

most mildly), that it is impossible for an ordinary layman, whose scholarship extendeth not beyond the range of modern Samskr̥t, to say whether the collocation of letters carries any sense at all in it or is mere 'abracadabra'.

But whatever the value of this particular man and his statements may be, there is little doubt—as I have learnt from independent sources also—that old and valuable MSS. and great learning do exist in the country “beyond the Sharayū,” forming the districts of Gorakhpur and Basti, and that there is a race of Paṇḍits dwelling scattered over that tract, who, unlike the Paṇḍits of most of our cities, are not forced to make of their knowledge their sole means of livelihood, but, possessing independent means, as small land-owners or large cultivators, prosecute their studies amongst themselves in that right spirit of love and reverence of learning for the sake of learning which is its best and tenderest fosterer, though most unfortunately under the vow, it seems, that they will not impart their knowledge to any other than a Sharayū-pārīṇa Brāhmaṇa. We may and do regret the vow in the interests of the world at large, but I cannot but admire the principle that prompts it. ...

The above extracts show amply the indecisiveness of the impressions then produced on me by the personality and the conversation of Paṇḍit

Dhanarāja. To these I now add an account of the troubles and tantalisations undergone by Paṇḍit Parmeṣhri Dās on account of this phenomenal person, whom he was the first to discover for practical purposes. Of course I had had many talks with him about the matter previously, but I took down from his mouth, systematically, for this introduction, a complete account of his experiences from the very beginning up to date, on the 25th October, 1903, when he was in Benares, on a short visit. He gave the account in Hindī, from which I put it in English.

#### PAṆḌIT PARMESHRI DĀS' NARRATIVE

I FIRST began to take an interest in the Samskr̥t language in 1894, so far as I can remember, when I was about fifty years of age, after coming across an account, in a newspaper, of a lecture by Mrs. Besant, delivered in Calcutta, wherein she strongly advocated the study of Samskr̥t.

My beginnings were very modest. I began, indeed, with Devanāgarī and the Hindī vernacular, which I did not know well, having studied Urdū and Persian at school and college. From Hindī and Devanāgarī I passed on to Samskr̥t, taking up the *Bhagavad-Gītā* to begin with, naturally, as will be easily understood.

The difficulties I met with in properly understanding the language of the *Gītā* compelled me to think of studying Samskr̥t grammar. I

went to a Shāstrī, teaching in a local school, and promptly got by heart the first fourteen sūtras of Pāṇinī, reported by tradition to have been received by him direct from Shiva after much penance and propitiation, and forming the foundation of the rest of Pāṇinī's grammar.

But now arose a difficulty. The misfortune of having been a practising lawyer for over twenty years, at the time I engaged the Shāstrī to help me across the depths of Samskr̥t grammar, compelled me to ask him why there were only fourteen sūtras and not fifteen or thirteen; why there were only so many vowels and so many consonants, and not more or less; why, even amongst those that were enumerated in these aphorisms, the particular order observed had been followed, why *a* preceded, and *i* followed and *u* succeeded, etc.

The Shāstrī came to a standstill. I tried to pull him along a little further; but our mutual perplexities became more and more tangled every day. I sought other help. The same results. My collection of Samskr̥t grammars, old and new, eastern and western, grew more and more complete. So did my discontent with them. The thing weighed on me like a nightmare. Why *were* there only and exactly fourteen aphorisms and forty-two (or counting also the repetition of one) forty-three letters enumerated in them, and why *were* they arranged in that

particular order? My very sleep was affected. My daily prayers began to include a petition for help on this particular point!

Months passed. It was June of 1894, I believe, and I was still rubbing my eyes in bed early one morning, preparatory to getting up, when I was informed that two men had arrived at the house, one of them blind, and that they wanted to see me. Against my usual custom, I went straight from my bed to the doorway of the house. I saw two men. One was under twenty, possibly not more than eighteen, blind of both eyes, one eye sunken, the other bulging with a sightless, distorted and swollen eyeball. The other man was of almost the same age. Neither had anything else on than a loin-cloth. I asked them who they were and what they wanted.

