INDIAN LITERATURE

Course Description
This course covers the literature of south Asia, from early Vedic Ages, and through classical time, and the rise of various empires. It also explores the rise of different religions and convergences of them, and then the transition from colonial control to independence. Students will analyze primary texts covering the genres of poetry, drama, fiction and non-fiction, and will discuss them from different critical stances. They will demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the works by responding to questions focusing on the works, movements, authors, themes, and motifs. In addition, they will discuss the historical, social, cultural, or biographical contexts of the works' production. This course is intended for students who already possess a bachelor's and, ideally, a master's degree, and who would like to develop interdisciplinary perspectives that integrate with their prior knowledge and experience.

About the Professor
This course was prepared by Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D., research associate / research fellow, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, Department of Languages and Cultures of South Asia.

Contents

Unit I Ancient Literature
Week 1 The Vedas
Week 2 Myth
Week 3 Epics: Mahabharata
Week 4 Epics: Ramayana
Week 5 Ancient Tamil poetry

UNIT II: Medieval Literature
Week 6: Tamil devotional poetry
Week 7: Kannada devotional poetry
Week 8: Hindi devotional poetry
Week 9: Oral literature

UNIT III Modern Literature
Week 10: The Novel 1: Bengali
Week 11: The Short Story 1 (1890-1950)
Week 12: The Novel 2: Hindi
Week 13: The Novel 3: English
Week 14: The Short Story 2 (1950-2000)
Week 15: 21st Century Literature

Required Texts (These books are available in paperback.)

- Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. Atlantic Books, 2008.
- Banerji [Banerjee], Bibhuti Bhushan. *Pather Panchali: Song of the Road*. translated by T.W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Indiana, 1975 (several editions available).
- Buck, William (trans.). *Mahabharata*. California, 2000 (other editions available).
- Buck, William (trans.). *Ramayana*. California, 2000 (other editions available).
- Chaudhuri, Amit (ed.). *Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*. Picador, 2001.
- Narayan, R.K. *The Guide*. Penguin, 2006 (several editions available).
- Premchand. *Godan. The Gift of a Cow*. translated by Gordon Roadarmel. Indiana, 2002 (other translations available).
- Ramanujan, A. K. (trans.). *Nammalvar: Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Vishnu.* Penguin, 2005.
- Ramanujan, A. K. (trans.). *Speaking of Siva.* Penguin, 1973.
- Ramanujan, A. K. (trans.). *Poems of Love and War: From the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems of Classical Tamil.* Columbia, 1985 (Oxford, Delhi, 2006).
- Ramanujan, A. K. (trans.). *Folktales from India*. Pantheon, 1994.

Writing Assignments: Students will write four 1,250-word essays (at the end of weeks 4, 8, 13 and 15) and a research essay of 5,000 words at the end of the course.

Guidelines for essays

1. Essays must be typed, double-spaced, with a 12-point font, and the pages must be numbered.
2. Essays should include a bibliography. The 1,250-word essays need only contain references to the books discussed in the essay. However, the research essay should

also include a minimum of three other references (see 'Reading List' at the end of this Study Guide).

3. Essays must use either footnotes or endnotes to cite sources of a quotation, an idea, a fact or a narrative passage.

4. Footnotes and endnotes may use Harvard, MLA or Chicago styles. It is acceptable to cite a source in a note in the following way, <u>if </u>that same source is fully cited in the bibliography:

> author's surname, short title of book or article, page   number(s): Stein, *A History*, p. 34.

<u>Note:</u> Students without a good grasp of Indian history and culture are advised to read a broad overview of the subject. The following are recommended:

- Khilnani, Sunil. *The Idea of India* (2nd ed.). Penguin, 2003
- Metcalf, Barbara and Thomas Metcalf. *A Concise History of Modern India* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, 2006
- Stein, Burton. *A History of India*. Blackwell, 1998
- Wolpert, Stanley. *A New History of India* (8th ed.). Oxford, 2009
- Thapar, Romila. *A History of India*, 2 vols. Penguin, 1966 (1990)

<u>Overview of course</u>

This course is designed to give students a thorough understanding of Indian literature over a period of more than 3,000 years. It is intended not only to provide a general literary history but also to enable students to read primary texts (in translation) and to develop skills of critical appreciation.

Studying 30 centuries of literature in 15 weeks means that something will be left out. Rather than include all (or even most) of the major works, and thus lay a broad but thin cloak over Indian literature, the course concentrates, whenever possible, on one book per week. This will allow students to gain an in-depth understanding of several masterpieces and to have the satisfaction of reading works in their (edited) entirety.

Unit I   Ancient Literature

This first Unit covers a vast range of literature composed in ancient India, from about 1,200 BCE to 300 CE. Four weeks are devoted to the great works in Sanskrit: the Vedas and associated texts; myths, and the two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana.* A final week explores the lesser-known but no less brilliant world of ancient poetry in Tamil.

Week 1 The Vedas

<u>Outline</u>

  A. Overview

1. four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva)
   a. composed in Sanskrit c. 1,200-900 BCE
   b. Aryan mythology and pantheon is Indo-European
2. commentaries
   a. Brahmanas
   b. Aranyakas
   c. Upanishads
      i. shift from external to internal
      ii. knowledge that atman/soul = brahman/reality
3. power of speech
   a. oral composition, transmission and performance
   b. Vedic literature heard, not read
B. The Rig Veda
   1. dramatic episodes and imagery
   2. speculation about creation of world

Lecture

1. Overview

   A. Four Vedas

The oldest texts of Indian literature are also the oldest texts of world literature still in use today. The four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva) were composed in Sanskrit between about 1,200 and 900 BCE, probably in northwest India. We assume they were created by the priests of the Aryans (or Aryas) who had migrated across west Asia, through the Khyber Pass and into the river valleys of the Punjab, bringing with them the Indo-European language of Sanskrit (and its spoken variety, Prakrit) and an Indo-European mythology and pantheon. The Aryan sky-father-god of Dyaus, for example, is cognate with Zeus and Jupiter.

The Vedas are a compilation of hymns, ritual formulae, myths and philosophical speculations, as well as advice on warfare, kingship, gambling, sport, sex and most other areas of life. The Rig Veda, which is the oldest and most literary of the four, contains 1028 hymns to be used at sacrifices. The Sama Veda is the more abstruse, being a re-arrangement of certain verses from the Rig Veda for liturgical purposes. The Yajur Veda, composed probably two centuries after the Rig Veda, is a compilation of verses to be sung by an assistant priest at the sacrifice. The last, the Atharva Veda, is different from the other three in that it mainly contains charms and imprecations.

   B. Commentaries

Vedic literature, however, is more than these four compilations. From about 900 to 500 BCE, Aryans composed three types of mainly prose texts as auxiliaries to each of the four Vedas: Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. The Brahmanas are prose explanations of how to perform sacrifices—a manual to be used by men less learned than the priests. The Aranyakas, or 'Forest Books,' are less functional and more contemplative, to be used by men toward the end of life when, by convention, they enter the forest for meditation.

In their focus on meditation, the Aranyakas are critical to the transition from the rituals of the Vedas to the speculation of the Upanishads. In the latter, we see the culmination of the shift away from an external, sanguine outlook in the four Vedas toward doubt and internal contemplation. In broad terms, in the Upanishads the early emphasis on ritual as action

was replaced by an examination of ritual as symbol. Knowledge of the sacrifice became more important than performing the sacrifice. And the greatest knowledge concerned the self or soul (*atman*).

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

We can escape this endless wheel of birth and death only if we achieve the pure consciousness represented by the equation: *atman* = *brahman*.   Then we do not die because we are not born. While most of these ideas are not original with the Upanishads, they receive full exposition only in these later texts.

Today Vedic literature is little understood by most Indians, and many of the gods and goddesses mentioned in it are no longer worshipped. Still, this ancient set of hymns, myths and meditations laid the foundation of modern Hinduism and retains a central place in modern Indian culture.   And while the practice of chanting the full four Vedas has declined, some men do continue to perform this extraordinary feat of memory.

C. Power of speech

I have used the word 'composed' when describing the creation of the Vedas and their commentaries. This is important.   The texts of Vedic literature were not written—writing in an Indian script first appears in the 3rd c. BCE. The texts of Vedic literature 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 (indeed, speech is deified as the goddess Vac). The Vedas were not read. They were heard, and overheard.

The power of speech, especially carefully calibrated speech, is central to understanding Indian literature. 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.

2. The Rig Veda

Certainly the literary brilliance and cultural authority of the Rig Veda owes little to its manuscripts (dating from the 11th c. CE) and printed texts (from 19th c. CE). Rather, its power lies in vivid imagery, in cosmogonic conundrums and dramas enacted by priests, natural forces and the gods. King of the gods Indra slays the cloud-dragon Vrtra with his thunderbolts. Gamblers lament their losses. The beauty of Dawn (Usas) is evoked with tenderness. Cosmic order is maintained by Varuna, the sober alter-ego to the tempestuous Indra. Yama, the first human and the first to die, presides over the world of the dead, where others must journey after death. The virtuous are guided on this journey by two dogs, while the others are attacked by demons. Many of the hymns are invocations of Angi

(fire) and Soma (an intoxicating libation), the two principal elements of the sacrifice that dominates the Rig Veda.

Some of the most memorable verses involve speculation about the creation of the world. But the Rig Veda, as befits a Hindu text, does not contain one creation myth; it contains several. 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 a 'universal egg.' Later, creation becomes the work of a creator, named Prajapati. But where did the original substance come from? '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.'

When we 'read' these lines in the Rig Veda and feel a quickening of uncertainty, we enter a dialogue about the human condition that stretches back three thousand years.

Reading

Required
> Doniger, *Rig Veda*, pp. 1-117 (more if possible)

Recommended
> Dimock, *Literatures of India*, pp.1-46
> Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 1, pp. 3-39
> Basham, *Wonder that was India*, pp. 232-256, 399-407
> Brereton, *The Rg Veda*
> (audio download MP3: gatewayforindia.com)

Discussion topics/questions/exercises

1. Why do you think the Vedas have lasted so long in India?
2. Based on your reading, can you identify any persistent themes in the Vedas?
3. Choose one verse and find a parallel for it in European or other world literature.
4. Try to memorise and recite one short hymn. Then consider that many Indians memorised and recited all 1008 verse of the Rig Veda for centuries.

Week 2 Myth

Outline

   A. Overview
      1. *purana* is closest genre label for 'myth'
      2. 18 or 20 *maha* ('great') *purana*s in Sanskrit, c. 3rd-10th c. CE
   B. Devotionalism
      1. myths are form of devotionalism (*bhakti*)
      2. dedicated to Siva, the Goddess and Visnu
      3. *bhakti* as major literary movement up to 19th c. CE
      4. hundreds of myths in regional languages
   C. Content
      1. not linear narratives; more tradition than text
      2. ritual efficacy important to listeners

3. core themes centre on Siva's many aspects , Visnu's avatars and forms of the Goddess
   4. etiological (explanatory) myths
 D. Interpretations
   1. comparative
   2. literary-historical
   3. symbolic
   4. structural
 E. Conclusion

<u>Lecture</u>

1. Overview

While 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.

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 text (of the *Skanda Purana*) is a Nepalese manuscript dated to 810 CE.

The majority of these major myth texts are devoted to Visnu, while others tell the stories of Siva, Devi (the goddess) and Brahma; these four are the chief deities of classical Hinduism. One major *purana*, and parts of others, tell the story of Devi, the goddess, either as a wife of Visnu (Lakshmi) or Siva (Parvati) or in her own right as an embodiment of compassion and power (Durga, Sakti). The comparatively greater emphasis on Visnu in the myths reflects the devotional aspirations of the Gupta rulers (320-467 CE), under whose patronage many of the *purana*s were created.

2. Devotionalism (*bhakti*)

Drawing on oral tradition, these massive texts (ranging from 15,000 to 80,000 verses) mark a second major shift in Hinduism. After the philosophical speculation of the Upanishads, the focus became devotionalism (*bhakti*), which would remain the core of Indian literature until the mid-19th century. Bhakti ('to share in,' 'to belong to') is characterised by an intense and personal attachment to a particular god or goddess, saint or guru.

While the major myths were composed in Sanskrit, hundreds of others were created in regional languages. The 275 Tamil temple *purana*s, or *sthalapuranas* ('place-myths'), for example, narrate the mythologies associated with specific Siva temples in south India. Buddhist and Jains also composed dozens of *purana*s.

Bhakti also inspired some of the most beautiful and poignant poetry in Indian languages (other than Sanskrit), which we will consider in later weeks. Devotionalism is the animating spirit behind Hinduism today, in which millions seek religious experience through an emotional, sometimes ecstatic connection to anthropomorphic divine beings.

3. Content

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 the myths of Siva, Visnu or Devi, 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.

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 Doniger's phrase). Although a close conceptual relationship between sexual desire and bodily mortification is not exclusive to Hindu tradition, it is elaborately articulated in the Saiva myths, again and again, as if the myth-makers are unable to resolve the paradox. 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.

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 some deity. One of the best-known of these myths, in the Saiva corpus, explains 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.

4.   Interpretations

The interpretation of Hindu mythology has a long history, beginning with the first Indological studies in the late 18th century. We can identify four main approaches:

   A. Comparative
   B. Literary-historical
   C. Symbolic
   D. Structural

The comparative approach was popularised by the German-born Oxford don Max Müller (1923-1900), whose famous essay on the topic was published in the 1850s. His 'solar mythology' (which found sun worship in the most unlikely places) and his attempts to prove historical derivations were ridiculed even by contemporaries. He argued, for instance, that the English proverb 'Don't count your chickens before they hatch' was derived from ancient India. And yet no one can deny that he advanced the study of Indian mythology by his prodigious scholarship, translations from Sanskrit and publications in English.

Müller's comparative approach was extended by George Dumezil (1898-1986), the French scholar of Indo-European religion and society, who is famous for his tripartite hypothesis. Ancient Indo-European society, he demonstrated, was structured by a triad of ruler (moral sovereignty), warrior (martial) and farmers (material productivity). He then showed that this set of figures and values is represented in Indo-European pantheons, such as Varuna, Indra and the Asvin twins (divine horsemen) in India.

Although it was dismissed as lacking in cultural specificity, the comparative approach became a default position for much subsequent research on Hindu mythology, if only because its findings of a set of mythic themes (two brothers, dragon slaying, creation from a human body) have stood the test of time.

The second approach, in part a reaction to the far-flung research of the comparative approach, is more text-based. Hindu myths should be studied as textual and linguistic documents, in their own right and within the Indian tradition, to search for meaning. This literary-historical approach has been the mainstay of research on Hindu mythology, from the early Indologists in the late 18th century and throughout most of the 20th century, especially in universities and research institutes. Key publications include those by J.A. B. Van Buitenen

Only after the mid-20 century was this conventional textual approach challenged by more adventuresome theories. The symbolic approach to Hindu mythology is best illustrated by Heinrich Zimmer (1890–1943) , who followed his countryman Müller to Oxford but then went on to teach at Columbia University. His 1946 posthumous book, edited by Joseph Campbell, sought to reveal the meaning of Indian civilisation by a study of its primary symbols expressed in myth and art. These symbols, such as the ocean or the snake, he believed, were the manifestations of psychic states.

Finally, the structural approach is an application of a methodology used to elucidate South American (and later other mythologies) by Claude Levi-Strauss (with help from the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp and the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure). The fundamental principle of the structural approach to myth is that meaning is not found in the sentences or the linear narrative, but in the underlying grammar, the repetitions of words and phrases, and in their relationships to each other. Levi-Strauss argued that a myth is an attempt to resolve a paradox, or a relationship between two incompatible statements: Siva is erotic and Siva is ascetic. The most successful attempt to apply structuralist principles to Hindu myths is a 1973 book on Siva by Wendy Doniger (O'Flaherty), who also draws on Freudian insights to advance her controversial thesis.

4. Conclusion

The major myths of Hinduism may have been written in Sanskrit a thousand or fifteen hundred years ago, but they have generated dozens of variants in every one of India's regional languages. They have also been recited by temple-based specialists and told and retold by thousands of storytellers in every town and village in the subcontinent. The oral roots of the *purana*s are obvious in that they are largely composed as dialogues, as are most of the Upanishads. The text is thus presented as a kind of moral discourse, in response to a series of questions, which was how these texts were originally performed and are still performed.

