

Article

'Srī Gurugītā: A Sanskrit Devotional Text and Musical Yogic Practice

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Abstract: This article investigates the Sanskrit hymn, 'Srī Gurugītā, from a scholarly, scriptural, historical, and ethnographic standpoint. Mystical yogic concepts such as *chaitanya-shabda* (Consciousness–sound) and *shravana samadhi* (absorption through reading or listening to holy texts) are introduced in the context of *Gurugītā* recitation. The history of diverse lineages that practice *Gurugītā* recitation and several historical dimensions of *svadhyaya* (long-text chanting) and *namasankirtana* (short chants) are briefly introduced, and the works of Jeremy Morse and Antonio Rigopoulos are closely considered. This article deals with the significant elements of yogic awakening referenced within the *Gurugītā* text and the goal of liberation cited therein. Many scholars have researched Hinduism, Tantra, Bhakti yoga, and devotion. This article investigates *musical devotion* in the context of yogic communities dedicated to *Gurugītā* recitation with the aim of experiencing the inner Self. The democratization and dissemination of this practice have global dimensions.

Keywords: *Gurugītā* text and recitation; yogic path of Self-realization; *svadhyaya* (chanting and reciting of sacred texts); musical yoga; female gurus; Siddha Yoga

1. Introduction

'Srī Gurugītā, Song of the Guru,¹ is a Sanskrit hymn that teaches the devotee how to worship and connect with God in the form of the Guru²—an enlightened spiritual master—with the ultimate goal of realizing one's oneness with the inner Self, also referred to as the conscious Self or Consciousness.³ In this hymn, the Goddess Parvati asks Lord Sadashiva to tell her how to become one with Brahman or absolute reality.⁴ In over 182 sung verses, Shiva explains this practice.⁵ In this article, I consider this profound musical practice of South Asian origin through scriptural, historical, and ethnomusicological research.

I begin by tracing the uncertain history of this text, noting several different uses of the *Gurugītā* by particular lineages originating in India. Then, I consider the practice of musical devotion, both the case of *svadhyaya* (chanting and reciting of sacred texts such as the *Gurugītā*)—which has been piously recited “generation after generation, in the monasteries founded by 'Sankara (8th century CE), the celebrated teacher of nondual Vedānta”⁶—and the expansion and popularization of chanting the Names of God in the Vaishnava tradition of Shankaradeva.⁷ Both of these musical practices are embedded in the regular schedule of Siddha Yoga Ashrams and meditation centers and play a key role in these yogic programs. I explore the intentions and benefits behind the recitation of sacred texts. I also consider the role of female gurus in certain contemporary traditions, in particular, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, the current Master of the Siddha Yoga lineage, and the increasingly decentered and diverse contexts for *Gurugītā* recitation.

This practice of Self-knowledge and Self-realization is referenced in Indian scriptures as far back as the Vedas. Citing the work of Edrisi Fernandes (2002), I take a brief deep dive into yogic perspectives to consider the Vedic Purusha hymn as an exploration of the divine in humanity. The contemporary recitation of sacred texts in yogic communities suggests a striving for inner connection, wherein the practice of musical yoga becomes a means to experience the inner Self. This study explores the *Gurugītā* text and sacred music



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practice to better understand this spiritual and philosophical tradition as a yogic path of Self-realization.

2. Methodology

This article is based on historical, scriptural, and scholarly research. In addition, I have had the opportunity to offer music *seva* on flute, as well as to recite and perform harmonium for *Gurugītā* recitations over the past thirty-five years in Siddha Yoga Ashrams, meditation centers, and chanting and meditation groups in Oakland and Los Angeles, California; Calgary, Alberta, Canada; Greater Boston, Massachusetts; South Fallsburg, New York; and Ganeshpuri, India. My experience of reciting, reading, and contemplating this long-text chant provides an important baseline of understanding for this research.

3. The History of the Text and Its Usage

Through textual research, various connections arise between the *Gurugītā* verses and numerous scriptural traditions. To begin with, the opening frame story of Shiva and Parvati as well as other references in particular verses suggest a Vedic and *śāstric*⁸ Hindu literary tradition.⁹ The *Gurugītā* also reflects the Tantras' focus on the Guru as an essential teacher on the path of Self-realization. This is evident in the *Kularnava Tantra* among others.¹⁰ One can also locate indications of the Upanishads' search for the Self¹¹ and the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of merging with the Absolute Brahman. These numerous references to different spiritual and philosophical traditions draw from a diverse range of ancient scriptures and treatises as teaching guides for devotees.¹²

In Jeremy Morse's dissertation, "Devotion According to the Rules: Guru-Bhakti in the Texts and Practices of the Datta Sampradaya," the author says that "The *Gurugītā*, a central text for guru traditions, has received very little scholarly attention."¹³ Antonio Rigopoulos addresses it in his chapter, "The *Guru-Gītā* or 'Song of the Master' as Incorporated in the *Guru-Caritra* of Sarasvatī Gaṅgādar: Observations on Its Teachings and the *Guru Institute*," in the edited volume entitled, *Theory and Practice of Yoga: Essays in Honour of Gerald James Larson*.¹⁴ Morse suggests that "the inclusion of the entire Sanskrit *Gurugītā* in the 49th chapter of (some recensions of) the *Gurucaritra*,¹⁵ adds further dimensions to the Marathi text, its interpretation, and the history of two of the principal texts of guru-bhakti," uncovering "the interplay between a vernacular bhakti tradition and a Sanskritic one."¹⁶ Rigopoulos identifies the Marathi *Guru-Caritra* ("The Deeds of the Master", circa 1550) of Sarasvatī Gaṅgādar as the foundational text of the *Datta-sampradāya* ("The tradition [of the followers] of Datta/Dattātreya"), very popular in the Marathi cultural area, celebrating the first two *avatara-s* of Datta/Dattātreya, 'Śrīpāda 'Śrīvallabha (circa 1323–53) and Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī (circa 1378–1458).¹⁷

Morse locates several manuscripts of the *Gurugītā* with the following timeline:

The Sanskrit *Gurugītā* is a short, independent collection of verses. It is a *gītā*, a song or hymn, which describes the figure of the guru, how he or she should be understood, and how a disciple should relate to such a figure. The *Gurugītā* has a life both inside and outside of the Datta *saṃpradāya*, and it is not known exactly when, or under what circumstances, the *Gurugītā* was incorporated into the *Gurucaritra*. On one hand, the oldest independent manuscript version of the *Gurugītā* attested to by Antonio Rigopoulos is dated to 1705 CE.¹⁸ R. K. Kāmata, the editor of the *Gurucaritra*, attests to *Gurucaritra* manuscripts containing the *Gurugītā* dated to 1847 CE at the earliest, although he believes them to be copies of a much older original that has not yet been uncovered. On the other hand, the Marathi historian R. C. Dhare, writing about the *Gurugītā*, asserts that the text had become famous before the 13th century CE; he bases his assertion on references found in Mukundarāja's *Vivekasindhu*,¹⁹ a work most likely composed in the late 13th or early 14th centuries.²⁰

Morse collected various manuscript editions of the *Gurugītā*, the majority of which attributed the hymn to the *Skanda Purāṇa*, which is also the case in the edition I have

consulted, yet several sources have indicated that attributing a text to the *Skanda Purana* can be “a convenient location to attribute texts whose provenance was unknown.”²¹

From references throughout the *Gurucaritra*, Morse suggests that “the *Gurugītā* was integrated into the ethos of the Datta *sampradāya* at least from the 16th century onwards, and is well known in guru traditions worldwide today.”²² Citing *Meditation Revolution: A History and Theology of the Siddha Yoga Lineage*, Morse notes the influential role of Swami Muktananda in popularizing the *Gurugītā* in modern times.

