

Texts and Traditions of Early India

B. A. Course No. U 41303

Credits: 3

Mode of Evaluation: 2 Sessionals (50%) + End Semester Exam. (50%)

The focus of the course will be to introduce learners to a range of textual traditions pertaining to early India, which have proved particularly influential and continue to arouse widespread interest at present. Necessarily selective, the attempt will be to provide a sense of the diversity and richness of these traditions. It is also likely that the specific excerpts/ texts may change from year to year- any such change will be notified to the students before the semester when the course will be offered.

Between 6 to 8 of the listed themes, including a diverse representation, will be selected for transaction

Questions that will run through the course will include those of the authorship and chronology of the texts, the intended audiences, the ways in which they were transmitted and preserved, the issues that were represented, strategies of representation and the social milieus in terms of which they may be contextualized. Specifically, there will be a focus on issues of caste, class, gender and other identities, and the ways in which they are represented in the texts selected for analysis.

The following general surveys on early Indian history may be used as background material for the course:

- Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, New Delhi, Pearson, 2008, Chapters 5 to 10
- Romila Thapar, *Early India*, New Delhi, Penguin, 2004, Chapters 4 to 13
- *A People's History of India*, New Delhi, Tulika, relevant volumes
- Ranabir Chakravarti, *Exploring Early India*, Primus, Delhi, 2016, relevant chapters.

Themes

1. Sacrifices and their Significance – Discussion on Vedic literature in terms of composition, chronology, contents, transmission; case study of either the *asvamedha* or the *rajasuya* based on later Vedic excerpts.

- Frits Staal, *Discovering the Vedas*, Penguin, relevant sections
- R.S. Sharma, essay on the *ratninamhavimsi* from *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions*, New Delhi, Motilal Banarasidas
- NN Bhattacharya, *Ancient Indian Rituals and their Social Contents*, Cambridge University Press, 2nd rev. edn. 1995.
- Excerpts from translations of either the *Purusasukta* or the marriage hymn.
- Excerpts from translations of the *Satapatha Brahmana* on the *asvamedha/ rajasuya* (J. Eggeling, *Sacred Books of the East*)

2. Defining the Domestic – the codification of rites of passage; case study of marriage based on *Grhyasutras*

- Jaya Tyagi, *Engendering the Household*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2008, Chapters 1 and 2.
- Excerpts from translations of the *Grhyasutras* (H. Oldenberg, *Sacred Books of the East*)

3. Dialogues and Dissent – the early Upanisads and early Buddhist tradition; case study on *varna* based on excerpts from the *Digha Nikaya*

- Romila Thapar, ‘Ideology, Society and the Upanisads’, *Cultural Pasts*, OUP, New Delhi, 2000.
- Patrick Olivelle translation of the Upanisads, selected portions
- T.W. Rhys Davids, excerpts from the *Digha Nikaya*

4. Traditions of Hagiography – early Buddhist negotiations of the secular and the sacred; case study based on excerpts from the *Buddhacarita/ Asokavadana*; Jaina understanding of the *salakapurusa* - ‘great men’.

- Excerpts from the *Buddhacarita*- Clay Sanskrit Library, introduction and translation by Patrick Olivelle.
- Excerpts from John L. Strong *The Ashokavadana*
- Excerpts from *Trisastisalakapurusa or the lives of sixty-three illustrious persons by Acarya Sri Hemacandra*, translated by Helen Johnson, Gaekwad Oriental Series, Baroda, 1931.
- KC Jain, *History of Jainism: Jainism before and in the age of Mahavira*, relevant chapters.

5. The Consolidation of the Sastras - theories of kingship and social hierarchy; case study based on excerpts from the *Arthashastra/ Manusmrti*

- R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions*, MLBD, Chapters 1-5, and 17
- Excerpts from R.P. Kangle, *The Arthashastra*
- Excerpts from P. Olivelle, *The Manavadharma Sastra*

6. The Epics - Sanskrit and Tamil: Introduction to the translation of the *Balakanda*, Critical Edition of the *Ramayana* by Robert P. Goldman; Introduction to the *Silappadikaram*, translated by R.Parthasarathy; Introduction to the *Manimekalai*, translated by Prema Nandakumar.

- Excerpts from the *Balakanda/ Sundarakanda*, translation of critical edition by R.P. Goldman.
- Excerpts from the *Adi Parvan*, translation of the Critical Edition of the *Mahabharata* by van Buitenen.
- Excerpts from *Silappadikaram*
- Excerpts from *Manimekalai*
- Suvira Jaiswal, 'Historical Evolution of the Ram Legend', *Social Scientist*, 21:3/4, 1993, pp. 89-97.
- Romila Thapar, *The Historian and the Epics, Origin Myths, and the Early Historical Tradition, Society and Historical Consciousness*, all from *Cultural Pasts*, OUP, New Delhi, 2000.
- A.K. Ramanujan, '300 Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three thoughts on Translation',
- Kamil V. Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1973, chapter on Tamil epics.

7. Plays and Playwrights – the performative traditions in the urban milieu; case study of excerpts from Kalidasa

- Barbara Stoler Miller *Theatre of Memory*, relevant sections
- Excerpts from the *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

8. Wisdom literature – social critique, resignation, acceptance; case study of excerpts from Bhartrhari, *Tirukkural*

- D.D. Kosambi, 'On the Origins of the Satakatravi', 'Some Extant versions of Bhartrhari's Satakas', both from the Oxford India Collected Works of DD Kosambi, ed. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, New Delhi 2009
- excerpts from the *satakams*, available in the Clay Sanskrit Series
- Rev. Pope, 'Introduction', in *Tirukkural*, Text and translation by Rev. G.U. Pope, Rev. W.H. Drew, Rev. John Lazarus and Ellis, Kazhagam, Madras, 1958.

- R. Mahalakshmi, 'Woman and Home in the *Tirukkural*: The Normative Construction of the Family in the Tamil Region in the middle of the first millennium CE', in Kumkum Roy (ed.), *Households in Early India*, Primus, Delhi, 2015.
- Excerpts from *Tirukkural of Tiruvalluvar*, With English Translation, V.R.R. Dikshitar, The Adyar Library, Chennai, 1949.

10. Poems of liberation and devotion - the early Buddhist tradition; case study of excerpts from the Thera and Therigatha. South Indian bhakti tradition – Karaikkal Ammaiyar, Andal, Akka Madevi

- Kumkum Roy, 'Of Theras and Theris', from *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power*, New Delhi, OUP, 2010
- Translation of Theri Gatha by Rhys Davids
- A.K. Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning*, Princeton University Press, 1981.
- R. Mahalakshmi, 'Outside the Norm, Within the Tradition: Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār and the Ideology of Tamil Bhakti', *Studies in History*, 16:1, 2000.
- Vidya Dehejia, *Slaves of the Lord: The Path of the Tamil Saints*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1988.
- *I Keep Vigil of Rudra: The Vachanas*, translated by H.S. Shivaprakash, Penguin.

11. Popular Perceptions – the preservation and transmission of 'popular' narratives; case study of excerpts from the Jatakas, Sangam poems

- Kumkum Roy, 'Justice in Jatakas', *The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power*.
- Uma Chakravati, Women men and Beasts, from *Everyday lives, Everyday histories*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2006.
- R. Mahalakshmi, 'Caṅkam Literature as a Social Prism: An Interrogation', in B.D. Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *A Social History of Early India*, Centre for Studies in Civilizations and Pearson Longman, Delhi, 2008, pp. 29-42.
- Excerpts from A.K. Ramanujan, *Poems of Love and War*
- Excerpts from Patrick Olivelle's translations of the *Pancatantra*.