IX

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

1. LANGUAGE

Sanskrit

It has long been universally accepted that Sanskrit is a remote cousin of all the languages of Europe, with the exception of Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, Turkish and Basque. The other European tongues look back to a common ancestor in a group of dialects spoken by tribesmen in the steppelands of South Russia some 2,000 years B.C. The relationship of Sanskrit to the languages of the West is indicated by several obvious resemblances, such as mit, "father", and mati, "mother", and many others which are less obvious. For instance the Sanskrit svan, "dog", is cognate with the Greek κόνος, the Latin canis, the German Hund, and the English hound, the Germanic h representing an original k. The Sanskrit cakra is related to the word with the same meaning in English, wheel, both of which originated from a word pronounced something like hvekulo, which was also the ancestor of the Greek κύκω, the Latin circus, and the Old English hweogol, from which our word "wheel" is derived. Many hundreds of relationships of this kind, at first not obvious, have been established with virtual certainty.

The reader with a slight knowledge of Latin or Greek will immediately recognize the relationship between their verbal systems and that of Sanskrit. Thus the present tense of the Sanskrit verb as "to be", is declined in singular and plural as follows:

Asmi, "I am"; smas, "we are";
asi, "thou art"; stha, "you are";
asti, "he is"; santi, "they are".

Vedic Sanskrit is in many respects closer than any other Indo-European language to the parent tongue or tongues, and it was the discovery of Sanskrit which enabled Bopp, Rask, and other scholars of the first half of the last century to establish a clear relationship between the languages of the Indo-European group and to develop the science of comparative philology.

The earliest surviving form of Sanskrit, that of the Rg Veda, bears about the same relation to the classical tongue as does Homeric to classical Greek. At all its stages Sanskrit is a language of many inflexions, but the Vedas contain numerous forms which
later went out of use. The verb is of a complexity rivalling the Greek, with a bewildering array of voices and moods, later much simplified. The Vedic noun, as in later Sanskrit, has eight cases, and both verb and noun have dual numbers.

A striking feature of Vedic Sanskrit is the tonic accent. Every important word had an accented syllable, which was not necessarily stressed, but on which the voice rose in pitch, as in classical Greek. The tonic accent of a Sanskrit word is, with exceptions due to the special rules of the languages, the same as in the cognate Greek word.

Sanskrit and most of the languages derived from it are characterized by the presence of aspirated consonants. Thus $k$, pronounced without appreciable emission of breath, is to the Indian quite a different sound from the aspirated $kh$, which is pronounced with a strong breathing, rather like the first sound of the English word $come$. To the average European, the difference is hardly noticeable. The distinction goes back to the Indo-Europeans, and was made in classical Greek, though in Greek the aspirate letters θ, ϕ and χ had lost their original pronunciation before the beginning of the Christian era. Another phonetic characteristic of Vedic Sanskrit, also surviving to modern times, is the series of "retroflex" or "cerebral" consonants, $t$, $th$, $d$, $dh$, and $n$. These to the Indian are quite different from the "dentals", $t$, $th$, etc., though the European finds them hard to distinguish without practice. The retroflex sounds are not Indo-European, and were borrowed very early from the indigenous inhabitants of India, either proto-Australoid or Dravidian. A further feature of the phonetics of Sanskrit is the predominance of the vowels $a$ and $ā$. Vedic is a fine language, capable of vigorous and noble expression. On p. 511 we quote two verses of the Vedic hymns in the original, which will give the reader some idea of its sound.

After the composition of the $Ṛg Veda$ Sanskrit developed considerably. In the early centuries of the 1st millennium B.C. old inflexions disappeared, and the grammar was somewhat simplified, though still remaining very complex. New words, mostly borrowed from non-Āryan sources, were introduced, while old words were forgotten, or lost their original meanings. In these circumstances doubts arose as to the true pronunciation and meaning of the older Vedic texts, though it was generally thought that unless they were recited with complete accuracy they would have no magical effectiveness, but would bring ruin on the reciter. Out of the need to preserve the purity of the Vedas India developed the sciences of phonetics and grammar. The oldest Indian linguistic text, Yāska's $Nirukta$, explaining obsolete Vedic words, dates from the 5th century B.C., and followed
much earlier work in the linguistic field. Pāṇini’s great grammar, the Aṣṭādhyāyi ("Eight Chapters"), was probably composed towards the end of the 4th century B.C. With Pāṇini the language had virtually reached its classical form, and it developed little thenceforward, except in its vocabulary.

By this time the sounds of Sanskrit had been analysed with an accuracy never again reached in linguistic study until the 19th century. One of ancient India’s greatest achievements is her remarkable alphabet, commencing with the vowels and followed by the consonants, all classified very scientifically according to their mode of production, in sharp contrast to the haphazard and inadequate Roman alphabet, which has developed organically for three millennia. It was only on the discovery of Sanskrit by the West that a science of phonetics arose in Europe.

The great grammar of Pāṇini, which effectively stabilized the Sanskrit language, presupposes the work of many earlier grammarians. These had succeeded in recognizing the root as the basic element of a word, and had classified some 2,000 monosyllabic roots which, with the addition of prefixes, suffixes and inflexions, were thought to provide all the words of the language. Though the early etymologists were correct in principle, they made many errors and false derivations, and started a precedent which produced interesting results in many branches of Indian thought (p. 88).

Though its fame is much restricted by its specialized nature, there is no doubt that Pāṇini’s grammar is one of the greatest intellectual achievements of any ancient civilization, and the most detailed and scientific grammar composed before the 19th century in any part of the world. The work consists of over 4,000 grammatical rules, couched in a sort of shorthand, which employs single letters or syllables for the names of the cases, moods, persons, tenses, etc. in which linguistic phenomena are classified. The great terseness of Pāṇini’s system makes his work very difficult to follow without preliminary study and a suitable commentary. Later Indian grammars are mostly commentaries on Pāṇini, the chief being the "Great Commentary" (Mahābhāṣya) of Patañjali (2nd century B.C.) and the "Banaras Commentary" (Kāśikā Vṛtti) of Jayāditya and Vāmana (7th century A.D.).

Some later grammarians disagreed with Pāṇini on minor points, but his grammar was so widely accepted that no writer or speaker of Sanskrit in courtly or brāhmaṇic circles dared seriously infringe it. With Pāṇini the language was fixed, and could only develop within the framework of his rules. It was from the time of Pāṇini onwards that the language began to be called Sanskrita, "perfected" or
"refined", as opposed to the Prākritas ("natural"), the popular dialects which had developed naturally.

Pāṇinian Sanskrit, though simpler than Vedic, is still a very complicated language. Every beginner finds great difficulty in surmounting Pāṇini's rules of euphonic combination (sandhi), the elaboration of tendencies present in the language even in Vedic times. Every word of a sentence is affected by its neighbours. Thus na-avadat ("he did not say") becomes nāvadat, but na-uvāca (with the same meaning) becomes novāca; Rāmas-uvāca ("Rāma said") becomes Rāma uvāca, and Rāmas-avadat becomes Rāmo 'avadat; but Haris-avadat ("Hari said") becomes Harir avadat. There are many rules of this kind, which were even artificially imposed on the Rg Veda, so that the reader must often disentangle the original words to find the correct metre.

Pāṇini, in standardizing Sanskrit, probably based his work on the language as it was spoken in the North-West. Already the lingua franca of the priestly class, it gradually became that of the governing class also. The Mauryas, and most Indian dynasties until the Guptas, used Prākrit for their official pronouncements. The first important dynasty to use Sanskrit was that of the Śakas of Ujjain, and the inscription of Rudradāman at Girnar (p. 63) is the earliest written Sanskrit document we possess, with the exception of a few inscriptions which are brief and unimportant.

As long as it is spoken and written a language tends to develop, and its development is generally in the direction of simplicity. Owing to the authority of Pāṇini, Sanskrit could not develop freely in this way. Some of his minor rules, such as those relating to the use of tenses indicating past time, were quietly ignored, and writers took to using imperfect, perfect and aorist indiscriminately; but Pāṇini’s rules of inflexion had to be maintained. The only way in which Sanskrit could develop away from inflexion was by building up compound nouns to take the place of the clauses of the sentence.

In the Vedic and Epic literature compound nouns are common enough, but they are usually of only two or three members, like the English "houseboat", or "blackbird". In classical Sanskrit, on the other hand, they may have as many as twenty or thirty components. Earlier classical poets such as Kālidāsa are comparatively restrained in their use of compound words, though even in poetry compounds of six elements are not uncommon; the earliest royal panegyrics in Sanskrit employ long compounds. For instance the emperor Samudra Gupta is referred to as "binding together the whole world by displaying the valour of his arm and by [accepting] acts of service [from other kings], such as paying personal homage, the presentation of gifts
of maidens, and soliciting his charter, sealed with the Garuda-
seal, to confirm them in possession of their territories" in a single
word of twenty components. This remarkable use of long com-
pounds may be due to the influence of Dravidian speech on the lan-
guage, for early Tamil has few inflexions, and its words are put
together in concatenations without definite indication of their re-
relationship. If the elements of a Sanskrit compound word are thought of
as separate words, as in such an English phrase as "my top right-
hand waistcoat pocket" which in Sanskrit would be treated as a
single compound, the new constructions of the classical period become
intelligible.

With the growth of long compounds Sanskrit also developed a
taste for long sentences. The prose works of Bāna and Subandhu,
written in the 7th century, and the writings of many of their suc-
cessors, contain single sentences covering two or three pages of type.
To add to these difficulties writers adopted every conceivable verbal
trick, until Sanskrit literature became one of the most ornate and
artificial in the world.

The interest in language which India had shown from the earliest
times continued in the medieval period. A number of valuable
"dictionaries" survive from this time; these are not comparable to
the alphabetically arranged dictionaries of the West, but rather to
such works as Roget's Thesaurus. They contain lists of words
of approximately the same meaning or used in similar contexts,
sometimes with brief definitions, the whole arranged in simple verse.
The most famous lexicographer, and the earliest whose work has
survived, was Amarasiṃha, by tradition a contemporary of Kālidāsa.
Another form of dictionary, more akin to our own, was the list of
homonyms, classifying words with more than one meaning.

Indian interest in language spread to philosophy, and there was
considerable speculation about the relations of a word and the thing it
represented. The Mīmāṃsā school (p. 329f), perpetuating the verbal
mysticism of the later Vedic period, maintained that every word was
the reflexion of an ideal prototype, and that its meaning was eternal
and inherent in it. Its opponents, especially the logical school of
Nyāya (p. 325), supported the view that the relation of word and
meaning was purely conventional. Thus the controversy was similar
to that between the Realists and Nominalists in medieval Europe.

Classical Sanskrit was probably never spoken by the masses, but on
the other hand it was never wholly a dead language. As the official
tongue of church and state it was read and spoken by the upper classes,

* Aima-nivedana-kany-opāya-dāna-garutmad-ahā-sva-vijaya-bhakti-lāsana-yakṣ-ādy-
upāya-svāt-hri-bāhu-vitra-śravaka-dharṣi-bandhaya.
and was understood to some extent by many of the lower orders. It served as a lingua franca for the whole of India and even today learned brähmans from the opposite ends of the land, meeting at a place of pilgrimage, will converse in Sanskrit and understand one another perfectly, though there are local differences in pronunciation.

Prākrits and Pāli

The language of the Rg Veda was already rather archaic when the hymns were composed, and the ordinary Āryan tribesman spoke a simpler tongue, more closely akin to classical Sanskrit. In the Veda itself there is evidence of dialectal differences. By the time of the Buddha the masses were speaking languages which were much simpler than Sanskrit. These were the Prākrits, of which several dialects have been attested.

The everyday speech of ancient India has been preserved for us largely through the unorthodox religions, whose earliest scriptures were composed in languages approximating to those spoken by the people. Most inscriptions of pre-Guptan times, notably the great series of Aśokan edicts, are in Prākrit, and the women and humbler characters of the Sanskrit drama are made to speak in formalized Prākrit of various dialects. A few works of secular literature were composed in Prākrit. Thus there is much material for reconstructing the popular languages.

Prākrits were much simpler than Sanskrit both in sound and grammar. Except for certain combinations which were easy to pronounce, such as doubled consonants, or compounds of which a nasal letter was the first member, groups of consonants were drastically simplified. Those at the ends of words disappeared, and in some dialects even single consonants in the middle of words were omitted. The diphthongs ai and au of Sanskrit vanished, as did the old vowels r and l, the correct pronunciation of which was almost forgotten very early. In one dialect, Māgadhī, r regularly became l, giving lājā for rājā. The rules of euphonic combination were practically ignored, and the dual number disappeared, while the inflexions of the noun and verb were much reduced.

One very important early Prākrit was Pāli, which became the language of the Sthaviravādin Buddhists. Buddha probably taught in Māgadhī, but as his doctrines spread over India they were adapted to the local dialects. The language chosen by the Sthaviravādins was a Western one, probably spoken in the region of Sānchī and Ujjayinī. Pāli, which is still the religious language of the Buddhists of Ceylon, Burma and South-East Asia, seems to look back rather to Vedic than to classical Sanskrit.
Māgadhī was the official language of the Mauryan court, and the edicts of Aśoka were composed in it, though the language in which they are inscribed in different parts of India is evidently affected by local vernaculars. A later hybrid Māgadhī, somewhat influenced by the Western Prākrits and usually known as Ārđha-māgadhī ("Half Māgadhī"), became the sacred language of the Jainas, and a large literature was written in it.

Other important Prākrits were Śaursenī, spoken originally in the western part of modern Uttar Pradesh, and Māhāraśṭrī, spoken in the north-western Deccan. Śaursenī was particularly used in drama, for the speech of women and respectable people of the lower orders. Māhāraśṭrī was a literary language, especially popular for lyric song. There were several other Prākrits of lesser importance. By the time of the Guptas the Prākrits were standardized and had lost their local character. The vernaculars had already developed beyond them. What Pāṇini did for Sanskrit others did for the Prākrits, and they began to bear little resemblance to the languages actually spoken. Dramatists, employing various Prākrits by convention, thought first in Sanskrit, and produced their Prākrit passages by following mechanically the rules for conversion from one language to another as laid down by the grammarians.

Another stage in the development of the Indo-Āryan languages was Apabhraṃśa ("falling away"), a vernacular of Western India which achieved literary form in the Middle Ages and was used by Jaina writers in Gujarāt and Rājasthān for the composition of poetry. Its chief characteristic is the further reduction of inflexions, which are in part replaced by postpositions, as in modern Indian languages. A similar degenerate Prākrit was used in Bengal by a few late Buddhist poets, and is the ancestor of modern Bengālī.

