

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

INDIAN CULTURAL HISTORY

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Part I: PREHISTORY (c. 40,000-3,000 BCE)

Overview

The culture of prehistoric India is largely reconstructed from some remarkable rock paintings, the archaeology of numerous burial sites and ethnographic studies of stone-age communities elsewhere in the world. One striking finding is the number of parallels between the cultural elements depicted in the rock paintings and the culture of tribes living in the area today.

Art

Rock art The earliest examples of visual art in the subcontinent are rock paintings and rock inscriptions (petroglyphs). More than 150 sites with this kind of artwork have been located, the earliest dating from approximately 40,000 BCE, with the majority from 15,000 to 5,000 BCE. Rock inscriptions, especially those found at Edakkal (modern-day Kerala and dated to 6000 BCE), show human and animal figures with a distinct resemblance to those of the later Indus Valley civilisation.

Bhimbetka paintings The rock paintings at Bhimbetka (modern Madhya Pradesh) are one of the largest known collections of stone-age art in the world. The 243 caves there form part of a group of about 750 rock shelters in this part of central India. The remarkable feature of the painting in the Bhimbetka caves is that it extends from roughly 40,000-30,000 BCE up to the first millennium CE. Even more significantly, the paintings depict many elements of culture that can be seen among tribes in the area today.

Technique Sixteen different colours were used at Bhimbetka, made from minerals and mixed with water, animal fat, animal marrow or egg whites. A pale white, made from limestone, and a dark red, made from iron oxide, are the dominant colours. Archaeologists assume that the brushes (which have not survived) were made of twigs and animal hairs.

Animal images Twenty-nine different animal species are depicted at Bhimbetka, including bison, tigers, panthers, antelopes, elephants, lions and rhinoceroses (the last three are no longer found in the area). It is noteworthy that no snakes of any kind are painted at Bhimbetka or any other stone-age site in India.

Human images Human figures (men, women and children) are drawn stick-like, many wearing necklaces, knee bands, wrist bands and bangles. Some carry spears or bow and arrows (although the extent of the use of these weapons is a matter of debate). There are also several scenes of humans dancing in a circle with linked hands. The men wear loin cloths, the women wear their hair braided. Some dancers wear masks and may be ritual specialists.

Religion

General The archaeological record provides scant evidence of the religious practices and still less the beliefs of stone-age communities in India. We can only sketch an outline, relying mainly on the remains at burial sites, supplemented by studies of stone-age religion in other part of the world and ethnographies of the religious system of tribal populations still living near many sites.

Shamanism There can be little doubt, for example, that stone-age communities in India practiced a form of shamanism. Like the shamanism of tribes in modern India, their ancestors probably conceived of a spirit world, with numerous named forces, perhaps associated with other living things (animals, flowers, trees), topographical features (rivers and mountains) and, most important the sun and moon. Stone-age handprints on cave walls in Panna Dt. Madhya Pradesh are identical to those on the house walls of tribal people in nearby villages, where they are 'good luck signs' and provide protection from the capricious spirit world.

Shamans We can also surmise that rituals and chanting were performed by specialists or shamans (although this term is often misused) in order to contact and communicate with these spirits. Several of the paintings in the Bhimbetka caves, for example, show a ritual-like dance with some masked dancers, who may be specialists.

Animals Large animals, such as tigers and lions, painted on the cave walls may represent objects of worship. Stone-age hunters elsewhere are said to have prayed to an animal spirit, asking it to manifest itself so that it could be

hunted and then ritually sacrificed. Tribal populations in modern India believe that many animals have (or are) spirits that can be contacted through chanting by ritual specialists. Killing animals, especially those with whom humans feel a strong bond, is often ritualised with chanting, dancing and singing.

Burial Burial sites provide us with further hints of stone-age religion in India. Most graves were shallow pits in which the body was aligned east to west, suggesting a possible orientation with the sun. Burnt ash found at the bottom of the pits indicates some kind of funerary ritual. One site contained more than 150 bodies, with slightly more complex graves. A small niche was cut into one side of the pit, and the body and the goods were placed inside. The niche was then sealed with mud-bricks, presumably to keep the ancestor 'safe.' Grave goods, such as necklaces, bone ornaments and dead animals, indicate a belief that the dead person would make a journey to a spirit world where these possessions would be useful. Another theory is that digging graves and performing funerary rituals was a method of claiming new territory.

Secondary burial There is also evidence of 'secondary' burial, a reflection of more complex cosmological ideas. Secondary burials or funeral rituals are defined as any artificial structures made after death, such as grave pits, erect stones (dolmens) or mounds, which become the focus for human activity and/or thought. Another theory is that digging graves and performing funerary rituals was a method of claiming new territory.

Fertility Female figurines, shaped from stone and bone and found at stone-age sites, have been interpreted as fertility symbols. At one site in Madhya Pradesh, a large, shaped stone (dated to about 20,000 BCE) matches images that are today worshipped by nearby villagers as fertility symbols.

Bhimbetka shrine One of the Bhimbetka caves contains what appears to be a 'shrine' or ritual centre. A long corridor (about 25 metres long) leads to a large space with three other entrances. In the centre of this space is a tall, vertical rock with several small scooped-out depressions, which may have been used to produce music. In any case, it appears that the space was the site ritual activity.

Baghor shrine Another possible shrine has been located in a cave at Baghor, Madhya Pradesh. In the centre of a circular platform, 85 cm in diameter, made of sandstone and dated to about 9,000 BCE, archaeologists found a natural stone with a complex design of triangles and colours. More fragments of this central stone were found and were joined together to form a pyramid. Tribal people living nearby also make platforms on which they worship triangular stones.

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Human images Human figures (men, women and children) are drawn stick-like, many wearing necklaces, knee bands, wrist bands and bangles. Some carry spears or bow and arrows (although the extent of the use of these weapons during the Stone Age is a matter of debate). There are also several scenes of humans dancing in a circle with linked hands. The men wear loin cloths, while the women wear their hair braided. Some dancers wear masks and may be ritual specialists.

Discussion/Questions

1. Compare the rock paintings in India with their more famous counterparts in Spain and France. What differences are apparent, and what might those differences suggest about the societies that painted them?
2. 'Religion is basically the worship of the dead.' Discuss this claim with reference to the burial practices in stone-age India.
3. Ideas, values and beliefs are not easily extrapolated from material remains. What suggestions of this conceptual world can you find in the evidence from stone-age India?
4. Although research on stone-age communities reveals new facts every year, many of our assumptions about these people and this period remain stubbornly static. A good project would be to study the popular perceptions of the 'stone-age' and then to compare them with the emerging picture from ancient India.

Reading

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Part II: INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION (c.3000-1500 BCE)

Overview

The Indus Valley (or Harappan) Civilisation (c. 3000-1500 BCE) is not only the crowning achievement of ancient Indian culture. It also belongs to that select group of ancient civilisations that arose at roughly the same time elsewhere in the world. Like its contemporaneous counterparts in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) developed in a riverine plain, used writing and built cities. Unlike the other ancient civilisations, however, the Indus valley writing remains undeciphered, which means that we rely on material remains to reconstruct the foundations of Indian history. At the same time, we have tantalising suggestions of continuity from this ancient civilisation to Hinduism in the present day.

Art

Workmanship In a civilisation of long duration, vast territory and monumental buildings, we might expect to find art and architecture on a monumental scale. In fact, the art of the IVC is characterised by small-scale elegance. IVC people created visual images by painting and incising them on a variety of surfaces, as well as by shaping them into three-dimensional forms. Most observers comment on the skilled workmanship of these craftsmen, who worked on such a small-scale and displayed such control of their medium.

Seals The incised steatite seals, for example, range in size from ½ x ½ inch to 2.5 x 2.5 inches. Yet on these tiny surfaces, using a few deft strokes, artists managed to depict anatomically convincing animals, detailed urns and flowering trees (in addition to the as-yet undeciphered writing).

Figurines The three-dimensional representations of humans and animals are mostly terracotta (unglazed fired clay), although we also have a few notable statues of stone and bronze (see examples noted below). Some of the terracotta pieces are no larger than a thumb. Many are goddesses with elaborate headdresses and ornaments, such as belts and bangles, some of which are painted. Others figurines are of animals—water buffalo, deer, ram, rhinoceros, elephant, monkey, bear, rabbit, dog and zebu (humped cattle)—as well as birds and fish.

Toys Among the many IVC objects seemingly made for play are a number of miniature bullock carts. Several of these are complete with driver, four or two wheels, axle and load of wood or pots. These carts average about 15 cm in length and 7 cm in width. Researchers have found that the proportions of the IVC miniature objects are exactly the same as those for full-scale carts used in modern-day Pakistan.

Dancing girl One of the standout objects of IVC art is a bronze statuette of a dancing girl. Its fine workmanship, especially in the modelling of the body with sinewy curves, is impressive. When it was discovered and first shown, in the 1920s, archaeologists doubted that it came from the Indus valley and suggested that it must have been made much later in the classical period. When the early date was confirmed, scholars then began to wonder if somehow Greek art had been influenced by the Indus artists.

Bearded man Another impressive art piece from the IVC is the bust of a so-called 'bearded man' or 'priest-king.' Made of soapstone and 18 cm tall, it was found in a wall-niche of a building with ornamental brickwork. His beard and upper lip are closely shaved, he has pierced earlobes and he seems to wear an elaborate hairstyle, though this is partially obscured. He also wears an armband and a cloak or shawl with an elaborate pattern of circles.

Fish bowl Among the thousands of terracotta works, we can point to a bowl to illustrate the imagination and skill of potters in the IVC. This shallow container (4 cm high, 23 cm in diameter at the top and 10 cm at the base) has been painted grey and black with a dazzling pattern of fish. Three fish swim counter-clockwise in one panel while two others travel in the opposite direction just below them. The black wavy line on the lip gives the impression that what we see below is water.

Religion

Speculation While little is known of the religion of the IVC, the archaeological evidence is suggestive. One example is the bust of a 'bearded man', which was conveniently identified as a 'priest,' though this is unsubstantiated. More promising are various scenes on the seals that appear to show religious figures or actions. A man in a yoga pose, with an animal headdress, looks like an early form of Siva, while other scenes resemble animal sacrifice. There are also a number of female terracotta figurines that have been identified as 'mother goddesses' who symbolise fertility. Much of this, it has to be emphasised is speculation and may be erroneous. As an example, worked stone pieces that had once been claimed as phallic symbols, associated with Siva, turned out to be domestic pestles.

Structures In contrast to Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilisations, the Indus Valley civilisation seems to have lacked any large temples or palaces that would give clear evidence of religious rites or specific deities. Although a large building (12 metres high) in Mohenjo-Daro is often identified as a 'citadel,' there is no evidence that it had a ritual function. Similarly, the function of the so-called 'great bath' at Mohenjo-Daro (12 x 7 x 2.5 metres, with two sets of stairs) remains a mystery. Many scholars believe it would have had a ritual cleansing function, but this interpretation may be an example of reading back from later Vedic culture.

Burial Funeral practices included burial and cremation. Unlike in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, however, the people of IVC did not bury the dead with items of wealth. Instead, we find common pots, beads and ornaments. The pots, and frequent animal bones, may have been thought to provide water and meat for the dead person in some kind of an after-life. The body was usually separated from the earth by a shroud, coffin or layer of clay, which it is tempting to interpret as a concern with ritual purity. In any case, the usual orientation of the body (head to the north and feet to the south) is striking because south is the direction of death in the Vedas and later Indian religions.

Writing

Indus seals The IVC used a system of writing incised on soapstone seals and copper plates, and painted on a few terracotta shards. The seals number approximately 3,700, with an average of five signs on each. The inscriptions on the copper plates, which number about a dozen, are much longer. Despite intense and ongoing computerised research and unverified 'discoveries,' the Indus script remains undeciphered. There is no consensus even on the number of characters in the script, although a figure of 350-500 is generally accepted. Many scholars believe the underlying language is a form of Proto-Dravidian, others claim it is Sanskrit, while there is a growing consensus that it might simply represent a form of communicating commercial transactions (invoices and receipts). There is no doubt, however, that the Indus script (not the language) is related to the script in Mesopotamia: both are logo-

syllabic. It is also significant that cuneiform tablets have been found in the Indus valley and Indus seals have been found in the Near East.

