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A NEW APPROACH TO TEACHING SANSKRIT

1. *The need for a new approach*

In antiquity the grammatical science of the Indians reached a high degree of perfection, and it was far superior to grammatical science in Europe at the time when European scholars first became acquainted with Sanskrit Grammar. To European philological scholarship the study of Sanskrit Grammar was almost a revelation, and naturally the first European grammars of Sanskrit were heavily influenced by the native descriptions of Sanskrit Grammar, accepting along with much that was good much that was less desirable.

However, linguistics has made some progress in Europe during the last two hundred years, and can now confidently be said to be superior to Ancient Indian linguistics. One should therefore expect that modern introductions to Sanskrit would have completely emancipated themselves from the two thousand year old conventions of traditional Indian grammar, but strange to say, this is by no means the case. Even in the most recent work in the field, Michael Coulson's very competent *Sanskrit, an Introduction to the Classical Language* (1976) in the "Teach Yourself" series, we find only half-hearted attempts to break with the almost sacrosanct traditional classifications and definitions: Coulson continues to consider *pracch* a root (the root is really *praś*), thereby reducing forms like *praśnaḥ* and *pr̥stāḥ* to incomprehensible irregularities and preventing the student from seeing the pattern made by the present tense *pr̥cchati* and other presents of the same type: *ṛcchati*, *gacchati*, *vāñchati*, etc. Coulson presents the vowel gradations on the traditional lines, i.e. he considers only the *i*-, *u*-, *r*-, and *l*-series, but not the *n*-, and *m*-series (though he does mention them in his discussion) or the *i/ā*-series (which is not mentioned at all). Therefore Coulson finds himself compelled to write:

"No rule can predict the form that the past participle of a particular verb will take. To ascertain it you should therefore consult the list of verbs on pp. 298-310."

If the vowel gradations are described and the roots listed without any regard to traditional grammar, it will be possible to give a quite simple rule for the formation of the past participle covering practically all verbs in Sanskrit.

Similar shortcomings are exhibited *mutatis mutandis* by all available Sanskrit manuals. When describing the declensional system, they all begin with the *a*-declension, followed by the *ā*- and usually then the various *i*- and *u*-declensions. Now, of all the Sanskrit declensions these are the most irregular and the most difficult to explain, so by the time the students reach the *r*- and later the *n*-declensions, which are structurally simple and (on the whole) easy to explain, they have long ago given up trying to find any system or regularity in the bewildering maze of freakish paradigms and whimsical exceptions. Since the *r*-declension by the Ancient Indians was considered a vowel stem and the *n*-declension a consonant stem, these two declensions (which are *identical* except for the acc. plur. and the gen.) are kept apart, and with a few exceptions (Coulson is one) the similarity is not even pointed out to the students. Many of the grammatical forms taught in the very beginning of the course are rare and the student is not likely to meet them again until months or even years later.

The obstacles which the student has to surmount in order to build up a vocabulary and acquire a feel for the language are considerable. After the introductory exercises which may be limited in number and yet now amusing, now touching, now beautiful as in Stenzler, or long drawn out and tedious as in Bühler and Perry, the student is confronted with "easy" original texts: Hitopadeśa, Kathāsaritsāgara and the like, which are by the standards of other disciplines very difficult. Only compared to other *Sanskrit texts* may they be called easy. In the beginning the student has to look up almost all the words and more than half of the grammatical forms in the text chosen. Worse than that, most of the words he does not see again until months later, when he has not only forgotten the meaning of the word, but cannot even remember that he has seen it before. Naturally his progress is very slow, and when after one or two years of hard work he suddenly discovers that he has been able to read a whole verse and understand it without looking up anything, he feels

exalted. Few indeed are those who reach a stage where they can sit down in an easy chair and read the so-called "easy texts" without a dictionary.

2. *A New Sanskrit Grammar*

Many teachers must, like me, have felt the need for a ~~for a~~ really thorough up-to-date pedagogical introduction to Sanskrit. Once when we were discussing this subject Professor Hans Hendriksen asked me why I did not write such an introduction myself. I felt that this task would be beyond my abilities, but nevertheless the idea caught hold of me and some time later I decided to make the production of such an introduction to Sanskrit - *sit venia verbis* - my life's mission. I have planned a manual in five volumes and called it *A New Sanskrit Grammar* (using the word "grammar" in the same sense as in Thatcher's *Arabic Grammar*). The First Volume will teach the basic patterns. The Second Volume will build up the vocabulary. The Third Volume will be an advanced and complete grammar of the Classical language. The Fourth Volume will introduce the Prakrits employed in Sanskrit dramatic literature, and the Fifth and last volume will deal with Vedic Sanskrit.

