

CHAPTER ONE

Paramānand's Poetic World

Rāga—bilāval

Mother Yaśodā arose in the morning and churned the milk.
She lovingly took some fresh butter and put it
in her son's hand.
She skimmed cream from the boiled milk and
fed it affectionately to Krishna.
(S134)

To the casual observer, these lines by the great Vaiṣṇava poet Paramānand might simply appear to portray the pastoral idyll of Vrindavan in which foster mother Yaśodā dotes upon her young son Krishna. But, to the devotee of Krishna, this seemingly simple passage opens a doorway to an entirely new, different world. This vignette evokes a rich sensual world: the smooth coolness of the butter placed in Krishna's hand and the sweet taste of the cream that Krishna drinks. We cannot help but be enticed by the sensuality of this poem. As we shall see, the earthy and grounded language of the poetic cycle uses the senses to lead devotees to an etherealized experience of Krishna's world.

The language appears ordinary, grounded in physical experience, and accessible to anyone. However, Paramānand illustrates scenarios in ritual service for Krishna that lead us to wonder about the role of the resonant language in his poesy. This query leads us to the central question of this book: How does hearing Paramānand's poetry in context serve as a portal between this world and Krishna's divine world?

It is important to know that sight and sound are privileged modes in the divine encounter in the Hindu tradition. To “see Krishna” or receive his *darśan* is a primary goal of the devotee and is a basic mode of communication between devotee and deity. Using sophisticated literary strategies, the author Paramānand deftly constructs a “vision” for the devotee through words. This is not an ordinary language but a language that can entice the devotee into a new realization of Krishna’s world through a conflation of the senses.

In the most general terms, Paramānand induces the devotee to “see” through what he or she “hears.” The techniques are familiar: simple metaphoric tropes, symbolic substitutions, puns, and other word games are employed in ever-changing combinations, but clearly, deliberately, and systematically. In what follows, I will show how Paramānand’s tales employ these and other strategies to allow the devotee to take the experience of this physical world and “see through it” to another world. This other world is called *alaukik*, a supramundane world, a world that stretches beyond the human imagination to that of the gods, but if Paramānand is to be believed, that world is visible here and now to those who learn how to see it. The locus of activity shifts by overriding the traditional sensory fields of this-worldly experience, an act that prevents the devotee from taking this seemingly ordinary world for granted. Paramānand—or at least the poems attributed to him—helps the devotee to break through to that other world, to learn to see that other world inherent in the physical world. To understand just how this manifests requires us to look systematically at the tales as they are sung in the context of the daily and annual ritual cycles—for the tales are always in a cycle. And it is that cycle of tales, not just one or two occasional poems, that holds the key that will enable us to discover the ways these poems work to transform the devotee’s vision.

A host of poems bear the name of the sixteenth-century Indian poet Paramānand, many of which are undoubtedly his. That many additional poems are attributed and accepted as his suggests that authorship is not the real issue but, rather, how the poems affect the listener, the devotee. The poems are not just literary expressions; although clearly they are significant in that regard. They are also tools and devices to help the individual understand the truth of Krishna’s world, and therein lies much of their significance. Paramānand’s poetry is especially significant because he is one of the Aṣṭachāp poets—a group of eight poets associated with the Vallabh Sampradāy, a Braj-based devotional community. And it may well be

that one of the primary reasons he is included in that august set of poets is precisely because his poetry operates on the devotees as a tool for entering this other world, a world not available to the ordinary senses or to ordinary people.

The religious leader Vallabh founded the Sampradāy in the sixteenth century to worship Krishna, and, as part of his plan to develop devotion, he appointed Paramānand and the other Aṣṭachāp poets to sing *sevā* for Krishna. What little we know about Paramānand comes from the *Vārtās*, hagiographic texts produced within the Vallabh Sampradāy. The *Vārtās* are simple prose materials written for didactic purposes that present aspects of the poets' lives (as well as those of other significant Sampradāy figures) and describe their devotional service of Krishna. But while the *Vārtās* themselves contain little that can be historically verified, they become all-important sources of inspiration to devotees, girding the primary work of the poems of the poets they portray.

Krishna devotion, *bhakti*, is centered in Braj, a cultural and linguistic region of north India that includes parts of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Although a variety of religious expressions, including Islam as well as local forms of Hinduism, exist in Braj, the predominant religious expression is devotion to Krishna, a form of Vaiṣṇavism. Vaiṣṇavism is the worship of the deity Viṣṇu in one of his incarnations or descents, or *avatārs*. Krishna, like Viṣṇu's other *avatārs*, descended to the earth when the earth and her denizens needed help. He and elder brother Balarām took birth in Braj to kill the tyrant Kamsa who ruled in nearby Mathura and was notorious for his oppression of the people. Until they came of age, they lived simply with their foster parents, Yaśodā and Nanda, in the cowherding region of Braj.

The stories of Krishna's adventures upon the earth have been told in literary and plastic arts for centuries, most notably in the tenth-century Sanskrit text *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The tenth chapter of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, easily the most popular chapter because of its focus on Krishna's early life, chronicles Krishna's life from his decision to be born in Braj through his life in Dwarka, the capital of Krishna's kingdom. After Krishna and Balarām leave Braj, they resume their destinies as rulers, but these are not the identities on which devotees choose to focus. Instead, through Paramānand's guidance, devotees choose to focus on their days as simple cowherd youths in Braj. Certainly Krishna is more approachable as a small boy or cowherding youth than as a king with the distance and respect that such royalty implies. In the sixteenth century, as Krishna

devotion flourished in north India, poets composed lyrics in the vernacular in response to Krishna's popularity among all social levels. Paramānand and his contemporaries sang of Krishna's adventures in Braj, narrating the stories of his life with his friends and family in Braj. And it was these poems that proved so effective in inculcating the devotional life.

