

# INDIAN CULTURE- Ancient Period

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## SECTION I : ANCIENT PERIOD

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### Part I : PREHISTORY

#### Overview

Our knowledge of the culture of prehistoric India is constantly changing due to new research. For example, while the consensus view among specialists has been that hominids first lived in the subcontinent from approximately 500,000 BCE, stone tools recovered from a site near Madras have pushed that date back to 1.0 million years ago. Cultural artefacts, however, are dated back only to roughly 40,000-30,000 BCE, when the cave paintings at Bhimbetka in central India were produced. These remarkable paintings, which are broadly similar to those on the cave walls in Lascaux, France and in Botswana, were discovered by chance in the 1950s, when an archaeologist noticed strange rock formation while travelling in a train. Twenty years later, the narrative of Indian prehistory shifted again, when archaeologists uncovered a Neolithic settlement at Mehrgarh, in present-day Pakistan.

#### Art

**Rock art** The earliest examples of visual art in the subcontinent are rock paintings and rock engravings. More than 150 sites with this kind of artwork have been located, the earliest dating from approximately 40,000 BCE, and the majority from 15,000 to 5,000 BCE.

**Bhimbetka paintings** The rock paintings at Bhimbetka (in modern Madhya Pradesh) are one of the largest known collections of stone-age art in the world. The 243 caves there form part of a group of about 750 rock shelters in this part of central India. The remarkable feature of the paintings in the Bhimbetka caves is that they extend from roughly 40,000-30,000 BCE to the first millennium CE. These paintings are dominated by a series of geometric figures, some on horses, some dancing, plus many animals and birds. In a remarkable instance of cultural continuity these same images are today painted on house walls by the Warli tribe not far from Bhimbetka.

**Animal images** Twenty-nine different animal species are depicted at Bhimbetka, including bison, tigers, panthers, antelopes, elephants, lions and rhinoceroses (the last three are no longer found in the area). Given the prominence of snakes in Indian tradition, it is noteworthy that none are painted at Bhimbetka or any other stone-age site in India.

**Human images** The human figures at Bhimbetka (men, women and children) are drawn stick-like, many wearing necklaces, knee bands, wrist bands and bangles. Some carry spears or bow and arrows (although the extent of the use of these weapons is a matter of debate). There are also several scenes of humans dancing in a circle with linked hands. The men wear loin cloths, and the women wear their hair braided. Some dancers wearing masks may be ritual specialists.

**Edakkal engravings** The rock art at Edakkal in modern-day Kerala is much later (c. 6000 BCE) and different in technique to the Bhimbetka paintings. Although similar in their stick-like design, the Edakkal images of humans and animals are carved on the rock face (petroglyphs). Scholars have recently discovered an image of a man holding a cup that resembles an image found in the later Indus Valley civilisation.

## Religion

**Shamanism** Although our knowledge of stone-age religion in India is limited, there can be little doubt that it involved a form of shamanism. Like the shamanism of tribes in modern India, their ancestors probably conceived of a spirit world, with numerous named forces, perhaps associated with living things (animals, flowers, trees), topographical features (rivers, mountains, caves) and, most important, the sun and moon. Stone-age handprints on cave walls in Penna Dt. Madhya Pradesh are identical to those on the house walls of tribal people in nearby villages, where they are considered to be 'good luck' signs that provide protection from the capricious spirit world.

**Shamans** We can also surmise that rituals and chanting in stone-age India were performed by specialists in order to contact and communicate with these spirits. Several of the paintings in the Bhimbetka caves, for example, show a ritual-like dance with masked dancers, who may have been shamans.

**Animals** Large animals, such as tigers and lions, painted on cave walls appear to represent objects of worship. Stone-age hunters elsewhere in the world are said to have prayed to an animal spirit, asking it to manifest itself so that it could be hunted and then ritually sacrificed. Tribal populations in modern India also believe that animals have (or are) spirits that can be contacted through chanting by ritual specialists. Killing animals, especially those with whom humans feel a strong bond, is often ritualised with chanting, dancing and singing.

**Burial** Burial sites provide further hints of stone-age religion in India. Most graves were shallow pits in which the body was aligned east to west, suggesting a possible orientation with the sun. Burnt ash found at the bottom of the pits indicates some kind of funerary ritual. At one site, with more than 150 bodies, a small niche was cut into one side of the pit, and the body and the goods were placed inside. The niche was then sealed with mud-bricks, presumably to keep the ancestor 'safe.' Grave goods, such as necklaces, bone ornaments and dead animals, indicate a belief that the dead person would make a journey to an after-world where these possessions would be useful. There is also evidence of 'secondary' burial, a reflection of more complex cosmological ideas.

**Fertility** Crude female figurines shaped from stone and bone have been found at many stone-age sites and interpreted as fertility symbols. At one site in Madhya Pradesh, a large, shaped stone (dated to about 20,000 BCE) matches images that are today worshipped by nearby villagers as fertility symbols.

**Shrines** One of the Bhimbetka caves contains what appears to be a 'shrine' or ritual centre. A long corridor (25 metres long) leads to a large space where researchers found a tall rock with several small scooped-out depressions, which may have been used to produce music. Another possible stone-age shrine has been located in a cave at Baghor, Madhya Pradesh. Inside the cave, researchers found a fragmentary stone lying on a circular, sandstone platform (85 cm in diameter and dated to about 9,000 BCE). When the stone, which had been worked to produce a complex design, was joined with other fragments, it formed a pyramid. Significantly, tribal people living nearby also make platforms on which they worship triangular stones.

## Mehrgarh

**Significance** Mehrgarh is a Neolithic settlement located in Baluchistan, at the foot of the mountains separating Pakistan from Afghanistan. Discovered only in the 1970s and excavated a decade later, it has transformed our knowledge of prehistoric culture in the subcontinent. Before its discovery, scholars thought that the Neolithic revolution in India began in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE and had spread from Mesopotamia. Now, however, we can trace a gradual and more localised evolution from about the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE, when early farming groups evolved into larger settled communities with houses and domesticated animals. This evolution reached its final stage in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE in the fully urbanised, literate civilisation of the Indus Valley.

**Arts and Crafts** From about 7,000 BCE, the people of Mehrgarh used axes and stone tools to fashion ornaments of stone, semi-precious stone and shell. They also employed pit kilns and the potter's wheel

to manufacture pots and containers with geometric designs, typically using black and red colours. Also interesting are ceramic human figures from about 4,000 BCE with well-delineated facial features and prominent breasts, which resemble those found in the Indus Valley civilisation.

**Architecture** Mud-brick houses and granaries dating from about 7,000 BCE at Mehrgarh are the earliest surviving examples of architecture in the subcontinent. The houses contained several rooms, usually four, and most had a hearth in the corner. Larger buildings, with as many as ten rooms, are assumed to have been granaries. The clay-plastered interior house walls were decorated with red colours, although the images have not survived.

**Religion** The people of Mehrgarh buried their dead. In one cemetery containing 99 bodies, several heads were placed on raised bricks. Grave goods included painted pots, sea shells and gems, such as lapis lazuli and turquoise. One grave contained the bodies of two young females, wearing headbands decorated with shells, and five sacrificial goats. This diversity and richness of grave goods indicate a considerable social investment in the welfare of the dead and a belief that they might achieve a successful transfer to an after-world.

### Discussion/questions

1. The oldest surviving cultural artefacts in India are the numerous and complex rock cave paintings at Bhimbetka. Compare those paintings with the more famous ones found at Lascaux, France and the Kalahari Desert, Botswana. What does the uniformity or variation among these three sites indicate about cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity among hunter-gatherer societies in the three regions?
2. Attempts to reconstruct the religion of stone-age cultures in India rely, in part, on practices and beliefs of modern tribes living near stone-age sites. When an image painted on a wall in a modern village matches an image painted on a cave wall 30,000 years ago, scholars extrapolate from modern meanings of the image to understand its ancient meaning. Are such reconstructions valid?
3. The religious beliefs of prehistorical cultures are also often deduced from graves. The position of the body, the type and amount of grave goods and the physical site (a deep pit or an erect stone, for example) provide clues to worldviews that may include a dimension beyond present reality. To evaluate the validity of such an approach, consider what future scholars could learn from burial practices and structures in a contemporary culture (your own country or region or town).

