

Relevance of Sanskrit in Contemporary Society

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Introduction

I have chosen to talk about the relevance of Sanskrit in today's society. In fact I have been thinking about this often, for the last 10 years. To tell you the truth, until I was doing my PhD, I was learning, writing examinations and talking about Sanskrit using several other languages such as Tamil, English and Hindi. That is what most of us do when it comes to Sanskrit. Yet we pass judgments about Sanskrit, we discuss about how important Sanskrit is, we discuss as to what is good in Sanskrit and what is not good in Sanskrit – everything in some other language, usually in one's own '*Matrubhasha*' and predominantly in English. I was also doing that.

Only when I was doing my PhD I happened to acquire some knowledge in Sanskrit, and ever since then, after I finished my PhD, the first question that naturally came to my mind was – 'why do we need Sanskrit?' I personally liked it; I personally enjoyed whatever little I have understood. I am not a Sanskrit scholar – let me clarify. But whatever little I have understood and have gone through in the last 10-12 years – there was one question that was ringing in my mind all the time, 'Do we need Sanskrit? And, if we need Sanskrit, what do we need it for?'

So it is only natural that I broached the subject with anybody who was willing to talk about it. What I am presenting today is, in some sense, an accumulation of my thoughts arising out of these discussions. I have discussed these issues with my students; I have discussed these in my house; I have discussed these with my colleagues in the Indian Institute of Management; I have discussed these with professionals belonging to different areas like management consultants, software and so on. In some sense what I am going to present today represents a certain evolution of my thought in this subject. I would think that it continuously evolves in my mind. I personally don't think that I have reached any substantive conclusion or opinion on this particular issue, but what I would like to share with you is what appears to be a reasonable way of putting the pros and cons of the subject in the society and it being so, what does it mean, and what do we do? So that is going to be the broad context in which I intend to spend the next 45 - 50 minutes, or one hour, depending on the interest.

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Role of Sanskrit – Alternative perspectives

Let me start by telling you that one can get a good idea of the dominant view by arranging a panel discussion on the lecture theme. Arrange a panel discussion on this theme – ‘Role of Sanskrit Today’, and invite the best set of people for the panel, it can be well known personalities, the who’s who of India...it can be politicians, it can be intellectuals from various professions, it can be people whom you can call the ‘common man’. I am connected in a very small way, with several sets of these people...not the politicians of course. I have been able to elicit their views on this subject in an informal sense.

I would think that six or seven dominant patterns are likely to emerge from such a discussion. Let me first state what those are. I am interested only in stating all these...I am not here to discuss it one way or the other...that is not my stated objective, but I would like to show to you as to what kind of treatment we have for Sanskrit.

The first and the most important and dominant theme, in the last two to three years is that if you talk anything about Sanskrit, then it is immediately branded as the saffron agenda – saffronising the society, or that you are communalising the society – probably there is a political spectrum to that. You know, there is one dominant group, which talks about it – I suspect that the general public does not talk about it. So if you put that group into the discussion, sooner than later, you will see that that is one stream of thought and a possible direction that the discussion will go into.

There is a second dimension, which I have seen...which is again found in the political mainstream, but I also see it amongst the professionals – there the discussion sways towards concluding that anything that we talk about Sanskrit, or anything that we talk about 2000 plus years there is a level of discomfort. When we make a reference to that, it is perceived as a general and sustained attempt towards mere glorification of the past – an unqualified glorification of the past. That is another prominent argument that I have seen in recent times.

What is interesting is that people who make such observations and hold on to these kinds of arguments, more often than not, do not even know what Sanskrit is about and what it contains and what it does not contain. And as many of us do, they rely on secondary sources and so they even take decisions on the basis of secondary sources. That is the second perspective on what Sanskrit is all about.

There is a third perspective, which is...I put it as broadly in the domain of religion. You know, if you look at religion as business, used by the merchants of religion, for them obviously Sanskrit could be viewed as a means for propagating the religion. The question is can Sanskrit be a vehicle for propogating all religions? Unfortunately, it does not appear to be so. Whether you like it or not, it appears that there is a great deal of Hindu colour to anything that has been done using Sanskrit as the vehicle...whether you like it or not, that is what it is. So the merchants of religion look at Sanskrit as a major threat

and may have vested interest in not allowing Sanskrit to regain its lost glory. So that is one perspective, which I have come across.

