



THE DEATH OF A CLASSICAL LANGUAGE: A CASE STUDY OF SANSKRIT IN INDIA

The paper explores various reasons for the demise of Sanskrit language that is left with only 24 thousand speakers. The research also states the significant reasons for allocating more central funds to Sanskrit in comparison to other classical languages. Premised on cooperative federalism, the paper argues that other classical languages have the support of the state, local governments and Indian diaspora for their survival and prosperity. But the state of Sanskrit in its place of birth is such that it is hardly left with speakers. The governments took a long time in according the status of official language to Sanskrit in 2010 but it ended up becoming the second official language. No state in India figures Sanskrit as its primary official language. The marginalized status of Sanskrit is in stark contrast to the other classical languages.

The article further makes an attempt to dispel the notion that the current nationalistic dispensation has a political agenda of saffronization of the Indian education system. Rather the policies pursued by BJP government for Sanskrit are the furtherance of Congress policies only. The paper discusses the policies pursued by BJP government for the preservation and protection of Sanskrit language and also highlights that their nationalistic endeavors and fervors for Sanskrit language are all ado about nothing.

Introduction

In mid-March 2020, the upper house of Parliament Rajya Sabha passed the bill to upgrade the three deemed Sanskrit universities into Central universities. A whopping Rs. 640 crores spent by the Centre on the popularization of Sanskrit language in the last three years has caused a huge furore amongst the opposition parties of all hues. The paper intends to explore why Sanskrit could not become the language of masses in its own native country? It also enunciates BJP's policy since 2014 vis-à-vis Sanskrit and argues against the futility of the opposition raked up against the promotion and protection of Sanskrit that is now spoken by merely 24,812 people.

Why Sanskrit?



Other than augmenting the popularity of the language, the intention behind the various initiatives taken by the current dispensation for the preservation and promotion of Sanskrit was to enhance unity of our diverse land that is afflicted with the caste malaise. The significant report carried by *The Print* titled 'Indian tribal students are learning Sanskrit to find jobs' is a case in point. Sanskrit which was earlier confined to the elite class, *The Print* writes that increasing number of Scheduled Tribes have opted for *Shiksha Shastri*- a B.Ed equivalent course in Sanskrit, "challenging the age old Brahminical hegemony over the ancient language". According to the data of All India Survey on Higher education, the number of ST students in the Shiksha Shastri course has almost doubled in the last six years. In 2011-12, 14.14 percentages of STs were enrolled in Shiksha Shastri course. In 2014-15, the percentage of STs was 28.34 %; 2015-16, it increased to 36.81 % , 2016-17, it was 36.51 %, and in 2017-18 it was 27.13 %.

The percentage of STs enrolled in the course is much beyond the percentage of seats reserved for ST's i.e. 7.5%. Though it has been argued that making Sanskrit mandatory for the course has led to the overall surge in enrolments. But the compulsory deployment of the language in the curriculum could also be seen as a progressive step where the knowledge of Sanskrit has not remained the preserve of the elites and upper castes

as it was in ancient India. Rather it has been disseminated to the lower echelons of society for bringing an inclusive education and growth.

Jairam Ramesh, leader of the opposition has also welcomed the support given by the nationalistic dispensation for the Sanskrit but lamented at lesser financial resources allocated to other languages. He said "Sanskrit has been the monopoly of few and that it is a matter of great sadness and tragedy for India. We have to make this monopoly into a treasure of many and that is what this bill hopes to achieve". But he added "we are giving greater importance to Sanskrit which is at the cost of the other Indian regional languages".

On February 3, 2020, he said Rs. 640 crores were spent by Centre in last three years on the popularization of Sanskrit language whereas 24 crores on Tamil, three crores on Telugu and Kannada and nothing on Malayalam and Odia. Twiterrati responded disturbingly asking the government not to fritter away the tax money on the dead language. They also questioned the differential and discriminatory treatment meted out to other classical languages, asking why can't an equal amount be spent on all classical languages. Next section will discuss the efforts made by state governments to preserve our classical languages namely Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Odia. The paper will explore the reasons for not allocating much of central funds to other classical languages.

 *Sanskrit, now being popularly resonated as a "dead language", was once the pride of India's ancient civilization history and was imbued with immensely enchanting ideas of science, astronomy, mathematics, medicine and literature. This old treasure is in such a dire state that its survival is at stake. The prominent question that is put forth is that why Sanskrit has been given a special treatment.* 

Status of Classical Languages

Language has remained central in defining the identity of an individual. Language is not just a means of communication but it is loaded with bountiful ideas of science, technology, history, literature and other varied subjects. Thus, the demise of a language also causes the death of its rich heritage and legacy.

Sanskrit, now being popularly resonated as a "dead language", was once the pride of India's ancient civilization history and was imbued with immensely enchanting ideas of science, astronomy, mathematics, medicine and literature. This old treasure is in such a dire state that its survival is at stake. The prominent question that is put forth is that why Sanskrit has been given a special treatment. It is because no other classical language is living on a ventilator. No other classical language has been popularly called a dead language.

