

Review

Hindu Theology in Early Modern South Asia: The Rise of Devotionalism and the Politics of Genealogy, by Kiyokazu Okita. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. xiii + 279 pp., £65.00 (hb), £55.36 (eb). ISBN 978-0-19-870926-8 (hb).

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Keywords: bhakti; early modern; Gaudiya Vaisnava; theology.

Expanding on his dissertation at Oxford, Kiyokazu Okita presents here a case study of how competition for patronage shapes the intellectual concerns and institutional development of religious traditions. The book focuses on the work of Baladeva Vidyābhuṣaṇa, an eighteenth-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava leader who forcefully responded to critics and won patronage from the Kachvāhā king Jaisingh II, thus securing a prominent place for the Gauḍīyas in the kingdom and eventually throughout much of northern India. He suggests that Baladeva's tactics, although overtly theological, were representative of the 'innovative traditionalist' intellectual discussed by Sheldon Pollock and others in the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the Eve of Colonialism project. Okita argues that Baladeva's creative engagement with Sanskrit commentarial traditions to face contemporary problems can be described aptly as 'Hindu theology'.

Okita situates his project amidst conversations about genealogy, early modern South Asia, reception history of the Purāṇas, and the study of theistic Vedānta as theology. The book proceeds with two chapters that contextualize Baladeva's work, followed by two lengthier philological chapters, in which the author reconstructs arguments from Sanskrit commentaries on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Brahmasūtras* in order to clarify the nature of the Gauḍīya affiliation with the Mādhva *sampradāya*. The first chapter discusses the historical context of Jaisingh II's court within the Mughal Empire and the king's ambition to project himself as a righteous supporter of worthy religious groups. In their competition for Jaisingh II's patronage, the Gauḍīyas faced three critiques: they had no clear connection to an authoritative *sampradāya*, they were insufficiently developed because they lacked a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* that clarified their intellectual positions, and they venerated Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā as a couple despite confessing that the two are unmarried. In the second chapter, Okita follows Mans Broo (*As Good as God*,

2003) in distinguishing between two kinds of lineage affiliation—formal and theological, or *dīkṣā* and *śikṣā*. This helps Okita analyse the controversial insistence by Baladeva and some of his predecessors that their tradition's founder, Caitanya, descended from the spiritual lineage of the great Dvaita philosopher, Madhva, who was acknowledged by Jaisingh II's time for establishing one of the four legitimate Hindu *sampradāyas*. Okita argues that the Caitanya-Madhva connection should be understood as a formal affiliation that was promoted because of its expedience in refuting the critique of indeterminate Gauḍīya spiritual pedigree. Theologically Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava thought is thus not significantly indebted to Mādhva Vedānta. Weighing in on a longstanding debate about whether Baladeva was more Gauḍīya or Mādhva, Okita concludes that Baladeva strategically used Mādhva terminology for the sake of positioning the Gauḍīya tradition among accepted authorities.

Chapter Three supports Okita's argument about Gauḍīya independence by comparing three commentaries on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 2.9.32-35, otherwise known as the *Catuṣṭhlokibhāgavata*. The most famous commentator, Śrīdhara, regarded these verses as the core revelation of the entire *purāṇa*. Okita considers Śrīdhara's commentary alongside that of Jīva Goswāmī (since earlier Gauḍīyas left not substantial written documents) and those of Madhva and a more verbose Mādhva adherent, Vijaydhvaja. Okita's skill as a philologist shines here, as his nuanced comparison of Sanskrit primary sources reveals Jīva's independence of the Mādhva commentaries. Although Jīva's commentary shows greater affinity to Śrīdhara on some points, Jīva's interests and innovations are demonstrably separate from Śrīdhara as well, highlighting the theological distinctiveness of Gauḍīya doctrine from their predecessors.

The fourth chapter, which comprises nearly half of the book, considers key arguments in the *Govindabhāṣya*, a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* that Baladeva wrote to counter one of the main critiques of the Gauḍīyas. Okita observes Baladeva's discussion of the first five verses of the *Brahmasūtras* (1.1.1-5), the nature of *prakṛti* (1.4.23-27), the nature of *jīva* or living entity (in 2.1 and 2.3), the role of Śrī (3.3.39-42), and the characteristically Mādhva idea of *viśeṣa* or 'differentiating capacity' (3.2.28-31). By comparing Baladeva's views with those of Jīva, Madhva, and others, Okita calls attention to the subtle ways in which Baladeva follows Jīva in promoting Gauḍīya doctrines while innovatively adopting Mādhva terminology to do so. Baladeva creatively drew on Madhva's thought in order to display a formal connection between the Gauḍīyas and the Mādhva *sampradāy*, while still maintaining his theological distinctiveness as a Gauḍīya. A five-page conclusion rounds out the book, reminding readers of larger conversations in which Okita aims to participate.

Hindu Theology and Early Modern South Asia makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of how the Gauḍīya tradition came to prominence in the eighteenth century. The book's aspiration to add to broader scholarly discussions will require further reflection, however. As the book progresses,

theoretical discussions of genealogy, early modernity, purāṇic studies, and Hindu theology become submerged by Okita's more thoroughgoing argument about the nature of Gauḍīya-Madhva connection. Although his argument about Gauḍīya independence and strategic use of Mādhva terminology is solidly made, a more substantive conclusion could have helped readers identify the significance of Okita's project to scholarship beyond the Gauḍīya world.

For example, Okita's use of the second-order distinction between formal and theological affiliation to analyse Gauḍīya claims of Mādhva pedigree is illuminating and may serve as a model for research on the development of religious traditions in South Asia and beyond. He claims that this notion that genealogical heritage underscores a tradition's salvific efficacy is important in the early modern period (p. 3), as if this period was distinctive for its genealogical projects. Although he does not address the issue directly, he gestures toward it by highlighting the catalytic effect that competing for patronage had on the development of Gauḍīya self-representation. But should anything in this religious-political climate be viewed as historically new, breaking with patterns of patronage and prestige in earlier times? Additionally, the subtitle of the book is *The Rise of Devotionalism and the Politics of Genealogy*, but aside from several pages in which the author situates the Gauḍīyas among other *bhakti* traditions in Jaisingh II's court, little is said about the 'rise of devotionalism' as such. Perhaps what is implied here is Baladeva's crucial role in securing patronage for the Gauḍīyas and energizing their growth, but this would only begin to address the title's expansive claim.

These reservations do not diminish the importance of Okita's work. *Hindu Theology in Early Modern South Asia* offers a penetrating and contextually sensitive engagement with Hindu theological texts—an excellent addition to the nascent field of theistic Vedānta studies. Okita's comparative study of commentators on the *Catuhśloki bhāgavata* and his exposition of Baladeva's *Govindabhāṣya* are welcome contributions to scholarship on Hindu thought. Okita's analysis of Sanskrit commentaries is inevitably technical and dense, but his writing otherwise is pleasantly clear and readily engaging for non-philologists. This book should appeal to graduates and specialists who are interested in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, early modern religious politics, and Sanskrit commentarial traditions. It may be useful in less direct ways, as well, such as offering points of comparative reference for scholars of *bhakti* traditions working in regional languages. It will also serve as an excellent resource for scholars to study patterns of religious institutionalization in the early modern period.