The next stage saw the development of the modern languages of North India and is outside the scope of this work, although the earliest of their literature is little later than the end of our period. One Indo-Āryan vernacular, however, had a long history behind it by this time—this was Sinhalese, the development of which can be traced in inscriptions and literature from the 2nd century B.C. down to the present day. The prākritic dialect spoken by the early settlers of Ceylon was already far removed from the original Sanskrit. Influenced by the local speech, and also by Tamil, Sinhalese developed rapidly and independently. Very early the aspirated letters, characteristic of most Indo-Āryan languages, were forgotten. Vowels were shortened, and the short vowels ī and ō, absent in most Indo-Āryan languages, appeared, as well as a wholly new vowel, ā, rather like that in the English hat. Many words were borrowed
from the aboriginals and the Tamils. By the beginning of the Christian era Sinhalese was no longer a Prākrit, but a distinct language. Surviving Sinhalese literature dates from the 9th century A.D., but it is certain that there was much earlier work which is now lost.

**Dravidian Languages**

While the modern Indo-Āryan languages, with the exception of Sinhalese, had not found literary expression at the time of the Muslim invasion, the Dravidian languages had been flourishing for centuries. Four of these tongues—Tamil, Canarese, Telegu and Malayālam—have distinctive scripts and written literatures. Of these Tamil is spoken in the south, from Cape Comorin to Madras, Canarese in Mysore and parts of Andhra Pradesh, Telegu from Madras northwards to the borders of Orissā and Malayālam in Kerala. Tamil is certainly the oldest of these languages, with a literature going back to the early centuries A.D.

Some authorities believe that the Dravidian languages are remotely affiliated to the Finno-Ugrian group, which includes Finnish and Hungarian. If this is the case it involves interesting corollaries concerning prehistoric race movements, but the hypothesis is not certain. Dravidian is virtually an independent group of languages with a distinctive character. Its sound system is rich in retroflex consonants, which give it a crisp character, and its varied vowels (including ē and ə, not present in Sanskrit) distinguish it from the northern languages, where the vowels a and ā predominate. Like Sanskrit it has a complicated system of euphonic combination. It does not recognize the aspirated consonants of Indo-Āryan languages—by the peculiar phonetic laws of Tamil, Sanskrit bhūta (“ghost”) becomes in Tamil pūda.

Tamil is not inflected, in the sense that Sanskrit is, but the relations of one word with another, and the number, person and tense of verbs, are shown by suffixes, which may be piled up one upon another indefinitely. Sanskrit began to affect the language very early, and by the Middle Ages the learned looked on their suffixes as nominal and verbal endings, on the analogy of Sanskrit. In the oldest texts, however, these suffixes are sparingly used, and related words are juxtaposed in clusters, with few if any indications of their relationship one to another—a system similar to the great compound words of Sanskrit, and giving much difficulty to all but the expert.

The earliest Tamil literature contains comparatively few Sanskrit loan-words, and those that it does contain are generally adapted to the Tamil phonetic system. The gradual growth of Āryan influence resulted in the borrowing of many more words in the Middle Ages,
often in their correct Sanskrit form. Telegu and Canarese, which are spoken further north, are naturally even more strongly influenced by Sanskrit. Canarese first appears in inscriptions at the end of the 6th century, and its earliest surviving literature goes back to the 9th. Telegu did not become a literary language until the 12th century and only became really important under the Vijayanagara Empire, of which it was the court language. Malayalam, very closely akin to Tamil, was a separate language by the 11th century.

Writing

We have seen that the people of the Harappā Culture had a script, which cannot be deciphered. From the time of the fall of Harappā, that is before 1550 B.C., to the middle of the 3rd century B.C. no Indian written material has survived. References to writing occur in the Pāli scriptures of the Buddhists and in the Sūtra literature, but there is no clear mention of it in the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas or Upaniṣads. This negative evidence, however, is not wholly conclusive, and in the later Vedic period some form of script may have been used by merchants. The Aśokan inscriptions, which are the earliest important written documents of India, are engraved in two scripts almost perfectly adapted to the expression of Indian sounds. It is generally thought that these scripts had many years, perhaps many centuries, of development before the days of Aśoka.

The most important of the Aśokan scripts, used everywhere in India except the North-West, was Brāhmī, about the origin of which two theories exist. Most Indian authorities would now maintain that the script was derived from that of Harappā. Many Europeans and some Indians believe that it was derived from a Semitic script. The first theory, tentatively put forward by Sir Alexander Cunningham and elaborated by the Assyriologist Professor S. Langdon,3 has many difficulties. Until we know the pronunciation of the 270 Harappā signs we cannot be sure that the dozen or so letters of the Brāhmī script which somewhat resemble them are derived from them, and with so many Harappā signs it is unlikely that there should be no resemblances at all. Similarities between Brāhmī and some early North Semitic scripts are perhaps more striking, especially as the latter offer only twenty-two letters to choose from,4 but the resemblances are still not strong enough to be altogether convincing, and the whole problem needs reopening.

Brāhmī (fig. xxv) is normally read from left to right, as are European scripts, while the Semitic scripts are read from right to left. There is a very defective series of Aśokan inscriptions at Yeṣṣagudi in
Thus speaks the King, Dear to the Gods, Priyadarśi. When I had been consecrated twenty-six years I ordered this inscription of Righteousness (Dharma) to be engraved. Both this world and the other are hard to reach, except by great Love of Righteousness, great self-examination, great obedience (to Righteousness), great respect (for Righteousness), great energy. But through my leadership respect for Righteousness and love of Righteousness have grown and will grow from day to day. Moreover my officers, of high, low and medium grades, follow it and apply it, sufficiently to make the wavering accept it; the officers on the frontiers do likewise. For this is (my) rule: government by Righteousness, administration according to Righteousness, gratification (of my subjects) by Righteousness, protection by Righteousness.
Andhra Pradesh, of which some parts are boustrophedon (reading alternately left to right and right to left). Moreover a very early Śiṁhalese inscription and an early coin from Eran in Madhya Pradesh are read from right to left. These facts would suggest that this was the original direction of Brāhmī, though the data are insufficient to prove the case conclusively. But this is no evidence of its origin, since it is believed that the Harappā script was also read from right to left.

Whatever its ultimate origin Brāhmī is so skilfully adapted to the sounds of Indian languages that its development must have been at least in part deliberate. In the form in which we have it it is the work not of merchants but of brāhmaṇs or other learned men who knew something of the Vedic science of phonetics. It may have begun as a mercantile alphabet, suggested by the shapes of Semitic letters or by vague memories of the Harappā script, but by the time of Aśoka, though still not completely perfect, it was the most scientific script of the world.

The words of Semitic languages, based largely on roots of three consonants modified by internal vowel changes, need few indications of vowels to prevent ambiguity, and until comparatively late times vowels were marked only at the beginning of words, and then not perfectly. The Greeks, when they borrowed the Phœnician alphabet, adapted it to express vowels other than a by the introduction of new signs. The Indians, on the other hand, expressed their vowels by the modification of the basic letter, which was looked on as containing an inherent short a. Thus the Brāhmī letter ṭ is not k, but ka. Other vowels were indicated by ticks attached to the top or bottom of the letter, thus: ṭ ṫ kū, ṭ ṫ ku, ṭ ṫ ku, ṭ ṫ ke, ṭ ṫ ko. Two consonants together were expressed by placing one under the other; thus ṭ ka and ṭ ya combined to form ṭ kya. No word in Prākrit ends with a consonant other than the final n, which was expressed by a dot, thus: ṭ kaṁ. In writing Sanskrit, at a later time, a consonant ending a sentence or line of poetry was marked by a diagonal stroke thus ṭ k. The words of sentence were not generally divided, the final letter of one being combined with the initial letter of the other; with some modification this is still the practice in the case of Sanskrit, though not of the modern languages, and it adds to the difficulties of the language for the beginner.

Variations of the Brāhmī script are evident even at the time of Aśoka. In the following centuries these differences developed further, until distinct alphabets evolved. Before the beginning of the Christian era engravers in the north, no doubt following the custom of scribes, began to add little ticks (called in Western
Fig. xxvi.—Kharoṣṭhī Script
From an inscribed silver leaf, Takṣašīlā. 1st c. a.d.

Transcript (Reading the script from right to left)
(Line 1) Sa 100 20 10 4 1 1 A-ya-sa A-qa-ḍa-sa ma-sa-sa di-va-se 10 4 1. I-dā di-va-se pra-di-sta-vi-ta Bha-ga-va-to dha-tu-(o) U-ra-(sa)-
Dha-ma-ra-

Translation.
In the year of Aya 136, in the month Ḡaḍha on the 15th day. On this day the relics of the Lord (Buddha) were deposited by Urasaka the Bactrian, the son of Ḡṛptabhṛta, a citizen of the town of Nōaca. These relics of the Lord were deposited by him in his own Bodhisattva chapel of the Dharmaśākāja (Stūpa) of Takṣašīlā, for the blessing of health for the great King, the King over Kings, the Son of the Gods, the Kuśaṇa, and in reverence to all the Buddhas, in reverence to all the Pratyekas Buddhas, in reverence to the Arhanta, in reverence to all beings, in reverence to his mother and father, in reverence to his friends, his advisers, his kinsmen, and those of common blood, and for the boon of health and Nirvāṇa for himself. May right renunciation be widespread.

* The correct interpretation of this word is much disputed. † See p. 276. ‡ See p. 277.
printing terminology serifs) to the letters, and to employ flourishes of various kinds. The tendency to ornamentation increased with the centuries, until in the late medieval period the serifs at the tops of letters were joined together in an almost continuous line, to form the Nāgarī ("City" alphabet, also called Devanāgarī, "Script of the City of the Gods"), in which Sanskrit, Prākrit, Hindī and Marāṭhī are written at the present day. Local variations led to the development of individual scripts in the Panjāb, Bengal, Orissā, Gujarāt and elsewhere.

Meanwhile in the Deccan scripts had been growing even more florid. In Central India in the 5th and 6th centuries a script evolved which substituted square boxes for the serifs of the northern scripts, and introduced several other elaborations. The scripts of the Southern Deccan and Ceylon became more and more circular in form, until in the Middle Ages they approximated to those of the present day. The Tamils, on the other hand, evolved an angular script known as Grantha, which is still sometimes used in the Tamil country for writing Sanskrit, and from which the modern Tamil alphabet is derived. Thus by the end of our period the alphabets of India differed little from those of today.

It was from India, especially from the south, that the people of South-East Asia learnt the art of writing. The earliest surviving South-East Asian inscriptions, found in Borneo, Java and Malaya and dating from the 4th or 5th centuries, are in fairly correct Sanskrit, and in a script resembling that of the early Pallavas. Though superficially very different, every South-East Asian script, except of course the Arabic and Roman scripts in which Malay and Indonesian are written, can be traced back to Brāhmī. Scripts of Indian type have been used as far eastwards as the Philippine Islands.

The origin of the other Aśokan script, called Kharoṣṭhī (a strange term, meaning "Ass-lip") (fig. xxvi), is not in doubt. It was certainly derived from the Aramaic alphabet, which was widely used in Achaemenid Persia, and was also known in North-West India. Many Kharoṣṭhī letters closely resemble Aramaic, and, like Aramaic, the alphabet is read from right to left. Kharoṣṭhī was adapted to the sounds of Indian languages by the invention of new letters and the use of vowel marks, which were lacking in Aramaic. It is generally thought that Kharoṣṭhī was adapted under the influence of Brāhmī, but the priority of the two scripts is not absolutely certain. Kharoṣṭhī was little used in India proper after the 5th century A.D., but it survived some centuries longer in Central Asia, where many Prākrit documents in Kharoṣṭhī script have been discovered. Later, Kharoṣṭhī was replaced in Central Asia by a form of the
Gupta alphabet, from which the present-day script of Tibet is derived.

The usual writing material was the leaf of the talipot palm (tālapatra, in Tamil ṭōlai), dried, smoothed, sized and cut into strips. To form a book a number of such strips was held loosely together by a cord passed through a hole in the centre of the leaf, or, in the case of large books, by two cords at either end. The book was usually strengthened by wooden covers, which were often lacquered and painted (pl. XLb). Palm leaves are still sometimes used as writing material in the outlying parts of South India. In the Himalayan districts, where supplies of dried palm leaf were difficult to obtain, it was replaced by the inner bark of the birch tree, which, carefully pared and smoothed, served the purpose excellently. As well as these materials, sized cotton and silk, and thin slips of wood or bamboo were also used, and important documents were engraved on copper plates (pl. XLVIIIb). Paper, believed to have been invented in China in the early 2nd century A.D., may have been known in North India and it was certainly widely used in Central Asia.6

In most of India ink made from lampblack or charcoal, applied with a reed pen, was the usual writing medium. In the South, the letters were generally scratched on the palm-leaf with a stylus, and the leaf was then rubbed over with finely powdered lampblack. This system of writing gave the letters a fine sharp outline and allowed the use of very small script; it probably encouraged the development of the angular forms of the Tamil alphabet.*

II. LITERATURE

Vedic Literature

We have already referred to the Four Vedas, the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads in many contexts, and have given extracts from them (pp. 236–58). In their literary aspect much of this literature is of high merit, especially some hymns of the Rg Veda and some parts of the early Upaniṣads; much, on the other hand, is dry and monotonous, or can only be appreciated after a considerable effort of the imagination.

The 1028 hymns of the Rg Veda are the work of many authors and show great variation of style and merit. Though their composition may have covered several centuries, even the earliest of these poems is the product of a long tradition, composed according to a strict metrical scheme† and a settled literary convention.

* For further information on the Indian alphabet see Appendix, p. 508ff.
† For notes on the prosody of ancient Indian poetry see Appendix, p. 510ff.
The collection is divided into ten "circles" (mandala) or books. Of these, books ii to vii are ascribed to individual families of seers, and contain the earliest hymns; books i, viii, and x are later, especially parts of x, while the ninth book was compiled by extracting the hymns to the god Soma from the other parts of the Rg Veda. The hymns contain many repetitions and the majority have a general sameness of outlook. Owing to their archaic language and the obscurity of their allusions many passages are not fully understood. The reader will already have obtained some idea of the style of the Rg Veda, as far as it can be conveyed in fairly literal translation, from the passages we have quoted. We add here a few further translations of hymns of special literary merit.

Our first translation describes Indra's fight with the cloud-dragon Vṛtra. The hymn evidently refers to a well-known legend, which has since been forgotten, but which was probably a variant of the creation myth of Mesopotamia, in which the god Marduk slays the demon of chaos, Tiamat, and creates the universe. Here Indra's function as a rain-maker is also in evidence, and if the story was originally borrowed from Mesopotamia it had evidently developed far from its prototype. Interesting is the fleeting reference to Indra's fear, from which it would seem that his battle with the dragon did not go all his own way. The last verse is evidently an addition by another hand.

"Let me proclaim the valiant deeds of Indra,
the first he did, the wielder of the thunder,
when he slew the dragon and let loose the waters,
and pierced the bellies of the mountains.

"He slew the dragon lying on the mountain,
for Tvaṣṭra made him a heavenly thunderbolt.
The waters suddenly, like bellowing cattle,
descended and flowed on, down to the ocean.

"In his strength he chose the soma—
from three cups he drank the essence.
The Generous seized his thunderbolt,
and smote the firstborn of dragons.

"When, Indra, you slew the firstborn of dragons,
and frustrated the arts of the sorcerers,
creating sun and heaven and dawn,
you found no enemy to withstand you.

