

**Love in Separation: An exploration of longing in devotion
(Viraha-Bhakti) in the Hindu and Christian faiths.**

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Abstract

This dissertation is a Hindu-Christian comparative study on the subject of *viraha-bhakti*, devotional love-in-separation. Although possessing distinctive characteristics, the longing for God in his divine absence that is encountered in Hinduism and Christianity corresponds closely with each other and forms an important devotional practice within both traditions. Focussing on a relatively unexplored subject in academic research, this study in comparative theology presents an opportunity for scholarly engagement and for favourably contributing to interreligious dialogue. In the religiously pluralistic setting of the twenty-first century, reciprocal learning across religions can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of devotion to God. Engaging in constructive dialogue and shared learning within theistic traditions can also facilitate individuals' spiritual and religious pursuit for God. An understanding of the totality of devotion and the fullness of loving God necessitates consideration of both the aspects of divine presence and divine absence. It is the powerful uncompromising longing and all-consuming love, which becomes greatly strengthened during God's absence, that keeps us connected to God in the midst of separation and eventually leads to divine union. This thesis explores the motif of longing in devotional love-in-separation in the Hindu and Christian faiths. In doing so, it seeks to advance an understanding of the concept of longing as encountered in the *bhakti* theology of Gauḍīya Vaishnavism and the mystical theology of Carmelite Catholicism. I do this by engaging in a comparative reading of the *Gopī Gīta* and *The Spiritual Canticle*. Within this framework, I examine longing through the facets of seeking, remembering, yearning and imploring. The thesis concludes that in both texts, longing emerges as a dynamic force which leads to ultimate self-surrender. In doing so, it reveals a new dimension of surrender, which I identify as belongingness.

Dedication

Dedicated in loving devotion

to

Lord Shri Radha Krishna

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The Hindu and Christian theistic traditions are both centred on achieving the human telos of life through loving devotion to a personal God, with the most intimate form of devotion being depicted through a lover-beloved relationship. Termed as ‘theistic intimism’,¹ this relationship of love comprises phases of union and separation in which divine presence and divine absence are respectively experienced.

The *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, a Hindu devotional treatise, delineates the nature of devotion (*bhakti*) to be of supreme love² and identifies the Gopīs,³ devotees of Lord Krishna, as the ideal exemplars of this love.⁴ Of the eleven types of *bhakti* enumerated by the text, *viraha-bhakti* is declared as the highest form of devotion.⁵ This devotion exhibits the ultimate expression of love for a Beloved God; a divine love (*prema*) which is pure, selfless, unconditional and solely for pleasing God.⁶ This passionate divine love is defined as undiminishing even if obstacles or reasons exist which may cause it to be destroyed, rather it persists and ever-increases.⁷ Consequently, it powerfully prevails, even in the state of divine absence.

Viraha-bhakti is the devotional practice performed in the experience of the absence of God, or in the experience of separation from God.⁸ It is succinctly and commonly

¹ Graham M. Schweig, ‘Interiority and Connectivity: A Brief Comparative Study on the Relation of Scripture and Contemplation in Bridal Mysticism and Krishna Bhakti’, *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, Vol. 27, Article 4 (2014), 11-39 (p. 11). <<https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1576>>, [Accessed: 28 May 2018].

² *Aphorisms on the Gospel of Divine Love or Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, Sanskrit text and English translation and commentary, trans. by Swāmi Tyāgiśānanda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1972; repr. 2016), *Sūtra* 2, p. 1. [Hereafter abbreviated *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*].

³ Gopīs are cowherd milkmaidens of Vraja (also known as Vrindāvana) who cherished utmost devotion to Krishna, the Supreme God. This thesis will use the term Gopīs (the plural form of Gopī) since the maidens are generally referred to as a group in connection with Krishna.

⁴ *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, *Sūtra* 21, p. 6.

⁵ *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, *Sūtra* 82, p. 23.

⁶ Graham M. Schweig, ‘The Dance between Tantra and Moksha: On the "Erotic" Dimension of the Gītagovinda and Krishna Bhakti Theology’, *Journal of Vaishnava Studies*, 23(1) (2013), 169-206 (pp. 187-188).

⁷ Rūpa Gosvāmin, *Ujjvala-nīlamanī with commentaries of Jīva Gosvami and Visvanahta Cakravarti Thakura*, trans. by HH Bhanuswami (Chennai: Sri Vaikunta Enterprises, 2014), 14.63, p. 790. [Hereafter abbreviated *Ujjvala-nīlamanī*].

⁸ Graham M. Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love: The Rāsa Līlā of Krishna from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, India’s Classic Sacred Love Story* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007) (originally published by Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 165. [Hereafter abbreviated *Dance of Divine Love*].

defined as devotional love-in-separation⁹ and this is the term that will be adopted in this thesis. *Viraha* meanwhile, is a complex Sanskrit word that extends beyond its generic meaning of ‘separation’.¹⁰ Scholars have outlined varying translations to convey the ethos of the literal-affective composite term. Hawley defines *viraha* as longing, its predominant trope, and further elaborates it as the ‘fact and feeling of separation’. This encapsulates the state of being separated from a dearly beloved and the associated array of experiences and sentiments which it is attended by.¹¹ Hillgardner similarly connotes *viraha* as ‘love-longing’¹² and Schweig’s description highlights the condition and experience of ‘being or feeling apart’ along with ‘the intense longing of the lover to be closer to the beloved’.¹³ I find these definitions to be the most germane for the purpose of this research.

Longing thus emerges as the defining trait of *viraha-bhakti*, and the very essence of love. Compounded by agony, despair, anxiety, love and suffering, it is through an irrepressible longing for God that separation is overcome and union with the divine is made possible. In the Vaishnava tradition, love and longing for Krishna is an important part of the devotional practice that is modelled on the *viraha-bhakti* and perfect love of the Gopīs. Martin posits that ‘it is in this ever-deepening dance of love and longing for God that life proves to be most meaningful’.¹⁴

Transitioning from an Eastern tradition to a Western tradition, a similar theme of love and longing is found in Christianity. The Psalms express a vital longing for God and his love, which is essential to life and its purpose.¹⁵ Augustine’s statement, ‘Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee’¹⁶ echoes the innate need of the soul to be in the presence of God. The Song of Songs also reverberates with a

⁹ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 239.

¹⁰ Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and philologically arranged* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1872), p. 935. Google ebook. [Accessed: 16 July 2019].

¹¹ John Stratton Hawley, ‘Longing in Hinduism’, in *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religions*, vol. 1, ed. by Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, 2 vols (Santa Barbara; Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2008), pp. 374-377 (p. 375).

¹² Holly Hillgardner, *Longing and Letting Go: Christian and Hindu Practices of Passionate Non-Attachment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 21.

<DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190455538.001.0001>, [Accessed: 21 September 2018].

¹³ Schweig, ‘The Dance between Tantra and Moksha’, p. 178.

¹⁴ Nancy M. Martin, ‘Love and Longing in Devotional Hinduism’, in *The Meaning of Life in World Religions*, ed. by Joseph Runzo and Nancy M. Martin (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), pp. 203-220 (p. 215).

¹⁵ Klaus K. Klostermaier, ‘Hṛdayavidyā: A Sketch of a Hindu-Christian Theology of Love’, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 9(4) (1972), 750-776 (pp. 757-761).

<ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATL A0000734029&site=ehost-live>, [Accessed: 6 September 2018].

¹⁶ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Book 1, trans. by E. B. Pusey (Edward Bouverie), [Project Gutenberg EBook #3296], <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3296/3296-h/3296-h.htm>, [Accessed: 29 March 2019].

deep-rooted love for God as a Beloved and the passionate yearning that ensues in his absence.¹⁷ Although there is no specialised terminology to define *viraha-bhakti* or *viraha* in Christianity, terms such as bridal mysticism and spiritual union encompass the notion of a deep-seated, love-filled longing as an integral aspect of contemplation, prayer and worship to attain mystical union with the Beloved.

Drawing inspiration from the Bible and especially the Song of Songs, love-longing and devotion in separation forms a prevalent part of Catholic mysticism, and these themes are reflected in the writings, poetry and sermons of many saints and mystics.¹⁸ Teresa of Avila speaks of the wounds of love that cause the heart great suffering in God's absence, and yet it is a pain gladly accepted.¹⁹ Similarly, John of the Cross's poetry conveys both an urgency²⁰ and the agony²¹ of longing in separation which becomes the impetus to avidly seek God. The mystic Ramon Llull elevates love in absence of the beloved over love in presence, since the former engenders constant remembrance whilst in the latter the mind could be prone to digression.²² As Clooney asserts, 'absence is a particularly powerful site for encounter with God'.²³

Thesis Statement

Whilst distinctive in their own ways, the longing and devotional love-in-separation encountered in Hindu and Christian faiths correspond closely with each other, and present an opportunity for mutual contemplation and learning. The observation of similarities can facilitate a better understanding of shared aspects in the path of loving God. The theological reflections discerned from both faiths can favourably contribute to interreligious dialogue within theistic traditions. In the twenty-first century we are

¹⁷ Francis X. Clooney, *His Hiding Place is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), pp. 5-6.

¹⁸ June McDaniel, 'Blue Lotuses Everywhere: Divine Love in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava and Catholic Mysticism', *Journal of Vaishnava Studies*, 5(1) (1996-1997), 83-102.

¹⁹ Deirdre Green, 'Living Between the Worlds: *Bhakti* Poetry and the Carmelite Mystics', in *The Yogi and the Mystic: Studies in Indian and Comparative Mysticism*, ed. by Karel Werner, Durham Indological Series No. 1 (Surrey: Curzon Press Ltd., 1989), pp. 121-139 (p. 128).

²⁰ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, 3rd edn (Washington: ICS Publications, 2017), p. 50.

²¹ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, pp. 55-56.

²² Ramon Llull, *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, ed. and trans. by Mark D. Johnston (Oxford: Aris & Phillips; University of Bristol: The Centre for Mediterranean Studies, 1995; repr. 2003), Moral metaphor no. 7, p. 9.

²³ Clooney, *His Hiding Place is Darkness*, Prologue, ix.

surrounded by religious pluralism and yet simultaneously find ourselves in a secular society where religion is more of a personalised and private practice. Reciprocal learning across religions and engaging in constructive dialogue can support our understanding and pursuit for God. The aim of this research is therefore to undertake a Hindu-Christian comparative study on the subject of *viraha-bhakti*.

The totality of devotion and fullness of loving God can only be realised and understood thoroughly by considering both the aspects of presence and absence. The uncompromising longing and all-consuming love that becomes strengthened during God's absence is what keeps us connected to God in the midst of separation and eventually makes union possible. This thesis explores the motif of longing in devotional love-in-separation in the Hindu and Christian faiths. In doing so, it seeks to advance an understanding of the concept of longing as encountered in the *bhakti* theology of Gauḍīya Vaishnavism and the mystical theology of Carmelite Catholicism. I do this by engaging in a comparative reading of the *Gopī Gīta* and *The Spiritual Canticle*. Within this framework, I examine longing through the facets of seeking, remembering, yearning and imploring. The thesis concludes that in both texts, longing emerges as a dynamic force which leads to ultimate self-surrender. In doing so, it reveals a new dimension of surrender, which I identify as belongingness.

Research Aim, Value and Contribution

This study is based on qualitative research, guided by a theoretical literature review and led by an exercise in comparative theology, conducted through a joint reading of a Hindu scriptural text and a Christian mystical text. Whilst the Gopīs' devotional love-in-separation has served as the model for many North-Indian Vaishnava schools and poet-saints, the scriptural passages depicting their *viraha-bhakti* have remained relatively underexplored. This study addresses this research gap by delving into the *Gopī Gīta* text that is the inspirational source for saints and devotees. It also focuses on the longing in absence as encountered in *The Spiritual Canticle* text, a topic which has not received detailed attention within Christian theistic mysticism. Additionally, this study brings together a pairing of texts that have not been previously read alongside each other, providing a foundation for deriving fresh new theological insights.

Another gap this research aims to address is for comparative theology to take place across religious borders into non-Christian faiths. Many comparative theology studies proceed from the direction of incorporating learning from non-Christian traditions into Christianity. Clooney encourages and advances a case for Hindu comparative theology to learn and draw insights from the Christian tradition for an enhanced faith seeking understanding of Hinduism.²⁴ This openness to learning is also espoused by the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*²⁵ which embraces consideration of other viewpoints, teachings and practices to further increase and develop devotion. Our religious commitments thus need not exempt us from opening up to shared learning.

This receptive approach serves as the impetus for undertaking a comparative theology project and provides the fundamental research value of learning across traditions to enrich intellectual inquiry and spiritual practice. The comparative endeavour finds more significance in deriving a learning based on parallels to better inform scholarly study. By studying longing as a central facet of devotional practice, we gain a unique and necessary addition to the understanding of the dialectic of divine presence and absence. This learning can provide direction and guidance on how to remain connected to God in the predicament of absence. Since experiences of presence are rare and the mystical journey predominantly consists of pursuing God, longing as a way to connect to the divine is a focal concept to apprehend and an important practice to cultivate. Separation is just as much, if not a more common reality than union, and as such is integral to our theological understanding.

This study of longing in devotional love-in-separation aims to offer valuable insights and contribute through an increased understanding to the fields of spiritual theology, interreligious dialogue and theological anthropology. By drawing on similarities and common approaches in longing between the two faiths, this thesis seeks to discover dimensions which further illuminate and complement a faith seeking understanding. Focus is on eliciting reflections that enable reaffirmation, re-emphasis and deeper engagement of understanding within both traditions. In carrying out this comparative endeavour, it is intended that a shared reading will reveal mutually enriching insights that allow the scholar or reader to formulate a consolidated understanding of the concept of longing within devotional practices in separation.

²⁴ Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 22-23; p. 164.

²⁵ *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, *Sūtras* 75-76, pp. 20-21.

Dissertation Structure

The current chapter outlines the research context and discusses the research aim and contribution intended by this study.

Chapter Two presents a literature review which examines and evaluates existing academic engagement within the fields of *bhakti*, theistic mysticism and Hindu-Christian comparative mysticism.

Chapter Three proceeds with the detailing of the research methods utilised for this study. It also provides an overview of the traditions and texts prior to undertaking the comparative theological project.

Chapter Four entails a comparative reading of both texts along with highlighting and drawing insights. Whilst deriving insights that can be taken back into the home faith, reflections are made across both traditions.

Chapter Five offers a conclusion on key learning points derived from the comparative theological study undertaken in this thesis, along with identifying areas for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review existing scholarship in the domain of *bhakti* and theistic mysticism with an emphasis on findings pertaining to theistic intimism. In order to situate the context of my research, there is a specific focus on examining the treatment of devotional love-in-separation as encountered within these fields. The evaluation of the literature is structured into three categories: Bhakti, Theistic Mysticism and Hindu-Christian Comparative Mysticism. The review further takes into consideration scholarly attention received by the texts selected for comparative reading in this thesis.

Bhakti

The most prominent academic study concerning devotion in separation can be regarded as having been undertaken by Hardy.²⁶ Tracing the origins of *viraha-bhakti* to the Tamil Āḷvārs, he provides a detailed historical account of the development of *viraha-bhakti* in the South-Indian Vaishnava tradition. Characterising *viraha-bhakti* as an ‘aesthetic-erotic-ecstatic mysticism of separation’,²⁷ he differentiates this emotional devotion towards Krishna from the intellectual form of devotion preceding it. Hardy’s extensive study of the Āḷvārs’ *viraha* through the corpus of their devotional poetry includes a combination of literal, emotional and theological analyses.

Whilst Hardy claims the Āḷvārs’ devotion to be the inspirational basis for the *viraha-bhakti* explicated in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*²⁸ (*BhP*), he recognises the pivotal importance of this scripture in promulgating emotional Krishna *bhakti* across India and especially North-Indian Vaishnava schools.²⁹ However, in his systematic account of the *BhP*, Hardy does not explore the *viraha-bhakti* of the scripture or in particular the *Gopī Gīta* to any great extent. His main intention is to demonstrate the parallel Tamil ‘source[s] of inspiration’³⁰ for the *BhP* verses.

²⁶ Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2014) (originally published by Oxford University Press, 1983).

²⁷ Hardy, p. 573.

²⁸ The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a sacred Hindu scripture revered by Vaishnava *bhakti* traditions.

²⁹ Hardy, p. 11; p. 43; p. 485.

³⁰ Hardy, p. 518.

Both earlier academics such as Hardy³¹ as well as recent scholars³² have observed that the subject of emotional devotion in the *BhP* has been undertreated in the scholarly arena. It appears that the predominant focus lay on Vedic philosophical and intellectual inquiry before Western scholarship engaged with the devotional scene.³³ Limited academic attention to the *BhP* has also been ascribed to its literal, translational and exegetical complexity.³⁴ More fundamentally though, the disregard is largely attributed to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the erotic overtones present in the scriptural material detailing amorous divine-human love.

The disparity between reconciling amorous accounts and religious teachings confounded both early Western³⁵ and Indian³⁶ scholars. Consequently, studies that broached this subject of ultimate devotional love sought to frame it in symbolic³⁷ and allegorical³⁸ terms, or provide overviews of the subject.³⁹ However it is also prudent to note that other scholars highlighted the limitations of language⁴⁰ and references⁴¹ to adequately define the pure bliss of the supreme spiritual state of love, hence the utilisation of erotic expression to serve as a metaphorical vehicle. Since cautionary approaches and correct discernments of this intricate topic are valued over misguided connotations and incorrect judgement,⁴² academic reticence towards this subject should therefore not be perceived altogether negatively.

Meanwhile, scholarship has more readily engaged with the devotional poetry modelled on the Gopīs' intimate devotion from the *BhP*. These religious poems depict both the joy of union and intense longing in separation. In his study of sixteenth century North-

³¹ Hardy, pp. 46-48.

³² Edwin F. Bryant (trans.), *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God (Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa Book X)* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), Introduction, lvi.

³³ Jessica Frazier, 'Bhakti in Hindu Cultures', *The Journal of Hindu Studies*, 6(2) (2013), 101-113 (p. 102). <DOI:10.1093/jhs/hit028>, [Accessed: 25 January 2019].

³⁴ Norvin Hein, Foreword, in *Dance of Divine Love*, xi.

³⁵ Hardy, pp. 47-48.

³⁶ S. K. De, *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961), pp. 550-554.

³⁷ Ch. Vaudeville, 'Evolution of Love-Symbolism in Bhagavatism', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 82(1) (1962), 31-40. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/595976>>, [Accessed: 26 May 2018].

³⁸ T. S. Rukmani, *A Critical Study of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (with special reference to bhakti)* (Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1970), pp. 161-162.

