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Vocabulary for New Testament Theology in India

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A. INTRODUCTORY

The purpose of this paper is to consider the extent to which, in spite of the many languages of theological study and discourse in India, we may have a common vocabulary for some of the most important terms in New Testament theology—or conversely, may lack such a common vocabulary. This is a question of growing importance today when we are trying to gain a common theological understanding across old religious and geographical boundaries and when, at the same time, a rapidly increasing mobility within India is bringing together Christians formerly separated by linguistic and other barriers.

The method followed will be to note, admittedly in a superficial way, a selection of terms that are in use in our modern Indian languages. These terms are drawn from two sources: first, a larger group of terms drawn from translations of the New Testament in Indian languages; and, second, a smaller group of terms not found, or rarely found, in New Testament translation which have been used by Indian writers in their exposition of important truths set forth in the New Testament. In both of these groups

the selection of terms has been to some extent arbitrary, but not wholly so. In general the attempt has been made to choose terms that bear some relation to Christology or to soteriology. This has been done in the belief that the two most important questions which the biblical theologian is required to answer in India are:

- (1) Who is Jesus Christ, for whom Christians make such high claims?
- (2) What is the Gospel of salvation which Christians consider it their responsibility to make known?

In the languages to which reference is made, an effort has been made to include most of those languages which are used as media for theological instruction or in which Christian theological literature of note has been published. Some very serious omissions will, however, be observed. The chief reason for these omissions is the lack of any competence to speak concerning them.

The languages noted here, with the abbreviations used for them, are as follows:

- (1) The Sanskrit-related group of languages:

B. Bengali	G. Gujarati	H. Hindi
Mar. Marathi	O. Oriya	S. Sanskrit

- (2) Languages which have borrowed extensively from Sanskrit:

K. Kannada	Mal. Malayalam	Tel. Telugu
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From the first group above the chief omissions are Punjabi (Gurumukhi) and Nepali. Both of these are at present in process of establishing themselves as media of importance for theological study and writing. From the second group a glaring omission is Tamil (occasionally referred to here as Tam.). Tamil has borrowed Sanskrit terminology extensively in the past, but at present is in the process of rejecting most of this. Only a person who is intimately acquainted with current developments there could speak with any relevance of present theological usage in the Tamil language. The omission of Tamil from this study might be considered a fatal flaw, as the Christian Church is possibly more advanced theologically in Tamilnad than in any other part of the country. One mitigating feature, however, is that, although most of us may not understand terminology used currently in Tamil, Tamil-speaking Christians are pretty sure to understand most of the Sanskrit terminology which we use, even though they tend to avoid the use of it themselves. Another omission which may be noted from the second group is Santali. This has largely a theological vocabulary of its own, but it has borrowed in a small way from Sanskrit as well.

Two languages of note lie entirely outside the above groups. These are Urdu, of major importance in Pakistan and still of some importance in north-west India, and Lushai, the importance of which as a medium for the training of ordinands and for significant

Christian theological writing is not always recognized. Special competence would be needed to speak of either of these, hence no reference is made to them here.

The notes which follow are based on the following sources:

I. *Studies in New Testament Translation :*

1. J. S. M. Hooper, *Greek New Testament Terms in Indian Languages*, B.S.I.C., 1957.
2. W. Perston, *Sanskrit words : Supplement to J. S. M. Hooper's Indian Word List*, N.D. (circ. 1960).
3. Bible Translators' Conference, Jabalpur, October, 1960. Two papers presented at this were published in the *Indian Journal of Theology*, Jan.-Mar. and Apr.-June, 1961. Full report in *The Bible Translator*, April, 1962.

II. *Studies in Theological Vocabulary :*

1. Pierre Fallon, *A Glossary of Bengali Religious Terms*, N.D. (Imprimatur, 1945).
2. C. Bulcke and R. Sah, *A Technical English-Hindi Glossary*, Ranchi: Dharmik Sahitya Samiti, 1955.
3. *Suggestions Towards an English-Hindi Glossary of Theological Terms*, Hindi Theological Literature Committee, 1958.
4. *A Telugu Theological Glossary*, Telugu Theological Literature Committee, N.D. (circ. 1961).
5. *English-Tamil Theological Vocabulary*, Tamil Theological Literature Committee, 1961.
6. *An English-Hindi Glossary of Theological Terms*, Hindi Theological Literature Committee, 1963.
7. *English-Malayalam Glossary of Theological Terms*, Theological Literature Committee of Kerala Christian Council, 1963.
8. Seminar on Theological Terminology in Sanskrit Languages, Bengal Christian Literature Centre, Barrackpore, July 8-18, 1964. (Representatives of the following languages participated: Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, Oriya, Nepali, Telugu, Sanskrit).

