

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

INDIAN LITERATURE

Study Guide Description

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

About the Professor

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Contents

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

PRE-CLASSICAL PERIOD

POETRY

Overview

Pre-classical Indian literature contains two types of writing: poetry and commentary (which resembles the essay). These ancient texts (dating from about 1200 to 400 BCE) were composed, transmitted and recited in Sanskrit by Brahmin priests. It is poetry, however, that dominates the corpus of Vedic literature and is considered the more sacred style of expression. Vedic verse is often puzzling, sometimes intentionally so, because it explores complex ideas and was a language reserved for priests.

Four Vedas

History The most famous and the oldest of these texts are known as the Four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva), which date from about 1200 and 900 BCE. Brought to India by the Aryans, who migrated to the subcontinent from the northwest, the Four Vedas contain a recognisably Indo-European mythology and pantheon. The Vedic sky-father god Dyaus, for example, is cognate with the Greek Zeus. The Four Vedas contain many recensions, or 'paths,' the most recent of which is thought to have been composed in about 100 BCE. 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 chanted 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 last, the Atharva Veda, is very different from the other three in that it mainly contains charms and imprecations.

Composition The Four Vedas were orally composed, transmitted and recited, using a complex set of mnemonic techniques, metrical schemes and literary conventions, by a series of poets over a period of several hundred years. Although writing was used in the earlier Indus Valley civilisation (c. 2500 -1500 BCE), the Indus script remains undeciphered, and the first inscriptions in a known Indian language appear only in the 3rd c. BCE. Vedic literature is sacred speech (speech is deified as the goddess Vac). The Vedas were not read. They were heard.

Memorisation Vedic 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.

Metre 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.

Rig Veda

Contents The Rig Veda is not only the oldest but also the most 'literary' of these ancient texts in that it contains mythic stories. Told in verse form, these stories paint a picture of human drama and divine power. 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.

Creation Memorable 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,' the ancient sages ask, 'did being evolve from non-being? There is no certainty, not even among those who look down on it, in the highest heaven.'

Discussion/questions

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 facilitate oral transmission. Then analyse the role of orality in religion by comparing the Vedas with the literature of two other world religions.
2. Study the 'Hymn of Creation' (Rig Veda 10.129, Text 1 below). 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 (of 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 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 scholarly reconstruction of Vedic society by closely reading the texts and the secondary sources.

Reading

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)

Texts

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 immortality then. There was no distinguishing sign of night nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own impulse. Other than that there was nothing beyond.

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

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

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

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

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

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

ESSAY

Overview

The largely poetic texts of the Four Vedas were followed in time by three other types of texts composed (c. 900-400 BCE) as commentaries and explications of them. The three sets of primarily prose texts are: 1) Brahmanas, 2) Aranyakas and 3) Upanishads. While the language and content of these commentaries are quite different to what we might think of as an 'essay,' they do approach that modern genre in their intention to instruct and inform. Early Indian inscriptions are perhaps closer to the model of argumentative prose writing suggested by the essay.

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

Aranyakas The *Aranyakas*, or 'Forest Books,' are less functional and more contemplative than the Brahmanas. They are meant to be used by men toward the end of life when, by convention, they enter the forest for meditation. They are also transitional texts, in that they provide a bridge from the ritual and mythology of the Four Vedas and the philosophical speculation of the Upanishads. As an example, the *Aitareya Aranyaka* contains discussions of the correct recitation of specific words, of breathing techniques and of the esoteric meanings of certain rituals and mantras. Continuity is also evident in that three of the last sections of this Aranyaka become, with minor changes, one of the Upanishads.

Upanishads While there are more than 200 texts bearing the title 'Upanishad' (lit. 'sitting near [a sage]'), only twelve are considered major texts. These major texts were composed over a number of centuries, probably from about 800-400 BCE. Like all early Indian literature, the major Upanishads were orally composed and transmitted; however, tradition maintains that they were created by named sages. The earliest surviving written texts date from about the 14 century AD, although, like other Vedic texts, they were probably written down much earlier. The Upanishads are central to understanding the development of Indian literature since they develop the prose style begun in the commentaries. The short passages of prose found in the *Brahmanas* are here extended to the equivalent of full pages.

Inscriptions Another important early source for the development of Indian prose in this period is the large corpus of inscriptions, mostly in Sanskrit but also in Prakrit. Many inscriptions were in verse, and many were heraldic declarations or hagiographical statements, but some of the most famous were written in prose (or a combination of verse and prose).

Among these prose inscriptions, the Ashoka edicts in Prakrit resemble the modern essay in that they present a personal argument (see Text 2 below, in which the Buddhist king explains why he has renounced warfare). This early use of prose is a rich, but so far untapped, resource for the study of Indian literary history.

Discussion/questions

1. Compare prose passages in all three categories of texts (Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads) and use them to trace the historical development of prose in this period.
2. Although the essay in its modern form did not appear in Indian literature until the 19th century, its antecedents can be found in earlier periods, all the way back to the ancient Vedic texts. Assess the validity of this statement by a study of argumentative prose in India. Can similar claims be made for the essay in other classical literatures, such as Chinese, Greek or Latin?

Reading

Patrick Olivelle, *Upanisads* (Oxford, 2008)

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

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

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

Texts

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

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

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

2. Edict XIII of King Ashoka, in Prakit, trans. E. Hultzsch,

(A) When king Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin had been anointed eight years, (the country of) the Kaliṅgas was conquered by (him).

(B) One hundred and fifty thousand in number were the men who were deported thence, one hundred thousand in number were those who were slain there, and many times as many those who died.

(C) After that, now that (the country of) the Kaliṅgas has been taken, Dēvānāmpriya (is devoted) to a zealous study of morality, to the love of morality, and to the instruction (of people) in morality.

(D) This is the repentance of Dēvānāmpriya on account of his conquest of (the country of) the Kaliṅgas.

(E) For, this is considered very painful and deplorable by Dēvānāmpriya, that, while one is conquering an unconquered (country), slaughter, death, and deportation of people (are taking place) there.

(F) But the following is considered even more deplorable than this by Dēvānāmpriya.

(G) (To) the Brāhmaṇas or Śramaṇas, or other sects or householders, who are living there, (and) among whom the following are practised: obedience to those who receive high pay, obedience to mother and father, obedience to elders, proper courtesy to friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives, to slaves and servants, (and) firm devotion,—to these then happen injury or slaughter or deportation of (their) beloved ones.

(H) Or, if there are then incurring misfortune the friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives of those whose affection (for the latter) is undiminished, although they are (themselves) well provided for, this (misfortune) as well becomes an injury to those (persons) themselves.

(I) This is shared by all men and is considered deplorable by Dēvānāmpriya.

(J) And there is no (place where men) are not indeed attached to some sect.

(K) Therefore even the hundredth part or the thousandth part of all those people who were slain, who died, and who were deported at that time in Kaliṅga, (would) now be considered very deplorable by Dēvānāmpriya.

- (L) And Dēvānāmpriya thinks that even (to one) who should wrong (him), what can be forgiven is to be forgiven,
- (M) And even (the inhabitants of) the forests which are (included) in the dominions of Dēvānāmpriya, even those he pacifies (and) converts.
- (N) And they are told of the power (to punish them) which Dēvānāmpriya (possesses) in spite of (his) repentance, in order that they may be ashamed (of their crimes) and may not be killed.
- (O) For Dēvānāmpriya desires towards all beings abstention from hurting, self-control, (and) impartiality in (case of) violence.
- (P) And this conquest is considered the principal one by Dēvānāmpriya, viz. the conquest by morality [dhamma vijaya].
- (Q) And this (conquest) has been won repeatedly by Dēvānāmpriya both here and among all (his) borderers, even as far as at (the distance of) six hundred *yōjanas*, where the Yōna king named Antiyoka (is ruling), and beyond this Antiyoka, (where) four—4—kings (are ruling), (viz. the king) named Turamaya, (the king) named Antikini, (the king) named Maka, (and the king) named Alikāśudara, (and) towards the south, (where) the Chōḍas and Pāṇḍyas (are ruling), as far as Tāmraparṇī.
- (R) Likewise here in the king's territory, among the Yōnas and Kambōyas, among the Nabhakas and Nabhitis, among the Bhōjas and Pītinikas, among the Andhras and Palidas, —everywhere (people) are conforming to Dēvānāmpriya's instruction in morality [dhamma].
- (S) Even, those to whom the envoys of Dēvānāmpriya do not go, having heard of the duties of morality, the ordinances, (and) the instruction in morality of Dēvānāmpriya, are conforming to morality and will conform to (it).
- (T) This conquest, which has been won by this everywhere, —a conquest (won) everywhere (and) repeatedly, —causes the feeling of satisfaction.
- (U) Satisfaction has been obtained (by me) at the conquest by morality.
- (V) But this satisfaction is indeed of little (consequence).
- (W) Dēvānāmpriya thinks that only the fruits in the other (world) are of great (value).
- (X) And for the following purpose has this rescript on morality been written, (viz.) in order that the sons (and) great-grandsons (who) may be (born) to me, should not think that a fresh conquest ought to be made, (that), if a conquest does please them, they should take pleasure in mercy and light punishments, and (that) they should regard the conquest by morality as the only (true) conquest.
- (Y) This (conquest bears fruit) in this world (and) in the other world.
- (Z) And let there be (to them) pleasure in the abandonment of all (other aims), which is pleasure in morality.
- (AA) For this (bears fruit) in this world (and) in the other world.

CLASSICAL PERIOD

POETRY

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, 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 Classical Sanskrit poetry was dominated by *kavya*, a capacious category that is perhaps best understood as a meta-genre containing several sub-genres. Long poems, for example, were called *maha* ('great') *kavya*. Another prominent form of Sanskrit court poetry is the lyric verse devoted to love and longing and using a repertoire of 'adornments' (*alankara*), such as stock epithets, alliterations and metaphors. *Kavya* poets flourished during the Gupta Empire (3rd-5th c. CE).

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. Appearing in approximately 100 CE as a hagiography of the historical Buddha, it is composed in 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.

Kalidasa The most influential classical Sanskrit poet was Kalidasa (5th c. CE), who was patronised by Gupta kings. Kalidasa was prolific. He wrote two long poems or *mahakavyas* (*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*). He was also a famous playwright.

Bhartrhari Little is known about Bhartrhari, though most scholars believe he lived in the 5th century CE and wrote important Sanskrit texts, such as the *Vākyapadīya* (an original 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* (the distillation of an aesthetic mood 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.

Genre 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, the war poems (*puram*) typically describe public events, especially war and the actions of kings, and they contain the names of kings, poets, battles and towns. They are filled with an ethos of fame and shame. A mother, for instance, does not want to see wounds on her son's back. And a king places his daughters in the care of a bard before he starves himself to death, rather than face defeat.

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 declaimed the verses, while the writing was done by Ganesa (the elephant-headed god) as a scribe. 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 1200 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 patrilineal 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 animosity and lead to the exile of one group by the other. Underneath themes 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 the 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 (an *avatar* of Visnu).

Epic poetry: Ramayana

Composition The Sanskrit *Ramayana* ('Way of Rama' or 'Story of Rama') was 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. However, we 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.

Contents The 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.

A Theme As with the Mahabharata, the story illustrates the value of fraternal loyalty and *dharma*. Underlying this 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.

Discussion/questions

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

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 A.K. Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape* (OUP India, 1994)
 William Buck, *Ramayana* (California, 2000)
 John Smith, *Mahabharata* (Penguin, 2009)
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 R. Parthasarathy, *Cilappatikaram: The Tale of an Anklet* (Penguin India, 2004)

Texts

1. From the *Buddhacarita*, trans. Charles Willemen

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*, trans. AK Ramanujan

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

3. From the Tamil *Kuruntokai*, trans. AK Ramanujan

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

4. From the Tamil *Purunanuru*, trans. AK Ramanujan

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.

DRAMA

Overview

Although little is known of the beginnings of drama in India, the earliest surviving plays (from the 5th c. CE) contain some of the best-loved stories in Indian literature. Classical Indian drama is, at the same time, very different to modern Indian 'theatre.' Closer to folk and regional traditions, classical drama is a mixture of the three arts of music, dance and theatre. As with classical Indian poetry, drama flourished under the generous patronage of the Gupta kings of north India. While drama was certainly performed in classical south India, we have no surviving texts or other reliable evidence of such a tradition.

Terminology

Genre 'Theatre' in Sanskrit is known as *natya*, although this term also covers 'dance' for the simple reason that the two arts were combined in classical India. Another term, *nataka* (or *natakam*), refers to 'drama' that is based on epic themes, although now it is used widely in most Indian languages to mean 'theatre' in the western sense. Ancient Tamil literature refers to 'drama' using the Sanskrit term *nataka*, and several plays (or what appear to be plays) are mentioned in subsequent literature, though none survive. The Tamil term *kuttu* is used for more localised, regional theatre traditions.

Aesthetics Indian classical theatre, and all Sanskrit literature and many art forms, is guided by an aesthetic theory. The two key terms are *bhava*, the mood or emotion of the dancer, and *rasa*, the distillation of that mood that is evoked in a (discerning) audience. The eight different *rasas* (love, pity, anger, disgust, heroism, awe, terror and comedy) were also later used to describe music and poetry.

History

Early fragments of a drama by Asvaghosa date from the 1st century CE, although it seems likely that dramatic performance must have occurred earlier. Two early Sanskrit texts, the *Mahabhasya* ('Great Commentary [on grammar]') and the *Nāṭyaśāstra* ('*Treatise on Theatre*'), from about the same period, provide evidence of a developed drama form. The earliest extant complete plays are those by Bhasa, Kalidasa and Sudraka (all 5th c. CE). Some scholars have detected Greek influence in early Indian drama, arguing that plays enacted at the courts of Indo-Greek kings (c. 250 BCE-50 CE) inspired Indian poets to develop their own form. Indeed, the curtain that divided the stage is called *yavanika* (from the Sanskrit word for 'Greek'). The famous 'Clay Cart' (see below) also bears a superficial resemblance to the late Greek comedy of the school of Menander.

Transmission Manuscripts of plays by both Kalidasa and Sudraka have been copied and transmitted throughout Indian literary history, but Bhasa's 13 plays had been lost for centuries and were known only from their mention in other works. In 1912, however, palm-leaf manuscripts were found in an old Brahmin house in south India. None mentioned an author, but linguistic research eventually (after much debate) credited them to Bhasa.

Performance

Plays were performed by troupes of professionals, of both men and women, but amateur dramatics were not unknown (texts refer to performances at court by officials, kings and ladies of the harem). No physical theatre building survives, and it is assumed that plays were performed in palaces or in the homes of rich merchants. A curtain, through which actors emerged, divided the front from the back stage; no curtain divided the actors from the audience. Scenery was non-existent and props were few.

Conventional costumes were worn by stock figures, who also used the language of gesture to convey meaning. Plays began with an invocation to the gods, followed by a long prologue, in which the stage manager or chief actor often discussed with his wife or chief actress the occasion and nature of the event. Most of the play's dialogue was in prose, interspersed with verse, declaimed rather than sung.

Content

While classical Indian drama drew on mythic stories and characters in earlier Vedic literature, it also

produced original stories and plot lines. In general, however, and like most of Indian literature, it did not hold with tragedy. Heroes and heroines might suffer defeat and loss, but a happy ending was not far away. There was, however, sufficient melodrama to satisfy the emotional needs of the audience. Innocent men are led toward execution, chaste wives are driven from their homes and children are separated from their loving parents.

Plays and playwrights

Bhāsa Very little is known about Bhasa, the earliest (and arguably the greatest) of the classical playwrights. He is dated between 200 BCE and 200 CE, and all that is certain is that he pre-dated Kalidasa and that 13 plays are attributed to him. Many of those plays retell episodes from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and some are tragedies, which was unusual in classical Indian theatre. For example, the *Pratima Nataka* tells the story of Kaikeyi from the *Ramayana*, usually considered the evil step-mother responsible for the sufferings of Rama and his father. Bhasa, however, shows how she herself suffered from her guilt.

Kalidasa The best-known playwright of the classical period is Kalidasa (5th c. CE), whose fame rests also on his poetry. Three of his plays have survived: *Malavika and Agnimitra* (a palace intrigue), *Urvashi Won by Valor* (the Vedic story of Urvashi) and *The Recognition of Shakuntala*. This last has always been considered his finest work and is still performed today, around the world.

Shakuntala *Shakuntala* is a love story, between a king and Shakuntala, the foster-daughter of a hermit. After their meeting and falling in love, much of the play describes their love-sickness, as they are unable to meet or marry. When they do meet again, the king gives her a ring to remember him by and to plight their troth. They marry but are cursed by an irascible Brahmin: Shakuntala will lose the ring, and the king will not remember her. In a tragic scene, Shakuntala, pregnant and veiled, is led before the king, who is unable to recall her. In folktale fashion, the lost ring is found by a fisherman inside a fish. The king recovers his memory and all ends happily.

Sudraka The only other surviving play of significance in this period is *Mrcchakaṭika* ('The Little Clay Cart') written by Sudraka, a contemporary of Kalidasa. This story is one of the most realistic and the plot one of the most complicated in the large corpus of classical Sanskrit literature. The central narrative concerns a love affair between a poor Brahmin (whose son can only have a little clay cart instead of grander toys) and a virtuous courtesan, but quickly moves into political intrigue, stolen jewels, a vivid court scene and the overthrow of a wicked king. With this moving story, 'The Little Clay Cart' is the most easily appreciated of classical dramas.

Discussion/questions

1. Drama was popular with court cultures in the classical period of Indian history, yet it has struggled since the medieval period to achieve a similar status. How does this history compare with the history of drama in other literatures, for example, Greek, Chinese, Russian or English?
2. The recognition theme in *Shakuntala* is widespread in world literature (cf. the ancient Egyptian text of *Sinuhe*, King Lear, Cinderella, Lord of the Rings). Consider how such topics as memory loss and recollection, identity and disguise, loyalty and betrayal, are expressed in different literary cultures.
3. A theory of classical Indian aesthetics was codified in the *Natyasastra*. The two key terms are the *bhava* ('mood,' 'emotion') of the artist (poet, dancer, actor) and the *rasa* ('taste,' 'sentiment') or the distillation of that mood that is evoked in a discerning audience. How does this aesthetic theory compare with another aesthetic, such as that in Greek theatre, Chinese opera or Shakespearean theatre?

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A. L. Basham (trans.), *The Little Clay Cart* (SUNY 1994)

Adithi Rao, *Shakuntala and Other Stories* (Penguin India, 2011)

Text

from 'The Little Clay Cart,' trans. Arthur Ryder

Maitreya [a friend]: Well, which would you rather, be dead or be poor?

Charudatta [Brahmin]: Ah, my friend,

Far better death than sorrows sure and slow;

Some passing suffering from death may flow,

But poverty brings never-ending woe.

Maitreya: My dear friend, be not thus cast down. Your wealth has been conveyed to them you love, and like the moon, after she has yielded her nectar to the gods, your waning fortunes win an added charm.

Charudatta: Comrade, I do not grieve for my ruined fortunes. But this is my sorrow. They whom I would greet as guests, now pass me by.

"This is a poor man's house," they cry.

As flitting bees, the season o'er,

Desert the elephant, whose store

Of ichor [blood of the gods] I spent, attracts no more.

Maitreya: Oh, confound the money! It is a trifle not worth thinking about. It is like a cattle-boy in the woods afraid of wasps; it doesn't stay anywhere where it is used for food.

During the mating season, a fragrant liquor exudes from the forehead of the elephant. Of this liquor bees are very fond.

Charud: Believe me, friend. My sorrow does not spring from simple loss of gold;

For fortune is a fickle, changing thing, whose favors do not hold; but he whose sometime wealth has taken wing, finds bosom-friends grow cold.

Then too: A poor man is a man ashamed ; from shame

Springs want of dignity and worthy fame;

Such want gives rise to insults hard to bear;

Thence comes despondency; and thence, despair;

Despair breeds folly; death is folly's fruit

Ah! The lack of money is all evil's root!

Maitreya: But just remember what a trifle money is, after all, and be more cheerful.

Charudatta: My friend, the poverty of a man is to him a home of cares, a shame that haunts the mind,

Another form of warfare with mankind; the abhorrence of his friends, a source of hate

From strangers, and from each once-loving mate; but if his wife despise him, then't were meet in some lone wood to seek a safe retreat.

The flame of sorrow, torturing his soul, burns fiercely, yet contrives to leave him whole.

Comrade, I have made my offering to the divinities of the house. Do you too go and offer sacrifice to the Divine Mothers at a place where four roads meet.

Maitreya: No!

Charudatta: Why not?

Maitreya: Because the gods are not gracious to you even when thus honored. So what is the use of worshiping?

Charudatta: Not so, my friend, not so! This is the constant duty of a householder.

FICTION

Overview

Short didactic tales known as *nithi katha* ('moral story') are generally in prose, although sometimes the 'lesson' itself is in verse. Nearly all these numerous stories began as oral tales before being collected and written down in manuscripts by scribes and scholars. The collections often use what is called a 'frame-story' to give a narrative coherence to the otherwise disparate tales. These originally oral tales were collected and redacted in manuscript form sometime in the early centuries of the Common Era. Some were composed in Pali, but most were in Sanskrit, although all were eventually written down in every Indian language.

We cannot put a date on these classical collections of moral stories. We can only assume that they drew upon tales that, even by the time they were committed to writing in the 6th c. CE, were already hundreds of years old.

Pancatantra

History Although scholars suggest that the 'original' version of the *Pancatantra* was composed between about 200 BCE and 200 CE, the earliest manuscript (now lost) was a Pahlavi (Middle Persian) version written in 570 CE. The oldest surviving version of the *Pancatantra* in an Indian language is a Sanskrit text by a Jain monk, dated 1199 CE and found in Kashmir. This influential version is considered the first 'clean' copy since the Jain scholar apparently consulted all extant manuscripts before producing his master copy.

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

Popularity The authority and popularity of the stories derives from the fact that they are believed to be the advice of a Brahmin, delivered in classical Sanskrit and addressing fundamental dilemmas of life. They function not only as admonitions on statecraft (like the 16th c. Italian text *The Prince*) and princely education, but also as entertaining tales about daily life. The last topic (Ill-Considered Action) contains one of the most popular stories about a Brahmin's wife who rashly kills a mongoose, believing that it had threatened her child. Later, with the rational approach of her husband, she discovers that the mongoose had in fact protected her child from a snake.

Diffusion Stories in the *Pancatantra* diffused throughout India, where they are found in every one of its major languages, in oral and printed forms. Some tales have an international spread and have been recorded as far away as China and Wales. The chain of transmission began when the Sanskrit version was translated into Persian in the 6th century CE, followed by translations into Syriac, Arabic, Greek, Latin, Spanish and the major languages of Europe, where it was often called *The Fables of Bidpai* (or *Pilpai*). The first known English publication was the *Morall Philosophie of Doni* in 1570 CE.

Jataka

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

Origins Linguistic analysis suggests that the composition of the *Jataka* tales in Pali (the language of early Buddhist scriptures) began in the 2nd or 3rd century BCE. Several recognisable tales are sculpted in stone on Buddhist monuments dating from that period. These stories are found scattered throughout the Buddhist Pali canon (the *Tripitaka*, or 'Three Baskets'), including 35 that were collected for religious instruction and form one section of that canon.

Diffusion The most influential redaction of the tales was compiled many centuries later, in the 5th century CE by Theravada Buddhists in Sri Lanka. This collection of about 550 tales, the *Jataka Katha*, is traditionally ascribed to a Sinhalese Buddhist monk named Buddhaghosa. Interestingly, the earliest surviving manuscript of that text is a Chinese translation, from Tibetan, also dated to the 5th century CE. While these Buddhist morality stories did not travel as widely as the more secular *Pancatantra*, several versions of the collection exist, for example, in Tibetan, Persian, Sinhalese, Thai and Burmese. A 9th-century CE stupa at Borobudur on Java has the 34 stories of the *Jataka Mala* carved in stone.

Jatakamala Among other influential texts is the *Jatakamala* (c. 400 CE) ascribed to Arya Sura. Several caves at Ellora, near Bombay and dated to about 700 CE, contain scenes of the *Jataka* tales and quotations from this particular text. This Sanskrit text contains 34 tales that illustrate the 'perfections' of the Buddha, a concept developed largely in Mahayana Buddhism. Even more significant, this later text does not include the crucial 'frame-story.'

Popular tale One of the most popular *Jataka* tales is called 'Prince Sattva.' In this story, the Boddhisattva ('Buddha-to-be') sees a starving tigress about to eat her own cubs. In desperation, the Boddhisattva kills himself, offering his flesh to the animal, so that she and her children might live. When the Boddhisattva's disciples see what has happened, they praise his generosity and lack of selfishness.

Discussion/questions

1. The trail of the *Pancatantra* leads from India to Europe, and some early Indian stories found their way into European oral tradition. Not many, however. How do stories cross linguistic and cultural borders? Does it really, as the cliché goes, take only one bilingual person? Why do some stories migrate and other not?
2. The *Jataka* tales were used to spread Buddhism, although monks also studied philosophical and theological texts (called *sutras*). Compare the tales with those other texts, especially the Four Noble

Truths and the Eightfold Path. Choose one specific tale and analyse its language and message with the more official texts.

3. The frame-story is a common literary device that gives coherence to an otherwise disparate collection of tales. Compare the frame-stories of the *Pancatantra* and the *Jataka* with the frame-stories in other famous collections, such as the *Arabian Nights*, *Canterbury Tales*, *Decameron*.

