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Content

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Question Paper—June-2024 (Solved)	1-3
Question Paper—December-2023 (Solved)	1-3
Question Paper—June-2023 (Solved)	1-2
Question Paper—December-2022 (Solved)	1-3
Question Paper—Exam Held in March-2022 (Solved)	1-5
Question Paper—Exam Held in August-2021 (Solved)	1-3
Question Paper—Exam Held in February-2021 (Solved)	1-3
Question Paper—December, 2019 (Solved)	1-3
Question Paper—June, 2019 (Solved)	1-5
Question Paper—December, 2018 (Solved)	1-5
Question Paper—June, 2018 (Solved)	1-3
Question Paper—December, 2017 (Solved)	1-3
Question Paper—June, 2017 (Solved)	1-7

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
--------------	-----------------------------------	-------------

BACKGROUND STUDIES

1. The Concept of Indian Literature	1
2. The Concept of Indian Literature: Modern Period	8
3. Comparative Studies in Indian Literature	19
4. English Translation of Indian Literature	27

SAMSKARA: U.R. ANANTHA MURTHY

5. The Writer and His Literary Context	39
6. <i>Samskara</i> : The Narrative	47
7. <i>Samskara</i> : Form and Themes	56
8. <i>Samskara</i> : Characters, Title, Literary Criticism and Contemporary Relevance	61

S.No.	Chapterwise Reference Book	Page
-------	----------------------------	------

TAMAS: BHISHAM SAHNI

9.	The Writer and the Partition	65
10.	Getting to Know the Text	68
11.	Making Sense of the Narrative	76
12.	Characters and Characterization	83
13.	An Overview	87

SHORT STORY - I

14.	Mahasweta Devi: <i>Salt</i> (Noon: Bengali)	91
	Translation: Sarmishta Dutta Gupta	
15.	Vaikom Muhammad Basheer: <i>Birthday</i> [Janmadinam:	96
	Malayalam] Translation: The Author	
16.	Nirmal Verma: <i>Birds</i> (Parinde: Hindi) Translation: Jai Ratan	102
17.	Ismat Chughtai: <i>Tiny's Granny</i> [Nanhi Ki Nanni: Urdu]	111
	Translation: Ralph Russell	
18.	Gopinath Mohanty: <i>Tadpa</i> [Tadpa: Oriya]	116
	Translation: Sitakant Mahapatra	

SHORT STORY - II

19.	Indira Goswami [Mamoni Raisom Goswami]: <i>The Empty Chest</i>	121
	(Udang Bakach: Assamese)	
	Translator: Prodipta Birgohain	
20.	Motilal Jyotwani: <i>Very Lonely, She</i>	126
	(Akeli Akeli Hoo-A: Sindhi) Translator: Dr. Nandlal Jyotwani	
21.	Afsar Ahmed: <i>Headmaster, Prawn, Chanachur</i>	130
	(Arthaheen Katha Balar Nirbharta: Bengali)	
	Translation: Chandana Dutta	
22.	Vijaydan Detha: <i>The Compromise</i>	136
	(Rajeenavo: Rajasthani) Translator: Shyam Mathur	

POETRY

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 23. | K.S. Nongkynrih: <i>Requiem</i> [Khasi]
Translation: The Poet
Chandra Kanta Murasingh:
<i>The Stone Speaks in the Forest</i> [Kokborok]
Translation: B.S. Rajkumar
Yumlebam Ibomcha Singh: <i>The Last Dream</i> [Manipuri]
Translation: Udayan Ghosh | 141 |
| 24. | Haribhajan Singh: <i>Tree and the Sage</i> (Rukh Te Rishi: Punjabi)
Translation: J.S. Rahi and Rita Chaudhry
Raghuvir Sahay: <i>The Stare</i> (Taktaki: Hindi)
Translation: The Poet | 147 |
| 25. | Dina Nath Nadim: <i>The Moon</i> [Zoon: Kashmiri]
Translation: J.L. Kaul
Padma Sachdev: <i>The Moment of Courage</i> [Dogri]
Translation: Iqbal Masud | 156 |
| 26. | Kondepudi Nirmala: <i>Mother Serious</i> [Telugu]
Translation: K. Damodar Rao
Vimala: <i>Kitchen</i> [Telugu]
Translation: V.V.B. Rama Rao
K. Ayyappa Paniker: <i>I Met Walt Whitman Yesterday: An Interview</i>
[Njaan Innale Walt Whitmaane Kandu–Oru Interview, Malayalam]
Translation: A.J. Thomas | 161 |
| 27. | Ramakanta Rath: <i>Sri Radha</i> [Oriya]
Translation: The Poet
Shakti Chattopadhyay: <i>Just Once Try</i>
[Akbar Tumi: Bengali]
Translation: Sibnarayan Ray | 167 |
| 28. | Sitanshu Yashashchandra: <i>Orpheus</i> [Gujarati]
Translation: The Poet Namdeo Dhasal: <i>A Notebook of
Poems and Autobiography</i> [Kavitechi Vahi; Atmucharithra:
Marathi] Translation: Santosh Bhoomkar | 174 |

