

Loss, Recovery and Renewal of Texts in India s Tradition

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ABSTRACT

Through sciences that were the earliest to develop in India, phonetics, grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), etymology (*nirvacana*), textual analysis (*mīmāṃsā*), and through systems of text-permutations (*pāṭha*) interpretation of meaning (*śāstra paddhati*), India has maintained its knowledge texts for almost five thousand years, if not more - Ṛgveda is the oldest extant Indo-European poetry and the Brāhmanas are the oldest Indo-European prose. Evidently, the community attached great value to knowledge and made enormous intellectual effort not only to possess, as relics, but also to comprehend the texts that embodied the knowledge. There are, however, records that the texts, the knowledge, were lost more than once — they actually disappeared or got fragmented and dispersed, or became opaque through their tradition of learning having been terminated. The text-internal dynamics (change in language over time for example) and text-external circumstances (war or natural calamities or invasions) disrupted the tradition and rendered the texts inaccessible, incomprehensible or incoherent. It is also recorded that the community assiduously sought to recover and/or renew the seminal texts and developed over a period of time a number of mechanisms for the purpose — re-enunciation, recension, redaction, adaptation, translation, commentary, popular exposition and recreation. There have been several cycles of loss and recovery and these are embodied in what the tradition calls the *Vyāsa Paramparā*. The last cycle, we posit (for the tradition has yet to incorporate a record of this cycle) began in and around the eleventh century when under the impact of waves of invasions, the tradition of learning broke up, texts dispersed, fragmented and were lost and the Indian knowledge systems became esoteric and almost dried up. The processes of reconstruction and renewal of texts/knowledge began in the modern times (18th century onwards), outside India, in Europe. The history of reconstruction and dissemination of the classical Indian (Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit) intellectual tradition in the last 200 years or so is truly an example of a successful global effort (*viṛwa yajña*) to maintain and sustain what is in fact the heritage of mankind. Reconstructed Indian thought has influenced and shaped much contemporary thinking. All the major European minds of the nineteenth century - Humboldt, Fichte, Hegel, Goethe, Schopenhauer, Kant, Nietzsche, Schiller, Schelling, de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, were either Sanskritists or, on their own admission, had been deeply involved in Indian thought. Their work has inspired various thought movements — Idealism, Romanticism - which have shaped the contemporary mind. For example, Structuralism which owes so much to the work of de Saussure who was the professor/teacher of Sanskrit at Geneva before he came over to Sorbonne, is the the underpinning of what are today virtually global thought-movements right up to Post-Modernism. A large numbers of Indian texts, through translations, have become available across cultures and enabled and strengthened Indian studies. However, the diffusion and dissemination of texts and their modern study has created a new challenge for the Indian scholar to defend the tradition and his traditional reading of the texts. Knowledge formation, storage and dissemination in the oral tradition is radically different from that in the scriptal/written traditions and has monumental intellectual achievements to its credit. It needs to be defended and sustained.

We take a look at what motivates these processes and mechanisms, what they are and what they achieved.

I

What is the continuity of a civilization? We ask this question because the continuity of Indian civilization is etched in the public cognition and enshrined in the folk vocabulary. Pt. Bhagvata Sastri ji of Pune once used¹ the metaphor of a river for this knowledge-centered civilization - *bharatīya jñāna paramparā sanātana Gangā pravāha*, Indian knowledge tradition is timeless and continuous like the flow of the river

¹ At a lecture in the Department of Sanskrit, Sagar University, Sagar., 1995

Ganga. *sanātana* (= age-old / ancient / timeless) and *śāśvata* (= given , unchanging , always *true*) are in fact the two almost fixed adjectives for this *sanskriti*, culture, in the ordinary speech of the people. The continuity , therefore, is the continuity of thought and of the texts that embody that thought and tradition is the mechanism of transfer of ideas from one generation to the other.

Knowledge has always enjoyed a primary, privileged status in India. It is to be noted that culture is understood here as a set of systems or grammars , *tantra* (on which various institutions of a society are founded). Thus there are systems/grammars such as Indian culture has, for example, of dance, language, music, polity, ethics, arts, crafts, painting, sculpture, literature, etc. These systems are expressed in compositions, texts, and the whole network of these systems, texts, constitutes the knowledge or culture of that community.

The sheer amount of knowledge-literature, texts of knowledge, available in Sanskrit is amazing.² The tradition has several knowledge typologies for this large body of literature to classify and arrange the compositions in a hierarchy of validity according to their status as discourses of valid knowledge. There is, therefore a range of knowledge discourses with relative validity and no ONE discourse of knowledge All rational discourses are placed on different clines of validity and all compositions are classified into categories intermediate between those that have contingent knowledge and those which contain non-contingent knowledge. Thus the Vedas are assumed to contain non-contingent knowledge, knowledge that is independent of time, place and person, the kind of knowledge that is coded in the laws of science, for example. We have the other well-known three-fold division of all literature into *śruti-smṛti-kāvya*. *Śruti* is directly apprehended knowledge, totally non-contingent. This covers Vedas and Upaniṣads —texts that handle metaphysical questions. *Smṛti* is next in degree — it is non-contingent knowledge but one that is recalled and therefore there is the intervention of a thinker. This applies to the primary texts of philosophy and the six auxiliary sciences. *Kāvya* is knowledge that is contingent on an individual, his particular perception and his location in time and space. Pāṇini (7th century B.C.), the celebrated grammarian sets up a five-fold typology —*dr̥ṣṭā*, *prokta*, *upajñāta*, *vyākhyāna* and *kāvya*. He substitutes *dr̥ṣṭā*, grasped by visual perception for *śruti*, grasped by aural perception , divides *smṛti* into two categories, restated by some one else (*prokta*) and found/constituted again (*upajñāta*) to distinguish between say Nyāyasūtra of Gautama and Aṛṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini, which is a re-formulation and extension of the knowledge available in the long line of earlier grammarians. He adds a new category, commentary (*vyākhyāna*) which established the importance of this kind of renewal literature in the Indian intellectual tradition. There is also a clear opposition made in one typology between *śāstra*, knowledge/texts and *kāvya*, imaginative / literary texts.

² We get some idea of this from the fact that despite losses due to calamities and vandalism, more than million Sanskrit manuscripts are still in existence. They are sometimes preserved carefully, as is the case with European collections, but more often they are just stock-piled and stored in private collections and public libraries, with a large number of them not even catalogued yet. Sanskrit word for literature is *vāṇmaya*, compositions in words/ language. The primary texts in this *vāṇmaya* span a large number of disciplines - philosophy, medicine, grammar, architecture, geography, literary theory, political economy, logic, astronomy and mathematics, biology, military science, sociology, metallurgy, agriculture, mining, shipbuilding, veterinary science and commerce besides the sixty-four arts and crafts that are conventionally enumerated and include, for example, sculpting, bangle-making, etc.

It is also to be noted that contrary to the popular impression knowledge in India has not been confined to learned texts, has never been, a repository of the few. Along with the learned, scholarly tradition, there has always been a parallel popular tradition of narration and exposition of texts, the *kathā*, *pravacana paramparā*, which has all through mediated between the learned tradition of the texts of learning and the ordinary masses. Even Ādi Śaṅkarācāryā, one of the greatest minds, besides composing numerous intellectual texts was also a *pravacanākāra*, a popular expounder, who traveled through the length and breadth of India addressing village congregations and explaining to them and sharing with them his understanding of Advaita Vedānta³. Similarly, Sri Rāmānujācāryā expounded for twelve years in Tamil, the people's language, his Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy in the village of Melkote near Mysore. In fact, there is strong reason to believe that Śaṅkara's learned commentaries originated in his popular discourses.

The presence in the learned texts of illustrations and analogies, *upamā* and *dr̥ṣṭānta*, borrowed from activities of day to day ordinary life of the people from the sphere of ornaments, cooking, family relationships and obligations, activities of importance to day to day life (such as digging wells) and the third step in the five step syllogism, *udāharanam*, a real life example, the applied example characteristic of India's practical outlook and its practical conception of proof⁴, show that in India Knowledge is not a privileged discourse, nor a discourse of the privileged. And what decisively attests the non-esoteric and non-elitist nature of knowledge and above all its **continuity** is the fact that what was once the learned vocabulary of Indian thought is today a part of the ordinary language of the people. Words such as *jaḍa*, *cetana*, *jīva*, *ātmā*, *saṃsāra*, *dhyāna*, *kṣamā*, *dayā*, *maitri*, *karuṇā*, *anu*, *jñāna*, *jñāni*, *citta*, *buddhi*, *pratyakṛā*, trans-disciplinary philosophical terms, are not only present today in ordinary Indian languages but are present as ordinary words. Not only terms of philosophy, even technical terms of grammar, *sanjñas*, such as *vṛdhi* and *guṇa* are high frequency words in the ordinary speech of the speakers of almost all Indian languages. Even the conceptual propositions⁵, as maxims, are a part of the ordinary thinking of the people. It is not just a question of words or clauses being present - it is a matter of ideas permeating and continuing to be alive. It is also an example of what may be unequivocally termed as the true democratization of thought in India. This democratization makes possession of *right* knowledge⁶ a civilisational value in India.