Reading

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Texts

1. The story of the loyal Mongoose, from the *Pancatantra*, trans. Ryder

There was once a Brahman named Godly in a certain town. His wife mothered a single son and a mongoose. And as she loved little ones, she cared for the mongoose also like a son, giving him milk from her breast, and salves, and baths, and so on. But she did not trust him, for she thought: 'A mongoose is a nasty kind of creature. He might hurt my boy.' Yes, there is sense in the proverb:

A son will ever bring delight,
Though bent on folly, passion, spite.
Though shabby, naughty, and a fright.

One day she tucked her son in bed, took a water-jar, and said to her husband: 'Now, Professor, I am going for water. You must protect the boy from the mongoose.' But when she was gone, the Brahman went off somewhere himself to beg food, leaving the house empty.

While he was gone, a black snake issued from his hole and, as fate would have it, crawled toward the baby's cradle. But the mongoose, feeling him to be a natural enemy, and fearing for the life of his baby brother, fell upon the vicious serpent halfway, joined battle with him, tore him to bits, and tossed the pieces far and wide. Then, delighted with his own heroism, he ran, blood trickling from his mouth, to meet the mother; for he wished to show what he had done.

But when the mother saw him coming, saw his bloody mouth and his excitement, she feared that the villain must have eaten her baby boy, and without thinking twice, she angrily dropped the water-jar upon him, which killed him the moment that it struck. There she left him without a second thought, and hurried home, where she found the baby safe and sound, and near the cradle a great black snake, torn to bits. Then, overwhelmed with sorrow because she had thoughtlessly killed her benefactor, her son, she beat her head and breast.

At this moment the Brahman came home with a dish of rice gruel which he had got from someone in his begging tour, and saw his wife bitterly lamenting her son, the mongoose. 'Greedy! Greedy!' she cried. 'Because you did not do as I told you, you must now taste the bitterness of a son's death, the fruit of the tree of your own wickedness. Yes, this is what happens to those blinded by greed. For the proverb says:

Indulge in no excessive greed
(A little helps in time of need) —

A greedy fellow in the world
Found on his head a wheel that whirled.'

2. From the *Jataka Tales*, trans. HT Francis and EJ Thomas

Once on a time at the foot of a certain mountain there were living together in one and the same cave two friends, a lion and a tiger. The Bodhisattva too was living at the foot of the same hill, as a hermit.

Now one day a dispute arose between the two friends about the cold. The tiger said it was cold in the dark half of the month, whilst the lion maintained that it was cold in the light half. As the two of them together could not settle the question, they put it to the Bodhisattva. He repeated this stanza:

In light or dark half, whensoever the wind
Doth blow, 'tis cold. For cold is caused by wind.
And, therefore, I decide you both are right.

Thus did the Bodhisattva make peace between those friends.

ESSAY

Overview

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

Sutras

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

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

Dharma Sastras

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

Technique The technique of the *Dharma Sastras* is to quote from an old text, explicate it and then attempt to reconcile differing interpretations that have accrued over time. This approach means that the texts are veritable encyclopaedias of Hindu tradition, gathering verses, maxims, aphorisms and quotations from anywhere and everywhere. For example, the *Manu Smṛti* (see below) contains hundreds of verses found also in the *Mahabharata*, probably culled from a common source.

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

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

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

Theatre

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

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

Statecraft

Artha Sastra Another major essay text in this period is the *Artha Sastra* ('Manual on Material Gain'), which was composed over several centuries, probably taking final form about 300 CE. Attributed to Kautilya, a Brahmin advisor to the king Chandragupta (4th c. BCE), it contains sharp observations on, and reminiscences of, that earlier kingdom.

Material gain The *Artha Sastra*'s discourse on polity elevates the science of 'acquiring and maintaining power' above the spiritual science of Vedic literature, and represents the gradual ascent of merchants and kings in Indian social history. Classical Hindu thought recognises four ends of man: *dharma* (social order), *artha* (material gain), *kama* (physical pleasure) and *moksa* ('spiritual release'). Proclaiming the prominence of *artha*, the text says: 'On material gain rests the realisation of social order and pleasure.'

Tirukkural The subjects of politics and material gain were also addressed in an influential Tamil text of this period, the *Tirukkural* (c. 400-500 CE). Attributed to Tiruvalluvar, who is said to have been an Untouchable/Dalit, this text contains 133 chapters, each with ten couplets (*kural*), offering advice on the ethics of everyday life. As such, it is much wider in scope than the *Artha Sastra* and speaks to concerns of the common man and woman. Even today, the memorable couplets, are quoted in daily conversations

and in the media. A very popular couplet says: 'Everyone my kin, everywhere my home.' This is often quoted to counter the hierarchies of caste and status.

Grammar

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

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

Discussion/questions

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

Reading

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

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

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

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

Texts

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

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

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

The king should grant exemption [from taxes] to a region devastated by an enemy king or tribe, to a region beleaguered by sickness or famine.

He should safeguard agriculture when it is stressed by the hardships of fines, forced labor, taxes, and animal herds when they are harassed by thieves, vicious animals, poison, crocodiles or sickness. He should keep trade routes [roads] clear when they are oppressed by anyone, including his officers, robbers or frontier commanders when they are worn out by farm animals. The king should protect produce, forests, elephants forests, reservoirs and mines established in the past and also set up new ones.

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

Make foes of bowmen if you must, never of penmen.
Great wealth, like a crowd at a concert, gathers and melts.
It is compassion, the most gracious of virtues, that moves the world.

EARLY POST-CLASSICAL

SANSKRIT POETRY

Overview

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

Myth

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 *puranas* ('old,' 'of old times'). Creation myths were already told in the Vedic texts, and new ones (often variants of earlier versions) were composed during later centuries, right up to the early twentieth century. Unlike the Vedas, however, the myths were never memorised, word-for-word, and many different versions of each myth exist.

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

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

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

Devi, the goddess, also has many manifestations. As Kali, she is death. As Siva's wife, Parvati or Uma, she is protection. As Durga, she is the slayer of the buffalo-demon. As Visnu's wife, Lakshmi, she is wealth.

Etiological myths Many myths are etiological, that is, they give explanations, usually for the origin or appearance of things. Cosmogonic myths, for example, explain the creation of the world(s), from an egg, primeval ocean or deity. One of the best-known of these etiological myths, in the Saiva corpus, explain

how Ganesa got his elephant head. When Parvati was bathing, she told her son to stand guard and prevent anyone from approaching. Siva (Parvati's husband) came near and chopped off the head of his impudent son who dared to order him to stop. The repentant husband then promised his angry wife that he would replace their son's head with the first one he could find. And that first head was on an elephant.

Kavya

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

Magha Perhaps the most highly regarded of Kalidasa's successors was Magha, who lived in the seventh century CE and lived in a small court in Rajasthan. His most enduring work is *Shishupala Vadha*, 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 *mahakavyas* based on episodes from the Rama story, the most famous being the *Ravanavadha*. Bharavi (probably 6th c. CE and probably from south India) wrote the *Kirātārjunīya*, modelled on earlier tellings of same story from the *Mahabharata* and considered one of the finest of the *mahakavyas*. Bana (7th c. CE), who was also a playwright, wrote poems collected under the title *Candisataka*. Kumaradasa (7th c. CE) is remembered for his retelling of the 'rape' of Sita (*Janaki-harana*) from the Rama story. Lastly, we should mention Anandavardana, a ninth-century poet from Kashmiri who composed the *Devasataka*.

Discussion/questions

1. Hindu myths have endured to the present day, depicted in film, television and comic books. What can account for this longevity?
2. Hindu mythology is cognate with other mythologies in the Indo-European world, such as Norse. Compare these two geographically distant mythologies in terms of themes, characters and social function.
3. Some scholars have dismissed the poetry of Kalidasa's successors as merely 'derivative.' Select one major *mahakavya* and read it closely, with another eye on Kalidasa's poetry. Is the dismissal by scholars justified?

Reading

Wendy Doniger, *Hindu Myths* (Penguin, multiple editions)

Anisile T. Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Vol. 1 (Columbia, 1988)

J.A.B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology* (Temple University, 1978)

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

Indira Peterson, *Design and Rhetoric in a Sanskrit Court Epic: the Kirātārjunīya of Bhāravi* (SUNY, 2003)

Texts

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

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

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

O man who desires war! This is that battlefield which excites even the gods, where the battle is not of words. Here people fight and stake their lives not for themselves but for others. This field is full of

herds of maddened elephants. Here those who are eager for battle and even those who are not very eager, have to fight.

TAMIL POETRY

Overview

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

Devotional poetry

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

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

Nayanmars Tamil 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 (*puranas*) 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') *puranas*. In effect, they are another form of the 'guide' poem, directing worshippers to the many Siva temples that dot the Tamil countryside.

Alvars During 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.

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

Epic poetry

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

New genre

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

Discussions/questions

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

Reading

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

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

David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the Tamil Saiva Tradition* (Princeton, 2014)

Paula Richman, *Women, Branch Stories, and Religious Rhetoric in a Tamil Buddhist Text* (Syracuse, 1988)

Texts

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

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

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

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

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

FICTION

Overview

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

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

Poetic prose: Dandin

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

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

Poetic prose: Subandhu and Bana

Subandhu A contemporary and admirer of Dandin, Subandhu is known for only one surviving work, *Vasavadatta*. This Sanskrit play describes the vicissitudes of the love of its eponymous heroine for a

prince. While lacking the storytelling skills of Dandin, this prose author did write memorable descriptions, obviously borrowed from poetic genres of the time. However, his long-winded sentences sometimes run to more than two pages.

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

Narrative poetry

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

Tamil epics

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

Civakacintamani A second, major Tamil narrative epic poem of this period is the *Civakacintāmaṇi* ('The Glorious Civaka'). It, too, was written by a Jain scholar (Tirutakkatevar), and it, too, borrows from Sanskrit originals and the *Perunkatai*. In turn, the beauty of its 3000-plus verses influenced the greatest of all Tamil epic poems (the *Ramayana* of Kamban, 12th c. CE). The story is one of court intrigue, assassination and a fatherless child. The child is the eponymous Civaka, who wades through a series of love affairs, but eventually avenges his father's death, wins back the kingdom and (like a good Jain hero) renounces the world.

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

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

Discussion/questions

1. The Western literary genres of poetry and prose do not easily map onto Indian genres. *Kavya*, the overarching category for several different poetic and prose forms, is a case in point. Does this

difference in terminology matter? Is it simply semantics? Or does it reveal a deeper conceptual difference between cultures?

2. Many of the story collections written during this period are rearrangements of earlier texts. What does this literary recycling reveal about Indian literature? Can we still speak of 'creativity' and 'literary skill' in such literature?
3. Each of the four narrative epic poems in Tamil during this period was written by a Jain, and yet it is fair to say that Jain influence is absent in modern Tamil literature. Trace the history of Jainism in south India by following its literary trail.

Reading

Kamil Zvelebil, *A History of Tamil Literature* (Otto Harrassowitz, 1974)

Donald Nelson, *Brhatkatha studies: the problem of the Ur-text*. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 37: 4, pp. 673-676 (1978)

J.E.B. Gray, *Dasakumaracarita as picaresque*. In C. Shackle and R. Snell (eds.) *The Indian Narrative: Perspectives and Patterns* (Otto Harrassowitz, 1992).

Moreswhar Ramachandra Kale, *Dasakumaracarita by Dandin* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1993)

Catherine Benton, *God of Desire: Tales of Kamadeva in Sanskrit Story Literature* (SUNY, 2005)

Arshia Sattar, *Tales from the Kathasaritsagara* (Penguin, 1996)

Padmini Rajappa, *Kadambari* (Penguin, India, 2010)

Text

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

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

DRAMA

Overview

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

Sanskrit

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

Visakhadatta Visakhadatta (6th c. CE?) wrote plays about politics, although only one entire play and fragments of another have survived. The partial text (*Devichandragupta*, 'The Queen and Chandra Gupta') is an ambitious attempt to tell the story of Chandra Gupta II and his rise to power in the 4th

century BCE. The other, complete play is the justly famous *Mudraraksasa* ('The Minister's Signet Ring'), which focuses on high-drama intrigue during the same historical period.

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

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

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

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

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

Tamil

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

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

Discussion/questions

1. While Kalidasa's successors have generally been regarded as less skilled than the master, others have suggested that this judgement is simply a cliché and not borne out by close textual analysis.

Compare one of the later dramas mentioned in this article with one of Kalidasa's dramas and make your judgement.

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

Reading

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Overview

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

Harshacarita

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

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

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

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

Document Even if the *Harshacarita* glorifies the king's political and military exploits, it is regarded as a reasonably accurate document of various social, administrative and military practices. For example, Bana includes more than one description of *sati*, or self-immolation of a widow. He also speaks in some detail

of the various castes and sub-castes of the time. A fascinating topic is the tributary (*samanta*) system of north Indian kingdoms in the post-Gupta era, which Bana explains. Similarly, there are detailed portraits of armies and soldiering (as shown in the text below).

Discussion/questions

1. At the centre of scholarship concerning the *Harshacarita* is the debate over the extent to which literature can be regarded as historical document. For example, can we use the *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad* as a source for understanding ancient India and Greece?
2. *Carita* is often translated as 'history,' but this is usually qualified by adding 'traditional history' or 'historical narrative.' A similar debate thrives in contemporary Western culture about the category 'historical fiction.' This should make us curious about the development of our own understanding of both 'history' and 'fiction.'

Reading

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

Text

From *Harshacarita* trans. A.L. Basham

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

ESSAY

Overview

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

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

Sanskrit

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

this text, as well as in other astrological texts of this period, including the *Bṛhat Parāśara Horāśāstra* and *Sārāvalī*.

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

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

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

Tamil

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

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

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

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

Grammar An important treatise on grammar and poetics composed in this period is the *Viracoliyam* (9th-10th c. CE). After the first Tamil grammar in the classical period (*Tolkappiyam*), Tamil scholars had continued to produce a series of grammars. However, *Viracoliyam* is radically different in that it is part of a growing Tamil Buddhist culture. While it conforms to the structure of earlier Tamil grammars, it aligns itself more closely with the rules of Sanskrit grammar, mixing Tamil and Sanskrit terminology along the

way. It is also the first Tamil text to define the hybrid language of *mani-pravalam* ('rubies-pearls'), which was common in south India during the much of the postclassical and medieval periods.

Discussion/questions

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

Reading

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LATE POST-CLASSICAL

Poetry

Overview

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 of 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.

Devotional: South India

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 form 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 of ten satirical, powerful and imaginative. In his composition, Rama and Sita become characters with a full spectrum of emotions and ambiguities. No Tamil poet since Kampan has combined such beautiful language with such depth of feeling.

Telugu The south Indian language of Telugu flourished during this period, gaining largely from the fruitful interaction between Sanskrit and Tamil court traditions. The early centuries of this period saw a

number of influential translations and retellings of the *Mahabharata*, but the best-loved poem is Srinatha's 13th-century reworking of the *Ramayana*.

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

Devotional: North India

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indo-Persian poetry

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

Baramasa *Baramasa* (lit. 'twelve months') is an older Indian genre that describes the seasons and the months of the year. This Indian genre, popular at the folk level, was brought into Indo-Persian literature by Mas'ud Sa'd-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 *masnawi* 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 *masnawi* 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 *ghazals* 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 today, he is credited with developing the influential *qawwali* genre of devotional song by fusing Persian and Indian music traditions.

Question/discussion

1. Hindu devotionalism is a movement with many strands, but in essence it refers to a personal, intense and often fraught relationship between a worshipper and a god or goddess. Some critics have compared the relation between a bhakti poet and a deity to that between a lover and a beloved. Analyse Hindu devotional poetry as a form of divine love. Select three poets for close reading, and then include a writer of similar love poetry from outside India for comparative purposes (for example, Sappho, Rumi, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila or Shakespeare).
2. Several north Indian bhakti poets were either Muslims or influenced by Sufism. Analyse the work of north Indian poets for their religious content. Do they, for instance, transcend the categories of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'?
3. Bhakti poets in north lived during the formation of an Indo-Persian cultural synthesis that drew influences from Persia, Turkey and Central Asia. However, whereas that synthesis is documented primarily at the courts of Muslim rulers, these poets were itinerant singers and mystics. How is their ambiguous position outside the social mainstream revealed in their poetry? Analyse the work of these poets to identify any correlations between literary creation and social position.

Reading

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

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

John Stratton Hawley, *The Memory of Love: Surdas Sings to Krishna* (OUP, 2009)

John Stratton Hawley, *Songs of the Saints of India* (OUP, 1988)

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

Kenneth Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God* (California, 1978)

Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India* (California, 2006).

Texts

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

The rich will make temples for Siva.

What shall I, a poor man, do?
My legs are pillars,
the body the shrine,
the head a cupola of gold.

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

2. Hindi poem by Kabir, trans. Rushil Rao

Hiding in this cage
of visible matter

is the invisible
lifebird

pay attention
to her

she is singing
your song

DRAMA

Overview

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

Kutiyattam

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

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

Abandonment of Sita This emphasis is illustrated by a play, still performed today, called *Sita Pratiyagam* ('Abandonment of Sita'). After Sita is rescued from Ravana, rumours of a love relationship between captor and captive spread. Lacking belief in the fidelity of his wife, Rama submits to pressure and abandons her in the forest, where she gives birth to two sons. Husband and wife are reunited, but Rama demands that she undergo a trial by fire. In despair, Sita asks the Earth goddess to accept her, and despite Rama's protestations, the Earth opens up and receives her.

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

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

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

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

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

Questions/discussion

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

Reading

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FICTION

Overview

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

Sanskrit

Kathasaritsagara ('The Ocean of Streams of Story') is a 12th-century version of the earlier (and lost) text known as *Brhatkatha*, but it also draws on the entire repertoire of Sanskrit story literature, including tales from the *Pancatantra*. Like those earlier texts, the *Kathasaritsagara* is a rambling compendium of tales, legends and the supernatural composed in an easy metre with prose sections interspersed. The author, Somadeva, put the story of a legendary prince at the centre of his narrative and built a number of other stories around it.

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

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

Indo-Persian

Masnavi Indo-Persian writers of the period adapted the *masnavi* genre (rhyming couplets in a religious poem), made famous in Persia by Rumi, to tell stories based on Indian folk tales. One of the earliest is the *Esq-nama* by Hasan Dehlavi of Delhi (13th-14th c. CE), which was inspired by an oral tale from Rajasthan. This synthesis of Persian literary genre with Indian story content is characteristic of much of the literature of north India in this period.

Tuti-Nama Another famous adaptation from Sanskrit story literature is the 'Story of the Parrot' (*Tuti Nama*) by Nakhshabi in the 14th century CE. Nakhshabi's life is typical of many during this period. A Persian physician born in Persia, he migrated to north India and found patronage under a minor Muslim ruler. While still in Persia, he had translated a Sanskrit version of the story (*Sukasaptati*, 'Story of 70 Parrots') and then adapted this to write the *Tuti Nama*. In his text, a single parrot tells 52 tales over as many nights in order to prevent its mistress from having a love affair while her husband is away (a delaying tactic of storytelling familiar to us from the *Thousand and One Nights*).

Tamil

A major Tamil text in which the art of storytelling is displayed in this period is *Kalingattuparani* written by Jayamkantar in the 12th century CE. Although this is essentially a 'war poem' (celebrating a famous victory by a Chola king over a northern king), it is an example of what we today would call 'historical

fiction.’ The author describes in detail the birth and maturity of his hero, followed by his military training and the campaigns that lead up to his ‘invasion’ of the north. The battle itself is fierce, leaving hundreds of men and elephants slaughtered. The victorious king has prayed to goddess Kali, and now she and her horde of hungry ghosts descend on the battlefield to gorge themselves on the flesh. All this is narrated in brisk, two-line stanzas that propel the story forward.

Kannada

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

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

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

Telugu

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

Questions/discussion

1. Fiction in Indian literature before the influence of European literature is found mainly in oral stories written down and in ‘historical fiction’ in which a king’s life is embellished by the author’s imagination. How do these narrative forms differ from fiction written during this period in Europe? When does ‘fiction’ in the modern sense appear in English, German, French?
2. Indo-Persian writers did more or less the same thing as their native-born Indian writers: they adapted pre-existing, mostly Sanskrit, Indian story literature. However, they often used genres borrowed from Persian. How did this use of genre influence the fiction they wrote?

Reading

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Overview

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

Tamil

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

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

Kannada

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

Marathi

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

Sanskrit

It is revealing that one of the few Sanskrit works of any note during this period is a biography of a legendary king. The *Naishadha Charita* was composed by Sri Harsha during the 12th century CE. In roughly 1800 ornate stanzas, it narrates the life of King Nala, a figure in the *Mahabharata*. The *Naishadha Charita*, one of the five great narrative poems (*mahakavya*) in Sanskrit literature, tells the story of lovers

who are separated and then reunited, making it one of the most popular tales in Indian literature. It is told and performed in various styles through north India, especially by itinerant musicians as an oral epic.

Indo-Persian

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

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

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

Questions/discussion

1. Biographies of saints dominate the life-writing of this period, a development that is another literary manifestation of the groundswell of devotionism that cut across religious divisions. Some would argue that these are 'hagiographies' and not proper biographies. What is the difference between these types of life-writing?
2. Compare Indo-Persian forms of life-writing with those composed by Hindus and Jains. Are there any essential differences, and can they be correlated with cultural contrasts between these communities?

Reading

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Texts

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

It is a nectar that will give you the immortal love, drink it.

It is a perennial river of love that will make the lands of your mind fertile, irrigate with it.

It is an ocean that will get you pearl heaps of coveted qualities, dwell in it.

It is a sharp sword that will cut off the bonds to make you feel the bliss of freedom, hold it strong.

It is a teacher that tells morals of life, make yourself a rock of discipline.
It is a historical information resource, develop your knowledge with that.

2. From the autobiography of Firuz Shah Tughluq trans. Anjana Narayanan

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

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

ESSAY

Overview

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

Commentary: Tamil

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

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

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

Commentary: Indo-Persian

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

Scholarly treatise

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indo-Persian Historiography

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

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

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

Universal One of the most comprehensive histories written during this period was the *Tabaqat-e naseri* written by Minhaj al-Seraj (13th c. CE) at the court of the Delhi Sultans. It begins with the creation of the world and narrates Muslim history up to the Mongol invasion of Delhi in 1221 CE. As someone who

sought refuge from the Mongols, the author is understandably biased against the invaders and appears to provide more ideas than facts.

Questions/discussion

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

Reading

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Texts

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

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

2. From Atiyarkkunallar's commentary on a verse

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

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

EARLY MODERN PERIOD

POETRY

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-heelled patronage of the Mughal emperors in Delhi and under more regional courts in the Deccan (central India).

Devotional: south India

Arunagirinathar The tradition of Tamil devotional poetry reached its apogee with Arunagirinathar, whose dates are uncertain, but late 15th or early 16th 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 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: north India

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

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 Krishna.

Riti poets The language of Braj was developed into a literary language by a slightly later group of poets who wrote *riti* poetry. In contrast to earlier 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 Vaisnava tradition of Krishna 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 *Manasa Mangal*, *Chandi Mangal* 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 devotionism. In particular, he developed the *garbi*, a type of lyrical verse sung while dancing during a ritual.

Ramayanans Another major contribution to north Indian devotional poetry during this period was the production of Ramayanans 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 (*Dandi Ramayana* also known as *Jagamohana Ramayana*), Kannada (*Torave Ramayana*), Malayalam (*Adhyathmaramayanam*) and Marathi (*Bhavartha Ramayana*), all 16th century, and a Gujarati *Ramayana* in the 17th century.

Tulsidas The most influential of all these Ramayanans 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

Abul Faizl Among the many poets patronised by the Mughal emperors, the outstanding name is Abul Faizl (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 *ghazals* 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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John Stratton Hawley, *The Memory of Love: Surdas Sings to Krishna* (OUP, 2009)

John Stratton Hawley, *Songs of the Saints of India* (OUP, 1988)

Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (North Carolina, 1978)

Muzaffar Alam, The culture and politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan. In Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (California, 2003), pp.131-198

Texts

3. Surdas, trans. Rushil Rao

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. Winand Callewaert 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

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.

DRAMA

Overview

Although India never again produced drama that rivalled classical Sanskrit theatre, this period generated a variety of interesting forms. Three trends can be identified. First, in the absence of patronage at the Muslim courts, drama moved from the palace to the temple. Second, in doing so, particularly in south India, it became more ritual performance than textual enactment. And third, again in south India there was the emergence of drama (and other literary forms) at minor courts of the Nayak kings during the 16th to 18th centuries. In these turbulent times of European advance and Muslim retreat, these new drama forms, often composed in a mixture of Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Sanskrit, were satirical, with a good deal of farce.

North India

Ram Lila Based on the text of Tulsidas's *Ramayana* (16th c. CE), Ram Lila ('Play of Rama'; *lila* carries both meanings of the English 'play,' plus a connotation of divine play) is a hugely popular drama that is still performed annually throughout the Hindi-speaking regions of north India. With elaborate costumes, it is staged outdoors over a series of nights, typically ten, though in Varanasi it stretches to 31. Dialogue is minimal, and reciters are used to chant verses from the Hindi text. Although we have no reliable evidence prior to observations by Europeans in the 19th century, it seems reasonable to assume that the Ram Lila formed sometime in the 17th century.

Pandava Lila Another popular drama in north India is Pandava Lila, which takes its name from the five Pandava brothers, protagonists of the other great epic of the *Mahabharata*. Unlike Ram Lila, however, it is written and performed in the Garhwali language spoken in the mountainous region of Garhwal.

Performances are temple rituals loosely based on textual versions of the epic, and different villages focus on different episodes in the epic story. It, too, appears to have emerged sometime in the period between 1600-1800 CE.

