

INDIAN ESSAY

Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

- Pre-classical
- Classical
- Early Post –classical
- Late Post-classical
- Early Modern
- 19th Century
- Early 20th Century
- Late 20th Century

Pre-Classical

Overview

Although the ancient Vedic texts, composed orally in Sanskrit from about 1200 to 400 BCE, are mostly poetic, ritual literature, some contain prose passages. At the same time, these prose texts also include many verses, either as samples to be used in ritual or as quotations from the ritual texts. These largely prose texts, which date from about 900 BCE and are considered ‘commentaries’ on the four Vedas, are divided into three groups: Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. Like the four Vedas themselves, they are considered as *sruti* (‘heard’) texts, as opposed to *smriti* (‘remembered’) texts, and thus have the highest authority in Hindu tradition. Nevertheless, they present arguments and explanations, and thus are the origins of discursive prose in Indian literature. In addition, these later texts (especially the Upanishads) tell stories.

Brahmanas

The *Brahmanas* are mainly prose explanations of how to perform sacrifices, that is, a sort-of manual to be used by men less learned than the priests. For example, the opening section of the *Chandogya Brahmana*, one of the oldest Brahmanas, lists the hymns to be used during a marriage and at the birth of a child. It also then instructs the user in how to perform the ritual, how to hold one’s fingers and how to pronounce the ritual words. This is followed by a short exposition of the social importance of marriage. In order to illustrate a ritual technique or instruct a pupil, the Brahmanas also use stories. One example is the story of Pururavas (a man) and Urvashi (his divine lover), told as part of the instructions for becoming a divine musician (Gandharva). This story is alluded to in the *Rig Veda* (one hymn contains a dialogue between the two lovers), but it is fully narrated in the *Satapatha Brahmana* (c. 800 BCE).

Aranyakas

The Aranyakas, or ‘Forest Books,’ came after the Brahmanas, probably 800-600 BCE. These texts are more contemplative than the functional Brahmanas and were used by men toward the end of life when, by convention, they entered the forest for meditation. They are also transitional texts, in that they provide a bridge from the ritual and mythology of the four Vedas to the philosophical speculation of the Upanishads. This point is crucial since it parallels the overall shift in Hindu thought from the correct external performance of a ritual to the internalised vision of the ritual.

For example, the *Aitareya Aranyaka* contains discussions of correct recitation of specific words, of breathing techniques and of the esoteric meanings of certain rituals and mantras. It is also transitional in that three of the last sections of this Aranyaka become, with minor changes, one of the later Upanishads.

Upanishads

History While there are more than 200 texts bearing the title 'Upanishad' (lit. 'sitting near [a sage]'), only twelve are considered major texts. These major Upanishads were composed over a number of centuries, probably from about 700-400 BCE. Like all early Indian literature, they were orally composed, performed and transmitted. Tradition, however, maintains that they were created by named sages. The earliest surviving manuscripts date from about the 14 century CE, although, like other Vedic texts, they were probably written down much earlier.

Prose The Upanishads represent a significant advance in the development of discursive prose in Indian literature. From the short passages found in the commentaries of the Brahmanas and Aranyakas, here we find sections extending for several printed pages. This is not simply a curious shift in literary expression but a vehicle for articulating two fundamental concepts of Indian religion: the unity of soul and universe, and the karmic law of transmigration.

Atman (soul) In earlier Vedic texts, the *atman* appeared distinct from the *brahman* (the underlying reality of the universe). The grand conclusion of the Upanishads is that the *atman* and the *brahman* are one, that there is no difference between individual souls and the ultimate reality. This realisation is possible only when a person understands, through meditation, that the *atman* is pure consciousness and that the body is a mere manifestation of that consciousness. The flux of fleeting impressions that make up the material world is unreal because it is impermanent and therefore subject to death.

Transmigration This realisation also led to the Hindu belief of transmigration in the Upanishads. In Vedic ritual texts, dead people are said to go to 'the House of the Fathers' or 'to the House of Clay,' where they would reside permanently (although there are a few cryptic references to souls becoming plants or animals and then reborn). In the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad*, however, the principle of merit is introduced. The souls of those who have lived lives of charity and austerity pass into the paradise of Yama (god of death), then to the moon, to empty space, to the atmosphere and eventually descend to earth as rain.

Inscriptions

Another important early source for the development of Indian prose in this period is the large corpus of inscriptions, mostly in Sanskrit but also in Prakrit. Many inscriptions were in verse, and many were heraldic declarations or hagiographical statements, but some of the most famous were written in prose (or a combination of verse and prose). Among these prose inscriptions, the Ashoka edicts in Prakrit resemble the modern essay in that they present a personal argument (see Text 2 below, in which the Buddhist king explains why he has renounced warfare). This early use of prose is a rich, but so far untapped, resource for the study of Indian literary history.

Questions/discussion

1. Make a chronological study of prose passages in the Vedic texts (Brahmanas and Upanishads) and inscriptions to draw up a time-line of the development of prose in this period.
2. Many scholars claim that the central idea in the Upanishads (that *atman=brahman*) is similar, or even identical, to the doctrine of 'forms' in Platonic philosophy. Is this claim justified? And if so, is the parallel explained by the transmission of an idea across territory or by the independent discovery of the same idea?
3. Buddhism, especially early Buddhist thought, developed within the same historical-philosophical context as the Upanishads. Identify both major differences and similarities between these two systems.

Reading

Patrick Olivelle, *Upanisads* (Oxford, 2008)

Ainslie T. Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition, vol. 1* (Columbia, 1988)

Samuel Geoffrey, *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra. Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2010)

Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads* (Harper Collins, India, 1953, Reprinted 1994)

Texts

1. From the *Katha Upanishad*, trans. Eknath Easwaran

Know the Self as lord of the chariot,
The body as the chariot itself,
The discriminating intellect as charioteer,
And the mind as reins.

The senses, say the wise, are the horses;
Selfish desires are the roads they travel.
When the Self is confused with the body,
Mind, and senses, they point out, he seems
To enjoy pleasure and suffer sorrow.

2. Edict XIII of King Ashoka, in Prarkit, trans. E. Hultsch,

- (A) When king Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin had been anointed eight years, (the country of) the Kalingas was conquered by (him).
- (B) One hundred and fifty thousand in number were the men who were deported thence, one hundred thousand in number were those who were slain there, and many times as many those who died.
- (C) After that, now that (the country of) the Kalingas has been taken, Dēvānāmpriya (is devoted) to a zealous study of morality, to the love of morality, and to the instruction (of people) in morality.
- (D) This is the repentance of Dēvānāmpriya on account of his conquest of (the country of) the Kalingas.
- (E) For, this is considered very painful and deplorable by Dēvānāmpriya, that, while one is conquering an unconquered (country), slaughter, death, and deportation of people (are taking place) there.
- (F) But the following is considered even more deplorable than this by Dēvānāmpriya.
- (G) (To) the Brāhmaṇas or Śramaṇas, or other sects or householders, who are living there, (and) among whom the following are practised: obedience to those who receive high pay, obedience to mother and father, obedience to elders, proper courtesy to friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives, to slaves and servants, (and) firm devotion,—to these then happen injury or slaughter or deportation of (their) beloved ones.
- (H) Or, if there are then incurring misfortune the friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives of those whose affection (for the latter) is undiminished, although they are (themselves) well provided for, this (misfortune) as well becomes an injury to those (persons) themselves.
- (I) This is shared by all men and is considered deplorable by Dēvānāmpriya.
- (J) And there is no (place where men) are not indeed attached to some sect.
- (K) Therefore even the hundredth part or the thousandth part of all those people who were slain, who died, and who were deported at that time in Kalinga, (would) now be considered very deplorable by Dēvānāmpriya.
- (L) And Dēvānāmpriya thinks that even (to one) who should wrong (him), what can be forgiven is to be forgiven,
- (M) And even (the inhabitants of) the forests which are (included) in the dominions of Dēvānāmpriya, even those he pacifies (and) converts.
- (N) And they are told of the power (to punish them) which Dēvānāmpriya (possesses) in spite of (his) repentance, in order that they may be ashamed (of their crimes) and may not be killed.
- (O) For Dēvānāmpriya desires towards all beings abstention from hurting, self-control, (and) impartiality in (case of) violence.
- (P) And this conquest is considered the principal one by Dēvānāmpriya, viz. the conquest by morality [dhamma vijaya].
- (Q) And this (conquest) has been won repeatedly by Dēvānāmpriya both here and among all (his) borderers, even as far as at (the distance of) six hundred *yōjanas*, where the Yōna king named Antiyoka (is ruling), and beyond this Antiyoka, (where) four—4—kings (are ruling), (viz. the king) named Turamaya, (the king) named Antikini, (the king) named Maka, (and the king) named Alikāṣudara, (and) towards the south, (where) the Chōḍas and Pāṇḍyas (are ruling), as far as Tāmraparṇī.

- (R) Likewise here in the king's territory, among the Yōnas and Kambōyas, among the Nabhakas and Nabhitis, among the Bhōjas and Pitinikas, among the Andhras and Palidas,—everywhere (people) are conforming to Dēvānāmpriya's instruction in morality [dhamma].
- (S) Even, those to whom the envoys of Dēvānāmpriya do not go, having heard of the duties of morality,
- (B) the ordinances, (and) the instruction in morality of Dēvānāmpriya, are conforming to morality and will conform to (it).
- (T) This conquest, which has been won by this everywhere,—a conquest (won) everywhere (and) repeatedly,—causes the feeling of satisfaction.
- (U) Satisfaction has been obtained (by me) at the conquest by morality.
- (V) But this satisfaction is indeed of little (consequence).
- (W) Dēvānāmpriya thinks that only the fruits in the other (world) are of great (value).
- (X) And for the following purpose has this rescript on morality been written, (viz.) in order that the sons (and) great-grandsons (who) may be (born) to me, should not think that a fresh conquest ought to be made, (that), if a conquest does please them, they should take pleasure in mercy and light punishments, and (that) they should regard the conquest by morality as the only (true) conquest.
- (Y) This (conquest bears fruit) in this world (and) in the other world.
- (Z) And let there be (to them) pleasure in the abandonment of all (other aims), which is pleasure in morality.
- (AA) For this (bears fruit) in this world (and) in the other world.

