



Sex, Gender, and Devotional Desire: Refiguring Bodily Identities in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Discourse

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Abstract Many of the debates among theorists of the body in feminist and gender studies center on the gendered body and its relation to the sexed body, with the validity of the sex/gender distinction itself a topic of contention. On the one hand, feminist advocates of social constructionism tend to distinguish between sex and gender, in which sex (male or female) is identified with the biological body as a “natural” datum and gender (masculine or feminine) is a second-order sociocultural construction that is superimposed as an ideological superstructure on this “natural” base. On the other hand, feminist advocates of sexual difference such as Judith Butler call into question the sex/gender distinction and insist that the sexed body, like gender, is socially constructed. This article brings these contemporary feminist interlocutors into conversation with sixteenth-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authorities who developed a distinctive discourse of embodiment in which they frame the categories of sex and gender in relation to devotional desire in their ontological theories of bodily identities. The Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment explodes notions of the relationship between embodiment, personhood, materiality, and gender on both the human and divine planes and challenges prevailing body theories by positing bodies beyond matter, personhood beyond matter, and gender beyond sex.

Keywords sex · gender · Kṛṣṇa · *bhakti* · Gauḍīya · body · identity

In the past decades theories of the “body” as an analytical category have proliferated in the social sciences and humanities, particularly within the context of cultural

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studies. The body has been theorized from a diverse range of disciplinary perspectives, which has generated a host of contending categories of the body, such as the lived body, the mindful body, the social body, the body politic, the medical body, the alimentary body, the sexual body, the sexed body, and the gendered body. Among the plethora of theories, as I have discussed at length elsewhere, three areas of scholarship in particular have had a significant influence on studies of the body in religion: the body in philosophy, the body in social theory, and the body in feminist and gender studies.¹

For the purpose of the present analysis, I would like to briefly highlight the contributions of feminist theorists whose critiques of the “phallogocentric” discourses of Western culture generally involve a sustained critique of the dualisms fostered by these discourses, with particular attention to the gendered inflection of the mind/body dichotomy. Among the wide-ranging theories of the body in feminist and gender studies, four types of approaches are of particular significance. One approach, consonant with early American feminists’ emphasis on the irreducible reality of women’s experience, centers on experiences of the female body, focusing on those bodily experiences that are unique to women, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, and menopause. A second approach, inspired by French scholars Julia Kristeva (1980, 1982, 1986), Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b, 1993), and Hélène Cixous (1976, 1994; Cixous and Clément 1986), focuses on the role of discourse in constructing the female body, emphasizing that the body is a text inscribed by the structures of language and signification, and hence there is no experience of the body apart from discourse. Irigaray and Cixous, exponents of *écriture féminine*, propose “writing the body” and generating new inscriptions of the female body that are liberated from phallogocentric discursive practices and that celebrate the alterity of woman’s sexual difference. The notion of sexual difference has been developed in a variety of distinctive ways by Anglo-American feminists such as Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2004). A third approach, represented by British and American Marxist feminists and other advocates of social reform, challenges the preoccupation by French feminists and other proponents of sexual difference with the discourse of woman’s body and emphasizes instead the politics of bodily praxis in which the female body is a site of political struggle involving concrete social and material realities, ranging from socioeconomic oppression and violence against women to reproductive rights and female eating disorders.² A fourth approach, espoused by the Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and other proponents of intersectionality, emphasizes the need to address sex and gender within the interlocking matrix of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and other identity markers.

Many of the debates among theorists of the body in feminist and gender studies center on the *gendered body* and its relation to the *sexed body*, with the validity of the sex/gender distinction itself a topic of contention. On the one hand, feminist

¹ For a discussion of recent trends of scholarship on the body in philosophy, social theory, and feminist and gender studies, and more specifically in religious studies, along with relevant references, see Holdrege 2015: 7–11; Holdrege forthcoming.

² As an example of this approach, see Bordo 1989, 1993.

advocates of social constructionism tend to distinguish between sex and gender, in which sex (male or female) is identified with the biological body as a “natural” datum and gender (masculine or feminine) is a second-order sociocultural construction that is superimposed as an ideological superstructure on this “natural” base. On the other hand, certain feminist proponents of sexual difference call into question the sex/gender distinction and insist that the sexed body, like gender, is a sociocultural construction.³

Butler, for example, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), challenges the heteronormative regimes that seek to delimit “intelligible” genders by maintaining relations of continuity among sex, gender, and sexual desire and perpetuating norms that “establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the ‘expression’ or ‘effect’ of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice” (17). In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993), Butler argues further that the binary sex/gender system arises not from nature but from a system of cultural norms grounded in the “heterosexual imperative,” and thus “sex” must be construed not “as a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but as a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies” (2–3). In Butler’s perspective, the construction of sexed bodies is not a once-and-for-all act culminating in a set of firmly fixed effects but is rather an ongoing process of *materialization* in accordance with regulatory norms.

What I would propose...is a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*. That matter is always materialized has, I think, to be thought in relation to the productive and, indeed, materializing effects of regulatory power in the Foucaultian sense. Thus, the question is no longer, How is gender constituted as and through a certain interpretation of sex? (a question that leaves the “matter” of sex untheorized), but rather, Through what regulatory norms is sex itself materialized? (Butler 1993: 9–10; emphasis in the original).

Butler argues that the process of constituting the human subject and materializing the body’s sex begins when an infant emerges from the womb—or when the fetus is first seen in an ultrasound scan—and, through the act of naming, shifts from an “it” to a “she” or a “he.” “[I]n that naming,” Butler asserts, “the girl is ‘girded,’ brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender” (1993: 7). Moreover, this “girling” of the girl does not happen only once, but, on the contrary, the founding interpellation is reiterated over time through the repeated inculcation of cultural norms so that the “naturalized effect” of sex and gender is reinforced and consolidated (Butler 1993: 7–8). Butler (1993: 2) understands gender performativity in this context as the “reiterative” and “citational” practices through which regulatory norms materialize the body’s sex over time and materialize sexual difference in the service of heterosexual

³ For a brief overview of the contending positions of the advocates of social constructionism and the proponents of sexual difference, see Grosz 1994: 16–19.

hegemony. However, Butler suggests that such reiterative practices can also serve as a means of contesting and destabilizing heterosexual norms by opening up “gaps and fissures” through which the confines of heteronormative constraints can be escaped (1993: 10).

[“Sex”] is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law (Butler 1993: 1–2).

Butler’s feminist interventions thus point to the possibility of resignifying the body by “rematerializing sex” and “undoing gender,”⁴ opening up potential avenues for “a reconceptualization of which bodies matter” (1993: 4) and an exploration of bodily identities that transgress the sanctioned limits of heteronormative regimes, including queer, transgender, and nonbinary identities.

In this article I will bring these contemporary feminist interlocutors into conversation with sixteenth-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authorities who, in contrast to feminist interrogations of the triad of sex, gender, and sexual desire, developed their own distinctive ontological theories of bodily identities in which they frame the categories of sex and gender in relation to a third term, *devotional desire*, which in their formulations takes precedence over sexual desire. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition is an important Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* tradition inspired by the Bengali leader Caitanya (ca. 1486–1533). Although Caitanya himself did not leave a legacy of devotional poetry or other literary expression beyond eight verses, termed *Śikṣāṣṭaka*, that are traditionally ascribed to him, he is represented in hagiographic narratives as charging a group of his disciples, who came to be known as the “six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana,” with the task of developing a formal system of theology and practice to perpetuate the *bhakti* movement inspired by him. The six Gosvāmins are credited with formulating a *bhakti-sāstra*, formal discourse of *bhakti*, together with the associated regimen of practices termed *sādhana-bhakti* that define the distinctive tradition-identity of the Gauḍīya *bhakti-saṅgha*, the community of Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas* who follow the path delineated by Caitanya and the Gosvāmins.⁵ The critical feature that distinguishes this Gauḍīya discourse of *bhakti* from contending discourses in the Indian religiocultural landscape is its function as a *discourse of embodiment*.⁶

⁴ See Butler’s 2004 work, *Undoing Gender*.

⁵ For an overview of the history and works of the six Gosvāmins—Sanātana Gosvāmin, Rūpa Gosvāmin, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, Raghunāthadāsa Gosvāmin, Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin, and Jīva Gosvāmin—see De 1961: 111–65.

⁶ For an extended study of the Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment, see Holdrege 2015.

The Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment is elaborated by Rūpa Gosvāmin (*ca.* 1470–1557) and Jīva Gosvāmin (*ca.* 1516–1608), the principal architects of the Gauḍīya theological edifice, in their most important Sanskrit works: Rūpa’s *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*,⁷ *Ujjvalanīlamanī*, and *Laghubhāgavatāmṛta*,⁸ and Jīva’s six-volume *Bhāgavata Sandarbha*.⁹ The key elements of this discourse are encapsulated and expanded on by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja (*ca.* 1517–1620), the Gosvāmins’ acclaimed disciple, in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, his authoritative Bengali hagiography of Caitanya’s life and teachings.¹⁰ This discourse includes a robust discourse of divine embodiment pertaining to the manifold forms of Kṛṣṇa and an equally robust discourse of human embodiment pertaining to the devotional bodies of Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas*. While the early Gauḍīya authorities ground their discursive representations and practices pertaining to both divine bodies and human bodies in the canonical authority of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, at the same time they invest the *Bhāgavata*’s teachings with new valences by reframing Kṛṣṇa devotion as what I term an “embodied aesthetics of *bhakti*.”

As we shall see, the Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment explodes notions of the relationship between embodiment, personhood, materiality, and gender on both the human and divine planes and thereby challenges not only contending Indian discourses of the body but also contemporary theories of the body in the social sciences and humanities. More specifically, the Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment challenges prevailing body theories by positing (1) bodies beyond matter, (2) personhood beyond matter, and (3) gender beyond sex. This is not a call to embrace the Gauḍīyas’ ontological claims but rather, as part of a belated postcolonial gesture, to grant “theory parity”¹¹ to the alternative imaginaries that they propose and to engage them as worthy interlocutors whose theorizing might inspire us to reimagine our own body theories in significant ways.

⁷ According to Haberman (2003: xxxiii), the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* was completed in 1541. The *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, “The Ocean of the Nectar of *Bhakti-Rasa*,” is divided into four quarters (*vibhāgas*)—Eastern, Southern, Western, and Northern—each of which is subdivided into chapters called “waves” (*laharīs*). References in the Notes to the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* indicate quarter (*vibhāga*), chapter (*laharī*), and verse(s). Among studies of Rūpa Gosvāmin’s works, see Haberman 1988, 2003 and Delmonico 1990, 1998.

⁸ References in the Notes to the *Laghubhāgavatāmṛta* indicate section (*khaṇḍa*), chapter (*pariccheda*), and verse(s).

⁹ According to Brzezinski (1992: 20), the *Bhāgavata Sandarbha* was composed between 1555 and 1561. The *Bhāgavata Sandarbha* is also called *Ṣaṣṭ Sandarbha*, since it comprises six *Sandarbhās*: *Tattva Sandarbha*, *Bhāgavat Sandarbha*, *Paramātmā Sandarbha*, *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*, *Bhakti Sandarbha*, and *Prīti Sandarbha*. For brief overviews of the contents of the six *Sandarbhās*, see Gupta 2007: 201–7 and Dasa 2007: 373–87. References in the Notes to the *Sandarbhās* indicate section (*anuccheda*). Among recent studies of Jīva Gosvāmin’s works, see Brzezinski 1992, 2007 and Gupta 2007.

¹⁰ According to Dimock (1999: 31–32), the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* was most likely completed around 1615 and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja died between 1615 and 1620. References in the Notes to the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* indicate section (*līlā*), chapter (*pariccheda*), and verse(s) and follow the numbering convention adopted in Dimock’s (1999) translation, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja*, which is based on the Bengali edition of the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* edited by Rādhāgovinda Nātha (1948–52). Among recent studies of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja’s *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, see Dimock 1999 and Stewart 2010.

¹¹ This expression derives from Cabezón 2006: 31.

In a recent essay Michael Radich (2016) argues that contemporary theories of the body in the academy are bound by “materialist” assumptions in which the ordinary material human body—and more specifically, the biophysical body composed of flesh and blood with an anthropomorphic shape—is the default template for what constitutes the body. After briefly surveying the principal currents of contemporary body theories—including Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body, Michel Foucault’s biopolitics of power, Pierre Bourdieu’s logic of practice, and Luce Irigaray’s and Hélène Cixous’s *écriture féminine*—Radich concludes that “these various theories all assume what I am calling the materialist understanding of body” (2016: 19).

The bodies they imagine, in the final analysis, are ordinary human bodies: subject to birth and death; gendered; composed of flesh and blood; with two arms and two legs and a head and a heart and a stomach; able to move, walk, talk, breathe, ingest food, and excrete waste, but not able to fly, or evanesce, or walk through solid objects. This is true regardless of claims that the body is also inscribed with social meanings or otherwise socially constructed....It is even true of the most radical claims for the relativity of embodiment to the nonuniversal parameters of culture, gender, class, sexuality, social role, and so on. It is also even true of theories that propose that current modes of embodiment dominant in our societies are repressive, unjust, and the means of our subjugation to alienating powers and therefore agitate for some sort of change in embodiment. Through all these theories one particular body—the ordinary living human body—runs like a relentless *idée fixe*, and, we might say, the outlines of the ordinary human body demarcate the limits beyond which all such theories will not or cannot think (Radich 2016: 19–20).

With respect to contemporary trends in radical feminist theory, Radich argues that even the liberatory interventions of scholars such as Irigaray and Cixous, who, as exponents of *écriture féminine*, seek to liberate the female body from phallogocentric discursive practices, in the end remain bound to materialist assumptions in which the biophysical body persists as the default template.

It is instructive...to observe the limits beyond which even these [French feminist] writers will not go in abandoning the archetype of the flesh-and-blood human body. They are famous for proposing that the body—particularly, for their purposes, the body of woman—is only text. The project is therefore to reinscribe this text, to generate new texts free of the phallogocentric, phallogocratic norms hidden in patriarchal discourse, which will furnish women with new, liberatory modes of embodiment. On the surface of it, this is a radical departure from the idea of the body as physical matter, as biological organism, as living animal, and so on. However, even these new “textual bodies” teem with anatomical details—genitalia, bodily fluids, body cavities, breasts—that reveal the persistence of the biophysical body as a template. The body may well be text, but it turns out that it is always written as palimpsest on the parchment of our given physicality. For all it might be supposed that we can overwrite it, perhaps in a language utterly new, it does

not seem to be imagined that we can transform the physical body into, or substitute for it, a different medium altogether. Thus even those theories that appear to present the most radical departure from the materialist premise end up not departing from it very far at all (Radich 2016: 20–21).