Nautanki Unlike the preceding two traditions, Nautanki is a secular theatre tradition, drawing on popular tales from Hindu and Muslim traditions. Dialogue is usually in Hindi, while libretti are often in Urdu. There is a strong satirical strain in the plays of Nautanki, as revealed by its original name of *svang* ('impersonation', 'mime'). As with the other north Indian theatres of this time, its history is poorly documented, although most scholars believe it coalesced into its present form sometime around 1600 CE.

South India

Terukkuttu As in the north, south India a popular theatre form based on the *Mahabharata*. Terukkuttu ('Street Theatre') is a ritualised enactment of episodes from Tamil versions of the epic text. The plays,

which are performed over a series of nights (from one to 18), focus specifically on the character of Draupadi, the wronged wife of one of the Pandava brothers, and are performed in temples dedicated to her. Again, song dominates over dialogue.

Tolpava Kuttu Tolpavu Kuttu ('leather puppet play') is a traditional shadow puppet play based very closely on the Tamil *Ramayana* (12th c. CE). It is performed over a number of nights (typically 8 to 41) in certain temples on the border between Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The puppeteers memorise and recite thousands of verses from the medieval text, while peppering their all-night performances with humorous banter.

Kathakali Kathakali ('Story-drama') is a highly sophisticated theatre, or opera, performed in central Kerala. One of several related drama forms found on this southwest coast region, it consists of a number of plays written in a Malayalam heavily influenced by Sanskrit and dating from the late 16th century and early 17th century CE. Sanskrit verses recited by vocalists explain the action, while the actors, in elaborate costumes and face paint, 'speak' the dialogue by dance, gesture and eye movement.

Teyyam Further up the northern coast of Kerala, Teyyam is another ritualised drama form that we can trace back to this period. Like Kathakali, from which it is surely derived, it uses elaborate costumes, especially headgear, face paint and the language of gesture. It is a heavily ritualised form, performed only in temple compounds, and involves intense spirit possession.

Yakshagana Similar in performance mode, but not textual base, to the above traditions, Yakshagana is a theatre form performed in the Kannada- and Telugu-speaking areas of south India. The Telugu tradition, which emerged in minor courts during this period, employs a high-literary Telugu (mixed with Sanskrit) to create plays ostensibly devotional but laced with mockery, usually directed at Brahmins. The Kannada tradition, which uses stories from the epics, is more serious, ritual theatre performed in temple precincts.

Kuravanci Another largely parodic theatre form of south India is Kuravanci ('Play of the Fortune-Teller Lady'). This text-based Tamil theatre arose in the eighteenth century in the courts of noblemen and temple festivals. Fortunately, we can date the first play, the *Kuttrala Kuravanci*, to 1718. Like most of these early modern drama forms, singing dominates over dialogue, although there is a more or less fixed plot. A tribal fortune-teller woman pines for her high-born lover and sings of the beauty of her hilly homeland. Her bird-catcher husband tries to find her, and the tribal couple are reunited, but not before all the characters, from tribesman to king, are made the object of satire.

Nonti Natakam Nonti Natakam ('The Gimp's Play') is yet another popular and satirical drama that appeared during this period in the Tamil country. Scholars date the first texts to the late 17th or early 18th century and pinpoint the action to the large city of Madurai. The play is narrated by a one-legged thief who is cheated out of his ill-begotten gains by a courtesan. Forced to steal to replenish his funds, he grabs a king's horse but is punished by amputation. A holy man sends him to a temple, where a god restores his missing limb (possibly a hint of Christian influence). Despite the devotional overtones, and as with other dramas of the time, it has elements of farce and parody.

Cavittu Natakam Cavittu Natakam ('Stamping Play') is a unique form of drama that arose during the latter half of the sixteenth century in Kerala among the region's recently-arrived Christian community.

While it draws on local drama traditions in its theatrical elements (a stage manager, for example, who comments on and translates the action), the stories are biblical. Plays of Charlemagne and of St. George are performed on feast days, at weddings and other major events by the Catholic community of Kerala.

Questions/discussion

1. Many of the drama traditions that arose or took final shape in the early modern period involve satire, parody or farce, or all three. Some cultural historians have explained this as a response to the fragmentation and new ethnic mix of society during this period (see Narayana Rao et al, below).

Even if this is not a simple one-to-one causal relation, can we explain literary history by reference to such macro-cultural history?

2. There is very little evidence that Muslim courts, either of the opulent Mughal Emperors or the smaller kingdoms in the Deccan, patronised drama. Some scholars have challenged this, repeating the mantra that 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence,' and indeed there are creditable references to Akbar hosting drama at his court. A future ground-breaking study of the hidden theatre at the Muslim courts would be welcome.

Reading

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Farley P. Richmond, Darius L. Swann, and Phillip B. Zarrilli (eds.), *Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance* (Hawaii, 1993)

Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nāyaka period Tamilnadu* (Oxford, 1992)

Texts

1. From *Kuttrala Kuravanci*, trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom

There courting monkeys gather fruit and offer them as gifts,
And heavenly poets beg for fruit that the monkey couples scatter.
There passing hunters gaze upwards inviting the gods to descend.
Venerable saints come there to tend their herbs and rare plants,
Where water rears up from sweet streams, reach skyward and pour down,
While the sun-god's chariot wheels and horse's hoofs slip on the spray,
Our mountain belongs to the god who wears the crescent in his hair.

2. From *Bhishma Vijaya* (Yakshagana), trans. Shivarama Karnath

[Two persons appear on stage holding a curtain. From behind the curtain a mask of Ganesh peeps at the audience. Two women dance and offer prayers to Ganesh, remover of obstacles.]

[palace of a king]

King: Listen to me, minister. It is not a lie. I am very worried. My daughter, now beautiful and young in age, is ready for marriage. Invite the kings, send them letters, let my daughter select a husband.

[Another king is addressed by a servant]

Oh, king. The king of Kashi has sent letters to kings everywhere, to come and win his daughter in a fight. But you, who are brave and who do not care for anyone, neither on earth or in heaven, you have been done a great injustice. You are not invited.

FICTION

Overview

Fiction writing in India took a variety of forms during this period. Historical fiction in Indo-Persian genres (*qissa/dastan* and *masnavi*) flourished at Muslims courts in Delhi and the Deccan. A greater emphasis on romance and adventure features in a number of significant prose poems. Historical ballads also appeared, largely from Hindu writers and mainly in Tamil, in which the near-continual warfare between Hindu, Muslim and European imprinted itself on the literary imagination. Finally, a ground-breaking prose story was written in Tamil in the mid-18th century, though it did not appear in print until the following century. The stage was thus set for the emergence of Indian modern fiction.

Indo-Persian

Hamzanama The *Hamzanama* (or *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza*, 'Adventures of Amir Hamza') is representative of the multiple literary and cultural influences that converge in this period. The picaresque text draws on the Indo-Persian genre of oral storytelling (*dastan/qissa*) to narrate the story of Amir Hamza, the legendary uncle of the prophet Muhammad. The hero is put through a series of escapades, including narrow escapes from deceitful friends and dangerous animals. Many versions of the work circulated orally and in manuscript, but a canonical text was produced when an illustrated Persian manuscript was commissioned by the Mughal emperor Akbar in about 1562 CE.

Padmavat Another multi-layered historical narrative in this period, with many versions and influences, is the *Padmavat*. Epic in scope, like the *Hamzanama* (and other narratives of the period), it is a fictionalised account of a 14th-century battle between a Hindu king and a Muslim attacker. Although written from a Hindu point of view, it shows the influence of Indo-Persian literary models. The story turns the bare bones of history into a morality tale that expresses the joy of transcendental love and the union of a human soul with god. We have a 1540 CE manuscript written by Malik Muhammad Jayasi in Awadhi (a north Indian language closely related to Hindi), but the story is much older and generated many later textual versions.

Urdu Urdu, which received little encouragement at the Mughal court in Delhi, flourished under the patronage of Muslim rulers in the Deccan, especially at the courts of Golconda and Bijapur. Sufficiently distant from Delhi, writers in these smaller kingdoms still drew on Persian literary forms but injected more Indian substance to forge a new literary identity of Deccani Urdu literature. The long historical narrative, in the *masnavi* genre, was their preferred vehicle of literary expression.

Kamal Khan Rustami Among the many talented writers of Deccani Urdu was Kamal Khan Rustami (17th c. CE). Supported by Muhammad Adil Shah of Bijapur, he wrote *Khawar Nama* (1649 CE), which borrowed its title from a 14th-century Persian text. This long (23,000-line) *masnavi* is an historical narrative based on the military exploits of Ali, son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad.

Nusrati Nusrati, Rustami's contemporary, also wrote epic *masnavis* as court poet of the Bijapur ruler Ali Adil Shah II. He was a prolific writer, but his most celebrated work is *Ali Nama* (1665), a narrative poem chronicling the military campaigns of his patron. With vivid imagery and religious fervour, Nusrati describes how his Muslim patron defeated the Mughals and later the Mahrattas.

Romance

Telugu The *Pratapacharitramu* by Ekambaranathudu (late 16th c. CE) is an important milestone in the development of narrative fiction in Telugu. Although earlier works in the language had utilised prose interspersed with verse, this is the first fully fledged prose poem.

Kannada A similar status in the adjacent language of Kannada is held by Nanjundakavi (early 16th c.). Among his many historical fictions, the best known is the colossal *Ramanatha Charite*, in which he invents a complex plot of palace intrigue. A queen falls in love with her stepson, who refuses her advances, after which her love turns destructive. But the writer imbues the older woman's passion with dignity. In the end, of course, the prince wins glory by defeating an invading Muslim army.

Oriya An author who produced similarly original romantic narratives in the Oriya language was Narayana Das (also 16th c. CE). While he followed the tradition of earlier poets by weaving together mythological characters with folktale motifs, unlike them he produced stories with a clear narrative line. His successor was Nilambar Bidyadhar (18th c. CE), whose *Prastaba Chintamani* shows a similar skill in telling the story of a prince who gets lost on a hunting trip. When he is taken in by forest dwellers, he falls in love with their daughter. A clichéd tale, perhaps, but told with a vivid imagination.

Tamil The category of romantic narrative poem is represented in Tamil by *Viralivitututu* ('The Message sent by a Virali [female singer]'). Written in the late 18th century by Cuppiratipa Kavirayar (b. 1758), it follows the fortunes of a young, educated man who leaves his wife after a domestic quarrel. He falls into a trap set by a prostitute, escapes and wanders from court to court before returning to his wife.

Ballads

Maturai Viran *Maturai Viran* ('The Hero of Madurai') is one of several Tamil historical ballads composed in the 17th and 18th centuries CE. This text, datable to 1680-1700, uses simple verse to tell the story of a low-caste man who violates social codes but becomes a local god. He elopes with a high-caste woman, defeats the army sent to punish him and is then enlisted by the king of Madurai to rid the city of thieves. The hero again runs off with a royal woman and is summarily quartered. When the repentant king asks a goddess to restore his limbs, the hero refuses and is worshipped as a god. Even today, Maturai Viran is still worshipped as a god in villages near the city of Madurai.

Muttuppattan Muttuppattan is another Tamil historical ballad, but with a very different kind of hero. In this story, which scholars have dated to the 17th century, the eponymous hero is a Brahmin who falls in love with two Untouchable women from a caste of leather-workers. In a very affecting scene, the Brahmin hero tries to convince their father that his love for his daughters is genuine. The father then asks him to make leather sandals (touching leather was taboo for Brahmins) as a demonstration of his love. The Brahmin does so and the marriage is held, but the hero is later killed when defending his father-in-law's cattle. He then becomes a god worshipped in local villages.

Tampimar The *Tampimar* ('Little Brothers') is a Tamil historical ballad set in Travancore, a kingdom that ruled most of modern-day Kerala and part of the Tamil country from 1729 until Independence in 1947. Unlike the other ballads, however, it includes named historical figures from that time, focusing on an internecine war between two factions of the ruling family of Travancore. Like the other ballads, though, the heroes (the two brothers) die a violent death and are deified by local people.

Desinku Raja Desinku Raja is an historical ballad written in Telugu, probably in the late 18th century. It narrates the heroism of a Hindu Raja (Desinku) who dies on the battlefield defending the fort of Gingee from a Muslim army. This work is raised above the level of ordinary storytelling by three tender scenes: when the queen says goodbye to the army on the eve of battle, when the raja's friend (a Muslim) dies from brave but foolhardy action and when the victorious Desinku is rewarded by his overlord.

Prose tale

While most of the narratives mentioned above were composed in verse, prose tales were also written and adapted in this period, as before, by drawing on existing story literature. One particular work, however, the story of 'Guru Simpleton' (*Paramatta Kuruvin Katai*) occupies a unique place in the literary history of India. It is the first piece of fiction in an Indian language written by a European. C.J. Beschi (1680-1742?) was an Italian-born missionary who spent four decades living in the Tamil country, where he wrote not only an epic poem, two grammars and several essays, but also this first example of fiction—all in Tamil. Beschi's genius is that he took a series of existing oral tales and wove them into a (more or less) coherent story in eight chapters.

Questions/Discussion

1. The theme of Hindu valour against Muslim invaders is found in several examples of historical fiction produced in this period (echoing the Muslim versus Christian stories narrated in the medieval south Slav epics). On the other hand, themes of war and heroism do not feature prominently in the Indo-Persian narrative poems and stories of the same period. Is there a political or literary explanation for this anomaly?

2. The Urdu literature produced in the Deccan is not as well-known as the Indo-Persian literature produced in Delhi. Is this best explained by the greater scholarly and public attention given to the Mughal Empire? How was Deccani Urdu regarded by Hindu and Muslim scholars during the early modern period?

Reading

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Text

From the *Hamzanama*, trans. Mamta Dalal Mangaldas and Saker Mistri

Once upon a time, there lived in India a young emperor who loved to ride wild elephants. He used to roam far and wide with his soldiers, through the forests and mountains of his kingdom, crossing deep and fast-flowing rivers, in search of these mighty beasts.

One day, when the young emperor was out riding in the forests of Narwar in North India, he saw a herd of wild elephants. He chased them deep into the woods and ordered his men to use rope snares and capture the elephants. The huge legs of the elephants became entangled in the ropes and as they struggled to free themselves, the emperor leapt on to the back of the leader of the herd. Digging his heels behind the matriarch's ears, he commanded the wild beast to be calm. Once the elephants were subdued, the emperor left his soldiers in charge, and rode back to the camp to rest in his tent.

On the evening of the elephant hunt, the sun set quietly over the forests. It did not want to disturb the Ruler of Rulers, the Badshah, the Noblest Emperor of all times: Akbar the Great. In Akbar's camp the men were bustling about, waiting for Darbar Khan, Akbar's court storyteller. The emperor loved listening to tales of magic and adventure, and took his storyteller with him wherever he went. Akbar sat in a large and resplendent tent, drumming his fingers impatiently on the rubies and diamonds on his throne.

When Darbar Khan finally entered the royal tent, Akbar leapt up to embrace him and said fondly, 'Come, and amuse us with one of your stories.' Then he turned to his men, 'Darbar Khan can tell a different story every day, for a whole year. He is a wonderful storyteller. When he describes a rainstorm, you will shiver and feel the cold wind on your face. If he portrays a battle scene, the very ground trembles with the sound of horses and elephants in full charge.'

Often the storytelling continued for many hours and was accompanied by music and dancing. As he listened with his head propped on one hand, Akbar found himself wishing that he could read. It would be fun he thought to himself, to be able to read stories on his own—but then, he wouldn't have the wonderful voice and expressive hands of Darbar Khan to transport him to these exciting new worlds.

The musicians took their places, and Darbar Khan in his scarlet robe, bowed low before the emperor. 'Today's tale my Badshah, is from your favourite book: the Hamzanama. There is no other book like it in the whole world. The paintings in the book are so dazzling that when you see them, it is as wondrous as seeing the sun and the moon for the very first time. The colours glow like the jewels in your majesty's throne. And the hero of my story, the great Persian warrior Amir Hamza, is as strong and brave....' Darbar Khan smiled, 'well, almost as strong and brave... as you, my Emperor.'



Image from the illustrated manuscript of *Hamzanama*, 1560s

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Overview

As one scholar put it, Indian 'literary tradition...rarely thought in terms of personal histories.' This reluctance changed substantially during the early modern period, when two external literary traditions came to India on the back of political and economic power. The historiographical impulse in Islam, evident in Indo-Persian writing, produced a remarkable series of autobiographies and biographies, mostly at the Mughal court in Delhi. Somewhat later, the arrival of Europeans, and their foreign languages, was another catalyst to self-reflection. The perspective of the outsider seems to have stimulated Indian writers to observe themselves more closely.

Indo-Persian

Baburnama The *Baburnama* ('Book of Babur') is the autobiography of the Babur (1483-1530 CE), the first of the Mughal emperors. It was written in Babur's native Chagatai (or Turki), a language of central Asia, although it is highly Persianised in vocabulary and morphology. It was soon translated into Persian, the language of the Mughal court, and reproduced in illustrated manuscripts. At 600 printed pages, it provides readers with an extraordinary insight into Babur's life in Transoxiana (present-day Uzbekistan, Babur's homeland), Kabul and Delhi. It is a bold political self-statement, a 'mirror for princes' and a valuable source of information about the social and natural world. We learn, for example, about the lack of decent trousers in Delhi, the colours of flying geese and the smell of apple blossoms.

Later Mughal Babur's work inspired a number of later Mughal autobiographies, all in Persian. They include the historian Haydar Mirza Doglat's (1499-1551 CE) *Tarik-e rasidi*, which is more self-consciously objective chronicle. A rare insight into women's lives at the Mughal court is provided by *Homayun-nama*, written by Golbadan (Gulbadan) Begim, who was Babur's daughter. *Jahangirnama*, the autobiography of Jahangir, Babur's great-grandson, is a psychologically complex self-examination, revealing the author's various cultural interests.

Akbarnama However, the most famous piece of life-writing during this period, and one of the most revealing texts in all Indian history, is the *Akbarnama* ('Book of Akbar'), the biography of Akbar, who ruled from 1556-1605 CE. Written by his court poet, Adul Fazl, and exquisitely illustrated by 116 miniature paintings, it took seven years to complete. It covers Akbar's life and reign, but also includes a detailed description of the Mughal administration, from taxation to public works.

Chahar Unsur A remarkable autobiography written outside the Mughal court is *Chahar Unsur* ('Four Elements', 1680-1694 CE) by Bidel of Patna (1644-1721). It is a complex and difficult book, composed in rhymed prose, ghazal, matnawi, rubai and other verse forms. Arranged in four chapters (one each for air, water, fire and earth), it contains Bidel's reflections on his life, travels and religious experiences, including dreams and the benefits of silence.

Chahar Chaman *Chahar Chaman* ('Four Gardens') is a memoir written by Chandar Bhan Brahman (d. 1662), a Hindu poet who also mastered Persian literary forms and became a munshi (secretary) at the Mughal court. While the first two 'gardens' describe historical events, the brief third and fourth 'gardens' are an autobiography, supplemented by his personal letters. Unfortunately, for readers, he ends his short text at the point when he is given a post at court by Shah Jahan.

Sufi

A popular form of life-writing during the period was a collective biography of sufi saints, or a group of them, following the earlier model set by Attar's 13th-century CE text, *Takzirat al-Awliya*. Representative of this genre is *Haft Iqlim* (1594 CE) by Amin bin Ahmad Razi. Individual biographies of sufi saints were less common but not unusual. *Mu'nis al-arvah* ('The Confidant of Spirits'), an account of Mu'in al-Din Chishti, was composed by Jahanara (1614-1681 CE), daughter of emperor Shah Jahan.

Hindi

Ardhakathanak *Ardhakathanak* ('Half a Story') by Banarasidas (1585-1643 CE) is the first extant autobiography in an Indian language. Whether or not the author had access to the Persian autobiographies of the Mughal court is unknown, but he was clearly a remarkable man. Unsurprisingly,

as a poet and scholar, he wrote in verse. As a Jain merchant and a philosophical man, he takes account of his failings and ascribes much to karma, the law of cause and effect. Although he writes of himself in the third person, his 'Half a Story' is autobiographical in that it attempts to understand the human condition through personal experiences. His skilful interweaving of the domestic sphere with the social, commercial, religious and political worlds of his time reveals his hard-earned views on greed, death, passion, ambition and the pursuit of truth. When he sat down to write, he was 55 years old, half the life-span of 110 recognised in Jain tradition. He died two years later, so his 'half a life' became his whole life.

Tamil

Tamil Navalar Caritai *Tamil Navalar Caritai* ('History of Tamil Poets', probably 18th c. CE) is a curious text. On the one hand, it is a traditional text, following the much earlier (12th c. CE) Tamil anthology of the brief lives of Tamil poet-saints. On the other, such anonymous texts were rare in the early modern period. It comprises 270 *catu* verses, or separate, stand-alone stanzas, that are intended to be memorised.

Ananda Ranga Pillai Ananda Ranga Pillai (1709-1761 CE) is not a name known to many students of Indian literature. However, his private diary, written over a period of twenty-five years, is an unparalleled source of information about colonial India, in the same way that Mughal India is revealed by the biography of Akbar. Ananda Ranga Pillai was a Tamil merchant who rose to considerable influence as the chief agent to the French in their enclave of Pondicherry on the southeast coast. His diary documents, often in excruciating detail, the social and economic life in Pondicherry, while also revealing his own opinions of people, politics and changing times. Written in Tamil, it was not fully translated into French until 1894, and then into English in 1896.

English

Sake Dean Mahomet Sake Dean Mahomed (or Mahomet, 1759-1851 CE) was born in India, where he served in the East India Company's army as a camp-follower and officer. He then emigrated to Ireland, married an Anglo-Irish woman and finally settled in England, where his medical therapies, including his famous shampoo (from Hindi *campo*, 'press') became popular with the British royal family. Here, too, the colonial encounter led to someone experimenting with a new literary form.

The Travels of Dean Mahomet He published his autobiography and travelogue, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, in Ireland in 1794, which is earliest (surviving) autobiographical writing by an Indian in English. Presenting a young man's life as a soldier in north India in the form of letters to an imagined friend, it offers a picture of this dramatic period of Indian history through the eyes of one individual. Since Dean Mahomed rarely speaks of himself, we might think of his book as a 'memoir.' The 100 or so pages, which are filled with descriptions of camps, manoeuvres, towns and garrisons, also resemble a travelogue. Although its style is not engrossing, the attention to detail and the self-confessed desire of the author to 'acquaint' Europeans with his early life has produced a powerful portrait.

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Texts

1. from *Baburnama*, trans. Wheeler Thackston

Compared to ours, it [India] is another world. Its mountains, rivers, forests, and wildernesses, its villages and provinces, animals and plants, peoples and languages, even its rain and winds are altogether different.

The cities and provinces of Hindustan are all unpleasant. All cities, all locales are alike. The gardens have no walls, and most places are flat as boards.

The parrot can be taught to talk, but unfortunately its voice is unpleasant and shrill as a piece of broken china dragged across a brass tray.

[addressed to Humayun, Babur's son]

Through God's grace you will defeat your enemies, take their territory, and make your friends happy by overthrowing the foe. God willing, this is your time to risk your life and wield your sword. Do not fail to make the most of an opportunity that presents itself. Indolence and luxury do not suit kingship...Conquest tolerates not inaction; the world is his who hastens most. When one is master one may rest from everything—except being king...

Item: In your letters you talk about being alone. Solitude is a flaw in kingship, as has been said. 'If you are fettered, resign yourself; but if you are a lone rider, your reins are free.' There is no bondage like the bondage of kingship. In kingship it is improper to seek solitude....

For some years we have struggled, experienced difficulties, traversed long distances, led the army, and cast ourselves and our soldiers into the dangers of war and battle. . . . What compels us to throw away for no reason at all the realms we have taken at such cost? Shall we go back to Kabul and remain poverty-stricken?

2. From *Mu'nis al-arvah*, trans. Sunil Sharma

It should be known to everyone that the guiding master Khvaja Mu'inuddin Muhammad [Chishtī] (may almighty God protect his secret) was a *sayyid*, and without doubt was among the offspring of the prophet. There is no disputing this. When the ruler of the age... Shah Jahan (may God preserve his realm), my glorious father, did not have information about the origins of the guiding master, he investigated the matter. I told him repeatedly that the master was a *sayyid* but he did not believe me until one day he was reading the *Akbarnama* and his auspicious eyes fell on the part of the where Shaikh Abu al-Fazl describes briefly the reality of the guiding master being a *sayyid*. From that day on this fact that was clearer than the sun was revealed to the king, shadow of God.

3. From the diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai
<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00litlinks/pillai/>

The English have captured the ships bound for Pondicherry, and have received as reinforcement men-of-war from England and other places. This accounts for their activity. Nevertheless they are much troubled owing to their leader, the governor [of Madras], being a worthless fellow, devoid of wisdom. Although Pondicherry receives no ships, her government lacks funds, the enemy has seized her vessels, she is feeble and wanting in strength, and her inhabitants are in misery, although she has all these disadvantageswhen her name is uttered, her enemies tremble...

In times of decay, order disappears, giving place to disorder, and justice to injustice. Men no longer observe their caste rules, but transgress their bounds, so that the castes are confused and force governs. One man takes another's wife and his property. Everyone kills or robs another. In short, there is anarchy...unless, justice returns, this country will be ruined. This is what men say, and I have written it briefly.

ESSAY

Overview

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

Indo-Persian

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

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

Nasihah Indo-Persian literature recognises a special genre of 'advice' called *nasihat* (sometimes referred to as 'mirror for princes').

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

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

Sikh

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

Bengali

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

Sanskrit

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

Tamil

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

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

Commentaries The Tamil tradition of commentary continued during this period, largely through the patronage of the Nayak kings of Madurai (1529-1736 CE). One example is *Meynavilakkam* ('Explanation of the Highest Knowledge'), a commentary on the *advaita* ('non-dualism') philosophy written by Madai Tiruvengadunathar, an official in the court of Tirumalai Nayak .