Classical

Overview

The thousand years of the classical period in India saw the proliferation of the essay in diverse forms. Not all these forms, however, satisfy the modern criterion that the essay should present the author's own argument simply because so much of Indian literature is based on the authority of tradition rather than a named individual. Similarly, while most of the classical essay forms are written in prose, some do use verse or some combination of the two. However, the content of these essay forms, which range across law, political science, drama, grammar and aesthetics, and their intention, which is to inform and instruct, do resemble the conventional essay.

Religious treatises

Hindu With the passage of centuries, the meaning of esoteric Vedic texts became obscure and a new type of prose text emerged to elucidate them. These were the *sutras* (lit. 'thread', cf. English 'suture'), which were compilations of aphoristic expressions that functioned as manuals to explain the scriptures. Three major examples of these texts, all composed in the second half of the first millennium BCE, were the *Srauta Sutras* (a manual for Vedic rituals), the *Grhya Sutras* (a manual for domestic rituals) and the *Dharma Sutras* (a set of manuals on Hindu law).

Buddhist The Mahayana Buddhist tradition of north India also produced remarkable religio-philosophical treatises called *sutras*. These texts explicated the esoteric doctrines of Mahayana 'perfectionism' and 'visualisation'. The most famous of these texts is the *Vajracchedika* or 'Diamond Sutra', so named because a diamond (a metaphor for insight) could cut through ignorance and reveal wisdom. The text was probably composed in the 4-5th century CE, though the earliest surviving text (a Chinese translation found by Auriel Stein in the Dunhuang caves) is dated 868 CE

Law texts

Dharma Sastras In the early centuries of the Christian Era, the prose *sutras* were expanded, revised and collected in compilations known collectively as the *Dharma Sastras* ('Instructions on Dharma [Law]'). The number of these new, much longer, texts is unknown (many cited texts have not survived), but experts place the total at about 5,000. The *Dharma Sastras* are composed in a simple verse form (the *sloka*), but their content and intent are close to those of the academic essay.

Technique The technique of the *Dharma Sastras* is to quote from an old text, explicate it and then attempt to reconcile differing interpretations that have accrued over time.

This approach means that the texts are veritable encyclopaedias of Hindu tradition, gathering verses, maxims, aphorisms and quotations from anywhere and everywhere. For example, the *Manu Smṛti* (see below) contains hundreds of verses found also in the *Mahabharata* and probably culled from a common source.

Key texts Four of these *Dharma Sastra* texts, which are commonly known as *smṛti* ('remembered' rather than 'heard' or *śruti*), are particularly influential in the development and practice of Hindu law. These four are: *Manu Smṛti*, *Yajñavalkya Smṛti*, *Narada Smṛti* and *Viṣṇu Smṛti*. The first two were composed in the period 200-500 CE, while the last appeared somewhat later.

Manu Smṛti Among this dense forest of Sanskrit law texts, the *Manu Smṛti* stands out as the most prominent in the development of the Hindu tradition. Even today, it is cited and studied by the general public, by law-makers and by public officials, especially in village councils known as the *panchayat*. The *Manu Smṛti* is primarily a discourse on the rights and obligations of individuals within society understood within a cosmological and teleological framework. This is evident from its four main divisions:

1. Creation of the world
2. Source of dharma [law]
3. The dharma of the four social classes
4. Law of karma, rebirth and final liberation

Theatre

Natya Sastra Another important yet very different *sastra* text is the *Natya Sastra*. Composed sometime in the early centuries of the Christian Era and ascribed to the legendary Bharata, this Sanskrit work of approximately 6,000 verses is a manual on the theory and the performance of the theatrical arts: music, dance and drama. It describes the *rasa* theory of Indian aesthetics, lists hundreds of gestures for dancers (including thirty-six for the eyes) and explains which pose is correct for which emotion. Even today, Indian dance-drama traditions, from classical Bharatanatyam to folk Teyyam, continue to combine these three arts of sound, movement and story.

Aesthetics The *Natya Sastra* is most famous for its articulation of the classical Indian theory of aesthetics. The two key terms are *bhava*, the mood or emotion, and *rasa*, the distillation of that mood that is evoked in a (discerning) audience. Eight different *rasas* are recognised (love, pity, anger, disgust, heroism, awe, terror and comedy). The *rasa* theory guides not only theatre arts but also literary arts, especially poetry

Statecraft

Artha Sastra Another major essay text from this period is the *Artha Sastra* ('Manual on Material Gain'), which was composed over several centuries, probably taking final form about 300 CE. Attributed to Kautilya, a Brahmin advisor to the king Chandragupta (4th c. BCE), it contains acute observations on, and reminiscences of, that earlier Mauryan kingdom. The *Artha Sastra*'s discourse on polity elevates the science of 'acquiring and maintaining power' above the spiritual science of Vedic literature. In doing so, it reflects the gradual ascent of merchants and kings in Indian society. Classical Hindu thought recognises four ends of man: *dharma* (social order), *artha* (material gain), *kama* (physical pleasure) and *moksa* ('spiritual release'). Proclaiming the prominence of *artha*, the text says: 'On material gain rests the realisation of social order and pleasure.'

Tirukkural The topics of politics and material gain were also addressed in an influential Tamil text of this period, the *Tirukkural* (c. 400-500 CE). Attributed to Tiruvalluvar, who is said to have been an Untouchable/Dalit, this text contains 133 chapters, each with ten couplets (*kural*), offering advice on the ethics of everyday life. As such, it is much wider in scope than the *Artha Sastra* and speaks to concerns of the common man and woman. Even today, memorable couplets are quoted in daily conversations and in the media. A very popular couplet— 'Everyone my kin, everywhere my home'— is often quoted to counter the hierarchy of caste and religion.

Grammar

Panini The Sanskrit grammar attributed to Panini (6th-5th c. BCE) is a masterful and precise work that, in effect, created the modern field of linguistics. It describes the language of the time and then proscribes rules for its use, using the aphoristic *sutra* form. Many linguists claim that this grammar has never been surpassed in descriptive accuracy of the Sanskrit language.

Tolkappiyam An equally famous Tamil grammar, ascribed to Agathiyar, is the *Tolkappiyam*. This Tamil text is dated variously, although a late date of about 400 CE seems reasonable inasmuch as its title ('On Ancient Literature') suggests it appeared sometime after the corpus of ancient Tamil poetry (c. 100-300 CE). It is divided into three sections: orthography and pronunciation; parts of speech and syntax; prosody and meaning. This work remains not only a major influence on the study of Tamil language but also a symbol of Dravidian cultural identity.

Questions

1. The *rasa* theory of classical Indian aesthetics rests on two key terms: *bhava* ('mood,' 'emotion') of the artist and *rasa* ('taste,' 'sentiment') or the distillation of that mood in a discerning audience. The eight *rasas* provide an emotional vocabulary for Indian poets, intellectuals and audiences to use when discussing culture. Compare this aesthetic theory with another theatrical aesthetic, such as that Greek, Chinese or Shakespearean.
2. The *Dharma Sastras*, or Hindu law books, are large compilations of older texts and interpretations. Looking at the legal traditions in other parts of the world, do you think this 'encyclopaedic' approach is effective or cumbersome?
3. The ancient Indian grammar of Panini is considered one of the finest works ever produced in the field of linguistics. After reading the secondary literature on this topic, can you identify its major contributions to modern linguistics?

Reading

Ainslie T. Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 1 (Columbia, 1988)

A.L. Basham, *Wonder that was India* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1982)

Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasutras: The Law Codes of Ancient India* (Oxford, 1999)

Sheldon Pollock (ed.) *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley, 2003)

Texts

1. From the *Artha Sastra* 7.2 trans by Patrick Olivelle

When the degree of progress is the same in pursuing peace and waging war, peace is to be preferred. For, in war, there are disadvantages such as losses, expenses and absence from home.

2. From the *Artha Sastra* 2.1.3.6-2.1.39 trans by Patrick Olivelle

The king should grant exemption [from taxes]

to a region devastated by an enemy king or tribe,
to a region beleaguered by sickness or famine.

He should safeguard agriculture

when it is stressed by the hardships of fines, forced labor, taxes, and animal herds
when they are harassed by thieves, vicious animals, poison, crocodiles or sickness

He should keep trade routes [roads] clear

when they are oppressed by anyone, including his officers, robbers or frontier commanders
when they are worn out by farm animals

The king should protect produce, forests, elephants forests, reservoirs and mines
established in the past and also set up new ones.

3. From the *Tirukkural* trans. by P.S. Sundaram, 1990.

Make foes of bowmen if you must, never of penmen.

Great wealth, like a crowd at a concert, gathers and melts.

It is compassion, the most gracious of virtues, that moves the world.

EARLY POST-CLASSICAL

Overview

Genre As always, it is difficult to match Indian genres with Western genres. In the case of the ‘essay’ (itself a relatively new term), there is more than the usual mismatch. Post-classical Indian literature includes a great deal of what we might call ‘commentary’, ‘discourse’ or ‘treatise’ but little of what we would think of as an individual author presenting a personal argument. Rather, a scholar, named or not, adds to a tradition by interpretation of older texts, in a chain, so that the end is really commentaries on commentaries. The Sanskrit genre of *bhasya* translates well as ‘commentary’, while the Tamil term *urai* refers to ‘commentary’ as well as ‘discourse’ or ‘treatise.’

