

# AMARABHĀRATĪ

## *Saṃskṛtam and the Resurgence of Indian Civilization*

*The Greater India encompassed by Saṃskṛitam*

Daṇḍin the great Sanskrit poet and scholar (c.7<sup>th</sup> century) declared:<sup>1</sup>

*Saṃskṛtam nāma daivīvāk anvākyāta maharṣibhiḥ*  
*Saṃskṛtam* is the divine language as expounded by the ancient sages

Around the same time, I-tsing the renowned Chinese Buddhist Monk records that:<sup>2</sup>

Even in the Island of Pulo Condore (in the south) and in the country of Suli (in the north), people praise the Sanskrit Sutras [of Pāṇini]; How much more then should people of the Divine Land (China) and the Celestial Store House (India), teach the real rules of the language.

The Island of Pulo Condore is off the Vietnam coast in Southeast Asia and the country of Suli is Sogdiana, the region surrounding Samarqand, in Uzbekistan of Central Asia. It is said that I-tsing stayed in the capital of Srīvijaya (present day Palembang in Sumatra of Indonesia) for six months in 671 AD to learn Sanskrit Grammar. He then proceeded to India where he spent fourteen years. On his return journey he spent several years at Palembang so that he could translate the large number of Indian texts that he had collected. He mentions that the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghōṣa was as popular in Southeast Asia as it was in India. He also recommends that other Chinese Buddhists proceeding to India should break journey in Srīvijaya, for obtaining the necessary training in Sanskrit and Indian *acāra* as there were more than a thousand monks in Srīvijaya who “lived by the same rules as those prevailing in India”.

While the Central Asian regions were soon to lose their Indian cultural moorings, the capital of the Sumatran kingdom remained a centre of [Indian] learning for several centuries. We have for instance, “another Chinese source, recording that in 1017 envoys from thence brought bundles of Sanskrit books, folded between boards. The active pursuit of Indian learning is further also shown by the existence of texts dealing with grammar, prosody and lexicography, part of which have, though unfortunately in a more or less corrupted form, been handed down to us.”<sup>3</sup>

This extraordinary phenomenon of “Greater India” or “Further India” encompassing a large part of the Asian continent, where Sanskritic learning and public discourse

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<sup>1</sup> Daṇḍin, *Kavyādarśa*, 1.32

<sup>2</sup> I-tsing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago*, Tr. By J.Takakasu, Oxford 1896, p.169. Note that India was referred to as the Celestial Store House (of Wisdom) by the Chinese scholars.

<sup>3</sup> J.Gonda, *Sanskrit in Indonesia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New Delhi, 1973, p.181. Gonda is here citing the Chinese *History of the Sung Dynasty*.

flourished for several millennia, has baffled most of the modern scholars. Commenting on this, an American scholar remarks:<sup>4</sup>

The spread of Sanskrit happens not only with extraordinary speed over vast space, but in a way that seems quite without parallel in world history... What is created in the period that covers roughly the millennium between 200 or 300 and 1300 (when Angkor is abandoned) is a globalized cultural formation that seems anomalous in antiquity. It is characterized by a largely homogeneous political language of poetry in Sanskrit along with a range of comparable cultural political practices (temple building, city planning, even geographical nomenclature) throughout it ... a common, a Sanskrit culture.

In many regions of Southeast Asia this culture continued to flourish for several more centuries, and the vestiges of this culture can be seen all over Southeast Asia even today.

### *Saṁskṛitam and the Bhāṣās*

Another issue that continues to be an enigma for modern Indological scholarship is the symbiotic relation that has been maintained through the Indian history between the so called “cosmopolitan language”, Sanskrit, and the “vernaculars” or the regional Indian languages.<sup>5</sup> Around the time when Daṇḍin was extolling *Saṁskṛitam* as the *Daivīvāk* in Tamil Nadu, there was indeed a great efflorescence of Tamil literature. The great Tamil devotional corpus of the Vaiṣṇava Āḷvārs (the *Divyaprabandam*) and of the Śaiva Nāyanamārs (the *Tirumurai*), were universally accorded the scriptural status of the *Veda*. The renowned Vaiṣṇavite Ācārya Śrī Nāthamuni (c.8<sup>th</sup> century) declares:

