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॥ विज्ञानमुपास्य ॥

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Sanskrit Knowledge on the Eve of Colonialism and at the Dawn of Globalization

SHELDON POLLOCK

I WISH TO discuss two important issues affecting the world of Sanskrit studies in India: the coming of colonial power and the dawn of globalization. I will speak of the moment when European expansion and penetration were about to change the way in which knowledge was produced in India. I am also interested in problems surrounding the knowledge of Sanskrit, not just the knowledge produced in Sanskrit, and the kinds of obstacles that both those outside and those in India face in understanding and researching Sanskrit. I want to address two aspects of this second problem, that of Sanskrit studies at the dawn of the global era: first, the question of scholarly access to manuscripts—something directly pertinent to the National Mission for Manuscripts—and second, the relatively new question of the growing loss in contemporary India of that deep philological command of Sanskrit (and the other classical Indian languages) that was omnipresent as recently as the mid-twentieth century. By raising the issue of Sanskrit “at the dawn of globalization”, I want to comment both on how Indians who control access to Sanskrit culture are responding to the worldwide interest in the subject, and on the challenges Indians will face in the coming generation of preserving the very capacity to read this and other classical languages whose literatures constitute one of their most luminous contributions to world civilization.

I shall begin with what I see as a moment of historic risk that

need a policy towards the survey of manuscripts. Therefore we should have a comprehensive project to collect manuscripts, help in their decipherment, promote the reading of Šikastah (the court Šikastah of the nineteenth century would not help very much as the forms were often different) along with the standard Persian of Mughal times. If this task is attempted with any amount of real earnestness then we may well find our understanding of our own composite culture improved in possibly quite unpredictable ways.

3

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I shall begin with what I see as a moment of historic risk that

occurred several centuries prior to the coming of colonialism, and I shall then turn to the moment of opportunity confronting us at present. When I say this I am not being naïve about the powerful threats that globalization presents to India. But my concern here is rather with the global community of scholars who love Sanskrit and are interested in working together with the scholars and lovers of Sanskrit in India. There is another issue that concerns me, and that is what a colleague of mine once referred to as “the communalization of Sanskrit and the Sanskritization of communalism.” But in today’s discussion, I will try to keep the problem of politics away, impossible though it may be in the end to completely achieve this exclusion.

Let me start with what I just called the moment of historic risk that confronted the world of Sanskrit learning with the coming of colonialism. What I am really interested in is: understanding the world of Sanskrit knowledge just prior to that moment of transformation. If we were to contextualize this particular problematic within the recent history of the academic study of India, one of the developments of the past few decades that we would need to look at closely is the rise of post-colonial critique, especially as this is informed by a historical understanding of the development of Indian knowledge formations under British colonialism. Since the 1980s, it has produced an extremely rich body of scholarship. I was privileged to teach at the University of Chicago during the high point of this development, and Chicago was a particularly interesting place to observe its growth—my late colleague Bernard Cohn in particular was a key contributor. But I watched this development with a certain level of bemusement, which stemmed from my belief that the capacity to understand the impact of colonialism in the nineteenth century surely depended to some degree on our capacity to understand what preceded colonialism. What was the intellectual world of India like prior to the coming of the British? This question, I saw, was in fact neither easily answered nor even answerable. It was not answerable in the light of the new epistemological *aporia* that post-colonial theory had produced. In the wake of Edward Said’s work, *Orientalism* (1978),

the perturbing claim began to surface that we cannot in fact have knowledge of the pre-colonial past, because it is colonialism itself and its discourses of knowledge that have shaped our understanding of what preceded colonialism. According to this widely held conception, it is impossible to see the past through the veil of colonial knowledge—this is something, though not much, of a caricature of the position.

For about twenty years I observed as a very powerful paradigm came to dominate the field. Some of the leading figures who helped to shape this paradigm—scholars like Arjun Appadurai, Nicholas Dirks, or David Ludden—fully understood the basic contradiction or at least tension in this post-colonial epistemology, and produced a body of work designed precisely to explore the pre- and post-colonial divide in religion, society, and the material world. But I think they were in the minority; the vast majority of scholars involved in the analysis of Indian society and culture in the nineteenth century were largely innocent of pre-colonial texts and practices, or at least made strikingly little use of them.

Eventually I came to feel that the historical critique of colonialism was to some degree a critique built on sand. About five years ago I began to ask far more pointedly what we do know about the Indian world of the late pre-colonial or “early modern” period (*c.* 1500–1800), particularly in terms of intellectual history. The answer to that question turns out to be quite striking, for what was actually known was precious little. In fact I think it would be fair to say that, up to very recently, the intellectual history of India from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century, with respect to what people actually wrote and believed—especially the history of Sanskrit systematic knowledge, in such fields as aesthetics, political thought, moral theory, or epistemology and ontology—was almost completely unknown to us.

