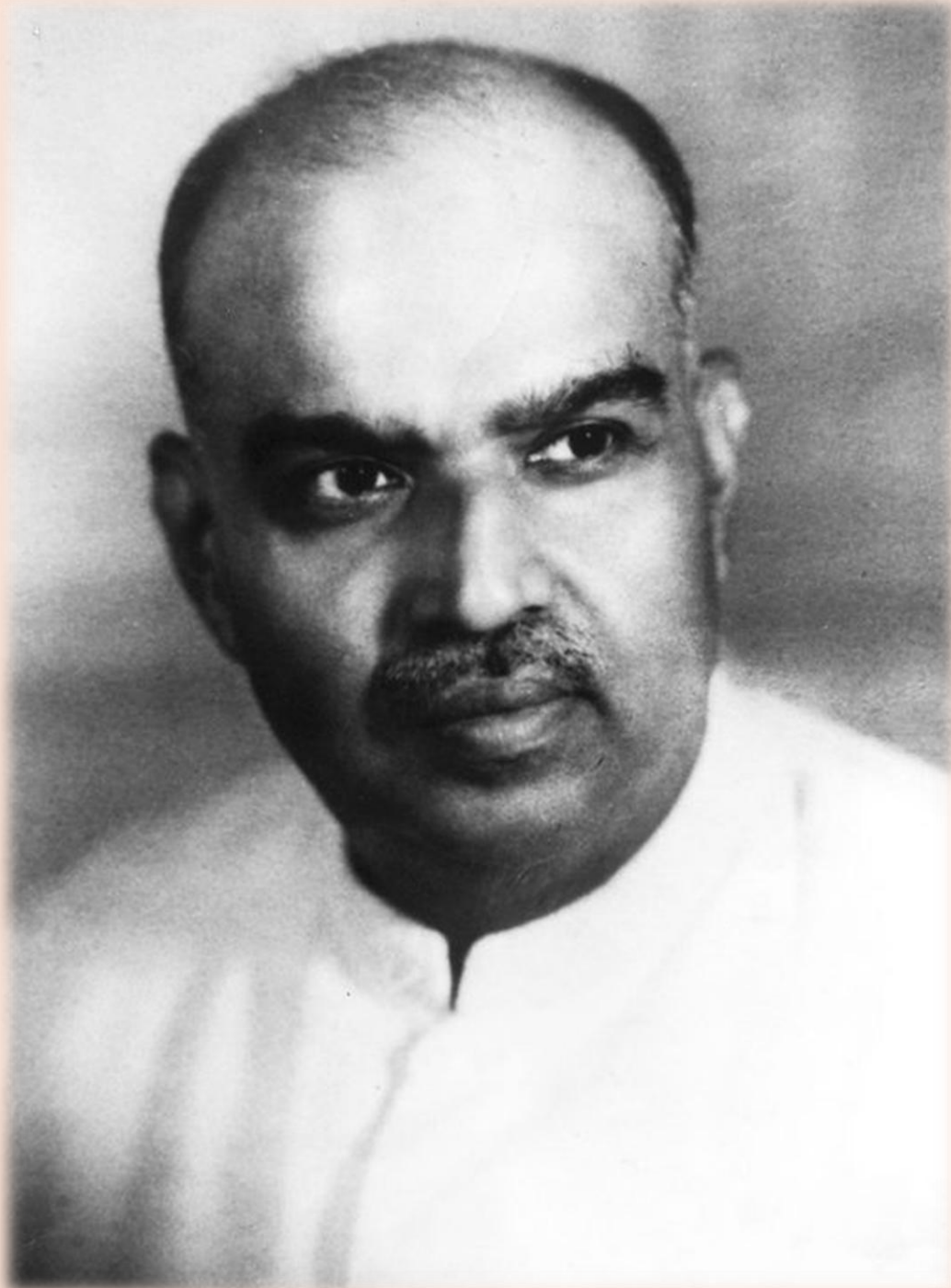


# **A LIFE OF LEARNING AND SERVICE**

*Remembering Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee*

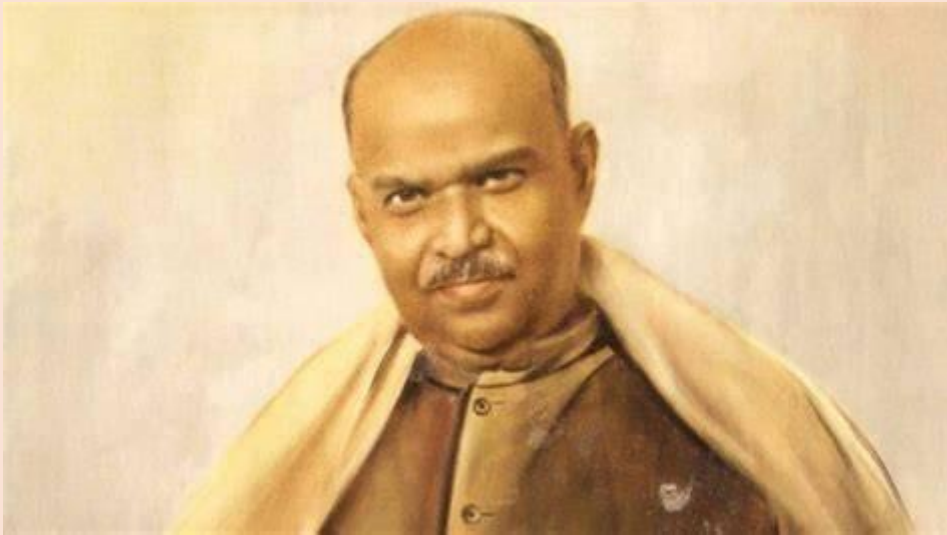


# DR. SYAMA PRASAD MOOKERJEE

(1901-1953)

A TRIBUTE ON HIS 125<sup>TH</sup> BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

*6<sup>th</sup> July 2026*



EDITED AND COMPILED BY

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*In collaboration with*

Internal Quality Assurance Cell

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## **Institutional Tribute**

This booklet is published as a humble tribute to Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee on the occasion of his birth anniversary. Remembered as an educationist, scholar, parliamentarian, and public leader, Dr. Mookerjee occupies an important place in the history of modern India. His life was closely connected with the world of education, public service, and national thought. Through this short publication, we seek to introduce students and readers to the major phases of his life, his contribution to education, his role in public affairs, and selected ideas from his writings and speeches.

## **Editorial Note**

This booklet has been prepared as a brief academic and commemorative introduction to the life and contribution of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee. It brings together a biographical sketch, a timeline, selected aspects of his academic and public career, photographs, and short excerpts from his writings and speeches.

The purpose of this publication is not to present an exhaustive account of his life, but to offer students and general readers a clear and accessible overview. Care has been taken to maintain a factual and respectful tone. Readers are encouraged to consult the references listed at the end for further study.

## **Advisory Board**

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## Life at a Glance

Year	Event
1901	Born on 6 July in Kolkata
1921	Graduated from the University of Calcutta
1923	Completed M.A. in Bengali
1924	Completed LL.B. and enrolled as an advocate
1926	Called to the Bar from Lincoln's Inn
1934	Became Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta
1938	Completed his tenure as Vice-Chancellor
1947	Became Minister of Industry and Supply in independent India
1950	Resigned from the Union Cabinet
1951	Founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh
1952	Became a member of the Lok Sabha
1953	Died on 23 June

## Early Life and Family Background

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was born on 6 July 1901 in Kolkata, then one of the most important centres of education, culture, and political awakening in British India. He belonged to a highly respected Bengali family known for its contribution to learning and public life. His father, Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee, was a celebrated educationist, jurist, and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta. He was widely admired for his role in strengthening higher education in Bengal. His mother, Lady Jogamaya Devi, also played an important role in shaping the values and discipline of the family.



