

# Understanding Science and Religion in Modern Vaishnavism: The Life and Thoughts of Siddhanta Sarasvati Thakur (Bimala Prasad Datta) in Colonial Bengal

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to reexamine the history of Vedic astral science from the viewpoint of Gaudiya Vaishnavism during the colonial period in Bengal. Here we need to highlight the life and works of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur, the founder of the Gaudiya Math and Mission, who established the '*Saraswat Chatuspathi*' in colonial Calcutta in 1897 to promote Vedic astral science. Additionally, he published two astronomical journals in Bengali, *Jyotirvid* and *Brihaspati*, to further the dissemination of scientific knowledge in the regional language.

**Keywords:** Vedic Astronomy, Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Journals, Almanacs, Colonial Bengal

## Introduction

This article examines the life and works of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur (1874–1937), the founder of the Gaudiya Math and Mission (1920), who deserves particular attention in light of the history of education in modern Bengal, where Vedic astral science played a significant role. The colonial period gave rise to the Bengali gentry, known as the *Bhadraloks*, who displayed a strong desire to learn from the Western knowledge system while also exploring the rich heritage of their Hindu culture. According to Tapan Raychaudhury (1988), the Bengali intelligentsia was the first group in Asia to engage intellectually with the British. This encounter altered their thought processes, leading to an inclination towards 'modernisation' in its colonial sense and the absorption of Western ideas.<sup>1</sup>

In 1817, the Bengali gentry, or the *Bhadraloks*, established Hindu College, the first Western higher education institution in Asia. This Bengali experience perhaps shaped modern life in Indian society and led to the growth of the "'proto-nationalist' consciousness and liberal-humanist values..." (Raychaudhury, Preface)<sup>2</sup>. During this period, the Bengali *Bhadraloks* launched reform movements aimed at embracing the Western enlightenment while rejecting its material culture. The Bengali socio-religious reformers such as Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and others advocated for the Renaissance and the revival of the Hindu religion and philosophy, emphasising an epistemological understanding grounded in indigenous science.

As a result, the idea of cultural nationalism evolved into scientific nationalism, with the Bengali middle-class intelligentsia stressing the importance of science education in the regional language (Lourdusamy, 2004).<sup>3</sup> Prominent science advocates such as P.C. Ray, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Mahendralal Sarkar, and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore actively promoted the vernacularisation of science in the nation. (Sinha, 2012).<sup>4</sup>

Their expertise created a space for intellectual debates and discourses to popularise indigenous science for the promotion of scientific nationalism. The two Derozians, Radhanath Sikdar and Madhusudan Datta, also fuelled this process of decolonising science from Western domination<sup>5</sup>. All these attempts were perhaps an answer to the colonial notions of understanding *Bharat*, which were often biased and determined by the ideas of Western intellectual domination.

In this context, this paper aims to revisit the history of propagating Vedic astral science in colonial Bengal, where an educated Bengali *Bhadralok* (gentry) and later religious reformer, Bimala Prasad Datta or Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur (1874–1937), the founder of *Gaudiya* Math and Mission, played a crucial role. In 1897, he

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established 'Calcutta Saraswat Chatuspathi' to facilitate the learning of Vedic astronomy and astrology. Through publications like *Jyotirbid*, *Brihaspati*, *Bhaktibhavan* and *Nabadwip Panjika*, he promoted science in the regional language.<sup>6</sup> His efforts helped the *Gaudiya* Vaishnava Community in modern Bengal to establish its worth not only in the domain of spiritual doctrines but also from the perspective of scientific humanism mentioned in *Sanatan Dharma* in the form of *Chaitanya* or consciousness.

### 1) A Brief Biographical Sketch of Bimala Prasad Datta (Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur)

Bimala Prasad Datta was born on February 6, 1874, in modern Bengal, then a part of British India. His father, Kedarnath Datta, was a government official who later became a monk to uphold and spread *Gaudiya* Vaishnavism, the religious philosophy of Lord Caitanya. The *Gaudiya* Vaishnava religion was founded by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu in 15th-century Bengal. It promoted cultural syncretism and religious inclusiveness based on the teachings of Lord Krishna.

