

Śrīkhr̥ṣṭa-saṃgītā: William Hodge Mill's Sanskrit Christian Purāṇa

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Abstract:

In the wake of Christian missionaries' arrival in India, a profound engagement with Sanskrit ensued, resulting in the emergence of 'Church Sanskrit' Literature. This genre not only witnessed translations of sacred texts like the Bible but also spawned original compositions centered on Jesus Christ, serving as a vehicle for propagating the Christian faith among the Sanskrit-knowing intelligentsia. Notably, figures like William Hodge Mill played a pivotal role, crafting monumental works such as the *Śrīkhr̥ṣṭa-saṃgītā*, which garnered acclaim for its literary and scholarly merits, transcending even revered indologists of the time. His mastery of Sanskrit reached such extraordinary heights that Kamlākānta Vidyālaṅkāra, a prominent Bengali scholar, bestowed upon him unprecedented praise, elevating him above esteemed figures like William Jones, William Carey, and James Colebrooke. Vidyālaṅkāra's proclamation likened him to the rebirth of Kālidāsa, the revered ancient poet, affirming the unparalleled excellence of his Sanskrit scholarship. Meanwhile, the *Śrīkhr̥ṣṭa-saṃgītā*, while serving as a historical testament to the life of Jesus Christ, transcends mere documentation. Rooted in Western interpretations of the Gospels, it stands as a literary masterpiece, blending historical narrative with artistic expression in a manner reminiscent of the belletristic tradition.

The research paper discusses the unique attributes of the *Śrīkhr̥ṣṭa-saṃgītā* through the lens of Sanskrit Poetics, exploring its historical narrative while elucidating its impact on nineteenth-century Indian society. Through meticulous analysis, it seeks to unravel the interplay between literary artistry and historical accuracy in this seminal work, shedding light on the cultural and intellectual landscape shaped by 'Church Sanskrit' literature. By synthesizing scholarly inquiry with linguistic and literary expertise, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the profound influence of Christian narratives in Sanskrit form on the socio-cultural fabric of colonial India.

Keywords: 'Church Sanskrit' Literature, *Śrīkhr̥ṣṭa-saṃgītā*, William Hodge Mill

Introduction:

Following the arrival of Christian missionaries upon the ancient shores of India, a profound engagement with the venerable language of Sanskrit swiftly ensued. With scholarly fervor, these emissaries delved into its intricacies, meticulously parsing its grammar, compiling lexicons, and crafting literary works that echoed the profound narratives of their faith. The scriptures, both ancient and new, found their resonance in Sanskrit, resonating through translations of the *Bible*, the *Old Testament*, the *New Testament*, and

the *Sermon on the Mount*. Thus burgeoned an extensive corpus of Christian Literature, suffused with the essence of Sanskrit, aptly christened ‘Church Sanskrit’ Literature.

The fabric of this literature, woven with threads of evangelism, served as a conduit for the dissemination of Christian tenets within the rich tapestry of Sanskrit literary tradition. Unlike its Buddhist counterpart, this literary oeuvre bears no discordant notes in its phonetics nor deviates from the canonical grammatical norms of classical Sanskrit. Indeed, it embodies the epitome of linguistic fidelity, adhering meticulously to the revered rules of Sanskrit literature. Hence, it stands not only as a beacon of Christian faith but also as a testament to the harmonious fusion of cultures. Thus, it is aptly termed ‘Sanskrit Christian Literature’, a testament to the seamless integration of two venerable traditions.

Rooted in the soil of India and nurtured by the intellectual elite steeped in Sanskrit lore, ‘Church Sanskrit’ literature flourished as a testament to the symbiotic relationship between faith and culture. From the pens of both Catholic and Protestant luminaries, this evangelical literature bore witness to the transformative power of language. With Sanskrit as their vessel, these wordsmiths imbued their theological musings with a creative vigor unparalleled, seeking to kindle the flames of faith within the hearts of the Sanskrit intelligentsia. Thus, ‘Church Sanskrit’ emerges as the poignant expression of a convergence of individuals and circumstances, a cultural crucible where faith found fertile ground.

