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# Directly perceiving Kṛṣṇa: Accounting for perceptual experiences of deities within the framework of naturalism

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## Abstract

Using descriptions found in Viśvanātha Cakravārtin's *Mādhurya Kādambinī* (c.17th century) as a case study, the author argues in this article that research in the psychological sciences offers a plausible account within the framework of naturalism for the occurrence of private perceptual experiences that can serve as a basis for what Viśvanātha and other early Gauḍīya theologians describe and appraise as direct perceptual experiences (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa. The purpose of this investigation is to bridge the methodological divide that often separates the humanities and sciences and facilitate a richer interpretation and explanation of historical claims than what is usually available through traditional humanistic approaches alone. The results of this research have implications for the study of private perceptual experiences of deities across cultures in both historical and contemporary contexts.

## Keywords

religious experiences, mystical experiences, cognitive science, psychology, hallucinations, Krishna, Gaudiya Vaishnava, Vishvanatha Chakravartin

## Disciplines

Comparative Methodologies and Theories | History of Religions of Eastern Origins | Other Religion | Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion

## Comments

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**Directly Perceiving Kṛṣṇa: Accounting for Perceptual Experiences of Deities within the Framework of Naturalism**

Using descriptions found in Viśvanātha Cakravārtin's *Mādhurya Kādambinī* (circa. 17<sup>th</sup> c.) as a case study, I argue in this paper that research in the psychological sciences offers a plausible account within the framework of naturalism for the occurrence of private perceptual experiences that can serve as a basis for what Viśvanātha and other early Gauḍīya theologians describe and appraise as direct perceptual experiences (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa. The purpose of this investigation is to bridge the methodological divide that often separates the humanities and sciences and facilitate a richer interpretation and explanation of historical claims than what is usually available through traditional humanistic approaches alone. The results of this research have implications for the study of private perceptual experiences of deities across cultures in both historical and contemporary contexts.

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## Introduction

The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition is a Hindu devotional tradition that originated in the Bengal region of India during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It holds Kṛṣṇa to be the supreme and personal deity and exclusive object of devotion. Early Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theologians developed and advocated a path of devotion (*bhakti-mārga*) over other paths as the best means for realizing one’s true eternal nature (*svarūpa*), attaining the highest level of transcendental pleasure (*ānanda*), and achieving liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*sāṃsāra*). The starting point of the path of devotion is *śraddhā*, or ‘faith;’ the overarching goal of following the path is to attain *premā*, or ‘divine love’ for Kṛṣṇa; and the principal means of attaining *premā* consists of faithfully engaging in *sādhana*, a range of diverse regulated religious practices that systematically engage the mind and body in devotional acts. In the course and consequence of attaining the goal of *premā*, early Gauḍīya theologians reference and describe occurrences of devotees having what they refer to as a ‘direct perceptual experience’ (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa relative to the devotee’s qualifications and devotional temperament.<sup>1</sup> These ‘direct perceptual experiences’ (*sākṣātkāra*) are construed as Kṛṣṇa personally manifesting himself to the devotee in a manner that allows the devotee to directly (*sākṣāt*)—in an immediate sense—perceive Kṛṣṇa’s non-material anthropomorphic form and presence. In other words, they are not experiences of perceiving Kṛṣṇa *as if* he were manifest in front them, but they are experiences of perceiving Kṛṣṇa, who *is* manifest in front of them. So for example in his normative descriptions of such an experience, Viśvanātha Cākravartin, one of the most important second generation Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theologians, writes that when a devotee attains supreme love (*premā*) for Kṛṣṇa, it attracts Kṛṣṇa like a magnet and causes him to become visible to the devotee’s eyes (*nayana-gocarī*) and perceptible to the other senses relative to how the devotee thinks about and emotionally relates to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See for example *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.1.39, 1.2.182, 2.5.11, 2.5.81, and 3.1.36-42; *Bhakti Sandarbha* 1, 7, 15, 16, 161, 179, 187, 188, 189, 234, 256, 268, 277, and 279; and *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 6 and 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.4-5 (Numbering follows the edition published by Sri Krishna Chaitanya Shastra Mandir, 2005).

Traditional historical scholarship has drawn our attention to the importance early Gauḍīya theologians placed on the occurrence of these direct perceptual experiences of Kṛṣṇa in the course and consequence of successfully traversing the path of *bhakti* and attaining *premā*. David Haberman (1988), for example, notes that the goal of *smaraṇa* meditation—an important Gauḍīya practice that involves visualizing Kṛṣṇa’s qualities, companions, service, and *līlās* (‘divine play’)—is ‘for the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas to achieve a direct vision (*sākṣāt-darśana*) of Kṛṣṇa and his dramatic world’ (Haberman, 1988, p.126). And Barbara Holdrege (2007) provides an analysis of some of the key practices that lead to direct perceptual experiences (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa’s form and *līlā*, or ‘divine play.’ Traditional historical scholarship has also clearly demonstrated that these theologians frame their references and descriptions of these and other types of acknowledged experiences in terminology and categories that are drawn from a long tradition of Sanskrit poetics and aesthetic theory that preceded the development of Gauḍīya theology.<sup>3</sup> What remains unclear, however, is the extent to which these references and descriptions may also reflect actual experiences that they or others had.

Using Viśvanātha Cākravartin’s descriptions of a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa that are found in his *Mādhurya Kādambinī* (circa. 17<sup>th</sup> c.) as a case study, the purpose of this paper is to investigate whether or not we can plausibly account for the occurrence of private perceptual experiences that may form a phenomenological basis for what he describes and appraises as a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa within the framework of methodological naturalism.<sup>4</sup> Investigating whether or not the occurrence of such experiences can plausibly be understood within a naturalistic framework serves to bridge the methodological divide that often separates the humanities and sciences and facilitate a richer interpretation and explanation of historical claims than what is usually available through traditional humanistic approaches alone. If we can offer a plausible account

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<sup>3</sup> For a summary of the lineage of the aesthetic traditions that inform early Gauḍīya theology, see Haberman (2003), Chapter Two.

<sup>4</sup> Methodological naturalism seeks to explain phenomena in terms of natural principles and processes as far as possible without appeal to any kind of supernatural influence, but without commitment to the metaphysical assumptions of ontological naturalism.

in naturalistic terms, it offers support for the hypothesis that Viśvanātha's descriptions are likely reflective, at least to some extent, of experiences that he (or others) had. If we cannot, it suggest that his claims may be better understood as solely or primarily the result of the teachings he inherited and his exegetical ruminations thereof.

