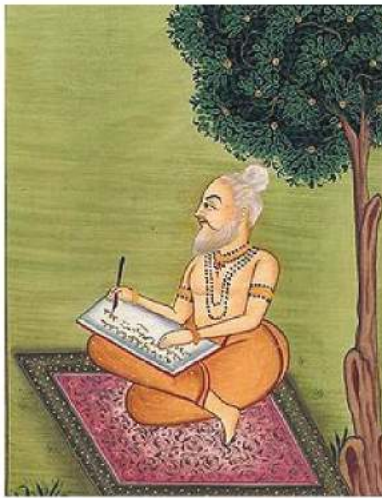




Indian Literatures: A Survey

Introduction

Indian literature has a long history, extensive linguistic diversity and immense variety of forms. The tradition records that the ancient sage Vālmīki, the composer of the



Ramāyāṇa, was the first to compose a *śloka*, a metrical couplet, dealing with the theme of suffering. The legend goes that he was a hunter and he killed one of the mating birds — when its mate died, the other bird went into wails of lamentation. On observing its deep anguish, Vālmīki gave up hunting, became an ascetic and composed the first couplet dealing with a worldly matter.

Sage Vālmīki composing the Rāmāyaṇa
(Courtesy Wikipedia)

Indian literatures are basically a product of the essentially oral Indian culture. Orality is an alternative culture — it may get written down or may co-exist with written analogue or it may not get written down. But even when an oral culture gets written down, it continues to be oral — witness for example texts such as Mahābhārata that remain recitative, performative texts even when rendered in different languages. There are also widespread compositions in almost all Indian languages of verse narratives devoted to love and war that are aural-visual compositions and are meant to be performed. As Bhalchandra Nemade notes in his 2009 book *Nativism*, ‘For centuries we have been accustomed to literature primarily as an oral manifestation of language and

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our rural and [small communities'] literature has meant only the spoken word. No language is primitive in any sense and the spoken norm is not in any sense underdeveloped. He notes that of the 1952 distinct languages spoken in our country, not more than 24 can be associated with the written culture. Even in these so-called 'recognized' literary languages, [only] a very marginal population has had a hand in their written literatures. In fact nearly all our literature was purely oral, [sometime also] in manuscripts that were [recited and] interpreted by some body to a gathering of expectant listeners. All types of works imbibed in different *rasas* including *śṛṅgāra* were collectively enjoyed by all age groups [castes and classes] without the slightest embarrassment to speaker or listener. Needless to say, the great umbrella of orality had been developed to shelter innumerable literary aesthetic systems. It has a continuous ... history, the last significant example of this culture in Marathi is Bahinabai's poem, written and published in 1952.'

Indian literature is a body of literatures, written and oral, classical and modern, from the Ṛgveda dialogues to Upanishadic narratives such as of Naciketa and Satyakāma, to Mahābhārata with its numerous stories, *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai* — the world's only epics with women as the protagonists — and the celebrated *Bṛhatkathā* and *Kathāsaritasāgara*, the 'Ocean of Stories'.

In the 8th century, Rājaśekhara, in his *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, a work devoted to literary theory, notes three important features of Indian literature:

- i. It is composed in many languages including dialects and the speech of small communities;
- ii. While having a distinct Indian character, it has immense regional variety of forms and themes; and



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iii. It is worldly and concerns the travails of ordinary human life.

Rājaśekhara visualizes the whole compositional literature in a human form. This visual image identifies many properties of literature:

Words and meaning together constitute its substance. It is composed in many languages: ‘Sanskrit language is its mouth. Prākṛts are its arms. Apabhraṃsas, its thighs. Paisācī language, its feet, and mixed languages its chest. Even/honest (*sama*), pleasant (*prasanna*), melodious (*madhura*), extensive/liberal (*udāra*), vigorous (*ojas*) — these are your attributes. Metres, your pores. Question followed by an answer, conundrum or quiz, problem — these are your modes. *Anuprāsa*, alliteration/repetition, *upamā*, simile, and such other devices ornament you. Even *śruti*, dealing with ultimate meanings, praises you.’ (Rājaśekhara, *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, Chapter 3)

Apart from defining in a straightforward manner the attributes of literature, this image captures the spread of compositional literature and attests the existence of such literature in almost all languages of India. Reference has been made to compositions even in the intermediate dialects. Rājaśekhara goes on to describe how Kāvya-puruṣa (poem as a person) and his bride, Sāhitya Vidyā (the art of literature), roamed all over the country. It is obvious they started their journeying from the middle country, the heartland, the area around Ujjain. Wherever they went, Kāvya-puruṣa’s dress and his song were influenced by the local practices. They travelled east (and a number of recognizable territories of the East and Northwest). Now this is interesting. What it means is that Indian Literature, though one, has many local and regional variations. Even today, the ‘fashions’ in films and music originating in middle India, in Mumbai, spread north, east, west and south of India; such is the cultural fact of India. This division of the subcontinent into three cultural zones is a very ancient division. Some major texts, in fact, come in three recensions corresponding to these three divisions — *udīcya*

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(northwest), *prācya* (eastern), *dakṣiṇātya* (southern). Thus, the Mahābhārata comes in three recensions: Mithila, Pune text and Kumbakonam text.

From the point of view of dress and dance and music, Rājasekhara divides the subcontinent into four parts: east, northwest, central and southern, with territories and regions of each zone clearly identified. From the point of view of properties of composition, however, there are only three zones.

