

UPSC Civil Services Examination

History

Topic: Sangam Literature

Sangam literature is the name given to the earliest available Tamil literature. It is dated between 400 BCE and 300 CE, although most of the work is believed to have been composed between 100 CE and 250 CE. The word ‘Sangam’ literally means association. Here, it implies an association of Tamil poets that flourished in ancient southern India. This period is known as the Sangam Period. The three chief Tamil kingdoms of this period were the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas.

The term Sangam was coined by later scholars. In this article, you can read relevant information about Sangam Literature for the IAS Exam. In total, there are about 2300 poems that are attributable to 473 poets.

Sangam Literature Classification

There were mainly three Sangams called Muchchangam. The chief sources of information for this age are archaeological sources, literary sources and foreign accounts.

Sangam Literature Classification	
Based on Period of Composition	Details of Sangam Literature
Patinenmelkanakku	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Works composed between 200 BCE to 100 BCE 2. Oldest surviving Tamil poetry
Patinenkilkanakku	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Works composed between 100 CE and 500 CE 2. Collection of 18 poetry compositions 3. Mostly composed before the age of the Pallavas 4. Chief works include Thirukkural, Palamoli, Naladiyar, etc.
Based on the Context and Interpretation	Details of Sangam Literature
Aham (Inner)	Abstract discussion on human aspects such as love, sexual relations, etc.

Puram (outer)

Human experiences such as heroism, customs, social life, ethics, philanthropy, etc.

Sangam Literature - Three Sangams

As mentioned before, Tamil legends talk about **three Sangams**:

1. Madurai
2. Northern Madurai
3. Kapatapuram

Note:

All the works of the first two Sangams except Tolkappiyam are lost. Only the works of the third Sangam survives.

Sangam Literature - Tolkappiyam

- Composed by Tolkappiyar.
- Oldest extant Tamil work till date.
- Dated between 4th and 5th century CE.
- Offers information on social life, human psychology, political and economic conditions during the Sangam Age.
- Also discusses Tamil grammar.
- The work is divided into three sections, each section further divided into nine chapters.
- Contains a total of 1612 sutras which are extensive in their range.
- Sanskrit influence on this work is peripheral and very little.

Third Tamil Sangam

The compositions of the third Sangam are classified into eight anthologies known as **Ettuttokoi/Ettuthokai** and ten idylls known as **Pattuppattu**.

Ettuthokai

It consists of the following works:

1. Narrinai
2. Kuruntogai
3. Ainkurunuru (composed by Gudalur Mar)

4. Padirrupattu
5. Paripadal
6. Kalittogai
7. Ahanuru (compiled by Rudrasarman)
8. Purananuru

Pattuppattu

It consists of the following works:

1. Murugatrupadai (composed by Nakkirar)
2. Sirupanarrupadai
3. Perumbanarrupadai
4. Pattinappalai
5. Maduraikkanji
6. Porunararrupadai
7. Kurinchipattu
8. Nedunalvadai
9. Malaipadukadam
10. Mullaippattu

The third Sangam saw the Patinenkilkanakku. They mainly deal with moral values. The most important among them is the Thirukkural, also simply called the Kural. Other important works are Palamoli (by Munrurai Araiya) and Acharakkovai (contains a description of the daily life of an orthodox Hindu, shows the influence of the Sanskrit Shastras).

Thirukkural

- First Dravidian work for ethics.
- Comprises of 1330 couplets.
- It has been translated into many languages including foreign languages.
- It discusses epics, love, and polity and governance.
- Authored by Thiruvalluvar.

Post-Sangam Period

This period lasted from 200 to 600 CE. This age saw the composition of five great epics in Tamil namely, Silappadikaram, Manimekalai, Jivaka Chintamani, Valaiyapati and Kundalakesi. There are also five minor works authored by Jain writers.

Silappadikaram

- Composed by Ilango Adigal.
- The story revolves around an anklet. The name literally means the tale of an anklet.
- Author Ilango Adikal is supposed to be an ascetic-prince and the younger brother of Chera king Senguttuvan.
- A chief character is Kannagi, who seeks revenge on the Pandya kingdom for her husband who was wrongly put to death.
- The poem gives a lot of insight into contemporary Tamil society, polity, values and social life of the people.

Manimekalai

- Composed by Chithalai Chathanar, also spelt Sattanar.
- It is a sequel to Silappadikaram.
- The author's aim was to propagate Buddhism in South India as the work espouses the values of Buddhism over other religions of the time.