‘The Golden Milkmaid’: a novel
and
‘Writing from the Gaudiya Tradition’: exegesis

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Exegesis
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Preamble

My novel, ‘The Golden Milkmaid’, presents the literary tradition, lore and culture of the Gaudiya Vaishnavs. I lived immersed in Gaudiya culture for some decades and so have chosen to contextualize my thesis in the Gaudiya tradition. Several years living in the holy place which is the setting for the novel and a dozen trips there over two decades, meant gathering a trove of books, artwork, notebooks, journals, photographs, letters, recordings and memories. Affection for the Gaudiya faith and a wish to see it represented afresh for the general reader has brought this work about. The work is presented to counterbalance clichés or irreverence to do with the superficial spiritual-search-in-India; it reflects the sentiment conveyed in Gaudiya literature and the rich aesthetic culture of the Gaudiyas encompassing their love for a personal deity.

That this project might contribute to knowledge has been a creative impetus, but greater still has been the hope that it might contribute to human understanding. My work represents the Gaudiya other-world as ‘real’ to believers. It re-tells and re-presents the Kishori-Krishna narratives, not as quaint and charming myths, but as sacrosanct and as the very sustenance and sanctuary of believers’ lives.

The term ‘Vaishnav’ denotes worshippers of deities associated with Shree Vishnu including Shree Krishna. The term ‘Gaudiya’ derives from Gauda, a region encompassing West Bengal and parts of Bangladesh and Orissa, so named when the ‘golden avatar’, Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534), instigated his major bhakti (devotionalism) movement there in the sixteenth century. This exegesis does not mention other forms of Vaishnavism such as South Indian or Assamese Vaishnavism; therefore Gaudiya Vaishnavism is often referred to simply as ‘Vaishnavism’. As is the norm in Gaudiya Vaishnav parlance, this exegesis sometimes refers to followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism as ‘Gaudiyas’, their lineage as ‘the Gaudiya lineage’, their literature as ‘Gaudiya literature’, and so on. The terms ‘Gaudiya Vaishnav’, ‘Gaudiya’, and
‘Vaishnav’ are used interchangeably: ‘Gaudiya’ emphasises the distinctiveness of the Gaudiya Vaishnav line and ‘Vaishnav’ indicates a more general sense. Gaudiyas understand Krishna to be the source of Vishnu. The divinity represented in my writing is Shrimati Kishori-ji (Radha) and Shree Krishna both; energy and energetic source, Kishori-Krishna. As is the in-cult norm, groups of male and female devotees together are termed ‘Vaishnavs’ and a female Gaudiya Vaishnav is called a ‘Vaishnavi’.

This exegesis falls naturally into three sections. The first part, ‘Neti Neti: Not this, not that’, compares and contrasts ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ with relevant texts to put forward some ways in which it is unique in the context of Australian literature. The second part, ‘Devi: Goddess/woman/sacred land’, illuminates my novel’s setting and characters, thus elucidating its purpose. The third and largest part, ‘Achintya-bheda-abheda-tattva: inconceivably at once the same and different’, provides pertinent background on Gaudiya writing and so defines the context in which ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ was conceived. It proposes that the work of a modern-day, independent, female Gaudiya writer does and does not belong in a Gaudiya genre.

This thesis has been produced beyond the jurisdiction of ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness) or any other religious institution.

A full glossary is provided as an addendum.
Part I

Neti Neti: Not This, Not That

This section is named ‘Neti Neti: Not this, not that’ after a Sanskrit expression and analytical tool used by certain Hindu philosophers to define or outline the nature of godhead by indicating what it is not. The section is intended to cast my novel, ‘The Golden Milkmaid’, in relief against a background of selected Australian literature, delineating what the novel is by demarcating what it is not. The section concludes with a reference to a poem by English Romantic, William Wordsworth, ‘Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent’s Narrow Room.’

Three recent Australian novels represent religion or spirituality through their characters: in That Eye the Sky (1986), Tim Winton distinguishes hypocritical, dogmatic religion from the uncorrupted spiritual vision of a child; in Cosmo Cosmolino (1992), Helen Garner questions belief and faith through her dark angel and ‘old-hippy’ characters; and in Knitting (2006), Anne Bartlett gently encodes the Christian concept of grace. Each novel presents religion obliquely or veils it; each writer incorporates their Christianity in their novel, but none foregrounds it. Novels with religious substance carry negligible significance in Australian literature. Some twenty years after That Eye the Sky was published, Winton described Australians as being anxious about religion and emotion. Many Australians hide their faith, he said, ‘not because it should be private’ but because there is ‘a real hostility towards it’ and so they ‘have to protect themselves’. He recognised Australia’s anti-religiousness as a symptom of a ‘sort of post-modern industrial age’ and described his writing as a way of going beyond commonly accepted boundaries, ‘knowing that people were really uncomfortable about discussing faith and mysticism and religion’ (ABC, 2004). This unease is compounded where the religion is foreign. In Anna and Jane Campion’s Holy Smoke: A Novel (1999) and the movie of the same name (1999), a ‘regular’ Australian family hires an exit counselor to brutally exorcise the young protagonist of the faith she finds in India.
Hinduism’s rate of growth in Australia is greater than Buddhism and Islam: each decade between 1986 and 2006 it more than doubled. Hindus now number one in every hundred Australians (ABS) and so it is high time for Australians, and significantly, academics, to delve deeper into the ancient, multi-faceted philosophies of Hinduism. My work addresses the lacuna caused by a lack of understanding of and even unease do do with the religions that originated in India. David Malouf, illustrious Australian author, writes:

Fear of India comes in many forms. Fear of dirt, fear of illness, fear of people; fear of the unavoidable presence of misery, fear of a phenomenon so dense and plural that it might, in its teeming inclusiveness, swamp our soul and destroy our certainty that the world is there to be read but is also readable. (143)

And yet fear can often be balanced with deep fascination and it is time for Australians, including academics, to delve deeper into the ancient, multi-faceted philosophies of Hinduism. Today, after the UK, the greatest number of immigrants being granted Australian citizenship are from India and Hinduism’s rate for growth in Australia is greater than Buddhism and Islam.

With continuing waves of migration and shifts in cultural interaction, global discourses around Asia-Pacific Writing in general are developing rapidly. Still, writing from Australia on the Indian immigrant experience is limited. The largest part of my background reading and my main literary inspiration apart from Gaudiya texts, has been Indian Writing in English (IWE), yet IWE from Australia forms a minute archive compared to that from the UK, America, or Canada. The genre covers issues such as the cross-cultural immigrant experience, submergence in Western culture, the search for identity, displacement, and yearning for a distant deshi (subcontinental) homeland. It comes from a liminal cultural space between Occident and Orient. Paul Sharrad, Australian academic researcher in the field of Indian/Australian writing, observes, however, that India’s and Australia’s two-way literary traffic is neither consistent nor equal: ‘The long shadow of the White Australia Policy still darkens attitudes outside of the cricket ground’ (8). Kabita Dhara of Brass Monkey Books sees that Australia and India need cultural exchanges other than Bollywood and cricket and she is saddened to see us ‘persisting with misconceptions about each other instead of forging a
relationship based on direct communication’. Writing has a large part to play in such recognition (Meyer).

Bruce Bennet, appointee to the Australia-India Council and editor of *Of Sadhus and Spinners: Australian Encounters with India* (2009), an anthology tracing Australia and India’s literary interaction over the last one hundred and fifty years, writes that, although twenty-first century Australians see themselves developing a special relationship with countries of the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, they know little about Indian literature just as India knows little about Australian literature (vii). Sharrad agrees: ‘syllabuses tend to the conservative’ because there is ‘a heartening, sometimes quaint ideal still widely held [in India] that the humanities play a significant role in shaping humanist ethics and raising moral and social well being’. Serious moral and social investment in this ideal ‘can entail degrees of incomprehension of the irreverence and sexual license in Australian culture,’ (4) except as evidence that the West is decadent and godless. Nevertheless, since the late 1980s, Australian Studies has thrived in India.

*Of Sadhus and Spinners* shows how in nineteenth-century Australian writing about India, barefaced racial prejudice or at the least a sense of condescension was customary, yet John Lang and Alfred Deakin were the notable exceptions who rose above this norm. In the early twentieth-century, Mary Elkington, Ethel Anderson and Mollie Skinner all convey deep affection for India and her people.

*Of Sadhus and Spinners* also contains Mena Abdullah and Ray Mathew’s evocative *Time of the Peacock* (1965), set in rural Australia and narrated by a little girl in an Indian immigrant family who keep a real peacock. The peacock will not fan his tail, supposedly because he does not feel at home in Australia, but one moonlit night, the enchanted child witnesses him in display. R.K Dhawan, Indian literary academic, sees here a metaphor for the Indian immigrant experience. Alienation is followed by a completion of the process of adaptation resulting in the hybridised consciousness the child develops: she is at once Indian and Australian (170-172).

*Of Sadhus and Spinners* also contains the work of Joan London and Manik Datar who both deal with sense of self, perceptions of relatives, and families moving between the subcontinent and Australia and both of whom were writing in the decades around the millennium. The largest part of London’s ‘Maisie Goes to India,’ is the story of the narrator’s mother’s life in India as a young woman in the early thirties, but London juxtaposes this narrative with italicised passages containing the narrator’s nostalgic,
child’s-eye impressions of India gleaned from photographs or from conversations that she had heard. London has her mother going to India; in ‘My Sister’s Mother,’ Datar has her Indian mother emigrating to Australia. Since she was a child, the narrator had lived in Australia with her mother while the narrator’s elder sister remained in India to finish her studies and marry; hence each sister has different memories and perspectives on their mother. The narrator was pleased at her own Australianisation.

Two relevant works included in Of Sadhus and Spinners are ‘Monsoon’ (1988) in which Inez Baranay caricatures a group of yoga students visiting a drizzly Indian hill-station, and Yasmine Gooneratne’s ‘Masterpiece’ (2002) set in the historical birthplace of Jayadev, one of India’s most famous leading writers. It introduces the reader to Kishori and Krishna’s romantic dalliances, and yet its purpose is not to exalt or venerate the Kishori-Krishna narratives. Baranay’s work and Gooneratne’s ‘Masterpiece’ are discussed elsewhere in this exegesis.

Australian-born Canadian Janette Turner Hospital’s The Ivory Swing (1982) begs comparison with ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ because its narrative also revolves around a Hindu widow, but it is set in the culture of South India and Hospital’s approach is different to mine. The narrator of The Ivory Swing, Juliet, is staying a year with her husband, an academic studying language and culture, in a house on the property of a landed gentleman. A restless young widow lives on the same property, and Juliet wishes she could rescue her from what she perceives as a plight of enforced seclusion, austere living, and chastity. The landowner sends a child-servant to the house, a cheerful boy who plays a flute and cares for the cows, clearly intended by Hospital to be reminiscent of Shree Krishna. Juliet wishes to liberate the boy from his culture too. The Ivory Swing confuses rasas of relationships between characters: at one point the child and the young widow play in the water as if they are Shree Krishna and nubile gopi, yet the work closes with bold imagery likening them to Shree Krishna and his mother Yashoda. The work appropriates traditional imagery of the Kishori-Krishna poetic tradition to exoticise descriptions of earthly lust. Through its sensuous passages describing the steamy forest and the widow’s body and body-language, The Ivory Swing perpetuates the idea that widows are sexually dangerous. The imagery used in the work to depict the tragedy with which the book ends does not bear repetition by a Gaudiya writer.

‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is informed by the texts listed above, yet its engagement with the purely spiritual sets it apart. It represents religion, piety, faith and devotion candidly.
It is around faith that the narrative revolves.

With its current intellectual underpinnings, fiction is the ideal form in which to record and share one’s cultural experience in an artistic form. Fiction dovetails effectively with various types of spirituality and each enables exploration of the other. But just as Gaudiya students guard against mechanical ritual and prayer, Natalie Goldberg, popular American writer recognised for her series of books on Zen practice, warns of mechanically pushing pen across page, dutifully putting in the time like a writing-goody-two-shoes (168). Gaudiya-\textit{bhakti} requires ardent desire and duty; similarly, Goldberg teaches, ‘Be ready to put your whole life on the line when you sit down for writing practice’. She writes of hunger and aching to write (140), a state reminiscent of \textit{lobha} (spiritual greed) at the level of \textit{raganuga-bhakti-sadhana} (advanced stage of devotion beyond regulations and conventions). Goldberg emphasises the dignity of writing truth — a truth that spreads from the page into our lives. She says writing teaches about life and life teaches about writing — there is a flow back and forth (143). Of Zen meditation, with regard to letting go of thoughts and being in the here-and-now moment, Goldberg says, ‘Writing is my deepest Zen practice’ (186). Although our practices differ greatly, Goldberg’s personal conviction echoes that of a Gaudiya: ‘... art, creativity without meditation practice doesn’t interest me’ (186).

Inez Baranay’s two most recent novels, \textit{Neem Dreams} (2003) and \textit{With the Tiger} (2008), were first published in India. \textit{Neem Dreams} engages with postcolonial theory and the cultural politics of representation. It exposes the clash of corporate greed with tradition and environmentalism. Although the work was lauded by Indian reviewers for the way Baranay represents a ‘real India’, it received little attention in Australia. \textit{With the Tiger} represents the Westerner’s spiritual search in India. It closely engages intertextually with Somerset Maugham’s \textit{The Razor’s Edge} which was written in 1944 before the notion of spiritual-seeking in India had evolved in the West into a cliché. In \textit{With the Tiger} as in \textit{The Razor’s Edge}, a young central character drops out of his life of material privilege to travel in search of spiritual truth to India, where he finds peace at the feet of a saintly preceptor. When he returns to his circle of friends in the West, he explains what he has learned. \textit{With the Tiger}’s structure and plot are derived directly from \textit{The Razor’s Edge}, even down to details of dialogue, but its characters are Australian and the novel is set almost in the present day.
In *Sun Square Moon: Writings on Yoga and Writing* (2005), Baranay says she seeks to upset assumptions people make about yoga practitioners, listing markers of the New Age movement including crystals, angels and dolphins (*Sun Square 2*). In Britain, where Vaishnavism is closely integrated with a longer-established Hindu culture, such stereotyping is less frequently encountered; in Australia, Hinduism is a relative newcomer and therefore less understood and less accepted. Australia has closer links with countries in which Buddhism is widespread and here, yoga principles fuse with Buddhist beliefs. *Sun Square Moon* and ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ both reflect on yoga practice, but there are essential differences between Baranay’s writing/yoga practice and that of a Gaudiya.

During her yoga practice, Baranay reflected on her writing practice and realised she had been regarding the two practices as being performed by conflicting parts of her divided self (*Sun Square 2*). Ultimately, in the yoga of bhakti (devotion), writing and yoga can become aligned: writing can be seva (service) or sadhana (systemised spiritual practice) to Kishori-Krishna and guru. Baranay reflects upon her writing practice in relation to her Iyengar yoga practice: she writes of her body as, ‘a text upon which yoga writes’ (*Sun Square 1*) and maintains in *Sun Square Moon* that, ‘[t]he body is the self, the self is an illusion’. Vaishnavs suppose differently: the text upon which their yoga writes would be the heart (*hridaya*) or the individual spirit-soul (*jivatma*). Vaishnavs care for their temporal body of flesh (*deha*) but know it not to be the self, realising their perfect eternal spiritual body (*siddhadeha*) and their true self is their all-important objective. Yet some of Baranay’s ideas are perfectly aligned with the Gaudiya way of thinking. She conducted an interview for ABC Radio National with well-known yoga master Yogacharya Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar. When she asked him whether he was a guru, Iyengar replied, ‘Your guru is your practice.’ Baranay wrote, with writing, as with yoga, ‘[y]ou learn to do it by doing it’ (*Sun Square 51*). Baranay maintains in *Sun Square Moon* that, ‘writing is the teacher of writing; writing is to be understood through writing’ (72). Furthermore, she explains that with writing, as with yoga, ‘[e]ventually, your discipline is not forced and it is not denial. It is your priority, not your sacrifice’ (54). Such knowledge is also a valuable open secret among practitioners of bhakti-yoga.

Linguist and writer Jill Jepson suggests that writing can be a spiritual vocation in itself and that if one already has beliefs and practices, they can work together with writing. In *Writing as a Sacred Path* (2008), she suggests that writing can nourish one’s
beliefs. She proposes that writing can deepen one’s awareness, bring one’s values into focus, ‘clarifying and energising’ the writer’s way along their chosen path. Even if a text is not about spirituality, writing it can be an opportunity to examine one’s relationship with humanity, the earth, and the divine (5). Writing requires the deep, focused attention meditation entails; it can be a lifting up of the consciousness to the divine; and it can be a process of inward contemplation.

