

UPSC 2020

Topic – Vedic Literature – UPSC GS-I

Having the status of 'Shruti' text (Meaning - Which has been heard), Vedas embody self-existent truth that is thought to be realized by the seers of Hindu tradition, in state of meditation. 'Smriti' texts (Meaning- Remembered) include Vedanga, Puranas, Epics, Dharmashashtra, and Nitishastra. This article will provide you relevant facts about Vedic Literature for the [IAS Exam](#) (Prelims, Mains - GS I).

Aspirants can read below-mentioned relevant articles of Ancient History for UPSC preparation:

Indus Valley Civilization	Types of Vedas	Vedic Civilization	Sangam Age
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Vedic Literature - What are Vedas?

The Vedas are the large bodies of religious text that is composed of Vedic Sanskrit and originated in ancient India. They form the oldest scriptures of Hinduism and the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature. The Vedas are said to have passed on through verbal transmission from one generation to the next. Therefore, they are also known as Shruti. The Vedic literature consists of four Vedas namely: Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda. The mantra text of each of the Vedas is called Samhita.

Types of Vedic Literature

There are broadly two types of Vedic literature:

- **Shruti Literature** - The word 'Shruti' from the term 'Shruti Literature' means 'to hear' and describes the sacred texts which comprise of Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, & Upanishads. Shruti Literature is canonical, consisting of revelation and unquestionable truth, and is considered eternal.
- **Smriti Literature** - Whereas, the word 'Smriti' literally means to be remembered and which is supplementary and may change over time. Smriti Literature is the entire body of the post-Vedic Classical Sanskrit literature and consists of Vedanga, Shad darsana, Puranas, Itihasa, Upveda, Tantras, Agamas, Upangas.

The Vedic literature can be classified into the following categories:

- The four Vedas i.e. the Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva, and their Samhitas.
- The Brahmanas
- The Aranyakas
- The Upanishads

Vedic Literature - Vedas

There are four types of vedas:

1. Rig Veda
2. Sama Veda
3. Yajur Veda
4. Sama Veda

Vedic Literature - Brahmanas

They are the prose texts that explain the hymns in the Vedas and are also the classification of Sanskrit texts that are embedded within each Veda, incorporating myths and legends to explain and instruct Brahmins on the performance of Vedic rituals. In addition to explaining the symbolism and meaning of the Samhitas, Brahmana literature also expounds scientific knowledge of the Vedic Period, including observational astronomy and, particularly in relation to altar construction, geometry. Divergent in nature, some Brahmanas also contain mystical and philosophical material that constitutes Aranyakas and Upanishads.

Each Veda has one or more of its own Brahmanas, and each Brahmana is generally associated with a particular Shakha or Vedic school. Less than twenty Brahmanas are currently extant, as most have been lost or destroyed. Dating of the final codification of the Brahmanas and associated Vedic texts is controversial, as they were likely recorded after several centuries of oral transmission. The oldest Brahmana is dated to about 900 BCE, while the youngest is dated to around 700 BCE.

Vedic Literature - Aranyakas

A few important points about Aranyakas are mentioned below:

- These are called Forest Books
- Sacrificial rituals are interpreted by Aranyakas in a symbolic and philosophical way.

Vedic Literature - Upanishads

A few important points about Upanishads are mentioned below:

- There are 108 Upanishads
- Out of 108 Upanishads, 13 are considered the major ones.
- The concepts of 'Atman' and 'Brahman' are majorly explained by Upanishads
- It contains philosophical ideas about the following concepts too:
 - Sacrifice
 - Body
 - Universe

Vedic Literature is an important topic for the Civil Service Exam. Candidates preparing for [UPSC 2020](#) are advised to go through the other History topics as several questions are asked from this section for IAS Prelims and Mains.

Aspirants can go through other [NCERT notes on Ancient India for UPSC](#).