³ In a personal conversation with Sri Śaṅkarācāryā of Shārḍa Peetha, Sṅgeri, it was confirmed that in the seventh century apart from the fact that Sanskrit was a very widely understood language, the Indian speech community was covered by five Prākritis and that Sri Ādi Śaṅkarācāryā gave his discourses in Prākṛit followed later by his compositions in Sanskrit, the pan-Indian language of learning.

⁴ Betty Heimann, *Indian and Western Philosophy. A study in Contrasts*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937. First Indian Edition, from Delhi: Aman Publishing Company, 1994. p.86-87

⁵ such as ...death is certain for the born (The Bhagavadgītā 2.27)

⁶ As we have said elsewhere, The goal of knowledge in the Indian tradition therefore is so very different - it is to promote the freedom of the individual. Of course, what constitutes freedom of the Individual in our thought has to be clearly understood... For true individual freedom, the only goal has to be *mokṣā*. So the individual seeks/pursues his *mokṣā*. But the instrument or means of *mokṣā* is Knowledge. But what Knowledge? That which promotes *dharmā*, which is defined in Mahābhārata as that which promotes the general welfare of mankind. So the individual has to seek knowledge that promotes what The Bhagavadgītā calls *loka-saṃgraha*,⁶ the collective well being. Knowledge informed by *dharmā* binds the

Great value thus has always been attached to knowledge and tremendous intellectual effort has gone into **maintaining** the texts of knowledge. As we noted elsewhere⁷ earlier even though Hindu culture is not bibliolatorous, it has accorded a special status to certain texts, the texts of knowledge, and made them perennial objects of study. The difference, however, is that there has been a complete freedom to interpret and come up with competing interpretations. A distinction therefore has to be made between the conformist, undifferentiated study of a single sacred text and freely interpretive study of an intellectually important text (such as Ṛgveda) that generates a multiplicity of what are often the contending interpretations.⁸ Śruti and Smṛti texts as texts of knowledge have been objects of perennial study. The two dominant metaphors for these texts are, (i) *kāmadhenu* , and (ii) *kalpavṛkṣa*, the first metaphor suggesting that they are sources of endless knowledge and the second that they yield the desired fruit whatever is *iṛṭa*, conducive to the happiness of the community/individual.

But it has not been simple, this maintenance of texts. Various processes have been involved in this — loss, recovery and renewal. Some texts, many in fact, must have been irretrievably lost. A text is lost when it (i) gets dispersed and portions of the text becoming unavailable for the time being; (ii) grows asymmetrical with new known facts and so ceases to be relevant or grows outmoded, that is obsolete or anachronistic, and (iii) becomes opaque and no longer makes sense. Tradition records in India repeated **loss and recovery** of its seminal cultural texts. Even in known/written history we can observe the operation of both loss and of various text-recovery/renewal mechanisms. **Renewal** needs to be understood as a different process, one that in the course of recovery or maintenance involves extension or deepening of the thought. These processes deserve to be studied though the evidence is scarce and culture specific.

It has been noted that culture is a set of systems or grammars , *tantra*. These systems, with the passage of time, may, due to various factors be lost. Thus when a text grows asymmetrical⁹ with what it seeks to explain and loses its relevance and position as a primary text in a given domain of knowledge, it may get dropped¹⁰. Or, through a sudden external event or process, texts (and their knowledge) may be physically destroyed or lost (as would happen, for example, in case of a Great War or upheaval such as the *Ahābahārata*, in which even great grammarians had to drive chariots).

However dynamic communities do not allow their systems of thought to die. A civilization such as India s that puts a premium on knowledge would strive and develop techniques for maintaining its texts. As we have described elsewhere¹¹ oral cultures have

individual and the society. (please see, *Knowledge, Individual and Society in the Indian Tradition* an Endowment Lecture delivered at PanjabUniversity, Chandigarh, December, 2001. To be published by Panjab University)

⁷ Kapil Kapoor, Some Reflections on the interpretation of texts in the Indian Tradition in Structures of Signification, H.S.Gill (ed.), Vol. I. Delhi: Wiley Eastern Limited ,1990

⁸ Bharṭhari says: Monism, Dualism and any number of points of view (*pravādā bahudhā mata* ;), all equally valid, are all rooted in and argued from the Veda (*Vākyapadīya*,1.8)

⁹ As would be the case of a book dealing with medicinal plants which have since become extinct.

¹⁰ Particularly in the oral tradition, where texts occupy space in the mind and that space has to be economically used and according to priorities.

¹¹ See, *Vyāsa Paramparā, Text renewal Mechanisms* , Max Mueller and European Scholarship in Max Mueller and Contemporary European Scholarship, Proceedings of the International Seminar Ramakrishna

in built mechanisms for the recovery of texts. As it is, strong cultures resist both kinds of loss — that due to the text-internal factors and that due to the text-external, contextual factors to preserve culturally central systems of ideas. A culture may, therefore, employ one or any of the following seven text maintenance/renewal mechanisms to keep the thought alive and pertinent:

- (i) **commentary** such as Kātyāyāna's *Vārttika*, 350 BC; Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* 2nd century BC; *Kāśikā*, 7th AD Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* and Śaṅkara's *Bhāṣya*;
- (ii) **recension** (a critical revision) such as *Cāndra Vyākaraṇa*, 4th C A.D., a Buddhist recension of *Aṛṣṭādhyāyī* that interestingly eschews what it believes is its philosophically loaded technical vocabulary; *Jainendra Vyākaraṇa/ Śabdānuśāsana*, composed in the 5th C A.D. by Devanandin or Siddhanandin), and *Āṛṣṭāvakra Gītā*, ;
- (iii) **redaction** (a re-arrangement) such as *Rūpamālā* of Vimala Saraswati, *Siddhānta Kaumudī* of Bhaṭṭojidīkṛīta, 16th C AD and *Laghusiddhānta Kaumudī*, 18th C.AD of Varadarāja,
- (iv) **adaptations**: *Hemaśabdānuśāsana* by Hemaśāstrī, 11th C AD, an adaptation of Pāṇini's grammar to describe Prakrit, contemporary spoken Prakrits or Śaṅkaradeva's Assamese adaptation of Vālmiki's *Rāmāyana* and such other adaptations, 13th-14th centuries onwards in almost all Indian languages.
- (v) **translation**: for example, all the many translations of major literary and philosophical texts in almost all the modern Indian languages, 14th century or so onwards; Hindi paraphrase of *Aṛṣṭādhyāyī* by Shri Narayan Misra and English translation of the text with incorporations from *Kāśikā* by Sri S. C. Vasu, 1898).
- (vi) **popular exposition**, the *kathā ~ pravacana paramparā*, a hoary tradition, has been chiefly instrumental in both the maintenance and renewal of texts of thought.¹² The two parallel traditions, the learned and the popular have been all through and are even today mutually enriching each other and contributing in equal measure to the development of thought through processes of paraphrase, explication, verification, falsification, illustration.

re-creation: The *Mahābhārata*, for example, is in addition maintained by repeated creative use of its themes and episodes. Recreations based on the *Mahābhārata* date back to the ancient Sanskrit playwright Bhāsa, who wrote a number of plays on epic characters and episodes including his portrayal of the dilemma of Karna in his play *Karnabhāra*. Another powerful attempt at recreation of the themes and characters of the

Mission, Kolkatta. 2000.(pp.117-135). The discussion of Recovery process here in section II is based on this paper. But I make a distinction now in this paper between Recovery and Renewal mechanisms.

¹² This *kathā, pravacana paramparā* continues to be vigorous and alive even today with many distinguished expounders of Upaniṣads, Vedānta, *Bhāgavadgītā* and *Rāmāyana* drawing huge crowds in their live discourses and having millions of devoted followers across the country. Sri Āśā Rām ji Bāpu and Sri Murāri Bāpu are just two examples. Their discourses are learned but *sārasa* and in the functional mode laid down by The Nāṭyaśāstra make profound thought accessible to the people.

epic is seen in the stage performances of Kathākali in Kerala, South India. Modern Indian literature has been lately flooded with re-tellings of the epic. In the Malayalam novel, *Anuyatra* by S.K. Marar, Kunti is portrayed as suffering like the Mother Earth herself. Shivaji Sawant's *Mrityunjaya* discusses Karna's moral predicament. This Marathi novel glorifies Karna and justifies his actions attempting to analyse him psychologically. A Malayalam novel *And Now Let Me Sleep* by P.K. Balakrishnan also attempts to see Karna as a person suffering from grave identity crisis. A very notable re-telling of the Mahbhārata is the English novel by Sashi Tharoor —*The Great Indian Novel*. Tharoor borrows the structure of the epic, employs the technique of subversion and parodies the general schema. The various re-tellings show that the great epic is viewed in different perspectives and is reinterpreted in the light of the changing conditions and thought.

These are modes of renewal for they restore the dynamics of a text that may be losing its vitality by re-contextualising and reinterpreting it. In this function they come close to the commentary, *ṭīkā* mode.

II

How is the loss due to external conditions handled? This external process is a very complex phenomenon and has several articulations. For example, when the Nālandā library was burnt, some Buddhist *bhikkhus* (monks) fled to Tibet with whatever texts they could take with them. (The library's massive collection, it is said, burnt for months; so only a small fraction could have been saved.).