Talking about the composition of literature in so many different languages, V.K. Gokak states that the languages in which this literature has been written fall into four main groups — Āryan, Draviḍian, Sino-Tibetan and Austric. Most of these languages also possess certain characteristics in common: the phonetic character of almost each Indian script, the normal word order of subject, object and verb. Composed almost in seven hundred dialects and not only in the twenty-two languages, which have a long cultural history and are recognized by the Sahitya Akademi of India, Gokak says that all regional and dialectal literatures share a ‘unique quality of Indianness ... [stemming from a] cultural tradition, which is five thousand years old. ... It is noted that the works of Rabindranath and Saratchandra, Premchand and Jaisankar Prasad, Bharati, Karanth, Bendre and Thakazhi Shivashankar Pallai and of Sri Aurobindo, to name only a few, are all of a piece, in that they present a view of life and ethos which are essentially and perennially Indian. It is perhaps good to remember that some of the true and outstanding representatives of Indian literature (in the regional languages), which is both Indian and universal, are still the Saṅgam poets (3rd century BCE) and Kambar (12th–13th century CE), the Ālvārs (6th century CE onwards), Jñāneśvara (13th century), Tulsidās (16th century), Vidyāpatī (14th century), Shāh Abdul Latīf (17th–18th century), Mirzā Ghālīb (18–19th century) and the saint-poets of the different parts of the country ... This



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continuity — the pastness of the present — has been possible because of the cultural unity of India. This unity is a unity in variety not in diversity.'

History of Indian literature can be studied in more than one way from the point of chronology, language, writers/composers, or major works. The first phase, often called 'Ancient Period', deals with what Patanjali calls *Vaidikī*, Vedic compositional literature, both verse and prose. This period approximately may be assigned to the period of time up to 1200 BCE, though, as is well-known, Indians not being a biographical people are interested only in the chronology of ideas and not in the temporal chronology. The second phase, often described as 'Classical Period' may be said to last from 1200 BCE to almost the 7th century CE and includes literature of classical Sanskrit, classical Tamil, Pāli and Prākṛt. The period has, as landmarks, the Sanskrit epics, the poetry of Kālidāsa, the Saṅgam Tamil literature, the Pāli Buddhist canon and the Prākṛt Jaina literature. The two Sanskrit epics, Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa, the two Tamil epics, *Cilappatikāram* and *Manimekhalāi*, and Kālidāsa's *Śākuntalam* and *Meghadūta* may be counted among the landmarks of this period. The third phase begins around the 1st century CE and may be said to last up to around the 11th century, and includes compositions in various Prākṛts including Mahārāṣṭrī, the most important literary Prākṛt. King Hāla's *Sattasāi* or *Gāthā Saptasāti* is an important landmark of this period.

The fourth phase, Apabhraṃsa Period or 'Middle Period', begins around the 7th century CE and lasts up to the 18th century when, with the colonization of India, Indian languages and literatures underwent a transformation through their contact with the Western thought and the English language. This period is tumultuous both in the external history marked by the impact of Islam that induced a decided shift from the classical languages and the classical literary habits and themes to modern Indian languages and new themes such as Bhakti. The Bhakti movement and aesthetics,

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originating in Tamil country in the 7th century and spreading across India and Indian language-literatures, remains, on account of the way it imbued music, sculpture, architecture, literature, dance and painting, the most powerful art movement in India's cultural history. The period also saw the rise and influence of Persian writing and the birth of a new language, Urdu, compositions in those two languages, and the adoption of some new forms such as *ghazal*. While the period saw a host of Bhakti poets in practically all major languages of India, Nāyanmār and Ālvār devotional poetry, Sūfi poetry in general and the two compositions, the Marathi *Jñāneśvarī* and *Guru Granth Sāhib*, may be counted among the outstanding landmarks of this period.

The Modern Period begins with the establishment of British rule in India in the last quarter of the 18th century. It is another watershed, the contact with the West, and marks 'a concerted change in poetic forms, themes, conventions, images, metrical frames, structural principles ...' apart from introducing Western theoretical thinking and forms such as Free Verse and Novel. Literature of the period also shows both the influence of Western sociopolitical thought and the tensions born out of it. The period saw compositions by Indians in a new language — English. The period however is not a complete break from the tradition in that many modern writers, including those who write in English, continue to draw their inspiration and themes from the classical epics and other texts. Several Indian writers have distinguished themselves not only in traditional Indian languages but also in English. India's only Nobel laureate in literature was the Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote some of his work originally in English, and did some of his own English translations from Bengali. Major writers in English who derive inspiration from Indian themes are R.K. Narayan, Ruskin Bond, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Raja Rao, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande. There is far more prolific and diverse literary creativity in Indian languages and any selection of landmarks is bound to be unsatisfactory.



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We may tabulate the history of Indian literature as:

1. Vedic Literature, approx. up to 1200 bce;
2. Classical Literature, from 1200 BCE to 5th CE (in classical Sanskrit, Pālī, Prākṛt and Tamil);
3. Prākṛt Literature, from 1st century CE to 11th century (in various Prākṛts);
4. Apabhraṃsa Literature, from 7th century CE to 18th century (regional Indian languages' literatures);
5. Indian-language literatures in Modern period, from 18th century.

There is a large body of folk literature in all Indian languages and dialects and this popular literature is much larger than the written literature — we propose to incorporate some representative selections in the next year's version of this module. Most of Indian literature is meant to be sung, recited or performed. The original phonocentrism (considering sound as a primary substance) of the Indian mind was perhaps both the result and the reason of this orality of Indian culture. The Indian literary tradition is therefore essentially oral and primarily one of verse.