Then of course, there are many other themes. If you approach the professionals and the general public, and if you get to tap their mind, which I have tried, in small groups here and there, then other interesting dimensions about Sanskrit emerge. Again in that group, in that section of society, the most dominant view that seems to emerge is that Sanskrit is after all a collection of mantras, religious texts and a set of dos and don'ts...a vehicle to be used during rituals. ...you know, Sanskrit means to many, 'Vishnu Sahasranama Parayana', or a rule book specifying what to eat, what not to, when etc. – that kind of an approach.

If you ask many they will say Sanskrit is required because evening one hour and morning half hour, we use Sanskrit - that is the purpose of Sanskrit. It is for rituals, it is for a long list of do's and don'ts. You know, we can talk about Manu Smriti, you can talk about *Parashara Smriti*. There are several papers written – available in some web sites about Manu Smriti and so on...which we are aware. I am also not getting into it, I am only trying to tell you what things are possible. So this view of Sanskrit essentially means a very uninteresting journey, which relies on a conditioned path with a whole lot of dos and don'ts.

I would say that a vast majority of the population would fall into these categories. I do not know whether it is 80% or even 90%...all that I know is that a vast majority fit loosely in what I have covered so far. But there are quite a few people in our society who seem to think that, yes Sanskrit is perhaps something interesting...may be there is something useful. But then, I again see two-three different views of the use of Sanskrit and its role even in that.

Futility of using translated works

The first one is, “Yes, there seems to be something interesting, although personally I do not know. I have reasons to believe that there is something very useful, something very interesting. But after all you know, you can translate everything into English, or you translate into some other language, Kannada, Marathi or Tamil or Malayalam or Telugu, and we can solve the problem.” This is one dominant argument. Until three years back I thought that there was some merit in this argument. But slowly I started losing my belief, and lost the charm of accepting this argument and to cap all these, I attended a two-day conference on *Ayurveda*, last year in Bangalore, in the Rajiv Gandhi Medical University, Bangalore. It was a big eye-opener for me.

This conference was interesting for two reasons: First is that the conference's objective was that we should inculcate a certain amount of scientific inquiry in the minds of *Ayurvedic* practitioners – that is the link today – to take *Ayurveda* at par with allopathy. In *Ayurveda*, if you get a medicine in a piece of paper or in a bottle, you don't even know the formulation, you don't even know what is the research that has gone behind it. We are so much used to these in the other systems of medicine, and particularly in allopathic

system. Slowly *Ayurveda* is also getting into it, but scientific research...establishing empirical research is very important in the field of medicine. So one of the purposes of that conference was to teach them and educate them on statistics, research and methodology – how you observe sample cases, and observe data and advance your understanding of illnesses and cures. I am sure all these things have been preserved one way or the other, but we have to learn to substantiate from that. That was one of the objectives of the conference.

The second objective was, they brought three *Talapatras* (palm leaves manuscripts) from the Oriental Research Institute, Mysore, these texts on *Ayurveda*² written sometime in 1200 AD or so...I don't remember the date exactly, and the idea was that during the two days of the conference, it will also be translated. In fact on the second day...for most part of the second day, the activity was centered on translation. I happen to observe this process and it was an eye-opener for me.

The whole conference participants were divided into three groups – because each group was required to work on one *talapatra*. There were three sub-groups in each of these. The first group consisted of Sanskrit pandits who could very well interpret what is given to them and could offer whatever explanations required of the Sanskrit verses. The second group consisted of *Ayurvedic* practitioners, because that is their domain knowledge, and they are specialists. And there was a third group of people who were experts in reading the *talapatra*, which itself required some amount of skill. I am told that the author dictates the script to a *talapatra* writer. There are certain poetic influences of the writer...so the people who read the *talapatra* get accustomed to understanding the subjective inferences and subjective deviations that are potentially possible in the script itself. So I am told that the third group is required for this.

Now, after all that I got a feeling that they were not very successful in carrying out that work. Why I am saying this is that translation is not as easy as it appears to be. It is not just taking one line from a text of a particular language and then sitting with a dictionary and take a one for one matching and then come up with the translation. There are plenty of examples, I don't have to say – you can try it for yourself. Take a very common saying in your mother tongue and try translating it into English, or try translating it into Sanskrit or some other language. So what I am trying to say is that this business of saying, 'you can translate what ever is in Sanskrit into some other language and solve the problem', will not solve the problem. It can actually create a whole set of problems which we may have to solve.