Many were irretrievably lost. One text, Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* has an interesting and representative history of recovery. In 1968 Masaaki Hattori translated, annotated and published¹³ the section on perception, the *pratyakṣapariccheda*, from the Sanskrit fragments and the Tibetan versions. In 1987, Richard P. Hayes, published an English translation from Kanakavarman's Tibetan translation and Vasudhārakṛitā's translation of the text. The Professor has prepared the explanatory notes on the basis of the sub-commentary (*ṭīkā*) by Jinendrabuddhi (also known as Jitendrabudhi, 8th c. AD). Jinendrabuddhi's sub-commentary is more useful as a guide to Dignāga's thought as it offers an explanation of nearly every phrase in *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, both for the verses and the prose autocommentary. Further Prof. Hayes notes in his introduction:

To all of the passages translated I have added my own commentary, which not only contains information on how Dignāga's arguments were interpreted by such philosophers as Uddyotkāra, Jayamisra, Pārthāsārthimisra and Jinendrabuddhi, but also ventures occasionally to express the line of argument used by the Indians in a way intended to make them a little more acceptable to modern readers.

Pramāṇasamuccaya text has had interesting history in Tibet where it was carried by the monks. The Sanskrit original is no longer available but three Tibetan translations were made from the original. Burston(?) reports/records that a puṇḍita by the name of Chandrarāhula was invited to Tibet and that he and the Tibetan translator Ting nge dzin Bzang Po translated *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and other works in the middle part eleventh

¹³ Harvard Oriental Series, ed. D.H.H. Ingalls, vol. 47

¹⁴ *Dignāga on Interpretation of Signs* (Studies of Classical India — 9). London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987. P.223

century. The second of the two surviving translations of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* was done by the Tibetan scholar Dad pai shes rab in collaboration with an Indian Pundita named Kanakavarman (Kser kyi go ch). Kanakavarman's translation of Dignāga's work is generally speaking far more clear than the translation by Vasudharakṛitā and Zha ma seng ge and it is more in line with the grammatical analysis and philosophical expositions given by Jinendrabuddhi. In cases where a fragment of the original Sanskrit passage has survived, a comparison of this fragment with the two Tibetan translations most often shows that Kanakvarman shows more finesse and accuracy than the other translation.

As for the original text, only the first chapter *Pramāṇasamuccaya* by Dignāga/Di_nāga (480-540 AD) is available at Government Oriental Library, Mysore, 1990. This first chapter, *pratyakṛapariccheda*, on perception as a means of valid knowledge consists of 48 verses while the total number of verses in this text has been reported to be 247. This is an example of partial recovery of a text in recorded history in an allied cultural tradition at a time when the traditional modes of storing the text in the mind in various permutations had been disrupted. But in what today we refer to as pre-history, it was possible to reconstitute the texts within the tradition though we have no means to assess the degree of reconstitution though the authenticity of reconstitution is implicitly accepted¹⁵.

II

The process of recovery of texts has been institutionalised in the tradition as *Vyāsa-paramparā*. Vyāsa-paramparā is a record of recovery of texts. Understanding this involves questions such as nature of evidence.¹⁶ As we said above, we are different from the west in our notions of matters such as authenticity, in our sense of time and in our modes of recording what happened/what is likely to happen (*itihāsa-purāṇa*). A tradition is enshrined in *Mahābhārata* and in the different *Purāṇas* that at least thirty timāes in India's long tradition, the central codes (*Vedas*, contingent *vāñmaya* and *Vidyās*) were lost and re-constituted or enounced anew, renewed, and subsequently elaborated. For the latter, we have the attested example of *Aṛṣṭādhyāyī* and for the former, we have cited the example of *Pramāṇasammucaya*, a culturally centrally code of Buddhist epistemology. Many western scholars would discount these formulations given their assumptions and their methodology. In no other tradition do we have such efforts at reconstituting and renewal, even by those from outside the tradition, as is the case with the Sanskrit tradition.

An Indian scholar, Dr. Kunwar Lal Vyasashishya, has pointed out,

¹⁵ We are referring to the elaborate and complex *pāṭha*-tradition which analysed and re-organised texts in various permutations and combinations which when stored in the mind in different arrangements/combinations ensured accurate re-construction of the texts even when, and if, all the exteriorized, written versions were to be destroyed. The texts have been maintained intact and uncorrupted through intricate techniques of mental storage and oral transference.

¹⁶ We rely on Purāṇa narratives. It is said that Purāṇa narratives are metaphorical, not literal. But on that count we cannot reject their evidence. *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* clearly says that *rupaka* is the mode of statement in Vedas and goes on to interpret, to attribute content to them. Further to call thirty different *ṛṣis*, scholars, the same nomenclature, Vyāsa, is itself an act of metaphoricization.

Western writers do not even accept the existence of Pār āśarya Vyāsa [the author of the *Mahābhārata*], what value they can attach to the 29 Vyāsas who preceded him? Today, Pārāśarya Vyāsa is the source of Vedavānmaya [the entire body of Vedic literature]. [By rejecting the existence of Vedavyāsa] the western writers have dug up the very root of authentic Indian history just as Kauṭilya had dug up the very root of the Nanda dynasty. But the roots of Indian *itihāsa* go into the very *pātāla* [the netherworld] and so they have not succeeded in plucking them out completely. So the famous Purāṇa scholar, Pargiter, though unable to grasp the whole truth, did apprehend the truth that Vyāsa enounced the texts before the Mahābhārata war .¹⁷

Far beyond the limited chronology of the west, Vedic literature has existed in India since time immemorial. Not only that it has been, for various reasons, repeatedly in need of re-statement, re-constitution, defence. It has happened thirty times. The span of time over which it has happened need not concern us here, as it is not pertinent. What is pertinent is the phenomenon of loss and recovery through restatement or reconstitution. We know for example from the *Mahābhārata* text itself that it was constituted in Janamejaya's *nāga-yajña* at the Nigamabodhaghāṭa, a tell-tale name, of the then Indraprastha, modern Delhi. This was obviously an assembly of the learned convened by Janamejaya to reconstitute texts that were lost in the great convulsion, for regaining knowledge of Nigama texts.

We must comment on the nature and the cause of loss. As Sri Max Mueller has noted¹⁸ texts in the oral tradition are stored and maintained in the memory.¹⁹ This mode assumes an ordered, stable society. If there is a major disturbance, such as the long twelve-year drought just before the ninth Vyāsa (*MB, Śalyaparva, adhyāya 51*), the scholars can think of nothing but their very existence and the texts go into the background. Or if there is a war such as *Mahābhārata*, or if there is a massive invasion such as that of the Sākās at the turn of the era or of the Islamic armies in the 10th-11th-12th centuries of this era.

The scholar we have already cited lists by name the thirty Vyāsas (p.1) on the basis of evidence in the *Purāṇās* and the *Mahābhārata*, and describes the function they performed. While the earlier Vyāsas are credited with the first enunciation of the texts, the ninth Vyāsa, the tenth Vyāsa, and the nineteenth Vyāsa, the twenty-fifth Vyāsa and thirtieth Vyāsa are explicitly recognized as those who re-constituted the texts.

Saundarānanda, 7 records:

¹⁷ Dr. Kunwarlal Vyāsaśiṛya, *Ārīa Yajña Vidyā*, Itihāsa Vidyā Prakashan, 1988. p.35, p.37. The author quotes Pargiter on p.37: He (Vyāsa) would probably have completed that work of Vedic (recension) about a quarter century before Bhārata battle . (A.H.T. p.318)

¹⁸ This may sound startling, but what will sound more startling, and yet is a fact that can be easily ascertained at the present moment, if every MS of the *Ṛgveda* was lost, we should be able to recover the whole of it- from the memory of the *śrotriya*s in India. Here then we are not dealing with theories, but with facts, which---anybody may verify. The whole of the *Ṛgveda*, and a great deal exists at the present moment in the oral tradition (India op. cit. p.131).

¹⁹ Orality, as a mode of constituting and maintaining knowledge, organizes knowledge in the mind, as against the literate traditions in which knowledge is maintained externally, exteriorized with attendant consequences for knowledge formation, storage and dissemination. For some more details, please see, *Texts of the Oral Tradition* in Kapil Kapoor, *Language, Linguistics and Literature. The Indian Perspective*. Delhi: Academic Foundation.1994.pp.27-31

ljLorh ;= lqr% vL; ;Ks; u"VL; osnL; iqu% izoDr%A

Sārasvato yatra suto asya yaj eya na ṛṭasya vedasya punaḥ pravaktaḥ i.e. Sarasvati son Sārasvata was born who re-constituted the Vedas that had been lost . It is also recorded that there was a continuous drought for twelve years and sixty thousand ṛṭis congregated in Sārasvata Āśrama, hermitage, and afflicted by hunger and thirst, they forgot the Vedas. Sārasvata then reconstituted them and taught them again. Aśvaghoṣa in his *Buddhacarita* again recorded the same fact:

lkjLor~ pkfi txkn~ u"Va osna iquFkZ nn" kquZiwoZsA

Sārasvat cāpi jagād naṛtaṁ vedaṁ punartha dadrṛṇapurve. (I.42)

It is noted by the *purāṇas* and *itihāsas* that *veda-śruti* has been several times lost or has been seized or has been forgotten and that it has been rescued time and again by great minds. For example, it is widely recorded that *asuras*, Madhu-Kaiṭabha, had seized the Vedas and Hari (Viṛṇu) had to rescue the texts.