One of his contemporaries, Civaprakasara, also wrote a number of interpretations of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and Tamil grammar. And very late in this period, Civanana Munivar (d. 1785) produced a voluminous commentary on *Civananapotam*.

Petitions

From the mid-18th century, when the British East India Company took over the governance of Bengal and Madras, Indians began to write petitions to their new rulers. Landlords, merchants and local rajas wrote long and detailed texts, to complain about unfair taxation, to ask for mitigation and to pursue action in the courts. One petition in 1788, for instance, asked the government to punish two local Tamil officials, a chieftain and a landlord, who had interfered with their temple festival. Caste-bound rules about who could worship, who could wear certain ornaments and who could process were all ripe for dissent and now there was an outside body to which one could appeal. Thus, the newly-arrived colonial state indirectly caused hundreds of Indians to write argumentatively in Bengali, Tamil, Telugu and (if capable) Persian or English.

Questions/discussion

1. Literary history is a changing field. Where once elite texts in educated languages dominated, now other, more demotic voices are included. Especially in attempting to trace the development of prose-

writing and the essay, less exalted forms, like letters to the editor of newspapers and political tracts, are studied.

2. The influence of Europeans on the emergence of the essay in India is difficult to overestimate. They wrote essays and they (or their culture and religion) were the subject of essays written by Indians. The difficult question is to determine how this strand of writing interacted, if at all, with the continuing traditions of religious and grammatical commentary.
3. English enters the frame of Indian literature and the public sphere during this period in the form of newspapers and printed books. By 1800, a few Indian writers began to use the foreigners' language to express themselves (a habit that grew over the next century). Is English, then, an Indian language? If so, when did it become one?

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Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (Permanent Black, 2003)

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Texts

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

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

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

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

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

19TH CENTURY

POETRY

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

Ghazal The 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 *ghazals* 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 (*Kavi ani Kavita*, '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 (*Narma Kavita*). 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

Vedanayaka Sastri Devashayam Pillai (1774-1864) was born in a Tamil Catholic family but converted to evangelical Protestantism as a young boy and became Vedanayaka Sastri. 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 traditional devotionalism into the hymns that Tamil Christians sang 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. Despite this, 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, *Ratchanya Yatrigram*, which took him sixteen years to complete, was inspired by both Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Kampan's Tamil *Ramayana* (12th CE.)

Ramalinga Swamigal Despite the impact of Christianity, traditional Tamil poetry continued to flourish during this century, as evident in the work of Ramalinga Swamigal(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.

Mastan Sahab 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 Madhusudan Dutt 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 Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873). A highly-respected playwright and essayist, Dutt also pioneered the Bengali blank-verse and the Bengali sonnet. One of his poems, 'Atma Bilap' ('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 *Bhanusimha Thakurer Padabali*. His most famous work, *Gitanjali*, a collection of verse 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. Separated 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.'

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 jasmynes 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.

2. 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.

DRAMA

Overview

Indian drama during the nineteenth century is a story of two halves, neatly separated by the rebellion of 1857-58. During the first five decades, traditional forms continued to dominate. In Kerala, for instance, Kutiyattam and Kathakali were popular, while elsewhere, regional forms that had emerged in the early modern period (Terukkuttu in Tamil, Yakshagana in Kannada, Nautanki in Hindi, and so forth) continued to flourish. During the second half of the century, however, the 'new drama' developed, inspired by English models and an increasing confidence in the ability of regional Indian languages to produce modern literature. A very significant exception to this generalisation was the growth of the Parsi theatre, which drew on traditional content and techniques (narrative, music, song and dance) to become a major contribution to Indian drama. In common with the so-called 'new' drama, Parsi theatre grew largely in the metropolitan centres of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay,

Bengali

Michael Madhusudan Dutt Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) contributed to this radical change in Indian theatre. In 1858, he was commissioned by a raja to translate a Bengali play (itself a translation from Sanskrit) into English. Frustrated by the poor quality of the play, however, he instead wrote his own in Bengali (*Sarmistha*) and then translated it into English. Although the story was taken from the *Mahabharata*, the play did not follow the conventions of Sanskrit dramaturgy. Anticipating criticism, Dutt explained that he had written the play 'for that portion of my countrymen who think as I think, whose ideas have been...imbued with western ideas...it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile admiration of everything Sanskrit.' He went on to write plays based on a variety of sources (such as a Greek legend), but he is remembered also for two farces. *Ekei ki bale Sabhyata* ('So this is what you call culture?') pokes fun at rich, half-educated young men who ape western manners, while *Bure Saliker Ghare Rowan* ('The Dotard Sports a Plume') satirises a lecherous old landlord.

Dinabandhu Mitra While Dutt influenced thinking about the theatre, perhaps a more substantial contribution to the content of new drama was made by another Bengali, Dinabandhu Mitra (1829-1874). His *Nildarpan* ('Indigo Mirror', 1860) was the first experiment in what is now a long tradition of social realism in Indian theatre. In it, he exposes the cruelty of British indigo planters and the struggle of peasants against them. Despite its popularity, ironically guaranteed when the government forbade its English translation, Mitra went on to write a number of farces and comedies, revealing his admiration for Moliere.

Rabindranath Tagore Although better known as a poet, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) also contributed to the new Bengali theatre, which in turn influenced new drama throughout India. He wrote several plays in the 1880s and 1890s, based on English models (including Oscar Wilde) or utilising traditional Indian stories. *Prakrtir Pratisodh* (1884), however, marked a significant departure from the mythology, historicity and musicality of most contemporary drama. It used verse to present a secular story set in the present, involving ordinary men and women in outside scenes, beyond the proscenium arch.

Tamil

Vedanayaka Sastri During the first half of the century, Tamil drama, like most Indian drama, was dominated by traditional forms written by poets. Of these men, the most influential was Vedanayaka Sastri (1774-1864), who composed an intriguing play in the *kuravanci* ('fortune-teller woman') genre, one of the many diverse drama forms that had emerged in the early modern period. However, his choice of this genre, which focuses on the erotic and parodic elements of low-caste life, for a play promoting evangelical Protestantism is curious indeed.

Bethlehem Kuravanci On the other hand, Sastri's *Bethlehem Kuravanci* ('The Fortune-Teller Lady of Bethlehem', 1809) is a perfect vehicle for his purpose. The fortune-teller lady, who usually falls in love with a disreputable raja, here falls in love with God. Her traditional bird-catcher husband is transformed into a catechist, and other bird-catchers become biblical fishermen, who use the net (the Gospel) to trap birds (people) and thwart the attempts of the evil bird-catchers (the Catholic Church).

Manonmaniyam Another unusual 'new' Tamil drama was *Manonmaniyam* (1891) by P. Sundram Pillai (1855-1997). It was written in verse, not for performance but for reading, something that we might expect from a writer who was more a scholar than an artist. Unsurprisingly, the play, based on Lord Lytton's *The Secret Way*, was not successful on the stage, but it did become a rallying cry for Tamil activists in the independence movement. One of its verses was adopted in 1970 as the state anthem of Tamil Nadu.

Parsi

History In the first half of the century, nearly all drama in Bombay was produced in English, largely by British actors and promoters. In 1835, however, the primary theatre venue in Bombay was sold to Parsi entrepreneurs, who sensed an opportunity to use culture as a platform for gaining wider participation in the public sphere. In 1853, a Parsi play in Gujarati, was performed there for the first time, and by the 1870s Parsi drama had spread across India. It remained the dominant form of drama until the 1930s, when it was replaced by another form of entertainment mixing story, song and dance: the cinema.

Gujarati Gujarati plays written by, and largely performed for, the Parsi community had a clear message. The writer of the very first play in this language announced in the preface his intention to promote what he called *swadeshi* ('self-reliant') plays for his 'fellow countrymen'. These Gujarati plays drew primarily on the Parsi heritage (Zoroastrians who came from Iran to Bombay, mostly in the 18th century), especially the Persian *Shahnama*, in an attempt to reinvent their Persian past.

Urdu Urdu (often written in the Gujarati script) was later used in the Parsi theatre because it was recognised across India as a prestige language of Muslim elites and because it could draw on the rich legacy of Indo-Persian literature for story material. Urdu-language plays were performed all across the subcontinent by touring companies, who went west to Lahore, north to Delh, south to Madras and east to Dacca.

Discussion/questions

1. The Parsi theatre, despite its widespread popularity, is still a relatively poorly-researched tradition. A good PhD could be written on the history of the Parsi theatre with a focus on how it influenced Indian cinema.
2. The pioneers of new drama in both Bengali and Tamil, respectively, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Vedanayaka Sastri, in Bengali and Tamil, were Christian. Yet, their plays have little in common. Is that contrast attributable to the difference in the historical periods in which they lived or to some other factor?
3. Many, though hardly all, new plays addressed the same social issues that stimulated most early novels. Consider how one common issue (child-marriage, caste domination or widow remarriage) was treated differently in these two different media.

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Text

From *Nildarpan*, by Dinabandhu Mitra, trans. James Long

[FIRST ACT FIRST SCENE. SVAROPUR GOLUK CHUNDER's GOLA OR STORE-HOUSE. GOLUK CHUNDER BASU and SADHU CHURN sitting]

Sadhu. Master I told you then we cannot live any more in this country. You did not hear me however. A poor man's word bears fruit after the lapse of years.

Goluk. O my child! Is it easy to leave one's country ? My family has been here for seven generations. The lands which our fore-fathers rented have enabled us never to acknowledge ourselves servants of others. The rice which grows, provides food for the whole year, means of hospitality to guests, and also the expense of religious services ; the mustard seed we get, supplies oil for the whole year, and, besides, we can sell it for about sixty or seventy rupees. Svaropur is not a place where people are in want. It has rice, peas, oil, molasses from its fields, vegetables in the garden, and fish from the tanks ; whose heart is not torn when obliged to leave such a place ? And who can do that easily ?

Sadku. Now it is no more a place of happiness : your garden is already gone, and your relatives are on the point of forsaking you. Ah !it is not yet three years since the Saheb took a lease of this place, and he has already ruined the whole village. We cannot bear to turn our eyes in the southern direction towards the house of the heads of the villages (Mandal). Oh !what was it once, and what is it now ! Three years ago, about sixty men used to make a daily feast in the house ; there were ten ploughs, and about forty or fifty oxen ; as to the court-yard, it was crowded like as at the horse races ; when they used to arrange the ricks of corn, it appeared, as it were, that the lotus had expanded itself on the surface of a lake bordered by sandal groves ; the granary was as large as a hill ; but last year the granary not being repaired, was on the point of falling into the yard. Because he was not allowed to plant Indigo in the rice-field, the wicked Saheb beat the Ma jo and Sajo Babus most severely; and how very difficult was it to get them out of his clutches ; the ploughs and kine[cows] were sold, and at that crisis the two Mandals left the village.

Goluk. Did not the eldest Mandal go to bring his brethren back?

Sadhu. They said, we would rather beg from door to door than go to live there again. The eldest Mandal is now left alone, and he has kept two ploughs, which are nearly always engaged in the Indigo-fields. And even this person is making preparations for flying off Oh, Sir ! IT tell you also to throw aside this infatuated attachment (mayo) for your native place. Last time your rice went, and this time, your honour will go.

Goluk. What honor remains to us now? The Planter

has prepared his places of cultivation round about the tank, and will plant Indigo there this year. In that case, our women will be entirely excluded from the tank. And also the Saheb has said that if we do not cultivate our rice-fields with Indigo, he will make Nobin Madhab to drink the water of seven Factories (i.e. to be confined in them).

Sadhu. Has not the eldest Babu gone to the Factory ?

Goluk. Has he gone of his own will? The pyedah (a servant) has carried him off there.

Sadhu. But your eldest Babu has very great courage. On the day the Saheb said, " If you don't hear the Amin, and don't plant the Indigo within the ground marked off, then shall we throw your houses into the river Betraboti, and shall make you eat your rice in the factory godown ;" the eldest Babu replied, "As long as we shall not get the price for the fifty bigahs[measurement] of land sown with Indigo last year, we will not give one bigah this year for Indigo. What do we care for our house ? We shall even risk (pawn) our lives."

Goluk. What could he have done, without he said that ? Just see, no anxiety would have remained in our family if the fifty bigahs of rice produce had been left with us. And if they give us the money for the Indigo, the greater part of our troubles will go away.

[NOBIN MADHAB enters.]

O my son, what has been done ?

Nobin. Sir, does the cobra shrink* from biting the little child on the lap of its mother on account of the sorrow of the mother ? I flattered him much, but he understood nothing by that. He kept to his word, and said, give us sixty bigahs of land, secured by written documents, and take 50 Rupees, then we shall close the two years' account at once.

Goluk. Then, if we are to give sixty bigahs for the cultivation of the Indigo, we cannot engage in any other cultivation whatever. Then we shall die without rice crops.

Nobin. I said, " Saheb, as you engage all your men, our ploughs, and our kine [cows], everything, in the Indigo field, only give us every year through our food. We don't want hire." On which, he with a laugh said, "You surely don't eat Yaban's* rice."

Sadhu. Those whose only pay is a belly full of food are, I think, happier than we are.

Goluk. We have nearly abandoned all the ploughs ; still we have to cultivate Indigo. We have no chance in a dispute with the Sahebs. They bind and beat us, it

is for us to suffer. We are consequently obliged to work.

Nobin. I shall do as you order, Sir ; but my design is for once to bring an action into Court.

* The Mahomedans and all other nations who are not Hindus, are called by that name.

FICTION

Overview

Short pieces of fiction (sketches, short stories and the like) dominated the first half of the century. Longer narratives, with elements of social realism and a contemporary setting, appeared from the 1860s, often serialised in journals and mostly in the metropolitan centres of Calcutta and Madras. By the turn of the century, a shift had occurred: the function of literature was no longer to display skill and incite pleasure, but to inform and to instruct. The social issues taken up by these early novelists were serious, from child-marriage to colonialism.

Urdu

Genres Urdu writers in the first half of the century continued the tradition of writing fiction in the Indo-Persian genres of *qissa/dastan* and *masnavi*. As before, they drew on a considerable repertoire of stories from both Persian and Indian literature. However, it is not always appreciated that novels in Urdu also benefited from other, short genres such as *lata'if* (witticism) and *naqliyat* (fable), as well as anecdotes and comic sketches. From 1800 to the 1830s, numerous collections of short stories in these genres were published by the British, aided by Urdu scholars, at Fort William College in Calcutta.

Novels These short pieces of fiction, along with Indian mythology and Persian legends, contributed to the later, full-length novels written in Urdu. In some cases, a humorous sketch was simply incorporated into a novel. An example is *Fasana-i-Azad* ('Story of Azad', 1878) by Ratannath Sarshar, one of the leading Urdu novelists of the nineteenth century. For the opening scenes, Sarshar simply borrowed two comic sketches he had previously published, one about a schoolmaster and father of a poor student, the other about a poetry competition. Another example is *Fasana-i-Mubtala* ('Story of an Afflicted Person', 1885) by Nazir Ahmad. Midway through the novel, the author throws in a comic scene in which a troupe of entertainers enacts a mock prayer ritual.

Bengali

Early fiction A not dissimilar situation lay at the heart of the development of Bengali fiction in the nineteenth century. Again in Calcutta, early parodies and farcical writing paved the way for novels, although this time the short pieces were published in journals and newspapers. This kind of satire in Bengali was usually called *naksha* (from the Persian *naqshah*). The object of the parody was often the western-educated, Bengali urban clerk or office worker (the famous 'babu'), who is spoiled, pretentious and often ridiculous. An early example is *Nabababubilas* ('The New Babus' Merry-Making,' 1825) by Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, which is a merciless parody of the poor babu. A later example, published serially between 1855- 1857, is *Alaler Gharer Dulal* ('The Spoilt Son of a First-Rate Family') by Pyarichand Mitra. This text, written with social realism, forms a bridge from the early writings to the later, famous Bengali novels.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay The life of Bengali's greatest early novelist, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) sums up the transitional nature of this century. Born in an orthodox Brahmin family, he was educated in English at Presidency College (now University of Calcutta) and became a magistrate in the Indian Civil Service until his retirement in 1891, but still found time to run a Bengali-language newspaper and write novels that are read today. One of his novels (*Anandamath*) contained a song ('Bande Mataram, 'Hail to thee, Mother') that became the rallying cry for Indian independence.

Bankim's novels Bankim's first novel, written in English in 1864, was soon forgotten. By contrast, his first Bengali novel, *Durgesnandini*, came a year later and, though somewhat clunky and melodramatic,

was wildly popular and led to the modern Indian novel. He went on to write a dozen more novels, mostly historical romances, with the inevitable triumph of Hindus over Muslim oppression, but also a few on social themes. He also pioneered the autobiographical narrative (made famous by Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*). Most scholars confirm the author's own assessment that his 'best' novel, which most approximates the modern genre in plotting and characterisation, is *Krishnakanter Uil* (*Krishnakanta's Will*, 1878).

Rabindranath Tagore Although Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is better known as a poet, he also made a considerable contribution to Bengali fiction in this century through his short stories. In the 1890s he wrote and published dozens of stories, some of which showcase his wit, technical skill and powers of observation. The 'Kabuliwallah' ('Fruitseller from Kabul') is a moving story, in which the eponymous trader speaks in the first person of his life in his adopted city of Calcutta and of his friendship with a four-year-old girl, who reminds him of his daughter back home in Kabul. An even more affecting story (filmed by S. Ray as 'Charulata') is 'Nastanirh' ('The Broken Nest'), which dissects the loneliness of a middle-class Calcutta family.

Tamil

Samuel Vedanayakam Pillai A first and somewhat clumsy attempt at a novel in Tamil was made by Samuel Vedanayakam Pillai (1826-1889) with his *Piratapa Mutaliyar Carittiram* ('The Story of Piratapa Mutaliyar', 1885). The author was acquainted with both English and French literature, but the material and point of view for his novel came from his observations of life as a district judge. Unfortunately, he was not a creative writer, and he only managed to string together a series of improbably romantic episodes, interrupted by his homilies for reform. Nevertheless, and again despite the scholarly language, it was an important experiment.

Rajam Aiyer An altogether different man and writer was Rajam Aiyer (1872-1898), a Brahmin who wrote the first modern novel in Tamil, one that is now regarded as a classic. The plot of *Kamalampal Carittiram* ('The Fatal Rumour' or 'The Story of Kamalampal', 1893-1895) is a little implausible and the solution even more so, and it uses somewhat stilted prose. Nonetheless, it succeeds in creating believable characters. The author describes the pettiness of villagers but also their genuine grief and confusion. It also reveals the injustice of a woman's position in a rural Brahmin family, and it does so with wit and panache. This combination of social realism and literary skill has rarely been achieved in Tamil literature.

Malayalam

Indulekha Early novels in Malayalam (the language of Kerala) are also mostly concerned with social issues. Considered the iconic early novel in this language, *Indulekha* (1889) by Chandu Menon (1847-1899) tells the story of the eponymous heroine, who defies convention and marries a man from another caste. Written by a high-caste man about high-castes, this novel of social reform replicates many late 19th-century novels in other languages.

Christian novels Malayalam, however, also has a more interesting set of novels that depict the problems of caste inequality, slavery and women's oppression written from the perspective of a low-caste, Christian convert. This is not unexpected since Europeans first came to India (in 1498) on the coast of Kerala, and Christianity has influenced that region more than any other part of the country. Two of these unusual novels are: *Saraswativilayam* ('The Victory of Knowledge,' 1892) by Pothiri Kunhambu and *Sukumari* ('Sukumari', 1897) by Joseph Muliyaal. Both begin with a death, something missing in the rosy picture of *Indulekha*, and both are narrated in gritty detail.

Hindi

The detective novel, an overlooked strand of Indian fiction writing, surfaced in Hindi in the last decade of the century. Earlier Hindi fiction had elements of the detective novel (a crime and its solution), but in these fin de siècle works, suspense dominates and, crucially, the narration does not give everything away. A significant practitioner of this new kind of fiction was Devki Nandan Khatri (1861-1913), whose *Chandrakanta* (1888) is considered the first example of modern Hindi prose. Less well-known, however, is his detective novel *Virendravir athva Katora Bhara Khun* ('Virendravir or A Bowl of Blood',

1895), which owes a large debt to Sherlock Holmes. The storytelling is skilfully handled by beginning in medias res (highly unusual at the time) and shifting the point of view from third to first person.

Questions/discussion

1. Very many of the early novels in India are named after the heroine (Kamamalpal in Tamil, Chandrakanta in Hindi and Indulekha in Malayalam, to cite just a few examples). What does this female-naming of novels suggest about Indian literature?
2. Many of these same novels, and others as well, are written in an early form of social realism. For more than two thousand years, poetry, myth and folk tales had dominated the Indian literary imagination. Suddenly, however, within three decades of its beginnings in the 1860s, the new genre of the novel had become a critical and popular fashion. What are the antecedents, if any, for this apparently radical shift in Indian literary history?

Reading

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Text

From 'Nastanirh' by Tagore, trans. Lopa Banerjee

Bhupati had inherited a lot of money and generous ancestral property, so it was quite natural if he didn't bother to work at all. By sheer destiny, however, he was born a workaholic. He had founded an elite English newspaper and that was how he decided to cope with the boredom that his riches and time, which was endlessly at his disposal, brought to him.

Since childhood, Bhupati had a flair for writing and rhetoric and would relentlessly write letters to the editors of English newspapers. He also loved speaking in assemblies, even when he didn't have anything significant to add to the discourses.

Years passed by, and he grew increasingly confident and eloquent in his English composition and oratorical skills, which was further nourished as he continued to receive accolades and support from influential political leaders. They loved him as he was rich and accomplished and wanted him to join their ilk.

Eventually, his brother-in-law Umapati, a frustrated and failed lawyer, came to him with a plea: "Bhupati, it's high time you publish your own newspaper. You possess the perfect background and necessary skills for it."

Bhupati was not only convinced but even inspired by the proposal. He believed getting published in newspapers and journals, that were run by other people, was demeaning. As the owner of his own publication, he could wield his pen and his own persona, liberated, uninhibited, and complete. With his brother-in-law to assist him, he embraced his new role as the founder and editor of a new publication.

Bhupati was young, passionate about his editorial work, current affairs and world politics to the point of addiction, and there was no dearth of people to arouse his passion for dissenting on an everyday basis.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Overview

In one sense, biography in the nineteenth-century, particularly at the end of the century, was quite different to the life-writing in earlier periods. In place of the hagiographies of deities, legendary sages and medieval poet-saints, the new subjects tended to be historical figures, some of whom were known to the biographer. Beneath this change, however, the fundamental impulse of the biographer—to present exemplary lives, often as a part of a movement—remained the same.

Influenced perhaps by Caryle's *Hero and Hero Worship*, there were numerous translations of English-language textbook biographies of famous figures (such as Ashoka, Napoleon, Queen Victoria and Abraham Lincoln), but toward the end of the period the lives of important Indian men, usually social reformers, appeared.

Urdu

Altaf Hussain Hali Altaf Hussain Hali (1837-1914) is considered one of the key figures in the Aligarh reform movement. Poet, scholar and government employee in Delhi, he wrote three pioneering biographies in Urdu, which taken as a whole amount to a manifesto for change among Muslims in the rapidly shifting world of the late 19th century. In *Hayat-e-Saadi* ('The life of Saadi,' 1886), he praised the religious and cultural views the 13-century Persian poet and thinker Saadi. His next biography was *Yadgar-e-Ghalib* ('Memorial to Ghalib,' 1897), which documented the life of his contemporary, Ghalib, and broke new ground in revealing unknown episodes in the private life of this famous poet. However, his most influential book was *Hayat-i-Javed* ('A Life Eternal', 1901), a biography of the great social reformer and champion of Urdu, Syed Ahmad Khan.

Shibli Numani Undoubtedly the most sophisticated Urdu biographer of the period was Shibli Numani (1857-1914), who was both a poet and a scholar. Like Hali, Numani belonged to the Aligarh reformist group led by Syed Ahmad Khan. However, if Hali's biographies succeeded in pointing the path to a Muslim future, Numani, who was first an historian, dedicated his to reclaiming a Muslim past. In both *Sirat-un-Nu'man* (1892-1893), on the life of an Islamic jurist, and *Al-Faruq* (1899), the life of the second Caliph, he demonstrated his ability to temper reformist zeal with critical skills absorbed from western historiography.

Gujarati

Mahipatram Rupram Biography in Gujarati, as in Urdu, was wielded as a weapon in the fight for reform against an entrenched conservative elite. The biographer for Gujarati was Mahipatram Rupram (1829-1891), himself an ardent reformer, poet and novelist, who documented the lives of several fellow reformers with a mixture of anger and wit. The anger is understandable: as the first Gujarati Brahman to cross the sea (to England), he was excommunicated by his caste members on his return.

Uttam Kapol Karsandas Mulji Charitra A representative example of Rupram's biographies is *Uttam Kapol Karsandas Mulji Charitra* ('A Memoir of the Reformer Mulji,' 1877), a study of his friend Mulji. In the preface, Rupram declared that the book is dedicated 'to the rising generation who emancipated themselves from the thralldom of ignorance, superstition and priest craft.' The book is noteworthy for its detailed account of the famous Maharaj libel case (1862), in which Mulji was accused of defamation by a religious sect (Vallabhacharyas) to which he had belonged and then criticised in print.

Tamil

A similar trend is evident in Tamil biographies of the late nineteenth-century. Here, too, life-writing is used to showcase men who have contributed to both social reform and literary reclamation. Perhaps the most representative, and influential, of these is Kanakarattina Upattiyayar's biography of Arumuka Navalar (*Srilasri Nallur Arumuka Navalar Carittiram*, 'The Story of His Holiness Arumuka Navalar of Nallur', 1892). The subject, Arumuka Navalar (1822-1879), was a Sri Lankan Tamil scholar and reformer whose life reveals the contradiction implicit in colonialism. Navalar received a Christian education, which he then used to fight against the mass conversion to Protestantism that he feared would destroy his culture.

