

Book Review

The book “*Gems of Human Heritage: Our Scripts*” stimulates to learn

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[Note added by the editor to foster comprehension of the book *Gems of Human Heritage: Our Scripts* by Jyoti Prakash Chaudhuri (ISEC, Kolkata, 2008; ISBN: 81-900442-8-1) which is a non-fiction title. It is a narrative on a journey across the languages along the bumpy road of orthography and phonetics in search of a suitable alphabet to solve the problem of discordance between spelling and pronunciation in English language. As a student of Banaras Hindu University the author was exposed to different Indian languages. In Germany he was confronted with European languages. Other academic missions brought him to Middle East and to the University of Hawaii where he could sample the Semitic and Sino-Japanese languages respectively. Scanning the spellings and scrutinizing the sounds he identifies the problem with the Latin alphabets used in English. The retail shops and the websites classify this title under philology, history of languages and ancient cultures.

Besides the ancient India this book covers the historic aspects of Jewish culture touching the key phrases Captivation of Jews in Babylon (Improvements of Hebrew writing using Nekudots), Merchant of Venice by Shakespeare (Jews in Europe became money lenders and jewellers), the Diaspora of Jews from Babylon and Dreyfuss Affair (Persecution of Jews in Asia and Europe, forcing them to buy land from the Ottoman Sultans).

The primary object of this book is an enquiry to find a correspondence between the spelling and the pronunciation, especially in context of English language. That the spelling is very important to conserve the meaning is seen very prominently in the German translation of the New Testament from the Greek version of the Bible. As the internationally

reputed Philologist Prof Amlan Das Gupta points out in the Foreword to this book, the author could “convincingly reveal the superiority of an alphabetic system based on Sanskritic and Semitic languages.” Once we have a new alphabet developed for English language based on the phonetic scheme of Sanskrit, it can be used profitably for any language.

As a scholar of religion I was a little surprised when a friend of mine, an active member engaged in our Interreligious Dialogue of Munich, popped into my office and told me, I had to write a review on the book *Gems of Human Heritage: Our Scripts* by Jyoti Prakash Chaudhuri. She left a copy on my desk and soon I started reading. Next time we met I argued that given the fact that I am not a linguist nor a poet or an expert on languages I am not in the position to write a review on the book. She replied: But you are an expert on dialogues of religions, so use this perspective.

It is hard to say if “*Gems of Human Heritage*” is a scientific book. If so, it is as unusual as the idea proposed: Use the Sanskrit script to improve English and other Latin languages. Of course there were many occasions in history where scripts were changed, simplified and improved. But mostly such a change went together either with a political change or could be done because someone had the power to force it. But let’s start from the beginning: Chaudhuri argues, that English and other languages using the Latin alphabet encounter huge problems in spellings and pronunciations, problems inherent in the alphabetic script itself (p 53). He discussed at length how, for example, in English the spelling is not consistent with sounds, many sounds cannot be expressed and so the spelling of words in English differs hugely from place to place. Also other languages like German etc. do have similar

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problems. As I said before, being not knowledgeable in the science of languages, I can neither prove his arguments right or wrong. But let's say, Chaudhuri had a point and one could agree that the usage of Sanskrit letters (p 78) would improve the world's writing, just because we all could read and pronounce the words of all languages, and spell them correctly (p 110). What would we win, what would we lose?

How does religion fit in this search for language? Chaudhuri is telling about his religious upbringing in chapter 5 where he tells a story how the Gayatri Mantra inspired him; not at the beginning in his life through the turmoil of religious strifes resulting into partition of India (p 25) but later. First it is stressed that all religions are a constructed frame: "1) God, or what ever you call Him, Her or It, is a creation of human imagination. Perhaps we have created God and not God us. 2) Human beings, in their helplessness, or thankfulness, crave for a supernatural power or a "divine" agency, simply called Ishwar, God or Allah etc. Even if there were none of that kind, we shall create one. 3) In spite of our ability to work on the management of information, we have failed to attain one consensus concept on God or religion for all of us." (p 31).

At the end of that chapter after having told the reader about all his struggles with religion, he told, how he discovered the Gayatri Mantra again: "Oh

the Ultimate, let us attain the ability to understand the creation, the earth and the universe around the sun." (p 32) - for Chaudhuri it is due to language and alphabet that the Mantra could preserve its meaning from ancient times up to now.

Exactly here lies the big question. If one would want to unify languages and maybe as a next step (is this suggested) create a "consensus concept on God or religion for all of us" (p 31) there is a big danger. The flux of ideas, hopes, songs and theologies would narrow down to a concept. It is exactly this plurality of religions, hymns, and theologies, which is keeping religion alive and does not allow enclosing the wisdom in a concept. I can agree that there are many mistakes in all the religious traditions causing misunderstandings, but they still keep the message alive. The craving and searching for this message is simply part of it. So I do not know if I can agree to have one alphabet -I am not a linguist nor a poet. But if one simply wants to clean religion from all muddled forms and shapes, the heart would be easily lost! Wisdom is a flux, not a concept. Therefore religions have to tell their story in multiple unaccounted voices, so that one is inclined to learn to listen. - But exactly to think about all of this, one is encouraged by Chaudhuri - thank you for opening a new door to dialogue: dialogue between languages and religions.

News Review

Robust Slide bearing with the biggest tower clock high over Mecca

The biggest tower clock of the world hangs about 450 meters high in Mecca Clock Royal Tower of the Fairmont Hotel over Mecca. The dial can be seen from distance of 10 km. To the orientation of both the shafts for the 22 meter long minute hand and the 17 meter hour hand have insertion as maintenance-free slide bearing of the automobile suppliers Federal Mogul, Wiesbaden. The slide bearings have as per statement of firms have very small frictional that these are encased in the bronze homogenous fast lubricants as graphite and polytetrafluorethyl-

ene (PTFE). Classic with fat or oil lubricated bearing solutions made out of bronze would very quickly push to its performance limit on account of the danger of pollution due to sand storm.

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Indian Science Cruiser

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