



A HISTORY
OF
CIVILISATION IN ANCIENT INDIA

BASED ON SANSKRIT LITERATURE

BY

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TO

MY GENTLE AND LOVING DAUGHTERS,

KAMALĀ AND BIMALĀ,

WHO HAVE CHEERED MY LABOURS AND BLESSED MY LIFE

WITH THEIR AFFECTION,

I DEDICATE THIS WORK

WITH A FATHER'S LOVE.

P R E F A C E.

“IF I were asked,” says Professor Max Müller, “what I consider the most important discovery which has been made during the Nineteenth Century with respect to the ancient history of mankind, I should answer by the following short line:—

“Sanskrit, DYAUSH PITAR=Greek, ΖΕΥΣ ΠΑΤΗΡ (ZEUS PATER)=Latin, JUPITER=Old Norse, TYR.”

And certainly, the discoveries which have been made by European scholars within the last hundred years, with the help of the old Aryan language preserved in India, form one of the most brilliant chapters in the history of the advancement of human knowledge. It is not my intention to give a sketch of that history here; but a few facts which relate specially to Indian Antiquities may be considered interesting.

It is about a century since Sir William Jones startled the scholars of Europe by his translation of Sakuntalâ, “one of the greatest curiosities,” as he said in his preface, “that the literature of Asia has yet brought to light,” and one of the tenderest and most beautiful creations of human imagination produced in any age or country. The attention of European literary men was roused to the value and beauty of Sanscrit literature; and the greatest literary genius of the modern age has recorded his appreciation of the Hindu dramatic piece

in lines which have been often quoted, in original and in translation:—

“Wouldst thou the life’s young blossoms and the fruits of its decline,
 And all by which the soul is pleased, enraptured, feasted, fed,—
 Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in one sweet name combine?
 I name thee, O Sakuntalâ, and all at once is said.”—GÖETHE.

Sir William Jones translated Manu, founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and lived to continue his researches into the store-house of Sanscrit literature, and achieved valuable results; but he did not live to find what he sought,—a clue to India’s “ancient history without any mixture of fable.” For his enthusiastic labours were mostly confined to the later Sanscrit literature,—the literature of the Post-Buddhist Era; and he paid little heed to the mine of wealth that lay beyond.

Colebrooke followed in the footsteps of Sir William Jones. He was a mathematician, and was the most careful and accurate Sanscrit scholar that England has ever produced. Ancient Sanscrit literature concealed nothing from his eyes. He gave a careful and accurate account of Hindu Philosophy, wrote on Hindu Algebra and Mathematics, and, in 1805, he first made Europeans acquainted with the oldest work of the Hindu and of the Aryan world, viz., the Vedas. Colebrooke, however, failed to grasp the importance of the discovery he had made, and declared that the study of the Vedas “would hardly reward the labour of the reader, much less that of the translator.”

Dr. H. H. Wilson followed in the footsteps of Colebrooke; and although he translated the Rig Veda Sanhitâ into English, his labours were mostly confined to later

Sanskrit literature. He translated into elegant English the best dramatic works in Sanscrit, as well as the beautiful poem of Kâlidâsa, called "Meghadûta." He also translated the Vishnu Purâna, and laboured to adjust the history of the later Hindu period, and settled many points on a satisfactory basis.

In the meantime, a great genius had arisen in France. The history of Oriental scholarship contains no brighter name than that of Burnouf. He traced the connection between the Zend and the Vedic Sanscrit, and framed a Comparative Grammar for his own use before German scholars had written on Comparative Grammar. By such means he deciphered the Zend language and scriptures, elucidated the Rig Veda, and showed its true position in the history of Aryan nations. Versatile as he was profound, he also deciphered the Cuneiform inscriptions of Assyria, and thus earned for himself an undying fame in Europe. And further, in his Introduction to Buddhism, he gave the first philosophical and intelligible account of that great religion. His lessons created a deep sensation in Europe during nearly a quarter of a century (1829-1852), and left a lasting impression on the minds of admiring and enthusiastic pupils in Paris, some of whom, like Roth and Max Müller, have lived to be the profoundest Vedic scholars of our age.

German scholars, in the meantime, had commenced their labours; and when once they began work in this line, they soon excelled and even ousted all other labourers in the field of Indian Antiquities! Rosen, the contemporary and friend of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, published the first Ashtaka of the Rig Veda, with a Latin translation, but his untimely death prevented the further progress of the work.

