

Sanskrit Literary Tradition: (Re) reading the Canon

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Abstract

Sanskrit literature is widely acknowledged as one of the oldest, prosperous and philosophically significant literary traditions in the world. This study elaborates these rich and enduring literary traditions. It emphasizes its antiquity. It dates back to the Vedic period and it has evolved naturally throughout time in a variety of forms, including religious hymns, epics, classical poetry, Drama and prose. This article examines the representation of the four *purushaartha*s – *dharma* (duty), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desire) and *moksha* (liberation) – as the core of literary traditions. The analysis encompasses a variety of genres, including sacred writings, artistic works, and empirical research. Particular emphasis is placed on the period of secular literature and its various forms, such as *Mahakavya* (epic poetry), *Muktakas* (lyric poetry), *Champu kavya* (a combination of prose and poetry), and *Roopaka* (drama). This genre boasts the rich literary traditions of Sanskrit. Furthermore, the study highlights the global impact of Sanskrit storytelling and prose, especially through influential works such as *Panchatantra*. Further, this paper concludes that Sanskrit literature is not merely an artefact of history; rather, it represents a vibrant and evolving intellectual tradition that continues to shape cultural and literary perspectives across generations.

Keywords: *Sanskrit Literature, Sanskrit Poetry, Sanskrit Drama, Sanskrit Prose, Sanskrit Narratives.*

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Introduction

Sanskrit literature has an antiquity, range and aesthetic excellence which is greater than that of all other classical literatures taken together. Its importance is supported by several compelling factors. Primarily, Sanskrit literature is unparalleled in terms of its ancient origins. No other tradition offers such antiquity. Some scholars in the West believe that Egyptian literature is the oldest in the world, but even that is only four thousand years old. On the other hand, there have been much more arguments over the dating of the *Rigveda*, the earliest of written Sanskrit texts. Some scholars propose that the *Rigveda* was composed several millennia ago. Although such estimates are often considered inflated, one cannot lose sight of the widely-reported view of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Mathematical and astronomical calculations allow him to conclude that many hymns of the *Rigveda* were composed at least six thousand years ago; Upadhyaya (1972) believes this to be authentic and many others too. No other literary tradition reaches such antiquity. The literary current that began with the *Rigveda* has continued flowing down to the present day. In the case of other literatures, we often find that they flourish during favourable times but diminish during adverse circumstances. This interruption is not observed in Sanskrit literature. After the composition of the Vedic *Samhitas*, more texts called *Brahmanas* were written, followed by *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. After these, epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as well as *Puranas* were written. Later came the era of classical literature, which included poetry, drama, prose, and epics, flourishing under the patronage of Indian kings before the medieval period. In this way, Sanskrit literature has maintained an unbroken tradition for over six thousand years. Whether evaluated by antiquity or by continuity, its importance is undeniable.

Sanskrit literature is renowned for having such extraordinary depth and range, covering every facet of human life. It mainly deals with four pillar of human life: *dharma* (duty), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desire), and *moksha* (liberation), giving such profound insights to each of these fields, as Upadhyaya (1972) pointed out in his book. Contrary to the common belief that Sanskrit literature is purely on religious theme, it in fact covers a broad range of theme. An epitome of such is Kauṭilya's *Arthāshastra*, which is a cornerstone of political and economic thought in this tradition. This seminal work gives us valuable insights on how the political systems of ancient India worked. But it is just one brick of the wall of interdisciplinary literature in Sanskrit. *Kāma Sūtra* an equally influential work of Vatsyayana, is concerned with practical aspects of human desire with such insight, which not only influenced future Sanskrit works but it also contributed to European erotic studies in 19th century. Besides these seminal works, Sanskrit literature also contributes significantly to science, astrology, medicine, architecture and zoology. Of course, religious and spiritual works are in plenty. Since ancient times, scholars have worked diligently with both *Preya Shastras* (mundane sciences) and *Shreya Shastras* (spiritual sciences), which indicates the all-embracing nature of the literary tradition.

