



Role of Sanskrit in Indian society

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Abstract

Sanskrit is the language encompassing culture, philosophy and religion. It has greatly inspired the intellectuals and unified our country. Sanskrit is known as the classical language of India. Sanskrit language plays a pivotal role in the life of the people of the country. It gives them a medium to express their thought and also influences their thought process. It denotes the culture of India and constantly spoken in the country in day-to-day interactions and important events. It is one of the main languages enumerated in the Indian Constitution. It can be stated that over the number of years Sanskrit language has rejuvenated local languages and culture in India and whole of South East Asia can be benefitted by promoting the use of Sanskrit language.

Keywords: Vedas, constitution. kalidasa, vedas, arthashastra, kavyas, culture, tradition

Introduction

Sanskrit is known as the classical language in India. Sanskrit language plays a pivotal role in the life of the people of the country. It gives them a medium to express their thought and also influences their thought process. It denotes the culture of India and constantly spoken in the country in day-to-day interactions and important events. It is one of the main languages enumerated in the Indian Constitution. Many learned scholars, academicians and political leaders have been advocating that Sanskrit should be declared as a national language of the country. Sanskrit has a pan Indian approach and binds the country together. Scholars have always stressed on the point that it is the culture that connects the people more than the politics. It is a language that imbibes the moral values of Indian tradition and is also a great medium of learning and exchange of knowledge. The languages of India generally fall into four families namely -the Indo-European family, secondly the Dravidian family, thirdly the Austric and fourthly the Tibeto Chinese family. In the organic languages generally, there are three categories in which words undertake an integrated form and become incorporating in nature. The first category is Chinese languages in which no modifications are witnessed internally. Second category shall include the Dravidian Language. Third category is of north Indian languages who were born out of Sanskrit only and fourth category is of Indo-German. Thus, it can be said that Sanskrit itself belongs to a family which is widely accepted and spoken in the world. Scholars believe that Sanskrit language belongs to English language family and in ancient times has remained powerful medium for imparting education and exchange knowledge. It can be stated that as in modern world English has gained popularity as we find that in the ancient past Sanskrit remained very popular. It has remained as a powerful mode of communication in various religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and Sikhism. World Sanskrit Day is observed worldwide on Shravana Purnima every year with great enthusiasm. Sanskrit is the language encompassing culture, philosophy and religion. It has greatly inspired the intellectuals and unified the country. When we look at the history of Sanskrit, we find that Sanskrit literature can be classified into two main periods- firstly the Vedic period and secondly is the

classical period. The Vedic period is stated to begin from 1500 BC to about 200 BC. At the final stages of the Vedic period, we find the start of Classical period and due to continuing literary use, it continues to exist till the present day. Let us discuss these periods in detail.

The Vedic Period

The popular term Veda is applicable for a group literature which formed the earliest records of Indian civilization. Vedas are said to be earliest records as tradition asserts that these are eternal in nature. The Vedic texts are generally classified into four groups namely the RK, Yajus, Saman and Atharvan, each one of them have different recensions that are called Sakhas. It is believed that Rigveda consists of 10 mandalas with 1028 Suktas and 10552 mantras. In the Yajurvedas there is said to be 40 adhyayas, 2024 Vargas and 10552 mantras. On the other hand, in the Samveda there are 27 adhyayas and 1875 mantras. The Atharvaveda includes 20 Kandas, 731 Suktas and 5977 mantras. Some portion of this literature is available thus making it little difficult to bring out a comprehensive picture. The four Vedas possess their own Brahamanas. Some portion of these brahamanas are available in the form of Aitareya, Kausitaki, Taittiriya, Tandya, Gopatha and Satapatha. Further portions of The Brahamanas are found as Aranyakas/forest treatise and it is the Upanishads that are able to form final part of the Brahamanas. It is interesting to note that though all the Vedas might not have their Aranyaka still there are Upanishads attached to all of the Vedas. There are six Vedangas that are necessary for the purpose of understanding the Vedas. These are Kalpa i.e. rituals, Siksa i.e. Phonetics, Vyakarana i.e. grammar, Jyotisa i.e. astronomy, Chandras i.e. metres and Nirukta i.e. etymology. Further, one finds that Kalpa deals with rituals which can be further divided into three kinds namely Sravta Sutras i.e. Vedic manuals, Dharma Sutras i.e. Legal manual and Grihya Sutras i.e. domestic manuals. At the same time, it is found that various other form of texts is also found in the form of Gandharvaveda which is called science of music, Dharmaveda which is called science of archery and Ayurveda which is known as science of medicine. One finds that the Sastraa that deals with the worship of deities in temples are also regarded to be based on the Vedas itself.

