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Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism (10.915 words)

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The constellation of persons, communities, texts, doctrines, and practices denoted by the term "Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism" constitutes a distinctive tradition of religious affiliation centered on the worship of Krsna (regarded as the source of all Visnu forms and *avatāra*s) with geographical origination and locus in the region of greater Bengal. "Gauḍīya" is an adjectival derivative of Gauḍa, referring roughly to the areas of present-day West Bengal and Bangladesh. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is also referred to as Bengal Vaiṣṇavism or Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism – the latter indicating recognition of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486–1533) as the principal founder and preceptor of the tradition.

While the central aim of this article will be to highlight distinctive features of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, it is worth noting that the tradition has significant areas of cultural, doctrinal, and other forms of overlap or close parallel, reflection, and refraction with other traditions. Such relations exist with other Vaiṣṇava traditions, especially those in geographic proximity, such as Assamese and Oriyan Vaiṣṇavism, or with the Vallabha Sampradāya, as well as with the more geographically distant Śrīvaisnavas and the Mādhva Sampradāya. It also shares features with other Indic religiocultural traditions, especially of Bengal, including Islamic Sufi culture and even Buddhist and Jaina traditions. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism exists by no means in an isolated religious and cultural space of its own, much less so in recent decades as the tradition has become increasingly globalized. Nonetheless, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism constitutes a distinctive tradition – with numerous variations – that represents an important and vital worldview and way of life within the sphere of Hindu *bhakti* modalities of understanding ultimate reality and addressing the human condition. As an important *bhakti* tradition, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is exemplary not only of the "burst of religious enthusiasm" characteristic of *bhakti* traditions, but also of a "rationally synthesizing influence and a tool of reflection" (Frazier, 2009, 124) that has itself had significant influence on the broader religious landscape of India and the world.

Here we will survey Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in four ways – as a historical development, a literary tradition, theological reflection, and social practice. In all of these dimensions can be recognized a spirit of exclusive pursuit of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* as a comprehensive, central, and unsurpassable ultimate aim of human existence (Griffiths, 1999, ch. 1). It should be noted that this account of Gauḍīya tradition is necessarily simplified to respect space limitations. Much must remain neglected here, such as accounts of a rich variety of Gauḍīya branches, discussion of controversial matters regarding disciplic succession(s) (see e.g. Brzezinski, 1996–1997), and elaboration on matters of theological debate.

Historical Development

Early History: (Re-)Creating a Vision and an Identity

Roots of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism reach back well into early medieval times in Bengal. Yet the tradition's distinctive contours become crystallized around the figure of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. In response to a growing sense of distinct Gauḍīya identity, in his *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* (completed early 17th cent.), Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja uses an extended organic metaphor of a family tree (that represents both disciplic and seminal relationships) to identify as various "branches" and "sub-branches" those persons he considers prominent among the founding generation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. Beginning with Mādhavendra Purī as the "seed" of the tree and nine <u>saṃnyāsin</u> peers of Caitanya as nine "roots," Kṛṣṇadāsa then identifies Caitanya as the tree's "trunk" and Caitanya's early close associates – Advaita, Nityānanda, and Gadādhara – as three principle "branches" from which several sub-branches extend to include over three hundred named individuals (*CaiC., Ādi*, 9–12).

That Mādhavendra Purī is identified as the founding father of the tradition is meaningful in several ways. First, for Kṛṣṇadāsa, it is he who initially exhibits the particular mood of *virahabhakti* (devotion-in-absence) that Caitanya later displays in rich depth and intensity. Second, Mādhavendra is a renunciant (apparently initiated into the <u>Daśanāmī</u> Saṃnyāsa order), serving as an ideal and model of renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*) for later generations of the tradition. Third, Mādhavendra's disciple Īśvara Puri becomes the *dīkṣāguru* (initiating preceptor) of Caitanya, indicating a direct link of school affiliation (<u>sampradāya</u>) connecting Caitanya back to Mādhavendra. Finally, and related to the third point, in later generations Mādhavendra will be identified as the Gauḍīyas' link to the disciplic school of <u>Madhva</u> (a claim that is contested on historical as well as theological grounds; see Hardy, 1974, 25–26).

While Kṛṣṇadāsa places Advaita (1434–1559; also referred to as Advaitācārya) on the same level of importance as Nityānanda, Advaita holds a place of special distinction as the herald of Caitanya's advent, having beseeched the latter to descend from his divine realm to this world (*CaiC., Ādi*, 3.92). Further, "he oversaw the birth and infancy of the Gauḍīya ... Vaiṣṇava movement introduced by Kṛṣṇa Caitanya" (Manring, 2005, 2), lending it considerable legitimacy as a cynosure of orthodoxy even as he came to revere Caitanya as his spiritual superior.

It is clear from *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* that by the time of its authorship, there was a conscious effort to connect the diverse persons named into one "system" linked to Caitanya, so that whatever philosophical or social diversity may have existed would be subordinated to this unifying scheme. Also, Kṛṣṇadāsa was concerned to convey that the entire tree was "fruitbearing," with *premaphala* (fruit of divine love) ripened by Caitanya's "gardening" but also suggesting that all members of the tree were of high spiritual caliber. Moreover, he sought to highlight Caitanya's wish that these "fruits" be distributed to anyone and everyone, without consideration of social position or internal qualification. In essence, one can discern a definite missionizing thrust to the nascent Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community by the time of the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*, but arguably from much earlier.

That a more or less cohesive "movement" of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism had gotten underway by the early 17th century is further confirmed by a Bengali composition, the *Bhaktiratnākāra* (*Bhakti* Treasure Trove) of Narahari Cakravartī. This work narrates details about the second generation of Caitanya's followers. Two extended episodes in this account are worth noting, both serving as affirmation and crystallization of theological orthodoxy. One is an account of the transportation, by Śrīnivāsa, Śyāmānanda, and Narottamadās, of several Sanskrit works by Caitanya's Vrindavan followers, the six *gosvāmī*s (ascetic adepts) to Bengal, probably in the 1590s (Lutjeharms, 2010, 58n185). Second was the first large-scale celebration, after the demise of Caitanya, of Caitanya's *āvirbhāva* (appearance, birth) in the home village of Narottamadās, at Kheturi (see below).

Early Legitimization, Patronage, Consolidation, and Mission

Various regional rulers in Bengal and beyond have extended various types and degrees of recognition and support to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas from early in the process of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava identity formation and institutionalization. In doing so, they naturally influenced how Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas defined and organized themselves, and they gave confidence to the nascent Gauḍīya communities. According to his early biographers, already during Caitanya's pre-*sannyās* days in Nabadwip (before 1510), official condemnation of Caitanya's followers' loud public chanting of Kṛṣṇa's names (*saṃkīrtana*; see <u>kīrtan</u>) led to a confrontation with the local *qāzī* (Muslim magistrate) that concluded in an amicable reversal of policy: the *qāzī* promised to allow and even protect the practice of public chanting and pronounced that his descendents in perpetuity shall do likewise. Later, after leaving Nabadwip and taking *sannyās* vows, Caitanya soon arrived in Puri, where he and his Bengali companions received welcome and honor from the regional king, Pratāparudra. According to the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* (e.g. *Madhya*, 11) and other Gauḍīya texts, Pratāparudra became Caitanya's avid devotee and provided his Bengali followers with accommodation for extended annual stays during the summer months. Caitanya was also reportedly provided a military escort for his departures from Puri for pilgrimage.

The presence in Vrindavan of Caitanya's key followers (especially the six *gosvāmī*s) coincided with <u>Mughal</u> ascendency in northern India, a power that found it prudent to accommodate resistant Hindu kingdoms, especially of Rajput clans in Rajasthan. During Akbar's reign (1556–1605), a notable spirit of imperial tolerance and even patronage of Hindus prevailed, which was especially favorable to the flourishing of Vaiṣṇavism in greater Vrindavan (Vraj/Braj). The high point of this imperial patronage unfolded with the construction of

the imposing Govindadeva Temple in Vrindavan (completed in 1590) under the sponsorship of Bhagavāndās (r. 1573–1589), *rājā* of Amber, and his son Mānsiṅgh (r. 1589–1614). Several other Kṛṣṇa temples were also built around this time, under the auspices of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava ascetic leaders and *mahant*s (married temple priest-managers; Horstmann, 2009, 6).

