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The Role Of Sanskrit Literature In India's Freedom Struggle: An Analytical Study

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Abstract:

The freedom struggle was an era marked by immense suffering, dignity, and sacrifice on the part of every Indian citizen. In this great movement for independence, every Indian willingly played a role. During this critical period, poets, literary figures, and writers contributed through their literary works. They used their words as a means to resist British rule. These literary figures not only infused their writings with patriotism but also encouraged fellow Indians to rise against the British through the power of literature. Like the literature of other Indian languages, Sanskrit literature played a significant role in the freedom struggle. Sanskrit poets expressed in their works the sense of alienation and subjugation that Indians experienced under British rule. They wrote about *Paratantrata* (dependence) and championed the cause of *Swatantrata* (independence). Their works sought to inspire the younger generations of India with patriotic fervor. Sanskrit poets instilled the spirit of nationalism in the hearts of the people through evocative and powerful poetry. Many modern Sanskrit poets have also written extensively about Mahatma Gandhi, highlighting his penance, sacrifice, and selfless service to the nation. Notable works include *Satyagraha Gītā*, *Gandhi Gītā*, *Śrī Gāndhīcaritam*, *Śrī Gāndhī Gauravam*, *Gāndhī Gāthā*, *Satyāgrahodayam*, and *Gāndhī Vijayānātakam*, among others. Hence, the objectives of this study are to highlight how Sanskrit literature and Sanskrit scholars contributed to the struggle for independence and to assess how Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of life influenced Sanskrit scholars.

Keywords:

Indian Freedom Movement- Sanskrit Literature- Gandhi's Philosophy- Influence

Introduction:

The freedom struggle was an era marked by immense suffering, dignity, and sacrifice on the part of every Indian citizen. In this great movement for independence, every Indian willingly played a role. During this critical period, poets, literary figures, and writers contributed through their literary works. They used their words as a means to resist British rule. These literary figures not only infused their writings with patriotism but also encouraged fellow Indians to rise against the British through the power of literature.

Like the literature of other Indian languages, Sanskrit literature played a significant role in the freedom struggle. Sanskrit poets expressed in their works the sense of alienation and subjugation that Indians experienced under British rule. They wrote about *Paratantrata* (dependence) and championed the cause of

Swatantrata (independence). Their works sought to inspire the younger generations of India with patriotic fervor. Sanskrit poets instilled the spirit of nationalism in the hearts of the people through evocative and powerful poetry.

One notable example is a statement attributed to Lord Rama:

Api Swarnamayī Laṅkā Na Me Lakṣmaṇa Rocate/

Jananī Janmabhūmiśca Svargādapi Garīyasī//

"Even the golden Lanka does not appeal to me, O Lakshmana; mother and motherland are greater than heaven."

Many modern Sanskrit poets have also written extensively about Mahatma Gandhi, highlighting his penance, sacrifice, and selfless service to the nation. Notable works include *Satyagraha Gītā*, *Gandhi Gītā*, *Śrī Gāndhīcaritam*, *Śrī Gāndhī Gauravam*, *Gāndhī Gāthā*, *Satyāgrahodayam*, and *Gāndhī Vijayānāṭakam*, among others.

While fostering patriotism and encouraging Indian society to move forward on the path of development, Sanskrit literature has continually promoted nationalist sentiments, dating back to the Vedic period. In the *Atharvaveda*, the sage praises Mother Earth in the *Pṛthvī Sūkta* by saying, "Mother is the Earth, and I am the son of the Earth." This verse remains relevant today, reflecting the deep-rooted sense of nationalism embedded in India's ancient literature.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- To highlight how Sanskrit literature and Sanskrit scholars contributed to the struggle for independence.
- To assess how Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of life influenced Sanskrit scholars.

Significance of the Study

The freedom movement holds a significant place in Indian history. Every Indian endured immense suffering and made notable contributions to this struggle. It was a crucial time for all—whether literate or illiterate, poets, writers, or ordinary citizens. Sanskrit literature possesses a glorious legacy, not only within Indian literature but also in world literature. Therefore, it is an intriguing subject to explore how Sanskrit literature contributed to India's liberation from British rule and how the profound philosophical thoughts of Indian tradition inspired people to struggle for independence.

Methodology

Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study. Secondary data were collected from various books, articles, and other published sources. The primary data mainly consist of information drawn from original Sanskrit literary works. Additionally, the observation method has been employed during the course of the study.