³⁹ John B. Carman, 'Conceiving Hindu 'Bhakti' as Theistic Mysticism', in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 191-225 (pp. 201-207).

⁴⁰ Edward C. Dimock, Jr., 'Doctrine and Practice among the Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal', *History of Religions*, 3(1) (1963), 106-127 (p. 125). <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1062079>>, [Accessed: 24 May 2019].

⁴¹ Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy: The Philosophy of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Madhva, Vallabha and Gauḍīya School of Vaiṣṇavism, Volume IV*, 5 vols (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975; repr. 2015) (originally published by Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 431.

⁴² Schweig, 'The Dance between Tantra and Moksha', p. 173.

Indian *bhakti* poet-saints Mīrābāī and Sūrdās, Hawley explicates the devotional love-in-separation of the Gopīs in terms of its poetic⁴³ and religious⁴⁴ significance. The classic poem of divine union and separation, *Gītāgovinda*, has also received scholarly attention.⁴⁵

Whilst paucity of scholarship on the intimate amorous *bhakti* of the *BhP* continued, Sheridan's study considerably illumined the Gopīs' *viraha-bhakti* as one of the foremost types of devotion expounded by the scripture.⁴⁶ His scholarly engagement⁴⁷ also highlighted the intellectual import contained within devotionalism and its significance. However, academic studies in the field of *bhakti* have only relatively recently encountered a radical shift leading to expansive and in-depth attention.⁴⁸ This momentum has been privileged by rigorously enhanced religious understanding and percipient comprehension of language, culture and theological contexts. In particular, Schweig's highly-acclaimed translation⁴⁹ of the *Rāsa Līlā* segment⁵⁰ of the *BhP*, has created the opportunity for scholarship to engage in its rich sacred writings of theistic intimacy.

Recent academic literature on emotional Krishna devotion has ventured into exploring its various dimensions. Martin affirms the centrality of the integrated human emotional, physical and spiritual experience of love, longing and separation in encountering the divine.⁵¹ Addressing the ethical premise in the passionate love of Krishna, Schweig explains how devotional love-in-separation educes humility and passion towards God.⁵²

⁴³ John Stratton Hawley, 'The Gopīs' Tears', in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, ed. by Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley (Princeton, N.J; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 94-111.

⁴⁴ John Stratton Hawley, 'Yoga and Viyoga: Simple Religion in Hinduism', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 74(1) (1981), 1-20. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1509763>>, [Accessed: 23 January 2019].

⁴⁵ Barbara Stoler Miller (ed. and trans.), *The Gītāgovinda of Jayadeva: Love Song of the Dark Lord* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984; repr. 2016) (originally published by Columbia University Press, 1977).

⁴⁶ Daniel P. Sheridan, 'Devotion in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Christian Love: Bhakti, Agape, Eros', *Horizons*, 8(2) (1981), 260-278.

<https://ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA000078888&site=ehost-live>, [Accessed: 6 February 2019].

⁴⁷ Daniel P. Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

⁴⁸ Frazier, p. 103.

⁴⁹ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*.

⁵⁰ The *Rāsa Līlā* is the most esteemed segment of the *BhP*. It comprises five core chapters depicting the ultimate love and devotion of the Gopīs for Lord Krishna.

⁵¹ Martin, 'Love and Longing in Devotional Hinduism'.

⁵² Graham M. Schweig, 'Humility and Passion: A Caitanyite Vaishnava Ethics of Devotion', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 30(3) (2002), 421-444 (pp. 421-426). <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40018093>>, [Accessed: 27 May 2018].

He also delineates the difference between spiritual and worldly love and articulately elucidates the role of eroticism within devotion.⁵³

Although scholarly studies affirm the highest devotion to be exemplified by the Gopīs and their *viraha-bhakti*, it is surprising that there has been minimal elaboration on the nature of this devotion. Moreover, there appears to be insufficient treatment of the *Gopī Gīta* from poetical, literary or religious perspectives, even though it is regarded as ‘the paradigmatic instance of viraha bhakti’.⁵⁴ Such acknowledgement demands scholarly exploration of this peak experience of devotion.

Theistic Mysticism

The study of theistic mysticism includes vast scholarship on mystics, their writings and the mystical paths they advocate. Within the subcategory of bridal mysticism, the Song of Songs along with medieval mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux have been the subject of many academic studies. Although many mystics experience phases of alternating divine presence and absence⁵⁵ and recognise the significance of devotion in separation,⁵⁶ scholarly literature largely appertains to the experience and state of mystical union.

*The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*⁵⁷ frames its discussions on the concepts and practices of the mystical life in terms of union, and does not venture into the theme of absence. McGinn’s study concerning communication of experience through affective intentionality also focuses on the experience of divine union and presence. He notes that the experience of presence further increases desire and there is a reference to yearning for God, albeit no further link is formed with divine absence.⁵⁸

⁵³ Schweig, ‘The Dance between Tantra and Moksha’.

⁵⁴ W. J. Johnson, ‘gopi’, in *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) <DOI:10.1093/acref/9780198610250.001.0001>, [Accessed: 11 March 2019].

⁵⁵ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th edn (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), pp. 227-228.

⁵⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, Vol. I, 4 vols (London: SCM Press, 1992), p. 212.

⁵⁷ Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) <<https://doi-org.ezproxy4.lib.le.ac.uk/10.1017/CCO9781139020886>>, [Accessed: 29 March 2019].

⁵⁸ Bernard McGinn, ‘The Language of Inner Experience in Christian Mysticism’, *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 1(2) (2001), 156-171 (pp. 156-159). <<https://doi.org/10.1353/scs.2001.0038>>, [Accessed: 31 March 2019].

Earlier studies by Balthasar⁵⁹ and Peers⁶⁰ have taken into consideration the aspect of divine absence in their analysis of John of the Cross (John) and his writings. However, the theme is mainly explored through the writings on the Dark Night and in context of purgation and purification of the soul. The section of divine absence appearing in John's poem *The Spiritual Canticle* has received scant treatment in comparison, and the poem has been predominantly studied in reference to spiritual marriage and the unitive state. This approach is also observed in the scholarly work of Stein⁶¹, Williams⁶² and Thompson⁶³.

A substantial treatment of divine absence is found in Underhill's study of mysticism. In her description of the mystic way, the phase of the Dark Night of the Soul defines the state where the mystic experiences separation from God. Underhill presents accounts of the suffering and trials encountered by mystics in the absence of God.⁶⁴ The reports reveal how the absence or loss of God serves a powerful role in the mystics' love as well as in their self-purification and perfection. Considering both psychological and spiritual perspectives, she notes that the Dark Night is experienced differently by individuals and cannot be generalised.⁶⁵ Underhill's collection of accounts provide an invaluable insight into the condition of the mystics, however, the impact on their devotional practice is not explored.

McGinn has made an important observation in the undertreatment of the various aspects of mystical texts due to excess emphasis on studying mystical experience. He notes that the writings are generally used for corroboration, whereas their primary function is to actuate a 'transformative process'⁶⁶ and not merely serve an informative purpose. Additionally, union is only one of many components that feature in mystical writings⁶⁷ hence these strands also warrant scholarly exploration. McGinn's assessment indicates

⁵⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Volume III: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*, trans. by Andrew Louth, John Seward, Martin Simon and Rowan Williams, ed. by John Riches, 7 vols (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 104-171.

⁶⁰ E. Allison Peers, *Studies of the Spanish Mystics, Volume 1*, 2 vols (London: The Sheldon Press; New York and Toronto: The Macmillan Co., 1927), pp. 247-283.

⁶¹ Edith Stein, *The Science of the Cross*, trans. by Josephine Koepfel (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2002), pp. 221-274.

⁶² Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St John of the Cross*, 2nd edn (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990; repr. 2002), pp. 162-183.

⁶³ Colin P. Thompson, *The Poet and the Mystic: A Study of the Cántico Espiritual of San Juan de la Cruz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁶⁴ Underhill, pp. 380-412.

⁶⁵ Underhill, pp. 387-388.

⁶⁶ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xvii.

⁶⁷ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xiv-xvii.

the potential and need for further elucidation of such texts from theological, poetical and psychological perspectives.

Academic literature also subsumes longing under the terminology of desire and passionate love for God.⁶⁸ This overlap inadvertently conflates mystical experiences of absence and presence, where absence is regarded as an ancillary aspect of the mystical pathway or a prelude to divine presence, resulting in studies according it lesser consideration. With precedence placed on studying the mystical experiences attributed to love-in-union, tropes such as symbolic interpretation, erotic imagery and spiritual senses emerge as more readily analysed.⁶⁹ In comparison, longing in absence remains a relatively underexplored topic although this may be changing.

Howell's recent study classifies the ardent longing for God as 'human desire',⁷⁰ a term which represents the pain, suffering and longing for God in his absence. His assessment is concerned with charting the course of human desire which transitions into divine desire whilst maintaining its distinctness in continuity. Through depicting the process of intensification of desire, the study leads to a better understanding of the role of desire in absence as well as in presence.

Although longing is concomitant with desire and love, it forms an integral part of the mystical journey leading to union. The writings of many mystics portray their devotional love-longing in the absence of God⁷¹ and the shortfall in specific attention on this subject constitutes a drawback in academic study.

⁶⁸ The broadened context of the word 'desire' seems to reflect the language found in the writings and commentaries of Christian mystics and Church Fathers. There is little differentiation found between the usage of the word to depict its modes in the state of divine union and its modes in divine absence.

⁶⁹ Louise Nelstrop, Kevin Magill and Bradley B. Onishi, *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 21-135. <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leicester/detail.action?docID=476263>>, [Accessed: 29 March 2019].

⁷⁰ Edward Howells, 'From human desire to divine desire in John of the Cross', *Religious Studies*, (4 December 2018), 1-13. <DOI:10.1017/S003441251800077X>, [Accessed: 7 January 2019].

⁷¹ McDaniel, 'Blue Lotuses Everywhere', pp. 87-90.

Hindu-Christian Comparative Mysticism

The extant scholarly literature in the field of Comparative Mysticism is testament to the diverse concepts and topics through which greater understanding of the beliefs and practices of religions is accrued. The field has continued to receive a wide range of attention from scholars who have pursued its study from various perspectives. James's centrality on experience,⁷² Underhill's theistic emphasis,⁷³ Hick's pluralistic approach⁷⁴ and Katz's contextualist model⁷⁵ have contributed towards developing a comprehensive understanding of this extensive field.

Comparative Hindu-Christian scholarship spanning the last three decades has included studies exploring contemplative and devotional practices in *bhakti* and theistic mysticism. Three studies which take into consideration the aspects of union and separation, or presence and absence will be discussed here first before reviewing modern scholarship.

Carman's analysis draws upon the work of Otto in exploring the forms of Hindu devotional mysticism alongside Christian mysticism. His observations find *bhakti* to be cognate with theistic mysticism, with both containing the dialectic of divine presence and absence. His brief treatment of this aspect conveys the devotee's essential goal of God's vision, and the crucial role of remembrance and longing in separation.⁷⁶ However, his reference to the presence and absence of Krishna is confined to experiences in context of religious drama performances. He swiftly moves on to outline philosophical approaches adopted by prominent Vaishnava schools to incorporate this dialectic within their *bhakti* theologies.

Akin to Carman,⁷⁷ Green highlights the differentiation between mysticism as a goal and path, and further notes preceding scholarship has predominantly addressed only the former. Her study is pivotal in recognising and advocating love-in-separation as an important element in the pathway of some strands of theistic mysticism.⁷⁸ The

⁷² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, ed. by Martin. E. Marty (London: Penguin Books, 1985) (originally published by Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902).

⁷³ Underhill, *Mysticism*.

⁷⁴ John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2nd edn (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁷⁵ Steven T. Katz, 'Mysticism and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture', in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 7-67. <DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195097030.001.0001>, [Accessed: 28 February 2019].

⁷⁶ Carman, pp. 191-225.

⁷⁷ Carman, p. 203.

⁷⁸ Green, pp. 126-7.

discussion of love-in-separation identifies key commonalities in the writings and experiences of Carmelite mystics and *bhakti* saints. Referring to the paths and doctrines of both traditions, notable features such as the betwixt-and-between state of living and the bitter-sweet trials of separation are also revealed. Green's study also concisely examines selected stanzas of *The Spiritual Canticle* pertaining to the separation phase and exhibits their symbolic meanings.⁷⁹ Albeit brief, her exploration highlights theological underpinnings in the poem's phase of love-in-separation which deserves further detailed study.

McDaniel's study comparing the Gauḍīya Vaishnava and Catholic mystical traditions similarly highlights the oscillating states of union and separation as a fundamental feature of both practices. The state of *viraha* is depicted through poems and excerpts of passages from Vaishnava religious works, including the *BhP*. Similarly, writings of Catholic mystics are presented portraying the pain of separation associated with the initial stages of the mystical pathway.⁸⁰ Though the article does not enter into the nuances of separation, the portrayal of the condition of longing in both traditions reveals it to be an elemental part of the mystical path of devotional love. Green and McDaniel both evince striking resemblances between Catholic and Vaishnava mystical experiences of intimate loving devotion and love-in-separation whilst remaining sensitive to their differences.

Aside from these insightful yet broad studies, the academic treatment of devotional love-in-separation has been sparse and interspersed in the comparative context up until the last decade. Recently however, two studies have specifically examined the theme of divine absence, marking an important step in academic scholarship engaging with this topic. Both are projects in the Hindu-Christian setting of comparative theology, consisting of a close reading of texts focussing on the longing of the lover for the beloved in separation. These studies advance beyond the theoretical exercise of literary or intellectual expositions to equally privilege eliciting of valuable insights that can support spiritual practice.

Clooney's comparative theology project in *His Hiding Place is Darkness* focuses on the subject of divine absence in a theopoetical reading of the Biblical *Song of Songs* with the Ālvār scriptural poetry *Holy Word of Mouth*.⁸¹ His detailed attention to the anguish

⁷⁹ Green, pp. 121-139.

⁸⁰ McDaniel, 'Blue Lotuses Everywhere', pp. 83-102.

⁸¹ Clooney, *His Hiding Place is Darkness*.

and longing of the human lover for the divine beloved leads to intricate analysis and compelling theological insights into patient waiting, strength of selfless love and the power of remembrance in evoking a presence-in-absence. Hillgardner's comparative theology in *Longing and Letting Go* explores the writings of two medieval mystics through the lens of *viraha-bhakti*.⁸² Reinforcing longing as an epistemology, she identifies a key element termed as 'passionate non-attachment', a paradoxical combination of desire and detachment found in the practice of both mystics. The resultant insights based on passionate non-attachment link to individual and communal practices, with emphasis on pragmatic spiritual practice, socio-religious factors and ethical living.

Another related and notable comparative theology study is the doctoral dissertation⁸³ by Hernández which comprises of a literary and theological comparison of *The Spiritual Canticle* and *Rāsa Līlā*.⁸⁴ Focussing on the aspect of withdrawal, the project examines the poetic and linguistic constructs and religious underpinnings that fuel the dynamics of presence and absence. Hernández's subsequent journal paper concentrates on comparatively analysing the performative function of the texts in reference to seeking the hidden divine.⁸⁵

It is acknowledged that in terms of a methodological approach, the study of one religion or comparative religions would yield an increased understanding of devotional love-in-separation. However, in a diverse cultural environment, the comparative theological methodology offers deeper insights with practical import that can be relevant for both scholars and practitioners. The transition from a generalised understanding to a specific understanding is more conducive and relevant to interreligious dialogue.

The central engagement of latest scholarship with *viraha-bhakti* and longing paves the way for further academic study. These recent studies highlight the possibilities for additional analysis from unapproached dimensions to further illumine this subject. Furthermore, these studies are from the standpoint of Christian comparative theology; this in itself accentuates the opportunity for a Hindu comparative theology which seeks to engage with and learn from the Christian tradition. Adopting this integrated learning

⁸² Hillgardner, *Longing and Letting Go*.

⁸³ This dissertation is currently in the process of being published as a book.

⁸⁴ Gloria M. Hernández, 'Presence, Absence and Divine Vision. A Comparative Study of the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Emory University, 2011).

⁸⁵ Gloria M. Hernández, "Where did you hide?" Locating the divine in the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*, *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, Vol. 25, Article 8 (2012), 34-42. <<https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1514>>, [Accessed: 28 May 2018].

framework for studying devotional love-in-separation advances the theology study models proposed by Klostermaier⁸⁶ and Cantwell Smith,⁸⁷ harnessing a holistic response incorporating emotion, belief and intellect.

Summary

This brief survey of academic literature relating to devotional love-in-separation in the afore-mentioned three areas reveals that there has been limited in-depth analysis of this mode of devotion. In the *bhakti* domain, *viraha-bhakti* and the scriptural text denoting this highest form of devotion have received insufficient attention. In the field of theistic mysticism, focus has remained on mystical union with only a generic treatment of the longing that occurs in divine absence. In comparison to these two areas, comparative mysticism has proffered a greater exploration of devotional love-in-separation, yet highlights a need for Hindu comparative theology.

Thus, there emerges a need to develop a deeper understanding of the nuances, theology and practice of devotional love-in-separation across the Hindu and Christian faiths. It also identifies the scope for research to add to the wider field of Hindu-Christian studies, leading to a greater representation of emotional devotion in theistic intimism, along with a balanced portrayal of love-in-union and love-in-separation. This thesis endeavours to address the research gap identified and thereby contribute to academic religious study.

⁸⁶ Klostermaier, p. 774.

⁸⁷ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards A World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), p. 123.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

This study is situated within the field of Comparative Theology, a discipline that encompasses advancement of a faith seeking understanding of one's home tradition based on theological reflection of another religious tradition. This reflective learning approach allows the comparativist to produce or derive new insights that enhance understanding of one or both traditions, and in particular, strengthen and acquire a better understanding of the home faith.⁸⁸ Prompted by 'a willingness to see newly the truths of our own religion in light of another',⁸⁹ the comparative theologian can constructively contribute to interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding in both academic and spiritual practice.⁹⁰

This chapter explains the research methodology employed in undertaking this comparative theological exercise, followed by an overview of the traditions and texts that comprise the comparative endeavour.

Research Methodology

For this study, I adopt the methodology propounded by Francis Clooney, a distinguished scholar of comparative theology who has undertaken extensive and intricate Hindu-Christian studies, especially pertaining to the Catholic and Vaishnava traditions. Clooney espouses the practice of reading sacred texts from the home and non-home traditions alongside each other, supported by commentaries on the respective texts that can assist with elucidation and exposition.

The in-depth attentive reading incorporates firstly reading the texts individually and then proceeding to read them together. This leads to interpreting the home text from a new perspective and drawing valuable insights which arise from reading outside the home tradition.⁹¹ This close shared reading also results in an 'intensification of the

⁸⁸ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁹ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, p. 69.

