tamil Nadu](#)
- [Carnatic music](#)
- [Dance forms of Tamil Nadu](#)
- [Naattupurapaattu](#)

[\[edit\]](#) **References**

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1. <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> [Tamil Music](#)

[\[edit\]](#) **External links**

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## Call it by any name, it is ‘Tamil Isai’

INDIRA PARTHASARATHY

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“If music be the food of love, play on,” says Duke Orsino in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. For the Tamils, from time immemorial, music was the food of love and devotion to God, as evidenced by their literary works dating from a distant past. The hymns of the (Vaishnavite) Azhvars and (Saivite) Nayanmars (7th-9th century), which are musical melodies of intricate *panns* (ragas) of the rarest beauty, stand testimony to this irrefutable fact. Mu. Arunachalam, an erudite Tamil scholar and one of the most distinguished historians of Tamil literature, had left, in manuscripts, a through chronological study of *Tamil Isai*. This has now been published in two substantial volumes, eminently edited by Ula. Balasubramanian. The first makes an in-depth study of *Tamil Isai* as it obtained in the Tamil literary works from the Sangam era to the present day, while the second deals with the manuals on this musical heritage, written in Sanskrit and Tamil.

According to the author, in Sanskrit there was only one musical style in the ancient days, namely the ‘Sama Gana’ (the raga *Karakarapriya*) that related to the recitation of *Sama Veda*. In Tamil, on the other hand, there had been a long tradition of a variety of *pannisai* as can be gathered from ‘Tolkappiyam’, the earliest Tamil grammar belonging to a period at the beginning of the common era. ‘Tolkappiyam’ refers to *pannaththi* (that which is the genesis of different kinds of *pann* or raga), for which, two musical works, called *Sitrisai* and *Perisai* (said to have been composed during the

Sangam age), are given as illustrations by the commentators. But, unfortunately, both of them are now extinct.

‘Paripadal’, which is described in ‘Tolkappiyam’ as a musical poem (also a Sangam work), had 70 songs, out of which only 24 are available now. The names of the composers of the poems, as also the names of those who set them to music, and the names of the *panns* in which they were sung are mentioned in ‘Paripadal’. This clearly establishes the antiquity of the Tamil musical heritage.

Why is it that only the musical works belonging to the Sangam period became extinct, when ‘Paththupattu’ and ‘Ettuthogai’ (the 18 literary poems) of the same era and belonging to the non-musical genre have survived? The author puts the blame on the mysterious ‘Kalabras’, who ruled the Tamil territory for nearly three centuries starting from the third century of the common era. He argues since they were Jains, not well-disposed towards music, the Tamil musical tradition collapsed and many of the earlier musical works went into oblivion. Such an explanation is in the realm of speculation and surmise, and it does not address the issue convincingly. ‘Silappadikaram’ (5th century), written by Ilango Adigal, is a treasure-house of glorious music and theatrical forms. It also gives encyclopaedic information about the rich Tamil musical and dramatic tradition. That Ilango Adigal was a Jain monk suggests that the ‘Kalabras’ belonging to the Jain cult could not have been responsible for the extinction of the earlier musical compositions and treatises written in Tamil. It is really sad that most of the grammatical works related to Tamil music and theatre quoted by Adiyarkunallar, (‘Silappadikaram’ commentator — maybe, of the 13th/14th century) no longer exist.

Arunachalam says that the south Indian music system, which was indeed *Tamil Pannisai*, was erroneously named, for the first time, *Karnataka sangeetham* in the 12th century by a western-Chalukya king, Someswara Bhuloka Mamalla, in his ‘Manasoullasam’, a monumental work that dealt with all the subjects under the sun, including music. According to him, in no other language in India, there existed at that time *Sahityas* (musical compositions) as they did in Tamil. Though most of the music manuals written from the 9th century onwards were in Sanskrit, the source materials for them — like the varieties of ‘ragas’ (*pann*) they had mentioned in their works — were all associated with the Tamil literary works, like ‘Silappadikaram’, ‘Thevaram’, and ‘Nalayira Divya Prabhandam’.

