

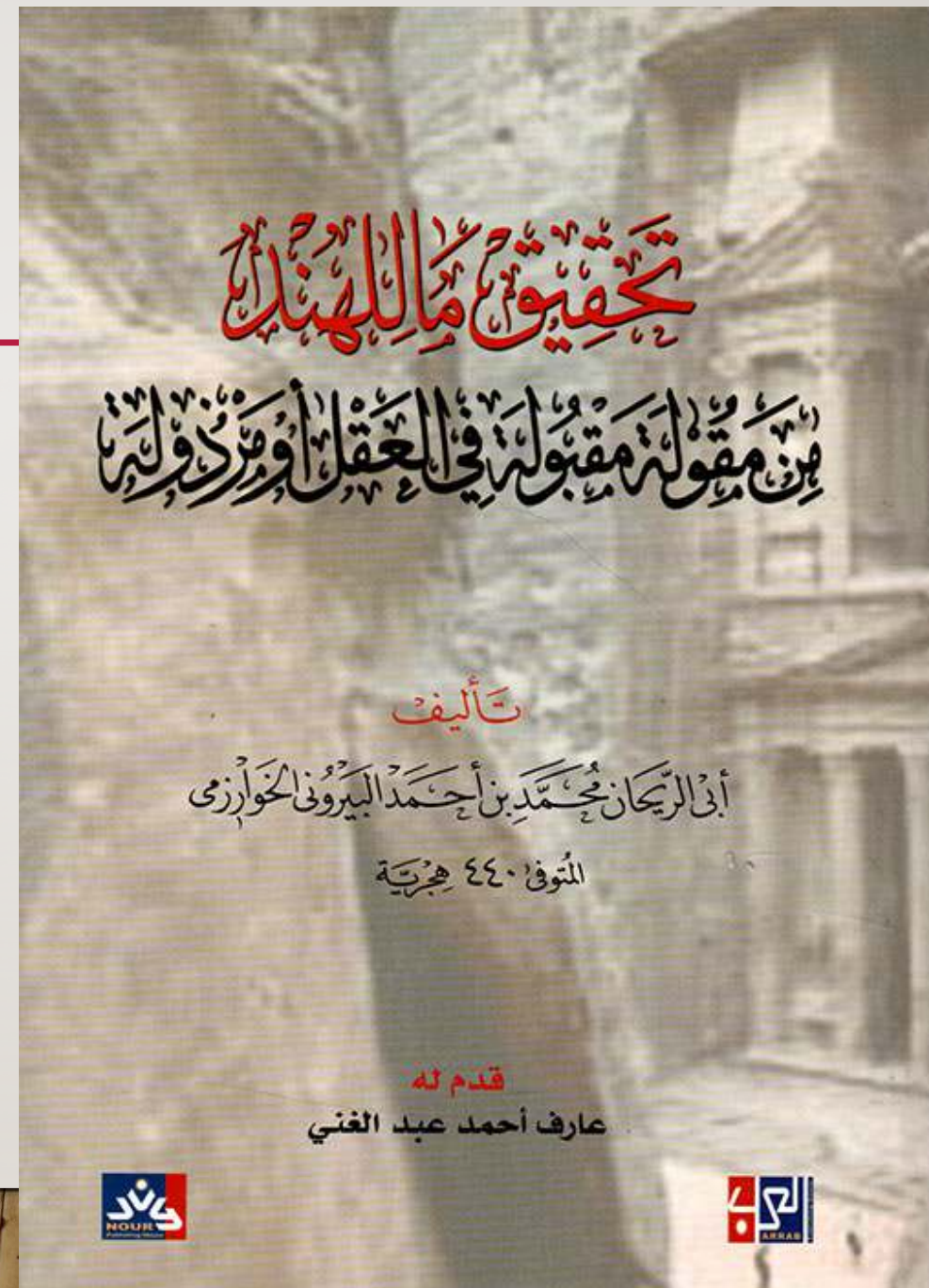
THE RAWḌA OF KṚṢṆA CAITANYA VAIṢṆAVA PILGRIMAGE FROM A MUSLIM COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE THEOLOGY OF
PILGRIMAGE