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## Part II : BRONZE AGE

### Overview

The decline of the Indus Valley civilisation is virtually concurrent with the arrival in the subcontinent of an entirely different culture. The Indo-Aryans entered India from the northwest, beginning about 1500 BCE and probably in a series of migrations spread out over many years. What they brought with them was an Indo-European culture, a highly sophisticated tradition of oral literature (the Vedas) in Sanskrit and the embryo of the caste system in modern India. The contrast with the Indus Valley people could not have been greater for the Indo-Aryans did not know writing and left very little in the way of archaeological remains. However, the enduring status of Sanskrit as a sacred language, of the Vedas as textual authority and of Brahmins as guardians of both has ensured that Indo-Aryan culture remains a dominant element in the cultural diversity of India.

### Literature

**Vedas** The Vedas, composed in Sanskrit by the Indo-Aryans between roughly 1500-900 BCE, represent the foundation of Hindu religious literature. The Vedas (from the Sanskrit word for 'knowledge') have two major divisions: ritual texts and the commentaries. Here we are concerned primarily with the ritual texts, which are a diverse compilation of hymns, formulae, myths, charms and philosophical speculations. They are not only the oldest texts in Indian literature but also the oldest texts of world literature still in use today. These ritual texts are commonly called the 'four Vedas.'

**Rig Veda** The Rig Veda, which is the oldest and most literary of the four, contains 1028 hymns to be chanted during sacrifices. It is also the most important text in terms of literary history and tradition as it contains many early versions of Hindu myths and legends. It tells the story of Indra, king of the gods, who slays the cloud-dragon Vrtra with his thunderbolts. In other verses, gamblers lament their losses, the beauty of Dawn (Usas) is evoked with tenderness and 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 Agni (fire) and Soma (an intoxicating libation), the two principal elements of the sacrifice at the core of the Rig Veda.

**Other Vedas** The other, slightly later Vedas (Yajur, Sama and Atharva) contain similar imprecations but focus primarily on rituals, especially the fire sacrifice. 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 others in that it mainly contains charms and imprecations. All these texts describe and explain the complex techniques necessary for conducting the ceremonies.

**Mantra** The key to performing the sacrifice is the efficacy of speech and the knowledge of the Brahmin priests. This concept of potent speech is summed up in the word 'mantra', which is a word or formula spoken by a knowledgeable person in the correct way. 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.

**Creation myths** Consistent with the multi-layered nature of Hinduism, the Rig Veda contains several creation myths. One verse proclaims that speech (the goddess Vac) created the world. (Compare this with '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 is also said to come 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?' the ancient sages ask. 'How did being evolve from non-being?' There is no certainty, not even among those 'who look down on it, in the highest heaven.' When we read these lines in the Rig Veda and feel a quickening of uncertainty, we enter a dialogue about the human condition that stretches back three thousand years.

**Composition** The Vedas were not written. Writing was used in the earlier Indus Valley civilisation (c. 2500 -1500 BCE), but that script remains undeciphered, and the first inscriptions in a known Indian language appear only about 500 BCE.

Vedic literature was composed, performed and transmitted orally, using a complex set of mnemonic techniques, metrical schemes and literary conventions, by a series of poets, over a period of several hundred years. In other words, Vedic literature is speech (indeed, speech is deified as the goddess Vac). This fact cannot be repeated too many times: the Vedas were not read. They were heard.

**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 are also common. Similarly, while the standard metre is iambic, there is considerable variation in metre.

### Religion

**Pantheon** The Indo-Aryan pantheon is clearly related to those of other Indo-European peoples, from Iran to Scandinavia. Dyaus, the sky-father, for example, is cognate with Zeus. Other major deities include Rta (guardian of cosmic order), Varuna (god of the waters), Indra (warrior god with a thunderbolt) and Vrtra (Indra's enemy). Goddesses are also important, especially Usha (dawn) and Vac (speech). The enemies of the gods are the *asuras* (anti-gods, known in ancient Persia, as *ahura*), who are renowned for their power and knowledge, and must therefore be destroyed.

**Ritual** The religion of the early Indo-Aryans was dominated by fire-worship and sacrifices made to the gods (*devas*), often to Agni ('fire') and to Soma (an intoxicating drink offered to the gods). Indeed, most of the vast Vedic literature can be seen as a ritual manual, instructing priests what to say and when to say it, while also providing explanations of abstruse concepts and terms. Over time, Indo-Aryan rituals became complex and expensive, exemplified by the horse-sacrifice (*ashvamedha*) and the installation of a king (*rajasuya*). These and other ceremonies were performed by Brahmins to bring prosperity, in the form of cattle and progeny, as well as success in cattle-raids, and even in playing dice. Sponsorship of a ritual conferred status on a raja, while performing a ritual demonstrated the powers of a Brahmin.

**Philosophy** Vedic speculation about the nature of reality is underpinned by the concept of 'correspondence.'

Underlying material concerns of cattle-keeping and physical health, early Indians believed that performance of the sacrifice = the recreation of cosmos. Similarly, the correct ritual utterance of a word created the reality denoted by that word. The Vedic world was also an optimistic one, filled with wonder and brilliance, expansion and growth, gambling and drinking. It all culminated, in the eschatological view that successful sacrifices would secure one a permanent place in heaven. Only toward the end of the Vedic period, about 900-600 BCE, did doubt creep in with the awful prospect of 'redeath,' that is, a return to earth when one's merit was exhausted in the afterlife. This doubt evolved into the key concept of karma.

### Legacy

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

### Discussion/Questions

1. Visual imagery produced by the people of the Indus Valley civilisation is often used to demonstrate the roots of Hinduism, stretching back to the third millennium BCE. The main evidence for this assertion are a terracotta bust of bearded man identified as a priest; a picture on a seal of a man in a yoga-like pose with an animal headdress identified as Siva; and many female figurines identified as goddesses. Assess this evidence and come to your own conclusion concerning religious continuity from the Indus Valley to later Hinduism.
2. The script of the Indus Valley has been described as the greatest remaining mystery of the ancient world. Despite a hundred years of intense research, including recent computerised analyses, no definitive decipherment of the script or its underlying language has been achieved. Why is the answer to this puzzle so important to Indians today?
3. The most enduring cultural achievement of ancient India is the body of Vedic hymns created at the end of the period. Very little else survives of the culture of the Indo-Aryans, who composed and preserved this extensive corpus of oral literature. Analyse the lasting cultural significance of this elite priestly tradition by focusing not only on its mythological content and religious details but also on its orality, ritual efficacy and centuries-long transmission.

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### Texts

1. Creation of the World (*Rig Veda* 10.129)

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.

(translation by Wendy O'Flaherty, 1981)

## 2. Purusha, the Creation of Man (*Rig Veda* 10.90)

Thousand-headed is Purusha, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. Having covered the earth on all sides, he stood above it the width of ten fingers.

Only Purusha 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 Purusha. One-quarter of him is all beings; three-quarters of him is the immortal in heaven.

Three-quarters of Purusha 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 Purusha. When born he extended beyond the earth, behind as well as in front.

When the gods performed a sacrifice with the offering Purusha, spring was its clarified butter, summer the kindling, autumn the oblation.

It was Purusha, 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 Purusha, 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 [Kshatriya 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 Purusha.

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.

(translated by Michael Myers,  
1989[http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/world\\_civ/worldcivreader/world\\_civ\\_reader\\_1/rig\\_veda.html](http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/world_civ/worldcivreader/world_civ_reader_1/rig_veda.html))

### **Part III : CLASSICAL AGE**(1000 BCE-500 CE)

#### Architecture

**Pataliputra** A gap of more than a thousand years separates the cities of the Indus Valley from the next examples of architecture in the subcontinent. In the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE the city of Pataliputra, on the Ganges and already the centre of earlier kingdoms, was established as the capital of the Mauryan Empire. Its wooden palaces and buildings were several stories high and surrounded by parks and ponds. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE, the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka had the city rebuilt in stone. Other Mauryan cities, notably Taxila in northwest India, were also built at the same time.

**Stupa** The chief architectural monument of the classical period was the *stupa*. Essentially a funeral mound housing the relics of the Buddha, the *stupa* is also the first example of a religious structure built with stone in India. The oldest and most elaborate stupa at Sanchi is 16 metres high and 37 metres in diameter. Four gateways were added about 100 CE and then decorated with scenes of the Buddha's life. Another magnificent stupa was completed about 200 CE at Amravati, in south India.