The medium of this great literature is the Sanskrit language, also called *Devavani*—the divine speech. It is the consensus of scholars that Sanskrit is the oldest of all cultivated languages. If any language can claim to be the oldest, it is Sanskrit. The word 'Sanskrit' is compounded from the root *kri*, combined with the prefix *sam*, meaning a cultivated or perfected language. Two major forms of Sanskrit are *Vedbhasha* and *lokbhasha* (vernacular language). These belong to the two major divisions of Sanskrit literature: Vedic (Vedic) and *Laukik* (Classical). Vedic literature, in Vedic Sanskrit, comprises the *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, and *Upanishads*. *Laukik* literature, in Classical Sanskrit, comprises the

Ramayana, *Mahabharata*, and other later secular works. The literary features of these two forms are quite different; testifying to the development of the language.

The history of Sanskrit literature can be categorized into several distinct periods. The first is the *Shruti* period, during which the Vedic *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, and *Upanishads* were compiled. This is the most ancient and foundational segment of Indian knowledge. It begins with the *Rigveda*, the oldest known literary text in the world, followed by the *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda*, and *Atharvaveda*. The *Rigveda* contains hymns composed by visionary sages. The *Yajurveda* elaborates on rituals in both prose and verse. The *Samaveda* focuses on chants used in rituals, while the *Atharvaveda* provides *mantras* for health, protection, and daily life. To interpret the Vedic hymns, *Brahmanas* were written, offering explanations of rituals and including societal narratives. The *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads* delve into philosophical inquiry, emphasizing spiritual wisdom. The *Upanishads*, in particular, discuss the soul, the divine, and the path to lasting happiness. These texts form the cornerstone of Indian philosophy and religious ideology. The second period is the *Smriti* period, characterized by the composition of epics like the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas*. These texts are often termed *Upajeevya Kavya*, meaning they serve as foundational inspirations for subsequent literary creations. They offer themes, structural templates, and stylistic elements upon which future writers built their works. The third period marks the phase when the Sanskrit language underwent significant refinement through Panini's grammatical rules. It is in this time that literary productions became more structured and polished, especially in secular genres. This phase can broadly be referred to as the 'period of secular Sanskrit' (Upadhyaya 1972).

Discussing all three periods in depth is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, after providing a brief overview of the *Upajeevya Kavya*, this study will focus primarily on

the third period—the period of secular Sanskrit. It will explore the evolution and defining attributes of its major literary genres in detail.

Genre of Sanskrit Literature

Kapil Dvivedi (2021) in his book *History of Vedic Literature*, states that the origin of Sanskrit literature runs deep in the Vedas, and more specifically in the *Rigveda*, where there is a rich occurrence of *Aakhyana* (narratives) and *Samvad-sukta* (dialogues). These narrative elements are not historical accounts but are often created as figurative accounts to convey profound philosophical, spiritual, or moral concepts. This didactic narrative trend paved the way for subsequent genres such as epics, poetry, and drama. The *Rigveda*'s story seeds later flowered into the majestic literary forms of the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas*. Sanskrit literary tradition, therefore, might be classified into two broad categories: *Drshya Kavya* (visual literature, or *Rupka*) and *Shravya Kavya* (audible literature, or poetry and epics), discussed in Baldev Upadhyaya's book, *Sanskrit Sahitya ka Sankshipt itihas* (1972). The dramatic genre, *Rupaka*, reached a high level of sophistication, with *Natyashastra* enumerating ten significant forms, the most significant of these being *Natak* (drama). Apart from *Natak*, others are *Prakaran*, *Bhaan*, *Vyog*, *Ank*, etc. Bharatmuni emphasized that *Natyaveda*, 'the fifth Veda', was composed from elements of all four Vedas: text from *Rigveda*, music from *Samaveda*, acting from *Yajurveda*, and emotion (*rasa*) from *Atharvaveda*, “जब्राह पाठ्यमृवेदात् सामभ्यो गीतमेव च । यजुर्वेदादभिनयान् रसानाथर्वणादपि ॥” (Natyashastra 1.17). This integrative view is echoed by both Indian aestheticians and Western scholars like Max Muller and Sylvain Levi, who recognize Vedic dialogues as the origin of Sanskrit drama.