The Constitution of India abides by the principle of affirmative policies that lends support to the marginalized sections that have lagged behind in development by giving them aid in kind or in terms of monetary assistance. Similarly, the lack of support and apathy towards Sanskrit language has put it in a perilous zone where if the number of speakers falls below 10,000, it will cease to be a separate language in the Census. Only 0.002% speakers are left of Sanskrit language. In the popular imagination, Sanskrit has already been buried and Rest In Peace condolences have been offered to it.

On the other hand, thanks to the efforts of governments and society, the size of speakers of other classical languages is notable. Tamil has 70 lakhs speakers forming 5.70 % of population. Telugu has 81 lakhs i.e. 6.70% of population. Malayalam has 35 lakhs making 2.88% of population and Odia has 37 lakhs, making it 3.10 % of population. Looking at the numbers, Sanskrit is at the greater threat of extinction vis-a-vis other classical languages of India.



DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran himself calls Sanskrit a “dead” language. Therefore, it becomes all the more important to provide support and resources to fuel and nourish the sustenance of Sanskrit, otherwise it will be an abominable disgrace to the country that it could not save its own treasure that once contributed immensely in the field of science, mathematics and astronomy, from its own demise. That’s the reason that Centre had set up a nodal authority christened Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan to promote the language of Sanskrit. And it allocated Rs. 231.15 crores in 2019-20, Rs. 214.38 crores in 2018-19 and Rs. 198.31 crores in 2017-18.

It seems to be a political gimmick and unnecessary furore created by opposition parties that has falsely raked up the issue of discrimination in the treatment of other classical languages. It can be agreed that Centre should have lent more assistance to other classics as well. But this nowhere discounts the fact that the survival of Sanskrit language that calls for immediate and emergent rescue measures need to be given less assistance.

The other notable fact is that other classical languages have a host state government. If the central government lacks behind, then the state and local governments pitch in to accomplish the task of nation building. That has been the beauty of Indian federalism and it’s constitution.

And this is what has happened in the case of grant and support for the other classical languages also. The Centre’s provision of aid to the classical languages was supplemented by the all-encompassing support given by their respective state governments.

Let us look at the assistance given by the Centre and various state grants for the protection and promotion of six classical languages. Government of India bestowed the honor of classical language to Tamil in 2004, Sanskrit in 2005, Kannada in 2008, Telugu in 2008, Malayalam in 2013 and Odia in 2014. In July 2014, Human Resource and Development Ministry replied in a starred question in Lok Sabha on the benefits accrued to a language that has attained classical status. The reply said that two major annual international awards are conferred to scholars of eminence in each classical language. Centre of Excellence for studies in classical language are also set up and the UGC has been requested to create, to start with a certain number of Professional Chairs for the classical language at least in the Central Universities. And to further promote these languages, the UGC also awards research projects. In 2017-18, UGC released 95.67 lakhs, and in 2016-17 INR 56.74 lakhs were disbursed for the same.

In addition to Centre’s efforts, states fully complement in securing and furthering the spread of its languages.

For instance, Kannada became the official language of Karnataka in 1963 and is relished by Kannadigas including linguistic minorities that border Karnataka, viz. states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala and Goa. The state government has also roped in private sector to further the spread of Kannada language. Priyank Kharge, a cabinet minister in the Government of Karnataka who holds the portfolio of Minister of Information Technology and Tourism, is making use of digital technology in dissemination of the language. In an event named Elevate Call2, IT department picked up startups under Kannada and Culture category to devise new ways on how to digitalize the language and bring it in common online use for the speakers. The tourism department will also be funding them from five lakhs to 35 lakhs INR for development of the app and solutions to address the challenges confronting the promotion of Kannada.

In 2015, Jawaharlal Nehru University had instituted a Kannada chair with the financial assistance of Rs.50 lakhs every year for a period of five years by Karnataka government after the decade of the conception of its idea. The objective is to undertake language teaching, literary and cultural studies and digital archiving.

And thanks to the efforts of Centre, Centre for Classical Languages in Kannada in Central University of Karnataka is also in the pipeline.

The second classical language, Tamil was adopted as the official language in Tamil Nadu by the Tamil Nadu Official Act 1956. And it is also one of the official languages in the two Union Territories of Puducherry and Andaman and Nicobar islands. Tamil also takes pride in going international and being one of the official languages in Singapore and Sri Lanka.



Now let's look at the support given by the Centre and Tamil Nadu government in its proliferation and development. Central Institute of Classical Tamil was given Rs.22.94 crores in the last three years of 2017, 2018 and 2019. In addition to this, state government ruled by the AIADMK has also raised the grant for the development of Tamil language from Rs 5 crores to Rs 56 crore. In one of the momentous events in '*Pariksha Pe Charcha*' in 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the beauty of Tamil and remarked that it is much older language than Sanskrit.

