

**A HISTORY OF  
INDIAN PHILOSOPHY,  
VOLUME V**

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A history of Indian philosophy, Volume V by Surendranath Dasgupta

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**SURENDRANATH DASGUPTA**

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BY THE LATE  
SURENDRANATH DASGUPTA

VOLUME V  
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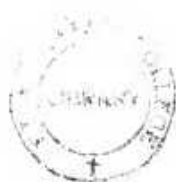
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## SURENDRANATH DASGUPTA

### A MEMOIR

THE late Surendranath Dasgupta was born in Kusthia, a subdivision of Bengal, in October 1885 (10th of Āśvina). He came from a well-known family in Goila, District Barishal, East Bengal. This family was particularly known for its great tradition of Sanskrit learning and culture. His great-grandfather was a distinguished scholar and also a Vaidya (physician of the Ayurvedic school of medicine). He was known by his title "Kavindra", and was running a Sanskrit institution known as "Kavindra College", which continued in existence up to the time of the partition of India in 1947. This institution maintained about 150 students with free board and lodging, and taught Kāvya, Grammar, Nyāya, Vedānta and Āyurveda in traditional Indian style. Professor Dasgupta's father, Kaliprasanna Dasgupta, was the only member of the family who learnt English and took up the job of a surveyor.

In his early years, between five and eight, while he did not know any Sanskrit, he showed certain remarkable gifts of answering philosophical and religious questions in a very easy and spontaneous manner. He could demonstrate the various Yogic postures (*āsanas*); and used to pass easily into trance states, while looking at the river Ganges or listening to some Kirtan song. He was visited by hundreds of learned men and pious saints at his father's residence at Kalighat and was styled "Khoka Bhagawan" (Child God). Mention may particularly be made of Srimat Bijay Krishna Goswami, Prabhu Jagat Bandhu and Sivanarayan Paramhansa. He was sometimes taken to the Theosophical Society, Calcutta, where a big audience used to assemble, and the boy was put on the table and questioned on religious and theological matters. The answers that he gave were published in the Bengali and English newspapers along with the questions. Some of these are still preserved.

He was educated at Diamond Harbour for a time, and then for seven years in the Krishnagar Collegiate School and College. He was interested in Sanskrit and science alike, and surprised the professor of chemistry by his proficiency in the subject so much that he never taught in the class unless his favourite pupil was

present. He took his M.A. degree from Sanskrit College, Calcutta, in 1908. His fellow-students noticed with interest his habits and peculiarities. He took no care of his clothes and hair; he studied on a mat with a pillow for his table; and his place was littered with books and papers. Though he did not talk very much, he already had a reputation for scholarship when he was an M.A. student at the Sanskrit College. His scholarship in Pāṇini was so great that when even his teachers had differences of opinion about a grammatical matter, he was called out of his class to solve it. His first research work on Nyāya, which was written while he was in the Sanskrit College, was read out before the Pandits, and was very highly appreciated by them and the then Principal, the late Mahamahopadhyaya H. P. Sastri. Incidentally it may be noted that Nyāya was not one of the subjects of his M.A. curriculum. After his childhood, both as a student and as a young man, he had many striking religious and spiritual experiences, which were known to a group of his intimate friends and admirers.

One of the peculiar traits of Dasgupta was that he seldom wished to learn anything from others. He had an inner pride that led him to learn everything by his own efforts. He never wanted any stimulus from outside. Whenever he took up any work, he threw his whole soul and being into it. He passed his M.A. in Philosophy in 1910, as a private candidate, summarising all the prescribed books in his own way. He was twice offered a state scholarship to study Sanskrit in a scientific manner in Europe, but as he was the only child of his parents, he refused out of consideration for their feelings. He began his service at Rajshahi College as an officiating lecturer in Sanskrit. He was soon provided with a permanent professorship at Chittagong College, where he worked from 1911 to 1920 and from 1922 to 1924.

Chittagong was to him like a place of banishment, being far away from the great libraries of Calcutta. The College was newly started and had none of the facilities that it possesses now. But Dasgupta had taken the resolution that he would dedicate himself to the study of the Indian "Śāstras" in their entirety. For him to take a resolution was to accomplish it, and while many of his colleagues enjoyed club life in an easy-going manner, he continued his studies for fourteen hours or more a day, in spite of the teasing of his friends. At this time Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi of

Cassimbazar made an offer of 300 rupees a month for Dasgupta to start his library; this is now one of the best of its kind, containing many unpublished manuscripts and over 15,000 printed books. It was given by him as a gift to the Benares Hindu University on his retirement from the Calcutta University. Love of knowledge seems to have been the guiding passion of the professor's life. He never sought position or honour, though they were showered upon him in quick succession in his later days. He had a unique sincerity of purpose and expression, and the light that came from his soul impressed kindred souls.

When Lord Ronaldshay, the Governor of Bengal, came to visit Chittagong College, he had a long talk with Professor Dasgupta in his classroom, and was so much impressed by it that he expressed the desire that the first volume of the *History of Indian Philosophy* might be dedicated to him. Originally Dasgupta's plan was to write out the history of Indian systems of thought in one volume. Therefore he tried to condense the materials available within the compass of one book. But as he went on collecting materials from all parts of India, a huge mass of published and unpublished texts came to light, and the plan of the work enlarged more and more as he tried to utilise them. As a matter of fact, his was the first and only attempt to write out in a systematic manner a history of Indian thought directly from the original sources in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit. In a work of the fourteenth century A.D., the *Sarva-darśana-saṃgraha* of Mādhavācārya, we find a minor attempt to give a survey of the different philosophical schools of India. But the account given there is very brief, and the work does not give an exhaustive survey of all the different systems of philosophy. In the present series the author traced, in a historical and critical manner, the development of Indian thought in its different branches from various sources, a considerable portion of which lies in unpublished manuscripts. He spared no pains and underwent a tremendous amount of drudgery in order to unearth the sacred, buried treasures of Indian thought. He revised his original plan of writing only one volume and thought of completing the task in five consecutive volumes constituting a series. He shouldered this gigantic task all alone, with the sincerest devotion and unparalleled enthusiasm and zeal.

Dasgupta had taken the Griffith Prize in 1916 and his doctorate