* The Vedic Vulcan.
"Indra slew Vṛtra, and Vyāmsa, stronger than Vṛtra,
with his thunderbolt, with his mighty weapon.
Like the branches of a tree felled by the axe
the dragon lay strewn over the earth.

"Like an enraged coward he called a challenge
    to the great hero, the strong's oppressor, charging.
But he did not escape the force of his blows—
    the foe of Indra crushed the clouds together [in falling].

"Footless and handless, he still gave Indra battle,
    until the thunderbolt struck him hard on his back.
The bullock sought to be match for the bull,
    but Vṛtra lay, his members scattered afar.

"The waters, flowing for man's good, pass over him,
    as he lies thus, broken like a reed.
Beneath the waters which he had encompassed
    in his great might, Vṛtra the serpent lay.

"The strength of the mother of Vṛtra was exhausted,
    and Indra bore away her weapon.
The mother lay above, the son below.
    Dānu lay like a cow beside her calf.

"Fallen in the midst of water-courses,
    never pausing, never resting,
floods overwhelm the hidden corpse of Vṛtra.
    In a long darkness lay the foe of Indra.

"Lorded by Dāsas and guarded by the dragon
    the waters lay, penned in as cows by a Pāni.
When the opening of the waters was closed up
    the slayer of Vṛtra threw it open.

"O Indra, you became a wreath of vapour*
    when he impaled you on his lance. Alone
you won the cows, hero, you won the soma,
    and you let loose the Seven Streams to flow.

"Thunder and lightning availed him nothing,
    nor the mist he scattered abroad, nor hail.
When Indra and the dragon fought he conquered,
    as he, the Generous, will in future conquer.

"And what avenger of the dragon did you see,
    Indra, as fear entered your heart when you had killed him,
when you crossed over nine and ninety streams,
    as a frightened hawk crosses the skies?
* Literally "a horse's tail", probably implying a wisp of cloud.
"Indra is king of all that moves or rests,
of tame and fierce, the wielder of the thunder.
He is the king of mortals, whom he rules,
encircling them as a wheel's rim the spokes."

A number of hymns show deep feeling for nature, the most famous of these being the hymns to Uṣas, the goddess of dawn; but the hymns to Uṣas are perhaps less beautiful than the single hymn to Rātri, the personified night.

"The goddess Night has looked abroad
with her eyes, everywhere drawing near.
She has put all her glories on.

"The immortal goddess now has filled
wide space, its depths and heights.
Her radiance drives out the dark.

"Approaching, the goddess has expelled
her sister Dawn.
Now darkness also disappears.

"And so you have drawn near to us,
who at your coming have come home,
as birds to their nest upon the tree.

"The clans have now gone home to rest,
home the beasts, and home the birds,
home even the hawks who lust for prey.

"Guard us from the she-wolf and the wolf,
and guard us from the thief, O Night,
and so be good for us to pass.

"For darkness, blotting out, has come
near me, black and palpable.
O Dawn, dispel it like my debts.

"I have offered my hymn as a cow
is offered, Daughter of Heaven. O Night,
accept it, as a victor praise."

Similarly sensitive to the moods of nature is the little hymn to Āraṇyāṇi, the elusive spirit of the forest.

* The exact meanings of several words and phrases of this hymn are quite uncertain. In translating I have given the sense which seems to me most probable, and filled out the elliptical Sanskrit to make the meaning clearer.
"Lady of the Forest! Lady of the Forest!
who seem to vanish from sight in the distance,
why do you never come to the village?
Surely you are not afraid of men!

"When the grasshopper replies
to the distant lowing of cattle,
as though to the sound of tinkling bells
the Lady of the Forest makes merry.

"Sometimes you catch a glimpse of her, and think it is cattle grazing,
or a house, far away,
and at evening you hear the Lady of the Forest
like the distant sound of moving wagons.

"Her voice is as the sound of a man calling his cattle,
or as the crash of a felled tree.
If you stay in the forest in the evening,
you will hear her like a far voice crying.

"But the Lady of the Forest will not slay
unless an enemy draws near.
She eats the sweet wild fruits,
and then she rests wherever she will.

"Now I have praised the Lady of the Forest,
who is perfumed with balm and fragrant,
who is well fed although she tills not,
the mother of all things of the wild."

A few Vedic hymns are by our standards primarily secular. Of these the "Gamester's Lament" is the most famous. Probably the poem was originally a spell to ensure success in gaming, addressed to the vibhīdaka nuts themselves. This was converted by an anonymous poet into a cautionary poem, which obtained a place in the Rg Veda on account of its reference to the god Sāvitṛ as attempting to reform the gamester.

"The dangling nuts, born where the wind blows the lofty tree,
delight me with their rolling on the board.
The cheering vibhīdaka has brought me joy,
like a draught of soma from Mount Mūjavant.

"She did not scold me, or lose her temper.
She was kind to my friends and me.
But because of a throw too high by one
I have rejected my loving wife."
"Her mother hates me; my wife repels me—
a man in trouble finds no one to pity him.
They say, 'I've no more use for a gambler
than for a worn-out horse put up for sale.'

"When the conquering die has got his possessions
others embrace the gamester's wife.
His father, his mother; his brothers say of him:
'We don't know him! Take him as a bondman!'

"I think to myself: 'I won't go with the others!
I'll stop behind when my friends go to play!'
But then the brown ones* raise their voices,
and off I go, like a mistress to her lover.

"The gambler goes to the hall of assembly.
'Shall I win?' he wonders. His body trembles.
The dice run counter to his hopes,
and give his opponent the lucky throws.

"The dice are armed with hooks and piercing,
they are deceptive, hot and burning.
Like children they give and take again, they strike back at their
conquerors.
They are sweetened with honey through the magic they work on
the gambler.

"They play in a troop of three times fifty.
Like the god Sāvitr, they are true to their laws.
They will not bend to the wrath of the mighty,
and even a king bows low before them.

"The dice roll down, the dice leap upwards,
unarmed they withstand the man with arms.
They are heavenly coals, strewn over the board,
and though they are cool they burn up the heart.

"The forsaken wife of the gambler sorrows,
and the mother of the son who wanders afar.
In debt, in fear, in need of money,†
he goes by night to the house of others.

* i.e. the vibhūdākā nūta, loosely translated "dice". See p. 290f.
† Literally "wealth". It is almost certain that there was no coined money in India
at the time of this poem's composition (p. 222).
"The gambler grieves when he sees a woman,  
another man's wife, in their pleasant home.  
In the morning he yokes the chestnut horses.  
In the evening he falls by the hearth, a beggar.

"So to the general of your great army,  
to him who is king, the chief of your host,  
I say, stretching out to him my ten fingers:  
'I risk my all! I am speaking the truth!'

"'Don't play with dice, but plough your furrow!  
Delight in your property, prize it highly!  
Look to your cattle and look to your wife,  
you gambler!' Thus noble Savitṛ tells me.

"So make friends with us, be kind to us!  
Do not force us with your fierce magic!  
May your wrath and hatred now come to rest!  
May no man fall into the snares of the brown ones!"\textsuperscript{19}

We need say little here of later Vedic literature. The Atharva Veda, in the main a monotonous collection of spells, contains a few poems of great merit. The prose Brāhmaṇas and the various recensions of the Yajur Veda are in general without any pretensions to literary qualities, though written in simple straightforward language, very different in style from Classical Sanskrit. Here and there legends are told in terse nervous prose, which gains in effectiveness from its austere economy. We give the story of Purūravas and Urvāṣī, which is told in the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa as part of the instructions for becoming a Gandharva (p. 240) by means of a magical sacrifice. The story is as old as the Rg Veda, for one hymn\textsuperscript{11} consists of a dialogue between the earthly lover and his heavenly mistress, and the verses quoted in the Brāhmaṇa version are taken from it. The story was very popular in later times, and was the subject of one of Kālidāsa's plays.

"The nymph Urvāṣī loved Purūravas the son of Iḍā. When she married him she said: 'You must embrace me three times a day, but never lie with me against my will. Moreover I must never see you naked, for this is the proper way to behave to us women!'

"She lived with him long, and she was with child by him, so long did she live with him. Then the Gandharvas said to one another: 'This Urvāṣī has been living too long among men! We must find a way to get her back!'

\textsuperscript{*} I.e. gambles with the brown nuts.
“She kept a ewe with two lambs tied to her bed, and the Gandharvas carried off one of the lambs. ‘They’re taking away my baby,’ she cried, ‘as though there were no warrior and no man in the place!’ Then they took away the second, and she cried out in the same way.

“Then he thought to himself: ‘How can the place where I am be without a warrior and a man?’ And, naked as he was, he leapt up after them, for he thought it would take too long to put on a garment.

“Then the Gandharvas produced a flash of lightning, and she saw him as clearly as if it were day—and she vanished. . . .

“Bitterly weeping, he wandered all over Kurukṣetra. There is a lake of lotuses there, called Anyatāḥplakṣā. He walked on its banks, and there were nympha swimming in it in the form of swans.

“And she noticed him, and said: ‘That’s the man with whom I lived!’ ‘Let us show ourselves to him,’ they said. ‘Very well’ she replied, and they appeared to him [in their true forms].

“Then he recognized her and entreated her:
‘O my wife, with mind so cruel,
 stay, let us talk together,
 for if our secrets are untold
 we shall have no joy in days to come!’ . . .

“Then she replied:
‘What use is there in my talking to you!
 I have passed like the first of dawns.
Purūravas, go home again!
 I am like the wind, that cannot be caught.’ . . .

“Mournfully Purūravas said:
‘Today your lover will perish,
 he will go to the furthest distance and never come back.
He will lie in the lap of disaster,
 and fierce wolves will devour him.’ . . .

“She replied:
‘Purūravas do not die! do not go away!
 do not let the fierce wolves devour you!
Friendship is not to be found in women,
 For they have hearts like half-tamed jackals!’

“And then she said to him:
‘When I dwelt in disguise in the land of mortals and passed the nights of four autumns,
 I ate a little ghee once a day,
 and now I have had quite enough!’ . . .

“But her heart pitied him, and she said: ‘Come on the last evening of the year, then, when your son is born, you shall lie one night with me.’
"He came on the last night of the year, and there stood a golden palace. They told him to enter; and brought her to him.

"She said: 'Tomorrow the Gandharvas will grant you a boon and you must make your choice.' He said: 'You choose for me!' She answered: 'Say, 'Let me become one of you!'"

"In the morning the Gandharvas gave him a boon, and he asked: 'Let me become one of you.'

"'There is no fire among men,' they said, 'which is so holy that a man may become one of us by sacrificing with it.' So they put fire in a pan, and said: 'By sacrificing with this you will become one of us.'

"He took it and his son, and went homeward. On the way he left the fire in the forest and went to a village with the boy. When he came back the fire had vanished. In place of the fire was a pīpal tree and in place of the pan a mimosa. So he went back to the Gandharvas.

"'They said: 'For a year you must cook rice enough for four [every day]. Each time [you cook] you must put on the fire three logs of the pīpal anointed with ghee ... and the fire which is produced [at the end of the year] will be the fire [which will make you one of us]. But that is rather difficult,' they added, 'so you should make an upper firestick of pīpal wood and a lower one of mimosa wood, and the fire you get from them will be the fire [which will make you one of us]. But that too is rather difficult,' they added, 'so you must make both the upper and lower firestick of pīpal wood, and the fire you get from them will be the fire.'

"So he made an upper and a lower firestick of pīpal wood, and the fire he got from them was the fire [which would make him one of them]. He sacrificed with it and became a Gandharva."

The Upaniṣads rank high as literature, but their chief importance is religious and they have been sufficiently treated and quoted in that setting.

Epic Literature

The earliest Indian literature of a fundamentally secular character is found in the two great epics, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana, which, though worked over by a succession of priestly editors, give clear evidence of their origin as martial legends. Their religious importance lay at first in the royal sacrificial ritual, part of which involved telling stories of the heroes of the past. This put the martial ballads into the hands of the priesthood, who, in transmitting them, often altered their superficial character, and interpolated many long passages on theology, morals and statecraft.

Of the two epics the Mahābhārata is the more important. It contains over 90,000 stanzas, most of them of thirty-two syllables, and is therefore probably the longest single poem in the world's literature. Traditionally the author of the poem was the sage Vyāsa, who is said to
have taught it to his pupil Vaiśampāyana. The latter, according to tradition, recited it in public for the first time at a great sacrifice held by King Janamejaya, the great grandson of Arjuna, one of the heroes of the story. Stripped of its episodes and interpolations the poem tells of the great civil war in the kingdom of the Kurus, in the region about the modern Delhi, then known as Kurukṣetra.

The throne of the Kurus, whose capital was Hastināpura, fell to Dhrta-raises. But he was blind and therefore, according to custom, was not eligible to rule, so his younger brother Pāṇḍu became king. Soon Pāṇḍu, as a result of a curse, gave up the kingdom and retired to the Himalayas as a hermit with his two wives, leaving Dhrta-raises on the throne. When Pāṇḍu died his five sons, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, were still children, and were taken back to Hastināpura to be educated with the hundred sons of Dhrta-raises. When he came of age Yudhiṣṭhira was consecrated heir-apparent. But the sons of Dhrta-raises, led by the eldest, Duryodhana, resented the Pāṇḍavas, and plotted against them, though Duryodhana was not legally heir to the throne, owing to his father's blindness and the stop-gap nature of his rule. After foiling a number of plots against their lives the five brothers decided to leave the country, and travelled from one court to another as soldiers of fortune. At the court of the king of the Pañcīlas Arjuna won the Princess Draupadī in a svayamvara, and, to avoid strife, she became the joint wife of all five brothers. Here they met their great friend and helper, Kṛṣṇa, the chief of the Yādavas. Soon after this the blind Dhrta-raises recalled them, renounced the throne, and divided the kingdom between them and his own sons. The five brothers built a new capital at Indraprastha, not far from the modern Delhi.

But the sons of Dhrta-raises were not content with this settlement. Duryodhana invited Yudhiṣṭhira to a great gambling match. With the aid of his uncle Śakuni, who knew all the secrets of the dice, he won from Yudhiṣṭhira his whole kingdom, including his brothers and their joint wife. A compromise was arranged, whereby the five brothers and Draupadī agreed to go into banishment for thirteen years, spending the last year incognito, after which they were to receive back their kingdom.

At the end of the thirteenth year they declared themselves, and sent to Duryodhana demanding their kingdom according to his promise; but he returned no reply. So the brothers prepared for war. They had many friends among the kings of India, and were able to gather a great army together. Meanwhile the Kauravas (Duryodhana and his brothers) marshalled their own forces. The kings of all India, and even the Greeks, Bactrians and Chinese, took sides with one or other faction, and two enormous armies assembled on the plain of Kurukṣetra.

For eighteen days the battle raged, until at last no important chief was left alive but the five brothers and Kṛṣṇa. Yudhiṣṭhira was crowned king and for many years he and his brothers ruled peacefully and gloriously. At last Yudhiṣṭhira renounced the throne and installed Parikṣıt, the grandson of
Arjuna, in his place. With their joint wife the five brothers set out on foot for the Himālayas, where they climbed Mount Meru, and entered the City of the Gods.