Muktananda came across the *Gurugītā* imbedded in the *Gurucaritra*, and “chanted the text [the *Gurugītā*] privately for many years.”²³ In 1972, Muktananda replaced daily recitation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* with the recitation of the *Gurugītā* in all Siddha Yoga ashrams worldwide, at which time the *Gurugītā* “became the core of the [Siddha Yoga] ashram morning recitation.”²⁴ In this way, Swami Muktananda effectively brought the *Gurugītā* to modern attention.²⁵

After Swami Muktananda began reciting the *Gurugītā* publicly, “other spiritual groups discovered and incorporated portions of it in their practice.”²⁶

The *Gurugītā*, as we find it today and most likely back to the 16th century CE, can be approached as an independent text. Contemporary published versions of the work can be classified into two groups, one consisting of 176 or 182 verses, the other comprising 352 verses. Both recensions of the text are composed almost entirely in the Sanskrit *śloka* or *anuṣṭubh* meter [. . .] The mostly widely distributed edition of the 352-verse version of the *Gurugītā* is Sri Swami Narayananda, ed (Narayananda 1972). *Sri Guru Gita*.²⁷

The *Gurugītā* text chanted in Siddha Yoga Ashrams and meditation centers within *The Nectar of Chanting* book, compiled by Swami Muktananda and published by the SYDA Foundation, contains 182 verses.

The breadth of the *Gurugītā* practice is truly immense. Rigopoulos sums up this vast influence in his relevant chapter when he states: “the *Guru-gītā* in one of its many variants is popular in the whole of the Indian subcontinent since it ‘cuts across’ traditions (*sampradāya*), be they ‘*śaiva*, *vaiṣṇava* or ‘*sāṅkta*: it is truly conceived as a ‘classic’ of Hindū piety (as the *Guru-gītā* itself proclaims, for instance in verse 151).”²⁸ In other words, whether different sects worship Shiva, Vishnu, or the Goddess in one manner or another, the *Gurugītā* practice may be incorporated.

Morse explains the *Gurugītā* as an example of “Guru-Bhakti” as it describes a devotional path to liberation or union with the Absolute. He states the following:

The *Gurugītā* is a hymn that describes the nature of a true guru as a divinized human teacher and as a principal [principle, the guru principle] that is identical both to one’s true self and to *brahman*. The *Gurugītā* asserts that the figure of the human guru is comparable to the gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, and even surpasses their power and influence.

According to this Sanskrit work, an embodied human teacher is necessary for advancement in *sādhana* [. . .]

Notably, it does not prescribe *śrauta* rituals. . . The *Gurugītā*. . . prescribes the uselessness of all actions if they are not based in a prior disposition of guru-bhakti [. . .]²⁹

I believe Morse may be referring to the guru principle here. The Guru is the spiritual head (principal) of the lineage, but the guru principle is somewhat different.

The Guru as the guru principle shifts the focus from the human teacher, who is an enlightened master, to the power of grace that enlivens their words, sounds, and teachings. In this case, the guru principle is “identical both to one’s true self and to *brahman*.”³⁰ In other words, the guru principle, or guru’s grace, is the goal of reciting the *Gurugītā*, as Parvati requests, to become One with Brahman or absolute reality.³¹

A useful concept to apply here is that of *chaitanya-shabda*, the Sanskrit terms for Consciousness–sound, which describes the way in which the words, sounds, and teachings

composed or imparted by a perfected master or Siddha convey the *shakti* or divine energy of the enlightened teacher, and in this manner, the sacred text recitation of “the *Gurugītā* is hailed as a perfected mantra that confers liberation on the one who recites it,”³² because it embodies and conveys the guru’s grace. When asked about the power of recitation, one yogic practitioner said, “It is based on the dissemination of *chaitanya*—consciousness—in enlivened mantras.”³³

4. Sounding the Sacred Text—Benefits from Recitation

How are the mantras enlivened, and how does the recitation of a sacred text such as the *Gurugītā* enable liberation or cause an inner awakening to occur? Within a *shaktipat* tradition, the mantras are enlivened, and this ‘inner awakening’ is supported by the presence of a realized Guru within a given tradition. Most notably, a *shaktipat* Guru can transmit spiritual power to the disciple, awakening the Kundalini energy lying dormant at the base of the spine.³⁴ *Shaktipat* is also referred to as the “descent of divine grace,” where ‘divine grace’ connotes the *shakti* or divine cosmic energy.³⁵ Furthermore, as noted above, the words, sounds, and teachings of an enlightened or realized master convey the powerful energy of their state when one engages in the spiritual practices of that lineage, which may include the following: meditation, contemplation, and recitation of sacred text.

Let us consider how the Guru and this process are described in the *Gurugītā* text itself. Verse by verse, the Guru is described, and the idea of the Guru is developed: Shrī Guru is “the eternal witness;”³⁶ “the Guru, the supreme Self,” is the deity of ‘*Srī Guru Gītā* (Song of the Guru);’³⁷ and “the purpose of repeating it is to win the Guru’s grace.”³⁸ This grace leads towards “the supreme knowledge.”³⁹

Several verses speak to the knowledge gained through Guru’s grace in this process. Verse 19 of the *Gurugītā* further states the following: “The supreme knowledge that lies on the Guru’s tongue can be realized through his grace. Always meditate on the Guru.”⁴⁰ Verse 69 offers insight into the spontaneous, intuitive knowledge that may arise: “Salutations to Shrī Guru, merely by remembering whom knowledge arises spontaneously.”⁴¹ And finally, verse 73 states the following: “Salutations to Shrī Guru, who by (imparting) the power of Self-knowledge burns up all the karmas acquired through countless lifetimes.”⁴² Clearly, this sacred text recitation honoring the Guru is at the same time honoring the path of Self-knowledge and supreme liberation enabled by Guru’s grace.

The final verse 182 refers to the *Gurugītā* as the “Gururāja mantra” with these concluding lines:

I bow to the Gururāja mantra (the *Guru Gītā*), which removes the great fear (of transmigration). It is the only mantra that rescues one from the ocean of the world. It is the perfected mantra worshipped by sages and gods, such as Brahmā and others. It is the mantra that puts an end to privations, miseries, and the disease of mundane existence.

Thus ends the *Guru Gītā*, which occurs in the dialogue between Shiva and Pārvaṭī in the latter portion of *Shrī Skanda Purāna*. This is offered at the feet of Shrī Gurudeva.⁴³

The *Gurugītā* is thus taken to be a supreme mantra with the power to rescue one from the suffering of the mundane world. As we have seen in the text as a whole, the *Gurugītā* alludes to mystical dimensions, wherein the Guru represents the eternal Self of All, also known as “Brahman (absolute reality).”⁴⁴

In the *Gurugītā* text, the Guru is further equated with the Guru principle, which may be defined as the eternal power of grace that flows through the embodied master. “It (the Guru principle) moves and moves not. It is far as well as near. It is inside everything as well as outside everything.”⁴⁵ The Guru’s spiritual power may be discerned through “four (sources of knowledge)—the Vedas, direct perception, sacred historical texts, and inference.”⁴⁶ Therefore, the *Gurugītā* is not only a form of worship, but it is also a text that leads to a greater understanding of the Guru principle and the Guru him or herself. This

far-reaching long-text chant educates the devotee on many levels, providing philosophical principles and practical advice on the meanings and methods of this spiritual path.

