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NCERT Includes Sengol in Class 9 Textbook, Linking Tamil Traditions with Righteous Governance and India's 1947 Independence

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Recent Development:

- The **National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)** released *Understanding Society: India and Beyond — Social Science Textbook for Grade 9, Part 2* on **29 September 2026** as part of the revised school-textbook framework.
- The textbook discusses the **Sengol** in the context of Indian traditions of governance and connects it with the **Chola tradition of righteous rule** and the 1947 presentation of the sceptre to Jawaharlal Nehru.
- The Sengol had earlier acquired contemporary national significance after its installation near the **Speaker's podium in the new Parliament building in May 2023**. The Union Government describes it as a symbol of just governance and the transfer of power in 1947.
- The textbook's treatment is relevant to UPSC because it connects **cultural traditions, political institutions, ethical governance, colonial transition and constitutional values**.

Historical and Cultural Significance of the Sengol:

Meaning and Concept:

- **Sengol** is a Tamil royal sceptre associated with the idea of **righteous and legitimate authority**.
- Its meaning is commonly connected with the Tamil concept '**Semmai**', referring to righteousness, fairness and proper conduct; the contrasting idea of '**Kodungol**' denotes oppressive or unjust rule.
- The Sengol therefore represents more than physical authority because it conveys the **ethical responsibility of the ruler** to govern fairly and work for public welfare.
- In the traditional conception, the holder of the Sengol receives an '**Aanai**', or command, to discharge authority justly.

Sengol and Tamil Political Thought:

- Tamil literary traditions associate the **sceptre** with the moral quality of kingship, particularly the ruler's obligation to uphold justice.
- The **Tirukkural** discusses *Sengonmai*, or righteous rule, and places ethical conduct and justice at the centre of kingship.
- **Silappadikaram** contains an important episode concerning the moral consequences of wrongful royal judgement, illustrating the connection between kingship, justice and the rectification of injustice.
- References to the ideal of the righteous sceptre also occur within the broader corpus of **Sangam literature**, demonstrating the long-standing association between political authority and ethical responsibility.
- The concept is therefore useful for UPSC as an example of how **pre-modern Indian political thought linked legitimacy with dharma, justice and accountability**.

Sengol and the Chola Tradition:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

Political and Cultural Context:

- The Sengol is presented in the contemporary official narrative as having roots in **Tamil traditions of kingship**, particularly the Chola period.
- In this conception, the sceptre represented the **continuity of legitimate authority** and the ruler's obligation to protect justice.
- Its symbolism can be connected with broader South Indian traditions in which royal ceremonies used material objects to communicate **sovereignty, legitimacy and ethical obligations**.
- The historical significance should, however, be distinguished from the specific modern claim that the 1947 Sengol constituted a formal constitutional instrument of power transfer.

Sengol and the 1947 Independence Context:

Presentation to Jawaharlal Nehru:

- A Sengol was presented to Jawaharlal Nehru in August 1947 by representatives associated with the **Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam**, a Shaivite religious institution in Tamil Nadu. Contemporary accounts establish the presentation of the sceptre to Nehru.
- The Union Government's account states that **C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji)** suggested using a Tamil symbol of righteous kingship to represent the transfer of authority from colonial rule to independent India.
- The Sengol was reportedly **gold-plated silver**, approximately five feet long, and topped by a **Nandi** figure.
- The Nandi is interpreted in the official narrative as representing **steadfastness, justice and the vigilant observance of truth**.

Historical Debate over the 1947 Transfer-of-Power Claim:

- The **Union Government describes the 1947 Sengol ceremony as a symbol of the transfer of power** from British rule to independent India.
- Some historians have questioned whether the available documentary evidence establishes the event as a **formal or constitutionally significant transfer-of-power ceremony**.
- The distinction is important: there is evidence that **Nehru received the Sengol in 1947**, but the precise interpretation of that event as the official symbol of British-to-Indian transfer of power remains debated.
- UPSC preparation should therefore distinguish between **the documented presentation of the Sengol** and the **contested interpretation of its formal constitutional significance**.