If we ignore interpolations the style of the Mahābhārata is direct and vivid, though it contains many often repeated clichés and stock epithets, which are typical of traditional epic literature everywhere. The chief characters are delineated in very simple outline, but with an individuality which makes them real persons. The blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra is a weakling, anxious to do the right thing, but easily persuaded to evil. Of the five brothers the eldest, Yudhiṣṭhīra, is pious, righteous and gentle, but a little negative in character; Arjuna is the ideal knight, noble, generous and brave; while Bhīma is a rougher character, gluttonous and immensely strong, but not very intelligent, and completely lacking in guile. Draupadī, their wife, is a woman of spirit, who is not afraid to upbraid her five husbands on occasion. The villain Duryodhana and his associates are not painted in the blackest of colours, but have elements of nobility and courage in their characters.

Some of the interpolated episodes are of much merit, while others are of no literary value. The longest is the Śānti Parvan, a dissertation on statecraft and ethics, recited by Bhīṣma, the elder statesman of the Kuruš, as he lies dying on a pile of arrows after the great battle (p. 81). This has been treated elsewhere and has little merit as literature. The Bhagavat Gitā, the sermon of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna before the great battle, has already been quoted (pp. 303f, 343f). There are many other theological and ethical passages, as well as many narrative episodes. Some of the latter tell legends of the gods, but others are more or less secular, including the famous stories of Rāma and Sitā (p. 414f), Śakuntalā (p. 437ff), and Sāvitṛ (p. 182). The longest narrative episode is the story of Nala and Damayantī, told to Yudhiṣṭhīra during his exile to convince him of the evils of gambling. It tells how King Nala won Princess Damayantī at a svayamvara, at which she chose him in preference to the gods themselves, and then lost his queen and his kingdom at a gambling tournament, to regain them both after many exciting adventures. This long story is probably as ancient as the main part of the epic, and is told in very simple verse. As a brief example of the Mahābhārata's narrative style we give the description of Damayantī's choice. Among the suitors at the svayamvara are four great gods, who, knowing that she is determined to choose Nala, have all taken his appearance, in the hope that she will choose one of them by mistake.
"Then, when the right time had come,
at the auspicious day and hour,
King Bhīma invited
the lords of earth to the bride-choice.

"When they heard, the lords of earth,
all sick at heart with love,
in haste assembled,
desiring Damayanti.

"Like great lions the kings entered
the hall, firmly founded,
with its splendid porch
and shining golden columns.

"There on their several thrones
the lords of earth sat down
all decked in fragrant garlands,
with bright gems in their ears.

"Their arms were thick
as iron bars,
shapely and smooth
as five-headed snakes.

"With lovely shining locks,
and well-formed noses, eyes and brows,
the faces of the kings were bright
as the stars in heaven.

"Then fair-faced Damayanti
entered the hall,
stealing with her splendour
the eyes and thoughts of the kings.

"When the glance of the noble
spectators fell on her limbs
there it was fixed,
and never wavered.

"Then, while the names of the kings
were being proclaimed,
the daughter of Bhīma saw
five men of the same form.

... ...

"Whichever of them she looked at
she recognized as Nala.
Wondering in her mind,
the fair one was filled with doubt.

"Of all the signs of godhead
that I learned from the elders
I see not even one
in those who are standing here.

"Thus thinking over and over,
and pondering again and again,
she resolved that the time had come
to take refuge in the gods.

"'I heard from the mouth of the swans
that Nala had chosen me as his bride,
and so, if that be true,
may the gods show him to me!' 

"'Never in word or deed
have I committed sin,
and so, if that be true,
may the gods show him to me!' 

"'The gods have ordained
the king of Nișadha to be my lord,
and so, if that be true,
may the gods show him to me!' 

"'May the great gods, the world-protectors
take on their own true form,
that I may recognize
the king of men, of good fame!' 

"When they heard Damayanta,
mournful and piteous
they did as she had asked.
and put on their true forms.

"She saw the four gods
sweatless, not blinking their eyelids;
their garlands fresh and free from dust,
not touching the ground with their feet.

"But the king of Nișadha had a shadow,
his garlands were faded,
his body bore dust and sweat,
and he blinked his eyelids.

"The modest long-eyed girl
seized the hem of his garment,
and on his shoulder she placed
the loveliest of garlands.

"She chose him for her lord,
she of the fair complexion,
and suddenly all the kings
together shouted and cheered.
"And all the gods and sages
thereupon cried bravo,
and shouted at the wonder,
praising Nala the king."

The second epic, the Rāmāyana, is rather different from the Mahābhārata in style and content. It is little more than a quarter of the size of the other epic, and of its seven books the first and the last are certainly later additions. The poem, like the Mahābhārata, contains interpolations, but they are much briefer and are mostly didactic. The main body of the poem gives the impression of being the work of a single hand, that of a poet whose style was based on that of the other epic, but showed some kinship to that of classical Sanskrit poetry.

Though the Rāmāyana does not contain so many archaic features as the Mahābhārata, and gives the general impression of being the later of the two, the Mahābhārata contains as an episode the story of Rāma, in a form which suggests that the editor of the final version of the Mahābhārata knew the Rāmāyana. The Mahābhārata as it is at present is probably later than the Rāmāyana, but its main narrative portions are appreciably earlier.

The traditional author of the Rāmāyana was the sage Vālmiki, a contemporary of its hero. In fact the legend was perhaps committed to verse in the form in which we have it, but excluding the first and last books, a little before the commencement of the Christian era. The central scene of the poem is Ayodhyā, the capital of the old kingdom of Kosala, and it evidently grew up in a milieu to the east of that of the Mahābhārata.

Daśaratha king of Kosala had by his three wives four sons named Rāma, Bharata, Laksmana, and Sātrughna. The four attended the court of King Janaka of Videha, where Rāma won the hand of Janaka's daughter, Sītā, at a great archery contest. Rāma and Sītā were married and for a time lived happily at the court of Daśaratha. (In this part of the story, contained in the first book of the epic, Rāma is explicitly described as an incarnation of the god Viṣṇu, and the original text has evidently been much added to and altered at a late period.)

When Daśaratha grew old he named Rāma as his heir; but his second queen, Kaikeyī, reminded her lord of a boon which he had promised her long ago, and demanded its fulfilment in the banishment of Rāma and the installation of her own son, Bharata, as heir apparent. Daśaratha and Bharata both demurred, but Rāma insisted on his father fulfilling his promise, and went into voluntary exile with Sītā and his brother Laksmana. When Daśaratha died Bharata took over the kingdom, but only as regent for the exiled Rāma.

Meanwhile Rāma, Sītā and Laksmana dwelt as hermits in the forest of
Danḍaka, where Rāma destroyed many demons who were harassing ascetics and villagers. Rāvana, the demon king of Lāṅkā (Ceylon), decided to avenge his fallen kinsmen, and, while Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were on a hunting expedition, came to their hermitage in the guise of an ascetic, seized Sītā, and carried her off to Lāṅkā in his aerial car (vimāna). The brothers sought far and wide for Sītā, and enlisted the help of Sugrīva, the king of the monkeys, and his general, the brave and loyal Hanumant. Hanumant went in search of Sītā, and, leaping over the straits, at last found her in Rāvana's palace. With the aid of a great army of monkeys Rāma built a causeway of stones across the sea to Lāṅkā. After a fierce battle Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and their allies slew Rāvana and his hosts, and rescued Sītā.

Sītā had been treated with respect by her captor, and had in no way yielded to his blandishments. But she had dwelt under the roof of another man, and Rāma, in accordance with the Sacred Law, could do nothing but repudiate her. She threw herself on a funeral pyre, but the fire-god Agni refused to accept her. After this proof of her innocence she was reunited with Rāma, and the two returned to Ayodhyā, where Bharata renounced the throne and Rāma was crowned, to rule long and righteously.

The last book, certainly later in composition, gives an unnecessary sequel to the story, which was probably added on account of growing prejudice on the part of the orthodox, and misgivings about Sītā's lawful status after her unwilling residence in her captor's house. The people murmured because their queen had been forced to break her marriage vows, and suspicions as to her purity were not allayed, even by her ordeal by fire. Though he was quite convinced of her innocence Rāma, whose first duty was to "please the people", was regretfully forced to banish her, and she took refuge in Vālmiki's hermitage, where she gave birth to twins, Kuṣa and Lava. Years later Rāma found Sītā again, and acknowledged her sons. As final proof of her innocence she called on her mother, the Earth, * to swallow her up. The earth opened, and she disappeared. Soon after this Rāma returned to heaven, and resumed the form of the god Viṣṇu.†

The fact that the Theravāda Buddhists preserved in the Jātakas a version of the tale in which there is no mention of the abduction of Sītā and the war with the demons, the most exciting part of Vālmiki's story, suggests that the author conflated two separate traditions, the first that of the righteous prince who was wrongly banished and the second of the conquest of Ceylon. The story of Rāma's adventures in exile has thus no historical basis whatever, even if we rationalize his monkey allies into aboriginal tribesmen with a monkey totem.

* Sītā means "furrow", and the heroine of the epic has some of the attributes of an agricultural goddess. According to the story she was not the natural daughter of King Janaka, but sprang from his plough while he was working in the fields. This story evidently looks back to a time when the tribal chief had to lend a hand with the work of the tribe.

† This rather grim ending to the story did not satisfy some gentler spirits. Bhavabhūti's Uttarārāmācarita, a drama of the 9th century, concludes with the full reconciliation of Rāma and Sītā.
The style of the Rāmāyana is less rugged than that of the Mahābhārata. The latter contains occasional grammatical and prosodical errors, the former few if any. It is a work of greater art, but less vigour, though it contains many dramatic passages, and beautiful descriptive writing, which the Mahābhārata lacks. We give a much abridged translation of the description of the death of Rāvana, which is typical of the treatment of battle in both epics.

"Then Rāma, reminded
by the words of Mātali,
took his flaming arrow
like a hissing snake. . . .

"He spoke a mantra upon it
as the Vedas ordain.
The strong one placed in his bow
that great and mighty arrow. . . .

"Enraged he fiercely bent
his bow against Rāvana,
and, intent on his mark, he shot
the entrail-tearing arrow. . . .

"Bearing the death of the body
the arrow flew with great speed,
and tore through the heart
of the evil-working Rāvana.

"Then, red with his blood and rapid,
that arrow, destroyer of bodies,
robbing the life-breath of Rāvana,
drove into the face of the earth. . . .

"Swiftly struck from his hand,
his bow and his arrow
dropped, with his life-breath,
upon the ground.

"Unbreathing, with awful speed,
the glorious lord of the demons
fell from his chariot to earth,
like Vītra struck by the thunderbolt. *

"When they saw him fallen to earth
the remaining demons of night
in terror, their lord destroyed,
fled in every direction. . . .

* See p. 402f above.
"Falling, struck down by the monkeys,
    they fled to Lāhkā in terror,
    their faces swimming in tears,
    piteous at the loss of their refuge.

"And in joy the monkeys
    roared a cheer of triumph
    and proclaimed the victory of Rāma,
    and his slaying of Rāvana.

"In the sky there sounded
    the lovely drums of the gods,
    and there blew a pleasant wind
    bearing a heavenly fragrance.

"A rain of flowers fell
    from heaven upon earth,
    flowers rare and lovely
    bestrewing Rāma’s chariot.”  

The epic style and metre became usual for didactic literature of all kinds. Much of this, the Purāṇas, Dharma Śāstras, and other texts, has been referred to elsewhere. It contains passages of literary merit, but we must pass them over for the great body of courtly literature.

Classical Sanskrit Poetry

The earliest surviving Sanskrit poetry of the classical type is that of the Buddhist writer Aśvaghoṣa, who is believed to have lived at the end of the 1st century A.D., and who composed a metrical life of the Buddha (Buddhacarita) in a comparatively simple classical style. The Gīrnar Inscription of Rudradāman, dated A.D. 150, is the earliest surviving example of courtly Sanskrit prose. Thus the courtly style is a comparatively late development in Indian literature, although it must have had a long period of evolution before the dates which we have mentioned.

On the whole classical Sanskrit literature has not been well received in the West. Though the works of Kālidāsa delighted Goethe, the literature taken as a whole has been called artificial, over-ornate, lacking in true feeling, or even an example of wasted and perverted ingenuity. Indians themselves are not always satisfied with it. Thus a modern authority writes: “As a result of the particular demand in the court atmosphere the natural spontaneity of the poet was at a discount. Learning and adaptation to circumstances were given more importance than the pure flow of genius. . . . As a result Sanskrit poetry not only became artificial but followed a traditional scheme

"
of description. . . . The magic of the Sanskrit language . . . also led the poets astray and led them to find their amusement in verbal sonorousness."

This judgement, which the author later qualifies, is in part correct. It is, moreover, an indication of how deeply modern India has been affected by European aesthetic standards, judged by which much Indian classical literature is indeed artificial. It was written mainly for recitation or performance at court, or for comparatively small circles of litterati, all well versed in the rigid canons of the literary convention and highly appreciative of verbal ingenuity. In such circumstances it would be futile to expect the native wood-notes of a Clare or the natural mysticism of a Wordsworth. The poets lived in a comparatively static society, and their lives were controlled in detail by a body of social custom which was already ancient and which had the sanction of religion behind it. They were never in revolt against the social system, and Indian Shelleys and Swinburnes are lacking. Most of this literature was written by men well integrated in their society and with few of the complex psychological difficulties of the modern writer; hence the spiritual anguish of a Cowper, the heart-searchings of a Donne, and the social pessimism of an early T. S. Eliot, are almost entirely absent. Despite their reputation for pessimism in the West, Hindu thought and literature are fundamentally optimistic, and the tragic drama, or the story with an unhappy ending, was not looked on with favour.

The chief raw materials of the Indian poet were love, nature, panegyric, moralizing and story telling. Religious subjects, in the sense of legends of the gods, are common enough, but deep religious feeling is comparatively rare in courtly literature. A few poets, such as Bhartrhari, wrote occasionally on religious themes with the intensity of deep faith, but for all its mythological trappings and polite invocations to deities classical Sanskrit poetry is predominantly secular. The gods, when they appear, usually have the character of enlarged human beings.

Love was passionately physical, and we have said something of the approach of the Indian poet to the subject in another chapter (p. 171ff). As in most European literature of ancient and medieval times, nature was usually treated in its relation to man, and rarely described for its own sake. The phenomena of the seasons, day and night, birds and beasts and flowers, were used to frame human emotions, or were personified as counterparts of the human subjects of the poet. But throughout the literature a deep love of nature is implicit, especially in Kālidāsa who, for this reason among others, has a higher reputation in the West than any other ancient Indian poet. Panegyrics, in praise of a king and his ancestors, are very numerous and form one of
the chief sources of our historical knowledge. The element of moralizing is prominent in the writing of most poets. Kālidāsa was particularly fond of including generalizations of a sententious or moral nature in his verses, and this practice was recognized as one of the legitimate alaṃkāras ("adornments") of Sanskrit poetry. Gnomic verses, often of a dry worldly-wise humour, were very popular.