Symbols of power A new theory regarding the use of the undeciphered stone seals has been proposed by Mark Kenoyer. He suggests that the writing on them might be royal titles and administrative offices. Further, he believes that the various animals inscribed on the seals represent symbolic power and might have been used by elite clans or social groups. The unicorn, for example, which is the most common animal image on the seals, might be associated with merchants.

Discussion/questions

1. Writing is generally considered a prerequisite of a civilisation, but the Indus Valley script remains undeciphered, despite decades of dedicated research. Why is writing considered so fundamental to civilisation? What is a 'civilisation' and how does it differ, if at all, from a 'culture'?
2. The role of the Indus valley script remains unknown: it may have been used to record business transactions or to write more complex ideas. What we do know is that roughly 1500 years passed before writing was again appeared in India. Brahmi inscriptions date from approximately 500 BCE, but the most famous are those used to write the edicts of King Ashoka in the 3rd c. BCE. How can we explain this hiatus of more than a millennium in the history of writing in India? Did the knowledge of writing simply disappear? Did the technology vanish? Did the need for writing no longer exist?
3. There are undoubted continuities from the religion of the Indus people to modern-day Hinduism, but the evidence is sparse. Consider the arguments made for the 'bearded man' as a priest, for the man in a yoga position as a 'proto-Siva' and for the female figurines as early goddess figures.

Reading

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Gregory Possehl, *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective* (AltaMira, 2002)

Asko Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Valley Script* (Cambridge, 2009)

Part III: INDO-ARYANS

Overview

The Indo-Aryans (who called themselves 'Arya') came from the Iranian high plateau ('Iran' and 'Aryan' are cognate words) and entered India around 1500 BCE, that is, at about the same time that the Indus Valley civilisation was in decline. The influence of the Indo-Aryans on later Indian culture is difficult to overestimate. They brought with them the language of Sanskrit and the religious texts of the Vedas, both of which continue to have enormous cultural authority in India. Although Hinduism underwent considerable change in the millennia following the arrival of the Indo-Aryans, many of its fundamental ideas, practices and structures are evident in this ancient period. In contrast to the Indus Valley culture, which left us a troupe of material remains without literature, the Indo-Aryans left virtually no objects but a rich oral literature.

Religion

Indo-European The religion of the early Indo-Aryans was a branch of a wider set of Indo-European beliefs and practices found among ancient Greek, Norse, Iranian and Germanic peoples. Key features of this reconstructed religion include a sky-father god, a myth of dragon slaying and a myth of two brothers who create the world from a sacrifice. The Vedic sky-father god Dyaus Pitr is cognate with the Zeus and Jupiter. A Vedic god, Indra, slays a dragon. And a Vedic myth explains the creation of the world from sacrifice.

Vedas The religion of the Indo-Aryans is encoded in a remarkable set of Sanskrit oral texts known collectively as the Vedas (after the Sanskrit word for 'knowledge'). There are four Vedas, composed from about 1500 to 900 BCE and then memorised and transmitted by specialists (Brahmins) to the present day. These ancient texts are filled with optimism and exuberance, a celebration of life and wonder at the magnificence of the world. The gods are benign and protective, especially if men continue to honour them with sacrifice.

Rig Veda The oldest of these four texts is the *Rig Veda* (c. 1500-1200 BCE), which contains speculation about the cosmos, its origins and order, its guardians and enemies. Some of its 1028 verses are charms and curses, intended to protect the cattle-keeping Indo-Aryans from disease, accident and misfortune.

Later Vedas The three other Vedas (Yajur, Sama and Atharva, c. 1200-900 BCE) also contain imprecations but focus on rituals. These later three texts describe and explain the complex techniques necessary for conducting the ceremonies, with an emphasis on the power of breath, spoken words and the one who speaks them, the Brahmin priest. Specific form of words, or mantras, are said to be imbued with magical power.

Pantheon Vedic religion is pantheistic. Rather than a single, all-powerful creator god, it encompasses many diverse gods and goddesses, most of whom are associated with natural forces. Chief male deities include Dyaus Pitr (sky-father), Varuna (guardian of cosmic order), Agni (fire), Indra (a sky warrior who succeeded Dyaus as 'king of the gods'), Yama (lord of the underworld) and Surya (Sun). Vac (goddess of speech) and Ushas (Dawn) are the only prominent female deities.

Sacrifice At the heart of Vedic religion is the fire sacrifice. Many hymns invoke Agni (fire) and Soma (an intoxicating libation), the two principal elements of the sacrifice. Brahmins conduct this sacrifice on behalf of others who wish to increase their wealth or progeny, or to ward off disease and misfortune. The fire sacrifice is still performed today, in a much changed form, during Hindu weddings.

Literature

Poetry Despite the heavy hand of cosmology and ritual, the Vedas also contain subtle poetic descriptions. For instance, the beauty of Dawn (Ushas) is evoked with tenderness. There is also magnificence in descriptions of the Sun (Surya) riding across the heavens in a chariot drawn by seven horses.

Myth The Vedas contain the earliest articulation of many stories that would evolve into the corpus of Hindu mythology. The underlying story describes how Indra, king of the gods, slays the cloud-dragon Vrtra with his thunderbolts and releases the rivers and the cows. In another story, Yama, the first human and the first to die,

presides over the world of the dead, where others must travel after death. The virtuous are guided on this journey by two dogs, while the others are attacked by demons.

Creation Vedic religion, and Hinduism more generally, has several creation myths. One story explains that speech (the goddess Vac) created the world. (Cf. 'In the beginning was the word.') Elsewhere, the world emerges from a primeval sacrifice of a man, who is then divided into four parts corresponding to the four major caste groups. The world also comes out of a 'golden womb', as well as from a 'universal egg.' Later, creation becomes the work of a figure named Prajapati. However, the most haunting creation myth has no definitive answer. 'How,' ask the ancient sages, 'did being evolve from non-being?' There is no certainty, not even among those 'who look down on it, in the highest heaven.'

Orality The Vedas were not written. Instead, they were composed, performed and transmitted orally, using a complex set of mnemonic techniques, metrical schemes and literary conventions, by a series of poets, over a period of several hundred years. In other words, Vedic literature is speech. Orality thus has an extremely high cultural status in India. Indeed, speech is deified as the goddess Vac.

Memorisation Vedic priests underwent extensive training in memorising the sacred texts to ensure that they were passed down without error, thus ensuring their efficacy. If one syllable was forgotten or recited in the wrong place, the ritual would not produce the desired results. Scholars, working from largely 20th-century field research, have identified eight different techniques of memorisation. In one, for example, every two adjacent words were recited in their original order, then in reverse order and again in their original order. The most complex method involved reciting the entire *Rig Veda* in reverse order.

Metre The Vedas are composed in a variety of metres, measured by syllables (*akshara*) and lines (*pada*, or 'foot'). The three most common metres employ lines of 8, 11 and 12 syllables. The most frequent of these (used in 25% of the *Rig Veda*) is the *gyatri* metre, which consists of three eight-syllable lines and is roughly similar to the Greek iambic dimeter. Interestingly, although both Sanskrit and Greek prosody use the term 'foot', in Sanskrit this refers to a line (or stanza), and in Greek (and in English) to a cluster of syllables.

Mantra The power of speech, especially carefully calibrated speech, is central to understanding the Vedas. A 'mantra' (word or formula spoken by a knowledgeable person in the correct way) is potent. Based on the concept of correspondences, through which the visible is linked to the invisible, speech can alter the material conditions of someone's life, whether to increase prosperity through sacrifice or to thwart disease through a spell. The potency of the spoken word connects this ancient layer of Indian literature with later genres and traditions, both popular and sophisticated.

Grammar Given this sophisticated science of the spoken word among early Sanskrit speakers, it is not surprising that they produced a remarkable grammar of the language. Panini's grammar (c. 400 BCE), with its nearly 4,000 rules, is still regarded by linguists as the finest description of Sanskrit available.

Discussion/Questions

1. The mythology of the Vedas is recognisably Indo-European. That is, it shares figures and stories with Persian, Greek and north European mythology. Follow the trail of one common story, such as the creation of the world by the dismemberment/sacrifice of a giant or proto-human. Find as many parallel stories as possible, plot them on a map and consider how such stories travelled so far.
2. The oral composition and transmission of the Vedas is one of the most astonishing achievements in world history. However, even today scholars persist in saying that the Vedas were 'written'. Why does the written word have a superior status in today's world? When did writing overtake orality in status? How does an oral/aural culture differ from an essentially graphic/visual culture?

Reading

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Frits Staal, *Discovering the Vedas: Origins, Mantras, Rituals, Insights* (Penguin India, 2008)

A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1963)*

Edwin Bryant, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture: The Indo- Aryan Migration Debate (Oxford, 2001)*

Texts

1. Creation of the World (*Rig Veda* 10.129)

There was neither non-existence nor existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomlessly deep?

There was neither death nor immortality then. There was no distinguishing sign of night nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own impulse. Other than that there was nothing beyond.

Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning; with no distinguishing sign, all this was water. The life force that was covered with emptiness, that one arose through the power of heat.

Desire came upon that one in the beginning; that was the first seed of mind. Poets seeking in their heart with wisdom found the bond of existence in non-existence.

Their cord was extended across. Was there below? Was there above? There were seed-placers; there were powers. There was impulse beneath; there was giving-forth above.

Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe. Who then knows whence it has arisen?

Whence this creation has arisen—perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not—the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows. Or perhaps he does not know.

(translation by Wendy Doniger (O'Flaherty), 1981)

2. Purusha, the Creation of Man (*Rig Veda* 10.90)

Thousand-headed is Purusa, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. Having covered the earth on all sides, he stood above it the width of ten fingers.

Only Purusa is all this, that which has been and that which is to be. He is the lord of the immortals, who grow by means of [ritual] food.

Such is his greatness, yet more than this is Purusa. One-quarter of him is all beings; three-quarters of him is the immortal in heaven.

Three-quarters of Purusa went upward, one-quarter of him remained here. From this [one-quarter] he spread in all directions into what eats and what does not eat.

From him the shining one was born, from the shining one was born Purusa. When born he extended beyond the earth, behind as well as in front.

When the gods performed a sacrifice with the offering Purusa, spring was its clarified butter, summer the kindling, autumn the oblation.

It was Purusa, born in the beginning, which they sprinkled on the sacred grass as a sacrifice. With him the gods sacrificed, the demi-gods, and the seers.

From that sacrifice completely offered, the clotted butter was brought together. It made the beasts of the air, the forest and the village.

From that sacrifice completely offered, the mantras [Rig Veda] and the songs [Samaveda] were born. The meters were born from it. The sacrificial formulae [Yajurveda] were born from it.

From it the horses were born and all that have cutting teeth in both jaws. The cows were born from it, also. From it were born goats and sheep.

When they divided Purusa, how many ways did they apportion him? What was his mouth? What were his arms? What were his thighs, his feet declared to be?

His mouth was the Brahman [caste], his arms were the Rajanya [Ksatriya caste], his thighs the Vaisya [caste]; from his feet the Sudra [caste] was born.

The moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born; from his mouth both Indra and Agni [fire]; from his breath Vayu [wind] was born.

From his navel arose the air; from his head the heaven evolved; from his feet the earth; the [four] directions from his ear. Thus, they fashioned the worlds.

Seven were his altar sticks, three times seven were the kindling bundles, when the gods, performing the sacrifice, bound the beast Purusa.

The gods sacrificed with the sacrifice to the sacrifice. These were the first rites. These powers reached the firmament, where the ancient demi-gods and the gods are.

Part IV: CLASSICAL PERIOD

Overview

During this period (c.500 BCE-500 CE), and especially under the patronage of the Gupta Empire (320-550 BCE), literary, artistic and religious elements that we now recognise as 'classical India' took shape. Hinduism evolved from its Vedic origins into a temple-based devotionalism. Hindu gods and goddesses were popularised through an extensive body of literature, and they were widely celebrated in the visual arts. Buddhism and Jainism also emerged, out of deep philosophical and social differences with Hinduism, and produced their own cultural traditions. Underlying many of these developments was the appearance (or reappearance) of writing sometime between 350-250 BCE. However, nearly all literary texts in the period were still orally composed.

