Everything in Its Right Place: A Study on the Field of Ritual in a *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* Temple

Tereza Huspeková   https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5331-8763

The Institute for Fundamental Theology, Ecumenism and Dialogue
The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow
e-mail: tereza.huspekova@gmail.com

Abstract

The focus of this article is on the spatial aspect of the daily temple rites of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*. The study is a contribution to theoretical reflection on rituals and their role within religious systems. Studies on rituals as multi-media entities have tended to concentrate on "visible" aspects of ritual such as objects, actors or symbols, while ritual space has often been neglected. However, in this essay, I would like to show that ritual space may operate as an interactive "field of ritual," which structures the conduct of practitioners and is subsequently structured by them. The text is modelled as an interpretative case-study grounded in field research performed in a *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple in Kolkata. The goal of the article is to develop a theoretical approach appropriate for this particular set of data which, nevertheless, could serve as an inspiration for theorizing in analogical cases.

Keywords: ritual, temple, space, field, *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*
Słowa kluczowe: rytuał, świątynia, przestrzeń, pole, wisznuizm bengalski

When observing a ritual enactment, one is easily taken aback by the complexity of levels on which the performance operates. Ritual as a multi-dimensional medium has the power to involve the whole body-mind of a person in a ritual process by appealing to all the senses and to the entire flux of consciousness at once. During a ritual performance, our perception is captured by colours, sounds, and smells or by the motions of performers, and our mind enters the stream of meanings attached to them. The outer form of rites can be vivid and impressive, which naturally makes us focus on action or other obvious elements of the performance. Thus, we can easily fail to reflect on the tacit aspects of ritual, such as ritual space. In theoretical approaches to ritual, the ritual space has often been either neglected or treated as a mere background for ritual performances. However, I would argue that ritual space can become

an active agent that structures the actions of performers and that, reciprocally, is structured by them. In this essay, I wish to show that ritual space can operate as a receptive and responsive field that bears direct influence on ritual actors, and that helps to relate the disorderly everyday life of practitioners to the "right" order of things.[1]

The study is based on the selection of data from field research carried out in a *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple in south Kolkata, West Bengal.[2] The research focused on daily temple rituals, which enabled me to observe the same rites performed repeatedly within a relatively consistent group of practitioners. In this context, the descriptive background of the article is modelled as a theoretically oriented interpretative case-study without any generalizing ambitions concerning the interpretation of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* ritual.

My methodological standpoint is based on a specific approach to ritual studies presented by Jens Kreinath and others in the project *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*.[3] In the *Introductory Essay*, the editors present the concept of "theorizing" as opposed to "theories" and state that:

> the age of "grand theories" […] is over. In modern scholarly practice of the study of ritual, one will therefore probably always need to refer to more than one theory. Today theoreticians of ritual(s) instead generate – to put it more modestly – theoretical *approaches*, which only try to explain a certain aspect of the material concerned.[4]

Unlike *theories,* which are developed to deal with the widest possible spectrum of phenomena, "*theoretical approaches* […] are concerned with a particular field of research; for this purpose, they operationalize relevant theories as their general frame of reference for their argument while addressing specific theoretical issues related to the respective empirical data."[5] "Theorizing rituals" thus becomes a creative enterprise attempting to set up a *theoretical approach* made to fit into a particular set of data. In this way, "theorizing" turns into a handy hermeneutic tool that can be likened to a scaffold, built to follow the shape of the building we wish to examine.

As such, the text is divided into three parts: the first section contains a short outline of the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* doctrine; the second is a reflection on the role of the

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[1] The concept of the field of ritual has been inspired by the introductory passage of *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* by Ronald L. Grimes. See R.L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies: Revised Edition*, Columbia (SC) 1995, p. 5.

[2] The field research was conducted as a part of a project supported by the Grant Agency of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (GAAV; KJB901010704: Aktéři, předměty, prostor a významy v rituálech denní oběti v Bengálsku). The first unpublished version of this article became the basis of my master's thesis *Field of Ritual: A Case Study on the Role of Space in the Daily Temple Ritual of Gaudiya Vaishnavism,* submitted under the supervision of Radek Chlup, Ph.D. at the Charles University (Prague).

[3] *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, J. Kreinath, J. Snoek, M. Stausberg (eds.), Leiden–Boston 2006.

[4] J. Kreinath, J. Snoek, M. Stausberg, *Introductory Essay*, [in:] *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, J. Kreinath, J. Snoek, M. Stausberg (eds.), Leiden–Boston 2006, p. xxi.

