

Article

Against Vaiṣṇava Deviance: Brāhmaṇical and Bhadrālok Alliance in Bengal¹

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Abstract: This article sets out to problematise the notion that late nineteenth and early twentieth century Vaiṣṇava anti-*sahajiyā* polemics can be taken as a definitive index of colonial wrought rupture within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. It proceeds by (1) drawing attention to oblique, yet unmistakably polemical, forms of response to *sahajiyā* currents in pre-colonial Gauḍīya literature that are indicative of a movement towards a brāhmaṇically-aligned Vaiṣṇava normativity; and (2) highlighting how this movement towards normativity was further fostered in colonial times by Gauḍīya *gōsvāmī* types, who were often extensively involved in *bhadrālok* Vaiṣṇava domains.

Keywords: Gauḍīya; Vaiṣṇava; Bengal; brāhmaṇa; *bhadrālok*; *sahajiyā*

1. Introduction

The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition² featured prominently in the socio-religious landscape of Bengal in the mid-nineteenth century in spite of the fact that it had become a palpable source of discomfort for the region's emerging western-educated indigenous middle class. The tradition thus frequently came in for scathing criticism from this small but socially powerful group—commonly referred to as the '*bhadrālok*' ('gentlefolk')—on account of its perceived promotion of sexual and other forms of moral impropriety.

It might therefore seem surprising that, in the latter decades of the century, a notable section of the *bhadrālok* began to turn to Vaiṣṇavism as a source of religious and cultural inspiration. *Bhadrālok* involvement with the tradition appears, however, to have been determined from the outset by the colonially-shaped moral framework that distinguished the group—a framework often regarded as characterised, above all, by a rigid Victorian puritanism (Banerjee 1987). *Bhadrālok* Vaiṣṇava enthusiasts thus took great pains to set a 'pure' (*śuddha*) or 'genuine' (*prakṛta*) Vaiṣṇava tradition apart from all that did not meet the demands of their distinctive moral sensibilities.

This dissociative undertaking took shape most notably in a broad polemical campaign against Vaiṣṇava currents bearing the mark of tantric and other such transgressive influences. These currents—which, I broadly denote '*sahajiyā*' (a term largely employed adjectivally rather than nominally in the context of the present discussion)³—were frequently denounced by *bhadrālok* Vaiṣṇavas as

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² I employ this as shorthand for the numerous (at times disparate, often discrete) communities that developed around the sixteenth century ecstatic Bengali Kṛṣṇa devotee, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486–1533). For a survey of recent critical literature on the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, see (Wong 2015).

³ I thank Tony K. Stewart for alerting me to the importance of this distinction. I am also grateful to him for kindly sharing his insightful unpublished paper on the study of the *Sahajiyās*: 'Sex and Secrecy in the Politics of *Sahajiyā* Scholarship [or Caveats

deviant on account of their alleged illicit sexual practices, such as ritual copulation with the wife of another (*parakīyā-sādhana*), and other morally problematic behaviour. The burgeoning arena of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava print served as the principal site for this campaign, with diatribes against *sahajiyā* depravity being an especially prominent feature of the many *bhadralok*-directed Vaiṣṇava periodicals that began to circulate in Bengal in the later decades of the nineteenth century.⁴ As the esteemed Vaiṣṇava scholar and regional historian Achyutacharan Chaudhuri Tattvanidhi wrote in one such article, entitled ‘Sub-religion’ (*upadharmma*) and published in Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinod’s pioneering Vaiṣṇava journal, *Saj-jana-toṣaṇī* (4.7):

Just as on large trees there are ‘parasites’ (*paragāchā*), religions (*dharmma*), too, have parasites. Absorbing the sap of the tree from which they emerge, parasites nourish themselves and make the host tree visibly ugly. Many such parasites or ‘sub-religions’ (*upadharmma*), such as the Sahajiyās, Bāulas, and so forth, feed on the support of Vaiṣṇavism. . . . It would not be necessary to say anything about them if Vaiṣṇava society was not harmed by this. But this is not actually the case. [These groups] continue to present themselves as Vaiṣṇava. As a result, external observers of Vaiṣṇavism witness their conduct and conclude that Vaiṣṇavism is a religion of abominable practices (*kadācāra*) and unrestrained behaviour (*yathechchācāra*). (Tattvanidhi 1892, p. 133)⁵

It is, perhaps, tempting to construe this pervasive drive against *sahajiyā* currents as instantiating a broader cultural dissociative programme through which the *bhadralok* sought to oppose itself to, and elevate itself above, the *chotolok* (‘small folk’) and their uncivil (*abhadra*) ways. This programme has been highlighted as constitutive of the *bhadralok*’s very identity, which was otherwise fraught with internal tensions and disparities (e.g., Broomfield 1968, pp. 153–54, 322; Mukherjee 1993, p. 73). Operative here was a strategy of deflection through which *bhadralok* agents redirected well-documented colonial moral criticism towards those they deemed more properly deserving of it, thereby implicitly acknowledging its force. We might think of this as a form of what Jeanne Openshaw neatly styles ‘displaced acquiescence’ (Openshaw 2002, p. 21). To frame nineteenth century Vaiṣṇava anti-*sahajiyā* polemics along these lines is, as I see it, to hold to the notion of a distinct ‘rupture’ within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism wrought by the importation of a new colonially-shaped *bhadralok* morality. The concrete implications of this were the marginalisation and expulsion of a host of currents and communities that had hitherto been an integral part of the tradition.

We must, however, be wary of oversimplification. I would argue that there are clear indications that an emerging Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy, with discernible brāhmaṇical predilections, had begun to dissociate itself from *sahajiyā* currents prior to the advent of British power in the region, and certainly well before the formative processes of *bhadralok* moral and social identity were underway in the mid-nineteenth century. *Bhadralok* morality was no mere colonial derivative; rather, as Brian Hatcher maintains, it was the outcome of a ‘complex process of cultural convergence through which alien discourse and practice becomes affiliated to indigenous traditions’. As Hatcher advises, we would do well to keep an eye on the persistent force of ‘indigenous sources and modalities’, particularly those of brāhmaṇical discourse, when dealing with expressions of it (Hatcher 1996, p. 7). It should come as

from a Faint-Hearted Student of Tantra’ (Stewart 1990). Although it does not explicitly feature in the present discussion, this paper proved to be invaluable background reading. For a revised version of the paper, see (Stewart forthcoming).

⁴ For more on how this campaign played out in some of these periodicals, see (Fuller 2005, pp. 132–44; Bhatia 2017, pp. 140–45; Dey 2015, pp. 131–37). For a comprehensive list of these periodicals, see (Stewart and Basu 1983).

⁵ *baḍa baḍa vṛkṣe yemana ‘paragāchā’ haya, dharmmearo seirūpa paragāchā āche; paragāchā ye vṛkṣe janme, sei vṛkṣerai rasa ākarṣaṇa karataḥ nije vṛddhi prāpta haya evaṃ dr̥ṣṭataḥ mūla vṛkṣaṭike kutsit kariyā tule. vaiṣṇava dharmmeara āśraye eirūpa anekāṭi paragāchā vā ‘upadharmma’ āche, yathā sahajiyā, bāula prabhṛti . . . ihādera sambandhe kona kathāi balibāra āvaśyaka chila nā—yadi ihāte vaiṣṇava samājera kona aniṣṭa nā haita. vastutaḥ tāhā nahe; ihārā āpanādigke vaiṣṇava baliyā paricaya diyā thāke. tāhāte ei haya ye, yāhārā vaiṣṇava dharmma bāhira haite dr̥ṣṭi kariyā thākena, tāhārā ihādera ācaraṇa dr̥ṣṭe vaiṣṇava dharmmake ekṭā kadācārera—yathechchācārera dharmma baliyā siddhānta karena . . .*

little surprise, then, that *bhadralok* Vaiṣṇava concerns about *sahajiyā* currents do in fact find a notable degree of resonance in pre-colonial Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature.

2. Brāhmaṇical Predilections

Contrary to idealised characterisations of Caitanya as a radically iconoclastic social emancipator—a vision of the ecstatic Kṛṣṇa devotee frequently championed by left-leaning Bengali social and cultural historians (e.g., Bandyopadhyay 2004, pp. 80–81; Chakrabarti 1985, pp. 6–7; 1999, p. 223; Sanyal 1981, p. 58)—his discernibly brāhmaṇical aversion to transgressive and impure behaviour is an unmistakable theme in many of his early biographies. Just what constituted such behaviour for Caitanya is clearly indicated by, for example, the numerous biographical narratives surrounding his ‘deliverance’ (*uddhāra*) of the two debauched brothers Jagāi and Mādhāi, who serve as paradigms of sin (*pāpa*) and fallenness (*patitatā*) in the literature on account of their unrestricted indulgence in (among other polluting activities) meat eating, alcohol consumption, and unrestricted sex (O’Connell 1971, p. 156). Caitanya’s uncompromising stance on sexual impropriety is particularly stressed in narratives treating his later life as a renunciant (Majumdar 1939, pp. 570–75). The moral proclivities articulated in these works are, of course, ‘only a reassertion of what had been the Vaiṣṇava preference for centuries in Bengal and elsewhere in India’ (O’Connell 1971, p. 176), and exhibit a discernible affinity with those of brāhmaṇical orthopraxy, however much they also report Caitanya’s criticism of Smārta ritual and social rigidities. Such notions of purity entailed that Caitanya and his followers were often portrayed as relating to groups and practitioners advocating transgressive ritual behaviour ‘with reservations if not hostility’ (Valpey 2014, p. 14). In his *Caitanya-bhāgavata* (2.19.86–4), for instance, Vṛndāvanadāsa reports that Caitanya once became so disturbed by the offer of wine (*ānanda*) from an eccentric and co-habiting *sannyāsī* of the left path (*vāma-pathi*) that he immediately jumped into the Ganges while repeatedly calling out the name ‘Viṣṇu’ in an urgent attempt to purify himself.

It is true that these images of Caitanya come to us through the various lenses of his early hagiographers, and we should be aware that, as Heidi Pauwels observes, all hagiographers ‘have their own agenda, creating according to their own preoccupations’ (Pauwels 2010, p. 518). Unfortunately, since Caitanya left only a handful of verses in writing (notably in Sanskrit), any claim of unmediated access to some kind of ‘original ideal’ against which later developments in the tradition can be definitively measured (Chakrabarti 1999, p. 223) seems a little far-fetched. Yet, irrespective of the socially subversive intent of Caitanya’s inceptive devotional movement (or lack thereof), pronounced brāhmaṇical influence in the *post*-Caitanya tradition in Bengal is undeniable.

