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# The Emotive Body in the *Aṣṭayāmalīlā* Festival: Pilgrimage Within to the Sacred Realm of Krishna

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The *Aṣṭayāmalīlā* festival (performed in Vrindavan, India, in November 1992) dramatized the human body as an essential element in creating and sustaining the intense emotional bond between Krishna and his devotees.<sup>1</sup> The devotee enters into a relationship with Krishna based on the *bhāva* (emotion) to which the devotee is most inclined. *Bhāvas* are those basic emotional attitudes that are essential to the make-up of human beings. Everyone has these basic emotional attitudes, but the individual person is inclined to one or more. Vraja *bhakti* (devotion) emphasizes *rati* (love) that is further sub-divided to reflect the patterns of love one might feel toward Krishna. The primary *bhāvas* for Krishna are: *sānta* (peace), wherein the *bhakta* contemplates the lord in his greatness; *dāsyā* (servitude), the relationship of servant to master; *sakhyā* (friendship), the relationship between equals; *vātsalya* (parental), the love of a parent for a child; and *mādhurya* (erotic), the erotic love of lover to beloved. The latter two are the most popular in Vraja devotion and are highlighted in the *Aṣṭayāmalīlā* festival.

In the eleven days of the *Aṣṭayāmalīlā* a drama from each of the eight *yāmas* (divisions of Krishna's day) was presented at the appropriate time. Poems (primarily those of the sixteenth-century poet-saint Paramānand) accompanied these dramatic episodes and described events of Krishna's life in Vraja. Devotees from all over India, as well as many from the local Vraja area, participated in the *Aṣṭayāmalīlā* by attending the performances and singing these devotional lyrics. The poems and physical stim-

uli combined to create a sensual and emotionally arousing ritual that through the arousal of *bhāva* (emotional attitudes) transformed the *laukika* (profane or worldly) into the *alaukika* (sacred or non-worldly).

This ritual of transformation clearly occurs with and through the body, making the body an integral aspect of the devotee's pilgrimage to Krishna. The bodies (both those of the actors and audience) functioned as the locale of the apprehension and expression of the emotion as well as the mode of arousal. Intense emotion characterizes this ritual practice as the devotee strives for an intimate and personal relationship with Krishna. The senses do not distract the practitioner but are essential in eliciting these emotional attitudes. Rather than suppressing the senses, the devotee relishes them to enhance the *bhāva*. An ideal devotee is the *rasika*, a connoisseur of the *bhāvas*, who can savor the subtleties and nuances as a cultivated oenophile could appreciate the subtleties of fine wine. In the Vraja devotional tradition, body, emotion, and physicality are not to be transcended, but instead constitute a triadic *sine qua non* for the devotee's ritual practice.

### Paramānand and the Vraja Tradition

The sixteenth century in Vraja (a cultural and linguistic region in north India) was a dynamic period in Indian religious history; many contemporary devotional practices can be traced to this time, including those in this festival. *Bhakti* emerged as a significant religious and cultural movement and actively included parts of the Indian population who had been previously marginalized by the Sanskritic Vaiṣṇava religious culture, namely women and those of lower caste or economic status. Ecstatic devotion and emotional fervor characterized this movement; the devotee longed for a personal and intimate relationship with a loving god. These relationships were patterned on the human relationships depicted in stories of Krishna's life, particularly the lover-beloved and parent-child relationships. For these devotees, religious success was not a matter of abstract contemplation of a transcendent deity, but a personal relationship with a qualified god, in this case Krishna. Paramānand and other sixteenth-century Vraja poet-saints composed lyrics that helped the devotees deepen their attachment to Krishna by arousing the appropriate emotions.

The sixteenth-century Vraja devotional tradition used aesthetic terminology to delineate the "proper" *bhāva* for the context of the devotee's relationship with Krishna. *Bhakti* theologians such as Rūpa Goswāmī continued the Vaiṣṇava trend of interpreting religious experience through a paradigm of Sanskrit dramatic theory based on Bharatamuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The aesthetic structure helps the devotee understand and

cultivate *bhāva*. According to Owen Lynch (1990, 24), aesthetics is one of the frameworks by which one appraises situations; aesthetic categories shape and render meaningful the emotional and intellectual responses to artistic stimuli—in this case, the poems and dramas. As the individual is culturally conditioned to respond to these stimuli, the resulting emotions are, at least partially, culturally determined. The goal in the aesthetic tradition based on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is to extract from the art the subjective response to the predominant emotional attitudes expressed in the drama or poetry. The evocation of this emotion allows the devotee to experience a non-worldly love for Krishna. In this way Paramānand's poetry helps to evoke the *bhāvas* that ultimately transforms the devotee's perspective.

Paramānand's poetry emerged from the devotional explosion of the sixteenth century. The *Vārtās* are our primary source of information about Paramānand and the other *aṣṭachāpa*, the eight poet-saints who served the Śrī Govardhananāthajī *svarūpa* (a material self-manifestation of Krishna).<sup>2</sup>

These hagiographic accounts claim that Paramānand dedicated his life to performing *sevā* (service) for the Śrī Govardhananāthajī *svarūpa*. Vallabha (1479–1586) recognized this *svarūpa* as Krishna and established the *Puṣṭimārga Sampradāya* (one of the two major sixteenth-century *Vraja* doctrinal communities) to worship this *svarūpa*. Although traditionally associated with the Vallabha *Sampradāya*, Paramānand is a popular *Vraja* poet and can also be heard in temples affiliated with *Gauḍīya* Vaiṣṇavism (another sixteenth-century doctrinal community).