But even if for a moment that seems to be a viable course of action, we need some Sanskrit scholars to do it, which is becoming a very difficult problem these days. In any case we are making an important assumption of having people who know Sanskrit, and then only comes the issue of translation. So that is one group, which seems to think that we will translate everything into English and that is it – we have translations of the Bhagavad-Gita etc. Let me tell you, it is not so. I used to attend a series of lectures in Vedanta in Madras at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. These lectures have been going on

² The texts are Shata Sloki, Vaidya Kalpa Druma, Anjana Nidhanam.

there for the last 40 years – every Saturday and Sunday, 7.00 - 8.00 you can go and attend lectures.

Now if you take a script, a simple *stotra* like Adi Shankara's *Soundarya Lahiri*, and think about interpreting, translating into another language (say one mother tongue). I recall how the pandit who was giving us the discourses on *Soundarya Lahiri* was doing this. There is the 22nd *stotra* of *Soundarya Lahiri*,

भवानि त्वं दासे मयि वितर धृष्टिं चक्रुणाम्

इति स्तोतुं वाञ्छन् कथयति भवानि त्वं इति यः । ...

He gave discourses for this sloka alone for nearly 14 hours, which means, 7 we have spent seven weekends and dwelt upon those two couplets, which have formed that *shloka*. On the word 'Bhavani' alone we could spend two hours. I have had similar experiences in his Upanishad Lecture series and in another popular *stotra* of Adi Shankara, known as *Shivananda Lahiri*. There is the 61st *shloka* in *Shivananda Lahiri*, which has an apt definition of bhakti. It is a beautiful *shloka* starting with अंकोलं

निजबीज सन्ततिः अयस्कान्तो पलं सूचिका ... We have spent about 7 – 8 hours on these.

So what I am trying to say is that our scriptures are written, our ancient works are written in such a way that there is an enormous scope, there is enormous room there to approach and analyse them from various dimensions – only then can you really understand them. It is not as if a four-line *shloka* and a four-line English translation of it is sufficient. It doesn't work like that. So all this translation business is just for people who use it for the purpose of keeping it in the bookshelf – not for advancing ones own knowledge from them. So those arguments are not going to make sense.

But there is one last argument – which I also come to. There is a set of people who believe that translating into other languages is not useful. They agree with me that when one tries to translate, you probably lose the essence of the original. But they have a different story to tell me. Sanskrit is a dead language, and Sanskrit is difficult to speak or revive. This is the last argument that I have come across. So you see, this is what we have to take.

Sanskrit has a rich repository for secular applications too

With this line of argument, I don't know how I can counter argue. I should somehow say that don't take this perspective, I should be ideally be in a position to point to something much more interesting than all these views that will compel you to look at Sanskrit. I would try and make my honest attempt to do that, as much as I can do. I will try to address some of these concerns. I am not going to address every one of them; I would certainly address some of these concerns by way of some of the thought processes that have been going through my mind.

And I would like to show to you that the reality could be a little different. But before doing that I must also tell you that there is one disturbing trend I see when we talk about Sanskrit. Any discussion on Sanskrit seems to have a certain undercurrent of religion, with which we look at it. Today I am not going to put the lens of religion. I am a very religious person – that is a different issue. In this platform I am not putting this lens of religion to look at Sanskrit. I would like to argue, that pursuing Sanskrit could make sense even if you keep the spiritual contributions, which are immeasurable, aside for a moment. Even if we look at Sanskrit through only a materialistic plane I feel that there is still a lot to take from there.

There is another important reason for me to put away the lens of religion, spirituality and philosophy for a moment when looking at the Sanskrit language. When more than one third of the population does not know where the next meal is going to come from, I can't go and talk to them about the Upanishads and so on. That will not lead to any solution, nor will it make people think about the usefulness of Sanskrit. Alternatively, I would like to approach it from a very utilitarian point of view, which can make it immediately appealing. So if you take such a perspective and look at Sanskrit, I personally feel that it will enjoy a great deal of credibility, and that is what I would like to leave as a message at the end of this talk. So the one feeling that I get these days, very frequently, is that in order to advance this Sanskrit knowledge it is extremely important to learn and use Sanskrit in a much more active sense than what we do today. We need to change the perspective with which we approach the language.