To invite the devotee into this world, Paramānand—or those who mimicked him, his proxies whose works also bear his name—acts as a guide to the uninitiated. The process is straightforward enough, but it requires us to be acutely aware of where each participant locates him- or herself in the process. Paramānand sees this higher reality through his distinct form of meditation; what he witnesses he shares in his poetry by constructing tableaux and peopling them with his divine characters, describing their play, their desires, and so forth. The content of this poetry is, then, not just depictions, but a kind of revelation, a vision vouchsafed to Paramānand, who in turn makes it available to those not so privileged. The listener “hears” Paramānand's vision of Krishna's play, simply at first but with an increased understanding and then, eventually, through repetition borne of love, at the most sophisticated level. In the end, the devotee's very mode of conceiving Krishna is transformed through Paramānand's literary techniques.

But to guide the devotee to this new understanding, it is not sufficient to declare it outright, nor simply to declare it once. Rather the poet takes the listeners by the hand and walks them through the daily life of Krishna and, in turn, through an annual cycle of predictable repetitive events. But Paramānand uses different tactics that are repeated in individual poems and cyclically in the set of poems to structure comprehension of each event, each point in the *nitya* (constant) cycle, which occurs daily, and *utsava* (festival) cycle, which occurs annually. It is through the repetition of these cycles that devotees gradually transform their vision from *laukik*, this mundane world, to *alaukik*, Krishna's supramundane world. Because the task of this book is to explore how Paramānand's poetry transforms what the devotees “hear” into what they “see,” in the following chapters, we will walk with Paramānand through that cycle. First, though, the remainder of this chapter will explore how Paramānand brings devotees into the *alaukik* realm with increasingly more complex and deep understandings using language as synaesthesia. This section explores Paramānand's linguistic tools and aesthetic structures, which provide a framework for devotees' vision of Krishna.

Paramānand's poetry constantly bombards devotees with rich images of Krishna's world. These images are not simplistic; they are complex codes that create a conceptual world. By conveying conceptual realms through words and images, these codes are critical elements of the poetic process in which devotees gain an increasingly sophisticated understanding of Krishna's world. The poetic process, that devotees see through their ears, communicates Krishna's *līlā* to devotees in a general—or macroscopic—way. Yet there are distinctions in the poetry—subtle ones—that affect the listeners; the ways they hear are important. On a microscopic level, Paramānand uses specific literary strategies, which—the metaphor of love as war, for example—operate upon the devotee by constructing the perceptual categories through which the devotee understands the world, but most important, Krishna's world. The devotees' modes of perception are reconfigured.

Some of the specific literary strategies and tropes, such as metaphors and symbolic substitutions, are the focus of certain chapters. For instance, in chapter 4, food and the preparation and eating of it are substitutes for love, and in chapter 5, we will see a conflation of senses and emotions when anger is actually an expression of love. These devices (re)structure and constitute the way in which the devotees see Krishna's world and are thus transformative. This transformation invites the devotees to see Krishna's world well enough to enter it. The devotees follow Krishna through Paramānand's eyes; hearing the poetry, then, becomes an act of emulation.

Paramānand is particularly important because his poetry—as sound become sight—is a visual path to Krishna. Each devotee's *darśan* of and relationship with Krishna is highly individualized and depends upon the devotee's own inclinations. The devotees' *darśans* are dialectical because (a) the text informs and lends shape to their daily lives, and (b) their daily activities and knowledge of Krishna inform and shape the ways in which they see Paramānand's words. This is the basis for the dialectical relationship between the text of Paramānand's poetry and the rituals and daily lives of Krishna devotees, and this dialectical relationship informs the devotees' sight of Krishna. Devotees of Krishna conduct their lives in ways that encourage a constant focus on Krishna; for example, devotees synchronize their daily activities to Krishna's that are detailed in the poetry and relate all sights and sounds to Krishna. When such devotees hear Paramānand's poetry, this vast repertoire of knowledge determines the ways in which each devotee sees Paramānand's words.

Darśan—being both a reciprocal and a reflexive process—not only enables the devotee to realize the deity’s presence in the world but arouses the passion that helps the devotee develop a relationship with the divine. Not only does the devotee see the divine, but the divine—through the eyes that enliven the image—also sees the devotee.¹ So this *darśan* is informed by a dialectical relationship between devotees’ individual experiences and their interpretations of the poetry.

Because of the way Paramānand teaches the listener to see the *alaukik* reality through the devotee’s ordinary or *laukik* world, his poetry invites us to reconsider notions of the sacred and the profane, or supra-mundane and mundane, and that is where we will begin. The poetry is sung to a material object, usually an image in a temple or home, in which Krishna chooses to manifest himself; the divine reveals itself in material form for each devotee. When devotees take *darśan* of (or see) Krishna, they are not seeing merely a symbol or representation but Krishna himself. The profundity of this sight transforms the devotees’ emotions and perceptions from the worldly to the nonworldly. Without this transformative sight, the devotees are blind to Krishna’s *alaukik* realm—as Paramānand illustrates.

Rāga—sārang

Why [do we] desire youth?

Seeing this body now, I’m sad, it was [meant] for Krishna.

Ashamed of my body, speech does not come,
my hair and speech have decayed.

In the dark my eyes cannot see the path;

I am slow with the thirst of love,

Fate has put us in the third stage,

our condition has become weak.

Paramānand says, the *gopīs* are in the state of separation,
again and again their hearts worry.

(S903)

Separation from her lover, Krishna, has blinded this young girl and robbed her of her youth. Sadly, she considers her once youthful body, meant only for Krishna, who has left Braj forever. She and her friends wasted their youth on this fickle boy who stole their love and fled. Their eyes, which once relished Krishna’s beauty, now thirst for his sight, and their desiccated bodies testify to the ravaging effects of separation from

Krishna. While the sentiment may at first appear to a non-Indian reader somewhat melodramatic, what is most important in this poem is that estrangement from Krishna leads to blindness. This is no ordinary blindness, but the inability to see with *alaukik* (nonworldly) sight, to see Krishna's presence in the world when it appears he is no longer there. The devotee's problem is, of course, precisely the same as the young girl's.

