

**Restoring Ānanda:
Philosophy, Aesthetic Experience, and Ritual in Puṣṭimārga Vaiṣṇavism**

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August 2006

A thesis submitted to McGill University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

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ISBN: 978-0-494-32561-2

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-32561-2

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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University, especially my supervisor, Dr. Daves Soneji, for taking time out of his busy schedule to offer his guidance and assistance with editing. I appreciate all your help and encouragement. Dr. Arvind Sharma, I am grateful for all the inspiring conversations we had. Dr. Katherine Young, I thank you for your support.

To Shyam Manohar Goswamy, thank you for your time, patience and insightful comments.

I give thanks to Danielle Arsenault and Chetan Soni for help with translating my abstract into French.

Reena Tabing, Emily Moras, Nina Chauhan, and Surabhi Rawal thank you all for your friendship and laughter. Chetan Soni, I appreciate all that you have done for me and continue to do. You make it all worth it.

Lastly, I would like to give thanks to my family for being so unique, and for supporting me in their own particular ways.

Abstract

This thesis examines the interrelation between ritual (*sevā*), aesthetic experience, and philosophy in the Puṣṭimārga Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* tradition of Vallabha (ca. 1479-1531). In Vallabha's Śuddhādvaita ("pure non-dual") philosophy, Kṛṣṇa is described as the embodiment of bliss or *ānanda*. At the moment of creation, Kṛṣṇa manifests the world and individual souls (*jīvas*) out of himself, but conceals the *ānanda* within the *jīvas*, and subjects them to his power of ignorance (*avidyā*). Thus, *jīvas* are in the search for restoring their *ānanda*, which can only occur as a result of being in Kṛṣṇa's presence. I argue that it is by performing ritual that Puṣṭimārga devotees experience Kṛṣṇa's eternal *līlā* ("play" or "sport"), transcend their states of *avidyā*, and permanently restore their *ānanda*. In Puṣṭimārga, emotion (*bhāva*) is both the path to experiencing Kṛṣṇa and the goal of this path in and of itself. Puṣṭimārga theologians validate the salvific role of emotion by invoking Sanskrit aesthetic theory. I argue that aesthetic experience is central to Puṣṭimārga ritual (including offerings of music, food and ornamentation) on the one hand, and also qualifies liberation itself on the other.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine l'interdépendance entre le rituel (*sevā*), l'expérience esthétique et la philosophie dans la tradition *bhakti* Puṣṭimārga Vaiṣṇava du Vallabha (ca. 1479-1531). Dans la philosophie Śuddhādvaita (« non-dualité pure ») du Vallabha, Kṛṣṇa est décrit comme l'incarnation de la félicité ou *ānanda*. Au moment de la création, Kṛṣṇa manifeste le monde et les âmes individuelles (*jīvas*) hors de lui-même mais il cache l'*ānanda* dans les *jīvas* et les soumet à son pouvoir de l'ignorance (*avidyā*). Alors, les *jīvas* tentent de restaurer leur *ānanda* et ceci ne peut se produire comme effet qu'en étant en présence de Kṛṣṇa. Je débat le fait que c'est en effectuant le rituel que les pratiquants Puṣṭimārga font l'expérience de l'éternel *līlā* (« jouer » ou « sport ») de Kṛṣṇa, transcendent leur état de *avidyā*, et restaurent de façon permanente leur *ānanda*. Dans le Puṣṭimārga, l'émotion (*bhāva*) devient à la fois la voie et le but d'une expérience avec Kṛṣṇa. Les théologiens Puṣṭimārga valident le rôle salvifique des émotions en évoquant la théorie esthétique Sanskrit. Je débat, d'un côté, que l'expérience esthétique joue un rôle central dans le rituel Puṣṭimārga (qui inclut des offrandes de musique, de nourriture et d'ornements) et qualifie la libération elle-même d'une autre part.

Note on Transliteration

This thesis employs transliterated text from Sanskrit and Hindi. I have retained standard Sanskrit transliteration for most words, retaining the medial and final vowel *a*, which is usually not pronounced in Hindi. However, certain terms, such as the names of localized deities (such as Śrī Nāthjī) have been transliterated as they are pronounced, without the *a* vowel. Modern spellings (without diacritical marks) have been retained for place names (such as Nathdwara).

