



Introduction to Indian Literature

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Stages of Indian Literature

- Can be characterized historically into:
- Ancient : Dominated by Sanskrit literature and Brahmanical philosophy.
Emergence of courtly texts and anti-Brahmanical texts in vernacular languages influenced by Bhakti, Jainism and Buddhism.
- Medieval: Growth of regional languages, and spurt of literature in Persian, Arabic, Urdu, Hindawi. Focus on court and king centric narratives.
- Modern: Influence of British, printing press and emergence of various genres of

English literature: plays, poem, songs etc. Social reform and Hindu revivalism important themes of this period.

- Each period saw a variety of literary genres.

There are four Vedas: Rig

Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and



Yajur Veda: book of sacrificial prayers. It is found in two parts, Black and White, and are full of rituals

In addition to sacred
and philosophical writings, genres such as erotic and devotional lyrics, court



• Jain literature comprises Jain Agamas and subsequent commentaries on them by various Jain ascetics. Jain literature was transmitted through oral tradition and consisted of teachings of Jain leaders like Mahavir. Important texts include: Purva, Acharang Sutra, Kalpa Sūtra etc.

- i) ~~The~~ Vinaya : monastic rules
- ii) ~~The~~ Sutra/Sutta: discourses of the Buddha
- iii) ~~The~~ Abhidharma : scholastic metaphysics

- Over time, Sanskrit became associated with the elites and Brahmanical knowledge, and to challenge this hegemony, c 6th century BC, religious reform movements: Jainism and Buddhism adopted languages spoken by the masses such as Prakrit and Pali to spread their gospel.

- Buddhist Literature: During his lifetime, Gautam Buddha chose local Indian dialect to spread his message and he also encouraged his monks to propagate his teachings in the vernacular. After his death, the Buddhist canon was formulated and transmitted by oral tradition, and it was written down in several versions in the 2nd and 1st century BC. Its main divisions are called pitakas [baskets], and these include:

- Also included in the Buddhist literature are the Jatakas, stories about the previous births of the Buddha, many of which are non Buddhist in origin.

- The Mauryan period (321-185 BC) brought in the most significant normative treatise on polity: The Arthashastra of Kautilya.*

Emergence of Courtly Texts

- The period also saw emergence of vernacular texts on polity. eg,. Pali texts on the Mauryas, especially Asoka.

*Assignment

Guptas, by the 4



Written by the poet Ved Vyasa

The period thus saw an efflorescence of literature in courtly texts (Abul Fazl's Ain-i-Akbari),

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flourished in India since the 13

literary genre of this sort that has

Devotional Literature

malfūzāt : a collection of sayings of the mystical

leader, which allow glimpses



- Love ballads and heroic poetry in Punjabi, known as Kissa and Var, were popular Punjabi medieval
- The most famous Punjabi love ballad is Hir Ranjha, an immortal book by a Muslim poet called Warris Shah.

- It was Amir Khusro (1253 A.D.), an early architect of India's composite culture, and a great Sufi was the genesis of a new language, subsequently recognised as Urdu.

northern India. It received the patronage of Rajput princes, especially the Sisodias of Mewar. It was

Other Genres

forms.

- During the medieval period, Urdu, as a language, came into being.

poet, who first experimented with Persian and Hindi (then known as Hindavi) mixed poetry, which

- The period also witnessed the growth of literature in local languages.
- For example, Rajasthani played an important part in the early middle ages in the greater part of used as the medium of heroic ballads and bardic poems, as well as of religious and devotional verse.

Modern Indian Literature

- Rabindra Nath Tagore (Bengali, 1861-1942), the greatest name in modern Indian literature, made federalism an important part of his concept of national ideology. He was of the view that the unity of India has been and shall always be a unity in diversity. The foundation for this tradition had been laid in India at the social level by saints like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others. He thus drew on traditional forms of poetry and performance. He was the first non-European winner of the Nobel Prize award for literature. Gitanjali (Song Offerings, 1910) remains his best known work, which is a collection of poems

Modern Writers

- Contact with the western world resulted in India's acceptance of western thought on the one hand, and rejection of it on the other, and the latter resulted in efforts to revive ancient glory and Indian consciousness.
- This led to the search for a national ideology and. To promote the idea of nationalism, many writers came to prominence.
- Bankim Chandra, for example, wrote many historical novels like *Durgesh Nandini* (1865) and *Anand Math* (1882) which acquired a pan-Indian popularity and made nationalism and patriotism a part of dharma.
- For example, Rangalal in Bengali, Mirza Ghalib in Urdu and Bharatendu Harishchandra in Hindi expressed themselves as the
- Rangalal Bandopadhyay was a poet and journalist. Rangalal's first, and perhaps most important, literary achievement is *Padmini Upakhyan* (1858), a historical romance based on Todd's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, and his rendition of which inspired revolutionaries in their struggle for freedom.
- Similarly the Hindi writer, Bharatendu Harishchandra represented the agonies of the people, country's poverty, dependency,

Modern Writers

- Gradually, patriotic writings proliferated almost spontaneously in different languages, as the resistance of a community against foreign rule.

patriotic voice of that era. This voice was, on the one hand, against colonial rule, and on the other, for the glorification of India.

English literature.

- Mirza Ghalib expressed his opinions by writing ghazals in Urdu, about love, with unusual imagery and metaphors.

inhuman exploitation, the unrest of the middle class and the urge for the progress of the country in his writings. He was a trendsetter in Hindi prose-writing and under the pen name of Rasa, he wrote several dramas, life sketches and travel accounts. For his outstanding writings, he is known as the father of Hindi literature as well as Hindi theatre.

