



# As Good as God

*The Guru in  
Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*

Måns Broo

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And finally:

*gopānanda-vanasya saukhya-karaṇaṃ śrīmat-suhotrārpiṭaṃ  
śrīpāda-trīpurāri-pūjita-padaṃ premāmṛtāhlādinam  
yoga-kṣema-vahiṣṭham āryaja-patiṃ mad-dṛṣṭi-hamsī-gatiṃ  
bhaktānāṃ hṛdayāntare para-guruṃ śrī-ṣaḍbhujākhyam bhaje*

Helsingfors, 2.4.2003

Måns Broo

## A NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION AND PRONUNCIATION

I have followed the standard international system for transcribing Sanskrit. For Bengali, I have used the same, even though that language is pronounced in a different way. The reason for this is consistency: many Sanskrit words are used also by Bengali authors. Keeping track of two different versions of them (e.g. Vaiṣṇava and Boiṣṇob) would be unnecessarily cumbersome for the reader. In the case of commonly known place names (e.g. Calcutta) I have used the well-known anglicised forms. I have italicised all Sanskrit and Bengali words and titles, unless they are commonly known (e.g. guru, mantra or bhakti).

The vowels of Sanskrit are pronounced much as those of Latin, Italian or French, with the following exceptions:

*a* is pronounced like the short u in English *cup*

*ā* is pronounced like the long a in English *father*

*ī* and *ū* similarly indicate long versions of those vowels

*r* is nowadays usually pronounced like the ry in English *very*

The consonants are a little more complex, but the most important guidelines are as follows:

*c* is pronounced like the English *ch*, as in *cherry*

*h* after a consonant (e.g. *ph*) indicates aspiration, like the English *hip-hop*

*ś* and *ṣ* are pronounced somewhat like the English *sh*, as in *shame*.

## ABBREVIATIONS

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| BG  | Bhagavad-gītā   |
| BP  | Bhāgavata Purāṇa  |
| BRS | Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin                         |
| BS  | Bhakti-sandarbha of Jīva Gosvāmin                               |
| CB  | Caitanya-bhāgavata of Vṛndāvana Dāsa                            |
| CC  | Caitanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja                       |
| GGD | Gaura-ganoddeśa-dīpikā by Kavi Karṇapūra                        |
| GSP | Gaura-govindārcana-smaraṇa-paddhati of<br>Dhyānacandra Gosvāmin |
| HBV | Hari-bhakti-vilāsa of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin                    |
| KB  | Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta of Narahari Sarakāra                          |
| SD  | Sādhana-dīpikā of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin                      |
| TS  | Tattva-sandarbha of Jīva Gosvāmin                               |

# I INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## 1 INTRODUCTION

A large and jovial bearded Indian man clad in shining silk robes, surrounded by dozens of starry-eyed western followers, boarding a black Rolls-Royce; a blind ascetic, marked by decades of self-starvation and all-night vigils, sitting cross-legged in a shadowy room teaching secrets of ancient scripture; a young man dressed in an expensive suit and tie, giving a power-point presentation on the next stage in mobile communications – the word guru certainly carries a lot of associations in our post-modern times. This thesis will look closely at the guru institution in one modern Hindu religious movement. Besides describing the conception of the guru in that particular context, it will also shed light on perennial questions of authority and interpretation of sacred texts.

### *1.1 Purpose and scope of the study*

The purpose of this study is to identify, examine and characterise the guru institution within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, the devotional Hindu movement started by Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486-1533) in Bengal. This will give a better understanding of an institution important for many strands of popular Hinduism. Beside that, I intend to arrive at some more general conclusions regarding interpretation of sacred texts and the interplay between canon and charisma. This is accomplished through examining the way the movement itself presents the guru, disciple and initiation, and through looking at the ways in which the guru interacts with his disciples, well-wishers and broader society. This study is written from the viewpoint of the academic study of religion, incorporating religio-historical as well as anthropological and sociological perspectives.

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is also known as Bengali or Caitanyite Vaiṣṇavism. Remarkably enough, I have found no clear definition of



Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism apart from “the followers of Caitanya”.<sup>1</sup> There are reasons for that, as we shall see (in 2.1). I will later define the term more precisely. At any rate, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is especially interesting when studying the guru institution, since this particular Hindu movement places great stress on the guru, and since the guru institution there has developed in ways not found elsewhere.

As it is difficult to define a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava, so it is with the guru, especially in this movement. In section 3.5 I will present a definition suitable in this context, but for now we can use that given by J. Gonda: *the man who on account of his special knowledge and function was held to be a bearer of power conspicuous by his prestige, “weight” and influence.*<sup>2</sup> A “disciple” is a person who has been initiated (see chapter 6) by a guru. Persons who support a guru and who may occasionally approach him for advice, but who are not initiated, I call “admirers” or “well-wishers”.

## 1.2 Theory

Gurus have been studied from various points of view. Daniel Gold views the guru as one of three immanent foci of the divine in his “The Lord as Guru”. Part of the typology in part III stems from his work. Ralph Marc Steinmann’s “Guru-śiṣya-saṁbandha” provides a great deal of general information about the Hindu guru, and I will often refer to his conclusions and typologies, even though they do not always fit the material at hand. Kirin Narayan focuses on the guru as a storyteller, using the tools of anthropology, folklore and literary criticism to find out what it is that make these stories such a compelling vehicle for religious teachings. The stories she examines all deal with aspects of the Hindu ascetic: potentially a saint, but perhaps also a scoundrel.<sup>3</sup> Lise McKean, again, has studied the

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1 E.g. Rosen (1992), i

2 Gonda (1965), 240

3 Narayan (1992)

role of individual gurus in the Hindu nationalist movement in India today.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the recent studies on Indian gurus have been done from the viewpoint of the psychology of religion. June McDaniel examines the role of mad religious ecstasy in Bengali devotion, pointing out the significant discrepancy between the expectations of the religious traditions and the actual experiences of the devotees, and the extremely fine line between the desired divine madness and ordinary madness, considered the least desirable state in Bengali culture.<sup>5</sup> In his psychoanalytically inspired study, Anthony Storr tries to find common psychological denominators among ten popular gurus.<sup>6</sup>

There are also other approaches. Antony Copley, while relying on the findings of Storr, examines the guru from a more biographical point of view.<sup>7</sup> Kimmo Ketola has studied the charisma of Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, the founder of ISKCON, using primarily the framework of the cognitive science of religion.<sup>8</sup>

One large group of studies concern what could be called “mega-gurus”, gurus internationally active (or at least with disciples from all over the world), often offering new interpretations of Hinduism or even something new altogether, for example Ramakrishna (1836-1886)<sup>9</sup> and Satya Sai Baba (1926-).<sup>10</sup> Sometimes such studies are more journalistic than academic in character, as seen for example in the writings of Hugh Milne and James S. Gordon on Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh or Osho (1931-1990).<sup>11</sup>

All of these approaches are of course valid, but I will try another one by focusing on the two concepts of charisma and canon. While

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4 McKean (1996)

5 McDaniel (1989)

6 Storr (1997)

7 Copley (2000)

8 Ketola (2002)

9 Kripal (1995), Olson (1989)

10 Haraldsson (1987)

11 Gordon (1987), Milne (1986)

these two factors on one level may seem as opposites, they are in many ways co-dependent, and they have been shown to provide useful new perspectives on the specific potential involved in the legitimisation of tradition and of the authority of religious specialists.<sup>12</sup> Particularly for an academic study of the guru-institution of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, where – as we shall see in part II – the normative scriptures as well as modern practitioners express both a great desire for orthodoxy and fidelity to tradition, and an ideal of powerful individual gurus, it seems natural to focus on these two terms. It is evident that religious concepts and practices can not be encompassed by notions of charisma and canon alone, but these factors offer useful analytical points of departure. Below I will present these and other theoretical tools that I will use for analysing my material.

While (as we shall see) canon stands for permanence, charisma stands for innovation – innovation that with the passing of time can become canon. In this thesis, I will show how these principles are useful for understanding the guru, a person who I will argue embodies both what is perceived as the eternal truths of the canon as well as that which is seen as the transcending power of charismatic authority.

### *1.2.1 Charisma*

*Charisma*, “a certain quality of individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities,”<sup>13</sup> is a quality bound by time. It is a power that creates extraordinary authority, often surpassing that of a canon. It can push new religious ideas into wider acceptance and gain them a following

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12 E.g. Dalmia, Malinar & Christof (2001)

13 Weber (1964), 358

that may survive the charismatic person.<sup>14</sup> Viewed sociologically, charisma has a double effect: it may isolate the bearer to a greater or lesser degree, or it may become the focus of a process of social crystallisation, thus having an integrative effect.<sup>15</sup> Both effects will be noticed in the material at hand.

What then is this “certain quality”? Max Weber, the father of the sociological concept of charisma, thought that it was marked by a unique and innate capacity to display highly coloured emotions of different kinds.<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that this power of course exists only in a social setting: charisma implies a relationship between the exceptionally powerful person and his followers.<sup>17</sup> However, the forms that this relationship takes may be very varied. Some scholars, following Weber, see charisma as a revolutionary, rather frightening type of absolute authority,<sup>18</sup> while others hold that being charismatically endowed does not determine the degree of power the person has on another.<sup>19</sup> I support the second view. As we shall see, gurus have very different grades of charisma – in some cases, their “certain quality” is hardly noticeable to an outsider – as well as power of authority. The charismatic person does not have to be a second Hitler or Jim Jones to qualify as such. In the third part of the thesis, we shall also see that at least in this case, charismatic renewal is often not at all as revolutionary and disruptive as Weber imagined it.

Weber describes different types of charismatic persons, categorised according to the type of charisma they possess. At one end of the spectrum is the *magician*, whose charisma is purely *personal* in that it depends only on his own qualities. At the other end of the spectrum is the *priest*, whose charisma does not depend on his own qualities, but

---

14 von Stietencron (2001), 15

15 Wach (1958), 131

16 Weber, quoted in Lindholm (1990), 26

17 Lindholm, (1990), 24

18 E.g. Lindholm (1990)

19 Ketola (2002), 31

rather on the qualities of the institution he belongs to. His charisma is in other words *institutional*, or a charisma of office. While the magician is self-employed and his practice occasional, the priests form a specialised social group in the service of a cultic enterprise.<sup>20</sup> In contrast with the magician, the priest's occupation is regularly organised and permanent.<sup>21</sup>

In between these extremes stands the *prophet*. As the magician, the prophet carries personal charisma, but the revelatory knowledge he claims to possess concerns specific doctrines and commandments of an older tradition. While the magician works on his own, the prophet functions on the fringe of a cultic enterprise. In practice, the establishment of the prophet's charisma is similar to that of a magician: special ecstatic abilities or magical feats. Typically, a prophet propagates ideas for their own sake and not for economic gains.<sup>22</sup> Weber furthermore divides the category of the prophet into two: the *ethical prophet*, who is thought to be an instrument for proclaiming God's will (e.g. Muhammed), and the *exemplary prophet*, who demonstrates the way to salvation by his own example (e.g. the Buddha).<sup>23</sup>

Separate from the prophet, but also as charismatic personages in between the magician and the priest, Weber locates also the *sacred legislator*, the *teacher of ethics*, and the *mystagogue*. The sacred legislator is someone who has been assigned the responsibility of

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20 Weber's enumeration of types of religious authorities is not the only one. Wach (1967), 341-374, for example, presents another one, based on Weber's list, with nine types. They are *the founder of religion*, *the reformer*, *the prophet*, *the seer*, *the magician*, *the diviner*, *the saint*, *the priest* and *the religious*. I have chosen to stick to Weber's typology, since it is easier to use. In Wach's list, it is very hard to distinguish for example between the reformer and the prophet. It could be argued that Weber's typology is outdated, but since it is widely known I find it convenient to use, especially for bringing out the distinction between personal and institutional charisma. See also Ketola (2002), 26-27.

21 Weber (1965), 28-30

22 Ibid, 46-48

23 Ibid, 59

codifying or reconstituting a law, while the teacher of ethics is someone who gathers disciples and counsels individuals on personal matters. Weber believes the traditional concept of guru within Hinduism to be a typical example of this category. The mystagogue is a religious specialist who performs sacraments, magical actions meant to bring salvation. As a prophet, he is part of a greater social community, but teaching an ethical doctrine usually plays only a subordinate role for him. As a priest, he may also make a living out of his practice.<sup>24</sup> Weber locates the guru in either the category of the teacher of ethics or as the mystagogue, both of whom implement an established social order rather than break with it, as the prophet does. As I will show, in the tradition at hand the issue is more complicated than this.

### *1.2.2 Canon*

According to von Stietencron, in the context of religion, *canon* is “the result of a deliberate attempt to collect, arrange and preserve the original message of a religious community, and to protect it against corruption. It transforms haphazard individual recollections into authoritative tradition or sacred scripture.”<sup>25</sup> He adds that its sacredness stems both from the original formulators and from the eternal truths that are thought to be expressed in the canon. Ideally, a canon is permanent once fixed. While everything else is subject to change, von Stietencron writes, the formation of a canon is an attempt at arresting time, by picking out a selected set of elements that are considered essential and eternally valid, such as values, rules, exemplary characters, and so forth.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from its quality of attempting to arrest time, a canon is authoritative. It explains and justifies a specific kind of life, ethics and theology.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the canon is a closed system, deriving

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<sup>24</sup> Weber (1965), 49-55

<sup>25</sup> von Stietencron (2001), 14

<sup>26</sup> von Stietencron (2001), 14-15

<sup>27</sup> Pyysiäinen (1997), 19

its authority and proof from itself, often in a circular manner. Ilkka Pyysiäinen gives the following example.

1. X is God's word.
2. How do you know that?
3. Because it says so.
4. But how can you trust it?
5. Because X is God's word.<sup>28</sup>

However, the system is not fully closed. Believers often hold that the canon has proven its authority by giving them good advice on how to act in difficult situations, mystically awarding them knowledge (for example when they randomly open a sacred book and find the answer they have been looking for), etc. Such a perceived efficacy will give the canon added authority in the eyes of the believer.

Even though the canon is usually thought to be holy and authoritative *en bloc* and on its own, in real life only selected parts are explained and interpreted, and it is often the correct interpretation by a charismatic religious authority that is authoritative, not the literal meaning of the text itself, which may not even be widely known. In this way, and as will become evident later in this thesis, the canon gathers added authority from a charismatic person.

It is sometimes argued that there are only two great religious traditions that have a canon, one starting with Judaism (and later encompassing also Christianity and Islam) and the second Buddhism.<sup>29</sup> I do not agree. Granted, the canon of these traditions is very clearly defined, but many other traditions claim to base their teachings on some collection of holy texts. That the collection may not be as clearly defined as in the above cases need not exclude them.

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<sup>28</sup> Pyysiäinen (1997), 15

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 14

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas are in this regard very particular in stating that their doctrine or *siddhānta* is “Vedic” or in accordance with the scriptures, probably to distinguish themselves from “non-scriptural” movements such as the Bauls.<sup>30</sup>

This is not only rhetoric: according to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology, scriptural evidence is the only way to reach otherworldly knowledge.<sup>31</sup> However, there is one exception, and it is noteworthy: *vaiduṣya-pratyakṣa* or the faultless perception of the pure and saintly persons, for it is considered the basis of scripture itself.<sup>32</sup> This dependence on scripture can also be seen in practice: theological discussions between even modern Gauḍīyas are often little more than throwing quotes from the scriptures at each other,<sup>33</sup> and in explaining the doctrine of the guru, the gurus I interviewed usually cited and interpreted the same scriptural passages.

The term “scripture” is a diffuse one, especially so in a Hindu context. Wach divides religious texts into three groups. The first consists of a binding and normative canon, such as the Bible, Koran or the Veda or Śruti texts. The second one consists of secondary commentary of a semi-canonical status, such as the Smṛti, Sūtras and commentaries by revered theologians. The third consists of classical literary works such as the *Mahābhārata* or *Rāmāyaṇa*, works that are not binding or normative, but that are meant to entertain, edify and educate.<sup>34</sup>

For the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas this system of classification does not work. In his *Tattva-sandarbhā*, Jīva Gosvāmin discusses this issue and accepts the canonic authority of both the Śruti and Smṛti class of texts, including the *Mahābhārata*. However, he argues that of all

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30 Madsen (2001), 27

31 Kapoor (1994), 63. For a detailed modern Gaudiya explanation of epistemology, see Suhotra Swami (1998).

32 *Sarva-saṃvādinī* commentary to TS 12

33 See e.g. Satya Nārāyaṇa & Kuṇḍalī Dāsa (1994) and ISKCON GBC Press (1996).

34 Wach (1958), 72-73



scriptures the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is topmost.<sup>35</sup> For this reason Jīva Gosvāmin will generally quote the authority of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in his theological and philosophical works. However, when convenient he also quotes other texts: S.K. De gives a list of works cited in his *Ṣaḍ-sandarbhā* running up to nine pages!<sup>36</sup> The same can be seen in the writings of other Gauḍīyas (e.g. Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin): both Śruti and Smṛti are considered authoritative, but in the case of conflicts (and they are not few) the standard is that given in the *Bhāgavata*.

While the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* thus is the basic canonical work of the Gauḍīyas and other ancient texts as far as they conform to it, later texts have been added: the books written by the six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana, the main hagiographies of Caitanya (especially Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*), collections of songs by prominent devotees (for example Narottama Dāsa's *Prārthanā*), commentaries on the *Bhāgavata*, etc. Even though the *Bhāgavata* is still thought to be the supreme authority,<sup>37</sup> it is in reality superseded by these texts, considered canonical by all Gauḍīyas.<sup>38</sup> There are also other, later texts that are held as authoritative within different groups of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, but their use is limited to within that particular group. Reflecting this praxis, my use of the term canon will similarly be very broad.

### 1.2.3 A hierarchy of understandings

For the above-mentioned reasons, it is necessary to have a thorough knowledge of what the canonical scriptures of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas have to say on the subject of the guru. Therefore, in this thesis, I have first gone through them and picked out the relevant parts, presenting them in part II divided into different subjects. Un-

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35 TS 12-26

36 De (1961), 413-421

37 E.g. IF 2002/14d

38 A similar development can be seen in the Vallabha-*sampradāya*. Dalmia (2001).

less otherwise indicated, all translations of Sanskrit and Bengali texts are my own.

To make sense of the sometimes very complicated doctrines found in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava canon, some kind of theoretical tool is needed. In his book “Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity”<sup>39</sup>, anthropologist Roy Rappaport presents an interesting and useful hierarchy of understandings. While he basically uses the typology for understanding rituals and liturgy, I think the same scheme can be used for unraveling theological doctrines. In particular, I find it useful in order to clarify the complex and seemingly contradictory doctrine of the guru that we will encounter in part II of the thesis.

Roy Rappaport argues that there are four levels of understanding. The first level, at the apex of the conceptual structure, he calls the *Ultimate Sacred Postulates*. These are postulates, that is, claims needing no demonstration. Self-evidence or obviousness may be the basis. These postulates can not be falsified, since they are devoid of material significata. Nor can they be objectively or empirically verified. Moreover, they are taken to be unquestionable.<sup>40</sup> An example of this, from the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava context, is the statement that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme Lord.<sup>41</sup>

The next level Rappaport calls *cosmological axioms*. These are assumptions concerning the fundamental structure of the universe, or paradigmatic relationships in accordance with which the universe is constructed. They differ from the Ultimate Sacred Postulates in concerning relationships between qualities that may be sensible (such as heat and cold), and which are manifested in social and physical phenomena. The expression of these axioms are thus also more general and varied. They are more specific than the Ultimate Sacred Postulates, and they are the logical basis of rules of conduct and proprieties of social life. An example of this is the common Hindu belief

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39 Rappaport (1999), 263-281

40 Ibid, 278-281

41 *Brahma-saṃhitā* 1.1

of human society created as a fourfold system of *varṇa* and *āśrama*.<sup>42</sup> Cosmological Axioms can, unlike Ultimate Sacred Postulates, change, expand or even be radically changed, in response to changes in the environment.<sup>43</sup>

The third level consists of *rules of conduct*. These are specifics dealing with relations among persons, qualities, conditions and states of affairs whose opposition are stated by cosmological axioms. They govern the behaviour of everyday life. These rules can be changed, even drastically, without affecting the oppositions they make material.<sup>44</sup> An example could be that one should not return the ghee-lamp to the plate of offerings after one has offered it to the temple image, based on the cosmological axiom of the difference between offered and unoffered things, and that they should not be mixed.<sup>45</sup>

The fourth and last level consists of *importations*. These are indicators of prevailing environmental conditions. There is a highly flexible relationship between these and the rules of conduct. These importations are extremely specific.<sup>46</sup> For example, it is permitted to offer foodstuffs with olive oil to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>47</sup>

These four levels can also be organized into concurrent hierarchies of specificity, concreteness, longevity, mutability, contingency, instrumentality, efficacy, authority and sanctity, with the Ultimate Sacred Postulates of course occupying the high end of the spectrum, and the importations the low.<sup>48</sup> As we shall see in part II, understanding these four levels greatly aids in understanding the seemingly contradictory aspects of the Gauḍīya doctrine of the guru.

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42 E.g. BG 4.13

43 Rappaport (1999), 264-265

44 Ibid, 265-266

45 *Pañcarātra-pradīpa*, 192

46 Rappaport (1999), 266-268

47 *Pañcarātra-pradīpa*, 67

48 Rappaport (1999), 275

#### 1.2.4 *Textual criticism*

For the reasons mentioned above the textual sources of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas cannot be excluded from the study. However, they are inadequate, since they present only a normative or idealised picture of theology and practice. Most of all, they tend to downplay the role of innovation, even though most of these writings have their source in individually charismatic innovators. To find a more balanced picture, I will contrast the normative scriptural statements with findings from anthropological field work. In this way, I try to arrive at a “thick description”<sup>49</sup> of the matter at hand. Still, neither the canonical texts nor the opinions of modern practitioners can at all times be taken at face value. In particular, when looking for historical facts, both have to be subjected to textual criticism.

The religious historian, Hannu Kilpeläinen notes that textual criticism means that it is not enough to know 1) one truth, 2) one source, 3) one description – textual or verbal, 4) one researcher/ research and 5) one interpreter. Furthermore, the researcher must also be able to critically view his own paradigms.<sup>50</sup> In this case, the problem is often aggravated by the pious tendency of disciples to highlight the achievements of their own guru – something that often leads to deliberately downplaying rival gurus. In some cases (see 8.2.2), accounts given by followers of rival gurus of the same events may differ dramatically.

A genre with special problems in this regard is hagiography. For that reason, while I have used hagiographies as a source in this thesis, what I have looked for in them have been ideals of practice, not necessarily facts. I have used them very sparingly when trying to establish historical facts.

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<sup>49</sup> The term was introduced by Gilbert Ryle. See Geertz (2000), 6-7.

<sup>50</sup> Kilpeläinen (1997), 61

### 1.2.5 Conducting interviews

In order to obtain first-hand information on how the gurus perceive themselves and each other, I decided to make use of loosely structured interviews with gurus and disciples in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. I drew up a basic structure of questions beforehand that I followed more or less strictly in the actual interviews. The main idea was to get the gurus to explain the guru-doctrine in their own words – something that usually was not very difficult, since the subject was of great interest to themselves. Usually extra questions would come up during the interviews, and sometimes I would omit some of the questions, for example if I noticed that someone was not inclined to answer personal questions. I tried to keep the interviews informal and free-flowing, in order to encourage the interviewee to “open up”. For this reason, I also sometimes asked questions not directly related to my present research. During my second term of fieldwork (in 2002), I tended to focus on specific issues that remained unclear, such as the relationship between different Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava groups.

In choosing the persons to interview, my main concern was to obtain as wide a spectrum of opinions as possible. With this in mind, I approached gurus from most of the so-called traditional groups of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, as well as from some of the most prominent modern ones. Among the traditional groups, I interviewed both *goswami*- and renunciate gurus, but mostly *goswamis*. I generally started with someone I had heard about previously (usually from lay Gauḍīyas), and then proceeded in a “snow-ball”-fashion, asking the interviewee to recommend someone else that I should speak to. In this way I would usually find one or at most two more persons before I had to start from scratch. It was also useful for me to hear which groups had a “wrong” understanding of the guru-doctrine, since that could also give me a clue as to where to go next.

Since my own knowledge of Bengali is rather basic, my choice of interviewees was limited by a constant lack of good and reliable translators. Some translators never turned up, others suddenly left,

and the ones that stayed sometimes translated only what they felt was relevant. For this reason, out of my 43 interviews, only 10 were conducted in Bengali with the help of a translator. In these cases, my own Bengali was enough to verify at least a bit of what the translator said, and to sometimes notice things he omitted and ask him to back-track. The rest were made in English. This meant that the persons interviewed represent a more educated section of society than would have been the case if I had been able to speak with everyone. Still, this was not as great a problem as it could have been, since the gurus often come from an educated background. I failed in obtaining only two interviews because of linguistic problems.

Of the 44 interviews, 12 were done in different places in Bengal, 2 in Puri, Orissa, 5 in Helsinki, Finland, 2 in Radhakund, and the remaining 23 in Vṛndāvana. The Vṛndāvana side is thus somewhat over-represented in the material. A more serious overrepresentation is that out of 17 interviewed gurus, not a single one is a woman! There are women gurus in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and I have met such, but unfortunately have not been able (for linguistic and other reasons) to interview any. Even though female gurus are rare in modern Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, this is admittedly a drawback in the study. Because of this great predominance of men in the study, I have (if not expressly referring to a woman) used the masculine pronoun throughout.

During my stays in India in 1998 and 2000-2001 I recorded the interviews on cassette tapes. The advantage of using an ordinary cassette recorder is obvious: one can easily procure more tapes if the old run out, and if the recorder is broken, there is at least a possibility of getting it repaired. Except for Indian batteries running out all the time, I had no problems with the equipment. During the last term of fieldwork, in 2002, I used a mini-disk recorder, which was very convenient and easy to use. The rechargeable battery also saved me from a lot of anxiety. In some cases, when the interviewee did not allow me to record the interview, I would take notes in shorthand during the interview. As soon as possible afterwards I would expand on the notes from memory.

The interviews were transcribed and divided into parts according to the theme discussed (e.g. relationships between gurus and disciples). Especially interesting passages (e.g. novel, illustrating or strange) were separately noted. Since the parts roughly conformed to the chapters of part II, it was usually easy for me to go back and see what the different gurus had said about each topic and incorporate their views into the text. After I had finished the first draft of the whole text, I returned to the transcribed interviews to make sure that I had not missed anything important.

Interviewing 17 gurus does not of course amount to a complete survey of the opinions of all modern Gauḍīya gurus. Nevertheless, I was able to obtain samples from the major groups of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism today, and to achieve a fair amount of satiation<sup>51</sup> of opinions within the groups, i.e. that the same opinions were repeatedly stated without much new information emerging.

After this, the interviews were qualitatively analyzed, rather than quantitatively. Quantitative research is based on finding statistical regularities in the way different variables relate to each other, after which the researcher increases the observation units, so that the statistical regularities become more significant. Exceptions are allowed in this kind of analysis and argumentation. Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, aims at finding rules and regularities found throughout the material at hand. The conclusions must be “absolute”: even one exception forces the researcher to reinterpret the data.<sup>52</sup> Qualitative analysis has two phases (that in practice are coexistent): *purification of observations*, and *unriddling*. Purification of observations implies examining the material from a particular theoretical point of view. The theoretical framework and the question at hand determines what is essential. By combining several such essential observations, one further reduces the amount of data. Unriddling means to try to come up with an interpretative explanation of the findings

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51 Alasuutari (1999), 107

52 Ibid, 34-38

obtained through the purification phase. Different clues may be used to arrive at the solution, such as previous studies, statistical data, and so forth.<sup>53</sup>

### *1.2.6 Participant observation*

Besides the interviews, the main method of my fieldwork was participant observation. The meaning of the term is self-explanatory: making observations while participating oneself. The idea is, as first stated by Bronislaw Malinowski, to stay long enough in the field for the natives to become used to and accept the fieldworker as some kind of group member, so that their behaviour and actions are not affected by his presence.<sup>54</sup> While a formal interview may include a lot of “self-editing” by the interviewee, the idea is that the researcher by participant observation is able to access a more normal, unreflected side of the persons he wishes to study. Not only does the researcher become more “invisible” with the passage of time, he also acquires a greater degree of competence in the new social reality. In the eyes of the natives, if he is successful, he goes through different stages: from interloper, to novice and finally to a marginal member. It is unlikely that he will ever be perceived of as a fully accepted, participating member. As pointed out by Brooks, this need not be seen as a problem, for if the researcher ever gained full competence and membership, it could become hard for him to objectify his experiences enough for them to be analytical.<sup>55</sup>

Participant observation starts with locating oneself physically in the social world one intends to study. After the physical location is accomplished, the situations of interaction particularly important for the task at hand must be discovered. Finally, one has to enter the social world that is composed of these situation. For this, an accept-

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53 Alasuutari (1999), 44-48

54 Ibid, 103-104

55 Brooks (1989), 236



able and convincing role must be taken up.<sup>56</sup>

After these preliminaries have been achieved (and together with them), one begins to gather observations of the experiences one has, reflecting upon them and noting them down as precisely as possible. Finally, usually when one has returned back to his desk, comes data interpretation. The researcher goes through all the material he has gathered, compares it with his memories, and tries to sort it out as best he can.<sup>57</sup>

For me all this meant travelling to the most important Gauḍīya centres in India: Vṛndāvana in Uttar Pradesh, Navadvīpa/ Māyāpūra in West Bengal and Puri in Orissa. I spent most of the time in Vṛndāvana, and I will exemplify my participant observation with a short description of my stay there. For a month and a half, I lived in the “Bhajan Kutir”, the *āśrama* of the late B.H. Bon Mahārāja, a rather famous Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava whose disciples I had come to know earlier, when I gathered material for my MA paper.<sup>58</sup>

My reasons for staying in this place were several. First of all, since I have been a member of ISKCON for about ten years, I had already seen how the interaction between gurus and disciples work in that movement. Now I wanted to observe the same in a different Gauḍīya movement. Second, I had already during my previous visit established good rapport with the leader and inmates of this *āśrama*. Third, I knew that since it was the month of *Kārttika*, a month of many festivals, when many Bengalis visit Vṛndāvana for pilgrimage, and since the guru of the institution was present, there would be many occasions for observing the interaction between the guru and different types of disciples. Fourth, the physical location was good. The Bhajan Kutir is situated near the Madana-mohana temple on the outskirts of “old Vṛndāvana”, near many other important temples and *āśramas*. Even though all the inmates of the *āśrama* (as in many

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56 Brooks (1989), 237-238

57 Ibid, 237

58 Broo (1999)

Gauḍīya *āśramas* in Vṛndāvana) are from Bengal, they are well integrated into the local community.

I arrived in the Bhajan Kutir on a hot, humid evening in the beginning of October. I had flown into Delhi the same morning and visited some bookstores before taking the train to Mathurā. When leaving the overcrowded train I noticed my mobile phone was missing – hardly an auspicious beginning to my research! Undaunted, I took a motor riksha to Vṛndāvana, where I changed into a bicycle riksha for the last part of the journey. Arriving in the Bhajan Kutir was memorable. The guru, Gopānanda Bon Mahārāja, was sitting outside on the porch, bare-breasted in the tropical heat, reading a medieval classic about the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. He lit up upon seeing me, having been expecting me. I was given a bed in the same room as the *pūjāri* (altar priest) upstairs, a small and dusty room visited also by several small mice, a cat interested in eating anything but the mice, and the occasional marauding monkey.

I tried to enter the social world of the *āśrama* as best I could, by participating in the temple functions, doing a little menial service, taking my meals with the devotees, and so on. Getting used to the rhythm of life was hard in the beginning. Dinner was sometimes not served before ten in the night, and one had to get up at half past three to attend the first temple service. A siesta in the afternoon was supposed to make up for the lost sleep. Nevertheless, I was soon accepted as a “marginal member” and trusted enough for people to be able to quarrel, laugh and go about their normal business in my presence. Still, the colour of my skin, of course, made it impossible for me not to stick out, as well as my notebook.

Besides staying at the Bhajan Kutir, I also visited many other places in Vṛndāvana, to observe festivals, initiations, interview persons or to see holy places in the company of some guru and his disciples. Usually, I carried with me one or several notebooks, and I would try to jot down important observations as soon as possible. It was often, however, more practical to peacefully write down the experiences later. I would also take pictures, and was in fact commissioned to take “the

official” pictures of Gopānanda Bon Mahārāja. During a later trip, much to my pleasure, I found laminated copies of the pictures I had taken in a remote village on the border with Bangladesh.

I have made use of the material gathered in this way particularly in part III, where I propose a typology of seven roles the guru takes in relationship with his disciples and other admirers. Perceiving the guru in terms of these seven roles renders his behaviour more understandable generally and analyzeable in light of the theory above and the findings of part II.

### 1.3 Sources

#### 1.3.1 Printed sources

The printed sources for this thesis include both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are writings from within the movement itself. They are further divided into two groups: the original, medieval writings, and modern interpretations. The medieval books have been given much more emphasis, since they are accepted and oft-referred to by practically all modern authorities within the movement. The three most important such works are the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, the *Bhakti-sandarbha* by Jīva Gosvāmin, and the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmin.<sup>59</sup>

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (“Manifestations of devotion to Hari”) is a treatise on the duties of the ideal Vaiṣṇava householder. Some editions of the book contain a verse at the end stating that it was completed in the fall of 1534. Even were this verse not genuine, the book must have been written before 1541, since it is quoted in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* of Rūpa Gosvāmin (e.g. 1.2.72), written in that year. The question of the authorship of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* is a

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59 Some of these books are available in electronic form at the Gauḍiya Grantha Mandira at <http://www.granthamandira.org>, but the verse- or passage-numberings are in some cases (especially for BS) different from the printed editions I have used.

rather complicated one: the book clearly says that it was written by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin (ca 1505-1586), while two contemporary Gosvāmins as clearly write that the author was Sanātana Gosvāmin. I have dealt with this problem at length elsewhere.<sup>60</sup> I believe the author is quite clearly Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, and that the author of the commentary named *Diḡ-darśinī* that practically always accompanies the text itself was Sanātana Gosvāmin. Probably because of the great repute of Sanātana Gosvāmin, a desire arose to see the whole book as his work.

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* is a voluminous book. It contains 9,275 verses divided into twenty *Vilāsas* (“Manifestations”) or chapters. The vast majority of these verses, however, are quotations from almost two hundred Purāṇas, Smṛtis and other ancient works. The method of the book is to provide a verse or two about a specific subject, and then support and illustrate that with copious and often repetitive quotations. This gives the work a great deal of authority in the eyes of religious orthodoxy.

Some scholars have been surprised by how the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* omits to mention many things essential to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, such as the joint worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.<sup>61</sup> While Caitanya is praised in the beginning verse of each *Vilāsa*, not a word is said about worship of him, nor is his mantra mentioned. The explanation for this is actually quite simple: the work is clearly not intended only for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, but as a guidebook for Vaiṣṇavas in general. In many places the reader is asked to proceed according to the rules of one’s particular *saṃpradāya* or group (e.g. 4.175). For this reason, the author avoids things that he believes Vaiṣṇavas from other *saṃpradāyas* would object to. The catholic spirit of the book can also be seen from how the author freely quotes or refers to books written by teachers of the Kumāra-*saṃpradāya* (such as the *Krama-dīpikā* by Keśava

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60 Bhṛḡumuni Dāsa (2001), xii-xvi

61 See for example De (1961), 412

Kaśmīri), Śrī-*saṃpradāya* (such as the *Rahasya-sāra* by Vedānta Deśikā), or even Smārta authors such as Kṛṣṇadeva or Hemādri.

It must also be added that at the time the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* was written, a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya* per se had not yet appeared in Vṛndāvana, not to speak of ritual worship of Caitanya, who at the time when the book was finished only quite recently had passed away. In the early works of the Gosvāmins one can clearly see a desire to fit into a general community of Kṛṣṇa-devotees. For example, in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.2.269, 309) Rūpa Gosvāmin equates his terms *vaidhī-* and *rāgānugā-sādhana-*bhakti with the terms *maryāda-* and *puṣṭi-mārga* of the Vallabha-*saṃpradāya*. Such a desire to co-operate with other Vaiṣṇavas is hardly surprising at a time when there were still very few Bengali Vaiṣṇavas in Vṛndāvana.

While the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* contains much material that is interesting to scholars of religion and medieval Indian iconography, the parts of most importance for the purpose at hand are the first two *Vilāsas*. The first contains a short general introduction to the work and then a description of the guru, disciple and mantra. The second *Vilāsa* is concerned with initiation. This *Vilāsa* is based on the fourth chapter of the *Krama-dīpikā*, but is much more detailed, especially if the commentary of Sanātana Gosvāmin is also consulted. Some information on the worship of the guru is also found towards the end of the third *Vilāsa*.

Some modern Gauḍīyas consider the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* of secondary importance and say that it is influenced by Smārta ideas. Among the examples they give, one usually finds that the author does not completely reject the *Varṇāśrama* system, that he quotes Smārta authors and that he places great stress on observances not followed by the later tradition.<sup>62</sup> Others give the book the greatest

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62 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1975a), 21

respect, calling it the true Vaiṣṇava *smṛti* or the like.<sup>63</sup> When defining key terms such as “guru” or “initiation” in his famous dictionary, Haridāsa Dāsa depends almost exclusively upon the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. Still, it is uncommon that ordinary devotees study the book, and it is one of the few books of the Gosvāmins that as of yet has not been translated into English in its entirety.

The *Bhakti-sandarbha* (“A thesis on Devotion”) by Jīva Gosvāmin (1516?-1608) is part five of his magnum opus *Bhāgavata-sandarbha* (also known as *Ṣaḍ-sandarbha*), a prose work in six parts that systematically presents the theology of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. The *Bhāgavata-sandarbha* is generally considered the most important philosophical treatise in the Gauḍīya *saṃpradāya*.<sup>64</sup> It deals, as the title says, with devotion to Kṛṣṇa, the means of reaching the goal of life, *preman* or ecstatic love of Kṛṣṇa. The exact date of the work is not known, but it was written some time towards the end of the sixteenth century.

Apart from being written in prose, a greater difference between Jīva Gosvāmin’s book and the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* is that while that book deals almost exclusively with ritual, the *Bhakti-sandarbha* is mostly concerned with theology. The author builds up a whole systematic theology around the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (8<sup>th</sup> century CE?), using reason and philosophy to support his ideas. Still, there is a clear connection between the *Bhakti-sandarbha* and the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, for Jīva Gosvāmin states that he has based his *Sandarbhās* on the notes of one “brāhmaṇa from the south, a friend of Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmins”<sup>65</sup> – a person identified with Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin by the later commentator Baladeva Vidyābhūṣana.<sup>66</sup>

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63 Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī in the preface to Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin (1991)

64 Rosen (1991), 164

65 TS 4, also BS 1

66 In his commentary to TS 4

The notes Jīva Gosvāmin refer to are not extant, but it is easy to see that much of the material of, for example, the *Bhakti-sandarbha* is based on what is written in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. One example is the passage on the *ekādaśī* fast in *Anuccheda* 299 of the *Bhakti-sandarbha*, in which all the quotations can also be found in *Vilāsas* 12 and 13 of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*.<sup>67</sup>

The *Bhakti-sandarbha* is comprised of 340 *Anucchedas* or passages of various length. In passages 202 through 213, Jīva Gosvāmin discusses turning to a guru as the first element of bhakti. Some more details relating to worshipping the guru are considered in passages 237 and 238. These are the parts of main interest for understanding what Jīva Gosvāmin thinks on this subject.

As with the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, the *Bhakti-sandarbha* is not largely systematically studied within the movement today. All Gauḍīyas however respect the *Sandarbhas*, and they are often said to be unsurpassed by any other philosopher and perfect in all respects,<sup>68</sup> but probably because of their technical and philosophical nature, and because of their size, few study them seriously. The *Bhakti-sandarbha* has been translated into English (by Kuśakratha Dāsa of the Krishna Institute), but the translation is unfortunately inaccurate and sometimes even misleading.

Just as the *Bhakti-sandarbha* is based on the work of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (“The Nectar of Acts of Caitanya”) by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja (1517-1610?) is firmly based on the works of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, Jīva, Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmins. While it, externally, is a hagiography of Caitanya, it presents the philosophy and theology of the Gosvāmins, some-

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67 Śrīvatsa Goswami of the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple in Vṛndāvana holds that Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin was the actual author of the *Sandarbhas*, and that Jīva Gosvāmin merely edited the books, just as he edited some of Rūpa Gosvāmin's books (IF 2000/14d).

68 See for example Satya Nārāyaṇa Dāsa (1995), xii

times even putting it into the mouth of Caitanya himself.<sup>69</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja never met Caitanya, but he studied under Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmin, who had had much association with the master. He also made good use of earlier biographies and diaries, some of which now are lost.<sup>70</sup> As a work of art, the book is of great merit. Sukumar Sen called it a “landmark of New Indian literature”.<sup>71</sup> In the very first chapter, the position of the guru is described, and later on other details are also given.

While the two previously mentioned works are written in Sanskrit, this book is in Bengali, and this opened up the possibility for common people to become acquainted with the teachings of the Gosvāmins. Even today, when Bengali and Hindi translations of the books of the Gosvāmins have long been available, what most Gauḍīyas know of, for example, the *Sandarbhas* of Jīva Gosvāmin is what they have read in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Undoubtedly this – that it has popularised the doctrines of the Gosvāmins – is the greatest merit of the work. It is widely read and studied. Two English translations are available, one devotional (by Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda) and one academic (by Edward C. Dimock).

There is a controversy regarding the date of composition of the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. Some editions contain a colophon with the date 1581 at the end, and some scholars (e.g. D.C. Sen) accept this date. As pointed out by several later scholars, however, that verse is not found in all editions and can not be genuine, since the book cites the *Gopāla-campū* of Jīva Gosvāmin from 1590. Another reading of the verse gives the year 1615.<sup>72</sup> The exact year of Kṛṣṇadāsa

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69 E.g. when Caitanya in CC 2.9.117 “quotes” a verse (1.2.59) from the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* of Rūpa Gosvāmin, written in 1541. The devotee answers by saying that Rūpa Gosvāmin learnt the verse from Caitanya and later put it into his book. See Yati Maharaj (1994b), 335.

70 De (1997), 27-29

71 Sen (1992), 92

72 De (1961), 56-57, Kapoor (1994), 60



Kavirāja's death is not known, but he signed as a witness to Jīva Gosvāmin's will in 1608.<sup>73</sup> It is thus possible that he was alive in 1615, though he must have been very old, as he also writes in the book. From internal evidence, it also seems that the so-called six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana had all died when the book was completed.<sup>74</sup>

Secondary printed sources are scholarly studies of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. These include articles and monographies from the last eighty years or so. Since S.K. De's groundbreaking "Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal" first came out in 1940, the theology, philosophy and esoteric practices of the movement have been widely studied.<sup>75</sup> Ramakanta Chakrabarty's thorough "Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal 1486-1900" provides much of the historical material presented in chapter 2.2. While ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness), a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava group active also in the West, has been widely studied<sup>76</sup>, there is a great scarcity of sociological and ethnographical studies of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in India. In this regard, a recent essay by Ferdinando Sardella of the University of Gothenburg concerning the two birthplaces of Caitanya is a very welcome addition.<sup>77</sup>

I have also utilised several studies of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism written by devotees.<sup>78</sup> These are sometimes written with the desire to distinguish "true" Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism from what are perceived as degraded forms, and to hopefully also attract the reader. However, they often also contain material not found elsewhere. Used with caution, they have been a great help. The books of O.B.L. Kapoor in particular straddle the line between primary and secondary material.

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73 Mukherjee & Wright (n.d.), 310

74 De (1961), 55

75 E.g. Case (2000), Haberman (1988), Wulff (1984)

76 E.g. Brooks (1989), Judah (1974), Rochford (1985), Rothstein (1996)

77 Sardella (2002)

78 E.g. Eidlitz (1968), Kapoor (1994), Rosen (1991)

### *1.3.2 Interviews*

An important part of the primary material are the interviews I have conducted with practicing Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, both gurus and disciples. The interviews have been conducted in Gauḍīya centres in India, such as Vṛndāvana and Navadvīpa in October 1998 (2 interviews), October to January 2000-2001 (29) and February and March 2002 (8 interviews). In addition, a few (5) were done during 2001 (with members of ISKCON) in Helsinki, Finland. Out of these 44 interviews, 20 are of gurus, and 24 of disciples. Since some gurus were interviewed in 2000-2001 and again in 2002, the actual number of gurus interviewed is 17. Many (11) of the disciple-interviews are short and concerned only with the reason for choosing their particular guru. These interviews contain a wealth of new material, and I have made extensive use of them particularly in part II of the thesis.

### *1.3.3 Field studies*

Much of the material presented in part III stems from participant observation conducted in various places in India, especially in Vṛndāvana, where I have lived in or at least visited Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava centres. I have taken part both in the daily life of the practitioners, as well as in special festivals. The observations were recorded in several field diaries. In some cases, photographs taken of the events observed have helped bring back details to memory.

### *1.3.4 Hagiographies*

Another important source for uncovering the dynamics between disciples and gurus are hagiographies of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava saints. While they of course may not be fully historically accurate, used with caution, they contain much valuable information, especially for charac-

terising the ideal guru and disciple. I have primarily relied on two books by O.B.L. Kapoor: “The Saints of Vraja” and “The Saints of Bengal”. The first one is based on the same author’s five-volume Hindi “Braj ke bhakta”, while the other is based on Haridāsa Dāsa’s Bengali “Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Jīvana”. Both are written for a wide Gauḍīya audience and contain stories about saints that are (with a few exceptions) commonly accepted as genuine.

### *1.3.5 Other sources*

I have also made use of sources found on the internet. Such material has its drawbacks, especially since it may change over time or even disappear completely. The list of sources gives the date I have accessed the sites. Most of the internet documents stem from a website called VNN or Vaishnava News Network, a site that features news and articles by mostly Western practitioners. It is updated daily and very widely read (the site claims to receive one million hits per month!<sup>79</sup>). I have also sometimes cited letters I have received from practicing Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.

## *1.4 Overview of the thesis*

This thesis consists of three parts. Part one contains two chapters. The first is the introduction, dealing with theory, sources, method and so on, while the second gives a descriptive overview of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, particularly its history and institutions. The purpose of this information is to give the reader a context in which to place the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru. Since particularly the institutions of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is an underresearched topic, the new material that I present here possesses also an intrinsic value.

Part II consists of four chapters. It describes the guru-institution of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism primarily as perceived by the Gauḍīyas them-

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79 <http://www.vnn.org>

selves. The main source for this part are the medieval scriptures of the movement. What the scriptural sources have to say about the guru is analysed and compared with the statements of modern practitioners. The topics covered are those the theologians themselves take up. Those they leave out (and they leave out several interesting ones) are covered in part III. I will also examine possible sociological reasons for interpretations by the modern day gurus. The normative descriptions are compared to categories presented by other scholars, notably R.M. Steinmann. Light is shed upon the sometimes conflicting statements by introducing Roy Rappaport's hierarchy of understandings. I will also try to locate the guru within Max Weber's typology of charismatic personages.

Part III contains seven short chapters. Here I look at the roles of the guru in relation to his disciples, well-wishers and broader society. I propose a typology of seven roles, some noticed by earlier scholars, some by myself. Many of these show the tension between charisma and canon that the guru embodies, according to my proposition. Some of these roles are more important than others, and not every guru will enter all of them very deeply. The source for this part is primarily my own ethnographic research.

Part IV is the conclusion, where the findings of the two previous parts are drawn together, and where I point to some conclusions of more general interest.

### *1.5 Self-positioning*

I am myself an initiated disciple of a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru, Suhotra Swami Mahārāja of ISKCON, and a practicing (converted) Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava. Does this make me partial, and thus disqualify me from writing about this subject? The simple answer is no – the subject of this thesis is not whether Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is a good religion or whether the gurus actually have spiritual realisation. Such questions are beyond the scope of any academic research.

When I began my research, a colleague told me seriously to

present myself as an outsider when conducting field research. “Grow your hair, pretend to not be able to sit on the floor, mix up terms – otherwise they will never take you seriously as an impartial scholar.” I did not follow this advice, for several reasons. First of all, I would have felt very uncomfortable behaving like this – as though I was cheating. Probably it would also not have worked – somebody would see me with prayer-beads in my hand and the word would spread. Presenting myself as something other than what I am would also have been ethically questionable. But my main reason was that I instinctively felt that my colleague was wrong. I felt that the gurus and disciples that I wanted to approach would feel more at ease with a convert than with a complete outsider, that my being a devotee would help establish a rapport with the persons I wanted to meet.

I took two years before I knew whether I had been right or not. My field work generally went well. I had my setbacks, but in general, I had little problems in meeting and speaking with Gauḍīyas from many different organisations and backgrounds. Working in the field was a great adventure for me: I met many interesting people, saw strange and enlivening places, and collected much new, previously unrecorded material.

Still, I did not know whether I was particularly successful or not – working in India is certainly not as efficient as one would like – until I met another colleague who had tried to interview Vaiṣṇava gurus in some of the places I had visited. This person told me how proud and difficult these gurus were, how difficult it was to meet them and get them to answer questions. I was surprised to hear this, since my own experience had been so different. I realized that my own background was perhaps not only no problem, but actually an asset.

When doing my field work in India I have consistently dressed as a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava, worn the *tilaka* mark on my forehead, and taken great care to behave as a Gauḍīya is supposed to: bowing down to temple images, touching the feet of persons considered saintly and respectable, eating in the proper way. I have gladly taken part in pilgrimages, festivals and daily life in *āśramas*, carefully distancing

myself from ordinary western tourists. At the same time, especially when I have wanted to interview someone, I have tried to explain who I am and what my intentions are: to do research about “*guru-tattva*”, the subject of the guru. I have endeavoured to make it clear that I am a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava myself, but that I am now not primarily interested in furthering my own spiritual life, but in doing my Ph.D.

Most had no problem understanding my dual roles. “Why should not one of our own men write our story?” was a common sentiment. No doubt some gurus wanted to give me religious teachings on the side of helping out with my research, but I had no problem with that. There were exceptions, of course. One guru called me a fool for trying to understand spiritual matters academically. “I could teach you so many things, but first you must surrender and become my disciple!” Another refused to see me since he perceived me as belonging to a rival Gauḍīya group.

While I have always been a respectful interviewer, I have not hesitated to ask things a disciple would not. However, my authority (as a convert and young man) was not always sufficient to get my informants to answer all my questions, for example, about their background. Usually they would humor me (letting me know that they considered those things irrelevant), but not always. Furthermore, dealing with a topic considered in some ways esoteric and mysterious, it is natural that my informants probably sometimes did not say everything they knew.

### *1.6 Ethical considerations*

All the gurus interviewed are, to a greater or lesser extent, public persons, and they were all aware of the reason for my interviewing them. All gave their consent to my interviewing them and mentioning their names, but a few did not let me record the interview on tape/ minidisk. The reason for this was probably a nervousness about their words being used against them in conflicts between different Gauḍīya groups. Even these persons did, however, let me take down

notes (probably thinking that if trouble arises from a particular statement, they could always deny having said that). For this reason, I have not changed any of their names or in any other way tried to conceal their identity.

Some did not want their name mentioned in connection with controversial subjects. I have honoured this desire. Others wanted a copy of the thesis when it is ready. Others expressed desires less easy to fulfil, for example that I should “realise” the import of all the topics before I write anything. Some may have had implicit expectations of being given a greater role than they have been assigned in the final thesis, and some may upon reading the thesis think that I have misunderstood them or lumped them together with the wrong people. Others may disapprove of my methods or choice of interviewees, not to speak of my conclusions. Still, I do not believe anyone will feel cheated.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF GAUḌĪYA VAIṢṆAVISM

### 2.1 General characteristics

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is the name generally used for the devotional (bhakti<sup>80</sup>) Hindu movement started by Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486-1533) in what is today known as West Bengal. This movement has also been characterised as a “revival movement”, since it revived interest in Vaiṣṇavism (worship of Viṣṇu, or in this case Kṛṣṇa) a faith with a much longer history. Similar revivals appeared all over northern India during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They all had some common denominators, such as expressing themselves through the vernaculars instead of Sanskrit; rejecting the religious monopoly of the brāhmaṇas; and encouraging an enthusiastic religion of congregational singing and dancing as a way to reach communion with God.<sup>81</sup>

The word “Gauḍīya” means Bengali. Some practitioners however consider the word “Gauḍīya” not to refer so much to the geographical location of Gauḍa or Bengal, but to Gauḍa *maṇḍala*, the sacred space of the same area. They derive the word Gauḍīya from “guḍa”, sugarcane, implying that this is a particularly “sweet” form of Vaiṣṇavism, where the sweetness rather than majesty of God is emphasised. A Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava would then be “a person who lives for the sweetness associated with the love and worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa”.<sup>82</sup> This definition is charming, but rather too wide, since there are Vaiṣṇavas in other movements that would fit the description. Some, again, argue that the appellation Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is too

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80 In keeping with common usage, I have translated bhakti as devotion. It should, however, be kept in mind that the Gauḍīya conception of bhakti is not one of “faith alone” as early scholars such as Otto and Söderblom envisaged it. Rather, bhakti is defined as “favourable service of Kṛṣṇa, unencumbered by knowledge (*jñāna*) and work (*karma*), etc, and free from the desire for anything else” (BRS 1.1.11). See Haberman (1988), 63-64.

81 Dimock (1989), 26-27

82 Rosen (1992), ii-iii



narrow, since the movement almost from the beginning spread beyond Bengal, and since there are also other forms of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal. Instead they propose the term “Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism”.<sup>83</sup> I have nevertheless opted to use the name Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, since it is the most widespread one.<sup>84</sup>

As mentioned above (1.1), a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava is usually defined as “a follower of Caitanya”, or “anyone who has taken shelter of Caitanya”.<sup>85</sup> A more precise definition could be a person initiated into the *saṁpradāya* of Caitanya. In his dictionary, Sir Monier Monier-Williams translates *saṁpradāya* as “a bestower, presenter; tradition, established doctrine transmitted from one teacher to another; any peculiar or sectarian system of religious teaching, sect.”<sup>86</sup> Sir Charles Eliot, following in the same lines, writes that “Sampradaya seems to be the original Sanskrit word for sectarian doctrine. It means traditional teaching transmitted from one teacher to another”.<sup>87</sup> Others have translated *saṁpradāya* with the terms “teaching tradition,”<sup>88</sup> “religious sect,”<sup>89</sup> “school of philosophy,”<sup>90</sup> “school or church”<sup>91</sup> or “movement or denomination”.<sup>92</sup> Taken together, these definitions give an idea of what is meant by *saṁpradāya*: a particular religious school passed down in disciplic successions. This means that it begins from one guru or group of gurus, who teach the doctrines, rituals and so on to the immediate disciples. In time, some of these disciples themselves become gurus and teach their own disciples. Some of

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83 E.g. Haberman (1988), 169

84 It is used by for example Chakrabarty (1985), Elkman (1986), Haberman (1988), McDaniel (1989)

85 IF mgt 2002/12

86 Sir Monier Monier-Williams (1995), 1175

87 Quoted in Miller (1976-1977), 529

88 Miller (1976-77), 529

89 Kapoor (1976), 36

90 Narang (1984), x

91 Vasu (1979), iii

92 Joseph T. O’Connell (1997), 45

the second generation of disciples also become gurus, and go on spreading the teachings of the original guru/ gurus. And so on. In this way a whole movement is gradually created.

Even though the word “movement” seems to be the one used most often to denote the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya*,<sup>93</sup> that term is not without its own problems, perhaps primarily since it is generally used for describing modern or pre-modern groups. “Tradition”, again, sounds too static. As Joachim Wach points out, neither is the term “denomination” suitable in this case, since a denomination implies a secession from a larger body, and since a *saṁpradāya* is not as exclusive as a denomination.<sup>94</sup> For these reasons, I will follow Wach in retaining the word *saṁpradāya* as a special kind of religious organisation falling between the mystery group and founded religion,

...implying a group with special concepts, forms of worship, and adherence to exclusive leadership exercised by an outstanding religious personality or by his physical and spiritual descendant.<sup>95</sup>

Within one *saṁpradāya* there will be many different *paraṁparās* or disciplic successions, chains of gurus and disciples all leading back to the original guru/ gurus. While individual gurus may add to or modify the teachings, as long as they and their disciples keep to some generally accepted common doctrinal and ritual principles, they are considered to be part of the same *saṁpradāya*. Often the *saṁpradāyas* are very loosely organised: in terms of practical management, different members of the same *saṁpradāya* may have nothing at all to do with each other.

In the case of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya* this is especially true. While Caitanya is acknowledged by all Gauḍīyas as the “founder” of the movement, he does not seem to have formally ini-

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93 It is used by for example De (1961), Elkman (1986) and Haberman (1988)

94 Wach (1967), 128

95 Ibid, 128

tiated anyone.<sup>96</sup> Instead, the different *paramparās* within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* begin from Caitanya's close companions. After Caitanya, there has never been any one person or institution with authority over the whole movement. The different *paramparās* have thus been able to develop in a kind of "chaotic democracy"<sup>97</sup> leaving them somewhat different theological conceptions, rituals and institutions. That is not to say that there are no common denominators, but rather that every rule will have its exceptions.

In relation to the normative writings of the Six Gosvāmins, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas are often divided into two groups: the orthodox and the heterodox. An incomplete list of heterodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava groups comprises 56 different movements.<sup>98</sup> The main heterodox groups are the Sahajīyas, who have incorporated many elements of Tantra into their brand of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and who believe in unity between the souls and God;<sup>99</sup> the Bauls, who beside the Tantra have many Sufi influences;<sup>100</sup> and the Kartābhājas, who also believe in monism and who oppose the asceticism of orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.<sup>101</sup> I follow historian Ramakanta Chakrabarty in including the Gaurāṅga-nāgarīs and some modern movements within orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.<sup>102</sup> This thesis deals only with

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96 The followers of Narottama Dāsa maintain that he had one disciple: Lokanātha Gosvāmin, Narottama Dāsa's guru (e.g. IF mgt 2002/10). Similarly, the followers of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin claim that he was Caitanya's only initiated disciple (e.g. Case (2000), 75). The evidence presented for either claim is very flimsy.

97 Haberman (1994), 80

98 Chakrabarty (1985), 349. Swami Tattwananda (1984), 27-41, gives short (and often deprecativ) descriptions of 76 "Vaiṣṇava Subsects", most of which are subsects of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.

99 See Dimock (1989)

100 See Sarkar (1990)

101 See Chakrabarty (1985), 346-384

102 Suhotra Swami (1997) includes the Gaurāṅga-nāgarīs among the *apasampradāyas* or "deviant Vaiṣṇava groups", but I do not find the doctrinal or ritual differences great enough to warrant that.

orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, of which I will later (2.3.4) present three main divisions.

The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya* prides itself on a very detailed theology and philosophy, which has been elaborately described elsewhere.<sup>103</sup> For the purpose at hand only some basic information is necessary. The bhakti movements of North India in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are usually divided into two clusters of often internally bitterly fighting movements: the *nirguṇa-* and the *saguṇa-saṃpradāyas*. The first cluster consists of those movements who believe in aniconic devotion, the second of those who believe in iconic devotion.<sup>104</sup> One *saṃpradāya* in the first cluster is that of the Sants of northern India,<sup>105</sup> while the *saṃpradāyas* of Vallabha (1478-1530) and Caitanya are examples from the second cluster.

The Gauḍīyas are Vaiṣṇavas, devotees of Viṣṇu. Their focus is on Kṛṣṇa, popularly known as the eighth *avatāra* or descent of Viṣṇu. However, for the Gauḍīyas, Kṛṣṇa is not an expansion or manifestation of Viṣṇu, “but God himself in an almost monotheistic sense”.<sup>106</sup> Viṣṇu is but a part of Kṛṣṇa. The other gods of the Hindu pantheon (such as Śiva, Brahmā and so forth) are not done away with, but are seen only as expansions or servants of Kṛṣṇa, and should therefore generally not be offered separate worship.

