

Famous Tamil Literature of South India.

Hello Everyone,

In the last session, we discussed on Introduction to Indian Philosophy and Famous Sanskrit literatures of India. Today in this session, we will discuss on Famous Tamil Literature of South India.

- South India, with its rich history and stunning landscapes, has provided the setting for some of the greatest epics in the ancient world.
- In ancient times the association or academy of the most learned men of the Tamil land was called ‘Sangam’ (or ‘Cankam’), whose chief function was promotion of literature. Later Tamil writers mention the existence of three literary academies (Sangams) at different periods. The last academy is credited with the corpus of literature now known as ‘Sangam Works

Let’s see the ancient and famous literatures of South India, starting with Tolkappiyam

- Tolkappiyam, the name signifying the ancient book or ‘the preserver of ancient institutions’, was written by Tolkappiyanar and is the oldest extant Tamil grammar dating back to 500 B.C.
- It lays down rules for different kinds of poetical compositions drawn from the examples furnished by the best works available at that time.
- Iyal is elucidated clearly and systematically in Tolkappiyam.
- Containing about 1,610 suttirams (aphorisms), it is in three parts-ezhuttu (orthography), Sol (etymology), and porul (literary conventions and usages)-each with nine sections.
- While the first two parts are interesting from both linguistic and philological points of view, the third, poruladhikdram, is most valuable as it gives a glimpse of the political, social, and religious life of the people during the period when the author of this treatise lived.
- The principal works of the third Sangam have come down to us in the shape of anthologies of poems. The two compilations forming the corpus of the poetry of the third Sangam are Ettuttogai (eight anthologies) and Pattuppattu (ten idylls),
- The anthologies of the third Sangam consist of poems divided into two broad categories-aham or interior and puram or exterior. The former concerns all phases of love between men and women. An allegory of the different stages through which the soul of man passes from its manifestation in the body to its final unification with the Supreme Being is seen in aham. The puram covers varieties of distinctive poems, mostly relating to man’s social behaviour.
- corresponding to five major regions of Tamil Nadu, these poems describe five types of tracts with their distinctive features. These are: kurinci (mountainous region), mullai (forest region), marutam (agricultural region), neytal (coastal region), and

pallai (desert region). True love, which is either karpu (wedded) or kalavu (furtive), is considered under five aspects, namely, punartal (union), pirital (separation), irutal (patience in separation), irangal (bemoaning), and udal (sulking), and these are made to correlate with tinai, the fivefold physiographical divisions.

- The delineation of the early Tamil society in these poems is remarkably clear and a great deal of light is thrown on the civilization of the Tamils.
- Sangam works provide us with valuable information regarding religion, social life, government, commerce, arts, music, dance, courtship, manners and customs, and the daily life of the Tamils.

One another notable piece of work by Tiruvalluvar's '(c. first century B.C.) is Tirukkural or Kural,

- Tirukkural which is in the form of couplets and deals with the three aims of life-aram (righteousness), porul (wealth), and inbam or kamam (pleasure).
- It consists of 133 chapters each containing ten couplets. Conveying noble thoughts couched in concised language, each couplet is a gem by itself. The first part of Kural (arattuppal) gives the essentials of Yoga philosophy. Besides, it deals with the happy household life as well as guiding towards the path of renunciation. The thoughts of Kural in its second part (porutpal) centre on polity and administration, including citizenship and social relations, in an admirable way. The third part (inbattuppal or kamattuppal), consisting of couplets in dramatic monologues, treats of the concept of love.

Post-Sangam period: The Epics

- The five major epics-Silappadikaram, Manimekalai, Jivaka-cintamani, Valaiyapati, and Kundalakesi-are the outstanding contributions of the post-Sangam period.
- In this session we will explore two of the 'Five Great Jewels' of Tamil literature: The Lay of the Anklet (Cilappatikāram) and The Dancer with the Magic Bowl (Maṇimēkalai). These epics were composed sometime between the 1st and 8th centuries CE and present a view of the societies, religions, and cultures of ancient South India. The central narratives of both epics follow the adventures of female protagonists: Kaṇṇaki, a devoted wife turned goddess, and Maṇimēkalai, a dancer-courtesan turned renunciant.
- These two epics are also connected through their female characters, as Maṇimēkalai is the daughter of Kaṇṇaki's husband Kōvalan and his mistress Mātavi. In conjunction with reading these fascinating tales, we will also explore their literary and historical contexts and their significance within the Jain and Buddhist religious traditions.
- Silappadikaram - contains all the three aspects of Tamil literature, viz. iyal, isai, and natakam, it has been designated as a muttamizh-kappiyam. It is, therefore, invaluable as a source-book of ancient Tamil dance and classical music-both vocal and instrumental. The author of this work is the ascetic-poet Ilanko Adikal.
- Manimekalai, a direct sequel to Silappadikaram, is also a great source of information on ancient Tamil society. Written by Cittalai Cattamar, this epic marks a new

development in Tamil literature by presenting philosophical and religious debates in mellifluous style.

With this, I hope you had a brief understanding of Sangam Literature, i.e, Tamil Literature which is the ancient literatures of South India.

Thank you