In November 1979 I sent descriptions of my planned grammar to a number of leading indologists and the following improved version owes much to suggestions given by Krzysztof Byrski, Richard Gombrich, Jan Gonda, Hans Hendriksen, Erik Hjortshøj, Manfred Mayrhofer and others. It should be stressed at the outset that it is not my intention to impart an *active* command of the language. The manual aims at enabling the student to acquire in a reasonably short time a good *passive* command of the language, i.e. ability to read and understand original texts with ease. At the same time it will serve as a first introduction to Indology, introducing philology and historical grammar and providing some background knowledge of Indian geography, history, literary history and religion.

3. *Contents of Volume One*

After a short introduction dealing with sound system, pronunciation and script, the declension of *sarīt* will be given together with the present indicative of *asti*. The forms will be analysed and then drilled by means of translation exercises Sanskrit-English and English-Sanskrit. In the next lesson the imperfect of *āśīt* and the declension of the anaphoric pronoun *sa sātāt* are introduced, the forms are analysed and the endings

compared with those of *sarīt* and *astī* and a first introduction to Sanskrit apophony (Ablaut, vowel gradation, alternation) is given on the basis of the forms *as-mi*, *s-maḥ* and *ās-am*. Then the two new paradigms are drilled by means of Sanskrit-English and English-Sanskrit exercises. Hereafter English-Sanskrit exercises will be used sparingly if at all. The purpose of the above English-Sanskrit exercises is to ensure a complete mastery over the basic declensional and conjugational endings. With some very minor exceptions all the declensions present themselves as having either the endings of *sarīt*, or pronominal endings or a combination of both. As for the verbs, the overwhelming majority of those forms c o m m o n l y met with have the same endings as the forms already learnt (or apophonic variations thereof, i.e. *ta* for *t*, *se* for *si* etc.)

The next lesson will contain a short general survey of Sanskrit morphology and henceforth in Sanskrit-English exercises accompanying each lesson form which can be predicted from the basic forms will be freely used. Thus in the masculine *a*-declension we will be able to employ forms like *devaḥ*, *deva*, *devam*, *devau*, *devāḥ*; in the *ā*-declension *senā*, *senām*, *senābhyām*, *senāḥ*, *senābhiḥ*, *senābhyaḥ*, *senāsu*; in the masculine *i*-declension *kaviḥ*, *kavim*, *kavibhyām*, *kavyoḥ*, *kavibhiḥ*, *kavibhyaḥ*, etc. Of a verb like *karoti* we can predict (and therefore use in the exercises): *karomi*, *akaroḥ*, *akarat*; from *dveṣṭi* we can predict *dveṣmi* and *adveṣam*; of *bharati* we can predict present indicative active except first person, and imperfect active except *abharāva* and *abharāma* etc. As the student progresses the number of predictable forms will increase — after the following lesson he will already be able to predict the full declension of *nauḥ* — and it will be possible instead of the constructed examples which I will be forced to use in the first few exercises to use examples culled from original Sanskrit texts (primarily from Classical prose, but also from the epics and from the Brāhmaṇa literature, etc.) In cases where it is felt that too much ingenuity is required the student will in a footnote be reminded of the required sandhi or other rule.

In order to accustom the student to an analytic approach to Sanskrit (and to languages in general) in the following lessons exercises will be given in which the student is told to form various grammatical forms from conjugations and declensions already given a n d declensions and conjugations not yet introduced. The purpose of this is not to make the student memorize a large number of forms, but only to accustom him to

using that very limited number of endings which he memorizes in the first two lessons in combination with the various sandhi and apophonic rules which will be introduced gradually. By and by the student will of course be told to memorize a few more endings (e.g. the neuter terminations $-ṛ$ and $-i$, but not the irregular genitive $-uḥ$ and locative $-au$), but the total number of such additional endings should not exceed ten.