Within the expansive realm of ‘Church Sanskrit’ literature lies a treasure trove of diverse narratives, oft overlooked and under-appreciated. Richly adorned with the vibrant hues of Sanskrit poetic tradition, these kāvyas weave captivating tales centered around the lives and teachings of Christian luminaries — Jesus Christ, Mother Mary, and the Apostles Paul, Luke, and John. From the celestial strains of Mill’s *Khr̥ṣṭa-saṃgītā* to the illuminating verses of P.C. Devassia’s *Kristubhāgavata* and Soma Varma Raja’s *Śrīyeṣusaurabha*, these literary jewels sparkle with theological insight and poetic brilliance. Moreover, amidst this literary landscape, one finds works that engage in comparative discourse, such as John Muir’s *Mataparīkṣā* and *Pāpa-mocanīya-yathārthopāya- pradarsāna*, shedding light on the intersections of faith. Delving deeper, one encounters scholarly endeavors like Muir’s *Nūmodantodotsa* and *Itihāsadīpikā*, which traverse the annals of history and philosophy with erudition and finesse, serving as luminous beacons of intellectual inquiry.

William Hodge Mill:

Born on July 18, 1792, in Hackney, Middlesex, William Hodge Mill hailed from esteemed lineage, being the son of John Mill, a native of Dundee, and Martha née Hodge. His formative years were marked by diligent private tutelage under the guidance of Thomas Belsham. Subsequently, in 1809, he embarked on his academic journey at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he distinguished himself by graduating as the sixth wrangler in 1813. The following year, Mill was honored with a Fellowship, a testament to his scholarly prowess, and he furthered his academic pursuits by attaining his M.A. degree in 1816.

In 1820, Mill’s trajectory took a transformative turn with his appointment as the inaugural principal of Bishop’s College, Calcutta, a fledgling institution under the auspices of Bishop Thomas Fanshawe Middleton. Immersed in the vibrant cultural milieu of colonial India, Mill’s intellectual curiosity led him to delve into the study of Indian vernaculars, Sanskrit, and even Arabic. His erudition and dedication found expression not only in his academic duties but also in his active involvement with esteemed scholarly societies such as the Bengal Asiatic Society, where he served as Vice-President from 1833 to

1837. Mill's contributions, ranging from scholarly articles to deciphering ancient inscriptions, underscored his commitment to advancing knowledge and scholarship in the region.

However, despite his illustrious tenure in India, Mill's health necessitated his return to Europe in 1838. Undeterred by physical challenges, he continued to make significant scholarly contributions, assuming roles such as chaplain to Archbishop William Howley and Christian Advocate on the Hulse foundation at Cambridge. In 1848, Mill's scholarly acumen was further recognized with his appointment as Regius Professor of Hebrew at the University of Cambridge, a position he held concurrently with a canonry at Ely Cathedral. His lectures, notably focused on the Psalms, exemplified his profound understanding of biblical texts. Mill's legacy endured beyond his passing on December 25, 1853, as evidenced by the commemorative stained glass window installed in Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge, in his honour in 1862.

Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā: A Sanskrit Purāṇa by W.H. Mill

The dawn of the nineteenth century witnessed a remarkable flowering of original Sanskrit compositions dedicated to Christ and the Christian faith. Among these illustrious works stands tall the monumental opus known as the *Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā*, or the *Hymn to the Blessed Christ*. Comprising four expansive volumes or parvas, this magnum opus emerged in installments between 1831 and 1837 under the collective title of *Christa-saṃgītā*, also referred to as the "Sacred History of Our Lord Jesus Christ". Crafted by the adept hands of William Hodge Mill, this masterpiece occupies a paramount position in the annals of 'Church Sanskrit' literature.

William Hodge Mill, hailed as the preeminent luminary in the realm of 'Church Sanskrit', meticulously sculpted his magnum opus over the course of several years. The *Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā*, envisioned as a Sanskrit Christian purāṇa, unfolded its narrative arc through the pages of four voluminous books, and emerged as a testament to Mill's scholarly prowess and unwavering devotion to the Christian faith.

Despite his eventual return to England in 1838, Mill's dedication to refining his seminal work remained undiminished. Demonstrating a commitment to excellence, he diligently revised and expanded upon his opus, culminating in the publication of a revised second edition in 1842 from the prestigious Cambridge University Press. Through this tireless endeavor, Mill ensured that his Sanskrit Christian purāṇa continued to resonate with scholarly rigor and theological profundity.

A detailed examination of the second edition of 1842 provides a comprehensive glimpse into the rich tapestry of themes and narratives encapsulated within the *Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā*. Divided into distinct books and chapters, this Sanskrit magnum opus unfolds with a symphonic harmony, each section weaving seamlessly into the next to paint a vivid portrait of the life and teachings of Jesus

Christ. As readers embark on this literary journey, they are immersed in a sacred chronicle that transcends temporal boundaries, offering profound insights into the essence of Christian spirituality.

