OPINIONS

"HISTORY OF THE BENGALI LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE" (IN ENGLISH)

BY

RAI SAHIB DINESH CHANDRA SEN, B.A.

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with illustrations.

His Excellency Lord Hardinge of Penshurst in his Convocation Address, dated the 16th March, 1912 as Chancellor of the Calcutta University:—

"During the last four years also the University has, from time to time, appointed Readers on special subjects to foster investigation of important branches of learning amongst our advanced students. One of these Readers, Mr. Sen, has embodied his lectures on the History of Bengali Language and Literature from the earliest times to the middle of the 19th century in a volume of considerable merits which he is about to supplement by another original contribution to the history of one of the most important vernaculars in this country. May I express the hope that this example will be followed elsewhere, and that critical schools may be established for the vernacular languages of India which have not as yet received the attention that they deserve."

His Excellency Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal, in his address on the occasion of his laying the Foundation Stone of the Romesh Chandra Saraswat Bhawan, dated the 20th November, 1910:—

"For long Romesh Chandra Dutt's History of the Literature of Bengal was the only work of its kind available to the general reader. The results of further study in this field have been made available to us by the publication of the learned and luminous lectures of Rai Sahib Dineshchandra Sen. * * In the direction of the History of the Language and the Literature, Rai Sahib Dineshchandra Sen has
created the necessary interest by his Typical Selections. It remains for the members of the Parishad to follow this lead and to carry on the work in the same spirit of patient accurate research.”

Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, in his Convocation Address, dated the 13th March, 1909, as Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University:—

“We have had a long series of luminous lectures from one of our own graduates, Babu Dineschandra Sen, on the fascinating subject of the History of the Bengali Language and Literature. These lectures take a comprehensive view of the development of our vernacular, and their publication will unquestionably facilitate the historical investigation of the origin of the vernacular literature of this country, the study of which is avowedly one of the foremost objects of the New Regulations to promote.”

Sylvain Levi (Paris)—“I cannot give you praises enough—your work is a Chintamani—a Rathaakara. No book about India would I compare with yours...Never did I find such a realistic sense of literature...Pundit and Peasant, Yogi and Raja mix together in a Shakespearian way on the stage you have built up.”

Extract from a review by the same scholar in the “Revue Critique” Jan. 1915;—(translated for the “Bengalee.”)

“One cannot praise too highly the work of Mr. Sen. A profound and original erudition has been associated with vivid imagination. The historian though relying on his documents has the temperament of an epic poet. He has likewise inherited the lyric genius of his race.”

. Barth (Paris)—“I can approach your book as a learner, not as a judge.”

C. H. Tawney—“Your work shows vast research and much general culture.”

Vincent Smith—“A work of profound learning and high value.”

F. W. Thomas—“Characterised by extensive erudition and independent research.”

E. J. Rapson—“I looked through it with great interest and great admiration for the knowledge and research to which it bears witness.”

F. H. Skrine—“Monumental work—I have been revealing in the book which taught me much of which I was ignorant.”

E. B. Havell—“Most valuable book which every Anglo-Indian should read. I congratulate you most heartily on your very admirable English and perfect lucidity of style.”

D. C. Phillot—“I can well understand the enthusiasm with which the work was received by scholars, for even to men unacquainted
with your language, it cannot fail to be a source of great interest and profit."

L. D. Barnett—"I congratulate you on having accomplished such an admirable work."

G. Kubtsuh—"Mr. Sen's valuable work on Bengali literature, a subject hitherto unfamiliar to me, which I am now reading with great interest."

J. F. Blumhardt—"An extremely well-written and scholarly production, exhaustive in its wealth of materials and of immense value."

T. W. Rhys Davids—"It is a most interesting and important work and reflects great credit on your industry and research."

Jules Bloch (Paris)—"Your book I find an admirable one and which is the only one of its kind in the whole of India."

William Rothenstein—"I found the book surprisingly full of suggestive information. It held me bound from beginning to end, in spite of my absolute ignorance of the language of which you write with obviously profound scholarship."

Emile Senart (Paris)—"I have gone through your book with lively interest and it appears to me to do the highest credit to your learning and method of working."

Henry Van Dyke (U.S.A)—"Your instructive pages which are full of new suggestions in regard to the richness and interest of the Bengali Language and Literature."