S.No.	Chapterwise Reference Book	Page
TUGHLAQ: GIRISH KARNAD		
29.	Introducing Contemporary Indian Theatre	182
30.	Introducing the Author and the Play	191
31.	<i>Tughlaq</i> : Structure, Themes and Motifs	201
32.	Characters and Critical Comments on the Play	205
NON-FICTIONAL PROSE		
33.	Amrit Rai: <i>Premchand: His Life and Times</i> [Kalam Ka Sipahi: Biography, Hindi] Translation: Harish Trivedi	208
34.	Bama (Faustina Mary Fatima Rani): <i>Karukku</i> [Karukku: Autobiography, Tamil] Translation: Laxmi Holmstrom	212
35.	Saadat Hasan Manto: <i>On Ismat</i> [Ismat Chughtai: Pen-Sketch, Urdu] Translation: Shobhana Bhattacharji	218
36.	Umaprasad Mukhopadhyaya: <i>Manimahesh</i> [Manimahesh: Travel Writing, Bengali] Translation: Sanjukta Das Gupta	221



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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2024

(Solved)

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

M.E.G.-14

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer all questions. All questions carry equal marks.

Q. 1. Discuss with reference to the context, any four of the following passages:

- (a) **Cave roofs are pushed and splintered,
Mistakes are fine follies howl,
Every eye begets its many dreams,**

Ans. Context: The passage is taken from poem Orpheus by Sitanshu Yashashchandra.

Explanation: It reflects both chaos and the boundless nature of human imagination. The 'cave roofs' being 'pushed and splintered' symbolize the breaking of barriers, perhaps the limits of the human mind or the boundaries between the conscious and subconscious. This imagery evokes a sense of upheaval and transformation, reminiscent of the tumultuous events in the Orpheus myth, where boundaries between life and death, music and silence, are transgressed.

The phrase 'Mistakes are fine follies howl' suggests that errors or missteps, like Orpheus' fatal glance back at Eurydice, are not just small oversights but significant, howling regrets that echo through time, much like the lament of Orpheus. These 'fine follies' emphasize the tragic beauty of human error, where even mistakes are imbued with a certain grandeur or nobility, reflecting the inherent imperfections in the pursuit of lofty goals or ideals.

Finally, 'Every eye begets its many dreams' alludes to the subjective nature of reality, where each person's vision or perspective creates a multitude of possibilities, much like how Orpheus' vision of bringing Eurydice back to life was a dream shattered by a single glance.

- (b) **Love live thirst,
Though all the world is for you
Yet the most precious gift of all**

Ans. Context: The passage is taken from Tree and the Sage by Haribhajan Singh.

Explanation: The passage encapsulates the poem's deep engagement with the concept of desire or

longing. Thirst symbolises an existential yearning that transcends mere physical needs, embodying the perpetual quest for truth, knowledge, and self-realisation. The poet celebrates thirst as a divine gift, suggesting that it is this intrinsic desire that propels individuals toward higher understanding and spiritual fulfilment. The acknowledgment that 'all the world is for you' implies that the external world offers abundance and satisfaction, yet it is the inner thirst that remains the most vital and precious. This thirst, bestowed by the creator, is not just a physical craving but a profound spiritual longing that drives the poet's journey in the poem.

