

MANJUL BHARGAVA

DR. P.L. BHARGAVA AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO INDOLOGY

Dr. Purushottam Lal Bhargava was born on May 29, 1909 in Alwar, Rajasthan to a family of scholars. His father Pandit Mukut Bihari Lal Bhargava was also a highly educated scholar and an author of several books on the political issues of the time. He worked for the Maharaja of Alwar and later moved to Lucknow to start a publishing company known as The Upper India Publishing House.

Dr. P.L. Bhargava was keenly interested in languages and history from his childhood, and was a brilliant student throughout, winning numerous awards and honors during his school and college years. He received his Bachelor's degree from Lucknow University and won the Empress Victoria gold medal from the University for standing first in the B.A. examination.

He then obtained Master's degrees in Sanskrit, Hindi, and History. He specialized in Sanskrit and passed the Shastri examination of Lucknow University, winning a gold medal from the university for standing first in it.

Dr. Bhargava's first scholarly book "Chandragupta Maurya" was written in his early youth at the age of 24, and was extremely well-reviewed by the experts in the field. His groundbreaking Ph.D. thesis, published as a book "India in the Vedic Age," received rave reviews from scholarly journals and newspapers around the world and the highest praise from scholars of Indology such as Dr. A.S. Altekar, Dr. U.N. Ghoshal, Professor A.L. Basham, Professor Nilkanta Sastri, Dr. K. M. Munshi, Dr. V.M. Apte, Dr. A.D. Pusalkar, Dr. Ludwik Sternbach, Professor

Oscar Botto, and Professor T. Burrow.

From there began a very prolific career, in which Dr. Bhargava continued his remarkable scholarly work in Ancient Indian History and Sanskrit. His specialty was reconstructing history, and separating history from myth, by corroborating various literary and historical sources along with archeological evidences.

In addition to over 100 research articles, Dr. Bhargava also published several other highly reviewed scholarly books, including “Retrieval of History from Puranic Myths”, “Pracheen Bharat ka Itihaas” (Hindi), and “Vedic Religion and Culture”. He continued writing influential books and articles even in his nineties, and all his books have been received with great enthusiasm, admiration and high encomiums by scholars in the field.

Dr. Bhargava was a plenary speaker at countless national and international conferences in Asia, Europe, and North America. Even at age ninety he was remarkably active professionally; for example, he travelled to Torino, Italy, with his grandson Manjul Bhargava in 2000 when he was invited to the 11th World Sanskrit conference by the Director of CESMEO, Dr. Oscar Botto (a very close friend and colleague of his for over 40 years), to deliver a lecture and chair two sessions on Vedic Literature.

Aside from scholarship, Dr. Bhargava also did much for education - particularly language education - in India. Dr. Bhargava was the very first and longest reigning Head of the Sanskrit Department at Rajasthan University. He laid the foundation of the Sanskrit Department of Rajasthan University in 1961, and with his vision, hard work and brilliant initiatives it quickly became one of the best known departments on campus and among the leading Sanskrit departments in the country. With Dr. Bhargava’s efforts, the newly formed Sanskrit Department at Rajasthan University rapidly became known not only outside Jaipur but also abroad, and attracted several foreign students who came to study Sanskrit with Dr. Bhargava; many of them are now well-established scholars/dignitaries in their own right, such as Professor Johannes Bronkhorst of the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, Ambassador Hinkus Nijenhuis, the Dutch Ambassador to Venezuela, and Professor Liudmila Khokhlova of the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow. Dr. Bhargava’s



P.L. Bhargava with Oscar Botto and some of the speakers and guests of the 11th World Sanskrit Conference (Villa Gualino, Turin, 2000)

numerous students who did research under his guidance have gone on to do excellent work as teachers and researchers at various institutions of higher learning, and some have followed in his footsteps by later heading the Sanskrit Department at Rajasthan University, like Dr. Hari Ram Acharya, Prof. Basant Jaitley and Dr. Subhash Taneja.

Dr. Bhargava remained as Head of the Sanskrit Department at Rajasthan University for an extended period of 12 years (1961-73), before which he was the Head of the Sanskrit Department of the newly created Rajasthan College, Jaipur, for several years. He was also a Visiting Professor at Punjabi University, Patiala for a year and a Visiting Professor of Religion at McMaster University in Canada where he taught for two years.

