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An Insight into Extinction of Sanskrit Language

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Abstract

Sanskrit is one of the world's classical languages. It is considered as the 'Language of Gods'. The Bhagavad Gita and many other Hindu scriptures like the Mahabharata, Ramayana etc. have been written in this ancient Language. It has been the foundation of many Indian languages right from the northern tip of India to its southernmost provinces. The decline of this language started roughly in the 13th Century when Islamic Invaders started to visit India. The purpose of this research paper is to carry out research on the causes that led to decline of Sanskrit language through research questions and objectives. In this research paper we will discuss the causes and various factors that led to the extinction of this ancient Language.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language refers to the expression of feelings among different personalities. It provides human values norms and situations to each other. It is only a vehicle for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, sentiments, values and characteristic of a community. It also represents a fundamental expression of social identity. For thousands of years Sanskrit has been a continuous spoken language. It was spoken by upper class community in the early history of India. Sanskrit language is considered to be one of the oldest languages of the world. India and its surrounding area is the home land of Sanskrit language. As Mauss says, "Sanskrit language is the language developed in India and its surrounding before many thousand years". According to Hindu holy books, Sanskrit thought

to be the language of God and human being. " God gave his instructions for human beings by using sanskrit language. Veda is the first instruction given by God's in sanskrit language".Hence, sanskrit is one of the oldest language used by the people in Indian subcontinent. As William Jones remarked:

“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 the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer 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 forcible, for supposing that both the Gothick and the Celtick, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanskrit ; and the Old Persian might be added to the same family”.

— William Jones, 1786, quoted by Thomas Burrow in *The Sanskrit Language* 8

1.1 A Brief History of Sanskrit Language

Sanskrit is the primary sacred language of Hinduism, and has been used as a philosophical language in the religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Sanskrit is a standardized dialect of Old Indo-Aryan, originating as Vedic Sanskrit as early as 1700-1200 BCE. One of the oldest Indo-European languages for which substantial documentation exists, Sanskrit is believed to have been the general language of the greater Indian Subcontinent in ancient times. It is still used today in Hindu religious rituals, Buddhist hymns and chants, and Jain texts.

Sanskrit traces its linguistic ancestry to Proto-Indo-Iranian and ultimately to Proto-Indo-European languages, meaning that it can be traced historically back to the people who spoke Indo-Iranian, also called the Aryan languages, as well as the Indo-European languages, a family of several hundred related languages and dialects. Today, an estimated 46% of humans speak some form of Indo-European language. The most widely-spoken Indo-European languages are English, Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian, each with over 100 million speakers. Vedic Sanskrit is the language of the Vedas, the most ancient Hindu scripts, compiled c. 1500-500 BCE. The Vedas contain hymns, incantations called Samhitas, and theological and philosophical guidance for priests of the Vedic religion. Believed to be direct revelations to seers among the early Aryan people of India, the four chief collections are the Rig Veda, Sam Veda, Yajur Vedia, and Atharva Veda. (Depending on the source consulted, these are spelled, for example, either Rig Veda or Rigveda.) Vedic Sanskrit was orally preserved as a part of the

Vedic chanting tradition, predating alphabetic writing in India by several centuries. Modern linguists consider the metrical hymns of the Rigveda Samhita, the most ancient layer of text in the Vedas, to have been composed by many authors over several centuries of oral tradition.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

The primary objective of this research is to find out the causes that led to the decline of Sanskrit. Hence, the objectives are : • Stating the causes that led to the decline of Sanskrit language • Understanding the factors that can contribute to revival of Sanskrit.

1.3 Research Questions

Sanskrit is a highly prestigious language which was used by upper class people. The crux of this investigation is to find out the causes that led to its decline and also the factors that can contribute to its revival. Hence, the research questions are : • What are the factors that led to the decline of Sanskrit Language? • What are the steps taken to revive Sanskrit?

