

# Meri Atmakahani

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It is a common practice to write reviews on the recently published books. In this way readers are introduced to the current publications and their authors. It is very rare to find reviews on the books published in distant past. Readers are also generally inclined to read new books. Perhaps only researchers quote selected content from old books in their publications or theses. Contrary to this, I wish to avail here an opportunity to introduce, particularly for the benefit of the young readers, a century old autobiography of a great Hindi litterateur, Babu Shyam Sunder Das (1875- 1945). I found his autobiography “*Meri Atmakahani*” While searching something else online. Out of curiosity I downloaded it and read the whole book in a week’s time.

The autobiography was published in 1941 by the Indian Press Limited, Prayag in Hindi. It contains twelve chapters covered in 284 pages. The book downloaded through Internet bears the stamp of the library of Allahabad University. The chapters of the book are:

1. *Vansh Parichay aur Shiksha*, 2. *Nagari Pracharini Sabha*, 3. *Adalaton me Nagari*, 4. *Hindi Vaigyanik Kosh*, 5. *Hindi ki Lekh tatha Lipi Pranali*, 6. *Hastlikhit Hindi Pustakon ki Khoj*, 7. *Anya Kaarya*, 8. *Aapattiyon ka Pahaad*, 9. *Hindi Shabda Saagar*, 10. *Lucknow ka Pravaas*, 11. *Kashi Vishvavidyalaya*, and 12. *Kuchh Vyaktigat Baten*

The book is written in the simplest possible language. It can be recommend to young researchers, esp. those engaged in the field of literature, humanities and social science. Not simply to be aware about the author’s personal, but educative, life but to have a feel of the ways and methodologies of working and the sense of dedication and commitment towards the society and the nation, as demonstrated by a number of litterateurs of those days.

Apparently, Babu Sham Sunder Das was one of the great litterateurs of the last decade of 19th century and the

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first half of the 20th century who dedicated their lives for the development of Hindi language and literature. While reading the book I passed through a thrilling feeling of the struggle of different litterateurs for the progress of Hindi language and literature during the British time. When Babu Sham Sunder Das was only eighteen years’ old and was studying in class twelve he along with his friends founded *Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha* in Prayag. He has written in detail about how *Nagari Pracharini Sabha* made significant contributions for the progress of Devnagari script and the developing Hindi literature.

During those days the correspondence with the people and the paperwork in courts was done in Persian script. Nagari script did not have due recognition. It was due to the efforts of some learned persons and dignitaries and the *Nagari Pracharini Sabha* that British Administration recognised and accepted the use of Nagari script along with Persian in courts and offices for correspondence with the general public. This movement continued for two years. Ultimately the government decided that (1) all people can submit their applications in Nagari or Persian script according to their wish, (2) all summons, notifications and other letters issued by the government court or offices in State language will be issued in Persian and Nagari scripts.

The *Nagari Pracharini Sabha* felt the need of writing scientific books in Hindi. But there was problem of the unavailability of proper technical terms in Hindi. The autobiography describes how the task of development of the foremost thesaurus of technical terms of Physics, Geography, Mathematics, Astrology, Economics, Chemistry and Philosophy in Hindi was carried out under the aegis of the *Nagari Pracharini Sabha*. Another task narrated in the book was related to establishing uniformity in the Hindi writing and script system which was the foremost initial step in this direction.

The book narrates the story of development of the Hindi dictionary “*Hindi Shabda Saagar*”. It is said that at that time, among all the dictionaries available in other

Indian languages, none was at par with "*Hindi Shabda Saagar*". The process of development of this dictionary was novel and exemplary and it took nearly twenty years to complete it. The British Government (in the then United Province) sent a letter of congratulation to the *Nagari Pracharini Sabha* stating, that "Governor acting with his ministers congratulates Rai Sahib Shyamsundar Das on the successful completion of the Hindi Dictionary..." .

Dr G A Grierson, British Administrator and Superintendent of Linguistic Survey of India wrote, "cannot let the opportunity pass without offering my congratulations to Mr Shyam Sunder Das on the successful completion of the Hindi Shabd-Sagar, of which he has been the Chief Editor. It is a most important and valuable work, and it is every way worthy of the high reputation of a scholar, whose writings I have studied and admire for more than thirty years". Pandit Mahaveer Prasad Dwivedi appreciated the work stating, "This dictionary is at par with *Kosh Shabd-Kaipdrum*, *Shabd-Stom Mahanidhi* and the *Prachand Kosh* published in St-Pittsberg".

The sixth chapter of the book gives details about the extensive search made for the "handwritten manuscripts" of books in Hindi which were lying (as waif or deserted) with the people in close dark chambers. The autobiography provides exciting experiences of the people associated with the the *Nagari Pracharini Sabha* who went to different

provinces in search of the handwritten manuscripts. The handwritten manuscripts they found belonged from 12<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These manuscripts were also published by the Sabha in the form of books along with the names of the original authors.

When Sham Sunder Das was working in the Hindi department of Kashi Vishva Vidyalaya the students of MA, Hindi faced problems associated with the unavailability of the proper curricular material. The autobiography mentions how Babu Shyam Sunder Das prepared a book to meet the needs of the students, simultaneously writing the content matter, and trying out the same on students for testing its utility and carrying out improvements. There are many more interesting and exciting things to go through in the autobiography.

The book manifests that different activities carried out for the progress of Hindi language and literature demonstrated the use of scientific and novel approach, great commitment, dedication and involvement of a large number of learned people of that time and for the benefit of the society at large.

Reading about the great works on language and literature, carried out in a century old backdrop, gives you a feeling of being present in that time. This book is one of them.