This poem exemplifies Paramānand's use of the trope of blindness and the metaphor of love as liquid sustenance. Paramānand metaphorically equates love with nourishment, which implies that this love—like food—is necessary for survival. This metaphoric construction builds into the devotee's vision—through language—the concept that Krishna's love is essential for life itself. Paramānand enhances this metaphor with the trope of blindness; Krishna has withdrawn his love-sustenance, and, as a result, the *gopīs* (cowherding girls) are now blind, literally and symbolically. Each of these literary devices is grounded in the material world, and each in turn invites the devotees to begin to question just how they should interpret the physical world.

The division of worldly and nonworldly relies on a bifurcation reinterpreted by Vallabh: *laukik* (worldly) and *alaukik* (nonworldly).² The terms *laukik* and *alaukik* derive from the Sanskrit *loka*, which means the world or people. '*Laukik*' indicates being of the world, something normal and customary; '*alaukik*' is beyond the world, in the realm of the sacred or the other. '*Laukik*' and '*alaukik*' can be understood in two ways: ontological and perspectival, that is, the nature of the thing itself or the devotee's attitude toward it. Krishna's *alaukik* games (*līlā*) or the *svarūpa* would be an example of ontology. Krishna himself manifests in a material object, so that object exemplifies embodied divinity. Substance does not automatically ontologically determine *laukik* or *alaukik*.

In terms of perspective, a devotee's attitude determines the *alaukik* status of a thing, emotion, or thought. Vallabh's understanding of *laukik* and *alaukik* relies less on ontology and more on perspective. The devotee's perspective of a thing—*laukik* or *alaukik*—is generally more important to devotion than the ontological status of the thing itself. As perspectives, *laukik* and *alaukik* indicate states or dynamic qualities instead of the static substances sacred and profane. The material world—when imbued with memories and love of Krishna—can be *alaukik*. Ordinary objects or daily activities can be rendered *alaukik* by virtue of the devotee's emotion for Krishna. Thus devotees can live an entirely *alaukik*, or Krishna-centered, life within a social and material world.

An object may have sacred or religious value to one person and not to another, and, in Braj devotion, objects such as images of Krishna can be coextensive with the divine, although the divine is never limited to an object. The material world is not rejected but used in service of Krishna. Devotees offer Krishna material objects, and the physical world reminds devotees that Krishna created the world for his own amusement. The material world is not glorified for its own sake but is lauded to the extent that it reflects Krishna. Sophisticated devotees are able to perceive the *alaukik* within the *laukik*. The poetry facilitates this perceptual shift by arousing the thoughts and emotions that make Krishna central to a devotee's existence, and those thoughts and emotions focused on Krishna are *alaukik*. This *alaukik* perspective relying on emotion toward Krishna is the sine qua non for *darśan* of Krishna's *līlā*.

Understanding the poetry hinges on the ability to contextualize and transform thoughts and emotions rooted in the *laukik* realm. The *gopīs'* bodies have wasted away, and they bemoan their fate. Such misery and the inevitable anger that ensues arise easily in the ordinary course of life. Loved ones die or choose to leave, and most people experience a range of emotional responses to these events. Emotions in response to the mundane world, such as jealousy at the fickleness of a lover, are *laukik*. Yet, the *gopīs'* and the devotees' emotions are evoked within the context of devotion to Krishna, and this devotional context renders them *alaukik*. As such, the poems provide frameworks for devotees' responses to emotional and physical stimuli.

About Paramānand's Poetry

Rāga—sārang

I've tried to make you appease *māna*, but I'm defeated.
 All is gone, ruined by your pride; Madanamurāri is dejected.
 Put on your blue sari, oh friend, take off your anklets.
 So when you go on this dark moonless night, no one will know.
 You just think about this and look inside yourself,
 why have you arranged your part in such a way?
 Just arrange it so that Nandakumār will find it even
 more becoming.
 Listen Rādhā, why make obstacles? You are a clever, though
 naive woman.

Meet Paramānand's lord who is all blissful with the *rasa* of love,
 don't spill what you have already gained.
 (S728)

Paramānand sings of the divine lovers Rādhā and Krishna, who are angry with one another, yet deeply in love. This pique-in-love, a state known as *māna* in aesthetic terms, has separated the couple, and neither can be happy until they are together again. Late at night, dejected Rādhā sulks and refuses to go to Krishna—although she desperately wants to be with him. Of all the *gopīs* who adore Krishna—and they all do—he has chosen Rādhā as his favorite. Rādhā's girlfriend, the speaker in the poem, attempts to remedy the situation; she wants to reunite the sparring couple. She refers to Krishna by the name *Madanamurāri*—which indicates Krishna's combat with the demon Murā—to convince Rādhā. Paramānand invokes the metaphor of love as war: the combative lovers need strategic advice, and Rādhā's friend will act as the liaison.

This friend offers romantic advice: she tells Rādhā to wear her blue sari to enhance her beauty and to conceal her fair body, and devotees know that Rādhā always wears blue. For village boys and girls, romantic meetings entail some planning. The dark moonless night is a perfect opportunity to slip away into the nearby forests, evading the vigilant eyes of family and neighbors. The *gopī* advises Rādhā to take off her anklets for their jingling would certainly give her away. This friend sees through Rādhā's pretense: "Look inside yourself, think about it," she says. Otherwise why would Rādhā arrange her hair just so if she did not plan on meeting Krishna?

Inserting himself into the poem in the last line, Paramānand asks Rādhā how she can waste her good fortune when she has already gained Krishna's love? Love, as Paramānand illustrates in this poem, is tangible, a liquid substance that must be guarded carefully or perhaps spilled and lost in this war of love. Paramānand's metonymic equivalence of "love as liquid" embeds in the devotee's view of this scene the various properties of liquid, such as its tangibility as well as its susceptibility to loss.

This poem engages one of the most common tropes of Indian art and literature: *viraha*, the motif of separation. The mood of *viraha* explores the emotional states that arise from painful separations, such as Rādhā's anguish at being separated from Krishna and the gulf between the devotee and divine. At one level, the love story here is between Rādhā and Krishna, but it is also a love story between the devotee and Krishna, and Paramānand's poetry helps the devotee bridge the gulf.