Major Discussions:

1.0 Freedom Struggle and Independence in the Thoughts of Sanskrit Poets

The works of modern Sanskrit poets reflect the evolving thought process of the contemporary era. During the freedom struggle, the spirit of nationalism deeply touched the hearts of both Sanskrit scholars and ordinary Indian citizens living under British rule. These poets contributed to the movement through their

creative works, writing poems that opposed colonial dependence and aimed to liberate India through the force of words.

1.1 Acharya Rebaprasad Dwivedi

Swātantryasāmbhavam is an epic poem written by Acharya Rebaprasad Dwivedi. It comprises 75 cantos and 6,064 verses. The poem chronicles significant events in Indian history, from the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 to the Anna Hazare Movement of 2011. From the first to the fourteenth canto—covering the story of Motilal Nehru—the narrative is based on textual testimonies. The remaining cantos depict events witnessed during the poet's lifetime.

The poem *Swātantryasāmbhavam*, which celebrates the extraordinary victory of patriotic warriors who fought to liberate the country, is collectively known as *Swātantryasāmbhavam*. This epic reflects the concept of personal freedom as salvation, alongside the national struggle for independence. It portrays Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as attaining salvation.

The epic especially highlights the lives of Maharani Lakshmibai, Kamala Nehru, Motilal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and Smt. Indira Gandhi. Canto titles such as *Swātantrasankalodaya*, *Jānabidroha*, *Kamalapavighraha*, *Janandolanam*, *Indibajanma*, *Bharatavibhajana*, and *Pakbangavijaya* indicate the themes of the poem.

The second canto of *Swatantryasambhavam* vividly portrays the life of Lakshmibai, who played a remarkable role in the freedom struggle and dealt a significant blow to British authority. She is described as an incarnation of the goddess Lakshmi, as Kamadhenu, and as the Fortune of India.

1.2 Prabhakar Shankar Joshi

Prabhakar Shankar Joshi is another eminent Sanskrit scholar who portrayed the life and philosophy of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, recognized as a national hero and principal architect of the Indian Constitution. His work *Bhimayanam* is an epic poem in four cantos, depicting the entire life of Ambedkar.

Each canto title reflects a specific phase of Ambedkar's life—for example, *Ishwaravatarasya Parśvabhūmih*, *Alaukikaḥ Bhimajanmaḥ*, etc. Dr. Ambedkar played a pivotal role in reconstructing the nation. He championed the cause of Dalits, the exploited, and the downtrodden, offering new hope and inspiration to the nation. He envisioned a classless society, and this ideal is beautifully portrayed by Joshi in *Bhimayanam*.

1.3 Swami Bhagavadacharya

The poetic works of Swami Bhagavadacharya played an influential role during the freedom movement. He was a staunch supporter of Indian independence. His three notable Sanskrit literary works—*Bharata Parijatam*, *Parijata Paharam*, and *Parijata Saurabham*—are recognized for their contribution to the nationalist cause.

The epic *Bharata Parijatam* consists of 25 cantos and spans the life of Mahatma Gandhi from birth to the establishment of the Sabarmati Ashram. *Parijata Paharam*, with 27 cantos, narrates the events of the 1942 Quit India Movement. *Parijata Saurabham*, comprising 20 cantos, describes the sequence of events leading up to Gandhi's death.

Bhagavadacharya's literary depiction of Gandhi transformed the Mahatma into a central figure of Sanskrit epic poetry. Gandhi's views on *Satyagraha* are articulated in his own words: "I promise not to deviate from the path of truth, never to harm or hurt others." He also wrote: "There is no weapon more powerful than *Satyagraha*, and none against which even the strongest army can stand."

The principal objective of Bhagavadacharya was to instill unwavering faith in the motherland, to awaken national consciousness, and to provide practical lessons in patriotism. His poems aimed to introduce

Gandhi's life to all, and to inspire people to emulate his dedication to the nation. Thousands of people participated in the freedom struggle under the influence and presence of Swami Bhagavadacharya.

1.4 Ganga Prasad Upadhyay

Aryodaya is an epic poem by Ganga Prasad Upadhyay. Through this work, he addresses the people of the nation, urging them to unite for the country's cause. He inspired them to fight for their homeland, advising all citizens to set aside their differences, jealousy, and hatred for one another in order to drive the British out of India. He emphasized that if internal conflicts persist, India can never achieve independence.

