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Why Ritual? An Eighteenth-Century Debate

In the year 1727, the doctrine and practice propagated by the seventeenth-century-teacher Rūpa Kavirāja were declared heterodox and his followers criminal.¹ The religious leaders (*mahants*) representing his tradition were deprived of their rights over religious estates and their faculty to teach. The Maharaja of Amer, Jaisingh II (r. 1700–1743), passed this decision in his capacity as Governor of Agra and Faujdār of Mathura, positions he had held since 1722. Rūpa Kavirāja belonged to the Gauḍīya tradition of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* and thereby to a powerful branch of Vaiṣṇavism which had contributed to the reformulation of Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy since the fifteenth century. It was part of the “four orders” of Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy which adhered to a both Vedic and Vaiṣṇava tradition, much indebted also to the Tantric tradition. The case of Rūpa Kavirāja was just one out of the many cases in the process of which the king of Amer/Jaipur reshaped the Vaiṣṇava orders and the structure of religious power in North India. Rūpa Kavirāja’s case is of topical interest because, apart from raising a host of other salient questions, it foregrounded the fundamental question why there should be ritual at all if a person had attained perfected devotion. This issue was crucial to the Vaiṣṇavas, but in addition addressed broader concerns as one tried to come to terms with all those religious groups that were critical of ritual on the whole or with respect to renouncers who deemed themselves exempt from it. Thus, a seemingly sectarian conflict had great consequences for state approval or disapproval of religious orders, lifestyles and the social and material position of religious groups. The issue of the doctrine of Rūpa Kavirāja formed but one, albeit particularly grave and consequential, concern in the religious policy of the

1 This contribution covers a facet of the religious debates conducted at the court of Jaisingh II on which I am currently preparing a study. I acknowledge gratefully the support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft which enabled me to collect the relevant manuscript material in 1987 and 1988. I also thank the participants of the seminar at which the first version of this paper was first presented for their comments, notably Professor Alexis Sanderson. For the case of Rūpa Kavirāja, see Bansal 1980: 504–506; Haberman 1988: 98–104.

first third of the eighteenth century. It was only in the 1730s that the debate was concluded.

As for Rūpa, his case hurt the Gauḍīya order to the quick, and, for that matter, also the other Vaiṣṇava orders. Rūpa raised questions that had been virulent since the beginning of the tradition, and especially the case of ritual was one such issue. No wonder that his approach failed to be suppressed by the solution proffered by as great a philosopher as Viśvanātha Cakravartī, who nevertheless set in motion formidable and persisting changes in the tradition.² The issue had an eminently social aspect, for there roamed renouncers through both Braj and Jaipur who in the name of god-madness sported a religiously or otherwise female persona thereby imitating the exemplary female companions of Kṛṣṇa and Rām, as he was worshipped by the followers of the Rāmarasikasampradāya.³ These renouncers were thereby felt to be well on the way to making a travesty of their own order and eroding Vaiṣṇavism as a whole.

Rūpa's stance proved so enduring because religious transgression of gender also related to, and was supported by, popular religious usage and, parallel to this, in aesthetics, by a well-established gentle oscillation in male-female identity. It could therefore not be eradicated by a stroke of the pen. A powerful pen, however, to be wielded to this effect was that of the Sārvabhauma Kṛṣṇadeva Bhaṭṭācārya, who, on the order of the Mahārājā, wrote the treatises by which the king eventually proceeded. It took more than a decade to pass the aforementioned verdict, and it took even longer for it to gain lasting impact.

Before I go into the issue of ritual itself, I will, first, briefly make mention of the basic assumptions on which the ritual conflict hinges, aspects of which I will discuss here, and, secondly, say something about the Sārvabhauma himself.