Akbar's supportive attitude toward Hindu activity was not to endure. Especially his great-grandson Awrangzēb (r. 1658–1707) would wield iconoclastic force against Hindu temple worship, leading to the exodus of temple images (beginning with Govindadeva in 1669 or 1670) from Braj into the shelter and patronage of the Kachvahas, Rajput princes of Amber/Jaipur. The presence and patronage of Gauḍīya temple images and their Bengali priests would become key components in the Kachvahas' complex process of self-legitimation (Horstmann, 2009, 4, 8–9).

Around the same time, as Gauḍīya migration westward from Vrindavan was taking place, other Gauḍīyas initiated another kind of move eastward, back to Bengal. As mentioned above, Narottamadās, Śyāmānanda, and Śrīnivāsa – three Vrindavan followers of the *gosvāmī*s – were commissioned to bring copies of the *gosvāmī*s' works to Bengal, apparently in order to win the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas of varied persuasions to the Vrindavan Caitanyaites' systematized theology. Before reaching their destination, according to legend (recounted in detail in the *Premavilāsa*), highwaymen intercepted the two wagon loads of books, a disaster that led Śrīnivāsa to the court of a southwest Bengal regional chieftain of the Malla clan, Vīr Hambir, eventually to become his *guru* (possibly in 1575–1576). Malla patronage of Vaiṣṇavism is evident already from the mid-15th century, when Patit Malla built a temple dedicated to Jagannātha. From that time through the 17th century, some 64 temples were built in the Bankura district, edifices that served the Mallas' interest, as Hindu rulers, in consolidating their social and political positions in the wake of a failed Bengal sultanate. Concerns of state power notwithstanding, a devotional spirit is clearly evident; these architecturally innovative *ratna*-type temples (*ratna*, lit. jewel; a particular architectural form of temple in Bengal), with their large spaces facilitating assemblies for *kīrtan* and their walls richly articulated with terra-cotta reliefs of *kṛṣṇalīlā* (see *līlā*), show that Hambir and his descendents were keen to create a replication of Vrindavan in which Kṛṣṇa and his divine consort Rādhā would be pleased to interact with their devotees. Initially under the direction of Śrīnivāsa (who came to be considered an *avatāra* of Caitanya, who, in turn, was seen as an *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa, or indeed of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa combined – see below), these chieftains facilitated ongoing Kṛṣṇa *sevā* that included the daily distribution of *prasād* and (from the first half of the 17th cent.) the singing of Kṛṣṇa-dedicated music in a distinctive style of classical music, *viṣṇupur gharānā*. To this day the practices of Kṛṣṇa *prasād* distribution and other temple services continue, some rendered by descendents of the original appointed temple servants from Hambir's time (Chakravarti, 1985, 210–222, 227; Stewart, 2010, 39–41; Michell, 1983, 137–146; Ghosh, 2005, 13–20).

In ways similar to those of Śrīnivāsa, Narottamadās was able to marshal support from influential persons in his carefully planned campaign to unite Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal under the teachings of the Vrindavan *gosvāmī*s. His extensive travels to meet leaders of the various disparate Vaiṣṇava communities culminated (possibly between 1610 and 1620) in a grand, meticulously planned festival in his home village, Kheturi Gram (Rajshahi district, present-day Bangladesh), sponsored by the local *rājā*, Santoṣa Datta (Narottamadās' cousin). The *Narottamavilāsa* and two other texts provide a roll call with 95 names of prominent guests who attended the festival, carefully noting the places from which they came (Chakravarti, 1985, 232–234). This festival was to be the first of an annual event celebrating the birthday of Śrī Caitanya, and, importantly, it became an occasion for doctrinal disputation and resolution – in favor of the Vrindavan *gosvāmī*s' views as promoted by Narottamadās and his companions Śrīnivāsa and Śyāmānanda. More generally, the staging of grand festivals sponsored by local chieftains became a key method for consolidating and expanding early Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism throughout much of the greater Bengal region. Yet it is also evident that Vaiṣṇavism became a substantial fixed component of the Bengal religious landscape from the number of temples (mainly in West Bengal); some 386 temples from up to the late 18th century have been counted (Chakravarti, 1985, 275–276). Also Vaiṣṇavism of Caitanyaite origins came to tribal areas of regions east of Bangladesh, including Manipur, Assam, and Tripura (Chakravarti, 1985, 280–281).

Modern Developments – From Regional Recovery to World Mission

Early Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava development must be viewed in the context of Muslim political domination and the varied responses to this condition by the wider populations of relevant areas. Similarly, later Gauḍīya development must be seen in the context of European political domination; from at least the mid-18th century, profound political changes rendered by European mercantile presence in Bengal led, in the latter half of the 19th century, to British colonial hegemony. During this time, into the early 20th century, Gauḍīyas unavoidably participated in the wider Hindu discourse of resistance, self-reassessment, and reform, necessitated by direct and indirect cultural, religious, and intellectual challenges arguably far more profound than those faced during Muslim domination.

Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda (1838–1914) holds a central position in any account of modern Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava history. Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda's early grooming as a member of the new *bhadraloka* class of British-educated Indian administrators placed him in a position of close engagement with other personages of what would later be called the Bengal Renaissance. Yet after initial (self-confessed) infatuation with progressive Western authors, Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda would soon be drawn to the Vaiṣṇavas active in his proximity and to their canonical literature, especially the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*. A prolific author (in English and Sanskrit, as well as in his native Bengali), Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda participated vigorously in the surge of indigenous journal, pamphlet, and book-publishing fever of religious "retrieval and remembrance" and of "recovery" (Fuller, 2005, 109; Bhatia, 2009) that swept Bengal in the wake of European (Danish, then British) Christian missionary publishing. Shunning offers to join the Brahmo Samaj, with its self-

conscious rejection of puranic thought and practices (such as *avatāra* theology, image worship, and pilgrimage), he instead garnered support for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava revival on two fronts. For the educated, middle-class, urban, reading public (especially the *bhadraloka*), Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda wrote and published several books and articles (mainly in his own journal, *Sajjana Toṣanī*); in these he addressed key theological challenges, especially on the status of scripture and the need for discerning readers to revere scriptural wisdom while spiritually qualified Vaiṣṇavas develop creative ways to reconcile scriptural with modern (especially historical) vision (Das, 1996–1997, 127–143). For the less-educated, rural public, Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda became (especially in the early 1890s) an active itinerant village-to-village preacher, establishing grassroots assemblies wherever he visited, conforming each group to a detailed system of franchisement he called *nāmahaṭṭa* (marketplace of [divine] names).

Significantly, at the time of Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda's missionizing activity, a major shift in religious patronage patterns was taking place in Bengal as a result of changing British policies, not least the 1793 Permanent Settlement on land revenues. As an example of what he calls "democratization of patronage," J. Fuller (2005, 242–244) cites the successful celebration of a festival at the newly claimed site of Caitanya's birth, in Mayapur, in the Nadiya district. Traditional displays of largess by *zamīndār*s (large landowners) were replaced by the practice of attendees (many from considerable distance) financing their own way, and a system of subscription was used to fund other on-site expenses, organized by a voluntary society, the Navadvipa Pracarini Sabha (Nabadwip Mission Association), styled after British voluntary organizations. It was also significant that this newly claimed site of Caitanya's birth undermined long-standing claims by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, who represented a traditional understanding of the state/religion relationship.

