

# The need to expand the Sanskrit Literature

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## Abstract

It is late, but at least now, we need to develop the Corpus of Sanskrit Literature. We have been seriously engaged in the translations of Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali texts since the independence, and as a consequence, almost no book is left untranslated. It is good to translate our ancient Indian literature, existing mainly in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali languages. Several Western and foreign scholars could receive excellent knowledge from India through these translations. They could seamlessly understand the great Indic knowledge traditions existing in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali languages. The Dutch translation of *Bhartrhari Subhāṣita* in 1651 by Abraham Roger gave the acquaintance of the Sanskrit language to the West. Charles Wilkins translated the *Bhagavadgītā* in 1785 with the name "The Song of the Adorable One". No doubt, these translations need a lot of effort. The translations from Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali texts need a lot of patience and dedication. We must appreciate those great scholars who have done remarkable work in Indic translations. Despite this, we are compelled to explore what kind of upliftment the ancient Indian languages, namely Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali, received from this contribution. Therefore, now we must realise the necessity of translating ancient and modern Indian and foreign literature into Sanskrit. This may look unnatural to many scholars, but this is the present need to expand the corpus of Sanskrit and other ancient Indian languages.

Keywords: *Sanskrit, Translations, Indic, Pali, Buddhist literature, Sanskrit literature, knowledge, Bhagavadgītā, Bhartrhari, Prakrit, Veda, Upanishad.*

## Introduction

In ancient India, we never used the translations of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit texts. Our ancient texts were never translated into other *Bhāratīya* languages for understanding them because there was no such need for Indians. But with time, this system had emerged. This translation system was started by those people who could not understand the ancient Indian languages, namely Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and other *Apabhraṃsha* languages. However, it was foreigners who could not understand our ancient Indian languages.

Consequently, they started translating Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit works into their languages and numerous other foreign languages. Over time, being inspired by this method, even Indians started translating Indian texts. It happened due to the diminishing knowledge of ancient Indian languages. It is obvious that the degeneration of ancient Indian languages began when we started the translations of ancient Sanskrit texts. Other Indian languages are also ancient and existed simultaneously with Sanskrit, which were called *the Deshi* language in those days. But

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Sanskrit Pali and Prakrit texts were studied by all Indians directly without translations because they used to maintain the knowledge of both languages.

In this paper, I confine myself only to Sanskrit translations. By Sanskrit translation, I mean the translation into Sanskrit from other languages. This is the need of the present day to grow the body of Sanskrit literature because we have translated almost all texts of Sanskrit into all other languages, and for many generations, there seems to be no need to learn the Sanskrit language. However, the new education policy of 2023 gives importance to education in one's mother tongue. Therefore, following this system, institutions like UGC have initiated translating and preparing textbooks in various mother tongues. Accordingly, all books will be translated into regional languages. This enhances students' comprehension and more effective communication in mother tongues.

### **Translations of Sanskrit texts into other languages**

The translation from Sanskrit to other Indian and foreign languages is a popular exercise. Let's see such popular translations. Before Alexander's invasion, Greeks were not aware of Sanskrit literature. The Dutch translation of *Bhartrhari Subhāṣita* in 1651 by Abraham Roger gave the acquaintance of the Sanskrit language to the West. At the instigation of Warren Hastings, Charles Wilkins acquired considerable knowledge of Sanskrit at Banaras and later translated the *Bhagavadgītā* in 1785 with the name "The Song of the Adorable One". After two years, another translation of the *Hitopadeśa* called "Friendly Advice" came out. Sir William Jones (1746-1794), the brilliant scholar of the West, stayed for four years in India, and during this short period, he acquired a good knowledge of Sanskrit and translated *Śākuntalam* of the great poet Kalidasa in 1789<sup>1</sup>. Sanskrit could not be known to the Western people without such excellent translations. These and many other famous translations have taken place in the past centuries by which Indian learning became known to the Western people.

Buddhism was transmitted into Tibet, and as a consequence, a massive number of Sanskrit texts were translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan and Chinese languages. Epistemological literature composed by Indian Buddhist scholars focusing on cognition and other philosophical concepts such as mind, logic, and language translated into Tibetan and Chinese. They had a profound impact on Tibetan intellectual history. These translations started during the 7th century, continued in the 8th century, and intensified later. Tibetan scholars have also consulted the Sanskrit versions of oral traditions. Tibetans divided Buddhist texts into two broad categories: *Kangyur* and *Tengyur*. *Kangyur* means the "Translated Words". They consist of the works supposed to have been said by the Buddha himself. This is, in fact, the *Mahāyāna Buddhist Sūtra* literature.