The next classical language, Telugu has 81 Lakhs speakers and is ranked fourth among the languages with the highest number of native speakers in India. It also boasts of being the most spoken Dravidian language. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have accorded the official language status to Telugu. It is also a linguistic minority in more than six states of India and a fastest growing language in United States. From 2010-2017, USA has witnessed a spike of 86% in Telugu speakers. Satya Nadella, Microsoft CEO is the most prominent USA based Telugu speaker. The reason for the upsurge in the number of speakers is not hard to find. The export of IT engineers from Hyderabad has led to the dissemination of Telugu language.

Union Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal in his response to a question asked by Telugu Desam MP Kesineni Nani on the steps taken by the Centre to promote Telugu said that the Telugu Classical Development Centre of the Central Institute of Indian Languages of Mysore was shifted to Nellore that has started working in November 2019. He added that Telugu as a subject has been introduced in Hyderabad Central University, Benaras Hindu University, Aligarh Muslim University and Delhi University. Centre has also set up Centre for Classical Languages in Telugu in University of Hyderabad. The TDP government in Andhra Pradesh has also constituted Telugu Language Development Authority in 2018 and Chandrababu Naidu has talked of strengthening its teeth. A fund of Rupees 25 crores has also been earmarked for the development of Telugu language by the state. Apart from this, Telugu has been made compulsory in all the private schools including CBSE, ICSE and IB boards in Andhra Pradesh. Venkaiah Naidu has also asked the state government to make learning and speaking Telugu compulsory for people working in the state. International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad has also taken a noble initiative to create quality content in Telugu on Wikipedia.

Official language of Orissa and second official language of Jharkhand, Odia was conferred the classical language status in 2014. With 35 million native speakers and four millions who speak as second language, it is predominantly spoken in Odisha and is also savoured in neighbouring states such as Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. 3.1 % of Indians speak Odia according to 2011 Census.

Naveen Patnaik moved the Odisha Official Language (Amendment) Ordinance 2016 making Odia mandatory in all the official communication of the state. Any violation of the said provision now calls for punitive action. MHRD is also considering setting up Centre of Excellence for Odia. In addition, Rs. two crores have been allocated every year to Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore for promotion of classical languages.

Spoken by nearly 2.88 % of Indians, Malayalam was designated the classical language in 2013. It is the official language of Kerala and Union Territories of Puducherry and Lakshwadeep. Minorities in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and a significant numbers in Gulf countries also speak the language. Kerala cabinet has also taken the decision to make Malayalam mandatory in getting government jobs. In 2017, Kerala Assembly also passed the Malayalam Language (Teaching Act) Bill making the language a subject for study in all schools of Kerala from class 1-10th. To take the language to the Malayali diaspora, Kerala Bhasha Institute for the first time in 50 years since its inception in 1968 organized book fairs in four prominent Indian cities including Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata and Mumbai under first of its kind in 'Look Beyond Kerala' programme. The second book fair was held in Bangalore. Established under the aegis of Central government, the aim of the institute is to publish university level textbooks spanning from language and literature, science, technology, and humanities in vernacular languages. In a bid to promote language diversity in a cyberspace, Kerala government launched a state-wide campaign for Malayalam computing. Aim was to access the technology benefits and its know-how in a local language and to alter the impression that the language of computing is only English. It was decided to set up 3000 Akshaya centres to cater to 40-50 lakhs households in enabling their computing system to Malayalam language. A Malayalam computing web portal <http://malayalam.kerala.gov.in> aids in teaching Malayalam language in technology.



The popularity of Indian classical languages can also be fathomed by that the Quora, a prominent online question answer platform with its headquarters in USA is now available in Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada. Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) is also considering setting up Centres of Excellence for Odia and Classical Malayalam.

All the above six languages reverentially come under the status of classical language and most of the languages engage each other in their evolution and development. So, the preservation of a language becomes the duty of a country and the glory of the civilization lies in how well its antiquities and classics are kept.

It is also to be noted that the furore raised over the allocation of central grants to Sanskrit vis a vis other classical languages is highly political and uncalled for. In 2017-18, Comptroller and Auditor General reported that Tamil Nadu has returned a humongous amount of Rs. 3,676.55 crore of Rs 5920.39 of central aid allocated to the state for various schemes in 2017-18. And the reasons for returning the funds were delay in identification of beneficiaries, slow progress of work and short release of funds by the state. The schemes, however did not include development of Tamil language and they ranged from housing to women development, provision of employment opportunities to development of village panchayats. But it shows the sheer callousness and unnecessary political bickering by the political factions who are interested only in raking up the issues for building political capital.