The poet's reverence for thirst as a gift from the creator also reflects the influence of Indian spiritual traditions, where desire is often viewed as a motivating force in the pursuit of spiritual goals. In the context of the poem, thirst is not a flaw or weakness but a powerful drive that connects the poet to the universal truths embodied by the sage and the tree.

- (c) **We'll strive to untie the narcissus with you,
And she'll be able to satiate her longings,
O bumble bee, the black bumble bee!**

Ans. Context: The passage is from Nadim's poem 'The Bumble-Bee.'

Explanation: It reflects the profound yearning and melancholy that pervades the poem. The poet, addressing the bumblebee, expresses a deep empathy for its sadness, symbolizing the unfulfilled desires and the inevitable separation of lovers. The promise to 'untie the narcissus' suggests a desire to overcome the barriers that keep the bee and the flower apart, mirroring the theme of longing and unattainable love.

The narcissus, a symbol of beauty and allure, represents the object of the bee's affection, and the poet's pledge to unite them underscores the universal theme of striving against fate. The line "she'll be able

to satiate her longings” captures the deep, unsatisfied desires of the lovers, while the repetition of “O bumble bee, the black bumble bee!” emphasizes the bee’s sorrowful state.

It is imbued with the natural imagery of Kashmir, where the narcissus and the bumblebee are bound by the cycles of nature, much like the rose and nightingale in classical poetry. However, unlike the traditional tales where love triumphs, this poem foreshadows an inevitable tragedy, with autumn, winter, and storms as symbols of the forces that prevent the fulfilment of love.

(d) What impudence in the sunlight.

**The wind's thoughts are wandering,
as though it has seen the long banished over.**

Ans. Context: The lines are from the poem “Sri Radha” by Ramakanta Rath.

Explanation: It evokes a powerful sense of disruption and longing. The “impudence in the sunlight” suggests an audacious or rebellious energy, perhaps reflecting Radha’s inner turmoil as she senses Krishna’s presence. The sunlight, typically a symbol of clarity and warmth, is portrayed here with a sense of defiance, which mirrors the emotional intensity and unrest within Radha. The wind’s ‘wandering thoughts’ further emphasize the atmosphere of unease, as though nature itself is unsettled by the return of something long lost or banished. The wind, often seen as a messenger or a force that carries news, seems to be aware of a profound change, as if it has encountered something that was once exiled and is now returning. This could symbolize Radha’s anticipation and the inevitable reunion with Krishna, which stirs both excitement and apprehension within her. In the context of ‘Sri Radha,’ these lines capture the tension between the ordinary and the divine, the mortal and the eternal.

**(e) The moans that floated
into the still autumn nights
were borne by the cold winds.**

Ans. Context: The lines are from the poem “Requiem” by K.S. Nongkynrih.

Explanation: It vividly captures the atmosphere of mourning and loss. The “moans” represent the grief and sorrow that permeate the air, as the community mourns the death of a young woman named Meri. These sounds are carried by the “cold winds,” symbolizing how grief spreads and touches everyone, just as the chill of autumn can reach into the hearts of those who are grieving.

The choice of autumn as the setting is significant, as it is traditionally associated with decline, decay, and the approach of winter, which can be seen as a metaphor

for death. The stillness of the nights adds to the solemn and sombre mood, emphasizing the weight of loss that hangs over the community. In the broader context of the poem, these lines set the tone for the meditative reflection on Meri’s death and the emotional impact it has on those left behind. The cold winds and autumn nights act as silent witnesses to the grief, underscoring the transient nature of life and the enduring pain of loss.

**(f) That can't be
That can't be
She had died many years ago
She cannot live any longer.**

Ans. The passage is from the poem The Last Dream by Yumlembam Ibomcha Singh.

Explanation: It reflects a deep engagement with the themes of death, ritual, and the supernatural. This passage captures the villagers’ disbelief and fear upon encountering the presence of an old woman who was believed to have died long ago, symbolizing a collision between the past and the present, life and death.

In the context of the poem, the woman is not merely a ghost but a representation of ancient beliefs, customs, and traditions that have been forgotten or disregarded by the modern villagers. Her reappearance at the riverbank, after being buried, suggests a disruption of the natural order and a challenge to the villagers’ understanding of death and life. The repeated phrase, “That can’t be,” emphasizes the shock and denial experienced by the villagers, who are unable to reconcile the woman’s presence with their belief that she had died “many years ago.” This disbelief hints at the supernatural, as if the woman’s return is an omen or a manifestation of something beyond the villagers’ comprehension.

