HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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INDIAN LITERATURE – Post-Classical Period

Contents

Part I : Early Postclassical Period
Part II : Late Postclassical Period

Part I : Early Postclassical Period

1. Sanskrit Poetry
2. Tamil Poetry
3. Fiction
4. Drama
5. Autobiography
6. Essay

SANSKRIT POETRY

Overview
Two major developments occurred in Sanskrit literature during the early postclassical period. The first is the composition and diffusion of Hindu myths, under the influence of devotionalism. The second is the continuation of the *kavya* tradition, especially *maha* ('great') *kavya* poems, which themselves are influenced by the rise of devotionalism.

Myth
GenreWhile there is no precise literary genre that corresponds to the (perpetually misunderstood) Western category of 'myth,' most of what we would consider mythic is contained somewhere in the vast compendia of the *purana*s ('old,' 'of old times'). Creation myths were already told in the Vedic texts, and new ones (often variants of earlier versions) were composed during later centuries, right up to the early twentieth century. Unlike the Vedas, however, the myths were never memorised, word-for-word, and many different versions of each myth exist.

History As with many Indian literary forms, myths were not created by a single author, written on paper or palm leaf. Instead, these massive texts (ranging from 15,000 to 80,000 verses) drew on earlier and contemporary oral tradition, including the Upanishads, the *Dharma Sastras* and the great Sanskrit epics. In order to control this literary hydra, Sanskrit tradition has compiled a canon of 18 or 20 (depending on how you divide the texts) *maha* ('great') *puranas*, which were written, following earlier oral compositions, from about 250 CE to 900 CE. The oldest surviving myth text (of the *Skanda Purana*) is a Nepalese manuscript dated to 810 CE.

Function It is often said that the *puranas* are more a tradition than a text. And as a traditional explanation of everything from the creation of the world to the details of a particular ritual, they are the reference books of Hinduism. If one has a question about anything in the Indian world—an historical event, the genealogy of a king, an astrological calculation or moral dilemma—these wide-ranging compendia provide the answer. Hindus, however, are usually more interested in the ritual efficacy of these mythic texts, their ability to breathe spirit into a stone statue and thus to enable a god or goddess to

bestow favours on worshippers. Hindu myths also offer moral guidance, spectacle and, not least of all, entertainment.

Themes While the *puranas* do not have a linear narrative, they do circle around core themes. Stories of Visnu focus on the protective powers of his *avatar*s (especially Rama), although later myths tell the story of love between Krishna and his consort Radha. The myths of Siva, and his wife (in various forms) and their children, provide the opportunity to domesticate the gods and to generate family drama. Siva himself is a figure of many aspects, including a fascinating dichotomy of the 'erotic-ascetic' (to use Wendy Doniger's phrase). The stories of Visnu, on the other hand, centre largely on his ten incarnations (*avatar*s), often in the role of saviour or advisor. If Siva represents power and passion, Visnu embodies grace and salvation.
Devi, the goddess, also has many manifestations. As Kali, she is death. As Siva's wife, Parvati or Uma, she is protection. As Durga, she is the slayer of the buffalo-demon. As Visnu's wife, Lakshmi, she is wealth.

Etiological myths Many myths are etiological, that is, they give explanations, usually for the origin or appearance of things. Cosmogonic myths, for example, explain the creation of the world(s), from an egg, primeval ocean or deity. One of the best-known of these etiological myths, in the Saiva corpus, explain how Ganesa got his elephant head. When Parvati was bathing, she told her son to stand guard and prevent anyone from approaching. Siva (Parvati's husband) came near and chopped off the head of his impudent son who dared to order him to stop. The repentant husband then promised his angry wife that he would replace their son's head with the first one he could find. And that first head was on an elephant.

Kavya

Post-Kalidasa Following Kalidasa, the great exponent of classical Sanskrit poetry and drama during the Gupta Empire, Sanskrit poets continued to experiment. In particular, Kalidasa's successors wrote accomplished works in the *mahakavya* genre (which Kalidasa himself had perfected), usually by reworking material from the Sanskrit epics. While all these later poets pay homage to Kalidasa, and while most of them write competent and at times original material, they never surpass the master.

Magha 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 *ShishupalaVadha*, a *mahākāvya* 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 devotionalism is evident in this poem, in which the poet glorifies Visnu as the preserver who slays an evil king.

Other poets Bhatti (probably 7th c. CE) wrote *mahakavya*s 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 *mahakavya*s. Bana (7th c. CE), who was also a playwright, wrote poems collected under the title*Candisataka*. Kumaradasa (7th c. CE) is remembered for his retelling of the 'rape' of Sita (*Janaki-harana*) from the Rama story. Lastly, we should mention Anandavardana, a ninth-century poet from Kashmiri who composed the *Devasataka*.

Discussion/questions

1. Hindu myths have endured to the present day, depicted in film, television and comic books. What can account for this longevity?
2. Hindu mythology is cognate with other mythologies in the Indo-European world, such as Norse. Compare these two geographically distant mythologies in terms of themes, characters and social function.
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
Wendy Doniger, *Hindu Myths (*Penguin, multiple editions)
Anisle T. Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Vol. 1 (Columbia, 1988)
J.A.B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology* (Temple University,1978)
Daniel Ingalls, *Sanskrit Poetry* (Harvard, 2000)
Indira Peterson, *Design and Rhetoric in a Sanskrit Court Epic: the Kirātārjunīya of Bhāravi* (SUNY, 2003)

Texts

1. From *ShishupalaVadha*byMagh, trans. SubhadraJha

   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.

2. 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.

TAMIL POETRY

Overview
Tamil poetry during this period is dominated by the emergence of devotionalism (*bhakti*), in which an individual worshipper imagined and nurtured a direct bond with a specific god or goddess. Although devotionalism had antecedents in earlier literature, its flowering in Tamil represents a new poetic expression. Sanskrit could not be the vehicle for expressing this intensely personal sentiment simply because it was a formal, courtly language far removed from what ordinary people spoke. Tamil poets, on the other hand, still wrote in a language that, while more sophisticated than everyday speech, was comprehensible to educated people. A second development in this period was epic poetry, in part derived from Sanskrit models but telling south Indian stories.

Devotional poetry
History We can trace the historical development of devotionalism from the late Upanishads and the epics (especially the *Bhagavad Gita*), but in this period it took a more explicit and exuberant form. By 500 CE, Hinduism had embraced a new religiosity, in which an individual worshipper imagined and nurtured a direct bond with a specific god or goddess. This fundamental shift in Indian culture and literature first surfaced in Tamil and then spread north to the Kannada area (another Dravidian language) and then to every literary language in the sub-continent.

Gods as kings As a result of devotionalism, gods replaced the kings of classical Tamil poetry as the object of the poet's attention. The king's palace became the god's temple, and the king's patronage, which kept the bards alive, became the boons given by a god to his devotees. The poet often assumes the role of lover or beloved toward the god. This transition is also evident in one type of poem known as *arruppatai* ('guide'), in which one poet guides another poet to particular destination. Whereas the destination in the classical poems was the court of a generous patron, now the destination is a deity and his temple. The common literary feature of all 'guide' poems is that they allow the poet to describe the natural beauty of the land that leads to the patron god. This skill is most fully developed in the *TirumurugaArruppatai* ('Guide Poem to Lord Murugan') by Nakirrar (7th c. CE).