Reading

Required
        Doniger, *Hindu Myths,* pp. 116-269 (more if possible)

Recommended
        Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 1, pp. 319-331
        van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*

Discussion topics/questions/exercises
1. Explain which of the four approaches to myth you think would be most suitable for Hindu mythology.
2. Select one myth and find a parallel for it in European or world mythology.
3. Hindu myths are largely religious, but can you identify any secular themes?
4. Although the myths were composed largely by specialists, they were 'used' by everyone. Can you imagine how an ordinary man or woman would understand these stories?

Week 3 Epics: Mahabharata

Outline

A. Overview
   1. the two epics
    a. known as *ithihasa* ('histories') and *mahakavya* ('great poems')
    b. centuries-long composition in Sanskrit
      i. *Mahabharata* c. 400 BCE-400 CE
      ii. *Ramayana* c. 200 BCE- 300 CE
    c. framing stories reveal oral tradition
   2. other classical Sanskrit literature
    a. *kavya* ('verse') is dominant form
    b. six *maha* ('great') *kavya*s recognised
    c. works of Kalidasa, ancient India' most famous poet
    d. short lyric; earliest collection c. 100-200 CE
   3. Five Tamil epics (*perumkappiyanka*l, 'large *kavya*s'), 3rd-9th c. CE
B. *Mahabharata* text
   1. 100,000 couplets in 18 chapters or 'books'
   2. legendary author is Vyasa
   3. frame story of composition and dictation revealing
C. *Mahabharata* story
   1. conflict between cousins, Pandavas and Kauravas
   2. core story known as *Jaya* ('Victory')
   3. based on historical events
   4. slow disintegration of fraternal kin bonds
D. *Dharma* and the *Bhagavad Gita*
   1. underlying lesson on *dharma* or right conduct
   2. Arjuna (prince) taught by Krishna (charioteer, avatar of Visnu)
    a. princes/warriors must fight, and kill, even cousins
    b. must act but remain detached from consequences
    c. detachment possible through devotion (*bhakti*)
E. Conclusion
   1. despite moral message story is tension-filled
   2. story of loss and slain kin is nuanced

1. Overview

A. The two epics

The two great epics of Indian literature might be considered myths, except that Indian tradition refers to them as 'history' (*ithihasa*) and less frequently as 'great poems' (*mahakavya*). The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are indeed massive verse compositions (about 200,000 and 50,000 lines, respectively in their final redactions). They both draw heavily on myths (*puranas*) and clearly come from the same literary tradition. Indeed, each epic elaborates one of Visnu's incarnations: Rama (in the *Ramayana*) and Krishna (in the *Mahabharata*).

And yet, these epics are markedly different to the myths. Their narratives are more linear and focused (despite buried beneath layers of mythic material, especially in the *Mahabharata*) and their narration bears the mark of a more single-minded poet (or set of poets). In the end, they are told as stories, among the greatest stories of world literature. As such, each deserves a separate lecture and reading.

It is impossible to 'date' the epics, except to say that they were composed, revised and retold over several centuries. The gestation of the *Mahabharata*, it has been suggested, took eight centuries, from 400 BCE to 400 CE. A somewhat shorter time period, within that same span, seems likely for the *Ramayana*.

The framing stories of both epics, which reveal the voice of the bard or reciter, once again demonstrate (as with the Vedas and myths) that they were oral in composition and probably in transmission and performance. The earliest surviving manuscript of the *Ramayana* is dated to the 11th century CE and the oldest of the *Mahabharata* (containing only one of its 18 chapters) to the 12th century.

B.   Other classical Sanskrit literature an epics

Sanskrit literature during the early centuries of the Common Era was dominated by the *kavya* forms, not only the epic, but also lyric poems and theatre. Indeed Sanskrit literary tradition acknowledges six *mahakavya*s, although they are hardly 'great' compared to the two named above and none contains more than 5,000 individual lines.

Asvaghosa's hagiography of the Buddha (*The Buddhacarita*, c. 100 CE) is perhaps the least complex metrically but had a lasting effect on the history of Buddhism. The most influential poet of this period was Kalidasa (probably 5th c. CE), who wrote two *mahakavya*s (*Kumarasambhava*, 'Birth of the War God Kumara' and *Raghuvamsa*, 'Dynasty of Raghu'), plus a well-loved lyric poem (*Megaduta*, 'The Cloud Messenger') and a still-performed play (*Shakuntala*).

The short lyric was a courtly form devoted largely to themes of love and longing, though it also had religious themes. The earliest known anthology of these 'secular' poems was the *Sattasai* of Hala (c. 2nd c. CE), which was actually in Prakrit (a regional variant of Sanskrit).

Finally, Tamil literature also recognises five epics (*perumkappiyanka*l, or 'large *kavya*s') of a similar length and time of composition (3rd-9th c. CE).

2. *Mahabharata* text

The vast, sprawling epic of the *Mahabharata* was composed in Sanskrit over a number of centuries. When completed about 400 CE, it had amassed 100,000 couplets (more than 8 times the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* put together) arranged in 18 books or chapters. 'If it's not in the *Mahabharata*,' a saying goes, 'it doesn't exist.' Another way of putting this is that the *Mahabharata* is not so much a work of literature as a whole literature in itself. Indeed, it contains several major literary works (including a telling of the Rama story) that exist on their own outside the epic.

Whereas tradition recognises a single-poet named Vyasa, multiple authors (poets, singers, redactors) and centuries-long composition are obvious. Tradition, however, tells a good story of the origin of the epic. Inspired by the god Brahma, the sage Vyasa asked Ganesa, the elephant-head god, to take down his dictation of the story. Ganesa agreed but only on one condition: that he would never have to wait while the poet contemplated his next line. Vyasa accepted that and countered with a condition of his own: that Ganesa only write down something when he had understood it. This explains the many elliptical passages in the poem, which Vyasa dreamt up in order to keep Ganesa puzzled and to give himself more time to compose the next passage.

Tradition also holds that when Vyasa first recited the complete epic in front of a learned assembly, he called it *Jaya* ('victory') and it was a mere 50,000 lines. After a series of later recitations, it became the massive story of the Bharatas, and finally the *Maha* ('great') *Bharata*.

Indian literary tradition thus assigns an author (Vyasa), but he is more reciter than creator. His skill is to compose and declaim the verses, while the writing is done by someone else, an assistant, in this case the ever-helpful Ganesa. The orality of this great epic is further revealed by its use of the story-within-a-story device. Vyasa recites the epic to one audience; in a later generation, Vyasa's disciple repeats that recitation to a king; and that recitation is again retold by a professional storyteller to an assembly of sages preparing for a sacrifice. This frame-tale technique is characteristic of Indian literature in general.

3.   *Mahabharata* story

The core of the *Mahabharata*, interspersed with large chunks of didactic and mythological material, is the story of a dynastic struggle between two groups of cousins: the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

This is the *Jaya*, the original story, which is told in the form of a conversation between a blind king (Dhritarashtra) and his charioteer, who describes the details of the 18-day war between the king's nephews. That this great war did in fact occur at Hastinapur (not far from Delhi) is accepted by most historians, who place it sometime between 1,200 and 800 BCE.   Thus, not unlike the *Iliad*, this Indian epic reconstructs a great war several centuries after the historical event.

While the war is the centrepiece, the background is equally important to the dramatic tension. We watch as the cohesion among fraternal kin, a high priority in a patrilineal and patrilocal society like Hindu north India, slowly breaks down. Jealousy, poor judgement, childlessness, a curse, sexual humiliation of a wife and a disastrous game of dice breed animus and lead to the exile of one group by the other.

4.   *Dharma* and the *Bhagavad Gita*

Underneath the tale of war, however, the *Mahabharata* is a discourse on the subtleties of *dharma*, or right conduct. It repeatedly comments on the code of conduct for a king, a warrior, a father and a son, and then pits one loyalty against another. The moral dilemmas are sometimes so complex that even a righteous character is 'trapped' and cannot avoid making a 'wrong' decision.

The complexities of *dharma* are dramatised in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is told in Book 6, again as a dialogue, this time between prince Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna. Arjuna faces his cousins across the battle field and expresses his doubts about the morality of killing his kin. Krishna then launches into the famous discourse in which he tells the prince that, as a warrior, he must do battle. The renunciation of action, continues Krishna, is for others and is not proper conduct for a warrior-prince. He must act, but he must act without attachment to the consequences ('fruits') of his action. Finally, Krishna explains that the prince can attain that detachment by surrendering himself and his actions to Krishna (*avatar* of Visnu).

5.   Conclusion

It is the great merit of the epic that even this moralistic discourse does not compromise the drama unfolding on the battlefield. Like the eye of a storm, it concentrates as it anticipates the tension, which builds to a climax. Resembling the Homeric epics and Tolstoy's great novel, the encyclopaedic *Mahabharata* is a deep and nuanced story about a destructive war, human frailty, the sorrow of loss, subterfuge and humiliation, and the final folly of victory over slain kin. No wonder the epic has been told, sung, danced, enacted and dramatised in shadow puppetry for centuries. It was also an extremely popular TV programme.

Reading

Required
        Buck, *Mahabharata*

Recommended
        Dimock, *Literatures of India*, pp. 47-54
        Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 1, pp. 274-296
        Smith, *Mahabharata*
        Brockington, *Sanskrit Epics*

Discussion topics/questions/exercises

   1. Summarise the main story of the epic in two paragraphs.
   2. Of the many ethical dilemmas presented in the epic, which strikes you as the most difficult?
   3. Does the epic have a hero and/or heroine?
   4. Would you describe the *Mahabharata* as a book? Why or why not?

Week 4 Epics: Ramayana

<u>Outline</u>

A. Overview
   1. *Ramayana* compared with *Mahabharata*
   2. similarities
      a. composed in Sanskrit over many centuries
      b. traditional single author
      c. two sets of male kin oppose each other
   3. differences
      a. shorter, more focused narrative
      b. hundreds of retellings, some as important as Sanskrit version
      c. some retellings shift the moral perspective of the story
B. Content
   1. Sanskrit text by Valmiki
      a. considered canonical; 'the' Ramayana
      b. begins with instructive frame-tale and theme of loss in love
   2. summary of plot
C. Power of love
   1. major characters driven by love, passion, lust
   2. Rama as flawless good hero; Ravana as depraved villain
D. Love retold
   1. hints of flaws in Rama and of nobility in Ravana
   2. retellings shift moral balance from Rama to Ravana

<u>Lecture</u>

1. Overview

The *Ramayana* ('Way of Rama' or 'Story of Rama'), like the *Mahabharata*, was composed in Sanskrit over several centuries (about 200 BCE to 300 CE) by different poets but is assigned a single creator by tradition. Again, like the other great epic, it begins with a frame-story; it concerns two sets of opposing male kin (this time brothers) who engage in war; and it is (in many but not all tellings) a vehicle for the worship of Visnu.

Nevertheless, the differences are many and more interesting. First, the Rama story (in its main Sanskrit version) is considerably shorter, about one-quarter of the *Mahabharata*. Second, the narrative is more linear and tightly focused. The opposition between good (Rama) and evil (Ravana) is also more stark than in the moral ambiguities that darken the *Mahabharata*. Fourth, while the Rama story expresses the importance of *dharma* (right conduct), often around dilemmas of fraternal loyalty, it is primarily a love story.

For all these reasons, the Rama story has inspired countless textual (not to mention dance, drama and song) versions. This is true, on a lesser scale for the *Mahabharata,* too, but that scale is instructive: more than 25 versions of the Rama story are known in Sanskrit alone, with many hundreds more in the regional languages, including several by Buddhist and Jain authors. But the telling difference is that some of these regional Ramayanas have a distinct literary identity, apart from the Sanskrit text attributed to Valmiki. In particular, the Hindi version of Tulsi Das (16th c. CE) and the Tamil version by Kampan (?11th c. CE) stand out as jewels of literary perfection in these two major languages.

Perhaps more importantly, many of these Rama stories tell a different story to the one found in Valmiki's Sanskrit text. They include not just minor additions but entirely new episodes and major shifts of the moral compass. And finally, unlike the *Mahabharata*, the Rama story has inspired tellings in languages outside the subcontinent, primarily in Southeast Asia, where Javanese, Thai and Khmer texts are held in high regard.

2.   Content

For all these reasons, it is misleading to speak of 'the' Ramayana, and more accurate to say 'Ramayanas' or the 'Rama story,' with the implication of multiple versions. At the same time, it is undeniable that the Sanskrit text by Valmiki (not the earlier version of the story, incidentally, which is found in the Buddhist *Jataka* tales, c. 100-200 BCE) has a canonical status in Indian literary tradition and is implicitly understood as 'the' *Ramayana*.

Valmiki begins his story with a frame-tale, in which he watches a hunter kill one of a pair of love- birds and curses the hunter. After a moment's reflection, the poet realises that his grief (*soha*) has been expressed in a particular type of verse (*sloka*) which he then uses to compose the epic. This lends a self-conscious aesthetic tone to the composition but also introduces the theme of love and loss, which runs throughout the story.

The core story is the life and adventures of Rama (*avatar* of Visnu) and heir to his father's throne. He marries Sita and is about to take the throne when a jealous stepmother forces him (and his wife and one of his brothers, Laksmana) into exile, causing the king to die in grief. The throne is offered to another brother (Bharata), who renounces it and follows Rama into the forest. Sita is kidnapped by the demon-king Ravana and taken back to his island kingdom of Ceylon.

The remainder of the epic describes Rama's attempt to find and rescue her. This is possible only with the assistance of an army of monkeys, and particularly the resourceful Hanuman. Ravana , who is intoxicated with his captive Sita, faces palace intrigues of his own when one brother announces that he will defect to Rama's cause. Rama eventually kills the demon Ravana and recovers Sita, whom he subjects to a fire-test to ensure that she has remained faithful to him during captivity.

Other important episodes include the enmity between two monkeys, Vali and Sugriva (the third such set of quarrelling brothers in the story), the fatal attempt by a vulture (Jatayu) to rescue Sita from Ravana's flying chariot, and Hanuman's ambassadorial mission to Ravana's court, his capture and flight, during which his burning tail sets fire to Ravana's kingdom.

3.   Power of love

As with the *Mahabharata*, then, there are spectacular battles, the theme of fraternal loyalty and betrayal, as well as teachings on *dharma*. However, the theme that ties it all together is the power of love.
Rama loves his father and must obey him (though, through a plot twist, it kills the father to do so). Bharata loves his brother and renounces the throne in his favour. Sita loves Rama and must accompany him to the forest. Hanuman loves Rama and becomes his servant. Kumbhakarna loves his brother, Ravana, and remains his ally despite misgivings about the latter's actions.

But pervading the whole epic is the brooding love of Ravana for Sita, which drives him to his destruction. His tempestuous love is matched only by that of his sister, Surpanakha, for Rama. An alternative title for the story might be 'Demons who love too much.'

4.   Love retold

And it is love that humanises the arch-villain of the piece. Indeed, Ravana's fiery passion is in striking contrast to the tepid affection that Rama demonstrates toward Sita. Herein lies the narrative fulcrum that alternative versions of the Rama story have exploited to shift the moral balance.

In the canonical Sanskrit text (and later derived versions), Rama, the righteous prince and embodiment of Lord Visnu, is too perfect, a nearly flawless hero, dutiful son, noble prince, loving brother and protective husband. Ravana, the depraved demonic rapist, is likewise a caricature of evil. However, even in the canonical texts, Ravana's passionate love, the source of his evil actions, lifts him above the role of unsympathetic villain and ennobles him with the grandest of human emotions, while Rama's coolly calculated virtue renders him merely admirable.

We also have hints of the hero's fallibilities. He is too hasty when determining right and wrong in the monkey's fraternal struggle; he misjudges his own brother's intentions toward his wife; he is led astray by a simple ruse of a golden deer; he cruelly rejects Surpanakha's crude advances; and he bows to public pressure to have his wife's loyalty tested by fire in front of an audience.

These hints have encouraged alternative versions of the Rama story in which Ravana is the beleaguered hero and Rama the immoral invader of his island; in which Sita falls in love with her captor; in which Sita takes over from the impotent Rama and slays her enemies; in which Laksmana is in love with Sita; in which Rama is in love with Surpanakha.
In other words, the Rama story tradition is a kaleidoscope of shifting moral perspectives, refracting everything through the prism of love.

5.   Conclusion

What could be more interesting than the story of a prince having to seek out and free his wife held captive by a demon king on an island? When one adds court intrigues, jealous step-mothers, brothers who choose loyalty over morality, flying monkeys and boulder-throwing giants, one begins to understand why this story is a masterpiece of world literature.
For many, it is a story of good against evil, a moral tale that is often invoked in social and political discourse. At the same time, it is a story about the potentially disastrous effects of love.

