

WORLD IN THE EMBRACE OF SANSKRIT: LANGUAGE BEYOND POLITICS AND NATIONALISM

¹Dr. Mithila Bagai, ²Dr. Smriti Singh

¹Senior Assistant Professor, ²Associate Professor

¹Department of Political Science, ²Department of English

Maitreyi College

University of Delhi

Abstract: *Sanskrit, one of the oldest languages in the world has many joyful takers across the globe who wants to learn the language and the Sanskritic values associated with it. Sanskrit has been the language that has led to the birth many vernaculars and other regional languages. The treasure house of Sanskrit has been recognized by the world and many corporates, heads of various countries want to speak the language and instill its values in their places. The article explores how Sanskrit has re-emerged at the global level and distributing wealth as it did in Ancient India but in a revised way.*

WORLD IN THE EMBRACE OF SANSKRIT: LANGUAGE BEYOND POLITICS AND NATIONALISM

“You hail from India which is the home of Hindu philosophy yet you have not cared to learn that language! Come along; see my library which treasures classics in Sanskrit. The language is a rich repository of knowledge that could be gainfully exploited in the area of classical science, including mathematics, astronomy and health.”

Albert Einstein, a winner of Nobel Prize (1921) in physics for his immortal work on photoelectric effect, once proudly flaunted his knowledge of Sanskrit to his fellow Indian scientist Dr. B.N. Gupta. On learning that Dr. Gupta did not know the language despite hailing from the native land of Sanskrit, he invited him to visit his library that houses rich classics of Sanskrit including Bhagvad Gita and the Upanishads. He expressed his deep gratitude towards the classical texts that has formed the basis of his stupendous research and theories. He proudly claimed “I have made the Gita as the main source of my inspiration and guide for the purpose of scientific investigations and formation of my theories.”

In 1945, when Robert Oppenheimer exploded the first atom bomb, he famously (mis) quoted the verse from Bhagvad Gita to refer atomic bomb as the rise of thousands Suns in the sky (*divi suryasahasrasya yugpat utthita*). Misquoted because Bhagvad Gita never ever has intended/done any invention that could destroy humanity.

The imprints of classical Sanskrit texts have remained so entrenched and eternal that today top management schools namely Harvard Business School, North Western Kellogg's School of Business, and the University of Michigan's Ross

School of Business have included Bhagvad Gita as part of its teachings to its management students. And the faculty employed in these schools constitutes 10 per cent of professors of Indian origin that is more than any other ethnic group.

Bhagvad Gita's teachings have been so influential that the rich, capitalist, corporate American class too is endorsing its principles in its work culture. They have started advocating self-mastery classes that are taught with the purpose to make an individual their own guru and decide their own values and principles and not to be driven by the Darwinian principles of greed and survival instinct. Consistency, concentration and compassion are the new highlights of the capitalist class to ease stress and anxiety accruing from target driven system. Purpose is now being given priority over self. Inclusive capitalism has become the new mantra. It has also been christened as karma capitalism. Taking cue from the classical Sanskrit texts, capitalism is getting redefined to accommodate humanitarian principles of empathy, selflessness and society. Capitalism is gradually coming out of its conservative definition of being a ‘profit driven’ system. It is ashamed of being recognized as solely a money minting system. Rather today it wants to be known as a socially responsible corporate or precisely to shoulder its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to have a positive image in the market and retain talent in the organization. It has broadened its realm of interests to include shareholders, employees, customers and society and also giving immense importance to environment. Emphasis has shifted from shareholders to stakeholders of society. Even in India, top ranked institute IIMs are drawing lessons from Bhagvad Gita to train its future corporate leaders on handling stress, pressure and conflicts. IIM Lucknow has introduced a mandatory course titled ‘Human Values and Responsible Citizenship’. IIM Ahmedabad has incorporated classical texts in its course to inculcate new skills of responsible and empathetic leadership.

Emphasis on establishment of inner peace is growing in importance rather than perpetuating the maddening rat race of the corporate world. The golden Sanskritic virtues of cooperation are gaining ground over competition. Duties rather than outcomes are becoming enshrined in corporate principles. ‘Giving’ rather than acquisition is gathering mainstream. Emotional intelligence and servant leadership are coming in vogue. The era of 1980s and 90s where the greed ruled the roost has started fading. Green has now become predominant for the government and corporates.