Apart from this, some scholars have pointed out two distinguishing factors in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology: the doctrines of *acintya-bhedābheda* and *bhaktirasa*.<sup>107</sup> *Acintya-bhedābheda* refers to the doctrine of “inconceivable simultaneous oneness and difference”. The individual souls (*ātman*s) are considered identical with God, Kṛṣṇa, in being eternal, joyful and full of knowledge, since they are his energy, but they have their distinct personality and are thus separate from him at all times. The favourite examples are fire and its

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103 E.g. De (1961), Gupta [n.d.], Eidlitz (1968), Kapoor (1994).

104 Dalmia (2001), 129

105 See for example Gold (1987)

106 Brooks (1989), 5

107 Chatterjee (1992), 15-16

sparks, and the sun and the sunrays.<sup>108</sup> However, how they can be both identical and separate at the same time is *acintya* or beyond the human intellect: a theological dogma pointing to the need of canonical authority to gain any understanding of these matters.

There is generally a much greater stress on the difference between God and the souls than on the oneness, no doubt as a reaction to the monism of Śaṅkara's *advaita* school of Vedānta.<sup>109</sup> As we shall see, this stress on the dualism between God and the individual soul makes it difficult to explain the traditional statements declaring the guru to be identical with God.

The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya* is, as already stated, a devotional one. The stress is on bhakti, devotion, as the only practical way for attaining the supreme goal – which for Gauḍīyas is not *mokṣa* or liberation, but *preman*, ecstatic love of God, of which *mokṣa* is a mere by-product. Bhakti is conceived of in terms borrowed from classical Indian aesthetics. Bhakti itself is the ultimate *rasa*, or aesthetic rapture, and *preman* is entering into the eternal play (*līlā*) of God. All souls have a particular *bhāva*, relationship to Kṛṣṇa, either as a neutral worshipper, a servant, friend, elder or lover. This relationship should be cultivated during this life, so that the devotee after death can take up his role in the eternal play.<sup>110</sup>

Caitanya has sometimes been portrayed as a social reformer, even though all contemporary sources make it clear that he was very little concerned with such issues.<sup>111</sup> Victor Turner points to Caitanya's *saṃpradāya* as an example of a *communitas* of withdrawal, withdrawal in the sense of a total or partial withdrawal from the participation of the structural relations of a world that is seen as inherently flawed. Turner's analysis is, however, flawed by severe misunder-

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108 Kapoor (1994), 132-137

109 Śaṅkara lived most probably in the 9th century. See Malinar (2001). For a well-written popular rendering of his life and teachings, see Madugala (2001).

110 Haberman (1988)

111 E.g. Chatterjee (1983), Sastri (1988)

standings of the relationships between Caitanya and followers of the Sahajīya school of thought.<sup>112</sup> While Caitanya did encourage a friendly, egalitarian mood amongst his disciples, in relation to outsiders he generally asked them to respect the rules of the society. This can be seen in the *saṁpradāya* even today. Membership in the community is voluntary, and the primary religious concern of the community is devotion to Caitanya and Kṛṣṇa, but one is also supposed to behave as a responsible citizen, regardless of who has the political power. Except for some notable exceptions (especially in its early stages) the *saṁpradāya* can be said to match the common idea of Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāyas* being socially conservative.<sup>113</sup> Most Gauḍīyas thus differentiate between a realm of religious activities and a realm of practical affairs, such as marriage, business or politics, in which different rules apply. For a brāhmaṇa Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava to refuse to sit and eat beside a śūdra at a religious festival would be wrong, but for him to make sure his daughter is wed to another brāhmaṇa would be seen as perfectly normal. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya* can thus be characterised as denominational rather than sectarian.<sup>114</sup>

There is almost no evidence of conflicts between Gauḍīyas and the political powers, for example the Muslim rulers of mediaeval Bengal. Rather, the relationship between Hindus and Muslims seems to have been relatively good at that time.<sup>115</sup> Many influential Gauḍīyas also supported the British rulers of Bengal before independence.<sup>116</sup>

The main rituals in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism are *japa*, repetition of Kṛṣṇa's name on a rosary; *kīrtana*, congregational chanting of Kṛṣṇa's names or

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112 Turner (1991), 155-165. Turner bases his analysis on early writings by Edward C. Dimock, some of which he himself later admitted as being wrong. See Dimock (1989), preface.

113 As stated by for example Sanjukta Gupta (1989), 243

114 O'Connell (1997), 47.

115 Eaton (1992), 167-177

116 Chakrabarty (1985), 396

songs about Kṛṣṇa or Caitanya, especially the *mahā-mantra*,<sup>117</sup> hearing the scriptures, especially the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, and worshipping the image of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>118</sup>

I have not been able to find any reliable statistical information about Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas in India. W.J. Wilkins, writing in 1887, claims that the greater part of the about 8 million Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal (one fifth of the whole Hindu community) are Gauḍīyas.<sup>119</sup> However, according to the census of 1881, only 568, 052 Bengalis were Vaiṣṇavas, while in 1901 they were calculated to be 391, 392.<sup>120</sup> Unfortunately, since 1931 the sects within religions have not been recorded. The census of 1991 gives the total amount of Hindus for West Bengal as 50, 866, 624.<sup>121</sup> Joseph T. O'Connell speaks about "a few million Vaiṣṇava Bengalis".<sup>122</sup>

## 2.2 History of the *saṃpradāya*

### 2.2.1 Caitanya and his contemporaries

What we know about Caitanya's life is mostly based on several near-contemporary hagiographies written by his followers. While they differ on some details, the main facts are commonly accepted.<sup>123</sup> Caitanya was born 1486 as Viśvambhara Mīśra in Navadvīpa, a town famed for traditional learning, about 130 kms norths of Calcutta in modern West Bengal. He spent his youth engrossed in study and teaching, apparently not interested in religious issues. By sixteen he was already consid-

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117 *hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare/ hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare//*

118 BRS 1.2.91-93

119 Wilkins (1975), 323

120 Chakrabarty (1985), 385

121 [www.censusindia.net](http://www.censusindia.net)

122 O'Connell (1986), 51

123 Here I primarily follow the secondary sources Brooks (1989), 44-51, and De (1961), 67-102. For good narrations by practitioners, see for example Ghose (1990), Kapoor (1997), Sambidananda Das (1994) and Tirtha (1947). For an study of one such hagiography, see Śāstrī (1992).

ered a great pundit and had his own school. A pilgrimage to sacred Gayā<sup>124</sup> at the age of 22 changed everything. There Viśvambhara met the ascetic Īśvara Purī and received from him initiation into the Kṛṣṇa-mantra. Gone was the pedantic scholar – now Viśvambhara (also known as Nīmaī) spent more and more time in ecstatic trances, and in *kīrtana*, congregational chanting of songs about Kṛṣṇa or just his names. He quickly gathered a large following.

The *kīrtanas* were in the beginning kept behind locked doors, but soon became so popular that they upset the Muslim administrators of the town, who tried to stop them. Viśvambhara defied the prohibitions and arranged huge, nightly *nāgara-kīrtanas* (congregational chanting in the town streets) that apparently made the Muslims back down and revoke their prohibitions. Viśvambhara's popularity grew, and more and more people started to proclaim his divinity. However, only two years after his trip to Gayā, he renounced his family and accepted the renounced order of *sannyāsa* from one Keśava Bhārati. With the rod and saffron robes of the *sannyāsin*, he also received a new name: Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. The biographers give different reasons for his taking of *sannyāsa*, but the one generally accepted is that he thought the position of a *sannyāsin* would be the most favourable for spreading his message.

Caitanya had initially wanted to settle down in Vṛndāvana after accepting *sannyāsa*, but he was convinced instead to go to Puri in Orissa, where his old mother could receive news from him more easily, and probably also since his followers in Navadvīpa could more conveniently visit him there. After just a few days in Puri, Caitanya converted the court scholar Vāsudeva Sarvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya and received the favourable attention of the king. He did not linger for long, however, but soon set out for a six-year pilgrimage to the south of India and Vṛndāvana. After he returned from Vṛndāvana in 1515, he did not again leave Puri, but spent his time there increasingly absorbed in even violent religious trances. His passing in 1533 is

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124 For more information on the pilgrimage centre at Gayā, see Vidyarthi (1961)



shrouded in mystery: his followers say he merged with the image of Jagannātha or Gopīnātha,<sup>125</sup> while others have suggested less mystical versions: septic fever, drowning in the ocean while in a trance, assassination by jealous temple priests/ royal officers, etc.<sup>126</sup>

Already during his lifetime, Caitanya was deified. It appears that at first he was seen as a descent of Kṛṣṇa, come for the purpose of spreading devotion in the present degraded age of Kali, but later the more esoteric doctrine of Caitanya being a dual incarnation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa became the norm. Ritual worship of Caitanya seems to have begun even before his death, though it finds no mention in the writings of the Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana.<sup>127</sup>

While it seems unlikely that Caitanya conceived of himself as a social reformer, his *sampradāya* had several important effects on particularly Bengali society. An emphasis on bhakti began to permeate also other sects; even non-Vaiṣṇavas accepted Caitanya as an *avatāra*; ritual sacrifices and drinking of wine as a religious ritual was almost completely abolished; open drinking among “polished society” became a matter of the past and instead came to be seen as a vice; caste distinctions were lowered (especially at religious occasions); education was spread to lower castes and even women; and (according to some) widow remarriage became more acceptable.<sup>128</sup>

Caitanya’s main companions were Nityānanda and Advaita. Nityānanda (1473-1545)<sup>129</sup> was a Raṅghīya brāhmaṇa who at an early age took initiation from Mādhavendra Purī, the guru of Īśvara Purī, Caitanya’s guru. Probably he also received *sannyāsa*-initia-

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125 Kapoor (1997), 617

126 Acharya (1989), De (1961), 102, Sastri (1988), 62-63

127 De (1961), 421-422

128 Chatterjee (1983), 157-170. Widow remarriage has been practiced at least amongst the *jāti vaiṣṇavas*. See Kennedy (1925), 178.

129 The estimate of Sukhamaya Mukhopadhyaya, quoted in Chakrabarty (1985), 154

tion.<sup>130</sup> He travelled between different holy places before meeting Caitanya in Navadvīpa 1509. Caitanya regarded him as his older brother, and he soon became one of Caitanya's most charismatic and enthusiastic followers. Nityānanda converted Jagai and Mādhai, two notorious ruffians, a feat that brought great fame to Caitanya's *saṃpradāya*. When Caitanya was awarded *sannyāsa* and left for Puri, Nityānanda accompanied him and preached in Puri until Caitanya sent him back to Bengal to spread the movement there.

Nityānanda's style of propagation was highly unorthodox – he dressed in costly and colourful silks, wore expensive jewelry and wielded an iron rod he would swing above his head while dancing in *kīrtana*. By all accounts he seems to have been extremely charismatic. Moreover, he had no qualms about associating with and initiating people from low castes, or in other ways breaking what he conceived of as worldly social rules. He had many disciples, especially from the mercantile classes. His most controversial act was, however, that he married twice at a fairly advanced age, giving up his *sannyāsa*.<sup>131</sup>

Advaita (1454-1550)<sup>132</sup> was a Vārendra brāhmaṇa from Sylhet, who had moved to Navadvīpa and become the leader of the small Vaiṣṇava community there already before Caitanya's birth. Like Nityānanda, he was a disciple of Mādhavendra Purī. He also had two wives. He spoke furiously against the brāhmiṇical reaction of the age, and it is said that for years before the birth of Caitanya he prayed to Viṣṇu that he would descend into the world. Later, he was the first

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130 Some (e.g. Rosen (1991), 81) maintain that he never formally accepted *sannyāsa*, while others hold that he did (e.g. Sasmal (2000), 146-150). The second alternative seems more plausible.

131 Chakrabarty (1985), 133-158. Yati Maharaj (1998), 15-23 argues that Nityānanda's marriage is a later concoction, mainly on the basis of the silence of CB and CC in this matter. There can be other reasons for that, and to uphold his theory he has to reject practically all of later tradition.

132 According to Sukhamaya Mukhopadhyaya, quoted in Chakrabarty (1985), 123. The apocryphical *Advaitaprakāśa* gives the dates 1434-1559.

to publicly declare the divinity of Caitanya. He was an ardent follower of Caitanya, but seems to have had a much more intellectual approach to bhakti than did Nityānanda, as well as (with a few exceptions) a more conservative opinion on social issues. His headquarter was in Śāntipura near Navadvīpa, a town that became famous for its brāhminical orthodoxy. He had six sons, out of which some were rejected for not accepting the divinity of Caitanya.<sup>133</sup>

Caitanya commissioned both Advaita and Nityānanda to spread the faith in Bengal. The relationship between the two seems to have been rather strained. The hagiographies contain several accounts of “love-quarrels” between the two, where Advaita would accuse Nityānanda of being a madman, whose caste and ancestors was unknown, while Nityānanda would malign Advaita as being a greedy brāhmaṇa. These narrations have been interpreted by several scholars to be an attempt at explaining away the bitter rivalry between the two.<sup>134</sup> However that may be, at least their followers have had sharp disputes in the past centuries, especially in regard to social issues.

In the opinion of some scholars, Caitanya was much too preoccupied with his devotional ecstasies to make any effort at organising or spreading a movement.<sup>135</sup> Later research has come to a different conclusion. Not only did Caitanya depute Nityānanda and Advaita to spread the faith in Bengal, he also sent a small group of renunciant disciples to Vṛndāvana, to there “rediscover” the holy places associated with the life of Kṛṣṇa, spread the movement and write theological treatises on bhakti.<sup>136</sup> These renunciants later became known as the “six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana”<sup>137</sup>. They developed Vṛndāvana into an important Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava centre, with imposing temples

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133 Chakrabarty (1985), 122-132

134 Ibid, 128; Dimock (1989), 88-89

135 E.g. De (1961), 103

136 Chatterjee (1983)

137 Gosvāmin is within the tradition usually explained to mean “master of the sense faculties” (e.g. Hawley (1992), 6).

staffed by Bengali devotees, pilgrimage routes and so on. They also created a comprehensive theology around Caitanya's teachings.<sup>138</sup>

Apart from these three groups, there were many others, such as that of Gaḍādhara Paṇḍita, another close associate of Caitanya; Narahari Sarkāra and others at Śrīkhaṇḍa; Nakula Brahmācārin in Ambikā; and Vakreśvara Paṇḍita in Orissa. All these persons initiated disciples, built temples and wrote songs (*padas*) and books.

### 2.2.2 Later developments

Very soon after the death of Caitanya two distinct branches of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism formed: a Bengali branch and a Vṛndāvana branch. The Bengali branch was by far the larger, but it comprised many internally different groups (followers of Nityānanda, Advaita and so on). It was characterised by a fervent belief in the divinity of Caitanya, charismatic preachers and great emotions. The Vṛndāvana branch, again, grew up around the scholastic teachings of the six Gosvāmins and the temples they founded, and was centred around Kṛṣṇa than Caitanya. The theology of the Vṛndāvana branch ultimately triumphed, and from the beginning of the seventeenth century came to be the commonly accepted dogma of the *saṃpradāya*. However, a synthesis between the Vṛndāvana emphasis on Kṛṣṇa and the Bengal emphasis on Caitanya was not reached until the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>139</sup>

It appears that the *saṃpradāya* in Bengal and Orissa suffered a setback after the death of Caitanya and his close contemporaries, but this was remedied by the efforts of Śrīnivāsa Ācārya, Narottama Dāsa and Śyāmānanda at the end of the sixteenth cen-

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138 For elaborate descriptions of these remarkable men, see Kapoor (1995b), Rosen (1991), or for a shorter summary, Brooks (1989), 47-52. For a comprehensive study on the development of Vṛndāvana, see Entwistle (1987).

139 Chakrabarty (1985), 221

tury and the beginning of the seventeenth.<sup>140</sup> These three were disciples of the Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana, charged with the task of bringing the Vṛndāvana dogma to Bengal and Orissa, and to spread the faith there. This they did with so much success that historian A.N. Chatterjee writes that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism was the most popular creed in Bengal in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Śrīnivāsa's most important accomplishment was converting the king of Vana Viṣṇupura in the Bankura district of Bengal to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, thus giving the movement enthusiastic royal patronage. Narottama Dāsa is most famous for uniting the different Gauḍīya groups at a great festival in Kheturī and for his beautiful devotional songs in colloquial Bengali.<sup>141</sup> Śyāmānanda and his disciple Rasikānanda spread the *saṃpradāya* in southern West Bengal and Orissa.

While these three were active mainly in Bengal and Orissa, disciples of Narottama Dāsa took the faith to Manipur on the border to Burma, where Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism became the state religion.<sup>142</sup> Vīrabhadra, the son of Nityānanda, continued his father's work of converting even the low castes into Vaiṣṇavism, and was particularly successful around Dacca in modern Bangladesh.<sup>143</sup>

The Śrīkhaṇḍa group developed the Gaurāṅga-nāgara doctrine, where Caitanya is regarded as a playful lover of the young girls of Navadvīpa, just like Kṛṣṇa is of the *gopīs* or cowherdresses of Vrindavan. This doctrine was considered unorthodox by most other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, and some even considered it heretical.<sup>144</sup>

At the same time the development of Vṛndāvana continued, where the intensely religious life of the Gosvāmins drew support from many quarters. British Magistrate of Mathurā F.S. Growse wrote:

140 Exactly dating these three important persons is difficult. For an attempt, see Chakrabarty (1985), 208-210.

141 These songs have been printed countless times. See e.g. Bhakti-śrīrūpa Siddhāntī Gosvāmī Mahārāja (1995), 48-112.

142 Chatterjee (1983), 59-67

143 Ibid, 55

144 For a modern apology of the Gaurāṅga-nāgara-doctrine, see Gadādhara Prāṇa Dāsa (1999).

Their fame spread so rapidly that in 1570, the emperor Akbar was induced to pay them a visit, and was taken blindfolded into the sacred Nidhban, where such a marvellous vision was revealed to him, that he was fain to acknowledge the place as indeed holy ground. Hence the cordial support which he gave to the attendant Rajas, when they declared their intention of erecting a series of buildings more worthy of the local divinity.<sup>145</sup>

The date is contested by some,<sup>146</sup> and the whole story may be fabricated, but what is certain is that the Gosvāmins did receive support from Hindu kings (such as Mān Singh) without interference from the muslim government. Large Kṛṣṇa-temples made of red sandstone were erected: Sanātana Gosvāmin's Madana-mohana around 1580; Madhu Paṇḍita's Gopinātha ca 1585 and Rūpa Gosvāmin's Govindadeva in 1590. The last in this series of "original temples" of Vṛndāvana, Yugala-kiśora, was completed in 1627.<sup>147</sup> These temples were remarkable accomplishments also in terms of architecture: Growse remarked that the Govindadeva temple "is the most impressive religious edifice Hindu art has ever produced, at least in Upper India".<sup>148</sup> Many other temples were also built.

While Vṛndāvana has from its beginnings/ renaissance in the sixteenth century always contained other Vaiṣṇava groups than the Gauḍīyas,<sup>149</sup> Raghunātha dāsa and Jīva Gosvāmins developed Rādhā-kuṇḍa (a small pond 14 miles from Vṛndāvana first identified by Caitanya himself), the pond of Kṛṣṇa's sweetheart Rādhā, into an exclusively Gauḍīya holy place considered to be the holiest of all holy places.<sup>150</sup> For the most part the Gosvāmins entrusted the maintenance of the temples and the daily worship of their images to householder disciples, probably thinking that family lines would be

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145 Growse (1979), 241

146 Brooks (1989), 52 gives the year 1573

147 Ibid, 53

148 Growse (1979), 61

149 Hawley (1992) ,275

150 Haberman (1988), 116, Mukherjee & Wright [n.d], 314-317. For a detailed insider view of Rādhā-kuṇḍa, see Mahānidhī Swami (1995).

the most efficient way to ensure the continued worship of the images. Rādhā-kuṇḍa, however, was mostly a place for renunciants.

However, this rapid development was not to last. Emperor Aurangzeb, grandson of Akbar, was infamous as an iconoclast, and Vṛndāvana was uncomfortably close to his capital at Fatehpur Sikhri. In connection with the Jāt-rebellion he sent troops to the Mathurā area in 1669, and fearing that the soldiers would destroy or desecrate the temples in Vṛndāvana, the priests secretly moved almost all the images of Kṛṣṇa to Jaipur, where the independent king Jai Singh offered them his protection. With the images, most of the priests who took care of them also left. While the political situation would eventually calm down, the images stayed in Jaipur, a city that thus became an important Gauḍīya centre of its own.<sup>151</sup>

It appears that by the end of the seventeenth century, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya* had lost some of its vitality. No doubt many important saints, theologians and charismatic preachers appeared after that (such as theologian Viśvanātha Chakravartin in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century or the philosopher Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century), but nobody was able to unify the different groups as Śrinivāsa, Narottama and Śyāmānanda had done. The reasons for this stagnation are several. Since the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement failed to present a new economic organisation that could have challenged the economic base of the *varṇāśrama* system, the brāhmaṇas were able to retain their dominant position within it.<sup>152</sup> Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scholars had done their best to equate their kind of Vaiṣṇavism with brāhmaṇism to get the support from the high and influential classes. The success of this policy, however, undermined the public support of the *saṃpradāya*. Coupled with a growing pressure to conform to orthodox Hindu rules of caste this led the *saṃpradāya* to largely give up the character of castelessness.<sup>153</sup>

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151 Chatterjee (1983), 76-77

152 Chakrabarty (1985), 345

153 Chatterjee (1983), 257, Sen (1992), 149

Gurus (with some exceptions) refused to accept disciples from low castes, thinking that they would become contaminated by their company.<sup>154</sup> The creative power of the movement that had manifested in a wealth of song, poetry and drama, also seemed to be spent. More songs and poems were written, but they were mostly little more than copies of the works of past masters. Sukumar Sen blames this stagnation on the rigid dogma of the Vṛndāvana Gosvāmins,<sup>155</sup> but another possibility is that the rather limited traditional Vaiṣṇava themes had simply become over-worked.<sup>156</sup>

At the same time, Bengali society went through great changes. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Moghul empire in only a couple of years lost its hold over Bengal. The absence of any other strong government before the British consolidated their power in Bengal in 1757 made life difficult for the common people. Especially the weavers and peasants were badly affected by the influx of British mercantile capital. The Mārāthā raids, starting in 1742, did not make things better. All these factors led to the birth of a great number of unorthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sects. These groups simultaneously protested against “the company doing business in the name of religion”<sup>157</sup> or orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and offered refuge to the lower castes.<sup>158</sup>

For Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, the introduction of British “law and order” was a happy event. While the petty kings, who for the most part worshipped Kālī, were ruined by the so-called Permanent Settlement of land in 1793, the new rich of Calcutta prospered. These people were for the most part Vaiṣṇavas or at least sup-

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154 See Kapoor (1995a), 36-37 for the story (with a happy ending) of how one saint was excommunicated for initiating a cobbler.

155 Sen (1992), 98.

156 As Sen in fact acknowledges later in his book (Sen (1992), 159)

157 Suhotra Swami (1997), 46-47

158 Chakrabarty (1985), 346



porters of Vaiṣṇavism. Ramakanta Chakrabarty goes as far as claiming that

...the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism at the end of the seventeenth century and at the beginning of the eighteenth century was an indirect effect of the consolidation of British power in Bengal, which put an end to murder and plunder in the name of [Kālī] religion.<sup>159</sup>

With the introduction of the printing press in Bengal and through the “Bengali renaissance” Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism was also infused with new life. The classic texts were printed and widely distributed. Old manuscripts were found (and fabricated), edited and published. Also, a new and clearly defined enemy was there to unify the separate groups: of all Hindu gods, Kṛṣṇa was probably the one who drew the strongest critique from the British and other westerners.

The whole history of this famous God is one of lust, robbery, deceit and murder ... the history of the whole hierarchy of Hindooism is one of shameful iniquity, too vile to be described.<sup>160</sup>

The conception of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism was usually also not very positive among learned society, even among the Bengalis themselves.

Starting from a basis of religious brotherhood and perfect equality, they have developed distinctions and class barriers among themselves, almost as stringent as those among the general Hindu community... The sect has degenerated from its former high standard of faith and morals, and holds a very low place in popular estimation.<sup>161</sup>

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159 Chakrabarty (1985), 385

160 Gogerly, quoted in Chakrabarty (1985), 412

161 Hunter (1886), 133

This sect, like so many others, began as a reform, only to become worse than its rivals.<sup>162</sup>

Faced with such criticism, reformers such as Kedarnātha Datta Bhaktivinoda (1838-1914) and Śīśirkumar Ghoṣe (1840-1911) endeavoured to show how their religion was at the forefront, fully suitable for educated and intelligent gentlemen.<sup>163</sup>

Beside the traditional Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava groups, several new groups, often embedded with a specific social mission, were founded by charismatic preachers such as Vijay Kṛṣṇa Goswami (1841-1899), Rādhāramaṇa Caraṇa Dāsa Bābajī (1853-1905), Jagadbandhu (1871-1921), Haribolānanda Ṭhākura (?-1925) and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī (1874-1937), the son of Kedarnātha Datta.<sup>164</sup>

The twentieth century saw Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas attempting to spread the faith to the west. Premānanda Bhārati (1857-1914) was the first. He arrived (after a short stay in Paris and London) in New York on October 15, 1902. He remained in the United States for five years, starting a small society, publishing a book on Kṛṣṇa and a journal, and making several disciples. With six admirers, he returned to India in 1907, making headlines especially in Madras. He returned briefly to the United States in 1910, but left abruptly the next year, apparently because of poor health. His influence faded quickly after his death, and most of his disciples converted into various kinds of Christianity.<sup>165</sup>

The next attempt came in 1933, when Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī sent some of his most prominent disciples, led by Swami B.H. Bon Maharaj (1901-1982) to London. Small monasteries were opened

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162 Hopkins (1895), 57

163 Chakrabarty (1985), 394. For a valuable study of Kedarnātha Datta and the Bengali renaissance, see Shukavak Dasa (1999)

164 Ibid, 401, Kapoor (1995a)

165 Carney (1998). Haridāsa dāsa (1981), 326 claims that he would have had 5000 American disciples!

in London and Berlin, a few books published and some disciples made. Also in this case little remained after the last missionary returned to India in 1937, though a small temple in London is still there.<sup>166</sup> Not before Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1896-1977) founded ISKCON in New York in 1966 did Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism acquire a substantial footing in the West. In the wake of his success, several other Gauḍīya groups have established themselves in the West, and western Gauḍīyas are now a common sight in the holy places of the movement in India.<sup>167</sup>

Otherwise, the second part of the twentieth century has been a period of decline for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, with the exception of some of the modern groups. While probably more financial resources than ever before are available, *āśramas* and *maṭhas* all over are lacking in manpower. A famous institution such as the Gaṅgamātā Maṭha in Purī, which at times has housed hundreds of renunciants, had in 2001 only 12 inmates. Many institutions are recruiting their manpower mainly from Bangladesh, where the politically oppressed Hindus view going to India as a positive prospect in life. With such a motivation, it is hardly surprising that these members may not be up to the strict standards of orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.<sup>168</sup> Not only that: it is no longer granted that the son of a Vaiṣṇava will become a Vaiṣṇava. Practitioners offer several explanations for these problems: the rampant materialism from abroad;<sup>169</sup> the modern tendency of breaking the rules set down by the ancient authorities;<sup>170</sup> or the perversion of the present *Kali-yuga*, dark age.<sup>171</sup> Perhaps the comparatively strict rules Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas

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166 Broo (1999). For more information about these missionaries, see Bhṛgumuni Dāsa (forthcoming)

167 See e.g. Brooks (1989)

168 IF mgt 2002/9b

169 IF mgt 2000/86

170 IF mgt 2002/12

171 IF mgt 2002/9b

have to abide by make the movement unattractive to modern Bengalis, faced with so many more choices than their predecessors. Whatever the reason, it is clear that in present Bengal, Vaiṣṇavism has lost a lot of ground to Śāktism, the worship of Kālī and Durgā.

## 2.3 Institutions

### 2.3.1 Saṃpradāya

Traditionally there are said to be four Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāyas*.<sup>172</sup> Three verses attributed to the *Padma Purāṇa* state:

Mantras without a *saṃpradāya* are considered fruitless. Therefore, in the age of Kali there will be four Vaiṣṇava founders of *saṃpradāyas*: Śrī, Brahmā, Rudra and Sanaka: purifiers of the earth. In the Kali age, these four will appear from the supreme person in Utkala.

Śrī claimed Rāmānuja; fourfaced Brahmā, Madhva; Rudra, the honourable Viṣṇusvāmin; the four Sanas, Nimbāditya.<sup>173</sup>

While historical persons are mentioned as the heads of these *saṃpradāyas*, they are all given a divine beginning.<sup>174</sup> These four *saṃpradāyas* (in their modern forms) can be called the main Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāyas* even today, but many more are found. Wilson enumerates twenty,<sup>175</sup> but there is no doubt that there are many more. However, the concept of “four *saṃpradāyas*” is well-known, so most Vaiṣṇava groups will acknowledge a connection, at least formally, with one of the four *saṃpradāyas* listed above. The Rāmānandīs, for example, are known as “the northern Śrī Vaiṣṇavas”. Where, then, do the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas enter into this scheme?

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172 Clémentin-Ohja (2001), 184

173 Quoted in *Prameya Ratnāvalī* 1.5-6. These verses are not found in modern editions of the *Padma Purāṇa*.

174 These *saṃpradāyas* are also known respectively as the *Rāmānuja-*, *Mādhva-*, *Nimbārka-* and *Vallabha-saṃpradāyas*, according to their founder/ most prominent theologian. In this thesis, I will generally use the names given above.

175 Wilson (1958), 15-16

The earliest Gauḍīya sources (such as the first hagiographies of Caitanya) say nothing or very little about the *saṃpradāya* of Caitanya. It is obvious that his teachings do not exactly follow those of any already established *saṃpradāya*. Since the Gauḍīyas regard Caitanya as not only an *avatāra* of the Lord but the *avatārin*, source of all *avatāras*, some also think that he could not be part of any *saṃpradāya*, but that his *saṃpradāya* would include all others.<sup>176</sup> His *saṃpradāya* would thus be a new one, one outside the four mentioned before, but also above them. Others argue that since Caitanya, even though God himself, acted as a perfect devotee for the sake of showing an example for others to follow, he would not initiate a new *saṃpradāya* but would connect himself to an already existing one, at least in form.<sup>177</sup>

All sources agree on Caitanya's taking mantra-initiation from Īśvara Purī in Gayā 1509. Īśvara Purī gave him the ten-syllable mantra, after which Caitanya started to exhibit ecstatic love for Krishna.<sup>178</sup> About one and a half years later, in January 1510, he took *sannyāsa*-initiation from Keśava Bhārati in Katwa. It was from him that he received the name Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, or simply Caitanya.<sup>179</sup> The names "Purī" and "Bhārati", and the fact that these two were *sannyāsins*, seem to indicate that these gurus were members of two of the Daśanāmi orders instituted by Śāṅkara. However, the teachings of these persons and that of Śāṅkara are radically different.<sup>180</sup> Both, or at least Īśvara Purī, were disciples of one Mādhavendra Purī, whom later tradition connects through Lakṣmīpati Tirtha with the Madhva- or Brahmā-saṃpradāya.<sup>181</sup> There are thus two main alternatives: that he belonged to the Śāṅkara-*saṃpradāya*<sup>182</sup>, or to the Madhva-*saṃpradāya*.<sup>183</sup>

176 Sunderananda Vidyāvinod, quoted in Kapoor (1976), 45

177 Yati Maharaj (1994b), 118

178 See for example CB 1.17.105-108

179 CB 2.28.101-181

180 For a summary, see Sambidānanda Das (1994), 47-48

181 E.g. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa in *Prameya-ratnāvalī* 1.7

182 Argued by for example Elkman (1986)

183 Argued by for example Kapoor (1976), 36-52

The main reason for the desire of many Gauḍīyas to connect their *saṃpradāya* with that of Madhva (referring to themselves as the Brahmā-Madhva-Gauḍīya *saṃpradāya*) is probably to give it added authority. The debate over this issue is an ongoing one, but one somewhat irrelevant for the purpose of this thesis, since even if Caitanya was affiliated with any previous *saṃpradāya*, his *saṃpradāya* is for all practical purposes a new one. The teachings of Madhva and especially those of Śaṅkara are in many ways drastically different from those of Caitanya and his followers. In describing Caitanya's *saṃpradāya*, little is gained by comparing it to that of Śaṅkara or Madhva.

### 2.3.2 Early descriptions of Caitanya's *saṃpradāya*

In describing the *saṃpradāya* of Caitanya, the early writers within it generally just list the prominent members. Kavi Karṇapūra's *Gauraganoddeśa-dīpikā* (A lamp to see the associates of Caitanya) from 1576<sup>184</sup> is perhaps the first work that tries to systematise the groups within the Gauḍīya *saṃpradāya*. Kavi Karṇapūra basically divides the leading devotees into two groups: *gopālas* and *mahantas*.<sup>185</sup>

*Gopāla* means cowherd. The idea is that just as Nityānanda is Balarāma in divine Vṛndāvana, his band of followers in this world are the cowherd boys there. Usually twelve *gopālas* are mentioned.<sup>186</sup> The *gopālas* are said to be the first Gauḍīya organisation in Bengal, since they were appointed already during the time of Caitanya.<sup>187</sup> Later on, towards the end of the sixteenth century, another category,

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184 De (1961), 45-46 argues for this date against another version (1544). He seems to doubt the book a genuine work of Kavi Karnapura, but as he himself points out (p 46), it is quoted with approval by writers in the 18th century. I see little reason for doubting the genuineness of this work.

185 GGD 13-17

186 But see Chakrabarty (1985), 160-161

187 Amulyadharan Rayabhatta, quoted in Chakrabarty (1985), 159

*upa-gopālas* (subordinate cowherds) was added.<sup>188</sup> In his *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja mentions the names of these persons, but does not specifically call them *gopālas*.<sup>189</sup>

Most of these *gopālas* were householders. They assisted Nityānanda in his great campaigns, but gradually settled down and established their *śrīpats* or headquarters in different parts of Bengal, mainly in the Burdwan, Hoogly and Nadia districts. These *śrīpats* could be just their own houses, or whole *āśramas* with a big temple of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa or Gaura-Nityānanda and endowed land. The *gopālas* had the right to preach Caitanya's doctrines within their own areas, and collect donations for their *śrīpats*, gradually developing them into centres of Vaiṣṇavism, even into holy places.<sup>190</sup>

The word *mahanta* ("great") generally means the leader ("abbot") of a *maṭha* (and will be used in that sense elsewhere in this thesis), but here it more generally refers to "great devotees". Kavi Karṇapūra further divides the *mahantas* into those belonging to the group of Caitanya, Advaita, Gadādhara and Śrīvāsa. It is clear that this category is more artificial than the twelve *gopālas* appointed by Nityānanda: these persons had much less in common. As the *gopālas*, the *mahāntas* were usually householders and had their own *śrīpats*.

The number of these *mahantas* is not given by Kavi Karṇapūra, but it must have grown from year to year. By the time of Devakīnandana and Narahari Chakravartin's *Bhakti-ratnākara* (18<sup>th</sup> century) they had been fixed at 64, but Narahari admitted that there was actually no end to their number.<sup>191</sup> Some arrange them into eight groups of eight.<sup>192</sup> At some point, possibly towards the middle of the sixteenth century, another category was added: *upa-* or secondary

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188 These are mentioned already in GGD 14

189 CC 1.11

190 See the dictionary of *tīrthas* (holy places) in Haridāsa Dāsa (1995)

191 BR 9.408

192 Radhanath Kabasi, quoted in Chakrabarty (1985), 187

*mahantas*. New *mahantas* and *upa-mahantas* were created until the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>193</sup>

Another attempt at describing Caitanya's *saṁpradāya* is found in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. The *saṁpradāya* is given the metaphorical form of a tree of devotion. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja writes:

The Lord thought: "I bear the name Viśvambhara, the maintainer of the world. My name will be successful if I fill the world with love." Thinking like this, the Lord took up the duties of a gardener. In Navadvīpa he started growing a garden. The gardener Śrī Caitanya brought the desire tree of devotion to earth, planted the seed and sprinkled it with the water of his desire.<sup>194</sup>

The author then proceeds to describe this tree of devotion. The seed is devotion, the first two sprouts Mādhavendra Purī and Īśvara Purī, and the main trunk Caitanya himself. The tree is supported by nine roots, one (Paramānanda Purī) growing straight downward, and eight (eight other *sannyāsins*) in all the directions and sub-directions. Out of the Caitanya tree grows three main branches: that of Advaita, that of Nityānanda, and that of Gadādhara. Beside these branches, 130 smaller branches spread out from the Caitanya tree. Those are Caitanya's main followers in Bengal, Orissa and Vāranaśī.

Then the three main branches are described. From the Nityānanda branch 75 sub-branches spread out in all directions. The main sub-branch is Vīrabhadra, Nityānanda's son, who is declared to be the Lord himself. From him unlimited further branches grow. The Advaita-branch includes 38 sub-branches, foremost amongst whom is Acyutānanda, one of Advaita's sons. However, because of severing their connection with the main trunk (Caitanya) some of these branches dried up and died. The Gadādhara-branch has 33 sub-branches.

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193 Chakrabarty (1985), 186-187

194 CC 1.9.7-9



This tree of devotion represents the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement as known to Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja. All the famous Vaiṣṇavas contemporary with Caitanya and those in the first, and in some cases second, generation after him are mentioned. It is interesting to see that Mādhavendra Purī is the “first sprout” of the seed of devotion in this world. The same idea is echoed elsewhere in Kṛṣṇadāsa’s work: Mādhavendra Purī is seen as the first who propagated the kind of ecstatic love for Kṛṣṇa that Caitanya later would spread.<sup>195</sup> This Mādhavendra Purī was a Bengali ascetic who travelled widely and is said to have rediscovered an old image of Gopāla lifting the Govardhana hill in Vṛndāvana. He established worship of him with Bengali priests, but later on the Vaiṣṇavas of the Vallabha *saṁpradāya* brought the image to Nathwar in Rajasthan where it is known as Śrī Nāthajī and worshipped in great opulence. The followers of Vallabha also trace the beginning of their *saṁpradāya* to him.<sup>196</sup> The next sprout is Mādhavendra Purī’s favourite disciple Īśvara Purī, the guru of Caitanya. We can thus see that the picture of the tree so far follows the *paramparā* or disciplic succession (Mādhavendra Purī – Īśvara Purī – Caitanya).

The gurus of the nine *sannyāsins* that stayed with Caitanya in Purī are not all known. In the few cases where they are known, he is Mādhavendra Purī. Since they were senior to Caitanya, and since they sometimes offered him advice, they are portrayed as the roots of the tree, keeping it in place. About some of these we know nothing, but since Caitanya regarded Paramānanda Purī as his superior and as a manifestation of Mādhavendra Purī himself<sup>197</sup>, Paramānanda Purī is described as the main root. Here the relation is not so much connected to *paramparā*.

The main trunk of the tree is Caitanya himself. While Caitanya did not begin this movement, he is the main part, and all subsequent

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195 CC 3.8.36

196 Brooks (1989), 46

197 CB 3.3.172

persons are thought to derive their spiritual nourishment from him. From the trunk branches grow out in different directions. Caitanya is thus the guru of all in his *saṁpradāya* – but directly not of anyone. There are no proofs that Caitanya himself would have ritually initiated anyone.<sup>198</sup> However, as Sanātana Gosvāmin writes, commenting on the statement by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin that Caitanya is the guru of the world,

Since he is the indwelling teacher [being God], and since he is the highest authority, he personally is the guru of all living beings. Or alternatively: because of the propagation of devotion, mainly consisting of the congregational chanting of the names of the Lord (*saṁkīrtana*) everywhere, and especially by favouring even the fallen with the full teachings, he is the guru of the world.<sup>199</sup>

Caitanya could thus be called either the guru of the heart (*caitya-guru*) or the instructing guru (*śikṣā-guru*) of everyone. These terms will be analysed later (in 3.4).

What this tree thus tells us about the Gauḍīya *saṁpradāya* in the very beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is that there existed four main groups: that of Caitanya, that of Nityānanda, that of Advaita, and that of Gadādhara. Membership in these groups did not necessarily depend on initiation, particularly in the group of Caitanya (since he had no initiated disciples). This group seems to be more or less artificial: those that do not directly fit any of the other groups are placed in it. There is some overlap: Gadādhara is a member of Caitanya’s group

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198 See for example Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja (n.d.2), 52-53, or *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 2.1. Margaret Case (2000), 75, thinks that he made one exception and initiated Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin. Gopāla Bhaṭṭa himself, however, states that his guru is Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī in HBV 1.2.

199 *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 2.1. *cittādhiṣṭhātṛtvādinā sarveṣām api jīvānām parama-gurutayātmano ’pi sa eva gurur ity abhiṣṭṛeṭya likhati – jagad-gurum iti/ pakṣe sarvatraiva bhagavan-nāma-saṁkīrtana-pradhāna-bhakti-pracāraṇāj jagatām gurutvena viśeṣato dīna-jana-viśayaka-samagropadeśānugraheṇa gurum iti//*

and has his own, Paramānanda Purī is a root and a branch of the Caitanya group, Acyutānanda is a member of both Caitanya's and Advaita's groups. The reason for this is found in what has already been said: the groups are not exclusively groups of initiated disciples, but more of followers and supporters. It is natural for Acyutānanda to be part of Advaita's group since he is his son, but also of Caitanya's group, since he was a staunch supporter of his and had much more personal association with him than his brothers had. This description also tells us that there was already at least one deviant group: some of Advaita's sons had rejected Caitanya and thus severed themselves from his *sampradāya*. It also lets us know that Mādhavendra Purī was considered the first precursor to what Caitanya would preach all over India.

### 2.3.3 *Parivāra and Vaṃśa*

What strikes one when reading these descriptions is their fluid and improvised nature. There really seems to have been very little central organisation, but rather many different groups of devotees establishing their own places of worship and residence. There were of course not 64 *mahantas* in eight clusters of eight or twelve *gopālas* and as many *upa-gopālas*. These categories were ways of trying to organise and achieve an overview of a rather chaotic situation. It appears that since this system proved too unstable (since there was no clear limit to the number of different *mahantas*), and since it failed in routinising (see 8.2 for more about this concept) the personal charisma of Caitanya and his followers so that it could be carried onwards in an institutional form, it led to another: that of *parivāra* and *vaṃśa*.

*Parivāra* means retinue. While one could say that all Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas belong to the same camp, there are different subgroups within it. *Parivāra* could also be compared with the terms group or branch in the above descriptions. Disciples of a guru from a particular *parivāra* become members of the same *parivāra*. *Vaṃśa* means family or line of descent, and here refers to geneological descent, or

in other words, that persons born in a particular family become members of the particular *vaṁśa* the father belongs to. In other words, a *parivāra* is passed down by disciplic succession (*śiṣya-paramparā*), and a *vaṁśa* by seminal succession (*bindu-paramparā*). This means that every *vaṁśa* will also have a *parivāra*: someone born in the family line of Advaita belongs to the Advaita *vaṁśa*, while anyone who has taken initiation from a guru in the Advaita *vaṁśa* is a member of the Advaita *parivāra*.

The main *vaṁśas* and *parivāras* of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* are as follows.<sup>200</sup> Gadādhara was a celibate, so no *vaṁśa* comes from him, but a *parivāra* does. However, there is a *vaṁśa* called the Gadādhara *vaṁśa* that stems from his nephew Nayaṅānanda. From Gadādhara's grand-disciple, the female ascetic Gaṅgamātā Gosvāminī, stems another *parivāra*. From Advaita comes a *vaṁśa*. As already explained, Caitanya himself had no initiated disciples, but Vakreśvara Paṇḍita, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin and Lokanātha Gosvāmin were all his contemporaries and members of his group. From Vakreśvara stems the Vakreśvara *parivāra*. From Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, through his disciple Damodara, comes the *vaṁśa* of the Rādhā-ramaṇa Goswamis. Another disciple of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa's, Lalita Kīśora, started another *parivāra*. Yet another disciple, Śrinivāsa Ācārya, began his own *vaṁśa*. Lokanātha Gosvāmin's only disciple Narottama began a *parivāra*, and his disciple Gaṅganārāyaṇa Cakravartin yet another.

From Nityānanda's wife Jāhnavā comes one *parivāra*, and from his son (with his other wife, Vāsudhā) Virabhadra the Nityānanda *vaṁśa*. From his daughter Gaṅgadevī comes another *vaṁśa*. From Gauridāsa Paṇḍita (one of the *gopālas*) stems one *parivāra*. From his grand-disciple Śyāmānanda comes the Śyāmānanda *parivāra*. From Rasikānanda, Śyāmānanda's main disciple, comes a *vaṁśa*.

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200 Based on Entwistle [n.d.], IF mgt 2002/13 and Swami B.B. Tirtha (2001)

These are not all the *vaṃśas* and *parivāras* in existence today. In fact, most of the *mahantas* mentioned in the *Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā* have their own *vaṃśas*. There is one from Narahari Sarkāra, one from Murāri Gupta, one from the *kīrtana*-singer Vāsudeva Ghoṣa, etc. Most of the old temples of Vṛndāvana also have a *vaṃśa* of their own, established for the maintenance of the temple.

Important to note is that while it is generally thought that a *parivāra* or *vaṃśa* has to begin from one of Caitanya's immediate associates, the enumeration above shows that new ones have appeared since then. Those branching out in second or third generation (for example Śyāmānanda and Rasikānanda) are the last that are accepted by all Gauḍīyas.<sup>201</sup> Kennedy writes (in the beginning of the last century) that new *vaṃśas* are created all the time,<sup>202</sup> but I have not noticed any such tendency today. Such a practice would require a general growth of the Gauḍīya *saṃpradāya*, something that is not seen outside the modern groups.

While most of the teachings of the different groups are the same, they all have some peculiarities, and usually do not mingle much with each other. One member of the Jāhnavā *parivāra* told me that esoteric teachings, such as knowledge of one's own spiritual identity, should never be revealed outside one's own *parivāra*.<sup>203</sup> Members of different *vaṃśas* rarely mix.<sup>204</sup> On the other hand, at the time of festivals one can see members of different *parivāras* come together and freely associate with each other. There are several examples of persons taking initiation from a guru in one *parivāra*, and then *veśa*-initiation (see 6.2.3) from a guru from another *parivāra*.<sup>205</sup> Some gurus wanted to play down

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201 Field notes, Navadvīp, December 2000

202 Kennedy (1925), 153

203 IF 2000/14a

204 Sardella (2002), 31

205 E.g. Nityananda Das Babaji (2) in Kapoor (1999)

the differences between the *parivāras*, and instead focus on the common heritage from Caitanya.<sup>206</sup>

Most groups have a *tilaka* (sectarian mark) of their own, usually a slight variation of the basic two thin vertical lines running across the forehead and a triangular mark on the nose looking something like a *tulasī* leaf. Entwistle has listed and illustrated the *tilakas* of the different *parivāras*, but even a little field experience reveals that persons of a particular *parivāra* do not always use the “right” *tilaka*.<sup>207</sup>

The development of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya* into a loose cluster of *vaṃśas* and *parivāras* can, for the sake of contrast, be compared with the growth of another contemporary guru-centered movement: the Sikhs. While Sikhism today is regarded as a religion in its own right, that has not always been the case: from its beginnings in the late fifteenth century until the last part of the nineteenth century, when it had to distance itself from resurgent Hinduism, it was largely perceived as yet another Hindu guru-cult.

The movement we today know as Sikhism was begun by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) in the Punjab. Until the fourth guru, succession was by appointment, but the fifth, Arjan Das (1563-1606) was the youngest son of the fourth, and from there on succession became hereditary. This led to conflicts and rival gurus, especially when the eldest son was overstepped for some reason. When the eighth guru, Harkrishnan (1656-1664), died at the tender age of eight, as many as 22 different persons set themselves up as his successor. One of his uncles, Tegh Bahadur eventually emerged as the ninth guru. His son Gobind Singh (1666-1708) terminated the line of gurus by appointing the book *Guru Granth Sahib* (a collection of hymns by the gurus and others) as the guru for all time to come, and by forming the *Khalsa*, a kind of inner circle of strict Sikhs, wearing distinctive attributes and forming a tight-knit, martial society.

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206 E.g. IF mgt 2000/85

207 Entwistle (n.d.)

Gobind Singh had many reasons for taking such a radical step. From the time of the sixth guru, the Sikhs suffered great persecution at the hands of the Muslim rulers of North India and became increasingly martially focused. Gobind Singh did not have the option to give over the position to his offspring, since they had all been killed, and no doubt feared that the situation after the eighth guru would be repeated. Not everyone accepted his decision: Banda Singh (d. 1716), one of Gobind Singh's officers, became the next leader and also proclaimed himself the guru. After him, the political role of the guru was taken over by the meetings of the whole *Khalsa* (*Sarbat Khalsa*) until the independence of the Punjab under Ranjit Singh, who ruled autocratically, without however proclaiming himself guru. The Punjab was annexed by the British after his death in 1839, and since then there has been no real Sikh political power. The focus has been on the *Guru Granth Sahib*, honoured in ways very similar to how a living guru is honoured.<sup>208</sup>

The difference between the development of the guru institution in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and that in Sikhism can be attributed to many factors. The sources of the two movements, for example, are very different. Probably most important, however, is that since Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism never became persecuted as Sikhism was, it was not unified in the same way. There has not really been a need for a single political leader of the *saṃpradāya*. Moreover, since Caitanya did not appoint any one successor, the movement has been divided into different groups from the beginning, so that there has not been any one line of gurus to fall back on. While the doctrines of the Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana eventually did unify the theology of the *saṃpradāya*, without political power, the Vṛndāvana group was not able to unify the different factions when it came to organisation. Persons such as Śrīnivāsa and Narottama who perhaps tried to do so merely ended up as founders of their own *vaṃśas* and *parivāras*.

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208 Cole (1982), Duggal (1980).

### 2.3.4 Classes of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas

While modern Gauḍīyas do identify themselves as belonging to some *parivāra* or *vaṁśa*, it is in many cases useful to divide Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism into three divisions: the *goswamis* and their followers, the *bābājīs* and their followers, and the modern groups. The first two divisions consist of four classes of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.

The first class is the *goswami*, a guru born in one of the *vaṁśas* of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement.<sup>209</sup> He is in almost all cases a brāhmaṇa, and he has gained his guruship by inheriting it from his father or mother. These families of gurus are connected with families of disciples as well, where all the members accept initiation from the current head of the *goswami* family. Kennedy writes that *goswamis* “inherit” the disciples of their predecessor,<sup>210</sup> but that is strictly speaking not true. Disciples of a previous head of the *goswami* family will not become disciples of the new one; they will, however, usually support the current head, financially and otherwise.<sup>211</sup>

The *grhasthas* (householders) are the second class. They are the laity of the movement and thus comprise the greatest part of it. They belong to different castes and communities, and are usually disciples of some *goswami*. As observed already by Kennedy, they are not always exclusively Vaiṣṇava, but may also worship Śiva and Durgā.<sup>212</sup>

The third class or the *bābājīs* (“respected fathers”) are those who have received *veśa*, the simple loincloth that is the mark of the ascetics of the *saṁpradāya*. *Veśa*-initiation (see 6.2.3) is sometimes called Vaiṣṇava-*sannyāsa*.<sup>213</sup> As other *sannyāsis*, *bābājīs* take vows

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209 To distinguish this term from the title Gosvāmin (e.g. Rūpa Gosvāmin) I use the colloquial spelling *goswami*, as well as italics. When the term is used as a surname by *goswamis*, I spell it Goswami.

210 Kennedy (1925), 153

211 IF mgt 2000/68

212 Kennedy (1925), 160

213 E.g. Kapoor (1993), 141



of life-long celibacy and poverty. However, instead of saffron, they dress in white, and they do not carry a rod. Ideally, they are to live by *madhukāri*, begging a little from several houses, and devote all their time to *rāgānugā-sādhanā*-bhakti, internal spiritual culture.<sup>214</sup> Unlike *sannyāsa*, also non-brāhmaṇas can receive *veśa*, even women, who are then known as *mātājīs* (“respected mothers”). Rather than forming an organised order of monastics, they are individuals subservient only to their own gurus and the institutions where they stay, and their standards of renunciation, learning and so forth vary a great deal. The origin of the *veśa*-institution is unknown, but it is believed by some that it was introduced by Nityānanda’s son Vīrabhadra.<sup>215</sup> It appears that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the repute of the *bābājīs* and especially *mātājīs* was very low. It was common for *bābājīs* (who were supposed to live in celibacy) to openly live together with *mātājīs*.<sup>216</sup>

While some hold that originally the *goswamis* were the only initiating (*dīkṣā*) gurus of the movement,<sup>217</sup> nowadays *bābājīs* also accept disciples. This is probably one of the reasons for the conflict between the *bābājīs* and the *goswamis* that sometimes can be seen.<sup>218</sup>

The *jāti vaiṣṇavas* comprise the fourth class of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. Kennedy writes that it consists of the offspring of *bābājīs* and *mātājīs*, and others who have become Vaiṣṇavas after being rejected by their own community for some reason.<sup>219</sup> The *jāti vaiṣṇavas* consider themselves for religious reasons as voluntarily standing outside the *varṇāśrama* system. This community remained more or less unknown until 1901, when the Census of Bengal for the first and last time included a hierarchy of castes, placing the *jāti*

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214 For an excellent study of *rāgānugā-sādhanā*-bhakti, see Haberman (1988)

215 Kennedy (1925), 162

216 Ibid, 171. I have not seen such things going on today at for example Rādhākuṇḍa, where many *bābājīs* live.

217 E.g. IF 2000/14d, Kennedy (1925), 169

218 IF 2000/14d

219 Kennedy (1926), 178

*vaiṣṇavas* very low. However, no less than about 500,000 Hindus claimed to belong to this *jāti*. The religious rites of this community were exclusively Vaiṣṇava, even though much more simple than those of the *gṛhasthas*. Marriage, for example, comprised of no more than a change of garlands in front of the guru. The minimal other *samṣkāras* that are followed also do not follow the brāhmaṇical standard, but are adaptations of devotional rituals. The low place given to this group in the census of 1901 led to a gradual *sanskritisation*<sup>220</sup> of it, so that it today appears to have in many places lost its distinctive character, its members being similar to the *gṛhasthas* described above.<sup>221</sup> Some classify the *jāti vaiṣṇavas* as heterodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.<sup>222</sup>

### 2.3.5 Modern groups

There are some Gauḍīya groups whose teachings do not differ so much from the norm that they could be called heterodox, but that are hard to fit into the above scheme of *parivāras* and *vaṃśas*. Moreover, these groups are so successful that other Gauḍīyas cannot just ignore them. There have always been independent saintly persons, greatly respected for their spritual qualities and realisations, but whose guru was unknown.<sup>223</sup> Generally, such persons would not give initiation to disciples, though they could function as instructing gurus.<sup>224</sup> Not all followed this rule, however, and instead started lineages of their own. Such groups are sometimes denounced by schol-

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220 This term was introduced by M.N. Srinivas to indicate the historical process by which the beliefs and practices of lower castes tend to converge with those of higher groups, as the former try to emulate the latter in order to raise their social status. My usage of this standard term does not indicate that I believe that there is any one Sanskritic Hinduism or clearly distinguishable higher and lower strata of Hinduism.

221 O'Connell (1986), 51-53

222 E.g. Kedarnātha Datta Bhaktivinoda. See Shukavak Dasa (1999), 124.

223 See for example Chota Baba and Gvariya Baba in Kapoor (1999)

224 Brzeszinsky (1996), 176

arly members of the established *parivāras* and *vamśas*, especially if their doctrines and/ or practices also differ from what is generally conceived as the Gauḍīya norm, and if they are perceived as a threat. Usually such groups (e.g. the Śyāmānanda *parivāra*) have with time become integrated into the Gauḍīya tradition, but the groups below are too recent for that. For this reason I call them “modern groups”.

What is common for these groups (and which justifies combining them into a third division of contemporary Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism even though they are internally very different) is that they are not part of any of the generally recognized *parivāras* described above, and that they have some peculiar teachings. I have listed three of the most important in an “order of general acceptance” – the Rāma Dāsa *parivāra* is the least controversial of the three, the Mahānāma *saṃpradāya* the most. The name of that group even seems to indicate a desire to separate themselves from the whole Gauḍīya *saṃpradāya*.<sup>225</sup>

The Rāma Dāsa Bābājī *parivāra* stems from a person by that name who was the main disciple of Rādhā-ramaṇa Caraṇa Dāsa Bābājī (1853-1905), a very influential guru of the latter part of the nineteenth century. Some of the reasons for why this group is considered unorthodox is that the name of the guru of Rādhā-ramaṇa Caraṇa Dāsa Bābājī is not known, and that he is said to have mystically received a Gaura-mantra which he delivered to his disciples.<sup>226</sup> He also encouraged some of his male followers to dress as *gopīs*, told them to publicly chant another mantra instead of the *mahā*-mantra and created a new kind of *tilaka*. Members of this group can be found in all the main Gauḍīya centres of India.

The Gauḍīya Maṭha was founded by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī (1874-1937), the son of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava reformer Kedarnātha

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225 This tendency can also be seen in biographies of Mahanambata Brahmācari. See <http://home.att.net/~pbdas/www.Prabhu-Jagadbandhu.org/HTML-Texts/mahanambata.htm>

226 Kapoor (1995), 104-106, 108

Datta Bhaktivinoda. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī also wanted to reform or revitalise Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Drawing inspiration from the Śrī Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* and (in terms of organisation) the Ramakrishna Mission, he instituted several innovations. To show common people that Vaiṣṇavas are as good as brāhmaṇas, in fact even better, he gave *upanayana* (the sacred thread of the brāhmaṇas) to qualified disciples, even if they were not from brāhmaṇa families. These disciples were given the right to perform religious duties ordinarily open only to (hereditary) brāhmaṇas. While the ordinary Gauḍīya ideal was the *bābājī* who has turned away from the world, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī introduced the order of *sannyāsa* for Gauḍīyas, and these *sannyāsins* were to travel and propagate the message of Caitanya.<sup>227</sup> These innovations were aimed at establishing *Daiivī-varṇāśrama*, a divine social system, while Gauḍīyas generally have either cooperated with secular society or left it altogether.

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī is said to have been initiated by one Gaurakiśora Dāsa Bābājī of the Advaita *parivāra*, but he passed on mantras and a *tilaka* different from that *parivāra*. He spoke against hereditary guruship, and while perhaps trying to break down the sectarian differences between different *parivāras*, for all practical purposes he established his own.<sup>228</sup>

After his death his institution broke into many factions which have spread all around India and abroad, especially in the form of ISKCON, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. ISKCON was founded in New York in 1966 by a disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1896-1977). With ISKCON and its branches Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism has become an international religion. After the death of the founder, many small splinter groups have appeared from this movement. All-in-all, ISKCON has

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227 Shraman (1983)

228 Brzeszinsky (1996), 166

over 400 centres, about 6000 full-time members and a congregation of about 190 000 worldwide.<sup>229</sup> With its Western members, elaborate altar worship and beautiful temples, ISKCON is a visible part of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in India as well.<sup>230</sup>

The Mahānāma *saṁpradāya* consists of followers of Prabhu Jagadbandhu (1871-1921). Jagadbandhu was a very powerful and charismatic preacher, who after a youth of vigorous activity withdrew into a small hut in 1902. There he remained in silence without almost any connection to the outside world for seventeen years. He had no guru and followed no other rituals than chanting the names of Kṛṣṇa, but had many disciples. He declared himself a combined *avatāra* of Caitanya and Nityānanda, and his followers believe that his death is only apparent: he will soon rise again and liberate the world.<sup>231</sup> The headquarters of the Mahānāma *saṁpradāya* is in north Calcutta, but it has a large following also in Vṛndāvana and Bangladesh. Many of the teachings, rituals and so forth differ from the norm of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, so much so that many declare this movement to be heterodox.<sup>232</sup>

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229 Sardella (2000), 38

230 Brooks (1989)

231 McDaniel (1989), 69-75

232 E.g. IF mgt 2002/13 (Gopal Ghosh). He thought that Haridāsa Dāsa had made a mistake by including Jagadbandhu in his collection of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava hagiographies.