The technique of poetry was thoroughly studied and rules were laid down in numerous textbooks. The purpose of poetry is usually described as emotive; the emotion aroused, however, is not the pity and terror of Aristotle, but a calmer experience, an aesthetic sensation based on feeling lifted to such a plane that grief is no longer felt as grief, and love no longer as love—according to one definition, "impersonalized and ineffable aesthetic enjoyment from which every trace of its component...material is obliterated". The basic rasas or "flavours" from which this aesthetic experience should arise are usually classified as eight—love, courage, loathing, anger, mirth, terror, pity and surprise. Theoretically every poem should contain one or more of these flavours.

An important element in Sanskrit poetic theory was dhvani ("reverberation"), the suggestion or incantation of words and phrases. Words have their denotations and their connotations, their primary meanings and their undertones, and it is with these latter that the poet has to do. By carefully choosing his words he can make them say far more than their bare meanings and induce a whole series of emotions by a single brief verse. Indian literary philosophers advanced far in this direction and produced theories on the psychology of poetic appreciation which, in broad outline, would not be unacceptable to many modern poets of the West.

Perhaps the most important tool of the poet was alaṃkāra, or ornamentation, which included simile and metaphor, generalization, punning, alliteration of various kinds, and so on. This branch of poetic technique was also worked out in great detail by the theorists, and the free use of ornamentation resulted in poetry of great floridity. This was encouraged by the enormous number of synonyms and homonyms in Sanskrit, and by the very numerous and universally accepted stock epithets, such as "the mine of jewels" (rātaṇākara) for "the sea", "the unmoving" (acala) for "mountain", "sky-goer" (khaga) for "bird", and "the frail" (abala) for "woman". The ancient Indian poet would have been quite at home with Pope's "denizens of air" and "finny tribes".

* The most important and original literary theorists were Daṇḍin (p. 444ff) (Kṛṇḍa- darśa, 6th-7th century), Bhāmaha (Kṛṇḍālaṃkāra, 7th century), Anandavardhana (Dhvanyāloka, 9th century), Mammiya (Kṛṇḍāprakāśa, early 12th century), and Viśvanātha (Śāhityadarpaṇa, 14th century).
The unit of poetry is the stanza, usually grammatically complete in itself. The mahākāvyya, loosely translated "epic", often degenerates into a string of verses or groups of verses, linked only by a very slender thread of narrative. In the more ornate courtly literature plot and construction are in general weak, and there is little sense of balance. This is not the case with purely narrative poetry, as in such works as the "Ocean of Story", the author of which tells his tales with economy and restraint (p. 481ff). And often, even in the most ornate kāvyya, the poet will from time to time rise to the occasion with vivid and dramatic description, though it must be admitted that the longer Sanskrit poem is usually prolix and shapeless.

On the other hand the individual verse is balanced and succinct. Single-verse poems, reminiscent of the Persian rubā'ī or the Japanese tanka, were very popular, either standing alone or included in dramas and prose works. Many of these are very beautiful, and make an immediate appeal to the Western reader, even in translation. They were collected in anthologies, of which a number survive, preserving thousands of lovely verses which would otherwise have been lost.

Metrically Sanskrit poetry was quantitative and rigidly regulated. The normal stanza was one of four quarters, each of equal length varying from eight to twenty-one syllables, and generally unrhymed. The Epics usually employed the metre called śloka, of eight syllables to the quarter, and this allowed some scope for variation; but classical poets preferred more complex and rigid metres, of which many are listed in textbooks on poetics, though only a dozen or so were popular. These metres allowed little or no scope for variation and their syllables were arranged in complicated patterns, usually of great beauty.*

Owing to the structure of Sanskrit, literal translation of classical Indian poetry into English is quite impossible, and we cannot convey the aesthetic effect of a Sanskrit verse. The brief extracts here translated in rhythmic prose give but a faint impression of the rich and closely knit texture of the originals or of the wonderful sonority of the language, which, when well handled, with all the arts of prosody and ornamentation, surely has a splendour unsurpassed by any other language in the world. Classical Indian poetry, like Indian music and art, developed along lines of its own and its canons are not those of the West, but it has its own special merits and beauties.

Indian and European judges alike agree that Kālidāsa was the greatest Sanskrit poet. He probably flourished in the reigns of the emperors Candras Gupta II and Kumāra Gupta I (376–454), and thus saw ancient Indian courtly culture at its zenith. Like the murals of Ajantā, his work seems to reflect that culture completely and con-

* For further notes on Sanskrit prosody see Appendix, p. 510ff.
vincingly. Though deeply imbued in tradition, he carried tradition lightly, and in all his work his personality breaks through. A few legends are told of him in late sources, but we have no reliable information about his life and character. From his work he seems to have been a happy and gentle man, sympathetic to sorrow, deeply understanding the moods of women and children, and loving flowers and trees, beasts and birds, and the pomp of court ceremonial. He was the author of three dramas (p. 457), two long poems, “The Birth of the War-god” (Kumārasambhava) and the “Dynasty of Raghu” (Raghuvaṃśa), and two shorter, the “Cloud-messenger” (Meghadūta) and the “Garland of the Seasons” (Rutasamhāra), as well as of several other works which have not survived.

The “Cloud Messenger” is a work of little over 100 verses, which has always been one of the most popular of Sanskrit poems. Its theme has been imitated in one form or another by several later poets in both Sanskrit and the vernaculars. More than most Indian poems this work has unity and balance, and gives a sense of wholeness rarely found elsewhere. In its small compass Kālidāsa has crowded so many lovely images and word-pictures that the poem seems to contain the quintessence of a whole culture. It describes a yakṣa who dwells in the divine city of Alakā, in the Himālayas. He has offended his master Kubera (p. 516), and has been banished for a year to the hill of Rāmagiri, in the modern Madhya Pradesh. The worst aspect of his exile is his separation from his beautiful wife, whom he has left behind in the mountain city. So, at the beginning of the rainy season, he sees a large cloud passing northward to the mountains and pours out his heart to it. After a verse or two of introduction the rest of the poem consists of the yakṣa’s address to the cloud.

First he tells it the route which it should take to reach the mountains; here Kālidāsa describes the lands, rivers and cities over which it must pass in very beautiful verses. We quote two describing the river Narmadā and the forests on its banks. Notable in the first verse is the bird’s-eye-view implied in the simile.

“Stay for a while over the thickets, haunted by the girls of the hill-folk, then press on with faster pace, having shed your load of water, and you’ll see the Narmadā river, scattered in torrents, by the rugged rocks at the foot of the Vindhya,
looking like the plastered pattern of stripes on the flank of an elephant."
"Note by the banks the flowers of the śāś trees, greenish brown, with
t heir stamens half developed,
and the plantains, displaying their new buds.
Smell the most fragrant earth of the burnt out woodlands,
and as you release your raindrops the deer will show you the way."

Then the cloud is told to turn westwards and visit the splendid city
of Ujjayini. Kālidāsa cannot long resist the śṛṅgāra rasa, the erotic
sentiment, and this is evoked by his description of the city,

"where the wind from the Śīrā river prolongs the shrill melodious cry of
the cranes,
fragrant at early dawn from the scent of the opening lotus,
and, like a lover, with flattering requests,
dispels the morning languor of women, and refreshes their limbs.

"Your body will grow fat with the smoke of incense from open windows
where women dress their hair.
You will be greeted by palace peacocks, dancing to welcome you,
their friend.
If your heart is weary from travel you may pass the night above mansions
fragrant with flowers,
whose pavements are marked with red dye from the feet of beautiful
girls.""

Then, as the cloud nears the Himālayas, it will see the magic city

"where yakṣas dwell with lovely women in white mansions,
whose crystal terraces reflect the stars like flowers.
They drink the wine of love distilled from magic trees,
while drums beat softly, deeper than your thunder."

Then the yakṣa describes his home and his beautiful wife, weak from
sorrow and longing. He gives the cloud a message to her, that his
love is still constant and that the time of reunion is approaching.

"I see your body in the sinuous creeper, your gaze in the startled eyes of
deer,
your cheek in the moon, your hair in the plumage of peacocks,
and in the tiny ripples of the river I see your sidelong glances,
but alas, my dearest, nowhere do I find your whole likeness!"

"The Birth of the War-god" may be described as a religious poem,
but though all its characters are supernatural, and include Śiva him-
self, the atmosphere of the poem is essentially secular. It begins with
a fine description of the Himālayas, from which we quote a few verses.
The daring comparison of the chain of mountains with a surveyor's
measuring rod is worthy of John Donne, and gives another example
of Kālidāsa's bird's-eye-view approach.
"In the northern quarter is divine Himālaya,
the lord of mountains,
reaching from Eastern to Western Ocean,
firm as a rod to measure the earth. . . .

"There demigods rest in the shade of the clouds
which spread like a girdle below the peaks,
but when the rains disturb them
they fly to the sunlit summits. . . .

"The hollow canes are filled with the wind
that bursts from the chasms,
as though to provide an ostinato
to the songs of heavenly minstrels. . . .

"All through the night the phosphorescent herbs
shine in the caverns with their glimmering radiance,
and light the loves
of hill-women and their paramours. . . .

"And the wind forever shaking the pines
carries the spray from the torrents of the young Gangā
and refreshes the hunting hillman,
blowing among his peacock plumes.""21

The poem, which is a long one, describes the courtship and marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī (p. 311), and the birth of their son, Kumāra or Skanda, the war-god. As he grows to manhood Kumāra is appointed general of the gods, and he leads them forth to battle with the terrible demon Tāraka, who has long been afflicting the whole universe. Tāraka hears of their approach, musters his forces, and goes out to meet them; but terrible omens greet the army of demons. Here Kālidāsa embarks on a remarkable description, which reminds us of the more macabre work of Gustave Doré.

"A fearful flock of evil birds,
ready for the joy of eating the army of demons,
flew over the host of the gods,
and clouded the sun.

"A wind continually fluttered their umbrellas and banners,
and troubled their eyes with clouds of whirling dust,
so that the trembling horses and elephants
and the great chariots could not be seen.

"Suddenly monstrous serpents, as black as powdered soot,
scattering poison from their upraised heads,
frightful in form,
appeared in the army's path.
"The sun put on a ghastly robe
of great and terrible snakes, curling together,
as if to mark his joy
at the death of the enemy demon.

"And before the very disc of the sun
jackals bayed harshly together,
as though eager fiercely to lap the blood
of the king of the foes of the gods, fallen in battle.

"Lighting heaven from end to end,
with flames flashing all around,
with an awful crash, rending the heart with terror,
a thunderbolt fell from a cloudless sky.

"The sky poured down torrents of red-hot ashes,
with which were mixed blood and human bones,
till the flaming ends of heaven were filled with smoke
and bore the dull hue of the neck of an ass.

"Like the thundered threat of the angry death-god
a great crash broke the walls of the ears,
a shattering sound, tearing the tops of the mountains,
and wholly filling the belly of heaven.

"The host of the foe was jostled together.
The great elephants stumbled, the horses fell,
and all the footmen clung together in fear,
as the earth trembled and the ocean rose to shake the mountains.

"And before the host of the foes of the gods
dogs lifted their muzzles to gaze on the sun,
then, howling together with cries that rent the eardrums,
they wretchedly slunk away."**

* The mastery of language in the last three stanzas quoted is so remarkable that it must impress even the reader who knows no Sanskrit. With brilliant use of assonance and alliteration Kālidāsa has wedded sound to sense in a way rarely achieved in the literature of the world.

**

Nirghāta-ghoṣo girl-frāga-lātana
ghano 'mbardā-khurodarambhāriḥ
bahuṣa bhūmnā śruṭi-bhīti-bhedanaḥ,
prakopī-kīlā-āśīta-gurji-tarḥanaḥ.

Skhalan-mahēbhāṃ propatā-turadvamaṃ
prasārdaliṣṭa-janoṃ samantaloḥ,
prakuphyad-ambhūdhi-vibhinna-bhūdharād
balas̄a dviśa 'bhūd avanti-prakompāt.

Odhrattṛṣyāḥ ravo-datta-dṛṣṭayeḥ
sametiya sarve saro-vidvīṣah puroḥ,
śodānāḥ svaṣye śravaṇa-śālīnaḥ
mātho rudantaḥ karupena nityayāḥ.
The poem ends with the death of Tāraka in single combat with Kumāra.

We have no space to discuss the rest of Kālidāsa’s poetry, all of which is of fine quality. “The Dynasty of Raghu” especially contains many passages of great beauty, including a concise version of the story of Rāma, but the work is apparently incomplete. “The Garland of the Seasons” describes the six seasons of the Hindu year in relation to śrīgāra, the erotic sentiment, but though charming it is slighter and less impressive than the rest of Kālidāsa’s work.

Many other poets after Kālidāsa wrote mahākāvyas, or long courtly “epics”, but none so ably as he. Kumāradāsa’s “Rape of Sītā” (Jānaki-karaṇa) continues his tradition, while Bhāravi’s “Arjuna and the Kirāta” (Kirātārjunīya), describing an encounter of the hero Arjuna and the god Śiva, in the guise of a Kirāta or wild mountaineer, is somewhat more florid. Bhaṭṭi, of the 7th century, wrote a remarkable poem on the story of Rāma, usually known as “Bhaṭṭi’s Poem” (Bhaṭṭikāvyā), containing passages of real beauty, as an exercise to illustrate rules of grammar. Even more ingenious was the 7th-century poet Māgha, who wrote a long poem on an incident in the life of Kṛṣṇa, the “Slaying of Śiśuṇāla” (Śiśupāla-vadha). Though the work contains many fine stanzas the story is so badly told that the poem as a whole has no semblance of unity. In the nineteenth canto, which describes the battle between Kṛṣṇa and his enemy, Māgha thought fit to display his mastery of language by inserting many stanzas of amazing ingenuity. We give an example of an ekākṣara stanza, employing only one consonant throughout:

\begin{align*}
\text{Dādado dudda-dud-dādi} \\
\text{dādād duda-dī-da-dōḥ} \\
\text{dud-dādam dadade dudde} \\
\text{dād-ādada-dado \text{\textasciitilde}da-dah}.\ *
\end{align*}

This stanza, using very rare and obscure words and exceedingly elliptical, may be translated as follows:

“The giver of gifts, the giver of grief to his foes, 
the bestower of purity, whose arm destroys the givers of grief, 
the destroyer of demons, bestower of bounty on generous and miser alike, 
raised his weapon against the foe.”

