

A HISTORY OF SANSKRIT LITERATURE

By

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PREFACE

It is undoubtedly a surprising fact that down to the present time no history of Sanskrit literature as a whole has been written in English. For not only does that literature possess much intrinsic merit, but the light it sheds on the life and thought of the population of our Indian Empire ought to have a peculiar interest for the British nation. Owing chiefly to the lack of an adequate account of the subject, few, even of the young men who leave these shores every year to be its future rulers, possess any

connected information about the literature in which the civilisation of Modern India can be traced to its sources, and without which that civilisation cannot be fully understood. It was, therefore, with the greatest pleasure that I accepted Mr. Gosse's invitation to contribute a volume to this series of Literatures of the World; for this appeared to me to be a peculiarly good opportunity for diffusing information on a subject in which more than twenty years of continuous study and teaching had instilled into me an ever-deepening interest.

Professor Max Müller's valuable History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature is limited in its scope to the Vedic period. It has long been out of print; and Vedic research has necessarily made great strides in the forty years which have elapsed since its publication.

The only book accessible to the English reader on the history of Sanskrit literature in general has hitherto been the translation of Professor Weber's Academical Lectures on Indian Literature, as delivered nearly half a century ago at Berlin. The numerous and often very lengthy notes in this work supply the results of research during the next twenty-five years; but as these notes often modify, or even cancel, the statements of the unaltered original text of 1852, the result is bewildering to the student. Much new light has been thrown on various branches of Sanskrit literature since 1878, when the last notes were added to this translation, which, moreover, is not in any way adapted to the wants of the general reader. The only work on the subject appealing to the latter is the late Sir

M. Monier-Williams's Indian Wisdom. That book, however, although it furnishes, in addition to the translated specimens, some account of the chief departments of Sanskrit literature, is not a history. There is thus distinctly a twofold demand in this country for a history of Sanskrit literature. The student is in want of a guide setting forth in a clear and trustworthy manner the results of research down to the present time, and the cultivated English reader looks for a book presenting in an intelligible and attractive form information which must have a special interest to us owing to our close relations with India.

To lack of space, no less than to the scope of the present series, is due the exclusion of a full account of the technical literature of law, science, and art, which contains much that would interest even the general reader; but the brief epitome given in the Appendix will, I hope, suffice to direct the student to all the most important authorities.

As to the bibliographical notes, I trust that, though necessarily restricted in extent, they will enable the student to find all further information he may want on matters of detail; for instance, the evidence for approximate dates, which had occasionally to be summarily stated even in the text.

In writing this history of Sanskrit literature, I have dwelt more on the life and thought of Ancient India, which that literature embodies, than would perhaps have appeared necessary in the case of a European literature. This I have done partly because Sanskrit

literature,  
as representing an independent civilisation entirely  
different from  
that of the West, requires more explanation than most  
others; and  
partly because, owing to the remarkable continuity of  
Indian culture,  
the religious and social institutions of Modern India  
are constantly  
illustrated by those of the past.

Besides the above-mentioned works of Professors Max  
Müller and Weber,  
I have made considerable use of Professor L. von  
Schroeder's excellent  
Indiens Literatur und Cultur (1887). I have further  
consulted in one  
way or another nearly all the books and monographs  
mentioned in the  
bibliographical notes. Much of what I have written is  
also based on  
my own studies of Sanskrit literature.

All the quotations which I have given by way of  
illustration I have  
myself carefully selected from the original works.  
Excepting the short  
extracts on page 333 from Cowell and Thomas's excellent  
translation  
of the Harshacharita, all the renderings of these are  
my own. In my  
versions of Rigvedic stanzas I have, however,  
occasionally borrowed a  
line or phrase from Griffith. Nearly all my renderings  
are as close as  
the use of metre permits. I have endeavoured to  
reproduce, as far as  
possible, the measures of the original, except in the  
quotations from  
the dramas, where I have always employed blank verse. I  
have throughout  
refrained from rhyme, as misrepresenting the original  
Sanskrit.

In the transliteration of Sanskrit words I have been  
guided by the  
desire to avoid the use of letters which might mislead  
those who do  
not know Sanskrit. I have therefore departed in a few

particulars  
from the system on which Sanskrit scholars are now  
almost unanimously  
agreed, and which I otherwise follow myself. Hence for  
c and ch I have  
written ch and chh respectively, though in the rare  
cases where these  
two appear in combination I have retained cch (instead  
of chch). I  
further use sh for the lingual s, and ç for the palatal  
s, and ri  
for the vowel r. I have not thought it necessary to  
distinguish the  
guttural n and the palatal ñ by diacritical marks,  
simply printing,  
for instance, anga and pancha. The reader who is  
unacquainted with  
Sanskrit will thus pronounce all words correctly by  
simply treating  
all the consonants as in English; remembering only that  
the vowels  
should be sounded as in Italian, and that e and o are  
always long.

