

## Review

*Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Philosophy: Tradition, Reason and Devotion*, edited by Ravi M. Gupta. Dorchester, UK: Ashgate, 2014. viii + 244 pp., \$153.00 (hb), \$54.95 (pb). ISBN 978-0754661771 (hb), 978-1-138-24885-4 (pb).

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The past decade has witnessed an efflorescence of research on the Vaiṣṇava traditions associated with the fifteenth-century teacher and mystic, Caitanya. Given the dominance of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in this particular strain of Vaiṣṇavism, it is no surprise that most of the scholarship has focused on this text and its receptive history within Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. Indeed, many of the contributors to this volume, including the editor, Ravi Gupta, are among the most important voices in this rapidly growing sub-field of Hindu Studies. While the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* serves as a seminal touchstone in this current volume, it cedes the stage to lesser-known works, introducing the reader to new texts that enable us to form a richer and fuller picture of the intellectual traditions, practices and methods that were nurtured by the saint's followers, and helped to systemize Caitanya philosophy. Thus, by choosing to focus on Caitanya philosophy and the hermeneutical strategies that informed the development of its intellectual traditions, this book makes an important contribution to the field of Hindu Studies, and more broadly to the study of Indic philosophical traditions.

The book's five substantial essays may be seen as divided into two parts. The first section consists of two essays on 'Epistemology and Ontology' and seeks to explicate the theoretical underpinnings of Caitanya philosophy. The second section addresses ethics and aesthetics and explores the experiential dimensions of the philosophical system. The two articles on epistemology and ontology by Ravi Gupta and Kiyokazu Okita consider two different, but equally seminal moments in the history of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. Gupta's essay (part 1) focuses on the life and works of Jīva Gosvāmi to demonstrate how he defended *acintya bheda-bheda* (simultaneous difference and non-difference), the Caitanya theory of Vedānta. In particular, he focuses on Jīva's ability to bridge the gap between Vedānta and bhakti by unpacking his interpretation

of an important verse (*BhP* I.2.11) of the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* that theorizes the nature of Bhagavān (god). In doing so, Gupta is able to demonstrate Jīva's unique approach that deftly synthesized multiple streams of knowledge and hermeneutical systems to assert the supremacy of a newly emergent philosophical system. Kiyokazu Okita's essay moves us ahead by a hundred years, to the eighteenth century, to focus on Baladeva, a little known, but no less important figure than the Gosvāmis. While Gupta's emphasis is largely on revealing the nuances of Jīva's argumentation, Okita offers rich historical detail that brings to the forefront issues of patronage and political power in the development of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. Although the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* is the text par-excellence for Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas, Baladeva is charged with composing commentaries on the Brahmasūtras by his patron, Jayasingh II (first half of the eighteenth century), so as to establish the validity of Caitanya's system. To do so, Baladeva must situate his tradition in relation to one of the already established schools of Vedānta. Here again, we return to a theme that runs through the book—of the flexibility and suppleness of the intellectuals of the Caitanya tradition, who borrowed, adapted and synthesized judiciously and with great creativity from a range of traditions and sources in order to establish not just the legitimacy, but the primacy of Caitanya's vision.

Joseph O'Connell's chapter on ethics and Rembert Lutjeharms' on aesthetics, which close out the book touch on the experiential aspects of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. O'Connell refers to this as devotional ethics, and surveys the ways in which biographical and hagiographical literature of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas valorize bhakti as the preeminent virtue and lionize Caitanya as an ethical exemplar. The emphasis of gentleness (*mādhurya*) as essential to the practice of bhakti functions to order interactions between devotees, and to establish a community guided by the ethics of service. Lutjeharms' essay on aesthetics closes out the book nicely, returning us to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and to the intellectual achievements of Rūpa and Jīva Gosvāmi. The article focuses on the Rūpa's theory of *rasa* and Jīva's commentary on the same, demonstrating both the centrality of the Gosvāmis in shaping the tradition, as well as drawing attention to the contributions of less well-known theoreticians such as Śrīnātha (a contemporary of Rūpa), and his disciple, Kavikarṇapūra. Each of the authors in this volume takes pains to broaden the scope of Caitanya Vaiṣṇava studies, by introducing new texts and less well-known authors. While they never lose sight of the centrality of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* or the towering contributions of the Gosvāmis, their choice to focus on figures like Baladeva and Kavikarṇapūra illustrate an intellectual tradition that was multifaceted and multi-centered.

An additional contribution of the edited volume are the accessibly translated excerpts from primary sources that accompany each of the five essays and the introduction. The translations serve to illustrate the main arguments presented in the essay, and taken together, provide a good overview of the range of analytical methods and argumentations favoured by the intellectuals

of Caitanya traditions. As the authors make clear, the Caitanya philosophers and poets worked very much within the framework of well-established South Asian hermeneutical practices. As such, these translated sections are also useful to anyone interested in South Asian intellectual history. Each of these translated pieces are also contextualized with a brief introduction to orient the reader. These primary sources are valuable in offering a range of genres and voices that provide a comprehensive picture of the intellectual vibrancy of this tradition. For example, Kenneth Valpey's introductory essay to the volume provides a brief history of Caitanya and the tradition, and helpfully situates this emergent tradition in its multiple contexts. Using the metaphor of a mandala, he examines how Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas have regarded themselves in relation to various 'others': in relation to other Vaiṣṇavas, to Brahmanical traditions, to Muslims, and even to what might be broadly referred to as the natural world. The essay then reverses the mandala to explore the multiple worlds within Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism itself, including its encounter with colonialism and its global presence. Indeed, one of the reasons that the authors choose to refer to this devotional tradition as Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism as opposed to the more common Gauḍiya (Bengal) Vaiṣṇavism, is to emphasize the long arm of the tradition's reach and its far-reaching influence that long burst the borders of Gauḍa in eastern India. This is reflected in the very first primary source, that offers a readable translation from the important hagiography *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* of a debate that takes place in far off south India between Śrī Caitanya and Veṅkaṭa Bhaṭṭa, a Śrīvaiṣṇava Brahmin.

*Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Philosophy* gives due importance to this important philosophical tradition, and provides an avenue to explore the intellectual frameworks that gird one of the most important and influential Vaiṣṇava traditions. The book will be of interest to scholars of the devotional movements in India and in the South Asian intellectual traditions and philosophy, and will be particularly useful in graduate seminars that engage with these topics.