HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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INDIAN POETRY

PARTS

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Part I : PRE-CLASSICAL

Overview
Preclassical Indian literature, which was composed orally between about 1200 and 500 BCE, contains two major divisions: ritual texts and the commentaries. Here we are concerned only with the poetry of the ritual texts, which are a diverse compilation of hymns, formulae, myths, charms and philosophical speculations. They are not only the oldest texts in Indian literature but also the oldest texts of world literature still in use today. These ritual texts are commonly called the 'four Vedas.'

Four Vedas
History The four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva) were composed in Sanskrit between about 1200 and 900 BCE, probably in northwest India. We assume they were created by the priests of the Aryans (or Aryas), who 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. As far as we know, the Vedas were not written down until the Gupta Empire (4th-6th c. CE). Extant manuscripts date from the 11th century CE and printed texts from the 19th century CE.

Contents 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 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 Atharva Veda, the most recent of the four texts, is very different from the other three in that it mainly contains charms and imprecations

Composition The Vedas were not written. Although writing was used in the earlier Indus Valley civilisation (c. 2500 -1700 BCE), the Indus script remains undeciphered, and the first inscriptions in a known Indian language appear only in the 3rd century BCE. Vedic literature was 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). This fact cannot be repeated too many times: The Vedas were not read. They were heard.

MemorisationVedic priests underwent extensive training in memorising the sacred texts to ensure that they were passed down without error, thus ensuring their efficacy. Scholars, working from largely 20th-century field research, have identified eight different 'paths' of memorisation.

In one path, for example, every two adjacent words were recited in their original order, then in reverse order and finally in their original order. The most complex method involved reciting the entire *Rig Veda* in reverse order.

Prosody The metric system of the Vedas, like that of most early and later Indian poetic traditions (and most Indo-European literatures) is measured by long and short syllables and not (as in English) by stress. A syllable was counted as 'long' if it contained a long vowel or a short vowel and two consonants. Most of the hymns are arranged in quatrains, although divisions of three and five also exist. Similarly, while the standard metre is iambic, there is considerable variation in metre.

Mantra 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.

<u>Rig Veda</u>

Significance As the oldest and most literary of the four Vedas, the Rig Veda carries unparalleled cultural significance in India. It contains 1028 hymns in praise (*ric* means 'praise') of various deities, most of whom are not worshipped today but whose stories have been preserved by later myths and epics.The literary brilliance of the Rig Veda lies in vivid imagery, cosmogonic conundrums and dramas enacted by priests, natural forces and the gods.

Contents The Rig Veda contains many of the best-known ancient myths.
For example, Indra, king of the gods, slays the cloud-dragon Vrtra with his thunderbolts. Gamblers lament their losses. The beauty of Dawn (Usas) is evoked with tenderness. Surya (the sun) rides across the heavens in a chariot drawn by seven horses. Yama, the first human and the first to die, presides over the world of the dead, where others must travel after death. The virtuous are guided on this journey by two dogs, while the others are attacked by demons. Many hymns invoke Angi (fire) and Soma (an intoxicating libation), the two principal elements of the sacrifice that dominates the Rig Veda.

CreationMemorable verses also involve speculation about the creation of the world. But, as befits a Hindu text, the Rig Veda does not articulate just one creation myth: it contains several. One verse proclaims that sound (the goddess Vac) created the world. (Cf. 'In the beginning was the word.') Elsewhere, the world emerges from a primeval sacrifice of a man, who is then divided into four parts corresponding to the four major caste groups. The world also comes out of a 'golden womb' as well as a 'universal egg.' Later, creation becomes the work of a figure, 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, we enter a dialogue about the human condition that stretches back three thousand years.

<u>Legacy</u>

Today, the four Vedas are little understood by most Indians, and many of the gods and goddesses mentioned in them are no longer worshipped. Indeed, Vedic Sanskrit became obsolete long before even the turn of the Christian era. However, and partly for this reason, it acquired a sacred status that continues to this day. The category of 'Veda' has persisted throughout Indian history, with many important texts in regional languages being hailed as the 'Fifth Veda.' And while the practice of chanting the full four Vedas has declined, some Brahmin priests, especially in Kerala on the southwest coast, still chant Vedic verses to accompany ceremonies.

<u>Discussion questions</u>

1. The Vedas are the oldest religious literature still in use, yet they were orally composed and transmitted. Describe the mnemonic devices and techniques in the Vedas that facilitated oral

transmission. Then analyse the role of orality in a sacred tradition, by comparing the Vedas with the literature of two other world religions.

2. Study the 'Hymn of Creation' (Rig Veda 10.129). What evidence of oral composition can you find? What explanation is provided for the creation of the world? Can you correlate any features of this short text with the socio-economic context (semi-nomadic pastoralism) in which it was composed?

3. Although the Vedas are said to be the source of modern Hinduism, many of the deities in the ancient texts are no longer worshipped or even recognised. Analyse the source of the continuing cultural significance of these poems.

4. Given that there are virtually no archaeological or other material remains from the Vedic period, these ancient Sanskrit verses are the primary source from which we must try to understand the society and culture of those times. Analyse the reconstruction of Vedic society by scholars by closely reading the texts and the secondary sources.

<u>Reading</u>

Joel Brereton and Stephanie W. Jamison, *The Rig Veda* (OUP, 2014)
Wendy O'Flaherty, *The Rig Veda* (Penguin, 1981)
Ainslie T. Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. 1* (Columbia, 1988)
Frits Staal, *Discovering the Vedas: Origins, Rituals, Mantras, Insights* (Penguin, 2008)

<u>Texts</u>

1. Creation of the World (*Rig Veda* 10.129), trans. Wendy Doniger

There was neither non-existence nor existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomlessly deep?
There was neither death nor immorality then. There was no distinguishing sign of night nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own impulse. Other than that there was nothing beyond.
Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning; with no distinguishing sign, all this was water. The life force that was covered with emptiness, that one arose through the power of heat.
Desire came upon that one in the beginning; that was the first seed of mind. Poets seeking in their heart with wisdom found the bond of existence in non-existence.
Their cord was extended across. Was there below? Was there above? There were seed-placers; there were powers. There was impulse beneath; there was giving-forth above.
Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe. Who then knows whence it has arisen?
Whence this creation has arisen—perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not—the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows. Or perhaps he does not know.

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

Thousand-headed is Purusa, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. Having covered the earth on all sides, he stood above it the width of ten fingers.
Only Purusa is all this, that which has been and that which is to be. He is the lord of the immortals, who grow by means of [ritual] food.
Such is his greatness, yet more than this is Purusa. One-quarter of him is all beings; three- quarters of him is the immortal in heaven.
Three-quarters of Purusa went upward, one-quarter of him remained here. From this [one-quarter] he spread in all directions into what eats and what does not eat.
From him the shining one was born, from the shining one was born Purusa. When born he extended beyond the earth, behind as well as in front.
When the gods performed a sacrifice with the offering Purusa, spring was its clarified butter, summer the kindling, autumn the oblation.

It was Purusa, born in the beginning, which they sprinkled on the sacred grass as a sacrifice. With him the gods sacrificed, the demi-gods, and the seers.
From that sacrifice completely offered, the clotted butter was brought together. It made the beasts of the air, the forest and the village.
From that sacrifice completely offered, the mantras [Rig Veda] and the songs [Samaveda] were born. The meters were born from it. The sacrificial formulae [Yajurveda] were born from it.
From it the horses were born and all that have cutting teeth in both jaws. The cows were born from it, also. From it were born goats and sheep.
When they divided Purusa, how many ways did they apportion him? What was his mouth? What were his arms? What were his thighs, his feet declared to be?
His mouth was the Brahman [caste], his arms were the Rajanaya [Ksatriya caste], his thighs the Vaisya [caste]; from his feet the Sudra [caste] was born.
The moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born; from his mouth both Indra and Agni [fire]; from his breath Vayu [wind] was born.
From his navel arose the air; from his head the heaven evolved; from his feet the earth; the [four] directions from his ear. Thus, they fashioned the worlds.
Seven were his altar sticks, three times seven were the kindling bundles, when the gods, performing the sacrifice, bound the beast Purusa.
The gods sacrificed with the sacrifice to the sacrifice. These were the first rites. These powers reached the firmament, where the ancient demi-gods and the gods are.