Following and extending Bhaktivinoda's lead in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava modernizing thought, practice, and mission was Bimal Prasad Datta, one of Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda's 14 children, later (upon taking *sannyās* vows) to be known as Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati. Like his father, Saraswati placed great importance on writing and publishing for missionizing aims. A vigorously outspoken preacher, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati challenged other reform Hindu leaders, especially in their ready acceptance of the illusionism (*māyāvāda*; see *māyā*) that pointed back to the nondualist idealism (Advaita Vedānta) of Śaṅkara. He was also outspokenly critical of "caste *gosvāmī*s" (*jāti gosāī*) who, though descending from families of exalted Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, were, in his view, depending for their identity as Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas on seminal descent alone rather than on spiritual qualification. Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati insisted that any initiated practitioner who honors Gauḍīya tenets and strictly observes prescribed practices must be respected as a Vaiṣṇava and, indeed, as a Brahman. He affirmed the latter claim by giving *upanayana* (initiation into the *gāyatrīmantra*) along with the sacred thread (to his male disciples), and along with *mantra*s for worship of the *guru*, Caitanya, and Kṛṣṇa.

From 1918, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati undertook institutional efforts for spreading Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practices and encouraged his followers to establish monastic centers (*maṭha*s) modeled somewhat on the Śaṅkara tradition and, more immediately and locally, on the Ramakrishna Math and Mission of Swami Vivekananda. In these *maṭha*s, he established the daily worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa *mūrti*s, accompanied by a *mūrti* of Caitanya, thus visually asserting Caitanya's identity as the combined form of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa (Sardella, 2009, 118–130). But before this narrative of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati's and his followers' missionizing and westward Gauḍīya migration proceeds, we must note that the earliest Gauḍīya Western missionary attempt was made by a member of another branch of the tradition, namely, Baba Premanand Bharati (1857–1914), the son of a Bengal deputy magistrate. He visited the United States (New York, Boston, and Los Angeles) from 1902 to 1907, during which time he was able to gain the attention of several newspapers, lecture and attend conferences, publish a book in English (*Sree Krishna: The Lord of Love*), establish a "Krishna Home" (in Los Angeles), and attract a few followers, six of whom accompanied him to India (Carney, 1998).

Fig. 1: Unusual 12-armed image of Śrī Caitanya, as the combined form of four-armed Caitanya as *sannyāsin*, four-armed Viṣṇu, two-armed Rāma, and two-armed Kṛṣṇa (photo by Param P. Tomanec, used by courtesy).

As the Indian independence movement gained momentum in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati's mission expanded in and beyond India. Including centers in Burma, Dacca, London, and Berlin, his mission came to include 67 *maṭha*s. But with Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati's death (in 1937) the rapid breakup of his institution (the Gaudiya Math), the interruptions of World War II, and Indian Independence, it would be another three decades before further noteworthy Gauḍīya missionizing achievements would appear. Then in 1965, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupad (1896–1977) departed from Calcutta for New York to begin missionizing alone, as a disciple of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati seeking to follow his *guru*'s order for him to expand the mission through the medium of English. With the founding of his International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in 1966, Bhaktivedanta Prabhupad drew a rapidly expanding following of mainly young Westerners – initially in New York, then in San Francisco, and soon in several cities of the United States, Europe, Australia, and elsewhere. The practice of "Krishna consciousness" (as he designated the goal of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*) was fostered by a semimonastic mode of living, which included the wearing of traditional Indian dress and the Gauḍīya *tilaka* markings, the *ūrdhvapuṇḍra*, strict observance of Brahmanical habits (including abstinence from all intoxicants and nonvegetarian food, gambling, and "illicit sex"), and initiation into the daily meditative chanting (*japa*) of the *mahāmantra* of Kṛṣṇa's names.

Fig. 2: A Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava, showing forehead *tilaka* mark (photo by Param P. Tomanec, used by courtesy).

In the process of establishing his mission, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (as he came to be called by his followers) took the egalitarian spirit of his *guru* to its logical conclusion by accepting as his disciples non-Indians, including women, and initiating them with the *gāyatrīmantra* and (for men) the sacred thread. This practice went hand in hand with his establishing temples in several Western cities; Western disciples would thus become qualified as temple priests, sustaining the daily *mūrtipūjā* (see *pūjā*) of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Gaura-Nitai (Caitanya and Nityānanda), and Jagannātha, Subhadrā, and Baladeva (modeled after the much larger images worshipped by Caitanya in Jagannāth Puri, Orissa). Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada also initiated several young male disciples into the *sannyās* order and brought some of them with him back to India, where he attracted considerable attention for his success in drawing Westerners to "Hinduism." No doubt at least partially explainable by the general globalizing direction of India in recent decades, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's institution has since flourished there, with numerous centers and large temples established throughout the country, especially in urban areas.

At this writing, ISKCON is no longer the sole Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava mission outside India, though it continues to remain prominent, with some five hundred centers of various sizes throughout the world. After Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's death in 1977, some leaders of various branches of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati's institution, the Gaudiya Math – arguably inspired by Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's success – have also undertaken active missionizing in many parts of the world. And it may be expected that yet other branches of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava disciplic succession may also gain followings in places outside India.

Fig. 3: Images (*mūrti*s) of Caitanya Mahāprabhhu (right) and Nityānanda Prabhu (left) from ISKCON-Budapest (photo by Param P. Tomanec, used by courtesy).

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Literature

The Gauḍīya sphere of Vaiṣṇavism has been inspired by and has itself produced a rich and varied galaxy of texts – mainly works in Sanskrit and Bengali, but also in several other Indic languages. The relatively early *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (known and revered already by Madhva and his followers from the 13th cent.) holds immense importance for the Gauḍīya tradition as a whole, and later – explicitly Gauḍīya – works have commented upon and drawn from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, creating a rich exegetical and literary web of intertextuality focused on Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*. Also enriching the soil out of which later Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literary production and religious practice grows is the body of Bengali and Maithili *padāvalī* (series of metrical verses) poetry associated with Vidyāpati (c. 1352–1448) and Caṇḍīdās (c. 14th–15th cents.). Equally important is Jayadeva's Sanskrit poem *Gītagovinda* (c. 1175). The works of these three authors may be regarded more as literary than as religious works (Hardy, 1974, 24); nevertheless their importance can hardly be exaggerated as models for both poetic form and devotional content of later religious writings by numerous early Gauḍīya authors.

But for the eight Sanskrit verses of *Śikṣāṣṭaka*, there are no extant written works attributed to Śrī Caitanya. Yet he commissioned particular followers to compose theological/philosophical and poetic or narrative works that have become foundational to later Gauḍīya tradition. Amidst the rich body of explicitly Gauḍīya works, the Sanskrit *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (The Nectar-Ocean of Devotional Relish) of Rūpa Gosvāmī (c. 1489–1564) is definitive, with its systematic and innovative mapping of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* practice as a progression from lower to higher levels of experiential intensity and religio-aesthetic refinement. Equally important, in this work Rūpa Gosvāmī analyzes types of devotional emotivity – *bhakti* – in the language and conceptuality of the classical Sanskrit discourse on aesthetic relish (*rasa*), positioning Kṛṣṇa as the central locus of relationality that engenders what he calls *bhaktirasa* – aesthetic devotional relish (Haberman, 1988, 31–35).

Complementing Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* is the six-part *Bhāgavatsandarbha* (Discourse on Divinity) of Jīva Gosvāmī (c. 1517–1608), Rūpa Gosvāmī's nephew. Also in Sanskrit, this text explicates in systematic fashion central philosophical-theological tenets of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava thought, framed in the discourse of Vedānta and argued with proof texts mainly from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Also complementing the early portion of *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* in its treatment of *vaidhībhaktisādhanā* (rule-governed *bhakti* practice) is the *Haribhaktivilāsa* (The Pleasure of Devotion for Hari), attributed to Gopāla Bhaṭṭa or Sanātana Gosvāmī (Rūpa Gosvāmī's elder brother). This work serves as a detailed manual of Vaiṣṇava Smṛti and *ācāra* – rules for daily and occasional ritual practice and behavior.

