

Promotion of Sanskrit and Sanskritic Culture in India

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Abstract- This paper is oriented to study the efforts made for promotion of Sanskrit language and Sanskritic culture in India in its post independent and post- liberal period. Sanskrit language, which had a glory in ancient time has gradually come to a status of medium of chanting mantras and worshiping language in India. There are initiatives by governmental and non-governmental organisations, and even some people who work independently for reviving the past glory of Sanskrit. It needs to gauge the extent of such initiative and its success. This paper tries to see the different initiatives taken by people and government to promote Sanskrit culture and education.

Index Terms- Sanskrit, promotion, education, culture, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sanskritic culture and Sanskrit education is the matter of concern for Indian scholars now a days due to its gradual deterioration. The western aggression to Indian culture due to colonial rule and its continuous impact on Indian society is a major reason behind the loss of glory of Sanskrit. The Sanskrit knowledge base and Sanskritic culture which became the dominant pattern of culture in Ancient India and the later periods down to pre-colonial period is the only written repository of knowledge at large in Indian subcontinent. It occupies a dominant space in Indological sources of literature. The growth of vernacular languages has led to the reduction of its popularity and usage. Due to its propagation of Brahmanical knowledge in one hand, the gradual deterioration of Sanskritic values and improper interpretation and usage of Sanskritic knowledge on the other has created inner contradiction within Indian society. It is because Sanskrit is regarded to be the mere representative of Aryan knowledge and worldview and has created its gradual deterioration. Besides, the Muslim invasion from Middle East and later aggression by the British imperialistic forces has reduced this language into a language for religious chanting of mantras and taking oath in auspicious moments. Besides, the globalisation in post-colonial period which is high in last decade of twentieth century and present twenty first century, has brought a number of changes to Indian culture and society.

Again, the Sanskritic culture that is inherited through ages by Indian society is also under continuous attack by foreign culture. While there is a degradation of Sanskritic culture, there is a rising consciousness in the society to preserve and revive many of these traditions and culture too. This is reflected in the steps taken by many sections of society in different places and time. The scholars of Sanskrit studies and social sciences reiterated it in many of their write ups, yet a systemic effort has not taken to study

the steps taken for promotion of Sanskritic culture and Sanskritic education. This paper makes a modest attempt to accumulate information on that line and assess the extent of initiatives at different level to promote Sanskrit education and culture.

II. PROMOTING SANSKRITIC EDUCATION AND INITIATIVES

After the growth of vernacular languages, Sanskrit did not remain as living language and is mostly used for certain specific purposes, mostly as medium of instruction and publication or writing literary piece. Sanskrit is one of the 22 official languages in India. It is the second official language of two of the states in India viz. Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. According to 2011 census, there are 2360821 Sanskrit speakers in India.

The use of Sanskrit in India is confined to the religious rituals as hymns and mantras chanted by the priests during the ritual. Sanskrit has been being written in Devanagari alphabet for nineteenth century, though many other regional languages are also used to write Sanskrit. in India. After Devanagari, Roman alphabets are also used for Sanskrit. Many vernacular languages of India are also used as script in writing Sanskritic contents.

As a language, it was a part of modern course curricula in primary, secondary, higher secondary, graduation and post-graduation level from the beginning of modern education system introduced during Colonial period and continued in post-colonial India till date. In case of lower level, Sanskrit was compulsory subject and even now also many central and state government - schools continue it to be the compulsory subject. There are also privately funded schools which included Sanskrit as a compulsory subject of study in primary and secondary level. It is an elective paper in post-high school level courses. and colleges.

There are many central and state Universities imparting knowledge on Sanskrit. Besides there are Sanskrit Universities too which are specifically established for Sanskrit education. Three major Sanskrit institutes which are given special attention and selected for promotion of different activities are; Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan (RSS) Delhi, Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha (LBSRSV) New Delhi, and Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha (RSV) Tirupati. Besides these three premiere Institutes, there are a number of institutes that impart Sanskrit education as Uttarakhand Sanskrit University, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University (Banaras), Sanskrit College and University (Kolkata), Kameshwar Singh Darbhanga Sanskrit University (Bihar), Shri Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Sanskrit University (Rajasthan) and many more. While there is a good number of Sanskrit Universities that impart Sanskrit education, the demand for such education has come down to the extent that these have become centre for

research. There are very few enrolments in those universities for Sanskrit education.