In the Gauḍīya doctrine, elaborated by the Gosvāmīs of Vrindaban, who were authorised by the founder of the Gauḍīya order, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu (traditionally dated 1486–1533), two assumptions are important from the point of view of ritual. One is that the perfection of the devotee leads through various stages of practice, starting with the execution of ritual injunctions which, as faith grows, leads on to the desire to learn more about Bhagavat,⁴ hence to mixing with the like-minded. The process of spiritual perfection is inseparable from practising ritual, religious discipline and complying with Vaiṣṇava ethics. This is called the *vaidhībhakti*. As perfection grows, the devotee develops *bhāva*. The

2 See Haberman 1988: 104–114.

3 For this, see Siṃha V.S. 2014.

4 In congruence with the Gauḍīya doctrine, I am using the term Bhagavat, who is Kṛṣṇa and the manifestation of God in his true form.

growing religious accomplishment entails a problem. As Dimock put it so lucidly (*Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 1999: 120–21),

It is obvious that if love is the proper relationship between man and God, the more intense the love the more intense the religious experience and satisfaction. Being pragmatists, the Vaiṣṇavas observe that of these kinds of love relationships, passionate love is the most intense. This, then, is the *bhāva*. But it is equally obvious that passionate love for a male is the only one among these relationships which is not typically available to a male worshipper in particular experience. So *bhāva* also means the transformation of one's self into the condition of a *gopī*. And this is where *sādhana*, ritual and religious discipline, comes in. One concentrates all one's activity and power of mind on one or another of the characters of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* story, preferably a *gopī*. And with the constant application of sixty-four types of discipline, meditation, chanting, listening to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, serving the image, etc., a change takes place in one's psychic state. One knows one's self as that *gopī* upon whom one has been concentrating; and knowing is becoming.

This knowledge, the transformed state, is the madness which the *bhakta* displays. He is simultaneously in two worlds. He walks around in this one, performing bodily and social duties, [...]. But his real existence is even now in the eternal Vṛndāvana, face to face with his beloved Kṛṣṇa. The separation between human and divine has been wiped out. The state in which the *bhakta* is still striving for complete transformation is called *vaidhī*, injunctive, *bhakti*; when he has attained his goal and knows pure abstracted bliss in Kṛṣṇa's presence, his *bhakti* is *rāgānuṣā*, ruled by pure passion.

The perfection of the religious process consists in the rise of *prema*, experienced as the consumption of the *rasa* in which "self-love and love for God [are] united" (*ibid.*: 131).

The second assumption is that in the process the body of the practitioner undergoes a transformation. He, of course, retains his usual body (the *sādhakadeha*). At the same time he resides in the heavenly Vrajaloka and with his interior perfect body (*siddhadeha*) lives in imitation of the exemplary players. So whereas he functions as a social being as he used to, he lives in a different, imperishable world as a being related to Bhagavat. If, in his perfect body, he identifies with a *gopī*, he is not supposed to walk around as a transvestite.⁵

These basic assumptions underlie the system elaborated by Rūpa Gosvāmī (not to be confounded with Rūpa Kavirāja). However, the way in which he for-

5 Bon Mahārāj 1965: 303–304 on *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 2.295 and Viśvanātha Cakravartī's commentary thereon.

mulated this point gave rise to the interpretation by Rūpa Kavirāja and is known by the term *sauramyavāda*. Rūpa Gosvāmī says (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 2.295),⁶

One who is desirous of attaining one of the emotional states of the residents of Vraja should perform services in a manner that imitates them with both the practitioner's body (*sādhakarūpa*) and the perfected body (*siddharūpa*). (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 2003: 83)

The question here was what precisely Rūpa Gosvāmī may have meant to say by this. What was to be achieved with the practitioner's body and the perfected body, respectively? Rūpa Kavirāja argued that the devotee had to imitate Bhagavat in both his mundane and perfected body. Not only this; he also thought that as perfection advanced, the *sādhaka* was to abandon both the regular and the occasional rites (*nitya*- and *naimittikakarman*). The religiously advanced were thus exempt from ritual and social obligations (Haberman 1988: 104). Rūpa Kavirāja's doctrine was rejected by Viśvanātha Cakravartī, but it remained fecund in the minds of his followers and ineradicable. The doctrine of the founder-Gosvāmīs was undermined which was all the more alarming because even the founding fathers of the system had had to struggle hard to mediate positions popular in the various regions of origin of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, namely Bengal and Orissa, in the east, and Braj, in the centre. The Gauḍīya system was thereby endangered by schism, doctrinally and socially.

