


॥ संस्कृतस्य माहात्म्यम् ॥


.. The Importance of Sanskrit ..

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भाषासु भुष्या मधुरा प्राचीना विश्वतोमुष्णी ।
भाति संस्कृतभाषेयं सर्वदा सर्वदा सती ॥ १ ॥

उन्नतेन स्थितिमता डिमवद्भूभृता यथा ।
त्वङ्गत्तरङ्गया पुण्यसरिता गङ्गया यथा ॥ २ ॥

तथैव भारतोर्वीयं दिव्यसंस्कृतभाषया ।
सरस्वत्यापि विष्याता विभाति वसुधातले ॥ ३ ॥

अयं भारतसंस्कारकोशागारस्य कुञ्चिका ।
भाषान्तराणां माता वा धात्रि वा स्तन्यदा शिरम् ॥ ४ ॥

संस्कारवत्यो जगति सन्तु भाषाः परःशतम् ।
तथापि संस्कृताभिष्या नान्यस्या दृश्यते क्वचित् ॥ ५ ॥

भृलस्यतिः पुरा दैवि प्रोवायेन्द्राय भारतीम् ।
अन्नेण व्याकृता पश्चादियं देवहितैषिणा ॥ ६ ॥

संस्कृत्य संस्कृत्य पदानील वाक्यं करोति हि ।
तेन संस्कृतभाषेति भाष्यकारः पतञ्जलिः ॥ ७ ॥

आर्याणां मातृभाषेयमार्यावर्तनिवासिनाम् ।
आसीत् पुरा पाणिनीये भाषाशब्देन वर्णिता ॥ ८ ॥

मृतभाषेति जल्पन्तु मृतसंज्ञविनीमिमाम् ।
पामराः पण्डितम्भ्याः परमार्थपराङ्मुखाः ॥ ९ ॥

पूर्णापि स्वीयकारैषा भाषान्तरपदान्यपि ।
सरिद्व्यो नीरमादत्ते सम्पूर्णाऽध्यम्भसां निधिः ॥ १० ॥

देशभाषाविकासार्थं तत्तद् भाषासु पण्डिताः ।
स्वीकृवन्ति यथाकामं संस्कृतात् पदसंययम् ॥ ११ ॥

“सम्परिभ्यां करोतौ सुट्” भूषणार्थे विधीयते ।
तेन भूषितभाषेति विष्याता पाणिनेर्भते ॥ १२ ॥

न केवलं भूषिता सा भूषयत्यपि भाषकान्
कुमारसम्भवे काव्ये कालिदासवचो यथा ।

“संस्कारवत्येव गिरा मनीषी
 तथा स पूतश्च विभूषितश्च” इति ॥ १३ ॥
 द्विजानां व्यवहारो हि संस्कृतेनैव सर्वदा ।
 आसीदिति ज्ञातमिह वाल्मीकिर्वचनामृतात् ॥ १४ ॥
 आराण्यकाण्डे वातापिकथायां दृश्यते किल ।
 “धृत्वेल्वलो विप्ररूपं संस्कृते व्याजहार उ” ॥ १५ ॥
 “धारयन् ब्राह्मणं उपमित्वलः संस्कृतं वदन् ।
 आमन्त्रयति विप्रान् स्म श्राद्धमुद्दिश्य निर्दृष्टः” ॥ १६ ॥
 उनुमत्कृतशङ्कापि सुन्दरे काण्डे ऽरिता ।
 अतदेव ज्ञापयति संस्कृतस्य स्थितिं तदा ॥ १७ ॥
 “यद्वि वायं प्रदास्यामि द्विजातिरिव संस्कृतम्” ।
 रावणं मन्यमाना सा सीता भीता भविष्यति ॥ १८ ॥
 “यतो वायो निवर्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सः” ।
 शिद्रूपिणी सा वागेव शब्दब्रह्माह्वया परा ॥ १९ ॥
 द्विवोऽवतीर्णा गङ्गेव लोकानुग्रहतत्परा ।
 प्रत्यात्मवृत्तिदृष्टा सा पश्यन्ती प्रतिभा मता ॥ २० ॥
 भाषावैविध्यमापन्ना मध्यमाऽपमाश्रिता ।
 वक्तृश्रोतृमनःसिद्धा वर्तते संलुप्तकमा ॥ २१ ॥
 ध्वनिरूपमथापन्ना वैभरी वाक् प्रकाशते ।
 व्यवहारे मनुष्याणां साहाय्यं कुर्वती सदा ॥ २२ ॥
 वाल्मीकिव्यासमुष्यैश्च लालिता पोषिता शिरम् ।
 जुयात् समाः सःसं सा ज्योतीरुपा सरस्वती ॥ २३ ॥
 अशक्नुवद्भिव्यर्तुं दशभाषान्तरे बुधैः ।
 स्वीकृतं संस्कृतमिति श्रीहर्षोऽध्यवदत् सुधीः ॥ २४ ॥
 अन्योन्यभाषान्वबोधधीतेः
 संस्कृतिमासु व्यवहारवत्सु ।
 द्विगुण्यः समेतेषु नरेषु तेषु

