

## **Caitanya and the Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana: A reappraisal of early Caitanya Vaiṣṇava intellectual history**

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The writings of the Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana have, since the early seventeenth century, been the foundation for all Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theology, and it is hard to find in the tradition any figure that is invested with greater authority than these authors. Some of the best scholars of the Caitanya tradition, such as Sushil Kumar De, Ramakanta Chakravarti, and Hitesranjan Sanyal, have argued that unlike the Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal, who composed several hagiographies of Caitanya, the Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana cared little for Caitanya, at least theologically. Though the Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana offer homage to Caitanya in most of their writings, their theology centres on Kṛṣṇa not Caitanya, and it is not until the early seventeenth century, when their student Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja composed the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and used their ideas to develop a comprehensive theology of Caitanya's life, that the Bengali tradition of Caitanya devotion was synthesised with the Kṛṣṇa theology of Vṛndāvana.

This paper aims to challenge this view, by examining what the Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana—Rūpa, Sanātana, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, Jīva and Raghunāthadāsa—wrote about Caitanya in their works on theology, ritual practice, and poetry. First, I will attempt to demonstrate that these authors did indeed have a theology of Caitanya, and will examine how Caitanya figures into their theology of devotion to Kṛṣṇa. In the light of this, I will then explore the reasons why the Gosvāmīs sometimes chose not to emphasise Caitanya's divinity in their writings. Drawing on their own works as well as other early historical sources, I will argue that they envisioned the development of a non-sectarian Vaiṣṇava culture, that included the various other Vaiṣṇava groups active in Vraja at the time.