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Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism

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This article examines various aspects of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition, a Hindu devotional tradition that centres on devotion to the deity Krishna (Kṛṣṇa). First, the entry provides a historical overview, followed by a description of how the tradition views Krishna as an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient personal God. The article goes on to describe the three main components of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition's theological framework. The first of these components is *sambandha*, or relationship. This knowledge of *sambandha* includes knowledge of Krishna's relationship with his *śaktis*, or energies. These *śaktis* are *māyā-śakti* (the material energy which constitutes and creates this phenomenal world); *jīva-śakti* (the living entities); and *svarūpa-śakti* (the Lord's personal energy which consists of his own nature). Krishna is simultaneously both one with and different from his *śaktis*, and the nature of this relationship of oneness and difference is unfathomable (*acintya*) to the human intellect. The second component of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theological framework is *abhidheya*, or spiritual practice. This is divided into various stages that correspond with an individual's degree of devotion for Krishna. The third component is *prayojana*, or the final goal, which is pure love of Krishna (*kṛṣṇa-preman*). After attaining this goal, a self attains spiritual perfection. Finally, the article describes the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition's epistemology, which acknowledges various forms of acquiring knowledge, such as sense perception (*pratyakṣa*), reasoning (*anumāna*), and scriptural testimony (*śabda*).

Keywords: Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, Hinduism, Hindu theology, Vaiṣṇavism, Krishna, Bhakti, Devotion, Epistemology, Hindu practice, Gurus

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1 Historical overview

The Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition (henceforth Caitanya tradition) is a Hindu devotional tradition that centres on devotion to the deity Krishna. For the purposes of this entry, ‘Hindu’ is taken to be an umbrella term that refers to the various religious traditions that have developed on the Indian subcontinent and which are distinguished from other religious traditions such as Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. The Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition is also known as the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, as it originated in the Gauḍa region of India, which includes present-day West Bengal and Bangladesh (Gauḍīya is a derivation of Gauḍa).

This article prefers the term Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism over Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, on the basis that other Vaiṣṇava traditions (apart from Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism) have developed in the Gauḍa region. Thus, it seems more appropriate to use ‘Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism’ as a broader term to refer to these various Vaiṣṇava traditions. Moreover, while Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism originated in the Gauḍa region, it later spread to other parts of India. Since the name ‘Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism’ specifically connotes the Gauḍa region, using this term to describe Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism can place excessive focus on this tradition’s region of origin without capturing the fact that it has a widespread influence beyond this region.

1.1 Origins of the Caitanya tradition

The Caitanya tradition is based on Caitanya’s (1486–1534 CE) life and teachings. Caitanya was born in a Brahmin family in the Nadia district of present-day West Bengal, about 130 kilometers north of Calcutta. In the Hindu social system, Brahmins occupy the highest social role and focus primarily on studying scripture, performing religious duties, teaching scripture, and other related religious activities. There are various biographies and hagiographies of Caitanya that allow us to understand some details of his life. One of the most prominent hagiographies of Caitanya is the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*, which is one of the most authoritative scriptural texts in the Caitanya tradition. It contains many of Caitanya’s teachings and is written by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmin (c. sixteenth century), a prominent thinker in the Caitanya tradition. This text is written primarily in Middle Bengali but also references numerous Sanskrit scriptural verses.

Other notable accounts of Caitanya’s life include the *Caitanyabhāgavata* of Vṛndāvana Dāsa (sixteenth century) and the *Kṛṣṇacaitanyacaritāmṛta* of Murāri Gupta (sixteenth century). These biographies and hagiographies describe that Caitanya was focused on scholarship and was a prominent scholar in the Nadia district. However, Caitanya’s outlook dramatically changed when, at the age of twenty-two, he went on a pilgrimage to Gaya in order to perform the *śrāddha* ceremony (in which one pays homage to one’s dead

ancestors) for his deceased father. On this pilgrimage, Caitanya met his guru, Īśvara Purī, an ascetic from whom Caitanya received initiation into Īśvara Purī's tradition.

After returning from Gaya, Caitanya was no longer interested in scholarship that had no connection with Krishna. Instead, he became 'God-intoxicated', dedicating all his attention to Krishna-*bhakti* (devotion to the deity Krishna). Caitanya soon became the leader of the Vaiṣṇavas, devotees of Vishnu (Viṣṇu) – or Krishna, in the case of certain Vaiṣṇava traditions such as the Caitanya tradition. (Some Vaiṣṇava traditions consider Vishnu to be the original form of God and consider Krishna to be a form of Vishnu that derives from Vishnu. In the Caitanya tradition, Krishna is the original form of God and Vishnu is a derivative form of Krishna.) In 1510, at the age of twenty-four, Caitanya became an ascetic. After that, he travelled extensively across India for several years before spending the remainder of his life in Puri, Orissa.

Caitanya initiated a wave of religious devotion to Krishna that spread across present-day Bengal, Orissa, and the Vṛndāvana area in northern India (Bryant 2017: xxiv). Like other Vaiṣṇava traditions, which centre on devotion (*bhakti*) to Vishnu or Krishna, worship in the Caitanya tradition is aimed at cultivating intense devotional love for Krishna, who is held to be the supreme personal God (Sardella 2012: 182–183). Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas also worship Krishna along with his divine consort Rādhā, the supreme Goddess (Holdrege 2013: 160). Caitanya greatly emphasized the repeated recitation of Krishna's names as a means of achieving the highest spiritual goal of the Caitanya tradition, which is *preman* – unselfish, pure love of Rādhā and Krishna (Bryant 2017: xxiv). In particular, Caitanya is believed to have popularized the chant known as the *mahā-mantra*: *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare*.

Caitanya also emphasized spiritual practices of meditation on Krishna's *līlās* (Krishna's free acts of play), particularly those of Krishna's early life as described in the tenth book of the Hindu sacred text known as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (c. ninth to tenth century CE) (Bryant 2017: xxiv). The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is a highly influential text that emphasizes devotion to Krishna and is considered to be 'one of the most remarkable medieval documents of mystical and passionate religious devotion' (De 1961: 7). Krishna's activities are described extensively in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*'s tenth book, which is considered the text's 'most distinguishing feature' (Majumdar 1969: 35). According to Edwin Bryant, the popularity of this tenth book is the main reason why the text is so influential (Bryant 2017: xix).

