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ISRO CHIEF SOMNATH HAILS ROLE OF SANSKRIT IN INDIA BECOMING KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY SINCE VEDIC TIMES

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Indian Space Research Organisation chairman, S. Somnath. File photo | Photo Credit: S.R. Raghunathan

India was a knowledge society since Vedic times involving Maths, medicine, metaphysics, astronomy etc written in Sanskrit, but all such learning came back to the country several thousand years later as "discoveries by Western scientists", Indian Space Research Organisation chairman S. Somnath has said.

Addressing the fourth convocation ceremony of the Maharishi Panini Sanskrit and Vedic University here on Wednesday, Mr. Somnath said Sanskrit was one of the most ancient languages of the world with its repertoire including poetry, logic, grammar, philosophy, science, technology, maths and other allied subjects.

"Surya Sidhanta, the very first book I came across in Sanskrit talks about the domain I am familiar with. This book specifically talks about solar system, how planets move around the sun, periodicity of this movement, timescales etc," he said.

"All this knowledge travelled from here, reached the Arabs, then went to Europe and thousands of years later came back to us as discoveries of great Western scientists. However, all this knowledge was written here in this language Sanskrit," Mr. Somnath asserted.

The imprint of the contribution of scientists that was expressed in Sanskrit down the ages in fields like astronomy, atmospheric sciences, biological sciences, medicine, physics, aeronautics can been seen through the journey of Indian culture, the ISRO chief added.

The point is this knowledge had not been full exploited or researched, he said, adding that inviting persons like him to talk about science and Sanskrit will help the organisers to take the next step of showing that Sanskrit can be used to easily convey scientific thought and the process of science.

Concepts like 'shunya' (zero) as well as infinity were discovered by ancient sages, while Algebra, the Pythagoras Theorem were expressed precisely and in poetic style (in Sanskrit), Mr.

Somnath said.

"Many other concepts like that of vimana, architecture, the concept of time, the structure of the universe, how it evolved and grew, metallurgy, chemical technologies, medicine treatment, languages, the structure of grammar, shastras like Nyaya, sangeet, spirituality, Yoga have been expressed beautifully in Sanskrit," he said.

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The difficulty faced by scientists of the time was that Sanskrit was expressed more in 'shruti' (sound) that in written form, which also made the language more beautiful to listen that many other languages, Mr. Somnath said.

"That's why it survived. Today you don't need that shruti structure, which is the beauty of this language as it is a formula based and logical based language. We scientists love this kind of language, which is rule based, syntax based, something which suits the computer language," he said.

Those working in the fields of Artificial Intelligence, machine learning love Sanskrit and there is a lot of research underway to see how it can be used for computing and natural language processing, the ISRO chief said.