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INDIAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE-I

Sagar and Sameer went to Andaman and Nicobar Islands for a holiday. They had a very good time out there playing in the sea and seeing so many small islands. But they faced some problems also. They could not understand the language which the local people were speaking. As a result they missed out on many things the tribals would have told them about themselves. From this you can understand the importance of language. Language is a medium through which we express our thoughts while literature is a mirror that reflects ideas and philosophies which govern our society. Hence, to know any particular culture and its tradition it is very important that we understand the evolution of its language and the various forms of literature like poetry, drama and religious and non-religious writings. This lesson talks about the role played by different languages in creating the composite cultural heritage that characterises our country, India.



OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson you will be able to :

- *examine the rich literary heritage of India;*
- *develop an awareness of the variety of languages and literature in India;*
- *list the different kinds of languages and literature in India;*
- *appreciate the diversity and the underlying unity among the languages and literature of India; and*
- *recognise the important contribution of India to world literature.*



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6.1 INDIAN LANGUAGES: THE ROLE OF SANSKRIT

Ever since human beings have invented scripts, writing has reflected the culture, lifestyle, society and the polity of contemporary society. In the process, each culture evolved its own language and created a huge literary base. This literary base of a civilization tells us about the evolution of each of its languages and culture through the span of centuries.

Sanskrit is the mother of many Indian languages. The Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas and Dharmasutras are all written in Sanskrit. There is also a variety of secular and regional literature. By reading about the languages and literature created in the past, we shall be able to understand our civilization better and appreciate the diversity and richness of our culture. All this was possible because of the language that developed during that time.

Sanskrit is the most ancient language of our country. It is one of the twenty-two languages listed in the Indian Constitution. The literature in Sanskrit is vast, beginning with the most ancient thought embodied in the Rig Veda, the oldest literary heritage of mankind, and the Zend Avesta. It was Sanskrit that gave impetus to the study of linguistics scientifically during the eighteenth century. The great grammarian Panini, analysed Sanskrit and its word formation in his unrivalled descriptive grammar *Ashtadhyayi*. The Buddhist Sanskrit literature includes the rich literature of the Mahayana school and the Hinayana school also. The most important work of the Hinayana school is the Mahavastu which is a storehouse of stories. While the Lalitavistara is the most sacred Mahayana text which supplied literary material for the Buddhacarita of Asvaghosa.

Sanskrit is perhaps the only language that transcended the barriers of regions and boundaries. From the north to the south and the east to the west there is no part of India that has not contributed to or been affected by this language. Kalhan's *Rajatarangini* gives a detailed account of the kings of Kashmir whereas with *Jonaraja* we share the glory of Prithviraj. The writings of Kalidasa have added beauty to the storehouse of Sanskrit writings.

Other great literary works, which marked the golden era of Indian literature include 'Abhijanam Shakuntalam' and 'Meghdoot' by Kalidasa, 'Mricchakatika' by Shudraka, 'Swapna Vasavadattam' by Bhasa, and 'Ratnavali' by Sri Harsha. Some other famous works are Chanakya's 'Arthashastra' and Vatsyayana's 'Kamasutra'.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.1

1. Name the most important ancient language of India.



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2. Which is the oldest literary heritage of mankind?
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6.2 THE VEDAS

The Vedas are the earliest known literature in India. The Vedas were written in Sanskrit and were handed down orally from one generation to the other. Do you know that preservation of the Vedas till today is one of our most remarkable achievements. To be able to keep such a literary wealth as the Vedas intact when the art of writing was not there and there was a paucity of writing material is unprecedented in world history.

The word 'Veda' literally means knowledge. In Hindu culture, Vedas are considered as eternal and divine revelations. They treat the whole world as one human family Vasudev Kutumbakam.

There are four Vedas, namely, the- Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. Each Veda consists of the Brahmanas, the Upanishads and the Aranyakas.

The Rig Veda, Sama Veda and the Yajur Veda are collectively known as Traji. In later years the Atharva Veda was incorporated in this group.