Paramānand's lyrics are known throughout north India; they are sung in homes and in temples and are part of almost everyone in the *Vraja* area's mental repertoire. The poetry sung in conjunction with service of the deity and the dramatic performances is instrumental for cultivating appropriate emotional and cognitive states in the devotee. These lyrics are generally short dramatic episodes in the life of Krishna or Rādhā (Krishna's consort), or vignettes that present a typical *Vraja* scene but without the dramatic action. These poems as "verbal icons"—to use Kenneth Bryant's phrase (1978, 72)—offer devotees an insight into Krishna's life and his *Vraja* environs that enables the devotee to cultivate an emotional relationship to Krishna's *alaukika* sport.

The poems create the ambiance in which the devotee forges an emotional bond with Krishna. It is important to consider that when Paramānand sang these poems, he was seeing Krishna's eternal sport. Though the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (a tenth-century Vaiṣṇava text that narrates Krishna's life in *Vraja*) and other sources first informed Paramānand of Krishna's sport and shaped the "theater of memory" from which he derived the poetry, he was not merely recreating the poems from memory.

Instead, in Paramānand's own mind, he was seeing the actual events and scenes. The lyrics are not remembered or fabricated but considered accurate depictions of Krishna's sport. Paramānand composed and sung his poetry in service of Krishna in response to an actual vision of Krishna's sport. An anecdote about another *aṣṭachāpa* poet, Govindaswāmī, illustrates the relationship between the poetry and Krishna's sport. Govindaswāmī was singing his poems, then abruptly stopped. When asked why, he replied that he could no longer see Krishna and his sport, so how could he continue to sing. These poems are the "lived experience" of the devotee's entry into this non-worldly or sacred realm.

This "theater of memory" adds a crucial dimension to the poet's lived vision. Memory evokes not only the past but also the past emotions and accompanying awareness and consciousness. Remembrances of the beloved bring the beloved into one's presence within the mind; separated lovers might be reunited within the lover's mind. The love is then strengthened and brought into the present (Miller 1984, 38–9). The lover remembers not only the details of the love but also the thoughts, introspection, and reflection that accompanied the events and images. Similarly Paramānand's poems use the memory to bring Krishna to the forefront of the devotee's mind. Much of the poems' meaning and depth relies on what the devotee imports into the poems. The devotee's knowledge and sensitivity in large part determine the nature of the experience as the theater of memory provides depth to the devotee's interpretation of the poems.

The responses to the poems fully involve the body. The poems and dramas use all the senses to create what Alan Entwistle has termed "the synaesthesia of experience" in which the senses are aroused and combine to create a total experience. This multidimensional mode of interpreting emotions (using all five senses) offers a rich and multivalent understanding. "Any temple service should feature auditory, gustatory, and visual elements, which are intended to evoke an appropriate aesthetic response in the audience. These elements supplement each other and are integrated in conformity with the prevailing aesthetic mood (*rasa*)" (Entwistle 1993, 89).

For Entwistle, the elements integrate the senses and the emotions to enhance the *bhāva*. These stimuli are mutually referential and evoke responses using all of the senses. These referents are multi-sensual; for example, a visual image of flowers also engages the sense of smell. One stimulus leads to another in a multi-sensual chain of signification that involves all aspects of perception and conception.<sup>3</sup> In the poems, descriptions of the physical setting, *uddīpana* (an aesthetic category), evoke a romantic mood similar to that evoked by a description of a candlelit din-

ner for a westerner. For Vraja devotees, the image of a moonlit night on the banks of the Yamuna presents a romantic image; the components of this picture enhance the reaction. The moon, which suggests nectar, *rasa*, and butter, arouses a myriad of cognitive responses, each of which prompts further associations and emotive responses.

Paramānand's lyrics link the devotee and Krishna in a ritual of transformation or an ideative pilgrimage that "transforms" the *laukika* into the *alaukika* through the investiture of *bhāva*. Here the devotee's perspective shifts from the *laukika* to the *alaukika*; the devotee then participates in Krishna's eternal, *alaukika* realm. The locale for this pilgrimage is not something external or geographic, but the body that plays an integral role in both the arousal and apprehension of the *bhāva*. These poems lead the devotee into an interior journey and enhance the *bhāva* for Krishna, the goal of the devotee. The evoked *bhāvas* are grounded in the body, as exemplified by the Indian concept of the *sāttvika-bhāvas*, physical manifestations that accompany emotion such as horripilation and trembling. The body is not a hindrance to the arousal of *bhāva*, but a necessary element of its apprehension and cultivation. It functions in a dual capacity as the source and stimulation of the *bhāva* and as the locale of and means by which the *bhāva* is experienced.

Both the lyrics and the Krishna-dramas highlight the beauty of the body as the *ālambana* (evoking source) of great emotion. The lyrics offer detailed and stylized descriptions of the bodies of Rādhā and Krishna that the dramas illustrate in time and space. The poetic images and actual bodies facilitate the *bhāva* by invoking the multitude of associations that the devotee brings to the experience. These descriptions incorporate known and beloved standards of beauty that trigger the devotee's memory and imagination. The beauty of these bodies evoke *bhāva* in the devotee that is apprehended within the body. In the dramas the bodies of the boys of the troupe are themselves rendered *alaukika* through the *bhāva* elicited in this case by the dramas and the poems. The bodies arouse the devotee's emotion through their beauty and are considered embodied divinity while in their roles.<sup>4</sup> Typically, pre-pubescent Brahman boys play the roles of Krishna and his companions, male and female.

The dramas and poetry of the festival arouse the *bhāva* that deepens the devotee's relationship with Krishna. Rather than being overcome or superseded, the body plays a central role in this devotion. In aesthetic terms, the body functions as both *ālambana* (generating source) and *āśraya* (shelter) for the emotions.<sup>5</sup> The *ālambana vibhāvas* (generative excitants) stimulate the *bhāva*; for example, seeing Krishna in a drama or hearing detailed descriptions of his beauty in the poetry heightens the *bhāva*. As *āśraya* one receives or is the abode of the emotions; this person

might either be a devotee or one of the Vraja characters. Yaśodā (and the devotee as well), for example, is often the *āśraya* of great *bhāva* for Krishna. The *ālambana* and *āśraya* can apply to both the devotee and Krishna, respectively. The body therefore plays a fourfold role in the dramas and poetry as recipient and enhancer of the *bhāva*.