Madangamuni’s ‘Brahata Desi’, (9th century), Saranga Deva’s ‘Sangeetha Ratnagaram’ (13th century) and several of the music manuals that followed mention many of the Tamil *panns*, and avoid, perhaps deliberately, any reference to the Tamil literary texts, according to the author. In Arunachalam’s opinion, the authors of these treatises, although well-acquainted with Tamil, wrote in Sanskrit because it happened to be the *lingua franca* of the learned in India at that time and so ensured a wide reach for

their works. That *Karnataka Sangeetham* is but a synonym for *Tamil Isai*, irrespective of the language of the songs, is the firm and considered view of the author of these two great volumes. This position may well provoke discussions and debates among the musicologists.

Keywords: [Tamil Isai](#), [Pann research](#), [Carnatic music](#), [Sangam literature](#), [Tamil history](#)

## **The Tamil Language**

**Tamil** (தமிழ்) is a Dravidian language spoken predominantly by Tamil people of the Indian subcontinent. It has official status in India, Sri Lanka and Singapore. Tamil is also spoken by significant minorities in Malaysia, Mauritius, Vietnam, Reunion as well as emigrant communities around the world. It is the administrative language of the Indian State of Tamil Nadu, and the first Indian language to be declared as a classical language by the government of India in 2004. Tamil is the only Indian Language which is not influenced or derived from Sanskrit.

Tamil literature has existed for over two thousand years. The earliest epigraphic records found date from around the third century BC. The earliest period of Tamil literature, Sangam literature is dated from the 3rd century BC to 6th century AD. Inscriptions in Tamil Language from 1st century BCE and 2nd century have been discovered in Egypt and Thailand. The Sangam-era literary work, Thirukural, written by Thiruvalluvar, is the most translated literary work next to the Holy Bible.

Tamil scholars categorize the history of the language into three periods,

- Old Tamil (300 BC - 700 AD),
- Middle Tamil (700AD - 1600AD)
- Modern Tamil (1600AD–present).

### **Old Tamil**

Epigraphic attestation of Tamil begins with rock inscriptions from the 3rd century BC, written in Tamil-Brahmi, an adapted form of the Brahmi script. The earliest extant literary text is the Tolkāppiyam, a work on poetics and grammar which describes the language of the classical period, dated variously between the 3rd century BC and 5th century AD.

During the post-Sangam period of Old Tamil, important works like Thirukkural, and epic poems were composed, including Silappatikaram, Manimekalai, *Sivakacintāmani*, Valaiyapathi and Kundalakesi which are known as the five great epics.

### **Middle Tamil**

The Bhakthi period is known for the great outpouring of devotional songs set to pann music, including over eight thousand Tevaram verses on Saivism and four thousand verses on Vaishnavism. The mediaeval period gave rise to a popular adaptation of the Ramayana in Tamil, known as Kamba Ramayanam (12th century) and a story of 63 Nayanmars known as Periyapurānam (13th century).

In the later medieval period (14th to 16th century), Tamil became increasingly Sanskritized, to the point of the emergence of a mixed language known as *maṇiippiravāḷam*.

### **Modern Tamil**

Today's Tamil possess region specific variations. Tamil dialects are primarily differentiated from each other



(c) Chandan



by the fact that they have undergone different phonological changes and sound shifts in evolving from Old Tamil. An example, the word for "here"—*in̄ku* in *Centamil* (the classic variety)—has evolved into *in̄kū* in the Kongu dialect of Coimbatore, *inga* in the dialect of Thanjavur, and *in̄kai* in some dialects of Sri Lanka. Old Tamil's *in̄kaṇ* (where *kaṇ* means place) is the source of *in̄kane* in the dialect of Tirunelveli, Old Tamil *in̄kaṭṭu* is the source of *in̄kuṭṭu* in the dialect of Ramanathapuram, and *in̄kaṭe* in various northern dialects.

