

Sanskrit, the most ancient language

(Valedictory Address on fourth world Sanskrit Conference organised under the auspices of HRD & Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, New Delhi on Monday the 9th April, 2001 at Vigyan Bhavan New Delhi)

I deem it a unique privilege to address this elite gathering of scholars from all over the globe and those from our country. You have during the last four days delved deep into all aspects of the language, literature and philosophy of the most ancient language of the World, namely Sanskrit. Millennia before Christ, our religious lore of Vedas and Upanishads were followed by epics *Ramayana*, by Valmiki, *Mahabharata* by Vyasa, dramas by Kalidasa and Bharvabhuti codes of Yagnyavalkia and Manu, treatises on the art of governance by Kautilya, on Natya (dance) and music by Bharata, on grammar by Panini, on Astronomy by Aryabhatta and on medicine by Charaka. In short, no branch of knowledge has been uncovered by the ancient Sanskrit literature. Even the concept of *Atom* is known to the ancients. The *Katho Upanishad* describes the Self as “anoraniyan” - smaller than the Atom and Mahato Mahiyan - mightier than the mightiest.

The subjects discussed at the World Conference are complete and comprehensive. The contribution of Sanskrit to the world civilization and to the humanity as a whole has received the widest attention and eminent scholars have discussed in several sessions the influence of Sanskrit, spread far and wide. Besides, Jothish (astrology) Ayurveda (medicine), Upanishads and Kavyas have received expert treatment during the several sectorial discussions. One can say without fear of contradiction that the last four days discussions have added a wealth of knowledge not easily gathered by one by years and years of hard work and study. I offer my deep appreciation to all the scholars who had toiled hard to produce the papers for discussion.

That it was the link language of the learned and the scholars of ancient India is borne out by Adi Sankara's visits to remote corners of India and carrying on religious disputations with the pandits of North, South, East and West. Besides, Sanskrit words have been taken into other languages freely and abundantly. For instance, Tamil language which is as ancient as Sanskrit, has no Tamil word for face. It has accepted the Sanskrit word “*Mukham*” and freely used it in all its ancient religious lore. There is no language in India, which has out absorbed Sanskrit words and made them their own. Whether religious or secular, whether in the form of epics, lyrics, dramas or prose texts Sanskrit words have permeated not only the national consciousness but spread to a large part of the world. *Ramayana* has spread to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Indonesia. Max Mueller spread Sanskrit in Germany and Europe. Today Sanskrit is known, practically in every part of the world. This vast array of Sanskrit scholars from abroad, I see before me, bears testimony to it. We are gratified by the presence in our midst of eminent Sanskrit scholars from practically all parts of the globe, besides nearly a thousand scholars from our country.

Primitive man was no better than a beast; he hunted for his food drank and slept. Some of them ate other men also. Such a being has now developed a society living peaceably with fellow beings, enjoying literature, art, music and developing noble qualities like kindness, compassion, selflessness and the like. The history of civilization is nothing but the history of human endeavour to transform the beast into a man. This miracle was wrought by religion – whatever it is – by preaching that one should not kill, cheat, rob, utter

falsehood, covet others' possessions and so on and that *if* one committed the above sins, one would go to eternal hell. All religions preach the virtues, which are conditions precedent for an orderly life. No religion has said, you can kill, rob, cheat, speak lies or covet. On the other hand they preach peace, harmony and brotherhood among all beings. The earliest scripture known to the world, the Rig Veda says, *Vasudeiva Kutumbakam*, the whole world is a family. It says, *Lokas Samasthan Sukino Bhavantu*. Let the entire world be happy, *Sarve jana Sukino Bhavatu*. Let all people be happy.

Our ancient texts have laid down clearly that in whatsoever form a devotee worships, it goes to the Supreme Being.

*Aakashath Pratilantoyam
Yatha gacchathi sagaram
Sarve Deva namaskarah
Sri Kesavam pratigacchathi*

Just as drops of water
that fall from the sky reaches
Ocean, worship of all deities
Reach the Supreme Lord.

Again in the Bhagavat Gita, Cha. VII . verse 21, the Supreme Lord says:

*Yo yo yam yam thanum Bhaktah
Sraddhaya rcitum icchati
Tasya tasya achalam sraddham
Thameva vidadami Aham.*

Whichever devotee with faith in whatever form wishes to worship I strengthen that faith of his.

Therefore, is no room for any conflict among religions, since all the prayers, reach only that Supreme Being by whatsoever name it may be called.

Interestingly there is a passage in the "*Holy Quran*" which echoes the same sentiment. In chapter 109 (Revelations) addressing the non believers the "*Holy Quran*" says:

In the name of Allah, the Gracious and the Merciful

Say O Ye disbelievers

I worship not that which you worship

Nor worship you what I worship

And I am not going to worship that

Which you worship

Nor will you worship what I worship

For you your religion and for me

my religion.

It follows, therefore, that if each one practices the tenets of his religion diligently, honestly and faithfully, there will be no place for rankle, bitterness, violence and hatred. The world today is faced with fissiparous tendencies, splitting the society on the basis of race, religion, ethnically etc., leading to chaos. It is upto the wisdom of scholars and religious leaders to stem

the rot before it engulfs the society. Our scriptures go further and say that the self (indweller) in man, beast and birds is the same.