1.4 Statement of Problem

The problem that led to the decline of our ancient language Sanskrit is: As stated by Jha (2019) in his study titled *Exploring the Factors that Sank Sanskrit into Oblivion(A pilot Study)*, he mentioned that: Only 14135 people according to 2011 census have been found to be associated with Sanskrit as their native language. The present research is restricted to few villages or towns where Sanskrit is spoken till date for example A village in the southern state of Karnataka where most residents speak Sanskrit is in focus at a time when the Indian government's insistence on promoting the ancient language has sparked a debate over the role it plays in the lives of people in the country now. And this is the point of departure for this study which can be seen in the form of two research questions.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to present an overview on how sanskrit kept extincting whereas there is a rise in English due to the British rule. The study also presents the causes like trade and commerce which affected the growth of Sanskrit as a language. The study also highlights how job prospects and to carry out daily livelihood led to the decline of the “ Language of god” i.e Sanskrit.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sanskrit is now spoken by less than 1% of Indians and is mostly used by Hindu priests during religious ceremonies. It's one of the official languages in only one Indian state, Uttarakhand in the north, which is dotted with historical Hindu temple towns. According to the last census, 14,000 people described Sanskrit as

their primary language, with almost no speakers in the country's north-east, Orissa, Jammu and Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and even Gujarat. In schools, it is only offered as an optional language, with most students preferring to choose more relevant languages, including French, German and even Mandarin, which are seen as more appropriate in a globalised world. As said by others, Sanskrit was never a common language and it was patronised by Kings. Sanskrit was patronised by Kings and when Islam Kings took over North, it was patronised in South by Vijayanagar Kings and many Sanskrit works were created during Vijayanagar rule. After arrival of British, Sanskrit lost its royal patronage and since Sanskrit was never a common spoken language, it lost its prominence. This also answers why political power is must for a culture. If political power does not patronise a language or culture, it will be lost. Now political power is with BJP government and they try to glorify and bring back Sanskrit, which is otherwise impossible.

3. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study has used document analysis as a prime instrument of data collection and the collected data were analysed using analytic induction.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 *Causes of Extinction*

There are many causes that led to the decline of Sanskrit. Few of them are:

1. Lack of Government support: After independence the nationalists acted against Sanskrit by removing it as a compulsory subject. The Nehru government also stopped supporting traditional Hindu schools which also caused further damage to the study of Sanskrit. Sanskrit was still used by some even as late as the 17th century. Some of the output of the Kerala school of astronomy and Mathematics (14th to 16th century) was in Sanskrit. The famous scholar Vijnanavikshu (probably around 16th century) also wrote his original works in Sanskrit. The famous 'Sarva Darsana Samgraha' by Madhavacharya written around 14th century was in Sanskrit. Vivekananda and Abhedananda wrote some of their works in Sanskrit in the late 19th and early 20th century. Nevertheless Sanskrit in its role as a link language was finished due to lack of political support.
2. Muslim invasion: Sanskrit's decline started from around the 11th century when vast parts of India came under Islamic rule. Persian and Arabic influenced Urdu became gradually language of governance after the establishment of Islamic rule. The treaties between the British and the Indian rulers in the Victoria Memorial in English, Persian and Urdu. Then during British rule Sanskrit study was basically proscribed and the study of English gained in importance. The reason given for the suppression of

Sanskrit as a link language was that using such a language would encourage vile superstition while the English language as a link language was an incomparably better vehicle of progressive and scientific thought. Muslim invasion and Turkish and then Persian being the official language in key Sanskrit scholarly centers and also destruction of seat /higher education centers of learning - Takshashila (Taxila), Nalanda, Prayag, Kashmir (Kashmir is 13 known to be the home of great Sanskrit scholars), Varanasi etc. This removed Sanskrit from higher education circles.