सौवर्गवर्गो स्वजनैरथिहि ॥ २५ ॥

– नैषध १०.३४

काशमीरे जन्मभाषावत् संस्कृतं प्राकृतं तथा ।

स्त्रीणामपि भुंभेष्यासीदित्येवं बिल्लुणोऽब्रवीत् ॥ २६ ॥

भ्रूमः सारस्वतजनिभुवः किं निधेः कौतुकानाम्

यस्यानेकाद्भुतगुणकथाकीर्णकणामृतस्य ।

यत्र स्त्रीणामपि किमपरं जन्मभाषावदेव

प्रत्यावासं विलसति वयः संस्कृतं प्राकृतं च ॥ २७ ॥

– विक्रमाङ्कदेवचरितम् १८.६

From The Importance of Sanskrit by K. Kunjunni Raja, Editor

The Adyar Library Bulletin 'brahmavidya,' Volume 63, 1999 p. 1-16.

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The Importance of Sanskrit

by Shri K. Kunjunni Raja

Sanskrit is one of the most important languages of the Indo-European family and has a very rich and continuous history of nearly five thousand years. As a result of the patient and laborious comparative study of the various languages like Sanskrit, Old Persian, Greek, Latin, German, and English in the beginning of the 19th century, it has been shown by scholars that all these can be traced back to a common source which is termed Proto-Indo-European (PIE). It is generally believed that the original home of the Indo-Europeans was somewhere in Eastern Europe north of the Black Sea and Western Asia and that the ancestor language (PIE) common to the sub-families was spoken

in a fairly unified form with minor dialectal variations. This ancestral language must have resembled some of its more archaic descendants such as Greek and Sanskrit rather closely.

The 'discovery of Sanskrit' by the West is usually associated with the memorable utterance of Sir William Jones in his third annual address before the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, on February 2, 1786 (Asiatic Researches, vol. I. 1788, pp. 422 f) :

“The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin and more exquisitely refined than either; yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed that no philosopher could examine them all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source which, perhaps, no longer exists ; there is a similar reason, though not quite so forceful, for supposing that both the Gothic and the Celtic, though blended with a different idiom, have the same origin with the Sanskrit; and the Old Persian might be added to the same family.”

This statement of Sir William Jones is considered as the starting point of comparative Linguistics of the Indo-European languages. He came to India as the Judge of the Supreme Court of India in 1783; he founded the Asiatic Society on February 2, 1782. He translated Kalidasa's Shakuntala into English in 1789 on reading which the great German poet philosopher Goethe went into raptures.

The year 1990 was declared 'the Sanskrit year' by the Government of India to celebrate the bicentenary of this translation and to focus attention on the value and significance of Sanskrit culture. A seminar on Sanskrit literature was conducted by the U.K. centre of the Bharatiya Vidyabhavan at London on October 20 and 21, 1990. Mathur Krishnarnurthy, Executive Director of the Bhavan, was the moving force behind the seminar. The late Professor K. Krishnamurti gave the keynote address. Among Indian scholars who

participated were Ramaranjan Mukherji (Calcutta), the late R.C. Dvivedi (Jaipur), K. Kunjunni Raja and the late S.S. Janaki (Madras). Indian High Commissioner Mr. Kuldip Nayar said in his inaugural address: 'Sanskrit was once proposed as the 'lingua franca' of India, but for various reasons never became so. Nevertheless, the spirit of Sanskrit still today represents the hidden heritage which looks at the man rather than at his station in life.'