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## Music of Tamil Nadu

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• **Tamil Nadu** • [Tripura](#) • [Uttar Pradesh](#) • [Uttaranchal](#) • [West Bengal](#) ([Bengali](#))

**Music of Tamil Nadu** has a long tradition and history going back thousands of years. Music is a very important aspect of the culture of the [Tamil people](#). The musical tradition evolved over a period of centuries into the classical [Carnatic music](#) and the more popular [film music](#).

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## [\[edit\]](#) Ancient music

*Main article:* [Ancient Tamil music](#)

The tradition of Tamil music goes back to the earliest period of [Tamil history](#). Many poems of the [Sangam literature](#), the classical [Tamil literature](#) of the early [common era](#), were set to music. There are various references to this ancient musical tradition found in the ancient Sangam books such as [Ettuthokai](#) and [Pattupattu](#). The early narrative poem [Cilappatikaram](#), belonging to the post-Sangam period also mentions various forms of music practiced by the [Tamil people](#). Music was also utilised in the compositions of the Tamil [Saiva saints](#) such as [Appar](#), [Thirugnana Sambanthar](#) and [Manikkavasagar](#) during the Hindu revival period between the sixth and the tenth centuries CE. The musical poet (*sandakkavi*) [Arunagirinathar](#) further embellished the Tamil musical tradition through his compositions of Tamil hymns known as [Thiruppugazh](#).

## [\[edit\]](#) Carnatic music

*Main article:* [Carnatic music](#)

[Carnatic music](#), which is the classical music form of Southern India, has a long history in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has produced a number of famous performers, as well as a closely related classical dance form [Bharatha](#)

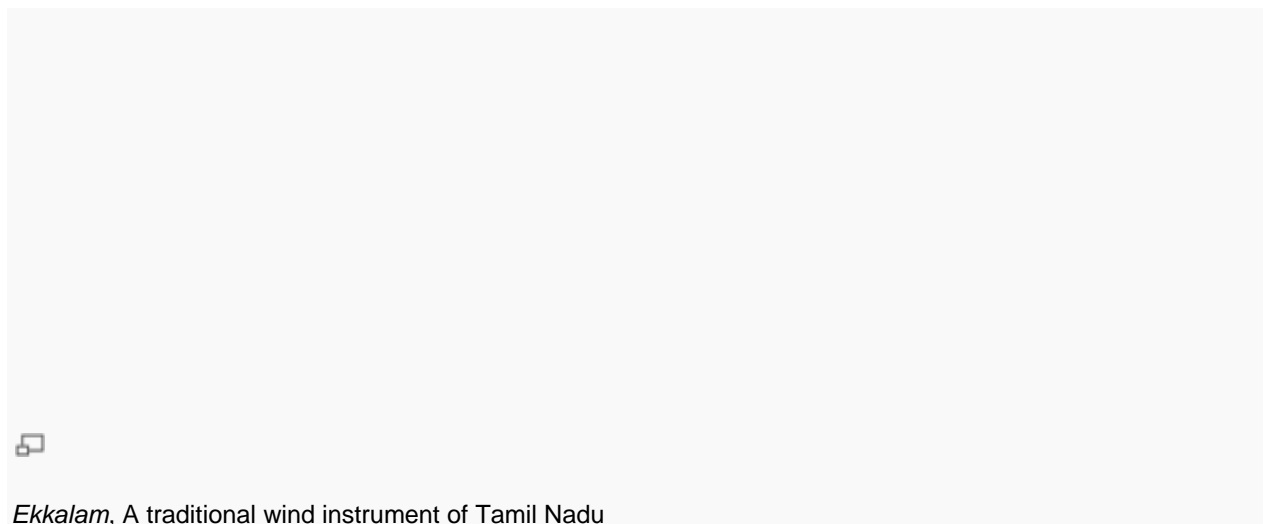
[Natyam](#). Chennai hosts a large cultural event, the annual [Madras Music Season](#), which includes performances by hundreds of artists.