Religion

Hinduism In the first part of this period, Hinduism underwent a fundamental shift, away from the external, sanguine outlook of the Vedas (c. 1,500-900 BCE) and toward the internal, sceptical contemplation of the Upanishads (c. 800-300 BCE). In broad terms, the early emphasis on ritual as action was replaced by an examination of ritual as symbol. Knowledge of the sacrifice became more important than actually performing the sacrifice. And the greatest knowledge was knowledge of the self or soul (*atman*). This shift was also deeply influenced by the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism.

Buddhism Buddhism grew out of Hinduism in the 6th c. BCE through a rejection of brahminical authority and the Hindu concept of the soul. Buddhism announced the startling claim that there was no 'soul', no permanent self, and that everything was in flux. The only reality was pure consciousness. In proposing a more open yet austere path to enlightenment, Buddhism split into two wings: the Hinayana (now found in Sri Lanka, Burma and Southeast Asia) and the Mahayana (found in Tibet, Nepal, Japan and China). Both schools developed sophisticated philosophical and philological traditions, the first in Pali, the second in Sanskrit and Tibetan.

Gautama Buddha Tradition holds that the ‘historical’ Buddha, a prince named Gautama, was born at Lumbini, on the Indian-Nepalese border, in the mid-6th century BCE. However, there had been no material evidence to support this claim until 2013, when archaeologists digging at Lumbini uncovered the remains of a timber structure (called a ‘shrine’) dated to the 6th century BCE. Whether the founder of Buddhism was born in that century or later, there is little doubt that there was an historical figure in the middle of the first millennium BCE who changed the course of Indian and world history.

Jainism Like Buddhism, Jainism is an offshoot of Hinduism and based on a historical figure (Mahavira, ‘Great Hero’) who lived in the 6th c. BCE. Again like Buddhism, asceticism and non-violence are central to Jainism. However, a key tenet of Jainism is the indestructible and immortal individual soul (*jiva*), which differentiates it from both Hinduism and Buddhism. Jains made a significant contribution to literature and philosophy, especially in south India, and won patronage from important rulers up to the medieval period.

Devotionalism Devotionalism (*bhakti*) was a pan-Indian religious movement that began toward the end of the classical period. Although it affected Buddhism, its primary imprint was on Hinduism. In this new religiosity, an individual worshipper imagined and nurtured a direct bond with a specific god or goddess. Contemplation of abstract spiritual ends gave way to more active engagement with deities, who were given human-like qualities of generosity and compassion. Although devotionalism was signalled in the late Upanishads, it flourished under the patronage of the Gupta rulers, especially in their state support for the worship of Visnu and Lakshmi.

Art

Architecture The chief architectural monument of the early period was the stupa. Essentially funeral mounds housing the relics of the Buddha, stupas were first built in the reign of Ashoka (3rd c. BCE). As such, they are the oldest surviving religious structures in India. The earliest and most elaborate stupa is that at Sanchi, which measures 16 metres high and 37 metres in diameter. Its hemispherical frame is made of brick, but the four gateways, added about 100 CE and decorated with fine sculptures of the Buddha’s life, are carved from sandstone.

Ajanta and Ellora Stupas, prayer-halls and monasteries were also carved out of rock caves at Ajanta and Ellora in western India (c. 200 BCE to 300 CE). Monasteries (*vihara*) were multi-storied structures containing kitchens, sleeping quarters and niches. The prayer-halls (*caitya*) were large spaces in which worshippers could gather, and most also contained a stupa. Some prayer-halls were built with wood, evidenced by a vault supported by horseshoe-shaped ribs, but only the rock-hewn examples survive.

Painting The ceilings and walls of these religious spaces in caves were painted with murals showing Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina figures and scenes from religious texts, especially the Buddhist *Jataka* stories. The paintings were done in ‘dry fresco’ style: painted on top of a dry plaster surface rather than onto wet plaster. These paintings—luxurious, sensual and ethereal—are considered by many to be the highpoint of Indian painting.

Sculpture A school of sculpture emerged that depicted scenes and figures from the life of the Buddha and the *Jataka* tales. Its characteristic features included the lotus flower, water symbols and the gestures and physical poses of the historical Buddha. Outstanding examples are found in north and western India at Sanchi, Ellora and Ajanta, but perhaps the most spectacular is found in south India at Amaravati. These exquisitely carved figures, often in narrative scenes and in small niches, display a skill, dynamism and imagination unseen in most later Indian sculpture.

Gandhara At roughly the same time, the Gandhara (or Greco-Buddhist) style of sculpture developed in the northwest. This style is named after the region of Gandhara, where Persian, Greek, Scythian and Chinese cultures intermingled. Artisans here were inspired by Mahayana Buddhism, patronised by the Kushana king Kanishka and influenced by Greek models. They produced large, muscular representations of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas (particularly Maitreya), who resemble Greek figures wearing a Roman toga.

Literature

Writing The re-emergence of writing (after the disappearance of the undeciphered Indus script in the second millennium BCE) underpinned many developments in this period. Writing in the Brahmi script first appeared in the

edicts of king Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE, although brief inscriptions on pottery found in Sri Lanka have recently been dated to between 450-350 BCE. The Brahmi script, which probably derives from a Semitic or Sumerian script, is the forerunner of all later scripts used in India, with the single exception of Kharosthi, which had a brief life in northwest India between about 200 BCE and 200 CE.

Sanskrit literature Sanskrit literature flourished during this period. The first examples of narrative prose in Indian literature appear in the Upanishads (c. 800-300 BCE). The first Indian biography, the *Buddhacarita* ('Life of the Buddha') by Ashvagosa (c. 200 CE), is a poetic hagiography of the historical Buddha. The great epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, which were composed over many centuries (culminating perhaps about 400 CE), became vehicles for the new devotionalism and provided material for every type of cultural expression. The same is true of Hindu myths, which cycled and recycled in numerous versions, serving as entertainment, ethical instruction and ritual manual. Sanskrit court poetry and drama flourished under the Guptas. Kalidasa (5th c. CE) excelled at both, producing plays that are still performed today.

Pancatantra The *Pancatantra* ('Five-Books') is a collection of nearly 100 animal fables orally composed in Sanskrit (and later found in all Indian languages). The frame-story is that a pundit instructs three ignorant princes in the art of statecraft, using these moral stories as lessons. The work is divided into five sections, each focusing on an aspect of statecraft, although each has more general significance. The five topics are: The Separation of Friends, The Gaining of Friends, War and Peace, Loss of Gains and ill-Considered Action. Each of these sections is itself introduced by a frame-story, within which animals take turns telling a story.

Jataka The *Jataka* tales are similar to those in the *Pancatantra* (some tales are found in both collections) with the important differences that they were adapted to tell the story of the previous lives of the historical Buddha and were orally composed in Pali, the language of Hinayana Buddhism. In most variants of the text, each tale has a similar structure. First there is a folktale in prose, in which the Buddha-to-be appears as one of the characters, either human or animal. This is then followed by a brief commentary in verse that links the story to an aspect of the Buddha's teaching

Sattasai An early but little-known collection of classical Indian poetry is the *Sattasai* ('Seven Hundred') by Hala (c. 100 CE). These 700 single-verse, largely secular poems were composed in Prakrit (a regional variant of Sanskrit), probably in the Deccan. The poet Halla was a king of the Satavahana dynasty, though little is known of his life.

Tamil literature A large corpus of Tamil classical poems was composed between c. 100-300 CE. Independent of Sanskrit conventions, Tamil tradition divided literature into two overarching genres: *akam* ('interior') and *puram* ('exterior'). These terms, which refer to both the topographical and psychological dimensions of a poem, are usually translated as 'love' and 'war' poems. Love poems describe inner states of love, usually in or around the house. They are divided into five sub-groups, each devoted to a specific type or condition of love, and each associated with a specific landscape, flower, time of the day, season of the year and bird. Convention requires that no names, only stock figures, appear in the love poems. Many are extremely short, not more than ten lines. War poems, on the other hand, typically describe public events, especially war and the actions of kings. They also contain the names of kings, poets, battles and towns, and they have an ethos of fame and shame. A mother, for instance, does not want to see wounds on her son's back. A king places his daughters in the care of a bard before he starves himself to death, rather than face defeat. A Tamil epic, 'The Lay of the Anklet' (*Cilappatikaram*), was composed in about 500 CE, probably by a Jain monk. While it bears some similarity to contemporaneous Sanskrit court poetry, especially in its ornate descriptions of place and nature, its deeper message of loss and revenge sets it apart.

Questions/Discussion

1. Over the course of this period, we can trace a widening separation between courtly culture and popular culture. Contributing factors to this division include the increasing use of writing, the spread of urbanism and the expanding authority of the state.

2. The history of the heterodox religions, Buddhism and Jainism, share many elements. They both developed out of early Hinduism in the 6th c. BCE; both were founded by an historical figure; and both challenged the religious beliefs of the time. However, their later histories are radically different. Although Buddhism became a major social and political force in India until about 1000 CE, thereafter it declined and is a negligible presence today. Outside India, however, in Southeast Asia, Buddhism wields the power it once had in India. Jainism, on the other hand, never gained the popularity that Buddhism did, but it also never lost the small status it did gain.
3. Early Buddhist art contains some of the finest examples of visual representation anywhere in the world. The earliest pieces, however, are aniconic. That is, they do not show the figure of the Buddha. This aniconism was consistent with the extreme austerity of the early Buddhist tradition. Within two centuries this changed, and artists created delicate, sensual representations of the Buddha and other figures. What can account for this shift in thinking and practice?

Reading

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 William Buck, *Ramayana* (California, 2000)
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Texts

1. From the Sanskrit *Buddhacarita*, translated by Charles Willemsen, 2009

Birth, old age, illness, and death are suffering; separation from what one loves or meeting with enmity, not attaining something one wants, and so on are kinds of suffering.

If one renounces desire or does not yet renounce it, has a body or is without a body, if one is without any pure quality, one may briefly say that all this is painful.

When, for instance, a great fire is appeased, it does not give up its heat, even though it may have become smaller. Even in a self that is quiet and subtle by nature, great suffering still exists.

The afflictions of greed and the others, and all kinds of wrong actions—these are the causes of suffering. If one gives them up, suffering is extinguished.

When, for instance, seeds are without earth, water, and so forth, when all conditions are not combined, shoots and leaves do not grow.

Existences continue by nature, from heaven to the woeful destinations. The wheel keeps turning and does not stop. This is produced by desire. Demotion differs according to weak, intermediate, or strong, but all kinds of actions are the cause.

If one has extinguished greed and so forth, there is no continuation of existence. When all kinds of actions have ended, different kinds of suffering know long-lasting appeasement. If this exists, then that exists. If this is extinguished, then that is extinguished.

Absence of birth, old age, illness, and death; absence of earth, water, fire, and wind; and both absence of beginning, middle, and end and condemnation of a deceptive law—these mean tranquility without end, abodes of the noble.

2. From the Tamil *Kuruntokai*, translated by AK Ramanujan

What could my mother be to yours?
What kin is my father
to yours anyway?
And how did you and I ever meet?
But in love,
our hearts have mingled
As red earth and pouring rain.

3. From the Tamil *Kuruntokai*, translated by AK Ramanujan

Bigger than earth, certainly,
higher than the sky,
more unfathomable than the waters
is this love for this man
of the mountain slopes
where bees make rich honey
from the flowers of the kurinci
that has such black stalks.

4. From the *Purunanuru*, translated by AK Ramanujan, 1985

This world lives
Because some men do not eat alone,
not even when they get
the sweet ambrosia of the gods;
they've no anger in them,
they fear evils other men fear
but never sleep over them;
give their lives for honor,
will not touch a gift of whole worlds
if tainted;
there's no faintness in their hearts
and they do not strive for themselves.
because such men are,
This world is.