This East to West export of humanitarian ideas where the development of society is held aloft over the greed of an individual has done a lot more in enhancing the pride and soft power of the cradle of Sanskrit civilization. Nehru once rightly remarked “whatever shape that future may take one of the biggest, the strongest, and the most powerful and the most valued of our legacies will be the Sanskrit language.” Interestingly, many powerful heads of various countries and surprisingly the premier of the daunting, dragon power of the world, China also relished the recitation of Sanskrit shlokas in public speech.

The premier recited Sanskrit Shloka from Upanishad ‘Aum Sahana Vavatu’ before he was to leave for his visit to India. The intention was to build closer ties with it’s on and off friendly neighbor India.

But the pertinent concern is that despite Sanskrit gaining considerable recognition and willing endorsement across the world, it could not become the language of masses in its own native country?

Did the Indian State fail Sanskrit in giving its rightful place in society? Or was it the Indian market that was too busy in capitalizing on popular culture that it shirked away from its social responsibility in according importance to the language and traditions of Sanskrit? What has been the policy of Indian State in sustaining and promoting the mother of languages that now unfortunately has mere 24,821 speakers? Did the advent of a nationalist government in power in 2014 made any considerable impact in the impoverished state of Sanskrit in India? These are few questions for which one needs to find answers for. But there are myriad reasons for which Sanskrit is the eternal social capital for the world.

SANSKRIT: AN ETERNAL SOCIAL CAPITAL

Sanskrit derived from the word Samskrta is a combination of sams and krta. Former means together, good, well, perfected and krta indicates made, formed, work. The word together connotes a work that has been well prepared, pure and perfect, polished and sacred. Sanskrit language itself has been so polished that it has been considered one of the finest languages that made William Jones remarked “The Sanskrit language, whether be its antiquity, is of wonderful structure, more perfect than Greek, more copious than Latin and more refined than either”.

In the sincere pursuit of perfecting itself, Sanskrit has been the first language to make a grammar of its own. Will Durant consider Sanskrit as the mother of Indo-European languages. Many South East Asian countries like Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and Indonesia, and also many languages in Europe such as Greek, Latin, Scandinavian and Slavic languages, German and French have been influenced by the ancient language. Also, the languages in Japan, China, Korea, Mongolia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have had an enriching influence of Sanskrit.

Sanskrit has also contributed in perfecting many regional languages of India. Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi,

Bengali and Nepali all bore the rich imprints of Sanskrit. Sanskrit texts have also richly contributed to the development of science.

The beautiful alliance of sams and krta gifts us with a polished, purified and elegant Sanskrit language, that also marvelously blends the scientific virtues of logic, precision and systematization to its structure and formation. Sanskrit language has contributed immensely in the development of science in ancient India.

Sanskrit literature has been divided into two categories: Vedic and Non-Vedic literature. (It will be discussed in detail in the following section).

Vedic Sanskrit was oral in nature and it was difficult to express scientific ideas in it. Non Vedic Sanskrit allowed our ancient scientists to express their scientific ideas in the language of Sanskrit with great precision and logic. Our highly accomplished and adept Mathematicians Aryabhata, Varamhira, Brahamgupta, Bhaskar enriched the humanity with their inventions in the language of Sanskrit. Immensely gifted Sushruta, who indebted the world with his stunning inventions of cataract and plastic surgeries and is also regarded as the father of Indian Surgery, and Charaka who enriched the Ayurvedic medicine, also employed the divine Sanskrit language of logic and precision.

Sanskrit signifies perfection and purity for myriad reasons. Firstly, Panini, the great grammarian of the world, crafted the language with great finesse, detailing and adeptness. He fixed 3959 rules of Sanskrit language in his book Ashtadhyayi. He closely studied and formed the language so that scientific ideas can be expressed in a systematic, logical and precise structure. Markandey Katju in his article ‘Sanskrit as a language of Science’ has elucidated with an example how Panini created the art of perfection and precision. Justice Katju compared the formation of Sanskrit language with the English. He says that the arrangement of alphabets in the English language has no order. There is no explanation why F is followed by G, or P is followed by Q. Whereas Panini arranges alphabets in Sanskrit in a logical and scientific manner after closely observing the sounds in human speech. He further writes, “The vowels a, aa, i, ee, u, oo, ae, ai, o, ou, are arranged according to the shape of the mouth when these sounds are emitted, a and aa, are pronounced from the throat, i and ee from the palate, o and oo from the lips etc. In the same way consonants have been arranged in a sequence on a scientific pattern. The (ka) varga (i.e. ka, kha, ga, gha, nga) are emitted from the throat, the (cha) varga from the palate, the (ta) varga from the roof of the mouth, the (ta) varga from the teeth and the (pa) varga from the lips.”