NayanmarsTamil bhakti poets who composed songs in praise of Siva were collectively called the Nayanmars ('Servants of the Lord'). They usually focused on a specific form of Siva associated with a specific region, temple or story. Some of their poems have a raw, wounded quality, often literally in the description of bodily mortification. Sometimes that poetic ferocity is directed against Jain and Buddhist

scholars, philosophers and mendicants, who had considerable influence in south Indian kingdoms and towns at the time. These songs (often called 'hymns') in praise of Siva were later collected in the *Tirumurai*('Sacred Way') a 12-volume compendium. From this massive work we know the names of 63 poet-saints who composed thousands of hymns. Another important anthology is *Tiruvacakam* ('Sacred Sayings'), a late (9th c. CE) compilation of Siva poems by Manikavacakar. This poet, a councillor at the court of a Pandya court in Madurai, has become one of the best loved of the Saiva saints in Tamil, whose poems are still sung today.

Stala-puranas One feature of Saiva devotionalism in Tamil, the specificity of place, also defines the Tamil myths (*purana*s) written in this period. Although these Saiva myths are largely derivative of contemporaneous texts in Sanskrit, the Tamil mythographers did add new material and situate the stories in particular temples. For that reason the 275 Tamil myths are called *stala* ('place') *purana*s. In effect, they are another form of the 'guide' poem, directing worshippers to the many Siva temples that dot the Tamil countryside.

AlvarsDuring the same period (roughly 500 CE-900 CE), the Tamil poets who sang devotional songs to Visnu were known as Alvars (lit. 'Deep Ones'). These poets are fewer in number than their Saiva counterparts—only 12 names are recorded—but they produced more than 4,000 poems. The worship of Visnu (the preserver) as opposed to the worship of Siva (the destroyer) is predictably less fierce in tone, less visceral in imagery and less uncompromising in its sectarian loyalty. As expressed in the Alvars' poetry, the approach to Visnu is a mixture of contemplation, mythological drama and rapturous love.

Nammalvar The most prolific and highly regarded of these Vaisnava poet-saints is Nammalvar ('Our Alvar'). Born into a high caste (but not a Brahmin) in the 9th century CE, the young man went on pilgrimages to sacred places, including many in north India. Although he died at 35, his poetry was lauded as the 'Fifth Veda' or the 'Tamil Veda', and images of the poet were cast in bronze and installed in major temples in south India.

TiruvaymoliNammalvar composed more than one thousand poems, which were anthologised a century or so after his death in a collection known as *Tiruvaymoli* ('Sacred Speech'). The verses draw on the mythology of Visnu, especially his ten avatars, but they luxuriate in describing his physical and spiritual characteristics. Thethousand poems of the *Tiruvaymoli* are interlinked to make a coherent whole by a unique poetic device: the last syllable of each poem is used as the first syllable of the next poem. The result is a garland of sound and sensibility.

Epic poetry

While Tamil poets did not favour epic poetry to the same degree that Sanskrit poets did, they did compose several major works. The most famous of these is *Manimekalai* (c. 6-7 c. CE), a Buddhist sequel to the*Cilappatikaram* of the classical period. The eponymous heroine of this latter work is, in fact, the daughter of the hero of the earlier poem. Her mother is a dancing girl at court, who becomes a Buddhist nun when she learns that her former lover has died. The daughter also becomes a nun, and much of the epic is a dialogue between various religious doctrines, in which Buddhism emerges triumphant.

New genre

A new Tamil genre that developed in this period is the *ula* ('procession'). Again, it shows the influence of devotionalism. Previously, poets described the procession of a king but now they described the procession of a deity. Like the *stala-puranas*, this genre gave full vent to poetic description, this time of a city, with its crowds and different types of people. For this reason, it is often drafted into service by historians of the period, desperate for any social documentation. The earliest known example of this genre is the*Nanavula* by CeramanPerumal (8th c. CE).

Discussions/questions

1. Tamil poetry during this period is dominated by Hindu devotionalism, but Buddhist and Jain poets also composed major epics. Indeed, the significance of Buddhist and Jain literature to literary culture of south India has never been fully understood.
2. Trace the emergence of devotionalism from its roots in the Upanishads and Sanskrit epics to its expression in Tamil.
3. Read the poems of Nammalvar (see Ramanujan in the reading list below). Some scholars have suggested that his theology is close to that of early Christianity.

Reading

Norman Cutler, *Songs of Experience: the Poetics of Tamil Devotion* (Indiana, 1987)
A.K. Ramanujan, *Nammalvar:Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Vishnu (*Penguin, 2005)
David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the Tamil Saiva Tradition* (Princeton, 2014)
Paula Richman, *Women, Branch Stories, and Religious Rhetoric in a Tamil Buddhist Text* (Syracuse, 1988)

Texts

1. From the poems of Nammalvar, 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 *Tirumurai*, a poem by Appar about Siva

> We are not subect to any; we are not afraid of death; we will not suffer in hell; we live in no illusion; we feel elated; we know no ills; we bend to none; it is one happiness for us; there is no sorrow, for we have become servants, once and for all, of the independent Lord, and have become one at his beautiful, flower-covered feet.

FICTION

Overview

Fiction flourished during this period, in which we find texts that are 'narrative-driven' and begin to resemble modern fiction. Although many texts are dull and pedantic romances, several influential story collections appeared in Sanskrit, Tamil and in the little-understood language of Paisaci. Fiction in Sanskrit used two styles, both considered *kavya*, a term commonly associated with classical Sanskrit lyric verse that also encompasses two sub-genres of fiction storytelling.

One could be called 'narrative poetry' because it uses easy but polished verse. The other could be called 'poetic prose' because it uses an ornate prose known as *katha*. Tamil fiction continued to use epic poetry, mostly written by Jains, and with a strong emphasis on storytelling.

Poetic prose: Dandin

Dasakumaracarita The most impressive and perhaps influential prose work of this period is Dandin's*Dasakumaracarita* ('The Tales of the Ten Princes'). This entertaining story, written in the 7th century CE, is a collection of exciting tales held together by a frame-story, which reveals its debt to oral tradition. The language of the *Dasakumaracarita* is comparatively uncomplicated Sanskrit. Extended compounds are numerous (the lasting effect of the ornamentation so loved by Sanskrit poets), but the incredibly long, page-filling sentences of other writers in the period are absent.

Contents The tales of the ten princes themselves are mostly secular, often amoral and usually humorous, a little like the ethos of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The characters are sharply–drawn, and much of the interest in the story lies in the realistic treatment of the people with whom the ten princes interact. Again, like Chaucer, we are introduced to merchants, prostitutes, wild hill people, thieves, peasants and scholars.

Poetic prose: Subandhu and Bana

Subandhu A contemporary and admirer of Dandin, Subandhu is known for only one surviving work, *Vasavadatta*. This Sanskrit play describes the vicissitudes of the love of its eponymous heroine for a prince. While lacking the storytelling skills of Dandin, this prose author did write memorable descriptions, obviously borrowed from poetic genres of the time. However, his long-winded sentences sometimes run to more than two pages.

BanaBana was the court poet of Harsha, whose kingdom dominated north India in the 7th century CE. Bana is known for two prose works: *Kadambari* and *Harshacarita* (the latter is biography and is described elsewhere). *Kadambari* might be seen as a deliberate attempt to improve on Subandhu's text for it, too, is a romance narrated through a sequence of loosely linked scenes told with elaborate figures of speech. It is one of most story-driven texts of premodern India, indulging in a plot of multiple sets of separated lovers, past lives, talking parrots, apparent deaths and miraculous resurrections. Remarkably, the story is incomplete and was only finished by Bana's son, whose prose style does not match that of his father.

