

‘Why Do We Still Sift the Husk-Like *Upaniṣads*?’

Revisiting *Vedānta* in Early Chaitanya Vaishnava Theology

The title of this chapter is derived from a poem by Raghupati Upadhyaya, a Bihari Brahmin who met Shri Chaitanya in Allahabad, where he recited some of his verses to Chaitanya’s great satisfaction. That the question is asked by a Vaishnava is significant. The two great, established Vaishnava traditions at the time—those of Ramanuja and Madhva—were thoroughly Vedāntic. The *vedānta* (conclusion of the Vedas) expressed in the *Upaniṣads* is the foundation for their theology, and their traditions’ thought develops primarily in commentaries on these and related texts, such as the *Brahma-sūtras* (a study of the *Upaniṣads*) and the *Bhagavadgītā* (understood as the *Upaniṣad* of the ‘fifth Veda’, that is, the *Mahābhārata*).

As Ravi Gupta has shown in his excellent study of Jiva Gosvami,¹ the early Chaitanya Vaishnava tradition also belongs within this rubric. Although the school initially does not produce commentaries on either the *Brahma-sūtras* or any of the principal *Upaniṣads*, there is nevertheless a strong engagement with Vedānta in general and the *Upaniṣads* in particular. Before moving to Vrindavan, Jiva Gosvami studied in Varanasi, the Vedānta capital of the north, and his deep

familiarity with Vedānta is evident throughout his works. Jiva quotes the *Upaniṣads* regularly in his *Bhāgavata-sandarbhā*, and incorporates a brief commentary on the first four sūtras of the *Brahma-sūtras* (a *catuḥ-sūtrī-ṭīkā*) in his *Paramātmā-sandarbhā*. Moreover, in the *Sarva-Saṃvādinī*, an appendix to the *Sandarbhās*, he engages at greater length with most of the Upaniṣadic passages that are central to Vedānta, as well as entire sections of the *Brahma-sūtras*.²

We could thus argue that the new Vaishnava tradition emerging by the inspiration of Chaitanya in Bengal and Vrindavan is a continuation of the older Vaishnava traditions, and sees itself in relation to the Vedic revelation in a similar way as those southern traditions did. But, as I will argue in this chapter, this is only one side of the picture. As Raghupati Upadhyaya’s question indicates, this engagement with Vedānta was not a given. Why should they align themselves with Vedānta? Why should they still look to the *Upaniṣads* for theology? How central is Vedānta really to Chaitanya Vaishnava thought?

We can discern two seemingly conflicting views of the role of Vedānta and of the importance of studying the *Upaniṣads*. On the one hand, there is a close engagement with Vedānta, particularly but not exclusively in the writings of Jiva Gosvami. On the other hand—elsewhere—there is an explicit rejection of Vedānta and the *Upaniṣads*, or at least an indifference to them. In what follows I will argue that these two attitudes towards Vedānta are related, and where the Chaitanya tradition expresses its indifference to Vedānta, it does so precisely on the basis of an engagement with Vedānta, which builds extensively on the thoughts of older Vedāntists. Vedānta is thus both a means to link the fledgling Chaitanya Vaishnava tradition with the past, and a means to set itself apart from the very same traditions that constitute it.

The focus of this chapter is a work that might seem to have very little to say about Vedānta. I will look at the *Paḍyāvālī* (‘A String of Verses’), an anthology of Sanskrit poetry compiled by Rupa Gosvami, the most influential theologian of the school. The work consists of 388 verses, of which 34 verses are Rupa Gosvami’s own compositions (which makes him the most prominent author in the work) and a large portion are composed by well-known contemporaries or immediate predecessors of Rupa—Chaitanya himself (22, 31, 32, 71, 74, 93, 94, 324, 337), Ishvara Puri (18, 62, 75), Madhavendra Puri (79, 96, 104, 286, 330), Raghupati Upadhyaya (82, 87, 97, 98, 126, 300), Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya (72, 73, 90, 91, 99, 100, 133), Ramananda

Raya (13, 14), Gopala Bhatta (38), Raghunathadasa (131, 331), and so on. There are also a few lesser-known contemporaries—Shrigarbha Kavindra (84), Vanivilasa (315), Ciranjiva (157), Kesavacchatrin (153), and so on. In addition, the anthology also contains many verses of pre-Chaitanya authors, whose sentiment and theology (at least as represented in the verses quoted) Rupa obviously appreciated. Thus, Shridhara Svami is quoted (28, 43), as is Lakshmidhara (16, 29, 33, 34), the author of the *Bhagavan-nāma-kaumudī*, as well as Vishnu Puri (9, 10), the author of the *Bhakti-ratnāvalī*. Apart from these well-known authors, who had considerable influence on the development of early Gauḍīya theology, Rupa brings together a number of authors otherwise unknown to us, several of whom are *sannyāsīs*. A certain Yadavendra Puri is quoted twice (42, 76); figures bearing the name Madhava Sarasvati (57), Avilamba Sarasvati (385), and Vira Sarasvati (368) are cited once each. All these are Vaishnava authors, but the anthology does not stop there. The later sections of the book contain several verses by Amaru (223, 229, 231, 237, 314), Govardhana (190, 242, 303, 374), Bhavabhuti (325, 326), and various authors known from earlier, non-religious anthologies of Sanskrit court poetry.

The *Padyāvalī* is a carefully constructed anthology. It does more than merely string together examples of good poetry. It creates with these verses a new narrative. The work consists of two parts: the first is on the nature of devotion, while the second part describes Krishna's play in Vrindavan. This second part is by far the longer of the two. In over 260 verses (as opposed to 118 verses for the first part) Rupa first briefly describes Vrindavan, Krishna's parents, and his childhood play, and then devotes the majority of the work to Krishna's sports with the *gopīs* (in over 220 verses). What sets the *Padyāvalī* apart from other Sanskrit anthologies is that Rupa does not merely organize the verses by topic, but organizes these topics and the individual verses arrayed within the topic in such a way that they form a new narrative, a new poem. By doing so, each verse of the *Padyāvalī* has thus, in a sense, two authors: the poet who originally composed the verse, and Rupa himself who composes the anthology and gives these verses a new context, and by that a new meaning. This is particularly obvious with the secular verses he culled from older anthologies: nearly all of them occur in this second section of the *Padyāvalī*, where the context turns these 'impersonal' secular verses into devotional poetry.³

This is equally true for the first half of the work, which is the focus of this chapter. It opens with several short *māhātmyas*, sections extolling

the greatness of Krishna and devotional practices such as meditation, chanting Krishna’s name, listening to narrations of Krishna’s play, and so on. The focus then shifts away from the practice of devotion onto Krishna’s devotees. In a series of sections, Rupa aims to illustrate the nature of a Vaishnava’s inner life and disposition. There are sections he labels ‘the devotees’ expressions of humility’, ‘the firm faith of devotees’, ‘the devotees’ prayer of longing’, ‘the eagerness of devotees’, and ‘contempt for liberation’.

These sections (among the longest in the entire anthology) are significant because they reflect the self-understanding, not just of Rupa, but of the community to which he belongs. Rupa evidently collects verses that are well loved by devotees who were his contemporaries. Thus, the anthology does not just contain many verses composed or beloved by them; it is also meant for them, as Rupa writes in the first verse.⁴ These sections of the anthology thus particularly reflect his associates’ understanding of what it means to be a devotee of Krishna, and by organizing these verses into sections, Rupa teaches the aspiring devotee—someone new to the community—how he or she should approach the practice of Krishna devotion.

So, what does Rupa teach us about Vedānta? I will start with a verse by Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, once one of the greatest Vedāntists of his day:

na vyaṃ kavayo na tārīkā
na ca vedānta-nitānta-pāragāḥ
na ca vādi-nivārakāḥ paraṃ
kapaṭābhīra-kiśora-kīṅkarāḥ

We are no poets, no logicians.
We have not crossed
the vast ocean of Vedānta,
and we definitely do not win debates.
We are servants
of a cheating cowherd boy.

—Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, *Padyāvalī* 72

Many of Sārvaḥma’s poems in the *Padyāvalī* show a strong dislike of intellectual endeavours and a staunch devotion to Krishna that seems to disregard reason.⁵ Particularly with a person like him, it is terribly difficult not to read these verses as autobiographical. Sarvabhauma was a well-respected elderly scholar who had spent

his entire life researching, teaching, debating, and writing,⁶ when a young *sannyāsī* named Krishna Chaitanya happened to visit his home town, Puri. Concerned that this attractive *sannyāsī* might not be able to maintain his vows, he decided to instruct him in Vedānta to strengthen his resolve for renunciation. And so Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya began to teach Chaitanya what he himself had studied his entire life.

When his new student finally admits that he does not think too highly of what Sarvabhauma had been teaching him for an entire week, the teaching turns into a debate, and at some point, somehow, devotion to Krishna dawns in Bhattacharya's heart. At this, Sarvabhauma comes to realize he is the servant not just of God but of Krishna, the mischievous cowherd boy of Vrindavan who roams the woods and dances with the cowherd girls. Now, swept away by his religious emotions, he casts aside his books, loses his interest in philosophical thought, and, having been at last defeated in debate—by such a junior, no less!—ceases being the dry, stern philosopher he had been his entire life.⁷

For all the autobiographical echoes, it is difficult to read Sarvabhauma's verses as merely the reflections of a philosopher who has discovered God in his old age: he gives voice to a well-known broader theme. The basic structure of the verse we have quoted—juxtaposing devotion to Krishna with a more intellectual path—is very common in the *Padyāvalī*. Consider for comparative purposes the following verse, which Rupa attributes to an unknown *sannyāsī* named Yadavendra Puri:

rasaṃ praśaṃsantu kavitā-niṣṭhā
brahmāmṛtaṃ veda-śiro-niviṣṭhāḥ
vayaṃ tu guñjā-kalitāvataṃsaṃ
gr̥hīta-vaṃsaṃ kam api śrayāmaḥ

Skilled poets may praise *rasa*,
those rapt in the *Upaniṣads*
the immortal bliss of Brahman.

But we seek refuge in someone
who wears earrings of *guñjā* berries,
who holds a flute.

—Yadavendra Puri, *Padyāvalī* 76

All these verses—of which many are part of the section on the devotee's firm faith or resoluteness (*niṣṭhā*)—have a similar structure.

The first element often relates to Vedānta, and particularly an Advaita understanding of Vedānta. In Yadavendra Puri’s verse, we have in this regard a poet who praises *rasa* (the blissful experience that a poem embodies and/or communicates) and Vedāntists who study the *Upaniṣads*, thereby praising the bliss of Brahman. Then we have a second element, which presents a contrast to such figures. In the poem at hand, it is the poet himself who worships a certain ‘someone’ (*kam api*) who seems rather rustic. He is not the majestic Vishnu or the otherworldly ascetic Shiva, but a person whose ornaments consist of common foliage—he wears earrings, made not of jewels but of berries from the *guñjā* (Indian liquorice) tree. Clearly Krishna is here seen as distinct from Brahman, and not the object of those who study the *Upaniṣads*. The *Upaniṣads*, Yadavendra Puri implies, do not teach us about Kṛṣṇa—or at least, do not *explicitly* teach about Krishna—but about Brahman and its bliss.

This may seem obvious to us—Krishna is not a prominent character in the *Upaniṣads*. He is only mentioned in passing in the *Chāndogya* (3.17.6),⁸ but is not the subject of the principal *Upaniṣads*, which is Brahman, the imperishable, which, in the language of the *Muṇḍaka* (1.1.6), ‘cannot be seen, cannot be grasped, is without color, without sight or hearing, without hands or feet’.⁹ But this is a radical claim for the older, southern schools of Vedānta, and for several canonical Vaishnava texts, where Krishna, generally seen as a manifestation of Narayana, is repeatedly identified with Brahman. Indeed that Narayana is Brahman is the cornerstone of Vaishnava Vedānta, as centuries of Vaishnavas have argued. ‘In the scripture of the [*Bhagavad-*] *Gītā*’, Yamunacarya states, ‘Narayaṇa is declared to be the Supreme Brahman’.¹⁰ Ramanuja writes in his introduction to the *Gītā* that ‘the Lord of Shri ... whose nature consists only of infinite perception and bliss which differentiates him from all other beings, the great ocean of innumerable auspicious attributes, such as knowledge, strength, sovereignty, vigor, power, and splendor, which he all possesses naturally, infinitely, and in abundance, ... is the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Person, Narayana’.¹¹ Indeed, as Yamuna indicates, Vaishnava scriptures themselves repeatedly make this claim. In the *Gītā*, for example, Arjuna declares that Krishna is ‘the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme abode’. ‘All the sages, Devarsi Narada, as well as Asita, Devala and Vyasa declared this’, Arjuna continues, ‘and now you yourself tell me this’.¹² The *Taittirīya-nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* (13.4) similarly declares, ‘Narayana is the highest Brahman.

Narayana is the highest truth. Narayana is the highest light. Narayana is the highest self.¹³

In other words, the earlier Vaishnava traditions all declared Brahman to be Narayana, a personal deity with ‘an ocean of innumerable auspicious attributes’, as Ramanuja repeatedly puts it. It is this deity that is the subject of the *Upaniṣads*—he is the *aupaniṣadaṃ puruṣam*, ‘the person known by the *Upaniṣads*’ (*Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.9.26).¹⁴

Yadavendra Puri, however, disagrees. Like Sarvabhauma, he does not care for the *Upaniṣads* or Brahman, but for the young boy who roams Vrinda’s woods and wears guñjā berries on his ears. This contrast between the *Upaniṣads* and Krishna, though unusual, is found in several verses of the *Padyāvalī*, and thus suggests that this idea resonated strongly with Rupa. Indeed, if there is any doubt as to what Rupa, the architect of a complex theology of religious emotions, really thinks of the *Upaniṣads*, the following verse, which he attributes to none other than Vyāsa, is abundantly clear:¹⁵

śrutam apy aupaniṣadaṃ dūre hari-kathāmṛtāt
yan na santi dravac-citta-kampāśru-pulakādayaḥ

Upaniṣadic discourse
is nothing like the nectar
of narrations about Hari
—it does not melt the mind
or make you shiver
or lead to tears or
bristled hair.

—Bhagavad Vyasa, *Padyāvalī* 39

Brahman

To better understand this new way in which the *Upaniṣads* are viewed, I will explore two concepts that are central to Vedāntic discourse: the nature of Brahman and the nature of liberation (*mokṣa*). Let us begin with two verses from the *Padyāvalī* by Raghupati Upadhyaya, the poet whose verses Chaitanya so loved.

kaṃ prati kathayitum īśe
samprati ko vā pratītim āyātu
go-pati-tanayā-kuñje
gopa-vadhūṭi-ṣṭam brahma

Whom can I tell?
Who will believe me now?
The pleasure seeker
with the young cowgirl
in the bushes
on the Sun’s daughter’s banks
is Brahman.

—Raghupati Upadhyaya, *Padyāvalī* 98

śrutayaḥ palāla-kalpāḥ
kim iha vayaṃ sāmpratam cinumaḥ
ahriyata puraiva nayanair
ābhīrībhīḥ paraṃ brahma

Why do we here still sift the
husk-like *Upaniṣads*?
Earlier the cowgirls caught
the Supreme Brahman
with a glance.

—Raghupati Upadhyaya, *Padyāvalī* 97

The inclusion of Raghupati’s verses in this collection is significant, as these are some of the very few verses where Krishna is identified as Brahman.¹⁶ But even in these two verses that identification is seen as problematic. Who indeed would believe Raghupati when he says that the person who is playing with young girls in the bushes is the Brahman the *Upaniṣads* describe as the self-satisfied foundation of all existence? Never mind, he quickly adds. This is indeed the Supreme Brahman taught in the *Upaniṣads*, but the question is: Why should we bother studying the *Upaniṣads* to find him? Why should we patiently sift them like dry, empty husks in the hope of finding some grain of truth about Krishna, when the cowherd girls of Vṛndāvana have already caught him?