⁹⁰ Comparative Theology is not an evaluative exercise to solely enumerate similarities or differences, or to privilege one faith over another.

⁹¹ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, pp. 58-61.

meaning of one (or both) texts'⁹² thereby providing opportunities for penetrative discernment and deeper engagement with one's own faith.

As a comparativist following this text-based approach, I apply three elements central to comparative reading as advocated and observed in the comparative work of Clooney. Firstly, I embark on the reading of texts as an interactive process, underpinned by a heuristic and hermeneutical approach that fosters bidirectional receptivity. There is an openness to learn from the non-home text whilst retaining a commitment to the home text. Yet there is also a commitment to earnestly learn from the other text with a view to being responsive to seeing one's own text in a renewed light.⁹³

Secondly, the selection of two texts as the mode for comparative study makes the project manageable, specific and focussed. This 'intentional narrowness'⁹⁴ yields potential for the unearthing of intricate concepts in a detailed manner. Furthermore, as the study is not definitive or exhaustive, it leaves plentiful room for other readers, their readings and their representations.⁹⁵ This thesis therefore does not claim a comprehensive presentation of longing, but articulates its theological significance as encountered through careful textual reading across two traditions.

Lastly, precedence is given to letting the texts lead the reading in order to become available to what is being revealed and expand understanding. By remaining attentive to what the texts are attempting to convey, the insights that unfold emerge as relevant, meaningful and 'strictly indebted to the reading'.⁹⁶ This text-led act becomes more potent when combined with a vertical in-depth reading which focuses on specific portions of the texts and analyses them in greater detail. This educes more penetrating observations as opposed to a horizontal reading that may cover more breadth by spanning the whole text or a wider selection of the text, but overlooks the essence of the learning and produces a more generic assessment.⁹⁷

⁹² Catherine Cornille, 'Discipleship in Hindu-Christian Comparative Theology', *Theological Studies*, 77(4) (2016), 869-885 (p. 871). <DOI: 10.1177/0040563916666826>, [Accessed: 11 May 2019].

⁹³ This approach is showcased in the synopsis of Clooney's comparative studies (see Clooney, *Comparative Theology*).

⁹⁴ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, p. 87.

⁹⁵ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, p. 66.

⁹⁶ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, p. 60.

⁹⁷ Guidance from personal conversation with Gloria M. Hernández on 11th February 2019.

Choice of Texts

My choice of texts is based on Clooney's practice⁹⁸ of identifying and selecting two texts that can read well together and be fruitfully compared on the theme of longing for God in separation. A thematic comparison of the texts serves as a springboard from which theological insights can transpire and provide learning opportunities. With the particular focus of this study being on *viraha-bhakti*, the preference was to find devotional texts which specifically convey the intensity of longing.

The chosen texts for this comparative exercise are the *Gopī Gīta (GG)*, a Hindu scriptural text, and *The Spiritual Canticle (SC)*, a Christian mystical text. Both texts are pieces of devotional poetry emanating from a love for the divine and powerfully depict the experience of longing in the absence of God. With each text abundant in theological and spiritual import, they are unique and potent enough to be read alone, but reading them together doubly 'intensifies rather than relativizes the deep yet fragile commitments of our singular, first love'.⁹⁹

The *GG* was the first to come to mind when searching for a depiction of the Gopīs' devotional love-in-separation. Although previously aware of this devotional text,¹⁰⁰ I was not very familiar with its subtle nuances and the extent of its sublime depth of meaning prior to the readings and research I undertook for this study. This text pulsates with affectionate intense longing and this in turn prompted my aspiration to find a Christian text reverberating with an equivalent emotional outpouring. After considering several possible works of Catholic mystics, I selected the *SC* poem which portrays a passionate longing for God along with thought-provoking theological expositions via its accompanying commentary. As I read and became more acquainted with this text, I reached the conclusion that it would read well with the *GG* as well as offer interesting dimensions for comparison.

I find these two texts to possess profound potential that can be unlocked to gain a better understanding of divine love and its composite constituent longing, which both the Hindu and Christian faiths deem to be one of the most intimate ways of encountering

⁹⁸ Francis X. Clooney, *Beyond Compare: St. Francis de Sales and Śrī Vedānta Deśika on Loving Surrender to God* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), p. 26. <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leicester/detail.action?docID=547787>>, [Accessed: 20 October 2018].

⁹⁹ Clooney, *His Hiding Place is Darkness*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁰ The *Gopī Gīta* appears within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* scripture.

God. Appearing relatively unexplored in this context,¹⁰¹ I am hopeful that their pairing based on the theme of longing will educe fresh theological and spiritual perspectives for both traditions.

Translations

This thesis relies on English translations of both texts and commentaries for their readings and interpretations.

For the *Gopī Gīta* poem, I utilise the translation by Schweig appearing in *Dance of Divine Love*¹⁰² and read with the commentary¹⁰³ of Jīva Gosvāmin (Jīva). Commended for his ‘sensitive literal translation’,¹⁰⁴ Schweig provides rich textual illuminations based on commentaries of Gauḍīya theologians, especially Jīva.¹⁰⁵ Regarded as an erudite theologian of the Gauḍīya school,¹⁰⁶ Jīva’s sixteenth century commentary parallels with that of the *SC*, also composed in the same historical timeframe.¹⁰⁷

For *The Spiritual Canticle*, I consult the Redaction B version of the poem and commentary by St. John of the Cross, appearing in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez.¹⁰⁸ This translation emerges from the Institute of Carmelite Studies and is thus situated within the context of John’s Carmelite thought and spirituality.

¹⁰¹ This view is based on my research, literature review and surveyed texts for this study.

¹⁰² Numeric references to verses in the *Gopī Gīta* and *Rāsa Līlā* will be presented from Schweig’s *Dance of Divine Love* alongside the corresponding original *BhP* verse references.

¹⁰³ *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam: A Symphony of Commentaries on the Tenth Canto: The Rāsa Dance, Volume Six, Chapters 29-33*, trans. by Gaurapada Dāsa (Charles A. Filion) (Vrindaban: Rasbihari Lal & Sons, 2018) (The *Gopī Gīta* forms Chapter 31, pp. 335-424). [Hereafter abbreviated *The Rāsa Dance*].

¹⁰⁴ Norvin Hein, Foreword, in *Dance of Divine Love*, xii.

¹⁰⁵ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁶ Dimock, Jr., p. 108.

¹⁰⁷ Though this comparative study does not feature a historical context, I have chosen the alignment of commentarial timeframes to allow for a more lateral comparative reading since the texts are from different periods. The *SC* is a sixteenth century work whereas the *BhP*, which contains the *GG* text is dated by scholars around 7-9th CE (see Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 12.).

¹⁰⁸ St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, 3rd edn (Washington: ICS Publications, 2017), pp. 469-630. (For this work, numeric references will be used to refer to stanza number followed by the commentary number). [Hereafter abbreviated *SC*].

I would like to clarify here that the *GG* is not a Gauḍīya text but is part of the authoritative scripture revered by Gauḍīyas and Vaishnavas at large. This is a comparative study in Gauḍīya Vaishnavism since I ground my reading of the *GG* on the commentaries, devotional works and the *bhakti* theology expounded by Gauḍīya scholars. This school accords devotional love-in-separation the highest position in their *bhakti* framework, making the *GG* a prominent text for Gauḍīya scholars and devotees.¹⁰⁹

Process of Reading and Comparative Method

Undertaking a study in Hindu Comparative Theology, the direction of reading I employ is to read the *GG* through the *SC*, with the objective to better read and understand the *GG* and also illumine aspects perhaps not as apparent outside of the comparative frame.¹¹⁰ As per Clooney's method, this mode of reading 'privilege[s] a productive convergence of texts'¹¹¹ and gives 'preference to similarity over difference'.¹¹² The highlighting of similarities allows to draw lessons for the home tradition, appreciate the non-home tradition, and serve as a foundation for further dialogue. It also requires a mindfulness that the identification of salient similarities does not lead to reductive interpretations.

In exploring the motif of longing, I also incorporate the aspect of 'commensurability' as outlined and adopted by Hernández¹¹³ by studying longing through the four facets of seeking, remembering, yearning and imploring. Reading closely through these lenses produces sharper examination of the interaction of the texts and retains focus on drawing pertinent theological comparisons. Whilst remaining sensitive to the religious themes and individual contexts through which they arise in each text, the emerging connections open up new means for theological reflection.

The reading process I adopt is centred on 'a theology in encounter *with* God' rather than 'a theology *about* God'.¹¹⁴ The former places emphasis on the wisdom derived from the

¹⁰⁹ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 164; p. 239.

¹¹⁰ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, p. 11.

¹¹¹ Clooney, *Beyond Compare*, p. 26.

¹¹² Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, pp. 75-76.

¹¹³ Hernández, 'Presence, Absence and Divine Vision', p. 79.

¹¹⁴ Clooney, *Beyond Compare*, p. 43.

affective and experiential dimensions in addition to spiritual understanding, whilst the latter may only be concerned with the conceptual knowledge of God.¹¹⁵ By delving into mystical and devotional experiences of longing for God, this comparative exercise becomes a transformative endeavour as opposed to a mere informative process. This approach to a faith seeking understanding is espoused by theologians of the traditions as well as academic scholars. The Gauḍīya scholar speaks of reading with the ‘eye of pure love’¹¹⁶ whilst John encourages interpretation through ‘simplicity of the spirit of knowledge and love’.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Clooney highlights the impact of the comparativist’s affective engagement in constructive reading,¹¹⁸ and Klostermaier encourages a Hindu-Christian ‘theology of the heart’, based on love.¹¹⁹

I finally add that my position as a reader and comparativist is of an insider engaged in Krishna devotion within the Hindu Vaishnava tradition, although not affiliated with Gauḍīya Vaishnavism. I believe this allows me to read passionately and faithfully, and without any predisposed tendency.

Scope and Limitations

The focus of this study is to explore the theme of longing, as encountered in the devotion in separation from God, through a comparative reading of the *GG* and *SC*. After reading the full texts, I have selected specific verses for comparative analysis which depict and illuminate the four facets of longing. The study covers a single episode of separation which results in union with God, as opposed to the episodic cycles of union and separation that feature in *viraha-bhakti* as a life-long devotional practice and which also appear throughout the mystical journey.

Whilst reading selected verses brings specificity, a limitation of this thesis is that it has been unable to cover all the verses in both texts which pertain to longing. This would

¹¹⁵ John also highlights the inexplicability of mystical experience through words alone, and points out the ineffability of ‘rational explanations’ to convey the entirety of the experience of divine love (see *SC*, Prologue 1).

¹¹⁶ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ *SC*, Prologue 1.

¹¹⁸ Francis X. Clooney, ‘Passionate Comparison: The Intensification of Affect in Interreligious Reading of Hindu and Christian Texts’, *The Harvard Theological Review*, 98(4) (2005), 367-390 (p. 368). <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4125273>>, [Accessed: 21 September 2018].

¹¹⁹ Klostermaier, p. 754.

undoubtedly enable a more comprehensive and theologically richer comparative study. As such, the limited verse selections do not claim to offer a full presentation of longing, or be entirely representative of devotional love-in-separation.

Overview of Traditions

Gauḍīya Vaishnavism and Discalced Carmelite Catholicism are both sixteenth century traditions which model their devotion on an amorous loving relationship between soul and God. Gauḍīya Vaishnavism belongs to the Hindu Vaishnava Bhakti tradition and Carmelite Catholicism is steeped in the tradition of Christian Mysticism.¹²⁰ Since a comprehensive overview of these traditions is not possible here, I focus on those aspects relevant to the comparative framework.

Bhakti

The path of *bhakti* (devotion) places a central emphasis on cultivating a personal loving relationship between devotee and God.¹²¹ Also termed devotional or theistic mysticism, *bhakti* is a total dedication of the soul and body by engaging the mind, senses and heart in constant contemplation of God. In this relationship, deep devotional love towards God remains the means and end for the devotee.¹²² It is devotional love that enables the devotee to experience the ecstasy of blissful union with God, and thereby achieve the ultimate purpose of human life.¹²³

In North-Indian Vaishnava traditions, devotion is directed towards Krishna¹²⁴ and is based on the sacred scripture and authoritative text for Vaishnavas, the *Bhāgavata*

¹²⁰ Gavin Flood suggests a similitude between the devotional mysticism of the two traditions. See Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press; 2004, repr. 2014.), p. 139.

¹²¹ Martin, 'Love and Longing in Devotional Hinduism', p. 203.

¹²² Klostermaier, p. 763.

¹²³ Bryant, xxxii.

¹²⁴ Vaishnavas are devotees of Vishnu or Krishna. The North-Indian Gauḍīya Vaishnava school of Caitanya and the Śuddhādvaita school of Vallabha hold Krishna to be the Supreme Being whilst the South-Indian Viśiṣṭādvaita school of Rāmānuja and the Dvaita school of Madhva worship Vishnu as Supreme God (see Bryant, xix).

Purāṇa.¹²⁵ Upholding the *BhP*'s pronouncement that Krishna is the Supreme Being¹²⁶, the Gauḍīya Vaishnava school¹²⁷ perceive him as 'the intimate persona and ultimate deity of the godhead'.¹²⁸ Possessing infinite sweetness (*mādhurya*) and infinite majesty (*aiśvarya*), Krishna is the lord of love and beauty whose transcendental divine form enchants the hearts of everyone.¹²⁹ The *BhP*¹³⁰ reveals through manifold stories and accounts how Krishna reciprocates with devotees who form a bond with him.

Gauḍīya Vaishnavism delineates five principal relationships through which a devotee can engage in loving devotion with Krishna: peaceful, servitude, friendship, parental and amorous. The highest intensity is fostered in the amorous or conjugal lover-beloved relationship (*mādhurya-bhāva*)¹³¹ due to its greatest intimacy. This most intense and intimate mode of love is exemplified in the *BhP* by the Gopīs, and in particular Rādhā, the most beloved Gopī of Krishna and paragon of superlative supreme love.¹³²

The Gopīs' selfless and unconditional *prema* is for the sake of loving and serving Krishna alone, and solely for his happiness. This supreme devotional love is characterised by the co-dependent states of love-in-union and love-in-separation which presuppose each other.¹³³ Whilst union is full of blissful joy, separation causes extreme sorrow and intolerable suffering. However, it is within separation that the most intense emotional devotion, love and longing for the Beloved arises, hence it is accorded the most elevated status in *bhakti*¹³⁴ and regarded as a superior state of devotion compared to the devotion of love-in-union.¹³⁵

The *BhP* is considered to be the first Sanskrit canonical work propagating devotional love-in-separation through the narratives of the Krishna-Gopī episodes in Book Ten¹³⁶

¹²⁵ Barbara A. Holdrege, 'Mystical Cognition and Canonical Authority: The Devotional Mysticism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa', in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 184-209 (pp. 184-185).

<DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195097030.003.0010>, [Accessed: 31 March 2019].

¹²⁶ Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, p. 57.

¹²⁷ Also known as Bengal or Caitanya Vaishnavism (Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 97).

¹²⁸ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 25.

¹²⁹ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, pp. 118-121.

¹³⁰ *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, (With Sanskrit Text and English Translation), Parts I and II, trans. by C. L. Goswami, 2 vols (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2005). [Hereafter abbreviated *BhP*].

¹³¹ Also known as *madhura-rasa* or *śṛṅgāra-rasa*.

¹³² Dasgupta, p. 392.

¹³³ *Viraha* is also more specifically known as *vipralambha* within *madhura-rasa* or *śṛṅgāra-rasa*.

¹³⁴ *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, *Sūtra* 82, p. 23; Vaudeville, pp. 39-40.

¹³⁵ June McDaniel, 'Hinduism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. by John Corrigan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 51-72 (p. 63).

<DOI:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195170214.003.0004>, [Accessed: 14 February 2019].

¹³⁶ Hardy, p. 41; p. 485.

and exalting the ultimacy of this type of devotion.¹³⁷ The Gauḍīya school places utmost prominence on adopting and emulating the *viraha-bhakti* of the Gopīs, which is believed to engender uppermost closeness with God.¹³⁸ The *GG* text contained within the *BhP* therefore serves as the paradigmatic model to base their spiritual practice on.¹³⁹

Theistic Mysticism

Theistic mysticism is a form of mysticism which is rooted in an essential and exclusive love for God nurtured through a relationship with the divine.¹⁴⁰ It is the pathway to actualising and experiencing the all-encompassing, wholehearted love which is fundamentally exhorted in the Bible.¹⁴¹ This love serves as the means by which a mystic experiences and attains union with God. The aim of the mystic life is to reach the perfection of love for God in complete union, and remain wholly centred in devotion.¹⁴² The Catholic tradition is replete with mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Mechthild of Magdeburg, who sought and achieved union with God by means of loving devotion and inner contemplation.

Within Catholicism, many mystics have pursued the path of spiritual love through bridal mysticism.¹⁴³ Inspired by the Biblical Song of Songs,¹⁴⁴ their devotion is based on a lover-beloved relationship wherein the human soul is the Bride, and Christ is the Bridegroom. Regarded as the highest type of love for God, it is selfless, disinterested and seeks God alone.¹⁴⁵ This pure love is selfless since it only aims to please and serve the Beloved and has no selfish motive. It is disinterested since it does not wish for any personal or material gain; it is not self-centred but completely God-centred. It seeks to love God for the sake of love alone and wishes to be united with God in this love. Consolidating both *agape* and *eros*, this seraphic love is a potent and passionate

¹³⁷ Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, pp. 114-115.

¹³⁸ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 165.

¹³⁹ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 239.

¹⁴⁰ Underhill, p. 81.

¹⁴¹ Nancy M. Martin and Joseph Runzo, 'Love', in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. by John Corrigan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 310-332 (p. 317). <DOI:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195170214.003.0018>, [Accessed: 14 February 2019].

¹⁴² McDaniel, 'Blue Lotuses Everywhere', pp. 84-85.

¹⁴³ Also termed nuptial mysticism or love mysticism.

¹⁴⁴ Appearing in the Old Testament, it is also known as Song of Solomon and Canticle of Canticles.

¹⁴⁵ McDaniel, 'Blue Lotuses Everywhere', p. 92.

unconditional love for the divine Beloved.¹⁴⁶ The Carmelite Catholic saints, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross exemplify this mode of love through their practice of bridal mysticism.