Sanātana Gosvāmī extended the stylistic scope of Gauḍīya Sanskrit works with his *Bṛhadbhāgavatamṛta*, a two-part "pilgrim's progress" narrative that serves as a literary commentary to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, quite different in form from his own formal commentary to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*'s tenth book, the *Vaiṣṇavatoṣaṇī*. Known especially for his Sanskrit devotional poetry, such as *Stavamālā*, is Raghunāthadāsa. Together with Rūpa Gosvāmī, Sanātana Gosvāmī, Jīva Gosvāmī, and Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, Raghunāthadāsa and a sixth ascetic follower of Caitanya, Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa, would become known and revered collectively as the six *gosvāmī*s of Vrindavan. Important Sanskrit Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava works *not* emerging from the Vrindavan *gosvāmī*s are those of Bengal-based Kavikarṇapūra (1528 to early 17th cent.) and the latter's *guru*, Śrīnātha Cakravartī. In addition to works on Sanskrit poetics, such as *Alaṃkārakaustubha*, and two Sanskrit works on the life of Śrī Caitanya (*Caitanyacaritāmṛtamahākāvya* and *Caitanyacandrodayanāṭaka* – the latter in the form of an allegorical drama), Kavikarṇapūra also composed *Gauragaṇoddeśadīpikā* (Little Light on the Identity of Caitanya's Followers), which identifies numerous first-generation followers of Caitanya as reincarnations of specific associates of Kṛṣṇa. Also important, though hardly known to either Gauḍīya practitioners or scholars, is the *Caitanyamatamañjuṣā* (The Chest of Caitanya's Ideas) of Kavikarṇapūra's *guru*, Śrīnātha Cakravartī. This work may be the earliest Gauḍīya commentary on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, significant for having considerably influenced Kavikarṇapūra's writings (Lutjeharms, 2010, 31–45).

Developing parallel to and in some cases interlaced with Sanskrit writing was a rich profusion of poetic works in Bengali language composed during and after Caitanya's life. These works were typically descriptive and eulogistic renderings of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* themes, centered on Caitanya's life and teachings or on the lives and teachings of Caitanya's principal associates such as Nityānanda and Advaita. Such works came to form a literary genre in its own right, as what S. Sen has called Caritaśākhā – the "Biographical Branch" of Bengali literature (Kaviraj, 2003, 506). These works were crucially instrumental to the nascent Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community as a whole (and also within various subcommunities) to define itself theologically and sociopolitically (Stewart, 2010, 6–8; Manring, 2005), as well as to articulate the distinctive emotional register and ritual practices of the tradition. S. Sen also notes more generally that Caitanya's advent marked a watershed in Bengali literature and that the literary forms thus developed (especially Caritaśākhā) continued to set the tone and style of Bengali literature for some two centuries thereafter (Kaviraj, 2003, 506).

At the apex of this sacred biographical genre stands a work by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, a Bengali resident of Vrindavan and student of the six *gosvāmī*s. His *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* (The Nectar-Acts of Caitanya; probably completed by 1615) proved to be the "final word" in an evolution of hagiographical Sanskrit or Bengali writings that sought to depict the life of Caitanya in accord with theological intimations about his divinity arising out of the nascent Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community (Stewart, 2010, 23–31). The *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* is a predominantly Bengali language text, yet it carries much of its authority through substantial Sanskrit quotation of works by the Vrindavan *gosvāmī*s, as well as of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and numerous other Sanskrit works. With this weaving of Sanskrit passages preceded or immediately followed by Bengali paraphrasing, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja made accessible to non-Sanskrit reading Bengalis the

theology that the six *gosvāmī*s had expounded and elaborated for a learned Sanskrit readership, based on what they had imbibed from their teacher, Śrī Caitanya. At the same time, the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* served a "Sanskritizing" function – lending Brahmanical legitimacy to a *bhakti* tradition – while also sup-plying a new idiom for the expression of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*. As S. Kaviraj (2003, 515) notes,

"Bhakti images necessitated a shift from a language of distance, which could give appropriate expression to the *aiśvarya*, the inconceivable and ineffable splendor, of the divine, to a language of *mādhurya*, or emotional gentleness and sweetness, which could express intimacy with the deity" (Kaviraj, 2003, 515).

The *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* certainly furnished such language to articulate a theology of intimacy as embodied in the life of Caitanya, who was now to be comprehended not merely as an *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa (as earlier Caitanya biographers had portrayed him), but rather as Svayam Bhagavān, Kṛṣṇa himself, absorbed in the emotive-devotional persona of Rādhā.

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authors following Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja and his *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* now had a clear theological template for narrating post-Caitanya continuity and community formation. In the process of narrating the activities and travels of second- and third-generation Caitanyaites, these Bengali-writing authors also solidified the locations and features of what should constitute the sacred geography for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. In particular, Nabadwip, the place of Caitanya's birth, was to be revered as spiritually equivalent to Vrindavan, the place of Kṛṣṇa's childhood and youth, and therefore worthy of visiting through pilgrimage. Several works pursued these purposes, notably *Bhaktiratnākāra* (The Treasure of Devotional Jewels) by Narahari Cakravartī, *Narottamavilāsa* by Naraharidās, and *Premavilāsa* by Nityānandadās.

Another centrally important genre of Bengal Vaiṣṇava literature is devotional songs, most of which were composed in Bengali, but which include a sizeable number of works in Brajbhasha, the spoken and literary dialect centered in Braj (Goyal, 1990), and in Brajabuli, a literary language blending Maithili and Bengali. Among Bengali works prominently stands the 17th-century work *Prārthanā* (Supplicatory Prayer), a collection of 53 songs by Narottamadāsa (the central subject of the *Narottamavilāsa*, mentioned above). We may note here the work's tone of self-denigrating humility coupled with emphasis on the need for self-discipline – both fueled by confidence in Vaiṣṇava saints, theology, and practice – as impetus for "ardent longing" (*lālasā*) for and attainment of spiritual perfection (Chakravarti, 1985, 238–239). Most significantly for an important current of later devotional practice, toward the end of this collection, the author prays to be granted the position of an assistant to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's intimate *gopī* associates, hinting at the ideal of *mañjarīsevā* – the service of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa by prepubescent girls – in transcendent Vrindavan.

Two prominent authors of the 18th century are Viśvanātha Cakravartī and his student, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣana, both of whom wrote Sanskrit works further delineating the contours of Gauḍīya theology and philosophy. It is the latter author who wrote the school's first complete commentary to Bādarāyaṇa's *Brahmasūtra*, apparently in an effort to legitimize the Gauḍīyas as a distinct *sampradāya*, at the behest of the Kachvaha *rājā* Savāī Jaisiṅgh, in Amer (Horstmann, 2009, 51–52, ch. 3).

Moving to the late 19th century, among the several significant works of different genres by Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda (see above), we may call attention to his *Śrī Kṛṣṇasaṃhitā*, consisting of 281 Sanskrit declarative verses organized into ten chapters, with Bengali commentary. Aimed to address the educated *bhadraloka* of Bengal, the author also sent copies abroad to known authors (including R.W. Emerson) and to foreign libraries. Addressing persons steeped in Western rationalist thinking, Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda counters his contemporary Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (in the latter's *Kṛṣṇacaritra*) by proffering allegorical interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's encounters with demons as described in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*; in chapter 8 of this work, each demon is identified with a particular obstacle on the *bhakti* path (Das, 1996–1997, 145n2).