Secondly, it is a misguided notion that BJP is upholding the cause of preservation of Sanskrit language for furthering its saffron agenda in Indian education system. This assumption based on ignorance has done immense damage to this rich language. The misconceived notion of associating Sanskrit with the religion has portrayed it to be non-secular entity in a secular and liberal nation. This has deprived Sanskrit of its sheen and charm amongst the current generation. It becomes important to trace the journey of the three deemed Sanskrit universities that have been converted to Central Universities by the Centre.

The first Sanskrit Commission was set up by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1957 under the tutelage of renowned linguist and educationist Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterjee.

On the basis of the report of first Sanskrit Commission, Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, country's first Sanskrit institution was established in Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh in 1961 as the premier institution of traditional *shastras* and pedagogy. The primary objective of the institution was to impart and improve Sanskrit pedagogy, to enhance the pace of higher Sanskrit learning, and to combine the traditional Sanskrit education with modern scientific research.

In 1965, the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri set up the second institution to preserve the Sanskrit legacy christened as Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth which was later renamed as Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth. The noble intention was to elevate it to an international institution. In 1970, Indira Gandhi government had set up Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, which now has 15 campuses across the country, as a nodal agency for Sanskrit education. It is an apex body that takes care of the propagation and development of Sanskrit and also assists Ministry of Human Resource and Development in formulating and implementing policies for Sanskrit studies. And it was she who first launched the Sanskrit bulletin on All India Radio with the intent to revive the language.

Therefore, the furore over the Central Sanskrit Universities Bill, 2019 to set up three central Sanskrit universities is uncalled for as it is these three deemed universities, viz. Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, New Delhi and Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Tirupati set by the Congress regime that will be converted into Central universities. This will provide an impetus to the status of universities and lend a fillip to the post-graduate, doctoral and post-doctoral education and research in the field of Sanskrit and Shastraic education. Many people from abroad will also be able to engage in learning Sanskrit and Shastraic lore from these recognized central universities.

Significant point to be noted is that it is not the BJP government that wants to elevate the status of Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan to the central university. Rather it was the UPA government that set up the Second Sanskrit Commission led by Prof Satya Vrat in 2013 with the intention to upgrade the status of Rashtriya Sanskrit



Sansthan to the national importance. Though the BJP government did not accept the recommendations put forth by Prof Satya Vrat as there was an year delay in the submission of report. In 2015, HRD ministry constituted a 13-member committee headed by former Chief Election Commissioner N. Gopalaswami to discuss matters related to promotion of the language. It gave suggestions on how to integrate the study of Sanskrit with other disciplines such as physics, chemistry, mathematics, medical science and law and have also solicited reforms for Sanskrit education in schools and colleges.

Amounting our ancient heritage to a culpable saffronization and equating it with a particular religion is a denigration of its richness, its legacy and the immense contribution of Sanskrit in the knowledge of science and literature. To say, that building of Sanskrit universities will protect and promote only one kind of a narcissistic ideology must look at the resolution passed by Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit at Kalady in Kerala against the Citizenship Amendment Act becoming the first university in the country to condemn the violence unleashed on students, teachers and scholars.

Popularization of Sanskrit under Modi Government

PM Modi has been frequently deploying Sanskrit *shlokas* in his public speeches. Whether it was on the launch of multi-role combat fighter jets or against the Chinese unlawful incursion in Galwan Valley. Or it was during the pandemic lockdown. His poetry book titled '*Naynam Idam Dhanyam*' was also released in Sanskrit for the lovers of the language. His official website can also be accessed in Sanskrit language.

Many Sanskrit words have been deployed in our daily usage without many people knowing that the words they are pronouncing are actually Sanskrit words. The popular government application to combat Covid-19 has been made by combining two sanskritic words- Aarogya Setu meaning a 'bridge to being healthy'.

In 2010, Uttarakhand made Sanskrit the second official language of the state. Himachal Pradesh has also tabled the bill Himachal Pradesh Official Language (Amendment) Bill, 2019 to make Sanskrit their second official language in the state. The language has also been made mandatory in all the state-run governments in both Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh and private schools in Uttarakhand from class 3-8th. It has also been decided to replace Urdu language on signboards at state platforms with Sanskrit. A new policy has been enunciated to create Sanskrit village in every block (administrative division) of Uttarakhand. In 2019, the Centre also advised Sanskrit teaching varsities namely Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Delhi, Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Delhi and Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Tirupati, to adopt two villages each. Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan has already adopted five villages - Jubarta (Mohanpur), Tripura, Masot (Pragpur) Himachal Pradesh, Chittembail (Shimoga), Karnataka, Adat (Puzhakkal), Kerala, and Barai (Huzoor) Madhya Pradesh. The complaint of Sanskrit linguists on the pedagogical method for Sanskrit that Sanskrit is taught in English to a student that is also called a Grammar Translation Method, has been started to address with Haridwar based Uttarakhand Sanskrit Academy making the use of Sanskrit compulsory on the campus for both students and faculty alike. In 2019, Maharshi Sandipani Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan (MSRVP), a fully funded autonomous body under HRD Ministry has approved setting up of Bhartiya Shiksha Board (BSB) to promote Ved Vidya that will have Sanskrit and Vedas as major subject. The Survey of India after a gap of 18 years has released the map of India in Sanskrit also. It has been published in the ancient language in 1979, 1983, 1988, 1997 and the last time it was published in 2002 under the NDA regime.