**Rock Caves** Stupas and pillared halls were also carved out of rock caves at Ajanta and Ellora in western India. Dated from about 200 BCE to 300 CE, the ceilings and walls of these religious spaces were painted with murals showing images taken from Buddhist texts, especially the *Jataka* stories. The famous paintings at Ajanta probably represent one regional variant of a more widespread tradition since examples of a similar style, dated a few centuries later, are found in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

#### Sculpture

**Mauryan** The elaborately carved monolithic columns and capitals erected by the Mauryas (322-185 BCE) appeared more than a millennium after the simple sculpted figures in the Indus Valley Civilisation (2500-1500 BCE). Their highly polished sandstone surfaces and the historical gap with the Indus Valley figures has given rise to a debate about the possible origin of this virtuosic art. Persian influence is likely, as is the contribution by indigenous styles, but the extent and nature of these influences remain unknown.

**Post-Mauryan** After the Mauryas, Buddhist sculpture decorated rock-cut and free-standing stupas, monasteries and halls built over much of the subcontinent from the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE to the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE. Characteristic iconography includes the lotus flower, water symbols and the gestures and poses of the historical Buddha. Outstanding examples are found in north and central India at Sanchi, Ellora and Ajanta, but perhaps the most spectacular is found in south India at Amravati, where exquisitely carved figures, often in narrative scenes and in small niches, display a rare skill, dynamism and imagination.

**Shift** In the early centuries of the Common Era sculpture experienced a shift from symbols and narrative scenes to individual figures. Earlier iconography, consistent with Buddhist ideas of impermanence and the absence of a soul, used aniconic symbols (an empty throne, Bodhi tree, wheel of life) and scenes to represent the Buddha. Now, however, the Buddha began to appear in anthropomorphic form as a powerful presence alongside other figures, such as folk deities and water nymphs.

**Gandhara** At roughly the same time, another school of Indian sculpture developed in the northwest. The Gandhara school of Greco-Buddhist art is named after the region of Gandhara, where Alexander the Great's invasion left behind Greek influence. Artisans produced large, muscular representations of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas (particularly Maitreya), who resemble Greek figures wearing Roman togas.

**Gupta** The Gupta Empire (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. CE) in north India produced the classical school of Indian sculpture, characterised by supreme plasticity, graceful lines and sensual yet serene surfaces. A good illustration is the red sandstone standing image of the Buddha from Mathura, wearing a diaphanous robe with



delicately carved folds. Similar softly moulded figures of the Indian pantheon were the inspiration for Hindu and Buddhist art produced in Southeast Asia, China and Japan. These images, displaying both physical presence and disembodied wisdom, became the ideal for Mahayana Buddhism.

## Dance

**Natyasastra** Many Indian traditions share a common repertoire that derives from the *Natyasastra* ('*Treatise on Theatre*'), possibly from the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE. This normative Sanskrit text, which also provided the blueprint for early Indian plays written during the Gupta Empire, governed the form and technique of classical dance and still guides their performance today. The text contains a full description of 15 different types of dance-drama, a language of hand-gestures and a sophisticated exposition of aesthetics. 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.

**Content** One important common feature of classical Indian dance is content. All the major dance forms draw heavily on Hindu mythology, epics and sculpture. Siva's role as the 'king of dance' and Krishna's dance among the cowherds, for example, supply dance with rich symbolism. Overall, however, Krishna's story is the predominant source for classical dance forms.

## Religion

**Hinduism** Hinduism underwent a major shift during this period from external sacrifice (emphasised in the Vedas) to internal contemplation (emphasised in the Upanishads, 800-500 BCE) and finally to the devotionalism (emphasised in the myths or *puranas*, dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE). The worship of Siva is evident in the Upanishads, and the devotional cult of Visnu was patronised by the Gupta rulers (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. CE). During this period of 1500 years, Sanskrit texts, practices and beliefs were localised and adapted to pre-existing religious systems throughout the subcontinent. The other significant consequence of the 'great shift' in religious thinking in this period was the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism.

**Buddhism** Buddhism grew out of Hinduism in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE through a rejection of the Hindu concept of the soul and the embrace of a more austere path to enlightenment. This new, heterodox belief system also rejected the domination of Hinduism's priestly elite in favour of monks and laymen and laywomen, who could follow the path of non-violence and virtue. This ideology, which appealed to the emerging mercantile and trading communities in the cities, was patronised by the Mauryan Empire and spread quickly all over India, including the far south, where it played a major role in literary, social and political life.

**Jainism** Like Buddhism, Jainism is an offshoot of Hinduism and based on a historical figure who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE (Mahavira, 'Great Hero'). Again like Buddhism, asceticism and non-violence are central to Jainism. However, a key tenet of Jainism is the indestructible and immortal individual soul (*jiva*), which differentiates it from both Hinduism and Buddhism. Jainism also spread through mercantile groups and contributed to literature and scholarship in many regional languages.

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### **Discussion questions**

The gap, measured by archaeological evidence, between the cultural achievements of the Indus Valley Civilisation and the Mauryan Empire stretches to more than a thousand years. We know, however, that culture did not stop evolving during this period. Study the lesser-known elements of culture in this so-called 'gap' and use that new knowledge to build a bridge over this long period of fifteen centuries.

Buddhism and Jainism are alike in many ways. Both are heterodox off-shoots of Hinduism founded by an individual in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE. Both rejected animal sacrifice and Brahmin elites. Both proclaimed a new conception of the soul. Nevertheless, the two religions differ in fundamental ways, which has led to divergent histories for them in India. Analyse these differences and explain why Buddhism is now a world religion but not popular within India, whereas Jainism is still current in India but insignificant outside it.

Analyse the significance of the stupa in Indian art and culture. What are its archaeological origins? What is its religious function? What role did it play in the development of Indian architecture, sculpture and painting in the classical period?

Study the thirty-three edicts of Ashoka, the Mauryan Emperor. These inscriptions on stone pillars, boulders and cave walls were an innovation in both architecture and communication. Analyse their content, their medium (including scripts and languages) and their role in building an empire.

## SECTION II : POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

### Part I : EARLY POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

#### Overview

The literature and art of the early post-classical period were deeply influenced by religious devotionalism. Indeed, while 'classical' Indian culture is said to have formed during the Gupta Empire of the preceding centuries (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> CE), that earlier period was only the beginning of a longer process of development that came to fruition in the centuries up to 1000 CE. Beginning about 500 CE in the Tamil country, poetry, myth and song were composed and sung in the languages of common people, and temples were built for the worship of Siva and Visnu. Sanskrit poetry also flourished, largely by recycling stories from the Sanskrit epics.

#### Art

**Architecture** The rock-cut temples, stupas and prayer-halls at Ellora (c. 600-1000 CE) represent a continuation of those same Hindu and Buddhist structures carved earlier at Ajanta, in the same region of western India. In particular, the Kailasanatha temple at Ellora dedicated to Siva is impressive. It was carved out a single rock face, starting from the top and working down. It has a courtyard, a tower, a central shrine, five minor shrines and a columned arcade three stories high, with alcoves and sculpted panels. Soon these rock-cave structures gave way to free-standing ones, although both rock-cut and free-standing temples are seen at Mahabalipuram (c. 700 CE). Free-standing temples were built according to conventions laid down in canonical texts (*sastras*), the most important being that the design was a symbolic representation of the universe. Temples were largely built with stone, although brick and mortar continued to be used in areas where stone was not readily available. The earliest (and still magnificent) temples were built in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE at Aihole and Badami in the Deccan. By the end of the period, several other distinct regional styles had developed, in the far south (Tamil Nadu), on the west coast (Kerala), on the east coast (Orissa) and in Bengal. Late Buddhist architecture is represented by the great monastery at Nalanda (9<sup>th</sup> c. CE) and the hall at Bodh Gaya (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. CE).

**Sculpture** Outstanding examples of early Hindu sculpture are seen on both the rock-cut and free-standing temples at Mahabalipuram and in the caves at Ajanta and Ellora. Further developments in stone sculpting of Hindu gods and goddesses are seen on the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital, not far from Madras. The 'lost wax' method of bronze casting had been known in the Indus Valley civilisation (3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE), but it reached perfection in the figures sculpted in South India at the end of this period..

**Painting** Continuity with the earlier tradition of wall painting is seen in the exquisite images depicted on the walls and ceilings of rock-cut temples at Ellora. Some of the most beautiful images are of graceful *apsaras*, female spirits of air and water in Indian mythology. Although the paintings have deteriorated, copies made both by hand and camera in the 19<sup>th</sup> century provide us with a good idea of their original beauty.