Dr. Bhargava contributed to the advancement of Rajasthan University in many capacities, scholarly as well as administrative. He started the prestigious scholarly publication “Rajasthan University Studies in Sanskrit” and served as its Editor. He also

served as the Dean of the Faculty of Sanskrit Studies and as the Director of the School of Humanities and continued to introduce new ideas and make constant improvements in the curriculum.

Another admirable initiative Dr. Bhargava took as Professor and Head of the Sanskrit Department at Rajasthan University, and prior to that at Rajasthan College, was to popularize Sanskrit by staging plays in Sanskrit. He directed many Sanskrit plays depicting interesting scenarios from various famous plays such as *Shakuntalam*, *Mrcchhatikam*, and *Swapna Vasavadattam*. He wrote the script in easy-to-understand Sanskrit and spent enormous amounts of time training the students to enact their roles properly and pronounce Sanskrit dialogues correctly and clearly.

Among his recruits for actors in his plays was Govardhan Asrani, who played the part of "Vidushak" in the scenes from *Mrcchhatikam* and who then went on to become a famous comedian in Indian feature films. Several years later, Asrani met with Dr. Bhargava and expressed his heartfelt gratitude towards him for initiating him into acting through the Sanskrit plays.

The part of Udayana in one of his plays, depicting a scene from *Swapna Vasavadattam*, was played by one of his brilliant foreign students Johannes Bronkhorst, who (as already mentioned) is now a well-known Indologist. Prof. Bhargava's Sanskrit plays in Jaipur were widely attended and highly appreciated and enjoyed by even the layman audience, who walked away with a happy feeling of having learnt many conversational Sanskrit phrases while being entertained by the wonderful student actors.

Professor Bhargava was also a very popular and frequent speaker at All India Radio, Jaipur where he gave many talks for the benefit and education of the general public on various topics of interest from Sanskrit literature.

Dr. Bhargava has had the rare distinction of being a profound scholar of both Sanskrit and History. He had equal command on the three languages of Sanskrit, Hindi and English and wrote and lectured extensively in all three. But he had an interest in all world languages. For example, in 1970, he took up learning Italian so that he could correspond in Italian with his good friend of many years, Professor Oscar Botto, the former President of CESMEO.

Today, due to his numerous and remarkable scholarly

contributions, Dr. Bhargava is highly regarded by the scholarly community of Sanskrit and Indic Studies as one of the leading scholars of our times. Among his more recent honors include the title of “Vidyamahodadhi” awarded by the Rashtriya Ved Vidya Pratishtan and Vedic Sanskriti Pracharak Sangh. In 1995, he was honored at the Rashtrapati Bhavan by the President of India as one of the great Sanskrit scholars of our time.

Despite his immense achievements, Dr. Bhargava remained always an extremely humble, gentle, generous, and kind person, a true rshi in every sense of the word, who has truly set an example for future generations to follow. He passed away in 2002, leaving behind Śrīmati Shanti Bhargava, his wife for 68 years, his three children Mira, Shobhana, and Divakar, and five grandchildren.

For his extraordinary accomplishments, including his involvement in the life of Rajasthan University, his unique contributions to the advancement and rise of the Sanskrit Department and Rajasthan University, his outstanding and deep work as a research scholar, his devotion and commitment to teaching and his love for his students, his relentless and innovative attempts to popularize Sanskrit among the masses and his deeply inspiring legacy, Rajasthan University is happy to have made this humble attempt to express its gratitude to him by bringing world scholars together at a conference in December 2009 marking his birth centenary.

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Major Books

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- *Vedic Religion and Culture*, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 1994.
- *Chandragupta Maurya*, Second Edition, D.K. Printworld, 1996.
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- *Founder of India's Civilization*, Second Edition, Ajanta Books International, Delhi, 2000.
- *India in the Vedic Age*, Third Edition, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 2001.
- *Bhagavadgita As It Was*, Publication Scheme, Jaipur, 2008.
- *Sahitya Vimarsh*, Second Edition, Publication Scheme, Jaipur, 2009.

On December 18th-21st 2009, at Jaipur, an International Conference in Honor of the 100th Birth Anniversary of Professor P. L. Bhargava was organized by the Department of Sanskrit, University of Rajasthan.



The Conference, entitled “Sanskrit and the history of early India”, has been held at the Department of Sanskrit, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, to commemorate the Birth Centenary Celebrations of Dr. P. L. Bhargava who was the founder head of the Department of Sanskrit, University of Rajasthan.