Part II : **CLASSICAL**

Overview
Classical Indian poetry is a broad category, encompassing a variety of Sanskrit traditions, from court compositions to the great epics, and the Tamil traditions of south India. While most of these poems, both north and south, were composed at roughly the same time (during the early centuries of the Common Era), they show sharp differences in aesthetic, content and audience.

Court poetry: Sanskrit and Prakrit
Genre ClassicalSanskrit poetry was dominated by *kavya*, a capacious category that is perhaps best understood as a meta-genre containing several sub-genres. The most common type is the lyric verse devoted to love and longing and using a repertoire of 'adornments' (*alankara*), stock epithets, alliterations and metaphors. *Kavya* poets flourished during the Gupta Empire (3rd-5th c. CE). Long poems were called *maha* ('great') *kavya.*
Sattasai An early but little-known collection of classical Indian poetry is the *Sattasai* ('Seven Hundred') by Hala (c. 100 CE). These 700 single-verse, largely secular poems were composed in Prakrit (a regional variant of Sanskrit), probably in the Deccan. The poet Halla was a king of the Satavahana dynasty, though little is known of his life.

Buddhacarita The *Buddhacarita* ('Life of the Buddha') by Asvaghosa is often recognised as the earliest classical Sanskrit poem. Composed approximately 100 CE as a hagiography of the historical Buddha, it utilised one of the simplest Sanskrit metres. Of its 28 chapters, or cantos, only the first 14 are found in extant Sanskrit versions, although complete versions do survive in Chinese and Tibetan.

KalidasaThe most influential classical Sanskrit poet was Kalidasa (5th c. CE), who was patronised by Gupta kings. A prolific poet, Kalidasawrote two long poems or *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*).

BhartrhariLittle is known about Bhartṛhari, though most scholars believe he lived in the 5th century CE and wrote important Sanskrit texts, such as the*Vākyapadīya* (a discourse on Sanskrit grammar and philosophy). He is best known, however, for the poems in the *Śatakatraya*, a collection of short verses in which each group is dedicated to a different *rasa*(an emotion or aesthetic mood created in a reader/listener).

Court Poetry: Tamil

Cankam Classical Tamil poetry is known as *cankam* ('academy'), after the academy of poets who, by tradition, composed this corpus of nearly 2,400 poems probably between 100-300 CE. Most of the 473 named poets composed only a single poem, although a few (Kapilar 235 poems and Ammuvanar 127) were prolific. Avvaiyar, one of the few female poets, wrote 59. Unlike the Sanskrit poets of the Gupta court, these Tamil poets were patronised by the rulers of small kingdoms, and many were itinerant.

Genres Tamil poetry has two overarching genres: *akam* ('interior') and *puram* ('exterior'). This dichotomy, which refers to both the topographical and psychological dimensions of a poem, may be translated as 'love' and 'war' poems. Love poems (*akam*) describe inner states of love, usually in or around the house. They are divided into five groups, each devoted to a specific type or condition of love. Each of these five states of love is also associated with a specific landscape, flower, time of the day, season of the year and bird. Convention requires that no names, only stock figures, appear in the love poems. Many are extremely short, not more than ten lines. By contrast, war poems (*puram*) describe public events, especially war and the actions of kings. Unlike the love poems, they contain the names of kings, poets, battles and towns. These war poems are filled with an ethos of fame and shame. A mother, for instance, does not want to see wounds on her son's back.

Epic poetry: Mahabharata

Composition The Sanskrit *Mahabharata* ('Great War') was composed 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). The Sanskrit *Mahabharata* is only one of many, many variants of the story that is found in numerous accounts in every major Indian language. Like all early Indian texts, this sprawling epic was composed orally. Even its traditional author, the sage Vyasa, is said only to have composed and declaim the verses, while the writing was done by the ever-helpful Ganesa. The orality of this great epic is further revealed by its frequent use of the story-within-a-story device.
Contents 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 core story is told in the form of a conversation between a blind king (Dhritarashtra) and his charioteer (Krishna), 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 battle several centuries after the historical event.

Themes While 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. 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.

Bhagavad Gita These 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 battlefield and expresses his doubts about the morality of killing his kin. Krishna then launches into a famous discourse in which he tells the prince that, as a warrior, he must engage in battle. The renunciation of action, continues Krishna, is for others and is not proper conduct for a warrior-prince. A warrior 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 (who is an *avatar* of Visnu).

Epic poetry: Ramayana

Composition The Sanskrit *Ramayana* ('Way of Rama' or 'Story of Rama') was also composed over several centuries (about 200 BCE to 300 CE), drawing on versions of the story circulating in oral tradition.

It was thus composed by different poets, but its author is said by tradition to be the legendary sage Valmiki. We thus speak of the *Valmiki Ramayana* because there are hundreds of other versions of the story, and more than 25 in Sanskrit alone. The multiple versions, simple metre and frame story all point to the origins of the Rama story in oral tradition.

Frame story Valmiki begins his story with a frame-tale, in which he watches a hunter kill one of a pair of love- birds and then 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 Rama 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.

ContentsThe core story is the life and adventures of Rama, *avatar* of Visnu and heir to his father's throne. Major episodes include his marriage to Sita, their exile in the forest and Sita's kidnapping by a demon king (Ravana) who takes her back to his palace in Lanka (Sri Lanka). Rama rescues her with the assistance of an army of monkeys, led by the resourceful Hanuman. Rama eventually kills the demon and the lovers are reunited.

Themes As with the *Mahabharata*, the story illustrates the value of fraternal loyalty and *dharma*. Underlying all this, however, is the power of love, which motivates nearly every character, sometimes to act against his own best interest. Love can also be destructive, especially in the case of the demons. For example, the brooding love of Ravana for Sita pervades the entire epic and eventually drives him to destruction.

Epic Poetry: Cilappatikaram

The 'Lay of the Anklet' (*Cilappatikaram*) is an epic composed in Tamil about 500 CE, probably by a Jain monk. Consisting of more than 5,000 verses, it is a tragic story of jealousy, deception, undeserved death and the power of a woman's love. While it bears some similarity to contemporaneous Sanskrit court poetry, especially in its ornate descriptions of place and nature, its deeper message of loss and revenge sets it apart. The heroine, Kannaki, became a popular goddess in Tamil culture, reversing the usual sequence in which a deity becomes a literary figure.

Questions

1. Both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* turn on the loyalty and betrayal of brothers. The strength of fraternal and other male bonds is not a unique theme in world literature, especially in epics. Compare the Indian articulation of this theme with two other examples from epics in world literature (from Cain and Abel to Dostoyevsky).

2. The Tamil epic *Cilappatikaram*, on the other hand, focuses on the bond between husband and wife. The wife, Kannaki, is the emotional centre of the story and its heroine. Analyse this epic on three levels: as a south Indian/Tamil story, as an Indian story and as a universal story.

3. Study the character of Rama in the *Ramayana*. He is the hero who defeats the demon, rescues his wife and renounces the throne to uphold truth. In most versions he is the incarnation of god Visnu and embodiment of *dharma* (moral law/duty). However, he has many shortcomings, not least in his treatment of his wife. He also makes errors of judgement and is indirectly responsible for his father's death. Is he really a god, or simply a flawed human?

4. The *Bhagavad Gita* episode in the *Mahabharata* is the best-known part of this rambling, massive epic. Read it carefully and analyse the ethical debate it dramatises. Is it a dilemma that is peculiar to Indian/Hindu culture or does it have wider relevance?