#### Religion

**Devotionalism** The devotionalism that emerged in this period is the second great shift in the history of Indian religion. The ritualism of the Vedas was followed by a turn to inner contemplation in the Upanishads. By the end of the fifth century CE, Hinduism shifted away from philosophical speculation toward a personal, often intense and direct relationship with a deity, saint or guru. This was the *bhakti* movement, named after the Sanskrit word *bhaj*, which has a spectrum of meanings from 'belonging' to 'attachment.' However, bhakti did not happen in Sanskrit. Instead, belonging and attachment were articulated and experienced in the regional languages, through which people communicated with local gods and goddesses. Although devotionalism had been expressed in earlier Sanskrit texts (especially the *Bhagavad Gita*), the new bhakti poetry spoke in a different idiom. Longing, pain, ecstasy, anger and passion were more viscerally expressed in one's mother tongue.

**History** The first bhakti poems were composed in Tamil in the 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Despite their regional origins, these poems draw on pan-Indian myths and iconography of Siva and Visnu. These cultural influences from Sanskrit texts had been carried to the south through royal patronage of the Pallava kings in the northern Tamil country. Favoured by other royal patrons, the movement later spread across the face of the subcontinent and has been the dominant form of Hinduism ever since.

Even Buddhism, which the bhakti poets 'sang out of India,' was affected by devotionalism. New Mahayana figures, such as bodhisattvas (Avalokitesvara and Maitreya) and goddesses (Padmini and Tara), were worshipped in shrines and with rituals similar to those in Hinduism.

### Sanskrit literature

**Poetry** In this post-classical period, Sanskrit poets produced excellent 'classical' works, particularly in the *mahakavya* genre and usually by reworking material from the Sanskrit epics. Perhaps the most highly regarded poet of the period is Magha, who lived in the seventh century CE in a small court in Rajasthan. His most enduring work is *Shishupala Vadha* ('Slaying of Shishupala'), a skilful composition employing 23 different metres. The imprint of devotionalism is also evident in that the poet glorifies Visnu as the preserver who slays an evil king.

**Other poets** Bhatti (probably 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE) wrote *mahakavyas* based on episodes from the Rama story, the most famous being the *Ravanavadha*. Bharavi (probably 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE and probably from south India) modelled his *Kirātārjunīya* on earlier tellings of same story from the *Mahabharata*. Kumaradasa (7<sup>th</sup> c. CE) is remembered for his retelling of the 'rape' of Sita (*Janakiharana*), a story from the *Ramayana*. Bana (7<sup>th</sup> c. CE), who was also a playwright and author of the first biography in Indian literature (*Harschacarita*), wrote poems collected under the title *Candisataka*.

**Fiction** Several important story collections appeared in this period, also. The source for many is the *Brhatkatha* ('The Great Story') composed by a Jain author in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> c. CE but now lost. One extant and very entertaining text is Dandin's *Dasakumaracarita* ('The Tales of the Ten Princes'), a seventh-century collection tales held together by a frame-story.

### Tamil literature

**Nayanmars** Tamil bhakti poets who composed songs in praise of Siva were collectively called the Nayanmars ('Servants of the Lord'). These 63 poets focused on a specific form of Siva associated with a place or mythic 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 India at the time.

**Alvars** 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 also predictably less fierce in tone, less visceral in imagery and less uncompromising in its sectarian loyalty. The approach to Visnu in these poems 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 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, he 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 temples across south India. His collection of a thousand poems (*Tiruvaymoli*, 'Sacred Speech') describes the ten avatars of Visnu in both physical and spiritual attributes. The thousand poems are linked together by repeating the last syllable of each poem as the first syllable of the next poem, creating a garland of sound and sensibility.

**Myths** Another literary form of Tamil devotionalism was the myth. Although they borrowed heavily from Sanskrit myths, these south Indian texts focused on a specific Siva temple associated with one of his many stories or attributes. For this reason the 275 Tamil myths are called *stala* ('place') *puranas*. In

effect, they are a form of the 'guide' poem (well-known in medieval Europe), directing worshippers to the many Siva temples that dot the Tamil countryside.

### Discussion/questions

1. The early rock-cut temples and monasteries are feats of considerable engineering and artistic skill. How exactly were they built, and why were they built in these unlikely places? The frescoes in them are regarded as perhaps the greatest achievement of Indian visual art. But how were they created and for whom?
2. The popularity of devotional Hinduism is generally attributed to language: the poems/songs were composed and sung in regional languages. Compare the role of language in the spread of other world religions. For example, scholars claim that one reason for the rapid spread of Islam was that it was preached in Arabic and not in the languages of those who had ruled the Arabs up until the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Persian, Latin, Greek, Coptic, Aramaic and Syriac).
3. Devotional poetry marked a decisive shift from philosophical speculation to passionate engagement with the divine that remains the life-blood of Hinduism. However radical it may have been, this shift had antecedents in earlier cultural forms. What can you find in that earlier literature that presages devotionalism? What political, social or economic factors might explain such a major change at this particular point in history?
4. The Tamil versions of the Sanskrit myths are distinguished by their specificity of place. How does this physical grounding make a difference to the tone and function of these mythological texts?

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## 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.

3. From *Dasakumaracarita*, trans. by 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....

4. From the poems of Nammalvar, trans. A.K. Ramanujan, 1982

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)].

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

We are not subject 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.

## Part II : LATE POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

### Overview

During this period, Indian culture was enriched by the influences from Persia, Turkey and Central Asia that were brought to the subcontinent and patronised by Muslim rulers. New synthetic styles emerged in architecture, poetry and religion, which were further developed during the Mughal Empire that followed.

### Art

**Indo-Islamic architecture** The sultans of Delhi, and the minor Muslim rulers in the Deccan, oversaw the development of an Indo-Islamic style of architecture, characterised by ornate and intricately designed arches and domes. Pillars, mosques and tombs were decorated with floral patterns and calligraphic inscriptions from the Qur'an. The royal tombs of the Lodi sultans in Delhi are an excellent illustration of this style. The most famous structure, however, is the Qutb Minar, a pillar standing 73 metres high at centre of a large complex of buildings, including tombs and mosques on the outskirts of Delhi. Made of brick but covered with metal and later enlarged by adding six storeys made of sandstone and marble, the Qutb Minar is an architectural metaphor for the Sultanate as a whole. Begun in 1192, it was struck by lightning, damaged by an earthquake, repaired and then enlarged, until it reached its present form in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Hindu architecture** Some of the most magnificent Hindu temples in India were also built in the early centuries of this period. Regional styles evolved in Bengal, Kerala and Orissa, but the most spectacular temples were constructed in the far south. A large open space, often with a pool of water, was enclosed by a square with high towers on each of four walls. Outstanding examples are the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram and the Brihadishvara temple at Tanjore, both in modern-day Tamil Nadu.

**Sculpture** The quality of sculpture in north India declined during the Sultanate and produced a predominance of massive, rigid forms. However, a subtle school of bronze sculpture developed in eastern India, as seen in the images of Buddhist gods and goddesses at Nalanda and Kurkihar. In the south, the tradition of exquisite Chola bronzes (made with the 'lost-wax' method) continued to produce excellent pieces.

### Religion

**Islam** Early Indian Islam was guided by the Qur'an and the Sunna, which tradition held were the words and principles of the Prophet. In effect, the Islam practiced in Delhi in this period would have differed little from that observed in Baghdad or Damascus. There were minor differences, however, especially in the interpretation of Islamic law (*shariah*), resulting from a recognition that adjustments had to be made when Islam conquered people of different faiths.

**Sufism** Islam during the Delhi Sultanate was also tempered by the Sufis, the wandering Muslim mystics who took their name from the coarse wool tunic they wore. Sufis represented the ecstatic impulse suppressed in legalistic schools of Islam, as illustrated by this famous statement: 'Mystics learn from God; scholars learn from books.' Although Islam held that the only path to paradise was unwavering faith in god, Sufi saints believed that one could draw closer to divinity during one's lifetime and thereby experience mystical oneness. As singers and poets, they helped to spread Islam through the countryside, in a way that traditional Islamic teachers could not. The Sufi poet-saints were virtually indistinguishable from the poet-saints of devotional Hinduism. Both groups sang of a direct, personal contact with the divine, a power that they believed transcended petty social categories like caste and religious identity.

**Hinduism** Devotionalism, which had begun centuries earlier in the Tamil country, spread like wild fire across the entire subcontinent. Hindu poet-saints composed songs in Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam, Telugu, Gujarati, Hindi and Assamese. As one scholar famously put it, they 'sung the Buddhists out of India.' Royal patronage for this rampant devotionalism was provided by the Chola kings in the far south

and the Vijayanagar kings in the Deccan, who built temples and local shrines. A theological basis for devotionalism was articulated by the south Indian scholar Ramanuja (c. 1017–1137 CE) and his school of *Vishistadvaita* ('qualified non-dualism').