Though Caitanya had many followers, six of his followers are worth highlighting. These are the six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana, six theologians Caitanya entrusted to systematically write the Caitanya tradition's teachings, which Caitanya did not do himself (De 1961: 113). The six Gosvāmins, who lived sometime between the fifteenth and the sixteenth

centuries, are Sanātana Gosvāmin, Rūpa Gosvāmin, Raghunātha Gosvāmin, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, and Jīva Gosvāmin. Notably, these six Gosvāmins (particularly Jīva) engage the Caitanya tradition with Vedānta, a prominent Hindu intellectual tradition that centres on spiritual practice and philosophical inquiry into three texts known as the *prasthānatrayī*: (1) the *Brahmasūtra* (c. 300 BCE–300 CE), a text consisting of aphoristic verses (*sūtras*); (2) the Upaniṣads (c. 800–300 BCE), philosophical texts that describe the nature of the self and the ultimate divine reality (*brahman*); and (3) the *Bhagavadgītā* (c. 500 BCE–200 CE), a dialogue between Krishna and his devotee Arjuna, which is one of the most, if not the most, influential Hindu sacred texts. The Caitanya tradition accepts the authority of these three compositions, and it pays special attention to the *Bhagavadgītā* in particular, as Krishna himself directly speaks this text. Many Vedāntic traditions, including the Caitanya tradition, also pay particular attention to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, although it is not considered part of the *prasthānatrayī*. For instance, the Vaiṣṇava traditions associated with Madhva (c.1238–1317 CE) and Vallabha (1479–1531 CE) greatly revere the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

1.2 Present-day Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism

In the present day, various Caitanya Vaiṣṇava organizations continue to follow the teachings of the Gosvāmins and Caitanya. The most well-known of such organizations is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) (for works on different aspects of ISKCON, see Bryant and Ekstrand 2004; Rochford 2007; Karapanagiotis 2021). ISKCON's founder, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (1896–1977), comes from a lineage of gurus that traces its spiritual heritage to the Gosvāmins and Caitanya (for more information about Prabhupāda, see Ketola 2008; Goswami 2008; 2014; Goswami 2012). ISKCON is also known as the 'Hare Krishna Movement', since practitioners within ISKCON strive to follow Caitanya's teachings by repeatedly chanting the previously mentioned *mahā-mantra* (*Hare Krishna...*).

Though not as prominent as ISKCON, the Gauḍīya Maṭha, founded by Prabhupāda's teacher Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī (1874–1937), is another notable Caitanya Vaiṣṇava organization (for more information about Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, see Sardella 2012). Currently, there are various branches of the Gauḍīya Maṭha all across the globe. ISKCON and the Gauḍīya Maṭha are both part of a lineage of teachers tracing back to the Gosvāmins and Caitanya. It is worth noting that although this is a prominent lineage with many important figures within the Caitanya tradition, other lineages (*parivāras*) also trace back to Caitanya. For instance, there are lineages associated with Advaita Ācārya and Gadādhara Paṇḍita, two of Caitanya's closest followers. Although these lineages are also important, it is not possible to cover them all in one entry, and so this article will focus primarily on the lineage of ISKCON and the Gauḍīya Maṭha, which is highly prominent in the present day given the influence of these two organizations. Henceforth,

when discussing the Caitanya tradition, the article will have this lineage in mind. However, various characteristics discussed in connection with this lineage (such as its theological doctrines) are also found in other Caitanya Vaiṣṇava lineages.

One distinguishing feature of the Caitanya tradition is that Caitanya is held to be Krishna himself, though with the devotional sentiments of Krishna's consort Rādhā (*Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.1.5):

rādhā kṛṣṇa-praṇaya-vikṛtir hlādinī śaktir asmād ekātmānāv api bhuvi purā deha-bhedaṃ gatau tau / caitanyākhyam prakāṣam adhunā tad-dvayaṃ caikyam āptaṃ rādhā-bhāva-dyuti-suvalitaṃ naumi kṛṣṇa-svarūpam (Prabhupāda 1998b: 40)

Rādhā is a transformation of love of Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa's pleasure giving energy. Although Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa were previously in two bodies on earth, they have now achieved unity and have manifest in the person known as Caitanya. I offer my respects to Caitanya, whose own form is Kṛṣṇa and who has appeared with the sentiment and luster of Rādhā.

Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas attempt to authenticate this divine identity of Caitanya by pointing to various scriptural verses that are believed to predict Caitanya's advent to this world. For instance, one such verse is *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.5.32 which states:

kṛṣṇa-varṇam tviṣākṛṣṇam sāṅgopāṅgāstra-pārṣadam / yajñaiḥ saṅkīrtana-prāyair yajanti hi su-medhasaḥ (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 261 [book 11])

[In the age of Kali, i.e. the current age] intelligent persons, primarily with the sacrifice of glorification (such as the glorification of Krishna's name), worship [Krishna], whose complexion is black but whose luster is not dark, and who is accompanied by his servitors and weapons.

Caitanya theologians offer an alternative translation of this verse. For instance, Prabhupāda, drawing from the commentaries of previous Caitanya theologians such as Jīva, translates *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.3.52 – which is identical to *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.5.32 – as follows:

In the Age of Kali, intelligent persons perform congregational chanting to worship the incarnation of Godhead who constantly sings the name of Krishna. Although His complexion is not blackish, He is Krishna Himself. He is accompanied by His associates, servants, weapons and confidential companion. (Prabhupāda 1998b: 276–277)

Here, one difference between these translations is that the word *kṛṣṇa-varṇam* is translated as ‘one whose complexion is black’ in the first translation, whereas it is translated as ‘one who constantly sings the name of Krishna’ in the second translation. This second translation aligns closely with Caitanya’s life, as Caitanya constantly chanted the name of Krishna. Nevertheless, in both translations, one finds the idea that in the current age (the age of Kali, one of the cosmological ages described in Hindu cosmology), the primary spiritual practice is the glorification of Krishna. This is indeed what Caitanya did, thus providing a basis for Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas to view this verse as a reference to Caitanya. There are additional verses that Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas draw on to reinforce their claim of Caitanya’s divinity, such as *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 7.9.38. The relevant phrase in this verse is *channaḥ kalau yad abhavas tri-yugo ’tha sa tvam* (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 338 [book 7]). This phrase states that Krishna is concealed (*channa*) in *kali-yuga* (*kalau*), and hence Krishna is known as one who appears in three of the four ages (*tri-yuga*). The Caitanya tradition interprets this verse to refer to Krishna’s advent as Caitanya because in this form, Krishna’s divinity was concealed to the general mass of people because he outwardly appeared as a devotee, and not as God directly.