Rig Veda

The Rig Veda is the earliest of the Vedas. It is a collection of 1028 hymns in Vedic Sanskrit. Many of these are beautiful descriptions of nature. The prayers are largely for seeking worldly prosperity. It is believed that these recitations are the natural outpouring of Vedic rishis experiencing a mentally transcendental stage. Some of the well-known rishis are Vasistha, Gautama, Gritasamada, Vamadeva, Vishvamitra and Atri. The prominent gods of the Rig Veda are Indra, Agni, Varun, Rudra, Aditya, Vayu, Aditi and the Ashwini twins. Some of the prominent goddesses are Usha - the goddess of dawn, Vak - the goddess of speech and Prithvi - the goddess of earth. Do you know that most of the hymns spoke of universally recognised higher values of life such as truthfulness, honesty, dedication, sacrifice, politeness and culture. The prayers are for seeking worldly prosperity and for the development of a highly cultured society. Along with religion Rig Veda provides us knowledge about social, political and economic condition of ancient India.

Yajur Veda

Yajur means sacrifice or worship. This Veda is concerned mostly with rites and mantras of different sacrifices. It gives directions for the performance of the yajnas. It has both poetic and prose renderings. Being a treatise on rituals, it is the most popular of the four Vedas. There are two major branches of Yajur Veda, namely Shukla and Krishna Yajur Veda i.e. Vajasaneyi Samhita and Taitriya Samhita. This text reflects on the social and religious condition of India at that time.



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Sama Veda

Sama means melody or songs. This Veda consists of 16,000 ragas and raginis or musical notes. Out of total 1875 verses only 75 are original and others are from the Rig Veda. The Sama Veda prescribes the tunes for the recitation of the hymns of the Rig Veda. It may be called the book of Chants (Saman). This book is an evidence of the development of Indian music during this period.

Atharva Veda

The Atharva Veda is also known as the Brahma Veda. It contains treatment for ninety-nine diseases. The source of this Veda is traced to two rishis called Atharvah and Angiras. The Atharva Veda is of immense value as it represents the religious ideas at an early period of civilisation. It has two branches, the Paippalada and the Saunaka. This book gives detailed information about the family, social and political life of later Vedic period.

In order to understand the Vedas, it is necessary to learn the Vedangas or the limbs of the Vedas. These supplements of the Vedas provide education (*siksha*), grammar (*vyakarana*), ritual (*kalpa*), etymology (*nirukta*), metrics (*chhanda*) and astronomy (*Jyotisha*). A good deal of literature grew around these subjects. It was written in the form of precepts in the sutra style. A precept was called sutra because of its brevity. The most famous example of this is Panini's grammar, *Ashtadhyayi*, which illustrates the rules of grammar and also throws light on society, economy and culture of those times.

Brahmanas and Aranyakas

After the four Vedas, a number of works called the Brahmanas were developed. These books gave a detailed explanation of Vedic rituals and instructions and deal with the science of sacrifice. The latter portions of the Brahmanas were called the Aranyakas while the final parts of the Aranyakas are philosophic books named Upanishads which belong to the later stage of the Brahmana literature. Each of the four Vedas have their own Brahmana books. Rig Veda had Kaushitaki and Aitreya. Taittiriya belongs to Krishna Yajur Veda and Shatpath belongs to Shukla Yajur Veda. Tandav, Panchvish and Jaimaniya belongs to Atharva Veda. It is through them that we get a detailed information of the social, political and religious life of the people.

The Arayankas deal with soul, birth and death and life beyond it. These were studied and taught by men in Vanprastha i.e. Munis and the inhabitants living inside the forests.

All these works were in Sanskrit. Initially they were handed down orally and were put to writing much later.

It is very difficult to determine the age of the Vedas and also the time they were written. Max Muller says that the Rig Veda was composed before 1000 B.C. While according to Lokmanya Tilak it appeared before 6000 B.C.



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Distinction between Sruti and Smriti

Both sruti and smriti represent categories of texts that are used to establish the rule of law within the Hindu tradition. Sruti is solely of divine origin and contains no specific concepts of law. Because of the divine origin, it is preserved as a whole instead of verse by verse. With sruti, the desire is more towards recitation and preservation of its divine attributes and not necessarily towards understanding and interpreting the oral tradition like that found in smriti.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.2

1. What does the word “Veda” mean?

2. Name the four Vedas.

3. What is the meaning of ‘Yajur’? What information does it give us of those times?

4. How many musical tunes originated from the Sama Veda?

6.3 THE UPANISHADS

The word Upanishad is derived from *upa* (nearby), and *nishad* (to sit-down), that is, “sitting down near”. Groups of pupil sit near the Guru to learn from him in the Guru-shishya parampara or tradition.