To understand the philosophical foundation of Bengal Vaishnava religion, SC Chakravarti (1969) stated,

*"The chief interest of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism is metaphysical and theological. Since metaphysical and theological discussions require logical reasoning and since the determination of the validity of such reasoning depends upon criticism of knowledge, epistemology has formed an essential part of this system...With respect to their conceptions of Pramā, Pramāna and Prāmānya, the teachers of the Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism have generally followed the teachers of the earlier theistic schools of Vedānta."*<sup>7a</sup>

Following the passing of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the religion encountered social malpractices and later faced criticism during the colonial period. Kedarnath Datta, also known as Bhaktivinod Thakur, spearheaded a reform movement and published a Bengali journal, *Sajjana-Toshini*, to revive *Gaudiya* Vaishnavism in 19th-century Bengal.

From a young age, Bimala Prasad, the son of Kedarnath Bhaktivinod Thakur, demonstrated exceptional devotion to Vaishnavism, accompanied by exceptional academic skills, particularly in astronomy. Much of his life was dedicated to advocating Vedic astronomy among the middle-class gentry, or *Bhadraloks*. Later, following his father's death, he turned to spiritualism and embraced monastic life. Known thenceforth as Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur, he founded the *Gaudiya* Math to promote *Gaudiya* Vaishnavism. He passed away on January 1, 1937, leaving behind a notable legacy as a socio-religious reformer in modern India (Sardella, 2018).<sup>7b</sup>

### 2) Bimala Prasad Datta (Bhakti Siddhanta Sarasvati Thakur) As a Religious Reformer: Knowing the Challenges and Constraints

Ferdinando Sardella (2013) discussed how the creation of the *Bhadralok* class in colonial Bengal aimed to integrate Western ideas with traditional beliefs. They saw religion as a tool to achieve their socio-cultural and political goals, such as promoting social consciousness, nationalism, humanitarianism, rationalism, egalitarianism, and nondualism.<sup>8</sup>

The reformers were not keen on promoting Caitanya Vaishnavism, as they considered it socially unattractive for various reasons. First, they viewed it as disempowered and degraded due to its association with the masses and marginalised individuals, who were considered uneducated and uncultured by Victorian standards. Second, they were unwilling to accept the caste structure of *Gaudiya* Vaishnavism, which they saw as outdated and tied to aristocratic *Brahminical* culture. Lastly, they found the philosophy of the religion to be mystical and hypothetical.

Here, Bimala Prasad, later Bhakti Siddhanta, played a vital role and became instrumental for the 'recovery and propagation'<sup>9</sup> of *Gaudiya* Vaishnavism. He held distinct views on gender, casteism, and corruption within the context of his religious beliefs. It is crucial to contextualise Sarasvati's position within the socio-cultural environment of his time, especially regarding his interest in traditional Indian knowledge systems. Perhaps his scientific nationalism and religious ontology align with one another, reflecting a complex understanding of traditional *Sanātana Dharma*.

In colonial Bengal, the tensions between modernisation and Westernisation must be explored through the philosophical pursuits of the *Bhadraloks*, who were often religious reformers influenced by the concepts of non-dualism and dualism. Additionally, scholars like David Kopf and Richard King have highlighted the challenges faced by the colonisers in positioning Hindus within the intellectual discourses of varied cultural legacies and influences in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>10</sup> According to Ferdinando Sardella, the *Bhadraloks* often sought models of modernity based on their native culture and beliefs rather than adhering strictly to Western standards.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps Bimala Prasad observed these changes and sought to assess the extent of the Bengal Renaissance by examining the response of the *Bhadralok* community, where his religious philosophy and scientific inquiry served as benchmarks.