In her short story ‘Masterpiece’ (1995), Australian Sri Lankan Yasmine Gooneratne asserts a feminist agenda by wittily altering a traditional narrative connected to the sacred text Gita-govinda. Romesh Chunder Dutt, nineteenth-century Bengali intellectual, declares of Jayadev’s Gita-govinda — Song of the Divine Cowherder (twelfth century), that ‘(n)ever in the Sanskrit language, never perhaps in any language in the world, have such melodious verses been written’ (23-24). Gita-govinda is arguably the most widely known text describing Kishori-Krishna’s amorous leela, and the ‘sole specimen of lyrical composition in Sanskrit literature’ (30). The work is pivotal in that it delineates Kishori-ji’s primary position in the theology and as such was inspirational to Shree Chaitanya (CC Madhya 2:77). It is the subject of much scholarly study and is recited in temples across India to this day. Folk-legend has it that when Jayadev was composing Gita-govinda, he had difficulty with a certain passage in which Krishna had been dallying with some milkmaids so that Kishori-ji had become angry with him. Krishna was to make a touching plea to Kishori-ji, to ornament his head with her lotus feet. Jayadev was in a quandary because he regarded Krishna as superlative divinity, hence, anyone touching their feet to Krishna’s body — more so his head — would be committing a grave offense. He put his pen down and left his cottage to go to the river to bathe. While he was away, Krishna came along disguised as Jayadev. He took up Jayadeva’s pen and completed his own dialogue in Act Ten, Verse Eight, writing: ‘decorate my brow with the soft buds of your lotus feet’ (Gg 276). This folk-narrative marks a shift from the twelfth century when Krishnaism ‘was characterised by a strong sympathy with the actions and feelings of the lover, rather than the conception of a deity, as such’ (Dutt 21), towards the sixteenth century when Krishna was worshipped with awe and reverence as Vishnu and scholars suggest that it might have been invented to resolve the issue of a writer-follower of Vishnu writing such a scandalous passage (Dutt 21). To this day, an annual fair is held at Jayadeva’s home village, in Orissa, Kenduli. Gooneratne
sets her ‘Masterpiece’ here during a seminar at a Literature and Language Research Centre. She has her narrator listening to an academic lecturer who is continually interrupted from the audience by the irrepressible voice of an Australian professor who doubts Jayadeva’s divine empowerment, questions Padmavati’s Indian wifeliness, and finally proposes an alternative version in which it is Padmavati who took up Jayadeva’s pen to complete the mysterious verse. He claims that because of patriarchal societal norms, Krishna was given credit for it.

Feminist sympathy is also demonstrated in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’, but unlike ‘Masterpiece’, the traditional narratives within it have been retold according to traditional templates. ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is intended for a non-Gaudiya audience, but without reference to the three-fold rule of guru-sadhu-shastra (one’s personal preceptor, other judicious and sagacious persons, and scriptural texts), it could not be accepted by the Gaudiya community as conveying the teachings of the Gaudiya masters as intended. Prolific fifteenth-century Gaudiya poet Shrila Narottam Das Thakur espoused the rule of guru-sadhu-shastra in his Prema Bhakti Chandrika (The Moonlight of Loving Devotion), saying,

Sadhu-sastra-guru-bakya, citete kariya aikya, satata bhasiba prema-majhe. Making the words of the guru, sahuds and sastras one with my heart, I constantly float and swim in the ocean of pure love.

Prabhupad quoted Narottam Das repeatedly as he established the teaching of guru-sadhu-shastra: one’s own preceptor, other sages and the literature must all agree. ‘So to accept one,’ Prabhupad said, ‘you have to take the opinion of the other two. Then you’ll get the right way.’ (Conversation, London, 1973)

I found encouragement in my choice to write within boundaries of rigorous Gaudiya dictate by reading William Wordsworth’s sonnet ‘Nuns Fret Not’

Nuns fret not at their convent’s narrow room,  
And hermits are contented with their cells,  
And students with their pensive citadels;  
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,  
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest peak of Furness fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:
In truth the prison unto which we doom
Ourselves no prison is: and hence for me,
In sundry moods, ’twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet’s scanty plot of ground;
Pleased if some souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

Wordsworth writes that he finds solace writing contained by the sonnet’s rigid limitations and likens the limitation to the restricted physical space in which a nun, hermit, or student might work. As a nun is at ease meditating or praying in the security and serenity of her bhajan-kutir (sage’s cell), so it is a solace to write within the rule of guru-sadhu-shastra, within the eightfold framework of asta-kaliya-leela on which the Kishori-Krishna narrative is based (this will be explained later in this exegesis) enclosed by the dictate of Gaudiya convention. In Part III, I will discuss in what ways I challenge these dictates.
This section considers the connections between believer (Vaishnav or Vaishnavi), sacred land (Vrindavan), and stories told about that land. Firstly, it discusses the rapport between the central women characters in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’. It then elucidates restrictions imposed on Gaudiya women and their creative expression through writing and goes on to describes the realities of the lives of the Vrindavan widows. ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ seeks to empower its women characters textually, and so their authority is discussed as well as the case for creating women Gaudiya gurus within the novel against the grain of what is, in reality, a highly patriarchal Gaudiya establishment. Finally, the case for believing, as the characters in my novel do, is presented.

The main setting of ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is Vrindavan, a dham (sacred site) for all Hindus as the home of Radha and Krishna. It is in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh approximately halfway between New Delhi and Agra on the Grand Trunk Road. The area of land surrounding Vrindavan is named Braj, and Braj-bhakti (devotion centred on the lore of Braj) is the key goal of Gaudiya practice. The second dham in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is Nabadwip in Nadia in West Bengal: Chaitanya was born here and this is where the seed of his Gaudiya movement germinated. It has been the greatest privilege to have worked on the editing teams of two reference works by BV Narayan which comprehensively describe these two dhams: Sri Navadvipa-dhama (The Holy Site of Navadvipa) and the Prominent Holy Places of the Gaudiya Vaisnavas in Sri Gauda-mandala (2005) describing a cluster of one hundred and thirty holy places in Bengal; and Sri Vraja-mandala Parikrama (Pilgrimage Around Vraja) (2007) describing over five hundred sacred sites within Braj. Moreover, it was the astonishing good fortune to have had the opportunity to tour these sites with the esteemed author as guru and guide.

Just as I have hidden the name of Radha in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ (this is explained elsewhere in this exegesis), so I have also lightly concealed the name of Vrindavan by re-naming it Swapnavan, ‘The Forest of Dreams.’ Sadly, many visitors to Vrindavan say,
‘Vrindavan has become so commercialised,’ or ‘it is dirty and polluted,’ and so I endeavour to portray Vrindavan’s magical qualities in the kindest of lights as if ‘she’ was a beloved person. But on the ecological level, this bustling pilgrimage town is suffering.

Through its paired descriptions of Uluru and Govardhan, two important sacred hills, ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ offers a parallel between traditions in which places and routes are charged with sacred associations so that landscape becomes numinous. David Kinsley, prolific writer and researcher on Hinduism, sees that the Australian Aboriginal traditions and the Gaudiya tradition share a similar ‘topographical spirituality’. He draws parallels between pilgrimage and walkabout (244), parallels frequently heard drawn in day-to-day speech among Gaudiyas familiar with Australian Aboriginal custom: *parikrama* translates as ‘walk around’, and walking for a month around the sacred land of Braj, reciting the sacred songs and stories of the place is considered a highly important part of the Gaudiya’s life.

With regard to the study of Australian literature in India, Sharrad writes that ‘nationalist anti-colonial feeling and intra-national concern for the rights of tribal and low-caste groups produces a strong curiosity about Aborigines’ (9). Conversely, study of Indian literature by Australians can raise awareness of land rights issues here. Arundhati Roy, in speaking about one of her essays on Indian humanitarian issues, ‘The Greater Common Good’, expresses how she has not written ‘on behalf’ of anyone because the politics of representation are fraught and complicated; nor was she writing an anthropological account of the displaced tribal people. She was writing about social justice, the politics of involuntary displacement, and what happens to those who are involuntarily displaced (Ram 12). And so it is that ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ has not been written ‘on behalf’ of the widows of Vrindavan. Rather, its purpose is to raise awareness of the widow and her environment.

Rick Huberman, a visitor to Vrindavan some three decades ago, contemplated as he gazed on Vrindavan, how, ‘[a]ll too soon, this may disappear into some textbook as “The Braj Tradition”, ‘or become, ‘a commercial Disneyland’ or ‘inundated by anthropologists, researchers and the rest’ (10). Indeed, ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is set in a fictional time-bubble in the nineteen-sixties and is, as such, a sort of ‘salvage ethnography’ like a sepia photo of a vanished era. With the increased affordability of cars, Vrindavan has now become a destination for day trips from Delhi and Agra’s large urban clusters. Cars now clog the alleyways of the fragile medieval town. Asphalt
covers the historical footpath on which barefoot pilgrims have walked for centuries. Hoardings are now erected along it. In carved sandstone archways or under trees near the riverbank where once frail, elderly devotees called out to pilgrims to drink some free, pure, cool, ‘mithai’ (sweet) drinking water, internet cafés now stand. Mobile phone spires tower among steeples. Problems with basic infrastructure have escalated out of control. Professor of Religion Bruce Sullivan, observes that: Vrindavan now attracts over two million pilgrims a year; there is an influx of people going to live there; the badly deforested area is rapidly becoming desert; the water table is falling by five feet annually; the quality of water is deteriorating; its river is polluted and its air is polluted by an oil refinery close by (252-3).

An important setting in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is the River Yamuna. Professor of Religion David L. Haberman has exactly presented an analysis of the state of the holy river in his *River of Love in an Age of Pollution: The Yamuna River of Northern India*. His work is based on ethnographic research at temples on the banks of the river — temples I frequented as a worshipper during my years in Vrindavan — exploring how religious culture connected with the river is being affected by the present-day pollution and what communities are doing to fight it. The work provides rigorous scientific analysis of the pollution and yet it also empathises with the devotees’ worshipful attitude towards her, referring to ancient texts that glorify her sacred spiritual form.

Devotees flock to experience a moment of religious rapture in the setting in which the divine play of their beloved deities took place — the flower-filled forests, the soft green hillsides, ponds, lakes, the goddess-river — but instead they are witnessing the destruction of a fragile ecology of forest, flora and fauna. Kinsley soberly observes that Hindu ideas of sacred landscape can lead to ‘obscuring present realities in nature in favour of idealised mythological vision’ (242-243). Devotees regard the disappearance of the ‘lush poetic landscape’ as a symptom of the ‘inevitable degeneration’ of *kali-yuga* (the present age) (Entwistle 79) predicted in lore and scripture, and so inevitable. The eco-linguist Joshua Nash perceives that Vrindavan is both a physical place and a concept, but that a schism has occurred between religious beliefs and ecology there (118). Yet, to this day, it is not difficult for a visitor to envisage what Vrindavan might have been like fifty or a hundred years ago and a photographer who points her camera carefully and uses the right filters can still produce images of an idyll. The widows’
cottages in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ are closely based on an actual area in Vrindavan of old, unspoiled gardens enclosed within a high, gated wall. Whole families live there in two rows of little one-roomed dwellings around an earth yard. Peacocks roam in the gardens, the trees are filled with parrots and monkeys, and it is close to the River Yamuna.

Alan Entwistle recognises the phenomenon that: ‘Braj is a spiritual landscape in which the devotee may seek refuge from the trammels of mundane life by entering a world of pure feeling (bhava)’ (87). ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ represents the Braj area located in this physical world and concurrently in an alternate dimension that cannot be located on any geographical or political map as according to Gaudiya lore. The protagonist travels through a romanticised orient towards a destination beyond earthly India — the eternal land of Kishori-Krishna. Gaudiyas believe that Vrindavan on this earth, ninety miles southeast of Delhi, is a facsimile of that supreme abode in a spiritual sky, and as such is of the same quality as Kishori-Krishna themselves (Prabhupad Bg 8:21 Commentary).

‘The Golden Milkmaid’ seeks to convey through its characters how Gaudiyas understand this alternate reality to be paradoxically non-different from earthly Braj and how it can be attained by passing through the portal of earthly Braj through meditation, devotion, intense longing or sadhu-sanga (connection with one who has realised it). The characters Surabhi and Swamini are familiar with the denizens of Braj’s spiritual alter-reality: they chat and gossip about Kishori and Krishna as if they are youngsters in their home village. In that Braj:

[t]he providence of nature is a reflection of the purity of the inhabitants; nature readily yields its bounty to those who live in sympathy with her, its fruits do not have to be striven after as in real life. In the poetic landscape of Braj ... Krishna can sow pearls in a field and produce pearl-bearing trees. Poverty is transcended, the superabundance cancels out avarice and envy; there is no need to labour, hoard, and guard. (Entwistle 88)

At first, the character Pearl perceives a Braj of crumbling stone and temple culture; gradually she comes to realise the otherworld Braj. This Braj is a place of ananda (bliss) and bladini-shakti (energy of bliss or Kishori-ji). John Stratton Hawley, a specialist in
devotional traditions of North India, sympathetically describes the mystery of Braj:

[Its streets swirl with the floods of love [and] once the unwary traveller is caught in the tide, there is no hope of escape. Safe passage is hardly what one expects at Brindavan. One comes not to cross but to drown, to drown in love’s uncharted sea, and to find in that drowning a tranquility unknown on dry land. (1992: 51)

Pearl assimilates this Braj into her own world-view and carries it in her mind and heart back to her loved ones in Australia. As such she is the protagonist of a Hero’s Journey returning to her homeland to share the Elixir that will save or heal. ‘If a traveler doesn’t bring back something to share,’ writes Christopher Vogler, ‘he’s not a hero.... He hasn’t learned his lesson. He hasn’t grown. Returning with the Elixir is the last test of the hero, which shows if he’s mature enough to share the fruits of his quest’ (221). As it is with the Pearl character and the Hero, so it is with the *ghosthi-anandi* Gaudiya Vaishnav (one who attains bliss through discussion of spiritual matters in an assembly or with companions). The Gaudiya *bhajan-anandi* (one who attains bliss through deep personal meditation on Chaitanya and Kishori-Krishna) meditates in seclusion, but the Gaudiya *ghosthi-anandi*, perceiving an emergency situation on the planet, postpones their own absorption in deep meditation to go out into the world to tell others about their learning from the joyful process of *bhakti-yoga*, the gentle teachings of Shree Chaitanya, the narratives of Kishori-Krishna in Braj, and so on.

Adept Gaudiyas teach that, just as every distinct holy site within Braj is a sentient personality, so too are the actual narratives of every pastime (*leela*) enacted there by Kishori-Krishna and their associates. The personalities such as Kishori-Krishna’s friends, family, parents, servant-friends, cows, birds and animals, river, hill, flowers, clouds, and all other characters in the *leelas* are included within these pastime-characters. The Gaudiya theology of Rupa Goswami has it that there are five different pastime-personalities relating to each of the five basic *rasas* of relationships, topmost of which is the selfless service in the conjugal *rasa* (*madhurya-bhakti*) of the cowherd maidens. Of all these maidens, Kishori-ji is topmost: she is *hladini-sakti* (the embodiment of Krishna’s pleasure potency). When *hladini-shakti* meets *samvit-shakti* (the potency of the moods of the relationships in Braj), *leela-shakti* (a personified potency of a narrative) is formed.
This *leela-bhakti* is the goddess Yogamaya, a manifestation of goddess Kishori-ji; she arranges for ‘a chain of pastimes (BV Narayan ‘Praying to the Pastime Personalities’), an infinite linked string of narratives, to automatically manifest in the heart of one who prays to her requesting it. All these points are relevant to understanding the worldview informing the writing of this project.

As well its divine players, Kishori and Krishna and the rest, ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is peopled with corporeal characters inspired by actual people. Pearl comes from an ‘ordinary background’ and her flawed thoughts are plain to the reader. Her feelings and actions carry the narrative along and the plot revolves around her outlook and observations.

Kathleen Erndl observes that although ‘the presence of the divine feminine is not any guarantee that women will be recognized as leaders or will be equal within [a religious] movement, it does seem to help (249)’. ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ might be seen to be a symptom of a trend in Gaudiya institutions towards women’s leadership and equality. The protagonist’s main co-characters are three virtuous Vaishnavis: Surabhi, a middle-aged ascetic, the more developed character of the three; Ramani-\textit{ma}, an elderly ascetic and Saraswati Swamini, Pearl’s charismatic and influential yet distant guru. These three women are at different stages of spiritual progress. Their lives are not easy but they work together as agents in a spiritual triumph-narrative. Vaishnavism teaches that one only attains *bhakti* (devotion) by the grace of a *bhakta* (one who is devoted) and so these mortal characters fulfill gatekeeping roles granting Pearl entrance to spiritual Braj.

Pearl’s relationship with Surabhi compliments the one she has with Swamini. Surabhi is an approachable, strong, independent, middle-aged Vaishnavi. Pearl and Surabhi become affectionate friends and Surabhi gives Pearl *siksha* (instruction in Gaudiya Vaishnavism), so becoming her principal *siksha* gurus (instructing) *guru*. Ramani, Kubja, Manjari and the others are also Pearl’s *siksha* gurus in varying measure. Swamini is Pearl’s *diksha* (formal, initiating) *guru*. This depiction of *siksha* and *diksha*-guru is consistent with important fundamental tenets of Gaudiya Vaishnavism regarding *guru-tattva* (principles to do with *guru*).

The Saraswati character’s namesake is the goddess of learning and the arts. Goddess Saraswati gives voice to and ‘validates speech’ for women as much as men (Bose 111). Regal Swamini’s relationship with Pearl is formal, yet, as Swamini gives Pearl *diksha*
Writing from the Gaudiya Tradition

(\textit{mantras} and initiation), her relationship is unfathomable and enduring on a super-sublime interior level. Pearl experiences telepathic-like exchanges with Swamini as in chapter XIII: ‘Pearl heard Swamini’s voice, kind and silent inside her mind. She spoke in words with perfect clarity.’ (183) Although Swamini’s role is important, she appears rarely, briefly, or distantly. Pearl regards her with veneration. Such limited outward interaction between \textit{diksha-guru} and student on the corporeal plane reflects the relationship between main character and \textit{diksha-guru} in a key Gaudiya text, Bhaktivinode Thakur’s novel, \textit{Jaiva-Dharma — Onus on the Soul} (1896) in which the main character meets his \textit{diksha-guru} only momentarily.

Gaudiya scriptures delineate \textit{guru-tattva} (doctrinal truths about authentic \textit{guru}) and the \textit{guru}-\textit{shishya} (guru-student) relationship, but research backgrounding this work also includes protracted observation of Gaudiya \textit{gurus} interacting with students. For the Gaudiya, \textit{guru} is \textit{atmiya-svajan} (nearest and dearest to one’s very spirit) and in Gaudiya culture, no writing would be legitimate without acknowledgement of one’s \textit{guru}.

