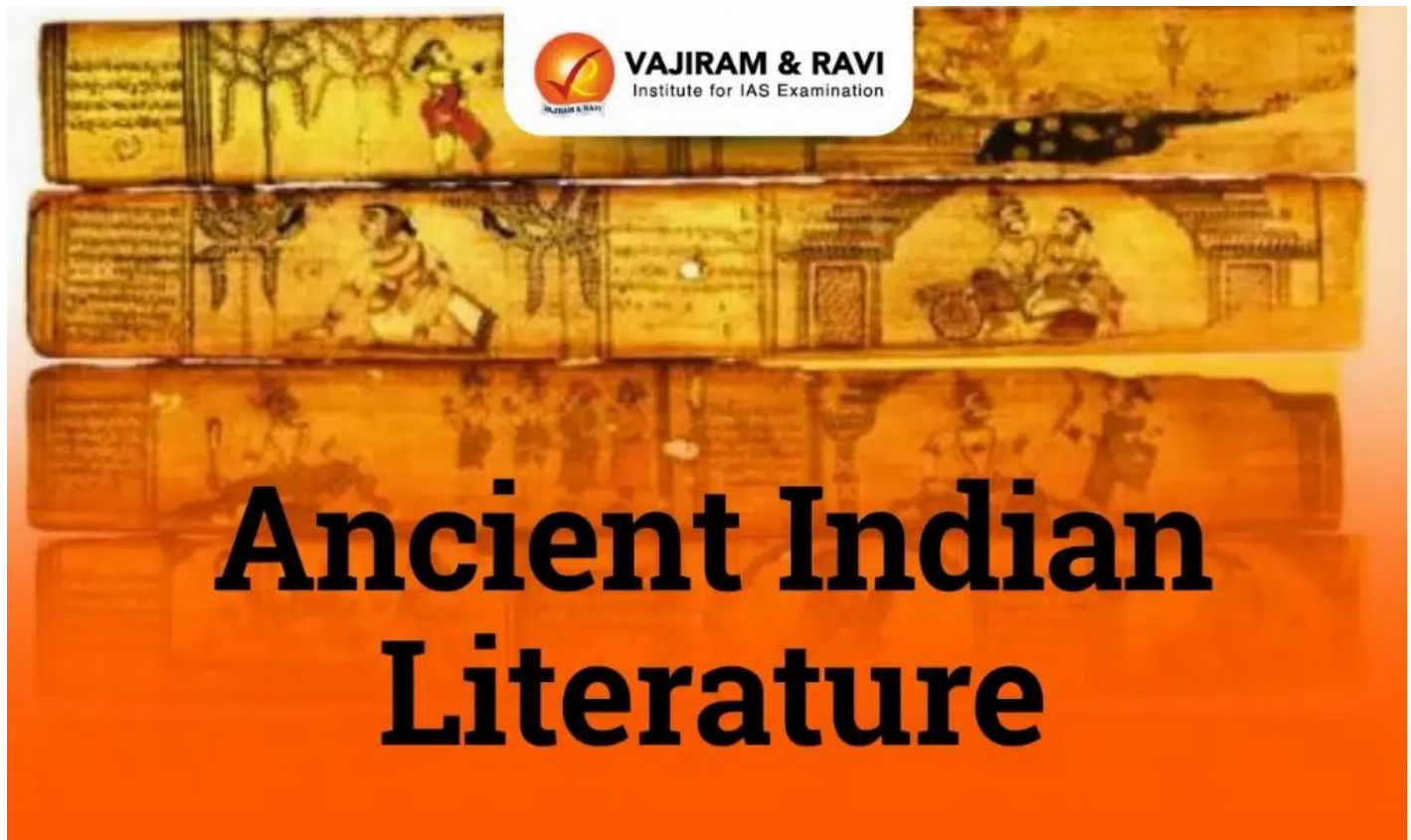


Ancient Indian Literature, UPSC Notes PDF

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Ancient Indian literature is a diverse collection of spiritual and secular works that have been passed down through generations as oral traditions. From the profound Vedas, including the **Rigveda**, to the epic tales of **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata**, it spans various genres. The **Gupta period** saw a literary flourish, with works encompassing **songs, drama, poetry, allegories, comedies, philosophical discourses**, and more, reflecting the diverse interests of the time.

Secular themes such as politics, romance, and philosophy were explored alongside religious ones. In the Southern part of India, Tamil literature emerged earliest, with **Sangam literature** covering **politics, love, and war**, followed by works in Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, which offered valuable insights into ancient history and culture.

The Vedic Literature

The Vedic period is the foundation of ancient Indian literature. It is a collection of sacred texts that were orally passed down for centuries before they were written. The **Vedic literature** is divided into distinct components.