[5] J. Kreinath, *Meta-Theoretical Parameters for the Analysis and Comparison of Two Recent Approaches to the Study of the Yasna*, [in:] *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*, M. Stausberg (ed.), Leiden–Boston 2004, pp. 103–104.

daily temple ritual within the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* system of practice; and the third is the interpretation of the data from the actual "field." The overall goal is to construct a theoretical "scaffold" around the "building" which is the spatial aspect of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* daily temple ritual on the basis of observation conducted in one particular temple. The purpose is to present an interpretative tool, one developed in a specific context but that could prove helpful in dealing with analogical material from other religious traditions.

The main features of the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* doctrine and practice

As stated above, the focus of this essay is on the spatial aspect of the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* daily temple rites. However, to deal with this issue, we must become familiar at least with the basic features of the tradition and its doctrine. The beginnings of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* lie in the 16th-century Bengal.[6] The movement draws upon the wave of emotional *bhakti*, which to some extent has affected most religious traditions in India. To the focus on the right way of conduct, which is usually stressed in non-*bhakti* traditions, *bhakti* adds an emphasis on the intimate emotional relation to a deity. In the case of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*, the worship is focused on Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Lord and, subsequently, on his divine consort Rādhā. The birth of the movement is connected with the name of Caitanya, a religious leader who is himself worshipped as the incarnation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in one body.

The cornerstone of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* theology is a concept called *acinty abhedābheda*, "a doctrine of inconceivable difference in non-difference."[7] The notion expresses the view that Kṛṣṇa as the ultimate source of the universe possesses divine energies called *śaktis* which bring into existence the living beings and the phenomenal world and which are at the same time different from and identical with their supreme Lord in a manner inconceivable by human consciousness. Kṛṣṇa's *śaktis* are divided into the *śakti* of existence, the *śakti* of consciousness, and the *śakti* of bliss. Among them, the *śakti* of bliss, through which Kṛṣṇa causes bliss both to himself and to the creatures, is considered the highest and is expressed in Rādhā.[8] Thus, the amorous sports of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa depicted in *Vaiṣṇava* mythology become a divine drama, stretching as a play between the Supreme Lord and his *śakti* over the universe.

Kṛṣṇa's *śaktis* operate on different levels according to their positions in relation to their ultimate source. The internal *śakti* constitutes Kṛṣṇa's inner nature and his glory with perfected *bhaktas* (worshippers) who eternally share in Kṛṣṇa's play, *līlā*. The external *śakti* is the source of the phenomenal world and causes the ignorance of the individual soul. The soul belongs neither to the realm of Kṛṣṇa's glory nor to

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[6] For an account of the early history of the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* movement see: S.K. De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, Calcutta 1986, pp. 34–165.

[7] The *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* doctrine has been systematized by early theologians known as the Six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana; for a discussion on its relation to practice see: D.L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā-Bhakti Sādhana*, Delhi 2001.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 32.

the level of external *śakti* but is exposed to influence from both sides.[9] When the soul perceives the external *śakti*, it cannot perceive the inner realm of Kṛṣṇa and vice versa. *Bhaktas*, therefore, seek to shift from the phenomenal world to the realm of Kṛṣṇa's eternal *līlā*. For *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*, the path to this goal leads through *bhakti* which, by means of the emotion of spiritual love, partakes in the eternal *śakti* of bliss and enables the soul to escape the phenomenal world.

The attainment of *bhakti*, thus, becomes the centre of the spiritual path, which brings us to the issue of the role of practice in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*. In theory, *bhakti* may be obtained by the sheer grace of Kṛṣṇa; however, theologians observe that such cases are rare and stress the importance of *bhakti sādhana*, the purposeful spiritual endeavour.[10] The tradition developed a sophisticated framework of ritual practice, the purpose of which is to direct every thought and feeling of a practitioner to the constant recollection of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*.[11] The foundation of this path is sixty-four *vaidhi* rituals, simple devotional acts, such as chanting Kṛṣṇa's name, which are obligatory for all practitioners. The advanced *bhaktas*, however, follow the path of meditative practice, the goal of which is to develop the identity of an inhabitant of the eternal world and to enter this realm.[12] During the meditation, all visualised actions are structured according to the rules based on particular episodes from the *Vaiṣṇava* mythology (morning is the time when Rādhā performs the sun worship, night is the time of her love union with Kṛṣṇa, etc.).[13] Thus, the whole practice is closely connected to the tradition of mythical narratives describing Kṛṣṇa's boyhood, his amorous sports with milkmaids, and his heroic deeds. As such, for practitioners, the stories are both an account of actual events and a description of the timeless *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa with his perfected *bhaktas*.

These notions lie at the base of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* aesthetics and are closely followed by the outward actions expressed chiefly in tending practices centred upon temple icons. The reminders of the eternal *līlā* become all-permeating and the implicit patterns constantly and almost sub-consciously affect even those practitioners who do not adopt the path of meditative practice or who are not familiar with the meanings ascribed to the rites.