Reading

Wendy Doniger, *Hindu Myths* (2nd ed.) (Penguin, 2004)
Ainslie T. Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition, vol. 1* (Columbia, 1988) A.K. Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape* (OUP India, 1994)

William Buck, *Ramayana* (California, 2000)
John Smith, *Mahabharata (*Penguin, 2009)
Daniel Ingalls, *Sanskrit Poetry* (Harvard, 2000)
R. Parthasarathy, *Cilappatikaram: The Tale of an Anklet* (Penguin India, 2004)

Texts

1. From the*Buddhacarita*, translated by Charles Willemen, 2009
Birth, old age, illness, and death are suffering; separation from what one loves or meeting with enmity, not attaining something one wants, and so on are kinds of suffering.
If one renounces desire or does not yet renounce it, has a body or is without a body, if one is without any pure quality, one may briefly say that all this is painful.
When, for instance, a great fire is appeased, it does not give up its heat, even though it may have become smaller. Even in a self that is quiet and subtle by nature, great suffering still exists.
The afflictions of greed and the others, and all kinds of wrong actions—these are the causes of suffering. If one gives them up, suffering is extinguished.
When, for instance, seeds are without earth, water, and so forth, when all conditions are not combined, shoots and leaves do not grow.
Existences continue by nature, from heaven to the woeful destinations. The wheel keeps turning and does not stop. This is produced by desire. Demotion differs according to weak, intermediate, or strong, but all kinds of actions are the cause.
If one has extinguished greed and so forth, there is no continuation of existence. When all kinds of actions have ended, different kinds of suffering know long-lasting appeasement. If this exists, then that exists. If this is extinguished, then that is extinguished.
Absence of birth, old age, illness, and death; absence of earth, water, fire, and wind; and both absence of beginning, middle, and end and condemnation of a deceptive law—these mean tranquility without end, abodes of the noble.

2. From the Tamil *Kuruntokai*, translated by AK Ramanujan, 1967

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

3. From the *Kuruntokai*, translated by AK Ramanujan, 1967

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

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

This world lives
Because some men do not eat alone,
not even when they get
the sweet ambrosia of the gods;

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

Part III **: EARLY POST-CLASSICAL**

<u>Overview</u>
Two major developments in poetry occurred during the early postclassical period. The first, which occurred in both Sanskrit and Tamil, is the composition of myths (in verse) and poetry under the influence of devotionalism. Although devotioinalism (or *bhakti*) began in the classical period, it flourished somewhat later when a new religiosity emerged in which an individual worshipper imagined and nurtured a direct bond with a specific god or goddess. Contemplation of abstract spiritual ends gave way to this more active engagement with deities who were given human-like qualities of generosity and compassion. The second major development in this period, which is more particular to Sanskrit, is the continuation of the *kavya*tradition, especially *maha* ('great') *kavya* poems, which themselves are influenced by the rise of devotionalism.

<u>Sanskrit myth</u>
Genre 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.

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

Deities The majority of these 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. The comparatively greater emphasis on Visnu in the myths reflects the preference of the Gupta rulers (4^{th}-5^{th} c. CE), when the earliest versions of many myths were composed.

Function It is often said that the *puranas* are more a tradition than a text. And as a traditional explanation of everything from the creation of the world to the details of a particular ritual, they are the reference books of Hinduism. If one has a question about anything in the Indian world—an historical event, the genealogy of a king, an astrological calculation or moral dilemma—these wide-ranging compendia provide the answer. Hindus, however, are usually more interested in the ritual efficacy of these mythic texts, their ability to breathe spirit into a stone statue and thus to enable a god or goddess to bestow favours on worshippers. Hindu myths also offer moral guidance, spectacle and, not least of all, entertainment.

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

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

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

Magha Perhaps the most highly regarded of Kalidasa's successors was Magha, who lived in the seventh century CE and lived in a small court in Rajasthan. His most enduring work is *<u>ShishupalaVadha</u>*, a *mahākāvya* based on a story in the *Mahabharata*. Magha is much loved by critics and scholars, who praise his technical skills and verbal dexterity in deploying 23 different metres. The imprint of devotionalism is evident in this poem, in which the poet glorifies Visnu as the preserver who slays an evil king.

Other poets Bhatti (probably 7th c. CE) wrote *mahakavya*s based on episodes from the Rama story, the most famous being the *Ravanavadha*. Bharavi (probably 6th c. CE and probably from south India) wrote the *Kirātārjunīya*, modelled on earlier tellings of same story from the *Mahabharata* and considered one of the finest of the *mahakavya*s. Bana (7th c. CE), who was also a playwright, wrote poems collected under the title*Candisataka,* whileKumaradasa (7th c. CE) is remembered for his retelling of the 'rape' of Sita (*Janaki-harana*) from the Rama story. Lastly, we should mention Anandavardana, a ninth-century poet from Kashmiri who composed the *Devasataka*.

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

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

NayanmarsTamil bhakti poets who composed songs in praise of Siva were collectively called the Nayanmars ('Servants of the Lord'). They usually focused on a specific form of Siva associated with a specific region, temple or story. Some of their poems have a raw, wounded quality, often literally in the description of bodily mortification. Sometimes that poetic ferocity is directed against Jain and Buddhist scholars, philosophers and mendicants, who had considerable influence in south Indian kingdoms and towns at the time.
These songs (often called 'hymns') in praise of Siva were later collected in the *Tirumurai*('Sacred Way') a 12-volume compendium. From this massive work we know the names of 63 poet-saints who composed thousands of hymns. Another important anthology is *Tiruvacakam* ('Sacred Sayings'), a late (9th c. CE) compilation of Siva poems by Manikavacakar. This poet, a councillor at the court of a Pandya court in Madurai, has become one of the best loved of the Saiva saints in Tamil, whose poems are still sung today.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions

1. Hindu myths have endured to the present day, depicted in film, television and comic books. What can account for this longevity?
2. Hindu mythology, both Sanskrit and Tamil, is cognate with other mythologies in the Indo-European world, such as Norse. Compare these two geographically distant traditions in terms of characters and social function.
3. Compare the devotionalism in Tamil poetry with similar attitudes in early Christian theology. What are the key differences?
4. The Tamil versions of the Sanskrit myths are distinguished by their specificity of place. How does this physical grounding make a difference to the tone and function of these texts?

Reading

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Norman Cutler, *Songs of Experience: the Poetics of Tamil Devotion (*Indiana, 1987)
A.K. Ramanujan, *Nammalvar:Hymns for the Drowning: Poemsfor Vishnu (*Penguin, 2005)
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Texts

1. From the poems of Nammalvar, trans. A.K. Ramanujan,

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

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

2. From *Tirumurai*, a poem by Appar about Siva

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

3. From <u>*ShishupalaVadha*</u> *by* Magh, trans. SubhadraJha

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

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

Part IV **: LATE POST-CLASSICAL**

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

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

Tamil Continuing the tradition of poetry in praise of Visnu, a court poet composed a Tamil version of the *Ramayana*. The poet Kampan (12th c. CE?) did not simply retell the Sanskrit story. Instead, he reinvented it as a full-blown devotional epic in which Rama is indisputably the avatar of Visnu, which is why his text of 24,000 lines is called *Rama-avataram*. The son of a temple drummer, Kampan wrote a work that is considered the jewel in the crown of Tamil literature. His writing is witty, and often satirical, powerful and imaginative. In his composition, Rama and Sita become characters with a full spectrum of emotions and ambiguities. No Tamil poet since Kampan has combined such beautiful language with such depth of feeling.
Telugu The south Indian language of Telugu flourished during this period, gaining largely from the fruitful interaction between Sanskrit and Tamil court traditions. The early centuries of this period saw a number of influential translations and retellings of the *Mahabharata*, but the best-loved poem is Srinatha's 13th-century reworking of the *Ramayana*.