Narrative poetry

The *Bṛhatkatha* ('The Great Story', 6th-7th CE?) is one of those paradoxes of Indian literary history: an absent text that is omnipresent. Tradition maintains that this vast collection of stories was written by a little-known Jain monk (Guṇāḍhya) in an extinct language (Paisaci) at the court of a kingdom (Sattavahana) whose dates are far from certain. Nevertheless, this now-lost text influenced most subsequent narrative traditions in India, north and south. The most famous of these, in Sanskrit, is the *Kathasaritsagara,* and there are also versions in Pali (the language of Theravada Buddhists), Prakrit, Apabhramsa (a regional dialect of Prakrit) and Tamil.

Tamil epics

PerunkataiThe Tamil retelling of the*Brhatkatha* is the *Perunkatai* ('Great Story'). From references to this text in other Tamil sources, we can date it to the 8th or 9th century CE. It was written by Konkuvelir, obviously a Jain scholar since Jaina maxims and terminology are abundant (the original *Brhatkatha* was also written by a Jain). The 16,000 verses use a common Tamil metre (*akaval*).The story told in*Perunkatai* is a loosely connected series of court romances with a religious message. Princes and princesses fall in love, are unfaithful and suffer tragic loss, but manage to fly around in chariots and enjoy the pleasures of affluence. The kingdom, however, declines into chaos, until all is righted when the main characters become Jain monks and nuns. Although the story is not well-constructed, it avoids pure propaganda, and the author draws his characters with skill.

Civakacintamani A second, major Tamil narrative epic poem of this period is the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*('The Glorious Civaka'). It, too, was written by a Jain scholar (Tirutakkatevar), and it, too, borrows from Sanskrit originals and the *Perunkatai*. In turn, the beauty of its 3000-plus verses influenced the greatest of all

Tamil epic poems (the *Ramayana* of Kamban, 12th c. CE). The storyis one of court intrigue, assassination and a fatherless child. The child is the eponymous Civaka, who wades through a series of love affairs, but eventually avenges his father's death, wins back the kingdom and (like a good Jain hero) renounces the world.

Nilakeci Yet another Tamil epic poem by a Jain is *Nilakeci*, a counter-blast to *Kundalakeci*, a lost Buddhist epic poem in Tamil. The *Nilakeci* tells the story of a demoness of the same name, who is known in Tamil folk religion but in this story is converted to Jainism. The nearly 900 stanzas were composed in the 10th century CE. The text is interesting primarily for what it reveals about sectarian disputes during the period.

CulamaniCulamani ('The Crown Jewel') is the fourth Tamil epic composed by a Jain in this period (c. 900 CE). This 2,000-verse work uses existing folk-tale episodes (including the core motif of a prediction that a prince will marry a fairy-princess) to lead up to the predictable ending in which the hero renounces the world and gains release.

Discussion/questions

1. The Western literary genres of poetry and prose do not easily map onto Indian genres. *Kavya*, the overarching category for several different poetic and prose forms, is a case in point. Does this difference in terminology matter? Is it simply semantics? Or does it reveal a deeper conceptual difference between cultures?

2. Many of the story collections written during this period are rearrangements of earlier texts. What does this literary recycling reveal about Indian literature? Can we still speak of 'creativity' and 'literary skill' in such literature?

3. Each of the four narrative epic poems in Tamil during this period was written by a Jain, and yet it is fair to say that Jain influence is absent in modern Tamil literature. Trace the history of Jainism in south India by following its literary trail.

Reading

KamilZvelebil, *A History of Tamil Literature* (Otto Harrassowitz, 1974)
Donald Nelson, *Brhatkatha* studies: the problem of the Ur-text. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 37: 4, pp. 673-676 (1978)
J.E.B. Gray, Dasakumaracarita as picaresque. In C. Shackle and R. Snell (eds.) *The Indian Narrative: Perspectives and Patterns* (Otto Harrassowitz, 1992).
MoreswharRamachandra Kale, *Dasakumaracarita by Dandin* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1993)
Catherine Benton,*God of Desire: Tales of Kamadeva in Sanskrit Story Literature* (SUNY, 2005)
ArshiaSattar, *Tales from the Kathasaritsagara* (Penguin, 1996)
PadminiRajappa, *Kadambari* (Penguin, India, 2010)

Text

From*Dasakumaracarita* XI, trans. A.L. Basham

When this was done, she put the grains of rice in a shallow wide-mouthed, round-bellied mortar, took a long and heavy pestle of acacia-wood, its head shod with a plate of iron. With skill and grace she exerted her arms, as the grains jumped up and down in the mortar. Repeatedly, she stirred them and pressed them down with her fingers; then she shook the grains in a winnowing basket to remove the beards, rinse them several times, worshipped the hearth, and place them in water which had been five times brought to the boil. When the rice softened, bubbled and swelled, she drew the embers of the fire together, put a lid on the cooking pot, and strained off the gruel….

DRAMA

Overview
In the first half of the early postclassical period, Sanskrit drama maintained a level of excellence, with several plays that are considered worthy of comparison with Kalidasa's masterpieces. By the end, however, the political impetus for much of classical Sanskrit culture had waned and the remaining texts are mediocre. One interesting feature of all these plays, nonetheless, is the intermixing of drama and politics, a combination that, on reflection, seems entirely natural. In south India, drama is virtually absent from the historical record, although inscriptions and other texts do refer to specific titles and playwrights.

Sanskrit
Bhavabhuti Following the high water mark of Sanskrit drama during the time of Kalidasa (5th c. CE), the tradition was ably continued by Bhavabhuti (7th or 8th c. CE). Fortunately, three of his plays have come down to us in more or less complete form: 'Malati and Madhava', *Mahaviracarita* ('The Deeds of the Great Hero') and *Uttararamacarita* ('The Later Deeds of Rama'). The first of these is a melodramatic story, full of incident and terror, in which a heroine is repeatedly rescued from death. The other two texts rework the Rama story. Critics judge Bhavabhuti as inferior to other dramatists of this period in terms of plot and characterisation, while at the same time praising his ability to express sorrow and loss.

VisakhadattaVisakhadatta (6th c. CE?) wrote plays about politics, although only one entire play and fragments of another have survived. The partial text (*Devichandragupta*, 'The Queen and Chandra Gupta') is an ambitious attempt to tell the story of Chandra Gupta II and his rise to power in the 4th century BCE. The other, complete play is the justly famous *Mudraraksasa*('The Minister's Signet Ring'), which focuses on high-drama intrigue during the same historical period.

Minister's Signet Ring The complex plot of this play begins with a plan to overthrow the fourth-century BCE Nanda dynasty and put a Maurya king on the throne. The plotters are successful and divide up the kingdom among themselves, but one key figure is soon poisoned to death, leaving his son to take his place. Now, a minister of the defeated dynasty plots with the son to reclaim the lost territories. The coup gains strength from its alliance with the kings of Persia, Kashmir and Sind, but they are foiled by the clever minister of the Mauryas, who persuades the son to rejoin his side.

Historicity The convoluted plot of the *Mudraraksasa* does appear to describe historical events that took place about a thousand years before it was written. Indian and Greek sources tell a roughly similar story of political intrigue, including the usurpation of the Nandas by the Mauryas, and warfare between the Mauryas and the smaller kingdoms in northwest India, which were formed after the departure of Alexander the Great. Here again, we see evidence that Greek tradition may have influenced classical Indian drama.