Introduction

Puṣṭimārga, or “the path of grace,” is a North Indian Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* tradition that is centered around the worship of a localized form of Kṛṣṇa known as Śrī Nāthjī. Its main cultic center is located in the town of Nathdwara, Rajasthan. The sect was established by Vallabhācārya (ca. 1479-1531, also known as Vallabha) who developed a form of devotional worship that came to be known as *sevā*, literally “service.” In Puṣṭimārga, *sevā* encompasses a spectrum of ritual activities ranging from the practice of domestic worship, to the temple-based offerings of poetry, music, food, and painting. Concurrently, Vallabha also formulated a philosophical system, known as Śuddhādvaita (“pure non-dualism”), and wrote one of the most voluminous commentaries (the *Subodhinī*) on the Vaiṣṇava theological text, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.¹ Philosophical and theological thought and ritual activity are intimately linked in the Puṣṭimārga tradition. Puṣṭimārga demands a devotee’s active and total participation. Ritual service or *sevā* remains ineffective without an understanding of its underlying “aesthetic philosophies,” while speculations on the nature of god and liberation cannot be fully realized without the practice of *sevā*. It is the complementary character of Puṣṭimārga theology and practice that renders each soteriologically efficacious. This thesis is concerned with the intersections between ritual, aesthetic experience, and philosophy in the Puṣṭimārga tradition.

I argue that corporeal, emotional, and sense-oriented aesthetic experience informs and engenders religious praxis in Puṣṭimārga. For Vallabha, emotion or *bhāva* becomes both the way and the goal for experiencing God. He affirms the soteriological role of

¹ The *Subhodhinī* consists of Vallabha’s commentary on books I, II, III, X, and XI (1-4) of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

emotion by positing that the highest form of liberation is the continual intimate association of a devotee with Kṛṣṇa in the context of his *līlās*, “play” or “sport.” Vallabha validates the salvific role of emotion by invoking the *rasa* theory of Sanskrit aesthetics into his philosophy and theology. According to this theory, the aesthetic experience is described as a process whereby quotidian feelings or emotions (*bhāvas*) are transformed into a unique state of consciousness.

Classical texts on aesthetics present this in the context of enjoying drama, poetry, or visual art. This transformed state or aesthetic rapture is most often described as a kind of “tasting” or “relish,” *rasa*. Vallabha, and later his son and prominent Puṣṭimārga theologian Viṭṭhalanātha (ca. 1516-1586), reinterpret classical aesthetic theory by understanding Kṛṣṇa as the embodiment of all *bhāvas* and *rasas*. Kṛṣṇa thus performs his *līlās* in accordance with the norms of aesthetic theory, for the purpose of producing all *bhāvas* and *rasas* in his devotees. Because Kṛṣṇa embodies all *bhāvas* and *rasas*, and performs his *līlās* in accordance with the paradigms for producing those sentiments, devotees are able to approach and experience Kṛṣṇa in terms of all *bhāvas* and *rasas*. In this thesis, I also focus on how Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* provide a narrative context in which devotees may become emotionally intimate with Kṛṣṇa, and also provide an aesthetic context in which *rasa* functions and can be experienced.

According to Vallabha, Kṛṣṇa is the embodiment of bliss (*ānanda*),² and his entire body is said to be made of *ānanda*. At the moment of creation, Kṛṣṇa manifests the world and individual souls (*jīvas*) out of himself (thus, the world, *jīvas* and Kṛṣṇa are all said to be “non-dual”). However, Kṛṣṇa conceals his *ānanda* aspect in the *jīvas* and then subjects

² Kṛṣṇa is accepted as Brahman in Puṣṭimārga and is thus described, as per classical Sanskrit philosophy, in terms of *sat* (“existence”), *cit* (“consciousness”), and *ānanda* (“bliss”).

them to his power-of-ignorance (*avidyā-śakti*). Because *jīvas* manifest from Kṛṣṇa's *ānanda* form, they are in constant search for the restoration of *ānanda*, which can only occur as a result of being in Kṛṣṇa's presence. I argue that it is by performing *sevā*, where they are in the presence of the image form of Kṛṣṇa and can experience his *līlās*, that *jīvas* transcend their states of *avidyā* and permanently restore their *ānanda*.