Sir William Jones also made a conjecture that Sandracottos of the ancient Greek writers was Chandragupta Maurya of the Puranas; this has been accepted by almost all scholars, and this has proved to be a pivotal one for ancient Indian history and chronology.

The 'discovery of Sanskrit' by Sir William Jones led to the comparative grammatical studies of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Old Persian and other languages. Bothlingk and Roth published the Sanskrit- German Dictionary in several volumes (St. Petersburg Dictionary, 1852-75). H.H. Wilson, the first Boden Professor at Oxford translated the Rigveda and Vishnu Purana with notes and wrote on the Indian Theatre.

Professor Max Miller's contribution to the popularization of Sanskrit has been the most important in the nineteenth century. He made a critical edition of the entire Rigveda with Sayana's Bhashya in about 25 years (1852-75). He also conceived a project of translating into English, with the collaboration of many scholars, the 'Sacred Books of the East' in a series of 49 volumes with a 50th volume of Index by Winternitz. He wanted to include the Old and New Testaments also in this series, but did not press for it because of objections from orthodox Christian scholars. Max Muller introduced three major academic disciplines in England -Comparative Philosophy, Comparative Mythology and Comparative Religion. As a Sanskritist he translated the Hitopadesa, Meghaduta, part of the Rigveda, the Dhammapada and some Upanishad-s'. Among his popular books are The six systems of Indian Philosophy, -Vedanta Philosophy, India -What can it Teach us? (Lectures for candidates of I.C.S.).

Although Max Muller was suitable for Boden Professorship after H.H. Wilson's

retirement, he was not selected partly because he was a German and not pro-Catholic. Monier Williams, the rival candidate was selected by a majority of votes. After the critical edition of the Rigveda and the series of the Sacred Books of the East of which 31 were devoted to the Indian texts alone, he retired in 1875 as Professor of Comparative Philosophy, for completing the preparation of the Sacred Books of the East. He died in 1900.

Max Muller did not visit India. He said he did not want to go to Benaras, for he was sure to be disillusioned if he saw the city as it was then. Vivekananda visited him in England. Max Muller appreciated the work done by Tilak. Relying on Vedic reference to Orion(मृग Mriga) as the place where the Vernal Equinox was, Tilak suggested B.C. 4500 as the date of the Rigveda ; in the BrahmAs, it had receded to Pleides(कुत्तिका Krttika) showing its date as c. B.C. 2500. On receiving Tilak's book Max Muller wrote to him that he was a bit skeptical, but it might be that he was not responsive to new ideas because of his old age. Tilak was released from prison because of the intervention of Max Muller who wrote a petition to Queen Victoria. His love for Sanskrit prompted him to have his name in Sanskrit asमोक्षमूल MokShamula.

Max Muller's Death centenary will be celebrated in December 2000 at Calcutta under the auspices of the Max Muller Bhavan of India and the Government of India.

Col. H.S. Olcott, Founder President of the theosophical Society, got the inspiration to specialize in the publication of the Upanishad-s by the Adyar Library from a letter written to him by Max Muller in 1888

(Later published in The Theosophist, December 1888) :

"It seems to me considering the higher object of the Theosophical Society, that you ought to publish a complete and correct edition of the Upanisad-s...The Upanisad-s are after all the most important portion of the Veda-s for philosophical purposes, and if the Theosophical Society means to do any real good, it must take its stand on the Upanisad-s and on nothing else. At present

the issue of a beautiful and correct edition of the text seems to me almost a duty to be performed by the Theosophical Society.”

From the affinity between the Avestan language and the Vedic Sanskrit, it is inferred that the forefathers of the Vedic Aryans and of the Iranians lived together and spoke a common language, Indo-Iranian. Hence the history of the evolution of Sanskrit has to be traced through the Old Indo-Iranian. Even though it is assumed that nomadic bands of Aryans migrated into India through the Northwest passes in successive waves, there is no reference to this migration in the Rigveda, the first recorded document of the Indo-Aryan. The Sanskrit language preserves many of the ancient features of PIE in its phonology and morphology, and Indian grammarians like पण्डितः Panini (B.C. 500) have analyzed the language into its constituent elements and described the structure so thoroughly as to make the language almost transparent.