The Upanishads mark the culmination of Indian thought and are the final parts of the Vedas. As the Upanishads contain abstract and difficult discussions of ultimate philosophical problems, they were taught to the pupils at the end. That is why they are called the end of Vedas. Vedas start with the worship of the manifest, as that is obvious and then slowly transform to the knowledge of the unmanifest

There are more than 200 known Upanishads, one of which, the Muktika, gives a list of 108 Upanishads – this number corresponds to the holy number of beads on a mala or Hindu rosary.

The Upanishads form an important part of our literary legacy. They deal with questions like the origin of the universe, life and death, the material and spiritual world, nature of

knowledge and many other questions. The earliest Upanishads are the Brihadaranyaka which belongs to the Sukla Yajur Veda and Chand yoga which belongs to the Sama Veda. Some of the other important Upanishads are the Aitareya, Kena, Katha Upanishad. Try and find out some other important Upanishads on your own. Read them and you will find a whole new world of Indian philosophy opening in front of you. There are more books selling on the Upanishads. Start with the small stories. Get interested in them and than go to the whole book of any Upanishad.



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INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.3

1. What is the meaning of Upanishad?

2. Name some important Upanishads.

6.4 THE RAMAYANA AND THE MAHABHARATA

Our two great epics are the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Ramayana of Valmiki is the original Ramayana. It is called Adikavya and Maharishi Valmiki is known as Adi Kavi. The Ramayana presents a picture of an ideal society. The other epic, the Mahabharata, was written by Ved Vyas. Originally, it was written in Sanskrit and contained 8800 verses and was called “Jaya” or the collection dealing with victory. These were raised to 24,000 and came to be known as Bharata, named after one of the earliest Vedic tribes. The final compilation brought the verses to 100,000, which came to be known as the Mahabharata or the Satasahasri Samhita. It contains narrative, descriptive and didactic material, relating to conflict between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana have several renderings in different Indian languages. The Mahabharata contains the famous Bhagavad Gita which contains the essence of divine wisdom and is truly a universal gospel. Though it is a very ancient scripture, its fundamental teachings are in use even today.



In the Bhagvad Gita, Krishna explains to Arjuna his duties as a warrior and prince and elaborates on different Yogic and Vedantic philosophies with examples and analogies. This makes Gita a concise guide to Hindu philosophy and a parochial, self-contained guide to life. In modern times Swami Vivekananda, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and many others used the text to help inspire the Indian

independence movement. This was mainly because the Bhagvad Gita spoke of positiveness in human actions. It also spoke of duty towards God and human beings alike forgetting



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about the results. You will appreciate the fact that the Gita has been translated nearly in all the main languages of the world.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.4

1. Name the two ancient epics written in Sanskrit.

2. Who were the authors of the Ramayana and The Mahabharata?

3. In the Bhagvad Gita what does Krishna explain to Arjun?

6.5 PURANAS

The Puranas occupy a unique position in the sacred literature of the Hindus. They are regarded next in importance only to the Vedas and the Epics. There are said to be eighteen Puranas and about the same number of Upapuranas. Some of the well known Puranas are - Brahma, Bhagvat, Padma, Vishnu, Vayu, Agni, Matsya and Garuda. Their origin can be traced as far back as the time when Buddhism was gaining importance and was a major opponent of the Brahmanic culture.

Puranas are mythological works which propagate religious and spiritual messages through parables and fables. They have a potent influence in the development of the religious lives of the people.