5. Siddha Yoga Background

The Siddha Yoga path is one lineage in which the recitation of *‘Sri Gurugītā* continues to be a regular practice. While there were “siddhas” (perfected masters) in India in ancient times, “Siddha Yoga” as a lineage of Divine Masters in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries refers to three perfected Siddhas in one lineage, beginning with Bhagawan Nityananda, who settled in the area of Maharashtra now known as Ganeshpuri, India. Nityananda, also known as Badé Baba, had countless disciples, and he became the Guru of Swami Muktananda, whom he initiated on this path, bestowing *shaktipat* awakening on Muktananda on August 15 of 1947, the same day as India’s Independence day.⁴⁷ When Bhagawan Nityananda passed on in 1961, Swami Muktananda Paramahansa (1908–1982) became the Guru of this lineage. In 1970, on the command of his Guru, Muktananda began to bring Siddha Yoga to devotees and new seekers around the world. He first met with countless devotees across India, and then he traveled to the United States, Europe, Australia, Singapore, and Japan through several world tours.⁴⁸ Even after his passing, Muktananda’s awakened energy continued to bring spiritual experiences to devotees on this path.

Gurumayi Chidvilasananda (b. 1955) visited Shree Gurudev Siddha Peeth Ashram in Ganeshpuri regularly as a young child with her parents. Eventually, she lived in the Ashram, where she became immersed in the spiritual practices of the Siddha Yoga path. As her Guru, Swami Muktananda gave her *shaktipat* initiation in 1969 (Durgananda 1997, p. 64), and before he left his body in 1982, he installed Gurumayi as the Siddha Yoga Guru to carry on this lineage. At that time, she received the spiritual name “Chidvilasananda,” which means “the bliss of the play of consciousness.”⁴⁹ For more than 40 years, Gurumayi has guided seekers on this path with the Siddha Yoga practices and teachings which lead a dedicated seeker to spiritual liberation.

When Gurumayi succeeded Muktananda, she continued to expand the globalization of the movement, traveling to Mexico, Poland, and Japan, among other places. Books by Muktananda and Gurumayi have been translated into fifteen languages, including Chinese, Russian, and several Indian languages. Today there are eight hundred meditation centers and six ashrams for Siddha Yoga in more than fifty countries. The Northern American Region (the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean) has 214 centers for Siddha Yoga Meditation, with each center in the United States serving an average of thirty- five devotees.⁵⁰

Lola Williamson notes in the above-cited book chapter that the statistics given were gathered by the SYDA Foundation in 2002, but these numbers may have declined since then.⁵¹

Through advancements in technology, recorded or live recitations of *‘Sri Gurugītā* can now be offered by way of the Siddha Yoga website, through the use of recordings, live video stream and audio *satsangs* (gatherings or programs), as well as on compact discs, enabling thousands of participants to recite *‘Sri Gurugītā* and engage in other practices with Gurumayi from diverse locations.

This dissemination of sacred yogic practices and Sanskrit text recitations indicates an extension of the Guru’s presence and teachings to diverse centers and localities where chanters and musicians have been empowered to practice on their own in alignment with the directions and guidelines of a given lineage or institutional structure. Thus, the reach of the Guru–disciple relationship now extends even more broadly across countless miles, oceans, and national/cultural borders. In these expanded traditions, the Guru can reach devotees all over the world *through the practices*. In fact, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda has said, “The practices are the body of God. They are His visible form; they are vibrant with Shakti. If you hold on to this visible aspect of God, then you’re able to receive the invisible aspect; you’re able to experience the *ātman*, the great Spirit.”⁵²

6. Group Chanting Practices: The Music of Siddha Yoga

Musically, the *Gurugītā* in Siddha Yoga practice begins with “Sadgurunath Maharaj Ki Jay,” honoring the true Guru, and then acknowledges Swami Muktananda in a short chant accompanied by a harmonium (pump organ) and drum entitled, “Muktananda Mahan.” This leads into the “Sri Guru Paduka-Panchakam: Five Stanzas on the Sandals of Shri Guru,” which is recited with just harmonium accompaniment. Then begins “‘Sri Guru Gītā: Song of the Guru.” After 182 verses of the Gita, there is generally a short meditation, followed by “Sadguru Ki Arati: Wave Lights to the True Guru,” a shorter chant that is accompanied by a harmonium, drum, and often cymbals.

The *Gurugītā* text is sung by two groups of singers who alternate. One group sings the first two lines of every verse in a repeating melody on a three-note pattern, beginning with D#, C#, and E in a melodic pattern (D# D# D# D# C# D# E D#, C# D# D# D# D# C# D# E D# C#), which later may be transposed up several times by a half step. The second group sings the third and fourth lines of every verse with the following response melody (B C# C# C# B C# D# C# B, G# G# B B G# B B B). To accommodate the text, there are occasional slight variations to the melodies, and similar to the first two lines, the melodies of the third and fourth lines may be transposed up several times by a half step over the course of the Gita so that the response is in the same key as the beginning of the verse. A few verses have a brief introductory phrase such as “The Goddess said,” or “The Lord said” to preface the dialogue in the narrative.

Throughout the *Gurugītā*, the voices are accompanied by the harmonium that plays the same melodies along with the chanters, thus supporting the voices in their part. Because the text is sung, the Sanskrit syllables resonate within each person reciting the text, and, when practiced within a community, a unified sound is created.

Swami Muktananda explains this ancient practice in his introduction to the *Nectar of Chanting* book. In this introduction, Muktananda delineates the yogic aspects engaged in this practice including the following elements: “mastery of a posture (*asana*), a pose (*mudra*), gazing at a fixed point (*trataka*) and one-pointedness of mind (*dhyana*) as one has to concentrate on the verses.”⁵³ Most importantly, Baba begins his introduction by claiming the following: “Do not be lazy in *swādhyāya* (chanting and reciting sacred texts)—do not neglect it! *Swādhyāya* is a way to study yourself.”⁵⁴

7. Personal Experience

In my own experience, I began to meditate while living in Bali, Indonesia. In 1988, I lived in a house in Bali that had just one photo in it, a photo of an Indian Guru who I did not recognize but who I later realized was Baba Muktananda. I decided to meditate every day, and I began to see a scintillating blue light in the forehead region between the eyebrows, which I later discovered is called the Blue Pearl. I instinctively knew that my meditation was complete when I saw the brilliant blue light in this inner vision. When I returned to the United States from Bali, I moved to a house one block from the Siddha Yoga Ashram in Oakland, California. I gradually realized that the invitations I had received to meet Gurumayi in South Fallsburg, New York, when I first returned from Bali in December of 1986, the picture I meditated with in Bali in 1988, and the Ashram in Oakland were all connected to the same lineage, all the Gurus of Siddha Yoga.

