

## **Abstract**

Set against the backdrop of Nabadwip, this study delves into the often-overlooked spiritual lives and evolving roles of women within Gaudiya Vaisnavism. Originally focused on women in guru roles, the study expanded to include women ascetics upon observing that many of them embody qualities resonant with spiritual leadership. This inclusion was driven by the recognition that, while they may not formally hold the title of guru, their practices reveal a depth of devotion and spiritual authority that align closely with the ideals of Gaudiya Vaisnavism. Through a sociological lens, the study examines how these women navigate and negotiate their positions in a tradition steeped in patriarchal structures yet deeply centred on the veneration of the feminine divine. It investigates how social expectations, theological frameworks, and individual agency shape their journeys toward spiritual authority. Key themes include the influence of caste, lineage, and socio-economic background - where Brahminical heritage and material privilege often intersect with, yet do not fully define, a woman's capacity to assume spiritual authority.

Anchored in qualitative research methodologies, the study employs narrative inquiry and thematic analysis to capture the nuanced experiences of these women. Certain theoretical foundations reveal the complex intersections of gender, spirituality, and authority within this religious tradition. The analysis reveals that while Gaudiya Vaisnavism embraces theological inclusivity through the veneration of Radha, institutional practices and hierarchical leadership often remain male-dominated. By amplifying the voices of women gurus and ascetics, this study challenges existing frameworks of guruhood, suggesting that Gaudiya Vaisnavism holds an unrealized potential for inclusivity.