Bengali

Rassundari Deb Rassundari Deb (1809?-1899) achieved a milestone in Indian literary history when she wrote her autobiography *Amar Jiban* ('My Life,' 1876, with a second part added in 1897). While we have a 16th-century memoir in Persian by the daughter of a Mughal Emperor, Deb's is thought to be the first autobiography written by a woman in an Indian language. More important, Rassundari Deb lived in a village. Given the position of women in rural Bengali society, she waited until her husband's death before writing her memoir, but she did not hesitate to include some distressing details of her life. Aged 12, she tells her readers, she woke up in a boat full of strangers, in the middle of a river, finding herself dressed as a bride. Later she bore twelve children, one of whom became an advocate in Calcutta. With little formal education (from a missionary woman), she taught herself to read devotional literature.

Devendranath Tagore Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905), father of Rabindranath Tagore, was a deeply spiritual man but also a radical thinker, who spearheaded the Brahmo Samaj movement, which fashioned a 'modern' Hinduism in this age of reform. His autobiography (*Maharshi Devendranath Thakurer Atmjivani*, 'The Autobiography of Maharshi [an honorary title used to address him when he was alive] Devendranath') was written in Bengali in 1898 and translated later into English by one of his sons as 'Autobiography.' In this nearly 400-page book, he describes his inner struggles and spiritual growth that resulted in his belief in a 'unified' god and a 'separate' nature. He records an early experience by the bedside of his dying grandmother, which taught him the 'unreality of things' and bred in him a fierce 'aversion to wealth.'

English

Life-writing in English seemed to wait until the end of the century, when it displayed the two trends seen elsewhere. First, there were the memoirs, whose authors reflect the kind of person who had the ability and confidence to write about himself in English. These include a book with a revealing sub-title by Lutfullah (1802-1874), who was a tutor to British officers: *Autobiography of Lutfullah, a Mohammedan Gentleman, and his transactions with his fellow-creatures interspersed with remarks on the habits, customs, and character of the people with whom he had to deal* (1857). Similarly self-revealing is the *Diary of the Late Raja of Kolhapur during his visit to England, 1870* (1872). A more humble autobiography, but one that followed the pattern of reform-motivated life-writing, is *Recollections of My School Days* by Lal Behari Day (1824-1894). Serialised in the *Bengali Magazine* (1873-1876), it argued the merits of an English education over traditional Indian learning. Finally, we can note, Nishikanta Chattapadhyaya's *Reminiscences of German University Life* (1892).

Collective Biography

The tradition of writing collective biographies, typically of a group of poets or saints, which was popular in the early modern period, was overtaken by the individual life-stories noted above. However, in the final decade of the century, the group biography re-emerged. Most of these composite biographies, like the earlier examples, were brief sketches of poets. Prominent examples include *Andhra Kavalu Charitramu* ('History of Andhra Poets', 1897) in Telugu by Kandukuri Viresalingam and *Kavi Charitra* ('History of Poets,' 1865) by Narmadashankar in Gujarati. The new politics of nationalism, however, required new subjects, as supplied in English by Parameswaran Pillai's *Representative Indians* and Manmathanath Dutt's *Prophets of India* (both 1897).

Questions/discussion

1. Most Indian life-writing in the nineteenth century was put to the service of social and/or religious reform. How does this motivation differ from the purpose of biography and autobiography written today?
2. Make a list of known biographies and autobiographies in this period. How many were written by Christians? How many by Muslims?
3. Rassundari Deb appears to be the first woman to write her story in an Indian language. It is entirely possible that other such manuscripts have been lost, or destroyed, or suppressed. Consider also other means by which women in India have 'told their story,' such as oral tales and painting.

Reading

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Text

From Devendranath Tagore's 'Autobiography,' translated by his son

My grandmother was very fond of me. To me, also, she was all in all during the days of my childhood. My sleeping, sitting, eating, all were at her side. Whenever she went to Kalighat, I used to accompany her. I cried bitterly when she went to Jagannath Kshetra and Brindaban leaving me behind. She was a deeply religious woman. Every day she used to bathe in the Ganges very early in the morning ; and every day she used to weave garlands of flowers with her own hands for the Shaligram.* Sometimes she used to take a vow of solar adoration, giving offerings to the sun from sunrise to sunset. On these occasions I also used to be with her on the terrace in the sun ; and constantly hearing the mantras (texts) of the sun-worship repeated, they became quite familiar to me.

I salute the bringer of day, red as the Java flower :
Radiant son of Kashyapa,
Enemy of Darkness,
Destroyer of all sins.

At other times Didima used to hold a Haribasar festival, and the whole night there was Katha and Kirtan the noise of which would not let us sleep.

She used to look after the whole household, and do much of the work with her own hands. Owing to her skill in housekeeping, all domestic concerns worked smoothly under her guidance. After everybody had taken their meals, she would eat food cooked by herself ; I too had a share in her havishyanna} And this prasad of hers was more to my taste than the food prepared for myself. She was as lovely in appearance as she was skilled in her work, and steadfast in her religious faith. But she had no liking for the frequent visits of the Ma-Gosain. There was a certain freedom of mind in her, together with her blind faith in religion. I used to accompany her to our old family house to see Gopinath Thakur.

But I did not like to leave her and go to the outer apartments. I would sit in her lap and watch everything, quietly, from the window. Now my Didima is no more. But after how long,

and after how much seeking, have I now found the Didima that is hers also; and, seated on Her lap, I am watching the pageant of this world.

Some days before her death Didima said to me, "I will give all I have to you, and nobody else." Shortly after this she gave me the key of her box. I opened it and found some rupees and gold mohurs, whereupon I went about telling everyone I had got mudi-mudki. In the year 1757 Shaka (1835), when Didima was on her death-bed, my father had gone on a journey to Allahabad. The vaidya came and said that the patient should not be kept in the house any longer ; so they brought my grandmother out into the open, in order to take her to the banks of the Ganges. But Didima still wanted to live ; she did not wish to go to the Ganges. She said, "If Dwarkanath had been at home, you would never have been able to carry me away." But they did not listen to her, and proceeded with her to the river-side. She said, " As you are taking me to the Ganges against my wish, so will I too give you great trouble ; I am not going to die soon." She was kept in a tiled shed on the banks of the Ganges,

where she remained living for three nights. During this time I was always there with her, by the river.

On the night before Didima's death I was sitting at Nimtola Ghat on a coarse mat near the shed. It was the night of the full moon ; the moon had risen, the burning ground was near. They were singing the Holy Name to Didima :

Will such a day ever come, that while uttering the name of Hari, life will leave me ?

The sounds reached my ears faintly, borne on the night-wind; at this opportune moment a strange sense of the unreality of all things suddenly entered my mind. I was as if no longer the same man. A strong aversion to wealth arose within me. The coarse bamboo-mat on which I sat seemed to be my fitting seat, carpets and costly spreadings seemed hateful, in my mind was awakened a joy unfelt before. I was then eighteen years old.

ESSAY

Overview

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

Urdu

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

Hindi

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

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

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

Tamil

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

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

G. Subramaniya Iyer The essay in Tamil received an enormous boost from a leading journalist in Madras, G. Subramaniya Iyer (1855-1916). An influential member of the nationalist movement, in 1878 he established *The Hindu*, an English-language weekly (and later daily) newspaper, for the express purpose of campaigning for the appointment of an Indian to the High Court in Madras. He was the paper's owner and editor for twenty years. In 1882, he set up the first Tamil daily, *Swadesamitran*, in order to communicate with the majority of people who did not speak or read English. In 1898, he left the English paper and became editor of the Tamil paper, which he ran until his death in 1916. During his editorship of both these newspapers, he promoted the cause of Indian nationalism through his editorials. As one contemporary put it, his pen was 'dipped in fiery chilli sauce.'

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

English

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

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

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

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

Questions/discussion

1. Benedict Anderson coined the term 'imagined community' in 1983 to explain how 'print capitalism' became a decisive factor in the emergence of nationalist movements in Asia. While Anderson focused primarily on Indonesia, he did consider India, as well. Now, however, there is a great deal more published scholarship on the growth of the media and of nationalist politics in India. A new study of print capitalism and nationalism India is overdue.

2. Evaluate the role of English in creating this 'imagined community' in 19th-century India. Only a small percentage of the population could read the language, but were they sufficiently influential to bring about change?
3. During the 19th century, Urdu was seen as the language of the fading Muslim aristocracy. Yet it was used by some Muslim reformers (Syed Khan, most famously) to promote change. Hindi, Bengali and Tamil were the other languages of reform. To what extent was a nationalist cause undermined by championing it in regional languages?

Reading

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Sasha Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words: The Transformation of Tamil Literature in Nineteenth-Century South India* (SUNY, 2010)

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

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

Texts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

POETRY

Overview

Poetry, the oldest, most entrenched and most respected genre in Indian literary tradition, had survived the challenges of the nineteenth century almost intact. However, if colonialism and Christianity did not substantially alter the writing of Indian poetry, 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 Sanullah, 1912-1949) wrote satirical verse, drawing on his knowledge of French poetry, while Sardar Jafri (b.1912) was influenced by Walt Whitman in his use of free verse, and Majruh Sultanpuri (1912-1955) went back to the traditional *ghazal* to express his reformist 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, Dwivedi popularised a 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 Suryakant Tripathi '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.

Mahadevi Varma The 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 Premendra Mitra, 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, Aurobindo Ghose (later Sri Aurobindo, 1872-1950), 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 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

Subramania Bharati Tamil had no poet of with the international fame of Tagore, but in Subramania Bharati (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

Kumaran Asan Kumaran Asan (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 'Vina Puvu' ('Fallen Flower,' 1908). One of his last (and perhaps greatest) work 'Karuna' ('Compassion') is a meditation on the universal need for empathy.

Vallathol Narayana Menon Vallathol 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 Subramania Bharati in Tamil, he used traditional images to articulate new feelings, as in 'Gangapati' (1913), in which Parvati challenges her husband Siva

Uloor Parameswara Iyer Uloor Parameswara Iyer (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 Subramania Bharati 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, but imagining their exchange would make a fascinating 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 be a fascinating topic for research.

Reading

Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature, 1911-1956* (Sahitya Akademi, 1995)

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Subramania Bharati and Usha Rajagopalan, *Selected Poems* (Hanchette India, 2012)

K.M. George (ed.), *Modern Indian Literature, Vol. 1. Surveys and Poems* (Sahitya Akademi, 1992)

Vijay Dwarwadker and A.K Ramanujan (eds.), *Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* (Oxford India, 1996)

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. Subramania Bharati's poems

trans. S. Vijaya Bharati (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.

DRAMA

Overview

During this period, traditional and regional theatre was gradually overtaken by drama as a literary form. While the Parsi theatre continued well into the 1930s, and Kutiyattam and Kathakali in Kerala remained popular, writers in all languages, especially English, were drawing on western models as well as responding to the social and political issues of the day. Still, the authors of these new plays, which were generally idealistic and reformist, had to be satisfied with small audiences and little critical notice. Publishers were reluctant to print 'new' dramas, and plays in English by Indian authors had neither a stage nor a public. As a spoken form of literature, plays were considered *deshi* ('provincial') and disregarded by the literary elite. If traditional theatre emphasised visual effects, the new theatre focused on themes. Yet, all drama needs an element of wonder, and modern Indian theatre continued to seek the optimal balance between story and spectacle.

Urdu

Agha Hashr (1880-1936) is the best-known Urdu playwright of the period. Born into a family of shawl merchants in Benares, he wrote more than thirty plays for the Parsi theatre, established the Indian Shakespeare Theatrical Company and went on to adapt many of his works for the silent era of Indian cinema. His most famous play, *Yahudi ki Larki* ('The Jew's Daughter,' 1913), is an historical drama, adapted from an early nineteenth-century English play that tells the story of the persecution of Jews by the Romans in Palestine. With its mixture of spoken and literary language, it remains a favourite and has been made into a film on two occasions.

Bengali

Rabindranath Tagore Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) continued to break new ground in Bengali drama in the early twentieth century. He criticised his fellow playwrights for their slavish imitation of English, especially Shakespearean, models, including an 'obsession' with realism and technical accessories. In response, he wrote a series of plays imbued with what he thought was a 'freer', Indian spirit: *Raja* (1910), *Dakghar* ('Post Office,' 1912) and *Phalguni* ('Cycle of Spring,' 1915). Critics thought these efforts unconvincing on the stage, however, and Tagore only found popular and critical success when he translated (and radically edited) his earlier Bengali plays into English. The outstanding example, which had success in London, was 'The Post Office.'

Girish Chandra Ghosh One playwright whose plays filled the theatres in Calcutta in the first decade of the century was Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1911). He was not only a fine writer, but also a director, actor and lyricist. He wrote more than forty plays, beginning with adaptations of traditional Indian stories but ending with his own original plots. In the period 1904-1908, he wrote two plays that dramatized the early history of British rule in Bengal (*Siraj-ud-Daula* and *Mir Qasim*, each telling the story of its eponymous hero), a biting social satire on dowry (*Balidan*, 'The Sacrifice') and, finally, an historical play praising a Hindu king who defeated the Mughals (*Chatrapati Sivaji*).

Kannada

T.P. Kailasam T.P. Kailasam (1885-1946) was a colourful and complex figure. Although a Tamil, he was born and educated in Mysore, spend several years in England (doing nothing, according to his disappointed father), but then became a leading playwright-actor who wrote plays in both Kannada and English. His Kannada plays annoyed critics because he introduced colloquial language and poked fun at contemporary figures, but his satires won huge audiences. In line with his contemporaries elsewhere, he also wrote about social issues, including education (*Tollu Gatti*, 'The Hollow and the Solid', 1918), the dowry system (*Tali Kattoke Cooline*, 'Wages for tying the Wedding Necklace'), corrupt religion (*Bahishkara*, 'Open Prison,' 1929) and prostitution (*Soole*, 'Prostitute', 1945). Swallowing his pride, one critic managed to concede that he was a 'bohemian genius.'

Tamil

Shankaradas Swamigal An outstanding figure in Tamil drama in this period was another playwright-actor-director Shankaradas Swamigal (1867-1922). He wrote dozens of plays, mostly adapted from traditional mythology, which were performed in Madurai, where he had set up his own a theatre company, and in Madras. He was also associated with several theatre companies known as 'Boys Companies'

because they used the traditional *gurukula* system (in which young men lived together and were trained by a guru) to teach the profession of acting.

Sambandha Mutaliyar Modern Tamil drama gained an institutional base through the efforts of Sambandha Mutaliyar (1873-1964). Encouraged by his father to see performances in Madras, Mutaliyar also read Shakespeare as a child and, when only 19 years old, established a theatre company in Madras (the Suguna Vilasa Sabha, 'Society for Respectable Drama'), which exists to this day, though only as a men's club. Despite his full-time job as a lawyer, and later judge, Mutaliyar wrote dozens of plays, including an adaptation of *Hamlet*, which made him a success on the stage. The popularity of his plays meant that, finally, publishers began to print them, audiences paid to see them and drama earned a foothold of respectability in Madras.

TKS Brothers More literary backbone was inserted in the new Tamil theatre by the TKS Brothers Dramatic Group. It was founded in Madras in 1925 by a man who had trained in a drama company linked to Shankaradas Swamikal. The brothers then recruited successful fiction writers, from a newly-established literary magazine, instead of employing the traditional playwright who had more experience with the stage than the page. These new writers produced powerful plays on social reform (*Uyiroviyam*, 'Life Portrait') and historical themes (*Rajaraja Colam*, a Chola king).

Assamese

Jyotiprasad Agarwal In the far northeast corner of India, Jyotiprasad Agarwal (1903-1951) succeeded in almost singlehandedly creating a new theatre in Assamese. Born into a wealthy tea-planter family, he completed his education in Calcutta and Edinburgh, where he absorbed influences from Shaw and Ibsen, especially the technicalities of staging. His plays, like those of his contemporaries in other languages, foreground social and political struggles, but they also introduce a strong romantic element. Again, following many other literary figures at the time, he served a jail sentence for his nationalist activities but went on to even greater fame as a film screenwriter.

English

Sri Aurobindo The influential poet and philosopher Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) also wrote several powerful plays during the first decades of the century. For various reasons, including the seizure of his papers by the British police, only one (*Perseus the Deliverer*, 1907) was published during his lifetime. Although the plots of these plays are largely taken from Indian, Greek, Roman and Norse history, Aurobindo infuses the stories with a spiritual nationalism. In *Perseus*, for example, the Greek myth is stripped of its cultural elements and turned into a universal 'myth of the hero', who must revive the lost spirit of a nation. All his plays are finely wrought literary accomplishments, though not, one suspects, good entertainment on stage. In some of them, Aurobindo skilfully mixes delicate verse with colloquial banter, while in others he uses pure poetry to create an atmosphere of deep tragedy.

Harindranath Chattopadhyay Another Bengali Brahman who made a substantial contribution to English-language Indian drama in this period was Harindranath Chattopadhyay (1898-1990). He was born outside Bengal, in Hyderabad, to a philosopher-educationalist father and a poet mother. His wife was Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the famous leader of women's organisations; their divorce marked the first time a court in India recognised legal separation. His most famous drama, *Five Plays* (1929), covers a spectrum of social ills, including exploitation of textile workers and child marriage. After independence, he went on to write scripts for the booming cinema industry.

Questions/Discussion

1. Many Indian plays written during this period were either translations or adaptations of English plays or borrowed from the reservoir of traditional Indian literature. Many were translated from one Indian language (usually Bengali) into another, and sometimes by the original writer an Indian language into English. This initial lack of original narrative material was overcome by the growing pressure of nationalism, which supplied numerous stories.
2. Sri Aurobindo perhaps illustrates another trend, and possible problem, in modern Indian drama. His subtle intelligence and literary skills produced complex and ambiguous plays, which did not appeal to

the theatre-going public. What are the historical roots of this split between aesthetic and popular drama in India. Is it found in other literary cultures?

3. The touring theatre company was a mainstay of Indian theatre right up to the end of this period. (See, for example, the 1965 film 'Shakespeare Wallah' by James Ivory.) Modern drama, however, required a financially viable theatre in the large cities, which Calcutta, Madras and Bombay struggled to achieve. How does this contrast between two models of drama help us to understand the status of drama in modern India?

Reading

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Texts

1. Sri Aurobindo in his preface to *Perseus the Deliverer*:

Acrisius, the Argive king, warned by an oracle that his daughter's son would be the agent of his death, hoped to escape his doom by shutting her up in a brazen tower. But Zeus, the King of the Gods, descended into her prison in a shower of gold and Danaë bore to him a son named Perseus. Danaë and her child were exposed in a boat without sail or oar on the sea, but here too fate and the gods intervened and, guided by a divine protection,

the boat bore her safely to the Island of Seriphos. There Danaë was received and honoured by the King. When Perseus had grown to manhood the King, wishing to marry Danaë, decided to send him to his death and to that end ordered him to slay the Gorgon Medusa in the wild, unknown and snowy North and bring to him her head the sight of which turned men to stone. Perseus, aided by Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom, who gave him the divine sword Herpe, winged shoes to bear him through the air, her shield or aegis and the cap of invisibility, succeeded in his quest after many adventures. In his returning he came to Syria and found Andromeda, daughter of Cepheus and Cassiopea, King and Queen of Syria, chained to the rocks by the people to be devoured by a sea-monster as an atonement for her mother's impiety against the sea-god, Poseidon. Perseus slew the monster and rescued and wedded Andromeda.

In this piece the ancient legend has been divested of its original character of a heroic myth; it is made the nucleus round which there could grow the scenes of a romantic story of human temperament and life-impulses on the Elizabethan model. The country in which the action is located is a Syria of romance, not of history.

Indeed a Hellenic legend could not at all be set in the environments of the life of a Semitic people and its early Aramaean civilisation: the town of Cepheus must be looked at as a Greek colony with a blonde Achaean dynasty ruling a Hellenised people who worship an old Mediterranean deity under a Greek name. In a romantic work of imagination of this type these outrages on history do not matter. Time there is more than Einsteinian in its relativity, the creative imagination is its sole disposer and arranger; fantasy reigns sovereign; the names of ancient countries and peoples are brought in only as fringes of a decorative background; anachronisms romp in wherever they can get an easy admittance, ideas and associations from all climes and epochs mingle; myth, romance and realism make up a single whole. For here the stage is the human mind of all times: the subject is an incident in its passage from a semi-primitive temperament surviving in a fairly advanced outward civilisation to a brighter intellectualism and humanism – never quite safe against the resurgence of the dark or violent life-forces which are always there subdued or subordinated or somnolent in the make-up of civilised man – and the first promptings of the deeper and higher psychic and spiritual being which it is his ultimate destiny to become.

2. From 'Purpose' by T.P Kailasam

DEDICATED
IN
ALL HUMILITY
TO
MY YOUTHFUL BROTHERS
OF
MY MOTHERLAND
IN
HAPPY MEMORY
OF
MY YOUTHFUL YEARS

**"IF Youth but knew!
If Age but Could!"**

Personae:

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| BHEESHMA | The Patriarch of the Royal Kuru House |
| ARJUNA, NAKULA and SAHADEVA | Bheeshma's Grandchildren |
| DRONAACHAARYA | Preceptor to the princes |
| EKALAVYA | A Nishaada (Non-Aryan) Boy |

Period:

The Aadi Parva of THE MAHAABHAARATA

ACT I

Place: THE ROYAL ATHLETIC GROUNDS: HASTINA

DISCOVERED: **In the Background:** *Stalwart Youths at Mace and Sword exercise*
In The Mid-Ground: *Arjuna practising with bow, his target swung by a tree-branch*
In The Fore-Ground: *Dronacharya with Nakula and Sahadeva; the former with a riding whip and the latter with a bow taller than his own self.*

Sahadeva: *(With a wry face)* Gurujee! I cannot use this bow! It is too big for me! I c a n n o t even lift it!

Drona: *(Feigning astonishment)* Bow too big for you? But my little man, you seem to forget you are a Kshatriya! Why, no bow in the world is really too big for a Kshatriya -- not only to lift, but to bend, string, and shoot with!

Sahadeva: *(With a more pinched face)* I AM remembering I am a Kshatriya, Gurujee! But *(Straining at the bow)* this is too big and I canNOT lift it!

Drona: Oh! You mean YOU are not big enough to lift it?

Sahadeva: *(Puzzled)* It is the same thing, I suppose?

Drona: "Same thing"? By no means! For, if it is the bow that is too big for you, no one can make that BOW smaller; but if it is YOU that is not big enough and strong enough to lift and use that bow... you can make yourself big enough and strong enough... can you not?

Sahadeva: *(Stragglingly)* I s u p p o s e I can.

Drona: "Suppose"? Why, of course you can: Look at your big brother yonder! Last week he

made out that his GADA was too big for him. But now it turns out it was HE that was not strong enough then to lift it! For look, he is wielding the SAME gada as it were a flower! And you know where Bheemasena has been these past eleven days?

Sahadeva: I know! The Vyayaamasaala!

Drona: Yes. And that is where you will spend your next eleven days. (*Looks at Nakula for a moment and looks away*) YOU will do the same too, Nakula!

Nakula: (*Startled*) I, Gurujee! Why?

Drona: (*Still looking away*) You thought perhaps that I was not watching you this morning whilst you were riding at day-break! But I was!...The MANE of a horse, Nakula!... (*Nakula bites the tip of his tongue guiltily*) is not meant for the rider to hold on to... unless he be a... (*meeting Nakula's eyes*) FRIGHTENED HORSEMAN!

(*Scandalised*) "FRIGHTENED"! I was NOT frightened, Gurujee! It was not fright that made me...do...what...I...did.

Drona: What was it then made you...do...what...you...did?

Nakula: I held on to the mane because...I did not want to slip off that very very big horse!...the horse was really much too big for me, Gurujee!

Drona: (*Feigning disgust and anger*) "Horse much too big"! And you are a Kshatriya! And to think I have just told your little brother that...I mean...

Nakula: (*Interrupting*) I KNOW what you mean...Gurujee...!

Drona: And what do I mean?

Nakula: You mean, Gurujee. I must never forget I am a Kshatriya! And that no bow in the world...I mean, no HORSE in the world is really too big for a Kshatriya to lift...I mean, to RIDE without holding the mane; that it was not the horse that was too big...as no one can make that horse smaller...but it was I that was not big enough and strong enough...so a MANDALA for me too in the Vyayaamasaala...and when I come back...

Drona: (*Suppressing a smile*) Yes...It is CHATHURTHEE today; and even as you can watch the MOON wax bigger and brighter every night—so must you watch your limbs and frame grow bigger and stronger everyday... and on, POORNIMA DAY—when your Royal Grandsire comes to visit us—you, Nakula, will be riding his big big, very very big, but—"never never much TOO big" war-horse DEERGHAKESHA, (*adding significantly*)—without holding the mane! And you, (*to Sahadeva*)—my little hero, will not only be lifting this bow, but bending it, stringing it and shooting with it!

Sahadeva: (*Clapping his hands*) Will I, Gurujee!?

Drona: Of course you will. Now, my little men, run away and start your SAADHANAAS this very now!

FICTION

Overview

Indian fiction came of age in this period. Quickened by the nationalist spirit that swept the country, writers found new content and techniques with which to tell stories that spoke to a wider public. Literary magazines played a large role in popularising the new fiction, mostly short stories but also serialised novels. Having assimilated techniques from western literature, Indian writers were now charting the journey that would lead to international fame by the end of the century. As these developments in each of the fifteen literary languages of India follow a general pattern, only a few of the most interesting examples are presented below.