*Namāmyahaṁ drāviḍavedasāgaram*  
I bow to the great ocean of Tamil Veda

The Āḷvārs themselves sang of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa as being both *Vaḍamoḷi* (Sanskrit) and *Tamiḷ-inbappa* (Tamil blissful song).<sup>6</sup> The tradition of *Ubhayaveda* incorporating both the *Saṁskṛita-Veda* and the *Tamiḷ-Veda* became a fully established philosophical doctrine from the time of Śrī Rāmānujācārya (c. 11<sup>th</sup> century). In *Acāryahrdayam*, a major

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<sup>4</sup> S Pollock, *The Cosmopolitan Vernacular*, J. Asian Studies, 57, 1998, p.12. An earlier paper on this by Pollock is titled, *The Sanskrit Cosmopolis 300 – 1300* and appeared in J E M Houben, Ed., *The Ideology and Status of Sanskrit*, Leiden, 1996, p. 197-247. What seems to be particularly intriguing to Pollock and other scholars is the fact that this globalization of Sanskrit culture was achieved without any imperial political conquest, colonization or religious proselytisation.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, use of the terms Cosmo-polis (the realm of citizens in the Greek city state or of the Roman “free men”) and “Vernacular” (the language of “Verna” the Roman household slave) are totally inappropriate in the Indian context.

<sup>6</sup> *Antamiḷinbappāvinai avvaḍamoḷiyai* (Kulaśekhara Āḷvār, *Perumāḷ Tirumoḷi* 1.4.). Similarly, we have Tirumaṅgai Āḷvār singing: *Sentirattamiḷosai vaḍasollāki* (*Thiruneḍundāṇḍagam* 4).

philosophical treatise of Sri-Vaishnavism written in the *Maṇipravāḷa* style<sup>7</sup>, Śrī Aḷagiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāḷ Nāyanār (c. 14<sup>th</sup> century), declares:<sup>8</sup>

*Vedam bahuvīdham.  
Idil Samskritam Drāviḍam engira pirivu Rigādi bhedaṁ pole  
Sentiratta Tamil engaiyāl Agastyamum Anādi*

Vedas are several.

The distinction between *Samskrita* and *Drāviḍa Vedas* is like that between Ṛk, Yajus etc.

Since the Āḷvārs have declared Śrīman Nārāyaṇa to be *Sentiratta Tamil* (expressive Tamil), the language of Agastya (Tamil) is also eternal.

Apart from the Tamil *Divyaprabandham* and *Tirumuṟai* which were regarded as *Veda*, there are indeed several great devotional works which have been accorded a similar status in Kannada (*Vacanas* of Vīraśaiva Saints), Marathi (*Jñāneśwarī* of Sant Jñāneśwar), Awadhi (*Rāmacaritamānas* of Goswāmī Sant Tulasīdās), etc., apart from *Śrī Guru Grantha Sāhīb* venerated by the Sikhs.

Some of the great Indian *Bhāṣās* such as Tamil and Kannada, developed technical literature in *Vyākaraṇa*, *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, *Jyotiṣa*, *Āyurveda* etc., by c 9<sup>th</sup> century, and when the regional polities emerged from around 11<sup>th</sup> century, these, as well as many other regional languages such as Telugu, Marathi etc., also became the languages of inscriptions and political discourse. But at the same time it was widely recognised that Sanskrit was the language of pan-Indian discourse. The Tamil savant Senāvāriyar (c.13<sup>th</sup> century) in his commentary on the ancient Tamil grammar *Tolkāppiyam*, states:<sup>9</sup>

*Vaḍasol ellātteyattirkum poduvāgalānum*  
Sanskrit indeed is common to all the countries

Modern scholars have not yet comprehended the symbiotic growth of Sanskrit and regional languages in the Indian tradition, as they are generally stuck with the models of raise of “vernacular” in Europe (at the expense of Latin) during the onset of European modernity. In this context it has been noticed that:<sup>10</sup>

Late medieval Europe and India differ profoundly on the question of language multiplicity. In the former, multilinguality is tainted with the

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<sup>7</sup> A style where Tamil words are interspersed with Sanskrit words even as ruby (*maṇi*) and coral (*pravāḷa*) are strung together in a necklace. There is a large corpus of Tamil *Maṇipravāḷa* literature, and similar *Maṇipravāḷa* style is found in Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam and even Javanese works.

<sup>8</sup> Aḷagiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāḷ Nāyanār, *Acāryahrdayam*, Sūtras 39-41.