The mystical journey of the Bride towards her Bridegroom comprises of three stages: purgation, illumination and union. Along this path, God imparts fleeting glimpses of his vision and divine touches which cause the Bride to revel in divine love and bring it further increase. Experiencing delight in the nearness of God in these brief moments of encounter, the Bride feels unbearable anguish as he becomes absent and hidden again. Enkindled with a more intense longing for God, she ardently desires to attain his complete vision and total union. These periods of separation from God cause the Bride great torment and suffering.¹⁴⁷

John's mystical theology identifies these phases of suffering in the absence of God as the Dark Night of the Soul. Encountered in the purgation and illumination stages, the soul has to undergo these phases deemed necessary for purification of the senses and the spirit. Passing through these trials, she becomes perfected for spiritual marriage, the highest state of union attainable in human life.¹⁴⁸ Inherent in these phases is the Bride's intense love and longing which constitutes an integral part of the journey towards the Beloved. The mystical theology explicated by John in the *SC* vividly portrays this intense longing in devotion, and provides an archetype of loving devotion for Carmelite Catholics to cultivate in their spiritual practice.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Martin and Runzo, 'Love', p. 318.

¹⁴⁷ McDaniel, 'Blue Lotuses Everywhere', pp. 88-90.

¹⁴⁸ McDaniel, 'Blue Lotuses Everywhere', p. 90.

¹⁴⁹ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, p. 465.

Overview of Texts

This brief overview of the *GG* and *SC* prior to their comparative reading aims to provide a background to their contexts and to situate the premise of longing in relation to the whole texts.

Gopī Gīta

The *Gopī Gīta*, also known as “The Song of the Gopīs”, is a chapter of nineteen verses appearing in Book Ten of the *BhP*.¹⁵⁰ It forms the third chapter of the five most eminent and sacred chapters¹⁵¹ of the *BhP*, collectively known as the ‘*Rāsa Līlā*’,¹⁵² containing an elaborate poetical account of the ultimate divine-human union through supreme devotional love.¹⁵³ The *GG* as the central act of *Rāsa Līlā* is given great prominence in Gauḍīya Vaishnavism for its portrayal of the most intense *viraha-bhakti*, depicted by the emotional acme of the Gopīs’ devotional longing.¹⁵⁴ The *viraha* the Gopīs encounter in the *Rāsa Līlā* narrative is described as *pravāsa*, the fourth type of ‘separation in intimate love’¹⁵⁵ caused by a distance from Krishna.¹⁵⁶ Jīva further explicates this separation as occurring within one pastime and demarcated by a short distance.¹⁵⁷

The *Rāsa Līlā* begins with Krishna’s loving invocation of the Gopīs through playing his melodious flute. Enchanted by the sweet-toned music, the Gopīs arrive in the forest of *Vraja*¹⁵⁸ where they meet and engage in a delightful encounter with Krishna. Thinking of their good fortune, the Gopīs become filled with pride, on account of which Krishna disappears from their midst. His disappearance is an act of grace in order to eliminate their pride, which causes an obstruction in *prema*, and also to further intensify their

¹⁵⁰ *BhP* 10.31.

¹⁵¹ *BhP* 10.29-10.33.

¹⁵² Schweig terms these five chapters as *Rāsa Līlā*. In his translation in *Dance of Divine Love*, these chapters appear as five acts, wherein *GG* forms Act Three, corresponding to *BhP* 10.31. The five chapters are also traditionally known as *Rāsa Pāñchadhyaī* (*Dance of Divine Love*, xi) or *Pañcādhyaī* (Bryant, lix).

¹⁵³ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 239.

¹⁵⁵ Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmi, *Śrī Pritī Sandarbha*, trans. by Kuśakratha dāsa, 2 vols (Vrindaban: Rasbihari Lal & Sons, 2007), *PrS* 370. [Hereafter abbreviated *PrS*].

¹⁵⁶ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 235; p. 238.

¹⁵⁷ *PrS* 389.

¹⁵⁸ *Vraja* is the land of Krishna’s childhood pastimes and where the *Rāsa Līlā* takes place.

love. Distraught at his sudden vanishing, the Gopīs desperately search for Krishna in the forest. They come across the foremost Gopī¹⁵⁹ with whom Krishna had eloped but she too has been abandoned due to developing self-importance. Unable to search any further in the dark forest, they return to the banks of river *Yamunā*. Suffering in the agony of separation and longing for their Beloved, the Gopīs¹⁶⁰ sing the *Gopī Gīta* and prayerfully plead for his vision. After hearing their heart-breaking tearful supplication, Krishna appears before them and assuaging their sorrow begins the divine *Rāsa* dance with them. In this dance, he bestows the highest bliss of loving union to the Gopīs. The *Rāsa Līlā* concludes with the declaration that one who recites or listens to these narrations obtains supreme devotion to Krishna.¹⁶¹

The Spiritual Canticle

The Spiritual Canticle, fully entitled as ‘*Songs between the Soul and the Bridegroom*’,¹⁶² is one of four key prose works by John. Reputed as a ‘poetic masterpiece’,¹⁶³ it is comprised of forty stanzas which along with its commentary eloquently depicts an emotionally deep experience underpinned by a theologically rich exegesis. A composition based on personal experience and greatly inspired by the Song of Songs, it portrays the love between the soul (Bride) and Christ (Bridegroom).¹⁶⁴ Detailing the entire spiritual journey of the soul towards God, the poem chronologically expounds the purgative, illuminative and unitive stages through which an individual progresses to achieve loving union with God.¹⁶⁵

The *SC* begins with the Bride in despair over the sudden disappearance of her Beloved. Wounded with his love, her burning heart cannot endure separation from him and she longs for him ardently. The first twelve stanzas express the Bride’s unrelenting longing for her hidden God. The next nine stanzas outline the state of the proficient, wherein the Bride reaches the spiritual betrothal and prepares for complete union. Stanzas twenty-two to thirty-five unfold the perfected state, where the Bride is united completely with

¹⁵⁹ Identified as Rādhā, the most beloved Gopī of Krishna (see Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 47.)

¹⁶⁰ The Gopīs all sing together, in one voice, therefore are referred to in the plural form.

¹⁶¹ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, pp. 25-77.

¹⁶² *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, p. 73.

¹⁶³ Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p. 164.

¹⁶⁴ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, pp. 461-462.

¹⁶⁵ *SC*, ‘Theme’, p. 477.

the Bridegroom in spiritual marriage. In this mystical union, she becomes immersed in the most intimate, passionate and sublime love of God. The last five stanzas pertain to the beatific state that is attained in eternal life, where the Bride can receive the full glory and beauty of God's vision.¹⁶⁶

In the commentaries to the *SC*, John explains the reasons for the Beloved's disappearance. The Beloved hides to 'try, humble, and teach'¹⁶⁷, to intensify and perfect the Bride's love, and to increase her desire to see him.¹⁶⁸ The Beloved's absence is not confined solely to the first stage of the spiritual path; John highlights that God's hiddenness in the spiritual betrothal state causes severe affliction to the Bride due to her immense love for him. As she experiences wonderful moments of joy in his presence, the periods of his absence inflict upon her greater suffering and intensify her longing.¹⁶⁹

Further Note on Reading of SC

In this comparative reading, I read the Bride's longing in the *SC* as if occurring in the illuminative stage where spiritual betrothal state has been attained and she is a proficient soul nearing perfection.¹⁷⁰ Attributing God's absence to this stage is primarily for two reasons. Firstly, it offers a better context for comparison with the *GG* where the Gopīs as elite devotees have also experienced a brief union with Krishna before he disappears. Their situation therefore offers a parallel with the Bride's short-lived encounter with the Beloved in the spiritual betrothal state, in which the torment of separation is greater than previously encountered. Secondly, we can assess longing from the perspective of devout souls who desire nothing but God and demonstrate an emotional expression of longing directed solely towards the divine.

¹⁶⁶ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, pp. 463-468.

¹⁶⁷ *SC* 1.15.

¹⁶⁸ *SC* 1.19.

¹⁶⁹ *SC* 17.1.

¹⁷⁰ I mainly utilise the term Bride in order to represent the soul in an intimate relationship and to remain attentive to the experience of the spiritual betrothal state, however I occasionally interchange it with the term soul. The meaning of soul here denotes the whole being with an emphasis on the spiritual dimension, and also includes the cognitive and affective dimensions. This is the usage adopted by John of the Cross and presented in the "Glossary" of *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, p. 774.

Chapter 4: Comparative Reading

As part of this comparative exercise, I undertake a close reading of the verses of the *GG* and *SC* alongside each other. As stated in chapter three, the comparative direction is reading the *GG* through the *SC*. I analyse selected verse pairings through the comparative frame of four different aspects of longing: seeking, remembering, yearning and imploring. Within each of these comparative sections, the verses are first read and understood individually, before proceeding to a comparative reading.

Seeking

GG 1

Glorious is Vraja, surpassing all,
for it is the land of your birth.
Indeed, the Goddess Indirā
resides in this place forever.
O beloved, please allow
your maidservants to see you!
Their very life-breath is sustained in you,
and they search for you everywhere.

The opening verse of the *GG* portrays the Gopīs' distress in separation from Krishna and their anguish in being unable to find him. Their heartfelt cry 'please allow your maidservants to see you', expresses the sole purpose of their search which is to attain Krishna's divine vision. Having been immersed in great joy in the presence of their Beloved, his sudden disappearance from their midst has left them suffering acutely in his separation. Experiencing deep *viraha* in his absence, their ardent love and longing coalesces into a fervid seeking.¹⁷¹ The expansiveness of the Gopīs' search highlights that their love for Krishna is unlimited; consequently, their search is also without limits.

¹⁷¹ Rāsa Līlā Acts 1-2 (*BhP* 10.29-10.30).

Having looked for him in all possible places, their physical seeking extends beyond the spatial realm and now takes on a more powerful mode in the form of a prayer, which is a sincere seeking of and by the soul. This prayer surpasses any restrictions of physical boundaries and has limitless potentiality to travel in and reach all directions, thus enabling the Gopīs to search for Krishna everywhere, as they utter in the last line of this verse.

Their prayerful exaltation and praise of Krishna is a steadfast act of devotion¹⁷² which also exhibits a characteristic stage (*guṇa-kīrtana*) of love-in-separation.¹⁷³ Here we observe that the Gopīs' practice of *viraha-bhakti* is indistinguishable from their condition; it is concretised in their very selves through a lived prayer that pervades every pore. Their glorification of Krishna leads to a deeper absorption in him which further inflames their longing. By addressing him as Beloved, Jīva¹⁷⁴ explicates that the Gopīs appeal to Krishna's compassionate nature and also remind him that he has captivated their hearts, in the hope that he may be compelled to grant his vision.

As they beseech Krishna to reveal his manifest form, the Gopīs articulate their desire to encounter him in his most supremely intimate form,¹⁷⁵ which is the essence of infinite bliss, love and beauty.¹⁷⁶ Although the nature of the Gopīs' love is theologically grounded based on their awareness that Krishna is God¹⁷⁷ and the inner-witness in each soul,¹⁷⁸ they do not seek an interior realisation of his impersonal form. For them, the perceptible vision of his transcendental form is pre-eminent since Krishna is foremost their Beloved with whom they share a loving relationship. As Hawley notes, 'direct contact with Krishna is all that matters to them – the real Krishna, not some shadowy, tasteless, subtle substitute'.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² Freda Matchett, 'The Pervasiveness of Bhakti in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa', in *Love Divine: Studies in Bhakti and Devotional Mysticism*, ed. by Karel Werner, Durham Indological Series No. 3 (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993), pp. 95-116 (p. 108).

¹⁷³ De, p. 217.

¹⁷⁴ *The Rāsa Dance*, p. 340.

¹⁷⁵ This intimate form of Krishna is the ultimate divine descent and non-different to the Supreme Deity. (see Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, pp. 108-109).

¹⁷⁶ The all-blissful essence of the Supreme God is declared in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* as '*raso vai sah*' (2.7.1) (see Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 99) and '*Brahman is bliss*' (3.6.1) (see Patrick Olivelle (trans.), *Upaniṣads*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)).

¹⁷⁷ Rāsa Līlā 1.31-1.41 (*BhP* 10.29.31-10.29.41).

¹⁷⁸ The Gopīs specifically refer to this in *GG* verse 4. Rāsa Līlā 3.4 (*BhP* 10.31.4).

¹⁷⁹ Hawley, 'Yoga and Vīyoga', p. 6.

The form of Krishna in *Vraja* is regarded as ‘most perfect’ by Vaishnava theologians¹⁸⁰ and it is this beautiful form that the Gopīs wish to behold, savour and relish in union.¹⁸¹ Knowledge of his inner presence does not assuage but inflames the pain in their longing hearts; even though he is near, he is not visible. It thus appears that their life-breath is not sustained by his indwelling presence insofar as it is preserved on account of them having dedicated their lives to Krishna in love. Seeking him and obtaining his vision is therefore vitally essential.

Fundamentally inherent in the Gopīs’ request to see Krishna is the wish to also be seen by him¹⁸² and this emphasises the important concept of *darśan* (vision). The act of *darśan* is a mutually interactive process whereby God sees the devotee and the devotee sees God.¹⁸³ It symbolises the apotheosis of devotion since it denotes the theological meeting point between the human effort of seeking and the divine grace of love, opening up the connection to experience the highest bliss through perceiving Krishna’s glorious beauty.

In Vaishnavism, direct vision of Krishna is regarded as the highest goal which supersedes liberation.¹⁸⁴ For the Gopīs, Krishna’s *darśan* enables an ecstatic exchange of sight which serves as the medium for the giving and receiving of selfless love into each other’s hearts. *Darśan* thus becomes a sacred act in which the loving divine-human relationship is actualised. Devoid of this opportunity in separation, the Gopīs suffer immeasurably and intensely long for the ultimate expression of reciprocal engagement that can only be granted by Krishna’s vision. As their seeking persists, their love-longing increases and their desire to see Krishna becomes transmuted into an existential need.

¹⁸⁰ Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Bhakti-Rasāmṛta-Sindhu*, (With commentary of Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī and Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Thākura), trans. by Bhānu Svāmī, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Chennai: Sri Vaikunta Enterprises, 2009), *BRS* 2.1.223, p. 464. [Hereafter abbreviated *BRS*].

¹⁸¹ In this theistic union, there is a duality retained between the soul and God which enables devotional love to continue both in human and eternal life.

¹⁸² Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 240.

¹⁸³ Diana L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007) (3rd edition published by Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ *PrS* 7-9; *PrS* 16.

SC 1

Where have you hidden,
Beloved, and left me moaning?
You fled like the stag
after wounding me.
I went out calling you, but you were gone.

The Bride's heartbroken state is clearly discernible in this stanza as she intensely seeks her Beloved who has suddenly and mysteriously vanished. Filled with immense love and longing for him, she employs all her efforts in finding him but is bewildered by not knowing where he has hidden. By piercing her heart with the arrows of his divine love, the Beloved has ignited an even deeper affection within her. These wounds of love now afflict her with the pain of longing in his absence, thus doubly wounding her and causing her to moan in increased anguish.¹⁸⁵ Having felt great elation in the company of her Beloved, she is now left engulfed by inestimable desolation. Stein submits that the agony caused by the Beloved's unexplained departure is indicative of the delight the Bride experienced in his presence.¹⁸⁶ Without him, she finds no solace and strives to seek him with the greatest resolve.

Highlighting the Carmelite Christocentric theology, John explains that the Bride's longing is for the 'clear and essential vision' of her Bridegroom, the Son of God.¹⁸⁷ Although the Trinitarian form of God is present within the soul,¹⁸⁸ this awareness of God's immanent presence does not pacify the Bride since she wishes to experience him through spiritual affection, the highest indwelling constituted of 'perfect love'.¹⁸⁹ Williams accords this latter mode greater theological significance since it is the means by which the Bride can engage in a loving relation with her Beloved.¹⁹⁰ This union of love is the acme of John's mystical theology. Having been so close to attaining this highest vision and union, the Bride is aggrieved by her Beloved's disappearance and languishes in love. Completely attached to him, she petitions him by 'Beloved' in order to invoke his mercy and vision.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ SC 1.16-1.17.

¹⁸⁶ Stein, p. 238.

¹⁸⁷ SC 1.2.

¹⁸⁸ SC 1.6.

¹⁸⁹ Stein, p. 167.

¹⁹⁰ Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p. 167.

¹⁹¹ SC 1.13.

As the Bride seeks the ‘manifest presence and vision of his divine essence’,¹⁹² the theological metaphor of the Bridegroom being a ‘hidden treasure’¹⁹³ provides an insight into revealing the nature of God’s essence as his beauty.¹⁹⁴ Both John¹⁹⁵ and the Christian tradition¹⁹⁶ designate beauty to be the very essence of God’s being, and it is this sheer abounding limitless beauty¹⁹⁷ that the Bride desires to behold. Connecting this with the Bible’s proclamation that ‘God is Love’¹⁹⁸ elucidates that the very essence of God’s beauty is love, and it is this being of love whom the Bride has been drawn to but who has hidden from her. Her ‘longing for God out of love of his being and majesty’¹⁹⁹ transforms into an imperative search to find the hidden treasure.

To find the hidden Beloved, the Bride seeks him in contemplation with a total dedication of the heart, mind and self, guided by ‘faith and love’.²⁰⁰ Although she suffers immensely due to separation from God, this journey of the ‘Dark Night’²⁰¹ is one that the soul must traverse to reach union.²⁰² Here we find John’s apophatic path of unknowing merging with the cataphatic path of love in the quest to see the beautiful essence of God. Turner construes that the concomitance of these two paths is integral to the mystical experience of God.²⁰³

Along with faith and love, the wounds of love that the Bride has received from her Beloved can be construed to play a crucial part in seeking him. These spiritual wounds of divine communications have consumed, pierced and inflamed her heart with increased love and longing.²⁰⁴ These cherished wounds now appear to become the very source of power which gives her will the strength and courage to search assiduously for her Beloved. In this manner, they propel her towards pursuing the ultimate telos of human life and attaining the vision of her Bridegroom.

¹⁹² SC 1.4.

¹⁹³ SC 1.9.

¹⁹⁴ SC 11.4.

¹⁹⁵ A. N. Williams, ‘The Doctrine of God in San Juan de La Cruz’, *Modern Theology*, 30(4) (2014), 500–524 (p. 514). <DOI:10.1111/moth.12110>, [Accessed: 3 January 2019]. See also SC 11.10; SC 36.5.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Viladesau, ‘Theosis and Beauty’, *Theology Today*, 65(2) (2008), 180–190 (pp. 181–182). <<https://doi-org.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk/10.1177/004057360806500205>>, [Accessed: 14 March 2019].

¹⁹⁷ Thompson, p. 100.

¹⁹⁸ Bible (1 John 4:8).

¹⁹⁹ Klostermaier, p. 757.

²⁰⁰ SC 1.11.

²⁰¹ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, (*The Dark Night* 1.11.1) p. 383; (*The Dark Night* 2.6.2) p. 404.

²⁰² Peers, p. 255.

²⁰³ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 265.

²⁰⁴ SC 1.17; SC 1.19.