But an All India Survey on Higher Education has a different story to tell. Despite the mammoth investment and efforts in enhancing popularity of the language, Sanskrit has not been able to win the hearts of the young. There has been a decline in the number of students enrolling for studying Sanskrit. Though two more universities have been set up to increase the intake of students, but no proportionate increase has happened in the enrolment of students. Rather students in PG level and MPhil have declined. There has been a small increase in PhD students but comparing it with 2015-16, the indicators appear pessimistic. This is despite the MHRD guidelines to give NAAC accreditation to Sanskrit universities so as to make them at par with national and international universities. But this also raises a startling question, are the governmental policies for reviving Sanskrit a shot in dark?



Years	Universities	Students in PhD Sanskrit	Students enrolled in MPhil Sanskrit	Students Enrolled in PG Sanskrit
2013-14	11	994	263	23590
2014-15	11	773	400	23951
2015-16	11	1074	620	25228
2016-17	13	939	505	26197
2017-18	13	971	476	26886
2018-19	13	1048	401	21226

Much Ado about Nothing

The greatest threat to Sanskrit language is not its dwindling speakers, or the paucity of funds for its development, or its diminishing popularity and endorsement. But it's misidentification with the religion. Sanskrit has been equated with the Hindu religion. This divisive and factionalism towards Sanskrit has confined it to a section. Therefore, any attempt to learn and disseminate the language and traditions of Sanskrit raises the political embers of "imposition", "saffronization", "hegemony", curtailing its spread and endorsement across the religions and castes. The result is, Sanskrit is not looked as a rich, ancient heritage of India. But rather as a mean dominion of a few Hindi bigots.

In its criticism of Modi government, an eminent Sanskrit scholar Shastri Kosalendradas says "The government under Narendra Modi should have done more for Sanskrit because the BJP claims to be a custodian of Hindu traditions".

The above words of Sanskrit scholar Shastri Kosalendradas underline the mere rhetoric endorsed by the BJP government in promotion of Sanskrit language. He commends the significant work of Congress government in development of Sanskrit language as unparalleled.

But it is not only Sanskrit scholar who is not in consonance with BJP's effort in development of ancient language.

RSS backed Samskrita Bharati, an NGO dedicated for the protection, development and propagation of Sanskrit language is severely miffed with the Modi government's insincere efforts towards the revival of Sanskrit. Expressing their chagrin, the organization held a three-day *chintan baithak* from 9-11 November 2019 and invited more than 4000 delegates over 17 countries to accelerate the spread of Sanskrit globally and discuss the concerns and impediments afflicting the promotion and propagation of language in their respective countries.

Samskrita Bharati has expressed its displeasure over the decline of status of Sanskrit under the BJP government that has explicitly kept the nation first. The organization's Akhil Bharatiya Mantri, Srish Dev Pujari expressed remorse over the closure of third of 800 Sanskrit schools in Uttar Pradesh due to the lack of funds and teachers. He also added that with this half-hearted approach, an equal number of Sanskrit schools will soon close down. Citing an example of Sampuranand Sanskrit Vishwavidyalaya, a university specializing in Sanskrit language located in Varanasi, Srish Dev lamented at the continuous dwindling of students taking exam in Sanskrit. In 2010, 1.61 lakh students took Sanskrit that has now fallen down to 54,715 in 2019. He also said that the recommendations put forth by the committee constituted under former Chief Election Commissioner N. Gopalaswami in 2016 had gone unheeded. Not even 10% of it was implemented in last three years.

Srish Dev disclosed that the objection to the pedagogy related to Sanskrit discipline has fallen on deaf ears. The current dispensation has not even changed the Sanskrit learning system. Sanskrit, he says, cannot be taught like English where grammar is pushed first. Rather Sanskrit has to be taught through *sambhashan* (conversation) and not by grammar.



Telegraph reported that 200 contract teachers mounted protests in front of Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan headquarters in Delhi to demand regularization of jobs. They complained that PM Modi government has not revised their remuneration even once. Unlike Congress government, that thrice revised their remuneration from Rs. 8000 in 2006 to Rs. 41,000 in 2012. And the less said about leave and provident fund, better it is.

But on visiting the website of Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, it has been found that the Sansthan advertised various important posts in both teaching and non-teaching areas and candidates were called for interviews for recruitment reportedly.

Sanskrit can also gain popularity if it also provides gainful employment to its learners. Another deemed university that was promoted to Central University status, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth also advertised its posts in both teaching and non-teaching fronts in 2019 but no links were found for the documents of eligible/rejected candidates or there were not any calls for interviews yet. The third university that was elevated to Central University status, Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, Tirupati also advertised various posts but the recruitment is yet to take place.

