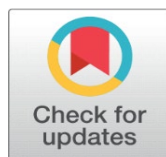


RELEVANCE OF GAUDIYA VAISHNAVA PILGRIMAGE IN TODAY'S WORLD

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ABSTRACT

In the modern age of growing secularisation, disintegration of community, and psychological breakdown, the old spiritual practices are taking on new therapeutic and transformative applications. The following study focuses specifically on the contemporary context of Gaudiya Vaishnava pilgrimage, specifically the contemporary context of the Navadvipa Mandala Parikrama, which draws 50,000 followers every year worldwide. This study has found, through interviews and participant observation of this 16th-century spiritual practice, that there are three components for coping with contemporary challenges. These three components are: philosophical foundations based on the doctrine of Caitanya Mahaprabhu about the Acintya-Bheda-Abheda that transforms one's geographic travel in the world into transcendental experience in every moment; mechanisms of cultural transformation which bring to life communities of inclusion across social classes and stratified society; and the therapeutic action of realising bodied bhava experiences which most participants express through our study as radical emotional transformation. The study also describes how the Gaudiya Vaishnava pilgrimage can develop to address contemporary needs, such as to combat the COVID-19 epidemic, to alleviate the modern feelings of isolation, anxiety, and crisis of identity. Thus, one can view Gaudiya Vaishnava pilgrimage as a flexible spiritual paradigm addressing the philosophical, cultural, and psychological dilemmas of a secular world.

Keywords: Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Pilgrimage, Navadvipa Mandala Parikrama, Sacred Geography, Sankirtana, Modern Spirituality, Community Building, Digital Religion, Acintya-Bhedābheda Philosophy, Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Dhāma, Bhāva, Prema-Bhakti, Therapeutic Pilgrimage, Virtual Parikrama, Collective Effervescence, Proto-Humanist Values, Sacred Space, Tirtha, Embodied Spirituality, Mental Health, Social Justice, Cultural Transformation

1. INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage of the Gaudiya Vaishnava sampradaya views pilgrimage not simply as a location (artha) but rather, a spiritual journey (prakata) that covers all elements of a journey to honouring devotion (bhakti), community participation (satsanga) and sacred memory (smarana). Unlike ordinary pilgrimages, which involve visits to sacred sites, Gaudiya Vaishnava pilgrimage focuses on developing prema-bhakti (pure love with Krishna) through chanting (sankirtana), in community and through exposure to holy geography¹. Therefore, in Gaudiya Vaishnava terms, pilgrimage is not simply travelling across space either; it is an extremely effective articulation of space, religion, and memory, so that transformation may occur. Scriptures like the Narahari Chakraborty Bhakti Ratnakara (and especially Taranga 12) and the Nabadwipa-dhama Mahatmya by Bhaktivinoda Thakura place emphasis on sacred space, not as fixed and unchanging geography, but a dynamic performance space, a practice area of religious rehearsal and community participation in the

¹ The Gaudiya Treasures of Bengal. (2023). *Holy dham Archives - Page 3 of 20 - The Gaudiya Treasures of Bengal*. <https://www.thegaudiyatreasuresofbengal.com/category/holydham/page/3/> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025].

divine play (lila) of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. This oral tradition is manifested in the annual Navadvipa Mandala parikrama that attracts 50,000 participants from all around the world². This thesis paper contends that Gaudiya Vaishnava pilgrimage is still exceedingly relevant in the contemporary world, to provide a strong philosophical, cultural, and psychological source of support in overcoming modern crises of meaning, isolation and identity, through its integrative practices of participatory sacredness, community creation and adaptive digital spirituality.