Paramānand's vivid illustrations of Krishna's life in Braj entice the devotee into seeing the world differently, that is, into seeing the mundane world in nonworldly terms. This sight will vary in its depth and intensity but no matter how great or small is indicative of the devotee's entry and participation in Krishna's play. The poetry sets the stage for the devotee to become an actor in the cosmic drama played around Krishna. The devotee cannot help but to establish a relationship with Krishna in a manner that is always appropriate to his or her own accomplishments in the realm of the emotions, and here is where the *bhāva*, the foundational emotional experience, is identified and cultivated.

Bhāvas are those basic human emotional attitudes that are essential to the makeup of human beings. Every human being has these basic attitudes, but each individual is inclined to one or more. *Rasa* translates literally as "sap" or "essence" but indicates the emotion aroused in response to an aesthetic experience. *Bhāva* and *rasa* derive from the realm of Indian aesthetics, but sixteenth-century Braj theologians adapted these aesthetic concepts to devotion and made arousing these passions central to devotion. Some are likely to feel more comfortable in a devotional relationship that posits Krishna as the object of affection as a small boy, while others might prefer the erotic approach of a *gopī* or at least of one of the *gopī*'s helpers. But, in every case, the approach is highly individualized, tailored to the needs and proclivities of the devotee.

Vaiṣṇava tradition claims that five thousand years ago Krishna lived in the earthly Braj with his foster parents, Nanda and Yaśodā, and his friends, the *gopas* and *gopīs* (the cowherding men and women of Braj), yet his games occur perpetually in the *alaukik* realm. He lived as a typical Braj boy, and most Braj residents knew him as nothing other than a normal, though mischievous, boy: he herded the cows in the forests of Vrindavan with his friends and played with the young girls, in particular with his favorite, Rādhā. The word typically used to describe Krishna's actions is *līlā*, which connotes play or sport. To devotees, this means that all of Krishna's activities—from killing demons to creating the world—are forms of play. God does nothing of necessity, and divine activities are considered play, not work or obligatory action. Because Krishna loves his devotees, his games are eternal and perpetually accessible to the devotee. Krishna performs each one of his games at all times so that devotees have multiple avenues from which to approach him. At any given moment, devotees can focus on Krishna at different ages and within the contexts of different emotional relationships, such as lover-beloved or parent-child.

Devotees appropriate the emotional attitudes of the characters in the *līlā* in their relationships with Krishna; depending on the individual's temperament, the devotee might approach him as a parent to child or a lover to beloved. Krishna's Braj family and friends—the *gopīs*, his mother, and the *gopas*—exemplify “roles” for the devotee who wants to participate in this drama. The mythic structure provides a framework that allows the devotee to interpret his or her own experience in terms of Krishna and that sets the stage for the devotee to enter Krishna's games. The poetry directs the emotions in a mutually reinforcing process: the devotee's emotions accord with the emotional resonance of the characters in the Braj drama, which renders the elements of the poetry even more meaningful. As devotees achieve greater sophistication in their poetic sensibilities, they are further sensitized to the emotional nuances and subtleties portrayed in Krishna's *līlā*.

According to tradition, the poet Paramānand himself witnessed Krishna's games and revealed his insight to devotees through his poetry. Paramānand became their eyes, but he painted words through sound. Paramānand's *bhaṇitā* (signature line) in each poem is both commentary on and narrative of his participation in Krishna's *līlā* and attests to Paramānand's sight of Krishna's play.³ The *bhaṇitā* reflects the identity of Paramānand the poet, and this persona indicates Paramānand's own participation in the *līlā*. Paramānand sings as if he were a particular character in each poem; thus he is embedded in the poem as he takes on the persona and experiences the emotions of a particular character. The tradition assigns Paramānand—as well as his contemporary poets—identities as one of Krishna's male or female friends. Paramānand's personal visions of and participation in the *līlā* authenticate his poetry, making it effective in communicating his lived experience to the devotee.

Paramānand's Poetic Environment

Paramānand's primary contribution was the Krishna poetry compiled into the collection known as the *Paramānandasāgar*, literally *Ocean of Paramānand* or *Ocean of the Highest Bliss*. Paramānand composed *padas* (short lyrics of six to ten lines) to praise Krishna and honor his life. His poems also appear in *sevā* anthologies, which include poetry primarily from the Aṣṭachāp poets but also from other Braj poets. He composed this devotional poetry in the vernacular Brajbhāṣā, so it was accessible to a wide

range of people. The corpus of poetry attributed to Paramānand developed over many centuries, and much of it could not have been composed by the “historical” Paramānand. Those poets attracted by Paramānand’s poetry attached his signature line to guarantee a reception. However, this body of poetry is considered the authentic testimony of Paramānand’s vision of Krishna’s *līlā*, and the entire corpus is deemed authentic by the Vallabhite and Braj community by virtue of its role in ritual performance. I will refer to Paramānand as the composer of these poems because that is how the devotees refer to him, but clearly there are many “Paramānands.”

Certainly Paramānand inherited a variety of local, traditional, and philosophical influences, but these were filtered through the lens of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as can be seen in the poetry. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was—and is—the focal text for the Braj devotional community. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* incorporated a confluence of traditions and influences of south Indian Hinduism in approximately the tenth century.⁴ Although the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* attributes itself to Vyāsa (a divine sage to whom hagiographic tradition credits the *Vedas*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Brahma Sūtras*), its most probable authors were a group of south Indian learned ascetics, probably Brahmans, who were attempting to establish the doctrinal legitimacy of devotion.⁵ Other Sanskrit works are not disregarded, but their authority is superseded by that of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The tenth chapter of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is most important for devotees of Krishna because this chapter narrates Krishna’s life in Braj. Vallabh tradition dictates that Paramānand himself experienced the entire *līlā* of the tenth chapter of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* after he had been instructed by Vallabh, so his lyrics derive from personal experience.⁶

However, although the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other sources first informed him of these games, Paramānand was not merely recreating the poems from memory. For example, according to his *Vārtā*, Govindaswāmī, one of the eight poet saints, was singing for Krishna, but he suddenly stopped. When asked why, Govindaswāmī replied that he could no longer see the *līlā*.⁷ The poems are traditionally considered to be not remembered or created but accurate depictions of the *līlā*. The poetry must be heard with the understanding that memory of Krishna’s *līlā* corresponds to a real subject, not an “imaginative universe.” Paramānand’s *alaukik* eyes allowed him to see beyond the *laukik* world to Krishna’s cosmic drama, a view not available to those with merely *laukik* vision. The richness of detail and sensual perception come from actual experience: Krishna reveals his *alaukik* play to his devotees who have *alaukik* eyes.