Youth4work, a recruitment portal that boasts of its partnership with All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and has almost 50 lakh users report that no active jobs are available for 519 candidates seeking jobs in Sanskrit on their site. The portal also reports that top companies in World offering highest salary packages in Sanskrit are currently N/A.

Another popular job portal Naukri.com did not have anything substantial to offer to Sanskrit graduates or post-graduates except an insignificant handful of openings. Sadly, Monster.com also a job portal, had nothing to offer.

The government's high pitch endorsement and low action on Sanskrit is also blatant in the no provision of support to the world's oldest and only running daily in Sanskrit, *Sudharma* that began in 1970 in Mysore by Sanskrit scholar Kalale Nadadur Varadaraja Iyengar. It lately appealed to its 3000 subscribers for donation for its sustenance after receiving no response from Honorable Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Smriti Irani and Rajnath Singh.

State of Sanskrit Today in India

The language of Sanskrit in India, famously called the *devabhasha*, has prospered magnificently in the realm of divinity.

Today, a number of yoga and meditation organizations in India and abroad have resuscitated life into the language by teaching Sanskrit *shlokas* to the seekers.

Sahaja Yoga founded in 1970 is educating young and old on the meditational practices and Sanskrit *mantras*.

Sanskrit symbols or *mantras* have also become quite a rage amongst youth in selection of their tattoo designs. Clothing companies like Fab India, have incredibly contributed in making Sanskrit a fad by printing symbols, images, *mantras* on their clothes.

Though Sanskrit has made inroads into the lives of people, it has not become a part of their lifestyle. The people have little knowledge of the language. They know about Sanskrit, but unfortunately they do not know Sanskrit.

The reasons are not hard to find.

Sanskrit is taught as an optional language in various states and at various levels from 1st to 12th standard. For example, Kerala offers Sanskrit as second language from class 1.



About 14,000 schools affiliated to Vidya Bharati Akhila Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan teach Sanskrit from class IInd. State of Uttarakhand teach Sanskrit from class IIIrd. It is also offered as part of Three Language Formula by most State Secondary Education AICTE Boards from class VIth to X and as second optional language in class XIth and XIIth. Some states also offer it as a composite course along with the mother tongue as well. Though approximately five crores students study Sanskrit at school level but only few thousands are the speakers of the language.

There are about 5000 traditional Sanskrit *pathashalas* at school level and 1000 Veda *pathashalas* in the country. Eight states have Sanskrit Secondary Education Board or Directorate of Sanskrit Education. Approximately 120 general universities offer Sanskrit at UG and PG level and there exist 15 Sanskrit universities.

Ten Sanskrit academies, 16 oriental research institutes, about 60 periodicals and magazines in Sanskrit exist and about hundred NGOs are working for the popularization of language.

Most of the states are offering Sanskrit at XIth and XIIth for Arts stream students but very few states are offering Sanskrit to Science and Commerce stream students. This is one of the major cause of a disconnect between Sanskrit and Science and technology.

Another reason for students not pursuing Sanskrit at higher education levels is the discriminate treatment meted out at school level. CBSE, National Institute of Open Schooling(NIOS) and Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE), all the three boards have removed not only Sanskrit but also local and regional language from higher secondary classes. They have three language formula till class VIIIth and teach two languages (English and regional) in IXth and Xth and one language that is English is taught in XIth and XIIth grade.

Some states even offer new subjects like computer, environmental science, agriculture, and skills in place of Sanskrit at secondary level.

The low status of Sanskrit can be attributed to the lesser salaries offered to the teachers. In many states, Sanskrit teachers are offered lesser salaries than their peers teaching other subjects. Britishers who paid higher salaries to teachers teaching Western subjects than the Sanskrit teachers introduced this legacy of paying lower salaries. The reason was that English speaking, well-trained administrators were required to sustain British rule. And Sanskrit education was merely confined to insignificant character building and moral education.

The panel headed by the former Chief Election Commissioner, N. Gopalaswami recommended pay parity in schools. It is palpable that when the Sanskrit educators are left to fend for themselves without much finance and institutional support, the demotivation is passed onto the students as well and they do not opt for Sanskrit in higher education thus resulting in further lesser production of Sanskrit teachers. This leads to the vicious cycle where low availability of Sanskrit teachers dismally impacts the quality of Sanskrit education.

The committee also noted the absence of B.Ed course in Sanskrit and suggested the introduction of diploma course for the students aspiring to become Sanskrit teachers.