Shravya Kavya, or audible literature, includes *Mahakavyas* (epics), *Khandakavyas* (short epics), and *Muktakas* (independent lyrical verses). The epics, especially the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, bear witness to poetic, ethical and narrative sophistication. The aesthetic debates about what is *kavya* - from Visvanatha Kaviraja's rasa-centric approach to Panditaraj Jagannatha's focus on semantic appeal - testify to the sophistication of Sanskrit poetic theory. The genre splits further into *gadya* (prose), *padya* (verse), and *champu* (a blend of the two), which attests to the resourceful expressiveness of Sanskrit epics. The evolution of prose fiction, even though fewer in number than verse, became the norm with authors such as Banabhatta, whose *Kadambari* is a seminal instance of complex, compound-rich classical prose. The earliest glimpses of prose in Sanskrit literature can be traced back to Vedic texts. Especially, the *Krishna Yajurveda* and *Brahmana* compositions employ prose to serve both ritualistic and explanatory purposes. Accounts of *Panchatantra* and *Brihatkatha* stories prove that storytelling was not a Western discovery, but a native Indian contribution to world literature (Upadhyaya 1972), with deep roots in indigenous literary and oral tradition.

In addition to various genres of literature and poetics, there is also a diverse tradition of non-fictional texts in Sanskrit. And there are also scientific, philosophical and utilitarian texts which show the intellectual wealth of ancient India. Vātsyāyana's *Kāma Sūtra*, which deals with human erotic desires, is considered an oldest treatise on erotic science, whereas the *Arthasāstra* by Kauṭilya is a veritable model of socio-political and ethical thinking. These texts stand witness to the richness and variety of non-fiction in Sanskrit. In science and astronomy, the works of writers such as Varahamihira and Aryabhata testify to serious attention to empirical observation and theoretical speculation. Such non-fictional writing not only testifies to the utilitarian intention of Sanskrit writing but also makes it a vehicle for the expression of the entire range of human life: emotional, intellectual, and practical. Sanskrit

literature thus never exists at all as monolith but as a dynamic, multi-generic tradition, ranging from emotive lyricism and epic grandeur to logical prose and scientific inquiry.

Differences between Vedic and *Laukik* Sanskrit Literature

The differences between Vedic and *Laukik* (secular) Sanskrit literature are indicated in their subject matter, language, form, and essence. Vedic literature is primarily religious. These religious works focus on rituals and hymns performed to praise the gods during the Vedic period. *Laukik* literature is on the other hand more people-centric, dealing with all the *Purusharthas* (goals of life) with a focus on values and morality, everyday worldly desires, and a wider concept of religion. It introduces newer deities like Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, replacing the earlier dominance of Vedic gods. Vedic literature placed great emphasis on prose, as can be seen in works such as the *Taittiriya* and *Kathaka Samhita*. In contrast, secular literature saw a decline in prose beauty and a rise in poetic expressions. Additionally, scientific subjects such as medicine and astrology were often expressed through verse. This change led to the use of a variety of metrical forms that were not only different from the Vedic metrical forms but also had the sophisticated grammatical structure established by Panini. Vedic texts utilize symbolic metaphors to express abstract concepts, whereas secular works focus on emotional depth and embellishment, as vividly illustrated in *Puranic* storytelling. The poetic beauty, emotional resonance, and nature-inspired imagery found in *Laukik* literature—especially in the writings of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti—highlight a vibrant cultural and literary evolution. This transition marks a movement from the ritualistic solemnity of Vedic times to the rich aesthetics of classical Sanskrit.

Upjivya Kavya: Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Purana

Upjivya is a Sanskrit term that refers to a base or source. This idea also suggests that there are organic founding works that become the foundation of later literature. It consists of those writings that inspire future writers, emphasizing the strong links and influences between different works. Especially, the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* are the best examples of *Upjivya Kavya*, which have had a great impact on the Sanskrit literature from time immemorial.