This was the vexing issue that Kṛṣṇadeva had to solve on behalf of the king. Who was that authority? By 1715 he became Jaisingh's theological counsellor (Burton 2000), residing in the then emerging complex of the new Kachavāhā residence, later on named Jaipur. He was a representative of the Gauḍīyas, the order that had enjoyed imperial and royal support from the very beginning and whose deity Govinddevjī had become the personal deity of Jaisingh. He hailed from a distinguished family, for his ancestor was Gadādhara, Caitanya's companion from Navadvīpa. He himself had lived in Vrindaban as a follower of, and perhaps also initiated by, the great theological doctor Viśvanātha Cakravartī in whose estate he lived in Rādhākuṇḍa in Braj before he was asked to become Jaisingh's counsellor. He followed the king's summons bringing with him the deity Śrī Rādhāvinodīlālī that he had inherited from Viśvanātha and that had come down to him from Lokanātha, Caitanya's companion. So charged with Vaiṣṇava legitimating power was the deity that it was coveted and, indeed, appropriated for quite some time, when Kṛṣṇadeva left for the east, by other Vaiṣṇavas of less indisputable legitimacy before it was returned to the Gauḍīyas.⁷

6 All translations are taken from the edition and translation by D. L. Haberman 2003.

7 See Horstmann forthc. a.

Despite being continuously attached for four years or so to Jaisingh's court, Kṛṣṇadeva remained based in Braj, with a special focus on the Madanamohana temple of Kāmām. From administrative and fiscal papers we know of the largesse showered on him by the king.⁸ In 1718, he was sent to Bengal to mediate the persistently conflicting positions within the Gauḍīya order. For Jaisingh, he wrote five texts, out of which four figure prominently, and in addition to these he left numerous letters and brief statements which allow us to reconstruct the kind of issues he mediated.⁹ The four main treatises are the *Jñāna-*, *Karma-* and *Bhaktivivṛti* and the *Siddhāntaikyaprakāśikā*. Of the *vivṛtis*, only the one on *bhakti* is dated (1722), but of the three, this was probably the last.¹⁰ In the treatises it is clearly stated that the texts were commissioned from Kṛṣṇadeva by the king. We also know that the king himself made amendments in some disputed texts of the Gauḍīya order to iron out what were from his point of view positions bordering on heresy (Bansal 1980, l.c.). Finally, we also know that Kṛṣṇadeva was personally responsible for the outcome of the *sāstrārtha* for which he had written those treatises (Bahura 1976, l.c.). Apart from these, he authored commentaries on Viśvanātha's, Rūpa Gosvāmī's and other authors' works (Burton 2000). The weight of his texts is only enhanced by the fact that, being written to advance conclusive decisions to be taken by the king that would be palpable also to non-Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, the author refrains completely from polemical statements. He certainly does quote Rūpa Kavirāja's points, but in the *Karmavivṛti* he does not even go as far as to mention his name. The argument is established almost solely on the basis of the scriptural tradition received as canonical by the Gauḍīyas. This scholastic method should not delude us into believing that we are dealing with an issue confined to the minds of the learned.

Here I am presenting Kṛṣṇadeva's *Karmavivṛti*. In doing so I follow the organisation of the text. Kṛṣṇadeva first defines what ritual is. Given the presupposition that the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* are the perfection of the Veda, not its supersession, Kṛṣṇadeva unsurprisingly sets out from the definition of the Śrauta sacrifice, namely, *dravyaṃ devatā tyāga (Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra 1.2.2)*, albeit proceeding directly from the argument put forth by Śaṅkara in his commentary on *Bhagavadgītā* 8.3. Here, *karma* and *visarga*, "outpouring", are equated (*visargaḥ karmasamjñītaḥ*). The half-line runs,

8 Burton 2000; Horstmann 2004.

9 Bahura 1976: 110 n. 3; Kapad Dwara 1523 and 1295.

10 The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (11.20.6) establishes a triad of disciplines arranged in that sequence, namely *yogās trayo mayā proktā nṛṇāṃ śreyovidhitasayā | jñānaṃ karma ca bhaktiś ca nopāyo 'nyo 'sti kutrचित् ||*

bhūtabhāvodbhavakaro visargaḥ karmasaṃjñitaḥ ||

[...] the outpouring that brings about the origination of the being of the creatures is called act.¹¹

