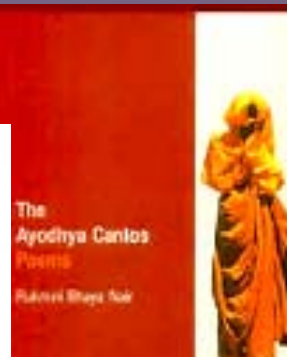
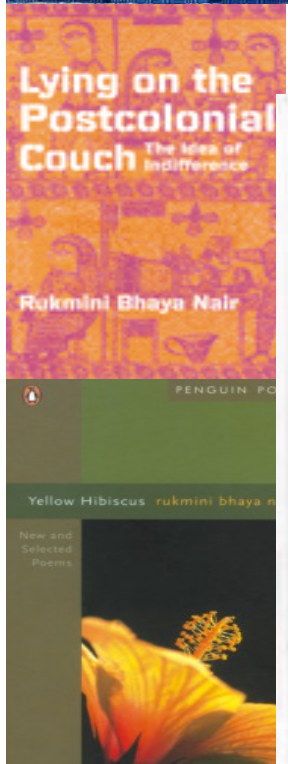
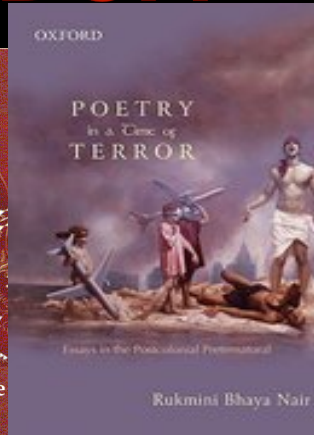
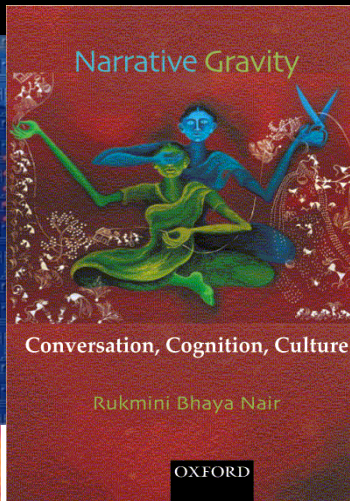
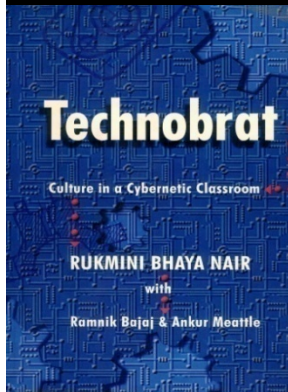


SCRIPT BOXES AND STORY BOXES: THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF ORAL NARRATIVES

RUKMINI BHAYA NAIR

THE SCRIPT BOX

THE STORY BOX



One Dozen Recent Papers 2008-11

1. "The Nature of Narrative: Schemes, Genes, Memes, Dreams and Screams!" (2011) in *Religious Narrative, Cognition and Culture: Image and Word in the Mind of Narrative* ed. A. W. Geertz, J. S. Jensen, Equinox Series in Religion, Cognition and Culture, London. pp 117-146.
2. "'Why am I so anxious?'" A Study of Attention Bias in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder' (2011) Co-authored with Shweta Sharma in *Psychological Studies*, Springer, Berlin and New Delhi, pp. 247-257.
3. "States of Reason and Reasons of State: Noam Chomsky's Metaphors as a Dialogue across Disciplines" (2011) in *Language and Dialogue*, Volume 2. John Benjamins, Amsterdam. pp. 266-291.
4. "Lost in Translation" in *Creativity, Language, Literature: the State of the Art* (2011) ed. Rob Pope, Ron Carter and Joan Swann, Palgrave, pp. 265-267..
6. "Listening to Creativity: Narratives of Impairment and Enablement in an Inclusive School" in *Creative Engagements with Children* (with Annie Koshy) Rodopi Press, Amsterdam / New York, 2011)
- 7.. "Lex Terroris" *Biblio*, (July-August Issue, 2010), pp. 22-24.
8. . "Gandhi's Assassination" in *Speaking of Gandhi's Death* (2010) ed. Tridib Suhrud and Peter Ronald deSouza, Orient Blackswan and Indian Institute of Advanced Study, pp. 17-30.
9. "Yudhishtira's Lie: The Fiction of India" in *Poetiques Comparatistes/Comparative Poetics* (formerly the journal *Belles Lettres* or *BLI* (Paris, 2010), pp. 227-242
10. "Learning to Write: Integrational Linguistics and the Indian Subcontinent" in *Language Teaching: Integrational Linguistics Approaches* (2009) ed. M. Toolan, Routledge, London/ New York [pp. 47-72].
11. . 'Writing the Future and the Future of Writing' Editorial Article in the Special Issue on Literature of the Asia Pacific Region, *Biblio* Volume XIII Nos. 9-10, Sept./Oct., 2008 pp.
12. "Language, Youth Culture and the Evolution of English" in *Language in South Asia* ed. B.B Kachru,³ Y Kachru and S.N Sridhar, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008. pp. 466-494.

SECTIONS

1. THE EVOLUTION OF SPEECH
-AND OF SCRIPT
2. THE SECRETS OF THE STORY BOX
3. THE CONSEQUENCES OF ORALITY
- AND OF WRITING

I. THE EVOLUTION OF SPEECH AND SCRIPT

Homo sapiens:
the birth of the **talking animal**



EVOLUTION & ENCEPHALIZATION

- **100-200,000 YEARS AGO:** DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE
HARDWARE: Nature put in place the basic hardware for speech - the larynx evolved its unique shape, the hyoid bone pushed down into the throat, the brain slowly cooled down and became bigger...
- **40-50,000 YEARS AGO:** DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIO-LINGUISTIC SKILLS During this period, human beings discovered each other *socially*. They took increasing delight in each other's verbal company, in chatting, arguing, gossiping, complaining, pontificating, etc. This is called 'the social explosion' by some evolutionary theorists.
- **5,000- 7,000 YEARS AGO:** DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING : Despite its simplicity – all it required at first was the delicate thumb and forefinger grip which humans have but their nearest cousins the apes and chimpanzees apparently don't – **writing was a very late arrival in linguistic terms.**
- **If the evolution of 'language' is counted as one day, writing came at the 11th hour.**

Why was script such a late-comer?

1. In terms of physical labour and embodiment, it possible to **talk** while holding a baby or stirring a pot but it is impossible to *write* while doing these things.
2. Writing needed **settled agrarian societies** where it was possible to release some part of the population from the daily grind of labour for survival and/or from reproductive labour so that they could have exclusive swathes of 'silence and slow time' to devote to the **lonely mental labour of writing**.
3. Inevitably, this meant that writing was associated with **hierarchy and gender dominance**, wondrously liberating some minds but severely 'boxing in' many more (N, 09.11)

ARCHI-WRITING ? FINGER PAINTINGS BY 'PREHISTORIC PRESCHOOLERS' (13,000 years ago)



Children as the makers of script-systems – a reversal in the order of knowledge-transmission/phallogocentrism?

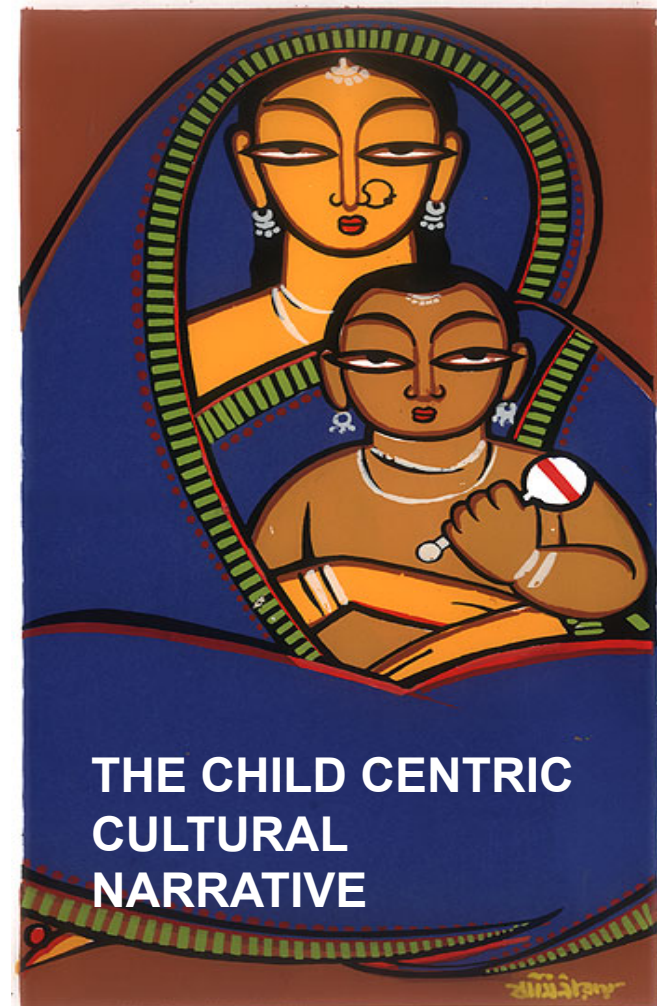
- Cambridge archaeologists seem to have identified the age and gender of the children who made the simple ancient art form known as "finger fluting" in the Rouffignac Caves in France
- "We have found marks by **children aged between three and seven years old** -- and we have been able to identify four individual children by matching up their marks," said Cambridge University archaeologist Jess Cooney.

