

Abstract

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Title: *Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati: The Context and Significance of a Modern Hindu Personalist.*

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This study explores the life and work of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati (1874-1937), a Vaishnava guru of the school of Chaitanya (1486-1534), who, at a time that Hindu non-dualism was most prominent, managed to establish a pan-Indian movement for the modern revival of traditional personalist *bhakti* that today encompasses both Indian and non-Indian populations throughout the world.

To most historians, the period between 1815 and 1914 is known as Britain's Imperial Century, when the power of British cultural influence was at its height, most especially in Calcutta, India, the jewel of the British crown. Here the profound admixture of Western and Indic social structures, values and ideas gave rise to a new indigenous middle-class known as the *bhadraloka*: the class responsible for what has come to be known as the Bengali Renaissance, and for producing such transformative figures as Rammohun Roy and Swami Vivekananda, both of whom believed non-dualism to be the fundamental expression of Indic thought. As a result of their efforts (especially those of Vivekananda), modern Hinduism gradually came to be identified with Vedantic non-dualism (*advaita*) in both India and the West—an outcome that has historically obscured personalist *bhakti* strands.

To redress this imbalance, the thesis explores Bhaktisiddhanta's background, motivation and thought, especially as it relates to his forging of a modern traditionalist institution for the successful revival of Chaitanya Vaishnava *bhakti*. That institution, originally known as the Gaudiya Math, has a number of contemporary global offshoots, the best known of which is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. The missing piece has been the scholarly study of the little known individual whose vision and thought provided the original impetus for these more recent movements, and who during his lifetime established centres in both London and Berlin. Bhaktisiddhanta pursued a modern traditionalist approach within the context of the multiple trajectories of Hinduism. While remaining faithful to a traditional reading of religious texts, he was nonetheless able to adjust core principles so as to make them fitting for modern times.

The results of this study carry implications for the understanding of modern Hinduism and its development from pre-colonial to post-modern forms, which occurred during a time of global modernisation.

Keywords: *bhakti*, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, Bengal intellectual life, Bhaktivinoda, caste, Chaitanya doctrines, colonialism, Gaudiya Math, globalization, India religion 20th century, missionaries, modern Hinduism, postcolonialism, Vaishnavism/Vishnuism, Vedanta, Vivekananda, worship (Hinduism).