He followed in the footsteps of his father to generate a space for *Gaudiya* Vaishnavism as a sophisticated religious culture based on dualism, surrender, devotion, and mercy

that could compete with the other traditions of modern Bengal invoked by Rammohun Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen, Thakur Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and others.<sup>12</sup>

He wrote in *The Harmonist*,

"The Vaishnava is never a Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya or Sudra. The Vaishnava is not a common Hindu or a karmi. It is no doubt true that a Hindu who is born in a Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra or Antyaja family or any other person, whoever he may be is potentially fit to be a Vaishnava. As a matter of fact, any Jiva (being) whose spiritual nature has been awakened is fit to be a Vaishnava." ("Vaishnavism and Hinduism", *The Harmonist*, August, 1927, 441 Chaitanya Era, Vol. XXV, No. 3, p. 51).<sup>13</sup>

#### 4) The Upper Class Hindu Bhadrals and the Kayastha Elites -Siddhanta Sarasvati's Journey as an Astronomer

Bimala Prasad's exceptional proficiency in astronomy made him an earnest learner and researcher who wanted to seek the truth in cosmology with his calculations. His arguments with his Kulin Brahmin Head Master of Sanskrit College over an astronomical calculation prompted him to leave the institution. But he was not keen to accept misinterpretations of the astronomical data. Perhaps he was also not ready to recognise the dominance of the Brahmins, the highest caste or varna in the Hindu hierarchical system, in the field of scientific knowledge delivery. This is why Bimala Prasad devoted a considerable amount of time in his life to studying, practising, and spreading the knowledge of Vedic astronomy to the Bhadrals.

The translation works from the Sanskrit texts, the teaching of Vedic astral science in an institutionalised manner, publication of journals and almanacs, exemplified how he was trying to create a non-Brahmin or a non-upper caste domain for communicating indigenous science.

His ardent propagation of Vedic astral science in modern Bengal as a teacher, researcher, and institution in the name of Saraswat Chatuspathi again faced a setback in the 1890s when a Chair Professor of astronomy at Sanskrit College questioned the validation of the theories of Siddhanta Sarasvati, which he used to teach his students. The 24-year-old Bimala Prasad, to prove his point, debated in front of the public, but his ideas did not match the traditional standards of Vedic astronomy.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps after this incident, his vigorous enthusiasm towards propagating Vedic astronomy became less active, and he concentrated on his job at the royal court of Tripura. He gradually lost interest in his quest for communicating ancient astral science in the regional language, which was, according to him, an unexplored field of study for the Bengali Bhadrals (Sardella, 2013).<sup>15</sup>

It was a time when he became deeply immersed in *Bhakti* and spirituality, and his life began to transform.

Bimala Prasad seemed to believe that his religious endeavours would reach more people than his astronomical journals and almanacs. Therefore, he focused on the theological aspects of Bengali Vaishnavism to interpret Lord Caitanya's religious ideology of pluralism. This religious stance of Siddhanta Sarasvati was far beyond his desire to be a science advocate; rather, it situated him as one of the pioneers in the milieu of socio-religious movements.

#### 5) Introducing জ্যোতির্বিদ (Jyotirbid) and বৃহস্পতি (Brihaspati) or 'The Scientific Indian': Key Aspects

The aforementioned journals aimed to promote astrology as a legitimate science rather than as a method of deceiving people. They acknowledged the importance of astral science as the traditional branch of knowledge, similar to Indian philosophy and Āyurveda. These journals of Siddhanta Sarasvati encouraged 'print culture' in astral science, like the Western countries. These journals took initiatives to inform readers about the origin and development of scientific knowledge worldwide. *Brihaspati* mentioned the establishment of the Royal Geographical Society and Royal Horticultural Society in London during the 1880s (*Brihaspati*, Vol 1, No. 10<sup>th</sup>, 1896).<sup>16</sup>

These journals promoted astral science as an integral part of the Hindu culture, depicting every moment of life, starting from birth to death. *Jyotirvid* and *Brihaspati* translated works on English astronomy. They tried to make the subscribers aware of the practical applications of astronomy, such as predicting solar and lunar eclipses, weather patterns, and time differences; providing directions; its crucial role in marine science, etc. These journals promoted books on astronomy. For example, *Jyotirvid* encouraged its readers to purchase books like *Book of Fate* or *Principles of Hindu Astrology*, authored by Mr K. Dutt, who was also the co-editor of the same journal (*Jyotirvid*, Vol 2, No. 2nd, 1902).<sup>17</sup>