A devotee's devotional sentiment or *bhakti-bhāva* matures through the practice of *sevā* (love-in-union) and *kathā* (meditative imagining, praising, remembering Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*, as a result of the experience of love-in-separation). Devotees begin to withdraw from the world and become increasingly attached to Kṛṣṇa, a state Vallabha refers to as "constraint" or *nirodha*. This stage culminates in the experience of *sarvātmabhāva*, in which a devotee loves Kṛṣṇa with all *bhāvas* and *rasas*. In this state, *sevā* becomes involuntary, and by the grace of Kṛṣṇa, devotees develop a "capacity for the transcendent" (*alaukikasāmarthaya*) whereby Kṛṣṇa "comes alive" during worship. When this occurs, Kṛṣṇa, together with his *līlās*, enters the devotee and permanently restores his/her *ānanda*, granting liberation. Thus, *sevā* is both the means to and the state of liberation.

I also argue that the "aesthetized philosophy" of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha is reified in *sevā*. The image of Kṛṣṇa that is worshipped is accepted as a full manifestation or *svarūpa*. As a living presence of Kṛṣṇa, the *svarūpa* becomes a site of corporeal, emotional and sensual experience. In the aesthetics of *sevā*, the loving emotions of devotees are conveyed to the *svarūpa* via the multiple media of food, adornment, and music (Bennett 1993, 129).

In ca.1500 CE, Vallabha initiated four poet-singers³ into the Puṣṭimārga *saṃpradāya* (“sect”) and encouraged singing *kīrtana*, or “hymns of praise,” as an act of *sevā* to Kṛṣṇa. The poetry forming the substance of these *kīrtanas* describe Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* and correspond to various *bhakti-bhāvas*, or the modes by which devotees emotionally approach and experience Kṛṣṇa. However, it was under the leadership of Viṭṭhalanātha that the aesthetic appeal of *sevā* flourished in the context of temple worship.

Viṭṭhalanātha was as accomplished an aesthete as a theologian and organizer. He went on to initiate four more poet-singers,⁴ and is said to have established the elaborate liturgical system in which the *sevā* of Kṛṣṇa is structured according to eight divisions of the day, known as *jhāṅkis*, or “glimpses.” He also succeeded in integrating ritual musicians, the *kīrtanas* of the poet-singers, backdrop paintings (*picchavāṭis*), and complex food offering rituals (*bhoga*) into the daily ritual cycle of the temple. Each *jhāṅki* represents a moment in one of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* and forms the context for each aspect of temple worship (*sevā*). In most Puṣṭimārga temples, ritual worship consists of offerings of *rāga* (“music”), *bhoga* (“food”) and *śṛṅgāra*, which includes the backdrop paintings and the adornment of the image of Kṛṣṇa.

The manner in which Kṛṣṇa is adorned, the substance of the poetry sung, and the scenes painted in the *picchavāṭis* effectively create a ritual space in which Kṛṣṇa’s Vraja, where he performs his eternal *līlās*, is made present and the devotee “shares in the essence of Krishna and consciously and physically enters with him into the eternal *līlā*” (Barz 75). In the latter half of this thesis I demonstrate how the devotee emulates and ultimately experiences Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* through cultivated *sevā*. *Sevā* thus becomes a process

³ Kumbhanadāsa, Sūradāsa, Kṛṣṇadāsa, Paramānandadāsa.

⁴ Nandadāsa, Govindasvāmi, Cittasvāmi, and Caturbhujadāsa.

of continual inner transformations and increasing intimacy until the act of emulation is actualized through Kṛṣṇa's own grace or *puṣṭi*. However, the efficacy of cultivated *sevā* necessitates the experience of *rasa* — the *rasa* of *bhakti*. In his philosophical treatise, *Tattvārthadīpanibandha* (I, v. 95) Vallabha himself states: “In the absence of *rasa*, worship by its own nature would not take the shape of an aim of life (*puruṣārtha*).”