It is beyond the scope of this entry to examine all such verses, but it suffices to say that Caitanya’s divinity is a distinct doctrine within the Caitanya tradition and that Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas aim to legitimate this claim with reference to Hindu scriptural texts.

This divine identity of Caitanya is but one theological motif within the Caitanya tradition. The next sections will focus more closely on the Caitanya tradition’s various theological ideas. The first of these ideas is that the Caitanya tradition envisions Krishna as all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing. It should be noted that these divine properties are commonly associated with a Christian conception of God, and that the Caitanya tradition highlights other properties Krishna possesses. For instance, the *Brahmasaṃhitā* (c. 1300 CE), an important text within the Caitanya tradition, states that Krishna has a form of eternality (*sat*), knowledge (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*) (*Brahmasaṃhitā* 5.1; Gosvāmī 1991: 3).

Nevertheless, this discussion focuses on Krishna’s goodness, power, and knowledge because these properties are more well-known within the Anglophone world. Moreover, the consideration of these properties in particular paves the way for future comparative exchanges between Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas and practitioners from other religious traditions that may also recognize these divine properties.

The view that Krishna is all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing is found in other Hindu contexts, and is not specific only to the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition. For instance, the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* also contains this view. As such, other Vaiṣṇava traditions that accept the authority of this text will also say that Krishna is a personal God who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.

2 Krishna as the omni-God

The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* describes Krishna's omnibenevolence in several places. For instance, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.3.17 states that God is *bhūri-karuṇā*, meaning the one whose compassion (*karuṇā*) is superabundant or great (*bhūri*) (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 63 [book 8]). *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.87.22 describes God as a benefactor (*hita*), the dear (*priya*) one, and the very self (*ātman*) of a living being (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 1137 [book 10, vol. 6]). *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 7.1.1 adds that God is an individual's well-wisher (*suhṛt*), and is equally disposed (*sama*) to all living beings (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 63 [book 7]).

Bhagavadgītā 4.11 also describes Krishna's equal disposition toward all individuals:

*ye yathā maṃ prapadyante tāṃs tathaiva bhajāmy aham / mama vartmānuvartante
manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ* // (Schweig 2010: 292)

In this verse, Krishna states: 'I share my love with individuals in the same manner as how they submit themselves to me. Humans follow my path universally, O [Arjuna].' As this verse indicates, Krishna's equal disposition to all living beings is best understood to mean that he reciprocates their love according to how they approach him. So, Krishna does not behave towards all individuals in the exact same manner, as individuals may relate to Krishna differently. However, if two individuals are equally devoted to Krishna, Krishna's reciprocal exchanges with these individuals will be equal in the sense that he will not partially reciprocate more with one individual than with the other.

Theologians within the Caitanya tradition also affirm Krishna's omnibenevolence. For instance, Prabhupāda explicitly declares Krishna to be omnibenevolent by writing, 'Kṛṣṇa, God, is all-good' (Prabhupāda 1998d: 693). Prabhupāda also states that Krishna is very friendly towards his devotees and is known as *bhakta-vatsala*, or the affectionate caretaker of his those who are devoted to him (Prabhupāda 1972b). Prabhupāda adds that out of kindness, Krishna removes a self's impurities when one hears about him (Prabhupāda 1972b). Prabhupāda also states that Krishna is anxious about our wellbeing and wants to liberate us from the physical world and bring us back to him (Prabhupāda 1972b).

Having shown that the Caitanya tradition conceives of Krishna as all-good, it is also worth briefly touching on what the Caitanya tradition considers 'goodness' to be. In the Caitanya tradition, the highest good is to develop pure love of Krishna (*preman*), which will be discussed in greater depth later in this entry. The view that pure love of Krishna is the highest good can be deduced from the following propositions, all of which are upheld by the Caitanya tradition: (1) the highest good is that which is ultimately the most beneficial for individuals and secures their highest happiness and wellbeing; (2) pure love for the

greatest person is that which is ultimately the most beneficial for individuals and secures their highest happiness and wellbeing; and (3) Krishna is the greatest person.

So, for the Caitanya tradition, Krishna is all-good because all his actions are oriented around enabling individuals to develop a loving relationship with him as well as deepening the love his devotees have for him, for it is through such love for Krishna that individuals can experience their greatest happiness. Moreover, according to this notion of goodness, humans act in 'good' ways when their worldly actions deepen – indirectly or directly – their devotion to God. Hence, when humans act according to scriptural injunctions such as Krishna's injunctions to practice nonviolence (*ahimsā*) and truthfulness (*satya*) in *Bhagavadgītā* 16.2, their actions are good because the fulfilment of such injunctions strengthens their commitment to Krishna and also positively shapes their character in a manner that is conducive for them to deepen their connection with Krishna. A person's actions are also good if they help others deepen their devotion to God. Conversely, if 'bad' is defined as that which runs counter to 'good', something is bad when it draws an individual away from God.

Krishna's expression of this notion of goodness is exemplified in the doctrine of the *avatāra*, which states that Krishna repeatedly descends to our world in order to perform various functions, such as fighting unrighteousness and providing the opportunity for individuals to know about him so that they can love him. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.8.35 explains that one of Krishna's motives for descending in this manner is to facilitate our hearing, remembrance, and worship of Krishna, as individuals in the world are afflicted by ignorance, desire, and the consequences of their actions (*karman*; Śāstrī 1965–1975: 408 [book 1]).

This is a significant point because, according to the Caitanya tradition, individuals can gradually become freed from the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*) and return to Krishna through the performance of Krishna-*bhakti*, which centres extensively around the remembrance of Krishna's actions and wondrous playful activities (Haberman 1988: 66). Krishna's descent to this world thus illustrates his compassionate longing to enable us to be able to cultivate Krishna-*bhakti*, return to him, and become freed from our worldly sufferings.

The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* also describes Krishna's omnipotence. For example, verse 8.3.9 describes God as *ananta-śakti*, or the one whose power is unlimited (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 54 [book 8]). Verse 10.3.17 states that God is *sarvātman*, or the one whose self is everything (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 497 [book 10, vol. 1]). Several verses throughout the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* assert that the production, the maintenance, and the destruction of this world occur because of Krishna, indicating Krishna's complete sovereignty over the world, such as 10.3.19 (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 497 [book 10, vol. 1]).