An additional aim of this paper is to illustrate some of the ways in which historians can make use of existing scientific and quasi-scientific research for developing and supporting informed working hypotheses about cultural-related phenomena in historical contexts. These informed working hypotheses can then be used as a basis for developing well-formed and well-informed hypotheses that are potentially testable. Developing well-formed and well-informed hypotheses can serve two critical roles for humanistic studies of religious culture and phenomena. First, they can serve as bases for developing carefully constructed experimental and quasi-experimental research designs in collaboration with scientists and psychologists. These can be implemented for generating quantifiable data that will either lend support to or weaken the original working hypotheses. Second, they can serve as warranted justification for the great deal of effort and resources, such as time and money, which are needed to conduct such studies.

## **Method**

In order to investigate whether or not the occurrence of what Viśvanātha describes and appraises as a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa within the framework of methodological naturalism, we can look to other types of experiences that can serve as heuristic analogues about which the natural processes involved in their generation and formation are better understood. Experiences that share uniquely similar structural and phenomenological features with direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa that distinguish both from other kinds of perceptual experiences are the most useful for our purposes. This is because within the framework of naturalism, the combination of natural processes that are responsible for uniquely shared structural and phenomenological features are likely

to be similar in many ways due to the shared biological and cognitive architectures that are responsible for modulating human perceptual experiences across cultures.

In order to find such an analogue, it is helpful to distinguish between the occurrence of a perceptual experience and the second-order act of appraising it as this or that, since phenomenologically similar kinds of perceptual experiences may be interpreted and appraised differently relative to culturally determined criteria, metaphysical presuppositions, and methods of interpretation and evaluation. For example, a person who is committed to a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava understanding of the world will interpret and evaluate a person's claim of having a private perceptual experience of Kṛṣṇa differently than a person who is committed to a naturalistic understanding of the world. By making this distinction between the occurrence of a perceptual experience and the second-order act of appraising it as this or that, we can more clearly discern and take advantage of existing research on experiences that cultures may appraise differently, but which are nonetheless constituted of uniquely similar structural and phenomenological features. In order to keep this distinction saliently in mind, throughout this paper I refer to the experiences under investigation in an ascriptive manner despite the awkwardness of using the long form reference.<sup>5</sup> So for example, I will refer to the direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa that Viśvanātha describes as a 'perceptual experience that Viśvanātha describes and appraises as a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa'.

One set of perceptual experiences that shares a remarkably unique set of structural and phenomenological features with the perceptual experience that Viśvanātha describes and appraises as a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa is the set of experiences that are appraised as 'hallucinations' in mainstream western psychological contexts. An experience that is appraised as a hallucination in these contexts can be defined as a 'sensory experience which occurs in the absence of corresponding external stimulation of the relevant sensory organ, has a sufficient sense of reality to

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<sup>5</sup> See Taves (2009), *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, pp. 8-26 for a more complete discussion of the scholarly benefits that can be derived from adopting an ascriptive approach for comparative and analytical purposes.

resemble a veridical perception, over which the subject does not feel s/he has direct and voluntary control, and which occurs in the awake state' (David, 2004, pp. 107-124). These defining characteristics share key parallels with the perceptual experience that Viśvanātha describes and appraises in the *Mādhurya Kādambinī* as a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa. In both cases, they can be described as perceptual experiences that 1) have no corresponding external stimuli that are publicly accessible, 2) are perceived as real to the person having the experience, 3) are not under the subject's direct and voluntary control; and 4) occur, at least initially, in an awake state. This set of features distinguishes these perceptual experiences from other types of perceptual experiences, such as the perceptual experience of perceiving a tree, for example, which has the tree as the perception's corresponding, publicly accessible external stimulus. Within the framework of naturalism, the set of uniquely shared features that Viśvanātha describes and appraises as a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa and the set of experiences that are appraised as 'hallucinations' in mainstream western psychological contexts suggests that similar natural processes would be involved in the occurrences of both. While these features distinguish these perceptual experiences from other types of perceptual experiences, it is important to recognize some of the critical differences that distinguish the way in which these analogues are interpreted and appraised.

Within the framework of Gauḍīya theology, perceptual experiences that are appraised as direct perceptual experiences (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa are viewed as having a corresponding external stimulus, namely Kṛṣṇa, who is believed to be a real and living deity who possesses a non-material anthropomorphic form. This deity is not, however, perceivable to the general public but only to those to whom he chooses to reveal himself. Within the framework of naturalism, however, phenomena are interpreted and evaluated in terms of naturalistic principles without appeal to any supernatural principles or causation. Within this framework there is no method to evaluate the claim that there is a supernatural deity referred to as Kṛṣṇa who can make himself perceivable at will to anyone he chooses at any time while remaining unperceivable to those to whom he chooses not to reveal himself. Such

supernatural claims fall outside the purview of naturalistic study and explanation. As a result, this study does not—and indeed cannot—speak to or make any claims about whether or not there is a real deity that is responsible for the occurrence of perceptual experiences that Viśvanātha or other early Gauḍīya theologians reference, and/or describe, and appraise as direct perceptual experiences (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>6</sup>

Another critical difference is that within the framework of Gauḍīya theology, perceptual experiences that early Gauḍīya theologians reference, and/or describe, and appraise as direct perceptual experiences (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa are viewed positively and symptomatic of one who has received Kṛṣṇa’s divine grace and attained the highest and most celebrated goal of life. In contrast, within western psychological models, perceptual experiences that are appraised as hallucinations are typically viewed negatively as a form of perceptual error and often times associated with various mental disorders. This latter association, though, may be due more to fact that, until recently, most of the research studies on these kinds of perceptual experiences have developed in the context of studies on the clinical populations in which they commonly occur, rather than on non-clinical populations. Increasingly, both psychological and anthropological researches on private perceptual experiences that psychologists and others operating within the framework of methodological naturalism appraise as hallucinations have shown that these experiences are not limited to people with clinical conditions.

For example, a study performed by Maurice Ohayon (2002) indicated that nearly 40% of the general population in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy has had an experience that qualifies as a hallucination. In addition to the use of psychoactive substances and alcohol, significant variables associated with the onset of various kinds of hallucinations—visual, auditory, olfactory, haptic, hypnagogic and hypnopompic—included anxiety, depression, sensory deprivation, and lack of or too much sleep (Ohayon, 2000, pp. 162-163).

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<sup>6</sup> Understanding how to reconcile the role that mental processes may play in the generation and formation of these experiences with theological understandings of Kṛṣṇa as an ontologically real deity with agency is an area of study for constructive theologians, rather than the secular scholar.

And in a recent article, Tanja Luhrmann (2011) argues that existing anthropological research suggests there are three distinct patterns of hallucinatory experiences that can be discerned: 1) those that are rare, brief, and non-distressing; 2) those that are frequent, extended, and distressing; and 3) those that are frequent but non-distressing (Luhrmann, 2011, pp. 73-76). Of these three, the second is typically associated with psychosis in psychiatric contexts and cause psychological distress. The other two, however, do not cause psychological distress and are frequently found to occur in various cultural and religious contexts among populations that would not be diagnosed as having a mental disorder. In this regard, the fifth and most recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2013) emphasizes the importance of clinicians taking into account a client's religious and cultural background when making a diagnosis of an individual's condition, being careful to distinguish culturally sanctioned response patterns from those that would otherwise be viewed as an indicator of psychotic disorders.