Readings

Required
        Buck, *Ramayana*

Recommended
        Dimock, *Literatures of India*, pp. 54-80
        Brockington, *Sanskrit Epics*

Richman, *Many Ramayanas*

Essay #1 (select one of the following and write a 1,250-word essay)

1. The Vedas and most of the myths are separated by more than a thousand years. What features connect them in the same literary tradition and what features demonstrate their distance in history? You might consider the following elements: composition, content, structure, intention and audience.
2. Analyse the characterisation of Rama in the Sanskrit text translated by Buck. Using several key episodes, describe his chief characteristics. You should think about his judgements, his relationships and his attitudes towards others.
3. Describe the moral dilemma faced by Arjuna in the *Mahabharata*. What are his options and what is Krishna's advice? Is this dilemma rooted in Indian culture or does transcend cultures and historical periods?
4. Despite their obvious differences, both the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are described and understood in India as epics. Identify their chief similarities and differences, and then explain why you think they belong to the same genre or not.

Week 5 Ancient Tamil poetry

Outline

A. Overview
    1. composed orally in Tamil c. 100 BCE-300 CE
    2. 2,381 poems, by 473 named and 102 anonymous poets
    3. poems reveal Tamil culture different to culture in north India
        a. social structure, kinship
        b. aesthetic theory
        c. king as god (not god as king, as in north)
B. Tradition
    1. poems called 'sangam' literature because created during 'assemblies' (*sangam*s) of poets
    2. commentaries written from c. 500 CE
    3. scholars arrange poems into anthologies
C. Rediscovery
    1. poems lost and forgotten from about 1,200 CE onward
    2. rediscovered, edited and published in mid-19th century by U. Ve. Caminataiyar
    3. translated and popularised in 20th century by A.K. Ramanujan
D. Genres
    1. *akam* (interior) poems
        a. about domestic settings, love, emotions
        b. no named characters, only stock figures
        c. 5 different conditions of love; each with a specific landscape, time of year, etc.
        d. enduring theme is chastity or inner worth
    2. *puram* (exterior) poems
        a. describe war, men's actions
        b. named characters and places
        c. chief theme is public honour or worth of men
E. Conclusion
    1. Tamil poets focus on material world, not mysticism

2. poems tell moving stories with sharp imagery

Lecture

1. Overview

Ancient Tamil poetry was composed about two thousand years ago (c. 100 BCE-300 CE), like the Sanskrit myths and epics. And like them, these poems reveal their oral origins in a dialogic mode of presentation. But there the similarities end.

This corpus of 2,381 poems, by 473 named and 102 anonymous poets, is in Tamil, a Dravidian language historically unrelated to Sanskrit and the Indo-European language family. As concise compositions (3 to 800 lines) of intense compression, they represent a different sensibility to the massive compilations of the same period in north India. Sanskrit has its own tradition of short court poetry (see Ingalls in Reading List), but it never acquired the status of the epics and myths.

The ancient Tamil poems also reveal a culture distinct from that found in ancient Sanskrit literature, with its own social structure, kinship system, gods and ritual practices. One specific and instructive difference is that the king is represented as a god and not the other way around (as in north India and later in south India). However, the most significant aspect of these poems is their unique literary aesthetic, embedded in a new set of genres and genre conventions.

2. Tradition

Tamil literary tradition refers to its oldest texts as 'sangam' literature, based on three legendary assemblies (*sangam*s) of poets and scholars who composed them. The texts of the first assembly were lost in a flood (a frequent occurrence in Indian literary history) and only a grammar remains from the second. The extant poems, then, are said to survive from the third assembly. Other texts (another grammar and works on morality, aesthetics and literary composition) exist, but most literary attention has been paid to the poems.

From about 500 CE onward, Tamil scholars began to write commentaries on these poems and (perhaps as late as 1000 CE) arranged them into anthologies. Of these anthologies, the most famous are *Pattupattu* ('Ten [Narrative] Songs'), *Purananuru*, ('400 [Poems] on War'), *Akananuru* ('400 [Poems] on Love'), *Kuruntokai* ('Short Poems') and *Ainkurunuru* ('Five Hundred Short [Poems]').

3. Rediscovery

From medieval times, for reasons as yet not fully understood, these classical Tamil poems gradually fell into disfavour and were eventually forgotten. It has been suggested that the bhakti movement (see last week and next week) overwhelmed earlier Tamil tradition.

Whatever the reasons, by 1800, not even the most traditional and learned Tamil pundits even knew of their existence. Then, in the mid-19th century, an indefatigable Tamil scholar, U. Ve. Caminataiyar, came across a dusty volume that listed these ancient texts and started a life-long search to find them. Eventually, in a box in a Saiva monastery, he found a bundle of palm-leaf manuscripts of the lost poetic anthologies. A century later, in the United States, another Tamil scholar, A.K. Ramunujan, stumbled upon an uncatalogued pile of books in the University of Chicago Library. One book was a 1937 edition of

Caminataiyar's edition and commentary on one of the ancient anthologies, of which he had never heard. Over the next few decades, Ramanujan found other anthologies that he translated, thus opening up a new chapter of world literature.

4. Genres

Soon after the poems were composed, Tamil literary tradition developed a complex aesthetic framework to describe them and guide their interpretation. The system begins with two overarching genres: *akam* ('interior') and *puram* ('exterior'). This dichotomy, articulated in a
6th-century CE text, refers to both the physical and psychological dimensions of the poetic subjects. Thus, *akam* poems describe the various inner states of love, usually in or around the house, while the content of *puram* poems is typically public events, especially war, and the actions of kings or other men, and the public attitudes towards these events and men. Convention requires that no persons or places are named in the interior love poems— instead only stock characters (lover, mother, father, etc.) appear— while kings, poets, battles and towns are named in the public war poems.

This contrast is also represented in the values or attitudes prominent in each genre. The recurring theme of the war poems is honour (*pukal*), or the public estimation of a particular man. In the love poems, it is the virtue (*karpu*) or inner worth (*nalan*) of an unnamed woman.

The love poems are themselves divided into five groups, each devoted to a specific type or condition of love: separation, union, domestic waiting, betrayal and elopement. Then, each of these five states of love is associated with a specific landscape: seashore, mountains, forest/pasture, paddy fields and scrubland (see Ramanujan 1985, p.242). Further associations are made with types of flowers, times of the day, seasons of the year, birds and so forth. The ancient commentators also constructed a set of corresponding themes for the war poems, but these often seem to be an after-thought and are not always found in the poems themselves.

5.   Conclusion

Ancient Tamil poets apparently had little time for contemplation and didacticism, so common in contemporaneous Sanskrit literature. Closer to Japanese haiku poets, they explored the natural world around them with precision and emotional insight. Some of their sharp images are unforgettable.

These poems contain no grand vision, no cosmogony, and neither do they amount to a mythology or a philosophy. But in their quiet way they do tell stories. There is the mother who does not want to see wounds in her son's back. And there is a king who places his daughters in the care of his bard before he starves himself to death (rather than face defeat). And there are the lovers whose hearts were mixed together 'as red earth and pouring rain.'

Reading

Required
        Ramanujan, *Poems of Love and War*

Recommended

Dimock, *Literatures of India*, pp.170-181
Hart and Heifitz, *Four Hundred Poems of War and Wisdom* Ramanujan, *Interior Landscape*
Selby, *Tamil Love Poetry*

Discussion topics/questions/exercises

1. Most scholars regard ancient or classical Tamil poetry as a distinct literary tradition from the Vedas, myths and epics in Sanskrit. What evidence can you find for this claim in the poems?
2. Choose five 'interior' (*akam*) and five 'exterior' (*puram*) poems, and then list their specific differences.
3. These poems were composed almost two thousand years ago in south India. Do their emotions seem distant in time and space?

UNIT II: Medieval Literature

In this unit we study what is perhaps the greatest single development in Indian literary (and religious) history: devotionalism (see also Week 2). This shift from the raw energy of the Vedas and the metaphysical speculation of the Upanishads toward an intense and personal devotion to a deity first found explicit expression in the *Bhagavad Gita (*c. 100-300 CE), which is a late addition to the *Mahabharata* epic. Devotionalism also received important court patronage during the Gupta Empire in north India (320 CE - 467 CE). Gupta kings called themselves 'devotees of the gods,' took the names of gods and supported a state cult of Visnu.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, however, was composed in Sanskrit and its devotionalism is a logical system laid out in rational discourse. By contrast, the devotionalism that swept across the breadth and depth of India from about 500 CE was expressed in ecstatic songs of the languages of the market place. That devotionalism is known as *bhakti* ('to belong,' 'to partake of').

These songs of devotion, composed and performed by poet-saints, began in Tamil and then jumped linguistic barriers in a chain-effect, inspiring similar compositions in Kannada, Marathi, Hindi, Bengali and nearly every other regional language, ending with Assamese in the northeast corner of the subcontinent in the 16th century. In some cases, these bhakti poets were part of a social reform movement, railing against caste inequality or the folly of sectarianism. In others, the songs in praise of Visnu and Siva fed into a broader political and intellectual Hindu revival against Buddhism and Jainism.

Week 6: Tamil devotional poetry

Outline

A. Overview
   1. Tamil bhakti poetry develops from c. 500 CE
   2. new genre formed around the stories of Siva and Visnu

      3.   fed by new stories and iconography from north
      4.   bards now sing of gods, not kings; king's palace becomes a   temple
  B. Poems to Siva
      1. thousands of poems composed c. 500-1000 CE
      2. poems describe Siva, or one of his forms, in a specific place
      3. poets known as Nayanmars, 63 named poets in tradition
      4. legends of poet-saints compiled in *Periyapuranam*, 12th c. CE
      5. famous legend of hunter whose love of Siva makes him a saint.
  C. Poems to Visnu
      1. four thousand poems composed c. 500-900 CE
      2. less visceral than Saiva poems, more rapture and salvation
      3. poets called Alvars ('Deep Ones'); only 12 named poets
  D. Nammalvar ('Our Alvar')
      1. most famous Vaisnava poet-saint (9th c. CE)
      2. 1,000 poems collected in *Tiruvaymoli* ('Sacred Speech')
      3. poems contain elements of both love and war
      4. poems express 'qualified non-dualism' which allows the worshipper to join with yet remain distinct from God
  E. Conclusion

<u>Lecture</u>

1.   Overview

Tamil bhakti poetry emerged at the end of the Sangam period (about 500 CE), when south Indian culture began to absorb influences from the north. Sanskrit texts, mythologies, gods and ritual specialists became part of the court of the Pallava kings in the northern part of the Tamil-speaking region. Through this geographical and cultural bridge, came the stories and iconography of Siva and Visnu, around whom the bhakti movement coalesced. These gods replaced the kings of the Sangam poems, so now the Tamil poets sang of them and not the worldly sovereign. One in three of the poets was a Brahmin (a significant increase over the Sangam period). The king's palace became the god's temple. The king's patronage, which kept the bards alive, became the boons given by the gods to His devotees.

These thousands of songs, which were compiled in manuscripts and performed by singers attached to temples, record the intense emotions of the devotee, who assumes the role of lover or beloved toward the god. Not surprisingly, these poems (unlike the earlier Sangam poems) were never lost or forgotten. Indeed, they are songs that are still sung today.

2.   Poems to Siva

The first Tamil bhakti poets (called Nayanmars) composed songs in praise of Siva, usually a specific form of Siva associated with a specific place or mythic story. We know the names of 63 of these poet-saints who composed thousands of poems between about 500-1000 CE. 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.

The lives and legends of the Saiva poet-saints are recorded in a massive biographical work (*Periyapuranam*) compiled during the 12th century CE. One of those legends tells a story (also found in Telugu) that exemplifies the devotion of bhakti. Kannappar is a rustic hunter

who worshipped Siva in unorthodox ways. After a day in the forest, he would sprinkle some liquor over a crude image of the god, toss on some fresh red meat and then jump around in a frenzied dance. One day, however, a pious Brahmin happened to see what he was doing and was outraged.

When the priest returned the next day to watch, 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 and cut out one of his own. Having inserted that eye into the empty socket of the image, he then saw that Siva's other eye was also oozing blood. So he started to cut out his other eye but stopped when he realised there was a problem. How would be able to put his second eye into the empty socket in the image when he couldn't see? Easy. He lifted his foot and planted his big toe in the empty socket, to know where it was, and then began to carve out his second eye. Because touching a god with one's foot is an insult and defilement the Brahmin called out in protest. Siva, however, so admired the heart-felt devotion of the hunter that he restored both his eyes.

3.   Poems to Visnu

During the same period (roughly 500 CE-900 CE), another group of Tamil poets (known as Alvars, lit. the 'Deep Ones') sang devotional songs to Visnu. 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 Tamil Alvars' poetry, the approach to Visnu is a mixture of contemplation, mythological drama and rapturous love.

4.   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.

Nammalvar 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 the body and characteristics of the Lord. The thousand poems of the *Tiruvaymoli* are interlinked to make a coherent whole by a 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.

These poems contain obvious elements of *akam* (love or 'interior') poetry, but they also have *puram* (war or 'exterior') elements, such as heroism and honour. In order to appreciate this, Nammalvar's poetry must be understood in the context of Hinduism's three theological strands:

1. Monism: there is one underlying reality (*brahman*); the material world is illusion; an individual's soul *(atman)* is not separated from *brahman* (the cosmic soul).

2.   Dualism: both divinity and the material world exist; individual souls are separate from *brahman* and the task is to achieve harmony between them.

3. Qualified non-dualism: agrees with monism that the individual soul is of the same essence as the cosmic soul but differs in denying that the former can ever be completely absorbed by the later; the goal is to live in close proximity with god. That subtle distance is necessary if we are to experience his love and grace.

The Alvars and Nammalvar in particular followed the third school (qualified non-dualism), and his poetry illustrates the Alvars' preoccupation with experiencing blissful union with God. Echoing the complexities of love in Sangam poetry, Nammalvar imagines himself in various relationships with God. He (the poet) is the lover as well as the beloved; he is the child and he is the mother. He is consumed by Visnu and he consumes Visnu. His body is god's body. He is immersed in god but not erased by that absorption. He is the true devotee.

<u>Reading</u>

Required
> Ramanujan, *Nammalvar: Hymns for the Drowning*

Recommended
> Cutler, *Songs of Experience*
> Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*

<u>Discussion topics/questions/exercises</u>

1. List the different roles that Nammalvar assumes in relation to Visnu.
2. Nammalvar's poetry is informed by a theology known as 'qualified non-dualism,' which allows the poet and worshipper to experience union and yet remain a separate reality. Can you find lines in the poems which express this situation?
3. Compare this bhakti view of god to that found in the Vedas. What differences do you find?

Week 7: Kannada devotional poetry

<u>Outline</u>

A. Overview

1. new bhakti poetry devoted to Siva in Kannada, 10th-12th CE
2. poems called *vacana* ('speech')
3. poets and their political/social movement called Virasaivism
B. Virasaivism
1. a 'militant' devotionalism, against dominant Jains and Brahmins
2. fierce monism of Virasaivism challenged beliefs of others; Siva as the universal reality
3. a political and social movement opposed to casteism and institutionalised religion
C. *Vacana*
1. new poetic form in Kannada, similar to free-verse
2. more direct, immediate than existing Sanskrit and Tamil forms

3. used common language in innovative ways
D. Personalised poems
    1. speak of Siva but also of poets
    2. poets speak in their voice, their mother-tongue
    3. their spiritual struggles to be free of physical world and body
E. Virasaivas as alternative community
    1. Basavanna, a poet and minister who established Virasaiva community (poets and common people) in a town
    2. Virasaivas ignore social conventions and are brutally attacked
    3. community dispersed but survives today
F. Conclusion

Lecture

1. Overview

A century of so after the Tamil devotional poets, another kind of bhakti sparked a literary and social upheaval in the Kannada-speaking immediately to the north. Kannada is a Dravidian language closely related to Tamil, and there is little doubt that Kannada poets across the porous linguistic border drew inspiration from the Tamil Nayanmars and Alvars. By about 900 C.E., when the Kannada bhakti movement appeared, the region had already had several centuries of literary history, mostly written by Jains and Brahmins in Sanskrit and Kannada. Then a group of Kannada poets and Siva devotees created a new form of verse in Kannada, the *vacana*. They used this new and simple verse from to propagate their spiritual vision and egalitarian social ideals.

These poets and their followers were known as Virasaivas ('Militant/Heroic Saivas') or (more commonly today) as Lingayats. For a period of about 200 years, between the 10th and 12th centuries, a few hundred men and women wrote these revolutionary poems, contributing to the stream of bhakti literature that spread across the rest of the subcontinent in subsequent centuries.