I first attended the *Gurugītā* at the Siddha Yoga Ashram in Oakland in the summer-fall of 1988. I felt the powerful mantras of the sacred text resonating in my heart, and I knew that this was the profound practice I had been seeking. My housemate would invite me to various evening programs (*satsangs*), and I would say, “I will go to the Gita.” I also knew since 1986 that I wanted a female Guru who could guide me in the Indian traditions of yoga.

I first accompanied the *Gurugītā* recitation on the flute. I experienced my flute playing shift down down down out of the hands and into the heart. I accompanied every line of the *Gurugītā* text on the flute during Gurumayi’s visit to the Ashram in Oakland in April of 1989. Every evening for two weeks, I played flute with the musicians for different chants,

either as part of the program or to accompany *darshan* (an opportunity for people to come up and receive the Guru's blessing and possibly to speak with her in person).

When I moved to Los Angeles to attend UCLA in ethnomusicology (1989–1991), I learned to play harmonium and began to serve as a lead chanter and play harmonium for *Gurugītā* programs in the main *satsang* hall and in the temple of the Siddha Yoga Meditation Center then in Santa Monica, CA. I have continued to play and lead chant for Siddha Yoga programs ever since. That is why I call this “musical yoga,” because that has been the *seva* (selfless service) I have offered and my experience.

The benefits of reciting sacred text and performing sacred music have been felt by many chanters and musicians. These experiences will be described in the words of individual practitioners based on ethnographic interviews I have conducted that will be cited in my edited volume, *Yogic Traditions and Sacred Sound Practices in the United States*, forthcoming with SUNY Press ([Heimarck forthcoming](#)). I will now proceed with this investigation of the *Gurugītā* as a text and transformative yogic practice while also considering the related spiritual and philosophical traditions in which this occurs.

8. Chanting the Names of God: Sankaradeva's Reforms to Vaishnavism in Late 15th-Century to Early 16th-Century Assam

Sanskrit hymn recitation may be traced all the way back to the Rig Veda (c. 1500–1000 BCE), and *svadhyaya* in the form of daily study was already a core practice within the Pancaratra tradition as early as 3rd century BC, with worship focused on Narayana and various avatars of Vishnu.⁵⁵ The widespread practice of chanting as a group to Vishnu involving all castes, men, and women among its ranks was greatly furthered by the reforms of Shankaradeva in Assam, northeastern India, beginning in the late 15th century and continuing with the reforms of Caitanya in the Bengal region in the 16th century.

[Biernacki \(\[2007\] 2008\)](#) notes these developments in Vaishnava devotional practices:

In the late fifteenth century a *Kayastha*⁵⁶ named Śaṅkaradeva/Śankardeb began preaching a new form of Vaiṣṇava devotion, which involved exclusive devotion to Viṣṇu. The form of *bhakti* he preached differed from the earlier devotion to Viṣṇu in the Assam region, which was a form of *Vāsudevism* connected to the *Pañcarātra* cult, and was a form that Śaṅkaradeva had picked up and synthesized through an earlier pilgrimage he made throughout India. One aspect of the new movement involved the translation into Assamese of several important Vaiṣṇava texts, including the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. He predates Caitanya, however, and began preaching his form of Vaiṣṇavism before Caitanya began preaching around 1510.⁵⁷

Shankaradeva's Vaishnava movement made no distinctions in caste or clan in giving initiation,⁵⁸ and the practices of the group greatly facilitated social mobility and equality.⁵⁹

Shankaradeva also initiated women into the movement, and some women became leaders in the movement. Two women, in fact, became heads of different subgroups of the movement after his death: one was his granddaughter, Kanaklata, and another was Bhubaneshwarī, the daughter of one of his disciples.⁶⁰ This acceptance of women in roles of leadership in this popular Vaishnava movement in Assam likely contributed to the esteem for women Biernacki found in many associated texts, or this tendency “may have reflected larger social patterns of esteem for women in Assam in this period.”⁶¹

In a very short period of time, Śaṅkaradeva's Vaiṣṇava movement gained a widespread popular appeal. Its growth was also no doubt enhanced by a couple of highly effective organizing techniques. One was the *sattrā* system, which set up communities of Vaiṣṇavas all over Assam. Another was the implementation of *namghars*, building structures found in most villages that were used as community halls and places of public prayer for Vaiṣṇavas affiliated with the new movement. These buildings were not like temples, in that they were funded by the communities and they functioned as community gathering places,⁶² not as abodes for deities. Eventually, the group with its various branches became very

powerful and was patronized by kings, who offered large tracts of land with servants attached to various *sattras*.⁶³

It is interesting to note the development of Vaishnava devotional practices through the use of community halls and places of public worship, as we have seen a similar process unfold through the spread of hatha yoga studios across the United States and dozens of chanting and meditation groups as well as several ashrams initiated in many different cities, towns, and villages in this country. These chanting and meditation groups may be located in rented community halls or public spaces, as well as privately owned houses or yogic establishments, and they provide a place to practice together within a community, facilitating group practices such as recitation, meditation, and contemplation, as well as selfless service or *seva* by individual members. As in Shankaradeva's initiatives, the spread of yogic community centers open to diverse constituencies represents a democratization of devotional opportunities for men and women interested in sacred Sanskrit hymns, chanting sacred texts, and the experience of Sanskrit mantras of Indian derivation.

9. Contemporary Female Gurus

The presence of female gurus active in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is beginning to draw scholarly interest. With regard to contemporary female gurus, Copeman and Ikegame highlight several key aspects:

Moreover, contemporary female gurus have begun prioritizing the personal experience of devotees over the presence of gurus and centralized organizations. Importantly, what this suggests is the survival of a long-established alternative path to male-centered asceticism within the Hindu imaginary; which is to say that uncontainable guru-ship could not be contained in one gender alone.⁶⁴

In other words, the presence of female gurus demonstrates the ability of all human persons to reach this ultimate goal of Self-enlightenment and Self-realization. It is not the organization that defines or controls this potential; it is the realization of great men and great women on the path of Self-realization that proves one's capability of reaching the goal.

The prioritizing of the personal experience of devotees noted above can lead to encouragement by female and male gurus for devotees to stay in their own homes and towns and to practice in a decentered local hall rather than feel the need to travel to or live in the centralized ashram setting with the guru him or herself. In the case of the Siddha Yoga path, both Swami Muktananda and his successor Swami Chidvilasananda have offered this decentralized approach, encouraging devotees to perform the spiritual practices in their own homes, with their own families, and in their own chanting and meditation centers to further their *sadhana* or spiritual practices. This decentering of the spiritual group and devotional practices would seem to open the door to a broader audience of devotees who could participate in these practices, including the musical form of yogic *sadhana* in various locations: that is, *musical yoga*.⁶⁵

Copeman and Ikegame distinguish two types of gurus, those who are predominantly human teachers and those who are received as avatars or embodiments of the divine:

Historically, and in the present, the guru has been represented either as a guide who leads devotees to the Supreme Being or as himself a primary object of faith (Gold 1988). Even among contemporary hyper gurus the two types are discernible. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1914–2008), founder of the Transcendental Meditation movement, and Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977), founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), both presented themselves as extremely knowledgeable yet human teachers, while other high-profile gurus, notably Sathya Sai Baba [1926–2011] and Mata Amritanandamayi [1896–1982], emerge as avatars or embodiments of the divine (Gold 2005, pp. 220–21). As Gold and others point out, in most guru-inspired religious movements gurus are represented both as respected teachers and avatars,

and gurus switch as a matter of convenience between the two images according to the demands of devotees and social circumstance.⁶⁶

In the case of Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, she is both a respected teacher and a perfected Master or Siddha, who lives in the constant awareness of God within herself and in all of creation, also described as the blissful state of Self-realization. In this state, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda offers grace to support devotees in realizing this divine inner state within their own consciousness. She serves as both a model and guide to her devotees, teaching the truth, embodying the truth, and guiding her devotees on a daily basis. Gurumayi trains swamis and lay meditation teachers to teach and publish, based on their own experiences and expressing the truth in their own words. She offers in-depth, transformative talks about the spiritual path while also writing articles, books, and poetry on spiritual subjects.