There are, I believe, two fundamental reasons for this profound lack of knowledge about the late pre-colonial period. First, there is an ideology in Indology that holds that the older something is in India, the more authentic it is; the more recent, the more derivative and unimportant. While this has engendered a fascination with

Vedic culture and society that has produced major research findings over the past century, it has at the same time led to a lack of interest and even a kind of a scorn for the intellectual products of the early modern epoch. The second reason for neglect is the obsession that Western scholars have with the religious history of India. Go to an American university and assess the amount of time devoted to talk about India, and I guarantee you that seventy-five per cent will be found to be spent in the discussion of religion. Discussions of political thought, historical discourse, aesthetics, epistemology—these are by comparison almost non-existent. So what I call the ideology of antiquity and the peculiar obsessions of Western academia with Indian religion have at one level conspired to produce this deep area of darkness about the world of Indian thought on the eve of colonialism. That being the crucial problem, it has to be said, however, that I do not think that it is the world of Sanskrit learning alone that faces the crisis. The same is true, even truer so to speak, of Indo-Persian studies. We do have a stalwart like Muzaffar Alam, my former colleague from Chicago, who has done singularly important work in political thought. But in general scholarly attention to Indo-Persian philosophy, aesthetics, or moral theory is almost inversely proportional to the magnitude of the corpus. The same problem confronts us in the study of the *deśhabhāṣās*. Consider the case of Brajbhasha. How many people in the world know what actually is written in Brajbhasha, that is, beyond the works of the great religious poets in the language—what is written in such domains as aesthetics, Ayurveda, political thought (*Nīti* literature), or philosophy? Very few scholars have even enquired into the bibliographical status of non-religious Brajbhasha writings in the late pre-colonial era. And such writings are substantial indeed.

About five years ago, in the spring of 2000, I decided to turn these stray musings into a systematic research project in collaboration with several scholars from the US and Europe, for which we eventually were awarded funding from the National Endowment Fund for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation. The immediate intellectual context of the project was

the realization that much of the most stimulating work done by colleagues in history and the social sciences from about 1980 onward on colonial transformation needed to be complemented by a more intensive study of the late pre-colonial period. The three centuries of the early modern age constitute one of the most innovative eras in Sanskrit intellectual history. Concurrently with the spread of European power in the mid-eighteenth century, however, this vitality began to diminish, and the Sanskrit tradition of the pursuit of knowledge more or less vanished as a force in shaping Indian intellectual life. In this connection our project has been exploring the “knowledge systems” or scholarly disciplines in India on the eve of colonial rule and the fact of their decline in the face of the new epistemological and social regime of European modernity. We have been looking at seven of the major śāstras: Vyākaraṇa, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Dharmaśāstra, Alaṅkāraśāstra, Ayurveda, and Jyotiṣa. We see an enormous augmentation in creativity in these disciplines in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and we aim to chart this development in terms of persons, places, and ideas. In addition to the book we hope to publish, within the next few years, on Sanskrit intellectual history in the early modern period, we are interested in developing an online textual archive—so that the manuscripts pertaining to early modern knowledge systems would be available to anyone anywhere—as well as a bio-bibliographical database, which would also be available to scholars everywhere. The latter would be an instrument to help us capture something of the social history of the Indian intellectuals, another of our critical objects.

I want to give you a kind of preliminary assessment of the findings of this project to date. The records that we have been able to access so far have led us to hypothesize that at around the beginning of the sixteenth century something really big happened in India, which allowed for an explosion of intellectual activity. One of my own particular areas of interest is Mīmāṃsā, a very dry subject in the eyes of some, but fascinating to me. Now, what happened in Mīmāṃsā at the start of the early modern era is absolutely extraordinary. It all begins, or seems to begin, with