Part I: Philosophical Foundations - The "Living Mandala"

1.1. SACRED GEOGRAPHY AND THE CONCEPT OF DHĀMA

Generally, the Gaudiya Vaishnava understanding of tirtha transforms the conception of tirtha from a fixed, physical point to a dynamic, multidimensional place of meeting between geographic materiality, collective memory, and theological consciousness. A simple translation of tirtha is a *ford*, a crossing place in the sense of intersection or crossover, as interpreted by Hindu tradition, the point of junction, the crossing point of worlds that are in contact and those that are out of contact. In the context of bhakti or devotional consciousness and sacred narrative, as opposed to naturalism or secular tourism or colonial religious pilgrimage, the tirtha of Gaudiya Vaishnava convention is a Theographical node where the material and spiritual worlds contact and intertwine³. A concept of Dharma as a living sacred place unconfined by physical geographic territory is developed. According to this description of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, the planet of Navadvipa is eternal and the abode of all the potencies of the Superlative, i.e., sat (eternal), city (cognisance) and Ananda (bliss). It is this theological principle that changes Navadvipa not from a fixed space, but from a living spiritual space where "*all the holy places of pilgrimage and all the other demigods are in Navadvipa*". The dhama is self-consciously aware of itself as spiritual to the extent that it is a self-inherently nonsensuous singularity, qualitatively identical to the self (the deity)⁴.

There is nothing that is an equivalent of the topmost of all pilgrimage places: Navadvipa Dhama, being the prime merciful of the pilgrimage land, where divine pastimes are forever going on. Lord Nityananda indicated that "*my Gauranga has never left Mayapur or Navadvipa*". What matters most is that followers of all varieties can observe his return every day. Lila means the spiritual life of Dharma. The nine sections of Nabadwip Dham symbolise nine parts of devotion as a living mandala of land that is theological⁵. This is geography with transformative agency, which acts at once as a potential site and as a path, as a vessel and container, in the religious act of the pilgrim who is walking toward divine self-realisation.

1.2. NAVADVĪPA AS COSMOLOGICAL MODEL

Given that the Navadvipa mandala is a multi-faceted cosmology, the configuration can be thought of as a holy lotus blossom. The holy residence of Navadvipa is an eight-petal lotus blossom. The eight petals are the eight dvipas, and the central lotus island is the whorl. This geometric circle of sacred space accounts for sixteen krosas (32 miles) in circumference, and sacred space or ground at the centre of the flower is the Antardvipa, which has a circumference of 15 km⁶. This describes the Antardvipa circle as 10 miles long.

Each of the dvipas corresponds exactly to at least one phase of the navadha-bhakti as defined in Bhagavata Purana (7.5.23): "sravanam kirtanam visnoh smaranam pada-sevanam arcanam vandanam dasyam sakhyam atma-nivedanam". The whole list is: "Antardvipa, Simantadvipa, Godrumadvipa, Madhyadvipa, Koladvipa, Rigdudvipa, Jahnudvipa,

² Navadvipaparikrama (2024). *Sri Navadvipa Mandala Parikrama – Join us for the 2024 parikrama!* <https://navadvipaparikrama.com/> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025].

³ Krishna (2025). *Page Restricted*. <https://btg.krishna.com/the-bhaktivedanta-research-centre-preserving-gaudiya-vaishnavisms-ancient-literary-tradition/> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025].

⁴ Roy, M. (2017). *Mystical Practices in Religious Traditions and Ecstatic Madness in Gaudiya Vaishnavism*. https://www.ijiras.com/2017/Vol_4-Issue_6/paper_5.pdf.

⁵ Sri Mayapur-dhama. (2024). *Nine Processes of Devotional Service - ISKCON Mayapur*. <https://srimayapurdhama.com/process-of-devotional-service/>. [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025].

⁶ Liutikas, D. (2023). Sacred Space in Geography: Religious Buildings and Monuments. *Springer geography*, pp.77–112. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32209-9_5.