10. Further Consideration of Morse and Tubb's Interpretation

While Morse provides a very useful history and chronology of the *Gurugītā* texts he has gathered and investigated, I do differ on one point. He discusses at some length the contrast between an active role by the bhakta disciple and a passive role. Drawing on a brief mention in verse 118 of the disciple's meditation on the Guru becoming like that of the worm on the wasp,⁶⁷ Morse suggests, with the assistance of Professor Gary Tubb's interpretation, that the worm-wasp is a metaphor for the guru-disciple relationship wherein the disciple represents the worm who is stung by the wasp and then numbed if not paralyzed by the stronger force. Ultimately, the two become one, as the bhakta is absorbed into the more powerful force.⁶⁸ While the quality of absorption in the guru's state of divine liberation represents one side of this equation, the other aspect of this continuum concerns the devotee's actions to prepare for and engage in the spiritual practices taught by the guru that would enable or develop this state. In other words, devotees or disciples are not entirely passive in this process; they have to engage in their own *sadhana* or spiritual practices.

The guru may confer some inner experiences of awakening, and instill the desire and ability to meditate, but the devotee must follow through in his or her intention to do so. The guru's *shakti* and grace enable a true awakening, which is supported by the devotee's efforts to follow the spiritual practices—whether *svadhyaya*, mantra *japa* (repetition of a mantra, whether silently or aloud), meditation, chanting, or *seva*.⁶⁹

Immediately following this brief mention of the worm-wasp metaphor in verse 118 of the *Gurugītā*, verses 119–123 expound upon the specific kinds of experiences of liberation the disciple may encounter. Therefore, rather than becoming “numb” or “paralyzed,” I would contend that a process of Self-realization is at hand. Let us consider a translation of the verses that follow. In the *Gurugītā* verse 119, it states the following: “By meditating on the Guru, one becomes Brahman. There is no doubt that one is liberated in *pinda*, *pada*, and *rūpa*.”⁷⁰ We should note that in this particular verse and spiritual practice, the disciple is meditating on the Guru; thus, they are actively engaged in spiritual practices. These spiritual practices may lead to various forms of liberation.

When Shri Pārvaṭī asks Shankara to explain the meaning of these terms in verse 120, Shri Mahādeva⁷¹ responds in verse 122:

O beautiful one, they are liberated in *pinda* (whose Kundalini is awake). They are liberated in *pada* (who hear spontaneous repetition of Hamsa). They are liberated in *rūpa* (who have envisioned the blue pearl). But they are undoubtedly liberated who are liberated in *rūpātīta* (who experience the transcendental state beyond form).⁷²

Verse 123- Becoming one with everything, a person should perceive the highest truth.⁷³

Verse 126- (Then), being ever-blissful and ever-tranquil, he rejoices wherever he may be.⁷⁴

Clearly, there are many aspects of yogic awakening that the adept practitioner may experience; they are not numbed or paralyzed by the Guru but rather begin a process of awakening through divine grace.

The awakening of the Kundalini—the divine energy at the base of the spine—through the grace of the guru, is known as *shaktipat*. This marks the beginning of a spiritual journey in certain yogic traditions, including Siddha Yoga. In addition, some people experience a scintillating blue light between the eyebrows the size of a pearl during meditation, while others hear sacred chants or mantras such as “Hamsa” (“swan; ‘I am He,’” “the natural vibration of the Self”)⁷⁵ repeating spontaneously inside. These are some of the fruits of meditation and sacred sound practices on the yogic paths referenced here in the text of the *Gurugītā*. “Becoming one with everything” means experiencing a sense of unity between oneself and everyone and everything else; this is the enlightened state, the culmination of Self-realization and liberation. Thus, beyond acts of devotion and guru’s grace that facilitate the disciple’s ability to become one with the supreme Self,⁷⁶ there is a long history of yogic awakening referenced in these mystical verses. Let us consider the history of the yogic concept of the perfection of a human as it relates to this process.

11. The Inner Path vs. The Outer Path: Tracing Ancient Derivations of the Self and “Universal Man” in the Vedas and Upanishads

In “Bringing the Divine down into Man: the building-up of the yoga path” (2002), Edrisi Fernandes analyzes “the evolution of Yoga as an ascetic discipline” through a review of themes of Purusha (Sanskrit for “person; man,” but also “Universal man; or man-god”) in classical Indian literary references drawn from the *Rigveda*, the *Atharvaveda*, many Upanishads, relevant portions of the *Mahābhārata* (particularly of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, and of the *Mokshadharma* and other sections of the *Shānti Parva*), the *Yoga-Sūtra* of Patañjali (the founding text of classical yoga), the *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, the *Yogavāsishtha* attributed to Valmiki, and the *Kulārnavā-Tantra* (an essential text to tantra-yoga, among others. These articulations give way to the idea that one can be “enlightened,” and the God-in-man status can be achieved. This can happen through knowledge (*jñāna*) and through yoga.⁷⁷

According to Fernandes, in this literature, the “[Divine] Person” (*Purusha*) is apprehended as the highest expression of divinity, and “one who knows Purusha thinks ‘This is Brahman’, for all devatā (divinities) are seated in him.”⁷⁸ The Rigvedic hymn known as the *Purushasūkta*, “Purusha Hymn,” defends the identity of the universe, God, and man. The Purusha theme is clearly present in the Vedic hymns, and as a result of the association between the living soul (*jīvātman*) and the eternal “Supreme Self” (*paramātman*), a human’s spiritual Self (*ātman*) was identified with the cosmic/ontologic “Pillar,” “Support,” or “Axis” of the universe, resulting in the idea that he who knows Brahman within a human [i.e., *ātman*] knows the “Lord of Creatures” (Prajāpati), the “Supreme Being” (Parameshtin).⁷⁹

Fernandes concludes that “the importance of the Purusha hymn can be perceived from the fact that it is the only hymn to be found in all four Vedas.”⁸⁰ “The word purusha is made to derive from puri-shaya, ‘[he] who rests in the citadel [of the body].’ Man’s deepest Self, toward which the ascetic and sage travels, is called the true ‘city of Brahman’ in the Chāndogya-Upanishad.”⁸¹

In “Kulārnavā Tantra- Pathway for Meaning Circulation,” (Valdez 2016) Beatriz Valdez highlights the importance of the guru for this inward journey, particularly within Tantric traditions. In this source, Valdez “identified the pathway for meaning circulation within the Kulārnavā, [...] which stated that the guru is crucial to facilitate the discovery of our inner self. For this purpose, [the guru] uses knowledge tools as well as the desire for Shakti.”⁸² Loriliai Biernacki, in *Renowned Goddess of Desire: Women, Sex, and Speech in Tantra* (Biernacki [2007] 2008, Appendix 1: Sources, Other Tantras, and Historical Context), locates the *Kulārnavā Tantra* (KuT) among the earlier Tantras “from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries.”⁸³ In her Appendix 1, Biernacki reviews numerous Tantric Tantras concluding that “Near absolute reverence for the guru is a core, fundamental element of nearly all Tantric paths.”⁸⁴

We have seen great evidence for the importance of the guru for the purpose of Self-realization within the above-cited traditions. Let us now consider the other side of this equation—that is, the evidence for the impact of yogic traditions more generally. What are

the claims concerning the effects of yogic practices to alter one's lived experience, and what evidence in scholarly research do we have for these aspects of engagement?