"We want a meal and enough money to carry us to Cawnpore."

"Are you literate?"

The blind man said: "Yes."

"What have you studied?"

"Samskr̥t."

"Why are you going to Cawnpore?"

"I hope to get some work there in connection with the Ārya-Samāj."

"What emoluments?"

"Rs. 5 or Rs. 7 *per mensem* for a teachership."

"Do you know the *Siddhānta-Kaumudī*?"

"Yes."



"All right; I will see you again; rest and eat in the meanwhile."

The blind man gave his name as Dhanarāja, and that of his companion as Chandra Bhāla.

I saw them again in the afternoon, and we had some little talk on Samskr̥t grammar. We met again in the evening. Then I could not wait any longer and propounded my standing difficulty.

The blind man said: "Yes, I can answer all your questions."

"Out of your own intelligence, or from some old book?"

"From old books." This was good news. "But," he added, "I have not got the books; I only know them by heart."

A few days later, after he had settled himself in the house, I began taking down to his dictation a series of Samskr̥t verses, mostly in the *anuṣṭup* metre. I took down about 1,500. They constituted a dialogue between Shiva and Pārvaṭī, in which the latter asked the very same questions that had been puzzling me, and the former answered them in a way that was quite satisfactory to me, at least, and at the time.

I do not now remember whether he mentioned the name of this work, but he said that it was complete in those 1,500 couplets. He added, however, on further inquiry, that if I wanted more details on Samskr̥t grammar I should find

them in complete fulness in the *Nārādīya-Bhāṣhya* on the *Māheshvara-Vyākaraṇa*.

I had been also studying pieces of the *Siddhānta-Kaumudī*, relating to sandhi (the coalescence of letters and sounds) with the man, all the while becoming more and more discontented with the *vr̥t̥tis* (explanations of Pāṇini's aphorisms) contained in the work, and obtaining better explanations from the blind Paṇḍit himself, out of his mnemonic resources, as regards the physiological reasons for these coalescences. I preserved notes of these perpetual "whys" of mine and "because" of his.

My next manuscript-enterprise was more ambitious. I began writing to Dhanarāja's dictation the *Nārādīya-Bhāṣhya*, which he said, extended over 60 or 62,000 couplets, all verse. I took down about 500 or 600 of these.

Then I began to question him about the *Māheshvara-Vyākaraṇa* (of which the *Nārādīya-Bhāṣhya* was said by him to be an extended commentary). He began to dictate and I to write. To the best of my recollection, he said there were 5,000 aphorisms in the work. I wrote down about a thousand. I found that the order and arrangement of the sub-divisions of the subject was exactly the same as in the modern *Siddhānta-Kaumudī*. But the aphorisms were entirely different, and the illustrations and examples were all Vaidika-looking, and very

numerous and lengthy, and full of compounds difficult to pronounce. In connection with this difficulty of pronunciation, after giving me a number of inconsistent replies, first saying that the current *Shikṣhā* (a set of rules for pronunciation, etc., forming a sort of supplement to the current grammar) was genuine, and then that the one published by Dayānanda Sarasvatī (the founder of the Ārya Samāj) was genuine, he ultimately said that the original *Shikṣhā* written by Pāṇini was different from both.

I wrote down this *Shikṣhā*, extending to over 100 shlokas, and said by the Paṇḍit to be complete in that number.

I also employed, about this time, another Paṇḍit, and got him to write down a *Bhāṣhya* (commentary) on this *Shikṣhā*, consisting of extracts of the best portions of eight different commentaries. This *Bhāṣhya* is also complete excepting the last five or six shlokas. All this, of course, was dictated also by Paṇḍit Dhanarāja, and all from memory, as he said.

The year 1894 came to an end with this.

I asked Paṇḍit Dhanarāja how he came to find the *Nāradya-Bhāṣhya*.