From this perspective, it seems apparent that in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* ritual constitutes an integral part of a complex and relatively consistent system of myth, theology and aesthetics. It is worth noting that, in contrast to many non-*bhakti* schools, the practice is considered purposeful and intentional by the tradition itself and it requires genuine affectionate involvement with the prescribed acts on the part of practitioners.

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[9] For the relations between the levels see: "Figure 1. The Three Śaktis of Kṛṣṇa" [in:] D.L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation…*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[10] See Rūpa Gosvāmin, *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.3.6: *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin*, trans. D.L. Haberman, New Delhi 2003, p. 99.

[11] The extensive classification of the rules has been accomplished by Rūpa Gosvāmin in his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* and in the complementary work *Ujjvalanīlamaṇi*.

[12] See Rūpa Gosvāmin, *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* 1.2.73–95; T.K. Stewart, *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritāmṛta and the Grammar of Religious Tradition*, New York 2010, pp. 213–215.

[13] See "Figure 4. The Eight Periods of the Vraja-līlā" [in:] D.L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation…*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

The place of daily temple ritual in the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* ritual system

As we have seen, the doctrine and practice in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* forms a relatively coherent system where rituals and meanings attached to them are intertwined. If we wish to "build a scaffold" for this particular set of data, we need a theoretical approach that would allow us to interpret ritual in relation to the system of myth and doctrine and to understand the role of daily temple rites within the whole process. For this reason, it may prove helpful to employ one of the key assertions of the myth-ritual attitude to religion, namely the assumption that there is a close connection between the actional and the narrative aspects of a religious system.[14] Following this perspective, I have decided to ground my argument in a theory of myth presented by Terence Turner in his analysis of the Oedipus myth.[15]

Turner's approach arises from a critique of Claude Lévi-Strauss, and it is based on the concept of opposition between the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of mythical time. While the *synchrony* is the timeless order of normative categories, the *diachrony* is the irreversible historical time of individual experience. The actual synchronic order is different in every tradition, and as such, it is not a self-evident system. The range of combinations and relations which might constitute a particular synchronic structure is potentially unlimited, and therefore a selection must be made. We can say with Mary Douglas that:

> [g]ranted that disorder spoils pattern, it also provides the material of pattern. Order implies restriction: from all possible materials a limited set has been realised and from all possible relations a limited set has been used.[16]

Hence, any ordered structure inevitably rests upon a selection of categories constituting the patterns of order out of disorder, which is the source of the order but at the same time presents a threat to the order as a realm of chaotic liminality. The synchronic order is further endangered by the occurrence of diachronic events, which spring from social processes and from the lives of individuals. Such transformations constantly distort the equilibrium of synchronic relations and threaten the order by drawing attention to the contingency of synchronic structures. The occurrence of an event that does not fit into the "right" order of things may result in a breakdown of the system, either on the personal or on the social level. To give an example, a tradition may be based on the concept of a merciful omnipotent Supreme Being (as in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*). Viewed from outside, there is no self-evident reason to prefer this notion instead of, say, the all-permeating presence of witchcraft; clearly, a restricting selection has been made by the tradition. However, in the face of a disaster, the death of

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[14] For a discussion of the implications of the myth-ritual approaches in ritual studies see R.A. Segal, *Myth and Ritual*, [in:] *Theorizing Rituals…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–121.

[15] T.S. Turner, *Oedipus: Time and Structure in Narrative Form*, [in:] *Forms of Symbolic Action*, R. Spencer (ed.), Seattle 1969, pp. 26–68.

[16] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, London–New York 2002, p. 117.

a beloved person or another "disorderly" event, the validity of the fundamental claim may be threatened by a creeping sense of meaninglessness. The situation may result in social disintegration or in an individual lapse and a desperate search for a different matrix of sense. Thus, every system must find a way to balance its structure and continually transform itself so that the chaotic disorder could be "put in its place."

Such operations can be carried out by various means. Turner shows that one of the most successful vehicles for the synthesis of synchrony and diachrony is myth. In his opinion, the ability to bind the two temporal modes together by means of the sequential ordering of a story is a characteristic feature of myths:

> The story of a myth is bounded at both ends by implicit or explicit assertions of synchronic order. The narrative itself, however, represents a complex temporal mediation of this framework of timeless order, necessitated by the eruption of conflict or confusion in the relations of actors or elements of the initial synchronic order. […] The temporal form of the narrative is thus a synthetic product of two antithetical tendencies: synchronic order and diachronic (disorderly) change.[17]

Typically, a mythical story begins with a distortion of the initial balance – for example, by an appearance of a new deity – and continues over a series of narrative situations that nevertheless still contain some structural tensions, until the pendulum of transformations stops in a new equilibrium (the new deity, for example, becomes a part of an established pantheon). The resulting state, however, is not a restoration of the original situation – because new elements have been introduced – which means that the structure has been transformed into a new and more flexible system. Myth, as a genre usually focused on the most problematic situations of human life, thus becomes an effective tool for the reorientation of individual conduct in accordance with the categories of synchronic order.[18] For an individual listener, the mediation between order and disorder reflects both the level of his personal micro-time (the individual experience of life-time events) and the level of macro-time (the historical time of socio-cultural processes).