The following is a dvayaksara, containing only two consonants:

\begin{align*}
\text{Krūrī-kāri kor eka-} \\
\text{kārakaḥ kārikā-karaḥ} \\
\text{karaṃkāra-karaṃkāḥ} \\
\text{karīraḥ karkaro \text{\textasciitilde}ra-ruṭ}.\ *
\end{align*}

* In these verses the breathing at the end of a word, known as visarga and indicated by \( \breve{} \), is not counted as a full consonant.
"The destroyer of cruel foes, the only creator of the world,
bestower of woes on the wicked, with hands like the buds of lotuses,
the overthrower of elephants,
fierce in battle, alone like the sun." 28

The next stanza is called sarvatobhadra ("valid all ways"), and is
a complicated mixture of syllabic palindrome and acrostic. Each
quarter-stanza is a palindrome; the first four syllables of the first
quarter are the same as the first syllables of each quarter, and in the
same order; the first four syllables of the second quarter are the same
as the second syllables of each quarter, and so on. This verse is
positively startling in its ingenuity, and when read in the original
produces an impression resembling that of complex polyphony.

Sakara-nān'-āra-kāsa-
kāya-sāda-da-sāyakā
ras'-āhāvā vāha-sāra-
nādavāda-da-vādanā.

"His army was eager for battle,
whose arrows destroyed the bodies of the varied hosts of his brave
enemies.
Its trumpets vied with the cries
of the splendid horses and elephants." 28

Finally a stanza called gatapratyāgatam ("gone and come back")
It is a perfect syllabic palindrome.

Taṁ Śriyā ghanayā 'nastā-
rucā sāratayā tayā
yātayā taraśā cāru-
stanayā 'naghay' ākritam.

"He who was eagerly and close embraced
by the fair-bosomed Śri, the sinless goddess,
of never-failing beauty, and endowed
with every excellence." 28

After Māgha longer poems were often mere displays of verbal
ingenuity. The narrative became progressively less important, and
the style progressively more ornate, though there were important
exceptions. The climax of the tendency came with the dvātraśayā-
kānya, telling two stories simultaneously by deliberately utilizing
the ambiguity of words and phrases. A well-known example of
this genre is the Rāmacarita ("Deeds of Rāma") of the 12th-century
poet Sandhyākara, which may be read as applying either to the legend-
dary Rāma of Ayodhya or to the historical king Rāmapāla of Bengal,
who was the poet’s contemporary and patron. Achievements like this are not to be disparaged, but they make little appeal to the modern reader and are quite untranslatable.

The best things in medieval poetry are to be found in the single-stanza poems, of which there are many collections, either by one or many hands. The finest poet in this genre was Bhartṛhari, thought to have lived in the 7th century, who left no long poems, but only three centuries of separate stanzas on the subjects of worldly wisdom, love and renunciation respectively. These are masterpieces of concise expression, and, unlike most Sanskrit poems, tell us much about the personality of the author. We quote first two stanzas in an amusingly sententious vein.

"You may boldly take a gem from the jaws of a crocodile,
you may swim the ocean with its tossing wreath of waves,
you may wear an angry serpent like a flower in your hair,
but you’ll never satisfy a fool who’s set in his opinions!

"You may, if you squeeze hard enough, even get oil from sand,
thirsty, you may succeed in drinking the waters of the mirage,
perhaps, if you go far enough, you’ll find a rabbit’s horn,
but you’ll never satisfy a fool who’s set in his opinions!"37

In his erotic verses Bhartṛhari often shows an undercurrent of dissatisfaction, as though trying to convince himself that love is not a futile waste of time after all. In the midst of his amours he feels the call of the religious life, and in one remarkable stanza he indulges in striking punning to this effect. The obvious meaning is:

"Your hair well combed, your eyes reaching to your ears,*
your mouth filled with ranks of teeth that are white by nature,
your breasts charmingly adorned with a necklace of pearls,
slim girl, your body, though at rest, disturbs me."

But this might also be fancifully translated as:

"Your hair self-denying, your eyes understanding the whole of scripture
your mouth full of groups of naturally-pure brāhmaṇs,
your breasts lovely from the presence of emancipated souls,*
slim girl, your body, though free from passion, disturbs me."

This is the sort of thing which most critics of Sanskrit poetry object to; but Bhartṛhari might justify his punning here, for by employing words with religious connotations he has given expression to

* This is one of the conventions of poetry. The eyes of a pretty girl are so long that their corners almost touch her ears.
his own divided mind. This is very forcibly expressed in another stanza, which we quote. "The forest" implies the life of the hermit.

"What is the use of many idle speeches!
   Only two things are worth a man's attention—
   the youth of full-breasted women, prone to fresh pleasures,
   and the forest." 29

It would seem that in the end Bhartrhari gave up the love of women for the love of God, though the word which we here translate "God" is the impersonal Brahman (p. 252).

"When I was ignorant in the dark night of passion
   I thought the world completely made of women,
   but now my eyes are cleansed with the salve of wisdom,
   and my clear vision sees only God in everything." 30

Bhartrhari's religious experience was intense enough to produce the following splendid psalm, in which he addresses the five elements of Hindu physics.

"Oh Earth, my mother, Air, my father, Oh Fire, my friend,
   Water, my kinsman, Space, my brother,
   here do I bow before you with folded hands!
   With your aid I have done good deeds and found clear knowledge,
   and, glorious, with all delusion past, I merge in highest godhead." 31

An erotic poet with none of Bhartrhari's doubts was Amaru, also probably of the 7th century. His stanzas on love are often voluptuous, but they can be humorously tender, and always show a sound understanding of feminine psychology. Amaru loved to describe a poignant moment in a human relationship in a single verse, in which the reader is given only the climax of the story, the reconstruction of the rest being left to his imagination.

"'I'll see what comes of it,' I thought, and hardened my heart against her.
   'What, won't the villain speak to me?' she thought, flying into a rage.
   And there we stood, sedulously refusing to look one another in the face,
   until at last I managed an unconvincing laugh, and her tears robbed me of my resolution."

   . . . .

"'Why are your limbs so weak, and why do you tremble?
   And why, my dear,' asked her lord, 'is your cheek so pale?'
   The slender girl replied, 'It's just my nature!'
   and turned away and sighed, and let loose the tears that burdened her eyelids."

   . . . .
"'Fool that I was, why didn't I clasp the lord of my life to my neck?

Why did I turn my face away when he wanted to kiss me?

Why did I not see? Why did I not speak?' So, when love is first awakened,
a girl is filled with remorse as she thinks of her childish shyness.'"

We cannot devote much more space to the many brief poems of the Middle Ages, which are so full of charm and skill, and which need a competent translator to introduce them to the West. In passing, however, we would quote two stanzas contained in the prose work called "The Deeds of Ḥarṣa", by the 7th-century writer Bāna (p. 448ff), which are sung by a bard at dawn to rouse his companions. In our opinion these neglected verses are among the finest in Indian literature. Ostensibly they describe a great stallion waking from sleep, but it may be that the poet remembered the cosmic symbolism of the horse in Vedic times (p. 250), and intended to speak of the universal in terms of the particular. Bāna has evidently carefully studied his subject, which he describes almost anatomically, in words which have few overtones of meaning; but he succeeds in conveying his own deep delight in the horse by subtle alliterative effects, by the heavy metre, which he handles with masterly skill, and by the implicit contrast of the tiny piece of chaff in the last line.

"He stretches his hind-leg, and, bending his spine, extends his body upwards.

Curving his neck, he rests his muzzle on his chest, and tosses his dust-grey mane.
The steed, his nostrils ceaselessly quivering with desire of fodder, rises from his bed, gently whinnies, and paws the earth with his hoof.

"He bends his back and turns his neck sideways, till his face touches his buttock,

and then the horse, the curls matted about his ears, rubs with his hoof the red corner of his eye, itching from sleep, his eye, struck by his dewdrop-scattering mane, waving and tossing, his eye, to the point of whose quivering eyelash there clings a tiny fragment of chaff."

* We quote the Sanskrit, in the hope that some of Bāna's wonderful sound effects, which seem so well to fit the sense of his verses, may be recognized.

Paścād aṅghrīṃ prasārya, trika-nāti-vitataṃ, drāghayitvāḥgam uccair,

ārajaśubhagna-katāḥo mukham urasi, satā dhūli-dhūmarā viḍhyaya,

ghaśa-grāhībhilājād anavarata-calai-protha-liṅgās turāṅgo,

mandaṅ labdhyamānā, vilūkhati, ṭayanāt uṭthitaḥ, kṣīmaḥ khureṇa.

Kurvannt śubhagn-prṣṭho mukha-mūkṣata-katśiḥ kandhāram ā tiracitām

loleṇāhanyamānāṃ ṭukina-kapā-mucaḥ sakvanā kesoreṇa

nīdā-devā-gadhāya kṣayam karati, nīvīḍita-śrotre-ḥukṣit, turāṅga,

trāṅga-pakṣāyag-carṇa-praiṇaṇa-dova-kapam kesam aḥpitaḥ khureṇa.
Before leaving this style of poetry we should mention the Kashmiri
Bilhana, of the 11th and 12th centuries, whose “Fifty Stanzas of the
Thief” (Caurapancastika), purporting to describe the secret love of a
bold housebreaker and a princess, are full of intense emotion
recollected without tranquillity. Each begins with the words “Even
today”.

“Even today I can see her, her slender arms encircling my neck,
my breast held tight against her two breasts,
her playful eyes half-closed in ecstasy,
her dear face drinking mine in a kiss.

“Even today, if this evening
I might see my beloved, with eyes like the eyes of a fawn,
with the bowls of her breasts the colour of milk,
I’d leave the joys of kingship and heaven and final bliss.”

In a class of its own is Jayadeva’s “Songs of the Cowherd”
(Gita Govinda), written in Bengal in the 12th century. This is a
series of dramatic lyrics intended for singing, and describes the love
of Krishna for Radha and the milkmaids (p. 306). The poem is still
sung at the festivals of the Bengal Vaisnava sects, but though it be-
gins with a beautiful invocation to the ten incarnations of Vishnu
its inspiration to the Western mind seems rather erotic than religious.
Unlike almost all other classical Sanskrit poetry Jayadeva’s lyrics are
rhymed, and look forward to the verse forms of vernacular literature.
Each commences with an introductory stanza in one of the more usual
Sanskrit metres, and the final stanza of each introduces the poet’s
name. The verses which we translate describe Krishna’s longings
when separated from his beloved Radha. “The foe of Madhu” (a
demon killed by Krishna) and “Hari” are epithets of the god.

“Here I am dwelling. Go now to Radha,
console her with my message, and bring her to me.”
Thus the foe of Madhu commissioned her friend,
who went in person, and spoke to Radha thus:

“Then the breeze blows from the Southern Mountains,
and brings the Love-god with it,
when masses of flowers burst forth
to rend the hearts of parted lovers,
he is grieved at separation from you, decked with his forest garland.

“Even the cool-rayed moon inflames him,
he is as if dead.
Struck by the arrows of love
he complains most wretchedly
He is grieved . . .
When the swarming bees are murmuring
he closes fast his ears.
His heart is clenched by parting,
he spends his nights in fever.
He is grieved.

He dwells in the depths of the forest,
he has left his lovely home.
He tosses in sleep on the earth
and much he murmurs your name.
He is grieved.

When the poet Jayadeva sings,
through this pious description
of the deeds of the parted lover,
may Hari arise in hearts full of zeal.
He is grieved at separation from you, decked with his forest garland."

Narrative Poetry

As well as various smaller collections there exists in various recensions a large series of popular stories, the Brhatkatha ("Great Story"), boxed one within the other in the manner of "The Thousand and One Nights". The most famous of these versions is Somadeva's "Ocean of Story" (Kathā-sarit-sāgara), written in the 11th century in easy but polished verse. The stories are told with comparative simplicity and directness, and with many touches of humour and pathos. We quote from the tale of the thief and the merchant's daughter. A wealthy merchant, Ratnadatta, has no sons, and his only daughter Ratnāvatī, much loved and pampered by her father, refuses to marry despite the pleading of her parents. Meanwhile a desperate thief has been captured by the king, and is led through the streets to execution by impalement.

To the beat of the drum the thief was led
to the place of execution,
and the merchant's daughter Ratnāvatī
sat on the terrace and watched him.

He was gravely wounded and covered with dust,
but as soon as she saw him she was smitten with love.

* The rhyme scheme varies from lyric to lyric. Here the second and fourth quarters end with a rhyme of two syllables, while the first and third quarters of each stanza end with the same syllable. The first and third quarters end in e throughout the poem. The refrain applies equally to the love of Kṛṣṇa for Rādhā and the love of God for the soul. We quote the last verse so that the reader may have some idea of the mellifluousness of the original:

Bhanati kavi-Jayadeva
virohi-vilasitena
manasi rabbasa-cibhave
Harir udayatu sukrtena.
Tava vīrahe vanamāl isakhi śdāte.
"Then she went to her father Ratnadatta, and said:

"This man they are leading to his death
I have chosen for my lord!
Father, you must save him from the king,
or I will die with him!"

And when he heard, her father said:

"What is this you say, my child?
You've refused the finest suitors,
the images of the Love-god!
How can you now desire
a wretched master-thief?"

"But though he reproached her thus
she was firm in her resolve,
so he sped to the king and begged
that the thief might be saved from the stake.
In return he offered
the whole of his great fortune,
but the king would not yield the thief
for ten million pieces of gold,
for he had robbed the whole city,
and was brought to the stake to repay with his life.

"Her father came home in despair,
and the merchant's daughter
determined to follow
the thief in his death.
Though her family tried to restrain her
she bathed,
and mounted a litter, and went
to the place of impalement,
while her father, her mother and her people
followed her weeping.

"The executioners placed
the thief on the stake,
and, as his life ebbed away,
he saw her come with her people.
He heard the onlookers speaking
of all that had happened,
For a moment he wept, and then,
smiling a little, he died.
At her order they lifted the corpse
from the stake, and took it away,
and with it the worthy merchant's daughter
mounted the pyre."
The modern European reader would find this a conclusive ending to a tale of old, unhappy far-off things; but to the Indian of medieval times such an ending would have been quite unsatisfactory, so a *deus ex machina* was brought in in the form of the god Śiva, who was so impressed by the girl’s love and faithfulness that he restored the corpse of the dead thief to life. He reformed his ways and became the king’s general, and the two were married and lived happily ever after.

In the category of narrative poems we must include Kalhaṇa’s great chronicle of Kashmir “The River of Kings” (p. 45), and several other medieval works of comparatively small literary value. Midway between the purely narrative poem and the courtly “epic” are a number of historical works partly descriptive, partly panegyric, and partly sober history. The most famous of these is “The Deeds of Harṣa”, by Bāṇa, written in ornate poetic prose, which is discussed below (p. 448ff). Of some literary merit is “The Deeds of Vikramāṅka” (*Vikramāṅkadevacarita*) of Bihāṇa (p. 430), dealing with the life and adventures of the great Cālukya emperor Vikramāditya VI (c. 1075–1125). Another example of this type is the *Rāmacarita*, already mentioned. Yet another is the work of a Jaina monk, Nayacandra Sūri, the *Hammīra-mahākāvyya*, which is among the latest important works of Sanskrit literature. This beautiful but little known poem deals with the life of Hammīra, the last of the dynasty of the Cāhamānas, who was defeated and killed by the Delhi sultan ‘Alā-ud-dīn Khaljī in 1301, after a long siege of his capital Raṇastambhapura (now known as Ranthambhor). As Hammīra was slain with all his followers the poet was forced by his theme somewhat to flout convention, but he managed to retain a semblance of the happy ending demanded by tradition by concluding his work with a description of the entry of Hammīra and his followers into heaven. Much of the poem, though not without beauty, is irrelevant to the main theme, but the description of the king’s last days is direct and forceful.