## II THE GURU DOCTRINE IN GAUḌĪYA VAIṢṆAVISM

After the overview of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism given in the last chapter, we are now ready to approach the main topic, the guru. In this second part of my thesis I will examine what the movement itself has to say about the guru, disciple and initiation. There are several advantages in including this material. The categories the thinkers within the movement have come up with are in many cases useful, especially when they are compared with findings of fieldwork, and critically analysed. Theological ideas on, for example, the ontological position of the guru form the basis of many things we will encounter in the next part, and thus give us a good starting point for the next part of the thesis, where I will examine the guru through the roles he takes on in relation to the disciples and society at large. Thus, this is not a part that one can skip when reading the thesis, but rather a basis for the next.

A problem with using extensive written primary material, especially when it originates in the elite of a particular society, is that it may say more about the ideals of the elite than about empirical reality. As we shall see, this is true in many cases here. However, it is often (as when describing the medieval situation) the only material we have. Despite the drawbacks of the normative texts, they can be revealing, especially in the possibly verifiable cases.

My method in compiling this part has been as follows. I have first gone through the canonical medieval writings of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* (see 1.3.1), noting the places where issues relating to the guru have been dealt with, as well as the passages on disciple and initiation, since the two latter topics are intimately connected with the guru. Finding these places has not been particularly difficult, since modern editions of these books contain elaborate tables of contents and indices, and since modern practitioners generally refer to the same passages.

After locating the relevant passages I have translated them and arranged them according to topic (e.g. qualifications of a real guru), rather than according to author or book. In this second part of the thesis, each such topic is usually given a separate chapter. For each topic, I have then presented the texts in a chronological order. I have also added modern texts and material gleaned from my interviews so as to give a picture of how the *saṃpradāya* views these topics today. In the cases that I have been able to find material from the time between the medieval and comparative texts, I have utilised that also. In this way I will also shed some light upon the historical development of the guru doctrine within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.

There is a steadily growing amount of contemporary Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava texts dealing with these issues. I cannot by any means claim to have read or even seen everything, but I have made a great effort to locate as much as possible, until I reached a satiation of opinions, i.e. that all new texts repeated what I had already read. It is of course possible that I have missed something, but any such missing opinions are likely to be very marginal, not having even been refuted in any of the texts I have seen.

Besides being thus chronologically presented, all this material has then been analysed by using several of the tools mentioned in the introduction (1.2). These include source criticism, Roy Rappaport's hierarchy of understandings and R.M. Steinmann's typology of gurus. In some cases, I have through my fieldwork tried to see whether the ideals described in the texts have any foundation in contemporary Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava reality. I have also compared the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava situation with that in other Indian contexts, notably other Vaiṣṇava groups and – for contrast – the Sikhs.

This approach means that the choice of topics has been dictated by what the scriptures of the tradition find important enough to discuss. This leads to the exclusion of some important and interesting issues, such as succession. They will instead be discussed in the third part of the thesis.

### 3. General characteristics of the guru

This chapter examines the ontological position of the guru given within the tradition itself, and after that the kinds of gurus mentioned in the tradition, leading us on to a general definition of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru. But first a general description of the Hindu guru.

#### 3.1 The Hindu guru

The guru institution is a pan-Indian one, even though it does find somewhat differing forms within different Hindu groups. Based on the findings of Weber,<sup>233</sup> Ralph Marc Steinmann has presented a useful short history of the Hindu guru-disciple relationship divided into five roughly chronological stages.<sup>234</sup> I have modified his scheme a little by reversing his stage three/ stage four sequence. As always, it must be kept in mind that in India older traditions are not fully replaced by new, but rather co-exist with the newer version. These stages do not thus completely supercede each other.

Steinmann calls the first stage the *Vedic* foundation and the classical brāhṃaṇic forms. While the word *ācārya* is mentioned in the oldest texts, as an institution of the highest importance, the *ācārya-brahmacārin* system is first mentioned in the Atharva Veda (11.5). The *ācārya* would generally be a brāhṃaṇa householder, and the *brahmacārin* his pupil, who would live with him in his *āśrama*, usually a rural dwelling free from the distractions of city life. The *brahmacārin* had to belong to one of the three upper *varṇas*. He would come to the *āśrama* at a young age (as young as five, according to some), undergo the *upanayana-saṃskāra* (the sacrament of receiving the *upavīta* or sacred thread), do menial service for the guru and his family and receive teachings. When fully taught (which could take as long as 24 years according to some authorities!), he

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233 Weber (1963), 350pp

234 Steinmann (1986), 278-281



would undergo the *samavartana-saṃskāra* (the sacrament of graduation), after which he would return to normal society as a full-fledged member of one of the three higher *varṇas*.

Although *upanayana* is thought of as a kind of “rebirth” and even though there is a close relationship between guru and disciple during the years in the *āśrama*, Steinmann argues that the relationship is mainly determined by the transmission of knowledge, Vedic and “secular”. The main function of the whole institution was to pass on the Vedic canon. Different families passed on different parts of the Vedas, using complicated mnemo-systems to insure that the texts would remain unchanged. The qualification of a Vedic guru would thus be twofold: to belong to the right family, and to know the particular text or texts by heart.<sup>235</sup>

The next stage is the *Upaniṣadic* time (800-400 BC). The this-worldly aims of the Vedas were now seen as temporary and thus illusory. It was not enough to know the words of the Vedas or the rituals, one had to have realised, otherworldly, mystic, knowledge. This knowledge particularly concerned the self, *ātman*, and how the self was identical with the divine, *brahman*, and the method for realising that identity.<sup>236</sup> The ideal human life changed from the householder *brāhmaṇa* to the ascetic who had given up all worldly enjoyments and entanglements. Recognising a real guru was also now much more difficult, since realisation is hard to judge. At the same time, the subtlety of the perilous path and the esoteric and mystic quality of the metaphysical knowledge endowed the Upaniṣadic guru with much greater authority than the Vedic guru had.

Before moving on, it must be pointed out that Steinmann has made a mistake by treating Hinduism as completely isolated from outside influence. This Upaniṣadic time is especially characterised by the so-called *śramaṇa*-movement, an ascetic movement that

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235 For a description of contemporary gurus of this kind, see Brent (1972), 32-51

236 Gansten (2001), 16-17

spawned both Buddhism and Jainism, both of which eventually came to be seen as wholly separate religions. However, both influenced what came to be known as Hinduism greatly (so much so that some scholars provokingly say that Hinduism is a Buddhist offshoot<sup>237</sup>), and also the bhakti movements.<sup>238</sup> In many ways, Buddha and Mahavira can be seen as typical “Upaniṣadic” gurus.

The third stage is the *Jñāna*-tradition, pre-eminently exemplified by Śaṅkara (9<sup>th</sup> century CE). There is an affinity to the upaniṣads, but added emphasis on *sannyāsa* for both guru and disciple. Also, instead of *āśramas*, Śaṅkara (probably inspired by Buddhist examples) founded *maṭhas*, monastic communities usually located within the cities. The ideal guru was the *jagadguru*, guru of the world, who, besides a small inner circle to whom he would teach otherworldly knowledge, could have thousands of lay disciples and even influence political events.<sup>239</sup>

The fourth stage is the *Bhakti* tradition, beginning with the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Instead of oneself striving to transcend the world, the idea here is to draw down the mercy (*prasāda*) of a personal God. This is done through taking refuge in him (*śaraṇāgati*) and bhakti. Here also a guru is needed, someone who has attained the mercy of God, and who can act as an intermediary between the disciple and God. Steinmann points out two conceptions of the guru during this stage: during the epic period (500 BC-400 CE) the guru is adored *like*

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237 Jacobsen & Smart (forthcoming)

238 See Cort (2002). Cort convincingly argues against the common notion that Jain laity borrowed “bhakti” practices from Hinduism. While not going as far as to say that bhakti originates in Jainism or even in the *śramaṇa* sphere, he does argue that Jain bhakti – and here bhakti must be taken as a practice or style of practice rather than as a theology – likely originates in guru-vandana, reverence of the guru, a reverence extended to deceased gurus, eventually leading to a deification of the founder, and that it cannot be ignored in tracing the history of bhakti (82-82). For Buddhism, a similar case was made by Har Dayal (1932).

239 See Cenknner (1984). A contemporary example of this could be the present Śaṅkarācārya of Kanchi, who during my stay in India in March 2002 tried to broker a deal in the conflict around Rāma’s birthsite in Ayodhya.

god, but in the Purāṇic and medieval times (400-1500 CE) he is completely identified with one's personal deity (*iṣṭadevatā*). Here the main qualification of the guru is his often ecstatic devotion, a qualification that can override birth in a low caste, illiteracy or other things that would disqualify a guru of the earlier types.

The fifth stage is the *Tantric* tradition, which, besides being a separate tradition, has modified both Bhakti and Jñāna traditions.<sup>240</sup> Here we find a climax of the deification of the guru. The guru is seen as completely identical with God, or as even more important. Detailed criteria are also listed for both guru and disciple – criteria that in practice are ideals much more than actual necessities. Very little emphasis is placed on Vedic knowledge. In keeping with the ritual orientation of Tantrism, the guru should rather know various magical mantras, rituals and so forth.

To sum up, one can discern two parallel lines of development in this admittedly very simplified scheme. On one hand, the importance of the guru grows from stage to stage: from teacher to metaphysical teacher, representative of God and finally God himself. On the other hand the criteria for determining who is a competent guru become progressively more elusive. As we shall see, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru contains elements from all these stages, making him a particularly interesting object of closer study.

### 3.2 *Ontological position of the guru*

The ontological position assigned to the guru within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is rather complicated, but it is essential for an understanding of the cult centered on him. In order to understand it, we need to

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240 Defining Tantrism is rather problematic. According to Blichfeldt (1983), Tantrism is goddess-worship combined with the philosophy of the Upaniṣads (7-8). I rather agree with Kinsley (1995) in seeing Tantrism as more of a ritual style. He writes that by means of various rituals (exterior and interior), the Tantric practitioner seeks to gain *mokṣa*. A consistent theme in this endeavour is uniting different opposites, chief of which is male-female (111). Many Tantric rituals (e.g. repeating *bija*-mantras, *nyāsa* or calling gods into the body of the practitioner, or *mudras*, mystical hand-signs) are used also in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava rituals.

look at how it has developed and which factors have influenced this development.

In connection with describing the worship of the guru, the fourth *Vilāsa* of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* contains a passage describing the greatness (*māhātmya*) of the guru<sup>241</sup>. Such descriptions are a common Purāṇic device for attracting people to a particular observance, worshipping a particular god, visiting a particular holy place and so forth. These descriptions have much in common, the most noteworthy feature being perhaps that everything is described in very hyperbolic terms, so that whatever is being eulogized in a particular passage is the highest, purest and best in every way. While these descriptions thus tend to become tedious and repetitive, they often contain a great deal of information of the worship procedure or object of worship described. In this context, describing the greatness of the guru says much about the ontological position assigned to the guru, even leaving out the routine hyperbole.

This whole section consists of quotations – not one word is written by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin himself. Still, the choice of what to cite is telling. He begins with a traditional quote from the Upaniṣads, moving on to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other Purāṇic texts. In several of these texts the guru is identified with Kṛṣṇa himself. “Know Me to be the guru,”<sup>242</sup> “The guru is Viṣṇu,”<sup>243</sup> “He who is the guru is known as Hari.”<sup>244</sup> These are clear words. On the other hand, Kṛṣṇa is also quoted saying that he is more pleased by reverence to the guru than by sacrifices to himself.<sup>245</sup> It is also said that he is pleased by one whom the guru is pleased with.<sup>246</sup> These statements imply a difference between the two. This difference is also obvious in the rituals described elsewhere: first one should worship the guru,

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241 HBV 4.346-365

242 BP 11.17.27, quoted in HBV 4.347

243 Unidentified popular verse, quoted in HBV 4.352.

244 *Vāmana-kalpa*, quoted in HBV 4.353

245 BP 10.80.34, quoted in HBV 4.348

246 *Vāmana-kalpa*, quoted in HBV 4.353

and then Kṛṣṇa.<sup>247</sup> Were they absolutely identical, there would be no reason for worshipping them separately.

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* does not systematically reconcile these two views. However, when writing about the worship of the guru, it is said that one should worship the guru “with the sentiment that he is Kṛṣṇa” (*kṛṣṇa-bhāvena*).<sup>248</sup> This will be elaborated on by Jīva Gosvāmin and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja.

Jīva Gosvāmin’s *Bhakti-sandarbha* also contains many statements equating the guru with God.<sup>249</sup> How is this equation to be understood? Obviously the guru does not share many of the qualities of God, such as being the creator of all, being smaller than the smallest or being greater than the greatest. While the *advaitin*s could understand the statements equating the guru with God to teach the actual oneness of all (a oneness realised by a true guru), such a teaching does not fit well into Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, where Kṛṣṇa is held to be the only God and all others his servants. Since these texts are part of the scriptural canon, they can not just be ignored. Instead, Jīva Gosvāmin tries to find other explanations for them. He comes up with three, of which the first is as follows:

Sometimes even materialists should see the Lord in the guru. This the blessed Lord explains (BP 11.17.27): “The *ācārya* should be understood as Me, and never disrespected. The guru, abode of all gods, should not be displeased by thinking that he is a human being.” This is mentioned as far as the duty of a *brahmacārin* is considered.<sup>250</sup>

The duty of even a materialist is to serve his guru like God “sometimes”: during his life as a *brahmacārin*, celibate student in the house

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247 HBV 4.342-345

248 Ibid, 4.371

249 Eg. BS 202

250 BS 211. *anyadā svagurau karmibhir api bhagavad-dṛṣṭiḥ kartavyety āha (bhā. 11.17.27) – “ācāryam mām vijānīyān nāvamanyeta karhicit/ na martya-buddhyāsūyeta sarva-deva-mayo guruḥ//” brahmacārī-dharmāntaḥ paṭhitam idam//*

of the guru. The equation between guru and God is thus not a theological one here, but we could rather call it a practical one. As one would respect God, one should respect the guru, just as the wife should serve the husband “like God”. In other words, the guru is as good as God, but not God himself.

The second reason concerns understanding otherworldly knowledge.<sup>251</sup> More important than the attitude of reverence of materialists is for persons trying to understand divine knowledge to consider the person who gives it as the Lord himself. When they see the guru in this way, they will also consider his teachings to be otherworldly. In order to understand the secret things the guru will impart to his disciples, they will have to have implicit faith in him and not view him as an ordinary, limited mortal being. The guru also shares some very important qualities with God: the desire and ability to liberate from ignorance, mercifulness, and so on. This reason for equating God and the guru could be called an intellectual one, in contrast with the earlier practical reason.

In addition to the practical and intellectual interpretations, Jīva Gosvāmin offers a third one:

The pure devotees consider both the revered guru and Lord Śiva to be nondifferent from the Lord, because they are so dear to Him. This the Pracetasas explain to the blessed eight-armed Lord (BP 4.30.38): “By a moment of direct association with your dear friend Bhava [Śiva], we have today gained You, who are the true physician for the difficult to cure disease of birth and death.”

The guru of these speakers is Lord Śiva.<sup>252</sup>

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251 BS 212

252 BS 213. *śuddhabhaktiās tv eke śrīguroḥ śrīśivasya ca śrībhagavatā sahābheda-dṛṣṭim tat-priyatamatvenaiva manyante, yathā (bhā. 4.30.38) – vayan tu sāksād bhagavat bhavasya priyas sakhyah kṣaṇa-saṅgamenā/ suduścikitsyasya bhavasya mṛtyor bhiṣaktamaṃ tvādyā gatim gatāḥ smaḥ// ũikā ca – “tava yah priyah sakhā tasya bhavasya, atyantam acikitsyasya bhavasya janmano mṛtyoś ca bhiṣaktamaṃ sadvaidyaṃ tvaṃ gatim prāptāḥ” ity eṣā/ śrīśivo hy eṣāṃ vaktṛṇāṃ guruḥ// śrīpracetasah śrīmad aṣṭabhujaṃ puruṣam//*

The first interpretation concerned materialists, the second persons trying to understand transcendental knowledge, and this third explanation concerns devotees of the Lord. There is an implicit gradation here, progressing from action (*karman*) to knowledge (*jñāna*) and to devotion (bhakti). Devotees view the guru (and Śīva) as non-different from the Lord because of the great love between them. In this way there is a union in love between them. This third reason could thus be said to be a devotional one.

Apart from these explanations, in the context of describing worship of the Lord's seat in his spiritual abode, Jīva Gosvāmin writes that the Lord stays on earth as a *bhaktāvatāra*, descent as a devotee, in the form of the localised (*vyasṭi*) guru, while at the same time remaining as the aggregate (*samaṣṭi*) guru in his own abode as a direct *avatāra*.<sup>253</sup> All gurus on earth are thus localised manifestations of the one divine guru. This idea will be developed by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja below.

The need for many reasons why the guru is the same as Kṛṣṇa points to the uneasiness felt by Jīva Gosvāmin when faced with such statements. The Gauḍīya theology Jīva Gosvāmin was so instrumental in creating – as indeed common sense – tells us that the person acting as a guru is not Kṛṣṇa but a human being. The theologian Jīva Gosvāmin could not, as Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, be content with merely repeating the statements of the old scriptures. Still, the authority of the canon is too great for it to be completely rejected. Practically all the bhakti movements have placed great emphasis on the need for a guru, and Jīva Gosvāmin no doubt saw the same need for maintaining strong respect for the guru.

Continuing along the same lines, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja writes the following in his *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, while explaining the concept of guru:

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253 BS 286

Although my guru is Caitanya's servant, still I know him to be His manifestation. Scripture says that the guru is the form of Kṛṣṇa. In the form of the guru, Kṛṣṇa shows mercy to the devotees. "The *ācārya* should be understood as Me, and never disrespected. The guru, abode of all gods, should not be displeased by thinking that he is a human being." (BP 11.17.27)<sup>254</sup>

In other words, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja considers the guru to have a dual nature, and interprets the famous verse of the *Bhāgavata* (also cited by Jīva Gosvāmin above) in that light. While it seems to indicate an absolute identity between the guru and Caitanya (and thus Kṛṣṇa), that is not how Kṛṣṇadāsa understands it. A modern guru clarifies: while the guru himself is a servant of Kṛṣṇa like anyone else, at the time of initiation, Kṛṣṇa enters his heart and makes him a manifestation of himself to the disciple.<sup>255</sup> In the eyes of the disciple, the guru is God; in his own eyes, a servant of God. This correlates with what Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin writes about the disciple worshipping the guru thinking that he is Kṛṣṇa, or the first explanation given by Jīva Gosvāmin.

It could be argued that the word "manifestation" (*prakāśa*) used in Kṛṣṇadāsa's verse above is defined later in the book as an expansion of Kṛṣṇa that is completely identical to Kṛṣṇa himself.<sup>256</sup> That meaning can not be accepted here, since the guru will not look exactly like Kṛṣṇa, who is blue, clad in a yellow *dhotī*, threefold bending and so forth. The word must therefore here be taken in a more general sense.

Thus, the idea is that the guru does not belong to the ontological category of ordinary *jīvas* or individual souls (*jīva-tattva*), and also not fully to that of Kṛṣṇa (*Kṛṣṇa-tattva*); rather, he is assigned to a

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254 CC 1.1.44-46. *yadyapi āmāra guru – caitanyera dāsa/ tathāpi jāniye āmi tāñhāra prakāśa// guru kṛṣṇa-rūpa hana śāstrera pramāṇe/ guru-rūpe kṛṣṇa kṛpā karena bhakta-gaṇe// ācāryaṃ māṃ vijānīyān nāvamanyeta karhicit/ na martya-buddhyāsūyeta sarva-deva-māyo guruḥ//*

255 Bon Maharaj (1974), 2. The same idea is expressed by Anantadāsa Bābāji in Mahāśaya (1997), 29 using Jīva Gosvāmin's terms *vyasṭi* and *samaṣṭi-guru*.

256 CC 1.1.69-70



category of his own, *guru-tattva*. While there are many persons who act as gurus, it is the same Kṛṣṇa who speaks through them all. In this way, the guru is God, and there is only one guru.<sup>257</sup> Kṛṣṇa will however only fully enter the heart of a person who is extremely pure.<sup>258</sup>

Later theologians have elaborated on this concept. Of what form of Kṛṣṇa is the guru a manifestation? The realisation of that depends on the advancement of the disciple. First the disciple simply thinks that the guru is a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa, then of Balarāma or Nityānanda, since Nityānanda is the one who leads the way to Caitanya. To see the guru as Balarāma or Nityānanda is the limit of realisation for those who aspire after *dāsya-*, *sakhya-* and *vatsalya-bhāva* or a relationship as servant, friend or parent in the eternal play of Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya, respectively. Those who aspire to *madhurya-bhāva* or an amorous relationship will next realise the guru as one of the leaders of the *gopīs* (milkmaids) serving Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, and finally as Rādhā herself. To see the guru as the delegate or manifestation of Rādhā is thus the highest realisation.<sup>259</sup>

That such a complex theological understanding is beyond the comprehension of many ordinary devotees is obvious. Some interviewees tried to explain the guru along these lines, but had not fully grasped the idea.<sup>260</sup> Others prefer to stress the identity between guru and God,<sup>261</sup> while yet others consider the guru different from Kṛṣṇa, but his best servant and representative.<sup>262</sup> However, as we shall see in part three, the notion of the guru's twofold nature is the one that best accounts for the sometimes seemingly contradictory behaviour of the guru and of the disciple towards him.

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257 Letter from Swami B.G. Narasimha to author, 29.8.1998

258 IF mgt 2000/69

259 Letter from Swami B.G. Narasimha to author, 29.8.1998

260 E.g. IF mgt 2000/72

261 Field notes, Navadvip, January 2001. The same verse is quoted in HBV 4.352

262 This is the official doctrine of ISKCON. See Ketola (2002), 76-81, Ravindra Svarupa Das (1994), 89-90. Some other Gauḍīyas also subscribe to this view. See e.g. IF mgt 2000/71.

### 3.3 The necessity of having a guru

The need of a guru is universally accepted within Vaiṣṇavism, and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is no exception. Today no Gauḍīyas even in the West admit the possibility of advanced spiritual life without a guru.<sup>263</sup> In this section I will look at the main arguments the theologians have advanced throughout the history of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism for the necessity of having a guru. These arguments also say much about how the role of the guru is conceived, a topic that will be developed in part III of the thesis.

#### 3.3.1 Guide

The first and most common argument is the *guide*-argument. The idea is that one needs a guide on the spiritual path. On their own, human beings are seen as too foolish and weak to be able to make their way to the goal. This is clearly expressed by two quotations from the Upaniṣads given in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*.

And in the Śruti: (*Muṇḍaka Up.* 1.2.12): “In order to understand this, one should, carrying firewood in his hands, indeed approach a true guru, who is learned in the Veda and who has faith in Brahman.” And (*Chāndogya Up.* 6.14.2): “One with an *ācārya* understands.”<sup>264</sup>

What is expressed here is one of the main Upaniṣadic teachings: that *brahman* or God is something one cannot understand by intellect, mind or senses. *Brahman* can only be understood through mystical knowledge. Materially bound living entities have no access to this

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263 The Ṛtvik-goups within ISKCON could be given as an exception. They believe that since the movement’s founder, Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1896-1977) did not appoint a successor, everyone should in his absence be initiated by him through a representative priest (*ṛtvik*). Even though not present, Prabhupāda would still be the guru, and all necessary knowledge would be gained through his books, collected lectures and so on. See The Final Order.

264 HBV 1.35. *śrūtāv api (mu. 1.2.12, chā. 6.14.2) – tad-vijñārthaṃ sad-guru evābhigacchet samit-pāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ brahma-niṣṭham/ ācāryavān puruṣo veda//*

knowledge, and it cannot be gained through simply reading the revealed scriptures. It must be imparted through a guru.<sup>265</sup> The first quotation, from the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, comes after a passage revealing the futility of the Vedic sacrifices, how they are difficult to perform, uncertain and temporary. Therefore, a wise person should give them up and approach a guru. A guru here means a guru of the Upaniṣadic type (see 3.1), not the person who teaches the Vedic hymns and rituals. “Carrying firewood in his hands” means that one should be humble and ready to attend to the needs of the guru by such menial service as collecting firewood for his sacred fire. The next verse, after the one cited, says that to such a person the guru will reveal knowledge of *brahman*.<sup>266</sup>

The Upaniṣads are full of stories about gurus and disciples. The quotation from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* is taken from the well-known dialogue between Śvetaketu and his father. The father gives the example of a person who has been kidnapped from the town Gandhāra, bound up, blindfolded and left alone in a desolate place. He would call out for help, and his only hope is that someone will hear him, release him from his bonds and show him the way back to Gandhāra. In the same way one who has an *ācārya* or guru “understands” and is freed from his material bondage.<sup>267</sup>

Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin provides two more statements from the scriptures on this topic.

In the prayers of the Śruti in the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata* (10.87.33): “They who here struggle to restrain the unsubdued horse of the inconsistent mind by controlled senses and breaths are tormented by their methods. Having abandoned the feet of the guru they are surrounded by hundreds of calamities! O unborn one, they are like a merchant on the ocean without a captain.” And in Śruti (*Kaṭha*

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265 See for example *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.3.12, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.3-4

266 *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.1-13

267 *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.14.1-2

*Up.* 1.2.9): “Dear one, this doctrine can not be approached through logic. For real knowledge it is indeed explained in another way.”<sup>268</sup>

Without a guru, spiritual life is thought to be very difficult, practically impossible. Trying through different means (such as penance, sacrifices or meditation) to control the senses and mind without a guru is simply torturing oneself. The lines from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* are spoken by Yama to Naciketas. Yama explains that there are two paths: that of sense enjoyment and that of otherworldly knowledge. The path of otherworldly knowledge can not be understood by ordinary logic, it has to be mystically realised with the help of a guru.

Jīva Gosvāmin continues on the same lines in his *Bhakti-sandarbha*. For him, accepting a guru is the first step on the spiritual path. He argues that just as knowledge is gained by association with persons possessing knowledge, bhakti or devotion to the Lord is awakened in the pupil by association with a saint, and that bhakti thus gained will be of a similar sort as that experienced by the particular saint. Jīva Gosvāmin opines that taste is the beginning of the religious journey. For one to embark on this arduous journey, some preliminary taste or interest in some school or faith is needed, a taste which is then transformed into a taste for the particular form of the Lord and way of devotion preferred by the school of choice. Only then does one approach a guru (or several gurus) to learn more by listening to their teachings.<sup>269</sup>

In order to learn the basic rules for worship, one has to hear the instructions of one or several elders in the group one has joined. Such persons naturally attain the status of instructors or gurus, and one of these persons will become most dear to the listener. From that person one should also

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268 HBV 1.36-37. *śrībhāgavate daśama-skandhe (87.33) śruti-stutau – vijī-ḥṛṣīka-vāyubhir adānta-manas-turagaṃ ya iha yatanti yantum atilolam upāyakhidāḥ/ vyasana-śatānvitāḥ samavahāya guroṣ caraṇaṃ vaṇija ivāja santy akṛta-karṇadhara jaladhau// śrutau ca (kaṭh. 1.2.9) – naiśā tarkeṇa matir āpaneyā proktānyenaiva sujñānāya preṣṭhā//*

269 BS 202

take formal initiation.<sup>270</sup> In this way, Jīva Gosvāmin sees the guru mainly as a teacher: one who guides the disciple on the spiritual path. The implied rhetorical question is: who can possibly learn anything without a teacher? This argument is also very common with modern Gauḍīyas.<sup>271</sup> Anantadāsa Bābājī, *mahānta* of Rādhākuṇḍa, writes that just as one needs a teacher for anything one wants to learn even in this world, so one also needs a guru to learn devotion, the highest science.<sup>272</sup>

For a modern Gauḍīya the “guide” argument may not be so convincing. Why is it not enough to just read the books? Previous gurus have already written so much that a physical, living guru would appear unnecessary. Such a guru might also make mistakes, fall into sinful life, or otherwise act improperly – things that a book will never do. One answer to this is that the main task of the guru is to teach the disciple to surrender, to give up trusting only his intellect, mind and senses. Without a living guru, one can always pit different authorities against each other, making choices only on the basis of what is pleasing to one’s own mind and senses. This is the reason for having only one initiating guru.<sup>273</sup> Another common argument is that a book is not able to judge changes in time, place and circumstances.<sup>274</sup>

### 3.3.2 Giver of eligibility

The second argument is that without a guru, and more specifically the mantra he gives, nobody is eligible to worship Kṛṣṇa. This could be called the *giver of eligibility*-argument. In the second *Vilāsa* of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* the topic is initiation, something that will be discussed at length below (chapter six). Accepting a guru means also

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271 See for example Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Goswami Maharaj (1989), 205, B.R. Śrīdhar (n.d.), 2-3, Gour Govinda Swami Mahārāja (1996), 1-2, Raghava Chaitanya Das ([www.angelfire.com/realm/bvpuri/books/guru\\_and\\_atma\\_nivedanam.html](http://www.angelfire.com/realm/bvpuri/books/guru_and_atma_nivedanam.html))

272 Anantadāsa Bābājī (n.d.), 4

273 Kīrtanānanda Swami Bhaktipāda (1987), 41

274 IF mgt 2000/91

accepting initiation, so the latter topic is relevant also here. Why does one need initiation?

In the Āgama: “Twiceborn without the sacred thread do not have the eligibility to engage in their own duties, such as study. It is gained through *upanayana*. In the same way, those who are not initiated do not have the eligibility for mantras, worshipping God, etc. Therefore, make yourself praised by Śiva!” In the *Skanda Purāṇa*, in connection with Kārtika, in the holy discussion between Brahmā and Nārada (5.2.5.39): “Those men who have not attained Hari’s initiation and who do not worship Janārdana are animals in this world. What is the use of their life?”<sup>275</sup>

The commentator, Sanātana Gosvāmin, writes that “praised by Śiva” means initiated. Since according to Gauḍīya theology, Viṣṇu is superior to Śiva, one who has accepted Vaiṣṇava initiation is the object of the full praise of even Śiva.<sup>276</sup> Initiation can thus be seen as a kind of purification, a rite that cleanses the disciple and makes him ritually eligible for worshipping Kṛṣṇa. Since attaining love of Kṛṣṇa is considered the goal of human life, someone without that eligibility is not considered a real human being.

### 3.3.3 Mandated by scripture

Another argument presented by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin is that one has to have a guru since it is *mandated by scripture*. To the rather extreme quotation above about nobody being a human without initiation, the commentator adds another even more graphic (unidentified) statement: one who eats something without worshipping the *śālagrāma* stone, becomes a worm in the excrement of dog-eaters for

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275 HBV 2.3-5. *āgame – dvijānām upetānām svakarmādhyayanādiṣu/ yathādhikāro nāstīha syāc copanayanād anu// tathātrādīkṣitānān tu mantra-devārcanādiṣu/ nādhikāro 'sty ataḥ kuryād ātmanam śiva-saṁstutam// skānde kārttika-prasaṅge śrī-brahma-nārada-saṁvāde – te narāḥ paśavo loke kiṃ teṣāṃ jīvane phalam/ yair na labdhā harer dikṣā nārcito vā janārdanaḥ//*

276 *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 2.3-5

a *kalpa* (4 320 000 000 years)!<sup>277</sup> The *śālagrāma* is Viṣṇu in the form of a stone. The implied meaning is that if one eats before worshipping Viṣṇu, one attains such a terrible destination. Since one cannot worship without initiation one must accept initiation if one wants to eat.

The same kind of warnings are issued in the two following verses:

In the same book, in the discussion between Rukmāṅgada and Mohinī: “Beautiful one, all that the uninitiated does is useless. Anyone without initiation is reborn as an animal.” Specifics are given in the *Viṣṇu-yāmala*: “The curse of the gods strikes that guru who through attachment or greed accepts a disciple without initiation, and also his disciple.”<sup>278</sup>

The first verse speaks of the mandatoriness of initiation by pointing out the dire consequences for neglecting it, while the second clarifies that it is not enough to just accept a guru, one must also accept formal initiation. The commentator understands “without initiation” to mean breaking the rules for initiation.<sup>279</sup>

This argument is not echoed by later writers, probably for different reasons. That it is not used today is obvious: it can be effective only in an environment where people have faith in such statements of scripture, and where the majority are initiated, rendering the non-initiate socially deviant.

### 3.3.4 Saviour

The first argument for accepting a guru was that the guru is a guide on the path of devotion. A further argument is that the power of the guru goes far beyond mere guidance. He is not only a teacher, but a

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277 *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 2.3-5

278 HBV 2.6-7. *tatraiva śrīrukṃāṅgada-mohinī-saṃvāde – adīkṣitasya vāmoru kṛtam sarvaṃ nirarthakam/ paśu-yonim avāpnoti dīkṣā-vihito janah// viśeṣato viṣṇu-yāmale – snehād vā lobhād vāpi yo gṛhṇīyād adīkṣayā/ tasmin gurau saśiṣye tu devatā-śāpa āpatet//*

279 *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 2.6-7

saviour in his own right. Jīva Gosvāmin writes in his *Bhakti-sandarbha*:

The necessity for a *mantra*-guru is even greater [than the necessity for a *śikṣā*-guru]. That one should approach a guru of the highest truth and give up worldly gurus, etc, is the thought behind this statement of Lord Rṣabhadeva to his sons (BP 5.5.18): “He is not a guru, he is not a relative, he is not a father, she is not a mother, that is not a divinity, and he is not a husband who cannot free [his or her dependent] from death.” From death means from the repetition of birth and death.<sup>280</sup>

The words “worldly guru” refer to common authority persons like one’s father, mother, elderly relatives and so forth. The *mantra*-guru should be able to release the disciple from the cycle of birth and death. If he does not, he is not a real (*sat*) guru but a “worldly guru”. Such a guru should be given up. This will be dealt with in more detail later (5.2).

But how can the guru be a saviour? Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmin offers an explanation. He has Caitanya explain a cosmological axiom to Sanātana Gosvāmin: there are two kinds of souls - those who are eternally liberated and those eternally bound. Those who are bound have forgotten that their nature is to serve Kṛṣṇa, and instead they wander in the material world from one bodily form to another, trying to gratify their senses, but actually suffering under the influence of *māyā*, illusion. However, if they happen to meet a saint, they may become enlightened by his association and take up the process of devotion. If they start worshipping Kṛṣṇa and serving the guru, they can be freed from the web of *māyā*.<sup>281</sup>

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280 BS 210. *ataḥ śrīmantra-guror avaśyakatvaṃ sutarām eva/ tad etat paramārtha-gurvāśrayo vyavahārika-gurvādi-parityāgenāpi kartavya ity āśayenāha (bhā. 5.5.18) – “gurur na sa syāt svajano na sa syāt pitā na sa syāj janani na sā syāt/ daivam na tat syām na patiś ca sa syāt na mocayed yaḥ samuṣeta-mṛtyum// samuṣetaḥ samprāpto mṛtyuḥ saṃsāro yena tam [...] śrīṣabhadevaḥ svaputrān//*

281 CC 2.22.10-17, 25



Why, then, do some persons meet saints while others do not? Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmin simply says because of “fortune” or “some kind of fortune”.<sup>282</sup> This fortune depends on the mercy of Kṛṣṇa:

When Kṛṣṇa shows his mercy to some fortunate person, he personally instructs him as the guru and as the indwelling monitor. “O Lord, poets are not able to express their gratitude, even if endowed with a lifetime of enjoyment as long as that of Brahmā. Dissipating the misfortune of embodied beings You appear internally and externally as the Supersoul and as the *ācārya* to show the path to Yourself.” (BP 11.29.6) If there is association with saints and faith in devotion to Kṛṣṇa, then *preman*, the fruit of devotion appears, and material bondage is destroyed.<sup>283</sup>

In other words, it is Kṛṣṇa who is speaking through the guru to a person who is sufficiently fortunate to receive his mercy. The result of meeting a saint or guru for even a split second can give the greatest fruit.<sup>284</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmin says nothing more about this “fortune”, leaving something for later theologians to ponder over. In any case, the reason for why the guru can act as a saviour is that Kṛṣṇa is acting through him.

This saviour-argument is very common among modern Gauḍīyas. One guru writes that the guru is the gate through which to enter the path of devotion since Kṛṣṇa’s grace reaches us through the saints.<sup>285</sup> Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda writes that Kṛṣṇa is the powerhouse and the guru is the contact through which we can access the electric current of love for Kṛṣṇa.<sup>286</sup> Despite the modern example,

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282 CC 2.22.43, 45

283 Ibid, 2.22.47-49. *kṛṣṇa yadi kṛpā kare kona bhāgyavāne/ guru-antaryāmi-rūpe śikhaya āpane// naivopayanty apacitiṃ kavayas taveśa brahmāyusāpo kṛtam ṛddha-mudaḥ smarantaḥ/ ya 'ntar bahis tanu-bhṛtām aśubhaṃ vidhunvann ācārya-caitṭya-vapuṣā sva-gatiṃ vyanakti// sādhu-saṅge kṛṣṇa-bhaktye śraddhā yadi haya/ bhakti-phala 'prema' haya, saṃsāra yāya kṣaya//*

284 CC 2.22.54

285 Anantadāsa Bābājī (n.d.), 4

286 Lecture on the Nectar of Devotion 10/29/72, quoted in Virābhū Dāsa (1988), 38

the idea is the same. The example, however, hints at something that soon came to be considered essential for the guru: that he is connected with an unbroken disciplic succession. This will be dealt with later (4.2).

### 3.3.5 “Practice Kṛṣṇa”

Satyanārāyaṇa Dāsa Bābājī, a leading disciple of Haridāsa Śāstrī of the Gadādhara *parivāra*, offered a new reason for the need of a guru.

The way you will treat [the guru], that is the *bhāva* you will have to Kṛṣṇa. It is not that you will die and then get something else. Kṛṣṇa says [in BG 8.6] that whatever *bhāva* you have at the time of death, you will attain the same body in your next life. *Bhāva* is to be acquired here, not that death will give you something. Death is just a change of body, not of *bhāva*. *Bhāva* you have to have with your guru. The way you want to treat Kṛṣṇa, that way you have to treat the guru.<sup>287</sup>

In other words, in the relationship with the guru one practises serving and being devoted to Kṛṣṇa. As devoted as one is to the guru, that devoted one will be to Kṛṣṇa. If one wants a relationship with Kṛṣṇa, one has to have a guru, who will function as a “*practice Kṛṣṇa*” for the disciple. There are examples of devotees who had a friendly (*sakhya*) mood (*bhāva*) to Kṛṣṇa, and exhibited this mood also in relationship with the guru.<sup>288</sup> But how does one exhibit the amorous mood (*madhurya bhāva*), the most popular *bhāva* in modern Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, with regard to the guru? The *bābājī* chided me for such a stupid question.

-This is all misconceptions. You have to study the *Sandarbhās* [of Jiva Gosvāmin] to know what is *madhurya*. What amorous? Kṛṣṇa is a sexual being?

-No, no, but...

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287 IF mgt 2000/70

288 For example Govinda Dāsa Bābājī in Kapoor (1995), 222-229

-All it means is surrender. It is a *bhāva* of surrender. Just like if a woman is completely in love with a person, she surrenders everything to him, fully, including her body. She does not keep anything. The same surrender has to be shown. It is the height of surrender, the ultimate limit of *dāśya* [service]. Therefore Rādhārāṇi is also a devotee. When surrender is there in love, there is pleasure, naturally. So you have to surrender like that to guru. Not that you have to perform *rāsa-līlā* [the circular pleasure dance of Kṛṣṇa and the cowherdesses].<sup>289</sup>

Others strongly maintain that this is an improper understanding, and that one should always behave like a humble servant towards the guru, and separately cultivate one's *bhāva* towards Kṛṣṇa.<sup>290</sup>

### 3.3.6 Dependence on Kṛṣṇa's grace

Faced with the postmodern society of the western world, Gauḍīyas have had to rethink the arguments for why one needs a guru. "Vows to the guru go against the grain of Western culture", admits one contemporary Western Gauḍīya guru, Swami B.V. Tripurāri. He argues that a guide is definitely needed, since spiritual life is about radical change, implying that one is unable to change enough on one's own. However, the relationship between the disciple and guru should be one of affectionate intimacy, not so much one of awe and reverence. Love of Kṛṣṇa is not a product of devotional practice. The relationship must be initiated by Kṛṣṇa. Since he is the personification of affection and love, he wants to initiate a relationship. For this reason he commissions his agents, the gurus.<sup>291</sup>

But still, why the need for an intermediary? Another Western guru put it like this, when answering the question whether he really accepts the physical offerings made by disciples from a distance:

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289 IF mgt 2000/70

290 Bhaktivedānta Araṇya Mahārāja. Field notes, November 2000, Vṛndāvana

291 Swami B.V. Tripurāri (1998b), 180-181

[My guru] accepts [the offering] through me, and Kṛṣṇa through him. This is the point. It is not me and Kṛṣṇa, but the guru and the other devotees are also there. [To think that there is only me and Kṛṣṇa] is spiritual arrogance, and that is *māyā* [illusion]. Since they pray to me, Kṛṣṇa accepts the offering. Not because I hear it, but since they show the right attitude.<sup>292</sup>

The attitude of a Vaiṣṇava should always be that he is a humble servant. Having a guru thus instills the spirit of humble dependence on God's grace which descends to the disciple through the guru.<sup>293</sup>

### 3.3.7 Exceptions

In the terms of Roy Rappaport (see 1.3.2), we have so far seen that the need for a guru in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism can be considered a rule of conduct based on the cosmological axiom of liberated and fallen souls, where the fallen need help from the liberated. As Rappaport writes, these rules can be changed, even drastically, without affecting the oppositions they make material.<sup>294</sup> In the writings of Jīva Gosvāmin, we find two exceptions to the rule of conduct of everyone having to accept a guru.

As mentioned before, for Jīva Gosvāmin, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the highest scriptural authority, and it extols spontaneous, ecstatic devotion as the highest ideal. Is there really a need for formal initiation? He writes the following in the context of altar worship:

Although in the opinion of the sacred *Bhāgavata* the altar worship of the Pañcarātrins and others is not compulsory, and even though one may attain the goal of life by engaging in but one of the processes that begin with surrender [the nine paths of bhakti] without it; still, in the opinion of those who follow the path of reverend Nārada and others,

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292 IF mgt 2000/92

293 Swami B.V. Tripurāri, Sanga online questions & answers, Vol III, no. 38

294 Rappaport (1999), 265-266

those who strive after a specific relationship with the Lord, established through the feet of the reverend guru through the method of initiation, when thus initiated, must certainly perform altar worship.<sup>295</sup>

In other words, it is possible at least in exceptional cases to achieve the goal of life, love of Kṛṣṇa, without a guru. The *gopīs* of the *Bhāgavata* had no gurus! Still, if one is attracted by the specific relationship to the Lord that a particular guru embodies, one should associate with him and become established in the same relationship through formal initiation. When thus initiated, one must perform altar worship. Jīva Gosvāmin thus turns the argument of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin around. Altar worship is not absolutely necessary, but it is necessary for those who are initiated, and initiation is necessary for those who wish to attain the same relationship with the Lord as a specific saint whose devotion to the Lord one feels attracted to.

Jīva Gosvāmin does not elaborate on this alternative of having no guru, obviously considering it an uncommon exception. Still, he does leave the door open, perhaps to acknowledge the devotion of saints such as Mīrābhāī (who is not known to have had any guru), whom some authors believe he personally met.<sup>296</sup> Later Gauḍīya tradition recognizes several saints who are known to have had no guru, or whose guru is unknown, but who still attained spiritual perfection.<sup>297</sup> In their cases, they achieved perfection in uncommon ways, something that does not change the cosmological axiom of liberated and bound souls.

Elsewhere in his *Bhakti-sandarbhā*, Jīva Gosvāmin gives another exception to the rule of accepting a guru. After writing about the qualifications of a real guru (see chapter four), he states:

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295 BS 283. *yady api śrībhāgavata-mate pañcarātrādi-vaḍ arcana-mārgasyāvaśyakatvaṃ nāsti, tad-vināpi śaraṇāpattyaḍīnām ekatareṇāpi puruṣārtha-siddher abhihitatvāt, tathāpi śrīnāradaḍi-varṇmānusaraḍbhīḥ śrībhāgavatā saha sambandha-viṣeṣaṃ dīkṣā-vidhānena śrīguru-carana-saṃpāḍūtaṃ cikīṛṣaḍbhīḥ kṛtāyāṃ dīkṣāyāṃ arcanaṃ avaśyaṃ kṛiyetiva/*

296 E.g. Kapoor (1995), 265. For more about Mīrābhāī, see e.g. Martin (1999), Schelling (1999).

297 E.g. Gulāl Sakhi, Gvāriya Bābā in Kapoor (1999)

In the absence of such a guru, some curious to know different opinions take shelter of many teachers. As is said by the reverend Dattātreya to Yadu (BP 11.9.31): “For firm, many-faceted knowledge is not imparted by only one guru. This nondual Brahman is glorified by many sages.” The meaning is clear.<sup>298</sup>

In connection with the quotation above, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* tells the story of the mendicant Dattātreya who had 24 “gurus”, such as the wind, a prostitute and a river, from each of whom he learned something. After he had gathered knowledge from all of them just by observation and contemplation, he became fully self-realised.<sup>299</sup> Steinmann refers to this story as one of only two in the Purāṇas where an alternative to the standard pan-Indian process of turning to a guru is presented, calling its doctrine *sarvātmā-guru*, the guru embodied in all living beings.<sup>300</sup> Jīva Gosvāmin writes “some”, so it is unclear how much he endorses this idea, but he does not refute it either. Later theologian Viśvanātha Cakravartin interprets the above verse from the *Bhāgavata* to refer to only *śikṣā*- or instructing gurus (see below) – an interpretation that is in line with orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, but which does not fit the context very well.<sup>301</sup>

### 3.4 Types of gurus

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas distinguish between several types of gurus, having different functions and roles in the life of the disciple. Before arriving at a general definition of the guru, we must be able to distinguish between these types.

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298 BS 203. *evambhūta-guror abhāvād yukti-bheda-bubhutsayā bahūnapy āśrayante kecit, yathā (bhā. 11.9.31) – “na hy ekasmād guror jñānaṃ susthiraṃ syāt su-puṣkalam/ brahmaītaḍ advitīyaṃ vai gīyate bahudharṣibhiḥ// spaṣṭam// śrīdattātreyo yadum//*

299 BP 11.7.32-11.9.31. For a modern commentary of this episode (which curiously enough completely overlooks the radical nature of the story), see Ācāryadeva (1986)

300 Steinmann (1986), 282

301 *Sārārtha-darśinī* commentary to BP 11.9.31.

While Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin does not explicitly distinguish between different kinds of gurus, Jīva Gosvāmin introduces three important categories: the *śravaṇa*-, *śikṣā* and *dīkṣā*-gurus. The *śravaṇa*-guru (guru from whom one hears) is defined as the the guru one listens to in order to achieve scriptural knowledge, the *śikṣā*-guru (instructing guru) as the one who gives more detailed knowledge of worship and spiritual life, and the *dīkṣā*- or *mantra*-guru (initiating guru) as the guru who initiates one with a mantra. Jīva Gosvāmin further adds that the *śravaṇa*-guru will usually also be the *śikṣā*-guru, and that while one may have several such gurus, one can have only one *dīkṣā*-guru.<sup>302</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmin adds the *caitya*-guru (indwelling guru), Kṛṣṇa in the heart of the devotee.<sup>303</sup>

Further categories can be found in modern publications. The *vartma*- or *patha-pradarśaka*-guru (guru who shows the way) is the one who originally points the disciple to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.<sup>304</sup> As in modern Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism there are usually two initiations (see 6.2.1), the *dīkṣā*-guru can be divided into two types: the *nāma*-guru, who gives first initiation and the *mantra*-guru who gives second initiation.<sup>305</sup> The *veśā*- or *sannyāsa*-guru is the guru who awards the disciple *veśā*- or *sannyāsa*-initiation (see 6.2.3, 6.2.4). He can be the same person as the *śikṣā*-guru or someone else. He could even be from another *parivāra*, as mentioned above (2.3.3), so his function seems to be more formal or perhaps temporary. This is also how the sub-category *sannyāsa*-guru is perceived: he awards *sannyāsa*, but the relationship need not go any further.

The *dhāman*- or *tīrtha*-guru is the one who introduces someone to a holy place and functions as a guide there. His relationship with the disciple is limited to only the duration of the pilgrimage.<sup>306</sup> Since all these

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302 BS 202, 206-209

303 CC 1.1.47

304 Sivarama Swami (1999), 5

305 Swami B.R. Sṛīdhar [n.d.], 85.

306 Haberman (1994), 10

categories are concerned with the function of the guru in the life of the disciple they may be called functional gurus.

The *ādi-guru* (original guru) is the founder of a particular *saṁpradāya* (e.g. Brahmā), whose teachings all later followers of the *saṁpradāya* are to follow.<sup>307</sup> Within ISKCON, some further differentiate the *saṁsthāpaka-ācārya* (founding guru) from the *ādi-guru*, holding that the founding guru (as Madhva, Rāmānuja or the founder of ISKCON, Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda) is an especially empowered person who, while not exactly beginning a new *saṁpradāya*, revitalises it and corrects any faults in it.<sup>308</sup> Others have introduced two terms from the Śrī- and Brahmā-*saṁpradāyas*: the *uddhāraka-* or saviour-guru, and the *upakāraka-* or assisting guru.<sup>309</sup> These types indicate the relative position of the guru within the *saṁpradāya*, and most of these terms are only used within ISKCON and related groups in the ongoing politically heated debate about the position of Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda in relation to the gurus who are his disciples.

Now, let us try to sort out these terms. To reduce the number of categories, I have regarded the *dhāma-* and *śravaṇa-*gurus as subcategories of the *śikṣā-guru*, in common with modern Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava usage.<sup>310</sup> The *sannyāsa-guru* can best be seen as a modern variant of the *veśa-guru*. Thus, the functional gurus can be divided into three classes.

| <u>Qualified/</u>          |                        |                        |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <u>Non-qualified human</u> | <u>Qualified human</u> | <u>Krishna himself</u> |
| vartmapradarśaka           | śikṣā<br>dikṣā<br>veśa | caitya                 |

307 Śivarāma Swami (1999), 20

308 Śivarāma Swami (1999), 20

309 See for example Swami B.G. Narasimha in <http://www.vnn.org/editorials/ET9901/ET05-2792.html>

310 As suggested by Atula Kṛṣṇa Dāsa in an e-letter 9.11.2001.



The *vartmapradarśaka-guru* is special since very little is demanded of him: Kṛṣṇa is thought to also speak through him, but he has no special own qualifications. In other words, he need not have any of the qualifications mentioned in chapter 4 below. On the other hand, his function and the respect shown to him is very limited: he only shows the way (knowingly or unknowingly), and has then fulfilled his purpose. The person who was guided should remember him with gratitude, but that is more or less all. An example of such a person is given later (5.1.1). The *caitya-guru* is on the other side of the spectrum, since he is Kṛṣṇa himself, not speaking through any qualified or non-qualified human, but directly to the disciple “from the heart”. The other gurus all have the dual nature described above. In other words they are Kṛṣṇa speaking and acting through an especially qualified devotee.

The relationship between the remaining types is somewhat unclear. Jīva Gosvāmin does not differentiate between the qualifications of the *śravaṇa*, *śikṣā*- and *dikṣā*-gurus (and does not mention the *veśā-guru*). Some contemporary Gauḍīyas hold the *dikṣā-guru* to be the most important of them all, since he takes the greatest responsibility for the disciple, and since he is his highest authority.<sup>311</sup> By giving the disciple mantras and by (in some cases) revealing his so-called spiritual identity he is of utmost importance to the disciple.<sup>312</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, however, holds the *śikṣā-guru* (obviously in the case that he is separate from the *dikṣā-guru*) to be more important,<sup>313</sup> probably since he is the one who practically guides the disciple. Kṛṣṇadāsa calls the *dikṣā-guru* *bhagavad-rūpa* or the form of the Lord,<sup>314</sup> and the *śikṣā-guru* the *bhagavat-svarūpa* or internal mood of the Lord,<sup>315</sup> implying that the *śikṣā-guru* is more intimate with Kṛṣṇa,

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311 Śivarāma Swami (1999), 43-44, Kirtanānanda Swami Bhaktipāda (1987), 41

312 Haberman (1988), 117

313 CC 1.1.58

314 CC 1.1.45

315 CC 1.1.47

and provides the disciple with more esoteric knowledge. Others downplay the difference, just as there is no difference between the inside and outside of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>316</sup>

If one examines the hagiographies of Gauḍīya saints, one quickly notices that in many cases they have been initiated by a *goswami* guru in their childhood or youth, but the actual instructions on worship and internal spiritual life they have received later from a *śikṣā*-guru, usually a *bābājī*. In this way, their *śikṣā*-gurus are much more prominent in their lives. While there may be many such gurus, there is usually one who is the most important. The stories also make it clear that Gauḍīyas have treated the *śikṣā*-guru with the reverence due to “the guru”. Sometimes, as in the case of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja himself, the *dikṣā*-guru is not even known.<sup>317</sup>

The reason for this lies in the way the Gauḍīya *saṁpradāya* came to be organised. The *goswamis* became the ones who gave large numbers of initiations, and who were responsible for the religious life of the ordinary lay disciples, visiting them, giving short talks, accepting donations and so forth. Those who wanted to embark on a more intensive religious journey would be sent to a holy place like Vṛndāvana, where they would seek out a *śikṣā*-guru, who could give more detailed instruction.

The idea behind these two main types of gurus is probably quite simple: many disciples are needed to spread the movement, to maintain temples and so forth. They all need a guru to receive the mantra and basic teachings, but few will dedicate their whole life to pursue the higher goals of the religion. Caitanya and his associates strongly discouraged ascetics from accepting many disciples since that would entangle them in material affairs,<sup>318</sup> so a better idea is to have a class of householders who would take care of householder

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316 E.g. Bhaktivedānta Vana Maharāja in [www.vnn.org/editorials/ET0208/ET05-7483.html](http://www.vnn.org/editorials/ET0208/ET05-7483.html)

317 E.g. Caitanya Dāsa Bābājī in Kapoor (1995), 31-44

318 E.g. CC 3.20.30

disciples, and ascetics who would give further guidance for those who want to themselves become ascetics. Similar systems are found in the Kumāra and Śrī *saṃpradāyas*. The terms *śikṣā*- and *dīkṣā*-guru have been taken up also by the Sahajīyas and the Bauls.<sup>319</sup>

The problem with this arrangement is that the function of the *dīkṣā*-guru tended to become completely formal, as described in section 4.3. Having the *dīkṣā*-gurus associate with worldly disciples and accept their worship also appears to have led to a degradation of many of the *dīkṣā*-gurus to mere initiators, offering very little or no spiritual instruction, and sometimes having only the qualification of being born in the right family.<sup>320</sup> Serious disciples would have little to learn from them, and instead have to accept another person as a *śikṣā*-guru. This does not mean that the importance of the *dīkṣā*-guru should be neglected: the *paramparā* or disciplic succession is always traced through the *dīkṣā*-guru, and respect is always shown to the *dīkṣā*-guru, at least “from a distance” (see 5.2).<sup>321</sup> For lay members, he may be their only guru.

One way of reforming this system was attempted by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī (1874-1937). While his own guru was a member of the Advaita *parivāra*, the *paramparā* that Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī presented to his disciples is not a line of *dīkṣā*-gurus, but mostly of *śikṣā*-gurus. One of his disciples has said that

... the very gist of the guru *paramparā*, the disciplic succession, is *śikṣā*, the spiritual teaching, and wherever it is to be traced, there is guru. [...] Otherwise the guru *paramparā* is only a body *paramparā*: a succession of bodies. Then the caste brāhmaṇas, the caste *goswamis*, will continue with their trade, because body after body they are getting the mantra. But their mantra is dead.<sup>322</sup>

319 Dimock (1989), 120-122, Sarkar (1990), 73

320 See for example Kennedy (1925), 1565-160

321 Haberman (1988), 117 argues that the *dīkṣā*-guru is “obviously” the most important, but he seems to base his argument only on the practice of the *bābājī*-community at Rādhā-kuṇḍa.

322 Swami B.R. Śrīdhar [n.d], 22

Better than following such a “succession of bodies”, *goswami* gurus perceived as unqualified, would be to follow a line of great teachers, whatever their *parivāra* or *vaṃśa*, and begin a new line of *dīkṣā*-gurus coming from Bhaktisiddhānta himself. Some other Gauḍīyas take strong exception to this and claim that because of this the Gauḍīya Maṭhas (and its offshoot, ISKCON) have no unbroken *paramparā*, and thus the mantras they receive are worthless.<sup>323</sup>

Instead of having formal *dīkṣā*-gurus and *śikṣā*-gurus giving the actual teachings, Bhaktisiddhānta wanted to join the two. The new type of guru could be called the *ācārya*-guru.<sup>324</sup> He would be a renounced and learned *sannyāsīn*, but actively travel, preach and widely accept disciples. He and a spiritual elite of *brahmacārīns* and *sannyāsīns* would live in *maṭhas* which would provide spiritual guidance to society at large. Bhaktisiddhānta exemplified this himself. He had several tens of thousands of disciples and founded over sixty *maṭhas*, but himself led a very renounced life.<sup>325</sup> This is similar to the position of the *jagad*-gurus in the Śaṅkara-*saṃpradāya*<sup>326</sup> or the *ācāryas* in the Śrī- and Brahmā-*saṃpradāyas*, but new to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya*. The history of the Gauḍīya Maṭhas and ISKCON has shown that the problem with this system, as we shall see later (8.2.2) is that it demands very much of the *ācārya*, and that it creates great problems with succession.

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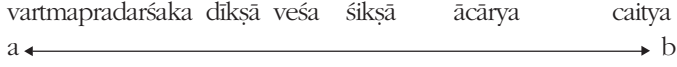
323 E.g. IF 2000/14a

324 When used separately (generally in quotations), the word *ācārya* does not denote this type of guru, but is rather simply a synonym for the word guru. My use of the term *ācārya*-guru is completely opposite to that of Steinmann (1986), 288-289. He contrasts the householder *ācārya* with the *sannyāsī* guru. Sardella (2002), 36-37 uses the term as I do.

325 For his life see Bhaktikumum Sraman (1983) and Prabhupada Saraswati Thakur. For a description of his movement see Madsen (2001).

326 See Cenknier (1984)

Summarising all this, we could modify the diagram above.



The line a-b representing individual qualification, a meaning little and b great. The *vartmapradarśaka*-guru need not have any personal qualification, while the *caitya*-guru (being Kṛṣṇa himself) has all.

### 3.5 Defining the guru

The several types of gurus mentioned above makes comprehensive definition difficult. A definition of guru that would cover them all will likely be too broad and hence vague. Śivarāma Swami in ISKCON proposes the following: “Anyone who gives instructions on the basis of revealed scripture is a guru”.<sup>327</sup> This definition has several problems. What about the seventeen gurus of Dattātreya (see 3.3.7) who indirectly instructed him? Or the *vartmapradarśaka* guru? Shortening down the definition to “anyone who gives spiritual instruction” includes them all. This is probably what Narahari Sarakāra has in mind when he writes that “all Vaiṣṇavas are gurus”.<sup>328</sup>

While such definitions may be theologically correct, they do not correspond very well with reality. Gauḍīyas simply do not offer the reverence and worship due to “the guru” to everyone that has at some point given them some spiritual advice or instruction. Rather, they have one or a few persons that they consider their gurus in their practical life. These will be the *dikṣā*-guru and perhaps some *śikṣā*-gurus. I have therefore opted to retain the different categories presented above (*ācārya*-, *caitya*-, *dikṣā*-, *śikṣā*-, *vartmapradarśaka*- and *veśa-guru*) with one exception: if the word guru is not qualified

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327 Śivarāma Swami (1999), 33

328 KB, p 8

by any other word, such as “instructing”, it refers to the *dīkṣā*-guru, since he is usually considered the most important guru.

