



The Contribution of Sanskrit Literature in Preventing Social Decay

Dr. Ashim Chakraborty

Asst. Prof., Dept. of Sanskrit, Women's Christian College, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

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Abstract

This essay, within a very limited scope, discusses the evolving aspects of contemporary society – such as the modern education system, the relationship between students and teachers, women's education, child marriage, social inequality, the establishment of material well-being, and the duties of householders – all of which are of great importance. In the context of the degradation witnessed in the social sphere, it explores how Sanskrit literature, through its various provisions and teachings, has played a crucial role in preserving and upholding social values. Various aspects related to this contribution are discussed here.

Keywords: Veda, Language, Society, Welfare, Social decay

Sanskrit literature holds a distinguished place in the cultural and intellectual history of India. More than a vehicle for spiritual expression, it served as a powerful force for maintaining social harmony, guiding ethical behavior, and preventing moral decay over centuries. In ancient India, society faced the same dangers of moral decline and social disintegration that any civilization confronts over time. Sanskrit literature, however, provided a robust framework to resist such deterioration. Through its sacred texts – the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas, and the two great epics, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata – Sanskrit preserved and transmitted essential values like truth, justice, compassion, duty, and self-restraint. These works were not confined to religious thought alone; they embodied practical lessons for daily life, offering models of ideal conduct and governance.

One of the greatest contributions of Sanskrit literature was the development and propagation of the concept of the four Puruṣārthas: Dharma (righteous duty), Artha (material prosperity), Kāma (pleasure), and Mokṣa (spiritual liberation). By emphasizing the balanced pursuit of these four aims, Sanskrit texts provided individuals with a clear moral compass, preventing extremism in behavior and promoting harmony between personal ambition and societal well-being. The legal and social treatises composed in Sanskrit, such as the Manusmṛti and the Dharmaśāstras, codified ethical standards and civic duties. These texts emphasized the importance of social responsibilities, respect for elders, care for the weak, and the importance of maintaining order and justice. Though some rules reflected the hierarchical structure of ancient society, the underlying spirit aimed at sustaining collective peace and righteousness.

Furthermore, Sanskrit plays, poetry, and philosophical treatises reinforced high ideals of character and conduct. Writers like Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti, and Bhāsa portrayed the virtues of patience, forgiveness, honesty, and sacrifice in their works, inspiring generations to live by these principles. These cultural narratives continuously reminded society of the consequences of greed, pride, and moral weakness, helping to curb social decay. Sanskrit literature's emphasis on self-knowledge and spiritual discipline also played a significant role. By encouraging introspection, detachment from excess materialism, and dedication to a higher purpose, it nurtured a society that valued inner growth alongside external achievements.

At present, some people accept Sanskrit only as the language of scriptural texts. However, Sanskrit should be recognized as the language that conveys religious knowledge. The profound history of Sanskrit reveals that in the history of Indian life and Indian culture, the contribution of the Sanskrit language is truly extraordinary. From the ocean to the Himalayas, the influence of this language has spread. Due to its universal heritage, even today, the journey of this language remains ongoing. As a result, this language is known to be highly enriched in fields such as religion, philosophy, society, grammar, poetry, history, ancient sciences, medicine, and applied sciences.

In this short essay, emphasis is placed on important aspects of modern society's development, such as the current state of education, the relationship between students and teachers, women's education, child marriage, social inequalities, the establishment of happiness in family life, and the duties of householders. In the social sphere, the decline that has manifested in these areas is discussed, highlighting the crucial role that Sanskrit literature can play in addressing these issues. Various important points are examined here.

In the R̥gveda (10.85), there is a description of the marriage practices of that time. From that description, it is evident that there was a concept of an ideal household where all members' minds were unified and harmonious, for example:

सम्राज्ञी शशुरे भव सम्राज्ञी श्वश्र्वां भव।
ननान्दरि सम्राज्ञी भव सम्राज्ञी अधिदेवेषु।ⁱ

(Be a queen to your father-in-law, be a queen to your mother-in-law, be a queen to your husband's sisters, be a queen among all the other relatives.)