The feminist interventions of scholars such as Irigaray, Cixous, and Butler have made important contributions to our understanding of the liberatory potential of resignifying the body by generating new bodily inscriptions and citations freed from the constraints of phallogocentric and heteronormative regimes. However, I would suggest that the materialist premise that undergirds the theorizing not only of Irigaray and Cixous but also of Butler is not adequate to account for the radically different models of embodiment found in premodern religious traditions such as the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. In contrast to the materialist understanding of ordinary human bodies that delimits contemporary body theories, Radich notes that even though most religious traditions may take as their starting point ordinary modes of human embodiment, at the same time they posit a range of *extraordinary* modes of embodiment, which are primarily ascribed to two classes of beings: (1) divine beings or other beings who are invested with the status of ultimate reality; and (2) human beings who have undergone some form of bodily transformation, which may entail realization of an ideal or perfected form of embodiment (2016: 21–23).

Radich's critique of the materialist assumptions that constrain contemporary body theories in the social sciences and humanities brings into sharp relief two critical points regarding constructions of embodiment in premodern religious traditions that are amply illustrated by the Gauḍīya case. First, as we shall see, while the Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment takes as its starting point the notion of an ordinary material human body, the entire Gauḍīya project is aimed at transforming bodily identities and attaining realization of a perfected form of embodiment that is *nonmaterial* and *eternally gendered*. In this context the early Gauḍīya authorities introduce important distinctions between “body” and “matter” and between “sex” and “gender” that transgress the materialist limits of contemporary body theories. Second, the Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment not only challenges the privileging of *material* bodies; it also challenges the privileging of *human* bodies as the default template by positing a multiform array of *divine bodies* beyond the human realm and giving precedence to the nonmaterial absolute body of Kṛṣṇa, the supreme Godhead, as the paradigmatic body in relation to which all other bodies—divine as well as human—are classified and ranked.

Divine Bodies beyond Matter

In contrast to contemporary body theories that are predicated on the ordinary human body made of matter, in the Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment the bodies that matter most on both the human and divine planes are those that are *beyond matter*. The Gauḍīya discourse pertaining to human bodies is constructed as a second-level discourse that is founded upon a first-level discourse pertaining to the divine bodies of Kṛṣṇa, for the entire Gauḍīya project is aimed at fashioning perfected embodied

persons with nonmaterial devotional bodies that are modeled after the paradigmatic nonmaterial body—the *vigraha*, absolute body, of Kṛṣṇa—and whose *raison d'être* is to revel in eternal relationship with the supreme Godhead embodied in his *vigraha* in his transcendent abode beyond the material realm of *prakṛti*.

The Absolute Body of Bhagavān

The Gauḍīya discourse of divine embodiment celebrates the deity Kṛṣṇa as *ananta-rūpa*, “he who has endless forms,” his limitless forms encompassing and interweaving the transcendent, macrocosmic, and microcosmic planes of existence. The early Gauḍīya authorities construct a number of hierarchical taxonomies that classify and rank the multifarious divine forms of Kṛṣṇa, the most important of which involves a hierarchical assessment of the three aspects of the supreme Godhead, from lowest to highest: Brahman, Paramātman, and Bhagavān. In allotting the highest place in their ontological hierarchy to Bhagavān, who is represented as a personal Godhead endowed with an absolute body, infinite qualities, and innumerable *śaktis* (energies), the early Gauḍīya authorities engage in a polemic that challenges the contending ontologies of two rival philosophical schools: the monistic ontology of Advaita Vedānta, which identifies the ultimate reality with the impersonal, formless Brahman, and the dualistic ontology of Pātañjala Yoga, which posits a plurality of nonchanging, formless *puruṣas* as the highest reality.¹²

To provide a scriptural basis for this hierarchical assessment, the early Gauḍīya authorities invoke *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.2.11 and interpret the order of terms in the verse as indicating increasing ontological importance: “The knowers of reality declare the ultimate reality to be that which is nondual knowledge. It is called Brahman, Paramātman, and Bhagavān.”¹³ In Gauḍīya formulations these three aspects of the Godhead are associated with different dimensions of embodiment. Brahman, the lowest aspect of the Godhead, is the impersonal, formless, attributeless, and undifferentiated ground of existence that is beyond *prakṛti*, primordial matter, and is the radiant effulgence of the absolute body of Bhagavān. Paramātman, the intermediary aspect of the Godhead, is the indwelling Self, who on the macrocosmic level animates the innumerable universes, or cosmos bodies,¹⁴ and on the microcosmic level resides in the hearts of all *jīvas*, embodied beings. Bhagavān, the highest aspect of the Godhead, is transcendent—beyond both the macrocosmos and the microcosmos—and is personal, endowed with an absolute body (*vigraha*), replete with infinite qualities (*guṇas*), and possessed of innumerable *śaktis*. Bhagavān is ascribed the status of the Godhead in his complete fullness

¹² For an analysis of the Gauḍīya challenge to Advaita Vedānta and Pātañjala Yoga, see Holdrege 2015: 40–45, 103–7.

¹³ All translations of Sanskrit texts are my own.

¹⁴ In Gauḍīya cosmography, as articulated by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, the material realm comprises innumerable Brahman-universes (*brahmāṇḍas*, literally, “Brahmā-eggs”), which are depicted as floating on the ocean of causality in the form of cosmic eggs, each of which contains its own Brahman the creator. These Brahman-universes each contain a hierarchy of fourteen material worlds, with the earth, *bhūr-loka*, in the middle and six subtle material worlds above the earth and seven subtle material worlds beneath the earth.

(*pūrṇa*), who encompasses within himself Brahman and Paramātman and is at the same time beyond both.¹⁵ The early Gauḍīya authorities invoke the declaration in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.3.28 that “Kṛṣṇa is Bhagavān himself (Bhagavān *svayam*)” as the *mahā-vākya*, authoritative scriptural utterance, that establishes Kṛṣṇa’s supreme status as *pūrṇa* Bhagavān, the full and complete Godhead.¹⁶

One of the most striking claims of the Gauḍīya discourse of divine embodiment is its insistence that—contrary to the ontologies of competing philosophical schools that claim that the ultimate reality in its essential nature is formless—the highest aspect of the Godhead, Bhagavān, is not without form (*nirākāra*) but rather is endowed with an absolute *body* with distinctive bodily features that is at the same time nonmaterial (*aprākṛta*), unmanifest (*avyakta*), eternal (*nitya*), and self-luminous (*svaprakāśa*). This absolute body is designated by the term *vigraha*. The early Gauḍīya authorities emphasize that Bhagavān’s *vigraha*, absolute body, like his *svarūpa*, essential nature, consists of being (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*). Thus in Bhagavān there is no distinction between body and essence, *vigraha* and *svarūpa*, for the *deha*, body, and the *dehin*, possessor of the body, are nondifferent.¹⁷ At the level of the *sat-cit-ānanda-vigraha*, the absolute body of Bhagavān consisting of being, consciousness, and bliss, the sex/gender distinction breaks down and gender alone remains, for sexed material bodies composed of flesh and blood have no place in the transcendent domain of the nonmaterial absolute body. The integrated personal-cum-bodily identity of the *dehin-deha* of Bhagavān is gendered as male/masculine, as reflected in his *svarūpa*, essential nature, and *svayaṃ-rūpa*, essential form, which are in the final analysis considered identical.¹⁸

The Gauḍīyas assert the paradoxical notion that Bhagavān’s absolute body, in its *svayaṃ-rūpa*, essential form, is the two-armed male form of Gopāla Kṛṣṇa, who is extolled in the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as descending to earth in

¹⁵ In the first seven sections (*anucchedas*) of the *Bhagavat Sandarbha*, Jīva Gosvāmin introduces the three aspects of the Godhead, Brahman, Paramātman, and Bhagavān. He then provides an extended analysis of the nature of Bhagavān in the remaining sections of the *Bhagavat Sandarbha* and an extended analysis of the nature of Paramātman in the *Paramātma Sandarbha*. He insists that it is not necessary to devote a separate *Sandarbha* to an analysis of Brahman because the *Bhagavat Sandarbha*, by providing a full explication of the nature of Bhagavān, simultaneously serves to clarify the nature of Brahman as an incomplete manifestation (*asamyag-āvirbhāva*) of Bhagavān. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja provides an overview of the three aspects of the Godhead—Brahman, Paramātman, and Bhagavān—in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.2.2–18, 2.20.134–137, 2.24.57–60.

¹⁶ After expounding the three aspects of the Godhead in the *Bhagavat Sandarbha* and *Paramātma Sandarbha*, Jīva Gosvāmin’s principal concern in the *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* is to establish Kṛṣṇa’s supreme status as *pūrṇa* Bhagavān, the full and complete Godhead. For an analysis of the arguments used by Jīva in the *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* to establish the indisputable authority of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.3.28 as the *mahā-vākya* of all the *śāstras*, see De 1961: 316–25. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.3.28 appears at the end of the *Bhāgavata*’s account of twenty-two *avatāras* and is invoked not only by Jīva but also by Rūpa Gosvāmin and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja to establish that Kṛṣṇa, as *svayaṃ* Bhagavān, is not himself an *avatāra* but is rather the *avatārin* who is the source and container of all *avatāras*.

¹⁷ See, for example, *Laghubhāgavatāmṛta* 1.1.12–13, 1.5.341–342, 1.5.400, 1.5.402, 1.5.423; *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 2.1.38, 2.1.187; *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 93, 99, 104, 106, 150, 153; *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.17.127–128, 2.6.150, 3.5.117–118, with *śloka* 5.

¹⁸ Indeed, in the Gauḍīya discourse of divine embodiment, the term *svarūpa* is used at times to refer to Bhagavān’s essential nature and at other times to refer to his essential form, which in the final analysis are considered identical.

Dvāpara Yuga and carrying out his *līlā*, divine play, in the form of a *gopa*, cowherd boy, in the area of Vraja in North India. It is the beautiful youthful form (*kiśora-mūrti*) of the cowherd Kṛṣṇa—with its distinctive blue-black color, lotus-like eyes, body marks, dress, ornaments, and characteristic emblems such as the flute—that is celebrated by the Gauḍīyas as the *svayaṃ-rūpa*, essential form, of Kṛṣṇa's absolute body that exists eternally in his transcendent abode, the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*, beyond the material realm of *prakṛti* and beyond Brahman. Rūpa Gosvāmin gives the following description of Kṛṣṇa's *svayaṃ-rūpa*:

The sweet form (*mūrti*) of [Kṛṣṇa]...brings me intense joy. His neck has three lines like a conch, his clever eyes are charming like lotuses, his blue-black limbs are more resplendent than the tamāla tree,...his chest displays the Śrīvatsa mark, and his hands are marked with the discus, conch, and other emblems....This lover has a beautiful body (*aṅga*) and is endowed with all auspicious marks, radiant, luminous, powerful, eternally young (*Bhakti-rasāmṛtasindhu* 2.1.22–23).¹⁹

The early Gauḍīya authorities maintain that the personhood of the supreme Bhagavān is characterized above all by *mādhurya*, pure sweetness, which is reflected in the *svayaṃ-rūpa*, essential form, of his *sat-cit-ānanda-vigraha* in which he appears in a human-like shape (*narākāra* or *narākṛti*), and more specifically in the youthful form of a ravishingly beautiful *gopa*, cowherd boy. In articulating their hierarchical taxonomy of divine forms, the Gauḍīyas are concerned to establish that, out of the multifarious array of corporeal shapes, features, colors, and ages that the polymorphous, polychromatic Godhead assumes in his manifold bodily manifestations as *ananta-rūpa*, the highly particularized form that he displays in the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman* as a youthful cowherd boy most perfectly embodies his *mādhurya* nature and is his *svayaṃ-rūpa*, essential form.²⁰ Jīva Gosvāmin marshals a series of arguments to establish that the *svayaṃ-rūpa* in its most full and complete (*pūrṇa*) expression is the two-armed (*dvi-bhuja*) *gopa* form of Gopāla Kṛṣṇa in Vraja and that all other divine bodies are secondary manifestations of this essential form, including the four-armed (*catur-bhuja*) form of the princely Vāsudeva through which Kṛṣṇa expresses his *aiśvarya*, divine majesty, in Mathurā and Dvārakā, and the thousand-armed (*sahasra-bhuja*) cosmic form of *viśva-rūpa* that he manifests to the warrior Arjuna on the battlefield during the Mahābhārata war.²¹

Having established the supreme (*para*) status of the two-armed *gopa* form as Kṛṣṇa's *svayaṃ-rūpa*, Jīva advances another critical component of his argument: although the form in which Kṛṣṇa appears during his sojourn on earth has a human-like shape, *narākāra*, as a male *gopa*, it is not an ordinary material human

¹⁹ In this passage Rūpa Gosvāmin uses the term *svarūpa* rather than *svayaṃ-rūpa* to refer to Kṛṣṇa's essential form.

²⁰ For an analysis of the Gauḍīya taxonomy of Kṛṣṇa's divine forms (*rūpas*), which distinguishes three principal categories of *rūpas*—*prakāśas*, *vilāśas*, and *avatāras*—see Holdrege 2015: 45–73.

²¹ For Jīva Gosvāmin's arguments regarding the essential form, *svayaṃ-rūpa* or *svarūpa*, of Kṛṣṇa's absolute body, see *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 82, 93 to 106. Jīva builds on Rūpa Gosvāmin's arguments in *Laghuhbhāgatāmṛta* 1.1.12–13, 1.5.332–343, 1.5.392–426, 1.5.447–448, 1.5.520–525, 1.5.538–540.

body (*prākṛta-mānuṣa*) composed of flesh (*māṃsa*) and material elements (*bhūta-māya*)²² but is rather an eternal (*nitya* or *sanātana*), nonmaterial (*aprākṛta*) absolute body consisting of *sat-cit-ānanda*, being, consciousness, and bliss.²³ According to Jīva, when Kṛṣṇa descends from the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman* to earth in Dvāpara Yuga, he manifests his eternal *vigraha* on the material plane for the duration of his earthly sojourn, after which he withdraws the manifestation of his *vigraha* from the earth. Jīva insists that, unlike ordinary mortals, Kṛṣṇa does not assume a temporary material body and then cast it off at the end of his sojourn. Rather he “appears” (root *bhū* + *prādur*, root *bhū* + *āvīr*, or root *as* + *āvīr*) on earth, making his imperishable absolute body visible (root *dṛś*) on the material plane for a period of time, and then he “disappears” (root *dhā* + *antar*), concealing his *vigraha*.²⁴

Jīva maintains that although the *svayaṃ-rūpa* of the *vigraha*, the two-armed *narākāra* form of the *gopa* of Vraja, is no longer visible to those whose vision is bound by materiality (*prākṛta-dṛṣṭi*), Kṛṣṇa’s absolute body can be “seen” (root *dṛś*) by those sages who are endowed with divine vision (*divya-dṛṣṭi*) that is invested with the *śakti* of Bhagavān.²⁵ Jīva claims more specifically that Vyāsa, the acclaimed *ṛṣi* (seer), while immersed in *samādhi* in the depths of meditation, “saw” (root *dṛś*) the absolute body of Gopāla Kṛṣṇa in the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman* beyond the material realm of *prakṛti* and then recorded his cognitions in the form of the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, the *śruti* pertaining to Kṛṣṇa.²⁶ He invokes a passage from the *Padma Purāna* in which Vyāsa describes his cognition of Gopāla Kṛṣṇa’s eternal *vigraha*:

I was thrilled with intense rapture upon seeing (root *dṛś*) Gopāla, adorned with all his ornaments, rejoicing in the embrace of the [cowherd] women, playing on his flute. Then *svayaṃ* Bhagavān, as he roamed about Vṛndāvana, said to me: “That which is seen by you is my eternal (*sanātana*) divine form (*divya rūpa*), my *vigraha* consisting of *sat-cit-ānanda*, which is undivided (*niṣkala*), nonactive (*niṣkriya*), and tranquil (*śānta*). There is nothing greater than this

²² See especially *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 98, 102, 106, 150.