What about the definition of Jan Gonda, quoted in the first chapter? “The man who on account of his special knowledge and function was held to be a bearer of power conspicuous by his prestige, ‘weight’ and influence.” This is still rather too vague. What kind of “function” is it that makes him a bearer of power? And who was it that held him to be such a person? Not necessarily the general populace – some gurus are considered complete frauds except by a few disciples. All this considered, I would define the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru as *a charismatic person who is offered special reverence by one or several persons on account of his awarding him/ them initiation and/ or especially important spiritual advice*. In the next chapter, the qualifications of the guru will be examined, giving us a clearer understanding of the kind of charisma the guru is supposed to have.

## 4. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE GURU

This chapter examines the qualifications given for a *sad*-guru or real guru within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. Through this, I will try to locate the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru within the framework provided by Steinmann (3.1). Moreover, we will achieve a preliminary view of the charisma the guru is supposed to have, a theme that will be more fully elaborated on in part III. After this, I will try to see whether such qualifications can be found in modern Gauḍīya gurus, and, as a contrast, look briefly at the qualifications expected of the disciple.

### 4.1 Personal qualifications

I base my description of the personal qualifications of the guru on the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. While it might be argued that this particular book is not widely studied or read in Gauḍīya circles nowadays, many gurus spontaneously referred to the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* when questioned about this topic. As already mentioned, when explaining words such as “guru,” and “characteristics of the guru,” Haridāsa Dāsa refers almost only to the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. That is easy to understand: nowhere else in the books of the Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana is this subject given as much treatment.

#### 4.1.1 Primary qualifications

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* gives two lists of qualifications of the guru. The first contains the primary qualifications.

There (BP 11.3.21) it is also said by Yogeśvara Prabuddha: “Therefore, one who is desirous of the ultimate good should turn to a guru who is deeply learned in scripture and the highest, and detachedly sheltered in *brahman*.” The Lord himself says (BP 11.10.5): “One should turn to a guru who knows Me, is calm and whose mind is in Me.”<sup>329</sup>

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329 HBV 1.32, 33. *tatraiva (śrībhā. 11.3.21) śrīprabuddha-yogeśvaroktau – tasmād guruṃ prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam/ śābde pare ca niṣṇātam brahmaṇy upaśamāśrayam// svayaṃ śribhagavad-uktau (śrībhā. 11.10.5) – mad-abhijñāṃ guruṃ śāntam upāsīta mad-ātmakam//*

The commentator, Sanātana Gosvāmin, explains that scripture means the Vedas (to be taken in the broad meaning of the term), and that the reason for this is that without scriptural knowledge the guru would not be able to remove the doubts of the disciple. “The highest” he explains as God, and that deep learning in this case means that he is able to explain what he has perceived, for otherwise he would not be able to transmit knowledge. In other words, the guru needs to have both theoretical and realised, mystical, knowledge. The commentator also explains “detachedly sheltered in *brahman*” as the best of Vaiṣṇavas, since only such a person can find shelter in the highest *brahman*, Kṛṣṇa.<sup>330</sup> The second quotation reflects the same idea. The commentator glosses “knows Me” with “who knows Me fully, beginning with understanding the greatness of My love for My devotees.”<sup>331</sup> These elaborations aside, in the scheme of Steinmann the first verse describes a guru of a decidedly Upaniṣadic type, while the second more of a Bhakti type.

The first verse is well-known by modern Gauḍiyas, and Smita Kṛṣṇa Swami of ISKCON gave a lengthy explanation of it when I interviewed him on this subject. He thought that this verse was a fully sufficient description of a real spiritual master. He interpreted the main point of the verse to be that the guru should be situated in the *sattva-guṇa*, the highest of the three modalities of material nature.

Have a brahmiṇical nature, be well-versed in the scriptures. That is the mode of goodness [*sattva-guṇa*]. In the mode of goodness one can better hear what the text actually teaches, while one in the mode of passion is more inclined to insert one’s own opinions in the text. Projecting one’s own ideas rather than taking it as it is. Therefore, [he] must be in goodness.

“Well-versed in the scriptures.” In my own case, my ability to quote verses is highly limited. But it does not say “memorised the

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330 *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 1.32

331 Ibid, 1.33. *mām abhīto bhakta-vātsalyādi-māhātmyānuhava-pūrvakam jānāti tam*/ This commentary follows closely that of Śrīdhara Svāmin in his commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.



whole *Bhagavad-gītā*, rather [my guru] Prabhupāda explains “the conclusion”. Such a person, I think, should also naturally be able to pass on and convince other persons about these things. “Convince” is more a question of passing on, whether others start chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa or not is up to them. If they are smart they understand that they have to surrender to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>332</sup>

He also interpreted “detachedly sheltered in *brahman*” to mean that the guru should not have any managerial responsibilities, a perennial topic of controversy in ISKCON, where some, along with this guru, think that this impedes their ability to think of the welfare of individual disciples, while others think that the gurus by dint of their spiritual advancement and authority are also best suited for managing the movement.

Ananta Dāsa Bābāji, commenting on the same verse, extracts four “definitions” of a bona fide guru: 1) that he is filled with realisations about Kṛṣṇa due to his firm faith and his firm adherence to the worship of the Lord, 2) that he is very learned in the Vedas and devotional scriptures such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, so that he can destroy the doubts of his disciples, 3) that he has attained the “mercy-potency” or guru-potency of Kṛṣṇa by his otherworldly realisations, and thus he is able to bring disciples to the path of bhakti and infuse this power into them also, and 4) that he is not overcome by vices such as lust or greed.<sup>333</sup>

Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja, a popular guru of the Gauḍīya Vedānta Samiti and grand-disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, follows the same verse in explaining the qualifications of the guru, but adds also that the guru must be at least of intermediate faith. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* explains that devotees can be classified into three groups according to their degree of faith: small, intermediate and great. The guru should ideally be of the best group (one that sees everything in relation to Kṛṣṇa), but he may also belong to the intermediate group. The following four qualities are found in such a devotee: 1) he has love and affec-

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332 IF mgt 2000/92

333 Ananta Dāsa Bābāji [nd], 6

tion for Kṛṣṇa, 2) he behaves properly to other Vaiṣṇavas in that he honours and obeys those more advanced, cultivates friendship with his equals, and is friendly and compassionate to those less advanced, 3) he is merciful to persons interested in Vaiṣṇavism even if they are ignorant, and 4) he avoids inimical persons. To be at least on the intermediate stage of faith, the guru must have these qualifications.<sup>334</sup>

Returning to the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, after these passages from the *Bhāgavata* follows another general text, but this one with more details:

And in the *Krama-dīpikā* (4.2): “One who is really desirous of knowledge should with a humble body and mind surrender to a guide who is a brāhmaṇa; who has destroyed the enemies of lust, etc; who has faultless limbs; is venerable; devoted; hankering after carrying the dust of the two lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa; who knows the pure paths of the Vedas, Śāstras and Āgamas; whose opinion is consistent with that of the saints; who is restrained and knowledgeable”.<sup>335</sup>

This passage is taken from the *Krama-dīpikā*, a book written by Keśava Ācārya, a famous Vaiṣṇava teacher and prolific author from the Kumāra-saṃpradāya.<sup>336</sup> It gives more information about the guru. The commentator interprets “faultless limbs” as free from disease,<sup>337</sup> no doubt

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334 Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja (2000), 23. He refers to BP 11.2.45-48

335 HBV 1.34. *krama-dīpikāyān ca – vipraṃ pradhvasta-kāma-prabhṛti-ripu-ghatam nirmalāṅgaṃ gariṣṭhāṃ bhaktiṃ kṛṣṇāṅghri-parikeruha-yugalarajo-rāgiṇīm udvahantam/ vettāraṃ veda-śāstrāgama-vimāla-pathāṃ sammatam satsu dāntaṃ vidyāṃ yaḥ saṃvivitsa praṇata-numaṇa deśikā saṃśrayeta//*

336 Some (e.g. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī in his *Anubhāṣya* commentary to CB 1.13.177) think that this author is identical with the Keśava from Kashmir that Caitanya vanquished in a debate in his youth. The episode is narrated in CB 1.13.19-199 and CC 1.16.25-108. For its historicity, see De, 73-74. It is noteworthy that Gopāla Bhaṭṭa does not hesitate to quote persons from other Vaiṣṇava groups, something that is practically unheard of nowadays. Bhaktisiddhānta Śārasvatī thought that the *Krama-dīpikā* was written after the meeting with Caitanya. However, only after the time of writing the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, Keśava Ācārya joined the Kumāra saṃpradāya, for otherwise he would not have been so much quoted! (*Anubhāṣya* commentary to CB 1.13.177)

337 *Dig-darśini* commentary to HBV 1.34

including that he should not be physically crippled in any way. This is also the interpretation of Ananta Dāsa Bābājī.<sup>338</sup> The guru described in this passage is clearly of the Bhakti type, though not of a radical sort. Traditional considerations such as caste, orthodoxy and health are retained.

In his *Bhakti-sandarbha*, Jīva Gosvāmin begins his explanation of the qualifications of the guru with the same verse of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that Gopāla Bhaṭṭa first quotes, explaining it in a way similar to that of Sanātana Gosvāmin.<sup>339</sup> More details of the guru follow in the next *Anuccheda*, where the main point is that the true guru should be dispassionate and that he should teach only what he has himself deeply deliberated on. More important than character, conduct and good ancestry (this-worldly qualities), is that the guru is “radiant” or that he possesses otherworldly qualities, especially what we are calling charisma.<sup>340</sup>

The idea that the guru should teach only what he himself has understood is a classic one. The very word *ācārya* is often translated as “one who teaches by his own example”<sup>341</sup>. Many modern gurus emphasise this.<sup>342</sup> Ananta Dāsa Bābājī quotes an unidentified verse defining the *ācārya*: “He who speaks the dharma explained in the scriptures, himself always follows it and also teaches it to others, he is known as an *ācārya*.”<sup>343</sup>

One of the qualifications repeated many times is that the guru should have knowledge. What kind of knowledge? Elaborating on a

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338 Ananta Dāsa Bābājī [nd], 6

339 BS 202

340 BS 203

341 E.g. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1974a), 865

342 E.g. IF mgt 2000/68

343 *śāstroktam dharmam uccārya svayam ācarate sadā/ anyebhyaḥ śikṣayed yas tu sa ācārya nigadyate*// Ananta Dāsa Bābājī [nd], 6-7. A different verse with the same meaning is given in the Gauḍīya Kaṇṭhahāra (1.23). It is ascribed to the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, but cannot be found in the printed edition.

verse of the *Bhagavad-gītā* describing the process of turning to a guru (4.3), Bhakti Prajñāna Yati Mahārāja of Śrī Caitanya Gauḍīya Maṭha said:

Who then is guru? *Jñānīnaḥ*, who is well versed in divine wisdom. Knowledge is material, wisdom is spiritual. Only a person well-versed in spiritual wisdom should one put questions to. Should one then ask priests or professors of philosophy? No, he should be *tattva-darśinaḥ*, have a vision of truth. Spiritual truth means *Śrī-bhagavān*, the Lord, not the *nirguṇa* of the *māyavādins*. He is full of all opulences. Vision means that he not only sees Him, but lives with Him, moves with Him, is dedicated to His service. All that he does should be *Hari-toṣaṇam*, for the pleasure of God. Such a person should be approached by an aspirant soul. When such a guru finds that the disciple has these qualities [submission, enquiry and service], only then should he enlighten him.<sup>344</sup>

Yati Mahārāja here makes the common distinction between material knowledge and spiritual wisdom. The guru has to have spiritual knowledge. Describing this spiritual wisdom, he then went on to explain the theology of the three aspects of Kṛṣṇa, and then summed it all up:

One who has got full knowledge, or I should say realisation, of these three - *Brahman*, *Paramātma* and *Bhagavān* – which are actually one object, one divine personality and His two aspects, is known as *brāhmaṇa*, who is fully dovetailed for His service, who is *ātmārāmin*, without any other desire, he is a guru.<sup>345</sup>

Again, the stress is on realised knowledge leading to tangible results in the life of the knower. This came out also when I asked what this “realisation” actually is.

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344 IF mgt 2000/81

345 Ibid

-How can a disciple know whether the guru is actually realised or not?

-No, practically it is not possible. At the same time, from the negative side, he can understand. Positively he cannot understand until he arrives at the plane of transcendence. But because he has got certain knowledge, like I have got a certain eligibility for which I am admitted in a college. After getting admission in college I can actually understand who is a good professor and who is not competent. If I am really sincere for my divine attainment [I can understand], because it is God who actually provides me with such knowledge for the understanding to know the divine characteristic to a certain extent of my divine guru. Do you follow? Or at least that he is not aguru. Means a worldly man. From that aspect only I can understand. From his acts also, from that aspect.<sup>346</sup>

In other words, one cannot fully understand a transcendentalist until one reaches that plane oneself, but by the mercy of God it is possible. Even if one does not attain such a level of realisation, at least one can see whether the guru is unqualified. Returning to the idea of behaviour reflecting teachings (*ācārya*), the external acts of the guru are strong indicators of internal realisation. Still, in explanations such as this one can see the problem inherent in regarding something as abstract as “realisation” as one of the main qualifications of the guru: it is very difficult to judge. More about this below (4.3).

#### 4.1.2 Secondary qualifications

After the primary qualifications, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin discusses the secondary characteristics of the guru.

In the *Mantra-muktāvalī*: “Of pure descent, clean, devoted to conduct suitable for him, situated in his *āśrama*, without anger, who knows the Veda and the Śāstras, faithful and nonenvious, nicely speaking, of nice appearance, pure, beautifully clothed, young, pleased by the happiness of all beings, thoughtful, humbleminded, complete,

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346 IF mgt 2000/81

nonviolent, reflective, having good qualities, determined and knowledgeable in worship, affectionate to his disciples, equal when confronted with praise or criticism, devoted to sacrifices and mantras, expert in logic and debate, pure in heart and a receptacle of mercy. A guru with these and other qualities is an ocean of venerableness [guru-ness].”<sup>347</sup>

Here we see a curious mix of the perfect teacher, the saint and the perfect gentleman. The guru should know the scriptures, how to conduct worship and utter mantras, but he should also be humble, non-envious and equally disposed towards praise or criticism, and be beautiful, young and well-dressed! “Pure descent” means, according to the commentator, that he comes from a good family (*sadvamśa*), in which there has been no degradation or that the ritual purity of none of the ancestors has been compromised. “Clean” is similarly interpreted as himself not subject to any such faults.

“Situated in his *āśrama*” is generally interpreted as being a householder,<sup>348</sup> something that has stirred up some controversy in the movement. Some hold this to be very important, referring to the fact that almost all of Caitanya’s companions who took disciples were householders and claiming that a *bābājī* or *sannyāsin* is forbidden from making disciples.<sup>349</sup> However, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin himself was not a householder, and he accepted many disciples. Gopal Ghosh, head librarian of the Vrindāvana Research Institute, suggested that Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin included this statement as a concession to the majority of gurus, who at this time already were

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347 HBV 1.38-41. *mantra-muktāvālyām – avadātānvayaḥ śuddhaḥ svocitācāra-tatparaḥ/ āśrami krodha-rahito vedavit sarva-śāstravit// śraddhānanasūryaś ca priyavāk priya-darśanaḥ/ śuciḥ suveśaś taruṇaḥ sarva-bhūta-hite rataḥ// dhīmān anuddhata-matiḥ pūrṇo 'hantā vimarśakaḥ/ saguṇo 'rcāsu kṛtadhīḥ kṛtajñāḥ śiṣya-vatsalaḥ// nigrahānugrahe śakto homa-mantra-parāyaṇaḥ/ ūhāpoha-prakāra-jñāḥ śuddhātmā yaḥ kṛpālayaḥ// ityādi-lakṣaṇair yukto guruḥ syād garimā-nidhiḥ//*

348 For example by Haridāsa Dāsa (1995), 240

349 IF 2000/14d

householders. There were exceptions already at that time, such as the followers of Vakraśvara Paṇḍita in Orissa.<sup>350</sup> At any rate, this is only one word in a verse giving secondary qualifications. From Vedic times onwards, gurus have usually been householders, with renunciants being a minority. So also in the Kumāra-*saṃpradāya*, from which the text at hand originates.

“Good qualities” refer to being parentally affectionate to his disciples.<sup>351</sup> Padmanābha Goswami of the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple *vaṃśa*, interpreted “of pure descent” to mean that the guru either belongs to a pure succession of gurus (*guru-paramparā*) or to a pure family line (*vaṃśa-paramparā*) stemming from one of the close associates of Caitanya. Another guru belonging to the same *vaṃśa*, Puruṣottama Goswami, interprets “pure descent” to mean that the guru must come in a family line of gurus.<sup>352</sup> More about this below. Instead of “young” Padmanābha Goswami read “mature”, and interpreted that to mean older than 25 or 30 years.<sup>353</sup>

Now, lists such as this must be seen as giving a picture of the ideal guru rather than as presenting an inviolable norm: for that reason, this and the following texts are labelled by the author as giving secondary qualifications of the guru. As far as known, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin himself continued taking disciples up until his last years, and we know nothing of his looks or manner of speaking. Since he was a renunciant he certainly did not dress nicely! The type of guru described here is similar to that in the last text: a socially acceptable Bhakti type guru.

The following text contains many of the same elements, but adds quite a bit:

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350 IF mgt 2002/13

351 *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 1.38-41

352 Case (2000), 47

353 IF mgt 2000/68

And in the *Agastya Saṃhitā*: “One who is a worshiper of the gods, calm, not touched by the sense objects, who knows the inner self, is a student of the Vedas, learned in the meaning of the Vedas and Śāstras, competent to deliver and indeed to destroy, highest of the brāhmaṇas, knower of the truth, cutter of doubts in *yantras* and mantras, knower of secrets, performer of introductory rites, perfected in *homas* and mantras, knower of means, austere, speaker of the truth and a householder, is called a guru.”<sup>354</sup>

This quotation ascribes even more divine qualities to the guru. He is still the perfect teacher and saint, but now he is also endowed with the power to deliver or destroy. The type of guru here, while not rejecting brāhminical orthodoxy, has obvious influences from the Tantric type. Of a similar strain is the popular “etymology” of the word “guru”: “The syllable *gu* means darkness, *ru* protection from that. Because he is the cessation of darkness, he is known as ‘guru’.”<sup>355</sup>

As interesting as the qualifications of the guru are the disqualifications he should be without. Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin supplies the following list:

In the *Tattva-sāgara*: “Who eats much, is slow, addicted to sense objects, fond of disputation, evil, who talks nonsense, is a scorner of good qualities, who is hairless or very hairy, serves in a despicable *āśrama*, has black teeth and lips and bad breath: an *ācārya* with these bad qualities, even be he a lord himself, is a destroyer of fortune even if able to give plenty of alms.”<sup>356</sup>

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354 HBV 1.42-44. *agastya-saṃhitāyān ca – devatopāsakaḥ śāntao viṣayeshv api nisprhaḥ/ adhyātmavid brahmavādū veda-śāstrārtha-kovidah// uddhārtuṃ caiva saṃhartuṃ samārtho brahmaṇottamaḥ/ tattvajño yantra-mantrāṇām marmabhetā rahasyavit// puraścaraṇa-kṛd dhoma-mantra-siddhaḥ prayogavit/ tapasvī satyavādī ca grhashto gurur ucyate//*

355 *gu-śabdās tv andhakārasya ru-śabdās tan-nivārakah/ andhakāra-nirodhatvād gurur ity abhidhīyate//* Ascribed to the *Skanda Purāṇa* in Swami B.P. Puri [Ind], 105

356 HBV 1.56-58. *tattva-sāgare – bahvāśi dīrgha-sūtri ca viṣayādiṣu lolupaḥ/ hetuvāda-rato duṣṭo vāgvādī guṇa-nindakah// aromā bahuromā ca ninditāśrama-sevakah/ kāla-danto 'sitaūṣṭhaś ca durgandhi-śvāsavāhakah// duṣṭa-lakṣaṇa-sampanno yady api svayam īśvaraḥ/ bahu-pratigrahāsakta ācāryaḥ śrīksayāvahah//*



This is all that is said of the “non-guru” in the whole book, and remarkable is the great emphasis on purely external factors such as too much or too little hair and bad teeth. The commentator interprets the last words as meaning that even if he is able to give many alms, he is unable to give any (real) blessings. One cannot help but wonder whether the author of the *Tattva-sāgara* (Ocean of Truths) had someone particular in mind. Since many Gauḍīya gurus have had long hair or a clean-shaven head, it is hard to see “hairless or very hairy” as anything other than (in Rappaport’s terms) an importation.

#### 4.1.3 *Vedānta Deśika*

The qualifications Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin expects from a real guru may be compared to those mentioned by Vedānta Deśika (1268-1369), an important theologian of the Śrī-*saṃpradāya*. Elsewhere in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin refers to him, so he may have been aware of his opinion also in this matter.<sup>357</sup> Vedānta Deśika mentions the following fourteen qualifications: perfect membership of a true *saṃpradāya*; possession of undisputed, clear knowledge; freedom from sin; deep knowledge of the scriptures; firm faith in the Lord; being established in *sattva-guṇa*; truthfulness; living according to the customs laid down by the saints; freedom from deceit, jealousy, etc; control of the senses; friendliness; compassion; helping erring disciples follow the right track and wishing the welfare of oneself and others.<sup>358</sup> Apart from omitting the Tantric elements, this is similar to the most common picture drawn in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*: the socially orthodox Bhakti-guru – with one exception: Vedānta Deśika does not insist that the guru be a brāhmaṇa.

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357 HBV 15.68

358 *Nyāya-vimśati* 1. Quoted in Chari (2000), 304-305.

#### 4.2 Institutional qualifications

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* does not stress institutional qualifications. However, it does state several times that the guru should be a brāhmaṇa, even amongst the primary qualifications. What about the other *varṇas*? Quoting the *Nārada-pañcarātra*, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin thinks the brāhmaṇa guru the best, but in the absence of such a guru, persons of other *varṇas* may function as gurus, if they have been properly consecrated by their own gurus, are devoted to the Lord, know the scriptures and the rituals of initiation. However, it is forbidden to initiate persons of a higher *varṇa*, just as it is forbidden to marry such a girl. Both are called *pratiloma* (contrary, reverse), and *pratiloma* initiation is explicitly forbidden. If a guru of a higher class is available, it is also forbidden to approach one of a lower class.<sup>359</sup>

Still, there is one consideration even more important than *varṇa*, and that is demonstrated with a verse from the *Padma Purāṇa*:

“A non-Vaiṣṇava who is born in a great family, initiated into all sacrifices, and a student of the thousand branches of knowledge cannot be a guru.”<sup>360</sup>

The commentator adds a well-known verse from the *Pañcarātra* stating that a mantra received from a non-Vaiṣṇava guru leads one to hell, and that one therefore should give up such a guru and accept a new mantra (or the same anew) from a Vaiṣṇava guru.<sup>361</sup> In the following verse by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin himself a Vaiṣṇava is defined as one who has taken Viṣṇu-initiation and is devoted to the worship of Viṣṇu. Others are non-Vaiṣṇavas.<sup>362</sup> Such a broad definition of Vaiṣṇavism of course leaves the door open for many different kinds

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359 HBV 1.45-52

360 HBV 1.54. *mahā-kula-prasūto 'pi sarva-yajñeṣu dikṣitaḥ/ sahasra-śākhādhyāyī ca na guruḥ syād avaiṣṇavaḥ//*

361 *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 1.54

362 HBV 1.55

of *saṃpradāyas*, well in keeping with the catholic nature of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*.

Since Caitanya himself is quoted as saying that whoever knows the subject of Kṛṣṇa is a guru, no matter whether he is a brāhmaṇa, *sannyāsin* or *śūdra*,<sup>363</sup> the above consideration of *varṇa* has been questioned by many in the later tradition. Some think that Caitanya speaks about gurus in a broad sense, not about *dikṣā*-gurus, while others take him more to the word and think that what Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin writes is “meant for those overly dependent on the mundane social order and is suitable for those who want to remain in mundane life.”<sup>364</sup> Others hold the texts mentioning brāhmaṇa gurus overruled by the one above, in which any *varṇa* qualification is overruled by one’s devotional qualifications.<sup>365</sup> Still, the gurus of the later tradition would usually be brāhmaṇas, though there were important exceptions. Not surprisingly, the brāhmaṇa *goswami* gurus take Gopāla Bhaṭṭa to the letter.<sup>366</sup>

Noteworthy is that in none of the works of the Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana anything is said about something that modern Gauḍīyas say is a qualification of paramount importance: that the guru should belong to a *paramparā* or disciplic succession. The idea is that no guru can be a guru simply in his own right. He has to come in an unbroken succession of gurus stemming from Caitanya or his associates. Jan Brzezinski has argued that both Gopāla Bhaṭṭa and Jīva Gosvāmins, even though not directly mentioning the need for a *paramparā*, take it for granted.<sup>367</sup> Since it is mandatory for everyone desiring to perfect himself spiritually to turn to a guru, naturally the

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363 CC 2.8.128

364 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1975), 163

365 Chatterjee (1988), 138-139

366 E.g. IF mgt 2000/68. Another brāhmaṇa guru, Kṛṣṇa Balarām Swami, makes birth in a brāhmaṇa family the prime requisite of a guru, even though his own guru (Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda) did not have that qualification and spoke strongly against its necessity. See <http://www.krsna.org/Guru1.html>

367 Brzezinski (1996), 167

guru would also have a guru. Also, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin does mention that one should follow the custom of the particular *saṃpradāya* in numerous ritual observances, such as applying *tilaka* markings to one's body,<sup>368</sup> so the notion of different disciplic successions is certainly known to him. Later in his book he quotes a verse saying that even the vultures do not eat the dead bodies of those ungrateful persons who give up a traditional (*āmnayāgata*) guru. The commentator glosses *āmnayāgata* with "coming in a family line" or "enjoined in the Veda".<sup>369</sup> This seems to imply the two kinds of gurus one can find in the present day Gauḍīya *saṃpradāya*: those coming in a family line of gurus, and those who have been appointed by their guru (see 2.3.3).

Still, why does he not say that one has to belong to a *paramparā* in the context of describing the qualifications of the guru? I think the answer is found in the catholic spirit of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. At a time when there were very few Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas in Vṛndāvana, the author sees no need for creating a new distinct group of Vaiṣṇavas. Instead he desires to integrate the Bengali Vaiṣṇavas into the greater community of Vaiṣṇavas in the Mathurā area. This is quite evident from the very broad definition of who is a Vaiṣṇava that he uses frequently in the book<sup>370</sup> and from the fact that he cites Vaiṣṇavas from the Śrī- and Kumāra-*saṃpradāyas*. Whether this catholicity was because of pragmatic necessity or ideological reasons is another matter, and one that I will not enter into here.<sup>371</sup> Another reason is offered by David Haberman: there were no long successions of gurus at this time. The authors were all disciples or granddisciples of the companions of Caitanya himself, and could thus consider themselves as "living in the immediate presence of revelation".<sup>372</sup>

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368 HBV 2.129

369 HBV 4.363

370 For example HBV 1.55, 12.338

371 For a longer discussion on this, see Bhṛgumuni Dāsa (2001), xvii.

372 Haberman (1989), 119

Whatever the reason for Gopāla Bhaṭṭa's silence, modern gurus often strongly stress the importance of the *paramparā*. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, the founder of ISKCON, writes:

No one can be a bona fide spiritual master without following this principle of disciplic succession. [Kṛṣṇa] is the original spiritual master, and a person in the disciplic succession can convey the message of the Lord as it is to his disciple. No one can be spiritually realized by manufacturing his own process, as is the fashion of foolish pretenders.<sup>373</sup>

His followers express similar views, often even downplaying the need for personal qualifications. One guru in ISKCON said that the main qualification of a guru is that he is "faithful to his own guru".<sup>374</sup> Smita Kṛṣṇa Swami put it even more clearly:

Now, whether we fully meet these qualifications is another thing, in my opinion. Maybe we, that is I, meet at least an institutional function. It is not on our own authority that we dare initiate, it is on Prabhupāda's indirect blessing through the GBC [Governing Body Commission, the managerial head of ISKCON], that we have the audacity to initiate disciples on behalf of this tradition. It is not exactly our own qualification that qualifies us, but we have been given an order or assignment, or at least a blessing.<sup>375</sup>

In other words, the personal shortcomings of a particular guru can be outweighed by the status of his own guru. The idea of *paramparā* has obvious sectarian consequences, something that will be discussed further on (8.2.2). For the time being, it is enough to know that most modern Gauḍīyas strongly emphasise the need for the guru to come in a proper disciplic succession. This added emphasis on institutional charisma can be seen as sign of a successful routinisation (see 8.2) of the personal charisma of the earliest gurus. For *goswami* gurus, birth in the right family is the one qualification

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373 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1974a), 259-260

374 IF 2000/14c

375 IF mgt 2000/92

overriding everything else. While *goswamis* often emphasise that sons of a previous *goswami* do not automatically become gurus themselves,<sup>376</sup> failure to become so would be the result of serious disqualifications, rather than the lack of certain personal qualifications.

#### 4.3 Standard of modern gurus

Reading all this, one naturally wants to know what things look like in the real world, outside books and the theories of theologians. Are there persons with all the above-mentioned qualities? Is everything that has been said really followed, or are such statements more of ideals, or something found only in a glorious past, mercifully shrouded by the fog of forgetfulness? Researchers, especially in the colonial time, did not have to think twice before giving an answer.

As a rule, however, they are ignorant and selfish, their chief object in visiting their disciples being to obtain the customary fee.<sup>377</sup>

For spiritual guidance and any real moral and social leadership in all that makes for the progress and well-being of society, the *goswamis* as a whole are not qualified. The principle by which they function in Vaishnava society is thoroughly vicious, the basis of their guruship being inheritance rather than qualifications for leadership. No matter how worthless, ignorant and good-for-nothing a *goswami*'s son may be, he becomes the object of the same reverence which his father received.<sup>378</sup>

Some modern scholars also agree with this pessimistic view.

Formerly the guru was the wisest and most learned person in the group and the head of the *ākhṛā* [monastery] but after some time, guruship became hereditary and became confined to one family. The son of a *goswami* must be a *goswami* even if he was licentious. The guru cared very little for the spiritual condition of the *śiṣya* (disciple) which was usually enjoined as the most noble task of the preceptor. He initiated

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376 E.g. IF mgt 2000/85

377 Wilkins (1975), 27-28

378 Kennedy (1925), 158

a large number of disciples not with a view of imparting them religious teaching, but only to extract money, which served to meet his family expenses.<sup>379</sup>

Other scholars, notably Ramakanta Chakrabarty, strongly disagree, and point out that the organisations of every faith are dependent on the financial assistance of the believers. To think that the *goswamis* were parasites just because they were supported by their disciples is oversimplifying.<sup>380</sup>

In making any kind of judgement in this matter, the problem is that most of the qualifications mentioned above are very hard to judge. The guru should know Kṛṣṇa, but how do we know whether he does that or not, or even if there is any such god to know? Other qualifications allow much interpretation. How much does one have to know to “know the scriptures”? With these questions in mind, I ventured to check one influential and widely respected present day Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru, Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja (1921-),<sup>381</sup> against the lists of qualifications given in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. I have spoken only once with this guru, but I have read several of his books and know some of his disciples, so what I know about him is at least as much as a prospective disciple.

If one point was to be given for each of the verifiable qualities found (e.g. “well-dressed”, “austere”), he would score 22 out of 35 (63%). He loses points especially by being old and a *sannyāsin*, but then again his austerity earns him some points that householder gurus would not get. However, if we just look at the main qualifications given in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, he scores full points (2/2), but we also notice that those qualifications contain three that are very difficult to judge and therefore left out in this test. These are, of course, the most important ones.

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379 Bhattacharya (1981), 38-39

380 Chakrabarty (1985), 338-339

381 For a brief biography, see Anon in [www.gaudiya.net/narayanamaharaja.htm](http://www.gaudiya.net/narayanamaharaja.htm)

The point I want to make here is that prospective disciples do not go through such lists when they judge whether the guru they are considering is a true guru or not. If I would tell a disciple of Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja that his guru scored 63% in the “perfect guru”-test, he would think that I did something wrong or even become offended. “One cannot understand the guru by just observing him from a distance”, they might say, but that brings up the same problem mentioned above: how is one then to choose a guru? This will be one of the subjects of the next chapter.

All in all, the charisma of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru is hardly severed from the canon. For a *goswami* guru, the main qualification is birth in a specific family tradition and allegiance to it. While this is not seen in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, we find knowledge of the scriptures repeated again and again both among the primary and the secondary qualifications of the guru. Of Weber’s charismatic personages, the magician can thus safely be left out when speaking about the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru. The interplay between canon and charisma within the person of the guru will be dealt with at length in part III.

#### 4.4 *Qualifications of the disciple*

Before moving on to the next chapter, let us, as a contrast, look briefly at the qualifications demanded of the disciple. The sources maintain that while there are no restrictions with regard to age (as long as one is over five<sup>382</sup>) family and sex,<sup>383</sup> not everyone is qualified to become the disciple of a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* contains the following descriptions of the character of the disciple.

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382 SD p 13

383 HBV 1.194



In the *Mantra-muktāvālī*: “From a good family; fortunate; humble; good-looking; speaking the truth; of pious behaviour; greatly intelligent; prideless; giving up lust and anger; devoted to the feet of the guru; day or night bowing to the gods with body, mind, words, etc; healthy; conquering all sin; faithful; always devoted to the worship of brāhmaṇas, gods, ancestors, etc; youthful; restrained in all deeds; a receptacle of mercy: a disciple with characteristics such as these is eligible for initiation.”<sup>384</sup>

Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin then offers a list of disqualifications of persons not to be initiated from the *Agastya Saṁhitā*, where opposites of the above positive qualities are given.<sup>385</sup> Reading such descriptions, one is struck by a paradox. If really only such outstanding students can be given initiation, why has it elsewhere been declared mandatory for everyone?<sup>386</sup> One answer could be that while not everyone can become young or beautiful, the main qualities can be acquired by training. Otherwise, it is obvious that these lists present ideals rather than strict criteria.

Jīva Gosvāmin approaches the issue from another angle. He has the following to say about worship of the guru:

Now, if one should ask whether one lacking in any specific attribute is able [to approach a guru], the answer is that he should indeed always render specific service to the feet of the gurus, either those who teach the scriptures about the Lord or those who teach the mantra of the Lord. The grace of the guru is firstly the root of the destruction of each and every one’s different unwanted habits, which are difficult to give up and seemingly do not admit any remedy, and secondly of the attainment of the grace of the Highest Lord.<sup>387</sup>

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384 HBV 1.59-62. *mantra-muktāvālyām – śiṣyaḥ śuddhānvayaḥ śrīmān vinītaḥ priya-darśanaḥ/ satyavāk puṇya-carita ‘dabhra-dhīr adammbha-varjitaḥ// kāma-krodha-parityāgī bhaktiś ca guru-pādayoh/ devatā-pravaṇaḥ kāya-mano-vāghbhir divā-nīśam// nirrujo nirjītaśeṣa-pātaḥ śraddhayānvitaḥ/ dvija-veda-pitṛñāñ ca nityam arca-parāyaṇāḥ// yuvā viniyatāśeṣa-karaṇaḥ karuṇālayaḥ/ ityādī-lakṣaṇair yuktaḥ śiṣyo dīkṣādhikāravān//*

385 HBV 1.64-70

386 HBV 1.36-37

387 BS 237. *tathāpi vaiśiṣṭhya-lipsuḥ śaktaś cet tato bhagavac-chāstropadeṣṭṛñām bhagavan-mantropadeṣṭṛñām vā śrīguru-caraṇām nityam eva viśeṣataḥ sevām kūryāt/ tat-prasādo hi sva-sva-nānā-pratīkāra-dustyajāmartha-hānau parama-bhagavat-prasāda-siddhau ca mūlam/*

Even unqualified persons should render service to a real *śikṣā-* or *dīkṣā-*guru, since the grace of such a person can remove his disqualifications, however great they seem. The guru's grace will finally lead to the attainment of the Lord's mercy.

These texts are generally not well known nowadays. When I questioned gurus about the qualifications of a disciple, the answers were much more general. Sincerity, surrender to Kṛṣṇa and the guru, faith in the line of gurus and in Kṛṣṇa, were the qualities usually mentioned. Only one guru read me the list from the *Agastya Saṃhitā* referred to above and commented upon it, but while evidently regarding it as correct, he admitted that he did not understand some things, for example why poor persons should not be given initiation.<sup>388</sup>

Another guru gave a longer description of the disciple. He explained that the disciple should first of all be spiritually dedicated. He should accept things conducive for divine culture, and reject detrimental things at all cost. He should have firm faith in Kṛṣṇa as the protector. He should not be an opportunist. He should know Kṛṣṇa alone as the master. He must have self-consciousness, be responsible for himself and for others. He should make sure that his body, mind and soul acts in accordance to devotion. He should be fully dedicated, not foster separate ideas, and only desire the fulfillment of his guru. Also he should feel himself humbler than a blade of grass. He should have no material ego, but also not spiritual ego (thinking that he is a great devotee), and feel himself as an instrument of guru and God. Still, after enumerating these ideal qualities, he felt that nowadays most disciples are after their own "self-agrandizement".<sup>389</sup>

The hagiographical literature of the movement is full of examples of ideal disciples. Īśvara Purī's exemplary menial service of his bedridden guru, Mādhavendra Purī, gained him the guru's full bless-

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388 IF mgt 2000/68

389 IF mgt 2000/81. The first part of this explanation is based on two well-known verses teaching *śaraṇāgati* or surrender, quoted for example in B.R. Sridhar (1987), 9-10.

ings.<sup>390</sup> Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmin exemplify the ideals of renunciation and humility.<sup>391</sup> Narottama Dāsa shows the example of determination in getting initiation.<sup>392</sup> “Bhondu” (simpleton), the boy-servant of Nandakiśora Dāsa Goswami (18<sup>th</sup> century) exemplifies simplicity,<sup>393</sup> while the story of Bihārī, the disciple of Jagannātha Dāsa Bābājī, a well-known saint of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who is said to have lived 147 years, illustrates the virtues of obedience.

Bihārī was a Vrajavāsī. He did not know Bengali. But Bābā [his guru] asked him to read *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* everyday so that he might listen. He said, “Bābā, I do not know Bengali.” But Bābā asked him to purchase a copy of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, which he did. He then asked him to read. Bihārī only looked vacantly at his face. Bābā said angrily, “Don’t look at me. Look at the book.” Bihārī began to look at the book and found that he was able to read *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* like one who had already learnt Bengali and studied *Caritāmṛta* well.<sup>394</sup>

In this way Bihārī’s obedience to the order of his guru miraculously gave him the power to read Bengali, a language that uses a different type of script than Hindi, the language Bihārī would have known from before, in the rather unlikely case that he was able to read at all. Another similar anecdote narrates how Bihārī in the same way learned to play the *khola*, oblong clay drum.<sup>395</sup>

It can thus clearly be seen that in keeping with the denominational nature of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement, individual commitment is a factor for discipleship. However, in most cases birth is even more so. That children were initiated seems to have been common already in Caitanya’s time (as, for example, in the case of Raghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmin), but it became standard in the generations after Caitanya. The *goswamis* would have families of disciples, where every child

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390 CC 3.8.28-32

391 CC 3.6

392 *Bhakti-ratnākara* 1.278-350.

393 Kapoor (1999), 3-7.

394 Kapoor (1995), 3.

395 Ibid

would be initiated at a tender age. Obviously, in these cases it is rare that anyone is turned down for not fulfilling the ideals. Still, disciples may later be rejected by the guru if they prove incorrigible, for example by arguing against the guru or Kṛṣṇa.<sup>396</sup>

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396 IF mgt 2000/71



## 5. FINDING AND LEAVING A GURU

This chapter explores some of the dynamics behind finding and leaving a guru. Questions such as why someone ends up with a particular guru and when it is permissible or even recommended that one should leave a guru are examined. These are questions of great importance for understanding the guru institution as a social phenomenon. However, while I do make some observations based on my interviews and observations, this chapter should not be seen as providing a comprehensive social or psychological study of why and how people find and leave gurus; rather, it is meant to serve as a broad outline of the issues involved.<sup>397</sup>

### *5.1 Finding a guru*

What the canonical scriptures have to say on this subject has already been covered above (3.3) in connection with the necessity of turning to a guru. The writings of modern Gauḍīyas, however, elaborate on this theme, and will thus here be used as a starting point. I will then compare that with my own observations and interviews.

#### *5.1.1 The classic way*

Reading the descriptions of what kind of a person a true guru should be like, one gets the impression that the duty of a prospective disciple would be to go out in search for a guru who fulfills all these qualifications. This is what I call the *classic* way of choosing a guru. But before starting to search for a guru, there must be some impetus. There are many stories about this.

Hayagrīva Prabhu, who was previously Herambo Banerjee, related that he had been working in a private European company when sud-

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<sup>397</sup> For a good summary of various conversion theories, see Robbins (1988), 63-99

denly by reading a book of Śaṅkarācārya he felt some intense indifference to worldly life. He then ran away to Hardwar and went far up into the hills where he stayed for three days and three nights under a tree, eating only some bael fruit. Then, as he told me, "I heard a sound: 'leave here now, you will find a real Guru, a *sad*-Guru. You will find him, so now you leave.'" He came back down, and consequently to the Gauḍīya [Maṭha]. That was Herambo Banerjee, who was later called Ganeśa, then Hayagrīva Brahmācārī, and finally Mādhava Mahārāja.<sup>398</sup>

This account contains many typical elements that are found in many such stories: the sudden, intense desire to get free of material life, running away from home and society, fasting and doing penance in the jungle for three days and nights, and the divine voice. The theme of young boys running off to the Himalayas in search of a romantic ideal of spiritual life is common in Bengali biographies.<sup>399</sup> Other stories are less dramatic.

One morning we were going to the jungle to collect twigs in order to cleanse our teeth when in the course of our talk he said suddenly about his father. He referred to him as, "That gentleman." I protested that it was disrespectful to use such a term, for his respectable father. Then he said, "Yes, I should not have mentioned in that way in your presence, but ultimately it is really so. Where was I in my previous lives? Only he is a 'gentleman' to me because it is only in this life that I have come in his house."

Somehow that touched a fine chord in me and I began to think, "Yes it is right. Nobody can stay here; not the father, the mother, the brothers or even this house. Everything is temporarily connected and I am wandering in eternity." That sort of impression came in me in a very, very intense form, and the entire world became as if it was just empty – fully empty. At that time that boy anyhow connected me with the life of Mahāprabhu.<sup>400</sup>

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398 Swami B.R. Sridhar (1999), 26

399 See for example Yogananda (2001), 28-41 for a typical (aborted) flight to the Himalayas.

400 Swami B.R. Sridhar (1999), 13-14

This story is also typical: seemingly commonplace spiritual advice that effects a sudden enlightenment to the follies of this temporary material world. The boy who uttered these words is a good example of a *vartmapradarśaka* guru (see 3.4). One guru told me how a scrap of paper lying on a Calcutta pavement totally changed his life. It contained only two words: “*asat-saṅga tyāgo*”, “give up the company of untruth/ bad people”.<sup>401</sup>

How do disciples then, after developing a desire to find a guru, find one? The classic model entails examining many different gurus before settling for the real one. Many disciples mention mystical experiences as the deciding factor.

I had been searching for a suitable guru for a long time, but had not found one, so I was feeling disturbed. Whenever I met someone who inspired my devotion, when I studied his character, I became disappointed and lost faith. I was anxious to find a guru so I prayed to God. One night in a dream the Lord indicated that soon I would receive initiation. The next morning I felt relieved. In a few days Gurudeva finally wrote a letter saying, “I will come soon and give you initiation.” When Gurudeva finally came both my wife and I received initiation and we were pleased. From that day on I felt compassion towards all beings and the sin of meat eating vanished from my heart and compassion arose towards living beings.<sup>402</sup>

The need for a long search after the true guru is dependent on the common Indian idea of the rarity of real gurus.<sup>403</sup> What most disciples will say is that while there are indeed many false gurus out there, their own guru is a real one, since he fulfills the qualifications given in the scriptures.<sup>404</sup> The sectarian consequences of this idea will be explored later (8.2). For an outsider, as we have seen (4.3), there sometimes seems to be quite a bit of wishful thinking and selective perception involved. One guru said:

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401 IF mgt 2002/10

402 Kedaranātha Datta Bhaktivinoda quoted in Shukavak Dasa (1999), 92

403 Mentioned for example in *Kulārṇava Tantra* 13.98-111, quoted in Bay-Schmidt (1984), 32.

404 E.g. IF 2000/14b



-Most gurus are not actually bona fide in the true sense of the word, cent percent devoted to Kṛṣṇa, cent percent surrendered to Kṛṣṇa. They don't know anything except Kṛṣṇa, they are on the level of *bhāva*, you know.

-That's a *sad*-guru?

-Yeah. How many ... actually, these people who take up the position of guru these days, none of them practically are on the level of *bhāva*. *Bhāva* is a very, very high stage. How many devotees have *bhāva*? I don't know any, but I know many who are in the role of guru.<sup>405</sup>

*Bhāva*, the half-way point to *preman*, full-fledged ecstatic love of God, is declared to be very rare by Rūpa Gosvāmin.<sup>406</sup> Even though the guru here said he knows nobody that advanced, later on he made an exception for his *dīkṣā*- and *śikṣā*-gurus.<sup>407</sup> A dialogue with a *bābājī* in Vṛndāvana, however, revealed that some disciples go even further. After he had explained to me that practically all gurus are only on the stage of devotional practice (*sādhana*-bhakti), I put the natural question.

-But what about your own guru?

-Aha! What can I say? I am sorry to tell you his position is like that. Please excuse me, I don't tell it otherwise, don't take it otherwise. Because actually it is ... But if anyone attains the highest position in *sādhana*, we can also take him as our teacher, our guru. Because it is not possible for all persons to attain the reality. That is why we can take initiation from that person who has some qualification. In some small grade he has Kṛṣṇa-*preman*, austerity, conviction. We can see him as our guru. And who has no possibility of *pātana*, fall down. As a saint, he can not be fallen down. Then he can be a guru in this time.<sup>408</sup>

This is a remarkable statement, especially since it comes from a person that is seen by many as the most qualified disciple of his own

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405 IF mgt 2000/86

406 BRS 1.3.6

407 IF mgt 2000/86

408 IF mgt 2000/69

guru, and his most probable successor, not from a disgruntled ex-follower.<sup>409</sup>

### 5.1.2 Predestination

The theme of examining many gurus and finally choosing the right one is very common, especially in the West. Still, as one female Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava pointed out, it is not without its problems. It is very difficult for a neophyte aspirant to arrive at an objective view of even the external spiritual life of the guru. One is often encouraged to be a little critical before accepting a guru, but that is not so easy. First of all, the aspirant may not have enough knowledge to know what to look out for, and even if he does have it, how far will that help him? What does an actually spiritually advanced person behave like? If the aspirant furthermore does not live in the *āśrama* or is female, there is very little practical possibility to actually “spy” on the guru. The choice thus becomes quite subjective, she thought.<sup>410</sup>

One answer to this problem is that ultimately, the prospective disciple does not really choose.

It is my accumulated spiritual virtue that leads me to a particular person. It is not that after examining the guru I come to know. So if I have a good disposition, I will be guided by God to the guru, preceptor. If I don't have such merit, I will be led to the wrong man. So two things. When a disciple is properly guided by *caitya*-guru, then he will not go to the wrong person.<sup>411</sup>

The belief expressed here is that the “choice” of one's guru is predestined by previous devotional merit. This kind of merit is not exactly the same as *karman*, which pertains to material actions and which is “spent” after receiving the good or bad result, but a merit that is gained by serving Kṛṣṇa or his devotees even unknowingly.

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409 Field notes, Vrindavan, November 2000.

410 IF mgt 2001/78

411 IF mgt 2000/81

This kind of merit is considered eternal and cumulative, and identified with what Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja calls “fortune” (see 3.3.4).<sup>412</sup> Does the aspirant then have no freedom or personal responsibility in this life? No, Yati Mahārāja does not want to go that far:

You have to crave! The disciple, before approaching the divine master, must crave, lament. “He Prabho [Lord]!” God is all-knower, omniscient. Therefore, if I sincerely pray “My Lord, give me a proper guide”, then if I am not a pretender, sincerely, then accordingly I will be led.<sup>413</sup>

However, some do take this idea to its logical end and say that the guru is entirely predestined. This notion seems to hold especially for those whose guru seems less qualified than they had hoped he would be. One person explained how he had three times approached a well-known guru for initiation, but every time been asked to wait a little longer. The guru then passed away, and the aspirant took initiation from the guru’s successor. To get initiation from the famous one, he said, was not destined for him.<sup>414</sup>

### 5.1.3 Social reasons

Besides Westerners, most of the Gauḍīyas I spoke to referred to neither of the above models. Rather, they said that the main reason why they chose a particular guru was that someone else recommended that guru to them. It could be one’s parents,<sup>415</sup> a neighbor,<sup>416</sup> the neighbor of a friend,<sup>417</sup> senior disciples of the guru<sup>418</sup> or someone

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412 B.R. Sridhar Maharaj (1999) 58-60, referring mainly to *Bṛhan-nāradya Purāṇa* 4.33 and *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.40

413 IF mgt 2000/81

414 IF mgt 2000/90. A similar thought is expressed in IF mgt 2000/76.

415 IF mgt 2000/82

416 IF mgt 2000/78

417 IF mgt 2000/74

418 IF mgt 2000/77

else: the point is that it was someone these people had faith in and whose judgement they accepted. In one case I personally witnessed a woman accepted initiation from a guru she had been recommended without even knowing his name!<sup>419</sup>

In these cases clearly what is important is to have a guru who is respected by others important to oneself. The particular personal traits of the guru do not matter so much, as long as they are not too idiosyncratic. This is also the case with many of the hereditary gurus (the *goswamis*), where children of particular families are initiated by gurus of a particular family since many generations, or when a person becomes attracted to an organisation or *āśrama* where there is only one person who initiates everyone. In these cases there is no individual search for a guru involved. Everything is predestined, whether by chance or by merit. Still, if the disciple later on finds that the guru he has had from childhood is not so inspiring, he can set out in search for a *śikṣā*-guru. Whether or not such an uninspiring guru can be rejected is the next subject.

## 5.2 *Rejecting the guru*

### 5.2.1 *The viewpoint of the scriptures*

Earlier on (4.2) a quotation from the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* was presented which said that if one has accepted initiation from a non-Vaiṣṇava, one should again take initiation from a Vaiṣṇava guru. But what if the guru is a Vaiṣṇava, yet somehow becomes deviated from the straight and narrow path? The answer of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* is clear. In connection with the greatness of serving the guru, the following verses are cited:

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419 At the Bhajan Kutir, Vṛndāvana, 24.11.2000.

In the *Āditya Purāṇa*: “Whether knowledgeable or ignorant, the guru is Janārdana [Kṛṣṇa]. Situated on the path or not, the guru is indeed always the goal.” And elsewhere: “When Hari is angry, the guru can save, when the guru is angry, nobody. Therefore, with all efforts the guru should certainly be pleased!”

In the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa*: “Even striking or cursing, illusioned or angry, the gurus are worshippingable. Having bowed, one should lead them home.”<sup>420</sup>

In this context, the word “guru” can also mean “elder” or “authority”. The commentator provides two lists from the *Kūrma Purāṇa* that enumerate the most significant gurus. The five most important are the father, mother, teacher, elder brother and husband. Amongst these, the first three are more important than the last two, and most important is the mother. At any rate, the point is that no matter how these elders behave, one has to serve them.

The two first verses deal particularly with the *ācārya* or guru in the ordinary sense of this thesis. The idea seems to be that just as Kṛṣṇa sometimes seems to act against the rules of dharma (such as when he steals butter or sports with the milkmaids in Vṛndāvana), the guru also may act strangely. But he is not only on the same level as Kṛṣṇa, he is even higher, since he can save the disciple from Kṛṣṇa’s wrath, but Kṛṣṇa cannot save the disciple from the guru’s anger. This is a notion characteristic of the Tantric type of guru in Steinmann’s typology.

The point of these verses is further emphasised a little later in *the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*:

And also: “Even the vultures do not eat the dead bodies of those ungrateful persons who give up a traditional teacher. Their intellect is

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420 HBV 4.359-361. *āditya-purāṇe – avidyo vā savidyō vā guru eva janārdanaḥ/ mārgastho vāpy amārgastho gurur eva sadā gatiḥ// anyatra ca – harau ruṣṭe gurur trātā gurau ruṣṭe na kaścana/ tasmāt sarva-prayatmena gurur eva prasādayet// brahma-vaivarte – api ghantaḥ śapanto vā viruddhā api ye krudhāḥ/ guravaḥ pūjanīyās te grhaṃ natvā nayeta tāt//*

foul, their degradation manifest. One who rejects the guru also rejects Hari.” And elsewhere: “That lowest of men who having attained a guru gives him up through ignorance will boil in hell during ten million *kalpas*.<sup>421</sup>

The commentator writes that with these verses the author describes devotion to the guru by stating the great offence of giving up the guru. He glosses “traditional” (*āmnāyāgata*) with “coming in a family line” or “enjoined in the Vedas”.<sup>422</sup> Haridāsa Śāstrī’s Hindi translation explains “coming in a family line” as “a teacher who knows the scriptures and who comes in disciplic succession enjoined by the scriptures”, and further as “a reverend *gurudeva* of a true (*sat*) *sampradāya*, who knows the scriptures and whose behaviour is perfect”.<sup>423</sup> But this interpretation is taking a step back from the extremely orthodox stance of the book itself, that not even an unqualified guru should ever be rejected. The rationale behind Gopāla Bhaṭṭa’s viewpoint is best understood in connection with the “saviour” (3.3.4) and “dependence on Kṛṣṇa’s grace” (3.3.6) – arguments for the need for a guru. In both of these cases, the personal qualifications of the guru are not so important.

In the commentary to the next verse, Sanātana Gosvāmin writes:

With the verses “Situated on the path or not...” (3.359) and “Even the vultures do not eat...” (3.363) it has been stated that no kind of guru should be given up. Now, what if one through ignorance has accepted

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421 HBV 4.363-365. *kiñ ca – upadeṣṭāram āmnāyāgataṃ pariharanti ye/ tān mṛtān api kravyādāḥ kṛta-gḥnān nopabhuñjate// bodhaḥ kulaśīta tena daurātmyaṃ prakāṣī-kṛtam/ gurur yena parityaktas tena tyaktaḥ purā hariḥ// anyatra ca – pratīpadya guruṃ yas tu mohād vipratīpadyate/ sa kalpa-kotiṃ narake pacyate puruṣādhamah//*

422 Dig-darśinī commentary to HBV 4.364. *āmnāyāgataṃ kula-kramāyātaṃ vedavihītaṃ vā/*

423 Hindi translation of HBV 4.364. *kula-paramparāgata arthāt śāstra-vihīta paramparāgata śāstrajña upadeṣṭā ko arthāt ācāraṇaśīla śāstrajña sat sampradāyī śrī gurudeva [...]*

a non-Vaiṣṇava guru? He should be given up. For this reason he gives the above exception. “Take” means accept a mantra. “From a Vaiṣṇava” means as a general rule from a brāhmaṇa, as was explained earlier on in the description of the qualities of the guru.<sup>424</sup>

Here we find an exception to the above rule, namely one who has, out of ignorance (for example in childhood), accepted initiation from a non-Vaiṣṇava guru. The reason a non-Vaiṣṇava guru should be rejected is that uttering the mantra he has given will not lead one to Kṛṣṇa, but rather to hell!<sup>425</sup>

Jīva Gosvāmin also thinks that if one has accepted a non-Vaiṣṇava guru that guru should be rejected and a Vaiṣṇava guru be selected instead.<sup>426</sup> Unlike Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, Jīva Gosvāmin opines that worldly “gurus” such as the mother and father also must be given up if one desires to attain the shelter of a real guru, one who can save one from repeated birth and death.<sup>427</sup> This is not as great a difference between the two as it might seem, since there have always been persons who give up the conventional duty of serving the parents for some “higher good”, such as taking *sannyāsa*.

However, a big difference is that Jīva Gosvāmin leaves some scope for rejecting a Vaiṣṇava guru. In the context of describing the benefits of serving a guru, he writes that it is good to serve other advanced Vaiṣṇavas, unless it interferes with the order of one’s own guru. That would be a great offense. However:

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424 *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 4.366. “*mārgastho vāpy amārgasthaḥ*” *ity anena “upadeṣṭāram” ity ādinā ca kathañcid api guru na tyājya iti likhitam, adhunā tatra mohād avaiṣṇavo guruḥ kṛtāś cet tarhi sa parityājya iti prasaṅgāt pūrvātrāpavādam likhati – avaiṣṇaveti. grāhayed iti svārthe in mantram grhṇīyād ity athaḥ; yad vā, sādhu-janaś tādrśaṃ janam kṛpayā mantram grāhayed ity arthaḥ/ vaiṣṇavāt prāyo brāhmaṇād eveti jñeyam, pūrvam guru-lakṣaṇe tathā likhanāt//*

425 HBV 4.366

426 BS 207

427 BS 210

One who has taken shelter of a guru who does not possess the qualities described in the verse “deeply learned in scripture and the higher” (BP 11.3.21), and then cannot get permission from him to serve great devotees due to his enviousness [*mātsarya*], etc, is not considered in this injunction because he had abandoned scripture to begin with. The disciple will be caught in a dilemma, incurring fault both by acting against the wishes of his guru and by not serving great devotees. This is the meaning of this statement of the *Nārada Pañcarātra*: “Both one who speaks without discernment and one who listens without discernment go to a horrible hell for undecaying time.” Therefore such a guru should be served from a distance.

But what if he is hateful towards the Vaiṣṇavas [*vaiṣṇava-vidveṣin*] ? He should certainly be rejected. Smṛti says: “A guru who is arrogant, who does not know what should be done and what not, and who is addicted to evils, should be rejected”. So also because he is the subject of utterances such as “through the mantra taught by a non-Vaiṣṇava [one goes to hell]”, by his being a non-Vaiṣṇava by not possessing the mood of a Vaiṣṇava.<sup>428</sup>

From this it seems that the normal procedure in Jīva Gosvāmin’s time was that if a guru was unable to guide the disciple, the disciple would seek out a *śikṣā*-guru who would guide him further. Jan Brzezinski observes that this is the common practice also today: if a disciple feels that his *dīkṣā*-guru is not sufficiently qualified, he will take his permission to study with someone more qualified, such as a renunciant at Rādhā-kuṇḍa.<sup>429</sup> If the guru is competent, he does not have to give permission for a disciple to go elsewhere, since there really is no need for it. However, if he is unqualified, he must allow

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428 BS 238. *yah prathamam (bhā. 11.3.12) “śābde pare ca niṣṇātam” ity ādy ukta-lakṣaṇam gurum nāśrītavān, tādr̥ṣāgurūś ca matsavādīto mahā-bhāgavata-satkārādāv anumatiṃ na labhate, sa prathamam eva tyakta-śāstro na vicāryate/ ubhaya-saṅkaṭa-pāto hi tasmin bhavaty eva/ evam ādikābhiprāyeṇaiva – “yo vakti nyāya-rahitam anyāyena śṛṇoti yah/ tāv ubhau narakam ghoram vrajataḥ kālam akṣayam// iti śrī nārada-pañcarātre/ ata eva dūrata evārādhyas tādr̥ṣo gurūḥ, vaiṣṇava-vidveṣi cet paritṛyāḥya eva – “guror apy avaliptasya kāryākaryam ajānataḥ/ utpatha-pratīpannasya paritṛyāgo vidhīyate// iti smaranāt, tasya vaiṣṇava-bhāva-rāhītyenāvaiṣṇavatayā “avaiṣṇavopadiṣṭena” ity-ādi-vacana-viṣayatvāc ca/*

429 Brzezinski (1996), 172



the disciple to seek guidance elsewhere. The standard verse from the eleventh canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* is used as a yardstick.<sup>430</sup> Otherwise, the disciple should do so anyway, since otherwise his chances to achieve perfection are in jeopardy. He should still not formally reject his guru, continuing to serve him from a distance. This is in contrast with Tantric tradition, which allows for rejecting an unqualified guru.<sup>431</sup>

What does this “from a distance” mean? A scholarly devotee in Vṛndāvana explained it as not following his orders, but also not disrespecting him, having at one point accepted him as an authority.<sup>432</sup> “Distance” implies also a physical distance. The disciple should avoid meeting and listening to the guru, so that he wouldn’t have to act against his orders, if he for example asked the disciple to stop listening to the more advanced devotee.