Caitanya theologians also affirm Krishna's omnipotence. Prabhupāda states that Krishna 'is the source of Brahmā, Śiva, and all other demigods', further highlighting his supremacy over all finite beings (Prabhupāda 1972a: 655). In his commentary on *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 6.8.32–33, Prabhupāda also explicitly writes, 'the Lord is omnipotent' (Prabhupāda 1998g: 488).

Demonstrating that the Caitanya tradition holds Krishna to be omnipotent is straightforward. However, a more difficult question to address concerning Krishna's omnipotence is whether Krishna controls karmic mechanisms, which administer pain and pleasure to individuals according to the moral quality of their actions. Scholars such as Wendy Doniger argue that Krishna's omnipotence would be undermined if Krishna were unable to directly control karmic mechanisms (Doniger 1980: 14). The consistent view of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is that Krishna does directly control karmic mechanisms, along with other various aspects of this world. *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 2.5.21 states:

*kālaṃ karma svabhāvaṃ ca māyeśo māyayā svayā / ātman yadṛcchayā prāptaṃ
vibubhūṣur upādade //* (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 189 [book 2])

Desiring to expand himself, Krishna, the controller of *māyā*, by his own will, accepted things obtained in the self, i.e. time, *karman*, and one's own nature, by Krishna's own *māyā*.

This verse indicates both Krishna's voluntary acceptance of karmic processes and illustrates Krishna's sovereign command over them. Furthermore, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 2.5.14 states that *karman* is not something other than or beyond Krishna (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 177 [book 2]).

Moreover, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 2.10.12 affirms that the karmic mechanisms exist because of Krishna's support (*yad-anugrahataḥ*). It also asserts that the karmic mechanisms would cease to exist if Krishna were to abandon (*yad-upekṣā*) them, thus illustrating that they require Krishna to continually sustain them (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 472 [book 2]).

The Caitanya tradition also states that Krishna can also intervene in karmic processes and prevent his devotees from experiencing the consequences of their actions that they were previously destined to experience (Buchta 2016). Hence, according to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the Caitanya tradition, Krishna's omnipotence indeed extends into the domain of karmic operations.

The Caitanya tradition also upholds Krishna's omniscience. For instance, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 6.8.33 explicitly states that God is omniscient (*sarva-jña*; Śāstrī 1965–1975: 270 [book 6]). Prabhupāda affirms this point as well in his commentary on

Bhāgavatapurāṇa 6.8.32–33 (1998g: 488). A related question is, therefore, whether Krishna also has foreknowledge (knowledge of future events). According to *Bhagavadgītā* 7.26, Krishna does possess knowledge of future events (*bhaviṣya*) (Schweig 2010: 299). Prabhupāda also affirms this point in his commentary on this verse (1972a: 524–525).

3 Relationship

Having illustrated that the Caitanya tradition conceptualizes Krishna as the omni-God, the following three sections focus on the main components of the Caitanya tradition's theological framework. The first of these three components is *sambandha*, or relationship. This includes knowledge of individual selves, the world, God, and the interrelationship between these three.

For Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, each individual self is an immaterial living being and is only temporarily associated with a specific physical body for the duration of a particular lifetime. This means that selves are distinct from their physical bodies. The self's original nature or form (*svarūpa*) is as Krishna's perpetual servitor (*Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 2.20.108; Prabhupāda 1998b: 3363).

Krishna is conceived of as the supreme person, God, who is worshipped along with his divine consort Rādhā (Sardella 2012: 182–183). However, it should be noted that Caitanya theologians such as Jīva state that Krishna also manifests himself as the *paramātmā*, or the 'inner controller, inspirer, and support of the cosmos' who directs the physical world and individuals (Gupta 2007: 35). Moreover, Krishna possesses a nonpersonal aspect, which is considered to be the effulgence of Krishna's supramundane body. The Caitanya tradition refers to this effulgence as *brahman*. For instance, *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1.2.5 states:

yad advaitaṁ brahmopaniṣadi tad apy asya tanu-bhā

That non-dual *brahman* which is described in the Upaniṣads is the effulgence of [Krishna's] body. (Prabhupāda 1998a: 39)

Here, it is worth elaborating on the term *brahman*. *Brahman* is the closest Sanskrit equivalent to the word 'God'; however, it is important to note that there can be various conceptions of *brahman*. The Caitanya tradition holds that there is a personal *brahman*, which is Krishna, the highest divine reality. This tradition also holds that there is a non-personal *brahman*, which is the effulgence of Krishna noted above.

Although the Caitanya tradition conceives of God specifically as Krishna, one can find views within the Caitanya tradition that describe a unity amongst the world's various

religions. For instance, the Caitanya theologian Bhaktivinoda Thakur (1838–1914), a prominent theologian within the Caitanya tradition and the father of Prabhupāda's guru Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, argued that the world's various religions are referring to the same one God, although the manner that they conceive of God differs according to differences in their religious differences, mentalities, cultural differences, and so on (Thakura 2017: 4–5). Prabhupāda also asserts, 'God is one, God cannot be two. It is not that Hindus have got one God and Christians have got another God. No. God cannot be two' (Prabhupāda 1972c).

Moreover, Krishna has three fundamental 'energies' (*śaktis*). According to Ravi Gupta (2007: 42, 205), these *śaktis* are 'the *māyā-śakti* (the material energy which constitutes and creates this phenomenal world), *jīva-śakti* (the living entities), and *svarūpa-śakti* (the Lord's personal energy which consists of His own nature).' Through the agency of *māyā-śakti*, Krishna is both the universe's material cause (the material that an effect is made of, e.g. the material cause of a table is the wood from which it is made) and its efficient cause (what causes a change in the material cause so as to produce an effect, e.g. the efficient cause of a table is the carpenter who fashions wood into the table). This same *māyā-śakti* is responsible, through the power of ignorance (*avidyā*), for both deluding selves into forgetting their original innate knowledge (Gupta 2007: 42, 205) and for liberating selves through the power of knowledge (*vidyā*) (Gupta 2007: 205). It should also be noted that although the *māyā-śakti* rests within Krishna and comes from Krishna, Krishna is not subject to its binding influence (Gupta 2007: 205).