Because each *jhāṅki* represents a moment in one of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*, each has a dominant *bhāva* and *rasa* associated with it. For example, in the morning *jhāṅki*, Kṛṣṇa is said to be performing his *bāla-līlas* or childhood *līlās*. And, because Kṛṣṇa performs his *bāla-līlās* in such a way as to produce *vātsalya-bhāva* (the devotional sentiment of motherly love), his devotees come to experience that *bhāva* upon witnessing that particular *jhāṅki*. This *bhāva*, moreover, is evoked by the “aesthetic rituals” of *rāga*, *bhoga*, and *śṛṅgāra* offered during the *jhāṅki*. When this *bhāva* culminates in the experience of *rasa*, devotees feel as though they are in the presence of Kṛṣṇa and are actual participants in his *līlās*. Thus, in this thesis, I argue that the experience of *rasa* is both expressive of a transformed state in which devotees delight in the experience of emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa, and also facilitates this transformation through the media of *rāga*, *bhoga*, and *śṛṅgāra*.

Methods and Materials

The method employed for this thesis is textual analysis. The authoritative scripture in the Puṣṭimārga *saṃpradāya* is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (ca. ninth century CE), the most well-known of the eighteen *Purāṇas* in the Sanskrit textual tradition. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* consists of three hundred and fifty five chapters, divided into twelve

cantos. This study focuses on the tenth canto, which describes the life and *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa. Unless noted otherwise, all excerpts in this thesis are taken from Edwin Bryant's (2003) translation of the tenth canto. Within the tenth canto itself, special emphasis is placed on the five chapters describing Kṛṣṇa's dance (*rāsa-līlā*) with the cowherd girls (*gopīs*) of Vraja. These five chapters, collectively called the *Rāsa-Pañcādhyāyī*, have been recently translated into English by Graham M. Schweig (2005). I also consult Friedhelm Hardy's (1983) work for my research on emotional Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* as presented in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

This thesis is largely concerned with the Puṣṭimārga *saṁpradāya*'s exegeses on the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and the multiple ritual and aesthetic cultures that these interpretations influence. To this end, I examine Vallabha's major commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, called *Subodhinī*, and two of his philosophical works, the *Tattvārthadīpanibandha*,⁵ and the *Ṣoḍaśagrantha*. I extract from these texts the basic framework of Vallabha's aesthetic theology, and bring this into dialogue with Puṣṭimārga perspectives on ritual and philosophy. As the majority of Puṣṭimārga primary sources have not been translated, all of the translations of the *Tattvārthadīpanibandha*, including Vallabha's own commentaries (*prakāśa*), are my own. I also rely on secondary materials dealing with Śuddhādvaita philosophy and Puṣṭimārga theology, including most importantly, James Redington's translations of the *Rāsa-Pañcādhyāyī* section of the *Subodhinī* (1990), and the *Ṣoḍaśagrantha* (2000).

⁵ The *Tattvārthadīpanibandha* is divided into three parts: *Śāstrārthaprakaraṇa*, *Sarvanirṇayaprakaraṇa*, and *Bhāgavatārthaprakaraṇa*. I have only consulted the first two parts for this thesis, which are indicated by "I" for the first section, and "II" for the second section.

Mrudula Marfatia (1967) provides an extensive overview of Śuddhādvaita philosophy, including a detailed summary of Vallabha's major writings and the writings of his followers. I also refer to the works of Manilal Parekh (1969) and J.G. Shah (1969), who detail accounts of Vallabha's life, and present a synopsis of Puṣṭimārga philosophy and theology.

In terms of Puṣṭimārga temple culture, I examine the ways in which *sevā* constitutes, affects, and transforms traditions of poetry, music, painting, and food offerings in temple ritual. My discussions of poetry will draw on the works of Kenneth Bryant (1978), and Richard Barz (1992), who has translated the *vārtas* ("stories") of the four poet-singers initiated by Viṭṭhalanātha. I will be consulting the works of Guy Beck (1993) and Anne-Marie Gaston (1997) for data on the ritual music that is performed in Nathdwara. The works of Amit Ambalal (1987) and Tryna Lyons (2004) will serve as sources for my examination of Nathdwara painting traditions and, finally, I refer to the studies of Paul Toomey (1986; 1990; 1992) and Peter Bennett (1983; 1990; 1993) for my analysis on the interrelations between aesthetic experience and food offerings in Puṣṭimārga temples.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into three chapters, each of which in its own way addresses the interplay between philosophy, aesthetic experience, and ritual in Puṣṭimārga. In examining these interrelations I also present a systematic study of emotion and aesthetics in Puṣṭimārga.