Chapters of *Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā* at a glance:

Table 1: Book I: *Yeṣūtpatti-parva (Book of the Birth of Jesus)*

Chapter	Title of the Chapter (In Sanskrit)	Title of the Chapter (In English)	No. of Ślokas
1	<i>Śabdāvatāraḥ</i>	<i>Incarnation of the World</i>	23
2	<i>Dhanyanamaskāraḥ</i>	<i>The Blessed Salutation</i>	28
3	<i>Mahāyohanni- janmopākhyānam</i>	<i>Account of the Birth of St. John (the Baptist)</i>	50

4	<i>Paitṛkasaṃvidupākhyānam</i>	<i>Account of the Promise to the Fathers</i>	74
5	<i>Dāvidvaṃśāvaliḥ</i>	<i>The Stem of David</i>	95
6	<i>Kumārīprasavanam</i>	<i>Virgineus partus</i>	49
7	<i>Mokṣṇāmakaraṇam</i>	<i>The Naming of the Saviour</i>	26
8	<i>Sannāyakanakṣatrodayaḥ</i>	<i>The Rising of the Star of the True Guide</i>	51
9	<i>Asmatsaheśvarapraṭiṣṭhā</i>	<i>The Presentation of Immanuel</i>	84
10	<i>Naramuktipraṭiśravaḥ</i>	<i>The Assurance of Salvation for Men</i>	80
11	<i>Anaghaśiśuvadhaḥ</i>	<i>Slaughter of the Innocent Children</i>	64
12	<i>Rājyavikāraḥ</i>	<i>The Change of Sovereignty</i>	62
13	<i>Śāstropākhyānam</i>	<i>Accounts of the Scriptures</i>	114
14	<i>Prabhuyātrākathanam</i>	<i>Story of the Journey of the Lord</i>	85
15	<i>Avatīrṇaparvavaraṇanam</i>	<i>Hymn to the Incarnate Son of God</i>	38
16	<i>Īśvaraputrastotram</i>	<i>Praise of the Son of God</i>	66
Sixteen Chapters			989

Table 2: Book II: Putrābhiṣeka-parva (Book of the Unction of the Son)

Chapter	Title of the Chapter (In Sanskrit)	Title of the Chapter (In English)	No. of Ślokas
1	<i>Dūtapreraṇam</i>	<i>The Sending of the Messenger</i>	19
2	<i>Prāntaraghoṣaṇam</i>	<i>The Cry in the Wilderness</i>	48
3	<i>Aiśvarasaṃskāraḥ</i>	<i>The Divine Inauguration</i>	19
4	<i>Parīkṣakaparājayaḥ</i>	<i>The Defeat of the Tempter</i>	41
5	<i>Prabhusākṣyasaṃvādavaḥ</i>	<i>Discourse of the Testimony to the Lord</i>	49
6	<i>Vivāhotsavaprabhāvaḥ</i>	<i>The Glory of the Marriage Feast</i>	20
7	<i>Īśārcakavibhāvanam</i>	<i>The Distinction of God's Worshipers</i>	72
8	<i>Mahājanyānandapūraṇam</i>	<i>The Full Joy of the Bridegroom's Friend</i>	53
9	<i>Samāryyāmṛtopadeśnam</i>	<i>Communication to the Samaritans of the Living Water of Immortality</i>	86
10	<i>Galīlābhīdhāsanam</i>	<i>Illumination of Galilee</i>	48
11	<i>Narasamgrahaṇam</i>	<i>The Gathering of Men</i>	44
12	<i>Parvatīyopadeśaḥ</i>	<i>The Discourse on the Mountain</i>	111
13	<i>Mocakavānāmāhātmyam</i>	<i>The Power of the Saviour's Word</i>	38
14	<i>Durvidhārthasuvārtā</i>	<i>Glad Tidings to the Poor</i>	56
15	<i>Dayālayapuṣkaraṇī</i>	<i>The Pool of the Abode of Mercy</i>	60
16	<i>Varadayāprakāśaḥ</i>	<i>The Declaration of Excellent Mercy</i>	71
17	<i>Śāntavicāraḥ</i>	<i>The Gentle Judgment</i>	35
18	<i>Svargīyadṛṣṭāntasārthaḥ</i>	<i>Series of Heavenly Parables</i>	125
19	<i>Bhūtopasargadamanam</i>	<i>The Conquest of the Demoniocal Possession</i>	35
20	<i>Sadagracaraśiraśchedaḥ</i>	<i>The Decapitation of the Holy Forerunner</i>	46