<sup>9</sup> Senāvāriyar, Commentary on *Tolkāppiyam*, *Solladikāram* 9.5. Somewhat earlier, the 12<sup>th</sup> Century poet Śrīharṣa from Kanyākubja, in his epic-poem *Naiṣadhīyacarita*, describes how people from various countries who had gathered in Damayantī's *svayamvara*, communicated with each other in Sanskrit (*Naiṣadhīyacarita* X.34).

<sup>10</sup> S.Pollock, *Indian in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000-1500*, Daedalus, 127.3, 1998, p 1-34.

guilt of diversity: Babel marks an original sin, and European cultural politics in early modernity can arguably be interpreted, at the level of language, as a project of purification. India by contrast ... never mythologized the need to purify, let alone sought to purify, original sins of diversity through a program of purification...

Indian vernacular cultures demonstrate little concern of Herderian “uniqueness” over which national cultures of the present obsess. On the contrary, all strive for a kind of equivalence by their approximation to Sanskrit cosmopolitanism.

It has also been noticed that most of the discussion on the growth of regional Indian languages is based on facile and wrong explanations, even though they seem to be universally accepted:<sup>11</sup>

...A number of received views about vernacularization of this world [India] are reproduced that have gone uncontested too long. Like every other scholar who has written on the issue, Kaviraj ties the “gradual separation of [the] emerging literatures [of the vernacular languages] from the high Sanskrit tradition” to “religious developments”, indeed religious developments hostile to the tradition, against which the vernacular literatures make an “undeclared revolution”. “The origin of vernacular languages appears to be intimately linked to an internal conceptual rebellion within classical Brahminical Hinduism”

In fact, there is precious little evidence to support these generalizations, universally accepted though they are. There is of course no denying that some relationship may be found between language choice and religious practice in South Asian history... But by the beginning of the second millennium this relationship is much etiolated. Sanskrit had long ceased to be a Brahmanical preserve, just as Brahmans had long taken to expressing themselves in literary languages other than Sanskrit, such as Apabhraṃśa or indeed Kannada.

### *Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the eve of colonialism*

A third issue confronting the modern Indological scholarship is the growing evidence for a flourishing intellectual tradition in India, which seems to have continued well into the period of colonial rule. The standard Indological view has been that:

1. The Indian intellectual tradition, embodied in the various *Śāstras*, had died long ago or had become totally outdated by the time of British conquest of India. In any case, the entire tradition is of no relevance for the concerns of modern India.

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<sup>11</sup> S.Pollock, *The Cosmopolitan Vernacular*, J. Asian Studies, 57, 1998, p.29. Pollock here is citing the work of Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*, in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pande, Eds., *Subaltern Studies VII*, Delhi, 1993, p.1-39.

2. The stagnation suffered by the Indian intellectual tradition, has nothing really to do with colonial rule and is entirely due to the methodological weaknesses inherent to Indian thought and the decadent Indian social organization which has inhabited growth of knowledge.

Recently the National Endowments for Humanities and the National Foundation of Science of the United States of America have funded a major project to study the *Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the eve of Colonialism*. The project involves about a dozen leading Indologists in the United States and Europe; and envisages extensive collection and analysis of published and unpublished texts written during 1550-1750, mainly in the disciplines of *Vyākaraṇa*, *Mīmāṃsā*, *Nyāya*, *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, *Dharmaśāstra*, *Jyotiṣa*, *Āyurveda* and *Mantraśāstra*. The proposal also envisages field work around four centres of classical learning in India to understand the dynamics of networking and diffusion of knowledge in the Indian scholarly communities. The details of the proposal, the experts who would participate, the work-plan for the period 2001-2004, and the Institutions in India whose cooperation is being sought etc., are available, along with some of the theme papers and reports of ongoing work, on the website of the Digital South Asia Library of the University of Chicago.<sup>12</sup> The basic presupposition of the project is that:<sup>13</sup>

The two centuries before European colonization established itself decisively on the Indian subcontinent (ca. 1550-1750) constitute one of the most innovative eras in Sanskrit intellectual history. Thinkers began to work across disciplines far more intensively than ever before, to produce new formulations of old problems, to employ a strikingly new discursive idiom and present their ideas in what were often new genres of scholarly writing. Concurrent with the spread of European power in the mid-eighteenth century, however, this dynamism began to diminish. By the end of the century, the tradition of Sanskrit systematic thought – which for two millennia or more constituted one of the most remarkable cultural formations in world history – had more or less vanished as a force in shaping Indian intellectual life, to be replaced by other kinds of knowledge based on different principles of knowing and acting in the world.