Ramayana is the *adi-kavya* of Maharshi Valmiki, which is considered the first epic of Sanskrit literature. Written approximately in 500 BCE (Dvivedi 2021), it is a work of great literary, moral, and historical significance. The story is about the ideal life of Rama and illustrates ideal Indian culture and values. Although the oldest epic, it boasts of astounding poetry skills. It blends simplicity with grandeur, rich with *rasa*, similes, and metaphors. Valmiki's portrayal of his character and his distinctive writing style are truly one-of-a-kind. As Dr. Shantikumar Vyas notes, "In *Ramayana*, there is much more seriousness of language, audibility of rhymes and maturity of *rasa* than in Homer, Virgil and Milton" (qtd. in Simhal 1961). Inspired by this epic, many Sanskrit dramatists and poets have created works, among them some of important are: *Pratima Natak* (Bhasa), *Raghuvansha* (Kalidas), *Uttararamacharita* (Bhavabhuti), *Ravana Vadha* (Bhatti), *Ramayana manjari* (Ksemendra), and others.

Similarly, the *Mahabharata*, composed by Vyasa, consider as Historical *Kavya* extends beyond the History of the Kauravas and Pandavas to present a complete vision of ancient Indian civilization and religious philosophy. The *Mahabharata* evolved in three phases over time. It started as the *Jaya*, which had 8,800 verses. Then it expanded into the

Bharata with 24,000 verses and ultimately transformed into the *Mahabharata*, with 100,000 verses. Over two centuries, from 500 B.C. to 600 B.C. (Dvivedi 2021), new tales, dialogues, and philosophical concepts were continually added. Often referred to as the fifth Veda, this collection includes the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Vishnu Sahasranama*, and *Anugita*. As Vyasa famously said, “What is not here is nowhere” (qtd. Upadhyaya 1972). The epic has influenced several works through time, among them some of important are: *Karnabhar* (Bhasa), *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* (Kalidasa), *Kiratarjuniya* (Bharavi), *Naishadhiya Charita* (Sriharsha), *Sishupala Vadha* (Magha), and others.

Moreover, *Puranas* also hold a foundational place in Indian literature and spirituality, following the Vedas in significance. They played a crucial role in preserving and spreading Indian civilization, religion, and ethical values among the masses. Rich in myth, theology, and history, the *Puranas* explore diverse themes—cosmology, genealogies, kings, gods, rituals, and social customs. They combine philosophy with engaging stories, promoting devotion (*bhakti*), truth, and *dharma*. There are 18 *Puranas*, along with several sub-*Puranas*, were composed from the early centuries up until the 5th century (Simhal 1961). They remain a vital source of cultural and historical knowledge, revered for both their moral teachings and religious depth. These works preserve traditions and promote moral values across generations.

These *Uppivya Kavya* have transcended Sanskrit to influence Hindi literature, such as *Saket* (Maithilisaran Gupta), *Rashmirathi* (Ramdhari Singh Dinkar) and many more, Bengali literature, such as *Draupadi* (Mahasweta Devi), and Indian English literature, which has particular genre ‘Mythological fiction’ based on *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Purana*.

The Aesthetic Spectrum of Sanskrit poetry

Sanskrit poetry is a reflection of India's rich and ancient heritage. It reflects the region's profound culture, philosophical and aesthetic consciousness. It is traditionally classified into various poetic forms, each with its own structure, purpose, and beauty. Among these, three prominent genres stand out—*Mahakavya* (epic poetry), *Giti Kāvya*s or *Muktakas* (lyrical poetry), and *Champu Kavyas* (mixed prose-poetry). Together, they showcase the literary brilliance of Sanskrit poets across centuries, from heroic sagas to delicate lyrical expressions and intricate narrative styles.