This influence is evidenced not least by the ascendance of *gosvāmī* lineages (*vaṁśa*) tracing hereditary descent from one of Caitanya’s companions, which provided a loosely-knit Gauḍīya community with its principal form of leadership. Most prominent among these were *brāhmaṇa gosvāmī* lineages tracing descent from Caitanya’s two intimate companions, Nityānanda and Advaita, described in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (1.9.19) as the two main ‘trunks’ (*skandha*) of Caitanya’s ‘wishing tree of devotion’ (*bhakti-kalpa-taru*).⁶ While differences in the degree of ritual and social orthopraxy exhibited by these communities may be discernible, they were on the whole marked by a pronounced ‘conservative character’ (O’Connell 1971, p. 310).⁷

It is true that not all the major Gauḍīya communities that arose in post-Caitanya Bengal were *brāhmaṇa*-led. Around the middle of the seventeenth century, for instance, there emerged discipular communities (*parivara*) affiliated with the pivotal Gauḍīya missionaries, Narottama and Śyāmānanda,

⁶ For analyses of Kṛṣṇadāsa’s strategic use of this arboreal metaphor and its historical implications, see (Stewart 2010, pp. 234–42; 2011, pp. 303–7).

⁷ *Gosvāmīs* of the Advaita-*vaṁśa*—with its principle ‘seat’ (*śrīpāt*) in Shantipur—traditionally refuse to accept initiates belonging to castes below the *navasākhā*, or ‘ritually clean *śūdra*’. By contrast, *gosvāmīs* of the Nityānanda-*vaṁśa*—whose principle seat is in Khardaha—do extend their ministry to castes below the *navasākhā*. They nevertheless appear to have developed means of guarding against ritual pollution, such as the post of *adhikārī*, which serves an intermediary leadership function between the *gosvāmīs* and their disciples belonging to lower castes and tribes (O’Connell 1971, pp. 311–12).

who hailed from the *kāyastha* and *sādgopa* castes respectively. These important Gauḍīya leaders even famously breached an established prohibition on the acceptance of *brāhmaṇa* disciples by non-*brāhmaṇa* *gurus*, or ‘initiation against the grain’ (*pratiloma-dīkṣā*), commonly attributed to Gopāla Bhaṭṭa’s *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. Yet, while the intention behind such a move was no doubt socially reformative and its radicalism glorified in much of the hagiographical literature of the period, it by no means entailed the wholesale subversion of brāhmaṇical values, remaining ‘consistent with the principles of purity’, however much these may have been grounded on ‘new criteria, devotion rather than birth’ (Stewart 2010, p. 283).

3. Oblique Response

In view of these developments in the tradition, it is only natural that we should find signs of pre-colonial Gauḍīya disapproval of Vaiṣṇava currents with a bent for the transgressive. Admittedly, pre-colonial Gauḍīya criticism of such currents may not have been quite as explicit as later Vaiṣṇava polemicists might have us believe. Joseph O’Connell has drawn attention to what he perceives as a marked difference between seventeenth and eighteenth century ‘canonical’ Vaiṣṇava attempts to address the problem of *sahajiyā*-type ‘deviance’ on the one hand, and those produced during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the other. Whereas the latter are generally characterised by their overt ‘denunciation of sexual promiscuity’, the former are conspicuously devoid of such a morally polemical tone, being more concerned with ensuring a ‘clearer restatement’ of their own theological position in relation to passion-pursuant devotional practice (*rāgānuga-sādhana-bhakti*) (O’Connell 1971, p. 273n.), which would appear to lend itself readily to *sahajiyā* appropriation. According to O’Connell, writers of this earlier period chose to direct their polemical proclivities more towards those considered ‘slanderers’ (*nindaka*), ‘who harassed and ridiculed Hari and his Vaiṣṇavas’, than towards those merely deemed to have misappropriated Vaiṣṇava ideas and symbolism (O’Connell 1971, p. 275).

We should note that O’Connell takes the ‘wave of canonical writing’ produced around the turn of the eighteenth century by the likes of Viśvanātha Cakravartī, Rādhāmohana Ṭhākura, and Narahari Cakravartī as providing a definitive yet somewhat indirect response to the ‘mass of hybrid cults’ that had begun to make themselves felt on the Gauḍīya scene. He reads, for example, the concerted attempts of Viśvanātha and Rādhāmohana to vindicate the doctrine of Kṛṣṇa’s illicit love (*parakīyā-vāda*) as being (rather paradoxically) constitutive of a general strategy to counter *sahajiyā* co-optation of the same ‘in the face of those who would recoil from the dangers of *sahajiyā* into cautious substitution of *svakīyā* for *parakīyā*’ (O’Connell 1971, p. 274).

O’Connell certainly makes a valuable point in highlighting the indirect mode in which much of the response to the *sahajiyā* phenomenon may have been articulated by pre-colonial Gauḍīya writers, particularly when it is compared with that of their colonial Vaiṣṇava counterparts. His suggestion, for instance, that the controversy surrounding the status of Kṛṣṇa’s love with the *gopīs*, which consumed the Gauḍīya community during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, can be read against a background of concern about physical *parakīyā* ritual practices of the kind advocated by *sahajiyā* currents proliferating at this time, adds an important social dimension to what might otherwise simply appear as an abstruse theological debate. It further entails that the Gauḍīya response to the *sahajiyā* phenomenon may have been far more pervasive than might initially appear to be the case, especially if nineteenth century polemical modes serve as one’s principal template.

A potential clue regarding the cause of this obliqueness is provided, somewhat ironically, by a notably anomalous instance of a rather more direct form of assault against *sahajiyā*-type practices—namely, Manohāradāsa’s early to mid-seventeenth century *Dīna-maṇi-candrodaya*, the ‘bluntness’ of which, Tony K. Stewart conjectures, likely led to its ‘suppression or failure to circulate’ (Stewart 2010, p. 340). In his analysis of the text, Stewart flags a curious trait: while Manohāradāsa appears to set forth a ‘near diatribe of frustration and criticism’ against physical interpretations of esoteric Gauḍīya worship or *sādhya-sādhana* (Stewart 2010, p. 342), he himself nevertheless has occasional recourse to an ‘alchemical’ idiom characteristic of *siddha* and *sahajiyā* discourse

(Stewart 2010, p. 345). Stewart proposes that this apparent peculiarity of the *Dīna-maṇi-candrodaya* may well be more reflective of its context than the more popular, idealised narratives of the tradition let on, with the boundaries between what we now think of as ‘normative’ and ‘deviant’ Vaiṣṇava modes likely being far less ‘clear cut’ at this time (Stewart 2010, pp. 346–47). The indirect nature of the pre-colonial Gauḍīya response to proliferating *sahajiyā* currents might accordingly be understood as the natural corollary of such nebulous sectarian boundaries; it is obviously difficult to respond directly to things that do not yet have clearly formed identities.

Any attempt to locate pre-colonial forms of Gauḍīya response to the *sahajiyā* phenomenon would therefore do well to take note of these important observations regarding its general obliqueness. I would, however, question the assumption that such obliqueness invariably precluded more polemical modes of response. In what follows, I want to draw attention to passages from popular pre-colonial Gauḍīya hagiographies that I believe can be understood as *oblique*, yet unmistakably *polemical*, forms of response to *sahajiyā* currents. Doing so will necessitate a method of reading that not only (1) attempts to discern some of the implicit markers of pre-colonial Vaiṣṇava discourse about *sahajiyās*; but also (2) displays a sensitivity to the signifying potential of these passages—what, following Paul Ricoeur, we might call their ‘semantic autonomy’—in full awareness that the meaning of a text is never contained simply within its author’s ‘finite intentional horizon’ (Ricoeur 2008, p. 80). My selection of material from the genre of hagiography for this investigation is not without significance. Gauḍīya authors in pre-colonial Bengal displayed a distinct preference for expositing theology through the hagiographical (and predominantly vernacular) medium. With the tradition’s Sanskrit analytic-philosophical corpus being ‘the preserve of a select few’, the ‘biographical image’ appears to have served as the apparatus of choice for the transmission of the Gauḍīya devotional ideal to a mass audience (Stewart 2010, pp. 6–7). That passages from prominent examples of this genre of Gauḍīya literature betray such polemical tendencies is thus, I would argue, indicative of the pervasiveness of concerns about the *sahajiyā* phenomenon within the pre-colonial tradition. In sum, I see these pre-colonial concerns as expressive of a movement towards a brāhmaṇically-aligned Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava normativity.

In the final section of this article, I examine how this movement towards normativity was further fostered in colonial times by Gauḍīya *gosvāmīs*, who often voiced a similar moral aversion to *sahajiyā* currents. By drawing attention to the extensive involvement of these *gosvāmī* types within *bhadralok* Vaiṣṇava domains, I make a case for understanding the colonial Vaiṣṇava campaign against the *sahajiyā* phenomenon as a development of pre-colonial Gauḍīya tendencies. In doing so, I hope to problematise the notion that this campaign can be taken as a definitive index of rupture within the Gauḍīya tradition.

4. Rūpa Kavirāja as a *Sahajiyā* Proxy

The name ‘Rūpa Kavirāja’ holds a particularly unenviable position within the Gauḍīya tradition’s history, being inextricably associated with deviance and offence. From the little biographical information available, it appears that he began his Vaiṣṇava sojourn in Bengal sometime in the early to middle part of the seventeenth century. While there are conflicting reports regarding his spiritual heredity, it seems that at some point Kavirāja came under the tutelage of Mukundadāsa at Radhakund in Braj, and ultimately ascended to a position of some authority within the Gauḍīya community of the region, probably on account his evident theological acumen.