Towards the end of the poem Nayacandra introduces a remarkable episode. We cannot say whether he consciously intended the beautiful dancer, who died so tragically, as a symbol of the courtly culture which fell to the invader, but it is thus that the passage, occurring so portentously just before Hammīra’s death, strikes the reader. In the course of the siege a temporary truce has been arranged, and the Rājputs are making the most of it. On the battlements a musical entertainment is taking place, and Hammīra’s favourite dancer, Rādhādevī, is performing for the king and his courtiers. A long bowshot away, on the other side of the moat, sits the sultan, also watching the dance with interest. He is referred to in the poem as the Lord of the
Sakas, a term by now applied to all the invaders of the North-West. The first part of our extract is exceedingly florid, and full of untranslatable puns, but the style suddenly becomes simple and terse when the episode moves to its climax.

"In time the drummers beat their drums, the lutanists plucked their lutes,
the flautists blew their flutes.
Their voices in tune with the shrill flutes, the singers
sang the glory and fame of the brave Hammira, . . .
Then, the vine of her body entrancing her lovers,
awakening passion with the glance of her half-closed eyes,
to delight the hearts of the courtiers,
same Radhadewi the dancer, arrayed for the dance.

"The quivering buds of her fingers moved in the dance
like tendrils of a vine, thrilling with passion. . . .
As the tips of her fingers bent, as though in a circle,
with her grace and delicate beauty all other girls seemed her slaves.
The moon, in the guise of the ring that trembled from the tip of her ear,
said: 'Your face is my likeness, the delusion even of sages!'
And as she danced she stirred the hearts of the young men watching—
the hearts which lay like motes of camphor under her feet. . . .
With her gestures the necklace trembled on the tips of her breasts
like a lotus twined in the beak of a swan.
When her body bent back like a bow in the dance
like a bowstring the braid of her hair stretched down to her heel. . . .

"And as she danced, at every beat of the rhythm,
she turned her back on the Saka king below.

"Then in fury of soul the Lord of the Sakas spoke to his chamberlain:
'Is there any bowman who can make her his mark?'
His brother said: 'Sire, there is he whom you formerly threw into prison,
Udganasiha—he is the only man who can do it!'
At once the Saka king had him brought, and struck off his fetters,
and arrayed the traitor finely, with double gift of affection.
And thus apparelled he took the bow which none but he could draw,
and the sinner shot her, as a hunter shoots a doe.

"At the stroke of the arrow she fainted and fell in the moist,
as lightning falls from heaven."*27*

The Drama

The origin of the Indian theatre is still obscure. It is certain, however, that even in the Vedic period dramatic performances of some kind

* The simile is not unduly exaggerated, as the dancer was covered with jewellery which glittered in the sunlight.
were given, and passing references in early sources point to the en-
action at festivals of religious legends, perhaps only in dance and
mime. Some writers have found elements in common between the
Indian and the classical Greek theatre. The curtain at the back of the
stage was called javanikā, a diminutive form of the name by which
the Greeks were generally known in India. One play at least, "The
Little Clay Cart" (p. 443), has a superficial resemblance to the late
Greek comedy of the school of Menander. We cannot wholly reject
the possibility that Greek comedies, acted at the courts of the Greco-
Bactrian kings of N.-W. India, inspired unknown Indian poets to
develop their own popular stage into a courtly art form.

The surviving Sanskrit dramas are numerous and varied, ranging
from short one-act playlets to very long plays in ten acts. They
were normally performed by troupes of professionals of both sexes,
but amateur dramatics were not wholly unknown, since we have
occasional references to kings and the ladies of the harim perform-
ing dramas in the palace. There was no regular theatre, though it
has been suggested that one of the caves of Rāmgargh (p. 186) was
specially adapted for theatrical performances. Normally dramas
were performed privately or semi-privately in palaces or the homes
of the rich, or were given public showing in temple courts on days of
festival.

A curtain (javanikā) divided the stage (raṅga) from the back-
stage (nāpathya), and through this the actors made their entrances.
There was no curtain between stage and auditorium. The drama was
performed without scenery and with a minimum of properties; the
absence of both was made up for by the highly developed gesture
language of the dance, which we have discussed elsewhere (p. 387).
Every part of the body was used to help tell the story, and the well-
trained audience recognized from conventional movements of hands,
limbs and features that the king was riding in his chariot, or that the
heroin was caressing her pet fawn. The splendid attire of the actors
was regulated by convention, so that heroes, heroines, gods, demons
and villains were immediately recognizable.

The drama regularly began with an invocation to one or more of
the gods, and a prologue, in which the chief actor and stage manager
(sūtradhāra) humorously discussed with his wife, the chief actress,
the occasion of the performance and the nature of the play to be per-
formed.* The main dialogue of the play was in prose, but this was
freely interspersed with verses, which were usually declaimed or in-
toned, but not sung. In this ancient Indian taste differed from that of

* This convention of the Indian stage was known to Goethe from Sir William Jones' translation of Šakuntalā, and was adapted by him for the prologue of Faust.
present-day India, which demands many songs in plays and films. The classical unities were not observed; years in time and a thousand miles in space might divide one scene from the next; but within the act unity of time and place was demanded. If in this respect the Indian dramatic convention differed from that of classical Europe, it agreed in forbidding the portrayal of violence, though this and other rules were sometimes ignored. The act was often preceded by a prelude (pravelaka), in which one or two characters set the scene and described what had gone before.

As in literature generally, so in the theatre Indian convention allowed no tragedy. Tragic and pathetic scenes were common enough, but endings were almost invariably happy. From the European point of view the insistence on the happy ending often led to the unnatural forcing of the plot. But if he rejected tragedy the ancient Indian playgoer delighted in melodrama and pathos. Though the emotion which the Indian writer sought to arouse was theoretically a sublimated one (p. 419), in fact the Sanskrit drama contains so many melodramatic scenes that the emotional Indian audience must often have been moved to tears. Noble heroes are led to execution for crimes they did not commit, declaiming their innocence to their sorrowing wives and children, only to be saved from the stake at the last moment. Unhappy wives are unjustly expelled from their homes by their husbands. Long-lost children are reunited with their parents in the final act. Whatever the theorists, beginning with Bharata (p. 384), may have said, the sentiment of the Indian drama was warm and living, sometimes a little reminiscent of that of more popular English authors of the last century.

Like Greek and Elizabethan dramatists Indian writers usually borrowed their plots from earlier sources, often adapting them freely in the process. Legends of the gods and ancient heroes formed an inexhaustible mine of dramatic material. Other plays were written around popular tales of a secular type. There are dramas of statecraft, based very freely on stories of historical kings of the past, and light comedies of harem intrigue, wherein the hero, a king, succeeds in pacifying the chief queen, who has set her heart against the promotion of the heroine, a servant girl (usually a princess in disguise), to queenly status and her husband's bed. There are also allegorical dramas, in which the characters are personified virtues and vices, and there are a few surviving examples of farces. Plays were classified by the theorists according to style and length into over a dozen categories.

The hero (nāyaka) and heroine (nāyikā) are inevitable characters in most types of drama, as is the villain (pratindya). An interesting
stock character is the vidūṣaka, who provides comic relief; he is an ugly and misshapen brāhmaṇ, the loyal friend of the hero, but invariably a figure of fun. Another stock character, occurring in one or two extant dramas and noted by the theorists, is the viṭa, the cultured but rather shallow man of the world who befriends the hero, and somewhat resembles the parasite of classical Greek comedy.

The earliest known dramas to have survived are fragments of plays by Aśvaghoṣa (p. 417), preserved in manuscripts found in the desert sands of Central Asia. The oldest complete plays are probably those attributed to Bhāsa, which seem to be earlier than those of Kālidāsa, though there is no complete unanimity of experts on this point. Bhāsa’s thirteen surviving plays include several works of great merit, notably “The Dream of Vāsavadatta” (Śvapnavāsavadatta) and “Yaugandharāyaṇa’s Vows” (Pratijnāyaugandharāyaṇa). Bhāsa also wrote a number of short dramas based on epic stories in simple and vigorous style. Nowadays his plays are often the first introduction of the student of Sanskrit to dramatic literature. He excelled in portraying the heroic sentiment, and ably individualized his characters. More than once he broke the rules of later dramatic theory by permitting acts of violence on the stage.

As in English literature so in Sanskrit, the greatest poet was also the greatest dramatist. Three plays of Kālidāsa have survived: “Mālavikā and Agnimitra”, a comedy of harem intrigue, its scene set in the Śuṅga period; “Urvaśī Won by Valour” (Vikramorvaśī), telling the ancient story of the love of Purūravas and Urvaśī (p. 407ff); and “The Recognition of Śakuntalā” (Abhijñānakūntalā). At all times the last has been reckoned Kālidāsa’s masterpiece, and merits special consideration. The plot is set in the days of legend, when gods and men were not so far apart as they later became. We give an almost complete translation of the fifth act, with a summary of the rest of the play.

The play opens with King Duṣyanta chasing the deer in the neighbourhood of a forest hermitage. He alights from his chariot to pay homage to the chief of the hermits, the sage Kaṇva. Kaṇva is not at home, but the king meets his foster-daughter, Śakuntalā, the illegitimate child of the nymph Menakā (p. 320). The girl runs on to the stage harassed by a bee, and is freed from its attentions by the gallant King. Naturally he falls in love with her, and with due modesty she shows that she returns his affection. The second act shows Duṣyanta in the throes of love. He cannot press his suit in the absence of Śakuntalā’s foster-father, so he remains in the neighbourhood of the hermitage, ostensibly to defend it from wild elephants and demons. In the third act Śakuntalā is languid and sick with love. She confesses her feelings to her two friends, Anasūya and Priyārvadā, who persuade her to
write a letter to the King. As she is writing, the King, who has heard every-thing from a nearby thicket, comes on the scene, and the two friends with-draw. He gives Śakuntalā a ring, and, by plaguing their troth, they are married by the gāndharva rite (p. 169).

In the fourth act Duṣyanta has been recalled to his capital by affairs of state, leaving Śakuntalā behind. Kanva is still away. Meanwhile a great and irascible hermit, Durvīśas, visits the hermitage, and, as a result of a fancied slight, he curses Śakuntalā, saying that she will be forgotten by her husband until he sees the ring he gave her. Meanwhile Kanva returns. He knows already of what has happened, and decides to send the now pregnant Śakuntalā to the King. In a scene of great pathos she takes leave of her foster-father and her friends, and sets out for the capital in the care of two young hermits and an elderly hermit-woman, Gautaml. The fifth act shows us the court of Duṣyanta. Śakuntalā, veiled, is ushered in with her attendants. She reminds the King of their love, and the attendants testify to her words; but the curse of Durvīśas has effaced all memory of her from the King’s mind, and he does not recognize her.

Gautaml. Child! Put your modesty on one side a minute and take off your veil. Then His Majesty will recognize you. (She does so.)

THE KING (looking at Śakuntalā, aside).

This shape of untarnished beauty is offered me.
I wonder whether or not I really wed her.
I am like a bee in a jasmine wet with the dawn dew—
I cannot now enjoy her, nor can I leave her.

(He remains deep in thought.)

THE DOORKEEPER (aside). How His Majesty respects the Sacred Law! Who else would think twice about a beauty so easily come by?

Śāṅgaravā (one of the hermits). Your Majesty, why are you so silent?

THE KING. Hermits, I’ve been racking my brains, but I’ve no recollection whatever of marrying this lady. How can I accept her, ... especially when she shows such obvious signs of pregnancy?

Śakuntalā (aside). His Majesty doubts that we were ever married! What has become of my high-soaring hopes?

Śāṅgaravā. So you won’t take her?

The sage indeed deserves your scorn,
for he respects his outraged daughter,
he gives to you the wealth you stole from him,
and treats a robber as an honest man!

Śāradvata (the other hermit). That’s enough, Śāṅgaravā! Śakun-talā, we’ve said all we can say, and His Majesty has spoken! Now it’s up to you! You must say something that will convince him.

Śakuntalā (aside). When his passion has sunk to such depths what’s
the good of reminding him of it! The only thing I'm sure of is that I'm to be pitied! (Aloud.) Your Majesty! (Her voice drops to an undertone). Even though you doubt your marriage to me, this isn't the way you ought to receive me. I'm a girl who is naturally open-hearted. Is it right that you should make promises to me at the hermitage and then deceive me, and now use such harsh words to throw me aside?

**THE KING** *(putting his hands to his ears).* Heaven forbid!

Why do you try to sully your kin
and bring me to ruin,
as a river dashing against its banks
sullies its water and fells the tree on the shore?

śákuntá. All right! If you really think I'm another man's wife I'll clear up your doubts by this token!

**THE KING.** That's a good idea!

śákuntá *(feeling her ring-finger).* Oh dear! Oh dear!! The ring isn't on my finger! *(She looks at Gautami in distress.)*

**Gautami.** The ring must have slipped off your finger while you were bathing.

**THE KING** *(smiling).* There's a well-known saying—"A woman always has her wits about her"!

śákuntá. Fate's against me again! One thing more I want to say.

**THE KING.** Very well! I'll listen!

śákuntá. One day when we were in the bower of creepers you had a lotus leaf filled with water in your hand.

**THE KING.** I'm listening.

śákuntá. Then my pet fawn Dirghápáňa came up, and you held out the water and tried to get him to come to you, and said tenderly that he should have the first drink, but he wouldn't come near your hand because he didn't know you. So I held him, and he took the water from me, and you laughed and said, "Everyone trusts his own kind—after all, you're both children of the forest!"

**THE KING.** Those are the sort of sweet and lying phrases with which scheming women fool men of the world!

**Gautami.** Good sir, you shouldn't say such things. This girl was brought up in a hermitage, and she knows nothing of deceit.

**THE KING.** Old woman!

Even in birds and beasts the female heeds no lessons in deceit!
How much less she who has the power of reason!
Cuckoos, before they take to flight,
make sure that other birds will rear their chicks!
śākuntāḷā (angrily). You wretch! You judge me by the measure of your own heart! Was there ever a bigger hypocrite? You, in your cloak of righteousness—you're like a well covered over with grass!

the king (aside). Her anger seems quite genuine and makes me have second thoughts.

She must think my soul is vile in its forgetfulness, and in not acknowledging our secret love.
At the knitting of the brows of her eyes red with anger the bow of the Love-god is snapped in two.

(Aloud). Good woman. The movements of King Duśyanta are common knowledge, and nobody knows anything about this.

śākuntāḷā. So be it! Here am I, turned into a wanton, and all because I trusted the race of Purū, and fell into the clutches of a man who had honey on his tongue and poison in his heart. (She covers her face with the end of her robe and weeps.)

śārṅgarāva. So you have to suffer for your own folly, when you don't keep a check on your impulses.