Comparison

A comparative reading of the first verses of both texts reveal an emotionally-charged search triggered by the separation of the lover from the Beloved. The disappearance of the Beloved has left the Bride and the Gopīs in a disoriented state but their seeking re-orientates them. The pain of his absence causes them to seek him everywhere but to no avail. Having exhausted their efforts, their longing further increases and their seeking takes on the modus operandi of intense contemplative prayer. Exhibiting their selfless love, they seek God for the sake of God alone.

The separation that the Bride and the Gopīs are faced with underlines the theistic tenets of both John's mystical theology²⁰⁵ and the *bhakti* theology of the *BhP*.²⁰⁶ Neither wish to overcome the ontological divine-human distinction and be merged into God.²⁰⁷ Instead, they wish to savour²⁰⁸ and experience a loving relationship by remaining two personalities but completely united in and through love. The oneness they seek is a oneness of love where the will is completely transformed and imbibed with the will of God. From this perspective, longing for and seeking God emerge as central to the theological anthropology of both traditions. Though God's presence allows one to love him, his absence reveals the depth of that affection and creates the opportunity to love and long for him even more.

The heart-breaking plea 'where have you hidden?' by the Bride encapsulates the love-longing aspect found within bridal mysticism in Catholicism and *viraha-bhakti* in Vaishnavism. The theological causes of God's hiddenness, such as to eliminate the pride of the devotee, or to purify, intensify and perfect the love that the soul possesses for God, cannot attenuate the distress felt by the Bride and Gopīs over the Beloved's disappearance. The urgency of their petition reflects the pain of separation which, as Clooney declares, cannot be 'explained away theologically'²⁰⁹ since it arises from the experience of an ardent love for a real Beloved who is absent.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ John's mystical theology emphasises the soul's absorption, transformation and participation in God through love. The *SC* stanzas on spiritual union expound this simultaneous oneness yet distinctiveness of participation.

²⁰⁶ The *BhP* emphasises a difference-in-identity philosophy known as *acintyabhedābheda* or *saviśeṣādvaita*. For further details, see Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāna*.

²⁰⁷ Hernández, 'Presence, Absence and Divine Vision', p. 98.

²⁰⁸ This savouring of love is demonstrated by the example of desiring to taste sugar as opposed to becoming sugar. See Hillgardner, p. 99.

²⁰⁹ Clooney, *His Hiding Place is Darkness*, p. 33.

²¹⁰ Clooney, *His Hiding Place is Darkness*, p. 32.

Even as longing is an inevitable part of loving, separation is a conjoined reality linked to union. As interdependent states, they cannot be held without one another. The current agony of separation faced by the Bride and Gopīs implies a previously experienced jubilant presence of God and also points to the possibility of future re-union.²¹¹ Hence this intense longing in separation is a vivid reality which compels the Bride and Gopīs to seek the Beloved even more fervently. Their suffering does not dampen but inflames their ardour of seeking. As the Gopīs' search becomes resolutely persistent, the Bride's search becomes persistently resolute.

Reading the *GG* verse through the *SC* reveals three insights. Firstly, the Bride and Gopīs both long to see the Beloved's manifest vision which is wholly constituted of infinite beauty and regarded as the most supreme form. It is by seeing him that they obtain the greatest happiness. For the Bride, this is through spiritual affection and for the Gopīs, it is by *darśan*. This divine vision of God's essence can only be received and enjoyed through a direct and immediate experience of divine presence, and it is through seeing his form that they can share an intimate bond of love. Though the theological stance of envisioning this form differs in each text, it is evident that no other substitute, such as God's indwelling presence in the soul, can suffice or satisfy.

Secondly, in both texts, longing is not constricted to a passive despondent or debilitating feeling but emerges as a powerful affective state capable of turning into a dynamic force to seek the divine. This seeking through longing represents the human effort which earnestly strives towards becoming qualified to receive the divine grace of the Beloved's presence. Accordingly, the search for the Beloved is one of necessity and therefore one-directional and without demarcations. However, there is a slight difference in the approach taken by the Bride and the Gopīs. Whilst the Bride's apophatic longing is symbolised by suffering the wounds of love and the path of unknowing, the Gopīs' longing is cataphatically symbolised by eulogising and preserving of the life-airs. The Bride is frantically desperate to find her Beloved, whilst the Gopīs are desperately frantic to attain their Beloved's vision. For both, there is no

²¹¹ The *Spiritual Cantic* and *Rāsa Līlā* chapters both show that along the entire mystical journey and the spiritual path of *bhakti*, the joyful periods of divine presence are intermixed with poignant phases of divine absence. John explains that even in the highest achievable state of union (spiritual marriage) in this life, the soul still experiences the hiddenness of God (*SC* 1.11) and the *BhP* recounts how the Gopīs face separation after attaining the highest union with Krishna (in the *Rāsa Līlā* dance) when he later departs from Vraja (*BhP* 10.39). (Similar observations on how love-in-separation is inextricably linked with union are made by Stein, p. 259 and Hillgardner, p. 17).

turning back in their seeking and no alternative but to move forward. With their very lives dependent on finding him, they search relentlessly and untiringly.

Thirdly, reflecting on the Bride's wounds help us to better understand the Gopīs' manner of searching. The Gopīs, like the Bride, are left moaning after being wounded by the arrows of Krishna's love. Their moanings and wounds become conspicuous in their words as they panegyrised him, and similar to the Bride's wounds, become their strength in searching and longing for him. Though these wounds cause them to languish in the Beloved's absence, they also enable the Beloved to be kept in view until he is regained in sight. In this manner, the wounds become a powerful way of searching and also preserving their lives until he appears.

That seeking may run the risk of not finding is something which the Bride and Gopīs do not even consider a possibility. Their searches emerge as acts of faithful loving in which there is dedication, determination and a complete focus on their Beloved. It is this aspect of focus in the form of remembrance that we will turn to explore next.

Remembering

GG 10

Your smiles,
 loving glances
 for your beloved ones,
And your intimate
 playful ways
 are auspicious meditations;
Also the promises
 you made to us in secret –
 all have touched our hearts.
O cunning one,
 indeed, these things
 agitate our minds.

As the Gopīs lament in their Beloved’s absence, they are overcome with his remembrance and memories of their loving encounters. They acknowledge that Krishna’s charming attributes and activities, by which their hearts have been captivated, are auspicious to meditate upon. Jīva accords incremental significance to each of Krishna’s acts in this verse, conveying that meditation of each brings increased delight,²¹² however this also infers unabating agitation in *viraha*. Recollecting fond moments of togetherness brings joy and deepens their love, yet at the same time, these moments cause the Gopīs acute anguish in separation. By recalling these cherished moments of happiness, they attempt to reconstruct the completeness felt in Krishna’s presence, but it evermore evinces their current incompleteness. In this manner, the Gopīs’ continual remembrance crystallises into natural and spontaneous meditation culminating in a one-pointed focus on Krishna.

The practice of meditation (*dhyāna*), constituting constant remembrance and visualisation, is a central aspect of Vaishnava devotional practice.²¹³ The *BhP* expounds that by channelling one’s emotions towards Krishna, one’s mind, heart and soul becomes fully absorbed in him.²¹⁴ The beautiful features and amorous acts of Krishna are regarded worthy of meditation since they cultivate one-pointedness, nurture one’s

²¹² *The Rāsa Dance*, p. 389.

²¹³ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 155; McDaniel, ‘Blue Lotuses Everywhere’, p. 94.

²¹⁴ Rāsa Līlā 1.15 (*BhP* 10.29.15).

love for him and lead to complete self-perfection.²¹⁵ Krishna’s smiling, glancing and playful ways demonstrate a mode of communication which surpasses speech and reasoning. These expressions of love abide in the realm of experience, and meditation functions as the vessel to contain the Gopīs’ overflowing love for him which is generated through reliving those experiences. Whilst the Gopīs’ sustained one-pointed concentration becomes a mechanism for survival in the Beloved’s absence, it paradoxically inflames their love-longing and avid desire to see him. Jīva points out that rekindling the memories of their intimate rendezvous creates a renewed hope and increased longing to meet him.²¹⁶

In their hope-filled longing, the Gopīs conjure an evocative presence-in-absence of their Beloved by engaging their mind, heart and body in contemplating Krishna. Although the meditation undertaken by the Gopīs in devotional love-in-separation parallels the practice of yoga²¹⁷, there is one fundamental difference which accords to the former superiority over the latter. The Gopīs’ meditation is not a cognitively enforced disciplinary method but a natural effortless response of the reminiscing mind and heart which fills their consciousness exclusively with Krishna.²¹⁸ This poignant reminiscence serves an integral purpose in effectuating a spiritual metamorphosis, causing a further intensification of longing for divine presence.²¹⁹ Unceasingly engrossed in Krishna through their immense love for him, the Gopīs’ heartache becomes more excruciating and exacerbates their pain of separation. As Hawley remarks, ‘to love God simply is as hard, even harder, than yoga’.²²⁰ Remembering Krishna is ineluctable; forgetting him is impossible.

The aspect of constant contemplation on Krishna in his absence leads to *viraha-bhakti* being given a soteriological value in the *BhP*.²²¹ However, for the Gopīs engaged in loving devotion to their Beloved, their love and longing for Krishna is not for the sake of liberation but to be able to attain the joy of his divine vision and presence. Jīva highlights the triviality of liberation for the devotee who loves Krishna by comparing it to a river, and asserts that the only goal of the devotee is to enjoy the bliss of devotion,

²¹⁵ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, pp. 154-155.

²¹⁶ *The Rāsa Dance*, p. 389.

²¹⁷ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, pp. 154-155; Hardy, pp. 101-102.

²¹⁸ Hawley, ‘Yoga and Viyoga’, pp. 6-8.

²¹⁹ Carman, p. 206.

²²⁰ Hawley, ‘Yoga and Viyoga’, p. 18.

²²¹ Tracy Coleman, ‘Viraha-Bhakti and Strīdharmā: Re-Reading the Story of Kṛṣṇa and the Gopīs in the Harivaṃśa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 130(3) (2010), 385-412 (p. 387). <www.jstor.org/stable/23044958>, [Accessed: 28 July 2018].

which is likened to an ocean.²²² Thus loving devotion emerges as far more superior and valuable than liberation. Interpreting this verse from this perspective, we gain a better theological understanding of the promises made in secret by Krishna, which the Gopīs allude to. The esoteric nature of these promises can be understood as pointing to precious moments of enjoying the highest devotional bliss in union with Krishna. Analogous to treasures, these special moments are kept concealed from external view since they are the preserve of the most intimate lover-beloved relationship.

SC 2

Shepherds, you who go
up through the sheepfolds to the hill,
if by chance you see
him I love most,
tell him I am sick, I suffer, and I die.

The Bride's plight resounds tellingly as she enlists her 'desires, affections and moanings'²²³ as messengers to relay her distressing condition to God via prayer. These intermediaries are completely inclined towards the Beloved and abound with a true love which seeks only God.²²⁴ In this manner, her feelings become a constant means of remembering her Beloved, and equally a way of reminding him of her unconditional love. Her relationship with God is so intimate that only her sentiments can discern and convey the state of her heart. This reveals a meaningful interpretation of prayer which is being conveyed implicitly by John, that it is not the words but the sincere sentiments contained within them that reach God. The power of her prayer is in her feelings.

The 'present-absence'²²⁵ of God inflames the innermost desire of the heart to see him. As the Bride reaches out to her Beloved whom she loves the most,²²⁶ she demonstrates a complete and exclusive centring on God. Her desires and feelings evoke vividly potent

²²² *BRS* 1.1.4.

²²³ *SC* 2.2.

²²⁴ *SC* 2.2-2.3.

²²⁵ McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xix.

²²⁶ *SC* 2.5.

reminders of past encounters where the compassionate Beloved had communicated to her glimpses of his vision and divine touches of love. Reflection on these moments of blissful rapture becomes a source of affliction since they accentuate what she has lost, compounding to her agony of feeling abandoned.²²⁷ Remembering barely provides any relief, instead it intensifies her longing to regain the Beloved's presence since 'nothing can 'substitute' for God'.²²⁸ Her restlessness can only be mitigated by God alone.²²⁹

The Bride's emotional eruption in proclaiming 'I am sick, I suffer, and I die' reveals how she finds herself extremely empty, bereft and deteriorating without him. At the same time, it also shows her single-minded love, dedicated focus and complete pre-occupation with her Beloved. In disclosing her needs, she reveals her one-pointedness towards her Beloved who is her everything – her health, joy and life.²³⁰ Here we can ascertain the loving attachment and dependency that the Bride has formed with the Bridegroom; her God-centredness leaves no room to be concerned with anything else. Williams postulates that in this 'state of single-mindedness' towards God, the soul becomes a reflection of 'divine purity and simplicity'.²³¹

Due to this firm bond, the Bride's spiritual faculties writhe in the agony of separation; the intellect is sick as it is deprived of the Beloved's vision and the will suffers having been left devoid of his union. Her memory is even more harrowed as it comes close to death upon recalling his absenteeism from her intellect and will. She also fears her own unworthiness which could impede seeing him at all in this life.²³² The emptiness of the faculties is felt all the more grievously since despite being void of all worldly satisfaction, they remain unfilled with the fullness of God.²³³ Apprising her desperate situation, Peers singles out the helplessness of the intellect in contrast to the memory and will, both of which, at least, can incessantly continue to reminisce and long for the Beloved.²³⁴

²²⁷ Peers, pp. 259-260.

²²⁸ Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p. 166.

²²⁹ Stein, p. 239.

²³⁰ SC 2.8.

²³¹ A. N. Williams, 'The Doctrine of God in San Juan de La Cruz', p. 516.

²³² SC 2.6.

²³³ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, (The Living Flame of Love 3.18)* pp. 680-681.

²³⁴ Peers, p. 250.

Along with the spiritual faculties, the theological virtues of faith, love and hope also suffer²³⁵ since they are the means by which God communicates in his presence.²³⁶ Oriented entirely towards the Beloved, although these virtues flounder in the abyss of separation, they become fortified through suffering and increase abundantly in remembrance.²³⁷ The co-occurring suffering and augmentation of these virtues strengthen the Bride's wholehearted centring on God as well as creating an upsurge of longing. The paradox of the Bride's situation is that though she feels empty without her Beloved, she is simultaneously consumed by and filled with his remembrance and love. Although her feelings and memories continue to plague her, they become the very means of sustenance in separation.

Comparison

A comparative rumination on the Bride and Gopīs' remembrance uncovers how they both evoke a palpable presence of their Beloved which induces a concurrent experience of solace and torment. Caught in the middle space of the 'experienced past' and an 'anticipated future', they indwell between capricious instances of delightful consolations and the distress of unfulfilled fulfilment. This twofold remembrance amplifies their longing, which in turn, becomes a catalyst for exclusive centring on God. The development of their respective one-pointedness, however, arises from two divergent poles of remembrance.

The Bride's remembrance emanates from the sense of emptiness and loss that she experiences in the Beloved's absence. Bereft with grief in the awareness of this desolation, she feels a terrible void in her spiritual faculties and virtues. Her feelings and recollections subsume this void through longing, saturating it with an unbreakable concentration of the absent Beloved. On the other hand, the Gopīs' minds overflow with memories of Krishna which provoke indescribable perturbation in his separation. Kindled by remembrance, their longing produces a presence-in-absence in which they become immersed to withstand their crushing loneliness. Though paradoxical, the respective emptiness and fullness of the Bride and Gopīs' contemplations converge into

²³⁵ SC 2.7.

²³⁶ For John's definition of the virtues, see *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, (Glossary – 'Theological Virtues') p. 776.

²³⁷ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, p. 357.

a longing that efficaciously results in a single-minded focus on their Beloved. This powerful aspect of their devotion fortifies and nourishes their selfless love²³⁸ which abounds just as much, if not more, in the Beloved's absence. This selfless love can be understood as a synthesis of an *agapic* love fuelled with the passionate intensity of an *eros* love.²³⁹

Superimposing²⁴⁰ the love-longing of the Bride onto that of the Gopīs further illumines the theological import contained within the Gopīs' remembrance. Similar to the Bride, we find a link between the Gopīs' spiritual faculties and Krishna's communications. In remembering what they had gained but subsequently lost, the Gopīs' intellect, will and memory can be understood as being suffused with a simultaneous fullness and emptiness of Krishna's communications. His smiles and glances mesmerised the intellect, his playful ways have enchanted the will and his secret talks have enthralled the memory. Bereft of his presence and lacking these pleasing communications, their hearts are in turmoil, and identical to the Bride, their spiritual faculties become 'sick, suffer, and die'.

As a result, the Gopīs' faith, love and hope are also affected; every moment without Krishna leaves their hope dying as they feel they lack the faith and love to see him. However, their meditation based upon previously experienced sweet associations creates a longing which is able to sustain their virtues of love and hope, and a one-pointedness which revitalises their faith in this time of desperation. Akin to the Bride, by recalling his benevolent nature, the Gopīs' hope to see their Beloved is further renewed and fosters a deeper love reinforced by an unbreakable faith.

This illumination allows us to read this verse of the *GG* with a new perspective, and unearths a deeper theological meaning by reading alongside the *SC*. For both the Bride and Gopīs, we ascertain how the experienced past develops faith, the anticipated future develops hope, and moreover how both elements combine through longing to increase their love. It also highlights the importance of the emotional aspect of spiritual

²³⁸ This selfless love is a love for God with the sole intent to love, please and serve him, as opposed to a worldly love which is motivated by selfish interests or materialistic desires. It is devoid of self-seeking motives or expectations for worldly fulfilment or self-gain. The sole objective of selfless love is to be in love with God, attain God through this love and delight in his love. The very act of loving and rejoicing in God is the reward of this spiritually-oriented and spiritually-motivated love.

²³⁹ Thompson, p. 167.

²⁴⁰ This is one of the methods of comparison identified by Clooney. See Francis X. Clooney, *Theology After Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 169. <<https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/2027/heb.30829>>, [Accessed: 20 March 2019].

experience which vividly and vigorously creates an exclusive centring on the Beloved. Fully occupied with his thoughts and remembrance, the longing hearts and minds of the Bride and Gopīs can only be pacified by the Beloved's divine vision.

Initially, these verses may only appear to be a description of the Bride and Gopīs' passive melancholy state as they do not exhort any action on the part of the lovers or the Beloved. However, careful reflection shows an active intensification of the Bride and Gopīs' longing through a sustained and continuously increasing one-pointedness towards the object of their affection. Caught in an unforgettable love for an unforgettable Beloved, they drown in the ocean of divine love as they are swept away by waves of fond memories now tinged with the pain of loss. Submerged in the pool of loving remembrance, they are not deviated by even an iota of mundane worldly remembrance and remain entirely focussed on him alone.