The Puranas follow the lines of the epics, and the earliest Puranas were compiled in the Gupta period. They are full of myths, stories, legends and sermons that were meant for the education of the common people. These Puranas contain important geographical information/ histories and deal with the mysteries of creation, re-creation and dynastic genealogies. This period also saw the compilation of various smritis or law books written in verse. The phase of writing commentaries on the smritis begins after the Gupta period. Amarasimha the Sanskrit Lexicographer, states that a Purana should describe five topics; (1) Sarga (Creation) (2) Pratisarga (Secondary creation) (3) Vamsa (Geneology) (4) Manvantara (Manu periods) and (5) Vamsanucarita (dynastic history)



INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.5

1. How many Puranas are there?

2. Name a few characteristics of the Puranas.



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6.6 BUDDHIST AND JAIN LITERATURE IN PALI, PRAKRIT AND SANSKRIT

The religious books of the Jains and the Buddhists refer to historical persons or incidents. The earliest Buddhist works were written in Pali, which was spoken in Magadha and South Bihar. The Buddhist works can be divided into the canonical and the non-canonical.

The canonical literature is best represented by the “Tripitakas”, that is, three baskets - Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. Vinaya Pitaka deals with rules and regulations of daily life. Sutta Pitaka contains dialogues and discourses on morality and deals with Dharma while Abhidhamma Pitaka deals with philosophy and metaphysics. It includes discourses on various subjects such as ethics, psychology, theories of knowledge and metaphysical problems.

The non-canonical literature is best represented by the Jatakas. Jatakas are the most interesting stories on the previous births of the Buddha. It was believed that before he was finally born as Gautama, the Buddha practising Dharma passed through more than 550 births, in many cases even in the form of animals. Each birth story is called a Jataka. The Jatakas throw invaluable light on the social and economic conditions ranging from the sixth century BC to the second century BC. They also make incidental reference to political events in the age of the Buddha.

The Jain texts were written in Prakrit and were finally compiled in the sixth century AD in Valabhi in Gujarat. The important works are known as Angas, Upangas, Prakimas, Chhedab Sutras and Malasutras. Among the important Jain scholars, reference may be made to Haribhadra Suri, (eighth century AD) and Hemchandra Suri, (twelfth century AD). Jainism helped in the growth of a rich literature comprising poetry, philosophy and grammar. These works contain many passages which help us to reconstruct the political history of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Jain texts refer repeatedly to trade and traders.

Ancient Indian literature can be placed in two categories:

(a) Religious and non religious or secular. Religious literature has the

(a) four Vedas

- Rig Veda- the oldest of the Vedas contains 1028 hymns known as Sukta or “Well said”.
- Sam Veda contains the hymns that are sung by a special class of priests at the time of soma Sacrifice.



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- Yajur Veda-contains hymns that are recited at the time of ordinary sacrifice.
- Atharva Veda-collection of songs, spells, magical charms for the evil spirits, etc.
- (b) The Brahmanas - attached to the Vedas. They explain in detail the value and efficacy of sacrifices.
- (c) Aranyakas- are the concluding portions of the Brahmanas.
- (d) Upanishads - Meant to be learnt sitting near the guru.
- (e) Epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata
- (f) Buddhist literature
- (g) Jain literature



INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.6

1. In which languages are the earliest Buddhist and Jain texts written?

2. Name the Tripitakas.

3. What do the Jataka tales tell us about?

4. Name some Jain scholars.

6.7 OTHER SANSKRIT LITERATURE

We also have a large body of books dealing with various sciences, law, medicine and grammar. To this class belong the law books called the Dharmasutras and smritis, together known as Dharmashastras. The Dharmasutras were compiled between 500 and 200 BC. These lay down duties for different *varnas* as well as for the kings and their officials. They prescribed the rules according to which property had to be held, sold and inherited. They also prescribe punishments for persons guilty of assault, murder and adultery. The *Manusmriti* tells us about the role of man and woman in society, their code of conduct and relationship with each other.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is an important treatise of the Mauryan times. It reflects the state of society and economy at that time and provides rich material for the study of ancient Indian polity and economy.



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The works of Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa and Banabhatta provided us with glimpses of the social and cultural life of northern and central India in times of the Guptas and Harsha. The Gupta period also saw the development of Sanskrit grammar based on the works of Panini and Patanjali.