Harsha Politics and drama combined once again in the figure of Harsha, who was both king and playwright. After the fall of the Gupta Empire (4th-6th c. CE), which patronised much of classical Indian culture, central and north India fragmented into small kingdoms. But then in the early seventh century, Harsha gained control of most of the subcontinent, excluding south India.Three plays are ascribed to Harsha, although they may all be the work of a 'ghost' writer. *Ratnavali* and *Priyadarsika* are both comedies based on the lives of the ladies of the harem, in which the eponymous heroines display wit and charm through banter. The third play, *Nagananda*('Joy of the Serpents'), is a religious story in which a prince gives his own life in order to stop the sacrifice of snakes to Garuda, a divine bird.

Decline With these three playwrights, the legacy of Kalidasa lingered for several centuries, but without further genius eventually declined.

Toward the end of the early postclassical period, Bhatta Narayana (8th c. CE?), Murari (9th c. CE), Rajasekhara (10th c. CE) and Krsnamisra (10th c. CE) all continued to write plays, though the dialogue was stilted, the language more and more literary and the texts intended for reading rather than performance. With the advent of Muslim rule in north India, from about 1000 CE, Sanskrit drama became a thing of the past.

Tamil

Mattavilasa*Mattavilasa* ('Drunkards' Gest') is the only Tamil drama that survives from this period. It is a one-act play written by Mahendravarman I, a Pallava king of south India (7th c. CE). It is a delightful farce, parodying both Hindu and Buddhist ascetics at a time when conflict between these two sects often resulted in violence. In the play, at least, a drunken Hindu mendicant uses a human skull to drink wine, as well as to collect alms. When it goes missing, he accuses his Buddhist counterpart of stealing it, prompting a series of humorous satirical dialogues. In the end, of course, it turns out that the dog took the bowl.

Lost plays Tamil literary tradition and inscriptions suggest that dramas were produced and performed during this period, although no text, not even in fragments, survives. One frequently mentioned play is *Pumpuliyurnatakam*('Play of Pumpuliyur'), which appears to be a religious play set in the fictional town of Pumpuli. Another is *Rjarajesvaranatakam* ('Play of Rajarajesvara') written by NarayanaBhattitityar in the late 9th century CE. The story is based on the life of the famous Chola king Raja Rajesvara and his construction of the temple at his capital, Tanjore.

Discussion/questions

1. While Kalidasa's successors have generally been regarded as less skilled than the master, others have suggested that this judgement is simply a cliché and not borne out by close textual analysis. Compare one of the later dramas mentioned in this article with one of Kalidasa's dramas and make your judgement.

2. Although the genre of drama *(natakam*) has a long textual history in Tamil, and several inscriptions and commentaries mention plays, no text (with the exception of a single one-act play) has survived from this period. This poses the question of how literary memory functions in the absence of raw material. Consider, for instance, a Shakespearean tradition based entirely on secondary sources.

Reading

A.L. Basham, *Wonder that was India* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1982)
Rachel Van M Baumer and James R. Brandon (eds.), *Sanskrit Theatre in Performance (*MotilalBanarsidass, 1981)
Farley P. Richmond, India. In Martin Banham (ed.), *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* (Cambridge, 1998)
KarthigesuSivathamby, *Drama in Ancient Tamil Society* (New Century Book House, 1981)

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Overview

Biography and autobiography, in their conventional forms, did not appear in Indian literature until Indo-Persian influences (1000 CE onward) and not in their modern forms until the late eighteenth century. However, pre-modern Indian literature does include a type of life-narrative known in Sanskrit as *carita* ('history') and in Tamil as *caritiram*. This is 'history' as told through the figure of a king, god or saint, which tends toward hagiography. Early examples would include the *Buddha-carita* by Asvoghosa (100-200 CE), versions of the Rama story (often titled *Rama-carita*), *Padma-carita* (10th c. CE) and *Dasakumara-carita* (discussed under 'fiction'). There is one extraordinary exception to absence of life-writing in Indian before 1000 CE, and that is the *Harshacarita*.

Harshacarita

Author The*Harschacarita* was written by the well-known poet Bana (7th c. CE.), famous for *Kadambari*,a romance in Sanskrit.

What we know of Bana's life is taken from introductory verses to *Kadambari* and the initial sections of *Harschacarita*. This means that the *Harschacarita* is not only the first biography but also the first (fragmentary) autobiography in Indian literature.

AutobiographyBana describes his early childhood in a well-to-do Brahmin family, when he lost first his mother and then his father at age 14. During his grief, he was consoled by friends and then took to the itinerant life, visiting various courts and cities in north India. During these years of wandering, he befriended people from all walks of life, including a snake doctor, a gambler, a goldsmith and a musician. He was received at the court of Harsha, whom he offended and was expelled. He returned to his village and took a peaceful life but was recalled to court and was restored to favour. From these varied experiences, Bana seems to have developed his unparalleled ability to create characters from princes to prostitutes. These skills, plus his acute observation of place, make his writing resemble modern literature more than that of his own time.

BiographyThe *Harshacarita*tells the story of king Harsha, who at first disliked the poet but later admitted him to his inner circle. Bana begins his tale with the king's rise to power and recounts his many territorial conquests, especially his resolve to achieve 'world-wide' conquest. From the biography, we learn that Harsha issued a decree that all kings must either submit to his rule or fight him.There is evidently a degree of exaggeration in Bana's description of his royal patron, although the story does follow the main events of Harsha's rule. Historians, understandably, treat Bana's 'history' with some scepticism and also with a good deal of frustration because it ends prematurely.

Document Even if the *Harshacarita* glorifies the king's political and military exploits, it is regarded as a reasonably accurate document of various social, administrative and military practices. For example, Bana includes more than one description of *sati*, or self-immolation of a widow. He also speaks in some detail of the various castes and sub-castes of the time. A fascinating topic is the tributary (*samanta*) system of north Indian kingdoms in the post-Gupta era, which Bana explains. Similarly, there are detailed portraits of armies and soldiering (as shown in the text below).

Discussion/questions

1. At the centre of scholarship concerning the *Harshacarita* is the debate over the extent to which literature can be regarded as historical document. For example, can we use the *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad* as a source for understanding ancient India and Greece?

2. *Carita* is often translated as 'history,' but this is usually qualified by adding 'traditional history' or 'historical narrative.' A similar debate thrives in contemporary Western culture about the category 'historical fiction.' This should make us curious about the development of our own understanding of both 'history' and 'fiction.'

Reading
E. B. Cowelland F. W. Thomas (trans.),*The Harsha-Carita of Banabhatta* (1897, also online at archive.org and www.mssu.edu/projectsouthasia/literature).

Text
From *Harshacarita* trans. A.L. Basham

Then it was time to go. The drums rattled, the kettledrums beat joyfully, the trumpets blared, the horns blew, the conches sounded. By degrees the hubbub of the camp grew louder. Officers busily roused the King's courtiers. The sky shook with the din of fast-hammering mallets and drum=-sticks. The general assembled the ranks of the subordinate officers. The darkness of the night was broken by the glare of a thousand torches which the people lighted. Loves were aroused by the tramping feet of the women who kept watch. The harsh shouts of the elephant-marshals dispelled the slumber of their drowsy riders as awakened elephants left their stables. Squadrons of horses woke from sleep and shook their manes. The camp resounded loudly as spades dug up the tent-pegs, and the tethering chains of elephants clinked as their stakes were pulled up…

ESSAY

Overview

Genre As always, it is difficult to match Indian genres with Western genres. In the case of the 'essay' (itself a relatively new term), there is more than the usual mismatch. Classical Indian literature includes a great deal of 'commentary', and some 'discourse' or 'treatise' but none of what we would think of as an individual author presenting a personal argument. Rather a scholar, named or not, adds to a tradition by interpretation of older texts, in a chain, so that the end is really commentaries on commentaries. The Sanskrit genre of *bhasya* translates well as 'commentary', while the Tamil term *urai* refers to 'commentary' as well as 'discourse' or 'treatise.'