I am indebted for some suggestions to my friend Mr. F.  
C. S. Schiller,  
Fellow and Tutor of Corpus Christi College, who looked  
through the  
final proof of the chapter on Philosophy. To my pupil  
Mr. A. B. Keith,  
Boden Sanskrit scholar and Classical scholar of  
Balliol, who has read  
all the final proofs with great care, I owe not only  
the removal of  
a number of errors of the press, but also several  
valuable criticisms  
regarding matters of fact.

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# A HISTORY OF SANSKRIT LITERATURE

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

Since the Renaissance there has been no event of such world-wide significance in the history of culture as the discovery of Sanskrit literature in the latter part of the eighteenth century. After Alexander's invasion, the Greeks became to some extent acquainted with the learning of the Indians; the Arabs, in the Middle Ages, introduced the knowledge of Indian science to the West; a few European missionaries, from the sixteenth century onwards, were not only aware of the existence of, but also acquired some familiarity with, the ancient language of India; and Abraham Roger even translated the Sanskrit poet Bhartrihari into Dutch as early as 1651. Nevertheless, till about a hundred and twenty years ago there was no authentic information in Europe about the existence of Sanskrit literature, but only vague surmise, finding expression in stories about the wisdom of the Indians. The enthusiasm with which Voltaire in his *Essai sur les Moeurs et l'Esprit des Nations* greeted the lore of the *Ezour Vedam*, a work brought from India and introduced to his notice in the middle of the last century, was premature. For this work was later proved to be a forgery made in the seventeenth century by a Jesuit missionary. The scepticism justified by this fabrication, and indulged in when the discovery of the genuine Sanskrit literature

was announced, survived far into the present century. Thus, Dugald Stewart, the philosopher, wrote an essay in which he endeavoured to prove that not only Sanskrit literature, but also the Sanskrit language, was a forgery made by the crafty Brahmans on the model of Greek after Alexander's conquest. Indeed, this view was elaborately defended by a professor at Dublin as late as the year 1838.

The first impulse to the study of Sanskrit was given by the practical administrative needs of our Indian possessions. Warren Hastings, at that time Governor-General, clearly seeing the advantage of ruling the Hindus as far as possible according to their own laws and customs, caused a number of Brahmans to prepare a digest based on the best ancient Indian legal authorities. An English version of this Sanskrit compilation, made through the medium of a Persian translation, was published in 1776. The introduction to this work, besides giving specimens of the Sanskrit script, for the first time supplied some trustworthy information about the ancient Indian language and literature. The earliest step, however, towards making Europe acquainted with actual Sanskrit writings was taken by Charles Wilkins, who, having, at the instigation of Warren Hastings, acquired a considerable knowledge of Sanskrit at Benares, published in 1785 a translation of the Bhagavad-gita, or The Song of the Adorable One, and two years later, a version of the well-known collection of fables entitled Hitopadeṣa, or Friendly Advice.

Sir William Jones (1746-94) was, however, the pioneer of Sanskrit

studies in the West. It was this brilliant and many-sided Orientalist who, during his too brief career of eleven years in India, first aroused a keen interest in the study of Indian antiquity by his unwearied literary activity and by the foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784. Having rapidly acquired an accurate knowledge of Sanskrit, he published in 1789 a translation of Çakuntala, the finest Sanskrit drama, which was greeted with enthusiasm by such judges as Herder and Goethe. This was followed by a translation of the Code of Manu, the most important of the Sanskrit law-books. To Sir William Jones also belongs the credit of having been the first man who ever printed an edition of a Sanskrit text. This was a short lyrical poem entitled Ritusamhara, or Cycle of the Seasons, published in 1792.

We next come to the great name of Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765-1837), a man of extraordinary industry, combined with rare clearness of intellect and sobriety of judgment. The first to handle the Sanskrit language and literature on scientific principles, he published many texts, translations, and essays dealing with almost every branch of Sanskrit learning, thus laying the solid foundations on which later scholars have built.

While Colebrooke was beginning his literary career in India during the opening years of the century, the romance of war led to the practical knowledge of Sanskrit being introduced on the Continent of Europe. Alexander Hamilton (1765-1824), an Englishman who had acquired a good knowledge of Sanskrit in India, happened to be passing through

France on his way home in 1802. Hostilities breaking out afresh just then, a decree of Napoleon, directed against all Englishmen in the country, kept Hamilton a prisoner in Paris. During his long involuntary stay in that city he taught Sanskrit to some French scholars, and especially to the German romantic poet Friedrich Schlegel. One of the results of these studies was the publication by Schlegel of his work On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians (1808). This book produced nothing less than a revolution in the science of language by the introduction of the comparative and the historical method. It led to the foundation of the science of comparative philology by Franz Bopp in his treatise on the conjugational system of Sanskrit in comparison with that of Greek, Latin, Persian, and German (1816). Schlegel's work, moreover, aroused so much zeal for the study of Sanskrit in Germany, that the vast progress made since his day in this branch of learning has been mainly due to the labours of his countrymen.