In *Engaged Emancipation: Mind, Morals, and Make-Believe in the Mokṣopāya (Yogavāsistha)*, a volume edited by Chapple and Chakrabarti, Matthew MacKenzie (2015) explores a phenomenological "horizon of interiority" whereby Rama's experience of the world becomes a part of himself, causing him to abandon his dispassion and re-engage with the world.⁸⁵ MacKenzie notes that "It is through certain forms of yogic practice that one is able to change one's most basic experience of the world."⁸⁶ In the given case, the realization of the ultimate unity of Self and reality "allows the expansion of Rama's horizon of interiority to include the entire world. His being has opened to the world, and he experiences the world as not fundamentally separate from himself."⁸⁷

The direct experience of the unity of Self and Brahman is accomplished through the yogic practices described in the text [*Yogavāsistha*]. Through concentration on the inner reaches of the self, and through the manipulation of *prana* (life-force) [...] through practice, one may radically transcend the inner-outer distinction, which divides the self from the world.⁸⁸

It is not just about looking without but also within, where the inner experience transcends all distinctions. This experience of inner unity is then visible in the world, as the outer world begins to reflect the inner reality.

Morse notes that while the *Gurugītā* mentions Vedic and *śāstric* traditions, it also asserts that Vedic learning is not necessary for the path of guru-bhakti (loving devotion to the guru); in this way, "the *Gurugītā* addresses a much larger and more inclusive audience," which is not limited by questions of caste affiliation or "twice-born" status.⁸⁹ Morse further claims that the *bhakta* (devotee; lover of God)⁹⁰ in this text is in fact a (true) *saṃnyāsi* (renunciant),⁹¹ who sets aside worldly affairs to focus one-pointedly on enactments of devotion.⁹² I concur with Morse that "The *Gurugītā* is an example of a bhakti text in the Advaita Vedānta tradition, with," I would emphasize, *strong* "yogic influences."⁹³ We have seen elements of the yogic awakening of the practitioner as well as a transcendent experience of unity between the inner Self and the supreme Self of all, in addition to the possibility of transcending "the disease of mundane existence" and experiencing liberation.⁹⁴ Clearly, this is an ancient path and one that is not limited by "caste or creed" or, I would contend, nationality or gender, with female gurus and devotees having a significant role to play. Morse's detailed investigation as well as the significant publications by Rigopoulos have instigated an important conversation on the *Gurugītā* text, scriptural background, and philosophical implications, and they deserve significant credit for their work.

12. Conclusions

In conclusion, the musical recitation of long-text chants known as *svādhyaya* is a powerful devotional practice on the yogic path towards Self-realization. The recitation of the *Gurugītā* was disseminated by Shankara in the 8th century CE, and over many centuries, various portions of it have been adopted by "a great variety of ascetics and religious groups."⁹⁵ This spiritual practice was greatly reinvigorated by Swami Muktananda's inclusion of *Gurugītā* recitation as a regular spiritual practice in Siddha Yoga Ashrams, meditation centers, and chanting and meditation groups. As noted in Shankaradeva's Vaishnava movement that emphasized the chanting of *namasankirtana* (short chants extolling the Names of God) in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, and the continued practice of *namasankirtana* under Caitanya's influence in Bengal, there has been a democratization of involvement in certain mystical yogic practices that involve the chanting or recitation of sacred Sanskrit texts, and the *Gurugītā* is one of the most important in this group.

Swami Muktananda deemed the *Gurugītā* an "ocean of bliss in this world" encompassing "the yoga of the Self."⁹⁶ When chanted with great reverence, this practice can lead to a heightened state of absorption known as "*śhravana samādhi*, the kind of *samādhi* that comes through reading or listening to holy texts. While you are reciting holy texts, you are

likely to pass into this state."⁹⁷ Long-text recitations such as the *Gurugītā* often enable such a quality of absorption through immersion in the sacred text and the wisdom and sacred sounds manifested therein.

In addition to reading or reciting long-text chants such as the *Gurugītā*, there are also the benefits of listening to sacred sounds. In *The Yoga of Discipline* (Chidvilasananda 1996), the current master of the Siddha Yoga lineage Gurumayi Chidvilasananda describes the immense benefits acquired through listening to sacred text recitations:

By listening to the sounds of sacred texts, your sense of hearing gets cleansed and strengthened, and the mind naturally becomes calmer and calmer until it is completely absorbed in the sweet vibrations of the Truth. Such a mind is very slow to anger. It becomes a serene lake. It acquires such steadiness and power that going through life is as simple and graceful as water flowing, cascading through high mountains and meandering through green meadows.⁹⁸

Through this vividly descriptive account, Swami Chidvilasananda emphasizes the powerful effects of the vibrations of Sanskrit mantras and the sounds of sacred texts to still the mind and enable absorption in the Truth (*shravana samadhi*).

When we recite the *Gurugītā*, the sounds of these powerful Sanskrit mantras and ancient scriptural teachings resonate through the inner chambers of our body, enlivening our heart, mind, and spirit with sacred sound, philosophical meaning, and various forms of yogic awakening. It is as if a spiritual channel opens up within, providing spiritual nourishment and a deeper level of understanding based on experience, insight, and profound teachings. The *Gurugītā* describes the methods and process of spiritual awakening on the path to liberation through enlivened mantras that enable that process to occur. It is a journey to the inner Self.⁹⁹ The mantras are enlivened by the enlightened master who transmits them, and the grace of that master is conveyed through Consciousness–sound (*chaitanya-shabda*) experienced through the words, sounds, teachings, and awakened energy (*chitshakti*) of a perfected master.¹⁰⁰

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Notes

- ¹ 'Sri is a term of respect that connotes sacredness, and this designation is given to the *Gurugītā* text in Swami Muktananda's *Nectar of Chanting* edition (Muktananda 1983), 6. To facilitate comprehension by a broad audience, in my discussion of terms and concepts, I will translate the Sanskrit 's to sh for English readers. However, when citing sources, I will copy the diacriticals as indicated in that source. Therefore, the reader will become familiar with different spellings of certain Sanskrit words: swadhyaya and svadhyaaya, 'sakti and shakti, 'saktipat and shaktipat, Guru Gītā and *Gurugītā*, Shrī and 'Sri, and so on.
- ² When referring to the tradition, practices, and *Gurugītā* text of the Siddha Yoga path, in which the current Guru is a woman, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, I will capitalize Guru and use the feminine pronoun. When referring to gurus in general, I will use the lower case.
- ³ For example, this citation from the *Varaha Upanisad* (2.45–47) states the following: "Concentrating on consciousness as unwavering, meditate on my abode in your heart. . . All that is conscious in the universe is actually [a reflection] of absolute Consciousness. This universe is absolute Consciousness only. You are Consciousness. I am Consciousness. Meditate on the world as Consciousness." Cited in (Muller-Ortega 1997, pp. 389–90).
- ⁴ In Tantric tradition, the *Agamas* refer to authoritative scriptures or the teachings of Shiva to Parvati, while *Nigamas* in this context refer to the Vedas or the teachings of the goddess to Shiva (Jones and Ryan 2006, p. 13).
- ⁵ The 182 verses refer to the shorter version of this text as practiced in Siddha Yoga Ashrams and chanting and meditation centers, among others. For further information on manuscript copies and printed versions of the *Gurugītā* text, see (Rigopoulos 2005, pp. 242–44).