'Oral literature', often used interchangeably with 'folklore', operates in the sphere of the spoken (oral) word, as 'literature' operates in the domain of the written word. It may, depending on the richness of an oral culture such as India's, include a wide variety of compositions: ritual texts, hymns and chants, epic, long and short poems, musical genres, folk tales, songs, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, text-recitations, historical or quasi-historical narratives and even technical knowledge texts, including dictionaries.

This large body of literature is essentially participative and it operates in many ways in the social, cultural life of the Indian people. By virtue of its close relationship with the masses, including the unlettered, Indian literature is celebratory in its function

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— people recite, sing, dance or enact a performance on every important occasion in the individual or family life and on every social occasion, a festival or mourning. There are pan-Indian forms, songs for example that are composed for all possible occasions. All these elements are present in the oral literatures of the country. For instance, the verbal compositions of Khāsī, Gāro, Ao, A'cik and Kokborok languages, among others of Northeast languages, have all the elements of orality — audiovisual (*śravya-prekṣa*) experience, highly evocative, de-contextualised, anonymous, structurally loose, metrical, open to extension, participative public transaction, immediate and intimate. The Indian literature is therefore, dominantly, performative, *śravya-prekṣa*, aural-visual, and is to be watched and heard rather than just read. The aural-visual elements are present strongly even in the urban written literatures of today. And even a massive structured composition such as the Mahābhārata with its innumerable translations, variants and editions, remains an oral text in the way it relates to its audience, in the way it is received in the *kathā paramparā*, the tradition of oral narration and exposition, and in its functioning as a frame of reference in the Indian society. Mahābhārata continues to be alive and vibrant as an enunciable, performance text. This reality of Indian literature puts it beyond the oral-written dichotomy.



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Comprehension

1. What, according to Rājaśekhara, are the three important features of Indian literature?
2. In your group, read the account of Kāvya-puruṣa's and his bride Sāhitya Vidyā's travels. Take up their roles and write a dialogue using the information above.
3. Complete the table given below using information from the text.

History of Indian Literature					
Period	Time	Languages	Major writers	Works	Other details
Ancient	up to 1200 BCE				
Classical	1200 BCE – 5 th c. CE				
Prakrit	1 st c. CE – 11 th c.				
Apabhraṃsa	7 th – 18 th c.				
Indian-language literature in modern period	18 th c. onward				

4. What do you know about India's oral tradition? Discuss its key features.

Project ideas

1. Prepare a PowerPoint Presentation on Indian literature with three of the following points in mind:

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- Some facts about Indian Literature
- Define Indian Literature
- Rājaśekhara's description of Kāvya-puruṣa
- India's oral tradition
- Five phases of Indian Literature.

You may also use information from sources beyond this survey article.

2. Organize a Literary Quiz using information from the above survey article. In addition, for making the quiz interesting you may consult some of the following URLs:

- www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/india
- http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/11i/15_rai.pdf
- <http://ssubbanna.sulekha.com/blog/post/>
- http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Folklore_of_India
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DHhPvbaV68 ('The Story of India' by Michael Wood)





Indian Literatures: Extracts from Primary Texts

Notes: The following Extracts from Primary Texts are intended to offer glimpses of Indian literatures. However, teachers and students need not study all selected authors in depth; we suggest that for close study they may choose any six authors out of the thirteen listed below in alphabetical order.

Because several of the authors belong to the genre of Bhakti literature, we have prefaced the extracts with a brief essay on this genre.

CONTENTS

1. **Āṇḍāl:** *Tiruppāvai*
2. **Guru Gobind Singh:** *Mittar Pyāre Nū*
3. **Guru Nānak Dev:** *Ārtī*
4. **Hāla:** *Gāthā Saptaśatī*
5. **Iḷaṅgō:** *Cilappatikāram*
6. **Kabīr:** *Dohā*
7. **Kālidāsa:** *Meghadūta*
8. **Kṣetrayya:** *Padas*
9. **Mīrabai:** *Bhajans*
10. **Mirzā Ghālīb:** *Ye nā thī hamārī qismat*
11. **Shāh Hussain:** *Kāfī*
12. **Veda Vyāsa:** *Mahābhārata, Vana Parva*
13. **Viśṇu Śarmā / Nārāyaṇa:** *Pañcatantra / Hitopadeśa*





Bhakti Movement

Introduction

Bhakti is devotional worship of God. Remember that a very thin line divides love, *rati*, and *bhakti*, devotion. In the songs of Bhakti poets, it is not easy to decide whether the poet is talking of God or his/her lover.

Nine kinds of Bhakti in relation to god / gods have been identified:

Śravaṇam kīrtanam Viṣṇoh smaraṇam pādsevanam
Arcanam vandanam dāsyam sakhyātmā nivedanam.

Hearing about Him, reciting, remembering and serving at the feet of Viṣṇu, worshipping, saluting and serving him, by becoming a friend to Him and entreating Him (are nine forms of Bhakti).

Bhakti has a very long tradition in India and in fact in Mahābhārata there is a reference to it. The Bhakti movement, as we know it, originated in Tamil Nadu in the 6th century with the Ālvār and Nāyanmār poets.*

Padma Purāṇa (in 'Uttarakhaṇḍa', 50.51) speaks of the origin of Bhakti in the following śloka:

Utpanna Dravide saham vridddhim Karnātake gatā
Kvacit kvacinmahārāstre Gujrāte jīrṇam gatā.