Kavirāja was the author of at least two substantial Sanskrit theologico-practical treatises, *Sāra-saṃgraha* and *Rāgānuga-vivṛti*. Both evince detailed knowledge of Gosvāmī literature, especially the writings of Rūpa Gosvāmī. By the early decades of the eighteenth century, however, Kavirāja’s views on doctrine and practice had come under severe scrutiny within Vaiṣṇava communities in Braj and Jaipur. This culminated in 1727 in the official declaration of his works as heretical by a theological council set up at the behest of Jai Singh II. While Kavirāja’s advocacy of the supremacy of *parakīyā* love was challenged by Jai Singh’s council, it was his radical interpretation of passion-pursuant devotional

practice (*rāgānuṣa-sādhana-bhakti*) that appears to have been the council's principal bone of contention (Delmonico 1999, p. 96).⁸

It is around this time that Kavirāja began to serve as something of a symbol of deviance within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature. The most well-known Gauḍīya account of his fall from grace is presented by Narahari Cakravartī's early eighteenth century *Narottama-vilāsa*. Intended primarily as a devotional biography about the famed Narottama and his pivotal missionary work, the *Narottama-vilāsa* contains an appendix entitled 'Introduction to the Author' (*grantha-kartāra paricaya*), which recounts a rather unhappy incident involving Kavirāja and Kṛṣṇapriyā Ṭhākuraṇī, the granddaughter of one of Narottama's disciples, Gaṅgā-nārāyaṇa Cakravartī. The incident is alleged to have occurred in the vicinity of Radhakund some days after the passing of Kavirāja's *śikṣā-guru*, Mukunda.

According to the text, Kṛṣṇapriyā—who had cared for Mukunda toward the end of his life with 'the affection of a mother' (*mātāra samāna sneha*), and 'upon whose tongue the name of Hari was constantly present' (*nirantara harināma yāhāra jhivāya*) (Cakravartī 1921, pp. 204–5)—arrived at a reading of the *Bhāgavata* attended by all the Vaiṣṇavas of Radhakund. Except for Kavirāja, all those present paid their respects to the revered Vaiṣṇavī (Cakravartī 1921, p. 205). Unperturbed by Kavirāja's slight, Kṛṣṇapriyā readily joined the assembly. Kavirāja, however, proceeded to challenge her, questioning how she could properly engage in two activities (*karma*) simultaneously: listening to the *Bhāgavata* (*bhāgavata-śravaṇa*) and chanting God's name (*nāma-grahaṇa*). Kṛṣṇapriyā retorted, 'This [chanting] is a habit of the tongue. My listening is not obstructed by it' (Cakravartī 1921, p. 206).⁹ Hearing this, Kavirāja is said to have become enraged, thereby meeting with 'utter ruin' (*sarva-nāśa*). As the text claims,

First he disregarded *guru*, then similarly the Vaiṣṇavas, who are the embodiment of Kṛṣṇacaitanya. He became destitute on the rarest path of *bhakti*; not a trace of his absorption in *prema* remained. Thinking himself great in all respects, he committed offences elsewhere too. He became eager to create a different view, and set on diverting others from the path. (Cakravartī 1921, p. 206)¹⁰

Kavirāja's deviant activity was soon exposed in Braj, and he fled to Bengal, returning deceitfully (*kapaṭa-rūpete*) to the place of his *guru*. There, too, his deviance came to light, and he was branded a 'guru renouncer' (*guru-tyāgi*). Ultimately, he is reported to have retreated to the village of Khuriya in Orissa, where he died from leprosy (*kuṣṭha-roga*)—only to become a ghost (*bhūta*) (Cakravartī 1921, p. 206)!

Questions of historical veracity aside, the polemical intent of this rather dramatic narrative is undeniable. The explicit connection drawn by the text between Kavirāja's contempt for the esteemed Kṛṣṇapriyā and his subsequent divergence from the tradition is underscored at the end of the narrative as its principal moral. As Narahari writes, 'If you say, "Being qualified, why [did Rūpa Kavirāja engage] in this conduct (*ācāra*)?" I respond, "What will one not do due to offence (*aparādha*) to the Vaiṣṇava?"' (Cakravartī 1921, p. 206).¹¹ Thus, although O'Connell may certainly be correct to observe that, in the context of pre-colonial Gauḍīya literature, it was principally the 'slanderer' (*nindaka*)—or, as in the case of the *Narottama-vilāsa*, the 'offender' (*aparādhi*)—'who drew upon himself the Vaiṣṇava's

⁸ Briefly, Kavirāja recommended what David Haberman dubs the 'literal imitative action' by the physical body of a practitioner (*sādhaka-rūpa*) intent on attaining the highest plane of devotion (Haberman 1988, p. 98); that is, the physical imitation of their chosen 'paradigmatic' passionate devotee (*rāgātmika-bhakta*), invariably a milkmaid (*gopī*). Despite facing explicit opposition from as weighty a theological authority as Viśvanātha Cakravartī in the late seventeenth century, Kavirāja's views on the practice appear to have gained currency among sections of the Gauḍīya community in North India. As Monika Horstmann describes, by the early decades of the eighteenth century 'there roamed renouncers through both Braj and Jaipur who in the name of god-madness sported a religiously or otherwise female persona' (Horstmann 2005, p. 278).

⁹ *ṭhākuraṇī kahe ei abhyāsa jhivāra / śravaṇera bādha ithe nā haya āmāra //*

¹⁰ *prathamei heya buddhi śṛṅgurudevete / taiche kṛṣṇacaitanya viṅgraha vaiṣṇavete // parama durllabha bhaktipathe haila hīna / nā rahila se premāveśe kichu cina // sarva prakāre baḍa māni āpanāre / anyatreo aparādha upārjjana kare // karite prthak mata haila mahā ārtti / anye bahirmukha pathe karāya pravṛtti //*

¹¹ *yadi kaha yogya haiyā kena e ācāre / tāhe kahi vaiṣṇavāparādhe ki nā kare //*

wrath', it seems he sets up too rigid a distinction between this group and those deemed to be guilty of misrepresenting Vaiṣṇavism (O'Connell 1971, pp. 274–75). As illustrated by the *Narottama-vilāsa*'s treatment of Kavirāja, the two groups were often seen as coterminous; in other words, deviants simply were offenders.

In drawing on the case of Kavirāja, it is not my intention to suggest, as Jan Brzezinski has, that Kavirāja posed what we can properly call a 'sahajiyā challenge to Gauḍīya orthodoxy' (Brzezinski 1996, p. 73). As should be evident from even a cursory reading of Kavirāja's construal of *rāgānuga-sādhana-bhakti*, his general religious orientation does not neatly correlate with that of those I am broadly designating *sahajiyā*, at least as far the available textual evidence goes. For one thing, whereas in *sahajiyā* practices male practitioners generally retain a distinct sense of their masculinity in the understanding that Kṛṣṇa predominates within the male body and Rādhā within the female body, Kavirāja proposed that male practitioners of *rāgānuga-bhakti* actively cultivate bodily femininity (Haberman 1992, p. 317). Moreover, Kavirāja does not appear to have advocated the ritual use of conventionally impure substances, such as the so-called 'four moons' (*cari candra*) (most commonly, semen, menstruation, urine and faeces), that are integral to *sahajiyā* practice (Jha 1995). What we appear to be presented with in Kavirāja's work is a reading of *rāgānuga-sādhana-bhakti* embedded within a general framework that is still very much devotional rather than tantric.

A case might be made, however, for tracing certain incipient *sahajiyā*-type tendencies in Kavirāja's writings. This is in fact a line of thought indicated by Neal Delmonico, who argues that, irrespective of the precise nature of his own practice, Kavirāja may have proffered 'a theoretical basis and justification for the hetero-practical [i.e., *sahajiyā*] sub-sects', highlighting Kavirāja's notion that *rāgānuga-sādhana-bhakti* is to be performed 'with both physical and mental bodies' (Delmonico 1999, p. 99). In support of this thesis, Delmonico points to the fact that both Kavirāja and his teacher, Mukunda, often feature prominently in *sahajiyā* lineages (*parampara*) (Delmonico 1999, p. 100). According to Glen Hayes, Mukunda was 'perhaps the most influential [*sahajiyā*] guru in the medieval period' and is still highly revered in Bāula and Kartābhajā communities today (Hayes 1985, p. 105n.). Regarding Kavirāja himself, Shaktinath Jha observes that many *sahajiyā*-type groups in Bengal engaged in some form of four moons practice explicitly trace the dissemination of this practice to him. Jha specifically mentions a tradition associated with one Kālācāda Vidyālaṃkāra,¹² which apparently has forty-nine branches and sub-branches across Bengal that all identify Kavirāja as one of their principal gurus (Jha 1995, p. 88).

While such appropriation does not necessarily imply substantive theological heredity, it certainly highlights a dimension of the Kavirāja affair germane to the present discussion. Regardless of whether characterisations of Kavirāja as an exponent of incipient *sahajiyā* ideas are warranted, the fact that he came to acquire symbolic significance for *sahajiyā* currents is quite evident. I would argue that it is against this background of significance that pre-colonial Gauḍīya narratives pertaining to Kavirāja's rejection by the tradition, such as that presented by the *Narottama-vilāsa*, can be profitably read. This is to propose, then, something of an inversion of Edward Dimock's evaluation of the *Narottama-vilāsa*'s Kavirāja rejection narrative; while Dimock also discerns *sahajiyā* significance in it, he curiously identifies Kavirāja, in view of his deprecatory attitude toward women, as representative of the orthodox tradition and the *Narottama-vilāsa* as itself articulating a *sahajiyā*-type position (Dimock 1989, pp. 100–1).

My reading of the *Narottama-vilāsa* is, admittedly, more exploratory than definitive. It is difficult to say whether Narahari consciously employs Kavirāja in the text as a proxy for *sahajiyā* currents. Whatever the case regarding Narahari's authorial intention, however, it is, I submit, hard to imagine pre-colonial readers of the *Narottama-vilāsa* living in a period that witnessed the proliferation of *sahajiyā*

¹² Ramakanta Chakrabarty identifies Vidyālaṃkāra as the founder of the Kiśorībhājanas, who emerged sometime in the later part of the eighteenth century and became especially popular in Vikrampur and eastern Faridpur in present-day Bangladesh (Chakrabarty 1985, pp. 324–25).

currents (many of whom symbolically aligned themselves with Kavirāja) not deriving such an import from the text.¹³

5. Deviance in Rarh and Banga

That deviance from emerging orthodox Vaiṣṇava tenets and practices was often intimately associated with perceived offense, and thus deemed contemptible, is evinced by another well-known pre-colonial Gauḍīya text of the biographical genre: the mid-seventeenth century *Prema-vilāsa* of Nityānandadāsa. Proffered largely as an account of the activities of the celebrated missionary trio of Śrīnivāsa, Narottama, and Śyāmānanda in early seventeenth century Bengal, the twenty-fourth chapter of the text presents a vivid account of Vaiṣṇava-related deviance perpetrated in the regions of Rarh and Banga¹⁴ during the time of Caitanya.