Even an unqualified, envious guru should not be rejected, just as was said in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, but if he becomes “hateful towards the Vaiṣṇavas” he should “certainly” be rejected. This is because he does not have the mood of a Vaiṣṇava (to be more humble than a blade of grass, etc), and because he does not behave like a Vaiṣṇava (by being addicted to sinful acts such as meat-eating, for example). Thus he comes under the jurisdiction of the verse stating that a non-Vaiṣṇava guru should be rejected.

Much of the modern debate (see 5.2.3) around what kind of a guru should be rejected hinges on the compound word *vaiṣṇava-vidveṣin*, that I have translated as “hateful towards the Vaiṣṇavas”. As we shall see, some take it more mildly. I think that the term is intended to be strong, to contrast it with the envy (*mātsarya*) of the type of guru that is to be served from a distance.

This assumption is corroborated by examining the way the word is used elsewhere. Jīva Gosvāmin uses the word *vidveṣin* only a few

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430 BP 11.3.12

431 *Kulārṇava Tantra* 13.133, quoted in Bay-Schmidt (1984), 65

432 IF mgt 2000/ 70

times in his *Ṣad-sandarbha*, to describe demons trying to kill Kṛṣṇa<sup>433</sup>, the boy-saint Dhruva’s evil stepmother;<sup>434</sup> as a contrast to people simply not interested in Kṛṣṇa<sup>435</sup> and to describe what devotees are not, even towards the demons.<sup>436</sup> Rūpa Gosvāmin uses the noun *vidveṣa* (enmity) once in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, mentioning it together with *vininda* (abuse) as things a devotee should not tolerate towards the Lord.<sup>437</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja uses the word *vaiṣṇava-vidveṣin* once in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*,<sup>438</sup> describing the landowner Rāmacandra Khān. He is also called *pāṣaṇḍa-pradhāna* (greatest of heretics),<sup>439</sup> *ajña mūrkhā* (ignorant fool)<sup>440</sup> and *sahajei avaiṣṇava* (naturally non-Vaiṣṇava), so it is certainly a strong term also here.<sup>441</sup>

The difference between a guru who is “envious of the Vaiṣṇavas” and one who is “hateful towards the Vaiṣṇavas” thus seems to be that the “envious” guru does not have the mood of a Vaiṣṇava when he does not realise his lower position, while the “hateful” one also does not behave like a Vaiṣṇava. According to Jīva Gosvāmin, for a guru to be rejected, he must have both of these disqualifications.

The book *Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* by Narahari Sarakāra<sup>442</sup> offers some additional considerations on the same lines. After stating that one always should side with the guru in the case of arguments, the author writes:

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433 BS 111, 286

434 BS 131

435 *Prīti-sandarbha* 7

436 *Paramātma-sandarbha* 94

437 BRS 1.2.82

438 CC 3.3.102

439 Ibid

440 CC 3.3.134

441 CC 3.3.146

442 It is by no means certain that the book is a genuine product of Narahari Sarakāra, the close associate of Caitanya. Many modern Vaiṣṇavas consider it genuine, but for example De (1961, p. 231) thinks that since there in the book is no trace of the Gaura-nāgara doctrine so characteristic of Narahari Sarakāra, but rather obvious influences from the Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana (as in the case at hand), it is unlikely that it is genuine. Gadādhara Prāṇa Dāsa, a follower of the Gaura-nāgara doctrine (Field notes, December 2000, Māyāpura), claims that it can be found in the book if one looks closely enough. I tend to think the book a later product.

But if the guru does something improper, then by suitable arguments and conclusions he should be punished in a secluded place, but not given up. If someone says that the guru cannot be punished, the answer is no, for it is said: "A guru who is arrogant, who does not know what should be done and what should not, and who is addicted to evils, should be punished by the club of logic"<sup>443</sup>. By this everything becomes auspicious.<sup>444</sup>

This is a remarkable statement. The disciple privately correcting the guru is a far cry from the "whether situated on the path or not..." verse quoted in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* above. How is the disciple to retain his subservient mood with regard to the guru after this? The author continues that since the nature of the devotee is to take shelter in Kṛṣṇa, he should then go on with the life of devotion as before, trusting that all will be resolved.<sup>445</sup> If not, he continues:

But if the guru now acts improperly, is confused about the Lord, is opposed to the glories of Kṛṣṇa, does not take part in delighting in His play, is himself intolerably proud, and imitates Kṛṣṇa desiring the praise of the world, then he should be rejected. One should not think "how can the guru be rejected?" Because of the strong desire for love of Kṛṣṇa, in order to attain Kṛṣṇa one takes shelter of a guru. If later a demoniac mentality appears in that guru, what is one to do? Having rejected this demoniac guru, one should worship another guru, who has devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. By his power from Kṛṣṇa, the power of the demoniac guru is destroyed.<sup>446</sup>

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443 This is a different reading of the verse quoted in BS 238 (see above)

444 KB, p. 10. *kintu yadi gurur asamañjasam karoti, tarhi ykti-siddhahī siddhāntais tasya rahasi daṇḍaḥ karaṇīyaḥ na tu tyājyaḥ/ gurur daṇḍaya tarhi cet, tatrāpi – "guror apy avaliptasya kāryākāryam ajānataḥ/ utpatta-pratīpannasya nyāya-daṇḍo vidhiyate/" anena sarvaṃ suśobhanam iti/*

445 Ibid

446 KB, p. 11-12. *tatra gurur yadi visadṛśakārī, īsvare bhrāntaḥ, kṛṣṇa-yaśovimukhas tad-vilāsa-vinodaṃ nāṅgikaroti svayaṃ vā durabhimānī, lokas vastavaīḥ kṛṣṇam anukaroti, tarhi tyājya eva/ katham eva gurus tyājya iti cen na, kṛṣṇa-bhāva-lobhāt kṛṣṇa-prāptaye guror āśrayaṇa-kṛtam/ tad-anantaram yadi tasmin gurau āsura-bhāvas tarhi kiṃ kartavyam? asura-gurum tyaktvā śrīkṛṣṇa-bhaktimantaṃ gurum anyam bhajet/ asya kṛṣṇa-balād asurasya guror balaṃ mardaniyam/*

This passage shows a very pragmatic view of the guru, much along the lines of the “guide” argument for the need of a guru (3.3.1). If the guru has lost his ability to function as such, he should be given up and a better one accepted instead.

In this way it can be seen how the Purāṇic dictum of “no guru can be given up” has been softened by introducing the exception of non-Vaiṣṇava gurus. Jīva Gosvāmin’s interpretation that a Vaiṣṇava can become a non-Vaiṣṇava is an important and far-reaching idea, as we shall see in section 5.2.3.

### 5.2.2 *The example of Śyāmānanda*

The story of the new initiation of Śyāmānanda (1556-1630?), one of the famous Gauḍīyas of the “second generation”, offers some insight into the issue of taking distance from or rejecting a guru. Śyāmānanda was a disciple of Hṛdayānanda Goswami, also known as Hṛdaya Caitanya Goswami, a disciple of Gauridāsa Paṇḍita, one of Caitanya’s direct associates. Originally Śyāmānanda was known as Duḥkhī (The sorrowful) Kṛṣṇa Dāsa. On the order of Gauridāsa Paṇḍita, and with the consent of his guru, Duḥkhī Kṛṣṇa Dāsa went to Vṛndāvana, where he did menial service by sweeping the grove where Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa were supposed to dance at night. At the same time, he studied theology under Jīva Gosvāmin, who taught him how to internally serve the divine couple in the *mādhurya* (amorous) mood.

One night, the story goes, in his meditation, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa danced splendidly in the grove. While Rādhā danced on and on, unknowingly, one of her ankle bells became loose and fell to the ground. Neither she nor her friends noticed it. In the morning, when Kṛṣṇa Dāsa performed his ordinary duty of cleaning, he found the golden ankle bell. Recognising its divine nature, he tied it around his neck.

Meanwhile, in the transcendent dimension, after entering her room, Rādhā was perturbed to find one of her ankle bells missing. Thinking that she may have dropped it in the grove, she ordered her

girlfriend Lalitā to go there and search for it. Lalitā, disguised as an old lady hurried there and met Duḥkhī Kṛṣṇa Dāsa. He saw through her guise and forced her to reveal her true identity. After some discussion, she ordered him to stay for the remainder of this life with Jīva Gosvāmin and to go on with his method of worship. She also gave him a mantra for attaining the divine couple.

Kṛṣṇa Dāsa then gave the ankle bell to Lalitā and fell at her feet. Taking the ankle bell in her hand Lalitā quickly placed it to his head saying “Let the touch of Rādhā’s feet be on your head.” When she again touched the ankle bell to his forehead, suddenly two vertical lines appeared on his forehead, and from the touch of the locket of the ankle bell, a dot appeared between the lines. She then said that from this day on he would be known by the name Śyāmānanda. In this way he received a new mantra, name and *tilaka*. Miraculously, his complexion had also changed: while he previously had been very dark, now he was of a wonderful golden colour. Lalitā finally forbade him to speak about the incident to anyone except Jīva Gosvāmin.

After Lalitā had disappeared, Duḥkhī Kṛṣṇa Dāsa, from now on known as Śyāmānanda, went to see Jīva Gosvāmin, and told him everything. Śyāmānanda requested him not to reveal this incident to anyone but to say only that by the grace of his spiritual master everything had taken place. Concealing Śyāmānanda’s secret, Jīva Gosvāmin simply told everyone that due to the wish of Hṛdayānanda Goswami, from now on Kṛṣṇa Dāsa would be known as Śyāmānanda, and his *tilaka* as Śyāmānandī.

Seeing Śyāmānanda’s new *tilaka* and hearing about his new name, the people of Vṛndāvana began to talk. Had Jīva Gosvāmin taken Hṛdayānanda’s disciple? How could he do such a thing? Some thought he had committed an offense, others that there was some misunderstanding, but nobody dared to question him personally. Finally, the rumors reached Hṛdayānanda Goswami in Bengal.

Hearing all this Hṛdayānanda became furious. Why had Jīva Gosvāmin taken his disciple as his own and given him a new name?

Did Jīva Gosvāmin consider him a non-Vaiṣṇava? “I shall arrange a debate with all the Vaiṣṇavas regarding this matter. If it is proven that I am a non-Vaiṣṇava, then I shall surely take refuge in Jīva Gosvāmin.” Speaking like this, he ordered some of his disciples to leave for Vṛndāvana immediately with an angry letter to Jīva Gosvāmin.

Replying to the letter, Jīva Goswami said that Kṛṣṇa Dāsa had told him that Hṛdayānanda had appeared in his dream and given him the new name and tilaka. Respecting Hṛdayānanda’s desire, Jīva Gosvāmin had started using the new name. The devotees were relieved to hear this explanation, and recorded it in a letter. They also confirmed the story with Śyāmānanda, who told the same story and explained that Hṛdayānanda Goswami certainly still was his guru and that Jīva Gosvāmin was “like his guru”.

Needless to say, Hṛdayānanda was not satisfied by this answer. He had no knowledge of appearing in any dream! He interpreted it all as a trick of Jīva Gosvāmin’s. After all, from his point of view, it appeared as an obvious case of re-initiation: a new name, *tilaka* (which, except for the dot, looked just like Jīva Gosvāmin’s) and mantra, and a flimsy explanation indeed! Together with his disciples and many *mahantas* he left for Vṛndāvana. On the way he visited the house of Gauridāsa Paṇḍita (who was by now dead) and picked up his chief disciple. Finally they all arrived in Vṛndāvana where they all met Jīva Gosvāmin, as well as Śyāmānanda. Hṛdayānanda Goswami and his followers challenged Śyāmānanda to prove the truth of his statements. “Dreams are always false”, they said. The *goswami* said that he would personally wipe away the new *tilaka* of Śyāmānanda, and if it did not reappear, it would be proof of his lying and cheating his guru. Śyāmānanda agreed, but asked for two days time to think.

In great distress, he approached Rādhā in his meditation and fell at her feet, telling her all about his troubles. What was he to do? He had promised to not disclose what had actually happened to anyone except Jīva Gosvāmin. Rādhā felt pity for him and called for Subāla, her brother (the spiritual identity of Gauridāsa Paṇḍita). He again painted the new *tilaka* on Śyāmānanda’s forehead and the name on

his chest, and promised that if Śyāmānanda remembered him, these signs would immediately appear.

When the time fixed for the test arrived, Śyāmānanda stuck to the story of the dream, adding only that the person in the dream must have been Gauridāsa Paṇḍita in the guise of Hṛdayānanda Goswami. The *mahantas* painted the new *tilaka* on Śyāmānanda's forehead and wrote the name Śyāmānanda on his chest. Hṛdayānanda Goswami brought a water pot, while Śyāmānanda called out to Gauridāsa Paṇḍita to come and save his reputation. In the presence of everyone Hṛdayānanda Goswami washed off the *tilaka*, as well as the name Śyāmānanda from his chest. Śyāmānanda loudly called to Lalitā to save him, and immediately the *tilaka* and name spontaneously reappeared in their proper places, even brighter than before. The *mahantas* were astonished, but Hṛdayānanda Goswami hung his head in shame.

All the Vaiṣṇavas were happy to see this miracle. Śyāmānanda fell at the feet of Hṛdayānanda. Repenting, the *goswami* placed Śyāmānanda on his lap and lovingly kissed his face again and again. Accepting Śyāmānanda as the best of his disciples he decided to keep his precious association always.

But Śyāmānanda's tribulations were not over. Some days later, while observing a play about the love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, he fell into an ecstatic trance. Hṛdayānanda Goswami could understand that Śyāmānanda's devotional mood was completely different than his, or that of Gauridāsa Paṇḍita, who both were in the mood of cowherd boys (*sakhya-bhāva*). Thinking that his disciple had given up the mood of his gurus, Hṛdayānanda left the place. Śyāmānanda, however, remained, something which infuriated Hṛdayānanda. The next morning he confronted Śyāmānanda and demanded that he return to *sakhya-bhāva*. When Śyāmānanda expressed his inability to do so, Hṛdayānanda beat him with a stick, striking him again and again until his flesh was cut. Bleeding profusely Śyāmānanda fell on the ground. The *mahantas* were shocked with Hṛdayānanda's behaviour, but Śyāmānanda did not show any anger. Rather, he asked

him to forgive any offences he had committed, in his mind, by words or deeds.

That night Caitanya appeared before Hṛdayānanda Goswami in a dream. Hṛdayānanda bowed to the Lord's feet. Looking up he saw that Mahāprabhu's white scarf was covered with blood. Severe wounds covered his body. Mahāprabhu explained that since Śyāmānanda is like his own self, he had taken his beating on himself. In great distress and remorse, Hṛdayānanda fell at the feet of Caitanya, who eventually pardoned him. Hṛdayānanda spent the rest of the night thinking deeply. In the morning he related the dream to the *mahantas*, and they all helped him celebrate twelve festivals in a wonderful way, as ordered by Caitanya by way of penance. Finally he left, blessing Śyāmānanda and Jīva Gosvāmin.<sup>447</sup>

I have retold this story at some length for several reasons. It nicely demonstrates how the perfected saints are thought to be able to move within both the normal earthly plane of existence and the divine realm of Vṛndāvana, sometimes connecting them. But most of all it says a lot about the problem of a disciple turning away from his guru.

Even apart from the miraculous events, the historicity of the story is not certain. Not all sources explicitly state that Hṛdayānanda Goswami was convinced.<sup>448</sup> The *Prema-vilāsa* bluntly states that the name Śyāmānanda was given by Jīva Gosvāmin.<sup>449</sup> The hagiography of Śyāmānanda's chief disciple Rasikānanda does not mention this story, but simply says that Hṛdayānanda "happily gave Duḥkhī Kṛṣṇa Dāsa the name Śyāmānanda!"<sup>450</sup> Some things are clear, though. Re-initiation was by no means a normal thing by the end of the sixteenth

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447 *Śyāmānanda Prakāśa*, Chapters 1-4. The same episode is also narrated in the *Bhakti-ratnākara*, chapter 6.

448 Chakrabarty (1985), 245 quotes a book called *Abhirāma-līlāmṛta* which simply says that Hṛdaya Caitanya and the *mahantas* took a highly critical view of Jīva Gosvāmin's conduct.

449 *Prema Vilāsa*, chapter 12

450 *Rasika-maṅgala* 1.2.10.



century if even suspicion of it would create such an uproar. Because of Jīva Gosvāmin's great reputation, nobody in Vṛndāvana dared speak up to him, but in Bengal the situation was different. Hṛdayānanda Goswami was senior to Jīva Gosvāmin, and did not hesitate in criticising what to him appeared as a great offense. Since Hṛdayānanda was well-known and respected as a Vaiṣṇava, the only way for Jīva Gosvāmin and Śyāmānanda to justify breaking his order was to refer to a still higher authority: Hṛdayānanda's own guru, Gauridāsa Paṇḍita.

It is not known whether this incident happened before or after Jīva Gosvāmin had written the *Bhakti-sandarbhā*. Even if that text already existed, it would take some more years until the doctrines of the Vṛndāvana Gosvāmins even theoretically would become the standard norm for the Gauḍīyas in Bengal. Even if the text had been accepted by the *mahantas* who accompanied Hṛdayānanda Goswami to Vṛndāvana as arbitrators, the reasons it gives for rejecting a guru would not have been applicable in this case. Hṛdayānanda (originally) did not seem to have any problems with his disciple studying under Jīva Gosvāmin. Since Jīva Gosvāmin was the undisputed leader of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community in Vṛndāvana during this time, studying under him was natural. What upset Hṛdayānanda Goswami was rather the thought that Jīva Gosvāmin had given his disciple a new initiation. Would such a re-initiation have been permissible? According to the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, no, since Hṛdayānanda Gosvāmin certainly was a Vaiṣṇava guru.

One could say that Śyāmānanda should have rejected his first guru Hṛdayānanda when the conflict erupted, since he was unqualified to teach him, not being situated in the *bhāva* Śyāmānanda was attracted to. Moreover, he wanted to deprive his disciple from Jīva Gosvāmin's association. This (barely) fulfills the reasons mentioned above for taking distance from a guru. For completely rejecting him, he would also have to be a non-Vaiṣṇava through his behaviour and mentality. But this cannot be said about Hṛdayānanda. Had Jīva Gosvāmin really

given Duḥkhī Kṛṣṇa Dāsa re-initiation, he would thus have acted against the rules in his own book.

There was therefore no way to completely reject Hṛdayānanda, even though it becomes evident that at the end of the story there is little or nothing in common between the guru and disciple. Instead, Śyāmānanda constantly maintains that Hṛdayānanda is his guru both in words (by saying it) and in deeds (by not trying to escape his punishment, by accepting his blessings, etc.), even though the story makes it clear that Śyāmānanda is far more spiritually elevated than Hṛdayānanda Goswami. As mentioned before (2.3.3), Śyāmānanda indeed went on to establish a disciplic succession of his own, although formally retaining his link to Hṛdayānanda Goswami.

### 5.2.3 Modern explanations

The story of Śyāmānanda shows what an exceptional thing rejecting a guru was in the early years of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. Today, the situation is somewhat different. When writing on this subject, Ananta Dāsa Bābāji also refers to the relevant passages of the *Bhakti-sandarbhā*. The expression “hater of Vaiṣṇavas” (describing the kind of guru who should be given up) he glosses as “an enemy of the Vaiṣṇavas.” “Hate,” he writes (quoting the *Bhakti-sandarbhā*<sup>451</sup>) is the same as slander, one way of offending a Vaiṣṇava. An offender to the Vaiṣṇavas is not qualified to be a guru, and should be rejected.<sup>452</sup> Such an interpretation makes rejecting the guru easier. Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja is even more radical in this regard. If one finds that the guru still desires sense gratification, one should give up his association. Especially if the guru has fallen down from the position of a renunciant and again taken up family life, one should pay him one’s respects, and then leave him behind “as one

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451 BS 107. The word for “hate” here is *dveṣa*, somewhat lighter than *vi-dveṣa*, the basis for *vidveṣin*.

452 Anantadāsa Bābāji [n.d], 14

leaves stool after passing it”.<sup>453</sup>

Others take a more moderate stance. If one’s guru somehow has become fallen, one should “worship him from a distance” and give him one year to rectify himself. If he does not, one should return the mantras received from him and accept them again from another guru.<sup>454</sup> The need for “returning” the mantra is based on the belief that a mantra received from a non-Vaiṣṇava guru will be detrimental.

Not all Gauḍīyas agree with the above views. For example many members of ISKCON think that if the guru was a proper Vaiṣṇava at the time of initiation, the mantras he gave have not been received from a non-Vaiṣṇava, and should therefore not be given up. There would therefore not be any need for a formal new initiation, even though one would have to seek the guidance of another *śikṣā-guru*.<sup>455</sup>

Some go even further in this direction. Padmanābha Goswami said that one should never reject a fallen Vaiṣṇava guru. One would certainly have to accept another instructing guru for further guidance, but one should never reject the original guru. He offered a graphic simile:

A mother has given birth to a child. The child is now ten years old and the mother has become a prostitute. Can you say that she is not his mother or he not her son? No, you can not say that. The child will give some respect to the mother. As human nature, he has to give respect to the mother, but on the other hand, he feels pain that she is a prostitute. Both things. How can you say that she is not his mother? You can not say. Impossible!

The same thing, when you have taken initiation from your guru, it means that he is your guru. You cannot deny it. Initiation is just like a sacrament, a *samskāra*. You have accepted him, heard the holy mantra with your ears, accepted him as a guru. Now you say that he is not guru? That is not possible. He has fallen down, that is another case, but you have to give him respect as a guru.<sup>456</sup>

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453 Bhaktivedanta Narayan Maharaja (2000), 20

454 IF mgt 2000/89

455 E.g. IF 2001/78

456 IF mgt 2000/68. A very similar example was given by another *goswami* guru, Gopinathāla Deva Goswami (IF mgt 2002/12)

Another *goswami* guru echoed the same ideas, clearly saying that the duty of a disciple of a fallen guru is simply to wait for the guru to become rectified, no matter how long that takes.<sup>457</sup> After all, one gets the guru one deserves, and all is not lost even if one does not attain the highest reaches of bhakti in this particular life.

While these opinions are radically different from each other, they all find some support in the scriptural passages examined above. The reasons for emphasising different texts may be manyfold, but one obvious motive is institutional politics. The gurus who stress the need for rejecting fallen gurus are also the ones who eagerly reinstate persons already initiated by gurus now judged unqualified. Likewise, the reason why *goswamis* so strongly oppose reinstatement is probably that they are the ones likely to be portrayed as “worldly” and less qualified than some charismatic ascetic guru.

The currently very strained relationship between ISKCON and Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja may serve as an example. The founder of ISKCON, Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, had a friendly relationship with Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja, and the *sannyāsa*-guru of Prabhupāda, Bhaktiprajñāna Keśava Mahārāja, was the *dikṣā*-guru of Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja. As per a previous order of Prabhupāda’s, Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja performed his funeral ceremony (*samādhi-kriyā*) after his demise in November, 1977. The relationship between Prabhupāda’s disciples in ISKCON and Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja remained friendly until the early 1990’s. By that time, several leading members of ISKCON had started going to Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja for guidance, and the leaders of ISKCON began to fear his taking over the whole movement. In accordance with earlier rules forbidding members of ISKCON from taking spiritual instruction from persons outside the movement, the governing body of ISKCON prohibited its members from associating with Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja and openly criticised him and some of his teachings.

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457 IF mgt 2000/71

The short-term effect of this denouncement was favourable to ISKCON. All but one of the leaders who had earlier associated with Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja distanced themselves from him. However, Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja and many members of ISKCON felt that he had been wronged and insulted by false accusations. He started touring the world, and through his scholarship and personal charisma quickly become very attractive for those who were dissatisfied with the leadership of ISKCON and the failings of their own gurus. Starting in the mid-1990's, Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja began reinitiating them. Almost from the beginning he also reinitiated disciples of gurus who were not fallen, arguing that if their ISKCON guru forbids them from listening to him, that is a sign of the so-called guru's enviousness. A Vaiṣṇava is not envious, so such a person should be rejected.

In this case, and, I would argue, generally, reinitiation is a sign of membership in a new group and of rejecting the old group. By reinitiating the disciple of another guru, the guru very clearly shows what he thinks of the qualification of the previous guru, or in the above example rather the previous institution (Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja has made it clear that he considers all gurus in ISKCON unqualified<sup>458</sup>). A person wishing to change institutional loyalties is generally expected to take reinitiation. In some cases, someone who wishes to return to his previous guru is given a second reinitiation!

Still, reinitiation has not lost the dramatic quality present in the story about Śyāmānanda. There are many stories in the hagiographical literature about ascetic gurus refusing to give reinitiation to disciples of, for example, a worldly *goswami* descendant of Nityānanda, fearing to offend him.<sup>459</sup> Most of the reinitiations take place when a person from a traditional background approaches a modern guru (e.g. a disciple of a *goswami* from the Nityānanda *vamśa* wants to join a Gauḍīya Maṭha) or vice-versa, when there is a practical reason for it: the mantras given are different.

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458 E.g. IF 2000/14b

459 See for example the story of Nandakiśora dāsa Goswami in Kapoor (1999).

## 6. INITIATION

The definition I have presented (in 3.5) for a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru is *a charismatic person who is offered special reverence by one or several persons on account of his awarding him/ them initiation and/ or especially important spiritual advice*. The two previous chapters have dealt with the first part of this definition, the charismatic person. Now, it is time to look more closely at one of the reasons for the reverence offered to the guru: that he may give initiation. As before, I will begin by examining what the scriptural sources say and then move on to what initiation looks like today. This time, the differences are greater than they have been in the earlier chapters of this part, but understanding the modern system of initiation in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism requires some knowledge of what the ideal ritual of initiation looks like. For this reason, I will give a rather lengthy description of them below.

### 6.1 Initiation in the scriptures

#### 6.1.1 Hari-bhakti-vilāsa

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* devotes the whole second chapter to describing *dīkṣā*, initiation, mostly following the *Krama-dīpikā* of Keśava Ācārya.<sup>460</sup> After again writing about the need and fruit of initiation, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin cites a verse from the *Viṣṇu-yāmala* defining *dīkṣā* as “when one gives divine (*divya*) knowledge and destroys (*saṃkṣaya*) sin”<sup>461</sup> While the etymology may not be that accurate according to linguistic principles, this definition does point to two things that will be repeated again and again in the differ-

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<sup>460</sup> *Krama-dīpikā*, 4.4-82

<sup>461</sup> HBV 2.10

ent descriptions of initiation to be given: the disciple receives a mantra full of otherworldly knowledge, and is ritually freed from all sins.

Gopāla Bhaṭṭa also quotes a verse from the *Tattva-sāgara* saying that “Just as brass becomes gold by application of mercury, so by initiation men become twice-born.”<sup>462</sup> The commentator glosses “men” as “indeed everyone” and “twice-born” as brāhmaṇas.<sup>463</sup> In other words, just as the alchemist is (at least supposed to be) able to transmute brass into gold by applying mercury, so the guru transforms all kinds of disciples into brāhmaṇas. This is a remarkable statement that later Vaiṣṇavas have made much out of. It seems a little odd in this book, where differences between Vaiṣṇavas of different *varṇas* have elsewhere been retained, for example in the section dealing with the qualifications of the guru (see 4.2).

The next subject is the time for initiation. Different authorities give somewhat different opinions, but generally the months Vaiśākha, Āśvina, Kārtika, Mārgaśīrṣa, Māgha and Phālguna are considered auspicious.<sup>464</sup> Kārtika is best, but for initiation into Gopāla-mantras also the otherwise prohibited month of Caitra is allowed on the authority of many authorities.<sup>465</sup> The pure days are Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. Pure asterisms and lunar days are also mentioned. The initiation should be performed during the bright fortnight.<sup>466</sup>

It is difficult to find a rationale behind why those particular months, days and so forth are auspicious and the others not. Tuesday, for example, is generally thought to be auspicious, but is here forbidden. Sunday is otherwise not thought to be a good day, but here it is. Generally, about half of the categories are pure and the other impure, so

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462 HBV 2.12

463 *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 2.12

464 HBV 2.13-19

465 HBV 2.20-21

466 HBV 2.23-26

finding an auspicious date can be a little tricky. At the time of writing this, it is the ninth of July 2001. The next day suitable for initiation according to these rules would be the eighteenth of October 2001 (month: Āśvina; fortnight: bright; day: Thursday; lunar day: second; asterism: Svātī), so a prospective initiate would have to wait for over three months.

In a typically Indian way, there are exceptions to these rules. One can always perform the ritual of initiation in a holy place, at a solar or lunar eclipse, and during the festivals of offering the cord or the *damana*-plant. A holy place or these times are so pure that they are able to counteract any bad influence.<sup>467</sup> Following this, the prospective initiate would not have to wait all the time until the second half of October, since the festival of offering the cord (*Pavitrāropana Dvādaśī*) falls already on July 30<sup>th</sup>. At that date, the month and day are impure, but that can be disregarded.

Having made things easier, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin gives yet another exception from the *Tattva-sāgara*: since it is so rare to find a *sad-guru*, one should immediately accept initiation from him when he gives his consent, whether it is day or night, one is in the forest or in a village. The desire of the *sad-guru* overrules everything.<sup>468</sup> In this way, if the guru of our prospective disciple considers himself a *sad-guru*, he could fix the date of initiation already today. Alternatively, if he is ignorant of these rules and happens to suggest initiation on a forbidden day, if the prospective disciple thinks of his guru as a *sad-guru* (as he most probably does), he does not have to worry about whether the date is good or not.

After discussing these preliminaries, the author goes on to describe the ceremony of initiation. Quoting the Tantric classic *Śāradā-tilakā*,<sup>469</sup> he explains that there are four kinds of initiation: *kriyāvati*

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467 HBV 2.28-30

468 HBV 2.31-33

469 *Śāradā-tilaka* 4.3



(ceremonial), *kalātmā* (ordination), *varṇamayī* (consisting of letters) and *vedhamayī* (consisting of perforation or penetration). Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin describes the first kind of initiation, *kriyāvatī*. The description is often very cursory, but the commentator fills in the details. Very briefly, the rite entails first constructing a sacred pavillion. Before initiation, the disciple practices fasting and silence. He is ritually purified by water from a sanctified pitcher, and is finally asked to enter a holy enclosure, the pavillion, where he sleeps beside his guru during the night, who has entered it previously and worshipped a sacred fire. On the next day, after many rites of worship and inner and outer purification, the guru marks the disciple with sectarian marks (*tilakas*), whispers the mantra into his ear, transfers his power into him and makes him agree to follow certain new rules. Finally the disciple offers some gifts to the guru and breaks the fast together with his friends.<sup>470</sup> As the author himself says, this method, based on books such as the *Prapañca-sāra*, is mainly Tantric.<sup>471</sup>

Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin next gives a description of another kind of initiation, one that he calls Purāṇic initiation. He provides a long quotation from the *Varāha Purāṇa* (98.7-55), where Śiva speaks to Pārvatī about initiation. The guru should first observe the disciple for one year to see whether or not the disciple is suitable for initiation. When the year has passed the disciple should ask the guru for initiation. He should then worship the guru as Viṣṇu. On the tenth lunar day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kārttika, the disciple should, after eating, lie down to sleep beside the guru in a temple of the Lord. In the morning, he should tell the guru what he has dreamt, and the guru should then tell him what the initiation will be like. The commentator quotes a verse saying that a cruel dream indicates a

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470 HBV 2.34-184

471 HBV 2.186

472 HBV 2.189-200

low initiation, a bad dream a middling initiation, and a good dream a good initiation.<sup>472</sup>

After fasting that day, the eleventh, they should both take bath and go to a temple of Viṣṇu. On the floor the guru should then draw a *maṇḍala*. He should then blindfold the disciple, who is clad in new white clothes and carrying flowers in his hands. The guru should then ritually establish and worship different divinities in nine pitchers of water. After this, he should sprinkle the disciple with water from the pitchers. Then the disciple should be led into the *maṇḍala*. He should ritually be purified and warned against blaspheming gods or elders. Then the guru should perform a *homa* or fire sacrifice, and after that, all the *saṃskāras* or sacraments (such as name-giving, feeding of the first rice, and so on<sup>473</sup>) for the disciple. He should then uncover the eyes of the disciple and speak the mantra three times into his ear. Finally, the disciple should offer the guru a gift (*dakṣiṇā*) according to his means. A king, for example, should give elephants, horses, jewels, rings, gold, villages or the like.<sup>474</sup>

As S.K. De points out, though called Purāṇic, this ritual is also not free from Tantric influences.<sup>475</sup> While decidedly simpler, it does not differ greatly from the previous method. Here we find the same typical elements of a rite of passage: fasting, dressing in white, sprinkling with sanctified water and so on. Blindfolding is added: a clear way of inducing the liminal state before entering a new stage in life. By performing the *saṃskāras* for the disciple anew, the guru asserts his position as the disciple's actual father.

For the benefit of those who are unable to perform such elaborate ceremonies as described above, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin also gives

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473 For a modern Gauḍiya presentation of these, see Premarāsa and Sāndipani Muni Dāsa (1997)

474 HBV 2.201-228

475 De (1961), 420

a description of a simplified procedure for initiation. When an auspicious moment has arrived, one should place a new pitcher, decorated with sandalwood and flowers, in a particular *maṇḍala*. The pitcher should be filled with milk, five flowers, all kinds of herbs, five gems, and seven kinds of earth. The seven kinds of earth are earth from a horse stable, from a stable for elephants, from an ant-hill, from a crossing, from a king's gate, from a cow-pen and from a riverbank. After worshipping Kṛṣṇa, the guru should sprinkle the pitcher using a bundle of holy *kuśa* grass, uttering the mantra he is to give 1008 times. With that water he should in the same way sprinkle the disciple and then teach him the mantra. The disciple should then devotedly worship the guru, and according to his capacity also the assembled brāhmaṇas.<sup>476</sup>

While finding earth from a stable for elephants may not always be so easy, this ritual is certainly radically simplified from the ones we have seen previously. Gone are the long preparations, the fasting and fire sacrifices. We are left with five elements: the *maṇḍala*, the establishment of a pitcher with sanctified water, worship of Kṛṣṇa, sprinkling the disciple with the sanctified water, and the teaching of the mantra. The power of the mantra is transferred from the guru to the disciple not only verbally, but also symbolically through the water in the pitcher.

Two even more simplified versions are quoted from the *Tattva-sāgara*. If the guru is unable to perform any other rituals, he should worship a faultless lotus flower. Dipping the lotus in water, he should eight times sprinkle the disciple. Having placed his hand on the head of the disciple, the guru should recite the mantra in his ear. Otherwise, during a solar or lunar eclipse, at a holy place or in a temple of Śiva, initiation can be given just by words.<sup>477</sup>

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476 HBV 2.237-242

477 HBV 2.243-244

From the five elements above we are down first to three: worship of a lotus flower, sprinkling of the disciple, and teaching the mantra, and then to one: teaching the mantra. In a typically Indian way Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin has gone from a very elaborate system of initiation to the most simple possible, in this way making the essence of initiation very clear: passing on a mantra. The mantra itself is supposed to be able to give otherworldly knowledge and remove sin, the definition of initiation given in the beginning of the chapter.

In the complex versions of initiation given above, the guru can be seen as a mystagogue, a religious specialist who performs sacraments, magical actions meant to bring salvation. He purifies the disciple of sin using sanctified water, he transfers his power into him, and so forth. With every simplification, this aspect is played down. Instead, the great emphasis on passing on the mantra points to another important aspect of the guru: the teacher. Even if he would never again meet the disciple, he would have taught him the mantra, which is considered full of mystical secrets, attainable simply by reciting or meditating upon it. Moreover, it connects the guru with a tradition, since he himself must have received the mantra in the same way. By passing on the mantra, the guru not only engages in teaching spiritual topics, he also acts as a preserver of tradition. More on these roles of the guru in part III.

### 6.1.2 *Sādhana-dīpikā*

Another southerner, Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, a granddisciple of Gadādhara Paṇḍita, also wrote a book on Vaiṣṇava rituals, the *Sādhana-dīpikā*. The date of the book is not known, but the author was born in 1531 and his magnum opus, *Vraja-bhakti-vilāsa*, was written in 1552.<sup>478</sup> The author was thus a junior contemporary with Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, something that is easy to see in the

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478 Haberman (1994), 56-62

*Sādhana-dīpikā*: it is little more than an abridged version of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, curiously enough without any reference to the original work. The reason I want to introduce this text here is that although the book is firmly based on the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, some details differ, and those differences are interesting.

The first chapter of the *Sādhana-dīpikā* is called approaching a guru, but it deals also with initiation. After describing *kriyāvati* and simplified kinds of initiation in a similar way as in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*<sup>479</sup>, he does something different: he gives short descriptions of the three types of initiation that Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin mentioned but fails to describe.

He begins with *varṇamayī* initiation. The guru should place the sixteen first letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, beginning from the last (*visarga*), on the body of the disciple all together and one after the other, sprinkle him with water, place his hand on his head and then teach him the mantra.<sup>480</sup>

*Kalāvati* initiation is when the guru first meditates on the five elements of the body in five parts of the body of the disciple. Then he awakens them all by *nyāsa* (a Tantric method of placing different divinities in parts of the body): from the feet up to the knees he meditates on the element earth, from the knees up to the navel water, from the navel up to the neck fire, from the neck up to the brow air, from the brow to the top of the head space. While meditating on these all together and one after the other, he should also recite mantras directed respectively to cessation, creation, knowledge, peace and that beyond peace. After this, the guru teaches the mantra to the disciple.<sup>481</sup> *Vedhamayī* initiation is when the guru by having sameness of purpose with his disciple infuses knowledge, renunciation and so forth in the disciple so that he immediately gives up material life.<sup>482</sup>

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479 SD, pp 37-51

480 SD, p 51-52

481 SD, p 52

482 Ibid

In all these cases the descriptions are very brief, but it is clear that these modes of initiation are Tantric. The two first contain different types of *nyāsa*, while the last (*vedhamayī*) seems to be a kind of mystical immediate transmission of power into a disciple having the right frame of mind. It is mentioned also in the *Kulārṇava Tantra*, where Ida Bay-Schmidt calls it “piercing” or “a subtle impact of the guru’s mental power”.<sup>483</sup> Even in the often extremely concise *Sādhana-dīpikā*, these three categories of initiation seem to be included for the sake of completeness. After this, Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin continues with another type of initiation:

But some *sāṃpradāyic* persons perform the five sacraments, according to the rules in the Padma Purāṇa. That is extremely beautiful. It is said: “*tāpa*, *puṇḍra*, *nāman*, mantra and *yāga*: these are the five sacraments that cause the greatest single-mindedness.” And also: “Carrying the conch, disk, vertical *tilaka*, etc, are the marks of a servant.”<sup>484</sup>

This kind of initiation is practiced by Vaiṣṇavas of the Śrī- and Brahmā-*saṃpradāyas* in south India. That the author calls them *sāṃpradāyic* (belonging to a *saṃpradāya*) is interesting, since it seems to indicate that he does not consider the Gauḍīyas themselves *sāṃpradāyic*. He gives his support to this manner of initiation by calling it “extremely beautiful” (*atīva cārutama*). He proceeds to explain this by quoting a rather lengthy explanation of the rituals, spoken by the Lord to a brāhmaṇa.

A proper guru should initiate a proper disciple. Short descriptions of the two are given, similar to the general descriptions of the ideal guru and disciple given in chapter four above. One should fashion metallic brands of the disk and conch of Viṣṇu out of gold, silver, copper or brass. The brands should be bathed with “fivefold nectar”

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483 Bay-Schmidt (1984), p 151

484 SD, p 53. *kecit tu sāṃpradāyikāḥ padma-purāṇokta-vidhinā pañca-saṃskāraṇ kurvanti, tad atīva-cārutamam/ tathā hi – “tāpaḥ puṇḍraṃ tathā nāma mantrō yāgaś ca pañcamah/ amī pañca-saṃskārāḥ vai parmaikānti-hetavaḥ/” “śaṅkha-cakrorhdva-puṇḍrādi-dharaṇaṃ dāsasya lakṣaṇam/” iti ca/*

(milk, yoghurt, honey, ghee and sugarwater) and then worshipped with mantras, sandalwood paste, flowers, etc., before the form of the Lord. The guru should then light a fire according to the rules of his family. The guru should then offer 1008 or 108 oblations of ghee into the fire with a mantra. He should also offer rice boiled in sweet milk together with ghee, reciting mantras such as the Puruṣa-hymn of the *Ṛg-veda* (10.90). Then the two brands should be placed in the fire. Uttering the sixteen-syllabled mantra, the guru should now offer ghee twenty more times into the fire. After this, using the heated metallic brands, the guru should brand (*tāpa*) the marks of the conch and disk onto the right and left shoulder of the disciple.<sup>485</sup>

After this, the guru should establish a pitcher filled with pure water. He should sanctify the water with the mantra and then sprinkle the water on the head of the disciple. He should then teach the mantra to the disciple, who wears vertical *tilaka* (*punḍra*), as also the goal of the mantra, proper behaviour and rules of worship (*yāga*). The guru should also give the disciple a new name (*nāman*) such as Kṛṣṇa Dāsa (the servant of Kṛṣṇa) or Govinda Dāsa.<sup>486</sup>

While Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin does not describe this kind of initiation in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, some of the five sacraments appear also in the other types of initiation. In the *kriyāvati* initiation, for example, the disciple is given *punḍra*, mantra and *yāga*. In the context of describing the rites of the Śayaṇa Dvādaśī festival, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa gives a long description of accepting the branded marks of Viṣṇu.<sup>487</sup> In general, initiation with five sacraments has not been practiced by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, though some, such as Baladeva Vidyābhuṣana<sup>488</sup> and Kedarnātha Datta Bhaktivinoda<sup>489</sup> have recommended it. Especially branding has been frowned upon, and even been declared for-

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485 SD, pp 53-54

486 SD, p 54

487 HBV 15.45-106

488 *Prameya-ratnāvalī* 8.5-6

489 Bhaktivinoda Thakur (1989)

bidden for practitioners of *rāgānuga-sādhana*.<sup>490</sup> Bhaktivinoda writes that Caitanya suggests substituting stamping the marks with sandalwood paste instead of branding them as a special concession to the fallen souls of the Kali age.<sup>491</sup> However, one of the five sacraments mentioned here, but not found in other descriptions, has passed on to most modern initiations: *nāman* or a new name.

## 6.2 Initiation today

As pointed out by Haberman, initiations nowadays are less elaborate than most of the above descriptions.<sup>492</sup> Especially in the case that the disciple is poor the rituals will be quite simple. Some even say that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava rituals should not include complicated things such as *homās*.<sup>493</sup> Padmanābha Goswami first gave a description of a rather complex ceremony involving a pitcher with sanctified water, a *homa*, etc., but then said that most disciples want a ritual that is not too costly nor takes too much time.<sup>494</sup> Also, if many persons are to receive initiation at the same time, the rituals are often simplified. Puruṣottama Goswami of the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple often initiates groups of 15-20 poor Oriyan farmers at a time. At that time, initiation will contain three elements: first he will give everyone three strings of small *tulasī* beads to wear around the neck (*kanthi-mālā*). Next he will, with the help of assistants, mark the upper body of the (male) initiates with twelve *tilakas*. Then he will give the mantras. They are to be chanted 108 times on the fingers or on a rosary. He will also give a small laminated board with a triptych: images of Rādhā-ramaṇa in the centre, Caitanya on the left and himself on the right.<sup>495</sup>

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490 See Kapoor (1999), pp 43-45

491 Bhaktivinoda Thakur (1989), p 2

492 Haberman (1989), 117

493 IF mgt 2000/69

494 IF mgt 2000/68

495 Case (2000), 35-36



### 6.2.1 First and second initiation

Apart from the simplification, the main difference is that today initiations are usually conducted in a two-tiered way. First the disciples receive the *mahā*-mantra, which is technically not a mantra but *Harināma*, Kṛṣṇa's names, and later, when they are considered a little more advanced, they receive one or several mantras. Some devotees would strongly object to this and say that the first initiation is not really initiation but only preparation for the real initiation to follow later.<sup>496</sup> Many also call the first initiation "*Harināma*" and only the second "*dīkṣā*" or initiation.<sup>497</sup> They argue that *Harināma* can not be called initiation since no mantra is given. That is a good objection, but I have opted to use the words first and second initiation, since the elements of the ritual of initiation described above are shared between the two. The disciple will, for example, receive his new name at the time of the first initiation.

Practically all gurus I have spoken to follow this two-tiered system of initiation. The time between first and second initiation will vary between disciple and disciple. Candidates deemed especially qualified by their gurus may receive both at one time, others may have to wait up to seven years or more.<sup>498</sup> Apart from these two main initiations, there are also other kinds of initiations that the disciple may or may not receive.

Generally, first initiation is a simple affair. Freshly bathed and clad in new clothes, the disciple approaches the guru and prostrates. The guru teaches him the *mahā*-mantra, gives some spiritual instructions, a rosary and neckbeads, and marks the disciple with the *tilaka* of his *parivāra*. In many cases, a new name is also given, usually beginning with the same letter as the old one. Finally, the disciple gives some *dakṣiṇa* to the guru. Often, the new disciple will eat together with the guru and be given some of the remnants of his meal.

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496 See for example Anantadāsa Bābāji (1996), 9

497 Field notes, Vṛndāvana, November 2000

498 IF mgt 2000/71

In ISKCON, the rituals are a little more elaborate. In addition to the above, the guru will also ask the disciple to follow some rules and regulations. In many cases, the sanctity of the occasion is highlighted by a *homa* performed by the guru himself or a senior devotee, in which the new disciples take part by throwing grains into the fire and at the end a banana, symbolising their past *karman*.<sup>499</sup>

Second initiation continues on from this. After similar preliminaries as in the first, the guru imparts the initiation mantra or mantras to the disciple. While the *mahā*-mantra is public, these mantras are secret and are communicated to the disciple in private. Generally, the mantras are whispered into the right ear of a male disciple, and the left ear of female.<sup>500</sup> The disciple is usually also given more elaborate spiritual instructions at this time, and may be asked to make some additional vows. The second initiation is seen as a deepening of the relationship between guru and disciple.<sup>501</sup>

In the Gauḍīya Maṭhas and ISKCON, the *upanayana saṁskāra* (investiture with the sacred thread) is given at the same time as second initiation. The rationale behind this is that every initiated Vaiṣṇava is (at least) on the level of a brāhmaṇa. Following the verse of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* cited above (6.1.1) saying that every man becomes a brāhmaṇa by *dīkṣā*, *upanayana* (including the Vedic Brahmā *gāyatrī*<sup>502</sup> traditionally chanted by brāhmaṇas three times daily) is given to any qualified disciple, regardless of birth. The main source for the elaborate rituals followed for this *upanayana* is the *Sat-kriyā-sāra-dīpikā*, a book on how to perform the traditional Hindu *saṁskāras* in a Vaiṣṇava way, attributed to Gopāla Bhaṭṭa

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499 Field notes, Tampere, 20.7.2002

500 Sinha (1966), 69

501 Prema Rasa and Sandipani Muni Dāsa (1997), 130

502 *Om bhūr bhuvah svah/ tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhīmahī/ dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*, Rg Veda 3.62.10. This mantra is the model for all other “*gāyatrīs*” that will be mentioned later.

Gosvāmin.<sup>503</sup> Such an elaborate initiation contains some of the elements of the ceremonies of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, such as a fire sacrifice, wearing new clothes and ritual sprinkling of water. Combining initiation with a *saṁskāra* is not a completely new idea: it was done also in the “Purāṇic” initiation of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*.

### 6.2.2 *Siddha initiation*

Apart from the two initiations described above, there are two other rituals within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism that may be called types of initiation, but which are optional or awarded only to persons held to be especially advanced. The first of these could be called *Siddha*-initiation, when the disciple is given knowledge about his *siddha-svarūpa*, spiritual identity, and that of his guru and predecessor guru, for use in *rāgānugā* meditation. The disciple will not at this time receive a new mantra, but since he receives much new “spiritual knowledge” and is allowed to enter a new stage in his spiritual practice this rite can well be called one type of initiation. It is not described in the writings of the Gosvāmins, but is, as Haberman and others have shown, a later development of the ideas Rūpa Gosvāmin articulated in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*.<sup>504</sup>

At the time of *Siddha*-initiation, the *dīkṣā*-guru gives the disciple knowledge of his *ekādaśa-bhāva*, or elevenfold existence. These eleven categories give the framework of the persona the disciple is supposed to have in the spiritual world and his relationship with

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503 *Sat-kriyā-sāra-dīpikā*, p 201-222. According to S.K. De (1961), p 529, it is “extremely doubtful” whether the Gopāla Bhaṭṭa who wrote this book is identical with the author of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. I subscribe to the same view, since many things (such as the style of the text, the prohibition against worshipping other divinities than Kṛṣṇa) are here different from what the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* teaches. Some believe the book was written by Vaiṣṇava Vācaspati, a later scholar (e.g. Bhaktibhūdeva Śrauti Mahārāja, cited in Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja [n.d.1], p. 111).

504 Haberman (1989), 116-117

Kṛṣṇa. The rites are very simple: the guru simply sits down with the disciple and gives him a paper listing the eleven categories for the disciple, himself and all the predecessor gurus. He will also explain them, and start teaching the disciple in *rāgānugā-sādhana*, the path of emulating the mood of one of Kṛṣṇa's liberated followers in the mind. Alternatively, he might direct the disciple to someone else who will teach him these practices.

As pointed out by Haberman, there are two different understandings of how the guru gives *Siddha* initiation.<sup>505</sup> The most common idea is that the guru, through his spiritual insight, is able to see the real, eternal spiritual form of the disciple. Because of this, he can enlighten the disciple about the details of his *siddha-svarūpa*. This spiritual form may be completely unknown for the disciple himself before the guru reveals it. As one guru succinctly put it: the guru will give it, because the disciple is not in the position to realise it.<sup>506</sup> The other idea is that the *siddha* identity the guru gives is more of a working model than the actual eternal identity in the spiritual world. Both guru and disciple will discuss the details so that it will be as useful as possible in the meditation of the disciple. In the course of practice, details that seem wrong may be changed, so that the eternal spiritual form is gradually unfolded. This view was held by Kedarnātha Datta Bhaktivinoda.<sup>507</sup> Some modern gurus, such as Kṛṣṇa Keśavānanda Deva Goswami, the head of the Śyāmānanda *parivāra*, also subscribe to this idea.<sup>508</sup>

The time when this initiation is given depends upon how the guru views *rāgānugā-sādhana*. Generally speaking, there are three views prevalent in modern Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. The first is that *rāgānugā-sādhana* is the primary mode of *sādhana* in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and the best and easiest way to advance spiritually. For

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505 Haberman (1986), 117-119

506 IF mgt 2000/71

507 Shukavak N. Dasa (1999), 227-229

508' IF mgt 2000/85

properly engaging in this kind of practice, and thus advancing spiritually, the disciple must have knowledge about his *siddha* form. For this reason, *Siddha*-initiation should be given immediately, together with ordinary initiation, or a short time afterwards. This view is held by the *bābājīs* of Rādhākuṇḍa, the members of the Rāmadāsa *parivāra*, and most other ascetic Gauḍīya gurus. For example Ananta Dāsa Bābājī gives his disciples first and second initiation almost immediately, and *Siddha*-initiation one or one and a half month afterward, when they have learned the basics, such as performing altar worship.<sup>509</sup> Dīna Hari Dāsa Bābājī, a granddisciple of Rāmadāsa Bābājī, gives *Siddha*-initiation at the same time as ordinary initiation.<sup>510</sup>

The second view is that while *rāgānugā-sādhana* is the best thing, not everyone is qualified for it. Most people should first practice *vaidhi-sādhana* to purify themselves and to gain the eligibility for *rāgānugā-sādhana*. This view is held by most of the *goswamis* and some parts of the Gauḍīya Maṭha. Some are very restrictive: Kṛṣṇa Gopalānanda Goswami of the Śyāmānanda *parivāra* said he has almost a thousand disciples but that he so far had not given *Siddha*-initiation to anyone.<sup>511</sup> While most speak in general terms of the disciple having to be very qualified,<sup>512</sup> one guru was very specific and said that after a disciple has chanted three lakhs (300 000) names of the *mahā*-mantra daily for 21 years, he can go to Vṛndāvana and get *Siddha*-initiation.<sup>513</sup>

The third view is that *rāgānugā-sādhana* and *Siddha*-initiation are so high things that they should only be honoured from a distance. According to this view, very few persons in this degraded age will develop the necessary qualifications needed. Instead of oneself or the guru concocting an imaginary spiritual identity, simply meditating upon Kṛṣṇa's name will reveal everything in due course of time. It is therefore not

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509 IF mgt 2000/66

510 IF mgt 2000/69

511 IF mgt 2000/71

512 IF mgt 2000/89

513 IF mgt 2000/88

necessary for the guru to personally give *Siddha*-initiation to the disciple. This view is held by some *goswamis* (e.g. Padmanābha Goswami<sup>514</sup>), most of the Gauḍīya Maṭhas<sup>515</sup> and by ISKCON.<sup>516</sup> Some *bābājīs* also subscribe to this view.<sup>517</sup>

While proponents of these three views in practice differ in always, sometimes, or never giving or allowing a disciple to elsewhere take *Siddha*-initiation, the differences are thus smaller on the theoretical plane: they simply interpret differently what the eligibility for *rāgānugā-sādhana* is. Such differences are not new: for example, Viśvanātha Cakravartin seems to have been considerably more liberal in this regard than Jīva Gosvāmin.<sup>518</sup>

Apart from not awarding any mantra, the role of the guru is quite different in this type of initiation from what it was in the earlier types. He is no mystagogue here: there are no detailed rituals intended at removing sin, no mystical transmissions of power. As in the earlier types of initiation, he again functions as a teacher, but to a greater degree. More about the guru as a teacher will follow in chapter nine.

### 6.2.3 *Veśa*-initiation

Yet another form of initiation is when a disciple who fully wants to dedicate himself to spiritual life is given *veśa* (also known as *bhek*), or the dress and position of a *bābājī*, a renunciate. Generally, only gurus who themselves are *bābājīs* can give this kind of initiation, even though some *goswamis* also do so.<sup>519</sup> Some *goswamis* even claim that only they can award *veśa*, not the *bābājīs*.<sup>520</sup> The *veśa*-guru need not be the same

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514 IF mgt 2000/68

515 See for example Swami B.G. Narasingha (1998), 121-130

516 E.g. Suhotra Swami (1994), 51-62

517 One example from the 20th century is Nityānanda Dāsa Bābājī of Nandagrāma. See Kapoor (1999), 447-460.

518 Swami B.V. Tripurari (1998), 9-11

519 IF mgt 2000/85

520 IF 2000/14d

as the *dīkṣā* guru, and is indeed usually different, as we have seen (in 3.4).

The candidate can be either a man or woman, and of any *varṇa*. At Rādhā-kuṇḍa one can today even see one or two western-born *bābājīs*. The main requisite is the desire to surrender fully to Kṛṣṇa. The guru is the one who decides when the disciple is ready, but at least at Rādhā-kuṇḍa there is a committee (*pañca*) who has to give its approval. Before initiation, the aspirant must stay in Rādhā-kuṇḍa for at least a year.<sup>521</sup>

Kennedy gives a summary of the ritual of *Veśā*-initiation following the book *Veśāśrayavidhi* (Rules for accepting *veśā*) ascribed to Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin. On the day before the initiation, the initiate is to fast and sleep on the ground. Early in the morning, he is to shave his head and bathe in the Ganges or in other holy water mixed with the five products of the cow.<sup>522</sup> He then smears the body with earth uttering mantras and drinks water with which the image of Kṛṣṇa has been bathed. After this, he presents himself before the guru wearing a new *dhoti* and *uttariya* (upper cloth). The guru takes a new *kanthi-mālā* (necklace of *tulasī*-wood), offers it to Kṛṣṇa, wears it himself and finally puts it around the neck of the disciple, uttering a special mantra. He then marks the twelve *tilakas* on the body of the disciple.<sup>523</sup>

After this the guru places his hand on the head of the disciple and gives him a new name. The name is usually one of Kṛṣṇa or Caitanya and begins with the same letter as the previous, and ends with Dāsa, just as above. Persons who already have such a name (from their general initiation) in some cases retain them.

Then the guru gives the disciple the *kaupina*, underwear consisting of a belt and a narrow strip of cloth worn between the thighs, commonly used by ascetics in India. The *kaupina* is fortified by invoking a number of divinities into it.<sup>524</sup> The *kaupina* symbolises the

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521 IF 2000/14a

522 I.e. milk, yoghurt, ghee, cow dung and cow urine

523 Kennedy (1925), 163

524 Mahanidhi Swami (1998), 143-144

austerity and especially the celibacy of the new *bābājī*. The guru ties the knot himself. He also gives the disciple a *bahirvāsa*, outer cloth, consisting of half a white *dhoti* and worn simply around the waist. The other half of the *dhoti* is used as an *uttarīya*. The disciple is also given the standard mantras, if he hasn't received them before, and a particular mantra for *bābājīs*.<sup>525</sup> These mantras are whispered in the left ear of the initiate even if male, since all *bābājīs* are supposed to think of themselves as maidservants of the divine couple Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The guru then imparts instructions on worship and speaks about the rules of ascetic life and on surrendering to Kṛṣṇa. The rites are concluded by the new *bābājī* eating remnants of the guru's meal, feeding the Vaiṣṇavas, and giving a donation to the guru.<sup>526</sup>

The whole ceremony thus includes ten elements: 1) fasting; 2) shaving the head; 3) bathing in holy water; 4) wearing the *tulasī* necklace; 5) putting on *tilaka*; 6) receiving a new name; 7) receiving a mantra; 8) receiving the *kaupina*; 9) worshipping Kṛṣṇa and 10) surrendering to Kṛṣṇa. The same rites are followed (except receiving the *kaupina*) when a woman is given *veśa* (becoming a *mātājī*). Kennedy also writes that the guru after marking the *tilakas* on the disciple stamps the disk and conch of Viṣṇu on his shoulders,<sup>527</sup> but I find that doubtful. I have never seen *bābājīs* marked like this. It is considered even forbidden to wear the marks of Viṣṇu for *rāgānuṅgā*-practitioners, who are supposed to be exclusively devoted to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.<sup>528</sup>

#### 6.2.4 *Sannyāsa initiation*

As mentioned above (2.3.5), Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī introduced *sannyāsa* into his form of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism as an alternative to the

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525 IF mgt 2002/11

526 Kennedy (1925), 164

527 Ibid

528 See for example Kapoor (1999), 42-45



*bābājī* class of ascetics. The practice of initiating Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsins* has continued in the groups stemming from him. Since *sannyāsa* is seen as a better alternative to *veśa*, the rites for awarding *sannyāsa* are quite similar to those for *Veśa*-initiation. One major difference, however, in keeping with the sanskritic character of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's innovations, is that only men can become *sannyāsins*. Also, while *bābājīs* do not enjoy a particularly high status in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava society, the *sannyāsins* are the elite in the Gauḍīya Maṭhas and ISKCON. Becoming a *sannyāsin* is thus in these movements a clear step up on the social ladder.

A short book, the *Samskāra-dīpikā*, describes the method of awarding *sannyāsa*.<sup>529</sup> While it is considered the standard rule-book for *Sannyāsa*-initiation,<sup>530</sup> the rituals actually describe awarding *Veśa*-initiation. Bhaktisiddhānta's followers thus add some things to the rituals to distinguish their own brand of *sannyāsa* from the *bābājī* form. There is no giving of *tilaka* or *tulasī* neckbeads, since they have been given already at the time of (regular) initiation, without which nobody can receive *sannyāsa*. As part of *saṃskāra* eight above (receiving the *kaupina*) the triple staff of a *tridaṇḍin sannyāsin* is given.<sup>531</sup> The mantra is usually given in private after the ceremonies are over.