OCTOBER 2023



Kitāb al-Hind by al-Bīrūnī (d. app. 1050 AD)



PROF. MUHAMMAD AKRAM (INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY ISLAMABAD)

- “Foundations of the Descriptive Study of Religion in Muslim History” (Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 2020)
- “Internationalisation of the Study of Religion and Its Methodological Challenges” (Islamic Studies, 2019)



ما بين بيتي ومنبري روضة من رياض الجنة

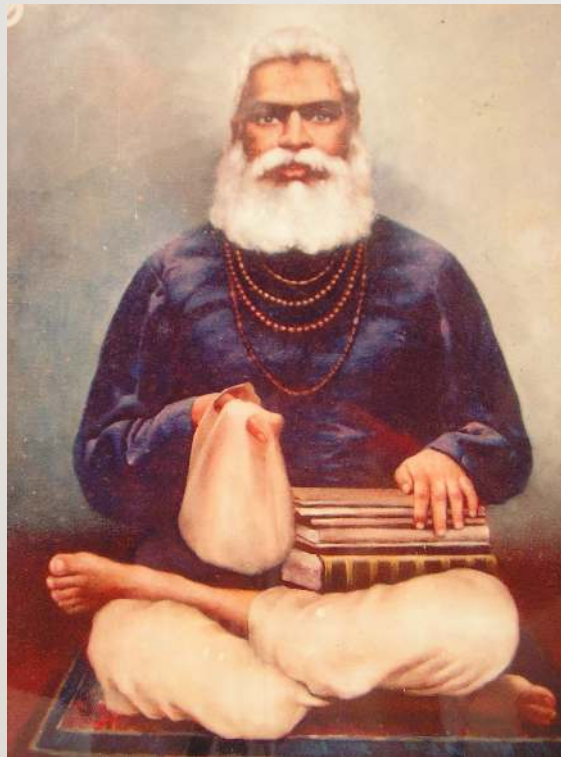


CAITANYA VAIṢṆAVISM & PARAMPARĀ

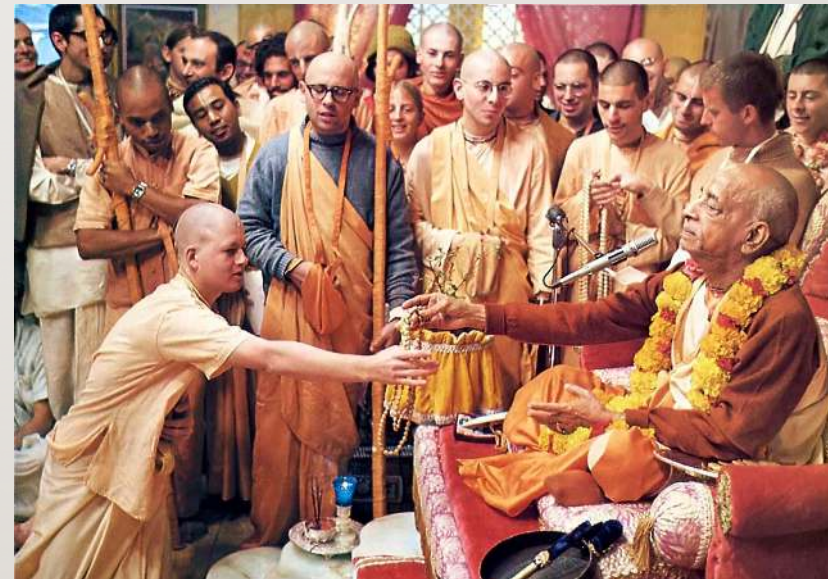
Caitanya (1486-1534)