Texts This period produced significant works of commentary in Sanskrit and Tamil. In both traditions, prose gradually began to dominate, although an entirely prose text was still rare. However, this was a period of intense philosophical and religious debate, and scholars used commentaries and treatises to advance their arguments. We have a variety of Hindu schools of thought defined and refined through commentaries, a Tamil literary culture canonised through commentaries, a south Indian Jain culture articulated through maxims and a south Indian Buddhist culture promoted through a grammar.

Sanskrit

Astrology Indian astrology (allied with mathematics) was the topic of a number of important texts during this period. The most far-reaching of these is the *Pancha-Siddhantika* by Varāhamihira (505–587 CE), also called Varaha or Mihir, who lived in Ujain in western India. In true commentarial tradition, this text summarises five earlier astrological texts and provides new information, such as a precise calculation for the shifting of the equinox (50.32 seconds). Scholars have found traces of Greek astrological thinking in this text, as well as in other astrological texts of this period, including the *Brhat Parāśara Horāśāstra* and *Sārāvalī*.

Mathematics The oldest surviving Sanskrit text on mathematics (*Āryabhaṭīya*) dates from the 6th century CE. A century later the mathematician Bhaskara wrote a commentary (*Āryabhaṭīyabhāṣya*) on this text, in which he describes the Hindu numerical system, including the circle as a representation of zero.

Sankara The Sanskrit commentary tradition in this period produced one of India’s greatest thinkers of all time. Sankara (or Shankaracharya) was a Brahmin scholar (probably 8th c. CE) who reinterpreted the Vedic canon in terms of a particular philosophy known as *advaita* (non-dualism). This meant, in short, that the individual soul (*atman*) and the universal reality (*brahman*) are one and the same, and that everything else (the perceptible world) is *maya* or illusion. Non-dualism, as defined by Sankara, continues to this day to be a strong philosophical tradition not only in India, but across the world.

Works Sankara wrote (or composed) hundreds of commentaries, on virtually every major Sanskrit text known in his time. His most influential commentary is that on the *Brahma Sutra*, in which he mentions several other (now lost) commentaries on the same text. Equally important, however, for propagating the non-dualist school of philosophy is his interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita* since this is the most popular Hindu text.

Tamil

Anthologies In the period after 500 CE, Tamil scholars began to compile into anthologies and then write commentaries on the earlier Sangam poems from the classical period. Compilation was not just an act of collection. The compilers also ‘edited’ the poems, adding a colophon and (in most cases) a poet’s name. One man, Peruntevanar, is credited with the compilation and editing of several of the most famous anthologies.

Types of anthologies Tamil literary tradition recognises three categories of anthology. First, there is a collection known as the *Ettutokai* (‘Eight Anthologies’), comprising *Akananuru* (‘400 [Poems] on Love’), *Kuruntokai* (‘Short Poems’), *Patirruppattu* (‘The Ten Tens’), *Ainkurunuru* (‘Five Hundred Short [Poems]’), *Narrinai* (‘Excellent Poems on Love’), *Parippatal* (‘Ten Tens’), *Kalitokai* (‘Poems in the *kali* metre’) and *Purananuru* (‘400 [Poems] on War’). A second category of anthologies is the *Pattupattu* (‘Ten [Narrative] Songs’), which are longer and later than the eight listed above. Yet a third category, edited and described in this period, is the *Patinēṅkiḷkaṇakku* (‘Eighteen Minor Works’).

Rediscovery These anthologies and their commentaries are the surviving versions of the classical Tamil tradition. It should be noted that even these texts were ‘lost’ for about a thousand years until a Tamil scholar rediscovered them in manuscript form in the late 19th century. This man, a Brahmin judge named Swaminatha Aiyar, made his life’s work the recovery and publication of classical Tamil literature. Without his somewhat serendipitous discovery, today we would not even know of the existence of Tamil classical poetry.

Jain Two important Jain texts in Tamil from this period are the *Nalatiyar* and *Palamoli Nannuru*. Both are included in the third anthology listed above (‘Eighteen Minor Works’), and both are collections of short maxims in the south Indian Jain tradition. While the surviving texts were compiled sometime in the 6th or 7th century CE, they clearly drew on a much earlier tradition. Although these brief, proverb-like maxims are in verse, their didactic intention regarding the moral life resembles the essay.

Commentary One of the seminal works of Tamil prose produced in this period is *Iraiyāṅār Akapporuḷ* by Nakkirar (8th c.). This is, in effect, Nakkirar’s commentary on an earlier commentary by Iraiyanar on classical love poetry. This commentary occupies a central place in the development of Tamil literature and literary culture. First, it is the definitive articulation of the poetics of Sangam poetry, describing and analysing two major genre categories (‘interior’/love and ‘exterior’/war) and the complex theory of the ‘interior landscape’, in which stages of love are correlated with types of landscape and the natural world. Second, the commentary, despite its frequent use of ‘flowery language,’ is the first Tamil work entirely in prose (though including quotations from verse). Third, it is an intellectual argument, a scholarly treatise intended for other scholars. Lastly, it is probably the first Tamil work that was originally composed in writing.

Grammar An important treatise on grammar and poetics composed in this period is the *Viracoliyam* (9th-10th c. CE). After the first Tamil grammar in the classical period (*Tolkappiyam*), Tamil scholars continued to produce a series of grammars. However, *Viracoliyam* is radically different in that it is part of a growing Tamil Buddhist culture. While it conforms to the structure of earlier Tamil grammars, it aligns itself more closely with the rules of Sanskrit grammar, mixing Tamil and Sanskrit terminology along the way. It is also the first Tamil text to define this dual-language style as *mani-pravalam* (‘rubies and pearls’), which was common in south India during the much of the post-classical and medieval periods.

Questions

1. Genres, it is said, are not just labels but conceptual categories. Discuss this with reference to the Indian genre of ‘commentary’ and the Western ‘essay.’
2. The Jain contribution to Indian literature is often marginalised (somewhat understandably given the enormous number of Hindu and Buddhist texts). However, a study of Jain literature brings up interesting angles on a tradition that we think we understood. Follow the trail of Jain literature by studying one or two key texts in that tradition.
3. Grammars are incredibly important in both the Tamil and Sanskrit literary traditions. Why is this? Is the primacy of grammars found in any other world literature?

Reading

- J. Gonda (ed.), *A History of Indian Literature*, (Otto Harrasowitz, 1974-1983).
- Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Brill, 1975)
- Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan: on Tamil Literature of South India* (Brill, 1973)
- Anne Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-Speaking South India* (Oxford, 1999)

LATE POST-CLASSICAL

Overview

During this period, essay writing developed along three tracks. The first two were parallel and largely situated in south India. First, the Tamil commentarial tradition continued to flourish under the Chola empire (9th-13th c. CE). These works, reflecting both wit and learning, are important as the (still poorly-understood) reservoir from which modern Tamil prose emerged. The second track of the essay, involving some of the same personnel, was the scholarly treatise. Again this occurred mostly in south India, where Sanskrit and Tamil scholarship converged in monasteries (*mathas*), and again with Chola patronage, especially under Rajaraja I and Rajendra I. A third, and unrelated, strand of the essay was Indo-Persian historiography.

Commentary: Tamil

Atiyarkkunallar Atiyarkkunallar (12th or 13th c. CE) wrote a subtle, though unfortunately incomplete, commentary on the earlier Tamil epic *Cilapatikkarm*. In this commentary, Atiyarkkunallar provides a new categorisation of Tamil poetry based on metrical structure and narrative contents. He also supplies quotations (from now lost works) that have enabled scholars to reconstruct the earliest phases of Tamil literary history.

Parimelalakar Considered the ‘prince’ of Tamil commentators, Parimelalakar was born a century later. Drawing heavily on Sanskrit sources, which enriched his grasp of poetics, he wrote two famous commentaries, one on the *Tirukkural* (collection of Jain-inspired maxims) and a second on *Paripattal* (an early collection of Tamil classical poetry). Later writers have admired Parimelalakar’s persuasive argumentation put forward in his concise and forceful sentences.

Nakkinarkkiniyar The last of the great, medieval Tamil commentators, and possibly the greatest, was Nakkinarkkiniyar. A near-contemporary of Parimelalakar, he produced glosses and interpretations of many of the most famous works of classical Tamil poetry. All of his commentaries shine with a brilliance of thought and vividness of language.

Commentary: Indo-Persian

Commentaries on the Qur’an had been produced in Arabic and Persian in the centuries before Muslim rule in India, and these were then drawn upon to compile more commentaries during the rule of the Delhi Sultanate. A well-known example is the *Miftah al-Jinan* composed by Muhammad Mujir Wajib Adib (14th c. CE?), who was a disciple of the Sufi saint Nasir ud-din Chiragh of Delhi. The simple prose of his text, based on repetitions of basic Muslim tenets and practices, is perhaps explained by the fact that its audience were recently converted Muslims in India.

Scholarly treatise

Convergence During these five centuries, there was a fruitful convergence between Tamil and Sanskrit scholarly traditions. This occurred when Tamil Brahmins established *mathas* (monasteries), in which high-caste (but non-Brahmin) Tamil scholars interacted with their Brahmin counterparts. Together they produced scholarly treatises, sometimes in the form of commentaries but always with well-defined arguments.

Ramanuja One of the most influential scholars in the history of Hinduism was Ramanuja, a Tamil Brahmin who lived in the 11th century CE. He challenged the non-dualism (*advaita*) philosophy, in which only divine consciousness (*atman/brahman*) is real and all else is illusion (*maya*). Pointing out that worshippers had a personalised relationship with the divine, but did not become one with it, Ramanuja promoted a philosophy of ‘qualified non-dualism’ (*vishishtadvaita*), also known as Srivaishnavism, since it focused on Visnu. He articulated this subtle school of thought in a number of prose commentaries on major Hindu texts.