Modadrumadvipa, and Rudradvipa"⁷. In particular, Godrumadvipa represents one of the constituents of devotional service, i.e., Kirtanam (songs to the Lord), punctuated by the fact that each geographical location is aesthetically prone to one particular form of devotional service. The mandala's transformational palette have other contextualization in a substantial *Gaura Mandala which is beyond 200km in circumference* and Ganges runs through the centre as hundred-leaf lotus with Navadvipa in the centre of the coordinate system; this quartic lotus generates a beautiful spiritual itinerary whereby; in every one of that the nine islands of the Navadvipa district is diverse sites of practicing devotional service, and that; a soul who practices sadhana-bhakti (*devotional service in action*) in the Navadvipa-dhama region, or optimally within the sphere of Sri Mayapura, can quickly manifest the ultimate sadhana goal of prema (*pure love of God*)⁸. Only a cosmology model can, in turn, provide the organising process that takes physical pilgrimage and transduces it into confined spiritual transformation, and it responds to questions, notably the success of mandala as a technology of transformational pilgrimage.

1.3. ACINTYA-BHEDĀBHEDA PHILOSOPHY

Acintya-Bhedabheda, denotes imultaneously both oneness and difference, and it is the real revolutionary doctrine put forth by Caitanya Mahaprabhu. This is called a 'school of thought' which arose in the 16th century, and has existed since, with thousands of adherents in the world (as of 2023), who hold this understanding of reality; that the causal relationship between the personal soul (the jivatma) and the Supreme Soul (the Paramatma) is at once the same and different; this is to say that it is illogical, and can only be understood under the sanction of Godly grace, and not otherwise by human fanatical grasp⁹.

The ungraspability (acintya) of such a relationship as described above is especially represented when the thing made into a subject of the pilgrimage process is dhama, when both aspects of the body, i.e., physical, metaphysical, and the possibility of existence that surpasses normal vision, are at once in unity. Understanding Navadvipa in its dual meaning of sacred geography, in Gaudiya Vaishnava theological cosmology, is both (1) a site with historical actuality, in reference to the banks of the Ganga, and also (2) a transcendental form having both spiritual actuality and existing well beyond normal chronological and spatial confines¹⁰. In this sense, the nine islands (navadvipa) of the dhama are both physical geolocalisations and metaphysical terms, where every step taken in devotional awareness is both a quotidian archetype of walking and an eschatological moment of dina rasa. Archaeological sources assert Nabadwip was established in 1063 CE and has been a continual topic of philosophical debate ever since; there are still traditional academies of Sanskritians that contextualise traditional knowledge within contemporary discourse of the science of spirituality¹¹. Thus, the framework Caitanya provides pilgrims with a multi-dimensional view of theology in which the geographical pilgrimage is an external activity of discovery of sacred space, as well as an inner experience of consciousness, that is at once the same another than ordinary travelling, the content of the principal Acintya-Bhedabheda philosophy.

⁷ Prabhupadavani (2025). *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.5.23-24. <https://prabhupadavani.org/transcriptions/760331sbvrn/> [Accessed on: 29th August, 2025].

⁸ Navadvipaparikrama (2024). *Sri Navadvipa Mandala Parikrama – Join us for the 2024 parikrama!* <https://navadvipaparikrama.com/> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025].

⁹ Gaudiya (2022). *Secrets of the Soul and Supersoul: Exploring Atma and Paramatma - The Gaudiya Treasures of Bengal*. <https://thegaudiyatreasuresofbengal.com/2022/03/31/atma-jiva-and-paramatma-krishna-nature-of-soul-sanatan-dharma/> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025].

¹⁰ Goswami, P. (2023). Rise of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and Evolution of Bengali Platter in 16th to 18th Centuries. In *Religion, Landscape and Material Culture in Pre-modern South Asia* (pp. 223-241). Routledge India. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003095651-14/rise-gaudiya-vaishnavism-evolution-bengali-platter-16th-18th-centuries-pritam-goswami> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

¹¹ The (1998). *Nabadwip / History & Map*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nabadwip> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025].