2. Virasaivism

The 'militant' (*vira*) nature of this new form of Saiva devotionalism in the Kannada-speaking region was directed against dominant religious ideologies, social privileges and literary conventions of the time. Jains and Brahmins had occupied positions of political power and cultural authority for some time in this part of the southern Deccan. Virasaivism opposed their theologies with a fierce monism (or non-dualism, in its polemic sense). Jains held that individual souls existed, and several strands of Hinduism (including the Vaisnava devotionalism expressed in the Alvar's poetry) found place for individuals apart from a universal god.

The Virasaivas countered both these ideas with an uncompromising monism. As A.K. Ramanujan explains in this week's reading (Appendix I to *Speaking of Siva),* the three major elements of the system—guru, wandering ascetic and Siva (in the form of the lingam)—were fused in a single vision. Everything was, in reality, Siva. He created illusion or *maya*, and *maya* generated desire, which is only neutralised when the devotee moves through six stages, including discipline, receptivity and bliss, to achieve a final union.

The poets of Virasaivism also protested against the social evils of caste, gender inequality and court corruption. The best known of these poets, Basavanna, was a Brahmin by birth,

and a senior court official by appointment, who threw away his sacred thread to establish a community of equals. Perhaps the most vivid statement of the vision of Virasaivism is his poem number 820, in which he sets up a comparison between institutionalised religion and the living spirit (see the discussion by A.K. Ramanujan in his Introduction).

3. vacana

Such a radical vision of the world required a new form of expression. Indeed, the decision to create the *vacana* was both a political and an aesthetic choice. At the time, courts in the Kannada-speaking region patronised Sanskrit poetic genres, such as the *champu*, in which Brahmin poets and court scribes eulogised gods and kings, while Jains used it to compose hagiographies of the founders of their religion. Other Kannada poets used Tamil metres and genres.

By contrast, the *vacana* is a kind of free-verse, without any obvious metrical line or stanza. *Vacana* means 'speaking,' and the poets chose this word to indicate the immediacy of their words. Not the laboured, finely-wrought jewels of learned pundits, but the direct and heart-felt emotions of ordinary people.

Here, once again, we see the orality of Indian literature, this time deliberately highlighted to make a social and political point. The poems draw on popular idioms, stock phrases and common images, but
it is the creative employment of this folk language, a juxtaposition that refreshes an old metaphor, for example, that lends the *vacana*s such power.

4.   Personalised poems

The *vacana*s are radical in another way, too. Although all forms of bhakti express a personal and intense devotion to god, in contrast to the abstraction of most courtly and Sanskritic literature, the Kannada poems take this to the extreme. They speak of Siva, but they also speak of the poet, of his personal life, and of his intimacy with Siva. Devara Dasimayya, the poor weaver, for instance, explains that Siva knows the 'secret of my body' while he (the poet) knows the 'secret of your [Siva's] breath' and 'that's why your body is in mine' (poem 120).

Mahadeviyakka, the woman poet regarded as the most accomplished of them all, reveals her raw emotions as lover of Siva, struggling against her physical body to reach union. Basavanna, the religious seeker serving as court minister, similarly broods over his entrapment in the political world. And all the poets speak in their own voice, in their mother-tongue, as themselves and not as an impersonal sage discoursing in a language of privilege.

5.   Virasaivas as alternative community

It was Basavanna, however, who had the power to put the poets' ideas into practice. As a minister in the court at Kalyan, he gathered poets, thinkers and common men and women who shared the Virasaiva ideals of social equality and religious reform. The Virasaivas became a religious community without priests. The traditionalists grew frightened and wanted to crush the movement. The chance came when the growing community of Virasaivas celebrated a wedding between a Brahmin and an Untouchable. Both bride and groom had renounced their caste-by-birth and embraced the commonality of all persons as servants of the Lord. When the king ordered the fathers of the bride and groom to be killed in the streets, a riot ensued and Basavanna, appalled by the violence, withdrew into

retirement. The Virasaiva community he had established broke up and scattered. But it survived and today is a prominent caste in the Kannada region, numbering in the millions. The radical vision has been tempered and has made accommodations with the social conventions, but it has not disappeared.

6. Conclusion

These poems would go on to inspire other forms of bhakti poetry, in which men and women sang to god in their mother-tongue, in Marathi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Assamese, and Punjabi. The *vacana* poets of a thousand years ago, speaking in their local language, contributed to the greatest of pan-Indian literary movements.

<u>Reading</u>

Required
 Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva*

Recommended
 Appendix I and Appendix II, *Speaking of Siva*
 Nagaraj, 'Critical tensions in Kannada literary culture'
 Dimock, *Literatures of India*, pp.165-170

<u>Discussion topics/questions/exercises</u>

1. Compare these poems to Siva with those to Visnu in last week's reading. Using specific lines and images, can you identify differences or similarities in the conception of god?
2. The translator has chosen to call this collection 'Speaking of Siva.' In what ways do these poets 'speak of Siva'?
3. The biographical headnotes to each section helps us to understand some of the details of the poems. Pick one of the four poets and find links between the life and the poems.

Week 8: Hindi devotional poetry

<u>Outline</u>

A. Devotional literature: overview
 1. pan-Indian literary movement
 2. reasons for geographic spread
  b. itinerant poets and musicians
  c. multi-lingualism
  d. common cultural language of myth and art
  e. influential devotional texts, Sanskrit and regional languages
  f. two overarching schools
   i. worship of Siva (and Sakti), or Saivism
   ii. worship of Visnu (incl. Krishna & Rama), or Vaisnavism

            iii. in north, Vaisnava bhakti more popular than Saiva
          iv. in south, Saiva bhakti has wider social base than
             Vaisnava

  B. North Indian bhakti, 14-18th c. CE, two types
    1. *nirguna* or impersonal: god without attributes
    2. *saguna* or personal bhakti: god with attributes
  C. Impersonal bhakti poets
    1. monism, cf. vacana poets
    2. critique of established religion
    3. three key poets
       i. Kabir, Muslim weaver
       ii. Ravidas, Untouchable
       iii. Guru Nanak, founder of Sikh religion
  D. Personal bhakti poets
    1. sang of both Siva and Visnu
    2. two major poets sang of Visnu (as Radha-Krishna)
       i. Surdas, blind poet
       ii. Mirabai, female poet
  E. Radha-Krishna story
    1. story of erotic love favourite theme of personal Vaisnava bhakti
  F. Tulsi Das, 16-17 c. CE
    1. most famous personal Vaisnava bhakti poet
    2. composed *Ramcaritmanas*, retelling of Rama story in Hindi

<u>Lecture</u>

1.   Overview: devotional literature

Before looking in detail at the third and last form of bhakti literature, in medieval north India, it would be useful to first consider this movement as a whole. Perhaps the most striking aspect is its spread—no other literary development could properly be called 'pan-Indian'—which we can map like a monsoon sweeping over the subcontinent. Beginning, as we have seen with the Saiva Nayanmars and Vaisnava Alvars in Tamil in the period 600-900 C.E., the singing of personal devotion to a god in one's mother-tongue moved north to the Kannada-speaking region and the *vacana* tradition that flourished from about 900 to 1200 C.E.

Bhakti soon crossed another linguistic boundary and sprung up in the Marathi-speaking region to the north and west, whence it moved into the Hindi heartland and flourished in the 14th to 16th centuries (the topic of this week's study). From there it completed its journey by inspiring bhakti poet-saints in Bengali, in roughly the same period, and in Assamese, where it continued to develop into the 18th century.

How did this transmission of literary form and religious idea take place over such a large geography? One reason is surely the poets themselves, who left behind the domestic role of the householder or wife and became wandering singers, bards and mystics. When attempting to understand their popularity, we should emphasise that they sang songs, and that many were musicians.

Another factor is the multi-lingualism of Indian society, in which most people speak two if not three languages. It takes only one bi-lingual speaker for a story or a song to leap an (extremely porous) linguistic border. There was also a common cultural language, the

stories and iconography of Siva and the Goddess, Rama and Krishna, which were familiar in every region of the country.

The popularity of bhakti poetry was also spread by other devotional texts. In addition to the *Bhagavad Gita*, two other Sanskrit texts were influential in disseminating the devotion of Krishna— the *Bhagavata Purana* (c. 500-1000 C.E.) and the *Gita Govinda* (12th c. C.E.) – especially as they were translated into regional languages. The devotion of Rama was popularised by the Sanskrit Rama story and by its retellings in regional languages. Finally, because bhakti was a literary expression of a religious movement, we have to recognise that it was spread not only by poets but also by religious leaders.

As a pan-Indian phenomenon, then, bhakti has two overarching types:
1. the worship of Siva (and the goddess, Sakti), known as Saivism
2. the worship of Visnu in the form of Rama and Krishna (and Radha), known as Vaisnavism.

A few poets, such as the 14th-century Vidyapati who sang of both Saiva and Vaisnava gods in Maithili (a dialect of Hindi), crossed this divide. But in most traditions, one or the other was dominant. At the risk of a generalisation, we may say that in the north devotion to Visnu was more popular than devotion to Siva. Vaisnava bhakti was also strong in the south (for instance, the Tamil Alvars), but it tended to be patronised by Brahmins and other high castes, whereas the popularity of Siva (as in the Kannada *vacana*s) was more widespread.

2. North Indian bhakti

Turning to north Indian bhakti, we find another dichotomy:
1. personal (*saguna*) bhakti, worship of a supreme god with attributes (*guna*)
2. impersonal (*nirguna)* bhakti, belief that god has no discernible attributes

As with all classifications, this dichotomy breaks down when applied to individual poems and sometimes to poets. Nevertheless, *nirguna* and *saguna* are native categories that provided literary culture with a language in which to discuss the poems.

3. Impersonal (*nirguna*) poets

Impersonal bhakti in north India is the more austere and less popular form (in terms of its social base), but it inspired several fine poets. This form of bhakti conceives of god as nameless, invisible and ineffable (despite the songs). Like certain forms of Saiva bhakti in south India (the Kannada *vacana*s, for example), impersonal bhakti is critical of the institutionalisation of Hinduism. Religion should be formless, that is, without temple, priests, external rituals or texts.

The best-known impersonal bhakti poet is Kabir, the Muslim weaver, whose gnomic verses exposed the folly of any distinction between 'Muslim' and 'Hindu' in the eyes of god. Another impersonal bhakti poet, who had good reason to reject conventional Hindu tradition, was Ravidas. As a shoe-maker who touched the polluting skin of dead animals, he was considered an Untouchable. A third great name is Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion.

4. Personal (*saguna*) poets

The personal bhakti poets fit more easily into prevailing Hindu tradition, both then and now. *Saguna* tradition in north India embraced both Siva and Visnu, but most poets tended to sing in praise of Visnu in the form of his avatars Rama and Krishna (due to the predominance of Rama and Krishna mythologies in north India). One of the best-loved poet in this tradition is Surdas, a blind singer and musician, who composed more than 100,000 songs of high literary quality in Braj (a regional dialect of Hindi). Surdas, who crossed the divide into impersonal devotionalism, drew on the love story of Radha and Krishna, which legend holds took place in the Braj region.

Then there is Mirabai, a 16th-century Rajput princess, who also composed lyrics to Krishna. But she, too, was something of an outcast. According to legend, she considered herself married to Krishna, not to her husband, and she defied all social taboos, enacting her love by dancing in the streets. Both she and Surdas were drawn by the erotic possibilities of the Radha-Krishna story.

5.   Radha-Krishna

Indeed, the Radha-Krishna story is the dominant mythic narrative in north Indian bhakti (in Hindi as well as Bengali and Assamese). This story was widespread throughout north India, particularly through its literary exposition in the *Gita Govinda* and countless folk songs and tales. It is a story of erotic and illicit love, as in most tellings both Radha, the cowherd girl, and Krishna, the cowherd, are married to other people. In seeking to experience this mystical union with Krishna, male poets such as Surdas assume the role of Radha. This literary transvestism places the male poet farther outside the social conventions that he has left behind in his life as a wandering bard.

6.   Tulsi Das

The third and last great personal bhakti poet is Tulsi Das (16th-17th c. CE), who composed the *Ramcaritmanas*, a devotional recasting of the Rama story in Hindi. It is testament to his subtlety of imagination that, although he is *saguna* poet, he wove elements of impersonal devotion into his epic poem of more than 40,000 lines. In a famous simile, used to illustrate his theology, Tulsi Das says that water, snow and hail all have the same substance and that their differences lie only in material form. He is also a skilful story-teller and adapts the Sanskrit text of the story to make the monkey ally (Hanuman) and the vulture ally (Garuda) selfless devotees of Rama. Finally, for Tulsi Das as for many other bhakti poets, chanting the name of God is sufficient for salvation, a soteriology that led directly to modern Hare-Krishna movement in the West.

Reading

Required
    Hawley, *Songs of the Saints of India*

Recommended
    Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices*
    Hawley, *The Memory of Love*
    Dharwadker, *Kabir*
    Bhattacharya, *Love Songs of Chandidas*
    McGregor, 'The progress of Hindi, Part 1'

Essay #2 (select one of the following and write a 1,250-word essay)

1. You have read poems by 11 bhakti poets (1 in Tamil, 4 in Kannada and 6 in Hindi). Which poet best illustrates the central idea of bhakti, the intense and personal devotion to god? Be sure to cite specific lines and images when making your argument.
2. Two of the poets are women (Mahadeviyakka in Kannada and Mirabai in Hindi). If we can say that gender influences their poetry, does it do so in similar ways? Again, refer to particular lines and images. Does a 'gendered' poetry contradict the principle of the oneness of all things?
3. Among the Hindi poets, choose one impersonal (*nirguna*) and one personal (*saguna*) poet. Then analyse how these religious ideas are expressed in their poems. Is the dividing line between these two religious ideas sharp or blurred?

Week 9: Oral literature

Outline

A. Overview
   1. orality inherent in most Indian texts
   2. oral and written as complementary techniques
   3. frame story of *Mahabharata*
   4. complex poetry performed and transmitted orally
B. Western and Indian narrative genres compared
C. Indian folktales
   1. *katha* genre broader than 'folktale' but close correspondence
      a. *nithi katha*: didactic tale
      b. *vrat katha*: tale told during women's fast
      c. Rama *katha*: any story about Rama
   2. Indian tales include many Grimm's tales, with twists
      a. Indian Cinderellas suffer but differently
      b. Indian Oedipus tales with different point of view
   3. folktale types that appear to be distinctly Indian
   4. characteristics of Indian folktales
      a. tale-within-a-tale
      b. tales about tales and telling
      c. domestication of gods and heroes
      d. inner power of women
      e. reversal of social hierarchy
      f. strong moral indictment of wrong-doers
D. Ambivalence of folktales in nationalist debate
   1. oral tales represent pre-colonial, traditional India
   2. oral tales represent unwanted 'old' ways

Lecture

1.Overview

As we have seen repeatedly over the past weeks, from the Vedas to bhakti poetry, orality is inseparable from Indian literature. Many texts are oral in composition, performance and transmission, or some combination of those three processes. Some texts also demonstrate the imprint of oral tradition in their frame-story and/or their dialogical form.

The main point here is that oral and written are complementary, not contradictory, techniques within Indian literary tradition. Most of the 'authors' or poets we have considered did not write. That lesser task was given to scribes who wrote down songs and stories on palm-leaf, birch bark and (after 1200 C.E.) paper. Remember the story of Vyasa ('author' of the *Mahabharata*) dictating to poor Ganesa who had to write as fast as the sage spoke. These manuscripts then became a physical record, sometimes used as an aide de memoir by later singers and tellers.

A learned poet (like Nammalvar) might compose lines too complex to have been taken directly from oral tradition, but his poem will have been sung and heard. And it may later be written down and passed to others. And even the most metrically complex poem or (jumping ahead) the most sophisticated novel will bear the traces of orality, in the images or phrases they have borrowed from the vast repertoire of Indian oral tradition. This week we will explore that tradition in the form of the folktale

2.   Oral narratives

Indian languages have literally hundreds of terms for different genres of oral narrative but most would fit (with minor adjustments) into one of four major western categories:

Western genres	Indian genres
1. folktale/story	katha, katai
2. song/ballad	git, pattu, pad
3. legend/history	caritra, carita
4. myth	purana

3.   Indian folktales

Of these, perhaps the first genre of tale has the closest correspondence between western and Indian understandings. Classical Sanskrit literary theory defines *katha* as a 'romantic story' with several sub-types. Popular understanding, however, views *katha* as a broader category containing many kinds of oral stories. Most are fictions, tales of wonder and discovery, but some are mythic, like the *vrat katha* told by women during religious fasts. And, in fact, the label can be applied to almost any text, for example 'Rama *katha*.'