Vedanta Desika Ramanuja’s thought was further elaborated in a series of texts written by another Tamil Brahmin scholar, Vedanta Desika (14th c. CE). His genius was to write in both Tamil and Sanskrit, and in a mixture of the two, as evident in his masterpiece, *Garland of the Nine Jewels (Navamanimalai)*.

Madhvacharya The qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja and Vedanta Desika was rejected by another south Indian Sanskrit scholar named Madhvacharya (14th c. CE), who set forth a new interpretation of Hindu scripture called ‘dualism’ (*dvaita*). Like his philosophic adversaries, Madhvacharya wrote voluminously, commenting and reinterpreting Hindu canonical texts to demonstrate that both the *atman* and the *brahman* are real.

His most influential text, however, is probably a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Vallabhacharya Yet another refinement of non-dualism was articulated by Vallabhacharya (15th c. CE), a south Indian (Telugu) Brahmin living in north India. His philosophy is often called ‘pure non-dualism,’ that is, non-dualism unaffected by illusion (*maya*). Although complex, his ideas are set forth in relatively simple prose in a series of texts (*Shodash Granthas*) designed to answer questions from disciples and spread his teaching to new converts.

Meykantar During the same time as these Visnu-oriented philosophical debates occurred, a new philosophical school arose that focused on Siva. Although it drew on earlier devotional songs, this school of Saiva Siddhanta (‘Perfected Saivism’) was formulated first by Meykantar (13th c. CE). Again, this new school grew out of the intellectual combination of Sanskrit and Tamil traditions in the monasteries. Meykantar, a non-Brahmin from a cultivator caste, announced this departure with his famous text, *Civajnanapotam*. His position was firmly dualistic, claiming that both the soul and the material world are real, but that release was possible only through deep meditation on Siva and his *sakti* (‘power’, manifest in the goddess).

Indo-Persian Historiography

Types During the 13th to 15th centuries CE, three different types of historical writing were developed by Indo-Persian writers. The first might be called ‘artistic’, in which poems and ornate language are used to narrate historical events. A second type is didactic history, which sought to interpret events in order to proclaim certain moral truths. A third type was ‘universal’ in that it attempted to tell the full story of human history.

Artistic Writing an historical chronicle in Persian verse was a favourite form for Indo-Persian scholars, who drew on the earlier tradition of praising kings/patrons in a *qasida* (‘ode’). Nonetheless, it required skill and patience to extend these short forms to the comprehensive histories written during this period. Examples include *Fotuh al-salatin* (1351?) by Abd al-Malek Esami, *Bahman-nama* by Nūr-al-Dīn Ḥamza (d.1461), which is a versified history of the Bahmanid sultans of the Deccan, and a version of the *Shan-nama* attributed to Badr Caci (14th c. CE).

Didactic A good representative of didactic historiography is Barani, who considered history to be the ‘twin’ of the *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet). His two major works are the *Tarik-e firuzsahi* (1357) and the undated *Fatawa ’-ye jahandari*. The latter is a manual of good governance written as a series of lessons by an historical king to his sons.

Universal One of the most comprehensive histories written during this period was the *Tabaqat-e naseri* written by Minhaj al-Seraj (13th c. CE) at the court of the Delhi Sultans. It begins with the creation of the world and narrates Muslim history up to the Mongol invasion of Delhi in 1221 CE. As someone who sought refuge from the Mongols, the author is understandably biased against the invaders and appears to provide more ideas than facts.

Questions/discussion

1. Sanskrit and Tamil have often been presented as divergent, even opposing, literary/scholarly traditions. This characterisation, however, owes more to modern politics than literary history, which tells us that the intellectual exchange between India’s two classical traditions is deep and wide, as evident in the commentaries and treatises mentioned above.
2. Indo-Persian historiography appears to be a transposition of Persian genres to the new territory of Muslim India. What contribution to Indian literature was made by this sudden surge of historiographical writing during the Delhi Sultanate?

Reading

Peter Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India* (Luzac, 1966)

Bruce B. Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute: The Extant Literature of pre-Mughal Indian Sufism* (Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978)

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Eva Wilden, *Between Preservation and Recreation: Tamil Traditions of Commentary* (French Institute, Pondicherry 2009)

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Texts

1. From the *Miftah al-Jinan* by Muhammad Mujir Wajib Adib

It is reported that a man came to the Prophet and said, 'O Prophet of God, the obligations of Islam are many. Advise me a little of what I should do, in the letter and spirit.' The Prophet said, 'Keep your lips moist by repeating God's name.'

2. Atiyarkkunallar's commentary (second paragraph) on a poetic text (first paragraph)

'Oh, Sun of burning rays, is my husband a thief?
He is not a thief, O woman with black fish-shaped eyes.
Glowing fire will devour this town,' so said a voice.

Therefore, O Sun with rays, you must know whether my husband is a thief. So she said and he declared standing (there) in a bodiless state, Your husband is not a thief, O woman. Look how this town, which declared him a thief, will be devoured by fire.

Early Modern

Overview

Essay writing in the early modern period was often stimulated by religious debate, which was in part generated by the arrival of Christianity and the Europeans. Although traditional commentaries were also written, mostly in the more conservative south, the great majority of discursive prose writings took a position on religion, propagating the true faith and discrediting one's enemies. During this politically chaotic time, as the Mughal Empire declined and foreigners gained more control of the country, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians used the essay to establish cultural legitimacy.

Indo-Persian

Governance An important treatise on governance was written by Abul Fazl (b. 1551 CE), the biographer and friend of the Mughal emperor Akbar. It forms the last section of the biography and is entitled *Ain-i-Akbari*. The author's thinking was influenced by Shia tradition and by ideas from classical Greece mediated through Muslim translations and philosophers. The original Shia concept was that a divine light, from the creation, rested in each generation in an *imam*. By Mughal times, however, the idea of a person with esoteric knowledge of god had changed to the belief in a ruler with divine understanding. This line of thinking brought Fazl to treat his subject, Akbar, as a 'philosopher king.'

Maktubat *Maktubat* ('Letters') by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624 CE) is one of the classics of Indo-Persian literature. The author, a Muslim cleric, was the leader of the opposition to what conservatives thought was Akbar's neglect of true Islam. At one point in the text, the author observes that the death of Akbar had given Muslims in India the opportunity to regain the true path of religion

Nasihah Indo-Persian literature recognises a special genre of 'advice' called *nasihat* (sometimes referred to as 'mirror for princes'). It is a broad category, including any biography, autobiography or history that offers counsel to rulers. A representative example, but from the late Mughal period at its furthest geographic extent, is Abd-al-Hadi Karnataki's work titled *Nasihahnama*. The author describes the political chaos in the Madras region in the mid-18th century and urges landholders and officials to take action before foreigners succeed in conquering the area. It is one of the few Indo-Persian texts to issue a rallying cry to both Hindus and Muslims to defend India against the European threat.

Chandra Bhan Brahman Chandra Bhan Brahman (d. 1662 CE) was a Hindu poet who also wrote in Persian, a result of the mixed Indo-Persian culture of his age. His father had been a government official at a Muslim court, and Chandra Bhan Brahman, too, served the ruler of Lahore. He wrote in a wide variety of literary genres, but his collection of 128 letters (*Monsa-at*) reveals his personal views on current affairs. The letters are divided into sections, according to whether they are addressed to kings, statesmen, friends or strangers.

Sikh

The canonisation of Sikh scriptures, which took place in the 15th and 16th centuries CE, was more or less completed by Guru Gobind Singh in 1706 CE. Gobind Singh and other Sikh scholars produced a number of scholarly appendices, advancing arguments and evidence for their final selection of hymns included in the *Adi Granth*. Gobind Singh also composed a number of shorter writings, similar to Christian catechisms, providing instructions on daily prayer and recitation.

Bengali

Dom Antonio de Rosario was a prince of a small kingdom in Bengal who was captured by Portuguese pirates as a young boy. A Catholic missionary then rescued him from slavery and initiated him into Christianity with a new name (his original Bengali name is unknown), after which the zealous convert wrote a tract attacking Hinduism. His *Brahman-Roman Catholic Samvad* ('Dialogue between a Brahman and a Roman Catholic') is a short, poorly written, unpublished text, but it demonstrates the influence of colonialism on the development of essay writing in this period.

Sanskrit

An even more intriguing example of a religious polemic essay is the *Maha Nirvana Tantra* ('Book of the Great Liberation'), which was produced in the 1790s in Calcutta, but passed off as an ancient Sanskrit text. A trio of writers—an English missionary (Wm. Carey), a Bengali pundit (Vidyavagish) and a Bengali scholar attracted to Christianity (Raj Mohan Roy)—collaborated in writing this fraudulent text purporting to explain the Hindu concept of the *brahman* while actually propagating the Holy Spirit of Christianity.

Tamil

Roberto De Nobili The first books in any Indian language written by a European are the Tamil (Telugu and Sanskrit) Christian tracts by the Italian missionary Roberto Di Nobili (1578-1656 CE), who spent nearly five decades in India. His major work in Tamil, which was printed posthumously in 1677-78 (and thereafter in different editions), is a catechism entitled *Nanopatecam* ('Teaching Wisdom'). In 88 sections, he sets out in high-literary and Sanskritised Tamil to explain the mysteries of Christianity to the 'heathens.'

