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Report

Symposium on the Storytelling Traditions of Sanskrit

Mysore, 20 October 2018.

Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi in association with Amrita Darshanam International Centre for Spiritual Studies organised a one-day Symposium on the Storytelling Traditions of Sanskrit on 20 October 2018, in Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Mysore.

On the morning of 20 October 2018, the guests of honour were welcomed traditionally with pūrṇa-kumbha and Vedic chants. The symposium commenced with the ceremonial lighting of lamps by Prof 'Abhiraj' Rajendra Mishra, Prof. Prabhunath Dwivedi, Br. Sunil Dharampal, and Dr. Ajay Kumar Sharma. Br. Sunil Dharampal, Director, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Mysore, presided the inaugural session as the Chief Guest. Dr. Ajay Kumar Sharma, Assistant Editor of Sahitya Akademi delivered the welcome speech, and in his welcoming remarks, he highlighted the efforts of Sahitya Akademi towards propagating different languages, and in lieu of the same, he lauded the initiative to hold a symposium on the Storytelling traditions of Sanskrit.

The keynote address was delivered by Prof. Prabhunath Dwivedi, Member, Sanskrit Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi, and Former Professor, Dept. of Sanskrit, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Hindu Vidyapeeth, Varanasi. He discussed the necessity of discussing the story-telling traditions of Sanskrit, the different classifications and types of stories in Sanskrit and of the possible ways in which modern Sanskrit stories could be classified.

Prof. 'Abhiraj' Rajendra Mishra, Convener, Sanskrit Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi delivered the presidential address. A modern Sanskrit story-teller himself, he shared his profound insights into the various aspects and types of the extant kathā-literature in Sanskrit and highlighted the fact that Sanskrit is an immortal language and through its stories it shall take us beyond this mortal world.

The first session was chaired by Prof. Prabhunath Dwivedi. It commenced with a presentation by Dr. Balram Shukla, Assistant Professor, University of Delhi. He spoke at length about the migration of Vishnu Sharma's Pancatantra across the world. He discussed how it first migrated to Iran in 6th century C.E. Borzūya, a Persian physician, was responsible for the first translation of it from Sanskrit to Pahlavi (medieval Persian). Two centuries later, in 750 C.E. in Baghdad, Ibn- al-Moquaffa translated it from Pahlavi to Arabic, and almost all the pre-modern translations of the Pancatantra in Europe have their roots in this Arabic translation. By 1888, there existed over seventy variants with different titles in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Spanish, German, French, Italian, English, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, Hungarian, Czech, Croat, Polish, Armenian and many other languages.

Ananta Sharma, Assistant Professor, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Bengaluru, presented his paper on the stories in the Upaniṣads. He discussed how stories are used as a vehicle to convey eternal truths, and illustrated it with stories of Yājñavalkya, Satyakāma, Naciketa, Indra-Prajāpati, Raikwa, and many others from various Upanishads.

Manish Walvekar, Assistant Professor, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Bengaluru, discussed the concept of Nāga-s in Kalhaṇa's Rājataranṅinī. He mentioned that there are three types of nāga-s mentioned the Rājataranṅinī, and highlighted the differences and purposes of using the medium of snakes as characters in his paper.

Prof. Prabhunath Dwivedi gave the remarks on each of the papers presented, and also presented his own paper on modern Sanskrit writings chiefly focusing on the various dimensions of the story genre.

The afternoon session was chaired by Prof. Kaushalendra Pandey, Former Head, Dept. of Sahitya, Faculty of SVDV, Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi. The first presentation of this session was delivered by Dr. N K Sundareshwaran, Professor and Head, Dept. of Sanskrit, University of Calicut, Kerala. In a very comprehensive presentation, Dr. Sundareshwaran discussed how stories of Sanskrit are treated in the treatises of Alankāra-śāstra, thus emphasising the śāstric perspective of Kathā.

In the next presentation, Manjushree Hegde, Assistant Professor, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore, discussed stories in Ayurveda textbooks. Vigneshwar Bhat, Assistant Professor, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Mysuru, highlighted the stories found in the treatises of mīmāṃsā, and Dr. M.V Vishwanath, Assistant Professor, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Mysuru, presented a very engaging paper on the nuances of the usage of the words rama-kathā, rāmasya-kathā, ramāyaṇasya-kathā in the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki.

The symposium came to a conclusion with a valedictory session. The Chief guest, Dr. S. Ranganath, Member, Sanskrit Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi, Bangalore, gave his remarks on the symposium. The session was presided by Dr. Vidya Pai C, Principal, Amrita School of Arts and Sciences, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Mysuru Campus, and the vote of thanks was delivered by Dr. M.V. Vishwanath.