Appayyadīkṣita in Madurai around 1550. All of a sudden, we get a range of ideas, genres and interests which are brand new, which had never been seen before. For example, around five hundred years before Appayya, a very important compendium of Mīmāṃsā called the *Śāstradīpikā* was produced by Pārthaśārathimīśra. From that time up to the time of Appayya, nobody appears to have touched this text. Yet in the century from about AD 1550 to 1650, we have a dozen or more very important commentaries, almost self-standing treatises dealing with the *Śāstradīpikā*. These are serious and important works, by people like Appayya himself, Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa, and Śaṅkarabhaṭṭa, the latter two working in Benares at the end of the sixteenth century. To all appearances Mīmāṃsā was almost reborn—in terms of sheer numbers of writers and texts, to say nothing of new ideas—after a quiescence of some five centuries. Similarly consider the problem of political thought—Rājanīti or Rājadharmaśāstra (*Arthaśāstra* as such having completely, if inexplicably, died out as a form of systemic thought by the middle of the first millennium). From the end of the twelfth century, with the appearance of the first independent Dharmanibandha, the *Kṛtyakalpataru* of Lakṣmīdhara, until the end of the sixteenth century, almost nothing was written in the field of Rājadharma, the one small exception being Caṇḍeśvara's relatively brief *Rājanītiratnākara* from late-fourteenth-century Bihar. Beginning in around 1570, we see the great court advisor of Akbar, Todar Mal, patronising the production of the enormous Dharmaśāstra text by Jagadguru Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa in Benares, a portion of which was called the *Rājyasaṅkhya* (unfortunately no longer extant). This is the first of about a dozen new, massive works on Rājanīti (or rather, on Dharmaśāstra of which Rājanīti is a sub-field). One such discourse is included in the *Viramitrodaya* of Mitramīśra, court scholar of Bir Singh Deo in early seventeenth-century Orcha, probably the largest Sanskrit text ever produced, a text bigger than the *Mahābhārata*, which makes it big indeed. But whereas everybody knows the *Mahābhārata*, I doubt if too many have even heard of the *Viramitrodaya*.

The renaissance that Mīmāṃsā and Rājanīti experienced seems

to pertain not only to those disciplines, but across the board. Let me mention two more cases, *Jyotiṣāśāstra* and *Nyāya*. On the first subject I am not an expert, but rely on the work of one of my collaborators, Christopher Minkowski of Oxford University. In the year 1503 in Maharashtra, the *Siddhāntasundara* was produced by one Jñānarāja. This was the first *siddhānta*, magisterial treatise, text to be produced in *Jyotiṣa* in four hundred years, and it opened (or coincided with the opening of) a floodgate of new thinking and experimentation, which I shall talk about in a moment. *Nyāya* is another good example of the creativity of early modern knowledge production in Sanskrit, and no doubt more familiar to you. The historical shape of this field is a bit different from those I have already mentioned, for *Navyanyāya* began at the end of the fourteenth century. But again, observe what happened in the mid-sixteenth century: *Raghunāthaśiromāṇi* appeared on the scene, whose self-proclaimed aim was, in part, to completely revise the ontological categories of the system. And with Raghunatha we see a massive, incredible efflorescence of *Nyāya* philosophy.

To summarize: Seeing the spurt in *Mīmāṃsā*, *Rājanīti*, *Jyotiṣa* and lastly *Nyāya*, one can arrive at the supposition that something really significant had happened in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One might of course contest this supposition by saying that this apparent renovation is a mere artefact of preservation: the number of later texts is larger because more of them survived precisely because they are later, whereas earlier texts have simply gone missing; the putative upsurge is accordingly an illusion. Still, I do not think this is an artefact of historical preservation, but a historical fact. In the case of *Mīmāṃsā*, there is no evidence of anybody having written anything on the *Śāstradīpikā* between Pārthasārathi Miśra in AD 1000 and Appayyadīkṣita in AD 1550. No early modern *Mīmāṃsaka* ever mentions any commentator in this period—while citing (and preserving) vast amounts of *Mīmāṃsā* before and around Pārthasārathi's time, including the works of Bhavadeva and Śālikanātha—and I see no reason to believe that anything major was produced and lost without trace. And the same kind of argument can be offered in each of the other cases I cited.

Apart from the sheer increase in writing that I have been talking about, another innovation of this period is what we might call a new inter-disciplinarity. For the first time scholars began to work widely across different forms of knowledge. Let me go back to Mīmāṃsā one more time. Pārthaśārathimīśra never wrote any work on Dharmasāstra; Vijñāneśvara in Karnataka in the twelfth century, the author of *Mitākṣarā*, one of the great works of Dharmasāstra, never wrote anything on Mīmāṃsā. Both were indeed deeply knowledgeable about the other's discipline: Mīmāṃsakas and Dharmasāstrins had always been serious conversation partners, and were raised together in a single epistemic formation. However, the point remains that they rarely crossed disciplinary boundaries—until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is in this connection that I want to mention one of the great scholars of the seventeenth century, Kamalākarabhaṭṭa, a true giant, a very outspoken and fascinating scholar. He wrote major works on Dharmasāstra, Mīmāṃsā, a range of Jyotiṣa texts, and an important treatise on the classic poetics text, Mammaṭa's *Kāvyaprakāśa* (eleventh century). Kamalākarabhaṭṭa is typical of this new cross-disciplinary practice.