He said: "Our family are residents of the village of Belhar Kalāñ, in Tahsīl Khalilābād of the Bastī District (in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, India). My grandfather was a very learned Paṇḍit. He had a great taste

for studying and teaching ancient works. His collection of MSS. is still with us. He kept up a private Pāthashālā (school). He was very fond of *Sannyāsīs* (wandering ascetics). One day, when I was about twelve or thirteen, there came a *Sannyāsī* who was very much struck with my exceptional memory, for I could get almost 1,000 couplets by heart in a single day. He taught me the *Nāradya-Bhāṣhya*. I had an elder cousin, now dead, who had not lost his eyesight, as I did at two and a half years of age from small-pox; and he had even a greater retentiveness. He also committed the *Nāradya-Bhāṣhya* to memory."

At the close of 1894, Paṇḍit Dhanarāja went back to his village. He returned again, after an absence of a few weeks, at the end of January, 1895. This time he came with changed ways, always trying to evade dictation and avoid talk on the matters in which I was most interested. However, I got him to dictate some old *ślotras* (hymns) to me. Then, one day in the course of conversation, he mentioned that in a work called the *Nārṇava*<sup>1</sup>, a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Uddhava, there was a statement that Ṛṣhis would continue to dwell on the Himālayas throughout the Kaliyuga and be the custodians

<sup>1</sup>"The ocean of Na, the Negation," for explanation of which Negation, see the text of the *Praṇava-Vāda*.—B. D.



of all knowledge after Kṛṣṇa's departure from this earth.

I forthwith began to reduce the *Nārṇava* into writing, having succeeded in inducing Paṇḍit Dhanarāja to dictate it. We proceeded to about 500 shlokas, the whole being declared by him to be many thousands. I forget the exact number.

Then, one night I asked him if he had ever studied the small *Bhagavad-Gītā* too, amidst all these huge performances. He said "No." Then I said: "You ought to study it now."

So we began, I this time acting as dictator and he as memoriser. I taught him about eight or ten shlokas, he repeating them faithfully after me, at first in a halting manner, and then over and over again, exactly imitating the process by which a child commits lessons to memory.

By and by it was decided that Dhanarāja and I and another friend should spend some time every day on the *Gītā* and endeavour to discover esoteric meanings therein, out of our own unaided intelligences, and write them down in the vernacular (Hindī). Well, I led off with guesses, based on Theosophical literature, which I had been reading steadily.

Dhanarāja said: "Yes, this is so." I asked: "Why do you speak in this *imprimatur* style?" After many days' haggling he repeated shlokas, from some *Kosha* (Dictionary or Thesaurus)

saying that they proved authoritatively that the *Gītā*-words had that particular meaning. I asked: "Why then bother our heads unnecessarily? If you have got an appropriate *Kosha*, specially fitted for this purpose, you can go along interpreting the *Gītā* far more easily." He said he had been repeating from a *Bhāṣhya* on the *Nirukṭa*, the *Kosha* of the *Veda*.

We began anew with this help. After we had struggled on to the seventh or eighth verse of the first chapter of the *Gītā*, Dhanarāja admitted that he knew the book very well and many *Bhāṣhyas* also on it, including one by Gobhila. The pretence of ignorance was only a hoax!

We began the *Gobhīlīya-Bhāṣhya* on the *Gītā* and, for a wonder, finished it too! People who will take the necessary trouble to put themselves mentally in my circumstances of age, life-long habits, heavy legal occupations, insufficient knowledge of Samskr̥t, eagerness to know more and inability to spare the necessary time and energy for systematic study from the beginning like a young tyro, and the wonderful nature of the entirely new world of literature opened up, will not wonder that I made so many beginnings and so few endings, and that I was always wandering off into alluring digressions. They will rather wonder that I completed the few MSS. that I did.

My previous familiarity with the subject-

matter of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and my great respect for the work, the Hīndūs' Bible, and the interest of the commentary itself, took me right through the whole of this great work. Not having learnt Samskr̥ṭ or practised Devanāgarī-writing in my earlier years, I have never made myself a good calligraphist of that character. Yet I, with my own hand, laboriously inscribed the bulk of the book. The rest was written by two other writers whom I employed. And the bulk is large; the complete work measures about 24,000 shlokas (of thirty-two syllables each.) This performance occupied us three whole years—1895-6-7.