In Chapter One, I discuss how the intense emotional and sense-oriented *bhakti* presented in the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* makes it the foundational scripture of the Puṣṭimārga tradition. I present several narratives from the text, which reveal deeply embedded philosophical and theological themes that continue to permeate Puṣṭimārga thought and practice. These themes include Kṛṣṇa's subordination to his devotee's love, the experience of *viraha-bhakti* and *sarvātmabhāva* (as exemplified by the *gopīs*), and the devotee's desire to be corporeally and emotionally associated with Kṛṣṇa in the context of his *līlās*. I conclude the chapter by demonstrating how Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* provide both a theological context in which devotees can experience emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa, and a narrative context in which *rasa* functions and can be experienced.

Chapter Two examines how the *bhakti* themes discussed in Chapter One affect and become incorporated into Vallabha's own ontological and soteriological formulations. I demonstrate how philosophical and theological thought and ritual activity are intimately linked in the Puṣṭimārga tradition. While presenting an overview of Śuddhādvaita philosophy, I demonstrate how it is by performing *sevā*, where devotees are in the presence of the image-form of Kṛṣṇa, that *jīvas* can mature their *bhakti-bhāvas*, remove their *avidyā*, and permanently restore their *ānanda*. In the second half of the chapter, I unpack the ways in which the soteriological doctrines of *nirodha* and *sarvātmabhāva* present emotion and aesthetic experience as both the way and the goal for experiencing Kṛṣṇa. And, finally, in outlining the forms of liberation in Puṣṭimārga, I illustrate how *sevā* is simultaneously constructed as both the means to and the state of liberation.

The purpose of Chapter Three is to reveal how the “aesthetized philosophy” of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha becomes reified in *sevā*. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the ways in which Sanskrit aesthetic theory informs and affects Puṣṭimārga theology. The “matured” state of a devotee’s *bhakti-bhāva* is described as an experience of intense emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa (*sarvātmabhāva*). This experience is explained and validated in Puṣṭimārga by the invocation of *rasa* theory. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss and analyze forms of Puṣṭimārga *sevā* and demonstrate how the efficacy of cultivated *sevā* rests upon the experience of *rasa*. Thus, by providing an outline of Sanskrit aesthetic theory, and examining the various ritual offerings involved in *sevā*, I argue that the experience of *rasa* is both expressive of a transformed state in which a devotee experiences intense emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa, and also facilitates this transformation through offerings of *rāga*, *bhoga*, and *śṛṅgāra*.

In order to locate developments in Puṣṭimārga within a specific socio-historical context, the remainder of this Introduction consists of a brief overview of Puṣṭimārga social history. This overview serves to posit an origin of Puṣṭimārga practice, and also illustrates the expansion of the sect under the leadership of Vallabha’s descendents, including, most importantly, Viṭṭhalanātha. I conclude the Introduction with an explanation of why, until recently, the Puṣṭimārga tradition has been neglected as an area of scholarly study.

Towards a Social and Religious History of Puṣṭimārga

Hagiographical texts known as *vārtās* (“account” or “story”) are the principal sources for reconstructing the history and development of the Puṣṭimārga *saṁpradāya* under the leadership of Vallabha and his second son, Viṭṭhalanātha (ca.1516-1586). The *vārtās* are written in the vernacular Vraja *bhāṣā*,⁶ making them accessible to a wide range of individuals, and pointing to a well-established oral tradition within the *saṁpradāya*. The texts are mostly didactic in nature and are viewed from an emic perspective, as *dharma-kathās* (Vaudeville 1980, 15). The oldest text amongst these is the *Caurasī Vaiṣṇava kī Vārtā*, which chronicles the lives and deeds of the eighty four disciples Vallabha initiated into the sect. Following this is the *Dau sau Vaiṣṇava kī Vārtā*, which details the biographies of the two hundred and fifty two disciples later initiated by Viṭṭhalanātha. Both these texts are said to have been compiled by Gokulanātha (ca.1557-1640), Viṭṭhalanātha’s fourth son, and were later expanded upon with commentaries by Gokulanātha’s nephew and prominent Puṣṭimārga theologian, Harirāya (ca.1590-1715). Another *vārtā* also attributed to Harirāya is the *Śrī Nāthjī ke Prākāṭya ki Vārtā* (SNPV), which, from a sectarian perspective, is perhaps the most important work of the tradition. This text details the origin and development of the sect of Śrī Nāthjī, who was worshipped first as a local deity by Vraja dwellers, and after being recognized by