²³ Regarding the eternity of Kṛṣṇa’s *narākāra*, see especially *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 82, 93, 98, 104, 106. For references regarding the nonmaterial nature of Kṛṣṇa’s body, see footnote 22 above. Jīva Gosvāmin invokes the image of the *vigraha* consisting of *sat-cit-ānanda* in *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 93, 99, 104, 106, 150, 153. The principal scriptural proof-text that Jīva cites in support of this description of the *vigraha* is *Gopālātāpanī Upaniṣad* 1.34.

²⁴ See *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 98, 106, 93.

²⁵ One of the key strategies that Jīva Gosvāmin deploys to establish the eternity of the *narākāra* is to invoke the canonical authority of the *śāstras*, which he argues preserve the record of the sages’ direct experiences (*vidvad-amubhava-śabda-siddha*) of Kṛṣṇa’s essential form as the *gopa* of Vraja. He claims that sages throughout the ages have attained by means of meditation (*dhyāna*) direct visionary experience (*sākṣāt-kāra*) of the eternal absolute body of Gopāla Kṛṣṇa in the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*, and they have recorded their experiences in the *śāstras* as authoritative testimonies for future generations. See *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 82, 93, 98. Regarding the role of meditation (*dhyāna*) in cognizing the essential form of Kṛṣṇa, see *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 93, 98, 106, 153.

²⁶ For an analysis of Jīva Gosvāmin’s perspectives on Vyāsa’s role in cognizing the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, see Holdrege 2015: 149–53.

perfect (*pūrṇa*) lotus-eyed form of mine. The Vedas declare this to be the cause of all causes.”²⁷

The Eternally Perfect Associates of Bhagavān

The Gauḍīya discourse of divine embodiment provides an extended analysis not only of Bhagavān’s *vigraha*, absolute body, and *svarūpa*, essential nature, but also of the other constitutive elements of the Godhead, including his nature as *śaktimat*, the possessor of innumerable *śaktis*; his transcendent abode, *dhāman*; his divine play, *līlā*; and his eternal associates, *parikaras* or *pārśadas*.

The three principal types of *śakti* of Bhagavān, as *śaktimat*, are the *svarūpa-śakti*, *māyā-śakti*, and *jīva-śakti*. The *svarūpa-śakti*, operating on the transcendent level, is intrinsic (*antar-aṅga*) to Bhagavān’s *svarūpa*, essential nature, comprising three aspects: *saṁdhinī-śakti*, the power of *sat*, being; *saṁvit-śakti*, the power of *cit*, consciousness; and *hlādinī-śakti*, the power of *ānanda*, bliss. The *māyā-śakti*, operating on the macrocosmic level, is extrinsic (*bahir-aṅga*) to Bhagavān and is responsible for manifesting and regulating the material realm of *prakṛti* and for subjecting *jīvas*, individual living beings, to the bondage of *saṁsāra*, the cycle of birth and death. The *jīva-śakti*, operating on the microcosmic level, is the intermediary (*taṣasthā*, literally, “standing on the border”) *śakti* that constitutes *jīvas* as, on the one hand, *aṁśas*, or parts, of Bhagavān in the *svarūpa-śakti* and, on the other hand, subject to the binding influence of the *māyā-śakti*.²⁸

The Gauḍīya discourse of divine embodiment, as explicated by Jīva Gosvāmin, is concerned in particular with the structures and dynamics of the *svarūpa-śakti*. The *svarūpa-śakti* assumes two forms: the *svarūpa*, which is Bhagavān himself in his essential nature and absolute body; and the *svarūpa-vaibhava*, which includes his *dhāman*, transcendent abode, and his *parikaras*, eternal associates. The *svarūpa-śakti* also includes Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā*, divine play, as *svayaṁ* Bhagavān, which is represented as the spontaneous expression of the *hlādinī-śakti*, the bliss that is intrinsic to Bhagavān’s essential nature. The transcendent *dhāman*, called Kṛṣṇaloka, is the domain where Kṛṣṇa engages eternally in his *līlā*. The innermost *dhāman* of Kṛṣṇaloka is the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*, which is the transcendent prototype of the earthly region of Vraja in North India.²⁹

Jīva, building on the formulations of Rūpa Gosvāmin, seeks to establish that Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā*, which is recorded in narrative form in the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata*

²⁷ Kṛṣṇa *Sandarbha* 104, citing a passage that Jīva Gosvāmin identifies as coming from the *Nirmāṇa Khaṇḍa* of the *Padma Purāna*. In the printed Venkateśvara Press (Venk) edition (1984–85) of the Southern recension of the *Padma Purāna*, a variant of this passage is found in *Pātāla Khaṇḍa* 73.22–25, which forms part of the *Vṛndāvana Māhātmya*. I will briefly discuss the *Vṛndāvana Māhātmya* of the *Padma Purāna* in a later section of this article.

²⁸ Jīva Gosvāmin introduces the three principal types of *śakti* in the *Bhagavat Sandarbha* and then focuses on the *svarūpa-śakti* that is intrinsic to Bhagavān’s essential nature. In the *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*, after establishing that Kṛṣṇa is *svayaṁ* Bhagavān, he further explicates the *svarūpa-śakti* through an extended analysis of Kṛṣṇa’s essential nature (*svarūpa*), absolute body (*vigraha*), transcendent abode (*dhāman*), and eternal associates (*parikaras* or *pārśadas*). He provides an analysis of the functions of the *māyā-śakti* and the *jīva-śakti* in relation to Paramātmā in the *Paramātmā Sandarbha*.

²⁹ See footnote 28 above. The two outer *dhāmans* of Kṛṣṇaloka are called Mathurā and Dvārakā and are the transcendent prototypes of the earthly cities of Mathurā and Dvārakā.

Purāṇa, occurs on both the manifest (*prakaṭa*) and unmanifest (*aprakaṭa*) levels. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* portrays Kṛṣṇa as descending to the material realm and unfolding his *līlā* on earth at a particular time and place in history: in the terrestrial region of Vraja in North India at the end of Dvāpara Yuga in approximately 3,000 BCE. In a hermeneutical turn that is critical to the Gauḍīya discourse of divine embodiment, Jīva interprets this earthly *līlā* as the manifest counterpart of the *aprakaṭa līlā*, unmanifest *līlā*, that goes on eternally within Bhagavān in the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*, beyond the material realm of *prakṛti* and beyond Brahman. He also ascribes an eternal status to the cowherds, cowmaidens, and other companions of Kṛṣṇa who are the key characters in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s literary account of the divine drama in Vraja. Kṛṣṇa's foster parents, Nanda and Yaśodā, and other elders; the *gopas*, Kṛṣṇa's cowherd friends; the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa's cowmaiden lovers; and the attendants of Kṛṣṇa are invested with the status of *parikaras*, eternal associates of Bhagavān, who reside with him in his transcendent abode, the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*.

The *parikaras* are portrayed as *nitya siddhas*, eternally perfect beings, who participate in Kṛṣṇa's essential nature as part of the *svarūpa-śakti* and who possess nonmaterial (*aprākṛta*) bodies consisting of *śuddha-sattva*, pure luminous being, and have therefore never been subject to the bondage of the *māyā-śakti* in the material realm of *prakṛti*. The eternally perfect associates who reside with Kṛṣṇa in the transcendent Vraja and engage with him perpetually in the unmanifest *līlā* are called *rāgātmikā bhaktas* because their very essence (*ātman*) is spontaneously absorbed in *rāga*, passionate, all-consuming love for Bhagavān.³⁰ As the perfect vessels (*āśrayas*) of *rāga*, they relish the ambrosial nectar of *prema-rasa*, supreme love for Kṛṣṇa, in distinct *rasas*, flavors of devotion, that are considered intrinsic to their eternally gendered devotional subjectivities in relation to the male Godhead—whether as female *gopī* lovers who relish *mādhurya-rasa*, the lover-beloved *rasa*; maternal or paternal elders who savor *vātsalya-rasa*, the *rasa* of parental love; male *gopa* friends who relish *sakhya-rasa*, the *rasa* of friendship; or male attendants who savor *dāsyā-rasa*, the *rasa* of service.

Jīva is concerned to illumine more specifically the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, the cowmaidens of Vraja, portrayed in the *rāsa-pañcādhyāyī*, chapters 29 to 33 of the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which celebrates in lavish detail Kṛṣṇa's love-play with the *gopīs*, culminating in the *rāsa-līlā*, the circle dance of Kṛṣṇa with his cowmaiden lovers.³¹ Jīva argues that the *gopīs* are the eternal expressions of the *hlādinī-śakti*, the blissful aspect of the *svarūpa-śakti*. Among the *gopīs*, he identifies Rādhā with the anonymous *gopī* who is singled out for Kṛṣṇa's special attention in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.30.24–44, and he invests her with the highest ontological status as Kṛṣṇa's eternal consort who is the quintessential expression of the *hlādinī-śakti* and consummate embodiment of Kṛṣṇa's bliss, from whom the other *gopīs* emanate as manifestations of that bliss.

³⁰ For Rūpa Gosvāmin's definition of "the *rāgātmikā-bhakti* that shines forth clearly in those who reside in Vraja," see *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.270–272.

³¹ For a translation and study of the *rāsa-pañcādhyāyī*, see Schweig 2005. Schweig's illuminating study draws on the works of Rūpa Gosvāmin, Jīva Gosvāmin, and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, as well as later Gauḍīya commentators such as Viśvanātha Cakravartin (seventeenth to eighteenth century).

The unmanifest *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā and the *gopīs* is thus interpreted in terms of the gendered dynamics of the Godhead as a self-referral dalliance within Bhagavān in which he revels eternally with the blissful impulses of his own nature.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, in expanding on the formulations of Rūpa and Jīva in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, his hagiography of Caitanya's life and teachings, allots a critical role to Rādhā, the consummate embodiment of the *hlādinī-śakti*, whom he portrays as the female counterpart of Kṛṣṇa who participates in his essential nature in a relationship of identity-in-nonidentity as the *pūrṇa śakti* of the *pūrṇa śaktimat*.

Rādhā is the full *śakti*, Kṛṣṇa is the full container of *śakti*; they are two principles, but they are not divided. To this the *śāstras* are witness. As musk and its scent are not divided, as fire and flame are not divided, so Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are always one in true form [*svarūpa*]. It is for the purpose of tasting *līlā-rasa* that they hold two forms [*rūpas*] (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.4.83–85).³²

Bhagavān, while remaining one in his *svarūpa*, bifurcates himself and appears as two nonmaterial *rūpas*, as the male *gopa* Kṛṣṇa and the female *gopī* Rādhā, in order to savor the exhilarating *rasa*, nectar, of his own blissful *līlā*. According to Kṛṣṇadāsa, Rādhā's mind (*citta*), senses (*indriyas*), and bodily form (*kāya*) are made of Kṛṣṇa-preman (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.4.61), and it is thus by manifesting himself as Rādhā that Kṛṣṇa is able to revel in bliss as both the subject (*āśraya*) and the object (*viśaya*) of his self-referral dalliance.

The singular Godhead, male and female halves intertwining as one whole, splits into two and issues forth in two complementary streams: a stream of male forms issues forth from Kṛṣṇa's *gopa* body, the *svayaṃ-rūpa*, as manifestations of the paradigmatic nonmaterial male body, and a stream of female forms issues forth from Rādhā's *gopī* body as manifestations of the paradigmatic nonmaterial female body. Among the *śaktis* that issue forth from Rādhā, the *mahā-śakti*, Kṛṣṇadāsa invests the *gopīs* with the status of *kāya-vyūhas*, direct emanations of the body (*kāya*) of Rādhā, who are variegated expressions of the *hlādinī-śakti* that Kṛṣṇa relishes as manifold flavors of the ambrosial *rasa* of *preman*.³³

When Kṛṣṇa descends to the material realm at the end of Dvāpara Yuga and manifests his *svayaṃ-rūpa* as a two-armed cowherd boy in the region of Vraja in North India, Rādhā and the *gopīs*, his *mahā-śakti* and her emanations, are represented as descending with him and appearing in the form of earthly cowmaidens who engage with their cowherd lover in the manifest *līlā* in the groves of Vraja. While in Dvāpara Yuga Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā descend to the material realm and engage in their love-play in two separate bodies, Kṛṣṇadāsa asserts that in Kali Yuga Kṛṣṇa descends and manifests himself together with Rādhā in one body—the radiant golden form of the Kali Yuga *avatāra*, Caitanya.

³² All translations of the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* are from the translation by Dimock (1999). I have at times inserted Bengali terms in brackets into Dimock's translations in order to call attention to specific terminology used by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja. Regarding the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, see footnote 10 above.

³³ For Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's discussion of Rādhā and the three classes of *śaktis* that issue forth from her—*mahiṣīs*, *lakṣmīs*, and *gopīs*—see *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.4.59–85, 1.1.40–42.

Rādhā is the manifested form of pure love for Kṛṣṇa; she is his *hlādinī-śakti*. Because of this they had previously assumed different bodies on earth, although really one, but now they have become manifest under the name of Caitanya in order to attain to non-duality and oneness: I praise the true form of Kṛṣṇa enveloped in the radiance of the *bhāva* of Rādhā (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.1.śloka 5).

