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Importance of Sanskrit Literature in Social, Religious, Spiritual Context

Dr. Pitas Das* & Laxmi Maji**

Abstract : Sanskrit is such an old language that it is almost symbolic to the identity of the rich Indian Tradition. Even in the modern age the relevance of Sanskrit still remains the same. Sanskrit is included in the list of modern Indian Languages in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India. This language is the mother of a number of Indian languages. A number of languages in India have taken freely from Sanskrit vocabulary and their literature is permeated with the Sanskrit language. According to the Indian scriptures Sanskrit is the Language, the Gods speak in. Sanskrit is interwoven in the culture of India. The Veda, the Upaniṣad, Smṛti and other important ancient and modern literature have been composed in Sanskrit. So it is evident that Sanskrit has a far-fetching influence on Indian culture. So in order to understand India thoroughly in respect of social evolution, its cultural legacy, its political idealism, its economic philosophy we must have a good understanding about Sanskrit, the ancient language of India.

Keywords: Veda, Yoga, Social, Political, Economic & Gītā

Introduction : The sublimity of the Sanskrit language is universal. The importance and authenticity of Sanskrit is a fact not only in India but also in the West. With the fall of the Roman empire, when Latin language became obsolete and European provincial languages, such as, English, French, German, Italian and other languages matured and became lingua franca in the respective countries, then in universities there began interested enquiries about classical languages, such as, Greek, Latin, Sanskrit. In this intellectual wave Sanskrit language was considered to be the classical language of the East. Especially orientalist, Philologists; ethnographers etc. took particular interest in learning Sanskrit in the West. William Jones, Max Muller, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Goethe, such geniuses in the West took thorough going interest in learning Sanskrit language, grammar, literature; so much so that, Vedas, Upaniṣads, Vedānta, Gītā and various other timeless Sanskrit literature got translated in English, German language. So colonialism not only introduced physical Asia but also it introduced Sanskrit language, literature and books in the West. The most ancient of the compositions in literature were all written in Sanskrit. In this regard we may easily mention, especially, the name of the Rg-Veda. The only medium to penetrate into the realm of the oldest civilization is undoubtedly Sanskrit. In the present times the comparative studies have developed centering on Sanskrit literature. Information about science, arts, culture, religion, philosophy, commerce, grammar, poetry and Ayurveda etc. can be found in ancient Sanskrit literature which is very rare in other languages. According to Macdonald, the source of the all civilizations is bestowed upon Sanskrit. The principal current of the evolution of mankind is Sanskrit which is more important than Greek language. The philosophy of religion bears excellence in Sanskrit. In order to practice spiritual satra, to acquire knowledge in potencies, to understand Ethics, to learn etiquettes, to know the ancient rules and regulations, to learn mathematics, astrology, commerce, sexology, music, dance, to learn the minute techniques we need to remember Sanskrit. In order to acquire deep knowledge of the world brotherhood, of world culture one must have thorough knowledge in Sanskrit. Macdonald, Keith, Winternitz, Paul, Dyson, Win ditz, Hurtle and other scholars of the West say that Sanskrit is not confined in the book of ancient history but it is still a living language today.

Objective of the study : The objective of the present study is to examine the contribution of Sanskrit literature in the ancient Indian spiritual practices to identify whether there would be any positive differences if the same is implemented in Society.

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Methodology : The present research work is based on various primary and secondary sources. The method which is adopted in this paper is descriptive, while some times narrative and expository techniques have also been adopted. As this paper deals with the Sanskrit language, references have been taken from different books like Rg-Veda, Hitopadeśa, Śrīmadbhagavad-Gītā, Veder Parichaya, and Upaniṣad. As per the secondary sources are concerned references have been derived from History of Sanskrit Literature, Sanskrit Nivandha Śatakam, Arthaśāstra, Manusamhitā, Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata and Web sources.

