

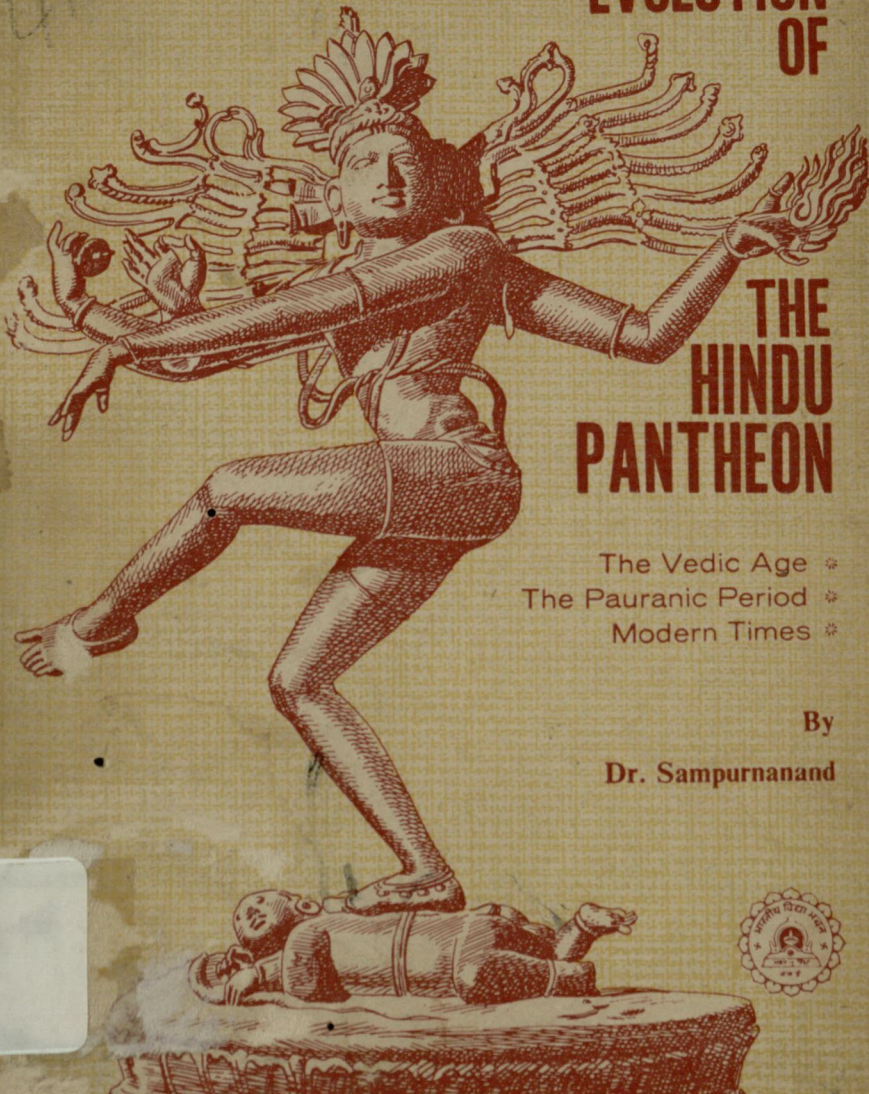
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EVOLUTION  
OF

# THE HINDU PANTHEON

The Vedic Age \*  
The Pauranic Period \*  
Modern Times \*

By

Dr. Sampurnanand



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY-7



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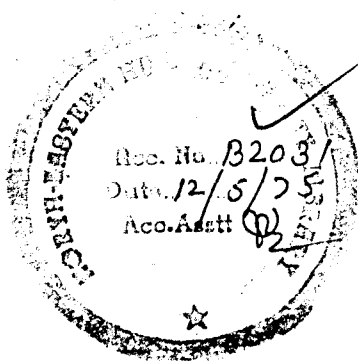
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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THIS book comprises the text of three lectures on the subject "Evolution of the Hindu Pantheon" delivered by Dr. Sampurnanand, Governor of Rajasthan, on December 26, 27 and 28, 1962, in the Bhavan's Annual Birla Endowment Lectures on Indian History.

These lectures fully reflect Dr. Sampurnanand's deep understanding and profound scholarship of the Vedas and Shastras. Not only are they illuminating and thought-provoking on important aspects of Indian culture, mythology and history, but also present an extremely able, authoritative and balanced evaluation of the contributions made to India's culture, mythology and history by successive religious leaders.

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# THE EVOLUTION OF THE HINDU PANTHEON

## I. The Vedic Age

शं नो मित्रः शं वरुणः । शं नो भवत्त्वयमा ।  
शं न इन्द्रो बृहस्पतिः । शं नो विष्णुरुक्रमः ॥

IT WOULD APPEAR to many friends that in taking up this subject, I am wasting my time and, of course, the time of my audience by discussing a theme which has already been discussed threadbare. It is true, of course, that a large number of distinguished men, great Indologists, anthropologists, linguists and students of Comparative Religion have considered this and allied problems and have arrived at certain conclusions which are more or less accepted by scholars all the world over. An exception must be made in the case of the Indian pundit of the old school but he is, as a rule, not vocal and his bare assertion, not backed by that wealth of argument which is available to modern scholarship, carries no weight. Even educated India sets little store by it.

The history of Religion is the story of man's rise to civilization from a primitive stage lower

## II. THE PAURANIC PERIOD

THE PAURANIC PERIOD is the age when the principal Puranas were written down. The work of amending and editing the books went on for a considerable period as is clear from internal evidence but the main texts seem to have been completed from the third to the seventh century. This period roughly corresponds to what is called the Gupta period of Indian History.

There can be no doubt that this was the most brilliant epoch in the history of the land. The extent of territory over which Ashoka ruled was probably larger but the Imperial Guptas, as Western scholars call them, with their frontier outposts established on the बद्युतट, the banks of the Oxus in Central Asia, maintained peace within the country and enjoyed the wholesome respect of neighbours beyond their frontiers for a much longer period than the Mauryas. And, in any case, their writ ran over the whole of Northern India including Afghanistan.

It was not only an age of internal cohesion and military prowess. Perhaps at no other time in our history has there been witnessed such

### III. MODERN TIMES

'MODERN TIMES' is a very vague expression in the present context. Not being a student of history, I am not particularly distressed by the fact that it is a very unorthodox system of chronology that I am adopting in treating the last one thousand years as included in Modern Times. A more detailed sub-division of time is possible, but not particularly necessary, from my point of view.

The social and political background of this period has to be remembered. Taken as a whole, the Hindu has not been a free man during all these years. There have been Hindu kingdoms but they have either existed as vassal states or been engaged in fighting for their free existence, finally to succumb. Foreign rule is not congenial to development of character. It enervates a people, making them pessimistic and timid and robs them of self-confidence. There was certainly something, a spark of genuine spiritual strength, which enabled the Hindu to survive during all these centuries and carry on an unequal struggle for political freedom, a struggle which often ended in defeat and suppression but was never wholly

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