There is also the *nithi katha* ('moral tale' or 'didactic tale') such as the early and well-known Sanskrit collections of the *Pancatantra* and the *Jataka*, as well as the more diverse and later *Kathasaritsagara*. These compilations, however, are only the surface of an oral tradition that is a vast ocean of storytelling.

Folktales told in the regional languages are beyond counting—even today one can find dozens of tales within a single village. Many of these stories are part of an Indo-European folktale tradition, whose influence is strong even in the Dravidian languages of south India. Cinderella suffers in Telugu and Assamese, as she does in Danish and Italian, but her suffering is inflected by local cultures. The plot may the same, or very similar, but the ethos will differ. Likewise, at first it appears that India has no Oedipus tales, until one realises that they do exist but are told from the mother's and not the son's point of view.

There are also many 'Indian' folktales, that is, stories that (as far as we know, from printed sources) are found only in the subcontinent. On the other hand, are types of stories, the mother-in-law tale, for example, that seem to be more popular in India than in other known tale traditions. Then there are hundreds of tribal tales that differ from the traditions of their Hindu and Muslim neighbours as much as those traditions differ from Japanese or African folktales.

If we had to identify the key features of 'Indian' folktales, we would begin with the tale-within-a-tale. Likewise, there is a great deal of meta-material, such as tales about telling tales and about the consequences of listening to them. Although this is not exclusive to the subcontinent, it is nonetheless exceptionally prominent.

Another feature would be the tendency of these tales to domesticate the great gods and goddesses. When villagers or townspeople tell tales of Rama, that god/hero sneezes and Sita has her period. Folktales everywhere tend to reverse hierarchies, and in India this means that Brahmins appear as greedy and foolish pedants. Women, who are often the tale-tellers, are shown to possess inner power, wit and wisdom. Indeed, because India has such dominant literary texts (like the epics and myths), with normative characters and codes of conduct, oral tradition has easy targets. Finally, I would also suggest that Indian tales have an intense moral energy that seeks out the wrongdoer and punishes him or her.

In terms of sheer number of tales, tellers and tellings, plus their historical longevity, these stories are the most popular in all of Indian literature.

4.   Ambivalence of folktales

As in nineteenth-century Europe, folktales (and folklore in general) played a significant but ambivalent role in public debates about Indian nationalism and modernity.

Collections of tales, in Tamil, Bengali and Marathi, were among the first printed books in Indian languages. At first, during the first decade of the nineteenth century, they were printed to enable colonial officers to learn regional languages. By the 1830s, they were used in the fledgling public school system, and by the end of the century they were pressed into service in the nationalist movement. Folktales, it was argued, represented an 'Indian tradition' untrammelled by colonialism (or even Islamic influence). The folklore pursuits of Tagore, for example, are well-known, but many other leading nationalists and writers of his period collected and published oral tales.

At the same time, however, leading political and cultural leaders wanted to reform tradition, or at least many traditional practices.   Folktales, with their unsophisticated ideas and superstitious characters, were not considered capable of being the literary vehicle of modernity. That role would fall to the novel. Still, as we will see in later weeks, the village setting with its oral traditions, is central to many important Indian novels, from the earliest period to the latest Booker-winner, in English and in regional languages.

This ambivalence of folktales— idealised symbol of pre-colonial India but not modern— continues to stimulate literary and cultural debates today.

<u>Reading</u>

Required
        Ramanujan, *Folktales from India*

Recommended,

> Ramanujan, 'Introduction', *Folktales from India*
> Ramanujan, *A Flowering Tree*
> Blackburn, *Moral Fictions*
> Narayan, *Storytellers, Saints and Scoundrels*

Discussion topics/questions/exercises

1. In his Introduction to this week's reading, A.K. Ramanujan explains why he arranges the tales into categories . What, in his terms, are the differences between 'male-centred' and 'female-centred' tales?
2. Which tales most resemble European ones? Which appear more distinctly Indian?
3. The first tale in this week's reading is entitled 'Tell it to the walls.' What does this story suggest about telling folktales?

UNIT III MODERN LITERATURE

Modern Indian literature is a rich admixture of traditional and European elements that began to coalesce in the mid-nineteenth century and produced its own distinctive literary culture. One overarching shift from pre-modern to modern periods is the reversal in cultural status for poetry and prose. Prose fiction was written in Indian languages (mainly Persian and Urdu) prior to contact with European models but few texts had the high cultural status of verse, in which the Vedas, epics, myths and devotional texts were composed. From the late 18th century onward, however, Indians began to experiment with various prose forms, such as biography, sketch, memoir and history. Still, literary modernity was judged and expressed in the novel, which developed from the 1850s.

This final unit, which concentrates on the novel and short story, does not include poetry, drama or other forms of prose such as journalism, biography and criticism. Poetic forms, including various genres of bhakti verse and song, continue to be composed and performed right through to the present. Modern Indian drama emerged in the Parsi theatre tradition, which flourished mainly in Bombay and other Indian cities from the 1860s to 1930s.

Week 10: The Novel 1: Bengali

Outline

A. Overview
   1. modern literature developed as part of Bengal Renaissance, social reform movement in Calcutta during 19th c.
   2. Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1775–1833) and
      Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)
B. Bengal Renaissance

     1. modern literature as literary wing of this cultural movement
     2. began in late 18th c. with Roy, ends in early 20th c. with Tagore
     3. centred in Calcutta, political and cultural capital of colonial India
     4. Brahmo Samaj social reforms at heart of movement
     5. cultural institutions in Calcutta also contributed

C. The Indian novel
   1. Two unconvincing theories of emergence of Indian novel
     a. translation of English Victorian novel into Bengali
     b. traditional Indian story content put into new genre
   2. Indian novel emerged from conjunction of factors:
     a. Indian-owned printing industry from 1830s
     b. rise of Indian journalism from same period
     c. availability of English/European models
     d. Indian elite interested in those models and traditional stories

D. Modern novel
   1. books with 'novel' on title page from 1800, but more romance than social realist novel
   2. first modern novel: Pyarichand Mitra's *Alaler Gharer Dulal* ('The Spoilt Son of a Rich Family'), 1855-1857
   3. form later developed by three Bengali writers: Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1938)
   4. early novels in other languages
     a. social reform novel
     b. comic novel
     c. detective novel
     d. historical novel

E. Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee (1894-1950)
   1. family had both doctors and professional storytellers
   2. born in village, educated in Calcutta, various occupations, mainly school teacher
   3. 17 novels and 20 short story collections
   4. stories move between village and city, as author did

F. *Pather Panchali* (1929)
   1. Banerjee's famous novel; with two later volumes becomes the 'Apu Trilogy'; Satyajit Ray adapts as film
   2. largely autobiographical but story reveals boy's psyche

<u>Lecture</u>

1. Overview

As we have seen with other developments, modern Indian literature emerged as the literary wing of a social and religious reform movement, underpinned by nationalism. This movement, known as the Bengal Renaissance, developed over the course of the 'long' nineteenth century in Calcutta, bookended by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1775–1833) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). In addition, to Tagore, a key literary figure was the dramatist Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824–1873), who wrote an influential epic-poem on the Rama story in the style of *Paradise Lost*.

2. Bengal Renaissance

The home of the Bengal Renaissance was Calcutta, the capital of British India and the historical centre of modern Indian literature. While the slightly more provincial colonial

metropolis of Madras, as well as other cities, contributed to the growth of a modern literary culture, it flourished first and most widely in the capital of the province of Bengal, on the banks of the Hooghly River.

At the heart of the Bengal Renaissance was the Brahmo Samaj, which campaigned against child marriage, widow burning, caste prejudice and religious superstition and inspired three generations of urban intellectuals to question prevailing conventions. The 'renaissance' refers to the reformers' search for a more humane society by returning to the ideals of the Upanishads and Vedas. Indian reformers were aided, for the most part, by British colonial scholars (the early Orientalists), who also plumbed ancient India for historical and linguistic knowledge. It is remarkable that Calcutta was the home of so many institutions of learning in this period: Asiatic Society (est. 1784), College of Fort William (1800), Hindu College (1817), Sanskrit College (1824) and University of Calcutta (1857).

3.   The Indian novel

But it is the novel that is the touchstone of literary modernity in India, as elsewhere. The Indian novel is often explained as merely a European transplant, a translation from English into Bengali that replaces the Vicar, the spinster and doctor in a Victorian novel for equivalent characters in an Indian village. Another, equally unconvincing argument, is that the Indian novel simply took the content of traditional prose narratives in Indian languages (such as *Brhat-katha*, 'Great-Story'; *Dasakumara Carita*, 'Tale of the Ten Princes; *Kathasaritsagara*, 'The Ocean of Stories'; *Sukasaptati*, 'Seventy Tales of a Parrot') and repackaged them in the new genre of the novel.

A more cogent argument, however, is that the Indian novel arose from the conjunction of several social and cultural factors that developed in the colonial encounter. First there was the development of an Indian-owned commercial printing and the need for educational textbooks in Indian languages from the 1830s onward. Second, the rise of Indian journalism, in many languages, created what it is now called the 'public sphere' and the need for a new language to understand colonial modernity. Added to this were the availability of European literary models (English, Russian and French) and an urban, sophisticated elite both eager to read them and (at the same time) steeped in a rich tradition of story literature in Sanskrit, Bengali, Persian, Tamil and Urdu. All this led to the emergence of the novel in Bengali, in Calcutta in the 1850s.

4.   Modern novel

From the early 19th century, the transliterated term 'novel' had appeared on the title page of several prose narratives in Urdu, but these publications were primarily collections of stories, sometimes not more than 20 pages in total. Similarly, books of prose narratives, mostly translations from Arabic and Persian romance story-literature, were plentiful on the streets of Calcutta in the first half of the nineteenth-century.

However, the first modern novel, with the talismanic social realism in a contemporary setting, was Pyarichand Mitra's *Alaler Gharer Dulal* ('The Spoilt Son of a Rich Family'), which was published serially in 1855-1857. The new genre was then developed by a trio of Bengali writers: Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1938). Novels soon appeared in Marathi, Urdu, Tamil and most other major regional languages by the end of the century. Novelists in these languages were themselves inspired, in part at least, by their Bengali counterparts.

Many early Indian novels took the form of social documents, often written to expose ills such child marriage, *sati* (widows who burned themselves on a pyre), caste prejudice and religious superstition. Other novels were historical, setting the story in Mughal times or later and often using 'history' (*caritra* or cognate terms) in the book's title. Comic novels, detective novels and some closer to a fictionalised memoir were also written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several of the early novels relied heavily on oral tradition, quoting proverbs, retelling folktales and recounting legends.

5.   Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee

Although born in the last years of the Bengal Renaissance,
Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee (1894-1950) is its direct heir and a pivotal figure in establishing the Indian novel as a modern literary form. For one thing, his biography reads like a recipe 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, Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee eventually went to college and then studied for an MA at Calcutta University. Due to lack of funds, however, he was unable to complete the course and took up teaching, although he also worked for the Society for the Protection of Cattle and as a clerk in a large estate. He soon returned to teaching, a profession he then followed until to his death in 1950. He taught mostly in rural settings, an experience reflected in his fiction. But his earlier life in Calcutta also enabled him to create a wide spectrum of characters.

In total, he published 17 novels, 20 collections of short stories and several miscellaneous books (a travelogue, an autobiography, a translation of *Ivanhoe*, a Bengali grammar, and works on astrology and the occult). His eclecticism is notable but not uncommon among educated Bengalis and others of the time. Despite his eventual fame, he never lived a comfortable life. His first wife died in childbirth a year after their marriage; he remarried decades later and had a son.

6.   *Pather Panchali*

Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee's first piece of fiction, a short story, was published in 1922. Seven years later he came to literary fame with the publication of his novel *Pather Panchali*, and two subsequent volumes. The resulting full novel, known as *The Apu Trilogy,* was quickly translated into several languages and was brought to an even wider international audience with the film adaptation by Satyajit Ray in the 1950s

The title of this book eludes translation. The first word is the genitive case of 'road', while the second refers to a genre of long narrative poems in Bengali. 'Song of the Road' has been the least inaccurate choice of translators. One translator, T.C. Clark, however, prefers 'Bends in the Road' because the novel follows a disjointed journey, with frequent breaks and abrupt transitions. Certainly the merit of the novel lies more in its emotional atmosphere and characters than in plot structure or suspense. Rarely has an Indian novelist entered into the mind of a character as successfully as Banerjee does Apu's. We are also treated to beautiful descriptions of the Bengali countryside. This is largely an autobiographical novel, which gives it a ring of truth but also enables the author to enhance fact with the dramatic power of fiction.

<u>Reading</u>

Required
> Banerji [Banerjee], *Pather Panchali*

Recommended
> Chaudhuri, 'The Bengali novel'
> Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*
> Kumar Das, *History of Indian Literature,* pp. 197-218
> Granoff, *A Strange Attachment and Other Stories*

<u>Discussion topics/questions/exercises</u>

1. *Pather Panchali* is said to be largely an autobiographical novel. Young Apu leaves the village and becomes an urban intellectual, like the author. In fact, this movement can be seen as a symbol of Indian modernity.
2. The novel is not written as social realism and does not aim at reform. Rather it is an exploration of the past through an older man's reconstruction of his young boy's mind.   However, it does depict harsh conditions. Do you think this 'poetic' novel is more effective than the 'documentary' novel in depicting social realities?
3. More than once the author comments directly or indirectly on types of literature. What do these comments suggest?

Week 11: The Short Story 1 (1890-1950)

<u>Outline</u>

A. Sources of the short story
   1. scholars suggest traditional short fiction in India
   2. more likely source is short prose forms in colonial period
      a. sketches, anecdotes, journalism from late 18th c.
      b. popular magazines with stories from late 19th c.
B. First attempts
   1. 'first' story in Bengali in 1873
   2. form developed by other Bengalis, incl. Tagore
      a. best-known as poet but fiction more influential
      b. European models but rooted in Bengali setting
C. Later stories
   1. many writers inspired by 1917 revolution
   2. Premchand in Hindi: irony and unflinching social realism
   3. Manto in Urdu: parody and tragedy of political events
D. Conclusion

<u>Lecture</u>

1. Sources of the short story

Many literary scholars (especially Indologists) attempt to trace the origins of the Indian short story to the vast corpus of short prose fiction in Sanskrit. The early collections of didactic short fiction, the *Jataka*, *Hitopadesa* and *Pancatantra* (all of which include the

'moral' in verse) are well known. Similar claims have also been made for Persian-derived prose forms, such as the *qissa* and the *dastan*.

All of these (Sanskrit and Persian-derived forms) were rewritten in regional languages, and many were available in printed collections from the early 19th century. However, the radical disjuncture between this story-literature and the modern Indian short story does not support such a thesis. The atmosphere of romance and adventure, the rambling narration and florid vocabulary of the earlier forms cannot be mapped onto the modern short story. In fact, the traditional prose narratives played a more significant role in the development of the Indian novel, which padded out its pages with excerpts and episodes from these sources.

A more fruitful search for sources of the modern Indian short story would begin with the diverse forms of short prose that appeared in the colonial metropolitan centres from the late 18th century. Although these were at first written in English, they soon appeared in regional languages, too.

Sketches of urban life, miscellaneous notes and anecdotes were encouraged by the expanding newspaper and periodical culture of the first half of the 19th century. More than one major Indian writer worked, however briefly, as a journalist, and they all read newspapers and periodicals. By the end of the century, several weekly magazines were printed in every regional language, typically with a piece of short fiction, often directed to women. In the 1920s and 1930s, literary magazines edited by writers themselves brought new writing to new audiences and helped to generate a public debate on literature. Here, if any literary form can be said to have a beginning, is where the Indian short story began.

2.   First attempts

The modern short story, like the novel, developed first in Bengali in Calcutta. Indeed, most of the early experimenters in the short form were also novelists. Literary scholars have identified the first modern Indian story, in a Bengali journal in 1873, as 'Madhumati' by Purnachandra Chattopadhyay (younger brother of the novelist Bankim Chandra). Its theme of a young girl's amnesia is strikingly original for the time. But the 'mature' form appeared two decades later when Rabindranath Tagore wrote six stories that appeared in consecutive issues of another literary journal in Calcutta. One of these six was the famous 'Postmaster' (included in this week's reading). By about 1900, similarly modern short stories had appeared in the major regional languages.

