History of Ancient India

By

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TO
THE SWEET
AND
EVER-CHERISHED MEMORY
OF
MY DEARLY BELOVED WIFE
HEMAVATĪ DEVI

"A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright,
With something of angelic light."
PREFACE

The object of this volume is to provide within a moderate compass a compendious account of the history, institutions, and culture of ancient India from the dim ages of antiquity to the establishment of Moslem rule. It has not been planned to meet the needs of any particular class of readers. Its primary purpose is to serve alike students, scholars, and all others, interested in the study of ancient Indian history, as a book of ready use and reference. How far I have succeeded in striking a happy balance in my narrative to suit the requirements and tastes of each one of these groups that approach history from widely divergent angles, it is for competent critics to judge. But suffice it to say here that in the pages which follow every attempt has been made to avoid presenting a mass of the dry bones of historical fact or over-burdening the account with intricate discussions on knotty problems of history, on the one hand, and giving a mere general and readable survey of India's long and fascinating past, on the other. I have endeavoured to tap and utilise properly the available sources of information, literary, epigraphic, and numismatic, and also to embody and set forth in a consistent manner the results of up-to-date researches on different topics and epochs. All the materials have been patiently sifted and critically examined with the sole desire to arrive at historical truths, however

For he is neither a propagandist of ideas nor a propagandist of the exploits of ambitious dynasts of old. He tries, as far as possible, to eliminate the subjective and hold up the mirror of his mind to reflect without the least distortion or colouring. He cannot afford to be dogmatic in his statement in ancient Indian history, where gaps still yawn, evidence is not only vague, uncertain, and jky, but also at times conflicting or contradictory, being the nature of the data at our disposal. Historicity of some kings is indeed a matter of debate and controversy at this distance in time. Historicism, however, appears natural, when we reflect our ancient predecessors as well had a failure in it. We may aptly recall here the words of the Purana, which run to this effect: “I have got nil story. The existence of these kings will in time become a matter of debate and doubt as the visible Rama and other august kings has become a matter of doubt and speculation. Emperor merely legends in the current of time—the Emperors thought and think “India is mine.” Fie fie on the Empire of Emperor Raghava.

The idea of the work originated a few years back, but, for reasons which need not be detailed, it could not materialise earlier. Even now I have been able to write a chapter on Greater India on the general features of our history. However, to add both in the second edition without illustrations owing to the forbidding price of materials.
them where necessary. I owe special obligation to my esteemed friend, Prof. B. L. Sahni, who very kindly went through the proofs at much personal inconvenience, and ungrudgingly gave me the benefit of his scholarship and experience. To my valued colleague, Dr. A. S. Altekar, I am grateful for going through the MS. and making some useful suggestions. Lastly, my thanks are also due to Mr. Ram Sumer for helping me in the preparation of the Index.

The system of transliteration adopted in the text is the one followed in my earlier work, ‘The History of Kanauj.’ To illustrate, we may mention: Bāna, Rastrakūta, Saśigupta, Soma, Candra, Cola, Aṅga, Rigveda, etc. But, as a rule, I have not used diacritical marks in the case of modern place-names and other popular forms.

In conclusion, I crave the readers’ indulgence for any blemishes and errors of omission and commission, which may still be discovered by the discerning eye, although no pains have been spared to make the account lucid, accurate, concise, and comprehensive. The subject dealt with here is vast and complicated, and while writing I was often reminded of the well-known lines of Kālidāsa:

कब सुर्यप्रभवो बंधा: कब चालपविषया मति:  
तितीषुद्वृत्तं मोहादुपेनासिस्म सागरम् !!