As the *āśraya* of the emotion, the devotee relishes this emotion towards Krishna. This apprehension of emotion depends on the subjective nature of beauty. Ingalls's examination of the concept of beauty in the Sanskrit poetic tradition presents two related dichotomies similar to my discussion of the sacred/profane or *laukika/alaukika* issue (Ingalls 1962). First, in the sense that sacrality, or the perception of *alaukika*, is dependent on individual subjectivity, beauty also is subjective. This duality parallels Ingalls's understanding of beauty. Second, Plato posited the ideal of beauty that is real, immutable, and eternal. It exists and is beautiful regardless of our apprehensions. Again a duality exists in which the beautiful transcends the physical world, which is but a pale representation of the real—similar to Eliade's conception of the symbol of the sacred. It directs us to the real beauty, but is not the real "thing-in-itself." Beauty is something objective that does not depend on subjective reactions.

In Sanskrit classifications of beauty, beauty is transient and subjective. Lakṣmī, for example, is both the guardian of beauty and a fickle goddess (Ingalls 1962, 106). Many descriptions discuss beauty in terms of one's subjective response to that beauty—how beauty acts upon the beholder/recipient determines a thing's beauty; beauty does not exist as an external and absolute standard. A typical description of the beautiful emphasizes the effect of the beautiful on the observer; for example, Paramānand describes Rādhā, or Krishna's beauty, in relation to its effect on the observer. *Sāttvika-bhāvas* (shaking or horripilation)—these signs in the beholder indicate a response to beauty. Many passages illustrate Krishna's beauty, but an important component is the individual's subjective response to it.

While traditional Western views construct a virtually absolute separation between the material and the spiritual, in these dramatic performances the body is a *svārūpa*, and the material/spiritual distinction becomes one of perspective, not ontology.<sup>6</sup> In this case, the body is considered equivalent to an image of Krishna honored during *sevā*. In Vraja *bhakti* the word *svārūpa* assumes a distinctive meaning beyond its Sanskrit origins. In Sanskrit *svārūpa* indicates the essential properties and/or form of a thing. In Vrajabhāṣā, *svārūpa* denotes the form in which the deity self-manifests and refers to the image worshiped in *sevā*, particularly in Vallabha *Sampradāya*. The boys who play the roles of Krishna, Rādhā (Krishna's consort), and their entourage become their characters

while performing and are thus *alaukika* and sacred.

As long as traditional Western thought assumes a substantial gap between the sacred and the profane, the symbol only points *to* the sacred, but never *is* the sacred. The Eucharist and the Incarnation are the two obvious exceptions in the Christian tradition. In the Vraja tradition the gap between the signified and the signifier collapses and allows the possibility of embodied divinity. The body in this capacity plays yet another crucial role: seeing the body as the *svarūpa* brings to the devotee present at the drama a vision of the embodied divinity. The poems heighten the devotee's emotion through varieties of sensual imagery, which are frequently mutually referential, creating a synaesthesia of experience. The poems evoke *bhāva* through music, food smells, and sights that focus the devotee's attention on Krishna's *alaukika* sport. The senses perceive these stimuli, while the emotions are expressed through the body as "appraisals" of the situation.

### The *Aṣṭayāmalilā* Festival

The Goswāmī family of Jai Singh Ghera produced and hosted the *Aṣṭayāmalilā* festival.<sup>7</sup> The Goswāmī family, which claims spiritual descent from Gopāl Bhatt, one of the six Goswāmīs affiliated with Caitanya, organized this festival. In the year prior to the festival the Goswāmī family began to restore the *ghāṭas* (embankments) and buildings of Jai Singh Ghera and purchased portions of the original property that they had lost. The family and others worked to prepare the elaborate decorations, costumes, and stage materials necessary for the festival. Puruṣottama Goswāmī chose the poems and wrote the scripts for the dramas. The actions and plots of the dramas derive from a sixteenth-century Sanskrit text *Govindalīlāmṛtam* by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, which describes Krishna's daily routine in great detail (Goswami and Case 1993, 34). Most of the lyrics come from Paramānand; the balance comes from other Vraja poets. The poetry attributed to Paramānand comes from the Kankaroli version of the *Paramānandasāgar* and the *Nityalīlā*, compilations of poems recognized by the community as authoritative.<sup>8</sup>

The Goswāmīs chose the *Bhramargīt* (Song of the Bee) as the underlying theme of the entire *Aṣṭayāmalilā*.<sup>9</sup> In this episode, Krishna's messenger Uddhava tries (unsuccessfully) to convince the *gopīs* (and by extension, devotees) that the body and physicality are insignificant to their devotional practices. This story not only emphasizes the paradigm of love-in-separation (*viraha*) but also reiterates the connection between devotion, the body, and emotion. Up to the point where the story begins, Krishna has been living in Vrindavan with his foster parents, Nanda and Yaśodā, tending the cows and enjoying a simple pastoral life. After he has

danced the *rāsapāñcādhya* with the *gopīs*, he and his half-brother Balārāma leave Vrindavan to participate in a wrestling contest in Mathura and promise to return in a week's time.<sup>10</sup>