Creative Games: The co-evolution of orality, literacy and body-language

- "The most prolific of the children who made flutings **was aged around five -- and we are almost certain the child in question was a girl.**"
- Adults lifted children up to draw on high walls
- Some alcoves in the caves seemed **devoted to children's art, their finger-writing**
- "It's important to realize that **children played a major role** in the development of not only art, but **what it means to be human**" Cooney said.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN

- **Krishna's Speech Act:** Yashoda asks her son Krishna to open his mouth because she suspects him of 'eating mud' but sees not mud in Krishna's mouth but the whole world, the universe and even herself reflected therein
- **Krishna's Lie:** *maiya, mae nahi maakhan khaayo*
- **Krishna's Flute:** does it mark an aural transition from childhood to youth?



NARRATIVE EVOLUTION - I

- **FACTS:**
- **MIND:** EVERY 'NORMAL' HUMAN CHILD HAS HEARD/ TOLD ITS FIRST LIE BY THE AGE OF FOUR. WHY?
- **BODY:** OUR PALMS SWEAT, OUR PULSE RATES GO UP WHEN WE LISTEN TO A GOOD BUT 'FALSE' STORY.
- **CULTURE:** FALSE STORIES (EPICS, MYTHS, LEGENDS) ARE DISCOURSE UNIVERSALS, I.E. THEY ARE FOUND IN EVERY KNOWN HUMAN CULTURE AND REMAIN A CHIEF MODE OF COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTION.
- **BUT WHY? WHY HAVE SUCH APPARENTLY 'FALSE' AND 'USELESS' FORMS SO ROBUSTLY SURVIVED?**

NARRATIVE EVOLUTION -II

ANSWER:

- NARRATIVES, WE COULD ARGUE, ARE SOCIALLY SACTIONED AND PLEASURABLE FORMS OF THE 'LIE' WHICH SERVE THE PURPOSE OF TRAINING US FROM CHILDHOOD ONWARDS IN BOTH BODILY AND CULTURAL SURVIVAL
- THEY ARE RELATIVELY INEXPENSIVE IN TERMS OF SPECIES PRESERVATION IN THAT THEY SAVE US TAKING MAJOR RISKS – I.E. ACTUALLY CONFRONTING A SNAKE OR CLIMBING A MOUNTAIN IN ORDER TO LEARN WHAT IS DANGEROUS OR ACTUALLY FALLING IN LOVE TO LEARN ABOUT ITS WONDERFUL/PROBLEMATIC CONSEQUENCES.

NARRATIVE AND ORALITY

NARRATIVES, IN SHORT, ARE A VERY OLD LANGUAGE GENRE THAT PERENNIALY SEEK TO ADDRESS THE BASIC QUESTION: **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?**

IN GENERAL, NARRATIVES COME EMBEDDED IN **ORAL EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS** AND ARE THUS HIGHLY **INTERSUBJECTIVE** (IN ORAL CONTEXTS, NAIR 2003 FOUND THAT AS MANY AS THREE OF THE SIX LABOVIAN 'PARTS' OF A NARRATIVE ARE INTERACTIVELY 'PERFORMED' BY LISTENERS IN THEIR TURNS – ABSTRACT, ORIENTATION, **EVALUATION**, COMPLICATING ACTION, **RESOLUTION** AND **CODA**)

THE NATURALNESS OF NARRATIVE

- Daniel Dennett, the cognitive scientist, has argued that humans are 'wired' to tell stories. Humans have evolved to tell stories **as naturally as birds build nests and beavers build dams**. In short, we need language interchange and narrative activity to fashion our cognitive environments as much as we need food, security, shelter and sleep for physical survival. (Dennett, 1991)

Creating Intersubjectivities: The Evolution of Oral Language during the 'Social Explosion' 40,000 years ago

There are maybe 3 or 4 structures that characterize the **evolution of language as a social structure** (Nair, 2011).

1. The **alternating** structure of **conversation**, which is also infinitely open-ended and marked by an **A-B-A-B-A-B... structure**
2. The **linear** structure of **narrative**, which is 'infinitely' recursive like the sentence and is marked by an **A-B-C-D-E... structure**.
3. The **comparative** structure of **metaphor or analogy**, which is marked by an **A:B::C:D structure**
4. The **rhythmic structures** of poetry accompanied by clapping, foot-tapping and other 'instinctive' forms of body language.

ORAL SUBSTRATE OF LITERATURE

Writing culture draws on such oral forms and has much to learn from them even today.

Conversation, for example, constitutes the dialogic core of drama/theatre and the performative text

Phonological rhythm, assonance and rhyme the centre of the poetic text

Narrative movement is the driving force that propels the fictional text.

Oral performances, rich in metaphor and locally indexed references, often combine all these genres with startling felicity as we shall see when the *kavad* or story-box are described in greater detail in the next section...

ORALITY AS AN EVOLUTIONARY TEXT

Robin Dunbar, the evolutionary biologist, argues that in early societies while men went out hunting, women created **verbal artifacts** and moral codes through daily talk and thus built the mental and emotional resources of the community. We could extend this thesis to claim that these evolutionary oral resources are reused even today in forms such as fiction and the novel to 'teach' community lessons in cultural survival. *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language* (1996)

THE EVOLUTION OF LITERATURE

LITERARY DARWINISM:

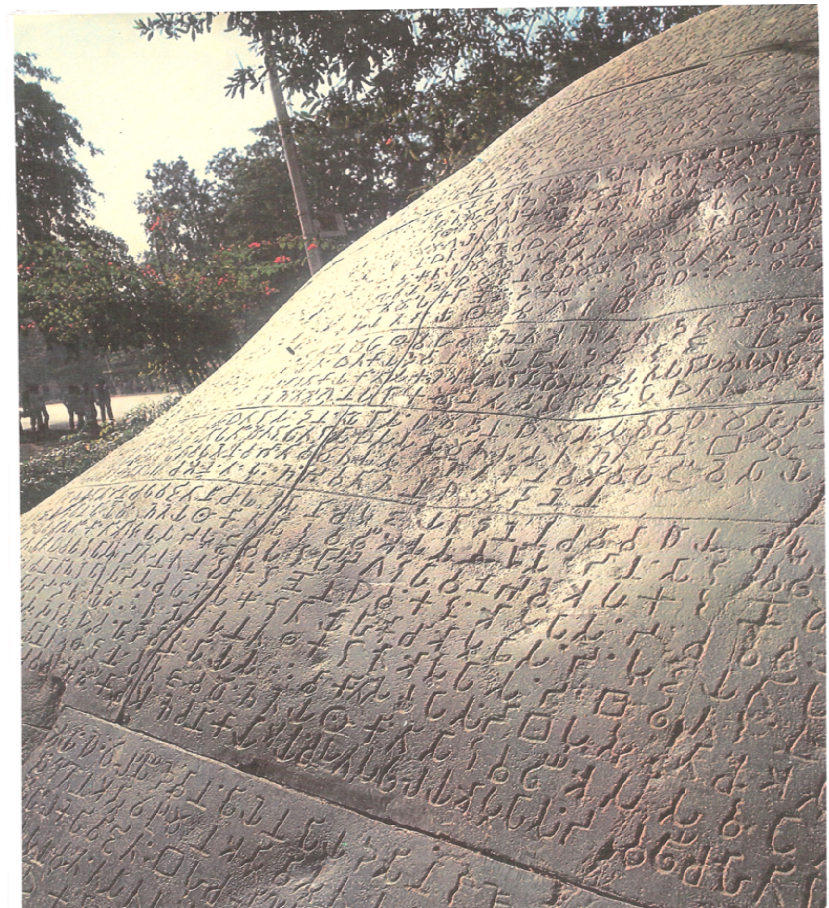
“Just as Charles Darwin studied animals to discover the patterns behind their development, Literary Darwinists read novels in search of innate patterns of human behavior: child bearing and rearing, efforts to acquire resources (money, property, influence) and competition and cooperation within families and communities. **It's impossible to fully appreciate and understand a literary text unless you keep in mind that humans behave in certain universal ways... For them, the most effective and truest works of literature are those that reference or exemplify these basic facts.**”