These operations may be found in most mythical traditions all over the world, but it is interesting that they lie also at the basis of many "personal" narratives which we would normally hesitate to call a myth. I would argue that this is the case with the accounts of the history of the shrine in which I did my field research. The story of the temple stretches to the beginning of the 20th century when a group of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas*, gathered around *gurumā* (a female spiritual preceptor) Mādhabī Debī in present-day Bangladesh, decide to establish a new temple in proximity to Dhaka. *Gurumā* and her followers moved to a new *āśram*, and the place began to grow in fame. Soon new temple images of Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā, Gaurāṅga (a name for Caitanya) and Nitāi (the eternal companion of Caitanya) were installed. The temple flourished until the partition of India in 1947 when clashes between Hindus and Muslims drove millions of people out of their homes. Almost overnight, the *bhaktas* were forced to leave the area and sought refuge in West Bengal. The temple images had been

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[17] T.S. Turner, *Oedipus…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–34.
[18] *Ibidem*, p. 36.

concealed in the wells of the temple garden, and only after much circumlocution were they retrieved and moved to Kolkata. The worship continued in a private flat until a new temple was built in the area of a refugee colony in Kolkata and the images were reinstalled and reconsecrated.

It is worth noting that in the accounts of the informants the story follows the pattern of a narrative sequence beginning with an initial "synchronic" equilibrium which is distorted by a disordering diachronic event and after a series of partially stable, but at the same time liminal, provisional situations (e.g., the worship in a private flat). Subsequently, it finds a new stability, the structure of which is transformed, but, at the same time, reflects the basic outlines of the original frame. For this particular community, the narrative became a "founding myth," which, through the figure of *gurumā*, is directly related to the synchronic order, but simultaneously works both with the "macro-time" experience of the partition and the "micro-time" individual experience of uprootedness and the loss of homeland. In this way, any narrative can be potentially transformed into "myth" by relating its elements to the underlying synchronic grid.

Moreover, such isolated narratives can be organized into extensive all-encompassing mythical cycles. From this point of view, the tradition of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* seems to represent an unusually viable structure of order. The appeal to the constant recollection of Kṛṣṇa's legends prepares the synchronic basis of the myths to permeate every aspect of life. The system becomes all-pervasive and as we have seen, it is flexible enough to embrace almost any diachronic event. On the large scale, we can observe these tendencies in the smooth integration of the historical story of Caitanya, who is now worshipped as a joint incarnation of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, with the older *Vaiṣṇava* epics. On the narrow scale of the particular south-Kolkatan community, which is now endangered by urban development and the disintegration of traditional social ties, the process still continues in the tendency of the *bhaktas* to incorporate disorderly events into individual narratives which, subsequently, become a part of the large-scale pattern of all-encompassing synchronic order. In this manner, the diachronic experience can be brought into relation with the stable yet flexible transformational structure.

This reflection brings us to the issue of the place of ritual practice within the whole system. I would argue that in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* the elaborate ritual cycles, which are often modelled on Kṛṣṇa's legends, can operate as an efficient medium of introducing the synchronic normative order expressed in narratives into the disorderly lives of individuals and communities. In this context, it may prove helpful to roughly distinguish the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* rites into three categories which play slightly different roles in the structure. First, there are the feasts and celebrations that follow the calendrical time pattern (e.g., Kṛṣṇa's birthday) and that, in many cases, can be seen as a multi-media expression of the directed structural operations between synchrony and diachrony. The second level consists of the all-pervading net of formalized acts connected with everyday religious discipline and tending practices; these forms of conduct constitute a background constantly reminding practitioners that they themselves play a part in Kṛṣṇa's cosmic drama. The last category would

comprise the daily temple rites, the chief example of which is the ritual of *ārati* conducted in front of the temple images at high points of the day to please the divinity.

It is worth noting that the daily temple rites are usually secluded from the ordinary course of time and lack any inner "narratively" diachronic dimension (in the case of *ārati*, for example, the performance in the inner room of the temple cannot be interrupted by any unnecessary action, the sequence of its acts lacks an obvious narrative structure, its time is marked off by the sound of a conch-shell, the sonic environment is filled by music and ringing of a bell, etc.). Thus, I would argue that these rites are by their nature closely connected with the realm of synchrony and, as such, they may operate as a tool directly introducing the synchronic dimension into the actual diachronic time. Whereas in a mythical narrative or in an equivalently ordered ritual celebration, the pendulum of structural transformations does not stop until the diachronic disorderliness of the mythical events is balanced with the synchronic frame, a daily ritual enactment would present a direct eruption of synchrony into the lives of the participants.