- The Vedic literature consists of the four Vedas – Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva.

- **The Rig Veda:** It is the earliest of the four Vedas and it consists of **1028 hymns**. The hymns were sung in praise of various gods.
- **The Yajur Veda:** It consists of various details of rules to be observed at the time of sacrifice.
- **The Sama Veda:** It is set to tune to chant during sacrifice. It is called the book of chants and the origins of Indian music are traced in it.
- **The Atharva Veda:** It contains details of rituals.
- Besides the Vedas, there are other sacred works like the **Brahmanas**, the **Upanishads**, the **Aranyakas** and the epics **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata**
- Vedic literature is categorised into **Shruti** (eternal, divine revelations) and **Smriti** (evolving supplementary texts).
 - The former includes the **Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads**, while the latter encompasses **Vedanga, Shad Darshana, Puranas, Itihasa, Upveda, Tantras, Agamas, and Upangas**.
- **Puranas:** These are rich narrative collections featuring gods, demons, serpents, sages, and ancient kings.
 - They were preserved through oral storytelling by bards known as **Sutas** and **Kusilavas**.
- **Tantra Literature:** This presents an **alternative spiritual path** to Vedic practices, democratising spiritual pursuits beyond **caste** and **gender** barriers.
 - Comprising Samhitas, Agamas, and Tantras, these texts are categorised into **Jnana** (knowledge), **Yoga** (meditation), **Kriya** (ritual action), and **Carya** (conduct).
 - Tantra has profoundly influenced Hindu and Buddhist practices, emphasising **mantra, yantra, and meditative** techniques for spiritual enlightenment and divine union.

Classical Sanskrit Literature

Classical Sanskrit literature is a rich and diverse work spanning various genres and subjects. It includes:-

- **Classical Sanskrit Poetry:** The earliest surviving Sanskrit poetry is attributed to the Buddhist writer **Ashvaghosa**, who lived around the end of the 1st century CE.
 - Ashvaghosa is renowned for composing the **Buddhacarita** in a simple classical style.
 - The **Girnar Inscription of Rudradaman**, dated to CE 150, stands as the earliest surviving example of courtly Sanskrit prose.
 - Sanskrit poetry was primarily created for recitation or performance at court or among small circles of intellectuals.
 - Indian poets explored themes such as love, nature, panegyric, moralising, and storytelling.
- **Narrative Poetry: Somadeva's "Ocean of Story"** (Katha-sarit-sagara) is a famous collection of popular stories, written in the 11th century. It features an 'easy' and 'polished' verse. Other notable works include:
 - **Kalhana's Chronicle of Kashmir:** Known as "The River of Kings."
 - **"The Deeds of Harsha"** by Bana.
 - **"The Deeds of Vikramanka"** by Bilhana.
- **The Drama:** The origins of Indian theatre are somewhat obscure, but references to dramatic performances during the **Vedic period** exist.
 - **Sanskrit dramas** vary in length, ranging from one-act plays to extensive works in ten acts.

- **Kalidasa**, a celebrated playwright, has three surviving plays:
 - **Malavikagnimitram**: Narrates the love story of King Agnimitra and Malavika.
 - **Vikramorvasiyam**: Tells the tale of the love between Pururavas and Urvashi.
 - **Abhijnanasakuntalam**: Often considered Kalidasa's 'masterpiece.'
- The earliest known surviving dramas are fragments by **Ashvaghosa**, while the oldest complete plays are attributed to **Bhasa**.
- Other distinguished dramatists include **Sudraka**, **Visakhadatta**, and **Bhavabhuti**.
- **Sanskrit Prose Literature: The Brahmanas** contain the earliest surviving prose stories, followed by the **Pali Jatakas**.
 - **Dandin's Dasakumaracarita** (Tales of the Ten Princes) is a notable collection of simple narrations.
 - **Subandhu**, another celebrated prose writer, penned "**Vasavadatta**", a story detailing the romance between Vasavadatta and Prince Kandarpa Ketu. It is acclaimed for its ornate descriptions and linguistic mastery.
 - **Bana**, known for his unconventional views, compassion for the 'poor and humble,' and keen observations, wrote:
 - **Harshacharita** (Deeds of Harsha).
 - **Kadambari**.
 - Prose romances and stories in mixed prose and verse (**campu**) were composed but did not hold significant literary value.
 - **The Panchatantra ("Five Treatises")**, serving as a manual on niti (conduct) for kings and statesmen, features mostly prose stories interspersed with gnomic verses and exists in several versions.

Buddhist and Jain Literature

Buddhist Literature and Jain Literature are vast and encompass a wide range of texts that have played a crucial role in the development and propagation of their respective religions.