But the most eminent German scholars of the day set before themselves a higher task; and the industry, perseverance, and genius of men like Bopp, Grimm, and Humboldt, soon achieved a result which ranks as one of the noblest and most brilliant discoveries of the century. They marked and traced the connection among all the Indo-European languages,—the Sanscrit, the Zend, the Greek, the Latin, the Slav, the Tuton, and the Celtic,—they demonstrated all these languages to be the offshoots of the same original stock, and they even discovered the laws under which words were transformed in passing from one language to another. Classical scholars of the day, who believed that all civilisation and culture began with the Greek and the Latin, at first smiled and ridiculed, then stood aghast, and ultimately gave way with considerable chagrin and anger to the irresistible march of Truth!

The desire to elucidate ancient Hindu literature and history deepened among scholars as they became more thoroughly alive to the value of Sanscrit. Roth, one of the profoundest Vedic scholars of the century, produced his edition of Yâska with his most valuable notes, and later on he published, with Whitney, an edition of the Atharva Veda, and completed, with Böehtlingk, the most accurate and comprehensive Sanscrit Dictionary yet written. Lassen published his profound work, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, displaying a deep learning and accurate scholarship which has seldom been excelled. Weber published the *White Yajur Veda* with its *Brâhmana* and *Sûtras*, elucidated many obscure points of Ancient Hindu History in his *Indische Studien*, and gave the first clear and comprehensive account of Sanscrit literature in his *History of Indian Literature*. Benfey published a

most valuable edition of the Sâma Veda, of which an edition, with translation, had been published by Stevenson and Wilson before. And Muir collected the most suggestive and historically-valuable texts from Sanscrit literature, in five volumes, which are a monument of his industry and learning.

And lastly, Professor Max Müller mapped out the whole of the ancient Sanscrit literature chronologically in 1859.

More valuable to Hindus than this great work—more valuable than the learned Professor's numerous works and contributions on Language, Religion, and Mythology, is his magnificent edition of the Rig Veda Sanhitâ, with Sâyana's Commentary. The work was hailed in India with gratitude and joy; it opened to Hindu students generally the great and ancient volume, which had hitherto remained sealed with seven seals to all but a very few scholars; and it awakened in them a historical interest in the past,—a desire to inquire into their ancient history and ancient faith from original sources.

Jones and Colebrooke and Wilson had worthy successors in India, but none more distinguished than James Prinsep. The inscriptions of Asoka on pillars and rocks all over India had remained unintelligible for over a thousand years, and had defied the skill of Sir William Jones and his successors. James Prinsep, then Secretary to the Asiatic Society, deciphered these inscriptions, and a flood of light was thus thrown on Buddhist antiquities and post-Buddhist history. Prinsep was also the first to deal in a scholar-like way with the coins of the post-Buddhist kings found all over Western India. He has been followed by able scholars. Dr. Haug edited and translated the Aitareya Brâhmana, and elucidated the

history of the Parsis; Dr. Burnell wrote on South Indian Paleography; Dr. Bühler has ably dealt with the ancient legal literature; and Dr. Thibaut has, in late years, discovered Ancient Hindu Geometry.

Among my countrymen, the great reformers, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Dayanand Sarasvatî, turned their attention to ancient Sanscrit literature. The first translated a number of Upanishads into English, and the latter published a translation of the Rîg Veda Sanhitâ in Hindi. Sir Raja Radha Kanta Dev cultivated Sanscrit learning, and published a comprehensive and excellent dictionary entitled the Sabdakalpadruma. Dr. Bhao Daji and Professor Bhandarkar, Dr. K. M. Banerjea and Dr. Rajendra Lala Mitra have, by their varied and valuable contributions, taken their fair share of work in the field of antiquities. My esteemed friend, Pandit Satyavrata Sâmasramin has published an excellent edition of the Sâma Veda with Sâyana's Commentary, and an edition of the White Yajur Veda with Mahîdhara's Commentary, and is now engaged in a learned edition of Yâska's Nirukta. And lastly, my learned friend, Mr. Anand Ram Borooah,* of the Bengal Civil Service, has published a handy and excellent English-Sanscrit Dictionary, and is now engaged in a Sanscrit Grammar of formidable size and erudition!

General Cunningham's labours in archæology and in the elucidation of ancient Indian Geography are invaluable; and Burgess and Fergusson have treated on Indian

* Since the above lines were written, the author has received the sad intelligence of the death of the talented scholar. His untimely death is a loss to Sanscrit scholarship in this country, which will not be easily remedied. To the present writer, the sorrow is of a personal nature, as he enjoyed the friendship of the deceased for twenty years and more,—since the old College days in this country and in England.

Architecture. Fergusson's work on the subject is accepted as the standard work.