Kṛṣṇadāsa's reflections about the gendered nature of the Godhead thus culminate in his own distinctive vision of Caitanya as the Kali Yuga *avatāra* in whom *svayaṃ* Bhagavān appears as Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, male-and-female, together in a single body and who is simultaneously the supreme object (*viśaya*) of devotion in his essential nature as Kṛṣṇa and the supreme vessel (*āśraya*) of devotion in his *bhāva* as Rādhā.³⁴

Refiguring Human Bodily Identities within and beyond Matter

The Gauḍīya discourse of divine embodiment has its counterpart in a discourse of human embodiment that is concerned with fashioning devotional bodies by means of *sādhana-bhakti*, an elaborate regimen of embodied practices that comprises two forms of devotional discipline: *vaidhī-bhakti* and *rāgānugā-bhakti*. In *vaidhī-bhakti* the *sādhaka*, practitioner, performs external bodily practices with the *sādhaka-rūpa*, which in Gauḍīya formulations is the *sexed material body* composed of flesh and blood that the *jīva*, individual soul, enters before birth and that is constructed not by sociocultural forces but by the residual karmic impressions (*saṃskāras*) accumulated from the *jīva*'s previous births. The regimen of *vaidhī-bhakti* is guided by *vidhis*, scriptural injunctions, and is designed to purify and transform the psychophysiology, reconstituting the karmically constructed body of bondage as a body of devotion in which the mental faculties, sense organs, and organs of action are all oriented towards one-pointed worship of Kṛṣṇa. In *rāgānugā-bhakti*, an advanced form of *sādhana-bhakti* characterized by passionate love (*rāga*), the *sādhaka* engages in a regimen of internal meditative practices in order to attain an embodied state of realization as a *samprāpta-siddha*, a perfected *mahā-bhāgavata*. While continuing to perform external devotional practices with the *sādhaka-rūpa*, material body, the *sādhaka* ceases to identify with the karmically constructed biological body and awakens to the reality of their *siddha-rūpa*, perfected devotional body, which in Gauḍīya formulations is a *nonmaterial* body that consists of *cit* and *ānanda*, consciousness and bliss, and is *eternally gendered* in relation to the male Godhead, Kṛṣṇa.³⁵

I will provide an analysis of the Gauḍīya path of *sādhana-bhakti* in terms of the progressive transformation of the *bhakta*'s bodily identities: from (1) the *ascribed*

³⁴ For an extended study of the contributions of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja to the competing theories of Caitanya's divinity, culminating in his own distinctive vision of Caitanya as the "androgynous divinity" who manifests Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā together in a single body, see Stewart 2010: especially 45–188.

³⁵ The two forms of *sādhana-bhakti*, *vaidhī-bhakti* and *rāgānugā-bhakti*, are discussed in *Bhakti-rasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2–1.4; *Bhakti Sandarbha* 235 to 340; *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.22.55–96.

identity associated with the karmically constructed biological body to (2) the *inscribed identity* in which the biological body is reconstituted as a devotional body to (3) the *remembered identity* in which the *jīva* awakens from the sleep of ignorance and realizes its eternally gendered nonmaterial body. I will conclude my analysis with a brief consideration of Gauḍīya debates in which they grappled historically with the existential dilemma posed by contending bodily identities in the state of realization.

Ascribed Identity: The Body of Bondage

According to the Gauḍīyas' analysis of the human condition, *jīvas* are consigned to a betwixt-and-between status in which, on the one hand, they are *aṃśas*, parts, of Kṛṣṇa, the supreme Bhagavān, and participate in his essential nature in the *svarūpa-śakti*, and, on the other hand, they are separated from Bhagavān because they are subject to the bondage of the *māyā-śakti* that governs the material realm of *prakṛti*. Enslaved by the binding influence of the *māyā-śakti*, the *jīva* becomes deluded by ignorance (*avidyā*) and, forgetting its true identity as an *aṃśa* of Bhagavān, assumes a false sense of atomistic personal identity in which it mistakenly identifies with the material psychophysical complex, which includes not only the physical body but also the mental faculties—mind, intellect, and ego—that are subtle forms of materiality.

The early Gauḍīya authorities, in reflecting on the nature of bondage and the mechanisms of refiguring bodily identities, appropriate traditional formulations of *karma* in which the law of *karma* is held to determine the circumstances of an individual's birth in each lifetime, including the species, sex, ethnocultural community, and family in which the *jīva* is born. In this perspective, an individual *jīva*'s *ascribed identity* is determined at birth by the law of *karma* and is circumscribed by the biological body that is constructed by the residual karmic impressions (*saṃskāras*) accumulated from previous births. This karmically constructed biological body is sexually marked as male or female and may be further classified as part of a *varṇa*, social class, and *jāti*, caste, in accordance with Brahmanical norms of *varṇāśrama-dharma* elaborated in the Dharmaśāstras, Brahmanical legal codes.³⁶

In the Brahmanical discourse of *dharma*, the differential norms of *varṇāśrama-dharma* distinguish seven separate groups, which are ranked hierarchically with respect to their purity status and their degree of participation in *varṇa-dharma*, the duties of the four *varṇas*, social classes,³⁷ and *āśrama-dharma*, the duties of the four *āśramas*, stages of life:³⁸ (1) male members of the “twice-born” *varṇas*—brahmins, *kṣatriyas*, and *vaiśyas*—who are participants in both *varṇa-dharma* and *āśrama-*

³⁶ *Varṇāśrama-dharma* is the Brahmanical system of ritual and social duties that regulates the four social classes (*varṇas*) and the four stages of life (*āśramas*).

³⁷ The four *varṇas*, social classes, are the brahmins, priests; *kṣatriyas*, kings and warriors; *vaiśyas*, merchants, agriculturalists, and artisans; and *śūdras*, servants.

³⁸ The four *āśramas*, stages of life, pertain to the *brahmacārin*, student; *gṛhastha*, householder; *vānaprastha*, forest-dweller; and *saṃnyāsīn*, renunciant.

dharma;³⁹ (2) male *śūdras*, the lowest of the four *varṇas*, who are relegated to the status of the “once-born”⁴⁰ and participate in *varṇa-dharma* but are excluded from the *āśramas*; (3) women, who, like *śūdras*, are deemed to be “once-born”⁴¹ and are similarly excluded from the *āśramas* but participate in certain aspects of *varṇa-dharma* and also have their own distinct set of duties; (4) members of “low-born” mixed castes generated through permissible *anuloma* unions between a man of a higher *varṇa* and a woman of a lower *varṇa* (hypergamy); (5) members of “debased” mixed castes generated through unsanctioned *pratiloma* unions between a woman of a higher *varṇa* and a man of a lower *varṇa* (hypogamy), who are deemed to be of impure origin and are relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy; (6) outcastes, who are beyond the pale of both the *varṇa* system and the *āśrama* system but whose status is nevertheless defined in relation to the broader socioreligious hierarchy; and (7) non-Āryans, designated as *mlecchas* (babbling barbarians) or *yavanas* (foreigners), to whom the regulations of *dharma* do not apply. Among these seven groups, it is the exclusive purview of the first group—male members of the twice-born *varṇas*—to learn and recite the Vedas, to sponsor Vedic *yajñas*, sacrificial rituals, and to participate in the full complex of sociocultural practices defined by *varṇāśrama-dharma*. Members of the other six groups are excluded from learning or reciting the Vedic *mantras* and from sponsoring *yajñas*.⁴²

Over against this socially circumscribed Brahmanical model, the early Gauḍīya authorities formed a new type of social body constituted not by the differential norms of *varṇāśrama-dharma* but by the socially open practices of the *bhaktasaṅgha*, the community of Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas* who follow the Gauḍīya path of *sādhana-bhakti*. The Gauḍīya path of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* is represented as in principle open to all people, irrespective of their ascribed identities as defined by sex, gender, social class, caste, and ethnicity.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, in his hagiographic narrative in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, emphasizes Caitanya’s unique status as the *yuga-avatāra* of Kali Yuga in whom *svayaṃ* Bhagavān appears as Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā together in one body. He provides an extended treatment of Caitanya’s role, as the Kali Yuga *avatāra*, in establishing *nāma-saṃkīrtana*, communal singing of the divine names of Kṛṣṇa, as the *yuga-dharma* of Kali Yuga. Expanding on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s image of *saṃkīrtana* as *yajña*, he emphasizes that the “*yajña* of *saṃkīrtana*” supersedes Vedic *yajñas* as the preminent practice of Kali Yuga, for the “*yajña* of the Kṛṣṇa-name” is the essence (*sāra*) of all *yajñas* and one Kṛṣṇa-name is worth more than ten million (one crore) *aśvamedha* sacrifices.⁴³ Moreover, in contrast to the circumscribed social

³⁹ In the Brahmanical discourse of *dharma*, male members of the three higher *varṇas*—brahmins, *kṣatriyas*, and *vaiśyas*—are referred to as “twice-born” (*dvija*), for they have undergone the “second birth” of the *upanayana*, the Vedic rite of initiation. *Śūdras* and women are “once-born” in that they are excluded from the *upanayana* and are therefore subject to the inherent deficiency associated with biological birth without recourse to a ritual remedy.

⁴⁰ See footnote 39 above.

⁴¹ See footnote 39 above.

⁴² For an analysis of the Brahmanical discourse of *dharma*, see Holdrege 2004.

⁴³ *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.3.62–64; cf. 2.11.88, with *śloka* 10; 3.20.8, with *śloka* 2. The *aśvamedha*, or horse sacrifice, is one of the most important of the royal rituals in the hierarchy of Vedic *yajñas*.

world of Vedic *yajñas*, which is closed to everyone but male members of the twice-born *varṇas*, Caitanya is represented as creating an open social body with permeable boundaries in which the *yajña* of *nāma-saṃkīrtana* is extended in principle to all people. “Women, children, old men, even *caṇḍālas* [outcastes] and Yavanas [foreigners]” are invited to take up the name of Kṛṣṇa and join the *bhakta-saṅgha*.⁴⁴ “He carried the *saṃkīrtana* even to the *caṇḍālas*, and in this way wove and threaded a garland of *nāma* and *prema* to be worn throughout the world” (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.4.36). Caitanya is represented as insisting, in accordance with the teaching of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, that “there is no consideration of caste [*jāti*], family [*kula*], and such, in Kṛṣṇa-worship,” and therefore an outcaste dog-eater (*śva-paca*) whose mind and heart are devoted to Kṛṣṇa is more fit for the *yajña* of *nāma-saṃkīrtana* than a proud brahmin of pure family who has turned away from Bhagavān.⁴⁵

Inscribed Identity: Fashioning a Body of Devotion

The early Gauḍīya authorities emphasize the efficacy of the path of *sādhana-bhakti* in purifying the material psychophysical complex and attenuating the residual karmic impressions (*saṃskāras*) that are the root cause of bondage and serve to perpetuate *saṃsāra*, the endless cycle of birth and death. In *vaidhī-bhakti*, the initial phase of *sādhana-bhakti*, the *bhakta* engages in a regimen of external bodily practices with the *sādhaka-rūpa* in order to refigure the karmically bound biological body as a body of devotion, transforming all aspects of the material psychophysical complex—mental faculties, sense organs, and organs of action—into instruments of devotion to Kṛṣṇa. The defective material body born through biological reproduction and delimited by Brahmanical markers of *ascribed identity*—sex, gender, social class (*varṇa*), caste (*jāti*), and ethnicity—is born anew out of the ritual womb of *vaidhī-bhakti* and reconstituted as a “devotionally informed body” that—evoking Bourdieu’s notion of a “socially informed body” (*habitus*)—is *inscribed* with the socioreligious taxonomies and devotional norms of the *bhakta-saṅgha*, the Gauḍīya community of Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas*.⁴⁶

Rūpa Gosvāmin, in his discussion of *sādhana-bhakti* in the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, repeatedly emphasizes the embodied nature of devotional practices. He defines *bhakti* as “service with the senses (*hr̥ṣīka*) to the Lord of the senses (Hṛṣīkeśa)” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.1.12), and he characterizes the sixty-four practices of *vaidhī-bhakti* as “forms of worship (*upāsanas*) for the physical body (*kāya*), senses (*hr̥ṣīka*), and mental faculties (*antaḥ-karaṇa*)” (1.2.94).⁴⁷ Through these practices the *bhakta* refigures the psychophysiology by focusing all aspects of the *sādhaka-rūpa*, the material psychophysical complex, on

⁴⁴ *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.18.112–115, with *śloka* 10; 1.4.36; 2.16.176–183, with *śloka* 3; 2.7.79.

⁴⁵ *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 3.4.62–66, with *śloka* 5, which cites *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.9.10.

⁴⁶ My notion of a “devotionally informed body” draws on Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) notion of a “socially informed body” in which the sociocultural taxonomies of a particular social field are inscribed in the body through the “logic of practice.”

⁴⁷ In *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.72, before enumerating the sixty-four practices of *vaidhī-bhakti*, Rūpa Gosvāmin acknowledges his indebtedness to the *Haribhaktivilāsa*, the Gauḍīya ritual compendium that is ascribed to Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin.

Bhagavān, including the mind, the sense organs (ears, sense of touch, eyes, tongue, and nose), and the organs of action (mouth, hands, feet, limbs, and so on). Rūpa and Kṛṣṇadāsa both invoke the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s description of the embodied practices of the paradigmatic *bhakta*:

He engaged his mind on the lotus-feet of Kṛṣṇa, his words in recounting the virtues of Vaikuṅṭha, his hands in cleaning the temple of Hari, his ears in hearing glorious stories about Acyuta, his eyes in seeing the images and temples of Mukunda, his sense of touch in touching the bodies of his servants, his nose in smelling the fragrance of the *tulasī* leaves placed at his lotus-feet, his tongue in tasting the food that had been offered to him, his feet in traveling by foot to the holy places of Hari, his head in bowing to the feet of Hṛṣīkeśa, and his desire in serving him... (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 9.4.18–20).⁴⁸

Among the sixty-four practices of *vaidhī-bhakti*, five are singled out by Rūpa and Kṛṣṇadāsa as most important for cultivating *prema-rasa*, the fully mature state of supreme love for Kṛṣṇa: (1) hearing (*śravaṇa*) the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and savoring its meanings; (2) singing (*kīrtana* or *saṅkīrtana*) the names (*nāmans*) of Kṛṣṇa; (3) residing in Mathurā-*maṇḍala*, the “circle of Mathurā,” that encompasses the entire region of Vraja; (4) worship of ritual images (*mūrtis*) of Kṛṣṇa; and (5) association with holy persons (*sādhus*).⁴⁹ Four of the five fundamental practices—as well as many of the other *vaidhī-bhakti* practices—involve four forms of Kṛṣṇa that I term “mesocosmic” modes of divine embodiment in that they function in Gauḍīya formulations as mediating forms through which *bhaktas* can access, engage, and experience the concentrated presence of the deity in localized forms on the gross material plane: (1) *śāstra*, Kṛṣṇa's *avatāra* in the form of a scriptural text, *grantha-avatāra*, identified as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; (2) *nāman*, Kṛṣṇa's *avatāras* in the form of names, *nāma-avatāras*, that are revered as identical with Kṛṣṇa's essential nature and absolute body; (3) *dhāman*, Kṛṣṇa's embodiment in the form of a geographic place, the earthly Vraja-*dhāman*, that is extolled as the manifest counterpart of the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*; and (4) *mūrti*, Kṛṣṇa's *avatāras* in the form of ritual images, *arcā-avatāras*, that are worshiped as his localized instantiations in temples and shrines.⁵⁰

Rūpa ascribes “inconceivable power” (*acintya śakti*) to these four mesocosmic forms—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *nāman*, Vraja-*dhāman*, and *mūrti*—as “transmundane (*alaukika*) forms” that are in the final analysis nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa and are therefore efficacious not only in arousing Kṛṣṇa-*rati*, love for Kṛṣṇa, in the hearts of *bhaktas* but also in manifesting the object of this love—Kṛṣṇa himself—on the gross

⁴⁸ See *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.266–268; *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.22.78, with *ślokas* 59–61. Both passages cite these verses from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (9.4.18–20).