It is important that devotees know that Paramānand's vision of Krishna's play is authentic. As a member of the Aṣṭachāp, the poet's name on the signature line guaranteed the "truth" of the poetry and the weight of the tradition associated with that poet. The *chāp* (name or seal) ensured the poem's credibility, as the signator "bears witness" to the activities of the poem.⁸ Each poet sang in response to a personal vision of Krishna's *līlā*, but the Aṣṭachāp and their poetry became institutionalized in ritual service as mediators of this *darśan*: these poets see the *līlā*, and poetry becomes the appropriate vehicle for expressing and communicating their sight. The poet himself has played with Krishna, both as a *gopa* and as a *gopī*. Paramānand's poetry brings devotees into this realm by offering them his lived experience of Krishna's *līlā*. In the next poem, for example, he has himself experienced the emotions—as the *gopī* Chandrabhāgā (his *gopī* identity in the *līlā*)—of a young girl infatuated by the charming Krishna.

Rāga—sārang

Mohan! He has forgotten his nature.

Because of love, whenever we asked for anything,
he brought it and gave it to us.

His charming hand plucked beautiful fragrant flowers
from the Pārijāta tree.

For my joy, Lotus eyes gives all his *rasa*.

I'll say all of this in front of Nanda the Yādava!

Abandon your bashfulness, the shame in your mind.

Though the lord of Paramānand is a king, he is
favored by many women.

(S1062)

This girl has no shame, and shame is one of the qualities most prized in a young village girl. Her love for Krishna overwhelms her prescribed modesty, and she speaks freely in front of Nanda, the village headman. She is besotted with Mohan—the one who enchants or intoxicates—because he has given her all of his *rasa*, all of his love. Paramānand employs the simple substitution of love as intoxication to entail the loss of control and inevitable breaking of boundaries that results from intoxication. Drunk with love, the *gopī* abandons her shame, and Krishna serves the *gopīs*. Whatever the *gopīs* want, Krishna has given—he even brought flowers picked by his own hand from the tree of Viṣṇu's paradise. The

pārijāta tree is particularly auspicious as it is one of the five types of trees produced by the churning of the ocean of milk. As the *rasarāja*, the king of passion, Krishna appears to the devotee in that way most accessible to the devotee (*bhāvātmaka*), and, for this young girl, the love-sick Krishna is the way to her heart.

In the final line, Paramānand comments on one of the reversals evident in this poem. Braj women—and devotees—are typically desperate to cater to Krishna’s needs. His mother Yaśodā is eager to offer him any food he might desire, and the *gopīs* assist him any way they can. This *gopī*, however, praises Krishna for his generosity, for he fulfills all of their desires. Paramānand notes that although Krishna is a king, he serves these women, not the reverse.

These poems might seem to be simple vignettes; in this poem, Paramānand describes the scenario of a village girl so besotted by Krishna’s charms that she proclaims her love to the village headman. However, the shifts from Paramānand’s vision of the *līlā* to the poetic composition to the devotee’s own *darśan* are a process which contains multiple voices—Paramānand, the devotee, and the characters of the poetry. Each poem represents a highly individualized and cyclical process comprised of five distinct stages that ultimately results in the devotee’s apprehension of Krishna’s play. By investigating this process, we can determine the mode by which Paramānand’s language is transformed into vision. By isolating the different stages of this process, and, in doing so, Paramānand’s different points of view, we delineate the process by which Paramānand’s words become each devotee’s *darśan*.

This process might best be construed as an iterative cycle, a process resulting in an evolving comprehension of Krishna. First, the action itself: Krishna operates in an *alaukik* world and reveals himself. Second, Paramānand takes *darśan* of Krishna’s *alaukik* action: he sees the *līlā* from a particular vantage point, in this case, that of the *gopī*. Third, Paramānand takes on a persona—he adapts a point of view as his narrative stance—and reveals his vision and brings the *alaukik* into the *laukik* world through poetry. Although Paramānand’s *bhaṇitā* indicates his role as poet witness, his narrative stance represents an interpretive choice, his specific choice about how to tell the story. Fourth, the members of the audience hear and contextualize the poetry according to time and place as well as their individual predilections. Fifth, through Paramānand’s language, devotees “hear the vision” and are gradually incorporated into Krishna’s world.

Individuals apprehend the “truth” of this poetry according to their own individual capacities. Ultimately, reception of the poetry—and the path of devotion itself—is highly individualized for each devotee. The general contours of the devotee’s experience may be similar to that of others; for example, most devotees know the basic context of Krishna’s life and use that narrative as a basic framework to structure their relationships with Krishna. However, the specifics of each devotee’s relationship with Krishna or apprehension of the poems are experienced by the devotee—to use a *laukik* phrase. Despite the individual differences, each devotee “sees” the truth, though in a slightly different way.

The worldly Braj is manifest to all, yet only those who have trained their senses and emotions can see beyond to the nonworldly Braj. Every emotion, every sight, and every sound should be related to Krishna so that all perception constantly evokes *smaran*, memories of Krishna—as it does for the *gopī* in this poem:

Rāga—sārang

Why am I always speaking of Braj?

Without Kamalanayan now the misery starts to burn
as if millions of the sun’s rays sear our hearts.

Without Syāmasundar, it is as if the moon of Gokul has been grabbed
as in an eclipse.