We hear, for instance, of Vāsudeva, an ‘exceedingly depraved’ (*baḍa durācāra*) *brāhmaṇa* from Rarh, who was guilty of certain ‘abominable practices’ (*baḍa anācāra*) in that region. While Vāsudeva considered himself to be ‘Gopāla, the son of Nanda’ (*nandera nandana gopāla*), he was known by others simply as ‘the jackal’ (*śiyāla*). We also learn of a ‘sinful’ (*pāpī*) *kāyastha* named Viṣṇudāsa, who ‘broadcast his own majesty (*aiśvarya*) in Banga’,¹⁵ claiming to be ‘Raghunātha’, who had ‘come to earth from Vaikuṅṭha for the deliverance of the world’.¹⁶ Coming to be known in the region as ‘Kapīndrī’, Viṣṇudāsa corrupted people ‘through his various deceptions’ (*nānā chale*) and ‘depraved practices’ (*durācāra*). Both individuals are said to have been ‘disowned’ (*tyājya*) by Caitanya and ‘rejected’ (*agrāhya*) by his devotees (Nityānandadāsa 1913, p. 246).

While the depravities and abominations indulged in by these two individuals is left unspecified, indication of the sorts of activities alluded to by the text is provided by the account of a third renegade, a *brāhmaṇa* known as Mādhava. Briefly, the text explains that Mādhava was originally the priest of an unnamed *rājā*, from whose deity (*vigraha*) he stole ornaments and fled to a village of cowherds (*goyāla*), where he assumed the role of a priest (Nityānandadāsa 1913, p. 246). Being ‘lustful’ (*kāmuka*) and an ‘extreme sinner’ (*pāpīṣṭha*), he donned a ‘crown’ (*cūḍā*)¹⁷ and proclaimed, ‘I am a wearer of the

¹³ It is worth noting the existence of an intriguing text by the name *Caitanya-kārikā*, attributed to Caitanyadāsa, the eldest son of Caitanya’s companion, Śivānanda Sen. Composed in Bengali *paṇḍita* and supplemented with substantial Sanskrit quotation, the *Caitanya-kārikā* recounts a dialogue between Mukunda and a disciple named Mathuradāsa Gosvāmī on a variety of Gauḍīya-related topics. Of particular relevance to the present discussion is the text’s sixth and final chapter, which narrates a pilgrimage Mathuradāsa makes to the holy town of Nabadwip. During his travels, Mathuradāsa crosses paths with Kavirāja and his coterie of followers. Kavirāja introduces himself to Mathuradāsa as a student of Mukunda. Mathuradāsa, however, soon becomes perturbed by alarming deviations he detects in Kavirāja’s teachings. Mathuradāsa is particularly horrified by Kavirāja’s advocacy of a *sahajiyā*-type ‘moon practice’ (*candra sādhana*)—he brands this as the ‘demoniacal conduct’ (*paśācika ācāra*) of Aghorapanthīs (Caitanyadāsa 1904, p. 87). Upon his return, Mathuradāsa relates this distressing exchange to Mukunda. Mukunda proceeds to reveal to Mathuradāsa that Kavirāja was a wayward student whom he had rejected because of insubordination. Mukunda, moreover, identifies Kavirāja as the founder of the heretical ‘Paṣṭa dāyī’ (i.e., Spāṣṭadāyika/Spāṣṭadāyaka) order (Caitanyadāsa 1904, p. 88) and, on the basis of Purāṇic authority, declares him an incarnation of the demon (*dāitya*) *guru* Śukrācārya, who had previously vowed to appear in the Kali-*yuga* to wreak havoc (*vidambana*) on the religion of Caitanya (Caitanyadāsa 1904, p. 92).

The *Caitanya-kārikā*’s ascription to Caitanyadāsa is certainly problematic, not least because of chronological improbability: a junior contemporary of Caitanya, Caitanyadāsa would have either been exceedingly old or, more likely, no longer living at the time that Kavirāja was active (cf. Lutjeharms forthcoming, chp. 1). If Chakrabarti is correct that the Spāṣṭadāyikas (according to him, also known as ‘Rūpa Kavirājīs’) emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century (Chakrabarti 1989, p. 19), then, in view of its explicit reference to this order, the text must be dated sometime after this. The *Caitanya-kārikā*’s citation of the *Īśāna-saṃhitā* (Caitanyadāsa 1904, p. 91) points, in fact, to a nineteenth century provenance—assuming that suggestions about the late origins of this latter work (Majumdar 1939, pp. 461–62) are well-founded. These observations can obviously be no more than tentative until the *Caitanya-kārikā* is subjected to a rigorous critical study. Irrespective of the outcome of such a study, however, the text, as I see it, provides indications of a pre-existing convention of aligning Kavirāja with *sahajiyā* currents within Gauḍīya circles.

¹⁴ Rarh and Banga comprise the south-western and south-eastern sub-regions of medieval Bengal respectively.

¹⁵ *āpana aiśvarya baṅge karaye prakāśa //*

¹⁶ *bole āmi raghunātha vaikuṅṭha haite / jagat uddhārtha upasthita avanīte //*

¹⁷ I take *cūḍā* here to imply the peacock-feathered crown that is a staple feature of the iconography of Kṛṣṇa. It could alternatively be read as a synonym for *śikhā* or *ṭiki*, the tuft of hair left unshaven on the crown of the head that marks Hindu orthodoxy (Bandyopadhyay 1966).

crown (*cūḍādhārī*), Kṛṣṇa-Nārāyaṇa himself. If you worship me, you will go to my abode, *Vaikuṅṭha*'.¹⁸ On the pretext of enacting Kṛṣṇa-*līlā*, Mādhava is alleged to have had sexual relations (*saṅgama*) with low-caste (*antyaja*) women of the area (Nityānandadāsa 1913, p. 247). On one occasion, he is reported to have arrived in Puri accompanied by his female entourage with the intention of participating in Caitanya's group chanting (*saṅkīrtana*). Caitanya, however, is said to have immediately put a stop to this intrusion:

The Lord said, 'That crown-wearer (*cūḍādhārī*) has come. He enacts *līlā* with females, defiling *dharma*. O devotees, that crown-wearer has deviated (*bhraṣṭa*) from *dharma*. The land in which he lives will be defiled (*naṣṭa*). Don't look at the face of that fallen offender (*aparādhī*). Quickly banish him from Purushottama [i.e., Puri]'. (Nityānandadāsa 1913, p. 247)¹⁹

We are thus presented once again with an explicit polemic against Vaiṣṇava-related deviance. As in the case of the *Narottama-vilāsa*'s Kavirāja rejection narrative, misappropriation of Vaiṣṇava symbolism, far from being tolerated, is looked upon by the *Prema-vilāsa* with patent disapprobation, its perpetrators deemed 'extreme sinners' (*pāpīṣṭha*) and 'offenders' (*aparādhī*).

Brāhmaṇical concerns are undoubtedly at play here. This is signalled by the text's emphasis on the defiling nature of the behaviour of the individuals concerned. In branding this behaviour 'abominable' (*anācāra*) and 'depraved' (*durācāra*), the text implicitly counterposes it to orthoprax notions of good (*sat*) or pure conduct (*śuddhācāra*), thus evoking the quintessentially brāhmaṇical discourse of the Dharma-śāstras.²⁰ The brāhmaṇical orientation of the text's assault is further underscored by its derogatory reference to the low-caste status of the women with whom Mādhava is said to have cavorted—those from the lowest castes (*antyaja*), such as *caṇḍālas* (Nityānandadāsa 1913, p. 247). These observations are borne out by the evident brāhmaṇical concerns articulated throughout the twenty-fourth chapter of the text, which even waxes lyrical about the history of the *kulīna* system in Bengal.

What does this reveal about Gauḍīya attitudes toward *sahajiyā* currents? Based on the sketchy and clearly partisan account of the three individuals proffered by the *Prema-vilāsa* alone, it is admittedly difficult to ascertain definitively whether their practices constituted what we could properly designate as '*sahajiyā*', or even broadly 'tantric'. Irrespective of the precise religious orientation of the three deviants in question, however, there do appear to be legitimate grounds for reading the text's criticisms as expressive of a polemic against *sahajiyā* currents, even if only by implication.

For one thing, although claims to divinity of the kind the *Prema-vilāsa* denounces were not a universal feature of the *sahajiyā* milieu, it was by no means uncommon for adherents of many *sahajiyā* groups to exalt their founders to the status of descents (*avatāra*) of Kṛṣṇa or Caitanya (Chakrabarti 1985, p. 8). Moreover, the text's unequivocal disapproval of such claims—what it styles 'self-deification' (*īśvarābhimānitva*) (Nityānandadāsa 1913, p. 247)—can, I suggest, be read as a variant expression of Gauḍīya distaste for 'self-worship' (*ahaṅgrāhopāsana*), a practice explicitly proscribed in the writings of Viśvanātha Cakravartī, for example.²¹ O'Connell argues that the pronounced attention the practice of *ahaṅgrāhopāsana* receives in the writings of Viśvanātha serves as another index of the oblique response of mainstream Gauḍīyas to the perceived 'self-apotheosis' of proliferating *sahajiyā* currents (O'Connell 1971, p. 271). That is to say, the *sahajiyā* practice of *āropa*—the essential 'attribution of divinity' to humanity, through which women and men realise their true nature (*svarūpa*) in their present physical form (*rūpa*) (Dasgupta 1969, p. 133)—was simply equated with *ahaṅgrāhopāsana*, or self-worship, when interpreted through the conceptual resources available to mainstream Gauḍīyas. The *Prema-vilāsa*'s treatment of *īśvarābhimānitva*, or self-deification, thus serves as another example

¹⁸ *bole āmi cūḍādhārī kṛṣṇa-nārāyaṇa / āmāre bhajile yabe vaikuṅṭha bhavana //*

¹⁹ *prabhu kahe iho kon āila cūḍādhārī / nārisaha līlā khelā dharmmanāśa kari // ohe bhaktaṅgaṅga cūḍādhārī dharmabhraṣṭa / ye deśe karibe vāsa deśa habe naṣṭa // iho aparādhī patita mukha nā dekhibā / puruṣottama haite śīghra tāḍāiñā dībā //*

²⁰ For more on the centrality of the concept of *ācāra* in the Dharma-śāstric tradition, see (Davis 2004; 2010, pp. 144–65).

