

CLASS I - INTRODUCTIONS, KALIDASA

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GOAL

- Class will have no pretense of rigorous scholarship
- More to develop an appreciation and understanding of non-Western antiquity literature

SANSKRIT

- Classical language belonging to Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family
- Language of choice for Hinduism, classical Indian philosophy, & historical texts for Buddhism/Jainism
- Most archaic form, *Vedic Sanskrit*, appeared within the Rig Veda ~1500 BCE - ~1200 BCE
- *Classical Sanskrit* emerged ~500 AD. Codification is largely attributed to Panini, the 'first linguist'

SANSKRIT POETRY

- Twin concepts of *rasa* and *dhvani*
- *rasa* = 'flavor', 'relish', 'mood'
- Emotions (*bhavas*) are ubiquitous, and evoke distinct moods (*rasas*)
- *dhvani* = 'sound', 'resonance', 'suggestion'

SANSKRIT POETRY

“When an image, action, or situation is objectively presented in a poem, it evokes a specific emotion in the reader. Once the emotion is purged of its impurities, it calls forth the corresponding mood realized through the power of suggestion.” - R. Parthasarathy

SANSKRIT POETRY

- ① Desire → The erotic
- ② Laughter → The comic
- ③ Grief → The tragic
- ④ Anger → The cruel
- ⑤ Energy → The heroic
- ⑥ Fear → The fearsome
- ⑦ Disgust → The loathsome
- ⑧ Wonder → The marvelous
- ⑨ Peace → The peaceful

SANSKRIT POETRY

“The great poets of India wrote for audiences of experts; they were masters of the learning of their day, long trained in the use of language, and they aimed to please by subtlety, not simplicity of effect. They had at their disposal a singularly beautiful speech, and they commanded elaborate and most effective metres.” - A.

Berriedale Keith

SANSKRIT POETRY

- Poets would largely be patronized by kings and present poems to educated elites in the King's court
- Poems were meant to be spoken, never read.
- “The notion of individual self-expression was foreign to the culture at that time. What the poet expresses are the thoughts and feelings of the personae in a given situation” - R. Parthasarathy

TRANSLATING FROM SANSKRIT

“In the process of translating a Sanskrit text into Chinese it loses all its nuances. . . It’s something like chewing cooked rice and then feeding it to another person. Not only has it lost its flavor; it will also make him want to throw up.” - Kumarajiva (344-413)

TRANSLATING FROM SANSKRIT

*One who looked did not see the word,
One who listened did not hear it
(Rig Veda 10.71.4).*

TRANSLATING FROM SANSKRIT

“The hymn emphasizes the fact that the *Word* is not revealed to everyone. . . It was a closely guarded secret by the Brahman priesthood. The *Word* was never written down; for once it was written down. . . It lost its sacred power. Under these circumstances, translation was an abomination. For how could the language of the gods, *deva-vani*, as Sanskrit was regarded, be translated into any human tongue? It was simply inconceivable. And so the Rig Veda was not written down until much later. In fact, for over 2,000 years it was orally transmitted—all of its 1,028 hymns comprising about 21,200 lines—from one generation to another by priestly families, a process that has continued to this day.” - R. Parthasarathy

TRANSLATOR: R.S. PANDIT

- Born in Rajkot (1893) to a wealthy family in British India
- Joined the non-cooperation movement against the wishes of his family
- Imprisoned by the British a total of 4 times, he translated the Ritusamhara in his last term, and died shortly after being released



KALIDASA

- Classical Sanskrit author considered one of India's finest dramatists
- Origin is unclear; however, likely lived ~400-500 AD
- Surviving works include 3 plays, 2 epic poems, and 2 minor poems
- Most popular theory today is he was a poet in the court of Chandragupta II of the Gupta Empire