III. *Other sources :*

1. V. Chakkarai, *Jesus The Avatār*, C.L.S., Second edition, 1930.
2. V. Chakkarai, *The Cross and Indian Thought*, C.L.S., 1932.
3. S. Estborn, *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, C.S.L., 1954.

4. R. Pannikar, 'The Integration of Indian Philosophical and Religious Thought', *Religion and Society*, June, 1958, pp. 22-29.
5. Peter May, 'The Trinity and Saccidananda', *I.J.T.*, July-Sept., 1958, pp. 92-98.
6. S. J. Samartha, 'The Modern Hindu View of History', *Religion and Society*, October, 1959, pp. 22-40.
7. Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai, *Prema Tattva Darshana*, Literature Committee, Gujarat Church Council, U.C.N.I., 1963.
8. Report of a Seminar on 'The Christian Approach to the Hindu through Literature', Nagpur, July, 1963. Published by the Christian Literature Service Association (C.L.S., Madras).
9. *Religion and Society*, September, 1963, especially the following:
 - (a) Editorial, pp. 1-6.
 - (b) R. V. DeSmet, 'Categories of Indian Philosophy and Communication of the Gospel', pp. 20-26.
 - (c) R. C. Das, 'My Spiritual Pilgrimage', pp. 48-54.
 - (d) Y. D. Tiwari, 'From Vedic Dharma to Christian Faith', pp. 63-69.
 - (e) Report and Findings of Conference on Philosophy and Religion, pp. 78-84.
10. *Bulletin of the Society for Biblical Studies*, January, 1964.
11. Mark Sunder Rao, *Ananyatva*, C.I.S.R.S., 1964.

B. TERMS USED IN NEW TESTAMENT TRANSLATION

In the notes which follow the Greek term is given first. This is followed by the most widely used renderings in Indian languages. An attempt is made to show broad trends only; an adequate study would require a separate paper for each N.T. term.

1. AGAPĒ, etc.; PHILIA, etc.: Throughout both the first and second groups of languages noted above, with the exception of Mal., these are translated as either *prema* or *prīti*. Both of these come from the Sanskrit root *prī* and are known throughout both these groups of languages. Mal. uses *sneha*, which is understood throughout the other languages of both groups, and is used also by O. and Tel. in some contexts.

H. K. Moulton in *The Bible Translator*, April, 1962, pp. 72 f., notes the difficulty in using the English word 'love' for the N.T. AGAPĒ because of the many other meanings that the English word carries in ordinary use. In our Indian languages this difficulty is largely obviated through the availability of such words as *vātsalya*, *kāma*, *pranaya*, etc., for aspects of love which are not closely related to the N.T. terms.

It is to be noted further that the two terms, *prema* and *prīti*, current in our Indian languages, provide scope for discussion of whether there is any material difference in meaning between the Greek terms AGAPĒ and PHILIA.