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

Devotional Poetry: North India

MarathiDevotionalism moved from Kannada to the neighbouring language of Marathi, where it was developed by several poets. The most influential poet was Namdev (13th-14th c. CE), who (like the Kannada poets) composed fiercely sectarian verse (this time in praise of Visnu) in a simple metre in order to reach common people. Most of his compositions are really 'songs' since they are words meant to be sung in the *bhajan* and *kirtana* tradition.

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

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

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

Assamese From Bengali, and largely from Chaitanya's neo-Vaishnavism, devotionalism found a home in Assamese. Here the leading light was Shankardev (b. 1449 CE). More than a mere poet, Shankardev was a skilled musician, playwright, linguist and social reformer. His most enduring work, *KirtanaGhosha*, is a collection of powerful, short poems that are well-known to most Assamese today.
SanskritThe outstanding work of Sanskrit devotionalism in this period is *Gita Govinda* by Jayadeva (12th c. CE). Ostensibly a poem in praise of Krishna, it in fact reveals the dark dangers of passion and the pain of separation in both human and divine attachments. The poem famously includes a dramatization of the 'eight moods' of Indian aesthetic theory, as shown in the character of the heroine.

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

Indo-Persian poetry

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

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

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

Ghazal Indo-Persian writers produced their most subtle work in the *ghazal*, a short lyric of rhymed couplets mixing the conventions of a love poem with those of a drinking song. The verses draw almost entirely on the landscape, flora and fauna of Iran for imagery, the most famous example being the contrast between the rose (*gul*) and the nightingale (*bulbul*). The language uses a highly complex poetic vocabulary, made even more enigmatic by the Sufi religious themes that supply the content. Many *ghazal*s express deep emotions of longing and loss, on both the level of ordinary human experience and the mystical experience of god.

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

<u>Questions</u>

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

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

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

<u>Reading</u>

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Kenneth Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God* (California, 1978)
Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (California, 2006).

<u>Texts</u>

1. Kannada poem by Basavanna, trans. A.K. Ramunujan

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

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

2. Hindi poem by Kabir, trans. RushilRao

Hiding in this cage
of visible matter

is the invisible
lifebird

pay attention
to her

she is singing
your song

Part V : EARLY MODERN

Overview

This period saw devotionalism continue its immense influence on Indian poetry in the form of regional Ramayanas, which became the signature text of any literary language. The urge to sing of god in the local tongue also led to the recognition of a new literary language (Braj) in north India. Somewhat in contrast to devotionalism, the *riti* school of Hindi poets clung to a more mannerist style, inspired by Sanskrit models. Indo-Persian poetry flourished under the well-heeled patronage of the Mughal emperors in Delhi and under more regional courts in the Deccan (central India).

Devotional poetry: south India

Arunagirinathar The tradition of Tamil devotional poetry reached its apogee with Arunagirinathar, whose dates are uncertain, but late 15^{th} or early 16^{th} century seems likely. Other poets came later, but his verse is the culmination of a rich interaction between Sanskrit and Tamil poetics that had been brewing for a thousand years. The result, illustrated in Arunagirinathar's masterpiece (the 1400 stanzas of *Tiruppukal*), is a magical confection of dazzling images and linguistic juggling. Some might say that the formal cleverness of the writing outshines its emotional depth, but even today his songs are sung by ordinary people with great pleasure.

Beschi An unlikely contributor to Tamil poetry in this period was an Italian-born missionary. C.J. Beschi (1680-1742 CE) spent four decades in the Tamil country, writing a still-used grammar and other works, but his extraordinary contribution ton to Tamil literature is crowned by *Tempavani*, a long devotional poem in praise of St. Joseph, Beschi's patron saint. Throughout the poem, the biblical story is Indianised and Tamilised, so that Joseph is made a prince who chooses the life of an ascetic (like the Buddha) until a sage convinces him to take up his duty (*dharma*) as a householder. The poem, with about 3,600 four-line verses, was completed in 1726 but remained buried in private collections until it was published in 1853. Even then many Tamil scholars refused to believe that a European could have written such an accomplished epic in refined Tamil.

Devotional poetry: north India

Ravidas An influential mystic, poet-saint and social reformer of this period is Ravidas (late 15^{th}/early 16^{th} c. CE?), who wrote searing songs in Hindi. Born to a low caste of leather-workers in the Punjab, his poems were heavily influenced by the egalitarianism of the Sikh movement and are included in the Sikh scriptures, which remain our primary textual source for Ravidas' work. Like Kabir, Ravidas articulated the *nirguna* concept of god, that is, a god without attributes.

Surdas An equally influential Hindi poet-saint, and contemporary of Ravidas, is Surdas (late 15th/early 16th c. CE). Surdas, however, wrote in Braj (a language closely related to Hindi and spoken in the Mathura region) and envisioned god (Krishna, in his case) as very much with attributes (*saguna*). His collection of poems (*Sursagar*) is said to have contained 100,000 poems, though only 8,000 survive, in which the poet achieves a subtle blend of mystical and sensual love.

Mirabai Among Surdas' contemporaries was Mirabai, a Rajput princess, who composed poems in a mixture of Braj, Rajasthani and Gujarati. As one of the few female poets recognised in literary histories, and one caught up in the Hindu-Muslim conflicts of her age, she has attracted a wealth of legends and attributions, many of which are considered spurious. The poems credited to her show an intense devotion to Krshna.

Ritipoets The language of Braj was developed into a literary language by a slightly later group of poets who wrote *riti*poetry. In contrast toearlier and contemporaneous devotional poems of longing and loss, the *riti*poets were more 'rule-bound' by Sanskrit poetics and wrote with more formal constraints.

Keshavdas A skilled writer in this genre was Keshavdas (1555-1617), a Brahmin who was brought up on Sanskrit learning. He, however, wrote his poems in Braj, a language spoke in the region of Mathura. His large output of poems, in the Vaisnavatradition of Krshna worship, is anthologised in major collections, such as *Rasikpriya* and *Kavipriya*. He also composed panegyrics to kings and patrons, moralistic verse and technical treatises on poetry.

Biharilal More highly regarded then and now among the*riti* poets is Biharilal (1595–1663 CE), whose poetry is less self-consciously academic and emotionally powerful. His best-known work is the *Satsai*('Seven Hundred Verses'), inspired by devotion to Krishna, and especially the love of Radha (cow girl) for the 'Dark Lord.' Nevertheless, Biharilal represented a return to the *bhakti* poetry of a few centuries earlier, in which Hindu and Muslim elements complemented each other.

Mangal-Kavya*Mangal-kavya* ('poems of benediction') were composed in Bengali as early as the 13th century CE, but the flowering of the genre took place in the 16th to 18th centuries. Most of these devotional poems are dedicated to a specific god or goddesses, the three most popular being *ManasaMangal*, *ChandiMangal* and *Dharma Mangal*. This poetic genre is representative of the early modern period in that the poems are a synthesis of classical and local literary-cultural traditions. For example, Chandi is a Bengali form of Parvati, wife of Siva, while Manasa is a Bengali goddess of snakes who was assimilated into the Hindu pantheon.

Dayaram The Gujarati language gained literary status toward the end of this period, largely through the writing of Dayaram (1767-1852). Although he wrote excellent prose, he is best remembered for his vast output of poems in the tradition of Krishna devotionalism. In particular, he developed the *garbi*, a type of lyrical verse sung while dancing during a ritual.

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

Tulsidas The most influential of all these Ramayanas was that composed in Hindi by Tulsidas (1532-1623 CE). His *Ramcaritmanas*is often called the 'bible of north India,' and certainly no other Hindi text matches the literary skill and cultural status of this epic rendering of the Rama story. Tulsidas transformed the Sanskrit text so thoroughly that recitation of his poem became (and still is) an act of worship. The influence of this text is underpinned by the fact that it is the textual basis for an immensely popular dramatic enactment of the Rama story in north India.