C. T. Winchester (U.S.A)—"A work of profound learning on a theme which demands the attention of all Western scholars."

From a long review in the Times Literary Supplement, London, June 20, 1912—"In his narrative, as becomes one who is the soul of scholarly candour, he tells those, who can read him with sympathy and imagination more about the Hindu mind and its attitude towards life than we can gather from 50 volumes of impressions of travel by Europeans. Loti's picturesque account of the rites practised in Travancore temples, and even M. Chevrier's synthesis of much browsing in Hindu Scriptures, seem faint records by the side of this unassuming tale of Hindu literature—Mr. Sen may well be proud of the lasting monument he has erected to the literature of his native Bengal."

From a long review in the Athenæum, March, 16, 1912—"Mr. Sen may justly congratulate himself on the fact that in the middle age he has done more for the history of his national language and literature than any other writer of his own or indeed any time."

From a long review in the Spectator, June 12, 1912—"A book of extraordinary interest to those who would make an impartial study of the Bengali mentality and character—a work which reflects the
ultimote credit on the candoir. industry and learning of its author.
In its kind his book is a masterpiece—modest, learned, thorough and
sympathetic. Perhaps no other man living has the learning and
happy industry for the task he has successfully accomplished."

From a review by Mr. H. Beveridge in the Royal Asiatic
Society's Journal, Jan. 1912—"It is a very full and interesting account
of the development of the Bengali Literature. He has a power of
picturesque writing...his descriptions are often eloquent."

From a long review by S. K. Batscliffe in "India," London,
March 15, 1912—"There is no more competent authority on the subject
than Mr. Dineschandra Sen. The great value of the book is in its
full and fresh treatment of the pre-English era and for this it would
be difficult to give its author too high praise."

From a long review by H. Kern in the Bijdragen of the Royal
Institute for Toal (translated by Dr. Kern himself)—"Fruit of investiga-
tion carried through many years...highly interesting book...the
reviewer has all to admire in the pages of the work, nothing to
criticise, for his whole knowledge is derived from it."

From a review by Dr. Oldenberg in the Frankfurter Zeitung,
December 3, 1911 (Translated by the late Dr. Thibaut) . "It is an
important supplementation of the history of modern Sanskrit Litera-
ture. The account of Chaitanya's influence on the poetical literature
of Bengal contributes one of the most brilliant sections of the work."

From a review in Deutsche Bundschan, April, 1912—"The
picture which this learned Bengali has painted for us with loving care
of the literature of his native land deserves to be received with
attentive and grateful respect."

From a review in Luzac's Oriental List, London, May-June,
1912—"A work of inestimable value, full of interesting information,
containing complete account of the writings of Bengali authors from
the earliest time .It will undoubtedly find a place in every Oriental
library as being the most complete and reliable standard work on the
Bengali Language and Literature."

From a review in the Indian Magazine, London, August, 1912—
"For Mr. Sen's erudition, his studly patriotism, his instructive perception
of the finer qualities in Bengali life and literature, the reader of
his book must have a profound respect if he is to understand what
modern Bengal is."

From a long review in the Madras Mail, May 9, 1912, "A
survey of the evolution of the Bengali letters by a student so
competent, so exceptionally learned can hardly fail to be an important
event in the world of criticism."
From a long review in the *Pioneer*, May 5, 1912—"Mr. Sen is a typical student such as was common in medieval Europe—a lover of learning for learning's sake. He must be a poor judge of characters who can rise from a perusal of Mr. Sen's pages without a real respect and liking for the writer, for his sincerity, his industry, his enthusiasm in the cause of learning."

From a review in *Englishman*, April 23, 1912—"Only one who has completely identified himself with the subject could have mastered it so well as the author of this imposing book."

From a review in the *Empire*, August 31, 1918—"As a book of reference Mr. Sen's work will be found invaluable and he is to be congratulated on the result of his labours. It may well be said that he has proved what an English enthusiast once said that 'Hengah unites the mellifluousness of Italian with the power possessed by German for rendering complex ideas.'"

From a review in the *Indian Antiquary*, December, 1912, by F G Pargiter: "This book is the outcome of great research and study, on which the author deserves the warmest praise. He has explained the literature and the subjects treated in it with such fulness and in such detail as to make the whole plain to any reader. The folk-literature, the structure and style of the language, metre and rhyme, and many miscellaneous points are discussed in valuable notes. The tone is calm and the judgments appear to be generally fair."
BANGA SAHITYA PARICHAYA

OR

TYPICAL SELECTIONS FROM OLD
BENGALI LITERATURE

BY

Bai Sahib Dineschandra Sen, B.A.