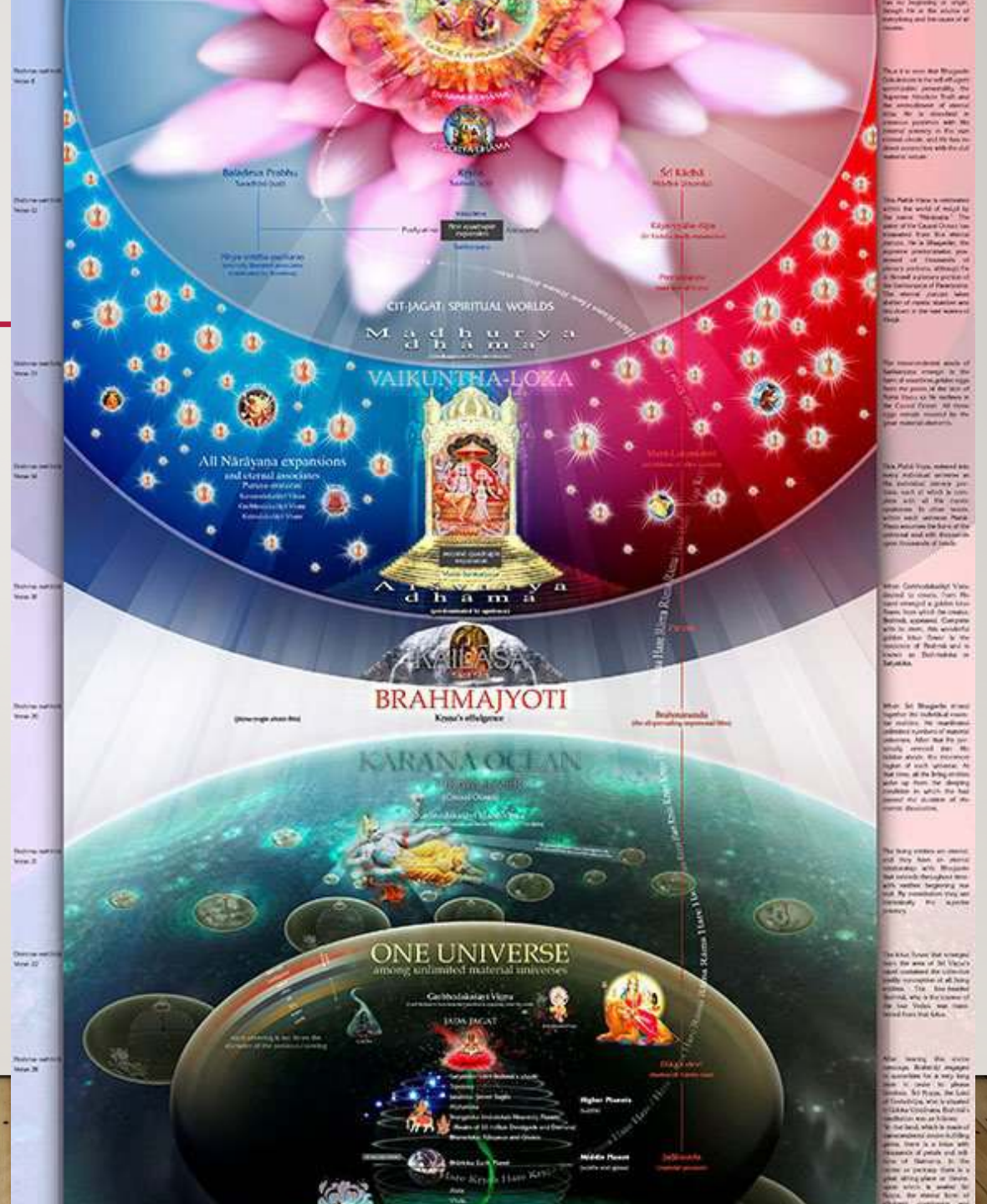
Bhaktivinoda (1838-1914)