⁶ Vraja refers to both the heavenly realm where Kṛṣṇa is said to be performing his eternal *līlās* (“sports”), and to its earthly manifestation, the region located in northern India, just south of Delhi. Mathurā, Kṛṣṇa’s birthplace, and Vṛndāvana, the home of Kṛṣṇa, are located in the heart of the Vraja region. Most often, Vraja and Vṛndāvana are used interchangeably. The Vraja region played an important role in the development of Vaiṣṇava-Kṛṣṇa sects in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. During this period, followers of Caitanya, the founder of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, made pilgrimages to the area and mapped out different areas within the Vraja region where they believed Kṛṣṇa performed his *līlās* when he manifested himself on earth. Presently, the most popular sects in the Vraja region are the Puṣṭimārga sect of Vallabha, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sect of Caitanya, and the Rādhāvallabha sect of Hita Harivaṁśa.

Vallabha, was worshipped as a *svarūpa*⁷ (“full self manifestation”) of the child-god, Kṛṣṇa-Gopāla (16).

The story of Vallabha’s life begins with the emergence of the image that would later be recognized as Śrī Nāthjī. According to the SNPV, in ca. 1410 a black stone in the form of a bent arm stretched upward, emerged from underneath the ground on top of the sacred hill, Govardhana (lit., “an increaser of cattle”).⁸ Since the image was discovered by a local Vraja resident on *Nāga-pañcamī* (the day commemorating snake worship), and emerged in such a particular form, it was accepted as a snake deity and was worshipped as such.⁹ Decades later, in ca. 1478, the face or more specifically the “lotus-like mouth” (*mukhārvind*) of the image was revealed. The image was then worshipped as Devadamana, an epithet of Kṛṣṇa meaning “the subduer of gods,” until ca. 1494 when Vallabha arrived in Vraja recognizing it as the very *svarūpa* of Śrī Nāthjī and established its *sevā*.

In the SNPV, Vallabha’s birth is intimately linked with the manifestation of the Śrī Nāthjī *svarūpa*, for it is believed that Vallabha was born at the same moment Śrī Nāthjī revealed his “lotus-mouth.” This simultaneous occurrence — the manifestation of Śrī Nāthjī’s mouth and the birth of Vallabha — is of special significance for Puṣṭimārga followers, because the mouth of Kṛṣṇa is not only viewed as the source of cosmic sound and speech, but it is also considered the receptacle of *agni*, “divine fire” (Barz 1992, 22).

⁷ Theoretically, images are categorized as follows: *vighraha* (individual form or shape, figure), *mūrti* (embodiment), and *svarūpa* (own form) (Gaston 1997, 26). The designation of “*svarūpa*” to the image of Śrī Nāthjī indicates how the tradition views it as a full embodiment of the deity, being self-revealed, and not man-made.

⁸ The Govardhana Hill, located in the Vraja district just west of Mathurā, is an important pilgrimage site for all Vaiṣṇavas. For the disciples of the Puṣṭimārga it is especially important because it is this hill that Kṛṣṇa is seen carrying in his form as Śrī Nāthjī. It is also believed to be a *svarūpa* of Kṛṣṇa himself.

⁹ The affiliation between the emergence of Śrī Nāthjī’s image and snake worship may be indicative of a prevalent local Nāga cult in the Vraja region at that time. For more on competing claims of ritual authority between local Nāga, Yakṣa, goddess, and Vaiṣṇava sects over Vraja sites, see Sanford (2002).