2. ALĒTHEIA: This is used with reference to Jesus particularly in St. John's Gospel, where Jesus is shown as the revealer of truth (e.g. 1: 14; 5: 33; 8: 32, 40; 14: 17; 16: 13) and as himself the truth (14: 6). Here the meaning of truth extends to that of ultimate reality. In this sense all our Indian versions, of both the first and the second groups, use *satya* or some variant of it. *Satya* is particularly appropriate here. It is cognate with and almost exactly parallel in meaning to the Greek word OUSIA, which played so important a part in early Christian theology. *Satya*, indeed, has one important advantage over the Greek OUSIA in that the participial forms *sant* and *sati* have definitely a personal reference (cf. H. K. Moulton, *The Bible Translator*, April, 1962, pp. 76 f.).
3. APHESIS: The versions, of both the groups noted above, are almost equally divided between the group *mocana*, *vimocana*, *mukti* (all from the Sanskrit root *muc*) and the noun *kshamā* (also from Sanskrit). All of these terms are understood throughout the languages of both groups. The reason for the division is not linguistic. It rises from the N.T. exegetical problem whether APHESIS means release from some bond or whether it connotes the fuller restoration of fellowship with God which is suggested by the English word 'forgiveness'. (On the exegesis, see J. C. Hindley, *The Bible Translator*, April, 1962, p. 103). In any case, our Indian languages have a common terminology for the discussion of the problem.
4. DIATHĒKĒ (e.g. Mark 14: 24 and parallels): Here the versions show a wide variety of renderings. The reason for this divergence appears to be partly linguistic and partly exegetical. The exegesis has been discussed carefully by J. C. Hindley in *The Bible Translator*, April, 1962, pp. 90-101. The chief renderings are as follows: *niyama* (B., Mal., O.), *nibandha* (Tel.), *vyavasthāna*, *sandhi*, *vācā* (various Hindi versions), and *karāra* (G., Mar.). The last of these is from Arabic. The others are of Sanskrit origin, but perhaps none of them, except possibly *niyama*, is widely known throughout the Sanskrit-related languages or those that have borrowed from Sanskrit. *Vidhāna*, a Sanskrit word that has been used outside N.T. translation, is probably much more widely known.
5. DIKĒ (DIKAIOS, DIKAIOSUNĒ, DIKAIŌŌ, DIKAIŌMA, DIKAIŌSIS): The versions under consideration translate these by three words (or by derivatives from them): *dharma*, *nīti*, and *nyāya*. All of these are from Sanskrit and are understood widely throughout both groups of languages. The difference in translations is partly exegetical, relating to the exact meaning of justice, justification, and righteousness in the N.T. (On the exegesis

cf. J. C. Hindley, *op. cit.*, pp. 103–108). Both the Jabalpur Translators' Conference and the Barrackpore Seminar commended particularly the use of *dharma* and related words wherever possible.

It has often been noted that in English we have difficulty in giving an adequate exegesis of the above group of Greek words because this unitary group has in English been split into two groups: (a) 'justice', and related words; (b) 'righteousness', and related words. In India, in the case of *dharma* (and perhaps also *nyāya* and *nīti*, if used consistently throughout) we have the opportunity of using a single group of Indian words for the corresponding group in Greek.

In the case of *dharma* one final point may be noted. As a description of the relation of man to God in the state of final beatitude, S. J. Samartha (*op. cit.*, p. 39) has particularly commended the use of *sādharmya* rather than *sālokya*.

6. ΖΩĒ (e.g. John 14:6, of Jesus; 1:4; 3:15, etc., of life in and through Jesus): All of the versions under consideration, plus Tamil, have a common Sanskrit term for this, namely *jīvana*.
7. THEOS: The versions under consideration are about equally divided between the use of *īshvara* (*parameshvara*) and *deva*. Both are from Sanskrit and are understood throughout both language groups.
8. HILASTĒRION (Rom. 3:25), HILASMOS (1 John 2:2): The versions under consideration have either *prāyascitta* (B., G., H., Mal., Mar., O.) or a compound formed from *kripā* (K., Mal.; Tel. is closely similar). Both are understood throughout the two groups of languages under consideration. The difference in translation is partly dependent on exegesis. (On the exegesis cf. J. C. Hindley, *op. cit.* pp. 108 f.)
9. KURIOS: The versions have *prabhu* (B., G., H., K., Mar., O., Tel.), *svāmī* (H., K., Mar.), and *kartā* (K., Mal., O.; also Tam.). All are from Sanskrit and are known throughout the range of languages under consideration here.

It is to be noted that, outside of N.T. translation, the term *bhagavān* has been used by many Christians. Possibly its use is most frequent among Roman Catholics, where it has been used both in worship and in serious theological studies. This again is a Sanskrit term which is known throughout both groups of languages considered here.

10. LOGOS: A majority of the versions (B., G., H., K., Mal., Mar., O., Tel.) use a direct derivative of the Vedic word *vāc*. A few (G., H., Mar.) use the Sanskrit word *śabda*. Both are understood throughout the range of languages under consideration.

