

RAYMOND DOCTOR

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PROVERB COLLECTIONS IN
INDIAN LANGUAGES

General Introduction

The bibliography presented below is restricted to proverb anthologies and collections. It does not cover the 1000 odd papers and articles devoted to proverbs in various journals and scholarly publications nor does it provide books written in French dealing especially with Tamil and Bengali. This bibliography covers around 34 languages in India starting with Ao and ending with Urdu and lists around 350 proverb collections. In some cases it is very succinct (Ao, Angami, Ho to mention a few have just one collection whereas other languages such as Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Oriya show a rich paremiological heritage). The earliest proverb collection can be dated to the end of the eighteenth century and is a collection of proverbs and sayings in the Malayalam language made by a Jesuit priest on the Malabar coast: Paulinus, Sancto Bartholomaeo, *Centum Adagia Malabarica*, Fulbonius, Roma, 1791. This is the watershed and from this date onwards a large number of proverb collections in Indian languages have commenced.

The proverbs are presented language-wise and each language is then sorted on its alphabetical order. A chronological sort based on dates would have been useful, but since this is a traditional bibliography, this has been avoided. In certain cases, the same collection which treats of different languages has been repeated under two different languages¹ since it is assumed that a researcher would be interested only in a language of his choice. No linguistic criteria for classifying the languages have been applied. Thus, traditionally Bhojpuri or Chhatisgarhi or Bundelkhandi are listed as dialectical representations of Hindi. In this bibliography, this dialectological classification has been avoided and wherever a collection exists, that particular language/dialect has been given an individual status.

The data provided here covers proverb collections both in English as well as in the particular language.² To facilitate access to the titles in Indian languages, a loose phonetic transliteration has been used. Narrow transcription of the texts which would have been a strain both on text-formatting as well as on the reader has been avoided.

Despite the best of searches made, some books and texts available did not have the author's name either because it was published in the name of a trust or mainly because the cover page of the book (in old and rare books) was torn off or was undecipherable.³ In such cases, an appropriate comment is made on the status of the author, just before the date marker. Similarly in certain cases, the publishing house or the date is just not available. In the latter case, the abbreviation n.d. (no date) has been used. Where the author has published the book himself, the publisher is specified as "Published by Self".⁴ Such incomplete bibliographical information which normally should not be part of a bibliography, has still been included in this collection, since the data (especially 19th Century anthologies) have been considered to be very precious and useful.

A short note on the paremiological tradition in India would not be out of place in this bibliography, since it would help in clearing up certain misconceptions.

Proverbs in India go back to Sanskrit. In traditional Indian literature, it has been customary to teach through proverbs and maxims as is attested by the *Hitopadesa*, the *Pancatantra* as well as in the Buddhist Jatak tales. These proverbs were termed as Subhasitas or the Good Word (su= A positive intensifier prefix + bhasit = a morphological form of *word*).⁵ In Buddhist literature, these were often called Buddhabhasita or the Good Words of the Buddha.

A Subhasit had to conform to certain formal and semantic criteria to merit its name:

- a. It had to be used in an appropriate context or "pragmatic" frame of reference for which certain ground rules pertinent to Sanskrit rhetorics were laid down;
- b. Within the framework of logic or "tarka", the Subhasit should corroborate a verifiable truth arrived at through appropriate inference;

- c. At the prosodic level, the Subhasit should please the ear. The musicality of the Subhasit depends on alankara or ornamental features specific to Sanskrit rhetorics such as alliteration, internal rhyme as well as a complex metre;
- d. In terms of content, the Subhasit should be moral in nature and should not offend the ethical code and norms laid down by society;
- e. Finally the Subhasit should serve as a guide to human action. The classical Subhasitsamgrahas (collections) were very often codes of conduct governing varied aspects of human life and social relationships.

These principles still continue to characterise a large number of Indic proverbs.

After the age of Sanskrit, proverb collections and paremiology in general lapsed into quiescence for a very long period of time. The Renaissance that took place in India around the 14th century was specific to religious texts being transcribed in the “prakrits” or the “native languages” particular to a given geolinguistic area. However, proverbs seem to have no place in this resurgence. The invasion of India by Islam in the shape of the Moghol invasion and the establishment of the Moghol dynasty did not in any way revitalise paremiology. Once the Moghol rulers were assimilated into the main-stream of Indian culture, a large number of collections and books in Persian were produced. Proverbs find no place in these collections with the possible exception of a stray Persian manuscript which quotes a few proverbs as guide-lines for good behaviour. The “Ain-e-Akbari” of the emperor Akbar similarly mentions in passing a few sayings and proverbs but one finds no single work dedicated to paremiology. This absence is puzzling, since in neighbouring Iran, where Persian was the court language as well as the language of the people, a large corpus of proverbs collections can be found.⁶

One has to await the contact of India with Europe for the growth of proverb collections. The first proverb collections were made by the Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans who accompanied the French and subsequently the English to India. However, proverbs seem to have had a low priority for them and one finds small collections of proverbs in their grammars and vocabularies.