The week and more passes, though, and the *gopīs* become increasingly distraught, wasting away to nothing and pining for the return of their beloved Krishna. Weeping, wandering about aimlessly, they alternately beg Krishna to return and remonstrate him for his cruelty and heartlessness; but he is not there. He is gone. Consumed by their grief, their hearts and minds are seared by the fires of separation that burn within them. They lament that Krishna's departure has prematurely aged them, draining their bodies of their youth that was meant only for Krishna. They have lost all faculties, defeated by the anguish of separation, as exemplified by the following *Bhramargīt* poems:

Why should we want our youth?  
Now seeing this body saddens me; it was meant for Krishna.  
I am ashamed of my body, I can't speak,  
my hair and speech are rotten.  
My eyes can't see the path in the dark;  
I am slow with the thirst of love,  
Fate has thrust us in the third stage,  
our condition has weakened.  
Paramānand says, the *gopīs* are in the state of separation,  
their minds are perpetually tormented.  
(Sāgar 903 rāga – sārang)

Why am I always speaking of Vraja?  
Without Kamalanayan now the misery starts to burn  
as if the sun's myriad rays sear our hearts.  
Without Syāmasundar, the moon of Gokul has been grabbed  
just like an eclipse.  
Who can vanquish the pain of separation? Such is my lot.  
Paramānand says, without the lord, my eyes flow with tears.<sup>11</sup>  
(Sāgar 1028 rāga – sārang)

Finally, in response to their pleas, Krishna sends his friend Uddhava to explain to the inconsolable *gopīs* that the physical separation really means nothing, that the separation is only illusory. Uddhava explains that Krishna and the *gopīs* are really not separated, that in essence they are one and the same. If the *gopīs* would realize their ultimate unity with Krishna, then they would not miss his presence in Vraja. The *gopīs* dispute Uddhava's argument and stubbornly claim that Krishna's qualities and physical presence are necessary in their devotion to Krishna. Uddhava ultimately capitulates to the *gopīs* and accepts them as ideal devotees. Their devotion embodies the ideal that governs Vraja *bhakti*.



During Uddhava's argument a bee flies by, and the *gopīs* unload all of their anger and frustration onto this bee, addressing it as if it were Krishna himself. Krishna's fickle character has frequently been compared to the bee who flies from flower to flower taking nectar from each, but never remaining for long with any one flower. Each *gopī* lets loose venomous imprecations, hurling insults at this hapless bee who has—in their eyes—given shape to the form and faults of Krishna. This dialogue gives the passage its name: *Bhramargīt* (the Song of the Bee).

Although the *Bhramargīt* determined the theme of the festival, the performances over the eight days replicated the Vraja daily worship cycle performed in temples and homes. The two days prior to these dramatic performances were filled with festive singing (*kīrtana*) and consecration rituals (*pūjā*). The consecration ritual (*adhivāsi pūjā*), performed at 10:00 A.M., October 31, 1992, began by invoking the deities to reside within this space, rendering the time and space of the festival "sacred." *Bhramarghāṭa*, the bathing area on the Yamuna, was honored as the "actual" site of this *Bhramargīt*. Thus the festival was construed to occur in a geography twice rendered sacred: first by the events of the *Bhramargīt* and second by the ritual consecration.

The focus on the physical space of the festival underscores the necessity of the physical in Vraja *bhakti*. Vallabha's text, the *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* of the *Ṣoḍaśāgrantha*, highlights the importance of the physical manifestation of the sacred. Vallabha posits three levels of manifestation analogous with *Purūṣottama* (supreme qualified deity), *aṣṣara Brahman* (unqualified deity), and *jagata* (the world). Using the Ganga as an example, Vallabha makes the following parallels: the goddess as *Purūṣottama*; the *tīrthā* as *aṣṣara Brahman*; and the actual river as the *jagata*. He claims that anyone who ignores the physical river and worships only the Goddess and/or the *tīrthā* misses the point of the triadic emanation. The devotee who understands Krishna and his emanations worships all three aspects. The physical manifestation of the sacred is prominent and accorded equal treatment with the more abstract, non-manifest divine (Barz 1976, 14; Haberman 1994, 169).

In each of the daily worship periods the devotee offers *sevā* (service) to Krishna and receives *darśana* (vision) of Krishna. By being present at the *darśana* periods, devotees attempt to homologize their worldly life to a day in Krishna's *alaukika* sport. The *aṣṭayāma* (eight periods) *sevā* encourages this homologization by helping devotees synchronize their lifestyle, that is, their eating and sleeping, to that of Krishna's daily cycle. The *bhakta* not only participates in Krishna's activities, but does these same activities at the same time and with similar content. For example, the *bhakta* may partake of the victuals described in a similar setting and

at the same time. This synchronization facilitates the arousal of *bhāva* by constantly invoking the “theater of memory” associated with Krishna’s activities.

In the *Aṣṭayāmalilā* the eight *nityalilā yāmas* (eternal-sport periods) are as follows:

1. *niśāntalilā* (end of the night): Rādhā and Krishna lie in the arbor attended by her girl friends (*sakhīs*);
2. *prātanlilā* (morning time): Yaśodā decorates and adorns Krishna according to the season. The boys eat breakfast and prepare to take the cows to the forest;
3. *pūrvahnalilā* (mid-morning): Krishna takes the cows to pasture with the other boys of Vraja;
- 4a. *madhyāhñnalilā-pūrvahnārddh* (mid-day, first half): Krishna eats a large midday meal;
- 4b. *madhyahnalilā-uttarārdh* (mid-day, second half): This drama celebrates the six seasons, and each gives an offering to Krishna;
5. *aparāhñnalilā* (afternoon): Krishna wakes from his nap and eats a light meal;
6. *Sayanalilā* (evening): Krishna eats a light supper;
7. *pradoṣalilā* (late evening): Yaśodā puts Krishna to sleep for the night. Krishna later slips away to meet Rādhā in the forest;
8. *naktalilā* (night-time): Rādhā and Krishna meet in the arbor.<sup>12</sup>

The lyrics of the different poems describe Krishna’s sport and engage devotees’ thoughts and emotions, so that the devotee is mentally participating in the sport. A poem illustrating Krishna’s lunchtime in the forest sets the scene’s details (e.g., Krishna’s companions, their play, the victuals eaten, along with the background scene). The devotee not only participates in Krishna’s activities, but also patterns his or her daily life on this model. By replicating elements of Krishna’s existence, the devotee can physically experience many of the sensations described in the poetry; for example, the aroma of Krishna’s meals, the dust of Vraja under one’s bare feet, the shade of the Kadamba tree, and so forth. Just like the *gopīs*’ argument in the *Bhramargūṭ*, the physical presence of these sensations is far more satisfying than simply thinking about them as one would in Vedāntic speculation, which regards physical presence as illusory.

