



## CONNECTING THROUGH LANGUAGE - REFLECTIONS ON THE SPREAD OF RUSSIAN SANSKRIT SCHOLARSHIP

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Sanskrit language & literature has attracted scholars across the world to involve themselves in its pedagogy. Scholastic attributes of several scholars around the world have been exposed through their in-depth study of Sanskrit language & literature. Even in Russia Sanskrit language has had several scholars. They were instrumental in introducing the richness of Sanskrit language into Russia. This paper looks at the significant scholarly contributions of Russian scholars towards popularizing Sanskrit language.*

**Key words:** Sanskrit language, Russian scholars, literary studies

### INTRODUCTION

One of the pioneers of the study of the ancient Indian language was Gerasim Lebedev. Tsar Alexander I was so fascinated with Lebedev's writing about India that he requested the scholar and musician a Sanskrit printing press in the Russian Imperial capital. Lebedev published a whole series of books, including translation of the poetry of Bengali poet Bharatchandra Roy, a Russo-Hindustani dictionary and a book on the grammar of Eastern dialects, but the famed Russian traveler was no Sanskrit scholar. (Williams, Monier (2004)- A Sanskrit-English dictionary).

### EXPANSION OF SANSKRIT SCHOLARSHIP IN RUSSIA

COUNT SERGEY UVAROV, Sanskrit scholarship in Russia began under the aegis of Count Sergey Uvarov, an influential statesman and educational curator. In 1818, Uvarov inaugurated the **Asiatic Academy of St Petersburg**, where Sanskrit was taught for the first time with Russian language being the language of instruction. Tsarist Russia

initially relied on foreign professors to teach Sanskrit, with German academics being the first to teach the ancient Indian language in the country.

**PAVEL YAKOVLEVICH PETROV** - Robert H. Stacy's classic work 'India in Russian Literature' mentions Pavel Yakovlevich Petrov, a Sanskrit scholar who had a meticulous affection for Kashmir and translated the Hindu epic Ramayana into Russian language. Petrov learned Sanskrit in St Petersburg and taught the language in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in the provinces of Kazan and later in the city of Moscow. He also translated Kalhana's Rajatringini, a chronicle of the rulers of north-western India into Russian language. Due to all these efforts St Petersburg became one of the major research centers for Sanskrit during second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and attracted Indologists from all across Europe to Russia.

**RUDOLF VON ROTH AND OTTO VON BOHTLINGK**- Rudolf von Roth and Otto von Bohtlingk were two German scholars who lived in the city of Russia



and compiled a seven-volume Sanskrit-German dictionary called **Sanskrit Wörterbuch** that was in wide usage in academic circles in Germany & Russia. Von Bohtlingk learnt Sanskrit at the St Petersburg State University & was very much fond of Classical works of Sanskrit. He is also well-known for translating an edition of the Sanskrit grammar of Panini, who formulated formulation of the 3,959 rules of Sanskrit morphology, syntax and semantics in the Classic grammar work known as Ashtadhyayi. (Russia India report (2014)).

**IVAN MINAYEV**-The famous Sanskrit professor from Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Ivan Minayev, who also taught comparative grammar of Indo-European languages. He travelled to India and Ceylon in 1874-75 and wrote extensively about the countries neighboring Srilanka. His excellent command over Pali language and Sanskrit language, as well as the knowledge of countless contemporary Indian languages and some Pahari dialects, allowed him to communicate freely with people in India living in the regions and territories which he travelled across. He collected and accumulated unique historical data & notes of his journeys to India, Nepal and Ceylon in 1874-75, to India in 1880 and to India and Burma in 1885-86. The State Library of the St Petersburg has preserved the Sanskrit and Pali manuscripts that Minayev collected in India, while his art collection can be seen in the museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg. The keen interest of I.P. Minayev towards the culture and everyday life of the peoples of India found expression in the study of folklore and ethnography, as important as everything else that this scientist-achiever did," said Madhu Malik, who

translated Indian fairy tales of Kumauni region. Minayev's trips to India resulted also in interesting ethnographic collections, preserved in the N.N. Miklukho-Maklay Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. (Russia India report (2014)).

**FYODOR STCHERBATSKOY** -Another St Petersburg-based Indologist who made a great contribution to Sanskrit and Indian studies before the Bolshevik Revolution was Fyodor Stcherbatskoy, best known as an authority on Buddhist texts. He was a student of scholar Minayev and worked on a theory of Indian poetry and published the Theory of Knowledge and Logic in the Doctrines of Later Buddhism in Russian in two editions. He later taught Sanskrit till his death in 1942. His scholarship of Hindu philosophy and Buddhism even won him the admiration of great Indian leaders like pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and poet Rabindranath Tagore.

#### POST-SECOND WORLD WAR

Post-Second World War, a new generation of scholars began to pursue Indology and India's warm relations with the USSR gave these scholars access to many places and older texts. (Banerji, Suresh (1989). A companion to Sanskrit literature). The newer generation of Indologists however followed a path that was laid out by the great scholars of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries from St Petersburg. (Russia & India report 2014)

**CONCLUSION**- Thus Russian love for Sanskrit language assisted in producing great translations & good authorship. There was royal support to these compositions. The relative connectivity with the Slav language was also helpful in Russians taking up Sanskrit reading. The narratives in Sanskrit grammar



attracted the Russian readership into taking the Sanskrit language seriously.

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