



Contribution of Westerns Scholars to Sanskrit Literature

Dr. Nagalakshmi.S

Assistant Professor in Sanskrit
Department of Languages
CHRIST (Deemed to be University)
Hosur Road, Bangalore-28.

India enjoyed a peace and tranquility till the first decade of the twentieth century. The Indian Mutiny was really a blessing in disguise and paved the way for a uniform system of government which provided security of tenure, regular taxation, protection of life and property and equal justice to the high and low throughout the country. As an administrator Lord Curzon executed the rules as per the demands of the home rule made by a generation of Indians brought up to admire British Parliamentary forms of government which was made mandatory and were met with half hearted concessions and compromises. But by that time the westerns were influenced a lot by the Indian scriptures.

Abstract-

In order to establish a system of government in consonance with the tradition of the people, one of the first acts of Warren Hastings, the governor general of Bengal, was to institute an enquiry into the ancient language and literature and the legal system of the Hindus. In this he followed the precedence of enlightened princes like Akbar and Dara Shikoh, were responsible for the Persian translations of the Hindu scriptures. As a result the European scholars were encouraged to take up the study of Sanskrit. In 1785 Charles Wilkins published a translation of the *Bhagavadgita*, and five years later, Sir William Jones translated *Kalidasa's* great drama *Sakuntala*. In 1802 William Hamilton, who was detained in France owing to the Napoleonic wars, beguiled his time by teaching Sanskrit to his fellow prisoners. Among them was the German poet William Schlegel. The effect upon Europe of the discovery of Sanskrit literature and philosophy was electrifying and may not unfairly be compared to the discovery of Greek Renaissance.

Key words: Sanskrit, Vedas, Upanishad.

Sanskrit is the mother of all Languages has a root in India for which we give references from the Upanishads. India is a land of many languages and with many languages is spoken as mother tongue. Some are learnt as regional, national languages. The flare in our languages is attractive, so also the Britishers were attracted by our land and they came to India for trading purpose. Their intention was to trade but they were trading with Indians. So in order to communicate with the Indians they learnt many languages. Here we get a doubt whether they knew the languages or they learnt. Similarly, they were attracted by Sanskrit language also and they learnt it and scholored in it. How did they know this language? Though they might have acquired after coming

to India still they had worked for it and contributed immensely. Their knowledge and contribution has laid foundation for many people to learn and appreciate. Even today foreigners are learning Sanskrit language as foreign language; they are doing Research to understand the rich culture and Heritage of our land. They are learning Sanskrit through Sanskrit and understanding in a best way possible where as we Indians are not ready to learn this language, even if they learn they understand that there is no scope and no importance. With this background let me discuss the contributions made by some western people to Sanskrit Literature.

During the 18 century itself the western scholars studied Sanskrit, but in 19 century the study of Sanskrit played a vital role in the field of comparative linguistics of the Indo European languages. The Britishers who ruled us for more than 200 years between 1857-1947, the western scholars edited and translated many manuscripts from Sanskrit to English.

After Alexander's invasion the Greeks acquired some Indian languages. The Arab's in the Middle Ages introduced the knowledge of Indian science to the west, a few European missionaries from 16 century onwards were not only aware of the existence of Sanskrit language but also acquired and got familiar to it. In 1951 a scholar by name Abraham Roger translated the poems of Bhartruhari into Portuguese language. But however for about 120 years there was no authentic information in Europe about the existence of Sanskrit literature. But only in stories we could find about the wisdom of Indian's very vaguely.

A scholar by name Voltaire in his work, *Essai Sur les Moeurs et l'Esprit des Nations* greeted the lore of the *EzourVedam* was brought to India which was an incomplete work. For this work a Jesuit missionary in 17 century a skepticism justified and indulged in when the discovery of the genuine Sanskrit literature was announced, and surviving into a present century. A philosopher by name Dugladstewart wrote an essay in which he endeavored to prove that not only Sanskrit literature but also Sanskrit language was a forgery made by the crafty Brahmans on the model of Greek after Alexander's conquest, but however this view was defended by another professor at Dublin as late as in the year 1838.

Here the first question arises why did the foreigners study Sanskrit? The answer is that Sanskrit gave the practical administrative needs of our Indian possessions. Warren Hastings who was the governor general at that time saw the advantage of ruling the Hindus as far possible according to their own laws and customs caused a number of Brahmans to prepare a digest based on the best ancient Indian legal authorities. An English version of this Sanskrit compilation made through the medium of a Persian translation, was published in 1776. The introduction to this work besides giving specimen's of the Sanskrit script for the first time supplied some trustworthy information about the ancient Indian language and literature. The earliest step however, towards making Europe acquainted with actual Sanskrit writings was taken by Charles Wilkins, who having at the instigation of Warren Hastings acquired a considerable knowledge of Sanskrit at Benares, and published translation of Bhagavadgita in 1785 or The song of the adorable one, and two years later a version or the well known collection of fables entitled Hitopadesa or Friendly Advice.