Urdu

Sadat Hasan Manto Fiction in Urdu was raised to a new level by the storytelling art of Sadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955). Unusual among fiction writers in India of this period, he specialised in the short story, and like Chekhov and Maupassant, he told stories with a fine eye for detail and character motivation. Some critics condemned his apparent fascination with violence and sex, but others praised his stories featuring prostitutes and pimps for their unsentimental humanity. Certainly he was prolific,

publishing no less than 15 collections during his lifetime, with several more published posthumously. Among his best books are *Atis Paray*, ('Spares of Fire,' 1936) and *Cughad* ('The Fool,' 1948).

Hindi

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

Assessment Premchand not only wrote stories with contemporary social relevance, but also used fiction as a medium for change. Taken altogether, his fiction gives the reader a panoramic view of rural north India in the first half of the twentieth century. His output was uneven, sometimes falling prey to sentimentalism, as when corrupt officials and money-lenders are reformed, but often he creates characters with depth and emotional complexity. And if from time to time he lapses into idealistic didacticism and offers a happy ending, he still presents an objective picture of the realities and injustices of his society.

Sevasadan Premchand's first novel, *Sevasadan* ('House of Service', 1918), is representative of his work and reveals the hypocrisy of the 'pillars of society.' A liberal Hindu lawyer is unable to reform his ne'er-do-well nephew and later, through a few unconvincing plot twists, is implicated in forcing a married Brahmin woman into prostitution. He atones by funding an institution for former prostitutes, where they learn music and dance (courtesan's skills), work with their hands and raise children in a healthy environment.

Godan Published in 1936, *Godan* ('The Gift of a Cow') was Premchand's last novel and his masterpiece. In it he created a social world that stands for all of India, without obvious villains and heroes. There is the village, with every kind of character, plus the *zamindar* (landowner). And there is the city, where the *zamindar* also lives, along with 'modern' women, professionals, intellectuals, traditional Hindus and Muslims. The main character is Hori, a villager burdened with the obligation to keep a cow. Cheated by a Brahmin landowner, Hori remains loyal to the system he was born in and ends up dying in a ditch. His urban counterpart, the educated professor, is similarly unheroic. Failing to practice his self-professed Gandhian ideals, he is violent at times and takes a self-serving vow of chastity.

Bengali

Rabindranath Tagore Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the great poet, also wrote a series of provocative novels in the early decades of the century: *Cokher Bali* (1902), *Gora* (1910) and *Caturanga* (1916). Perhaps the most powerful was *Yogajog* (1929), a story of the struggle between masculine power and feminine resistance, coarseness and culture, and featuring a marital rape.

Sarat Chandra Chatterji The Bengali novel, however, found an even more outstanding practitioner in Sarat Chandra Chatterji (1876-1938). Like Tagore, he used the Bengali family as a prism for exploring the world of emotions, often focusing on women's lives. However, his stories move more quickly, with few authorial interventions, relying instead of sudden and dramatic shifts that maintain suspense. His novella *Badadidi* ('The Elder Sister,' 1913) brought him instant fame, and he remained extremely popular for his entire lifetime. While his most popular novel is arguably *Binder Chele* (1914), critics prefer *Srikanta* (1917-1933), a four-volume family saga.

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay (also Banerjee, 1894-1950) was a transitional figure between the early novelistic experiments in the 19th century and the fully-developed form of the 20th. Indeed, his biography reads like a blueprint for creating a modern Indian literature with its blend of tradition and innovation. His grandfather was an Ayurvedic doctor, while his father was a Sanskrit scholar and professional storyteller (*kathak*). Born as the eldest of five children in a rural village, Bandyopadhyay went to college and studied for an MA at Calcutta University. In total, he published 17 novels, 20 collections of short stories and several miscellaneous books (a travelogue, an autobiography,

a translation of *Ivanhoe*, a Bengali grammar, and works on astrology and the occult). His eclecticism is notable but not uncommon among educated Bengalis of the time.

Pather Panchali *Pather Panchali* is the novel that catapulted Bandyopadhyay to national and then international fame. Published in 1929 as the first part of a trilogy known as *The Apu Trilogy*, it was quickly translated into several languages and brought to an even wider audience with the film adaptation by Satyajit Ray in the 1950s. The excellence of the novel lies more in its emotional atmosphere and characters than in plot structure or suspense. Rarely has an Indian novelist entered into the mind of a character as successfully as Bandyopadhyay does with the young boy Apu, and we are also treated to beautiful descriptions of the Bengali countryside. This is largely an autobiographical novel, which gives it a ring of truth but also enables the author to enhance fact with the dramatic power of fiction.

Tamil

Manikkodi It is characteristic of Indian literature that a short-lived literary magazine (*Manikkodi*, 'The Jewelled Flag') changed the history of Tamil fiction. Published in Madras from 1933 to 1936, it featured short stories that challenged the accepted manner of telling stories. Narratives were fractured, told from different points of view, and they highlighted the grotesque and the psychotic, sex and violence. The magazine launched the careers of most of the best fiction writers of the inter-war years, including B.S. Ramiah, Chellappa, Mauni and Putumaipittan.

Putumaipittan The most radical and interesting of these Tamil writers was Putumaipittan ('The Crazy One,' 1906-1948). In his brief literary career, he wrote nearly 100 short stories (some of which were unpublished and are being discovered even today), translated 50 stories from English into Tamil and wrote four non-fiction books (promoting his socialist ideals and condemning fascism, notably in his biography of Hitler).

God and Kandaswami Pillai Putumaipittan's best story, by critical consensus, is 'Katavulum Kantacuvami Pillaiyum' ('God and Kandaswami Pillai', 1934). The author anthropomorphises god and makes him endure the hardships of human existence, as he is led by Kandaswami Pillai (a publisher) on a tour around Madras. In a series of clever and humorous scenes, both god and his human guide reveal their vulnerability and dignity.

Kalki The Tamil novel, which had had several capable, even creative, practitioners, gained a wider following in the 1940s with the emergence of a storyteller who knew how to please readers. Kalki (R.A. Krishnamurthy, 1899-1954) used his magazine *Anandavikatan* as a vehicle for serialising his fabulously popular stories told in easy but rhythmic prose. Most of his novels are historical, transporting the reader back to the splendour of ancient Tamil kingdoms. Some critics felt his work was escapist, but no one could argue with his popularity.

Kalki's Life Kalki's father was a poor Brahmin who served as an accountant to a rich landowner in an isolated village. Kalki was educated there but did not finish high school. Instead he answered Gandhi's call for non-cooperation and joined the Indian National Congress in 1921. He was arrested and went to jail twice but also worked on and later edited literary magazines, most famously *Anantavikatan*.

Tiyaga Bumi Kalki combined his politics and his powerful storytelling in his most popular novel, *Tiyaga Bumi* ('The Land of Self-less Sacrifice,' 1939), which was also made into an equally famous film. Its hero is a Brahmin priest who offers shelter to Harijans made homeless by a hurricane and is excommunicated for this act of charity. Then his daughter is ill-treated by her westernised husband, finds herself homeless, gives birth to a child whom she entrusts to her father and goes wandering. Her father, the Gandhi-like figure, embarks on a programme of Harijan uplift. In the end, his daughter becomes rich and rejects her husband's request to return to him.

English

Indian fiction in English during the first half of the twentieth century was dominated by three novelists whose lives spanned all ten decades: Raja Rao (1908-2006), Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) and R. K. Narayan (1906-2001). Raja Rao's most famous novel (*Kanthapura*, 1938) describes the reception of Gandhian ideals in rural India, while Raj Anand was an even more committed political writer, who helped

to establish the Progressive Writers' Association. His novels (especially *Untouchable*, 1935) took on the task of exposing the indignities and inequalities in Indian society. However, it is the novels by R K Narayan, cleverly told with both empathy and humour, that have stood the test of time.

Questions/discussion

1. The quantity and popularity of Indian fiction in this period might be partially explained by non-literary factors. With the rise of print and literacy, there were clearly more publications and more readers. And the nationalism fervour meant that more of them were anxious to read, not just books, but also newspapers and magazines. Is this correlation between print, nationalism and the novel found elsewhere in the world?
2. In this period, unlike the second half of the century, most popular fiction was written, published and read in regional languages, Bengali, Tamil, Hindi and so forth. This would change, after Independence, in favour of English-language Indian literature. What accounts for this radical shift in so short a time?
3. Recent research has cast doubt on the contrast often drawn between the romance of early Indian novel and the social realism of novels in this period. It is now suggested that the supposedly realistic novelists also invented imaginative worlds and experimented with new aesthetics. Certainly, many writers of fiction in this period went on to work in the film world. How did this shift of medium affect their storytelling?

Reading

Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature, 1911-1956* (Sahitya Akademi, 1995)

K.M. George (ed.), *Modern Indian Literature, vol. 1. Surveys and Poems* (Sahitya Akademi, 1992)

Usha Anjaria, *Realism in the Twentieth-Century Indian Novel Colonial Difference and Literary Form* (Cambridge, 2012)

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

Text

'The Shroud', by Premchand, trans. F. Pritchett

At the door of the hut father and son sat silently by a burnt-out fire; inside, the son's young wife Budhiya lay in labor, writhing with pain. And from time to time such a heart-rending scream emerged from her lips that they both pressed their hands to their hearts. It was a winter night; everything was drowned in desolation. The whole village had been absorbed into the darkness.

Ghisu said, "It seems she won't live. She's been writhing in pain the whole day. Go on-- see how she is."

Madhav said in a pained tone, "If she's going to die, then why doesn't she go ahead and die? What's the use of going to see?"

"You're pretty hard-hearted! You've enjoyed life with her for a whole year-- such faithlessness to her?"

"Well, I can't stand to see her writhing and thrashing around."

It was a family of Chamars, and notorious in the whole village. If Ghisu worked for one day, then he rested for three. Madhav was such a slacker that if he worked for an hour, then he smoked his chulam for an hour. Thus nobody hired them on. If there was even a handful of grain in the house, they both swore off working. When they'd fasted for a couple of days, then Ghisu climbed trees and broke off branches, and Madhav sold the wood in the market; and as long as that money lasted, they both spent their time wandering idly around. *When their hunger grew intense, they again broke off branches, or looked for

some work.* There was no shortage of work in the village. It was a village of farmers; for a hard-working man there were fifty jobs. But people only sent for those two when they were forced to content themselves with getting out of two men the work of one.

If only the two had been ascetics, then they wouldn't have needed any exercises in self-discipline to achieve contentment and patience. This was their very nature. Theirs was a strange life. Except for two or three clay pots, they had no goods at all in the house. Covering their nakedness with torn rags, free from the cares of the world, laden with debt-- they suffered abuse, they suffered blows too, but not grief. They were so poor that without the smallest hope of repayment, people used to lend them something or other. When peas or potatoes were in season, they would dig up peas or potatoes from the fields and roast and eat them, or break off five or ten stalks of sugarcane and suck them at night. Ghisu had spent sixty years of his life in this pious manner, and Madhav, like a dutiful son, was following in his father's footsteps-- or rather, was making his name even more radiant.

This time too, both were seated by the fire, roasting potatoes that they had dug up from somebody's field. Ghisu's wife had passed away long ago. Madhav's marriage had taken place the year before. Since this woman had come, she had laid the foundations of civilization in the family. *Grinding grain, cutting grass, she arranged for a couple of pounds of flour,* and kept filling the stomachs of those two shameless ones. After she came, they both grew even more lazy and indolent; indeed, they even began to swagger a bit. If someone sent for them to work, then with splendid indifference they demanded double wages. That woman was dying today in childbirth. And these two were perhaps waiting for her to die, so they could sleep in peace.

Pulling out a potato and peeling it, Ghisu said, "Go see what shape she's in. We'll have the fuss over a ghost-witch-- what else! And here even the exorcist demands a rupee--from whose house would we get one?"

Madhav suspected that if he went into the hut, Ghisu would finish off most of the potatoes. He said, "I'm afraid to go in."

"What are you afraid of? I'm here, after all."

"Then *you* go and see, all right?"

"When my wife died, for three days I never even left her side. And then, won't she be ashamed in front of me? I've never seen her face-- and today I should see her naked body? She won't even have bodily ease: if she sees me, she won't be able to thrash around freely."

"I'm thinking, if a child is born-- what then? Dried ginger, brown sugar, oil-- there's nothing at all in the house."

"Everything will come. If Bhagwan [god] gives a child-- those people who now aren't giving a paisa, will send for us and give us things. I've had nine sons. There was never anything in the house, but this is how we managed every time."

A society in which those who labored night and day were not in much better shape than these two; a society in which compared to the peasants, those who knew how to exploit the peasants' weaknesses were much better off-- in such a society, the birth of this kind of mentality was no cause for surprise. We'll say that compared to the peasants, Ghisu was more insightful; and instead of joining the mindless group of peasants, he had joined the group of clever, scheming tricksters. Though indeed, he wasn't skilful in following the rules and customs of the tricksters. Thus while other members of his group became chiefs and headmen of villages, at him the whole village wagged its finger. But still, he did have the consolation

that if he was in bad shape, at least he wasn't forced to do the back-breaking labor of the peasants, and others didn't take improper advantage of his simplicity and voicelessness.

Pulling out the potatoes, they both began to eat them burning hot. They had eaten nothing since the day before. They were too impatient to wait till the potatoes cooled. Both burned their tongues repeatedly. When the potatoes were peeled, their outer parts didn't seem so extremely hot. But the moment the teeth bit into them, the inner part burned the tongue and throat and roof of the mouth. Rather than keep that ember in the mouth, it was better to send it quickly along inward, where there was plenty of equipment for cooling it down. So they both swallowed very fast, although the attempt brought tears to their eyes.

Then Ghisu remembered a landowner's wedding procession, in which he had taken part twenty years before. The repast that had been vouchsafed to him in that feast was a memorable event in his life, and even today its memory was fresh. He said, "I'll never forget that feast. Never since then have I had that kind of food, or such a full stomach. The girl's family fed puris to everyone. As much as they wanted! Great and small, everyone ate puris-- ones made with real ghee! Chutney, raita, three kinds of green vegetables, a flavorful stew, yoghurt, chutney, sweets. How can I tell you now what relish there was in that feast! There was no limit. Whatever thing you want, just ask! And however much you want, eat! People ate so much, ate so much, that nobody could even drink any water. And there the servers were-- setting hot, round, sweet-smelling pastries before you! You refuse, saying you don't want it. You push away the tray with your hand. But that's how they are-- they just keep on giving it. And when everybody had wiped their mouths, then everybody got a *pan* as well. But how could I be in any shape for a *pan*? I couldn't stand up. I just staggered off and lay down on my blanket. He had a heart as big as the ocean, that landowner!"

Enjoying the story of these grand festivities, Madhav said, "If only somebody would give us such a feast now!"

"As if anybody would feast anybody now! That was a different time. Now everybody thinks about economy-- 'don't spend money on weddings, don't spend money on religious festivals!'. Ask them-- what's this 'saving' of the poor people's wealth? There's no lack of 'saving'. But when it comes to spending, they think about economy!"

"You must have eaten twenty or so puris?"

"I ate more than twenty."

"I would have eaten up fifty."

"I couldn't have eaten less than fifty. I was hale and hearty. You're not half of what I was!"

After eating, they both drank some water, covered themselves with their dhotis, curled up, and went to sleep right there by the fire, as if two gigantic serpents lay coiled there.

And Budhiya was still moaning.

In the morning, when Madhav went into the hut and looked, his wife had grown cold. Flies were buzzing on her face. Her stony eyes had rolled upward. Her whole body was covered with dust. In her stomach, the baby had died.

Madhav came running to Ghisu. Then they both together began loudly lamenting and beating their breasts. When the neighbors heard the weeping and wailing, they came running. And following the ancient custom, they began to console the bereaved.

But this wasn't the occasion for an excessive show of grief. They had to worry about the shroud, and the wood. Money was as scarce in their house as meat in a raptor's nest.

Father and son went weeping to the village landlord. He hated the very sight of their faces. A number of times he had beaten them with his own hands-- for theft, or for not coming to work as they had promised. He asked, "What is it, Ghisua, why do you weep? Nowadays we don't even see you around. It seems that you no longer want to live in the village."

Ghisua fell prostrate on the ground, and said with tear-filled eyes, "Master, I'm in great trouble! Madhav's wife passed away last night. All day she was writhing in pain, Master; we two sat by her bed till midnight. Whatever medicines we could give her, we did. But she slipped away. Now we have no one to care for us, Master-- we're devastated-- our house is destroyed! I'm your slave. Now who but you will take care of her final rites? Whatever money we had at hand was used up on medicines. If the Master will show mercy, then she'll have the proper rites. To whose door should I come except yours?"

The Landlord Sahib was a compassionate man. But to show compassion to Ghisua was to try to dye a black blanket. He felt like saying, "Get out of here! *Keep the corpse in your house and let it rot!* Usually you don't come even when you're called-- now when you want something, you come and flatter me! You treacherous bastard! You villain!" But this was not the occasion for anger or revenge. Willingly or not, he pulled out two rupees and flung them down. But he didn't open his lips to say a single word of consolation. He didn't even look in Ghisu's direction-- as if he'd discharged a duty.

When the Landlord Sahib gave two rupees, then how could the village merchants and money-lenders have the nerve to refuse? Ghisu knew how to beat the drum of the landlord's name. One gave two paisas, another gave four paisas. In an hour, Ghisu had collected the sum of five rupees in ready cash. Someone gave grain, someone else gave wood. And in the afternoon Ghisu and Madhav went to the market to get a shroud. Meanwhile, people began to cut the bamboo poles, and so on.

The sensitive-hearted women of the village came and looked at the body. They shed a few tears at its helplessness, and went away.

(3)

When they reached the market, Ghisu said, "We've got enough wood to burn her, haven't we, Madhav?"

Madhav said, "Yes, there's plenty of wood. Now we need a shroud."

"So let's buy a light kind of shroud."

"Sure, what else! While the body is being carried along, night will come. At night, who sees a shroud?"

"What a bad custom it is that someone who didn't even get a rag to cover her body when she was alive, needs a new shroud when she's dead."

"After all, the shroud burns along with the body."

"What else is it good for? If we'd had these five rupees earlier, we would have given her some medicine."

Each of them inwardly guessed what the other was thinking. They kept wandering here and there in the market, until eventually evening came. [Sometimes they went to one cloth-seller's shop, sometimes to another. They looked at various kinds of fabric, they looked at silk and cotton, but nothing suited them.] The two arrived, by chance or deliberately, before a wine-house; and as if according to some prearranged decision, they went inside. For a little while they both stood there in a state of uncertainty. [Then Ghisu

went to the counter and said, "Sir, please give us a bottle too." *Ghisu bought one bottle of liquor, and some sesame sweets.* [After this some snacks came, fried fish came]. And they both sat down on the verandah and [peacefully] began to drink.

After drinking a number of cups in a row, both became elevated.

Ghisu said, "What's the use of wrapping her in a shroud? After all, it would only be burned. Nothing would go with her."

Looking toward the sky as if persuading the angels of his innocence, Madhav said, "It's the custom of the world-- why do these same people give thousands of rupees to the Brahmins? Who can tell whether a reward does or doesn't reach them in another world?"

"Rich people have wealth-- let them waste it! What do we have to waste?"

"But what will you tell people? Won't people ask where the shroud is?"

Ghisu laughed. "We'll say the money slipped out of my waistband-- we searched and searched for it, but it didn't turn up. [People won't believe it, but they'll still give the same sum again.]"

Madhav too laughed at this unexpected good fortune, *at defeating destiny in this way*. He said, "She was very good, the poor thing. Even as she died, she gave us a fine meal."

More than half the bottle had been finished. Ghisu ordered two measures of puris, a meat stew, and spiced liver and fried fish. There was a shop right next to the wine-house. Madhav ran over and brought everything back on two leaf-plates. The cost was fully one and a half rupees. Only a few paise were left.

Both then sat eating puris, with all the majesty of a tiger in the jungle pursuing his prey. They had no fear of being called to account, nor any concern about disgrace. They had passed through these stages of weakness long ago. Ghisu said in a philosophical manner, "If my soul is being pleased, then won't she receive religious merit?"

Madhav bowed his head in pious confirmation. "Certainly she'll certainly receive it. Bhagwan, you are the knower of hearts-- take her to Heaven! We're both giving her our heartfelt blessing. The feast I've had today-- I haven't had its equal in my whole life!"

After a moment a doubt arose in Madhav's heart. He said, "How about it-- we'll go there too someday, won't we?"

Ghisu gave no answer to this childish question. *He looked reproachfully at Madhav.* [He didn't want the thought of heavenly matters to interfere with this bliss.]

"When she asks us, there, why we didn't give her a shroud, what will you say?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"She'll certainly ask."

"How do you know that she won't get a shroud? Do you consider me such a donkey? I've lived in this world for sixty years-- and have I just been loitering around? She'll get a shroud, and [a very good one]-- *a much better than we would have given*."

Madhav was not convinced. He said, "Who will give it? You've gobbled up the rupees! [It's me she'll ask -- I'm the one who put the sindur in the parting of her hair.]"

Ghisu grew irritated. "I tell you, she'll get a shroud. Why don't you believe me?"

"Who will give the money-- why don't you tell me?"

"The same people will give it who gave it this time. But they won't put the rupees into our hands. *And if somehow we get our hands on them, we'll sit here and drink again just like this, and they'll give the shroud a third time.*"

As the darkness deepened and the stars glittered more sharply, the tumult in the wine-house also increased. One person sang, another babbled, another embraced his companion, another pressed a glass to his friend's lips. Joy was in the atmosphere there. Intoxication was in the air. How many people become 'an ass with a glass'! *They came here only to taste the pleasure of self-forgetfulness.* More than liquor, the air here elevated their spirits. The disaster of life seized them and dragged them here. And for a while they forgot whether they were alive or dead-- or half-alive.

And these two, father and son, were still sipping with relish. Everyone's eyes had settled on them. How fortunate they were! They had a whole bottle between them.

After he had finished eating, Madhav picked up the leaf-plate of leftover puris and gave it to a beggar who was standing there looking at them with hungry eyes. And for the first time in his life he felt the pride and delight and thrill of giving.

Ghisu said, "Take it-- eat your fill, and give her your blessing. She whose earnings these are has died, but your blessing will certainly reach her. Bless her with every hair on your body-- these are the payment for very hard labor."

Madhav again looked toward the sky and said, "She'll go to Heaven-- she'll become the Queen of Heaven!"

Ghisu stood up, and as if swimming in waves of joy he said, "Yes, son, she'll go to Heaven! She never tormented anyone, she never oppressed anyone; even while dying, she fulfilled the greatest desire of our lives. If she doesn't go to Heaven, then will those fat rich people go-- who loot the poor with both hands, and go to the Ganges to wash away their sin, and offer holy water in temples?"

This mood of piety too changed; variability is the special quality of intoxication. It was the turn of despair and grief. Madhav said, "But the poor thing suffered a great deal in her life. Even her death was so painful!" Covering his eyes with his hands, he began to weep, [and sobbed loudly].

Ghisu consoled him: "Why do you weep, son? Be happy that she's been liberated from this net of illusion. She's escaped from the snare; she was very fortunate that she was able to break the bonds of worldly illusion so quickly."

And both, standing there, began to sing, "Temptress! Why do your eyes flash, temptress?"

The whole wine-house was absorbed in the spectacle, and these two drinkers, deep in intoxication, kept on singing. Then they both began to dance-- they leaped and jumped, fell down, flounced about, gesticulated, [strutted around]; and finally, overcome by drunkenness, they collapsed.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Overview

During the first half of the twentieth century, life-writing gradually gained in popularity and by the end of the period had established itself within the literary culture of the country. For those writing in English, or for those writing in regional languages who were conversant with English literature, autobiography and biography were already accepted literary forms in the first years of the century. But for others, they remained associated with an external culture, the culture of the colonialists. Soon, however, the biographical impulse overcame this prejudice, and Indians were writing the lives of figures from the turbulent 19th century, such as Raj Mohun Roy and Karl Marx, and those who were still alive, especially M.K. Gandhi. Autobiography also flourished in modernising, urban India, where individualism was becoming both more respectable and necessary. Private space, traditionally the preserve of the ascetic, became a more widespread. Indeed, autobiography became a quest not just for an individual but an independent India. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru used autobiographical writing to think through the political and ethical dilemmas that faced them.

English

M.K. Gandhi M.K Gandhi (1869-1948) wrote one of most influential autobiographies in world literature. *An Autobiography, or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* inspired freedom movements across the globe, including those led by Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. Gandhi began the diary that became his book while in prison in 1921, when his greatest achievements still lay ahead of him. The final book was later serialised in a Gujarati-language magazine and in translation in an English-language magazine between 1925 and 1929, appearing in book form in English in 1940. Gandhi explains that he had severe doubts about writing an autobiography because it was thought to be a genre written by westernised Indians. He explained his decision to write it with this, far from clear, logic: 'It is not my purpose to write a "real" autobiography; I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with the Truth.'

Truth 'Experiments with Truth' is not a standard narrative of one's life. Rather than a chronology of events, it is an intense self-examination, and at times self-condemnation, of the author's adherence to his philosophy of *satyagraha* 'truth force.' As such, it is a deeply personal and yet detached scouring of the soul. However, this most private of literary forms had a massive public impact. Gandhi's search for an inner truth led to an independent India.

Jawaharlal Nehru The convergence of self-examination and nation-building is even more explicit in the thoughtful autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964). Like Gandhi, Nehru began his book (*An Autobiography*, 1936) while serving a prison sentence for this political activism. And he, too, subjected himself to extended self-analysis, but for Nehru the self was a psychological not a spiritual entity. He had read a great deal of Freud during his lonely prison life. Nevertheless, Nehru also records fascinating details of his own family and leading figures of the 1920s and 1930s (describing Gandhi as 'an introvert'). As such, it is an incomparable source for understanding the political and social developments that led to the independence of India.