The surge in scholarly production and new inter-disciplinarity were matched by a new discursive idiom, an altogether fresh language in Indian theoretical discourse. Everybody started talking the talk of Navyanyāya, an idiolect of extreme, even obsessive, precision. And the new discursive idiom was matched by entirely new genres and scientific forms. The field of Sanskrit grammatical science in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries evinces a profound transformation of its genre, one that entailed a complete reorganization of Pāṇini's architecture. This seems to have begun with Rāmacandradīkṣita, and gained strength in the work of Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭathirī in Kerala and of course Bhaṭṭojidīkṣita, whose *Siddhāntakaumudi* was one of the bestsellers of early modern India. This reorganization of the system of grammar is, I think, typical of what may be observed throughout this period. We see new scholarly genres emerging, for example, the *vāda* or essay. The essay appears in the European literature in the eighteenth century and is considered

to be an important sign of intellectual modernity. In India this innovation arguably happens in the sixteenth century, again with Appayyadīkṣita, whose *Purvottaramīmāṃsāvādanakṣatramālā* is the perfect example of the essay type I am talking about. The essay form was not introduced by colonial modernity—precisely the kind of error to which post-colonial studies falls prey when it ignores the early modern period.

The other feature of this period I might call attention to is the focus on the *mūlagrantha*—again, a focus usually credited to orientalists (or in more recent times discredited). The earlier scholarly tradition was characterised by the proliferation of commentary, ever more deeply nested. But in the early modern period we begin to find scholars who were interested in the *sūtrapāṭha* as such, of the founding text of the system. So for example in the domain of Nyāya, people begin to inquire into the textuality of the *sūtras* in the *Nyāyasūtra*, asking, really for the first time which of them are authentic and which are not, and what is their proper sequence. Similarly, we find Dharmasāstrins for the first time seriously talking about the philological constitution and the actual readings of the Dharmasūtras and Smṛti texts.

The last formal innovation I want to mention is the emergence of a new historicity, or maybe the more precise descriptor would be a sense of temporality. What I mean by this is that people began to think about the past in a certain kind of a way that seems almost unprecedented. I will cite here one text, the *Nyāyakaustubha* written by Mahādeva in Benares at the end of the seventeenth century, a fascinating work in itself. This exposition of many topics is arranged in a chronological manner, so that it provides a quasi-historical account of Nyāya. Mahādeva talks about the *pracīnas*, the *navīnas* and *atinavīnas* and the *ādhunikas*, offering a very sensitive temporal calibration of an intellectual practice.

In terms of content too, something very novel is happening here. Let me try very briefly to show this with respect to three knowledge forms, Alaṅkāraśāstra, Mīmāṃsā, and Rājanīti. Many of you will remember the famous discussion of the source of poetry (or rather sources, but that is the whole point) that Mammaṭa gives in his

Kāvyaprakāśa: *śaktir nipiṇatā lokaśastrakāvyādyavekṣaṇāt kāvyajñasiṣṭayābhyaśa iti hetus tadudbhave*. In order to write poetry you need talent, training and practice. From the time Mammaṭa wrote that around AD 1050 in Kashmir until the sixteenth century, no one offered any dissenting opinion on this part of Mammaṭa's definition. Suddenly we find in Orissa in the mid-sixteenth century, a scholar by the name of Śrivatsalāñchana expressing his most vigorous disagreement—the views of Mammaṭa, he declares, are *tuccha*, completely fatuous—and asserting that the only thing you need in order to write poetry is *śakti*, everything else is irrelevant. Actually this is precisely the view that vernacular poets had been defending for centuries, from Basavaṇṇa in twelfth-century Karnāṭaka to Narasiṁha in fifteenth-century Gujarat and Tulsīdās in sixteenth-century Benares. This dispute—initiated in Sanskrit by an author who was called a *navya*, new, scholar by the eighteenth-century critics who violently opposed him (above all, Bhīmasenadikṣita)—is strikingly similar to the debates taking place in France a century later, the celebrated “Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns”, beginning in the 1680s. They too asked what are the sources of poetry? Is it *le génie*, individual genius, or is it classical training? We can see a very deep homology in these two traditions, if with very different outcomes.

So in the domain of *Alaṅkāraśāstra* we can observe a big transformation—or rather, let me put it this way: a very interesting attempt at a transformation of older ideas. A similar attempt at radical change is offered by my second example. Many of you will be familiar with the name Gāgābhaṭṭa, the Benarsi intellectual and priest who performed the *abhiṣeka* of Chatrapati Sivaji in 1674. But no one in the room is likely to know the name of his father. This was Dinakara, a prolific scholar but of whose many works almost none has been published to date. In fact he wrote a marvellous *Mīmāṃsā* text called the *Bhāṭṭadinakara*. Notice how he begins his work, this is quite interesting: *unmūlāyan viśādayan sādhayan vā vidhāntaraih / jīrṇāśayān dinakaro vakti*. . . . Dinakara is going to present his view of the *Mīmāṃsā* system by

unmūlayan, the *jīrṇāśayān*, uprooting the thoughts of the ancients, destroying the desiccated ideas of the past. This is a very striking declaration of an intention of doing something radically different in terms of the arguments of Mīmāṃsā.