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<sup>1</sup>A history of Sanskrit literature, Arthur A Macdonell, Chapter-1, p. 2. (Published by MLBD, Reprint 1929)

All texts have Sanskrit originals and were translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan. Texts were also translated into Tibetan from Chinese, which were mere Sanskrit translations. These works were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese when some Chinese masters came to India. *Tengyur* means the "Translated Treatises". This is the section to which commentary texts have been assigned. One hundred treatises and *Abhidharma* works (both *Mahāyāna* and *Non-Mahāyāna*), The *Tengyur* contains 3626 texts in 224 Volumes. Among these, the essential texts translated by Kumarajiva are the *Diamond Sūtra*, *Amitābha Sūtra*, *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*. His translation style was distinctive, possessing a flowing smoothness that reflects his prioritisation on conveying the meaning instead of precise literal rendering. Because of this, his rendering of *Mahāyāna* texts often remained more popular.

The tradition of translating the early Sanskrit texts is ancient. Some ancient Sanskrit scholars have translated the Sanskrit texts like Vedas and post-Vedic literature into English and other foreign languages. *Rāmāyana* translations are very popular in contemporary society, and people have become interested in listening to the story of Rama in their local languages. The Puranas have been translated into many languages. The Matsya Purana was translated into Persian by Goswami Anand Daga in 1792 at Varanasi. A manuscript of which is available in the Italian Institute of Rome. A copy of the Persian translation of *Bhāgavatapurāna* is reported to be available in the Aligarh Muslim University, U P.

Not only in India, the Puranas have travelled beyond the Indian territories. They travelled to Tibet, China, Japan, Indonesia and South East Asia. The *Brahmānda purāna* travelled to Bali, the island of Indonesia. Many ancient Javanese adaptations of original Sanskrit works indicate the popularity of Sanskrit and Indian culture in the islands of Indonesia. Dr H. N. Vander Tank collected many Sanskrit manuscripts of Purana, which are now kept in the Netherlands after his death. Many translation works into Japanese Ramayana are also reported from Java. The Puranas have also travelled to European countries, especially to Germany. The Indian ideas have greatly influenced German literature and philosophy from the 9th century. The German scholars once observed that the Indian concepts of philosophical systems could serve as a model for Western thinking. The influence of Indian literature over European thought could be traced even in the Middle Ages. Some of the ancient Indian works passed to Europe through the Arabic and Persian translations, for example, the Panchatantra, which was first translated into Pahlavi in the early 6th century and which was again translated into Arabic in 8750. Then, the various versions derived from the Arabic translation became known to Europe.

In 1951, a Dutchman, Abraham Roger, published some of the verses of *Bhartṛhari*, which were translated into Portuguese by a Brahmin. The Upanishads were first translated into Persian by Dara Shiko. From the Persian, they were translated into Latin at the beginning of the 9th century by a French scholar under the title of *Opnekhat*. Great German scholar Schopenhauer had observed it was "the production of the highest human wisdom." Then, in due course of time, *Bhagavadgītā*, *Hitopadeśa*, and *Śākuntala* were translated directly from Sanskrit into English. In this

way, Sanskrit studies became popular in Europe, and several Indian works were translated into English and European languages.

When we look into the present period, Prof. Mirashi, Kane, Dandekar, etc., have done significant work. Prof. Satyavrat Shastri has done many valuable translations in his life. He translated a poem, *Srirāmacaritābdhiratna*, into English and an English work, *A Vedic Grammar for Students* by A. A. Macdonell, into Hindi. We know some Sanskrit scholars have translated the Hindi poems into Sanskrit. They translated Hindi prose into Sanskrit prose and Hindi poems into Sanskrit poems. Likewise, some Sanskrit poets have translated Sanskrit prose into Hindi prose and Sanskrit poems into Hindi poems. Some talented Sanskrit poets have adopted a new method of translation. They translated the Sanskrit verses into Hindi verses in the same meter in which they wrote the original Sanskrit verse. Dr. Prashasya Mitra Shastri has made such an effort in his *Vyangyakaumudī*. See following verses in his poem named सुस्थिरं स्यात् पदं नः