Part V: EARLY POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

Overview

Indian culture between the demise of the Gupta Empire (c. 500 CE) and the rise of the Delhi Sultanates (c. 1,000 CE) was dominated by a religious movement known as 'devotionalism.' This shift away from the contemplative focus in the preceding period toward a personal relation with god influenced every aspect of culture, from literature to architecture. Given royal patronage, devotionalism led to a new and close set of relations between a local temple, deity, poetry and language. On the fringe of this central development, Islam entered India on the west coast.

Religion

Devotionalism The second historic shift in Indian religion (after the turn the ritualism in the Vedas to speculation in the Upanishads) was the development of devotionalism, known as *bhakti* ('to share in', 'to belong to'). Characterised by an intense and personal attachment to a particular god or goddess, saint or guru, devotionalism illustrates the regionalism of the period. Until the bhakti movement, religious thought had been expressed almost exclusively in Sanskrit, the preserve of ritual specialists and court poets. Then, beginning in about 500 CE in the Tamil country, religious poetry, myth and song were composed and sung in the languages of common people. Favoured by royal patronage, the movement spread across the face of the subcontinent and has been the life-blood of Hinduism ever since. Even Buddhism, which the bhakti poets 'sang out of India,' was affected by devotionalism. New Mahayana figures, such as bodhisattvas (Avalokitesvara and Maitreya) and goddesses (Padmini and Tara) were worshipped in shrines and with rituals similar to those in Hinduism.

Philosophy A parallel shift occurred in Hindu religious philosophy, as illustrated by Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya was a religious philosopher who lived in South India, probably in Kerala and probably in the first half of the 8th c. CE. He is arguably the most influential theologian in all Indian history. Tradition holds that he became a wandering ascetic at an early age, travelled north to Benares and debated with religious thinkers all over India. It was a time of fierce rivalry, and even violence, between Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. In this maelstrom Shankaracharya wrote commentaries on major Hindu texts to explicate the *advaita* or 'non-dualism' school of Hinduism, which claimed that beneath the flux of our impressions there is an unchanging reality. This is the *brahman*. All else is *maya* or illusion. Although he did not agree with the emotive devotionalism that was sweeping south India at the time, he did provide Hinduism with an uncompromising foundation in its battle against rival religions.

Buddhism Buddhism grew out of Hinduism in the 6th c. BCE through a rejection of the Hindu concept of the soul and the embrace of a more austere path to enlightenment. By 500 CE, it had spread all over India but was divided into three schools. Theravada Buddhism flourished in India, Sri Lanka, Burma and much of Southeast Asia. This new, heterodox belief system also rejected the domination of Hinduism's priestly elite in favour of monks and laymen and laywomen, who could follow the path of non-violence and virtue. This ideology, which appealed to the emerging mercantile and trading communities in the cities, was patronised by the Mauryan Empire and spread quickly all over India, including the far south, where it played a major role in literary, social and political life.

Jainism Like Buddhism, Jainism is an offshoot of Hinduism and based on a historical figure who lived in the 6th c. BCE (Mahavira, 'Great Hero'). Again like Buddhism, asceticism and non-violence are central to Jainism. However, a key tenet of Jainism is the indestructible and immortal individual soul (*jiva*), which differentiates it from both Hinduism and Buddhism. Jainism also spread through mercantile groups and contributed to literature and scholarship in many regional languages.

Muslims As these large scale developments were unfolding, another key event occurred when Muslims arrived in the subcontinent in the early 8th century CE. India had been familiar with Arabs and Persians as a result of the maritime trade between West Asia and the west coast of India in the early centuries of the Common Era. In 712, however, another kind of Arab presence came in the form of overland armies. Still, Indian Islam did not diverge much from Islam in the Arab or Persian world, although Sufism (itself a Persian import) became a major force and comingled with forms of local Hinduism. For example, Hindu devotionalism and Sufism both focus on a saint as a conduit to divine power, rather than on God himself, and the cults of the Sufi saints (*pir*) became almost indistinguishable from their Hindu counterparts.

Art

Architecture The rock-cut temples, stupas and prayer-halls at Ellora (c. 600-1000 CE) represent a continuation of those same Hindu and Buddhist structures carved earlier at Ajanta, in the same region of western India. In particular, the Kailasanatha temple at Ellora dedicated to Siva is impressive. It was carved out a single rock face, starting from the top and working down. It has a courtyard, a tower, a central shrine, five minor shrines and a columned arcade three stories high with alcoves and sculpted panels. Soon these rock-cave structures gave way to free-standing ones, although both rock-cut and free-standing temples are seen at Mahabalipuram (c. 700 CE). Free-standing temples were built according to conventions laid down in canonical texts (*sastras*), the most important being that the overall design was a symbolic representation of the universe. Temples were largely built with stone, although brick and mortar continued to be used in areas where stone was not readily available. The earliest (and still magnificent) temples were built in the 6th century CE at Aihole and Badami in the Deccan. By the end of the period, several other distinct regional styles had developed, in the far south (Tamil Nadu), on the west coast (Kerala), on the east coast (Orissa) and in Bengal. Late Buddhist architecture is represented by the great monastery at Nalanda (9th c. CE) and the hall at Bodh Gaya (6th-7th c. CE).

Sculpture Outstanding examples of early Hindu sculpture are seen on both the rock-cut and free-standing temples at Mahabalipuram and the caves at Ajanta and Ellora. Further developments in stone sculpting of Hindu gods and goddesses are seen on the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital, not far from Madras. The 'lost wax' method of bronze casting had been known in the Indus Valley Civilisation (3rd millennium BCE), but it reached perfection in the figures sculpted in South India at the end of this period. Artisans patronised by Chola kings produced bronze figures of deities and rulers with remarkable plasticity and subtlety.

Painting Continuity with the earlier tradition of wall painting is seen in the exquisite images depicted on the walls and ceilings of rock-cut temples at Ellora. Some of the most beautiful images are of graceful *apsaras*, female spirits of air and water in Indian mythology. Although the paintings have deteriorated, copies made by both hand and camera in the 19th century provide us with a good idea of their original beauty.

Literature

Sanskrit Sanskrit literature did not hit the heights it had achieved in the previous period, but poets and playwrights continued to produce individual pieces of excellence, especially in the *mahakavya* genre. Perhaps the most highly regarded of Kalidasa's successors was Magha, who lived in the seventh century CE and lived in a small court in Rajasthan. His most enduring work is *Shishupala Vadha*, based on a story in the *Mahabharata*. Magha is much loved by critics and scholars, who praise his technical skills and verbal dexterity in deploying 23 different metres. The imprint of devotionism is evident in this poem, in which the poet glorifies Visnu as the preserver who slays an evil king. Bhatti (also probably 7th c. CE) wrote *mahakavyas* based on episodes from the Rama story, the most famous being the *Ravanavadha*. Bharavi (probably 6th c. CE and probably from south India) wrote the *Kirātārjunīya*, modelled on earlier tellings of same story from the *Mahabharata* and considered one of the finest of the *mahakavyas*. Bana (again 7th c. CE), who was also a playwright, wrote poems collected under the title *Candisataka* and is the author of the first complete biography in Indian literature, the *Harschacarita* or 'Story of King Harsha.'

Tamil As mentioned earlier, devotional poetry was first composed in Tamil, the oldest of the regional languages with a literary history that stretches back to about 100 CE. A group of poets called the Nayanmars ('Servants of Lord Siva') composed and sang thousands of hymns that typically focused on a specific form of Siva or on a specific Siva temple. Some of these poems have a raw, wounded quality, often literally in the description of bodily mortification. Sometimes that poetic ferocity is directed against Jains and Buddhists, who had considerable influence in South India. At roughly the same time, another group of Tamil poets sang in praise of Visnu. They were known as the Alvars (lit. 'Deep Ones') because they immersed themselves in Visnu. Their hymns to Visnu (the preserver) are predictably less fierce in tone than those to Siva (the destroyer), less visceral in imagery and less uncompromising in sectarian loyalty. The Alvars' approach to Visnu is a mixture of contemplation, mythological drama and rapturous love. Many of these poets, in both groups, became objects of worship themselves. Finally, two Tamil epics (*Cilappatikaram* and *Manimekalai*) were also composed in this period, the first by a Jain and the second by a Buddhist.

Questions/Discussion

1. Devotionalism dominates this period of Indian history. Poets, singers, mystics and saints expressed a new kind of relationship between people and gods. Although this personal, emotional and painful bond was articulated first in the Sanskrit text of the *Bhagavad Gita*, it flowered in the regional languages of India from about 500 CE onward. Map the geographical spread of this religious-cultural movement from Tamil to Assamese, by identifying key texts and poets.
2. The nature of historical research differs according to the evidence available. IN the period from 3000 BCE, we have extensive material remains but no texts. Then we have a corpus of religious texts but almost no archaeological remains. Then, in the post-classical period (500-1000 CE) we have not only literary texts but thousands on inscriptions. Compare these three main types of evidence—inscriptions, literary texts and material remains—for the role they play in our reconstruction of Indian history.
3. Some scholars have dismissed the poetry of Kalidasa’s successors as merely ‘derivative.’ Select one major *mahakavya* and read it closely, with another eye on Kalidasa’s poetry. Is the dismissal by scholars justified?

Reading

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Texts

1. A Tamil poem in praise of Visnu (9th c. CE), trans. A.K. Ramanujan

We here and that man, this man,
and that other-in-between,
and that woman, this woman,
and that other, whoever,
those people, and these,
and these others-in-between,
this thing, that thing,
and this other-in-between, whichever,
all things dying, these, things,
those things, those others-in-between,
good things, bad things,
things that were, that will be,
being all of them,
he stands there.

[Note: ‘He’ in the last line refers to Visnu. Each of the Tamil personal pronouns (‘he,’ ‘she,’ and ‘it’) has three forms: 1) for near the speaker, 2) far away and 3) in the middle. There is also a distinction between ‘we’ (inclusive) and ‘we’ (exclusive)].

2. From *Shishupala Vadha* by Magha, trans. Subhadra Jha

Then the warrior, winner of war, with his heroic valour, the subduer of the extremely arrogant beings, he who has the brilliance of stars, he who has the brilliance of the vanquisher of fearless elephants, the enemy seated on a chariot, began to fight.

3. From *Kirātārjunīya* by Bharavi, trans. Sampadananda Mishra,

O man who desires war! This is that battlefield which excites even the gods, where the battle is not of words. Here people fight and stake their lives not for themselves but for others. This field is full of herds of maddened elephants. Here those who are eager for battle and even those who are not very eager, have to fight.

Part VI : LATE POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

Overview

It would be difficult to exaggerate the depth and longevity of the cultural changes set in motion by the Muslim conquest and rule of India during this period (c. 1000-1500CE). The Sultan's court at Delhi, and those of minor rulers in the Deccan, patronised poets and artisans who brought Persian literary culture and architecture to the subcontinent. Sufism, the mystical and emotional school of Islam, also spread throughout India, often blending in with Hindu devotionalism.

Art

Indo-Islamic architecture The sultans of Delhi, and the minor Muslim rulers in the Deccan, oversaw the development of an Indo-Islamic style of architecture characterised by ornate and intricately designed arches and domes. Pillars, mosques and tombs were decorated with floral patterns and calligraphic inscriptions from the Qur'an. The royal tombs of the Lodi Sultans are an excellent illustration of this style. The most famous structure, however, is the Qutub Minar, a pillar standing 73 metres high at the centre of a large complex of buildings, including tombs and mosques on the outskirts of Delhi. Made of brick but covered with metal, and later enlarged by adding six storeys made of sandstone and marble, the Qutub Minar is an architectural metaphor for the Sultanate as a whole. Begun in 1192, it was struck by lightning, damaged by an earthquake, repaired and added to throughout the period, reaching its present condition in the early 16th century.

Hindu architecture Some of the most magnificent Hindu temples in India were also built in the early centuries of this period. Regional styles evolved in Bengal, Kerala and Orissa, but the most spectacular temples were constructed in the far south. A large open space, often with a pool of water, was enclosed by a square, with high towers on each of four walls. Outstanding examples are the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram and the Brihadishvara temple at Tanjore, both in modern-day Tamil Nadu.