The proposal goes on to highlight that the modern scholarship has been totally silent on how there was an “explosion of intellectual production in Sanskrit in the seventeenth century”; it has also not paid any attention to the “demise of [these knowledge systems] in the latter half of the eighteenth century”. The proposal emphasizes the need to collect, collate and study all the relevant Sanskrit source texts in order to address these important issues. It also evokes the need for fresh theorization, as the “interpretations dominant in western historical sociology and intellectual history, little changed from the time of their strongest formulation in Max Weber nearly a century ago, are based more on assumptions than on actual assessment of data.”<sup>14</sup> However, the proposal does offer its own

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<sup>12</sup> <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/sanskrit>

<sup>13</sup> <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/sanskrit/proposal> p.1

<sup>14</sup> Proposal cited above, p.3

perspective on the “comparative intellectual history of Europe and India”:<sup>15</sup>

Stressing the historical fact of the victory of western learning indicates the importance this project gives to a comparative intellectual history of Europe and India... In these two worlds, systematic thought had run along a largely parallel course for some two millennia, until the seventeenth century. Even into the eighteenth, points of comparability can be found...

Yet it was at this historical juncture that a great divergence between the two traditions occurred, as a set of important changes in the production and dissemination of knowledge began to manifest themselves in late-Renaissance and early-Enlightenment Europe. This is a long familiar list, which includes new procedures in method (empiricism), new kinds of conceptualization (quantification), new attitudes towards the past (critical rationalism), new communicative codes (the intellectualized vernacular) ...and last and not the least, a pedagogical revolution. Little that is comparable appears to have occurred in the world of Sanskrit intellectuals. Consider again only the fundamental question of language...Sanskrit remained the sole idiom for most major forms of systematic thought. No Bengali Descartes or Gujarati Bacon was concerned to teach the vernacular to speak philosophically. And like the language of learning, the material and social composition of the Sanskrit intellectual sphere remained largely unchanged.

Although we may as yet be unable to specify exactly when or where or how, it is likely to have been such innovations in the European knowledge systems that, once colonialism made them the systems of India, more than anything else spelled defeat for the Indian forms.

The “death of Indian knowledge systems” is not in any sense a new theme for Indological scholarship. The reason that the issue is surfacing again in the above proposal is because it makes a somewhat radical departure from the conventional view that the Indian knowledge systems died long ago. This departure had become necessary, in fact overdue, because of the mounting evidence that in almost every scholarly discipline, the Indian tradition suffered a set back only after the onset of colonialism, or much later. However, the present project proposal is just an updated version of the conventional viewpoint that the decline in Indian intellectual tradition was entirely due to its own internal inadequacies.

Further, the proposal seeks to introduce a new twist to the historiography of Indian knowledge systems by singling out the period 1550-1750, as having witnessed a new resurgence in scholarship. Many of the theme papers prepared in association with the project also follow suit in identifying this period as one of the most creative periods of Indian history. The proposal itself makes the usual qualification that these “chronological

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<sup>15</sup>Proposal, cited above, p.3

boundaries...are themselves subject to revision”<sup>16</sup>. It notes that 1550 is chosen in recognition of the work of Raghunātha Śiromaṇi the renowned *Naiyāyika* of Navadvīpa in Bengal and Appayya Dīkṣita the great *Vedāntin* of South India, who was also an expert in several *śāstras*. The date 1750 is related to the demise of the great *Vaiyākaraṇa* Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, who died in Vārāṇasī in 1755.

The date 1550 is of particular political significance in Indian history as it corresponds to the consolidation of the Mughal rule under Akbar. One has to indulge in extraordinary sophistry to discover this as the point of departure for ushering in a period of great creativity in Indian intellectual tradition. Raghunātha Śiromaṇi the great *Naiyāyika* was carrying forward the tradition of *Navyanyāya* initiated by Gāṅgeśa Upādhyāya in early 14<sup>th</sup> century. The *Prakriyā* tradition in *Vyākaraṇa* was initiated by Rāmacandra in his *Prakriyāsarvasva* (c.14<sup>th</sup> century). New trends in *Jyotiṣa* emerged in the works of Mādhava (14<sup>th</sup> century), Parameśvara (1380-1460) and Nīlakaṇṭha (1450-1550) in Kerala. Sāyaṇa’s monumental commentaries on the Vedas and several major works on *Vedānta*, *Mīmāṃsā* and *Dharmaśāstra* were produced in the Vijayanagar Empire in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It would indeed be strange to pick up mid-sixteenth century as a starting point of a new resurgence in Indian intellectual tradition unless one is exclusively looking for those innovative elements, which could have resulted by the efforts of the Mughal court. Perhaps the investigations under this project are supposed to do that only.