अभिनवमुखहास्यं सुन्दराणां शिशूनाम्, जनयति हृदि शान्तिं प्रायशो मानवानाम्।

उदरमिह परं तद्रिक्तमालोक्य तेषाम् भवति बहुविषादो मानसे नैव केषाम् ? ॥

and he gives the Hindi translation in the same metre as follows,

प्रतिदिन खिलती हो बालकों की मुख-श्री परम सुखद होती देखने में निराली।

अधिक दुःखद होता देखने सेद्विगों को जब हम उनका ही देखते पेट खाली ॥

Likewise, following Sanskrit verse,

प्रविशति पतिगेहे सुन्दरी कोमलाङ्गी, यदि विभवविहीना सद्गुणा सद्बधूटी।

परमिह धनलुब्धैः पीड्यते यौतकार्थम्, अहह! भवति पीडा मर्मसंघातिनी सा ॥

He translates it into Hindi,

पति घर जब जाती व्याहता हो नवेली सब गुण परिपूर्णा हो भले ही परी सी।

तदपि न धन लोभी स्वल्प सन्तुष्ट होता मनुज हृदय कैसा? वेदना सो गयी सी

॥etc.

Today, we have developed translation techniques. English to Sanskrit translation and converter tool to type in Sanskrit is free. The online English-to-Sanskrit translation

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tool powered by Google helps you to type in Sanskrit using phonetic translation. Just type the Sanskrit word, as it sounds in English, in the box. When you type each word in English, the term is automatically converted into Unicode Sanskrit script.

## Sanskrit Translations

But coming to the central concept of this article, today, there is a need for translations of all useful literature into the Sanskrit language to enrich its literature. It is high time to realise the necessity of translating modern literature into Sanskrit. It is often observed that even Sanskrit scholars prefer English and other modern languages for the expositions of some genuine Sanskrit literature such as "*Vedic Mathematics*", "*Astrology*", "*Vāstu*", "*Indian Philosophy*", "*Ayurveda*" etc. These are, in fact, purely Sanskrit subjects but are translated into English and Hindi, eliminating the necessity of learning the Sanskrit language. On the other hand, in foreign countries like Japan, China, France, Germany, and Russia, scholars write books on rare subjects in their languages, which creates the necessity of learning their languages. But in India, by writing all important Sanskrit subjects into other languages, the Sanskrit scholars are only minimising the need and importance of the Sanskrit language. But we need to translate popular writings from foreign and Indian languages into Sanskrit.

We need translations into Sanskrit. So much literature has been translated into other languages from Sanskrit. Now, let us concentrate on Sanskrit translations. By translating modern literature into the Sanskrit language, we can enrich the literature of Sanskrit. By enhancing the literature on these grounds, we can find the following benefits:

1. *Students of Sanskrit can express their feelings in Sanskrit freely as in their mother tongue.*
2. *Sanskrit scholars can develop the comparative knowledge of different literatures.*
3. *Development of Sanskrit literature with the translation of modern literature into Sanskrit.*

## Methods of Translations

In the field of translation, the following types of translations are commonly seen:

1. *The literal translations (syllable by syllable)*
2. *The condensed translations (this is only a summary type of translation)*
3. *The genuine translations (original translations which can convey the real sense of the author)*

Among these, the last one is considered to be the correct translation. Considering the benefits of Sanskrit translation, teaching translation becomes essential for embellishing Sanskrit literature. The methods of Sanskrit translation can be imparted

to students in various ways. The teaching of translation should be according to the psychological level of students. The comparative study must be included in the exercises. In Sanskrit translations, one should protect the style of the mother tongue. Suppose a particular Indian Sanskrit scholar translates a poem from Sanskrit to any Indian language. In that case, he should use those Sanskrit words closer to a reader's mother tongue. Sanskrit translations should be simple, and knowledge of grammar is also essential for better translations.

## Efforts of Sanskrit translations

Now, let us see if such an effort has occurred at any time. Let us see some translations which various scholars carried out. Many Sanskrit scholars have already entered into this field. Prof. Ravva Srihari has translated the 'Narasimha Śātakamu' of Seṣakavi into Sanskrit with the title of 'Narasimha Śātakam'. Earlier, he had translated the charming Telugu poems of famous Telugu poets like Joshua C. Narayana Reddy into Sanskrit. His translations of *Prapançapadi*, *Phiradousi*, and *Tailapāyikā* (Gabbilamu is the Telugu poem) are the best translations worth mentioning here. This trend has started long ago. Sriman Gunde Rao Harkari has translated the famous English poem 'Traveller' with the name of 'Pravāsi' into Sanskrit, which Sanskrit Academy, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh published.