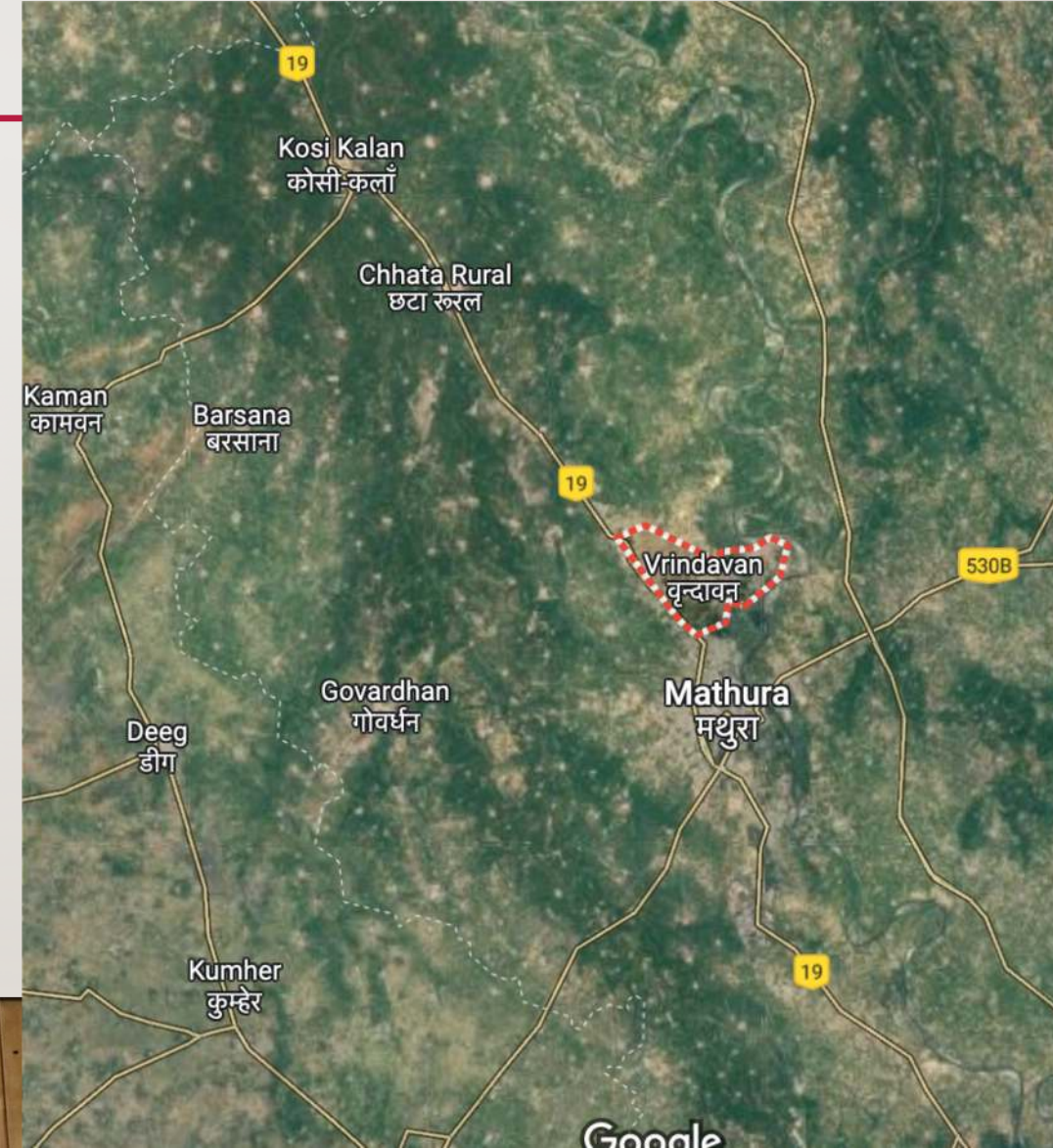
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami
(often called simply “Prabhupāda”)