Muslim

AbulFaizl Among the many poets patronised by the Mughal emperors, the outstanding name is AbulFaizl (Shaikh Abu-al-Fazal-ibn Mubarak, 1547-1595). In addition to his well-known biography of Akbar (Akbarnama, for which see the article on ‘auto/biography’), he translated Hindu story literature into Persian, produced a list of 59 poets (including several Hindus) at Akbar’s court and wrote letters that have survived. Somehow, he also found time to compose a large number of poems in the Persian genres of*qasida*, *ghazal* and *rubai*.

Urdu Not all poets favoured Persian, and many turned instead to the inchoate language of Urdu, with its greater mix of Indo-Aryan words. Not surprisingly, this choice was made by writers living away from Delhi in the smaller but still sophisticated Muslim courts in the Deccan (central India). Two representative figures, who mainly wrote *ghazal*s in Urdu, are Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1580-1627), a ruler of Bijapur, and Mansabdar Allah-wirdi Khan (early 18th c.), a nobleman and military officer in the Muslim court at Hyderabad.

Questions/Discussion

1. The first European to write a major text in any Indian literature was the 18th century Italian missionary J.C. Beschi in Tamil. A close study of his epic poem *Tempavani*reveals an eclectic mixture of European and Tamil elements. What later contributions did Europeans make to the writing of Indian literature?
2. Urdu has a complex linguistic and political history that underpins the cultural history of early modern India. More research needs to be done on the literary cultures of Muslim courts in central India.
3. Compare the poetry of Surdas with that of Biharilal, both of whom wrote in the then-recently elevated literary language of Braj. Surdas’ verse is said to be ‘sensual’ and Biharilal’s to be ‘rational’, but is that contrast supported by a reading of their poems?

Reading

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Texts

1. Surdas, trans. RushilRao

Krishna said, 'O fair beauty, who are you?
Where do you live? Whose daughter are you?
I never yet saw you in the lanes of Braj.'

Radha said, 'What need have I to come this way?
I keep playing by my door.
But I hear that some son of Nanda
is in the habit of stealing butter and curds.'

Krishna said, 'Look, why should I appropriate
anything that's yours? Come, let's play together.'

Suradas says: By his honeyed words,
Krishna, the crafty prince of amorists,
beguiled Radha and put her at ease.

2.Ravidas, trans. WinandCallewaert and Peter Friedlander
Ravidas says, what shall I sing?
Singing, singing I am defeated.
How long shall I consider and proclaim:
absorb the self into the Self?

This experience is such,
that it defies all description.
I have met the Lord,
Who can cause me harm?

3. From *Tempavani* by Beschi, trans. B.G. Babington, 1823
Who is ignorant that Death fears not the strong bow dreaded by enemies,
Nor the works in verse or prose of such as have made all learning their own,
Nor the splendour of the king's sceptre, sparkling with innumerable refulgent rays,
Nor the beauty of such as resemble the unexpanded flower?

4. From *Tiruppukal* (song 1304) by Arunagirinathar

I do not wish to dwell in this illusory body,
built of the sky, water, earth, air, fire and desires.
Enlighten me, that I may praise the glory of your holy name
in the wise, beautiful Tamil tongue,
O Lord of the celestial heavens,
who protects the Kurava woman of the sweet, child-like words,
who wields the spear which destroyed the majestic hill
and wears a garland of scarlet flowers
where bees dance seeking honey.

Part VI : 19TH CENTURY

Overview
The nineteenth century was the long century of colonialism in India. From a few hundred officials in 1800, the British Raj grew into an empire by 1900. Christianity, English education and printing brought enormous changes, not least in literature. Rejection of the new was not possible, but a debate raged about the degree of accommodation, and the key literary battleground was poetry. The novel was too new—it had no Indian tradition with which to accommodate—and it came too late in the century. So it was in poetry (and, to a lesser degree, drama) that the battle between tradition and modernity was fought. With few exceptions, the result was the insertion of new content into traditional forms, but even that proved controversial.It was an exciting time to write poetry.

Urdu
GhazalThe decline of Muslim power meant a loss of prestige for Urdu (and Persian), which then became the literature of lament. The *ghazal* was ideally suited for this role, since even classical form expressed the pain and sorrow of lost love, in both earthly and divine realms. The *ghazal*was not, however, 'love poetry' in the Western sense. Rather, it was poetry about a highly formalised and stylised love that enabled poets to leave the constraints of reality behind and reach transcendental heights of mysticism.

Ghalib The greatest Urdu poet (and arguably the greatest Indian poet) of the century was Ghalib (1797-1869), who was an aristocrat and a defender of the crumbling Muslim aristocracy. He was educated in Persian and Arabic, and wrote Persian verse, but his Urdu *ghazal*s are considered his finest work. Although a conservative, he was also a mystic who criticised the ritualisation of religion and placed emphasis on personal experience. His verse is both complex and quotable, which is why he has come to represent the faded glory of the Mughal Empire.

Gujarati

Narmad (Narmadashankar, 1833-1886) was the voice of poetic change in Gujarati, though he spoke for all of India when, in 1858 he wrote a manifesto (*KavianiKavita*, 'The poet and poetry'). In it, he eloquently defended the new poetry that self-consciously borrowed from English verse. In the same year, he demonstrated his ideas by publishing a collection of his poetry (*NarmaKavita*). It was hailed, even by reluctant critics, as brilliant, and soon became a landmark of Gujarati literature. Narmad himself became something of a literary hero, a patriot (despite appreciation of English literature) and a fiery social reformer. His attitudes, shaped by the revolt of 1857-1858, are most clearly expressed in *Hinduo-ni-Padati*, which is a glorification of the Hindu past.

Tamil

VedanayakaSastriDevashayamPillai (1774-1864) was born in a Tamil Catholic family but converted to evangelical Protestantism as a young boy and became VedanayakaSastri. He wrote more than 35 books in Tamil, mostly prose tracts, but his lasting contribution was as a poet of this age of transition, transposing traditionaldevotionalisminto the hymns that Tamil Christians sung in church. His accommodation between *bhakti* and the bible, however, met with resistance from some parts of the Tamil Christian community who objected to Sastri's inclusion of 'heathen' aesthetics and practices. Still, his collection of hymns (*Jepamalai*) remained extremely popular with congregations.

Henry Alfred Krishna Pillai A generation after Sastri, came another Tamil Christian who wrote one of the finest poems of the 19th century in that language. Krishna Pillai (1827–1900) was born a Hindu but was educated in a Christian school in a small village. He was later baptised in Madras, adding the names 'Henry Alfred' but retaining his Hindu names. Like Sastri, his life's work was an accommodation of traditional Tamil devotionalism to Christian thinking. His greatest work, *RatchanyaYatrigram*, which took him sixteen years to complete, was inspired by both Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Kampan's Tamil *Ramayana* (12th CE.)

RamalingaSwamigalDespite the impact of Christianity, traditional Tamil poetry continued to flourish during this century, as evident in the work of RamalingaSwamigal(1823-1874). Some scholars even consider him the greatest poet of the century, which is debatable, but certainly he was the last in the long line of Tamil Saiva poet-saints. Although he lived in the 19th century, little is known of his life, though today he is the centre of a cult whose members believe that he did not 'die' but was 'received by God.' His output was enormous (one modern print collection runs to 1500 pages), composed in many different verse forms and exhibiting a nimble use of language. However, the outstanding feature of his poetry, again deriving from the *bhakti* tradition, is its musicality.

MastanSahab Tamil poetry of a high quality was also written by Muslims, the most famous of whom is Mastan Sahib (b. 1830?). Like Ramalinga, he was a mystic, who withdrew from life, wandered in the forest and acquired disciples. He did not write many poems—only about 5,000 lines survive—but many display a subtlety and depth of feeling, again similar to that of the classical Tamil *bhakti* poets, in expressing his universal religion.

