

# A Vedic Word-Concordance

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[ 14 PARTS ]

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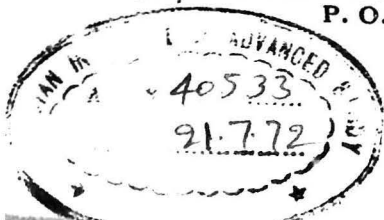
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# A Terminological Lingua-franca for India

By

SIDDHESHWAR VARMA, *New Delhi.*

In spite of the tremendous attention accorded to the problem of a Lingua-franca for India, the problem still remains baffling. But the very limitations of the previous attempts embolden the present writer to venture a new approach to the problem, viz., through a terminology radically based on Sanskrit.

China's example will be instructive in this connection. The difference between the various dialects spoken in China is so enormous that many of them are absolutely-unintelligible to one another. But there is one bond, viz., a common script, which has given a Lingua-franca to the whole of China. So the question before us in India is : just as China has got a Lingua-franca only in a limited sense, could we not have in India a Lingua-franca in a limited sense, which may perhaps one day prove to be a transition to a full-fledged Lingua-franca ?

Fortunately, the basis of this 'limited' Lingua-franca is not far to seek. This basis is Skt., for certain characteristic features of Skt. offer us a promising material out of which something like a Lingua-franca may be constructed. Some of these features are as follows :—

## 1. *The wide intelligibility of the Skt. 'base'*

The Skt. word had two parts (a) non-grammatical, technically called the 'base', e.g., Skt. *jala-* 'water' and (b) grammatical part, technically the 'termination'. Now the linguistic history of Sanskritic languages shows us that these two parts had quite antipodal fates. The 'base' has persisted inspite of the ravages of centuries, and in view of this Sanskrit is not a dead language yet; the 'termination' has either perished or been transformed. Thus the word *jala-* 'water' is understood in all parts of India, though its grammatical forms like *jalam* etc. are understood only by those who have studied Skt. systematically. The range of the Skt. base is so wide that it has reached even greater India, and on the basis of the Skt. base new words have been formed there. Cf. the following words in modern Siamese :— *cakrayāna* 'bicycle', *ākāśayāna* 'aeroplane', *jala-prādāna* 'irrigation', *uparāja* 'a viceroy'.

## 2. *The marvellous unity of languages derived from Skt.*

But even the phonetic and grammatical changes which Skt. words have undergone indicate the marvellous unity of languages derived from Skt. Thus, for the sentence 'I am going home', Dogri, a dialect spoken in Kashmir sub-mountain tracts, has *ai* 'I' *kar* 'home' *jandā* 'am going'; 1500 miles to the east, Calcutta has *ami* 'I' *ghare* 'home' *jāchi* 'am going', while 1500 miles

down to the south, Poona has *mī* 'I' *gharī* 'home' *zātō* 'am going'. This marvellous similarity of these languages, considering the distances, will be particularly appreciated when we take into account the fact that France, only 25 miles from England, has *za vai se mwā* 'I am going home', while Russia, about 400 miles from England, has *yā idu damoi* 'I am going home'. In view of the tremendous difference between French and English, although spatially so near each other, Dogri, Bengālī and Marāṭhī should be technically called not 'languages' in relation to one another, but sub-languages as Bloomfield<sup>1</sup> has suggested, while to the layman they will appear only in the relationship of dialects to one another. But the unity of Sanskritic languages will strike us as even more amazing when we take into account the Dravidian languages, which, though spatially so near each other, remarkably differ from one another; cf. the Dravidian version of the same sentence: 'I am going home' Tamil: *nān* 'I' *vittuku* 'home' *poḥiren* 'am going', Telugu: *nainu* 'I' *iṅṅaki* 'home' *vaiḷuḷu unṅānu* 'am going'; Canarese: *nānu* 'I' *manage* 'home' *hōgutēnē* 'am going', Malayālam: *ñāṅ* 'I' *viṭal* 'home' *poṅu* 'go'; Tulu: *nān* 'I' *illarai* 'home' *poḥai* 'am going'.

A comparison of the Skt. derived sentences noted above will show that the corresponding words for 'I' etc. have the same base in all the three 'sub-languages': the base has remained unchanged, though the phonetic and grammatical forms have undergone some change; but even then the change is not so tremendous that the sentences could be taken as being entirely different from one another.

### 3. The value of Sanskritic words for scientific terminology

Considering the wide diffusion and their ready intelligibility, the bases of Skt. have a value for scientific Terminology which cannot be exaggerated. The following terms, for instance, will be understood far better than any of their foreign corresponding forms:—

- jalodara*- 'dropsy', lit. 'water in the abdomen'
- aṅḍākāra*- 'elliptical', lit. 'egg-shaped'
- maladrava*- 'diarrhoea', lit. 'flow of faecus'
- garbhakosa*- 'uterus', lit. 'receptacle of the child'

Foreign expressions for these terms will never be comprehended intelligently; if used in text-books, they will be only crammed by students, leading to intellectual ruin, as is well-known.