* The Ālvārs (also spelled 'Ālwārs' or 'Āzhwārs', a word which literally means 'immersed in god') are twelve Tamil saint-poets who composed hymns in praise of Viṣṇu; together with the sixty-three Nāyanmārs, who composed hymns in praise of Śiva, they created a large body of Bhakti literature in Tamil. We will quote from Āṇḍāl, an Ālvār poetess, later in this module.



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‘Born in Dravida, I grew up in Karnataka. I earned respect here and there in Maharashtra and waned in Gujarat.’

The *śloka* was composed probably before the 12th century, so another tradition added a new dimension to it:

Bhakti Dravid upajī laye Rāmānanda
Pargat kiyā Kabīra ne saptadvīpa navakhaṇḍa.

‘Born in South India, it went into North India with Rāmānanda, was best manifested in Kabīr [and spread to the Northeast with Shankardeva].’



However, this is an incomplete narrative. In fact every region of India had one or more important bhakti poet at one time or the other, including Guru Nānak in Punjab, Kabīr and Raidas in Uttar Pradesh and Narsi Mehta in Gujarat. The bhakti poets belonged to all castes, cutting across the whole social scale.

Sant Rāmānanda (1400 to 1480) says:

Jāti-pānti pūche na koi
hari ko bhaje so hari kā hoi

‘Let no one ask a man’s caste or with whom he eats.
 If a man is devoted to Hari, he becomes Hari’s own.’

Bhakti was a pan-Indian subcontinental social and cultural movement that extended itself in different parts of India for more than 1,500 years. Bhakti poets composed, sang and performed their poems through which they presented knowledge and devotion of Upanishads, Purānas written in Sanskrit in simple languages of people (*lokbhāṣās*). The Ālvār saints of Tamil Nadu from the 6th century onwards, the Nāyanmārs,



Ācāryas, Vīraśaiva of Karnataka, Sūfis and mystics from all parts of the country, people from different regions, religions and professions and backgrounds participated in it. For instance, Kabīr was a weaver, Raidas a cobbler, Mīrabai from royal background, Narsi and Tulsidās Brahmins, Malik Muhammad Jayasi and Bulleh Shah Muslims. Around the 14th century, it took northern India in its sweep, and it became a movement of masses, as it branched out into forms of worship of god: *nirguṇa* (non-attributive) and *saguṇa* (attributive). Kabīr, for instance, worshipped *nirguṇa brahman*. The *nirguṇa* developed into *jñānāśraya* (knowledge-centric) and *premāśraya* (love-centric); and the *saguṇa* form of Bhakti branched into *Rāmāśraya* (Rāma-centric like Tulsidās) and *Kṛṣṇāśraya* (Kṛṣṇa-centric like Surdās). However, the demarcating line between *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*, and *Rāmāśraya* and *Kṛṣṇāśraya* is very thin, as a poet like Narsi Mehta from Gujarat composed poems in both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* traditions. Moreover, the bhakta poets made use of different metrical forms like *dohās*, *pada*, *caupāyī*, *sorathā*, *sākhī* and *śabad*.

Many ācāryas like Mādhavācārya, Rāmānujācārya, saints like Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, poets like Āṇḍāl, Akka Mahādevī, Nāmdev, Jñāneśvar, Janabāi, Narsī Mehtā, Shāh Hussain, Nānak, Lal Ded, Kabīr, Surdās, Tulsidās, Mīra, Guru Govinda Singh, Jayadeva, Shankardev, Balram Dās are among the inexhaustible list of contributing thinkers to the Bhakti movement.

Women Bhakti Poets

Poets from different regions, religions and genders contributed to the works of Bhakti poetry. Here let us focus on the poetry by women *bhaktas*.

The imagery of Bhakti poetry is grounded in the everyday, familiar language of ordinary people. Women *bhaktas* wrote of the obstacles of home, family tensions, meaningless household chores, and restrictions of married life, including their status as



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married women. In many cases, they rejected traditional women's roles and societal norms. In some instances they formed communities with other poet-saints. Their new focus was utter devotion and worship of their divine husbands. These women transferred the object of their devotion and their duties as the 'lovers' or 'wives' to their divine lover or husband. Nonetheless, that their poetry became an integral aspect of the Bhakti movement at large is highly significant and inspirational. All wrote exquisite poetry that has been passed on through bards and singers throughout India.

Activity: Identify these women bhaktas





Let us sum up

➤ What is the Bhakti movement?

The Bhakti movement is a pan-Indian religious and sociocultural movement that started from Tamil Nadu in the 6th century CE and then spread to different parts of the Indian subcontinent.

➤ What are the main principles of the Bhakti movement?

- A loving relationship between the devotee and his personal god.
- Opposition to rituals and sacrifices as modes of worship.
- Purity of heart and mind, and kindness.
- Rejection of any discrimination based on gender, caste or creed.

➤ How has the Bhakti movement influenced Indian life?

- Social reform.
- Increased harmony in society.
- Development of a philosophical outlook in people.
- A new energy in Performing Arts.
- Extensive literary composition.

➤ Where did the Bhakti movement start?

It started in Tamil Nadu and began to spread to the Northwest during the late medieval ages when North India was under Muslim rule.



