A HISTORY OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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BY THE LATE
SURENDRANATH DASGUPTA

VOLUME V

SOUTHERN SCHOOLS OF ŚAIVISM

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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 "Kavīndra", and was running a Sanskrit institution known as "Kavīndra 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

in Indian Philosophy in 1920. Maharaja Sir Manindra Chandra Nandi now urged him to go to Europe to study European philosophy at its sources, and generously bore all the expenses of his research tour (1920–22). Dasgupta went to England and distinguished himself at Cambridge as a research student in philosophy under Dr McTaggart. During this time the Cambridge University Press published the first volume of the *History of Indian Philosophy* (1921). He was also appointed lecturer at Cambridge, and nominated to represent Cambridge University at the International Congress of Philosophy in Paris. His participation in the debates of the Aristotelian Society, London, the leading philosophical society of England, and of the Moral Science Club, Cambridge, earned for him the reputation of being an almost invincible controversialist. Great teachers of philosophy like Ward and McTaggart, under whom he studied, looked upon him not as their pupil but as their colleague. He received his Cambridge doctorate for an elaborate thesis on contemporary European philosophy. The impressions that he had made by his speeches and in the debates at the Paris Congress secured for him an invitation to the International Congress at Naples in 1924, where he was sent as a representative of the Bengal Education Department and of the University of Calcutta; later on, he was sent on deputation by the Government of Bengal to the International Congress at Harvard in 1926. In that connection he delivered the Harris Foundation lectures at Chicago, besides a series of lectures at about a dozen other Universities of the United States and at Vienna, where he was presented with an illuminated address and a bronze bust of himself. He was invited in 1925 to the second centenary of the Academy of Science, Leningrad, but he could not attend for lack of Government sanction. In 1935, 1936 and 1939 he was invited as visiting professor to Rome, Milan, Breslau, Königsberg, Berlin, Bonn, Cologne, Zürich, Paris, Warsaw and England.

While in Rome he delivered at the International Congress of Science in 1936 an address on the Science of Ancient India with such success that shouts of "Grand' uomo" cheered him through the session of the day. This led eventually to the conferment of the Honorary D.Litt. upon him by the University of Rome in 1939. He was on that occasion a state guest in Rome and military honours were accorded to him. At this time he read out before many

cultured societies English translations of his own Bengali verses called *Vanishing Lines*. The appreciation that these verses received secured for him a special reception and banquet at the Poets' Club. Before this, only two other Indian poets had been accorded this reception: Tagore and Mrs Naidu. Laurence Binyon spoke of his poems in the following terms: "I am impressed by the richness of imagination which pervades the poems and the glow of mystic faith and fervent emotion—reminding me of one of William Blake's sayings: 'Exuberance is beauty'. It would be a great pity if the poems are not published in English."

The University of Warsaw made him an honorary Fellow of the Academy of Sciences. He was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. The Société des Amis du Monde of Paris offered him a special reception, and M. Renou, Professor of Sanskrit in the University of Paris, wrote to him afterwards: "While you were amongst us, we felt as if a Śaṅkara or a Patañjali was born again and moved amongst us." Kind and simple and gentle as he was, Dasgupta was always undaunted in challenging scholars and philosophers. In the second International Congress of Philosophy in Naples, the thesis of his paper was that Croce's philosophy had been largely anticipated by some forms of Buddhism, and that where Croce differed he was himself in error. On account of internal differences Croce had no mind to join the Congress, but the fact that Dasgupta was going to challenge his philosophy and prove it to be second-hand in open congress, induced him to do so. In the same way he challenged Vallée Poussein, the great Buddhist scholar, before a little assembly presided over by McTaggart. In the meetings of the Aristotelian Society he was a terror to his opponents, his method of approach being always to point out their errors. At the same time he was deeply appreciative of the scholarly achievements of others. In his personal life he had a kind and warm friendliness towards others and was loving and generous to all his friends and acquaintances.

Disinterested love of learning and scientific accuracy were his watchwords. He had to make a most painstaking tour of South India to collect materials for his great *History*. Though he was well known as a scholar of Sanskrit and philosophy, his studies in other subjects, such as physics, biology, anthropology, history, economics, political philosophy, etc. are very considerable. Above all, he

developed a new system of thought which was entirely his own. A brief account of this appeared in *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* edited by Radhakrishnan and Muirhead and published by Allen and Unwin.