Most of the other authors collected in the *Padyāvalī*, however, are not so eager to identify Brahman with Krishna. Consider, for example, the following verse by Ishvara Puri, Chaitanya’s own guru:

dhanyānāṃ hṛdi bhāsatāṃ giri-vara-pratyagra-kuñjaukasāṃ
satyānanda-rasaṃ vikāra-vibhava-vyāvṛttam antar-mahaḥ
asmākaṃ kila vallavī-rati-raso vṛndāṭavī-lālaso
gopaḥ ko’pi mahendra-nīla-ruciraś citte muhuḥ krīḍatu

May an inner light,
the very essence of bliss
freed from the power of change
glow in the hearts of the fortunate
who have made the blooming groves
of the best of hills their home.
May a herder of cows
continually play in our hearts,
longing for the gardens of Vrinda,
relishing the cowgirls' love,
lustrous like sapphire.

—Ishvara Puri, *Padyāvalī* 75

Or the following, by Kaviratna, an unknown poet:

dhyānātītaṃ kim api paramaṃ ye tu jānanti tattvaṃ
teṣāṃ āstāṃ hṛdaya-kuhare śuddha-cin-mātra ātmā
asmākaṃ tu prakṛti-madhuraḥ smera-vaktrāravindo
megha-śyāmaḥ kanaka-paridhiḥ pañkajākṣo'yam ātmā

In the hollow of the hearts
of those who discern some ultimate truth
beyond meditation
may the self abide—
nothing but mere consciousness—
while in ours
may this charming self remain,
with lotus eyes and smiling lotus face,
dark as a cloud,
clothed in gold.

—Kaviratna, *Padyāvalī* 75

And finally, this beautiful verse of Shridhara Svami, the renowned commentator on the *Bhāgavata*:

sadā sarvatrāste nanu vimalam ādyaṃ tava padaṃ
tathāpy ekaṃ stokaṃ na hi bhava-taroḥ patram abhinat
kṣaṇaṃ jihvāgra-sthaṃ tava tu bhagavan-nāma nikhilam
sa-mūlaṃ saṃsāraṃ kaṣāti katarat sevyam anayoḥ

It is true:
your primordial splendor
exists undefiled
in all places, at all times,

yet it has not torn
even a single small leaf
from the tree of life.
But your blessed name
for a mere moment
standing on the tip of my tongue
obliterates the endless stream of rebirth.
Which of these two shall I serve?

—Shridhara Svami, *Padyāvalī* 28

These verses do not talk of Brahman, at least not explicitly. But they do all have the same format we have already encountered in Yadavendra’s verse: we meet Krishna (or his name), who is contrasted with other conceptions of the Absolute, most of which have a rather Advaitic ring. The self that is ‘nothing but mere consciousness’ (*śuddha-cin-mātra ātmā*) in Kaviratna’s verse; Ishvara Puri’s ‘inner light, the very essence of bliss, freed from the power of change’ (*satyānanda-rasaṃ vikāra-vibhava-vyāvṛttam antar-mahaḥ*); or the ‘primordial splendour’ that Shridhara talks about, which exists untouched by matter ‘in all places, at all times’ (*sadā sarvatrāste nanu vimalam ādyaṃ tava padam*)—they all seem apt descriptions of an Advaitin’s conception of Brahman, which is then sharply contrasted with the beauty and charm of Krishna.

If we assume that Rupa approved of the doctrines taught in all the verses he cites, it follows that he must argue Krishna both to be the supreme Brahman (as Raghupati declares) and yet different from it (as the other poets suggest).¹⁷ And indeed he does. In his *Laghubhāgavatāmṛta*, a study on the nature of God, Rupa addresses this very issue:

But why do you claim that Mukunda is superior to Brahman, since it is well-known that Brahman and the Lord are one? Repeatedly it is said in the scriptures that the Supreme Lord (*bhagavān*) is one only, and is known by the terms ‘person’ (*puruṣa*), ‘Supreme Self’ (*paramātmā*), ‘Brahman’, and ‘perception’ (*jñāna*). Thus the *Skānda* [*Purāṇa*] says, ‘The Supreme Lord is called the Supreme Self by the *yogīs* of the eightfold path, Brahman by those immersed in the *Upaniṣads*, and perception by the gnostic *yogīs*.’ Similarly, the first book [of the *Bhāgavata*] (1.2.11) states, ‘Those who know the truth call that truth, which is non-dual perception, “Brahman”, “Supreme Self” and “Supreme Lord”.

What has been said is true. Now listen to Kapila’s teaching in the third book [*Bhāgavata* 3.32.33]: ‘Just as a single object that has many

attributes is perceived differently by each individual sensory faculty, so is the Supreme Lord [perceived differently] by the paths [ordained by] scripture.’

To summarize: In the blessed Lord exist various forms, which become manifest to their worshipers in accordance with their worship. Just as an object like milk always possesses attributes like color and taste, and this single object is perceived [differently] by the various sensory faculties—it is white to the eyes, sweet to the tongue—so the Supreme Lord, though one, is perceived variously by [different forms of] worship. Just as only the tongue can perceive its sweetness, and no other [sensory faculty], and just as the eyes and the other senses grasp [only] their own object, so do all other forms of worship that depend on the external senses [only perceive part of God’s attributes]. But devotion, which depends on consciousness, can perceive all these objects. Thus it is said in the best scriptures that Krishna is higher than this Brahman nature, because he possesses an abundance of attributes, such as sweetness.¹⁸

The passage is revealing: these different terms—‘Brahman’, ‘Puruṣa’, ‘Paramātmā’, and ‘Bhagavān’—are no longer just different names to refer to the same absolute reality, as older Vaishnavas, represented here in the *pūrva-pakṣa*, might have argued, but rather names that denote the different ways in which that same reality is realized by practitioners of different paths.

Jiva develops this notion much further in the *Bhagavat-sandarbha*. Using *Bhāgavata* 1.2.11 (which Rupa’s *pūrva-pakṣa* invokes) as a key to understand the nature of God, Jiva makes a distinction between Bhagavān, the personal deity of the earlier Vaishnava schools, and Brahman, the impersonal, abstract *nirviśeṣa* Brahman of the Advaitins—‘existence that is pure awareness’.¹⁹ This latter is perceived by the best ascetics (*parama-hamsa*), who have no interest even in the bliss of Brahmā and who have attained oneness (*tādātmya*) by their spiritual practice, but who cannot accept God’s nature and His many potencies and thus perceive God ‘generally’ (*sāmānyataḥ*).²⁰ These two aspects of God are distinct, he argues, yet part of the same ‘non-dual perception’ (*advaya-jñāna*), as the *Bhāgavata* verse states, and thereby non-different. The implications of this view for Vedānta in the Chaitanya tradition are very significant: since Brahman and Bhagavān are two aspects of the same non-dual truth, each of these terms can refer to the other, as Ravi Gupta has remarked.²¹ This allows early Chaitanya Vaishnava authors to interpret the *Upaniṣads’* descriptions of Brahman as

referring to a deity with infinite attributes, and thereby to build on the teachings of the southern Vaishnavas, while at the same time to incorporate Advaita notions of Brahman, and thereby, to some extent, integrate these two rival systems of Vedānta. But this strategy also makes it possible for them to distance themselves from Brahman and Vedānta in general, and see the *Upaniṣads* as texts teaching about an attributeless principle, as we have seen in the above-mentioned verses. Jiva’s friend Krishnadasa, for example, does just this at the beginning of the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, when he talks of ‘the nondual Brahman [taught in] the *Upaniṣads*’ and clearly distinguishes that from ‘the Lord (*bhagavān*) who is complete with the six powers’.²²

What is striking in this attitude, however, is that the Advaitin view is not denied, but dismissed. Authors such as Rupa or Jiva do not argue that the Advaitins have failed to grasp what Brahman really is, but rather that they do not care about the nature of the realization that follows from this perception or the type of worship they should foster in its wake. Unlike Ramanuja or Madhva, they do not feel the need to argue that Brahman or the Ātmā is a person and possesses unlimited attributes, and that only this view is in accordance with what the *Upaniṣads* teach. Rather, they concede that those who want Brahman can perfectly well have it, as long as Krishna’s devotees by the same token can have *him*!