Sengol in the New Parliament Building:

Installation in 2023:

- The same Sengol associated with the **1947 presentation to Nehru** was installed in the new Parliament building during its inauguration in **May 2023**.
- The Union Government presented the installation as a reminder that holders of political authority must remain committed to **justice, duty and public welfare**.
- Its placement near the **Lok Sabha Speaker's chair** gives the object a contemporary institutional context and connects a historical symbol of authority with the functioning of parliamentary democracy.

Broader Indian Concepts of Ethical Governance:

Rajdharma and Public Welfare:

- The broader theme surrounding the Sengol is the Indian conception of **Rajdharma**, under which political authority carries obligations towards society rather than functioning merely as an instrument of personal power.

- Epics and classical traditions contain discussions of **duty, justice, welfare and accountability of rulers**, providing historical context for the evolution of political thought in India.
- The modern constitutional system differs fundamentally from hereditary kingship because **sovereignty rests with the people**, while elected institutions exercise authority within constitutional limits.

Ram Rajya and Gandhian Interpretation:

- The new NCERT textbook also discusses **Ram Rajya** in relation to Mahatma Gandhi's conception of an ethical political order.
- In Gandhian usage, Ram Rajya was associated with **justice, welfare, moral responsibility and governance oriented towards the common good**, rather than simply with monarchical rule.
- For UPSC, Ram Rajya should therefore be studied as an example of how historical and cultural concepts were reinterpreted within the framework of **modern ethical and public-oriented governance**.

Institutional Symbols and Governance:

Continuity between Tradition and Modern Institutions:

- India's modern institutions retain several symbols and expressions derived from older intellectual and cultural traditions.
- '**Satyameva Jayate**', drawn from the **Mundaka Upanishad**, functions as India's national motto and emphasises the normative importance of truth.
- The Supreme Court uses the motto '**Yato Dharmastato Jayah**', generally translated as "Where there is righteousness, there is victory", reflecting the continuing presence of ethical vocabulary within modern institutions.
- Such examples demonstrate that **institutional symbolism can preserve cultural memory while operating within a constitutional-democratic framework**.

UPSC Relevance:

GS Paper I — Indian Heritage and Culture:

- **Tamil literary traditions**, Chola political culture, Sangam literature and concepts of righteous kingship.
- Material symbols of authority and their role in understanding **political culture and cultural continuity**.
- The Sengol as an example of the interaction between **regional traditions and national historical narratives**.

GS Paper II — Polity and Governance:

- Relationship between **ethical governance, accountability and constitutional authority**.
- Distinction between **traditional kingship** and **constitutional democracy**.
- Role of symbols in strengthening institutional consciousness and public understanding of governance.

GS Paper IV — Ethics:

- **Justice, duty, accountability, public welfare and responsible exercise of authority**.
- The Sengol can be used as an illustration of the principle that **authority carries corresponding ethical obligations**.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Key Conceptual Takeaways:

- Sengol ? Righteous authority and ethical governance

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- Semmai ? Righteousness and fairness
- Aanai ? Obligation or command to govern justly
- Nandi ? Symbolic association with steadfastness and justice
- Sengonmai ? Righteous rule in Tamil political thought
- Rajdharmma ? Ethical duty of the ruler
- Constitutional democracy ? Authority derived from the Constitution and ultimately from the people

Mains Linkage:

- The Sengol provides a useful case study for discussing how **historical traditions can be interpreted within contemporary constitutional institutions**.
- A balanced UPSC answer should distinguish **cultural symbolism, documented historical evidence, and modern political interpretation**, rather than treating all three as identical.
- The central conceptual link is “**authority with responsibility**”: traditional political thought emphasised righteous rule, while the Constitution institutionalises accountability through **rule of law, fundamental rights, democratic representation and constitutional limitations on power**.