Tagore, though best-known for his mystical poetry, was probably more influential through his fiction. And, while his novels are admired, his enduring reputation now rests more squarely on his (more than one hundred) short stories. He read widely, of course, and was familiar with Edgar Allan Poe's short stories as well as (through family members and translation) those of Maupassant and Chekov. These may have helped him to visualise the new form, but he filled it with the lives of ordinary Bengalis, not poor peasants necessarily, but common men and women, described with emotional acumen.

3.   Later stories

Only two decades after these early Bengali short stories, the new genre gained added impetus from the radical politics of those who wrote them. The Russian Revolution of 1917 was an inspiration for many young writers looking for models of social change, as the nationalist movement gained momentum but lacked a clear plan and leader (Gandhi was yet to take centre stage).

This shift is clear in the (more than 300) stories of Premchand, the Hindi writer who was equally skilled as a novelist (see Week 12). It is difficult now to appreciate just how radical his stories were in their time, but one can see the contrast between the somewhat patrician tone of Tagore and the realism of Premchand(1880-1936). One of his most famous stories ('The Shroud') assaults the reader with two of the most despicable characters in world literature. A father and son, lazy and self-centred, uninterested in the labour pains suffered by wife and mother inside the hut. She dies, but they drink the money they have and there is no shroud.

Premchand's story included in his week's reading, 'The Chess Players,' is somewhat atypical in that it is set in the mid-19th century, before and during the Revolt/Mutiny of 1857-58. But the ruthless yet ironic depiction of the indolence and corruption of the nobility is trademark Premchand.

The radical politics of Indian literature of this period is shown again in the writing of Sadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955). Manto, a Muslim who wrote in Urdu, is unusual in that he specialised in writing short stories, rather than being a novelist who also wrote in the shorter form. A translator of Wilde, a man put on trial six times for obscenity, Manto did not fit the mould of the average Indian author. His character and his career were indicated by his first story ('Tamasha' ['Spectacle']), which parodied the historical massacre of Indians by British troops in 1919. He continued to chronicle what he saw as the disintegration of society through the madness it induced in individuals, culminating in a series of stories about the incomprehensible slaughter of Partition. One of his most anthologised stories is 'Toba Tek Singh', in which the governments of India ('Hindustan' is his word) and Pakistan decided to exchange inmates in their mental asylums, displaying the violence and distrust left behind by Partition.

4. Conclusion

The short story, more than the novel, reflects the cultural heterogeneity of India. It is written in more languages, by more people, in greater numbers and reaches a wider readership than the longer genre. Each year new stories are printed and published in hundreds of newspapers and magazines, and collections, in every regional language. The Indian short story is a literary form for everyone, in provincial towns as well as cities. It is also revealing that the short story in English does not have the same cultural status as the novel in English, which has scaled the international heights of fame.

Reading

 Required
        The following stories in Chaudhuri, *Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature:*

        'The Postmaster'
        'A Topsy-Turvy Tale'
        'Blue Star'
        'The Jackal-Faced Tongs'
        'The Chess Players'
        'Peerun'
        'The Black Shalwar'

 Recommended

Kumar Das, *History of Indian Literature,* pp. 219-310
Tharu, *Women Writing in India*, Vol. 2

Discussion topics/questions/exercises

1. Tagore's short story 'The Postmaster' is often said to represent literary modernity in India. What elements of the story support this claim?
2. Some of the stories in this week's reading were written decades after 'The Postmaster.' Can you detect a different tone in these later stories?
3. Many of these stories (especially by Manto and Premchand) are political satires in miniature. Do you find these satires effective in making a social or political point?
4. All the stories have been translated (from Bengali, Hindi and Urdu). While reading, were you conscious of this, or was the translation as unobtrusive as transparent glass?

Week 12: The Novel 2: Hindi

Outline
A. Cultural status of Hindi
    1. most widely spoken language but short literary history
    2. after medieval period languished until mid-19th c.
    3. first Hindi novel in 1890
B. Premchand (1880-1936)
    1. 'father' of modern Hindi literature
    2. social reformer, nationalist, Gandhian
C. *Godan* ('Gift of a Cow',1936)
    1. Premchand's last novel and his best
    2. panoramic view of India in1930s, with new political realities
D. Hindi novel after Premchand
    1. psychological novels of Jainenedra Kumar (1905-1988)
    2. historical novels of Vrundavan Lal Varma (1889-1969)
    3. rural novels of Phanishwar Nath Renu (1921-1977)

1. Overview

Although Hindi is the most widely spoken language in India and one of two 'official' languages (English is the other), it has only recently developed its own literary identity. Literary Hindi produced a sophisticated and substantial corpus of medieval bhakti poetry as well as an epic retelling of the Rama story. However, from the Mughal period until the second half of the nineteenth century, the Hindi language was overshadowed by the prestige of Persian and Urdu, which were patronised by both the Mughal courts and the British colonial government.

Hindi, in fact, was artificially separated from Hindusthani (a blend of Hindi and Urdu but often called 'Urdu') only in the nationalist period by employing the devanagri script (derived from Sanskrit script) and emphasising a Sanskritised vocabulary (over against the Perso-Arabic script used to write Urdu, with its greater amount of Persian vocabulary). Hindi was also slow to find its way into print, and a Hindi novel first appeared in the 1890s. During the first decades of the 20th century, the detective novel (for some reason) flourished in

Hindi, while other novels were largely based on traditional romance story-literature, legend and myth

2.   Premchand

This all changed with the social realist fiction of Premchand, who single-handedly dragged Hindi literature into the modern world. He wrote at least a dozen novels and published several collections of short stories.

A biographical profile of Premchand (1880-1936) is remarkably similar to that of Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee, author of *Pather Panchali*. Premchand was a social reformer (a supporter of the Arya Samaj and then Gandhi), born in a village, educated in a major city, did not complete university education, went to work as a teacher in the countryside and died with both literary fame and financial debts.

The key to understanding his fiction is his commitment to social and political reform, and it is relevant that his life-span paralleled that of the nationalist movement. An event in his early life reveals a great deal. Born Dhanpat Rai, he published his first stories (more than a hundred) in Urdu under the pen-name 'Nawab Rai.' One of these early volumes was banned by the British colonial government in 1909 and all available copies burned as politically subversive. Then he changed his name to Premchand and continued to write in Hindi.

His early novels are heavily imbued with Gandhian ideals of uplift, self-help and a romanticised vision of the village. Corrupt officials are reformed, Harijans are persuaded to give up meat-eating, money-lenders change and utopian endings prevail. Unlike Gandhi, however, anti-industrialism was a major concern for Premchand and in his writings. In one novel (*Rangbhumi*, 'The Stage'), he sets up a struggle between a blind beggar, Surdas (echoing the famous medieval bhakti poet), and a cigarette factory owned by an Indian Christian. Surdas is a virtuous and contented man, full of religious piety, but the newly-built factory is surrounded by vice and villainy. In the end, Surdas is shot opposing the factory, but his gravestone falls over and kills his adversary.

In another novel (*Sevasadan*, 'House of Service'), a liberal Hindu lawyer is unable to reform his ne'er-do-well nephew and later, through a few unconvincing plot twists, is implicated in forcing a married Brahmin women into prostitution. He atones by funding an institution for former prostitutes, where they teach music and dance (a courtesan's professional skills), work with their hands and their children grow up in a healthy environment.

3.   *The Gift of a Cow*

Premchand's last novel (and his masterpiece) was written at a time of political rethinking in India. By the early 1930s, it was clear that Gandhi's movement would eventually deliver self-rule. But what would an independent India look like? What role would peasants have in a 'new' India? Premchand had already described the social, political and personal struggles of India in a dozen novels. Although rich landowners, humble servants, poor peasants, shopkeeper Muslims, educated Hindus and many more characters had moved through his fiction toward reform and moral uplift, the point of view was usually that of the urban reformer (or the blind beggar). Now, however, the imminence of freedom forced the novelist to rethink the political struggle and to imagine a panoramic dramatisation of the country's conflict. He would have to shift focus to the majority of India's population, the illiterate and poor peasants, low castes and Untouchables.

And in *Godan* ('The Gift of a Cow'), published in 1936, he created a social world that stands for all of India. There is the village, with every kind of character, good and bad, plus the zamindar (landowner). And there is also the city, where the zamindar mostly lives, along with other city types: modern girls, professionals, intellectuals and traditional Hindus and Muslims. These two sets of characters interact and influence events, but it is the village that is the emotional centre of the story.

The main character, Hori, is burdened with the tradition of a Hindu to have a cow in the family. Cheated by the evil Brahmin landowner (and money-lender), Hori remains loyal to the system he was born in and ends up dying in a ditch. His urban counterpart, the educated professor, is similarly unheroic. He fails to act on his self-professed Gandhian ideals, is violent at times and takes a self-serving vow of chastity.

Overall, the moral development of individuals, the driving force of Premchand's other novels, does not seem to alter the fate of society. Stupidity and caste prejudice have so weakened the willpower of potentially good characters that decline is unstoppable.

4. Hindi novel after Premchand

In the generation after Premchand, the Hindi novel was shaped by the Second World War and the new reality of Independence. Writers began to move away from external social realities and toward internal psychological conditions. This is best illustrated by the novels of Jainenedra Kumar (especially *Tyagpatra,* 'Resignation,'1937), while the novels of Vrundavan Lal Varma (e.g., *Jhansi ki Rani*, 'Queen of Jhansi',1946) elevated the historical novel to a new sophistication. On the other hand, perhaps the most highly regarded of these novelists is Phanishwar Nath 'Renu,' who wrote about rural India using colloquial speech registers. His novel *Maila Aanchal* ('The Soiled Border,' 1954) is considered the finest novel in Hindi after Premchand's 'The Gift of a Cow.'

Reading

Required
        Premchand, *Godan*

Recommended
        'Introduction' to *Godan* by Roadarmel
        Trivedi, 'The progress of Hindi, Part 2'
        Rubin, *The World of Premchand*

Discussion topics/questions/exercises

1. How do you interpret the ending of *Godan*? Is it, on balance, an optimistic or a pessimistic novel?
2. Is Hori to blame for his downfall? Or, like many of Thomas Hardy's heroes, is he brought low by things beyond his control?
3. Does the social message of the novelist impede or assist the aesthetic enjoyment of the novel?
4. Both *Godan* and Banerjee's *Pather Panchali* depict rural life (though in different decades and parts of the country). How do those depictions differ in technique? Do they seem to be two different settings or largely the same?

Week 13: The Novel 3: English

<u>Outline</u>

A. Overview
    1. paradox of Indians writing in English
        a. language of domination and of independence
        b. most nationalist leaders used English
    2. early novel dominated by three writers
        a. Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Ananda, R.K. Narayan
        b. all social reformers, except Narayan
B. R.K. Narayan (1906-2001)
    1. early years
        a. schoolmaster father, family spoke English
        b. read in home and school libraries
        c. good education, becomes teacher
        d. shifts to writing, meets rejection
    2. breakthrough in 1930
        a. novel accepted in London
        b. married
        c. though a Brahmin, worked for anti-Brahmin campaign
    3. his fiction
        a. not political writer, but concerned with social ills
        b. no one masterpiece
        c. fictional setting of Malgudi is main element
        d. compared to many, but closest to Graham Greene
    4. *The Guide* (1958)
        a. parody of Indian culture, gurus and deception
        b. also a powerful love story
        c. enigmatic ending

<u>Lecture</u>

1. Overview

Indian writing in English emerged from the colonial encounter as a paradox. Indians wanted and needed to learn the new language of modernity in order to understand as well as to extricate themselves from political and cultural domination. The language of the oppressor thus became the instrument of freedom. This is not to ignore the role that writing in Bengali and Tamil, to choose two important Indian languages, played in the Independence movement. However, it is instructive that from the beginning of the nationalist movement (Raja Ram Mohan Roy, c. 1772-1833) to the end (Gandhi, 1869-1948), its chief architects decided to publish their ideas in English. Gandhi wrote some of his works in Gujarati but later helped translate them into English.

Indian fiction 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.

Narayan was not a political writer in the conventional sense, yet it is characteristic of his depth of understanding that he wrote about the controversy of Indians writing in English. In one novel, a young man goes to America to study 'creative writing' and brings back a writing-machine. Before he leaves, his father berates his plan and screams, 'Going there to learn storytelling? Did Valmiki [legendary sage] go to America or Germany in order to learn to write his Ramayana?'

2. R.K. Narayan

It is no surprise to learn that Narayan's father was a schoolmaster and that the family spoke mostly in English. He also knew Tamil (his mother tongue) and picked up Kannada when his family moved to Mysore. Sanskrit he learned from his grandmother. But he wrote almost exclusively in English.

Narayan found a lot to read both in his father's library and in the schools where he taught, especially a prestigious school in Mysore. As a young boy and man, he was educated at a string of excellent (most Christian) schools in Madras and Mysore. A brief stint at teaching ended when he refused to take physical exercise classes. He then dedicated himself to writing, including short pieces for newspapers and magazines. In 1930, he wrote his first novel (*Swami and Friends*), which was rejected by more than one publisher and scoffed at by his family.

But he persisted and three years later everything changed. The novel was published in England (with the assistance of Graham Greene) and he was married (to a 15-year old cousin). Although a Brahmin himself, he also began to work for a journal in Madras that supported the campaign against Brahmin cultural and economic domination in south India.

3. His fiction

This last, minor biographical fact is revealing. Narayan was never a political writer, and sometimes his fiction has been criticised for its apolitical stance and wilful neglect of colonialism. However, he was too keen an observer of human nature to be indifferent to injustice. Most of his novels, in fact, explore some kind of social problem, though not the spectacular ones favoured by many of his contemporaries, such as colonial rule or caste oppression.

Narayan turned his attention instead to more hidden but no less invidious practices, for example, the canning of students and the baleful influence of astrology in determining Hindu marriages (he himself had to overcome 'crossed stars' in order to persuade his wife's family to agree to their marriage). The only politics he wrote about explicitly were domestic, the domination of wives by husbands. If he wrote about contemporary (or recent) political events, he did so from an oblique angle and with heavy irony, as in *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955).

Unlike most successful Indian authors, Narayan is not known for any single novel. He didn't write a masterpiece (which probably explains why, though shortlisted several times, he never received the Nobel Prize). Instead, all his books were equally brilliant, and especially in their evocation of Malgudi. While it is recognisably somewhere in southern Karnataka (around Mysore, where Narayan grew up), Malgudi is fictional. And like the most memorable fictional settings, it is both true to experience and manipulated for effect.

Significantly, Malgudi is neither a village nor a city (most contemporaneous Indian novels are set in one or the other). Narayan knew little of village life and cared less for the metropolis. Also, while Malgudi is a town, it is a particular type of town. Not a small market-town with a set of satellite villages, but a provincial town, with a college, a railway station and a library. Large enough to provide its creator with dramatic possibilities, yet small enough for the compression and coherence, despite the fragmented narration, that make the stories satisfying.

Narayan's fiction is often compared to that of William Faulkner (creation of a small-scale fictional world) and Guy de Maupassant (concise storytelling). But Malgudi bears little resemblance to Faulkner's rural county in the southern US, and although the French writer is similar to Narayan in his use of irony, a closer comparison would be with Graham Greene. At first any similarity appears dubious since Greene set his stories within overtly political and often international contexts, with elements of the thriller and spy novel. In this, however, Greene, like Narayan, was merely writing about what he knew.

The similarities between Greene and Narayan, which the former immediately spotted and led to a life-long friendship with his Indian protégé, lay beneath the external plot-line. There is the uncomplicated diction, the perfectly pitched dialogue and, above all, the detachment necessary to examine human relations. Both writers have a distance that removes sentimentality but enables insight into the full spectrum of human eccentricities and foibles, including love, always described with grace and humour.

4.   *The Guide*

The Guide (1958), Narayan's eighth novel, exhibits all these qualities.
It is both a parody of Indian culture (the susceptibility to the authority of gurus or spiritual masters) and a poignant love story. Its hero, Raju, is the guide of the title, who loiters at the local railway station, waiting to fleece the next innocent traveller. Before long he meets and falls in love with Rosie, ends up in jail for fraud and forgery but on release is mistaken for a holy saint by a villager. His reputation, seemingly but not entirely without his contrivance, grows and grows until he becomes known all over India, attracting film crews, even from Hollywood, when he undertakes a fast. But no plot summary can really tell the story of this novel, with its shift in narration, doubling back in time and layer upon layer of irony.