I will give you one last case, again from Jyotiṣa, again based on research done by Prof. Minkowski. He writes of a work called the *Grahalāghava*, an immensely popular mid-sixteenth-century work in which the author, Gaṇeśa, proposed a new form of mathematical astronomy, “a self-consciously new system for calculating the positions of planets and for other astronomical practices.” From the same period we have the *Jyotirmīmāṃsā* by Nīlakaṇṭha-somayājin in Kerala, which argues that the astrological parameters inherited from the texts of the past are not in themselves inherently correct, but need to be constantly improved and corrected, based on a systematic practice of observation and reason. Texts can be wrong and reasoned observation is needed to transcend them. This is a radically new approach to the study of mathematical astronomy.

Now, even more striking than all this innovation, ferment, and dynamism, is what happened at the end of our period. What I see in the evidence available to me at present is a gradual but unmistakable and indeed stunning decline of Sanskrit intellectual productivity in the course of the eighteenth century. This begins to erode almost everywhere and across most disciplines. I have looked high and low for additional Rājanīti texts produced in the years after Anantadeva’s *Rājadharmakaustubha* (c. 1675), but in fact there is almost nothing to be found. In the domain of Mīmāṃsā, there is no important new work produced beyond the middle of the eighteenth century—this is universally agreed by every scholar both in India and the West who has bothered to study the problem. In Alāṅkāraśāstra it is very difficult to find a major voice after Viśveśvara, author of the *Alāṅkārakaustubha* at the end of the eighteenth century. I do not think there can be any doubt that a profound erosion of the Sanskrit intellectual tradition had commenced; what is not clear is why this happened. One could talk about patronage disruptions here, but I am not sure that gets to the heart of the matter. If you look at the Wodeyar court of Mysore,

Kāvyaprakāśa: śaktir nipuṇatā lokaśāstrakāvyādyavekṣaṇāt/ kāvyajñāśikṣayābhya iti hetus tadudbhave. In order to write poetry you need talent, training and practice. From the time Mammaṭa wrote that around AD 1050 in Kashmir until the sixteenth century, no one offered any dissenting opinion on this part of Mammaṭa's definition. Suddenly we find in Orissa in the mid-sixteenth century, a scholar by the name of Śrivatsalāñchana expressing his most vigorous disagreement—the views of Mammaṭa, he declares, are *tuccha*, completely fatuous—and asserting that the only thing you need in order to write poetry is *śakti*, everything else is irrelevant. Actually this is precisely the view that vernacular poets had been defending for centuries, from Basavaṇṇa in twelfth-century Karnāṭaka to Narasiṁha in fifteenth-century Gujarat and Tulsīdās in sixteenth-century Benares. This dispute—initiated in Sanskrit by an author who was called a *naya*, new, scholar by the eighteenth-century critics who violently opposed him (above all, Bhīmasenadīkṣita)—is strikingly similar to the debates taking place in France a century later, the celebrated “Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns”, beginning in the 1680s. They too asked what are the sources of poetry? Is it *le génie*, individual genius, or is it classical training? We can see a very deep homology in these two traditions, if with very different outcomes.

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Kāvyaprakāśa: *śaktir nipiṇatā lokaśāstrakāvyaḍyavekṣaṇāt/ kāvya jñāśikṣayābhyaśa iti hetus tadudbhavē*. In order to write poetry you need talent, training and practice. From the time Mammaṭa wrote that around AD 1050 in Kashmir until the sixteenth century, no one offered any dissenting opinion on this part of Mammaṭa's definition. Suddenly we find in Orissa in the mid-sixteenth century, a scholar by the name of Śrivatsalāñchana expressing his most vigorous disagreement—the views of Mammaṭa, he declares, are *tuccha*, completely fatuous—and asserting that the only thing you need in order to write poetry is *śakti*, everything else is irrelevant. Actually this is precisely the view that vernacular poets had been defending for centuries, from Basavaṇṇa in twelfth-century Karnāṭaka to Narasiṁha in fifteenth-century Gujarat and Tulsīdās in sixteenth-century Benares. This dispute—initiated in Sanskrit by an author who was called a *nāvya*, new, scholar by the eighteenth-century critics who violently opposed him (above all, Bhīmasenadīkṣita)—is strikingly similar to the debates taking place in France a century later, the celebrated “Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns”, beginning in the 1680s. They too asked what are the sources of poetry? Is it *le génie*, individual genius, or is it classical training? We can see a very deep homology in these two traditions, if with very different outcomes.