Apart from pay discrepancy, the other conspicuous reason for the decline of Sanskrit education in India has been 'Grammar Translation Method'. Though the entire world has discarded this method, unfortunately it is still very much in use for imparting Sanskrit education in India. And this has gravely affected the prosperity of Sanskrit. People read translations only and not Sanskrit. Even today, the question paper of Sanskrit comes along with the translation. Whereas the question papers in other languages do not carry the translation. Therefore, it does not become easy to understand the Sanskrit language. Hence, it has been earmarked as 'difficult' language and students have taken to rote learning and memorization. This memorization has also made it a very 'scoring' subject.

Though universities now give a concession to students in admissions who have taken Sanskrit in secondary and higher secondary classes or want to opt for Sanskrit as optional language, but this has not resulted in qualitative learning of the language. Result is that students know about Sanskrit but they do not know and cannot speak the language of Sanskrit. They can translate Sanskrit to other languages but not vice versa. They



can understand Sanskrit but cannot converse in Sanskrit. There are Sanskrit classes and departments but no environment for Sanskrit. That's why it has become difficult to promote inter-disciplinary studies in Sanskrit institutions.

The Way Ahead

Many prominent personalities involved in the making of Constituent Assembly including Dr. B.R. Ambedkar favored the grant of official status to Sanskrit language. Having himself read many Sanskrit texts, he was of the firm view that Sanskrit will correct the distorted history of India. After his in-depth study, he concluded that Aryans and Dravids are the original inhabitants of India. He believed that the reading of classical Sanskrit texts by masses will ultimately annihilate the caste hierarchy and destroy the false and derogatory notions attached to the *Dalits*.

This paper is an attempt to state the apathetic condition of our dying language, that is now spoken as their mother tongue by only 0.00198 percentage or 24,821 people of India's 121 crores of population.

There is an urgent need for the state concomitant with the civil society, academia and media to vamp up its efforts and sincerity in the sustenance and preservation of our withering heritage. ■

References:

1. Ramphal, N. (2018, August 13). Indian tribal students are learning Sanskrit to find jobs. *The Print* . <https://theprint.in/india/governance/more-and-more-scheduled-tribe-students-are-learning-the-language-of-the-brahmins/96638/>
2. Nehru, J. (1946). *Discovery of India*. USA: John Day.
3. *Outlook The News Scroll*. (2020, February 10). Row in LS as Dayanidhi calls Sanskrit "dead" language. *Outlook* .
4. Explained Desk. (2020, January 20). How is a language declared 'classical' in India, what benefits it enjoys. *The Indian Express* . [https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-is-a-language-declared-classical-in-india-what-benefits-it-enjoys-6216415/#:~:text=are%20they%20classified%3F-,Currently%2C%20six%20languages%20enjoy%20the%20'Classical'%20status%3A%20Tamil,%2C%20and%20Odia%20\(2014\).](https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-is-a-language-declared-classical-in-india-what-benefits-it-enjoys-6216415/#:~:text=are%20they%20classified%3F-,Currently%2C%20six%20languages%20enjoy%20the%20'Classical'%20status%3A%20Tamil,%2C%20and%20Odia%20(2014).)
5. Balasubramanyam, K. (2018, March 01). Priyank Kharge funds startups that promote Kannada. *The Economic Times* . <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/priyank-kharge-funds-startups-that-promote-kannada/articleshow/63119947.cms>
6. ANI. (2015, November 26). Kannada Studies Chair instituted in JNU. *Business Standard* . https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/kannada-studies-chair-instituted-in-jnu-115112601237_1.html
7. *The Print Team*. (2019, October 1). After Hindi, row over Sanskrit in Anna University: Is Tamil Nadu's language politics dated? *The Print* .
8. Reality Check Team and BBC Telugu. (2018, October 21). *Do you speak Telugu? Welcome to America*. Retrieved from www.bbc.com: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45902204>
9. *Deccan Chronicle*. (2019, November 19). *Telugu Promotion Underway : Centre*. Retrieved from www.deccanchronicle.com: <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/politics/191119/telugu-promotion-underway-centre.html>