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

Sanskrit

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

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

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

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

Tamil

CommentariesIn the period after 500 CE, Tamil scholars began to compile anthologies and then write commentaries on earlier poems from the classical period. The compilers also 'edited' the poems, adding a colophon and (in most cases) a poet's name. One man, Peruntevanar, is credited with the compilation and editing of several of the most famous anthologies.

Anthologies Tamil literary tradition recognises three categories of anthology. First, there is a collection known as the *Ettutokai* ('Eight Anthologies'): *Akananuru* ('400 [Poems] on Love'), *Kuruntoka*i ('Short Poems'), Patirruppattu ('Ten tens'), *Ainkurunuru* ('Five Hundred Short [Poems]'), *Narrinai* ('Excellent Poems on Love'), *Parippatal* (poems in the *parippatal* metre),*Kalitokai* ('poems in the *kali* metre') and *Purananuru*, ('400 [Poems] on War'). A second category of anthologies is the *Pattupattu* ('Ten [Narrative] Songs'), which are longer and latter than the eight listed above. Yet a third category, edited and described in this period, is the *Patiṉeṇkīḻkaṇakku*('Eighteen Minor Works').

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

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

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

Discussion/questions

1. Genres, it is said, are not just labels but conceptual categories. Discuss this with reference to the Indian genre of 'commentary' and the Western 'essay.'

2. The Jain contribution to Indian literature is often marginalised (somewhat understandably given the enormous number of Hindu and Buddhist texts). However, a study of Jain literature brings up interesting angles on a tradition that we think we understood. Follow the trail of Jain literature by studying one or two key figures.

3. Grammars are incredibly important in both the Tamil and Sanskrit literary traditions. Why is this? Is the primacy of grammars found in any other world literature?

Reading

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Anne Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-Speaking South India* (Oxford, 1999)

Part II : Late Postclassical Period

Contents

Poetry
Drama
Fiction
Autobiography
Essay

POETRY

<u>Overview</u>
Two significant developments occurred during this fertile five-hundred-year period in Indian literature. The first is the advent of Muslim rule in north India that led to the emergence of Indo-Persian poetry. From about 1000 CE, poets and scholars at the Muslim courts, especially in Delhi and the Deccan, adapted and developed several major forms of Indo-Persian poetry. The second, not unrelated, phenomenon is expansion devotionalism (*bhakti*) across the subcontinent. Continuing on from the earlier devotional poems in Tamil, devotionalism spread from one regional language to the next, like a wandering traveller, eventually reaching Assamese in the far northeast corner of India in the late 15th century.

<u>Devotional: South India</u>
Kannada The immediate successor to the earlier Tamil *bhakti* tradition was devotional poetry in Kannada, another Dravidian language immediately to the north. These Kannada poets (c. 1000-1200 CE), who included non-Brahmans and women, created a new and simple form of verse called *vacana* ('speech'), in which they sang songs to Siva. Known as Virasaivas ('Militant/Heroic Saivas') or more commonly today as Lingayats, they used this simple verse from to propagate their spiritual vision and egalitarian social ideals. The best known poet was Basavanna, a Brahmin who threw away his sacred thread to establish a community of equals.

Tamil Continuing the tradition of poetry in praise of Visnu, a court poet composed a Tamil version of the *Ramayana*. The poet Kampan (12th c. CE?) did not simply retell the Sanskrit story. Instead, he reinvented it as a full-blown devotional epic in which Rama is indisputably the avatar of Visnu, which is why his text of 24,000 lines is called *Rama-avataram*. The son of a temple drummer, Kampan wrote a work that is considered the jewel in the crown of Tamil literature. His writing is witty, and often satirical, powerful and imaginative. In his composition, Rama and Sita become characters with a full spectrum of emotions and ambiguities. No Tamil poet since Kampan has combined such beautiful language with such depth of feeling.

Telugu The south Indian language of Telugu flourished during this period, gaining largely from the fruitful interaction between Sanskrit and Tamil court traditions. The early centuries of this period saw a number of influential translations and retellings of the *Mahabharata*, but the best-loved poem is Srinatha's 13th-century reworking of the *Ramayana*.

Malayalam A similar pattern is evident in Malayalam, the last of the four Dravidian languages. The *Ramacharitam* (11th-12th c. CE) is an accomplished epic poem in Malayalam. Later, a number of mostly court poetic forms were written in the mixed Sanskrit-Malayalam language called *mani-pravalam* ('rubies and coral'). One of the earliest of these poems is the 13th-century *Vaisika Tantram*, which offers professional advice to a courtesan by her mother.

<u>Devotional: North India</u>

Marathi Devotionalism moved from Kannada to the neighbouring language of Marathi, where it was developed by several poets. The most influential poet was Namdev (13th-14th c. CE), who (like the Kannada poets) composed fiercely sectarian verse (this time in praise of Visnu) in a simple metre in order to reach

common people. Most of his compositions are really 'songs' since they are words meant to be sung in the *bhajan* and *kirtana* tradition.

Maithili The north Indian Vaishnava bhakti tradition continued to flourish in other north Indian languages. Vidyapathi (14th-15th c. CE) wrote his poems/songs in a language that is close to Maithili, but heavily influenced by Sanskrit, particularly the Sanskrit of Jayadeva.

Hindi One of the most celebrated, and revolutionary, poets of north Indian *bhakti* is Kabir (15th c. CE). Born into a low caste of weavers that soon converted to Islam, Kabir's intense poetry reveals a mixture of Hindu and Islamic mysticism. He is most remembered for his rejection of caste and sect in favour of a humanism, which was later lauded by famous Indian figures, including Tagore and Gandhi. His universal appeal is underlined by the fact that many of his poems/songs are included in the Sikh holy scriptures.

Bengali In the manner of Kabir, the Bengali poet-mystic Chaitanya (15th c. CE) also renounced caste, ritualism and idol worship, perhaps through the influence of iconoclastic Islam. Chaitanya's poems, however, show a more sectarian slant and glorify Krishna as the supreme reality.

Assamese From Bengali, and largely from Chaitanya's neo-Vaishnavism, devotionalism found a home in Assamese. Here the leading light was Shankardev (b. 1449 CE). More than a mere poet, Shankardev was a skilled musician, playwright, linguist and social reformer. His most enduring work, *Kirtana Ghosha*, is a collection of powerful, short poems that are well-known to most Assamese today.

Sanskrit The outstanding work of Sanskrit devotionalism in this period is *Gita Govinda* by Jayadeva (12th c. CE). Ostensibly a poem in praise of Krishna, it in fact reveals the dark dangers of passion and the pain of separation in both human and divine attachments. The poem famously includes a dramatization of the 'eight moods' of Indian aesthetic theory, as shown in the character of the heroine.