Bengali

Sibnath Sastri Sibnath Sastri (1847-1919) was a leading reformer in the Brahmo Samaj movement in Calcutta. His *Atmacarit* ('Autobiography,' 1918) is a report of his religious life, partially inspired by the confessional strand of Christianity, which influenced the Brahma Samaj. Unlike Augustine, or Rousseau, or even Gandhi, however, this Bengali intellectual does not disclose a private self. Instead, he writes without personal intimacy, documenting his experiences in simple language and without any attempt to teach. But precisely because it is so artless, his autobiography provides deep insight into the complex thinking of the 19th-century reformers in Bengal.

Oriya

Fakir Mohan Senapati Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918), credited with the modernisation of Oriya literature (one of India's lesser regional literatures), also wrote a remarkable autobiography. Although *Atmajeevancharita* was begun in the 1890s, and although it was serialised in magazines soon after, it only appeared in book form posthumously in 1927. The author, who had penned several well-received

novels and short stories, claimed that his life was 'too insignificant' to make the book 'worthwhile', but he did agree that Oriya needed an autobiography. Here we see how this non-traditional literary form became a prerequisite for a modern literature.

Tamil

U. Ve. Swaminatha Iyer The life of U. Ve. Swaminatha Iyer (1855-1942), the last in a two-thousand-year tradition of Tamil pundits, was remarkable. He discovered, edited and published many of the oldest texts of Tamil classical literature; without his diligent searching for crumbling manuscripts in the attics of disused houses, we would have lost about 500 years of Indian literary history. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the most important autobiography and biography of this period in Tamil were both written by this man.

Autobiography Swaminatha Iyer published his autobiography *En Carittiram* ('My Life') in the Tamil weekly *Anandavikatan*, from January 1940 to May 1942. It was later published as a book in 1950. Running to 762 (sometimes monotonous) pages, it is an unparalleled account of village life, especially in the Thanjavur district in the late 19th century. The language is simple and peppered with many observations on people as well as descriptions of school life and life in a monastery (*matta*). The book also reveals the enormous perseverance of Swaminatha Iyer in his quest to find and preserve old manuscripts.

Biography Swaminatha Iyer's definitive study of his teacher, Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai (1815-1875), was the first prose-biography in Tamil. He published the first volume in 1933 and the second in 1940. It was a massive undertaking, which he approached like any other scholarly project.

In 1900, he issued a call in a magazine for any materials that people might have concerning his subject. In the end, after working for nearly forty years, he produced a flowing and detailed account of his mentor. We learn, for instance, about how he prepared palm-leaves for writing, what he had for breakfast and how he enjoyed locking horns in debate.

T. Selvakecavaraya Mutaliyar T. Selvakecavaraya Mutaliyar (1864-1921) was a fine literary biographer in Tamil during this period. He wrote a number of life-studies, including those on the two giants of Tamil literature (*Tiruvalluvar*, 1904, and *Kamban*, 1909), but his best biography, paradoxically, is that of the Marathi nationalist Ranade (*Madava Govinda Ranade*, 1920), which is based on a memoir by Ranade's wife.

T.S.S. Rajan *Ninaivu Alaikal* ('Waves of Reflections,' 1947) by T.S.S. Rajan (1880-1953) is the most sophisticated political autobiography ever written in Tamil. Through 400 pages, the author, who was a doctor and politician, describes his family's early struggle with poverty, his own education and his rise to become a minister in the provincial government in Madras.

Nammakal Ramalingam Pillai For sheer reading pleasure, however, the best Tamil autobiography of this period is *En Katai* ('My Story,' 1944) by Nammakal Ramalingam Pillai (1888-1972). A poet and a freedom-fighter, the author entertains us with portraits of his mother—who was uneducated but could recite the epics and many myths by heart—and his father, who was an unassuming postman. Pillai describes his first love, who jilted him for another man, his career as a painter and a musician, his journey to Delhi in 1912 for the coronation of George V and his tour of the Northwest Provinces. The most moving sections narrate his arranged marriage to a cousin, a village girl who was forced on him and whom he mistreated. Eventually, though, he was shamed by her patient suffering and learned to love her.

Marathi

One of the most gifted biographers of this period was N.C. Kelkar (1872-1947). Like many of his literary contemporaries in other parts of India, Kelkar wrote poetry, fiction and non-fiction, edited a newspaper and played a leading role in the nationalist movement. He began his biographical writing with a long study of the Italian patriot Garibaldi, though he dedicated most of his time to a study of Lokmanya Tilak (1856-1920), who stirred nationalist feelings even before Gandhi. Kelkar published four separate books

on this man, whom he had known during his lifetime, the most important being the three-volume *Lokmanya Tilka Yanche Charitra* ('The Life and Times of Lokmanya Tilka,' 1928).

Questions/discussion

1. Biography and autobiography are both considered 'life-writing', but are their differences greater than their similarities?
2. Some scholars have used the phrase 'the invention of private space' to describe the emergence of autobiography in late 19th and early 20th century India, arguing that it was created to express a new sense of individualism. Others have shown that individual lives were not separated from the wider social and public contexts in which they were written. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that autobiography created a bridge between the private and the public.
3. Autobiography as a literary form may have emerged in the modern era, but contemplation, meditation and other forms of self-examination have been a part of Indian culture for a very long time. What link, if any, might exist between these traditional meditative practices and modern life-writing?

Reading

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ESSAY

Overview

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

Gujarati

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

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

government must change. An independent country with an English-style government would not be India, he says, but 'Englishtan.'

Marathi

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

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

English

Rabindranath Tagore The essays written in this period by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) represent a mixture of interests. Although he wrote about nationalism (a collection with that title was published in 1917), he devoted himself more to aesthetic and spiritual issues. *Personality* (1917) is a collection of six essays, (including the famous 'What is Art?'), while *Sadhana* ('The Perfection of Life', 1913) expresses his mystical idealism. Tagore transcended many categories, as is illustrated by his eclectic collection of writings entitled *Bicitra Prabandha* ('Miscellaneous Essays,' 1907), which includes letters, poems and reminiscences. Always an original thinker, he did not hesitate to criticise what he saw as Gandhi's error in calling on Indians to burn their foreign-made clothes ('The Call of Truth,' 1922).

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

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

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

Tamil

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

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

Questions/discussion

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

Reading

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Texts

1. From *Bicitra Prabandha*, by Tagore

OUR REAL PROBLEM in India is not political. It is social. This is a condition not only prevailing in India, but among all nations. I do not believe in an exclusive political interest. Politics in the West have dominated Western ideals, and we in India are trying to imitate you. We have to remember that in Europe, where peoples had their racial unity from the beginning, and where natural resources were insufficient for the inhabitants, the civilization has naturally taken the character of political and commercial aggressiveness. For on the one hand they had no internal complications, and on the other they had to deal with neighbours who were strong and rapacious. To have perfect combination among themselves

and a watchful attitude of animosity against others was taken as the solution of their problems. In former days they organized and plundered, in the present age the same spirit continues - and they organize and exploit the whole world.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The control of the young mind in its most impressionable period is of vital importance to the continuance of the hypnotic spell by which alone the foreign domination manages to subsist; the exploitation of the country is the chief reason for its existence; the control of the judiciary is one of its chief instruments of repression. None of these things can it yield up without bringing itself nearer to its doom. It is only by organised national resistance, passive or aggressive, that we can make our self -

development effectual. For if the self-help movement only succeeds in bringing about some modification of educational methods, some readjustment of the balance of trade, some alleviation of the curse of litigation, then, whatever else it may have succeeded in doing, it will have failed of its main object. The new school at least have not advocated the policy of self-development merely out of a disinterested ardour for moral improvement or under the spur of an inoffensive philanthropic patriotism. This attitude they leave to saints and philosophers, – saints like the editor of the *Indian Mirror* or philosophers like the ardent Indian Liberals who sit at the feet of Mr. John Morley. They for their part speak and write frankly as politicians aiming at a definite and urgent political object by a way which shall be reasonably rapid and yet permanent in its results. We may have our own educational theories; but we advocate national education not as an educational experiment or to subserve any theory, but as the only way to secure truly national and patriotic control and discipline for the mind of the country in its malleable youth. We desire industrial expansion, but Swadeshi without boycott, – non-political Swadeshi, – Lord Minto's "honest" Swadeshi – has no attractions for us; since we know that it can bring no safe and permanent national gain; – that can only be secured by the industrial and fiscal independence of the Indian nation. Our immediate problem as a nation is not how to be intellectual and well-informed or how to be rich and industrious, but how to stave off imminent national death, how to put an end to the white peril, how to assert ourselves and live. It is for this reason that whatever minor differences there may be between different exponents of the new spirit, they are all agreed on the immediate necessity of an organised national resistance to the state of things which is crushing us out of existence as a nation and on the one goal of that resistance, – freedom.

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

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

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

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

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

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

They went to Dada Keluskar, a personal friend of my father, and asked him to intervene. He agreed. After a little argumentation, my father yielded, and the meeting was held. Dada Keluskar presided. He was a literary person of his time. At the end of his address he gave me as a gift a copy of his book on the life of

the Buddha, which he had written for the Baroda Sayajirao Oriental Series. I read the book with great interest, and was greatly impressed and moved by it.

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

So after some time, I asked again the same question. This time my father had evidently prepared himself for a reply. He said, "The reason why I ask you to read the Mahabharata and Ramayana is this: we belong to the Untouchables, and you are likely to develop an inferiority complex, which is natural. The value of [the] Mahabharata and Ramayana lies in removing this inferiority complex. See Drona and Karna--they were small men, but to what heights they rose! Look at Valmiki--he was a Koli, but he became the author of [the] Ramayana. It is for removing this inferiority complex that I ask you to read the Mahabharata and Ramayana."

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

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

LATE 20TH CENTURY

POETRY

Overview

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. Unlike the Indian novel, 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.

Urdu

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 troubles and hopes of the common man, which he has composed for films, starting with '*Mora Gora Ang*' (in *Bandini*, 1963) and '*Humne Dekhi Hai*' (in *Khamoshi*, 1969). In 2008, he shot to international fame when he won the Oscar for the song 'Jai Ho' in *Slumdog Millionaire*.

Hindi

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 *Shaher Ab Bhi Sambhavana Hai* ('The City is Still Likely') in 1966 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.

Anamika Among 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 *Khurduri Hatheliyan* ('Rough Palms,' 2005).

Marathi

Arun Kolatkar Arun Kolatkar (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 1976 and another collection (*Kala Ghoda*, 'Black Horse,' a neighbourhood of Bombay) won a Sahitya Akademi 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.

Tamil

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 (*Oru Malaiyum, Innoru Malaiyum*, '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.

English

Dilip Chitre Like many of his contemporaries, Dilip Chitre (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.Ramanujan A.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?

Reading

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Jeet Thayil (ed.), *60 Indian Poets* (Penguin India, 2007)

Jeet Thayil (ed.), *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets* (Bloodaxe, 2009)

Bruce King (ed.), *Modern Indian Poetry in English* (Oxford, 2005)

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 Dilip Chitre

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.

DRAMA

Overview

Like the poets of post-Independence India, many of the country's leading playwrights eventually migrated to the world of the cinema, where their monetary reward and public recognition is far greater. As a spoken literary form, drama does connect more directly with audiences, but its costly production requires a cast of actors and an infrastructure that militates against success. Some of this problem has been mitigated by the establishment of cultural organisations on the state and central level. These well-funded organisations promote classical forms of theatre, such as Kutiyattam, folk forms, such as Terukuttu, and the new theatre written by urban elites. Outside these institutions, politically-motivated theatre continues to attract audiences, but not on a regular basis. Thus there remains a divide between urban elites and the bulk of the population, which some playwrights have attempted to bridge by using traditional techniques, colloquial language and stories from mythology and epics.

Radio-plays

An obscure episode in the history of Indian drama in the twentieth century is the radio-play. At first these plays were written as if for the stage, but producers soon realised that the new medium of radio required a drama stripped of all its visuality and commissioned scripts based on the concept of 'total action.' In Calcutta, Birendra Krishna Bhadra and Bani Kumar rewrote old classics and adapted new work to fit

these requirements. Among the best of these early experiments, all written in the 1950s, are *Rachodlal* by Yashodhar Mehta, *Vani Mari Koyal* by Chunilal Madia and *Anant Sadna* by Shivkumar Joshi.

Bengali

Utpal Dutt The career arc of Utpal Dutt (1929 –1993) charts the fortunes of Indian modern theatre in general. He began as an actor in Bengali theatre performed in Calcutta, later founded the Little Theatre Group and twice toured the country in the early 1950s with the Shakespearean International Theatre Company.

With the later company he was famous for his passionate performances of Othello. However, his reputation primarily rests on the political dramas he wrote and directed in the 1960s and 1970s, such as *Kallol*, *Manusher Adhikar*, *Louha Manob*, *Tiner Toloar* and *Maha-Bidroha*. The radical views expressed in his plays earned him a jail sentence in 1965 and meant that several were banned, despite their wide popularity. In the 1980s and 1990s he rounded off his life with several starring roles in Hindi and Bengali cinema.

Badal Sircar Badal Sircar (1925 – 2011) was another radical Bengali playwright of the late twentieth century who tried to bridge the gap between elite theatre and folk drama by creating what he called the 'third theatre.' He came to prominence during the Naxalite rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s when he took his plays out into the countryside. Earlier, his 'day job' as an engineer had taken him to England and Nigeria, where he entered theatre as an actor. Soon he wrote *Ebong Indrajit*, ('And Indrajit'), a play about the alienation of youth in post-Independence India, which brought him national attention. In 1976, he established his own theatre company, Shatabi, which performed in open spaces in Calcutta without elaborate props or lighting. There was no ticketing, and audiences were encouraged to participate in the productions.

Marathi

Vijay Tendulkar Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) also attempted to create a new theatre that would combine the best of traditional drama with western-inspired writing. He wrote more than 30 full-length and many more one-act plays (plus short stories and film scripts) in Marathi, focusing on major social themes, such as poverty, women's rights and political corruption. His most famous plays include *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe* ('Silence! The Court is in Session,' 1967), *Sakharam Binder*, ('Sakharam the Binder', 1971) and *Ghashiram Kotwal* ('Ghashiram the Constable,' 1972). In his later life Tendulkar wrote numerous successful film scripts.

Sakharam Binder In *Sakharam Binder*, Tendulkar tells the story of its eponymous protagonist, a book-binder who picks up discarded women and employs them in his home as servants and sex partners. He convinces himself that he is a social reformer by giving each woman a new sari, 50 rupees and a ticket to wherever she wishes to go. Slowly, the psychological damage is revealed. The play was banned in 1974.

Ghashiram Kotwal Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* is an equally powerful play about political ambition and corruption. It was written in 1972, during the rise to power of the Shiv Sena, a right wing Hindu party in Maharashtra. Tendulkar, however, sets the action in the court of a Hindu king in Pune in the late 18th century. With its use of broad satire, and song-dance routines from Tamasha (Marathi folk theatre), it proved extremely popular and has been performed in more than 20 countries.

Kannada

Girish Karnad What Tendulkar did for Marathi theatre, and Sircar did for Bengali, Girish Karnad (b. 1938) has done for Kannada. An intellectual educated at Oxford, as well as a writer, Karnad has more consciously than the others attempted to create a theatre that reflects the complexities of post-colonial India. As he has explained, contemporary India is a convergence of anxieties and dreams from the past and the present. He mines the rich resources of traditional Indian stories, layering them with modern technique, to reveal the passions and absurdities of human existence. His most performed play is one of his first, *Tughlaq* (1964), which tells the story of a Sultan in 14th-century Delhi, widely interpreted as a

comment on Prime Minister Nehru, whose idealistic vision of a modern India collapsed in disillusionment. Karnad has also been active in the cinema, where his film scripts have won a long string of awards

Hindi

Mohan Rakesh Mohan Rakesh (1925-1972) is credited with starting the new theatre movement in Hindi in 1958 with his first play, *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* ('One Day in Ashadh'). It tells the story of Kalidasa, the great classical Sanskrit playwright, and his broken marriage. Although on the surface it appears to be a traditional historical play, it introduces Rakesh's trademark themes of a lack of communication, guilt and alienation. Our inability to understand each other is the cause of our tragedy. It might be relevant to note that Rakesh's own, arranged marriage ended in 1957, as did a second one in 1960.

English

Lakhan Deb Although Lakhan Deb (b.1953?) is not a household name in India, two of his plays are regarded as original contributions to modern theatre. In both *Tiger's Claw* (1967) and *Murder at The Prayer Meeting* (1976), Deb uses blank verse to portray two key events in Indian history. The first play dramatizes the killing of a Muslim general (Afzal Khan) by a Hindu king (Shivaji) in 1659, which some historians believe was the death-knell of the Mughal Empire. *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* enacts a second seminal death, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948, with a strong echo of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Mahesh Dattani Mahesh Dattani (b.1958) began his working life in an advertising firm and did not write plays until he was 30 years old. *Tara* (1990) was hailed as breakthrough in revealing the male chauvinism hidden beneath the polite, educated veneer of modern Indian society. Homosexuality is another taboo topic that Dattani explores in his writing, especially in 'Bravely Fought the Queen' (1991). Other plays address the complex identity of eunuchs (*Seven Steps Around the Fire*, 1998), patriarchy and feminism (*Where There's a Will*, 1988) and the institution of marriage (*Do the Needful*, 1997). Several of these works were written as radio-plays for the BBC. In 1993, Dattani was the first playwright in English to win the annual national prize (from the Sahitya Akademi) for drama with his *The Final Solution*.

Questions/discussion

1. Modern drama in India is not a thriving business. Audiences do not flock to the theatre, and playwrights (as playwrights) do not gain national attention. Producing a play is expensive, and the returns are minimal. One solution has been to put drama on the life-support machine of government funding through cultural organisations (Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi and its regional affiliates). Is state-supported drama ('drama in a museum', as one critic put it) a viable long-term solution? What is the level of state support for drama, or opera, in other countries?
2. On the other hand, various forms of regional, folk and 'street' theatre do manage to survive, if not thrive, especially when there is a local or national issue to address. Perhaps we should think of two distinct genres: literary drama and performed theatre.

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FICTION

Overview

In the immediate aftermath of Independence, Indian short stories tended to reveal a sense of loss and confusion. While the politically motivated writing of the previous decades did not disappear, the point of view shifted from an examination of external material conditions to a probing of the interior states of individuals. Over the course of this period, however, the short story gradually gave way to the novel, and the 'Indian novel' became virtually synonymous with the 'Indian English novel.' This is largely the result of the globalisation of English literature. When the economic policies of the Indian government were relaxed in the 1990s, western publishing houses set up offices in the country to scout new talent and offer lucrative contracts. They were aware that there are approximately 125 million English-readers in India and roughly 400 million worldwide. Indians writing in English had achieved international attention before, but the recent success is impressive. V. S. Naipaul won the Booker Prize in 1971, Ruth Praver Jhabwala won in 1975, Rushdie in 1981, Arundathi Roy in 1998, Kiran Desai in 2006 and Aravind Adiga in 2008. A less publicized trend has been the emergence of Dalit writers, especially women, in regional languages.

Short story

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

Mahashweta Devi Whereas Verma wrote about the urban middle-classes, Mahashweta Devi (1926-2016) was a Bengali academic and a committed political writer, focusing on the lives of tribal communities.

She wrote close to 100 novels and published 20 collections of stories. She, too, was a communist and was fired from her job at the post office for her political activities.

U.R. Anantha Murthy Anantha Murthy (1932-2014) was an elegant writer of short stories (and novels) in Kannada. Although he was a professor of English literature, he stirred up controversy by repeatedly stating that an Indian writer in English has a less immediate contact with an Indian audience than does a writer in a regional language.

Vaikom Muhammad Basheer Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (1908-1994) wrote a series of powerful short stories (and novels) in the 1950s and 1960s. He, too, created a national debate through his refusal to use standard Malayalam and instead to rely on the dialect of his Muslim community. His fiction contains both fierce social realism (criticism of the backward practices of Muslims in Kerala) and explorations of the interior experiences of his characters.

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

Novel

R. K. Narayan R.K. Narayan (1906-2001) dominated the field of Indian English fiction for most of the century. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, Narayan was never a political writer, and his fiction is often criticised for its apolitical stance and neglect of colonialism. However, he was too keen an observer of human nature to be indifferent to injustice. Most of his novels, in fact, explore some kind of social problem, though not the spectacular ones favoured by many of his contemporaries.

Malgudi Unlike most successful Indian authors, Narayan is not known for any single novel. He didn't write a masterpiece (which probably explains why, though shortlisted several times, he never received the

Nobel Prize). Instead, all his books were equally brilliant, especially in their evocation of Malgudi, their fictional setting. Like the most memorable fictional settings, it is both true to experience and manipulated for effect.

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

Contemporary

Novelists Following R.K. Narayan's generation, high-quality novels have been written by several authors. Anita Desai (b.1937), who was shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times, wrote a sensitive and moving portrait of a Delhi family in *Clear Light of Day* (1980). More lyrical are the novels by the Kerala-born Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004), whose *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955) was a best-seller. In recent years, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhuri and Rohinton Mistry (shortlisted for the Booker in 1991,1996 and 2002 respectively) have all won international reputations.

Aravind Adiga The most recent Booker-winning novel is *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga (b. 1974). Written in the form of letters from its hero (Balam) to the Chinese Premier, 'from one entrepreneur to another,' as Balam says, it chronicles the effect of global capitalism on India. Balam himself is a poor village boy, who goes to the big city and makes a success, but only by murdering and stealing along the way. Aravind Adiga has great fun in lampooning the official rhetoric of progress, but the bitter cynicism is a long way from Narayan's gentle irony.

Shoba De One name that rarely appears on a list of Indian English writers is Shoba De (b. 1948), yet she is the most popular novelist and journalist in the country. To date she written 17 novels that, with titles such as *Starry Nights* and *Sultry Days*, might be called 'soap opera literature' and compared to Jackie Collins. Her sales figures are impressive, and she has filled a (rather large) literary niche.

Chetan Bhagat If De's novels tell the tale of middle-class women in contemporary India, those written by Chetan Bhagat (b. 1974) hold up a mirror for the men. His eight novels (beginning in 2004) have broken all sales records by selling in the millions. By comparison, the Booker-winning novels by Roy, Desai and Adiga have sold in the range of 50,000-100,000 copies each. In describing the success story of young men, Bhagat's novels are entertaining, youth-focused and aspirational.

Dalit writing

Marathi Since the early 20th century, Indian writers had created Dalit (Untouchable, Harijan) characters, but in the second half of the century Dalits themselves began to write their own stories. The landmark publication in 1978 of Daya Pawar's *Balute* ('Share') was followed by several more novels in Marathi in the 1980s. One researcher has found 86 life-stories by Marathi Dalits. One of the best, *Akkarmashi* ('Outcaste,' 1984) by Limbale, is the life-story of a bastard son born to a Dalit woman seduced by her landlord. Marathi is the natural home of such writing because it is the region where a major Dalit liberation struggle began in the 1920s.

Tamil Another major anti-caste movement during the same period, this time in the Tamil county, might explain the emergence of Dalit life-writing in Tamil. The two most important of these Tamils novels have been written by Bama: *Karuku* ('Blades') in 1992 and *Sangati* ('Events') in 1994. *Karukku* tells the life-story of a Dalit Catholic woman, using the idioms of her community rather than standard Tamil. The novel demands the reader's attention, an effort that is repaid by insights into a spiritual journey outside the Hindu mainstream.

Hindi Joothan ('Left Overs', 1997) by Omprakash Valmiki tells the story of a caste of scavengers, who subsist on what others throw away. Starting in the 1950s, the novel reveals the hollowness of Gandhian programmes of Untouchable uplift. Through sheer force of will (and reading the real-life novelist Premchand), the scavenger boy becomes educated and achieves literary success as a poet.

Questions/discussion

1. No matter how one theorises post-colonial literature in India, it is difficult to avoid the fact that the novel is an imported genre. Although it has developed in India for about 150 years and become indigenised, it remains unconnected to the deep historical patterns of literary culture in the country. That may explain why (with few exceptions) Indian novelists have yet to find a way to write historical novels that integrate the past into the present.
2. It is also true that the international success of the Indian novel in English is both a legacy of colonialism and a manifestation of today's globalised literary culture. The lasting effect of the success of Indian English fiction on the regional literatures of India, though too early to assess, is likely to be substantial.
3. The major development in fiction written in regional languages has been the popular success of Dalit writing, which is very different to the English-language, block-busting best sellers of Shoba De and Chetan Bhagat. However, they all share the theme of aspiration. Perhaps mass-market, English-language fiction is closer to contemporary realities than the critically-acclaimed English-language fiction of international festivals.

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Text

'A Devoted Son,' by Anita Desai

When the results appeared in the morning papers, Rakesh scanned them barefoot and in his pajamas, at the garden gate, then went up the steps to the verandah where his father sat sipping his morning tea and bowed down to touch his feet.

"A first division, son?" his father asked, beaming, reaching for the papers.

"At the top of the list, papa," Rakesh murmured, as if awed. "First in the country."

Bedlam broke loose then. The family whooped and danced. The whole day long visitors streamed into the small yellow house at the end of the road to congratulate the parents of this *Wunderkind*, to slap Rakesh on the back and fill the house and garden with the sounds and colors of a festival. There were garlands and halwa, party clothes and gifts (enough fountain pens to last years, even a watch or two), nerves and temper and joy, all in a multicolored whirl of pride and great shining vistas newly opened: Rakesh was the first son in the family to receive an education, so much had been sacrificed in order to send him to school and then medical college, and at last the fruits of their sacrifice had arrived, golden and glorious.