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Project ideas

- Collect some poems of the Bhakti poets that fascinate you and create a physical atmosphere of poetry. Add them to your portfolio file. This file can include pictures and collection of poems of the Bhakti poets of your local region.
- In imagery, identify the images that the Bhakti poets employ / create.
- You can also try to create your own poem based on the same theme. Don't expect your creation to be a masterstroke. Focus on the process that the Bhakti poets must have gone through to write such poetry. Do not worry about the end product.
- Listen to Bhakti music / poetry rendered by various musicians like D.V. Paluskar, M.S. Subbulakshmi or Girija Devi.
- Match the Bhakti poets to their respective place of birth with the help of the box below.

Kashmir | Rajasthan | Gujarat | Karnataka | Tamil Nadu | Kerala

Poet	State
Mīra	
Akkamahadevi	
Āṇḍāl	
Lal Ded	

Enrichment activities

- In your group, discuss the different practices of worship that devotees from different religions engage in while offering prayers.

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- Now that you have been introduced to a number of Bhakti poets compare the concept and image of God in the writings of the poets.
- Complete the table using information from the section on the Bhakti poets.

Name	century	God	concept of God
Mīra			
Kabīr			<i>nirguṇa brahman</i>
Āṇḍāl			
Tulsidās			
Guru Nānak Dev			
Guru Gobind Singh			

- Portfolio Presentation: You have studied about the Bhakti poets. Discuss whether *bhakti* is still alive today? What place does it have in people's lives in modern times?
- Research the various devotional practices that exist in India. Make a presentation or organize a panel discussion on 'Contemporary Devotional Practices in India: Its Influence on the life and Culture of People'. You may use the following internet link for help: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcGyEf-1wvA





1. ĀṇḍĀḷ: *Tiruppāvai* (7th century CE)

Āṇḍāḷ is one of the earliest women *bhaktas* who wrote in Tamil in the 7th century. According to a tradition, she was found abandoned as a baby by a gardener of Śrīvilliputtur, not far from Madurai. She used to assume the garb of a cowherdess (*gopī*) and pray for the union with the Lord. As she grew up she picked flowers for the Lord and accompanied her father to the temple every morning at the time of the prayers. There she heard the *stotra*, hymns sung in honour of the Lord. Gradually she herself started composing poems and became one of the most celebrated Āḷvār Bhakti poets. When she became of marriageable age, she insisted that she would only marry the Lord of Śrīraṅgam, that is, Viṣṇu. She eventually reached Śrīraṅgam (an island in the Kāvēri River, north of Tiruchī, where a major ancient temple is located). The legend goes that she ran into the *garbha-grha* (inner sanctuary) and merged with her Lord.



Till today, Āṇḍāḷ's hymns are sung in temples with great devotion. She is often called 'proto-Mīra'. It is believed that she took birth on this earth to liberate suffering human beings from worldly bondage. Āṇḍāḷ sang thirty sweet songs in praise of Lord Viṣṇu which are still sung in the temples of Tamil Nadu. She composed a 30-stanza song in praise of Viṣṇu, called *Tiruppāvai*, which is sang during the month of *Mārgāḷi*, considered to be a very holy month (from mid-December to mid-January). Āṇḍāḷ in her *Tiruppāvai* sings and praises this month where each day of the month gets its name from one of the 30 verses. In the poem presented here, *Tiruppāvai*, Āṇḍāḷ wakes her friends from their sleep and takes them to have the *darśana* of the Lord and to get the blessings of serving Him forever.



Tiruppāvai

The auspicious full moon of Mārgāli is here —
 maidens bejewelled and intent on bathing, come out!
Darling girls of the cowherd clan
 whose hamlet brims over with beauty and wealth;
That cruel sharp spear — Nanda's son,
 young lion of Yaśodā with her love-filled eyes
Cloud-hued, red-eyed, sun and moon for his face
 Nārāyaṇa, himself has offered
His gracious drum for us
 to sing his praise and gain the world's. ... (1)
Dawn breaks in the east, and the buffaloes
 let loose a short while, are grazing all over.
We detained many that would have gone,
 and have come here to call you out. O jubilant maiden,
Rise up ! Let us sing that He may give us the drum.
 Let us go to the Killer of Keśi, to the Slayer of the wrestlers,
To the God of gods let us go and offer obeisance and service.
 Taking pity on us indeed, Kṛṣṇa will bestow upon us His grace. ... (8)
We have come here, like the kings of this beautiful wide world,
 humbled, renouncing pride and gathered at the foot of your throne,
We too have come seeking you, with bended head,
 will not your benign eyes like half blossomed lotuses,
Resembling little bells, open upon us little by little?
If you will deign to look upon us with your two eyes
 that resemble the sun and the moon arisen;



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We will be freed from the curse which is upon us. ... (22)
Born to one mother, and at the dead of night
lodged with another to be raised unknown.
You frustrated the chagrined tyrant's plots.
A raging fire within his [Kamsa's] belly.
We have come here as beggars, O Nedumal [Viṣṇu]!
Should you grant us the drum we seek,
We shall ever sing of Your bounty, befitting the Goddess of Wealth,
and Your might, our sorrows dispelled, we shall rejoice. (25)

Note: Like much of Tamil Bhakti poetry, Āṇḍāl's poem abounds in imagery: 'waking up' means waking up to the inner call; 'bathing' is a symbol for the immersion the object of the *bhakti*; Kṛṣṇa is called 'cruel' because he has not yet obliterated the *bhakta*'s sense of separation; the gift of his 'drum' symbolizes his acceptance of the *bhakta*'s everlasting service. Many of the epithets used for Kṛṣṇa refer to episodes of his life.