Topic	Description
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Buddhist Literature	- Pali Literature: Pali prose literature differs from Sanskrit, emphasising accessibility and common language. - The Tripitaka (three baskets) contains Buddhist canonical texts, covering teachings, rules, and narratives. - Tripitaka Components: • Vinaya Pitaka: Monastic discipline and daily life of monks and nuns. • Sutta Pitaka: Explanations on religion, often in dialogue form. • Abhidhamma Pitaka: Analytical aspects of teachings. • Jatakas: Folklore stories disseminating Buddhist principles. - Pali Poetry: • Theragatha and Therigatha: Verses by elder monks and nuns, simple yet profound. • Ambapali: Autobiographical verses by a courtesan turned nun. - Pali Descriptive Poetry: • Mahavamsa: Chronicles historical events with vivid descriptions. - Folk Poetry: A notable section of the Buddhist canon called Samyutta Nikaya was first translated into Chinese about CE 440, from a manuscript acquired in Ceylon by Fa-Hsien in 411.
Jain Literature	- Prakrit Literature: Jainas used Prakrit for spreading teachings. - Early texts were in Prakrit dialects. - Later, Sanskrit was adopted for scholarly works and poetry. - Jaina Sacred Texts (Siddhanta or Agama): • Share features with Pali Canon. • Language: Arsa or Ardha-Magadhi (Mahavira's preaching language). • Jainas' Poetry: Esteemed more than prose.

Sangam Literature

The Sangam Age (3rd century BCE to 3rd century CE) in South India was a period of Tamil literature, marked by assemblies of poets and scholars.

Aspect	Key Details
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Sangams (Literary Schools) in Madurai	- First Sangam: Attended by gods and legendary sages; all works lost. - Second Sangam: Only the Tamil grammar work, Tolkappiyam, survives. - Third Sangam: Produced the “Eight Anthologies” (Ettutogai), significant ancient Tamil literature; dating these works is complex.
Division of Tamil Poetry	- Internal (Agam): Focuses on love themes. - External (Puram): Centers on the praise of kings.
Five Traditional Regions (Tinai)	- Kurinji: Hills, associated with love/war. - Palai: Dry lands, associated with love/war. - Mullai: Jungle/woodland, associated with love/war. - Marudam: Cultivated plains, associated with love/war. - Neytal: Coast, associated with love/war.
Eighteen Minor Work	- Pathinenkilkanakku: Largely aphoristic and moralistic; includes famous works like Tirukkural and Naladiyar.
Notable Tamil Epics	- The Jewelled Anklet (Silappadikaram): Realistic and different from Sanskrit poetry. - Manimegalai: Sequel to Silappadikaram; tells the story of Prince Udayakumaran and Manimegalai. - Sivaga-Sindamani: Describes the exploits of hero Sivaga/Jivaka; authored by Jaina Tiruttakkadevar, influenced by courtly Sanskrit.

Scientific and Technical Literature

The scientific and technical literature of ancient India is indeed fascinating, encompassing a wide range of subjects from statecraft and economics to medicine and astronomy.

Topic	Description
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Astronomy and Mathematics	- The Vedic period introduced "ganita," a science of numbers encompassing astronomy, arithmetic, and algebra. -Aryabhata (476-550 CE) made significant contributions to mathematics, including zero, algorithms for celestial body motions, and trigonometric functions. - Chandogya Upanishad mentions these mathematical and astronomical concepts. - Varahamihira (505-587 CE) authored works on astronomy, astrology, and mathematics.
Medicine	- Ayurveda, one of the world's oldest holistic healing systems, originated during the Vedic period in India. - Sushruta Samhita (6th century BCE), this comprehensive text describes advanced surgical techniques and medical knowledge.
Arthashastra by Kautilya	- Written around the 4th century BCE, this treatise covers statecraft, economics, and administration. - It remains a seminal work on political science and governance.

Ancient Indian Literature UPSC PYQs

Question 1: Though not very useful from the point of view of a connected political history of South India, the Sangam literature portrays the social and economic conditions of its time with remarkable vividness. Comment. (UPSC Mains 2013)

Question 2: With reference to Indian history, consider the following texts. (UPSC Prelims 2022)

1. Nettipakarana
2. Parishishtaparvan
3. Avadanashataka
4. Trishashtilakshana Mahapurana

Which of the above are Jaina texts?

1. 1, 2 and 3
2. 2 and 4 only
3. 1, 3 and 4
4. 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (b)

Question 3: With reference to Indian history, consider the following pairs: (UPSC Prelims 2022)

Historical person Known as

1. Aryadeva Jaina scholar
2. Dignaga Buddhist scholar
3. Nathamuni Vaishnava scholar

How many pairs given above are correctly matched?

1. None of the pairs
2. Only one pair
3. Only two pairs
4. All three pairs

Answer: (c)

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