There is another invidious claim made in the project proposal that the Indian intellectual tradition “retreated in silence” in the face “vociferous” criticism offered by modern western knowledge:<sup>17</sup>

Direct confrontation between Indian and European learning was as rare as that between Sanskrit and Persianate scholarship during the previous three centuries. Or better put, the confrontation was one sided; As modernizing Europe attacked vociferously, Sanskrit India retreated in silence; no shastri ever bothered to answer the critique, made so painfully explicit by Macaulay and his compatriots in the century following our epoch.

The fact of the matter is that most of the Indian *Śāstras* were founded on the technical and philosophical foundations provided by the disciplines of *Nyāya* (logic), *Vyākaraṇa* (language analysis) and *Mīmāṃsā* (hermeneutics). The technical and philosophical sophistication achieved by the Indians in these disciplines were beyond the comprehension of European thought till at least the end of nineteenth century. As one scholar has remarked:<sup>18</sup>

Acquaintance with the Pāṇinian analysis of root and suffixes and his recognition of *ablaut* (though only indirect via Ch. Wilkin’s Sanskrit Grammar) inspired Franz Bopp and others to develop the imposing structure of Indo-European comparative and historical linguistics. The

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<sup>16</sup>Proposal, cited above, p.6

<sup>17</sup> Proposal, cited above, p.2

<sup>18</sup> H.Scharfe, *Grammatical Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1977, p.115.

generality of phonetic and morphophonemic rules was rigidly established only in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; at about the same time the notion of “becoming” gave way to that of substitution. A purely grammatical description of language and a formalized set of derivational strings are hotly debated issues today. It is a sad observation that we did not learn more from Pāṇini than we did, that we recognized the value and the spirit of his “artificial” and “abstruse” formulations only when we had independently constructed comparable systems. The Indian New Logic (*Navyanyāya*) had the same fate: only after the Western mathematicians had developed a formal logic of their own and after this knowledge had reached a few Indologists, did the attitude towards the *Navya-nyaya* school change from ridicule to respect.

What else could the Pandits do but to retreat in despair when they were confronted by what were clearly ridiculous arguments and claims of the Indologists, who could not comprehend the methodology of the Indian *Śāstras*, but nevertheless had the backing of an imperial power behind them?

Though the onset of British rule had a totally debilitating effect on the Indian intellectual tradition, great *Śāstric* works continued to be written for a fairly long time, in fact almost well into the middle of the nineteenth century, in most disciplines. The Kerala work on *Jyotiṣa* continued right into the first half of nineteenth century with the work of Ghaṭigopa and Śaṅkaravarman. The Oriya Astronomer Candrasekhara Sāmanta carried on his own observations and worked out many improvements in astronomical computations, which he presented in his treatise *Siddhāntadarpaṇa* written in 1869. A recent history of Indian medical literature lists a large number of major treatises and many more tracts on particular topics, which were written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> In *Navyanyāya*, major *krodhapatras* were written by Kalīśaṅkara Bhaṭṭācārya and Paṭṭābhirāma in the first half of nineteenth century. Many important treatises and commentaries in *Nyāya*, *Mīmāṃsā* and other *Darśanas* were produced during the whole of nineteenth century and later.<sup>20</sup> In the sphere of literature, we have the great epic poem *Śivarajavijaya* written by Ambikādatta Vyāsa in 1870, apart from several other *Mahākāvya*s written in the nineteenth century.

In fact any assessment of Indian intellectual tradition and its historical development would be very tentative unless a comprehensive analysis is made of the enormous number of unpublished manuscripts lying in various Libraries and private collections.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> G.J.Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, 4 parts, Groningen, 2000

<sup>20</sup> See for instance, K.H.Potter, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., Delhi, 1995. Amongst the 1962 authors listed in the Encyclopaedia (whose dates are known), who wrote treatises on different *Darśanas*, over 600 authors are dated to be posterior to 1750.