In this manner, the relation among the three dimensions of the ritual system may be seen as one of mutual interdependence. The daily rites and tending practices are repeated and replicated along the same pattern every day and as such, they constitute a "ritual backdrop" on which the annual and monthly ritual cycles may proceed. Thus, the daily enactments represent basic structural units that, as essentially synchronic entities, may "hook" participants onto the synchronic structure, transforming their diachronic experience. Such units constitute larger wholes of ritual cycles that, supported by everyday ritual acts, form an effective ritual system seeking to encompass the entire field of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* world-view and practice. From this perspective, we can say that daily temple rites in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* may operate as an effective multi-media device for relating the diachronic disorderly experience of individuals and communities to the synchronic order of normative categories.

The "field of ritual" in the *Gauḍīÿa Vaiṣṇava* daily temple rites

In previous sections, I have described the relation between the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* doctrine and practice and presented a perspective from which the daily temple rites may be viewed as a tool introducing the synchronic order of the tradition into the diachronic reality. However, the play between synchrony and diachrony does not remain abstract. As Robert E. Innis observes, the structure of ritual becomes "embodied in the stream of acts and utterances […] in objects […] [and also] in places."[19] In this manner, space becomes one of the aspects of the multi-media ritual enactments that enable the relation between synchrony and diachrony to be "made material." Thus, if we wish to construct the final part of our theoretical "scaffold," we need an approach that would allow us to view the ritual space of a *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple as a case of "materialization" of the play between synchrony and diachrony.

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[19] R.E. Innis, *The Tacit Logic of Ritual Embodiments*, "Social Analysis" 2004, vol. 48, no. 2, p. 199.

We can note that Jonathan Z. Smith describes the temple as a "marked-off space in which nothing is accidental" and "serves as a *focusing lens*, marking and revealing significance."[20] Although Smith's approach has sometimes been criticized as too static[21] and we could certainly find data from many traditions contradicting it, the above statement compellingly portrays the role of a temple in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*. Steven J. Rosen, for instance, writes that for *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* practitioners the temple is "a material structure that brings one into contact with the divine."[22] If daily temple rites in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* are understood as a tool relating synchrony to diachrony and making it "material," then the area where the ritual takes place becomes, metaphorically, a lens focusing the attention of practitioners to synchrony and affecting the way they perceive the "disorderly" elements constituting their lives.

The spatial "embodiment" of abstract categories begins at the moment when a group of practitioners decides to found a site of worship, a ritual place.[23] To accomplish the task, they must share some basic idea of what the place should be like. In many traditions, there is a wide range of prescriptions constituting the basic set of potential spatial relations that draw on the particular synchronic order. In *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*, the tradition itself provides a long list of rules for the construction of a site of worship, which are closely connected to aesthetic science and to the rules for visualisation in the meditative practice.[24]

The relation between these imaginary spatial concepts and actual places of ritual, then, resembles the relation between the schemas of ritual performances and actual enactments. To constitute an actual site of worship, the logic must be embodied, and the embodiment inevitably begins with the selection of place. When a location is marked off as a site of ritual, it suddenly becomes a point where synchrony breaks into diachrony: when a ritual place is founded, an "ordinary" diachronic area is bound with synchrony and connected to the net of orderly relations both in time and in space. The place becomes a location in the sacred geography of the tradition and the history of the place potentially connects the site to the respective cycle of myth and doctrine.

In the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* tradition, any temple is potentially related to the order of synchronic relations already at the moment of its founding. Tony K. Stewart notes that any time a new local community is established, it is understood as a re-creation of the eternal community of the inhabitants of Braj.[25] As such, through its outer form, the temple should bring to mind the mythical Braj both as a location of Kṛṣṇa's sports on earth and as a visualised background of the events in meditation. In the specific case of the south-Kolkatan temple, the site became an actualization of the events

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[20] J.Z. Smith, *The Bare Facts of Ritual*, "History of Religions" 1980, vol. 20, no. 1/2, p. 113.

[21] For a critique of Smith's theory of ritual see R.L. Grimes, *Jonathan Z. Smith's Theory of Ritual Space*, "Religion" 1999, no. 29, pp. 261–273.

[22] S.J. Rosen, *Introduction*, "Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies" 1995, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 1.