3. Job security: According to the data presented in Lok Sabha on July 30, 2018, there were over 10 lakh posting of teachers lying vacant at elementary and secondary level – 9,00,316 and 1,07,689 respectively. On November 25, 2019, Human Resource Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank revealed more than 30,000 vacancies were lying vacant across universities in the country. These figures imply that the government either feels students can learn on their own or it considers investing here a low, rather highly low, priority. These figures, as discouraging as they are, instill fear among people who aspire to render their service of imparting education, and this fear turns bigger when they have received their formal education in Sanskrit, in the environment, due to scarcity of teachers. Hindi teachers are somehow managing to teach Sanskrit and, with their help, students are looking up various references to pass the exam.
4. Lack of Government efforts: We don't see any required steps being taken to encourage the study of Sanskrit. Sanskrit has often been made to be associated with the Hindus only, in some way or the other. Sudharma, only Sanskrit daily newspaper in the world, demanded funds from the government to help them survive its publication, they did not even get a reply, either from UPA-2 or Smirti Irani in NDA-1 though such funds are reserved. It appears to have failed in maintaining high standards at the university level. Universities don't find many students in their courses devoted to Sanskrit as they fail to provide required teachers. We need to understand that a language should not be imposed to be learned, to be spoken. It must also be conceived that Sanskrit cannot be a common or linking language used for communication. But, are these reasons sufficient for letting it die gradually, overlooking its important in Indian literature. Sanskrit shouldn't be confused as a language that only contains religious texts. It's been a pioneer in other fields as well, for example, medicine, Science, Yoga, History, Philosophy, Astrology. Many may seem to believe that apart from religion, Sanskrit's texts don't offer authentic information. However, they themselves may not have read a single text. It can't be denied Sanskrit has a lot to unravel, taking into consideration the fact that more than 90% of texts have not yet been translated – which at times is perceived to be coloured by bias of a translator, causing the actual essence to turn less visible, or filtered by their preoccupations or comprehension, tarnishing the image of our glorious culture. Sanskrit is needed to be taught in Sanskrit itself. It seems to be the only language that is not taught through Sanskrit, rather Hindi

or any other language is used to teach it resulting in substandard quality. We are also required to encourage those willing to contribute in any way and not make a mockery of them.

5. Three Language Formula: Formulated in 1968, it emphasizes on the study of Hindi, English, and other modern Indian languages (preferably one of the southern languages) in the Hindi-speaking states; and Hindi, English, and a regional language in the non-Hindi speaking states. Hindi-speaking states chose Sanskrit as the third language since no compulsion was made to choose a southern language. On account of poor supervision and a great scarcity of not-so-qualified teachers, Sanskrit fell victim to the education system in the Northern states as it turned out to be a subject to be mugged up in order to fetch higher marks – as there's a predictable pattern that's applied for its exam, yielding no actual learning out of it. However, it is evident that the Southern states have learned Hindi, chosen by most of the non-Hindi speaking states, well, are gaining advantage from it.
6. Use of local/ state language : After the 1952 division of states based on the linguistic lines and the subsequent promotion of local /state language by most of the states in India further cut down, wherever the meagre amount and opportunities available for Sanskrit -this further killed the minuscule number of Sanskrit scholars livelihood opportunities.
7. Translation: Translation of key Sanskrit texts of commerce (Arthashastra), Medicine (Ayurveda), Agriculture (Vrikshayurveda) and Administration (Rajaniti) into Persian language. Subsequently, the Persian language versions were only used widely in administrative circles. This effectively removed Sanskrit from the official circles For example when Government of India after independence started using english in official circles (even partially) had the effect of now people understanding only English in official communications just in a matter of 70years.Imagine this being done with persion over 500 years.
8. Outlook of pandits: One of the reasons for Sanskrit being limited to a small circle of people was the narrow outlook of pandits. They never allowed the language to reach the common people. So, India today does not have Sanskrit as its first language, like French in Francophone countries and Arabic in West Asia. When a language is not used by common people, it dies a natural death. If Sanskrit is not made popular among Indians, it is likely to become an endangered language in its country of birth.
9. Language of elite class: The other reason why Sanskrit is losing out is because it was never really the language of the masses. It was the language of the elite used for correspondence amongst royalty and for composing classic prose and poetry. There are some who opt for Sanskrit because it is regarded as a subject in which one can get high grades and can help improve one's overall grades. But most students learn the language to know about the past.
10. Modernism: Due to the invention of technology and more scope in English and other languages. People usually opt for modern language instead if learning ancient languages like sanskrit.

4.2 Steps to Revive Sanskrit

Sanskrit is a language that is in the process of a slow death. Timely intervention can prevent that and make the ancient language be used widely once again. We can take huge inspiration from the revival of Hebrew. Conscious efforts by Government and the people to increase the exposure of Sanskrit to the new generation. Once people get interested in it, it will only be a matter of time before everyone takes it up. We should take steps like:

- Educating children at a young age in Sanskrit.
- Promoting the use of Sanskrit in day to day activities. The language is not common because of not being used regularly.
- Spreading awareness and demystifying the Language of Gods.
- Promoting learning for use and not just for marks.
- Most students in India pick Sanskrit as an optional subject just for marks Making advance studies available in Sanskrit. This will not just promote the language but will also promote the spread of ancient knowledge in our scriptures.
- Career preferences and better opportunities for people who know Sanskrit. In China, Mandarin has the first spot and English is not known to most people. We do not endorse pushing back English but we need to promote our languages equally. More people will learn Sanskrit if they get benefits from it.