Bengali

Michael MadhusudanDutt As the capital of the British Raj, Calcutta was the seedbed for the new literature, and that city's most celebrated author (until Tagore) was Michael MadhusudanDutt (1824-1873). A highly-respected playwright and essayist, Dutt also pioneered the Bengali blank-verse and the Bengali sonnet. One of his poems, 'AtmaBilap' ('Self-lament') nicely reveals the shift towards personalised literature that epitomises the period. However, his most celebrated work, and one that displays the transitional nature of 19th-century Indian poetry is *Meghnad Bodh Kavya* ('Story of Meghnad's Killing'). In it, he adapts a story from the *Ramayana* using a variety of western romantic and classical influences, as well as Sanskrit poetics.

Rabindranath Tagore The most remarkable writer of this remarkable century, however, was surely Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Even before his concern for the destiny of his country brought him into politics, his poetry shone with an passion for the natural world and an understanding of human emotions. Like other great poets of this century, he married the sensibility of his regional (Bengali) tradition with that of modernity. In particular, he drew on the ballads of the itinerant Bauls, plus the

Vaisnava devotionalism of his own language and that of Braj. At the age of 16, he composed poems later published (under a pseudonym) as *BhanusimhaThakurerPadabali.* His most famous work, *Gitanjali,* which was published in 1910, earned him the Nobel Prize in 1913.

Questions/Discussion

1. Poetry has been the default position of Indian literature since ancient times. For more than two thousand years, it was regarded as the most cultivated expression of the literary arts, close to singing and close to god. Perhaps this longevity and cultural status is what enabled poetry not only to survive the encounter with western literary models, but also to enrich itself in the process.
2. The accommodation of Christianity with devotionalism in Tamil poetry is a good example of this process. Yet, this, too, was controversial and generated debates about the unwanted 'heathen' elements in Indian Christian hymns and prayer practice. This situation was replicated all over the colonised world, in Asia and Africa. Today, however, the 'empire strikes back,' and the Church of England is facing a severe challenge to its unity from African churches who do not like the liberal drift of its leaders.
3. Compare the poetry of Dutt and Tagore. Separate by a generation, do they display traces of the significant political and social changes that had occurred by the end of the century?

Reading

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Texts

1. From Ghalib's poetry

The Sheikh hovers by the tavern door,
but believe me, Ghalib,
I am sure I saw him slip in
As I departed

Said I one night to a pristine seer
(Who knew the secrets of whirling Time)
'Sir you well perceive,
That goodness and faith,
Fidelity and love
Have all departed from this sorry land.
Father and son are at each other's throat;
Brother fights brother.
Unity and Federation are undermined.
Despite these ominous signs
Why has not Doomsday come?
Why does not the Last Trumpet sound?
Who holds the reins of the Final Catastrophe.'

2. From *Gitanjali* by Tagore

Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light! Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life; the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love; the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth. The butterflies spread their sails on the sea of light. Lilies and jasmines surge up on the crest of the waves of light. The light is shattered into gold on every cloud, my darling, and it scatters gems in profusion. Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling, and gladness without measure. The heaven's river has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad.

3. From poetry of Dutt, translated from the original Bengali by the poet

Where man in all his truest glory lives,
And nature's face is exquisitely sweet;
For those fair climes I heave impatient sigh,
There let me live and there let me die.
Long sunk in superstition's night,
By Sin and Satan driven,
I saw not, cared not for the light
That leads the blind to Heaven.
But now, at length thy grace, O Lord!
Birds all around me shine;
I drink thy sweet, thy precious word,
I kneel before thy shrine!

[on his way to England]:
Forget me not, O Mother,
Should I fail to return
To thy hallowed bosom.
Make not the lotus of thy memory
Void of its nectar Madhu.

Part VII : EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Overview

Poetry, the oldest, most entrenched and most respected genre in Indian literary tradition, had survived the challenges of the nineteenth century almost intact. Colonialism and Christianity did not substantially alter the writing of Indian poetry, but the modernism of the early twentieth century did. We could say that Indian poetry in most languages reached modernity through two stages: first romanticism and then nationalism. Urdu, however, was something of an exception to this generalisation, inasmuch as its modernity was implicated in a romantic nostalgia for the past.

Urdu

Mohammad Iqbal Mohammad Iqbal (1877?-1938) was the last major Persian poet of South Asia and the most important Urdu poet of the twentieth century. A philosopher and politician, as well, he is considered the spiritual founder of Pakistan. His finely worked poems combine a glorification of the past, Sufi mysticism and passionate anti-imperialism. As an advocate of pan-Islam, at first he wrote in Persian (two important poems being ‘Shikwah,’ 1909, and ‘Jawab-e-Shikwah,’ 1912), but then switched to Urdu, with *Bangri-Dara* in 1924. In much of his later work, there is a tension between the mystical and the political, the two impulses that drove Urdu poetry in this period.

Progressives Politics came to dominate in the next phase of Urdu poetry, from the 1930s, when several poets formed what is called the ‘progressive movement.’ Loosely connected, they nevertheless shared a tendency to favour social engagement over formal aesthetics. ‘Miraji’ (Muhammad Sanaullah,1912-1949) wrote satirical verse, drawing on his knowledge of French poetry, while SardarJafri (b.1912) was influenced by Walt Whitman in his use of free verse, and MajruhSultanpuri (1912-1955) went back to the traditional *ghazal*to express his progressive ideas.

Hindi

Dwivedi The new poetry in Hindi was pioneered by Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1864-1938), whose verse broke from the mannerism of earlier poets, particularly those who used the Braj dialect. Through the magazine *Saraswati*, which he edited for a while, Dwivedipopulariseda poetry inspired by nationalism and by an awareness of social evils.

Chayavad A more lasting influence on Hindi poetry was exerted by the *chayavad*('reflexionist') movement in the 1920s and 1930s. These poets, influenced by the English romantics, Tagore's Bengali lyricism and Indian mysticism, wrote with self-reflection about sensual love and nature.

Nirala A key figure of this 'neo-romanticism' was SuryakantTripathi 'Nirala' (1896-1961), a Bengali Brahman, who nevertheless wrote his poetry in Hindi. Equally conversant with ancient Indian philosophy and modern English literature, he had the intellectual power to synthesise various strands in his humanist and revolutionary writing. Often using free verse, his work was considered too unconventional to be popular in his lifetime.

MahadeviVarmaThe only woman poet in the*chayavad* movement, was Mahadevi Varma (1907-1987), who went largely unrecognised in her time. She drew on the more traditional reservoir of Sanskrit poetry and the medieval lyrics of Mirabai (a woman poet of the 16th c. CE) to create sensual love poetry.

Bengali

Rabindranath Tagore Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who had already helped shape modern Bengali with his poems and fiction in the late 19th century, continued to influence its future with his poetry in the 20th. In 1901, he established a rural retreat (Shantiniketan), where he wrote his Nobel Prize winning *Gitanjali* ('Song Offerings') in 1912. Although these poems are rightly regarded as mystical (and often derided as such), they were deepened by his grief over the recent deaths of his wife and two of his children. Tagore, however, was moving away from spiritualism at the time and soon produced a collection of robustly humanist verse, such as *Balaka*, 'Wild Geese,' 1916.

Kallol poets The modernist movement in Bengali poetry was self-consciously announced by the Kallol('Sound Waves') poets, a term taken from a magazine of the same name that published their poetry in the 1920s and 1930s. Influenced by Marx and Freud, Pound and Eliot, and distancing themselves from Tagore's 'soft' humanism, some (like PremendraMitra, 1904-1988) preferred a gritty realism, while others (like Buddhadeva Bose, 1908-1974) produced 'art for art's sake.'

English

Sri Aurobindo While Tagore was leaving behind the mystical traditions of Indian poetry, another Bengali poet, AurobindoGhose (later Sri Aurobindo, 1972-1950), was entering into a very deep spiritual plane in his poetry. Having spent 15 years in England, he returned to India in 1893 and became a passionate advocate of Indian nationalism. His radical politics landed him in jail, where he had spiritual experiences, though was later forced to leave to leave British India to escape an arrest warrant and live in the French enclave of Pondicherry. There he wrote his masterpiece, *Savitri*, an epic poem of 23,000 lines in blank verse, which was only published after his death. It is the poetic expression of his philosophy, which explains the evolution of the human soul through the history of mankind and its hopeful future.