Through this one-pointedness, they fervently long for the Beloved's vision and presence in order to be relieved of their anguish. Immersing themselves in the one whom they are trying to find, their longing serves as an instrumental tool for conscious meditation. There is a deep penetrating love-longing that emerges from the core of their soul and pervades their entire being.²⁴¹ The measure of their formidable love can be discerned from their acute longing; no matter how painful, it is a love that they cannot do without and a Beloved they cannot live without.

Mindful that this insight arises through a reversed directionality of reading the texts, an important observation is that although the Bride and Gopīs' longing bears a very strong resemblance, the Bride's longing is not presented or alluded to as a soteriology in Catholic mysticism as it is within Vaishnavism. In mysticism, the soteriological function is accomplished by union alone, however absence and longing both perform an instrumental role in reaching this union.

²⁴¹ This instinctive nature of the love of God is intrinsic to both the Hindu and Christian faiths. Happiness of the devotee is inextricably linked to being in union with God; an individual can therefore only find fulfilment through the fruition of their love and longing. (See Klostermaier, 'Hṛdayavidyā').

Yearning

GG 17

The promises you made
to us in secret and
the passionate feelings
rising in our hearts;
Your smiling face and
glances of pure love;
Your broad chest,
the abode of Sri;
Recalling all this,
we feel constant,
unbearable longing for you
and our minds become bewildered.

The Gopīs' recollection of the blissful moments relished in union with Krishna, which kindled love and passion, now ignite an intolerable fire of agony in their hearts during separation. The poetic repetition of the sentiments in this verse²⁴² indicate an increased intensity of their longing and emotional turmoil, whereas the theological repetition emphasises the sincere devotional relationship between Krishna and the Gopīs.

Recalling the pleasurable past makes the present painfully unendurable and for the first time in the song,²⁴³ the Gopīs explicitly express their yearning by telling Krishna of their 'constant, unbearable longing'. The intensity of their longing is increased by the opportunity they had to savour the highest degree of passionate love (*madhura-rasa*)²⁴⁴ through the most intimate form of loving devotion (*mādhurya-bhāva*) in an albeit short-lived²⁴⁵ union with their Beloved. During this time, they relished Krishna's smiles, glances and sweet conversations which expressed his reciprocity of their pure divine selfless love (*prema*).²⁴⁶

²⁴² This verse bears some resemblance to *GG* verse 10, explored in the 'Remembering' section.

²⁴³ Whilst all the *GG* verses exhibit the Gopīs' longing through various statements, words and expressions, this is the first occasion that their hankering is explicitly referred to. The next direct reference to longing is made in the succeeding verse (verse 18).

²⁴⁴ Rukmani, p. 170.

²⁴⁵ *Rāsa Līlā* 2.42-2.48 (*BhP* 10.30.42-10.30.48).

²⁴⁶ Glances and smiles are the indicators and expression of *mādhura rasa* (*BRS* 3.5.13).

The interpretation by Jīva in his commentary also affirms this reciprocal love, and specifically accentuates that the initiation of love was by Krishna. Jīva states that the passionate feelings arose in Krishna’s heart, due to which he conveyed his sentiments through his loving gaze and smiles.²⁴⁷ The Gopīs responded to the feelings Krishna evoked in their hearts. Thus, his actions were the primary cause of arousing desire and love in the Gopīs’ hearts. Martin similarly asserts, ‘even as we might love God, so God pursues us, woos the human heart.’²⁴⁸ Having shared the delights of this mutual love,²⁴⁹ the Gopīs now face an insurmountable grief in separation from Krishna. As they ponder on the moments of union, their yearning intensifies and their hankering to see him grows even stronger. After all, it is the nature of true love to perpetually increase,²⁵⁰ hence, as Vaudeville posits, it cannot be sated.²⁵¹

The escalation of the Gopīs’ yearning leads to a heightened state of love-longing which in turn causes their mind extreme bewilderment. They manifest various stages that occur in love-in-separation²⁵² such as reflection, lamentation, torment and bewilderment.²⁵³ In his commentary to the eighth verse of the *GG*, Jīva equates bewilderment to the penultimate stage of *viraha*.²⁵⁴ The Gopīs’ excessive fervid longing causes them to become inexorably engrossed in remembering Krishna’s beautiful form and amorous acts. As their devotional love-in-separation reaches its zenith through staunch passionate longing, it encapsulates the essence of *bhakti* defined in Gauḍīya Vaishnavism as an intense emotional one-pointedness towards Krishna.²⁵⁵ In this verse, we also perceive a powerful manifestation of the aesthetic, erotic and ecstatic elements of *viraha-bhakti* as identified by Hardy.²⁵⁶

Whilst thinking of Krishna brings happiness, it simultaneously causes sadness due to his absence and evokes an even greater sense of longing to behold him, hence educing a bitter-sweet experience of emotional intoxication. This is symbolic of the Gopīs’ *prema*

²⁴⁷ *The Rāsa Dance*, p. 412.

²⁴⁸ Martin, ‘Love and Longing in Devotional Hinduism’, p. 214.

²⁴⁹ Krishna also advocates a mutual process of *bhakti* in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (4.11) proclaiming ‘according to the manner in which they dedicate themselves to me so I devote myself to them’. See Nicholas Sutton, *Bhagavad-Gita* (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, 2016), p. 70.

²⁵⁰ *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, *Sūtra* 53, p. 14.

²⁵¹ Vaudeville, p. 40.

²⁵² All the *GG* verses depict the element of *pralāpa* (lamentation) which arises in the type of separation caused by distance (see Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 238).

²⁵³ *PrS* 389; *Ujjvala-nīlamanī*, 15.167; *De*, p. 218.

²⁵⁴ *The Rāsa Dance*, p. 374.

²⁵⁵ *BRS* 1.1.11.

²⁵⁶ Hardy, p. 9.

for Krishna, which is a powerful concatenation of nectar and poison.²⁵⁷ Krishna is bliss,²⁵⁸ so thinking about him and reminiscing about loving memories inflames their heart with increasing love and imparts a nectar-like joy. However, it also serves as a painful reminder of ‘what the gopīs want – what they do not have – but have experienced’.²⁵⁹ Aggravated by his separation, they are inflicted with an unbearable poison-filled torment. As their *viraha* intensifies so does their love, and the Gopīs appear to be caught in an inescapable trap where the nectar of love does not let them die and the poison of separation does not let them live.

Expressing their devotional emotion (*bhāva*)²⁶⁰ through ardent yearning, the Gopīs call out to their Beloved with a heightened eagerness for the *darśan* of his divine form. In doing so, they enkindle a renewed hope for reunion with Krishna, to see his charming smiles and glances, embrace his beautiful chest and engage in sweet loving talks again.

SC 9

Why, since you wounded
this heart, don't you heal it?
And why, since you stole it from me,
do you leave it so,
and fail to carry off what you have stolen?

Bereft with grief, the Bride is inconsolable as her yearning for her Beloved reaches its pinnacle. Deeply enamoured of her Beloved, she faces a crisis of the heart as she recalls the fond moments in which he enchanted her with his love. Distraught in his absence, she is completely flummoxed by his actions and beseeches him with reproaching words. She cannot fathom why her Beloved has wounded and stolen her heart but disappeared

²⁵⁷ Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, CC Madhya: 2.50-2.52, *BhaktiVedanta Vedabase* <<https://www.vedabase.com/en/cc/madhya/2>>, [Accessed: 10 November 2018].

²⁵⁸ Hardy, p. 76.

²⁵⁹ Hernández, ‘Presence, Absence and Divine Vision’, p. 172.

²⁶⁰ David L. Haberman, ‘A Selection from the *Bhaktirasamritasindhu* of Rupa Gosvamin: *The Foundational Emotions (Sthayi-bhavas)*’, in *Krishna: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Edwin F. Bryant, South Asia Edn (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007; repr. 2016), pp. 409-440 (pp. 413-417).

without healing it and fully seizing it.²⁶¹ Her question of ‘why’ conveys the gravity of her love-longing and captures the profundity of her unfathomable love for God. Left in a betwixt and between state, she is ‘like one suspended in the air with nothing to lean on’.²⁶² Through an emotional outpouring, she makes a desperate plea to the Beloved since only he can allay her sorrowful condition.

The Bride’s fragile state of being wounded, dispossessed and forlorn highlights the abiding intensity of her love for the Beloved as well as the Beloved’s love for her. The acts of wounding and being wounded, along with stealing and the heart being stolen reveal a reciprocity of love.²⁶³ This signifies the deepest intimate bond that is established between the Bride and her Beloved through a personal relationship in bridal mysticism.²⁶⁴ A reading of this verse reveals two themes of captivity and possession that emerge from John’s exegesis which enable us to derive a theological understanding of the depth of divine-human love.

By his alluringly irresistible wounds of love, the Beloved captivated the Bride’s heart and caused her to become fully bound by his love. Being drawn into and consumed by his love, the Bride finds herself in his captivity. The actions of the Beloved here depict how God awakens love in the soul²⁶⁵ and it is this desire induced by God that causes the soul to long for him.²⁶⁶ Additionally, John avers that God’s longing for the soul is even greater than that of the soul which longs for him.²⁶⁷ Seized by his love and suffering in separation from her Beloved, the Bride finds herself helpless as her own efforts are futile in assuaging her pain.²⁶⁸ The wounds which had given delight in his presence now penetrate the heart like a ‘poison arrow’,²⁶⁹ inflicting her with the piercing pain of longing and the agonising pain of his absence.²⁷⁰ At the same time, they inflame her love by reminding her of their previously shared joy. This paradoxical nature of love

²⁶¹ SC 9.2.

²⁶² SC 9.6.

²⁶³ Elizabeth B. Davis, "The Power of Paradox in the "Cántico espiritual", *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, 27(2) (1993), 203-223 (p. 210). <<http://osu.academia.edu/ElizabethDavis>>, [Accessed: 31 May 2019].

²⁶⁴ McDaniel, ‘Blue Lotuses Everywhere’, p. 92.

²⁶⁵ God is the one who loves the soul first, on account of which love for God is awakened in the soul. See Bible (1 John 4:19); SC 31.2.

²⁶⁶ Augustin Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer: A Treatise on Mystical Theology*, 6th edn (Caritas Publishing, repr. 2016) (originally published in French as *Des Grâces d’Oraison* in 1901, First English edition published in 1910), p. 134.

²⁶⁷ John explains ‘that if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more’ (*The Living Flame of Love* 3.28) and how God is wounded by the love of the Bride (SC 35.7).

²⁶⁸ SC 9.1.

²⁶⁹ SC 9.1.

²⁷⁰ SC 9.3.

produces a ‘bitter-sweet pain of insatiable love’²⁷¹ which intensifies the Bride’s yearning for the Beloved’s vision, as he is the only antidote for the poison arrow she is wounded with.²⁷²

The second theme is of possession. With his sweet and pleasing divine touches of love, the Beloved stole the Bride’s heart, resulting in her loving and living for him alone.²⁷³ This act of stealing serves to exhibit the nature of true love which is underlined by an unconditional and selfless giving of love. To enter into buying and selling would render love a commodity, but here the Beloved has not entered into a trade; he has won over her heart freely. Being dispossessed of her heart is a source of happiness for the Bride, as it is dedicated to the Beloved alone.²⁷⁴ However, she is confounded as to why he has disappeared without taking full possession of her heart.²⁷⁵ Not claiming ownership and neglecting what he stole solely to possess is an incomplete act on the Beloved’s part that causes the Bride inconceivable anguish. Here we observe that the Bride’s suffering arises predominantly due to the desire to be possessed by God, rather than from wanting to possess God.²⁷⁶ She vehemently longs for him to accept her heart, and in doing so, for it to be imbued with his presence.

The torment the Bride experiences portrays the immensity of her selfless love and nature of her intimate and exclusive relationship with the Beloved.²⁷⁷ This is directly reflected in the profound tribulations her heart undergoes in separation; it is an agony that is equated with the pain of childbirth in the Bible.²⁷⁸ Although deserted and powerless, she is not dejected and draws increasing strength²⁷⁹ from her wounds to continue longing unrelentingly for her Beloved. Finding it unbearable to be without him, she yearns for him unceasingly and restlessly with ‘impatient love’.²⁸⁰ This stage bears resonance with the fifth step of the mystical ladder of divine love outlined by John, by which the soul progresses towards God.²⁸¹

²⁷¹ Green, pp. 127-128.

²⁷² SC 9.3.

²⁷³ SC 9.5-9.6.

²⁷⁴ SC 9.5.

²⁷⁵ SC 9.4.

²⁷⁶ Poulain, p. 131.

²⁷⁷ Klostermaier, p. 768.

²⁷⁸ Israel Selvanayagam, *Kristu Bhakti and Krishna Bhakti: A Christian-Hindu Dialogue Contributing to Comparative Theology* (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2017), p. 144.

²⁷⁹ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, (The Dark Night 1.13.5)* p. 390.

²⁸⁰ SC 9.2.

²⁸¹ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, (The Dark Night 2.19.5)* p. 443.

Comparison

The yearning of the Bride and the Gopīs reveals an exponential relationship between love and longing. Ardent longing increases their love which in turn further intensifies their longing. Their love-in-separation has reached a level where they are compelled to forthrightly express their plight to their Beloved. The depth of emotional intensity contained in the Bride and the Gopīs' appeal reveals that the desire for God burns even more avidly within their hearts. Both Krishna and the Bridegroom are stealers of the heart, and their acts of stealing yet leaving hearts unclaimed create an overwhelming bewilderment. Yet, the Bride and Gopīs show no stagnancy or complacency in their love as they incessantly long for and adjure their Beloved to manifest himself. Their loneliness in separation is a heart-breaking reality that can only be resolved by God's presence.

A joint reading of these verses leads to an 'intensification'²⁸² of three aspects emphasised by yearning. The first aspect that is illumined is the theological significance of the longing of God for the soul. It is God's love and longing that instigates the love and longing of the Bride and Gopīs. Since it emanates from an eternal source, their longing therefore contains the capacity to abound infinitely, and in separation we witness it increase maximally. Reliving the Beloved's loving deeds in his absence produces a proliferation of love that far exceeds the love which is engendered during reliving memories in his presence. Arising from a reciprocal relationship, the Bride and Gopīs' *viraha* emerges as a corollary to God's longing. This intensification enables us to develop a better understanding of their yearning. We can now comprehend that it is their longing compounded with an awareness of the Beloved's longing that causes the Bride and Gopīs suffer even more acutely.

Secondly, the bitter-sweet experiences of the Bride and Gopīs emerge as a theological certainty appertaining to their longing in separation. Observing its progressive amplification from the preceding two comparisons, bitter-sweetness in yearning underlines the centrality of the paradoxical co-existence of love and pain, consolation and torment, and hope and desperation encountered in loving God. In doing so, it encompasses the complete experience of love, comprising an array of emotions all directed towards the divine. Whilst this bitter-sweet element somehow enables both the

²⁸² Cornille, p. 871.

Bride and Gopīs to endure the insufferable pain of separation, it is unable to help them endure the actual separation itself. This period of waiting for the Beloved is excruciatingly painful since ‘he comes sooner than we deserve but not as soon as we desire’.²⁸³

As the Bride and Gopīs await their Beloved’s arrival, their devotional love-in-separation can also be understood to function as an eschatological passage. The time of the Beloved’s appearance and presence is ultimately entirely dependent on his will; it cannot be predicted or ascertained, only devoutly and eagerly anticipated. The sincerity of the Bride and Gopīs’ love along with the intensity of their longing continues to unfailingly increase until the Beloved chooses to confer his divine grace upon them and manifest himself. Their bitter-sweet love-longing contains an eschatological potential which enables their love to become perfected²⁸⁴ and for themselves to become worthy of the highest possible union in this life and consequently in eternal life.

It is the pure divine love inculcated and ingrained in human life which qualifies them to advance from death into eternal life.²⁸⁵ Eternal life, like divine union, is also a result of grace. It is a divine gift of God in which the Bride²⁸⁶ and Gopīs²⁸⁷ can remain constantly engaged in the love and service of their Beloved, thereby enjoying the unending bliss of eternal union. It is important to note here that after union has been attained in this life, the subsequent wholehearted love and longing for eternal communion does not imply in the slightest a desire for death. Rather it reveals that one will readily embrace death when it approaches since it is a gateway to the Beloved. In this manner, even the barrier of death is overcome in the passionately resolute love for God.

The Bride and Gopīs’ plight of desperate yearning and distressed waiting thus emerges as a necessary means for progressing and leading them towards union both in this life and eternal life. Regardless of the pain this period of separation causes them, the Bride and Gopīs express no regret for loving, only an uninterrupted yearning to regain what they have lost.

²⁸³ Clooney, *His Hiding Place is Darkness*, p. 54.

²⁸⁴ John likens the process of the soul becoming purified and perfected in the fire of separation to gold being purified in the crucible of fire (see *SC* 3.8 and *The Dark Night* 2.6.6, p. 405).

²⁸⁵ The Bible similarly declares ‘anyone who does not love remains in death’ (1 John 3:14). This reveals the supreme and elevated status of love, and suggests that the act of loving not only leads to eternal life but verily constitutes life itself on the earthly plane, since to love is to live.

²⁸⁶ *SC* 1.11.

²⁸⁷ Bryant, xlviii.

This inability to be without God highlights the third aspect, which is the intimate loving bond shared by the Bride and Gopīs with their Beloved. It is because their bond is so strong and intimate that separation is impossible to endure. Other than their Beloved, they know nothing else, seek nothing else and desire nothing else. Enraptured and enthralled by his charming love, their state is most fragile as they burn in the inescapable fire of separation and flounder in the whirlpool of longing. However, it is due to the strength of this devout bond of love that their faith in his return remains unshakeable.

In addition, the metaphors of captivity and possession encountered in the Bride's longing reveal a profound relationship based on a steadfast and earnest love that cannot settle for anything less than God. Reading the longing of the Gopīs through the longing of the Bride discloses how they also wish to possess and be possessed by their Beloved. It is through the process of possessing and being possessed that they truly become dispossessed, and this marks the beginning of the dissolving of the human-divine boundaries, to be finally eliminated in complete union.²⁸⁸ Whilst both the Bride and Gopīs display a convergence towards divine possessiveness, there is a slight difference in their yearning. The Bride demonstrates a 'resolute attachment' through a love that binds, and the Gopīs exhibit a 'passionate commitment' entailing a love without boundaries. In both cases though we find that their yearning, like their love, is unparalleled.

²⁸⁸ This is not a dissolution of individual identity but as John describes, it is a oneness and likeness in love (SC 39.4).