The novel weaves in multiple themes: deception, ambition, gullibility, the mystery of identity, fleeting fame and fortune. The charlatan guru, the devious Brahmin, is a trope of traditional Indian storytelling, but nowhere in the three thousand years of Indian literary history has the fake sheikh been so mercilessly yet so lovingly described. And although the enigmatic ending at first seems inadequate, a failure or inability to conclude the tale, we later we see that it sums up the entire novel.

Reading

Required
        Narayan, *The Guide*

Recommended
        Dharwadker, 'The historical-formation of Indian-English literature'
        Sadana, 'Writing in English'

Essay #3 (select one of the following and write a 1,250-word essay)

1. Is Raju in *The Guide* a hero or an anti-hero? Describe in some detail how Narayan's characterisation evokes both sympathy and disapproval. Consider also the reasons for Raju's rise and fall.
2. Compare the fictional setting of Malgudi (in *The Guide*) with that of the village in *Godan*. How does the setting influence the story in each novel? Is the setting equally important in the two novels?
3. R.K. Narayan wrote abbreviated versions of both the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Read one of these and then compare it with *The Guide*. Do you find any similarity in content? Does Narayan use similar storytelling techniques in both?
4. Considering both novels and all the short stories, identify three or four elements that represent modernity. Be sure to explain how these elements are 'modern' and are not found in earlier Indian literature.
5. OR Considering both novels and all the short stories, identify three or four elements that connect this 'modern' fiction with earlier texts in Indian literature. You are, implicitly, suggesting continuity rather than a leap into modernity. Make this an explicit argument.

Week 14: The Short Story 2 (1950-2000)

Outline

A. Overview
   1. shift from external social realities toward internal states
   2. dividing line of 1950 artificial but useful
   3. post-Independence milieu
      a. freedom delivered but poverty and casteism persist
      b. sense of loss, confusion
      c. neo-realism of 1970s and 1980s
B. North Indian writing
   1. specialisation in short story writing
   2. influence of traditional genres and foreign experiences
   3. key figures
      a. Nirmal Verma (1929-2005),
      b. Aamer Hussein (b. 1955)
      c. Mahashweta Devi (b. 1926)
      d. Naiyer Masud (b. 1936)
C. South Indian writing
   1. social realism and historical fiction still popular, middle-class alienation is new theme, esp. in women's lives
   2. key figures
      a. Kannada: U.R. Anantha Murthy (b. 1932)
      b. Malayalam: Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (1908-1994)
      c. Malayalam: O.V. Vijayan (b. 1930)
      d. Tamil: C.S. Lakshmi ('Ambai') (b. 1944)
   3. modern Tamil literature
      a. distinct from other regional literary cultures
      b. modern short story begins with 1930s journal (*Manikodi*)

1.   Overview

If the predominant themes of the first half-century of the Indian short story were the exposure of social inequities and the pursuit of political reform, these were supplemented in the second half-century by middle-class alienation and the search for identity. The dividing line of 1950 is, of course, somewhat artificial and certain themes cross over

The struggle for Independence was over in 1947 and now the new nation confronted itself alone, without the colonial master. In 1948 it went to war with its neighbour and twin, Pakistan. Communal riots swept over the country and poverty did not end with colonialism. In the immediate aftermath of this momentous event, the short stories of the1950s and 1960s tended to reveal a sense of loss, confusion and sometimes despair. Idealism gave way to alienation

While the politically motivated writing of the previous decades did not disappear and continued to produce good stories, the point of view shifted from an examination of external material conditions to a probing of the interior states of individuals. This is not quite accurate, either, for
many stories move between outside and inside worlds of the main characters. This exploration of the outer causes of inner conditions is what some scholars call the 'neo-realism' of the1970s and 1980s.

2.   North Indian writers

Several north Indian writers have focused on the short story and achieved literary reputations within and outside India. This specialisation in Hindi and Urdu, in particular, may suggest the influence of traditional prose forms (*qissa*, for instance) on the modern short story. Equally significant, however, has been the influence of foreign experiences and/or models on many of the best writers.

Foremost among them in Hindi is Nirmal Verma (1929-2005), who spent a decade living in Prague, where he learned Czech and translated many classics into Hindi. During that time, as he travelled widely across Europe, he wrote most of his best stories. Another example is Aamer Hussein (b. 1955), who spent many years in London (as a student and lecturer of Persian History and Urdu language. He now lives in London and is renowned as a fine craftsman of the short story, especially his use of language to convey shades of feeling.

Other writers are more rooted in their regional and national contexts. Mahashweta Devi (b. 1926), for example, is an academic and a committed political writer in Bengali, focusing on the lives of tribal communities. Naiyer Masud (b. 1936), whose family background includes Persian literature specialists, is an acclaimed Urdu short story writer.

3.   South Indian writers

Fiction in south Indian languages during this post-Independence period reflects many of the trends already noted. While social realism never disappeared (and has taken on a semi-documentary format in some cases), and the historical novel remains popular, many novels and short stories probe middle-class alienation, especially in women's lives.

The Kannada writer represented in this week's reading, U.R. Anantha Murthy (b. 1932), did a doctorate in the UK and became a professor of English when he returned to India in the

1970s. He later became head of the Sahitya Akademi, India's premier literary organisation, and earned an international reputation for his writing and lecturing. His most acclaimed novel, *Samskara* ('Rites for a Dead Man'), is a critical exploration of traditions among his own Brahmin caste.

Anantha Murthy also stirred up controversy by repeatedly stating that an Indian writer in English has a less direct or immediate contact with an Indian audience that does a writer in a regional language. Amit Chaudhuri has pointed out that the dissonance between writer and audience is in fact an important element of modernity and that Anantha Murthy's own short story 'A Horse for the Sun' (in this week's reading) make this point. When a sophisticated man visits his natal village and meets his illiterate childhood friend, communication breaks down.

Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (1908-1994) straddles the divide between the two periods of short story writing. While a young man, he became deeply involved in Gandhi's movement and spent time in jail in the 1940s.   He wrote most of his novels and stories in the 1950s and 1960s, using his mother-tongue, the language of the Muslim community in Kerala. He was passionate that he should write in this colloquial language and not in standardised Malayalam. In fact, when his works were 'translated' into this register, he objected strongly. His fiction carries both the fierce social realism of the early decades of the short story (criticism of the backward practices of his Muslim community) and the interiorisation of the later decades.

The other Kerala writer in this week's reading is O.V. Vijayan. Born in 1930, he wrote a small number of novels and short stories, published mostly in the 1970s and 1980s. Although his writing displays a concern for the poor, its defining quality is satire of ideology, of religion, and of politics.

C.S. Lakshmi is the only Tamil writer represented in this week's reading (and in Unit III as a whole) and for that reason a general comment is required. Modern Tamil literature, including the short story, developed along somewhat different lines than literatures in north Indian languages (and others in the south, too). More provincial and traditional, and to a certain extent defining itself over against the literary and intellectual domination of the Sanskrit-dominated north, Tamil literary culture was more inward-looking.

The Tamil short story made the transition from traditional story literature to modern fiction in the 1930s, principally through a journal (*Manikodi*) in Madras. Four major Tamil authors, with little exposure to European models, used this journal to experiment with the short form, writing stories mostly about domestic or everyday life, but with an eye for detail and often with dark humour. The individual struggling against blind social forces, without victory or even heroic resignation, presages the loss of idealism and cynicism of post-1950 fiction.

C.S Lakshmi was born in 1944, a decade after this breakthrough, and soon became the voice of Tamil feminism, as a critic, scholar and a writer. Her journalism ranges widely over current affairs, but she is best known (under the pen name 'Ambai') as a short story writer. Her stories are not distinguished by their literary style or language. Neither are they particularly humorous, and the topics are not original. But therein lies their power. They look uncompromisingly at the everyday reality of women, revealing both their vulnerability and their strength.

Reading

Required

The following stories in Chaudhuri, *Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature:*
'Arjun'
'Terminal'
'Sheesha Ghat'
'A Horse for the Sun'
'Walls'
'The Rocks'
'Gifts'
'The Colour of a Loved Person's Eyes'

Recommended

Alter, 'Introduction' in *Modern Book of Indian Short Stories*
Dimock, *Literatures of India*, pp. 239-248

Discussion topics/questions/exercises

1. This second group of stories was written after 1950. Does that historical context of the writing affect the writing itself? Do the earlier stories, written before Independence, also bear traces of their historical context?
2. 'The Gifts' by Ambai (C.S. Lakshmi) is a subtle (and sometimes confusing) story about an encounter between an urban, educated woman and a woman (and others) in a small town. Is this a 'feminist' story, as many have called it?
3. How would you describe Basheer's style of writing? Is it effective, for you as a reader?
4. Many of these stories have political or social themes, like earlier literature, but the more recent stories usually speak in a different voice. How would you describe that different voice?

Week 15:   21st Century Literature

Outline

A. Globalisation
    1. economic liberalisation of 1990s led to global literary culture
    2. international success of Indian novelists in English
B. Writing in English
    1. colonial language survives Independence as link-language
    2. Indian writing in English has a long history
C. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*
    1. illustrates globalisation in Indian novel
    2. poor man is corrupted by global economic forces
D. Shoba De and Chetan Bhagat
    1. most popular Indian novelists in English
    2. aspirational stories of success
E. Regional literatures
    1. debate about quality of writing
    2. experimental, bring in 'new voices'
F. Dalit (Untouchable) writing

1. unlike earlier social novels, Dalits now write own stories
2. proliferation of Dalit writing in Marathi, from 1970s
3. similar movement in Tamil Dalit writing

G. Conclusion
1. aspiration as common theme in modern Indian writing though authorial voice has changed from idealism to irony
2. novel an imported colonial form though now indigenised
3. effect of global success of English writing on regional writing not yet known but will be substantial

<u>Lecture</u>

1. Globalisation

Since the 1990s, the most fundamental changes in Indian literature have been the consequences of globalisation. When economic policies were relaxed in the in the 1990s, western publishing houses began to set up operations in the country, scouting new talent in English writing and offering lucrative contracts. Indians writing in English had achieved international attention prior to the 1990s, of course, but the recent success is impressive.

V. S. Naipaul won the Booker Prize in 1971, Ruth Prawer Jhabwala in 1975, Rushdie in 1981, Arundathi Roy in 1998, Kiran Desai in 2006 and Aravind Adiga in 2008. That is a remarkable six winners of the top international literary prize, and other Indian writers have been shortlisted seven times. Publicity campaigns, literary festivals, book tours, the internet and Facebook have ensured that Indian literature is not only popular but also big business. This applies to Indian literature in English or, to be more accurate, Indians writing in English in the diaspora.

2. Writing in English

This international fame is matched by the curious case of the success of English in India. According to the Constitution of 1950, the colonial language was supposed to be phased out by 1965, when Hindi would take over as the sole 'official' language (there is no 'national' language in India). Some leading Indian literary figures even declared that English was dead. However, riots in the Tamil-speaking south against Hindi 'domination' underlined the fact that no regional tongue could be the link-language in multilingual India. Sanskrit was as dead as Latin, and Persian (the language of courts and government up to the 1830s) had long before disappeared. English, though spoken by less than 5% of the population, continues to be the default link-language.

This is not entirely a contemporary development since highly-acclaimed writers in English have existed right through the 20th century. Following R.K. Narayan's generation, high-quality novels were written, for example, by Anita Desai (mother of Kiran Desai and shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1980, 1984 and 1999), Manohar Malgonkar and Kamala Markandaya. More recently, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhuri and Rohinton Mistry (shortlisted for the Booker in 1991, 1996 and 2002) have all won international reputations and audiences.

3. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

The most recent Booker-winning novel by an Indian, Adiga's *The White Tiger*, is a good illustration of globalisation in Indian literature.

It is the story of Balram, a poor village boy who goes to the big city and makes a success, but only by murdering and stealing along the way. The themes may be caste and corruption, as they have been from the 1890s, but the intention is not reform. This son of a rickshaw driver, the very epitome of economic and social oppression in India, is not the object of sympathy. Nevertheless, Adiga is able to suggest that the system, especially the corrosive master-servant relationship that dominates the story, might be to blame. Balram is both corrupt and corruptible.

The White Tiger also chronicles the effect of global capitalism on India, from the city to the village. The novel is written in the form of letters from Balram to the Chinese Premier, 'from one entrepreneur to another,' as Balram puts it. The virtually uneducated villager writes in English, the international language of commerce. His boss, who lives half of his life in New York, predicts that Indian will soon be just like the USA.

Further, when Balram goes to the city, it is significant that he doesn't actually go to New Delhi. He goes instead to Gurgaon, a new international business satellite city located 20 miles outside the capital. When the Indian government liberalised laws on foreign investment, the giants of transnational commerce, particularly in technology, began to fill the enormous glass and steel office complexes in Gurgaon.

The novel is realistic and social, but the tone is too detached to be social realism. 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.

4.   Shoba De and Chetan Bhagat

Two names that rarely appear on a list of Indians writing in English are Shoba De (b. 1948) and Chetan Bhagat (b. 1974). Yet they are the most popular novelists in the country. Shoba De is a leading journalist who turned to novels in the 1990s. To date she written 17 novels that, with titles such as *Starry Nights* and *Sultry Days*, might be called 'soap opera literature' and compared to Jackie Collins. Her sales figures, however, are impressive and she has filled a (rather large) literary niche.

If her novels tell the tale of middle-class women in contemporary India, Chetan Bhagat holds up a similar mirror for men to look in. Bhagat studied engineering and business management in New Delhi before working as an investment banker in Hong Kong. Then he became a professional writer, and his five novels (beginning with the first in 2004) have broken all sales records by selling in the millions. By comparison, the Booker-winning novels by Roy, Desai and Adiga have sold only 50,000-100,000 copies each.

Bhagat's English-language Indian fiction is thus the first to be both serious and popular. In describing the success story of young men who resemble the author, his novels are entertaining, youth-focused and aspirational.

The slice of India's population who read English novels as a habit may be tiny, but it appears that De's and Bhagat's readers include not only those who read English but those who want to read English. These popular writers demonstrate the close relationship between life and fiction: to read their novels is to be aspirational.

5.   Regional literatures

In closing this final lecture, we return to regional languages, in which the overwhelming majority of fiction is and always has been written and read. Recent and current

developments in these regional literatures are difficult to determine (unless one reads fifteen Indian languages), and nearly all commentators (Indian and foreign) rely on translations. In 1997 Salmon Rushdie suggested that English writing was 'stronger and more important' than writing in Hindi, Bengali, Tamil and the other regional languages. That remark generated a lot of heat and little light, although it has brought a welcome critical attention to regional literature.

Whatever the overall quality of the regional literatures—available translations suggest both subtlety and entertainment—there is no doubt that they are a site of experimentation and inclusion of new voices. This is best illustrated by the increase of life-writing by Dalits (Untouchables, Harijans).

6.   Dalit writing

Since the early 20th century, Indian writers have created Dalit characters, but now Dalits themselves are writing and publishing their own stories.
While a few autobiographical novels and memoirs appeared in the 1970s, today Dalit writing has achieved a new sophistication and popularity. The landmark publication in 1978 of Daya Pawar's Marathi-language *Balute* ('Share') was followed by several more novels in Marathi in the 1980s. 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. Marathi is the natural home of such writing because it
is the region where a major Dalit-liberation struggle began in the1920s. One researcher has found 86 life-stories by Marathi Dalits.

Another major anti-caste movement during the same period, this time in the Tamil county, might also explain the emergence of Dalit life-writing in Tamil. The two most important of these Tamils novels have been written by Bama: *Karuku (*'Blades') in 1992 and *Sangati* ('Events') in 1994.   *Karukku* tells the life-story of a Dalit Catholic woman, using the idioms of her community, and not standard Tamil. The novel demands the reader's attention, an effort that is repaid by insights into the spiritual journey outside the Hindu mainstream.

An influential Dalit novel in Hindi appeared in 1997. *Joothan* ('Left Overs') by Omprakash Valmiki tells the story of a caste of scavengers, who subsist on what others throw away. Starting in the 1950s, the novel reveals the hollowness of Gandhi's and post-Independence programmes of Untouchable uplift. Through sheer force of will (and incidentally reading the novels of Premchand), the scavenger boy becomes educated and achieves literary success as a poet.

Finally, Dalit writing has also generated a new form of journalistic-document. In 2006, newspapers carried reports of the rape and murder of several Dalit women in Maharashtra. It turned out that the attack was revenge on an educated Dalit woman who had participated in politics and dared to act above her station. A year later, a major publishing house (Navayana) launched a series of 'Holo-caste' books, each of which will focus on a violent crime against Dalits. The first title appeared in 2008.