Famous Sanskrit Authors of the Gupta Period

The Gupta period was India's golden age of culture and one of the greatest and most glorious times. The Gupta kings patronized the classical Sanskrit literature. They helped liberally the scholars and poets of Sanskrit. This enriched the Sanskrit language. In fact Sanskrit language became the language of cultured and educated people. Many great poets, dramatists and scholars appeared during this period and works in Sanskrit reached great heights.

1. Kalidas: Poet Kalidas wrote many beautiful poems and plays. His works in Sanskrit are considered the gems of Literature. He wrote passionate plays and poems. His wonderful skill is exhibited in his poem Meghaduta, Ritusambara, Kumar Sambhavam and Raghuvamsha. His plays are Abhijan Shakuntalam, Vikramorvashi and Malvikaganimithram.
2. Vishakhadutta: Vishakhadutta was another great play writer of this period. He wrote two great historical plays like- Mudra Rakshas and Dev Chandra Gupta.
3. Shudraka: He wrote an exciting play Mrichchha Katikam or the Toy Cart. It is a great source of socio-cultural conditions of that time.
4. Harisena: Among the great poets and play writers of the Gupta period was Harisena. He wrote poems praising the valour of Samudra Gupta. It is inscribed on Allahabad pillar.
5. Bhasa: He wrote thirteen plays which echo the lifestyle of the era along with its prevalent beliefs and culture.

The Kushana kings patronised Sanskrit scholars. Ashvaghosha wrote the *Buddhacharitra* which is the biography of the Buddha. He also wrote *Saundarananda*, which is a fine example of Sanskrit poetry.

India produced great literary works on subjects like Maths, Astronomy, Astrology, Agriculture and Geography etc.

Books on medicine were written by Charak and on surgery by Sushruta. Madhava wrote a book on pathology. Books written on astronomy by Varahamihira and Aryabhatta and on astrology by Lagdhacharya had all achieved prominence. There is none that can compete with Varahamihira's Bhrihatsamhita, Aryabhatta and Vedanga Jyotisha.



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The post-medieval period in northern India saw the rise of Sanskrit literature in Kashmir. Somadeva's *Katha-sarit-sagar* and Kalhan's *Rajatarangini* are of historical importance. It gives a vivid account of the Kings of Kashmir. The *Geet Govinda* of Jaidev is the finest poem of Sanskrit literature of this period, besides numerous works on different aspects of art and architecture, sculpture, iconography and related fields.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 6.7

1. What is the subject of the Dharmashastras?

2. Who wrote *Rajatarangini*?

3. Name a famous play by Kalidasa.

4. Name a work by Jaidev.

5. Name the author of the book on medicine.

6.8 TELUGU, KANNADA AND MALAYALAM LITERATURE

The four Dravidian languages Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam developed their own literature. Tamil being the oldest of these languages began writing earlier and produced the sangam literature - the oldest literature in Tamil.

Telugu Literature

The Vijayanagara period was the golden age of Telugu literature. Nachana Somanatha, a court poet of Bukka I, produced a poetical work titled *Uttaraharivamsam*. Krishnadevaraya (1509-1529), the greatest of the Vijayanagara emperors, was a poet of great merit. His work *Amukta Malyada* is regarded as an excellent *prabandha* in Telugu literature. Eight Telugu literary luminaries, popularly known as *ashtadiggajas* adorned his court. Among them, Allasani Peddana, the author of *Manucharitram*, was the greatest. He was known as *Andhra kavitaipitamaha*. The other seven poets of the group were Nandi Timmana, the author of *Parijathapaharanam*, Madayagari Mallana, Dhurjati, Ayyalaraju Ramabhadra Kavi, Pingali Surana, Ramaraja Bhushana and Tenali Ramakrishna.

