

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF JAGADĀNANDA ROY (1869-1933) TO SCIENCE POPULARIZATION IN BENGAL

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Jagadananda Roy was one of the greatest science communicators of the 20th century, whose popular science books are still appreciated by children in Bengal, even after more than 90 years of his death, due to their lucid and interesting style of presentation. Born in a landed gentry family in Krishnanagar, Nadia, Bengal in 1869, Roy was educated in Krishnanagar and was teaching in a local missionary school, when he met Rabindranath Tagore in connection with his writings in Sādhana Patrikā. Tagore spotted the talent in Jagadananda and first appointed him in the family estate in Silaidaha, then as the private tutor of his children and finally, as the science and mathematics teacher of the Santiniketan school. Jagadananda taught here for about three decades and inspired generations of students to learn and embrace science as a passion and a profession. Inspired by his idol Ramendrasundar Tribedi, a legendary science communicator of Bengal, Jagadananda started writing popular science articles in Bengali in various magazines with the aim of popularizing science among children and creating a science awareness, scientific temper and inquisitiveness among them. The articles were then compiled into books; notable among his books were Vijñānacārya Jagadīscandrer Āviskā, Vaijñānikī, Prākṛtikī, Graha-Nakṣatra, Pokā Mākāḍ, Māch-Byāng-Sāp, Śabda, Bānglār Pākhī, Cumbak, Cala Vidyut, Nakṣatra Cena etc., which are still equally popular as they were 100 years ago. His articles were devoid of technical details and scientific jargons but provided immense pleasure to his readers. He transformed science articles into science literature that touched the mind and heart of children, whom he loved so much. He not only wrote science, but encouraged experimentation in science, nature study and sky watching in the Santiniketan school. Jagadananda was one of the early amateur astronomers in Bengal. He also wrote the first science fiction in Bengali. Hailed as the ‘Science Guru’ of Santiniketan, he left an indelible mark on the canvas of science communication in Bengal and reaffirmed that effective science communication is possible through vernacular. Jagadananda Roy died in 1933 in Santiniketan.