2 vols. pp. 1911, Royal 8vo., with an Introduction in English running over 90 pages, published by the University of Calcutta.

(With 10 coloured illustrations) Price Rs. 12).

Sir George Grierson—"Invaluable work ....That I have yet read through its 1900 pages I do not pretend, but what I have read has filled me with admiration for the industry and learning displayed. It is a worthy sequel to your monumental History of Bengali Literature, and of it we may safely say "finis coronat opus." How I wish that a similar work could be compiled for other Indian languages, specially for Hindi."

E. B. Havell—"Two monumental volumes from old Bengali Literature. As I am not a Bengali scholar, it is impossible for me to appreciate at their full value the splendid results of your scholarship and research, but I have enjoyed reading your luminous and most instructive introduction which gives a clear insight into the subject. I was also very much interested in the illustrations, the reproduction of which from original paintings is very successful and creditable to Swadeshi work."

H. Beveridge — "Two magnificent volumes of the Banga Sahitya Parichaya. ....I have read with interest Rasa Sundari's autobiography in your extracts."

F. H. Skrine—"The two splendid volumes of Banga Sahitya Parichaya I am reading with pleasure and profit. They are a credit to your profound learning and to the University which has given them to the world."

From a long review in The Times Literary Supplement, London, November 4, 1915—"In June, 1912, in commenting on Mr. Sen's History of Bengali Language and Literature, we suggested that that work might usefully be supplemented by an anthology of Bengali prose and poetry. Mr. Sen has for many years been occupied with the aid of other patriotic students of the medivial literature of Bengal in collecting manuscripts of forgotten or half-forgotten poems. In addition to these more or less valuable monuments of Bengali poetic
art, the chief popular presses have published great masses on literary matter, chiefly religious verse. It can hardly be said that these piles of written and printed matter have ever been subjected to a critical or philological scrutiny. Their very existence was barely known to the Europeans, even to those who have studied the Bengali Language on the spot. Educated Bengalis themselves, until quite recent times, have been too busy with the arts and sciences of Europe to spare much time for indigenous treasures. That was the reason why we suggested the compiling of a critical dictionary for the benefit not only of European but of native scholars. The University of Calcutta, prompted by the eminent scholar Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, then Vice-Chancellor, had already anticipated this need it seems. It had shrunk (rightly, we think) from the enormous and expensive task of printing the MSS. recovered by the diligence and generosity of Mr. Sen and other inquirers and employed Mr. Sen to prepare the two bulky volumes now before us. The Calcutta Senate is to be congratulated on its enterprise and generosity."

From a review in the *Athenæum*, January 16, 1915: "We have already reviewed Mr. Sen's History of Bengali Language and Literature and have rendered some account of his previous work in Bengali entitled *Bhawana Bhasa O Sahitya*. Mr. Sen now supplies the means of checking his historical and critical conclusions in a copious collection of Bengali verse. Here are the materials carefully arranged and annotated with a skill and learning such as probably no one else living can command."

From a review by Mr. F. G. Pargiter in the Royal Asiatic Society's Journal: "These two partly volumes of over 2,100 pages are an anthology of Bengali poetry and prose from the 8th to the 19th century and are auxiliary to the same author's History of Bengali Language and Literature which was reviewed by Mr. Beveridge in this Journal for 1912. The Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University who was consulted, decided that the best preliminary measure would be to make and publish typical selections. The University then entrusted that duty to Babu Dinsh Chandra Sen; this work is the outcome of his researches. There can be no question that Dinsh Babu was the person most competent to undertake the task and in these two volumes we have without doubt a good presentation of typical specimens of old Bengali literature. The style of the big book is excellent, its printing is fine, and it is embellished with well-executed reproductions in colour of some old painting. It has also a copious index."
THE
VAISNAVA LITERATURE OF MEDIEVAL BENGAL
[Being lectures delivered as Reader to the University of Calcutta.]

BY
RAI SAHIB DINESH CHANDRA SEN, B.A.