Figure 1 Sir Asutosh Mookerjee

Growing up in such an intellectually rich atmosphere, Syama Prasad Mookerjee was exposed from an early age to books, debates, education, and public responsibility.

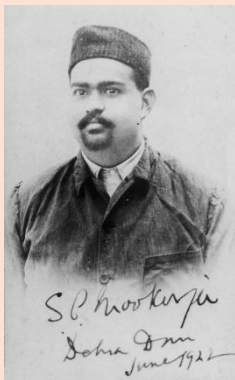
The influence of his father's academic career and public service left a deep impression on him. His childhood home was not merely a private domestic space; it was also connected with the larger world of scholarship, law, administration, and national thought. This environment helped him develop a serious attitude towards study and a strong sense of duty.

As a young student, he showed remarkable intelligence and discipline. His early education prepared him for a career that would combine scholarship, institutional leadership, and public life. The values of learning, moral responsibility, and service to society remained important throughout his life. His family background therefore helps us understand the foundation of his later achievements as a scholar, Vice-Chancellor, minister, parliamentarian, and national leader.

Name	Relation
Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee	Father
Lady Jogamaya Devi	Mother
Sudha Devi	Wife

## Education and Academic Career

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee was a brilliant student from an early age. He received his education in Kolkata and later studied at the University of Calcutta, one of the most important centres of higher learning in India at that time. His academic record reflected his intelligence, discipline, and deep interest in learning. He graduated with English as one of his major areas of study and later completed his M.A. in Bengali. This combination of English and Bengali studies shows his connection with both Western education and Indian language and culture.



Along with literature and language, Dr. Mookerjee also studied law. He completed his legal education and was later called to the Bar from Lincoln's Inn in England. His training in law helped him develop clarity of thought, argumentative skill, and a strong understanding of public institutions. These qualities later became important in his role as an educationist, administrator, minister, and parliamentarian.

His academic career is especially meaningful for students because it shows that public leadership can grow out of serious study and intellectual discipline. Before becoming a well-known public figure, Dr. Mookerjee was a scholar with a strong foundation in literature, language, and law. His life reminds us that education is not only a means of personal success; it can also prepare an individual for service to society and the nation.

Dr. Mookerjee became the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta in 1934, at the age of only 33. This was a major achievement. His period as Vice-Chancellor is often remembered for his concern for higher education, Indian languages, and academic reform.

- He represented the link between scholarship and public service.
- He valued Indian languages and higher education.
- He became a major figure in Bengal's academic history at a very young age.
- His career shows how education can prepare a person for wider social responsibility.



## Vice-Chancellorship

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's appointment as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta in 1934 was one of the most important moments of his academic career. He was only thirty-three years old at the time, and his appointment reflected his brilliance, discipline, and deep connection with the world of higher education. The University of Calcutta was one of the leading institutions of learning in India, and to lead such an institution at a young age was a remarkable achievement.



As Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Mookerjee worked during a period when Indian education was passing through important changes. The country was still under colonial rule, but there was a growing demand for an education system that would serve Indian society more meaningfully. Dr. Mookerjee understood that universities had a larger responsibility than simply conducting examinations and awarding degrees. They had to shape the

intellectual, moral, and civic life of students.

His tenure is remembered for his interest in academic discipline, institutional development, and the promotion of Indian languages and culture within higher education. He believed that education should help students develop both knowledge and character. His work as Vice-Chancellor showed his ability to combine scholarship with administration. This phase of his life is especially important because it presents him not only as a political leader, but also as a committed educationist.

## **Ideas on Education and Nation-Building**

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee believed that education should have a broad and meaningful purpose. It should not be limited to passing examinations, obtaining degrees, or preparing for employment. For him, education was a process through which young people could develop discipline, clarity of thought, moral strength, and a sense of service. As a scholar and later as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, he understood that educational institutions had an important role in shaping responsible citizens.