- ⁶ Antonio Rigopoulos, "The *Guru-Gītā* or 'Song of the Master' as Incorporated in the *Guru-Caritra* of Sarasvatī Gaṅgādar," 245. In (Rigopoulos 2005). Tracing the long history of Shankara's influences and practices since the 8th century CE is beyond the scope of this article. However, there is a connection to the Siddha Yoga swamis and their *svadhyaya* practices documented here: the renowned Advaita theologian Adi Shankara established four monasteries and ten orders of renunciant monks including the Sarasvati Order, which is "the monastic lineage into which swamis Muktananda and Chidvilasananda and all Siddha Yoga swamis have been initiated" (Brooks et al. 1997, p. 366). Several sources on Shankara recommended by Rigopoulos include the following: (Potter 1982; Cenkner 1983; Dazey 1990; Sawai 1992).
- ⁷ The chanting of mantras and extolling the Names of God are also widespread in various Shaivite sects, in addition to the mantra repetition found in many Buddhist traditions.
- ⁸ In Sanskrit, " 'Sastra' is defined as "scripture; teaching; doctrine; treatise (from the verb root 'sas = 'to rule, teach')" (Grimes 1996, p. 288). Thus, in this context, the *Gurugītā* could be viewed as a scriptural teaching or a doctrine of religious beliefs. For those seeking background information on the Vedas, you can see (Dandekar 1987).
- ⁹ See (Morse 2017, p. 115). "The Vedas, Vedic authority, and other Sanskrit texts surface throughout the *Gurugītā*. On the one hand, the *Gurugītā* uses the Vedas as one of the appropriate sources of knowledge about the guru, ascribing to the Vedas the affirmation that the guru is the highest state. The claim that the Vedas proclaim the divinity of the guru is a common anachronism across guru-traditions; the figure of the teacher and Vedic initiator, the *ācārya*, is indeed present in Vedic literature, but such a person's status as a transcendent, divine being is found only in later texts. The popular equation of the figure of the guru with a god, 'guru-deva,' is not found in the Vedic corpus" (Ibid., p. 116).
- ¹⁰ For a beautiful introduction to this material, see (Brooks 2018, pp. 347–60).
- ¹¹ In the *Maitrī Upanishad* (2.7) (ca. 5th century B.C.E.), it states that the Ātman [pure Self] "is pure, steadfast, unswerving, unstained, unagitated, and free from craving. It remains fixed, like a witness, and abiding in its own Self" (cited in Mahony 1997, p. 382). The *Katha Upanishad* speaks to the Self or Ātman as well, "Seeking life eternal, a wise person beholds the Ātman with his gaze turned inward" (Ibid., p. 383).
- ¹² See (Brooks et al. 1997, p. 302).
- ¹³ (Morse 2017, FN33, p. 16).
- ¹⁴ Ibid., FN33, pp. 16–17.
- ¹⁵ (Rigopoulos 2005, p. 237, FN 1) notes that Datta/Dattātreya was "presented in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna* as well as in other *Purāna*-s as a partial descent of Visnu." Rigopoulos investigates the *Gurugītā* as it was incorporated in the Marāthī *Guru-caritra* (circa 1550) of Sarasvatī Gaṅgādhara.
- ¹⁶ (Morse 2017, "Guru-Bhakti," p. 59).
- ¹⁷ (Rigopoulos 2005, p. 237).
- ¹⁸ (Rigopoulos 2005, p. 243). See also (Rigopoulos 1998). Grimes (1996, p. 110) defines "Dattātreya" as "A divine incarnation known as the Lord of *avadhūtas*, and often revered as the embodiment of the supreme *guru*."
- ¹⁹ (Dhere [1958] 1964, p. 237), cited in (Morse 2017, p. 61).
- ²⁰ (Tulpule 1979, p. 316), cited in (Morse 2017, p. 61). Full citation from (Morse 2017, pp. 60–61).
- ²¹ (Doniger 1993, pp. 59–60), cited in (Morse 2017, p. 61). As defined by Grimes (1996, "Purana," p. 250), "there are eighteen major Puranas, or sacred books, containing stories, legends, and hymns about the creation of the universe, the incarnations of God, and the instructions of various deities as well as the spiritual legacies of ancient sages and kings." The *Skanda Purana* is here listed within the category of those that honor 'Siva.
- ²² (Morse 2017, p. 62).
- ²³ (Brooks et al. 1997, p. 60), cited in (Morse 2017, p. 62).
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ (Morse 2017, p. 62). "The *Gurugītā* was a fitting text for the kind of religiosity Muktananda taught, which was built around initiation and spiritual transmission, *śaktipata*, given to a disciple through the power of an accomplished or perfected true guru, a *siddhaguru* or *sādguru*" (Morse 2017, p. 62). For a discussion of *śaktipata*, see (Muller-Ortega 1997, pp. 407–44).
- ²⁶ (Brooks et al. 1997, 60 FN**).
- ²⁷ (Morse 2017, "Guru-Bhakti," p. 63 including FN12).
- ²⁸ (Rigopoulos 2005, p. 247).
- ²⁹ (Morse 2017, "Guru-Bhakti," p. 64). *Sādhanā* refers to spiritual practices and discipline that provide a means to the goal (Chidvilasananda 1995, p. xv). See also Grimes (1996, "Sādhanā," p. 261). *Śrauta* rituals would be Vedic rituals, generally older, more complex, and dedicated to Agni and Soma (Grimes 1996, " 'Śrauta,' p. 299). For further information on North India's *bhakti* movement circa 1450–1750, including its relationships with tantra, yoga, and Sufism, see (Burchett 2019).
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ See verse 3 of the *Gurugītā* text in (Muktananda 1983, p. 8).
- ³² (Morse 2017, "Guru-Bhakti," p. 99).