C.J. Beschi A century after Nobili, another Italian missionary made an even more lasting contribution to Tamil literature. C.J. Beschi (1680-1742?) wrote not only grammars and fiction but also an argumentative essay called *Veta Vilakkam* ('Explanation of the Veda'). In this work, written in the 1720s, but not printed until 1842, Beschi turns his sharp wit not toward Hindus or Muslims, but toward his closest enemy, the Lutherans who had just set up camp in the Tamil country. With his Hindu audience in mind, he accuses the Protestants of using a rustic, ungrammatical Tamil in their own propaganda tracts.

Commentaries The Tamil tradition of commentary continued during this period, largely through the patronage of the Nayak kings of Madurai (1529-1736 CE). One example is *Meynavilakkam* ('Explanation of the Highest Knowledge'), a commentary on the *advaita* ('non-dualism') philosophy written by Madai Tiruvengadunathar, an official in the court of Tirumalai Nayak. One of his contemporaries, Civaprakasara, also wrote a number of interpretations of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and Tamil grammar. And very late in this period, Civanana Munivar (d. 1785) produced a voluminous commentary on *Civananapotam*.

Petitions

From the mid-18th century, when the British East India Company took over the governance of Bengal and Madras, Indians began to write petitions to their new rulers. Landlords, merchants and local rajas wrote long and detailed texts, to complain about unfair taxation, to ask for mitigation and to pursue action in the courts.

One petition in 1788, for instance, asked the government to punish two local Tamil officials, a chieftain and a landlord, who had interfered with their temple festival. Caste-bound rules about who could worship, who could wear certain ornaments and who could process were all ripe for dissent and now there was an outside body to which one could appeal. Thus, the newly-arrived colonial state indirectly caused hundreds of Indians to write argumentatively in Bengali, Tamil, Telugu and (if capable) Persian or English.

Questions/Discussion

1. Literary history is a changing field. Where once elite texts in educated languages dominated, now other, more demotic voices are included. Especially in attempting to trace the development of prose-writing and the essay, less exalted forms, like letters to the editor of newspapers and political tracts, are studied.
2. The influence of Europeans on the emergence of the essay in India is difficult to overestimate. They wrote essays and they (or their culture and religion) were the subject of essays written by Indians. The difficult question is to determine how this strand of writing interacted, if at all, with the continuing traditions of religious and grammatical commentary.
3. English enters the frame of Indian literature and the public sphere during this period in the form of newspapers and printed books. By 1800, a few Indian writers began to use the foreigners' language to express themselves (a habit that grew over the next century). Is English, then, an Indian language? If so, when did it become one?

Reading

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Ronald Stuart McGregor, *Hindi Literature from Its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Harrassowitz, 1984)

Texts

1. From *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abul Fazl, trans. Peter Hardy

No dignity is higher in the eyes of God than royalty, and those who are wise drink from its auspicious fountain. A sufficient proof of this, for those who require one, is the fact that royalty is a remedy for the spirit of rebellion, and the reason why subjects obey. Even the meaning of the word *padshah* [emperor] shows this; for *pad* signifies stability and possession. If royalty did not exist, the storm of strife would never subside nor selfish ambition disappear. ...

Silly and short-sighted men cannot distinguish a true king from a selfish ruler. Nor is this remarkable as both have in common a large treasury, a numerous army, clever servants, obedient subjects, an abundance of wise men... But men of deeper insight remark a difference. In the case of the former, these things just now enumerated are lasting, but in that of the latter, of short duration. The former does not attach himself to these things, as his object is to remove oppression and provide for everything that is good.

2. From *Veta Vilakkam* by Beschi, trans. S. Blackburn

These Protestants have poisoned the *amirtam* (sweet ambrosia) of pure Tamil. When they cannot even write the name of their own country correctly [Beschi claimed that they misspelled 'Germany'], how can they hope to use Tamil well? Their translations of the Bible are like gems thrown into the mud, like black ink spilled on a beautiful portrait.

19TH Century

Overview

Essay writing flourished in the hothouse of ideas that was 19th-century India. Muslim, Hindu and Christian movements all vied for public attention using the new medium of printed newspapers, magazines and journals. Many of these polemicists used the new language of English, and many of their writings were first serialised in periodicals. Argumentative prose-writing of this kind was produced in every major regional language, too, although Calcutta, as befits the capital of the British Raj, was the starting point.

Urdu

Syed Ahmad Khan The case for Islam in a modern India was most forcefully articulated by Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898). Islam, he argued in a series of essays, was compatible with science, English education and British Rule. Equally, after the Revolt of 1857-1858, he had to persuade the colonialists that Muslims were loyal subjects of the crown. His two-sided strategy is illustrated by the two books he wrote in the aftermath of the revolt. In *Asbab-i-baghavati-Hind* ('Causes of the Indian Revolt', 1859), he attempted to explain to the British that their mistakes in governance had caused the rebellion. And in *Sarkashi-yi zila Bijnor* ('A History of the Bijnor Rebellion,') he chastised the people of Bijnor for joining the mutiny. He also found time to write, in English, 'The Mohomedan commentary on the Holy Bible' (1862).

Hindi

Dayananda Saraswati The voice of Hindu reform in Hindi was Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), leader of the Arya Samaj movement in north India. Scholar and orator, he was a fiery opponent of Islam and Christianity, who wrote more than 60 books on every aspect of religion and society. In 1875, he published his most influential, and most controversial tract. *Satyarth Prakash* ('The Light of Truth') attempts to be study in comparative religion, but misrepresents Islam so badly that it was banned in areas under Muslim rule.

Bharatendu Harishchandra An essayist with a more secular and literary reform agenda was Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-1885). He is considered the 'father of modern Hindi literature' for his poetry, drama and prose, and especially for his journalism. In 1867, at the age of 17, he established the first literary magazine in Hindi, the *Kavi-vachana-sudha* in 1868, followed in 1873 by *Harishchandra Magazine* (later called *Harishchandra Chandrika*) and *Bala Bodhini* in 1873. Under his editorship, he gathered around him a number of like-minded Hindi writers, who collectively set the modern standard for prose-writing.

Balabodhini Harishchandra's journalism can be illustrated by looking at *Balabodhini*, one of the several literary journals under his editorship. Though it lasted little more than three years, and though its agenda appeared to be Victorian (for example, in advocating separate spheres for men and women), he used it as a pulpit to argue for various reforms, from the elevation of Hindi to the eradication of child-marriage. Indeed, he was a clever champion of women's causes, using the shield of his traditional journal to advocate change. In the very first issue, for example, he wrote a rousing essay about the fact that equality between the sexes had once existed in India.

Tamil

C.W. Damodaram Pillai One strand of Tamil essay-writing during this century was the traditional commentary on old texts. The master of this art in the 19th century was C.W. Damodaram Pillai (1832-1901), who used the discursive prefaces to his editions of Tamil classical poetry to establish the canon of classical Tamil literature.

Arumuka Navalar Another traditional Tamil scholar who contributed to the essay was Arumuka Navalar (1822-1879). Though educated as a Christian, Navalar led a Saivite revival movement to stop mass conversion to Protestantism that threatened southern Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. In 1851, he published a 250-page prose version of a 12th-century Tamil hagiographical text. As part of his anti-Christian crusade, he also used his knowledge of the Bible to publish a tract, *Bibiliya Kutsita* ('Disgusting Things in the Bible'), in 1852.

G. Subramaniya Iyer The essay in Tamil received an enormous boost from a leading journalist in Madras, G. Subramaniya Iyer (1855-1916). An influential member of the nationalist movement, in 1878 he established *The Hindu*, an English-language weekly (and later daily) newspaper, for the express purpose of campaigning for the appointment of an Indian to the High Court in Madras. He was the paper's owner and editor for twenty years. In 1882, he set up the first Tamil daily, *Swadesamitran*, in order to communicate with the majority of people who did

not speak or read English. In 1898, he left the English paper and became editor of the Tamil paper, which he ran until his death in 1916. During his editorship of both these newspapers, he promoted the cause of Indian nationalism through his editorials. As one contemporary put it, his pen was 'dipped in fiery chilli sauce.'

Rajam Aiyar Another strand of Tamil essay-writing was dedicated more to literature (although, as we have seen, politics and literature were tightly intertwined in this period). Rajam Aiyar (1872-1898), an outstanding novelist whose bright flame burned briefly, first made his mark on Tamil literature through a series of critical essays published in the 1890s in a Tamil journal (*Vivekacintamani*) in Madras. His criticism of a famous play ('Manomaniyam') and an essay on humanism ('Man, his Greatness and his Littleness') are regarded as the first stirrings of literary criticism in Tamil.

English

Raj Mohun Roy Raj Mohun Roy (1774-1833) is deservedly called the 'father' of modern India. A Bengali Brahman and founder of the Brahma Samaj movement, he wrote crusading essays in Persian, Sanskrit, Bengali and English. In 1803 he published an essay in Persian, *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin*, arguing the cause of monotheism. From 1823, he edited a Bengali-language newspaper (*Sambad Kaumudi*), and in 1829, he published a Sanskrit tract condemning idolatry. In 1823, when the British government passed regulations restricting the press in India, he used his fluent English to write a 'letter' to King George IV in protest.

Dadabhai Naoroji If Roy was the 'father' of modern India, its architect was Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917). A Parsi businessman, Naoroji spent fifty years living in England, during which time he delivered speeches, wrote essays and submitted petitions, all with one purpose: to persuade the British government and people that Indians should be granted the same rights as other British subjects. A good example of his argumentative prose is found in *Admission of educated natives into the Indian Civil Service* (London, 1868). In 1892 he himself was the first Indian to be elected to serve in the Parliament at Westminster.

Keshub Chunder Sen The stormy times of the 19th century are illustrated by the life and writing of the Bengali reformer Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884). Born a Hindu, he followed Raj Mohan Roy in the Brahma Samaj movement, later broke with it and later still left the organisation shattered into three separate parts. In his journalism (and indefatigable speechmaking), he resolutely championed a synthesis of Christianity and Hinduism, arguing that Christ was Asian and that all Indian religions should unite in one 'church.'