### **Education as Character Formation**

Dr. Mookerjee viewed education as a means of character formation. He believed that students should learn not only facts and subjects, but also the values necessary for life. True education should teach them to think independently, act ethically, respect knowledge, and accept responsibility. In this sense, students were not only future professionals; they were also future citizens. Education, therefore, had to prepare them for service, leadership, and honest public conduct.



### **Indian Culture and Modern Learning**

Another important aspect of his educational vision was the balance between modern knowledge and Indian cultural values. Dr. Mookerjee valued higher education, legal training, professional development, and modern intellectual growth. At the same time, he emphasised the importance of Indian languages, literature, history, and cultural traditions. His own academic life reflected this balance, as he studied English, Bengali, and law, and later used this broad training in academic administration and public life. His example reminds students that modern learning and cultural awareness need not oppose each other; they can strengthen each other.

### **Education and Public Duty**

Dr. Mookerjee saw the university as an institution connected with nation-building. A university, in his view, should prepare students not only for personal success but also for responsible participation in society. His own career shows this connection clearly. He moved from academic life to public life, carrying with him the habits of scholarship, debate, discipline, and institutional responsibility. His speeches, administrative work, and public career suggest that knowledge becomes most meaningful when it is used for the welfare of society. His life therefore teaches students that education should connect personal achievement with social duty.

## Role in Public Life and National Politics

Dr. Mookerjee's public life developed during one of the most difficult periods of Indian history: the final decades of British rule, the Second World War, the Partition of India, and the early years of the Republic. He participated in debates concerning governance, national unity, refugees, education, and constitutional questions.

He served in the Bengal Legislative Council and Assembly and later became a member of independent India's first Lok Sabha. Archival records also identify him as a member of the Bengal Legislative Council and Assembly between 1929–37 and 1937–47.

### Areas of Public Concern

- National unity
- Education
- Refugee issues after Partition
- Industrial development
- Parliamentary democracy
- Constitutional questions

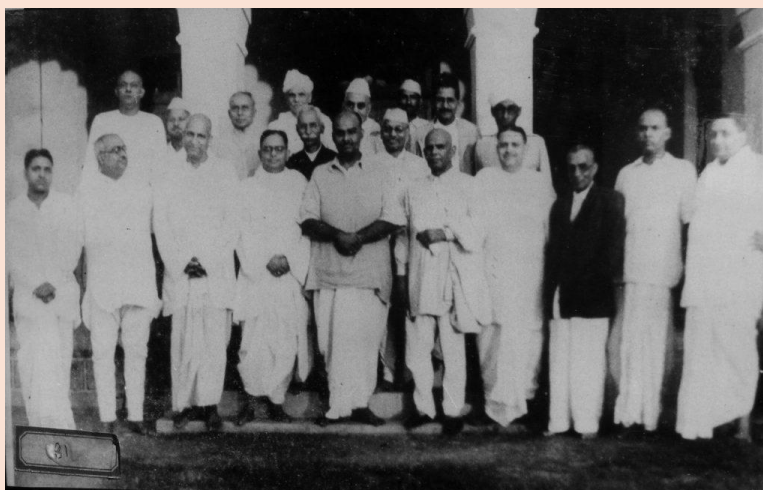
### As Minister of Industry and Supply

After Independence, Dr. Mookerjee served as Minister of Industry and Supply in the Government of India from 1947 to 1950.

In the early years after Independence, India faced the difficult task of rebuilding its economy, organising industries, and responding to the material needs of a newly independent nation. As Minister of Industry and Supply, Dr. Mookerjee was associated with the early phase of India's industrial and administrative development. This period shows his participation in the practical work of nation-building after Independence.

### Parliamentary Career

Dr. Mookerjee entered parliamentary life at a time when India was shaping its democratic institutions. He became a member of the Lok Sabha in 1952. His parliamentary career was brief but significant. He is remembered as a strong speaker who raised issues of national importance. His speeches and interventions reflected his views on governance, citizenship, education, and national integration.



