

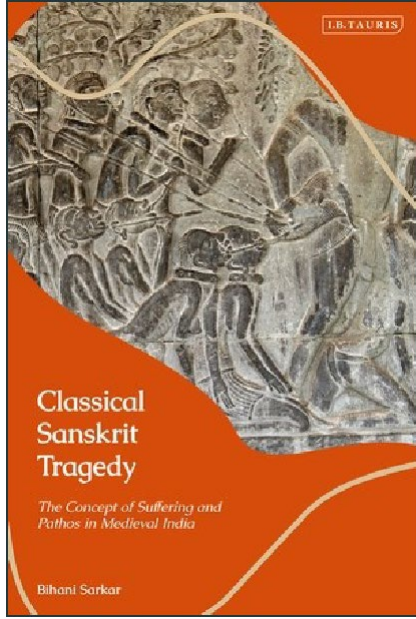
Classical Sanskrit Tragedy

The Concept of Suffering and Pathos in Medieval India

Bihani Sarkar

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It is often assumed that classical Sanskrit poetry and drama lack a concern with the tragic. However, as Bihani Sarkar makes clear in this book, this is far from the case. In the first study of tragedy in classical Sanskrit literature, Sarkar draws on a wide range of Sanskrit dramas, poems and treatises – much of them translated for the first time into English – to provide a complete history of the tragic in Indian literature from the second to the fourth centuries.

Looking at Kalidasa, the most celebrated writer of Sanskrit poetry and drama (*kavya*), this book argues that constructions of absence and grief are central to Kalidasa's compositions and that these 'tragic middles' are much more sophisticated than previously understood. For Kalidasa, tragic middles are modes of thinking, in which he confronts theological and philosophical issues. Through a close literary analysis of the tragic middle in five of his works, the *Abhijñanasakuntala*, the *Raghuvaṃśa*, the *Kumarasambhava*, the *Vikramorvasiya* and the *Meghaduta*, Sarkar demonstrates the importance of tragedy for classical Indian poetry and drama in the early centuries of the common era. These depictions from the Indian literary sphere, by their particular function and interest in the phenomenology of grief, challenge and reshape in a wholly new way our received understanding of tragedy.

Bihani Sarkar is Associate Faculty Member of the Oriental Institute, University of Oxford and Research Member of the Common Room, Wolfson College, University of Oxford, UK. She is the author of *Heroic Shaktism: the cult of Durga in Ancient Indian Kingship* (2017).



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