Explore

To know more about Āṇḍāl and her poem *Tiruppāvai* (Āṇḍāl's first work), you may refer to the following websites, which offer the text in Tamil as well as in an English translation (the above excerpts are adapted from the second URL):

- <http://www.sundarasimham.org/ebooks/Thiruppavai.pdf>
- <http://yajurvedaustralasia-resources.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/TIRUPPAVAI.pdf>

Comprehension

- To whom does Āṇḍāl address her poem?

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- In which month does Āṇḍāl sing her verses? Mention the significance of the month.
- In which other story of Indian mythology can you find similarities to Āṇḍāl's birth?



A popular depiction of Āṇḍāl, narrating the stages of her life.





2. GURU GOBIND SINGH (1666–1708): *Mittar Pyāre Nū*



Mittar pyāre nū, hāl murīdān dā keh nā

This is a beautiful *śabad** by the tenth guru, **Guru Gobind Singh**, who laid the foundation of Khālsā Pañth in Anandpur Sahib in 1699. Guru Gobind Singhji is celebrated in Indian history as a unique combination of a saint, scholar, a warrior and a poet. He led an ascetic life, and composed great poetry, two epics, a hymn to goddess Caṇḍi and his autobiography.

We are, here, considering him as a poet. The four-line *śabad* we have included was recited by him in the Machivara forest when after a battle he was separated from everyone; but he was not alone because his connections to God remained strong as always. The *śabad* is present in Dasam Granth Sahib of the Guru.

It is also said that this *śabad* was sung by Guru Gobind Singhji on the cold winter night, after a long battle. It was during this relentless battle that his sons embraced martyrdom in front of his own eyes, fighting for Khālsā ideals.

* A *śabad* is a short verse composition that the Gurus employed in Guru Granth Sahib to express their deeply felt feelings.

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In the *śabad* Guru Gobind Singhji yearns for remembrance of *Waheguru* ('Praise be to the Guru') at all times.

Guru Gobind Singh: *Khyāl* of the Tenth Guru

Mittar pyāre nū hāl muridān dā kehnā
Tudu binu rogu rajāiān daodana nāga nivāsan de rehnā
Sūla surabi khañjarupiālā bing kasāñ dā sehrā
Yārde dā sālū satharucaṅgā bhata kherān dā rehnā kehnā

Translation 1

Tell the dear friend the condition of the sufferers
Without you even the quilt feels like a disease and life is like living in the
home of serpents
The wine-holder is like a spike and the cup like a dagger and [the separation]
hurts like the butcher's chopper
Tell the dear friend the condition of the sufferers
Hard floor of the beloved is welcome but the home of the Kheras* is like
a furnace.

Translation 2

Please tell the dear friend — the Lord — the plight of his disciples.
Without you, rich blankets are a disease and the comfort of the house is like
living with snakes.
Our water pitchers are like stakes of torture and our cups have edges like
daggers.

* Kheras are is a sub-clan of Hindus in Punjab.



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Your neglect is like the suffering of animals at the hands of butchers.
Our Beloved Lord's straw bed is more pleasing to us than living in costly
furnace-like mansions.

Comprehension

1. Who does Guru Gobind Singhji refer to as 'mittar'?
2. How can the poet's suffering be alleviated and by whom?
3. Examine the two translations in groups. Which translation do you prefer? Justify your choice.
4. The poet has expressed his suffering using two similes. Identify and explain them.
5. What name did Guru Gobind Singhji give to the newly created community of followers?

Enrichment activities

- Research and find out about: the ten Gurus of the Sikhs; the Pañj Pyārās; the 5 'K's that every Sikh must possess; the Khālsā Pañth; the names of the Sāhebzādās (Guru Gobind Singh's four sons). Share the information with others in the class.
- Put together a project on Guru Gobind Singhji and make a presentation before the class. You may use the following URL link to go about it:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4hgtEpNXoE
- Guru Gobind Singhji is highly regarded by the people of India for his monumental role in the development of the Sikh faith and his defence of *dharma*, righteousness. Elucidate.





3. GURU NĀNAK DEV (1469–1539): Ārtī



Guru Nānak Dev, the founder of Sikhism, was the first of the ten Gurus of the Sikhs. He was born in a village, now known as Nankānā Sāhib, near Lahore, in present-day Pakistan.

The name ‘Nānak’ was used by all subsequent Gurus who wrote any sacred text in the Sikh Holy Scripture called the Guru Granth Sahib. It is believed by the Sikhs that all subsequent Gurus carried the same message as that of Guru Nānak, and so they have used the name Nānak in their holy text instead of their own name. Thus they are all referred to as the ‘Light of Nānak’. Guru

Nānak Dev is also called Satguru Nānak, Baba Nānak, Nānak Shah Faqir, Bhagat Nānak, Nānak Kalandar, etc. by people of different religions and cults.

The following beautiful poem has an extended simile (analogy) in which the sky with its sun and moon, stars and planets, has been compared to a plate of earthen lamps used to offer worship to the Supreme Being. It is said that the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore considered this poem as the highest kind of suggestive poetry.



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The Guru's Ārtī*

*Gagan mah thāl, rav-cānd dīpak baney
tārka maṇḍal janak motī
dhūp maliānlo pavan cāvaro karey
sagal banrai phūlant jyoti*

The Sky is Your platter,
The sun and moon are the *dīpakas* [lamps or lights],
The stars in the sky are the pearls,
The *dhūp* [incense] is the fragrance
That the wind propels,
The whole forest is Your flowers.