Let us have a clean slate approach to the language, and ask for ourselves, what is this language going to give us? If we don't have any of the so-called preconceptions about Sanskrit we would like to still find out what does Sanskrit really offer to us? I would ideally like to look at three important dimensions in today's talk. The first dimension is – what does Sanskrit offer to us? I am going to spend considerable time on this issue. I would hopefully convince you that there is something reasonably interesting in Sanskrit.

Sanskrit is hard to learn, revive?

There are the other two dimensions, about which let me briefly touch upon before I take up the first dimension for an elaborate analysis. There is this mindset among a majority that Sanskrit is dead. We never pause for a while, stop for a while, and think about this issue. Six years back we wanted to take Sanskrit to USA in a big way. At that time some efforts were on to gather some statistics about the status of Sanskrit. It was mind boggling for myself. I was involved in that with a few well wishers and I hope I can share with you some of the facts we had gathered at that time on another occasion. However, the exercise helped us to show that Sanskrit is still very much alive. We have not talked about it, we have not looked at it in that perspective before.

And thirdly, I would also like to tell you about the revival that has been happening in the last 20 years – particularly in terms of the technology by which we are trying to learn and communicate Sanskrit. Apparently it has been addressed with seriousness in a different

approach towards the teacher and the taught. I have been a beneficiary of this approach. I will look forward to sharing some of those ideas with you in the future through another lecture.

Contemporary applications of Sanskrit

There is an interesting database called GISTNIC. GISTNIC is in Hyderabad. It is called 'General Information System Terminal', and NIC stands for National Informatics Centre. They are doing yeoman service in e-governance. GISTNIC has a database on traditional sciences. In fact I was looking at it a little bit while I was preparing for this, and to my surprise I found that there were 10 divisions, in which they have classified Sanskrit literature – 10 distinct divisions, and each one of them has 10 subdivisions. So there were 100 menus. You can go through the 100 menus to understand what kind of classifications are there, and what kind of contributions have been made in the field of Sanskrit. I will just show you a small, most well known departments where you have very substantial information.

Sanskrit and Health

The World Health Organization (**WHO**), has in 1948 defined health as follows. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. In fact, until then the definition of health was primarily confined to physical condition of the body. It did not include the well being of the mind and the spirit as part of health. But the increase in diabetes and blood pressure and other such diseases, which are related to stress are traced to the state of the mind of an individual. This led several organizations to tinker with the definition of health. The widely accepted WHO definition was expanded in the 1970's and 1980's as other components were included: intellectual, environmental, and spiritual health. The balance of all these components is based on the principle of self-responsibility.

In contrast to this let us understand the conclusion our ancestors had already made about health. Here is one definition of health from *Sushru Samhita*:

समदोषः समाग्निश्च समधातुमलक्रियाः ।

प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रियमनाः स्वस्थ इत्याभिधीयते ॥

While the first line in the above *sloka* relates to physical parameters of the health as the westerners have so far done, the second line clearly extends it to spiritual, philosophical and mental dimensions to define health. We understood that health is not just physical health. Physical health after all is an antenna for the mental health. You enjoy good health when you feel good not in bodily terms, but also in terms of your mind; in terms of your predisposition; in terms of your spirit; in terms of *Buddhi*, *Ahankara* and so on. That is the contribution you get from *Ayurveda*. And I am told that the market for *Ayurveda* products in Germany is growing at a rate, which is significant.

In fact there is a whole branch of science in the *Upanishads* and the Vedas, which has purely prescriptions from a materialistic point of view. I am talking about a materialistic utility – the well being of the mind; the well being of the body; there are treatments suggested; there are extensive references to surgeries that can be done; there are references to many diseases which we call as ladies diseases – they are all referred to in *Ayurveda*. That is what I learnt in the two day *Ayurveda* conference, from some of the presentations.

I merely wanted to bring to your attention some of the areas in which we have plenty of information, which we are not tapping properly. But the most important thing is that there are a lot of interesting references, a lot of interesting issues raised, and documented knowledge in the *Ayurvedic* texts. In fact, we are losing a great deal by not practicing *Ayurveda* on a daily basis. I read a news item reported in financial express on Monday the 4th August 2003, which confirms my fear on this count. I will come to it a little later when I talk about intellectual property rights.