JUST PUBLISHED BY THE
CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY
Demy 8vo. 257 pages
WITH A PREFACE BY
J. D. ANDERSON, Esq., I.C.S., (Retired)

Price Rs. 2 only.

Sir George Grierson:—Very valuable book.....I am reading it with the greatest interest and am learning much from it.

William Rothenstein.—I was delighted with your book, I cannot tell you how touched I am to be reminded of that side of your beloved country which appeals to me most—a side of which I was able to perceive something during my own too short visit to India. In the faces of the best of your countrymen I was able to see that spirit of which you write so charmingly in your book. I am able to recall these faces and figures as if they were before me. I hear the tinkle of the temple-bells along the ghats of Benares, the voices of the women as they sing their sacred songs crossing the noble river in the boats at sunset and I sit once more with the austere Sanyasin friends I shall never, I fear, see more. But though I shall not look upon the face of India again, the vision I had of it will fill my eyes through life, and the love I feel for your country will remain to enrich my own vision of life, so long as I am capable of using it. Though I can only read you in English, the spirit in which you write is to me as true an Indian spirit, that it shines through our own idiom, and carries me, I said before, straight to the banks of your sacred rivers, to the bathing tanks and white shrine and temples of your well remembered villages and tanks. So once more I send you y thanks for the magic carpet you sent me, upon which my soul can
return to your dear land. May the songs of which you write to me remain to fill this land with their fragrance; you will have need of them, in the years before you, as we have need of all that is best in the songs of our own seers in the dark waters through which we are steering.

From a long review in the Times Literary Supplement, 2nd August, 1917

The Vaisnava Literature of Mediaval Bengal. By Rai Sahib Dineschandra Sen. (Calcutta - The University)

Though the generalisation that all Hindus not belonging to modern reform movements are Saivas or Vaisnavas is much too wide, there are the two main divisions in the bewildering mass of sects which make up the 217,000,000 of Hindus, and at many points they overlap each other. The attempts made in the 1901 Census to collect information regarding sects led to such unsatisfactory and partial results that they were not repeated in the last decennial enumeration. But it is unquestionable that the Vaisnavas, the worshippers of Krishna, are dominant in Bengal, owing to the great success of the reformed cult established by Chaitanya, a contemporary of Martin Luther. The doctrine of Bhakti or religious devotion, which he taught still flourishes in Bengal, and the four lectures of the Reader to the University of Calcutta in Bengali here reproduced provide an instructive guide to its expression in the literature of the country during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first part of the book is devoted to the early period of Vaisnava literature, dating from the eleventh century.

The Rai Sahib is filled with a most patriotic love of his nation and its literature, and has done more than any contemporary countryman to widen our knowledge of them. His bulky volume recording the history of Bengali Language and Literature from the earliest times to the middle of the nineteenth century is accepted by Orientalists as the most complete and authoritative work on the subject. The industry and learning displayed therein and in his thought is still dominant in modern Bengali literature not directly Vaisnava in import.

There is refreshing ingenuity in his claim, "my industry has been great," and the "forbearing indulgence" for which he asks if he has failed from any lack of powers, will readily be granted in view of the enthusiasm for his subject which somewhat narrows the strictly critical value of his estimates, but does not impair the sustained human interest of the book.
Chaitanya clearly taught, as these pages show, that the Krishna of the Mahabharata, the great chieftain and ally of the Pandava brother, was not the Krishna of Brindaban. The latter, said the reformer, to Rupa, the author of those masterpieces of Sanskrit drama, the Vidagdha Madhava and the Lalita Madhava, was love's very self and an embodiment of sweetness; and the more material glories of Mathura should not be confused with the spiritual conquest of Brindaban. The amours of Krishna with Radha and the milkmaids of Brindaban are staple themes of the literature associated with the worship of the God of the seductive flute. But Mr. Sen repeatedly insists that the love discussed in the literature he has so closely studied is spiritual and mystic, although usually presented in sensuous garb. Chaitanya who had frequent ecstasies of spiritual joy; Rupa, who classified the emotions of love in 360 groups and the other authors whose careers are here traced were hermits of unspotted life and religious devotion. The old passionate desire for union which they taught is still dominant in modern Bengali literature not directly Vaishnava in import. As Mr. J. D. Anderson points out in his preface, the influence of Chaitanya's teaching may be detected in the mystical verses of Tagore.
Chaitanya and His Companions

From a long review in the Times Literary supplement 25th April, 1918:

"This delightful and interesting little book is the outcome of a series of lectures supplementing the learned discourses which Mr. Sen made the material of his "Baisvava Literature of Mediaeval Bengal" reviewed by us on August 2, 1917.