Liberation

The way in which Brahman is understood in the earlier Vedānta schools determines naturally the way liberation, the state of union with Brahman, is understood. While for Shankara liberation is attained by realizing one’s nature as the self (*ātmā*) which as pure consciousness is non-different from Brahman, and is thereby ‘becoming Brahman’,²³ both Ramanuja and Madhva have insisted that since Brahman is a person, the state of liberation is necessarily a state of union with that person that does not imply abrogating the individuality of both God and the human self. Just as no attributeless Brahman exists, so can there be no non-dual state of liberation where all individuality disappears. This is particularly well expressed in poetic form by Nammalvar:

If they should merge,
That’s really good:
if the two that’ll never meet

should meet
 then this human thing
 will become our lord,
 the Dark One
 with the sacred bird
 on his banner—
 as if that's possible.
 It will always be itself.
 There are yogis
 who mistake fantasy
 for true release
 and run around
 in circles
 in the world
 of what is and what was
 and what will be.
 It takes all kinds.²⁴

‘As if that’s possible!’ For Shri vaishnavas such as Ramanuja, liberation means reaching Shri man Narayana’s divine abode, Vaikuṅṭha, where one is in union with Him. The self, as a small part (*śeṣa*) of the whole (*śeṣī*), can never become God, but after liberation it attains ‘sameness’ with God, in the sense that such a self attains his purity and experiences his bliss.²⁵

Madhva agrees to some extent with Ramanuja, except that he argues that not all liberated selves experience the same bliss. Even in the state of liberation there is a hierarchy of beings, based on their proximity to God and the degree of bliss they experience.²⁶ Depending on their degree of devotion, some may attain the abode of God (*sālokya*), some may attain proximity to God (*sāmīpya*), some may obtain a form similar to that of God (*sārūpya*), whereas others may attain a union with God in His divine realm (*yoga* or *sāyujya*) quite similar to what Ramanuja understood.²⁷

In his magnum opus, the *Rahasya-traya-sāra* (“The Essence of the Three Mysteries”), Vedanta Deshika responds to Madhva’s views, and, in the course of doing so, reiterates the traditional Shri vaishnava teachings on liberation:

Some living beings attain ... the privilege of living in the same world as Vishnu (*sālokya*), some individual selves attain proximity to the presence of Vishnu (*sāmīpya*); some attain forms similar to that of Vishnu (*sārūpya*); these, too, are sometimes called liberated in a figurative sense (*upacāra*), since they are very near the ultimate goal [though they

are not actually liberated]. This idea is set forth in the following verse: 'Some live in the worlds of Vishnu; others approach very near to Viṣṇu; others, again, acquire forms resembling Vishnu's; yet others attain union (*sāyujya*) with Vishnu. This, alone, is called liberation.'²⁸

This verse declares that only union (*sāyujya*) in the highest realm is [actual] liberation.... *Sāyujya* refers to the relationship between two who are united in communion (*sayuk*). One might be in union with another, although only in the common enjoyment of a certain pleasure. Here, in regard to the liberated self, the object of enjoyment is Brahman with his modes (*prakāra*). Since Brahman and the liberated self both commune with each other in the enjoyment of that bliss, the liberated self is said to be in union [with Brahman].²⁹

Madhusudhana Sarasvati, a prominent Advaitin of the sixteenth century, agrees with Vedanta Deshika's critique of Madhva's idea of liberation, and also considers *sāyujya* the only true form of liberation. For him, however, *sāyujya* refers not to a state in which the self and God share the same experience of bliss, but rather to Shankara's notion of liberation.³⁰

In several verses of the *Padyāvalī*, poets stress that they do not long or pray for liberation. This is nothing new: such sentiments can be found in the poetry of many Shrivaiṣṇava teachers. But what is very new is the motivation that seems to lie behind such prayers. The Vaishnavas from the south would not ask for liberation either because they felt unqualified to ask for it; or because their worship of the Lord was not motivated by such a self-centred desire as liberation; or because they wished to praise an image installed in a particular temple here on earth that they could not conceive of abandoning. When some of the poets collected in the *Padyāvalī* state that they do not want liberation, however, they seem to do so with a different motivation. Take, for instance, this verse of Yadavendra Puri:

nanda-nandana-kaiśora-
līlāmṛta-mahāmbudhau
nimagnānāṃ kim asmākaṃ
nirvāṇa-lavaṇāmbhasā

We drown
in an ambrosial sea
of Nandanandana's youthful play.
What are the salty waters
of liberation to us?³¹

Or the following verse of Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya:

bhavantu tatra janmāni
yatra te muralī-kalaḥ
kaṇṇapeyatvam āyāti
kiṃ me nirvāṇa-vārttayā

May I ever be born
there where my ears can drink
the soft, mellifluous call of your flute.
Why talk to me of extinguishing
my existence?

—Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya, *Padyāvalī* 91

Both verses draw a contrast between, on the one hand, the joy experienced through devotion and intimacy with Krishna, and, on the other, the unpleasant dullness of liberation—which in both verses is called *nirvāṇa*, perhaps to suggest Buddhist notions of emptiness. This seems odd from a Shrivaiṣṇava point of view: how are these two opposed?

Towards the end of the first part of the *Padyāvalī*, Rupa has a section called ‘contempt for liberation’ (*mokṣānādarah*). It is a short section—there are only four verses—but a surprising one, and one that illustrates very clearly how Rupa differs from Vedānta Deshika. Take the first verse, for example:

bhaktiḥ sevā bhagavato
muktis tat-pada-laṅghanam
ko mūḍho dāsātām prāpya
prābhavaṃ padam icchati

Devotion is service to the Lord.
Liberation is going beyond his feet.
What fool, having obtained servitude,
desires a position of majesty?

—Shivamauni, *Padyāvalī* 110

Here liberation is not the union with God through devotion in God’s own realm, beyond this world, as earlier Vaiṣṇavas saw it, but rather the opposite of devotion! To be liberated means to step over or abandon the feet of God to the position of power (*prābhava*) that is liberation.³² For Rupa, thus, liberation has come to mean what the Advaitins say it means.

Another verse in this section makes this contempt for liberation even more vivid:

kā tvam muktir upāgatāsmi bhavatī kasmād akasmād iha
śrī-kṛṣṇa-smaraṇena deva bhavato dāsī-padaṃ prāpitā
dūre tiṣṭha manāg anāgasi kathaṃ kuryād anāryaṃ mayi
tvad-gandhān nija-nāma-candana-rasālepasya lopo bhavet

Who are you?

I am Liberation,
and am at your service.

Why have you come here,
unannounced?

Your remembrance of Shri Krishna,
Sir, has made me
your servant.

Begone!

I am nearly sinless. Why
would you dishonour me?

Your smell
could overwhelm
the sandal perfume
that is mine
from the name of the Lord.