But while our energies were mainly directed to this work during this period, digressions were not wanting, as was inevitable from my endless queries. A piece of a *Vyārṇava-Samhitā*—a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī (that is Paṇḍit̃ Dhanarāja's spelling, the current one being Rukmiṇī) on all matters in heaven and earth, said to be complete in about 14,000 shlokas—was put on paper.<sup>1</sup> A *Sāmyāyana-Kośa*—an independent lexicon in about 8,000 verses, by Vyāsa, was so fortunate as to get completed. And the 'real original' *Vaidika Nirukṭa* with a *Bhāṣya* was also begun. Of

<sup>1</sup> About 800 shlokas of this were written down by me, in the course of some holidays during my stay at Bārābaṅkī.—B. D.

course all this was done to the dictation from memory (as he alleged), of the blind Paṇḍit̃, who is also the sole authority for the descriptions and epithets used, as to whether a work was or was not completed, whether it was genuine, etc., or not.

In 1896 Paṇḍit̃ Dhanarāja attended the Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society, held at Benares; and with his help I contributed some articles on Samskr̥ṭ grammar to *The Theosophist*, during the three years 1895-6-7.

At the end of 1897, Paṇḍit̃ Dhanarāja went away for a long period. But he did not go to his home. He went and stayed with the Rājā of Haḍahā, close to Bārābaṅkī. He stayed with him almost throughout the whole of 1898, coming to see me now and then for a few days only at a time. I, too, suffered from unhappy family bereavements in that year, and no work could be done with Paṇḍit̃ Dhanarāja. The year 1899 also passed similarly. Paṇḍit̃ Dhanarāja was wandering about elsewhere, coming to see me now and then. In 1900 he stayed with me for almost a month in the summer, when we did some sporadic work on the 'real, original' *Bhāṣya*<sup>1</sup> on the *Bhagavad-Gītā* by the 'real' original' Śaṅkarāchārya, the current one being

<sup>1</sup> The first hundred shloka-measures or so of this were written down by me on the 31st of July, 1900, when I was visiting Paṇḍit̃ Parmeshrī Dās, for a



decided by him to be spurious. We also did some miscellaneous hymns and śtoṭras.

Then Paṇḍit Dhanarāja went on to Benares, and dictated the *Pranava-Vāda* there.<sup>1</sup>

He returned to Bārābaṅkī in the summer of 1901; and then dictated to me 700 shlokas of what he declared was the second half and continuation of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* now current. The *Vyārṇava-Samhitā* was also continued with the help of a copyist.

We also began a *Bhāṣhya*, by Bārḥaṇa, in 80,000 shlokas, on the 'original' *Brahma-Sūtras*, numbering 10,000. By the end of February, 1902, we had progressed to the seventh or eighth sūtra of the original and about the 3,000th shloka of the commentary. He left again and has not returned to me since. But he has been wandering about amongst other householders in the district of Bārābaṅkī, and I have met him also at one or two places casually.

At the end of these eight years of acquaintance, this extraordinary man still remains a puzzle to me, notwithstanding the fact that he has lived in the same house, almost in the same room, with me, night and day, for months and months together. If all he says about himself; his day at Bārābaṅkī; they seemed to be a sort of abstract of the alleged *Gobhīlīya-Bhāṣhya* of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.—B. D.

<sup>1</sup>To me, as will be described later on.—B. D.

memory; the hundreds of ancient works of which nobody in the outside world knows anything at all; his memorial knowledge of them all, comprising perhaps two million couplets of thirty-two syllables each (I have and have had taken down some 60,000, and you, Bhagavān Dās, 16,000); amongst them such 'trifles' as fifty-two *Bhāṣhyas* on the *Gītā*, four complete *Bhāṣhyas* on the 'complete' *Veḍas* (not the patches now extant) from beginning to end, all the eighteen *Purāṇas*, the 'real, original' ones, and the *Mahābhārata*, with Gobhila's *Bhāṣhyas* on them all, full of wonderful 'esoteric' interpretations, the original *Sūtras* of the six systems of philosophy and the six *Veḍāṅgas*, all with *Bhāṣhyas*, in fact works on all possible branches of science and philosophy; and all that he says about the secret handing-down of all such wondrous learning in old families of Paṇḍits, in the Nepāl Terāi and adjoining country—if all this, or a tenth or a hundredth of it, be true at all, then it is very, very wonderful.