## Dr. Mookerjee and the Formation of West Bengal

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's role in public life became especially significant during the final years of British rule, when Bengal was passing through a period of intense political uncertainty. The question of Bengal's future became one of the most serious issues during the Partition of India in 1947. At that time, different proposals were being discussed, including the possibility of an undivided Bengal and the possibility of Bengal becoming part of Pakistan.

Dr. Mookerjee strongly argued that the Hindu-majority districts of western Bengal should remain within the Indian Union. His position was shaped by the political and social circumstances of the time, including the insecurity felt by large sections of the population during the communal disturbances of the 1940s. He believed that if the whole of Bengal was included in Pakistan, the interests and safety of many people in western Bengal would be seriously affected.

In this context, Dr. Mookerjee supported the partition of Bengal as a practical political necessity, though the division of Bengal itself was a deeply painful historical event. His efforts contributed to the formation of West Bengal as a province within India. Scholars have noted that he played a leading role in demanding the separation of the Hindu-majority districts in the western part of Bengal from the areas that later became East Pakistan.

His contribution to the birth of West Bengal should therefore be understood within the complex background of Partition, communal tension, and competing political plans for Bengal's future. He opposed the scheme of an independent united Bengal and supported the creation of a separate West Bengal within India. Contemporary debates on this issue were not simple, and different leaders held different views. However, Dr. Mookerjee's role remains important because he gave organised political voice to the demand that western Bengal should remain a part of India.

For students, this phase of his life shows how political decisions are often shaped by difficult historical circumstances. The birth of West Bengal was not merely an administrative event; it was connected with questions of identity, security, citizenship, and the future of millions of people. Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's role in this process forms an important chapter in the political history of Bengal and modern India.

HE SUPPORTED THE DEMAND THAT THE HINDU-MAJORITY WESTERN DISTRICTS OF BENGAL SHOULD REMAIN WITHIN INDIA DURING THE PARTITION OF 1947.

HIS ROLE IS REMEMBERED AS SIGNIFICANT IN THE FORMATION OF WEST BENGAL AS A PART OF THE INDIAN UNION.

# **Selected Excerpts**

## I

“May I take the liberty of making an earnest appeal to you and through you to the British Government to reconsider the Indian political situation? No one genuinely interested in the welfare of India wants that the Axis Powers should win the war, for their victory is a peril to the cause of world freedom and specially to Indian liberty. For the sake of winning the war and for mobilising public opinion and the great resources of India, it is essential that India should have a free political status immediately. It is not enough for you to declare that India will attain freedom after the war. Immediate attainment of a free and equal status is not a mere expression of an abstract right but an essential condition for successful prosecution of the war itself. My experience as a provincial minister under the present Constitution convinces me that the present system of administration which places the final power of veto in the hands of the British representatives and which provides scope for interference with the legitimate activities of the minister can never serve the war-time requirements of the country. Gigantic preparations for Indian defence cannot be made satisfactorily unless a National Government has the power to formulate and carry out a well-balanced policy for the purpose.

The lessons of Burma should be an eye-opener to all right-thinking British statesmen. The British Power, which controlled the destinies of that country during the period of its struggle with Japan, collapsed and made its exit from the country when it found that it had to yield to the superior strength of the enemy. On the other hand, if Burma was a free country, acting with the fullest co-operation with Britain and other Allied Powers, the people and their representatives would not have beaten a retreat but fought with their life-blood for maintaining every inch of a country whose freedom it was their sacred duty to uphold at any cost. It is therefore essential that India's free status should be recognised immediately and the people of the country called upon to defend their own country in co-operation with the Allied Powers, and not merely look upon Britain to fight the impending aggression...”