*Sannyāsins* of the *advaita* school are known by ten names (*daśanāmin*): Tīrtha, Āśrama, Vana, Araṇya, Giri, Parvata, Sāgara,

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529 The rituals described are identical with those of the *Veśāśrayavidhi* described above. Since the *Samskāra-dīpikā* also is ascribed to Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, we probably have two names for the same book. The book is obviously not written by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, since it refers to the author of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (on page 21), speaks about following in the footsteps of the Gosvāmins (p. 27) and enjoins worship of Caitanya along with his four principal associates, known as the *Pañca-tattva* (ibid), an idea not found in the writings of the Gosvāmins.

530 Mahanidhi Swami (1998), 143

531 Ibid, 144

Sarasvatī, Bhārātī and Purī.<sup>532</sup> These names are passed on from guru to disciple as a kind of surname. The guru will also give another name, usually ending with “-ānanda”. The full name of a *daśanāmin sannyāsin* could thus be Brahmānanda Bhārātī. When Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī instituted his system of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsa*, he introduced these ten names, but also many others that are said to have been used for *tridaṇḍin sannyāsins* in the Rudra-*saṃpradāya* in ancient times.<sup>533</sup> They are all contained in a list of 108 names ascribed to the *Muktika Upaniṣad* and the *Sāttvata-saṃhitā*.<sup>534</sup> Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī would give one of these names as a *sannyāsin*-name, and a prefix of “*bhakti*” plus another word, such as “*pradīpa*” (lantern). A full name could thus be Bhaktipradīpa Tīrtha. The prefix is often written as two separate words or shortened into two letters, e.g. B.P. Tīrtha. An honorific “Mahārāja” is usually added at the end, and often “Tridaṇḍī Swami” at the beginning. The previous name (e.g. Rāma Dāsa) is given up, just as anything connected with the previous life is supposed to be. In common parlance, such a *sannyāsin* will be known by his *sannyāsa*-name plus Mahārāja, for example Tīrtha Mahārāja. This system is followed by most of the Gauḍīya Maṭhas today, but there are at least two exceptions. Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Mahārāja gave his *sannyāsa* disciples names according to the list mentioned above, but the same prefix, Bhaktivedānta, to all.<sup>535</sup> B.H. (Bhaktihṛdaya) Bon Mahārāja passed on the name Bon (Vana) to his disciples, but gave them prefixes with-

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532 Cenkner (1984), 23

533 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1974b), 183

534 *Gauḍīya Kaṅṭhahāra* 15.40. I have not been able to consult the *Sāttvata-saṃhitā*, but the list is not found in the *Muktika Upaniṣad*, which however does contain a list of 108 Upaniṣads. According to B.R. Śrīdhara Mahārāja, Ananta Vāsudeva Dāsa, one of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī’s leading disciples, said that the list was composed by one of Bhaktisiddhānta’s disciples. See B.B. Vishnu Maharaja in [http://www.gosai.com/chaitanya/saranagati/html/vishnu\\_mjs/affection\\_unabridged/oag\\_a\\_3.html](http://www.gosai.com/chaitanya/saranagati/html/vishnu_mjs/affection_unabridged/oag_a_3.html)

535 Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja [nd], 139-143

out “Bhakti” and ending with” –ānanda”, for example Gopānanda Bon.<sup>536</sup>

### 6.3 Initiation mantras

As we have seen, the main part of the ordinary initiation is awarding the mantra. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* speaks about the greatness of Vaiṣṇava mantras in general, but specifically mentions the eight- and twelve-syllable mantras addressed to Viṣṇu,<sup>537</sup> the 32-syllable mantra of Nṛsiṃha (The lion-man descent),<sup>538</sup> the six-syllable mantra of Rāma<sup>539</sup> and the eighteen-syllable mantra<sup>540</sup> also known as the Gopāla mantra.<sup>541</sup> There is no clear indication which one is best, but since the last one gets the most space, one can guess that it is the most important one.

All these mantras have their origin in the Śruti part of the scriptures, though mostly in the late Upaniṣads such as the *Gopāla Tapanī*. Particularly the eight-, twelve- and eighteen syllable mantras are also celebrated throughout the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas, especially the *Padma Purāṇa*.

Nowadays, the mantras that are given vary between *parivāras* and even individual gurus. The general practice is that the guru will pass on some or all of the mantras he has himself received from his guru. Still, there is considerable difference among different gurus. Some will give only one mantra,<sup>542</sup> others up to sixteen or more.<sup>543</sup>

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536 Broo (1999), 75

537 *om namo nārāyanāya, om namo bhāgavate vāsudevaya*

538 *ugra-vīraṃ mahā-viṣṇuṃ jvalantaṃ sarvato-mukhaṃ/ nṛsiṃhaṃ bhīṣanaṃ bhadraṃ mṛtyo mṛtyuṃ namāmy aham//*

539 *om namo rāmāya*

540 *kṛīm kṛṣṇāya govindāya gopījana-vallabhāya svāhā*

541 HBV 1.126-193

542 IF mgt 2000/68

543 IF 2000/14a

These mantras are thought to be essential for worship of Kṛṣṇa, but also for internal spiritual culture. They are said to be “full of unlimited spiritual power,”<sup>544</sup> and should be mentally or silently repeated at least once daily.

The origin of these mantras is often uncertain. If we examine, for example, the 24 mantras that Ananta Dāsa Bābājī gives, we find that only seven can be traced to a written source, the *Gaura-govindārcana-smaraṇa-paddhati* (ca 1620) by Dhyānacandra Gosvāmin of the Gopāla Guru *parivāra*. They are the Gaura mantra<sup>545</sup> and *gāyatrī*,<sup>546</sup> Gopāla mantra and Kāma *gāyatrī*,<sup>547</sup> Rādhā mantra<sup>548</sup> and *gāyatrī*,<sup>549</sup> and Rūpa-*mañjarī* mantra.<sup>550</sup> Apart from these, he also gives his disciples the following mantras: guru mantra and *gāyatrī*, guru-*mañjarī* mantra and *gāyatrī*, Nityānanda mantra and *gāyatrī*, Advaita mantra and *gāyatrī*, Gadādhara mantra and *gāyatrī*, Śrīvāsa mantra and *gāyatrī*, Lalitā mantra and *gāyatrī*, Anaṅga-*mañjarī* mantra and *gāyatrī* and Rūpa-*mañjarī gāyatrī*. While mantras with these names also are given in the *Gaura-govindārcana-smaraṇa-paddhati*, they are different from those given by Ananta Dāsa Bābājī. The origin of his variants of the mantras is unknown: except for the Gopāla mantra and Kāma *gāyatrī*, he received all of them from a *śikṣā*-guru, Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Dāsa Bābājī, about whom little is known.<sup>551</sup>

This example also shows that a guru, in contrast to the general rule that one may have only one *dikṣā*-guru, may receive mantras from

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544 Mahanidhi Swami (1998), 62

545 *Klīm gaurāya svāhā*. GGSP 55, quoted from *Urdhvāmnyā Tantra* (3.15)

546 *Klīm caitanyāya vidmahe viśvāmbharāya dhīmahī/ tan no gaurah pracodayāt//*. GGSP 72, no source mentioned

547 *Klīm kāmādevāya vidmahe puṣṭabāñāya dhīmahī/ tan no 'nangah pracodayāt//*. GGSP 143-144. Quoted from the *Svāyambhuva Āgama*. This mantra is mentioned (by the name “Anaṅga *gāyatrī*”) in the *Gopāla-tāpanī Upaniṣad*, 1.18.

548 *Śrīm rām rādhikāyai svāhā* GGSP 181. Quoted from the *Gaurī Tantra*.

549 *Śrī-rādhikāyai vidmahe prema-rūpāyai dhīmahī/ tan no rādhā pracodayāt//*. GGSP 181. No source given.

550 *Śrīm rūpa-mañjarīyai svāhā*. GGSP 298. Quoted from the *Kiśorī Tantra*.

551 E-letter from Mādhavānanda Dāsa to author, 21.3.2003

several persons. Ananta Dāsa Bābājī himself states that only the Gopāla mantra and Kāma *gāyatrī* are “actual *dīkṣā*-mantras” (since he received only them from his *dīkṣā*-guru), but he gives his own disciples all of these mantras at the time of initiation, so that the distinction between “actual *dīkṣā*-mantras” and the others (“additional mantras for worship”) is blurred.<sup>552</sup>

Sources are mentioned for most of the mantras given in the *Gaura-govindārcana-smaraṇa-paddhati*, but the texts referred to are very obscure, such as the *Svāyambhuva Āgama* or *Kiśori Tantra*, or if the books are available, the verses attributed to them are not found in modern editions. That is hardly surprising, since many of the persons mentioned in the mantras are much posterior to the date of, say, the *Padma Purāṇa*. Attributing the mantras to various scriptures thus seems to be a way to give them greater respectability. Such a practice is nothing new.<sup>553</sup> Another indication of the dubiousness of these sources is that modern Gauḍīyas are not aware of them. One author devotes 28 pages to describing the Kāma *gāyatrī*, but has nothing to say about its source,<sup>554</sup> another similarly 71!<sup>555</sup> Some say that it was Jāhnavā (one of Nityānanda’s two wives) who introduced the mantras for Caitanya and his associates.<sup>556</sup>

## 6.4 Rules for initiated disciples

### 6.4.1 General rules

An important way the life of a disciple changes after initiation is that he is now obliged to follow certain rules. He has probably already been following most of them, but after initiation they become man-

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552 E-letter from Mādhavānanda Dāsa to author, 21.3.2003. Another disciple I spoke with (IF 2000/14a) was not aware of this distinction.

553 For a discussion on Madhva’s use of spurious quotations, see Mesquita (2000).

554 Mahanidhi Swami (1998), 97-124

555 Swami B.G. Narasingha (2000), 121-167, 169-192

556 E.g. Rasānanda Vana Mahārāja (2001), 17-18

datory. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* contains several lists of rules (one containing no less than 104!) that the disciple is to agree to follow at the time of initiation.<sup>557</sup> A modern reader of these rules is likely to be surprised by the emphasis on details of ritual and religious observances. Out of 52 injunctions, only eight concern other things, such as the attitude towards the guru. Out of the 52 prohibitions, 31 deal with rituals or observances such as *Ekādaśī* or *Śrāddha*. Few general moral rules are given. Indeed, nothing is said about such basic prohibitions as not killing, stealing, lying or having illicit sexual relations, since such things are considered general rules of Hindu society, while the rules here are specifically dealing with the initiated disciple. They deal with things the disciple is supposed to do or avoid doing after initiation. Stealing or lying is forbidden at all times. If nothing is said contrary to ordinary rules, they are to be followed.

A noteworthy omission, however, is that nothing is said about *japa*, or chanting the name of Kṛṣṇa (usually the *mahā*-mantra), a practice that is of utmost importance for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas both past and present. The reason for this lack is that, as stated earlier (1.2.1) the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* was written for Vaiṣṇavas in general, and the sources quoted were all pre-Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava. The practice of *japa* is not given the same emphasis in other Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāyas*.

Modern Vaiṣṇavas generally consider these rules as ideals. Bhakti Pramoda Puri Mahārāja (a disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, who was known as a very strict follower of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*) writes:

Hari-bhakti-vilāsa, however, gives far more regulations than is possible for anyone to follow. The disciple should therefore seek specific instructions from the spiritual master about what exactly he must do or must not do. The essence of all instructions, however, should be kept in mind. That essence is to always remember the spiritual master, the Vaiṣṇavas, and the Supreme Lord, and the essence of all prohibitions is to never forget them. Whatever injunctions and prohibitions are found in the scripture are merely variations on this theme.<sup>558</sup>

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557 HBV 2.136-146, 149-178

558 Swami B.P. Puri Maharaja [n.d.], 114.

The rules emphasised today vary greatly from guru to guru. In Samāja Baṛī, one of the largest *āśramas* in Navadvīpa, initiated devotees are supposed to follow 53 rules (mainly taken from the lists of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, with the difference that the emphasis there is on rules for householders, here on rules for renunciants) listed on two big tables hanging on pillars near the main altar.<sup>559</sup> At the other extreme is Puruṣottama Goswami, who does not demand anything else from prospective initiates than that they have a desire to become initiated, although he claims that 85% of those who become initiated eventually give up meat-eating and drinking alcohol.<sup>560</sup>

There are some rules that most Gauḍīyas do agree on. One should be vegetarian, avoid intoxicants, avoid illicit sexual relations, worship an image of Kṛṣṇa, honour and follow the guru and, especially, chant the name of Kṛṣṇa. Caitanya did not specify how much one is to chant, but rather said that one should do it constantly.<sup>561</sup> The ideal was given by his Muslim-born follower Haridāsa who would chant three *lakhs* (300, 000) names daily, equalling 194 rounds on a standard rosary of 108 beads.<sup>562</sup> Some of my informants claimed to follow that standard.<sup>563</sup> If one would take as little as five minutes per round, that many rounds would take more than sixteen hours to complete. The standard for *bābājīs* has traditionally been a minimum of one lakh, the equal of 64 rounds on the rosary. Such amounts have generally not been demanded from householder disciples. Kṛṣṇa Keśavānanda Deva Goswami asks new disciples to begin with three rounds.<sup>564</sup> Ananta Dāsa Bābājī tells his householder disciples to chant at least four rounds,<sup>565</sup> as does Ramavallabha Dāsa Adhikārin of the Rādhākāṇṭha Maṭha in Puri.<sup>566</sup>

559 Field notes, Navadvīpa, December 2000

560 Margaret Case (2000), 47-48

561 CC 3.20.21

562 CC 3.3.100

563 IF mgt 2000/88

564 IF mgt 2000/71

565 IF 2000/14a

566 IF mgt 2000/88

How one should honour the guru will be dealt with in part three. For now it will suffice to say that many think this to be the most important rule, since the guru will then engage the disciple in everything else that is necessary.<sup>567</sup>

#### 6.4.2 Rules for *bābājīs* and *sannyāsins*

Apart from the rules already given, there are some particular rules that initiated *bābājīs* and *sannyāsins* are expected to follow. The main principle is cessation of any worldly social connections, such as to wife, children and relatives. The renunciant must give up wealth and prestige and live simply as a celibate humble devotee of the Lord. As a sign of this, the *bābājī* will discard his *upavīta* (holy thread) if he has one. Kennedy mentions an extensive list of rules for *bābājīs*,<sup>568</sup> but they are not all strictly followed today. *Bābājīs* are not supposed to accept gifts from worldly people, but I have never seen anyone refuse a donation on the basis of the caste status of the donor, though the hagiographies contain stories to that effect.<sup>569</sup>

*Bābājīs* are supposed to live by a system of begging known as *madhukārī*, the way of the bumblebee. The idea is to beg from door to door, but to accept only a little in every place, never a full meal, to avoid becoming dependent on any particular person. Some also restrict the number of houses they will approach.<sup>570</sup> In the Vṛndāvana area, where this system is common, the *bābājīs* will usually be given pieces of simple unleavened flatbreads (*roṭī*) and buttermilk. In *āśramas* with many inmates, the procedure is usually to send out a few persons to collect *madhukārī* in the form of rice, flour, vegetables, etc. in the forenoon and to then prepare whatever has been

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567 IF mgt 2000/70

568 Kennedy (1925), 164-166

569 See for example Kapoor (1999), 180, 185

570 Kapoor (1999), 16



received for everyone in the *āśrama*. Ideally, nothing should be stored for the next day, trusting that the Lord will provide.<sup>571</sup>

As a *bābājī*, a *sannyāsin* should renounce the association of relatives and live in strict celibacy. He should carry the triple-staff and wear saffron robes. Since the *sannyāsin* still is a part of the *varṇāśrama* society, he should keep his *upavīta* or sacred thread.<sup>572</sup> In some ways, however, he is considered socially dead. Any assets gained after the acceptance of *sannyāsa* cannot be inherited by his children.<sup>573</sup> A *sannyāsin* should be honoured by everyone. Indeed, if one fails to bow down to a *sannyāsin* when one sees him the first time in the day, one should remain fasting for the rest of the day.<sup>574</sup> On the other hand, a *sannyāsin* who falls down from his position of celibacy is called a *vantāsin*, or one who eats his own vomit, since he again takes up something he previously rejected.<sup>575</sup>

While *sannyāsin*s are supposed to be the most renounced of all the *āśramas*, one can see that they often (especially in ISKCON) enjoy more comforts than the *brahmacārins*. They often eat food especially cooked for them that is better than that the other inmates of the *āśrama* get, have rooms of their own and even servants that take care of their laundry and so forth. Especially *sannyāsin*s that are gurus receive much service. One rationale given for this rather glaring paradox is that it is beneficial for others (especially their disciples) to serve them, since they are more spiritually advanced; another oft-heard reason is that the *sannyāsin*s need some material conveniences to facilitate their preaching to worldly-minded people.

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571 Kapoor (1995), 254

572 Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja [n.d.2], 7-11

573 IF 2001/78

574 Mahanidhi Swami (1998), 151

575 BP 7.15.36

### 6.4.3 Breaking the rules

Since uttering the name of Kṛṣṇa is thought to purify from any kind of sin, there is no other developed system of ritual atonement in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya*.<sup>576</sup> When a guru corrects a disciple who has done something wrong, he will generally just point out the fault and ask the disciple not to repeat it, and the disciple will ask for forgiveness.<sup>577</sup> However, there also seems to be four cases in which atonement is demanded: 1) when the sin is especially great, 2) when someone has made repeated smaller offenses, 3) when the reputation of a particular institution or guru has been threatened, or 4) when the offender is a well-known Vaiṣṇava.

Perhaps the most common example of the first case is when a celibate Vaiṣṇava has broken his vow, either by directly engaging in sexual intercourse, or even by associating too closely with the opposite sex. Caitanya himself completely rejected one ascetic follower for this offense.<sup>578</sup> In the second case the offense itself need not be so great, rather the problem is that it is repeated again and again, for example if someone repeatedly misses the early morning service (*maṅgala-ārati*).

In the third case not only the offender is concerned, but the reputation of his guru or of a whole institution. For this reason some steps must be taken so that the offender rectifies himself, and, even more importantly, that others do not think that the authorities condone the behaviour of the offender. The offence here is usually serious.

The fourth and last case is related to the third. It is felt that if leaders such as gurus behave improperly, general devotees may lose faith in Vaiṣṇavism. Here the offence need not be very serious. An example may be taken from the hagiography of Gaurakiśora Śiromaṇi (19<sup>th</sup> century). He was a well-known saint and discourses on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* living in Vṛndāvana. It is said that once the queen

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576 CC 2.22.143.

577 IF mgt 2000/68

578 CC 3.2.102-172

of Hetampur came to hear him. Pleased by what she heard, she offered him some fruits, flowers and money as a gift. Not wanting to displease her, Gaurakiśora accepted the gift. By doing so, however, he broke two rules, namely that one should never accept gifts for speaking the *Bhāgavata*, and that renunciants should never accept alms from a worldly minded person.<sup>579</sup> To atone for this mistake, he was asked to speak on the *Bhāgavata* in every temple of Vṛndāvana within a year, something that he succeeded in doing by giving several talks a day.<sup>580</sup>

The atonement for a particular offense is determined on an ad-hoc basis, depending very much on the severity of the guru and on the nature of the offense. Generally it will consist of fasting or other extra austerities, staying away from other Vaiṣṇavas for a certain period of time, performing special worship or other religious activities (for example dramatically increasing the number of mantras chanted daily), sponsoring Vaiṣṇava festivals or simply begging for forgiveness and showing repentance. In extreme cases, a guru can even reject a disciple.<sup>581</sup> There have been some examples of persons being excommunicated from the whole Gauḍīya *saṁpradāya*, so that all Gauḍīyas were forbidden from associating with them.<sup>582</sup>

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579 Given in CC 1.12.50

580 Kapoor (1999), 94

581 IF mgt 2000/71

582 Chatterjee (1983), 151

### III. ROLES OF THE GURU

This part of the thesis deals in part with the middle part of my definition of a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru: *a charismatic person who is offered special reverence by one or several persons on account of his awarding him/ them initiation and/ or especially important spiritual advice.* I believe that a description of the reverence offered to the guru and an understanding of it can best be achieved by focusing on the roles of the guru. I have chosen to examine seven roles that the guru may accept in relation to his disciples.<sup>583</sup> This typology stems partly from earlier scholars, and partly from my own observations in the field. None of the roles I specify will seem very original or radical in themselves, but taken together, I believe they form a good tool for studying the guru.

Splitting the role of being guru into seven distinct aspects also makes it easier to view the interplay between canon and charisma, and to grasp the distinction between institutional and personal charisma. By the end of this part, it will also be easier to locate the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru within the framework of Weber's typology of charismatic personages.

It is important to note that all these roles are enacted in relation to disciples and other admirers. A householder in the position of a guru may act and function as any other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava householder in relation to his family. Also ascetic gurus will usually have a "sphere of their own," into which they may withdraw from time to time.<sup>584</sup> Gurus may also give up their position as guru completely.

As will be seen, some of the roles are more important than others. They also act on somewhat different platforms. The guru functions, for example, only sometimes as a "father" while he at all times remains a "manifestation of divinity." Still, as I will show, every guru will

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583 With "role" I do not wish to imply that the guru always consciously plays plays or changes into another character at specific points of time.

584 IF mgt 2000/92

at some time step into all roles, regardless of whether he wishes to emphasise a particular one or not. There are of course more roles that the guru might accept apart from the ones I deal with (for example lover, betrayer, son, etc.), but those roles would be voluntary. The seven roles described below have to be accepted at least sometimes by every Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru.

## 7. PARENT

To compare the guru with a parent is no new idea. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement itself does so explicitly,<sup>585</sup> as do Hindu sacred texts in general: usually the guru is compared to the father and the disciple with the son.<sup>586</sup> One reason for this is historical: as already mentioned (3.1), in Vedic times the guru was very often the same person as the father. Neither has the academic community missed the connection. Psychoanalytically minded scholars have seen the relationship between father and son as the basis for the relationship between guru and disciple.<sup>587</sup> Steiermann observes that the guru can take the role of a protecting mother or commanding father according to the soteriological need of the disciple.<sup>588</sup> In this chapter, I will examine two cases in which the “parent-role” of the guru clearly manifests itself in the relationship between guru and disciple.<sup>589</sup> The first applies to practically all Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava gurus, the other to some.

### 7.1 *Creating a spiritual family*

One way in which the guru can be compared to a father is how he creates a community around himself that in some ways resembles a family. This is seen for instance in the vocabulary used by disciples: the guru is often called *bābā* or *bābājī* (father, respected father), and other disciples are addressed as brother or sister so-and-so. When one disciple speaks about a fellow-disciple of the same guru, that person is usually called a “Godbrother” or “Godsister.”<sup>590</sup>

585 E.g. HBV 3.450

586 E.g. *Kulārṇava-tantra* 12.15, 35, cited in Bay-Schmidt (1984), 45

587 See Narayan (1992), 145, 180-181

588 Steiermann (1989), 290

589 The guru and the father can of course be one and the same person also in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. This chapter does not deal with those cases, since it then is obvious that the guru will be a parent of the disciple.

590 Field notes, Rādhākuṇḍa, 25.10.2000. ISKCON is an exception to this. While the terms “Godbrother” and “Godsister” are used, the guru is never called father, neither are fellow disciples addressed as brother or sister.

Sometimes this sense of family can be more than just a matter of religious sentiment. In the circle of close disciples of Puruṣottama Goswami, for example, the families have to some extent used the network of disciples to marry their children to one another or to each other's nephews.<sup>591</sup> Even without this, it has been pointed out that such relationships “in God” can often become very strong ties – perhaps even stronger than any other.<sup>592</sup> In this instance, we see how charisma can have an integrative effect.

Just as the guru can be seen as a kind of father to the disciples, the guru of the guru can be compared to a grandfather. Narahari Sarakāra writes:

See, see! As the father is an authority, so are his older and younger brothers. Still the father is more worshipable, even though they are related. In the same way the father of the father, or the guru of the guru is twice worshipable. This behaviour is accepted by all.<sup>593</sup>

However, it is uncommon that the guru of the guru (*paramaguru*) will interfere with the orders of the guru so that the disciple would have to take sides. Generally, he will act as a senior well-wisher for his grand-disciples. In many cases, there will not be more than one living “generation” of gurus, something that naturally will prevent such clashes of authority. Some even claim that nobody can become a guru while his own guru is alive.<sup>594</sup>

As one might know one's ancestors, disciples will usually be able to list at least a few of their own guru's predecessors. In Tantric tradition, usually three guru-generations are remem-

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591 Case (2000), 33

592 Wach (1958), 125

593 KB, p 9. *paśya, paśya, yathā pitā gurur tathā tasya bhrātāgrajo 'nujah, pitor adhika-pūjyo vā pituṣ cedātmīya eva vā, tathāpi pituḥ pitā gurur api gurur, tasya pūjā dviguṇiteti śailī loka-prasiddhā/*

594 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, Lecture 750406CC.MAY. In Bhaktivedānta Vedabase 4.11.

bered,<sup>595</sup> but Gauḍīyas generally go farther than that. At the time of *Siddha*-initiation, a disciple will receive what is called *guru-praṇāli*, a list of all the gurus of the *parivāra*, from the present one down to the associate of Caitanya who originated the *parivāra*. Rāmavallabha Dāsa Adhikārin of the Rādhākanta Maṭha in Puri, for example, listed 19 predecessor gurus from memory.<sup>596</sup> Ordinary devotees may not be able to reach so far back, but it is common for disciples to know at least four or five predecessor gurus.<sup>597</sup>

How much reverence previous gurus are offered depends especially on their position within the *parivāra*. If the grand-guru, for example, was a famous, charismatic person, while the present guru is not so, it is possible that his role in the life of the disciple will be very important, even if he is not physically present. In ISKCON, all devotees are encouraged to form a personal relationship with Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (d. 1977), the founder of the movement and grand-guru of new disciples mainly by reading his books.<sup>598</sup> Mā Maṇi, a granddisciple of the famous Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmin, usually saw him in her spiritual trances rather than her own guru.<sup>599</sup>

If the guru is a householder, the disciples will necessarily interact with his biological family. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* offers some remarks in this connection:

One should always act favourably - like towards the guru - towards his sons, wives and his friends. One should not anoint the limbs, bathe, eat the remnants of or wash the feet of the son of the guru. The wife of the guru should be worshipped like the guru, if she is

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595 Bay-Schmidt, 134

596 IF mgt 2000/88

597 In ISKCON, for example, all disciples are supposed to know at least five predecessors to their guru. See Premarasa and Sandīpani Muni Dāsa (1997), 137

598 See for example Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami (1995)

599 Kapoor (1995a), 391-417



of the same caste, but if she is of a different caste she should be honoured by rising up and saluting respectfully. One should not inunct, bathe, or anoint the limbs or hair of the guru's wife.<sup>600</sup>

As the commentator observes, the first sentence gives the rule, while the rest consists of exceptions. The prohibition against bathing the wife of the guru is fitting in an age where the disciple could be of the same age as she. In fact, the sin of “defiling the bed of the guru” is one of five *mahā-pātakas* or “great sins” of classic Hindu law.<sup>601</sup>

### 7.2 Accepting fatherly duties

Of course, whether or not a guru wants to emphasise the role of a parent in relation to the disciples depends on factors such as his personality, the needs of the disciples, and so on. If he does, it will generally be by trying to nurture not only the strictly spiritual needs of the disciple, but by seeing to the disciple's all-round welfare. Many disciples are not shy to say that they feel their guru is “fatherly” in this way.<sup>602</sup> Sometimes this paternal affection may border on friendship, but if there is any equality in the relationship between the guru and disciple, it is a temporary one, initiated by the guru. The status difference between the guru and disciple will not be permanently changed.

Except for being paternal in such a general way, a guru may also emphasise this role by accepting social duties and responsibilities usually connected with the biological father, such as helping a disci-

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600 HBV 1.84-87. The text is a quote from the *Kūrma Purāṇa* (2.14.28, 30-32). *kiñ ca – śreyas tu guruvād-ṛttir nityam eva samācareṭ/ guru-putreṣu dāreṣu guroṣ caiva svabandhuṣu// utsādanaṃ vai gātrānāṃ snāpanocchiṣṭa-bhojane/ na kuryād guru-putrasya pādayoḥ śaucam eva ca// guruvat pariṇījyāś ca savarṇā guru-yoṣitaḥ/ asavarṇās tu saṃpūjyāḥ praty-uthānābhivādanaiḥ// abhyañjanam snāpanaṃ ca gātrotsādanam eva ca/ guru-patnyā na kāryāṇi keśānāṃ ca prasādanam//*

601 See for example *Manu-saṃhitā* 11.56

602 IF mgt 2000/93

ple find a good job or getting married. Padmanābha Goswami said that the guru should take care of the disciple in every way, material and spiritual. It is the right of any disciple, for example, to invite the guru to his home to officiate or even perform marriages or other such rituals. However, the *sannyāsin*-gurus are an exception: they should not be involved in such worldly dealings.<sup>603</sup> Śrīvatsa Goswami, also of the Rādhā-ramaṇa-temple, went even further. He opined that *bābājīs* or *sannyāsins* should not accept disciples at all, since that would create a new family for the renunciant – something that he was supposed to be rid of!<sup>604</sup> Still, as we have seen (4.1) there are today both householder and renunciant gurus in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Forming a “family” of disciples is generally not seen as a problem, but the new family is rather seen as a spiritual one, not comparable with material (and thus entangling) relationships.<sup>605</sup>

While renunciant gurus generally do not involve themselves in what they perceive as the worldly life of their disciples, there are exceptions. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda personally arranged the marriage (even performing the actual marriage *saṁskāra*) of several of his disciples. For this he was criticised by his Godbrothers, who maintained that it was against the rules of *sannyāsa* to involve oneself in such worldly dealings. His defence was that married disciples could perform much service for Kṛṣṇa, and that there was none else than himself who knew how to perform the proper rites.<sup>606</sup>

While arranged marriages are not in vogue in ISKCON nowadays, some *sannyāsins* conduct marriage ceremonies for their disciples. Among the arguments they give for this is that they want to make sure that the disciples can remain steady in their spiritual life, that they want to give them a position in society suitable for preaching, and that celibate disciples may become dysfunctional.<sup>607</sup> However,

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603 IF mgt 2000/68

604 IF 2000/14d

605 See for example Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami (1994), part two, 194

606 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1975a), 124

607 Bir Krishna das Goswami, e-letter to author, 30.9.2002

today practically every ISKCON centre has qualified householders who know how to perform *saṁskāras*, so there is no real necessity anymore for *sannyāsins* to conduct the ceremonies themselves. Rather than bowing to necessity, a *sannyāsin* who performs a marriage ceremony in present day ISKCON does so voluntarily, perhaps to show that he approves of the couple getting married and to bless them with his presence.

The exception of ISKCON above points to one important correlation: the more sectarian the group, the more paternal the guru tends to become, in the sense of taking over responsibilities of the father. The reason is easy to understand: in a group where contact with outsiders is discouraged, the guru (or some other authority, such as the leader of the *āśrama*) has to take over the duties of the father if he is an outsider.

## 8. FEUDAL LORD

The parallel between the guru and a feudal lord has been noted by Daniel Gold.<sup>608</sup> Hindu tradition itself sometimes compares a guru to a king (for example in the saying that one should not go empty-handed to a physician, king or guru<sup>609</sup>). Here, I will stick to Gold's feudal lord, since Gauḍīya gurus will consider themselves subordinate to Kṛṣṇa (whom we could consider the king), and generally do not wield that much power themselves.<sup>610</sup> This chapter will focus on some dynamics of the guru institution that are best seen in the light of this parallel. But before going into that, some remarks on Indian feudalism.

As Romila Thapar has observed, Indian feudalism (beginning in AD 800-1200) differs in some aspects from the feudalism of medieval Europe. For instance, in Indian feudalism the large-scale farming and manorial system of Europe was unknown. Still, the basic requisites were there: the king granted the revenue from a varying proportion of his land to his officers or selected holders, persons equivalent to vassals elsewhere. The feudatories could (and usually would) hire out their assigned land to cultivators, from which they would collect an agreed upon revenue. Part of this revenue would be sent to the king. The feudatory was also supposed to maintain soldiers for the use of the king in times of emergency. Beside these two main duties he also had others: he had to attend court on special occasions, such as the king's birthday, he might be called upon to give his daughter to the king in marriage, and in order to change the administration of his holdings he had to get the permission of the king. In return, the feudatory was allowed to use some royal paraphernalia (such as elephants, a *cāmara*, etc), take a royal title (sometimes as

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608 Gold (1987), 17-20

609 Quoted in HBV 4.343

610 Another alternative would be to compare the guru with a politician, as suggested by professor Kasinath Mukherjee, IF 2000/14e

imposing as *mahāmaṇḍaleśvara*, Lord of the great earth) and in some cases appoint sub-feudatories standing in the same relation to himself as he towards the king.<sup>611</sup>

In this chapter, I will first look at two cases in which the guru himself or the institution functions in ways very similar to a temporal ruler, regardless of whether the particular guru desires to take up and cultivate the role of a feudal lord. Examples of this are royal rituals and succession. After that, different alternatives for a guru who wishes to emphasise this role are examined.

### 8.1 Royal rituals

It has been argued that many of the typically Hindu religious rites, such as *pūjā* and *darśana*, have their origin in court etiquette.<sup>612</sup> However, since they have outgrown that context long ago, I will leave them for chapter 14, where the guru is examined as a manifestation of divinity. In this chapter, I will consider rituals more explicitly connected with medieval court life.

#### 8.1.1 Consecration

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism does not know any standard rituals for becoming a guru. Especially nowadays, almost anyone can declare himself guru as long as he can find followers. No ceremony is needed: the new guru just starts accepting disciples. However, when a new *mahanta* or leader of an *āśrama* or *maṭha* is appointed, some ceremonies will take place. Generally they are simple. The person to be consecrated is seated on the *pīṭha* or seat of the leader of the institution, offered standard items of worship (such as incense, lamps and flower garlands) and honoured with prostrated obei-

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611 Thapar (1969), 241-243

612 Gonda (1970), 77

sances by the members of the institution. Often leading members are asked to give short speeches in which they declare their loyalty to the new leader.<sup>613</sup>

Details will vary from group to group. The *mahanta* of the Gopīnātha-temple in Vṛndāvana (who himself was elevated to that position at the age of eight months) explicitly compared the ritual of becoming *mahanta* to a royal consecration by claiming that it is very elaborate, like a *Rājasūya-yajña* without the fire sacrifice.<sup>614</sup> The *Rājasūya* is the grand ceremony in which an emperor is consecrated as sovereign of the whole world. The *Mahābhārata* describes how Yudhiṣṭhira performed this ceremony, starting by sending out his brothers for a full year to extract the allegiance of all kings in the four directions, collect the immense wealth necessary, etc.<sup>615</sup> Although the appointment of a *mahanta* even in the Gopīnātha-temple may not contain all the elements of Yudhiṣṭhira's archetypical *Rājasūya*, it has many obvious parallels to the crowning of a king: taking the seat, receiving oaths of loyalty from the subjects, and so on.

### 8.1.2 Appointing subordinate vassals

As a feudal lord in some cases might appoint subordinate vassals, so *goswami* gurus sometimes appoint subordinate gurus, or *adhikārins*. As we have seen, according to the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, a brāhmaṇa guru is allowed to initiate disciples of all lower classes, while gurus of other *varṇas* can initiate only disciples of similar or lower social status.<sup>616</sup> However, if a brāhmaṇa guru accepts many

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613 I have not personally witnessed such an event, but at the Bhajan Kutir in Vṛndāvana I saw pictures of the ceremony when Gopānanda Bon Maharāja was declared *ācārya* of the Rādhā-Govinda Trust, as that institution is called. The participants all seemed very grave and sober. The similarly simple consecration (*ācāryābhiṣeka*) of Ananta Vāsudeva Dāsa is described in Śrīharikṛpa Dāsa (1975), 24-25.

614 IF mgt 2002/12

615 *Mahābhārata*, Sabhāparvan 13-45

616 HBV 1.47-50

low-caste disciples, he risks his own ritual purity, at least in the eyes of brāhmaṇical Hindu society. This is the reason for why the *goswamis* of the Advaita *vaṃśa*, for example, have been so careful in refusing women and low-born men. A system of *adhikārins* was created to answer this problem. A *goswami* would authorize a person of a lower *varṇa* to initiate persons of similar or still lower social status. In this way the movement could be spread socially, and also geographically, in a time when travel still was a dangerous and difficult undertaking.<sup>617</sup>

The persons the *adhikārin* initiated would be his own disciples and not disciples of the *goswami*. While an *adhikārins* have a degree of freedom, he and his disciples can all be called upon for service to the *goswami*, such as collecting funds, organising pilgrimages, etc. Generally, an *adhikārin* cannot appoint further subordinate *adhikārins*.<sup>618</sup> If an *adhikārin* himself is a *bābājī*, he can also give *Veśa*-initiation. It is also possible for an *adhikārin* to become the *mahanta* of an institution.<sup>619</sup>

It is difficult to pinpoint when this system appeared. There are no hints of it in the writings of the Vṛndāvana school. It may be an importation from the Assamese brand of Vaiṣṇavism, founded by Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1569?), who seems to have instituted a similar system among his disciples by appointing the leaders of various low-caste tribes and communities as leaders (*atoī*) of their own groups.<sup>620</sup> Kennedy, writing in the 1920', mentions that the gurus of the *jāti vaiṣṇavas* are *adhikārins*,<sup>621</sup> so at that time this system seems to have been in full swing. With the gradual erosion of the traditional social structure, the need for such a two-tiered system of gurus seems to be fading. Today, many Gauḍīya

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617 O'Connell (1986), 46

618 IF mgt 2002/11

619 Ibid

620 Fuchs (1992), 192

621 Kennedy, 179

Vaiṣṇavas do not even know of the difference between these two kinds of gurus.<sup>622</sup>

Still, that is not to say that there are no *adhikārins* today, but their role is changing. While they have lost much of their social role, they still fulfill the geographical role of representing a *goswami* in a place he seldom visits. They may also be managers of temples owned by a *goswami* who is not able for some reason to manage them himself.

Kṛṣṇa Keśavānanda Deva Goswami mentions a change that has entered into this system:

The system is that the *adhikārins* at first take *dīkṣā* from *mahantas*, but now some *adhikārins* try to take *dīkṣā* in their [own] family, but that is not the system. [...] The system is that at first they take *dīkṣā*, then they give.<sup>623</sup>

In other words, the *adhikārins* have begun to pass down their *adhikāra* or eligibility for giving initiation in their own family lines. Instead of following “the system” of remaining subservient to the *mahantas* or *goswamis*, they have started to create their own family lines of gurus. The son of an *adhikārīn* will thus become a guru without the approval of some *mahanta*. Still, it seems that at least in this area (the Midnapura district of West Bengal) the *adhikārins* restrict their giving of initiation to the lower classes.<sup>624</sup>

## 8.2 Succession

As mentioned before (2.3.3), there are two basic forms of succession in the Gauḍiṃya Vaiṣṇava movement: hereditary and appointed. Below I will examine both forms, comparing them with succession of rulers in feudal states in India and elsewhere. Finally, a third way of becoming a guru is highlighted: appointing oneself.

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622 E.g. IF mgt 2000/86

623 IF mgt 2000/85

624 IF mgt 2000/85



Especially if the previous guru has been very charismatic, succession may be problematic. What then happens, can in Weber's terms be called routinisation of charisma, by which one tries to convert the personal charisma of the deceased guru into an institutional charisma that can be picked up by others. Weber distinguishes six types, of which no less than four can be found below: *heredity*; *designation* by the charismatic leader himself; *designation* by an elite of qualified followers; and *revelation* through oracles, lots, divine judgements, etc.<sup>625</sup>

### 8.2.1 Hereditary succession

Hereditary succession is practiced within the *goswami* families (and, apparently, among some *adhikārins*). If, apart from the position of guru, there is an institution such as a temple to inherit, the system generally used is male primogeniture, that the eldest son inherits everything. In most cases, other children may initiate their own disciples, manage subordinate temples, etc.

The idea of hereditary guruship seems quite contrary to the emphasis on personal qualifications discussed above (4.1.1), and to the very notion of guruship prevalent in the West. How could spiritual standing be hereditary? In fact, systems of hereditary guruship can be found in most Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāyas*. Rāmānuja instituted 74 or 84 hereditary guruships amongst his followers. The descendants of these gurus are called *ācārya-puruṣas* and are considered equally qualified gurus as the celibate heads of the *maṭhas*, called *svāmins*.<sup>626</sup> In the Rudra *saṃpradāya*, the male descendants of Vallabha are called *mahārājas*, and they function as the movement's gurus. Since Vallabha is considered to have been divine, they also share in the same divine nature. The Kumāra *saṃpradāya* also has a

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625 Weber (1964), 363-373

626 Wilson (1958), 18

class of hereditary gurus called *goswamis* as well as renunciant gurus, just like the Gauḍīyas. The Rāmānandīs, however, have only renunciant gurus.<sup>627</sup> Thus, amongst the Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāyas*, the most common system is to have both hereditary and appointed gurus.

As mentioned above (3.1), in Vedic times, guruship was mainly inherited, so it is by no means a modern phenomena. One way of securing additional prestige for a lineage of gurus is to give it a divine origin. As the *mahārājas* of the Rudra *saṃpradāya*, the *goswamis* of the Nityānanda and Advaita *vaṃśas* are also at least extraordinarily holy because of their divine ancestors. Similarly, most other *goswamis* consider their ancestor divine in some way. Such gurus naturally have a more powerful inherited charisma than gurus who are born from normal human parents.

Another argument for the qualification of *goswami* gurus turns the tables around. Rather than referring to institutional charisma, *goswamis* possess a type of special personal charisma. One such guru said:

From our birth we have taken *prasāda* [sanctified food], taken part in *pāṭha* [religious discourses], *kīrtana*, etc. When I was born my father gave me *Harināma* [first initiation]. He also gave me the *tulasī-mālā* [prayer beads]. In our family the custom is that nobody takes food from outside, only *mahāprasāda*, all are doing *bhajana* [worship], *kīrtana*, *pāṭha*, etc.<sup>628</sup>

In other words, *goswamis* are especially qualified because of the circumstances accompanying their childhood. From birth they have been surrounded by religious rituals, remained pure by only eating foodstuffs offered to Kṛṣṇa, heard the name of Kṛṣṇa, been taught how to act as a guru, and so on. And of course, that they were born

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627 Fuller (1992), 164. See Brent (1972), 183-199 for two lively portraits of modern *mahārājas*.

628 IF mgt 2000/71

into that particular family is no chance either, but determined by their extraordinary previous *karman*.<sup>629</sup>

Apart from such emic explanations, comparing the guru to a feudal lord helps understanding hereditary succession. It is no coincidence that monarchy has almost always been linked to hereditary succession, for it greatly helps to maintain stability. When the next ruler is fixed and known many years beforehand, little room is left for court intrigues and politics (except for murdering the crown prince, of course). Attempts at regularly electing a ruler have usually failed (the prime example being Poland), since such elections leave much room for infighting, and since the electors will find it hard to submit to the king they themselves elected, no matter how personally qualified he might be. On the other hand, primogeniture fixes the next *mahanta* no matter what opponents say. Weber goes further to claim that without primogeniture, hereditary routinisation of charisma is almost impossible.<sup>630</sup>

In practical life, however, things still tend to become complicated. The younger brothers of the *mahanta* may not always accept his leadership. In the Govinda temple in Vṛndāvana, the oldest son of the previous *mahanta*, Pradyumna Kumāra Goswami, is Añjana Kumāra Goswami. However, at the time of the death of the previous *mahanta*, the *seva-pūja* (daily temple worship) was supervised by Anuja Goswami, a younger brother of Añjana Kumāra's. The younger brother feels that he should also now have influence over the worship, and this has led to a conflict that disturbs the whole temple community. Similar conflicts over power between *goswami* brothers can be seen in other large temples in Vṛndāvana.<sup>631</sup> However, as we shall see shortly, these conflicts seem dwarfed by the problems appointed succession can lead to.

There are of course also other reasons for a guru wanting his son to be his successor. Blood is, after all, thicker than water. And as Daniel Gold points out, Indian law especially today makes inheriting a rich

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629 IF mgt 2002/12

630 Weber (1964), 370

631 IF mgt 2002/11

establishment much easier for a man with a family than for a favourite celibate disciple.<sup>632</sup>

### 8.2.2 Succession by appointment

Gurus in the renounced order of life have no descendants that could inherit their seat. While there are several examples of such gurus leaving their succession open (generally using the argument that such important things should be left to Kṛṣṇa and that some conflict can prove healthy and refreshing in the long run<sup>633</sup>), the usual system is that the guru appoints his favourite disciple as his successor. Sometimes, aging gurus will keep their disciples in suspense until the last possible moment (and some disciples feel that it is greatly offensive to even think about a successor while the guru is alive<sup>634</sup>), but more common is that the successor is appointed well in time.

Three years before his passing, Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Mahārāja (1895-1988) publicly declared that his favourite disciple, Bhakti Sundara Govinda Mahārāja, would from now on initiate all disciples on his behalf, and after his passing become the *ācārya* and president of the institution.<sup>635</sup> In a speech he said:

You all know that from long time ago I have chosen Śrīman Bhakti Sundar Govinda Mahārāja and I have given him *sannyāsa*. All my Vaiṣṇava Godbrothers are very affectionate towards him and it is also their desire to give him this position. [...]

Those who have any regard for me should give this respect and position to Govinda Mahārāja as my successor. As much as you have faith in my sincerity, then with all sincerity I believe that he has got the capacity of rendering service in this way. [...] If anyone cannot accept this, he may leave the Math rather than stay here and disturb the peace of the Math.<sup>636</sup>

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632 Gold (1987), 101

633 IF mgt 2000/81

634 IF mgt 2002/9a

635 Swami B.R. Sridhar (1993), 41

636 Prapanna Krishna Brahmācari [n.d.], iii-iv

In trying to convince his followers, Śrīdhara Mahārāja draws not only on his own authority, but also on his Godbrothers', adding that those who cannot follow his order should rather leave than stay in the *maṭha* stirring political conflicts.

In the above case, the transfer of institutional charisma went relatively painlessly. If the deceased guru has many disciples and a large and rich organisation, there will almost certainly be conflicts over who will be the next leader. Perhaps the best example of this is what happened after the death of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, the founder of the Gauḍīya Maṭha.<sup>637</sup> The movement first fractured into two contending groups led by the two leading managers of the founder, Ananta Vāsudeva Dāsa (1895-1959) and Kuṅjabihārī Dāsa (1894-1976). The first attracted the greater following of the two and was initially largely successful in setting himself up as the legitimate successor. However, when he subsequently gave up his *sannyāsa*, married and withdrew from the post of the *ācārya*, many of his Godbrothers abandoned him and started their own organisations. With this, the threshold of breaking one's loyalty to the present *ācārya* seems to have been lowered, so that even small disagreements led to Godbrothers parting ways and starting their own *maṭhas* and organisations. Today, only 66 years after the death of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, there are more than fifty separate Gauḍīya Maṭha institutions, several of them claiming that their particular *ācārya* is Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī's one and only legitimate successor, or even the only real guru in the whole world.<sup>638</sup>

Even though the sum total of today's multiplex Gauḍīya Maṭha is much greater than the unified Gauḍīya Maṭha of 1936 - there are about thirty Gauḍīya Maṭha temples in the Mayapūra/ Navadvīpa

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637 There are many versions of this story. I have compiled this trying to fit together the narrations of B.B. Vishnu Maharaj (internet document), 4, Bhagabat Maharaj (1974), 36-37, Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami (1994), part one, 95-96, Sasmal (2000), 132-166 and Yati Maharaj (1994), 130-131, 147-148.

638 E.g. IF 2000/14c, IF mgt 2002/9a, Sasmal (2000)

area alone<sup>639</sup> - the breakup of the organisation and the bickering between Godbrothers is still seen as a missionary failure. In order to avoid the same thing happening again, several alternative strategies have been tried. As we saw above, Śrīdhara Mahārāja made sure that his choice of successor was clear to everyone well in advance of his death. B.H. Bon Mahārāja formed a board of seven trustees who elect an *ācārya*. The trustees are elected for life and themselves appoint new trustees when someone dies.<sup>640</sup> Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda also formed a board to manage his ISKCON movement called the Governing Body Commission (GBC). Here, however, no new *ācārya* is elected, but rather many persons are allowed to initiate their own disciples as long as they and the disciples remain subservient to the GBC.<sup>641</sup>

One novel way of succession is propounded by the R̥tvik-movement within or around ISKCON. They claim that Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda did not appoint a successor since he did not want one. Rather, through his books, recorded classes and so on, he is still (though deceased in 1977) fully capable of acting as the *ācārya* of the organisation, and will continue to do so for the next 10 000 years. New disciples are initiated by *rtviks* (priests), who function only as representatives of the *ācārya*.<sup>642</sup> In this way, the proponents of this doctrine propose to solve the problem of succession by terminating it, not at all unlike what the Sikhs did with the *Guru Granth Sahib* (see 1.3.3).

### 8.2.3 *Appointing oneself*

Another way of becoming a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru is to simply appoint oneself, much as a powerful political leader might take over

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639 Field notes, Māyāpura, February 2002

640 Broo (1999), 86

641 Ibid, 87

642 The Final Order

part of a chaotic country. Since Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is so loosely organised, anyone charismatic enough to gather at least one disciple can declare himself a guru, even if his own guru never asked him to become one, without anyone having much to say about it.

Of course, the motives for becoming a guru may be many. The one usually presented by self-appointed gurus themselves is a desire to help others. Since compassion is a saintly quality, saints will naturally want to help others attain what they have.<sup>643</sup> But is declaring oneself guru not going against the cardinal Vaiṣṇava virtue of humility? Not necessarily. Śrīdhara Mahārāja comments:

Another thing also came to my mind, that a doctor is not omniscient, but should he not try his best to cure a patient? As much as he has capacity he must try to help, otherwise the world will be at a stand-still. It is not that everyone will say, “Only if I have complete and full knowledge will I approach to help another,” for that is not possible in this world. Everyone has a relative position. With this also coming to my mind I began in a mild way to help.<sup>644</sup>

Another alternative is to proclaim that one has indeed been selected as the true successor, but in an unusual way such as in a dream or vision,<sup>645</sup> or that one was pressured by many Godbrothers to accept the task of being guru.<sup>646</sup> In any case, such self-appointed gurus may with time become the leaders of big institutions, facing the same problems with succession as those inheriting an old one.

#### *8.2.4 Abdicating*

Above (5.2) the question of giving up a guru was examined. Even though rare, the opposite situation may also occur: that the guru gives up his disciples and the his position as a guru. The reasons for

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643 Ananta Dāsa Bābāji [n.d.], 5

644 Swami B.R. Sridhara (1999), 23

645 IF mgt 2002/9a, Sasmal (2000), 74-75

646 Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja [n.d.1], 95

this may be many: outside pressure, dissatisfaction with the progress of the disciples, loss of faith, so-called “material desires”, etc. One resigning guru of ISKCON wrote:

There are advanced devotees in ISKCON, and it is my duty to request those who have accepted guidance and shelter under me to take shelter of other senior devotees within ISKCON, and if in doubt to consult your local GBC representative. [...] I sadly release my disciples and aspiring disciples. I hope that you do not curse me out of anger and despair. However, it would be cruel and unfair if I were to falsely mislead you into believing that I am in some way qualified or capable to act as your true spiritual master. I am not.<sup>647</sup>

In spite of such apologies, losing the guru is a traumatic experience for all disciples I have spoken with who have gone through it. One compared it with the world collapsing.<sup>648</sup> Another disciple said:

Therefore, his departure was a terrible thing. I respected him, trusted him. I did not feel that I was betrayed, like some did, but I did feel let down, like if a close relative had died. [...] Even after getting *śikṣā* from [another guru], waves of this sadness would come up again. Coping with this hasn't been easy. But I have not felt any bitterness. Sorry, “why did this have to happen?”<sup>649</sup>

While some disciples will find another guru and be able to trust him, many will lose faith in the bhakti path. In ISKCON, an organisation that has been plagued by the “falldown” of many gurus (of the original eleven appointed by Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, only four remain), this has led to a the defection of many members and widespread disillusionment with present gurus. On the other hand, it has also strengthened the faith of loyal members in the unique position of Prabhupāda.<sup>650</sup>

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647 Vipramukhya Dasa in [www.vnn.org/world/WD0209/WD15-7559.html](http://www.vnn.org/world/WD0209/WD15-7559.html)

648 IF mgt 2000/93

649 IF mgt 2001/78

650 IF mgt 2000/91, Tamāl Krishna Goswami (1997)



There are many strategies available for disciples wishing to cope with this kind of loss. One is to see it as Kṛṣṇa testing the sincerity of the disciple.<sup>651</sup> Another is denial. Even though Ananta Vāsudeva Dāsa gave up *sannyāsa*, renounced his post as *ācārya* and denounced his own guru, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, as heterodox,<sup>652</sup> some of his disciples and followers interpreted all this as a “*tilā*”, that he merely gave up the outer trappings of an institutional position to devote himself to a more intensive, inner spiritual life.<sup>653</sup> Yet another strategy for coping is to try to find a mysterious meaning behind it all. The case above is then interpreted as Kṛṣṇa’s arrangement for expanding the Gauḍīya Maṭha, by breaking it up into many small groups, all competing with each other by establishing more and more branches.<sup>654</sup>

### 8.3 Acting as a feudal lord

#### 8.3.1 Using regalia

While Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava gurus do not display as much pomp as the Śāṅkarite *jagadgurus*,<sup>655</sup> especially *goswami*- and *ācārya*-gurus often employ some regalia. They are fanned with the royal white *cāmara*, their disciples bow down before them, and they may even be called (especially in the Gauḍīya Maṭhas and ISKCON) *guru-mahārāja*, “Emperor guru”. According to the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, one should never utter the name of the guru “alone”; rather, it should be prefixed with *om śrī* and appended with *viṣṇupāda*.<sup>656</sup>

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651 IF mgt 2000/91

652 Jan Brzezinski in [http://www.harekrsna.com/vada/cor\\_publ/jagat2.htm](http://www.harekrsna.com/vada/cor_publ/jagat2.htm)

653 Sasmal (2000), Śrīharikṛpa Dāsa (1975)

654 Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja in <http://members.surfeu.fi/gaudiya/articles/id2.htm>

655 See Cenknier (1984)

656 HBV 1.94-95

Gurus that wish to emphasise this lordly role often do so by increasing the royal opulence around them. They may sit on high, throne-like seats (at least higher than those of the disciples,<sup>657</sup> engage servants for the smallest tasks, use costly garments, and so on. Together with such behaviour it often occurs that the guru isolates himself from his followers, interacting with them rarely and only on his own terms, to clearly maintain the status-difference between himself and them. Jagadbandhu went to the extreme of shutting himself up in a dark room for seventeen years, not even allowing his own disciples (with a few exceptions) to see him.<sup>658</sup> In this case, charisma works as an isolative force.

The rationale generally given for such display of pomp is that it is the disciples who wish to honour the guru in this way, and that the guru does not want to disappoint them by not accepting it,<sup>659</sup> or that it helps them maintain the proper reverential attitude towards the guru.<sup>660</sup> The first argument is hardly convincing, since those gurus who reject such opulence have no problem convincing their disciples to use their funds in other ways. One ISKCON guru has forbidden his followers from offering him flower-garlands, arguing that “Kṛṣṇa’s money” can be used in better ways.<sup>661</sup> The second argument is more to the point: royal opulence is an effective way of highlighting the status-difference between guru and disciples.

### *8.3.2 Exerting power*

I mentioned above that gurus generally do not wield very much “power”. I here follow Bernard de Jouvenel’s understanding of power or authority (below I will use the two words synonymically),

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657 HBV 4.353

658 McDaniel (1989), 73

659 Monckton (1994), 42

660 Ibid, 43

661 IF mgt 2001/78

which I find useful. He differentiates three dimensions of power: *extensiveness*, or how many people are subject to the commands, *comprehensiveness*, or how many different types of actions may be influenced, and *intensiveness*, or how great sacrifices to their self-interests the subjects are ready to make in order to comply.<sup>662</sup> It is often popularly thought that Hindu gurus have great power in at least the two latter respects.<sup>663</sup>

In terms of *extensiveness*, the power of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru varies a lot. Some gurus have only one or two disciples,<sup>664</sup> while others are said to have as many as 40 000.<sup>665</sup> The latter case is, however, very exceptional: even gurus who are known as influential may not have more than a few hundred disciples.<sup>666</sup> *Goswami* gurus may have a few thousand disciples, but tens of thousands is very rare. These disciples will be, in varying comprehensiveness and intensiveness, under the power of the guru. The larger circle of admirers will also be affected, but in a smaller degree.

In some cases, gurus are also able to exert authority on a part of Vaiṣṇava society broader than their disciples and admirers. Traditionally, *goswamis* had much influence on social affairs especially in rural areas. Bhagavān Dāsa Bābāji of Kālnā exercised great control over much of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement in Bengal during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>667</sup> One sign of how such extensiveness of power has lessened since that time is mentioned above: *adhikārins* becoming hereditary gurus themselves without caring for the *goswamis*. Still, some gurus do retain a bit of social power. In one important Gauḍīya centre I heard stories about how the daugh-

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662 de Jouvenel, quoted in Ketola (2002), 29

663 E.g. Narayan (1992), 82

664 E.g. Sudhānanda Bon Maharāja, a disciple of B.H. Bon Maharāja, had only two disciples.

665 Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Maharāja, according to an e-letter from Mādhavānanda Dāsa, 27.8.2002.

666 E.g. Ananta Dāsa Bābāji has about 300 disciples. IF 2000/14a

667 Chakrabarty (1985), 339

ter of an influential *goswami* was raped by a band of sweepers a few years ago. The *goswami* hired ruffians to raid the sweepers' community, killing several men and torching their makeshift houses, keeping the police out of the whole business.<sup>668</sup>

While Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism generally has stayed out of Hindu communal politics, a few gurus have tried to enlarge the extensiveness of their authority in this way.<sup>669</sup> The more common way of building up extensiveness is recruiting more disciples – nowadays often by travelling to the West.

It might be argued that with the advent of cheap and widely distributed printed Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava texts (e.g. the books of Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda) and modern media such as the internet, the extensiveness of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism has been dramatically increased. I would disagree. While many persons might be somehow influenced by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava teachings in this way, very few will take the step to becoming followers or disciples of a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru.<sup>670</sup> Generally speaking, I think it is safe to say that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava gurus today seldom have any power outside the group of their disciples or other followers.

The *comprehensiveness* of the guru's power varies with the commitment of the disciple. A disciple staying in an *āśrama* is ideally supposed to in all his doings be following the orders of the guru. When asked about rules for disciples, one *bābājī* found the question irrelevant: the disciple will do anything the guru says, and nothing else.<sup>671</sup> Such a disciple is supposed to wait on the guru hand and foot. If the guru does not explicitly ask him to eat, for example, he will fast.<sup>672</sup> With regard to householder disciples (which form the over-

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668 Since my source for this is not very reliable, I have left out names and dates.

669 O'Connell (1997)

670 Compare the reported pieces of literature distributed by ISKCON, about 400 000 000 (<http://www.iskcon.org/main/twohk/iskcon/means.htm>), with the number of congregational members, 190 000 (Sardella 2002).

