



Vedic Literature - Classification of Smriti & Shruti Vedas & Other Important Facts!

UPSC Notes

Vedic Literature refers to the four Vedas in their Samhita and the allied literature based on or derived from the Vedas. Vedic literature is one of the most significant information sources on Aryans and the Vedic era. The word Vedas implies knowledge. The primary source of data for restoring the Vedic era is the Vedic text.

Vedic Literature is one of the most important topics for the [UPSC IAS](#) exam. It covers a significant part of the Art & Culture subject in the [General Studies Paper-1 syllabus](#) and [UPSC Prelims Syllabus](#) General Studies Paper-1.

In this article, we shall study the overview of the Vedic age, the Vedic literature classification, and the importance of **Vedic literature** UPSC.

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An Overview of the Vedic Age

The [Vedic Age](#) was the time period between 1500 BC and 600 BC. Following the collapse of the [Indus Valley Civilization](#) around 1400 BC, this is the next significant civilization to flourish in ancient India. This age got its name since the Vedas were written during this time. The Vedas are the main source of knowledge regarding this time period. The primary source of data for reconstructing the Vedic era is the Vedic text. Archaeological materials have been used to augment this information. It is thought that Indo-Aryans wrote the Vedic texts. A Subgroup of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European linguistic family is referred to as Indo-Aryans.

Vedic Literature

"**Vedic literature**" refers to writings that are inspired by or drawn from the Vedas. The history of Vedic Literature constitutes the four Vedas, or Samhitas, the Brahmanas associated with each Samhita, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads are the texts that make up Vedic literature. The origin and development of religion in Vedic literature are derived from certain religious and sacred texts.

Features of Vedic Literature

The features of **Vedic literature** are discussed below.

- The Vedic culture is divided into two timelines, **Older Vedic and later Vedic**.
- In North India, the early Vedic period is associated with the Chalcolithic culture and the later Vedic period is associated with the Painted Grey pottery or Iron age.
- During the Vedic era, a number of philosophical, literary, and scientific fields were formed. Various fields of language, algebra, ethics, astronomy, and literature were also formed.
- Meditation and the cycle of birth and death are both emphasized in Vedic literature. This literature praises the values of mercy, generosity, self-control, and good behavior as well as karma.
- The women eminent in Vedic literature are Ghosha, Sulabha Maitreyi, Lopamudra, and Gargi.
- Allied Vedic literature constitutes Vedangas, Darshanas, the Sutras, Upavedas, the Dharmashastras, and the Ashtadhyayi.
- There is also mention of environmental awareness in Vedic literature. It mentions that the environment belongs to all living beings and it must be preserved for their welfare.

Also, check out the [Differences and Similarities Between Buddhism and Jainism](#) with this link!

Classifications of Vedic Literature

Vedic literature is classified into 2 categories: **Smriti and Shruti**. Let's discuss each Vedic literature in detail.