The epic *Aryodaya* is divided into two parts: *Purvoday* and *Uttarardha*. *Purvoday* has 10 cantos, and *Uttarardha* contains 12 cantos. The poem reflects Ganga Prasad Upadhyay's devotion to the Aryan race and his belief that the Aryan system of governance was ideal. He expresses his desire for the prosperity of the Aryans throughout the epic. Upadhyay was fully aware that dependence is an obstacle to progress, and this belief is echoed throughout *Aryodaya*. He writes that having the desire for independence is not enough; the Creator grants results only to those who are worthy. He also states that the country will never gain independence if people wait for others to achieve it. Therefore, the poet encouraged everyone to step forward for the sake of the nation, so that they could become citizens of an independent India.

2.0 Poetry Inspired by Gandhi's Ideal Life

Mahatma Gandhi is a towering figure in Indian history, revered as the Father of the Nation. His life has been written about in numerous Indian languages. Sanskrit literature, too, contains literary works inspired by Gandhi's philosophy and life.

2.1 Pandit Kshama Rao

Satyagraha Gita, *Uttara Satyagraha Gita*, and *Swarajya Vijaya* by Pandit Kshama Rao are three well-known Sanskrit *kāvya*s published in the year 1932. During the freedom struggle, Kshama Rao's *Satyagraha Gita* was published from Paris. It contains a vivid description of Gandhi's Round Table Conference.

Satyagraha Gita is composed in the form of an epic with eighteen chapters, modeled after the *Bhagavad Gita*. In this *kavya*, the poet narrates that when the oppressed, exploited, and Dalit communities were suffering greatly, Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a divine figure to alleviate their pain. *Uttara Satyagraha Gita*, published in 1948, narrates events from India's independence up to Gandhi's death. In *Swarajya Vijaya*, the poet laments the sorrow Gandhi experienced due to the partition of India and Pakistan. This work also discusses the concept and nature of Indian independence. The poet expresses the idea of *Satyagraha* as follows: "Those who follow the path of peace are considered weak, but there is no force stronger than *Satyagraha*."

Pandita Kshama Rao also expresses patriotic sentiments, stating that even if she is not very intelligent, she still loves her country, and that is why she sings its praises. She writes that if every true citizen of the nation strives consistently, one day the country will achieve freedom. Pandita Kshama Rao is adept at both praising the virtuous and criticizing the wicked. She condemns those who did not support Gandhi or opposed nation-building, such as Lord Lothian and Mohammad Ali Jinnah. In contrast, she praises figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Satyagraha Gita is grounded in the historical events of the freedom struggle. Having personally participated in the movement alongside Gandhi, Pandita Kshama Rao bore witness to the efforts and sacrifices of freedom fighters. This is evident throughout her poem. The *kavya* narrates Gandhi's life and the measures he undertook for the country's welfare.

The poet seeks to awaken feelings of patriotism in the hearts of all Indians. She asserts that truth, non-violence, *Satyagraha*, peacefulness, and trust in God—rather than weapons—will bring about the desired results.

2.2 Gandhi Gita or Ahimsa Yoga

The revolutionary events of 1942, particularly the nationwide Quit India Movement, stirred deep patriotism in the heart of Professor Indra. To honor and pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, Prof. Indra composed *Gandhi Gita*, also known as *Ahimsa Yoga*. This text is a detailed account of Gandhi's principles of non-violence and is stylistically modeled after the *Bhagavad Gita*. The poem comprises 18 chapters and 700 verses.

The first chapter mentions many heroes and heroines of the freedom struggle, such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Lokmanya Tilak, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, Motilal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai, Subhas Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sarojini Naidu.

In the second chapter, when Rajendra Prasad asks Mahatma Gandhi how to establish peace for the sake of freedom, Gandhi begins to impart the teachings of this *Gita*. Gandhi explains both the philosophical and practical dimensions of non-violence. In subsequent chapters, he outlines the features of a non-violent society and the ideal state of *Ramrajya* (the rule of Rama).

In *Gandhi Gita*, Prof. Indra describes Gandhi's concept of *Satyagraha*. He writes: "Satyagraha is the effort to defend truth, knowing that the adversary stands with falsehood, while the self stands with truth." This form of *Satyagraha* is non-violent and unbiased. One who follows this path must endure a thousand sufferings but never inflict harm upon others.

The significance of *Satyagraha* is beautifully expressed in the fifth chapter. Prof. Indra writes that the soldiers of *Satyagraha* are unafraid of death, and no powerful force on earth can stand against them. Non-violence is the strongest shield for the *Satyagrahi*. Though unarmed, these warriors of truth are symbolically armed. They root out hatred from the hearts of their enemies and defeat them through moral strength. The poet regards Gandhi's *Satyagraha* as a powerful and advanced weapon for attaining freedom.

