SUGGESTIONS OF ACTION TO PROMOTE AND DEVELOP SANSKRIT STUDIES IN SRI LANKA

Presently, there is a teacher-centered education in the teaching of Sanskrit. This teacher-centered system needs to be departed from in favor of a student-centered strategy. Further, the old-time methodology of teaching should be done away with and a new methodology should be devised to meet the demands of present world conditions. Presently, most people who learn foreign languages do not attend schools or training classes. They learn numerous languages through the internet. Similarly, we need to make use of the internet in the study of Sanskrit. Thereby, we could promote Sanskrit to a very high standard.

Through information technology, we have the opportunity to learn what is happening daily around the world. It appears there is no one in Sri Lanka who accesses the television and radio channels. It would be opportune to televise and broadcast information about Sanskrit language and literature in the two available channels of communication using interesting episodes of the language, news reports, teledramas, and films that also use Sinhala and Tamil mediums. We could quote the telecast of mega serials of Ramayana and Mahabharata in the 1990s as successes that became very popular. How many people knew that the characters they adored in these tele serials were characters of Sanskrit epics? Many did not. Epics and their literature should be transmitted to the people. Although Sanskrit transmission channels of India are connected with Sri Lankan channels, today that is no longer in existence. If these channels are reconnected, the love for Sanskrit language could be re-
established.

The privately owned print media of Sri Lanka should cover the contemporary events, news reports, newspapers, journals, etc. in Sanskrit. Presently, a few journals are issued annually by the Oriental Languages Society and the Government Examination Department. These issues should be further developed. Additionally, national universities and educational institutions with Sanskrit departments should issue literary journals and monthly magazines accommodating features by teachers as well as students. Although some universities engage in such publications, their frequency is neither monthly nor annual. Therefore, The government should provide the required financial allocation to make subject of Sanskrit a living entity instead of gradual deterioration. In that case, annual workshops could be held, lectures should be organized globally, and the interests of the students could be properly generated. In cities like Colombo, Kandy, Gampaha, and Kurunegala such workshops are held, but in the absence of holding such workshops in other semi-urban areas this opportunity is denied to those interested in or learning this particular subject. Therefore, such programs should be held island-wide and thus an opportunity is offered to all those who are interested, including those at the grassroots level of society.

Sanskrit literature is rich information as well as content which is not found in any other literature of the world. It’s numerous portions, tasteful similes, proverbs, and one notes from epics could be presented to children through cartoons, children’s stories, and tele serials. It would indeed be an
invaluable contribution. It would certainly enrich the children’s’ minds. For, the youth of the present day are the hope of the future and the well being of society or infact any country depends on the youth. Thereby the high virtues embedded in Sanskrit language and literature would be given entry into the hearts and minds of the youth. This will elucidate our practical lifestyles and the language will be productively observed. Further, the adoption of such virtues would also be feasible.

In Sri Lanka’s school system there are colorful pictures and various features depicting books in use in primary sections. However in pirivenas, the texts of ancient eras are in vogue. Although the texts are prescribed to meet with the required syllabus, these texts lack attraction. Therefore, for the pirivenas too, like the texts of the primary sections of schools, a set of text books are to be prepared. Such an endeavor would attract young students.

In respect to the schools as well as the pirivenas, text books begin with a prayer or dedication to a god and proverbs extracted from Sanskrit literature could be printed in Sanskrit script as well as the script of the mother tongue, the student would be inspired at least and come to know of the name of the language i.e. Sanskrit.

Presently, there are Days of Literature for the Sinhala, Tamil, and English languages as well as for science and mathematics. There are no such special days for Oriental languages. All the Oriental languages commenced in this manner. It is because of this a language is deemed “God’s Language.” Therefore, it is necessary that the government should declare a Sanskrit day,
and on such days programs of literary value could be initiated.

There is a wide scope for employment in Sanskrit language in Sri Lanka and in order to broaden the scope of employment, this subject could be made more and more job oriented or job potential. So that the youth get jobs and there will not be any unemployment problem.

Presently, those adept in Sanskrit have plenty of employment avenues in Sri Lanka and in order to widen this scope, the subject should be made more popular. For those literate in Sanskrit and oriental languages and those qualifying at the Oriental languages examinations it is possible to find employment as teachers in pirivenas and other educational institutions. This facility need not be restricted only to pirivenas. In order to open avenues in the general school system and other educational institutions the understatement shown towards this language could be nullified and this language will undoubtedly develop.