Idealism : Sanskrit literature deals with the question of the highest state of man. It is stated that a world with all good devoid of any evil does not exist. The Sanskrit logicians call it a "dream in the air" (Patañjali Yoga Sūtra). Secondly the concept of rebirth has been analyzed minutely as well as the question where man comes from? What is beyond death? How does the cycle of birth work? All these questions are discussed logically and convincingly giving ample examples from the system from nature. As it says that the state of manhood is not the highest state with any evil characteristics. So it is resolved that the state where men dissolve in the infinite is the highest state. So the journey from birth to death is a degraded state of man. One must return to its primary elements to complete the circle. This is how nature Works. Yoga means connection to self. One must work full heartedly without any expectation of the result. A mind coveted with the desire of fruit produces inferior quality of Work. "योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्" (Gītā - II - 50)

Man is compared to the flame of a candle. Yoga is the process to remove the fluctuations of the wondering mind. Once the mind is come it goes to the state of tranquility and becomes one with the infinite. This process is called Yoga.

"योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः" (Patañjali Yoga Sūtra - 2)

It can be easily assumed that in the modern materialistic world we have wealth but no peace of mind. Life is stressed with endless rat-race of competition. We are ignorant about our own health where religion is taking the shape of terrorism. In this situation the only way of survival is to follow the ancient Indian idealism of Yoga.

Society : The Sanskrit literature tells us about the social system in ancient India. The Varṇa system was prevailing in the society. Varṇa refers to a system where people are given a certain status in accordings to their trade. Reference of Varṇa system is found in Rg-Veda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda and later in the Gītā.

"ब्राह्मणोऽस्य मुखमासीद् बाहु राजन्यः कुतः।

ऊरू तदस्य यद् वैश्यः पदभ्यां शूद्रो अजायत॥" (Yajurveda - 31 - 11)

"चातुर्वर्ण्यं प्रया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः।

तस्य कर्तारमपि मां विद्ध्यकर्तारमव्ययम्॥" (Gītā - IV - 13)

The characteristics of Brāhmaṇas is found in Manusamhitā and Gītā and they are instructed to -

"अध्यापनमध्ययनं यजनं याजनं तथा।

दानं प्रतिग्रहश्चैव ब्राह्मणानामकल्पयत्॥" (Manusamhitā - I - 88)

"शमो दमस्तपः शौचं क्षान्तिरार्जवमेव च।

ज्ञानं विज्ञानमास्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम्॥" (Gītā - XVIII - 42)

In Manusamhitā and the Gītā the Kṣatriya are instructed to -

"प्रजानां रक्षणं दानमिज्याऽऽद्ययनमेव च।

विषयेष्वप्रसक्तिश्च क्षत्रियस्य समादिशत्॥" (Manusamhitā - I - 89)

"शौर्यं तेजो धृतिर्दाक्ष्यं युद्धे चाप्यप्लायनम्।

दानमीश्वरभावश्च क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजम्॥" (Gītā - XVIII - 43)

The Vaiśyas, in the similar way, are instructed to do the following -

"पशुनां रक्षणं दानमिज्याऽऽद्ययनमेव च।

वणिक्पथं कुसीदं च वैश्यस्य कृषिमेव च॥" (Manusamhitā - I - 90)

"कृषिगौरक्ष्यवाणिज्यं वैश्यकर्म स्वभावजम्॥" (Gītā - XVIII - 44)

Manusamhitā and The Gītā also mention the duties of the Śūdras. They would do the following -

"एकमेव तु शुद्रस्य प्रभुः कर्म समादिशत्।

सर्वेषामेव वर्णानां शुश्रूषामनसूयया॥" (Manusamhitā - I - 91)

"परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शुद्रस्यापि स्वभावजम्॥" (Gītā - XVIII - 44)

The system of Varṇa, as mentioned earlier, was based upon the quality of a human being that affects his working efficiency.

"ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च परन्तप।

कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि स्वभावप्रभवैर्गुणैः॥" (Gītā - XVIII - 41)

It may be said that Varṇa system is violation of human Rights, but we must not forget that this system was based upon quality of a human being. But unfortunately the system was distorted in the later time and caste system was created. It happened because of the misinterpretation of the actual Varṇa System.