It is because of his services and blessings that this department has flourished and risen to fame as one of the principle centers of Sanskrit learning in India. Historically Jaipur, popularly known as the “Pink city”, is not only known for its tourist attraction but has also been a very old center of Sanskrit learning. Even in modern times it is remembered as the “other Kashi” because of a galaxy of scholars that belonged to Jaipur. Dr. P. L. Bhargava was and continues to be one of the shining stars of this Galaxy and there can be no better way to remember him but to hold a conference in Jaipur to re-visit his contribution and to talk about the subjects that were very dear to him.



Governor Kamalaji lighting the lamp at the ceremony, while Vinod Shastri, conference organizer, Furqan Qamar, Vice Chancellor of Rajasthan University, and Johannes Bronkhorst, lecturer at the Conference look on in background

Convener: Dr. Furqan Qamar - Vice Chancellor, University of Rajasthan.

Organizers: Professor Laxmi Sharma (Organizing Secretary); Professor Bina Agrawal; Professor Madan Sharma; Professor Rajesh Kumar Punia; Professor Ram Singh; Professor Sunita Sharma 1; Professor Sunita Sharma 2; Professor Chandramani Chauhan; Professor Jyotsna Vashishth; Professor Mahipal Yadav; Professor Monica Jain; Professor Basant Jaitley; Professor Vinay Kumari Sharma.

International Advisory Board; Professor Johannes Bronkhorst, University of Lausanne (Chair); Professor Devarshi Kalanath Shastri, Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Sanskrit University; Professor Manjul Bhargava, Princeton University.

Coordinator: Professor Vinod Shastri.

Programme

December 18th

Welcome Dinner

December 19th

Inaugural Function: Welcome by Dr. Vinod Shastri;
Honouring of Special Guests; Remarks by Shri Divakar
Bhargava; Plenary Address by Dr. Vachaspati Upadhyaya,
Vice-Chancellor, S.L.B.S. Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth,
Delhi; Remarks by Dr. Johannes Bronkhorst, University
of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland; Remarks by Shri
Pratapsingh Khatchariavas; Remarks by Honorable Vice-
Chancellor Dr. Farhan Qamar; Remarks by Chief Guest The
Honorable Governor Kamala ji; Expression of Thanks by
Dr. Lakshmi Sharma.

Plenary Lecture: Dr. Devarshi Kala Nath Shastry

Plenary Lecture: Dr. Greg Bailey, La Trobe University,
Bundoora, Australia: *The Puranas as Sources for History,
but what kind of history?*

Invited Lecture: Dr. Abhijit Ghosh, Jadavpur University,
Kolkata, India: *Rationale Behind the Parentages of the
Pandavas: Honouring the Sequence of a Vedic Tradition?*

Invited Lecture: Dr. Liudmila Khokhlova, Institute of Asian
and African Studies, Moscow, Russia: *Traces of Indo-Aryan
on the Territory of Former Soviet Union and Russia*

Invited Lecture: Dr. Hari Ram Acharya, Former Professor,
University of Rajasthan

December 20th

Plenary Lecture: Dr. Ashok Aklujkar, University of British
Columbia, Vancouver, Canada: *Why Asoka is older than he
looks*

Plenary Lecture: Dr. Johannes Bronkhorst, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland: *Candragupta Maurya and His Importance for Indian History*

Plenary Lecture: Dr. Irma Piovano, Director CESMEO, International Institute for Advanced Asian Studies, Torino, Italy: *Some Notes about the Cārucaryāśataka of Kṣemendra*

Invited Lecture: Dr. Madan Mohan Sharma, Professor, University of Rajasthan

Invited Lecture: Dr. Boris Zakharyin, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow, Russia: *Soviet and Russian Historians on Aryans' Problem (A Synopsis)*

Invited Lecture: Dr. Subhash Taneja, Former Professor, University of Rajasthan: *Kalhana ki Rajtarangini*

December 21st

Plenary Lecture by Dr. Satyavrat Shastri, Honorary Professor, Special Centre for Sanskrit Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Valedictory Function



Dr. Vachaspati Upadhyaya paying respects to Dr. P.L. Bhargava



P.L. Bhargava's daughter Mira Bhargava.



Vinod Shastri, conference organizer, speaking



Dr. Vachaspati Upadhyaya speaking



Johannes Bronkhorst speaking



Furqan Qamar, Vice Chancellor of Rajasthan University, speaking



Greg Bailey speaking