The Writing Box: Scripted Treasures

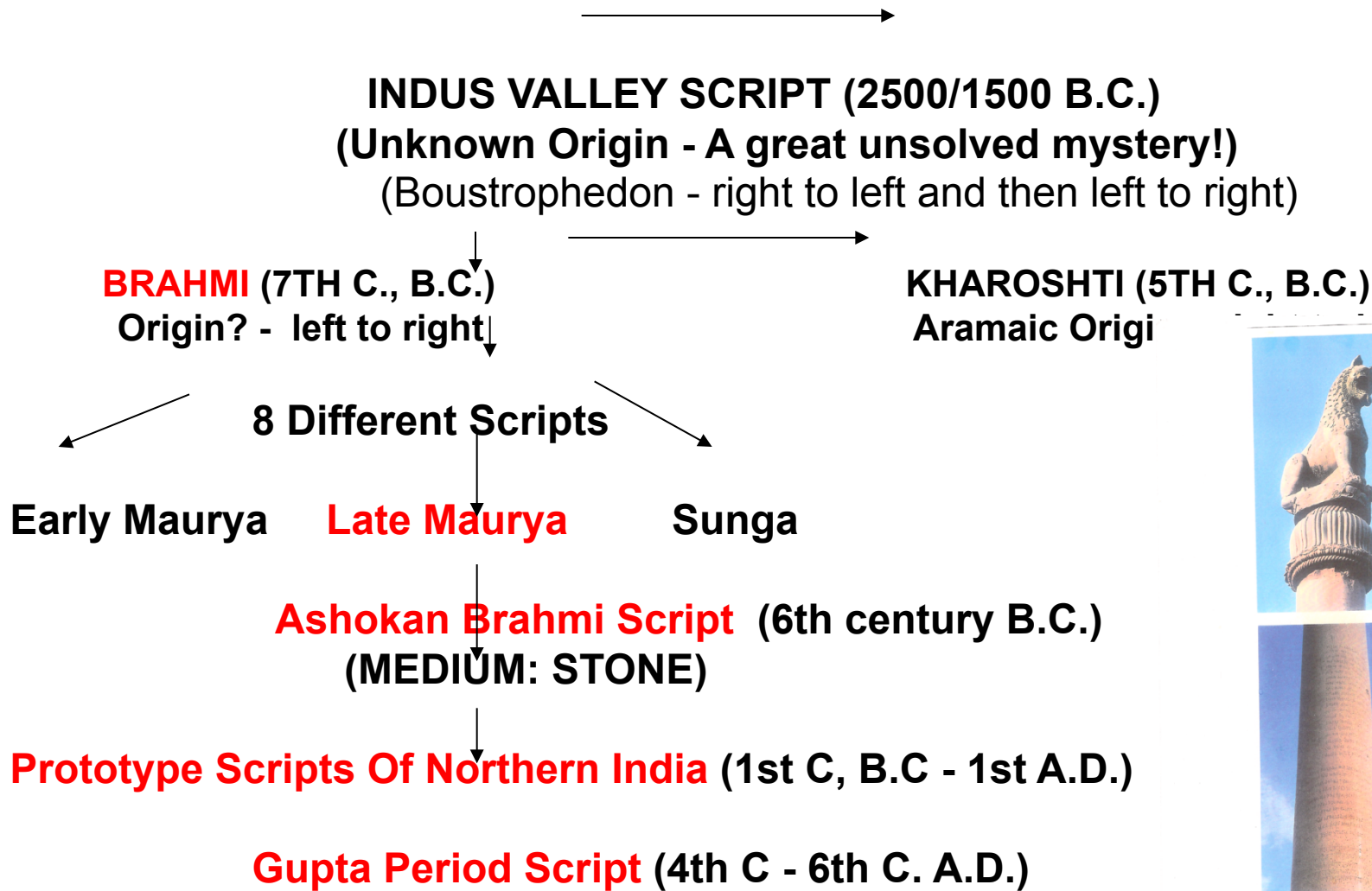
SCRIPT INHERITANCE

- India today has more scripts than the rest of the world put together. It is an absolute treasure-house of scripts that have travelled all over East Asia, as well as of oral genres and therefore is undoubtedly one of the best places to study the speech-script continuum. **PARADOX:** How come such a script-rich sub-continent still has half the world's illiterate population?

THE BRAHMI SCRIPT



SCRIPT EVOLUTION ON THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT



Script Materiality, Script Media

SIDDHAMATRIKA Script (W. branch of the E. Gupta Script **6th C. AD**)

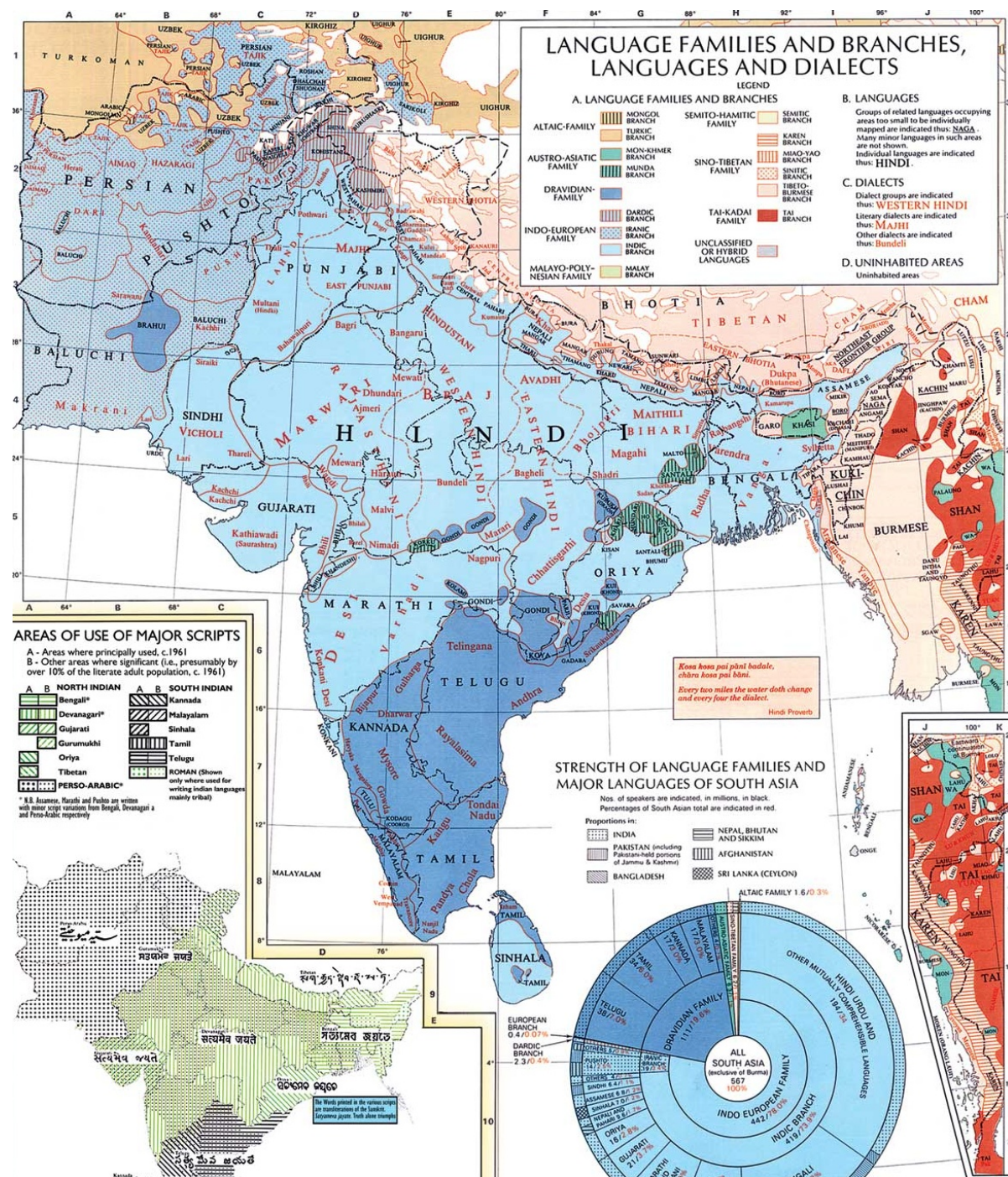
MEDIUM: PALM LEAF, TREE BARK

GRANTHA Script (Developed in Southern India in the **5-6th C. A.D.**) during the **Pallava** and **Chola** Periods, originally used only to transcribe Sanskrit texts and later for transcribing other texts from the Dravidian languages and transliterating into **NAGARI** and vice-versa)

MEDIUM: BRASS, COPPER, PALM LEAF

NAGARI/DEVNAGARI Script (Developed in Northern India during the 7th-9th Century A.D with **10-12 Major Variations**. and has remained virtually unaltered until the Present. Still Going strong in the 21st C)