Sir William Jones was, however the pioneer of Sanskrit studies in the west, It was his brilliant and many sided orientalist who, during his too brief a career of eleven years in India, first aroused a keen interest in the study of Indian antiquity by his unwearied literacy activity and by the foundation of the Asiatic society of Bengal in 1784. Having rapidly acquired an accurate knowledge of Sanskrit, he published the translation of *Shakuntala* in 1789, the fine and beautiful Sanskrit drama by *Kalidasa*, which was greeted with enthusiasm by such judges as Herder and Goethe. This was followed by a translation of the code of Manu, the most important of the Sanskrit law books. To sir William Jones also belongs the credit of having been the first man who ever printed an edition of a Sanskrit text. This was a short lyrical poem entitled *Ruthusamhara* , or *cycle of the seasons*, which was published in the year 1792.

Another great person by Henry Thomas Colebroke , who was an extraordinary industrious combined with rare clearness of intellect and sobriety of judgment, handled the Sanskrit language and literature on scientific principles, he published many texts, translations and essays dealing with almost every branch of Sanskrit

learning, thus laying the solid foundation on which later scholars have built. When Colebrooke was starting his career in India during the opening years of the century, the romance of war led to the practical knowledge of Sanskrit being introduced on the Continent of Europe. Alexander Hamilton an English man who had acquired good knowledge of Sanskrit in India, happened to be passing through France on his way home in 1802. Hostilities breaking out afresh just then, a decree of Napoleon, directed against all English men the country, kept Hamilton as a prisoner in Paris. During his long involuntary stay in that city he taught Sanskrit to some French scholars and especially to the German romantic poet Friedrich Schlegel. As a result he published a work on `the language and the Wisdom of Indians`, in 1808. In his book he had created a revolution in the science of language by the introduction of the comparative and historical method, which in turn led to the foundation of the science of comparative philology by Franz Bopp and German in the year 1816. The work of Schlegel's work encouraged and created a zeal in the mind of the people in Germany, which happened a vast progress made since his day in this branch of learning has been mainly due to the labours of his countrymen.

In the early days of Sanskrit studies Europeans became acquainted only with that later phase of the ancient language of India which is familiar to the Pandit's and is commonly called classical Sanskrit. So it came about that the literature composed in this dialect engaged the attention of scholars almost exclusively down to the middle of the century. Colebrooke had, it is true that he had given very important and valuable information about the literature of the older period in the year 1805 in his essay on the *Vedas*. After a quarter century later, F.Rosen a German scholar, had conceived the plan of making this more ancient literature known to Europe from the rich collection of manuscripts at the East India House, and his edition of the first eighth of the *Rg-Veda* was actually published in the year 1838, soon after this, as he passed away Rudolf Roth, the founder of Vedic philology published his epoch making little book on *The Literature and History of the Veda* in the year 1846. With this the scholars were enlightened with knowledge of Vedas and literature and almost all the valuable works regarding Vedas was received by the Sanskritists and studies documented. The last five decades were made accessible in thorough trustworthy editions.

The study of Sanskrit literature deserves far more attention that it has yet received in this country. For in that ancient heritage, the languages, the religious and intellectual life and thought in short, the whole civilization of the Hindus who form the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Indian nation, have their roots. Among all the ancient literature of India the study of Sanskrit literature is, undoubtedly of intrinsic value and aesthetic merit or the study of human evolution. Its earliest period being much older than any product of Greek literature, presents a more primitive form of belief of religious ideas than any other literary monument of the world. Hence it came about that, just as the discovery of Sanskrit language led to the foundation the science of comparative philology an acquaintance with the literature of the Vedas resulted in the foundation of the science of comparative Mythology by Max Muller and Adalbert Kuhn.

Maxmuller, a German scholar passionate about classical languages like Greek, Latin, Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. He studied at Berlin with Friedrich Schelling and began to translate the Upanishad's for him and continued his research work in Sanskrit under Franz Bopp, who was the first systematic scholar of the Indo European languages. Schelling guided him to relate the history of language to the history of religion. With his guidance he published his first book '*Hitopadesha*' a collection of Indian fables in German.