The term *māyā* is often used interchangeably with the term *prakṛti* within the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (Gupta 2020: 53). In such contexts, *māyā* or *prakṛti* refers to the physical world, and every physical object can be said to be encapsulated within *prakṛti*. From another perspective, *prakṛti* can be viewed as the substratum or underlying substance that all physical entities are composed of. From this perspective, *prakṛti* is analogous to matter. Paul Schweizer treats 'matter' and '*prakṛti*' as rough synonymous terms, with the caveat that *prakṛti* is not to be identified with the particles that make up physical objects and is instead 'the *metaphysical* principle which underlies physical manifestations' (1993: 847, original emphasis).

All finite selves are considered one of Krishna's *śaktis* (*jīva-śakti*). There are innumerable *jīvas*, and each one is numerically different from the other *jīvas*. Nevertheless, despite the distinct personality of each *jīva*, each one possesses a similar spiritual nature as an immaterial being (Gupta 2007: 205).

Next, the *svarūpa-śakti* itself can be divided into three categories, namely, '*sandhinī* (the Lord's power of existence), *samvit* (the power of knowledge), and *hlādhinī* (the power of bliss)' (Gupta 2007: 204). These three aspects of the *svarūpa-śakti* also correspond to

Krishna's tripartite nature of *sat* (eternal existence), *cit* (knowledge), and *ānanda* (bliss) (Gupta 2007: 41). The question of the interrelationship between Krishna and the *śaktis* has conceptual parallels to debates about the interrelationship between God, selves, and the world within other Vedāntic traditions. The Caitanya tradition's theological stance on this matter, which Jīva puts forth, is that the relationship between Krishna and his various *śaktis* is that of unfathomable simultaneous oneness and difference (*acintya-bhedābheda*; Gupta 2007: 205). One analogy often given to describe this unfathomable (*acintya*) relationship is that of a fire and a spark that emanates from this fire (*Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 2.20.108–109; 2.20.108; Prabhupāda 1998b: 3363)

Just as a particular spark is simultaneously distinct from and connected to the fire from which it emanates, Krishna's and Krishna's *śaktis*, too, have a similar relationship of difference and non-difference. It is worth noting that these selves are not created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) at a specific temporal point. Rather, according to Hindu scriptural texts such as the *Bhagavadgītā*, they exist eternally without having been brought into existence (*Bhagavadgītā* 2.12; Schweig 2010: 286).

4 Practice

The next component of the Caitanya tradition's theological framework is *abhidheya*, or practice. Specifically, this practice is the continual performance of various devotional activities intended to enable individuals to deepen their love and devotion for Krishna. By performing such devotional activities, a person can become more spiritually and morally pure due to eliminating their *anarthas* or vices, such as lust, anger, and greed. Ultimately, selves can become completely spiritually and morally pure, at which point they can awaken the pure love of Krishna lying dormant within them.

Rūpa Gosvāmin divides the practice of Krishna-*bhakti* into the following subcategories and discusses them at length in the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (c. sixteenth century CE), a comprehensive description of Krishna-*bhakti* that focuses extensively on spiritual practice and aesthetics:

(1) *Sādhana-bhakti*: the performance of Krishna-*bhakti* in which one adheres to a spiritual regimen in order to gradually progress toward the attainment of *preman*. It can be subdivided into the following two categories:

- (a) *Vaidhi-bhakti-sādhana*: the performance of Krishna-*bhakti* that is rooted in adherence to *vidhis*, or scriptural rules and injunctions, such as the injunctions to glorify the names of Krishna. According to Rūpa, there are sixty-four *aṅgas* (limbs, components, or items of worship) of *vaidhi-bhakti-sādhana* (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.74–96; Gosvāmin and Haberman 2003: 35–39). The five most important *aṅgas* are faithfully and lovingly serving the feet of the *mūrti* (statue or icon of the deity),

relishing the meanings of the verses of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, freely choosing the company of affectionate and like-minded devotees, glorifying the auspicious names of God, and residing in the holy district of Mathurā in northern India (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.90–92). When a devotee has sufficiently progressed in their performance of *vaidhi-bhakti-sādhana*, they can proceed to practice *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* or *bhāva-bhakti-sādhana*.

- (b) *Rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*: the performance of Krishna-*bhakti* that follows, or is in conformity to, the Krishna-*bhakti* appearing distinctively in the inhabitants of the celestial Vṛndāvana (Krishna's abode in a divine realm beyond this physical world; (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.270). A practitioner of *rāgānugā-bhakti* continues to perform *bhakti* with one's physical body (*sādhaka-rūpeṇa*) according to the *aṅgas* of *bhakti*; however, in addition, one performs service to Krishna with one's *siddha-deha* (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.295), which Jīva states is a spiritual body suitable for Krishna's service that is contemplated and desired internally (*Durgasaṅgamanī* 1.2.295). Thus, *rāgānugā-bhakti* is practiced simultaneously with one's physical body and the spiritual *siddha-deha*. Through such performance of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana*, one can arrive at *bhāva-bhakti*.

(2) *Bhāva-bhakti*: the performance of Krishna-*bhakti* in which one experiences great emotion (*bhāva*) for Krishna while performing the *aṅgas* of *bhakti*. This is an intermediate stage between *sādhana-bhakti* and *prema-bhakti*, which is the final development of *bhakti*. Rūpa introduces this category of *bhakti* in *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.3.1.

(3) *Prema-bhakti*: the most mature stage of *bhakti* in which one possesses pure love of Krishna (*preman*) and becomes a perfected self (*siddha*). Attainment of *preman* is viewed as the Caitanya tradition's ultimate spiritual goal (*prayojana*).

Since its inception, the Caitanya tradition has valued the performance of Krishna-*bhakti* within devotional communities, which were often more egalitarian than the society in which this tradition existed. For instance, as Joseph O'Connell has argued, though the Caitanya tradition did not radically transform the hierarchical social structures of its time, it did improve them and led to less discrimination based on gender and caste (O'Connell 1990; Lutjeharms and O'Connell 2018). Within these communities, Caitanya Vaiṣṇava practitioners have emphasized the *aṅgas* of *bhakti* that Rūpa Gosvāmin describes and elaborates. In particular, these groups and organizations place a special emphasis on the glorying of Krishna's names in a group setting, a process known as *kīrtana*, which is also referred to as *saṁkīrtana* when performed collectively (for an overview of the history of *kīrtana* and its impact on Bengali society, see Sanyal 1989). Specifically, Caitanya Vaiṣṇava practitioners often glorify Krishna's names through the previously described *mahā-mantra* (section 1.1).