MEDIUM: PALM LEAF, PAPER, ELECTRONIC SCREENS



LIST OF MAJOR INDIAN LANGUAGES

Agaria, Ahirani, Aimol, Aiton, Anal, Andamanese, Angani, Angika, Ao, Apatani, **Arabic**, Armenian, Ashing, **Assamese**, Asuri, Awadhi, Badaga, Baghelkhandi, Bagri, Baigani, Bajania, Balti, Bangni, Banjari, Basturia, Bauria, Bawm, Bazigar Boli, **Bengali**, Bhanja-bhumia, Bantu, Bharmauri, Bhairi, Bhili, Bhojpuri, Bhotia, Bhuiya, Bhumij, Bhunjia, Biate, Bilaspuri, Birhor, Birjia, Bishnupriya, Bodo, Bokar, Bondo, bori, Braj Bhasha, Brijlal, Bugun, Bundelkhandi, **Burmese**, Bushari, Chakhesang, Chakma, Chambilai, Chameali, Chang, Changpa, Chattisgarhi, Chikari, Chinali, Chiru, Chote, Churasi, Dalu, Deori, Dhanki, Dhimal, Dhodia, Dhundhari, Didayi, Dimasa, Dingal, Dogri, Dommari, Droskhat/Dokpa, Duhlian-Twang, **English**, French, Gadaba, Gadiali, Gallong, Gameti, Gamit, Gangte, Garasia, Garhwali, Garo, Giarahi, Gondi, Gujarati, Gujjari, Gurung, Gutob, Hajong, Halam, Halbi, Harauti, Haryanavi, **Hebrew**, Himachali, **Hindi**, Hinduri, Hindusthani, Hmar, Ho, Hrusso, Hualngo, Irula, Jabalpuri, Jangali, Jarawa, Jaunsari, Juang,

Kabui, Kachanga, Kachari, Kachchi, Kadar, Kagati, Kakbarak, Kanashi, Kangri, **Kannada**, Karbi, Karen, Karko, **Kashmiri**, Kathiawari, Khadiboli, Khaka, Khamba, Khampa, Khampti, Khampti-shan, Kharia, Khasi, Khaskura, Khatri, Kherwari, Khiangan, Khorusti, Khotia, Kinnauri, Kiradi, Kisan, Koch, Kodagu, Koi, Koireng, Kokni, Kolami, Kom, Komkar, Konda, Konicha, Konkani, Konyak, Koracha, Koraga, Korava, Korku, Korwa, Kota, Kotwalia, Kudmali, Kui, Kuki, Kulvi, Kumaoni, Kunbi, Kurukh, Kuvi, Ladakhi, Lahauli, Laihawlh, Lakher (Mara), Lalung, Lambani, Lamgang, Laotian, Laria, Lepcha, Limbu, Lisu, Lodha, Lotha, Lushai, Mag, Magahi, Magarkura, Mahal, Maithili, Majhi, Makrani, Malankudi, **Malayalam**, Malhar, Malto, Malvi, Manchat, Mandiali, Mangari, Mao, Maram, **Marathi**, Maria, Maring, Marwari, Mavchi, Meitei, Memba, Mewari, Mewati, Milang, Minyong, Miri, Mishing, Mishmi, Mizo, Monpa, Monsang, Moyon, Muduga, Multani, Mundari, Na, Nagari, Nagpuri, Naikadi, Naiki, Nati, **Nepali**, Nicobarese, Nimari, Nishi, Nocte, Odki, Onge, Oriya, Padam, Pahari, Paharia, Palilibo, Paite, Panchpargania, Pang, Pangi, Pangwali, Parimu, Parji, Paschima, Pasi,

Rai (Raikhura), Rajasthani, Ralte, Ramo, Rathi, Rengma, Riang, Sadri, Sajalong, Sambalpuri, Sangtam, Sansi, Santali, Sadra, Saraji, Sarhodi, Saurashtri, Sema, Sentinelese, Shekhawati, Sherdukpen, Sherpa, Shimong, Shina, Shompen, Sikligar, Sindhi, Singpo, Siraji, Sirmauri, Soliga, Sulung, Surajpuri, Tagin, Tai, Tamang, **Tamil**, Tangam, Tangkhul, Tangsa, Tataotrong, **Telugu**, Thado, Thar, Tharu, **Tibetan**, Toda, Toto, Tulu, Urdu, Vaiphei, Varli, Wagri, Wancho, Yereva, Yerukula, Yimchungre, Zakring (Meyer), Zeliang, Zemi, Zou.

INDIA'S MAJOR SCRIPTS: Resulting in a pervasive perception of illiteracy/oral immersion?

Main Scripts in Contemporary India:

Bengali	68,007,965 (pop.1991)
Gujarati	41,309,582
Gurmukhi (Punjabi)	20,923,984
Kannada	44,977,201
Malayalam	29,098,518
Marathi	78,937,187
Oriya	31,659,736
Sindhi/Kashmiri	80,18,700 (estimate)
Sanskrit (Hindi, <i>Devanagari</i> Script)	3.5-400 mil.
Tamil	55,858,946
Telugu	88,508,008
Urdu (Arabic Script)	100,000,000 (estimate)
English (Roman Script)	50,000,000 (estimate)

Related scripts

Sinhalese
Balinese
Burmese etc.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SCRIPT

So much religious and emotional significance is attached to script that it is really difficult to talk in rational terms about script and script reform.

Scripts are no more permanent than fashions in clothes. But in a traditional society, where the instrument of writing was a clod of clay, a piece of chalk, an iron stylus, the feather of a bird, or the medium of writing was either a birch leaf, a palm leaf or a rock face, the number and shape of letters in the writing system had to be meticulously preserved...

Writing [was] popularly endowed with magical power. This had led to the belief that the script was the soul of a language...[But] today a new script is created in India almost once every six months

D.P. Pattanayak and Ivan Illich

- **Multilingualism and Mother Tongue Education, 1981**

AREAS OF USE OF MAJOR SCRIPTS

A - Areas where principally used, c.1961

B - Other areas where significant (i.e., presumably by over 10% of the literate adult population, c. 1961)

NORTH INDIAN		SOUTH INDIAN	
A	B	A	B
Bengali*		Kannada	
Devanagari*		Malayalam	
Gujarati		Sinhala	
Gurumukhi		Tamil	
Oriya		Telugu	
Tibetan		ROMAN (Shown only where used for writing Indian languages mainly tribal)	
PERSO-ARABIC*			

* N.B. Assamese, Marathi and Pushto are written with minor script variations from Bengali, Devanagari and Perso-Arabic respectively



Oral texts and traditions

- The Vedas, Unpanishads (approx. 1500 BC)
- The Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Puranas, the Panchatantra (1000 BC to 1 AD)
- The works of the Bhakti Poets: Tukaram, Mahadevi, Kabir, Rahim, Jayadeva, Meerabai, etc (1,000 – 1500 AD approx.)
- The various dastaans, baramasahs, regional folktales (upto 2012 AD)

Al Biruni, early 11th century

The Indian scribes are careless, and do not take pains to produce correct and well-collated copies. Consequently, the highest results of the author's mental development are lost by their negligence, and his book becomes already in the first or second copy so full of faults, that the text appears as something entirely new, which neither a scholar nor one familiar with the subject, whether Hindu or Muslim, could any longer understand. It will sufficiently illustrate the matter if we tell the reader that we have sometimes written down a word from the mouth of Hindus, taking the greatest pains to fix its pronunciation, and that afterwards when we repeated it to them, they had great difficulty in recognizing it.

Abul'l-Fazl, 16thC. *Akbarnama*

Badshah Akbar performed his own experiment to see whether children kept in isolation would learn to speak:

The newly born were put into that place of experience, and honest and active guards were put over them. For a time, dumb wet-nurses were admitted there. As they had closed the doors of speech, the place was commonly called the Gan Mahal (the dumbhouse). On the 9th of August 1582 he went out to hunt...and the next day he went with a few special guards to the house of the experiment. No cry came from that house of silence, nor was any speech heard there. In spite of their four years, they had no part of the talisman of speech and nothing came out but the noise of the dumb.

The Colonial Period

Indians unaccountably believe in "history, abounding with kings 30 feet high and reigns 30,000 years long".

MACAULAY, 1835

To *Dufterkhana, Ottor, Tanks*

The English language owes no thanks;

Since *Office, Essence, Fish-pond* shew

We need not words so harsh and new.

ANON. circa mid 1850

Our church as at present it stands

Has no congregation or steeple;

The lands are all low-lying lands

And the people are low, lying people!

BIGNOLD, 1873

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE INDIAN

Conflict between the written and the oral in the self-perception of modern Indians

"I am Indian, very
brown, born in
Malabar,
I speak three
languages, write in
Two, dream in one."