<sup>21</sup> It is estimated that the manuscript wealth of India is of the order of 3.5 million, of which about 1 million are in collections which have been catalogued. About 2 lakh Indian manuscripts are in Libraries outside India. A bibliometric analysis of about 22,000 Tamil manuscripts (see the *Union Catalogue of Tamil Manuscripts*, Vol.5, Tamil University, Thanjavur, 1991) reveals that that about a third of them relate to philosophy and religion, a third to literature and another third to various *śāstras* Perhaps this is also true of the Indian manuscript wealth in general.

The compilation, copying, study and analysis of the great manuscript wealth of India is indeed a gigantic task yet to be accomplished.

### *The Alleged “Death of Sanskrit”*

Amongst the theme papers of the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems Project is a paper with the provocative title, *The Death of Sanskrit*,<sup>22</sup> written by the leader of the Project team, Prof. Sheldon Pollock.<sup>23</sup> In this paper, which seems to be written in a lighter vein in comparison to some of his other scholarly works, Pollock asserts that notwithstanding the various measures initiated and implemented by the Government of India since Independence and the recent intensive efforts “in the age of Hindu identity politics (Hindutva) inaugurated in the 1990s by the ascendancy of the Indian peoples party (Bharatiya Janata Party) and its ideological auxiliary the World Hindu Council (Viswa Hindu Parishad)”, “most observers would agree that, in some crucial way, Sanskrit is dead”<sup>24</sup>. The reason why the “death of Sanskrit” has so far not been so clearly announced is because much of modern scholarship had wrongly presumed that Sanskrit was never really alive.<sup>25</sup>

...The assumption that Sanskrit was never alive has discouraged the attempt to grasp its later history; after all what is born dead has no later history. As a result there exist no good accounts or theorizations of the end of the cultural order that for two millennia exerted a trans-regional influence across Asia – South, Southeast, Inner and even East Asia – that was unparalleled until the rise of Americanism and global English”

Thus the global cultural order dominated by Sanskrit for over two millennia is comparable only to the emerging global cultural order dominated by English and Americanism. The later order, everyone would agree, is not even a century old and is likely to be seriously contested in the coming decades.<sup>26</sup>

We shall not go into a discussion of the arguments in Pollock’s paper.<sup>27</sup> Much of it is a restatement of the contention that the Indian *Śāstric* tradition, though very active in the

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<sup>22</sup> S.Pollock, *The Death of Sanskrit*, Comparative Studies in History and Society, 43 (2), 2001, p. 392-426.

<sup>23</sup> George V Bobrinsky Professor of Sanskrit and Indic Studies, University of Chicago. Incidentally Prof. Pollock has concluded a project on Literary Cultures of South Asia for the National Endowments for the Humanities during 1995-2000. Much of his work on the “Sanskrit Cosmo-polis” and “Vernacular Millennium”, cited earlier, has been done as a part of this project. The project has led to an overview of the medieval and early modern South Asian literature by a group of seventeen scholars and has been published as S.Pollock Ed. *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, Berkeley, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> S.Pollock, cited above, p.392-3.

<sup>25</sup> S.Pollock, cited above, p.393

<sup>26</sup> This is perhaps the larger political context for the project on the Sanskrit knowledge systems and the pronouncements on the “death of Sanskrit”.

<sup>27</sup> For a refutation of some of the points made in Pollock’s paper, see J.Hanneder, *On “The Death of Sanskrit”*, Indo-Iranian Journal, 45, 2002, 293-310. Hanneder also notes that: “Pollock has over-interpreted the evidence to support his theory, perhaps in his understandable anger over current nationalistic statements about Sanskrit and indeed new attempts at re-Sanskritization.”

pre-colonial era, could not stand up to modern European power and knowledge and more or less ceased to exist by c 1800. To buttress this up, Pollock looks into a mélange of issues: the decay of Sanskrit literature prior to the establishment of Muslim rule in Kashmir in the 13<sup>th</sup> century; the failure of the Vijayanagar empire to revive Sanskrit literature; the brief infusion of modernity into Indian intellectual traditions in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Mughal court; and the decadent state of indigenous education as observed in the early nineteenth century colonial Bengal. Presumably, all this discussion is to throw light on the cultural, social and political factors internal to Indian society which nurtured Sanskrit and were also eventually responsible for its alleged death.