The *Mahakavya* or Sanskrit epic occupies a unique place in Indian literature. It is not only a narrative form rather also a cultural and philosophical expression of life. It presents a holistic view of life. This all-encompassing nature is one of the epic's most defining traits—combining mythology, history, philosophy, and aesthetics into a unified poetic vision. Unlike short poetic forms or dramatic compositions, the *mahakavya* weaves intricate narratives across multiple cantos (generally eight or more), and its protagonists are often heroic figures of noble lineage, embodying lofty ideals, moral values, and threaded through with rich *rasa* (aesthetic emotion) like *sringara* (erotic), *vira* (heroic), and *santa* (tranquil). Bhamaha, one of the earliest literary critics and the first to discuss the presence of *rasa* in poetry, described the *mahakavya* in his work as follows:

That is, epic is Canto-structured, representative of the great (subject) and is great. It should have incomprehensible words, beautiful meaning, ornamentation and good content. It should contain mantras, messenger incidents, war, emergence of a hero and five treaties. It should not be very explainable, it should be sublime. (Simhal 1961)

Dandin reiterated this structural and emotional framework in *Kavyadarsa*. He emphasized the importance of starting with a benediction and incorporating vivid natural and social descriptions such as cities, oceans, forests, seasons, and festivals. Vishwanatha in *Sahityadarpana* provided perhaps the most systematic model, insisting that:

Mahakavya is an epic bound by cantos, centered on a heroic figure—divine or noble. It features one primary *rasa* among *Sringara*, *Vira*, or *Santa*, includes all dramatic elements, and conveys a historical or noble tale. It begins with invocation and spans over eight metrically-structured, moderately-sized cantos. It should aim for one spiritual goal—*dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, or *moksa*. (Simhal 1961)

Beyond plot and heroism, the *mahakavya* must inspire the reader both aesthetically and ethically. There has been a lot of debate in Sanskrit literature regarding *rasa*. But despite all this, *rasa* has been accepted as the soul of poetry. According to Sanskrit literature-scholar, only one *rasa* should be predominant in the epic and that too should be any one of *Shringar*, *Veer* and *Shant*.

Valmiki's *Ramayana* is always considering as the earliest known epic in Sanskrit literature and set the standard for later epic poets. The concept of the epic itself originates from Valmiki. Although early secular epics are lost, Panini's *Jambavati Vijay* survives only in parts, the tradition continued with Kalidasa, Ashvaghosha, Bharavi, Bhatti, Kumardasa, Magha, Ratnakar, Harichandra, and Shriharsha. While *Mahakavyas* present life in its grand and heroic dimensions, *Giti Kavyas* or *Muktakas* capture the intimate and emotional aspects of human experience in brief, melodic verses.

Giti Kavyas or *Muktakas* (lyrical poetry), in Sanskrit poetry, are lyrical jewels that express profound emotions in compact poetic forms. It classified into two main types: secular

(*laukika*) and religious (*stotra*). While religious *Muktakas* are devotional hymns praising deities, In Secular *Muktakas*, the grace and sensual beauty of women are depicted with rare elegance, often reflecting complex emotions of love, longing, and intimacy. Far from mere sensuality, these verses embody deep artistic and philosophical essence, as critics Rudrat rightly argue, that By studying these *Giti* poems, we experience the sublime purity of a woman's love and the vivid interplay between outer nature and inner emotion, where nature enhances moments of love with joy and deepens the pain of separation, resembling a moving picture that captures real emotions and beauty (Upadhyaya 1972). *Giti Kavya* is the most beautiful part of Sanskrit literature. Many poets like Kalidas, Bhartrihari, Amaruk, Bilhan, Govardhanacharya, Jaidev, and Pandit Raj Jagannath etc. have presented beautiful poetic texts like *Meghdoot*, *Shringar-Shatak*, and *Nitishatak*. These lyrical expressions remain unmatched in their poetic charm and philosophical depth.

Lastly, *Champu Kavya* is a unique form of Sanskrit Poetry. It blends prose and poetry, much like a song accompanied by musical instruments. In this style, prose is used for detailed narration, while verse highlights key emotions or ideas. Though its roots are older, the earliest known *Champu* work is *Nala-Champu* by Trivikram Bhatt from the 10th century, which beautifully narrates the story of Nala and Damayanti. Another major contribution is *Yashastilak Champu* by Jain poet Somdev Suri, combining philosophical depth with narrative elegance. These works hold significance not only in literature but also in philosophy and historical understanding.