For the purposes of this investigation, I focus on Viśvanātha's references and descriptions of a perceptual experience that he appraises as a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa in his *Mādhurya Kādambinī* rather than those of other early Gauḍīya theologians for several reasons. First, he offers one of the most extensive and rich phenomenological descriptions and discussions that can be found in the primary literature. These descriptions form part of his exegetical elaborations on the nine progressive stages of self-transformation and development that culminate in the attainment of *premā*, or 'supreme love,' which were first articulated by Rūpa Gosvāmin,<sup>7</sup> who is arguably the Gauḍīya tradition's most influential and innovative theologians.

Second, while there is much that is conventional in Viśvanātha's account, the tenor and content of key descriptions and discussions he offers suggests that he is likely basing them, at least to some extent, on personal experiences he (or possibly others) had, rather than being solely based on inherited teachings and interpretations thereof. For example, near the end of his description of the devotee's

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<sup>7</sup> *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.4.15-16.

direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa, he compares the devotee’s emotional response to that of a poet who realizes that his attempts to allude to the Lord’s splendid form through poetic analogy amount to a transgression and defilement in light of the form he has just seen (*samīkṣita-śrī-mūrti-rūpeṇa*).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, though he writes from a third person point of view in the capacity of an exegetical commentator, he does not include any scriptural proof texts in the context of his descriptions of the direct perceptual experience of Kṛṣṇa, which is a standard and expected practice in Gauḍīya exegetical work. He justifies this exclusion by stating that what he has described is brought directly (*sākṣāt*) into the range of sensory experience (*sākṣād-anubhava-gocaratām prāpitesu*) and that referencing such evidence obstructs the path of such direct experience (*pramāṇāpekṣayā hy anubhava-vartma-pāruṣyā-pādakavāt*).<sup>9</sup> This claim seems to imply that he is basing his descriptions, at least in part, on experiences he personally had rather than basing them solely on inherited teachings and interpretations thereof.

### **Direct Perceptual Experiences (*Sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa**

The first six stages of devotion that Viśvanātha discusses in his *Mādhurya Kādambinī* include the development of faith (*śraddhā*), the importance of being in the company of and taking guidance from advanced saintly persons (*sādhu-saṅga*), ‘unsteady engagement in devotional practices’ (*aniṣṭhitā bhajana-kriyā*), ‘clearing of obstacles’ (*anartha-nivṛttiḥ*) that prevent one from steady engagement in devotional practices, ‘steady engagement in devotional practices’ (*niṣṭhitā bhajana-kriyā*), and eventually a particular ‘relish’ (*ruci*) for practicing them. These practices would have included observing various sexual regulations and dietary laws and engaging in various ritual, meditative, and visualization practices. The final three stages, wherein Viśvanātha describes the onset of a perceptual experience that he describes and appraises as a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa, consists of the development of ‘attachment’ (*āsakti*) to Kṛṣṇa, which is viewed as a maturation of the

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<sup>8</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.10.

<sup>9</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.12.

previous stage of ‘relish’ (*ruci*); the development of ‘loving emotion’ (*bhāva*) for Kṛṣṇa, which is viewed as a maturation of ‘attachment’ (*āsakti*) and causes the devotee to think and relate to Kṛṣṇa in particular ways relative to the particular type of love one feels towards Kṛṣṇa;<sup>10</sup> and then finally, under the right conditions, the development of ‘supreme love’ (*premā*), which Viśvanātha praises as the ‘crown-jewel of human pursuits’ (*puruṣārtha cūḍāmaṇiḥ*). Viśvanātha’s descriptions of these final three stages, which I will now discuss more fully, serve as the primary focus of this study.

### ***Āsakti*, ‘Attachment’**

The seventh stage in the development of ‘supreme love,’ or *premā*, is the development of *āsakti*, or ‘attachment.’ The signature characteristic of one who has advanced to this level is the development of deep emotional attachment to Kṛṣṇa, who Viśvanātha describes as becoming the primary object (*viṣaya*) of the practitioner’s attention and devotion over and above anything else.<sup>11</sup> At this stage Viśvanātha describes the devotee’s mind as no longer drifting from absorption in thoughts of Kṛṣṇa to other topics, as he described was the case in the preceding stage of development (*ruci*), but rather as automatically drifting from other topics to thoughts of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>12</sup> He describes this level of attachment to Kṛṣṇa as ‘polishing the mirror of the heart in such a way that the Lord, who is suddenly reflected there [in the heart], becomes almost as if visible’ (*āsaktir evāntaḥ-karaṇa-mukuraṃ tathā mārjayati yathā tatra sahasā pratibimbīto bhagavān avalokyamāna iva bhavati*)<sup>13</sup> and causing objects, people, events or circumstances that the devotee comes across to effortlessly remind the devotee of Kṛṣṇa and increase his desire to attain him. In his description, he compares the devotee’s state of mind to that of a covetous merchant:

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<sup>10</sup> There are five principle forms of love that one can cultivate in relation to Kṛṣṇa: 1) a neutral form of love (*śānta*), 2) love in service (*dāsa*), 3) love as a friend (*sakhī*), 4) love as a protector or parent (*pitr*), and 5) love as a lover (*preyasī*); see *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 7.4.

<sup>11</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 6.1.

<sup>12</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 6.1.

<sup>13</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 6.1.

Dwelling in his own home like a miserly merchant who is greedily desirous of great wealth, he sits down, then gets up, then sleeps, and anxiously thinks (*^cint*) with a forlorn expression: ‘What should I do? Where should I go? By what means could I obtain that desired object?’<sup>14</sup>

He further describes the devotee as sometimes exhibiting odd behavior, which causes people to think he has gone out of his mind (*channa-buddhiḥ*), among other misinterpretations.

### ***Bhāva/rati*: the eighth stage**

As *āsakti* matures, it is transformed into *bhāva*, which is also referred to as *rati*, or ‘love’ for

Kṛṣṇa.<sup>15</sup> Viśvanātha describes the devotee at this level of development as intensely longing to relish the various attributes of Kṛṣṇa’s divine form to such an extent that he feels he will be able to experience (*anu + ^bhū*) and perceive (*^lābh*) them at any moment. He longs to see the blackness of Kṛṣṇa’s limbs, the reddish tinges of the corners of his eyes and lips, the white hue of moonlight that is his smile; and the yellow color of his clothes and ornaments; he longs to hear the song of Kṛṣṇa’s flute and the jingling of his ankle bells; he wonders what it would be like to feel the tender touch of Kṛṣṇa’s two hands, which causes his hairs to stand erect; his nose opens wide as if he can perceive (*^labh*) Kṛṣṇa’s sweet fragrance; and it seems as though he can taste the moisture of Kṛṣṇa’s lips.<sup>16</sup>

In this state, Viśvanātha describes the devotee as having a flashing glimpse of Kṛṣṇa (*tadīya-sphūrṭi*) that causes his mind to rejoice as if Kṛṣṇa were immediately present (*sākṣāt*) before him.<sup>17</sup> When this flashing glimpse and the sweetness of relishing him disappears, he describes the devotee as becoming depressed (*vi + ^sad*) and exhausted (*^glai*).<sup>18</sup> He further describes the devotee as remembering Kṛṣṇa at all times; becoming increasingly identified

<sup>14</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 6.2. All translations of Sanskrit texts are the result of a joint effort between me and Aleksandar Uskokov.