In the glossaries verbs will be listed in the third person singular followed by the root which will always be quoted in full grade anteconsonantal form (followed in brackets by the traditional root which the student must know in order to use the Sanskrit dictionaries), thus *gacchati gam-*, *jāyate jan-i-* (*jan*), *ṛcchati praś* (*pracch*), *jayati je-* (*ji*), *bhavati bhav-i-* (*bhū*), etc. Nouns are listed in the nominative singular and when possible the radical element is underlined. If the final consonant (group) of the stem is not predictable from the nominative it will be given in brackets. The gender is indicated except in the case of masculines ending in $ḥ$ in the nominative, feminines ending in long vowel in the nominative, and neuters ending in m or in short vowel in the nominative. Thus *samudraḥ*, *kanyā*, *mitram*, *paśuḥ*, *dhenuḥ* f., *bhartā* m. (*r*), *vāk* f. (*c*), *apsarāḥ* f. (*s*), *nāma* (*n*), etc. Adjectives will be given in the nominative m. and f. following similar principles: *garīyān*, *garīyasī* (*ns*), etc. This system will be followed in the glossaries right from the outset, although the meaning of some of the abbreviations cannot be explained till much later.

In the next lesson apophony will be discussed in some detail. The alternations will be presented without the slightest regard to traditional grammar. In this lesson the following alternations will be introduced: *i/y-e/ay-ai/āy*, *i-ya-yā*, *u/v-o/av-au/āv*, *u-va-vā*, *ṛ/r-ar-ār*, *ṛ-ra-rā*, *a/n-an-ān*, *a/m-am-ām*, *i/+-ā-ā*. (In later lessons and in Volume Three other and more complicated or simply rarer alternations will be illustrated.) The first series will be illustrated by the present and imperfect of *eti*, and it will be pointed out that these forms are identical in formation with those of *asti*. The preterite participle will be introduced. It will be useful in illustrating the zero grade and also greatly enlarge the number of possible constructions in the exercises.

The method to be followed in the first volume of *A New Sanskrit Grammar*

will be clear from the above. In the remainder of this volume the commonest and the most useful paradigms will be gradually introduced in a carefully devised order so as to bring out the similarities and dissimilarities of the various paradigms most strikingly, and show the working of analogy across the sound laws. Thus the declension of *bhartā* m. (r) will be introduced very soon after the declension of *rājā* m. (n). It will be shown that the declensions are identical when carried out with due regard to sandhi and apophony except for the gen./abl. sing. (where we find *-uḥ* instead of **-raḥ*), acc. plur. (which is here, as in a number of declensions to be introduced later, characterised by a long stem vowel followed by *n*) and gen. plur. (which is, as in all vowel stems, characterised by a long stem vowel followed by *-nām*), and it will be hinted that this *-nām*, (characteristic of gen. plur. in vowel declensions and many pronouns and numerals) may have originated from the *-nām* of stems ending in *n*. The paradigm will not be given for *bhartā* (r), but in the exercises the student will be told to decline the word in full on the basis of the information given. Immediately afterwards the declension of *sakhā* m. (y) will be treated. It differs from *bhartā* only in abl./gen. sing. (where *y* does not disappear before the ending *-uḥ*) and loc. sing. (where we find the ending *-au*). (In "normal" grammars *sakhā* is given together with the *i*-declension, where it appears as a most confusing freak of the language.) When later the *i*-declension is given, the student will be reminded that he has already met the locative ending *-au* in the declension of *sakhā*.

Simple *tatpuruṣa* and *bahuvrīhi* compounds will be introduced in an early lesson.

So far I have not mentioned sandhi. The sandhi will be introduced gradually as necessitated by the examples. Towards the middle of the volume a lesson will be devoted exclusively to sandhi, with a systematic exposition of the sandhi rules and an explanation of their origin. Then a simple story will be given with all the words written in their detached form and the students will be asked to rewrite the story using the sandhi rules.

Throughout the volume, in the grammatical sections as well as in the vocabularies, historical linguistics and comparative grammar will be introduced as a help to the student. In other words, comparison with

other languages will only be made when it can actually assist the student in the acquisition of Sanskrit, and Sanskrit will not be made a pretext for an exposition of comparative Indoeuropean grammar. Therefore comparisons with languages unknown to the great majority of students like Hittite, Tocharian, Irish and Lithuanian, interesting though they be (I am myself very fond of Lithuanian), will be excluded. Only the following two groups of languages will be used for comparison:

(A) *Languages which on account of their prominent role in the Western educational system must be known to a large proportion of the students:* Latin, Greek, Russian, German and of course English. To these might have been added French and Spanish. However French will for obvious reasons be of very little use for direct comparison with Sanskrit, and Spanish (of which the same is true) has to be excluded for the even more cogent reason that I do not know that language. As a help to those students who do not know Latin and Greek, Latin and Greek loanwords in English will accompany the Latin and Greek illustrations wherever possible. Occasionally Anglo-Saxon, Church Slavonic and Old High German forms will have to accompany the English, Russian and German forms in order to make the comparison clear, but one will never find Anglo-Saxon, Old High German and Church Slavonic forms unaccompanied by the corresponding Modern English, German and Russian forms. If a cognate form of a Sanskrit word exists say in Anglo-Saxon, but not in Modern English then the Anglo-Saxon form will not be given.

