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Sanskrit – myths and facts

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In spite of an active, fact-finding and researching schedule all through the millennia, we find some prevailing superstitious elements about Sanskrit and Sanskrit pundits in India. To sum up these, those who are yet to know Sanskrit do not examine before believing what the antagonists want to hold:

1. That Sanskrit is a dead language; that it is out-dated; that it is not and can never be and was never a spoken language.
2. That it is a language of scriptures / religion; that only the people of certain professions like pundits or the priests study it to understand and help do rituals; that it has no use in the daily walks of life or for the common man.
3. That since it is used in the scriptures (the language of gods), it is sacred and consequent to this, committing mistakes in Sanskrit is sinful and cannot be excused.
4. That only the scholars can use it because, before using it, one needs to master the whole grammar which is the most complicated and that its vocabulary which is again endless.
5. That there is a lot to memorise / learn by heart / mug up to learn Sanskrit; that even its learning is very difficult, labouring as well as boring and even dreadful.
6. That on the racial discriminations, Sanskrit was once an ancient language owned by the Aryans; that it was a member of the Indo-Aryan family of languages; for the overdoing of this theory which is only a speculation or a hypothesis, that the non-Aryan races can think they should have no interest or discourage any efforts favouring Sanskrit. This is a over reacting to the idea of the Aryans. race who are blamed as the oppressors of the indigenous cultures of certain countries.

Falling prey to these widespread misnomers and some intimidating aspects which are often deliberately commissioned that, unfortunately, people shy away from studying Sanskrit. They either give up after some trial or never try to own this treasure of human wisdom stored in Sanskrit literature.

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On the contrary, see how many virtues and advantages Sanskrit language and literature has to offer to all.

1. It is a natural language. There is a direct link between the sound and signs; it is phonetic. We write Sanskrit and other Indian languages exactly as we say which means that the writing of Sanskrit language is based on the sound of the spoken form.

In other words, Sanskrit has no spelling; there are no silent letters either. In contrast to Sanskrit, you can't read many English words properly unless you know English to certain extent. This means that a student is assumed to have known already the English language before one starts learning it!

Sanskrit coalescence (SANDHI) is yet another example of the natural flow in Sanskrit.

2. There is only one set of alphabet in Sanskrit. This avoids many complexities of writing capital / small and italic letters as they are in the Roman alphabet / European scripts.

3. There aren't many punctuation marks found in Sanskrit (Devanagari) script.

4. For writing Sanskrit language, any comprehensive alphabet can be used and vice versa.

5. Thanks to its phonetic scripts, there is an easy-flowing, natural and logical way to proceed while learning this wonderful language or to write any language after that.

To give a contrast example to this, see how difficult it is to learn the spelling-oriented European languages whose silent letters add to the complications.

By a careful examination of the Roman alphabet we can see that some sounds are repeated in it while many sounds are left out. Capital letters are a whole set of repetition.

6. There is logic in its sound system, and a natural continuity in its word-making as well as sentence-making. Compare this with pronouncing and spelling of the languages of other countries than India.

For example, unless one has visited England, one cannot guess the correct reading of the names / places like Reading, Gloucester, Leicester, Peugeot, Plymouth. .Chaos. in English, follows if not pre-learnt.

7. Sanskrit sentence structure is flexible. The declensions and the conjugations have a wide range. Hence every student has more freedom in composing sentences in Sanskrit. In contrast to this, every English sentence has to follow syntax (the law of particular order of words).

8. In Sanskrit, the order of words in a sentence does not matter. Thanks to this flexibility, a Sanskrit sentence may well follow any language the student is familiar with.

Sanskrit is also a unique language. That Sanskrit is unique is the popular quotation we find in every manual of its teaching. Let's look at some of them;

1. Sanskrit is the oldest and living language on our planet. Hence in its study and research we see a wonderful history passing through many millennia.

2. It is the language of the most ancient Indian scriptures belonging to various faiths. Sanskrit is a spiritual language. Owing to these reasons, the description is very popular, like .as old as

the hills., that Sanskrit is the language of Divinity, language of gods.

3. It is a language of classical literature . rich and abundant.

4. As its name itself explains, it is systematised and perfected. Its alphabets are impeccably arranged. They are easy to remember and help in memorising textual stanzas which explains why the oral tradition of Indian wisdom is so popular and long-standing in the entire world. Virtually everything, including those subjects which are technical - like science, engineering, medicine, grammar, philosophy, law . are in poetry, easy to memorise and to quote them melodiously. Not even a Sanskrit dictionary (Amara-kosha) is spared from this impeccably convenient structure/formation.