Historically, the Caitanya tradition's communities have been centred on temples to Rādhā and Krishna. (For an overview on worship in various temples associated with the Caitanya tradition, see Case 2000; Ghosh 2005; Valpey 2006; Packert 2010.) In these temples, one can see a visual representation of Rādhā and Krishna, often in the form of a carved marble sculpture of these deities. These deities are often worshipped with various offerings multiple times a day, consisting of flowers, water, incense, lamps, and other items. An important part of temple worship is also singing *kīrtana* or other devotional songs for the deities, which often accompanies the offerings. Furthermore, temples often hold lectures on various scriptural texts such as the *Bhagavadgītā* and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Many ISKCON temples, for instance, commonly have one or two of these lectures daily.

Yet, worship in the Caitanya tradition does not take place exclusively in temples. Caitanya Vaiṣṇava traditions often gather in each other's homes to discuss scriptural texts, perform *kīrtana*, and take *prasādam*, or food that has been ritually offered to Rādhā and Krishna before being eaten. In recent years, ISKCON in particular has re-branded its spiritual practices in order to attract a global audience. Thus, one can now find Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas performing the *aṅgas* of Krishna-*bhakti* in a wide variety of spaces, including yoga studios, urban spiritual lounges, and meditation retreat centres (Karapanagiotis 2021).

5 Pure love of Krishna

As indicated above, through one's spiritual practice one can attain pure love of Krishna, or *preman*, which the Caitanya tradition views as spiritual perfection. Someone who attains *preman* experiences spiritual *rasa*, the worldly counterpart of which is a central idea in Indian aesthetics. According to David Haberman, '*rasa* originally meant "sap," "essence," or "taste"; though, in the context of Indian aesthetics, it can best be translated as "dramatic sentiment" or aesthetic enjoyment' (Haberman 1988: 13). When the term *rasa* is used in the Caitanya tradition, it is imbued with a theological significance that denotes the supramundane taste that a devotee experiences or savours in their relationship with Krishna. (An in-depth exploration of the Caitanya tradition's views on *rasa* is beyond the scope of this work; however, see Schweig and Buchta 2010 and Holdrege 2015: 88–94 for further discussion of the topic of *rasa* as it pertains to the Caitanya tradition.)

Within the Caitanya tradition, it is also believed that the attainment of *preman* leads one to experience the highest happiness that one can attain. For instance, Jīva states that the bliss obtained through absorption in the happiness of *brahman* (taken here to mean Krishna's bodily radiant splendour) for hundreds of billions of years cannot compare to even a drop of the ocean of happiness of *preman* (*Durgasaṅgamanī* 1.1.38).

Notably, the happiness of *brahman* is also considered to be superior to worldly happiness. Prabhupāda suggests this by making a distinction between three types of

happiness: ‘(1) happiness derived from material enjoyment, (2) happiness derived by identifying oneself with the Supreme *brahman* and (3) happiness derived from Kṛṣṇa consciousness’ (Prabhupāda 1998c: 20). Here, it is implied that (3) is greater than (2) and (1), and it is also implied that (2) is greater than (1). Thus, the happiness of *preman* is believed to be immeasurably greater than any other form of happiness.

By attaining *preman*, the devotee qualifies themselves, following their death (Prabhupāda 1998g: 133), to enter the divine realm (*vaikuṇṭha* or *paravyoma*) (Holdrege 2013: 161) in which Krishna and his manifold forms reside. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and related works describe this realm as a transcendental place of perfection where no suffering exists at all. (For lengthier descriptions of this realm, see *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 2.9.9–12 and Sanātana’s *Bṛhadbhāgavatāmṛta*, Gosvāmin and Dāsa 2002.) In this abode, Krishna enjoys and participates in *līlā*, which are his divine acts of freely performed play that he enacts with his devotees for his own enjoyment as well as theirs. Periodically, Krishna comes down to this earth to display his *līlā*, which is *prakaṭa*, or visible to ordinary eyes (Prabhupāda 1998f: 70). *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 2.20.391 and 2.20.393 state that Krishna continually performs his *prakaṭa-līlā* (visible acts of play) in one universe after another (Prabhupāda 1998b: 3603–3604, 3606). This can be understood against the cosmological backdrop of scriptural verses such as *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.16.39, which conceive of the physical realm as comprised of innumerable universes (*aṇḍāni koṭīśaḥ*) (Śāstrī 1965–1975: 723 [book 11]).

The description of the Caitanya tradition’s theological framework given in the above three sections can be summarized as follows. The self is an immaterial living being whose ontological nature is that of a devoted servant of Krishna. Through the performance of *bhakti*, the self can intensify its devotional love for Krishna and ultimately attain spiritual perfection (*preman*), which enables it to enter Krishna’s abode, participate in Krishna’s *līlā*, and experience *rasa*.

6 Epistemology

Having described the three components of the Caitanya tradition’s theological framework, this section outlines some important aspects of its epistemology, beginning with the work of Jīva. Jīva’s *Tattvasandarbhā* is a foundational treatise on epistemology within the Caitanya tradition. In the *Tattvasandarbhā*, Jīva discusses three means of acquiring knowing (*prāmaṇas*). The first of these means of knowing is *śabda*, or scriptural testimony. Jīva takes *śabda* to be the most reliable means of attaining knowledge about the divine reality (*Tattvasandarbhā* 10; Gosvāmin and Śāstrī 1983: 17). Jīva’s reasoning for this claim is that the other means of acquiring knowledge, namely sensory perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inferential reasoning (*anumāna*), are insufficient means of apprehending God (*Tattvasandarbhā* 9; Gosvāmin and Śāstrī 1983: 11–12).

Jīva explains that *pratyakṣa* is not as epistemically authoritative as *śabda* because selves have four basic defects (*Tattvasandarbhā* 9; Gosvāmin and Śāstri 1983: 11–12): (1) *bhrama*, the tendency to commit mistakes; (2) *pramāda*, the tendency to become subject to illusion; (3) *vipralipsā*, the desire to cheat others; and (4) *karaṇāpātava*, deficiency in sense-capacities. Jīva also explains that worldly *pratyakṣa* cannot comprehend a divine reality whose nature is supramundane and inconceivable (*Tattvasandarbhā* 9). According to Jīva, *anumāna* also cannot provide wholly authoritative knowledge about a divine reality. Jīva’s reasoning in this defence of this claim is his citation of *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.11: ‘Logical reasoning has no solid foundation’ (*Tattvasandarbhā* 11; Gosvāmin and Śāstri 1983: 20). In other words, because reasoning can be used to support whatever position one wishes to defend (evidenced by the fact that there is widespread disagreement on philosophical issues), it cannot provide wholly authoritative knowledge about the divine reality.