7.   Conclusion

Aspiration drives the protagonists of these Dalit life-histories, as well as the heroes and heroines of many English-language novels, even the anti-hero of *The White Tiger*. The scale of ambition varies, and the obstacles differ, but the need to make sense of one's place in society runs through all phases and forms of modern Indian literature. What has

changed is the authorial voice. The idealism of social reform has been followed by detachment and irony.

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 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.

The international success of the Indian novel in English is a legacy of colonialism. The lasting effect of this global literary culture on the regional literatures of India, though too early to assess, is likely to be substantial.

Reading

Required
        Adiga, *The White Tiger*

Recommended
        Subrahmanyam, 'Diary' [review of *The White Tiger*)
        Ganguly, 'Dalit life-stories'

Essay #4 (select one of the following and write a 1,250-word essay)

   1. Describe the effects of globalisation on the telling of the story in *The White Tiger*. Consider settings, characters and events, and the fact that the novel told in the form of letters from Balram to the Chinese Premier.
   2. What is the source of Balram's corruption in *The White Tiger*? Is it global capitalism? Or poverty? Or traditional India's master-servant relationship? Or human weakness? Or some combination of these?
   3. The short stories in Week 14 were written after Independence, when it is said that Indian literature was dominated by the themes of loss and alienation. Identify which, if any, of these eight stories
      support that observation and which do not. Then compare in detail two stories, one with these themes and one without.

Unit IV   Research Paper

Week 16 Research Paper

Guidelines
Write a 5,000-word research paper on one of the topics listed below.
The paper should set out the question to be addressed, exploring its possibilities, then present evidence and analysis, which should lead logically to a conclusion.

Research paper topics/questions

1. Assess the influence of oral tradition in Indian literature. You should consider the composition, performance and transmission, as well as the frame-stories and dialogic format of poetry and stories. Are these elements particularly prominent in certain historical periods of genres? Can you suggest a reason (or reasons) for that prominence? While you need not refer to all periods and texts included in this course, you should, in conclusion, attempt to make a summary statement of the role of oral tradition in Indian literature.

2. Devotionalism, or bhakti, is a literary and religious movement that swept across the entire subcontinent, from about 500 CE to 1800 CE. It is thus uniquely pan-Indian—no other literary movement has such a geographical spread and historical depth. However, the Tamil, Kannada and Hindi bhakti poets whom you have read are not identical and their poems are varied. Looking carefully at the poems, would you place them all in the same category of 'bhakti'? Or would you highlight their differences? Be sure to first describe what bhakti is. Then look at all the 11 poets: do they fall into categories, by language, historical period, gender or theology (personal vs impersonal; Saiva vs. Vaisnava)? After these broad observations, you should concentrate on two or three poets and describe in detail their differences and similarities.

3. The composition of classical Tamil poetry (sangam poetry) was guided by an aesthetic theory of 'interior' and 'exterior.' Interior (*akam*) poems were further subdivided into five classes, depending on the landscape and other features of the natural world. Explain this idea of the 'interior landscape' and its emotional dimensions by citing specific poems and lines.

4. The *Ramayana* is perhaps the most popular story in Indian literature. Using Buck's translation, try to explain this popularity. Does it lie in the plot, or the characterisations, or the moral dilemma? Why do you think Indians (and others) love this story? Is it primarily entertainment, or religious instruction or romance?

5. Some critics argue that the modern Indian novel emerged largely from traditional narrative forms, such as myths, epics and folktales.
   Looking back at all these forms and the novels you have read, what evidence can you find for this view? You should consider content and form, and possibly authorial voice and intention, point of view and audience. In the end, of course, the novel is different, but can you describe that difference? How, for example, does it differ from the *Ramayana* epic?

6. You have read four novels (by Banerjee, Premchand, Narayan and Adiga) that stretch from the 1920s to the 2000s. All four describe, in part, village life and village characters. Choose two novels that you think differ in their treatment of rural India and then analyse those treatments. What picture of rural life is shown in the novels? (To answer that, you will also have to consider the role of the 'city'.) How does each author's view of traditional India inform his story? Compare also the main characters in each novel. Do they represent the virtues or failings of 'village' life?

Reading list (required and recommended; * = required)

*Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. Atlantic Books, 2008.

Alter, Stephen and Wimal Dissanayake (eds.). *Penguin Book of Modern Indian Short Stories*. Penguin, 2005.

*Banerji [Banerjee], Bibhuti Bhushan. *Pather Panchali: Song of the Road.* translated by T.W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji. Indiana, 1975 (several editions available).

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

Bhattacharya, Deben. *Love Songs of Chandidas: Rebel Poet-Priest of Bengal.* Grove, 1970.

Blackburn, Stuart. *Moral Fictions: Tamil Folktales from Oral Tradition.* Folklore Fellows Communication No. 278. Soumalainen Tiedeakatemia (Helsinki), 2001.

Brereton, Joel and Stephanie Jamison (trans.). *The Rgveda.* Oxford, forthcoming 2013.

Brockington, John. *The Sanskrit Epics.* Brill, 1998.

*Buck, William (trans.). *Mahabharata.* California, 2000 (other editions available).

*Buck, William (trans.). *Ramayana.* California, 2000 (other editions available).

*Chaudhuri, Amit (ed.). *Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*. Picador, 2001

Chaudhuri, Supriya. The Bengali novel. In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern India*, Vasudha Dalmia and Rashmi Sadana (eds.), pp. 101-123. Cambridge, 2012.

Cutler, Norman (trans.). *Songs of Experience: the Poetics of Tamil Devotion.* Indiana, 1987.

Dharwadker, Vinay (trans.). *Kabir: The Weaver's Song.* Penguin, 2003.

Dharwadker, Vinay. The historical formation of Indian-English literature. In Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, pp. 199-269. California, 2003.

Dimock, Edward (et al.). *The Literatures of India: An Introduction*. Chicago,1974.

*Doniger, Wendy (trans.). *Hindu Myths.* Penguin, 2005 (1975).

*Doniger, Wend (trans.). *The Rig Veda.* Penguin, 2005 (1981).

Embree, Ainsle T. *Sources of Indian Tradition.* Vol I (2nd ed.). Columbia, 1988.

Ganguly, Debjani. Dalit life-stories. In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern India*, Vasudha Dalmia and Rashmi Sadana (eds.), pp.142-162. Cambridge, 2012.

Granoff, Phyllis (trans.). *A Strange Attachment and Other Stories* [by Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee]. Rupa, 2005.

Hardy, Friedhelm. *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Krsna Devotion in South India*. Oxford (Delhi), 2002.

Hart, George and Hank Heifitz (trans.). *Four Hundred Poems of War and Wisdom*. Columbia, 1999 (2002).

Hawley, John Stratton. *The Memory of Love: Surdas Sings to Krishna.* Oxford, 2009.

*Hawley, John Stratton and Mark Juergensmeyer (trans). *Songs of the Saints of India*. Oxford, 1998(2004).

Hawley, John Stratton. *Three Bhakti Voices. Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Our*s. Oxford (Delhi) 2012.

Ingalls, Daniel. *Sanskrit Poetry*. Harvard, 1965 (2000).

Kaviraj, Sudipta. *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*. Oxford (Delhi), 1995.

Kumar Das, Sisir. Vol. 8. *A History of Indian Literature: Western impact: Indian response, 1800-1910*. Sahitya Akademi (Delhi), 1991.

Limbale, S. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*. trans. by Alok Mukerjeee. Longman, 2004.

McGregor, Stuart. The progress of Hindi, Part 1. In Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, pp. 912-958. California, 2003**.**

Nagaraj. D.R. Critical tensions in the history of Kannada literary culture. In Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, pp. 323-382. California, 2003**.**

Narayan, Kirin. *Storytellers*, *Saints*, and *Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching. Pennsylvania, 1989.*

Narayan, R.K*. The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*. Penguin, 2006 (1972).

*Narayan, R.K. *The Guide*. Penguin, 2006 (many editions available).

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

*Premchand. *Godan. The Gift of a Cow*. translated by Gordon Roadarmel. Indiana, 2002 (other translations available).

Ramanujan, A. K. (trans.). *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology*. Indiana, 1967(Oxford, Delhi, 1994).

*Ramanujan, A. K. (trans.). *Nammalvar: Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Vishnu.* Penguin, 2005.

*Ramanujan, A. K. (trans.). *Speaking of Siva.* Penguin, 1973.

*Ramanujan, A. K. (trans.). *Poems of Love and War: From the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems of Classical Tamil* (Columbia, 1985/OUP Delhi, 2006).

*Ramanujan, A. K. (trans.). *Folktales from India*. Pantheon, 1994.

Ramanujan, A. K. (trans.). *A Flowering Tree, and Other Oral Tales from India*. California, 1997.

Richman, Paula (ed.). *Many Ramayanas: Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia.* California, 1992.

Rubin, David (ed. and trans.). *The World of Premchand.* Oxford, 2001.

Sadana, Rashmi. Writing in English. In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern India*, Vasudha Dalmia and Rashmi Sadana (eds.), pp.124-141. Cambridge, 2012.
Selby, Martha Ann (trans.). *Tamil Love Poetry: The Five Hundred Short Poems of the Aiṅkuṟunūṟu, an Early Third Century Anthology*. Columbia, 2011.

Shaw, Sara (trans.). *The Jatakas: Birth Stories of the Bodisatta*. Penguin, 2006.

Smith, John D. (trans.). *Mahabharata.* Penguin, 2009.

Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. 'Diary.' *London Review of Books*, Vol. 30, no. 21, 6 Nov. 2008, pp. 42-43.

Tharu, Susie and K. Lalita (eds.). *Women Writing in India.* Vol. 1. *600 BC to the early Twentieth Century*; Vol. 2. *The Twentieth Century.* Feminist Press, 1993.

Trivedi, Harish. The progress of Hindi, Part 2. In Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, pp. 958-1003. California, 2003**.**

van Buitenen, J.A.B. (edited by Cornelia Dimmit). *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas*. Temple University, 1978.

Syllabus

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students should be able to do the following:

1.   Discuss the major trends, movements, and works of literature found in the subject of the course.
2.   Identify unique theoretical underpinnings and influential thinkers in the course topic.
3.   Analyze the relationship between the various aspects of literary texts and the particular social, cultural, and biographical contexts of their production.
4.   Research and critically evaluate cultural productions.
5.   Use secondary sources and close reading skills to produce a substantive critical essay relating one or more specific literary works to the economic, social, cultural, or biographical contexts of its production.
6.   Demonstrate a balanced perspective and a deepened understanding of the cultures, times, people, and situations that produce these works.
7.   Write coherent historical arguments that explore the relationships of various

concepts and texts, and which provide a clear synthesis.

Course Goals:

1. To provide students with a broad perspective of approaches to world culture and an understanding of the various ways in which they manifest themselves and to assess students' ability to express their perspectives through exams and essays.
2. To provide students with a deeper understanding of diverse cultural and interdisciplinary traditions the course focus and to express this deepened understanding in written tests and a critical essay.
3. To provide an overview of cultural analysis and interpretation methods and help students apply these skills in writing essay examinations and a critical essay.
4. To read widely and critically in a variety of cultural texts in order to explore potential meanings and to demonstrate the depth and breadth of this reading in essay examinations and a critical essay.
5. To do library research on a particular trend, event, concept, an individual theorist, or an issue in the area of comparative culture and to write a critical essay which incorporates this research.

Course Content:

1. Cultural developments and texts that have been designated as being produced within the category of the course topic.
2. Discussion of the theoretical, social, philosophical and biographical contexts in which those works were produced.
3. Historical movements in various periods.
4. Discussion of the cultural issues and questions related to theoretical, social, philosophical, and biographical approaches to the study of the course topic.
5. Key ideas about how to evaluate and interpret cultural events, texts, and approaches.
6. Criticism and reflection upon political and economic systems as reflected in culture.
7. Discussion of the relevance of course readings to the understanding of contemporary cultural issues.
8. Critical analysis and interpretation of culture.
9. Conducting scholarly research on and off-line.

Course Outline and Required Work:

For the detailed course outline and required work and assignments, please see the study guide.

Course Readings:

The course readings for this course will be available through the Online Library, which will provide students access to selected journal articles, book chapters, and reference materials.

Course Preparedness:

This course is a history course which requires analysis, research, and writing. It assumes the mastery of prerequisite college-level skills in spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphing, and essay writing. It also assumes the ability to read and analyze literary texts. This course provides instruction in history and does not address remedial writing issues at the sentence, paragraph, or essay level. The California Department of Education

"English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools" offers context for understanding the standard for writing at the college level. Students who do not meet the standards outlined in the "English-Language Arts Content Standards" will not pass this course.

In short, this course assumes that students already "write with a command of standard English conventions, write coherent and focused texts that convey a well-defined perspective and tightly reasoned argument, and use clear research questions and creative and critical research strategies" (California Standards, Grades Nine and Ten). This course focuses on texts and analysis and requires college-level writing skills that exceed those required at the secondary level.

Course Workload:

In accordance with accreditation standards,   requires approximately two hours of outside work for every contact hour. For a 3-hour course, there are 48 contact hours, plus a minimum of 96 hours outside work. For a sixteen-week course, students can expect to devote a minimum of 6 hours of independent study per week in order to complete the coursework.

Definition of Grades:

   Graduate Courses

   A   Outstanding Achievement

   B   Commendable Achievement

   C   Marginal Achievement

   D   Unsatisfactory *

   F   Failing *

* Students receiving this grade in a course that is required for his/her degree program must repeat the course.

   I   **Incomplete** A grade given at the discretion of the instructor when a student who has completed **at least two-thirds of the course class sessions** and is unable to complete the requirements of the course because of uncontrollable and unforeseen circumstances. The student must convey these circumstances (preferably in writing) to the instructor prior to the final day of the course. If an instructor decides that an "Incomplete" is warranted, the instructor must convey the conditions for removal of the "Incomplete" to the student in writing. A copy must also be placed on file with the Office of the Registrar until the "Incomplete" is removed or the time limit for removal has passed. An "Incomplete" is not assigned when the only way the student could make up the work would be to attend a major portion of the class when next offered.

   An "I" that is not removed within the stipulated time becomes an "F." No grade points are assigned. The "F" is calculated in the grade point average.

   W   **Withdrawal** Signifies that a student has withdrawn from a course after beginning the third class session. **Students who wish to withdraw must notify their admissions advisor before the beginning of the sixth class session in the case of graduate courses, or before the seventh class session in the case**

of undergraduate courses. Instructors are not authorized to issue a "W" grade.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas or work as one's own. Students must give credit for any information that is not either the result of original research or common knowledge. If a student borrows ideas or information from another author, he/she must acknowledge the author in the body of the text and on the reference page. Students found plagiarizing are subject to the penalties outlined in the Policies and Procedures section of the   Catalog, which may include a failing grade for the work in question or for the entire course. The following is one of many websites that provide helpful information concerning plagiarism for both students and faculty:
http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml

Ethics:

Ethical behavior in the classroom is required of every student. The course will identify ethical policies and practices relevant to course topics.

Technology:

Students are expected to be competent in using current technology appropriate for this discipline. Such technology may include word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software. Use of the internet and e-mail may also be required.

Diversity:

Learning to work with and value diversity is essential in every class. Students are expected to exhibit an appreciation for multinational and gender diversity in the classroom.

Civility:

As a diverse community of learners, students must strive to work together in a setting of civility, tolerance, and respect for each other and for the instructor. Rules of classroom behavior (which apply to online as well as onsite courses) include but are not limited to the following:

- Conflicting opinions among members of a class are to be respected and responded to in a professional manner.
- Side conversations or other distracting behaviors are not to be engaged in during lectures, class discussions or presentations
- There are to be no offensive comments, language, or gestures

Students with Disabilities:

Students seeking special accommodations due to a disability must submit an application with supporting documentation, as explained under this subject heading in the General Catalog. Instructors are required to provide such accommodations if they receive written notification from the University.

Writing Across the Curriculum:

Students are expected to demonstrate writing skills in describing, analyzing and evaluating ideas and experiences. Written reports and research papers must follow specific standards regarding citations of an author's work within the text and references at the end of the paper. Students are encouraged to use the services of the University's Writing Center when preparing materials.

The following website provides information on APA, MLA, and other writing and citation styles that may be required for term papers.

Online Library:

Our Online Library supports academic rigor and student academic success by providing access to scholarly books and journals electronically.