In Europe, Dr. Fausböll may be said to be the founder of Páli scholarship, and edited the Dhammapada so far back as 1855, and has since edited the Játaka Tales. Dr. Oldenberg has edited the Vinaya texts; and these scholars, as well as Rhys Davids and Max Müller, have now given us an English translation of the most important portions of the Buddhist Scriptures in the invaluable series of Sacred Books of the East.

I wish to say a word about this series, because I am in a special degree indebted to it. Professor Max Müller, who has, by his life-long labours, done more than any living scholar to elucidate ancient Hindu literature and history, has now conceived the noble idea of enabling English readers to go to the fountain-source, and consult Oriental works in a series of faithful translations. More than thirty volumes, translated from the Sanscrit, Chinese, Zend, Pahlavi, Páli, Arabic, &c., have already been published, and more volumes are expected. I take this opportunity to own my great indebtedness to the volumes of this series which relate to Indian History. I have freely quoted from them,—allowing myself the liberty of a verbal alteration here and there; and I have seldom thought it necessary to consult those original Sanscrit works which have been translated in this faithful and valuable series.

And this brings me to the subject of the present work, about which I wish to say a few words. I have often asked myself: Is it possible, with the help that is now available, to write, in a handy work, a clear, historical account of the civilisation of Ancient India, based on ancient Sanscrit literature, and written in a sufficiently

popular manner to be acceptable to the general reader? I never doubted the possibility of such a work; but I have often wished—even when engaged in this task—that it had been undertaken by an abler scholar, and by one who could devote his attention and time more exclusively to it than I could possibly do.

Scholars who have devoted their lifetime to the study of Indian Antiquities, and who have brought out rich ores from that inexhaustible mine, seem however to have little time or little inclination to coin the metal for the every-day use of the general public. That unambitious task must, therefore, devolve on humbler labourers.

That there is need for such a popular work will not be denied. The Hindu student's knowledge of Indian History practically begins with the date of the Mahomedan Conquest,—the Hindu period is almost a blank to him. The school-boy who knows all about the twelve invasions of Mahmud, knows little of the first invasions and wars of the Aryans, who conquered and settled in the Punjab three thousand years before the Sultan of Ghazni. He has read of Shahab-ud-din Muhammad Ghorî's conquest of Delhi and Kanouj, but has scarcely any historical knowledge of the ancient kingdoms of the Kurus and the Panchâlas in the same tract of country. He knows what emperor reigned in Delhi when Sivaji lived and fought, but scarcely knows of the king who ruled in Magadha when Gautama Buddha lived and preached. He is familiar with the history of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, and Golkonda, but has scarcely heard of the Andhras, the Guptas, and the Chalukyias. He knows exactly the date of Nadir Shah's invasion of India, but scarcely knows, within five centuries, the date when the Sakas invaded India, and were repelled by

Vikramāditya the Great. He knows more of the dates of Ferdusi and Ferishta than of Âryabhatta or Bhavabhûti, and can tell who built the Taj Mahal without having the faintest notion when the topes of Sanchi, the caves of Karli and Ajanta, the temples of Ellora, Bhuvanesvara, and Jagannâtha were built.

And yet, such things should not be. For the Hindu student the history of the Hindu Period should not be a blank, nor a confused jumble of historic and legendary names, religious parables, and Epic and Puranic myths. No study has so potent an influence in forming a nation's mind and a nation's character as a critical and careful study of its past history. And it is by such study alone that an unreasoning and superstitious worship of the past is replaced by a legitimate and manly admiration.

It almost seems an irony of fate that the past should be considered a blank in a country where ancient sages have handed down traditions and elaborate compositions through thousands of years, and where, generation after generation, they have preserved the heritage by a feat of memory which is considered a miracle in modern days! In vain must the thousands of ancient Hindu students and scholars have toiled to preserve these works, if the works give us no clue to a general outline History of Ancient India. And in vain, too, must eminent European scholars and antiquarians have worked during the last hundred years, if it be still impossible to put together the results of their learned researches in the shape of a connected history which will be intelligible to the general reader and the ordinary student.

Happily this is no longer impossible. And although many portions of Indian History are still obscure,
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although many questions of detail are still subjects of controversy, to construct a general history of the Hindu Period is no longer a hopeless task. And, however unfit I feel myself to accomplish this task, I, nevertheless, venture to make a commencement, in the hope that abler scholars will pardon my shortcomings, rectify my inevitable errors, and perform skilfully and well what I may do clumsily or leave undone.