Justice Katju in the article is celebrating the Sanskrit language that no language in the world has arranged its alphabets in a scientific and logical manner. He is also taking pride by emphasizing the immense amount of work and effort put in a simple work of arranging the alphabets. He

writes, “How deeply our ancestors went in the seemingly simple matter of arranging alphabets we can realize how deeply they went in more advanced matters”.

Since the teachings of our ancient Veda scriptures were delivered orally in Sanskrit before Panini, it became important to develop a written language. Our earliest Sanskrit work Rig Veda, which was composed probably around 2000B.C., was passed orally to generations. So written language became requisite for the development of philosophy, mathematics, science, astronomy, and literature. Sanskrit underwent lot of changes for 1500 years. And in 5th century B.C., Panini wrote his stupendous work Ashtadhyayi where he set the rules of grammar of Sanskrit. There were no major changes made to Sanskrit after the Ashtadhyayi work except the slight changes made by the other two renowned grammarians- Katyayana who wrote his book ‘Vartika’ and Patanjali who wrote a commentary on Ashtadhyayi called ‘Maha Bhashya’. Therefore, the Sanskrit we study today in our schools and colleges is Panini’s Sanskrit, also called Classical Sanskrit.

Secondly, Sanskrit is highly respected for its contextual specificity. It means that the single word of Sanskrit can have multiple meanings according to the contexts and subject matter dealt with there. Merely addition of suffixes and prefixes give a different meaning to the context. For example: Ek-vachana- singular, Dvi vachana- dual, bahu vachana- plural.

Another very significant reason for crediting the Sanskrit for its perfection is that the ‘Devabhasha’ (language of Gods) Sanskrit is in enchanting harmony with nature. It is scientifically proven that universe around us is the vibration of atoms/molecules that produces energy. And Sanskrit is a language of vibrations. So when Sanskrit is spoken, the vibrations/sounds of the words aligns with the language of the environment.

Lot many eminent scientists and Nobel Laureates like Albert Einstein, Erwin Schrodinger, Neil Bohr, Robert Oppenheimer have used classical Sanskrit texts namely Gita and Upanishads to explain the properties of sub atomic particles. Another Nobel Laureate and German Physicist W. Heisenberg’s seminal work on sub atomic particles extolled Hinduism and said “After the conversions about Indian philosophy, some of the ideas of Quantum Physics, that had seemed so crazy, suddenly made much more sense to me.”

The ubiquitous presence of Sanskrit further adds to the reverence of the language. And its influence on our friendly (or not so friendly) neighbor China exhibits the extent of our prevalence of our soft power. Less people are aware that a common surname Chan is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Dhyan’. Bodhi Dharma, a royal son of Suganda, 6th century king of Kanchipuram, who turned into a Buddhist monk, took on the mantle of spreading Buddhism in China. His meditation was called Chan Buddhism (derived from Sanskrit word Dhyan). And when it spread to Korea and

Japan, it was called Zen Buddhism. Even today, there are thousands of temples with statues and images of bearded Bodhi Dharma.

A Chinese educator, scholar and philosopher, Huh Shih, once remarked “India conquered and dominated China culturally for 20 centuries without ever to have send a single soldier across her border”.

The increasing prevalence of Sanskrit and its tradition are conspicuous across the globe.

In September 2003, President of Republic of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki echoed Vedic hymns while addressing the Durban University students.

On July 12, 2007 Indian priest Rajan Zed opened the US Senate with a Sanskrit prayer. In 2009, Barack Obama, head of the world’s most powerful country, United States of America, lit the Diwali lamp amidst the chanting of Vedic hymns. In 2010, the opening ceremony of Commonwealth Games 2010 was celebrated in London with the chanting of Vedic hymns by British students in presence of Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain and former President of India Pratibha Patil.