To encourage synchrony between Krishna’s sport and the devotee’s thoughts and actions, these poems are sung only during the designated time of day or year or at the appropriate festival. Singing a poem or *rāga* (accompanying melody) at the inappropriate time would disrupt the devotee’s routine, revealing an essentially incorrect understanding of the

poem. Because the singer sees the sport during the *sevā* period, visualizing one event and singing another would produce cognitive dissonance similar to that produced by watching an ice hockey game while describing a ballet.

The *Aṣṭayāmalilā* festival consisted of nine different dramas spread out over nine days. During the dramas musicians sang poems that complemented the action and mood. The following poems were those sung during the appropriate drama. The two episodes discussed here, *niśāntalilā* and *pradoṣalilā* (1 & 7 above), illustrate the critical role of the body.

**November 2, 1992: *niśāntalilā* (end of the night) 3:36 A.M.** The *niśāntalilā* is the first *sevā* period of the day. At this time Rādhā and Krishna are asleep after the night's amorous activity and must be awakened. The sight of the sleeping couple evokes the *mādhurya bhāva* (the erotic emotion). Devotees often identify with Rādhā's girlfriends (*sakhīs*) or their helpers (*mañjarīs*) who serve the couple and make possible their time together.<sup>13</sup> This *mañjarī sādhana* is a ritual practice in which devotees assume the emotions and personalities of one of the young assistants of Rādhā's friends. While Rādhā's girlfriends facilitate Rādhā and Krishna's liaisons, the *mañjarīs* assist the *sakhīs*. This poem depicts the opening scene:

The pair lie in the natural forest shelter.  
 The darlings of Nanda and Vṛṣabhāna are incomparable.  
 Skilled in the arts of love, he fashioned a flower bed.  
 The supreme lord, the crown-jewel of the *rasikas*, was soaked with  
 the sap of passion.  
 Paramānand stood at the entrance.<sup>14</sup>  
 (Sāgar 819/kīrtan 1518 rāga – kedārau)

In this opening scene, Rādhā and Krishna sleep in the arbor surrounded by plants, trees, and flowers that reflect the natural beauty of the woodland scene. In their sleep they have accidentally switched their clothes, Rādhā wearing Krishna's gold clothes and Krishna Rādhā's blue.<sup>15</sup>

Eventually it becomes late and they must rise to return to their homes. Accompanied by deer and singing birds (parrots and a dancing peacock), Rādhā's girlfriends appear; it is their duty to awaken the pair and get them home before their parents awake. The drowsy pair lean against each other on the platform. One sweetly plays a stringed instrument (*vīna*). The girls offer food and *ārati* (fire) to the pair and re-ornament them, masking some of the love-marks from the previous night's sport. Time moves along and finally they part. With a final longing glance, they run for a final embrace, appearing in the "*eka prāna, do deh*"

position (one life-breath, two bodies). The devotees in the audience, who know well this embrace and its theological interpretation, show their approval.

The dramas and the supporting poetry depict the beauty of Rādhā's and Krishna's bodies. Their crowns, long braids, and nose and ear ornaments are stylized elements that render them beautiful in the devotee's eyes. Rādhā and Krishna are the *ālambana* (evoking source) as their bodies arouse the *mādhurya bhāva* (erotic emotion) in the devotee—the *āśraya* (recipient) in this scenario. Poem 821 describes Krishna's sleep while entangled in an embrace with Rādhā.

Covered with a sheet of fine cloth, Krishna sleeps.  
 With the daughter of Śrīvṛṣabhāna, a treasure of beautiful *rasa*.  
 Crocodile earrings, twisted curls, and a garland of gunja flowers.  
 Flowers adorn her ears.  
 As their limbs intertwined during the night, they exchanged their  
 yellow and blue clothes.  
 Breast to breast, lip to lip, and eye to eye.  
 Eyebrow to eyebrow, head to head, arm locked in arm.  
 Fragrant flowers, jasmine, and blossoms from the trees.  
 Dās Paramānand says, the wise companion collects and gives  
 away her flowers.  
 (Sāgar 821/kīrtan 1514 rāga – kānari)

In poem 824 the illustrations of Rādhā's body, which bears the marks of passion, further incite *bhāva* in the devotee.

In the morning, she arises and leaves the forest shelter.  
 She staggers, locks of hair hang loose. She wears Krishna's yellow silk.  
 Her red eyes wandering lazily like a wave on the ocean of *rasa*.  
 Wilted flowers fall from her hair.  
 The string for her hair has broken.  
 The marks of the youthful groom's toe nails shine  
 and render her golden body lovely.  
 Up to now the lord of Paramānand passed the night in sport.  
 Leaving him, she laughs and turns her face.  
 (Sāgar 824/kīrtan 312 rāga – bilāval)

Rādhā's reddened sleepy eyes, her ragged braid and her lurching gait remind devotees of the couple's sport. The bodies of the divine couple provide the visual stimuli that deepens the devotee's love for Krishna and Rādhā and encourages the devotee to direct his or her heart and mind to Krishna.