Can we believe him or can we not? In all these eight years, he has never repeated a second time, despite incessant requests and offers of all kinds of inducements, honorary, pecuniary, etc., a single shloka that he has dictated once. He has evaded and avoided, equivocated and prevaricated; but never actually given this absolutely

simple and conclusive test of memory. He has failed most woefully in promises to show or secure MSS. of the works he dictated, which again would have settled all our doubts most satisfactorily. The majority of my friends, interested in these matters, who have come into contact with him, hold the strongest and most unfavourable opinion as to his straightforwardness in this respect. Indeed they do not hesitate to call him a charlatan; and it is difficult to prove them wrong.

I myself have been often driven to such irritation by his want of straightforwardness, that I have driven him out of my house—but always only to call him back again when the irritation subsided. And yet the fact of what he has dictated remains and stands invincibly. Has it or has it not any merits?

After eight years of work on it I am satisfied that a fair portion of it is new and valuable to modern thought. I have made many efforts to trace the MSS. of the works mentioned by Ḍhanarāja, with the help of occasional descriptions given by him as to the Paṇḍit families with which, as he says, he stayed and studied the books he says he knows by heart. But I have always failed to lay my hand on any such substantial thing, partly, at least, I think, because of my very restricted opportunities for search. Yet I believe that the MSS. exist, for

I cannot believe, after what I have seen of Ḍhanarāja for eight years, that he has the power to invent all that he has dictated to me or my copyists. For the present, then, the people who take any serious interest in valuable philosophical thought must content themselves with judging these dictated works, and pieces of work, on their inherent merits. The future will show whether actual old MSS. justify this most wonderful man's statements.

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#### PANĎIT DHANARĀJA'S BIOGRAPHY.

To the above I wished very much to add a full account of his life from the lips of Paṇḍit Dhanarāja himself. But for reasons which will be partially understood from the latter portion of the narrative of Paṇḍit Parmeshrī Dās, I have not succeeded in getting from Dhanarāja any such systematic account. If I do in future I will certainly publish it. In the meanwhile I am compelled to content myself with putting together such notes, either on paper or in memory, as I retain, of occasional talks about himself that Dhanarāja has indulged in in my hearing. Of course, the reliability of these talks is no greater, nor less, than that of his sayings and doings in general; and it is so defective, that I should ordinarily have refrained from publishing any of these matters. But the many years' experience of the man that Paṇḍit Parmeshrī Dās and I have had, and his failure and mine (of which more will be said later) to trace or secure original MSS., and the utter uncertainty of my having better opportunities in the future, and the very great inherent merits, in our eyes, of the material dictated by the man, and finally the hope that others with better opportunities will take the work up,

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and possibly bring to light this whole new world of very valuable literature for the use of humanity—all these considerations have combined to induce me not to delay publication of these matters any longer.

What I have gathered from Paṇḍit Dhanarāja Mishra about his life is as follows :

He was born about 1873 A. D. in the village of Belhār Kalān, Post Office Menhāwal, Tahsil Khalilābād, District Bastī, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, India. His father was Nepāl Mishra, uncle Paṭirāja Mishra, and grandfather Haragovinda Mishra. He had an elder brother, Chandrikā, who died at the age of sixteen or seventeen. (In Paṇḍit Parmeshrī Dās' narrative this brother is mentioned as cousin.) Dhanarāja lost his eyesight from small-pox when he was two and a half or three years of age.

