# Indexed notes - RELT00000 Stories from South Asian History

* This document contains notes for RELT00000.
* The contents table below uses text style and headings to hyperlink to key sections - refresh the contents list after editing each section.
* Press CTRL+ALT+A to turn the document outline pane on and off for quick navigation.
* Press CTRL+F to search for keywords.

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## Topic 1 – The Story of Our People

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| Slides | Topic\_1.Intro.The\_Story\_of\_Our\_People.ppt. (Blackboard) |
| Podcast | <https://video.manchester.ac.uk/index.html?login> |
| Key readings | Alan Williams (2009). [The Zoroastrian Myth of Migration From Iran and Settlement in the Indian Diaspora: Text, Translation and Analysis of the 16th Century Qeṣṣe-ye Sanjān 'The Story of Sanjan'](http://web.b.ebscohost.com.manchester.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=5885047b-b58f-4ced-9887-5bbbab706544%40pdc-v-sessmgr04&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBlPWlwLHNoaWImc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl#AN=312649&db=nlebk)* The Parsi community sees the Qesse-ye Sanjan as an accurate account of their ancestors
* The text is perceived as the most generally accepted narrative of events described.
* Tells the story of Parsi emigration from Iran and settlement in West India.
* The story is signed by a Parsi priest – Bahman. The date of authorship is 969YZ which is several centuries after the described events.
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| Eric Csapo (2005). ‘Malinowski and Charter Myths’ in *Theories of Mythology* p.140-145. (pdf scanned copy available on Blackboard topic 1 folder or hard copies found in library)* Malinowski argues that myth does work to justify social order, institutions, practices, customs and codes [p.141]
* Myths often establish a ‘sociological charter’ which strengthens traditions and gives them value [p.142]
* Charter myths are myths of origins – often retrojections of present-day cultural values. Follows by giving examples of the Tobriand myth, Genesis 9 and the Old Testament [p.143]
 |
| Abbott Porter (2007), ‘Story, plot and narration’, in [*The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*](https://www-cambridge-org.manchester.idm.oclc.org/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-narrative/45E41A6D74F9CB697D9668AC46D88397) p.39-51.* Key article that examines the distinctive definitions of ‘story’, ‘plot’ and ‘narration’ that have been employed by various groups. [p.39-41]
	+ Story is composed of action and characters and always moves forward in time [p.41]
	+ Narration has various definitions including that which refers to the narrative discourse, production of narrative by narrator or recorded speech/thought [p.41-42]
	+ Plot is even more slippery – most frequently understood as a ‘type’of story or the sequencing of events [p.43]
* Explores Gerard Genette’s framework of homodiegetic vs. heterodiegetic narrators [p.42]
* ‘Narrative is the representation of events, consisting of a story and narrative discourse, story is an event of sequence of events (the action), and narrative discourse is those events as represented’ [p.16]
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### Seminar questions, or past exam questions:

* What is the difference between a ‘story’ and ‘narrative’?
* How do charter myths ossify group identity? Which groups and what identity?
* Has the Qesse-ye Sanjan story changed over time?
* To what extent does Malinowski's theory of charter myths help us understand the Qesse-ye Sanjan?

### Key themes:

#### Story vs. Narrative vs. Plot

* + These terms have been used and identified in a variety of ways throughout academia.
	+ Genette’s *Narrative Discourse* (1980) looks at 3 tiers of narrative to distinguish between different meanings of the term ‘narrative’ itself
	+ He distinguishes the story to be the content, narrative to be the signifier/discourse or text itself and narrating to be an act (p.27)

#### Charter Myths (concept) – the Qesse-ye Sanjan

* + Charter myths go beyond the binary of history vs. myth
	+ Root groups and allow them to mark themselves as different
	+ People use them to figure out their relationships to the world
	+ A fruitful example of how the power narratives have in society/identity
	+ The Qesse-ye Sanjan can be understood to be a charter myth. Williams (2009, p.218) argues in ‘A mirror of a clock’ that the QS was not intended to be a historical work but instead is better understood as a mirror of Parsi self-understanding.

#### Perspectives – Who’s story is the Qesse-ye Sanjan?

* + The story could be interpreted in many ways… but whose story is it and what is its meaning?
	+ Iranian/Zoroastrian argument: Invasion of Iran resulted in persecution of Zoroastrians. Persecution increased over time and forced Zoroastrians to flee. Settlement in India was complicated by demands to alter aspects of culture.
	+ Arabian/Muslim argument: Aim of the Persian conquest was to liberate and not oppress. Corrupt rulers and other factors complicated this. Invasion was a much more complex affair
	+ Indian argument: India has always been hospitable towards Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. Allowed the Zoroastrians refuge, military powers and authority. Hospitable in spite of possible threat of invasion.

### Other notes:

* There has been a general shift away from the literacy and aesthetic value of stories and movement towards: What is the relationship between the study of stories and history? How are histories and stories contextual? What is the relationship between tellers and audiences? How are stories and histories represented and recounted? How can we think about the interplay of the narrated world and the world in which the story is narrated? Remember to think at this level when encountering stories.
* The Qesse-ye Sanjan may seem like just a narration of a diasporic journey, however, unpicking its structure makes it clear that it actively works as a sociological charter of the Parsi people (refer to Alan Williams ‘[The Re-placement of Zoroastrian Iran](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24049236)’ for this argument)

### Additional tips from tutors:

* When using the terms ‘narrative’, ‘story’ and ‘plot’ remember to define what you mean and support your interpretation based on other scholarly works.