Sanskrit and Mathematical Sciences

One of the most important contributions, I would say, that India has made to mankind, is in the field of mathematics and astronomy. I have been coming across very interesting references and news items about how superior our mathematical system has been and how superior our astronomical calculations were. For example, in Bukka's court, Sayana was a minister, it must have been in the 14th century, if I am right. It appears that he has calculated the speed of light as 2202 Yojanas in half a *Nimesha*. There is another source that pints to Rig Veda which exactly has the same calculation for speed of light as evidenced by the sloka:

योजनानां सहस्रद्वे द्वेशते द्वेच एकेन निमिषार्धेन क्रमेण नमोस्तु ते

And you know, *Yojana* and *Nimesha* can be related to modern day SI units in the following manner:

1 Yojana = 4 Kose

1 Kose = 8000 British yards

1 British Yard = 0.9144 metres

Therefore 2202 *Yojanas* = 2202x4x8000x0.9144 = 6443228.16 metres.

Similarly, we have a good description of *Nimesha* in Srimad Bhagavata as follows:

15 Nimishas = 1 Kashta

15 Kashtas = 1 Laghu

30 Kaghus = 1 Muhurta

30 Muhurtas = 1 Diva-Ratri (i.e. 24 hours)

Using the above, we can similarly show that half *Nimesha* = 0.213333 seconds

Using these, I calculated the speed of light using this and it come to 3.02026367×10^8 metres/sec, which is very close to what we have computed with modern day high tech gadgets. The error of approximation is to a large extent attributed to the approximations in the conversion measures used above. He said 2202 *Yojanas* in half a *Nimesha*!

Vedic Mathematics is another great thing. There is so much controversy about Vedic Astrology. I don't want to dwell on that. But I happened to study Vedic mathematics, which is equiovalent to LKG or UKG of Vedic Mathematics, but I was impressed by whatever I have learnt in that course. And after that I bought the book, 'Vedic Mathematics, by Jagadguru Swami Sri Bharati Krishna Tirthaji Maharaja, The Shankaracharya of Puri Mutt³, which is one-sixteenth of what he proposed to write. And what I read in two courses in Veda Ganitha Adhyayana Vedike, the entire two courses' material is contained in the first 15 to 30 pages of his book containing over 350 pages book. That is what Vedic Mathematics is all about.

Even in the two-part course that I studied, I discovered some amazing mathematical principles and unique and simple methods of dealing with what appears as a complex task in modern day mathematics. If you don't want to believe me, I will take one minute and show you how you divide one by forty nine, because some of the things we will appreciate better only when we see. I will divide one by forty nine and show you how you get that number.

It is a very interesting thing, and that is why I want to do that. If you ask what is one by forty nine, I start writing like this....that is all. Now I can tell you what is one by forty nine. According to vedic mathematics one by forty nine is nothing but 0.020408163265306122448979591836734693877551. This set of digits will repeat endlessly. If you have a calculator, you will see only the first six digits, or first eight digits – not more than that. The most interesting thing is that in modern day mathematics, when we divide a number by another we arrive at the answer from left to right, whereas in Vedic Mathematics you arrive at the numbers from right to left. There are very interesting properties of 99; there are very interesting properties of 9 and 0 and so on. I thought I would just show you this to just tell you...this is a starter lesson in Vedic Mathematics that I had done. And what I saw/learnt is, as I told you very meagre...ten pages of a 200 page book.

So coming back to our ancestors contributions...the point I am trying to come to is, today I hear so much about mental mathematics. I hear about ALOHA; I hear about the Abacus. But let me tell you, there are amazing structures, and there are amazing principles, which are buried in Vedic Mathematics. So much so that one Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore student, after finishing his MBA, started a site called Magical Methods dot com, where he says 'I will teach you Vedic Mathematics so that you can pass your CAT and other examinations without much difficulty'. So he has made a business out of Vedic Mathematics in a small way. This is the point I have been trying to come to.

³ The latest edition of this book was brought out by Motilal Banrsidas in the year 1992.

Sanskrit and Astronomy

Our rishis have estimated the life of the universe to be 8 billion years, which took a long time for the scientists to even think of a number like 8 billion years. They are approaching those critical numbers now. There is a famous *Brahmana* called *Shatapata Brahmana*. *Shatapata Brahmana* is one in which there is a description of Rohini as the favourite wife to Chandra. As mythology goes, Chandra out of the 27 stars likes Rohini the most. So in *Shatapata Brahmana* all these are explained and how Rohini was special to Chandra. But in the process of that description, there are references to the night sky – there are references to the constellations. There is a professor in the University of Memphis who has used a software called Skymap Pro, which can plot the night sky between 5000 BC and 8000AD in any part of the world. So he has used that software and dated that particular Shatapata brahmana in the period of 3000 BC to 3029 BC.

