HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Stuart Blackburn, Ph.D.

INDIAN LITERATURE - Ancient Period

Contents

Pre-classical
Classical

Part I : Preclassical 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)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 *AitareyaAranyaka* 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)
SarvapalliRadhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads* (Harper Collins, India, 1953, Reprinted 1994)

Texts

1. From the *Katha Upanishad*, trans. EknathEaswaran

> 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 Prarkit, trans. E. Hultzsch,

(A) When kingDēvānaṁpriyaPriyadarśin 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, Dēvānaṁpriya (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 Dēvānāṁpriya on account of his conquest of (the country of) the Kaliṅgas.
(E) For, this is considered very painful and deplorable by Dēvānāṁpriya, 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 Dēvānāṁpriya.

(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 Dēvānāṁpriya.

(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 Dēvānāṁpriya.

(L) And Dēvānāṁpriya 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 Dēvānāṁpriya, even those he pacifies (and) converts.

(N) And they are told of the power (to punish them) which Dēvānāṁpriya (possesses) in spite of (his) repentance, in order that they may be ashamed (of their crimes) and may not be killed.

(O) For Dēvānāṁpriya 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 Dēvānāṁpriya, viz. the conquest by morality [dhammavijaya].

(Q) And this (conquest) has been won repeatedly by Dēvānāṁpriya 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 Alikaṣudara, (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 Pitinikas, among the Andhras and Palidas,—everywhere (people) are conforming to Dēvānāṁpriya's instruction in morality [dhamma].

(S) Even, those to whom the envoys of Dēvānāṁpriya do not go, having heard of the duties of morality, the ordinances, (and) the instruction in morality of Dēvānāṁpriya, 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) Dēvānāṁpriya 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.

Part II : Classical Period

POETRY

<u>Overview</u>
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 sound were composed at roughly the same time (during the early centuries of the Common Era), they show sharp differences in aesthetic, content and audience.

<u>Court poetry: Sanskrit and Prakrit</u>
Genre ClassicalSanskrit 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 *mahakavya*s (*Kumarasambhava*, 'Birth of the War God Kumara' and *Raghuvamsa*, 'Dynasty of Raghu'), plus a well-loved lyric poem (*Megaduta*, 'The Cloud Messenger') and a still-performed play (*Shakuntala*). He was also a famous playwright.

Bhartrhari Little is known about Bhartṛhari, 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).

<u>Court Poetry: Tamil</u>
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 patrilocal society like Hindu north India) slowly breaks down. Jealousy, poor judgement, childlessness, a curse, sexual humiliation of a wife and a disastrous game of dice breed animus and lead to the exile of one group by the other. Underneath 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

Wendy Doniger, *Hindu Myths* (2nd ed.) (Penguin, 2004)
Ainslie T. Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition, vol. 1* (Columbia, 1988)
A.K. Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape* (OUP India, 1994)
William Buck, *Ramayana* (California, 2000)
John Smith, *Mahabharata (*Penguin, 2009)
Daniel Ingalls, *Sanskrit Poetry* (Harvard, 2000)
R. Parthasarathy, *Cilappatikaram: The Tale of an Anklet* (Penguin India, 2004)

Texts

1. From the *Buddhacarita*, 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 (ornatakam),* 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 *rasa*s (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 *Nātyaśāstra* ('*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 the 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 *PratimaNataka* 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), *Urvasi Won by Valor* (the Vedic story of Urvasi) 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 *Mṛcchakaṭika* ('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?

<u>Reading</u>

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<u>Text</u>
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 thushonored. 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 *nithikatha* ('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 *MorallPhilosopie 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 Singhalese 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, Singhalese, Thai and Burmese. A 9th-century CE stupa at Borobadur 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 AryaSura. 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 texts 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 *sutra*s). 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 mungoose. And as she loved little ones, she cared for the
mungoose 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 mungoose 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 mungoose.' 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 mungoose, 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 mungoose. '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, whensoe'er the wind
Doth blow, 'tis cold. For cold is caused by wind.
And, therefore, I decide you both are right.

Thus did the Bodhisatta make peace between those friends.

ESSAY

<u>Overview</u>
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.

<u>Sutras</u>
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 *sutra*s (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 *sutra*s. 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.

<u>Dharma Sastras</u>

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 Smrti* (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 *smrti* ('remembered' rather than 'heard' or *sruti*), are particularly influential in the development and practice of Hindu law. These four are: *Manu Smrti, YajnavalkyaSmrti, NaradaSmrti*and *VisnuSmrti*. The first two were composed in the period 200-500 CE, while the last appeared somewhat later.

Manu Smrti   Among this dense forest of Sanskrit law texts, the *Manu Smrti* 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 asthe *panchayat*. The *Manu Smrti* 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

NatyaSastraAnother important yet very different *sastra* text is the *NatyaSastra*. 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 *NatyaSastra* 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 *rasa*s 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

ArthaSastraAnother major essay text in this period is the *ArthaSastra*('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 *ArthaSastra'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 *ArthaSastra* 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 *rasa*s 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
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Texts

1. From the *ArthaSastra* 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 *ArthaSastra* 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. he 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.