Who can vanquish the pain of separation? Such is my lot.

Paramānand says, without the lord, my eyes flow with tears.

(S1028)

Remembrance of Krishna sears the *gopī*’s heart, and she can think of nothing but Krishna. Krishna’s absence has doomed the *gopīs* to the searing rays of the sun. She invokes Krishna by epithets that juxtapose the cooling relief of water to the burning sun and the rainy season to the end of summer. Krishna, as Kamalanayan, the “lotus-eyed one,” evokes the image of the still waters upon which this flower grows. The names *Syāmasundar* and *Krishna* both indicate the dark blue-gray color of a rain cloud about to burst, suggesting the relief of the monsoon rains. When the monsoon arrives, the sky fills with dark clouds heralding the end of the summer heat.

Without beautiful Syām, the *gopī* says, it is as if the moon—another cooling agent—has been grabbed by an eclipse (Rāhū or Graha, grabber). From time to time, Rāhū, both the cause of and the name for an eclipse,

eats the moon. During the lunar eclipse, the moon disappears along with its cooling rays and no longer shades the earth from the sun's heat. The water-borne lotus, the rain clouds, and the moon's rays—in the form of Krishna's presence—once protected this girl from the pains of separation, but without Krishna, her only relief is her tears. Paramānand's metonymic identification of the moon with Krishna provides for the devotee a conceptual structure, which intimately links Krishna to cooling water and to the cessation of pain.

Paramānand's poetry uses the vitality and sensuality of the world to elicit and illustrate emotional states, in this case, the *gopī's* anguish of separation. Anyone familiar with a mid-June day on the plains of India knows the torment of a still, cloudless day, and that experience informs the devotees' perceptions of the poem's emotion. The exterior landscape describes the emotional interior, playing with concepts of "rain" and "bounty," which resonate with the devotee's experience. The images of Krishna's presence—the lotus and the clouds—suggest the monsoon, a time of agricultural bounty, a time of relief, and, most important for the *gopī*, a time for the reunion of lovers. While the *gopī* dreams of this plentitude, she is trapped in its opposite. Her tears mock her situation: her attempt to replicate the water's cooling effects dooms her to desiccation and excessive thirst for Krishna.

The poems highlight the physical world, and the senses are vehicles to the *alaukik* realm: Krishna reveals himself in the material world. The senses encourage memories of Krishna: the devotee can see and touch the very dust that Krishna once walked upon. Despite the privileging of sound and sight, tactile descriptions, such as the girl's thirst for Krishna, reflect and communicate those emotional states indicative of the devotee's relationship with Krishna. We should not underestimate the importance of the physical realm: the concrete experience of trees, birds, and plants, for example, provokes sensual responses that are rendered *alaukik* through passion for Krishna. *Sevā* and its poetry incorporate intense emotion and an emphasis on the senses to render the *laukik* world *alaukik*. Because the senses operate in both the *laukik* and *alaukik* realms, devotees can use the senses—rooted in the *laukik* world—to experience the stimuli of the *alaukik* realm.

The adept devotee uses the world to maintain a focus on Krishna. The sight of butter, for example, evokes relevant responses, including the sweet taste of butter, Krishna's love of butter, and images of a mischievous Krishna stealing butter. As devotees sing or hear these poems, they can

connect visions of their “real life” with the visions in the poems. The poems are not maudlin; the language is elevated and dignified. The use of daily objects and events grounds the poetry in real life and narrates episodes of daily life that devotees can easily assimilate to their own lives. So, as we can see, Paramānand's words render the ordinary extraordinary, and the simplicities of daily life—with the appropriate attitude—become a threshold to Krishna's world.

Serving Krishna

The *sevā* periods and the descriptive poetry help devotees synchronize their lives with the daily and seasonal patterns of Krishna's life. The ritual patterns of *sevā* that devotees follow today were first developed in the sixteenth century by Vallabh and his son Viṭṭhalnāth. Many devotees rise in the morning with Krishna, eat only the foods that Krishna eats, and eat only when or after he does—according to *sevā* patterns. In this way, devotees can engage in Krishna's *alaukik* play and render *alaukik* what would otherwise be mundane aspects of life. To encourage this process, specific poems are sung only during the designated time of day or year or at the appropriate festival. Singing a poem at the inappropriate time would disrupt the devotee's routine and would reveal an essentially incorrect understanding of the poem.

The *sevā* periods are based on patterns of life of sixteenth-century Braj. Each day is divided into the *aṣṭayām* (eight periods of the daily ritual cycle), each of which represents the different events of a typical day for the boy Krishna.⁹ The eight daily periods in *sevā* are as follows:

1. Maṅgalā (early morning). Like most women of Braj, Yaśodā is the first in the household to wake, so she can begin her morning chores. She is delighted to wake at this early hour for she has not seen Krishna all night. Her first sight of him in the morning is auspicious.
2. Śṛṅgār (adornment). Yaśodā dresses and adorns Krishna before he leaves the house. Yaśodā gives Krishna his morning bath and applies perfumed oils to his body. These different oils heat and cool the body depending on the season. She dresses him in his characteristic yellow clothes; his brother, Balarām, wears blue. Finally, Yaśodā adorns Krishna with ornaments, such as

