

A Sanskrit Dictionary of Law and Statecraft

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A Sanskrit Dictionary of Law and Statecraft, edited by Patrick Olivelle with his students David Brick and Mark McClish, is a dictionary of technical terms from two important domains of Sanskrit texts of ancient and medieval India viz. Dharmaśāstra (texts dealing with law) and Arthaśāstra (texts dealing with statecraft). Domain-specific dictionaries are very important especially when the words in a language are loaded with meanings. Such dictionaries provide the precise meaning appropriate in a given domain.

This dictionary has around 4000 entries. Each entry has a head word printed both in Devanāgarī and IAST followed by one or more meanings in the form of definitions/explanations and a few citations where the term is used. This dictionary has two special features that we normally do not come across in normal dictionaries. I illustrate these features with an entry of “uttara” on page 94. Three meanings of this word have been provided. The second meaning is further supported by an explanatory note since the editors felt the need of further explanation to the definition provided. Such explanations are essential in order to understand the definition further.

Another special feature of this dictionary is the cross references. We are familiar with the cross references or pointers to other entries when there are spelling variations with regards to the head words. But in this dictionary, the cross references are provided to all the terms that are related to the head word. For example, under the first meaning of “uttara”, there is a list of words that are related to this meaning such as *atidośavat*, *atyalpa*, *anuttara*, etc. It is, however, not clear to me what the editors mean by ‘related’. While the ‘related’ words are given for some entries, there are some entries where these ‘related’ words would have been useful, but are missed out. One such entry is on the very next page (the last entry on page 95) for the word “uttarasākṣin”. The word means ‘indirect witness’. Further there is an explanation: “One of the five

kinds of appointed witness (*kṛtasākṣin*).” Naturally there is a curiosity to know what are the other four kind of witnesses. But there is no reference to other four types. Such an information would have been useful. Of course this in no way diminishes the quality of the dictionary.

The editors have avoided providing any etymological information and also the constituent components in case the head word is a compound. The only one exception I noticed is the case of pre-verbs or the verbal prefixes. For example, on page 75, the entry for *ākṣara* has been given as *ā√kṣara* and the entry for *ākṣip* is given as *ā√kṣip*.

The editors refer to several authors and extant works – both primary and secondary. There is an elaborate and informative introduction detailing the inception and progress of this work, followed by the information on the organisation of the entries and the list of important topics for which cross references have been provided. Editors describe the importance of this work as “Having all its technical terms in one place with illustrative references to their usage will give a bird’s eye view of the entire legal and jurisprudential system of classical India” (page xi).

It is not clear why the publisher has chosen a Tamil/ Grantha script manuscript folio as a cover design. If it has any special significance a footnote explaining the importance/relevance of this manuscript would have added value. If it is not really significant, Devanāgarī image of some manuscript of dharmaśāstra or arthaśāstra would have been appropriate.

This dictionary, like other domain specific dictionaries such as *Dictionary of Sanskrit Grammar* by K.V. Abhyankar and J.M. Shukla, the *Dictionary of Vedic Rituals* by C. Sen, *Nyāyakośa* by Jhalakikar, *Dictionary of Technical Terms in Navyanyāya* by V.N. Jha, etc. is an important milestone in the lexical resources for Sanskrit and I’m sure in the times to come this would become an indispensable resource for the researchers working in the law and spacecraft of ancient India.