[23] I keep to a modified version of Ronald L. Grimes's distinction between ritual place, space and embodiment. See: R.L. Grimes, *Jonathan Z. Smith's Theory…*, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

[24] For the connection between abstract visualized spaces and actual geography see e.g., D.L. Haberman, *Shrines of the Mind: A Meditative Shrine Worshipped in Mañjarī Sādhana*, "Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies" 1993, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 18–35.

[25] See T.K. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

connected with the difficult history of the Dhaka community. As shown above, their story became integrated into the large-scale synthesis of synchrony and diachrony within mythical time, and through this connection the temple became a material expression of such interplay.

When a ritual place is founded, it usually does not remain empty. The inner space is further organized according to synchronic rules, and various objects may be installed. In a *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple, the ground-plan of the area should follow a list of rules prescribed by the tradition.[26] According to the accounts of my informants, the images must always face south, the entrance gate should not be on the western side and the rooms with temple images should be always arranged in a given order. Figure 1 presents the ground plan of the site:[27]
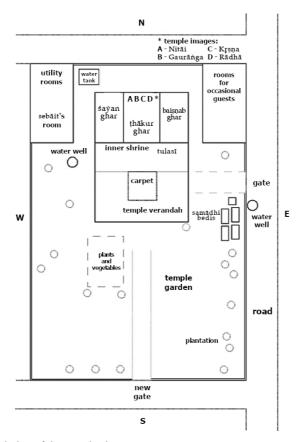

Figure 1. The ground plan of the temple site

[26] For a summary of basic rules concerning the construction of a shrine as described by theologian Gopāla Bhaṭṭa see: S.K. De, *op. cit.*, pp. 507–515.

[27] The plan is mine – T.H. It is based on data from the site of field research.

The whole structure of the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple is built as a house serving to sustain the needs of Kṛṣṇa and his divine companions. Hence, every action should be aimed at this goal. The temple is sometimes called *bhagabāner bāṛi*, the "house of the Lord," and as such it is modelled as Kṛṣṇa's dwelling. The temple should have pleasant surroundings and be adjoined by utility rooms for temple servants. A sacred *tulasī* plant ("Holy Basil"), which is especially dear to Kṛṣṇa, should be worshiped on the site. The inner room of the temple must be secluded from the temple verandah. The temple must include a central "room for the divinities" (*ṭhākur ghar*) and a separate "bedroom" for the night rest of the deities (*śayan ghar*). If images of some revered *bhaktas* are worshipped at the site, the "room for the *bhaktas*" (*baiṣṇab ghar*) must be separated from the *ṭhākur ghar*. The position of the images is prescribed by tradition and every object should have its own place.

The south-Kolkatan temple, where the research was conducted, has a lovely garden containing five *samādhi bedis* (sepulchral monuments) of revered *bhaktas*. The space is vertically secluded from its surroundings by tops of high trees, and a high wall was erected around the site. In this way, although the area is surrounded by roads from three sides, the temple is isolated from the hubbub of the street and it forms an enclosed environment. As such, the space constitutes a refuge arranged to reflect the "synchronic" form of the mythical background of the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa.

According to Terence Turner, ritual space may also include some "pivotal" objects, that is, entities that help to objectify the internal force of ritual outside the actual ritual frame.[28] In a *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple, such a role can be ascribed to the temple images, which constitute temporal "bodies" of the deities who descended from their eternal abode to enjoy the worship. As such, the images present a direct "pivoting" of synchrony in the diachronic context and in this manner become a point of reference even outside the frame of ritual activities. In the case of the south-Kolkatan temple, the entire history of which spins around the construction, loss, retrieval and re-installation of the prized metal images, the temple icons also are the centre of the local "founding narrative" depicting the quest for re-establishing the lost stability in the face of the historical disruptions. In this manner, the images become a fixed point that can be metaphorically leaned on in the disorderly experience.

However, the process of embodiment of synchronic schemas within the diachronic settings is not completed until the ritual place with its inner spatial organization encounters the concepts dwelling in the minds of practitioners. Drawing on Ronald L. Grimes, we can describe this network of relations recognized by the performers at the site of worship as "emplacement."[29] Whereas a ritual "place" is simply a site of worship, the term "emplacement" refers to a grid of spatially ordered ideas, which, despite its implicit nature, closely follows the actual ritual space. Hence, an emplacement becomes an actualization of such conceptions in particular settings. For instance, there is an unwritten rule in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temples that men and women sit separately, but only when the rule is made actual in a temple where women are supposed to sit on a red carpet in the middle and men on the other carpet on the right

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[28] T. Turner, *Structure, Process, Form*, [in:] *Theorizing Rituals…*, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

[29] See R.L. Grimes, *Jonathan Z. Smith's Theory…*, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

side, can we call it an emplacement. Thus, the emplacement can be more likely deduced from the actions of practitioners than from the physical appearance of the site.