*kaisī ārtī hoi bhaykandana terī ārtī
anhata śabad vajanta bherī*

O! What a wonderful *ārtī* this is!
You are the destroyer of Fear,
The sound of Your Name, which is so subtle that it goes unheard,
Resounds endlessly.

*sahas tav nain na na
nain hai tohey kau
sahas mūrat nana ik tohī
sahas pad bimal na na
ik pad gaṇdh bin
sahas tav gaṇdh iv
calat mohī*

*sabh mah jot jot hai sohī
tis dat cānan sabh mah cānan hoi
gur sakhi jot pragat hoi
jo tis bhāvey so ārtī hoi*

* Ārtī is worship with earthen lights.

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You have a thousand eyes, forms, feet, noses ...
And you have none ...
I am charmed!
Your Light enlightens all!
It is by the Grace of the Guru that the real Light [of Knowledge]
Manifests.
What pleases the Almighty is this *ārtī* [Creation].

*Har caran kamal makrand lobhit mano
ana din mohey āyey pyāsa
kirpā jal dey Nānak sarang kau
hoi jātey terey nai vāsa*

I yearn for Your Lotus feet,
Night and day;
Nānak is like the thirsty bird that asks for a drop of water,
From You O Lord!
That drop [of Grace] will make Nānak find comfort
in the uttering of Your Name.

Comprehension

1. What is the central theme of the poem?
2. Notice how the poem is built on an extended metaphor. What is the metaphor used by the poet?
3. How does the use of the extended metaphor contribute to the overall impact of the poem? Discuss.





4. HĀLA (1st century CE): *Gāthā Saptasatī*

Gāthā Saptasatī is a celebrated collection of 700 four-lined verses addressing different moods and emotions of women. It was composed in Maharashtra Prākṛt at the turn of the Common Era during the rule of **Hāla**, the famous Śātavāhana king of Maharashtra.

The 700 verses build up a complex beautiful universe evoking the depth of a woman's heart. It is a unique composition of its time in India's literary history. It has an enduring charm and has been translated into many Indian languages, among them Hindi by the late Govind Chandra Pande in 2002.

This celebrated composition apart from its profound psychological understanding of women's mind and heart, and apart from its excellence as metrical poetry, has great historical importance in the history of Indian literature. This is the first extended verse composition that is composed in an emerging Prākṛt, the language of common speech. The language, Prākṛt, had been used for intellectual texts such as some of the Jaina canon, but this poem marks the first literary use of Prākṛt. It established the fact that good poetry can be written in a language other than Sanskrit as well.

Gāthā Saptasatī

Helplessness

Knocking here and there, depending on others
The old body is killing ending old age today

Lonely Dawn

Today the street appears desolate, with voiceless footfalls of travellers

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The faded colour of the crossing with people wandering absentmindedly
Even the temple looks deserted and the village suddenly silent
He has left only today – our hearts lonely and the lonely dawn.

(Śataka II.90)

Comprehension

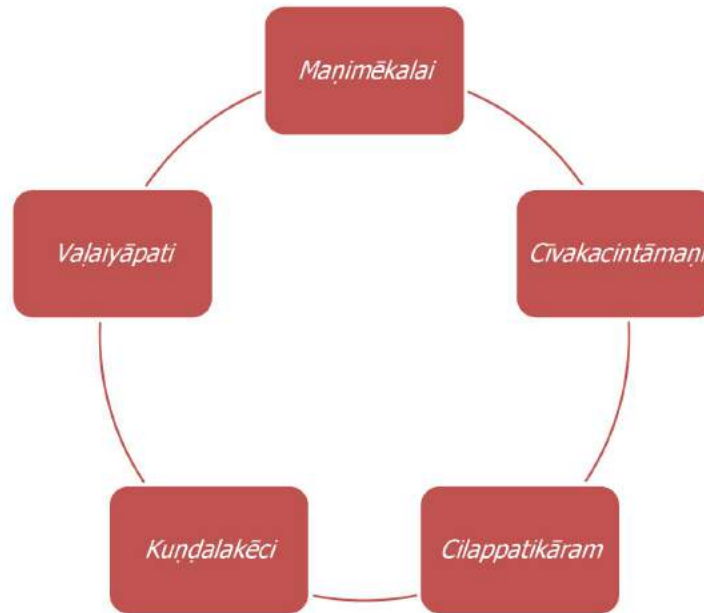
- List the theme of each of the two couplets.
- Do the themes have a contemporary connect? Is there universality in the themes?
Share your view with your group.





5. IḷAṅGŌ AḍIGAḷ (5th–6th century CE): *Cilappatikāram*

Cilappatikāram (pronounced *Shilappadigāram*) is the earliest epic poem in Tamil, written in the 5th–6th century CE by Prince **Iḷaṅgō Aḍigaḷ**. The title means ‘The Jewelled Anklet’ or ‘The Story of the Anklet’. The epic’s plot is derived from a well-known story of Kaṇṇagi, which is one of the five great epics of Tamil literary tradition. They are:



The poet prince Iḷaṅgō Aḍigaḷ is believed to have been a Jain monk. *Cilappatikāram* is a piece of highly regarded literary work. The three Sections constitute a total of 5,270 lines of poetry. The *Cilappatikāram* is a fine synthesis of mood poetry in ancient Tamil Saṅgam tradition and the rhetoric of Sanskrit poetry.