In undertaking this great work, I must, once for all, disclaim any intention to make any new discoveries, or to extend in any way the limits of Oriental scholarship and research. My limited knowledge of the subject precludes the possibility of such a pretension being advanced, and the limits of the present work make it impossible that any such results should be achieved. I have simply tried to string together, in a methodical order, the results of the labours of abler scholars, in order to produce a readable work for the general reader. If, in the fulfilment of this design, I have been sometimes betrayed into conjectures and suppositions, I can only ask my readers to accept them as such,—not as historical discoveries.

Ten years ago I collected and arranged the materials then available to me, with a view to write a little school-book in my own vernacular; and the little work has since been accepted as a text-book in many schools in Bengal. Since that time I have continued my work in this line, as far as my time permitted; and when, three years ago, I was enabled by the generosity of the Government of Bengal to place a complete Bengali translation of the Rig Veda Sanhitâ before my countrymen, I felt more than ever impelled to rearrange the historical materials furnished by our ancient literature

in a permanent form. In pursuance of this object, I published some papers, from time to time, in the *Calcutta Review*; and these papers, together with all other materials which I have collected, have been embodied and arranged in the present work.

The method on which this work has been written is very simple. My principal object has been to furnish the general reader with a practical and handy work on the Ancient History of India,—not to compose an elaborate work of discussions on Indian Antiquities. To study clearness and conciseness on a subject like this was not, however, an easy task. Every chapter in the present work deals with matters about which long researches have been made, and various opinions have been recorded. It would have afforded some satisfaction to me to have given the reader the history of every controversy, the account of every antiquarian discovery, and the *pros* and *cons* of every opinion advanced. But I could not yield to this temptation without increasing the work to three or four times its present humble size, and thus sacrificing the very object with which it is written. To carry out my primary object, I have avoided every needless controversy and discussion, and I have tried to explain as clearly, concisely, and distinctly as I was able, each succeeding phase of Hindu civilisation and Hindu life in ancient times.

But, while conciseness has been the main object of the present work, I have also endeavoured to tell my story so that it may leave some distinct memories on my readers after they have closed the work. For this reason, I have avoided details as far as possible, and tried to develop, fully and clearly, the leading facts and features of each succeeding age. Repetition has not been avoided, where

such repetition seemed necessary to impress on my readers the cardinal facts—the salient features of the story of Hindu civilisation.

The very copious extracts which I have given (in translation) from the Sanscrit works may, at first sight, seem to be inconsistent with my desire for conciseness. Such extracts, however, have been advisedly given. In the first place, on a subject where there is so much room for difference in opinion, it is of the highest importance to furnish the reader with the text on which my conclusions are based, to enable him to form his own judgment, and to rectify my mistakes if my conclusions are erroneous. In the second place, it is a gain in the cause of historical knowledge to familiarize the reader with the texts of our ancient authors. It is scarcely to be hoped that the busy student will spend much of his time in reading the ancient and abstruse works in the original or even in learned translations, and the historian who seeks to familiarize his readers with some portions at least of these ancient works, adds in so far to the accurate knowledge of his readers on this subject. And lastly, it has been well said, that thought is language, and language is thought. And if it be the intention of the historian to convey an idea of ancient thought,—of what the ancient Hindus felt and believed,—he cannot do this better than by quoting the words by which that ancient people expressed themselves. Such brief extracts very often give the modern reader a far more realistic and intimate knowledge of ancient Hindu society and manners and ways of thinking than any account that I could give at twice the length. And it is because I have desired the modern reader to enter into the spirit and the inner life of the ancient Hindus, that I have tried to bring the old composers of hymns and sūtras

face to face with the reader, and allowed them to speak for themselves. Such an intimate grasp of the inner life and feelings of the ancients is the very kernel of true historical knowledge, and I have felt it a hopeless task to impart this knowledge more accurately or more concisely than in the words of the ancients. It is for this reason mainly, and consistently with my anxiety to be concise, that I have quoted copiously from ancient works.

In conclusion, I have to crave the indulgence of the reader for the many deficiencies which he will, no doubt, find in the present work, written in moments stolen from official work, and in places where a decent library was never available. Such claim to indulgence is seldom admitted, and the reader very pertinently inquires why a writer should ever undertake a work for which he was not in every way fully equipped. Nevertheless, I mention these circumstances, as they may explain, if they cannot justify, the shortcomings of the work. The time of the present writer is not his own, and the charge of a Bengal District with an area of over six thousand square miles and a population of over three millions, leaves little leisure for other work. To arrange my materials, under these circumstances, has been an arduous work, and I can only ask the indulgent consideration of my readers for any errors and defects which may have crept into this work.

R. C. DUTT.

MYMENSING DISTRICT, BENGAL,

13th August 1888.

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