Dhurjati, a devotee of Shiva, composed two poetical works of great merit known as *Kalahasteswara Mahatmayam* and *Kalahasteswara Satakam*, Pingali Surana



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composed two works *Raghavapandaviyam* and *Kalapuranodayam*. In the former, he attempted a literary feat telling the story of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata simultaneously. Tenali Ramakrishna, the court jester, was an interesting figure of the Krishnadevaraya's court. His practical jokes on high-placed men of the time are recounted with pleasure even today. Ramakrishna was the author of *Panduranga Mahatmayam* which was considered one of the greatest poetical works of Telugu literature. Ramarajabhushana was the author of *Vasucharitram*. He was also known as Bhattumurti. His other works include *Narasabhupaliyam* and *Harishchandra Nalopakhyanam*. It is a poetical work on the model of *Raghavapandaviyam*. One can read in it stories of Nala as well as Harishchandra. Madayagari Mallana's work *Rajashekharacharitra* is a *prabandha* dealing with the wars and loves of Rajashekhar, king of Avanti. Ayyalaraju Ramabhadra was the author of two works *Ramabhyudayam* and *Sakalakathasara Sangraham*.

Kannada Literature

Apart from Telugu, Vijayanagara rulers extended their patronage to Kannada and Sanskrit writers as well. Many Jain scholars contributed to the growth of Kannada literature. Madhava wrote *Dharmanathapurana* on the fifteenth *tirthankara*. Another Jain scholar, Uritta Vilasa, wrote *Dharma Parikshe*. The Sanskrit works of the period include *Yadavabhyudayam* by Vedanatha Desika and *Parasara Smriti Vyakhya* of Madhavacharya.

Kannada language developed fully after the tenth century AD. The earliest known literary work in Kannada is *Kavirajamang* written by the Rashtrakuta King, Nripatunga Amoghavarsha I. Pampa, known as the father of Kannada wrote his great poetic works *Adi Purana* and *Vikramarjiva Vijaya* in the tenth century AD. Pampa lived in the court of Chalukya Arikesari. In his poetic skill, beauty of description, delineation of character and development of *rasa*, Pampa is unrivalled. Ponna and Ranna were two other poets who lived during the reign of Rashtrakuta Krishna III. Ponna wrote an epic named *Shanti Purana* and Ranna wrote *Ajitanatha Purano*. Together Pampa, Ponna and Ranna earned the title *ratnatraya* (the three gems).

In the thirteenth century new feats were achieved in Kannada literature. Harishvara wrote *Harishchandra Kavya* and *Somanatha Charita* whereas Bandhuvarma wrote *Harivamshabhyudaya* and *Jiva Sambodhana*. Under the patronage of later Hoysala rulers, several literary works were produced. Rudra Bhata wrote *Jagannathavijaya*. Andayya's *Madana Vijaya* or *Kabbigara Kava* is a work of special interest in pure Kannada without the mixture of Sanskrit words. Mallikarjuna's *Suktisudharnava*, the first anthology in Kannada and Kesirja's *Shabdamanidarpana* on grammar are two other standard works in the Kannada language.

Kannada literature flourished considerably between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries under the patronage of the Vijayanagara kings. Poets of all religious groups made important contribution to it. Kunura Vyasa wrote *Bharata* and Narahari wrote *Tarave Ramayana*.



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This is the first Rama Katha in Kannada composed on the basis of Valmiki's Ramayana. Lakshamisha who lived in the seventeenth century wrote *Jaïmini Bharata* and earned the title of *Kamata-Karicutavana-Chaitra* (the spring of the Karnataka mango grove).

The other eminent poet of this period was the great Sarvajna, popularly known as the people's poet. His aphoristic *tripadi* (three-lined) compositions serve as a source of wisdom and ethics. A special mention may be made of Honnamma, perhaps the first outstanding poetess in Kannada. Her *Hadibadeya Dharma* (Duty of a Devout Wife) is a compendium of ethics.

Malayalam Literature

Malayalam is spoken in Kerala and the adjoining areas. The language of Malayalam emerged around the eleventh century AD. By fifteenth century Malayalam was recognised as an independent language.

Bhasa Kautilya, a commentary on *Arthashastra* and *Kokasandisan* are two great works. Rama Panikkar and Ramanuj an Ezhuthachan are well known authors of Malayalam literature. Though it developed much later compared to other South Indian languages, Malayalam has made a mark as a powerful medium of expression. Now a large number of journals, newspapers and magazines are published in Malayalam. When people read and write in their own language, they enjoy it more. This is because language is a part of their culture. It is so well interwoven in their social life that they can express and feel their emotions as well in their own language. This, must also be the case with you and your language also.