Imploring

GG 18

O dearest one,
by manifesting yourself,
You remove the distress
of the inhabitants
of the forest of Vraja.
Please give to us, whose
hearts are longing for you,
That medicine which brings relief
to our tormented hearts,
fully devoted to you.

In this penultimate verse of the *GG*, the Gopīs, overwhelmed with utmost love-longing, make a final entreaty to Krishna. Their ‘tormented hearts’ can no longer survive without their Beloved and pine excruciatingly in separation. With their longing having reached its epitome, they desperately implore him to grant them the ‘medicine’ of his vision and provide a remedy for their ailing condition.²⁸⁹ In their heart-touching supplication, the Gopīs remind Krishna of the power of his manifest presence, which alleviates miseries and eliminates adversities of all the Vraja residents.²⁹⁰ Jīva explicates that among all the denizens, the Gopīs are the most dearest²⁹¹ of Krishna and thus they adjure him to pay heed to their heart-wrenching plight and extinguish their suffering.

The irony of the Gopīs’ situation is that Krishna is extolled as the lord who obliterates all kinds of miseries,²⁹² but here their profuse suffering is due to him and his act of disappearing. Yet there is no other recourse for the Gopīs but to depend on him to eliminate their suffering. Since their malady has been caused by him, it can only be cured by him. Furthermore, engaged in exclusive devotional love with their minds solely engrossed in him, Krishna is the means and the goal.²⁹³ To behold the beautiful blissful form of Krishna is to also be bestowed with the divine grace of his love, through

²⁸⁹ Hernández, ‘Presence, Absence and Divine Vision’, p. 197.

²⁹⁰ *The Rāsa Dance*, p. 416.

²⁹¹ *The Rāsa Dance*, p. 416.

²⁹² The prologue to the *BhP* proclaims that ‘Krishna puts an end to the threefold agony’, consisting of suffering from natural phenomena or supernatural beings, suffering from other creatures, and psycho-physiological suffering. (see *BhP Part I*, p. 1).

²⁹³ Carman, p. 217.

which separation is overcome and union can be attained.²⁹⁴ The Gopīs thus pine and implore their Beloved for his *darśan*, the only remedy to relieve and assuage the disease of their hearts. This resolute and unwavering longing of the Gopīs leads to their complete self-surrender (*ātma-nivedanam*) to Krishna, revealed here in their enunciation of being ‘fully devoted’ to him.

The Gopīs’ surrender can be comprehended as an act grounded in *parodharma*, the highest duty, which the *BhP* equates with *bhakti*.²⁹⁵ Here we observe a powerfully potent combination of self-surrender, the foremost expression of devotion,²⁹⁶ and *viraha-bhakti*, the highest form of devotion.²⁹⁷ The Gopīs’ incipient surrender is evident from the beginning of the *GG*, and exploration of the facets of seeking, remembering and yearning has found this surrender to emerge in various forms such as dedication, commitment and exclusive centring. As the *GG* progresses, their submission is also demonstrated on the physical and mental planes. However, it is significantly augmented through longing and results in ultimate self-surrender on the spiritual plane in which there is a complete giving of the self – body, mind and soul. A brief consideration is given to the surrender on the physical and mental levels here, before returning to the spiritual level.

In verse three,²⁹⁸ the Gopīs recall how Krishna saved them unreservedly and without delay from numerous disasters. In their surrender, they entrusted their physical welfare to him and sought his refuge. Becoming their saviour, he rescued them on each occasion without waiting to be summoned or requested. Through this recollection, the Gopīs indicate that the agony their physical selves are undergoing in separation is far greater than the physical calamities that afflicted their material bodies. Tormented by the ‘demon of separation’,²⁹⁹ they avidly long for Krishna to relieve them of their grief by his manifest presence. As their torment increases, they seek his refuge even more and become completely reliant upon him.

Verse sixteen³⁰⁰ shows the Gopīs’ act of surrender on the mental plane through the renunciation of all worldly attachments for the sake of Krishna’s love. Forsaking their temporary and illusory familial attachments, the Gopīs approached Krishna and

²⁹⁴ Hernández, ‘Presence, Absence and Divine Vision’, p. 210.

²⁹⁵ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, pp. 163-164.

²⁹⁶ Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, pp. 82-84.

²⁹⁷ *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, Sūtra 82, p. 23.

²⁹⁸ Rāsa Līlā 3.3 (*BhP* 10.31.3).

²⁹⁹ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 241.

³⁰⁰ Rāsa Līlā 3.16 (*BhP* 10.31.16).

submitted themselves to him. Their renunciation is regarded as most authentic and superior since it is an act conducive to their devotion³⁰¹ and arising naturally out of selfless love.³⁰² Dependant on Krishna alone, his abandonment causes inexplicable grief and the Gopīs reprimand Krishna for deserting them in the dark night. This could be regarded as analogous to the Dark Night of the Soul experienced by the Bride. The Gopīs’ suffering educes a dynamic longing which in turn further solidifies their loving submission towards their Beloved.

As the Gopīs’ longing intensifies, it leads to a deepening of their surrender on the physical, mental and spiritual planes, and culminates in total self-surrender in verse eighteen. Submerged in the torrent of longing, they wholly surrender their body, mind and heart to Krishna and place their lives in his hands. Uncertain of when he will grant his vision, they have indomitable faith in Krishna’s proclamation of alleviating the afflictions of those who fully surrender unto him.³⁰³ The Gopīs’ lives are oriented in and to him and he is their only resort. Consequently, their loving surrender opens up an infinite capacity to long for him indefinitely and selflessly. Clooney describes this surrender as a ‘total self-giving with no safety-net’.³⁰⁴

This ultimate surrender of the Gopīs represents the most complete giving of themselves in love, for the sake of love alone. The Gopīs’ self-surrender reveals their unalloyed love which remains unobstructed, undiminishing and ever-present even under the most trying conditions.³⁰⁵ This immense love continually inflames their longing, and in doing so, leads to an unfaltering surrender. Mirroring their love, their surrender equally persists, sustains and increases even in adverse circumstances. Besieged by *viraha*, the Gopīs’ pining in their self-surrender becomes their mode of subsistence.³⁰⁶

³⁰¹ BRS 1.2.255.

³⁰² Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 3.

³⁰³ Sutton, (*Bhagavad-Gita* 18.65-18.66), pp. 271-272.

³⁰⁴ Clooney, *Beyond Compare*, p. 5.

³⁰⁵ *Ujjvala-nīlamanī*, 14.63.

³⁰⁶ Carman, p. 209.

SC 11

Reveal Your presence,
and may the vision of your beauty be my death;
for the sickness of love
is not cured
except by your very presence and image.

The Bride's impassioned and fervid lovesickness compels her to implore her Beloved to manifest his divine vision. Suffering acutely from the disease of love caused by him, she can only be cured by his vision for that alone is the remedy of love.³⁰⁷ Pining for him with her heart, mind and soul, she is prepared to undergo death for a glimpse of his beauty.³⁰⁸ Here we see that her love and longing is so intense that even death seems a trivial occurrence if it enables her to see her Beloved. Whilst John clarifies that the Bride 'speaks conditionally'³⁰⁹ about dying, I contend another theological interpretation may also apply to this statement. Here, death may be interpreted as a symbolic term for self-surrender on the spiritual plane. This death can be understood as a dying to self, an important theme in Christian theology and espoused by St. Paul's pronouncement of 'I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me'.³¹⁰

The Bride's surrender to her Beloved is prevalent in varying preliminary forms from the beginning of the poem but is substantially strengthened through her ardent longing. The aspects of seeking, remembering and yearning show this inchoate surrender appearing through determination, dependency and single-mindedness. Her surrender is discernible on the physical and mental levels, and transfigures into complete self-surrender on the spiritual level, represented by a complete self-giving consolidated by self-emptying and selflessness. The Bride's levels of surrender are reviewed here in respect of their culmination into ultimate surrender.

Stanza three³¹¹ shows the Bride's physical detachment from all material comforts, worldly pleasures and spiritual delights in order to reach her Beloved. She possesses such a strong desire for the Beloved's vision that she steadfastly decides to direct every effort towards finding him by forsaking all pleasures and objects that may create

³⁰⁷ SC 11.11.

³⁰⁸ SC 11.7.

³⁰⁹ SC 11.8.

³¹⁰ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, p. 518.

³¹¹ SC 3.

impediments.³¹² This is a path replete with risk and vulnerability³¹³ but one she has to unavoidably pursue since her longing surpasses even the longing for life.³¹⁴ Along with this detachment, she firmly resolves to ‘practice the virtues and engage in the spiritual exercise’³¹⁵ and courageously overcome any obstacles presented by the world, devil and flesh.³¹⁶ Thus, there is a complete abandonment of all things uncondusive to her quest. Her detachment educes a longing for God replete with intent and boldness, and results in a deepening attachment towards him.

In stanza ten,³¹⁷ the Bride petitions her Beloved to dispel her sorrow since he is the only one who can alleviate the painful condition of her longing.³¹⁸ With her mind solely focussed on him, she remains engrossed in an overwhelming longing for his vision.³¹⁹ Hernández postulates this longing as unique since the desire for God’s ‘perceptible appearance’ necessitates his presence,³²⁰ which itself is the pre-requisite for actualising spiritual union. Expressing her desire to open her eyes to him alone, the Bride demonstrates an affectionate submission of her love and will to him.³²¹ Her absolute dependence and dedication exhibits a surrender on the mental plane and denotes her utter faith in his mercy and solicitude. Finding no satisfaction in anything else, her only solace lies in God and living a life immersed in his love.³²² Her surging despair reveals her fervent longing for the confluence of human desire with divine desire.³²³

The immensity of the Bride’s pertinacious longing strengthens her physical and mental surrender, and results in an ultimate spiritual self-surrender to her Beloved in stanza eleven. In a complete self-giving of her entire life in love, she wholeheartedly surrenders to him such that she lives for him alone and is consumed by his love in thought, word and deed. Unable to support herself any further, it is her complete surrender to the Beloved that provides her succour and strength in the grievous condition of his absence. Here, we find a complete sublimation of her love through longing, and an unshakeable resolve to be united with her Beloved.

³¹² SC 3.5.

³¹³ Turner, p. 178.

³¹⁴ Stein, p. 238.

³¹⁵ SC 3.1.

³¹⁶ SC 3.6.

³¹⁷ SC 10.

³¹⁸ SC 10.4.

³¹⁹ SC 10.1.

³²⁰ Hernández, ‘Presence, Absence and Divine Vision’, p. 189.

³²¹ SC 10.9.

³²² SC 10.2.

³²³ Howells, pp. 6-7.

The Bride's loving surrender to her Beloved is sustained through a devout practice of the theological virtues of faith, hope and love.³²⁴ This true love, which is the foundation of John's mystical theology, is of an ever-increasing nature and firmly fixed in God.³²⁵ As the Bride's ardent love deepens her surrender, it incites a pining in which the suffering she endures bears resonance with sharing in the suffering Christ endured for the love of mankind.³²⁶ The unrelenting force of her pining combined with an unremitting self-surrender reverberates a steadfast determination to persist in her longing under all conditions. Thus, in a similar vein to the Song of Songs,³²⁷ the Bride's love, longing and self-surrender emerge stronger than death.

Comparison

Reading the Bride and Gopīs' episodes of imploring alongside each other emphasises the paramount importance of longing in engendering ultimate loving self-surrender. In doing so, it reveals a new and integral dimension of surrender, which I identify as belongingness. It is this factor which enables longing to perpetually and limitlessly persist in love-in-separation.

Languishing in separation and finding it impossible to continue living without their Beloved, the Bride and Gopīs pine excruciatingly and unceasingly. Suffering grievously, the medicine they require to cure their disease is the vision of their Beloved, whose divine essence abounds with bliss and beauty. The paradox of their situation is such that their spiritual sorrow can only be alleviated by the one who caused it, their divine Beloved. With their longing at its zenith, they completely surrender unto him and implore the Beloved through a final prayer and supplication to manifest his presence.

Surrender is generally understood as incorporating renunciation, abandonment, taking shelter, dependency on God and submitting to his divine will. The Bride and the Gopīs demonstrate a progressive augmentation of these elements on the physical, mental and spiritual planes. Furthermore, the tropes of seeking, remembering and yearning underpin their surrender through the various facets of dedication, commitment and

³²⁴ von Balthasar, pp. 133-134.

³²⁵ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, (The Dark Night 1.4.7)* p. 370.

³²⁶ Howells, p. 8.

³²⁷ *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, p. 519.

exclusive centring. The trope of imploring reveals a totalising of all these physical, intellectual and emotional aspects of surrender, culminating in a loving self-surrender. Here, their minds, hearts, souls and entire lives are wholly surrendered to their Beloved. Fundamentally characterised by an ‘irrevocable self-giving which cannot be taken back’,³²⁸ this sacred transcendental act marks the apotheosis of the Bride and Gopīs’ longing and illumines a new dimension to their self-surrender, that of belongingness.

It is the aspect of belongingness that takes surrender radically beyond its modes of submission and dependency. The complete self-giving of the Bride and Gopīs to their Beloved signifies that they no longer belong to themselves but belong to their Beloved alone. Giving themselves to the object of their love, they are wholly at the mercy and disposal of, and in the possession of their Beloved. Whilst their unconditional surrender reinforces the feelings of total dependency, letting go of everything and yielding to God’s will, their belongingness firmly instils the feeling of ‘I am not mine or the world’s, but I am entirely yours’. It is this powerful affectionate conviction of belonging to the Beloved that causes the Bride and the Gopīs to incessantly pine for God and implore him for his vision. In a constant awareness of their belongingness to God, their longing perpetually intensifies. It also serves as a continual prayer to their Beloved, reminding him that they belong to him alone and cannot live without him. The belongingness of the Bride and Gopīs becomes the ultimate expression of their undiminishing love and indestructible longing.

Here we observe that it is longing in belongingness which makes the surrender of the Bride and Gopīs not a passive process but an active dynamic force. Their surrender is a self-giving, not a self-elimination, therefore whilst submitting themselves wholly to his will, they retain absolute control over their resilient longing for him. This belongingness precludes any possibility of their longing subsiding. Enduring all afflictions and suffering, their belongingness reassures them that God will bestow the grace of his vision.³²⁹ Whilst their longing represents the act of faithful loving, their belongingness demonstrates the act of loving faithfully. Longing and surrender thus form a synergetic and symbiotic relationship which grows and gains immense power through faith, hope and love.

³²⁸ Clooney, *Beyond Compare*, p. 24.

³²⁹ God cannot stay away from the soul who loves him entirely with no other attachments or desires (*SC* 11.1).

The heart-breaking final entreaties by the Bride and the Gopīs for their Beloved to re-appear reveal the most significant moment of their longing in belongingness. The complete breaking of their hearts in the intensity of love-in-separation effects a radical opening up of their hearts. Here they stake everything in loving faith³³⁰ to open themselves up fully to the possibility of blissful union with God. As Clooney aptly remarks, ‘loving God is always a risk’³³¹ and one that the Bride and Gopīs fearlessly embrace through belongingness. This fearless belongingness is wholly unimpeded by any doubts of self-worth or inhibitions of imperfections.³³² Although entirely spiritually vulnerable, their broken-open hearts become a fragile yet powerful zone for unlimited, uninhibited and boundless passionate longing. Deriving strength and courage from this vast expanse of belongingness, their longing does not become stagnant, satiated or complacent. Moreover, it enables them to love selflessly in an endless capacity. Consequently, belongingness as a form of self-surrender occupies the liminal space between separation and union, where longing has infinite potential to persevere, increase and becomes a force to be reckoned with.

³³⁰ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006) (originally published by Harper & Row, Inc., 1956), pp. 116-118.

³³¹ Clooney, *His Hiding Place is Darkness*, p. 139.

³³² Francis X. Clooney, 'When the Religions Become Context', *Theology Today*, 47(1) (1990), 30-38 (p. 34). <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/208082776?accountid=130472>>, [Accessed: 20 August 2018].

Union

Following their heart-rending entreaties filled with utmost love-longing, devotion and belongingness, the Beloved appears and manifests his divine vision to the Bride and the Gopīs. Obtaining the *darśan* of the beautiful transcendental form of Krishna, the supreme Cupid,³³³ the agony of the Gopīs' hearts is assuaged and they experience the highest bliss.³³⁴ Dispelling their sorrow of separation and fulfilling their desire, Krishna graciously bestows upon the Gopīs the highest spiritual union with him through *Rāsa Līlā*, the dance of divine love.³³⁵ Here, their extraordinary love attains to its 'perfect fulfillment and expression'³³⁶ with the grace of their Beloved Lord, who is Love incarnate. Just prior to their ensuing intimate encounters, Krishna extols the Gopīs' supreme love and explains that his disappearance was to intensify their love. He also reveals that he was never away from them and that he continued to love them even whilst being invisible.³³⁷

The Bride too, attains the highest union possible in human life through spiritual marriage with her Beloved Christ.³³⁸ Wounded in love as much as the Bride, God grants her the gracious gift of his divine vision and reveals the essence of his beauty, leading her into an ecstatic rapture.³³⁹ Sharing and participating in divine love, the Bride is transformed and completely imbued with her Beloved's love. In his commentaries³⁴⁰, John elucidates the reason for God's hiddenness as being due to increase the soul's love and longing, in order to bring her to full perfection. The Beloved too cannot remain far away, for 'love captures and binds God himself'³⁴¹ whereby he surrenders himself to his lover.

Thus, we observe that the longing and belongingness of the Bride and Gopīs possesses an infinite power to 'compel God closer'³⁴² and in surpassing all limits, they attain their infinite Beloved God and achieve the blissful state of limitless love.

³³³ Rāsa Līlā 4.2 (*BhP* 10.32.2).

³³⁴ Rāsa Līlā 4.13 (*BhP* 10.32.13).

³³⁵ For further details on *Rāsa Līlā*, see Graham Schweig's *Dance of Divine Love*.

³³⁶ Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love*, p. 2.

³³⁷ Rāsa Līlā 4.20-4.22 (*BhP* 10.32.20-10.32.22).

³³⁸ *SC* 22-35.

³³⁹ *SC* 36.5.

³⁴⁰ John explains these reasons in the commentaries of various stanzas. One example is *SC* 11.1 which compares God's actions to throwing 'water in a forge to stir up and intensify the fire' in order to increase the love of the soul.

³⁴¹ *SC* 32.1.

³⁴² Hillgardner, p. 75.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

It is recognised that the totality of devotional love is constituted by love-in-union and love-in-separation, therefore both are equally important forms of devotion and warrant academic study. Whereas love-in-union symbolises the grace of God,³⁴³ love-in-separation can be interpreted as the human effort to reach God. In this ‘integral harmony of grace and freedom’³⁴⁴ longing emerges as a central component of devotional love-in-separation representing the human effort which constantly strives to be rewarded with the grace of divine vision.