Sarojini Naidu Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was a poet and politician, whose career nicely illustrates the two strands of early twentieth-century poetry. She was the first woman to serve as governor of a state and the first Indian woman to be elected leader of the Indian National Congress. Her poetry, harking back to the lyricism of Bengali poets of the previous century, has been criticised as a faded voice from the past, while others have pointed out that it was an authentically Indian voice, finely tuned to the composite reality of India. Her major works include *The Bird of Time* (1912), *The Broken Wings* (1917) and *The Sceptred Flute* (1946)

Tamil

SubramaniaBharatiTamil had no poet of with the international fame of Tagore, but in SubramaniaBharati (1882-1921) it had a poet of equal skill and status, who fired the imagination of the south Indian literary world. Burning with a revolutionary fever for political change, he famously hailed the 1917 Russian revolution as a manifestation of the power of *shakti* (female force in Hindu mythology). Like the best of his contemporaries, he combined traditional learning with western thinking, using well-known metres and *bhakti* imagery to condemn the caste system and women's oppression. Like Sri Aurobindo, he fled to Pondicherry to escape being jailed for sedition, and there he continued to publish poems that drew on Hindu, Christian and Islamic traditions. He brought also free verse into Tamil and wrote poems that sung.

Malayalam

KumaranAsanKumaranAsan (1873-1924) was one of three Malayalam poets who were collectively known as the 'trio. Asan was the poetic voice of a low-caste uplift movement. For instance, in his poem 'Simhanadam' ('The Tiger's Roar,' 1919), urges his readers to respond 'where the caste-demon rears its ugly face.' All his poems are similarly devoted to raising awareness of caste inequality, but he was capable of delicate lyrics, too, as in 'VinaPuvu' ('Fallen Flower,' 1908). One of his last (and perhaps greatest) work 'Karuna' ('Compassion') is a meditation on the universal need for empathy.

VallatholNarayanaMenonVallathol Narayana Menon (1879-1958) was a more conventional poet, utilising the traditional themes of Indian mythology. He was, however, a committed nationalist and refused to accept a gift offered by the British government in honour of his poetry. Like SubramaniaBharati in Tamil, he used traditional images to articulate new feelings, as in 'Gangapati' (1913), in which Parvati challenges her husband Siva

UloorParameswaraIyerUloorParameswaraIyer (1877-1949) also followed tradition, especially in his epic poem about the history of Kerala ('Uma Keralam,' 'The Glory of Kerala,'1913). However, his later poems move away from traditional themes and use more conversational language.

Questions/Discussion

1. Two outstanding poets on this period, Sri Aurobindo in English and SubramaniaBharati in Tamil, were jailed by the British authorities for the seditious ideas in their writing. Both subsequently fled to Pondicherry, where they became friends and talked about the role of poetry in colonial India. One observer commented that their 'conversation was a sort of variety entertainment.
   Only the level was very high, both of them being, in cricket language, "all-rounders".' No historical document exists of their conversations, which would make fascinating material for a short story or a play.

2. Sarojini Naidu and Mahadevi Varma were both excellent poets and the best-known women poets of their generation in English and Hindi, respectively. Yet, they were very different people. Naidu was a high-profile public figure, while Varma, though serving as Vice-Chancellor of a minor women's university, was more retiring. A good research topic would be to determine the extent to which one influenced the other.

3. Modern poetry (and fiction) in most major Indian languages was promoted by literary journals and magazines, often edited by key literary figures. Sometimes these periodicals were very small operations, poorly produced and continued for only a few years, yet their impact was enormous. The role of these minor periodicals in forging a new Indian literature would a fascinating topic for research.

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Texts

1. From Tagore's *Gitanjali*

The time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long.
I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued my voyage through the wildernesses of worlds leaving my track on many a star and planet.
It is the most distant course that comes nearest to thyself, and that training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune. The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end.
My eyes strayed far and wide before I shut them and said 'Here art thou!'
The question and the cry 'Oh, where?' melt into tears of a thousand streams and deluge the world with the flood of the assurance 'I am!'

2. SubramaniaBharati's poems

trans. S. VijayaBharati (the poet's granddaughter)

They are fools who cultivate the flames of enmity
Insisting on the existence of several Gods
God is One, Which exists in all beings.
There should be no cruelties of caste .
The world will flourish only by love."
God blessed woman with wisdom
A few fools on earth destroyed their intellect.

trans. A.K. Ramanujan

Wind, come softly.
Don't break the shutters of the windows.
Don't scatter the papers.
Don't throw down the books on the shelf.
There, look what you did — you threw them all down.
You tore the pages of the books.
You brought rain again.
You're very clever at poking fun at weaklings.
Frail crumbling houses, crumbling doors, crumbling rafters,
crumbling wood, crumbling bodies, crumbling lives,
crumbling hearts —
the wind god winnows and crushes them all.
He won't do what you tell him.
So, come, let's build strong homes,
Let's joint the doors firmly.
Practise to firm the body.
Make the heart steadfast.
Do this, and the wind will be friends with us.
The wind blows out weak fires.
He makes strong fires roar and flourish.
His friendship is good.
We praise him every day.

3. From Nirala's poems, trans. David Rubin

As T. S. Eliot tossed out

A stone from here, a pebble from there

His readers, with
their hands on their hearts,
exclaimed,
'He's described the whole world!'

I know I've crossed
The rivers
and torrents I had to cross.
I laugh now
as I see
There wasn't any boat.

Whoever's spent
these days of sorrow
counting and counting
the minutes,
the trifles,
has strung
a necklace
of tears
like pearls
and tossed it around
his lover's throat
to see the fair face
serene and bright,
in the night of sorrow.

Part VIII : LATE 20TH CENTURY

<u>Overview</u>

Poetry, the premier literary form in India for three thousand years, did not recover from the onslaught of modernity in the twentieth century. There is no modern counterpart to the court-poet or the poet-saint, unless we speak of the lyricist whose lines are sung in Indian cinema. While the Indian novel continues to flourish, poetry has largely lost its cultural status and public profile. It is still written in regional languages, but audiences and book sales are small. Indian poetry in English does enjoy some success, although it retains little from premodern Indian poetry except on the level of content. There are, however, bright spots in Indian post-colonial poetry. We can, for instance, point to the rise of women poets in all languages, as part of the broader feminist movements in the late 20th century. The brevity of poetry also means it can be read with pleasure in a matter of minutes. And, so, in the age of the internet, a poet in a small town in India can reach an audience in Tokyo and Melbourne and Warsaw.

<u>Urdu</u>

Gulzar These trends are illustrated by the career of Gulzar (Sampooran Singh Kalra,b. 1934), who is today described as a 'poet-lyricist'. He writes in several languages (Hindi, Punjabi, Braj and Urdu) and has published several well-received collections of poetry, the latest in 2014 (*Green Poems*). However, his reputation rests on the Urdu lyrics, featuring the trials and hopes of the common man, which he has composed for films, starting with songs like 'Mora Gora Ang'(in *Bandini*, 1963) and 'HumneDekhiHai'(in *Khamoshi*, 1969). In 2008, he shot to international fame when he won the Oscar for the song 'Jai Ho' in *Slumdog Millionaire*.

<u>Hindi</u>

Ashok Vajpeyi Hindi writer Ashok Vajpeyi (b. 1941) represents another kind of modern poet. More a 'man of letters' than of song lyrics, Vajpeyi is an academic poet, critic, essayist and cultural administrator. He has published more than twenty books, including poetry collections, starting with *ShaherAbBhiSambhavana Hai* ('The City is Still Likely') in1966 and continuing with *Vivaksha* ('Implication') in 2006. He has also had a parallel life in government, beginning in 1965 and culminating in his chairmanship of the country's elite arts organisation in 2008-2011.