(Excerpt from Letter to Lord Linlithgow dated 12<sup>th</sup> August 1942)

- Dr. Mookerjee rejects Axis victory and sees it as a threat to both world freedom and Indian liberty.
- He argues that India should be given free political status immediately, not after the war.
- He criticises British control, especially the power of veto and interference in Indian administration.
- Through the example of Burma, he suggests that only a free people can defend their country with full commitment.

## II

“Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I with your permission make a statement on the opening day of the Legislative Assembly dealing with the circumstances which led to my resignation as a minister. It is all the more necessary that I should do so, since my resignation has not been due to any want of confidence in me either by the House or the party to which I have the honour to belong. In fact, it has not been due also to any difference of opinion either with the Chief Minister or any of my colleagues on any question of public importance. As members of the House are aware, I felt compelled to resign, first, because I found that the continued policy of the British Government and the Government in this country was to ignore the claims of Indians to fuller political power, to hamper good government consistent with the true interests of the people and to weaken the forces of people's defence against enemy aggression. It is not my intention to reiterate the points which I had mentioned in my letter of resignation to the Governor dealing with the all-India political situation. That letter, along with several other documents, true to the Hitlerian traditions of the government of this province, today form part of proscribed literature. A minister's accusation of autocratic misrule need not be replied to with facts and figures, but must be suppressed under arbitrary rules-what grander conception could the British authorities hold before us of responsible government in this country? Suffice it to say that I definitely regard the authorities as responsible for the present deadlock in India. The Indian public on the whole can possibly have no sympathy with any foreign aggressor. The reason is simple and straightforward. We do not want a change of masters. We would like to see our country attain as speedily as possible that political status which is its birthright. There is no sense in our asking to be rid of British control if we simultaneously wish to place ourselves under a fresh foreign yoke...”

(Excerpt from Statement of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee before the Bengal Legislative Assembly, on 12 February 1943)

- Dr. Mookerjee presents his resignation as an act of principle, not as a result of personal conflict or party disagreement.
- He criticises British rule for denying Indians fuller political power and weakening the country's ability to defend itself.
- His statement shows strong nationalist conviction: India should not exchange one foreign master for another.
- He asserts that freedom is India's birthright and must be achieved as early as possible.

### III

...Whoever God may be, whoever may have created this world and is responsible for its destruction, a devotee needs to have an image of his God before him when he prays. Such an image helps the mind to focus. and concentrate. If we start considering this symbol as the absolute, then, whosoever God is, must be laughing at us. But if I use this symbol to invoke God and gain contentment thereby, then my purpose is fulfilled. The purpose of the whole thing is to pour one's heart and to pray with wholehearted devotion. But when is it that we pray? When we are in travails; when our children are ill ; when we have lost our livelihood or property or suffered a setback. At such times, what else can we do but pray? How many of us remember Him when we are not in trouble; when we are in the midst of abundance or comfort and not in the throes of sorrow and poverty? One must invoke Him spontaneously, selflessly and with no hope of gain. I have been trying to pray for several days but have not succeeded. No rituals are needed. I will find peace if I simply offer Him my devotion. It does not matter what I call Him or how I invoke Him...

... Help me devote myself to the service of others and carry out Your will to the best of my ability for the rest of my life. It will not grieve me if You do not wish me to serve any particular purpose. I am not after fame and glory. Let me abide near You. Give me shelter at Your feet, take me to that unknown land and fill my mind with Your peace. You know whom I still love and care for. I do not claim anything from them. I just wish them the best. My mind yearns to see You but I am trying my best to restrain it.' I have realized the futility of this world. Here today, gone tomorrow-this is the process of life. Then why fuss over such trivial things? We are only travellers in transit. What is the difference between us and beasts if we spend the little time we have on this earth, steeped in a mire of lust and greed. I have often observed the instinctual behaviour of animals. If men, who have a soul and can recognize God, forget everything and indulge in these base pursuits, what can be more tragic? 'Oh God ! Kindle a new spirit within me. Give me the strength to invoke You.' This is my prayer. I retire for the night with this thought in my mind. 'Oh merciful, fill the hearts of men with love. Let hatred not sully my heart.' I know that my life will be snuffed out suddenly. This does not sadden me. But before that, I want to prepare my mind by surrendering it to God.