It is to be noted that scholarly opinion has recently tended increasingly to favour the use of *śabda* when speaking of Jesus as the Logos (cf. Bulcke and Sah, s.v.; *English-Hindi Theological Glossary*, s.v.; *The Bible Translator*, April, 1962, p. 88; the Barrackpore Seminar).

11. LUTRON (e.g. Mark 10 : 45), APOLUTRŌSIS (e.g. Rom. 3 : 24; Eph. 1 : 7; Col. 1 : 14): Here the versions show a very wide variety of renderings. The only Sanskrit influence of any extent is to be found in formations from the root *muc*, as in *mukti-mūlya* (B., O.) and *vimocana-kraya-dhana* (Tel.). The variations in translation are partly a matter of exegesis, the chief exegetical point being how much weight should be given to the literal meaning of LUTRON as 'ransom-price' (cf. J. C. Hindley, *op. cit.*, pp. 110 f.).
12. PISTIS, etc.: The versions under consideration here, also Tamil, have a common rendering, the Sanskrit word *vishvāsa*. It might be noted that in occurrences in the N.T. where PISTIS has the meaning 'faithfulness' (e.g. Rom. 3 : 3) the related word *vishvastatā* is available for use.
13. SŌTĒRIA (SŌZŌ, SŌTĒR): A majority of the versions have *trāna*, or a compound formed from it (B., G., H., Mar., O.). Others (K., Mal., Tel.) have *rakshā*. Both are Sanskrit and are well-known throughout both groups of languages under consideration. Also Sanskrit, but perhaps not widely known in other languages, is *uddhāra*, which is found in some Hindi renderings. The difference between *trāna* and *rakshā* is largely a matter of two aspects of the meaning of the verb SŌZŌ itself which are noted in Greek lexicons, namely 'rescue' vs. 'preserve', 'save' vs. 'keep safe' 'make well' vs. 'keep in health'. *Trāna* in each case tends to draw attention to the former meaning and *rakshā* to the latter.
14. CHARIS: The versions under consideration have either *anugraha* (B., H., K., Mar., O.) or *kripā* (G., K., Mal., Mar., Tel.). Both are Sanskrit and both are well-known throughout the range of languages considered here.

In the above 14 important N.T. words or groups of words it is to be noted that in the renderings of 12 of them we have a mutually intelligible vocabulary throughout nearly the whole range of languages under consideration. In the case of only two of these terms, namely DIATHĒKĒ and LUTRON, do we seem to lack such a common basis for intelligible discourse.

In the case of certain terms, we noted that translation and exegesis are inter-related. It would appear that for most of these we have a common vocabulary in which to discuss these exegetical questions. Again in the case of DIATHĒKĒ and LUTRON, and related words, it would appear that such a common basis is lacking.

C. TERMS USED OUTSIDE NEW TESTAMENT TRANSLATION

Bishop Chellappa, in his opening address at the Indian Conference of Biblical Scholars held at Madras in August, 1963 (the conference at which this Society was constituted), pointed out that biblical theology, if it is to fulfil its function in India, must be related to both the Church and the world (*Bulletin*, p. 3). In

India the 'world' to which our theology must be related is largely a non-Christian world. Can we be related to that world unless we use language understood by it? If there is to be a relatedness to that non-Christian environment, does that mean first learning from it in order that we may speak to it? R. Pannikar (*op. cit.*, p. 25) has reminded us that 'A theology deaf to the environment where it has to live would become very soon also dumb for that milieu.'

