

SANSKRIT VANGMAYA KA BRIHAD ITIHAS

A Comprehensive History of Sanskrit Literature

Chief Editors: Baldev Upadhyaya & Shrinivas Rath

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Set of 15 books

Sanskrit is one of the oldest languages to emerge from India. Preceded only by Vedic Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali and Tamil, Classical Sanskrit was the lingua franca of Indian elite for centuries. However, the jury is still out on whether Sanskrit was actually a spoken language. Right until the Islamic conquest of India, Sanskrit was not only the medium of expression for the arts and philosophies but also the administrative language. Sanskrit united the Kashmiri with the Tamilian and the Assamese with the Gujarati.

Sanskrit is a historical Indo-Aryan language, the primary liturgical language of Hinduism and a literary and scholarly language in Jainism and Buddhism. Today, it is listed as one of the 22 scheduled languages of India and is an official language of the state of Uttarakhand. Sanskrit holds a prominent position in Indo-European studies.

The corpus of Sanskrit literature encompasses a rich tradition of poetry and drama as well as scientific, technical, philosophical and religious texts. Sanskrit continues to be widely used as a ceremonial language in Jain, Buddhist and Hindu religious rituals in the form of hymns and *mantras*. Spoken Sanskrit is still in use in some villages, a few traditional institutions in India and there are many attempts at further popularization.

Classical Sanskrit is the standard register as laid out in the grammar of Panini, around the 4th century BCE. Its position in the cultures of Greater India is akin to that of Latin and Greek in Europe and it has significantly influenced most modern languages of the Indian subcontinent, particularly in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

The pre-Classical form of Sanskrit is known as Vedic Sanskrit, with the language of the Rigveda being the oldest and most archaic stage preserved, its oldest core dating back to as early as 1500 BCE. This qualifies Rigvedic Sanskrit as one of the oldest examples of any Indo-Iranian language, and one of the earliest attested members of the Indo-European languages, the family which includes English and most European languages.

Sanskrit was spoken in an oral society, and the oral tradition was maintained through the development of early classical Sanskrit literature. Writing was not introduced to India until after Sanskrit had evolved into the Prakrits; when it was written, the choice of writing system was

influenced by the regional scripts of the scribes. Therefore, Sanskrit has no native script of its own. As such, virtually all of the major writing systems of South Asia have been used for the production of Sanskrit manuscripts. Since the late 19th century, Devanagari has become the de facto standard writing system for Sanskrit publication, quite possibly because of the European practice of printing Sanskritic texts in this script.

The oldest written inscription in India appears on the famous Prakrit pillar inscriptions of king Ashoka. These were in the Prakrit language and written in the Brahmi script. These were written in the 3rd century BCE. The earliest South Indian inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi, written in early Tamil, belong to the same period.

The earliest known inscriptions in Sanskrit date to the 1st century BCE. They are in the Brahmi script, which was originally used for Prakrit, not Sanskrit. It has been described as a "paradox" that the first evidence of written Sanskrit occurs centuries later than that of the Prakrit languages which are believed to be its linguistic descendants. When Sanskrit was written down, it was first used for texts of an administrative, literary or scientific nature.

It is therefore highly commendable that the government of Uttar Pradesh thought it beneficial to publish an excellent, well-researched and low priced encyclopedia of Sanskrit literature. The encyclopedia has been written in Hindi. We are proud to make it available to all book lovers.

17 volumes of this fine encyclopedia have been published. Unfortunately, volumes 6 and 14 are out of print. We therefore present this set of 15 books for sale.

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