

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Gary A. Tubb, Emery R. Boose.** *Scholastic Sanskrit: A Handbook for Students.* New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2005. 276 pp. \$36.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-9753734-7-7.

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## Commentarial Sanskrit

It is true for many disciplines within the humanities that there are numerous excellent works that introduce the beginner to the basic building blocks of the discipline, and also many advanced studies for the accomplished scholar, but few works that help the student get from the beginning stage to the advanced level. That has certainly been true of the discipline of Sanskrit. Once a student has devoted a couple of years to working through one of the excellent introductions to the language by Ashok Aklujkar, Michael Coulson, Madhav Deshpande, Robert Goldman, or Walter Maurer, there have been hardly any intermediate texts to help the student systematically progress to more advanced levels. Now, however, with the publication of *Scholastic Sanskrit*, an important step has been taken toward filling that lacuna. This book assumes that the student has learned enough about Sanskrit grammar and syntax to be ready to begin plunging into the vast corpus comprising the many genres of Sanskrit literature. It is built on the conviction that even a student at the early stages of exploring Sanskrit literature can benefit from the work of traditional commentators; it is also built on the observation that until now there have not been reliable guides to help the student make intelligent use of Sanskrit commentaries.

The book is organized around a verse from the *Parāśarapurāna* that names five characteristics of a commentary: the division of the text into individual words (*padacchedah*), paraphrases of the meanings of words (*padārthoktiḥ*), analysis of compounds (*vigrahaḥ*), the syntactical structure of sentences (*vākyaযযojanā*), and responses to objections (*ākṣepasamādhānam*). The first four of these characteristics are discussed in part 1 of the book, written by Gary A. Tubb. Part 2, written by Emery R. Boose, deals with the fifth characteristic.

The brief chapter 2, entitled “Division of Words,” explores many of the ways that individual words are marked off for discussion and how variant readings are signaled by commentators. Chapters 3 through 7 deal with commentarial conventions for giving meanings of individual words and phrases. Chapter 3 examines how words are glossed by other words and through rephrasing marked off by such expressions as “Ity arthaḥ,” “iti bhāvah,” and “iti yāvat.” It also deals with how puns are explained, how traditional dictionaries are cited, and how proper names and names of species are indicated. The following chapters treat various kinds of word derivation. The formation of derivative verbs, such as desideratives, intensives, causatives, and denominatives, is the subject matter of chapter 5, while chapter 6 deals with the formation of nouns from verbal roots (*dhātu*) through the use of primary suffixes (*kr̥tpratyāyah*), and chapter 7 addresses the formation of nouns from other nouns through the application of secondary suffixes (*taddhītapratyāyah*). The discussion of nominal formation in chapter 6 also includes an introduction to the traditional theory of factors in an action (*kārah*), which lies at the heart of explaining not only the use of the cases of Sanskrit nouns, pronouns, and adjectives but also the semantic structures of individual words and the analysis of compounds. The discussion of nominal formation in chapter 7 includes explanations of how traditional commentaries indicate the formation of feminine nouns and how nominal case-markers (*sup*) are applied. The topic of compound analysis ranges over chapters 8 and 9, which cover indeclinable (*avyayībhāva*) compounds as well as *tatpuruṣa*, *karmadhāraya*, *dvigu*, *dvandva*, and *bahuvrīhi* compounds and *ekaśeṣa* formations. Chapter 10, the last of part 1, deals with ways that sentences are explained through the asking of questions

or through the rearrangement of a verse text into “normal prose order.”

All the chapters of the book offer several examples of each phenomenon being explained by citing and translating passages from well-known commentaries. All the commentarial passages quoted are listed in an index. By far the largest number of commentarial passages are from various commentaries to such poetic works as Kalidāsa’s *Kumārasambhava* and *Raghuvamśa*. Students planning to read mostly philosophical literature may wish that there were a few more illustrations from that genre of text, although there are numerous citations from Śaṅkara’s *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* and his commentary to the *Bhagavadgītā* to illustrate philosophical commentarial style. All citations from commentaries are brief, and most are given without the root text that is being commented on. A welcome addition to the book might have been an extended passage of a root text and its commentary to show how all the parts fit together.

Part 2, which comprises chapters 11 through 20, amounts to an extended introduction to the conventions of the *bhāṣya*-style commentary, in which the commentator typically entertains questions about the interpretation of the text being commented on. Chapter 12 discusses the formation of abstract nouns and the idioms associated with them; it also treats the tendency of commentaries, often challenging to beginning students, to pack a great deal of information into a small amount of space through the use of nominalized verbs rather than inflected finite verbs and through the use of compounds. Chapter 13 builds on the foundation laid in chapter 8 by showing the conventions used by commentators to analyze long compounds. Chapter 14 discusses word order. Chapters 15 and 16 offer an account of how the logical structure of arguments is discussed through the use of nominalized constructions and abstract nouns in the ablative and instrumental cases and through the join-

ing of clauses with such words as *iti*. Chapter 17 deals with conventions used for quoting authorities and indicating authors, while chapter 18 illustrates how commentators use and explain examples and comparisons. Perhaps the most important chapter of part 2 is chapter 19, which gives an account of how the traditional conventions of oral debate informed Sanskrit commentaries, especially of philosophical texts, by presenting material as if it were recording a debate containing one or more *pūrvapakṣas* and a *siddhānta*. The final chapter of the book presents a number of useful bits of information on the uses of pronouns, particles, and idiomatic connective phrases that indicate the flow of ideas in the text being commented on.

The book is outfitted with an appendix of useful reference works and with four indices. In addition to the index of cited commentarial passages already mentioned, there is an index of passages from grammatical texts (both classical Indian texts, such as Pāṇini, and modern European reference books), and an index of Sanskrit words and another of English words.

This work by Tubb and Boose should be a welcome addition to the collections of both the students for whom it was written as well as their teachers, and not just because it fills the aforementioned lacuna between elementary works and advanced studies. The book contains most of the features of a Sanskrit commentary that students usually learn from their teachers as they read texts. While no book can be expected to replace human teachers, it is undeniably useful to have a book that students who have teachers can use for quick reference and that students who do not have access to teachers can use for learning on their own. The work serves the useful purpose of helping students begin, with relatively little pain, to make use of commentaries early in their reading careers. This manual is likely to become a standard for years to come.

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