—Anonymous, *Padyāvalī* 113

Both Rupa and Jiva accept five types of liberation—adding *sārṣṭi*, possessing the same majesty as God, to Madhva’s list, on the authority of the *Bhāgavata*³³—and admit that these different types of liberation do not contradict devotion if they are accepted for ‘service and love’ rather than for personal ‘pleasure and power’. That is, all except *sāyujya*, which those that wish to serve the Lord quite simply reject!³⁴ Rupa and Jiva understand *sāyujya* to consist of a union of the self and God, not in the sense that Madhva or Vedanta Deshika interpret this, but more along the lines of Madhusudhana Sarasvati. In *sāyujya* liberation, Jiva explains, the self either ‘enters into the blessed body of the Lord’³⁵ or merges ‘into Brahman’,³⁶ and is thus unable to serve God in that state.³⁷

Jiva defines liberation as a realization (*sākṣāt-kāra*) of the Lord’s own form (*svarūpa*).³⁸ Therefore, if one of the five forms of liberation is superior to all others, it would not be *sāyujya*, but *samīpya*, being in the presence of God, since that is the only type of liberation in which God manifests himself in person to the devotee, whereas

he generally only manifest himself internally in the other forms of liberation.³⁹ But since God does not manifest himself in his fullness to one who is without love or devotion, Jiva argues, such devotional love is what causes true liberation. This devotion or love (variously called *bhakti*, *prīti* or *prema*) is therefore the highest goal of human life (*parama-puruṣārtha*), and not liberation.⁴⁰

Jiva's argument may seem pedantic, particularly since his description of this devotional love comes very close to Vedanta Deshika's concept of *sāyujya* liberation. According to Jiva, love of God is a form of God's potency of bliss (*hlādinī-śakti*), which allows God to experience his own bliss and make others experience it too. The devotee and God are united in that common experience of bliss and through that experience become non-different from each other⁴¹—which is precisely the way Vedanta Deshika describes liberation! Why then does Jiva go to such trouble to present his view of liberation as if it were a clear alternative? He seems partly motivated to do so to give a place in his theology to the Advaitin's notion of liberation, and partly to include the concept of 'living liberation' (*jīvan-mukti*), a concept that many southern Vaishnavas rejected but that the Advaitins supported.⁴² His main motivation, of course, seems to be to distinguish devotion from liberation, and to make devotion independent and its own goal, but he needs to do so precisely because he has reinterpreted liberation to include concepts of liberation that earlier Vaishnavas such as Vedanta Deshika had rejected.

Despite Jiva's reinterpretations of the concept of liberation to suit Rupa's theology of devotion, the concept of liberation is often primarily conceived of in Advaitic terms and rejected for that very reason, as the verses from the *Padyāvalī* illustrate.⁴³ This attitude towards liberation is illustrated well by an incident recorded in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (2.6.259ff.).⁴⁴ One day, shortly after he embraced the path of devotion to Krishna, Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya visits Chaitanya. He offers his respects to his new master, and begins to recite a verse from the *Bhāgavata* (10.14.8), but changes the ending: 'One who lives, seeking your compassion and undergoing the fruits of his own actions, offering obeisance to you with mind, speech and body, is eligible to inherit devotion (*bhakti*).' Chaitanya quickly responds: 'The verse actually reads *mukti-pade*, but you have changed it to *bhakti-pade*. Why?' Bhattacharya, with firm faith in his newly found devotion to Krishna, replies:

The fruit of liberation is not equal to devotion; it is merely the punishment for those who are averse to devotion to the Lord. He who does

not accept Krishna’s form as real and who blasphemes him or quarrels with him is punished for these acts by the liberation of merging with Brahman. But he who engages in devotion does not obtain this result. There are five kinds of liberation: *sālokya*, *sāmīpya*, *sārūpya*, *sārṣṭi*, and *sāyujya*. If there is a means to serve [God], a devotee may accept the four beginning with *sālokya*. But even hearing of *sāyujya* causes hatred and fear for a devotee. He may desire to go to hell, but will not accept *sāyujya*.

Chaitanya, however, offers a different reading of the verse: ‘The words *mukti-pada*’, he says, ‘refer to the Lord himself. He at whose feet is found liberation is *mukti-pada*.... Since the word can refer to Krishna, why would you change the verse?’

Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya’s response is quite telling. He says:

I could not give that reading to the verse. Although the meaning you have given can be derived from this word, I can still not utter it because of its double meaning. Even though the word *mukti* has five meanings [the five types of liberation], its conventional meaning [*rūḍhi-vṛtti*] is still the notion of merging [with Brahman]. To say the word *mukti* brings hatred and fear to my heart, but when I say the word *bhakti* my heart fills with joy.

Hearing this, Chaitanya laughs and embraces his new disciple. Krishnadasa, the author of the text, delights in Sarvabhauma’s staunch devotion, and completes the section by saying that ‘Bhattacharya who read and taught *māyā-vāda* now blossomed forth in such speech by the grace of Chaitanya!’ In other words, the meaning that the word *mukti* had acquired was reason enough for Sarvabhauma to reject the word and edit the prayers of the *Bhāgavata*. Though other meanings could be given to the word, the Advaitins had ruined it for him. Just as with the notion of Brahman, here too the Advaitins’ understanding of the term has prevailed, and the poets of the *Padyāvalī* and the early Chaitanya Vaishnava theologians have made room for it, shifting their attention elsewhere.

Where Does This All Come From?

What caused this shift in the perception of Vedānta? Why do these Vaishnava poets of the *Padyāvalī* seem to throw in the towel and let the Advaitins win the centuries-old debate on the nature of Brahman and liberation?

The attitude towards Brahman and liberation exhibited in the verses of the *Padyāvalī* is not entirely unheard of in Sanskrit literature, and there are some important precedents in the amorous, secular Sanskrit poetry composed at royal courts. Such works often contain verses that are similar in style to those we have seen above. Part of their power comes precisely from their juxtaposition of an otherworldly, emotionless Vedānta with impetuous, passionate, wildly corporeal love. As must be immediately apparent, contrasts of just this sort resemble what we find in the *Padyāvalī*. I will offer only two examples here, but more could easily be given. The first is from the *Āryā-saptaśatī* (70) of Govardhana, a work which Rupa cites several times in the *Padyāvalī*.⁴⁵

asatī kulajā dhīrā prauḍhā prativeśinī yadāsaktim
kurute sarasā ca tadā brahmānandaṃ tṛṇaṃ manye

If the girl next door,
noble but unchaste,
resolute, bold, and passionate,
would only become attached to me,
then I'd think the bliss of Brahman
straw.

In a famous verse from the *Śṛīgāra-tilaka* (24) attributed to Kalidasa, liberation is described and dismissed in a way that resembles the sentiments of the Vaishnava authors of the *Padyāvalī*. The translator is W. S. Merwin:

avidita-sukha-dukhaṃ nirguṇaṃ vastu kiñcit
jaḍa-matir iha kaścin mokṣha ity ācacakṣe
mama tu mataṃ anaṅga-smera-tāruṇya-ghūrṇan
mada-kala-madirākṣī nīvimokṣo hi mokṣaḥ

Some in this world insist
that a certain whatever-it-is
that has no taste of
joy or sorrow
no qualities
is Release
they are fools
to my mind her
body unfurling
with joy of being young

flowering out of love
her eyes floating as with wine and
words wandering with love
then the undoing of the knot
of her sari
that
is Release.⁴⁶

The poets of the *Padyāvalī* were clearly familiar with the court poetry, and it is, therefore, no surprise we find the strongest dismissals of the *Upaniṣads*, Vedānta, Brahman, and liberation in poetic works such as the *Padyāvalī* rather than the tradition’s theological works.

But whereas such literary tropes are obviously borrowed from amorous court poetry, we need to turn elsewhere to find possible theological influences. The most important, and most obvious, of these is undoubtedly the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Both Rupa and Jiva ground their entire theological system in the *Bhāgavata*, and cite the text repeatedly to support their theological claims, including their views on Brahman and liberation. Though the *Bhāgavata* is not unambiguous in its views on these two topics and lends itself often to alternative interpretations, we do find the seeds of early Chaitanya Vaishnava theology in this text. The *Bhāgavata* frequently refers to the triad Brahman–Paramātmā–Bhagavān, and often they can easily be interpreted as having the same referent (as indeed Rupa’s pūrva-pakṣa did with *Bhāgavata* 1.2.11),⁴⁷ but at times the text suggests that, though these terms have the same referent, they nevertheless articulate distinct aspects of it, as when the text clearly distinguishes between ‘Narayana ... who is indicated by the word ‘bhagavān’ and the ‘attributeless Brahman’.⁴⁸ The *Bhāgavata* too makes a distinction between liberation and devotion,⁴⁹ and rejects the five forms of liberation—including an Advaitic ‘oneness’ (*ekatva*) or *sāyujya*⁵⁰—if they are devoid of the possibility to attend the divine,⁵¹ and states that a devotee should, therefore, never desire union with God.⁵² The *Bhāgavata* is a notoriously difficult text, and though it teaches a clear theism and is uncompromisingly devotional in its outlook, its theological language is nevertheless often profoundly Advaitic, as Daniel Sheridan has highlighted,⁵³ and it is probably this mixture of monistic discourse and devotional theism that contributed to the revisioning of Vedānta among early Chaitanya Vaishnavas.

