

Ancient Literature

These notes are your ultimate revision weapon to revise Ancient Literature history. We've distilled years of previous exam questions (PYQs) into one powerful, concise resource. Everything you need to know, nothing you don't.

- **PYQs, Decoded:** All key concepts from past exams, organized and simplified.
- **Revise in Record Time:** Short, precise, and designed for last-minute review.
- **Focus on What Matters:** Master high-probability topics and boost your confidence.

Ancient Indian Literature & Scholars: A Structured Overview

Sanskrit Literature



A. Drama & Plays

Work	Author	Key Facts
Mudrarakshasa	Vishakhadatta	- Sanskrit play from the Gupta period. - Narrates the story of Chandragupta and Kautilya overthrowing the Nanda dynasty.
Devi-Chandragupta	Vishakhadatta	- Another play by Vishakhadatta.
Mrichchhakatika (The Little Clay Cart)	Shudraka	- A famous Sanskrit play.
Swapnavasavadatta	Bhasa	- Play by the renowned poet Bhasa.
Matta Vilasa	Mahendra	- Discusses contemporary religious and

Prahasana	Varman (Pallava ruler)	social life.
Plays by Kalidasa	Kalidasa	- Wrote Abhijnana Shakuntalam, Vikramorvashi, and Malavikagnimitram (a romantic story about King Agnimitra). - Did not write Mrichchhakatikam or Janaki Haranama.
Plays by Harsha	Harshavardhana (King)	- Wrote Nagananda, Ratnavali, and Priyadarshika. - Did not write Karpuramanjari.
Other Playwrights	Bhavabhuti	- Wrote Mahavira Charita, Malatimadhava, and Uttararamacharita.
	Rajasekhara	- Wrote Karpuramanjari.
	Hastimalla & Kshemeshvara	 - Also famous ancient playwrights.

B. Poetry & Epics (Mahakavyas)

Work	Author	Key Facts
Kumarasambhava ("The Birth of the War God")	Kalidasa	- An epic poem.
Raghuvamsa	Kalidasa	- An epic poem.
Meghaduta (The Cloud Messenger)	Kalidasa	- A lyrical poem.
Ritusamhara	Kalidasa	- A poem.
Kiratarjuniya	Bharavi	- Epic based on a story from the Mahabharata.

Dashkumarcharitam (The Tale of the Ten Princes)	Dandin (Dandi)	- A poetic work.
Geet Govind	Jayadeva (Court poet of King Lakshman Sen)	- A poem divided into twelve sections (12th century).
Mahabharata	Vyasa	- Known for the saying: "What is here is also found elsewhere, but if not here is found nowhere else."
Bhagavad Gita (Part of Mahabharata)		- States the philosophy: "The right is to work only, but never with its fruits."
Panchatantra	Attributed to Vishnu Sharma	- A collection of animal fables. - Translated into 15 Indian and 40 foreign languages. - Translated into Persian by Abul Fazl as Ayar-e-danish.
Works based on Mahabharata	Various	- Include Naishadha Charita, Kiratarjuniya, and Sisupalavadha.

C. Prose, Historical Texts & Biographie

Work	Author	Key Facts
Rajatarangini (River of Kings)	Kalhana	- A history of Kashmir. - Kalhana was a contemporary of King Jai Singh (c. 1128-1149 CE). - Narrative continued by Jonaraja and Srivara.
Harshacharita	Banabhatta	- Biography of King Harshavardhana.

Vikramankade vacharita	Bilhana	- A historical biography.
Gaudavaho	Vakpati (in Prakrit)	- A historical poem about King Yasovarman of Kanauj; similar to Rajatarangini.
Kadambari	Banabhatta	- A novel/prose romance. - Was not written by Subandhu.
Vinaya-Patrika	Tulsidas	- A book of religious poetry (Bhakti literature).

D. Lexicography & Grammar

Work	Author	Key Facts
Amarakosha	Amarasimha (Gupta period)	- A Sanskrit lexicon (thesaurus).
Ashtadhyayi	Panini	- Foundational text of Sanskrit grammar.
Mahabhasya	Patanjali	- A commentary on Sanskrit grammar.
Katantra	Associated with Sarva Varma	- A Sanskrit grammar text.