- 33 I am grateful to Robert Wolsky for bringing my attention to the role of *chaitanya* in this process (Conversation in May 2024). Grimes (1996, p. 100) defines “*chaitanya*” as “consciousness; intelligence; spirit; awareness; Pure Consciousness,” and he notes that “according to Kashmir ‘Saivism, it is the Absolute Reality, and is essentially, one and nondual, Pure Illumination (‘*suddha prakāśa*’), self-luminous, and self-revealed.” In summary, the Guru’s grace is Pure Consciousness that is scintillating with *shakti* or divine energy, and this supports the spiritual path of her devotees.
- 34 See (Grimes 1996, “*Saktipāta*,” p. 268).
- 35 Ibid., “*Sakti*,” p. 268.
- 36 (Muktananda 1983, Verse 51, p. 20).
- 37 (Muktananda 1983, p. 6).
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid., p. 12.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid., p. 26.
- 42 Ibid., p. 27.
- 43 Ibid., p. 57.
- 44 “‘*Srī Guru Gītā* (Song of the Guru),” (Muktananda 1983, Verses 3 and 5, pp. 8–9).
- 45 Ibid., Verse 62, p. 24.
- 46 Ibid., Verse 65, p. 25.
- 47 (Muktananda 1978, p. 64).
- 48 For further information on the three world tours of Swami Muktananda and a detailed history of the lineage see Swami Durgananda, “To See the World Full of Saints: The History of Siddha Yoga as a Contemporary Movement” and Appendix 2, “Swami Muktananda’s Three World Tours,” both in *Meditation Revolution* (1997): 3–161, 575–79.
- 49 (Rhodes Bailly 1995, xiv).
- 50 (Williamson 2005, p. 149).
- 51 Ibid., FN 7, p. 165.
- 52 Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, cited from the June 4 entry of *Resonate with Stillness: Daily Contemplations* (New York: SYDA Foundation, 1995). See also (Grimes 1996, “*Atman*,” p. 68).
- 53 (Muktananda 1983, p. x).
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 *Svādhyāya* was practiced in the shrauta and the smarta traditions during Vedic times. The Pañcharatra follows these antecedents. The Pancharatra tradition was further systematized in the 1st-2nd centuries CE and expounded by Ramanuja in the 11th century.
- 56 ‘Kayastha’ represents a Hindu caste in India historically associated with scribes, administrators, ministers, and record-keepers and considered one of the three higher castes in Bengal. Renowned religious figures of the Kayastha group include the following: Sankaradeva, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, and Paramahansa Yogananda. For an in-depth study of this caste group, see (Gupta 1996).
- 57 (Biernacki [2007] 2008, pp. 185–86). For a brief biographical account of Caitanya’s life and theology, see (O’Connell 2005, pp. 1345–48).
- 58 (Barpujari 1990–1994, 3:232, 3:236), cited in (Biernacki [2007] 2008, p. 188).
- 59 (Barpujari 1990–1994, 3:177), cited in (Biernacki [2007] 2008, p. 188).
- 60 (Barpujari 1990–1994, 3:236–237), cited in (Biernacki [2007] 2008, p. 188).
- 61 (Biernacki [2007] 2008, p. 188).
- 62 These community halls in Assam sound reminiscent of the *banjar* community gathering places widespread in Bali, Indonesia.
- 63 Biernacki, *Renowned Goddess of Desire*, pp. 188–89.
- 64 (Copeman and Ikegame 2012, pp. 289–336).
- 65 During the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020–2024), by necessity, some *Gurugītā* recitation groups began to meet online and recite with an online recording. Still, whether online or in-person, individuals who gather to recite the *Gurugītā* together represent a community where this musical practice has spiritual meaning.
- 66 (Copeman and Ikegame 2012, p. 313).
- 67 See (Muktananda 1983, p. 39).
- 68 See (Morse 2017, p. 85).
- 69 In his commentary on the *Shiva Sutras*, Kshemaraja writes, “The Guru is the grace-bestowing power of God” (Muktananda 1985, p. 25), cited in (Brooks et al. 1997, p. 315).
- 70 (Muktananda 1983, p. 40).

- 71 Mahadeva and Shankara are two of the many names of Shiva. Other names for Shiva include the following: Viswanatha (lord of
the universe), Mahesha, Maheshvara, Shambhu, Rudra, Hara, Devendra, and Neelakanta.
- 72 (Muktananda 1983, verse 122, pp. 40–41).
- 73 Ibid., verse 123, p. 41.
- 74 Ibid., verse 126, p. 42.
- 75 These definitions of “Hamsa” derive from Grimes (1996, p. 135). He explains further that *Hamsa* as the natural vibration of the
Self “occurs spontaneously with each incoming and outgoing breath. By becoming aware of *hamsa*, a seeker experiences the
identity between the individual self and the supreme Self. Also repeated as *So’ham*.”
- 76 For a fascinating discussion of the Advaita “final transition into the Real” and the concepts of Being, existence, *cit*, and “the
notion of ‘grace’ of the Divine Being,” see (Sinha 1983, pp. 134–37).
- 77 (Fernandes 2002), Alexander Fidora, and Jordi Pardo Pastor, coordinators, Special Issue: Expressing the Divine: Language, Art
and Mysticism, Abstract, p. 6. Also see (Venkatesananda 1984) and (Vidyaratna [1965] 1975).
- 78 AV, X I.8.32, trans. Edgerton, cited in (Fernandes 2002, p. 9).
- 79 *Atharvaveda* [AV], X.7.17, and X.8.43–44, cited in (Fernandes 2002, p. 8). Further to this theme, the AV, X.7.15 asks the following:
“In whom, as Man [Purusha], deathlessness [amrita] and death [mrityu] combine,/to whom belong the surging ocean/and all the
arteries [nadī] that course within him;/Tell me of that Support [Skambha]—who may he be?” (Ibid., 8–9).
- 80 (Fernandes 2002, p. 10).
- 81 *Chāndogya-Upanishad* (VIII.1.4 & 1.5), cited in (Fernandes 2002, p. 10). Furthermore, the Purusha theme is again emphasized in
the Upanishads: “The Brihadāranyaka-Upanishad [BU] reworks the Purusha theme by assuming the identity of the universe,
Brahman, Ātman and man. We can read there that ‘In the beginning this [universe] was Self [Ātman] alone, in the shape
[= likeliness] of a person (purusha)’ (I.4.1; trans. Max Müller). Man is elevated to a privileged status, as we can see in BU, II.1.2–13;
‘(. . .) Whoso thus knows that he is Brahman, becomes this whole [universe]. Even the gods have not the power to cause him to
un-BE, for he becomes their own self. . .’ (BU, I.4.10; trans. Zaehner. In M. Müller, ‘(. . .) he who thus knows that he is Brahman,
becomes all this, and even the Devas cannot prevent it, for he himself is their Self....’),” (Fernandes 2002, p. 11).
- 82 (Valdez 2016, p. 227).
- 83 (Biernacki [2007] 2008, p. 163).
- 84 “With one rare exception of a particular Kali practice.” (Biernacki [2007] 2008, p. 151).
- 85 (MacKenzie 2015, p. 17).
- 86 Ibid., p. 11.
- 87 Ibid., p. 13.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 (Morse 2017, p. 118).
- 90 (Grimes 1996, “Bhakta,” p. 82).
- 91 For further explanation of this term, see (Grimes 1996, “Sannyāsin,” p. 284).
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Ibid., p. 64.
- 94 See Verses 182 and 165, respectively, in (Muktananda 1983, pp. 52, 57).
- 95 (Rigopoulos 2005, “The Guru-Gītā or ‘Song of the Master’,” p. 246).
- 96 (Muktananda 1983, “Introduction,” p. xiii).
- 97 (Chidvilasananda 1996, pp. 104–5), citing (Muktananda 1976, p. 8).
- 98 (Chidvilasananda 1996, p. 105).
- 99 (Muktananda 1983, “‘Srī Guru Gita’” verse 110, p. 37).
- 100 For more information on Chitshakti and its personification as the Goddess Chiti Shakti Kundalini, see (Muktananda 1978, p. 210).

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