Sculpture The quality of sculpture in north India declined during the Sultanate and produced a predominance of massive, rigid forms. However, a subtle school of bronze sculpture developed in eastern India, as seen in the images of Buddhist gods and goddesses at Nalanda and Kurkihar. In the south, the tradition of exquisite Chola bronzes (made with the 'lost-wax' method) continued to produce excellent pieces.

Literature

Regional Hindu literature during this period was inspired by the devotionalism that had begun in the Tamil-speaking region of the south a few centuries earlier. The new literary-religious impulse spread to the adjacent Kannada-speaking area, where in the 11th and 12th centuries CE a group of poets invented a new genre of the *vacana* ('speech'), with which to speak to Siva. Known as Virasaivas ('Militant/Heroic Saivas'), they used this simple verse form to propagate their spiritual vision and egalitarian social ideals. In Tamil, the outstanding literary achievement was a devotional retelling of the Ramayana by Kampan (12th c. CE?). Another Ramayana of equal iconic status in the north was written in Hindi by Tulsidas (15th c. CE). In Sanskrit, the prevailing devotionalism is best illustrated by the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva (12th c. CE).

Sanskrit Sanskrit writers produced a number of compendia of stories, the most famous of which is *Kathasaritsagara* ('The Ocean of Streams of Story') is a 12th-century version of the earlier (and lost) text known as *Brhatkatha*. Like that earlier text, the *Kathasaritsagara* is a rambling compendium of tales, legends and the

supernatural composed in an easy metre with prose sections interspersed. The author, Somadeva, put the story of a legendary prince at the centre of his narrative and built a number of other stories around it. He drew on the vast repertoire of Sanskrit story literature, including tales from the *Pancatantra*. Two other collections put together in this period are the *Vetalapancavimsati* ('Twenty-Five Tales of a Vampire') and the *Hitopadesa*, a series of moral tales.

Indo-Persian Indo-Persian writers of the period adapted the *masnavi* genre (rhyming couplets in a religious poem), made famous in Persia by Rumi, to tell stories based on Indian folk tales. One of the earliest is the *Esqnama* by Hasan Dehlavi of Delhi (13th-14th c. CE), which was inspired by an oral tale from Rajasthan. Another famous adaptation from Sanskrit story literature is the 'Story of the Parrot' (*Tuti Nama*) by Nakhshabi in the 14th century CE. Nakhshabi's life is typical of many during this period. A Persian physician born in Persia, he migrated to north India and found patronage under a minor Muslim ruler. While still in Persia, he had translated a Sanskrit version of the story (*Sukasaptati*, 'Story of 70 Parrots') and adapted this to write the *Tuti Nama*. In his text, a single parrot tells 52 tales over as many nights in order to prevent its mistress from having a love affair while her husband is away (a delaying tactic of storytelling that is familiar to us from the *Thousand and One Nights*).

Ghazal The pre-eminent genre, in both Persia and India, was the *ghazal*, a short lyric of rhymed couplets combining the conventions of a love poem with those of a drinking song. Its imagery is drawn almost entirely from the landscape, flora and fauna of Persia, the most famous example being the contrast between the rose (*gul*) and the nightingale (*bulbul*). A subtle poetic language is made even more enigmatic by the Sufi religious themes that supply the content. Many *ghazals* express emotions of longing and loss, in both ordinary human experience and the mystical experience of god. The acknowledged master of the *ghazal* was Amir Khusrau (1253-1325 CE), who is also credited with developing the influential *qawwali* genre by fusing Persian and Indian music traditions.

Religion

Islam Early Indian Islam was guided by the Qur'an and the Sunna, which tradition held were the words and principles of the Prophet. Thus, the Islam practiced in Delhi in this period would have differed little from that observed in Baghdad or Damascus. There were minor differences, however, especially in the interpretation of Islamic law (*shariah*), resulting from a recognition that adjustments had to be made when Islam conquered people of different faiths.

Sufism Islam during the Delhi Sultanate was also tempered by the Sufis, the wandering Muslim mystics who took their name from the coarse wool tunic they wore. Sufis represented the ecstatic impulse suppressed in legalistic schools of Islam and expressed in their statement: 'Mystics learn from God; scholars learn from books.' Although Islam held that the only path to Paradise was unwavering faith in God, Sufi saints believed that one could draw closer to God during one's lifetime and thereby experience mystical oneness. As singers and poets, they helped to spread Islam through the countryside in a way that traditional Islamic teachers could not. The Sufi poet-saints were virtually identical to the poet-saints of devotional Hinduism. Both groups sang of a direct, personal contact with the divine, a power that they believed transcended petty social categories like caste and religious identity.

Hinduism Devotionalism, which had begun centuries earlier in the Tamil country, spread like wild fire across the entire subcontinent during this period. Hindu poet-saints composed songs in Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam, Telugu, Gujarati, Hindi and Assamese, which sang the praises of deities in the language of common people. The Chola kingdom in the far south and the Vijayanagar kingdom in the Deccan provided the patronage to promote the worship of Visnu and Siva in large temples and local shrines. The philosopher Ramanuja (c. 1017-1137 CE) established a theological basis for devotionalism with his school of *Vishistadvaita* ('qualified non-dualism'). He explained that a worshipper need not merge into oneness with god (the goal of the rival *Advaita*, or non-dualism, school). Instead, the worshipper could become immersed in god, while still retaining a personal identity; indeed, that personal identity was a prerequisite to forming a bond with god.

Discussion/questions

1. The mosque is the best-known Indo-Islamic architectural form, but the tomb garden is perhaps the most unique. Analyse the tomb garden by studying its precedents in Arab, Persian and Central Asian cultures, its counterparts (if any) in pre-Islamic India and its cultural significance during the Delhi Sultanate and later.

2. Bhakti poets in north lived during the formation of an Indo-Persian cultural synthesis that drew influences from Persia, Turkey and Central Asia. However, whereas that synthesis is documented primarily at the courts of Muslim rulers, these poets were itinerant singers and mystics. How is their ambiguous position outside the social mainstream revealed in their poetry? Analyse the work of these poets to identify any correlations between literary creation and society position.

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George Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India* (Cambridge, 1995)
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Texts

1. Kannada poem by Basavanna (c. 1105-1167 CE), trans. A.K. Ramunujan

The rich will make temples for Siva.
What shall I, a poor man, do?
My legs are pillars,
the body the shrine,
the head a cupola of gold.

Listen, O lord of the meeting rivers,
things standing shall fall
but the moving ever shall stay.

2. From the autobiography of Firuz Shah Tughluq (1309-1388 CE), trans. Anjana Narayanan

Among the gifts which God bestowed upon me, His humble servant, was a desire to erect public buildings. So I built many mosques and colleges and monasteries, that the learned and the elders, the devout and the holy, might worship God in these edifices, and aid the kind builder with their prayers.

Through God's mercy the lands and property of his servants have been safe and secure, protected and guarded during my reign; and I have not allowed the smallest particle of any man's property to be wrested from him.

3. A poem by Amir Khusrao (1253-1325 CE)

I wonder what was the place where I was last night,
All around me were half-slaughtered victims of love,
tossing about in agony.
There was a nymph-like beloved with cypress-like form
and tulip-like face,
Ruthlessly playing havoc with the hearts of the lovers.
God himself was the master of ceremonies in that heavenly court,
oh Khusrao, where (the face of) the Prophet too was shedding light
like a candle.

Part VII: EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Overview

The culture of early modern India (1500-1800 CE) in north and central India is dominated by the Mughal Empire, and largely by the individual genius of Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605). Under his patronage and that of other Muslim rulers the Indo-Persian synthesis that began in the preceding period flourished, especially in music, religion and poetry. Hindu rulers in the south supported more regional cultural traditions, often based in a temple. By the end of the early modern period, European influences in terms of painting and literature had been added to the eclectic mix.

Art

Architecture The Mughals developed the tradition of Indo-Islamic architecture that they inherited from the Delhi Sultanate. The Mughals retained the ornate arches and domes, but their buildings tended to be symmetrical, large enclosed spaces, like Hindu temples. Crucially, they also added a garden, itself laid out in a square grid pattern. The most perfect example of the tomb garden is the Taj Mahal, built for the wife of the Emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658). Other typical structures are the Friday mosques (Jami Masquid) of red sandstone and white marble that were constructed in Delhi, Lucknow, Lahore, Fatehpur Sikri and Agra. The Red Fort, also in Delhi and also built by Shah Jahan, is another impressive structure. Although it is slightly asymmetrical, in order to incorporate an older fort on the same site, this massive sandstone complex was the political and symbolic centre of the Mughal Empire.

Regional styles Regional styles of Indo-Islamic architecture also evolved in the smaller Muslim kingdoms in the Deccan. In particular, the domed tombs at Golconda are spectacular. Built by the Qutb Shahi rulers in the 16th and 17th centuries CE, and furnished with carpets and chandeliers, these now abandoned mausoleums stand as symbols of a past glory. Hindu temples also became more elaborate, adding porches, columns, doorways, ceilings and passageways. The domes, niches and arches of some temples (e.g., the Govindadeva temple in Mathura) show clear Indo-Islamic influence. On the other hand, some of the most spectacular buildings are the Hindu temples and palaces constructed in the far south, at Madurai, Trivandrum and Padmanabhapuram (all 16th-18th c. CE).

Painting The Mughal rulers brought significant changes to Indian painting. From the 16th century onward, book-painting superseded wall-painting as the favoured form and then developed into a visual art altogether separate from manuscripts and books. In another departure from tradition, the names of individual artists were recorded. Once again, Emperor Akbar was instrumental in these developments. He assembled a large contingent of artists from all over his empire and put them under the instruction of a Persian master-painter, whom he supervised. Later Mughal emperors continued to patronise 'miniature' painting, as did local rulers in the Deccan and Rajasthan. The Hindu tradition of illustrated manuscripts flourished as part of the devotionalist movement that developed in north India. Krishna and Radha are wonderfully rendered on manuscripts of the *Bhagavata Purana*, and a new genre of painting appeared, in which a series of images symbolised musical modes.

Music

The two schools of 'classical' Indian music both emerged at the end of the early modern era. Although most Hindustani (north Indian) musicians today trace their lineage from Tansen, the great vocalist and instrumentalist at Akbar's court, the style of singing known as *khyal* and the modern style of playing the *sitar* developed in the 18th century. The south Indian tradition of Carnatic music derives from the Maratha court at Tanjore, where three men composed the repertoire that defines the tradition today: Syama Sastry (1762-1827), Tyagaraja (1767-1847) and Muttuswami Dikshitar (1775-1835).

Drama

North India Based on the text of Tulsidas's *Ramayana* (16th c. CE), Ram Lila ('Play of Rama') is a hugely popular drama that is still performed annually throughout the Hindi-speaking regions of north India. With elaborate costumes, it is staged outdoors over a series of nights, typically ten, though in Varnasi it stretches to 31. Dialogue is minimal, and reciters are used to chant verses from the Hindi text. Another popular drama in north India which

emerged in the period, is Pandava Lila, which takes its name from the five Pandava brothers, protagonists of the other great epic of the *Mahabharata*. Unlike Ram Lila, however, it is written and performed in the Garhwali language spoken in the mountainous region of Garhwal. Unlike the preceding two traditions, Nautanki is a secular theatre tradition, drawing on popular tales from Hindu and Muslim traditions. Dialogue is usually in Hindi, while libretti are often in Urdu. There is a strong satirical strain in the plays of Nautanki, as revealed by its original name of *svang* ('impersonation', 'mime').