Rather than merge into oneness with god (the goal of the rival *advaita*, or non-dualism, school), he argued that the worshipped could become immersed in god and yet retain a personal identity that could form a bond with god.

### Literature

**Hindu** Hindu literature during this period was inspired by the devotionalism that had begun in the Tamil-speaking region of the south a few centuries earlier. The new literary-religious impulse spread to the adjacent Kannada-speaking area, where in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries CE a group of poets invented a new genre of the *vacana* ('speech'), with which to speak to Siva. Known as Virasaivas ('Militant/Heroic Saivas'), these poets used this simple verse form to propagate their spiritual vision and egalitarian social ideals. In Tamil, the outstanding literary achievement was a devotional retelling of the Ramayana by Kampan (12<sup>th</sup> c. CE?). Another Ramayana of similar iconic status in the north was written in Hindi by Tulsī Das (15<sup>th</sup> c. CE). In Sanskrit, the prevailing devotionalism is best illustrated by the *Gita Govinda* by Jayadeva (12<sup>th</sup> c. CE).

**Indo-Persian** A new literary culture developed at the court of the Delhi Sultanate and the courts of minor Muslim rulers in the Deccan. The wealth and fame of these rulers attracted poets from the eastern reaches of the Persian Empire and stimulated local talent, as well. Writing in Persian, but often incorporating Indian themes and metres, these poets experimented with Indo-Persian genres, such as the *qasida* (panegyric ode) and the *masnavi* (mixing romantic love and moral instruction). But the pre-eminent genre, in both Persia and India, was the *ghazal*, a short lyric of rhymed couplets combining the conventions of a love poem with those of a drinking song. Its imagery is drawn almost entirely from the landscape, flora and fauna of Persia, the most famous example being the contrast between the rose (*gu*) and the nightingale (*bulbul*). Its subtle poetic language is made even more enigmatic by the Sufi religious themes that supply its content. Many *ghazals* express emotions of longing and loss, in both ordinary human experience and the mystical experience of god. A master of the *ghazal*, and other genres, was Amir Khusrau (1253-1325 CE?), who is also credited with developing the influential *qawwali* tradition by fusing Persian and Indian music traditions.

**Story of the Parrot** The Indo-Persian literary synthesis is epitomised by the 'Story of the Parrot' (*Tuti Nama*), written in the 14<sup>th</sup> century CE. The author, Nakhshabi, was a poet and physician born in Persia who migrated to north India and found patronage under a Muslim ruler. While still in Persia, however, he had translated a Sanskrit version of the story (*Sukasaptati*, 'Story of 70 Parrots'), which he later adapted as 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 that is familiar to us from the *Thousand and One Nights*).

### Discussion/questions

1. The Qutb Minar in Delhi is a large architectural complex, almost like an archaeological site that contains historical layers of a culture. Analyse the Qutb Minar complex by studying its various layers. Why were the different structures built at different times? Who commissioned them? And who used them?
2. Hindu devotionalism is a movement with many strands, but in essence it refers to a personal, intense and often painful 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).



3. Several north Indian bhakti poets were either Muslims or influenced by Sufism. Analyse the work of the north Indian poets for their religious content. Do they, for instance, transcend the categories of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'?
4. Indo-Persian writers did more or less the same thing as their native-born Indian writers: they adapted pre-existing, mostly Sanskrit story literature. However, they often used genres borrowed from their native Persian. How does this change the fiction they wrote?

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## 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

3. Persian poem by Amir Khusrau, trans. Hadi Hasan  
I am a pagan and a worshipper of love: the creed (of Muslims) I do not need;  
Every vein of mine has become taunt like a wire,  
the (Brahman's) girdle I do not need.  
Leave from my bedside, you ignorant physician!  
The only cure for the patient of love is the sight of his beloved –  
other than this no medicine does he need.  
If there be no pilot in our boat, let there be none:  
We have god in our midst: the sea we do not need.  
The people of the world say that Khusrau worships idols.  
So he does, so he does; the people he does not need,  
the world he does not need.

## SECTION III : EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1500-1800 CE)

### Architecture

**Hindu** Some of the most ornate Hindu structures were built during this period, which saw a baroque elaboration of porches, columns, doorways, ceilings and passageways. Most of these buildings appeared in south India, where architecture developed with minimal Islamic influence. Splendid examples are the temple and palace at Madurai in Tamil Nadu and those at Trivandrum and Padmanabhapuram in Kerala (all 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> c. CE).

**Mughal** Indo-Islamic architecture flourished during the Mughal Empire. Friday mosques (Jami Masquid) were built in red sandstone and white marble at the Mughal capitals in Delhi, Lucknow, Lahore, Fatehpur Sikri and Agra. These monumental buildings, with large enclosed spaces, stand as symbols of the grandeur of the Mughals. The best-known is the Taj Mahal, built as a tomb garden for the wife of the emperor Shah Jahan.

**Regional** Regional Indo-Islamic styles also developed, particularly in the independent Muslim kingdoms in the Deccan. An impressive mosque at Gulbarga is entirely covered with a dome and vaulted bays, while the domed tombs at Golconda are equally spectacular. Built by the Qutb Shahi rulers in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, and once furnished with carpets and chandeliers, these now abandoned mausoleums stand as symbols of a past glory.

**European** In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, shortly after they arrived on the west coast of India, the Portuguese built a number of baroque churches. They also built less elaborate but still impressive churches with tall spires in Madras and all along the southeast and southwest coasts.

### Sculpture

**South** The regional (or Nayaka) temples built during the early modern era in south India are distinguished by new kinds of sculpture. Royal and heroic figures, part of the emerging tradition of portraiture, were rendered in stone statues and carved on temple pillars. An outstanding example of the latter is the 'Hall of 1000 Pillars' at the Meenakshi temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, showing local warrior-rulers seated on horse-back, as well as images of Siva and other deities.

**North** Sculpture under the Mughals also displayed a similar interest in large-scale human figures. Rajput heroes are shown seated on stone elephants at the gate to Agra Fort, and life-size marble statues of other Rajput warriors were erected in the palace garden at Agra. A more distinctly Islamic development was the decorative relief carving that embellished Mughal buildings, such as the delicate marble work on the walls of Akbar's tomb at Sikandra. Carved white marble stone was equally fashionable, as exemplified by the screen-work at the Taj Mahal.

### Mosaic

Mosaic and inlay decoration were another innovative feature of Mughal buildings. In the time of Akbar (r. 1556-1605), mosaics were made from small tesserae that were combined in Persian geometrical patterns. But in Jahangir's reign (1605-1627) pietra-dura began to be utilized for inlay work. Fine early examples are the water Palace at Udaipur and Itimad-ud-Daulah's tomb at Agra. Many of Shah Jahan's (r. 1627-1658) buildings in the forts of Delhi and Agra were also decorated with pietra-dura inlay.

### Painting

**Hindu** The Hindu tradition of illustrated manuscripts flourished as part of the *bhakti* movement that developed in north India from the 15<sup>th</sup> century CE onward. Krishna and Radha, in particular, are

wonderfully rendered on versions of the *Bhagavata Purana*, and a whole new genre of painting (*ragamala*) appeared, in which a series of images symbolised musical modes.

**Mughal** The Mughal Empire brought a significant change to painting. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, book-painting superseded wall-painting as the favoured form and developed into a visual art altogether separate from manuscripts and books. Even the names of individual artists were recorded. These changes were largely engineered by the eclectic genius of the Akbar (r. 1556-1605), the Mughal ruler who assembled a large contingent of artists from all over his empire and put them under the instruction of a Persian master-painter, supervised by himself. Later Mughal emperors continued to patronise 'miniature' painting, as did local rulers in the Deccan and Rajasthan.

### Music

**Hindustani** As with many other art forms, Hindustani (or north Indian) music reached a high point during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. Most musicians today trace their lineage from Tansen, the great vocalist and instrumentalist at Akbar's court. However, the popular style of singing known as *khyal* and the modern style of playing the *sitar* both developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Carnatic** Historical evidence of early south Indian music is scant, but Purandara Dasa (1484-1564 CE) is considered the founder. Modern Carnatic music derives from the Maratha court at Thanjavur in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when three men composed the repertoire that defines the tradition today: Syama Sastry (1762-1827), Tyagaraja (1767-1847) and Muttuswami Dikshitar (1775-1835).