The Advaita influence goes beyond the *Bhāgavata*, however. It is remarkable how many Advaitin *daśanāmī* sannyāsīs⁵⁴ surround Chaitanya: there is his own guru, Ishvara Puri, and his guru’s guru,

Madhavendra Puri, as well as Chaitanya's *sannyāsa*-guru, Keshava Bharati, and Ranga Puri, a disciple of Madhavendra whom Chaitanya met in Pandharpur.⁵⁵ Once Chaitanya settles in Puri, several others join him, such as Paramananda Puri, Brahmananda Bharati, Damodara Svarupa (said to be a disciple of one Chaitanyananda), and Shankarananda Sarasvati.⁵⁶ Kavikarnapura lists nine additional *sannyāsīs* who 'played with the Lord Gaurahari', but about whom very little is known: Nrisimhananda Tirtha, Satyananda Bharati, Nrisimha Tirtha, Chidananda Tirtha, Jagannatha Tirtha, Vasudeva Tirtha, Rama Tirtha, Purushottama Tirtha, Garuda Avadhuta, and Gopendra Ashrama.⁵⁷ Early Gauḍīya texts also list other *sannyāsīs* as important influences or predecessors of Chaitanya: Brahmananda Puri, Krishnananda Puri, Sukhananda Puri, and Vishnu Puri.⁵⁸ It is difficult to determine exactly what the religious affiliations of these *sannyāsīs* were. They are praised in the biographies of Chaitanya as staunch Vaishnavas, yet their *sannyāsa* identified them as Advaitins too.⁵⁹

What exactly does it mean to be an Advaitin, and particularly a *sannyāsī* initiated in an Advaita lineage in this first half of the second millennium? The rise of Shrivaiṣṇava and Mādhva Vedānta and their constant debates with the rival school of Advaita Vedānta have profoundly altered the latter's development. Though it is quite clear that Shankara had Vaishnava leanings,⁶⁰ when Vaishnava Vedānta began to flourish in earnest, some Advaitins, at least, seemed to take more and more of it in. We see this already in the eleventh century in Krishnamishra Yatī's *Prabodha-candrodaya*, an allegorical drama teaching Advaita Vedānta. The play reads entirely like a Vaishnava work, until one comes to the final act. Its heroine is Vishnu-bhakti, who subdues everyone and reigns supreme; only in the final (rather anticlimactic) act does she retreat when Wisdom (*Prabodha*) appears. While Krishnamishra still subordinates Vaishnava devotion to monistic wisdom, over the centuries much more of Vaishnava theology is adopted by Advaitin theologians. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the works of Shridhara Svami, who pays respect to Shankara in his writings and who might have been the abbot of an Advaita monastery in Orissa.⁶¹ His teachings are often so incompatible with traditional Advaita Vedānta that Jiva claims he was a Vaishnava trying to convert his fellow Advaitins.⁶² Shridhara's continuous emphasis on devotion (*bhakti*) being the only means to liberation; his insistence that this is not a particular form of knowledge (*jñāna*), as other Advaitins might argue, but superior to it,⁶³ and

his ambivalent but, at times, very Vaishnava views of the nature of God only reinforce the point.

As mentioned before, there are a number of such sannyāsīs among the poets of the *Padyāvalī*. Were these Advaitins, or Vaishnavas, or both? It is hard to tell, but it seems likely that there was a strong influence on the poets of the *Padyāvalī* from the ‘Vaishnava’ Advaita Vedānta that developed in the centuries prior to Chaitanya. Were they once Vedāntic Advaitins initiated into Advaitin ascetic lineages who ‘converted’ later in life to devotional Vaishnavism? Such conversion narratives are indeed frequently found in Chaitanya Vaishnava texts and even in the *Bhāgavata*, the tradition’s principal sacred text. Shuka, the speaker of the *Bhāgavata*, is said to have been ‘established in transcendence (*nairgunya*)’, but, when hearing about the attributes of Krishna, he gave this up and pursued devotion.⁶⁴ Similarly, the four Kumaras, when encountering God in person, were moved with devotion, even though they were previously ‘devoted to the imperishable [Brahman]’.⁶⁵ Several early Chaitanya Vaishnava authors consider Bilvamangala, the author of the *Kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛta*, to have been an Advaitin who was lured to the path of devotion by Krishna himself,⁶⁶ and a few of Chaitanya’s associates followed a similar religious journey. We have already seen Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya’s conversion, but Brahmananda Bharati is said to have had a similar experience,⁶⁷ as is Prakashananda Sarasvati.⁶⁸ Perhaps some of these poets, such as Yadavendra Puri, were so dismissive of Brahman and liberation, and Vedānta as a whole, because they had a change of heart similar to but not necessarily as sudden as that of someone like Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya. So then, can we trace the firm dismissal of Vedānta in the *Padyāvalī* to these poets’ own religious experiences, which theologians such as Rupa and Jiva then tried to accommodate and explain in their own theology?

Whatever the exact causes for this redirection of Vaishnava theology, the consistent attempt to make space for the experiences of the Advaitins among early Chaitanya Vaishnava theologians seems particularly remarkable when considered alongside the tradition’s fierce opposition to Shankara’s *māyā-vāda*, but as I have attempted to show in this chapter, these two attitudes are harmonized in the new Vedānta that Rupa and Jiva articulate, which allowed the Chaitanya Vaishnavas to engage as Vaishnavas with Vedānta, but also to relinquish Vedānta to the Advaitins, who are conceded the right to claim all its terminology—such as Brahman and mokṣa—as their own.

Vedānta is no longer the choice discourse for the Krishna-centred Vaishnavism of Chaitanya, at least not as expressed in the *Upaniṣads*. The *Purāṇa* take central stage, and particularly the *Bhāgavata*, which is not just seen as the best *Purāṇa*, but also as a commentary on the *Brahma-sūtras* and thus as the Vedāntic text par excellence.⁶⁹ Their Vaishnava colleagues from the south might have seen this as an admission of defeat, but this inclusive theology of Chaitanya's devotees is the outcome of a centuries-long interaction and rapprochement between Advaita Vedānta and Vaishnavism. It meant that even the experience of the Vaishnava's great opponents could now be seen as a limited, but valid, experience of the cunning cowherd boy of Braj.

Notes

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1. Ravi Gupta, *Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedānta of Jīva Gosvāmī: When Knowledge Meets Devotion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

2. Jīva also acknowledges his indebtedness to Ramanuja and Madhva, as well as other Vaishnava authors, in Jīva Gosvami, *Tattva-Sandarbhā*, ed. Haridasa Shastri (Vrindavan: Shri Gadadhara-Gaurahari Press, 1983), para 27. In this chapter, I focus on the Chaitanya Vaishnavas from Mathura, but the same attitudes towards Vedānta can be found in those from Bengal, particularly in the writings of Kavikarnapura and his guru, Shrinatha Chakravarti. For more on their views of Vedānta, see chapter 2 of my forthcoming book *Splendour of Speech: The Theology of Kavikarnapura's Poetics* (Oxford University Press).

3. Rupa can easily do so because such verses are 'impersonal', as Daniel Ingalls once remarked. See Daniel Ingalls, *Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry: Vidyākara's 'Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa'* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 22–9. Nevertheless, Rupa does edit a few of those secular verses to suit the devotional theme of his anthology. See, for example, Rupa Gosvami, *Padyāvalī*, ed. Sushil Kumar De (Dacca: University of Dacca, 1934), vv. 190, 219, 281, 284, 303.

