Sanskrit Speaking Villages in India

Sanskrit can become the language of the masses in rural areas
By Shreesh Deopujari

“……One more medium of imbibing virtues like sense of duty, integrity, devotion, faith, etc. is Sanskrit language. By speaking consistently in devvani (God’s language) the so-called downtrodden or the depressed class of the society also feels elevated. They not only feel confident but also develop samskars, which is the very base of any developmental activity. Therefore, Sanskrit Sambhashan is one of the prominent aspects of rural development, the work being undertaken by swayamsevaks across the country. There are a number of villages in the country where all daily activities of life are conducted only in Sanskrit. The prominent villages in this group are Muttoor and Hosahalli in Karnataka and Jhiri and Mohad in Madhya Pradesh where Sanskrit has truly become language of the masses. More than 95 per cent the people of Muttoor and hundred per cent people in Jhiri speak Sanskrit.

Muttoor (Karnataka)
Apart from Muttoor, Hosahalli and Jhiri; Mohad and Baghuwar in Madhya Pradesh and Ganoda under Banswara district of Rajasthan are also the villages where Sanskrit is spoken by majority of the villagers. Not only for asking well-being of each other but even while ploughing the fields, talking on telephone, purchasing goods from the grocer’s shop, getting the hair cut at barber’s shop, preparing food in kitchen, etc. people freely speak Sanskrit. The containers having spices and other things in the kitchen too contain the names in Sanskrit. Nobody in these villages thinks what will happen by learning Sanskrit. Whether it will help in getting a job or not. It is our language and we have to learn it is the only feeling amongst them.
Muttoor, the village of about 2,000 inhabitants, is located about 8 km south of Shimoga. The **Tunga river** flows gently on one side of the village. Its fame as the Sanskrit Gram has spread far and wide. Sanskrit is the spoken language of over 95 per cent of the people here. Soft and dulcet, a conversation sounds like a Vedic recital. Though it is a journey, which began about 500 years ago, Sanskrit has been modified as per the modern needs here by Samskrit Bharati. As one enters the village he is greeted with ” bhavatha nam kim? (What is your name?), “coffee va chaayam kim ichchhathi bhavan? (What will you have, coffee or tea?). The pronunciation of “Hari Om” instead of ‘hello’ and “katham asti” instead of ‘how are you?’ are common here.

Everybody-men, women, children, literate or illiterate-freely speaks Sanskrit. Even the Muslim families speak Sanskrit without hesitation and as comfortably as is spoken by the Hindus. Their children are found in the streets reciting Sanskrit shlokas. Even while fighting and playing cricket in the grounds children freely speak Sanskrit. When one walks down a few places from the school where one touches the ratha veethi (car street) and graffiti on the walls what grabs the attention is: “Maarge swachchataya virajate, grame sujanaha virajante” (Cleanliness is as important for a road as good people are for the village). Other slogans like ‘keep the temple premises clean’, ‘keep the river clean’ and ‘trees are the nation’s wealth’ are also written in Sanskrit and painted on walls reflecting ancient values. There are families who have written on their doors-‘You can speak in Sanskrit in this house.’ This is basically to tell the visitors that in case they are fluent in the language they can talk to them in Sanskrit.

Study of the language here begins from Montessori level, where kids are taught rhymes and told stories in Sanskrit-even Chandamama and comics printed in Sanskrit are available here. While the language is a compulsory subject in schools, teachers and even students talk to each other in it. Muttoor is not a cloistered hermitage shy of the outside world. Many of its youngsters have moved to cities in search of greener pastures in pursuit of higher education. Some are teaching Sanskrit in
universities across the State and more than 150 youngmen and women are in the field of IT as software engineers. Many foreign students also visit the village to learn Sanskrit and stay with them in true guru-shishya tradition.

For more than 25 years now the village has been in the forefront of a movement to keep spoken Sanskrit alive. In the local Sharada Vilasa High School, Sanskrit is compulsory till class VIII to X. So, the present generation too has learnt to speak it. Mothers teach children Sanskrit at home.

The credit for this silent revolution surfacing the country to popularising Sanskrit goes to Samskrit Bharati. Thousands of its activists are burning the midnight oil to move forward this movement.

It is not necessary for a person to be literate for learning Sanskrit. Undoubtedly, a literate person can pick up the language easily, but an illiterate person too can learn it. There are thousands of people who were earlier fully illiterate but now speak fluently in Sanskrit. One such example was seen in Baoli village under Baghpat district of Uttar Pradesh where a 50-year-old Shri Jaiprakash speaks fluent Sanskrit. Shri Jaiprakash has never been to school but he learnt Sanskrit only in four camps of Samskrit Bharati organised in Delhi, Haridwar, Meerut and Baraut. Now he teaches Sanskrit to his fellow villagers. All his family members too speak Sanskrit.

Jhiri, Mohad and Baghuwar (Madhya Pradesh)

Jhiri comes under Rajgarh district of Madhya Pradesh. Total population of the village is 976 and all the people including small children, women, elder people, school-going children, literate and illiterate speak fluently in Sanskrit. Samskrit Bharati had started conducting Samskrit Sambhashan camps in the village in 2002 through an activist Vimla Tewari. She had come here only for one year. But in that one year she developed so much interest of the villagers to the divine language that everybody in the village turned to learn Sanskrit. Now all the villagers love Vimla as their own daughter. Former RSS
Sarsanghachalak Shri KS Sudarshan visited this village. He was so much impressed with the command of the villagers over Sanskrit that he, while touring the village, touched the feet of elderly women at four places and sought their blessings. The morning of the people in this village begins with Namo Namah and ends with the greetings of Shubhratri. Anyone who visits this village is thrilled seeing all people speaking fluently in the God’s language.

The village Panchayat takes special steps to popularise Sanskrit in Mohad. Even Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Muslim families speak Sanskrit without hesitation. Similar picture can be seen in Baghuwar village, which is near Mohad. In Jhiri, the farmers while ploughing their field even order their oxen in Sanskrit and the oxen too follow those instructions.

Due to the Sanskrit language caste, discrimination between the so-called lower and upper castes has reduced. Those who speak the language can hold his head high in the society. The oneness of the society leads to the development of the village. Jayatu Sanskritam.

(The writer is Akhil Bharatiya Prakalp Pramukh of Samskrit Bharati.)