### Dance-Drama

**Regional** During this period of minor courts, dance and dance-drama forms evolved in many regions. Joining the already existing forms (Bharatanatyam in Tamil Nadu, Orissi in Orissa and Mohiniyattam in Kerala) were Kathakali in Kerala, Kathak in the Hindi heartland, Manipuri in the northeast state of Manipur and Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh. Most of these traditions combine body movements with narrative storytelling, supplemented by spectacular costumes, face-paint and headdress.

**Content** Overwhelmingly these traditions draw their content from Hindu myths and the two epics. The best-known of these dance-drama traditions is Kathakali, which began in 17<sup>th</sup> c. CE in Kerala. A similarly famous form in north India is Ram Lila, which was adapted from the Hindi *Ramcaritmanas* written by Tulsi Das in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. CE.

### Print

The printed book was introduced to India in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century by Portuguese missionaries in Goa, and soon religious tracts (the Apostle's Creed, for example) were being published in Indian languages in both Roman and Tamil scripts. Only about 40 books (mostly in Latin, Konkani and Portuguese) were printed in India during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but this changed when Protestant missionaries set up a printing press in 1712 at Tranquebar on the southeast coast. By 1800, several presses in Madras and Calcutta were turning out hundreds of books (including translations, popular tales, geography, history and science).

### Religion

**Hinduism** Devotionalism continued to spread during this period, especially to the eastern corners of the subcontinent. Chaitanya in Bengal and Sankaradeva in Assam led popular movements promoting the worship of Visnu. In south India, the many little kingdoms supported local cults and the production of regional versions of Sanskrit myths, particularly in Tamil.

**Islam** The Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) encouraged a new kind of religion and court culture. He appointed officials from a wide range of backgrounds—Hindu, Muslim, Shia, Sunni, Persian, Afghan, Sufi, European—and he gathered around him scholars, theologians and poets from an equally diverse

spectrum. Largely inspired by Sufi Islam, he encouraged a more tolerant Islam and abolished the traditional tax on non-Muslims. While other Mughal rulers took a more strident approach to non-Muslim populations, the cults of the Sufi saints still managed to form a bridge between Hindu communities and their Muslim rulers.

**Christianity** Although largely confined to the southwest and southeast coasts, especially to the towns of Madras, Cochin and Goa, Christianity gradually found a place in Indian society. Numbers of converts were few by 1800, but missionaries made major contributions to the study of regional languages and literatures by printing bilingual grammars and dictionaries, as well as various texts in Indian scripts. Controversy over the extent to which missionaries made concessions to local cultural practices led to the Jesuits being withdrawn from India (and other parts of the world) during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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### Discussion questions

Analyse the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar as a catalyst for cultural change. Identify its features and describe their novelty. Then assess the impact such an innovative and powerful court had on the surrounding culture.

One of the new influences in that Mughal court was the presence of Europeans. The Portuguese arrived at the beginning of the early modern period, and by the end the French, Dutch and English had established themselves. Analyse the origins of this colonialism by studying the Portuguese at Goa and Cochin on the west coast and Madras on the east coast, and their contacts with the Mughal and Vijayanagar empires. What was the nature of their interactions with local populations and courts? Were those first encounters with Indians a harbinger of what would come later? Compare this early colonialism in India with one other similar case (for example, in west Africa, Mesoamerica or Indonesia).

One of the major cultural achievements in this period was the Mughal miniature. Study the history of this art form, from its Persian origins to its early development under the Delhi Sultanate and then its 20<sup>th</sup>-century status as a favourite possession among elites in metropolitan centres all over the world. Analyse the reasons for its success as both an art form and a cultural symbol.

Sculpture in both Hindu and Islamic traditions took a distinctive turn during the early modern period. Large, life-size forms of historical and legendary warriors and rulers, as well as mythological deities, appeared for the first time. Some scholars have suggested that this development reflects a broader shift toward life-stories and biography in the period. Analyse these concurrent developments in sculpture and literature to determine whether they are related.

## SECTION IV : 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### Architecture

**Colonial** Although Hindu and Islamic architecture continued with the trends set in the early modern period, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the grand era of colonial, mostly British, architecture. Libraries, museums, universities, law courts, railway terminals and government buildings were all erected with massive dimensions as a visual display of power. Most were designed in the neo-classical style, such as the Government House in Calcutta.

**Indo-Saracenic** Toward the end of the century, European architects in India began to build in the Indo-Saracenic style, which combined features of Victorian Gothic with Mughal architecture. Mughal architecture was preferred to Hindu architecture because its domes and arches were considered more compatible with European buildings methods than were the post and beam structure of Hindu temples. The Napier Museum in Trivandrum (1880) and the Taj Hotel in Bombay (1903) are both fine examples of this composite style.

### Painting

**Cloth** While court painting declined from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onward, painting traditions at the local level maintained their vitality. Painted cloth scrolls depicting mythological scenes were (and in some cases are still) used as a backdrop to storytelling traditions in Bengal, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

**Kalighat** One of these cloth-painting traditions became a commercial success in the Kalighat district of Calcutta. Local folk artists produced these paintings and then sold them to the pilgrims who came to the temples and shrines in the area, eventually attracting interest from Europeans and Bengali elites. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, this popular visual art had been undermined by mass-produced wood-cuts and later by poster art.

**Raja Ravi Rama** Raja Ravi Varma of Travancore (1848-1906) is thought to be the first Indian to adapt western techniques of perspective and composition to Indian content in painting. He chose traditional Indian scenes and figures from both real-life and mythology. Having won a prestigious award in the 1870s, he soon became famous in British colonial society and then in European capitals. Toward the end of his life, he set up a lithographic press that mass-produced his paintings and made them available to people who could not otherwise afford them. This technology of reproduction then led to an explosion of popular visual culture in the next century.

### Theatre

**Parsi** From the 1850s, Parsi theatre (named after the Iranian Parsi community who subsidised it) thrived in Bombay and later in other north Indian cities. Parsi theatre drew on European techniques of presentation (principally the proscenium arch) but was largely Indian in content. Most stories were taken from Hindu and Persian sources, dialogue was in Indian languages and the acting was accompanied by light-classical music from the Mughal courts.

**European** A more strictly European theatre, presenting European plays in English, was introduced during the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the British for entertainment in the provincial centres. *Othello* was staged in Calcutta in the 1840s, and that city continued to be a centre for modern theatre into the next century. Shakespeare was performed by travelling troupes (sometimes in Indian languages) well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Folk** Several forms of folk theatre were also popular in the cities and towns during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jatra, a theatre tradition in Bengali, for example, influenced the development of modern theatre in Calcutta, while the Tamil-language Teru Kuttu tradition did the same in Madras.

### Print

Print emerged as an important element of culture during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the provincial capitals (Madras, Calcutta and Bombay) but also, by the end of the century, in towns and cities. From the 1830s onward, publishing by missionaries and provincial governments was augmented by Indian-owned presses that found commercial success in supplying textbooks for the increasing number of schools and traditional texts (classical poetry, tales, epics, myths) for the emerging Hindu revival movements.

### Hindu Revivalism

**Origins** By the 1820s, British colonialism (particularly in the form of Christianity and the English language) had sufficiently penetrated the lives of Indian elites in the provincial capitals to provoke a cultural backlash. This cultural revival was facilitated by the dissemination and consumption of ancient Hindu texts (both in Sanskrit and Tamil) in the form of printed books. In other words, Indian cultural revival was made possible by European technology and European philology (assisted by traditional Indian scholarship).

**Bengal Renaissance** Hindu revivalism was most prominent in Calcutta, appropriately the capital of colonial India. From the late 18th century, Bengalis were exposed to colonial institutions of law, church and learning, which led to a reassessment of tradition known as the Bengal Renaissance.

**Brahmo Samaj** At the centre of this reassessment was the Brahmo Samaj. Formed in 1828 by Bengali elites and led by Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), it encouraged a monotheistic, rational Hinduism that opposed the worship of idols, widow-burning (*sati*) and caste inequality.

**Arya Samaj** In 1875 a Hindu ascetic named Dayananda Saraswati (1827-1883) founded the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj also rejected the caste system but differed from the Brahmo Samaj in that it maintained the authority of the Vedas and appealed to the masses. Dayananda Saraswati began his reform activities somewhat earlier with the establishment of 'Vedic school' intended to revive ancient Indian culture. The schools failed, however, and he broadened his revival campaign to attract more popular support by championing the protection of cows from slaughter.

**Vivekananda** Perhaps the reform movement with the most lasting effect was that begun by Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902). A brilliant speaker, and fluent in English (he famously addressed the Congress of Religions in Chicago in 1893), he was a traditional Hindu holy man and renouncer who combined the monism of the Vedanta school of philosophy with the social uplift message of 19<sup>th</sup>-century reformism.