He had a phenomenal memory from his earliest childhood. When he was seven or eight years old, he could commit to memory many hundreds of shlokas in a single day. His brother Chandrikā was even better endowed. The family of Dhanarāja were grammarians. His grandfather kept a kind of private school (or day-pāthashālā), and taught deserving vidyārthīs ('seekers of learning,' students). Dhanarāja early exhausted his family stores of modern Samskr̥t grammar, and grew more and more dissatisfied and inquisitive.

Many Sannyāsīs (wandering ascetics) used to visit his grandfather. One of them was specially attracted by Dhanarāja's wonderful memory and inquisitiveness, and told him that he should study the *Maheshvarīya-Vyākaraṇa*, with the *Nārādīya-Bhāṣya* on it, if he wanted his grammatical difficulties solved and his curiosity satisfied. Dhanarāja was eager to learn, and the Sannyāsī put him on the track. He told him the names of the Paṇḍits and the places from whom and where he would get what he wanted.

Dhanarāja ran off from his home, accompanied and helped by a companion. (In Paṇḍit Parmeshrī Dās' narrative Dhanarāja says he was taught the big work on grammar by the Sannyāsī himself.) His phenomenal memory, precocious intelligence, and developed inquisitiveness, were ready certificates of desert, and served as passports to the confidence of the Paṇḍits mentioned by the Sannyāsī, and he began his astonishing career of memorising.

He went from one Paṇḍit to another, from village to village, and district to district, obtaining clues to each successive house of learning from the previously visited one, all being occupied by members of the same ancient fraternity. (Some brief mention of them has been already made in the extracts reprinted from the *Prashnoṭṭara*.)

In this way he committed to memory some

hundreds of thousands, almost millions, of shloka-measures of literature (one shloka-measure being equal to thirty-two syllables). He wandered about thus for eight or ten years, and then felt surfeited. In the course of his wanderings he seems to have heard from some Paṇḍits, who had been tried and found wanting, about Paṇḍit Parmeshrī Dās' unanswerable questions. Here was a congenial spirit. In the spirit of the old *Upaniṣhat* stories he went to Paṇḍit Parmeshrī Dās to answer his questions. What followed has already been described above.

From August 30th, 1900, to January 19th, 1901, he stayed with me at "Durgākund," Benares. In this period the *Praṇava Vāda* was written down to his dictation, by me and Paṇḍit Gaṅgānāth Jhā, M.A., D. Litt., (now Professor of Samskr̥t, Muir Central College, Allahabād); the last portion, about an eighth of the whole, being written by Paṇḍit Ambā Dās of Benares (sometime head Paṇḍit in a Jaina Samskr̥t Pāthashālā in Benares and now Professor of *Veḍānta* in the Rājavīra Samskr̥t Pāthashālā Department of the Central Hindū College, Benares). I have not seen him again since. I myself have not had the desired opportunity of going to his place and visiting the neighbouring tracts, and he has not been able to comply with my invitation to come and stay with me again. But I have had some correspondence,

very occasional and rare, with him since. I wrote to him repeatedly to send me an account of his life, written down to his dictation by some pupil of his; but he has not done so. He gave me some hopes of coming to me on a visit, in answer to repeated invitations, but these hopes have also remained unfulfilled so far. I might have got from him orally what he had not thought fit to send in writing.

I understand he has been married twice, the first wife having died.

I have made a list of the 'ancient' works of which he has spoken to my brother or myself from time to time during the months the *Pranava Vāda* was being written, together with the names of the Paṇḍits or others, and the places, with whom and where, according to him, manuscripts of them exist. Very much to my regret I have not had an opportunity, so far, of going out to search for them myself, personally, though I retain hopes of being able to do so some day, later on. But I have had search made for them, through friends residing in or near the localities concerned. All without success, so far. Either the villages do not exist, or at least cannot be traced and recognised; or, if the villages are found, then the Paṇḍits named are not to be found there; or if both are found, then the Paṇḍits swear that the MSS. named are not with them, and that they never even

heard of them; and so on. Perhaps others may take up the search and succeed better. The list is printed below for permanent record as a clue at least.