<sup>15</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 7.1.

<sup>16</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 7.2.

<sup>17</sup> Within Gauḍīya theology, the *sphūrṭi* form of Kṛṣṇa is a “flashing vision” or “flashing appearance” of Kṛṣṇa, often occurring during deep states of meditative absorption or separation. It is typically fleeting and serves as a foreshadowing or foretaste of the encounter to come, such as the more sustained and defined perceptual experiences of Kṛṣṇa that Viśvanātha discusses occur during the stage of *premā*. For more discussion on the nuance of the term and its distinctions from other manifestations of Kṛṣṇa, see Brzezinski (1997), p. 58 and Brzezinski (1999), pp. 21-22.

<sup>18</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 7.2.

(*ahantā*) with a *siddha-deha*, or ‘perfected body,’ which is used in meditative practices to serve and relate to Kṛṣṇa in a particular loving way; and experiencing a strong sense of possessive attachment (*mamatā*) for Kṛṣṇa that Viśvanātha compares to that which a bee might have for the honey of Kṛṣṇa’s lotus-like feet.<sup>19</sup>

As in the previous stage of *āsakti*, his behavior can be such that common people think he has gone mad (*unmatta*), though advanced practitioners recognize his advanced state.<sup>20</sup> Viśvanātha also discusses the different types of loving moods with which a devotee may identify that causes the devotee to experience the Lord’s sweetness in particular ways relative to his or her particular feelings of love of which there are five principle kinds: a neutral form of love (*śānta*), love in service (*dāsa*), love as a friend (*sakhi*), love as a protector or parent (*pitṛ*), and love as a lover (*preyasī*).<sup>21</sup>

### **Premā: the ninth stage**

Viśvanātha then describes that *bhāva*, under the right conditions, matures into *premā*, an emotional state appraised as pure love for Kṛṣṇa, which is the culminating ninth and final stage towards which the others lead. When *premā* arises, Viśvanātha describes the devotee’s remaining emotional attachments to the products of the mundane world as being redirected to the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa’s transcendent qualities, name, and form.<sup>22</sup> Following Rūpa’s descriptions before him, Viśvanātha characterizes *premā* as consisting of a special form of condensed bliss (*sāndrānanda-viśeṣātmā*) that attracts Kṛṣṇa.<sup>23</sup> He compares the mental state of a devotee who is under the influence of *premā* to the mental states of a great warrior and a greedy thief, both of whom have lost all sense of discrimination and all sense of themselves due to their frenzied absorption in the objects they seek.

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<sup>19</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 7.3.

<sup>20</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 7.3.

<sup>21</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 7.4.

<sup>22</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.1.

<sup>23</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.2.

He further compares the devotee’s longing for Kṛṣṇa to the scorching heat of the sun and a hunger that cannot be satiated until the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa’s qualities and forms appear (*āvirbhāvita*) due to having a sudden flashing glimpse (*sphūrti*) of him.<sup>24</sup> As *premā* increases, the devotee’s intense longing to have a direct perceptual experience of perceiving Kṛṣṇa directly (*bhagavat-sākṣātkāram*) increases. In other words, he longs for Kṛṣṇa to personally manifest himself in a manner that allows the devotee to directly (*sākṣāt*)—in an immediate sense—perceive Kṛṣṇa’s form and presence. Flashing glimpses (*sphūrti*) of Kṛṣṇa at this point no longer pacify the devotee’s intense yearning and, as he loses all attraction for mundane objects, Viśvanātha describes him as falling into a state of repentant anguish.<sup>25</sup>

Viśvanātha then describes how the devotee’s pure love (*premā*) attracts Kṛṣṇa and causes Kṛṣṇa to become visible to the eyes (*nayana-gocarīkaroti*) of the devotee, who becomes overwhelmed with an ocean of bliss that ‘cannot be measured with the stick of a poet’s eloquence’ (*nārhati kavi-sarasvatī-lakṣyā parimeyatām*).<sup>26</sup> He describes Kṛṣṇa as first manifesting (*prakāśyate*) his beauty to the astonished devotee’s eyes (*locanayoḥ*), the sweetness of which causes all the devotee’s senses and mind to become like eyes, which brings about obstacles such as paralysis, shivering and tears. The resulting bliss he experiences causes him to swoon with ecstasy. Then as if to awaken him, Kṛṣṇa manifests his fragrance to the devotee’s nose and senses, all of which become like the nose and the devotee swoons a second time.<sup>27</sup> Viśvanātha then goes on to describe similar patterns occurring with regard to Kṛṣṇa’s manifesting himself to the devotees other senses, including the ears, sense of touch, and sense of taste and the devotee’s experience of Kṛṣṇa’s magnanimity, compassion and affection.<sup>28</sup>

He describes the devotee as perceiving these manifestations of Kṛṣṇa in different ways relative to the particular loving mood (*bhāva*) with which the devotee identifies. For example, the devotee who

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<sup>24</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.2.

<sup>25</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.3.

<sup>26</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.4.

<sup>27</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.5.

<sup>28</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.5-8.

relates to and loves Kṛṣṇa in the mood of service feels his touch as the Lord's feet on his head; one who relates to and loves Kṛṣṇa in the mood of friendship feels the touch of Kṛṣṇa's hands on his own hands; those who have parental affection for him feel the touch of wiping Kṛṣṇa's tears from his face; and those who relate to him as their lover feel his touch as the touch of his chest on theirs.<sup>29</sup> Included in this account is a conversational exchange he narrates as taking place between Kṛṣṇa and the devotee. Therein the devotee declares his previous poetic attempts to describe the beauty of Kṛṣṇa's form through various poetic analogies as falling woefully short in light of the form of Kṛṣṇa he has just seen (*samīkṣita-śrī-mūrti-rūpeṇa*) and the visions of Kṛṣṇa's intimate associates and intimate places within Kṛṣṇa's divine realm of Vṛndāvana that were shown (*darśayitvā*) to him.

