



Mains Marathon

Day 4: Compare and contrast Sangam and Vedic literature. (150 Words)

14 Jul 2022 | GS Paper 1 | Indian Heritage & Culture

Approach / Explanation / Answer

- Give a brief Introduction about Sangam and Vedic ages.
- Compare and contrast Sangam literature and Vedic literature in detail.
- Conclude suitably.

Answer

Traditions and oral myths were widely disseminated and preserved due largely to Indian literature. Through literature, the general public can learn about the rich culture and art of India. Indian literature from the Middle Ages to the 20th Century provides a window into the realities of Indian literature.

Sangam Literature:

Sangam literature is the name given to the earliest available Tamil literature. The Sangam age roughly extends between 300 BC and 300 AD*, although most of the work is believed to have been composed between 100 CE and 250 CE.

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- The Sangam literature includes Tolkappiyam, Ettutogai, Pattuppattu, Pathinenkilkanakku, and two epics named – Silappathikaram and Manimegalai .
- Tolkappiyam was authored by Tolkappiyar and is considered the earliest of Tamil literary work. Though it is a work on Tamil grammar but it also provides insights on the political and socio-economic conditions of the time.
- Ettutogai (Eight Anthologies) consist of eight works – Aingurunooru, Narrinai, Aganaooru, Purananooru, Kuruntogai, Kalittogai, Paripadal and Padirrupattu.
- The Pattuppattu (Ten Idylls) consists of ten works – Thirumurugarruppadai, Porunararruppadai, Sirupanarruppadai, Perumpanarruppadai, Mullaippattu, Nedunalvadai, Maduraikkanji, Kurinjippattu, Pattinappalai and Malaipadukadam.
- Pathinenkilkanakku contains eighteen works about ethics and morals. The most important among these works is Tirukkural authored by Thiruvalluvar, the tamil great poet and philosopher.
- The two epics Silappathikaram is written by Elango Adigal and Manimegalai by Sittalai Sattanar. They also provide valuable details about the Sangam society and polity.

Other Sources that give details about the Sangam Period are:

- The Greek authors like Megasthenes, Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy mention about commercial trade contacts between the West and South India.
- The Ashokan inscriptions mentioned the Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers to the south of the Mauryan empire.
- The Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela of Kalinga also has mention of Tamil kingdoms.

Vedic Literature:

The only extant Vedic materials are the texts known as the Vedas, which were composed and handed down orally over about 10 centuries, from about the 15th to the 5th century BCE. The Vedic corpus is composed of archaic Sanskrit. The most important texts are also the oldest ones. They are the four collections (Samhitas) that are called the Veda, or Vedas.

The Rigveda, or 'Veda of Verses', the earliest of those, is composed of about 1000 hymns addressed to various deities and mostly arranged to serve the needs of the priestly families who were the custodians of that sacred literature.

The Samaveda, or 'Veda of Chants', is made up of a selection of verses—drawn almost wholly from the Rigveda—that are provided with musical notation and are intended as an aid to the performance of sacred songs.

The Yajurveda, or 'Veda of Sacrificial Formulas', contains prose formulas applicable to various rites, along with verses intended for a similar purpose.

The Atharvaveda, or 'Veda of Spells', is a later compilation that includes incantations and magic spells.

To each Veda is attached a body of prose writings of later date called Brahmanas (c.800–600 BCE), which explain the ceremonial applications of the texts and the origin and importance of the sacrificial rites for which the Vedas were composed.

Further appendices, the Aranyakas (c.600 BCE) and the Upanishads (c.700–500 BCE), respectively expound the symbolism of the more difficult rites and speculate on the nature of the universe and humanity's relation to it.

When Vedic religion gradually evolved into Hinduism between the 6th and 2nd centuries BCE, the texts, taken collectively, became the most sacred literature of Hinduism. They are known as Shruti ("What Is Heard"), the divinely revealed section of Hindu literature—in contrast to the later strata of religious literature known as Smriti ("What Is Remembered"), which are traditional texts attributed to human authors. But in modern Hinduism, the Shruti, except for the Upanishads and a few hymns of the Rigveda, little is now known, while some of the Smriti texts remain extremely influential.

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