(Excerpt from *Leaves from a Diary*)

- The excerpt reveals Dr. Mookerjee's deeply spiritual side, where prayer is seen as an inward act of devotion rather than a matter of ritual.
- He presents faith as a source of strength, especially during suffering, loss, uncertainty, and human helplessness.
- The excerpt shows his humility: he does not pray for fame, personal gain, or success, but for peace, surrender, and the ability to serve others.
- His words connect spirituality with moral life, urging human beings to rise above greed, hatred, and selfish desires.

## Education in British India

By SYAMA PRASAD MOOKERJEE

**T**HE present system of education in India was introduced in the early years of the nineteenth century as one distinct and apart from the indigenous system which was already in existence, consisting of both higher and elementary institutions. The indigenous educational institutions were indeed no better nor much worse off than similar contemporary institutions in the West. A foreign observer speaking of them in the thirties of the last century said: "My recollections of the village schools of Scotland do not enable me to pronounce that the instruction given in them has a more direct bearing upon the daily interests of life than that which I find given or professed to be given in the humbler village schools of Bengal."

But widely prevalent as the indigenous system was, it was fast going into decay owing to various economic and political forces, chief among which were the growing poverty of the people and the withdrawal of state patronage which followed the change of government. In reaction to the external forces which it could not control, the indigenous system became more and more conservative and it lacked the progressiveness which is the sign of a growing and organic system.

### TWO ALTERNATIVES

In those early days two courses were open to those officially responsible for the education of the people. They might have utilized the widespread indigenous system after infusing new life into it, reconstructing and reorganizing it wherever necessary and making it the vehicle of new ideas and ideals; or they might have created an altogether new system, unconnected with the indigenous one, and used it for the educa-

tion of the people of this country. By an irony of fate they adopted the latter course. Thus was evolved a system which was largely dissociated from the cultural and educational traditions of the people and which made an alien language the vehicle of new ideas that were expected to regenerate the people of India.

It is idle to speculate what course Indian education would have taken if the early educational administrators had chosen the former of the two alternatives. But it cannot be denied that by adopting the latter they imposed upon themselves a task the magnitude of which perhaps they failed to visualize. And they also lost a splendid opportunity to build what might have been a truly national system of education—a system democratic in its foundation and based on the language and culture of the people. India has, then, about 700,000 villages, and in the early years of British rule many of these villages had elementary schools to which I have already referred. By neglecting them and allowing them to decay, and by deciding to set up a parallel system of public instruction, the Government set for itself a stupendous task which even after a century remains unfinished. No doubt at a later stage attempts were made to use them, but it was too late; they were then beyond revival.

Excerpt From: Mookerjee, Syama Prasad. "Education in British India." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 233, no. 1, May 1944, pp. 30–38. DOI: 10.1177/000271624423300107.

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee wrote and spoke extensively on education. His essay, "Education in British India," was published in 1944. In his writings and speeches on education, he reflected on the condition of Indian education under colonial rule, the need for a more meaningful national educational policy, and the importance of linking education with character, culture, and public responsibility.

## Photo Gallery

### Family and Home



### Politics and Administration



Image Source: [Albums Archive - Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation](#)

# Photo Gallery

## Dr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee Fortnight at Hingalganj Mahavidyalaya





Hingalganj, West Bengal, India  
FX7Q+P8X, Hingalganj, West Bengal 743435, India  
Thursday, 02/07/2026, 02:35 PM GMT +05:30  
Lat: 22.464355, Long: 88.988529  
57 NE 33.62° 56% 20.27 km/h



Hingalganj, West Bengal, India  
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Thursday, 02/07/2026, 02:36 PM GMT +05:30  
Lat: 22.464341, Long: 88.988570  
67 NE 33.62° 56% 20.27 km/h

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