This again refers to the idea that it is by the sacrifice that the cosmic wheel is kept in motion, as put forth in *Bhagavadgītā* 3. 14–21,

Creatures exist by food, food grows from rain, rain springs from sacrifice, sacrifice arises from action. (3.14)

This ritual action, you must know, originates from the *brahman* of the Veda, and this *brahman* itself issues from the Syllable *OM*. (3.15)

Therefore the ubiquitous *brahman* is forever based upon sacrifice. He who does not keep rolling the wheel that has been set in motion, indulging his senses in a lifespan of evil, lives for nothing, Pārtha. (3.16)

On the other hand, a man who delights in the self, is satiated with the self, is completely contented with the self alone, has nothing left to do. (3.17)

He has no reason at all to do anything or not to do anything, nor does he have any incentive or personal interest in any creature at all. (3.18)

Therefore pursue the daily tasks disinterestedly, for, while performing his acts without self-interest, a person obtains the highest good (*param*). (3.19)

For it was by acting alone that Janaka and others achieved success, so you too must act while only looking to what holds together the world (*lokasaṃgraha*). (3.20)

People do whatever the superior man does: people follow what he sets up as a standard. (3.21)¹²

Kṛṣṇadeva would throughout his discourse always recall these ideas, notably action without self-interest, but in the cosmic interest of “holding the world together”. From the process depicted in *Bhagavadgītā* 3.14, he can logically equate *visarga* with *tyāga*, *tyāga* with *yajña*, and *yajña* with *karma*. Anything that is righteous (*dharma*) and called *karma* is characterised by this. That *dharma/karma* is founded on the Veda who is Nārāyaṇa himself. And finally, the “domain of the Vedas is the world of the three *guṇas*”, as Kṛṣṇadeva concludes by quoting *Bhagavadgītā* 2.45. This is already a hint that ritual is going to be extended to the total comportment of the devotee in the world.

As for ritual acts, they lead either to involvement in the world (*pravṛtti*) or to rest (*nivṛtti*). Anything that is governed by one’s own wishes and objectives

11 *Bhagavadgītā* (trans. van Buitenen 1981: 101). In the following, all translated passages from the *Bhagavadgītā* are taken from that translation.

12 Trans. van Buitenen 1981: 83.

leads to further involvement in the world. Therefore, *kāmya* rites, which are performed to obtain the fulfilment of a wish, are forbidden. This leaves us with the *nitya* and *naimittika* ritual. Also this is denounced as *pravṛtta* unless it is carried out “with one’s face turned to Bhagavat”, that is, with the sole objective of pleasing him. In fact, any activity has to follow this description. Therefore, ritual dedicated to Bhagavat leads to pure *bhakti* (*śuddhabhakti*). Put differently, *karma* practised with such an attitude is a practice of pure *bhakti* (*śuddhabhakti-sādhana*), and not something inferior to pure *bhakti*. *Karma* is the door opening on *bhakti*, and but for it, Bhagavat cannot be found. *Karma* can only exist within the norms of one’s own social position (*svadharmā*) (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.20.10–11). There is no salvific action outside service (*sevā*) to Bhagavat to whom every action has to be dedicated. The distinguishing mark of a devotee is that for the sake of *bhakti* he abides by the norms of good conduct (*sadācāra*). Thereby, one’s whole life becomes the arena of a ritual dedicated to Nārāyaṇa. The scriptural authority for this is *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.2.36,

*kāyena vācā manasendriyair vā buddhyātmanā vānusrtasvabhāvāt |
karoti yad yat sakalaṃ parasmai nārāyaṇāyeti samarpayet ||*

All that he performs for someone else by his body, speech, mind, senses, intellect and self because he is disposed to imitate Him, he does for Nārāyaṇa to whom he thereby dedicates it.

Action is determined by attitude which is effective within and without an isolated ritual act.

Now what about the nexus between *karma* and *dharma*? Why are the two connected with *bhakti*? The crucial point is contained in *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.2.6 (and the two subsequent verses, 7–8). Śrīdhara bases his discussion of *pravṛ-* and *nivṛ-* on that stanza which shows the importance attributed to it by him, as much as by subsequent authors.