Sanskrit served as a link language not only within India but even outside in the South-east Asian countries. Its influence on foreign languages and even on modern Indian languages has been vast and immense. Sanskrit was a polished language of the elite Brahmins, the शिष्टः Shista-s of अर्यवर्तः Aryavarta and was confined to the orthodox literary circles, but it was propagated throughout the mainland of Asia up to Japan and China by the Buddhists, and to South-east Asia through Saivism and Vaishnavism by Brahmins, though some Smṛti texts prohibit sea-voyage to the Brahmins as against their वर्यावर्णमधर्मः Varnasramadharmā.

The first epigraphical documents available to us are Asoka's inscriptions in the third century B.C. which are मगधः Prakrit with various peculiarities on the basis of geographical locations. Sanskrit is found replacing Prakrit gradually; and Rudradaman's inscription in the second century A.D. is the first Sanskrit inscription available. But in Indo-China the earliest inscription known is the Vocanh inscription, found in the Champa country, which is in Sanskrit. No Prakrit inscription is found outside India. Among Middle Indo-Aryan languages it is only पाली Pali that has spread outside India from Ceylon as the

language of Hinayana Buddhism. In India inscription in mixed Sanskrit and Prakrit, and literature in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit began to appear.

Pali and Ardhamagadhi developed as the special languages of Hinayana Buddhism and Jainism respectively; but for the sake of prestige, Sanskrit began to be used especially in Mahayana Buddhism. In India along with the various Prakrits, Dravidian languages, especially Tamil, developed and became popular.

Facing such a diversity of language a common means of communication became necessary. During the period of Buddhist propaganda and later of Hinduism this link language was Sanskrit. In spite of its sophisticated nature, Sanskrit was regularly taught in schools not only in India, but even abroad, mostly by Brahmins. In India also Sanskrit was the link language used in the different regions. Post-Vedic religious texts as well as texts on medicine, astronomy, philosophy, art and architecture, and important literary works were written directly in Sanskrit itself in spite of the development of regional languages.

Itsing in the seventh century studied Sanskrit at Palambang in Sumatra on his way from China to India. Many foreign scholars could communicate in Sanskrit, though their command in the language was not perfect. Sanskrit MSS. were brought from India to Central Asia and Tibet. The propagation of Indian culture abroad has been through Sanskrit. Panini's grammar, Dandin's Kavyadarsa and the Astangahrdaya were taught and translated in Tibet and Mongolia. Sanskrit was also used for inscriptions, perhaps for prestige. They were in kavya style. Sanskrit inscriptions of Cambodia are rich and vast. Brahmins married princesses there and their children were considered as Brahmins. Saivagama-s and Pancaratragama-s were popular. The local languages were influenced by Sanskrit loan words.

The importance of the study of Sanskrit goes far beyond the aesthetic value of its literature. Sanskrit is the key to most of the branches of the study of

Indian civilization and the contribution of this civilization to the development of human thought and culture are considerable. The study of Indian classics is the foundation for the study of one of the major and ancient civilizations of the world.

One special feature of this Indian cultural inheritance is the unbroken continuity between the most modern and the most ancient phases of Indian thought extending for nearly 5000 years. Again, it is not an isolated existence. India had continuous and timely contacts with Babylonians, Iranians, Greeks, Egyptians, Chinese and Arabs, and has absorbed and assimilated the best from their civilizations without losing her own individuality. 'If her basic culture survived these contacts, there must have been something in the culture itself which gave it the dynamic strength to do so, some inner vitality and understanding of life.'

(A.A. Macdonall)

Unique Features of Sanskrit

Sanskrit is universally recognized as the language containing the earliest literature in the world; one or two other languages may contain some earlier inscription, but not a whole literature. It has been established as one of the ancient branches of the Indo-European family of languages, an elder sister of the ancient classical languages of Europe like Greek and Latin; modern North Indian languages are derived from it, and even the South Indian languages are saturated with Sanskrit loan words. For expanding the vocabulary to cope with the development of civilization, all languages of India and some of the neighboring languages like Singhalese, Burmese and Malaysian depend heavily on Sanskrit loan words. The discovery of Sanskrit as a sister language of the West made it an essential tool to understand the origin and early stages of the European languages, and European scholars began to study Sanskrit as their own language. It may be said that there is more awareness and a growing interest in the West for Sanskrit studies than in India. This is because Sanskrit

is recognized as the earliest member of the Indo-European family .