Conveying the essential meaning of \textit{guru} as dearmost friend was a priority in my novel. Key tracts — those in which Surabhi imparts Gaudiya knowledge to Pearl — are based on the traditional question and answer format loosely comparable to that employed by Thakur in \textit{Jaiva Dharma}. ‘This dyadic framework of questioning and answering between disciple and teacher is found throughout Sanskritic Hinduism up to current times’ writes Julius Lipner (221). A function of \textit{guru} in a traditional \textit{guru-disciple} relationship is to encourage the disciple to develop a discipline of critical questioning on spiritual matters and the disciple’s ‘spiritual and intellectual growth’ takes place at the feet of the \textit{guru} (221-222).

Readers may interpret the relationship of the women characters to Pearl as maternal and indeed, according to basic Gaudiya teaching, \textit{guru}’s relationship toward a student is very much in \textit{vatsalya-rasa} (parental disposition) in this world. The attitude of the student towards his or her \textit{guru} is also traditionally in \textit{dasya-rasa} (disposition of servitude). But one’s relationship with \textit{guru} is eternal and in Kishori-Krishna’s spiritual otherworld, one’s \textit{guru} is one’s dearmost friend: the relationship transforms into one in \textit{sakhyya-rasa} (friendship between equals). Relationships in the spiritual otherworld sections of ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ culminate in Kishori and Krishna’s romance and meeting arranged by Kishori’s friends, the milkmaids; relationships in the earthly sphere are mainly between friends. ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ represents characters typifying the Gaudiya
approach in that they request service, not of Krishna alone, but of Kishori and Krishna both with a strong attachment for Kishori in ‘the rasa of the female friend’ (Harberman 1994:113).

William Dalrymple’s, ‘The Nun’s Tale’ in Nine Lives describes the real-life relationship between two Jain nuns, who, like the characters in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’, are ordained women who have renounced the attachments and trappings of worldly life and live in austerity. Like Surabhi and Ramani, they live as ascetics and wear plain, pure white saris. One, Prasannamati, tells of her life, her ordination, her meditation, and her relationship to her fellow nun Prayogamati (1-28). The bond between Prasannamati and Prayogamati might be read as being no different to that between non-religious people of this world, as can the attachment between the Vaishnavis in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’, but these relationships are founded in faith and it is this shared faith that links the characters before any other bond of affection.

Tracey Pintchman has researched ritually sealed friendships between women in Benares, North India. The women form a circle around an icon of Krishna and, like Kishori-ji’s friends in the Gaudiya narratives, they refer to one another as sakhi (female friend) (55-63), a term one hears Vaishnavis call one another to this day in Vrindavan. Like the relationship described by Dalrymple, these relationships endure until the end of life. Such is the relationship between Surabhi and Ramani characters in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’.

Despite the pre-eminence of female deity Kishori and her sakhis, Gaudiya discourse gives limited consideration to the womanly voice. With regard to Hindu thought, in Women in the Hindu Tradition: Rules, Roles and Exceptions (2010), Mandakranta Bose writes that Hindu tradition has a preoccupation with topics such as women’s nature and duties, however, ‘even though history acknowledges female savants of renown’, their ‘opinions are conspicuously absent from this vast discourse’ (7) which, despite forces of liberalisation and vibrant women’s movements, has been dominantly ‘one of overbearing control’ (156). So it has been too within Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Vaishnavism teaches that all people are, in essence, equally pure, blissful perfect eternal souls. But on another level, Gaudiya literature and discourse broadly define and depict women as honoured or reviled according to two typecasts: a wife who produces sons or a seductress. Bose identifies the goddess-mother/prostitute definitions of women in
Hindu history and observes how traditionally, women who fall outside the social norm, such as prostitutes or educated women, are denigrated. Throughout Hindu history, Bose writes, the irreconcilable ideas of powerful goddess and dependent subordinate mortal womankind has ‘provided room for liberation through acts of creative imagination within the conditions of its religious culture’ by women who are anomalies in the scheme of gender roles (149 & 154). The ‘poetry of women’s spirituality’ transcending social restraint has been ‘utterly overwhelming in its emotional authority’ (8).

The earliest spiritual women poets were Buddhist nuns of the sixth century BCE; before them, around the fifth century CE, women poets were writing in South India. Of Vaishnava women writers, ninth-century Tamil poet Antal sees herself as a maiden eager for union with Krishna and fifteenth-sixteenth century Mirabai, arguably the best known female Hindu mystic poet-singer, wrote of Krishna as her husband. In the fifteenth century Chandravati retells the masculine epic Ramayan from the point of view of Sita-devi, the wife of Raam, the Vishnu/Krishna avatar. In Ramayan, Raam, rescues Sita from the clutches of the demon-king of Lanka but then rejects her because he no longer trusts her purity. Chandravati laments Sita’s suffering as the women’s lot (132). For Bose, this text demonstrates Hinduism’s ‘oppressive gender ideology and its simultaneous if muted undercutting’ (134).

Bose sees the self-revelation of Hindu women writers through history as necessarily an intense emotional event that revolves around women’s personal relationships with the life divine as with fellow mortals. It expresses itself, not in analytical academic treatises, but in emotional revelation through poetry and music (7-8). Bose describes Hinduism as a philosophical world-view and social system that allows women little self-determination. She sees women’s ‘poetic imagination’ as an ‘instrument of liberation’ and suggests that in poetry, women find a voice unconstrained by social expectations in an ‘act of self-construction through language’ (111). Karen Pechilis points out, however, that historically, the women who were elevated as exemplars were those who praised the male gods (19).

In his study of the construction of religious reality based on his examination of the meditation technique formulated by the theoreticians of Braj, Haberman writes ‘[i]t is not uncommon to hear a male Hindi-speaking (Bengali does not indicate gender) baba [a renunciate in another Bengali Vaishnav lineage] using feminine grammatical endings
when referring to himself” (1988: 139). But in the Gaudiya associations in which this work has taken root, in-cult language was exceedingly gender exclusive. Practiced Gaudiyas most usually aspire to a female siddha swarup (perfected eternal soul-form, usually as maidservant of Kishori-ji) yet both traditional and contemporary English translations of Gaudiya texts refer to the soul in the third person singular personal pronoun masculine even when acknowledging a soul in a female state. For example, the Preface to Sri Bhajana-Rahasya (2003) states that the work will guide a practitioner ‘in awakening his eternal identity as a servant of Krsna’ (my emphasis) (ix) although Sri Bhajana-Rahasya describes meditation upon identity as a young gopi (my emphasis) (ix) although Sri Bhajana-Rahasya describes meditation upon identity as a young gopi serving Kishori-Krishna (366). Some involved in the publishing of Gaudiya texts are resistant to change. Others, such as Ranchor Prime, whose The Illustrated Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation with Commentary (2003) contains gender-inclusive language, are more progressive in this matter.

In Sanskrit, there are feminine forms for terms for most types of religious adepts, but not for guru. Swami Prabhupad grew up in Victorian and Edwardian India and received a British education at a high-status Calcutta university, Scottish Church College. He learned conventions of spoken and written English current in that cultural milieu where bland sexism and gender-exclusivity were the norm (Das) and his ideas on women were developed from Hindu scripture that deem them subordinate to men. But he demonstrated the archetypal enigmatic guru’s contrariness: misogynistic teachings came alongside progressive changes in favour of women. He empowered them to engage in altar worship and ordained them with Gayatri mantra, a mantra which, until that time in Gaudiya culture had been recited only by men. But still, there were no Gaudiya women gurus. Many of the Gaudiya women I interviewed in the early stages of research for this thesis, expressed thankfulness for being born as a woman because the circumstance of a woman is more conducive for the cultivation of that indispensable condition for bhakti to thrive — utter humility. On the other hand, my informants explained, men, known as purusha (controller) in Sanskrit, find it harder to become humble. My informants then invariably named two or three historical female gurus as examples of female Gaudiya leaders — among literally countless male gurus.

Rebecca Manring describes Sita Devi as one of the earliest female gurus in South Asia for whom we have literary evidence (53). Jahnava Devi is a prominent player in the history of Vaishnavism in Bengal. Gaudiya poets have sung her praises as diksha-guru to
men and women alike and she organised the first recorded annual birth-festival of Chaitanya after he passed on, overseeing altar-worship, musicians, colour-throwing and festive cooking for thousands. Now, in both religious as well as academic contexts, there is unprecedented interest in women Hindu gurus and social, political, economic, communication and educational factors all contribute to the fact that today there are many women gurus in India and the West (Erndl 245). There is a growing feminist voice within ISKCON and more women in the movement ‘are looking for legitimization of women as gurus and look to such women as Sita Devi and Jahnava Devi … as role models’ (248). The historic characters Sita Devi and Jahnava Devi provide legitimisation for the female guru character in my writing, but a scenario precisely like that depicted in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is unlikely ever to exist beyond the pages of the book.

In a preliminary draft of my novel, both music teacher and guru characters were men. Removal of culturally normative male-female barriers was intended to establish closer intimacy between guru and student characters to enable transmission of esoteric knowledge. ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is an attempt to represent women gurus as embodiments of devotion (bhakti) rather than as women teachers who work within and uphold a patriarchal tradition. Bose observes that to the woman mystic, ‘poetry brings liberation from the constraints of social relations because it gives her a voice which, singing of divinity as it does, cannot be silenced by conventional Hindu thought and practice’. She adds that, ‘this is not to say that they mount a personal rebellion against these norms; it is truer to say they render them utterly irrelevant’ (8).

The characters in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ were inspired by my experience of living some years in little, centuries-old temples in the alleyways of the medieval section of Vrindavan town in the neighborhood of widows’ dwelling-places and, for a year or two, in the same building. Some of the women were elderly and incredibly frail. Some sat on the ground in the street for hours every day for years. Others attended my guru’s discourses, and spoke English.

Kusum Ansal’s desolate and disturbing The Widow of Vrindavan (2004) ends in the death of its protagonist. ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ takes a different approach in raising awareness about the same topic. Since Western audiences were first exposed to photographs of malnourished Biafran children, anti-poverty agencies have relied on such images to market charities and their products; determined to see an end to
endemic, abject poverty, they appeal to natural human sympathy, guilt and compassion to stir emotional responses so that people might give. But such provocative images can portray the world’s most disadvantaged in a manipulated light that reinforces an ‘us and them’ partition. As such, these images actually take from the poor. Duncan McNicholl, who works for Engineers Without Borders in Malawi, protests that such pictures rob people of dignity and his photography project, ‘Perspectives of Poverty’, shows how images can be constructed to present the same persons in different ways: he took two photos of the same persons — one in tatty clothes and with grim body language, and the other, posing in good clothes, smiling, or using their cell phone. McNicholl says, ‘I want to bring to light some of the different assumptions we make about a person, especially when we see an image of poverty from rural Africa.’ As media images of suffering became commonplace, the term ‘compassion fatigue’ entered the English vocabulary and so now, more NGOs describe potential and opportunity and depict their subjects with power to work towards ending extreme poverty in their individual lives. McNicholl has staged simple positive and negative imagery where issues are complex, yet he had drawn attention to the aesthetic choices photographers make in the construction of imagery: simple choices equivalent to the ones I have made while writing about the widows of Vrindavan. ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is a protest against the ubiquitous representation of Vrindavan widows as wretched. McNicholl allows people to be empowered through visual images; ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ empowers characters through text.

An assembly of Vrindavan widows in white muslin is a visual echo of a herd of white Vrindavan cows. Such visual effects are put to use by film-makers who bring the widows’ plight to the world’s attention as a contemporary human rights issue. In Moksha (1993), by Indian documentary film-maker Pankaj Butalia, ‘moments of astonishing sensuous beauty’ contrast with ‘rhythms of anguish’ (Magic Lantern). Water (2005), by Indian-born Canadian film director and screenwriter Deepa Mehta, is set in 1938 in colonial India, yet its setting — details of its bare stone rooms around a central courtyard, its proximity to ghats of a sacred river, the bustling streets — is strikingly similar to, even indistinguishable from places in Vrindavan not so long ago and its characters — elderly women in creamy-white saris with shaved heads — could be Vrindavan widows. White Rainbow (2005), a heartening account about three widows’ fight for their rights, has also been a strong influence in forming characters for ‘The
Golden Milkmaid’. It represents the life of prominent social activist and scholar Dr. Mohini Giri, who founded The Guild of Service after the Indo-Pakistani war in which thousands of women were directly affected by the death of their menfolk. The Guild for Service is now an significant organisation that works towards empowering India’s disadvantaged, marginalised women and children including those in Vrindavan.

The women characters in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ do not take the role of helpless products of cultural exclusion, and so they depart from the victimised widow stereotype. They are empowered in text but are inspired by real people. As input to my project, Jagannath Poddar, a Vrindavan environmental activist, wrote in personal correspondence about his father’s elder sister. She was married at seven and widowed at fifteen and then travelled from her native Bengal to Vrindavan. Her late husband’s estate was transferred to her name and she owned her personal jewellery and money from the sale of her possessions and so was able to rent a house.

In those days becoming a widow was a curse. Though all the property was transferred in her name she was considered as inauspicious being a widow. She couldn’t participate in the marriages and other functions. Re-marriage was not possible, it was a social taboo. Then she decided to dedicate her life for Krishna and used to consider Him as her husband, as did the other widows that time.

Jagannath’s aunt appreciated Bhajan Ashram and participated in the chanting and singing, but rather than accept an allowance of grain and coins with the other women, she gave money to support the initiative. Jagannath’s parents later joined his aunt and cared for her until she passed on in 1976. Jagannath writes, ‘Since my mother tongue is Bengali and we used to live in a house where many widows lived so I knew many of them. Economically many of them were self sufficient in contrast of today’s perception of their poverty. But, yes, the majority of the widows now are poor these days.’

Parvathi Athavale’s compelling autobiography (1930) also provided a suitable model for fictional Shanti Ashram, with its widow characters having agency and challenging conventions of vulnerable femininity. Parvathi was the foundation for my Ramani character. She was born in 1870 in a house of mud-plastered reeds, married at eleven, soon widowed, and returned to her parents’ home. Here, the eldest of her widowed
sisters lived; she had remarried and her husband was an open-minded social-reformer who encouraged Parvathi to obtain an education. Parvathi graduated with teaching qualifications and taught in a widows’ home, then a mere hut, founded by her brother-in-law. She raised funds for the home by travelling and lecturing, studied English, and, when she was forty-eight, sailed to America where she stayed in a hostel and worked in several menial jobs. After some time, she came in contact with two vegetarian women campaigners for uplifting the working class and orphans who introduced Parvathi to society. She was invited to lecture in women’s clubs, at afternoon teas, and to an audience in the Hotel Astoria where she pleaded the cause of the widows’ home. People were receptive. Somebody donated an automobile. In 1920, Parvathi sailed to England, waved off by friends pressing her with flowers and candy. She lectured in England and in Paris, where she founded La Association des Hindu de Paris. At last, she sailed for India among the entourage of Rabindranath Tagore. The funds Parvathi Athavale collected built a large, comfortable, brick establishment named Home for Widows.

As a native Hindi-speaker, Mohini Giri works closely today with the widows of Vrindavan. In an interview related to White Rainbow, she speaks critically of the ‘Chaitanya cult where all these widows think they are married to Krishna’. But in the line of Chaitanya teachers who have informed this work, becoming one of Krishna’s wives is not a desirable goal. They do not want to enjoy in such a way with him. Gaudiyas wish to serve Krishna by bringing to him that which pleases him most, and that is Kishori. Besides, Vrindavan is the wrong place: Krishna lived as lord with his many queenly wives in Dwaraka on the West coast of India where sixteenth century poet-princess Mirabai wrote of her love for Krishna as perfect bridegroom and true husband (Kinsley 88). In Braj, Krishna is a rustic puckish lad. This idea that Krishna will protect a Vrindavan widow by becoming her husband is not espoused in the parampara (lineage) which informs this work. In the teachings of Chaitanya as I have studied them there is no mention of becoming Krishna’s lover, not to speak of being his wife. Nevertheless, this conception seems common among Hindus in general. Dr. Giri continues, ‘Krishna is a great attraction. It is seeped into our psyche. It is very difficult to remove that from these widows’ minds that they are not … once they become a widow Lord Krishna is their saviour. And that will take a long time. We’ll have to change slightly slowly and steadily’. My work proposes that it is needless to
remove from anyone’s mind that Krishna is saviour because such faith can be a
strength. Besides, because of the good works Dr. Giri does, many of the widows likely
see her as Krishna’s direct response to their prayers.

Phillipa Kafka writes in On the Outside looking In(dian): Indian Women Writers at Home
and Abroad that widows in India are subjected to ‘great physical and mental hardship’ so
as never to ‘[appear] in such a way as to arouse men’s lusts (14)’. Yet hundreds of
thousands of Vaishnavs follow this same system of ‘hardships’ that are ‘enforced’ upon
the widows, and consider them a source of ananda (happiness): a vegetarian diet (to
engender compassion for all living entities), fasting (the health-giving fortnightly twenty-
four hour ekadashi fast that all Vaishnavas follow, during which one may consume milk
products, fruit, and cooked root vegetables according to one’s psychological or physical
strength), no onions or garlic (most orthodox Hindus avoid them because, according to
the ancient Indian system of medicine, Ayurveda, plants in the allium family both
agitate and dull the brain and are toxic to the digestive system), clothing restrictions
(plain white dress), praying, and service to others.