*a vai puṃsāṃ paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhokṣaje |
ahaitukyapratihatā yayātmā samprasīdati ||*

Verily, the highest *dharma* of humans is that from which arises *bhakti* of Adhokṣaja, it has no cause and no restraints, the soul finds rest by it.

In fact, the stanza in a nucleus contains the quintessence of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, for it is an answer to that question of existential dimension in the opening chapter (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.1.11 ef),

brūhi naḥ śraddadhānāṃ yenātmā samprasīdati ||

Tell us what it is by which the soul finds rest, for we are full of faith.

This kind of *dharma* is the good conduct comprising ritual and leads to *bhakti* characterised by a growing inclination on the part of the practitioner to listen to

narratives about Bhagavat and to praise him. All this is *bhaktisādhana* (or *bhaktiyoga*). Being a full human being lies in following this kind of *dharma*. The supreme *dharma* is, thereby, *ahaitukī saguṇa bhakti*, conducted within the boundaries of one's own *varṇāśramadharmā* (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.2.13). Unless *dharma* is conducive to *rati*, "love, delight", it is mere toil, something utterly inferior and thwarting human fulfilment.¹³ Accordingly, the view that *bhāva* produces what rites and other strategies fail to do is invalid. Implicitly, this goes to defeat Rūpa Kavirāja's position.

All ritual needs to be more than what is revealed by the visible and audible action, for to prove salvific it has to have an additional quality: Dedication to Bhagavat and the absence of any other ulterior motive. Relevant to any distinction between ritual and ordinary action is the assumption that the practitioner's actions become inseparably linked with listening to religious discourses and praising Bhagavat (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.5.35–36).¹⁴

yad atra kriyate karma bhagavatparitoṣaṇam |
jñānam yat tad adhīnam hi bhaktiyogasamanvitam ||
kurvānā yatra karmāṇi bhagavacchikṣayāsakṛt |
gṛṇanti guṇanāmāni kṛṣṇasyānusmaranti ca ||

Enlightenment, accompanied by *bhaktiyoga*, does not but derive from an act that is done to please Bhagavat.

While performing acts according to Bhagavat's teaching, they praise and remember Kṛṣṇa's excellencies and names.

This, "listening and praising" (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 2.3.11), may be called a shorthand term for religious life as community experience. It is a style of life that leads on to imperturbable love (*prīti*). Its eminence made Śrīdhara Svāmī identify it with the highest *puruṣārtha*, and this was confirmed by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja (*Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 2.9.241). But for this assumption and its implications for a wide concept of ritual and a religious life perfected within the community, Gauḍīya religion would be deprived of its essentials (and so probably would all other *bhakti* systems). All one's senses and one's intellect have to be turned towards Bhagavat (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 4.31.9). Without the religious discourse, *kathā*, the awakening of faith (*śraddhā*) is unfeasible (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.14.5). The development that is assumed to take place is from *śraddhā* over *rati* to *bhakti*. All, including *jñāna*, can only be produced by *bhakti* and within the boundary of

13 *Dharmah svanuṣṭhitah puṁsām viśvakṣenakathāsu yah | notpādayed yadi ratim śrama eva hi kevalam ||*, as *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 1.2.8 says.

14 Cp. especially *Karmavivṛti* fol. 11b, #7.

the norms of good conduct. The ritual act is purified thereby, because it becomes pleasing to Bhagavat; otherwise it is futile.

Kṛṣṇadeva, after emphasising the communal and communicative factors that determine the “ritual stance”, moves on (fol. 12b, #17)¹⁵. Beyond this extended notion of *karmayoga*, the practitioner also needs to observe the wide spectrum of ethical and social rules (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 3.29.15–19). Apart from serving the deities, this includes doing good to one’s fellow human beings and compassion as well as observing the *bhakti* to Kṛṣṇa (*madbhaktikṛt*, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.19.27), and therefore also the renouncer is enjoined to continue practising ritual the boon of which is the love of God for human beings.