2. CULTURAL RELEVANCE AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

2.1. PILGRIMAGE AS COMMUNITY BUILDING

The Navadvipa Parikrama pilgrimage acts as a potent source of social integration by acknowledging different pilgrims from various castes, classes, and nations; and by recognising them as one community, transcending worldly differences to partake in a common aim related to spirituality¹². At the centre of this is the idea of "collective effervescence", which will arise from collective chanting, as each pilgrim participates in this journey together. In a pilgrimage, each devotee sings in big groups all together, creating an ecstatic experience. Each pilgrim participates in a deep social effervescence, because each pilgrim collectively, through chanting, has become one eternal, collective being, travelling together as individual, yet integrated, beings.

In the contemporary pilgrimage, thousands of devotees come from forty to fifty countries to partake in the pilgrimage. As it has increased in size, there have been significant logistical efforts that have adapted to the demands of a global event. However, looking at the most recent pilgrimage, devotees who spoke English, Russian, Bengali, Hindi, and South Indian languages were given separate accommodations, where hundreds of pilgrims could fit¹³. Despite the planning; in a logistical perspective; this is important because it is an example of how the pilgrimage goes global with a focus, while still preserving the group unit.

2.2. CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND JUSTICE MODEL

Caitanya's teachings, found in books such as the *Bhakti-Ratnākara*, provide an inspiring model that ground the understandings of social justice by transforming social hierarchies¹⁴. For Caitanya, the ethical theory of prema-bhakti, or divine love, also suggested that dignity belongs to everyone by teaching that everyone, regardless of birth, occupation, or gender, has dignity. For example, in terms of the inclusion of marginalised people such as Kolavecha Śrīdhara, and Haridasa Thakura, there was a tangible model of this position¹⁵. Caitanya 'transcended' Kolavecha Śrīdhara, a banana-leaf vendor on the economic margins, by suggesting value is about devotion rather than revenue or social standing. This kind of story with the banana-leaf vendor becomes a critique about caste and class oppression, such that today's institutions experience the same critiques being enacted, incorporating a sense of collective idealism, along with applause for free food for poor people. Caitanya included Haridasa Thakura, even of Muslim birth, as a 'chanting teacher', which is a direct assault on caste exclusivity in 16th century Bengal¹⁶. These activities are called "proto-humanist" which give them a theological basis for inclusion and a critique of systemic racism, and the inability to access disability materials, in the experiences of people.

2.3. SAṆKĪRTANA MOVEMENT AS CULTURAL ENGINE

The Saṅkīrtana movement that began in 16th century Bengal has evolved from a local, religious practice into a universal socio-cultural movement. Caitanya Mahāprabhu's call for group chanting and dancing pilgrims in the Navadvipa, as seen in the *Bhakti-Ratnākara*, broke down social barriers based on caste and socioeconomic status through

¹² Pure Bhakti, (2025). *Sri Navadvipa Dhama Parikrama*. <https://www.purebhakti.com/parikrama> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

¹³ Mitra, S.J., (2022). *A retrospective study of a history of outdoor practices, recreation, and education in India*. Prescott College. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Soumya-Mitra-4/publication/368918626_A_Retrospective_Study_of_a_History_of_Outdoor_Practices_Recreation_and_Education_in_India/links/64006e11b1704f343f97a27a/A-Retrospective-Study-of-a-History-of-Outdoor-Practices-Recreation-and-Education-in-India.pdf [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

¹⁴ Archive, (2012). *Bhakti Ratnakar : Srila Narahari Chakravarti Thakura*. <https://gosai.com/writings/a-study-for-sri-chaitanyas-birthplace> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

¹⁵ Gaudiya History, (2011). *Kholavecha Shridhara - Gaudiya History*. <https://gaudiyahistory.iskcondesiretree.com/sri-kholaveca-sridhara/> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