21	<i>Śasyacchedakapreraṇam</i>	<i>The Sending forth of the Harvest Labourers</i>	40
22	<i>Galīlāpurabhartsanam</i>	<i>The Reproach of the Cities of Galilee</i>	39
23	<i>Anantajīvanāṇnam</i>	<i>The Bread of Everlasting Life</i>	118
Twenty Three Chapters			1272

Table 3: Book III: *Satpālākacaritra-parva (The Book of the Acts of the Good Shepherd)*

Chapter	Title of the Chapter (In Sanskrit)	Title of the Chapter (In English)	o. of Śloka
1	<i>Paricārakagaṇaniyāṇam</i>	<i>The Going Forth of the Troop of Ministers</i>	32
2	<i>Bāhyadharmmanirasanam</i>	<i>Rejection of Mere Outward Religion</i>	29
3	<i>Bhakṣyāvaśeṣaḥ</i>	<i>Remnant of the Food</i>	98
4	<i>Khrṣṭiyamaṇḍalī-nirmmāṇaparisaraḥ</i>	<i>The Rock on Which the Christian Church is Founded</i>	36
5	<i>Putraīśvaryaāvabhāsanam</i>	<i>Effulgence of the Son's Divinity</i>	31
6	<i>Śiṣyamalanirodhaḥ</i>	<i>Prevention of Faults or Defilements in the Disciples</i>	106
7	<i>Śāntadharmmapraśamsā</i>	<i>Praise of Meek Religion</i>	74
8	<i>Muktyākara pradārśanam</i>	<i>Display of the Fountain of Salvation</i>	81
9	<i>Jagatprakāśaḥ</i>	<i>The Light of the World</i>	124
10	<i>Lobhādivirodhanam</i>	<i>Rebuke of Covetousness and Other Vices</i>	52
11	<i>Nāśanivāraṇahita- samayādeśaḥ</i>	<i>Prescription of the Right Time for Escaping Destruction</i>	26
12	<i>Galīlāntimabhramaṇam</i>	<i>The Last Circuit of Galilee</i>	34
13	<i>Īśvarāhvānam</i>	<i>The Invitation of God</i>	42
14	<i>Apacitāptiharṣaḥ</i>	<i>The Joy of Finding the Lost</i>	34
15	<i>Viśvastabhṛtyasaddhanam</i>	<i>The True Riches of Faithful Servants</i>	56
16	<i>Satprāthanāvivekaḥ</i>	<i>The Discernment of Right Prayers</i>	48
17	<i>Pitrputraikatvopadeśaḥ</i>	<i>Declaration of the Oneness of the Father and the Son</i>	37
18	<i>Nirmalarājyaśāsanam</i>	<i>The Discipline of the Kingdom of Purity</i>	28
19	<i>Viśiṣṭālpavopākhyānam</i>	<i>Announcement of the Paucity of the Elect</i>	44
20	<i>Mṛtyuvijayanidarśanam</i>	<i>Specimen of the Conquest of Death</i>	62
21	<i>Bhavyamṛtyusūcanam</i>	<i>Information of the Death at Hand</i>	35
22	<i>Andhādivimuktiḥ</i>	<i>Deliverance of the Blind and Others</i>	24
23	<i>Yātrāśeṣaḥ</i>	<i>End of the Journey</i>	53
Twenty Three Chapters			1186

Table 4: Book IV: Mokṣmāhātmya-parva (Book of the Majesty of the Redeemer)