South India A south Indian popular theatre form based on the *Mahabharata*, Terukkuttu ('Street Theatre') is a ritualised enactment of episodes from Tamil versions of the epic text. The plays, which are performed over a series of nights (from one to 18), focus specifically on the character of Draupadi, the wronged wife of one of the Pandava brothers, and are performed in temples dedicated to her. Again, song dominates over dialogue. Tolpavu Kuttu ('leather puppet play') is a traditional shadow puppet play based very closely on the Tamil *Ramayana* (12th c. CE). It is performed over a number of nights (typically 8 to 41) in certain temples on the border between Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The puppeteers memorise and recite thousands of verses from the medieval text, while peppering their all-night performances with humorous banter. Kathakali ('Story-drama') is a highly sophisticated theatre, or opera, performed in central Kerala. One of several related drama forms found on this southwest coast region, it consists of a number of plays written in a Malayalam heavily influenced by Sanskrit and dating from the late 16th century and early 17th century CE. Sanskrit verses recited by vocalists explain the action, while the actors, in elaborate costumes and face paint, 'speak' the dialogue by dance, gesture and eye movement.

Literature

Indo-Persian The *Baburnama* ('Book of Babur'), the autobiography of Babur (1483-1530 CE), the first Mughal emperor, is a remarkable work of psychological insight and ethnographic observation. Although written in Babur's native Chagatai (or Turki), a language of central Asia, it is highly Persianised in vocabulary and morphology. During Babur's lifetime, it was translated into Persian and reproduced in illustrated manuscripts. An equally impressive book is the autobiography of a Jain merchant named Banarasidas (1585-1643 CE), whose *Ardhakathanak* ('Half a Story') is the first autobiography in an Indian language. Among the best-loved Muslim poets was Abul Faizl (Shaikh Abu-al-Fazal-ibn Mubarak, 1547-1595 CE), who wrote in several Persian genres (*qasida*, *ghazal* and *rubai*). An example of narrative fiction is the ever-popular *Hamzanama* (or *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza*, 'Adventures of Amir Hamza'). This picaresque text draws on the Indo-Persian genre of oral storytelling (*dastan/qissa*) to narrate the story of Amir Hamza, the legendary uncle of the prophet Muhammad. Many versions of the work circulated orally and in manuscript, but the canonical text is an illustrated Persian manuscript commissioned by Akbar. Hindu devotional poetry also flourished, providing the stimulus that transformed several regional tongues into literary languages. Even the minor languages (or possibly Hindi dialects) of Braj, Awadhi and Maithili produced poems that are still sung and studied today.

Hindi Devotional poetry An influential mystic, poet-saint and social reformer of this period is Ravidas (late 15th/early 16th c. CE?), who wrote searing songs in Hindi. Born to a low caste of leather-workers in the Punjab, his poems were heavily influenced by the egalitarianism of the Sikh movement and are included in the Sikh scriptures, which remain our primary textual source for Ravidas' work. Like Kabir, Ravidas articulated the *nirguna* concept of god, that is, a god without attributes. An equally influential Hindi poet-saint, and contemporary of Ravidas, is Surdas (late 15th/early 16th c. CE?). Surdas, however, wrote in Braj (a language closely related to Hindi and spoken in the Mathura region) and envisioned god (Krshna, in his case) as very much with attributes (*saguna*). His collection of poems (*Sursagar*) is said to have contained 100,000 poems, though only 8,000 survive, in which the poet achieves a subtle blend of mystical and sensual love.

Ramayanas Another major contribution to north Indian devotional poetry during this period was the production of Ramayanas in regional languages. In most cases, the composition of the Rama story was seen to elevate a regional language to literary status, a condition that would later have enormous political advantages. Examples include Oriya (*Dandi Ramayana* also known as *Jagamohana Ramayana*), Kannada (*Torave Ramayana*), Malayalam (*Adhyathmaramayanam*) and Marathi (*Bhavartha Ramayana*), all 16th century, and a Gujarati *Ramayana* in the 17th century.

Tulsidas The most influential of all these Ramayanas, however, was that composed in Hindi by Tulsidas (1532-1623 CE). His *Ramcaritmanas* is often called the 'bible of north India,' and certainly no other Hindi text matches

the literary skill and cultural status of this epic rendering of the Rama story. Tulsidas transformed the Sanskrit text so thoroughly that recitation of his poem became (and still is) an act of worship. The influence of this text is underpinned by the fact that it is the textual basis for an immensely popular dramatic enactment of the Rama story in north India.

Urdu Not all Muslim poets favoured Persian and many turned to Urdu (or Hindustani), with its greater mix of Sanskrit-derived words. Both languages, it should be said, were written in the Arabic script (slightly modified for the new sounds in Urdu), and calligraphy was itself a highly developed art form. Urdu was the choice, not surprisingly, of several writers living outside Delhi in the smaller but still sophisticated Muslim courts in the Deccan. Two representative figures, who mainly wrote *ghazals*, are Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1580-1627), a ruler of Bijapur, and Allah-wirdi Khan (early 18th c.), a military officer in the Muslim court at Hyderabad. By the 18th century, Urdu had become the literary language of Indian Muslims.

European Europeans also made a significant contribution to Indian literature during this period. Missionaries printed the first book in an Indian language, they brought the first printing press to India and they wrote grammars and dictionaries for many regional languages. Perhaps the most remarkable European was C.J. Beschi (1680-1742 CE), an Italian-born missionary who spent four decades in South India. He wrote a Tamil grammar that is still used today and an epic poem that scholars refused to believe could have been written by a non-Tamil. Although the poem (*Tempavani*) tells the story of Joseph, Beschi's patron saint, the biblical story is Indianised so that Joseph is made a prince who chooses the life of an ascetic (like the Buddha) until a sage convinces him to take up his duty (*dharma*) as a householder.

Religion

Islam During the Mughal Empire, Sunni and Shia Muslims generally practiced Islam in accordance with scripture and followed the guidance of traditional Islamic scholars in the interpretation of *sharia* law. However, Sufism (which had come to India in the 14th c. CE) was also extremely popular. Sufi mysticism, which dismissed institutions in favour of a personal bond between believer and god, engaged people through ecstatic singing. Nevertheless, and predictably, Sufis formed their own organisations, called orders (*silsilah*), with spiritual leaders and large shrines. The most successful orders were the Suhrawardi and the Chisthi, which cultivated sophisticated Persian poetry. With its shrines, singing and egalitarianism, Sufism played a major role in the accommodation of Islam with Indian traditions, as illustrated by the synthesis created by Akbar. At court, he gathered around him a wide spectrum of theologians—Sunni, Shia, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Jain, Jewish and Catholic. Akbar led a pious life, and could be seen sweeping the floor of the mosque he had built at his new capital, Fatehpur Sikri (near Agra). He also openly opposed Islamic legal scholars by citing Sufi principles, which traditionalists regarded as heresy.

Hinduism Hindu devotionalism continued to spread during this period, especially to the eastern corners of the subcontinent. Chaitanya in Bengal and Sankaradeva in Assam led popular movements promoting the worship of Visnu. In south India, partly in reaction to the Islamic threat from the north, kings built large temples that employed thousands of Brahmins. However, at the local level, the theologies of Hindu devotionalism and Sufi mysticism were very similar, and the Hindu cults of deified heroes were little different to the Muslim cults of saints.

Christianity At first, Christianity was practiced mainly on the southwest and southeast coasts, where Europeans had established trading centres. Although the number of converts was low, church spires soon dotted the shorelines, and the new faith slowly worked its way into the lives of low-castes, particularly the fishermen (who may have felt an affinity with Christ). In fact, by the end of the 18th century, when Christian churches and congregations appeared in Madras and Calcutta, the Indianisation of Christianity, with its doctrinal concessions to local cultural practices, led to the Jesuits being withdrawn from India (and other parts of Asia).

Discussion/questions

1. Akbar is called 'The Great Mughal.' He did rule for a longer time than the other emperors, but he did not conquer the most territory. Instead, his status rests on his contributions to the development of syncretic cultural forms, painting, music and religion.

- Urdu has a complex linguistic and political history. Research that history as a way of understanding the cultural history of early modern India.
- The first European to write a major text in any Indian literature was the 18th century Italian missionary J.C. Beschi in Tamil. A close study of his epic poem *Tempavani* reveals a mixture of European and Tamil elements. What later contributions did Europeans make to Indian literature?

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Texts

- In praise of Akbar, from *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* by Muhsin-i-Fani (b. 1615):

Know for certain that the perfect prophet and learned apostle, the possessor of Fame, Akbar, this, the lord of wisdom, directs us to acknowledge that the self-existent being is the wisest teacher and ordains the creatures with absolute power, so that the intelligent among them may be able to understand his precepts; and as reason renders it evident that the world has a Creator, all-mighty and all-wise, who has diffused upon the field of events among the servants, subject to vicissitudes, numerous and various benefits that are worthy of praise and thanksgiving, therefore, according to the lights of our reason, let us investigate the mysteries of his creations, and, according to our knowledge, pour out the praises of his benefits.

- Description of Akbar's religion by Abd ul-Qadir Baudani (1540-1605)

Samanas [Hindu or Buddhist ascetics] and Brahmans ... gained the advantage over every one in attaining the honor of interviews with His Majesty ... And he made his courtiers listen to those revilings and attacks against our pure and easy, bright and holy faith ... And at one time a Brahman, named Debi, who was one of the interpreters of the Mahabharata, was pulled up the wall of the castle sitting on a bedstead till he arrived near a balcony, which the emperor had made his bedchamber. Whilst thus suspended he instructed His Majesty in the secrets and legends of Hinduism, in the manner of worshipping idols, the fire, the sun and stars, and of revering the chief gods of these unbelievers ... His Majesty, on hearing further how much the people of the country prized their institutions, began to look upon them with affection.

Part VIII: 19th CENTURY

Overview

The culture of nineteenth-century India was largely shaped as a result of an interaction between tradition and colonial influences. Christianity, English education and printing brought enormous changes, not least in literature and especially in the emergence of the novel. The novel, however, had no counterpart in Indian tradition and so the major literary confrontations between tradition and modernity occurred in poetry and drama. Similar accommodations were forged in painting, architecture and sculpture. Religious revival was sparked by the encounter with colonialism and resulted in several different strands of reformed and rediscovered religious traditions.

Bengal Renaissance

From the early 19th century, Bengalis were exposed to colonial institutions, such as the Asiatic Society, the College at Fort William and Christianity, which led to a reassessment of Hindu tradition known as the Bengal Renaissance. Based in Calcutta, it began with the reformer Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833) and ended with writer Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). It was a broad-based movement, encompassing radical social practices (dowry-free marriages), religious reform organisations (the Brahmo Samaj), scientific discoveries (radiology) and literary experimentation (modern novels). The Bengal Renaissance exemplifies the peculiar dynamic of nineteenth-century India: confronted by colonial modernity, India responded by reshaping pre-existing beliefs and practices into something called 'tradition.'

Art

Architecture Although Hindu and Islamic architecture continued with the trends set in the early modern period, the 19th century was the grand era of colonial, mostly British, architecture. Libraries, museums, universities, law courts, railway terminals and government buildings were all erected with massive dimensions as a visual display of power. Most were designed in the neo-classical style, such as the Government House in Calcutta. Toward the end of the century, European architects in India began to build in the Indo-Saracenic style, which combined features of Victorian Gothic with Mughal architecture. Mughal architecture was preferred to Hindu architecture because its domes and arches were considered more compatible with European building methods than were the post-and-beam structure of Hindu temples. The Napier Museum in Trivandrum (1880) and the Taj Hotel in Bombay (1903) are both fine examples of this composite style.

Painting While court painting declined from the mid-19th century onward, painting traditions at the local level maintained their vitality. Painted cloth scrolls depicting mythological scenes were (and in some cases are still) used as a backdrop to storytelling traditions in Bengal, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. One of these cloth-painting traditions became a commercial success in the Kalighat district of Calcutta. Local folk artists produced these paintings and then sold them to the pilgrims who came to the temples and shrines in the area, eventually attracting interest from Europeans and Bengali elites. By the early 20th century, however, this popular visual art had been undermined by mass-produced wood-cuts and later by poster art. Indian painters were commissioned by British patrons to produce scenes of local life known as 'Company paintings.' British residents and travellers also painted and drew aspects of Indian society and landscapes, notably the works by Thomas and William Daniell. By the end of the century, art schools had been established in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Raja Ravi Varma of Travancore (1848-1906) is thought to be the first Indian to adapt western techniques of perspective and composition to Indian content in painting. He chose traditional Indian scenes and figures from both real-life and mythology. Toward the end of his life, he set up a lithographic press that mass-produced his paintings and made them available to people who could not otherwise afford them. This technology of reproduction then led to an explosion of popular visual culture in the next century.