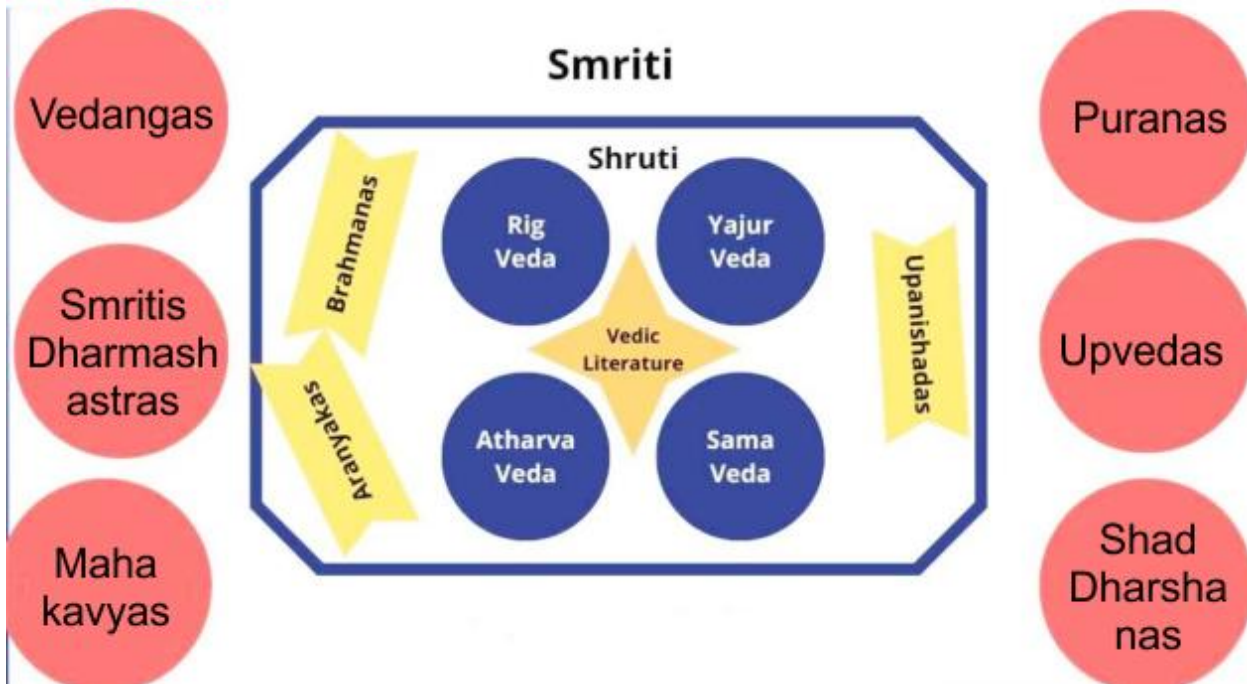
Smriti

- **Smriti** is a Sanskrit word that translates to remember. It is a class of Hindu sacred literature.
- Although Smriti Vedic literature develops, interprets, and codifies Vedic philosophy, it is regarded as less authoritative than Vedic Shruti literature because it is a descendant.
- However, Smriti scriptures are more widely known to modern Hindus.
- The texts include the Kalpa-sutras, significant religious manuals; the Puranas, collections of prehistoric myth, tradition, and history; and the Ramayana and Mahabharata, two of India's greatest epics.
- Over time, the term "Smriti" came to be used specifically in reference to works dealing with social behavior and the law, such as the renowned Manu-smriti (Laws of Manu).

Shruti

- In Hinduism, **Shruti literature** refers to the most treasured body of sacred text and it is thought to have been created by divine revelation.
- Shruti is a Sanskrit word that translates as "what is heard" in English.
- As opposed to Smriti, or that which is remembered by regular people, Shruti's works are thought to have been heard and transmitted by earthly sages.
- Although Shruti is seen as having greater authority, the Smriti writings really have a greater impact on contemporary Hinduism.
- The Samhitas and the four Vedas are part of the Shruti.

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Vedic Shruti Literature: Vedas

The Vedas are thought to be the earliest Hindu texts. Despite the fact that tradition frequently dates them to the start of the Kali-yuga, scholars estimate that they were written down around 2,500 years ago (3000 BCE). According to some Hindus, the Yajur, the original single Veda, was eventually divided into four. However, according to scholars, the Rig Veda is the first Hindu text. The four Vedas are described in the following Table.

Four Vedas at Glance			
SNo	Vedas	Composed Time Period	Features
1	<u>Rig Veda</u>	1700 BC	Rig Veda is the oldest and most significant of the Vedas. - It contains 1028 hymns in ten books (known as mandalas) that are dedicated to various gods. Indra, Agni, Vishnu, Rudra, Varuna, and other early or "Vedic gods" are among them. - It also includes the well-known Gayatri mantra and the Purusha Shukta prayer (the story of Primal Man).
2	<u>Yajur Veda</u>	1000 and 800 BCE	- The Yajur Veda, the second of the four Vedas, is referred to as the ritual book. - It was written about one or two centuries after the Rig Veda was. Yajur signifies sacrifice.

			- Yajur Veda is a priestly manual for use when performing yajnas (sacrifices). - It is divided into two parts: the older "black"/"dark" (Krishna Yajur Veda) section and the more current "white"/"bright" (Shukla Yajur Veda) section.
3	<u>Sama Veda</u>	200 or 1000 BCE	- Sama Veda is composed of chants and melodies that are chanted during worship and yajna rituals. - It was created just to be used in ritualistic contexts. Sama Veda's words are recited during rituals like soma sacrifice. - It is tied to the Rig Veda and is the shortest of the four Vedas.
4	<u>Adharvana Veda</u>	1000-800 BCE	- The fourth and last Veda, Atharva Veda, is frequently referred to as the Veda of magic formulas. - Hymns, mantras, and incantations included in the Adharvana Veda fall mostly outside the purview of yajna.

Study in detail about [Types of Vedas](#) for UPSC preparation!

Vedic Shruti Literature: Brahmanas

- The hymns of the Vedas are explained by the Brahmanas Vedic literature. They are prose works that discuss in great detail the different sacrifices and rites as well as their esoteric significance.
- There are numerous Brahmanas in each Veda. Aitareya Brahmana and Kausitaki Brahmana are the two Brahmanas connected to the Rig Veda.
- These were written by invokers or Holy-priests (the priest who recites mantras of the Rigveda at the sacrifices).
- The Satapatha Brahmana, which advises "one hundred sacred paths," is annexed to the Sukla Yajurveda (Satapatha). Of all the Brahmanas, it is the most comprehensive and significant.
- The Atharvaveda has the Gopatha Brahmana added to it. Actually, these Brahmanas are in-depth analyses of the numerous hymns in Samhitas.

Vedic Shruti Literature: Aranyakas

- The term Aranyaka translates to "the forest," often known as "forest books." They were primarily produced for hermits and students who lived in the jungles.
- The Aranyakas Vedic literature was subject to a rigorous code of secrecy because it was thought that teaching the uninitiated their contents would be dangerous.
- They were subsequently to be researched in the forest. They discuss symbolism and mysticism.
- They serve as the Upanishads' logical conclusion. They provide a link between the Upanishads' promoted jnana marga (way of knowledge) and the Brahmanas' exclusively concerned Karma marga (way of deeds).