**Saiva Siddhanta** Saiva Siddhanta was a south Indian reform movement led by Ramalinga Swamy (1823-1874), among others. Like Vivekananda, Ramalinga Swamy came from a historical lineage of traditional holy men, but he was far more provincial and lacked the Bengali man's cosmopolitan outlook. Again, and like most 19<sup>th</sup>-century reformers, he (a non-Brahmin) denounced the caste system and dedicated himself to uplifting the poor.

### Muslim Revivalism

**Origins** Muslim reform movements, beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with the decline of the Mughal Empire and centred in Delhi, took diverse forms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some strove to rid Islam of Hindu practices and the belief in the intercessionary power of Sufi saints, some spoke of a *jihad* against infidels and some sought reform through inner purification. After the suppression of the Indian Revolt/Mutiny in the 1850s, Muslims felt a further sense of loss and responded by seeking reform through three strategies.

**Deoband** The first of these was rooted in the Deoband seminary of Islamic scholars founded in 1867 in a small town north of Delhi. The curriculum emphasised the authority of the Qur'an and other traditional Islamic texts, in other words a scriptural Islam far removed from the popular practices centred on saints' tombs. This strategy was nevertheless popular among educated Muslims, and by 1900 forty Deobandi schools had been set up in different parts of north India.

**Aligarh** The Aligarh movement was led by Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) and based at the Anglo-Oriental College (est. 1875-1878) in Aligarh, north India. It advocated reform based not on strict Islamic tradition but on an English education combined with Islam. Islamic texts, it was argued, should be interpreted in their historical context and adopted to fit new and evolving social situations. Several important Muslim thinkers were influenced by the Aligarh movement and went on to develop what some have called a 'modernist Islam.'

**Barelvi** The third strand of Muslim revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century centred on the thinking of Ahmad Raza Khan of Bareilly (1856-1921) and came to be known as 'Barelvi.' His solution to the problem of Muslims in colonial and post-Mughal India was to emphasise the role of the Prophet, who (he argued) was nearly identical to God himself. Barelvis allowed for the intercessionary power of saints, but they placed them below Allah in a hierarchy of soteriological assistance.

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### Discussion questions

Architecture is often said to reflect social and political realities more than any other form of visual culture. Defend or refute this argument by analysing colonial and Indo-Saracenic building in 19<sup>th</sup>-century India.

Some historians have argued that the British Raj contained the seeds of its own destruction. In other words, the very values and institutions that it established in India provided the arguments and produced the men and women who led the Independence movement. Evaluate this thesis by analysing colonialism in 19<sup>th</sup>-century India.

Select one of the Hindu revival movements and discuss its place in 19<sup>th</sup>-century India. Pay attention to the origins, ideas and leading figures of the movement, as well as the means by which these leaders communicated with the masses.

Muslim reformers faced a somewhat different task to that of their Hindu counterparts. The loss of empire, the failure of the 1857-1858 revolt, the decline of Persian culture and the perceived incompatibility between Islam and British colonialism left Muslims in India with difficult choices, ranging from



accommodation to outright rejection of social and political realities. Analyse the strategies chosen by three main reform movements. What factors best explain their origins, their differences and their subsequent histories?

## SECTION V : 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### Part I : EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

#### Overview

These decades of political agitation and social upheaval left its mark on a variety of cultural forms. In this modernising half-century, cultural expressions that had historically relied on court patronage, such as the visual arts, the performing arts and poetry, struggled to redefine themselves. By contrast, the modern novel flourished as a medium for the expression of political and social ideas. Quickened by the nationalist spirit that swept the country, writers found new content and techniques with which to tell stories that spoke to a wide public. Literary magazines played a large role in popularising the new fiction by publishing short stories and serialised novels. Although the cinema was even newer than the novel, its mode of production and transmission meant that it remained under the control of the colonial government. The novel, an affordable, mass-produced and hand-held object, was the epitome of culture in early twentieth-century India.

#### Art

**Painting** In first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, painting sought to find a place within the politics of cultural nationalism. A 'Bengal' school of painting, led by Bengali intellectuals and British officials at the Government Art School in Calcutta, sought to move away from 'materialist' modernism and emphasise Indian themes and spirituality. A good illustration of this school is the oil painting 'Bharata Mata' ('Mother India') by Abanindranath Tagore, cousin of Rabindranath. The most distinctive painter of this period, however, was Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941). Born in Budapest to an Indian father and Hungarian mother, Sher-Gil trained in Paris before going to India in 1934, where she completed a series of remarkable paintings inspired by the Ajanta and Ellora cave works but rendered in a modernist idiom.

**Bharata Natyam** Although regarded by many as one of India's 'classical' dances, Bharata Natyam ('Dance of India') is largely an invention of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. When a tradition of female temple dancing was banned by the government in 1910, Indians in Madras (supported by British officials and scholars) sought to revive and purify it by modelling it on the ancient *Natyasastra*. Allegedly erotic elements of the temple dance were expunged, and an institute was established to teach the proper movements. Performances were also taken out of temples and put on the urban stage in front of ticket-buying audiences.

#### Film

Despite the political turmoil, Indian cinema blossomed. After it began in Bombay in 1896, money poured in to finance studios, build cinemas and support companies that toured films all across the country. British-owned and run, these touring companies showed mainly sports, news, travel and topical documentaries. The first Indian feature was 'Raja Harischandra' in 1913. By the 1920s, only 15% of the hundred or so films made each year were produced by Indians. The advent of sound in the 1930s brought not just the 'talkies' but also the songs that are central to the success of Indian films. Regional cinema also developed in this decade, especially Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Bengali films. By 1950, Indians owned most of the industry and were producing the films that would later become classics.

#### Religion

The hardening of the communal divide between Hindus and Muslims, enacted in legislation, practiced in separated constituencies and cemented in the creation of Pakistan, fed the politicisation of religious identities. Islam, which had suffered the ignominy of Mughal decline, now felt like a beleaguered minority

in India, and it suffered further when many Islamic scholars chose to live in Pakistan. Hinduism was given a makeover by Gandhi's non-violence, even though that principle was actually developed within Buddhism. Buddhism itself, more or less irrelevant for many centuries, experienced a minor recovery as two low-caste political movements (led by Dr Ambedkar in western India and Ramaswami Naicker in south India) drew inspiration from Buddhism's historical critique of the caste system. Christianity, energised by Protestant evangelism, spread rapidly in the northeast, while maintaining a major presence in coastal South India.

## Literature

**Sadat Hasan Manto** Unusual among writers of this period, Sadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) specialised in the short story, and (like Chekhov and Maupassant) he wrote his Urdu-language stories with an 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. He published 15 collections during his lifetime, with several more published posthumously. Critics have praised *Atis Paray*, ('Spares of Fire,' 1936) and *Cughad* ('The Fool,' 1948).

**Premchand** The social realist fiction of the Hindi writer Premchand (1880-1936) is characteristic of this period. 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. His last novel, and his masterpiece, was *Godan* ('The Gift of a Cow' 1936), in which he created a social world that stands for all of India. Gritty and sentimental by turns, it is a drama without heroes or villains. The main character fails to act on his self-professed Gandhian ideals but remains loyal to the system in which he was born and ends up dying in a ditch.

**Sarat Chandra Chatterji** The Bengali novels of Sarat Chandra Chatterji (1876-1938) were not social realist but still reflected the changing social landscape. Through the prism of the Bengali family, often with a focus on women, he explored the emotional consequences of external events. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he wrote fast-moving stories, with few authorial interventions, and relied on sudden shifts to maintain suspense. His most popular novel was *Binder Chele* (1914), but critics prefer *Srikanta* (1917-1933), a four-volume family saga.

**Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay** Another gifted novelist of this period was Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay (also Banerjee, 1894-1950). Writing in Bengali, 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 finest work is undoubtedly *Pather Panchali*, published in 1929 as the first part of *The Apu Trilogy*. Rarely has an Indian novelist entered into the mind of a character as successfully as Bandyopadhyay does with the young boy Apu. Largely an autobiographical novel, it has the ring of truth, though the author invents events to enhance the drama. The novel was quickly translated into several languages and was brought to an even wider audience with the film adaptation by Satyajit Ray in the 1950s.