This thesis has sought to explore the role of longing in devotional love-in-separation through the teachings advanced by the Hindu and Christian faiths. As part of this comparative theological study, a number of insights and observations have been elicited concerning this relatively unexplored topic in Western academic study. It is intended that these insights can inform theological understanding, deepen spiritual practice and contribute to fruitful interreligious dialogue. The joint reading of Hindu-Christian texts has led to a significant intensification of the meaning, function and practice of *viraha-bhakti* in both traditions. Furthermore, the interfaith sharing of experiences associated with the epitome of love and longing for God have both reaffirmed and fostered deeper theological understanding within the home tradition.

In particular, a more in-depth understanding of the theology of love has been acquired which affirms the significance of devotional love-in-separation in the pursuit for a Beloved God. In both faiths, longing is the process by which one is drawn into the greatest depth of love for God. The longing of the Bride and Gopīs reveal their steadfast devotion which results in complete inward transformation and total participation in their Beloved, culminating in attaining divine vision and union with God. The four pivotal elements of longing that their devotion is traced through have revealed enriching theological and spiritual insights which are pertinent to a scholar and a practitioner.

The facets of seeking, remembering, yearning and imploring reveal an escalation of the intensity of the Bride and Gopīs’ longing along with a profound augmentation of their love. Their dynamic and powerful longing to attain the Beloved perseveres under all

³⁴³ Joseph Maréchal, ‘Ontology and Theology of Christian Mysticism’, in *Understanding Mysticism*, ed. by Richard Woods (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), pp. 469-476 (p. 474).

³⁴⁴ Clooney, *Beyond Compare*, p. 148.

conditions by metamorphosing from an affective state into affective action. Their spiritual feelings thus transform into spiritual acts of devotion. Comprising a total human response of their entire selves, we observe how the Bride and Gopīs seek with their hearts, remember with their minds, yearn with their whole beings and implore with their souls. Their love-longing pervades their every pore and consumes their entire spirit; not a part of them is left untouched or unaffected. The devotional love-in-separation of the Bride and Gopīs also reveals the paradox of the power and vulnerability of love. Although the pain of separation is sharper than a piercing arrow and their grief is as vast as the ocean, they manifest an invincible longing for their Beloved.

In the trope of seeking, the Bride and Gopīs display an indomitable determination and faith to obtain the divine vision of their hidden Beloved. Overwhelmed by unbearable separation and desperately anxious to revel in the beauty of the one who has beautified their love, their seeking is utmost necessary and defines the starting point of their ascent towards God. A comparative reading emphasises the importance of the manifest vision and presence of the Beloved for both the Bride and the Gopīs. Additionally, the Bride's wounds of love highlight the critical role they execute in her own search as well as the Gopīs' search by powerfully evoking and strengthening their longing through contemplative prayer.

The element of remembering demonstrates the catalytic role of longing in engendering one-pointedness and exclusive centring on God. As the Bride and Gopīs search for their Beloved, their minds are filled with his remembrance and swing like a pendulum back and forth between consolation and desolation. His thoughts, like himself, are irresistibly charming yet also beguilingly ensnaring. The Bride and Gopīs' recollections consequently create a vivid presence-in-absence of the Beloved which becomes a means of holding him near until he reappears. Here the comparative reading of the Bride's longing and its effect on her spiritual faculties and theological virtues also illumines how the Gopīs' faculties and virtues are impacted through remembrance of their Beloved.

The stage of yearning reveals the reciprocity of love which induces the bitter-sweet experience of love-in-separation encountered by the Bride and Gopīs. Their agony in the absence of the Beloved conveys their closeness and immense love for him. The Bride and Gopīs do not love from the peripheries but from the very centre, therefore in his absence they are surrounded by a sense of incompleteness from all sides. Inebriated

with his love, they exhibit an unrestrained and impatient longing combined with committed yet painful waiting. Through a comparative reading of yearning, the captivity and possession of the Bride by her Beloved enables us to discern the significance of divine possessiveness intrinsic in the Gopīs' love and longing for Krishna.

The compounding of the Bride and Gopīs' longing through the aspects of seeking, remembering and yearning reaches its peak in imploring. Here, their condition reveals the epitome and totality of their devotion. Their longing is so strong that they cannot remain alive without seeing him but equally they cannot die without seeing him. Burning in the fever of love, they suffer a complete crisis of the heart. As they plummet further into the abyss of separation, they demonstrate an uninhibited love and determined longing for the Beloved. In this comparative reading, the facet of imploring emerges as a vital aspect of longing that results in ultimate surrender in the form of belongingness. The longing in belongingness serves as a bridge between absence and presence, eventually leading the Bride and Gopīs towards union with their Beloved.

The emergence of belongingness as a dimension of self-surrender is a key insight derived from this comparative study which is deemed to be of research value in the study of both traditions. This concept emerges strongly in both texts as a result of the comparative exercise, which otherwise perhaps would not have been as apparent. As the longing of the Bride and Gopīs reaches its zenith, their self-surrender also reaches its pinnacle wherein there is a complete belongingness to their Beloved in love, to love, with love, and for love. It is surrender in the form of belongingness which creates a zone where the divine absence of God causes the Bride and Gopīs' love to become perfected and their longing to increasingly deepen. Their belongingness allows them to love and long intensely and freely without any boundaries, conditions and limitations. Longing and surrender are therefore not mutually exclusive but interdependent. As belongingness pervades the liminal space between separation and union, it creates the potentiality for longing in separation to remain an active force, enabling love to expand endlessly for a God who is infinite.

This thesis has aimed to contribute to scholarship by explicating an understanding of the practice of *viraha-bhakti* and longing in the Hindu-Christian faiths from theological and spiritual perspectives. As comprehensive study of devotional love-in-separation appears in its nascent stages, there are opportunities for pursuing and expanding scholarly inquiry in this area. Firstly, the present study can be extended by studying the complete

set of verses of both texts which pertain to longing to obtain a more complete representation and intricate understanding. This would address the limitation of this thesis identified in chapter three, where it has only been possible to study selected verses. It would also enable diverse scholarly approaches to be considered such as contemporary contemplative practices, literary analysis, psychological dimensions and anthropological aspects. Secondly, future scholarship could venture into examination of the theological aesthetics and theopoetic elements which are richly interweaved in both poetical texts. These elements can further contribute to discerning the nuances of *viraha-bhakti* and emotional devotion as encountered in Hindu and Christian traditions. Such research paths would further build upon the work of scholars such as Green,³⁴⁵ Clooney³⁴⁶ and Voss Roberts³⁴⁷.

Finally, the undertaking of this study has evinced valuable insights for engaging in a comparative theology project. These insights have also impacted and developed my skills as an academic and comparatist. Akin to the topic of this thesis, I have found comparative theology to be motivated by a longing to learn and derive deeper understanding of traditions and their devotional practices. Additionally, I have learnt that comparative theology entails a sense of belongingness, not only in the home tradition but in the visited non-home tradition. To indwell in this space of belongingness is essential to furthering a mutual understanding of both faiths, their theologies and religious practices, thereby providing opportunities for a scholar and a practitioner to learn, love and live more effectively.

³⁴⁵ Green's study contains several strands that can be explored further such as symbolic expressions and meanings utilised to portray love-in-separation, and discerning the nuances found in separation during different stages of the spiritual life.

³⁴⁶ Clooney, *His Hiding Place is Darkness*.

³⁴⁷ Michelle Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

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Appendix I: Gopī Gīta

This appendix contains the full translated text of the *Gopī Gīta* as it appears in Graham Schweig's *Dance of Divine Love* (pp. 51-58). It also includes the first two verses of the following chapter that outline the reappearance of Krishna (pp. 58-59).

Act Three

THE SONG OF THE GOPĪS: GOPĪ GĪTA

Bhāgavata Purāṇa Book 10 Chapter 31

Monologue: Longing for God's Presence with Humility and Passion

The Gopīs spoke:

Glorious is Vraja, surpassing all,
for it is the land of your birth.
Indeed, the Goddess Indirā
resides in this place forever.
O beloved, please allow
your maidservants to see you!
Their very life-breath is sustained in you,
and they search for you everywhere.

1

With your eyes,
you steal the beauty
of the center
Of an exquisite fully bloomed
lotus flower, rising out
of a serene autumn pond,
O Lord of love,
and it is killing us,
your voluntary maidservants—
O bestower of benedictions,
in this world,
is this not murder?

2

Whether it be
from poisonous waters
or a fearsome demon;
From torrential rains,
wind storms, and
fiery thunderbolts;
From the bull demon,
the son of Maya, or from
any other fearful predicament;
O almighty one,
you have been our protector
time and time again. 3

Clearly you are not the son of a Gopī;
you are the Witness
Residing in the hearts
of all embodied beings.
When Vikhanas prayed to you
for protection of the universe,
O friend, you appeared
in the dynasty of the Sātvatas. 4

O leader of the Vṛṣṇis,
those who fear the cycle
of endless suffering
Approach your feet,
which grant fearlessness.
O beloved,
please place on our heads
Your hand, beautiful as a lotus,
that fulfills all wishes
and holds the hand of Śrī. 5

O destroyer of suffering
for the residents of Vraja;
O hero of all women
whose smile crushes
the pride of your devotees;
O friend, please accept us
as your maidservants—
Show us the beauty
of your lotus-like face! 6

Your lotus feet
remove all sins of
those surrendered unto you.
Your feet, the resting place
of the Goddess Śrī,

follows cows out to graze.
May your lotus feet,
 once placed on
 the hoods of a serpent,
Be placed upon our breasts—
 please crush this passion
 lying within our hearts! 7

By your sweet voice
 and charming words
So attractive to the wise,
 O one with lotus eyes,
These maidservants
 are becoming delirious—
O hero, please revive us
 with your intoxicating lips! 8

Your words of nectar
 described by sages and poets
Are life for the suffering,
 destroy all sins, and
 are auspicious to hear.
Those who extol your praises
 throughout the world
Are the most generous persons,
 bestowing the greatest riches. 9

Your smiles,
 loving glances
 for your beloved ones,
And your intimate
 playful ways
 are auspicious meditations;
Also the promises
 you made to us in secret—
 all have touched our hearts.
O cunning one,
 indeed, these things
 agitate our minds. 10

When you leave Vraja
 while herding the cows,
Your feet, O Lord,
 beautiful as a lotus,
May be hurt by stones,
 grasses and grains;
O beloved, our hearts
 become disturbed. 11

At the close of each day,
your face, encircled by
Dark blue locks of hair,
like the lotus enveloped
by forest foliage,
Displays thickly smeared
dust from cows.
O hero, you constantly place
this loving memory
within our hearts.

12

Your lotus feet fulfill
the desires of all
who humbly submit to them.
Worshiped by the one
born from the lotus flower,
they are the ornament of the earth.
They are to be meditated upon
during times of distress, for
they grant the highest satisfaction.
O charming lover,
please place upon our breasts
your lotus feet, O slayer of misery.

13

The nectar that
strengthens our love
and vanquishes our grief;
The nectar that
is abundantly kissed
by the flute you play,
Making everyone forget
all other attachments;
O hero, please bestow
upon us this nectar
of your lips!

14

During the day when
you go off to the forest,
we cannot see you.
The smallest fraction
of a moment seems
like thousands of years.
When we eagerly behold
again your beautiful face
with curling locks of hair,
It seems the creator was mindless,
making eyelids to cover our eyes.

15

Our husbands, sons, brothers,
ancestors and all others
Have been completely forsaken, O Acyuta,
so we could be in your presence.
You know why we have come here—
we were captured by your alluring song.
O deceiver, who would abandon
such women in the middle of the night? 16

The promises you made
to us in secret and
the passionate feelings
rising in our hearts;
Your smiling face and
glances of pure love;
Your broad chest,
the abode of Śrī;
Recalling all this,
we feel constant,
unbearable longing for you
and our minds become bewildered. 17

O dearest one,
by manifesting yourself,
You remove the distress
of the inhabitants
of the forest of Vraja.
Please give to us, whose
hearts are longing for you,
That medicine which brings relief
to our tormented hearts,
fully devoted to you. 18

Your fine feet,
delicate like the lotus,
we gently place upon our breasts
Which we fear, O dear one,
may be too rough for you.
When you roam the forest,
we wonder, are your feet not hurt
By small stones and other harsh objects?
Our minds are turning and reeling—
our very lives are only for you. 19

Act Four

KRISHNA REAPPEARS AND SPEAKS OF LOVE

Bhāgavata Purāṇa Book 10 Chapter 32

Scene I

Narrative: God Appears before Souls Possessing Unconditional Love

The sage Śuka said:

Thus after the Gopīs sang out for him,
lamenting in these wondrous ways,
They burst into tears, O king,
longing for the vision of Krishna. 1

Then, right before them,
the heroic Śauri appeared,
his face blossoming like a lotus
and beaming with a smile.
Wearing yellow garments and
adorned with a flower garland,
the supreme God of love
stood directly before them,
alluring even the love-god
who himself charms all others. 2

Appendix II: *The Spiritual Canticle*

This appendix contains the full translated text of the Redaction B version of *The Spiritual Canticle* of the poem as it appears in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez (pp. 471-477).

Stanzas between the Soul and the Bridegroom

Bride

1. Where have you hidden,
Beloved, and left me moaning?
You fled like the stag,
after wounding me;
I went out calling you, but you were gone.

2. Shepherds, you who go
up through the sheepfolds to the hill,
if by chance you see
him I love most,
tell him I am sick, I suffer, and I die.

3. Seeking my Love
I will head for the mountains and for watersides,
I will not gather flowers,
nor fear wild beasts;
I will go beyond strong men and frontiers.

4. O woods and thickets,
planted by the hand of my Beloved!
O green meadow,
coated, bright, with flowers,
tell me, has he passed by you?

5. Pouring out a thousand graces,
he passed these groves in haste;
and having looked at them,
with his image alone,
clothed them in beauty.

6. Ah, who has the power to heal me?
now wholly surrender yourself!
Do not send me
any more messengers,
they cannot tell me what I must hear.

7. All who are free
tell me a thousand graceful things of you;
all wound me more
and leave me dying
of, ah, I-don't-know-what behind their stammering.

8. How do you endure
O life, not living where you live,
and being brought near death
by the arrows you receive
from that which you conceive of your Beloved?

9. Why, since you wounded
this heart, don't you heal it?
And why, since you stole it from me,
do you leave it so,
and fail to carry off what you have stolen?

10. Extinguish these miseries,
since no one else can stamp them out;
and may my eyes behold you,
because you are their light,
and I would open them to you alone.

11. Reveal your presence,
and may the vision of your beauty be my death;
for the sickness of love
is not cured
except by your very presence and image.

12. O spring like crystal!
If only, on your silvered-over faces,
you would suddenly form
the eyes I have desired,
which I bear sketched deep within my heart.

13. Withdraw them, Beloved,
I am taking flight!

Bridegroom

Return, dove,
the wounded stag
is in sight on the hill,
cooled by the breeze of your flight.

Bride

14. My Beloved, the mountains,
and lonely wooded valleys,
strange islands,
and resounding rivers,
the whistling of love-stirring breezes,

15. the tranquil night
at the time of the rising dawn,
silent music,
sounding solitude,
the supper that refreshes, and deepens love.

16. Catch us the foxes,
for our vineyard is now in flower,
while we fashion a cone of roses
intricate as the pine's;
and let no one appear on the hill.

17. Be still, deadening north wind;
south wind, come, you that waken love,
breathe through my garden,
let its fragrance flow,
and the Beloved will feed amid the flowers.

18. You girls of Judea,
while among flowers and roses
the amber spreads its perfume,
stay away, there on the outskirts;
do not so much as seek to touch our thresholds.

19. Hide yourself, my love;
turn your face toward the mountains,
and do not speak;
but look at those companions
going with her through strange islands.

Bridegroom

20. Swift-winged birds,
lions, stags, and leaping roes,
mountains, lowlands, and river banks,
waters, winds, and ardors,
watching fears of night:

21. By the pleasant lyres
and the siren's song, I conjure you,
to cease your anger,
and not touch the wall,
that the bride may sleep in deeper peace.

22. The bride has entered
the sweet garden of her desire,
and she rests in delight,
laying her neck
on the gentle arms of her Beloved.

23. Beneath the apple tree:
there I took you for my own,
there I offered you my hand,
and restored you,
where your mother was corrupted.

Bride

24. Our bed is in flower,
bound round with linking dens of lions,
hung with purple,
built up in peace,
and crowned with a thousand shields of gold.

25. Following your footprints
maidens run along the way;
the touch of a spark,
the spiced wine,
cause flowings in them from the balsam of God.

26. In the inner wine cellar
I drank of my Beloved, and, when I went abroad
through all this valley
I no longer knew anything,
and lost the herd that I was following.

27. There he gave me his breast;
there he taught me a sweet and living knowledge;
and I gave myself to him,
keeping nothing back;
there I promised to be his bride.

28. Now I occupy my soul
and all my energy in his service;
I no longer tend the herd,
nor have I any other work
now that my every act is love.

29. If, then, I am no longer
seen or found on the common,
you will say that I am lost;
that, stricken by love,
I lost myself; and was found.

30. With flowers and emeralds
chosen on cool mornings
we shall weave garlands
flowering in your love,
and bound with one hair of mine.

31. You considered
that one hair fluttering at my neck;
you gazed at it upon my neck
and it captivated you;
and one of my eyes wounded you.

32. When you looked at me
your eyes imprinted your grace in me;
for this you loved me ardently;
and thus my eyes deserved
to adore what they beheld in you.

33. Do not despise me;
for if, before, you found me dark,
now truly you can look at me
since you have looked
and left in me grace and beauty.

Bridegroom

34. The small white dove
has returned to the ark with an olive branch;
and now the turtle-dove
has found its longed-for mate
by the green river banks.

35. She lived in solitude,
and now in solitude has built her nest;
and in solitude he guides her,
he alone, who also bears
in solitude the wound of love.

Bride

36. Let us rejoice, O Beloved,
and let us go forth to behold ourselves in your beauty,
to the mountain and to the hill,
to where the pure water flows,
and further, deep into the thicket.

37. And then we will go on
to the high caverns in the rock
which are so well concealed;
there we shall enter
and taste the fresh juice of the pomegranates.

38. There you will show me
what my soul has been seeking,
and then you will give me,
you, my life, will give me there
what you gave me on that other day:

39. the breathing of the air,
the song of the sweet nightingale,
the grove and its living beauty
in the serene night,
with a flame that is consuming and painless.

40. No one looked at her,
nor did Aminadab appear;
the siege was still;
and the cavalry,
at the sight of the waters, descended.