Swami Vivekananda Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was the last in a long line of 19th-century Bengali reformers. Like them, he wrote in many languages but reached the world through English. He became an internationally recognised spokesperson for Hinduism after his barnstorming address to a conference of religions in Chicago in 1892. In his long, Bengali essay *Bartaman Bharat* ('Modern India,' 1887), he surveyed the history of India, arguing that castes rise and fall, and that the real purpose of life is to 'love your brothers and sisters.' An English-language collection of essays, taken from his lectures (*Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, 1897), is still widely read.

Questions/Discussion

1. Benedict Anderson coined the term 'imagined community' in 1983 to explain how 'print capitalism' became a decisive factor in the emergence of nationalist movements in Asia. While Anderson focused primarily on Indonesia, he did consider India, as well. Now, however, there is a great deal more published scholarship on the growth of the media and of nationalist politics in India. A new study focusing on India is overdue.
2. Evaluate the role of English in creating this 'imagined community' in 19th-century India. Only a small percentage of the population could read the language, but were they sufficiently influential to bring about change?
3. During the 19th century, Urdu was seen as the language of the fading Muslim aristocracy. Yet it was used by some Muslim reformers (Syed Khan, most famously) to promote change. Hindi, Bengali and Tamil were the other languages of reform. To what extent was a nationalist cause undermined by championing it in regional languages?

Reading

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- Sisir Kumar Das, *History of Indian Literature, 1800–1910. Western Impact, Indian Response* (Sahitya Akademi, 1991)

Texts

1. From Raj Mohan Roy's letter to King George III, protesting against press regulation, 1823

After this Rule and Ordinance shall have been carried into execution, your Memorialists [the signatories] are therefore extremely sorry to observe that a complete stop will be put to the diffusion of knowledge and the consequent mental improvement now going on, either by translations into the popular dialect of this country from the learned languages of the East, or by the circulation of literary intelligence drawn from foreign publications. And the same cause will prevent those Natives who are better versed in the laws and customs of the British Nation from communicating to their fellow-subjects a knowledge of the admirable system of Government established by the British.

2. From *Satyarth Prakash* by Dayananda Saraswati, 1875

They should also counsel then against all things that lead to superstition, and are opposed to true religion and science, so that they may never give credence to such imaginary things as ghosts (Bhuts) and spirits (Preta).

All alchemists, magicians, sorcerers, wizards, spiritists, etc. are cheats and all their practices should be looked upon as nothing but downright fraud.

Young people should be well counseled against all these frauds, in their very childhood, so that they may not suffer through being duped by any unprincipled person.

3. From *Bartaman Bharat* by Swami Vivekananda, 1899

O India, this is your terrible danger. The spell of imitating the West is getting such a strong hold upon you that what is good or what is bad is no longer decided by reason, judgment, discrimination, or reference to the Shastras [sacred laws]. Whatever ideas, whatever manners the white men praise or like are good; whatever things they dislike or censure are bad. Alas! what can be a more tangible proof of foolishness than things?

Early 20th Century

Overview

Essay-writing in this period took diverse forms. While the scholarly treatise and commentary continued, and while the beginnings of literary criticism were evident, most discursive prose-writing engaged with the two pressing debates of the day, both in response to the heyday of the British Raj. First, the reform movements of the nineteenth century continued to argue for change in religion and society. Second, again picking up threads from the previous century, there was a demand for political freedom and eventually independence. The genius of Aurobindo and Gandhi was to combine the clamour for religious and political change, although each spent many years in British jails. Although controversial pamphlets calling for radical change in religion and society did not much trouble the British authorities, they cracked down hard on political writing that they considered seditious. Newspapers, as established businesses, proved easy to control through legislation, but not so the pamphlets that could appear and disappear in a day. In these times of campaigning journalism and political pamphleteering, the essay moved out of the university and into the public imagination.

Gujarati

M.K. Gandhi Although Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) is not always appreciated as an essayist, he practiced law in South Africa and his early writings display the argumentative power that would later persuade even his enemies. He edited newspapers in Gujarati, Hindi and English, and produced numerous essays on a wide variety of topics from vegetarianism to economics. He usually wrote in Gujarati and then translated himself into English.

Hind Swaraj A good example of his prose and his process is *Hind Swaraj* ('Indian Self-Rule'). It was written in a little over a week, as he travelled by boat from South Africa to India in November 1909. When this political tract was swiftly banned by the British, he translated it into English, and the authorities, believing it would have little impact on English-speaking elites, let it sell. The book takes the form of a dialogue between author and reader (a typical Indian), whose doubts about independence are swept aside by the cogent reasoning of the author. For instance, when the reader says that he would be content for the English to leave, the author replies that not just the people but also the system of government must change. An independent country with an English-style government would not be India, he says, but 'Englishtan.'

Marathi

Vinod Damodar Savarkar The religious nationalism begun by Gandhi took a virulent anti-Muslim turn with V.D. Savarkar (1883-1966). His extremism began when, as a student in London and Paris, he learned bomb-making from a Russian émigré and planned the assassination of Lord Curzon (responsible for the hated partition of Bengal in 1905). When a member of his revolutionary group shot and killed an officer of the India Office in London, Savarkar was arrested. But when the ship carrying him back to India docked at Marseille, he escaped and claimed asylum on French soil. Recaptured, he was sent to the Andaman Islands to serve a fifty-year sentence but was released in 1921 and subsequently led the Hindu Mahasabha, an extreme Hindu nationalist organisation.

Essays Savarkar wrote extensively in Marathi, although much of it was translated into English. An example, with an amazing history, is his book *1857-The War of Independence*, which was originally written in Marathi in 1908, but was published in English, in Holland. The British authorities had tried to suppress its publication in Marathi and then again in English, in both England and India, even stealing two chapters of the manuscript in London—all because the book dared to recast the 'mutiny' of 1857 as an act of insurrection. Savarkar's most famous work, *Hindutva-Who is a Hindu?* (1923), was written in English, while he was in prison, but its author was named only as a 'Maratha'.

English

Rabindranath Tagore The essays written in this period by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) represent a mixture of interests. Although he wrote about nationalism (a collection with that title was published in 1917), he devoted himself more to aesthetic and spiritual issues. *Personality* (1917) is a collection of six essays, (including the famous 'What is Art?'), and *Sadhana* ('The Perfection of Life', 1913) expresses his mystical idealism. Tagore transcended many categories, as is illustrated by his eclectic collection of writings entitled *Bicitra Prabandha* ('Miscellaneous Essays,' 1907), which includes letters, poems and reminiscences. Always an original thinker, he did not hesitate to

criticise what he saw as Gandhi's error in calling on Indians to burn their foreign-made clothes ('The Call of Truth,' 1922).

Sri Aurobindo Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghose, 1872-1950) was a patriot who became a mystic. He participated in the nationalist movement at the highest level before retreating to Pondicherry in 1910 to escape another term in a British jail. Even his political essays, however, reveal a spiritualism not dissimilar to Gandhi's. Indeed, he wrote a series of essays as early as 1907 outlining the philosophical foundation of passive resistance to aggression. In other early prose writings, he argued passionately for the revival of Hinduism in the service of nationalism. Later essays moved away from temporal problems and urged his followers to act for world peace as 'instruments of the Divine Will.'

B.R. Ambedkar B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) was one of the most extraordinary men in this period of remarkable people. Born into an untouchable caste, he went on to gain a PhD from Columbia University and pass the bar from Grey's Inn, London. He made his mark on the nationalist movement in the 1930s, when he broke ranks with Gandhi and argued the case for the millions of Harijans in India. While others saw Hinduism as the antidote to colonialism, Ambedkar argued that Hinduism was itself as oppressive as foreign rule.

Essays Ambedkar bravely published his ideas in a series of fiercely argued books and essays. In 1936 he wrote a speech called 'The Annihilation of Caste' to be delivered at a conference in Lahore. He sent it in advance to the organisers for printing and distribution, as was the custom, but they objected to its condemnation of the caste system. When they requested changes, he printed it on his own. Later, he published *What Gandhi and the Congress have Done to Untouchables* (1945), which is a closely argued polemic, citing facts and statistics to condemn the Gandhian position that the caste system (including Untouchables) was desirable. The book was banned by the Indian government after Independence in 1947. In the early 1950s, he wrote *Buddha and His Dhamma*, in which he explained why he had converted to Buddhism.

Tamil

E.V. Ramaswami Naicker E.V. Ramaswami Naicker (1879-1973, 'Periyar') epitomises this age of the fervent pamphleteer. He, like Ambedkar, opposed Gandhi on the question of caste, but Naicker's protest was on behalf of all non-Brahman Tamils (not just Untouchables). He protested endlessly against what he saw as the historical domination of Sanskrit/Hindi and Brahmins over the language and people of south India. His 'rationalist' movement attacked superstition and idolatry, while his 'self-respect' movement aimed to restore dignity to Tamils. He also championed women's rights in the form of 'self-respect marriages', which were conducted without a Brahmin priest. A tireless orator (even in old age he would speak for three or four hours), he edited several newspapers (such as *Kudi Arasu* and *Viduthalai*). He is still the guiding spirit behind every political party (DMK and its offshoots) that has held power in Madras.

Essays Naicker articulated his unorthodox, even offensive, views in a florid but easily understood Tamil. It was a Tamil ostensibly scrubbed clean of all Sanskrit influences (an impossible task), so that his language would embody his political message. Perhaps his most famous pamphlet is *Iramayanam, Unmaiyanatai* ('*Ramayana, the True Story*', 1936?), in which he unmasks Rama, the symbol of Hindu virtue, as a cad and a coward. Other important works include *Namatu Kurikol* ('Our Aims,' 1938) and *Pen Yen Atimaiyanal?* ('Why did Women become Enslaved?', 1942).