Panjabi The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak (b. 1469 CE) composed nearly one thousand poems in a mixture of old Panjabi and old Hindi. Like many bhakti poets, he used a language that appealed to common people and forms borrowed from folk tradition. In particular, he adapted a folk-lyric in which the poet is cast as a village girl pinning for her absent lover (god).

Indo-Persian poetry

Qasida One of the preeminent poetic forms of Indo-Persian literature in this period is the *qasida* (panegyric ode). An early master of this genre was Abu'l-Faraj Runi (d. 1091 CE), who lived in Lahore. A later exponent was Šehāb-al-Din Maḥ-mera (13th c. CE), who introduced overtly religious themes into the *qasida*. Another was Badr Čāči (14th c. CE), who wrote in abstract, metaphysical language and was revered by later literary tradition.

Baramasa *Baramasa* (lit. 'twelve months') is an older Indian genre that describes the seasons and the months of the year. This Indian genre, popular at the folk level, was brought into Indo-Persian literature by Masʿud Saʿd-e Salmān in the late 11th century CE. The *baramasa* format, in which the singer longs for the seasons, provided an opportunity for the Persian-influenced poets to sing songs of separation on both secular and divine levels.

Masnavi The *masnavi* is a flexible form using rhymed couplets to describe romantic love and make didactic observations. Indo-Persian poets in this genre were, like Muslim poets throughout the Islamic world, guided by the *masnavi* of Rumi, the Persian poet, who was himself inspired by Sufi religious ideas.

Ghazal Indo-Persian writers produced their most subtle work in the *ghazal*, a short lyric of rhymed couplets mixing the conventions of a love poem with those of a drinking song. The verses draw almost entirely on the landscape, flora and fauna of Iran for imagery, the most famous example being the contrast between the rose (*gul*) and the nightingale (*bulbul*). The language uses a highly complex poetic vocabulary, made even more

enigmatic by the Sufi religious themes that supply the content. Many *ghazal*s express deep emotions of longing and loss, on both the level of ordinary human experience and the mystical experience of god.

Amir Khusrau Among the many *ghazal* compositions in this period, those of Amir Khusrau (1253-1325 CE) are regarded as the finest. Critics both then and now admire his concise style, in which each verse encapsulates a complete moral point of view. Like most accomplished Sufi poets, his work combines asceticism with aestheticism. Amir Khusrau, who served as court poet during the Delhi Sultanate, was a prolific and popular writer. In addition to writing odes, riddles and legends, some of which are still studied toddy, he is credited with developing the influential *qawwali* genre of devotional song by fusing Persian and Indian music traditions.

Question/discussion

1. Hindu devotionalism is a movement with many strands, but in essence it refers to a personal, intense and often fraught relationship between a worshipper and a god or goddess. Some critics have compared the relation between a bhakti poet and a deity to that between a lover and a beloved. Analyse Hindu devotional poetry as a form of divine love. Select three poets for close reading, and then include a writer of similar love poetry from outside India for comparative purposes (for example, Sappho, Rumi, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila or Shakespeare).

2. Several north Indian bhakti poets were either Muslims or influenced by Sufism. Analyse the work of north Indian poets for their religious content. Do they, for instance, transcend the categories of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'?

3. 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 social position.

Reading

Vinay Dharwadker (trans.), *Kabir: The Weaver's Song* (Penguin, 2003)
John Stratton Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*. *Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Our*s (OUP, Delhi 2012)
John Stratton Hawley, *The Memory of Love: Surdas Sings to Krishna* (OUP, 2009)
John Stratton Hawley, *Songs of the Saints of India* (OUP, 1988)
A.K. Ramanujan (trans.), *Speaking of Siva (*Penguin, 1973)
Kenneth Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God* (California, 1978)
Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men:Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (California, 2006).

Texts

1. Kannada poem by Basavanna, 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. Hindi poem by Kabir, trans. Rushil Rao

Hiding in this cage
of visible matter

is the invisible
lifebird

pay attention
to her

she is singing
your song

DRAMA

Overview

There is no doubt that classical Sanskrit drama never recovered from its Golden Age during and immediately following the Gupta Empire (4th-8th c. CE), and this can be probably be explained by two inter-related factors. First, there was the loss of royal patronage at court, not only because the Gupta Empire fragmented but also because the successor Muslim courts did not promote drama. Second, the dominance of devotionalism (*bhakti*) during this period, especially as sung poetry and music, pushed other performance styles, like drama, to the side-lines, even in Hindu courts. While the diminution of courtly performance in north India is incontestable, in south India the *kutiyattam* tradition flourished. It is also true that provincial drama continued to develop in both north and south India. Although no texts survive from the period, contemporaneous literary references and twentieth-century documentation enable us to reconstruct the beginnings of these more provincial drama traditions. In north India, these emerging drama traditions include Ram Lila and Nautanki, while in south India, they include Kathakali, Yakshagana and Terukkuttu.

Kutiyattam

Origins *Kutiyattam* is a drama of medieval Kerala combining classical Sanskrit models with innovations from Malayali playwrights. It was performed in temple compounds using elaborate costumes, face paint and unusual percussion instruments. The term *kuti-yattam* means 'acting/dancing together' and apparently refers to the fact that the actors were both men from the Chakkyar caste and women from the Nampiar caste. Ancient Tamil poetry and temple inscriptions (from the early centuries of the Christian era) mention *kutiyattam* and provide a few details about patrons and performance. However, we have no textual or material evidence before 1000 CE that establishes the presence of *kutiyattam*.

Repertoire The repertoire of *kutiyattam* includes revised plays of Kalidasa and other classical playwrights, as well as plays written for this drama form. These locally produced plays include some of the earliest drama texts in Indian literary history. They are *Kalyanasaugandhika* by Nilakanthakavi, and *Subhadradhananjaya* and *Tapatisamvarana* , all by Kulasekhara Varman and all dated to the 11th or 12th century CE. Most *kutiyattam* plays draw on the Rama story for inspiration, and they tend to focus on either Ravana (the demon king) or Sita (Rama's wife) rather than on Rama himself.

Abandonment of Sita This emphasis is illustrated by a play, still performed today, called *Sita Pratiyagam* ('Abandonment of Sita'). After Sita is rescued from Ravana, rumours of a love relationship between captor and captive spread. Lacking belief in the fidelity of his wife, Rama submits to pressure and abandons her in the forest, where she gives birth to two sons. Husband and wife are reunited, but

Rama demands that she undergo a trial by fire. In despair, Sita asks the Earth goddess to accept her, and despite Rama's protestations, the Earth opens up and receives her.

Kulasekhara Varman Kulasekhara Varman (late 10th or early 11th c. CE) was a king in the Chera dynasty that ruled the southwest coastal region of India known as Chera (or now 'Kerala'). He was not just a playwright but also a stage director, who introduced the practice of using both a play text (*granthapatha*) and a performance text (*rangapatha*). He also introduced the technique of *nirvahana* (summarising the play's plot by an actor) and codified the repertoire of eye movements for expressing emotions. Finally, he promoted the element of dance (*attam*) over pure acting (*abhinaya*).

Language While the early plays used Sanskrit only, by the 13th century CE they were written in a combination of Sanskrit and Malayalam (the regional language). In this innovation, the stage manager or Nampiar (a stock character) spoke to the audience in Malayalam to introduce and later comment on the action. However, since Malayalam had not yet evolved into a separate language from Tamil, the language of the stage manager was actually called *Nampiar Tamil*.

Manuals Malayalam was also used to write manuals for the actors. One of these (*attaprakara*) explains what an actor should do to interpret and enact the verses and the prose sequences. A second manual (*kramadipika*) provides details for make- up, costumes and props. Fortunately, for scholars, these manuals have survived in manuscript form.