- earrings, different crests, and flowered garlands that devotees know about and associate with Krishna.
3. Gvāl (cowherding). This period particularly reflects the different devotional approaches that depend on Krishna's age. As an infant, Krishna and Balarām play in their courtyard, watched closely by mothers Yaśodā and Rohiṇī. In temples where Krishna is worshipped as an infant, he might be swung in his cradle or crawl in the courtyard. As a child, Krishna is renowned for wreaking havoc on Braj. With his friends, he races through the village, looting houses of their butter and curd. No matter how much the women complain, Yaśodā never believes her darling boy to be capable of such mischief. As an older boy, Krishna takes the cows to pasture with the other boys of Braj, and they spend the day grazing in the forests and return home in the evening.
 4. Rājabhog (midday meal). At midday, Krishna eats a large meal. Often, he is in the forest with the boys, and the *gopīs* bear containers of food. The *gopīs* are thrilled to have this task. Not only do they escape their mothers' watchful eyes, but they meet with Krishna. Far from their neighbors' prying eyes, the boys and girls cavort in the dense forest. Many poems highlight Krishna and the *gopīs*' romantic trysts at this time.
 5. Utthāpan (after the nap). After a large meal, in the heat of the day, Krishna and the residents of Braj rest. During this time, most temples are closed and reopen later in the afternoon after Krishna wakes from his nap. This *darśan* period reflects the joy of reunion because Krishna returns from the forest, covered with dust kicked up by the cows. Yaśodā and the other women have not seen him all day and anticipate the moment at which they will spy the telltale clouds of dust that announce his arrival with the cows.
 6. Bhog (meal). After his nap, Krishna eats a light meal. He usually eats snack foods, fried foods eaten in the late afternoon, which hold him until a later dinner.
 7. Sandhyārati (dinner). Yaśodā serves dinner to Krishna, Balarām, and Nanda. She takes care to prepare delicacies that appeal to Krishna's tastes, so he will eat.
 8. Śayan (bedtime). Yaśodā puts Krishna to sleep for the night. According to the aesthetic of the *līlā*, Yaśodā assumes Krishna

to be asleep all night in his bed. Krishna, however, sneaks out of the house to meet with the *gopīs*. Many poems specify Rādhā as the chief recipient of his affections, while others are less specific. When Krishna plays with Rādhā, Rādhā's *sakhīs* (girl friends) attend them by making this romantic meeting possible. They serve snacks, play music, and ensure that both return home undetected.

In each of the periods, the devotee views the deity in a *jhāṅkī* or tableau. *Jhāṅkī* literally means “tableau” or “scene” and refers to the scene portrayed during *darśan*. Krishna's dress and his accoutrements in the *jhāṅkī* reflect the particular *darśan* period. For instance, images of the baby Krishna might be surrounded by child's toys. The foods, scents, and clothes reflect the season; after all, who would clothe Krishna in heavy clothes during the hot Indian summer? The accompanying poems set the scenario for the devotee and offer details about Krishna's actions at that particular time. The majority of the poems are performed in *sevā* during the *jhāṅkī* periods, and the poems usually thematically match the tableau.

The tableau is enlivened by stimuli that arouse all of the senses, not merely sight. The poetry and the temple service evoke the senses and relevant emotions for that period of *darśan*, so the devotees can experience the richness of Krishna's *līlā* at that particular time. For any given episode, Paramānand describes the sights, sounds, and, often, tastes—a significant proportion of Paramānand's poems involve food—so that the devotees “see” the scenario with all five senses. For example, in the previous poem, the heat of the physical landscape is illustrated by the *gopīs'* misery. This multidimensional mode of interpreting emotions offers a rich and multi-sensual understanding. This full-body experience means that devotees not only see Krishna's world but also feel and perhaps taste it as a gestalt.

The conflation of the senses is important for the devotees' perceptions of the *līlā*. Devotees experience the *līlā* as an integrated whole, not a disjointed series of sensual impulses, an experience that can be described as synaesthetic. In this synaesthetic experience, each sense is experienced through another so that the senses are integrated into a gestalt, a total experience. This concept accords with Lawrence Sullivan's argument that synaesthesia in performance facilitates the appearance of a “unity of the senses,” which allows for the semblance of a “unity of meaning” within a culture.¹⁰

It is important not to conflate synaesthetic apprehension with “*smaraṇ*” (evocation from memory), although the two can appear to be similar. In the latter, one stimulus leads to another. For example, feeling a cooling breeze might evoke the scent of fresh flowers, which, in turn, could evoke the remembered sight of Krishna picking flowers; these evoked memories are not synaesthesia themselves. Similarly, the mention of a tree might lodge that image in a devotee’s mind, yet that is memory or imagination. So, although Alan Entwistle, for example, has identified the “confusion of the senses” during temple *sevā* as synaesthesia, he rightly admits that this experience is “not so much synaesthesia in *stricto sensu*, but rather a *Gesamkunstwerk*, or what is now called a multi-media event.”¹¹ Entwistle’s “confusion” seems to be more a case of evocation through memory than a form of synaesthesia.

The devotee sees Krishna’s *alaukik* world, that is, something real, and that is radically different from an evoked memory. When these nonvisual stimuli are apprehended through the medium of vision, at this point, the path of *bhakti* (devotion) moves beyond evocation of memory to the apprehension of the *alaukik* world: Krishna’s *līlā* is perceived through the senses of touch, sight, and smell. More precisely, synaesthesia is the experience of one sense in terms of another, so synaesthesia occurs not in the “confusion of senses” during *sevā*, but in the transformation of sound into sight.

Synaesthesia, Metaphor, and Transformation

Synaesthesia is a type of the larger category of metaphor, defined as “understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another.” Metaphor provides a conceptual structure for the images in poetry, and each metaphoric image or concept suggests a range of meaning that adds depth and breadth to this realm. When we hear metaphoric language, we bring interpretations to the material that range far beyond the immediate and limited meaning of the words themselves. The devotee integrates the images of the poetry into a system of personal and cultural meaning. These metaphors not only reflect an understanding of the various facets of Krishna’s realm, but they also structure the devotee’s thoughts and concepts, and therein lies the transformation. Indeed, metaphors are embedded so deeply in language that we confuse statements of fact with metaphorical statements, and such terms appear “natural.” Language and

metaphor so shape our thinking that most of us are unaware of the pervasive hidden metaphors in everyday speech.¹²

Metaphors that appear so commonsensical as to seem trite permeate everyday speech and determine related concepts and images. *Love is war*, for example, reflects and determines the idea that love is a combative relationship, requiring the entailments of negotiations, liaisons, and concessions. This metaphor can be traced back as far as the *Kāma Sūtra* and is quite evident in the *Gītagovinda* (a twelfth-century Sanskrit poem), which frequently describes the act of love making in martial terms and suggests concepts of strategies and negotiations, of messengers and secret codes.¹³

Rāga—sārang

Let's go, why not look at the hut in the arbor.