Scientific, Technical & Philosophical Treatises

Field	Treatise	Author	Key Facts
Politics & Statecraft	Arthashastra	Chanakya (Kautilya)	- Treatise on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy.
Science & Astronomy	Brihat Samhita, Brihat Jataka, Pancha	Varahamihira	- Brihat Samhita is an encyclopedic work. - Panchasiddhantika is

	Siddhantika		based on Greek astronomy.
Mathematics	Lilavati	Bhaskara II (Bhaskaracharya)	- 12th-century mathematician known for Algebra.
	Decimal Place Value System	Aryabhatta	- Credited with its invention.
Medicine (Ayurveda)	Charaka Samhita	Charaka	- Foundational text of medicine; Charaka is the father of Indian medicine.
	Ashtanga-Samgraha	Vagbhata	- A medical text.
Performing Arts	Natyashastra	Bharata Muni	- Foundational text on performing arts; considered the primary source for North Indian classical music.
Erotics	Kamasutra	Vatsyayana	- A text on erotics.
Law	Mitakshara	Vigneshwara	- A commentary on Yajnavalkya Smriti (important in Hindu law).
Philosophy	Charvaka/Lokayata		- School of Indian materialism. - Accepts only Perception as a valid source of knowledge. - Rejects god, afterlife, and liberation (moksha).
	Nyaya	Gautam	- School of logic and epistemology.

Historical & Religious Texts

A. Puranas & Dharmashastras

- **Vayu Purana:** Mentions the ancient name "**Nilotpala**" for the Mahanadi River.
- **Manusmriti (Laws of Manu):**
 - Related to the Social System (varna, ashrama, duties).
 - Also known as *Manav Dharam Shastra* (18 chapters).
 - Attributed to Manu, the first law-giver of India.
 - Foundation of Indian law and society.

B. Buddhist Literature

- **Milindapanha:**
 - A Buddhist text in the Pali language.
 - A dialogue between King Menander (Milinda) and the Buddhist monk Nagasena.
 - It is **not** a Jain chronicle, Sanskrit drama, or Persian epic.
- **Buddhacharita:**
 - A Sanskrit epic on the life of Buddha, written by **Ashvaghosha** (not Vasubandhu).
- **Saundarananda:** Also written by Ashvaghosha.

C. Sangam Literature

- **Sangam Sahitya** (Sangam Literature) is **silent about the trade routes** of ancient India.

Court Poets & Their Patrons

Poet/Scholar	Patron / Court
Kalidasa	Court of Chandra Gupta II (Gupta Period)
Harishena	Court of Samudra Gupta (Composed the Allahabad Pillar Inscription)
Banabhatta	Court of Harshavardhana

Bhavabhuti	Court of King Yasovarman of Kannauj
Vakpati	Court of King Yasovarman of Kanauj
Jayadeva	Court of King Lakshman Sen of Bengal (12th century)
Amir Khusrau	Court of Sultan Alauddin Khilji

Foreign Accounts of India

Historian/Author	Work	Key Facts
Herodotus (Greek)	The Histories	- Known as the 'Father of History'. - Discusses the relationship between India and Persia in the 5th century BCE.
Pompeius Trogus (Roman)	Historia Philippica	- Wrote about history.
Pliny the Elder (Roman)	The Natural History	- A Roman author; work was not written by Ptolemy.
Hui-li (Chinese)	Life of Hiuen Tsang	- Wrote the biography of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang.

The Gupta Period: A Golden Age of Literature

- Known as the **"Golden Age of Sanskrit Literature"**.
- Notable works from this era include:
 - **Amarakosha** by Amarasimha
 - **Kamasutra** by Vatsyayana
 - **Meghadūta** by Kalidasa
 - **Mudrarakshasa** by Vishakhadatta

Miscellaneous Facts

- **Concept of Zero:** Invented by Indians, transferred to Arabs (c. 873 A.D.), and then to Europe.
- **Musical Instruments:** The **Veena** is the most ancient instrument among Sitar, Sarod, and Tabla.
- **Dramaturgy:** **Das Rupaka** refers to the ten types of plays in Sanskrit literature.

Know More about Ancient Literature:

- [Ancient Literature One Liner Questions & Answers](#)
- [Ancient Literature – Old Year Questions and Answer](#)