⁴⁹ For Rūpa Gosvāmin's enumeration of the five practices, see *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.90–93, which in turn provides the basis for Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's enumeration in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.22.74–75. See also Rūpa's discussion of the five practices in *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.225–244.

⁵⁰ For an extended analysis of the role of these four mesocosmic forms of Kṛṣṇa in the Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment, see Holdrege 2015.

material plane (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.244).⁵¹ Invoking the semiotic terminology of Charles Sanders Peirce, we could say that in the Gauḍīya hermeneutics of embodiment these mesocosmic forms are not understood as “symbols” that *represent* the deity, pointing beyond themselves to a transcendent referent, but rather they function as “iconic signs” that *manifest* the deity, disclosing the deity’s living presence through a localized form—whether the form of a text, a name, a geographic place, or a ritual image.⁵²

Each of these modes of divine embodiment is associated with a distinct sensorium, or perceptual world, in which a particular “ratio of the senses”⁵³ dominates. In two of these mesocosmic forms Kṛṣṇa is embodied in language—as *śāstra*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, or as *nāman*, name—and therefore the principal modes of reception are *śravaṇa*, hearing; *paṭhana*, recitation; and *kīrtana*, singing. These practices are then extended through a variety of cognitive and corporeal modalities. On the one hand, they are internalized through meditative practices such as *dhyāna*, meditation; *smaraṇa*, contemplative recollection; or *japa*, silent repetition. On the other hand, they are externalized through bodily performances such as *rāsa-līlās*, dramatic performances, or *nṛtya*, dance. In the other two mesocosmic forms Kṛṣṇa is embodied in place in visible forms—as the sacred geography of *Vraja-dhāman*, or as the *mūrti* enshrined in the temple—and in these cases the principal perceptual modalities are *darśana*, seeing, and *sparsana*, touching. The associated bodily performances involve ritual negotiation of sacred space through *tīrtha-yātra*, pilgrimage, or the carefully choreographed postures and gestures of *mūrti-sevā*, service to the *mūrti*.

The *bhakta* thus fashions a devotional body by engaging—through invoking, hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, and tasting—the various mesocosmic forms in which Kṛṣṇa is embodied on the gross material plane. Through engaging and partaking of Kṛṣṇa’s mesocosmic forms, the *bhakta*’s own psychophysiology is gradually suffused with the qualities and substance of Kṛṣṇa’s *vigraha*, absolute body, which consists of *sat-cit-ānanda*, being, consciousness, and bliss.⁵⁴

Among the various practices of *vaidhī-bhakti*, I would like to examine the role of the public performance of *nāma-saṃkīrtana*, as a public spectacle of bodies on display, in shaping the social body of the *bhakta-saṅgha* through inscribing the socioreligious taxonomies and devotional norms of the community in the bodies of the individual performers while at the same time establishing the boundaries that differentiate the *bhakta-saṅgha* from the hierarchy of publics who witness the performance. I would suggest that the public performance of *nāma-saṃkīrtana*, as represented in Kṛṣṇadāsa’s hagiographic narrative in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, serves as both an instrument of social formation and an instrument of

⁵¹ The transmudane realities to which Rūpa Gosvāmin refers in this verse are the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *nāman*, *Vraja-dhāman*, and *mūrti*, along with Kṛṣṇa’s *bhaktas*, which he described in the five preceding verses, *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.239–243, as the focal points for the five most important practices of *vaidhī-bhakti*.

⁵² For Peirce’s theory of signs, see Peirce 1955: 98–119.

⁵³ This expression derives from Ong 1981, 1982.

⁵⁴ See, for example, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.22.43, 3.4.183–185.

psychophysical transformation through which the material bodies of the performers are transformed into “devotionally informed bodies” that have internalized the socioreligious taxonomies and devotional norms of the *bhakta-saṅgha*.

In order to illustrate the discursive strategies through which Kṛṣṇadāsa represents the mechanisms of social formation and psychophysical transformation involved in the public performance of *nāma-saṁkīrtana*, I will cite his account of a *nāma-saṁkīrtana* performance by Caitanya and his followers at the Jagannātha temple in Purī, Orissa, and then will provide an extended analysis of the account.

Then Prabhu [Caitanya] went, with all of them [the Vaiṣṇavas], to the temple of Jagannātha, and there began the *kīrtana*. Seeing the *sandhyā-dhūpa* [incense offering], they began the *saṁkīrtana*, and the temple servant brought and gave garlands and sandalwood to them all. Four groups sang *saṁkīrtana* on all four sides while Prabhu Śacīnandana [Caitanya, the son of Śacī] danced in the center. Eight *mṛdaṅga* drums played, and thirty-two *karatāla* cymbals; the sound of “Hari” arose, and the Vaiṣṇavas said, “Excellent!” That most auspicious sound of *kīrtana* which arose filled the fourteen worlds and pervaded the universe. The people who dwelt at Puruṣottama came to see, and when they saw the *kīrtana* the Oḍiyā people were dumbfounded.

Then Prabhu circumambulated the temple; and as he circumambulated it he danced. Before and behind him sang the four groups....Prabhu danced about [the temple] for some time; stopping in back of the temple he performed *kīrtana*. In all four directions the four groups sang in loud voices, and amongst them Gaura Rāya [Caitanya] danced like Śiva. Having danced for a long time, Prabhu became quiet, and commanded the four *mahāntas* to dance. Advaita Ācārya danced in one group, and in another one Nityānanda Rāya. Paṇḍita Vakreśvara danced in another one, and Śrīvāsa within the next. Mahāprabhu remained watching in their midst, and there one of his divine powers [*aiśvarya*] became manifest. Many people danced and sang all around, and all saw that “Prabhu is looking at me.” Prabhu wanted to see the dance of all four, and because of that desire he manifested his divine power [*aiśvarya*]. Each one thought that he was looking only at him, absorbed in his gaze [*darśana*]; how he could look in all directions cannot be known. It was as when Kṛṣṇa was in the center, at the *pulinabhojana* [riverside meal], and all around his companions said—“He is looking towards me.” Whoever came nearby while dancing, Mahāprabhu gave him a deep embrace. Seeing this great dance, great *prema*, great *saṁkīrtana*, the people of Nīlācala [Purī] floated in the joy of *prema*. Gajapati Rājā [King Pratāparudra], having heard the *kīrtana*, climbed to the roof of his palace with his people and watched. Seeing the *saṁkīrtana*, the *rājā* was astonished, and his desire to meet Prabhu grew infinitely. When the *kīrtana* was finished, Prabhu watched the offering of flowers, and then with all the Vaiṣṇavas came to his dwelling place. The temple servant brought and gave them much *prasāda*; dividing it, Īśvara distributed it to all. He bade farewell to them all, telling them to go to bed; such was the *līlā* of Śacī’s son. As many days as they were all with Mahāprabhu, they performed the delight

of *kīrtana*. So the *kīrtana-vilāsa* [divine play of *kīrtana*] has been related; and he who hears it becomes the servant of Caitanya (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.11.197–225).

In his account of this public performance of *nāma-saṃkīrtana*, in which Caitanya and his followers circumambulate the Jagannātha temple, Kṛṣṇadāsa deploys a number of discursive strategies to recast this performance as a cosmic event with resounding power that reverberates throughout creation. The key strategy involves re-presenting the choreography of the performance as a moving *maṇḍala* that reflects more specifically the architectonics of the lotus-*maṇḍala* that is used as a meditation device in the advanced meditative practices of *rāgānugā-bhakti*. An extensive description of the lotus-*maṇḍala* is given in the *Vṛndāvana Māhātmya* of the *Padma Purāṇa*, which extols the glories of Vṛndāvana as both a geographic place and a transcendent domain. As a transcendent domain, Vṛndāvana, which is also called Vraja, is represented in the *Māhātmya* as a thousand-petaled lotus-*maṇḍala* arranged in seven concentric rings, which functions as a cosmographic *maṇḍala* that presents a hierarchized vision of the realms and retinues that together constitute Kṛṣṇa's transcendent abode.⁵⁵ Kṛṣṇa is seated together with Rādhā on a gem-laden throne on an octagonal *yoga-pīṭha* in the pericarp (*karnikā* or *varāṭaka*), the seed-vessel at the center of the lotus.⁵⁶ Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā are encircled by the eight most beloved *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa's cowmaiden lovers, who are seated in the eight corners of the octagonal *yoga-pīṭha* and are surrounded by two additional rings of *gopīs*. The *gopīs* are encircled by four *gopas* who are Kṛṣṇa's close friends among the cowherd boys and who are represented as the guardians of the four directions. The four *gopas* are surrounded in turn by myriads of *gopas*.⁵⁷ Although Kṛṣṇadāsa does not explicitly make reference to the *yoga-pīṭha* in his account of the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance at Jagannātha temple, I would suggest that he re-presents the choreography to evoke the structure of the *yoga-pīṭha* at the center of the lotus-*maṇḍala*. Kṛṣṇadāsa refers to the *yoga-pīṭha* elsewhere in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, where he describes Kṛṣṇa seated along with Rādhā “on the *yoga-pīṭha* in Vṛndāvana...on a throne all made of jewels” and surrounded by Rādhā's *sakhīs*, *gopī* companions (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.5.195–197).⁵⁸

Kṛṣṇadāsa's evocation of the image of the lotus-*maṇḍala*, with its concentric rings, serves as a means of marking the socioreligious hierarchies involved in the performance. The *maṇḍala* incorporates and circumscribes the *bhakta-saṅgha* as a distinct social body composed of the *kīrtanīyās*, *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performers, that is set apart from the hierarchy of publics who witness the performance. The concentric rings of the *maṇḍala* demarcate the internal divisions within the social

⁵⁵ See *Vṛndāvana Māhātmya* of the *Padma Purāṇa* (Veñk) *Pātāla* 69.80–83, 70.2–65.

⁵⁶ A *yoga-pīṭha* is the “seat of union” where the deity is stationed in the center of a *maṇḍala* and is used as a focal point in meditation.

⁵⁷ For an extended analysis of the *Vṛndāvana Māhātmya*, which is an independent unit consisting of fifteen chapters (69–83) that forms part of the *Pātāla Khaṇḍa* in the Southern recension of the *Padma Purāṇa*, see Holdrege 2015: 216–28.

⁵⁸ Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja describes the *yoga-pīṭha* in the context of discussing his experience of *darśana* of the *mūrti* of Govindadeva in Vṛndāvana.

body of the *bhakta-saṅgha* and establish the hierarchy of performers. Caitanya sings and dances in the center of the moving *maṇḍala*. As the Kali Yuga *avatāra* who is revered as Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā together in a single body, his presence marks the site of the *yoga-pīṭha*. The four *mahāntas*—Nityānanda, Advaita Ācārya, Śrīvāsa Paṇḍita, and Vakraśvara Paṇḍita—surround Caitanya in the four directions, singing and dancing as the heads of the four groups of *kīrtanīyās*. As the close companions of Caitanya who are leaders of the *bhakta-saṅgha*, the four *mahāntas* take their place in the inner circle as the *gopas* who are the guardians of the four directions in the *maṇḍala*. The four groups of *kīrtanīyās* in turn surround the four *mahāntas* in the four directions. As “the Vaiṣṇavas” who are members of the *bhakta-saṅgha*, these anonymous *kīrtanīyās* form the outer circle as representatives of the myriads of *gopas* who encircle the four guardian *gopas* in the *maṇḍala*.

Kṛṣṇadāsa’s account of the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance explicitly invokes the *līlā* episode related in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* about the *pulīna-bhojana*, riverside meal, in which Kṛṣṇa enjoys a picnic with the *gopas* on the bank of the Yamunā River. Kṛṣṇa is portrayed as sitting in the center while his cowherd friends surround him in concentric rings like the petals encircling the pericarp (*karnīkā*) of a lotus (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.13.4–11). Just as each of the *gopas* encircling Kṛṣṇa thinks that Kṛṣṇa is looking only at him, so each of the dancing *kīrtanīyās* encircling Caitanya thinks that Caitanya is looking only at him. The *kīrtanīyās* in the moving *maṇḍala* thus assume the role of *gopas* who are the exemplars of *sakhyā-rasa*, the devotional mode of friendship.

The image of the dancing *kīrtanīyās* encircling Caitanya also recalls the image of the *rāsa-līlā*, circle dance, recounted in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in which the *gopīs* array themselves in a circle around Kṛṣṇa. When the circle dance commences, Kṛṣṇa multiplies himself by means of his inconceivable power and assumes a separate form for each *gopī* so that each *gopī* thinks that Kṛṣṇa is dancing with her alone (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.33.2–6, 10.33.20). The allusion to the *rāsa-līlā* suggests that the *kīrtanīyās* assume the role not only of *gopas*, Kṛṣṇa’s cowherd friends, but also of *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa’s cowmaiden lovers, who are the paradigms of *mādhuryā-rasa*, the lover-beloved mode of devotion, which is celebrated as the most intimate and sublime expression of *preman*. Kṛṣṇadāsa’s account of a subsequent *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance by Caitanya and his followers at the Jagannātha Ratha Yātrā, the annual temple cart festival in Purī, similarly suggests a parallel between the *kīrtanīyās* and the *gopīs* by relating how through his inconceivable power (*acintya-śakti*) Caitanya manifested himself so that he sported with seven different groups of *kīrtanīyās* at the same time, and each group—like the *gopīs* in the *rāsa-līlā*—thought that he was sporting with them alone (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.13.51–53).