To illustrate the process, we may consider several examples. As mentioned above, the arrangement of the images of the deities in the inner shrine is prescribed by the tradition. Thus, Kṛṣṇa should always stand at the right hand of Rādhā, Gaurāṅga stands at the right hand of Kṛṣṇa, and Nitāi stands at the right hand of Gaurāṅga (see the ground-plan). The reason for such ordering lies in the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* doctrine, because, iconographically, the position at the right hand of someone means a position of a servant, while, in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*, a deity always stoops out of mercy and humility. In this manner, Kṛṣṇa, who in fact is considered the Supreme Lord, stands in the position of a servant towards Rādhā, who is considered to be his *śakti* and who herself claimed to belong to him as a slave. Gaurāṅga, who is the joined incarnation of the divine couple and who came in the human form of a perfect *bhakta*, gives himself as a servant to Kṛṣṇa. And Nitāi, a historical personage and a companion of Caitanya, stands in the subordinate position, although he was more than ten years older than Gaurāṅga, and as such he could have enjoyed the position of a superior older brother. In this way, particular synchronic categories became embodied within a particular spatial arrangement.

Another example is the treatment of the basil plant which, in a sense, depends on its position in the space. Not all basil plants receive worship. Only when a particular plant is taken out from the row of bushes growing in earthen pots in the garden, placed in front of the temple images and dressed in a coloured cloth, does it become the *tulasīdebī* which is praised by songs and ritual acts. However, if its leaves begin to turn yellow, it can be substituted with another plant the next day.

The notion of emplacement may be demonstrated by a custom concerning how incomers are seated. The place one receives in the temple corresponds to their gender and social role: women and men sit separately, and there is a special place reserved for the local *guru*. Where one sits means who one is. So, for example, as a female anthropologist at the beginning of my research I was expected to sit on the "men's carpet" close to the *guru* on a spot reserved for guests, while after a couple of days I could shift to the "women's carpet" and sit together with local women. Thus, when there is nothing going on in the temple, the area remains empty and homogenic; it is only when practitioners enter the space that the net of emplacements is made visible.

The most obvious example of an emplacement is the restriction concerning the inner room of the temple. Only a person who is entitled to perform the service to the images has access to the inner shrine; other people may enter only under pressing circumstances and with special permission. In this way, the inner temple is completely secluded from the "ordinary" space and the contact with the deities is only visual. This sense of exclusion of the inner temple is further enhanced by the fact that the servants who perform the worship normally belong among those *bhaktas* who have dedicated their entire lives to Kṛṣṇa, and as such somehow belong to the middle position of what Victor Turner called "liminal *personae*"[30] who are betwixt, on

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[30] See V. Turner, *Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Chicago 1969, p. 95.

the borderline between the "synchronic" realm of Kṛṣṇa's world and the "ordinary" diachronic everyday experience.

By means of these processes, the abstract synchronic order is embodied in diachronic settings. The categories and rules of synchrony emerge expressed in various "diachronic" entities or acts and can be literally touched or looked at as something "material." On the level of ritual place, synchrony is expressed in the actual geography and its further spatial organization, while on the level of emplacement, the synchronic categories are expressed in the shared ideas concerning the given ritual space in the actual place. All these aspects constitute the totality of the spatial dimension of ritual, which may be called the "field of ritual."

In this context, the field of ritual becomes a directing matrix of "communicative possibilities," which constitute the horizon of information from which the selection of what is to be understood is made. Anything that enters the field of ritual potentially turns into a vessel carrying a certain amount of information, which may be responded to by ritual actors on multiple levels, and as such, it is manipulated and directed in accordance with the underlying synchronic "vectors" of spatial schemas.

To give an example, we may consider the rite of *ārati*: When a lamp, incense, a conch-shell, a cloth, a plate with flowers and a fan are waved in front of the images successively, the movements of the person performing the worship strictly follow the prescribed pattern. In the temple where the research was conducted, the waving always begins in front of Kṛṣṇa, then proceeds to Rādhā, and then to Gaurāṅga and Nitāi. The performer then turns his face out of the inner temple over the basil plant towards the group of *samādhis* in the temple garden, and then he finally proceeds to the *baiṣṇab ghar* (see the ground-plan). In the rite of incense offering, which follows the same pattern, but which unlike *ārati* allows the performer to leave the space of the inner temple, the salutation in front of *samādhis* follows the performance in the *baiṣṇab ghar*. Such a sequence exactly follows the doctrinal hierarchy of the worshipped deities and personages and it is continually repeated every day, year after year, which exerts a considerable pressure on the freedom of an individual in the matter of understanding the nature and hierarchy of relations among the worshipped entities. Thus, an individual who participates in the rites is compelled to accept the synchronic background of the diachronic settings by accepting certain units of information offered by the organization of the ritual field. In this manner, the body-mind of a practitioner is continually transformed through the outer form of the field, through the interaction with other ritual actors, who are also directed by the structure of the field, and through the actions he is expected to perform within the boundaries of the field.