**Putumaipittan** Putumaipittan ('The Crazy One,' 1906-1948) was a Tamil writer who illustrated another strand of Indian literature of the period. Although Putumaipittan was a committed socialist, rather than produce realist fiction, he chose to write experimental, somewhat bizarre, stories. The most famous of his nearly one hundred short stories is 'God and Me', in which an ordinary man imagines that he is accompanied by god as he goes about his daily business. This juxtaposition of the quotidian and the divine generates satire of both human and godly behaviour. Putumaipittan also translated dozens of stories from English into Tamil and wrote an entertaining but fiercely critical biography of Hitler.

**Manikkodi** Putumaipittan was one of several radical Tamil writers whose careers were launched by (*Manikkodi*, 'The Jewelled Flag'). Published in Madras for only three years (1933 to 1936), this literary magazine featured short stories that challenged the accepted manner of telling stories. Narratives were fractured, told from different points of view; they highlighted the grotesque and the psychotic, sex and violence. This short-lived magazine was the beginning of modern Tamil writing.

## 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 nationalist fervour meant that more of them were anxious to read, not just books, but also newspapers and magazines. This close correlation between print, nationalism and the novel has been noticed by scholars in other regions of the world (see B. Anderson's 1983 book *Imagined Communities*).
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. Many writers of fiction in this period went on to work in the film world. How did this shift of medium affect their storytelling?
4. Bharata Natyam is an example of what some have called an 'invented tradition.' Most cases of this phenomenon are the result of elites attempting to salvage a fast-disappearing heritage for cultural or political purposes, as described in 1983 by E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger in their book, *The Invention of Tradition*.

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## 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 pipe 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 repelion 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 snacks 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 Ghisu 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 pennies, another gave four pennies. 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 pennies 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 [red mark] 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.

## Part II : LATE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

### Overview

The dynamics of change that had shaped culture in the first half of the century continued to operate in the second half. Only more so. Like its economy, Indian culture became more global. Artistic expression, religion, the cinema and literature were all deeply influenced by an increasing interaction with the West and by the countervailing desire to explore Indian 'tradition.' In effect, nationalism had divided Indian society into two realms: an inner, traditional core, and an outer, modernising layer. The two had to be kept separate, to prevent the uncolonised core from being contaminated by modernisation in the social, political and economic realms. The challenge, therefore, has been to find cultural expressions that are both 'Indian' and modern. That synthesis has been achieved in English-language Indian literature, whose novelists have won international awards and audiences, while other, less-known writers still sell millions of copies at home. In Indian-language literature, a noteworthy trend has been the success of Dalit (Untouchable) novelists.

### Painting

Modern Indian painters of this period attempted to combine Indian decorativism and western naturalism. A good example was M.F. Husain (1915-2011), an eccentric and controversial artist who never maintained a studio, painted Hindu deities in the nude and owned a collection of vintage sports cars. For his synthesis, he borrowed the techniques of Cezanne and Matisse to paint scenes from the Hindu epics and myths. Another distinctive figure was Bhupen Khakhar (1934-2004), who drew inspiration from a variety of sources, both Indian and western. His openly homosexual themes were autobiographical and created controversy. However, his skill, particularly in rendering colour on flat surfaces, has earned his work a place in major museums around the world.

### Cinema

**Golden Age** The 1950s saw the beginning of the 'Golden Age' for Indian cinema, when Indian-made films, including many classics, were produced. Bengali art cinema (directed by Ray, Sen, Roy and Ghatak) emerged and (especially Ray's films) gained an international audience. At the same time, domestic demand rose, and Hindi films were subtitled in three or four regional languages. Fan magazines flourished, and stars, such as Raj Kapoor, Rajesh Khanna and Sharmila Tagore, became celebrities. Almost as popular were the play-back singers, who sang mainly Urdu-language *qawwalis* and *ghazals*. During the 1970s, Hindi cinema began to draw heavily on

**Industry** Based in Bombay but borrowing techniques from Hollywood, the Indian film industry is a run-away financial success. Some production cost \$20 million, but the hits regularly bring in \$25 or 30 million. It is a populist medium, telling stories of romance, of good over evil and of rags to riches. Rickshaw drivers have a heart of gold, corrupt politicians are denounced and poor village girls marry nice doctors. Today India produces about 1,300 of these films every year, mostly in Hindi but with substantial numbers in Telugu and Tamil.

**Politics** Film in India has always been political. Before 1947, the colonial government banned films with a nationalist message. After Independence the moral character of the nation was portrayed in 'Mother India' (1957), in which the heroine faces hardships but is a self-sacrificing mother. The path from screen to politics was laid down when the female star of 'Mother India' was elected as a member of parliament in New Delhi. More recently, stars of Tamil cinema (MGR) and Telugu cinema (T.N. Rama Rao) have been elected chief ministers of their states.

## Religion

**Shiv Sena** The harnessing of religion by political movements, a trend that began during the nationalist era, shows no sign of abating. A revealing example is the Shiv Sena ('Siva's Army'). This Hindu nationalist political party began as an agitation in the 1950s for a separate Marathi-speaking state to be carved out of Bombay Province. After Maharashtra was duly created in 1960, protests against non-Marathas began. The easy targets were Gujaratis, who controlled commerce in Bombay, and South Indians, who held professional positions. Later the Shiv Sena allied itself with the Bharatiya Janata Party and stoked anti-Muslim feelings.

**Communal violence** More broadly, the psychological divide between Hindus and Muslims has been deepened by the ongoing dispute over Kashmir and the threat of jihadism, especially following the attacks in Bombay in 2008. In 2002, Hindu activists clashed with Muslims in rural Gujarat, leaving two thousand Muslims dead, with the apparent complicity of Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat and later Prime Minister of India. New wealth has also enabled people to display their prosperity by building temples and mosques, which then act as lightning rods for conflict.

## Literature

**Nirmal Verma** Nirmal Verma (1929-2005) was perhaps the most influential Hindi writer of his generation. A skilful novelist, he was also a founder 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..

**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, and neither are they humorous or original. Instead, they look uncompromisingly at the everyday reality of women, revealing both their vulnerability and their strength.

**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, Narayan was never a political writer, and his fiction is often criticised for its apolitical stance and avoidance of colonialism. However, he was too keen an observer of human nature to be indifferent to injustice. Most of his novels, in fact, explore social problems, though not the spectacular ones. His masterpiece is probably *The Guide* (1958), which is both a parody of Indian culture and a poignant love story.

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

**Popular fiction** Another strand altogether are the English-language novels by Shoba De (b. 1948) and Chetan Bhagat (b. 1974), which reflect the aspirations of a growing lower-middle class. De has published 17 novels, with titles such as *Starry Nights* and *Sultry Days*, that might be called 'soap opera literature.' If her novels tell the tale of middle-class women in contemporary India, Bhagat's describe the success story of young men. Novels by both writers are entertaining, youth-focused and extremely popular, selling in the millions and filling a (rather large) literary niche.

**Dalit fiction** Another kind of success story is the growing popularity of novels written by Dalits (formerly 'Untouchables') in regional languages. This trend began in 1978 with the Marathi-language *Balute* ('Share') by Daya Pawar and continued with several more novels in Marathi. 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. Then came two Dalit novels in Tamil by Bama (b. 1958), *Karukku* ('Blades') in 1992 and *Sangati* ('Events') in 1994. *Karukku* tells the life-story of a Dalit Catholic woman in the idiom of her community rather than in standard Tamil. A major Hindi-language novel is *Joothan* ('Left Overs') published by Omprakash Valmiki in 1997, which dramatizes the lives of scavengers who subsist on what others throw away. Starting in the 1950s, the novel reveals the hollowness of Gandhian government programmes of Untouchable uplift.

### 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. Cinema is perhaps India's best-known cultural export in a globalising world. But to what extent is it Indian? The technology and the early films themselves were borrowed from the west, and Bollywood continues to take inspiration from Hollywood. Explain these two seemingly contradictory dimensions of Indian cinema: its international scope and its local content.
3. Modern painting is an excellent window on the tricky synthesis of tradition and modernity in Indian culture more generally. A study of a handful of the acknowledged masters of painting since 1950 (M.F. Hussain, Amrita Sher-Gil, Bhupen Khakar, Jamini Roy, F.N. Souza) would be an original contribution to the analysis of contemporary Indian culture.
4. Religion in modern India is a complex combination of ancient texts and cultural practices in the context of growing global secularism. Some scholars have argued that these two forces are two sides of the same coin. The more India is exposed to a materialist and secular modern world, the more it retreats into a spiritual sanctuary. And, if it is secure in that interior, invented past, India can safely absorb more external, western influences.

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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 multi-coloured 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 rancor 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 it out 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 bird* 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.