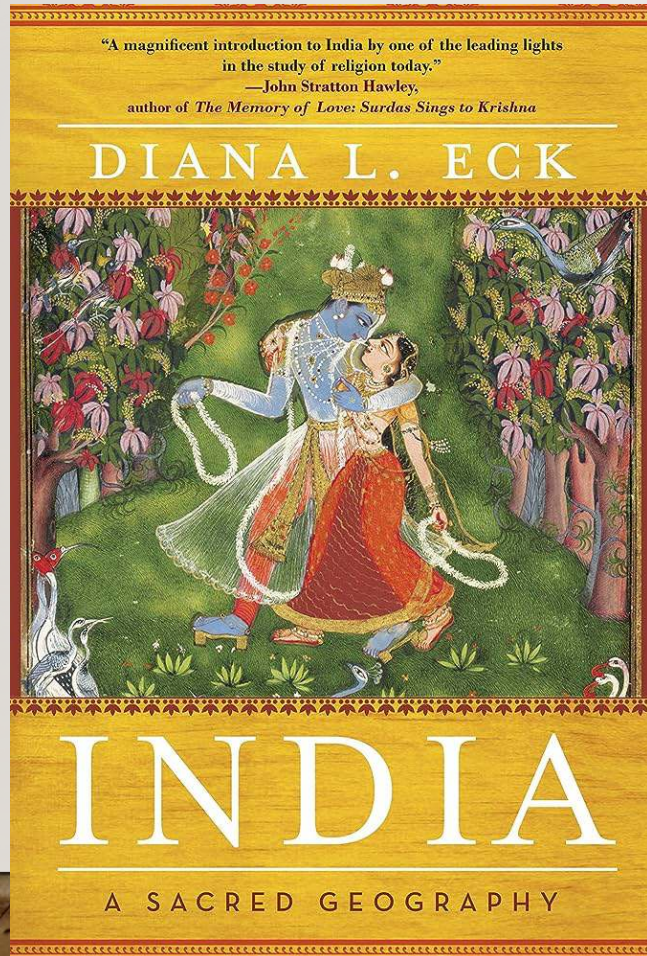
ONTOLOGY/COSMOLOGY



VRAJA (UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA)



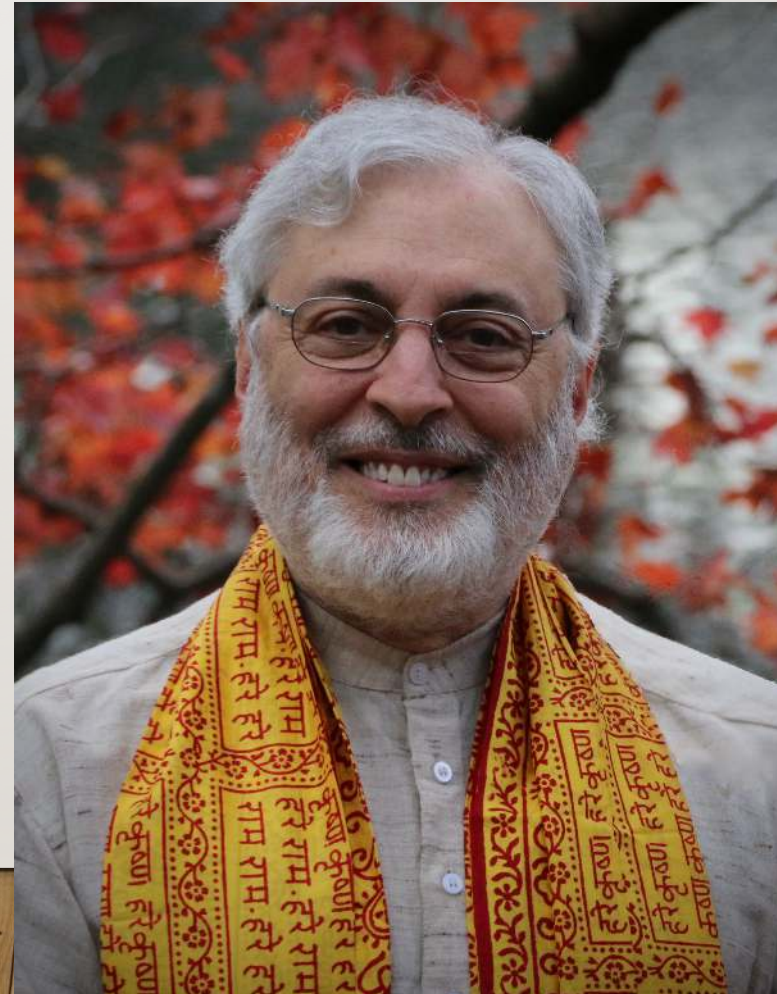
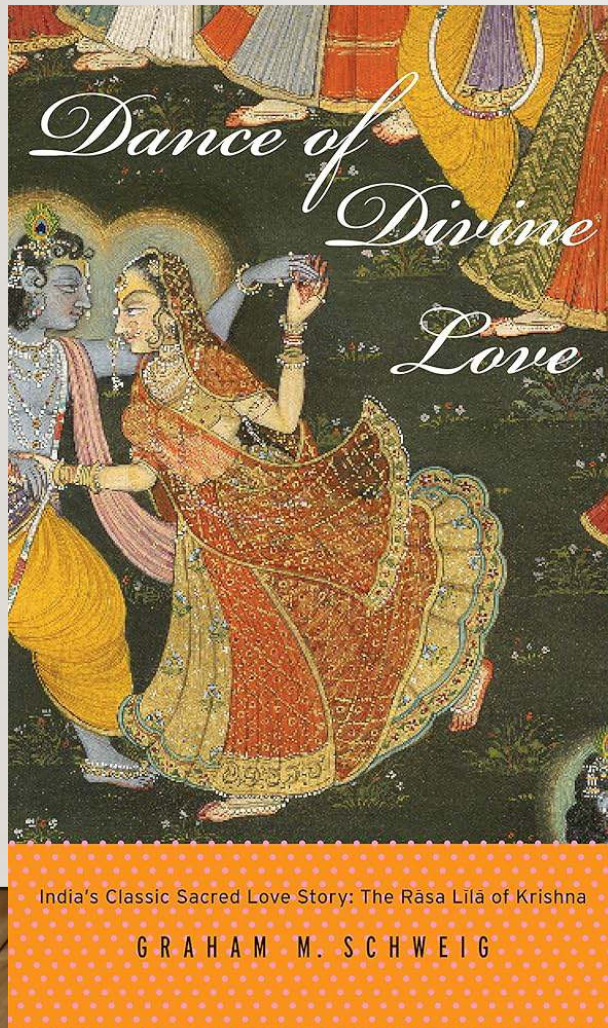
DIANA ECK (HARVARD UNIVERSITY)