²¹ See, for example, Viśvanātha's *Bhakti-sāra-pradarśini-ṭīkā* on *Bhakti-rasamṛta-sindhu* 1.2.306.

of how *sahajiyā* ideas and practices may have been rendered by a Gauḍīya devotional schema. The text's overtly polemical stance against this practice offers, however, a notable counterpoint to O'Connell's insistence that Gauḍīya warnings about *ahamgrāhopāsana* generally 'fall short of denouncing presumably well-meaning persons who may have slipped into such an un-Vaiṣṇava posture' (O'Connell 1971, pp. 274–75).

Whether Nityānandadāsa was aware of the anti-*sahajiyā* implications of his polemic is a moot point. I would contend, however, that, as in the case of the *Narottama-vilāsa*, conservatively orthoprax Vaiṣṇavas in pre-colonial Bengal who were witness to the burgeoning of *sahajiyā* currents and their perceived practices of self-deification could not but have derived such implications from it.²² We might note in this regard that many areas within the regions of Rarh and Banga have historically been sites of substantial *sahajiyā*-type activity. The district of Birbhum in Rarh, for example, with its predominantly tantric religious landscape (Chakrabarty 1985, p. 136; Dimock 1989, p. 65), has long been associated with *sahajiyā* figures (Chakrabarti 1989, p. 194). Likewise, Murshidabad, much of which falls within the Rarh region, has hosted manifold Vaiṣṇava *sahajiyā*-type minor sects (*upasampradāya*) engaged in forms of body-oriented ritual practice (*deha-sādhana*). Interestingly, the deifying projection of *guru* 'as the living God' appears to have been a pervasive trend among such groups (Jha 1988, p. 110). We see a history of similar kinds of activity in areas of Banga like Vikrampur and Faridpur (both in present day Bangladesh), where, in the eighteenth century, a slew of Vaiṣṇava-oriented *brāhmaṇa gurus* are reported to have propagated transgressive modes of tantric worship among low-caste and untouchable followings (Chakrabarty 1985, pp. 324–25).

The notion that the views articulated by this section of the *Prema-vilāsa* can be taken as broadly representative of mid-seventeenth century orthodox Gauḍīya attitudes toward *sahajiyā* currents, however, run into a significant difficulty. This is not so much to do with any ostensibly sectarian agenda on the part of the text's author, Nityānandadāsa, a disciple of Nityānanda's second wife, Jāhnavā Devī. The *Prema-vilāsa* was in fact the first among hagiographies pertaining to the second generation of Caitanya's followers to move beyond the provincial history of an individual lineage and attempt a broader treatment of the various Gauḍīya communities of the period (Stewart 2010, p. 337). Rather, the difficulty lies in the fact that the provenance of the text's twenty-fourth chapter (where the polemical narrative in question is located) has come under serious scrutiny.²³ It is unfortunately beyond the scope of the present article to weigh in on this issue (an undertaking contingent on the findings of further historical-critical work on the chapter), but the argument I am developing here

²² It is in fact along precisely these lines that the text's polemic was read by orthodox representatives of the Gauḍīya tradition in the early twentieth century. In the preface to his 1913 edition of the *Prema-vilāsa*, Yashodalal Talukdar includes an official decree (*vyavasthā-patra*) signed by thirty members of the Gauḍīya *gōsvāmī* and *vairāgī* communities of Vrindavan. The decree invokes the passage in question as a precedent for the excommunication of three *sahajiyā*-type groups—namely, the Cūḍādhāris, Kapīndrīs, and Śrgālas—for their imitation of the *rāsa-līlā*, etc. (*rāsādi-līlāmukāraṇa*) (Nityānandadāsa 1913, pp. v–xii). Their curious presence in the Braj region aside, these groups appear to correspond directly with the three deviant individuals targeted by the *Prema-vilāsa*'s polemic. I have come across references to two of these groups in sources beyond those cited in Talukdar's edition of the *Prema-vilāsa*. Most notably, an oft-quoted Bengali verse ascribed to Totārāmadāsa Bābāji, a south Indian *brāhmaṇa* Vaiṣṇava *paṇḍita* who migrated to Nabadwip sometime in the mid- to late eighteenth century, includes the Cūḍādhāris in its list of thirteen deviant orders (*āula bāula kartābhajā neḍā daraveśa sāi / sahajiyā sakhibhāvaki smārta jāta-gosāi // atibaḍī cūḍādhārī gaurāṅganāgarī / totā kahe—ei terora saiga nāhi kari //*); for more on Totārāmadāsa and this verse, see (Chakrabarti 1989, pp. 192–94; 1986, pp. 6–7; 1999, pp. 229–30). Additionally, Nabadwip Chandra Goswami includes both the Cūḍādhāris and the 'Kapīndra community (*parivāra*)' in an extended list of extant Vaiṣṇava subjects (*upadhārma*) in his *Vaiṣṇava-orata-dina-nirṇaya* (1900–1901) (cited in Chakrabarti 1989, pp. 19–20; 1999, pp. 231–32).

²³ Talukdar reveals that he based his edition of the *Prema-vilāsa* on eight manuscripts (Nityānandadāsa 1913, p. iii). Of these, one contained the 'complete' (*sampūrṇa*) twenty-four and a half chapters (*vilāsa*) of the work, while another contained twenty-four chapters (Nityānandadāsa 1913, p. iv). Talukdar considers these two manuscripts to be 100 and 150 years old respectively. If Talukdar's dating is accurate, the twenty-fourth chapter of the text can be assigned at least to the mid-eighteenth century. Others, however, express reservations about the chapter's authenticity; see, for instance, (Chakrabarty 1985, p. 323; Majumdar 1939, pp. 506–10; Manring 2005, pp. 129–30; 2011, p. 46; O'Connell 1971, p. 166). Rebecca Manring goes so far as to suggest that the chapter is an early twentieth century interpolation, on account of what appear to be references in it to the *Advaita-prakāśa* and *Bālyā-līlā-sūtra* (Manring and Stewart 1977, p. 116; Manring 2011, p. 46).

does not hinge on it. For the polemical narrative the chapter presents finds palpable tonal and material resonance with passages in other more assuredly pre-colonial biographical sources.

The chapter itself supplies verses in support of its claims from *Vṛndāvanadāsa*'s sixteenth century *Caitanya-bhāgavata* (1.14.82–8), which relate the deviant behaviour of individuals who broadly correspond with those targeted by its own polemic (*Nityānandadāsa* 1913, p. 247). In these verses, *Vṛndāvanadāsa* reports on the 'many sinners' (*kata pāpigaṇa*) who moved among Caitanya's followers in the land of Banga. Inciting others to accept their divinity (*āpanāre laoyāiyā*), these miscreants are said to have 'defiled the people' (*loka naṣṭa kare*) for the sake of 'filling their bellies' (*udāra-bharaṇa*). One of these 'extreme sinners' (*pāpīṣṭha*) called himself 'Raghunātha'. Another 'made [the people] sing of him as 'Nārāyaṇa'' (*āpanāre gāoyāya baliyā 'nārāyaṇa'*). *Vṛndāvanadāsa* expresses disbelief in the audacity of such self-deification by those manifestly subject to the constraints of mundanity. 'Out of what shame', he asks, 'does that scoundrel, whose three states (*tina avasthā*) we see daily, sing hymns of himself?'²⁴ *Vṛndāvanadāsa* also tells us of a third reprobate, a 'demon *brāhmaṇa*' (*brahma-daitya*) from the region of Rarh, who claimed to be 'Gopāla', but was known by others as 'the jackal' (*śiyāla*). *Vṛndāvanadāsa* decries this 'extreme sinner' as being unworthy of the status of a genuine *brāhmaṇa*: 'A demon within, he merely donned the dress of a *brāhmaṇa*' (*antare rākṣāsa, vipra-kāca mātra kāce*) (*Vṛndāvanadāsa* 1928, p. 284).

Another passage redolent of the *Prema-vilāsa*'s polemic is found in Narahari's popular early eighteenth century *Bhakti-ratnākara*, the fourteenth chapter of which levels charges of self-deification against deviant individuals hailing, once again, from Rarh and Banga. Narahari highlights the pernicious influence in these regions of 'those averse [to *bhakti*]' (*bahirmukha-gaṇa*'), who became 'independent' (*svatantra*) and thus 'transgressed *dharma*' (*dharmma karaye laṅghana*). Forsaking chanting (*kīrtana*) to Kṛṣṇa, these 'great sinners' (*mahāpāpigaṇa*) are said to have 'caused [others] to sing hymns to them' (*āpanāke gāoyāya*) (*Cakravartī* 1912, p. 1045). One such deviant deceived the people by masquerading as 'Raghunātha'. Indulging in 'depraved practices' (*durācāra*), he came to be known throughout Banga as 'Kavīndra' (*Cakravartī* 1912, p. 1045). Similarly, in Rarh there roamed a 'fallen *brāhmaṇa*' (*viprādhamā*) known as 'Mallika', whose 'wicked' (*duṣṭa*) nature was unparalleled. 'That great sinner', Narahari reports, 'declared himself 'Gopāla''. Displaying his demonic magic (*rākṣasa-māyā*), he deceived the people' (*Cakravartī* 1912, p. 1045).

Both the *Caitanya-bhāgavata* and the *Bhakti-ratnākara* thus set forth similar, brāhmaṇically-informed diatribes against deviant Vaiṣṇavas in the regions of Rarh and Banga.²⁵ As can be seen, many of these miscreants go by names that are either identical with (Raghunātha, Gopāla/Śiyāla) or very similar to (Kapīndrī/Kavīndra) those targeted in the *Prema-vilāsa*. Like the *Prema-vilāsa*, both texts home their polemics in on the transgressive practice of self-deification and its associated immoral activity. The *Bhakti-ratnākara*'s polemic in fact exhibits a parallel structure with that of the *Prema-vilāsa*, substantiating its claims by citation of the very same *Caitanya-bhāgavata* verses as those invoked in the context of the latter. It thereby presents itself as a likely candidate for the immediate source of the *Prema-vilāsa*'s polemic—assuming, of course, that the twenty-fourth chapter of the *Prema-vilāsa* is indeed a later production.²⁶

²⁴ *dekhitechi dīne tina avasthā yāhāra / kon lāje āpanāre gāoyāya se chāra? //* In his *Gauḍīya-bhāṣya* on the *Caitanya-bhāgavata*, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati proffers the following as possible meanings of the phrase 'three states' (*tina avasthā*): (1) gross (*sthūla*), subtle (*sukṣma*), and causal (*kāraṇa*); (2) waking (*jāgrat*), dreaming (*svapna*), and deep sleep (*suṣupti*); and (3) past (*bhūta*), present (*varttamāna*), and future (*bhaviṣyat*). The basic idea, he suggests, is that these states are markers of the conditioned living being's affliction by material nature (*prakṛti*) and time (*kāla*) (*Vṛndāvanadāsa* 1928, p. 287).