#### 6) Circulation of the Journals –Printing Popularity

The subscribers of *Jyotirvid* and *Brihaspati* were limited in number; however, readers outside of Bengal also showed interest in these publications. For instance, in the *Jaisthya* edition of *Brihaspati* (May 1897), there is a list of 22 readers who paid in advance for their subscriptions to the journal. Among the subscribers was Mannulal Jyotishi from Banaras, along with others. The list also included Jadunath Mukhopadhyaya from Hazaribagh and Anant Kumar Basu from Dhaka, highlighting the journal's



wide circulation from Banaras to Hazaribagh and Dhaka. The list illustrates how Sarasvati Thakur attempted to implement a structured and systematic method for promoting national science even before the *Swadeshi* era (1905-1911).<sup>18</sup>

### 7) Translating the Stars and Defining the Cosmos: Siddhanta Sarasvati's Translation Works on Vedic Astronomy from Sanskrit to Bengali

So far, three editions of *Brihaspati* (1896-97) and twenty-nine editions of *Jyotirvid* (1901, 1902, 1904) have been found in the library of the Bhaktivedanta Research Centre in Kolkata. Further research is ongoing to obtain additional copies of the journals from other libraries in West Bengal. In these journals, Sarasvati translated several astronomical texts and published them in a series with his own annotations. These are such as "(a) Bangla translation and explanation of *Bhāskarācārya's Siddhānta-Shiromani Golādhyaya* with *Vasanabhasya*, (b) Bengali translation of *Ravichandrasayanaspashta*, *Laghujatak*, with annotation of Bhattotpala, (c) Bengali translation of *Laghuparashariya*, or *Ududaya-Pradip*, with Bhairava Datta's annotation, (d) *Bhauma-Siddhānta*, (e) *Ārya-Siddhānta* by Āryabhata, (f) Paramadishwara's *Bhatta Dipika-Tika*, *Dinakaumudi*, *Chamatkara-Chintamani*, and *Jyotish-Tatva-Samhita*." <sup>19</sup>

His journals mentioned that Siddhanta Sarasvati wanted to translate 52 Vedic or Hindu astronomical Sanskrit texts, listing his preferences. These texts were: *Siddhānta-Śiromaṇiḥ*, *Gaṇitādhyāya*, *Golādhyāya*, *Bījagaṇitādhyāya*, *Līlāvati*, *Gaṇitasāriṇī*, *Lalla- Siddhānta Dhī Vṛddhitāntrah*, *Siddhāntarahasya*, *Siddhāntarahasya*, *Siddhāntarahasya*, *Grahalāghava*, *Bhāsvatī*, *Makaranda*, *Dinacandrikā*, *Dinakaumudī*, *Vṛhājāataka*, *Laghujāataka*, *Jātakālāṃkāra*, *Kalpalatā*, *Keśavajāataka*, *Sarvvārthacintāmaṇiḥ*, *Uḍadāyapradīpa*, *Jaiminiyasūtra*, *Jātakacandrikā*, *Śuddhidīpikā*, *Jātakapārijāta*, *Nīlāmbarījāataka*, *Aṣṭādaśasaṃhitā*, *Praśnavaiṣṇava*, *Karaṇakutūhalaḥ*, *Jyotiṣatattva*, *Purāṇokta-Jyotiṣa*, *Muhūrttacintāmaṇiḥ*, *Bhāvakutūhala*, *Bhṛgusūtra*, *Bhṛgusaṃhitā*, *Mānasāgarīpaddhati*, *Muhūrtta-Gaṇapati*, *Yavanajāataka*, *Lagnacandrikā*, *Śambhuhorāprakāśa*, *Keralapraśna*, *Ṣaṭ-Pañcāśikā*, *Jyotiṣ-sāra*, *Praśacaṇḍeśvara*, *Hāyanaratna*, *Jyotirribandha*, *Cirapañjikā*, *Arghaparakāśa*, *Ratnadyoda*, *Jātakamārtanḍa*, *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*.<sup>20</sup>