Mahabaratha has more than 200 astronomical references. Many of you may or may not know that in a matter of 13 days, when the war was going on, there were two eclipses. There was another eclipse 36 years after the war when Krishna was in Dwaraka. Like this there are 200 interesting astronomical references. There was a conference in Bangalore in the month of January 2003, which I attended, organized by the Mythic Society in which they were attempting to date the Mahabaratha war using all these astronomical references. The papers that were presented were highly scholarly. The authors used professional scientific methodology, and they were all talking of a date around 3000 BC to 2000 BC. The date is very wide, but what is important here is that methodologies are interesting, the results are interesting and to arrive at a particular date will take more time.

Why I am saying all this? I am saying all this to only scratch the surface and tell you that our contribution to astronomy is extraordinary, and if at all we have scratched, we have scratched not even the tip of the iceberg. We have not been able to do so because we don't have enough scholars and enough professionals, in astronomy who know Sanskrit. I believe the next 30 years of this country should be characterized by people, professionals like us, who should actually learn Sanskrit in a big way and unearth all these scriptures.

If I take every one of these, I can really spend a lot of time. I am not going to do that today, but let me tell you that there is a lot of repository of knowledge, which has not been understood ...not even the tip of the iceberg has been scratched today. But we produce a long list of how useless this language is, without knowing what it is.

I remember one of the parables of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. A bee makes a lot of noise as long as it sits on the flower and begins to suck the honey. Once it starts eating honey; there is no noise. The same way, without tasting this nectar of Sanskrit in its entirety, we are making a lot of noise. It is only required that we spend our time drawing from this great source, which we have never attempted.

Sanskrit and Management

I teach a very interesting concept called creating a learning organisation, because it is the “in thing” for business organisations. Being in the institute of management I am supposed to do all that. And I always use this couplet, which beautifully summarises the concept of learning. It is a beautiful couplet, perhaps about 1000 years old.

आचार्यात् पादमादत्ते पादं शिष्यः स्वमेधया ।

पादं सब्रह्मचारिभ्यो पादं कालक्रमेण च ॥

The idea is that there are four quarters of learning – ‘आचार्यात् पादम्’, that is, teacher can teach only one fourth of your knowledge ‘पादम् शिष्यः स्वमेधया’, that is, there is enormous emphasis on self-reflection and thinking. If people refuse to think, and internalize and do some reflection on the ideas they have discussed, then 25% learning is gone. And with so much emphasis in the last 10 years in the business schools and corporates, on what is called small group activities, on team effort – there are potential opportunities for learning during the team exercises. Interestingly, the sloka says that

पादम् सब्रह्मचारिभ्यो In a gurukula, the brahmacharis are there, because they sit together and collectively discuss the subject matter, they get 25% learning. So there is a likelihood that 25% learning improves because they are a team – learning in a team, understanding the dynamics of it.

After considerable research, during the 1990s management researchers concluded that learning is a continuous process. Whereas we said 1000 years ago that ‘पादम् कालक्रमेण च’, that is, there is a continuous learning, which will happen, and even quantified its contribution to be roughly one fourth. We have been teaching this in the past 10 years, and that learning is a continuous process. ‘Kaala kramena ----’, you don’t get it just like that; there is no short cut. There is a way of learning, which has its own time and experience and so on.

I am using this couplet in my learning organisations lecture simply because I stumbled on it accidentally not that I systematically found it out. I find that nothing can communicate the idea better in my lectures on learning than this *sloka*. I am sure other professionals have such experiences of discovering the treasures in Sanskrit rather accidentally.

In fact I find *Prashnopanishad* useful for many reasons when it comes to management principles. The first and the most important reason is that when I was a student of management, I was always told, that the earliest known examples and ideas on organisation, decentralization, delegation of power and structure came from Roman

church. Whenever I read a book, those nice books by foreign authors they reinforce this idea.

Let me tell you, the earliest living example of what is called decentralisation and delegation is vividly available in *Prashnopanishad*. In the third chapter the guru (in response to the question raised by Kausalya) talks about ‘Prana, Apana, Vyana, Udhana, and Samana’, which has a clear reference that ‘one person cannot handle it and so I am dividing it’ – the idea of decentralization and delegation. Let us look at the definition of Vyana in *Prashno Upanishad*.