AnamikaAmong a younger generation of Hindi poets is Anamika (b. 1961). Born after Independence, she belongs to another cultural world, more cosmopolitan and less connected to tradition. Anamika writes poetry and novels in Hindi, literary criticism in English and translates from English into Hindi. Her work, especially the poetry, reflects a feminist, social activist and global perspective. Among her collections, critics have single out *Anushtup* ('Invocation,'1998) *and KhurduriHatheliyan*('Rough Palms,' 2005).

<u>Marathi</u>

ArunKolatkarArunKolatkar (1931-2004), who wrote in both Marathi and English, is widely recognised as an outstanding modern poet. Although he published widely as a young man, mostly in small magazines and newspapers, his first book of English poems (*Jejuri,* the name of a town) won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1976and another collection (*Kala Ghoda,'*Black Horse,' a neighbourhood of Bombay) won a SahityaAkademi Award in 2004. *Jejuri*, however, is still regarded as his finest. Named after an old town with a famous temple, it describes the experience of a traveller, who arrives on a state transport bus and wanders about the town, confused and alienated, and yet at the end leaves the place with a sense of wonder. It is a haunting portrait of psychological disorientation.

<u>Tamil</u>

Salma The story of Tamil poet and novelist Salma (Rajathi Salma, b. 1968) is almost the stuff of legend. Born into a conservative Muslim family in a small town, she was taken out of school at age 13 and forced to marry. Undeterred, Salma continued to write her poems surreptitiously. She hid the scraps of paper, smuggled them out of the house and posted them to a publisher in Madras. Eventually, in 2000, a collection of poems *(OruMalaiyum, InnoruMalaiyum, '*An Evening and Another Evening') was published, followed by another (*Pacai Devatai*, 'Green Angel') in 2003. Reactions to these often overtly sexual and sensual poems have ranged from disgust to high praise. Today she is a central figure in new Tamil poetry.

<u>English</u>

DilipChitre Like many of his contemporaries, DilipChitre (1938 -2009) was a poet who travelled back and forth between his mother-tongue and English. Born in Baroda and brought up in Bombay by a Marathi-speaking family, he was educated in English and later spent time in several countries, including the USA. He published his first book of Marathi poems in 1960 but gained an international reputation in 2008 with his collection of English poems (*As Is, Where Is*). His bilingual poetic powers are evident in a famous translation of devotional poems from the 17th-century Marathi writer Tukram (*Says Tuka*, 1991). Chitre was also a talent painter and musician.

Nissim Ezekiel Nissim Ezekiel (1924 –2004) was another polymath best-known for his poetry. Born into an Indian Jewish family in Bombay, he was brought up by his professor father and school-principal mother. After four years studying in London, where he immersed himself in the world of film and the visual arts, he returned to India (working on a cargo ship) and worked as a critic and editor. His first poetry collection (*A Time to Change*) was published in 1952, followed by a dozen others. When his language was criticised as 'old school' and 'colonial', he experimented (unsuccessfully) with 'Indian English.' His best poems ('Patriot' and 'The Night of the Scorpion') display a wicked wit and deep humanism.

A.K.RamanujanA.K. Ramanujan (1929 –1993) was perhaps the most brilliant of all the Indian English poets. Trained as a linguist, famous for his translations from ancient poems, and fascinated by Indian folklore, he brought to all his work a deep knowledge of Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada and English literature. At the same time, he balanced this classical learning with an appreciation of Indian oral traditions. For example, he opened up the study of the *Ramayana* with an essay 'Three Hundred Ramayanas', which was subsequently banned in major Indian universities but continues to enlighten generations of students and researchers. His poetry (*The Striders*, 1966; *Relations*, 1971; *Selected Poems*, 1976; *Second Sight*, 1986) displays a similar originality in its Haiku-like lapidary concision.

Questions/Discussion

1. One explanation for the decline of poetry in Indian languages in the twentieth century is that the nationalist and reformist ideas that dominated India until after 1950 were more effectively articulated in fiction and the essay.
2. To what extent can we compare the poet-saints of medieval and pre-modern India with the lyricists of today's cinema? Both composed and sang songs, but is this only an irrelevant, albeit interesting, commonality?
3. Many of the best English-language poets either wrote in or translated from a regional language. What role does bi- and tri-lingualism play in the formation of literary culture in contemporary India?

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Texts

1. 'The Black Hen,' by A.K Ramanujan
   It must come as leaves
   to a tree
   or not at all

   yet it comes sometimes
   as the black hen
   with the red round eye

   on the embroidery
   stitch by stitch
   dropped and found again

   and when it's all there
   the black hen stares
   with its round red eye

   and you're afraid.

2. 'Father returning home,' by DilipChitre
   My father travels on the late evening train
   Standing among silent commuters in the yellow light
   Suburbs slide past his unseeing eyes
   His shirt and pants are soggy and his black raincoat
   Stained with mud and his bag stuffed with books
   Is falling apart. His eyes dimmed by age
   fade homeward through the humid monsoon night.
   Now I can see him getting off the train
   Like a word dropped from a long sentence.
   He hurries across the length of the grey platform,
   Crosses the railway line, enters the lane,

His chappals are sticky with mud, but he hurries onward.
Home again, I see him drinking weak tea,
Eating a stale chapati, reading a book.
He goes into the toilet to contemplate
Man's estrangement from a man-made world.
Coming out he trembles at the sink,
The cold water running over his brown hands,
A few droplets cling to the greying hairs on his wrists.
His sullen children have often refused to share
Jokes and secrets with him. He will now go to sleep
Listening to the static on the radio, dreaming
Of his ancestors and grandchildren, thinking
Of nomads entering a subcontinent through a narrow pass.

3. from *Jejuri,* by Kolatkar
The tarpaulin flaps are buttoned down
on the windows of the state transport bus.
all the way up to jejuri.

a cold wind keeps whipping
and slapping a corner of tarpaulin at your elbow.

you look down to the roaring road.
you search for the signs of daybreak in what little light spills out of bus.

your own divided face in the pair of glasses
on an old man`s nose
is all the countryside you get to see.

you seem to move continually forward.
toward a destination
just beyond the caste mark beyond his eyebrows.

outside, the sun has risen quietly
it aims through an eyelet in the tarpaulin.
and shoots at the old man`s glasses.

a sawed off sunbeam comes to rest gently against the driver`s right temple.
the bus seems to change direction.

at the end of bumpy ride with your own face on the either side
when you get off the bus.

you don't step inside the old man`s head.

4. 'Oppantam' ('Contract'), by Salma, trans. N. Kalyan Raman

My sister hisses at me in anger
what my mother whispers tactfully:
that all failures
on the conjugal bed
are mine alone.

The first words I hear
every night in the bedroom:
'What's with you tonight?'

These are, most often,
the final words too.

A finger points to whorish barter.
Upon the air of timorous nights, awaiting redemption
from ten million glowing stars,
float words of wise counsel

Unable to feed its young,
the cat sobs like a child;
and its wail
seizes my heart.

You, too,
must have your complaints.
My stand, though,
has been made clear
by time and history.

To receive
a little of your love,
dreary though it might be –

To fulfil
my duties
as the mother of your child –

To have you bring
sanitary towels and contraceptives
From the outside world;
And to seek more such petty favours –

To order you around a bit,
if I could –

To affirm a little
of my authority –

My vagina opens,
knowing all that it should.

5. 'Pacai Devatai' '(Green Angel') by Salma,trans. Lakshmi Holstrom

In the midst of a thicket
beside a pond that has fed on the morning
and spreads out in beauty
I search for the pathway that I have lost.
Just as the darkness of the dense trees
threatens to snatch me up and swallow me
a compassionate angel appears
to close up my dark hole of fear
and to retrieve three pledges
even from the depths of the mysterious pond:
to light up the path I lost
to re-thread a shattered dream from my youth

to imagine an entirely new dream.
And while I find again my path,
straighten an old dream that was askew,
relish a new dream once more,
through tongues of fire that flame my eyes
I see the angel treading the earth
her clothes steeped in green.