

PREFACE TO FIRST VOLUME

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The want of a practical English-Sanskrit Dictionary is felt so much at the present time that it calls for no apology for an attempt to remove that want, although it will probably be unanimously admitted that the task is beset with the greatest difficulties. Sanskrit has long ceased to be a living language and its antiquity has been mixed up with all that imagination could inspire and veneration could support. Its grand and varied literature is, to a considerable extent, shut up in distant manuscripts and special works on special subjects have yet received but very scanty attention. A variety of causes has alienated the modern dialects from their mother tongue, making it often unsafe to draw any inferences from their usage. *The Light of the West has not yet even spread over the surface of our society and any deviations from the established opinions will be set down by our veteran Sanskritists as audacious and preposterous. It will be considered foolishness to maintain that our revered grammarian Pāṇini did not exhaust the subject of idioms,† although my critics will probably agree with me that the father of grammar was ignorant of any other refined language and was not therefore in a position to treat the subject fully. It will be considered arrogance to assert that our popular lexicographer Amara simha confounded the language of conversation with “theatrical language”, although it may be shewn that such language is not confined to the drama, but used alike in prose and poetry, in the romances and tales.‡ It will be considered imprudence to question the correctness of his definitions and lay bare the mistakes in his grouping of synonymous terms, although there may be the strongest grounds and the clearest evidence to the contrary.§

2. These are some of the difficulties in the way of this attempt—difficulties which would probably stagger the most accomplished scholar of the day. They are doubly telling on a man of

*It must, however, be admitted that they are sometimes of very great use in determining the exact sense of words, which have been clearly defined by any Sanskrit lexicographer. Take, for instance, the word पिच्छल. The Bengali word पिच्छल derived from it, shews its exact meaning and clears the apparent obscurity of such passages as रणाङ्गणे शोणितपङ्क्तिपिच्छले.

†The great commentators of Pāṇini were aware of his omissions, although they filled them up in a circuitous way. Take, for instance, the use of the plural in the case of proper names in the sense of family or race. This is not to be found in the Aṣṭaka, but supplied by the commentators. But there are other idioms which, so far as my knowledge extends, are not noticed by any grammarian. Take, for instance, the use of the demonstrative pronouns with the personal pronouns. The cause of these omissions is apparent. Our ancestors had all the advantages of a spoken tongue—knew the language thoroughly—and used the idioms correctly, without being able to perceive that there was any thing to remark about them.

‡Take, for instance, the word देवी. In the Amara Koṣa, it is stated that a queen is called देवी in theatrical language. If Amara Simha had said “in addressing,” he would have been half correct, for in no dramatic work a queen of a country is called *its* देवी. But it is not difficult to shew that the term is not confined to the drama. I will not quote Kādambarī which may be regarded as a poem by the conservative Sanskritists but refer for its use to the fifth tale in the first part of the simple Panchatantra, which never smells of inflated style and does not come under the technical definition of poem.

§For instance, he groups together पञ्चता, कालधर्म, दिष्टान्त, प्रलय, अत्यय, अन्त, नाश, मृत्यु, मरण, निधन. The only equivalents of *death* in this group are मृत्यु and मरण. The other words respectively mean “*fivefold stage*”, “*effect of time*”, “*fated end*”, “*dissolution*”, “*departure*”, “*end*”, “*destruction*”, “*perishing*” and as in English sometimes signify *death*. (Comp. “we expected immediate dissolution”, Tilton). But if these words are to be reckoned as synonyms of death, we might as well include दीर्घनिद्रा, दीर्घप्रवास, दीर्घतमस्, स्वर्गगमन, and a hundred other similar expressions. To this illogical and mischievous grouping of words is to be ultimately traced the severe, but most unjust remarks of the historian Mill about the capabilities of the Sanskrit language as a medium of conveying one’s thoughts correctly and accurately.