10. *Express News Service*. (2019 , November 11). No threat to Telugu, it's a must in all schools: Language panel chief. *The New Indian Express* .
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/andhra-pradesh/2019/nov/11/no-threat-to-telugu-its-a-must-in-all-schools-language-panel-chief-2060131.html>
11. *Hans News Service*. (2020, February 24). Warangal: Venkaiah Naidu pitches for promotion of Telugu <https://www.thehansindia.com/telangana/warangal-venkaiah-naidu-pitches-for-promotion-of-telugu-607190>. *The Hans India* .
12. Kurumanath, K. (2020, February 8). IIIT-H calls for promoting quality Telugu content on Wikipedia. *The Hindu Business Line* .
<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/iiit-h-calls-for-promoting-quality-telugu-content-on-wikipedia/article30769781.ece>
13. *Press Trust of India*. (2017, May 24). Kerala assembly passes Malayalam Language Bill. *Business Standard* .
https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/kerala-assembly-passes-malayalam-language-bill-117052401598_1.html
14. *First Post*. (2017, January 31). Kerala State Launches Malayalam Computing Initiative. *The First Post*.
<https://www.firstpost.com/business/biztech/kerala-state-launches-malayalam-computing-initiative-1866599.html>
15. J. S. (2019, August 3). Tamil Nadu returns Rs3600 crore central aid unused. *The Times of India* . <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/tamil-nadu-returns-rs-3600-crore-central-aid-unused/articleshow/70505689.cms>
16. Goswami, R. (2019, August 15). On Sanskrit Diwas, a look at what govts did for the ancient language. *Hindustan Times* .
17. *India Today Web Desk*. (2019, December 11). 3 Sanskrit deemed universities to become central. *India Today* .
18. *Press Trust of India*. (2013, December 30). Commission set up to promote Sanskrit. *Business Standard* https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/commission-set-up-to-promote-sanskrit-113123001035_1.html
19. N, S. (2020, January 20). Sanskrit varsity becomes first univ to pass resolution against CAA. *Deccan Chronicle* . <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/politics/200120/sanskrit-univ-passes-resolution-against-caa.html>
20. Chauhan, P. (2019, February 17). Bill to make Sanskrit second official language of HP passed. *The Tribune* .
<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/himachal/bill-to-make-sanskrit-second-official-language-of-hp-passed-730075>
21. *Press Trust of India*. (2019, August 12). Sanskrit to be taught in Govt primary schools of Himachal Pradesh. *The India Today* .
<https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/sanskrit-to-be-taught-in-govt-primary-schools-of-himachal-pradesh-1580142-2019-08-12#:~:text=Sanskrit%20will%20be%20taught%20in,to%20regain%20its%20lost%20glory&text=To%20help%20Sanskrit%20regain%20its,today%20i.e.%20August%208%2C%202019>
22. Chopra, R. (2019, January 12). To blend Vedic and modern studies, HRD body clears Bharatiya Shiksha Board. *The Indian Express* . <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/to-blend-vedic-and-modern-studies-hrd-body-clears-bharatiya-shiksha-board-5534352/>
23. Sharma, M. B. (2020, February 26). New Sanskrit map of India features Nagalandam, Mansarovar-jheelah and even Pakistanam. *The Print* .
<https://theprint.in/india/new-sanskrit-map-of-india-features-nagalandam-mansarovar-jheelah-and-even-pakistanam/372998/>
24. <http://aishe.nic.in/aishe/reports>

25. Sharma, K. (2020, March 12). How Modi govt plans to get international recognition for India's Sanskrit universities. *The Print* . <https://theprint.in/india/education/how-modi-govt-plans-to-get-international-recognition-for-indias-sanskrit-universities/379101/#:~:text=The%20Ministry%20of%20Human%20Resource,of%20other%20higher%20education%20institutions.>
26. Goswami, R. (2019, August 15). On Sanskrit Diwas, a look at what govts did for the ancient language . *Hindustan Times* . <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/on-sanskrit-diwas-a-look-at-what-govts-did-for-the-ancient-language-opinion/story-jYWJEf2iH21bUDTAQC5gYP.html>
27. Arnimesh, S. (2019, November 6). RSS affiliate not happy with Modi govt's efforts to promote Sanskrit, charts own course. *The Print* . <https://theprint.in/india/rss-affiliate-not-happy-with-modi-govts-efforts-to-promote-sanskrit-charts-own-course/316051/>
28. Arnimesh, S. (2019, November 6). RSS affiliate not happy with Modi govt's efforts to promote Sanskrit, charts own course. *The Print* . <https://theprint.in/india/rss-affiliate-not-happy-with-modi-govts-efforts-to-promote-sanskrit-charts-own-course/316051/>
29. Arnimesh, S. (2019, November 6). RSS affiliate not happy with Modi govt's efforts to promote Sanskrit, charts own course. *The Print* . <https://theprint.in/india/rss-affiliate-not-happy-with-modi-govts-efforts-to-promote-sanskrit-charts-own-course/316051/>
30. Mohanty, B. K. (2018, December 30). Sanskrit reality check for Munshi Modi. *The Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/sanskrit-reality-check-for-munshi-modi/cid/1680348>
31. <http://www.sanskrit.nic.in/>
32. <https://www.cos.youth4work.com/Insights/work-in-world-for-Sanskrit>
33. <https://www.cos.youth4work.com/Insights/work-in-world-for-Sanskrit>
34. Bose, A. (2016, June 12). India's Only Sanskrit Daily Is Dying, Seeks Help From The Government. *Huffington Post*. https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/06/12/sanskrit-daily_n_10423440.html
35. http://www.sanskrit.nic.in/data/Vision_and_Road_Map.pdf
36. http://www.sanskrit.nic.in/data/Vision_and_Road_Map.pdf

AUTHOR



Dr Mithila Urmila Bagai

(The author is an Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Maitreyi College, University of Delhi)