Again, in the fourth act of the famous play *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, composed by the great poet Kālidāsa, when Śakuntalā is about to leave for her husband's home, the sage Kaṇva reminds her of the essential duties that must be observed, as follows:

शुश्रूषस्व गुरून् कुरु प्रियसखीवृत्तिं सपत्नीजने।
भर्तुर्विप्रकृतापि रोषणतया मास्म प्रतिङ्गमः॥
भूयिष्ठं भव दक्षिणा परिजने भाग्येष्वनुत्सुकिनी।
यान्त्येवं गृहिणीपदं युवतयो वामाः कुलस्याधयः॥ⁱⁱ

(Serve your elders with devotion. Behave like a dear friend even towards the co-wives (other family women). Even if your husband speaks harshly, do not respond with anger. Always remain generous towards the household members, and do not become greedy for wealth. Thus, young women, by acting in this way, attain the revered status of a householder and become the adornment of the family)

This advice is applicable at all times and in all circumstances. Even in the present era, such guidance remains essential for attaining happiness and prosperity in family life; its

importance has certainly not diminished in any way. In the present society, orphans can be seen wandering here and there. Due to the lack of food, permanent shelter, and continuous security, and because of the absence of proper care and nurturing, they somehow survive, but over time, they become a source of fear and disturbance in society. Because of society's neglect and acts of injustice, many of them turn into thieves, criminals, or terror-stricken individuals. On the other hand, childless wealthy couples spend enormous amounts of money seeking heirs through various means. If such families were to adopt and nurture even one orphan with love and care, human society could be freed from future dangers. Thus, humanity would achieve complete development. Here itself lies the true welfare of society. Just as in ancient times, destitute figures like Śakuntalā, who had lost her parents, found loving shelter at the hermitage of sage Maharṣi Kaṇva. And grew up to become a virtuous woman, similarly, even in the modern age, capable individuals should take up such noble deeds with self-restraint and responsibility. Then, orphans would be transformed into complete and contributing members of society, and there would be no room for doubt in this regard.

In this modern twentieth century, we observe that women's education and child marriage have become prominently visible issues in the structure of society. In the global arena today, although we are influenced by Western education, we are still not entirely free from these social evils. Moreover, modern technological civilization has liberated us from one kind of bondage, yet offered us another new form of bondage. This new bondage is the persistent inequality between men and women. The reasons for this lie in the fact that even before birth, through the misuse of modern technological assistance, wealthy individuals determine the gender of the unborn child and, if it is a girl, often destroy her. Although legal prohibitions against gender-based discrimination exist, such practices are still observed in society. Furthermore, if a daughter is born into a determined family, then the condition of the daughter in the modern culture becomes almost like that of the dead. From the very moment of her birth, the girl child becomes an object of neglect and misfortune and somehow survives. Thus, the girl child is often deprived of proper education and affection. In her childhood itself, her parents, seeking to free themselves of responsibility, attempt to hand her over to someone else through marriage. Such a girl has neither autonomy nor free will, and this situation is a stark reality of modern technological civilization.

However, in our ancient scriptures it is stated –

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।

यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः ॥ⁱⁱⁱ

(Where women are honored, there the gods are pleased; where they are not honored, all actions (rituals, endeavors) become fruitless.)

However, in the modern age, such a way of thinking does not befit us. Such narrow-mindedness must be eliminated. Equality between men and women should not only be established in law but also practically implemented in every sphere of life. In ancient India, it was believed that man and woman were two equal halves of a single body. This thought must also be cultivated by us today because the harmonious development of men and women leads to the complete progress of society.

The transformation of education into one that fosters the development of humanity must be rooted in service and discipline. In such education, even though there is the

presence of a teacher, true teachers are rare – only those who embody these ideals are real teachers.

