Chapter V
CONCLUSION

Various unique responsibilities that GB was entrusted with in his lifetime, shaped him as a pioneering Indologist, and converting them into opportunities of research, he was successful in making numerous path-breaking discoveries.

The process of composition of the Digest of Hindu Law had certainly molded GB’s views and gave a practical basis to his philological investigations, which eventually prompted him to accept the position of the Educational Inspector, the post which facilitated him to travel across the country, to undertake extensive search of MSS, to interact with all classes of people and to get intimate knowledge of the Indian culture.

The discovery of the MS. of the Vikramāṇkadevacarita also was turning point in his research career. His interest was then channelized towards epigraphic researches. However, he could carry out the most of his epigraphic work while in Vienna during the last eighteen years of his life.

During his four decade long research career, GB dealt with variety of subjects from Dharmaśāstra to palaeography and from religion to epigraphy, which demonstrates his contributions to various branches of Indology. The vast amount of material that GB left behind him in the form of his books articles and edited works, stands in testimony of his path-breaking and painstaking research activity.

The methodology and approach adopted by GB in his Indological pursuits is his major contribution to the field of Indology.

GB’s writings denote that his concept of history was not narrow and it covered, besides political history, social, religious, literary and linguistic aspects of the Indian culture.
Historical consciousness is a complex process. There cannot be a direct linear relation of the availability of historical literature to the historical consciousness possessed by society. Non-availability of the ancient historical literature does not positively prove, or it is not sufficient to prove the lack of historical consciousness in a society of the past.

Historical consciousness manifests itself in various forms. This understanding is discernible from GB’s approach in the quest of ancient India in the following three aspects:

1. Documentation of the past events.
2. Preservation of the tangible and intangible past.
3. Historical approach while interpreting the Śāstras.

It is evident from GB’s writings that he considered all these three aspects while judging the historical sense which the Indians possessed. Consequently he fully trusted the literary and commentarial traditions of the country for interpreting texts. He frequently corroborated the ancient society and culture with the contemporary customs prevalent in the country, believing strongly that there is a continuity in the culture and the observations of the present society can guide one to solve the problems of the past. He did this successfully in numerous cases.

He believed that the sense of history that the Indians possessed manifested itself in a different manner; in forms such as poetical treatment of the historical events, preservation of various traditions etc.

The Indians naturally look at past events with poetic perspective. GB was very much aware of this tendency and was able to infer the ‘correct’ historical facts from such poetical descriptions as he did in the case of the Samudragupta Praśasti.

GB refuted MAX MÜLLER’s theory of renaissance and showed that there existed artificial i.e. classical ornate poetry as early as at least second c. CE. Similarly he showed that Praśasti Kāvyas and court poetry were also in vogue at that time. There must have existed historical Kāvyas and narratives which were not fortunate enough to reach to us.
GB’s approach towards the historical Kāvyas is noteworthy. He not only points out their shortcomings, but also brings out their importance for history. He pioneered in finding out the following peculiarities of the Kāvyas: (1) Conventional Descriptions; (2) Poetical Description; (3) Exaggeration; (4) No Exactness and Details; (5) Based on Historical Facts; (6) Important for the Literary History; and (7) More reliable compared to the Prabandhas.

According to GB there must have been chronicles of various kings recorded by the contemporary poets, however, the reason behind the fact that they are not available to us is that they have not been preserved by the written tradition in the country. The reasons of the discontinuity of the historical literature in the writing tradition is the want of popularity and the psyche of the scribes, which inclines more towards (1) fictions than facts, (2) mythical characters as against the historical ones. Thus the conventional descriptions in the Kāvyas did not attract readers’ attention unless the language and the poetic elements were exceptionally well.

The principles that have been laid down by GB in dealing with such Kāvyas provide the key to use them in the right direction for the historical purpose.

1. Remove the Kāvyam mythical element
2. Consider the Style of the Author
3. Check the historicity with the help of other corroborative evidences.
4. If the poet is contemporary or nearer to the events in time then the possibility of authenticity increases.