Sculpture During the nineteenth century, Hindu deities were joined by secular figures as subjects of public representation in stone. A statue of Lord Cornwallis, Governor of Madras, was erected in 1800, followed by at least 200 sculptures of other Europeans

Theatre

Parsi From the 1850s, Parsi theatre (named after the Iranian Parsi community who subsidised it) thrived in Bombay and later in other north Indian cities. Parsi theatre drew on European techniques of presentation (principally the proscenium arch) but was largely Indian in content. Most stories were taken from Hindu and Persian sources, dialogue was in Indian languages and the acting was accompanied by light-classical music from the Mughal courts.

European A more strictly European theatre, presenting European plays in English, was introduced during the 18th century by the British for entertainment in the provincial centres. *Othello* was staged in Calcutta in the 1840s, and that city continued to be a centre for modern theatre into the next century. Shakespeare was performed by travelling troupes (sometimes in Indian languages) well into the 20th century.

Folk Several forms of folk theatre were also popular in the cities and towns during the 19th century. Jatra, a theatre tradition in Bengali, for example, influenced the development of modern theatre in Calcutta, while the Tamil-language Teru Kuttu tradition did the same in Madras.

Literature

Urdu Urdu writers in the first half of the century continued writing in Indo-Persian genres (*qissa/dastan*, *masnavi*, *ghazal*). The decline of Muslim power meant a loss of prestige for Urdu (and Persian), which became the literature of lament. The greatest Urdu poet (and arguably the greatest Indian poet) of the century was Ghalib (1797-1869), who was an aristocrat and a defender of the crumbling Muslim aristocracy. But it was the novel that most expressed the historical shifts in the second half of the century. By 1900, most regional languages had produced a modern novel, but, predictably, those by Bengalis in Calcutta are the most memorable. These writers include Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who later won the Nobel Prize, and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894), who captured the spirit of the age with one novel with a song ('Bande Mataram, 'Hail to thee, Mother') that became the rallying cry for Indian independence. Mention should also be made of the first modern Tamil novel written by Rajam Aiyer (1872-1898) in the 1890s. *Kamalampal Carittiram* ('The Fatal Rumour' or 'The Story of Kamalampal', 1893-1895) is a classic story of social reform focusing on the life of a married woman.

Bengali The life of Bengali's greatest early novelist, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) sums up the transitional nature of this century. Born in an orthodox Brahmin family, he was educated in English at Presidency College (now University of Calcutta) and became a magistrate in the Indian Civil Service until his retirement in 1891, but still found time to run a Bengali-language newspaper and write novels that are read today. One of his novels (*Anandamath*) contained a song ('Bande Mataram, 'Hail to thee, Mother') that became the rallying cry for Indian independence. Better known as a poet, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) also made a considerable contribution to Bengali fiction in this century through his exquisite short stories. In the 1890s he wrote and published dozens of stories, some of which showcase his wit, technical skill and powers of observation.

Tamil A first, somewhat clumsy, attempt at a novel in Tamil was made by Samuel Vedanayakam Pillai (1826-1889) with his *Piratapa Mutaliyar Carittiram* ('The Story of Piratapa Mutaliyar', 1885). The author was acquainted with both English and French literature, but the material and point of view for his novel came from his observations of life as a district judge. Unfortunately, he was not a creative writer, and he only managed to string together a series of improbably romantic episodes, interrupted by his homilies for reform. Nevertheless, and again despite the scholarly language, it was an important experiment. An altogether different man and writer was Rajam Aiyer (1872-1898), a Brahmin who wrote the first 'real' novel in Tamil, one that is now regarded as a classic. The plot of *Kamalampal Carittiram* ('The Fatal Rumour' or 'The Story of Kamalampal', 1893-1895) is a little implausible and the solution even more so, and it uses somewhat stilted prose. Nonetheless, it succeeds in creating believable characters. The author describes the petty nature of some people, but also the genuine grief and confusion of others. It is a novel of critical realism, something that few other Tamil writers have managed to produce till this day. It uncovers the injustice of a woman's position in a rural Brahmin family, but it does so with wit and panache.

Hindi The detective novel, an overlooked strand of Indian fiction writing, surfaced in Hindi in the last decade of the century. Earlier fiction had elements of the detective novel (a crime and its solution), but in these fin de siècle works, suspense dominates and, crucially, the narration does not give everything away. A significant practitioner of this new kind of fiction was Devki Nandan Khatri (1861-1913), whose *Chandrakanta* (1888) is considered the first example of modern Hindi prose. Less well-known, however, is his detective novel *Virendravir athva Katora Bhara Khun* ('Virendravir or A Bowl of Blood', 1895), which may owe a large debt to Sherlock Holmes. The storytelling is skilfully handled by beginning in medias res (highly unusual at the time) and manipulating the point of view from third to first person.

Religion

Hinduism Hinduism was reformed by both urban and rural elites, who pulled it in different directions. The Brahmo Samaj, formed in 1828 by English-educated intellectuals in Calcutta, encouraged a monotheistic and rational Hinduism that opposed the worship of idols, child marriage, dowry, *sati* (widow self-immolation) and caste inequality. The opposite trend, to recover old practices, was spearheaded by the Arya Samaj movement in the Gangetic heartland. This reform movement was led by the firebrand Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), who promoted cow protection and denounced both Christianity and Islam.

Islam Muslim reform movements centred on two institutions, close to Delhi. The Aligarh movement, led by Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) and based at the Anglo-Oriental College. Khan believed that Islam and modernity were not incompatible and argued that one could be a good Muslim and have enlightenment ideas. An alternative approach, centred on the Deoband seminary, taught a version of pure Islam in confrontation with infidels, both Hindu and British.

Christianity Christianity grew into a major cultural presence in India, especially through the Protestant missions that spread all over the country. They established schools, translated the bible into dozens of languages and eventually developed a distinctive literature, which Indianised Christian story material.

Questions/discussion

1. The Bengal Renaissance was one of the major cultural developments during the 19th century. In some respects it was a reaction to colonialism, while from another perspective its causes lay much deeper in the past. Write an essay, arguing for one position or the other. First describe the events of the 'renaissance', the key actors, texts and institutions. Then explain the causes of each in order to support your argument.
2. Architecture is often said to reflect social and political realities more than any other form of visual culture. Defend or refute this argument by analysing colonial and Indo-Saracenic building in 19th-century India.
3. Muslim reformers faced a somewhat different task to that of their Hindu counterparts. The loss of empire, the failure of the 1857-1858 revolt, the decline of Persian culture and the perceived incompatibility between Islam and British colonialism left Muslims in India with difficult choices, ranging from accommodation to outright rejection of social and political realities. Analyse the strategies chosen by the two main reform movements. What factors best explain their origins, their differences and their subsequent histories?

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Part IX: EARLY 20th CENTURY

Overview

During the half-century to Independence, Indian culture continued to be shaped by the increasingly politicised interaction between colonial modernity and tradition (rediscovered and redefined). English education became widespread, which led to the paradox that key nationalist figures now communicated in the language of the oppressor. Regional literature, however, flourished, especially in the form of social realist novels. Film, which combined the traditional arts of dance, song, music and storytelling, burst onto the scene, destined to become a national obsession.

Art

Architecture In the 1920s., New Delhi was built as the new capital of British India by the English architect Lutyens. His new city was laid out in a symmetrical design with large roundabouts and wide avenues leading to a complex of government buildings. These buildings synthesise Hindu, Muslim and European features in a new imperial subcontinental style.

Painting In the early decades, painting sought to find a place within the politics of cultural nationalism. The oil paintings of the half-Hungarian and Paris-trained Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941) were inspired by the Ajanta and Ellora caves. But her paintings were rendered in a modernist idiom and were hailed as a new artistic awakening. M.F Husain (1915-2011) was an eccentric and controversial artist, who never maintained a studio, painted Hindu deities in the nude and owned a collection of vintage sports cars. He borrowed the techniques of Cezanne and Matisse to paint scenes from the Hindu epics and myths.

Sculpture From the late 19th century onward, Indian fine art sculpture came under the influence of European traditions. However, unlike painting, sculpting was not supplanted but rather supplemented by modern trends. Statues of public figures were erected all over India during the first half of the century, mostly commissioned from European, usually British, artists.

Dance With the disappearance of traditional court patronage at the end of the 19th century, many dance forms were in decline until they were revived (or reinvented) by new elites in the colonial metropolitan centres as symbols of Indian tradition. Kathak in north India, Gaudiya Nritya in Bengal, Kathakali in Kerala and Odissi in Orissa were all revived by establishing formal academies and rewriting choreography based on a scholarly investigation of manuscripts and sculpture. Bharatanatyam is the best-documented example of this revival. In the early 20th century, Tamil and Telugu elites in Madras (with support from British officials and scholars) set out to 'purify' the tradition of female temple-dancers. Allegedly erotic elements were expunged, and a school was established to teach the proper movements. Performances were also taken out of temples and put on the urban stage in front of ticket-buying audiences, often as part of a festival of music and dance.

Cinema Indian cinema began in 1896, when the Lumière brothers' films were shown in Bombay. Money soon poured in to finance studios, build cinemas and support tours that took films all across the country. British-owned and run, these touring companies showed mainly sports, news, travel and topical documentaries. The first Indian feature was 'Raja Harischandra' in 1913. Based on a well-known mythological story, it started a genre that has never lost its appeal. By the 1920s, only 15% of the hundred or so films made each year were produced by Indians. The colonial government then instituted censorship, a move supported by Gandhi, to suppress nationalist films. The advent of sound in the 1930s was significant because it brought not just the 'talkies' but also the songs that are central to the success of Indian films. Regional cinema also developed in this period, especially in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Bengali.

Literature

Urdu Fiction in Urdu was raised to a new level by the storytelling art of Sadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955). Unusual among fiction writers in India of this period, he specialised in the short story, and like Chekhov and Maupassant, he told stories with a fine eye for detail and character motivation. Some critics condemned his apparent fascination with violence and sex, but others praised his stories featuring prostitutes and pimps for their unsentimental humanity. Certainly he was prolific, publishing no less than 15 collections during his lifetime, with

several more published posthumously. Among his best books are *Atis Paray*, ('Spares of Fire,' 1936) and *Cughad* ('The Fool,' 1948).

Hindi Beginning with its first novel in 1882, Hindi fiction had been dominated by romance and adventure until Premchand (1880-1936). His father was a large landowner, who had his son educated in Persian and Urdu. Devastated by the early death of his mother, Premchand went on to become a bookseller, to study English at a missionary school and to become a teacher. His first novel was serialised in an Urdu weekly between 1903 and 1905, but thereafter he wrote in Hindi, publishing a dozen novels and more than 300 short stories.

Bengali Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the great poet, also wrote a series of provocative novels in the early decades of the century. Perhaps the most powerful was *Yogajog* (1929), a story of the struggle between masculine power and feminine resistance, coarseness and culture, featuring a marital rape. The Bengali novel, however, found an even more outstanding practitioner in Sarat Chandra Chatterji (1876-1938). Like Tagore, he used the Bengali family as a prism for exploring the world of the emotions, often focusing on women's lives, but his stories move more quickly, with few authorial interventions, relying instead of sudden and dramatic shifts that maintain suspense. A third masterful writer was Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay (also Banerjee, 1894-1950), who was a transitional figure between the early novelistic experiments in the 19th century and the fully-developed form of the 20th. Indeed, his biography reads like a blueprint for creating a modern Indian literature with its blend of tradition and innovation. His grandfather was an Ayurvedic doctor and his father was a Sanskrit scholar and professional storyteller (*kathak*). Born as the eldest of five children in a rural village, Bandyopadhyay went to college and studied for an MA at Calcutta University.