The essential purpose of my writing project is not to bewail the plight of the
Vrindavan widows. Beyond raising awareness about them, its principal purpose is to
represent the beautiful Braj religion through them. The widow characters in ‘The Golden
Milkmaid’ live frugally, but can afford rent, food, clothing, medicine, fares, books, and
so on. ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is a dreamlike tableau. Its individual widow characters are
depicted in a positive way not as unloved victims of a crushing system, but as women
who are a part of a beautiful living faith — after all, it is because of the bliss Braj
promises that these women go there to live and to die. It is prudent not to minimise the
spirituality of the Vrindavan widows while showing concern for their corporeal
wellbeing. Negating the religious beliefs of the helped is counter-productive. There is a
premise in psychology that people are not affected so much by external events as by
their beliefs about these events and the widows of Vrindavan who are Vaishnavis
believe that when they die they will go to a beautiful spiritual world. Perhaps they will.

My writing suggests that fantasy is not the opposite of reality. The word ‘fantasy’ is
used here, not in the Tolkeinesque sense, but in the sense of vision, the visionary, and
the deepest part of imagination contiguous to soul. Harvey Cox teaches that fantasy is
humus for humanity’s growth, the richest source of human creativity, and, theologically,
a reflection in humans of god’s creativity. It creates new futures and it remakes the past
Yet, despite its importance, our era has dealt very shabbily with fantasy. In many other cultures fantasy has been carefully nurtured and those with unusual abilities at fantasy honoured. In ours, we have ignored fantasy, deprecated it, or tried to pretend it wasn’t really there. After all, we are ‘realists’. (59)

Cox sees that in our ‘hard-nosed, pragmatic, [and] problem-solving’ culture, ‘we do not want to be distracted by something so evanescent’ as fantasy. Our world is divided into two distinct spheres, that of fact, and that of fantasy (59). But reality is not a fixed concept; it is not a changeless category. Some oriental cultures view that which we call the factual world as unreal and find reality in that which we call illusion: dreams, visions and fantasy. Cox suggests there is no final arbiter of what is real: science is not designed to demonstrate what is real or unreal, ‘but to investigate that portion of reality for which its methods are appropriate’ (60). ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ assumes that readers will be able to suspend their understanding of fixed categories of ‘belief’ and ‘reality.’ The ‘Running with Eyes Closed’ sections of ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ signify Gaudiya Vaishnavism’s idea of a site of eternal reality; on the other hand, Australia or India may be seen to be ephemeral and chimerical places. These worlds of reality and illusion can be compared to optical illusions where a perceptual switch reveals alternative interpretations. A commonly recognised example of this is Rubin’s Vase. At first, a viewer sees a white vase against a black background but then suddenly clearly perceives two silhouetted faces, nose-to-nose, and the vase has become the emptiness between them. Rubin’s Vase relates to the concept of Negative Space used by artists and designers working in two-dimensional space. Similarly, while the bookworm is absorbed in the reality of the world of the book, the usual “real” world recedes: such a reader on a train might be so involved in her book-world that she does not realise she has long passed her station.

According to the system of Indian aesthetics, a text’s ‘emotional juice’ is called rasa. ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is designed to be read with, in the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’, or poetic faith, so that its rasa can be more fully experienced.
Part III

Achintya-bheda-abheda-tattva:
The Actuality of
Inconceivable, Simultaneous Oneness and Difference

Achintya-bheda-abheda-tattva, refers to a theological tenet proposed by Shree Chaitanya which is unique in Vaishnavism to the Gaudiya school: this tenet reconciles god’s being at once one with and removed from creation and the individual souls. The following chapter is not thus named to imply that the author is both within and without the text, but to propose that a novel such as ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ has a place within a Gaudiya canon even as it remains outside it.

This section opens with reflection upon a living spoken and literary Gaudiya tradition against the backdrop of India’s vast and ancient religions. My process of striving to amalgamate literary creativity and faith is given some analysis acknowledging the rich tradition of Indian aesthetics, the dilemma of revealing confidential topics, and the textual or meditational scaffolding used in the novel. The section closes with contemplation on a pivotal Gaudiya text, Bhaktivinode Thakur’s novel Jaiva-dhama.

According to orthodox Indian theologians, authoritative religious texts are classified according to their perceived origins as shruti (heard) and smriti (remembered). Works such as the Vedas are believed not to be the work of human authors, but ‘heard’ as revelation or direct transmission from an absolute god; others were written by sages and derive authority in so far as they are supported by the oldest literature of Hinduism, the Vedas, usually through exegesis (Prabhupad SB 4.2.31p; Johnson 347).

Contemporary literary theorists, though mostly concerned with more recent ideas since Barthes and Foucault, acknowledge that philosophers and theologians in the Middle Ages conceived authority and creativity as coming from a primary creative power, god. This point is elucidated by Jeri Kroll. She quotes the Knight’s Tale wherein Chaucer has Theseus speak of ‘The firste moevere of the cause above’ (199), the
primeval mover, god, who created the ‘faire cheyne of love he bond the fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond’. Then, Kroll looks further back to fifth century Roman philosopher Boëthius who initiated the notion of ‘the Great Chain of Being’, the hierarchical structure of all that is, from lowly inanimates such as rocks, through plants, animals, humans, and angels, culminating in and sourcing from an unchanging and infallible ultimate divine perfection seen to be ‘the source of true creativity’ (199). Such a cosmology is compatible with that of Vaishnavism wherein god is seen as cause of all causes (sarva karana karanam) (BS 5.1). According to Vaishnav understanding, a writer cannot put words together in praise of god unless empowered by god. Furthermore, the Indian view of linguistics derives from Rigveda in which ‘the “word”’ is a goddess Vac (a direct cognate with the Latin vox) who encompasses worlds beyond this and ‘carries the gods’ (Lehman 84). In the making of this thesis, the task of representing a way of thinking that contemporary Western literary theorists regard as archaic or undeveloped has been testing. It has been the quandary that has pervaded the writing-process of this exegesis.

Cheever Mackenzie Brown affirms that originally, Veda simply meant knowledge, and that its plural, Vedas, is a literary concept. When this plural form is applied retrospectively to oral texts, original meaning as insight into ‘the deepest sort of knowledge’ becomes obscured (72). Until the bhakti period, that is, during the time of Vedic religion before devotional movements arose, sound of word and mantra were the focus of ritual rather than the deity’s form. According to academic scholars and historians, writing was virtually unknown in India when the Vedas were first composed around 1500BC — 700BC. With the introduction of writing around 600BC, mistrust and hostility towards writing grew. Books and written words were perceived as ‘graven images’ and defilements of holy sounds. Learning from manuscripts was considered second-rate and attending to books was regarded as an obstacle to knowledge along with gambling, addictions, lethargy, theatre, and women. Mahabharat proclaimed that anyone writing down the Vedas would go to hell. Though the two were linked, at that time, meaning (artha) was subordinate to sound (shabda). Mantras, the sacred sounds of the texts, contained great power, and their vibrations were understood to affect the universe (72).

The dominant priestly caste claimed ownership of Sanskrit, but poets of the bhakti movement reached people who were often untaught in the language of high culture,
who had little to gain under the inflexible Brahmanical system, and who believed that the path to salvation lay simply in devotion to god. Nathaniel Tarn notes that the Gaudiya movement used regional languages rather than Sanskrit for most of the poetry, biography, and theological literature it inspired (17-18). The every-day language of ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ favours the Gaudiya continuum of inclusion and adaptability. During the later bhakti period when attitudes to the written word had evolved, the absolute necessity of hearing from a living teacher remained (Mackenzie Brown 68-73). The key concept of link between text and teacher-of-text is represented in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’.

Sushil Kumar De, author of the earliest study of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in English, Early History of Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal (1942), wrote that the ‘extraordinary literary activity’ of Chaitanya’s movement was marked by ‘power and vitality’. Its works enriched Sanskrit scholarship and it ‘poured itself out lavishly in song and story, almost creating, as it did, a new literary epoch by its fruitful contributions of great diversity and charm’ (556). De writes that the Sanskrit poetry of Shree Chaitanya’s movement brought a new era to a previously staid and sober genre by lifting the human psyche into glorious exaltation by mystically basing religious sentiment on transfigured amatory yearning (594). The movement does not have a single pivotal scripture. Its vast literal corpus was composed in the learned classical tongue as well as in the living provincial language; scriptures from the older Vedic tradition sat alongside an extensive body of literature composed by Chaitanya’s followers of whom the Six Goswamis of Vrindavan were foremost.

Hearing the sacred, esoteric texts of the worshippers of Kishori and Krishna elucidated by adept gurus in Vrindavan left me humbled and inspired. To the devotee ear, the very names of such texts are poetry in themselves and a stimulus to remember the oceanic rasa contained within them. It would be impractical here to present an exhaustive list of classical Gaudiya literature, histories, narratives, poetry, hymns, biographies or hagiographies, philosophical and theological treatises and manuals on the performance of rituals. The following paragraphs indicate a sample of some essential Gaudiya texts; texts that provide the world-view and philosophy in which ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ characters Surabhi and Saraswati Swamini and the others would be well-versed, and in which they would desire to fully immerse their minds and hearts.
Two hagiographies of Shree Chaitanya harmonise and establish Chaitanya as an *avatar* of Radha and Krishna combined: the *Chaitanya-Bhagavat* (*The Divinity of Chaitanya*) of Vrindavana Das Thakur (1496-?) which gives account of Chaitanya's birth, childhood, and youth; and the *Chaitanya-Charitamrita* (*Nectar of the Life of Shree Chaitanya*) of Krishnasdas Kaviraja Goswami (1496CE-?) which gives account of Chaitanya's later life. The latter work was composed within a century of Chaitanya's passing and is the more scholarly of the two in that it propounds the theology of the Six Goswamis and provides theological justification for earlier 'naive popular adoration' of Chaitanya (De 53). It is written in Bengali rather than Sanskrit, and so, 'complete exposition of scholastic theological presuppositions of Bengali Krishnaim' are now available to other than the learned few (De 57). Prabhupad’s version (1974) presents each of *Caitanya-caritamrita*'s twelve and a half thousand verses in Bengali script along with a transliteration into the Latin script followed by a word-for-word translation, a translation of the full verse into English, and finally, as according to Gaudiya literary tradition, Prabhupad’s exegetical commentaries as *acharya* (teacher of regulations).

Among the *Puranas*, *Bhagavat Purana* is prominent. It consists of eighteen-thousand verses of poetry. Gaudiyas accept it as their highest authority (Das. *Hist & Lit.* 90) and term it 'the spotless *Purana* for the purity of its philosophical didacticism (CC Madhya 24.313). Gaudiyas deem the date of this scriptural classic as immeasurable but scholars date its composition to around the ninth or tenth century. *Bhagavat Purana* is traditionally attributed to Veda Vyasa (no date of birth can be given for this author) who is worshiped as the ‘literary *avatar* of Vishnu’ and scribe of the *Vedas* and their eighteen supplementary texts, the *Puranas* (*Ancient Texts*). *Bhagavat Purana* contains plentiful dramatic narrative set in a complex frame narrative: the narrative of the pilgrimage of a sage and stories of those he met along the way; narrations of rulers and demigods; description of the cosmos creation; stories of prominent *avatars* (manifestations of god); and documentation of extensive chronology and historic dynasties up to Krishna himself. Of *Bhagavat Purana*’s twelve cantos, the tenth and longest which is almost a quarter of the entire work, lingers on descriptions of Krishna’s boyhood pastimes in rural Braj. This section is taken by Gaudiyas to be the high point of the work as it covers *madhurya leela* (*sweet* pastimes, namely those set in Braj), although it is taught that this sweetness that cannot be truly appreciated before a thorough understanding of the previous nine Cantos has been attained. Prabhupad’s
multi-volume edition of Bhagavat Purana, Srimad Bhagavatam (1972-1977), presents each verse with: the Devanagari script; in transliteration into the Latin script; a word-for-word translation; a translation of each verse; and finally, Prabhupad’s exegetical commentary.

In over two hundred written works, six theologians and Sanskritists known as the Six Goswamis of Vrindavan recorded Chaitanya’s teachings on his behest. Brihad-bhagavatamrita (Vast Nectar of the Lord’s Devotee) by Sanatan Goswami (1499-1558) introduces philosophical conclusions through the separate spiritual odysseys of two characters: the cosmic traveller-sage Narada and the humble devotee Gopa Kumara. Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu (Nectar-Ocean of Devotion) by Rupa Goswami (1493-1564) is a foundational theological and philosophical work that elaborately describe the nature, practices and gradations of bhakti, constituents of bhakti-rasa, experience of sacred rapture, and primary and secondary divisions of bhakti-rasa. Rupa’s Madhurya-kadambini (Cloudbank of Sweetness) provides analysis of stages on the path of bhakti from its beginning to the topmost perfection. After composing Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu (The Ocean of Nectar of Divine Love) describing the stages of devotion, Rupa penned its sequel, Ujjvala-nilamani (Blazing Sapphire of Passion) discussing the highest conception of madhurya bhakti rasa (amorous devotional love). Rupa’s Stava-mala (A Flower-garland of Praise) is an anthology of songs glorifying characters from Krishna’s and Chaitanya’s lives and his Padyavali (A Compilation of Poetry) is an anthology of devotional poetry. Stavavali (A Compilation of Praise) by Raghunath Das Goswami (1495-1586) contains texts which are often published separately: Manab-siksa (Instructions to the Mind) and Vilapa-kusumanjali (A Handful of Flower-like Lamentations), the poetry of praise, intense longing and lamentation of an intimate servant of Radha-Krishna.

Shreela Narottam Das Thakur (Born c1466CE) is arguably the most important songwriter of the Gaudiyas. His Prarthana (Prayers) is a collection of prayers of submission, lamentation, and spiritual aspiration. Prema-bhakti-candrika (Moonbeam of Loving Devotion), written in simple Bengali verse, delineates basic bhakti-tattvas (theological tenets of the practice of devotion).

Shreela Visvanath Chakravarti Thakur (C1630-C1710) composed over twenty important texts on bhakti after entering the order of ascetic renunciation and moving to Braj, until he entered a state of deep absorption in meditation on Radha-Krishna in his old age. Sri Ujjvala-Nilamani-Kirana (Ray of the ‘Dazzling Sapphire’) is a summary study of
Goswami’s *Ujjvala-Nilamani* and as such fathoms the complex amorous relationship of Radha-Krishna. *Sri Bhakti-Rasamrita-Sindhu-Bindu* (*Drop of the Nectar-Ocean of Devotion*) is a summary study of Rupa Goswami’s *Bhakti-Rasamrita-Sindhu* delineating types and stages of devotion from novicehood to maturity to transcendent divine love. It has been a privilege to have served on editing teams for BV Narayan’s translations of two short works by Cakravarti Thakur: *Sri Camatkara-candrika* (*Moonbeam of Complete Astonishment*), a book of merriment and comic wit telling of the times Krishna would come before Radha in disguise; and *Sri Prema-samputa* (*Treasure Chest of Pure Transcendental Love*) in which Krishna assumes the form of a celestial goddess to work his way into Radha’s affection to trick her into revealing the secrets of her heart.

‘The Golden Milkmaid’ represents Krishna’s *nara-leela* (human-like pastimes) rather than his *aishvarya-leela* (pastimes in which he exhibits awe-inspiring divine powers). It illustrates Krishna’s *leela* (activities) as a baby (*pauganda-leela*), with the cows and cowherd boys (*pauganda-leela*), and his *madhurya-leela*. *Madhurya* means sweet, and *madhurya-leela* are seen by Gaudiyas to be intensely sweet because they tell of Kishori and Krishna’s clandestine dalliance in the forest groves of Braj. They are the acme of Krishna’s *leela*, they take place only with Kishori-ji; and they take place in Braj, and are the very life of the locality.

Alan Entwistle coins the term ‘pastoralization’ to trace the process of religious adaptation he perceives took place in the Krishna cult. It involved the embellishment of devotional literature and ritual and after the Sanskrit *Bhagavat Purana* and *Gita-Govinda* and inspired ‘hordes’ of vernacular poets (77). The pastoral mode depicts an idyllic world, a ‘bucolic environment’ representing ‘an age of innocence and primitive simplicity’ and the ‘spontaneity of rustic life’ that contrasts with complex, artificial civilisation. Dominant themes are romance with simple girls and the ‘delight and refreshment’ of natural beauty which create nostalgia for childhood happiness (74-75).

‘The Golden Milkmaid’ attempts to reflect the pastoral by representing natural purity as opposed to refinement and artifice, feeling as opposed to thinking, yet the Braj pastoral is somewhat removed from the idyllic phenomenal world of its European counterparts because of its emphasis on rarefied emotions:

By immersing himself in Braj pastoral, the devotee aims to visualize and
internalize the paradise of Krishna so that he may be lifted out of the mundane phenomenal world and be transported into the supernatural realm of Krishna’s eternal play (nitya lila) — a condition that the devotee hopes to enter permanently at death. (Entwistle 80)

In aesthetic traditions relating to the Gaudiya, representations of the inner mood of the nayika (romantic heroine) connect with that of her environment: the trees are dripping with sap, the scented wind whispers a love song, birds are cooing in pairs, and so on. Dehejia writes that in the Bhagavat Purana and the Gita Govinda ‘we see how beautifully the environment mirrors the mood of the sringhara rasa nayika [the heroine in the mood of amorous love]. The enchanted Vrindavana with its birds and the bees, blossoms and trees is not just a forest but a landscape of the mind of the gopis. (Leaves 54)’ But when the lovers are separated and the heroine is in a state of longing, ‘the trees and blossoms are joyless and bereft of life (Leaves 54). Thus, the landscape enhances the rasa of the characters, especially the heroine and the lovers apart.