In the foregoing sections, the usefulness of Sanskrit and the existing facilities and constraints was discussed. In the proposals, the idea that occurred most frequently was this language’s connection with other subjects. They always make mention of subjects like Ayurveda and astrology. These subjects are taught and studied at various levels in Sri Lanka. The two words Ayurveda and astrology (Jotisaya) themselves are Sanskrit words. These subjects were originally composed in Sanskrit. Of those who are engaged in these on large financial concerns, how many of them have even an iota of Sanskrit language knowledge? Therefore, society should be informed of this
situation. The “Gampaha Wickramaracchehi Ayurvedic Vidyalaya”, conducted on the status of a university under the aegis of the government and other educational institutes both of the government and of the private sector that conducts Ayurveda and astrology, Sanskrit should be made a compulsory study by the government. Thereby, those following these subjects will acquire knowledge of Sanskrit enabling them to access the original texts on these subjects. The services rendered to them will also be enhanced.

Presently, the name boards of most institutions are in Sanskrit, such as Karyala, Mattru Sayanaya, and Adhikarana Vaidya Niladhari, but they are written in Sinhala script. It is interesting to mention that all the names though of Sanskrit origin were written in the native Sinhala script. If the names of these institutions are written in Sanskrit script in addition to Sinhala script, it would allow the Sanskrit script will be known to the people and it will gradually ecome progressively popular with the general public. In order to gain a perfect knowledge of Sinhala language, a knowledge of Sanskrit will be a prerequisite as Sanskrit is considered as the mother of all languages. Considering this, acquaintance of Sanskrit is of great advantage to both Sinhala language graduate and post-graduate students. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a minimum knowledge of Sanskrit knowledge to all schoolchildren as well as privately operated schools and institutions. This system was in place in very early times, even when Sri Lanka was a British colony from 1796 to 1948 A.C. As such, all Sri Lankan scholars of those times had a certain standard of knowledge in Sanskrit. This could be observed in the biographies of these
Scholars. Even today, in society were honoured with great respect. Those who use Sanskrit words or difficult Sinhala words. The difficult words in Sinhala language are Sanskrit words.

**Steps to promote and develop Sanskrit in Sri Lanka:**

In order to promote and develop Sanskrit in Sri Lanka, the intervention and support of the government is imperative. During the reign of Sinhala kings in ancient times, the kings brought Sanskrit Pandits down from India and directed them to compose Sanskrit works. They visited East Asian counties as well to study the language. After returning to the motherland, they authored excellent works. The best example of such works include the great epic Janakiharana by King Kumaradasa of Sri Lanka. On the invitation of King Kumaradasa, Kalidasa, the greatest Sanskrit poet and Shakespeare of India who is still being honored as the kavikukaguru Sanskrit. Came to Sri Lanka and it recorded in ancient Sri Lankan chronicles. During Sri Lanka’s Kotte period, the poet and Pundit Ramachandra of India came to Sri Lanka to study Sanskrit and Buddhism. On his arrival, he rendered extensive services in his chosen fields of study. Therefore, we should obtain association with government sponsored scholars of India as well as Western and Eastern countries and Pandit. This will definitely strengthen the Sanskrit language and literature in Sri Lanka.

In order to develop the Sanskrit language in Sri Lanka, we need to increase the students studying the subject. Presently, teachers and students of
Sanskrit are dissatisfied. This is because those who prepare subject-wise syllabi do not possess an understanding of the subject. In the education sector, many appointments are given based on political relationships. The talent or standard is not recognized. The directors and inspectors are appointed on political considerations and as such neither the tutorial staff nor the students are confident in them. If the appointments are made basing on the merit and experience, they can do justice to the subject and effectively work and draw the attraction of students toward the subject.

There are island-wide piriven educational establishments affiliated with Vidyodaya and Vidyalanka Pirivenas which are located in Colombo. Among these affiliated pirivenas there are only a few teachers qualified to teach Oriental subjects and teachers of Sanskrit are very few in number. Therefore, it is necessary that the authorities pay attention to these shortcomings by establishing a network of pirivenas teaching Oriental subjects. The students who wish to study and who gain the necessary qualifications should be given admission to universities more liberally than in the present. In the earliest stages, Vidyalankara Pirivena (established in Colombo in 1873 and later upgraded to university status and renamed Kelaniya University; Similarly Vidyodhaya Pirivena, which was established in 1873 at Peliyagoda, Kelaniya, a Colombo suburb, later upgraded to university status and was renamed as Jayewardenapura University, these pirivens were originally established by Buddhist laity and bhikkus in order to promote and develop Sanskrit language. The authorities of Sri Lanka’s educational structure need to be reminded of
this. Although it is not possible for other faculties, at least the Arts faculties could make note of these needs by making either Sanskrit or any other Oriental language either compulsory or a co-sub- subject to the undergraduates, according to their choice. Further, these universities should revive courses for the award of M.A., M Phil., and PhD degrees that existed in earlier times.

At the moment, for undergraduates reading for the university special degrees the only avenue available for employment upon graduation is the teaching profession. There are no facilities for them to pursue post graduate studies. Although some universities have commenced post graduate studies, these have to be paid for by the candidate which is very expensive. Even though they meet financial input, the extensions of the period of studies and the lack of lecturers tend to frustrate the students and they give up their studies. In this context, it is necessary to start both term the long or the short term courses at an affordable cost. Consequently, we might expect the this subject in Sri Lanka will flourish.