Harivaṁśa Purāṇa records a similar event in the tenth age (*daṛaṁ tretāyuga*). Dattātreya re-established Vedas when they were lost:

nRrk=s; bfr [;kr% {ke;k ij;% ;qr%A

rsu u"VsÔk osnsÔq izfdz;klq e[ksÔ pAA

lg ;Kfdz;k osnk% izR;kuh rk fg rsu oSAA

Dattātreya iti khyātaḥ kśamayā paraya: yutaḥ/

Tena naṛṭeṛu vedeṛu prakriyāsu makheṛa ca//

Saha yaj akriyā ved āḥ pratyānī tā hi tena vai// (*Harivaṁśa Purāṇa* I.41.4-5-7)

Vāyu Purāṇa also records it with some variation:

=srk;qxs rq n'kes nRrk=;ks oHkwo gA

u"Vs /keZ prqFkZ'p ekdZ.Ms; iqjLlj%AA

Tretāyuge tu daśame dattātrayo vabhūva ha/

Naṛṭe dharma chaturthaśca mārkandeya purassaraḥ/

So, for the tenth time, as a Vyāsa, Markaṇḍeya with the help of Dattātreya re-constituted the Vedas.²⁰

The names of eleventh to thirtieth Vyāsa are known but details are available only about the nineteenth (Bharadvāja) the twentieth (Vājaś ravā, the father of Naciketā), the twenty fifth (Rkṛavālmiki), the twenty seventh (Parāśara) and of course, the thirtieth Kṛṇadvaipāyana Vedavyāsa, the contemporary of Śāntanu, whose contribution of this nature is acknowledged by Pargiter, as we have noted above. In many *Puras* and in the *Mah_bh_rata* this is acknowledged, viz.

²⁰ It is to be noted that in the early texts and tradition, the term *veda* encompasses not only *śrutis* but also all Brāhmaṇas and all *smṛtis*, and *vidyās*. Later the term got restricted to *śruti* texts, at some point of time.

loZosnfona Js"Bks okl% IR;ofrlqr%A

sarvavedavidm śreṭho vāsaḥ satyvatisutaḥ. (Śānti Parva, 2.9)

It is said that Vedavānmaya composed in the earlier ages became disordered and dispersed. Vedavyāsa, seeing that the human intellectual abilities have declined, put together the essence of all *Veda Samhitās* in the form of four Vedas because of which he came to be called Vyāsa. (*Ādi Parva* 63/ 87-88)

This whole text-renewal institution of Vyasa needs to be studied depending on the needs of the times.

There are thus various functions of this institution of Vyāsa - such as, re-establishment, recovery and reconstitution, extension (viz. 21 *śākhās* of the *Ṛgveda* by the disciples of the Vedavyāsa) and propagation. What is of importance is the evident knowledge-centredness of the Indian community - so great is the value attached to the texts of knowledge (*Veda*) that great effort has repeatedly been made by great minds to maintain these texts intact. In this sense, Ādi Śāṅkara could also be called Vyāsa as he re-established, re-interpreted and propagated Vedic knowledge after it had been restricted and sent into hiding by the Buddhist thought for almost one thousand years.

From these narratives, another convention emerges. Such monumental work as the different Vyāsas did, can not be achieved by one individual —several thinkers must have been involved in what must have taken the shape of a vigorous intellectual movement. So what the later recorders do is to identify one of them as the leader of that movement, call him Vyāsa, and name several other thinkers performing limited, specific tasks, as his disciples. Thus Vedavyāsa's disciples are known and one of them Paela engaged himself with the *Ṛgveda* and later twenty-one of his disciples developed twenty-one schools of the *Ṛgveda*. This kind of intellectual progression and relationship one can trace even in the history of evolution of Advaita and thus the subsequent thinkers such as Rāmānujācārya of *Viśiṭādvaita* would be counted as a *śiṭya*, disciple of the Vyāsa —Ādi Śāṅkara. And in the same vein, one may recognize the contribution of Yāska, more than fifteen hundred years before Ādi Śāṅkara. We know from his *Nirukta* that the vedic texts with the passage of time had become opaque so much so that materialist skeptics such as, Kautsa, asserted that the vedic mantras are meaningless. Yāska took up the gauntlet, developed the science of, *nirvacana*, etymology, and restored meanings to the vedic texts and thus renewed them. He initiated the science of interpretation and came at the head of a line of scholars culminating in Jaimini and his *Mīmāṃsāsāstra*. He may be attested as the thirty-first Vyāsa with Ādi-Śāṅkara as the thirty-second Vyāsa.

In this manner a number of times, a number of *drṭās/ṛṭs* rescued the Indian knowledge systems from being submerged and destroyed very much like Lord Viṭṇu rescued *gaja* (elephant) from the fatal clutches of *graha* (crocodile).

III

There is (i) the availability of the text, (ii) the ability to understand the text, And (iii) the relevance of the text. The continuous and cumulative *Ṭikā* Paramparā, the commentary tradition, ensured all the three — availability, comprehensibility and contextual relevance of the texts.

The commentary tradition is a cumulative tradition, i.e., a number of commentaries on a given text follow each other in succession with every succeeding commentary taking into account and building on the preceding ones. Almost all the major texts have been cumulatively commented upon.²¹

These commentaries take many forms from bare annotation (*panjikā*) to exhaustive, encyclopedic analysis (*mahābhāṣya*)²². What Sri K.A. Subramania Iyer ji says about the purpose and value of commentaries is true of commentaries in general:

[These] supplied the context and brought out the full implications of the main idea [they also explain] the logical sequence [of topics and ideas] [handing down the old tradition] was also one of the original motives of those writers [they also placed the text in the context of the totality of philosophical systems]²³.

Above all as Vāmana-Jayaditya say in the first *karika* of their *Kāśikā*:

The purpose is to bring together and unify the knowledge that lies scattered in *vṛttis*, *bhāṣyas* and all *śāstras*

Thus texts over a period of time (i) grow opaque, and/or (ii) become assymetrical with the context, and/or (iii) their connection with the tradition of knowledge in that domain becomes incoherent. If the intellectual texts have not become dead and are still studied in the learned, though now relatively esoteric, tradition, it is because the *ṭīkā paramparā* has kept them alive and pertinent. As we have already noted, some of India s most brilliant minds have been exegetes — Yska (9th century BC), Śabarawāmin (1st century AD), Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (6th century AD), Ādi Śaṅkara (7th century AD), Sri Rāmānuja (11th century AD), Mādhavācāryā (13th century AD), Śayanācāryā (14th century AD, Jñāneśwara (14th-15th century AD) right down to The Great Moderns , Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, Vinoba Bhave (who all wrote commentaries on The *Bhagavadgītā* in the illustrious line of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja). As already noted²⁴, existence of this continuous, cumulative tradition of interpretation apart from attesting the society s commitment to knowledge also attests the freedom of mind that the culture allows the individual to exercise in reaching different, competing and self-validated interpretation/constructs. Freedom to interpret means freedom to think. Above all this

²¹ For example, the commentaries, *Ṭīkā*, on Jaimini s *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*: Śabarabhāṣya (1st centry AD ?); Kumārila Bhaṭṭa s *Ślokavārtika* and *Tantravārtika* (6th c./ 7th c. AD?) commentaries on Śabara Bhāṣya; Prabhakara Misra s commentary on Śabarabhāṣya, *Bṛhatī* (7th c. AD ?); Śālikanātha s commentary on *Bṛhatī*, *Rjuvimalā* (9th c. AD); Pārthāsārthy Misra s *Śāstradīpikā*(14th c. AD ?); Mādhavācāryā s *Nyāyamālā*(14th / 15th c. AD); Appāyādikṣita s *Upakramaparākrama*, Apodeva s *Mīmāṃsānyāyaparakāśa*, Khaṇḍadeva s *Mīmāṃsakaustubha*, Gāgabhaṭṭa s *Bhaṭṭacintāmaṇī*, Narayana Bhaṭṭa s *Mānamyodyā* all 17th. century; Kṛṣṇanayajavana s *Mīmāṃsāparibhāṣā* (18th. c. AD).

The commentary literature is indeed endless; we have mentioned here only those that are most frequently cited and discussed. There are indeed commentaries on these commentaries (which is what makes the tradition interlaced) such as the two major *Ślokavārtika* commentaries *Kāśika* by Suchārīta Misra and *Nyāyaratnākara* by Pārthāsārthī Miśra the *Tantravārtika* commentaries *Nyāyasudhā* by Someśvara Bhaṭṭa, *Tauttātītamataṭilaka* by Bhāvedeva Bhaṭṭa, to mention only two. (For a complete list, please see Ganganatha Jha s Introduction in his translation , *Ślokavārtika*, 1983 reprint, Delhi: Satguru Publications).