671 IF mgt 2000/70

672 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1982), 139

whelming majority of disciples to all kinds of gurus<sup>673</sup>), the comprehensiveness will naturally be minimal, limited almost exclusively to matters of doctrine and religious practice. For instance, several gurus admitted that they do not even try to make their householder disciples follow the rule not to associate with non-Vaiṣṇavas, since they find it impossible to avoid them in the modern world.<sup>674</sup>

Some gurus feel the need to maintain comprehensive authority over their disciples in order to be able to guide them on the spiritual path. To do this, they might encourage their disciples to move into their *āśrama*, to visit often or to keep regular contact, even up to writing weekly reports.<sup>675</sup> This works best in groups with a sectarian character. In ISKCON, which has been becoming more denominational since the mid-1980's, some gurus complain of how the comprehensiveness of their authority has been hampered.<sup>676</sup>

With regard to *intensiveness* of power, we find the same variations between disciples. The ideal is that the disciple should be willing to lay down his life for the guru, and to have implicit faith in his words. Blind faith in the guru is an old idea.<sup>677</sup> Not to follow the order of the guru is one of the ten “offenses against Kṛṣṇa’s name”, something of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava cardinal sins.<sup>678</sup> In actuality, disciples are seldom given very intensive orders, but they are supposed to be ready to face the challenge if one comes. One merchant was asked by his guru to construct a new temple in Vṛndāvana. Dutifully, he followed the order, even though it almost ruined him financially.<sup>679</sup>

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673 One guru reported having about 5000 disciples, out of which only 100 renunciates. IF mgt 2000/88.

674 E.g. IF mgt 2000/85

675 IF mgt 2000/93

676 E.g. Hṛdayānanda Dāsa Gosvāmī (2000), 53

677 Bay-Schmidt (1989), 128

678 Swami B.H. Bon Maharaj (1965), 150-152

679 IF mgt 2002/12

One reason often given by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas for the exercise of intensive authority is that it helps disciples come to the plane of total surrender to the will of God – in this world manifested through the guru – which is thought to be necessary for spiritual progress.<sup>680</sup> Intensive authority could also function as a way to test the loyalty of the disciples (much as a feudal lord might test his subjects to reassure himself of their allegiance in times of crisis) and to make clear who is in charge. However, exercising intensive authority may also rebound on the guru. If the disciple for some reason is not able to comply, he (and indeed others in the community) may lose faith or even leave the guru altogether. When a guru is financially dependent on his disciples – as especially *goswami* gurus generally are – many defections will be problematic in more than a spiritual sense.

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680 Kapoor (1993), 387



## 9. TEACHER

In my definition of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru (3.5), I have stated that he receives special reverence on account of awarding initiation and/ or especially important spiritual advice. This chapter looks at the guru's function of imparting or teaching spiritual knowledge.

Calling the guru an advisor or teacher is not new. Indeed, in India, any kind of teacher may be called a guru – a usage which has spread to the West, where experts in any particular field often are called “gurus”. As we saw before (3.1), in the Vedic and Upaniṣadic times, the guru was first of all a teacher of the Vedic hymns/ otherworldly knowledge. This understanding of the guru's role is seen also in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Among the primary qualifications of the guru stipulated (see 4.1.1), the first was “deeply learned in scripture and the highest” – a learning that is explained as necessary for imparting spiritual knowledge to the students,<sup>681</sup> thus implying that transmission of knowledge is one of the main responsibilities of the guru. Moreover, one of the arguments for the necessity of accepting a guru (3.3.1) was that everyone needs a guide, a teacher.

When in the role of the teacher, the guru can be compared with the teacher of ethics in Weber's typology of charismatic personages. There is one important difference, however: while the teacher of ethics does not break social norms, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru might do so, thus coming closer to the category of the prophet. There are many examples of this especially in the early phases of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya* (e.g. Nityānanda and his son Vīrabhadra), and among gurus that have come to the West, where the social norms are very different from those in India.

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<sup>681</sup> *Dig-darśinī* commentary to HBV 1.32



It is sometimes argued that a guru differs from an ordinary teacher by at all times teaching his disciples, i.e. by never stepping out from the role of a teacher.<sup>682</sup> This is true only in an indirect way. It is hard to imagine that any guru will consciously try to teach something by every single action he undertakes, but disciples may interpret even seemingly meaningless actions as esoteric instructions. In part 9.2 below, this kind of non-verbal teaching will be dealt with.

When it comes to verbal teaching, as we also have seen, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement knows two primary classes of gurus: the *dīkṣā*- or initiating guru and the *śikṣā*- or instructing guru. Obviously, the *śikṣā*-guru will be the guru who best can be compared to a teacher, but the *dīkṣā*-guru will also be a teacher, at least when giving the mantra. This chapter will look on some aspects of the teacher-role, first focusing on the way every *dīkṣā*-guru (the *śikṣā*-guru teaches by definition) takes up this role, then on the options available for gurus who want to delve deeper into it.

Being an effective teacher hinges largely on the guru's personal charisma. Nevertheless, a strong institutional charisma can help the guru gain enough respect for persons to take his teachings seriously, even if he himself is only moderately talented as a speaker or as a scriptural exegete. As we shall see, as in the case of the Vedic and Upaniṣadic gurus, much of the teaching of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru is intimately connected with canon.

### 9.1 Imparting the mantra

Following a verse found in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, Jīva Gosvāmin explains initiation in the following, oft-quoted way:

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682 IF mgt 2000/91

“Since from it divine knowledge is given and the destruction of sin is effected, it is called initiation by the teachers, knowers of the truth.” [...] Thus the *Āgama*. The words “divine knowledge” here refers to knowledge of the form of the Lord in the holy mantra, and knowledge of the specific relationship with the Lord, as is explained in the *Padma Purāṇa*, Uttara-khāṇḍa, where the excellence of the eight-syllable mantra is proclaimed.<sup>683</sup>

Jīva Gosvāmin thus opines that initiation is more than just teaching the disciple the words of one or more mantras. The guru should also explain the meaning of the mantra, since it is thought to contain a wealth of otherworldly knowledge. The example given is the eight-syllable mantra,<sup>684</sup> explained in chapter 226 of the Uttara-khāṇḍa of the *Padma Purāṇa*. The mantra is first given, then technical details such as the *ṛṣi* (the sage who first revealed the mantra), *devatā* (the divinity addressed in the mantra) and metre, and then the rather lengthy meaning, given by explaining many esoteric purports of the syllables of the mantra. The specific relationship explained in the mantra is that the human being is a servant of God in all circumstances.<sup>685</sup>

Lengthy explanations of seemingly simple mantras are also offered in contemporary Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, but not always. Sometimes initiation is, as explained above (6.2) little more than whispering the mantra into the ear of the disciple. Still, a *dīkṣā*-guru who does only that functions as a teacher by teaching the mantra. The method of teaching varies: some gurus have their disciple repeat the mantra after them until they have learnt it by heart,<sup>686</sup> others give out papers of the mantras, from which the disciple can learn it.<sup>687</sup>

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683 BS 283. “*divyaṃ jñānaṃ yato dadyāt kuryāt pāpasya saṃkṣayaṃ/ tasmād dīkṣeti sā proktā deśikais tattva-kovidaiḥ/ [...] ity āgamāt/ divyaṃ jñānaṃ hy atra śrīmantra bhagavat-svarūpa-jñānaṃ, tena bhagavatā sambandha-viśeṣa-jñānañ ca, yathā pādmottara-khaṇḍādāv aṣṭākṣarādikam adhikṛta-vivṛtam asti/*

684 *Oṃ namo nārāyaṇāya*

685 *Padma Purāṇa* 5.226.1-93

686 E.g. Gopānanda Bon Maharāja. Field notes, Vṛndāvana 5.11.2000

687 E.g. in ISKCON. Field notes, Helsinki 5.6.2002

## 9.2 Non-verbal teaching

### 9.2.1 Personal example

It was mentioned above (4.1.1) that a very common ideal for the guru is that he should be an *ācārya* in the sense of teaching by his own example. There is a story about a man who brought his son to his guru so that the guru could tell the son not to eat so many sweets. The guru listened to the father and then asked both of them to come back after two weeks. When they returned, the guru sternly told the boy not to eat so many sweets. “Why did you have to wait two weeks to say such a simple thing,” the father then asked. “I first had to quit eating sweets myself!” Likewise, a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru is supposed to be “practicing what he preaches” at all times.

In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, the guru generally acts on two planes: in the *sādhaka-deha* and in the *siddha-deha*. The *sādhaka-deha* is the physical body. The disciple is supposed to observe and emulate the behaviour of the guru and thus himself rise to the same level of spiritual advancement. The *siddha-deha*, again, is the spiritual body the guru has in the divine play of Kṛṣṇa. At the time of *Siddha*-initiation (see 6.2.2), apart from the disciple’s own spiritual identity, the guru also reveals to the disciple his own and his predecessors’ spiritual identities (*siddha-praṇālī*). This the disciple will use in his *rāgānugā*-meditation.

*Rāgānugā-sādhana-bhakti* is defined as bhakti arising through following a *rāgātmika*-devotee, a devotee in Kṛṣṇa’s eternal abode who has *rāga* or passionate, spontaneous love of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>688</sup> *Rāga* is defined as love flowing towards Kṛṣṇa as naturally as the senses are drawn to the sense objects.<sup>689</sup> In this path, one does not only perform the outer rituals of ordinary bhakti, but within one’s mind meditates on a particular eternally liberated associate of the Lord, and visualises

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688 BRS 1.2.271-272

689 BS 310

oneself as a servant of this person, helping him or her serve Kṛṣṇa. While one theoretically could follow any associate of Kṛṣṇa or his expansions, almost all Gauḍīyas follow one of the handmaids of Rādhā in Vṛndāvana.<sup>690</sup>

The internal meditation and participation in Kṛṣṇa's play (*manasi-seva*) follows the descriptions given in the scriptures of what the eternal abode looks like, what the inhabitants are like, and so forth. Rādhā's and Kṛṣṇa's play is divided into eight watches in which different activities take place. The practitioner visualises these activities, the background scenery and takes part himself, sometimes remaining for hours or even days in meditation. The ideal is to contemplate the play of Kṛṣṇa twenty-four hours a day.<sup>691</sup> Also here, the disciple should serve and emulate the actions of his guru. He learns about the particular service his guru has in Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*, about his mood in relation to Kṛṣṇa, and so on, and is then supposed to carry out his meditation accordingly.

This also demonstrates an important aspect of the guru's role of being a teacher that is different from an ordinary one: for the disciple, he never stops being the teacher, not even in the liberated state.

Now, what if the guru acts in a way that does not seem to be exemplary? First of all, the guru is supposed to be above criticism. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda writes:

Even if there appears to be some discrepancy according to an imperfect devotee's estimation, the devotee should be fixed in the conviction that even if his spiritual master goes to a liquor shop, he is not a drunkard; rather, he must have some purpose in going there.<sup>692</sup>

In other words, even strange actions are interpreted as having some mysterious purpose. Perhaps he entered the liquor shop to deliver the sinners. Another way of understanding mistakes or weaknesses

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690 Kapoor (1995c), 37-38

691 McDaniel (1989), 49

692 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1975c), 213

of the guru is that they stem from his desire to help. Using skilful means, he mirrors the disciple's own flaws.<sup>693</sup> Yet another explanation is that the human body of the guru inevitably makes him commit mistakes, even though he is otherwise perfect.<sup>694</sup> The guru (especially those who wish to emphasise the role as a feudal lord) may also deliberately break the rules meant for ordinary devotees to demonstrate his otherworldly character – or to illustrate the status difference between himself and the disciples.

If a guru acts in a very strange or even insane way, it will often be interpreted as divine madness, a state that, especially in Bengal, is considered almost a prerequisite for a holy man, as noted by June McDaniel.<sup>695</sup> These bouts of madness may seem very odd, but disciples will find meaning in them. When Jagadbandhu appeared after seventeen years of self-imposed seclusion, he walked only with difficulty and acted like a child: lisping only a few words, alternately abusing people nearby or smiling serenely at them, and so forth. His followers interpreted all this as “a life of vicarious suffering”.<sup>696</sup>

### 9.2.2 *Mystical transmission of knowledge*

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism does not know any ritualised forms of mystical transmission of knowledge, such as the *śakti-pāta* of the Śaivas of Kashmir or of many modern Hindu gurus.<sup>697</sup> Still, disciples will also often say that their gurus have given them knowledge in supernatural ways. These include performing miracles to give disciples faith in, for example, Kṛṣṇa's name.<sup>698</sup> The factuality or not of these miracles is irrelevant in this context: what is important to note is that they usually seem to be done with a two-fold purpose in hand: to increase the

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693 Gold (1987), 183

694 IF mgt 2000/72

695 McDaniel (1989)

696 Ibid, 73

697 E.g. Yogananda (2001), 142-144

698 Kapoor (1993), 395-398

faith of the disciples in the extraordinary position of the guru, and for converting the faithless.<sup>699</sup> Types of miracles include commanding animals,<sup>700</sup> healing disciples,<sup>701</sup> appearing in visions before them,<sup>702</sup> teaching them in dreams<sup>703</sup> and so forth. It need not come as a great surprise that the guru usually is not aware of having taught the disciple in this way. As we shall see later (12.1.2), the movement has its own way to explain such occurrences.

### 9.3 Verbal teaching

While Wach states that one of the tasks of the Vaiṣṇava guru is to interpret the holy writ (the other being to defend the faith),<sup>704</sup> few gurus will systematically teach their disciples philosophy or theology. A common critique of gurus is that since they themselves are not learned, they do not want their disciples to study, fearing loss of respect by them.<sup>705</sup> While this view might be germane in some cases, there are notable exceptions. Most gurus will take up the role of a teacher on many more occasions than only when teaching the mantra.

The main venue of teaching is explaining scripture,<sup>706</sup> a fact that clearly shows that also in this case, the guru is strongly bound to canon. Even gurus with radical ideas will generally present them by interpreting the canonical texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Interpreting and explaining scripture takes two main forms: public readings and more private instruction.

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699 Peter Schreiner comes to the same conclusion in his article on the charisma of the founder of the Swaminarayan Movement. See Schreiner (2001), 161.

700 Kapoor (1995a), 61-62

701 Ibid, 193-194

702 Kapoor (1993), 532

703 Ibid, 239-242

704 Wach (1967), 129

705 IF 2000/14e

706 For example, all of the lectures of Ananta Dāsa Bābāji found on the web-site [www.raganuga.org](http://www.raganuga.org) are expositions on scripture.

### 9.3.1 Public readings

At least on festive occasions, leaders of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava organisations are expected to give *pāṭha*, readings from the scriptures. I witnessed one such reading in the Bhajana Āśrama, a temple established by B.H. Bon Mahārāja, in Calcutta on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 2002. A *goswami* from Vṛndāvana, Rajeśa Kiśora Goswami, spoke on the five chapters about Kṛṣṇa's mystical *rāsa*-dance of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.<sup>707</sup> Sitting in the temple-room of the *āśrama* on a raised seat beside a *tulasī*-plant, dressed in costly garments, the young *goswami* was a striking sight. He started by leading the congregation (about 60 men and women) in popular Gauḍīya religious songs, and by reciting standard prayers for invoking auspiciousness (*maṅgalācaraṇa*)<sup>708</sup>. After a brief introduction, he then started reading the verses (in Bengali translation) of the *Bhāgavata*. He interspersed the reading with his own explanations, leading the congregation in singing common pan-Vaiṣṇava songs (by Tulasī Dāsa, Mīrā Bhāī, etc), and sometimes by singing the original Sanskrit verses. After going on with great energy for more than two hours (and being asked by his father more than once to stop soon) he ended with more congregational singing and by thanking the hosts.<sup>709</sup>

While this occasion was more festive than most, elements found in the description above are common for almost all such readings. The guru (or other senior devotee reading) will commence from the canonical text, explaining it according to what he has heard from his teacher(s) and adding comments based on his own insights. There is little interaction with the audience during the reading. Questions are not taken (except in ISKCON), neither are the listeners supposed to interrupt the reader with their own comments. On occasion, mem-

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707 BP 10.29-33

708 For one set, see Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa and Bhaktivedānta Vāmana Maharāja (1999), 1-8

709 Field notes, Calcutta, 24.2.2002

bers of an audience may exhibit great emotion by crying, fainting, and so on, but generally speaking, their role is to sit quietly and listen, and to join in the congregational singing.

Though this kind of reading at its worst may be stereotypical and the explanations extremely repetitive, even a person as critical of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism as Melville Kennedy has to admit that it is “something of a teaching and inspirational agency”.<sup>710</sup> Others have credited such scriptural readings with the spread of education to the lower castes and women, all of whom have always been welcome to hear.<sup>711</sup>

A variant of this public reading is when the readings are recorded and transcribed, to become books, or when the guru writes books for his disciples and others. As the readings, such books are usually expositions upon scripture. They are usually addressed to practitioners rather than to outsiders. There are of course exceptions, the books of Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda, the founder of ISKCON, being perhaps the most noteworthy.

### 9.3.2 *Private instruction*

Particularly *śikṣā*-gurus will also personally guide their disciples. Gurus may personally teach disciples how to conduct temple worship, play musical instruments used in religious observances, and so on, but usually they will delegate such tasks to senior disciples. When it comes to understanding the scriptures and teaching *manasi-sevā*, they will generally do the teaching themselves.

Gurus seldom systematically teach their disciples theology apart from when expounding the scriptures, but disciples may put questions to their guru at the time of *darśana* (more about *darśana* will follow in 13.1). At the Bhajan Kutir, for example, Gopānanda Bon Mahārāja would sit in his chair on a veranda in the afternoons, chant-

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710 Kennedy (1925), 167

711 Chatterjee (1983), 170-171



ing on his prayer-beads and responding to questions of disciples and visitors, who would gather around him, sitting cross-legged on the floor. Generally, he would speak on such high theological subjects as the *līlā* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, but he would also answer questions dealing with the practical lives of disciples, such as whether a woman can take initiation without the consent of her husband.<sup>712</sup> Apart from at such direct meetings, disciples might also write or telephone their guru when important questions arise.

One of the main tasks of the *śikṣā*-guru is often thought to be teaching the method of *manasi-sevā* or service in the mind. For this kind of service to be possible, the meditator has to know what the stage of this divine play – the different parts of divine Vṛndāvana – looks like, what the actors look like, what they do, how they speak, and so on. For conveying all this knowledge, different *gūṭikās* (“notebooks”) have been compiled, narrating the daily activities of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in great detail.<sup>713</sup> For learning the divine geography, colourful and intricate diagrams are often used. Apart from these aids, the personal coaching of a guru who knows these techniques is deemed necessary. Since these methods of worship are considered confidential, teaching will be done in private to small groups of disciples.

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712 Field notes, Vṛndāvana, 24.11.2000

713 For part of one, see [www.raganuga.com/literature/sri\\_sri\\_bhavana\\_sara\\_sangraha.pdf](http://www.raganuga.com/literature/sri_sri_bhavana_sara_sangraha.pdf)

## 10. PRESERVER OF TRADITION

In contrast with contemporary Western thought, the traditional Hindu worldview does not know of a linear evolution of humanity. Rather, the cosmos goes through eternally repeating cycles of creation, maintenance and destruction. The world is at its best at the beginning of creation, only to slowly degrade until it is finally destroyed. There are four ages of the world: *satya-*, *tretā-*, *dvāpara-* and *kali-yuga*, of which *kali-yuga* (the present age) is the last and worst. Even though some 427 000 years remain in the present age before the next cosmic destruction, the quality of life will steadily worsen.<sup>714</sup>

With such an orientation to cosmic time it is no surprise that even today the past is often glorified in India. A nostalgia for times gone by is of course not limited to India by any means, but it seems to be exceptionally strong there, no doubt for several reasons. The past does not even have to be very far removed. One person I spoke to lamented the present, sorry state of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. “Ten years ago things were so different!”<sup>715</sup>

Thus one of the most important tasks of a guru will be to preserve and safeguard what remains of his group’s holy tradition.<sup>716</sup> The tradition has been preserved in a canon of holy texts – most but not all common for all Gauḍīyas (see 1.3.2). Every orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru will belong to a *guru-paramparā* or succession of gurus, some of which may have given their own contributions to the canon, to be preserved by their followers, basically by repeating the same message that they heard from their own gurus. For a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru, to say “nothing is mine, not a single letter”<sup>717</sup> is thus a matter of pride. Other aspects of the

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714 For an in-depth Gauḍīya treatment of eschatology, see Bon Maharaj [n.d]

715 IF mgt 2000/86. R.M. Sarkar mentions a similar trend in his study of the Bauls of Bengal. “At present the scholars as well as laymen complain that there are no Bauls in the strict sense of the term.” Sarkar (1990), 217.

716 Wach (1967), 129

717 Gaur Govinda Swami Maharaja (1998), 106

tradition are customs peculiar to the particular group and institutions founded by predecessors.

### 10.1 Preserving the heritage

In Vaiṣṇava thought, time is generally seen as a destructive agent. “By the influence of great time”, Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, “this yoga was lost”.<sup>718</sup> Even a canon, which can be said to be an attempt to collect and safeguard the original message of a religious community against corruption, needs a contemporary guru to protect it against corruption in the form of wrong interpretations, and to pass it on. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda gives the example of a ripe mango high up in the tree. If it is thrown directly down to the ground, it will be spoiled. Rather, it has to be passed down carefully from one hand to the next. Similarly spiritual knowledge has to be passed down in a guru-*paramparā*.<sup>719</sup>

In concrete terms, what the mango represents varies. One thing that every guru will pass on to his disciples is a mantra. Except in rare cases (see 11.2.2), the guru will give the disciple the same mantras that he has received from his own guru. It is commonly believed that a mantra has to be received in this way in order to have any effect. Just reading it in a book will be useless.<sup>720</sup> The guru thus seems to do more than just pass the mantra on: he keeps the mantra “alive” by his own power. Similarly with the scriptural canon. Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī endeavoured to keep the writings of his father and *śikṣā-guru* Kedarnātha Datta Bhaktivinoda available at all times by bringing out new editions, but also emphasised that they have to be understood through him.<sup>721</sup> The conclusion is that the guru is thought

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718 BG 4.2

719 Lecture 720902VP.NV (In Vedabase 4.11)

720 *Prameya-ratnāvalī* 1.5, quoting a verse from the *Padma Purāṇa* not found in modern editions. Gaur Govinda Swami Mahārāja (1998), 65.

721 Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī in <http://www.wva-vvrs.org/nectar/paper.htm>. The same idea is expressed in Gaur Govinda Swami Mahārāja (1998), 76.

to not only preserve the concrete, physical aspect of the heritage, but also to keep its spirit alive.

Again, canon and charisma are bound to each other: indeed, the canon does not seem to be able to stand on its own without the charismatic power of a guru. I will explain more about this in the next chapter.

### 10.1.1 Customs

Even though most of the rituals and practices are common for all Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, every *parivāra*, *vaṃśa* or modern group will have its own customs, such as what the *tilaka* looks like, what religious songs to sing at the time of temple worship, what festivals to celebrate, and so on. One of the mandatory tasks of the guru is to make sure that these customs are remembered and followed. One guru told me emphatically that in his temple “nothing new” is done, only what is prescribed by tradition.<sup>722</sup>

One way by which this link to the tradition is highlighted is by celebrating the *tirobhāva* or “disappearance” days of previous saints in the group. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas generally do not celebrate the birthdays of saints, since a saint is just like anyone else when he is born, but the day of his death, since he is then known to be a saint, and since he at that time enters the eternal *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>723</sup> Such festivals are generally centered around the *samādhi* or tomb of the saint in question.

The festival commemorating the 372nd *tirobhāva* of Śyāmānanda at the Rādhā-Śyāmasundara temple in Vṛndāvana may serve as a particularly grand example. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, 2002, the festival began with *adhivāsa* or preliminary worship and *kīrtana* in the evening. The whole of the next day featured different kinds of

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722 IF mgt 2002/12

723 Mahanidhi Swami (1993), 48-49

*kīrtanas* describing the play of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The third day, 15<sup>th</sup> of June, was the main day of the festival. The day began at six in the morning with recitation of the thousand names of Gopāla Kṛṣṇa, continued on with song, readings from the *Bhāgavata Purāna* and *Śyāmānanda Caritāmṛta* (a hagiography of Śyāmānanda), *kīrtana* and more songs. There was also a memorial meeting, to which many of the leading *goswami* and *bābājī* gurus of Vṛndāvana had been invited, and where they spoke about the contributions of Śyāmānanda.

The festival continued on the 24<sup>th</sup> with a full day of *kīrtana* of the *mahā-mantra*. The next day was the actual *tirobhāva* day. In the morning, Śyāmānanda's *samādhi* was worshipped with standard items such as flowers, incense and lamps. Then followed *nagara-saṅkīrtana*, congregational chanting in the streets of Vṛndāvana, after which a grand feast was served to the hundreds of participants – who swelled to thousands at this time. In the evening, the *śocaka-kīrtana* or song lamenting the death of Śyāmānanda was sung. The next day, the *tirobhāva* of another famous Vaiṣṇava of this group, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, was celebrated in a way similar to the day before, but on a smaller scale.<sup>724</sup>

Such seven-day festivals are of course rare – the cost to feed all the participants so many days alone must be substantial – but it is common for similar memorial festivals to last two or three days. Essential elements are worshipping the *samādhi* or at least a picture of the saint, speeches about him from senior and respectable Vaiṣṇava guests, *mahā-mantra* and *śocaka kīrtana* and feasting. Such festivals serve many purposes: strengthening ties to other Vaiṣṇava institutions (especially within the same *parivāra*) by inviting their members (and thus being invited by them when they have their next festival), providing opportunities for musicians and singers to display their talent and practice their livelihood, giving the guru a chance to speak before a great audience, and so on, but the main purpose is to

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724 Letter from Sri Krishnagopalananda Dev Goswami to author, June 2002.

remind the members of the group of their connection with a glorious past.

### *10.1.2 Literature*

Another way to preserve the tradition is to preserve the canon. The writings left by past saints are felt to be their most valuable legacy. Previously, this often meant taking care of a library left by previous gurus – a daunting task in India’s subtropical climate. Caretakers sometimes devised surprising methods: Jīva Gosvāmin found maintaining the original manuscripts of Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmins impossible, and instead interred them in a “*samādhi*” where they would be offered regular worship instead of gathering dust and being eaten by worms.<sup>725</sup> Today, gurus who want to emphasise this role often publish or reprint books by their predecessors, adding their own foreword. Since printed books last no longer than handwritten ones, this is a task every generation of gurus can busy themselves with. Reprinted texts may or may not be systematically studied within the group, but at least they will be available when sought..

### *10.1.3 Institution*

Apart from customs and writings, many gurus have physical properties to preserve, as tangible assets of the institution established by a predecessor. The institution may possess a small *śrīpāta* or a whole range of *maṭhas*, all requiring much effort to maintain in India’s climate. Also, because of heavy taxation and government confiscation of landed properties, many gurus have fallen upon bad times, having big temples to maintain with limited funds.<sup>726</sup> Institutions that used to enjoy the patronage of royalty and landowners, and that have not been able to find new sponsors, are often in a deplorable situation.

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<sup>725</sup> Mahanidhi Swami (1993), 10

<sup>726</sup> IF mgt 2000/ 85

At the heart of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava temples usually stands the image of Kṛṣṇa or Caitanya that the founder or some illustrious predecessor had installed and worshipped. One of the most important functions of the leader of the institution is to make sure that its daily worship continues without interruption. Poor worship is a common source of criticism, and is believed to reflect the poor devotion of the caretakers.<sup>727</sup> Many systems have been tried to maintain the worship. The most successful one seems to be hereditary periods of worship, such as is followed at the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple in Vṛndāvana.

Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, who founded this temple, was a celibate, but he wanted to establish a family line for maintaining the worship of his image of Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā-ramaṇa. He asked his favourite disciple Gopīnātha to marry for this reason, but Gopīnātha refused. Instead Gopīnātha's brother Damodara, who also was a disciple of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, took up the task. All the *goswamis* of the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple come in a *vaṁśa* from him. As usual, only males pass on the *vaṁśa*. Damodara had three sons, one of whom also had three sons, so that there are now five lineages of *goswamis* who serve Rādhā-ramaṇa and take disciples. Each of the five lineages is obliged to take care of the complex worship of Rādhā-ramaṇa for six months every two and a half years. These six months are then divided between the adult male members of the lineage. In this way, the worship of Rādhā-ramaṇa has been taken care of through the centuries.<sup>728</sup>

Another system is to appoint disciples to take care of the worship. The drawback with this is that the disciple either has to be a very dedicated renunciant who has no other duties, or he has to be paid, generally through a portion of the donations left by pilgrims or other donors for the image. Dedicated disciples may be hard to find, especially in the long run down the centuries. Paid temple worship, again, is frowned upon and the social status of such

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727 IF mgt 2002/ 11

728 Case (2000), 75-78

brāhmaṇas is not very high. Furthermore, either the congregation donates too little (making it difficult for the priest to maintain his family) or too much (making the post attractive to others and spawning rivalry between disciples). For these reasons, hereditary periodic worship seems to be the best and hence most widespread system.

However, in order to function properly this system requires the *vamśa* to have many male members. If one person has to take care of the worship for extended periods, his dedication may slacken. In Vṛndāvana, some *vamśas* have very few male members, and some have even died out, making for severe problems with maintaining the worship.<sup>729</sup>

### *10.2 Protecting the tradition against threats*

Another form of preserving tradition is to protect it against perceived threats from outsiders or heretics within. Some gurus feel that entering into controversies is unworthy of Vaiṣṇava,<sup>730</sup> while others feel that it is necessary for protecting the purity of the tradition.<sup>731</sup> At any rate, heretics and non-believers have been denounced since the very beginning of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. As is usual in religious societies, heretics within the movement are seen as posing a much greater threat than non-believers without, and thus most of the energy of the orthodox are channelled in this direction. One early example of such a heretic was Rūpa Kavirāja, a seventeenth-century theologian, whose doctrine of imitating the eternally liberated companions of Kṛṣṇa (such as the cowherdesses of Vṛndāvana) not only in the mind but also physically was rejected and condemned in a council in Jaipur in 1727. Rūpa Kavirāja was expelled from Vṛndāvana and moved to Assam.<sup>732</sup>

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729 IF mgt 2002/11, IF mgt 2002/12

730 IF mgt 2002/9b

731 IF mgt 2002/12

732 Haberman (1989), 98-104



Today also, many gurus want to assert themselves as protectors of true Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and expose the misconceptions of rival groups. They may write books,<sup>733</sup> articles in journals,<sup>734</sup> and letters on the internet,<sup>735</sup> or arrange meetings, and so forth. Generally, the most persistent and intense conflicts are between modern and traditional groups, and between the *bābājīs* and the *goswamis*. However, there is one important difference between today's and yesterday's conflicts. The influence of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava gurus today is not as great as it was in previous centuries – they might write refutations of each other and boycott each other's functions, but that is about as far as it goes. When the followers of Jagadbandhu built a temple in Vṛndāvana in which an image of Jagadbandhu was placed above Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya-Nityānanda, there was a great outcry from most other Gauḍīya groups in town, but they were not able to do anything about it, not to speak of expelling the whole group from Vṛndāvana.<sup>736</sup> In ISKCON, leaders have not been able to expell from their own organisation the proponents of the Ṛtvik-theory of succession even after several attempts, and even though they have condemned their theory as heretical and dangerous.<sup>737</sup>

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733 E.g. Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja [n.d.2], Swami B.G. Narasingha (1998)

734 E.g. Rosen & Deadwyler (1996)

735 For one example, see Krishna-kirti Das (<http://www.chakra.org/2002/02/10/posthumous.initiation/index.htm>)

736 IF mgt 2002/ 13

737 Adridharana Dasa in <http://farsight.members.beeb.net/35.htm>

## 11. RENEWER OF TRADITION

The tradition itself does not generally recognise any need for renewal. As mentioned in the last chapter, the ideal lies in the past. The essential idea of guru-*paramparā* is that an unbroken chain of teachers carries forward through time the same, unchanged, timeless message. However, as was already hinted above (10.1), this is not completely true in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Every guru will do more than just pass on the knowledge he has received: he will add his own mark to it.

Why this is so is not hard to see. Daniel Gold writes about two ways in which a tradition can break down. *Corruption* is when its ideals and actualities drift too far away from each other, so that the manifest forms seem tainted and no longer able to give access to the hidden divine. *Collapse* is when the tradition is unable to adapt to changing external conditions, after which potential adherents no longer see the divine in the forms that the tradition has offered, and thus lend it no practical support.<sup>738</sup> Even a guru who has no intention to innovate has to make sure neither of these things happens.

In most cases, no spectacular action is necessary. Both of the above types of breakdown are gradual processes that can, and usually are, countered by slow and gradual changes within the tradition itself. Outstanding reformers are needed only when a full breakdown has occurred or is about to occur. Thus most gurus will not feel impelled to institute radical reforms, but invariably they will make some response to contemporary conditions.

Apart from in this minimal way, not every guru will want to be a reformer, nor is every guru able to institute reformative measures without being considered an iconoclast or as heterodox. Even the smallest changes can draw harsh criticism. I have heard one guru be called “deviated” since he allowed his disciples to occasionally wear

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738 Gold (1988), 90

turbans!<sup>739</sup> For great changes, strong personal charisma is needed. The reformer usually would have to be particularly articulate and learned in scriptural, exhibit intense ecstasies, or the like. The emphasis is on personal charisma – to have inherited a strong institutional charisma (by being the son of another famous guru, for example) helps, but would be of secondary importance.

How much can be changed before the whole tradition is lost? As we have seen (2.1), there is no supreme authority over the whole Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya* who could determine the line between legitimate renewal and heterodoxy. That does not mean that there are no norms, however. As mentioned before (1.3.2), when it comes to theology and philosophy, authority rests largely in the books of the six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana. To explicitly counter a doctrine propounded by them (e.g. regarding the three *śaktis* of Kṛṣṇa) and still be counted as a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava would be difficult indeed. Still, explanatory details might be added to existing doctrines, and particulars of practice might be changed. In Rappaport's terms (1.3.2), teachings on the level of cosmological axioms are seldom touched (not to speak of ultimate sacred postulates), while rules of conduct sometimes can be changed. The fourth category, importations, are about change by definition.

As we saw in the last chapter, preserving and reforming the tradition often go hand in hand – after all, a reformer renovates the tradition since he feels it is valuable and worthy of renovation rather than rejection. Reformers often see themselves as preservers of the “essence” of the tradition. As Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda wrote in the introduction to his commentary on the *Bhagavad-gītā*: “If personally I have any credit in this matter, it is only that I have tried to present [the teaching] as it is, without adulteration”.<sup>740</sup> Prabhupāda did not see himself as a reformer (even though he instituted several

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739 Field notes, Calcutta 9.12.1998

740 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1974a), xii

changes to the practices instituted by his own guru<sup>741</sup>) but as faithfully presenting the teachings of his predecessors in unadulterated form.

There is also a theological side to this renewal: even though Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas believe in the sanctity and importance of their canon, Kṛṣṇa or Caitanya is thought to be able to reveal new details about the spiritual truth if he so desires. After all, the canon itself is thought to consist largely of the realisations and divine visions (*vaiduṣya-pratyakṣā*) of past masters. Even though this world is believed to go through a slow but sure degradation, many Gauḍīyas present a history of spiritual evolution. First comes Cārvāka, then follows the Buddha, Jainism, Vaiśeṣika, Nyāya, Saṃkhya, Yoga, Śāṅkara's "*māyāvāda*", Rāmānuja's *viśiṣṭādvaita*, Madhva's *dvaita*, one after the other, and finally, Caitanya.<sup>742</sup> Even though Caitanya's teachings are conceived as the "zenith of theistic thought",<sup>743</sup> more revelations about them can come all the time. Some examples of this will follow below.

### *11.1 Presenting the message in a contemporary way*

Even though the movement has always allowed for some changes, especially when made by charismatic gurus, it is only in modern times that a need for changes has been explicitly articulated within the tradition itself. Swami B.V. Tripurāri writes:

One must distinguish between the form and the substance of the tradition. Thus we find that the most prominent members of the lineage are involved in renovation of the tradition, revealing its truth in a way relevant to time and circumstance, such that those who are members in form only cannot appreciate them. To recognize reformers of the mission, practitioners themselves must also become essence seekers

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741 For a list of some of them, see [www.vnn.org/world/WD9810/WD16-2367.html](http://www.vnn.org/world/WD9810/WD16-2367.html)

742 B.H. Bon Maharaj (1984), 201-213

743 Ibid, 212

on a deeper level and thus remain vital in their practice. Failure to do so involves a break from the tradition despite superficial adherence to its external symbols.<sup>744</sup>

These are strong words, presented, curiously enough, in the most traditional of contexts: in a commentary on the *Bhagavad-gītā* while arguing for the need of a guru-*paramparā*. Again, we can see an example of the interconnection between canon and charisma, along with the relation between tradition and innovation.

This explicit expression of the need for changes is connected with the fact that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism has become a world religion in the past century, and is thus faced with many challenges unknown to past masters.<sup>745</sup> It remains to be seen what developments and responses will follow. Not many gurus have taken up this challenge apart from presenting the theology in Western languages and using Western concepts and examples. So far, attempts at presenting Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in a Western cultural garb have not proven remarkably successful.<sup>746</sup> On the contrary, many gurus have adopted a scriptural fundamentalism arguably foreign to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.<sup>747</sup>

### *11.2 Creating new tradition*

As mentioned above, besides presenting the tradition “as it is” but in a contemporary idiom, reformers mainly concern themselves with rules of conduct. A reformer will introduce some change within his own group of disciples and admirers, after which it could gain acceptance in a wider segment of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. For this

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<sup>744</sup> Swami B.V. Tripurāri (2001), 131

<sup>745</sup> For a study about an early Gauḍīya reaction to modernism, see Shukavak N. Dasa (1999).

<sup>746</sup> One group which has made an attempt in this direction is the Chaitanya Mission. See Paramahansa (1989). For an interesting account of an ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful attempt at “de-Indianising” Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotional music, see Henry Doctroski at <http://www.henrydoctroski.com/newvrindaban.shtml>

<sup>747</sup> For a drastic example, see Thompson (1991).

to occur, there must be a felt need for the change, arising from new social conditions.

An example of such change is the practice of prefacing all *lilā-kīrtanas* (congregational songs describing the play of Kṛṣṇa) with a song describing a corresponding *lilā* of Caitanya and prefacing any meditation on Kṛṣṇa's *lilā* with a corresponding meditation on Caitanya's *lilā*. Siddha Kṛṣṇa Dāsa Bābājī of Govardhana introduced this practice in the eighteenth century among his followers, but gradually the practice spread to almost all of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.<sup>748</sup> This partly satisfied a long-felt need in the wider community to harmonise two trends – one in Bengal emphasizing Caitanya, and the other in Vṛndāvana emphasizing Kṛṣṇa.

Reforms may become deep-set tradition in a relatively short time. The *kūrta* or Indian shirt considered part of “traditional” Gauḍīya dress is never seen on pictures from the beginning of the twentieth century. It may go even quicker: the particular set of songs that are sung in ISKCON centres and that no one in ISKCON would dare change was instituted in the beginning of the 1970's.<sup>749</sup>

### 11.2.1 New doctrines

Beside rules of conduct, gurus may also introduce new doctrines, usually by adding more details to or reinterpreting existing ones. This is very common, since exegetical practice implies the exercise of originality. Some gurus go to such lengths in showing originality that they could well be called sacred legislators, in Max Weber's terms. Let us consider two examples.

The first example concerns a typology of faith. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* describes three types of faith in Kṛṣṇa. A person with weak faith is one who has faith in the image form of the Lord, but not in his devotees or other people. One of intermediate faith cultures love

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748 Chakrabarty (1985), 309-316

749 Vaiyasaki dasa Adhikari (1999)

for the Lord, friendship to his devotees, mercy to the innocent and indifference to the inimical. A person who has superior faith sees the Lord in everyone and everyone in the Lord.<sup>750</sup>

Rūpa Gosvāmin adopts this general scheme, but gives it a twist. Instead of looking at relationships with others, he focuses on the depth of faith. According to him, anyone who has faith is eligible for devotional service according to his grade of faith: weak, intermediate or superior. One whose faith is tender, so that it can be moulded in any way, has weak faith. One who has faith but is not expert in the arguments of the scriptures, has intermediate faith, while one who in all respects has strong faith and is expert in scriptural argumentation has superior faith.<sup>751</sup>

Both of these schemes are used (sometimes rather confusingly) in later Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava writings. New interpretations have also arisen. In his book *Kṛṣṇa-saṃhitā* (1880) Kedarnātha Datta Bhaktivinoda offers a typology of faith in terms of one's ability to connect it with reason. Weak faith means that one does not have independent power of discrimination, but has to accept whatever is written in the scriptures "as the order of the Lord". A person with weak faith can only understand external meanings of scriptural statements. Persons of intermediate faith try to connect faith with reasoning, but they are plagued by doubts and uncertainty. Persons of superior faith are expert in connecting faith and reason.<sup>752</sup>

Bhaktivinoda offered this scheme in the particular historical context of the Bengali renaissance, when all of Hinduism was under the assault of Christianity, modernity, and so on. Contrasting reason with belief was the order of the day.<sup>753</sup> The new interpretation did not survive. Rather, today Gauḍīyas in Bhaktivinoda's own group tend to reject any attempt to subject scripture to rational scrutiny.<sup>754</sup> The

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750 BP 11.2.45-47

751 BRS 1.2.17-19. The same scheme is given in CC 2.22.64-69.

752 Bhaktivinoda Thakura in <http://www.hknet.org.nz/BVT-no-sects.html>

753 For details, see Shukavak N. Dasa (1999)

754 E.g. Suhotra Swami (1998)

main reason for its failure was probably that Bhaktivinoda himself seems not to have developed it further. Yet in recent years this interpretation has resurfaced, with a growing interest in a “liberal” Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.<sup>755</sup>

In a series of articles in the weekly “Gauḍīya” Journal, Ananta Vāsudeva Dāsa offered yet another development of the same tripartite classification of faith. He divided each of the three classes into three sub-categories, thus identifying faith that is weak-weak, weak-intermediate, weak-superior, etc. This modified structure was then used to explain the gradual advancement of a devotee in detailed terms.<sup>756</sup> Even though this theologian later gave up his position as *ācārya* and was rejected by almost all of his Godbrothers, reference to his new typology of faith can be found in contemporary Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava discussions – carefully omitting his name as its originator.<sup>757</sup> The new idea needed the charisma of Ananta Vāsudeva Dāsa to become widespread, and having been spread and found theologically useful, survived his downfall.

While doctrines and ritual behaviour on Rappaport’s level of rules of conduct are the main target of reformers, sometimes charismatic gurus may try to go further and try to reinterpret cosmological axioms. One example of this is Bhaktivinoda’s notion of *daivī-varṇāśrama*. While traditional *varṇāśrama* is based on birth in a particular *varṇa* and a gradual spiritual evolution based on performing one’s duties, Kedarnātha Datta Bhaktivinoda taught *daivī-varṇāśrama*, whereby one’s *varṇa* is determined by one’s inclinations and qualifications rather than by birth, and persons in all *varṇas* should use their own inclinations in service to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>758</sup> This perspective remained a theoretical question for Bhaktivinoda. But his son,

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755 See e.g. many of the articles on [www.saragrahi.org](http://www.saragrahi.org)

756 Sasmal (2000), 122-123

757 E.g. in an article by Swami B.V. Tripurāri ([www.vnn.org/editorials.ET0111/ET20-6974.html](http://www.vnn.org/editorials.ET0111/ET20-6974.html))

758 Bhaktivinoda Thākura (1998), 84-92, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura (1999)



Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, instituted the idea in his own mission by awarding qualified disciples of any *varṇa* the *upavīta* of brāhmaṇas, authorizing them to perform religious rites that otherwise only (born) brāhmaṇas would be expected to do.<sup>759</sup>

Democratizing *varṇāśrama* is not a wholly foreign idea in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. As mentioned before, Caitanya himself had taught that anyone who knows the subject of Kṛṣṇa can be a guru,<sup>760</sup> and Nityānānda and other early preachers had sometimes openly flaunted caste rules. There is thus a canonical basis for this innovation. Still, as discussed above (2.1), generally Gauḍīyas would accept the prevailing social system, or else leave it altogether. This new praxis was a significant change of the cosmological axiom of *varṇāśrama*, and drew great criticism from many quarters. Disciples of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī suffered threats of rejection from ordinary Hindu society (they found it hard, for example, to get their children married<sup>761</sup>) and were at least once even violently assaulted.<sup>762</sup> Even today this issue is controversial, and brāhmaṇas initiated as such within the Gauḍīya Maṭhas and ISKCON are not always acknowledged outside these movements—especially when it comes to social dealings such as marriage.<sup>763</sup>

Another example has to do with the cosmological axiom of Kṛṣṇa's sometimes coming to this world as an *avatāra*. Caitanya is regarded as a special, hidden *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa, after which the next will be Kalkin, some 427 000 years from now.<sup>764</sup> In spite of this, the Śyāmānanda *parivāra* has a doctrine about the divinity of Rasikānanda (1590-1652<sup>765</sup>), foremost disciple of Śyāmānanda. Basically, it is claimed that Rasikānanda is an *avatāra* of Aniruddha,

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759 Brooks (1989), 87

760 CC 2.8.128

761 Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja [n.d.1], 171-172

762 Ibid, 41-42

763 See Brooks (1989)

764 Bon Maharaj [n.d]

765 Chakrabarty (1985), 247

one of Viṣṇu's so-called *vyūha* expansions.<sup>766</sup> To proclaim great gurus as incarnations of some associate of Kṛṣṇa is not uncommon - in fact, all of Caitanya's contemporary associates were considered such<sup>767</sup> - but to consider a guru (excepting Nityānanda and Advaita) as a descended form of God himself will generally lead to the guru and his disciples being considered heterodox.

I do not know who originated this claim, but it is well-established in the present-day Śyāmānanda *parivāra*. In the Rādhā-śyāmasundara temple in Vṛndāvana, Rasikānanda is called *Aniruddhāvatāra* in big letters both in Hindi and Bengali on a large painting of him near the altar. The same statement is given on the cover of a book written by him<sup>768</sup> and echoed by representatives of the *parivāra*.<sup>769</sup> The evidence given for this doctrine is all taken from books within the *parivāra*.<sup>770</sup> However, outside the Śyāmānanda *parivāra*, I have not encountered anyone accepting this claim, even though they usually will not deny it either.<sup>771</sup> With the passage of time, opponents have come to politely disagree. I thus seem that this new doctrine has not spread very far. However, it has had far-reaching consequences in extending the time-span of *nitya-siddha* gurus on earth. A *nitya-siddha* is a person eternally liberated, whose sojourn on earth is purely voluntary, to help bound souls achieve love of Kṛṣṇa. Originally only the devotees contemporary with Caitanya were believed to be in this category.<sup>772</sup> Next, the most important saints (such as Śyāmānanda and Rasikānanda) of the next generation were added, and the line drawn there. After them, all saints were ordinary humans

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766 The *vyūhas* do not figure very prominently in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, but they are extremely important in earlier, Pañcarātric Vaiṣṇavism. See Matsubara (1994).

767 The GGD gives a long list of corresponding identities in Caitanya's *līlā* and Kṛṣṇa's.

768 Śrī Śrī Rasikānanda Murāri (1986)

769 IF mgt 2000/71, IF mgt 2000/85

770 IF mgt 2000/71

771 E.g. IF mgt 2002/12, IF mgt 2002/13

772 GGD 33-34

who became perfected through their devotional practices or through the Lord's mercy.<sup>773</sup>

While this second step seems to be just pushing the line a little forward, it had far-reaching consequences. Since this generation had had no personal contact with Caitanya, but were thought to be *nitya-siddhas* because of their personal charisma, there was no hindering later saints of a similar charisma to be given the same status. That can be seen today, when in some quarters practically all gurus are held to be descended *nitya-siddhas*.<sup>774</sup>

### 11.2.2 New mantras

More dramatic than coming up with new doctrine is creating new mantras. While gurus usually pass on mantras they have received from their own gurus, new mantras also do appear, although it is rare and considered quite unorthodox. The Śyāmānanda *parivāra*, for example, passes on the Rādhā-mantra Śyāmānanda was given by Lalitā (see the story in 5.2.2). Kedarnātha Datta Bhaktivinoda gave his disciples a new Gaura-Gadādhara mantra.<sup>775</sup> Rādhā-ramaṇa Caraṇa Dāsa gave his followers a Gaura-mantra (which apparently did not conform to ordinary Sanskrit grammar) which he claimed to have received from Nityānanda himself.<sup>776</sup> In the Gauḍīya Maṭhas and ISKCON the so-called Brahmā *gāyatrī* is given – a mantra that is found in the Ṛg Veda<sup>777</sup> and thus by no means new, but which is not given by other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava gurus. In most of these cases, the common denominator is that the origin of the new mantra is claimed to be a divine revelation. Introducing a new mantra seems to be an instance where the personal charisma of the reformer is not enough; rather, he has to draw upon the authority of a divine being. Since

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773 IF mgt 2000/86

774 IF mgt 2000/88

775 IF mgt 2000/86

776 Kapoor (1993), 329

777 Ṛg Veda 3.62.10

mantras are given only to disciples, new mantras can spread only as much as the own group does.

Some *goswamis* also think (following a rule that one is not to teach the mantra to others<sup>778</sup>) that one should not pass on the same mantra one has received oneself, but instead another mantra, or the same mantra in a little different form. Some gurus also make changes to mantras when they are to be given to disciples of low social standing, for example by removing the very sacred *om* and replacing it with the less sacred *aim*.<sup>779</sup>

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778 HBV 2.136. Most interpret the rule to mean that one should not reveal the mantra to outsiders.

779 B.P. Puri Mahārāja [nd], 115-116



## 12. MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN

The tradition itself recognises one of the most important roles of the guru as being a mediator between God and man. Among the arguments for the need for a guru (3.3.2), one was that the guru gives the disciple eligibility for worshipping Kṛṣṇa. But the guru does even more: he forwards the disciple to Kṛṣṇa. As Bhakti Prajñāna Yati Mahārāja said:

Guru recommends one to Kṛṣṇa. Like Svarūpa Damodara was Mahāprabhu's dearest associate: all had to pass through him. Like this guru also. When we become the dearest disciple we can understand the ontological aspect of the guru.<sup>780</sup>

What the Mahārāja here refers to is the guru's aspect as Kṛṣṇa's dearest devotee. Because he is so dear to Kṛṣṇa, his dear disciple will naturally also be dear to Kṛṣṇa. However, according to the principle of guru-*paramparā*, the guru should not consider himself as the direct link to Kṛṣṇa, rather, he should see himself as simply leading his disciples to the shelter of his own guru, who then can lead all on to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>781</sup> However, instead of going into the ontological side of this issue, which has been examined before (3.2), this chapter will look at how this doctrine manifests itself in ritual and in daily dealings between guru and disciple.

In Steinmann's typology, the role of mediator between God and man corresponds with the first phase of the bhakti-guru. The guru is worshipped not as God but like God, since the disciples believe that he is able to bring down the mercy of God.

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780 IF mgt 2000/81

781 Whether gurus really feel themselves as humble servants of their own guru or if they consider themselves as the saviour of their disciples is an interesting issue, but one which falls outside the scope of this thesis. For an interesting account of the thoughts of a newly appointed guru, see Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami (1997).

In contrast with some of the roles presented earlier (e.g. the renewer of tradition), this is one that the guru does not step in and out of. As the disciple considers the guru to be at all times a teacher, so he considers him also to always be a mediator between himself and God. Still, there are some instances in which this role comes out more clearly, such as the ritual worship of the guru before worshipping Kṛṣṇa.

While this role is very strongly a manifestation of the guru's institutional charisma, personal charisma can be added by a guru who opts for emphasising this role more. When he does so, he often emphasises his own unique position as Kṛṣṇa's dearest devotee and the only one able to lead the disciples to salvation, much like the prophet in Weber's typology. As we shall see, this is usually done in situations when a the guru perceives a threat that has to be countered.

### *12.1 Via medium*

One important part that the guru plays is as a *via medium* between his disciples and Kṛṣṇa. Usually it is the disciple who needs a medium for approaching Kṛṣṇa. Since the status of Kṛṣṇa is so much higher than that of the devotee, the disciple needs someone more accessible to help him reach Kṛṣṇa. However, it is also thought that Kṛṣṇa sometimes similarly uses the guru as a *via medium* for approaching the devotee. The guru can thus function as a *via medium* in both directions, albeit for different reasons. Examples of both will follow below.

#### *12.1.1 Key for the devotee to access Kṛṣṇa*

Any worship of Kṛṣṇa has to be preceded by worship of the guru. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* states that before commencing the daily worship of Kṛṣṇa, one should worship the guru and prostrate oneself before him “like a stick” at least three times, touching his feet.<sup>782</sup> Touching

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782 HBV 4.371-372

the feet of superiors is a pan-Indian expression, denoting respect and recognition of the difference in status.

The forms this worship of the guru takes varies. One manual of worship says that one should worship the guru with sixteen *upacāras*<sup>783</sup> (see 13.1 for more about this subject), while another states that five is enough.<sup>784</sup> Furthermore, in practical life flowers or water may substitute all of these items, or they may even be offered only mentally.<sup>785</sup> The point is thus not the forms the worship takes, but rather that worship of Kṛṣṇa must begin by some kind of worship of the guru.

By worshipping the guru, the disciple ritually asks him for the permission to approach Kṛṣṇa. The same can be seen in almost all rituals of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. When offering food to Kṛṣṇa, the devotee in ISKCON begins by chanting prayers to the guru, goes on to prayers to Caitanya, before finally addressing Kṛṣṇa.<sup>786</sup>

There is also another, more general way in which the guru precedes Kṛṣṇa. Rūpa Gosvāmin defines *arcana* or worship as offering articles together with mantra,<sup>787</sup> implying that no worship in the strict sense can be done without mantras. And without a guru, one can not receive mantras. In other words, the guru gives the disciple the eligibility for worship. The same eligibility is then re-affirmed by first approaching the guru when worshipping Kṛṣṇa.

### *12.1.2 Key for Kṛṣṇa to access the devotee*

While the guru usually mediates from low to high, there are some instances in which the mediation goes in the other direction. It was mentioned before (3.2) that the disciple is supposed to consider

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783 Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa & Vāmana Mahārāja (1999), 53-58

784 *Pañcarātra Pradīpa*, 155

785 *Ibid*, vol II, 18

786 *Pañcarātra Pradīpa*, 149

787 BRS 1.2.137. This is not the full definition, but the rest is not relevant for the purpose at hand.



Kṛṣṇa to be speaking through the guru. This idea has some interesting consequences. One is that since Kṛṣṇa is the one who is really speaking, the guru himself may not always be conscious of everything he says. As one guru said:

Some things happen that I am not conscious of. It may be Kṛṣṇa, Paramātman [the Supersoul] or whatever who acts through me. So that one sometimes says the right things - sometimes, but often enough so that [the disciples'] faith is strengthened.<sup>788</sup>

The same idea is even more clearly expressed in the way the same guru explained dreams disciples have about him. When asked whether he was conscious of entering their dreams and giving them spiritual advice there, he denied it. It was not he personally who entered their dreams, he said, but Kṛṣṇa taking his form.<sup>789</sup> The idea of a divine being appearing in dreams in the guise of a more familiar person we saw earlier, in the story of Śyāmānanda (5.2.2).

Why then does Kṛṣṇa need to appear in the guise of the guru? Would the message not be taken even more seriously if he appeared in his own form? The answer was given by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja earlier on (3.2): the disciple is not able to perceive the otherworldly form of Kṛṣṇa himself.

These instances also show that the notion of the dual nature of the guru is the one that gives the best theological explanation of his behaviour. The answer that it is not the guru personally who appears in the dream is obviously very convenient if the disciple would ask the guru to repeat the instructions he gave in the dream! Still, it should be emphasised that this explanation is usually given by disciples. I have never heard or heard about a guru claiming innocence for something he has said or done on the plea that it was Kṛṣṇa who actually performed the action.

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788 IF mgt 2000/ 92

789 IF mgt 2000/ 92

## 12.2 *The greatest devotee*

While every guru is a mediator between God and man in the sense described above, gurus who wish to emphasise this role have some further options. Perhaps the most common one is to emphasise one's own unique position as Kṛṣṇa's dearest devotee. Since Kṛṣṇa is believed to love his devotees more than himself, serving the devotees is considered one of the best ways to attract his attention and mercy.<sup>790</sup> A guru who wishes to bolster his own authority may draw upon this dogma.

Since the cardinal virtue of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is humility, gurus can usually not directly spell out this message. It is not unusual to hear gurus in a round-about way speak about the great importance of serving advanced souls, the rarity of meeting such persons and how fortunate one is if one happens to do that, etc., making it obvious that they are speaking about themselves. One guru I interviewed denied being the guru of anyone. Those I called his disciples were just his friends and advisors.<sup>791</sup> The same guru had, however, just moments before, asked one person to “surrender everything to me: mind, body, words and soul” – hardly words one would direct to an advisor!<sup>792</sup>

A guru who wishes to prove to his disciples that he is Kṛṣṇa's dearest devotee will often refer to his personal charisma, for example some extraordinary achievement that he has been able to perform by Kṛṣṇa's special mercy. Why would Kṛṣṇa had bestowed that mercy upon him if he wasn't especially qualified? Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda writes:

Without receiving the Lord's special power, one cannot preach His glories all over the world. Even though one may celebrate himself as a learned follower of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and even though one

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790 See e.g. BS 213 quoted above (3.2)

791 IF 2000/14b

792 Field diary, Vṛndāvana, 11.11.2000

may attempt to preach the holy name of the Lord all over the world, if he is not favored by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu he will find fault with the pure devotee and will not be able to understand how a preacher is empowered by Lord Caitanya. One must be considered bereft of the mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu when he criticizes the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement now spreading all over the world or finds fault with this movement or the leader of the movement.<sup>793</sup>

“The leader of the movement” is the same as the author of the passage, and the “one” who “must be considered bereft of the mercy” is probably B.H. Bon Mahārāja, who also had tried to preach Caitanya’s message outside of India and who at times had voiced critical opinions of some of the activities of ISKCON. The reason for singling him out in this way is probably that he at the time of writing was considered a threat to the movement.<sup>794</sup>

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793 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1975b), 265

794 See Broo (1999), 81-83

### 13. MANIFESTATION OF DIVINITY

In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, the second part of the dual nature of the guru is that he is God himself, manifested in the form of a human being. In Steinmann's typology, this corresponds with the second phase of the Bhakti-guru and with the Tantra-guru. Especially the Tantric scriptures are full of statements to this effect. The *Kulāṃḍava Tantra* says:

My dear, the revered guru is described as Śiva himself but without his three eyes, Acyuta [Viṣṇu] without his four arms, Brahmā without his four heads.<sup>795</sup>

The doctrine of the dual nature of the guru gives orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism the chance to both agree and disagree with statements such as this. As mentioned before (3.2), many will disagree and say that the guru is not God, but as good as God.<sup>796</sup> Still, there are several instances in which he is treated in a way very similar to how God is, and which justify calling him a manifestation of divinity, the most obvious perhaps being that the guru often is called *gurudeva*, “guru-god”.<sup>797</sup>

In the eyes of the disciples, this is a role that the guru does not enter and leave. He is always a manifestation of divinity, even while sleeping. No personal charisma is needed. Still, as with the other roles, every guru can emphasise this one more or less, according to their personal nature and what they perceive as the needs of their disciples. An orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru will not be able to go as far as a Tantric guru and fully fusion the devotion of his disciples for himself with that for God, but he can certainly go far enough for critics to claim that he obscures Kṛṣṇa from his disciples by his presence.<sup>798</sup> Still, this role is one that the guru himself usually does not

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<sup>795</sup> *Kulāṃḍava-tantra* 13.58, quoted in Bay-Schmidt (1989), 76.

<sup>796</sup> Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1991), 78

<sup>797</sup> E.g. Gaur Govinda Swami Maharaja (1996), 19

<sup>798</sup> IF 2000/14e

have to consciously enter: his disciples put him into it, especially in connection with worship. As in the case of preserver and renewer of tradition, the role of the guru as manifestation of divinity is often hard to separate from that of mediator between God and man.

In some cases, the guru is in a very concrete way considered to be divine: when he is *Prabhu-santāna* or the offspring of God. This term is given to the descendants of Nityānanda and Advaita, the two associates of Caitanya who, like him, are considered *avatāras* of Kṛṣṇa (as Balarāma and Mahā-viṣṇu, respectively).<sup>799</sup> These persons have a particular institutional charisma which, especially in previous times, made them stand out amongst Gauḍīya gurus. In modern times also, at least some such gurus seem to be very much conscious of their own special status, and behave accordingly.<sup>800</sup>

### 13.1 Acting like God

Most of the instances in which the guru can be seen to be in the role of a manifestation of divinity, or when he acts like God, pertain to image worship. For that reason, a brief explanation of image worship in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is necessary.