So in the domain of *Alaṅkāraśāstra* we can observe a big transformation—or rather, let me put it this way: a very interesting attempt at a transformation of older ideas. A similar attempt at radical change is offered by my second example. Many of you will be familiar with the name Gāgābhaṭṭa, the Benarsi intellectual and priest who performed the *abhiṣeka* of Chatrapati Sivaji in 1674. But no one in the room is likely to know the name of his father. This was Dinakara, a prolific scholar but of whose many works almost none has been published to date. In fact he wrote a marvellous *Mīmāṃsā* text called the *Bhāṭṭadinakara*. Notice how he begins his work, this is quite interesting: *unmūlāyan viśādayan sādhayan vā vidhāntaraih / jīrṇāśayān dinakaro vakti*. . . . Dinakara is going to present his view of the *Mīmāṃsā* system by

unmūlayan, the *jīrnāśayān*, uprooting the thoughts of the ancients, destroying the desiccated ideas of the past. This is a very striking declaration of an intention of doing something radically different in terms of the arguments of Mīmāṃsā.

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it is clear that patronage for Sanskrit remained strong through the nineteenth century, but very little of consequence was produced. Even more striking is the situation in eighteenth-century Maharashtra, the subject of a recent study by another of my collaborators, Madhav Deshpande. The Peshwas awarded enormous *dakṣinās* to Sanskrit scholars: in 1707 alone, they gave half a million rupees to forty thousand pandits. That is very substantial patronage—and yet it is almost impossible to identify a single major text from Maharashtra in the Peshwa period in *Rājanīti*, *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, *Mīmāṃsā*, or even in literature. It is very possible that I have missed something, and I would be thrilled to know what it is. If the disruption of old patronage patterns was not the reason for the disintegration of the Sanskrit cultural formation then what was? The coming of colonial power was no doubt concomitant to this development, but it does not seem to have been causal in any demonstrable way. This is a conundrum upon which our project hopes to shed more light.

As you can see, our knowledge of early modern Sanskrit intellectual history is still very imperfect. And you can see too that it is altogether contingent on our capacity to inventory and study the texts that were produced during this period. I want now to turn to consider the obstacles that are being placed in the way of scholars attempting to study texts needed to make sense of these historical—and historic—developments. I want to discuss the problems that my colleagues and I have faced over the last five years in gaining access to the manuscript data of the Sanskrit intellectual tradition. I have to confess that this has been an extremely frustrating and painful experience, but one that is awkward to discuss openly, except to a sympathetic audience that realizes the importance of Sanskrit and knows what is required to learn its secrets. I want to share with you some of the difficulties that we have encountered in the past in simply trying to gain access to the material needed to strengthen or revise the arguments that I have offered here. Let me say at the start that, to be sure, problems of access are not unique to India. Colleagues who work at the Imperial Library in Japan, even at the British Library, sometimes

encounter similar difficulties. But while the problems may be everywhere, there are specific issues in India that friends of Sanskrit and friends of scholarship need to know about and help address. I want to cite three examples of the kinds of hindrances that have been placed in our way and that have prevented us from doing the kind of scholarship we want to do. One of my examples is from a Central Government Library, one from a regional library, and one from a private royal library.

Before we even initiated the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems research project, we requested and received permission to copy all relevant manuscripts from a host of institutions, including the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (Pune), the Sarasvati Mahal Library (Thanjavur), Adyar Library (Chennai), and the Ganganath Jha Research Institute (Allahabad). All the scholars in charge of these places graciously gave us permission to photograph whatever was needed for our project. Once we received funding for our archival work we sent our photographic teams out—and everywhere we went we confronted almost insuperable problems from extortionate demands for "copyright fees" to outright refusal.

Let me start with Allahabad. I made a personal visit to the principal of the Institute, Dr. Goparaju Rama, and later provided him with a complete set of records of the manuscripts we required. He viewed our project with great interest and sympathy, and we received permission to take digital photographs of everything we requested. We accordingly dispatched our photographers from Chennai. No sooner had they begun their photographic work than they were prevented by the librarian in charge, Mr. Jha. We were told to contact Dr. Kutumba Sastri, head of the Rastriya Sanskrit Samsthan in Delhi, which has authority over the Ganganath Jha Institute. He refused to intervene, claiming 'it is matter of resolving the problem locally by Dr. Rama and his colleagues.' Repeated attempts at resolution came to nought.

