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I am fortunate that Sanskrit, the most beautiful language on earth, has been a part of my life since my earliest childhood. Born in an orthodox Brahmin family, I grew up in a traditional household charged with the energy of rituals, chanting, and Hari Katha. As I grew, my grandfather began teaching me Sanskrit. He wanted me to dedicate myself entirely to the preservation and propagation not only of Sanskrit but of the larger tradition that is its basis. As a result, I chose Sanskrit as my life calling, and it became an integral part not only of my academic journey but my entire life.

The deeper I delved into Sanskrit, the more amazed I was at its beauty and perfection. There seemed to be no limit to its treasures and wonders. However, what attracted me beyond the greatness and majesty of Sanskrit was the creative power engendered in its sounds. I realised that every word of

this language has been created consciously, chosen consciously and has to be used consciously. I experienced firsthand how this 'conscious' nature of Sanskrit deepens awareness and refines and perfects us at every level. Indeed, its very name Samskritam means "polished" or "refined" or "sculpted to perfection". No wonder then that I began propagating Sanskrit as the language of consciousness.

Sanskrit revealed itself to me as a living and conscious force. It is, I realised, something that has manifested from the highest source, and is therefore capable of conveying infinitely more than what it appears to do on the surface. I realised that I was not beholding a man-made invention or medium for communication, but a revelation. Sanskrit is not a random grouping of sounds that have meanings attributed to them as a matter of convention. It is a living and creative mode of expression, and not merely a conventional symbol for lifeless ideas.

Deep roots

Sanskrit is a transparent language and its words hold

within themselves the secret of the roots from which they are derived. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a perfect relationship between a word and its meaning. The meaning of a word in Sanskrit emerges from its own depth. This becomes evident as one masters the system of root-sounds and sound-ideas that form its wonderful structure. It is because of this transparency of the system of root-sounds that Sanskrit has the ability to reveal its own history. A proper investigation of many Sanskrit words revealed to me that in Sanskrit a word is not merely a conventional symbol for an idea, but itself the parent and the creator of ideas.

I began a little exercise to get at the soul of words. I took, to begin with, the word 'shraddhaa' which is commonly translated as faith. As I contemplated the word and started repeating it like a mantra, I was thrilled to see a whole range of beautiful images appearing before me. And, one day, the word revealed itself to me in all its glory. Joy and bliss pervaded my being. I realised that the word 'shraddhaa', which, translated into English, means trust, faith, confidence, loyalty, respect and reverence, is constituted from two components: 'shrat' and 'dhaa'. The root sound 'dhaa' stand for 'putting, placing, bestowing, holding, having and causing'. From this root we get the word 'dhaatu' which means a constituent element or essential ingredient which holds things together. The primary element of the earth or of a word is also called 'dhaatu'. The words dhaatri and dhasna are from this root, both of which mean a receptacle or vessel that holds things within it. These are a few derivatives of the root-sound dhaa meaning 'to hold'. The other component of the word shraddhaa is 'shrat'. This sound is not used in classical Sanskrit as an independent word. But in several mantras of the Veda the word 'shrat' is used independently as a word with proper meaning. In the Vedic sense 'shrat'

means 'whatever is true to one's aspiration'. Now taking this meaning together with that of 'dhaa', shraddhaa means 'to hold unto that which is true to our aspiration'. This is true faith. When each and every movement of one's being is in harmony with one's highest aspiration, then one is truly faithful.

Emboldened by this beautiful experience, I decided to explore its opposite, which is doubt. So I contemplated on the word 'sandeha', one of the words in Sanskrit meaning doubt. Here is the explanation of the word: Sandeha has two components: 'sam' and 'deha'. The sound 'sam' is a prefix which refers to the experience of completeness, totality and perfection. We also see this in the English word 'sum'. The next component is 'deha'. 'Deha' has been derived from the root-sound 'dih' which primarily means 'to gather, collect or pile-up'. Imagine that

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we are in a group and sitting opposite each other and decide to collect or gather or pile up, say, books. So we keep adding more and more books until the pile gets bigger and bigger. This in turn leads to the experience of 'growth, increase, prosperity'. This, in fact, is an alternative meaning of the root 'dih' which also means 'to increase, grow, prosper'. Moving on, when things 'pile up' they tend to cover each other. When books are piled up, they are concealed from each other. Now, 'to cover' is an important meaning of the root 'dih'. To cover also means to hide, to conceal, to anoint, to plaster and

smear. Thus 'dih' stands at once for gathering, growing and for concealing. Out of one root-sound three meanings!