The late 19th through 20th centuries saw a considerable burgeoning of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scholarship in Bengal, shown in writing, editing of earlier texts, and publishing. Two works among many examples of such scholarship can be mentioned here, namely, the *Śrī Caitanya Cariter Upādān* of B.B. Majumdar (1959), and the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna* of Haridas Das (1957–1958). This latter work represents a new genre for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature, an encyclopedic catalogue and overview (in three thousand pages) of Gauḍīya terminology, literature, biography, and sacred places. With respect to writing in non-Indian languages, we have already mentioned the worldwide missionary activity of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and here we may note the breadth and impact of his extensive translation and commentarial work in English language, in the late 20th century. Central to his initial mission was his publication of *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* (1968; 1972), a verse-by-verse prose translation with "purports" for nearly every verse, largely based on the <u>*Bhagavadgītā*</u> commentary of the 18th-century Gauḍīya theologian Baladeva Vidyābhūṣana. Several works followed, translated and commented in similar style: the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* up to 10.14), and the entire *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja (following closely his *guru* Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati's Bengali commentary). Significantly, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's disciples took their *guru*'s order seriously to distribute his books widely, and consequent efforts have been crucial to the spread and reach of his mission worldwide. At this writing, they also continue to translate and publish his works in numerous other languages of the world.

In recent decades, international missionizing activities have been accompanied by a noticeable upsurge in the authoring (especially in English) of religious biographies of modern Gauḍīya leaders as well as of selected "rank-and-file" practitioners; also a variety of other works ranging from popularizing digests of Gauḍīya thought and practice to confessional memoirs have appeared. Much attention has

been given to Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada by his immediate followers and personal servants (including a seven-volume work, *Śrīla Prabhupāda Līlāmṛta*, 1980, by Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami, and a five-volume memoir, *A Transcendental Diary*, 1992, by Hari Sauri Das). Similar works – also in English – have appeared recently recounting the lives of other leaders of the Saraswati line of succession (followers of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati), and a three-volume biography of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati (2009) has been written by a Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada disciple, Bhakti Vikasa Swami. In a quite different style are the relatively short hagiographic lives of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava saints by O.B.L. Kapoor, *Saints of Vraj* (1999) and *Saints of Bengal* (1995), both originally written in Hindi. Among "other works," we may again mention Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami, whose numerous books include children's stories, journals, and poems – all explorations of the trials and successes of a determined Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practitioner of Western (American) origin.

Theological Reflections: Ontology, Practice, and Fulfillment

Early Gauḍīya theologians, particularly of the Vrindavan school, placed considerable value in a threefold interpretive scheme for comprehending the wide range of texts they deemed canonical. This same scheme will serve here as an organizing principle for sketching essential features of what may be called Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology. The first category, *sambandha* (relationality), is largely concerned with ontology; the second category, *abhidheya* (that which is to be expressed, or named), is concerned with the sphere of practice; and the third category, *prayojana* (purpose, aim, end), encompasses soteriology and perfectional states of devotion within the present life.

Knowing Fundamentals (*Sambandhajñāna*)

The beginning point of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology is the claim that there exists a supreme being, Bhagavān, who is most fully manifest as Kṛṣṇa, and that Kṛṣṇa constitutes ultimate and absolute reality. In the largely Sanskritic sphere of the tradition, the locus of theistic discourse for Gauḍīya ontology is Vedānta. In classical Vedānta, a central concern is to understand or realize _brahman_ as the singular ultimate reality and source of phenomenal existence. Jīva Gosvāmī, implicitly granting this assumption, then shifts ultimacy from *brahman* to Bhagavān by proffering an interpretive technique of "passing the referent" coupled with a "top-down" logic (Gupta, 2007, 36 –37) that subsumes *brahman* within Bhagavān. And while typically in Sanskrit literature, the term Bhagavān can refer to any powerful being, Jīva Gosvāmī offers a narrowed yet rich definition that points to Kṛṣṇa as the term's sole referent. To quote the beginning of Jīva Gosvāmī's definition of Bhagavān,

"He who is the very form of existence, consciousness, and bliss; who possesses inconceivable, multifarious, and unlimited energies that are of his own nature; who is the ocean of unlimited, mutually contradictory qualities, such that in him both the attribute and the possessor of attributes, the lack of differences and varieties of difference, formlessness and form, pervasiveness and centrality (madhyamatva) – all are true ..." (Gupta, 2006, 33).

Not unlike other Vaiṣṇava schools of Vedānta, Gauḍīyas insist that ultimate reality is Bhagavān, the possessor of all excellences and hence the supreme person. As such, he does not merely possess form but rather *is* form that is constituted of *sat, cit*, and *ānanda* – existence (or being), consciousness (knowing awareness), and bliss (unending joy). He is not only the possessor of qualities (or attributes) but also the very "ocean" (or reservoir) of them. And yet within this – what has been called "personalist" – characterization of ultimate reality, Jīva Gosvāmī accommodates formlessness. Moreover, Gauḍīya theologians (especially Rūpa Gosvāmī, in his *Laghubhagavatāmṛta*, appropriating _Pāñcarātra_ typologies of divinity) identify and classify several named and theoretically countless unnamed forms of Bhagavān, each in subordinate relation to Kṛṣṇa, the supreme and original form. Thus, departing from some Vaiṣṇava traditions that place Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa in the position of supreme godhead and Kṛṣṇa as but one "descent" (*avatāra*), Gauḍīyas reverse this order, with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa as expanding from and subordinate to Kṛṣṇa, such that Viṣṇu serves a mediating function (in three distinct forms, for different levels of the cosmos) to manifest, sustain, and dissolve the cosmic manifestation. That Kṛṣṇa is identified as the original form of Bhagavān is of crucial importance for Gauḍīyas, especially in that the majesty (*aiśvarya*) associated with Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa is subsumed to and even denigrated in comparison with the "sweetness" (*mādhurya*) embodied in Kṛṣṇa and celebrated in the aesthetic moods of relish (*rasa*) elaborated by Rūpa Gosvāmī.

The next portion of Jīva Gosvāmī's definition sets the stage for explaining how this thoroughly transcendent supreme person, Bhagavān, is related to the world, namely, through "energies" or powers (_śakti_) that are "of his own nature" (*svarūpabhūtā*) as well as through "lack of differences," either internal or with respect to the world, and through "varieties of difference" – the varieties exhibited in the world, and the difference among individual selves and the supreme self (*paramātman*, identified as a facet of Bhagavān). The acknowledgment of both formlessness and form and of Bhagavān's possession of intrinsic energies is formulated in an expression central to Gauḍīya Vedānta, namely, *acintyabhedābhedavāda*, the doctrine of inconceivable simultaneous nondifference-and-difference (or oneness-and-distinction). This is the claim that Bhagavān's "nondifference" or nonseparateness (*abhedatva*) – his oneness with the world – is in balanced tension with his simultaneous "difference" or separateness (*bhedatva*) from the world, and that the *apparent* contradiction between these two understandings renders this state of affairs inconceivable. In Jīva Gosvāmī's vedantic analysis, this doctrine is closely coupled with *śaktipariṇāmavāda*, the notion that the world is a transformation of the *śakti* (or *śakti*s) of Bhagavān, and therefore it is *not* a transformation of him (hence also not a transformation, or change, of *brahman*).

From this starting point, the early Gauḍīya theologians elaborated subcategories of divine *śakti* in a threefold scheme of "interior energy" (or "proximate energy," *antaraṅgaśakti*), "exterior energy" (*bahiraṅgaśakti*, or *māyāśakti*), and "marginal energy" (*taṭasthāśakti*). The first of these energies is conceived as having a further threefold subdivision in terms of three aspects of Bhagavān, namely his eternality (*sat*) expressed through *sandhinīśakti*, his omniscience (*cit*) expressed through *saṃvitśakti*, and his blissfulness (*ānanda*) expressed through *hlādinīśakti*. Most crucially for Gauḍīyas, it is the last of these aspects of Bhagavān's attributes – blissfulness expressed through his "joy energy" – that is embodied in his feminine counterpart, namely Rādhā, with whom Kṛṣṇa eternally consorts.