Apart from being in the list of the five most important devotional activities in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, worshipping Kṛṣṇa's image pertains to at least thirty-six items in the list of sixty-four devotional activities in the same book. The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* contains extremely complex and detailed rules for image worship. Every Gauḍīya *āśrama* and temple, and practically every Gauḍīya home will contain an altar with images of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa or Caitanya. Image worship is thus an important part of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava ritual.

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799 There are other associates of Caitanya (and later personalities also) who are considered *avatāras* of some form of Kṛṣṇa, but the term *Prabhu-santāna* is reserved for these two families.

800 Field notes, Navadvīpa, December 2000.

The rationale behind image worship is not, as popular Neo-Hindu authors reason,<sup>801</sup> that it is just a help for beginners to fix their mind on the transcendent Lord. Rather, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology maintains that a properly fashioned, installed and worshipped image of Kṛṣṇa actually is a special *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa. While the image is fashioned out of material ingredients (usually stone, an alloy of eight metals or *neem*-wood), Kṛṣṇa descends into the image and makes it alive. After this, the Gauḍīyas do not (as some Hindus do<sup>802</sup>) believe the image to represent or contain Kṛṣṇa, but to be actually non-different from Kṛṣṇa.<sup>803</sup> By worshipping the image, the devotee can use all his senses in the Lord's service.<sup>804</sup>

The image is treated as being alive and dependent on its worshippers. For this reason it is awakened in the morning, bathed and dressed in clothes suitable for the season, offered eatables and refreshments. In the day it gives audience (*darśana*<sup>805</sup>) to the devotees, and in the evening it is put to sleep. In big temples the image may be worshipped with elaborate rituals and great pomp, while an image in the house of a poor farmer will have to be content with less.

### 13.1.1 Giving *darśana*

As an image gives *darśana* to its devotee, a guru gives *darśana* to his disciples. *Darśana* literally means “seeing”, but the idea is not of a one-way action, but rather an audience where one person looks up and the other down. In this case, it is of course the disciple who looks up at the guru.

The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* gives several rules in this connection. The disciple should never come before the guru emptyhanded,<sup>806</sup> and

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801 See for example Sen (1991), 65.

802 Fuller (1992), 60

803 *Pañcarātra Pradīpa*, 12

804 *Ibid*, 11-13

805 For an excellent treatment of the dynamics of *darśana*, see Eck (1981).

806 HBV 4.343

upon seeing the guru he should immediately prostrate before him like a rod fallen on the ground. While in the presence of the guru, he should avoid stretching his feet, yawning, laughing, cracking the fingers, instructing or worshipping others or displaying a haughty attitude. The disciple should furthermore take care not to step over anything intimately connected with the guru, such as his shoes, bed, palanquin or canopy, not to speak of the guru himself. He should also not leave before being given the express permission to do so.<sup>807</sup> The same rules are given for someone going for the *darśana* of a god.<sup>808</sup>

Whether or not all these rules are emphasised and followed is another thing. Only in ISKCON have I seen disciples bowing down every time they see the guru. Elsewhere in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* it is said that one should avoid stepping over the guru's shadow,<sup>809</sup> but I have never seen that rule being consistently followed. Regardless of details, the basic idea is that the disciple comes before the guru and receives the blessings of the guru. The disciple may (and is often advised to) also put questions to the guru. In fact, as we saw above (9.3.2), *darśanas* are one of the main venues for the guru to give his disciples spiritual advice.

The degree of intimacy between guru and disciple during *darśana* depends on the role the guru wants to emphasise: if it is the father, the situation may be quite informal; if the feudal lord, extremely formal. In the latter case, disciples may take obtaining even a glimpse of the guru as a treasured *darśana*.<sup>810</sup> The extreme is once again taken by Jagadbandhu: he once gave a woman *darśana* by showing her his finger, covered by cloth, through a hole in the wall.<sup>811</sup>

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807 HBV 1.82-91

808 See for example Bon Maharaj (1965), 147-149.

809 HBV 2.166

810 E.g. IF mgt 2001/78

811 Datta, in <http://home.att.net/~haripurush-jagadbandhu/HTML/rambagan.htm>

### 13.1.2 Receiving *pūjā*

The worship of images of gods in Hinduism is called *pūjā* and follows the same basic structure all over India and even beyond. A fixed number of *upacāras* or articles of worship are offered to the image. The most common list includes sixteen *upacāras*: seven of welcoming – a seat, welcoming words, water for bathing the feet, water for sprinkling on the head, water for sipping, a sweet drink and water for sipping again; three of bathing – a bath, clothing and ornaments; five of general worship – sandalwood, flowers, incense, lamps and food-stuffs; and one concluding *upacāra* – offering respects.<sup>812</sup>

Being as it is at the centre of theistic Hinduism, *pūjā* has been extensively studied by scholars of Indian religion. Many interpret it as an act of respectful honouring, much akin to how one would entertain a king.<sup>813</sup> However, there is also another, more intimate, aspect to it: the god is entertained as a dear guest. As C.J. Fuller writes: “[*pūjā*] elaborates the hospitality of the home as much as the grandeur of the palace.”<sup>814</sup> In other words, *pūjā* implies a dramatic status difference between worshipper and worshipped, but the act of worship signifies the momentary coming together of high and low. This communion does not affect the status of the god, but it does affect that of the worshipper, who is purified and temporarily given a higher status.<sup>815</sup>

As mentioned above (12.1.1), the guru receives *pūjā* very similar to that of an image. This is called guru-*pūjā* and even if the guru is present in the vicinity, it is only on special occasions (such as when he is installed as *mahanta* or *ācārya*, at the time of initiation, on the day of *guru-pūrṇimā* or at *Vyāsa-pūjā*) done directly to the living form of the guru. Instead, it is directed to a picture or other represen-

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812 *Pañcarātra Pradīpa*, Vol II, 133-135. Fuller (1992), 67 gives a slightly different list.

813 Gonda (1970), 77

814 Fuller (1992), 69

815 Ketola (2002), 113



tation of him. While very similar, the worship is not exactly the same as for Kṛṣṇa. For example, *tulasī*-leaves are never offered to the feet of the guru since they are reserved exclusively for Kṛṣṇa and his *avatāras*, but they may be offered to the heart of the guru, since Kṛṣṇa is considered to reside there.<sup>816</sup>

### 13.1.3 Entering an image

For an image of a god to be properly consecrated for worship, a ceremony called *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* or installation of life must be performed. The details of this ceremony may vary (as usual, an extremely elaborate version is given in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*<sup>817</sup>), but the idea is to call down the deity into the image and to bring all of its senses to life. Such a ceremony may also be performed for an image of a guru.

In the compound of the Govinda *bāri* (temple) in Navadvīpa I witnessed part of the *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* ceremony for images of three past masters. The temple belongs to the Narottama *parivāra*, and the three images depicted the founder of that particular temple, affectionately known as Bhūvaneśvara Sādhu Ṭhākura (?-1940), his main disciple and grand-disciple.<sup>818</sup> The three images were made of plaster, life-size and brightly painted, and depicted the trio sitting with legs crossed and their right hands in the characteristic Gauḍīya small bag containing prayer-beads.

Two brāhmanas performed the ceremonies while a crowd of mostly elderly ladies watched. The older brāhmana read mantras (mainly so-called root-mantras consisting of particularly powerful syllables, e.g. *klīm*) while the younger one touched the heart and mouth of the three images with a bundle of holy *kuśa*-grass. Every now and then the older brāhmana exclaimed “*om pratiṣṭha!*”, “be

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816' Field notes, Vṛndāvana, November, 2000.

817 HBV 20.820-998

818 Sardella (2002), 19

established!”, to which the onlookers responded by joyous ululation.<sup>819</sup>

The function of images of past gurus such as these can be called substitutive. When the guru is no longer present, he can be offered *pūjā* and general reverence in the image form instead. Such images are usually placed above the grave of the guru. Hindu saints are not cremated, but buried, and above the grave a small monument is usually constructed, generally called a *samādhi*.<sup>820</sup>

The centre of such a *samādhi* is the image of the saint interred there. In the first Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *samādhis*, such as those of Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmins, the image is abstract, looking a little like a big egg, but nowadays the ambition is that the images should be as realistic as possible. They are generally made of plaster and painted. The images are fed, offered *pūjā* and *ārati* (waving of ghee-lamps, etc.), prayed to, clothed and bathed just like the image of a god.

Theologically speaking, it is the divine nature of the guru that enters the image and receives the offerings, the same Kṛṣṇa that speaks through every guru, but in practical life, the two natures are not differentiated. Many devotees think that somehow the guru after death has acquired the power of expanding himself into a new form or even several, since there may be several images of the same deceased guru, all as much alive.<sup>821</sup> As with images of Kṛṣṇa, a mythology soon springs up around especially important guru-images.<sup>822</sup>

Apart from the worship of images, songs addressed to the guru also often contain many phrases and pictures generally used for Kṛṣṇa. In a song written for the midday worship at the *samādhi* of B.H. Bon Mahārāja, it is said that the gods behold the worship, hidden in the clouds.<sup>823</sup> B.H. Bon Mahārāja himself sings elsewhere that he bows

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819 Field notes, Navadvīpa 30.12.2000

820 See Mahānidhi Swami (1993)

821 E.g. IF mgt 2000/91

822 IF mgt 2000/92

823 Premānanda Vana Mahārāja (1994), 170

down at the feet of his guru, birth after birth, in life or death.<sup>824</sup> Another Vaiṣṇava poet sings that if the guru is not merciful towards him, he can only cry and cry and is not able to retain his life.<sup>825</sup> Such phrases are used very commonly in songs directed to Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya.<sup>826</sup>

#### 13.1.4 Purifying and spiritualising matter

Another important aspect of image worship is that the image is thought to sanctify whatever comes in touch with it. For this reason, the remnants of foodstuffs, garlands, *tulasī*-leaves and other items that have been offered to the image are distributed to the devotees as sanctified articles. Strict Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas eat no food that has not first been offered to an image of Kṛṣṇa. Such food is called *prasāda* (“mercy”) and considered greatly purifying. It is not just eaten, but “honoured”.<sup>827</sup> At festivals, Gauḍīyas sit down in rows and freely eat *prasāda* together with each other, neglecting caste rules.

In Hindu culture, eating someone’s leftovers is taboo, but not in all cases. The servant may eat his master’s remnants, the wife those of the husband, and so forth, but not the other way around. Consuming someone’s remnants indicates acceptance of a great difference in status. Eating *prasāda* thus denotes recognition of one’s position as a servant of Kṛṣṇa. However, as pointed out by Kimmo Ketola, there is also another side to *prasāda*: it is thought to be “contaminated” with Kṛṣṇa’s saliva. Since that saliva is divine, it “contaminates” the eater in a positive way with divine qualities.<sup>828</sup>

Just as Kṛṣṇa, the guru is able to turn food offered to him into *prasāda*. In ancient times, the Vedic student would go around beg-

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824 Bhaktihr̥daya Vana Devagosvāmī (1981), 4

825 Premānanda Vana Mahārāja (1994), 21

826 E.g. *ibid.*, 188-189

827 *Pañcarātra Pradīpa*, 250

828 Ketola (2002), 113

ging, and after returning to the *āśrama*, he would offer his begging bowl to the guru. After eating, the guru would give the remnants to the disciple.<sup>829</sup> This practice developed into offering the guru food and taking the remnants as in the case of a god.<sup>830</sup> As Gold says, in his power to sanctify food the guru seems to differ little from a god.<sup>831</sup>

In the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya* the issue is somewhat more complicated. While a disciple will offer food to the picture of image of the guru (thinking that he will forward it to Kṛṣṇa), gurus themselves prefer to eat *prasāda* and not unoffered food. For that reason, when cooking for the guru, disciples will first offer the food to Kṛṣṇa and then bring it as *prasāda* to the guru. However, when they ritually offer the food, they will first ritually give it to the guru.<sup>832</sup> If they at any rate offer the food to the guru on the altar, why not give it directly to the guru in his room? Several devotees I have spoken to have not been able to answer this question with more than “that is just the way it is done.”<sup>833</sup> The answer is to be found in the doctrine of the two-fold nature of the guru. The guru himself is and thinks of himself as Kṛṣṇa’s devotee, and therefore asks to be served *prasāda*. The picture, conversely, represents the divine side of the guru. In any case, the remnants of the guru’s meal is twice “contaminated”: first by Kṛṣṇa and then by the guru, so it is considered doubly spiritually potent.

Another form of *prasāda* which the guru traditionally awards his disciples is allowing them to wash his feet and drink the water that has been used. While some gurus have indicated that this custom is on the decline,<sup>834</sup> it is still very much part of the way of honouring a guru, especially when he visits the home of disciples. The basis of

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829 *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra* 1.1.3.26-35 (in Olivelle 2000)

830 Bay-Schmidt (1989), 118

831 Gold (1987), 37

832 Field notes, Helsinki, August 2002

833 E.g. IF mgt 2000/91

834 IF mgt 2000/68

this ceremony is the idea that while for the saints themselves, their feet are the lowest part of the body, for those below them, the feet are the only part that can be accessed. While the dust of an ordinary man's feet - or the water that has washed them - would be extremely polluting, in the case of a saint the opposite is true. For this reason, the feet (often called "lotus feet"<sup>835</sup>) of the guru are often used to represent him, both in iconography and writing.<sup>836</sup>

### 13.2 Saving the disciples

While the guru is usually seen (as in the last chapter) as leading the disciple to Kṛṣṇa, in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism the guru is often seen as more or less an independent saviour. He is sometimes compared to a physician who saves the disciple-patient from the disease of *saṁsāra*.<sup>837</sup> In fact, like the Tantric guru, the importance of the Gauḍīya guru may overshadow that of Kṛṣṇa. As a verse quoted in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* proclaims:

When Hari is angry, the guru can save, when the guru is angry, nobody. Therefore, with all efforts the guru should certainly be pleased!<sup>838</sup>

Especially in songs directed to the guru, he often seems to be an independent saviour of his disciples. The famous Gauḍīya poet Narottama Dāsa sings of the guru as the only abode of devotion, his lord birth after birth; about love for "his feet" as the ultimate goal; and how by whose mercy one can cross over nescience and attain Kṛṣṇa.<sup>839</sup> In Viśvanātha Cakravartin's *Gurvāṣṭaka* or eight prayers to the guru (18<sup>th</sup> century), it

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835 E.g. Gaur Govinda Swami Maharaja (1999), 1.

836 Narayan (1992), 82-83

837 E.g. BS 213, quoting BP 6.30.38.

838 HBV 4.360. *anyatra ca – harau ruṣṭe gurus trātā gurau ruṣṭe na kaścana/ tasmād sarva-prayatmena gurum eva prasādayet//*

839 Bhakti-śrīrūpa Siddhānti Gosvāmī Maharāja (1995), 89.

is said that one who has the mercy of the guru attains the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, but that one who does not will never attain it.<sup>840</sup>

The theological idea behind such statements is that since the guru is supposed to be Kṛṣṇa's dearest, his opinion will weigh heavily indeed with Kṛṣṇa. However, gurus who feel a need for increasing their own authority can use such statements for strengthening their own position, much as when the guru in the role of mediator between God and man emphasises his own position as Kṛṣṇa's dearest devotee (12.2). It is thus also in this case difficult to distinguish this role from the previous one.

### *13.3 Declaring himself God*

The extreme limit of pursuing the role of manifestation of divinity is when the guru crosses the line of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy and declares that he is actually not only representing Kṛṣṇa, but Kṛṣṇa himself, descended to save humanity. Gurus who do so are usually considered heterodox, but in some cases they manage to remain on the fringes of orthodoxy. For that, they must be charismatic enough and others must have the option to politely disagree with their divinity, for example by saying that it was the disciples of the guru who came up with the idea (because they wanted to be disciples of God, not only of an ordinary guru), not the charismatic person himself.<sup>841</sup> Because the guru is financially dependent on the disciples, he has to oblige them.<sup>842</sup> The facts do not seem to agree with such rationalisations. Jagadbandhu, for example, spoke clearly about his own position as the supreme Lord:

Govinda is the beginning of all, the origin of all creation. His existence depends on nothing whatsoever, being the Supreme Being Himself -

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840 Bhakti-śrīrūpa Siddhānti Gosvāmi Maharāja (1995), 6

841 E.g. O.B.L. Kapoor on Prabhu Jagadbandhu, in Kapoor (1995a), 94

842 Suhotra Swami (1997), 58

He is Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Śrī Gaurāṅga [Caitanya]. He, who is the combination of all powers of these two *līlās* of Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Śrī Gaurāṅga, is Śrī Śrī Haripuruṣa Prabhu Jagadbandhu. Know me as to be the same.<sup>843</sup>

Many of his disciples initially seem to have had a hard time digesting some of his more unorthodox statements.<sup>844</sup> Haranātha, another unorthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava, also claimed to be a new *avatāra* of Caitanya, stated that himself on many occasions.<sup>845</sup> Other gurus, such as Rādhā-ramaṇa Caraṇa Dāsa Bābājī or Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda objected strongly when some of their disciples tried to portray them as God, and did not hesitate to banish them if they did not stop speaking such heresy.<sup>846</sup> It does not thus seem that gurus need to oblige their disciples in this way if they do not desire so themselves.

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843 According to Kunja Lal Datta in <http://home.att.net/~haripurush-jagadbandhu/HTML/dhaka.htm>

844 McDaniel (1989), 72

845 Ibid, 59

846 Kapoor (1995a), 213-214, Vaiyaisaki dasa Adhikari (1999), 299-318

## IV CONCLUSION

### 14. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 14.1 Summary

The purpose of this study has been to identify, examine and characterise the guru institution within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, the devotional Hindu movement started by Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486-1534) in Bengal, and besides that to arrive at some more general conclusions regarding interpretation of sacred texts and the interplay between canon and charisma.

This has been done through examining the way the movement itself presents the guru, disciple and initiation, and through looking at the ways in which the guru interacts with his disciples, well-wishers and broader society. This study is written from the viewpoint of the science of religion, incorporating religio-historical, antropological and sociological viewpoints.

My primary theoretical framework has been the concepts of *charisma* and *canon*. Max Weber defines charisma as “a certain quality of individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities”. Charisma can be divided into *personal charisma*, meaning charisma that is born of and dependent on the particular qualities of an individual person, and *institutional charisma*, charisma derived from an institution the charismatic person is connected to. Weber has further described six different types of charismatic personages, none of which alone covers the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru.

Canon is defined by Heinrich von Stietencron as “the result of a deliberate attempt to collect, arrange and preserve the original message of a religious community, and to protect it against corruption. It transforms haphazard individual recollections into authoritative tradition or sacred scripture.” According to Ilkka Pyysiäinen a canon is



moreover authoritative, explaining and justifying a specific kind of life, ethics and theology. There are different ways to categorise sacred texts, but they do not work very well in this case. For modern Gauḍīyas, the writings of the “six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana”, a group of ascetic and scholarly followers of Caitanya, form the basis of the canon, whose boundaries sometimes are a little vague.

Since the Gauḍīyas Vaiṣṇavas are very much textually oriented, I have made an in-depth study of what their canonical writings say about the subject of the guru. For analysing the scriptural statements, I have used Roy Rappaport’s hierarchy of understandings. He argues that there are four levels of understanding theological teachings. The first level, at the apex of the conceptual structure, he calls the *ultimate sacred postulates*. These are postulates, that is, claimed without demonstration, for example the statement that Kṛṣṇa is the supreme Lord.

The next level Rappaport calls *cosmological axioms*. These are assumptions concerning the fundamental structure of the universe, the logical basis of rules of conduct and proprieties of social life. They can, unlike ultimate sacred postulates, change, expand or even be radically changed, in response to changes in the environment. An example of this is the common Hindu belief that human society is created as a fourfold system of *varṇa* and *āśrama*.

The third level consists of *rules of conduct*. These are specifics dealing with relations among persons, qualities, conditions and states of affairs whose opposition are stated by cosmological axioms. They govern the behaviour of everyday life. These rules can be changed, even drastically, without affecting the oppositions they make material. The fourth and last level consists of *importations*, or indicators of prevailing environmental conditions.

One of the problems inherent in the textual sources of the movement is that they are normative. Here textual criticism is important. Moreover, I have complemented the written material with interviews of gurus and disciples. The interviews have been done primarily in major Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava centres in India, where I have also

done my participant observation. The interviews followed a basic set of questions, but were kept as informal and free-flowing as possible. In choosing interviewees, my main concern was to get as wide a spectrum of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism as possible represented. The interviews were subsequently transcribed and qualitatively analysed.

Besides the interviews, the main method of my fieldwork was participant observation, or making observations while participating oneself. The idea is, as first stated by Bronislaw Malinowski, to stay long enough in the field for the natives getting used to and accepting the fieldworker as some kind of group member, so that their behaviour and actions are not affected by his presence. I did most of my participant observation in Vṛndāvana, a major Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava centre that I was somewhat acquainted with from before.

Since the theology of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas has already been extensively studied, I have only given a brief overview of the parts of it relevant for this thesis. The Gauḍīyas worship Kṛṣṇa as the highest God and see all other Hindu gods as his servants and expansions. Kṛṣṇa is conceived of as *saguṇa*, a personal being with divine qualities, and the individual souls are considered “inconceivably simultaneously one and different” from him, but the stress is on the difference. The goal of life for all souls is not to merge into an impersonal oneness with Kṛṣṇa, but to attain *preman* or ecstatic love for him, as exemplified by Caitanya himself.

Following Wach, I have retained the sanskrit term *saṁpradāya* to denote the type of movement started by Caitanya. Wach defines a *saṁpradāya* as “a group with special concepts, forms of worship, and adherence to exclusive leadership exercised by an outstanding religious personality or by his physical and spiritual descendant”. Many similar bhakti *saṁpradāyas* sprung up in North India during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They all had some common denominators, such as expressing themselves through the vernaculars instead of Sanskrit; rejecting the religious monopoly of the brāhmaṇas; and encouraging an enthusiastic religion of congregational singing and dancing as a way to reach communion with God.

In terms of organisation, what is particular for the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya* is its loose and semi-democratic nature with no universal authority. Rather, several different *vaṁśas* (lines of hereditary gurus) and *parivāras* (lines of appointed gurus) have sprung up, all having some individual characteristics. This *saṁpradāya* can moreover be called denominational rather than sectarian, since it usually differentiates between a religious and a social sphere of action. In terms of influence and comparative size, the heyday of the *saṁpradāya* was in the seventeenth century, with a strong revival in the later part of the nineteenth. Today, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism has in Bengal been clearly outdistanced by Śāktism, the worship of Durgā, Kālī and so forth.

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practitioners can be divided into four classes: *goswamis* or hereditary brāhmaṇa gurus; *grhasthas* or householder laity; *bābājīs* or renunciants; and *jāti vaiṣṇavas* or a class of hereditary laymen, originally stemming from wayward renunciates and persons who had been ostracised from their own community. The last group has during the last century to a large extent become amalgamated with the second. There are also some modern groups of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas (e.g. ISKCON) that do not fit into the traditional *vaṁśas* and *parivāras* and who have some peculiar teachings, but that still generally are held to belong to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya*.

I started part two of the thesis, dealing with the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava doctrine of the guru, with a slightly modified version of the typology of Hindu gurus presented by Ralph Marc Steinmann. He argues that there are five basic types of gurus that are roughly chronological. The first is the *Vedic* type. Here the guru is predominantly a teacher of the hymns of the Vedas. He would always be a householder and a brāhmaṇa. Next comes the *Upaniṣadic* type, where the guru's role is completely different: rather than only teach the disciple the Vedic hymns, he tries to help his disciple realise otherworldly knowledge. For this reason, he himself must be apart from learned in the scripture also mystically realised. Now the ideal was an ascetic rather than a householder.

The third type is the *Jñāna*-guru of Śaṅkara and his followers. More emphasis on asceticism than before, and instead of retreating into a rural *āśrama* with his disciples, this type of guru founds *mathas* in cities and may have tens of thousands of disciples. He may also have political power. The fourth type is the *Bhakti*-guru, divided into two stages. Now the guru helps the disciple in drawing down the mercy of God. In the earlier stage the guru is worshipped like God, while he in the later stage is God. His main qualification is now his ardent devotion to God, a qualification that may override a low social status, illiteracy and so forth. The climax in the merging of guru and God comes in the *Tantra*-guru, where the guru may be even more important than God. Detailed criteria is drawn up for guru and disciple, even though they are more of ideals than actual reality.

Important to note here are two parallel lines of development. On the one hand, the importance of the guru grows from stage to stage: from teacher to metaphysical teacher, representative of God and finally God himself. On the other hand the criteria for determining who is a competent guru become progressively more elusive.

As far as the ontological position given to the guru by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theologians is concerned, I have argued that it best can be described as dual. The guru has two natures: as a human being and as a devotee of a Kṛṣṇa he is a man, but since Kṛṣṇa speaks through him to the disciple, he is also God. For the disciple, the second nature is more important, and he is for different reasons urged to view the guru in this light. Others, and the guru himself, will see him as a man - perhaps on a higher level than most others, but still not God.

In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, having a guru is seen by most theologians to be an absolute necessity. Different reasons are given, most based on a cosmological axiom of bound and liberated souls. The bound souls are engrossed in matter and need outside help to extricate themselves. The type of theological argument emphasised has practical consequences: for example, those who argue that one needs a guru to function as a guide will be more prone to propose abandoning the guru if he does not fulfill the expectations placed on a spiritual

guide. For those who emphasise that the ultimate sacred postulate of the Gauḍīyas, Kṛṣṇa himself, appears through the guru, the human side of the guru is less important, including also various types of human weaknesses.

The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya* recognises two main types of gurus: the *dīkṣā*- and the *śīkṣā*-guru. The function of the first one is to give the disciple initiation. The second class of gurus functions as advisors and teachers to guide the disciple in his daily spiritual life. A disciple may have several *śīkṣā*-gurus, but only one *dīkṣā*-guru. In practical life, any one or all these gurus will be given special reverence by the disciple. Usually, the *dīkṣā*-guru will be most revered. Still, it is the *śīkṣā*-guru who needs more qualifications or charisma – the *dīkṣā*-guru may have only institutional charisma. Gurus may furthermore be either householders or ascetics, with traditionally the first group functioning as *dīkṣā*-gurus.

Because of the different functions of these gurus, earlier definitions of the guru are not appropriate here. Emic definitions, on the other hand, are too vague. I have opted for a new definition of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru as *a charismatic person who is offered special reverence by one or several persons on account of his awarding him/ them initiation and/ or especially important spiritual advice.*

Describing the charisma of the guru, the theologians put great emphasis on his personal qualities. Generally speaking, the guru is supposed to have knowledge about the canon and about Kṛṣṇa, and to himself be fixed in bhakti or devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Long lists are given of desirable qualities, but I argue that they are to be taken as ideals rather than actually necessary qualifications. For the most part, the Gauḍīya guru corresponds with the first stage of the Bhakti-guru, but he has influences from all types. Moreover, with the routinisation of the primary charisma of the first gurus, the emphasis has changed from personal to institutional qualifications, so much so that some persons are viewed as fully qualified *dīkṣā*-gurus simply by being born in the right family.

A person wishing to become initiated into the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya* will thus have to find such a guru. There are many ways to go about this. In what I call the “classic” method, the prospective disciple gets a call to renounce the world and goes searching for a real guru. After meeting many disappointments and frustrations, he finally finds his guru. In this method, the independent endeavour of the disciple is highlighted. Another method is to view the guru as predestined, either partially or fully, by the disciple’s previous devotional merits. I argue that the idea of the predestination of the guru is especially popular amongst those who did acquire the kind of guru they initially wanted. The third method downplays the need for individual searching for a guru even more: here the guru is chosen on the basis of social reasons, for example since he is the guru of the husband also. In my material, this method proves to be the most usual.

Traditionally, once a disciple has taken initiation from a guru, he can never give up his guru. That idea is also mirrored by the earliest of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sources I have used: even if fallen, ignorant or envious, the guru may never be given up. However, there is one exception: if for some reason a person has taken initiation from a non-Vaiṣṇava guru, that guru should be given up and a Vaiṣṇava guru taken instead. The reason given is that while a Vaiṣṇava mantra will lead the devotee to Viṣṇu or one of his forms such as Kṛṣṇa, a non-Vaiṣṇava mantra will lead to hell. Another theologian has added to this exception the idea of a Vaiṣṇava guru becoming a non-Vaiṣṇava, thus opening up a debate about who is a real Vaiṣṇava guru and who not. Contemporary gurus offer very different interpretations of this issue. While they base their arguments on the same sources and give seemingly theologically based guidelines for when to give up a “fallen” guru and to accept a new, the basis of such arguments are usually institutional politics.

Since giving initiation or *dikṣā* is the primary function of the *dikṣā*-guru, I have devoted one chapter to this subject. *Dikṣā* is the ritual by which the disciple is accepted as a member of the religious community, given the eligibility for worshipping Kṛṣṇa, special rules to abide

by, and awarded one or several mantras. Often he is also given a new name. The medieval sources describe very elaborate ceremonies that nowadays are greatly simplified. Moreover, initiation is today generally two-fold: first the candidate is given the *mahā-mantra* consisting of names of Kṛṣṇa, and later, usually at least half a year afterwards, the mantra(s).

Apart from this, there are two more kinds of initiation: when the disciple is given knowledge of his spiritual identity (*siddha-svarūpa*) and when he is given the ascetic order of *veśa* or *sannyāsa*. The second is purely optional, mainly for religious virtuosi, and the first is generally given only to disciples deemed especially advanced. Gurus differ radically in defining who is qualified, since the canonical basis is not very clear on this point.

Within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, there is no developed system for punishing or correcting disciples who break the rules they have agreed to follow at the time of initiation. Generally, no other atonement than remorse and continuing on with the duties given by the guru is demanded. Still, I have argued that there are four cases in which special atonement is meted out to an errant Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava: 1) when the offense is especially great, 2) when a small offense is repeated several times, 3) when the reputation of the guru or the institution is at risk, and 4) when the offender is well-known. In all cases, the atonement asked of the offender is determined on an ad-hoc basis.

In examining the relationship between guru and disciple and for further investigating the charisma of the guru, I have constructed a typology of seven roles that every Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru will take up in relationship to his disciples and admirers. Individual gurus may emphasise one or several of these roles, moulding them to suit their own and their disciples' needs. All of the roles include both personal and institutional charisma, but in different degrees.

The first role is that of a *parent*, usually a father. This is seen in how the guru creates a kind of "spiritual" family around himself, sometimes forming much stronger ties between the member than biologi-

cal ones. Gurus wishing to emphasise this role may take on duties ordinarily connected with the biological father, such as arranging marriages for their disciples, helping them find jobs, and so on. I have pointed out how this role is often taken up by gurus in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava groups with a pronounced sectarian character. Here the charisma of the guru works in an integrative way.

The second role is the *feudal lord*. Likening the guru to a feudal lord helps in understanding many of the arrangements surrounding him, such as how he can appoint subordinate gurus that function somewhat like sub-vassals or how he himself is appointed. I have shown how there within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya* are four basic ways of routinising the personal charisma of a guru, all similar to how a feudal lord may gain his throne: inheritance by primogeniture, appointment by the previous one, appointment by a board of experts, and just appointing oneself.

A guru who wishes to emphasise this role may do so by increasing the regalia or majestic pomp around himself, to clearly show the status difference between himself and his disciples. Often, it leads to distancing himself from the disciples, not to speak of society at large. Here the charisma of the guru thus becomes isolative. This distance need not be taken negatively by the disciples, rather, it may elevate the status of the guru further.

In this connection I have also dealt with the power or authority exerted by the guru, using Bernard de Jouvenel's tripartite classification into *extensiveness*, *comprehensiveness* and *intensiveness* of authority. I have argued against the popular notion of gurus being very strong in the two latter regards: in most cases, gurus do not have very much authority even in these ways. The exception to this are ascetic disciples, who are subjected to very comprehensive and sometimes rather intensive authority.

The third role, that of a *teacher*, is especially reserved for the *śikṣā-guru*, but the *dīkṣā-guru* will also function as a teacher at least at the time of initiation, when he teaches the disciple the mantra. Moreover, much of the teaching the disciple claims to receive from the guru



comes in a non-verbal form: through observing the conduct of the guru, miracles performed by him, and so forth. Thus, this role is not completely dependent on personal charisma. When a guru does want to systematically teach his disciples, it usually takes the form of explicating scripture, either as public readings and explanations of some canonical work, or as more intimate sessions between guru and a few disciples. The main difference between the two is that the second type permits much more interaction between guru and disciple. The disciple may - and is advised to - ask questions of the guru.

The fourth role is that of a *preserver of tradition*. The pan-Indian idea of a continuous degeneration of the world gives great importance to the canon, where eternal truths are thought to be encapsulated from the corruptive influence of time. However, I have shown how the canon does not seem to be able to stand on its own: it needs to be repeated and explicated by a living charismatic guru to retain its authority.

Apart from passing on the canon, gurus are also expected to maintain the customs and tradition of the *paramparā* they belong to. This includes particular teachings and rituals. They may also have to maintain a temple or *āśrama* founded by a predecessor, usually centred on an image of Kṛṣṇa. The spiritual standing of a guru and a whole institution is often measured by how well the worship of such an image is taken care of. Several methods have been tried for this, of which the most successful seems to have been families taking care of the worship in a rotating system.

Gurus who desire to enter this role more deeply often do so by championing what they consider the correct understanding of doctrinal and ritual matters. Because of the absence of any one authority ruling over all Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and because of the great number of different interpretations, there is no end to the “deviations” and “misunderstandings” such a guru will find and direct his energy towards correcting. However, I have also shown how gurus nowadays do not have the authority to do much more than notice and propagate against the faults they find.

The fifth role is the *renewer of tradition*. At first glance, this seems to be the opposite of the previous role, but on closer investigation it is seen to be in many ways be connected with it. To preserve the canon, the guru has to repeat and interpret it in a way accessible to his disciples. In this minimal way, even gurus who pride themselves on not “changing one word” of the traditional teachings are renewers of the tradition.

Gurus that want to do more reforming generally busy themselves with giving new interpretations of doctrines and rituals on Rappaport’s plane of rules of conduct. It is rare that anyone will venture to try and change cosmological axioms. In practical terms, adapting rituals and ritual behaviour are things that reformers usually take up. They may also add details to old doctrines, even interpret them in a radically new way, but they must not explicitly contradict past masters.

The sixth role is that of a *mediator between God and man*. The theological idea of everyone needing a guru to approach Kṛṣṇa was here illustrated with several examples from rituals. Moreover, I have shown how the guru is held to act as a via medium in the other direction also: sometimes Kṛṣṇa takes his form to interact with the devotee, especially in dreams.

While this role is very strongly a manifestation of the guru’s institutional charisma, personal charisma can be added by a guru who opts for emphasising this role more. When he does so, he often emphasises his own unique position as Kṛṣṇa’s dearest devotee and as the only one able to lead the disciples to salvation, much like the prophet in Weber’s typology. Since humility is the cardinal virtue of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, gurus will have to do so in a roundabout way, looking sometimes rather comical to outsiders.

The seventh and last role is that of a *manifestation of divinity*. This role also comes out mostly in rituals, where the guru is often treated as a divinity even if the disciples do not emphasise the divine nature of the guru. In order to understand the context of these rituals, I briefly described the doctrine behind image worship in Gauḍīya

Vaiṣṇavism, where the properly fashioned and installed image is treated as a special kind of *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa.

I gave four examples of how the guru is treated very much like God in rituals: at the time of *darśana*, when offered *pūjā*, when he is thought to enter an image and when he is held to spiritualise matter. Especially for understanding the details of the last case, understanding the dual nature ascribed to the guru by Gauḍīya theologians is helpful. Finally, I gave two examples of how the guru can enlarge the scope of this role by adding his personal charisma, by becoming the sole saviour of his disciples, and in extreme cases, by declaring himself God.

## 14.2 Conclusions

Below I will restate some of the more important conclusions I have drawn from the material at hand, the two first pertaining primarily to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya*, and the two latter of a more general application.

### 14.2.1 Characterising the guru

Max Weber locates the guru in either the category of the teacher of ethics or as the mystagogue, both of which implement an established social order rather than break with it, as the prophet does. In the case of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, the case is as we have seen rather more complicated. Because of his strong link to the canon, the Gauḍīya guru cannot be classified as a magician. While the mystagogue type of guru is found in more Tantric quarters, some Gauḍīya gurus are indeed teachers of ethics. However, some of the *goswami* gurus are very much akin to priests, while renunciant gurus may indeed break social norms and thus be either ethical- or exemplary prophets. Some gurus may even be sacred legislators. Where then to locate the guru?

It is obviously not possible to find one single slot for the guru. One has to recognise that “the guru” is another kind of category than those presented by Weber. Not to speak of the “Hindu guru”, in the comparatively small *saṃpradāya* I have examined we find gurus belonging to four out of six categories. I have therefore opted for just calling the guru a “charismatic person”, leaving open the kind of charisma he possesses. As we have seen, all Gauḍīya gurus will have both personal and institutional charisma, but the proportions vary. What characterises the guru here is that he awards one or several people (either initiated disciples or other well-wishers and admirers), initiation and/ or especially important spiritual advice. In other words, his function can be either initiating or educative, or both. The educative function could apply to many Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practitioners, but it is not meaningful to call them all gurus. For that reason I have added that he is shown special reverence – not necessarily by everyone (as is implied in the definition of Jan Gonda, quoted in 1.1), but by one or several followers and disciples. When all these conditions apply, we have found a guru.

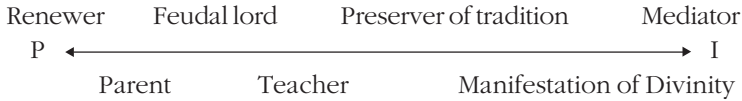
I believe that this definition will also apply to other *saṃpradāyas* than just the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava. Many *saṃpradāyas* have different types of gurus, not all of whom necessarily give their followers initiation, but who still are considered and treated as some kind of “guru”.

#### *14.2.2 The charisma of the guru*

In describing the personality of the guru, I have called him charismatic, further adding that this charisma may be either personal or institutional. I recognise the danger in imposing this external scale on a phenomena that does not recognise such distinctions. Neither the gurus nor their disciples distinguish between these types of charisma; rather, for them the guru is simply a “heavy”, authoritative person.

Furthermore, the material has shown that both types of charisma are held by all gurus. The following chart illustrates the predomi-

nance of either type of charisma, P standing for personal charisma, and I for institutional, in my scheme of seven roles of the guru.



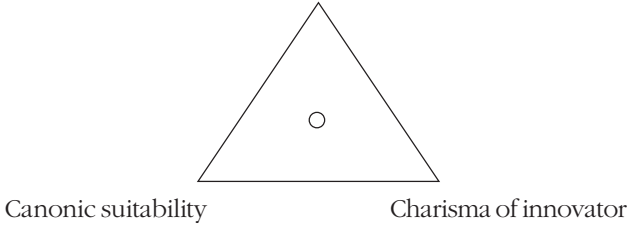
Important to note is, again, that every role includes some amount of both personal and institutional charisma. Even though the role as renovator of tradition is the one that rests the least on institutional charisma, and the role as mediator between God and man the least on personal charisma, the opposite types of charisma are present also in these roles. Moreover, the more to the left a role is, the less the guru has to enter into it. A guru need only be a renewer of tradition, for example, in a minimal way, while every guru very much has to be a mediator between God and man.

Still, the distinction between the two types of charisma is useful. It helps in highlighting the ways in which a “special” guru will differ from other, “ordinary” gurus. This is brought out well, I believe, in my typology of seven roles of the guru, where all roles are mandatory for every guru, but all have aspects that can be emphasised by personally charismatic gurus, some more than other. Granted, there is some overlap between the roles, but not so much as to invalidate the scheme.

### *14.2.3 The interplay between canon and charisma*

I have many times stated and shown how the guru is bound to the canon, even if he himself is a very charismatic and innovative person. The interplay between the two is nicely shown in how new interpretations succeed. For a new interpretation to be accepted outside the circle of disciples and other followers, I have argued that three factors must be in balance. This is best illustrated through the following diagram:

Social or theological need



The three points of the triangle represent the three factors that must be in balance for the innovation to succeed. The three points must all draw the “o” of the innovation towards themselves with equal strength. If there is too little “pull” from the direction of for example canonic suitability – as in the example I have given of Bhaktivinoda’s interpretation of the three levels of eligibility for devotion – the innovation will likely fail. For a change of a cosmological axiom to be successful, it must have very strong support from all three sides.

However, there is one more factor that has to be taken into consideration. Within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya*, an innovation can become recognised as a part of canon within a very short time. As part of canon, it is no longer as dependent on somebody’s charisma as it was before, and may survive even if the innovator subsequently loses his charismatic position.

While the two concepts of canon and charisma thus are useful, we do best by not separating them too much, just as in the case of the roles of preserver and renewer of tradition. The *saṁpradāya* itself generally does not distinguish them, but rather sees some modification of the message as necessary for the successful preservation of its essence. In the same way, in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṁpradāya*, there is no real meaning to canon without charisma. First of all, the canon is recognised to have its origin in the visions and realisations of charismatic persons, and secondly, without being explicated by a contemporary, living charismatic person, it does not fully open up to

the reader. Similarly, even in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, where personal qualifications of the guru are given great emphasis, knowledge of the canon is declared to be of paramount importance. Furthermore, when charismatic innovators want to propagate their ideas, they almost always do so using the medium of interpreting the holy writ.

What I want to argue is that in this case, and probably also in other Indian contexts, canon and charisma must not be taken as polar opposites. In the writings of Weber and others who have studied a Western context, the impression is sometimes given of charisma as an immensely revolutionary and disruptive element. Here, the two work in a rather symbiotal relationship. This is because of the nature of the system of guru-*paramparā*: to preserve the “essence” (however that is defined) while allowing rules of conduct and importations the change needed to keep the *sampradāya* from losing its relevancy. New charisma is often surprisingly quickly routinised and preserved until the next renewer comes along.

However, the *paramparā* system also has inborn weaknesses: in the absence of personally charismatic renewers, it responds slowly to changes in the environment. Generally, this has been no problem, but in the present day, when Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism has become a world religion, with all the challenges connected with that, and when changes in Indian society happen quicker than ever, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism seems to be losing terrain. On the other hand, organisations founded by charismatic renewers (such as Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī) tend to become plagued by problems of succession after the death of the founder, since there are often no sufficiently personally charismatic disciple to take over, or then too many. It remains to be seen what the best organisational model for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be.

#### 14.2.4 *As Good as God*

Early Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authors were faced with a delicate theological dilemma: on the one hand, scriptures commonly held to be ca-

nonical spoke of the guru as being one with God, and on the other hand, Caitanya clearly eschewed the monistic idea of any individual soul ever being or becoming God. Somehow, both views had to be harmonised.

While different approaches were tried, the view that gradually won prominence was that of the two natures of the guru, or that by himself, the guru was a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, but that for his disciple he was a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa.

Such theological wranglings may seem rather meaningless. When Amma, a popular contemporary Hindu guru, is ritually worshipped as Devī by her followers, it is condemned as *māyāvāda* by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, who are quick to point out that there is only one Devī, and that the scriptures say nothing about her taking the form of a south Indian woman in *kali-yuga*. Still, the same Gauḍīyas worship their own gurus as Kṛṣṇa on a daily basis. Does it make any difference whether one sees the guru as directly the divinity or as a channel through which the divinity reveals itself? At first sight no: the *pūjā* will look the same in both cases, but when we take a closer look, such theological details do influence rituals and day-to-day behaviour, as I have shown above (13.1.4) with the case of offering the guru food.

As we have seen, this solution made it possible for theologians to both agree and disagree with the two propositions above. Moreover, this model could explain sometimes seemingly wild statements about the power of the guru – that he is capable of liberating or destroying, and so forth – without compromising the authority and “truth” of the scriptures.

I believe that the last point is of paramount importance. Throughout the history of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya*, its theologians have been constantly reinterpreting, modifying and even contradicting the views of previous authorities – but very rarely explicitly saying that they disagree. Rather, they have been “bringing forth hidden meanings,” “unearthing what he actually wanted to say, but was unable to say for social reasons,” “what his disciples were not ready to hear,” and so forth. All of these “reasons” are of course excuses. Duc



de la Rochefoucauld said that hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue, and in the same way, refuting the opinions of previous authorities without being able to say that one does so, is perhaps the clearest sign of how important canon is to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava guru.

There is, finally, another reason for not contradicting the statements about the divinity of the guru. When submission to the guru is held as such an important principle for advancing on the path towards God, stating that if the guru is not exactly God, he should at least be regarded as God, will invest the guru with very strong institutional charisma. In this way, for his disciple, the guru will indeed become as good as God.

## GLOSSARY OF NAMES

- Acyutānanda* — 16<sup>th</sup> century. The most famous of Advaita's sons.
- Advaita* — 1454-1550. One of Caitanya's main companions, considered an *avatāra* of Mahā-viṣṇu or Śiva.
- Ananta Dāsa Bābājī* — The present *mahanta* of Rādhā-kuṇḍa and a well-known Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scholar and guru.
- Ananta Vāsudeva Dāsa* — 1895-1959. Disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī who was elected his successor in 1937, but later gave up his post.
- Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa* — Eighteenth century. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scholar of the Śyāmānanda *parivāra* best known for his *Govinda-bhāṣya* commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtra*.
- Balarāma* — Kṛṣṇa's brother and first expansion.
- Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Mhḡ.* — 1898-1968. Disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and founder of the Gauḍīya Vedānta Samiti.
- Bhakti Prajñāna Yati Maharaja* — 1929-. Granddisciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. Ācārya of Śrī Caitanya Maṭha.
- Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī* — 1874-1937. Son of Kedarnātha Datta and founder of the Gauḍīya Maṭha.
- Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mhḡ.* — 1921-. Disciple of Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Mahārāja. Co-*ācārya* of the Gauḍīya Vedānta Samiti.
- Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda* — 1896-1977. Disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and founder of ISKCON.
- B.H. Bon Mahārāja* — 1901-1982. Disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī and founder of the Rādhā-Govinda Trust.
- Caitanya* — 1486-1533. Considered a combined *avatāra* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.
- Gadādhara* — 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century. One of Caitanya's closest associates. Considered an *avatāra* of Rādhā.

- Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin* — 1505-1586. One of the six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana. Author of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* and founder of the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple.
- Gopānanda Bon Maharāja* — 1930-. Disciple of B.H. Bon Maharāja and present *ācārya* of the Rādhā-Govinda Trust.
- Gopīnātha* — 1) Lit. “Lord of the cowherdesses”, name of Kṛṣṇa, 2) a particular image of Kṛṣṇa in Puri.
- Haridāsa Dāsa* — 1901-1957. Renunciant and scholar, best known for his monumental dictionary *Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇava-abhidhāna*.
- Īśvara Purī* — 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century. Caitanya’s guru.
- Jagadbandhu* — 1871-1921. Charismatic preacher. Considered Kṛṣṇa himself by his followers in the Mahānāma *saṁpradāya*.
- Jīva Gosvāmin* — 1516-1608. One of the six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana. Author of the *Bhakti-sandarbhā* and founder of the Rādhā-damodara temple.
- Kavi Karṇapūra* — 16<sup>th</sup> century. Poet and theologian, author of the *Gaura-ganoddeśa-dīpikā*.
- Kedarnātha Datta Bhaktivinoda* — 1838-1914. Prominent reformer from the Jāhnavā *parivāra*.
- Kṛṣṇa* — The supreme God of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.
- Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja* — 1517-1610. Author of the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*.
- Kṛṣṇa Gopālānanda Deva Goswami* — 1959-. *Goswami* coming in the Rasikānanda *vaṁśa*. Adhikarin in charge of the Rādhā-śyāmasundara temple in Vṛndāvana.
- Kṛṣṇa Keśavānanda Deva Goswami* — 1949-. *Goswami* coming in the Rasikānanda *vaṁśa*. Head of the Śyāmānanda *parivāra*.
- Lalitā* — One of Rādhā’s intimate girlfriends.
- Mādhavendra Purī* — 15<sup>th</sup> century. Caitanya’s guru’s guru. Pioneer of the kind of bhakti Caitanya popularised.
- Mahā-viṣṇu* — Lit. “Great Viṣṇu”, Kṛṣṇa’s first Viṣṇu expansion.
- Narottama Dāsa* — 17<sup>th</sup> century. Famous preacher and author of Bengali devotional songs. Originator of a new *parivāra*.
- Nityānanda* — 1473-1545. One of Caitanya’s main companions,

- considered an *avatāra* of Balarāma.
- Padmanābha Goswami* — 1956-. *Goswami* in the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple *vaṃśa*.
- Puruṣottama Goswami* — 1920-. *Goswami* in the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple *vaṃśa*.
- Rādhā* — Kṛṣṇa's cowherdess girlfriend and primary *śakti*.
- Rādhā-ramaṇa Caraṇa Dāsa Bābājī* — 1853-1905. Charismatic preacher and founder of the Rāma Dāsa *parivāra*.
- Rāghunātha Dāsa Gosvāmin* — 16<sup>th</sup> century. One of the six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana, best known for his intense austerities.
- Rasikānanda* — 17<sup>th</sup> century. Chief disciple of Śyāmānanda and famous preacher.
- Rūpa Gosvāmin* — One of the six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana. Author of the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*.
- Sanātana Gosvāmin* — Eldest of the six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana.
- Śaṅkara* — 9<sup>th</sup> century. Founder of the *advaita* or monistic school of Vedānta and the Daśanāmin order of *sannyāsins*.
- Satyanārāyaṇa Dāsa Bābājī* — 1955-. Disciple of Haridāsa Śāstrī of the Gadādhara *parivāra*.
- Śrīvāsa* — 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century. One of Caitanya's closest associates.
- Śrīvatsa Goswami* — 1952-. *Goswami* in the Rādhā-ramaṇa temple *vaṃśa*, son of Puruṣottama Goswami. Director of Śrī Caitanya Prema Saṃsthāna.
- Swami B. V. Tripurāri* — 1949-. Disciple of Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda and founder of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Society.
- Śyāmānanda* — 1556-1634 (?). Charismatic preacher and originator of a new *parivāra*.
- Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Goswami* — 1841-1899. Charismatic preacher of the Advaita-*vaṃśa*.
- Viśvanātha Cakravartin* — 18<sup>th</sup> century. Theologian, best known for his commentaries on Rūpa Gosvāmin's works.
- Viśvambhara Mīśra* — Pre-*sannyāsa* name of Caitanya.



## GLOSSARY OF PLACES AND TERMS

Several of the terms below have many meanings, of which only those relevant in this thesis are given.

*Ācārya* — 1) Synonym for guru, 2) type of guru found especially in the Gauḍīya Maṭhas.

*Adhikārin* — See 8.1.2.

*Advaitin* — Follower of the monistic philosophy of Śaṅkara.

*Āgama* — Class of Hindu scripture, usually in the form of discussions between Śiva and Śakti.

*Anuccheda* — Passage of the *Bhakti-sandarbha*.

*Āśrama* — 1) Religious commune or school, 2) Four stages of life: *brahmācārya*, celibate studenthood; *garhastya*, married life; *vānaprasthya*, retirement; and *sannyāsa*, renunciation.

*Avatāra* — Lit. “descent”. Form of God that has descended to this world. In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology not an “incarnation” in the sense that it would have a material body or be bound by material laws.

*Bābāji* — Lit. “respected father”, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava mendicant.

*Bhāva* — 1) Spiritual emotion, 2) type of relationship between devotee and Kṛṣṇa.

*Brahmā saṁpradāya* — The *saṁpradāya* said to come from Brahmā, also known as the Madhva-*saṁpradāya*.

*Brahmacārin* — 1) Person in the first *āśrama*, 2) novice residing in an *āśrama* or *maṭha*.

*Caitya-guru* — The guru in the heart.

*Cāmara* — Hand-held whisk traditionally made of a yak’s tail.

*Dakṣiṇa* — A gift offered to the guru, usually money.

*Daśanāmin* — The institution of ten different orders of *sannyāsa* introduced by Śaṅkara.

*Dikṣā-guru* — Initiating guru.

*Dhotī* — Traditional Indian garment worn by men, a cloth wrapped around the waist.

- Dvaita*— Madhva’s Vedāntic philosophy of dualism.
- Ekādaśī*— The eleventh lunar day, observed by especially Vaiṣṇavas through fasting and increased religious activities.
- Gauḍīya Maṭha*— Institution founded by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, now split into many branches.
- Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava*— A person initiated into the *saṃpradāya* of Caitanya.
- Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*— The *saṃpradāya* stemming from the associates of Caitanya.
- Gayā*— Town in Bihar, famous for the temple of Viṣṇu’s footprint.
- Gopī*— Cowherdess of Vṛndāvana, expansions of Rādhā.
- Gosvāmin*— Lit. “master of the cows/ senses,” title of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava renunciants.
- Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana*— Group of six ascetic sixteenth-century followers of Caitanya who settled in Vṛndāvana, wrote important theological works and founded temples.
- Goswami*— A guru coming in a seminal line of gurus.
- Gṛhastha*— Householder, lay member of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāya*.
- Homa*— Fire sacrifice.
- Japa*— Silently reciting prayers or mantras, often with the help of a rosary.
- Jāti Vaiṣṇava*— Class of hereditary Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas stemming perhaps from fallen *bābājīs* and *mātājīs*.
- Jñāna*— Knowledge.
- Kaupina*— Type of underwear consisting of two strips of cloth traditionally worn by Hindu ascetics.
- Kīrtana*— Congregational chanting of religious songs or mantras, accompanied by singing and dancing.
- Līlā*— Divine play.
- Mahā-mantra*— Lit. “great mantra”, the most important mantra in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare, generally interpreted as an invocation addressed to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

- Mahanta* — 1) See 2.3.2, 2) the leader of an *āśrama* or *maṭha*.
- Maṇḍala* — Mystic, circular diagram generally drawn on the floor.
- Mātāji* — Lit. “respected mother”, female Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava mendicant.
- Maṭha* — Monastic community.
- Māyāpūra* — Small town on the opposite side of the Ganges from Navadvīpa. Contested birthsite of Caitanya.
- Māyāvāda* — Deprecative name for Śaṅkara’s Vedānta-philosophy of monism.
- Mokṣa* — Liberation from material bondage.
- Nāgara-kīrtana* — *Kīrtana* moving through the town streets.
- Navadvīpa* — Town about 130 kms north of Calcutta in West Bengal. Centre for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and (contested) birthsite of Caitanya.
- Pañcarātrin* — A follower of the ancient Pañcarātra doctrine of Vaiṣṇavism.
- Paraṃparā* — Succession of gurus.
- Parivāra* — See 2.3.3
- Pūjā* — Worship.
- Pūjāri* — Altar priest.
- Purāṇa* — Class of Hindu scripture dealing with mythology, rituals, vows, history, etc.
- Puri* — City on the shore of the Bay of Bengal in Orissa. Centre of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Famous for the temple of Jagannātha. Caitanya spent his last years there.
- Preman* — Ecstatic love of God, the ultimate goal of life according to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.
- Rādhā-kuṇḍa* — The pond of Rādhā, the most holy of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sacred sites. Situated ca. 30 km to the West of Vṇḍāvana town.
- Rāgānugā-sādhana* — The path of spiritual practice that follows the *rāga* or intense attachment of one of the eternally liberated followers of Kṛṣṇa. See 9.2.1.



*Sādhaka-deha* — The physical body of a practitioner.  
*Sādhana* — Spiritual practice.  
*Śaiva* — Devotee of Śiva.  
*Śākta* — Devotee of one of the forms of Śakti, e.g. Durgā.  
*Śakti* — 1) Power, 2) The consort of Śiva.  
*Samādhi* — The grave monument of a buried saint.  
*Sampradāya* — See 2.3.1.  
*Saṃskāra* — Hindu sacrament.  
*Sannyāsin* — Renunciant; a person in the fourth stage of life (see *āśrama*).  
*Śāstra* — Type of Hindu scripture.  
*Siddha-deha* — The perfected spiritual body of a practitioner.  
*Siddha-initiation* — Type of initiation where the disciple is given knowledge of his perfected (*siddha*) spiritual identity.  
*Śikṣā-guru* — Instructing guru.  
*Smārta* — Follower of the Smṛtis; so-called orthodox Hindu, generally adhering to the philosophy of Śaṅkara.  
*Smṛti* — 1) Lit. “remembered”. Class of Hindu scriptures not acknowledged as authoritative by all Hindus. 2) Book of laws.  
*Śrāddha* — Ceremony of offering oblations and rice to the ancestors.  
*Śravaṇa-guru* — A guru from whom one hears scriptural teachings.  
*Śrī-sampradāya* — The *sampradāya* said to stem from Śrī, also known as the Rāmānuja-*sampradāya*.  
*Śrīpat* — Residence of a *gopāla* or *mahānta*. See 2.3.2.  
*Sūtras* — Works on particularly philosophy written in terse code, not considered authoritative by all Hindus.  
*Śruti* — Lit. “heard”. Class of Hindu scriptures comprising for example the Vedic hymns and thought authoritative by all Hindus.  
*Tattva* — Category or class, e.g. *guru-tattva*, the category of the guru.  
*Tilaka* — Secterian mark generally made of clay worn on the forehead and other places of the body. Distinguishes members of different *parivāras* from each other.

- Tulasī*— *Occimum sanctum*, a shrub considered dear to Kṛṣṇa and whose leaves are used in his worship.
- Upacāra*— Article of worship, such as flowers.
- Upanayana*— The ceremony of investing a child from the three higher *varṇas* with the *upavīta* or sacred thread.
- Uttarīya*— Upper garment traditionally worn by Hindu men. A square piece of cloth simply wrapper around the body or worn loose over the shoulders.
- Vaidhī-sādhana*— The type of spiritual practice that follows the injunctions of scripture.
- Vaiṣṇava*— Devotee of Viṣṇu or one of his *avatāras*.
- Vaṃśa*— See 2.3.3
- Varṇa*— Fourfold division of so-called civilised humanity into *brāhmaṇas* or the priestly, intellectual class, *kṣatriyas* or the princely, administrative and martial class, *vaiśyas* or the merchantile and agricultural class and *śūdras* or the labour class.
- Vartma-pradarśaka-guru*— Guru who first introduces a person to spiritual life.
- Varṇāśrama*— The social system based the four *varṇas* and four *āśramas*.
- Vedānta*— One of the six orthodox Hindu schools of philosophy, based primarily on the Upaniṣads and the *Vedānta-sūtras*. Divided into several branches.
- Vedānta-sūtra*— The earliest known treatise on Vedānta philosophy, written by Bādārāyaṇa (4<sup>th</sup> century BC?), considered authoritative by all schools of Vedānta. Also known as *Brahma-sūtra*.
- Veśa*— 1) The loincloth of a *bābājī*, 2) the position of *bābājī*.
- Vilāsa*— Chapter of the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*.
- Viśiṣṭādvaita*— Rāmānuja's Vedānta-philosophy of qualified monism.
- Vṛndavana*— Town six miles north of Mathurā in Uttar Pradesh, India. Also denotes the highest abode of Kṛṣṇa in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology.
- Yantra*— Mystical diagram.



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Few aspects of contemporary Hinduism capture the imagination of Western observers as strongly as the *guru*, popularly seen as a “Godman” or saintly teacher of mystical doctrines – or as a sly misleader of gullible followers. The present study identifies, examines and characterises the guru institution within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, the devotional Hindu movement started by Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486–1533) in Bengal, a movement in which both the doctrine of the guru and his ritual worship has been particularly elaborated. The study is written from the viewpoint of the academic study of religion, incorporating religio-historical as well as anthropological and sociological perspectives and methods. Focusing on the seemingly paradoxical concepts of canon and charisma, it also presents more general conclusions regarding religious authority, the interpretation of sacred texts and the interplay between tradition and innovation.