It is an authentic record of the religious emotion and thought of that wonderful province of Bengal which few of its Western rulers, we suspect, have rightly comprehended, not from lack of friendly sympathy but simply from want of precisely what Mr Sen, better than any one living, better than Sir Rabindranath Tagore himself, can supply.

It is indeed, no easy matter for a Western Protestant to comprehend, save by friendship and sympathy with just such a pious Hindu as Mr. Sen, what is the doctrine of an "Indratala," a "favourite deity" of Hindu pious adoration. In his native tongue Mr Sen has written charming little books, based on ancient legends, which bring us very near the heart of this simple mystery, akin, we suppose, to the cult of particular saints in Catholic countries. Such for instance, is his charming tale of "Sati," the Aryan spouse of the rough Himalayan ascetic god Siva. The tale is dedicated, in words of delightfully candid respect and affection, to the devoted and loving wives of Bengal, whose virtues as wives and mothers are the admiration of all who know their country. Your pious Vaisnava can, without any hesitation or difficulty, transfer his thoughts from the symbolical amaranth of Krishna to that other strange creation legend of Him of the Blue Throat who, to save God's creatures, swallowed the poison cast up at the Churning of the Ocean and bears the mystic stigma to this day. Well, we have our traditions, legends, mysteries, and as Miss Underhill and others tell us, our own ecstatic mystics, who find such ineffable joy in loving God as, our Hindu friends tell us, the divine Radha experienced in her sweet surrender to the inspired wooing of Krishna. The important thing for us, as students of life and literature is to note how these old communal beliefs influence and develop that wonderful record of human thought and emotion wrought for us by the imaginative writers of verse and prose, the patient artists of the pen.

When all is said, there remains the odd indefinable charm which attaches to all that Dinesh Chandra Sen writes, whether in English or
his native Bengali. In his book breathe a native candour and piety which somehow remind us of the classical writers familiar to our boyhood. In truth, he is a belated contemporary of, say, Plutarch, and attacks his biographical task in much the same spirit. We hope his latest book will be widely (and sympathetically) read."

The Vaisnava Literature of Mediaeval Bengal

J. D. Anderson, Esq.—retired I. C. S., Professor, Cambridge University;—I have read more than half of it I propose to send with it, if circumstances leave me the courage to write it, a short Preface (which I hope you will read with pleasure even if you do not think it worth publication) explaining why, in the judgment of a very old student of all your works, your book should be read not only in Calcutta, but in London and Paris, and Oxford and Cambridge, I have read it and am reading it with great delight and profit and very real sympathy. Think how great must be the charm of your topic and your treatment when in this awful year of anxiety and sorrow, the reading of your delightful MS. has given me rest and refreshment in a time when every post, every knock at the door may bring us sorrow.

I write this in a frantic hurry—the mail goes today—in order to go back to your most interesting and fascinating pages.

History of the Bengali Language and Literature


1 One cannot praise too highly the work of Mr. Sen. A profound and original erudition has been associated with a vivid imagination. The works which he analyses are brought back to life with the consciousness of the original authors, with the movement of the multitudes who patronised them and with the landscape which encircled them. The historian, though relying on his documents, has the temperament of an epic poet. He has likewise inherited the lyrical genius of his race. His enthusiastic sympathy vibrates through all his descriptions. Convinced as every Hindu is of the superiority of the Brahmanic civilization, he exalts its glories and palliates its shortcomings, if he does not approve of them he would excuse them. He tries to be just to Buddhism and Islam; in the main he is grateful to them for their contribution to the making of India. He praises with eloquent ardour the early English missionaries of Christianity.

The appreciation of life so rare in our book-knowledge, runs throughout the work; one reads these thousand pages with a sustained interest; and one loses sight of the enormous labour which it
presupposes; one easily slips into the treasure of information which it presents. The individual extracts quoted at the bottom of the pages offers a unique anthology of Bengali. The linguistic remarks scattered in the extracts abound in new and precious materials. Mr. Sen has given to his country a model which it would be difficult to surpass; we only wish that it may provoke in other parts of India imitations to follow it.