In the light of the information stated earlier on Sinhala society, the principal ethnic group of the Jaffna peninsula, the Tamils, should also be enlightened of these values. Action should be taken to propagate these views among them. This is the ideal opportunity, now that the war is over, to propagate these views among the community and the twilight of dawn to be stabilized in joining the north and south and Sanskrit, being a harmonious language, could be effectively serve this purpose. The principal religion of the Tamil people is Hinduism, a religion based on the Sanskrit scriptures, i.e.
Vedas, epics and the Bhagavad-Gita. The birthplace of almost all of their gods is India. Their medium for worship of these gods Sanskrit. Consequently, Sanskrit language and its utilization and more than in Sinhala society, the Sanskrit studies and its utilization would increase. They should be reminded with great honor that their ancestors used Sanskrit and the manner in which Sanskrit was used. The faculties of Sanskrit that existed in the Jaffna university and Sanskrit departments that existed in their schools with Tamil as the medium of instruction need to be set up again. A search should be made for competent teachers and they should be provided with all facilities, and they must be appointed as teachers and lecturers, so that they are well paid for their services.

The foregoing information reveals that in the north as well as the south, indeed the entire country, there is a certain degree of enthusiasm with regard to Sanskrit language. This is confirmed by the views expressed by teachers and students. (Vide supra Ch. V) Sri Lanka faced the scourge of war for thirty years. In countries that suffer such long durations of war naturally will be there degradation in all sectors. Although such situation arose in Sri Lanka’s economic, national, and societal sectors, there was no degradation in the sphere of education. We can be emphatically say this fact.

Is Sanskrit a “Dead” Language?

According to the views of the teachers and students enumerated above, a development of this subject is perceived in modern as well as ancient times of Sri Lanka. In the light of these circumstances, is Sanskrit a dead language, as
claimed by certain individuals? Is a pertinent question. “Dead” means devoid of life. Something when destroyed its existed life and non-life characteristics are totally lost. As regards, it is true with Sanskrit? Certainly “NOT”.

From the Anuradhapura period, which commenced from the third century B.C. with the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka, up to the present twenty-first century, (Vide Supra Ch. I). Sanskrit works were composed. There is a composed increase of works composed not only by teachers and writers but by students as well. The contribution of Pirivena education institutions affiliated with the two main pirivenas, Vidyodhaya and Vidyalankara, all over the country, was already noticed above. The Oriental Languages Society continually initiates action to develop this subject. In the universities also there are Sanskrit departments. Venerable Davuldena Sri Gnanrshvara Mahanayaka Thero, honored with the title “Sanskrit chakravarti,” Venerable Kekunawala Piyaratana Maha Nayaka Thero, and such chief monastics as well as lay scholars are still among the living legends. They converse in Sanskrit language. They give training to those who are attempting to teach Sanskrit. Still, various commentaries, word explanations and analysis, prose texts, and epics are being composed and published. Through a Government Gazette notification, applications have been invited for the appointment of a scholar with knowledge of Tamil language and Sanskrit Honors degree for the Jaffna University. They still chant prose and verse sections and stanzas as adoration to the gods. As such, Sanskrit is not a “dead language.”
As a resume, it can be concluded that long as Sinhala language continues in Sri Lanka, as long as Pali, the medium of language of Buddhism exists, and as long as Sanskrit teachers of a high standard and also students of Sanskrit exist, Sanskrit language will continue to be in Sri Lanka. This is because the language is interconnected with all sections of society. This proves that the claim of some that Sanskrit is a dead language holds no ground. This is evident to us by the facts enumerated in the foregoing four chapters of the present thesis.

Therefore, action should be taken to build up Sanskrit language studies in Sri Lanka. We shall set up more and more Oriental language institutions. Opportunities should be provided to all so that students of Sri Lanka and abroad study Sanskrit. Shall provide teachers who teaching the living Sanskrit as living scholars some suggestions for the required financial allocation to protect them. Without allowing their exemplary knowledge to die, we shall direct them to compose works of the government as well as the private sector must come forward in this connection. Several programs should be organized to inculcate the values of this subject in society. With this course of action, we will have a kin like Kumaradasa and scholars like Kalidasa who authored the Janakiharana epic of a foreign land. Scholars of Sanskrit will arrive in Sri Lanka and such an era will dawn.

A humble attempt is made in the present thesis not only to explain the present position of Sanskrit in Sri Lanka, but suggestions (through interviews / questionnaires) were also proposed to revive Sanskrit in the Island of Sri Lanka. The present work in only a starting points for progress of Sanskrit and further in-depth research and
investigation by research scholar in future is still a necessity.

“वाचस्पति सहस्राणां सहस्रैरपरियतं।

नवदुधा सा क्षयं नैतिपुरुक्तिर्जगतामि॥”

Would be the most befitting conclusion

- इतिशिम् -

* * *
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