In 1924, as a mark of recognition of his scholarship, he was admitted to I.E.S. service in Calcutta Presidency College and was posted as Head of the Department of Philosophy. In 1931 he became Principal of the Government Sanskrit College, Calcutta, and *ex-officio* Secretary of the Bengal Sanskrit Association. In the latter capacity he had to arrange about 218 papers in Sanskrit for Sanskrit Title Examinations for about ten thousand candidates coming from all parts of India. During the eleven years of his principalship in Sanskrit College he had worked in various ways for the advancement of Sanskrit learning and culture in India.

In 1942 he retired from Sanskrit College and was appointed King George V Professor of Mental and Moral Science in the University of Calcutta. He worked there for three years and delivered the Stephanos Nirmalendu lectures on the history of religions. He had been suffering from heart trouble since 1940, but was still carrying on his various activities and research work. In 1945 he retired from the Calcutta University and was offered the Professorship of Sanskrit at Edinburgh which had fallen vacant after the death of Professor Keith. The doctors also advised a trip to England. On his arrival in England he fell ill again. In November 1945 he delivered his last public lecture on Hinduism in Trinity College, Cambridge. Since then he was confined to bed with acute heart trouble. He stayed in England for five years (1945–50). Even then he published the fourth volume of his *History of Indian Philosophy* at the Cambridge University Press, the *History of Sanskrit Literature* at Calcutta University, *Rabindranath the Poet and Philosopher* with his Calcutta publishers, and a book on aesthetics in Bengali. In 1950 he returned to Lucknow.

In 1951, through friendly help given by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, he started writing the fifth and final volume of the *History of Indian Philosophy*. He had also planned to write out his own system of philosophy in two volumes. His friends and students requested him several times to complete the writing of his own thought first. But he looked upon his work on Indian philosophy as the sacred mission of his life, and thought himself to be com-

mitted to that purpose. His love of his mother country and all that is best in it always had precedence over his personal aspirations. With strong determination and unwavering devotion he brought his life's mission very near its completion. Till the last day of his life he was working for this, and completed one full section just a few hours before his passing away, on 18 December 1952. Even on this last day of his life, he worked in the morning and afternoon on the last chapter of the section of Southern Śaivism. He passed away peacefully at eight in the evening while discussing problems of modern psychology. All his life he never took rest voluntarily and till his end he was burning like a fire, full of zeal and a rare brightness of spirit for the quest of knowledge.

His plan of the fifth volume was as follows:

(1) Southern Schools of Śaivism.
(2) Northern Schools of Śaivism.
(3) Philosophy of Grammar.
(4) Philosophy of some of the Selected Tantras.

Of these the first was to be the largest section and covers more than a third of the proposed work according to his own estimate. He collected manuscripts from various sources from Southern India and completed his survey of the different schools of Southern Śaivism. This is now being published by the Cambridge University Press.

Another aspect of his life, which showed itself in trances and in deep unswerving devotion and faith in his Lord, never left him. These were manifest in him even as a child, and continued all through his life. In trials and troubles and sorrows he was fearless and undaunted. In difficulties he had his indomitable will to conquer; he bore all his sufferings with patience and fortitude. His faith in God sustained him with an unusual brightness and cheerfulness of spirit. He never prayed, as he thought there was no need of it since his dearest Lord was shining in his heart with sweetness, love and assurance. That is why in different critical stages of his illness he never gave up hope, and tried to cheer up his worried wife and attending doctors. It was through sheer determination and unshaken faith that he carried out his life's mission nearly to completion when God took him away—maybe for some purpose known to Him alone.

It now remains to thank the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press for the very kind interest that they have shown in the publication of this fifth volume of the *History of Indian Philosophy* by my husband. The work as it stands now is self-complete and will serve the need of enquiring minds about the different important schools of Śaivism from the beginning of the Christian era. The references to texts and manuscripts have been duly checked. I beg the forgiveness of readers for any mistake that might remain.

SURAMA DASGUPTA

University of Lucknow, India
19 *June* 1954

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