²⁵ While it is not a hagiographical source, one could also point to the resonances the *Prema-vilāsa*'s polemic finds in the forceful criticism of Vaiṣṇava deviance in the *Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* of Narahari Sarakāra, Caitanya's intimate Srikhanda-based companion. Of course, as Rembert Lutjeharms notes, this concise Sanskrit theological treatise does not so much find issue with self-deification as it does with the deceitful devotional posturing of those 'who dress like perfect *yogīs*', yet 'become sensual enjoyers of sensual enjoyers' (*Lutjeharms* 2017, p. 166). Regardless of the original target of this criticism, I concur with Lutjeharms that its pertinence to proliferating *sahajiyā* currents would not have been lost on subsequent generations of the text's readers (*Lutjeharms* 2017, p. 167).

²⁶ In a footnote to the *Prema-vilāsa*'s polemic, Talukdar supplies verses from a Sanskrit text ascribed to Viśvanātha entitled *Gaura-gaṇa-candrikā*. These provide an account of three deviant self-deifying individuals from the Rarh and Banga regions

6. Vaiṣṇava Normativity

It is no coincidence that our search for indications of pre-colonial Gauḍīya anti-*sahajiyā* polemics should lead us once again to the early eighteenth century hagiographical writings of Narahari. The missionary work of Śrīnivāsa *et al.* precipitated a process of doctrinal and ritual standardisation within the Gauḍīya tradition that led to the emergence of what Stewart dubs a ‘corporate identity’, the tangible origins of which can be located in the famed late sixteenth century festival (*mahotsava*) of Kheturi (Stewart 2010, p. 336). Kheturi may have afforded the various Vaiṣṇava communities of Bengal a concrete platform for cohesion under the overarching authority of the Vrindavan Gosvāmīs, but, as Stewart argues, the tradition’s ‘consolidation’ would not be realised at a ‘metadiscursive’ level until the appearance of Narahari’s *Bhakti-ratnākara* and its supplement, the *Narottama-vilāsa*. In many ways, these works replicated the metanarrative style and function of Kṛṣṇadāsa’s monumental *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* in relation to seventeenth century Gauḍīya hagiographical literature, serving to ‘redefine the relationships among the texts and . . . curb and contain the direction of thought and practice’ (Stewart 2010, p. 334). It thus seems only natural that Narahari’s works should make efforts to suppress or expunge expressions of Vaiṣṇavism that did not cohere with the ‘normative’ form they sought to promote, founded on the theological and ritual authority of the Vrindavan Gosvāmīs as mediated by the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. It is not without significance, then, that the *Bhakti-ratnākara* frames its depiction of deviance in Rarh and Banga as a vivid counterpoint to the missionary work undertaken by Śrīnivāsa, portrayed as one who ‘destroys the pride of those who are opposed to devotion, preaching the books of the Gosvāmīs’ (Cakravartī 1912, p. 1045).²⁷

This normative, brāhmanically-aligned form of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism would persist well into the period of British colonial rule, sustained particularly by Vaiṣṇava *gosvāmī* communities throughout Bengal (the orthoprax proclivities of which were highlighted above). Contrary to colonial accounts of the Gauḍīya tradition that emphasise the diminishing efficacy of *gosvāmī* leadership in the post-*Bhakti-ratnākara* period (e.g., Kennedy 1925, pp. 76–77), there is evidence of the continued flourishing of a number of *gosvāmī śrīpāṭṣ*. While, as the conflicting nature of colonial period reportage indicates, some *śrīpāṭṣ* had indeed ‘fallen upon hard times’ by the middle of the nineteenth century, others appear to have displayed continued growth and prosperity (Bhatia 2017, pp. 73–74). Referencing the cases of Srikhand and Baghnagara, Bhatia concludes: ‘It seems obvious that some of these *shripats* flourished, gained disciples, ran schools, and became rich centres of Vaishnava doctrine and practice, by the mid- to late nineteenth century’ (Bhatia 2017, p. 74).

7. Brāhmanical and Bhadrakok Vaiṣṇava Alliance

There are also clear indications of the persistence of broad *gosvāmī* influence over the tradition well into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period in Gauḍīya history often portrayed as dominated by an emerging *bhadrakok* Vaiṣṇava leadership.²⁸ Most significantly, perhaps, we know that many *bhadrakok* Vaiṣṇavas established discipular relationships with representatives of *gosvāmī* communities. Achyutacharan Chaudhuri Tattvanidhi (1866–1953) and Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinod (1838–1914)—both of whom we briefly encountered toward the beginning of this article—are cases in point. Both of these figures featured centrally in the wave of Vaiṣṇava-related activity that swept across

that maps neatly onto the polemical narrative of the *Prema-vilāsa* (Nityānandadāsa 1913, pp. 247–48n.). Many of these verses are also cited by Bhaktisiddhanta in his *Gauḍīya-bhāṣya* (Vrindāvanadāsa 1928, p. 288), as well as by Haridas Das under the text’s entry in his *Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇava-abhidhāna* (Das 1959, p. 1537). I have not yet managed to procure a copy of the *Gaura-gaṇa-candrikā*. Based solely on the verses cited, it is difficult to ascertain the validity of the text’s attribution to Viśvanātha. What is evident is that it is intimately connected to the *Prema-vilāsa*’s polemic; the direction of influence, however, remains unclear. In the event that the *Gaura-gaṇa-candrikā* is also of colonial provenance, the arguments I have made in relation to the influence of the *Caitanya-bhāgavata* and the *Bhakti-ratnākara* on the *Prema-vilāsa* would also apply.

²⁷ *gosvāmīdīgera grantha kariyā pracāra / bhaktivirodhira darpa karila saṁhāra / /*

²⁸ A narrative of *bhadrakok* dominance over the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition during the colonial period has featured ubiquitously in recent critical work in this area. For more on this scholarship, see (Wong 2015, pp. 319–23).

the *bhadralok* religious and cultural landscapes during the later decades of the nineteenth century.²⁹ Any attempt to understand their pivotal roles in this context must, however, contend with the fact both received their initiations (*dīkṣā*) into Vaiṣṇavism from, and cultivated enduring relationships with, respected hereditary members of *gosvāmī* communities. Tattvanidhi's *dīkṣā guru*, Radhikanath Goswami (dates unknown), was a leading light of the *gosvāmī* community of Shantipur, which traces lineal descent from Advaita. Likewise, Bhaktivinod's *dīkṣā guru*, Bipin Bihari Goswami (1850–1919), was a notable ambassador for the *gosvāmī* community of Baghnapura, which claims descent from Caitanya's associate, Vaṁśīvanānanda.

Admittedly, it would be distorting to give the impression that these 'traditional' Vaiṣṇava figures and their communities were wholly impervious to the pervasive impact of British colonialism. The intimate relationships developed by certain representatives of these communities with those members of the late nineteenth century *bhadralok* who began to turn to Vaiṣṇavism itself stands as testament to *gosvāmī* implication in colonially-wrought social and cultural change; but the concrete impact of colonialism on these communities goes even further back. From the late eighteenth century, patronage of *gosvāmī śrīpāṭṣ* often fell to that new class of Bengali 'comprador-rajās' who had made their fortunes as agents and intermediaries to the East India administration (Bhatia 2017, pp. 62–64). I would thus propose a softening of the rigid boundaries sometimes drawn between colonially-implicated *bhadralok* Vaiṣṇava types, on the one hand, and *gosvāmīs*, *bābājīs*, and other 'standard bearers of traditional Vaiṣṇavism', on the other (Fuller 2005, p. 31). Nevertheless, it would be similarly misleading to deny the persisting, brāhmanically-aligned orthopraxy that often characterised these colonial *gosvāmī* figures—an orthopraxy that would naturally shape their basic attitudes toward the *sahajiyā* phenomenon.

Take, for example, the case of Radhikanath. Brāhmanical concerns pervaded his Vaiṣṇava thinking.³⁰ They are clearly on display in, for instance, his *Yati-darpaṇa* (Goswami 1910). This is perhaps only to be expected in a work that attempts to establish the legitimacy of the *sannyāsa* order—the pinnacle of the 'fundamentally Brāhmanical institution' of the *āśrama* system (Olivelle 1993, p. 19)—within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Announcing his brāhmanical credentials at the outset of the text, Radhikanath identifies himself as a tenth-generation member of the Advaita-*vaṁśa* and proceeds proudly to extol his Vaiṣṇava community as 'continually honoured by dutiful *brāhmaṇas* for its virtue of observing the scriptural rites expected of *brāhmaṇas*' (Goswami 1910, p. 1).³¹ Such predilections naturally entailed a palpable distaste on Radhikanath's part for acts transgressing orthoprax standards of social and ritual purity. He provides ample indication of this in his *Bhakti-sikṣā*, wherein he outlines the behavioural norms to which he expects all Gauḍīya initiates to strictly conform. Drawing on Gopāla Bhaṭṭa's decidedly brāhmanical *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*—a work that principally sets out to 'define the orthopraxy of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas' (Broo 2009, p. 68)—Radhikanath details the activities he regards

²⁹ Tattvanidhi was a prolific author dedicated to the preservation of the legacy of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal. Between 1891 and 1930 he published twenty-nine books (and wrote eighteen others that remain unpublished) on the tradition's theology, aesthetic theory, and history. His essays were a staple feature of many Vaiṣṇava journals of the period. In 1896, he was awarded the title 'Tattvanidhi' ('Ocean of Knowledge') by his *guru* Radhakinath Goswami for his service to the Gauḍīya cause; for more on Tattvanidhi's life and literary contributions, see (Manring and Stewart 1977; Manring 2005). Bhaktivinod's manifold devotional and theological writings, editorial and publication projects, and organisational endeavours also played a crucially contributive role in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava flourishing in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal. His work has borne fruit in the form of numerous pupillary lineages in India and, more recently, across the globe, which trace their spiritual heredity through him. These have assumed their most dominant institutional forms in the numerous offshoots of the Gaudiya Math—including that of ISKCON—all of which locate their nexus to Bhaktivinod in his seventh child and follower Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati (1874–1936); for a survey of recent critical scholarship on Bhaktivinod, see (Wong 2015, pp. 320–21).

