

# DANAM CONFERENCE 2004

## SESSION 1:

### **Theme: Scholarship on Sanskrit, Tamil, Prakrits: Debate about Native Exegetical Traditions**

*B.V.K. Sastry*, Hindu University of America, *Convener*

*Trichur S. Rukmani*, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada, *Presiding*

## SUMMARY AND ABSTRACTS

### **Summary of Session 1:**

The study of Hindu dharma demands integrated linguistic scholarship in at least three scriptural languages of Hindus, namely Sanskrit, Prakrits (Sanskrit influenced and Sanskrit origin languages) and Tamil. The current debates about the outputs of academic studies and research about Hinduism—religions and traditions is a pointer to a deeper concern related to the methodology of studies. There is presently much debate in the field as to the degree to which three hundred years of scholarship in the West has integrated traditional scholarship within these languages—such as the various commentarial traditions, *koshas*, *anukramanis* etc. Similar is the concern about the integration of the knowledge in the practicing traditions. Some argue that the academic study of Hinduism has ignored these native methodologies and scholarly traditions. Others argue that while scholarship on traditional exegetical methods needs to be engaged, contemporary methods of critical analysis (historical, text-critical, and linguistic) should not be sacrificed in the process.

The amount of studies that have been produced and placed in academia and wider public circulation, the secondary studies and research that have stemmed from these divergent constructs due to differing methodologies of studies has separated the modern academia from the traditional streams. This is not in the interests of progress in authentic Hindu studies.

The panel will focus particularly on three areas (1) the continuity of native traditions (2) the kinds of established methodologies within their lineages, (3) their methods of instruction and interpretation, in un-written, spoken and written texts. The panel will get at the heart of the recent debates about the representation of Hinduism itself.

### **Abstracts of Session 1:**

**Sridhar Melukote, Ph.D.**, Hindu University of America  
*Traditonal Methodologies in the Writings of the Epics*

**Abstract:** This paper examines the traditional methodologies adopted by writers of Indian Epics while composing their Epic poems. There were some discreet suggestions in the Vedic texts for writing or composing myths and legends which were followed by the Epic poets. Even the commentators on the Vedas interpreted the myths and legends of the Epics in several ways. With the advent of Indological studies in the West, these traditional methodologies took a backseat. New research designs based on the western model became popular which also threw some light on the Epic studies. An attempt will be made here to make a comparison of the methodologies of Epic studies from both the East – West perspectives and the impact of such studies in the research field.

**Veena Howard**, University of Oregon, Lane Community College  
***Problem of Choosing and Changing Methodologies in the Study of Hindu Texts***

**Abstract:** This paper will explore the need to define the methodologies and paradigms for the scholars in translating and interpreting the texts of the Hindu tradition. A call for debate in this field becomes very crucial since the scriptural languages have cultural specific connotations arising from cultural experiences that are inherent in and unique to languages. By giving some examples from recent textual analysis of the Hindu texts by some scholars I ask: Is it appropriate to utilize new methodologies in interpretations outside of the cultural context? Is it possible to retain the intrinsic cultural connotations while using different methodologies? Does the extreme departure from the established tradition of scholarship raise an enhanced burden of proof on the choice of alternative methodology?

**Frederick M. Smith, Ph.D.**, University of Iowa

**Abstract:** Two local traditions of interpretation of emotion in South India. Indigenous interpretation operates on two levels: Sanskritic and vernacular, sastric and local. I will discuss two case studies of the interplay between Sanskritic interpretative strategies and those of derivative local traditions in South India. In the first I will briefly examine some of the main points of the Sanskritic theory of emotion, namely *rasa* and *bhâva* in poetics (*alamkarasastra*), and look at how this was adapted in local ritual traditions in coastal Andhra Pradesh. The latter is based on ethnographic study and evidence from Sanskrit manuscripts from Andhra in mixed Sanskrit and Telugu on certain aspects of esoteric Tantra. The second example will be from âyurvedic interpretations of mental health and how these are further interpreted in the modern indigenous âyurvedic mental health care practices in Kerala, with textuality in both Sanskrit and Malayalam. I will show how both of these interpretative traditions differ from those which derive from non-indigenous methodologies.

**S. Kalyanaraman, Ph.D.**, Sarasvati Nadi Shodh Prakalp, Chennai, India.  
***Prakrit Languages and Jaati***

**Abstract:** Two dominant cultural unity markers of *itihaasa bharati* or Hindu civilisation which evolved indigenously, are: 1. languages of Sanskrit and Prakrits and 2. *jaati*. The cultural idiom expressed by these markers are related to the core doctrines of *vrata*, *dharma*, r.n.a., yoga and karma. Sanskrit and Prakrits are the grammatically correct and spoken streams flowing out of the interactions among munda, dravidian and indo-aryan dialects operating in a linguistic area circa 5000 years before the present time. In ancient Bharatiya texts, *mleccha*, a Prakrit, was recognised as an early speech form, a dialect referred to in *S'atapatha Brahmana* and *Mahabharata*, a dialect which required a translator for a Mesopotamian transacting with a sea-faring Meluhha merchant of the Saptasindhu region. *Jaati* is an extended kinship group which evolved out of the interactions related to the core doctrines. No wonder, Mahavira explains *jaina ariya dhamma* in *mleccha (ardhamagadhi)*, which differentiates into the present-day language kaleidoscope of Bharat.

**B. V. Venkatakrishna Sastry, Ph.D.**, Hindu University of America  
***Scholarship on Sanskrit, Tamil, Prakrits – A key prerequisite for understanding Hinduism traditions.***

**Abstract:** Hinduism source works (*revelations& scriptures*) come in three main language streams - Sanskrit, Prakrit's and Tamil. The Hindu traditional identity rests on the explanation of these sources in multiple interconnected languages, as provided by the traditionalists. The native

exegetical traditions follow a preferred methodology in the studies of the sources, characterized by a working hypothesis about the 'language', 'historicity' and 'interpretation methodology'. Modern studies approach the same sources with a different set of working hypothesis characterized by the mounting of non-traditional methodologies and a selective discounting of the native traditions of interpretations. The resultant understanding of the source works and the traditions based on it differs due to this divergence of the language related methodologies. This presentation is to highlight the criticality of the scholarship on the languages of the source works and methodology of interpretation for a better appreciation of traditions built on them. Select illustrations from Sanskrit language are provided to support the presentation.