To return to the original word, deha, we can see that the third meaning of concealing or covering is most apt. The body is called deha in Sanskrit because it is a cover for the soul. It conceals the soul within. What then of sandeha? Its root sense is 'perfect concealment or covering'. So in a state of doubt, consciousness is perfectly clouded, the reality is covered or concealed, the truth is hidden, and thus there is no clarity of vision. One is confused and is groping in the dark. How appropriate a description of doubt!

I have contemplated on several key words of Sanskrit in this fashion in order to have the right understanding of these words based on how I experience them within myself. Yet another important feature of Sanskrit that keeps me engrossed is the multiple significance of every root-sound of this language, and how each of these meanings is inextricably interdependent. Also, each root-sound can be used to create fresh words by adding prefixes and suffixes in accordance with the rules of Sanskrit grammar. These features not only make Sanskrit a creative language, they also provide us with trustworthy clues that help us rediscover its lost heritage.

Mantric language

The very alphabet of Sanskrit is an ocean of experience. The resonating power and the vibrational purity of the sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet make this language a mantric language. One of the most important features of the Sanskrit alphabet is that vowels and consonants are arranged in an extremely logical fashion into two distinct groups. Sanskrit consonants are arranged in vertical and horizontal groups according to the voicing state, manner of articulation, place of articulation and the intra-oral pressure required to produce them. This unerring logic underlying the arrangement of alphabets makes it easier for one to memorise the alphabets and frees one of the burden of committing randomly arranged alphabets.

In Sanskrit, all the sounds are articulated through five distinct places of articulation located in the mouth: throat, palate, cerebrum, root of the upper teeth, and lips. On the basis of this the sounds are either guttural or palatal or cerebral or dental or labial. Though the letters of one group are

pronounced from one position yet each sound of that group differs from the other because of its internal efforts. For example: ka, kha, ga, gha and nga belong to the guttural group. Here ka is a hard unvoiced consonant with minimum breath release, kha is also hard and unvoiced but it is pronounced with maximum breath release; ga is soft and voiced with minimum breath but gha is soft and voiced with maximum breath; nga is the last sound in the group which is soft and voiced but nasal. For this sound the breath gets released through nostrils and the mouth. The arrangement of all consonants in the Sanskrit alphabet follows the same order. Thus the Sanskrit alphabet is more scientific, methodical and comprehensive than any other system of alphabet. However, what I have experienced is not just the scientific nature of the Sanskrit alphabet but an inbuilt system of pranayama that occurs when one chants the alphabet. The recitation creates a natural pranayama and offers the same benefits as pranayama. The scientific nature of the Sanskrit alphabet is also an immense help for those afflicted with speech-related disorders and disabilities. I have taken up a pilot project titled Sanskrit and Speech Pathology with the aim of creating a remedial training programme based on Sanskrit sounds that are of immense help for those who stammer and suffer from other speech-related disorders. Thus, I have kept exploring, through my research, many wonders and splendours of this beautiful language, and I joyfully share my discoveries with others through workshops, lectures and writing.

That India has been expressing herself abundantly and incessantly for centuries through Sanskrit is widely known. I also maintain that our nation's future can gain much from Sanskrit's dynamism. Unfortunately, we were cut off from this fountain of wisdom, knowledge and genius in the recent past thanks to the exclusion of Sanskrit from the mainstream curriculum of our schools and universities. The good news is that this is finally changing, and I am hopeful that the resurgence of Sanskrit in all the fields of life will power the revival of the true spirit of India and unleash its soul-force. It is, after all, through Sanskrit that we can reclaim the creative thrust that helped our forefathers create one of the greatest civilisations ever.



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