During my university student days, I translated the "Elegy Written in a Country's Churchyard" by the famous poet Thomas Gray in Sanskrit in a condensed form. This poem was published in the 'Message (students' magazine) of Arts College of Osmania University in 1986 with the title "तस्मिन्सूर्यास्तमयसमये"। The Translated version runs as follows-

तस्मिन् सूर्यास्तमयसमये

मदन्तरनेत्रगवाक्षान्ततः

अनन्तदूरस्थ ऊहाप्रकम्पनेभ्यः

संदृश्यते कलेवरानां मेलनं

अदृश्यमानप्रेतात्मनां जनपदम्।

तस्मिन् सूर्यास्तमयसमये

वलयाकारेण भ्रममाणगोधूल्यां

अम्बेत्याक्रन्दमानाः वत्साः

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अनुगम्यमानाः गावः... etc.

Returning to the works of Prof. Ravva Srihari Andhra, ‘*Narasimha Śātakamu*’ was authored by Sri Seshakavi, known as Seshappa. He was a great devotee of Sri Lakshmi Narasimha of Dharamapuri, situated in Telangana. Seshappa wrote this ‘*Satakāvyaṃ*’ in *Sisa* metre. Prof. Ravva Srihari has also adopted the same *Sisa* metre while translating it from Telugu to Sanskrit. This *Sisa* metre is a *desi* metre in which several beautiful Telugu poems were composed and are being composed even today by Telugu poets. However, scholars expressed their opinion that *Sisa* is a *Tadbhava* word from *Sīrsaka*, which is described as a kind of *Mārga* metre belonging to the *Viāta* metre, which contains 32 syllables in each line (*Pāda*).

Please see the *Sisa* translation of Sanskrit verse of Prof. Ravva Srihari,

गार्दभस्य तु किन्नु मृगमदतिलकेन

मर्कटस्य च किन्नु मलयजेन

व्याधस्य किन्नु वा शर्करापूपैश्च

भूतफलेन किं सूकरस्य

किन्नु वा मल्लिका गुच्छैः बिडालस्य?

किन्नु वा घूकस्य कुण्डलैस्तु

निर्मलवस्त्रैस्तु किन्नु वा महिषस्य

किन्नु वा पञ्जरैर्बकचयस्य ?

The untiring efforts of *Samskr̥ta Bharati*” in this field are highly praiseworthy. Recently, it has published some famous/popular novels which were translated from Kannada into Sanskrit, such as *Vamśavṛkṣaḥ* etc. The process of translation into Sanskrit from regional languages has already started. Recently, many popular books of modern Indian literature were translated into Sanskrit.<sup>2</sup> To achieve this task successfully, we need to accept the simplification of the Sanskrit language. Sanskrit, like other languages, has two forms: Literary and Spoken. The<sup>3</sup> The Sanskrit language suggests that Sanskrit should be simple and brought nearer to the people

<sup>2</sup>For Example: Sanskrit Translation of Kala pūrṇodaya with the name Sanskrit Kala pūrṇodaya by Y. Mallikarjun Rao R.

<sup>3</sup>active pracharaks of Sanskrit organisations such as Samskr̥ta Bharati, Lokabhasha Prach mithi, Vishwa Sanskrit Pratisthan etc.

without disturbing its genuine nature.<sup>4</sup> For simple Sanskrit translations, we must open the doors of the Sanskrit language for the new vocabulary because any living language has to adopt words from other languages for practical expression. It has to assimilate a large number of comments from other languages<sup>5</sup>. Another important fact is that translators must use such Sanskrit words which are used in other Indian and foreign languages because a linguistic survey record reports that a large number of Sanskrit words, ranging from 40 to 85 per cent, are being used in different languages of India<sup>6</sup>. Because of the simple Sanskrit translation, the following suggestions may be accepted by the Sanskrit translators<sup>7</sup>.

1. *They are abandoning the Sandhi-s as far as possible within a sentence.*
2. *We are reducing the number of tenses and moods.*
3. *Reducing the ten Gana-s into two or three by using roots like bhū and kr and thereby reducing the number of roots.*
4. *I am using limited tenses and moods.*

Sadly, some Sanskrit scholars and professors in famous Indian universities often argue that Sanskrit is not a language; it is a subject, and therefore, one should not speak in it. Instead, only study it through translations as a subject. The hidden reason is that they can't express themselves in Sanskrit and feel inferior when their colleagues talk in Sanskrit. But this needs to be corrected. Being incompetent to speak and write in Sanskrit, they are indulging in anti-Sanskrit campaign. Their argument cannot be accepted as it is incorrect and greatly opposes Sanskrit. Enjoying jobs in the Sanskrit field while many other deserving scholars struggle for jobs and indulge in meaningless and stupid arguments, these professors deserve so much reproach. Let us understand the problem and enrich the literature of Sanskrit. Hence, it is necessary to translate texts into Sanskrit from other languages. Let us collectively create a new scope in this field and engage ourselves in translating other literature into the Sanskrit language.

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