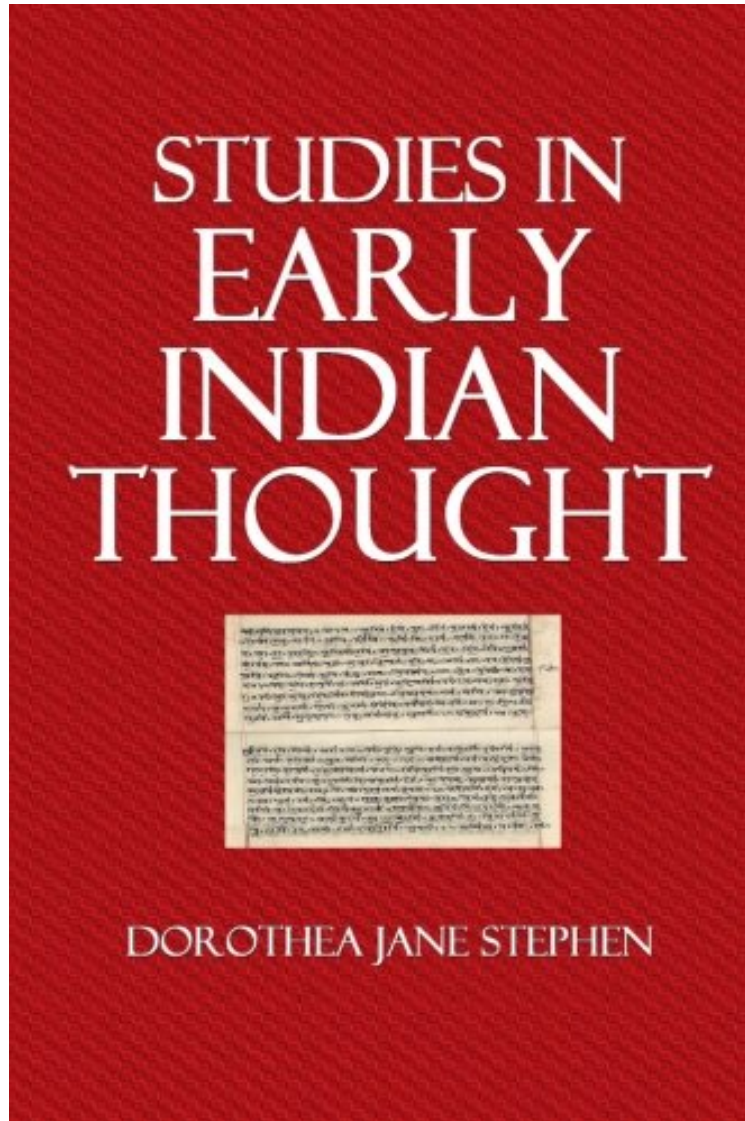


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Dorothea Jane Stephen

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An excerpt from the beginning of the INTRODUCTION: THE object of this essay is to follow the course of Indian thought from the Vedic period to the period of the Bhagavadgita, to find what account it gives of the world, of men, and of that power of which the world and men are the outcome. We shall trace this course by means of Indian

literature, taking it in three stages, that of the Vedas, of the Upanishads, and of the Bhagavadgita itself. These books contain the record of the best thought of India on the subjects most vital to it from the earliest time till now. They are closely connected with each other. The Vedic hymns are the earliest literature of the race. They were used at sacrifices, and in order to adapt them for that purpose the Brahmanas were compiled. These are practically commentaries, giving explanations and directions, and their last chapters are the Aranyakas, or "Forest Books," intended for the Sages, who had left the world and retired to the forest. The last chapters of the Aranyakas are the Upanishads, which are concerned with the search for the truth behind the ritual. These writings arose in various places, and among different schools, and they differ among themselves; but there is a general likeness among them, which may be taken to show what is characteristically Indian. Finally the Bhagavadgita is founded on the Upanishads, and gathers up the various streams of thought which appear in them. It is thus the flower of the whole process; and it remains to this day the standard expression of Indian thought. Although we propose to trace the thought of India through books, the books of the Aryan race, we have always to remember that India does not only mean the Aryans, nor is the line of thought opened to us in these books the only line followed, even among them. All Aryans were not philosophers in search of the truth. Some were in search of a protector, some merely in search of amusement; and the epic poems grew up at the same time as the philosophical treatises. But there are also the Dravidians to be remembered. The thoughts and practices of the conquered people have affected the thoughts and practices of the conquerors. The worship of spirits in stones and trees, of heroes, of snakes, of mountains, and the superstitions of the jungle tribes go on, recognized and sanctioned by Hinduism, absorbed into its system; but, if we may judge by similar ways of thought in other countries, they remain very much the same as they were when the Aryans first came over the mountains. The mark made on the lower religion by the higher is external. The local godling becomes the son of Iva or Vishnu, or a form of Parvati; and there the matter ends. The ritual and the thought, or belief that moulds the ritual, go on as before. On the other hand, the mark of the lower religion on the higher is internal: the ideas on which it was founded, are taken up and assimilated, and what was unconscious in the lower race is realized and worked out in the higher....