If we get a closer look at the actual Varṇa System we will understand that the system is very scientific. In this system every individual will be given the job he deserves. This will enhance the productivity of a society dramatically. But the kind of situation can only be imagined in a corruption free society. So, Sanskrit literature has reference of the corruption-free state.

Sanskrit Literature gives us the clear picture of the four stages of an individual in the Vedic Ages. This system is called Catur Āśrama, known as Brahmacharya, Gārhasthya, Vānaprastha, and Sannyāsa. The Brahmacharya period lasts up to age 25 during which one's duty is to study, meditate, learn different things of life etc. From the age of 25-50, the period is called Gārhasthya, in which one is involved in conjugal life, with children and other family members. From the age of 50-60 the phase is termed as Vānaprastha. In this period a man takes complete refuge from the materialistic life and lives away from his family along with his wife. During this time, the primary duty of the person is to involve him in spiritual rituals. From 60 onwards the time of a man's life is Sannyāsa. This is the ultimate state of life where he is completely aloof from any worldly affairs and leads a solitary life meditating and worshipping the Gods for his final abode to the world of infinity.

This undoubtedly is a wonderful system and if implemented in the present society, the results can be surprising. The whole system is based on the scientific approach that engages in a strict regimen to achieve excellence through constantly practicing his duty both physical and spiritual.

Political life : The political life of in Vedic Age was divided into five parts. These are Gṛha, Grāma, Viśa, Jana and Rāṣṭra. The duty of the king was to protect the state and repel the enemies. The administrative system was divided into two parts – Monarchy and the Democratic way. In both cases incarnation was mandatory. The electors of the king were known as 'Rājakṛtaḥ'. Sabhā and Samiti were the two organizations to execute the administrative works. These two organizations were called the two daughters of the Prajāpati. Sabhā was run by the villagers and Samiti was control by the people selected by the king.

This administrative system still exists in the present Indian democratic system. The Upper house and in Lower house in the parliament is proof of the legacy of the ancient administrative system prevailing in the Vedic ages. We get the detailed information about it in the Sanskrit literatures.

Economic life : Agriculture was the backbone of the economic system. Fields were ploughed with help of oxen. People worshiped cow as God. Wheat and Barley was the main cultivated crops. Irrigation system was present. Waterways were use for trades. Tax system was present. Niṣka was the currency. People were involving different trades such as Rathakāra, Carmakāra, Pathakāra, Astrakāra, Svarnakāra, Lauhakāra etc.

The same tradition is still prevailing in India. The Tax system of the present India is the continuation of the earlier Vedic tradition.

Spiritual and Religious vision : Man has both positive and negative quality in his character. Sanskrit literature teaches us how to dominate the negative side of character and nourish the positive qualities of one's character. Envy, greed, lust, jealousy and enmity invite misfortune. So, one must give away all kind of negative traits to be happy and prosperous in life. *Yajna* was performed for the well being of other people. It is a selfless act through which people used to pray not for themselves but for others. The Sanskrit words 'स्वाहा' originates from 'स्व-आ-हा' which means giving up one's own selfishness. Materialistic pleasure is temporary and one must cultivate spiritual qualities for eternal peace. In Hitopadeśa the following śloka –

"अयं निजः परोवेत्ति-गणना लघुचेतसाम्।

उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्॥" (Hitopadeśa– I – 69)

It means all the people around the world are my relatives. With this mental setting there will be peace in the world. If there is no division among us the world will become heaven. Therefore, the Īsopaniṣad in Yajurveda gives the following sloka-

"यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्नेवनुपश्यति।

सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते॥ (Īsopaniṣad – 6)

"यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मीवाभूद् विजानतः।

तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः॥ (Īsopaniṣad – 7)

The concept of the world religion is the main essence of Sanskrit literature. So, it is mentioned in Rg-Veda – "कृण्वन्तो विश्वमार्यम्" (Rg-Veda IX.63.5). The welfare of the world is only possible when all the positive things of all religions are extracted to make a new religion. The reference of this can be found in Patañjali Yoga philosophy -