The rise of *bhāva* is indicated by man’s eagerness to listen and praise. Therefore, no ritual is valid unless the love of God is constituted in a process of communication. The Gauḍīya system, as Rūpa Gosvāmī established it, first treats *sā-dhanabhakti* from which develops *bhāva*. He did not rigidly define how long ritual had to be sustained during the process of the perfection of love. This is the cleft in which Rūpa Kavirāja inserted his own concept which led him to disapprove of ritual action. Kṛṣṇadeva starts his counter-argument with a passage from *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (11.20.9) which is of pivotal importance for understanding the Gauḍīya tradition.

tāvat karmāṇi kurvīta na nirvidyeta yāvataḥ |
matkathāśravaṇādau vā śraddhā yāvan na jāyate ||

One should perform ordinarily prescribed ritual actions until one has developed an indifference toward them or until there arises a faith for listening to my stories.

The Gauḍīya tradition, indeed, emphasises the superiority of *prema* over *karma* and quotes this verse as a testimony. An eminently exemplary case is that of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, who says (*Caitanyacaritāmṛta* 2.9.241–2, pp. 476–7),

241. For *prema* comes to Kṛṣṇa from *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana*: and that is the highest end of man, the limit of the goals of men. [...] (In support of this, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.2.40 is quoted.—MH)

242. The abandonment of *karma* and the vilification of *karma*—this the *śāstras* attest; there is never any *prema-bhakti* of Kṛṣṇa from *karma*. [...] (In support of this, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.11.32, *Bhagavadgītā* 18.66, and—*nota bene*—*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.20.9 are quoted.—MH)

15 For some portions, the *Karmavivṛti* proceeds by numbered paragraphs which seems to reflect that Kṛṣṇadeva took up issues submitted to him as a list numbered accordingly.

Already Viśvanātha Cakravartī tried to straighten out the interpretation by

[explaining] “Karma” here as “daily relative duties in *Varṇa* and *Āśrama* life according to the injunctions of the Scriptures”. The Lord Himself has said elsewhere: “The *Śrutis* and the *Smṛtis* are My Own Orders. One who violates them disobeys My Orders, and hence is hostile to Me. Even if he be a devotee, he cannot be a Vaiṣṇava.” The offence mentioned in this śloka cannot be applicable to a pure devotee, because a pure devotee must have crossed the barriers of Karma and Jñāna. In fact, if one performs Karma even after gaining indifference to Karma and gaining faith in listening to and singing the glories of the Lord, then in such cases only one has violated the Orders of the Lord, and not otherwise. (Bon Maharaj 1965: 251)

Kṛṣṇadeva thus squarely addressed the issue by basing his point on that stanza of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.20.9, which seems to blatantly contradict his own position. He tackled the problem by linking it with the issue of eligibility (*adhikāra*) to act. Apart from the general ineligibility to perform *kāmya* rites, there exists among the Gauḍīyas a system of three grades of eligibility. One is inferior (*kaniṣṭha*) and entitles one to *karmayoga*, the advanced (*madhyama*) entitles one to *jñānayoga*, and the superior (*uttama*) makes one eligible for *bhaktiyoga*. As long as one has not achieved *jñāna*- and *bhaktiyoga*, one has to abide by *karmayoga*.¹⁶ The candidate of the inferior grade is not yet firmly rooted in faith (*śraddhā*). The advanced candidate is well-versed in the *śāstras* and has faith, whereas the superior practitioner is rooted in the *śāstras* and reasoning (*yukti*), firmly determined and of mature faith. By this scale, it seems clear that ritual is restricted to the inferior grade of incipient faith. All agree that a mature devotee (*prauḍhaśraddha*) does not commit a sin by not performing ritual. So why should he perform ritual? Despite his missing eligibility to performing ritual (*karmādhikāra*) he must abide by ritual, for it is his duty to contribute to “holding the world together” (*lokasaṃgraha*). Accordingly, he must not abandon ritual because the *dharma* must be sustained and his family purified. Kṛṣṇadeva expressly refers to the direct injunction of *Bhagavadgītā* 3.20. However, the stance that the devotee takes is one detached from the act itself, for he acts as an exemplar of *dharma*. It is by his example that the unenlightened or immature faith recognise the impact of *śraddhā* and *bhakti*. This duty is especially well taken care of by householders, although it also applies to renouncers. As long as humans live they have to conduct ritual. So doing does not sully the state of *suddhabhakti*. Faith (*śraddhā*) is no uncertain term, for in the Gauḍīya tradition