¹⁶ Gaudiya History, (2015). *Haridasa Thakura - Gaudiya History*. <https://gaudiyahistory.iskcondesiretree.com/sri-haridasa-thakura/> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

shared song and ritual¹⁷. This tradition had a significant impact on music, art and identity; it incorporated many of the traditional Bengali and Sanskrit *rāgas* such as *Mālakaunsa* and *Bhairava* into its chants, thereby creating a new form of devotional music¹⁸. Ethnomusicology has noted that the "call and response" approach for the chant encouraged democratic participation above and beyond elite sponsoring alone. Eventually, this art form expanded to a global audience when George Harrison of the Beatles released the "Hare Kṛṣṇa Mantra" into the international music scene in 1969¹⁹. This tradition is a continuing theme for a transcultural identity wherein the local identity of Bengal and commitment to the form of global devotion as practiced in Sāṅkīrtana get interconnected.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL DIMENSIONS

3.1. PILGRIMAGE AS THERAPEUTIC PRACTICE

The Navadvipa pilgrimage serves as a strong form of collective healing and psychological therapy because it provides a spiritual antidote for contemporary stressors of anxiety and loneliness. The Bhakti-Ratnākara calls the pilgrimage "a ritual of collective resilience"²⁰. Engaging in an act of walking together, chanting together, and remembering God together, creates an opportunity for collective well-being. In today's society, this is especially relevant, since group singing has been shown empirically to produce oxytocin and endorphins, producing evidence that potentially leads to reduced stress and greater sense of health.

In many ways, the therapeutic nature of the pilgrimage emerged stronger in the COVID-19 era. Although people could not travel during the pandemic, there emerged an unprecedented response from ISKCON leadership with a variety of online pilgrimages (*parikramas*) and representations of temple services across various platforms, garnering hundreds of thousands and millions views, respectively²¹. These online pilgrimages provided ways to take on a spiritual journey and produced emotional conditions of connection and healing, while being isolated from contemporary society. Hence, it was an initial proof of whether the function of the pilgrimage was emotionally, educationally and pedagogically possible without physically being on the pilgrimage.

Although it is called an emotional 'journey', the Navadvipa pilgrimage permits an emotional experience that is sequenced to help pilgrims engage in an emotional process that resembles cognitive-behavioural therapy. The pilgrimage has nine islands and of the nine islands, each one relates to a specific effect mode. The concept of surrender (*śaraṅāgati*) as practiced at Antardvīpa allows for release from the pressures of self-organisation, which produces feelings of lightness that are associated with both lower levels of anxiety and stress²².

3.2. EMBODIED EXPERIENCE OF BHĀVA

A directly embodied Gaudiya Vaishnava pilgrimage experience of bhava is a deeply developed mental health treatment and psychotherapeutic treatment modality of the mental health crisis of contemporary society. The unprecedented rise of anxiety and depression (some approximating 25% above world parameters), including close to 4 out of 10 adults reporting symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in

¹⁷ Bhakti Gaurava Vani, (2020). *The Golden Age of the Sāṅkīrtana Movement*. <https://swaminarasingha.com/writings/articles/the-golden-age-of-the-sankirtana-movement/> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

¹⁸ Krishna Consciousness. (2022). *Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta Adi-lila Volume 2 Chapter 10 The Trunk, Branches and Subbranches of the Caitanya Tree*. <https://protectacow.typepad.com/krishna/2022/09/sri-caitanya-caritamṛta-adi-lila-volume-2-chapter-10-the-trunk-branches-and-subbranches-of-the-caita.html> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

¹⁹ Iskcon Desire Tree, (2019). *The Hare Krishna Mantra - Blog*. <https://iskcondesiretree.com/profiles/blogs/the-hare-krishna-mantra> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

²⁰ Archive, (2012). *Bhakti Ratnakar : Srila Narahari Chakravarti Thakura*. <https://gosai.com/writings/a-study-for-sri-chaitanyas-birthplace> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

²¹ Keune, J. (2021). *Shared devotion, shared food: equality and the bhakti-caste question in western India*. Oxford University Press. [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

²² Harekrṣṇa. (2025). *The Hare Kṛṣṇas - Spiritual Practice - Atma Nivedanam, Surrendering*. <https://www.harekrṣṇa.com/practice/process/atma-nivedanam/atma-nivedanam.htm> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

2021, introduces the urgent need for alternative therapy products²³. Direct effects that develop from the neurophysiology of the basic triadic practice of walking, chanting, and common devotion of parikrama directly impact contemporary psychological suffering.

