Texts and Traditions of Early India

B. A. Course No. U 41303  Credits: 3
Mode of Evaluation: 2 Sessionals (50%) + End Semester Exam. (50%)

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

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

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

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

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

1. Sacrifices and their Significance – Discussion on Vedic literature in terms of composition, chronology, contents, transmission; case study of either the asvamedha or the rajasuya based on later Vedic excerpts.
   - Frits Staal, *Discovering the Vedas*, Penguin, relevant sections
   - R.S. Sharma, essay on the ratninamhavimsi from *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions*, New Delhi, Motilal Banarasidas
   - Excerpts from translations of either the Purusasukta or the marriage hymn.
   - Excerpts from translations of the Satapatha Brahmana on the asvamedha/ rajasuya (J. Eggeling, Sacred Books of the East)

2. Defining the Domestic – the codification of rites of passage; case study of marriage based on Grhyasutras
   - Excerpts from translations of the Grhyasutras (H. Oldenberg, *Sacred Books of the East*)

3. Dialogues and Dissent – the early Upanisads and early Buddhist tradition; case study on varna based on excerpts from the Digha Nikaya
   - Patrick Olivelle translation of the Upanisads, selected portions
   - T.W. Rhys Davids, excerpts from the Digha Nikaya

4. Traditions of Hagiography – early Buddhist negotiations of the secular and the sacred; case study based on excerpts from the Buddhacarita/ Asokavadana; Jaina understanding of the salakapurusa - ‘great men’.
   - Excerpts from the Buddhacarita- Clay Sanskrit Library, introduction and translation by Patrick Olivelle.
   - Excerpts from John L. Strong *The Ashokavadana*
   - Excerpts from Trisastisalakapurusa or the lives of sixty-three illustrious persons by Acarya Sri Hemacandra, translated by Helen Johnson, Gaekwad Oriental Series, Baroda, 1931.
   - KC Jain, *History of Jainism: Jainism before and in the age of Mahavira*, relevant chapters.
5. **The Consolidation of the Sastras** - theories of kingship and social hierarchy; case study based on excerpts from the *Arthasastra/ Manusmrti*

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


- Excerpts from *Silappadikaram*
- Excerpts from *Manimekalai*

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

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

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

- excerpts from the *satakams*, available in the Clay Sanskrit Series


• Kumkum Roy, ‘Of Theras and Theris’, from The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power, New Delhi, OUP, 2010
• Translation of Theri Gatha by Rhys Davids
• Vidya Dehejia, Slaves of the Lord: The Path of the Tamil Saints, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1988.
• I Keep Vigil of Rudra: The Vachanas, translated by H.S. Shivaprakash, Penguin.

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

• Uma Chakravati, Women men and Beasts, from Everyday lives, Everyday histories, Tulika, New Delhi, 2006.
• Excerpts from A.K. Ramanujan, Poems of Love and War
• Excerpts from Patrick Olivelle’s translations of the Pancatantra.