The passage also reflects the tension between life and death, as the villagers are confronted with the possibility that death is not as final as they believed.

Q. 2. What part does religion play in ‘Tamas’? Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 89, Q. No. 2. (SAQ)

Also Add: The novel tells the harrowing story of a small town engulfed in a communal riot, a conflict that erupts due to religious tensions and deeply ingrained prejudices between different communities. The inciting incident in the novel is a pig being thrown into a mosque, an act that ignites communal tension and provides an opportunity for people to unleash their long-standing biases and animosities against another religion. This seemingly small act of provocation leads

Sample Preview of The Chapter

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CONTEMPORARY INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

BACKGROUND STUDIES

The Concept of Indian Literature



INTRODUCTION

The need for defining the Indian literature might come for surprise for some people. The reason for this surprise is that Indian literature is simply written in India. However, what makes the concept complicated is the fact that in India there is no one literature, i.e. literature written in one language. In India, there are many literatures and many linguistic cultures and sub-cultures. What is interesting is that some of these linguistic cultures and sub-cultures were born in opposition to the other. That is why we cannot rely on the above definition as far as the concept of Indian literature is concerned. The complexity of the concept is obvious and therefore, needs further exploration and explanation. In fact, the idea of India as a nation is closely associated with the concept of Indian literature, and both should be explored clearly.

There is no doubt that culture and literature share a very close relation, and if we make a clear understanding of India as a nation then, the task of defining Indian literature would not be much of a pain.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

THE IDEA OF INDIA AS A NATION

Considering the idea of India as a nation will make it clear to us the reason behind the fact that we do not have a credible history of Indian literature and also will allow us to think for the reason for the need of one. This idea will also give us an opportunity to look for the basis of such history, which lies in the past, in the

epics, in the folks, and popular literature, specifically the Bhakti movements. This will open a wide spectrum of Indian literature for us and will help us to look at it as an amalgamation of different waves coming from various different regions joining together to form a wonderful whole.

In order to avoid the trap of looking at India as an existent only after the idea of nation-state surfaced after the historical event of 1947, it is important for us to consider the idea of India as a sub-continent, which went through various historical experiences including that of the colonization, succeeded by independence and partition. But one should take any suggestion from the above statement that we should not consider the way our nation was 'imagined' into being. We are very well aware of the fact that governments of independent India have always talked about the need and requirement of national integration, a need which would not have surfaced if we as the citizen of India would have looked at ourselves as the part of same 'national' community rather than some regional communities. It must be noted that during the Indian struggle of independence, various politicians tried to come up with the concept of 'Bharat Mata', which actually was an attempt to remind people that they belong to the same motherland. Though, this was not an easy task in a nation which was divided by various languages, races, religions, castes, and other regional factors, but they took recourse to the undeniable truth of underlying cultural unity in the country.

In his book '*Discovery of India*', Jawaharlal Nehru talks about the essential unity of Indian in spite of the

various essential differences. And it is this unity which helped in the formation of such a nation, which otherwise does not need any basis for the division. In his book, Nehru points out various differences based on race and talks about Tamil and Pathans. He says, “there is no mistaking the impress of India on the Pathans and this is obvious on the Tamil”. It must be noted that Nehru is talking about the India which was undivided then. He further says that the majority of Indians fall between these two extremes, they too “have retained their peculiar characteristics for hundreds of years... and yet have been throughout these ages distinctively Indian, with the same national heritage and the same set of moral and mental qualities. It is quite clear that this heritage was cultural and was apparent as a way of life and also in “a philosophical attitude of life”. To Nehru, India is as “a culture and a civilization which gave shape to all things”. A culture which is under the influence of foreign idea always attempted to synthesize the traditional and upcoming ideas. Nehru further goes on to say that for Indians, India is simply home. An Indian would feel more like home in India, then outside India. Now this statement immediately reminds us of a statement of one of the most famous Indian poet Nissim Ezekiel. Ezekiel, while commenting on V.S. Naipaul, in his essay “Naipaul’s India and Mine” wrote, “In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am an Indian.”