- From 'An Introduction'
in *Summer in Calcutta*
by Kamala Das, 1965

"Since we come from
an oral tradition,
preserving the past
doesn't matter to us.
We don't deserve our
classics."

Shivendra Singh
Dungarpur, *Times of
India*, May 23, 2012

II THE SECRETS OF THE STORY BOX

KAVAD



E-TEXT

- IS THE AGE OF CINEMA, TELEVISION, AND THE INTERNET IN FACT ANTICIPATED BY THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE KAVAD AND SEVERAL OTHER TRADITIONAL ARTIFACTS?

The kavad opens: shukla paksh



The kavad's enigmatic embrace



Travelling inwards: Darshan!



Krishna resting on ledge outside the kavad...



And now he's inside! Magic...



One frisky cow has escaped – Dhenu and Kalpataru



The multivalent kavada... breaks, ruptures, continuities and codas



ANOTHER KAVAD...



The sacred kavad in Orissa



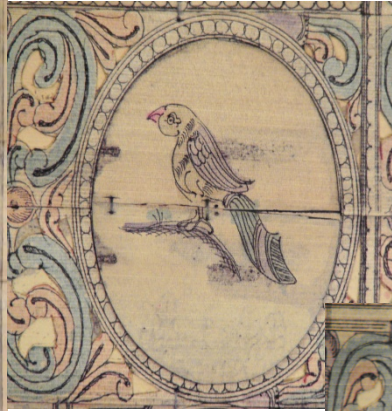
The Embodied Culture of the 'Kavad': Kavadiya Delhi/ Durga as Bollywood Actress Kolkata



ARCHETYPAL PUPPETS: DEATH, THE JOKER AND THE BEAST



PATACHITRA: BACK TO OUR EVOLUTIONARY ORIGINS



ANIMAL



HUMAN



DIVINITY

THE LATEST: GIRL READING...



III ORALITY/LITERACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

- A RETURN TO THE ORAL?
- DEMOCRATIZING LITERACY
- POSTCOLONIAL ERASURES
- AND ARCHI-WRITING

READING AND WRITING – THE SEALS OF POWER



CRITIQUE OF SCRIPT CULTURES



BLIND BLOCKHEAD BUREAUCRATS?





CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY, CHANGES IN INTERSUBJECTIVITY?

- HOW, IF AT ALL, IS THE TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION THAT WE ARE CURRENTLY IN THE MIDST OF AFFECTING OUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS BUREAUCRATIC AND OTHER FORMS OF POWER AND CONTROL?
- HOW, IF AT ALL, CAN WE REDEMOCRATISE LANGUAGE AND WORLD THROUGH THE NEW INTER-ORALITIES?

New Intersubjective Thresholds: The Birth of Formal Script Orders

- Writing, as we have noted, is at most 8,000 years old and it first required the development of the 'dextrous grip'. **As such, it involved brain and body 'lateralization'.** CHANGES IN THE BRAIN?
- However, today, even this level of skill required by early writers isn't needed. **Typing enables us to use all our fingers and the left and right hands almost equally.** CHANGES IN HANDEDNESS?
- We also choose from **a character array on a key-board** rather than shape the letters with our hands. CHANGES IN PERCEPTION?
- Our **orientation** to the **computer screen (upright)** versus a piece of **paper on a desk (flat)** has also changed IN ORIENTATION?
- The **information** available on-screen includes IN MEMORY ACCESS?
- Simultaneously, **television, phones etc.** allow us to place far less reliance on writing as a source of information. IN VISUAL CUEING?

Technological Transformations

One good measure of the success both of intellectual paradigm shifts and of technological revolutions is their capacity to foster new discourse genres.

Will computer technologies generate 21st century pomo/poco textual styles with radical epistemological consequences?

Current privileging of a **cluster of inter-subjective genres**, characteristic of new forms of self-representation, as India and other countries transform themselves in the era of globalization.

Unlike the 'pure' literary genres of the 19th and early 20th centuries, these new genres are obviously more oriented towards **visual cueing, orality and conversational interaction** and tend to have a dialogic rather than a monologic bias.

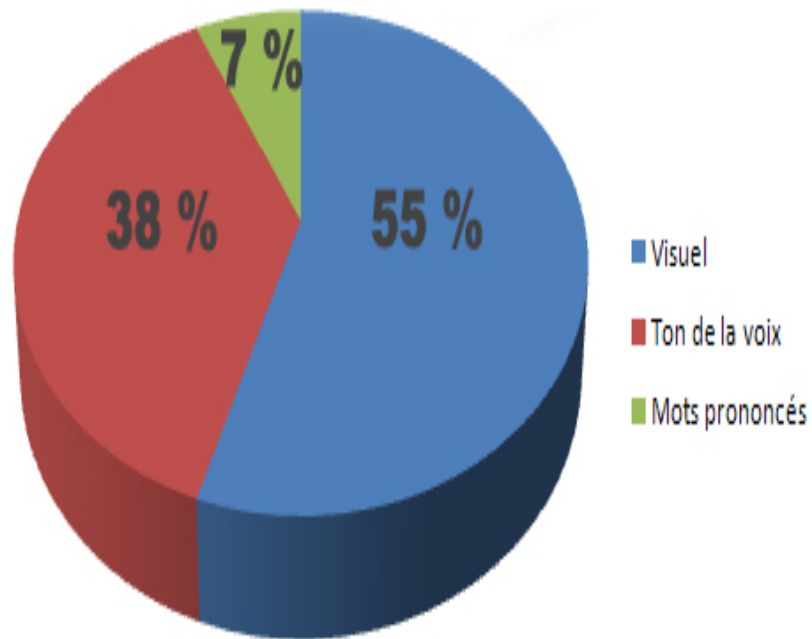
New post-literary genres

1. **EMAIL** the revival of the '**epistolary form**', so well known in the novels of the 18th and 19th centuries, in the guise of magically fast and often stunningly informal email (resulting in the regeneration of romantic encounters that interestingly move from 'facelessness' to 'face' as in You Got Mail)
2. **CHAT-ROOMS** the rise of a myriad '**chat-rooms**' tantalizingly poised between writing and speech and - in India - between the twin tongues of English and Hindi/Bangla/ Tamil etc. (resulting in a very vital spread of conversational discourses into e-space)
3. **VIDEO GAMES, GAME NARRATIVES, E-BOOKS, GRAPHIC NOVELS** experiments in '**interactive** writing', where readers can influence the shape of a text as it is being made; and simple automated 'story-generators'
4. **BLOGS, SMS, TWITTER** fluidly mixing story and text often in more than one language
5. **BULLETED FORMS OF THE INTERVIEW , BOOK EXTRACT ETC.** leading to direct intellectual/commercial visibility.

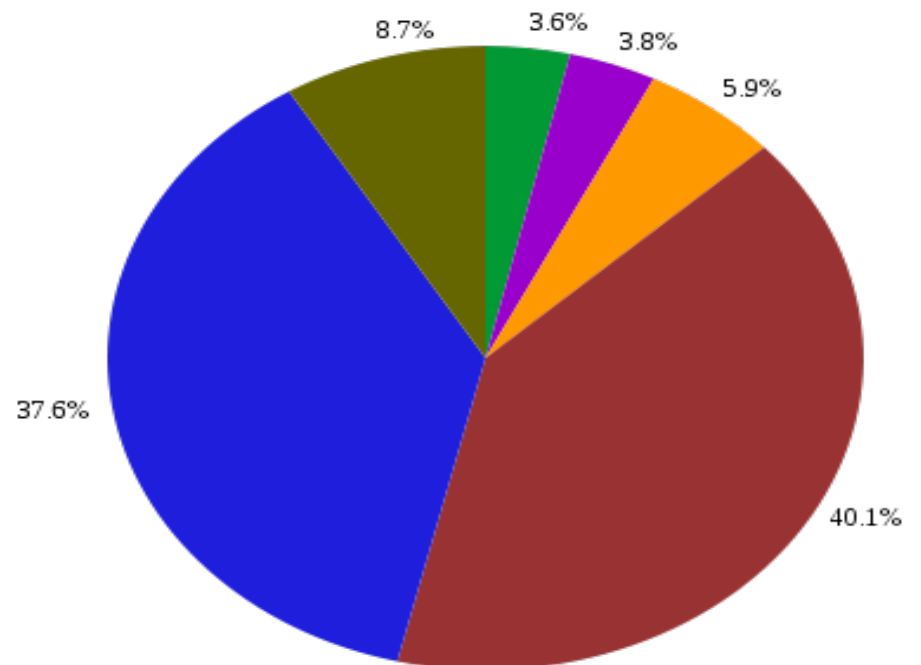
MEHRABIAN INDEX

TWITTER

**Le langage du corps
représente 93 % de la communication**



NEWS	SPAM	SELF-PROMO	PASS-ALONG	CON	BABBLE
3.75%	3.9%	5.86	8.7	37.00	40.1



Technology, language and youth

RNI NO. 28/8775
 REGISTERED NO. DLND-11/6068/06-08
 TECH/HK/05/FBD/07
 TN/PMG/CCR/1837/06-08/WPP-519/06-08
 LIC-88/06-08
 MH/MR/VEST/164/06-08
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AUGUST 21, 2006