Thus, for Jīva, the primary means of knowing God is *śabda*, scriptural testimony. Other Caitanya theologians affirm this point, such as Prabhupāda (1998b: 3573). This is not to say that *pratyakṣa* or *anumāna* are wholly unreliable means of acquiring some measure of knowledge of the world and God. Jīva mentions that one can acquire knowledge through *pratyakṣa*, although such knowledge is not infallible (*Sarvasaṃvādinī* 10; Gosvāmin 1965: 9, cited from an unspecified passage from Vacāspati Miśra’s *Bhāmatī*, which is his commentary on Śaṅkara’s commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*).

As Jīva also mentions, *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* can also be employed in order to assist the interpretation of scripture (*Sarvasaṃvādinī* 9; Gosvāmin 1965: 5). For instance, Jīva explains that ascertaining one’s viewpoint through inferential reasoning (*tātparyā-nirṇaya*) is one of several hermeneutical tools that can be used to understand the meaning of scripture (*Sarvasaṃvādinī* 11; Gosvāmin 1965: 18; here Jīva draws from a verse that is purportedly from a text called the *Brhatsaṃhitā*).

The Caitanya theologian Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa (c. eighteenth century CE) echoes this perspective and explains that *ūha*, or reasoning, can be employed in order to understand the intended meaning of a scriptural passage (*Gītābhūṣaṇa* 1.1.3; Vidyabhūṣaṇa 1965: 9).

Moreover, in the Caitanya tradition and several other Hindu religious traditions, a guru plays an important role in transmitting the knowledge contained in scriptural texts. The role of a guru in the Caitanya tradition is so important, in fact, that it is common to encounter the view that a guru is as good as God (Ketola 2008: 62; Broo 2003: 78–80). What this means is open to interpretation, and one can find different perspectives among different Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas. In what follows, the article will clarify what it means for the guru to be as good as God according to the author’s own perspective, which draws heavily on the work of Jīva and a few other Caitanya theologians. The discussion will pay special attention to Jīva, since he wrote extensively on this topic.

Jīva states that there are three primary reasons why the guru is to be seen as being as good as God. The first reason is that the guru is deserving of the same respect as God (*Bhaktisandarbha* 211; Gosvāmin and Śāstri 1985: 438). The second reason is that the guru is like God because they are merciful and can liberate one from ignorance (*Bhaktisandarbha* 212; Gosvāmin and Śāstri 1985: 438). The third reason is that there is a devotional relationship between the guru and God that forges a union between the guru and God (*Bhaktisandarbha* 213; Gosvāmin and Śāstri 1985: 439).

Understanding a guru's sphere of epistemic authority is also important. There are two extremes to avoid regarding this understanding. One extreme is that one views a guru as an ordinary human being. Prabhupāda highlights one danger of this view: one can fail to avail oneself of a guru's soteriological guidance and miss the opportunity to attain *preman* (Prabhupāda 1998e: 234). Another extreme is that one understands the guru to be fully God and that the guru possesses God's omniscience and omnipotence. The danger of this view is that one can mistake a guru's somewhat opinionated claims on various subject matters, such as science, social issues, politics, etc., to be wholly authoritative when such statements are not. So, the question can be asked: Why exactly does a guru who is held to be spiritually perfect have greater epistemic authority than an ordinary self?

Jīva's writings provide an answer to this question. He states that, like God, the devotees (which can be understood here to mean advanced practitioners of Krishna-*bhakti*) are not overcome by ignorance (*Sarvasaṃvādinī* 10; Gosvāmin 1965: 10). As this statement implies, ordinary world-bound individuals are affected by such ignorance. Indeed, Jīva later explains that it is difficult for non-omniscient individuals to understand the meaning of scriptural texts (*Sarvasaṃvādinī* 11; Gosvāmin 1965: 12).

However, he mentions that the scriptural teachings can be fully understood when distinguished individuals who possess the necessary perception to master the meaning of scripture acquire insight into scriptural truths through their own experience (*Sarvasaṃvādinī* 11). Jīva also adds that logicians cannot comprehend such scriptural truths (*Sarvasaṃvādinī* 11). Elsewhere, Jīva cites a verse purportedly from a text called the *Puruṣottamatantra*. This verse states: 'The highest form of knowledge is experience connected with the meaning of scripture' (*Sarvasaṃvādinī* 11; Gosvāmin 1965: 12).

From these statements, one can infer that an advanced spiritual practitioner is not influenced by ignorance, and can comprehend the intended meaning of scripture because of their scripturally rooted experience and spiritually attuned perception.

Thus, according to Jīva, a guru possesses epistemic authority when they communicate the messages found in scripture since, by virtue of a guru's spiritual purity and experience, they can accurately relay the intended meanings of such scriptural teachings. Thus, within the Caitanya tradition, theologians such as Prabhupāda emphasize that a spiritually

perfected individual repeats the message of God without adulteration (Prabhupāda 1977). This claim suggests that such a guru is not perfect because they possess absolute epistemic authority. Rather, a guru recognizes their epistemic limitations when they attempt to acquire knowledge independently of scriptural testimony.

The above points thus support the following principle for interpreting the teachings of a guru: the guru is infallible when they reference scripture, but not otherwise. The Caitanya tradition's scriptural texts and theologians both support this principle. For instance, *Bhagavadgītā* 4.34 indicates that one should approach a wise individual (such as a guru) who possesses knowledge, has seen the truth, and can impart this spiritual knowledge to others (Schweig 2010: 293).

However, this verse does not indicate that such a wise individual has infallible knowledge when such knowledge is not contained within scripture. Although such a person is held to be a seer of the truth (*tattva-darśina*), it is important to note that the term used in *Bhagavadgītā* 4.34 is *tattva*, which connotes the truth about ultimate reality and not the truth about ordinary mundane entities. This is particularly true in the Caitanya tradition, where *tattva* can mean the truth about a particular theological motif. For instance, *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 2.25.265 describes six types of *tattvas*, namely, the truth about (1) Krishna (*kṛṣṇa-tattva*), (2) *bhakti* (*bhakti-tattva*), (3) pure love of God (*prema-tattva*), (4) devotional ecstasy (*bhāva-tattva*), (5) aesthetic sentiments (*rasa-tattva*), and (6) God's playful activities (*līlā-tattva*) (Prabhupāda 1998b: 4528).