There are also many commentaries that base itself on the Vedas and get included and used in the form of Vedic literature. Through Mimamsa which is critical investigation of the Vedas also gets closely related to it.

We find that even the science and art in India traces their origin to the Vedas specially the Atharveda that gives us an insight towards scientific knowledge. One finds that the geometry was laid down by outlining the sacrificial altar with the help of measurements. Even in the Vedic period Astronomy and mathematics were in a developed state. Indian mathematicians had a good idea of the abstract number much before the numerical quantity. The value of zero was a contribution made much earlier than was done by Aryabhata in 449 AD. The Romans and Arabs were quick to acquire it for the purpose of their trade with other nations of the world. Fields like Astronomy, astrology and ayurveda found lot of development due to Vedas and medicines and surgeries were mentioned in the Vedas by Susrata that paved the way for the development of modern medicine and surgical tools in the western world. Thus, it can be stated that Vedas have acted as a foundation of all technical and general Sanskrit literature.

Classical Period

The great Sanskrit grammarian Panini is known as the founder of Classical Sanskrit language. Panini was able to standardize the grammatical rules of Sanskrit by including 3959 rules of syntax. He also underlined morphology and semantics that helped in formation of the onwards and how they shall relate with each other. Till today, Astadhyay is known as the most powerful text of Vyakarana. Panini calls this language as Bhasha which refers to spoken tongue. These were rules governing the speaking of Sanskrit language thus paving the way for its usage in day to day communication among people. It helped preserve the language and the text of Vedas. Phonetics were able to add sounds to the words so that it can be spoken with perfection. The Classical period saw the development of Sanskrit as a refined dialect and starting second century, Sanskrit became a popular language spoken in Aryavata demarcating the area between the Vindhya and the Himalaya range. Lot of people started taking interest in understanding of Sanskrit language and scholars believed that even those who could not speak or write Sanskrit were able to understand it thus providing them a means of communication in the society. It is estimated that till there was a Muslim incursion in India, Sanskrit used to be the only language available in the written form. There were many inscriptions available in Sanskrit language that made an easy access to understanding and spread of the Sanskrit language. The classical literature of Sanskrit focused more on Kavya, drama, fables, Dharma and lyrics depicted through Arthashastra, Kalidasa etc. Classical Sanskrit was used as a medium of writing various Indian religious texts such as Bhagavad Gita. The Hindu religious texts were further classified into two categories namely Sruti – which is heard and Smriti-which can be remembered. The Classical period was more of a secular one. This period has touched upon perfection in various branches of literature through many epics included in the Puranas and Mahakavyas.

Indian Context

With the discovery of Sanskrit language in India, there was a new dawn of study of scientific linguistic. It was the

Sanskrit language that made possible the formulation of Indo-European family as Sanskrit manuscripts were preserved in India and which could make a study of it possible by Orientalists. In the year 1786, Sir Williams Jones stated, the Sanskrit language whatever be its antiquity is of wonderful structure which is more perfect than the Greek and more captive than Latin and also more and more exquisitely refined than either of the two, yet bearing to both of these languages having strong roots of verbs and the form of grammar than which could possibly produced by accident so strong indeed that no philosopher can examine all of them without believing them to have sprung from one common source that perhaps no longer exists. Also, there is a similar reason which might not be very forcible that both Gothic and Celtic through blended within different idioms having the same origin with Sanskrit Sanskrit was written in two different scripts namely the Kharoshithi that came to India around 700 BC and other one was Brahmin that came around 500BC. It is observed that from Brahmin all the scripts like Dravidian and Devanagri have developed. Concludingly, it can be stated that Sanskrit should not be considered a dead language rather over the number of years Sanskrit language has rejuvenated local languages and culture in India and whole of South East Asia can be benefitted by promoting the use of Sanskrit language.

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