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## Priceless heritage

By: SONAL SRIVASTAVA on Jul 17, 2015 | 153 Views | [2 Responses](#)Category **Science of Spirituality**[ADD TO SPIRITUAL DIARY](#)[g+](#)

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### Why is it important to popularise the study of Sanskrit in India?

My guess is that there are 75 million students studying Sanskrit in India; however, they are learning nothing. You say you studied Sanskrit. If you did, what do you remember? Perhaps you remember very little. Sanskrit is part of India's heritage. If India really cares about its classical heritage, it needs to figure a way to improve

its teaching. For instance, India is the birthplace of Persian modernity, but today how many people here would be able to read classical Persian? All I'm saying is that people can be taught these languages in a joyful way, in a way there is real learning.

Students flock to the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT); they acquire PhDs, but mostly they become businessmen; they don't grow up to become scholars. You need to ensure that there is a class of professional scholars who are trained to the highest levels of expertise in classical languages. In the same way as there are IITs and IIMs, you need institutes that teach these languages and the fund of wisdom they encompass. Everybody cares about science and management. Why shouldn't there be an Indian Institute of Classics? I'm not here to tell Indians what they should do, I'm just an observer who cares and if a friend who cares cannot speak, then who can? There is a famous line in the Ramayana, where Vibhishana says that there are many people who will tell you what you want to hear, but how many people will tell you what is true, but what you don't want to hear?

### What do you think would be a good way to get people interested in India's classical languages and literature?

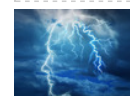
I wrote an article in which I explored conditions that were conducive to a vibrant, creative, joyful world of Sanskrit. In many cases, you need a coherent, stable and supportive structure of patronage, which in 20th century would have been replaced by a market and in the 21st century, a political power that ideally has open, legitimate, joyful, honest and open view of culture. For Sanskrit to prosper in India today, you need a political environment that is open and inclusive and embodies the inclusive energies of the great Sanskrit tradition, not a divisive exclusionary, majoritarian and unhappy environment. It can't come out of a sense of humiliation; it has to come out of a sense of pride and joy. Sanskrit is not the preserve of any one group; it's a preserve of people who care about the beauty and richness of this language.

### Do languages have destinies?

Better would be to say that they have their own dynamics. How do you explain the growth of a global language like English? It was practically nothing in global terms, In the 13th century CE — like Latin, which was the language of a barbarian tribe in the Tiber valley. In contrast, Sanskrit was the language of religious professionals in the middle of the first millennium BC. Destiny is a wrong word; it sounds like no human agency is involved; that things are driven by gods or something, but human beings do this. Why do some languages rise to global status and others have their regional power and yet others have very local existences? I like Tulu, Kannada, Sanskrit system or Konkani, Kodava and Kannada where each language has its place in the language order. Destiny may be an enigma. Why didn't Tulu become the language of globalisation? There were more people speaking Tulu in the first century CE than there were



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speaking Latin in the seventh century BCE. My teacher at Harvard used to ask why this little language from Tiber Valley became a global cultural powerhouse. Well, Tulu didn't have an imperial army! They only had tender coconut and you can't go to war with that!

### What led to Sanskrit's decline?

Just 40 years ago, you had a major project on the Ramayana in Baroda. Kashiraj Banaras was trying to do major books on the puranas. You had publication programmes in Trivandrum, Madras, Calcutta and Baroda of newly edited manuscripts. What are they publishing now? You know how many manuscripts are lying untouched, unread? Why are they not being edited and published? I may not know many things that have been going on; there may be fabulous projects I'm ignorant of, great books I have missed, and world class scholars I don't know about. I'm prepared to admit that I'm wrong, but I don't see any great projects, I don't see great books or journals being published in your classical languages.

### Is the modern version of Sanskrit more complicated with ras, chandas and alankaras than classical Sanskrit?

It was the beauty of Sanskrit alankaras and chandas that interested people of China, Thailand and Java. They wanted to write Sanskrit poetry in Thai, Chinese and Javanese. The Chinese referred to it as beautiful sounds. This was in the ninth century; now people have begun to study the influence of Sanskrit poetry on Chinese. One of the things that the Murty Classical Library — being set up by Narayan Murty's family — is that it wants to provide real evidence for India's classical past, with the hope of dispelling fantasies about the classical past, whether it is to do with ancient surgeries or intergalactic vimanas. The Murty classical library will be providing real evidence for people around the world to get deeply into Indian cultural history on the basis of real evidence — and not on mere fantastical stories.

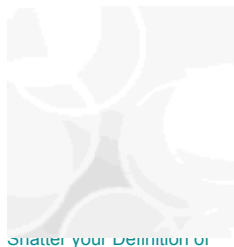
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