³⁰ Rebecca Manring suggests that Radhikanath's brāhmanical Vaiṣṇava agenda provided the decisive impetus for the late nineteenth century production of the Advaita-promoting hagiography *Advaita-prakāśa* (Manring 2005, p. 248). She makes a compelling case for reading the *Advaita-prakāśa* as an essential part of a broader attempt to rejuvenate a dwindling Advaita-related community and cast it as the Vaiṣṇava 'standard-bearer of propriety and legitimacy as well as . . . social purity' in the face of a wider Gauḍīya tradition that had acquired notoriety for 'scandalous behaviour' (Manring 2005, p. 236).

³¹ *svadharmmaniṣṭha brāhmaṇadigera nikaṭa brāhmaṇocita kriyākalāpānuṣṭhāna guṇe . . . dhārāvāhika rūpe samādrta haiyā āsītechena.*

as most detrimental to the cultivation of a life of Vaiṣṇava devotion, including the partaking of grains (*anna*) prepared by those of sinful livelihood, among whom he singles out prostitutes (*veśyā*); the eating of fish (*mātsya*) and meat (*māṃsa*), which he denounces as ‘thoroughly contemptible’ (*nitānta garhita*); and association with women (*yoṣit-saṅga*), by which he means illicit encounters with the wives of others (*para-strī*) and prostitutes (*veśyā*) (cited in [Bhaktiratna 1928](#), pp. 208–11). Radhikanath characterises these activities as both ritually and morally polluting, and thereby as obstructive (*anārtha-kāraka*) to the purity he sees as a prerequisite for the effective pursuit of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*. Regarding sexual transgression, he adopts an unequivocally hard line:

Those who keep the company of other’s wives (*para-strī-saṅgī-gaṇa*) perform evil acts in secrecy; therefore, they lack honesty. Purity, too, vanishes as a result of association with women (*strī-saṅga*). All virtues, such as compassion, controlled speech, intelligence, modesty, wealth, fame, forbearance, equanimity, steadfastness in God, self-command, and restraint of the external senses, are thoroughly and completely destroyed [by such association]. Womanisers (*yoṣit-saṅgī-gaṇa*) are thus agitated. [They are] deluded, believers that the body is the self, self-destructive, deplorable, and controlled by women like toy-deer. Never associate with them’. (cited in [Bhaktiratna 1928](#), p. 211)³²

The framework of moral evaluation Radhikanath employs here is plainly brāhmanical. Many of the virtues (*guṇa*) enumerated in the passage, for example, are closely associated with the model *brāhmaṇa* of Dharma-śāstric discourse. His adherence to such a framework makes it near impossible to conceive that he would have remained silent on the subject of *sahajiyā* currents, the practices of which often flouted orthoprax notions of purity in the name of Vaiṣṇavism.

That Radhikanath was an ardent opponent of such currents is borne out by his serving an extended term as co-editor of the popular Bengali language Vaiṣṇava periodical *Viṣṇupriyā-patrikā* in the final decade of the nineteenth century. A literary project of the renowned anti-colonial *bhadralok* journalist and Vaiṣṇava organiser Sishir Kumar Ghosh (1840–1911), the *Viṣṇupriyā-patrikā* made the task of redressing what it deemed the Gauḍīya tradition’s many ‘untidy realms’ one of its chief objectives ([Bhatia 2017](#), p. 140). As one might expect, *sahajiyā* currents featured regularly within the pages of the journal, with contributors frequently levelling attacks against groups such as the Bāula, Daraveśa, and Kartābhajā. The *Viṣṇupriyā-patrikā* thus became a significant voice in the broad anti-*sahajiyā* campaign of the period ([Bhatia 2017](#), pp. 140–45). As the journal’s co-editor, one can safely assume this campaign had Radhikanath’s full backing.³³

Bipin Bihari, too, serves as an exemplar of *gosvāmī* brāhmanicism within the Gauḍīya tradition during this period. His brāhmanical bent is unmissable, for instance, in his *Hari-bhakti-taraṅgiṇī* ([Goswami 1902](#)), a comprehensive Sanskrit treatise on the duties (*kṛtya*) and conduct (*vyavahāra*) of Gauḍīya practitioners. In terms of both content and structure, the text draws heavily on the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. Predictably, then, one of its distinguishing features is its emphasis on good or proper—that is, brāhmanically-aligned—Vaiṣṇava conduct (*sadācāra*). Directly citing the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (3.3–4),³⁴ Bipin Bihari signals the centrality of *sadācāra* to his vision of the ideal Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava life in the work’s opening verses (1.5–6):

³² *parastrīsaṅgigaṇa asat kāryya gopane kare, sutarāṃ tādādera satya thāke nā. śaucao strīsaṅga nimitta dūre yāya. dayā, mauna, buddhi, lajjā, sampatti, yaśa, kṣamā, śama, bhāgavatniṣṭhā, dama, bāhyendriya nigrāha ityādi guṇasakala ekebāre samyakrūpe kṣaya haiyā yāya. ataeva yoṣitsaṅgigaṇa aśānta. mūḍha, dehātmaavādī, ātmaḡhātī, śocya evaṃ kṛdāmṛgera nyūya yoṣitgaṇera adhīna. ihādigerā saṅga kadāca karite nāi.*

³³ As Madhusudan Goswami reports, while editors of some Vaiṣṇava journals of the period were willing to publish articles with which they did not agree, it was standard practice for such disagreement to be explicitly indicated ([Goswami 1922](#), p. 235). At no point do the editors of the *Viṣṇupriyā-patrikā* do this. It is true that Radhikanath did at one point express a desire to rescind his support for the *Viṣṇupriyā-patrikā* and step down as co-editor, but this does not appear to have been related to the journal’s stance on the *sahajiyā* issue; rather, it was due to its vocal participation in the debate over the legitimacy of the ‘Gaura-mantra’ that raged throughout the Gauḍīya world during these years ([Majumdar 1939](#), pp. 459–60).

³⁴ The *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* is itself citing the *Markaṇḍeya-purāṇa*.

Since nothing could be accomplished by anyone without good conduct (*sadācāra*), it is certainly required at all times. For one who is devoid of [good] conduct, there is no happiness in either this world or the next. Sacrifice, charity, and austerity does not benefit a person in this world who lives by transgressing good conduct. (Goswami 1902, p. 3)³⁵

Once again, the position set forth in this text appears to leave little room for compromise with views and practices in contravention of the unmistakably brāhmaṇical standards that underpin it—not least those associated with *sahajiyā* currents. This is corroborated by comments Bipin Bihari makes further along in the *Hari-bhakti-taraṅgiṇī* in a section treating passion-pursuant devotional practice (*rāgānuga-sādhana-bhakti*) (3.570–1):

Indeed, the imitation (*anukaraṇa*) of passion (*rāga*) by one whose mind is engrossed in the objects of the senses and who is devoted to his penis and belly is mere deception of the people. Almost all of those who currently pursue passion (*anurāgin*) in this holy land [i.e., Bhārata-varṣa] are cheaters, who steal others' wives, etc. (*para-stry-ādy-apahāraka*). Those who keep their company will surely go to hell. (Goswami 1902, p. 359)³⁶

This passage is most properly a reference to the perceived travesty of devotion perpetrated by those who engage in *rāgānuga-sādhana-bhakti* without appropriate qualification and motive. Its pertinence to an appraisal of a *sahajiyā* practice like *parakīyā-sādhana* should nevertheless be plain to see.³⁷

There are good contextual grounds for reading *sahajiyā* currents as one of the passage's implied targets. We learn from a short, unattributed biographical note included in the prefatory section of the *Hari-bhakti-taraṅgiṇī*³⁸ that, during his youth, Bipin Bihari spent time briefly with a *sahajiyā*-type 'minor sect' (*upasampradāya*) by the name of the Navarasika (Goswami 1902, p. iv), a group identified by some as a Kartābhajā community (Sil 2003, pp. 48–49; Urban 2001, p. 246n.). His encounter with the group is said to have led to his realisation of its 'degenerateness' (*apakarṣatā*) and the concomitant solidification of his faith in the 'pure' (*viśuddha*) Vaiṣṇava religion of Caitanya preserved by his ancestral community in Baghnāpara, to the sanctuary of which he swiftly returned (Goswami 1902, p. iv). The demarcation of well-defined boundaries between a normative, brāhmaṇically-aligned form of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, on the one hand, and what he considered to be deviant, *sahajiyā* perversions of it, on the other, was thus a framing concern of Bipin Bihari's Vaiṣṇava thinking.

This concern is even more explicitly operative in Bipin Bihari's *Daśa-mūla-rasa* (Goswami 1904), a systematic theological Bengali verse treatise on ten essential Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava themes. The final section of the *Daśa-mūla-rasa* narrates a history of the Baghnāpara *śrīpāṭ* based largely on pre-colonial hagiographical sources. At several points in the narrative Bipin Bihari broaches the issue of what he deems the questionable nature of some of the available material pertaining to the Baghnāpara community. He points, for instance, to two works purporting to present accounts of the *śrīpāṭ*'s revered founder, Rāmacandra Gosvāmī (otherwise known as Rāmāi Ṭhākura):³⁹ Ākiñcanadāsa's *Vivarta-vilāsa*, regarded by some as 'the principle treatise of the Sahajiyā Vaiṣṇavas' (Sanyal 1989, p. 131),⁴⁰ and a

³⁵ *na kiñcit kasyacit sidhyet sadācāraṇi vinā yataḥ / tasmād avāśyaṃ sarvoatra sadācāro hy apekṣ[ya]te // na hy ācāravihīnasya sukham atra paratra ca / yajñādānatapāmsīha puruṣasya na bhūtaye / bhavanti yah sadācār[am] samullaṅghya pravarttate //*

³⁶ *viśayāviśācittasya śiśnodaraparasya ca / rāgānukaraṇam aṅga kevalam lokavañcanam // sampraty asmin puṇyabhūmau ye santis cānurāginah / prāyās te vañcakāḥ sarove parastryādyapahārakāḥ / saṅgam kurvanti ye teṣāṃ te yānti narakam dhruvam //*

³⁷ Interestingly, unqualified participation in the practice of *rāgānuga-bhakti* is at times explicitly identified as a type of *sahajiyā* deviation in the writings of Bipin Bihari's disciple Bhaktivinod (e.g., Bhaktivinod 1906, pp. 46, 454–55). It would, moreover, become one of the principle targets of the trenchant anti-*sahajiyā* polemics of Bhaktivinod's son and follower Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati (e.g., Saraswati 1916a, 1916b)—who, incidentally, seems to have had a hand in editing the *Hari-bhakti-taraṅgiṇī* (Goswami 1902, p. ii).