6.9 TAMIL OR SANGAMA LITERATURE

Tamil as a written language was known since the beginning of the Christian era. It is, therefore, no wonder that considerable Sangama literature was produced in the early four centuries of the Christian era, although it was finally compiled by 600 AD. Poets who in these assemblies were patronised by kings and chieftains produced the Sangama literature over a period of three to four centuries. Poets, bards and writers, authors came from various parts of South India to Madurai. Such assemblies were called "Sangamas", and the literature produced in these assemblies was called "Sangama literature". The contributions of Tamil saints like Thiruvalluvar who wrote 'Kural' which has been translated into many languages are noteworthy. The Sangama literature is a collection of long and short poems composed by various poets in praise of numerous heroes and heroines. They are secular in nature and of a very high quality. Three such sangams were held. The poems collected in the first sangam have been lost. In the second Sangam about 2000 poems have been collected.

There are about 30,000 lines of poetry, which are arranged in eight anthologies called *Ettuttokoi*. There are two main groups – the *Patinenkil Kanakku* (the eighteen lower

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collections) and *Pattupattu* (the ten songs). The former is generally assumed to be older than the latter, and considered to be of more historical importance. Thiruvallurar's work 'Kural' is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the epics, the second part with polity and government and the third part with love.

Besides the Sangama texts, we have a text called *Tolkappiyam*, which deals with grammar and poetry. In addition, we have the twin epics of *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*. These two were composed around the sixth century AD. The first is considered as the brightest gem of Tamil literature and deals with a love story. The second epic was written by a grain merchant of Madurai. These epics throw light on the socio-economic life of Tamils from second century to sixth century AD.

From the 6th to 12th century AD, the Tamil devotional poems written by Nayanmars (saints who sang in praise of Shaivism) and Alvars herald the great Bhakti movement which engulfed the entire Indian sub-continent. During this period, Kambaramayanam and Periya Puranam were two Tamil literary classic writers.

**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

- Heritage is the sum total of intellectual treasure that is passed on from one generation to the other.
- Sanskrit is the most ancient language of India.
- Rig Veda is the oldest and the richest literary heritage of mankind.
- The Upanishads have influenced the greatest philosophers of the world.
- Our epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata still dominate the social ethos of our country.
- The Puranas provide the guiding light to the masses.
- Jainism laid emphasis on good conduct and morality and preaches ahimsa, truthfulness and austerity. Jataka tales are an invaluable source of knowing the thoughts and lives of the people during that period. Buddhist *sanghas* became centres of great learning.
- There are invaluable ancient treatises on law, political science, medicine, surgery, biology, chemistry, and architecture.
- Tamil literature is famous as Sangama literature.

**TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. "Sanskrit is the root of many Indian languages". Explain.

**Notes**

2. Discuss the importance of the Upanishads.
3. Make a list of two Buddhist and Jain literatures and then write about two of their works which you find interesting.
4. Write a short note on the following:
 - (i) Sangama literature
 - (ii) The Vedas
5. What is the story behind the twin epics of Silappadikaram and Manimekalai?
6. What is the unique feature of Tarave's Ramayana?

**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****6.1**

1. Sanskrit
2. Rig Veda

6.2

1. Knowledge
2. Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, Atharva Veda
3. It means sacrifice and worship. Social and religious condition of India at that time.
4. Sixteen thousand

6.3

1. Upanishad means to sit near the Guru.
2. Aitareya, Kena, Katha, Brihadaranyaka and Chhandogya
3. Krishna tells Arjun about his duties as a warrior and elaborates on different philosophies with examples and analogies.

6.4

1. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata
2. Valmiki and Ved Vyas

6.5

1. There are 18 Puranas and 18 Upapuranas.
2. The Puranas deal with the mysteries of creation, recreation dynastic genealogies.



Notes

6.6

1. Pali and Prakrit
2. Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka
3. Previous births of Lord Buddha wherein he practiced Dharma.
4. Two important Jain scholars are Haribhadra Suri (eighth century AD) and Hemchandra Suri (twelfth century AD)

6.7

1. Law
2. Kalhan
3. *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*
4. *Geet Govinda*
5. Charak