4. 'padyāvalī viracitā rasikair mukunda-sambandha-bandhura-padā pramodormi-sindhuḥ ramyā samasta-tamasāṃ damanī krameṇa saṃgrhyate kṛti-kadambaka-kautukāya' (*Padyāvalī* 1).

5. See *Padyāvalī* 73, 99.

6. For more on Sarvabhauma's works, see Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharyya, 'Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma', *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1940): 58–69.

7. *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.6.

8. ‘Tad dhaitad ghorāṅgirasah kṛṣṇāya devakī-putrāyoktvovāca’ (*Chāndogya* 3.17.6).

9. Translation by Patrick Olivelle (Olivelle, trans., *Upaniṣads* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], 268).

10. ‘Nārāyaṇaḥ paraṃ brahma gītā-śāstre samīritah’ (Yamuna, *Gītārtha-saṅgraha*, in *The Bhagavad-gītā with Eleven Commentaries*, ed. G.S. Sadhale [New Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1992], v 1).

11. Ramanuja’s *Gītā-bhāṣya*, ed. and trans. Svāmī Ādidevānanda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, n.d.). The passage is drawn from Ramanuja’s own introduction.

12. ‘Paraṃ brahma param dhāma [...] āhus tvām ṛṣayaḥ sarve devarṣir nāradas tathā asito devalo vyāsaḥ svayaṃ caiva bravīṣi me’ (Gītā 10.12–13).

13. ‘Nārāyaṇaḥ paraṃ brahma tattvaṃ nārāyaṇaḥ paraḥ, nārāyaṇaḥ paro jyotir ātmā nārāyaṇaḥ paraḥ’ (*Taittirīya-nārāyaṇa* 13.4).

14. See Madhva, *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, ed. K. T. Pandurangi (Bangalore: Dvaita Vedanta Studies and Research Foundation, 1997–2002), v 1.1.3.

15. As if considering that even Vyasa himself is not a strong enough authority, Jiva, who cites the verse in *Bhakti-sandarbha* 69, says it was ‘sung by the Lord who descended to deliver the *kali-yuga*’ (*ata eva gītāṃ kali-yuga-pāvanāvatareṇa śrī-bhagavatā—śrutam apy aupaniṣadam ... iti*), which is a common epitaph for Chaitanya.

16. Kaviratna also identifies Krishna with Brahman when he declares that his mind ‘only bathes itself in/pure Brahman/the splendor of a cloud/with motionless lightning//on Kālindī’s forest banks/caught by the vine of a milkmaid’s arm’ (*kālindī-vana-sīmani sthira-taḍin-megha-dyutau kevalaṃ/sūddhe brahmaṇi vallavī-bhuja-latā-baddhe mano dhāvati, Padyāvalī* 78). For another example of this, see *Padyāvalī* 317 (quoting *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* 6.314). All the other verses in the collection that identify Krishna with Brahman are Raghupati Upadhyaya’s.

17. Kaviratna does seem to hold that view: in verse 78, he identifies Krishna with Brahman, but in verse 75, he makes a distinction between an Advaitic notion of the *ātmā* (often used as synonymous with Brahman in Vedāntic discourse) and Krishna.

18. Rupa, *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta*, ed. Bhaktivilāsa Tīrtha (Mayapura: Shri Chaitanya Maṭha, 1995), vv. 1.5.194–205.

19. ‘Yasya brahmeti saṃjñāṃ kvacid api nigame yāti cin-mātra-sattāpī’ (*Tattva-sandarbha* 8).

20. ‘Tad ekam evākhaṇḍānanda-svarūpaṃ tattvaṃ thūtkṛta-pārameṣṭhyādikānanda-samudayānāṃ paramahaṃsānāṃ sādhana-vaśāt tādātmyam āpanne, satyāṃ api tadīya-svarūpa-śakti-vaicitryāṃ, tad-grahaṇāsāmarthye cetasi yathā sāmānyato lakṣitaṃ, tathaiva sphurad vā, tadvad evāvivikta-śakti-śaktimattā-bhedatayā pratipadyamānaṃ vā

brahmeti śabdyate' (Jiva Gosvami, *Bhagavat-sandarbhā*, ed. Haridasa Shastri [Vrindavan: Shri Gadadhara-Gaurahari Press, 1984], v 1).

21. See Gupta, *Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedānta*, 32–9.

22. *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 1.1.3. The six powers (*ṣaḍ-aiśvārya*) are mentioned in a famous passage from the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* (6.5.73–5), which Jiva comments on in *Bhagavat-sandarbhā* 1. Perhaps the strongest dismissal of an unqualified Brahman, as understood in Advaita Vedānta, is found in the writings of Raghava Pandita, a south Indian Brahmin who had settled at the foot of Govardhan and became a friend of Raghunathadasa Gosvami. In his *Śrī-kṛṣṇa-bhakti-ratna-prakāśā*, ed. Puridasa Mahashaya (Vrindavan: Haridasa Sharma, 1954), he contrasts various alternatives to devotion to Krishna, and in the second chapter (2.11) brings up *brahmopāsanā*, the worship of Brahman.

'Likewise, what is the point of worshiping Brahman?' he asks. 'Brahman too is void (*śūnya*). By worshiping the void, one gains emptiness. As the *śruti* states: 'Whatever one's meditation is like, the perfection one attains is likewise.' So what is the point of worshiping something that is void? Let it be cheated by the sweet liquor of the nectar of the love for the lotus feet of Shri Krishnachandra, whose nature is the eternal, imperishable joy of the highest bliss!

Tathaiva brahmopāsanena kim? brahmāpi śūnyam. Śūnyopāsanena śūnyatvaṁ prāpnoti. Yathāśrutiḥ—yādṛśī bhāvanā yasya siddhir bhavati tādṛśī iti śūnyopāsanena kim? Nityākṣaya-paramānanda-sukha-svarūpa-śrī-kṛṣṇa-candra-caraṇāravinda-premāmṛta-madhu-pānena vañcītaḥ syāt.

The Buddhist reading of Brahman as being *śūnya* is not so surprising, given that the Vaishnavas have long held that Shankara is really a Vedāntic Buddhist!

23. *Brahma-bhāvaś ca mokṣaḥ* (Shankara, *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, ed. V. Sadanand [Chennai: Samata Books, 1999], v 1.1.4). See also his commentary on *Brahma-sūtra* 4.4.4.

24. *Tiruvāymoli* 8.8.9. From A.K. Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1993).

25. See Ramanuja's commentary on *Brahma-sūtras* 4.4.4.

26. See chapters 56 and 57 of B.N.K. Sharma, *The Philosophy of Śrī Madhvācārya* (New Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), for a full analysis (and defence) of this view.

27. Madhva on *Brahma-sūtras* 4.4.19. As far as I understood, Madhva is arguing that all four of these can be obtained in Śvetadvīpa, Vishnu's realm within this world, but there seems to be disagreement within the Mādhva tradition about this. See Sharma, *The Brahmasūtras and their Principal Commentaries: A Critical Exposition* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1986), 803–4.

28. In Shrivaiṣṇava circles, this verse is generally attributed to the *Bhāgavata*, but it is not found there.

29. Vedānta Deśhika, *Rahasya-traya-sāra*, trans. M.R. Rajagopala Aiyangar (Kubakonam: Agnihothram Ramanuja Thathachariar, 1956), chapter 22. Translation based on this edition.

30. Madhusudhana Sarasvati, *Advaita-siddhi*, ed. N.S. Ananta Krishna Sastri (Bombay: Nirṇaya-Sagar Press, 1915), 894–5.

31. See *Padyāvalī* 42. It is very tempting to see in this a reference to the salty water that Uddālaka uses to teach his son about Brahman in *Chāndogya* 6.13.

32. Many verses in the *Padyāvalī* talk of liberation as being a state of ultimate dominion, or talk of the wealth and splendour of liberation, for example, *mokṣa-sāmrājya-lakṣmī* (12), *mukti-lakṣmī* (45), *mokṣa-lakṣmī* (102), *svārājya* (18).