There are 72 basic scales on the octave, and a rich variety of melodic motion. Both melodic and rhythmic structures are varied and compelling. This is one of the world's oldest and richest musical traditions.<sup>[1]</sup> Songs have been composed by great artists and handed down through generations of disciples.

The composers belonging to the [Tamil Trinity](#) of [Muthu Thandavar](#) (1560 - 1640 CE), [Arunachala Kavi](#) (1712-1779) and [Marimutthu Pillai](#) (1717-1787) composed hundreds of devotional songs in Tamil and helped in the evolution of Carnatic music. Three saint composers of the 18th to 19th Century, [Tyagaraja](#), [Muthuswami Dikshitar](#) and [Shyama Shastri](#), have composed thousands of songs that remain favourites among musicians and audiences. Today, Tamil Nadu has hundreds of notable carnatic singers who spread this music all over the world. [M. S. Subbulakshmi](#), a renowned carnatic singer, had the honour of singing a song in the [UN Security Council](#).

## [\[edit\]](#) Folk music

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*Ekkalam*, A traditional wind instrument of Tamil Nadu

Folk singing remains popular, especially in rural areas; elements of the traditional styles are sometimes used in film music. There are contemporary enthusiasts, like [Vijayalakshmi Navaneethakrishnan](#) and Pushpavanam Kuppuswamy, who have worked to revive popular interest in the folk music of Tamil Nadu.

The rural hill tribes of Tamil Nadu each have their own folk traditions. The [Pulayar](#), for example, perform [melodies](#) called [talams](#) which are said to come from the cooing of birds. Each talam is named after a deity, including Kunhanada talam, Mangalanada talam and Karaganachi talam.

## [\[edit\]](#) Film music

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AR Rahman at his [Madras](#) residence after bagging two [Academy Awards](#) for his work in [Slumdog Millionaire](#)

[Tamil Cinema](#) is well known for its talented composers. Two of the most famous and acclaimed film composers of India, [Ilaiyaraaja](#) and [A. R. Rahman](#) are from Tamil Nadu. Other prominent Tamil [film score](#) and [soundtrack](#) composers in the industry include [Harris Jayaraj](#), [Yuvan Shankar Raja](#), [Vidyasagar](#) and [Thomas Rathnam](#). During the 1960s and 1970s, prominent film composers [K. V. Mahadevan](#), [M. S. Viswanathan](#) and others were popular.

The film music of Tamil Nadu is widely known for its innovation and eclecticism. Scores may showcase blends of Carnatic, Western and other instruments, with a range of melodic and rhythmic patterns. Orchestral themes and minimalist songs often feature. Recent trends show the prevalence of [synthesizers](#) and other electronic instruments.

## [\[edit\]](#) Tamil Christian keerthanai

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*Main article:* [Tamil Christian keerthanai](#)

**Tamil Christian Keerthanai** (Keerthanai meaning Songs of Praise) are devotional Christian lyrics in Tamil.

A century ago, this term would have immediately conjured up the names of three lyricists who formed the Triumvirate of Tamil Christian poets: [Vedanayagam Sastriar](#) of Tanjore, [Krishnapillai of Palyamkottai](#), and [N. Samuel of Tranquebar](#).

These are mostly a collection of indigenous hymns written by Protestant Tamil Christian poets. A few of them are translations of Christian hymns from other languages.

These hymns were written in the early stages of Protestant Christianity in India. These hymns are widely used in worship services by the Tamil Churches belonging to the "main-line" or traditional denominations. Some of the more popular hymns include "Mangalam Selikka" (used during wedding celebrations) and "Ellam Yesuve".

## [\[edit\]](#) References

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1. [^ "History of Music, Origins".](#) *The Carnatica Group*. Carnatica.net. Retrieved 2007-07-03.

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