हृदि ह्येष आत्मा ॥ अत्रैतत् एकशतं नाडिनां
तासां शतं शतमेकैकस्यां द्वासप्तर्तिं द्वासपततिः
प्रतिशाखा नाडि सहस्राणि भवन्ति
असु व्यानः चरन्ति ॥

And look at this particular phrase – it says, ‘हृदि ह्येष आत्मा’. The atma is the heart; it also about the nervous system, actually. The ultimate spirit sits here, and how does it branch out? It says, ‘अत्रैतत् एकशतं नाडिनां – there are a hundred and one nerves, ‘nadis’, which are emerging out of it. ‘Ekashatam’, hundred and one nadis are emerging out of it. Then it goes, ‘तासां शतं शतमेकैकस्यां द्वासप्तर्तिं’ – out of each one of these nadis you get hundred, and from each one of them seventy two thousand.

See, the disciple is asking, ‘what is this prana, dhyana, udana and samana?’ When the teacher discusses about vyana, this is the description, and if you multiply all that, you realize that this the nervous system that they were talking about, and now it is closely verified by microscopic studies.

So we are talking about 72 crores; 72 lakhs nadis, which are entirely spread in the body – that is what the guru says. How are they trying to make such observations? That means there was some systematic way of looking at things; there was a spirit of scientific inquiry; there was a way of documenting all that - that is what I am trying to show you.

You know, in *Prashnopanishad* there are prescriptions on population control. In the first chapter it clearly says, ‘ये मिथुनं उत्पादयन्ते ते एव प्रजापतिव्रतं चरन्ति – people should have only two children (मिथुनं) clearly says the *Prashnopanishad*.

I will take one more example from the Bhagawad Gita. You know, Bhagawad Gita is a vast treasure and one can talk about all the time, but I will take just one example. If you ask, ‘who is a good leader?’...in fact I am using all these examples because in management school we keep talking about leadership in corporate and business houses and even in public policy domains. If you ask, ‘who is a good leader?’, nothing can be as powerful as this answer. You see, in Chapter-14 verses 24 – 25, where the verses are,

समदुःखसुखः स्वस्थः समलोष्टाश्मकांचनः ।

तुल्यप्रियाप्रियो धीरः तुल्यनिन्दात्मसंस्तुतिः ॥ १४.२४ ॥

मानापमानयोस्तुल्यः तुल्यो मित्रारिपक्षयोः ।

सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी गुणातीतः स उच्यते ॥ १४.२५ ॥

What is happening in several corporate and other organisations in the world is personal flattery. People do these things to get personal and professional favours. Those succumb to these lose their credibility as the leader. They can be good managers, but they can be never be a good leader. ‘तुल्यनिन्दात्मसंस्तुतिः’ – here Krishna says if somebody personally flatters you, ‘आत्मसंस्तुतिः’, which is like saying, ‘you are king; you are the greatest person’, etc. and even if somebody talks against you, ‘निन्दा’, even if they completely disagree with you; even if they foul on you, you should not lose your balance. If somebody personally flatters you or if somebody disagrees with you, take it evenly. I agree, if we can find somebody like that, he would be truly great.

Look at another one. It is even more interesting. He says, ‘मानापमानयोस्तुल्यः ---’ – this is the greatest requirement for emotional stability? These days, you know, what we call the emotional quotient is being tested. So, who is a good leader? A leader is somebody who is not emotional. ‘If you do something great; don’t lose your balance. Even if you have lost everything; don’t lose your balance. You try to know how to keep your nerves.

Krishna further says, look at people beyond their group affiliations, ‘मित्रारिपक्षयोः’. Don’t see whether he belongs to the opposition group or my group. Look at the objectivity of the whole discussion – great leaders share these attitudes. Krishna says people have all these – ‘गुणातीतः स उच्यते’. Such a person is said to have conquered these weaknesses. So we have a good explanation gleaned from this to identify the leader.

So you know, there is so much, which I can write even for my management articles. I try to see practice of management from these scriptures, and what I have done is,

accidentally stumbled upon some of these. One day when I was reading the Bhagawad Gita these parallels struck me, though I have not gone about it systematically.