INDIA TODAY

INDEPENDENCE DAY SPECIAL

CAREERS

The median **age** for Indians is **24.9 years**, compared to 32.7 years for the Chinese

There are **17,189 colleges** and universities in India, while the US has 4,182

India has held **14 general and 283 state assembly elections** so far

Indians watch **2 hours** of TV every day, while it is 6 hours in the US

23 million people watch **Indian movies** daily, against 20 million in the US

86% Indians have access to clean water, in comparison to 77% in China

INDIA IN

NUMBERS

The Indian Railways covered **576 bn passenger km** in 2004-05, compared to 571 bn by the Chinese railways

India has **32 Internet subscribers** per 1,000 people, while China has 73

It takes an enterprise **264 hours** to file taxes in India, compared to 325 hours in the US

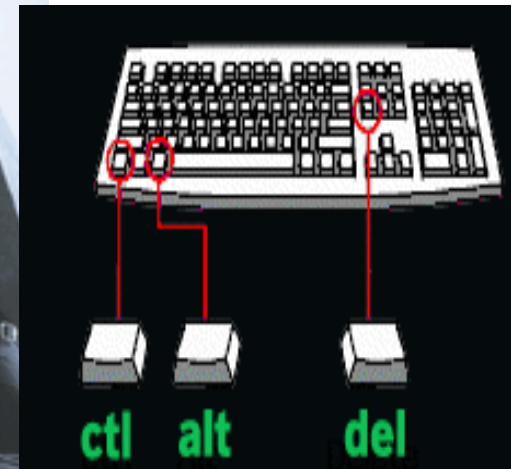
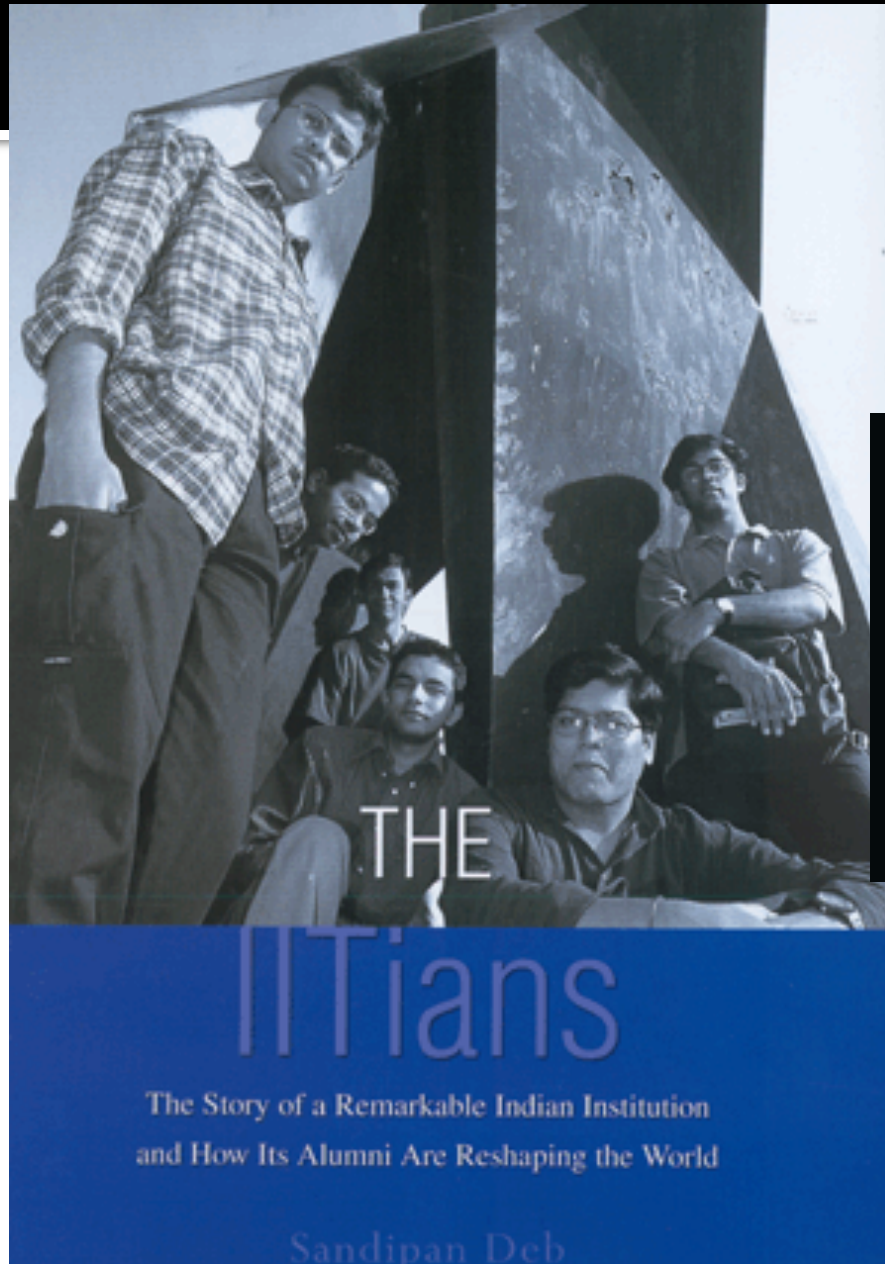
125 Fortune 500 companies have research bases in India, while 400 are in China

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CAREERS

The ITians: post-literate tecchies?



The Cultural & Psychological Context of India



In a culture nurtured on the Krishna myth and similar legends, is 'youth' in some ways as **socially invisible as it is numerically significant?**

How is this crisis of identity reflected in the multi-modal **e-language** that the Indian youth of today use?

Bilingual Indian-English Youth Lexicon

Nouns	9	10	-	19
Verbs	8	5	-	13
Adjectives	5	5	-	10
Speech acts: exclamative	1	2	-	3
Speech acts: declarative	0	1	-	1
Suffixes	-	-	6	6
Total	23	23	6	52*

*One word functions as a noun as well as a verb;

**one word is a noun-cum-adjective, hence the count is 52.

This mini-lexicon illustrates that words from Hindi and English occur in almost **equal proportions** in this language-variety. Given the '**three language formula**', the balanced distribution of source languages found here is not surprising, since post-1947 policy has meant that **an Indian citizen is essentially defined as multi-lingual**. Her 'core' self is symbolized by her mother tongue, her 'national' self is represented by Hindi, and her 'international' self is epitomized by English.

Modes of Talk

Babu language: Staid, bureaucratic, bumbling discourse, middle-aged bias

Butler language: Pidginized English, servant to master speech, establishment values

versus

Bakra language: Cocky command over several ‘goat argot’ languages, code-mixing, youth bias,

Bakwaas language: Subversive, irreverent, mocks establishment ‘nonsense talk’ values, very meta-linguistic in orientation

Modes of Talk

The **bilingualism and code-switching** that constitute the overarching features of these new, chat-supported varieties of discourse, signal an **attitudinal shift in an postcolonial, metropolitan, IT-infused India**.

In this respect, the stilted language-contact between English and the other languages of the subcontinent has currently made way for a freer & literally more 'youthful' relationship.

Transforming English into Angrezi

- 1. **App:** *Verb*. To app is to quit Desh (India) for greener pastures (!) to the west of the Atlantic. Every IITian worth his CGPA can app. Apping is a long drawn process beginning in the summer of the penultimate year of your stay on campus and culminating in a school maybe towards the end of your final year.
- 2. **Arbit:** *Adj*. An abbreviation of 'arbitrary', this word is used to describe something/someone weird, e.g. "That guy does arbit things" or "He's an arbit guy" implies that the person being referred to is a bit on the strange side.
- 3. **Disco:** *Noun*. Double clipping from the conjunction of 'disciplinary committee'. Note the bitter irony of the pun.
- 4. **Funda/fundaes:** *Adj*. Abbreviations of 'fundamental(s)'. The 'funda' of something means the basic principle behind it. 'Fundaes' are a collection of several 'fundas' and the person with the best fundaes is called a 'funda man'.
- 5. **Schol:** *Noun*. What almost every IITian lives for, a schol is a composite offer of Admission and Financial Aid from a US University - for many, the finale of their stay in IIT.

Youth Language, continued...