In the larger scheme of threefold divine *śakti*, the "exterior energy" is constituted of the phenomenal, temporal world in all its multiplicity, serving as a means for living beings alienated from Bhagavān to experience quasi independence and eventual reconciliation with Bhagavān. The "marginal energy" consists of living beings (*jīva*) who are, significantly, of neither the same substance as this world nor the transcendent realm, but are subject to participation in one or the other. Being under the sway of exterior energy, living beings are subject to perpetual transmigration unless and until they receive divine <u>grace</u> (*kṛpā, anugraha*), especially as delivered by a perfected soul acting as <u>*guru*</u>, who blesses and teaches his or her student the practices of *bhakti* that secure shelter within the divine *antaraṅgaśakti*.

While Jīva Gosvāmī offers systematic elaboration of this theology in his *Ṣaḍsandarbha*, with profuse proof texting from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, it is also important for the Gauḍīyas that the theology is set within narrative frames of what are considered historical conversion events. That Śrī Caitanya is represented as having encountered and prevailed over philosophical opponents, winning them to the ways of the Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* cult, calls attention to the tradition's concern to establish a seamless link between orthodox vedantic discourse and *bhakti* practice. So, for example, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja recounts (*CaiC., Madhya*, 6) how, having been philosophically persuaded by Caitanya to accept the latter's interpretation of *Brahmasūtra* aphorisms, the erstwhile *advaitavādin* (nondualist) scholar Sarvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya happily sets aside his customary Brahman orthodoxy (in the matter of morning bathing prior to eating) for the sake of honoring the *prasāda* of the local temple Kṛṣṇa deity, Jagannātha. Or later, when in Benares Caitanya similarly sways Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī, the latter and his many *sannyāsin* followers joyfully join Caitanya and his followers in *saṃkīrtana* – congregational singing of Kṛṣṇa's divine names (*CaiC.* Madhya 25). From such narratives, readers are cued to appreciate that *bhakti* as engagement with divine mercy (and its active principle, *rasa*) is a logically and scripturally reasoned consequence of comprehending Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava vedantic ontology.

What we may call "Caitanyology" – theological reasoning about the identity of Śrī Caitanya – shares centrality with identity of Kṛṣṇa as Bhagavān in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology. As T. Stewart (2010, chs. 3–5) has shown, a clear conceptual development is traceable from early speculation (in Vṛndāvandās' *Caitanya Bhāgavata*) that Caitanya was the *avatāra* for the *kaliyuga* (see <u>cosmic cycles</u>), establishing the <u>*dharma*</u> practice for the age, namely *saṃkīrtana*, to the full-blown (and inclusive) thesis of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja (in his *CaiC.*) that Caitanya is the original godhead, Kṛṣṇa, appearing in the mood of Rādhā, for the purpose of experiencing fully her love for him. Integral to this unfolding of Caitanya's identity is a simultaneous identification of his various associates as reappearances of particular eternal associates of Kṛṣṇa, so that Caitanya's entire life becomes seen as a reenactment (or as a continuation) of *kṛṣṇalīlā* from the latter's time on earth at the end of the previous age (*dvāparayuga*).

Practices (*Abhidheya*)

In the literature overview above, we have already hinted at Rūpa Gosvāmī's systematic mapping of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* practice as a step-by-step progression toward full participation in Kṛṣṇa's perpetual *līlā*, and we may now consider this in greater detail. But first, we may note the extent of attention given to gradual progression of devotional practice, considering that its ideal practitioner, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, is said to have exhibited very sudden transformations in himself (as in the case of his change into an intensely absorbed devotional "madman" immediately upon his receiving initiation from his *dīkṣāguru*, Īśvara Purī). Nonetheless, the tradition views Rūpa Gosvāmī's eightfold scheme of progression as normative (*BhRaAm.* 1.4.15–16): Beginning with *śraddhā* (faith), a practitioner seeks *sādhusaṅga* (company with saints) and then, under saintly guidance, practices regular (daily) activities of worship (*bhajanakriyā*), which lead to the cessation of undesirable habits (*anarthanivṛtti*). What follows is *niṣṭhā* (fixity, firm conviction), *ruci* (taste, appetite, longing), *āsakti* (steady attachment to Kṛṣṇa), *bhāva* (deep emotional focus), and finally *prema* (intimate love). Viśvanātha Cakravartī (b. mid-17th cent.) richly elaborates Rūpa Gosvāmī's scheme in his *Mādhuryakadambinī* (Cloud-Bank of Sweetness), providing details to the map (including obstacles to be overcome) and a sense of anticipation and promise that the desired goal is indeed achievable by the serious aspirant.

This progression of stages is mapped onto Rūpa Gosvāmī's broader scheme, which distinguishes three major categories of *bhakti*, namely, *bhakti* in practice (*sādhanābhakti*), emotion-filled devotion (*bhāvabhakti*), and love-filled devotion (*premabhakti*). *Bhakti* in practice is further subdivided into rule-governed practice (*vaidhīsādhanā*) and practice ruled by feeling (*rāgānugāsādhanā*). But on whatever level of practice or perfection a practitioner may find himself or herself, specific devotional practices may be continued throughout an individual's life. Following the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (7.5.23), Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas practice devotional activities of hearing (*śravaṇa*), praise (*kīrtana*), remembrance (*smaraṇa*), "attending the feet" (*pādasevana*), formal worship (*arcana*), prayer (*vandana*), service (*dāsya*), offering companionship (*sākhya*), and dedicating oneself (*ātmannivedana*) – centering all these activities on, and

dedicating them to, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and their associates (*parikara*s) or to Caitanya and his associates. Just how a given individual will practice these depends on several factors, most importantly the directions of one's *guru*(s), in turn depending on the specifics of disciplic tradition and regional location. Naturally, from the premodern time of Caitanya to postmodern times of the 21st century, there have been changes in details of practice, shifts in emphasis, and reinterpretations of meaning.

Certainly a characteristic practice of most if not all Gauḍīya subtraditions is the regular recitation of divine names, especially in the formulation referred to as a *mahāmantra* consisting of the three names *kṛṣṇa, rāma*, and *hare* – all vocative forms (the last being the vocative of both *hari* and *harā*) – combined in the 16-name form:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa,

kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare,

hare rāma hare rāma,

rāma rāma hare hare.

The repetition of these names in particular (typically as quiet, individual recitation, *japa*, with counting beads, *japamālā*) is considered an essential practice for bringing oneself into direct contact with Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, as these names serve to collapse the semiotic gap between sign and referent; "nondifference" (*abhinnatva*) between name and named is considered a key characteristic of Bhagavān (*CaiC. Madhya* 17.133, attributed to *Padmapurāṇa*). Significantly, the Gauḍīya tradition affords special recognition of Ṭhākura Haridās, an elder associate of Caitanya considered to have been from a Muslim (and hence "outcaste") background. Later Gauḍīya tradition will refer to him as the *nāmācārya* (the master of [divine] names) for his radical dedication to the incessant recitation of the *hare kṛṣṇa mantra*, as well as for his teachings on its efficacy (*CaiC., Antya*, 3). In this way, the tradition signals that this practice is accessible to all, regardless of social or religious ascription, and that such devotional recitation can bring anyone to the highest levels of spiritual accomplishment. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas are also particularly known for practices of singing divine names in assembly (*kīrtana, saṃkīrtana*), whether in homes, temples, or processions in public streets. The tradition locates precedent for these forms of practice in rich accounts of Caitanya with his associates during his youth in Nabadwip and then later in Puri, in which the master is reported to have repeatedly entered states of profound devotional emotions while singing the divine names and dancing, often exhibiting radical bodily changes and sometimes falling unconscious (e.g. *CaiC., Madhya*, 13). That *nāma* meditation and *nāmasaṃkīrtana* are central to the tradition is indicated by the fact that the first three of the eight verses constituting the *Śikṣāṣṭaka* attributed to Caitanya eulogize and instruct on these practices. After enumerating several devotional benefits of *saṃkīrtana* due to divine names' possession of "all powers" of the lord, one is assured that his name "can be constantly praised" by those who sustain a mood of humility and forbearance.