The devotee as *āśraya* also experiences the *bhāva*. The sensuality of the poems and dramas use the devotee's body as the ground of the experience by invoking the senses. In the background tapes of birds play that

suggests that morning has come; the pair must rise and rush home to their own beds. This scene triggers the devotee's emotional associations with the event: the joy of love tinged with the sadness of parting. Poem 821's description of the various flowers of the arbor arouses the senses of smell and sight; the embrace suggests the sense of touch.

*November 9, 1992: pradoṣalīlā (late evening) 8:24 P.M.* This *yāma* (division of Krishna's day) depicts Yaśodā putting Krishna to bed. Unbeknownst to his mother, Krishna later sneaks out of the house to meet Rādhā. Featured here is the *vātsalya bhāva* (parental emotion) that encourages the devotee to approach Krishna with the tender intimacy a parent feels for a child. The *mādhurya bhāva* is later invoked when Krishna meets Rādhā in the forest shelter.

In the opening scene, Nanda, Krishna's foster-father, and a group of Brahmans are in the house; soon Krishna, Balarāma, and the cowherd boys arrive. The Brahmans perform a *pūjā* and recite *mantras*. A series of performers entertain the boys, including a *sitār* player, a singer, and two acrobats. Krishna appears bored, so his friend Bhāna jokes and imitates Nanda until finally Krishna laughs. The boys eat and Yaśodā puts them to bed.

In the next scene Rādhā and two girl-friends wander around the forest. The arbor is decorated with flowers and sounds of thunder echo in the background. Krishna arrives and the girls shower them with flowers. Rādhā and Krishna play hide-and-seek in the forest, but they get separated and cry inconsolably. Krishna asks Rādhā's friends to help find her. When he hears of Rādhā's failing condition, he realizes that he must go to her. Meanwhile Rādhā also tries to find Krishna, so they miss each other in the dark. They lament the night's darkness, remaining apart. They wander from arbor to arbor, forest to forest until they finally meet and joyfully embrace.

The accompanying poetry elucidates the *bhāva* featured in the dramas. In poem 402 devotees can place themselves in Yaśodā's role and relish the emotion of the parent nurturing a child.

Darling Krishna, thief of my heart, drink your milk.  
 I should give blessings to protect you.  
 I yearn to see your face.  
 You are the apple of my eye.  
 Drink the boiled milk, oh give me joy.  
 Take your brother Balabhadra with you.  
 Paramānand says, I swear by the wealth of our cows,  
 as soon as I get up in the morning, I'll make you sweets.  
 (Sāgar 402/kīrtan 1221 rāga – kāṇharau)

Yasodā relishes the maternal bliss of feeding Krishna his bedtime milk. She assumes the maternal protective stance in blessing him, subverting the normative downward flow of blessing. She is unaware of her son's true nature, although she suspects that there is more than what meets the eye.

Later, when Krishna sneaks off, the devotee enjoys the *mādhurya* attraction of the *gopīs*. Again the stage-set (the *uddīpana*) furnishes a multi-sensory stimulus; the birds and flowers of the forest evoke romantic feelings. Poem 582 describes Rādhā's beauty as the sum of the moon's nectar that the gods produced by churning the ocean of milk.

The nectar has amassed in one place.  
Your face is a beautiful ocean of bliss.  
After that day, Brahma created nothing else.  
Listen Rādhā, what simile can I give?  
Enchanted, Śyāma gazes at you like a *cakora*.  
With respect, he drinks in your beauty delighted by your sight.  
Love burns in the Nandakisor's chest.  
Which limb should I describe? Which incomparable quality?  
Each a bundle of modest beauty.  
A treasure of modest beauty.  
Paramānand says, the lord's heart is bound.  
His sight and speech ensnared by love.<sup>16</sup>  
(Sāgar 582/kīrtan 1224 rāga – kalyān)

Krishna gazes upon Rādhā's beauty and drinks it in just as a *cakora* gazes upon the moon. The *cakora* is a mythological bird that stares endlessly at the moon, infatuated with the moon's beauty. It subsists only on moonbeams. Krishna's face is often likened to the moon, the sight of whom immerses one in the cool rays of the moon. The *cakora* stares at the moon from sunset to sunrise, never shifting its eyes. Ultimately its neck breaks from the strain. Krishna's body is the shelter of the emotion of her incomparable beauty, and Rādhā is the source. As the *āśraya* (shelter) of emotion, Paramānand sings that "the son of Nanda's love burns in his chest"—a reversal of the usual scenario in which the *gopīs* are stricken with love.

In poem 852 the *gopī*, instead of Krishna, is the abode of *bhāva*.

She went on the path to Mathura city and obtained Hari like a diamond.  
Hey listen sister, I'm in a whirl.  
The *gopī* roamed around Gokul.  
Coming from the forest, he played the flute under the shady tree  
on the banks of the Yamuna river.  
The Lord of Paramānand, she laughed and put a betel leaf in his  
mouth.<sup>17</sup>  
(Kīrtan 852 rāga – kānharau)

When the *gopī* recalls finding Krishna in Mathura, she remembers his days in Vraja when Krishna arrived from the forest playing the flute every afternoon. Seeing and remembering his body arouses the *bhāva* that she experiences through her senses. The *gopī* wistfully recalls this experience no longer available to her—the sight of Krishna coming from the forest covered in the dust of the cows and the sound of his flute (two of the most popular images in Vraja). These sensual stimuli and recollective associations bring the devotee into Krishna's sport, attuning the devotee's emotional and sensate experience to this *alaukika* realm.