33. See *Bhāgavata* 3.29.13, cited in Rupa Gosvami, *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, with commentaries of Jiva Gosvami, Mukundadasa and Vishvanatha Chakravarti, ed. Haridasa Dasa (Navadvip: Haribola Kuṭīra, 1961), 1.2.28. Jiva defines it as follows: ‘sārṣṭis tatraiva samānaiśvaryaṃ api bhavatīti’ *Prīti-sandarbhā* 10).

34. ‘Sukhaiśvoryottarā seyaṃ prema-sevottarety api sālokyādir dvidhā tatra nādyā sevā-juṣaṃ matā’ (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.56).

35. ‘Sāyujyaṃ keṣāṃcit bhagavac-chrī-vigraha eva praveśo bhavatīti’ (*Prīti-sandarbhā* 10).

36. See Jiva on *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.56: ‘tac ceśvare brahmaṇi ca sāyujyaṃ jñeyam.’ See also his commentary on *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.27: ‘ekātmatāṃ brahma-sāyujyaṃ bhagavat-sāyujyam api.’

37. See Jiva on *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.56.

38. See *Prīti-sandarbhā* 1, 7.

39. *Prīti-sandarbhā* 10 (‘tatra sālokyā-sārṣṭi-sārūpya-mātre prāyo’ntaḥ-karaṇa-sākṣātkāraḥ, sāmīpye prāyo bahiḥ, sāyujye cāntara eva’), and 16 (‘sālokyādiṣu ca sāmīpyasyādhikyaṃ bahiḥ sākṣātkāramayatvāt tasyaiva hy ādhikyaṃ darśitam’).

40. *Prīti-sandarbhā* 1. See also Shrinatha Chakravarti, *Caitanya-mata-maṅjuṣā*, ed. Haridāsa Dāsa (Navadvip: Haribola Kuṭīra, 1952), 1, and Krishnadasa’s *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 1.7.84–5, 2.9.261, 2.19.164, 2.20.125, 2.23.101, 3.7.24. Jiva comments in *Bhakti-sandarbhā* 233, that if one considers liberation to be the only goal of human life, one’s devotion is not transcendental and pure, but conditioned by the material mode of goodness (*satva*).

41. *Prīti-sandarbhā* 65. Moreover, Jiva argues in *Prīti-sandarbhā* 1, that if the principal aim of human life is defined as the cessation of suffering, the attainment of happiness, and the realization of God—as liberation is often conceived—love for God must be considered the principal aim of human life, as it accomplishes these three aims to the highest degree.

42. If liberation is defined as ‘seeing God’, it is easier to argue that liberation can be attained in this world. Jiva talks of *jīvan-mukti* in *Prīti-sandarbhā* 1, and *Bhakti-sandarbhā* 111. Rupa defines it in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.187. Ramanuja rejects the concept in his commentary on *Brahma-sūtra* 1.1.4, and Vedanta Deshika refutes it (see, for example, S.M. Srinivasa Chari, *Fundamentals of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta: A Study Based on Vedānta Deśika’s Tattva-Muktā-Kalāpa* [New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987], 310–16). Madhva’s position is a little more complex. Though he argues against Shankara’s notion of *jīvan-mukti*, he does accept the concept. See Daniel Sheridan, ‘Direct Knowledge of God and Living Liberation in the Religious Thought of Madhva’, in *Living Liberation in Hindu Thought*, ed. Andrew Fort and Patricia Mumme (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1996), 91–112, and Mesquita, *The Concept of Liberation While Still Alive in the Philosophy of Madhva* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2007).

43. See also *Bhakti-sandarbhā* 132.

44. The story is also told in Kavikarnapura’s *Caitanya-caritāmṛta-mahākāvya* 12.89ff.

45. *Padyāvalī* 190, 242, 303, 374.

46. W.S. Merwin and J. Moussaieff Masson, trans., *Sanskrit Love Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

47. See, for example, Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa, *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, with Sanskrit commentary *Bhāvārtha-bodhinī* of Shridhara Svami, ed. J.L. Shastri (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 1.2.11, 3.28.41, 3.29.36, 3.32.26, 5.7.7, 5.16.3, 6.2.41, 6.9.42, 7.5.41, 7.10.10, and 10.28.6.

48. *Bhāgavata* 11.15.16–17, 12.6.39.

49. *Bhāgavata* 5.6.18.

50. *Bhāgavata* 7.1.14, 20: Shishupala is said to attain to attain sāyujya ‘in the Lord, Vasudeva’ (*vāsudeve bhagavati sāyujyaṃ*, 14), and later, it is clarified that he merged into Krishna (*layam īyatuh*, 20).

51. ‘Sālokya-sārṣṭi-sāmīpya-sārūpyaikatvam apy utadiyamānaṃ na grhṇanti vinā mat-sevanaṃ janāḥ’ (*Bhāgavata* 3.29.13).

52. *Bhāgavata* 3.25.34.

53. Daniel Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

54. It is very doubtful that these different sannyāsīs were called ‘daśanāmī’ in Chaitanya’s time, for as Matthew Clark has demonstrated the daśanāmī orders, as they are known now, were only formed in the seventeenth century (see Matthew Clark, *The Daśanāmi-Samnyāsīs: The Integration of Ascetic Lineages into an Order* [Leiden: Brill, 2006]). There existed, however, several distinct Advaitin sannyāsa orders in Chaitanya’s time (see *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.6.70–2), which later were grouped together and called ‘daśanāmī’, and, though anachronistic, I use that term to refer to them, for convenience’s sake.

55. *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.9.285–303.

56. For Shankarananda Sarasvati, see *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 3.6.288.

57. Kavikarnapura, *Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā*, in *Grantha-ratna-pañcakam*, ed. Krishnadasa Baba (Kusumasarovara: Krishnadasa Baba, 1953), vv. 99–101. See *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 1.10.114.

58. See *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 1.9.13–15 and Kavikarnapura, *Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā*, 24.

59. See, for example, Act 4 of Kavikarnapura’s *Caitanya-candrodaya-nāṭaka*, ed. Ramchandra Mishra (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1966), where after his sannyāsa initiation Chaitanya is repeatedly identified as an Advaitin. Both Chaitanya and Damodara Svarupa renounce their sacred thread and *śikhā* when they became sannyāsīs, which is an Advaitin practice, normally not followed by Vaishnava renunciators (see Vrindavanadasa, *Caitanya-bhāgavata*, ed. Bhakti Kevala Audulomi Maharaja [Calcutta: Gauḍīya Mission, 1961], vv. 2.26.132, 161–80 and *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.10.108).

60. See Paul Hacker, ‘Relations of Early Advaitins to Vaiṣṇavism’, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens* 9 (1965): 147–54.

61. See Ananta Ch. Sukla, *Śrīdhara Svāmī: A Medieval Philosopher of Religion* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2010), 13–22.

62. See *Tattva-sandarbhā* 27.

63. See particularly the conclusion to his Bhagavad-gītā commentary.

64. See *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* 2.1.9 and 1.7.8–11. *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* 1.7.10 figures prominently in early Chaitanya Vaishnava works. See *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.6.184ff. and 2.24.

65. See *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, 3.15.43ff.

66. See *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 3.1.44; *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.10.177–8; and *Caitanya-candrodaya-nāṭaka* 8.22. The verse, attributed to Bilvamangala, is not found in the *Kṛṣṇa-karmāmṛta*.

67. See *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 2.10.175.

68. See Jan Brzezinski, ‘Prabodhananda Sarasvati: From Benares to Braj’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 55, no. 1 (1992): 52–75.

A conversion might also explain why a deeply emotional devotee like Madhavendra Puri would have a disciple that seems so staunchly Advaitic like Ramacandra Puri: Ramacandra Puri is said to have been present when Madhavendra Puri was on his death bed. When Madhavendra cried out in separation from Krishna, Ramacandra rebuked him, telling him to remember Brahman and be absorbed in the bliss of Brahman, which seems a rather odd comment for a Vaishnava! The story is told in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* 3.8.

69. *Tattva-sandarbhā* 21; *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, 2.25.98–100, 142–6.

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