(B) *Languages the study of which is intimately connected with the study of Sanskrit:* Iranian languages and Indo-Aryan languages, because all serious students of these languages study Sanskrit as a auxiliary subject. Of course, not *all* Indo-Aryan and Iranian languages will be used for this purpose. Basically only Old Persian, Modern Persian (and the Persian loanwords in Urdu and Hindi), Pali and Hindi will be used. Occasionally other languages, primarily Avestan and Bengali, will be used when they afford striking and instructive examples not available in Persian, Pali and Hindi. This may sound rather overwhelming. However, in the first volume the use of comparison will be very restricted and only the most striking and instructive examples will be used. Moreover the comparisons will be kept separate from the grammar proper and given at the bottom of the pages so as not to obscure the synchronic description of the language. In order to make the comparisons intelli-

gible a very limited number of Indoeuropean, Indo-Iranian and Indo-Aryan sound laws will be given in a short appendix and the sound laws will be numbered. The student will be referred to them in connection with the comparisons given in the glossaries and in the grammar. The original accent, when known, will be shown for the convenience of those interested. Occasionally, reference to the accent will be made (in comparison with Greek and elucidation of the apophony), but the students will be told that for the study of Classical Sanskrit the accent is of very slight importance and may well be ignored.

As already mentioned only the most commonly used and most instructive paradigms will be given in this first volume. Among the paradigms excluded will be the desiderative and the aorist, most of the perfect paradigms and many of the so-called 2nd, 3rd and 9th present class paradigms, *adas-*, monosyllabic nouns in \bar{i} and \bar{u} etc. However, due to the method followed the students should nevertheless be able to understand many of the single forms making up these paradigms when confronted with them. The students will be advised to accustom themselves to use a reference grammar and the work will contain copious references to Manfred Mayrhofer, *A Sanskrit Grammar*. As for syntax and word-building only the most indispensable information will be given, more detailed information being reserved for Volume Two.

4. Contents of Volume Two

The purpose of this volume is to teach basic syntax, to teach composita and word-building, to build up vocabulary and proficiency in reading simple Sanskrit by the means of Sanskrit texts. The texts will be selected so as to form -- together with my commentary -- a first introduction to Ancient Indian geography, history, literary history and religion. The final choice of texts for this volume is not yet made, but one text is certain to be included in full, namely Gaṇapati Śāstrī's *Bhāratānuvarṇanam*.

This work, written almost a hundred years ago by Gaṇapati Śāstrī, the famous rediscoverer of the lost plays of Bhāsa, comprises 159 small pages with 18 lines to the page and about twenty akṣaras to the line. The work contains a summary description of Classical India giving the Sanskrit names of the principal mountains, rivers, provinces, towns, etc., then, a sketch of the ancient history of India up to Muslim conquest, of course not a complete history, but marking the epochs: the Buddha, Candragupta

and the Greeks, Aśoka, the Indo-Scythians, the Indo-Greeks, the Guptas and the Hindu revival, Harṣa and Bhoja. Then the legendary and epic figures: Rāma and the Rāmāyaṇa, the Pāṇḍavas and the Mahābhārata, Vikramāditya, Śālivāhana. A chapter on Sanskrit literature: the various genres and types of literature, the Ancient Indian concepts of literary criticism, the major poets and their works. Then follow sketches of actual Indian life, the Hindu boy at home and in the school (*gurukula*), the day of a paṇḍita, the divine service in a Hindu temple, a village and the peasants, the bāzār and the things sold etc.