Philip Lutgendorf writes with relation to Vaishnav drama that moral or ethical textual meaning pertains to society whereas spiritual meaning pertains to an individual (340). Such personal spiritual development lies at the heart of ‘The Golden Milkmaid’. Its characters’ realisation of aprakat-leela (the hidden pastimes of Kishori and Krishna in Braj) draws from itihasa and purana (histories and stories) rather than regulative scripture. Lutgendorf writes:

In India, the authoritative, systemizing sastra literature has never enjoyed mass appeal; it largely appears as a sterile imposition from above on the disordered activity of the world. The mythical narrative of itihasa and purana, on the other hand, reflects that activity and remains immensely popular, for its stories harbour paradoxes that point (as all paradoxes do) to the possibility of transcendence. (342)

Shree Ganesh, the popular pot-bellied devata (lesser god) with the head of an elephant, is petitioned by worshippers to shove away obstacles. Gaudiya storytellers narrate that when Vishnu’s literary avatar, Vyas, composed Mahabharat, he employed Ganesh as scrivener: Mahabharat was for the people rather than for the priestly echelon alone — it contained romance and combat — so Ganesh thrust aside the obstructions
of social exclusion and disqualification, thus enabling the progress of a socially inclusive bhakti movement.

Linguist Winfred Phillip Lehman writes that in ancient times, qualified students would recite scripture without the aid of written text and that mantras were chanted only according to precise rules of grammar, pitch, intonation and rhythm. Sacred writings were to be transmitted ‘with the original sounds, intonation, and forms intact’. Word and meaning were so closely aligned that, the masters taught, when such mantras were chanted correctly, the listener’s very soul would be affected (85). Historian Michael Wood speaks of zealously guarded mantras, ‘magical formulas’ that take days to recite, are never shared with outsiders, and are ‘passed down orally from father to son with exact accuracy, over a vast period of time’ (18). William Dalrymple writes of oral tradition as cultural erudition of a people whose literacy rate is relatively low (78-111). In India, where less than half of women in rural areas are literate (censusindia.gov.in), ‘even those who could read have never been satisfied that a tradition can be learned from the page of a book’ (Hawley 1992: xi). ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ illustrates the Gaudiya oral tradition of maha-mantra (the great mantra), rasa-leela (drama) and hari-katha (storytelling). For the most part, Hindus recognise hari-katha as formal religious entertainment by professional orators with co-singers and mridanga accompanists. This type of hari-katha in its most precise form of Padavali-kirtan, has been a topic of extensive academic study. The type of hari-katha inspiring ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ and in which its characters engage, is a more spontaneous oral tradition. My project is the result of countless hours over several years listening to hari-katha discourse from adepts in the actual sites to which the talks relate.

The characters in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ engage fluently in hari-katha. Among Gaudiyas, eagerness to hear hari-katha is a valuable and highly sought-after type of spiritual voracity (lobha). Gaudiyas teach that, like Kishori-Krishna, hari-katha remains ever-fresh (eternally new or youthful: nava-yauvanam) and that hearing or reciting the narratives causes rejuvenation of the spirits and purification of the emotions. Traditional Braj leela — dramas of the stories of Kishori-Krishna such as in Chapter VII in the novel — are a form of hari-katha. Of these dramas, Hawley writes:

These dramas are lilas, as their title declares — gestes, sports, plays. Accordingly, they tend to be lighthearted, but not all of them are so. Some of the most important lilas
are intensely sad, being dramas of separation in which Krishna’s departure from Braj and the collapse of its dynamic of love are prefigured. As the songs of separation are performed there, the child actors … disintegrate into tears, and so does the audience. Sometimes the plays have to be cut short after an hour or two lest they become too great a psychic burden. (2005: 109)

Dehejia sees that the Indian art tradition does not set up a dichotomy within human creativity between classical and folk, art from craft, artists from artisans. These taxonomies are modern constructs. The Indian tradition subsumed language, music, dance, sculpture painting, architecture, ritual, and even everyday objects under the rubric of \textit{sundara}, beautiful. To be cultured was to uphold beauty (2004: 39). Haberman writes that beauty plays a major role in Gaudiya Vaishnavism and that Chaitanya, like a true artist, was overwhelmed by it and responded to it in a total way (1988: 136).

Historically, in the Indian system of art and aesthetics, art was created not as object, but as offering to the divine. An artist would see him- or herself more as an instrument \textit{(nimitta)} than a creator. Personal name was insignificant and not meritorious (Sharma 21-22). This conception is in line with transmission of knowledge in the Gaudiya line. The illustration reproduced on the cover of this thesis is my rendition of a painting by Bengali artist Jamini Roy (1887-1972) who was trained in the Western tradition but who turned to folk art using natural pigments. He created templates and his workshop artisans would copy them using a set range of embellishments in protest against the bourgeois artist-as-unique-individual in favour of the modest artisan. The artwork in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ similarly represents a ‘copying’ of the work of Gaudiya adepts to the best of one’s ability.

Klaus K. Klostermaier perceives that the strength of Gaudiya Vaishnavism lies in its \textit{education of emotion}. He writes that History, which he sees as the dominant Humanities discipline, involves, ‘finding facts about the past and fitting them together into an objective picture of what had “really” been’ (127). But emotions, ‘far from being primitive and pre-rational,’ are ‘what being human is all about’ (128). To Gaudiyas, god is \textit{akhila-rasamrta-murti} — the totality of blissful feeling and the way to realise God the Beautiful is through feelings rather than rationality (131). Academic writing results from rigorous research and intellectual analysis and has an objective critical stance; Gaudiya teachers advocate that supreme truth and absolute knowledge lie beyond the plane of

Writing from the Gaudiya Tradition
the senses, mind, and intellect (atindriya-manasa-gocarali) and those who try to enter subtler stratum of the faith through intellectualism return baffled and dissatisfied. Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati (1874-1937) likens scholars searching for ultimate truth in books to bees sitting on the outside of the glass of a honey pot — it behoves one to open the jar to taste what is inside (Sridhar-dev Goswami, Sri Guru, 29; Prabhupad Bg 4:9 Commentary). According to Gaudiya teaching, mind (manas) and intellect (buddhi) are useful tools, but neither can sense bhakti (devotion to god) because bhakti can only be experienced from ‘the heart’ (hridoy). Gaudiya guru Gour Govinda Swami has said, ‘By dint of your own material merit, scholarship, you cannot, you cannot understand it or enter into it. Impossible affair. (Gour Govinda Swami)’ In this tradition of humility, the neophyte practitioner is warned that academic achievement can bring about arrogance detrimental to the cultivation of pure faith; over-emphasis on cerebral activity, a baser type of gratification, can detract from the cultivation of refined, higher, more sublime sentiments experienced by the pure, essential spirit-soul itself. ‘Divine revelation is not a matter of research within this world,’ Sridhara-dev Goswami teaches, ‘rather, we should have a sincere heart to serve’ it (88). To illustrate the lesson that humility is vital for bhakti and academic learning inconsequential, Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta’s followers repeat an account of how, as a young man, Bhaktisiddhanta was an esteemed scholar of mathematics, astronomy and Sanskrit, but he turned down a chair at Calcutta University to dedicate his life to Vaishnavism and became the solitary disciple of the saintly guru Gaurakisora Das Babaji who could neither read nor write (Mahanidhi 82). The leela of Radha and Krishna, however, were playing out on the heart of Gaurakisora Das Babaji and he was serving them there. He had no need of written text.

Norvin Hein calls scholar and priest, ‘a bickering pair. (4)’ in his ‘Foreword’ to Steven Rosen’s The Six Goswamis of Vrindavan (1991). He sees it as the duty of academics to examine the history of religions objectively without submission to human authority, and it is therefore unusual for an academic such as he to take professional notice of confessional literature like The Six Goswamis. He sees tension between ecclesiastical authority and scholar in every religion and acknowledges that even religious movements that formally legitimise the role of scholars find them problematic because faiths have an internal understanding of the historical circumstances in which their religion developed and these traditional accounts are inculcated in their young and carried in

Writing from the Gauḍīya Tradition

– 39 –
their message to the world. But, Hein writes, this polarisation of roles involves dialectical opposition rather than eternal enmity: scholars and orthodox literati are intimate participants in a process from which fruitful resolutions constantly occur. He advises scholarly historians of religion not to ignore the publications of the orthodox: they need sincere conversation with their writers and statements of approved doctrine produced by sectarian literati, for they are ‘indispensable definers of the identity of the groups’ whose history they trace (3-4). Ultimately, each needs the other, and ‘scholars need the orthodox and do well to give thoughtful attention to their work’ (3).

In the production of this thesis, scholar and devotee become one and struggle with the ethical dilemma caused by writing a novel in the Western tradition about bhakti (devotion to god). The work lacks the precise, logical, observer-independent perspective such as would be provided by an etic viewpoint (using extrinsic scrutiny to give meaning to scientific observers); it also steps back from the emic viewpoint (focusing on intrinsic cultural meaning), to the degree that it has been at all possible, to observe bhakti objectively and so, hopefully, make it agreeable to nonbelievers. This stepping-back has been easier following my immersion in University culture after moving apart from any of an institutionalised Gaudiya society. The novel is quasi-autobiographical in that its perspective tends more to the emic than the etic. Emic knowledge is essential for an intuitive and empathic understanding of a cultural system such as the Gaudiya, and yet an etic approach is useful for penetrating, discovering, and elucidating that emic view. This challenge of presenting one’s religious beliefs to a critical readership has been tackled by making an effort to anticipate the outsider view: the move of observing one’s own religion from a remote, etic, and scholarly standpoint has proved inestimably useful in contemplating its foibles, otherwise concealed in its flow of sentiment and its rituals.

Chetanya’s biographer Krishnadas Kaviraj explained how Chetanya’s primary reason for coming to this world was to experience prem rasa (the taste of love of god). But Chetanya’s mission had a secondary purpose. He also came to spread the chanting of the hare krishna mantra (CC Adi 4:15-16). And so, primarily, The Golden Milkmaid tells a tale of prem rasa. But is has a secondary purpose too. It questions certain obsolete rigidly patriarchal conventions in the day-to-day dealings and ethos of institutions now encrusting Chetanya’s original unalloyed design. Such questioning of power relationships is a firm push against the boundaries of Gaudiya social norms. Chetanya
was an early leader of passive resistance in India (CC Adi 17:130), although Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) is the more renowned proponent of the practice. In non-violent, civil (also in the sense of the word as *civility*) disobedience, Chetanya undermined the repressive regime imposed by a regional magistrate by leading a party of follower-musicians singing the *hare krishna mantra* and by appealing to the magistrate’s higher nature through polite well-chosen words. Gandhi developed the concept of *satyagraha* (*satya*: truth, *agraha*: insistence: insistence on truth) of respectful disagreement. He utilised an ethical principle of virtue named *ahimsa* (without injury or hurt) related to the idea that violence will carry karmic consequences. The Golden Milkmaid represents a method of passive-resistance-through-writing in insubordination to male suprematism in Gaudiya society. This could be read, in this case, to be loosely derived from the dichotomous trope of male activity and female passivity. The Golden Milkmaid does not apply mockery, parody, satire, insult, burlesque, or any carnivalesque inversion of rank in imparting its feminist message. Vulgar insult is contrary to *ahimsa* and so The Golden Milkmaid is neither confrontational nor overbearing; it simply places women in the roles invariably and conspicuously dominated by men: diksha-guru, siksha-guru, venerated renounced sage, leader of religious institution, and protagonist. But as such, it questions status quo and soberly challenges convention.

Yet to one unfamiliar with Gaudiya society and institution, The Golden Milkmaid might well seem to be lacking grit or prudish. As The Golden Milkmaid addresses feminist issues within a religious group and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* comments on feminist issues at a certain time, so the two may be somehow compared: today’s reader might see *Jane Eyre* as a work of *prim* outmoded restraint, yet the novel raised Victorian eyebrows. It was one of the more socially engaged novels of its time and it had radical things to say on issues of gender (Da Sousa Correa 97-8). *Jane Eyre’s* contribution to the fierce ideological debate over women’s role and nature was, in the view of some of Brontë’s contemporaries, ‘dangerously radical’ (102). Certain of its original reviewers found it socially subversive because Jane assumed equality of intellect with her employer (98). And more recently it has been identified as a feminist fairytale (Carlton-Ford 375) and cult text of Western feminism.

To reiterate, to readers unfamiliar with Gaudiya culture and institution, The Golden Milkmaid might seem to exemplify outdated cultural principles, yet to those who are familiar with, or are on the inside of Gaudiya life, it is likely to be read as contentious,
controversial, or cutting edge. Besides, it should not be forgotten that historically, Gaudiya Vaishnavism also has a culture of adaptive development.

Gaudiya teaching holds that attempts to grasp subtleties of bhava (spiritual emotion), prites (sublime affection), or prema (love of god) through intellect alone are fruitless and that endeavours to understand god through intellect alone are like trying to beat rice from husks (Bhagwat Purana 10.14.4). Prabhupad asserts that only those with at least a loving affinity for Krishna as god are qualified to translate and write commentary on Gaudiya texts. He writes vehemently on the importance of cultural understanding to do this work, condemning writers and translators who make sub-optimal word choices through their lack of ‘an attitude of service’ to god or who are tainted with envy of Krishna (Bg 6.47 Commentary).

But where acharyas like Prabhupad stress that scholarship alone is insufficient to write about the sublime mood and inner meanings in Gaudiya texts, for one who works under guru, writing can be a means of attaining the highest perfection in spiritual goals:

… one can attain the highest perfection of spiritual life simply by offering service according to his ability.... [A]n artist can attain perfection simply by performing artistic work under the direction of the spiritual master. If one is a literary man, he can write articles and poetry for the service of the Lord under the direction of the spiritual master. (SB 3.22.7 Commentary)

In the spirit of adaptation and cultural translation, Gaudiyas maintain that kirtan (congregational devotional singing) retains spiritual potency whether accompanied by traditional instruments such as kartalas and mridangas or African djembe drums, Australian didgeridoos, Russians shouting and dancing Cossack-style, or harmonium (French-made harmoniums were introduced by missionaries to India in the nineteenth century and have become a significant instrument in North Indian classical music). Where historians of religion see change, those concerned with transmission of bhakti perceive adaptability. Gaudiya gurus affirm that although they utilise practical innovations, such as the printing press, they transmit knowledge unchanged. To convey this teaching, during the nineteen-thirties when renunciates still shunned Western dress and amenities, pioneer Gaudiya preacher Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur (1874-1937) had himself photographed in a British overcoat seated in an automobile. He instructed
his disciple Prabhupad to preach Gaudiya Vaishnavism in English, and Prabhupad crossed the forbidden ocean to the West in 1965, where he invested both men and women with the sacred *brahminical mantras*. During the Bengal Renaissance (late 1800s to 1941), a period of revolutionary cross-cultural thought among Bengali intelligentsia, Bhaktivinoda Thakur had his English *Caitanya Mahaprabhu, His Life and Precepts* (1896) placed in McGill University library in Canada the year it was published. Bhaktisiddhanta instructed his followers that Gaudiya publications were the great drum (*brihad-mridanga*): a *mridanga* can be heard at best across a few fields or a street but the reverberation from a publication resonates around the world. Shrila Bhakti Prajnana Keshava Gosvami Maharaja writes in glorification of his guru Bhaktisiddhanta’s teaching:

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sarva-vadya-mayi ghanta baje sarva-kala / brihat-mridanga-vadya parama rasala —
Krishna-kirtan, which is accompanied by bells and other instruments, resounds for all time in all directions, but really it is the printing press, known as the *brihat-mridanga*, which distributes the supreme *rasa*. (Shrila Prabhupad Arati)
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Under his direction, Bhaktisiddhanta’s more erudite students published articles, essays, poems, lectures, discussions and scriptural debates in daily Bengali *Nadiya-prakasa*, weekly *Sri Gaudiya*, and monthly *Sri Gaudiya-patrika* (Bhaktivedanta Memorial Library). BV Narayan, B.R. Sridhara and other masters in line from Bhaktisiddhanta also placed great importance on book publishing. Bhaktisiddhanta told Prabhupad, ‘If ever you get money, print books’ (Satsvarupa xix) and Prabhupad established ‘book distribution’ as a fundamental tenet of his organisation and guided his followers in developing an unprecedented style of artwork to decorate his publications and attract and edify a public readership.

Ultimately, the devotional/academic duality underlying this thesis proved to be a generator of creative energy. The tension reflects in the two different types of reading informing the shaping the novel: the first is the devotional literature which is studied with affection and veneration by Gaudiyas, and the other was the body of literature genres studied during undergraduate and post-graduate university English and Creative Writing courses consisting of myriad literary genres. Distillations of these two types of
reading matter are reflected in the alternating chapters of the novel; settings switch from the ‘real’, tangible or mundane sphere, and the narrated pastimes of Kishori-Krishna in the spiritual otherworld. This main narrative technique alludes to the life of the Gaudiya adept who moves between these two worlds and specifically echoes in the final chapter in which the central character is physically in Australia although she is already returning in her mind to Swapnavan. Throughout the research process, it was a delight to find books and papers connecting the ‘real’ and the spiritual, for example, facts about flora and fauna in the ordinary world also applied to flowers and animals described in texts narrating Kishori-Krishna’s aprakat-leela (otherworld pastimes), and a scholarly treatise called Journey through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna, by Haberman, unexpectedly included an account of the author’s vision of Kishori-Krishna in the waters of Prem Sarovara: The Lake of Love.

Harsha Dehejia affirms that according to the tradition of Indian aesthetics regarding literature, the sense of sundara, the beautiful, occurs not in shastra (doctrinal literature) but predominantly through kavya (poetry) (2004:40). Kishori-Krishna narratives have long been the subject of literature, art, drama, music and dance and ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ reflects this tradition through its ‘Running with Eyes Closed’ passages, set in the sylvan otherworld. Kishori-Krishna act in this dimension in aprakat-leela (divine pastimes invisible to the material eye) based on descriptions in narratives throughout the Gaudiya canon such as in the writing of Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami (1496-?) and Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakur (c1630-c1710). ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is orientated towards leela (pastime stories), rather than tattva (doctrinal principles) and is intended to be sundara, not shastra.