²² Rājaśekhara in his *Kāvyaṃmāṃsā* (9th c. AD) in chapter 1, lists eight forms.

²³ **Bhartrhari**. Poona: Deccan College. 1969. Pp.50-51

²⁴ *Vākyapadīya*, Kāṇḍa 1, kārikā 8-10.

tradition ensured continuity of the habits of mind, of what is called the culture of a community.

Commentary is the major form that interpretation, *artha-niradhāraṇa*, takes in the tradition. The interpreter seeks to establish meaning at the level of *yathārtha*, meaning at the apparent level and at the level of *tattvārtha*, significance or purport. As texts can be highly complex even at the surface, we need canons and instruments of interpretation. Faced with transparent, discontinuous, repetitive, contradictory, tautological, implausible, non-coherent, apparently meaningless texts, developed over time a system of interpretation that employed the following ten strategies or instruments of exegesis:

A. *śabda pramāṇa* (verbal testimony)—

śruti, darśana, itihāsa-purāṇa.

jñāna mimāṃsā (established epistemologies, perception, inference, etc.)

B. *sārvabhauma siddhānta*, major assumption of text-domain

C. *sangati* (coherence)

paribhaṛā nyāya (meta-rules; rules of interpretation)

laukika nyāya (judgements employed in ordinary life)

vyākaraṇa (grammar)

D. *nirvacana* (etymology; exposition of word meaning)

śabdaśakti (theories of meaning, including *dhvani*, suggestion, and *lakṣaṇā vṛtti*, figurative meaning)

It is educative to study the great exegetes and see how they employ these instruments of interpretation and how they differ from each other in their preferred instruments. For example, while Sri Rāmānuja dominantly uses verbal testimony in his *Gītā Bhaṣya*, Sri Śāṅkara's dominant epistemology is inference.²⁵ Sri Śāṅkara's argument in his commentary on the second chapter of *Gītā* is presented in the given *vāda* tradition — the *pūrva pakṣa*, the opponent's point of view is presented first and then controverted and then the *sva-siddhānta* is argued. Ādi Śāṅkara employs all the instruments of interpretation in an exposition that displays a concentric enlargement of the argument built around the one key word, *aśocya*, un- or non- mournable.

Sri Śāṅkara achieves in this part of his commentary a remarkable reconciliation of what had been argued since the *Upaniṣads* as the three contending means of liberation, *mokṣa-jñāna* (knowledge), *karma* (action) and *bhakti* (devotion). The BG is important in the Indian history of ideas because it investigates the cause of suffering in relation to a real life situation, a drastic situation involving killing and getting killed but one that epitomises all the dilemmas that one may encounter in this life. The great sage Vyāsa examines this question and to give it authority makes Lord Krishna the spokesman. Ādi Śāṅkara's seminal commentary establishes/articulates Lord Krishna's *siddhānta* for attaining *mokṣa*, freedom from suffering: unattached action (*niṛkāma karma*) leads to purification of the self (*citta śuddhi*) which leads to wise indifference (*vairāgya*) which leads to discriminating faculty (*viveka*) which leads to pure knowledge (*vishudha jñāna*) which then leads to freedom from suffering (*mokṣa*).

²⁵ For a detailed statement of Sri Śāṅkara's method in his commentary on the *Gītā*, chapter 2, see Kapil Kapoor, *Some Reflections* op cit, pp.264-271

The commentary tradition remained alive, though it did grow restricted, even in the period of great disruption following the 11th century.

IV

Now following the great disruptions in the Indian history in the 11th century and the vandalism that followed, the Indian learning/knowledge got excluded, suffered, dispersed- it went into hiding, with some families of scholars secretly continuing to engage with particular parts and portions of this body of knowledge²⁶. The Bhaṭṭojidikṣita family of Varanasi, for example, took upon itself the task of maintaining *vyākaraṇa* texts at great risk and in penury. Gradually the whole education system came to be disrupted, various schools disappeared one by one, and new objects of knowledge replaced this traditional knowledge.

The process continued with the British period. Dr. Bhattacharya has described the state of affairs and the attitude of Indians to their own learning:

The introduction of English as the medium of instruction and the establishment of a large number of schools and colleges on the Western style led to the virtual closure of Tols and Pāṭhaśālās. After the quelling of the Mutiny a feeling of desperation took possession of the Indian mind. It was feared that the old Indian literature old Indian culture, old Indian sciences and arts would perish at no distant future. Manuscripts were perishing in heaps in the houses of Pandits or were being carried to all parts of Europe. A Pandit in the early years of the 19th century considered his manuscripts to be his best treasures. His son who had learnt A B C saw no good in the manuscripts and removed them from best room from his house, first to the kitchen. The house wife took the wooden-board covers and utilized them for fuel. The leaves got intermixed for want of board and string in the course of a year or so were thrown to the kitchen garden to rot²⁷. This situation of ignorance came to such a pass that we could no longer read Aśoka's inscriptions (Princep had to do it for us), the Nawab of Bhopal offered the Vidisha sculptures to be taken away and had to be told by the British resident that he did not know what he was saying and Jagat Singh, the general of Raja of Banaras pulled down the *stupa* of Sāranāth to provide bricks/materials for the Raja's new palace. As Swami Nirvedānanda ji says:

young minds began to swallow queer cultural shibboleths, such as India has no culture worth the name, that her entire past was (one big error best forgotten) a foolish quest after false ideals, that if she wanted to live seriously, she would have to re-mould herself.

Thoroughly in the mould of European civilization, these incantations lulled the self-awareness of the Indians into sleep²⁸

Not just young minds, the whole people grew ashamed. As we said elsewhere:

²⁶ Like the Bhaṭṭojidikṣita family of Varanasi that in the 16th-17th centuries took upon itself the task of maintaining important *vyākaraṇa* texts at great risk and in great penury.

²⁷ Dr. B. Bhattacharya, *Sanskrit Culture in a Changing World*, Baroda: Good Companions, 1950, pp.54 -55.

²⁸ Swami Nirvedananda, *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, Calcutta: Ramakrishna Institute of Culture, 1953, p. 653.

It is perhaps not difficult for us even today to reconstruct the Hindu mood of deep despondency in the last decades of the 19th century [And then subsequently] Marathas had been defeated in 1818, the Sikhs in 1839, the revolt of the Hindi heartland put down in 1857 [it was a case of people having lost] their voice [a case of] subjugation of the discourse- a whole lexis de-invigorated [dropped], rendered meaningless.²⁹ We get a glimpse of the psychological state of the people in Swāmi Vivekānanda jī s address also:

It has been one of the principles of my life not to be ashamed of my ancestors The more I have studied the past more and more has this pride come to me.

Swami ji went on to link this mood to the submerging of India s thought and literature, referred to the recurrence of this phenomenon and the repeated re-emergence of this thought in India s long history:

Sect after sect arose in India, seeming to shake the religion of the Vedas to its very depths, but like the waters of the sea-shore in a tremendous earthquake it receded only to return in an all-absorbing flood³⁰

V

It is in this perspective that we have to see, due to the happy accident of the British rule in India, **the renewal of texts in the modern times**, the 18th century onwards exercises in the recovery and reconstitution of texts. It is the European scholars, particularly the Germans, who set in motion the process of recovery - of both the texts and the self-respect of the people.

It is not out of place to note chronologically the work of major contributors here as recorded by Dr. Bhattacharya.³¹ Warren Hastings, nominated Governor General of India in 1773 commissioned the first law-book compiled by the Sanskrit scholars-published subsequently, in 1776, in English translation as *A Code of Gentoo Law*. Later Charles Wilkins translated the *Bhāgavadgītā* and *Hitopadeśa* into English. However, for really opening Indian literature to Europe, credit goes, as is well known, to Sir William Jones who founded the Asiatic Society, which printed editions of numerous Indian texts in a series known as Bibliotheca Indica. He himself translated Śakuntalā and *Manusmṛti* into English. Colebrooke continued his work and initiated Indian philology. He introduced *Ṛgveda* to Europe in 1805. H.H. Wilson next translated the *Ṛgveda*. Another Englishman, Alexander Hamilton learnt Sanskrit and on his way back was detained in Paris. There Fredrich Schlegel, the German scholar learnt Sanskrit from him and published his studies in German. His talented brother followed him and became the first professor of Sanskrit in Germany and settled in Bonn in 1818. Franz Bopp was a contemporary of Schlegel and became the founder of the new science of Comparative Philology.

²⁹ Kapil Kapoor, *Rebirth of a Language: The Conceptual Structure of Vivekananda s Discourse in Reflection on Swami Vivekananda. Hundred Years after Chicago*, M. Sivaramakrishna and Sumta Roy* (eds.), Delhi: Sterling Publishers. 1993. p. 100.

³⁰ *The Chicago Address*, para 1.

³¹ *op.cit.* pp.52-54.