Sanskrit has a definite role to play

Now are you trying to tell me that hundreds of such references that you see in several of our vedic texts are all imaginations of people? Are you trying to tell me that these are all thousands of strange coincidences? In case there is just one reference like this, then I can understand that it may be a strange coincidence or a spurious correlation. But we see that there are hundreds of such passages in every text that we have. Are you trying to tell me that these are all just wild imaginations of people? I am a serious person with little bit of logical thinking and research. I have a background of research. I will not buy such an argument. I would like to think that there ought to have been some systematic process behind creating all these interesting knowledge.

So what is dead? Our entire sanskriti is in Sanskrit only. Our entire tradition is in Sanskrit only – whether you like it or not, that is a fact. We will get a lot of useful material from the literature, if only we look at it seriously. But more important than this, let me also tell you, that there are very important things, which are emerging in the so-called knowledge economy. See the whole world today talks about knowledge economy. And in my personal opinion, in the next 30- 40 years, the geo-political and economic conflicts would be on the basis of how much intellectual property rights a nation owns.

I read a new report that appeared in The Financial Express on August 4th 2003, which read as follows: The US patent and trademarks office (USPTO) has granted three patent rights (Nos. 6.410.596, 6.541.522, 6.542.511) to the \$ 109 million bio-pharmaceutical company Insmad Inc. based in Richmond, Virginia for its novel invention on pigeon pea extracts (known as Arhar or red gram in India) for treating Diabetes. This Virginia based pharmaceutical firm has stated that it uses a variation of Arhar for treating diabetes. All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) recently have apparently consulted our *Ayurvedic* texts, where this idea of using Arhar for treating diabetes is extensively discussed, and is very much documented there. But the patent application did not mention any ancient text, but it mentioned some 1957 and 1968 journal references, and it was trying to show an apparent variation, for which they wanted to be given the intellectual property rights.

You may know that there is something called ‘Gomeya’. You know, in traditional families, before the start of any rituals the *Karta* or the *Yajamana* is supposed to have ‘Gomeya’, which is supposed to be made of some five ingredients like the urine of cow, ‘gomutra’, and cow dung, ghee, curd and milk – it was called ‘pancha gavya’. This was a normal practice even 20 years before, but I hardly see that happening now. But you may not know that CSIR Lab in Lucknow have obtained a US patent for ‘Gomeya’, last year, for the simple reason that the cow’s urine has very special anti-bacterial properties, which are exploited by all pharmaceutical companies in the US. In this case we were fortunate that somebody from our side could patent it.

There is a German firm, which has patented the *Gayathri Mantra* – what it means is that everyday when I do the *Sandhya Vandanam*, I should pay them – fortunately I think India is excluded from that. Just as *Gayathri Mantra* the term ‘Veda’ has also been patented.

So what do we learn from all this? Leave alone any other reason, but surely in the next 50 years, the growth of a nation, as I understand this term as a person related to management, is going to be on the basis of the rights that it can claim on the repository of knowledge. And if we want to lay our hands on the traditional knowledge that we have in this country, it is obvious that we need Sanskrit. Not the translated pieces of works, but we need professionals who are experts in Sanskrit. Only then can we conclusively and unambiguously establish our credentials and make this possible.

According to the convenor of the national group on patent law, it is very easy to get patent rights on the basis of so called novelty. We must gather strong evidences from our traditional texts to challenge such patent rights. I do not see any other way of doing this except for professionals in various fields gaining proficiency in Sanskrit. Any other method will not only be inefficient but also frustrating.

So, what I am trying to come to is that there are enormous number of reasons for learning Sanskrit, which are exclusively outside the realm of religion: outside of the spiritual domain. In the pure secular sense, we need this language very much. Now having done this, the next question that comes forward is, people say that Sanskrit is dead. Ladies and Gentlemen, let me tell you that Sanskrit is not only alive but has gone through a fresh approach towards learning the language. I do not have much time to broach this subject today. It could be the subject matter for discussion on some other day.

I would end by saying that I have been a beneficiary of this new way of learning and developing the Sanskrit language. I hope some of you would seriously consider taking a clean state approach towards Sanskrit. Our hope of becoming a great nation and realising great dreams if the future and reclaiming the lost glory is inextricably linked to this central issue of reviving Sanskrit. Thank you for giving a patient hearing of my lecture. I also thank Sri Thirunarayana Trust for providing me an opportunity to share my thoughts on this subject.