Vaiśākha Pūrṇimā  
April 30, 1942  

Rama Shankar Tripathi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ep. Ind.—Epigraphia Indica.
S. I. I.—South Indian Inscriptions.
C. I. I.—Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Volumes I, II & III.
R. E.—Rock Edict of Aśoka.
M. R. E.—Minor Rock Edict of Aśoka.
P. E.—Pillar Edict of Aśoka.
M. P. E.—Minor Pillar Edict of Aśoka.
Ind. Ant.—Indian Antiquary.
Jour. Ind. Hist.—Journal of Indian History.
J. N. S. I.—Journal of the Numismatic Society of India.
Mem. As. Soc. Beng.—Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Arch. Surv. Ind., or A. S. I.—Archaeological Survey of India.
Cam. Sh. Hist. Ind.—Cambridge Short History of India.
E. H. I.—Early History of India.
Ox. Hist. Ind.—Oxford History of India.
C. C. G. D.—Catalogue of the Calcutta Coins and Dynasties (John Allan).
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<td>Ancient India as described in Classical Literature.</td>
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<td>Hc.—Harṣacarita.</td>
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<td>Hc. C. T.—Harṣacarita (English Translation by Cowell and Thomas).</td>
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<td>G. O. S.—Gaekwāḍ Oriental Series.</td>
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<td>Sachau—Alberuni’s India (English Translation).</td>
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<td>Watters—On Yuan Chwang’s Travels.</td>
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<td>Beal—Buddhist Records of the Western World.</td>
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<td>Life—Life of Yuan Chwang (Samuel Beal).</td>
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<td>Stein—English Translation of Kalhaṇa’s Rājatarāṅgini.</td>
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<td>Elliot—History of India as told by its own Historians.</td>
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<td>Briggs—History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power (Tārikh-i-Firishta).</td>
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PART I
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTORY

Sources

Absence of History

Ancient Indian literature, varied and rich in many respects, is singularly deficient in history. There is no work in all the literary treasures of the Brahmans, Buddhists and Jains comparable to the *Book of Kings* or the *Annals* of Livy or the *Histories* of Herodotus. This is not because India's past is barren of deeds worthy of remembrance. On the other hand, the ages were filled with heroic achievements, great upheavals and dynastic vicissitudes, but, strangely enough, these events did not find any systematic record with due regard to chronology. Whether this curious neglect of an important branch of literary activity was due to a lack of proper historical sense, or to the indifference of the religious orders, that controlled and developed the literatures, towards the fleeting mundane affairs of life, there is no gainsaying that the historian of ancient India suffers greatly from the initial difficulty of the want of genuine works of historiography.
The sources of early Indian literature can be divided into two classes, Historical and Non-Historical, which are either indigenous to India or were transmitted from abroad. We shall first take up the former.