Aesthetic Depth of Sanskrit Drama

Sanskrit drama is a vibrant artistic tradition that explores life through a unique blend of poetry and visual expression. It is often called visual poetry or *Roopak*, different from

written poetry that relies solely on words; drama is brought to life through acting. This performance builds a bond between the actor and their character, as well as connecting the character to old legends, which ultimately ties the actor to the audience. Beyond just entertainment, its purpose is to educate, inspire emotions, and reflect societal values. Sanskrit drama originated in the Vedic period, evolving from rituals known as *yajnas* into a refined art form referred to as *Natyaveda*, which is detailed in the *Natyashastra* (Upadhyaya 1972). Drama in Sanskrit literature is inclusive; Bharat has called drama as *Sarvarvanak* Veda. Because other Vedas are mainly centred to the Brahmins, but drama is centred to every Varna (Upadhyaya 1972). It integrates elements from all arts: music, dance, dialogue, and visual storytelling. It is the pioneers such as Kalidasa and Ashwaghosh and others who decorated this heritage, and made drama a strong reflection of emotional and moral creed of life.

Natyashastra by Bharatamuni is the earliest extant work of dramaturgy in Sanskrit literature. The work is a key reference for the practice of drama, and provides detailed guidance on theatrical structure, for which a theatre should be square, with a rectangular or triangular stage. It also specifies appropriate occasions for staging plays, such as lunar festivals (*Chandra Adhyaya*), coronations, public celebrations, religious ceremonies, marriages, childbirth, reunions, housewarmings, or the victory of a city (Simhal 1961). Furthermore, the *Natyashastra* outlines which scenes are suitable for performance and which should be avoided. It prohibits the direct portrayal of overly distressing or inappropriate events on stage, such as death, murder, war, marriage rituals, eating, or intimate acts like kissing, emphasizing a balance between emotional impact and decorum.

Sanskrit plays stand apart from Western, especially Greek drama, through their consistent use of happy endings. Even when sorrowful events occur, the conclusion is always joyful, reflecting the optimistic outlook of Indian philosophy rooted in the Vedic concept of

Rita, or cosmic order (Upadhyaya 1972). This approach aligns with the Elizabethan tragicomedy, which, as Dryden claimed, best represents human nature: “A play ought to be a just and lively image of human nature... for the delight and instruction of mankind” (An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, 1668). While Greek plays often adhere to Aristotle’s unities of time, place, and action, Sanskrit plays allow flexibility in both setting and timeline, *Uttara Ramacharita*, for example, includes a twelve-year gap between acts. This narrative freedom also considered as a valued feature of Elizabethan drama as well. The mix of languages, where heroes and upper-class characters used Sanskrit, but women and lower-class male characters used *Prakrit* (Upadhyaya 1972), mirrors the real linguistic fabric of society. A unique feature of Sanskrit drama is the *Vidusaka*, or clown, who is not merely a source of humour but the hero’s close friend, offering both comic relief and essential narrative support. Though often compared to the Elizabethan Fool, the distinction is clear. The Elizabethan Fool is often a servant or jester from lower social class who uses wit and irony to critique society and reveal deeper truths, masking wisdom beneath humour. In contrast, the *Vidusaka*, usually a *Brahmin*, combines playful exaggerated humour with an intellectual role rooted in cultural tradition, and assisting the hero, especially in romantic pursuits. Their functions reflect broader cultural values: social critique in the West, versus learned companions in Sanskrit drama. Another key aspect of Sanskrit drama is its theoretical basis in *Rasa*, which refers to the aesthetic essence central to Sanskrit literature. Unlike simply focusing on realism or historical detail, Sanskrit drama aims to touch the emotional core of the audience. This emotional connection creates *Rasa* (Nāṭyaśāstra Ch. 6). *Rasa* arises from the interplay of *Vibhava* (the cause), *Anubhav* (the effect), *Vyabharibhava* (temporary emotions), and a deep artistic impact, summed up in the phrase “विभावानुभावव्यभिचारी संयोगादसनिष्पत्ति” (Nāṭyaśāstra Ch.6). This theory is closely related to T.S. Eliot’s notion of the ‘objective correlative,’ or a set of objects, a situation, or a chain of events in which an emotion can be