The configuration of the moving *maṇḍala*, with the inner and outer circles of *kīrtanīyās* surrounding Caitanya in the center, thus defines the boundaries of the social body of the *bhakta-saṅgha* as Caitanya’s own *bhakta-gaṇa*, troop of devotees, who join with him in ecstatic singing and dancing in the *līlā* of *nāma-saṃkīrtana*.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ See, for example, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.13.28, where the term *bhakta-gaṇa* is used to refer to the group of devotees who participate with Caitanya in the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance at the Jagannātha Ratha-Yātrā.

By delimiting the social body, the moving *maṇḍala* distinguishes the *bhakta-saṅgha* from the hierarchy of publics who encircle the *maṇḍala* and witness from a distance the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance as passive observers.

First in the hierarchy of publics who witness the performance are the Vaiṣṇava priests and other temple servants at the Jagannātha temple who are alluded to in the account. The priests provide a ritual frame for the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance by offering incense to the *mūrti* of Lord Jagannātha prior to the performance and offering flowers to the *mūrti* after the *saṃkīrtana* is finished. The connection between the priests and the *kīrtanīyās* is mediated through the temple servant who gives the performers flower garlands and sandalwood paste at the beginning of the performance and brings them *prasāda* at its conclusion. Although the temple priests are not included in the moving *maṇḍala* of *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performers, they are first in the hierarchy of publics who witness the performance, for as the servants of Lord Jagannātha, Kṛṣṇa's embodied form as an *arcā-avatāra*, image-*avatāra*, they exemplify *dāsyā-rasa*, the devotional mode of service.

Second in the hierarchy of publics are King Pratāparudra, the last great Gajapati Mahārājā of Orissa (r. 1497–1540), and his associates who watch the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance from the roof of the palace. Kṛṣṇadāsa's account of this particular *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance occurs at a point in his hagiography when King Pratāparudra has not yet met Caitanya—although he is eager to do so—and thus he remains outside of the moving *maṇḍala* as a passive witness to the performance. At this point, the king, like the Jagannātha temple priests, is an exemplar of *dāsyā-rasa*, for in his role as Mahārājā he is the protector of the Jagannātha temple. Later in the hagiography, when the king is accepted by Caitanya as a disciple, his incorporation into the *bhakta-saṅgha* is marked by his inclusion in the troop of *gopa*-garbed *bhaktas* who join with Caitanya in dance at the festival of Nanda.⁶⁰

Third in the hierarchy of publics are the “people of Nīlācala [Purī],” the anonymous “people” (*jana* or *loka*) who reside in Purī and witness the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance from a distance. Finally, Kṛṣṇadāsa's account suggests that the reverberating power of the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance extends beyond even the anonymous people of Purī to the most encompassing of publics: the denizens of the fourteen worlds that are contained in each of the innumerable universes.⁶¹ Elsewhere in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* he elaborates on this notion, claiming that through the cumulative effect of Caitanya's propagation of *nāma-saṃkīrtana* the entire cosmos reverberates with *saṃkīrtana* and all beings, moving and nonmoving, in all of the innumerable universes dance in the ecstasy of *preman* (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 3.3.63–71, 3.3.79).

The public performance of *nāma-saṃkīrtana*, as represented in the image of the moving *maṇḍala*, thus serves as an instrument of social formation that delimits the social body of the *bhakta-saṅgha* and distinguishes it from the hierarchy of publics

⁶⁰ See *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.15.18–22.

⁶¹ As mentioned in footnote 14 above, in Gauḍīya cosmography, as articulated by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, the material realm comprises innumerable Brahmā-universes, each of which contains a hierarchy of fourteen material worlds, with the earth, *bhūr-loka*, in the middle and six higher worlds above the earth and seven lower worlds beneath the earth.

who witness the performance. The socioreligious hierarchies delineated in Kṛṣṇadāsa's account are further emphasized through a second discursive strategy in which he establishes a stark contrast between the multiple modes of reception through which the *kīrtanīyās* engage in the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance and the more limited modes of engagement on the part of the various publics.

For the *kīrtanīyās*, their performance of *nāma-saṃkīrtana* with Caitanya at the Jagannātha temple serves as an instrument of psychophysical transformation through which they refashion their material bodies as bodies of devotion by engaging three different embodied forms of Kṛṣṇa with the mind, senses, and organs of action: Kṛṣṇa's sound-embodiment as a *nāma-avatāra*, his human embodiment as a *yuga-avatāra*, and his image-embodiment as an *arcā-avatāra*. The *kīrtanīyās* engage the *nāma-avatāra* through *saṃkīrtana*, singing, and *śravaṇa*, hearing, giving vocalized expression through the vehicle of their speech to the vibrating sound-embodiments of Kṛṣṇa. Their tongues and ears pulsate with the reverberations of the divine name, which overflow from the speech into the limbs, inspiring them to whirl and dance in ecstatic celebration of the Kṛṣṇa-*nāman*. As they savor the ambrosial nectar of the *nāman*, they revel in the intoxicating streams of *preman*. The *kīrtanīyās* engage the *yuga-avatāra* through *darśana*, seeing, and *sparśana*, touching. They behold the manifestation of divine power (*aiśvarya*) through which Caitanya casts his gaze in all directions simultaneously so that each dancer is absorbed in his *darśana* and both sees and is seen by him individually. The dancers are enveloped by Caitanya's deep embraces as well as by his encompassing gaze. While the primary focus of the *kīrtanīyās* during the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance is on engaging Kṛṣṇa's embodied forms as *nāma-avatāra* and *yuga-avatāra*, they also engage his *arcā-avatāra* at the beginning and end of the performance. They receive *darśana* of the *mūrti* of Lord Jagannātha and partake of his blessings through smelling the sweet fragrance of the incense and flowers offered to him, adorning their own bodies with the flower garlands and sandalwood paste touched by his form, and relishing the food (*prasāda*) offered to him.

In contrast to the *kīrtanīyās*, who actively engage in the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance with all their mental and physical faculties, the various publics are represented in Kṛṣṇadāsa's account as observers who passively witness the performance. Although they hear the auspicious sounds of *nāma-saṃkīrtana* that reverberate throughout the fourteen worlds, the principal emphasis in the account is on their gazing at the spectacle from a distance. King Pratāparudra, accompanied by his associates, watches the performance from his palace roof and is astonished by what he sees. The people of Purī float in the bliss of *preman* as a result of "seeing this great dance, great *prema*, great *saṃkīrtana*." But the gaze of the king and of the people is one-sided. They do not participate in the reciprocal gaze of Caitanya's *darśana*, which is a privilege reserved for the *kīrtanīyās* who are members of the *bhakta-saṅgha*.

Before concluding my analysis of Kṛṣṇadāsa's account of the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance at the Jagannātha temple in Purī, I would like to briefly consider the gender dynamics involved in refashioning the bodily identities of the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performers. With respect to the ascribed identities of the four *mahāntas* who are identified by name in Kṛṣṇadāsa's account, their ascribed sex is male, and

the caste status of three of them—Advaita Ācārya, Śrīvāsa Paṇḍita, and Vakreśvara Paṇḍita—is brahmin, while the fourth, Nityānanda, is a casteless *avadhūta* ascetic. In Kṛṣṇadāsa's hagiography, as well as in earlier hagiographies of the life of Caitanya, three of these four historical figures—Nityānanda, Advaita Ācārya, and Śrīvāsa Paṇḍita—are allotted key roles as chief disciples of Caitanya and, in the case of Nityānanda and Advaita Ācārya, as leaders of influential *guru* lineages in the formative years of the *bhakta-saṅgha*.⁶² With respect to the other *kīrtanīyās* who participate as unnamed Vaiṣṇavas in Kṛṣṇadāsa's account, their ascribed sex is also male. In a discussion that appears prior to his account of the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance, Kṛṣṇadāsa describes "two hundred Vaiṣṇavas...all great *bhāgavatas*, *bhaktas* of Mahāprabhu" who had come from Bengal to Purī to join with Caitanya in the performance, and he identifies many of them by name (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.11.55–85). On the level of their sexed bodies, then, all the Vaiṣṇava *kīrtanīyās* who participate in the *nāma-saṃkīrtana* performance at the Jagannātha temple are male. On the level of their gendered devotional subjectivities, the imagery of the *pulina-bhojana* suggests that they may assume a masculine role as *gopas* in a devotional mode of friendship with Kṛṣṇa, or, alternatively, the allusion to the *rāsa-līlā* suggests that they may assume a feminine role as *gopīs* in a lover-beloved devotional relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

When engaging in the external bodily practices of *vaidhī-bhakti*, the *bhakta* may adopt the persona of a *gopa* or a *gopī* on the level of performance, but in the advanced meditative practices of *rāgānugā-bhakti* the focus shifts from engaging in external performances to catalyzing an internal state of realization in which the *jīva* awakens to the *eternally gendered* devotional subjectivity that is intrinsic to its *svarūpa*, essential nature, and the particularized form of its *siddha-rūpa*, eternal, nonmaterial body.

Remembered Identity: Realizing an Eternally Gendered Nonmaterial Body

In the Gauḍīya discourse of human embodiment the process of refiguring bodily identities is brought to fruition in *rāgānugā-bhakti*, the advanced phase of *sādhana-bhakti*, in which the *bhakta* engages in a regimen of meditative practices that is designed to catalyze the final shift from the *inscribed identity* of a devotionally informed material body to the *remembered identity* of a *siddha-rūpa*, a perfected nonmaterial devotional body that is eternally gendered in relation to the male Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. The *siddha-rūpa*, perfected devotional body, is described as

⁶² Three of these four men—Nityānanda, Advaita Ācārya, and Śrīvāsa Paṇḍita—are included, along with Gadādhara Paṇḍita, in the *pañca tattva* theory of Caitanya's descent elaborated by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.1–7, which identifies Caitanya and these four chief disciples with the five *tattvas*, essential principles, necessary to ensure the flourishing of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* on earth. Moreover, in Kṛṣṇadāsa's formulation of the metaphor of the tree of *bhakti*, Caitanya is identified with the main trunk of the tree and two of these chief disciples—Nityānanda and Advaita Ācārya—are identified with the two main branches. As Stewart emphasizes, "Caitanya was the main trunk of this wishing tree, his *gurus* its roots, and Nityānanda and Advaitācārya its main branches, with all other branches coming off of those three" (2010: 239). For an analysis of Kṛṣṇadāsa's re-visioning of the *pañca tattva* theory and his formulation of the metaphor of the tree of *bhakti*, see Stewart 2010: 234–42.

eternal (*nitya*), nonmaterial (*aprākṛta*), and consisting of *cit* and *ānanda*, consciousness and bliss.⁶³

The Gauḍīyas' hierarchized vision of the *bhakta-saṅgha* as a socioreligious *maṇḍala* comprising rings of *bhaktas* mirrors its hierarchized vision of Kṛṣṇa's transcendent abode, the transcendent *Vraja-dhāman*, as a cosmographic thousand-petaled lotus-*maṇḍala* arranged in concentric rings. Kṛṣṇa is enthroned with Rādhā in the pericarp of the thousand-petaled lotus-*maṇḍala* and is encircled by his *parikaras*, his eternally perfect associates, who have never been subject to the bondage of the *māyā-śakti* and possess nonmaterial bodies consisting of *śuddha-sattva*, pure luminous being. In *rāgānugā-bhakti* the advanced *sādhaka* enters into an intimate relationship with Kṛṣṇa characterized by passionate love (*rāga*), which is achieved through emulating the eternally perfect associates of Kṛṣṇa and cultivating one of the four principal *rasas*, devotional modes of relationship with Kṛṣṇa, that are embodied by these paradigmatic *rāgātmikā bhaktas* of the transcendent *Vraja*.⁶⁴ The cosmographic lotus-*maṇḍala* can be reimagined in this context as comprising four concentric rings that radiate outward from the pericarp of the lotus where Kṛṣṇa is enthroned with Rādhā, presenting a hierarchized vision, from the most intimate to the least intimate, of the modes of devotion: from *mādhurya-rasa*, the lover-beloved mode of devotion exemplified by the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa's cowmaiden lovers, in the innermost ring; to *vātsalya-rasa*, the devotional mode of parental love exemplified by Kṛṣṇa's foster parents, Nanda and Yaśodā, and other elders, in the second ring; to *sakhya-rasa*, the devotional mode of friendship exemplified by the *gopas*, Kṛṣṇa's cowherd friends, in the third ring; to *dāsyā-rasa*, the devotional mode of service exemplified by the attendants of Kṛṣṇa, in the outermost ring.

Rūpa Gosvāmin suggests that the *rāgānugā sādhaka* should seek to realize the *rasa*, devotional mode, that accords with their *svarūpa*, inherent nature—whether that of a lover, elder, friend, or servant—by emulating a corresponding *rāgātmikā bhakta* of the transcendent *Vraja* “with both the *sādhaka-rūpa* and the *siddha-rūpa*.”

One should dwell (*vāsa*) continually in *Vraja*, absorbed in various stories (*kathā*) about it, remembering (root *smṛ*) Kṛṣṇa and his beloved associates whose devotional mode accords with one's own. One who wishes to realize a particular devotional mode (*bhāva*) should perform devotional service (*sevā*) emulating the residents of *Vraja* with both the *sādhaka-rūpa* and the *siddha-rūpa* (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.294–295).

Although Rūpa himself does not elaborate on the nature of these two bodies, in his commentary Jīva Gosvāmin renders the term *rūpa* as *deha*, “body,” and glosses *sādhaka-rūpa* as the “body as it is” (*yathāvastitha-deha*) and *siddha-rūpa* as an “internal meditative body (*antaś-cintita-deha*) that is suitable for one's intended

⁶³ Rūpa Gosvāmin provides an overview of the progression from *rāgānugā-bhakti* to *prema-bhakti* in *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.270–1.4.21. See also Jīva Gosvāmin's discussion of *rāgānugā-bhakti* in *Bhakti Sandarbha* 310 to 340 and of *prema-bhakti*, or *prīti*, in the *Prīti Sandarbha*. For an extended analysis of *rāgānugā-bhakti*, see Haberman 1988.

⁶⁴ According to Rūpa Gosvāmin's definition, “That [*bhakti*] is called *rāgānugā* which emulates the *rāgātmikā-bhakti* that shines forth clearly in those who reside in *Vraja*” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.270).

devotional service (*sevā*) to Kṛṣṇa” (Jīva Gosvāmin’s commentary on *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.295). Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja suggests that the *sādhaka*’s emulation of the *rāgātmikā bhaktas* with both the *sādhaka-rūpa* and the *siddha-rūpa*—which he terms the *sādhaka-deha* and the *siddha-deha*—entails becoming identified with the chosen *rāgātmikā bhakta* on two levels: first, by emulating the chosen *rāgātmikā bhakta* through performing with the *sādhaka-rūpa* external bodily practices such as *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* that engage Kṛṣṇa and his *līlā*; and, second, by cultivating a state of inner absorption in the *aprakāṣa līlā*, unmanifest *līlā*, of the transcendent Vraja through internal meditative practices such as *dhyāna* and *smaraṇa*, which culminates in the realization of a perfected devotional body, *siddha-rūpa*.