## Topic 2 - Framing the Great Indian Epic: The *Mahabharata*

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| Slides | Topic\_1.Framing\_the\_Great\_Indian\_Epic.ppt (Blackboard) |
| Podcast | <https://video.manchester.ac.uk/index.html?login> |
| Key readings | Smith tr. Extracts from The Mahabharata: an abridged translation, pp.1-3 (see Blackboard folder for topic 2)* This section summarises the 18 books of the Mahabharata epic.
* Text was probably composed by *bards* who were storytellers and accompanied kings on the battlefields around the 5th Century.
* Examining a critical edition enables a study of reception/retellings.
 |
| Black (2007), [Eavesdropping on the Epic: Female Listeners in the Mahābhārata](https://www.librarysearch.manchester.ac.uk/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma9927967594401631&context=L&vid=44MAN_INST:MU_NUI&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,Gender%20and%20Narrative%20in%20the%20Mah%C4%81bh%C4%81rata&offset=0&pcAvailability=false), p.53-78. (Library book or find scanned pdf on Blackboard)* Women are integrated into the imagined audience of the Mahabharata and their presence as listeners impacts on the text in a number of ways by allowing female characters to claim authority to speak on matters of *dharma* and *moksa*
* Whilst there are no claims that the MBh as a whole is for the benefit of women it argues that females emerge as primary characters that shape and direct the story [p.73]
* Gives the examples of Gandhari and Draupadi as female characters.
* Characterizing the audience: the king is the primary listener. But who are the other listeners of these frames? [p.57]
* Frame narratives have importance because the technique of multiple framing suggests that the composers and compilers were concerned with the question of the text’s reception. [p.57]
 |
| Lutegendorf (1991), ‘[The Fathomless Lake: Tulsi’s narrative framing](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppzkw.6)’, p.18-29.* This is on Tulsidās’s 16th c telling of the Rāma story but has an excellent early section on frames.
* How frame narratives work in the Ramacaritmanas written by Tulsi Das to give the text authority and context.

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### Seminar questions, or past exam questions:

* Who’s story is the Mahabharata?
* How do stories help construct a group’s identity?
* How do frame narratives function?
* Is the Mahabharata a female story?

### Key themes:

#### Frame Narratives

* + A method where you have the overarching frame and within it you have stories within stories. These stories are related to one another and are self-referential. Storytellers want us to think about who is telling this story and to whom they are telling this story, whose story is this, and why is it being told.
	+ Explicit acknowledgment of ‘reception’**.**
	+ Who you’re talking to has an impact on the story and changes the story that is being told: due to assumptions of pre-known information vs. the wider picture.
	+ Mahabharata displays the earliest evidence of frame-stories.
	+ 4 main frame narratives within the Mahabharata:
		- Ugrasraravas recites MhB stories to a Brahmin-ritual audience in Naimisha forest saying where he heard the story.
		- MhB is recited by Vaisampayana to King Janamejaya during the snake sacrifice until the war – why the snake sacrifice is happening. The king’s dad was killed by a snake, emphasising why the Pandava family and their descendants are trying to wipe out all of the snakes and why the family are so obsessed with power and control.
		- Samjaya reports the battle of MhB to King Dhrtararashtra of why the cousins wiped each other out.
		- Bhisma recounts stories to King Yudhishthira after the MhB battle – the war is over, in order to prepare Yudhishthira to be a good king.

#### Tensions

* + The tensions found within the Mahabharata encourage reader participation in the story’s events.
	+ Three types of tension: narrative, conceptual and ethical.
	+ These tensions are formed against the Mahabharata’s claims aimed to enlighten upon artha (wealth), kama (pleasure), dharma (duty), moksha (liberation from rebirth).
	+ Explored further in topic 3.

#### Significance of the Mahabharata today

* + A self-proclaimed important text. It is now presented as *itihasa* (history).
	+ Tells a complex story of a war between two sets of cousins.
	+ Has established greater and more ‘universal’ significance in more recent centuries due to nationalism and ossification into Indian/Hindu society. Originally the text seems to be aimed at kings and the aristocracy class (refer to [The Origin and Significance of the Epic Mahabharata](http://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/essays/the-origin-and-significance-of-the-epic-mahabharata.asp), Lutgendorf (1989) ‘[The view from the ghats](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2057378)’, and Fitzgerald (1983) [The great epic of India as religious rhetoric](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1462584))

### Other notes:

* Frame stories are an integral part of the Mahabharata identity (Minkowski 1989), they are self-referential thus indicating how embedded stories are to be understood.
* The frame narratives within the Mahabharata are significant because three out of the five main frames are told to a king
* Rituals are embedded into the story. What significance does this have?

### Additional tips from tutors:

* The value of examining the frame narratives found within stories can help unpick its significance, audience and intentions.