The Editors of *Religion and Society* (Sept., 1963, p. 4) recommend the borrowing of terminology from Hindu religious and philosophical sources. They write: 'There is a common terminology that has remained as the basis of philosophical discourse in India between the different schools of philosophy. The schools have given their own meanings to these terms. The same method can be adopted by Christian thinkers in India, that is, of taking the basic terms of Indian thought and redefining them so as to convey the distinctive Christian message. This would greatly enrich the presentation of the Gospel message and take the Christian faith into the Indian world of religious discourse.' R. C. Das (*op. cit.*, pp. 56-58) similarly commends such borrowing. The following sentences in particular may be noted: 'Christian writers and thinkers should use Hindu religious terminology more abundantly and without fear . . . I suggest that it is usually those who are ignorant of the thought forms of the Hindu mind and the vocabularies of the Indian languages who see red when any attempt is made to naturalize Christianity. While it is true that no human word can convey the full Christian meaning, I venture to state that Hindu terms are excellent vehicles of expression for Christian truths. We must realize the injury done to the Christian cause in India through overmuch caution in this respect.' Y. D. Tiwari (*op. cit.*, p. 67) suggests the adoption of a more discriminating attitude. He writes: 'I shall use the literary vocabulary of Sanskrit language, its idioms, figures of speech, its literary allusions, so far as they harmonize with our present-day usage and needs, *but*, as far as possible, *not the Hindu philosophical terms.*' His rejection of Hindu technical terminology is, however, not complete. He states that, whereas he would avoid such terms as *avatāra* and *advaita*, he would adopt for Christian use a word like *mukti* (*loc. cit.*).

At least two recent study conferences have assumed that there will be Christian borrowing from non-Christian sources and, on that assumption, have suggested certain guiding principles. The Report and Findings of the Conference on Philosophy and Religion in India (*Religion and Society*, Sept. 1963, p. 80) suggests two such principles. The first is that there is no virtue merely in seeking novelty and in borrowing for the sake of borrowing. We must not overlook the power and effectiveness of the language of the Bible itself in theological exposition. The second is that, where we may consider it necessary to go outside the vocabulary of the Bible, we may borrow freely and legitimately 'with the conviction

that all truth is ultimately one, and that all truth ultimately coheres in Christ'. Similarly, the Report of the Nagpur Seminar on the Christian Approach to the Hindu through Literature (p. 3) assumes that there will be such borrowing, and offers the following as guiding principles:

- (a) 'Use Indian terminology and categories of thought where these are understood by prospective readers and can be made vehicles of Christian truth.'
- (b) 'Make clear, either by definition or by context, the precise Christian sense in which you wish your key terms to be understood.'
- (c) 'If necessary, justify the meaning you have attached to a particular term, especially if there are other ways of understanding it.'

The above opinions and suggestions have been noted, not with a view either to endorsing them or dissenting from them, but rather in order to emphasize one point, namely, that the question of our borrowing theological terminology from non-Christian sources has engaged the serious attention of persons who are competent to speak on the subject. It is more relevant to our immediate purpose to note the actual terminology which Christian writers have used in their exposition of important New Testament matters. The following are noted as terms of some significance:

1. *Avatāra* : This is a term which Christians have discussed back and forth for years. One might say that it has been discussed to death. Out of all the discussion it would seem that two points emerge which are of note: (a) If the term is to be used in Christian theology at all, it must take its definition from Jesus as he is shown in the Gospels. Who Jesus himself is may not be defined in terms of any previous meaning of *avatāra*. (b) If the word is considered suitable for Christian use, it has the advantage that it is understood throughout the entire range of languages with which this paper is concerned.
2. *Karma* : This has sometimes been used by Christians in their exposition of New Testament teaching. Two examples may be noted:
 - (a) S. Estborn (*op. cit.*, p. 186) writes: 'If *karma* is made to signify all the effects and consequences of sin, in its corporate as well as its individual aspects, the Gospel is the stupendous news that Christ has taken our *karma* upon Himself and thereby broken its power and made us free from it.'
 - (b) Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai (*op. cit.*), whether familiar with what Estborn had written or not, develops the same point a little further. He speaks of God as sharing in the *karma* of the whole human race. This is shown most clearly in the life and death of Christ. His suffering on the cross was a bearing of men's

karma, and at the same time the means by which they may be freed from it.

Karma is a term understood throughout the range of languages dealt with here.