In the early days of Sanskrit studies Europeans became acquainted only with that later phase of the ancient language of India which is familiar to the Pandits, and is commonly called Classical Sanskrit. So it came about that the literature composed in this dialect engaged the attention of scholars almost exclusively down to the middle of the century. Colebrooke had, it is true, supplied as early as 1805 valuable information about the literature of the older period in his essay On the Vedas. Nearly a quarter of a century later, F. Rosen, a German scholar, had conceived the plan of making this more ancient literature known to Europe from the rich collection of

manuscripts  
at the East India House; and his edition of the first  
eighth of the  
Rigveda was actually brought out in 1838, shortly after  
his premature  
death. But it was not till Rudolf Roth (1821-95), the  
founder of Vedic  
philology, published his epoch-making little book On  
the Literature  
and History of the Veda in 1846, that the studies of  
Sanskritists  
received a lasting impulse in the direction of the  
earlier and more  
important literature of the Vedas. These studies have  
since been  
prosecuted with such zeal, that nearly all the most  
valuable works  
of the Vedic, as well as the later period, have within  
the last fifty  
years been made accessible in thoroughly trustworthy  
editions.

In judging of the magnitude of the work thus  
accomplished, it should  
be borne in mind that the workers have been far fewer  
in this than  
in other analogous fields, while the literature of the  
Vedas at least  
equals in extent what survives of the writings of  
ancient Greece. Thus  
in the course of a century the whole range of Sanskrit  
literature,  
which in quantity exceeds that of Greece and Rome put  
together, has  
been explored. The great bulk of it has been edited,  
and most of its  
valuable productions have been translated, by competent  
hands. There  
has long been at the service of scholars a Sanskrit  
dictionary, larger  
and more scientific than any either of the classical  
languages yet  
possesses. The detailed investigations in every  
department of Sanskrit  
literature are now so numerous, that a comprehensive  
work embodying the  
results of all these researches has become a necessity.  
An encyclopædia  
covering the whole domain of Indo-Aryan antiquity has

accordingly been planned on a more extensive scale than that of any similar undertaking, and is now being published at Strasburg in parts, contributed to by about thirty specialists of various nationalities. By the tragic death, in April 1898, of its eminent editor, Professor Bühler of Vienna, Sanskrit scholarship has sustained an irreparable loss. The work begun by him is being completed by another very distinguished Indianist, Professor Kielhorn of Göttingen.

Although so much of Sanskrit literature has already been published, an examination of the catalogues of Sanskrit manuscripts, of which an enormous number are preserved in European and Indian libraries, proves that there are still many minor works awaiting, and likely to repay, the labours of an editor.

The study of Sanskrit literature deserves far more attention than it has yet received in this country. For in that ancient heritage the languages, the religious and intellectual life and thought, in short, the whole civilisation of the Hindus, who form the vast majority of the inhabitants of our Indian Empire, have their roots. Among all the ancient literatures, that of India is, moreover, undoubtedly in intrinsic value and æsthetic merit second only to that of Greece. To the latter it is, as a source for the study of human evolution, even superior. Its earliest period, being much older than any product of Greek literature, presents a more primitive form of belief, and therefore gives a clearer picture of the development of religious ideas than any other literary monument of the world. Hence it came

about that, just as the discovery of the Sanskrit language led to the foundation of the science of Comparative Philology, an acquaintance with the literature of the Vedas resulted in the foundation of the science of Comparative Mythology by Adalbert Kuhn and Max Müller.

Though it has touched excellence in most of its branches, Sanskrit literature has mainly achieved greatness in religion and philosophy. The Indians are the only division of the Indo-European family which has created a great national religion--Brahmanism--and a great world-religion--Buddhism; while all the rest, far from displaying originality in this sphere, have long since adopted a foreign faith. The intellectual life of the Indians has, in fact, all along been more dominated by religious thought than that of any other race. The Indians, moreover, developed independently several systems of philosophy which bear evidence of high speculative powers. The great interest, however, which these two subjects must have for us lies, not so much in the results they attained, as in the fact that every step in the evolution of religion and philosophy can be traced in Sanskrit literature.

The importance of ancient Indian literature as a whole largely consists in its originality. Naturally isolated by its gigantic mountain barrier in the north, the Indian peninsula has ever since the Aryan invasion formed a world apart, over which a unique form of Aryan civilisation rapidly spread, and has ever since prevailed. When the Greeks, towards the end of the fourth century B.C., invaded the North-West, the

Indians had already fully worked out a national culture of their own, unaffected by foreign influences. And, in spite of successive waves of invasion and conquest by Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Muhammadans, the national development of the life and literature of the Indo-Aryan race remained practically unchecked and unmodified from without down to the era of British occupation. No other branch of the Indo-European stock has experienced an isolated evolution like this. No other country except China can trace back its language and literature, its religious beliefs and rites, its domestic and social customs, through an uninterrupted development of more than three thousand years.