In 1845, he went to Paris to study Sanskrit under 'Eugene Burnouf' who encouraged him to publish the complete *Rigveda*, by making use of the manuscripts available in England. He went to England in 1846 to study Sanskrit texts collected by the East India Company. His Connection with East India Company and with the Sanskrit scholars which began at Oxford University helped to establish his career in Britain, where he became a leading intellectual commentator on the culture of India. During this period Britain controlled his territory as a part of his empire which led to the complex exchanges between Indian and British intellectuals' culture, especially through his contact with *Brahma Samaj*.

During his period of studies the scholars began to see the development of language in relation to the development of culture. A group of Indo-European language began to lead to much speculation about the relationship between Greco Roman cultures and the Vedic culture of India was considered as the ancestor of European classical cultures. The Scholars compared the European and Asian languages to reconstruct the earliest form of the root language. The vedic Sanskrit was considered to be the root for the Indo-European languages.

MaxMuller completely dedicated himself completely to the study of the Sanskrit language. He strongly believed that the study of Vedic culture is very much necessary to provide a key for the development of Pagan European religion. He studied the scripture of the Rigveda and translated Rigveda Samhitha authored by Sayanacharya in the 14 century from Sanskrit to English. He was very much impressed by the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa on Vedantic philosophy and wrote several essays and books about him.

The western scholars developed interest in philosophy of Upanishad. Max Muller believed that Upanishad philosophy can be linked to the primitive henotheism of early Vedic Brahmanism from where it was evolved. He persuaded East India Company to complete the critical edition of Rig-Veda in 1874 and completed it.

Griffith a Sanskrit scholar, was initially educated at West minister school and then at Uppingham. He continued his studies at Queens College and at Oxford University where he entered as a commoner and graduated in BA. At Oxford he became a student of prof. Horace Heyman Wilson and earned Boden the Sanskrit scholarship and continued his study of Sanskrit till the end of his life. He became professor of English literature at Benaras Government College. He got a very rapid promotion and became the Headmaster of the college. He was a sports person who encouraged Indian students. In addition to this he was also incharge of the Anglo-Sanskrit Department and was appointed as inspector of school in Benaras circle. The First eight years of stay in India he devoted fulltime to learn Sanskrit and Hindi which was widely spoken in Northern India, under Pandit Ram Jason the head of the Sanskrit teacher of the college.

In 1852 He composed 'Specimen of Old Indian poetry'. Containing the selection of translated various rhyming meters from the two great epics 'Ramayana and Mahabharatha', He also translated Kalidasa's Sakuntala and Kumarasambhavam as 'The Birth of war God'. In 1853 Griffith came to India and spent his whole life in studying and working on Sanskrit literary works. He was attracted by the literary rather side than the linguistic side of Sanskrit. In 1866 he founded 'Pandit' a Sanskrit literary monthly journal at Benaras College and edited the journal for about eight years. And he composed 'Idylls' from the Sanskrit, similar to Sakuntala his first book. In 1868, He translated and published some scenes from the Ramayana and translated full Ramayana of Valmiki in rhyming octosyllabic completes occasionally varied by other meters in about five volumes in 1875. He studied Persian and published a version of 'Yusuf' and 'Zuleika, which was his only work on the translation other than Sanskrit.

After his retirement he translated 'Rigveda' or Veda of hymns, which represent the higher religion of ancient Indo-Aryan' entitled 'Hymns of the Rigveda' with a popular commentary in four volumes in 1893 translated 'Samaveda' concerned with the rituals of 'Soma' and 'Hymns of Atharvana veda' mainly consisting of magical spells in 1895-96 and the text of the 'white yajurveda' or sacrificial veda in 1899 at Benaras. These translations of Griffith abandoned rhymes and rendered each verse by one syllabically harmonizing with the original and generally divided into corresponding hemistiches. His command over the poetical diction enabled him to reproduce the format split of the ancient hymns better than by means of prose or of rhyming verse. His method of interpretation is excellent it is partly mediaeval. The Western Research Scholars are supplemented by investigations of his own. His work cannot be reckoned authoritative but they are the only versions that present the general spirit of ancient hymns to the English reader. He was not only the most voluminous but also the best translator of ancient Indian poetry who has no parallel form Great Britain.

Conclusion: Thus Indian thoughts deeply influenced the German transcendentalists and they learnt and translated many Sanskrit books to English which have become guidance even today for upcoming learners. This developed many pioneers of the Romantic movement in England and America.

India benefitted in her turn by contact with European minds. The application of western methods of study to oriental literature had an intensely stimulating effect. The Vedas were no longer part of a mysterious ritual, the very meaning of which was forgotten, but living works to be interpreted and studied like the Greek and Latin classics. But after the invent of Britishers' to India many drastic changes took place and those changes are enjoyed by us even today.

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