Sanskrit studies grew more and more influential in Europe and a large number of scholars took to Sanskrit studies. Some of those who made significant contributions, apart from Max Mueller, are — Roth, Burnouf, Aufrecht, Lassen, B hthink, Weber, Senart, Sylvain Levi, Foucher, and others. The long line ends in such giants at the turn of the 20th century as Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of structuralism, who was a professor of Sanskrit at Geneva and had done his Ph.D. on the genitive case in Sanskrit and had published papers in the area of Sanskrit poetics and meters; Roman Jakobson, the formalist, linguist and literary theorist who worked on Vedic mythology and Trubetzkoy the structural phonologist who for his Ph.D. had worked on the *Ṛgveda*. In America also the Sanskrit studies took root and a number of eminent scholars are associated with it - Lenman, Edgerton, Norman Brown, Whitney, Clarke and the two eminent contemporary scholars, D.D.Ingalls and George Cardona, whose work has, ironically, added respectability to Sanskrit Studies and promoted their acceptability in the Indian academy. This *sahastranāma*: is auspicious and should be enounced by all those who study or revere this tradition.³²

As Shri Kamalakar Tiwari appropriately observes we owe a deep debt of gratitude to these European and British scholars - they renewed a whole tradition afresh by reconstituting the texts and gave them respectability by making them the object of serious study in the mainstream education of Europe. It is through the medium of Sanskrit scholars, Shri Tiwari writes, that

We are getting to know our brightness/fairness. In this matter we shall ever remain grateful to the Western scholars who gave us the kind of sight (*dr̥ṣṭi*) that makes it possible for us to see our own past.³³

While William Jones did draw the attention of Europe to the Sanskrit language and its beauty through his translations of *Śakuntalā* and *Manusmṛti*, his scholarly efforts remained focused on Post-Buddhist literature and the Vedic literature remained a closed book. Colebrooke also did not realize the value of his work related to *Ṛgveda*. H.H. Wilson also remained interested in mostly later Sanskrit literature. At this point, Burnouf published a comparative grammar of Zend and the Vedic Sanskrit and initiated an intellectual revolution in Europe for the next twenty-five years (1826-52).

VI

His two disciples Roth and Max Mueller continued his work of foregrounding the intellectual strength of the Vedic literature. Max Mueller's contribution in this recovery/renewal cycle is unequalled.

As Max Mueller declared, it was his chief object to try to remove [a most unhappy misconception] that [while Sanskrit texts may be pretty, quaint and curious] Sanskrit texts either teach us nothing or teach what we do not care to know.³⁴ He therefore took it upon himself to **defend the tradition and articulate it as an intellectual, and not as a fanciful tradition, and in the process reconstruction of texts became his major work.** The tasks are inter-related - as by constructing an authentic

³² We obviously disagree with anti-imperialists and so-called Orientalists .

³³ Kamalakar Tiwari (tr.) Translator's Introduction to Max Mueller *Hum Bhārata se Kyā Sīkha Sakte Hain* ? Allahabad: Adarsh Hindi Pustakalaya, 1967. (2nd Edition). P.11.

³⁴ Max Mueller, *India- What Can It Teach Us*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, Indian Edition, 1991.p.4.

edition of *R̥gveda*, with Śāyana's commentary, he both defended and articulated the Indian intellectual tradition.

Yet it is important to note that in his seven lectures, he explicitly devoted himself to the articulation and defence of the tradition³⁵.

Prof. Max Mueller offers a reasoned defence, in sequence, against the charge that-

- (i) Sanskrit literature has no serious thought content, (p.4)
- (ii) Indians lack truthfulness of character, (p.33)
- (iii) Sanskrit is a dead language, (p.52)
- (iv) Sanskrit literature is an artificial literature, (p.54)
- (v) that Indians are impractical, therefore, failure in the material sense, (p.61)
- (vi) Vedic hymns are irrational outpourings, (p.68)
- (vii) Brahmins withheld knowledge from people, (p.92)
- (viii) Vedas are purely fictitious (p.105) and primitive (p.31)
- (ix) Vedic literature does not have antiquity that is claimed for it (p.131)
- (x) modern India is in complete disjunction with its Vedic past, (p.134)
- (xi) Indian Vedic literature developed under foreign influences of Babylonia, China, Persia, and etc. (p.89).

It is not necessary to go into the details of his arguments against these postulates — suffice it to say that he argues from facts and uses reason. As he says in the context of the oral tradition:

We are not dealing with theories, but with facts, which anybody may verify (p.131).

As for the articulation of the intellectual content of the tradition, we note Prof. Max Mueller's exposition, the first of its kind, of the rationality and the substance and the purpose of the Vedas, Brāhmanās, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads, Sūtragranthas, Prātiśākhya and Vedānta. His exposition became the desiderata for subsequent research in Indian studies. In this expository discourse, Prof. Max Mueller defends Indian character and thought, gives evidence of his profound insight into Indian life and thought and asserts that India has contributed in a major way to the Global, the whole of mankind's repository of knowledge and values. To give some examples:

(i) He claims, for example, **that India has a place in the history of the human mind** and his argument comes from the Sanskrit language. He cites the verb root *√as* — no language he says, could ever produce at once so empty, or, if you like so general a root as *√as*, to be and this root *√as*, to breathe has to lose all signs of its original material character, before it could convey that purely abstract meaning of existence, without any qualification, which has rendered to the higher operations of thought the same service which the naught, likewise the invention of Indian genius, has to render in mathematics. Who will say how long the friction lasted which changed *√as*, to breathe, into *√as*, to be? ³⁶

(ii) After having talked of the parallel columns of Numerals, Pronouns, and verbs in Sanskrit, Greek and Latin written on the blackboard, one felt in the presence of facts, before which no one has to bow, he underlines the consequence of this knowledge of affinity between India and Europe in these

³⁵ And this needs to be remembered by those who focus only on his Christian or Imperialist stance.

³⁶ op. cit. p.17.

insightful terms — **the concept of the European man has been changed** and widely extended by our acquaintance with India, and we know now that we are something different from what we thought we were many thousand years ago, we were something that had not developed into Englishman, or a Saxon, or a Greek, or a Hindu either and this is not all **it [the attested Sanskrit literature] has imparted to the whole ancient history of man a reality which it never possessed before .**³⁷

(iii) Reacting to Mill s critique of average Indian character, Prof. Max Mueller quotes Sleeman to make the observation that **to know an Indian, he has to know him in the village community** and then makes his own generalized point that the political unit or the social cell in India has always been, and, in spite of repeated foreign conquests, is still the village community we hear of the circles of 84 villages, the so called Chourasees³⁸

(iv) Reacting again to Mill s charge, Prof. Max Mueller cites so many travellers and administrators to testify the Hindus reverence for truth and then cites etymological proof- Their very word for truth is full of meaning. It is *sat* or *satya*, *sat* being the participle of the verb *as*, to be. Truth, therefore, was with them simply *that which is*.³⁹

(v) He **disputes the assertion that Sanskrit is a dead language** and cites several facts to show that though Sanskrit had ceased to exist as a language spoken by the people at large in the third century B.C. yet such is the marvelous continuity between the past and the present in India that in spite of repeated social convulsions, religious reforms, and foreign invasions, Sanskrit may be said to be **still the only language that is spoken over the whole extent of the vast country.**⁴⁰ He calls this the third prejudice and says that even after a century of English rule and teaching Sanskrit is more widely understood in India than Latin was in Europe at the time of Dante . But even if, he draws attention to what is generally ignored in discussions, Sanskrit were more of a dead language than it really is, **all the living languages of India, both Aryan and Dravidian draw their very life and soul from Sanskrit.** literature,

(vi) **Talking of the range and the extent of Sanskrit *vāṅmaya***, he says that the examination of the mss. shows that more than 10,000 separate works (texts in different domains of knowledge) are in existence. Saying that not all are of that sophistication or excellence, he gives a parameter of judgment - judge an intellectual community by the best it has to offer-

there runs through the whole history of India, its three or four thousand years, a high road It may have been trodden by a few solitary wanderers But to the historians of the human mind, those few solitary wanderers are after all the true representatives of India Do not let us be deceived. The true history of the world must always be the history of the few; and **just as we measure the Himalayas by the height of the Mount Everest, we must take the true**

³⁷ op. cit. pp. 18-19.

³⁸ op. cit. p.31.

³⁹ op. cit. p.41.