The pandemic was both a time when new modes of adaptation in pilgrimage practice were catalysed and where virtual parikramas emerged as significant mental health interventions during lockdowns across the world²⁴. Online religious services diminished the link between declining mental health and COVID-19, and community identification and solidarity during COVID-19 were predictors of increased well-being, reduced depression, and anxiety²⁵. The representational bhava transcends experience that is personal and forms what have been described as therapeutic communities, where participants experience a high degree of emotional regulation predicated on coordinated devotional rites²⁶. This type of group healing provides an evidence-based practice alternative to the ordinary mental practice, particularly given what has been shown to provide positive mental health outcomes in areas such as lowering anxiety, meaning of life, connectedness to community, and as a solution to the isolation epidemic evident in modern urban environments.

3.3. SURRENDER AND HUMILITY

According to the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition, transcendental emotional experiences are by far the most important means of spiritual realisation, having transcended the need to assume embodied devotional acts rather than just intellectual cognitions. The 168 Langi verses of 56 books of the Sri Navadvipa Bhava Taranga by Bhaktivinoda Thakura, that, in masterful detail, describe the other transcendental places of the nine islands of Navadvipa and Antardvipa or Mayapur²⁷. The journey starts with atma-nivedana, where 700 or more monks who reside in Navadvipa devote a certain time of their lives to complete service, both spiritual and social, including the distribution of 10,000 daily meals; it is a mesmerising culture in practice²⁸.

The nine islands (navadvipa) are only emotional topography, and each dvipa fulfils certain devotional meditations, and in doing so, they sow the seeds of conscious cleansing in the pilgrim. The antardvipa (middle island), where Caitanya appeared, develops an audarya-bhava (magnanimous love) while the simantadvipa (island of heroes) develops virabhava (heroic devotion) through reminders of the academic discussions of Caitanya²⁹. Godrumadvipa develops santa-bhava peace, Madhyadvipa develops dasya-bhava service, and Koladvipa develops sakhyabhava friendship. The heartos system continues with Rtudvipa (parental love), Jahnudvipa (conjugal), Modadrumadvipa (transcendental bliss) and Rudradvipa (awe and reverential love)³⁰.

²³ World Health Organization (2022). *COVID-19 pandemic triggers 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide*. <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide>. [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025].

²⁴ Sarkar, A. (2023). Spread of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur: A Comprehensive Analysis and Historical Study. *Journal of People's History and Culture Vol*, 9(2). <https://gsmp.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/3-7.pdf>

²⁵ Klaiman, M. H. (2022). Vaishnavism, Brahmanism and Hindu Identity in Medieval Bengal. *Australian Association for the Study of Religions Book Series*, 9-9. <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/AASR/article/download/16841/14298>

²⁶ Ghosh, S. (2023). Concept and Practice of Devotional Love (Raganuga Bhakti) in Gaudiya Vaishnavism. *Mñ elYv cwÎKv*, 21. <https://www.ru.ac.bd/arts/wp-content/uploads/sites/61/2023/08/2nd-International-Conference-13-14-November-2022-Special-Volume-3-2.pdf#page=26>

²⁷ Shuddha Bhakti (2011). *Sri Navadvipa-bhava-taranga (A Wave of the Ecstatic Moods of Navadvipa) by Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura | Revealing the Secrets*. <https://bhaktivinoda.com/sri-navadvipa-bhava-taranga-bhaktivinod-thakur/> [Accessed on: 29th August, 2025].