### Embodied Emotions

Catherine Lutz (1988) and Michelle Rosaldo (1984) claim that emotions are ultimately socially constructed whatever the context. Competing explanations as to the ultimate origins of emotion abound. This is not the place to enter into the debate. However, social constructionist theories of emotion, which inform the positions of Lutz and Rosaldo, are helpful in elucidating the ways in which socio-cultural paradigms effect emotive responses and their interpretations.

In the case of Vraja *bhakti*, practitioners understand *bhāva* as an emotional attitude that can be evoked through various means. As devotees achieve greater levels of sophistication regarding the evocation of *bhāva*, they develop skills in using various stimuli to cultivate even more subtle nuances of *bhāva*. These stimuli can be interpreted in ways that are socio-culturally determined. Lutz, for example, in a discussion of the cultural determination of fear, notes her own reaction to a strange man in her hut in the middle of the night. Her reaction, conditioned by twentieth-century America, was one of fear. However, the Ifaluk (a people of Micronesia) thought her reaction "hilarious." For the Ifaluk, a nocturnal visitor signifies a desired sexual rendezvous, which does not intend to provoke fear. A drunken man in a public context is more likely to provoke fear (Lutz 1988, 199–200).

Emotion is not something purely physical or uncontrollable, as traditional Western theories of emotion might suggest. Rather, emotion is an "embodied thought" (Rosaldo 1984, 143). Both thought and emotion require interpretation, but the body reacts "emotionally" relative to one's personal involvement in a situation—as seen in physical manifestations of emotion (Marglin 1990, 212). The *sāttvika-bhāvas* are not emotions themselves; they indicate the presence of undetermined emotions. Horripilation, for example, might suggest several different emotions, but the context will determine the interpretation. The interpretation of the emotion is shaped by socio-cultural factors, but individual physical manifestations of it are not. In this way, interpretations of emotion are at once

determinedly social and intensely personal (Lynch 1990, 14). This integration supersedes the opposed dualities of body/mind, social/individual, and emotion/thought. Emotion and thought are thus not in opposition but intimately linked.

This grounding of emotion in the realm of the personal gives to emotion an aura of common sense, rather than that of pure cognitive abstraction (Lynch 1990, 14). Lynch suggests that social scientists are beginning to discover the power of ritual and religion to lie in such a grounding. He claims that Hinduism grounds emotions in food, music, and scent, in addition to the “self,” thus lending an added factuality to these activities. These grounded emotions are appraisals of a given situation. They “affirm their reality” by producing the physical feelings that are often taken to be the feeling itself. The Indian aesthetic concept of *sāttvika-bhāva* supports this bodily affirmation of *bhāva*. These “true” manifestations cannot be controlled, stopped, or faked and are, as such, true indications of the presence of *bhāva*.

According to Lynch (1990, 22), India, and particularly the *Puṣṭimārga Sampradāya*, has “objectified or substantialized” emotions into materials such as food. The Indian tendency to substantialize emotions contrasts with the Western tendency to internalize emotions as drives and with the Chinese tendency to somatize emotions.<sup>18</sup> The food in *sevā* is *prasāda* (sanctified offerings), which is metonymic for love in the *Puṣṭimārga*. In this tradition emotions are grounded in a multiplicity of materials, for example, food, the *svarūpa*, scents, and *sevā* materials. The *sevā* ritual employs a variety of sensual elements that provoke an aesthetic and emotional response.

Individual cultures provide the interpretive framework and paradigm for sensory and cognitive stimuli. Stimuli can be manipulated to suggest certain emotions, but such manipulation does not necessitate the emotions. In the same way, cultural frameworks can suggest and stimulate certain responses, but they do not necessitate the responses. Both the dramas and the poetry function by presenting stimuli to the devotee that evoke a particular *bhāva*. A poem regarding Krishna and the cows intends to provoke a multitude of associations about Krishna’s sport, his qualities, and the characters of Vraja. Yet the interpretation of these stimuli depends on the interpretive framework of the recipient. The devotee who can invoke a rich field of associations from the “theater of memory” can fathom better the nuances and subtleties of the *bhāva*. Similarly, a connoisseur of music is more likely to have a richer experience of a complex Bach fugue than one who is unschooled in music. The devotees of Krishna emerge from a cultural paradigm that encourages particular emotional responses to Krishna’s sport. A non-devotee or non-Indian might



not exhibit similar responses or, at the least, might experience the *bhāva* in a less sophisticated manner.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

The body plays an integral role in the devotee's transformation from the *laukika* to the *alaukika*. Illustrations of Rādhā and Krishna's beauty arouse *bhāva* in the devotee that strengthens the relationship between devotee and deity. Sights, sounds and smells combine to heighten the devotee's emotional attachment to Krishna. *Bhāva* is apprehended in the body through sensual stimuli and is reflected in the *sāttvika-bhāvas* such as horripilation. Poems lamenting separation from Krishna engender painful feelings articulated through physical phenomena—as seen by the *gopīs'* descriptions of their seared hearts. As the poems and dramas foster the devotee's transition from the *laukika* to the *alaukika* perspective, the body functions as the locale for this transformation. It serves as the ground for the pilgrimage within to Krishna's *alaukika* sport. The body, the physical, and the emotive are not superfluous but necessary elements in the transformation that allows for the devotee's participation in Krishna's eternal sport.

## Endnotes

1. The body I am discussing is the physical body that relates to physical experience. "Body" can be a contested term particularly in regard to gendered experience.

2. There are several sources for biographical information on Paramānand. Nabhadās' *Bhaktamāla* (Garland of Bhaktas) gives biographical information on a number of devotees. The Vallabhan *Vārtās* tend to be more hagiographic and less reliable. The *Vārtā* in Ramdasji Sampandit (1931, 34–44) gives no dates. These *Vārtās* were written in the vernacular Vrajabhāṣā instead of traditional Sanskrit. See also Richard Barz (1976), Shyam Das (1985), Dinadiyalu Gupta (1970), and Govardhan Nath Shukla (n.d.) for biographical information about Paramānand and the other poets.