Temple theatre Although we believe that these Kerala plays were originally performed in temples, we have no supporting archaeological evidence for this until the 15th century CE.

This 'temple-theatre' (*kuttampalam*) is a covered, open-air hall divided into two halves: one for the acting and one for the audience. The oldest theatre, which is still standing at the Vadakkunnathan temple in the town of Trichur, is believed to date from 700 CE

Questions/discussion

1. What accounts for the presence of a flourishing classical drama tradition in Kerala at a time when it had all but vanished elsewhere in India?
2. *Kutiyattam* is still performed today, more than a thousand years since its inception, but it is much changed and largely intended for a tourist audience. It receives funds from the UNESCO cultural heritage programme, which some people see as fossilisation rather than protection. Any tradition must be flexible to survive for centuries, but at what point does change diminish authenticity?

Reading
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N.P. Unni and Bruce M. Sullivan, *The Sun King's Daughter and King Saṃvaraṇa: Tapatī-Saṃvaraṇam and the Kūṭiyāṭṭam Drama Tradition* (Nag Publishers, 1995)

FICTION

Overview
During these centuries between the advent of Islam and the foundation of the Mughal Empire, Indian writers continued to produce ever more versions of the popular tale collections (*Pancatantra*, *Jataka* and *Brhatkatha*). One key difference, however, is that now those redactions were written in regional language as well as Sanskrit and Tamil. Indeed, by the end of this period, Sanskrit ceases to generate any new, major literary work. Jain influence in the southern languages was prominent, while in the north, writers produced a series of adaptations of Indian texts using Persian genres and metres.

Sanskrit

Kathasaritsagara ('The Ocean of Streams of Story') is a 12th-century version of the earlier (and lost) text known as *Brhatkatha*, but it also draws on the entire repertoire of Sanskrit story literature, including tales from the *Pancatantra*. Like those earlier texts, 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.

Vetalapancavimsati One section of the *Kathasaritsagara* that later found its way into most regional languages is the *Vetalapancavimsati* ('Twenty-Five Tales of a Vampire'). The story centres on a king who is tricked into helping an ascetic perform an esoteric ritual and is tasked with retrieving a corpse, which is hanging from a tree. When the unsuspecting king carries the corpse on his back, he finds it is inhabited by a 'spirit' (the *vetala* of the title). Fortunately, for the king, the *vetala* is a good storyteller and proceeds to narrate a series of 25 stories. Unfortunately, each story contains a riddle, which if the king cannot solve will result in his death. The series ends when the king fails to solve a riddle and walks away in resigned silence, an act of bravery that inspires the *vetala* to tell him how to outwit the ascetic, who had been planning to sacrifice him.

Hitopadesa The *Hitopadesa* is another Sanskrit collection of tales. Rather than the entertaining adventures of the vampire tales, however, this text is a series of moral fables. The primary source for this text is the *Pancatantra*, borrowing not only many of its tales but also its frame-story. Like many of these story collections that borrow from earlier texts, the dating of the *Hitopadesa* is difficult. Some scholars, relying on internal references to other texts, favour the 9th or 10th century CE, but as the earliest surviving manuscript carries a date of 1377 CE, a later date seems reasonable.

Indo-Persian

Masnavi 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 *Esq-nama* by Hasan Dehlavi of Delhi (13th-14th c. CE), which was inspired by an oral tale from Rajasthan. This synthesis of Persian literary genre with Indian story content is characteristic of much of the literature of north India in this period.

Tuti-Nama 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 then 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 familiar to us from the *Thousand and One Nights*).

Tamil

A major Tamil text in which the art of storytelling is displayed in this period is *Kalingattuparani* written by Jayamkontar in the 12th century CE. Although this is essentially a 'war poem' (celebrating a famous victory by a Chola king over a northern king), it is an example of what we today would call 'historical fiction.' The author describes in detail the birth and maturity of his hero, followed by his military training and the campaigns that lead up to his 'invasion' of the north. The battle itself is fierce, leaving hundreds of men and elephants slaughtered. The victorious king has prayed to goddess Kali, and now she and her horde of hungry ghosts descend on the battlefield to gorge themselves on the flesh. All this is narrated in brisk, two-line stanzas that propel the story forward.

Kannada

Janna A major Kannada writer of the period is known simply as Janna (13th c. CE) because he was a Jain (as were many other writers in south India at this time). Janna was both a court poet and an architect responsible for the building of several Jain temples. His patron, the Hoysala king Veera Ballala II, is also important because Kannada literature achieved its 'Golden Age' during his reign.

Yashodhara Charite Janna's masterpiece is the *Yashodhara Charite*, a narrative poem borrowing episodes from Sanskrit literature. In Janna's hands, the story becomes a vehicle for dramatizing Jain values and beliefs. The cycle of life-and-birth is endured without finding release because the main characters do not live according the primary Jain precept of non-violence. In one famous episode, a king plans to sacrifice two young boys to a goddess, but then relents. In another, a king kills his friend and steals his wife, who then dies of grief, prompting the king to burn himself on the widow's funeral pyre.

Nemichandra A second influential Kannada writer who produced fiction in this period is Nemichandra. Unsurprisingly, he was patronised by the same Hoysala king (Veera Ballala II) who supported Janna. Nemichandra is best remembered for his *Lilavati* (c. 1170 CE), not to be confused with a mathematics treatise with the same title written about the same time). Inspired by the earlier Sanskrit work *Vasavadatta* by Subhandu in the 7th century CE, *Lilavati* is a romance in which a prince and princess carry on a love affair through dreams, until, after suitably long delays, they meet and marry.

Telugu

Vikramarkacharitramu Among the many story collections written in Telugu in this period, *Vikramarkacharitramu* ('Story of Vikramaditya') is representative. Tales about a legendary king Vikramaditya appear to have circulated in Sanskrit and other languages from the early centuries of the Christian era before being anthologised in the great story collection of *Kathasaritsagara.* The stories, familiar from that collection, involve a series of adventures by the eponymous king, who must escape vampires, disloyal servants, undeserved curses and treacherous women.

Questions/discussion

1. Fiction in Indian literature before the influence of European literature is found mainly in oral stories written down and in 'historical fiction' in which a king's life is embellished by the author's imagination. How do these narrative forms differ from fiction written during this period in Europe? When does 'fiction' in the modern sense appear in English, German, French?

2. Indo-Persian writers did more or less the same thing as their native-born Indian writers: they adapted pre-existing, mostly Sanskrit, Indian story literature. However, they often used genres borrowed from Persian. How did this use of genre influence the fiction they wrote?

Reading

Catherine Benton, *God of Desire: Tales of Kamadeva in Sanskrit Story Literature* (SUNY, 2006)
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Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature, 500-1399: From Courtly to the Popular* (Sahitya Akademi, 2005)
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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Overview

The key development in life-writing during this period was the popularity of saints' biographies, a phenomenon that was remarkably consistent across Hindu, Jain and Muslim traditions. From the hagiographical tendency already present in Indian literature in the stories of the gods (such as Rama and Krishna), it was a short step to the hagiography of the humans who were themselves revered as gods. These saints (*sant* in Hindi; *tontar*, or 'servant', in Tamil) had become near-divine through their intense devotion to a god as expressed in devotional songs. The Muslim Sufi tradition within Indo-Persian writing regarded their saints without the full supernatural trappings of Hinduism, but they, too, saw these god-men as intermediaries between humans and the divine. People, it seemed, had an insatiable need to learn from these exemplary lives, and biography became a literary mechanism for morality.

