PREFACE

The present volume is an attempt to meet the wants of the readers of the history of Sanskrit literature, so far as this is feasible under existing circumstances. It is intended to form an introduction to Sanskrit literature, which is so vast in quantity and which embraces all departments of human knowledge with the possible exception of history in its modern sense. The Indian mind seems to have always been naturally careless of noting and recording those facts and occurrences that constitute history, and thus great uncertainty prevails in the chronology of historical literature. The great mass of Sanskrit literature is in metre, even works on science and law having a poetical form. Most of it was written after the language had ceased to be spoken in the fullest sense.

The Vedas are the oldest literary monuments, by far the oldest of which the Indo-European family can boast. They are looked upon as the source of all the Sāstras or sacred lore of the Hindus. The Purāṇas form another important department of the religious literature, but are very much later than the Vedas. It is pretty certain that epic compositions existed in Vedic times, and truly some of the Vedic hymns themselves may be called epic in the broad sense of the term; the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata are certainly post-Vedic. The Hindus are perhaps the only people of the East among whom dramatic poetry had sprung up as a native growth; but it did not arise among them from the lyric, as it did among the Greeks, but directly from their epic poetry.

The Sanskrit poetic tales and fables have exercised a most important influence on the whole literature of the East, and even on that of the Western middle ages.
The scientific literature of India is likewise large. The first place is due to the grammatical works, which are very thorough. Indian grammarians having carried phonetic and etymological analysis farther than it has been carried except by modern European science. In philosophy, too the Hindus have produced some remarkable works, the beginnings of philosophical speculation going back to a very high antiquity. The history of Sanskrit literature is yet to be written. My humble endeavour has been in this small volume to bring out the nucleus of its history. The difficulties of beginners are manifold; to smooth their path a little and to show them the way to study the history of Sanskrit literature no pains have been spared.

It will perhaps not be amiss to remind Western scholars who are sometimes apt to judge us harshly, of Goethe’s saying: —*Fines Schicht Sich nicht fur alle*! what is best for the West need not be so for the East, and even the ideally best may need considerable modifications to meet existing circumstances.

For want of revision some of its defects could not have been mended. If the students for whom it is intended accord favourable reception to the present work and if the work can commend itself as a practical aid to them it is hoped that the whole book will be entirely recast in the next edition.

My thanks are due to my friends and colleagues for their valuable suggestions and corrections while the book was going through the press and specially to Pandit Amulya Charan Vidyabhushana for his reading the book through the press, lending to me some rare books, revising the manuscripts and helping me in various other ways. Above all, my heartfelt gratitude is due to the authors of the following books
which were mainly consulted during the preparation of the work.


पूर्णसम् पूर्णविंद्रं पूर्णवतुद्भचते।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णेनवाचारस्य च।

*Calcutta.*

*THE AUTHOR.*
PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The book has been thoroughly revised. Some portions have been rewritten and many new things have been introduced. To speak the truth it is a new work. Though the present book has attained more than double of its former volume, yet in consideration of the present economic depression of the country the price of the book has been raised only nominally.

In preparing this edition I have consulted specially the works of Messrs. Winternitz, Kieth, Weber K. M. Banerjee, R. L. Mitra, J. C. Bhaumic and others, besides many original works. My thanks are due to these authors. Besides, I am greatly indebted to my friend and colleague Prof. J. M. Ghosh, M.A. for his valuable suggestions, correction of manuscripts and reading the entire book while going through the press. My thanks are also due to my colleague Sj. P. K. Mukherjee, M. A. P. R. S. for his kindly preparing the Index. My thankfulness is none the less to Anantabandhu Das B.A. who has helped me in various ways in the preparation of the book.

I shall deem my labour amply rewarded if the students for whom it is chiefly intended, derive even the slightest help from its perusal. I shall ever remain grateful to those generous readers who would kindly point out to me the errors and defects which have crept into the work and offer kind suggestions for its future improvement.

Calcutta


AUTHOR