invested. Eliot famously labelled Hamlet ‘an artistic failure’ because it demonstrates the dearth of an objective correlative that is sufficient, drawing our attention again to the Western predicament concerning the expression of attitudes in the theatre. Sanskrit drama, through its careful and considered advancement of the *Rasa* theory, creates what Eliot recognized as unavoidable: an outcome that is emotionally enriching and artistically harmonious. Thus, the beauty of Sanskrit drama lies not only in its poetic elegance and philosophical depth but also in its mastery of emotional resonance, making it a timeless expression of the human experience.

Sanskrit drama encompasses several unique forms, each serving distinct literary and cultural functions. *Natika* blends historical figures with imagined romantic episodes, as seen in *Ratnavali* and *Priyadarsika* by Harshavardhana, portraying kings like Arjunavarma in fantastical yet rooted plots. These plays preserve royal history while entertaining with imagination. In contrast, *Prakarana* features entirely fictional socially grounded narratives focused on middle-class life, where the hero is a composed *Brahmin* or *Vaishya* (merchant) and the themes revolve around love and everyday ethics; classics include *Mrcchakatika* by Shudraka, and *Malati Madhava* by Bhavabhuti. *Bhāṇa* is a monologue-style one-act play cantered on a witty character, often a cunning or brave, engaging in imagined dialogues; early examples like the *Chatura-Bhāṇi*, attributed to Varruchi and Isvaradatta. Meanwhile, *Prahasana*, a comedy or farce has special place in Sanskrit drama. Medieval *Prahasana* may have contained some vulgarity, but ancient *Prahasana* is a source of pure humour from a poetic point of view and is far from the shadow of vulgarity. In this ancient comedy, the views of Charvaka, Jain, Buddhist, Shaiva, who did not believe in Vedic religion have been ridiculed. These dramatic forms: *Natika*, *Prakarana*, *Bhāṇa*, and *Prahasana*, along with *Vyog*, *Veethi*, *ank* and other eighteen types as mentioned in *Natyashastra*, together illustrate

the richness and versatility of Sanskrit drama, balancing historical grandeur, social realism, wit, and critique within a deeply Indian aesthetic tradition.

Indian Contribution to World: Prose and Story

The origin of Sanskrit prose is important. It represents a foundational chapter in the history of world literature. Its earliest forms are found in the *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*. The prose there was simple, Unembellished, and functional. This early phase evolved in the *Brahmana* texts, where prose was used to narrate religious and philosophical ideas through stories that were didactic and clear in language. A more refined stage of prose is evident in the *Upanishads*, which skilfully combined prose and verse to express complex metaphysical ideas with emotional depth and simplicity. The *Sutras* may be short and sometimes tough to interpret, yet they reflect a singular writing style that values clarity and conciseness. It often requires interpretive commentaries. Secular Sanskrit prose made notable advancement through works such as: *Mahabharata*, Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, Patanjali's *Mahabhashya*, and several inscriptions. It reflects use of prose expression for governance, philosophy, and poetic creation. This literary mode of expression further matured in prose-poetry, especially in the literary achievements of Subandhu's *Vasavadatta*, Bana's *Harshacharita* and *Kadambari*, and Dandi's *Dashakumaracharita*. They are all instances of sophisticated rhetoric, vivid imagery, and emotional expression (Simhal 1961). Compactness is a hallmark of Sanskrit prose, which is mostly attained by the extensive usage of compound words (*samāsas*). It made it possible to express dense and emotionally potent ideas deeply and powerfully (Upadhyaya 1972). Sanskrit prose literature is valuable and expressive, but it's not very easy to access due to historical losses and the challenges of writing prose compared to poetry. Sanskrit prose is an important part of Indian literature. It expresses deep philosophical ideas and aesthetic beauty.