This *sādhana* has two parts: external and internal. External is the performance of *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* with the body of the *sādhaka* [*sādhaka-deha*]. In their minds [these *sādhakas*] mentally construct their own perfected bodies [*siddha-dehas*], and day and night they serve Kṛṣṇa in Vraja....Following after one who is beloved of Kṛṣṇa,...in their inner minds they serve him eternally (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.22.89–91).⁶⁵

This passage presents the difference between the *sādhaka-rūpa* and the *siddha-rūpa* in terms of different forms of practice: the physical body utilized in external bodily practices, and the meditative body constructed through internal mental practices. However, in other contexts the distinction between the *sādhaka-rūpa* and the *siddha-rūpa* is presented as an ontological distinction between two categories of embodiment: the material (*prākṛta*) psychophysical complex that is subject to the binding influence of Kṛṣṇa’s *māyā-śakti* in the material realm of *prakṛti*, and the eternal, nonmaterial (*aprākṛta*) body that participates in Kṛṣṇa’s essential nature as part of the *svarūpa-śakti* in the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*. In this perspective every *jīva* possesses a *siddha-rūpa*, an eternal, nonmaterial body, which is an *aṁśa* of the self-luminous effulgence (*vyotir*) of Bhagavān and, like the *vigraha*, the absolute body of Kṛṣṇa, consists of *cit* and *ānanda*, consciousness and bliss.⁶⁶ Due to the binding influence of the *māyā-śakti*, the *jīva* becomes deluded by ignorance (*avidyā*) and mistakenly identifies with the *sādhaka-rūpa*, the material psychophysical complex, and forgets its true identity as an *aṁśa* of Bhagavān. Moreover, the *jīva* forgets its *svarūpa*, inherent nature, and the corresponding form of its *siddha-rūpa*, which determine its distinctive role as an eternal protagonist in the *aprakāṣa līlā* in the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*.

In the Gauḍīya perspective the material body into which the *jīva* enters before birth is sexually marked as male or female as determined by the *jīva*’s particular karmic heritage in any given lifetime, but this sexed body is simply one in a series of karmically constructed bodies that the *jīva* is destined to inhabit in the course of its journey in *saṁsāra*, and its ascribed identity as male or female has nothing to do with the *jīva*’s *svarūpa*, essential nature. Indeed, as long as the *jīva* mistakenly

⁶⁵ This passage invokes *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.294 and 1.2.295 as illustrative *ślokas* (*ślokas* 70 and 69, respectively).

⁶⁶ See, for example, *Prīti Sandarbha* 10; *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 3.4.183–185. For a discussion of Gauḍīya conceptions of the *siddha-rūpa*, see Haberman 1988: 86–93. I will discuss Jīva Gosvāmin’s understanding of the two aspects of the *siddha-rūpa* later in this section.

identifies with the sexed body, it remains enslaved by the binding influence of the *māyā-śakti* in the endless cycle of birth and death. The goal of *rāgānugā-bhakti* is to awaken the *jīva* from the sleep of ignorance so that it casts off this false sense of atomistic personal identity and awakens to the reality of its *svarūpa*, essential nature, and the particularized form of its *siddha-rūpa*, nonmaterial body, which is eternally gendered as female/feminine or male/masculine in relation to the supreme Bhagavān, whose absolute body is eternally gendered as male.

In contrast to contemporary gender theories that interrogate the relationship between sex, gender, and sexual desire, the Gauḍīyas frame sex and gender in relation to *devotional desire*, which is understood in terms of the *rasa*, devotional mode of relationship, that the *jīva* seeks with Kṛṣṇa and that is ultimately considered intrinsic to the *jīva*'s *svarūpa*, essential nature. At the meta-physical level of the *siddha-rūpa*, sex is left behind as an epiphenomenon of the flesh-and-blood physical body and gender alone remains. At this level the gendered identity of the realized *jīva* as female/feminine or male/masculine is reflected in an integrated nonmaterial state of personal-cum-bodily identity in which the *jīva*'s *svarūpa*, essential nature, is simultaneously manifested in its *rasa*, devotional mode, and in its *siddha-rūpa*, bodily form. The *rasa* is the correlative of gender as the gendered devotional subjectivity that is intrinsic to the *jīva*'s *svarūpa* and that is embodied in the particularized form of the *siddha-rūpa* appropriate to the devotional mode through which the *jīva* engages the male Godhead. In accordance with its *rasa*, the *jīva*'s *siddha-rūpa* may be in the form of either a female lover who embodies *mādhurya-rasa*, a maternal elder or paternal elder who embodies *vātsalya-rasa*, a male friend who embodies *sakhya-rasa*, or a male attendant who embodies *dāsyā-rasa*.

The Gauḍīya discourse of human embodiment emphasizes the role of the *guru* and of meditative practices as two critical components in the *rāgānugā sādhanā*'s realization of the *siddha-rūpa*. The realized *guru*, who has attained the status of a *samprāpta-siddha*, perfected *bhakta*, and whose awareness is established in the *aprakāṣa līlā* of the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman*, is ascribed a role in revealing or confirming to the *sādhanā* the identity of their *siddha-rūpa*.⁶⁷ An advanced regimen of meditative practices—including *dhyāna*, meditation; *smaraṇa*, contemplative recollection; and *mantropāsana*, meditation by means of a *mantra* on a particular *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa—then serves as the means to catalyze a state of realization in which the *jīva* awakens to its eternally gendered *siddha-rūpa* and reclaims its distinctive role as an eternal protagonist in the *aprakāṣa līlā*.⁶⁸

Rūpa provides the basis for a specific form of *smaraṇa* called *līlā-smaraṇa*—contemplative recollection of the *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa—by instructing practitioners of

⁶⁷ Regarding the central importance of the *guru* in the Gauḍīya tradition, see *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.74, 1.2.97–99, in which Rūpa Gosvāmin describes the first three practices among the sixty-four practices of *vaidhī-bhakti* as (1) taking refuge (*āśraya*) at the feet of a *guru*; (2) receiving initiation (*dīkṣā*) and instruction (*śikṣaṇa*) regarding Kṛṣṇa from the *guru*; and (3) serving (*sevā*) the *guru* with confidence. For Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's enumeration of these three practices, see *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 2.22.61, with footnote 62 above. See also *Bhakti Sandarbha* 202 to 203, 206 to 213, 237, in which Jīva Gosvāmin discusses the roles of the *śikṣā-guru* and the *dīkṣā-guru* and emphasizes that taking refuge (*śaraṇāpatti*) in a realized *guru* is the critical foundation of the Gauḍīya path of *sādhana-bhakti*.

⁶⁸ For an analysis of Gauḍīya meditative practices, see Holdrege 2015: 277–93.

rāgānugā-bhakti to dwell continually in Vraja by remembering (root *smṛ*) Kṛṣṇa and his beloved companions (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.294).⁶⁹ In the *Bhakti Sandarbha* Jīva elaborates on Rūpa's instruction by providing an extended analysis of *smaraṇa*, which he defines as contemplative recollection of the names (*nāmans*), forms (*rūpas*), qualities (*guṇas*), eternal associates (*parikaras*), service (*sevā*), and playful activities (*līlās*) of Kṛṣṇa. He distinguishes five stages of *smarana*: (1) *smaraṇa*, thinking about Kṛṣṇa in any manner; (2) *dhāraṇā*, withdrawal of the attention from external sense objects and focusing the mind on Kṛṣṇa; (3) *dhyāna*, meditation on the forms and other aspects of Kṛṣṇa; (4) *dhruvānusmṛti*, a more advanced stage of meditation in which consciousness flows in an unbroken stream towards Kṛṣṇa; and (5) *samādhi*, the most advanced stage of meditation in which the *sādhaka* attains a state of complete absorption that culminates in a direct cognition of Kṛṣṇa's self-luminous absolute body and his *aprakāṣa līlā* (*Bhakti Sandarbha* 275 to 279).⁷⁰

In the *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* Jīva recommends a specific form of meditation, termed *mantropāsana*, that involves meditating on a particular *līlā* in a particular place (*sthāna*) in Vraja-*dhāman* by means of a *mantra*. He introduces this meditation technique as part of his discussion of the two aspects of the *aprakāṣa līlā*: *mantropāsana-mayī līlā*, which is a specific *līlā* that is mentally constructed by means of meditation utilizing *mantras*; and *svārasikī līlā*, the continuous stream of *līlā* that is spontaneously relished as the natural flow of *rasa* (*Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 153). Jīva defines *mantropāsana-mayī līlā* more specifically as a particular *līlā* that is constructed by meditation (*dhyāna*) utilizing a particular *mantra* and whose distinctive identity is delimited by the particular place (*sthāna*) associated with that *līlā*. He cites examples of *mantras* from a number of authoritative *śāstras* that can be used in the practice of *mantropāsana*. Verses from the *Gopālatāpanī Upaniṣad* are considered particularly efficacious *mantras* because the Gauḍīyas invest this post-Vedic Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣad with the transcendent authority of *śruti* as the record of the ancient *ṛṣis*' direct cognitions of Gopāla Kṛṣṇa in his transcendent *dhāman*. Jīva cites the following passage from the *Gopālatāpanī Upaniṣad* in which Brahmā the creator responds to a question by the primordial sages about the nature of Kṛṣṇa's form (*rūpa*) and recommends meditation on a series of *ślokas* that describe the *gopa* form of Kṛṣṇa engaged in a specific *līlā* in which he rests with his *gopa* and *gopī* companions beneath a wish-fulfilling tree near the Yamunā River in Vraja-*dhāman*.

⁶⁹ See also *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.87 and 1.2.175–177, in which Rūpa Gosvāmin includes *smṛti*, remembering, as one of the sixty-four practices of *vaidhī-bhakti*.

⁷⁰ In his analysis of the five-stage meditative practice of *smaraṇa*, Jīva Gosvāmin deploys what I term the principle of “superordination” by appropriating three terms that are central to the practice of yogic meditation in *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, the eight-limbed system of Pātañjala Yoga—*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*—and embedding them in a devotional framework that reinscribes them as stages in the Gauḍīya practice of meditation on Kṛṣṇa. Moreover, he explicitly distinguishes his understanding of the highest form of *samādhi* from the yogic ideal of *asamprajñāta samādhi*: whereas the *rāgānugā sādhaka* attains a state of absorption in the highest aspect of the Godhead, Bhagavān, that involves a direct cognition of Kṛṣṇa's self-luminous absolute body, the *yogin* attains an objectless state of absorption in the lowest aspect of the Godhead, the impersonal, formless Brahman, which is simply the light that radiates from Kṛṣṇa's absolute body.

The golden one [Brahmā] said: [Kṛṣṇa's form] is in the garb of a cowherd (*gopa-veśa*), is the color of a rain-cloud, is youthful, and is resting under a wish-fulfilling tree. Here are the *ślokas* [for meditation]: The Lord's eyes are like lotuses, his color is that of a rain-cloud, and his garments are dazzling like lightning. He has two arms (*dvi-bhuja*), his hands are positioned in the *jñāna-mudrā* (knowledge gesture), and he wears a garland of forest flowers. He is surrounded by *gopas*, *gopīs*, and cows, is adorned with divine ornaments, and rests beneath a wish-fulfilling tree in the center of a jeweled lotus. He is fanned by breezes that mingle with the waves of the Kāṁdī [Yamunā]. Anyone who contemplates (root *cint*) Kṛṣṇa in his heart (*cetas*) in this way will be liberated (*mukta*) from the cycle of birth and death (*Gopālatāpanī Upaniṣad* 1.8–11, cited in *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 153).

Although Jīva does not explicitly describe the specific method through which *ślokas* such as these are utilized as *mantras* in meditation, he does indicate that during the practice of *mantropāsanā* the *sādhaka* engages the particular *līlā* that is the focus of the meditation through “hearing” (root *śru*), implying that the *sādhaka* mentally vocalizes the *mantra* that describes the *līlā* while visualizing the discursive content of the *mantra*. Thus, for example, the *sādhaka* mentally vocalizes the *ślokas* from the *Gopālatāpanī Upaniṣad* quoted above while visualizing the particularities of Kṛṣṇa's *gopa* form engaging in this particular “resting” (*śayana*) *līlā* with the *gopas*, *gopīs*, and cows in a particular locale in *Vraja-dhāman*: under a wish-fulfilling tree on a jeweled lotus near the Yamunā River.

Through regular practice of *mantropāsanā* involving mental vocalization of *ślokas* and visualization of the corresponding *līlā* tableaux, the *sādhaka* penetrates more and more deeply into the unmanifest structures of the *līlā* in the transcendent *Vraja-dhāman* and becomes increasingly immersed in the flow of *rasa*. In the advanced phases of *rāgānugā-bhakti*, the *sādhaka* awakens to the constantly flowing dynamism of the *svārasikī līlā* in which the constructed world of *līlā* tableaux gives way to a spontaneous stream of *rasa*-filled *līlā*. According to Jīva, the *svārasikī* aspect of the *aprakāṣa līlā*, in which the *sādhaka* relishes through direct experience a continuous stream of *līlā* flowing with *rasa*, is like the Gaṅgā River, whereas the *mantropāsanā-mayī* aspect of the *līlā*, in which the *sādhaka* mentally constructs one *līlā* after another, is like a series of pools (*hradas*) arising from that river. Moreover, Jīva suggests that when the practice of *mantropāsanā* finds fruition in the unbroken flow of the *svārasikī līlā*, then the process of “hearing” (root *śru*) gives way to true “seeing” (root *drś*) in which Kṛṣṇa himself directly appears before the *sādhaka* in the depths of *samādhi*.

“O Lord, who are greatly praised, you become seated in the lotus of the heart absorbed in *bhāva-yoga*. Your devotees' path to you is by hearing and seeing. In whatever form they contemplate (root *bhū* + *vi*) you in meditation (*dhī*), in that form (*vapus*) you manifest out of your graciousness” [*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 3.9.11]. In accordance with this statement, when the *mantropāsanā-mayī* finds fruition in *svārasikī*, then even today he [Kṛṣṇa] at times manifests (root *spḥur*) as if immediately in the hearts of *sādhakas* (*Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* 153).