Questions/Discussion

1. The British Library holds an enormous collection of essays, books, pamphlets and tracts that were banned by the British government in India prior to Independence. Most of these sources have never been studied by scholars. The story of Indian Independence has yet to be told in full.
2. Most of us know the names of Gandhi and Nehru, and understandably so, but their influence was closely matched by Ambedkar and Naicker. These latter two did not always write what people wanted to read, but they reflected the views of a very large segment of India's population, then and now. Again, it is salutary to realise that Gandhi did not speak for everyone.
3. In the end, however, Gandhi's vision of a future Indian society won the day. Why is this? Is it because of he practiced what he preached in terms of non-violent political action? Is it because his vision was rooted in

traditional Hinduism? Is it because he used his lawyer-trained powers of persuasion, in print and speech, to convert the masses to his cause? We could also ask what role did the media, most of it British, play in creating the image of the 'Mahatma' ('Great Soul').

Reading

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Stephen Hay (ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition: Modern India and Pakistan, vol. II* (Columbia, 1988)

Christophe Jaffrelot, *Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analysing and Fighting Caste* (Social Science, 2005)

Stanley A. Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford, 2002)

Amiya Sen, *Social and Religious Reform: The Hindus of British India* (Oxford, 2003)

Texts

1. From *Bicitra Prabandha*, by Tagore

OUR REAL PROBLEM in India is not political. It is social. This is a condition not only prevailing in India, but among all nations. I do not believe in an exclusive political interest. Politics in the West have dominated Western ideals, and we in India are trying to imitate you. We have to remember that in Europe, where peoples had their racial unity from the beginning, and where natural resources were insufficient for the inhabitants, the civilization has naturally taken the character of political and commercial aggressiveness. For on the one hand they had no internal complications, and on the other they had to deal with neighbours who were strong and rapacious. To have perfect combination among themselves and a watchful attitude of animosity against others was taken as the solution of their problems. In former days they organized and plundered, in the present age the same spirit continues - and they organize and exploit the whole world.

But from the earliest beginnings of history, India has had her own problem constantly before her - it is the race problem. Each nation must be conscious of its mission and we, in India, must realize that we cut a poor figure when we are trying to be political, simply because we have not yet been finally able to accomplish what was set before us by our providence.

This problem of race unity which we have been trying to solve for so many years has likewise to be faced by you here in America. Many people in this country ask me what is happening as to the caste distinctions in India. But when this question is asked me, it is usually done with a superior air. And I feel tempted to put the same question to our American critics with a slight modification, 'What have you done with the Red Indian and the Negro?' For you have not got over your attitude of caste toward them. You have used violent methods to keep aloof from other races, but until you have solved the question here in America, you have no right to question India.

In spite of our great difficulty, however, India has done something. She has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist, and yet seek for some basis of unity. This basis has come through our saints, like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others, preaching one God to all races of India.

In finding the solution of our problem we shall have helped to solve the world problem as well. What India has been, the whole world is now. The whole world is becoming one country through scientific facility. And the moment is arriving when you also must find a basis of unity which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity. There is only one history - the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one. And we are content in India to suffer for such a great cause.

2. From the 'Doctrine of Passive Resistance', by Sri Aurobindo

We have defined, so far, the occasion and the ultimate object of the passive resistance we preach. It is the only effective means, except actual armed revolt, by which the organised strength of the nation, gathering to a powerful central authority and guided by the principle of self-development and self-help, can wrest the control of our national life from the grip of an alien bureaucracy, and thus, developing into a free popular Government, naturally replace the bureaucracy it extrudes until the process culminates in a self-governed India, liberated from foreign control. The mere effort at self-development unaided by some kind of resistance, will not materially help us towards our goal. Merely by developing national schools and colleges we shall not induce or force the bureaucracy to give up to us the control of education. Merely by attempting to expand some of our trades and industries, we shall not drive out the British exploiter or take from the British Government its sovereign power of regulating, checking or killing the growth of Swadeshi industries by the imposition of judicious taxes and duties and other methods always open to the controller of a country's finance and legislation. Still less shall we be able by that harmless means to get for ourselves the control of taxation and expenditure. Nor shall we, merely by establishing our own arbitration courts, oblige the alien control to give up the elaborate and lucrative system of Civil and Criminal Judicature which at once emasculates the nation and makes it pay heavily for its own emasculation. In none of these matters is the bureaucracy likely to budge an inch from its secure position unless it is forcibly persuaded.

The control of the young mind in its most impressionable period is of vital importance to the continuance of the hypnotic spell by which alone the foreign domination manages to subsist; the exploitation of the country is the chief reason for its existence; the control of the judiciary is one of its chief instruments of repression. None of these things can it yield up without bringing itself nearer to its doom. It is only by organised national resistance, passive or aggressive, that we can make our self-development effectual. For if the self-help movement only succeeds in bringing about some modification of educational methods, some readjustment of the balance of trade, some alleviation of the curse of litigation, then, whatever else it may have succeeded in doing, it will have failed of its main object. The new school at least have not advocated the policy of self-development merely out of a disinterested ardour for moral improvement or under the spur of an inoffensive philanthropic patriotism. This attitude they leave to saints and philosophers, – saints like the editor of the *Indian Mirror* or philosophers like the ardent Indian Liberals who sit at the feet of Mr. John Morley. They for their part speak and write frankly as politicians aiming at a definite and urgent political object by a way which shall be reasonably rapid and yet permanent in its results. We may have our own educational theories; but we advocate national education not as an educational experiment or to subserve any theory, but as the only way to secure truly national and patriotic control and discipline for the mind of the country in its malleable youth. We desire industrial expansion, but Swadeshi without boycott, – non-political Swadeshi, – Lord Minto's "honest" Swadeshi – has no attractions for us; since we know that it can bring no safe and permanent national gain; – that can only be secured by the industrial and fiscal independence of the Indian nation. Our immediate problem as a nation is not how to be intellectual and well-informed or how to be rich and industrious, but how to stave off imminent national death, how to put an end to the white peril, how to assert ourselves and live. It is for this reason that whatever minor differences there may be between different exponents of the new spirit, they are all agreed on the immediate necessity of an organised national resistance to the state of things which is crushing us out of existence as a nation and on the one goal of that resistance, – freedom.

3. From M.K. Gandhi's, *Hind Swaraj*

The English have not taken India, we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them. Let us now see whether this proposition can be sustained. They came to our country originally for purposes of trade. ... They had not the slightest intention at that time of establishing a kingdom. Who assisted the Company's officers? Who was tempted at the sight of their silver? Who bought their goods? History testifies that we did all this. In order to become rich all at once we welcomed the Company's officers with open arms. We assisted them. If I am in the habit of drinking *bhang* and a seller thereof sells it to me, am I to blame him or myself? By blaming the seller, shall I be able to avoid the habit? And, if one particular retailer is driven away, will not another take his place? A true servant of India will have to go to the root of the matter.....

We have already seen that the English merchants got a footing in India because we encouraged them. When our Princes fought amongst themselves they sought the assistance of [the Company]. That corporation was versed alike

in commerce and war. It was unhampered by questions of morality. Its object was to increase its commerce and to make money. It accepted our assistance and increased the number of its warehouses. To protect the latter it employed an army which was utilised by us also. Is it then not useless to blame the English for what we did at that time? The Hindus and the Mahomedans were at daggers drawn. This, too, gave the Company its opportunity and thus we created the circumstances that gave the Company its control over India. Hence it is truer to say that we gave India to the English than that India was lost.

3. From the author's unpublished preface to *The Buddha and His Damma*, by Ambedkar

A question is always asked to me: how I happen[ed] to take such [a] high degree of education. Another question is being asked: why I am inclined towards Buddhism. These questions are asked because I was born in a community known in India as the "Untouchables." This preface is not the place for answering the first question. But this preface may be the place for answering the second question.

The direct answer to this question is that I regard the Buddha's Dhamma to be the best. No religion can be compared to it. If a modern man who knows science must have a religion, the only religion he can have is the Religion of the Buddha. This conviction has grown in me after thirty-five years of close study of all religions.

How I was led to study Buddhism is another story. It may be interesting for the reader to know. This is how it happened.

My father was a military officer, but at the same time a very religious person. He brought me up under a strict discipline. From my early age I found certain contradictions in my father's religious way of life. He was a Kabirpanthi, though his father was Ramanandi. As such, he did not believe in Murti Puja (Idol Worship), and yet he performed Ganapati Puja--of course for our sake, but I did not like it. He read the books of his Panth. At the same time, he compelled me and my elder brother to read every day before going to bed a portion of [the] Mahabharata and Ramayana to my sisters and other persons who assembled at my father's house to hear the Katha. This went on for a long number of years.

The year I passed the English Fourth Standard Examination, my community people wanted to celebrate the occasion by holding a public meeting to congratulate me. Compared to the state of education in other communities, this was hardly an occasion for celebration. But it was felt by the organisers that I was the first boy in my community to reach this stage; they thought that I had reached a great height. They went to my father to ask for his permission. My father flatly refused, saying that such a thing would inflate the boy's head; after all, he has only passed an examination and done nothing more. Those who wanted to celebrate the event were greatly disappointed. They, however, did not give way.

They went to Dada Keluskar, a personal friend of my father, and asked him to intervene. He agreed. After a little argumentation, my father yielded, and the meeting was held. Dada Keluskar presided. He was a literary person of his time. At the end of his address he gave me as a gift a copy of his book on the life of the Buddha, which he had written for the Baroda Sayajirao Oriental Series. I read the book with great interest, and was greatly impressed and moved by it.