All these processes do not proceed at random, but rather are directed within the confines of the synchronic frame which balances the equilibrium of the structure. It appears evident that, in the case of the particular *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple, the whole ritual field directs the attention of a practitioner towards the temple images as the central "pivotal objects." The images may be viewed as the embodiment of the underlying principles of the synchronic order – indeed, the statues are thought to constitute the "bodies" of the deities in our material world – so the involvement with the images means constant connection with the order. The icons, metaphorically,

bend the space around themselves, thus, it will not surprise us that the degree of orthodoxy and loyalty to the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* doctrine and world-view among individual *bhaktas* is often directly proportional to the measure of their involvement with the temple ritual. Hence, if a site of worship is a "lens" focusing the attention of practitioners on the realm of synchrony, then a *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple is a lens focusing the practitioners on Kṛṣṇa and his eternal *līlā*.

However, it seems obvious that the field of ritual does not belong to the realm of pure synchrony, but rather is an expression of the synchrony embodied in diachrony. As such, it is inevitably liable to the influence of diachronic events and the actions of practitioners (to give a theoretical example, if the position of women in the contemporary Bengali society changed due to emancipation, it might have influence on the net of emplacements in the temple and men and women might begin to sit together during the worship, which has happened recently in some reformed synagogues and Christian churches). In this manner, the field of ritual, which in fact structures and shapes the experience and actions of practitioners in accordance with the underlying synchronic patterns, is conversely structured by their acts and diachronic events and this, in turn, opens up the possibility of gradual modification of the level of synchrony.

Conclusion: "Everything in its right place"

In this article, I have attempted to construct a theoretical "scaffold" for a particular set of data relating to the spatial aspect of daily temple ritual as it is observed in one particular *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple. Although several theoretical approaches were employed to deal with the task, the selection was not meant to be exhaustive and my goal was not to discuss the contemporary study of ritual in general; the approaches were blended together in order to fit one specific ritual environment. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the outcome of our theorizing is of no use outside the boundaries of the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple ritual. The logic is simple: if something worked for one case, it may well work for another. As such, the above theoretical approach may become an inspiration for dealing with analogical issues.

From this perspective, it may prove useful to summarize the main points of our reflection. As we have seen, through the optic of Terence Turner's distinction between the order of synchronic categories and the diachronic temporal dimension of historical and life events, ritual can be viewed as a means of connecting disorderly changes by continual transformation of the underlying grid, which makes it possible to incorporate new elements and situations without effacing the particular structure of order. To deal with this task, ritual may operate as a multi-media tool, by means of which the play between synchrony and diachrony becomes embodied in gestures, objects, the stylized motions of ritual actors, and in places as well. As we have seen in the case of the particular *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* temple, the spatial dimension of ritual enactments may serve as a useful "focusing lens" through which the ritual performances may be viewed and reflected upon. In this way, the tension between the level of synchronic order and the

diachronic temporal frame affects the selection of a place of worship along with the physical arrangement of the space within the site, and is present in the net of spatially relevant conceptions, meanings and gestures connected with the place and its actual spatial ordering. All these dimensions together constitute the directing matrix of the "field of ritual," which may be understood as a synthetic embodiment of synchronic categories within diachronic settings through material indices and symbols as well as through the concepts, rules and customs shared by the particular group of practitioners.

All such processes are persistently being imprinted on the individual to make him become what Steven J. Rosen has called a "walking temple,"[31] which, in the language of our theoretical approach, means that the body-mind of a practitioner is gradually transformed to include a whole grid of synchronic relations along with its balancing principle, which prepares him or her to structure the unresolved mass of the diachronic life events operatively and to share this experience with other people. Through such influence, an individual may become a willing bearer of the abstract structure of synchronic concepts and categories, which are nevertheless capable of being embodied within diachrony. Indeed, the wish to found a new temple arose in the minds of the *bhaktas* gathered around their *gurumā* and did not leave them even after the destruction of the first site of worship, but on the contrary became a driving force behind the impulse to found the new temple in Kolkata. Hence, in the mind of actual ritual participants the synchronic structures are deposited and may be transferred even outside the particular ritual frame to cover the totality of everyday experience.

To sum up, in the actual form of ritual field, the individuals are given an effective tool that helps them to deal with potentially any situation – be it a stressful life event or the eruption of social disorder – by enabling them to connect it to the chain of synchronic relations and, both conceptually and literally, to put everything in its right place.

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