5. Sanskrit literature is unique in its overwhelmingly poetic character.

6. Rationality is in everything including the arrangement of its alphabets. It is perfected. The Devanagari script used to write Sanskrit is also complete. Being phonetic, it can easily be adopted to write any language.

7. It is a global language. It has no territory, has no bias; hence has no limitations.

8. Sanskrit is a 'world language' in the real sense of the term. It hasn't got local variations or vernaculars nor dialects nor usages of slang words. Its uniformity owes to this aspect as well.

9. It has written rules of grammar, phonetics, etymology and epistemology which are all followed wherever Sanskrit is used. The wonder that this bedrock of Sanskrit grammar, which is, allows its purity to continue no matter however it grows.

Consequent to this, the uniformity found only in Sanskrit has not changed even after many millennia of its expansion as well as migration to so many lands outside India.

10. There is infinity in its word-formation possibilities and they are all well-structured, computerized long before the computers came in use.

11. There is a vibration or resonance in the sounds well-expressed in Sanskrit speaking.

12. Absolute freedom is in using this language because of "No syntax". This means that even a beginner can proceed with words as one's thoughts progress.

13. Flexibility or adaptability - Same sentence can be said in a variety of ways. Brevity and elaboration . both are possible, thanks to the 'classical' nature of Sanskrit. If one sentence in Banabhatta's novel - "Kadambari" virtually runs beyond 20 printed pages and a single word extends to 13 printed lines, imagine the range of expansion and contraction achieved by this celestial language namely, Sanskrit!

Here, a mention has to be made about the Dwi-sandhana Kavyas and other specimen of Chitra kavyas in Sanskrit which exhibit a fantastic world. On those lines you will be able to say a whole story . even of whole Ramayana if you like, in one set of formation, say, in one set of letters, or in one set of words . only nouns and those nouns only in the Nominative case, singular no. etc...

E.g.

.Ayodhya-emperor, three-wived-Dasharatha, child-less, performer-of-Putrakameshti-acrifice, becoming-the-father-of-four-sons,-Rama- Lakshmana-Bharata-Shatrughna-as-well, consequently-the-sender-of-two-of-his-sons-namely-Rama-and Lakshmana-along-with-viswamitra-sage-who-came-with-request-for-the-king.s-help-to-rescue-his-sacrifice

Such a never-ending phrase = ANANTYA-PADAM or ANANTYA-VAKYAM = one single sentence for the whole story i.e. going to any length can contain in it, not just an episode, but the whole epic of Ramayana itself. Such a feat is possible in a Sanskrit narration. There are many reasons for this amazing power of Sanskrit which all explain the richness and inexhaustibility of this classical language.

Depending upon how pedantic the narrator could be, even in one long word . running for many pages - one can fill in the whole story.

Owing to its enormous flexibility, only Sanskrit can imitate any language in the sentence structure.

14. Its universality. It can do all functions, - scriptural (holiness), technical (precision and derivative power) and romantic (resourceful and flowery style) but can never be slang.

15. Has a very rational derivative power. In Sanskrit, etymology (Niruktam) is a special science (Sastra) of finding the derivations. The derivative potential of Sanskrit words is breath-taking. Unbelievable it may look though, there are no proper nouns in Sanskrit! Every single Sanskrit word has a meaning built into the word itself; the root hidden in the word contains the meaning of that word. Hence a Sanskrit scholar seldom runs for a dictionary to find out the meaning of any new or a strange word one may come across. He uses the key of etymology which breaks the egg, and the contents come out!

16. Its economy. Sanskrit letters can be used to write other languages as well. Any lengthy expression could be put in brief in Sanskrit - as small as a word; or sometimes it is smaller than a word, say a syllable! E.g. A Bijakshara like OM. Passive voice sentences are more in Sanskrit also owing to this reason which are surprisingly shorter expressions!

17. Sanskrit words possess a special vibration of sound waves whose resonance is very effective. People use Sanskrit Mantras for healing. They owe this mystic character and holiness to the essential spiritual character of Sanskrit.

18. Spirituality has moulded into Sanskrit! Hence its name , - perfection to be reached by any word.

Different voices . 3 of them . in Sanskrit make way for different aspects related to the same . i.e. Reality.

By knowing Sanskrit, you are now in touch with a language which is very natural (sound-oriented), rationally developed or systematised in its structure and versatile in its usage even while retaining its purity and uniformity. Its ancient, abundant, full of variety and everlasting literature passing through the longest period of time has plentiful wonders to offer to those interested in any of them.

Herewith, we have seen the various aspects and facts about Sanskrit. We may conclude that Sanskrit is a natural language, and was created to help us connect with our deeper roots. Studying such a language should definitely be a benefit to the entire world and help us in becoming better human beings.