GB’s writings involving an analysis of the Sanskrit commentaries, show that he considers them as one of the manifestations of historical consciousness. At times, against the views of his contemporaries, he readily adheres to the opinions expressed by the commentators. He adduces the scholarship and ability of commentators and appreciates the trustworthiness of their writings. According to GB commentarial works become authentic sources of knowledge for the history of original texts. It is not surprising that GB, a historian at his core, gives an upper hand to the history of text rather than mere and pure grammatical
approach for settling the correct readings in a text. However, he does not hesitate to discern between good commentators and bad ones. His writings make him a “faithful transmitter” of the traditional texts giving a philological and scientific expression to the literary tradition. His views, though opposed by many of his contemporaries, are subscribed to by the latest scholarship.

Studying the history of concepts is an indispensable tool to unearth the meanings of the past. Evidently, concepts are expressed through words and digging their forgotten meanings from oblivion is a task of great skill and ingenuity. Consideration of the context in which certain custom, usage or idea has originated can help to understand its purpose and meaning, and thus can serve as a significant tool to unravel some of the mysteries of the past. Such a thought process is visible in ingenious discoveries by GB. He was able to postulate successfully the context in which the various technical terms came into use.

GB trusted the commentarial works for interpreting the texts. Similarly he also relied and hence studied the living traditions. He tried to imbibe the “Hindu modes of thought” through getting acquainted with “the inner life of the Hindus”. GB made deliberate efforts to reach to the “inner life”, customs, beliefs, religion, philosophy and psyche of the Indian people.

GB tried to compare even minute prescription by the Dharmasūtras with the modern customs or remnants of such customs. He believed the traditions to be the past prolonged into the present. This, naturally, presupposes continuity in the culture. GB often seeks explanations of past events or expressions from parallel contemporary customs. For this he accepted ethnographical approach towards research. He used such techniques which can be termed as Ethno-Indology. At many places he has used his knowledge of modern India to solve the riddles in ancient Indian history. He took into consideration contemporary customs, contexts and usages and the parallel words in modern languages.

GB followed the path of “Ethno-Indology” without coining the term, which was his self-developed approach towards investigation. His success can be
attributed to a clear and unbiased perception of the “other”, abolishing predetermined frameworks.

GB combined the traditional knowledge and modern techniques of criticism. He collaborated with the traditional Shastris, contemporary Indian scholars, British officers, and his European colleagues.

GB preferred to write in English rather than in German. By this, he ensured the participation of a wider audience, rather of the people whose history and culture he was working on.

GB was against the practice of drawing conclusions on the basis of feeble evidences. Thus, on the basis of new evidence and application of his insightful mind to it, he made it a point to refute some views of senior and contemporary scholars like MAX MÜLLER, HOLTZMANN and WHITNEY.

His writings are a source to know the tradition of Sanskrit prevalent during the colonial period and as preserved till the 19th c. CE. A study of his writings is also important to know the traditional views of 19th c. Pandits and Shastris on philological, textual, historical and social issues which are not recorded in any texts. A peep into the 19th c. society in India is possible through his writings.

With his pure unprejudiced mind, keen observation and unbiased judgment GB made ancient India far more understandable to the West. He understood the very thought-process of the ancient Indian mind and this made him the phenomenal scholar that he was.

The only spot that would head to deface GB’s selfless, spotless and pioneering career is his association with FÜHRER. The only lapse on GB’s part in this affair seems to be that he trusted FÜHRER fully and quickly. He was not involved in any of FÜHRER’s delinquencies except that he deciphered inscriptions from the rubbings, enstampages and the photographs that were sent
to him from India. There too, he began to refrain from drawing any ‘conclusions’ before he would see the originals with his own eyes.

Finally, a truly disciplined German, having been trained in Philology, Theology and the ancient languages, having travelled all the way from his native continent to India—and in India from Kashmir to the Southern Maratha country—collecting MSS, editing texts, deciphering inscriptions, mingling with the people and searching the true lineage of India, has left his eternal mark on Indology.