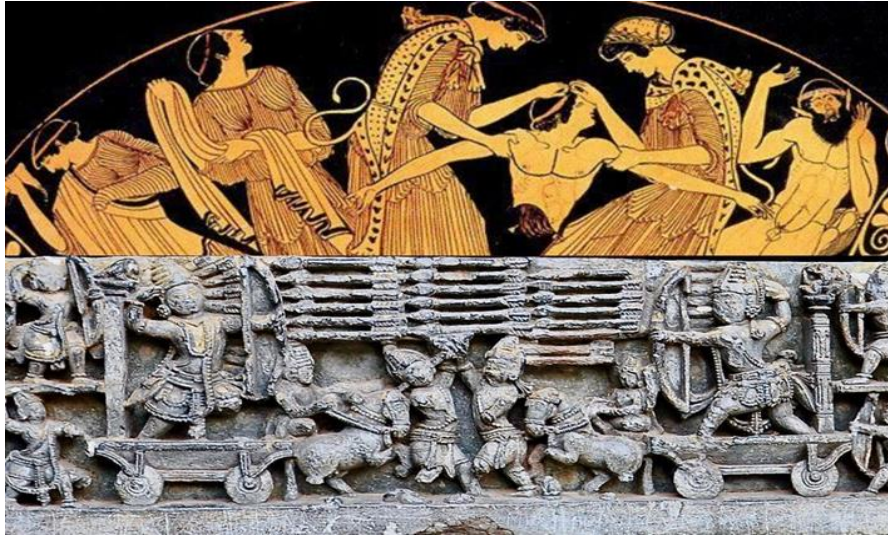


Save Ancient Studies Alliance

Summer 2022 Texts-in-Translation Reading Group

The Tragic in Ancient Sanskrit & Greek Drama



Your SASA Educational Ambassador:

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Dates (8-weeks):

Fridays @ 1pm - 2pm EDT (10:30pm - 11:30pm IST)

July 8 - August 26

How did ancient Indians and Greeks understand the tragic? How did their literary imagination grapple with the inescapable unfolding of tragedy—erotic and political disasters, violent conflicts between kins, the unpredicted yet inevitable advent of despair, disease, and death? While classical Greece is celebrated for the flourishing of tragedy as a dramatic genre at the festival of Dionysus, it is generally believed that ancient India did not have a concept of the tragic and that its vast literary repertoire is largely marked by a conspicuous absence of tragedy. In this reading group, we will critically examine—and contest—this claim, asking what it means to witness a tragedy and how Greek and Indian notions of the tragic overlap

and differ. Readings will include works by Aristotle, Bhāṣā, Sophocles, Euripides, Menander, Śūdraka, Bhavabhūti, and Kālidāsa.

No previous knowledge or participation is required. For each of the sessions, our aim will be to have done the readings in the previous week and then discuss any aspect of the texts that interest us, though our primary focus will be on how the ancient Hindus and Greeks understood and articulated the tragic. The discussions will be very open, fun, and laidback! **All readings will be posted through this live syllabus.** I will also (sometimes) add a couple of discussion questions to this doc just to give us some direction, but it's not at all something we need to stick to. Please use the "comment" feature on this doc to post any questions, thoughts, concerns you might have about the readings and we'll take them up during discussion!

By the end of the three meetings, participants will develop:

1. An understanding of ancient Greek and Sanskrit dramatic traditions, conventions, and poetics
2. A basic knowledge of the philosophy of tragedy as expressed in antiquity
3. An ability to read ancient cultures (especially Indian and Greek) comparatively
4. An ability to read ancient texts in relation to current theoretical debates in gender and sexuality studies

Location:(Provided by SASA)

Zoom Meeting Link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85438009769?pwd=WEllQy9WRjJVQXpXM1JFeENwdTNOZz09>

Zoom Meeting ID

854 3800 9769

Zoom Meeting Password

639744

[Reading Group Google Folder: \(PDF Readings and Recordings of Sessions\) The Tragic in Ancient Sanskrit and Greek Drama](#)

Week I: Poetics

Click on the link below:

[Aristotle - Poetics \(trans. Stephen Halliwell\) Ch 1-18.pdf](#)

Suggested discussion points:

1. What does Aristotle mean by tragedy being “a mimesis of an action”? What kind of action does tragedy imitate? (Ch: 6)
2. Who is the ideal tragic hero? What is the role of hamartia? (Ch: 13)
3. How is pleasure derived from tragic mimesis of actions that are in themselves horrifying and loathsome?
4. What are simple and complex plots? (Ch: 10) Does size matter? What would Aristotle have thought of ancient Sanskrit epics that are long, almost endless, and whose plots are seemingly all over the place? (Ch: 7 & 8)
5. What kind of tragic plot-structure does Aristotle qualify as the best in chapter 14, and why? What is the role of the family in tragedy?

Week II: Aeschylus

[Aeschylus - Persians \(trans. Ian Johnston\).pdf](#)

[for Week II, we will start by discussing Aristotle’s *Poetics*, particularly in the light of the questions above. Please be prepared to respond and interact. We’ll then move on to Aeschylus’s play linked above. I’ll add a couple of discussion points for the play a few hours before the meeting. Excited to see you all next week!]

1. Aeschylus’s *Persians* is the oldest surviving Greek play we have. What we find in this tragedy, however, is a story not about the self (Greece/Athens) but about the other, the enemy, the Persians whom Athens had vanquished in war. What does this origin of tragedy—in its gaze at the self through the imagined eyes of the other—entail?
2. What do the tattered robes of Xerxes—first mentioned in Atossa’s dream but then re-appearing several times in the play—signify?

Week III: Sophocles

[Sophocles - Oedipus the King \(trans. David Kovacs\) play text.pdf](#)

Suggested discussion points:

1. Why did actors on the ancient Greek stage wear a mask?
2. What is the role of the Sphinx? Why does Oedipus need to solve its riddle in order to enter the city? What are its consequences?
3. [Conspiracy theory alert!] Did Oedipus really kill his father?

Week IV: Euripides I

[Euripides - Ion \(trans. W. S. Di Piero\).pdf](#)

Week V: Euripides II

[Euripides - Iphigenia in Tauris \(trans. Richard Lattimore\).pdf](#)

Week VI: Bharata and Bhāsa

[Bharata - Natyasastra \(chapter 6\).pdf](#)

[Bhasa - Karna's Burden.pdf](#)

[Bhasa - The Shattered Thigh.pdf](#)

Week VII: Kalidasa, *The Recognition of Sakuntala*

[Kalidasa - The Recognition of Sakuntala.pdf](#)

[Sakuntala story \(Mahabharata\).pdf](#)

Discussion points:

- How does the play differ from the epic narrative? How is Śakuntalā's character transformed between the two genres?
- What is the relationship of nature to Śakuntalā and Duṣyanta, particularly in the first act of the play depicting the king's hunt? How is the relationship between nature and female sexuality depicted in the play?
- What is the role of erotic desire—both reciprocated and thwarted—in the text? What dramatic tools are used to convey eroticism? How does it relate to the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*) *rasa* described in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*?
- In the light of our discussion in the group so far, would you call the play tragic? Why? Why not?

Week VIII

[Shudraka - Mrchchakatikam \(The Clay Toy-Cart\) play-text.pdf](#)