It may be noted that translation studies in India mainly refer to the translation of the *Bhasa* literature by the colonisers, emphasising the classical language, Sanskrit. The Christian missionaries translated the Bible into the regional languages of India to broaden its reach among the colonised. The Baptist missionaries of Serampore played an important role in this initiative. They not only translated the Bible into Bangla but also made Oriya, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Assamese editions of the Holy Book,

where William Carey, one of the Baptist missionaries of that time in Serampore, played a pivotal role. It was also understood that command over the local languages would help the British to control the natives of India. The missionaries would have felt the need to reach people with the regional editions of the Holy Bible to spread Christianity at the mass level (Jana, 2020).<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps in this situation, when the circulation of knowledge became pro-British and limited, the Hindus, particularly the Bengali intellectuals, came forward to initiate an intellectual movement to foster national integrity by exploring the Hindu knowledge systems. Sarasvati's translations of the Vedic astronomical texts can be treated as an attempt to decolonise science from the imperial understandings, as colonial masters used translation as a tool for intellectual domination in the name of Indology.

### 8) কলিকাতা সারস্বত চতুষ্পাঠী (Calcutta Saraswat Chatuspathi): The Centre for learning Astrology

Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur founded the Calcutta Saraswat Chatuspathi at 181 Maniktola Street, Rambagan, Calcutta. The purpose of this institute was to teach astrology to aspiring astrologers who wanted to make it their profession after passing the government and other degree examinations.

This institute was not residential but had an extensive collection of books on astronomy and astrology. The students were also taught English astronomy, astrology and Western mathematics. The Saraswat Chatuspathi followed the tradition of the ancient Gurukul system, and the Professors used to give honorary titles to the meritorious students. Patrons would often donate to this school of astrological excellence.<sup>22</sup> The education at Saraswat Chatuspathi was free of cost, and its sole purpose was to spread the knowledge of astral science.

The Chatuspathi published বঙ্গ পঞ্জিকা সংস্কার ( *Bange Panjika Samskar*) compiled by Pandit Satkari Chattopadhyay Siddhantabhushan with an English introduction of twelve pages to guide the writers of almanacs on how they can calculate like *Bishuddha Siddhanta Panjika* with the help of Western mathematics. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur published *Almanac for the year 1917* from this Chatuspathi (Sardella, 2013).<sup>23</sup>

### 9) The Almanacs- *Bhaktibhavan Panjika* and *Sri Nabadwip Panjika*

*Bhaktibhavan Panjika*, published by Bhakti Siddhanta Sarasvati Thakur, was designed for the devotees and written in simple Bangla language. This almanac continues to be published by Sri Caitanya Math, Mayapur, West

Bengal. The almanac references three types of calendars based on AD or খ্রিস্টাব্দ, Bangla solar calendar or বঙ্গাব্দ and শ্রীগৌরব্দ (Sri Gaurabda), the lunar calendar which has counted from Sri Chaitanya's appearance day. It talks for twelve months, which have the various names of Krishna. These are such as বিষ্ণু (Vishnu), মধুসূদন (Madhusudan), ত্রিবিক্রম (Trivikram), বামন (Baman), শ্রীধর (Sreedhar), র্ষিকেশ (Rishikesh), পদ্মনাভ (Padmanava), দামোদর (Damodar), কেশব (Keshab), নারায়ণ (Narayana), মাধব (Madhab) and গোবিন্দ (Govinda).

The days to perform rituals or ব্রত and to keep fast or উপবাস used to be mentioned in the almanacs according to the decisions taken by the eminent Vaisnava Gurus or শুদ্ধবৈষ্ণব সিদ্ধান্তানুসারে. The almanac also contains the dates for তিথিপূজা, or religious celebrations, including the appearance and disappearance days of famous Vaishnava Gurus. It provides information about the history of *Gaudiya* Vaishnavism and highlights important pilgrimages associated with it. Siddhanta Sarasvati also published *Sri Nabadwip Panjika* or *Sri Caitanya-Panjika* to promote print culture for almanacs. (Brahamachari, Prangopal (ed). *Nabadwip Panjika*. Mayapur. 2008-09. Gaurabda 522).<sup>24</sup>