⁴⁰ op. cit. pp. 51,52,53.

measure of India from the poets of the Veda, the sages of the Upaniṣads, the founders of the Vedānta and Sāṃkhya philosophies and the authors of the oldest law-books ...⁴¹

(vii) **Contrasting the Indian meditative philosophy of life with the activism of the West, he pleads for seeing some value in reflection and then posits:** two hemispheres in human nature, both worth developing — the active, combative and political on the side, the passive meditative and the philosophical on the other. He later sets up an analogous opposition between the northern Aryan and the southern Aryan and asks **why should we not be satisfied with a little less of work, and a little less of pleasure, but a little more thought,** and a little more of rest. And then in the spirit of the *Bhagavadgītā*, he adds as a clincher — For short as our life is, we are not mere Mayflies that are born in the morning to die at the night.⁴²

(viii) Prof. Nilakantha Shastri says that while his theories of Renaissance in 3rd century A.D. no longer find acceptance, the differences he noted between Vedic literature and later classical Sanskrit still hold good.⁴³

(ix) He boldly **rejects the theory that Brahmins withheld their sacred literature from any but their own caste**. Far from withholding it, they have been striving to make its study obligatory for the other castes. He also cites the reception his *R̥gveda* has received from the Brahmins.⁴⁴

(x) In progressive structuring of gods in the Vedas, **he observes with great insight the gradual advance from the material to the spiritual**, from the sensuous to the super-sensuous, from the human to the super-human and divine.⁴⁵

(xi) Finally, his exposition of Vedic poetry, Vedic gods and domestic rituals enabled all subsequent research in these areas. Later scholars had only to pick up a sentence or a phrase from Prof. Max Mueller and elaborate upon it to shed light on the whole domain⁴⁶. To see the **strength of these first enunciations**, one has only to cite Prof. Max Mueller's statement on the oral tradition of India (pp. 131-134), which is still informative in nature⁴⁷, and his statement on Vedānta, a case of subtle interpretation (pp. 152-156). The following must be acknowledged as a rare right insight into this philosophical system, one worthy of our best seers:

Much that was not dear, that had seemed for a time their very self, **had to be surrendered before they could see the self of selves** a subject independent of all personality then the highest knowledge began to dawn, the self within (*pratyagātmān*) was drawn towards the Highest Self

⁴¹ op. cit. pp.54-55.

⁴² op. cit. pp. 61,64.

⁴³ op. cit. p.73.

⁴⁴ op.cit p. 92.

⁴⁵ op. cit. p. 101.

⁴⁶ Work in Vedic mythology by later scholars like Roman Jakobson may be cited as an example.

⁴⁷ He calls those who have memorized the texts, living libraries. (p. 132).

(*Paramātman*) **the oneness of the subjective with the objective self was recognized as underlying all reality**⁴⁸.

And then he adds that the leading **tenets of Vedanta are known to some extent in every village in India**. And then he makes a remark that shows his great understanding of how the average Indian behaves (even today!):

In India notwithstanding the indifference to religious matters so often paraded before the world by the Indians themselves, religion and philosophy too, are great powers still.⁴⁹

VII

If we revert now to what we had said about the Vyāsa-institution and its functions, it is clear that after the great disruption, a number of the western scholars worked hard to re-constitute and re-establish (defend) the Indian thought. Of all these scholars, Prof. Max Mueller stands out for his life-long work.

Like a visionary, aware that all thought is human before it is Eastern or Western, he conceived, initiated and implemented in large measure that unrivalled, massive 50 volume project of translations. **Translation**, we have noted above, has been a major instrument of dissemination and renewal of Indian texts. As we said elsewhere⁵⁰, the act of translation is a very complex act - purpose, situations, format/nature and effect and function differ widely. First of all, inter-translatability is a philosophical problem as it involves "inter-cultural understanding, trans-cultural interpretation and trans-cultural evaluation."⁵¹ It also assumes a state of mind, a certain psychology of translation. There is in each act of translation, an attitude towards the source language and a certain assessment of the target language - it is a recognition of the intellectual strength of the source and of a vacuum or gap in the target language/culture. Translations from classical into modern languages may be done within the same culture and tradition or across cultures.

The first case is a real possibility. There are instances of some Buddhists texts retranslated into Sanskrit in modern times. These are cases of translations within the same overall intellectual tradition - a kind of special case of **renewal**, one of the three functional parameters of translations, **diffusion** and **borrowing** being the other two. Similarly, when a text is translated into a modern language in the same tradition, it is also to be considered as a case of renewal - the text becomes accessible once again in a widely spoken and used language. The text is recomposed in a way and in the process is it is unfolded and reinterpreted to make it intelligible to a much larger readership. It also becomes pertinent - once again it begins to function as an explanatory construct for contemporary realities. Translations of classical texts of literary theory, philosophy and grammar such as *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *Mūmāṃsāsūtra* and *Aṅgīrādhyaī*, among others, into modern Indian languages are some recent examples of renewal.

When a text is translated into a modern language of another tradition / culture, it is a case of diffusion. Diffusion as a horizontal concept is a special case of renewal - a text not only gets

⁴⁸ op cit. p.155.

⁴⁹ op. cit. p. 154.

⁵⁰ Kapil Kapoor, 'Philosophy of Translation: Subordinating or Subordination - Translating Sanskrit Technical Texts'. in Translation Theory and Practice, Shantha Ramakrishna, (ed.). New Delhi: Pencraft 1997

⁵¹ B.K.Matilal, Word and World. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990.p.120

activated, it also spreads beyond its earlier boundaries. The most recent example is the translation of Pāṇini's Aṛṭādhyāyī into German, French and English in the 19th / 20th centuries which made this proto-grammar available to a whole new world of European and Anglo-Saxon scholarship. In such inter-cultural transfers, the parameter of borrowing is also present. This is the most recent renewal of a text, which in the history of Indian thought has been renewed again and again through various processes of abridgement, recension, reordering, and adaptation besides translation.

But in recent times, the overwhelming trend has been of translations from European languages into modern Indian languages and these too chiefly from English. This is virtually a unidirectional flow - as the few translations that have been done into English (or, other European languages) are meant not for the European audiences but for the Indian readers. Apart from the self-evident problems of translating between such distant languages. There is in this process a characteristic one way relationship, an implicit intellectual relationship, and a recipient - donor relationship. In the last hundred years or so, the Indian languages have been placed in a **recipient** role with European languages, particularly English, as the **donor**. As we said above, there is in this an implicit recognition of the source language as the intellectual reservoir and of the relatively impoverished state of the target language. This could be just a state of mind nurtured by quite extraneous reasons in the translators who are, almost all of them, Indians. There are three presuppositions in this one-way traffic: that all the worthwhile things are being said by the speakers of other languages, that what is being said is worthwhile, and that we have nothing worthwhile to say in return. This state of mind is a part of the general attitude of uncritical subordination to the western ideas.

There is on the other hand another kind of translation activity - equally pervasive and for its intellectual merit and wide usefulness much more significant - that has a long history and has been going on in a big way in recent times as well. We are talking of the translations of classical Sanskrit texts, technical as well as literary, into modern European languages mostly by European scholars and also by modern Indian scholars. Sanskrit is the **donor** intellectual tradition in this transaction. Sanskrit has, in fact, always been a donor language for translations into Asian and European languages.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, Buddhist texts were translated into Chinese and later into Tibetan. Apart from this northern connection, as attested by the Arab sources, there was considerable interaction between the Hindus and the pre-Islam Arabs on their west. Not much direct evidence remains but it is acknowledged that Hindu mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy travelled to the west in this phase. Even after the advent of Islam, on Alberuni's testimony, the relationship of give and take continued. From the eleventh century onwards, with the rise of modern Indian languages, Sanskrit technical/cultural texts began to be transferred to those languages (Assamese, Mahārāshtri, Kannaḍa, Telugu, etc.) as a method of preserving those texts through diffusion. At the same time, translations began to be made into Persian. Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-1470), the enlightened ruler of Kashmir, established a translation bureau for bilateral renderings between Sanskrit and Persian. Dara Shikoh's Persians translations of the upaniṛads and Mulla Ahmad's rendition of Mahābhārata are among the major islands in this stream. In the seventeenth-eighteenth century, the great Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh ji, set up a bureau and had a large number of Sanskrit texts translated into Panjabi.

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the encounter with the west resulted in a complex, bidirectional, cultural-intellectual relationship. In the fields of science,

engineering, and in new disciplines such as politics and economics, English became the donor language for translations into Indian languages. In the fields of philosophy, religion, linguistics and literary theory, Sanskrit renewed its role as a donor language for translations into English and other European languages. In fact in the nineteenth century, Europe discovered India as much as India discovered Europe and the mutual influence was perhaps equal. By 1820, all the major universities of Europe had chairs in Sanskrit and Sanskrit studies had come to enjoy immense prestige. As the century progressed, Sanskrit studies increasingly shaped the European mind and as already noted almost all the major European minds of the nineteenth century were either Sanskritists or, on their own admission, had been deeply involved in Indian thought. In 1839-40, Otto Bohtlingk brought out an edition of Pāṇini's *Aṛṭādhyāyī* with German comment on rules and an index of technical terms with glosses. In 1841, N.L. Westergaard brought out an edition of the *Dhātupāṭha* (enumeration of Sanskrit verb roots) with Latin gloss and references. In 1858, Albrecht Weber published a German translation of the Vājasaneyī *Prātiśākhya*. In 1862, W.D. Whitney brought out his translation into English of Atharvaveda *Prātiśākhya*. In 1874, Lorenz Franz Kielhorn published a translation into English of Nagojibhatta's *Paribhāśenduśekhara*. This example list, restricted to grammatical texts, is illustrative of Europe's interest in Sanskrit technical literature. This engagement with Sanskrit literature continues. Europe was equally, if not more, interested in the philosophical literature. It has been noted that as a result of these translations "...Goethe and many other writers of the early 19th century read all they could of ancient Indian literature in translation... From Goethe onwards most of the great German philosophers knew something of Indian philosophy. Schopenhauer, whose influence on literature and psychology has been so considerable, indeed openly admitted his debt, and his outlook was virtually that of Buddhism. The monism of Fichte and Hegel might never have taken the forms they did if had not been for Anquetil-Duperron's translation of the upanisads and the work of other pioneer Indologists. In the English speaking world the strongest Indian influence was felt in America. where Emerson, Thoreau and other New England writers avidly studied much Indian religious literature in translation, and exerted immense influence on their contemporaries and successors, notably Walt Whitman. Through Carlyle and others the German philosophers in their turn made their mark on England as did the Americans through many late 19th century writers ..⁵²"