Study in detail about [Sangam Literature](#) with this link!

Vedic Shruti Literature: Upanishads

- Upanishads are also known as books of philosophy, Vedanta.
- The basic word Upanishad, which means "to sit down near someone," is derived from the root Upani-sad.
- It represents a learner studying while seated at the guru's feet. The term eventually came to refer to the hidden information that the guru taught his chosen students.
- The term is now frequently used to refer to the guru's hidden teachings to his chosen students. The term is now used to refer to intellectual and spiritual learning.
- The Upanishads are also known as Vedanta (the end of the Veda), in part because they mark the end of the Vedic era and in part because they make clear Veda's ultimate goal.
- The Mundakopanishad is where our country's motto, Satyameva Jayate, is derived from.

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MIND MAP OF VEDIC COMPOSITION

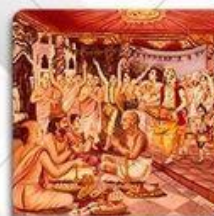
SAMHITAS

- Collections of mantras and benedictions
- The term Vedas is often used to refer to these Samhitas.
- There are Four vedic samhitas - **Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, Atharva Veda.**



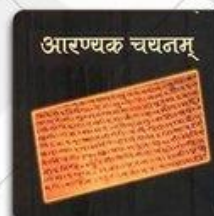
BRAHMANAS

- Commentaries on **rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices.**
- It may either form separate texts or partly integrated with Samhitas.



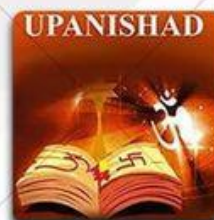
ARANYAKAS

- 'Wilderness texts' or 'forests' - written on forests.
- Composed by people who meditated in the woods.



UPANISHADS

- Texts discussing meditation, philosophy and spiritual knowledge.
- Also known as Vedanta (the end of Vedas)
There are 108 Upanishads.



**VEDIC
COMPOSITION**

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To study in detail visit the [Difference Between Vedas and Upanishads for UPSC Exam](#) with the linked article!

Vedic Smriti Literature

The various types of Vedic Smriti Literature are discussed below.

Vedangas

The Vedangas are also known as the limbs of Veda. The mention of Vedangas can be found in the Mundaka Upanishad. There are six Vedangas.

1. Siksha (pronunciation)
2. Kalpa (rituals)
3. Vyakarana (grammar)
4. Nirukta (etymology)
5. Chhanda (meter)
6. Jyotisa (astrophysics)

Shatdarsana

- There are six schools of Shad-Darshana philosophy in India. These are Uttara Mimamsa, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, and Purva.
- These are written in the short, direct, and Sutra (aphorism) style.
- They all spread the value of living. Gautama wrote the Nyaya Darshana, Kanada the Vaisheshika, Jaimini the Purva Mimamsa, Kapila the Sankhya, Patanjali the Yoga, and Badarayana the Uttar Mimamsa.

Puranas

- The Puranas are an important source of sacred Hinduism. Purana, which means "very old" or "ancient," refers to the texts themselves, which assert an older date than the Vedas. Nevertheless.
- They are regarded by scholars as newer scripture since they deal with what they refer to as the "later deities"—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.
- The Puranas discuss the creation, the ancestry of gods and patriarchs, moral guidelines, descriptions of numerous worlds, and many well-known myths and legends.
- Some Puranas are frequently recited in public such as Devibhagavata-, Bhagavata-, and Vishnu-Puranas.

Itihasas

Itihas such as Ramayana and Mahabharata are stories or epics. Ramayana was composed by Maharishi Valmiki and consists of 24,000 verses. Mahabharata was composed by Maharishi Vyas and contains 1 lakh verses.

Tantras

- There are 3 Hindu Tantras: Śaiva, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇava.
- Tantric literature is not a coherent body of literature, nor is it always made up of the same kinds of content.
- Agama, Nigama, and Samhita are sometimes used in place of the word Tantra, particularly when writings desire to underline their similarity to the Vedas.
- According to a custom, Saiva Tantras are referred to as Agamas, Vaisnava Tantras as Samhitas, and Sakta Tantras as Tantras. But these classifications are not consistent.
- Tantric literature must therefore be characterized as theistic literature primarily concerned with worshipping one or more deities.

Agamas

- The Agamas are instructional guides for god worship as well as theological treatises.
- The Tantras, Mantras, and Yantras are all part of the Agamas.
- These are treatises that describe how God is worshipped outside of the body, in idols, temples, etc.
- Every agama treats four different attributes:
 1. Jnana (Knowledge)
 2. Yoga (Concentration)
 3. Kriya (Esoteric Ritual)
 4. Charya (Exoteric Worship)

Upavedas

Upvedas constitute traditional literature and applied knowledge. There are four Upvedas:

1. Dhanurveda which deals with the art of warfare
2. Gandharvaveda which deals with music
3. Silpaveda deals with art and architecture
4. Ayurveda deals with medicine

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