16 I am here not pursuing the issue of *jñāna*, which is discussed in the *Karmavivṛti*, but which also forms the topic of a separate treatise, the *Jñānavivṛti*.

it is *śāstrārthaviśvāsa*.¹⁷ That faith is tantamount to faith in the decisions arrived at by the debates of the learned has been emphasised deliberately. Kṛṣṇadeva as spokesman of the king confirms the *śāstrārtha* as authority against popular belief which holds, as Kṛṣṇadeva reports, that deviating from good conduct does no harm if only one firmly believes, and this is also corroborated by scriptural testimony. For Kṛṣṇadeva this is as terrible as venerating alien gods. Hence faith is delimited to faith in learned authority, and based foremost upon the triad of serving the guru (*gurusevā*), initiation, and following the path of the godly (*sādhuvartmānuvartanam*) (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 2.74 and pass.).

There may, no doubt, arise a state when a man cannot but abandon ritual, when this happens spontaneously because he finds himself transformed (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 2.67 = *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.11.32). The transformation makes him partake of Bhagavat in all that exists. At this stage, he takes refuge in Bhagavat (*madekaśaraṇa*). Ultimately, *śraddhā* and *śaraṇāpatti* coincide.

If, from such a perspective, the *prauḍhaśraddha* is exempt from ritual, how is his status to be ascertained? One unconditional symptom is *śaraṇāpatti*. However, this has at least two properties, compliance (*ānukūlasaṃkalpa*) and humility. Because the perfected devotee may have retained earlier stances of conduct, these must be rectified by rites within the spectre of ethics conforming to his status in the world (*maryādā*).

The conclusion from this kind of reasoning is that, for the sake of “holding the world together”, also the supreme form of *bhakti*, *rāgānugā*, even in its ultimate perfection (*mukhyarāgānugā*), requires that ritual injunctions be faithfully executed. Thus, whereas the perfected devotee (*siddhabhakta*) is certainly considered to be a transformed persona, the stance of a practitioner (*sādhaka*) retains social relevance for him, for to serve those who are Bhagavat’s own (*tadīya*) is part of the sixty-four kinds of *vaidhīsādhanabhakti* (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 2.89–95). Consonant with *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.11, Kṛṣṇadeva reviews the spectre of social action (*sādhusevā*) coming within the orbit of *karma* with its material aspects. The quintessence of the text is that *śuddhabhakti* and “holding the world together” are linked. *Bhakti* can only be attained within the boundaries of the all-encompassing good conduct (*sadācāra*). This implies that the ritual stance cannot be dissociated from the totality of the practitioner’s lifestyle and attitudes.

It is obvious that the debate triggers the question of how this sophisticated reasoning could effectively relate to what actually happened in the religious practice. The decision taken certainly did discipline deviant practitioners, per-

17 This is the definition given by Jīva Gosvāmī, cp. *Karmavivṛti*, fol 24b.

haps by force rather than by argument. It repressed the status of renouncers to the benefit of householder authorities. It also repressed non-canonical doctrine, for in the same breath the canon was rigidly defined and the heretical works condemned.¹⁸ How far, however, did it reach the common devotee? If we ask this question on the basis of contemporary practice, two points seem obvious. Firstly and unsurprisingly, scholarly debates such as the reported one are beyond the interest and capacity of devotees beyond a handful of specialists, for whom much is at stake and who operate in a politically charged atmosphere. Secondly, the Gauḍīya tradition remains a specialist tradition. Its orthodoxy and orthopraxy, however, are effectively and powerfully mediated and transported to the congregation of ordinary devotees by a sophisticated apparatus of aesthetic performance of ritual, also ritual drama, dance and music, and that which the texts call in that short-hand fashion “listening and praising”, that is religious discourse and communal worship of the *kīrtan* type. As an element of this, the display of *bhāva* is permitted and appreciated, but it unfolds, as it were, following an established norm and does not spill over the boundaries within which space is provided for it. The impact of ritual must therefore be assessed within its wider living context.

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18 Bansal 1980: 504–6; documents in the holdings of the Vrindaban Research Institute, microfilm T[emples]/[reel]2, frames 23 and 24.

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