- 13. **DOSA:** *Noun*. Dean of Student Affairs - the guy who's supposed to be on the side of the students - hmmm... (A 'dosa' is also a very popular food item: a South Indian pan-cake).
- 14. **GKR:** *Noun*. 'Ganne ka ras' (sugarcane juice to pseudos)
- 15. **LT:** *Noun*. Lecture Theatre, venue for a refreshing nap during the CS101 class.
- iv. *Neologisms*
- 16. **Bindaas:** *Noun or Adjective*. Happy-go-lucky. A common attitudinal term signalling youthful insouciance
- 17. **Bong:** *Noun*. Someone from the state of West Bengal. See also
- 'Maddu'/'Tam'/'TamBram' to denote persons from the state of Tamil Nadu;
- 'Mallu', indicating people from Kerala, speakers of Malayalam. 'Ghat' or 'ghati'
- describe persons from Maharashtra, the origins of these terms probably deriving from the nearby Western Ghats. 'Punju' refers to someone belonging to the Punjab, while 'Surd' is term for a Sikh, with 'Surdi' as an affectionate version. People from Andhra Pradesh are called 'Gults'. The etymology of this word is unclear, but it is thought to have originated from 'Telugu', the language spoken by Gults. 'Telugu' when spelt backwards sounds like 'Gulutey', which possibly changed to 'Gult' with the passage of time.

Iitlang...

- 21. **Hukkah:** *Adj.* Applied to humanities courses at the IITs, implying that they consist of mostly smoke and very little substance - a cultural pun on the idea of the leisurely 'hookah'.
- 22. **Leching:** *Verb.* An activity at which IITians excel, 'leching' is the act of leering at any good looking female who passes by.
- 23. **Mug:** *Verb.* To mug is to study/cram, an activity usually undertaken the night before the exam, but some people mug during other - unseasonal - times too. Such characters are known as 'muggoos'; 'muggoos' who 'hug' in exams are known as 'huggoo muggoos'.
- 24. **P K Palta:** *Verb phrase.* Fell over drunk (translation from Hindi)

SOME EXAMPLES OF MIXED CODES: HINDI & ENGLISH/ SPEECH & WRITING

Bakwaas Advertising: First Class Bread

This is a marvellous contest, see it as a game
Simple *tareeka* to get *paisa*, name and fame

What's on your mind? Write all that *bakwaas*
But style of writing should be *kuch khas*

Main to hoga gaya famous, you can be too
Just write anything funny, *jhoota* or true

Agar idea nahi aata, don't give up the fight
Increase your IQ level with Harvest Gold *ki* bite.

Delhi-Dhaka Chat

0:14:57 A: so ..hoz
life going ...!!

0:16:01 B: i am
bored these
days

0:17:42 A:
oh.....kya baat
hai

0:17:52 B: kuch
nehi yaar
ETC.

Not Speech vs. Writing but Speech and Writing

WRITING

- Detachment
- Integration
- Passives constructions
- Third person
- Embedded clauses versus
- Fewer mental state clauses (eg. 'I think') in writing
- Writing more high prestige than speech

■

SPEECH

- Involvement
- Fragmentation
- Active constructions
- First person usage
- Conjunctions, repetitions
- More self-corrections in speech
- Speech delivered faster than writing

PHATIC COMMUNION?

- Tantalizingly poised between conversation and writing, 'e-lang' offers a theoretically rich field for detailed conversational and speech act analyses of the pragmatics of discourse.
- If youth is a period of psychological preparation for adulthood, then it is possible that we may be witnessing here a striking twenty-first century, technologically supported, manifestation of a phenomenon that the anthropologist Brownislaw Malinowski once called 'phatic communion':

THE REBIRTH OF ORALITY?

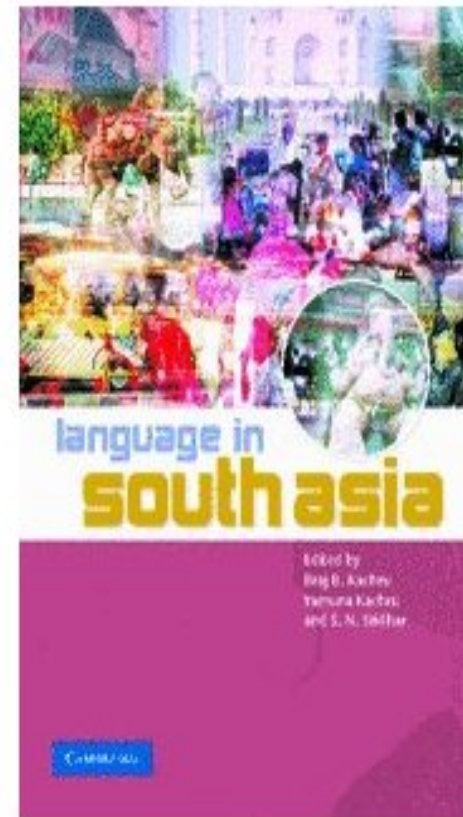
“a type of speech in which ties are created ... by the special feelings which form convivial gregariousness, by the give and take of utterances which make up ordinary gossip...Once more, language appears to us in this function not as an instrument of reflection but as a mode of action.”

MALINOWSKI

NEW TROBRIAND ISLANDERS?

Typing away at their keyboards, usually late at night, the transcripts of youth talk in our corpus conjure up an atmosphere of latent sexuality and closet-talk.

Romantic encounters literally lies at the heart of the psychology of youth, but we should note that the self-representation of Indian youth is here in the 'bakra' and 'bakwaas' modes, where the main purpose of language is to question established societal norms and set up a *counter idiom*.



VAGUE TOPICS. CODE SWITCHING, REPETITIONS

- i. Often the topic of discussion remains unspecified, and the conversation revolves in circles, since the primary intent is to bolster "convivial gregariousness" rather than exchange hard facts (0:30:51-0:32:12; 23:39:41-23:44:38). This "ordinary...give and take of utterances" is also mirrored in the references to everyday activities like sleeping (23:34:46-23:35:02) eating (23:37:51-23:36:34) and studying (22:58:31). At the level of discourse, these strategies effectively mirror the prolific use of lexical *nonce words* in this youth argot.
- ii. Code-switching and repetitions abound (0:14:57-0:18:08; 0:30:51-0:35:26; 23:34:24-23:38:01), with opening and closings as well as greetings and questions being duplicated in *both* Hindi and English (0:14:57-0:17:52; 23:40:44-23:41:32). Linguistically, such a plural attitude seems to imply mental 'openness' as well - conforming once again to the 'anything goes' formats of the 'bakra' and 'bakwaas' modes of youth talk. The processes of *suffixisation* mentioned in connection with the sub-continental youth lexicon are especially noticeable here.

MISSPELLING, METAREPS OF SPEECH, LAUGHTER, RAISED VOICE, PUNS, EMOTICONS

- Misspelling, colloquialisms in both in Hindi and English, and wayward punctuation (0:14:57; 0:18:03; 0:20:49; 23:44:38) likewise create a informal atmosphere, where judgmental attitudes are eschewed and care-freeness is emphasized. Extended 'joking' is typical (22:50:29-22:52:11) and 'seriousness' is laughingly condemned (22:47:46-22:48:19; 22:59:13).
- iv. Meta-representation of different types of laughter - uproarious (0:27:36) measured (0:32:50) and sceptical (0:32:51) shows how adept these youth are at portraying the modalities of speech in the written mode. Other examples include pauses rendered with ... (0:30:51; 22:41:04; 22:41:44; 22:43:42), expostulation with !! (22:41:04; 22:56:39) and 'raised voice' with capitals (the most striking example of the latter is 22:51:16 when the Hindi word 'MOTI' (fat) is immediately followed by a 'smiling' emoticon.

EMOTIONAL STATES, USE OF ENDEARMENTS, EMOTICONS

- Emotional states are crucial in all phatic communion and the use of visual emoticons is frequent as well as innovative in this discourse (22:51:20; 22:48:29). Specifically, references to the typically 'youthful' feeling of boredom occur throughout (0:14:57-0:20:49; 0:30:51-0:32:12). "Say something interesting" is a constant plea and 'chat' is clearly perceived as a 'talking cure' to the predicament of possible alienation, again underlining the fact that Eriksonian 'identity crises' of emergence are a recurrent feature of this discourse.
- vi. Thematically, the related discussion of 'forbidden' activities such as flirting (22:41:04, 22:56:39), smoking and sexuality (23:38:19-23:39:14) and the use of endearments such as 'dear' and 'janeman' from both English and Hindi are deployed to sustain the excitement of the chat.

REF TO COMMUNICATION CODES, USE OF AMERICANISMS, ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS

- Extended discussion of the actual medium of communication (22:53:58-22:55:51), showing awareness of different 'codes' - msn, yahoo, LINUX - heightens the impression of meta-linguistic savvy displayed in 4-6 above. The high tolerance of *neologisms* and *relexicalizations* shown in the youth lexicon are repeated here in the realm of discourse.
- viii. Internationalization of a communication code that relies on a popular spelling system including 'Americanisms' and innovative 'short messaging' minus vowels (22:51:50; 22:55:08; 23:00:41-23:00:47; 23:35:08) mirrors the widespread recourse to *abbreviations*, *acronyms* and *clippings* also noted in the youth lexicon we compiled.