Ramesh Chandra Sharma delineates the four basic elements behind the formation of the art object according to the ancient system of Indian aesthetics; they are: artha (meaning), chanda, (rhythm), and rupa (form) and rasa (emotion) (21). ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is designed to these carry these four elements through: the message it conveys, the flow of its prose, its structure, and the sentiment it stirs. And yet, in Gaudiya poetry, literary embellishments are secondary to the direct meditative experience of the Kishori-Krishna’s narratives (Haberman 1998: 129). Essential experience is rasa.

The aesthetic theory of rasa is expounded in Natya Shastra (The Scripture of Dance),
a treatise on classical Sanskrit performance art, traditionally understood to have been written between the second centuries BC and CE by legendary philosopher Bharat Muni. This theory is fundamental to Indian arts, music, theatre and dance. With relation to literary work, the *rasa* or ‘juice’ of a text is considered to be the outstanding elements that arouse emotional states to do with romance, compassion, humour, heroism, rage, horror, and so on. Bharat’s theory of *rasa* was elaborated by subsequent schools and most notably, for the Gaudiya, by Rupa Goswami (1493-1564), who applied the theory to all types of relationships among characters of Kishori-Krishna’s spiritual otherworld such as Kishori-ji, Krishna, Krishna’s parents, Kishori’s parents, Kishori’s friends, Krishna’s friends, the servants in Kishori’s and Krishna’s country palaces, animals such as cows and birds, and even flowers, trees, the river, the mountain, clouds, etcetera. *Hari-katha* in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ unfolds approximately according to *rasa* in relation to levels of loving relationship. According to the theory, there are five main *rasas* of relationship: neutrality (*shanta-rasa*), servitorship (*dasya-rasa*), fraternity (*sakhyya-rasa*), parent-child (*vatsalya-rasa*) and conjugal (the *rasa* of sweetness: *madhurya-rasa*). In early parts of the novel, characters speak about Krishna’s babyhood pastimes; later, they narrate Krishna’s boyhood play with his cowherding mates, and ultimately, his relationship with Kishori-ji in the topmost *rasa* of *madhurya*.

Steven Rosen notes in *Vaisnavism: Contemporary Scholars discuss the Gaudiya Tradition*, that the Gaudiya movement extends far beyond the parameters of Gauda, Bengal, and the etymology of ‘Gauda’ similarly extends beyond geographical location. As well as a grammatical derivation, there is a poetic, spiritual derivation whereby ‘Gauda’ refers to *gur*, unrefined molasses made from date juice. Gaudiyas consider their tradition to be the ‘sweetest’ not only because it emphasises sweet love of god above awe of might and majesty, but because it includes worship of the girl-goddess Kishori-ji. Kishori-ji’s *madhu-sneha*, her honey-like love for Krishna, is the very essence of this form of Vaishnavism (ii). Rosen writes that a real Gaudiya ‘is not one who lives in Gauda, but one who lives for gauda’: for the sweetness deriving from Kishori-Krishna’s love. Hawley identifies the intangible:

In Brindavan one worships ultimately not Krishna but Krishna-and-Radha. One worships love itself, and the only true worship is love. One worships not an object but a relation, and one worships relationally; one worships by
Haberman writes that Gaudiya ‘[p]oetry is used both to express meditative experience and evoke the meditative experience’ (1988: 130); it was written both from lila-smaranam (memory-meditation on Kishori-Krishna’s activities) and for lila-smaranam. Here, he is referring to asta-kaliya-leela narratives which recount Radha-Krishna’s leela according to the ‘eight watches of the day and night.’ Such revered texts are drawn on by the Gaudiya adept as scaffolding for contemplative remembrance and they are revered as most sacrosanct and high. The greatly simplified asta-kaliya-leela that unfolds in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ derives from texts such as: Krishnadas Kaviraja’s Govinda-lilamrita (Nectar of Govinda’s Pastimes); Visvanatha Cakravarti’s Krishna Bhavanamrita Mahakaya (Great Poem of Nectareous Feelings about Krishna); Bilvamangala Thakur’s Krishna-Karnamrita (Nectar for Krishna’s Ears); Kavi Karnapura’s Krishnahnika-Kaumud (Lotus of Krishna’s Daily Acts); and Rupa Goswami’s Lalita-Madhava (Playful Madhava). Stimulus for writing ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ came from proofreading the manuscript of Mahanidhi Swami and Bhanu Swami’s translation into English from the Sanskrit of Ananda Vrndavana Campu (Blissful Vrindavan Prose-Poetry) (1999) composed by a younger contemporary of Chaitanya Shree Kavi-Karnapura (1527-?). Ananda Vrndavana Campu elaborates the Radha-Krishna leela from Vyasa’s Bhagavat Purana from Krishna’s childhood and youth frolicking with the cowherd boys, up to his interaction with Radha and her friends. The practitioner participates in a world expressed within texts such as these; in the beginning stage, by mechanically basing his or her meditation on the poetic expressions of the perfected adepts, relying on them and striving to realise the experience expressed within them. At last, after an indefinite time following this process and according to the qualification of the practitioner, ‘[a]t the highest point of lila-smaranam, the script leaps off the printed page and leads its actor into the unpredictable play’ (Haberman 1985: 51-52). The asta-kaliya-leela passages in ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ can be understood to be written to be like sutras (short, aphoristic stanzas with compacted meanings for memorisation and meditation). They provide but a introductory sample of asta-kaliya-leela.

Sharma articulates that, in the classical Indian context, the joy of kalaa (art) is experienced on different levels, the highest of which is beyond the scope of the senses. If an artefact elates one to higher consciousness, its purpose has been achieved (19).
Manifestation of and dedication to the divine has been the main function of Indian art: although art is a human creation (manushi-shilpa), it remains close to the divine creation (daivi-shilpa) because inspiration itself is seen to be divine. The Indian aesthetic tradition is not limited to the outer form: one’s inner vision is opened by the grace of the divine through a blend of beauty and spirit. Beside the mountains, oceans, galaxies, and so on, one is conscious of the dwarfishness of one’s creative ability even if one does not believe in the existence of a divine entity (20). According to pre-eminent Sanskrit dramatist and poet, Kalidas (4th-5th century), the levels of viewing an artwork can be understood as follows: seeing without effort; seeing with curiosity; seeing with effort and longing; and seeing with keen aspiration; seeing and totally forgetting oneself; drinking through the eyes and seeing that beauty as the very purpose of life (Sharma 22-23). In the realm of aesthetics beyond matter, writes Sharma, one can become a true connoisseur of art, and experience rasa (24).

Gaudiya gurus Shrila BV Swami Prabhupad (1896-1977) and Shrila BV Narayan (1921-2011) were avant-garde in their presentation of Vaishnavism. Under gurus in the lineage before them, and especially under Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, rasik books (books full of rasa, namely madhurya) were studied under direct guidance and in the physical proximity of a guru unto whom one had dedicated one’s life. Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati (1874-1937), Prabhupad’s guru, prohibited his followers from reading rasik texts — texts which the printing press and internet have made readily available — until they were sufficiently cultured through favourable association and asceticism to begin to comprehend their deep inner meanings. Until that time, students were limited to the study of texts such as the Bhagavad-gita, which establish Krishna’s divinity. Hopefully, ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ interprets the narratives of Kishori-Krishna’s love-dalliance in a manner appropriate to the teachings of the Gaudiya lineages informing it.

Early in his significant hagiographical and theological exposition, Sri Caitanya-caritamrta (16th Century), Krishnadas Kaviraj writes that nectar-like narratives concerning Kishori-ji’s love for Krishna, the happiness she feels when she realises his love for her, and his desire to understand the love she feels (CC Adi 4: 430) are gudha (highly confidential) and too valuable to be revealed in public. But, he continues, if they are not revealed, nobody will ever hear them, understand them, or be able to enter them (CC Adi 4: 431). To resolve his quandary, he says he presses the essence from the topics
so that rasiks (those conversant with the nature of rasa) will be able to understand, but unqualified people will not (CC Adi 4: 432-435). BV Narayan also says that it is inappropriate to reveal the intimate stories of Kishori-Krishna to the public, but, ‘there is every possibility that this sacred mystery will disappear if it is not thoroughly explained’ (Jaiva-Dharm). Amid larger-than-life accounts of kings, gods, and universes, Bhagavat Purana — Ancient Text of God, the essential Vaishnav text, tells the story of Krishna. Of the Bhagavat Purana, the tenth canto is Gaudiya ‘scripture par excellence’ (Harberman 1988: 128). It contains narrations of Krishna’s infancy and youth. Not knowing how long he had to live, Prabhupad translated this section of Bhagavat Purana early in his literary career, and had his first published edition of the work, KRSNA Book (1970), sold by his zealous early followers on the streets of America. KRSNA offered a vision of an exotic world, but to deter readers from imagining themselves enjoying as godly lovers, Prabhupad repeated the phrase, ‘supreme personality of Godhead’ in his writing. He emphasised Krishna’s superhuman potencies and used upper case for all personal pronouns relating to god. To convey that Kishori-Krishna are not ordinary teenage lovers, ‘The Golden Milkmaid’, uses flowery dreamlike prose contrasting with the down-to-earth prose of passages set in the terrestrial world. To convey the raganuga (advanced level of bhakti) conception that Krishna is among us rather than a distant, ruling, majestic lord, upper case is not used for personal pronouns. This also makes reading easy. Lower case is used for ‘god’ in both creative text and exegesis to facilitate accessibility and break down barriers for readers so that the raganuga approach of bhakti is accentuated over the vaidhi (regulated devotion in awe).

I have chosen to use the name Kishori, a name meaning ‘young girl’, when referring to Krishna’s consort, the Goddess Radharani, or Radha. Nowhere in Bhagavata-purana is Radha’s (Kishori’s) name mentioned directly, though Gaudiyas say that her presence can be divined by the rasik (the adept) in every one of the Purana’s thousands of verses. BV Narayan explains that according to rasa-bhastra (scriptures to do with loving sentiment rather than regulative scripture), ‘an indirect utterance is better than a direct one’ (Nectar of Govinda Lila 92). He quotes Krishna’s words: ‘paroksa-vada raayah/paroksam mama ca priyam — the Vedic seers and mantra deal in esoteric terms, and I am pleased by such confidential descriptions’ (SB 11.21.35). In an era of mass media explicitness, ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ uses reserve in its depictions of love and sensuality. Gaudiyas warn
of the problem of the sacred narratives falling on spiritually deaf ears with the popular anecdote of the man who said, ‘Whenever I hear the name “Radha,” I always think of a barber’s wife whose name is Radha.’ (CC Madhya 8.255 Commentary) and so I copy Bhagavat Purana’s concealment of Radha’s supremely sacrosanct identity by using one of her alternative, lesser known names, Kishori, which translates simply as young girl. In a similar way, Vrindavan is referred to by the fictitious name of Swapnavan.

Gaudiya novels are rare and yet a Gaudiya novel was published in English, in London, as early as 1952. Little-known Journey to Unknown India was written by an Austrian Indologist named Walther Eidlitz and it is like the ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ only insofar as it is a quest narrative expounding Gaudiya theology. Where ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is a work of fiction, Journey to Unknown India is creative non-fiction. It is an adventure story of courage and survival and is the autobiographical account of Eidlitz’s internment in a concentration camp in India for the entire duration of World War Two. In the camp, Eidlitz becomes close friends with a fellow prisoner, a German named Ernst Schulze. Schultz was the first Westerner to have been given diksha (initiation with mantra) by eminent Gaudiya guru Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. Through his discussions with Schulze, Eidlitz develops deep understanding of Gaudiya theology, and after his release at the end of the War, he becomes shishya (student) of Gaudiya guru Shreela Bhakti Hridaya Bon (1901-1982), who grants him the spiritual name, Vamana Das. Journey to Unknown India draws to a close as Eidlitz reunites with his wife and child who had been relocated to Sweden because they were Jewish; his son, a four-year-old when he last saw his father, was then a lad of thirteen.

Several present-day senior members of the ISKCON Hare Krishna movement have also composed works of creative non-fiction—mainly memoirs of their time with Prabhupad when he first came to the West in the nineteen-sixties until the time he passed away in the nineteen-seventies. Srsvrup Das Goswami is known for his decades of ‘freewriting’ journaling and other writing including children’s books; ISKCON guru Indradyumna Swami has been publishing a journal titled Diary of a Travelling Monk since 1995. And yet, even though founder-acharya of ISKCON and the ultimate authority of all devotees within the society, Prabhupad, gave his blessings for his followers to write as long as they followed the teachings of the previous acharyas, among present-day Gaudiyas, very few novels are written, especially by rank-and-file devotees. Journeying
from deep within the societies of Gaudiya Vaishnavas (ISKCON and later the idyllic seclusion of BV Narayan’s temple society in Vrindavan), good fortune has brought me into contact with writers in the literary sphere at the University of Adelaide. It was only after stepping out of the cloisters of Gaudiya institutionalism that my writing took form. This expedition into the literary world at the University of Adelaide has been like a quest for the proverbial elixir of knowledge itself. Here, I have re-evaluated Prabhupad’s teachings on writing. He spoke damningly of ‘mundane’ writing: ‘And if it is a presentation of mundane literary career... [trails off]. What is the use, jugglery of words? It has no fact, all imaginary. All imaginary!’ Yet he quotes a verse from The Mahabharat to stress to his students that their writing is acceptable if attention is given to hearing from the authentic teacher rather than through dry argument and intellectualism: ‘If your literature is exactly following the mahajano yena sa gatah [the way of sages], then it will be liked by highly advanced saintly person.’ He says, ‘That is the secret of success.’ (Lecture 1976)

Potential Gaudiya novel-writers have a rich aesthetic heritage. They have a vast wealth of philosophical and theological concepts to expound and epic narratives of humor, romance and chivalry from which to draw inspiration. I see novel-writing as a natural progression for a present-day Gaudiya writer, beyond memoir, hagiography or translation: the spiritual imagination is boundless. I have learned that the lowly writer of a Gaudiya novel must overcome over-cautiousness and fear of transgression, yet self-assurance must be vigilantly balanced by adherence to the teachings of the previous acharyas through referral to guru, sadhu and shastra (personal preceptor, sages and the literature). Bhaktivinode Thakur (1838–1914), the guru of Ernst Schultze’s guru, wrote several novels layering narrative with philosophy in the colloquial Bengali. Could these works serve as an indication that there is a need for Gaudiya writing in everyday speech? And what is the essential prerequisite to write about Radha and Krishna?

Writing from the Gaudiya Tradition

— 51 —

consists mainly of questions and answers as characters Vijaya-kumara and Vrajanatha submit reverential inquiry to their guru Premadas Babaji. Within this discourse, Thakur frames teachings from Rupa’s foremost treatises, Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu — Nectar of Devotion and Ujjvala-nilamani — The Lightening-Sapphire. As characters Vijaya-kumara and Vrajanatha discover their own personal spiritual proclivities, Premadas instructs them individually on symptoms of ecstasy, emotion in transcendence, and affection for and different types of relationship with Krishna. Premadas directs Vijaya-kumara to travel to the holy site of Puri in Orissa to receive instruction from Gopala-guru, student of Svarupa Damodara. Gopala-guru gives instruction on esoteric topics such as the relationship between Kishori-Krishna, meditation on stimulants for ecstatic love, and asta-kaliya-leela. Both Gopala-guru and Svarupa Damodara are historical persons who have been recorded by Shree Chaitanya’s biographers; Gopal-guru is author of Smarana-krama-paddhati — Guidebook to the Steps to Remembering and Gaura-govindarana-paddhati — Guidebook to Worship of Gaura-Govinda’s Forms.

Thakur’s writing of a novel to transmit Gaudiya philosophy seems to give Gaudiya writers permission to do likewise. But would other Gaudiyas agree? My vox populi research among devotees of different Gaudiya groups in Vrindavan provided evidence that many consider the work to be wholly factual. Many claim that a bhakta on the exalted level of Thakur simply did not ‘make things up’: the specific grove with its huts actually existed and the characters, events and dialogue were all absolutely factual and true. Such believers informed me that Thakur is an uttama adhikari (soul of highest qualification) and so, they vigorously maintained, Jaiva Dharma must be ‘revealed scripture’ because it has been revealed to Thakur by god and as such presents untainted tattva siddhanta (the perfect conclusion of truth). Others explained how Jaiva Dharma is fiction that conveys fact. Contention was largely a result of interpretation of terms.

At last, the most helpful response came from a solid middle-aged woman wearing a white sari and with the cropped hair of a renunciate. She had come from buying vegetables when I caught up with her to pose my question: Was Jaiva Dharma a work of fact or of fiction?

She simply laughed knowingly and turned to walk away.

After a few footsteps, she slowed down and turned a little to call back to me, ‘Jaiva Dharma ... it is a work of affection!’

And so, whether characters in The Golden Milkmaid are fact or fiction; how
autobiographical the novel is, or not; and whether and how much the work stimulates intellectual discussion on the meaning of faith, still, essentially, and similarly, it is work of affection. And it is with affection, that this writer heartily recommends it be read.

