Prabodh Chandra Sengupta (1876–1962): Historian of Indian Astronomy and Mathematics

1 Introduction

Prabodh Chandra Sengupta, the younger son of Ram Chandra Sengupta, was born in a village near Tangail in Mymensingh district (now in Bangladesh) on 21 June 1876. He had his early education in the Santosh Jahnavi H. E. School and passed the Entrance (Matric) examination with sufficient merit to obtain a scholarship. Subsequently he studied in Calcutta passing the First Arts (Intermediate) examination from the Presidency College, the B. A. examination with first class honours in Mathematics from the General Assembly's Institution, and the M. A. examination in Mathematics from the Presidency College in 1901.

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Professor Sengupta entered the educational service under the Government of Bengal in July 1902 and worked as a teacher in various government schools till 1914. Several renowned scholars like M. N. Saha and R. C. Majumdar were his students during their school days in Dacca.

Shortly after passing the B. T. examination, Prof. Sengupta was appointed as a Lecturer in Mathematics at the Chittagong College in 1914. Later on in 1916, he joined the Bethune College, Calcutta, which he served till his retirement from the government service in January 1934. He was made Professor of Mathematics in 1921 under Bengal Educational Service.

2 Research Contributions

Professor Sengupta is best known for his researches and publications in the field of Indian astronomy and chronology which date from 1916 and lasted for a long period of 40 years. He also delivered lectures in Indian Mathematics and Astronomy at the Calcutta University. The arrangement of teaching Indian Astronomy (2 papers) and Indian Mathematics (2 papers) in M. A. Course (Group IV) was there under the University Department of Ancient Indian, History and Culture (see *Journal of Ancient Indian History,* Vol. II, 1968–1969, p. 3).

Besides translating (1927a) the *Āryabhaṭīyam* of Āryabhaṭa I (born 476 AD). Professor Sengupta gave us his famous translation (1934) and edition (1941) of Brahmagupta's *Khaṇḍakhādyaka* (665 AD). These two parts were dedicated to Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee (1864–1924), the Founder of Research Studies in the University of Calcutta, who had nicely utilized the handsome donation from Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandy of Cossimbazar for the promotion of researches in the domain of ancient Indian Mathematics and Astronomy. Professor Sengupta got inspiration also from others like Professor Ganesh Prasad (1876–1935), Hardinge Professor of Pure Mathematics, Calcutta University, whose two students, B. Datta (1888–1958) and A. N. Singh (1901–1954), turned out be famous historians of Indian Mathematics. Professor Sengupta's numerous papers on various aspects of ancient Indian Mathematics and Astronomy including comparison with Greek methods are the result of his deep research and labour. His introductions attached to his translation of *Khaṇḍakhādyaka*, to the Calcutta edition (1935) of Burgess's translation of the *Suryasiddhānta* and to B. Misra's edition of the *Siddhāntaśekhara* (see [1944/47]) are equally valuable.

By applying the so-called 'astronomical method', Professor Sengupta determined the dates of a number of events and works related to Indian history, culture and civilization and published several papers on the subject. At the suggestion of Professor M. N. Saha, FRS, Professor Sengupta submitted a scheme of research work to the Calcutta University which was duly approved. Mr. Nirmal Chandra Lahiri worked as a research assistant in the scheme which was carried out from 1939 to 1941. The result is the famous work *Ancient Indian Chronology* (Calcutta 1947) which reflects profound knowledge of Astronomy, Mathematics and Sanskrit.

Professor Sengupta was the President of the Technical Sciences Section of the XIIth All-India Oriental Conference (Benares, 1944). His publications continued to come out when he was well over 80 years. He died in Calcutta on 6 August 1962 leaving his widow, five sons and three daughters and grandchildren to mourn his loss. In his passing, India lost a pioneer worker in the field of ancient Indian exact sciences. A very good way to cherish his work and memory will be to bring out in a book form a collection of his numerous papers on Indian Mathematics and Astronomy.

3 Bibliography of P. C. Sengupta

The following abbreviations are used:

BCMS = *Bulletin of the Calcutta Math. Society*.
JASP[L] = *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Letters).* Was called *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal earlier.*
JDL/JDS = *Journal of the Department of Letters/Science* (University of Calcutta).
YB = *Year Book of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.

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Note: Prof. Sengupta also authored numerous contributions on Indian chronology in Bengali which appeared in Bengali periodicals like *Sri Bharati, Bharatavarsa*, etc.

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