When studying languages with the help of computers there are two levels to be distinguished the word level and the sentence level ; the former deals with the total amount of information contained in separate words, irrespective of where and how they are used; the latter deals with sentences which give information on the basis of the syntactical aspects, like their position in the sentence. For languages like the English, the syntactic pattern is used for getting the maximum information possible ; but for languages like Latin, Greek and Sanskrit the word level approach is more suitable than the other, since they have a highly detailed morphological system, where the syntactic elements are included as part of the words themselves, through declensional and conjugational suffixes. Of these Sanskrit has the most detailed morphological system and is ideally suited for computer programmes of such classical languages. These programmes consist of pattern recognition - unambiguous recognition of significant patterns of words. The phenomenon of sandhi in Sanskrit, effecting alteration of word endings under the influence of the beginning of the next word, makes the task more complicated; the machine has to be taught these rules, so that the elements can be got in their neutral form.

Sanskrit has also been found the most suited as a universal language. The kAraka system in Sanskrit grammar lends itself for transformation into other languages. In ordinary sentences of the statement type indicating an action, the agent, the instrument, the object which undergoes change, the location etc. are all definite (named as kartar, karaNa, karma adhikaraNa etc.). A sentence in any language can be first transformed into the Sanskrit pattern, and then translated into any other language. The universal nature of the karaka system helps Sanskrit to play an important role in modern programmes using the computer.

Another interesting feature about Sanskrit is that its simplicity and flexibility do not depend on reducing the vocabulary (as in Basic English), but in a plethora of possible forms to convey an idea. The possibility of building up new

words from smaller units as in compound words, or even in कृता and लङ्ग and taddhita formations, and of the componential analysis of larger units into smaller semantic units makes Sanskrit a sort of transparent language. There are several words for water (salilam, jalam, vari etc.) ; if the suffix ja is added to any of them, it becomes a word for the lotus; if da is added, it becomes word for the cloud. Any word for 'cool' added to any word for 'ray', makes a word for the 'moon'. These could be stored in a computer, and pressing a word for 'hot' and then for 'ray', will give several words for the sun (the sandhi problem has to be taken care of). A Sanskrit student is never at a loss for finding the appropriate word for any idea he has.

The apparent diversity and plethora of vocabulary may baffle the novice, but helps the scholar with a rich and abundant storehouse for proper choice and accurate usage.

The New Catalogus Catalogorum

The New Catalogus Catalogorum project of the Madras University in the Sanskrit Department was started in 1935 with Dr. C. Kunhan Raja as its editor and its first volume was published in 1949. After his retirement Dr. V. Raghavan became the editor. He published the second volume in 1966, and the revised version of vol. I in 1968. Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja was appointed its Associate editor in 1966 to help Dr. Raghavan and volumes III, N and V were published in 1967, 1968 and 1969 respectively. After Dr. Raghavan's retirement in 1969 Dr. Kunjunni Raja became the editor and volumes VI, VII, VIII, IX and X were published in 1971, 1973, 1974, 1977 and 1979 respectively.

The Catalogus attracted international and national cooperation. The Rochfeller Foundation was associated with it for some time; and then the University Grants Commission assisted it for ten years during the third and fourth plan. The International Council of Philosophy and Human Science of the UNESCO

held at Mexico in 1976 gave it strong moral support. In 1977 the financial commitment was stopped; and the project would not have continued but for the timely initiative of the Vice Chancellor Malcome Adiseshaiah. Volume XI edited by Kunjunni Raja and Veezhinathan came in 1983, Volume XII edited by Veezhinathan was published in 1988. Volume XIII edited by Veezhinathan, with C.S. Sundaram and N. Gangadharan as joint editors, was published in 1991. Volume XIV will be published in September 2000.

The present Vice Chancellor, Pon Kodandaraman, has constituted a five member Advisory committee with Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja as the convener to plan and execute expeditiously the remaining ten volumes of the New Catalogus Catalogorum.

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