Rastriya Sanskrit Sansthan was established in 15th October, 1970 as an autonomous organisation registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 (Act XXI of 1860) for the development and promotion of Sanskrit all over the country. It is fully funded by Government of India. It works as an apex body for propagation of Sanskrit and assists the Ministry of Human Resource Development in formulating and implementing various plans and schemes for the development of Sanskrit studies. It plays the role of a nodal body for proper implementation of various recommendations made by the Sanskrit Commission, which was set up by the Government of India, Ministry of Education in 1956 for the propagation and development of Sanskrit language. The institute has now been declared as Deemed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. It is declared as Central Sanskrit University. This Sansthan has adopted five villages. These are; Jubatara (Mohanpur), Tripura, Masot (Pragpur), Himachal Pradesh. Chittembai (Shimoga), Karnataka Adat (Puzhakkal), Kerala and Barai (Huzoor), Madhya Pradesh to promote Sanskrit. Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha (SLBSRSV) was established on 8th October 1962 in New Delhi and it got the status of Deemed university in 1987. It has been providing Sanskrit education for a long time.

The Art, Culture and Language Department is a newly Department of Government of National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi with the aim to preserve cultural heritage. Propagation, promotion and development of languages, literature, art and culture as an integral part of composite culture of Union Territory of Delhi. These activities are carried out through Sahitya Kala Parishad and Language Academies: Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit and Sindhi, which are autonomous bodies.

The Sanskrit Academy is engaged in the promotion, propagation and development of Sanskrit language and literature in Delhi. With a view to promote Sanskrit lingual culture and encourage exchange of ideas and experiences, it organises poets meets, competitions of different natures in Sanskrit language, distributes ABCDs of Government Centre for Civil Society 59 awards for original writing in Sanskrit. It organises centres for Sanskrit teaching, yoga, ayurveda, jyotish and karmakanda.

Different state governments have also given priority to promote Sanskrit. While it is the second official language in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, many state governments have taken interest in promoting Sanskrit.

The government of India has taken many steps to promote Sanskrit language. It has devised a provision of financial assistance to Adarsh Sanskrit Mahavidyalayas / Shodha Sansthans and instituted the award of merit scholarships to students of Sanskrit Pathasala to College level. It also provides financial assistance to NGOs / Higher Educational Institutions of Sanskrit for various Research Projects / Programmes. The retired eminent Sanskrit scholars are engaged under the Shastra Chudamani scheme for teaching. Sanskrit is also taught through Non-formal Sanskrit Education (NFSE) programme, by setting up Non-Formal Sanskrit learning centres, in reputed institutions like Indian Institute of Technology, Ayurveda Institutions, modern colleges and Universities. The government has also provided presidential awards for Sanskrit Language to senior and young

scholars. Storing the knowledge base are very much the need of the hour as many Sanskrit texts are disappearing day by day.

It has provided financial assistance for the publication and reprint of rare Sanskrit books. The government has also implemented Astadashi projects containing eighteen projects to sustain the growth of Sanskrit. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) had established the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan – and allocated Rs 643.84 crore to it in the last three years – in Delhi as a nodal authority to promote Sanskrit. In 2019-20, the Sansthan was allocated Rs 231.15 crore, Rs 214.38 crore in 2018-19, and Rs 198.31 crore in 2017-18 (16 Feb., Hindustan Times, 18 Feb., 2020; Deccan Herald).

The non-governmental organisations which are engaged in promoting Sanskrit culture at all India level are Sanskrita Bharati, Viswa Hindu Parishad, Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha, Sanskrit Promotion Foundation, etc. Out of these, the International Association of Sanskrit Studies (IASS), Sanskrit Bharati, Viswa Hindu Parishad, are the international organisations involved in promoting Sanskrit education and Sanskrit culture at a larger scale. The need to establish International Association of Sanskrit Studies (www.sanskritassociation.org/) emerged in 1972 in International Sanskrit Conference (Visva Sanskrita Sammelana) held in New Delhi under auspices of Ministry of Education and Rastriya Sanskrit Sansthan. It was realised that the International Congress of Orientalists and international Congress of Asian and African Studies did not allow sufficient discussion on Sanskrit and allied subjects. As a result, in 1973 international congress of Orientalists held in Paris, Sanskritists from various countries endorsed this need for an International Association of Sanskrit Studies.