There was a time when the idea of division of India between the urban India and rural Bharat was a critical commonplace. At times this division formed its ground over elitist English speaking India, which obviously was a minority, and the majority Indian language speaking Bharat. The danger of easy categorization becomes quite obvious in the second formulation. The problem lies in the fact that those who speak Indian languages also constitutes the population of cities, i.e. urban India, and some of these people who both speak and earn their living by speaking Indian languages constitute the elite both in the sense of political occupancy and cultural richness. Usually, as the common perception prevails, India is represented to foreign audience in, while various Indian languages cater only to fellow Indians. And perhaps, this is why Meenakshi Mukherjee and Nissim Ezekiel named their anthology of translation into English from various Indian languages “Another India”. Other suggestions for the title of anthology could have been “Other India’s”, or simply “writing India”. The reason that these suggestions for the title of anthology could have worked better is that they do not attempt to flatten out the diversity of literature which constitutes Indian writing.

The main idea behind the reading of translated Indian literature is to know the diversity of linguistic tradition and culture which constitute the nation. But here an important question comes to the fore – Aren’t we already aware of these traditions and cultures because they belong to one nation? One thing that we should

keep in mind while proceeding in our journey of Indian literature is the slogan, which was made famous during the Nehruvian era which said, “Unity in Diversity”. This slogan makes us aware of the fact that in spite of various common linguistic and religious cultures, there exist a wonderful diversity and therefore, it would not be unjustified to say that India is a pluralistic nation.

SEARCH FOR INDIANNESS IN LITERATURE

In his reading and research on Indian literature K. M. George talks about the basic problem which lingers with the term Indian literature. According to him, the term is used both in singular and plural sense. Here George is trying to emphasize the fact that we accept the diversity and plurality of languages and still we use the term Indian literature in the sense that all these languages produce only one literature. It is very much possible to read all the literatures of various Indian languages in terms of their own history and development. There is no doubt that in India there is no common Indian language but still in India there is what we call Indian literature. In order to explain this complex phenomenon, George uses the analogy of traditional brass lamp with various wicks. He says:

The lamp is the same, the oil is the same, but it is the wicks that determine the brightness of light. The lights from various wicks merge imperceptibly and produce brightness which is the totality of the many lights. Just as many wicks produce one light, India’s many languages produce one literature.

To say in different words, the various Indian literatures have the same source and even if they are discrete if seen in individual sense they still produce one literature what we call as Indian literature. In the words of George: Indian Literature “is the sum total of the literatures produced in the Indian languages, modern and classical”. (ix)

Sisir Kumar Das, India’s one of the most famous comparatist scholars, in his attempt to develop the concept of the Indian argues that India is “a space undistributed by the changes in geographical factors from time-to-time affected by political expediency”. (Das 1995: xii), and has “existed in some form or the other throughout the pre-colonial history of India”. (xiv) The concept of *Bharatvarsa* though was already there but was taken to new heights during the national struggle for independence. Das further argues that though Indian literature is not one as it is written in many different languages, it is the combination of many different and unique literature and “looks at each of them as a distinct expression of the experience of each community”. (xiv) But this does not mean that Das does not consider various common threads which run along various literatures. Actually, he denies both the concepts of homogenization of Indian literatures and also the concept of heterogeneity which ignores the commonalities in culture. Various historical and geographical factors are responsible for the interaction between these literatures in such a way that their separate

histories have “certain point of convergences, thematic, generic, ideological...” (xiv)

Thus we see that just by arriving at the idea of India as a nation we establish the idea of Indian literature. By going on the study of the economic, political and social factors of India, which are the factors that “are seldom confined to a particular language or the region, and an instrument of exploration which transcends the boundaries of a particular language and region.” In the words of Sujit Mukherjee, the ‘literary history of India should account for our literary past.’ He further complains, “Literature in India is sold as its sculpture or painting or music but has not received historical attention on the way that these other arts have”. Therefore, if we ought to establish the contours of contemporary Indian literature, we must seek for discovery of the common literary past of Indian languages.

ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE

Sujit Mukherjee says, “... the very term ‘Indian Literature’ is sparingly used in Indian literary circle. Most often, it tends to make people think only of ancient literary works in Sanskrit. No modern and forward-looking concept of Indian literature has yet been formulated, in spite of the much-used official declaration, ‘India has one literature that is written in many languages’, authored apparently by Radhakrishnan. This declaration has never been fully explored nor has any serious attempt been made to establish its validity’. What is important here is note that usually the word Indian literature reminds of the ancient Sanskrit literature. At this point it is important for us to rest here and think of the term and try to make out the meaning which is individual to each one of us, and that to in context of ancient Indian literature or classical Indian literature. Usually, people of northern part of India would name some of the Sanskrit text which they consider to be the part of classical Indian literature, but they would not name any other text in other languages. They need to look down to the southern part of India, especially to Tamil language. Tamil is the only language in India which has a continuous literary history since the starting of Christian era or perhaps even before that. There is no doubt that Tamil language has a very rich tradition and history. It is interesting to note that an early Tamil grammatical text, Tolkappiyam, clearly mentions about one another language which it considers to be a literary equal or even strong competitor, and that language is “vadamozhi” or northern language, i.e. Sanskrit. Thus, while talking about the ancient literature or classical literature of India we must also think of Tamil along with Sanskrit and then Prakrit, and we must not forget Telugu and Kannada which also has a hoary past. Another point which we must consider is that while talking about the literature we are only considering the written works of literature and not taking oral tradition of literature into concern.

But of course, there must be a very rich oral tradition of literary work in various other Indian languages.

Now the above discussion immediately brings the basic problem with Indian literature into our attention. And that is – many people would not be able to think of Tamil and other languages, while thinking of Indian literature because it belongs to an entirely different region, and also to a different family of language. There are so many languages in India that it is impossible for a person to know all the languages, and that is why it becomes utterly impossible for one to talk about all the languages with confidence. Therefore, one has to rely on other scholars for the information to find the commonalities in the various languages, and by extension various literatures. Factors like the development of modern Indian languages, the formation of linguistic states based on the language spoken by the people of the region, and the ever reinforced politics of the linguistic identity, in a way compel us to consider our language different from the other and thus look at the languages in isolation rather than looking at the common threads are present in all the languages. This makes the idea of coherent Indian literature more complex and difficult. According to **Sujit Mukherjee**, “...no previous model exists anywhere in the world for the literary history of a country of this size and containing so many languages that have achieved a widely scattered and highly uneven literary culture”.

If we look at the ancient period and also at the mediaeval period we will find a happy cross-pollination of Indian literatures which makes us able to see the literary movements across the country. In India, if the literary works like *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* can be considered as the landmarks of the Indian epic tradition, which not only gave rise to the interest in literature but also manifested itself in the establishment in the literary tradition and also folk traditions, then Bhakti movement, without a doubt is one of the first true literary movement of the country. It started in the 7th century CE (*Christian era*) in the southern part of India, and it is because of the popularity of Bhakti movement in Tamil, and that too of the Saivite saints, Tamil is also known as the Saivite language. There are so many evidences according to which the ancient Sanskrit literature was a rich resource in both the north and south India. It is important for us to note that during the medieval periods both Tamil and Sanskrit were used in the Tamil courts as literary language. Another interesting fact is that these languages not only influenced each other but also were written by the same poets.

India’s Vedic and Upanishadic heritage need no introduction, at least for those who call themselves Indian. One of the oldest parts of Vedas is Rigvedic poetry. The richness and fully evolved literary style of these poetry point to a very rich and vibrant culture which must be prevailing during the Vedic era. Even if we go by the popular belief that Vedic and Upanishadic

knowledge were only limited to a specific group of people called Brahmins, then also we cannot deny that the influence of these texts found their way in the popular culture of the time and which were accessible by the common people. And at this point we must consider the role played by Indian epics like *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Nehru emphasized that all Indians shared a common cultural background, which according to him “was a mixture of popular philosophy, tradition, history, myths and legends” and that both the epics, “in popular translation and paraphrases, were widely known among the masses, and every incident and story and moral in them was engraved on the popular mind and gave richness and content to it”. According to Nehru, *Mahabharata* is the foundation text of India because it is in this epic that “a very definite attempt has been made to emphasize the fundamental unity of India, or Bharataravsha as it was called”. *Mahabharata* is the second longest epic in the history of literature and the entire planet, and its richness in the early philosophy, religious beliefs, social structure, political thoughts, myths and legends are beyond any question. The influence of *Mahabharata* is not limited only to the fact that it has been translated in several languages and its episodes are parts of various folk traditions, but it has also inspired various contemporary works of literature. Apart of this the translation of *Mahabharata* in various languages helped in the development of several Indian languages during the first and the second millennium of the Christian era. Some of the examples are:

- (a) Bengali version of *Mahabharata* by Kabi Sanjay during the first half of the 15th century, many argue it to be in the 16th century though.
- (b) Malayalam version of *Mahabharata* as Bharatmala during the 15th century
- (c) Kannada version in 10th century as *Pampabharata*.

An interesting point to note is that various episodes of the epic *Mahabharata* helped in the construction of various Sanskrit plays and has also been referred in Tamil Sangam poetry, thus providing a common cultural background for ancient Indian literature, and by extension India as a nation.

There are various examples of the playwrights who took inspiration from the different episodes of *Mahabharata* for their plays. In the 3rd century, the famous playwright Bhasa, wrote at least six of his plays based on the episodes of *Mahabharata*: (a) *Madhyamavyayogam* (it talks about the reunion of Bhima with his family), (b) *Dutavakyam* (talks about Krishna as an emissary in Kaurava’s court), (c) *Karnabharam* (talks about Indra begging Karna’s armour and earrings), (d) *Pancaratham* (takes on the episode of raid on Virata), (e) *Dutaghatolkacam* (talks about the Ghatotkacha going to Kaurava’s with the message that Arjun will avenge the death of Abhimanyu), and (f) *Urubhangam* (talks about the duel between Bhima and Duryodhana). Apart from these Kalidasa’s Abhijanana *Shakuntalam*

and *Kumarasambhava* needs no introduction. What is interesting to know is that the Sangam poetry of Tamil refers to few events of *Mahabharata* without even affirming the awareness of the epic, this suggests that the oral tradition reached to the South India first, and also that the various events and characters of the *Mahabharata* paved their way into different various literary works and became the part of literary imagination even before the epic was put into popular Sanskrit form. Even if we are not sure of what exactly happened, there is no doubt that the both the epics, outside the Sanskrit tradition found their expression in Tamil, in their first Avatars. We can assume that Tamilians were aware of the epic *Mahabharata* at least two or three century before the Christian era, based on the fact that the first mention of characters and events of *Mahabharata* comes in the Sangam poetry. Another interesting thing is to notice that in *Purananunu*, we see a Chera king, Perunchhoru Utiyan Cheralatan providing food to both Kauravas and Pandavas in *Mahabharata* war. This interesting intersection of a Tamil king in *Mahabharata* refers to the significant of the events of all parts of the land. Other such reference can be found in the similes used in *Perumpanarruppatai*, in which Tamil king Tontaiman Ilanthiraian is compared to the victory of Pandavas over Kauravas. In Kalittokai we find the mentioning of the Kurukshetra war, and also the death of Bhishma and Drona. By now we know that many of the Tamil dynasties claimed to have taken part in the episodes occurred in *Mahabharata*. The Pandya kings claimed that they were the direct descendent of Pandavas – through Arjuna’s marriage with Chitrangada, who herself was a daughter of a Pandya king and whose son Babruvahana ascended the throne. Another point which must be noted in regards of literary affinities is that one of the Sangam poets is called Bharatampatiya Peruntevanar, i.e. Peruntevanar who composed and Sang Bharatam. Another point to be noted is that two the early Tamil epics, which are Jain Cilappadikaram, written in 3rd century CE, and Buddhist Manimekalai, written in 5th century contain the references to the vents and characters of the *Mahabharata*. Later in the years *Mahabharata* has been retold numerous times, but the one which is considered to be the greatest in all the retellings is *Bharatam* by Villipputturazhavar, composed in the 14th century CE.

The history of Indian ancient literature is indeed interesting. The Sanskrit texts were not composed in any specific part of the country but in various different parts, and that is why many of the retelling of Sanskrit text comes from the various eastern and western location of the country. Sanskrit was used as a language of communication and literature in the various parts of India, when Prakrit came into prominence during the 6th and 11th century. During this time the Pali was also an established language. Sanskrit also played a major role in the Tamil region of the nation. This was the period