*Jaya Shree Radhe!*
### Glossary with Note on Transliteration and Translation

**NOTES:** The main component of this thesis, the novel, ‘The Golden Milkmaid’, can be read without a glossary. The concise glossary that follows is a handy reference guide to facilitate reading of the exegesis. It consists of terms from the Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, or Braj, as well as the names of places, people, and texts. To make this thesis accessible to a wide range of readers, I have eliminated the use of diacritical marks. Translations of place names in Braj reflect standard Romanised forms similar to those used by others writing on Braj today, but consonants have been selected and medial and final consonants have been dropped when such practice more closely reflects the local pronunciation: thus, Braj instead of Vraj or Vraja. The final vowel is retained in a few words that are now familiar to English-speakers, such as in yoga, karma and Krishna. I have spelled Prabhupad’s name without the final a to reflect its pronunciation. Spellings are retained in text titles; thus ‘Braj’ but the Sanskrit title, ‘Vraja Bhakti Vilasa’. Words now part of the English language, such as guru and yoga, are italicised because their common use and general understanding are haphazard and the sense in which I use them is specifically that of the Gaudiya. Furthermore, all glossary definitions accord with my own grasp of the teachings of the lineage in which I trained and they bias toward my personal perception and production of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Several glossary entries are terms that do not appear in the exegesis, nevertheless, they will contribute toward readers’ appreciation of the work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acharya</td>
<td>a spiritual preceptor who has expansive knowledge of scripture (shastra) and philosophy (tattva-siddhanta)</td>
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<tr>
<td>aishvarya-leela</td>
<td>activities of Krishna which inspire awe and reverence and in which he is represented with opulence, splendour, magnificence, majesty, omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience; as opposed to madhurya-leela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ananda</td>
<td>enduring, spiritual bliss, joy or ecstasy far beyond mundane contentment or</td>
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pleasure; a potency of god

**anartha** ... an inauspicious unwanted habit of consciousness impedimental to one’s **bhakti**

**aparadha** ... from the verbal root *radh*, meaning, ‘to give pleasure’ and the prefix *apa* meaning, ‘a taking away’, hence ‘that which displeases the deity’; an act of insult, denigration, or profanity directed toward a divinity, **dham**, **guru**, **shastra**, **bhakta** and so on

**ashram** ... 1. a hermitage or monastery to facilitate spiritual practice 2. one of the four stages of life of socio-religious duty: student, householder, retired, renounced

**asta-kaliya-leela** ... **Radha-Krishna**’s pastimes at eight time of the day

**atmiya-svajan** ... one nearest and dearest to one’s very spirit/soul

**avatar** ... a form of Vishnu; god descending to this world to execute a specific purpose

**babaji** ... a term of respect given to a man who has given up household life; respected father/grandfather; a wise old man

**ban / van** ... forest

**BBT** ... The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust; the publishing arm of **Prabhupad**’s **ISKCON** and publisher of all **Prabhupad**’s work

**bhagavat** ... one who is entirely pure, who possesses every opulence, and who is the cause of all causes (god/**bhagavan**); one describing or perfectly embodying understanding of god/**bhagavan**, either book-**bhagavat** or person-**bhagavat**

**Bhagavad-gita (The Song of God)** ... primary Hindu text; 700-verses embedded in the **Mahabharat** recording **Krishna**’s theological and philosophical teachings spoken on the battlefield of Kurukshetra

**Bhagavat Purana (‘Divine Eternal Narratives of Supreme God’) **... A major Vaishnav scripture that plays a vital role in the development of medieval and subsequent Hinduism; the Bhagavan (God) of the title is Krishna and a quarter of the work includes a narrative of the story of Krishna; composition dated by most scholars during the ninth century

**bhajan** ... 1. devotional song sung alone or congregationally 2. spiritual practices involving
hearing, chanting and meditating on the names, forms, qualities and activities of Radha-Krishna. Profound, personal loving service in meditation to guru, Chaitanya and/or Radha-Krishna.

*bhajan-kutir* ... a small hut in which a sage carries out *bhajan*

*bhajan-anandi* ... one who is absorbed in the bliss of *bhajan;* one whose primary inclination is to carry out their sadhana and *bhajan* in seclusion.

*bhakta* ... a devotee of Radha-Krishna

*bhakti* ... (from the root *bhaj,* ‘to serve’) typically translated as ‘devotion;’ the performance of activities meant explicitly for the pleasure of the deity; a path in the Hindu tradition which seeks to participate in devotion to Radha-Krishna as the highest reality.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is the first text we know of that uses the term *bhakti* as a technical term to designate a religious path. It in its earliest usage, the term encompassed meanings of affection and attachment. (Pechilis 5)

*Bhaktivedanta* ... title conferred by *Gaudiya Math* *acharya* upon their most erudite male disciples meaning, ‘one with tangible realisation of devotional service to Radha-Krishna as the conclusion of all knowledge’

*Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati* ... *Gaudiya guru,* author and translator, *guru* of *Bhaktivedanta Swami;* the name *Bhaktisiddhanta* means ‘the ultimate perfection of devotion’

*Shrila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur* (1874-1937) was Bhaktivinode’s son and successor *guru,* and founder-*acharya* of the *Gaudiya Math.* He penned many key translations, philosophical essays and commentaries in his characteristically rich and lexically dense English and proclaimed the printing press the most effective means of spreading Chaitanya’s movement around the world. He preached against caste *brahminism* and gave *diksha* to the sincere regardless of caste, sex, nationality, or background. He adjusted tradition to match technological and social progress by allowing his preachers to wear Western clothes, to travel in modern conveyances, and voyage abroad; in 1933, he sent disciples to preach and open monasteries in England. He emphasised restraint in the demonstration of spiritual emotion.
BV Narayan ... Shrila Bhaktivedanta Narayan Goswami Maharaja (1921-2011); Gaudiya guru, writer and translator; grand-disciple of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati and therefore in a ‘nephew’ relationship with Prabhupad; my seniormost shiksha guru

Bhaktivinode Thakur ... (1838-1914) guru in the Gaudiya line; prolific writer; father and guru of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati

Bhaktivinode Thakur wrote prolifically in Sanskrit, Bengali, Oriya, Hindi, Urdu and English. His voluminous work in Bengali, much of which is poetry composed from the point of view of a manjari, includes Saranagati (Surrendered to the Lord’s Shelter); Gitanali (Collection of Songs), an anthology of one hundred and twenty of his songs of devotional surrender and ecstatic praise; and Gita-Mala (Garland of Songs) an anthology of eighty poems. Foremost among his numerous novels is Jaina Dharma (The Onus on the Soul). Realising the importance of writing in English, Bhaktivinode Thakur had his introductory booklet Caitanya Mahaprabhu: His Life and Precepts (1896) placed in library of McGill University in Canada (Prabhupad. Lecture, London, September 3, 1971) and the Royal Asiatic Society library in London (Dwyer & Cole 232).

bhava ... highly developed spiritual emotion, mood, or sentiment; heart-softening transmission of god’s potencies of knowledge (jnan) and bliss (ananda) into the heart of a bhakta via qualified guru

brahman ... the formless, all-pervading effulgence of Krishna

brahmin ... the caste of priests and theological scholars

brahminical ... of the brahmins; denoting high standards of cleanliness and intellect

Braj (Vraja) ... literally ‘around’; cowherd encampment; the area of grazing land where Krishna’s semi-nomadic kinsfolk lived with their cows; a tract of land between New Delhi and Agra encompassing some eighty-four square miles at which Brindaban is the heart and which includes Govardhan and innumerable other sites which were the settings of the Radha-Krishna narratives; setting of largest part of ‘The Golden Milkmaid’

Brajbhas ... dialect spoken in Braj and formerly the most familiar idiom for Hindi poetry
Braj-leela – Radha-Krishna’s activities in the bucolic setting of Braj among cowherd folk, as opposed to the later Dwarka-leela where Krishna ruled as king.

Brinda (Sanskrit, vrinda) – Ocimum Sanctum; a shrub or small tree that is a member of the basil family and is commonly called tulsi; namesake of the forest where Krishna grazed his cows.

Brinda / Vrinda – the guardian goddess of Brindaban of whom tulsi is an expansion.

Brindaban / Vrindavana – literally ‘forest of Brinda’; the place famous as the childhood home of Krishna and so an important Hindu pilgrimage town; situated approximately eight miles northeast of Mathura along the western bank of the Yamuna river in Uttar Pradesh; one of the twelve ‘forests’ of Braj within which are twelve smaller ‘forests’ (now subject to almost complete deforestation); my own home for eight years and the town in which ‘The Golden Milkmaid’ is set.

Buddha – according to Gaudiya Vaishnavas, an avatar of Vishnu, descended to teach non-violence and compassion, and to counteract rigid braminical strictures that were non-conducive to love of god.

C

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534) – (Chaitanya means ‘consciousness’; Mahaprabhu means ‘grand master’) also referred to as Shree Chaitanya, Shriman Mahaprabhu, Krishna-Chaitanya, Gaura (gold), Gauranga (one with limb of molten gold), Gaurachandra (golden full-moon), Gaura-Hari (one who has stolen the golden complexion of Radhika), Gaura Kishore (beautiful golden youth), Nimai Pandit (a name of endearment used during his scholarly youth indicting that he was born beneath a neem tree), Sachinandana (the son of mother Sachi), and Vishvambhar (universal).

Shree Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was born in 1486 in Nabadwip, West Bengal (Gaudadesh). He was a saint and mystic and is believed by his followers to be an exceptional avatar as Radha and Krishna combined in the one body. He is believed to be Krishna assuming the sentiment of a bhakta to promulgate the chanting of the hare krishna maha-mantra.

Chaitanya Bhagvat (The Divinity of Chaitanya) – hagiography of Chaitanya.
**Mahaprabhu** by Vrindavan Das Thakur (1507-1589)

*Chaitanya Charitamrita (The Nectar of the Life of Shree Chaitanya)* ... hagiography of *Mahaprabhu* by Krishna Das Kaviraj (b1496); primarily Bengali verse, including many Sanskrit verses

**D**

darshan ... beholding; seeing or meeting with a deity or revered being
devas ... angelic denizens of the celestial planets endowed with great piety, tremendous lifespans and superior mental and physical prowess; the lesser gods who govern the nature of the material world and who exercise power for universal administration; Hindu deities
devanagari ... system of notation in which Sanskrit, Brajbhasa and Hindi are written
dham ... a sacred place; a holy place of pilgrimage; the abode of Radha and Krishna
dharma ... (from the verbal root *dhri* meaning ‘to sustain’ literally ‘that which sustains’) the inseparable nature or natural characteristic function of a thing; socio-religious duty; religion in general
didi ... big sister (Bengali); a respectful but closely affectionate appellation used by Gaudiya Vaishnavs and Vaishnavis when speaking to or referring to women in their group (note: ISKCON members use the designation ‘*mataji* (respected mother)’
diksha ... formal connection with a line of Gaudiya Vaishnavs; *brahmin* initiation (in Gaudiya Vaishnavism, *brahmin* status is awarded according to qualification rather than bloodline); the process by which *guru* imparts *divya-jnana* (divine knowledge) to an individual; the giving by *guru* to disciple a *mantra* which, in due course of time, will reveal the particular form of the deity to be the object of the disciple’s worship as well as the disciple’s specific relationship with that deity
diksha-guru ... also known as *mantra-guru*; the guru who formally initiates a disciple into a practice; one who gives, to a qualified candidate in accordance with the regulations of *shastra*, a *mantra* for realisation and worship of the deity

**G**

Gauga / Gauda-desh / Gauda-bhumi ... archaic name corresponding to the region of West Bengal and including some parts of Bangladesh and as far as Bhubaneshwar in
Orissa; the site holy to **Gaudiya Vaishnavs** as the home of **Chaitanya**

**Gaudiya ... of Gauda**; a resident of **Gauda**; term used after the appearance of **Chaitanya** to indicate to his **Vaishnav** followers

**Gaudiya Math ...** chain of monasteries founded by **Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati** on principles of **Chaitanya** and **Radha-Krishna** worship

**Gaudiya Vaishnav ...** a member of the **Vaishnav** denomination who follows **Chaitanya**

**Gaudiya Vaishnavs:**

- believe in a supreme god who has both male and female nature
- worship **Radha-Krishna** with external ritual and in private meditation
- consider divinities’ power and majesty to be secondary to their beauty, love and sweetness
- see god as a **person** whose beauty, charm and love is all pervading and infinite
- deem consciousness is a symptom of the soul and that all souls remain eternally individual
- accept in transmigration of the soul as true
- see the intrinsic nature of the soul as being in a personal relationship with god
- see spiritual perfection as an awakening of pure love for god
- sing the **maha-mantra** in private gatherings and in public as a promotional activity
- chant **maha-mantra** softly as the basis for individual meditation
- see cows as sacred, are lacto-vegetarian, and include culinary art among their rituals
- wear tulsi neckbeads and, when practical, identifying forhead markings
- embrace a broad corpus of Hindu texts and hold the canon of Gaudiya writing most sacred

**Gaudiya Vaisnavism ...** movement devoted to the worship of **Radha** and **Krishna**; a major **bhakti** movement instigated in the 16th century at the behest of **Chaitanya** by his immediate followers, the **Six Goswamis of Vrindavan**, in order to promulgate and systemise his teachings and devotional practices
During Chaitanya’s time, the region including present-day West Bengal, parts of Bangladesh and parts of Orissa was named Gauda, and the followers of Chaitanya became known as Gaudiya Vaishnavs. Since the twelfth century in Bengal, worship of Shakti in her various forms has predominated and worship of Krishna is atypical there, but nowhere else in India have the love of Krishna found such poetic expression [Dutt 2-3]. After Chaitanya’s advent, Gaudiya Vaishnavs were not considered Hindus proper but as a sect who ignored Hindu faith.

Chaitanya, in the vehemence of his convictions, ventured to declare war on Hinduism itself, and questioned some of its fundamental tenets … the system of caste inequalities was boldly questioned; the Chandala who had faith in Krishna was declared superior to the unbelieving Brahmin though well versed in the Vedas… [Dutt 5]

In time, however, Hinduism absorbed Gaudiya Vaishnavism within itself. After a period of decline in popularity during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Chaitanya’s movement underwent a renaissance at the beginning of the twentieth century. (Dutt 2-7)

gopas … the cowherding lads who are Krishna’s intimate friends and older cowherders who relate to Krishna with fatherly affection

gopis … the young milkmaidens who are Radhika’s intimate companions and older cowherder women who relate to Radhika and Krishna with maternal affection; exemplary spiritual figures for the Vaishnav traditions of Braj; the form of the inner being capable of the highest love

ghosthi-anandi … a Gaudiya preacher; one who attains bliss through discussion of spiritual matters in an assembly or among companions (as opposed to a bhajan-anandi)

goswami … lord of the cows; one who is in charge of the cows /one who can control their own senses

Govardhan / Govardhana … the sacred mountain of Braj located west of Mathura

Govinda … a name for Krishna as one who pleases the gopis, gopas, cows, senses, earth and Govardhan Hill

Govinda-lilamrta … Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami’s description of Radha-Krishna’s eightfold daily pastimes
guru ... an authentic spiritual preceptor

guru, sadhu, and shastra ... ‘the preceptor, the erudite ones, and the literature’: reference points by which Vaishnavs determine authenticity of knowledge

guru-shishya ... guru-student relationship

H

hare ... ‘O Radha!’; vocative of Hara, a name for Radha

Hare Krishna ... words of the mantra chanted by Gaudiya Vaishnavs referring to Radha-Krishna

Hari ... ‘one who takes away’; a name for Krishna signifying that he removes inauspiciousness and that he steals hearts

hari-katha ... talk about Hari (Krishna); narrations of the names, forms, qualities and pastimes of the deity

hladini ... the bliss (ananda) aspect of the deity by which the deity can experience and cause others to experience bliss; the pleasure-potency of Krishna that is embodied in Radha

I

ISKCON ... The International Society of Krishna Consciousness, popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement

ISKCON is a proselytising and fund-raising organisation founded by Prabhupad in New York in 1966 by which Gaudiya Vaishnav tradition has been carried to the West. Its headquarters are in Mayapur, West Bengal. ISKCON has devotees, including diasporic Hindus, across the world, and has also established itself in its somewhat Westernised form throughout India. Although notably conservative and orthodox in its practices, ISKCON embraces those born outside the Hindu caste system. Since Prabhupad passed on, there have been a number of theological and organisational disputes resulting in the establishment of separate groups and the spiritual quest of many aspiring Gaudiya bhaktas (Hare Krishna devotees) outside the jurisdiction of ISKCON.
**jnana** ... knowledge; knowledge leading to an impersonal realisation of the deity (‘oneness’ or ‘merging’) as opposed to loving devotion towards a personal deity

**K**

**kalpana** ... imagination, fantasy

**Kali-yuga** ... 432,000-year dark age of quarrel and hypocrisy which began 5,000 years ago

**karma** ... action; work; the principle of causality and consequence linked with the model of reincarnation

**karmic** ... to do with *karma*

**kirtan** ... congregational devotional singing, generally of the *maha-mantra*; an important practice in *bhakti*

**Kishori** ... a name for Radha meaning, ‘little girl’

**Krishna** ... ‘black’; the dark-skinned cowherd-boy consort of Radha

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**Krishna** is a charming cowherd boy with a complexion the colour of a monsoon raincloud. He wears a yellow cloth around his waist, a garland of forest flowers, and a peacock feather in his hair. His mother is the milkmaid Yashoda; his father is Nanda, king of Nandagram; he is the darling of the residents of Braj and he is besotted by Radhika. Krishna's extraordinary nature and the music of his flute attracts everyone and everything. He is surrounded by those whose love is unfettered by reverence and formality.

To many, Krishna's form is concealed by his aura, the astounding divine light known as *brahman*. According to *Bhagavat Purana*, hence all Gaudiya Vaishnavs, Krishna is the original supreme deity, the *avatari* — the source of all *avatars* including Vishnu — and is therefore termed The Supreme Personality of Godhead. His body is composed of eternity (*sat*), knowledge (*chit*) and bliss (*ananda*) and he is the personification of all *ras*.

**Krishna** is the favourite deity of many Hindus. He is an immensely popular subject for art, craft, dramatic, musical, poetic and literary traditions, all with a wide variety of local and regional variations.