After these visions disappear,<sup>30</sup> Viśvanātha describes the devotee as gaining external awareness, opening his eyes, and desiring to see (*didṛkṣur*) Kṛṣṇa again. When he does not see him, he becomes distressed and questions whether what he has just experienced was a dream, an illusion, the result of some mental confusion, a mental concoction created by his strong desire to see Kṛṣṇa, a direct perceptual experience of him due to having a flashing glimpse (*sphūrti*) of him, and so on.<sup>31</sup> No longer seeing Kṛṣṇa, Viśvanātha describes the devotee as exhibiting erratic behavior and disturbed states of mind.<sup>32</sup> When he relates his doubts and experiences to a friend, the friend tells him that he is very fortunate because he has had a direct perceptual experience of the Lord (*bhagavat-sākṣātkāra*).<sup>33</sup> Hearing this, the devotee then wonders what he has done to achieve such a good fortune and if he will have the experience again, though these sentiments and ruminations quickly devolve into deep dismay and depression, motivating the devotee to go into isolation where he longingly prays to see (*^dṛś*) Kṛṣṇa's form again. No longer seeing him, however, he suffers and longingly weeps for Kṛṣṇa until he

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<sup>29</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.5.

<sup>30</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.10.

<sup>31</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.11.

<sup>32</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.11.

<sup>33</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.11.

passes from his body, which Viśvanātha describes as Kṛṣṇa making himself directly perceivable (*pratyakśībhūya*) to the devotee and leading him to his divine abode.<sup>34</sup>

Viśvanātha concludes his descriptions by declaring the meaning of Rūpa Gosvāmin's passage regarding these nine stages of personal transformation and development as now being properly revealed. He notes that he is aware of even higher states of attainable forms of love that Rūpa Gosvāmin discusses, but he declines to describe them because they would be too intense to experience in the physical body. It is at this point that he notes he has not included scriptural evidence for his descriptions of the higher stages of devotion, which he claims are brought directly into the range of sensory experience (*sākṣād-anubhava-gocaratām prāpitesu*). The reason for their exclusion, he argues, is because referencing such texts would serve to obstruct the experience of directly perceiving him (*pramāṇāpekṣayā hy anubhava-vartma-pāruṣyā-pādakavāt*).<sup>35</sup> However, for the sake of those who depend on them, he then goes on to offer a succinct list of scriptural references that are intended to support key aspects of what he has just described.

### **Analysis**

In the above descriptions, Viśvanātha offers an extensive description of Kṛṣṇa manifesting himself to the devotee in a manner that allows the devotee to directly (*sākṣāt*) perceive Kṛṣṇa and the various aspects of his form and nature, which causes the devotee to become emotionally overwhelmed until Kṛṣṇa withdraws. Traditional historical-critical scholarship makes it clear that Viśvanātha articulates and frames his descriptions in terminology and categories that historically preceded him. For this reason, it is difficult to determine with any certainty the extent to which the details of Viśvanātha's descriptions build on the phenomenological content of what he or others may have actually experienced and to what extent they are, intentionally or not, the product of historical influence and theological conformity. However, as noted earlier,

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<sup>34</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.11.

<sup>35</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.12.

he argues that he has not included scriptural evidence in the course of his descriptions because what he has described is brought directly (*sākṣāt*) into the range of sensory experience (*sākṣād-anubhava-gocaratām prāpitesu*) and referencing such evidence would cause an obstruction of that direct experience (*pramāṇāpekṣayā hy anubhava-vartma-pāruṣyā-pādakavāt*).<sup>36</sup> This suggests that his descriptions build on experiences he (or possibly others) personally had.

In order to further evaluate this possibility, the analysis that follows focuses on using contemporary psychological research to determine whether or not we can plausibly account in natural terms for the occurrence of private perceptual experiences that may form a phenomenological basis for Viśvanātha's descriptions. This analysis, as discussed earlier, uses private perceptual experiences that are appraised as hallucinations as a heuristic analogue in light of 1) the unique structural and phenomenal features they share with private perceptual experiences that Viśvanātha describes and appraises as direct perceptual experiences of Kṛṣṇa, and 2) the extensive research that has been done on the mental processes involved in their generation and formation and the conditions under which these occur. With this in mind, I first analyze and present evidence from contemporary psychological research that implicates key mental processes in the occurrence of private perceptual experiences that are appraised as hallucinations and the conditions under which these mental processes are mobilized; second, I examine parallels that Viśvanātha explicitly or implicitly includes in his descriptions; and third I develop examples of potentially testable hypotheses in light of these parallels that can serve as a basis for further research. I follow this analysis section with a general discussion on the methodological limitations of this study, suggestions for future research, and a conclusion.

### ***Emotions***

Psychological research has implicated stressful and anxious emotional states in the precipitation of private perceptual experiences that are appraised as hallucinations. Viśvanātha also describes

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<sup>36</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.12. <sup>37</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 7.2.

the devotee as experiencing stressful and anxious emotional states that parallel these as precipitating both experiences of flashing glimpses (*sphūrṭi*) of Kṛṣṇa as well as the culminating and more dramatic private perceptual experiences that he describes and appraises as a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa.

Multiple studies of both clinical and non-clinical populations suggest that emotions, particularly stress and anxiety, are associated with the onset of experiences that are appraised as hallucinations. Stress and anxiety are generalized psychological terms that can characterize a range of specific emotional states. The *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (2006) defines stress as ‘psychological and physical strain or tension generated by physical, emotional, social, economic, or occupational circumstances, events, or experiences that are difficult to manage or endure’ (Coleman, 2006, p. 731) and anxiety as ‘a state of uneasiness, accompanied by dysphoria and somatic signs and symptoms of tension, focused on apprehension of possible failure, misfortune, or danger’ (Coleman, 2006, p. 46).

In a study performed by Frank Larøi and Martial Van der Linden (2005), nearly one-fourth of their non-clinical participants indicated that their hallucinatory experiences occurred in the context of a particularly difficult or stressful life event (Larøi and Van der Linden, 2005, p. 41). In another study, Paul Allen et al. (2005) evaluated the influence of emotions and reasoning on the generation of hallucinatory experiences among a sample of 327 undergraduates with no history of mental illness. Among the measures each participant filled out were the Launay Slade Hallucination Scale (LSHS), which is designed to measure hallucinatory predispositions by assessing clinical and sub-clinical hallucinatory experiences, and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS), which is designed to measure symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Higher scores on the former indicate a greater frequency of hallucinatory experiences, and higher scores on the latter indicate higher levels of emotional distress. Among the results, the study found that high levels of anxiety were a significant

predictor of hallucinatory experiences among the non-clinical population (Allen et al., 2005, p. 131).

Studies have also implicated emotional states of bereavement that accompany the loss of a loved one in the onset of experiences that are appraised as hallucinatory. For example, a study on fifty people in the first year after the death of a spouse, which would generally be considered a highly stressful even, indicated that post-bereavement hallucinations were frequent and considered helpful: ‘Half of the subjects felt the presence of the deceased (illusions); about one third reported seeing, hearing and talking to the deceased (hallucinations). Former marital harmony was found to make a person more prone to loneliness, crying and hallucinations or illusions’ (Grimby, 1993, p. 72).