To everyone who came to him to say "*Mubarak*, Varmaji, your son has brought you glory," the father said, "Yes, and do you know what is the first thing he did when he saw the results this morning? He came and

touched my feet. He bowed down and touched my feet.” This moved many of the women in the crowd so much that they were seen to raise the ends of their saris and dab at their tears while the men reached out for the betel-leaves and sweetmeats that were offered around on trays and shook their heads in wonder and approval of such exemplary filial behavior. “One does not often see such behavior in sons anymore,” they all agreed, a little enviously perhaps. Leaving the house, some of the women said, sniffing, “At least on such an occasion they might have served pure ghee sweets,” and some of the men said, “Don’t you think old Varma was giving himself airs? He needn’t think we don’t remember that he comes from the vegetable market himself, his father used to sell vegetables, and he has never seen the inside of a school.” But there was more envy than rancour in their voices and it was, of course, inevitable—not every son in that shabby little colony at the edge of the city was destined to shine as Rakesh shone, and who knew that better than the parents themselves?

And that was only the beginning, the first step in a great, sweeping ascent to the radiant heights of fame and fortune. The thesis he wrote for his M.D. brought Rakesh still greater glory, if only in select medical circles. He won a scholarship. He went to the USA (that was what his father learnt to call it and taught the whole family to say—not America, which was what the ignorant neighbors called it, but, with a grand familiarity, “the USA”) where he pursued his career in the most prestigious of all hospitals and won encomiums from his American colleagues which were relayed to his admiring and glowing family. What was more, he came back, he actually returned to that small yellow house in the once-new but increasingly shabby colony, right at the end of the road where the rubbish vans tipped out their stinking contents for pigs to nose in and rag-pickers to build their shacks on, all steaming and smoking just outside the neat wire fences and well tended gardens. To this Rakesh returned and the first thing he did on entering the house was to slip out of the embraces of his sisters and brothers and bow down and touch his father’s feet.

As for his mother, she gloated chiefly over the strange fact that he had not married in America, had not brought home a foreign wife as all her neighbors had warned her he would, for wasn’t that what all Indian boys went abroad for? Instead he agreed, almost without argument, to marry a girl she had picked out for him in her own village, the daughter of a childhood friend, a plump and uneducated girl, it was true, but so old-fashioned, so placid, so complaisant that she slipped into the household and settled in like a charm, seemingly too lazy and too good-natured to even try and make Rakesh leave home and set up independently, as any other girl might have done. What was more, she was pretty—really pretty, in a plump, pudding way that only gave way to fat—soft, spreading fat, like warm wax—after the birth of their first baby, a son, and then what did it matter?

For some years Rakesh worked in the city hospital, quickly rising to the top of the administrative organization, and was made a director before he left to set up his own clinic. He took his parents in his car—a new, sky-blue Ambassador with a rear window full of stickers and charms revolving on strings—to see the clinic when it was built, and the large sign-board over the door on which his name was printed in letters of red, with a row of degrees and qualifications to follow it like so many little black slaves of the regent. Thereafter his fame seemed to grow just a little dimmer—or maybe it was only that everyone in town had grown accustomed to it at last—but it was also the beginning of his fortune for he now became known not only as the best but also the richest doctor in town.

However, all this was not accomplished in the wink of an eye. Naturally not. It was the achievement of a lifetime and it took up Rakesh’s whole life. At the time he set up his clinic his father had grown into an old man and retired from his post at the kerosene dealer’s depot at which he had worked for forty years, and his mother died soon after, giving up the ghost with a sigh that sounded positively happy, for it was her own son who ministered to her in her last illness and who sat pressing her feet at the last moment—such a son as few women had borne.

For it had to be admitted—and the most unsuccessful and most rancorous of neighbors eventually did so—that Rakesh was not only a devoted son and a miraculously good-natured man who contrived somehow to obey his parents and humor his wife and show concern equally for his children and his patients, but there was actually a brain inside this beautifully polished and formed body of good manners

and kind nature and, in between ministering to his family and playing host to many friends and coaxing them all into feeling happy and grateful and content, he had actually trained his hands as well and emerged an excellent doctor, a really fine surgeon. How one man—and a man born to illiterate parents, his father having worked for a kerosene dealer and his mother having spent her life in a kitchen—had achieved, combined and conducted such a medley of virtues, no one could fathom, but all acknowledged his talent and skill.

It was a strange fact, however, that talent and skill, if displayed for too long, cease to dazzle. It came to pass that the most admiring of all eyes eventually faded and no longer blinked at his glory. Having retired from work and having lost his wife, the old father very quickly went to pieces, as they say. He developed so many complaints and fell ill so frequently and with such mysterious diseases that even his son could no longer make out when it was something of significance and when it was merely a peevish whim. He sat huddled on his string bed most of the day and developed an exasperating habit of stretching out suddenly and lying absolutely still, allowing the whole family to fly around him in a flap, wailing and weeping, and then suddenly sitting up, stiff and gaunt, and spitting out a big gob of betel-juice as if to mock their behavior.

He did this once too often: there had been a big party in the house, a birthday party for the youngest son, and the celebrations had to be suddenly hushed, covered up and hustled out of the way when the daughter-in-law discovered, or thought she discovered, that the old man, stretched out from end to end of his string bed, had lost his pulse; the party broke up, dissolved, even turned into a band of mourners, when the old man sat up and the distraught daughter-in-law received a gob of red spittle right on the hem of her organza sari. After that no one much cared if he sat up cross-legged on his bed, hawking and spitting, or lay down flat and turned gray as a corpse. Except, of course, for that pearl amongst pearls, his son Rakesh.

It was Rakesh who brought him his morning tea, not in one of the china cups from which the rest of the family drank, but in the old man's favorite brass tumbler, and sat at the edge of his bed, comfortable and relaxed with the string of his pajamas dangling out from under his fine lawn night-shirt, and discussed or, rather, read out the morning news to his father. It made no difference to him that his father made no response apart from spitting. It was Rakesh, too, who, on returning from the clinic in the evening, persuaded the old man to come out of his room, as bare and desolate as a cell, and take the evening air out in the garden, beautifully arranging the pillows and bolsters on the divan in the corner of the open verandah. On summer nights he saw to it that the servants carried out the old man's bed onto the lawn and himself helped his father down the steps and onto the bed, soothing him and settling him down for a night under the stars.

All this was very gratifying for the old man. What was not so gratifying was that he even undertook to supervise his father's diet. One day when the father was really sick, having ordered his daughter-in-law to make him a dish of *soojie halwa* and eaten it with a saucerful of cream, Rakesh marched into the room, not with his usual respectful step but with the confident and rather contemptuous stride of the famous doctor, and declared, "No more *halwa* for you, papa. We must be sensible, at your age. If you must have something sweet, Veena will cook you a little *kheer*, that's light, just a little rice and milk. But nothing fried, nothing rich. We can't have this happening again."

The old man who had been lying stretched out on his bed, weak and feeble after a day's illness, gave a start at the very sound, the tone of these words. He opened his eyes—rather, they fell open with shock—and he stared at his son with disbelief that darkened quickly to reproach. A son who actually refused his father the food he craved? No, it was unheard of, it was incredible. But Rakesh had turned his back to him and was cleaning up the litter of bottles and packets on the medicine shelf and did not notice while Veena slipped silently out of the room with a little smirk that only the old man saw, and hated.

Halwa was only the first item to be crossed off the old man's diet. One delicacy after the other went—everything fried to begin with, then everything sweet, and eventually everything, everything that the old man enjoyed.

The meals that arrived for him on the shining stainless steel tray twice a day were frugal to say the least—dry bread, boiled lentils, boiled vegetables and, if there were a bit of chicken or fish, that was boiled too. If he called for another helping—in a cracked voice that quavered theatrically—Rakesh himself would come to the door, gaze at him sadly and shake his head, saying, “Now, papa, we must be careful, we can’t risk another illness, you know,” and although the daughter-in-law kept tactfully out of the way, the old man could just see her smirk sliding merrily through the air. He tried to bribe his grandchildren into buying him sweets (and how he missed his wife now, that generous, indulgent and illiterate cook), whispering, “Here’s fifty paise,” as he stuffed the coins into a tight, hot fist. “Run down to the shop at the crossroads and buy me thirty paise worth of *jalebis*, and you can spend the remaining twenty paise on yourself. Eh? Understand? Will you do that?” He got away with it once or twice but then was found out, the conspirator was scolded by his father and smacked by his mother and Rakesh came storming into the room, almost tearing his hair as he shouted through compressed lips, “Now papa, are you trying to turn my little son into a liar? Quite apart from spoiling your own stomach, you are spoiling him as well—you are encouraging him to lie to his own parents. You should have heard the lies he told his mother when she saw him bringing back those *jalebis* wrapped up in filthy newspaper. I don’t allow anyone in my house to buy sweets in the bazaar, papa, surely you know that. There’s cholera in the city, typhoid, gastroenteritis—I see these cases daily in the hospital, how can I allow my own family to run such risks?” The old man sighed and lay down in the corpse position. But that worried no one any longer.

There was only one pleasure left in the old man now (his son’s early morning visits and readings from the newspaper could no longer be called that) and those were visits from elderly neighbors. These were not frequent as his contemporaries were mostly as decrepit and helpless as he and few could walk the length of the road to visit him anymore. Old Bhatia, next door, however, who was still spry enough to refuse, adamantly, to bathe in the tiled bathroom indoors and to insist on carrying out his brass mug and towel, in all seasons and usually at impossible hours, into the yard and bathe noisily under the garden tap, would look over the hedge to see if Varma were out on his verandah and would call to him and talk while he wrapped his *dhoti* about him and dried the sparse hair on his head, shivering with enjoyable exaggeration. Of course these conversations, bawled across the hedge by two rather deaf old men conscious of having their entire households overhearing them, were not very satisfactory but Bhatia occasionally came out of his yard, walked down the bit of road and came in at Varma’s gate to collapse onto the stone plinth built under the temple tree. If Rakesh was at home he would help his father down the steps into the garden and arrange him on his night bed under the tree and leave the two old men to chew betel-leaves and discuss the ills of their individual bodies with combined passion.

“At least you have a doctor in the house to look after you,” sighed Bhatia, having vividly described his martyrdom to piles.

“Look after me?” cried Varma, his voice cracking like an ancient clay jar. “He—he does not even give me enough to eat.”

“What?” said Bhatia, the white hairs in his ears twitching. “Doesn’t give you enough to eat? Your own son?”

“My own son. If I ask him for one more piece of bread, he says no, papa, I weighed out the *ata* myself and I can’t allow you to have more than two hundred grams of cereal a day. He *weighs* the food he gives me, Bhatia—he has scales to weigh it on. That is what it has come to.”

“Never,” murmured Bhatia in disbelief. “Is it possible, even in this evil age, for a son to refuse his father food?”

“Let me tell you,” Varma whispered eagerly. “Today the family was having fried fish—I could smell it. I called to my daughter-in-law to bring me a piece. She came to the door and said no. . . .”

“Said no?” It was Bhatia’s voice that cracked. A *drongo* shot out of the tree and sped away. “No?”

"No, she said no, Rakesh has ordered her to give me nothing fried. No butter, he says, no oil. . . ."

"No butter? No oil? How does he expect his father to live?"

Old Varma nodded with melancholy triumph. "That is how he treats me—after I have brought him up, given him an education, made him a great doctor. Great doctor! This is the way great doctors treat their fathers, Bhatia," for the son's sterling personality and character now underwent a curious sea change. Outwardly all might be the same but the interpretation had altered: his masterly efficiency was nothing but cold heartlessness, his authority was only tyranny in disguise.

There was cold comfort in complaining to neighbors and, on such a miserable diet, Varma found himself slipping, weakening and soon becoming a genuinely sick man. Powders and pills and mixtures were not only brought in when dealing with a crisis like an upset stomach but became a regular part of his diet—became his diet, complained Varma, supplanting the natural foods he craved. There were pills to regulate his bowel movements, pills to bring down his blood pressure, pills to deal with his arthritis and, eventually, pills to keep his heart beating. In between there were panicky rushes to the hospital, some humiliating experience with the stomach pump and enema, which left him frightened and helpless. He cried easily, shriveling up on his bed, but if he complained of a pain or even a vague, gray fear in the night, Rakesh would simply open another bottle of pills and force him to take one. "I have my duty to you papa," he said when his father begged to be let off.

"Let me be," Varma begged, turning his face away from the pills on the outstretched hand. "Let me die. It would be better. I do not want to live only to eat your medicines."

"Papa, be reasonable."

"I leave that to you," the father cried with sudden spirit. "Leave me alone, let me die now, I cannot live like this."

"Lying all day on his pillows, fed every few hours by his daughter-in-law's own hand, visited by every member of his family daily—and then he says he does not want to live 'like this,'" Rakesh was heard to say, laughing, to someone outside the door.

"Deprived of food," screamed the old man on the bed, "his wishes ignored, taunted by his daughter-in-law, laughed at by his grandchildren—*that* is how I live." But he was very old and weak and all anyone heard was an incoherent croak, some expressive grunts and cries of genuine pain. Only once, when old Bhatia had come to see him and they sat together under the temple tree, they heard him cry, "God is calling me—and they won't let me go."

The quantities of vitamins and tonics he was made to take were not altogether useless. They kept him alive and even gave him a kind of strength that made him hang on long after he ceased to wish to hang on. It was as though he were straining at a rope, trying to break it, and it would not break, it was still strong. He only hurt himself, trying.

In the evening, that summer, the servants would come into his cell, grip his bed, one at each end, and carry it out to the verandah, there sitting it down with a thump that jarred every tooth in his head. In answer to his agonized complaints they said the doctor sahib had told them he must take the evening air and the evening air they would make him take—thump. Then Veena, that smiling, hypocritical pudding in a rustling sari, would appear and pile up the pillows under his head till he was propped up stiffly into a sitting position that made his head swim and his back ache.

"Let me lie down," he begged. "I can't sit up any more."

"Try, papa, Rakesh said you can if you try," she said, and drifted away to the other end of the verandah where her transistor radio vibrated to the lovesick tunes from the cinema that she listened to all day.

So there he sat, like some stiff corpse, terrified, gazing out on the lawn where his grandsons played cricket, in danger of getting one of their hard-spun balls in his eye, and at the gate that opened onto the dusty and rubbish-heaped lane but still bore, proudly, a newly touched-up signboard that bore his son's name and qualifications, his own name having vanished from the gate long ago.

At last the sky-blue Ambassador arrived, the cricket game broke up in haste, the car drove in smartly and the doctor, the great doctor, all in white, stepped out. Someone ran up to take his bag from him, others to escort him up the steps. "Will you have tea?" his wife called, turning down the transistor set. "Or a Coca-Cola? Shall I fry you some *samosas*?" But he did not reply or even glance in her direction. Ever a devoted son, he went first to the corner where his father sat gazing, stricken, at some undefined spot in the dusty yellow air that swam before him. He did not turn his head to look at his son. But he stopped gobbling air with his uncontrolled lips and set his jaw as hard as a sick and very old man could set it.

"Papa," his son said, tenderly, sitting down on the edge of the bed and reaching out to press his feet.

Old Varma tucked his feet under him, out of the way, and continued to gaze stubbornly into the yellow air of the summer evening.

"Papa, I'm home."

Varma's hand jerked suddenly, in a sharp, derisive movement, but he did not speak.

"How are you feeling, papa?"

Then Varma turned and looked at his son. His face was so out of control and all in pieces, that the multitude of expressions that crossed it could not make up a whole and convey to the famous man exactly what his father thought of him, his skill, his art.

"I'm dying," he croaked. "Let me die, I tell you."

"Papa, you're joking," his son smiled at him, lovingly. "I've brought you a new tonic to make you feel better. You must take it, it will make you feel stronger again. Here it is. Promise me you will take it regularly, papa."

Varma's mouth worked as hard as though he still had a gob of betel in it (his supply of betel had been cut off years ago). Then he spat out some words, as sharp and bitter as poison, into his son's face. "Keep your tonic—I want none—I want none—I won't take any more of—of your medicines. None. Never," and he swept the bottle out of his son's hand with a wave of his own, suddenly grand, suddenly effective.

His son jumped, for the bottle was smashed and thick brown syrup had splashed up, staining his white trousers. His wife let out a cry and came running. All around the old man was hubbub once again, noise, attention.

He gave one push to the pillows at his back and dislodged them so he could sink down on his back, quite flat again. He closed his eyes and pointed his chin at the ceiling.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Overview

During this period, life-writing gradually assumed a firmer foothold in the literary culture of India. The lives of writers, politicians and other public figures, from film stars to cricket heroes, have a sizable market,

though mostly in English. Among these somewhat predictable books, however, several stand out for their brilliant writing or original technique. A notable development has been the popularity of other lives, the lives of marginal people, men and women from low-castes and tribes. These books, usually the result of oral interviews written up by someone else, pose questions about the genre of 'auto'-biography.

English

Prakash Tandon Prakash Tandon (1911-2004) was one of the leading businessmen in twentieth-century India. After eight years in England, where he met his future wife, from Sweden, he eventually became head of Unilever and later the Punjab National Bank. None of this prepares the reader for his remarkable book, *Punjabi Century, 1857-1947* (1963). It is ostensibly an autobiography, but he takes the reader back to his grandparents' generation and tells his family's story as part of the wider historical forces that shaped the subcontinent.

Nirad Chaudhuri Nirad Chaudhuri (1897-1999) was born in a small town, in what is now Bangladesh, was educated in Calcutta, steeped himself in English literature and eventually emigrated to England in 1970, where he spent the rest of his life and became a 'Commander of the Order of the British Empire.' His literary output covers history, literary criticism and sociology, but his masterpiece is the controversial *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951). In his stubborn, contrary and mischievous examination of his own life, Chaudhuri offers a compelling description of how of one culture can penetrate another. Even the book's dedication is complex:

To the memory of the British Empire in India,
Which conferred subjecthood upon us,
But withheld citizenship.
To which yet every one of us threw out the challenge:
"Civis Britannicus sum"
Because all that was good and living within us
Was made, shaped and quickened
By the same British rule.

Published in 1951, at the mid-point of a life that spanned the twentieth century, this fiercely personal story also manages to be a provocative history of modern India. He brought his story up to date in 1987 with another memoir, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*

R.K. Narayan R. K. Narayan (1906-2001), like Nirad Chaudhuri, lived through every decade of the twentieth century, but there the similarities end. Narayan spent most of his life in a small town in south India, where his entertaining novels are set. Indeed, his autobiography *My Days* (1975) reads like one of those novels. With self-deprecating wit, he tells us about his hometown, his indifferent school years and how he became a writer. Beneath the jibes and journalistic reportage, however, we glimpse the anxieties of a young man struggling to find his way. An early marriage, widowhood six years later, a spot of journalism and haphazard participation in politics, but always the aspiration to become a writer. It is this combination of nonchalance and desire that makes his autobiography as gripping as the melodramas he loved to read.

Ramachandra Guha An equally talented yet completely different type of writer, Ramachandra Guha (b. 1958) completed his education and early career in India before teaching in universities in America and Europe. An historian with interests ranging from environmentalism to cricket, Guha has written three original biographies. *Makers of Modern India* (2012) supplements biographical accounts of these leaders with substantial excerpts from their own writing. Among its nineteen figures is an English anthropologist, who spent his life documenting India's tribal groups. In *Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, his Tribals and India* (1999), Guha examines the mixed motives and results of Elwin's dedication to the cause of tribal uplift. Lastly, in *Gandhi Before India* (2013) Guha again combines biography with social history to produce a portrait of a man we thought we knew but didn't.

Bengali

Mahesweta Devi A prolific Bengali writer and passionate social activist, Mahesweta Devi (1926-2006) is

best-known for her novels, but she also wrote an excellent biography. Very different to most of the biographies written in this period, which tell the lives of persons known to the author, Devi's *Jhansir Rani* (1956) reconstructs the life of a figure from the 19th century. Lakshmibai, Rani of Jhansi (1828-1858), was killed by a British soldier during the revolt of 1857-1858, making her the first martyr of the nationalist movement. Devi did extensive research, aided by the Rani's own archive of documents held by her grandson.

Hindi

Visnu Prabhakar Visnu Prabhakar (1912-2009), a gifted writer of poems, novels and short stories in Hindi, also wrote a dozen influential biographies, mainly of political figures. One of his books covered the life of a man at the centre of one of the most sensational events in the Independence movement. Not Gandhi, or another recognisable name, but Bhagat Singh. In 1928, Singh murdered a British police officer (as revenge for an Indian protestor who had earlier died of police brutality) and was then himself hanged. Completely different in tone, *Aawara Masiha* ('Great Vagabond,' 1974), Prabhakar's biography of novelist Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, is regularly cited as a model of the genre. The biographer describes his subject's experiences almost as if he had been present, with vivid detail and emotional insight.

Marginal Lives

Phoolan Devi Married at ten to a man twenty years older, Phoolan Devi experienced a life of brutality. She was raped several times, including by the police, and put in jail. Eventually she became the leader of a gang who attacked upper-caste villagers, held captives for ransom and eventually killed 22 men. After serving eleven years in prison, she was twice elected to the Indian Parliament and then shot dead in 2001.

Her Autobiography This is the story told in *I, Phoolan Devi: The Autobiography of India's Bandit Queen* (1995). The book is based on oral interviews with Phoolan in Hindi that were translated into English and then turned into a book by a French TV presenter and a British writer on rock music. This book, an immediate best-seller, raised issues of agency and voice, so fundamental to the production of an autobiography. Still, there is no doubt that her life became (and to an extent still is) a powerful symbol of female resistance, and not only in India.

Viramma The life of another marginal woman was published two years later. *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* (1997), however, is scrupulously authentic. An agricultural worker and mid-wife, Viramma belongs to the Paraiyar ('pariah') caste, who live in virtual bondage to the upper castes in her village. She has no land and no money. Nine of her twelve children die. Her hardship is leavened only by the pleasure she takes in the songs and dance all around her.

Her Autobiography Viramma told her story in Tamil over a period of ten years to two anthropologists, Josiane Racine (a native speaker of Tamil) and Jean-Luc Racine, who then produced this 'autobiography.' It is a gripping if harrowing read, describing the forces that determine Viramma's life, religion, relations with other castes, modernisation and political initiatives to reduce poverty. Told in Tamil, translated into French and then English, the narration is not always smooth, but it is a raw and vivid portrayal of a life lived by millions of Indians today.

Questions/discussion

1. How can we explain the international popularity of books about the lives of marginal people in India? Is it part of a wider global interest in human rights and suffering?
2. Another question raised by these books is their motive. Are they, as some have claimed, a call by the subjects for recognition of personhood? Where is the agency in books that are often two or three times removed from the words of their subjects?
3. Collective biography, telling the lives of a group of people, has been a part of Indian literary tradition for a long time, reaching back to the compilation of biographies of medieval saints and poet-saints.

Ramachandra Guha's *Makers of Modern India* (2012) and Sunil Khilnani's *Incarnations: India in 50 Lives* (2016, also a BBC radio series) have revived this technique.

Reading

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ESSAY

Overview

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

Hindi

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

Tamil

Venkat Swaminathan The Tamil cultural critic Venkat Swaminathan (1933-2015) was an iconoclast, whose witty essays gave pleasure even to his enemies. He delighted in puncturing the inflated balloons of his contemporaries. At a time, when any self-respecting Indian intellectual was a communist, he argued that the Soviet Union was destroying human enquiry in the arts and science. When the Tamil literary world was enamoured of the poet Bharatidasan, he wrote an essay to show that his poetry had been corrupted by work in the film world.

Swaminathan was prolific, writing caustic but revealing essays about painting, sculpture, film, music and theatre. His book *Kalai-Anubhavam, Velipadu* ('Art -Experience, Expression,' 2000) is a collection of essays, articulating his central idea that art derives from experience, not from ideology.

English

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

M.J. Akbar M.J. Akbar (b. 1951) is a younger gadfly, who has gained international acclaim for his journalism. He distinguished himself first within India by his investigative reporting on several newspaper and magazines, particularly *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in the 1970s. He vigorously opposed the censorship and dictatorship during the Emergency in 1975-1977. Later he created India's first 'modern' daily newspaper when he set up *The Telegraph* in Calcutta. He edited several other periodicals, and

spent time in politics, as well. However, he is best known outside India for his books on Nehru, the intractable Kashmir issue, Islamic politics and Pakistan. Perhaps his most influential book is *India: The Siege within -Challenges to a Nation's Unity* (1996), which examines the centrifugal forces in India's fragile nationhood and concludes with a memorable sentence: 'If India learnt more of the truth of its own past, it would perhaps have fewer problems today.'

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

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

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

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

M.K. Rukhaya M.K. Rukhaya (b. 1980) belongs to the newest generation of essayists in India who use new media to communicate their ideas.

She works as a professor of English in a small town in Kerala, but she has an international following through e-journals, blogs and other social media. She is a young Muslim woman whose views on contemporary events and literature are unpredictable and refreshing.

Questions/discussion

1. Literary criticism in India is almost entirely in English about English literature (written in India and elsewhere). Moreover, many of the leading essayists live part of their lives outside India. Is this a necessary condition of a post-colonial, global literary culture, which indicates a long-term decline in the literary culture of India's regional languages? Or does it reflect the strength of a literary culture that is both international and regional?

2. The other major strand of essay-writing in India addresses social and political issues. Here, too, though to lesser extent, English-language journalism predominates. One could argue that this linguistic link to the rest of the world has given India a place on the international stage that it would not otherwise have. However, this also means that the great majority of Indians, who do not read English, are left out of these public debates.

Reading

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

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

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

Text

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

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

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

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