Iso Upanishad says :

*Yastu Sarvani bhutani
atman eva anupasyathi
Sarva bhuteshu cha Atmanam.
Tha to na vijugupsate.*

One who sees himself in all being
And sees all beings as himself
Thereafter hates no body

The Bhagavat Gita says :

*Yo mam pasyathi sarvatra
Sarvam cha maye pasyati
Tasya ham na pranasyami
Sa cha me na pranasyati*

He who sees Me in all things
And sees all things in Me (God)
He never becomes separated from Me
Nor do I become separated from him.

This emphasizes the unity of all beings i.e. God and the multitudinous lives as one and the same. When one gets this realization, the concept of Brotherhood of man and the world as one family is established.

I am reminded of an anonymous Verse which runs as follows:

I sought my soul
The soul I could not see
I sought my God
God evaded me
I sought my brother
I found all the three
(The Soul, God and Brother)

It should therefore be endeavour of all of us to find a brother in every other being.

One of the greatest contribution of Sanskrit to humanity is the concept of Dharma. There is no English equivalent to Dharma. Once the Sage, the Sankaracharya of Kanchi, asked me to find an English equivalent to Dharma. Dharma means charity, fair play, justice, one's duty – Svadharma, the Raj Dharma, Yuddha Dharma, Sanyasa Dharma, - religion, righteousness, good conduct and a host of others described as a spectrum of values. A language will have no words unless it has the concept. If there is no concept, there can be no word. This composite concept of all virtues is peculiar to Sanskrit language. Every Indian language adopted the word Dharma into their vocabulary. The Supreme Lord has said in the Bhagavat Gita that for the establishment of Dharma (virtues) I come into being from Age to Age. It must be noted that the Lord's promise is not confined to any region, religion or creed. Sanskrit is, therefore, a repository of universal cultural legacies. The Vedas speak not merely for India but for all mankind, indeed for all creations.

Dharma may be summed up as moral law or rules of conduct of morality, which binds society together. The Bhagawat Gita enumerates what is Dharma or right conduct in several circumstances.

In Chap. II, verse 40, the Great Lord tells Arjuna that it is Arjuna's own Dharma as Kshatriya to fight a righteous war. In verse 33, the Lord says that if Arjuna did not fight a righteous war, he will be transgressing his own Dharma. In later chapters, the Gita propounds what is "Adharma" and how one avoids them. In Chapter XII, verse 13 -14, the Lord describes the qualities that endear one to Him. These are universal in application and not confined to any creed, race, religion, or ethnic group.

<i>Adveshta</i>	-	one who is without ill will
<i>sarva boothanam</i>	-	or hatred towards all beings
<i>maitra</i>	-	friendly and
<i>karuna eva cha</i>	-	compassionate
<i>Nirmamo nirahankarah</i>	-	without feelings of "I" and "mine"
<i>sama dhukha sukhah</i>	-	even minded in joy and sorrow
<i>kshami</i>	-	forgiving
<i>Santushtah sathatam</i>	-	ever content
<i>Yogi</i>	-	steady in meditation
<i>yathatma druda nischayah</i>	-	self controlled and possessed of firm conviction
<i>Myarpitham mano buddi</i>	-	with mind and intellect fixed on Me
<i>ye madbhaktah sa me priyah</i>	-	such a devotee is dear to Me.

If the entire humanity possessed all these virtues the cussed planet will become the Garden of Eden again. It was man's first disobedience that lost us the Eden. Sanskrit literature had realised the vital role played by natural forces in shaping human existence. It worships nature. The Rig Veda prays that the mountains, the rivers, the plants, the forests, the Sun, the king be full of sweetness to us.

<i>Madhu vatha Ruthaya the</i>	-	<i>the winds are full of Sweetness</i>
<i>Mathu ksheeranti Sindavah</i>	-	<i>the Rivers pour Sweets</i>
<i>Madhvira na santhosha si etc.,</i>	-	<i>so may the plants be full of Sweetness to us.</i>

The Vedic literature displays its deep concern for ecology. The two gods Dyava, Prithvi – the canopy of the SKY and the Earth under his feet are symbolic of the concern for environment.

What makes the study of Sanskrit difficult is *Sandi* or the combination of several words together. In all modern languages each word is written separately For instance 'a' 'I' etc. making the study easier. In early Tamil language several words were also linked together as in Sanskrit. But modern Tamil has followed the practice of writing each word separately. In some editions of the Bhagavat Gita the *sandi* has been split, making it easier for non scholars to read verses easily. In ancient times when there were no writing materials, knowledge had to be transmitted by oral tradition. Since it is easier to remember poetry and not prose, the verses had to be compressed into a form that is easy to memorise. There are no such compulsions any more. To all learners, Sanskrit will become easier if words are separated, as in modern languages, for purposes of chanting the present versified form may be continued. In his inaugural address, the Prime Minister of India conveyed the idea of Sanskrit being made easier so that it may be

popularized. It is a challenge to the Sanskrit scholars. The double and triple words also cause some problems to those who are unaccustomed to it. Scholars may think about it and find some solutions which will make learning Sanskrit easier.

I find that a suggestion has emanated before this august body that Sanskrit be made a compulsory subject in all schools in India. I am afraid this will unnecessarily create antagonism to and agitation against the sacred language. It is enough if Sanskrit is made an optional subject and facilities provided in all schools whether public or private. People will understand the value of this ancient language, which is the storehouse of all wisdom.