**Literary Sources—Non-Historical**

**Non-Historical Works**

The earliest literature of India belongs to the religious kind. The patience and industry of scholars have, however, succeeded in extracting from it useful bits of history. For instance, specifically the Rigveda—have furnished copious materials of historical information relating to the Indo-Aryans in India, their internal divisions such as the “Dasyus” and other cognates, and the Brāhmaṇas (e.g., Aitareya, Saunaka) and the Upanisads, like the Brihadāraṇyaka, have furnished material of historical importance, and the Buddhist Pitakas, besides the Jain canonical works (e.g., Pāṇiniya Sūtra) incidentally embody historical information that may be utilised with profit. Further demonstrated how such works as the Gārgī-Sanhitā, an astrological work, dramas of Kālidāsa and Bhāsa, and illustrations of grammatical rules such as the Astādhyāyī, or by Patañjali in the Mahābhāṣya, afford us welcome light on dark points of history. But valuable and trustworthy as these works are, they are far too meagre to serve the purpose of historical literature.
Epics—the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata—represent the first notable attempts of the ancient Hindus in this direction. No doubt, they give interesting pictures of the then religious and social conditions, but as chronicles of political events they seem lamentably full of tale-telling and chronological aberrations. Next come the Purāṇas, eighteen in number, which are said to have been recited by the Śūta Lomaharṣaṇa or his son (Sauti) Ugraśravas. Normally, they should deal with five set subjects, viz., (a) Sarga (primary creation), (b) Pratisarga (re-creation after periodical dissolution of the universe), (c) Vāṃśa (genealogies of gods and Rīṣis), (d) Manvantara (groups of mahāyuga “great ages” in a Kalpa or æon, in each of which the first father of mankind was Manu), (e) Vāṃśānucarita (histories of old dynasties of kings). Of these, the last topic alone is important for the purpose of history, but it is found in the Matsya, Vāyu, Viṣṇu, Brahmāṇḍa, Bhāgavata and Bhaviṣya only out of the extant Purāṇas. Thus, most of these “collections of ‘old world’ legends” have got no historical value whatsoever. Even the rest contain much that is manifestly mythological and altogether confused from the chronological point of view.¹ They sometimes treat contemporaneous dynasties or rulers as successive, or omit some of them entirely (e.g., the Purāṇas are silent about the Kushans, Indo-Greeks Indo-Parthians, etc.). No dates are given, and even names of kings are not often inaccurate (cf. the list of Andhra kings). Notwithstanding these defects, the Purāṇas certainly transmit scraps of historical data, and it would not be fair to disparage their authority roundly. Among other early productions relevant
Harṣacarita, Sandhyākaranandi’s Sandhyākarananda’s Navasāhasānkacarita, Gupta’s Navasāhasānkacarita, kadvecaarita, and Jayaratha’s Kadvecaarita, and Jayaratha’s Kadvecaarita, happily, however, these works are more historical matter, and are more full of elaboration, metaphor, and metaphor, and are more work in Sanskrit, which can be work in Sanskrit, which can be an approach to history, as we understand an approach to history, as we understand the tarangini of Kalhana. It was based on writings of previous period on royal charters and laudatory inscriptions, account of Kashmir for a few centuries preceding his time is quite reliable. The period he too is unfortunately the period he too is unfortunately lapses. In addition to these, we consider the evidence of some source works (e.g., the Nandikkalambakūrakottu Pillaiattamill, Jayagondanā, Rājarāja-solam-Ulā, Colavamśa-caritam). The Chinese chronicles, the Dipavamśa (fourth century) and the Mahāvamśa (sixth century), such Prakrit compositions as Vāraṇasi, Hemacandra’s Kumārapālacakarita; and a cautious and critical use.

Foreign Writings

Not less valuable than the accounts of foreign writers or travelers. The knowledge of India was based either on the stay in the country for a short time or the stay in the country for a short time or the stay in the country for a short time. Some of the Travelers belong men of several nationalities: Chinese, Tibetan, and Moslem. Some of the Travelers belong men of several nationalities: Chinese, Tibetan, and Moslem.
and Roman works by Quintus Curtius, Diodoros Siculus, Arrian, Plutarch, and others; and the value of their testimony can best be judged from the fact that but for them we should have known nothing about the Macedonian invasion, so thoroughly have Indian writers maintained silence regarding this memorable episode. The Indika of Megasthenes, the Seleucid ambassador at the Maurya court, is another important source of information about the institutions, geography and products of India. It is now lost to us, but fragments are still preserved in the form of quotations by later authors, such as Arrian, Appian, Strabo, Justin, etc. Similarly, the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea and Ptolemy's Geography furnish geographical data of interest.

Like the classical (Greek and Roman) works, Chinese literature is also of great help in reconstructing ancient Indian history. There are numerous notices in it regarding the movements of the predatory Central Asian tribes that profoundly affected the destinies of India; and above all, we have the excellent narratives of Fa-hian (399-414 A.D.), Yuan Chwang (629-45 A.D.), and I-tsing (c. 673-95 A.D.)—three of the most distinguished pilgrims, who visited India in search of knowledge and with the desire to worship at the sites hallowed by the memory of the Buddha. Further, the works of the Tibetan Lāmā Tārānātha, the Dulva and Tangyur, etc. may also be profitably consulted.

Then come the Moslem authors, who inform us how step by step the armies of Islam conquered India and introduced another vigorous factor into Indian polity. The most celebrated of such writers was Alberuni, a man of versatile intellect and a scholar of
a mine of information on India and its earlier Moslem writers were Al-Mas'udi’s (Silsilat-ut-Tawārīkh), and Al-Ma‘ārof. Among other Moslem works, we may quote Nizāmi’s Tāj-ul-Maāsir, Mīrkhod Khond Mir’s Habib-us-Siyar, Firishta’s Nizāmuddin’s Tabaqāt-i-Akbari, Mir Nastri, Al Utbi’s Tarikh-i-Yamīn, and Tārkīb-ul-Kāmil.