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A Tamil palm-leaf manuscript (Courtesy: Wikipedia)

The epic revolves around the heroine Kaṇṇagi, who married Kōvalan, the son of a wealthy merchant. They lived together happily, till Kōvalan met the dancer Mādavi (Tamil for ‘Mādhavī’) and fell in love with her. He squandered all his wealth on the dancer. Later there was a change of heart in Kōvalan. The following extract will give you an idea of the beautiful expression of poetry in prose that *Cilappatikāram* is famous for:

... the girl Mādavi
Had a lover's quarrel with Kōvalan as they amused
Themselves on the cool seashore. Inspired by fate,
She sang the songs of the seaside grove
To accompany her dance. Instead of reuniting them,
The songs made them drift apart. He returned
To his virtuous wife, and they came
To the old towered city of Madurai.
Its king, wreathed in leaves, went to heaven
Because of Kōvalan's murder. It is his wife,
O lord of the west, who has entered your country.
On their crowned heads the northern kings
Now carry her.



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Kōvalan returned to his wife. The only fortune the couple was left with was a precious pair of anklets. Because of her unflinching love for her husband, Kaṇṇagi gave him her anklets, her only possession. Together they decided to go to the great city of Madurai, where Kōvalan would use this pair of anklets as the capital to recoup his fortunes by trade.



At Madurai, Kōvalan went to the market to sell one of Kaṇṇagi's anklets. Unfortunately, the queen, wife of Neḍuñcēliyan, king of the Pāṇḍiyas, had just been robbed of a similar anklet by a wicked court jeweller. The jeweller happened to see Kōvalan with Kaṇṇagi's anklet. Taking advantage of the situation, he seized this opportunity and informed the King. Kōvalan was executed. When Kaṇṇagi learnt of this, she was devastated. Grieved and angry, she carried the other anklet to the court as proof of her husband's innocence....

Chaste women of Madurai, listen to me!
Today my sorrows cannot be matched.
Things which should never have happened have befallen me.
How can I bear this injustice? ...
'A new and a mighty goddess
has come before us,
in her hand a golden anklet!
What can this mean?'
'This woman afflicted and weeping
from her lovely dark-stained eyes
is as though filled with godhead!

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What can this mean?’

Thus, raising loud accusing voices,
the people of Madurai befriended and comforted her,
and among the tumultuous throng
some showed her husband’s body
She, the golden vine, beheld him,
but her he could not see. ...

Then the red-rayed sun folded his fiery arms
and hid behind the great mountain,
and the wide world
was veiled in darkness.

But he saw not the agony of her grief
as she mourned in sorrow and wrath. ...

The chaste Kaṇṇagi established the innocence of her husband and in remorse and anger invoked Agni, the fire-god, and asked him to burn the entire city of Madurai.

In *Cilappatikāram*, Iḷaṅgō Aḍigal underlines the objectives of the epic:

1. to show that those in power will be punished if they deviate from righteous principles;
2. to show the power of virtue as in Kaṇṇagi;
3. The inevitability of the *karma* working itself out.



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Statue of Kaṇṇagi holding
her second anklet and
pointing an accusing
finger to the Pāṇḍiya king
(Marina Beach, Chennai)

Literary value

Cilappatikāram is also important for its literary innovations and poetry of great refinement. It introduces the intermingling of poetry with prose, a form not seen in previous Tamil works. It features at its beginning an unusual praise of the Sun, the Moon, the river Kāvēri and the city of Pūmpukār (Poompuhar*). In addition, *Cilappatikāram* is a vast treasure of information on music and dance, both classical and folk.

* It is a port city located at the Kaveri river, south of Chidambaram. Also known as Kaveripoompattinam or Kaveripatnam, it was partly excavated by archaeologists, who found that a portion of the port was indeed submerged by the sea.

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Comprehension

1. What are the three traits of Kaṇṇagi's personality that the narrative brings out?
2. Name the city Kaṇṇagi burnt.
3. What is the name of Kōvalan's virtuous wife?
4. What was the effect of Mādavi's song on Kōvalan?
5. What is the insinuation from the following line, 'Its king, wreathed in leaves, went to heaven'?
6. Identify the protagonists of the story and name them. Also work on their personalities as reflected in the text.

Enrichment activities

1. Write and enact the literary text discussed, keeping in mind the tone, mood, setting, conflict, etc.
2. Find out what happened before the second extract above, and make a presentation before the class. You may use the following videos for help:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6wPeJXUIxc
3. If you were to rewrite the story, which element of the epic would you emphasize? Why?
4. What is Saṅgam literature? Collect some names of the main works of this literature.
5. Though Kōvalan is the hero, the author in his unique style 'has elevated both Kaṇṇagi and Mādavi to the highest status in the eyes of the society for ever'.



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6. Have a brain storming session in class; you could use the following as stimuli:
Kaṇṇagi's exaltation as a woman of virtue; the repentance and renunciation of Mādavi; using ordinary folks as heroes and heroines....

English translations

1. *The Cilappatikaram*, translation by V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar (1939, republ. International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai, 2004)
2. *The Cilappatikāram: The Tale of an Aklet*, translation by R. Parthasarathy (Penguin Books, 2004)

Internet resources (all URLs accessed July 2012)

- *Tamil Nadu's Silappathikram, Epic of the Ankle Bracelet: Ancient Story and Modern Identity*, by Eric Miller: www.storytellingandvideoconferencing.com/18.html
- Tamil text: http://projectmadurai.org/pm_etexts/pdf/pm0046.pdf
- Dance adaptation: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvTmeo8FVJg&feature=fvsvr>
- A film rendering (in Hindi, *Bharat Ek Khoj*, episode 16, part 1): www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgfi15VJGVk