In June 2005, some 2300 students of Massachusetts Institute of Technology received their college degrees amidst the chanting of Sanskrit prayers. In 2006, French first lady quietly left for Benaras to satisfy her spiritual quest while her husband was busy discussing bilateral relations with the then Prime Minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh.

Iyengar Yoga has been widely endorsed. It’s not only popular in the West but many Arab countries are also deriving immense benefits out of Yoga and meditation. BKS Iyengar trained many Arab Yoga experts to inculcate and disseminate the values of Yoga. Even in an atheist country of China, many Chinese disciples of Swami Satchitananda in Hong Kong has spread the benefits of Yoga, meditation and Hindu Bhajans to Chinese. More than 10% of people in US, New Zealand, Europe and Australia practice yoga and meditation. Some churches have also started teaching meditation and yoga to its followers. Over 10% of advanced countries are also following vegetarianism, the practice originated from India.

In 2007, the Greece president Karolos Papoulis welcomed APJ Abdul Kalam in Sanskrit language “Rashtrapatam Mahabhaga, Sur Swagatam Yavana dishe (President, welcome to you). The former has studied Sanskrit in Germany as the ancient Indian language is related to ancient Greek.

The global significance accorded to Sanskrit can be gauged from the fact that today the world celebrates World Sanskrit Day on August 5 on a much larger scale than India. Though in India too, there are villages that have preserved the tradition and culture of spoken Sanskrit. Adi Sankaracharya’s native village Kaladi in Kerala and Matur, a village close to Shimoga in Karnataka, Sanskrit is the spoken language.

Even the Muslims in Mattur speak the devbhasa (language of Gods). It is also famous for being the Sanskrit village of India. More Sanskrit speaking villages in India are Jhiri in Madhya Pradesh, Sasana in Orissa, Baghuwar in Madhya Pradesh, Ganoda in Rajasthan, Mohad in Madhya Pradesh, Hosahalli in Karnataka. In these villages, young and old, literate and illiterate, women and men speak fluent Sanskrit. 2011 census has shown remarkable spurt of 71% in Sanskrit speakers. 24,821 people have reported Sanskrit to be their mother tongue in 2011 in comparison to 14,135 people in 2001. Though the figures still remain quite dim when compared to 1991 census where Sanskrit speakers were 49,736 but encouraging when compared to 1981 census where there were only 6106 speakers.

The worrisome fact is that if the speakers will fall below ten thousand, then Sanskrit will cease to be considered as a separate language in the Indian Census policy.

REFERENCE

1. Perumal, G. (2017, June 16). Tamil won't be as sweet as sans Sanskrit, let our children learn it. The Times of India.
2. Kumar, R. (2017). Glimpses of Hindu Genius (Fourth ed.). New Delhi.
3. Verma, P. (2018, March 19). Economic Times. Retrieved November 14, 2018, from [economictimes.indiatimes.com: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/iims-go-big-on-offbeat-courses-to-build-leadership-skills-cut-stress/articleshow/63371313.cms](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/iims-go-big-on-offbeat-courses-to-build-leadership-skills-cut-stress/articleshow/63371313.cms)
4. Publications Division. (2017). Jawaharlal Nehru Speeches (1953-57) (Vol. 3). Publications Division Minsitry of Information and Broadcasting .
5. Katju, M. (2009, October 19). Sanskrit as a language of Science. Outlook India .
6. Lekshmi VR, H. C. (2018). Importance of Sanskrit language in learning Ayurveda. Journal of Ayurveda and Integrated Medical Sciences, 3 (3), 159-164.
7. Panda, P. (2014, April 17). Speaking Tree. Retrieved December 11, 2018, from [www.speakingtree.in: https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/the-influence-of-sanskrit-on-world-civilizations](https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/the-influence-of-sanskrit-on-world-civilizations)
8. Bhaskar, B. (2009, July 31). The Hindu. Retrieved January 3, 2019, from [www.thehindu.com: https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-fridayreview/Mark-of-Sanskrit/article15939175.ece](https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-fridayreview/Mark-of-Sanskrit/article15939175.ece)