Madanagopāl, the hero of Kāmadeva's army,
grabs the spoils.

Fighting a battle of lovers, the *sakhī*'s garland of pearls was broken.
Her blouse was torn from her chest, the knots of her waist-cloth
came undone.

The gem of gems of the *rasika*, the son of Nanda offers the
nectar of his lower lip.

Paramānand says, Govind is paired with this beautiful *gopī*.
(K950; L132; P3, 232; S704)

Here, lovers wage war, and the *gopīs*—or their hearts—are the spoils. Madanagopāl is Krishna, the conquering hero of Kāmadeva's army. Kāmadeva, the god of love, uses a bow of sugarcane and a bowstring of bees, and his arrows are tipped with five fragrant flowers: blue lotus, jasmine, mango, golden *campā*, and *sirisa* (mimosa tree) flowers. His weapons and arsenal are the tools of romance, and the battleground is the romantic arbor of Krishna's nightly trysts. Ultimately Krishna, or Govind, emerges victorious in this battle of love.

The love-is-war metaphor structures the listener's response to this poem. Such an approach emphasizes certain entailments: love is a battle; there are winners and losers, and those with superior weapons emerge victorious. This panorama suppresses qualities that, at times, are also associated with love, such as love as mutual harmony or sustenance that appear in other poetic scenarios. Other poems reveal different and conflicting representations of love: "love as nourishment" in which Krishna's love—frequently substantialized in physical substances such as milk or food—

sustains those who love him. In this case, food *is* love, and this nourishment ensures Krishna's and the *gopīs'* survival.

Culture provides the interpretive framework and paradigm for metaphoric understanding. For example, "love is war" appears to be universal, but, in this poem, it is primarily understood within a cultural framework. For example, the name Kāmadeva and the flowers of his arrows import specific connotations and memories to those familiar with Indian culture. Devotees of Krishna primarily emerge from a cultural paradigm that encourages particular emotional responses to stimuli of Krishna's *līlā*. These cultural frameworks suggest and stimulate certain responses but do not compel them, although stimuli can be manipulated to suggest certain emotions. The poetry incorporates human emotions and images readily decodable to anyone familiar with the Braj tradition, as devotees would be. Although these portrayals use culturally specific motifs, they are firmly anchored within the very real human emotions that make them accessible and comprehensible to virtually anyone, especially an ideal listener.

An ideal listener is firmly grounded in Braj tradition and can decode the range of interrelated images in the poetry. Members of this fully enculturated audience can, from their previous *laukik* and *alaukik* experiences, supply the detail necessary to understand and reexperience the narrative.¹⁴ The poems employ specific Braj themes to elicit basic human emotions that are redirected toward Krishna. As short but dense structures, the poems incorporate words, phrases, and images, each of which triggers a myriad of associations, limited only by the depth of the devotee's familiarity with Krishna's world.

Love for Krishna is not a worldly love, but it is modeled on it. Devotees interpret the lyrics as *alaukik* and feel *prem*—not *kām*—for Krishna. In this case, *kām* and *prem* translate roughly as love and desire, a distinction that roughly parallels the distinction in Greek between, respectively, *agape* and *eros*. *Kām* is the profane love that may entail marriage, offspring, and other consequences. *Prem* is the nonworldly love that characterizes the devotee's love for Krishna; this love is considered to be purified of worldly consequences. The *kām/prem* distinction parallels the *laukik/alaukik* distinction. *Kām* involves worldly or social concerns (such as children) or, worse, selfish gratification of one's desires. *Prem* places Krishna as the focal point of desire, which makes those desires nonworldly and not selfish. The poems are a path or guide to the transformation from the *laukik/kām* to the *alaukik/prem*.

These transformations—themselves the path of *bhakti*—reflect the devotee's shift of perception from *laukik* to *alaukik*. Paramānand's poems guide the devotee: the devotee hearing this poetry "sees" the word image. The poet's metaphors and metonyms inform the reader/listener's reception of the poetry. For example, the metaphor of love as a commodity suggests the entailments of shortages and competition, details that nuance the reader/listener's vision of the *līlā*. This transformation appears in two capacities: first, the transformation of sound into an actual sight; and second, the transformation of the broader figure of speech of sight into comprehension. The transformation is one example of figurative speech: the metaphor of "seeing" the message through words, such as "I see your point!" The dominant metaphor of expressing comprehension through visual language provides a trope through which to express this transformation.

To further understand how these transformations contextualize Paramānand's poetry, let us revisit momentarily the poetic cycle, which takes devotees from Paramānand's *alaukik* vision of the *līlā* to the devotees' apprehension of this *līlā*. Krishna's *līlā* eternally occurs in daily and annual cycles—without change—in perpetuity. Krishna's *līlā* is not understood as a linear system in which there is a beginning and end. Certainly, devotees can chart Krishna's life from beginning to end, birth to death, and texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* narrate his entire life. Yet the Braj devotional community—through poetry, music, and ritual—emphasizes the cyclical nature of Krishna's brief time in Braj, that he repeats his same activities on a daily basis and repeats his festival and seasonal games on an annual basis. Paramānand's *darśan* of the *līlā* and his poetic rendering of it adhere to these cyclical contours, institutionalized in *sevā*, and these cycles mediate Paramānand's, and, thus, the devotee's reception and transmission of the *līlā*.

Devotees "see" the *līlā* within this cyclical structure. The poems as vignettes reflect points or times in these cycles, and each offers access to the "eternally present" *alaukik līlā*. Paramānand sang of what he saw at that moment—not the past or anticipated future. He and the devotee then supplement that particular scenario through remembered *laukik* and *alaukik*. The cyclic nature of the poetry allows the devotee a unique access to experience Krishna's games because all of these games occur in the "eternal present."

Paramānand's experience and *darśan* of Krishna's *līlā*—as well as his poetic skill—allow him to manipulate language, to employ metaphors