²⁸ Historyworld (2025). *HISTORY OF MONASTICISM | Historyworld*. <https://www.historyworld.net/history/Monasticism/477> [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025].

²⁹ Fici, C. (2015). The spiritual ecology of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in praxis: The Govardhan Eco-Village (GEV). *Journal of Vaishnava Studies*, 24(1), 205-226. https://www.academia.edu/download/54251990/Christopher_Fici_The_Spiritual_Ecology_of_Gaudiya_Vaishnavism_in_Praxis.pdf

³⁰ SRI CHAITANYA-BHAGAVATA Adi-khanda. (2025). *SRI CHAITANYA-BHAGAVATA Adi-khanda*. https://ia903107.us.archive.org/4/items/CBAdi_201901/CB-Adi.pdf [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025].

In a psychological study made about pilgrims, positive affect, positive changes in spiritual well-being and positive changes in emotional regulation were measured after the pilgrim completed the mandala parikrama. The sequential journey of the island affects (hearing (sravana) at the islands at Simanta; friendship (sakhya) at Modadruma), reinforcing how a total aural (hearing) re-broadcast responds to the present psychological halting (vatika-sannata)³¹. This embodied bhava experience demonstrates that sacred geography provides both emotional healing and sustained change.

4. MODERN CHALLENGES AND CONTEMPORARY PRAXIS

4.1. TRADITION VS. MODERNITY INTERSECTION

Modern travel and commercialisation present obstacles to the pilgrimage as the sacred journey may become reduced to a tourist experience. ISKCON is responding to this commercial threat by providing the necessary infrastructure and support, including foreign language guidebooks and guided parikrama groups for the pilgrim, to facilitate the experience for a worldwide audience while supporting both the adherence to the proper doctrinal beliefs about this sacred place and the practice of saṅkīrtana³².

4.2. DIGITAL PILGRIMAGE AND VIRTUAL SACRED SPACE

Through the use of technology, individuals can now take "virtual pilgrimages" to make participation feasible and available to an audience outside of the physical space. The videos of live-streamed kīrtanas or online parikramas showcase how the pedagogy, emotions, and healing of the pilgrimage can be transcended through physical boundaries of space and time. For example, the online pilgrimage experience during COVID provided a way for individuals to feel connected and whole during a time of isolation, where the pilgrimage was shown to be less an act of a human being physically present, and more an act of the human being's state of heart and mind³³.

5. CONCLUSION: RELEVANCE IN A SECULAR WORLD

The Gaudiya Vaishnava pilgrimage serves as an incredibly effective spiritual model for the modern world. The movements' principles of universal love and social equality push against hierarchies in society, and its focus on communal healing provides a meaningful solution to contemporary anxiety and isolation. Thus, the pilgrimage is not simply about rituals; beyond just a mere ritual, the pilgrimage is an interface to a living dynamic, a practice that brings contemporary realities to our spiritual lives. As a politics of a yet-to-be realised "mandal of unity," the legacy of Caitanya Mahāprabhu's movement continues to offer transformational possibilities to an "angry and alienated" world.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

³¹ Wieland, S. R. (1996). *The axiological correlation between the aesthetics and ethics of Gaudiya Vaishnavism*. American University. https://aura.american.edu/articles/thesis/The_axiological_correlation_between_the_aesthetics_and_ethics_of_Gaudiya_Vaishnavism/23877615/1/files/41874069.pdf

³² Swami, B. (2025). *CHAPTER THIRTEEN*. <https://vedabase.io/en/library/cc/adi/13/>. [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

³³ Jorge, A., (2023). Pilgrimage to Fátima and Santiago after COVID: Dis/connection in the post-digital age. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 11(3), pp.549-565. [Accessed on: 28th August, 2025]

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