Towards the end of the paper Pollock evokes some similarities between the status of Latin with the onset of European modernity and that of Sanskrit in India. However he does emphasize “that the differences between the two are equally instructive”.<sup>28</sup>

For one thing, Sanskrit literary culture was never affected by communicative incompetence, which began to enfeeble Latin from at least the ninth century. The process of vernacularization in India, in so many ways comparable to the European case, was no where a consequence of growing Sanskrit ignorance; the intellectuals who promoted the transformation, certainly in its most consequential phases, were themselves learned in Sanskrit...The specific conditions for the death of Sanskrit have therefore to be located in South Asian historical experience.”

Pollock then comes up with a concluding observation:<sup>29</sup>

During the course of this vernacular millennium, as I have called it, Sanskrit, the idiom of a cosmopolitan literature, gradually died, in part because cosmopolitan talk made less and less sense in an increasingly regionalized world.

What was this regionalized world? In fact, the British rule led to the establishment, after a long time, of a trans-Indian polity, but there was no place for Sanskrit in it. Sanskrit and the Indian intellectual tradition survived and even flourished, though under great stress, during the centuries of Turko-Afghan and Mughal rule in large parts of India, even though there was no trans-Indian polity that subscribed to the ethos of Indian civilization. However, the onset of British rule saw the establishment of a trans-Indian polity that encompassed the entire sub-continent, a polity that was totally hostile to Indian civilization and sought to subvert it by every possible means. And this left very little “cosmopolitan space” for the intellectual tradition of India as enshrined in the great *Śāstric* literature of Sanskrit.

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<sup>28</sup> S.Pollock, cited above, p.415-6.

<sup>29</sup> S.Pollock, cited above, p.417

## *Amarabhāratī*

The Indian nationalist movement in the twentieth century led to a great resurgence of the Indian languages, both in education and public life. It also generated an all round awareness and respect for the Indian civilisational heritage, especially the great corpus of classical literature of India. When the issue of official language was debated in the Constituent Assembly, there was a considerable body of opinion that suggested that Sanskrit be made an official language of the Indian Union.<sup>30</sup> In the final Constitution that was adopted, Hindi in the *Devanāgarī* script, was declared the official language of India with the stipulation that it should draw upon Sanskrit as the primary source to enrich its vocabulary. Sanskrit was also included among the languages recognized by the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.<sup>31</sup>

In October 1956, the Government of India appointed a Sanskrit Commission under the Chairmanship of the renowned linguist Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, to “consider the question of the present state of Sanskrit Education in all its aspects”. In its Report presented in 1958, the Commission presents a survey of the state of Sanskrit in India.

It reported that there were 1381 *Pāṭhaśālās* and *Mahāvidyālayas* in Uttar Pradesh with 4462 teachers. There were 1320 *Tols* in Bengal, 305 in Bihar and 146 in Orissa. There were 112 *Pāṭhaśālās* in Madhya Pradesh, 88 in Mysore and 32 in Andhra Pradesh. The Travancore-Cochin State had 47 Sanskrit Schools. The Commission also found that in Uttar Pradesh almost all the schools had provision to teach Sanskrit; in Bihar, Sanskrit was compulsory up to the IX Standard; more than 75% of the school students in Bengal studied Sanskrit. Sanskrit was a compulsory subject for all the students in the Benares Hindu University and the Lucknow University. The Report also listed the important University Departments and Research Institutes engaged in Sanskrit research.<sup>32</sup>

The Commission made detailed recommendations on Sanskrit education both in the traditional and the modern streams, on various measures to be taken to promote Sanskrit research etc. It also addressed itself to the issue of “Sanskrit and the aspirations of Modern India” where it referred to the role of Sanskrit in awakening “national self-consciousness” and “national solidarity”. The Commission recommended that Sanskrit should be declared an additional official language of India. It also noted that:<sup>33</sup>

The place of Sanskrit in maintaining both the cultural and political unity of India is like that of the Chinese system of writing in preserving the

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<sup>30</sup> About twenty-eight members Constituent Assembly did voice such an opinion (see G. Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Oxford, 1966, p.301). Amongst them were Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar and also a Muslim member, Naziruddin Ahmed.

<sup>31</sup> See Articles 343 (1) and 351 of the Constitution of India. The Eighth Schedule listed fourteen languages at the time of adoption of the Constitution. Four more languages have been added subsequently.