EXAMPLE: GOVARDHAN HILL



GRAHAM SCHWEIG (CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY)



TEXTUAL EXAMPLE: UPADEŚAMṚTA

- Of the many objects of favored delight and of all the lovable damsels of Vraja-bhūmi, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is certainly the most treasured object of Kṛṣṇa's love. And, in every respect, Her divine *kuṇḍa* is described by great sages as similarly dear to Him. Undoubtedly Rādhā-kuṇḍa is very rarely attained even by the great devotees; therefore it is even more difficult for ordinary devotees to attain. If one simply bathes once within those holy waters, one's pure love of Kṛṣṇa is fully aroused.



COMPARATIVE OBSERVATIONS

- In 25 years of studying and practicing Islam, I have not come across any elaborate attempts to theorize/philosophize/theologize the ontological significance of the Rawḍa.
 - **By contrast, the ontological role played by the land of Vraja is quintessential in Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. Vraja is “*Riyāḍ al-Jannah*” for them.**
- The Rawḍa in Madīnah represents the philosophy of realism/”dualism” that is so common amongst Muslims, because *al-Jannah* is conceived of as a real place.
 - **Similarly, the heavenly eternal Vraja is a real place, which forms the basis of their critique of Advaita Vedānta.**
- But the cosmologies/ontologies of each tradition are quite different, and require more comparative theological work to truly understand their differences and dislocations.
(AAR Presentation)