### ***Parallels***

In light of these studies, it is significant to note that Viśvanātha describes the devotee as experiencing an escalation of stressful and anxious states just prior to the occurrence of what he describes and appraises as the devotee’s direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa. For example, during the stage of *āsakti*, which immediately precedes the stage of *bhāva*, during which Viśvanātha describes the practitioner as intensely longing to experience the various sensory dimensions of Kṛṣṇa’s form and experiencing brief ‘flashing visions’ (*tadīya-sphūrti*) of Kṛṣṇa, he compares the devotee’s state of mind to the highly anxious state of a covetous merchant who has become greedy for great wealth. These glimpses cause him to rejoice as if he had attained him directly (*kadāpi tadīya-śphūrtau taṃ sākṣāt prāptavad iva ceto hr̥ṣyet*), but then cause the devotee to become depressed and exhausted upon their disappearance (*tadaiva tat-tirobhāve viśīdet glāyed*).<sup>37</sup>

Then, as *bhāva* matures into *premā*, Viśvanātha describes the devotee as anxiously thinking and reflecting on the Lord (*bhagavat-cintanam*) and increasingly longing for a direct

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<sup>37</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 7.2.

perceptual experience of him (*bhagavat-sākṣātkāram*), which he compares to a hunger that cannot be satiated and that burns like the sun until he receives a direct experience of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>38</sup> Following the escalation of this longing, Viśvanātha describes the Lord as appearing within the domain of the devotee's eyes (*kṣaṇe bhaktasyāsyā nayana-gocarīkaroti*) and manifesting (*prakāśyate*) the various aspects and qualities of his form to the senses of the devotee.<sup>39</sup> It is also worth noting here that the Gauḍīya tradition advocates cultivating a form of devotion that is characterized by intense feelings of loss and separation from Kṛṣṇa (*viraha-bhakti*) that are comparable in many ways to feelings of deep bereavement.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Further research***

These parallels suggest that anxious and stressful emotional states may be a factor in occurrences of private perceptual experiences that Viśvanātha and other early Gauḍīya theologians reference, describe, and appraise as direct perceptual experiences of Kṛṣṇa. In order to gain further support for this working hypothesis, we can transform it into a potentially testable hypothesis, an example of which could read as follows: High levels of anxiety that are associated with feelings of eagerness and longing to be with Kṛṣṇa predict increased experiences of Kṛṣṇa that seem real to the practitioner but for which there is no corresponding external stimuli that are observable to others. Formulating such a hypothesis can serve as a starting point for developing more refined hypotheses and appropriate experimental and quasi-experimental research designs for generating quantitative data in contemporary contexts that will support or weaken the working hypothesis. In this particular case, the data would shed light on whether or not such emotional states have a significant correlation with people's experiences of Kṛṣṇa.

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<sup>38</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.4-6.

<sup>40</sup> For an extended discussion on the historical antecedents and developments documenting the rise and elevation of this form of *bhakti*, which was later appropriated into early Gauḍīya theological developments, see Hardy (1983).

### ***Conceptual processing***

Psychological research has also implicated conceptual processing mechanisms, especially the role of expectations and culture, in the occurrence and content formation of private perceptual experiences that are appraised as hallucinations. Parallel to this, devotees learn and are primed to expect a direct and immediate encounter with Kṛṣṇa in the course of their spiritual development through their study of sacred texts, engagement in *sādhana* practices, and immersion in Gauḍīya theological teachings.

Research on experiences appraised as hallucinations has implicated top-down cognitive processing, also known as conceptual processing, in their occurrence. ‘Top-down’ cognitive processing refers to processes that contribute to perception that do not originate in the external world but in the mind-brain of the perceiver (Aleman and Larøi, 2008, p. 91). As a result, missing information from expected sensory input is typically, though not always, correctly inferred or imposed in light of what a person expects to perceive:

Expecting you are about to see or hear something primes the perceptual system and actually lowers thresholds for perception. Such expectations can be conscious (e.g., explicit task instructions that you are going to hear something) or implicit and nonconscious (e.g., by being conditioned to expect hearing certain noises in certain environments without being aware of that) (Aleman and Larøi, 2008, p. 102).

Priming here specifically refers to conditions that bias a person or a group of people to interpret information that is presented to the senses in particular ways.

A research study demonstrating the contribution expectations can play to erroneous perceptions can be found in Barber’s and Calverley’s hallmark ‘White Christmas’ study (1964). The study involved 78 females, who were asked to close their eyes and hear a phonograph record with words and music playing ‘White Christmas’ (best-selling single of all time). After 30 seconds they were asked to open their eyes and indicate whether they heard the music clearly and believed the record had been playing; heard the music clearly and knew there was no record playing; had a vague impression of the record playing the music; or did not hear the

record. Even though the experimenters did not actually play any record, 49% of the subjects reported that they had clearly heard the phonograph record, but knew there was no record playing, and 5% reported clearly hearing the music and thought the record was actually playing, even though there was no record being played. In both instances, the induced expectation that certain music was playing led to the perception of hearing the music being played.

Relatedly, in a study that attempts to integrate research findings on the role of socio-cultural factors in relation to experiences appraised as hallucinations across cultures, Ihsan Al-Issa (1995) argues that ‘cultural beliefs may increase both the expectancy of the individual and perceived probability of certain types of hallucinations, under certain culturally controlled conditions. In non-Western cultures, for example, through a long process of socialization, individuals see and hear what is expected of them, increasing their level of suggestibility for these experiences’ (Al-Issa, 1995, 371).

Culture has also been implicated as a formative factor in shaping the content of experiences that are appraised as hallucinations. In a seminal study, Kausar Suhail and Raymond Cochrane (2002) compared the phenomenological content of hallucinations in three sample population groups of schizophrenic patients: 1) Pakistanis living in Britain (BP), 2) Pakistanis living in Pakistan (PP), and 3) and British white people living in Britain (BW). These three population groups were chosen because British Pakistanis were theorized to be more similar to Pakistanis living in Pakistan in terms of background cultural factors but more similar to British white patients in terms of their immediate environment, namely a British urban environment. They found that ‘comparisons indicated greater differences in phenomenology of delusions and hallucinations between the Pakistani pair (BP vs. PP) than between the British groups (BP vs. BW)’ (Suhail and Cochrane, 2002, p.126). On the basis of these results, Suhail and Cochrane conclude that culture plays a significant role in influencing the content of hallucinations in participants (Suhail and Cochrane, 2002, p. 137).