<sup>32</sup> See *Report of the Sanskrit Commission 1956-1957*, Delhi, 1958, p.27-67.

<sup>33</sup> Report, cited above, p.82. This fact that Sanskrit which has been a language with a single spoken form that has been written in many different ways, and Chinese which is a language with a single written form that is spoken in many different ways, have both in their own way contributed to the unity of these civilizations, has been widely noted.

cultural and political unity of China. In China, virtually there is not one language but a number of languages, all coming from a single ancient Chinese speech, but they are generally described as “dialects”. The fact of their really being languages and not dialects (in *Han* or Chinese-speaking China) is obscured by the great factor of the Chinese system of writing. The modern Chinese languages may differ from one another profoundly in pronunciation as well as recent grammatical developments, but the fact that the written language consisting of characters...is understood everywhere, is a great link which binds up most remote corners of China into a single cultural unit. Any attempt to replace the Chinese system of writing by a strictly phonetic system, whether of Chinese or foreign origin, is likely to lead to a cultural and political disintegration of China. Therefore, in China they have accepted the position that a few years of hard labour must be put forth by Chinese boys and girls in acquiring some thousands of characters of their language which constitute the most obvious, the most potent and virtually indispensable expression or symbol of Chinese unity.

The Commission reported that in the course of its interaction with diverse sections of Indian society it noted a deep sense of disappointment that not much had been done for the revival of Sanskrit. The Commission cites an old verse that many Sanskritists referred to in this connection:

*rātrirgamiṣyati bhaviṣyati suprabhātam  
bhāsvan udeṣyati hasiṣyati pañkajaśrīḥ  
ittham vicintayati kośagate dvirephe  
hā hanta hanta nalinīm gaja ujjahāra*

The night will pass and the bright day will dawn; the sun will rise and the lotus will bloom in all its beauty – while the bee, imprisoned in a closed bud, was pondering over its future, alas, an elephant uprooted the lotus-plant itself.

The situation of Sanskrit in India, nearly a half century after the review by the Sanskrit Commission, makes us recall the same verse; for the Indian society had great expectations that we would soon re-establish Sanskrit and the Indian intellectual tradition in all their glory in Independent India. This remains a dream for future. The current status of Sanskrit learning is not all that dismal, as may be seen from the following report by a well-known Sanskrit activist.<sup>34</sup>

There are eight Sanskrit Universities, 93 Sanskrit departments in various Universities, 200 Sanskrit PG centres, 800 Sanskrit colleges, and 5000

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<sup>34</sup> Chamu Krishna Sastry, *Problems of Sanskrit Teaching in India*, in D. Prahladachar Ed. *Relevance of Sanskrit in the Contemporary World*, Tirupati, 2001, p. 139. In another paper included in this volume, A.R. Mishra reports that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century more than 1000 literary works were produced in Sanskrit of which nearly 300 are *Mahakavyas* (ibid, p.103)

Sanskrit schools in India. In seven states Sanskrit is taught as a compulsory subject at upper primary and secondary levels...In six other states though Sanskrit is not a compulsory subject, 90% of students at upper primary and secondary levels are opting for Sanskrit. There are 3 crore students studying Sanskrit at various levels. There are six lakh students in traditional Sanskrit schools. The total number of Sanskrit teachers at all levels is nearly eight lakhs...There is an active Sanskrit teaching programme at graduate and post graduate levels in more than 450 universities outside India.

Independent India has seen an even greater revival of all the Indian languages. They have fully re-established their perennial links with their ancient literary heritage and Sanskrit, and have largely come on their own. But the same is not true of the world of Indian learning which is yet to re-establish its links with great intellectual tradition of India.

*Saṃskṛtam* indeed is *amarabhāratī* the eternal language<sup>35</sup>, like the timeless *sanātana* civilization of India. An awakened India is well aware that demise of *Saṃskṛtam* would mean the end of Indian civilization. It has to respond to the challenge that resurgence of Indian civilization depends crucially on revitalization of *Saṃskṛtam*.

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<sup>35</sup>We may recall that the great sage Paramacharya Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamiji, 67<sup>th</sup> Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakotipeetham, had initiated a movement called *Amarabhāratī* to revive instruction of *Saṃskṛtam* amongst children. Sri Mahadeva Iyer, the father of Sri Jayendra Saraswati Swamiji, the present Shakaracharya, was asked to organize this movement initially.