4.3 Why Sanskrit should be Revived?

There is a report given by a Nasa scientist Rick Briggs which says Sanskrit is one of the most suitable languages for the computers. The 6th and the 7th generation computers will also be operated in Sanskrit. Hence that would probably help in its revival. Sanskrit is one of the 17 oldest language known to us. It is also believed to be the most systematic and technical language of all. It is also referred to as the mother of all languages and is the only language that is used in holy functions and ceremonies of the Hindus, as it has always been regarded as the sacred language of the religion. Sanskrit mantras, when recited in combination with the sound vibrations, have a specific effect on the mind and the psyche of the individual. Sanskrit has the power to say something using the minimum amount of words. There are numerous synonyms for each word each with specific meaning in the language of Sanskrit. For instance, a simple word like the elephant has about a hundred synonyms. English has only one word for love, Sanskrit has 96.

Sanskrit has an amazing wealth of words and synonyms to give great versatility. It has in fact over 70 words for water where English has just got one. Sanskrit language has over 122 words for the action to go each with the specific meaning. It is also called the master of phonetics as it is perhaps one of the most accurate languages in pronunciation. It makes use of 49 types of

sounds that make pronunciations of different kinds of words very distinct. The attention devoted to the grammar, phonetics, and linguistics in Sanskrit is believed to have been unprecedented until the 20th century. Also, Research suggests that learning Sanskrit improves brain functioning and students improve academically; they get better marks in subjects like Mathematics and Science which some people find difficult. It is because Sanskrit enhances memory power and concentration.

James Junior School in London has made Sanskrit compulsory. Students of this school are among the toppers in various fields and worldwide exams year after year. Some schools in Ireland also have made Sanskrit compulsory. Hence, Sanskrit's revival can help in a. Lot of ways and some steps by government should be taken in order to revive our ancient language. It is also to be noted that Sanskrit also knows as the mother of all languages as according to the UNO almost 97% of languages have taken words or are directly or indirectly influenced by Sanskrit. Some of the examples are:

Root Sanskrit Word	Median Word in Latin(L) / Greek(G) / Arabic(A)	Derived English Word
Madhyam (meaning Medium)	Medium (L)	Medium
Kaal (meaning Time)	Kalendae (L)	Calendar
Mishra (meaning Mix)	Mixtus (L)	Mix
Matr (meaning Mother)	Mater (L)	Mother
Aksha (meaning Axis)	Axon (G)	Axis
Navagatha (meaning Navigation)	Navigationem (L)	Navigation
Sarpa (meaning Snake)	Serpentem (L)	Serpent
Anamika (means Anonymous)	Anonymos (G)	Anonymous
Naas (means Nose)	Nasus (L)	Nose
Ashta (meaning Eight)	Octo (L)	Eight
Barbara (meaning Foreign)	Barbaria (L)	Barbarian
Dhama (meaning House)	Domus (L)	Domicile
Danta (meaning Teeth)	Dentis (L)	Dental
Dwar (meaning Door)	Doru	Door
Pithr (meaning Father)	Pater (L)	Father

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, It is estimated that at least half of the world's 6500 languages are expected to become extinct in the next century. The death of a language marks

the loss of yet another piece of cultural uniqueness from the mosaic of our diverse planet, and is therefore a tragedy for the heritage of all humanity as the death language is often compared to "species extinction".Although some measures are being taken for the Upliftment of sanskrit education and preservation of sanskrit language, due to the limitation of classroom and religious activities the situation of sanskrit language is going to be an endangered language of the world.

It's hard to predict that Sanskrit will regain the glory that it once had. After all, it's over 3000 years old. But, today we have most of the great works in Sanskrit with word to word translation and meaning. So, if someone wants to learn the language, they can very well learn and speak anytime in the future. 217.

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