It might be objected that *Bhāratānuvarṇanam* is a modern production, and hence the students should not waste their time on it, since there must be differences between the language of this book and the classical language; and as for the contents, they could more easily be studied elsewhere in books written in European languages. However, I do not think these two objections carry much weight in the case of *Bhāratānuvarṇanam*. In the words of Sylvain Lévi, it is "written in a plain and good style, without any show of pedantry à la pandit". Gaṇapati Śāstrī's language is quite idiomatic as far as I can judge, and certainly does not differ more from Classical Sanskrit than the classical authors differ among themselves. The students will have the satisfaction of reading in Sanskrit useful information about Ancient India at a very early stage of their study, even though this information obtained through the Sanskrit medium might be more easily obtained elsewhere, and this will animate them to new exertions to master Sanskrit, because -- as Sylvain Lévi says about the book -- "the Sanskrit language plays here the part it ought to play, I mean as a key to Hindu lore and Hindu civilization." One of the most happy accidents during my own Sanskrit studies was when I chanced to buy *Bhāratānuvarṇanam* for four crowns in a second hand bookshop in Copenhagen. It is true that the two months that I spent studying the book were taken from time which I ought to have spent on "real" Sanskrit texts, but I immensely enjoyed reading the book, and moreover it so increased my ability to read "real" texts, that the time "wasted" upon the book was very soon more than regained.

The book works like a series of graduated readings, although this was probably never the author's intention. The whole book is in a uniform style, but the subject matter imposes its limitations upon the writer. In the summary sketch of the geography of Ancient India, where the author mentions all the mountains, rivers, etc., the vocabulary is naturally very

limited and the same words and patterns are met again and so that the student begins to acquire a feel for the language. As the subject matter gradually becomes more and more complicated, the vocabulary and patterns used become more complex too, and towards the end of the book the language is rather more difficult than in the easier parts of Lanman's reader. In the chapter on Sanskrit literature I intend to add easy selections from some of the works mentioned by Gaṇapati Śāstrī. The extracts will be different from those used in readers already in use.

Only rarely will the student in this work be confronted with grammatical forms which he is not able to understand (provided he has mastered the contents of Volume One). Such forms will be explained in footnotes. The student is not expected to increase his knowledge of Sanskrit morphology during his study of this second volume, only to stabilize what he has already learnt.

The copy of *Bhāratānuvarṇanam* which I possess is beautifully printed with large and very clear devanāgarī letters eminently suited for a photographic reprint. Each subdivision of the text will be followed by a vocabulary giving the new words and by a commentary on the language and the content. Special attention will be paid to syntax, word-building, verbal prefixes and composita, and there will be occasional exercises in word-building. Comparisons with Indoeuropean, Indo-Iranian and Indo-Aryan languages will be made to a greater extent than in Volume One and the appendix on sound laws will be longer. Nevertheless the principle will still hold good, that comparisons are only made where they can be a real help to acquiring the language.

At the end of the volume a complete vocabulary will be given, but it will not be arranged alphabetically: each word will be found under the root from which it is derived, in the manner of Arab dictionaries. This should greatly improve the student's ability to recognize roots and affixes and cultivate in him a flair for guessing what a word means. The translations given in the root-lexicon will be very short and references will be given to the vocabularies where the words have been explained and to the lines where they occur.

5. Contents of Volume Three

This volume will aim at a complete description of the Classical language using the principles described in connection with Volume One.

References will now be made to standard works like Wackernagel and Whitney. A systematic index will make it possible to use the work not only as an advanced course in Sanskrit Grammar, but also as a reference grammar. The illustrations and texts will all be taken from the accepted classics.

6. Contents of Volumes Four and Five

Hardly any justification is needed for the planned Volume Four (dramatic Prakrit). Probably most students of Sanskrit give up beforehand and read only the so-called *chāyā* "shadow", i.e. Sanskrit translation of the Prakrit passages. But the dramatic Prakrit is not very difficult. It is not really Middle Indo-Aryan. It is to the Middle Indo-Aryan dialects what the English actor's dialect-English is to genuine English dialects. Yet, it is a pity not to read it, just as it would be a pity to substitute refined King's English for the broad accent to be used in the speech of rural and lower class characters in English plays.

Since I shall not begin to work on Volumes Four and Five until a rather distant future, I consider it unnecessary to give a detailed account of my plans which may be substantially changed before they are eventually executed. Suffice it to say that the very nature of both Prakrit and Vedic studies necessitates a diachronic approach.

7. Concluding Remarks

Finally, I want to mention that I am already using in my teaching the principles described above, with very encouraging results. Even students who are interested only in the cultural aspect of indology and not in the linguistic aspect profess that they find my "sound law" approach a great help in mastering Sanskrit morphology and in building up vocabulary.