### ***Parallels***

Within the early Gauḍīya context and the more general religious cultural context of India of which the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition would have constituted a sub-culture, the notion that a practitioner could have a direct and immediate encounter with a deity such as Kṛṣṇa (or any other deity), would have been viewed as entirely within the realm of possibility and, if the path of *bhakti* is executed faithfully, expected. This particularly holds true in light of multiple references to such experiences occurring that early Gauḍīya theological authorities include in their written works, which shape what devotees learn to expect to happen while traversing the path of *bhakti*.<sup>41</sup> These expectations are implicitly reflected in Viśvanātha's descriptions.

Moreover, the social context, culture, and environment in which a devotee lived and the religious practices in which he or she would have been engaged would have served to augment and chronically prime the devotee to expect a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa. For example, devotees typically lived in domiciles that were replete with objects of worship and other reminders of Kṛṣṇa that were invested with soteriological significance and meaning, such as images of Kṛṣṇa that have been constructed and ritually installed on a home altar, sacred texts, and other paraphernalia related with Kṛṣṇa or his worship. Gauḍīya teachings further emphasize living among and exclusively associating with a community of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas and/or living near or in a physical institution that was dedicated to the practice of devotion to Kṛṣṇa. They emphasize residing in places of pilgrimage, such as Vṛndāvana, which is held to be invested with Kṛṣṇa's divine presence and which has innumerable associations with Kṛṣṇa that would have served to constantly remind a practitioner of Kṛṣṇa. They also emphasize regularly engaging in hearing of and singing about Kṛṣṇa's divine names (*nāmas*), forms (*rūpas*), qualities (*guṇas*), and play (*līlā*), including his ability to manifest himself at any moment to the faithful devotee; venerating his deity image (*mūrti*) as a living deity; engaging in

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<sup>41</sup> See for example, *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.1.39, 1.2.182, 2.5.11, 2.5.81, and 3.1.36-42; *Bhakti Sandarbha* 1, 7, 15, 16, 161, 179, 187, 188, 189, 234, 256, 268, 277, and 279; and *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 6 and 8.

meditative visualizations that focus on envisioning oneself in elaborate detail as a participant in Kṛṣṇa's divine play (*līlā*); and other practices that bolster belief in Kṛṣṇa and expectations that Kṛṣṇa will directly manifest himself to the devotee.

***Further research***

The parallels above suggest that a devotee with strong expectations that Kṛṣṇa will directly reveal himself to the devotee is likely to lower the devotee's perceptual threshold for having such an experience. In order to gain further support for this working hypothesis, we can transform it into a potentially testable hypothesis, an example of which could read as follows: Among those who identify as Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, strong expectations that Kṛṣṇa will directly reveal himself predicts more occurrences of such experiences than weak expectations that Kṛṣṇa will reveal himself. Such a hypothesis can then serve as a starting point for developing more refined hypotheses and appropriate experimental and quasi-experimental research designs for generating quantitative data in contemporary contexts that can support or weaken the working hypotheses. In this particular case, the data would shed light on whether or not a devotee's expectations can play a role in the occurrence of private perceptual experiences that may be described and appraised as experiences of Kṛṣṇa.

We can also transform the research question of whether or not Gauḍīya religious culture influences the content of experiences that are interpreted, described, and appraised as experiences of Kṛṣṇa into a potentially testable hypothesis. For example: Among indigenous devotional practitioners living in West Bengal who have a tendency to have experiences that are believed to be experiences of a deity, being devoted to Kṛṣṇa predicts more experiences that are appraised as experiences of the deity Kṛṣṇa than the goddess Kālī and being devoted to Kālī predicts more experiences that are appraised as experiences of Kālī than Kṛṣṇa. As before, these hypotheses can serve as a starting point for developing more refined testable hypotheses and

appropriate research designs for generating quantitative data that can support or weaken the working hypothesis.

### ***Source-monitoring***

Psychological research has also implicated source-monitoring errors in the occurrence of private perceptual experiences that are appraised as hallucinations. Parallel to this, Viśvanātha explicitly recognizes the possibility of source-monitoring errors in his descriptions of the devotee's puzzlement regarding what later turns out to be appraised and accepted as a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa.

Building on source-monitoring theories, Richard Bentall (1990) argues 'that the available evidence suggests that hallucinations result from a failure of the metacognitive skills involved in discriminating between self-generated and external sources of information' (Bentall, 1990, p. 82). In other words, he is arguing that experiences that are appraised as hallucinations occur when the metacognitive skills that we use to discern the source from which the information was derived fails for one reason or another. Building on Bentall's theory, Larøi and Woodward (2007) examine two critical dimensions of source-monitoring in relation to hallucinations: 1) the self-generated/non-self-generated dimension, and 2) the inner/outer dimension:

The former dimension refers to the perceived/subjective origin of a given cognitive event. For example, a cognitive event that is perceived as produced by the person him/herself is considered a self-generated event, but a cognitive event that is perceived as generated not by the person, but by an external agent, is characterized as a non-self-generated event. The second dimension refers to the localization of the cognitive event in space. An event that the person locates in inner space is referred to as an inner event. In contrast, an event that the person locates in outer space—that is, outside of the subject—is referred to as an outer event. It is important to underline that it is the *subjective* experience of an event being inner, outer, self-generated, or non-self-generated that is decisive (Larøi and Woodward, 2007, p. 111).

Larøi and Woodward hypothesize that the combination of these two dimensions gives rise to four different types of cognitive events: 1) inner, self-generated events; 2) inner, non-self-generated events; 3) outer, self-generated events; and 4) outer, non-self-generated events. Inner, self-generated

events are ordinary and commonly experienced. They include, for example, daydreams, memories, songs, imagery, bodily sensations, images, voices, thoughts, ideas, sounds, and impulses: ‘For all these events, the subjective origin is the person (i.e., self-generated) and the subjective spatial location is internal (i.e., inner)’ (Larøi and Woodward, 2007, p. 111). When these inner, self-generated events are experienced as inner non-self-generated events, outer self-generated events, or outer non-self-generated events, they are considered forms of hallucinations. In other words, ‘hallucinations may be viewed as inner, self-generated events that are erroneously attributed’ (Larøi and Woodward, 2007, p. 111).

Based on these distinctions, Larøi and Woodward further hypothesize that there are two cognitive processing steps that underlie the onset of hallucinations: the alienation of inner, self-generated events and the misattribution of inner, self-generated events:

The first type of cognitive process involves loss of the cognitive representations that code the inner, self-generated nature of what will become a hallucination. In other words, an inner, self-generated event is (subjectively speaking) not clearly experienced as inner, self-generated, or both. The second type of cognitive process occurs when hallucinators attribute inner, self-generated events to the specific origin/location combination that determines their hallucinatory experience (Larøi and Woodward, 2007, pp. 111-112).

Thus, alienation of an inner, self-generated event refers to those inner, self-generated events that are not experienced as such due to a loss of the cognitive representations that indicate their self-generated nature. Misattribution of an inner, self-generated event refers to those inner, self-generated events that are misattributed to an outer, self-generated event; outer, non-self-generated event; or an inner, non-self-generated event.