### 10) Locating Siddhanta Sarasvati in the Sociology of Religion: An Estimation of Siddhanta Sarasvati as a Modern Hindu Personalist or a Hindu Religious Guru Exhibiting the Qualities of a Traditional Moderniser

According to Sardella (2013), Siddhanta Sarasvati's language was extraordinarily intellectual, and the literature that he produced was scanty in nature. There have been few efforts to compile his writings by the social scientists; therefore, understanding his religious thoughts seems complex and needs more academic interventions. He believed in the concept of 'Personalism' and wanted to apply that method in Caitanya Vaishnavism to understand 'God-head' and the interpersonal relationship between the Supreme Soul and the devotees.<sup>25</sup>

Siddhanta Sarasvati preached *Bhakti Yoga*, which can be likened to the ideals of integrated humanism and personalism, transcending the caste structure of traditional *Brahmin* culture. In the *Bhakti Yoga* of *Gaudiya* Vaishnavism, there are no barriers between Krishna and his followers regarding caste, class, creed, or gender. In this process of self-surrender through the path of *Bhakti*, Sarasvati emphasised the significance of chanting the name of Hari (Krishna). He expressed his reverence for *Vishishtadvaita* thoughts, and gave utmost importance to *Bhakti* over *Jnana* and *Karma* as the path or *Marga* to attain salvation or *Mokshya*.<sup>26</sup>

He expressed his differences of opinion about the acceptance of nondualism, but had a great respect for Adi Sankaracharya as one of the stalwarts of the Vedic

knowledge systems. In *Nadiya Prakash*, he wrote on the personal and impersonal experiences of the Supreme Soul. He mentioned, a true Vaishnava will try to understand God from three perspectives: *Brahman* or the impersonal, *Paramatma* or the personal mediator and *Bhagavan* or the personality of Godhead. The Caitanya *bhakta* will only emphasise the personalistic traits of *Bhagavan*, and will try to connect with him through the threads of *Bhakti*. His unique understanding of the relationship between the divine and the devotees, based on the Caitanya philosophy, perhaps gave him the recognition of a modern Hindu personalist, as mentioned by F. Sardella in his seminal work on Siddhanta Sarasvati Thakur<sup>27</sup>

How can we situate Siddhanta Sarasvati as a traditional Guru in *Sanātana*? According to the ancient Vedic literature, the Guru is not only the source of knowledge and wisdom, but also the torchbearer for the communities, capable of uplifting their moral standards as responsible citizens, thereby contributing to the holistic development of society. A guru can eliminate ignorance and can be both a spiritual and educational mentor. Siddhanta Sarasvati qualified all these standards of an ideal Hindu Guru mentioned in *Sanātana* Dharma. His quest for scientific truths, where he wanted to accommodate Western intellectual discourses, will surely place him as a traditional moderniser in the socio-cultural history of modern Bengal.

### 11) Decolonising Science in Colonial Bengal: Historicising Sarasvati's Contributions in the Field of Science

The epistemological approach for this paper is based on a qualitative analysis of Sarasvati's work in the context of decolonising science. Sarasvati's understanding of indigenous science and the acceptance of the Western Enlightenment made him a balanced critic of colonial rule, which is evident in his editorials. He supported colonial rule for its modernity but also objected to the unfair criticism from the *Raj* regarding the Vedic knowledge systems.

Sarasvati challenged the 'positional superiority of Western knowledge'<sup>28</sup>, through his writings. In one of his editorials, he urged educated Bengalis to study ancient Vedic texts to dispel the belief that our forefathers simply replicated Western astronomy in the Siddhanta literature. Therefore, this approach of Sarasvati indicates how he protested against 'colonising knowledges' by the *Raj*. The work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) provides a relevant analysis, which sought to analyse the scope of this confrontation through the lens of Marxian theory, specifically regarding class struggle and exploitation.

She aimed to contextualise the dynamics between the colonisers and the colonised (Smith, 2021, p. 69).<sup>29</sup>

Walter D. Mignolo (2007) tried to define the intellectual movements of the colonised in terms of 'decoloniality'. In his words, "*De-coloniality, then, means working toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ, which is what modernity/ coloniality does and, hence, where decolonisation of the mind should begin*" (p. 459).<sup>30</sup> His attempt at 'delinking history' from the established standards provides a model for understanding Sarasvati's initiatives of glorifying the ancient Aryan knowledge system.

