

How hard can a dead heart beat? Reflections on Modern Sanskrit Literature

Modern Sanskrit literature has not received the Indologists' attention it clearly deserves. The reason for this state of affairs is certainly the belief that it has only a commentarial or even inferior value, and in a sense it has been long dead, as the language itself. This opinion was constructed and reinforced by the English Orientalists of the colonial period. They created the canons for Sanskrit studies pointing to the oldest texts written in the Indian subcontinent as worthy of scientific interest and description. For decades the interest was given to the Vedic texts and to the texts on Vedic exegesis as well as to the epics, and from the tradition of the so-called classical (*kāvya*) literature almost only one author seemed worthy of attention—Kālidāsa. The situation has gradually changed and it is still changing but modern Sanskrit literature and its authors are yet waiting for their explorers. The theses about the alleged death of Sanskrit find their supporters but even more opponents. However, the discussions do not change into actions, that is into extensive research on the present condition of Sanskrit literature.

Pandita Kshama Rao (1890-1954), an outstanding albeit now forgotten contemporary writer creating in Sanskrit, when asked why she did not create in a “living” language replied that for her a language lives when it is possible to write in it about things that are happening right before our eyes (Preface, *Uttarasatyāgrahagīta*). And she wrote about such matters, those that bother her, using both old forms and the literary genres new to the Sanskrit literary tradition. She devoted two verse poems to Gandhi, believing that the beauty of Sanskrit will elevate the ideas of a man whom she admired. She reported the events accurately. When she described Gandhi's reactions to the outbreak of the World War II, she did not fail to mention Ignacy Paderewski's letter to Gandhi and his response.

Among the authors writing in Sanskrit nowadays there are many who experiment with the form of the text, for instance, using typography to illustrate some emotions and emphasize the message of the work. There are creators of radio plays, scripts for film and television programs. To describe new phenomena the linguistic layer is being supplemented with neologisms, as it happens in any other language. At the same time, Sanskrit is not a language used every day, although in censuses made in India few respondents indicate it as their mother tongue.

The works of foreign authors and of the authors writing in other Indian languages were and still are being translated into Sanskrit. Periodicals (dailies, weeklies and monthlies) were and are being published.

What causes the heart of Sanskrit literature to continue to beat? What topics do contemporary works deal with? How does the Sanskrit literary life look like today? During the project implementation we will try to find answers to these and other questions that may arise in the course of our quest.

There is no doubt that the analysis of selected examples of Sanskrit works created in India from the 19th to the 21st centuries and the analysis of translations of native and foreign literature into Sanskrit will prove the continuation of the tradition and the inevitable changes taking place in it (i.e. the vitality of the aforementioned tradition). Moreover, many of the works can be treated as a historical narrative, many of them can become a source of knowledge about building regional identity.

The result of the project will be bringing closer the contemporary Sanskrit literature, often overlooked in the scientific discourse. We plan to create a compendium of trends and tendencies that prevail in it, to present the profiles of writers who create in Sanskrit nowadays and, together with thorough analysis, to make the complete (in the case of shorter works) or partial (for longer compositions) translations of selected original works that were written in this language in the 19th century and later. The results of research will be presented in the form of seminar and conference speeches, lectures at academic centres in Poland and abroad, as well as articles in peer-reviewed journals and a monograph in English devoted to the subject of the project.