USE OF LOCATIVES, DEIXIS ETC.

- Acute consciousness of locative parameters and career options, so important in the psyche of an 'internationalized' youth, is indicated by the way in which Dhaka, Delhi and, finally, the U.S. and U.K. function as crucial coordinates of youth identity (0:20:49-0:21:42; 23:00:24-23:01:16). Other locations are such as the 'lab' (23:40:44-23:41:32) and 'home' (23:01:05) form a 'local' counterpoint to these 'global' cities that define varying degrees of political power and metropolitan success. B endearingly confesses, for example, that her reason for not wanting to "go to US...may be becos everyone is always crazy for US". This sort of reasoning may seem 'perverse' at first sight, but read it in light of the self-mocking 'bakra' and 'bakwas' idiom, it suddenly makes phatic sense.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH?

- The parameters above, taken as a cluster, reveal the formal sophistication characteristic of this deceptively 'casual' oral form.
- As is apparent, chat is a device adapted to both the **creation and the concealment of crises of identity**, where the breaking of linguistic norms psychologically reflects a challenge to other social barriers.
- **Gender, caste and religious differences**, sustained by a 'babu' and 'butler' linguistic syndrome, may have proved highly constraining within the family dominated scenarios of the Indian sub-continent, but they **are now being bypassed or transcended in the virtual space of the chat room.**

Orality, youth language and technology: some conclusions

A. BILIGUALISM: Many studies of bilingual competence have so far emanated from predominantly monolingual societies where borrowing, code switching and language mixing are seen as indicative of a lack of command over the target language. In the post-colonial Indian situation, however, these same features may offer evidence of **self-confidence rather than inadequacy**. This is an important interpretive insight that accrues from a study of youth-chat on the subcontinent, where **huge interpersonal gains and an enhancement of visibility and power result from these very linguistic practices**.

Orality, youth language and technology: some conclusions

B. ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH: Among an earlier generation of users, the 'babu' and 'butler' modes marked a classical 'subject positioning' vis-a-vis the 'master language'. Then, the model tongue was undeniably written forms of 'British English'; today, the youth of the subcontinent seem much more strongly influenced by a relatively easy-going spoken brand of 'American English' disseminated worldwide via a range of powerful public media. This **postcolonial makeover** highlights yet again the changing landscape of English as it is being rapidly and almost unrecognizably 'internationalized' 'politicized' and fostering **new 'language tribalisms'**.

Orality, youth language and technology: some conclusions

C. SHIFT OF SOCIAL EMPHASIS FROM CHILDHOOD TO YOUTH AS A LOCUS OF POWER: My specific argument has been that **linguistic transformations may in such a postcolonial technological context be indicative of the psychological struggle for a less constrained group identity within a social structure where 'childhood' rather than 'youth' was traditionally the important social category**. It is for this reason that I have analyzed this form of quasi-oral discourse as both intensely adapted to deal with a classical Eriksonian 'crisis of youth' and extensively 'phatic' in the best Malinowskian sense.

Orality, youth language and technology: some conclusions

D. REFLEXIVITY AND TRANSLATION:

Extremely local in its phonological, semantic and syntactic choices but global in its reach, the youth idiom I have described is psychologically pervasive on the Indian sub-continent.

Its most distinctive feature is that, in it, **one language is used to comment on another language with enormous, reflexive sophistication. The much vaunted cultural pluralism and democratic diversity of India are thus showcased in this language variety.**

The present generation of middle class, post-Independence youth are **'natural born' translators.** Their skill at crossing linguistic boundaries aids their propensity to smoothly traverse other boundaries - such as those defined by nation and corporation. **Nationalism is still an important motif but the simplified diction of an earlier nationalism is being reinvented by the technologically savvy Indian youth now represented by 'outgoing' diasporic groups like the IIT graduates.**

Orality, youth language and technology: some conclusions

E. DIASPORIC EFFECTS AND BONDING: In the process, sub-continental youth inevitably **carry with them their 'bakra' and 'bakwaas' epistemic baggage, linguistic portmanteaus that help them identify and bond with their increasingly international fraternity – whether in Delhi, Dhaka or Dallas**. The radical speech acts of affiliation promoted in this discourse thus derive paradoxically from the fact that the 15-25 year olds pioneering it have managed to create a technologically sustained and stable argot, that could ultimately serve the independent and 'free' self-image of society as a whole.

Evolution: Past and Future Travelling and Talking



Notes towards a new research vocabulary

KAVAD TALK

Oraliteracies

Material Cultures and Online Sub-cultures

Indian Script Cultures and E-scripts

Narrative Cartographies

Intersubjective Thresholds in Everyday Talk

Childhood and Developmental Indices

Embodiment and Orality

The beginning and the end: the enigmatic oral text of the kavad



CAMBRIDGE BLUES

CAMBRIDGE BLUES

at Cambridge I learnt to lie with elegance
to turn to advantage a narrow bed
a narrower scholarship, sail close
to the edge of the fens but be careful
not to sink, fence myself with books
but be certain not to think.

I thrust behind the lowered guards
of several visored dons, merry maid
through every night and blackmailed
in the mornings, a soupcon of malice
saw me to success, I learnt to trade
more and more for ever less and less.

and now I am a don myself, whose duty
is to see the shuffling undergraduates
develop deviously, sharp their skill
at feinting, secure a neat pass or two
but above all forget those clumsy truths
that send them far, far beyond the edge.



a queen anne bed, a unique
dresser
I teach my acolytes finesse in
pleasure
for the untutored minute comes
the cold fens circling wait,
styxward slip
our familiar quarters, point
encompasses point
and there's an end to all our
hauteur.



THE THIRD EYE (for Stephen Hawking)

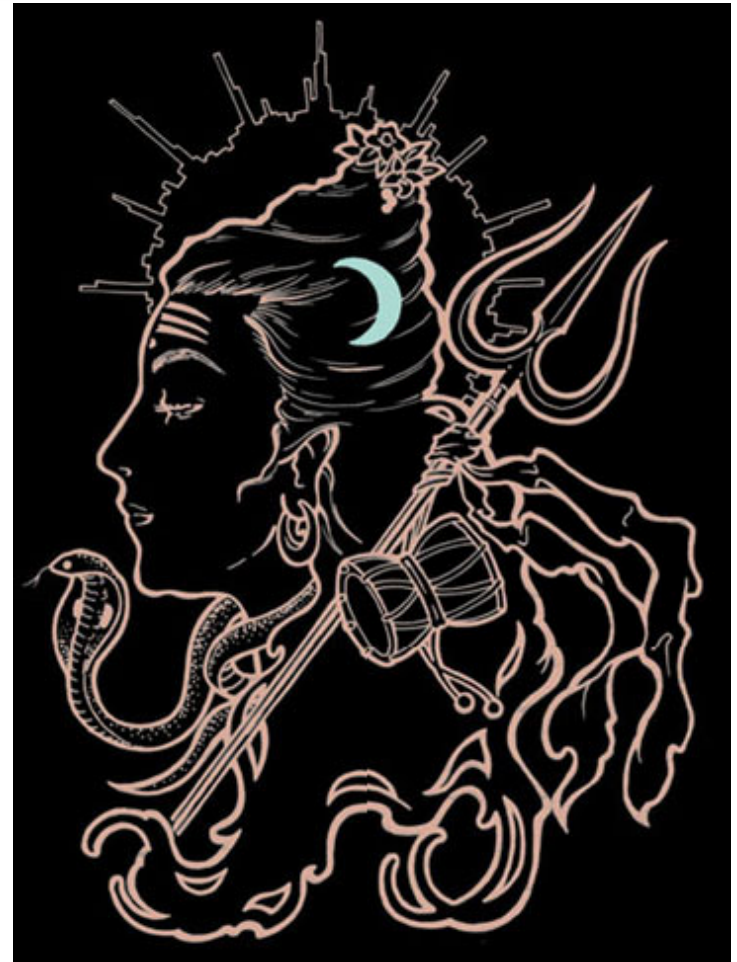
Shiva know no Bhangra
Nor the Punjabi Rap!
But he's a divine dancer
Who never takes a nap!

And if for the single trillionth of a second
Shiva ceased to dance

All the world's great cities would quiver
On a knife-edge of chance

Every star in the universe would
Cease to burn

Neither sun nor earth
Would turn



**Matter grow
So dense**

**So intense
The dark**

**That your
Cry**

**Would
Die**

**On a windless night
In the lap of the sea
When Shiva sleeps
You will know eternity**