### 4. The concrete in Skt. vocabulary

A notable feature of Skt. vocabulary, particularly in scientific terminology, is the abundant occurrence of words in concrete form: thus for the 'arc of a

1. *Language*, 1945, pp. 44, 54.

circle'; the Skt. term is *cāpha-*, lit. meaning 'a bow'; for a 'magnet', it is *cumbaka-*, 'one who kisses'. When scientific terminology is couched in such concrete forms, they are easily picked up by the man of the street, and thus their educative value is great. This feature of Skt. is an additional advantage which would further facilitate the intelligibility of Sanskritic terminology.

#### 5. *Intelligible brevity*

In order to save the brain from over-taxation due to lengthy words, Skt. also uses abbreviating but readily intelligible devices: thus it adds only the initial consonant of a verb to a word for the formation of various words in different contexts, cf. the following examples:—

*oṣṭhaja-* 'labial', lit. 'arising from the lips', the initial consonant *j* of *√jan* 'to be produced' being added to *oṣṭha-* 'lip'.

*mathaja-* 'butter', lit. 'arising from churning'.

*anuga-* 'a follower', lit. 'going after'.

It is on this happy basis, that words like *udaja-* 'hydrogen' have been formed by the editor-in-chief of the *Great Indian-English Dictionary*.

#### 6. *Terseness and distinctness*

Allied to the above feature, there is terseness and distinctness in Skt. word-formation which not only further facilitates the intelligibility of Skt. words, but also leaves a vivid impression on the mind of the learner, so that they are enjoyed and fully remembered, even by a semi-educated man, cf. the following words:—

*itihāsa-* 'history', lit. 'so indeed was' (*iti* 'so' *ha* 'indeed' *āsa* 'was').

*alan̄puruṣīṇa-* 'sufficient for a man'

*alaṅkarmīṇa-* 'competent to do any act'

In the above words, a whole phrase is compounded into a single terse word. The value of this terseness for scientific purposes will be acknowledged on all hands. Besides this terseness, there is a distinctness and directness in many terms, which further strengthen the impression of the learner, cf. the following words:—

*ardha-vyāsa-* 'radius of a circle', lit. 'half-diameter'. The source of English radius is Latin *radius* which means a 'rod',

*ardha-sīrin-* 'a cultivator (who takes half the crop for his labour)', lit. half-ploughman'. Such expressions, though seemingly telegraphic, become readily explicit for those familiar with Indian conditions.

#### 7. *Thus a salvation for the Indian intellect*

With these many-sided advantages, as listed above, a Skt. terminology is bound to prove a salvation for the Indian intellect, which has tremendously degenerated while rotting in the prison-wall of cram, brought on by unintelligible

Latin, and Greek terminologies That even the British have suffered from these unnatural Latin and Greek terms has been thus declared by a British writer—: 'It is well-known that the level of intellectual education among the German people is far higher than in England. The difference is due largely to the respective merits of English and German as instruments of thought. The English man is hampered in his abstract thought by the difficulty of his verbal symbolism. If we wish to talk about eternal life, we must have recourse to the Latin word 'immortality', which is quite different from the everyday words 'die' and 'death'.<sup>2</sup>

8. *Advantages to the lexicographer :*

(a) *Expressiveness* and (b) *Expansibility*

For that branch of lexicography, which is engaged in coining new words, Skt. comes like a fortune, for it has the following additional advantages:—

(a) *Expressiveness.* Skt. can express the most abstruse abstract thought, for it has proved to be a wonderfully efficient medium of conveying the concept of abstraction, and composite though single concepts by means of single words, e.g. 'man's conquest of nature', a phrase consisting of four words can be expressed in the following single Skt. word—: *manusya-kṛta-prakṛti-vijaya* 'man made nature conquest'.

(b) *Expansibility.* The potentiality of the Skt. word to expand is enormous, as it freely uses a fourfold mechanism, viz. :—

(i) *Prefixes.* The prefixes in Skt. have unusual significative power, e.g. *pra-hāra-* 'stroke', *ā-hāra-* 'food', *sam-hāra-* 'destruction' etc.

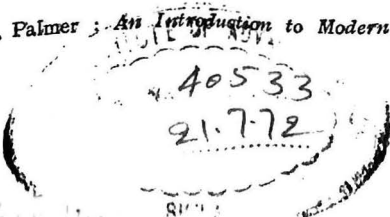
(ii) *Vowel-changes.* Skt. has the power to show changes of meaning by a mere change of the vowel, e.g. *nagara-* 'city', but *nāgara-* 'civic', *viśa-* 'enter!' but *veśa-* 'entrance' etc.

(iii) *Compounds.* That single compound words lead to brevity and speed, has been suggested by the compound illustrated under (i) above.

(iv) Like English and many other languages, Skt. uses perfixes abundantly, but much more freely than those languages, e.g. to indicate 'the nature of a horse' Skt. will use the suffix *-tva* after *asva-* 'horse', the phrase being expressed by a single word *asvatva-*.

N. B.— The above views are my personal views.

2. L. R. Palmer : *An Introduction to Modern Linguistics*, 1936, p. 178.



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