My example of a regional library is the Sarasvati Bhavan in Benares. Here our request was initially also received with great enthusiasm by the then Vice-Chancellor, Ramamurti Sharma. This library, which holds countless treasures of Sanskrit literature, had

long been difficult to access for Sanskritists, no matter what their country of origin. In the mid 1980s I studied with the great Pt. Pattabhirama Sastrī—for decades the leading pandit in Benares—and during all that time not even he could get materials from the Sarasvatī Bhavan (much of the time it was locked at the command of the governor of UP). So we were overjoyed to receive permission from Ramamurtī Sharma. But when Dr. Sharma retired the permission appears to have retired with him. When—beginning in 2002 and then repeatedly over the following two years—we requested of his successor, Rajendra Mishra, that he honour his predecessor's commitments—and indeed, the commitments of science—it was all in vain. We were even prohibited from making copies of microfilms of SB manuscripts held for this purpose at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. A more difficult and lamentable case, however, is my last, that of the private royal collection, and among these collections the most difficult and lamentable is the Anup Sanskrit Library in Bikaner. Few in the audience are likely to be familiar with this collection, so let me take a moment to describe it. The founder of the library, King Anūpa Simha (d. 1697), was one of the great bibliophiles of premodern India; this is not unknown, but a largely untold story is his relationship with the intellectuals of late-seventeenth-century Benares. Anūpa Simha acquired a large collection of manuscripts that once belonged to the library of Kavīndrācāryasrasvatī, the celebrated Vedic scholar and vernacular poet, including some copies of Kavīndrācārya's own compositions (among them a remarkable eulogy of Jahangir, this in Sanskrit). There are several important gifts from Vaidyanatha, son of Anantadeva, the great *dharmaśāstrin* mentioned earlier. Also collected were many works of the Bhaṭṭa family, including a unique complete manuscript of what appears to be the most important work on Mīmāṃsā of Kamalākarabhaṭṭa, called the *Śastratattvakamalākara* (a work of two hundred and sixty-three folios, or more than five hundred pages, that in twelve chapters provides a full analysis of the Mīmāṃsā system) as well as autograph manuscripts of text editions from the hand of Kamalākara's elder brother Dinakara and Dinakara's son

Gāgābhaṭṭa. There are also what are almost certainly autograph manuscripts of parts of the *Todarānanda*, the Dharma encyclopaedia I also mentioned earlier that was produced by Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa at the direction of Todar Mal. And last, the library contains the only complete and correct manuscript of the *Siddhāntasamhitāśārasamuccaya* of Sūryadāsa, one of the greatest of the sixteenth-century astronomers, whose *Mlecchamataniरूपाना* seems to be the earliest attempt in an astronomical text to write a doxography of Arabic/Persian astronomy and astrology.

In the 1940s the then Maharaja Sri Sadul Singhji invited the great south Indian pandit Kuhnna Raja to prepare a catalogue of the library, and to begin the publication of its holdings in the Ganga Sanskrit Series. Only a few volumes were published before the king's death (in 1950?). From that time to the present none of the works possessed by the library has been published, and what is worse, scholars have consistently and without exception been denied the opportunity to make copies. "We are not a public library," the current head of the trust and granddaughter of Sadul Singhji, Rajyashree Kumarji, told me during a recent visit I made to Bikaner in one last attempt to convince her to allow our team access to the holdings. "We have no obligation to make these materials available. My father did not want copies made." I was told that I could only be given permission to read in the library. We had even offered to help the library digitize the Anup Library holdings—we were prepared to produce a digital archive of ten thousand manuscripts in exchange for copies of two hundred—but all overtures were rebuffed. "We will do this ourselves, with our own resources," I was told. These are not isolated incidents—and they are compounded by a very widespread denial.

As I said earlier, however, such problems are not unique to India—and I should hasten to add that Indian scholars suffer from them as much as foreign scholars do. Still, the fact that they are ubiquitous does not diminish the need for India to address them. In the midst of all this gloom there is good news. The National Mission for Manuscripts and the IGNCA are most certainly forces for progressive change. Let me tell you a quick story by way of

illustration. I had originally planned to describe to you this evening the virtues of India's contributing to the new World Digital Library initiative proposed by James Billington, the US Librarian of Congress—indeed, I had extensive discussions with Library of Congress personnel prior to this visit to India and even expressions of interest in cooperation. But now I have seen that India itself is in fact running apace of the LOC and may soon be further ahead in realizing the World Digital Library dream than any other nation in the world. What two days earlier I had planned to recommend, I learned yesterday is already in process. If the World Digital Library's "American Memory Historical Collections" has some ten million "rare and unique materials" available online, the IGNCA has already digitized fifty lakh folios and one lakh slides, along with four thousand photographs—and much more to follow. In the not-too-distant future the entire IGNCA holdings will be online, and—in the best case!—made available to scholars everywhere for a nominal price. I urge the wonderful people working on the Kalāsampadā Project to move from Intranet to Internet at the earliest possible occasion, and to ensure a price structure that acknowledges the limited means of most scholars in most places. And I urge you in the audience to find whatever ways are possible to pressure those libraries still trapped in a mentality of yesteryear to realize they now live in a global world with global responsibilities. New Delhi is closer to New York than it is to Navadweep. The question is how do we move Navadweep—and Allahabad and Benares and Bikaner—closer to New Delhi?