One should think hard before making love, especially in secret.
Friendship to those whose hearts we know not soon turns to hatred.

the king. What, do you trust this lady enough to attack me with your censorious words?

śārṅgarāva (scornfully). You hear things upside down!

The word of one who from her birth has learnt no guile carries no weight at all, but they who have mastered the science of deceit have power to speak words of authority.

the king. Honest sir, if for the sake of the argument I admit your accusation, tell me what good it would do me to deceive her.

śārṅgarāva. You'd reap your own ruin.

the king. And surely it's unbelievable that a king of the line of Purū should seek his own ruin?

śārabdvata. Śārṅgarāva, what's the use of arguing with him? We've carried out the Teacher's command, now let's go home. (To the King.)

Here is Your Lordship's wife— leave her or accept her. It is said that the husband's power over the wife is all-embracing.
Gautami, let's go! (They make for the door.)

Śakuntalā. Oh, how I've been cheated by this deceiver! You mustn't leave me! (She follows them.)

Gautami. (pausing.) Look, Śāṅgarava, my child Śakuntalā is following us and crying pitifully. Oh, what will my little girl do, now that her husband has cast her off so cruelly?

Śāṅgarava (turning sternly). Wanton, you are too independent! (Śāṅcalā trembles with fear.)

Śāṅgarava. Śakuntalā!

If you are what the king says you are
you are cast off by your family, and your father is nothing to you;
but if you know your vow to be true
even bondage in your husband's home is good.

You must stay behind, and we must go!

The king. Hermit, why do you delude this lady?
The moon awakens the night-flowering lotuses,
and the sun those that flower by day.
The way of the man of self-control
is to have no dealings with the wife of another.

Śāṅgarava. When Your Majesty has such a short memory for his past deeds he does well to be so fearful of sin!

The king (to the Chief Priest).* I ask you the rights and wrongs of the matter.

I wonder, am I forgetful,
or has she told me lies?
Shall I abandon my own wife
or sin by touching another's?

The chief priest (thoughtfully). If you ask me, this is what I think should be done.

The king. Command me, Your Honour!

The chief priest. Let the lady stay in my home until the child is born. If you ask why, this is my reason—Long ago the wise men told you that your first son would become a universal emperor. If the son of the hermit's daughter bears the tokens of such kingship you should congratulate her and take her into your harem—otherwise send her back to her father.

The king. It shall be as my master pleases.

The chief priest. Child, follow me!

* This stage direction is inserted by us. All the others are Kālidāsa's. In their comparatively full stage directions Sanskrit plays contrast strikingly with those of ancient Greece.
Sakuntalā. O holy Earth, open for me! (She starts to go, and leaves with the Chief Priest. The hermits depart. The King, his memory clouded by the curse, thinks about Sakuntalā.)

Soon the Chief Priest returns. As he was leading Sakuntalā to his home a heavenly shape appeared and carried her up to heaven. It was her mother, the nymph Menakā, who had come to take her to her true parents’ home for her confinement.

Act six introduces two policemen and a fishermen. He has found a precious ring in the maw of a fish, and is hauled before the king under the suspicion of having stolen it. As soon as Duṣyanta sees the ring he recognizes it as the one he gave Sakuntalā, and his memory returns. But Sakuntalā has vanished. For a while the King gives himself up to grief, for he has lost his wife and he has no heir. Soon he assuages his sorrow in action, for Mātali, the charioteer of Indra, brings him word that his help is needed in the long war between gods and demons.

The final act takes place several years later on the lower slopes of heaven, at the hermitage of the divine sage Mārīca. Duṣyanta is returning victorious from battle, when he sees a small boy, nobly wrestling with a tame lion cub. He stops his chariot to admire the child’s courage and strength, and is told that he is Bharata, the son of Sakuntalā. The lovers are reunited, and all ends happily.

In many respects “Sakuntalā” is comparable to the more idyllic comedies of Shakespeare, and Kanva’s hermitage is surely not far from the Forest of Arden. The plot of the play, like many of Shakespeare’s plots, depends much on fortunate chances and on the supernatural, which, of course, was quite acceptable to the audience for which Kālidāsa wrote. Its characters, even to the minor ones, are happily delineated individuals. In the passage we have quoted the two hermits, who play no further part in the action, are sharply differentiated. Sārīgarava is a brave and upright man, fearless in his denunciation of wickedness in high places, but rather stern and hard in his righteousness. Sāradvata, on the other hand, betrays himself in two lines as a moral weakling, anxious to escape from an unpleasant situation as quickly as possible. Kālidāsa makes no pretense to realism, but his dialogue is fresh and vigorous. In fact the dialogue of the better Sanskrit plays generally seems based on vernacular, and is full of idiomatic expressions. Indian playgoers did not demand the conflict of feelings and emotions which is the chief substance of serious European drama, but Kālidāsa was quite capable of portraying such conflict effectively. His beauties and merits are tarnished by any translation, but few who can read him in the original would doubt that, both as poet and as dramatist, he was one of the great men of the world.
There were many other dramatists, of whom we can only mention a few. Śūdraka, probably Kālidāsa's approximate contemporary, has left only one play "The Little Clay Cart" (Mrčchakatika). This is the most realistic of Indian dramas, unravelling a complicated story, rich in humour and pathos and crowded with action, of the love of a poor brāhmaṇ Cārudatta for the virtuous courtezan Vasantasena; this story is interwoven with one of political intrigue, leading up to the overthrow of the wicked king Pālaka, and the play contains a vivid trial scene, after which the hero is saved from execution at the last moment. It is notable for its realistic depiction of city life and for its host of minor characters, all of whom are drawn with skill and individuality. It has more than once been performed in translation on the European stage, and, to a Western audience, it is certainly the most easily appreciated of Indian plays.

Viśākhadatta (7th century) was the dramatist of politics. His only complete surviving play, "The Minister's Signet Ring" (Mudrā-rākṣasa), deals with the schemes of the wily Cānakya (p. 51) to foil the plots of Rākṣasa, the minister of the last of the Nandas, and to place Candragupta Maurya firmly on the throne. The plot is exceedingly complicated, but is worked out with great skill, and the play is beautifully constructed to lead up, like "The Little Clay Cart", to a pathetic scene where one of the chief characters is saved from death by impalement at the last moment. Another play by Viśākhadatta, "The Queen and Candra Gupta" (Devicandragupta), purporting to tell the story of the rise to power of Candra Gupta II (p. 66), exists only in fragments.

Three plays are ascribed to the great king Harṣa (p. 69f), though they may be the work of a "ghost writer". They are "Ratnāvali", "Priyadarśikā", and "The Joy of the Serpents" (Nāgānanda). The first two, named after their heroines, are charming harem comedies, while the last is a play of religious purport, telling of prince Jīmūtavāhana, who gives his own body to put a stop to the sacrifice of snakes to the divine Garuḍa (p. 303).

With Harṣa we may link his royal contemporary, the Pallava king Mahendravikramavarman, who has left a one-act play "The Sport of the Drunkards" (Mattaviḷāsa). It treats of a drunken Śaivite ascetic, who loses the skull which he uses as a begging bowl and accuses a Buddhist monk of stealing it. After much satirical dialogue, in which other dissolute ascetics of various persuasions and both sexes are involved, it is found that the skull has been stolen by a dog. This little farce, though slight, throws a flood of light on the life of the times and is full of Rabelaisian humour.

Second only to Kālidāsa in the esteem of the critics was Bhavabhūti,
who lived at Kānyakubja in the early 8th century. Three of his plays survive—"Mālatī and Mādhava", "The Deeds of the Great Hero" (Mahāvīrācarita), and "The Later Deeds of Rāma" (Uttararāmacarita). The first is a love story with a pseudo-realistic background, full of incident of an exciting or horrific type, in which the heroine is more than once rescued from death, while the two latter plays tell the story of Rāma. By Western standards as a dramatist Bhavabhūti falls short of those we have mentioned earlier. His plots are weakly constructed and his characters lack individuality. His greatness rests on his deep understanding of sorrow; in his treatment of the pathetic and the terrible he perhaps excels Kālidāsa.

After Bhavabhūti the quality of Sanskrit drama declined. Playwrights of some merit, such as Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa (? 8th century), Murāri (early 9th century), Rājaśekhara (9th–10th centuries), and Kṛṣṇamiśra (11th century), continued to write dramas, but their work grew more and more literary, and was evidently often intended rather for reading than for performance. We have records of the occasional production of Sanskrit plays after the Muslim invasion, but the Sanskrit theatrical tradition, though not forgotten, had by now become a thing of the past.

Sanskrit Prose Literature

The earliest surviving prose stories are a few narrative episodes in the Brāhmaṇas (p. 407ff), followed by the Pāli Jātakas (p. 456ff). In the Gupta period, however, there developed a style of ornate prose narrative, which was very different from the simple Pāli stories and was classed as kārīya. The chief writers in this genre were Daṇḍin, Subandhu and Bāṇa, all of whom lived in the late 6th and early 7th centuries.

Daṇḍin's "Tales of the Ten Princes" (Daśakumārācarita) is a collection of exciting and ingenious stories, held together by a framing narrative and all interwoven with great skill. The prose is comparatively simple. Long compounds are numerous, but the inordinately lengthy sentences of Bāṇa are not to be found. The stories are secular, often humorous, and sometimes amoral, while the characters are well delineated. Some of the interest of the "Ten Princes" lies in its comparative realism, for in their adventures the ten heroes come in contact with merchants and thieves, princesses and prostitutes, peasants and wild hillmen. Few works of Indian literature tell us so much about low life.

As examples of Daṇḍin's style we give two little stories which are contained within the larger tales, and are intended to show contrasting aspects of the character of the fair sex. The styles are sharply
differentiated to fit the themes; the grisly story of Dhūmini is told in crisp short sentences with great economy of detail, while in the domestic idyll of Gomini Dāṅjin lingers lovingly on his words, and describes the charming scene in leisurely periods.

"There is a country called Trigarta, where there lived three householders, who had accumulated a great fortune. They were brothers, called Dhanaka, Dhānyaka and Dhanyaka. In those days Indra gave no rain for twelve years. The corn withered, plants were barren, trees bore no fruit, and the clouds were impotent; water courses dried up, ponds became mere mudholes, and the springs ceased to flow. Bulbs, roots and fruit became scarce, folk-tales were forgotten, and all festive merrymaking ceased. Robber bands multiplied, and people ate one another's flesh. Human skulls, white as cranes, rolled on the ground. Flocks of thirsty crows flew hither and thither. Villages, cities, whole districts, were deserted.

"The three householders first ate their store of grain and then one by one their goats, their sheep, their buffaloes, their cows, their maidservants, their menservants, their children, and the wives of the eldest and the middle brother. Finally they decided that next day they would eat Dhūmini, the wife of the youngest; but the youngest brother, Dhanyaka, could not bring himself to eat his darling, so that night he stole away with her.

"When she grew weary he carried her, until they came to a forest... and they walked on through it until at last they came upon a man who was writhing on the ground, with his hands, feet, ears and nose cut off. He compassionately supported this man too on his shoulder, and for a long time the three dwelt in a hut which he painstakingly built of leaves in a corner of the forest, which abounded in edible bulbs, roots and game. He healed the man's wounds with almond and sesamum oil, and fed him with a full share of his own meat and vegetables.

"One day when the man had quite recovered and was restored to health, while Dhanyaka was hunting, Dhūmini approached the man with desire for pleasure, and though he upbraided her she compelled him to satisfy her. When her husband came back and asked for water she said, 'Draw it from the well yourself, I've got a splitting headache', and tossed him the bucket and rope. As he was drawing water from the well she crept up suddenly behind him and pushed him in.

"Supporting the cripple on her shoulder she wandered from land to land, and gained the reputation of a devoted wife, and was much honoured. Finally she settled in Avanti, and lived in great affluence, thanks to the generosity of the king. One day she heard that her husband had been rescued from the well by a band of thirsty merchants, and was now roaming about the land of Avanti, begging his food. So Dhūmini declared to the unwitting king that he was the villain who had crippled her husband, and he condemned the good man to death by torture.

"As Dhanyaka was being led to execution, knowing that his appointed time had not yet come, he boldly said to the officer in charge, 'If the beggar
I'm supposed to have crippled is ready to condemn me I deserve my punishment!” The officer thought that no harm could come of testing [his words, so he sent for the cripple]. As soon as the cripple was brought and saw Dhanyaka his eyes filled with tears. He fell at the good man’s feet, and, being a man of noble mind, he told of Dhanyaka’s kindness and the false Dhūmini’a wickedness. The enraged king had the wicked woman’s face disfigured, and made her serve as a cook in his kennels, while he bestowed great favour on Dhanyaka. And that is why I say that women are hard-hearted.”

“In the land of the Dravidians is a city called Kāñcī. Therein dwelt the very wealthy son of a merchant, by name Śaktikumāra. When he was nearly eighteen he thought: ‘There’s no pleasure in living without a wife or with one of bad character. Now how can I find a really good one?’ So, dubious of his chance of finding wedded bliss with a woman taken at the word of others, he became a fortune-teller, and roamed the land with a measure of unhusked rice tied in the skirts of his robe; and parents, taking him for an interpreter of birthmarks, showed their daughters to him. Whenever he saw a girl of his own class, whatever her birthmarks, he would say to her: ‘My dear girl, can you cook me a good meal from this measure of rice?’ And so, ridiculed and rejected, he wandered from house to house.

“One day in the land of the Śibis, in a city on the banks of the Kāverī, he examined a girl who was shown to him by her nurse. She wore little jewel-lery, for her parents had spent their fortune, and had nothing left but their dilapidated mansion. As soon as he set eyes on her he thought: ‘This girl is shapely and smooth in all her members. Not one limb is too fat or too thin, too short or too long. Her fingers are pink; her hands are marked with auspicious lines—the barleycorn, the fish, the lotus and the vase; her ankles are shapely; her feet are plump and the veins are not prominent; her thighs curve smoothly; her knees can barely be seen, for they merge into her rounded thighs; her buttocks are dimpled and round as chariot wheels; her navel is small, flat and deep; her stomach is adorned with three lines; the nipples stand out from her large breasts, which cover her whole chest; her palms are marked with signs which promise corn, wealth and sons; her nails are smooth and polished like jewels; her fingers are straight and tapering and pink; her arms curve sweetly from the shoulder, and are smoothly jointed; her slender neck is curved like a conch-shell; her lips are rounded and of even red; her pretty chin does not recede; her cheeks are round, full and firm; her eyebrows do not join above her nose, and are curved, dark and even; her nose is like a half-blown sesamum flower; her wide eyes are large and gentle and flash with three colours, black, white and brown; her brow is fair as the new moon; her curls are lovely as a mine of sapphires; her long ears are adorned doubly, with earrings and charming lotuses, hanging limply; her abundant hair is not brown, even at the tips, but long, smooth, glossy and fragrant. The character of such a girl cannot but correspond to

* Though a fair complexion was much prized in ancient India a trace of brownness in the hair, fairly common in the North, was thought very unbeautiful and inauspicious.