Moreover, in his commentary on *Bhagavadgītā* 4.34, Baladeva states that the one possessing knowledge can provide others with knowledge about (a) the self's original form (*jīva-svarūpa*), (b) the self's relationship with God (*parātmā-sambandhi-jñānam*), and (c) the spiritual means of realizing the self's original form (*tat-sādhanaṁ*; Gītabhūṣaṇa 4.34) (Vidyabhūṣaṇa 1965: 141).

Yet, crucially, Baladeva does not state that one should approach the one possessing knowledge for *mundane* knowledge. Thus, from his comments, it can be concluded that one should approach a wise individual in order to acquire the *supramundane* knowledge contained in scripture, and no clear indication is given by Krishna or by Baladeva that an individual possessing knowledge (such as a guru) can, with epistemic infallibility, impart *ordinary* knowledge to their students. Taken together, these points support the conclusion that the Caitanya tradition only considers a guru's statements referring to scripture to be wholly authoritative.

This section has considered certain aspects of the Caitanya tradition's epistemological framework that have their basis in the writings of Jīva. However, the Caitanya tradition is a dynamic tradition that has evolved over the last five centuries. Therefore, one finds later Caitanya theologians expanding the accepted means of acquiring knowledge within the

Caitanya tradition. For instance, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhakur included ‘innate intuition’ (a type of intuition that individuals innately possess) as a means of knowing for the Caitanya tradition (Ghosh 2019). In more recent times, Prabhupāda was well known for emphasizing the epistemic value of spiritual experiences, such as those one can have while chanting the names of Krishna. Yet, though the Caitanya tradition’s epistemological framework has expanded since its inception, scriptural authority – *śabda* – has remained the most important means of knowing the divine reality.

7 Conclusion

This article has discussed various aspects of the Caitanya tradition, spanning its history, theology, and epistemology. In short, the Caitanya tradition is based on the life and the teachings of Caitanya, who spread Krishna throughout various regions of India, such as present-day West Bengal and Vṛndāvana. The Caitanya tradition includes many lineages and organizations.

The teachings of the lineage to which ISKCON and Gauḍīya Maṭha belong – and which are found in other lineages – may be summarized as follows. Individuals are spiritual selves and servitors of Krishna, who has various divine attributes, such as omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and omniscience. Through the performance of Krishna-*bhakti*, which includes practices such as the glorification of Krishna’s name (*kīrtana*) and temple worship, individuals can attain the ultimate spiritual goal of the Caitanya tradition, which is to develop a loving relationship with Krishna. Caitanya Vaiṣṇava practitioners perform Krishna-*bhakti* in devotional communities. These communities have often centred around temples, although the performance of Krishna-*bhakti* is not limited to temples and can also be performed in homes. In recent years, Caitanya Vaiṣṇava practitioners within ISKCON have performed Krishna-*bhakti* in a wide variety of spaces, including yoga studios and retreat centres.

Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism holds that individuals can understand Krishna and to develop a relationship with him through scriptural testimony. Notable scriptural texts of the Caitanya tradition include (1) the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is one of the most influential Hindu scriptural texts and is spoken directly by Krishna to his devotee Arjuna; (2) the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which is another influential Hindu sacred text and focuses extensively on devotion to Krishna, particularly in its tenth book; (3) the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*, which describes the life of Caitanya and contains many of his teachings; and (4) the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, which describes the performance of Krishna-*bhakti* in great detail.

Furthermore, according to the Caitanya tradition, scriptural teachings are best understood through a guru. There are various interpretations of a guru’s authority, including the view

presented here that a guru has spiritual authority because their spiritual purity enables them to properly understand the meaning of scriptural texts.

8 Notes on translations

All translations from Sanskrit and Bengali texts are in quotation marks or in block quotations and are the author's own unless otherwise indicated. The author also paraphrases these texts, and these paraphrases are not in quotations. When a text is translated or paraphrased, the relevant reference is provided. The author's translations of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* are based on Kṛṣṇaśaṅkara Śāstrī's edition of the text (Śāstrī 1965–1975). In many cases, the author's paraphrases of this text are also based on this edition. However, at other times, the author's paraphrases of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* are based on J. L. Shastri's and G. V. Tagare's (1950) translation of it as found in their edition of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

9 Notes on further reading

This article is intended to provide a brief overview of some important aspects of the Caitanya tradition. This entry is informed by and draws on the author's previous research on Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism (Gupta 2020; 2022a; 2022b).

However, in addition to this article, there is a vast amount of literature on the Caitanya tradition and various organizations included in this tradition, such as ISKCON. For readers interested in learning more about the Caitanya tradition, the following works represent notable contributions to the scholarship on this tradition and are worth exploring. However, this is not intended to be an exhaustive list of major Caitanya Vaiṣṇava scholarship.

Two comprehensive overviews of the Caitanya tradition are Valpey (2011) and Gupta (2013). Silvestre, Herbert, and Göcke (2023) provide an edited volume containing various chapters that philosophically examine different teachings of the Caitanya tradition. Holdrege (2015) also examines various aspects of the Caitanya tradition.

Wong (2015) provides a helpful overview of the scholarly literature on Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism prior to 2015. Gupta (2016) offers an edited volume that introduces key thinkers and ideas within the Caitanya tradition. Haberman (1988) examines *rāgānuga-bhakti* in significant depth. Gupta (2007) examines Jīva's important work known as the *Ṣatsandarbhāṣa*.

Bryant and Ekstrand (2004) hone in on various aspects of ISKCON. Valpey (2006) offers a study of temple worship in the Caitanya tradition, with specific focus on the Rādhāramaṇa temple in Vṛndāvana and ISKCON's Bhaktivedānta Manor in London. Karapanagiotis (2021) studies how ISKCON has rebranded its spiritual practices for a global audience.

Okita (2014) explores how the religious policies of Jaisingh II influenced the self-representation of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. Bhatia (2017) examines the Caitanya tradition and its representation of Caitanya in colonial Bengal, and Sardella and Wong (2019) examines the religious, social, and cultural roles that Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism played there. Lutjeharms and O’Connell (2018) consider the social implications of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal.

Lutjeharms (2018) provides an in-depth study of the influential Caitanya Vaiṣṇava poet Kavikaṇapūra and his guru Śrīnātha. Patel (2023) explores the Caitanya tradition’s theological contributions to public engagement in North India during the early eighteenth century.

Attributions

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