Interaction with Sanskrit thought proved Intellectually very fruitful for the Western tradition. Merely by translating an alien text into one's language one does not ensure the transfer of knowledge - knowledge assimilates knowledge. European scholars remained rooted firmly in their own intellectual tradition even while 'translating' Indian thought — strongly-enabling roots in a powerful tradition made possible a very constructive interaction which produced as we have already noted a number of highly original thinkers. Besides, a whole new discipline developed - Historical and Comparative Linguistics, which extended the methods of philology to classical languages other than Latin and Greek. And most importantly, these studies generated a new and very powerful conceptual system, Structuralism, which in itself and in its later avatars and, alter-egos, has continued to be the dominant intellectual construct of the twentieth century. Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of structuralism, a professor and a scholar of Sanskrit, and his phonocentrism, his conception of language as speech, is an insight founded on the classical Indian theory of language. (The three Indian words for language, vani, bhasa, vak, mean respectively

⁵² A.L. Basham, Wonder That Was India. New York: Grove Press Inc. 1954, 486-7

‘speech’, ‘sound’, ‘statement’.) Saussure was a scholar of Sanskrit grammar and at the time of his death was working in the symmetries in the R̥gveda.

This was a proper interaction between two intellectual traditions, a kind of interaction that the Indian scholars failed to achieve in modern times because having abandoned their own intellectual tradition they did not have the requisite frame of knowledge to receive knowledge. Thus the enterprise of translation from the European into Indian languages has not proved fruitful at all because it was not conceived carefully as a part of any larger intellectual goal. It amounts to a willing acceptance of the recipient role. The effect of these translations has been to increasingly marginalise the native traditions of thought. This trend has been countered only by the translations from Sanskrit into the modern languages, particularly European. The European translations foregrounded these texts and the prestige and importance that their ideas acquired in the west gained them prestige in the Indian academic world as well and put them on the agenda of Indian scholarship once again. It is in the middle of the nineteenth century that in Europe the first translations of Indian texts began to be made. At the same time in India, major Sanskrit texts began to be translated into English. The motivation no doubt was a little different from that of the European work - the Indian translations were a part of a larger process of resistance to the alien domination, an expression of identity, a reassertion of the native self.⁵³

Professor Max Mueller's project of translating The Sacred Books of the East has to be assessed in this perspective. This was the first planned program for translating a series of texts of thought from six major cultures (Judaism was left out). In the Program of Translation and in the Preface to the Series, the learned Professor dwells on the difficulties and problems in such a program of translations and on his well considered philosophy of translation.⁵⁴ We must not expect, he says, that a translation of the sacred books of the ancients can ever be more than an approximation of our language to theirs, of our thought to theirs. The translator, however, if he has once gained the conviction that it is impossible to translate old thought into modern speech, without doing some violence either to the one or to the other, will hardly hesitate in his choice. He will prefer to do some violence to language (xxxvii) I have thought it best therefore to keep as close as possible to the Sanskrit original and where I could not find an adequate term in English, I have often retained the Sanskrit word (xxxii) He was negotiating a very difficult terrain in overcoming both prejudice and opposition to the whole project of introducing Eastern thought to the West with the firm conviction that there is in every one of the sacred books, something that could make man shrink from evil and incline to good, something to sustain him in the short journey through life, with its bright moments of happiness, and its long hours of terrible distress. (xxxviii)

Of the 49 volumes, after excluding the Index volume, 32 are Vedic Buddhist and Jain texts. Of these, Prof. Max Mueller personally translated the

⁵³ But, and this is important, this effort was supported by the British whose eclecticism and real love for scholarship must be recognised as not all the translations they commissioned or supported were a part of their administrative requirement.

⁵⁴ Sacred Books of the East. First published by OUP, 1879. Motilal Banarsidass, reprint, 1969. and Pp.xxii, xxxvii,xxxix.

Ṛgveda and the Upanishads and was one of the three translators of the Buddhist Mahayana Texts.

But his outstanding contribution was his reconstitution and translation of the *Ṛgveda* text with Śāyana's commentary. This was the work of his mature years which followed his first translation of the selected hymns of *Ṛgveda*⁵⁵ for Sanskrit scholars only explaining every word and sentence that seems to require elucidation, and carefully examining the opinions of early commentators, both native and European. (xliv). I had taken the liberty to suggest, to much opposition and some applause, in a Seminar at Calcutta that as reconstituting *Ṛgveda* seems to be the prime determinant of the Vyāsa status, we may recognize Prof. Max Mueller's place in the intellectual traditions as the 33rd Vyāsa. Yāska of 9th century B.C., we have recognized as the 31st Vyāsa and Ādi Śaṅkara of 7th A.D. as the 32nd Vyāsa. There was a palpable contradiction in his own attitude to the Eastern knowledge and texts and he swung between adulation and disgust. But to assess his contribution, we apply to his work the same parameter of the Himalayas that he had applied to the Indian texts.

Thus around Prof. Max Mueller, and inspired by him, the central texts of Indian culture were once again renewed and re-established in the 19th and 20th century after a dispersal and darkness spread over eight centuries. Not only that, through translation they gained large new readership. His Sacred Books inspired The Harvard Oriental Series. Of the forty seven texts have been textually edited, translated and published in the Series With Professor Charles Rockwell as the General Editor to begin with, 27 are Indian texts⁵⁶. These two series renewed a large number of Indian texts (Brahman, Buddhist, Jaina) of thought and literature and enabled and strengthened Indian studies. They also motivated and inspired Indian scholars to undertake the study of their own tradition with western methods. There was a palpable contradiction in his own attitude to the Eastern knowledge and texts and he swung between adulation and disgust.

VIII

This diffusion and dissemination across cultures has also created a new challenge for the Indian scholars, the need to defend the texts and the tradition in the face of attacks from two quarters — the materialists and the proponents of the modernist reading. Some western scholars and their Indian followers do what one may call meta-reading; they talk *about the text* and ask *why?* before they ascertain what. Their purpose is to undermine the traditional reverence for the texts and they do this selecting parts and portions of texts and making original

⁵⁵ *Rig-veda-sanhita, The Sacred Hymns of the Brahmins*, translated and explained by F. Max Müller. Vol. i. Hymns to the Maruts or the Storm-Gods. London, 1869.

⁵⁶ *Jātakamāla*); *Vijñānabhikṣu*; *Buddhism In Translation: Passages Selected From The Buddhist Sacred Books*); *Karpuramañjar*; *Bṛhaddevatā*; *Atharvaveda Samhitā* (2 vols.); *Vedic Concordance*; *Pañcatantrā*; *Yoga System (of Patañjali)*; *Veda of the Black Yajurveda School Entitled Taittiriya Samhitā* (2 vols.); *Ṛgveda Brahmanas: The Aitareya and Kauṣītāki Brahmanas of the gveda*; *Buddhist legends: Dhammapāda Commentary* (2 vols.); *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads* (2 vols.); *Ṛgveda* (4 vols.); *Materials for the Study of Nāvya-Nyāya Logic*; *Visuddhimagga (of Buddhaghosa)*; *Subhāṣitartakoṣa (of Vidyakara)*; *Saundaryalahiri*; *Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry*; *Nāvya-Nyāya Doctrine of Negation. The Semantics and Ontology of Negative Statements in Nāvya Nyāya Philosophy*; *Dignāga on Perception*.

claims by applying to those bits and pieces questionable methods of interpretation. There is also the attitudinal difference in these modes of scholarship. Subversion of beliefs and values is acclaimed as originality and takes precedence over total, unbiased interpretation of the text. Debunking is very dear and meaning becomes the instrument for some given social / political purpose.

Now that such reading of the Indian texts is pushing the Indian goals and modes of reading in the mainstream institutions of learning, it is imperative that the Indian scholars should revert to and cultivate the traditional *ŚĀSTRA PADDHATI*, the method of interpreting the texts. The methods of traditional scholarship should be replicated and the traditional institutions and scholars must be given total state patronage. Only that will maintain and renew and keep relevant India's intellectual traditions and texts. Right now the pressures of modernity are proving too much and the Punḍits are busy storing in the computer what they used to store in their mind. The whole philosophy of knowledge is thus shifting. From interiorised, subject-centered knowledge formation and storage of the Indian theory, we are fast moving towards exteriorized, object-centered system. Memory, *smṛti*, has been accepted as the crucial first part of intellection, *vimarṣa*, reflection / permutation and *prayoga*, application — unless we have something in our mind, what will we reflect on. In the exteriorized, sequential mode of processing, there is no possibility of deep meditation or one-pointedness, *ekagrata*, with necessary deleterious consequences for knowledge-creation. How do we maintain and sustain the Indian knowledge —tradition — that is the question.

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