In Sarasvati's astronomical research, language played an important role, as he was an expert in Sanskrit, Bangla, and English. He did not translate the intended astronomical texts from Sanskrit to English to gain global recognition and credit. His approach was regional, where he aimed to nurture the community consciousness of the Hindus as a nation by promoting Vedic knowledge in their mother tongue. This understanding of race theory from the cultural perspective needs to be seen through the lenses of postcolonial studies.

Bill Ashcroft (2010) mentioned in his article:

*"Widespread interest in the link between language and race really began in the late eighteenth century with the discovery of the Indo-European family of languages and the subsequent rise of philology — comparative or historical linguistics — which developed out of an interest in the link between language and the essential identity of communities. While the concept of 'race' might exist entirely in language, a convenient and protean trope of Otherness, philology became the major impetus in the myth of the link between language and race as the diversity of languages was used to explain the diversity of races"* (Language and Race, p. 316).<sup>31</sup>

In Sarasvati's work, a philological connection emerges that positions Sanskrit as a fundamental basis for comprehending ancient knowledge systems. This linguistic approach was also evident in regional media during the colonial period in the name of print culture in indigenous languages. In Bengal, a dominant portion of *Bhadraloks*, including Sarasvati, acknowledged the superiority of their classical and regional languages compared to colonial modes of communication in the intellectual context.

The themes of language dominance and the circulation of indigenous knowledge are also significant in Sarasvati's literary works, making him an important case study for discourses on language from both postcolonial and postmodern perspectives, particularly in relation to the thoughts of Derrida and Lyotard.<sup>32</sup>

Severo and Makoni, in their article, "African Languages, Race, and Colonialism: The Case of Brazil and Angola" (2020), mentioned that language as a social process

germinates the sense of homogeneity in the respective community, which further flourishes as an ideology of "one language—one nation" that was practiced in the colonies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>33</sup>

Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati emphasised a cultural identity rooted in Vedic wisdom and its regional expressions. He aimed to unite Sanskrit and Bangla in intellectual discourses to form a national consciousness. Hence, Bimala Prasad or Sarasvati Thakur exemplified criticalities not only in indigenous science and religion but also from the perspectives of language and translation, leading towards postcolonial debates and discourses.

## 12) Conclusion: Science and Sarasvati – The Marginalisation of a Scientific Humanist

There are several reasons to consider.

Firstly, his journals had a short lifespan (1890s – 1904), and the copies were lost due to a lack of preservation. Therefore, it is difficult to create a chronological history of his astronomical journals and almanacs.

Secondly, there are very few mentions of his scientific journals and almanacs in established scholarly works. While publications from the *Gaudiya* Math and ISKCON have some references, they are not always considered authentic sources for historicizing his life and works.

Finally, his contributions to the field of science were overshadowed by his religious reforms. This other aspect of his life was not discussed by the social scientists, who perhaps believed that he should only be positioned in religious history rather than the history of science. This bias needs to be corrected to give him justice, not just as a religious reformer but also as one of the pioneers in colonial Bengal who promoted science in the regional language.

A similar kind of study on the Bengali almanacs by Gautam Bhadra, titled "Pictures in Celestial and Worldly Time: Illustrations in Nineteenth-century Bengali Almanacs," published in 2014 in *New Cultural Histories of India, Materiality, and Practices*, edited by Partha Chatterjee, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, and Bodhisattva Kar.<sup>34</sup> Bhadra did not focus on Gaudiya almanacs; however, his efforts to highlight the social and cultural significance of the Bengali almanacs can support an interdisciplinary approach to studying the history of science and religion in modern Bengal, where Siddhanta Sarasvati can be seen as one case study.

Last year, on February 29th, the Gaudiya Vaishnava Community celebrated the 150th Birth Anniversary of Siddhanta Sarasvati. This research seeks to commemorate this occasion by placing him alongside other science experts in modern Bengal.



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## Notes

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