The narrative of *Gandhi Gita* is also based on real events from the freedom struggle. It traces Gandhi's journey from the *Dandi Yatra* to his death. As the title suggests, the hero of the poem is Mahatma Gandhi, whose heart was filled with patriotism. The poem depicts his efforts to rescue a society burdened by subjugation and discrimination. *Gandhi Gita* teaches us to pursue freedom through the path of truth and non-violence.

Thus, Professor Indra beautifully articulates Gandhian ideals in *Gandhi Gita*, identifying Gandhi's *Satyagraha* movement as the path toward the supreme welfare of the nation.

2.3 Other Sanskrit Poems Inspired by Gandhi's Philosophy

Ramesh Chandra Shukla's book of poems inspired by Gandhi's ideals is *Gandhigauravam*. In this work, the poet writes that the British imprisoned Mahatma Gandhi multiple times and subjected him to torture. However, Gandhiji never deviated from his chosen path and ultimately succeeded in his mission.

Brahmananda Shukla's *laghu kāvya* (short poem) titled *Śrīgāndhīcaritam* also narrates India's journey to independence through the path of truth and non-violence. Yajneshwar Shastri portrays the lives of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru as national heroes in his book *Rāṣṭratna*, where he refers to Gandhiji as the "symbol of India."

The poem *Mahatmavijaya* was written by the scholar Vyasavaj Shastri, inspired by the ideals of Gandhi's life. Another Sanskrit scholar, Jaivam Venkatesh, praises Gandhi's life in *Mohanmañjarī*, where he writes that Gandhi's body shone like gold. The poet remarks that the name "Mohan" suited Gandhi, as he could enchant everyone.

Madhukar Shastri's *Gandhīgāthā* presents a comprehensive account of Gandhi's life, covering his childhood, education, key life events, the influence of other sages on him, foreign travels, and his role in the freedom movement.

In the poem *Rāṣṭrasabhāpakigaura vam*, Śrī Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa writes that Gandhi adhered to three principles to liberate the nation: the promotion of *khadi*, the importance of the Sanskrit language, and the establishment of world peace.

Mahāmahopādhyāya Mathura Prasad Dixit, a renowned scholar of the modern era, actively participated in India's Non-Cooperation Movement. His works *Vīrapratāpanāṭakam*, *Bhāratavijayanāṭakam*, and *Gāndhīvijayanāṭakam* recount the stories of great heroes who sacrificed their lives during India's struggle for independence. He wrote the play *Bhāratavijaya* in 1937, which portrays the hardships India endured under British rule, the Congress-led freedom movement, and the eventual withdrawal of the British after transferring power to Mahatma Gandhi. The play is divided into seven acts.

3.0 Sanskrit Poetry Based on the Freedom Struggle

Ramnath Tarkaratna, born in 1840 in Shantipur near Bengal, expresses his patriotic fervor in the thirteenth canto of his book *Vāsudevavijaya*. In it, he declares that dependence destroys a person's heroism and that slavery is a curse.

He further writes, "Death is preferable to subjugation."

Subodh Chandra Pasta is another Sanskrit scholar who contributed to nationalist literature. He wrote the epic *Jhānsīsvarīcaritam*, which depicts Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi as an incarnation of Goddess Durga. The work contains 22 chapters that glorify her heroic struggle.

Hariprasad Dwivedi Shastri, born in 1892 in the village of Ban in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, writes that the flowing waters of the Ganges advise people to rise above caste and religion, stating that only then will the country prosper.

In his final epic poem *Śrī Nehrucharitam*, Brahmananda Shukla presents the difficulties faced by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru—not only in achieving independence for the nation but also in navigating personal and family challenges. He prays that Nehru may never stray from the path of truth, even if it leads to death.

Conclusion

In the first half of the twentieth century, an unprecedented wave of patriotism swept across India. In particular, Mahatma Gandhi's *Satyagraha* movement, the Quit India Movement, and his life philosophy inspired and influenced people across the nation to embrace patriotic ideals. This influence is vividly reflected in Sanskrit literature. Numerous Sanskrit poets and scholars, deeply moved by Gandhi's teachings of non-violence and truth, enriched the literary landscape with their compositions. Therefore, it is vital to recognize and understand the profound impact of Mahatma Gandhi on the field of Sanskrit literature.

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