Sanskrit stories (*katha*), such as *Panchatantra*, have been essential to the development of storytelling around the world. Baldev Upadhyaya (1972) in his book *Sanskrit Sahitya ka Sankshipt itihās*, states that Far from being a Western innovation, the narrative tradition originated in ancient India. Sanskrit was the medium through which timeless stories of strategy, wisdom, and morality were transmitted. The *Panchatantra*, which originated from the earlier *Brihat-Katha* and *Tantrakhyika*, is one of India's most important contributions to world literature. In sixth century when India and Persia had close relation, these stories reached Persia through Burzoy's translation into *Pahlavi*. Later, just after fifty years, a Christian priest translated it from Pahlavi to Syrian language, under the name of 'Kalilag' and Damag'. Further, it was translated in from Syriac to Arabic in 750 AD by a Muslim scholar named Abdullah Almuqaffa. Abdullah Bin Hawaji was another scholar who translated this story from Pahlavi to Arabic in the same year. Before the end of sixteenth century, it was translated in several European languages such as Greek, Latin, English, German, Spanish and French (214–215). These are the stories that worked as foundation of famous collection of Greek stories 'Stories of Jesus' and Arabia's 'Arabian Nights'. Many cultures find resonance in these stories' themes, which have influenced medieval Christian literature and even become ingrained in religious mythos. For example, in European stories, the Bodhisattva is transformed into "Saint Joseph" (215). This is about the spread of Indian stories in the western world. However, these stories had reached east of India even before this century. Many of Indian stories were translated in Chinese language in 668 AD in two encyclopaedias of Chinese language. These cross-cultural adaptations highlight the deep impact of Indian narrative tradition on global literature; establish Sanskrit story literature as a cornerstone of the world's shared storytelling heritage.

Conclusion

The conclusion is that Sanskrit literature is one of the oldest and most enduring literary traditions in human history. Its origins are linked to the *Rigveda* and its continuity is unmatched. It reflects the rich cultural and spiritual development of India. Sanskrit literature has a lasting influence on the world. While many literary traditions have faded due to time or political upheaval, Sanskrit literature has thrived for over six thousand years. It encompasses a diverse legacy that includes sacred hymns, epic tales, philosophical discussions, political writings, scientific documents, and lyrical poetry.

The soul of this rich tradition is a vibrant and inclusive literary culture. This culture explores all four *Purusharthas*—*Dharma* (duty), *Artha* (wealth), *Kama* (desire), and *Moksha* (salvation)—while also embracing a wide range of genres. These include religious texts, dramatic works, political manuals, erotic literature, and scientific writings. Rather than being limited to strict religious teachings, Sanskrit literature seeks a comprehensive understanding of human life. Sanskrit literature blends the material world with the spiritual world and merges the aesthetic with the intellectual.

Although it is not explicitly discussed, it is important to acknowledge that Sanskrit literature includes a profound tradition of literary theory referred to as *Alankar Shastra*. This exploration helps in understanding aesthetic and emotional qualities of literature. This journey began with Bharata's *Natyasastra* and was influenced by the thinkers such as Bhamaha, Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta and Mammat. Their concepts extend beyond mere writing techniques to fundamental ideas such as *Rasa* (aesthetic feelings), *Dhvani* (Suggestive meaning), *Vakrokti* (oblique expression) and *Guna* (stylistic quality). It enhances our understanding of literary art, allowing us to recognise its profound impact on individual's emotions and experiences. These theories represent some of the earliest and most advanced studies of literary aesthetics found around the world.

Thus, this study concludes that Sanskrit literature is not merely an artefact of the past; it represents a living intellectual tradition. This tradition is marked by rich theoretical insights, artistic creativity, and a welcoming embrace of diverse cultures. Its continuous history and significant impact on poetic theory highlight its lasting importance in influencing literary thought both in India and around the world. This tradition has not only safeguarded knowledge but also continually reshaped our understanding of beauty, expression, and meaning in literature.

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