I began to ask why my father did not introduce us to the Buddhist literature. After this, I was determined to ask my father this question. One day I did. I asked my father why he insisted upon our reading the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which recounted the greatness of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas and repeated the stories of the degradation of the Shudras and the Untouchables. My father did not like the question. He merely said, "You must not ask such silly questions. You are only boys; you must do as you are told." My father was a Roman Patriarch, and exercised most extensive Patria Pretestas over his children. I alone could take a little liberty with him, and that was because my mother had died in my childhood, leaving me to the care of my auntie.

So after some time, I asked again the same question. This time my father had evidently prepared himself for a reply. He said, "The reason why I ask you to read the Mahabharata and Ramayana is this: we belong to the Untouchables, and you are likely to develop an inferiority complex, which is natural. The value of [the] Mahabharata and

Ramayana lies in removing this inferiority complex. See Drona and Karna--they were small men, but to what heights they rose! Look at Valmiki--he was a Koli, but he became the author of [the] **Ramayana**. It is for removing this inferiority complex that I ask you to read the Mahabharata and Ramayana."

I could see that there was some force in my father's argument. But I was not satisfied. I told my father that I did not like any of the figures in [the] Mahabharata. I said, "I do not like Bhishma and Drona, nor Krishna. Bhishma and Drona were hypocrites. They said one thing and did quite the opposite. Krishna believed in fraud. His life is nothing but a series of frauds. Equal dislike I have for Rama. Examine his conduct in the Sarupnakha [=Surpanakha] episode [and] in the Vali Sugriva episode, and his beastly behaviour towards Sita." My father was silent, and made no reply. He knew that there was a revolt.

This is how I turned to the Buddha, with the help of the book given to me by Dada Keluskar. It was not with an empty mind that I went to the Buddha at that early age. I had a background, and in reading the Buddhist Lore I could always compare and contrast. This is the origin of my interest in the Buddha and His Dhamma.

Late 20th Century

Overview

Several strands of essay-writing are now practiced in India, most of them continuing on from the first half of the century. Journalists and critics write in all regional languages, notably in Hindi, Tamil and Bengali. However, as with fiction and poetry, writers in English have a far greater reach, and many command international audiences. This English-language essay-writing can be divided into different types (periodical journalism, literary criticism and campaigning journalism). Unsurprisingly, many of the best essay writers are novelists, as well.

Hindi

Kuber Nath Rai As a specialist in the essay, Kuber Nath Rai (1933–1996) was unusual among his contemporaries in Hindi. Although he was a student of English literature and a scholar of Hindi literature, his essays ranged over many topics, from agriculture to folk songs. His romantic outlook, lamenting the loss of tradition in the rush to modernity, combined with a keen eye for beauty, endeared him to a wide Hindi-reading public. His most important essays have been published in two collections (*Kuberanatha Raya ke pratinidhi Nibandha*, 1991, and *Kuber Nath Rai Sanchayan*, 1992).

Tamil

Venkat Swaminathan The Tamil cultural critic Venkat Swaminathan (1933-2015) was an iconoclast, whose witty essays gave pleasure even to his enemies. He delighted in puncturing the inflated balloons of his contemporaries. At a time, when any self-respecting Indian intellectual was a communist, he argued that the Soviet Union was destroying human enquiry in the arts and science. When the Tamil literary world was enamoured of the poet Bharatidasan, he wrote an essay to show that his poetry had been corrupted by work in the film world. Swaminathan was prolific, writing caustic but revealing essays about painting, sculpture, film, music and theatre. His book *Kalai-Anubhavam, Velipadu* ('Art -Experience, Expression,' 2000) is a collection of essays, articulating his central idea that art derives from experience, not from ideology.

English

Arun Shourie Among the many distinguished journalists in this period is Arun Shourie (1941-), who came to national prominence during the 'Emergency' in 1975-1977, when the government of Indira Gandhi used the pretext of national security to suppress civil rights across the country. Shourie wrote courageous articles in the *Indian Express* newspaper protesting against these measures, and he fought hard to prevent censorship in the media. In 1979, he became editor of the paper and continued to campaign against corruption and for a free press. Later he served in government, but even today writes fearlessly about politics.

M.J. Akbar M.J. Akbar (1951-) is a younger gadfly, who has gained international acclaim for his journalism. He distinguished himself first within India by his investigative reporting on several newspaper and magazines, particularly *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in the 1970s. He vigorously opposed the censorship and dictatorship during the Emergency in 1975-1977. Later he created India's first 'modern' daily newspaper when he set up *The Telegraph* in Calcutta. He edited several other periodicals, and spent time in politics, as well. However, he is best known outside India for his books on Nehru, the intractable Kashmir issue, Islamic politics and Pakistan.

Perhaps his most influential book is *India: The Siege within -Challenges to a Nation's Unity* (1996), which examines the centrifugal forces in India's fragile nationhood and concludes with a memorable sentence: 'If India learnt more of the truth of its own past, it would perhaps have fewer problems today.'

Pankaj Mishra Pankaj Mishra (1969-) represents a different strand of journalism in contemporary India. Rather than working at a particular paper or magazine, he is a free-lancer, who roams across a broad spectrum, from travelogue to fiction to politics. He has published several full-length books, many of which explore the problems posed by globalisation, but with a focus on India and China. At the same time, he frequently appears in periodicals, such as the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Times*, with pieces on literature and culture that challenge accepted views.

Arundhati Roy Arundhati Roy (1961-) first came to international attention in 1997 when she won the Booker Prize for *The God of Small Things*, but she has since devoted herself to reporting on controversial social and political issues. She is now an indefatigable campaigning journalist with more than a dozen books, scores of major essays and hundreds of newspaper articles to her name. She has covered armed insurgency, the Iraq war, India's nuclear policy, the Kashmir dispute and a controversial dam project. Perhaps her most influential reportage resulted from the time she spent living with tribal rebels in the jungles of central India in 2010 (see Text below). Using her storytelling skills, she produced a number of articles, published around the world, explaining the rebels' grievances against the Indian government. She has won many awards for her original writing, but has also been criticised in some quarters for her 'anti-India' views.

Amit Chaudhuri Amit Chaudhuri (1962-) is an award-winning novelist, short-story writer, poet and classical musician who also excels as an essayist. His primary territory is literary criticism, but he mixes in social history and personal anecdote. Having grown up in Calcutta and received his education there, he now spends half his life in England, primarily as a professor of comparative literature. His writing ranges very widely, from a book-length critical study of D.H. Lawrence to essays on Indian politics to memoirs about Calcutta. His anthology (*The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*, 2001) has played a role in forming the canon of modern Indian literature.

A.K. Ramanujan A.K. Ramanujan (1929-1993) was an internationally-known poet, scholar and critic. Born in a Tamil Brahmin family in Mysore, he received his PhD in linguistics in the US, where he eventually settled as a professor at the University of Chicago. His essays, which covered a wide spectrum from folklore to Sanskrit poetics, had the precision and concision of his poetry. But they also brimmed with new ideas, which often ruffled established feathers. An example is his 'Three Hundred Ramayanas,' in which he celebrated the diversity of Rama stories and argued that there is no 'the' Ramayana. This angered traditionalists who regard the Sanskrit Rama story as a sacred text and who then lobbied successfully to have the essay removed from libraries and university syllabi.

M.K. Rukhaya M.K. Rukhaya (1980-) belongs to the newest generation of essayists in India who use new media to communicate their ideas. She works as a professor of English in a small town in Kerala, but she has an international following through e-journals, blogs and other social media. She is a young Muslim woman whose views on contemporary events and literature are unpredictable and refreshing.

Questions/Discussion

1. Literary criticism in India is almost entirely in English about English literature (written in India and elsewhere). Moreover, many of the leading essayists live part of their lives outside India. Is this a necessary condition of a post-colonial, global literary culture, which indicates a long-term decline in the literary culture of India's regional languages? Or does it reflect the strength of a literary culture that is both international and regional?
2. The other major strand of essay-writing in India addresses social and political issues. Here, too, though to lesser extent, English-language journalism predominates. One could argue that this linguistic link to the rest of the world has given India a place on the international stage that it would not otherwise have. However, this also means that the great majority of Indians, who do not read English, are left out of these public debates.

Reading

M.K. Naik, *A History of Indian English Literature* (Sahitya Akademi, 1995)

G. N. Raghavan, *The Press in India: A New History* (Gyan Books, 1994) *Contemporary Literary Review India* (a quarterly journal, edited by Khurshid Alam)

Amit Chaudhuri, *Clearing A Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Culture* (Peter Lang, 2008)

Text

From Arundhati Roy's 'Walking with Comrades,' 2010

In Dantewada, the police wear plain clothes and the rebels wear uniforms. The jail superintendent is in jail. The prisoners are free (three hundred of them escaped from the old town jail two years ago). Women who have been raped are in police custody. The rapists give speeches in the bazaar...

Across the Indravati river, in the area controlled by the Maoists, is the place the police call 'Pakistan'. There the villages are empty, but the forest is full of people. Children who ought to be in school run wild. In the lovely forest villages, the concrete school buildings have either been blown up and lie in a heap, or they are full of policemen. The deadly war that is unfolding in the jungle is a war that the Government of India is both proud and shy of...

It's easier on the liberal conscience to believe that the war in the forests is a war between the Government of India and the Maoists, who call elections a sham, Parliament a pigsty and have openly declared their intention to overthrow the Indian State. It's convenient to forget that tribal people in Central India have a history of resistance that predates Mao by centuries. (That's altruism of course. If they didn't, they wouldn't exist.) The Ho, the Oraon, the Kols, the Santhals, the Mundas and the Gonds have all rebelled several times, against the British, against zamindars and moneylenders. The rebellions were cruelly crushed, many thousands killed, but the people were never conquered.