Tamil

Periyapuranam The importance of these saints' lives is clearly illustrated by *Periyapuranam,* a Tamil text of the 12th century CE. As its title suggests, it is considered a *puranam* (or 'myth'), with the same legendary dimension as noted above for the genre of *carita.* The 4,000 stanzas of the *Periyapuranam* narrate the life-stories of 63 saints (poets and devotees) who sang about and worshipped Siva. It begins with a mythic story on Mt Kailasa, the heavenly abode of Siva, and slowly descends to the Chola kingdom, where the text was composed (or compiled) by Cekkilar. This court poet, in true Indian storytelling fashion, uses the saints' lives to bring in a host of oral tales and legends.

Kannappar One of the most famous saints in the *Periyapuranam* is Kannappar, a rustic hunter who worshipped Siva in unorthodox ways. He sprinkled liquor over a crude image of the god, tossed on pieces of fresh red meat and then jumped around in a frenzied dance. One day, however, a Brahmin saw what he was doing and was outraged by this supposed desecration. The next day the Brahmin watched again. The hunter knelt down before the image and noticed that one of the Lord's eyes was bleeding. He immediately sharpened one of his arrows, cut out one of his own eyes and inserted it into Siva's empty socket. Then he saw that Siva's other eye was also oozing blood and began to cut out his other eye but stopped. How could put his second eye into the empty socket in the image when he couldn't see? The hunter then lifted his foot and planted a toe in the empty socket, to know where it was, and began to carve out his second eye. Touching a god with one's foot is a defilement, so the Brahmin called out in protest. But Siva was so struck by the heart-felt devotion of the hunter that he restored both his eyes.

Kannada

Kannada writers of the period composed similar biographies, but of Jain saints known as *tirthankara*s ('ford crossers'). Most of these twenty-two Jain saints are celebrated in one or more *purana*s composed in a fertile period between about 1000-1300 CE. The best known of these was *Adipurana* ('The First Purana'), so-called not because it was chronologically primary but because it told the story of the first Jain saint. It was written at the end of the 10th century CE by Pampa, considered the greatest of medieval Kannada writers. His contemporary, Sri Ponna, wrote an equally influential biography of the 16th *tirthankara* under the title *Santipurana*.

Marathi

Some of the earliest literary works in Marathi are the saints' biographies written by Mhaibhat, who lived in the 13th c. CE. Two of these texts survive (*Acharya Sutra* and *Siddhanta Sutra),* in which the writer relies primarily on the sayings of his religious mentor Charkadhara. This form, interweaving the words of a religious saint with prose narration, may have been borrowed from Indo-Persian tradition (see below). Mhaibhat also wrote an autobiography called *Lilacharitra*, which chronicles nearly 1000 events, each in a short section of 8-10 lines of prose.

Sanskrit

It is revealing that one of the few Sanskrit works of any note during this period is a biography of a legendary king. The *Naishadha Charita* was composed by Sri Harsha during the 12th century CE. In roughly1800 ornate stanzas, it narrates the life of King Nala, a figure in the *Mahabharata*. The *Naishadha Charita*, one of the five great narrative poems (*mahakavya*) in Sanskrit literature, tells the story of lovers who are separated and then reunited, making it one of the most popular tales in Indian literature. It is told and performed in various styles through north India, especially by itinerant musicians as an oral epic.

Indo-Persian

Malfuzat Indo-Persian writers, influenced by contemporaneous life-writing in India and drawing on sources from Persian literature, also produced a number of important biographies during this period. The most common genre of life-writing was the *malfuzat* ('dialogues'), which (like the Marathi example noted above) was a record of a Sufi saint's conversations with his disciples, including question-and-answer sessions. These texts typically include comments on the authenticity of the conversations and on the method of their collection. A good example is the *Favaid ul Faud*, compiled by Amir Hasan (d. 1328) who was a disciple of Nizam ud Din and himself a mystic poet.

Tadkera Another Indo-Persian genre used to write the lives of Sufi saints in India is the *tadkera (tazkera, tazkirah*). This form relies primarily on the saint's poems or songs, interspersed with descriptions of their miraculous deeds. The first of these is *Tazkirat al-Awliyā*, a complex work of 72 chapters telling the lives of as many saints and composed by Shaikh Farid al din Attar in the early 13th century CE. However, the most famous is probably Saiyid Muhammand Bin-Mubarak's biography of his mentor, the 14th century teacher Harzat Sultan-ul-Mashaikh of the Chisti order.

Autobiography Two Indo-Persian autobiographies have been assigned to this period. The first is now lost but has been tentatively attributed to Muhammad bin Tughluq (c. 14th CE), one of the Turkic kings of the Delhi Sultanate. As he left no son, his cousin, Firuz Shah Tughluq, succeeded him and wrote his own autobiography, a 32-page memoir called *Futuhat-e-Firozshahi.* It is a series of disjointed anecdotes about the author's hunting and military expeditions, plus his comments on various topics such as medicine, astronomy and archaeology. In one passage, he describes how visiting governors brought him hordes of slaves, whom he meticulously recorded in a ledger and then credited back to the governor's provincial treasury.

Questions/discussion

1. Biographies of saints dominate the life-writing of this period, a development that is another literary manifestation of the groundswell of devotionalism that cut across religious divisions. Some would argue that these are 'hagiographies' and not proper biographies. What is the difference between these types of life-writing?

2. Compare Indo-Persian forms of life-writing with those composed by Hindus and Jains. Are there any essential differences, and can they be correlated with cultural contrasts between these communities?

Reading

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Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Otto Harrassowitz, 1974)
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Texts

1. From the Preamble to the *Periyapuranam*, trans. R. Rangachari

It is a nector that will give you the immortal love, drink it.
It is a perennial river of love that will make the lands of your mind fertile, irrigate with it.
It is an ocean that will get you pearl heaps of coveted qualities, dwell in it.
It is a sharp sword that will cut off the bonds to make you feel the bliss of freedom, hold it strong.
It is a teacher that tells morals of life, make yourself a rock of discipline.
It is a historical information resource, develop your knowledge with that.

2. From the autobiography of Firuz Shah Tughluq 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.

ESSAY

Overview

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

Commentary: Tamil

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

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

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

Commentary**:** Indo-Persian

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

Scholarly treatise

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indo-Persian Historiography

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

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

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

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

Questions/discussion

1. Sanskrit and Tamil have often been presented as divergent, even opposing, literary/scholarly traditions. This characterisation, however, owes more to modern politics than literary history, which

tells us that the intellectual exchange between India's two classical traditions is deep and wide, as evident in the commentaries and treatises mention above.

2. Indo-Persian historiography appears to be a transposition of Persian genres to the new territory of Muslim India. What contribution to Indian literature was made by this sudden surge of historiographical writing during the Delhi Sultanate?

Reading

Peter Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India* (Luzac, 1966)
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Muzaffar Alam and François Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau, *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture* (Manohar/Centre De Sciences Humaines, 2000)
John Carman, The Theology of Rāmānuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding (Yale, 1974)
Eva Wilden, Between Preservation and Recreation: Tamil Traditions of Commentary (French Institute, Pondicherry 2009)
Stephen Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedantadesika in Their South Indian Tradition* (Oxford , 2002)

Texts

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

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

2. From Atiyarkkunallar's commentary on a verse

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

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