³⁸ The author of this note was possibly Bipin Bihari's middle son, Lalita Ranjan Goswami, who provided the Bengali commentarial prose rendering (*marmārtha prakāśa baiganuvāda*) of the text's Sanskrit verses.

³⁹ Rāmacandra was the grandson of Vāṃśīvanānanda and adopted son of Nityānanda's second wife, Jāhnavā Devī. For more on Rāmacandra and the history of his Vaiṣṇava *śrīpāṭ* in Baghnāpara, see (Goswami 2008).

⁴⁰ For more on the Sahajiyā orientation of the *Vivarta-vilāsa*, see (Hayes 1995; Stewart 2010, pp. 348–62). For more on Ākiñcanadāsa's relation to the Baghnāpara community, see (Goswami 2008, pp. 497–520).

text he refers to simply as ‘*Rāmāñi-chalā*’.⁴¹ Accusing both works of having perverted (*vikṛta kariyā*) Rāmacandra’s life and teachings, Bipin Bihari denounces them as ‘books authored by Bāulas’ (*bāulera kṛta grantha*) and ‘unworthy of acceptance by true Vaiṣṇavas’ (*sad-vaiṣṇava grāhyāyogyā haite nāraya*) (Goswami 1904, p. 1135). He also detects suspicious elements in sources on which his own narrative is otherwise heavily reliant. He discerns, for instance, ‘repugnant philosophy’ (*viruddha darśana*) in places in the available manuscripts of Premadāsa Miśra’s early eighteenth century *Vaṃśī-śikṣā*.⁴² Seeking to distance the celebrated Baghnpara author from such unsavoury views, Bipin Bihari dismisses it as ‘the interpolated narration of a Sahajiyā’ (*sahaja vādīra . . . prakṣipta varṇana*) (Goswami 1904, p. 993). He deals in much the same way with those features of Rājavallabha Gosvāmī’s early seventeenth century *Muralī-vilāsa* that do not sit well with his own orthoprax sensibilities. He denounces, for example, the current text’s ‘detestable’ (*jaghanya*) version of Rāmacandra’s famous reception of the 1200 shaven-headed (*neḍā*) disciples of Vīracandra as the interpolation of a ‘Bāula poet’ (*bāula kavi*) (Goswami 1904, pp. 1049–50). Bipin Bihari indicates further along in the text that he finds the notion that a Vaiṣṇava of Rājavallabha’s pedigree could have countenanced the view that Rāmacandra fed his guests the impure food of fish particularly troubling: ‘The learned declare that the talk of hilsa fish we see in the [*Muralī*] *vilāsa* was interpolated by a Bāula. A Bāula has mischievously inserted views that are repugnant to Vaiṣṇavas in various places of the *Muralī-vilāsa*’ (Goswami 1904, p. 1136).⁴³

Bipin Bihari had the opportunity to give expression to this dissociative impulse at an institutional level in the early twentieth century. In 1909, a society by the name of Sri Krishna Chaitanya Tattva Pracharini Sabha was founded in Calcutta by Dr Priyanath Nandy, a vocal participant in urban Bengal’s *bhadralok* Vaiṣṇava milieu. The society’s stated purpose was the purging of unwanted elements from the contemporary Gauḍīya world—as Nandy put it, ‘reforming the diverse forms of licentiousness (*byabhichar*) and corruption (*glani*) and different types of deviant sects (*upadharma*) that have crept into the “pure” (*bisuddha*) [Vaiṣṇava] religion’ (cited in Dey 2015, p. 224). The society sought to realise this objective by harnessing consensus among respectable quarters of the tradition against *sahajiyā* currents and other forms of Vaiṣṇava deviance, often by means of official decrees (*vyavasthā-patra*) (Dey 2015, pp. 225–26). Along with several other representatives of *gosvāmī* communities in Bengal, Bipin Bihari appears to have lent his full support to this cause (Dey 2015, pp. 225, 227), to the point of serving as the society’s president (*sabhāpati*) during its inceptive years (Goswami 2008, p. 527).

Aspirations for a brāhmanically-aligned Vaiṣṇava normativity in the pre-colonial Gauḍīya tradition were thus further fostered in colonial times by *gosvāmī* types like Radhikanath and Bipin Bihari. Their bid to demarcate the boundaries of this normativity frequently entailed express moral condemnation of *sahajiyā*-type deviance. It is thus no coincidence that when members of the colonial Bengali *bhadralok* such as Tattvanidhi and Bhaktivinod turned to Vaiṣṇavism in the late nineteenth century, they often found allies in these *gosvāmī* figures. Far from being relationships of mere convenience, as some have suggested—an attempt, perhaps, on the part of *bhadralok* Vaiṣṇavas to ‘fit rhetorically into the authority structures of the larger tradition’ ((Fuller 2005, p. 327); italics in original)—I would argue that brāhmanical-*bhadralok* Vaiṣṇava alliances were founded on a

⁴¹ No work by this title is listed in the *Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇava-abhidhāna*, and I have been unable to find references to it anywhere else.

⁴² Bipin Bihari does not specify what ‘repugnant philosophy’ he is referring to here. Elements of the distinctive esoteric devotional practice that the *Vaṃśī-śikṣā* exposit—what it dubs ‘*rasarāja upāsana*’ (Miśra n.d., p. 98)—have indeed been deemed by some observers to be of a *sahajiyā* nature. Biman Bihari Majumdar, for instance, takes the text’s invocation of the concept of the ‘cultivation of the favourable’ (*ānukūlyānuśīlana*) as a reference to a Bāula-like ritual copulative practice (Majumdar 1959, p. 477n.). Chakrabarty, on the other hand, considers *rasarāja upāsana* to constitute a purely contemplative, ‘right-handed’ (*dakṣinācāra*) tantric mode of worship (Chakrabarty 1985, p. 274; Goswami 2008, pp. 486–89).

⁴³ *īlśa matsyera kathā yā dekhi vilāse / bāula prakṣipta tāhā vijñagaṇa bhāṣe // vaiṣṇava viruddha mata muralī-vilāse / sthāne sthāne nikhepilā bāule ullāse //* It is interesting that the Baghnpara-associated Vaiṣṇava editors of the first published edition of the *Muralī-vilāsa* (1895), Nilakanta Goswami and Binod Bihari Goswami, do not deal with the episode of Rāmacandra’s alleged serving of fish in this way. Rather, they retain the story in their edition of the text (Gosvāmī 1895, pp. 3, 160–62), supplying a note to the effect that Rāmacandra’s guests’ request for fish was nothing but a ploy to test his supramundane glory (*alaukika mahimā*) and, moreover, that any fish eating that took place was merely illusory (*māyā*) (Gosvāmī 1895, p. 3n.).

commonality of purpose and shared values. After all, *bhadralok* Vaiṣṇavas were invested in a very similar programme of dissociation from the transgressive. In other words, there was something of an elective moral affinity between these two broad Vaiṣṇava groups in colonial Bengal. Without positing an affinity of this kind, it simply does not seem possible to adequately account for the pervasive and committed participation of *gosvāmī* figures within *bhadralok* Vaiṣṇava domains, as *gurus* to figures like Tattvanidhi and Bhaktivinod; as editors for journals such as the *Viṣṇupriyā-patrikā*; or in leadership positions in organisations such as the Sri Krishna Chaitanya Tattva Pracharini Sabha.

8. Conclusions

In sum, then, the Vaiṣṇava campaign against *sahajiyā* currents that took shape in colonial Bengal in significant ways built upon antecedent polemical proclivities within the Gauḍīya tradition. To be sure, anti-*sahajiyā* polemics of this later period often assume a more explicit form than the oblique mode in which they are expressed in precolonial Gauḍīya writings. Not only do they commonly deploy more direct modes of reference to *sahajiyā* groups (not least their use of designators like ‘*sahajiyā*’, ‘*sahaja vādī*’, ‘*bāula*’, etc.), but also place a new accent, as O’Connell rightly notes, on the perceived ‘sexual promiscuity’ associated with the *sahajiyā* phenomenon (O’Connell 1971, p. 273n.). A variety of factors may be at play here: decades of foreign and indigenous attacks on Vaiṣṇavism in what is often portrayed as a colonial climate of moral obsession with ‘obscurity’ (*aślīlatā*) (Banerjee 1987, 1989; Ghosh 2006); increased exposure to *sahajiyā* currents as a result of their continued proliferation on the ground (Banerjee 1989, pp. 68–69; Bhatia 2017, p. 89; Chakrabarty 1985, p. 326); unprecedented access to *sahajiyā* literature through the burgeoning medium of print, particularly that associated with the ‘Battala’ presses of north Calcutta (Chakrabarty 1985, pp. 392–93; Dimock 1989, p. xxii; Sarkar 1999, p. 57); and the emergence of new forms of research on *sahajiyā*-type groups by both western scholars (e.g., Wilson 1846; Wise 1893) and their Orientalist-inspired indigenous counterparts (e.g., Datta 1987; Bhattacharya 1896)—to list but a few. Whatever the case, it is clear that long before these late nineteenth and early twentieth century *bhadralok* Vaiṣṇava attempts to ‘define, delimit and discipline’ the tradition (Bhatia 2017, p. 145), representatives of Vaiṣṇava communities across Bengal had already openly and vocally taken issue with *sahajiyā* or tantric-style tendencies as inimical to the truth they understood Caitanya and his immediate entourage to have exemplified. To attribute this intervention to a newly instigated morality born of the colonial experience is thus to fail to recognise the ethical impulses of early modern, pre-colonial Vaiṣṇavas. In short, *bhadralok* Vaiṣṇavas only continued what was already a vibrant discourse of censure and reprimand within the Gauḍīya tradition, though they did manage to focus attention using the new technologies of print and formal corporate entities that emerged in the colonial era.

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