Tamil It is characteristic of Indian literature that a short-lived literary magazine (*Manikkodi*, 'The Jewelled Flag') changed the history of Tamil fiction. Published in Madras from 1933 to 1936, it featured short stories that challenged the accepted manner of telling stories. Narratives were fractured, told from different points of view; they highlighted the grotesque and the psychotic, sex and violence. The magazine launched the careers of most of the best fiction writers of the inter-war years, including B.S. Ramiah, Chellappa, Mauni and Putumaipittan. The most radical and interesting of these writers was Putumaipittan ('The Crazy One,' 1906-1948). In his brief literary career, he wrote nearly 100 short stories (some of which were unpublished and are being discovered even today), translated 50 stories from English into Tamil and wrote four non-fiction books (promoting his socialist ideals and condemning fascism, notably in his biography of Hitler).

English Indian literature in English during the first half of the twentieth century was dominated by three novelists whose lives spanned all ten decades: Raja Rao (1908-2006), Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) and R. K. Narayan (1906-2001). Raja Rao's most famous novel (*Kanthapura*, 1938) describes the reception of Gandhian ideals in rural India, while Raj Anand was an even more committed political writer, who helped to establish the Progressive Writers' Association. His novels (especially *Untouchable*, 1935) took on the task of exposing the indignities and inequalities in Indian society.

Religion

Hinduism Hinduism underwent considerable reform through the agency of the Bengal Renaissance, Gandhi's campaigns and other attempts to accommodate an ancient religion to modernity. Continuing a trend the arguably began in the classical period (with the Gupta Empire), religion became ever more closely entwined with politics, as religious identity provided a rallying cry for mobilising popular movements.

Buddhism Having nearly disappeared from India centuries earlier, Buddhism made a startling comeback during the early twentieth century. In western India, a movement of Neo-Buddhism led by Dr Ambedkar appealed to many low caste Hindus. A similar movement was led by elites in the Tamil-speaking region, as part of an anti-Brahmin crusade.

Islam Having lost their prestige and much of their culture in post-Mughal India, Muslims found a new source of inspiration in pan-Islamism as symbolised by the Ottoman Caliph. In 1919, after the defeat of Turkey and its allies by Britain and its allies, Muslims in India had another cause to unite them: anti-colonialism. This 'Khilafat' Movement argued that it was the duty of Muslims to defend Islam and *sharia* law against its enemies, including

western countries. In the 1920s, thinking turned toward post-Independence and the need for a separate Muslim nation-state. Since Independence, Muslim revivalism in India has concentrated on social and cultural issues.

Questions/Discussion

1. The quantity and popularity of Indian literature in this period might be partially explained by non-literary factors. With the rise of print and literacy, there were clearly more publications and more readers. And the nationalist fervour meant that more of them were anxious to read, not just books, but also newspapers and magazines. This close correlation between print, nationalism and the novel has been noticed by scholars in other regions of the world (see B. Anderson's 1983 book *Imagined Communities*).
2. In this period, unlike the second half of the century, most popular fiction was written, published and read in regional languages, Bengali, Tamil, Hindi and so forth. This would change, after Independence, in favour of English-language Indian literature. What accounts for this radical shift in so short a time?
3. Bharatanatyam is an example of what some have called an 'invented tradition.' Most cases of this phenomenon are the result of elites attempting to salvage a fast-disappearing heritage for cultural or political purposes, as described in 1983 by E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger in their book, *The Invention of Tradition*.

Part X: LATE 20th CENTURY

Overview

The dynamics of change that had shaped culture in the first half of the century continued to operate in the second half. Only more so. Like its economy, Indian culture became more global. Artistic expression, religion, the cinema and literature were all deeply influenced by an increasing interaction with the West and by the countervailing desire to explore Indian 'tradition.' In effect, nationalism had divided Indian society into two realms: an inner, traditional core, and an outer, modernising layer. The two had to be kept separate, in order to protect the uncolonised core from contamination by modernisation in the social, political and economic realms. The challenge, therefore, has been to find cultural expressions that are both 'Indian' and modern. That synthesis has been achieved in English-language Indian literature, whose novelists have won international awards and audiences, while other, less-known writers still sell millions of copies at home. In Indian-language literature, a noteworthy trend has been the success of Dalit (Untouchable) novelists.

Art

Architecture Foreign influences shaped large scale building after Independence, especially in the work of the Frenchman Le Corbusier and the Indian Correa. In the 1950s, at Nehru's bidding, Le Corbusier built the city of Chandigarh, the capital of the new state of Punjab. In the following decade, Correa, having returned from studying in the US, began to experiment with his unique blend of traditional Indian and modern features. Following his memorial to Gandhi in Ahmedabad, he went on to build high-rise apartments in Bombay and public buildings in Bhopal and Jaipur. His buildings, especially the arts centre in Jaipur, are widely praised as a successful blend of spirituality and functionality.

Painting Modern Indian painters of this period attempted to combine Indian decorativism and western naturalism. A good example was M.F. Husain (1915-2011), an eccentric and controversial artist who never maintained a studio, painted Hindu deities in the nude and owned a collection of vintage sports cars. For his synthesis, he borrowed the techniques of Cezanne and Matisse to paint scenes from the Hindu epics and myths. Another distinctive figure was Bhupen Khakhar (1934-2004), who drew inspiration from a variety of sources, both Indian and western. His openly homosexual themes were autobiographical and created controversy. However, his skill, particularly in rendering colour on flat surfaces, has earned his work a place in major museums around the world.

Cinema The 1950s saw the beginning of the 'Golden Age' for Indian cinema, when Indian-made films, including many classics, were produced. Bengali art cinema (directed by Ray, Sen, Roy and Ghatak) emerged and (especially Ray's films) gained an international audience. At the same time, domestic demand rose, and Hindi films were subtitled in three or four regional languages. Fan magazines flourished, and stars, such as Raj Kapoor, Rajesh Khanna and Sharmila Tagore, became celebrities. Almost as popular were the play-back singers, who sang mainly Urdu-language *qawwalis* and *ghazals*. Based in Bombay but borrowing techniques from Hollywood, the Indian film industry is a run-away financial success. Some production cost \$20 million, but the hits regularly bring in \$25 or 30 million. It is a populist medium, telling stories of romance, of good over evil and of rags to riches. Rickshaw drivers have a heart of gold, corrupt politicians are denounced and poor village girls marry nice doctors. Today India produces about 1,300 of these films every year, mostly in Hindi but with substantial numbers in Telugu and Tamil.

Religion

Shiv Sena The harnessing of religion by political movements, a trend that began during the nationalist era, shows no sign of abating. A revealing example is the Shiv Sena ('Siva's Army'). This Hindu nationalist political party began as an agitation in the 1950s for a separate Marathi-speaking state to be carved out of Bombay Province. After Maharashtra was duly created in 1960, protests against non-Marathas began. The easy targets were Gujaratis, who controlled commerce in Bombay, and South Indians, who held professional positions. Later the Shiv Sena allied itself with the Bharatiya Janata Party and stoked anti-Muslim feelings.

Communal violence More broadly, the psychological divide between Hindus and Muslims has been deepened by the ongoing dispute over Kashmir and the threat of jihadism, especially following the attacks in Bombay in 2008. In

1992, a mob of religious activists, with the tacit approval of the authorities, demolished a mosque in Ayodhya because they claimed it had been built over a Hindu temple. This event sparked a series of bloody attacks and reprisals in north India. In 2002, Hindu activists clashed with Muslims in rural Gujarat, leaving two thousand Muslims dead, with the apparent complicity of Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat and later Prime Minister of India. New wealth has also enabled people to display their prosperity by building temples and mosques, which then act as lightning rods for conflict.

Literature

Hindi Nirmal Verma (1929-2005) was perhaps the most influential Hindi writer of his generation. A skilful novelist, he was also a founder of the 'new short story' movement in Hindi. He published twelve collections of stories, starting in 1959 with *Parinde* ('Birds'), whose title story is often cited as his best. Like so many of his contemporaries, Verma was active in politics and spent ten years in Prague as the guest of the Soviet-controlled government. He resigned from the Communist Party in 1956 after the invasion of Hungary..

Tamil C.S Lakshmi ('Ambai, b. 1944) is a feminist critic, scholar and author in Tamil. Her journalism ranges widely over current affairs, but she is best known for her short stories, especially *Cirukukal Muriyum* ('Wings will be Broken,' 1968) and *Vitin Mulaiyil oru Camaiyalarai* ('A Kitchen in the Corner of the House', 1988). Her stories are not distinguished by literary style, and neither are they humorous or original. Instead, they look uncompromisingly at the everyday reality of women, revealing both their vulnerability and their strength.

English R.K. Narayan (1906-2001) dominated the field of Indian English fiction for most of the century. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Narayan was never a political writer, and his fiction is often criticised for its apolitical stance and avoidance of colonialism. However, he was too keen an observer of human nature to be indifferent to injustice. Most of his novels, in fact, explore social problems, though not the spectacular ones. His masterpiece is probably *The Guide* (1958), which is both a parody of Indian culture and a poignant love story.

Booker Prize Winners Since the beginning of the annual Booker Prize for world's best novel in English in 1969, Indian authors have won an astounding seven times. The most recent Booker-winning novel by an Indian is *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga (b.1974). Written in the form of letters from its hero (Balram) to the Chinese Premier, 'from one entrepreneur to another,' as Balram says, it chronicles the effect of global capitalism in India. Balram himself, a poor village boy, goes to the big city and makes a success, but only by murdering and stealing along the way. Like R.K Narayan, Aravind Adiga has great fun in lampooning the official rhetoric of progress, but the bitter cynicism is a long way from Narayan's gentle irony.

Popular fiction Another strand altogether are the English-language novels by Shoba De (b. 1948) and Chetan Bhagat (b. 1974), which reflect the aspirations of a growing lower-middle class. De has published 17 novels, with titles such as *Starry Nights* and *Sultry Days*, that might be called 'soap opera literature.' If her novels tell the tale of middle-class women in contemporary India, Bhagat's describe the success story of young men. Novels by both writers are entertaining, youth-focused and extremely popular, selling in the millions and filling a (rather large) literary niche.

Dalit fiction Another kind of success story is the growing popularity of novels written by Dalits (formerly 'Untouchables') in regional languages. This trend began in 1978 with the Marathi-language *Balute* ('Share') by Daya Pawar and continued with several more novels in Marathi. One of the best, *Akkarmashi* ('Outcaste,' 1984) by Limbale, is the life-story of a bastard son born to a Dalit woman seduced by her landlord. Then came two Dalit novels in Tamil by Bama (b. 1958): *Karukku* ('Blades') in 1992 and *Sangati* ('Events') in 1994. *Karukku* tells the life-story of a Dalit Catholic woman in the idiom of her community rather than in standard Tamil. A major Hindi-language novel is *Joothan* ('Left Overs) published by Omprakash Valmiki in 1997, which dramatizes the lives of scavengers who subsist on what others throw away. Starting in the 1950s, the novel reveals the hollowness of Gandhian government programmes of Untouchable uplift.

Questions/discussion

1. No matter how one theorises post-colonial literature in India, it is difficult to avoid the fact that the novel is an imported genre. Although it has developed in India for about 150 years and become indigenised, it remains

unconnected to the deep historical patterns of literary culture in the country. That may explain why (with few exceptions) Indian novelists have yet to find a way to write historical novels that integrate the past into the present.

2. Cinema is perhaps India's best-known cultural export in a globalising world. But to what extent is it Indian? The technology and the early films themselves were borrowed from the west, and Bollywood continues to take inspiration from Hollywood. Explain these two seemingly contradictory dimensions of Indian cinema: its international scope and its local content.
3. Modern painting is an excellent window on the tricky synthesis of tradition and modernity in Indian culture more generally. A study of a handful of the acknowledged masters of painting since 1950 (M.F. Hussain, Amrita Sher-Gil, Bhupen Khakar, Jamini Roy, F.N. Souza) would be an original contribution to the analysis of contemporary Indian culture.
4. Religion in modern India is a complex combination of ancient texts and cultural practices in the context of growing global secularism. Some scholars have argued that these two forces are two sides of the same coin. The more India is exposed to a materialist and secular modern world, the more it retreats into a spiritual sanctuary. And, if it is secure in that interior, invented past, India can safely absorb more external, western influences.

Reading

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