Following B. Holdrege's (forthcoming) appraisal of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practice as engagement with "mesocosmic modes of divine embodiment," the practice of *nāma* recitation may be seen as a central instance of such engagement. Of slightly secondary yet similar importance is *arcana* practice, whereby the physical, usually three-dimensional image (*mūrti*) is the focus of sometimes elaborate devotional attention (Valpey, 2006). As with divine names, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas regard *mūrti*s as not mere symbolic forms of divinity, but fully present and conscious manifestations of divinity. As such, whether having been ritually consecrated or considered "self-manifest," the *mūrti* (or *vigraha*) of Bhagavān is a recipient of regular service (*sevā*), whether present in a temple, small shrine, *havelī* (courtyard mansion), or home. In a general sense, Gauḍīya *mūrtisevā* may be said to follow Pāñcarātra tradition and texts, while the encyclopedic *Haribhaktivilāsa* of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa (and its commentary, possibly by Sanātana Gosvāmī) serves as the more immediate guide. This work, in turn, has given way to specific temple digests and local customary practices that evidence various local or regional influences. Beyond ritual forms, Gauḍīya *arcana* practice is supported by a variety of written and oral narratives about specific *mūrti*s that affirm their identity as Kṛṣṇa himself, his eagerness to reciprocate with his devotees, and his rightful custodianship by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas (rather than by priests of other traditions).

A potential indicator of varying degrees of felt presence or threat of interference by Muslim governmental or military power might be found in the size of Hindu images. In the case of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava image-worship practice, images in Bengal have tended to be quite small (so, for example, the image of Nārāyaṇa thought to have been worshipped by Caitanya's father, Jagannātha Miśra, is only some 15 cm high). In contrast, there are images of Kṛṣṇa that are remarkably larger, indicative of a relatively tolerant Mughal imperial policy in Braj, as in the case of Govindadeva, whose imposing sandstone temple in Vrindavan made a strong statement of Gauḍīya confidence at the time of its construction in the late 16th century. In terms of Gauḍīya preferred forms of worshipable images, certainly the two-handed, "threefold bending" (*tribhaṅga*) pose of Kṛṣṇa is favored, generally (but not in the earliest times of Gauḍīya temple development) with Rādhā to Kṛṣṇa's left. One also finds images of Caitanya, together with one or more of his associates – especially Nityānanda or Gadādhara. Some temples in Bengal (and, as informed, in Manipur) display images of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā to Kṛṣṇa's left and Caitanya (often referred to as Gaurāṅga ["He of Golden Limbs"]) to Kṛṣṇa's right. Caitanya's iconography is typically with arms raised high, in a dancing pose, or with arms down or extended forward, palms forward or out in a gesture of blessing.

Beginning as early as Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, Gauḍīyas distinguish between two types of practice, namely, rule-based devotional practice (*vaidhisādhanābhakti*) and passion-driven devotional practice (*rāgānugāsādhanābhakti*). Rule-based practice is centered around the numerous services directed toward the *arcāmūrti*, specified as 64 in number. The latter has been developed in later generations into elaborate practices of meditative visualization and participation in Kṛṣṇa's atemporal exchanges with his associates in Vrindavan (Haberman, 1988, ch. 5). Both involve the recitation and devotional singing of divine names and songs describing Kṛṣṇa's qualities and divine sports (*līlā*), and in current practice there will invariably be elements of one practice present in the other (Valpey, 2006).

Fulfillment (*Prayojana*)

Returning to the significance of narratives for Gauḍīya theology, they also underline the notion that what is presumed to be the ultimate aim of what might be called "generic Vedānta," namely permanent <u>liberation</u> (*mokṣa* or *mukti*) from the cycle of death and rebirth (<u>*saṃsāra*</u>), is relatively unimportant for Caitanya and his followers – a distraction at best and a subversion of *bhakti* at worst. Thus, the same Sārvabhauma mentioned above, after becoming Caitanya's follower, suggests that the word *mukti* should be replaced by the word *bhakti* in a certain verse of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (10.14.8), so that it reads, "… One so situated in *bhakti* is a proper recipient of grace" (*CaiC.*, *Madhya*, 6.261). Rūpa Gosvāmī suggests such indifference to *mukti* in his definition of *bhakti*: "*Bhakti* at its best is evident when there is absence of any other aspiration – such as for ritual perfection or liberative knowledge – than constant favorable service to Kṛṣṇa" (*BhRaAm*. 1.1.11).

Bhakti at its best is completely focused on Kṛṣṇa and his associates, and such devotion is, as mentioned above, conceived as progressively unfolding through several stages, with a cumulative enrichment of each stage culminating in *prema*. The *Mādhuryakadambinī* (ch. 8) of Viśvanātha Cakravartī describes this stage as one characterized by a complete transformation from a self-centered mentality (*ahaṃkāra*) to identification with the service of Kṛṣṇa. Symptomatic of this state is an all-consuming longing for contact with Kṛṣṇa, rewarded eventually by Kṛṣṇa's full revelation that overwhelms each of the *bhakta*'s senses, causing her to faint repeatedly. The specific nature of this revelation is in accord with the *bhakta*'s particular basic relationship with Kṛṣṇa (*rasa*), and hence images of "tasting" predominate in Viśvanātha's description of the devotee's experience of Kṛṣṇa in this stage. Yet he also suggests that the *premabhakta* experiences a synesthetic simultaneity of sensations that are facilitated by Kṛṣṇa's *kṛpāśakti* (mercy energy), which is "situated like an emperor amidst all the other intrinsic powers of the Lord" (*MāKad*. 8.7). In this state, there is direct exchange of words with Kṛṣṇa, who then briefly reveals his transcendent realm, Goloka Vṛndāvana, with all his eternal associates. But Kṛṣṇa and his realm then suddenly disappear, leaving the *bhakta* in extreme anxiety. Alternately appearing and disappearing, Kṛṣṇa brings the *bhakta* to a state of noncognition of her own body, and at this stage, Viśvanātha Cakravartī suggests, the *bhakta* transits permanently from this world to Kṛṣṇa's transcendent realm to experience even more intense stages of *prema* (divine love). In another work, *Rāgavartmacandrikā* (Little Moon of the Way of Passion; 2.7), Viśvanātha Cakravartī tells precisely how this transition to Kṛṣṇa's abode takes place through first being born "from the womb of a *nityasiddhagopikā* (an eternally perfected cowherdess)" who appears on earth to serve Kṛṣṇa during his descent. The implication is that the practitioner undergoes further "training" in order to qualify for a permanent position in Kṛṣṇa's transcendent realm, Goloka Vṛndāvana.

In the two works mentioned, Viśvanātha Cakravartī eeks to represent a perfected devotee's experience of *prema*. Elsewhere he also explores the attitude and behavior of the object of devotion, Kṛṣṇa, in relation to such a devotee. So, for example, in his commentary on Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Ujjvalanīlamaṇi* (5.6), he identifies four types of *prema*s in terms of magnitude that determines whether and to what extent Kṛṣṇa subordinates himself to his devotee. On the extreme end of perfection is Rādhā, to whom Kṛṣṇa entirely submits himself. The *prema* of the Vrindavan residents is also "great," and hence Kṛṣṇa also subordinates himself to them. In relation to other devotees, Kṛṣṇa reciprocates with greater or lesser subordination, depending on the magnitude of their *prema* (Brzezinski, 1993, 61).

Social Dimensions of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism

In an important sense, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava social ideology questions the ultimacy of complex and often divisive social distinctions such as were prominent in Bengal society during and after its emergence in the 15th and 16th centuries. "Ultimacy" here is a reference, in terms of social identity, to a central theological tenant with deep roots in the broader Indic religious constellation, that all living beings – temporally embodied as plants, animals, humans, and celestials – are in fact atemporal and as such are eternal servitors of Kṛṣṇa: "The inherent nature of the living being is eternal servitorship of Kṛṣṇa, being Kṛṣṇa's marginal energy, his manifestations in difference-nondifference" (*CaiC., Madhya*, 20.108).

