

Obituary

SUMITRA MANGESH KATRE (1906–1998)

The community of Indological scholars and Indo-Aryan linguistics will note with tremendous sadness the loss of Professor Sumitra Mangesh Katre who died on October 21, 1998 at the Good Samaritan Hospital in San Jose, California. He was 92 years old.

Dr. Katre was born on April 11, 1906 in Honavar, North Kanara District of what was then the Bombay Presidency (today Karnataka State). He completed his schooling at the Ganapathy High School in Mangalore where he obtained his S.S.L.C. in 1923. He then studied at Government College in that city completing his Intermediate degree in Arts and Science in 1925 before going on to Presidency College, Madras where he earned his B.A. with Honors in Mathematics in 1928, a degree deemed equivalent to the M.A. in 1930.

After graduation Dr. Katre turned to what would prove to be the consuming intellectual passion of his life, the study of Indo-Aryan languages and linguistics. He attended the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London where he received his Ph.D. in 1931 for his dissertation entitled “Early Buddhist Ballads and their Relation to the Older Upanishads,” a work that inspired a number of scholarly essays on Pali and Middle Indic which he published during the 1930s and 1940s.

Two years after receiving his doctorate, Dr. Katre was appointed Professor of Sanskrit at Wadia College in Poona. Subsequently he served as Professor of Sanskrit at Sir Parashuram College in Poona from 1937–39 before being appointed in 1939 as Professor of Indo-European Philology at the Deccan College, an institution with which he would remain deeply involved until his retirement in 1971. During the course of his long and distinguished career at the Deccan College he served as its Director from 1942–71, the Director and General Editor of the Sanskrit Dictionary Department (1951–71), Director of the Language Project (1954–60), and Director of the Centre of Advanced Study in Linguistics (1964–69).

After his retirement Dr. Katre’s reputation as an outstanding scholar and teacher assured that he would be in great demand. Accordingly, he served as a Professor in the Department of Oriental and African languages and Literatures at the University of Texas at Austin, where he had earlier served twice as a Visiting Professor (in 1966 and 1970) from 1971 to 1976 and as a Distinguished Visiting Lecturer at the California State University at Fullerton in 1978–79.

He was an active member of numerous scholarly societies and institutes including the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain, the Société Linguistique, the Linguistic Society of America, the American Oriental Society, the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, and the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute. He was a member, also, of the Linguistic Society of India, an organization in whose reorganization he was the prime mover and which he served at various times in the capacities of Treasurer and President.

Dr. Katre was the recipient of many scholarly awards and distinctions noteworthy among which are his appointments as the Wilson Philological Lecturer at the

University of Bombay (1941–42), the Pratibha Devi Memorial Lecturer at the University of Gauhati (1957) and Special Officer of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

During the course of his long and productive scholarly career Dr. Katre authored hundreds of scholarly articles and monographs which have, collectively, vastly enriched our understanding of the languages and linguistics of North India. In addition to his contributions to the study of Pali and other Middle Indic languages, and the comparative and historical linguistics of Indo-Aryan, he turned his scholarly attention to the study of his native language, Konkani, producing several noteworthy articles and a major treatment published both as articles and in book form on the Formation of Konkani.

Later on in his career Dr. Katre turned his scholarly attention increasingly to the study of the great ancient grammarian, Panini, and his immortal grammar, the *Ashtadhyayi*. In 1967 he published his Paninian Studies including an alphabetical index of Panini's sutras, the *Dhatupatha*, and an alphabetical listing of its verbal roots. In the following year he published his useful *Dictionary of Panini* in three parts. His fascination with this seminal work culminated in the 1987 publication of his complete translation and indexing of the *Ashtadhyayi* itself, an immensely useful work that runs to more than 1300 pages.

Dr. Katre was also an editor of a Festschrift, a volume of Indological studies presented to Professor P. V. Kane on the occasion of the latter's sixty-first birthday and was himself similarly honored by his friends, colleagues, and disciples with a two-part *Katre Felicitation Volume* representing volumes 29 and 30 of the journal *Indian Linguistics* and presented to him on his sixty-fifth birthday in 1971. He also served as an editor of several important scholarly periodicals including *The New Indian Antiquary*, the *Oriental Literary Digest*, the *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, and *Indian Linguistics*.

Of all of his numerous contributions to the study of Indian languages and linguistics, perhaps none will in the end be as enduring as his visionary work in the conception and organization of the massive *Dictionary of Sanskrit on Historical Principles*. Without his prodigious intellectual, organizational, and administrative skills, this immense project, which he first envisaged in the 1940s and over whose development he presided for two decades as Director and General Editor, would never have seen the light of day.

Dr. Katre will perhaps be most warmly remembered by American Indianists in his role as the longtime Director of the Deccan College during the period when the American Institute of Indian Studies was, through his generous spirit of institutional and scholarly cooperation, headquartered on its campus. In that capacity he frequently served as a sponsor and mentor for young American Sanskritists and linguists and many of us fondly remember his warmth, his gentleness and his generosity with his time and his extraordinary learning. He was respected and loved by his faculty, staff and students so that even now, more than a quarter of a century since he retired, older scholars at the Deccan College still speak fondly of the era of his Directorship almost as a kind of Krita Yuga. His loss will be keenly felt by many of us around the world.

Dr. Katre is survived by his two daughters, Mrs. Padma Savur of San Jose, California and Ms. Lalita Katre of Pittsburg, California as well as his beloved grandchildren, Sameer and Sheela, and a great-grandson, Rishi.

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