A few examples will serve to illustrate this remarkable continuity in Indian civilisation. Sanskrit is still spoken as the tongue of the learned by thousands of Brahmans, as it was centuries before our era. Nor has it ceased to be used for literary purposes, for many books and journals written in the ancient language are still produced. The copying of Sanskrit manuscripts is still continued in hundreds of libraries in India, uninterrupted even by the introduction of printing during the present century. The Vedas are still learnt by heart as they were long before the invasion of Alexander, and could even now be restored from the lips of religious teachers if every manuscript or printed copy of them were destroyed. A Vedic stanza of immemorial antiquity, addressed to the sun-god Savitri, is still recited in the daily worship of the Hindus. The god Vishnu, adored more than 3000 years ago, has countless votaries in India at

the present day. Fire is still produced for sacrificial purposes by means of two sticks, as it was in ages even more remote. The wedding ceremony of the modern Hindu, to single out but one social custom, is essentially the same as it was long before the Christian era.

The history of ancient Indian literature naturally falls into two main periods. The first is the Vedic, which beginning perhaps as early as 1500 B.C., extends in its latest phase to about 200 B.C. In the former half of the Vedic age the character of its literature was creative and poetical, while the centre of culture lay in the territory of the Indus and its tributaries, the modern Panjab; in the latter half, literature was theologically speculative in matter and prosaic in form, while the centre of intellectual life had shifted to the valley of the Ganges. Thus in the course of the Vedic age Aryan civilisation had overspread the whole of Hindustan Proper, the vast tract extending from the mouths of the Indus to those of the Ganges, bounded on the north by the Himalaya, and on the south by the Vindhya range. The second period, concurrent with the final offshoots of Vedic literature and closing with the Muhammadan conquest after 1000 A.D., is the Sanskrit period strictly speaking. In a certain sense, owing to the continued literary use of Sanskrit, mainly for the composition of commentaries, this period may be regarded as coming down to the present day. During this second epoch Brahmanic culture was introduced into and overspread the southern portion of the continent called the Dekhan or "the South." In the course of these two periods taken together, Indian

literature attained noteworthy results in nearly every department. The Vedic age, which, unlike the earlier epoch of Greece, produced only religious works, reached a high standard of merit in lyric poetry, and later made some advance towards the formation of a prose style.

The Sanskrit period, embracing in general secular subjects, achieved distinction in many branches of literature, in national as well as court epic, in lyric and especially didactic poetry, in the drama, in fairy tales, fables, and romances. Everywhere we find much true poetry, the beauty of which is, however, marred by obscurity of style and the ever-increasing taint of artificiality. But this period produced few works which, regarded as a whole, are dominated by a sense of harmony and proportion. Such considerations have had little influence on the æsthetic notions of India. The tendency has been rather towards exaggeration, manifesting itself in all directions. The almost incredible development of detail in ritual observance; the extraordinary excesses of asceticism; the grotesque representations of mythology in art; the frequent employment of vast numbers in description; the immense bulk of the epics; the unparalleled conciseness of one of the forms of prose; the huge compounds habitually employed in the later style, are among the more striking manifestations of this defect of the Indian mind.

In various branches of scientific literature, in phonetics, grammar, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and law, the Indians also achieved notable results. In some of these subjects their attainments are,

indeed, far in advance of what was accomplished by the Greeks.

History is the one weak spot in Indian literature. It is, in fact, non-existent. The total lack of the historical sense is so characteristic, that the whole course of Sanskrit literature is darkened by the shadow of this defect, suffering as it does from an entire absence of exact chronology. So true is this, that the very date of Kalidasa, the greatest of Indian poets, was long a matter of controversy within the limits of a thousand years, and is even now doubtful to the extent of a century or two. Thus the dates of Sanskrit authors are in the vast majority of cases only known approximately, having been inferred from the indirect evidence of interdependence, quotation or allusion, development of language or style. As to the events of their lives, we usually know nothing at all, and only in a few cases one or two general facts. Two causes seem to have combined to bring about this remarkable result. In the first place, early India wrote no history because it never made any. The ancient Indians never went through a struggle for life, like the Greeks in the Persian and the Romans in the Punic wars, such as would have welded their tribes into a nation and developed political greatness. Secondly, the Brahmans, whose task it would naturally have been to record great deeds, had early embraced the doctrine that all action and existence are a positive evil, and could therefore have felt but little inclination to chronicle historical events.

Such being the case, definite dates do not begin to appear in Indian

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