III. ONLINE INITIATIVES

There are a number of online initiatives to impart Sanskrit education in recent decades. The times of India report, Jan, 23, 2004 says that the glory of Sanskrit revived online. A number of initiatives are taken both with profit and non-profit motive to impart Sanskrit education and Sanskrit knowledge. A number of websites, online journals, magazines, translators are available in Sanskrit. Vyoma-Samskrta-Pāṭhaśālā, Shri Timli Sanskrit Pathashala, Many Sanskrit tools and software are also developed in Sanskrit in IITs. Many spoken Sanskrit lessons, Sanskrit pages are available online.

Government of India has started a portal dedicated to Sanskrit itself known as Sanskrit Portal. It provides access to various links related to Sanskrit education and activity related to that. It is a repository of vast Sanskrit knowledge and various developments taking place in promoting Sanskrit. A number of published and archaic materials are uploaded in this portal.

IV. HINDUTVA POLITICS AND SANSKRIT PROMOTION

Sanskrit as propagator of Hindutva ideology and Brahmanical text has been raised by the anti- Sanskrit and anti-Brahmanical organisations in India, the DMK movement and all India DMK is a political organisation which criticising the promotion of Aryan language and the Brahmanical ideology. The anti- Brahmanical movement started by JP Narayan, Jotiba Phule

and B.R. Ambedkar are some of the major movements that have been working as a strong force against the propagation of Sanskrit culture and language. These organisations focus on non-Aryan base of Indian civilisation and consider Sanskrit as the creator and propagator of social inequality, the dominant system of caste hierarchy in India. The pluralistic political philosophy along with parliamentary democracy which gives equal weightage to all cultural groups and representation in parliament allows these diverse movements and ideological coexistence. Hence there is a divide between different linguistic and cultural communities to accept the language as the only language to propagate.

Besides this linguistic difference Sanskrit also has got rejection by the larger Muslim community as the language to propagate Hinduism and Hindu ideology. RSS and Viswa Hindu Parishad are considered as the organisations which work for promotion of Hinduism. The present Prime Minister and the government ruled by the political party Bharatiya Janata Party is considered by opposing forces and political party to propagate Hindutwa ideology and has given a special focus on promotion of Sanskrit. Many newspapers bring forth this kind of claims made by politicians of different parties.

It is reported that there is unhappiness by the politicians who pointed out that the present BJP led government has spent around Rs. 643.84 crore to promote Sanskrit in last three years span. This is 22 times of the total amount (Rs 29 crore) spent on the other five classical Indian languages – Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Odia according to the information of Union Ministry of Culture (The National Herald). The DMK leader Dayanidhi Maran questioned the relevance of Sanskrit in the face of a subordination of other languages led to heated criticism. Recently the move to rewrite the names of railway station in Sanskrit which were written in Urdu (19 Jan, www.livemint.com.), also raised a lot of criticism.

V. CONCLUSION

Sanskrit as the oldest known Indo-Aryan language, not only stores knowledge base of people existed till that time, but also

contains the existing knowledge of non-Aryan people of that time. A language and mainly classical language need to be preserved and Sanskrit is the oldest classical language known so far. It needs promotion not only for resource base in general, but also the very rich resources of that time for which the language got internal reputation too. Besides the religious contents, it has a vast stock of scientific knowledge reiterated by scholars of different disciplines. Hence promotion of Sanskrit and preservation of Sanskrit language is very much necessary. There is no doubt that with BJP government it has got more importance due to the ideological base of being oriented to Indian culture, but the preservation of it being very old language is the prime need of the hour. Hence being the generator of many vernacular languages, Sanskrit has got its merit to be preserved than any other vernacular language.

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