In the culminating stage of realization in *rāgānugā-bhakti*, as represented by Jīva, the *sādhaka* goes beyond the role of a witness enjoying the continual play and display of Kṛṣṇa's unmanifest *līlā*. In the final stage of realization the *jīva* awakens to its eternally gendered devotional subjectivity embodied in the nonmaterial form of the *siddha-rūpa* and reclaims its distinctive role in the *aprakaṭa līlā* as an active participant and established resident of the transcendent *Vraja-dhāman*. I would suggest that Jīva's analysis of the connection between the two aspects of the *aprakaṭa līlā*—the discrete *līlā* tableaux that are mentally constructed through *mantropāsanā*, and the continuous stream of *svārasikī līlā* that is a spontaneous expression of Kṛṣṇa's blissful nature—can help to illuminate the connection between the two aspects of the *siddha-rūpa*: the meditative body that is mentally constructed through meditation,⁷¹ and the eternal, nonmaterial body that is an *aṁśa* of the self-luminous effulgence of Kṛṣṇa.⁷² With respect to the first aspect, as mentioned earlier, the *rāgānugā sādhaka* constructs in meditation the *siddha-rūpa* as an “internal meditative body (*antaś-cintita-deha*) that is suitable for one's intended devotional service (*sevā*) to Kṛṣṇa” (Jīva Gosvāmin's commentary on *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.295). Under the guidance of the *guru*, the *sādhaka* visualizes a meditative body that accords with the devotional *rasa* that is intrinsic to their *svarūpa*, essential nature, and the particularized form of the *siddha-rūpa*, eternal, nonmaterial body. The process of visualization involves identifying with those *parikaras*, eternally perfect associates of Kṛṣṇa in the transcendent *Vraja-dhāman*, who are the perfect embodiments of this particular flavor of *rasa*—whether Kṛṣṇa's cowmaiden lovers, who embody *mādhurya-rasa*; Nanda and Yaśodā and other elders, who embody *vātsalya-rasa*; Kṛṣṇa's cowherd friends, who embody *sakhya-rasa*; or the attendants of Kṛṣṇa, who embody *dāsyā-rasa* (*Bhakti Sandarbha* 312, 286). The *sādhaka* then visualizes their meditative body in a series of *līlā* tableaux and through the agency of this body envisions directly engaging with Kṛṣṇa and his eternal associates in *Vraja-dhāman*: “I am personally (*sākṣāt*) a particular resident of *Vraja*,... I am personally (*sākṣāt*) attending *Vrajendranandana*, the son of Nanda the lord of *Vraja*” (*Bhakti Sandarbha* 312). The implication of Jīva's analysis is that the reiterative practice of meditation involving visualization of the mentally constructed *siddha-rūpa* serves to catalyze the final stage of realization in which the *jīva remembers* (*smaraṇa*) its eternal *siddha-rūpa* and reclaims its distinctive role as an eternal protagonist in Kṛṣṇa's *aprakaṭa līlā* in the transcendent *Vraja-dhāman*.

Building on the insights of Rūpa and Jīva, Kṛṣṇadāsa and later Gauḍīya authorities developed complex techniques of *līlā-smaraṇa* visualization in which the *rāgānugā sādhaka* visualizes in elaborate detail the *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā*, the eight periods of Kṛṣṇa's daily *līlā* that goes on eternally in the transcendent domain of *Vraja*. As part of these meditation techniques, the *sādhaka* visualizes the *svayaṁ-rūpa*, the beautiful two-armed cowherd form of Kṛṣṇa's absolute body; the eternal forms of the *gopīs*, *gopas*, and other residents of *Vraja*; the spatial arrangement of

⁷¹ See, for example, Jīva Gosvāmin's commentary on *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.295; *Bhakti Sandarbha* 312, 286.

⁷² See, for example, *Prīti Sandarbha* 10.

the transcendent *Vraja-dhāman*, including the specific locale of each *līlā* activity; and the time of day in which the *līlā* activity occurs. The *sādhaka* also constructs a mental image of their own *siddha-rūpa* and visualizes this meditative body interacting with the eternal residents of Vraja in particular *līlā* activities. For example, if the *guru* has revealed or confirmed the identity of the *siddha-rūpa* to be that of a particular *gopī*, then the *sādhaka* visualizes their *gopī* body in all its particularity, including the *gopī*'s name, age, appearance, dress, place of residence, mode of service, and so on.⁷³ Once again, the implication of the Gauḍīyas' analysis is that the regular practice of meditation involving visualization of the mentally constructed *siddha-rūpa* serves to catalyze an awakening in which the *jīva* remembers (*smaraṇa*) its eternal *siddha-rūpa* and reclaims its distinctive role as an eternal participant in the *aprakaṭa līlā*. Established in the highest state of realization as a member of Kṛṣṇa's transcendent entourage, the *jīva* savors the exhilarating sweetness of *prema-rasa* in an eternal relationship with Bhagavān.

In this final stage of transformation the *jīva* casts off the last vestiges of atomistic personal identity tied to the material psychophysical organism and awakens to its true identity, true personhood, embodied in the particularized form of its *siddha-rūpa*, which is ontologically distinct from the *sādhaka-rūpa*. The early Gauḍīya authorities represent this final stage as an embodied state of realization in which the *bhakta* becomes a *samprāpta-siddha*, a perfected *mahā-bhāgavata*, who inwardly identifies with the *siddha-rūpa*, the nonmaterial body, while outwardly continuing to perform practices with the *sādhaka-rūpa*, the material body. Moreover, they claim that although the *sādhaka-rūpa* ceases at the time of death, the realized *jīva* continues to maintain its nonmaterial *personal* and *bodily* identity in the form of its unique *svarūpa* and *siddha-rūpa*, by means of which it revels in an eternal relationship with the divine Person, Kṛṣṇa, embodied in his *vigraha*.

The Gauḍīya discourse of human embodiment, in its formulations regarding the final state of realization, thus poses a significant challenge to contemporary theories of the body that are predicated on the ordinary human body composed of flesh and blood. In contrast to theories that are founded on the assumption that human bodies are made of matter, this discourse is founded on a distinction between bodies and materiality that challenges us to imagine the possibility of human bodies that are not composed of flesh and blood. The early Gauḍīya authorities posit an innumerable number of human *jīvas*, each of whom possesses a *siddha-rūpa*, eternal, nonmaterial body, that is modeled after the paradigmatic *vigraha*, the absolute body of Kṛṣṇa. Just as the absolute body of the supreme Bhagavān that exists eternally in the transcendent *Vraja-dhāman* has a human-like shape with two arms and consists of *sat-cit-ānanda*, being, consciousness, and bliss, in the same way every human *jīva* has a nonmaterial body that exists eternally in the transcendent *Vraja-dhāman* and that is like the absolute body of Bhagavān in that it has a human-like shape with two

⁷³ See in particular Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's *Govindalīlāmṛta*, the authoritative guidebook for the practice of *līlā-smaraṇa* visualization. Kṛṣṇadāsa's 2,488-verse poem provides an extended account of the *aṣṭakālīya-līlā*, the eight periods of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*, which builds on Rūpa Gosvāmin's eleven-verse formulation in the *Aṣṭakālīyalīlāsmaraṇamaṅgalastotra*. For an analysis of the role of these *līlā-smaraṇa* techniques in Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's *Govindalīlāmṛta* and other Gauḍīya works, along with a translation of Rūpa's *stotra*, see Haberman 1988: 123–33, 161–63.

arms and, as an *aṁśa* of the divine effulgence, consists of *cit* and *ānanda*, consciousness and bliss. In Gauḍīya formulations these nonmaterial *siddha-rūpas* are not subsumed within the absolute body of Kṛṣṇa as a singular, distinctionless totality, but rather they retain their distinct identities as perfected *devotional bodies* that remain eternally in a relationship of inconceivable difference-in-nondifference, *acintya-bhedābheda*, with his absolute body. On the one hand, in their status as *aṁśas* they are nondifferent (*abheda*) in that they are characterized as partaking of the *cit* and *ānanda* aspects of Kṛṣṇa's absolute body, while, on the other hand, they are different (*bheda*) in that they are not characterized as partaking of the *sat*, being, aspect—which I would suggest is a strategic omission on the part of the early Gauḍīya authorities in order to maintain an ontological distinction between Kṛṣṇa's absolute body in its all-encompassing totality and the *siddha-rūpas* that are its *aṁśas*.

Each *siddha-rūpa* is represented in the Gauḍīya discourse of human embodiment as ontologically distinct not only from the absolute body of Kṛṣṇa but also from all other *siddha-rūpas*. Just as the *svayaṁ-rūpa*, essential form, of Kṛṣṇa's absolute body reflects his *svarūpa*, essential nature, in the same way the distinctive form of each *jīva*'s *siddha-rūpa*, nonmaterial body, reflects its distinctive *svarūpa*, essential nature. In Gauḍīya formulations each *jīva*'s *siddha-rūpa* has a particularized bodily form that, in accordance with the devotional *rasa* that is intrinsic to its *svarūpa*, is eternally gendered as female/feminine or male/masculine in relation to the male Godhead and is distinguished by a particular age, complexion, mode of dress, and other bodily features.

Contending Bodily Identities

The Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment thus challenges us to imagine the possibility of embodied divine and human persons beyond the realm of matter. Moreover, in the case of realized human *jīvas*, it challenges us to imagine the possibility of gender beyond sex.

Contemporary feminist advocates of social constructions who distinguish between sex and gender tend to essentialize the sexed material body as a naturally given datum and relegate gender to the secondary status of an ideological construction superimposed on this “natural” base. The Gauḍīya authorities, in contrast, frame the sex/gender distinction in terms of their own distinctive ontological theories of alternative bodily identities and reverse this hierarchical assessment: they relegate the sexed material body, or *sādhaka-rūpa*, to the secondary status of a karmic construction and essentialize gender as intrinsic to the nonmaterial body, or *siddha-rūpa*.

The Gauḍīyas' philosophical reflections concerning alternative bodily identities did not remain on a theoretical level but gave rise to on-the-ground debates in which they grappled historically with the existential dilemma encountered by practitioners who experienced contending bodily identities in the embodied state of realization prior to death. For example, consider the case of a Gauḍīya practitioner whose *sādhaka-rūpa*, sexed material body, is that of a male brahmin but who claims to

have realized his *siddha-rūpa*, eternally gendered nonmaterial body, which is that of a female *gopī*. In other words, he/she is male outside but female inside. Does such a person transgress the heterosexual imperative and qualify as “transgendered”? Or would a more appropriate designation be “metagendered,” since we are dealing with an alternative bodily state that is simultaneously physical and meta-physical? How does such a person contend with these competing bodily identities? Does he/she continue to engage in the external devotional practices of *sādhana-bhakti* as a male brahmin while remaining inwardly identified as a female *gopī*, or does he/she adopt the dress, speech, and comportment of a *gopī* on the external plane as well?

Although Rūpa Gosvāmin, Jīva Gosvāmin, and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja do not directly address such matters, these issues were actively debated by later Gauḍīya authorities between the second half of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century. As David L. Haberman has discussed, Rūpa Kavirāja and Viśvanātha Cakravartin are the two central protagonists in the debate. Rūpa Kavirāja (seventeenth century), in his Sanskrit works *Rāgānugāvivṛtti* and *Sārasaṅgraha*, claims that the *sādhaka-rūpa* is not the ordinary material body (*taṭastha-rūpa*), which Jīva glosses as the “body as it is” (*yathāvastitha-deha*), but rather it is the reconstituted material body that has been ontologically transformed through initiation and therefore is exempt from normative socioreligious injunctions. He interprets Rūpa Gosvāmin’s instruction that the *sādhaka* should emulate “the residents of Vraja with both the *sādhaka-rūpa* and the *siddha-rūpa*” (*Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.295) to mean that a male practitioner whose *siddha-rūpa* is a *gopī* should cease to think of himself as a male and should adopt the identity of a *gopī* in thought, speech, and behavior on the level of the *sādhaka-rūpa* as well as on the level of the *siddha-rūpa*. He insists that the betwixt-and-between state in which “I am a male outside and a *gopī* inside” must in the end give way to a singular identity in the supreme state of realization: “I am a *gopī*, outside and inside.” The teachings of Rūpa Kavirāja expounded in his two works were condemned by a Gauḍīya council in Jaipur in 1727.⁷⁴ However, despite this official condemnation by the normative Gauḍīya tradition, the positions articulated by Rūpa Kavirāja have persisted and have found expression up to the present day in the living practices of *bābās* in contemporary Vraja (Hindi, Braj) who assume the identity of a *gopī* both internally and externally, adopting dress, ornaments, speech, and comportment appropriate to their *gopī*hood. There are even reports of *bābās* who claim that their female *siddha-rūpas* have gradually transformed their male *sādhaka-rūpas* from the inside out—for example, by spontaneously manifesting breasts.⁷⁵

The normative Gauḍīya position in the debate over Rūpa Kavirāja’s teachings is represented by Viśvanātha Cakravartin (seventeenth to eighteenth century), an authoritative Gauḍīya theologian in the lineage of Jīva Gosvāmin’s disciple Narottama Dāsa who composed original works as well as influential Sanskrit commentaries on the works of Rūpa Gosvāmin and other early Gauḍīya authorities. He is credited with resolving the debate by positing a two-model solution in which

⁷⁴ For an analysis of Rūpa Kavirāja’s arguments, see Haberman 1988: 98–104.

⁷⁵ See Haberman 1988: 137–39, 92.

he interprets Rūpa Gosvāmin's statement that the *sādhaka* should emulate the residents of Vraja with both the *sādhaka-rūpa* and the *siddha-rūpa* as operating on two distinct levels referring to two types of Vraja residents. On the one hand, in the case of a male practitioner whose *siddha-rūpa* is a *gopī*, he should construct in meditation a meditative body in the form of a *gopī* and should identify internally with the devotional mode of the eternally perfect *gopīs* who reside perpetually with Kṛṣṇa in the transcendent Vraja-*dhāman* and who are the paradigmatic exemplars of *mādhurya-rasa*. On the other hand, with the *sādhaka-rūpa* he should emulate the external devotional practices of Rūpa Gosvāmin, Jīva Gosvāmin, and the other Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana who resided in the earthly Vraja and who are the paradigmatic exemplars of *sādhana-bhakti*.⁷⁶ In the final analysis, the Gosvāmins are celebrated by Viśvanātha and his lineage as doubly paradigmatic, for their *sādhaka-rūpas* are male, while their *siddha-rūpas* are female *gopīs*, and they thus possess "bodies that matter" on both the physical and meta-physical planes.

As we have seen, such issues concerning competing bodily identities—as in the case of a practitioner who is sexually marked as male outside on the physical plane but inwardly identifies as female on the meta-physical plane—did not remain on the level of philosophical reflection but were actively debated by leading Gauḍīya authorities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as matters of critical import for the day-to-day practices of the Gauḍīya community. I would suggest that these historical debates continue to have important implications to the present day, not only for the lives of contemporary Gauḍīya practitioners but also for contemporary debates about the sex/gender distinction both within and beyond the academy.

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⁷⁶ For a discussion of Viśvanātha Cakravartin's two-model solution, see Haberman 1988: 104–8.

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