### ***Parallels***

In light of the above, it is reasonable to infer that in some cases devotees’ metacognitive skills could become disrupted or fail in some way that leads them to attribute an inner, self-generated event to an inner, non-self-generated event that is believed to be or have been an instance of directly perceiving Kṛṣṇa. Indeed, Viśvanātha himself indicates an awareness of this possibility while narrating the devotee’s thoughts at the conclusion of his experiences of Kṛṣṇa. There he describes the devotee as

being confused about the source of his experience to such an extent that he ponders whether or not what he has experienced was an authentic experience of Kṛṣṇa or a creation of his mind due to his strong desires for Kṛṣṇa (*kiṃ vā manoratha-paripāka-prāpto 'yam vastu-viśeṣah*), among other possibilities. It's not until another devotee assures him that he must have had a direct perceptual experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of Kṛṣṇa that he comes to recognize and accept what has occurred.<sup>42</sup>

### **Further research**

In light of the above parallels, we can develop the following potentially testable hypothesis, which can serve as starting point for more refined testable hypotheses: Among practitioners who claim to have equally strong expectations that Kṛṣṇa will reveal himself, higher occurrences of experiences that are appraised as experiences of Kṛṣṇa predict higher occurrences of other kinds of source-monitoring errors. If the hypothesis is supported, it provides indirect correlational support that source-monitoring errors may be playing a role in the generation of at least some experiences that are appraised as experiences of Kṛṣṇa.

### **Methodological limitations and future research**

Traditional historical-critical methods are critical tools for evaluating and interpreting the extent to which the details of Viśvanātha's descriptions are explicitly or implicitly borrowed from and/or informed by previous ideas, teachings, and categories; they can parse out much of what is inherited or borrowed, what is original, and their relationship in light of historical circumstances. The approach I have used in this paper serves as an additional tool in the toolbox of methods available to historians for evaluating and interpreting historical data and claims. In trying to make sense of the private perceptual experiences that Viśvanātha and other early Gauḍīya theologians reference, describe, and appraise as direct perceptual experiences of Kṛṣṇa, private perceptual experiences that are appraised as hallucinations in psychological contexts seem, *prima facie*, to share uniquely similar structural and phenomenological features. Since more is understood about the natural processes involved in the

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<sup>42</sup> *Mādhurya Kādambinī* 8.11.

occurrence of the latter, it consequently serves as a promising heuristic analogue for thinking about what natural processes could be involved in the former. In the process of comparing this heuristic analogue with the case study, a series of more specific parallels then emerged, further suggesting that similar naturally occurring mental processes and conditions could be involved in occurrences of both. As discussed above, these parallels include 1) an escalation of stressful and anxious types of emotional states that immediately precede and lead up to the occurrence of the private perceptual experience; 2) a sense of heightened, primed, and culturally determined expectation of a particular kind of perceptual experience, which then occurs; and 3) ambiguity about the source of the private perceptual experience from the perspective of the person described as having the experience. While the inferences derived from observing these parallels are not conclusive, they do serve to warrant further research and investigation.

To this end, three complementary avenues of future research seem particularly promising. The first is historical and involves cross-referencing and analyzing various references and descriptions of private perceptual experiences of Kṛṣṇa that Viśvanātha, other early Gauḍīya theologians, and the teachings they directly and indirectly build on describe and appraise as direct perceptual experiences of Kṛṣṇa and other deities both within and outside the Gauḍīya tradition and at different points of time in history. Such cross-referencing, which is standard practice for historians, can help us get a better handle on the kinds of experiences that individuals or communities appraise as experiences of Kṛṣṇa and other deities; differences and similarities between the descriptions of these experiences; their frequency and importance; the extent to which early Gauḍīya theologians reference and build on other theologians' descriptions or other sources that may or may not be appropriated within the Gauḍīya tradition; and so on. Such research would provide a basis for identifying portions of Viśvanātha's text that he is repeating and embellishing and more resources for hypothesizing about the extent to which his descriptions may be reflective of personal experiences he or others had.

A second avenue of research is ethnographic and involves interviewing living practitioners and developing a database of information related to private perceptual experiences and other experiences they have had. Such a database could include narrative descriptions of experiences and their effects on the person who had them; details regarding the time, place and circumstances leading up to, during, and following the occurrence of the experiences; and extensive demographic information about the practitioner's practices, beliefs, cultural background and living environments. Such information can then be analyzed and used as a basis for developing a typology of experiences that are appraised as experiences of Kṛṣṇa; discerning patterns in the descriptions and/or the circumstances surrounding the occurrence of any experiences; and discerning relationships between experiences and beliefs, practices, emotions, immediate environment, events, and so on. The results of these analyses can be compared with analyses of historical descriptions and data to look for patterns of similarities and differences that may shed further light on the extent to which experiences that early Gauḍīya theologians refer to and describe as experiences of Kṛṣṇa are plausible and what mental processes are involved in their generation and formation.

Analysis of the above historical and ethnographic information can also contribute to a third avenue of research, which I have advocated throughout this paper, which is experimental and quasi-experimental research. The above historical and ethnographic information can serve as a basis from which to develop refined testable hypotheses and construct or adapt adequate research designs for obtaining evidence in contemporary contexts for the role that specific types of mental processes may have played in the generation and formation of private perceptual experiences in historical contexts that Viśvanātha and others describe and appraise as experiences of directly perceiving Kṛṣṇa. For scholars trained in the humanities, this step in the research process provides an opportunity to work in conjunction with interdisciplinary collaborators or an impetus to learn the interdisciplinary skills needed to formulate refined testable hypotheses, construct or adapt appropriate research designs, implement those designs, and collect and analyze the data.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, psychological research on our heuristic analogue has implicated a range of specific mental processes in the occurrence of private perceptual experiences that may form a phenomenological basis for what Viśvanātha and other early Gauḍīya theologians reference, describe, and appraise as experiences of perceiving Kṛṣṇa directly (*sākṣāt*). Further historical, ethnographic, experimental, and quasi-experimental research can help further tease apart and better discern to what extent these references and descriptions are likely borrowed; to what extent they may be reflective of actual experiences that Viśvanātha and/or others may have personally had; enrich our ability to interpret and explain critical aspects of the Gauḍīya tradition's historical and theological development; reveal relationships between Gauḍīya religious beliefs, practices, and experiences; increase our understanding of the reasons early Gauḍīya theologians may have emphasized certain kinds of *sādhana* practices over others in addition to historical reasons; and shed light on what mental processes and conditions may contribute to occurrences of private perceptual experiences that are interpreted, described, and appraised as perceiving various deities and supernatural agents not only in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava historical contexts, but also in different cultures around the world in both historical and contemporary contexts.

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