Information wants to be free, as one commentator in the US put it recently: Knowledge must be treated as a public good rather than as a commodity, and access to it must become affordable, if not, free. Indeed, this is all in the best Indian tradition. For recall how Bhartṛhari described the *vidyākhyam antardhanam*, the inner treasure called knowledge:

Arthibhyah pratipadyamānam aniśam prāpnōti vrddhim parām

"The more you give knowledge away to those who seek it, the more it will grow."

I want to turn very briefly in closing to one last issue, indeed an issue that is very much on my mind. There is a very famous *śloka* from third book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Āranyakāṇḍa*, which many of you will remember:

*Sulabhāḥ puruṣā rājan satataṁ priyavādinah/
apriyasya ca pathyasya vaktā śrotā ca durlabhaḥ//*

“It is very easy to find people who will listen to you when you say what they want to hear, but it is very difficult to find somebody who will speak and listen to something beneficial however unpleasant.”

What I want to talk about now is a kind of *apriya*, but it is a valuable truth, *pathya*. Let me put the matter as baldly as possible: To what end are all the activities of NMM directed, what does it really mean to collect and catalogue all these manuscript materials—if in the future nobody in India will be able to read them? And the danger of that happening, I believe, is very real and present.

If you were to examine the history of textual studies in India in the early modern and modern periods, you would find yourself in the presence of a tradition of world-class scholarship. The work of the Sanskrit intellectuals at the beginning of this period I have already described, and even if the creative era ended by the beginning of the nineteenth century, a brilliant succession of great pandits adorned the Indian subcontinent—I think only of my teacher Pattabhirama Sastri, his teacher Chinnasvami Sastri, his teacher Kuhnna Raja, men of profound learning and outstanding scholarly achievement. The same is true of the history of the study of Persian; think only of Siraj al-Din Ali Khan Arzu (d. 1756, Delhi), the greatest Persian philologist of his day, ranked against a host of superb grammarians and lexicographers. And the same is true in the vernacular scholarly traditions. In the modern period, the scholarship on Old Kannada produced in Karnataka in the first half of the twentieth century is among the treasures of modern

Indian learning. In the cases of Old Hindi, places like Allahabad and Benares saw a remarkable efflorescence of skilled editing and exegesis of many of the great works of Brajbhasha literature that are still in use today.

What is shocking, however, is how this vast and incomparable tradition of philological learning has eroded in the course of the past fifty years. Midnight's children, let alone their own children, have produced little that is comparable to the great achievements of their ancestors, and on the contrary, seem on the verge of completely losing command of this age-old tradition of philological excellence. Again such cultural erosion may not be unique to India. I think of Edward Said, one of the premier literary scholars of the second half of the twentieth century, who passed away last year: He used to complain that he had no Latin or Greek, and that his German was very bad. The loss of knowledge of pre-modern languages is a very widespread problem—but again, that does not make it easier to accept and any wiser to acquiesce with.

If we look at the broader landscape of higher education in India, however, what do we see? We find elite institutes such as the Indian Institutes of Management, or of Science, or of Technology producing leading scholars in their fields—and by leading I mean truly world-class. India's long and unbroken tradition of literacy, systematic reflection on knowledge, and love of learning enables it to produce excellence wherever it seriously directs its resources—there is no doubt of that whatsoever. What I wonder is whether the classical languages of India—Sanskrit, Persian, Prakrit, Apabhramṣa, Old Tamil and Telugu and Kannada and Hindi—whether these languages can ever be the recipient of a comparable degree of attention. The need to regain world leadership in the scholarship in these areas is pressing; failure here could well mean the complete loss of competence in accessing these languages—it is already the case that one can count on two hands the number of scholars truly proficient in Old Kannada, say, or Old Telugu. Why, I ask, should there not be a National Mission for Textual Scholarship? Why should there not be an Indian Institute of Philology, dedicated to scholarship on India's textual past—its

languages, its scripts, its grammars and metrics, its editorial complexities, its commentaries, its specific hermeneutical protocols—as profound as the scholarship to which the IIMs, IIS's, and IIT's are dedicated? And why should this not be an initiative to which Western scholars too might contribute? The effort to rescue India's textual heritage should be a matter of deep national and global concern. It is a unique heritage and merits an undertaking whose energy and devotion are equally unique.