DISTINCT FROM ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

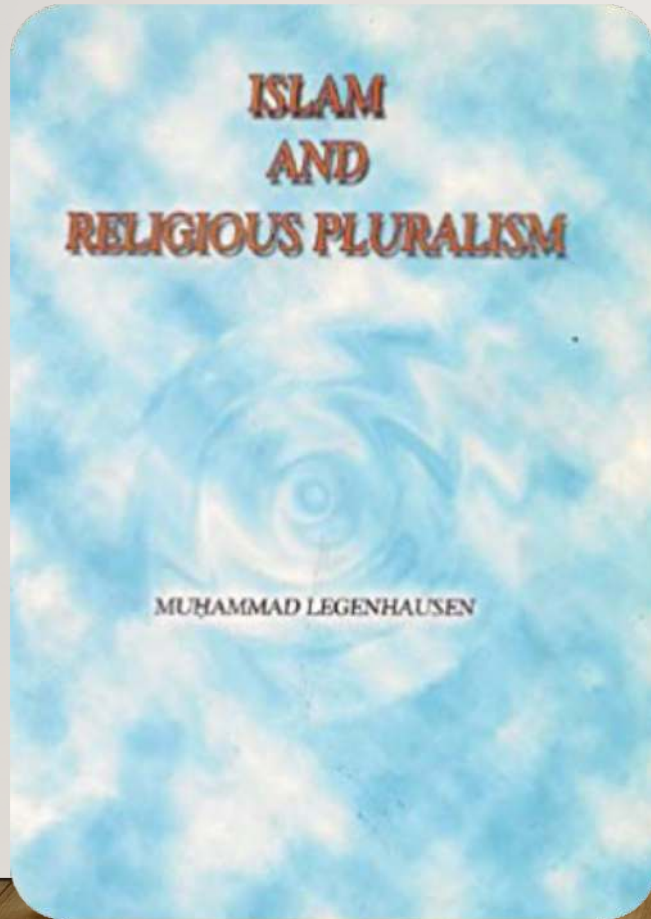
- There are six classical schools (*darśana*) of Indian Philosophy that acknowledge the authority of the Vedas (as opposed to Buddhism and Jainism which rejected the Vedas)
- Out of those six schools, both Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism and Advaita Vedānta are from the school known as Vedānta
- In theory, all sub-schools of Vedānta share scriptural sources, but in practice their respective canons overlap and diverge
- Most importantly, Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism rejects Advaita Vedānta's claim that the ultimate stage of human life is liberation (*mokṣa*) that results in the end of the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*).
 - Instead, to put it simply, Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism states that liberation is an incomplete stage of realization, beyond which is an eternal loving relationship (*bhakti*) with God in a heavenly realm where there is no sadness, suffering or grief.
 - Advaita means “non-dual” in Sanskrit, and in response the Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas call their philosophy Acintya Bhedābheda, which means “Inconceivable Simultaneous Oneness and Difference”

MUSLIM ENGAGEMENT WITH THE HINDU TRADITION HAS HEAVILY FAVORED ADVAITA

- Seyyed Hossein Nasr makes numerous references to the Advaita tradition in his works
- Fadlallah Haeri studied with a famous Advaitin guru named Chinmayananda
- Reza Shah-Kazemi wrote a study comparing the foremost Advaita scholar named Śaṅkara (8th century AD) with Ibn 'Arabī
- The translator Tawus Raja has made references to Advaita philosophy in his footnotes and introductions.
- In a number of works, emphasis has been made on 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī's study of the Upaniṣads (which play a far different role in Caitanya Vaiṣṇava philosophy than Advaita)
 - This has historical precedent (e.g. Dārā Shikōh's translation of various Upaniṣads into Persian)
 - Different understandings of Algar and Nasr on this point

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NONREDUCTIVE PLURALISM

- Ignoring Caitanya Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage practices (and its basis within their philosophical theology) is a violation of Legenhausen's *nonreductive* approach
 - The Advaita tradition provides the most resources to *reduce* the Hindu tradition to a universal monism overlaced with a cultural veneer
 - It privileges Advaita as the true core of Hindu tradition and ignores the rich history of Caitanya Vaiṣṇava critique of Advaitins (usually referred to as “Māyavādīs,” a label they reject)
 - This would be like Hindus studying Islam and deciding that the Naqshbandī ṭarīqa is the true core of the Islamic tradition and Uṣūlī Imāmī Shī‘ism is not worthy engaging with and studying on its own terms- يحب لأخيه ما يحب لنفسه
 - Thus this also violates Legenhausen's concern for *pluralism* in that it does not take the pluralism *within* the Hindu tradition seriously