**Krishna** plays a central role in the *Mahabharat* (*Great India*) and is the speaker of the primary Hindu text, *The Bhagavad-Gita* (*The Song of God*). His awe-inspiring aspect displayed in these texts is somewhat less cherished by Gaudiyas because he is away from Braj, causing heartbreak to its inhabitants.
Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami ... (1496—) author whose magnum-opus was the hagiography of Chaitanya, Chaitanya Charitamrita which he wrote in his old age and in poor health; author of Govinda-lilamrta

leela (lila) ... what the deity does; ‘play’, both in the sense of ‘fun-and-games’ and in the sense of ‘drama’; the divine sports of Radha-Krishna; activity of the deity narrated, heard, meditated upon by bhaktas as part of sadhana-bhakti

lobha ... greed; spiritual voracity to serve the deity

madhurya ... sweetness or beauty; the type of devotion that allows for the greatest exchange of love between deity and devotee

madhurya-leela ... Radhika and Krishna’s delicate playful pastimes full of sweetness; pastimes in the sweetness of love; the highest, most confidential topics to do with Radha-Krishna; as opposed to aishwarya-leela

madhurya-bhakti-rasa ... flavour of devotional sentiments stimulated by meditations on the amorous love of Radha-Krishna

Mahabharat (The Great History of Bharat (India)) ... Hindu, Sanskrit, epic consisting of 100,000 couplets; chronicle of the conflict that culminated in the War of Kurukshetra; Krishna’s teachings at the battlefield at Kurukshetra are recorded in Mahabharat as an embedded text, the Bhagavad-gita (The Song of God); scholars date layers of the written text at the Vedic period, around 1,500 BCE, but Gaudiyas accept that it was written beyond the jurisdiction measurable time

maha-mantra ... literally ‘great mantra’, a mantra consisting of the names of Radhika and Krishna in whose chanting Chaitanya located the sufficient cause of salvation in kali yuga

bare krishna bare krishna
krishna krishna bare bare
bare rama bare rama
rama rama bare bare

Writing from the Gauḍiya Tradition
manas ... mind; consciousness inferior to intelligence (buddhi)

mandala ... a circular design; Braj-mandala: the area ‘a-round’ which Krishna grazed his cows; rasa-mandala: the circle dance of Krishna and the gopis

manjari ... a pre-teen maidservant of Radhika

mantra ... literally 'mind-free'; mystical verse or sacred formula given by guru to disciple at the time of diksha; spiritually-charged words recited in meditation; names of the deity

Mathura ... ancient trading and pilgrimage centre on the Yamuna south of Delhi at the heart of Braj

maya ... illusory magic; that which is not; the two types of illusion are: (1) maha-maya: a superficial divine potency which influences persons to believe they are independent enjoyers of the material world (2) yoga-maya: the power of the goddess Yogamaya who creatively facilitates Radha-Krishna’s leela

mayavada ... ‘seeing illusion’; the doctrine of illusion; a theory which holds that the variegated material world, the individual existence of living entities and any form of the deity are illusion and false, and that reality is the ultimate merging into an undifferentiated amorphous oneness-of-all-that-is

moksha ... ‘freedom’; liberation from the cycle of material existence, birth and death; generally interpreted as a merging into divinity and all that is, but to the Gaudiya, moksha denotes eternal blissful service (seva) to Radha-Krishna maintaining unique individuality conducive for that service

mridanga ... Bengali double-ended clay drum

Nama

nama-bhajana ... the practice of chanting softly to oneself on tulsi beads

nara-leela ... Krishna’s human-like pastimes

Narasimha ... half-man, half-lion avatar of Krishna’s ferocity and wrath who appeared to kill a powerful demon who was tormenting his infant bhakta

Narottam Das Thakur (1466?-?) ... a younger contemporary associate of The Six Goswamis of Vrindavan; guru of thousands, mostly in area of modern day Bangladesh; organiser of annual festivals in Bengal after the passing of Chaitanya; poet
known for his intensely devotional poetry to Radha-Krishna; author of Prarthana — Supplication and Premabhakticandrika — Moonrays of Loving Devotion

*Natyashastra* ... compendium of the performing arts containing the first textual discussion of the *rasa* theory, most likely a product of the fourth to sixth centuries

*nava-yauvanam* ... ‘ever fresh’; eternally youthful; a descriptive term used to identify to Radha-Krishna

*parampara* ... disciplic succession; traceable lineage of *guru* through which ideas are transmitted

*parikram* ... circumabulation; the circling of an object as a way of honouring, worshipping, and experiencing it

**Prabhupad, Prabhupada** (pronounced *Prabu-padh* (1896-1977); ... His Divine Grace Abhay Charanaravinda Bhaaktivendanta Swami Prabhupada / Bhaaktivendanta Swami; Gaudiya guru, writer and translator; founder- *acarya* of ISKCON; ‘Prabhupad’ can be interpreted to mean either, ‘one at whose feet all masters sit,’ or ‘one who sits at the feet of the masters’ and is the familiar, affectionate appellation used by his followers

**Prabhupad** was born in a Gaudiya Vaishnav family in Calcutta and received a British education at Calcutta’s Scottish Church College. In 1920 he rejected his graduation certificate in protest against British rule in India. In 1922 he met Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, received *diksha* from him ten years later, and was sent by him to preach in the West. In 1968 **Prabhupad** established the ISKCON Hare Krishna movement in America. He encouraged his followers to write for his Back to Godhead magazine which he founded in 1944. He authored more than fifty volumes of English translation and commentaries on Sanskrit and Bengali Gaudiya texts including Hinduism’s primary text, *Bhagavad-gita* and his magna opera, his multi-volume translations of *Srimad Bhagavatam* and *Chaitanya-Charitamrita*. Before he passed away in 1977, **Prabhupad** told his followers, ‘I will live forever in my books (Goswami, 337)’.

*prasad, naivedya, bhog* ... concepts for understanding food offerings to the deity: food brought before the deity (*naivedya*) becomes a delectable repast during the deity’s eating
bhoga and becomes transformed into blessed ‘remnants’ afterwards for the devout
prasad

prem … love for the deity which is concentrated, melts the heart, and gives rise to a deep
sense of mine-ness; affection for the deity that cannot be damaged

prem rasa … the taste of love of god

Purana … genre of Hindu scripture which contains much traditional history; there are
eighteen major Puranas, chief among which, for the Gaudiya, is the Bhagavat
Purana

pure devotee … suddha bhakta; one with unalloyed love for Radha and Krishna, such that
they are devoid of material desire; requisite platform of guru of topmost qualification

R

Radha … also known as Radharani (Queen Radha), Radhika (Little Radha); Vrishabhanu-
Nandini (the daughter of cowherder king Vrishabhanu), Kishori (little girl), Mahabhav-
Swarupini (the personification of the highest ecstasy of divine love) and Gaurangi (one
with the golden limbs)

Shrimati Radhika is a milkmaid of Braj. She has a bright golden complexion and wears blue garments
She is the beloved eternal consort of Krishna, the embodiment of devotion to Krishna, the
embodiment of the hladini (divine bliss) potency, the source of all the gopis, and the embodiment of the
cosmic energy (shakti). Her ornaments are her unlimited auspicious qualities. In ‘The Golden Milkmaid’
she is referred to as Kishori and in my exegesis as Radhika.

Radha-Krishna … the divine couple, Radha and Krishna

Radhakund … ‘the lake of Radha’; the most sacred place of pilgrimage for all Gaudiya
Vaishnavas; the direct embodiment of Radha; the site of the most confidential
pastimes of Radha-Krishna

Radhika … affectionate diminutive of Radha and the name for Radha that I use in this
exegesis

raganuga-bhakti … bhakti in the wake of the eternal inhabitants of Braj (the ragamikas);
the highly advanced stage of bhakti wherein restrictive regulation (such as in vaidhi-bhakti) becomes subordinate to a spontaneous flow of loving devotion

Raghunath Das Goswami (1495-1586) … a close associate of Chaitanya; born in 1494 in Hugali district of West Bengal; author of Stavavali, Dankeli-cintamini, and Mukta-carita.

Ras/ rasa … literally ‘juice’; sap, liquid, nectar, taste, flavour, essence, hence mood; an aesthetic and/or devotional mood; the ‘juice’ of a text being its dominant emotional theme or emotion evoke

The concept of ras is fundamental to Indian theatre, dance, art and literature. It pertains to the state of aesthetic consciousness or emotional experience of the actors or audience. The theory of ras originated from Bharat Muni’s treatise on Sanskrit poetics and dramaturgy Natya Sastra (200BCE—200CE?). Rupa Goswami applied this secular conception to bhakti in his Bhakti-Rasamrita-Sindhu—The Ocean of the Nectar of Devotion (mid-1500s). Rupa Goswami’s explanation of how ras is generated accords with that of Bharat Muni yet he explains the experience of ras in terms of Radha-Krishna’s activities as well as to individuals’ relationships with Radha-Krishna. Gauḍiya Vaishnavs understand ras to be the state of permanent emotional relationship of the soul with the deity. It is also a spiritual transformation that takes place at a perfected stage of love of god when the heart becomes liquefied and combines with various types of spiritual ecstasies.

ras-abhasa … an incompatible mixture of rasas; a jarring aesthetic

ras-leela … Krishna’s circle dance with the gopis; a musical drama depicting Radha-Krishna leela

ras-shastra … written narratives that are full of ras

rasik … one conversant with the theory of ras; a connoisseur of ras; one at a highly elevated stage of bhakti

rasik-katha … narration of sweet Braj pastimes of Radha-Krishna

Rupa Goswami (c.1493-1564) … close associate of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu whom Chaitanya instructed to write books explaining bhakti; poet, dramatist, theologian, and Sanskrit scholar; author of systematic theologies and Radha-Krishna plays; most influential of the Six Goswamis of Vrindavan; contributor of an analysis of Vaishnav bhakti which utilised the classical Indian aesthetic theory of ras; author of Ujjvala-
nilamani (The beautiful Sapphire), Vidagdh-Madhava, Lalita-Madhava and Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu (The Ocean of the Nectar of Devotion) in which raganuga-sadhanabhakti and the aesthetic approach to bhakti were first systematically presented.

S

sadhaka … one who follows a discipline to achieve a specific goal; a practitioner of bhakti

sadhaka-deha … a practitioner’s external physical body

sadhana … (derived from sadh meaning to go straight to the goal or to succeed) the method one adopts to accomplish a specific goal; dedicated disciplined spiritual practice or technique; a practical means to a spiritual end; practice to achieve a spiritual goal

sakhi … a female friend, companion, or attendant; a girlfriend; one of Radhika’s gopi friends

sadhu … one who speaks the truth unaffected by convention; a sage; a bhakta; one who is uninterested in mundane life, who is firmly established in love of god, who wishes well equally to all and is free from lust, rage and fault finding

sadhu-sanga … literally ‘with sadhus’; seeking out, staying with, serving, hearing from, and following in the footsteps of sadhus

samadhi … final resting place; eternal bliss

sampradaya … a guru-disciple lineage; a temple tradition

Sanatan Goswami (1499-1558) … The seniormost of The Six Goswamis of Vrindavan; author of important texts including Brihat-bhagavatamrita — The Great Nectar of Krishna’s Devotees and Hari-bhakti-vilasa — The Performance of Devotion to Hari

Saraswati … goddess of music and education

satyagraha … (satya—truth, agraha—insistence: insistence on truth) term coined my Mohandas Gandhi to describe his movement of non-violent resistance; respectful disagreement

sattva … rarefied quality to do with cleanliness, goodness, purity, and sweetness; one of three elements constituting human nature and the material world (the other two being: rajas—speed, ambition, lust, power etc. and tamas—ignorance, inertia, sloth, darkness, decay etc.)
seva … service; work or tasks for deity or guru

Shakti … consort of Shiva; manifests as Parvati, Durga, Uma, Kali, and so on; regarded by her worshippers in relationship of helpless child to beautiful, awesome mother

shakti … female personification of supernatural energy of energetic deity / god; energy, potency, female principle

shastra … scripture, especially the Vedic scriptures

shiksha … instructions received from a teacher, specifically from guru about bhakti

shiksha-guru … the spiritual preceptor from whom one receives instructions in the lore and practice of bhakti

shishya … student; disciple; follower

shloka … a verse form Vaishnav literature, usually Sanskrit or Bengali

siddha-deha … perfect spiritual body (as opposed to sadhaka-deha); an internal meditative body which has access to Braj leela

siddhanta … literally ‘established end’; the demonstrated and definite conclusion to a theological or philosophical argument

Sita … goddess consort of Raam; worshipped as epitome of good wifeliness

Six Goswamis of Vrindavan … (16th Century CE) six immediate followers of Chaitanya who, in over two hundred written works, established the scriptural and ritual basis of the Gaudiya tradition, delineated the sacred geography of Braj as the focus for Gaudiya Radha-Krishna bhakti and, by writing in Sanskrit, aligned the tradition with the Vedic orthodoxy

sphurti … face-to-face vision of the deity in meditation

Srimad Bhagavatam … see Bhagavat Purana

smaran … ‘remembering’, contemplative meditation on the name, form, qualities and pastimes of the deity

suddha-bhaktas … literally ‘pure devotees’; those who have attained and are infused with pure devotion to Radha-Krishna unalloyed with any material desire and who bring Braj with them wherever they go

Surabhi … a cow of divine origin
sutra ... literally ‘thread’; a verse in seed-form that must be explained by a guru

swami / Swami ... goswami; one who can control their own senses

swamini / Swamini ... female swami; one who can control their senses; a name for Radha

Swapnavana ... an imaginary name for Vrindavan used in ‘the Golden Milkmaid’ meaning ‘Forest of Dreams’

T

tattva ... (literally ‘thatness’) a true or real state, principle or element; the essence or substance of anything; truth, reality, philosophical principle

tattva-siddhanta ... the perfection of the end of all truth; absolute truth

tirtha ... a place to ‘cross over’; a passageway to another world; many pilgrimages in South Asia are called tirtha-yatra

trimurti ... three main deities of Hinduism: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the sustainer, Shiva the destroyer

tulsi ... a sacred plant whose leaves and blossoms are used in the worship of Krishna; a manifestation of the goddess Vrinda-devi

tulsi-mala ... a strand of beads made of tulsi wood used like a rosary for counting the chanting of the maha-mantra; a necklace of small tulsi beads worn by Gaudiyas to indicate their devotion

U

uttama-adhikari ... a bhaka ‘of the topmost qualification’

An uttama-adhikari is one: who has developed deep love and surrender to Radha-Krishna and who remembers them at all times; who is well-versed in scripture and can present it adeptly and logically; who can see through illusion; who is able to tolerate urges of mind, body and senses; who is equal and kind to all; who is magnanimous and works for the benefit of all; who has neither material possessions nor desires; who does not eat more than required; who makes enemies of no-one and offers respect to everyone; who thinks him- or herself to be of low qualification and so has an aversion to veneration towards him- or herself; who is serene, honest, genial, gracious, poetic, grave, guiltless, expert, balanced, pure, and silent.
vaidhi-bhakti ... devotion prompted by the regulations of shastra; sadhana which is not inspired by intense longing; essential foundational stage on the path of devotion where practice is regulated by injunctions and conventions of worship in awe and reverence (as opposed to raganuga-bhakti)

Vaishnav ... literally: of Vishnu; one devoted to Vishnu/Krishna; pertaining to Vishnu/Krishna or his worship;

In its broadest sense, the term Vaishnav encompasses every soul in its gradual spiritual evolution; in a narrower sense, the term indicates one who worships god as an absolute, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent entity; and in its most common and narrow interpretation, it indicates a worshipper of the central deity of the Hindu trimurti (three gods), Vishnu. According to Hindu lore, Vishnu manifests in the material world in many different avatars such as Narasimha, Ram, and Buddha. Most Hindus and vaishnavs such as the culturally prominent South Indian Vaishnavs regard Vishnu as the source of all avatars including Krishna, but Gaudiya Vaishnavs regard Krishna as the primordial form of God, source of Vishnu and cause of all causes.

Vaishnavi / Vaisnavi ... female Vaisnava

Vaishnavism ... the cult of Vishnu/Krishna

Vedas ... from the Sanskrit वेद veda meaning knowledge; a large body of texts composed in Sanskrit; the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature; the oldest scriptures of Hinduism; attributed to the god Brahma as aprauruṣeya — not written by mortals

Vishnu ... the supreme lord of the cosmos who presides over material goodness (sattva)

Vishvanath Chakravarti Thakur ... (C1630CE-C1710CE) Gaudiya writer in Sanskrit born in then West Bengal; prolific author of devotional works including Camatkara-candrika—A Moonbeam of Sheer Astonishment, Prema-samputa—The Treasure Chest of Pure Transcendental Love, and Gitavali—Selected Songs

Vrinda-devi ... also known as Tulsi-devi; an intimate attendant to Radha-Krishna who makes all arrangements for their clandestine forest meetings; the predominating goddess of the Vrindavan forest; goddess from whom tulsi manifests;
Vrindavan / Vrindavana / Vrindaban ... see Brindaban

Vyasa ... also known as Veda-Vyasa or Vyasadeva; a great sage and empowered incarnation of Krishna; father of the great sage Shree Sukhadev who spoke the Bhagavat-Purana; compiler and arranger of the Vedas, Vedanta-sutra, the Puranas, the Mahabharat and Bhagavat-Purana; usually depicted as an ancient bearded scribe

Y

Yamuna ... a sacred river who flows from the Himalayas through Braj and Vrindavan; second major river of the Gangetic plain; believed to be an expansion of the goddess-daughter of the sun-god as well as a gopi friend of Radhika

yatrap ... a ‘journey’; often refers specifically to pilgrimage

yoga ... literally ‘union, meeting, connection’; a cluster of spiritual disciplines aiming at establishing one’s connection with the divine

yogamaya ... power of miraculous illusion; the type of illusion that affects the inhabitants of spiritual Braj, for example, Krishna, so that he does not know he is god and so may enjoy himself as a human cowherd boy

Yogamaya ... the personification of yogamaya who appears to be a renounced village elder-woman and who is actually an expansion of Radhika

yuga ... a cosmic cycle like a season of aeons spanning many thousands of years
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