It is after the first three decades of the 19th century that proverb collections seem to make their presence felt in India. Thus whereas the first collection in Assamese dates back to 1896, and that in Bengali goes as far back as 1830, the oldest is the one in Hindi entitled *The New Cyclopaedia Hindoostanica of Wit* (1810).⁷ A large number of proverb collections form part of grammars written in English by either the British or Indians for the British administrators.⁸ (These have not been furnished in this bibliography, except where the collection was large enough to be of interest.)

The true growth of proverb collections in India starts relatively around the second half of the 19th century. In a certain manner, this parallels the growth of paremiology as a science in Europe with large collections of proverbs being made in the latter half of the 19th century. Moreover, this period in India is characterised by a certain amount of political stability, with the English having affirmed their military superiority over their other European rivals. Translations of texts in Indian languages and Sanskrit were undertaken and this seems to have given an impetus to proverb collections being made both by the British as well as by Indians. A majority of these are mainly collections of proverbs with their English translations and where possible their English equivalents. No taxonomical approach is observed; although proverb collections in Bengali, Oriya and Gujarati try to adopt a thematic approach. Between 1858 (one year after the Indian mutiny) and 1948 (one year after Independence), i.e. a period of 90 years, a staggering 180 proverb collections can be counted, nearly two a year, the largest numbers being in Gujarati, Bengali and Oriya with Tamil a close contender. A majority of these are either in English or try to provide English equivalents, a tacit acknowledgement of the language of the coloniser. The next half-century coincides with the growth of Indian nationalism and it is not surprising to note that proverb collections are published in the native language and English seems to be little favoured. The growth is, however, just as prolific: around 110 collections (the ratio of 2 per year seems to be maintained). What is more encouraging is that proverb collections are published not by the author himself, as was the practice in the past,⁹ but by publishing houses, showing that proverbs are a saleable commodity. Twenty-four books of the collections in the period 1858-

1948 were published by the author himself, as opposed to only five in the second half 1948-1998.

The future of proverb collections seems to be secure in India. One area where a considerable lacuna is observed today is in comparative collections. Earlier proverb collections seem to provide equivalents in languages other than the one under survey. Thus whereas J.N. Petit's proverb collection of Gujarati lists at least two or three proverbs in languages other than Gujarati, present day collections do not have this comparative approach. And yet, given the close cultural, ethnic and linguistic links between languages, such an approach could be extremely enriching.

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Acknowledgements

This bibliography has been a long time in the making. No bibliography, especially of the type above can be prepared by a single individual. The author would like to acknowledge the help and cooperation of public and university libraries in India, private collections, individuals as well as existing bibliographies. Special mention needs to be made of Handoo Jawaharlal, *A Bibliography of Indian Folk Literature*, CIIL, Mysore. 1977, as well as Padhi Pitambara, *Reference Sources in Modern Indian Languages*. Gayatridevi Publications. Bhubhaneshwar. 1994, which provided a rich mine of information and bibliographical details. Some data were also collected from the Internet.

Corrections and changes have been made wherever anomalies have been noted.

Notes:

¹ This is especially in the case of Hindi and Urdu which were very often bunched under the same head of Hindustani, or in the case of collections of proverbs in two or more languages.

² Only one French contribution has been incorporated. This should not give the false impression that the French did not encourage paremiology. French Jesuits and Dominicans in the earlier period and later the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient (EFEO) have undertaken large collections especially in the case of Tamil. The French bibliography is under preparation.

³ This collection could have been considerably enriched but for the fact that bibliographies existing in a large number of old collections have been rendered useless by the absence of all information apart from the name of the author and the title. In older collections, this proves tantalising and frustrating, since references are made to authors and their books about whom one can only make a guess.

⁴ A common convention was and in some cases still survives, to have the book published by a near parent either the mother, father or the wife. In the early period of Indian paremiology, quite a few books have been published in this manner, showing that few publishing houses were ready to undertake the risk of printing a proverb collection.

⁵ Review Article on "Proverbes et Locutions Thai" by Roger Pelletier in *Proverbium*. Vol. 8., 1992. pp. 311-317.

⁶ The curious case of Gujarati needs to be investigated, where a large number of Persian or "Farsi" proverbs as they are called entered into the mainstream of the language and even today are freely used by speakers.

⁷ It is not extraordinary that the largest proverb collections made under the English regime are in the four "factories" where the English established themselves: Madras (Tamil), Calcutta (Bengali), Bombay (Marathi), Surat (Gujarati). It is from these regions that proverb collecting spread to neighbouring areas.

⁸ These grammars were written to help the British learn an Indian language. In order to administer India, a formal knowledge of the language of the region to be administered was made mandatory. The inclusion of proverbs in traditional grammars is not new to the European grammatical tradition and one finds in both Greek as well as Latin grammars (on which the Indian grammars written for the English were modelled) an odd proverb or two given at the end of every lesson. The proverb was seen as the largest syntactic collocation and hence its presence in the grammatical tradition of Europe.

⁹ Cf. Note ii

¹⁰ In the case of Sanskrit, Subhasit literature as well as collections are so many, that we have avoided giving a full list. A representative collection has been provided.

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