अस्माकं शास्त्रेषु उच्यते - सा विद्या या विमुक्तये ॥

In our scriptures, it is said – that alone is true knowledge which leads to liberation (freedom).

However, in the present time, education has largely become a means for earning a livelihood rather than for achieving true liberation. Through such education, a person becomes extremely materialistic. In ancient times, education was meant to dispel darkness and spread light. Therefore, even in the modern era, the education system should be structured based on the ideals of ancient Indian education. By doing so, like in ancient times, even today, the relationship between teacher and student would become more complete and sweeter. In the ancient age, teachers regarded their students as their own children. Only those students who were nurtured and developed with care were considered truly successful. Thus, it should be considered that the teacher-student relationship today must not be just an external formal connection but must be based on deep internal affection and bonding

In relation to the subject of the teacher-student relationship, a verse from the *Katha Upaniṣad* is found, which emphasizes the deep internal bond between teacher and student. The verse is as follows:

ओं सह नावतु ।
सह नौ भुनक्तु ।
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजसि नावधीतमस्तु ।
मा विद्विषावहै ॥
ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥^{iv}

(Om, may we (teacher and student) be protected together. May we be nourished together May we work together with great energy, may our study be enlightening and not give rise to hostility Om, peace, peace, peace.)

In the present time, however, the teacher-student relationship has been greatly distorted. Teachers must recognize that the students they interact with are not their equals.

Because of neglecting this understanding, sometimes even minor offenses by students are met with harsh punishment, inappropriate speech, and unnecessary strictness. Due to a lack of emotional sensitivity, teachers often show excessive rigidity towards students. Whether in the governance of a nation or the education system, unnecessary harshness is simply another name for insensitivity. In the book *Rabindra Parichaya*, a relevant observation is made in this context: "*Patience is the strength of the teacher. Where there is no patience, even a capable person becomes weak.*"

Student life is essentially a microcosm of the entire social life. The fundamental aim of this microcosm is to facilitate the upliftment of the entire society. In order to achieve this goal, the education system adopted in ancient India combined profound knowledge with practical life experience and emphasized a simple way of living. However, the modern education system has been heavily influenced by Western thought and culture. Western civilization is primarily rooted in materialism. In contrast, Indian culture is deeply grounded in the ideal of renunciation. Without considering the welfare of others, no one

can truly be called human. True humanity lies in freeing oneself from blind selfishness and striving for the welfare of all. Therefore, the educational ideals honored in ancient India should be applied even in the modern age. In the Vedic society, wealthy individuals and established families held significant positions. Despite this, the moral standard of that society was quite high. However, in today's world, abandoning morality, immorality has begun to raise its head everywhere in society. In India, the place of Sanskrit has been diminished, and along with that, morality and political stability have also declined. Truly, the degradation we see in today's society is the result of neglecting Sanskrit and its associated values. Education in morality, character building, social knowledge, economics, and political sciences were all originally preserved in Sanskrit literature and treatises. Without moral knowledge, it is impossible to establish a society devoted to the welfare of all or to promote true progress. If we wish to re-establish truth and equality in today's society, we must first elevate the moral standards of every individual. The absence of moral education in our current curriculum is the root cause of our downfall. Sanskrit and moral education are deeply intertwined. Now, having considered Sanskrit as a "dead language," we are facing the dire consequences of this misjudgment. Therefore, to revive moral integrity, establish societal stability, and uphold equality among all, special importance must again be given to the study of Sanskrit. In this brief essay, we have summarized the decline of society and its causes. We have also explained, in short, why the revival of Sanskrit is essential for reversing this degradation. So, in this brief essay, we have discussed, in short, the decline of society and its causes. We have also explained why the revival of Sanskrit is essential for reversing this decline.

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ⁱ Ṛgveda 10.85.46

ⁱⁱ *Abhiṣṭānaśākuntalam* 4.18

ⁱⁱⁱ Manusmṛti 3.56

^{iv} Śānti Mantra (Peace Invocation) from the Taittirīya Upaniṣad