These *Vārtās*—composed by Gokulanātha (1552–1641) (Viṭṭhalanātha's fourth son) and arranged by Harirayaji (1591–1716)—are hagiographic writings, presented so as to be easily accessible to the devotee. The prose is straightforward and the vocabulary basic. The *Vārtās* are not philosophical texts; they are meant to instruct the devotee about the *aṣṭachāpa* and the progression from *laukika* to *alaukika*. The *aṣṭachāpa* are exemplary devotees and models to follow; their *Vārtās* are used congregationally by *Puṣṭimārgis* to inspire *bhāva* (Barz 1976, 101–2). Other *Vārtās* discuss the lives of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanāth, Vallabha's younger son.

3. See Alan Entwistle (1993, 92–5). Entwistle analyzes the lyrics of numerous poems to show how they depict Krishna's sport using all the senses.

4. Boys and men fill all of the roles in this genre, an external assumption of femininity that replicates the necessary internal feminine transformation. In Vraja devotion all participants are “female” before Krishna and must appropriate the thoughts and emotions of women as a ritual of discipline (*sādhana*) in their devotion to Krishna. See A. Whitney Sanford (1995b) for a discussion of the gender transformation that the poems facilitate. However, there is also the *sakhyā* (friendship) approach to Krishna that replicates the emotions of Krishna’s *gopā* (cowherd) friends.

5. For explanation and charting of these categories see S.K. De (1961, 183–6).

6. Discussion of the “reality” of the images and of embodied divinity is too large to be covered within the present confines. For extensive coverage of these issues, see A. Whitney Sanford (1995a, chapter 3).

7. Jai Singh Ghera was originally a retreat for Raja Jai Singh of Amber who was both a devotee and a minister of Aurangzeb, a Mughal ruler. Puruṣottama Goswāmī purchased the 2 1/2 acre site in 1962. See also Srivatsa Goswami and Margaret Case (1993) who examine the textual basis of the *Aṣṭayāmalilā* and the appearance of the “bee” that resulted in the “birth of the shrine.” On three separate occasions during the *Aṣṭayāmalilā* festival a black insect, resembling the bee portrayed in the painting hanging in the main tent, alighted on this tent as if to offer its approval of the event. Puruṣottama Goswāmījī Mahārāja declared this appearance a miracle, the visible manifestation of Krishna, and erected a shrine on the spot.

8. That a member of the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* community could so rely on a poet claimed by a rival sect provokes a re-thinking of notions about divisions within the Vraja religious community.

9. The *Bhramargīt* appears in both the tenth chapter of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (a central *Vaiṣṇava* text) and in the *Bhramargīts* of the *aṣṭachāpa* poets. The tenth chapter, easily the most popular part of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, chronicles Krishna’s life from his decision to take birth in Vraja through his life in Mathura and beyond. The *Bhramargīt* specifically narrates the story of Uddhava’s message that is only a small section of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (10.47).

10. Mathura acts as a set of parentheses enclosing Krishna’s brief sojourn in Vraja. He was born in a jail in Mathura then immediately whisked away to the safety of Gokul where he was raised by his foster parents. Ultimately he returned to Mathura and never returned to his childhood home. These early idyllic years are the focus of the devotional tradition; they are bracketed off from Krishna’s later worldly tasks of governance and courtly pleasures. The *rāsa-pāñcādhyāya* in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (10.29–33) is the dance in which Krishna met the *gopīs*, the cowherd girls, and women of Vraja in the forest on the night of the autumn full moon (*śarada*), Krishna’s last night in Vraja. He called the *gopīs* away from their homes and duties to come dance with him under the light of the moon. He multiplied himself so that every *gopī* thought that she alone was dancing with Krishna.

11. Syāmasundar is a name for Krishna meaning the beautiful dark one. Gokul is the Krishna's childhood village.
12. For details regarding time of the *yāmas* and *sevā* performed in the Vallabha *Sampradāya*, see Barz (1976, 48–9).
13. David Haberman (1988) discusses drama as a mode of attaining entrance into the *līlā*. He uses the motif of acting in the capacity of a *mañjarī*.
14. Nanda and Vṛṣabhāna are, respectively, the fathers of Krishna and Rādhā. *Rasikas* are sophisticated connoisseurs of art. Here the term (*rasikas*) specifically refers to those who can appreciate aesthetically the emotion associated with Krishna's sport.
15. The story, which the audience knows, goes as follows. In their passion, Rādhā and Krishna switch their clothes. Rādhā goes home wearing Krishna's gold clothes while Krishna goes home wearing Rādhā's blue clothes. Lalitā, Rādhā's closest friend, convinces Rādhā's mother that her eyesight is faulty; the yellow that she sees is simply the glow of Rādhā's skin.
16. Nandakiśor is a name for Krishna, meaning the son of Nanda or, more literally, the delight of Nanda. *Śyāma* indicates Krishna's dark-gray coloring, similar to a rain-cloud on the verge of bursting.
17. This betel leaf is pan, a mixture of areca nut, lime and spices, which is often chewed after a meal.
18. See also Paul Toomey (1990, 157–81) who discusses the metonymic relationship of food and love.
19. Entwistle suggests that people without the *bhāva* might react negatively to the narcissistic element of *sevā* and *līlā*, considering it a "vicarious epicureanism" of sorts. Entwistle notes that "[p]eople unsusceptible to the *bhāva* may react in the same way Babbitt did to French Romanticism, in which he saw a 'tendency towards a hypertrophy of sensation and an atrophy of ideas...a quest that may at any time assume the guise of a heavenly idealism'" (Babbitt 1910, 145–6).

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