The observations and writings are particularly valuable not only for light they throw on the political events, society, history, and religion of ancient India, but also for the aid they establish synchronisms in the dates. Indeed, the identification of Candragupta Maurya has been made possible by their hands as the sheet-anchor of Indian history.

Archaeological sources: Inscriptions

Where the literary sources are wanting, inscriptions fortunately come to our rescue. Out of thousands of them, the earliest belong to the fourth or fifth century B.C. 1 have been recovered, perhaps a large number still await discovery. They are found engraved upon stone tablets, metal plates, caves, and temples, in the languages current at different localities—Sanskrit, Pāli, mixed dialects, Southern India, vīṣṇu Tamil, TeM, and Kanarese. Some of them are of literary merit too, being either in prose or verse form.
number are also incised in Kharoṣṭhī running, like Arabic and Persian, from right to left. Their decipherment, which is a marvel of scholarship, reveals that their object is to record a donation, public or private, or to commemorate a great event, or the exploits of a conqueror. The edicts of Asoka, containing his ethical exhortations, are, of course, a class by themselves. The subject-matter of inscriptions is indeed very varied. There are even Sanskrit plays (e.g., at Dhār and Ajmer) and musical rules (e.g., at Kuḍimpālai, Pudukotta State) recorded on stone. The importance of these documents can hardly be over-emphasised. They are extremely useful in fixing dates, and often regulate and supplement what we learn from literature and other sources. For instance, in the absence of such epigraphic evidence the veil of oblivion would hang heavily even on rulers like Khāravela or Samudragupta, and our knowledge of the mediæval Hindu dynasties would be altogether incomplete. Sometimes foreign inscriptions, too, unexpectedly lend us aid. Thus, the Boghaz-Koi (Asia Minor) inscriptions, which mention Vedic gods, probably testify to the movements of Aryan tribes. We have elsewhere referred to the contact of India with ancient Iran, and curiously it is confirmed by inscriptions discovered at Persepolis and Naksh-i-Rustam. Similarly, inscriptions throw a flood of light on the political and cultural relations between India and the Far East in early times.

**Coins**

The next guides, we may appeal to, are coins.
derived from literature, it. They are of various or alloy, and contain legenda with dates are doubtless work of Indian chronology. Anonymous ones yield fully consider their fabric, our sole evidence with and Indo-Baktrian kind, completely ignored then. Coins shed remarkable ganas (autonomous communities), and also on the religions of monarchs (e.g., of Kanishka) accomplishments (e.g., of Ashoka) of the metal undoubtedly indications of the time, and helps us in fixing the link. The latter must be applied discovery of Roman coins in means indicate an extensive technical influence in India. Malm of Pliny over the country in exchange for etc.

Monuments

Last, but not the least, are not directly concerned here, except for
at Boro-Bodur and Prambanam (central Java), as also the remarkable ruins at Angkor Vat and Angkor Thom (Kambuja), reveal the hand of Indians, and show that they had migrated to the Far East and spread their power and culture there. Even for purposes of chronology, the evidence of monuments cannot be entirely despised, for experts have demonstrated how important conclusions follow a close study of the stratification of buildings. Further, it may not be out of place to add here that sculptures and paintings (e.g., at Ajantā) occasionally illumine our path where we might otherwise have walked with faltering steps.

Conclusion or Main Features

Such, in brief, are the sources for the resuscitation of India’s early past. The most striking feature, when compared with modern history, is the meagreness of our materials and the wide range over which they lie scattered. Accordingly, the historian must work like a miner with the pick and shovel of his perseverance and critical judgment to get at the gold of facts without the dross of courtly exaggerations and poetic embellishments. Quite often rocks intervene in the shape of conflicting claims, utter absence of dates, or prevalence of several eras at different periods and places.

1 See Dr. R. C. Majumdar, Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East, Vol. I, Champa; Suvarṇadvīpa; and publications of the Greater India Society; Dr. B. R. Chatterji, Indian Cultural Influence in Cambodia (Calcutta, 1938); India and Java (Calcutta, 1934); H. C.