"अहिंसा सत्यास्तेय-ब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहायमाः।

जाति-देश-काल् समयानवच्छिन्नाः सार्वभौमा महाव्रतम्॥ (Yoga Darśana –II – 30)

In Veda there is a sloka -

“सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।

सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद् दुःखः भागं भवेत्॥

Life is not only for the physical enjoyments there are several Sādhanās. Spirituality is one of the Sādhanās that transforms man to God. The world is manifested through God. So, in Īsopaniṣad it is said that

“ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्।

तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद् धनम्॥ (Īsopaniṣad – 1)

“यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्नेवमुपश्यति।

सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते॥ (Īsopaniṣad – 6)

“यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवाभूद् विजानतः।

तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमुपश्यतः॥ (Īsopaniṣad – 7)

The Vedānta Upaniṣad believes that the Brahma or infinity is the only truth and it is reflected on this material World. Through Spiritual practices man can merge into God. A man with spiritual mindset becomes sympathetic and friendly. There are ample references of this fact in the Gītā and the Upaniṣad.

The world is transient and only work achievements are permanent; it is mentioned in Kirātārjunīyaṃ – “अपतरन्मा विषयाः पर्यन्तपरितापिनः” (Kirātārjunīyaṃ – XI – 12). Materialistic pleasure leads to destruction. The duty of men is to sacrifice their lives in the battlefield while fulfilling his duties.

Man's destiny is defined through his deeds. Good work leads to good fortune while bad work results in domination. It is said that in the Īsopaniṣad and the Gītā –

“कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छ्रेतं समाः।

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा क्लेषु कदाचन॥ (Īsopaniṣad – 2)

“मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥ (Gītā – II – 47)

Sanskrit literature speaks about rebirth. In this connection it is said in the Gītā that – “जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युध्रुवं जन्ममृतस्य च।” (Gītā – II – 27). Man must reborn and live life according to their past achievements in life.

Mokṣa is freedom from the circle of rebirth. It is the most important among the four Puruṣārthas. A man preoccupied with materialistic pleasure fails to achieve Mokṣa. Mokṣa only can be achieved through knowledge.

“मातृदेवो भव, पितृदेवो भव, आचार्यदेवो भव” the parents are worshipped as living God. One must pay respect to his parents to achieve success in life. We must behave according to their instructions.

“अनुव्रतः पितुः पुत्रो मात्रा भवतु संमनाः।

जाया पत्ये मधुमतीं वाचं वदतु शान्तिवाम्॥ (Atharvaveda – III.30.2)

In Rg-Veda monotheism is explained in Hiranyagarbha Sūkta (10.121) and Puruṣa Sūkta (10.90). In this monotheism it was shown how Puruṣa sacrificed himself and his soul became a phenomenon. Everything that takes birth is Puruṣa. It is said in the Gītā – “विष्ट्वभ्याहमिदं कृत्स्नमेकांशेन स्थितो जगत्।” (Gītā – X – 42).

Polytheism is the special characteristics of Hinduism where worship of many deities together form one divine entity, under the control of one supreme God.

Conclusion : From the above discussion it clears that Sanskrit literature has all the necessary information about the idealism, spirituality, economic life, and political system etc. of the Vedic India. No other language has such information about the golden history of the Vedic ages. From numerous Sanskrit literatures we became aware about the profound store of knowledge the ancient people left for us. We should take it as an opportunity to implement the prescription of the wise people of ancient India in our present life. The present world is burning with mistrust, enmity, selfishness, greed. Modern man is exhausted running after materialistic pleasure. He finds no peace of mind. The world is wounded with terrorism. We are now disintegrated without any harmony. In this critical situation only universal brotherhood, spirituality and love for fellow men can save the world. We must take care of our parents and learn lessons from them for better family life and an ideal society. Sanskrit literature has all the guidelines in store for us and if we follow the wisdom of the ancient people we will be successful in making a better world. A world will be built where we believe in existence of one God. We will be motivated by our sense of duty, least expecting about the outcome. This is the key to success.

“समानी व आकुतिः समाना हृदयानि वः।

समनमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः सुसहासति॥ (Rg-Veda – X.191.4)

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