From this ontological grounding unfolds a principle of egalitarianism, which, though far from perfectly realized in practice, nevertheless supports a relaxation of caste distinction and an energizing of the tradition's missionary mandate. But one cannot properly speak of an erasure of social boundaries in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. It might be more appropriate to acknowledge a softening of social boundaries in a context of "resistant Hinduism," particularly in the context of orthodox Brahmanical response to Muslim rule. The tradition's canonical text, the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*, is indicative of how the ideal of transcendent egalitarianism plays out in early 16th-century Gauḍīya self-representation. Thus the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* implicitly maps out concentric circles of greater to lesser Gauḍīya orthodoxy and orthopraxy, with Caitanya reaching out to – or at times keeping at a distance – various representatives of social and theological difference.

Certainly the widest social and religious distance and therefore challenging difference portrayed in the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* is that between Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas and Muslims, and Kṛṣṇadāsa takes considerable care to show how Caitanya and his followers overcame or otherwise managed these differences. I have already mentioned the episode with the *qāz̤ī* of Nabadwip, and I have also mentioned Ṭhākura Haridās, considered to have been a Muslim by birth who later (already *prior* to Caitanya's birth) adopted Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practices in an extremely ascetic mode. Ṭhākura Haridās insists on continuing to acknowledge his social marginality from Hindu society (by, for example, making no attempt to enter the Jagannātha Temple in Puri) while assuming a central position in Gauḍīya ideology as (in later tradition) the *nāmācārya* (master of the [divine] names; *CaiC., Antya*, 3, 11).

In contrast to this example of a social distance portrayed as having been bridged by Caitanya and his followers is one of social and religious proximity being put at a distance. As represented in the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*, Vallabha, contemporary of Caitanya and founder of the Vaiṣṇava tradition identified with his name (as Vallabha Sampradāya or sometimes as the Puṣṭi Mārga [Path of Nourishment]), is on occasion shunned by Caitanya and his close followers, because of Vallabha's ostensive disrespect for the (by Gauḍīyas) venerated *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* commentator Śrīdhara. In this case, the several similarities between Vallabhites and Gauḍīyas would seem to have been undervalued in order to highlight theological differences (*CaiC., Antya*, 7).

A significant marker of acceptance that devotional accomplishment transcends social status showed itself in the life of Narottamadās (mentioned above). Although identified as a Śūdra by caste (in a time when Bengal society counted anyone who was not a Brahman to be a Śūdra), Narottamadās became the *guru* of several Brahmans, some of whom had been known for their extreme orthodoxy (Chakravarti, 1985, 243).

Yet within the more orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava communities, there are also indicators of social conservatism, especially with respect to intermarriage. Thus, for example, Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda (1989, 36; Valpey, 2006, 87–88) writes that those who receive *dīkṣā* into Vaiṣṇava praxis should continue to respect social designations, observing all social conventions with respect to marriage partner selection within expected caste boundaries. And while honoring such conventions on the level of *naimittikadharma* (instrumental, conventional *dharma*), one should simultaneously practice one's devotional duties as *nityādharma* (eternal, existential *dharma*), quietly maintaining awareness of one's higher identity as Kṛṣṇa *dāsa*, servant of Kṛṣṇa. As J. O'Connell has noted with respect to the early Gauḍīya tradition, Caitanyaites maintained "egalitarian affectivity with fellow devotees in devotional (sacred) situations; in-egalitarian functionality (even with fellow devotees) in mundane (profane) situations," a stance that was "neither confused, nor inconsistent, nor for that matter, peculiar" (O'Connell, 1993, 23; Ghosh, 2005, 121).

With respect to forms of formal renunciation in terms of *āśrama* identity, there are complexities as well as controversies. On the one hand, Śrī Caitanya stands as a model of renunciation who took formal vows of *sannyās*. On the other hand, this practice has generally been shunned by Gauḍīya renunciants in favor of adopting *bābājīveśa* – the dress of a *paramahaṃsa*, considered beyond and aloof from the orthodox brahmanical social structure of *varṇa* and *āśrama* and therefore beyond the final *āśrama*, *sannyās*. A significant exception to this trend was Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, who, as noted above, adopted the *sannyās* order (in 1918), distinguishing himself from the Śankarite Daśanāmī traditions by bearing a *tridaṇḍa* (three-rod staff, signifying the renounced order) rather than the Daśanāmī *ekadaṇḍa* (single-rod staff). Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati's *sannyāsī* followers and their disciplic descendents have continued this practice to the present day.

With the passage of time, the initially fluid social identification of a practitioner as a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava has in some situations yielded to more reified structures, such that Vaiṣṇava caste (*jāti*) identities emerge. Thus, for example, priestly families who are the custodians of temples established by the original renunciant followers of Caitanya, the *gosvāmī*s of Vrindavan, now carry the family name Gosvāmī, maintaining relatively endogamous marriage practices for offspring, with male priests serving as *guru*s to wider communities of Gauḍīya affiliation (Case, 2000, 76–77; Valpey, 2006, 55–57). Yet another emergent structure is that of the "open-caste" phenomenon of "Caste Vaiṣṇavas" in Bengal, whereby, for example, a husband and wife originally from another caste are initiated jointly into renunciatory status as Vaiṣṇavas – often as a means of raising caste status (Openshaw, 2006; Chakravarti, 1985, 253).

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Ethics

I will conclude this survey of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism with a brief look at some features of the tradition's ethical thought. As S.K. De has observed (1986, 542–543), Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava thought on ethics is inseparably interwoven with its theistic devotionalism; at the same time, it draws from and affirms much ethical thought from within the wider fabric of Hindu ethics in general. Given these contexts, ethical ideas are strongly expressed in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava discourse, making distinctions of right and wrong action essentially on the basis of divine sanction or proscription and framed in the language of *dharma* and "qualities" (or virtues) of a Vaiṣṇava. Based on a passage from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (11.11.29–32), the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* (2.22.78–80) lists 26 *guṇa*s as symptomatic of a Vaiṣṇava – virtues that are centered on submissive surrender to Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇaikaśaraṇa*), beginning with mercifulness (*kṛpalu*) and including purity, truthfulness, and self-control as supportive virtues. In a more active-prescriptive tone, in his *Upadeśāmṛta* (Nectar of Instruction), Rūpa Gosvāmī devotes the first six verses to prescription and prohibition, echoing yogic formulations of *yama* and *niyama* (practices of sensory and mental self-restraint). Most relevant to a consideration of ethics may be considered *Upadeśāmṛta* 4, which describes six "characteristics of love," namely, "giving and receiving [gifts], confiding and inquiring, and eating and serving [sanctified food]." One model of ethical behavior is, broadly speaking, the *sādhu*, who is considered a paragon of essential human virtues (as listed in *BhāgP.*

3.25.21), namely tolerance, compassion, well-wishing friendship to all beings, having no enemies, and peacefulness. In the late 19th-century writings of Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda, one finds the term *sāragrahīvaiṣṇava* (essence-grasping Vaiṣṇava) to identify the ideal actor in the world, suggesting that such a person is best able to judge any given situation, being free of selfish or sectarian motivations.

But equal to if not more important than notions of a generic *sādhu* or even a *sāragrahīvaiṣṇava* as a model of ethical behavior is the figure of Rādhā in her passionately intense love for Kṛṣṇa that subsumes all considerations of appropriate behavior to her all-consuming relationality with Kṛṣṇa (Frazier, 2009, ch. 6). It is in such relationality with the supreme beloved person, Kṛṣṇa, that rightness of action has its origin and locus, exemplified and, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas would claim, eternally enacted and ever expanded in the Vrindavan *rasa* dance of Kṛṣṇa and his *gopī* consorts, as celebrated in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa's rasapañcādhyāya* section (10.29–33). Yet just how this ideal of relationality plays out for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practitioners in the phenomenal world is a matter of ongoing practice and sometimes controversy, for a tradition that seeks ever to question the ultimacy of values fashioned from within a world of temporality.

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