3. *Guru* : This has sometimes been used by Christians when referring to Jesus. J. C. Hindley (*Bulletin of the Society for Biblical Studies*, p. 59) has offered the tentative suggestion that it might be able in India to fulfil in some measure the function of the designation 'Son of Man' in the Gospels, a term that gained its significance from what Jesus himself was and did rather than from any meaning which it may have had before he used it. This, again, is a term which, if Christians decide to use it, will be understood throughout the main languages of India.
4. *Nirguna-saguna* : These are terms with a long and important history in Hindu philosophical usage. R. V. DeSmet (*Religion and Society*, Sept., 1963, p. 22) calls *nirguna Brahman* 'the most personal being', but admits that this conception 'does not clearly connote the possibility of interpersonal exchange between the pure Absolute and man'. If it is desired to use these terms in attempting to define the relation of Jesus to the being of God, perhaps the chief question will be whether *nirguna* even allows scope for 'interpersonal exchange'. I am not able to say to what extent these Sanskrit terms are known and used throughout the two groups of languages referred to in this paper, but I suspect that they will be familiar to a minority of both Hindus and Christians in most of our Indian language areas.
5. *Purusha (paramapurusha, mūla purusha, pusushottama)* : These terms were used extensively, and some would consider very effectively, by V. Chakkarai (e.g. *Jesus the Avatār*, pp. 73 f., 128, 159, 191; *The Cross and Indian Thought*, pp. 85 f). In older Christian use of the term *purusha*, it may be noted that in the translation of the Athanasian Creed in earlier editions of the Hindi *Book of Common Prayer* (until at least 1932) 'Person' in the Trinity is rendered as *purusha*. This point would not be of any major significance, except for the probability that the rendering comes from Pandit Nilkantha Shastri, one of the greatest of Christian Indian scholars (cf. R. D. Paul, *Chosen Vessels*, C.S.L., 1961, p. 242.)
Recently *purusha* and related terms have attracted renewed attention among Christian writers (cf. *English-Hindi Glossary*, 1963, s.v. 'person'; Barrackpore Seminar, 1964). If Christians should decide to make fuller use of this group of terms, they would be understood widely throughout the area of the languages noted in this study.
6. *Yoga (sanyoga, sahayoga, karamyoga, bhaktiyoga, jnānayoga, sāyujya)* : All of these terms, derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, have been used by Christians, especially in describing that relation of the believer to God which St. Paul refers to as 'in

Christ'. Almost the entire group of words has been used with unusual effectiveness by Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai (*op. cit.*) as stepping-stones leading up to his newly-coined expression *premayoga*, 'union of love', within which all the lesser kinds of *yoga* are subsumed. Mark Sunder Rao (*Ananyatva*, p. 3) uses *yoga* for the 'at-one-ment' which is given in Christ. This he describes further as *sāyujya* and *ananyatva*. *Yoga* and most of the related words noted above are widely known throughout India.

7. *Saccidānanda*: This Sanskrit term, formed by joining the words *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*, has been used with considerable frequency by Christians. Earlier Christian use of this threefold designation for the Trinity was noted by Peter May (*I.J.T.*, July-Sept., 1958). Chakkarai also used it of the Trinity (*Jesus the Avatār*, p. 179). Recently it has been used by Mark Sunder Rao (*op. cit.*, p. 34). In particular, he equates *sat* (*satya*) with the Greek OUSIA. Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai (*op. cit.*) has used *saccidānanda* to designate the different complementary aspects of God which are known in Christian experience. But, he adds, all of these are enfolded within God's comprehending love. If Christians should wish to develop further such uses of *saccidānanda*, they could assume that they would be understood widely throughout India.

It may be noted that the above seven words or groups of words are from Sanskrit. All of them, with perhaps some reservation in the case of *nirguna* and *saguna*, are widely known throughout the two main groups of Indian languages noted here.

D. CONCLUSIONS

This paper began with the question whether, in spite of the many languages of theological study and discourse in India, we have a common vocabulary for some of the most important terms in New Testament theology. The attempt to answer this question has led to a consideration of a selection of important New Testament words, and also a smaller number of words outside the New Testament which have been used in the exposition of New Testament truths. If this sampling of terms has been a reasonably representative one, and if the comments on them have been in some measure appropriate, it would appear that the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. We are not condemned in India today to a modern Babel of mutual unintelligibility. We have means available for significant theological communication across language barriers.

2. We are likely to improve this means of communication by using it.

3. Such communication across language barriers should be a stimulus to significant theological expression through the medium of our Indian languages.