- The first Tamil novel, *Pratap Mudaliyar Charitram* (1879) by Samuel V. Pillai, the first Telugu

novel, *Sri Ranga Raja Charitra* (1872) by Krishnamma Chetty, and the first Malayalam novel, *Indu*

Lekha (1889) by Chandu Menon were written with the intention of didactic (i.e. one to one interaction) and to re-examine evil social customs and practices like untouchability, caste

distinctions, denial of remarriage to widows, etc. • Historical novels were written by Bankim

Chandra Chatterjee (Bengali), Hari Narayan Apte (Marathi), and others, to describe the glorious

past of India, and to instill nationalist fervour in people. • Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938)

was one of the most popular Bengali novelists, whose popularity continues unabated even today,

not only among Bengali readers, but also among people in other parts of India. His main theme

was the man-woman relationship, and he was well known for his portrayal of women, their

sufferings and their often unspoken love.

- Tagore: wrote the novel Gora (1910), to challenge colonial rule and to give new meaning to Indian nationalism.
- Premchand (1880-1936) wrote novels in Hindi and was deeply attached to the Indian earth. His magnum opus is Godan (1936), where he recorded the suffering and struggle of the Indian rural poor.
- The birth of the novel is associated with the social reform movement of the 19th century. This new genre, borrowed from the West, is characterized by a spirit of revolt, right from its adoption into the Indian system. It paved the way for India to understand the real, factual position by the time it reached the threshold of the 20th century.
- Novels were found to be the most appropriate medium to eulogize the intellectual and physical richness of the past, and reminded Indians about their obligations and rights.

Other Important Novelists:

- Gandhi spoke the language of the common man, and followed the path of truth and
 - Tagore gave him the title of Mahatma (saint) and Gandhi became the theme/protagonist
 - Poets like Vallathol (Malayalam), Satyendranath Datta (Bengali), Kazi Nazrul Islam (Bengali) and Akbar Allahabadi (Urdu) accepted Gandhi as a challenge to western
- Gandhi, in Literature

- The emergence of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) influencing Indian life and literature, were quite often complementary to one another.

non-violence. He was for traditional values and against industrializations.

of both poetry and fiction of cultural nationalism in modern literature.

civilization, and as an assertion of the dignity of Asian values.

- Gandhi, thus emerged as a protagonist of several literary works in the modern era.
- At that time, a majority of new writers portrayed a dreadful world, based on western
- But the situation of the country led many others to a quest for new values and a re examination of Indian values. S.H. Vatsyayan

Ajneya (Hindi), Navakanta Barua(Assamese), B.S. Mardhekar (Marathi), Harbhajan Singh (Punjabi),

Sharatchandra Muktibodh (Marathi) and V.K. Gokak (Kannada), to name a few, emerged with a distinct^a continuation of the progressive literature of the thirties and forties, but definitely more militant in its approach.

G.M. Muktibodh (Hindi), Bishnu Dey (Bengali) or the Telugu • Then came the Naxalite movement of the seventies, and with it post-modernism entered

- In 1946, India witnessed the worst bloodbath in the memory of the sub-continent, just before it became Independent, after the partition of the country. India's nationalism at that juncture was a nationalism of mourning.

modernism.

- There were some Indian poets who looked outside, and accepted T.S. Eliot, Yeats etc. as

Aurobindo and Gandhi. Those who adhered to western modernity separated themselves from the common masses and their reality.

their masters, and in the process, rejected Tagore, Sri

voice and vision, enriching the new movement.

- The literature of social realism became a dominant trend in contemporary literature. It was

naked (Digambar) poets wrote political poetry on the theme of agony and struggle.

the Indian literary scene. Post-modernism carried with it the trend of progressive literature of protest and struggle. Literature now moved to the downtrodden and the exploited.

- India saw the emergence of Dalit literature which became concerned with the socially underprivileged, and

which asserted their socio-political stature. • It is a literature of militant protest against upper caste literature.

- Marathi poets, Namdev Dhasal or Narayan Surve, or novelists like Daya Pawar, or Laxman Gaikwad, reflect in their writings the anguish of this community, and demand the shaping of a just and realistic future for the underprivileged and the outcast in society.

Contemporary Trends

- Example, U.R. Anantha Murthy (Kannada), novel, Samskara, is a world classic, which portrays the spiritual struggle of man in terms of the urgency of life's demands. Other examples: Immortals of Meluha (Amish Tripathi), Asura (Anand Neelkanth),

Dalit Literature

- These writers have made an effort to retrieve, rediscover, and redefine elements of past to move ahead:

importance of knowing the past and its literature.

- One of the most significant features of the post-modernist era was the emergence of writings of the outcasts, as a major literary force.

- The Dalit movement was started in literature by Marathi, Gujarati and Kannada writers under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.
- Dalit literature introduced a new world of experience in literature, widened the range of expression, and explored the potentiality of the language of the outcasts and underprivileged Dalits. Use of Mythology
- In order to bridge the gap between urban and rural consciousness, between the past and the present, another trend which became very much visible in the post-modernist literature is the use of mythology to present the modern problems. • Myth is now accepted as a meaningful sub-text of the literary text. It is used for the rediscovery of the past for the present, and an adaptation for the future.

Liberation of Sita (Volga) etc.

Task:

- Write a note on the contribution of women to Indian literature.