Chapter	Title of the Chapter (In Sanskrit)	Title of the Chapter (In English)	No. of Ślokas
1	<i>Mumūrṣudehā- bhyañjanam</i>	<i>The Anointing of the Body of Him Who Was to Die</i>	51
2	<i>Sadrājapraveśaḥ</i>	<i>The Entrance of the Holy King</i>	31
3	<i>Sarvānvayaprāthanā- layaśodhanam</i>	<i>The Cleansing of the House of Prayer for All Nations</i>	27
4	<i>Saadhanṭṛmandaguru- parājayaḥ</i>	<i>Defect of the Evil Teachers, Murderers of the Good</i>	144
5	<i>Naraputradvitīyā- gamanādeśaḥ</i>	<i>Proclamation of the Son of Man's Second Coming</i>	112
6	<i>Abhiśiktaghātakakāla- prastutiḥ</i>	<i>Arrangement of the Time for the Slaying of the Messiah</i>	87
7	<i>Sadbhojanāśīrvvādaḥ</i>	<i>Blessing of the Holy Supper</i>	148
8	<i>Mahāmadhyastha- caramopadeśaḥ</i>	<i>Last Discourse of the Great Mediator</i>	89
9	<i>Udyānīavyathanam</i>	<i>The Agony in the Garden</i>	50
10	<i>Varopalanirākṛtiḥ</i>	<i>The Rejection of the True Cornerstone</i>	72
11	<i>Pāpihaste Prabhusamarpaṇam</i>	<i>The Delivery of the Lord into the Hand of Sinners</i>	121
12	<i>Mahāyajñasaṃpūraṇam</i>	<i>Completion of the Great Sacrifice</i>	139
13	<i>Āryadehanikhātārpaṇam</i>	<i>Interment of the Sacred Body</i>	61
14	<i>Paramaviśrāmaḥ</i>	<i>The Most Excellent Sabbath or Rest</i>	40
15	<i>Tamobalaparājayaḥ</i>	<i>Defeat of the Power of Darkness</i>	114
16	<i>Mṛtyumjayapradarśanam</i>	<i>Manifestation of the Conquerer of Death</i>	46
17	<i>Satpratyaayaprasāmsā</i>	<i>Praise of Excellent Faith</i>	23
18	<i>Nityapālakāvabhāsanam</i>	<i>Appearance of the Eternal Shepherd</i>	44
19	<i>Svargārohaṇam</i>	<i>The Ascension into Heaven</i>	37
20	<i>Sadātmaśāsitamāṇḍalī- prabhandhaḥ</i>	<i>History of the Church Ruled by the Holy Spirit</i>	132
21	<i>Sarvvaśaktimanmokṣ- stotram</i>	<i>Hymn of Praise to the Almighty Saviour</i>	10
Twenty One Chapters			1578

Salient Features of Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā :

W.H. Mill's virtuosity as a Sanskrit scholar soared to such unparalleled heights that he garnered accolades surpassing even the esteemed likes of William Jones, William Carey, and James Colebrooke, according to the esteemed Bengali pandit Kamlākānta Vidyālaṅkāra. Such was his acclaim that Vidyālaṅkāra proclaimed Mill as a reincarnation of Kālidāsa himself¹, heralding a renaissance of Sanskrit literary brilliance upon the world stage.

¹ 'Kālidāsaḥ punarajani bhuvī' (Anonymous 1837: 710-11)

While the *Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā* stands as a testament to the historical narrative of Jesus Christ, rooted in the foundational tenets of Western Gospels, it also emerges as a masterpiece of belletristic excellence. Its pages resonate not only with the echoes of sacred history but also with the lyrical beauty and artistic finesse characteristic of the finest literary works. Through a meticulous examination of its verses, this scholarly inquiry endeavors to uncover the nuanced interplay between these two facets, shedding light on the unique attributes of the *kāvya* through the lens of Sanskrit Poetics, known as *Alaṅkāra-śāstras*. Within its pages, the *Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā* not only recounts the sacred life of Jesus Christ but also transcends mere documentation, weaving together historical events with poetic eloquence to create a rich tapestry of spiritual insight and artistic expression.

Furthermore, this study delves into the profound impact of ‘Church Sanskrit’ literature on nineteenth-century Indian society, particularly during the era of colonial India. By exploring the societal reverberations emanating from the dissemination of Christian narratives in Sanskrit form, the investigation seeks to illuminate the cultural and intellectual landscape shaped by the *Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā* and similar works. As a vehicle for propagating Christian faith and values among the Sanskrit-knowing intelligentsia, this Puranic text played a pivotal role in shaping religious discourse and cultural identity during a transformative period in Indian history.

In essence, the *Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā* emerges not only as a literary masterpiece but also as a testament to the complex interplay between religion, literature, and society. Through its exploration of historical events and societal dynamics, this study seeks to unravel the multifaceted layers of meaning embedded within this Sanskrit Puranic text, offering valuable insights into its enduring significance within the broader context of ‘Church Sanskrit’ literature and the cultural heritage of colonial India.

Acknowledgement:

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the **Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)** for their generous financial support for the Major Research Project titled “‘Church Sanskrit’: A Theological Exploration of an Evangelical and Didactic Literature” awarded in 2023, which has made this research paper possible. The funding assistance was essential for conducting the necessary research and facilitating the scholarly endeavours required to write this paper on William Hodge Mill’s magnum opus titled *Śrīkṛṣṭa-saṃgītā*.

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