Vallabha's association with *agni*, however, does not end here. According to his birth narrative, Vallabha was born into a family of Telugu *brāhmaṇas*, in the modern-day state of Andhra Pradesh beneath a *śamī* tree. He was still born, and his father Lakṣmaṇa Bhaṭṭa, and mother Illammāgāru, believed he was dead and left him under the tree. Later, as Lakṣmaṇa slept, he had a dream in which Kṛṣṇa informed him that the baby they thought dead was indeed alive. When they returned to find their son, they saw him alive and well, but surrounded by a blazing fire. Once again, the *agni* theme surfaces, because not only was Vallabha found encircled by a protective fire, but the wood of the *śamī* tree under which he was born is also used in Vedic rituals for kindling the sacred fire (Barz 1992, 24-25). In light of this narrative, Vallabha is considered a *mukhāvatāra* ("incarnation of the mouth") of Kṛṣṇa, and an *agni avatāra* or more specifically, the *avatāra* of Vaiśvānara, an epithet of the Vedic fire-god *Agni* (30). In the Vedic tradition, the term *agni* is identified with both the god *Agni* and the sacrificial fire and is therefore regarded as the "mouth of the gods," acting as a divine portal or medium through which the Vedic gods partake in the sacrificial offering. Thus as a *mukhāvatāra*, Vallabha embodies the divine speech which guides his followers. As an *agni avatāra*, Vallabha acts a divine intermediary or medium between Kṛṣṇa and his followers, and embodies the divine fire which can burn away their *doṣas* ("defects"/"impurities") (22-30).¹⁰

Vallabha's parents were Vaiṣṇava *brāhmaṇas* who preferred to worship the child Kṛṣṇa. As an infant, Vallabha spent the first few years of his life in Varanasi studying scriptures such as the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the *Gītā*, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

¹⁰ The intense emotion of experiencing *viraha-bhakti* ("love-in-separation") is described as an all-consuming fire that engulfs the heart of the devotee. Thus, in keeping with the *agni* theme, Vallabha has also been looked upon by his followers as an *avatāra* of this *viraha bhakti* (Parekh 1969, 144).

According to traditional accounts, Vallabha is said to have mastered these scriptures by the time he was eleven years of age (Ambalal 1987, 42) and, not surprisingly, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was his favourite. Throughout his life, Vallabha is said to have made three important pilgrimages¹¹ across the Indian subcontinent, systemizing his own philosophy, which would later be known as Śuddhādvaita (“pure non-dualism”), and discussing and disseminating his own interpretations of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which would later crystallize in the form of a voluminous commentary, the *Subodhinī*.

At the age of fourteen, Vallabha embarked on his first pilgrimage. His journey was motivated by a dream in which Kṛṣṇa appeared to Vallabha instructing him to go to Vraja and reveal the true identity of the *svarūpa* that was being worshipped as Devadamana on the Govardhana hill. However, it was in the course of making this first pilgrimage that a significant event took place in Gokula, a small town in Vraja where it is believed Kṛṣṇa performed his childhood *līlās*. This event, which is perhaps the most important in the Puṣṭimārga tradition, consists of Vallabha receiving the *Brahmasambandha* mantra (also known as the *ātmanivedana* mantra), the formal mantra of initiation into the sect, from Kṛṣṇa himself. Vallabha describes this vision in his Sanskrit treatise, the *Siddhāntarahasyam*, as follows: “At midnight on the eleventh day of Shravana’s bright half, the Blessed Lord himself appeared before my eyes. And what He proclaimed to me then I repeat here, word for word. For everyone who performs the Brahmasambandha ceremony, the removal of all defects of body and soul is sure to result” (v.1-3, Redington 2000, 64). The very next morning, by conferring the mantra

¹¹ The places where Vallabha visited and delivered his sermons are commemorated in the Puṣṭimārga and are referred to as *baiṭakhas* (“seats”). There are eighty four such *baiṭakhas*, which are listed along with details of Vallabha’s travels in a mid eighteenth century text, the *Caurāsī Baiṭakha Caritra*, attributed to Harirāya (Saha 2004, 107-108).

onto his two travel companions, Dāmodaradāsa and Kṛṣṇadāsa, Vallabha initiated his first disciples. After leaving Gokula, Vallabha continued to the Govardhana hill and announced to the worshipers that the image revealed here is really a *svarūpa* of Kṛṣṇa in the act of holding up the Govardhana hill, and should now be identified as Śrī Govardhananāthjī (Śrī Nāthjī). Vallabha insisted on erecting a small shrine to the *svarūpa* and developed a simple form of *sevā* for the image, thus marking the formal establishment of the Puṣṭimārga *saṁpradāya*.

A few years later, a rich merchant named Purnamal Khattri asked Vallabha for his permission to build a temple for Śrī Nāthjī. He informed Vallabha that Kṛṣṇa appeared to him in a dream and requested that a larger shrine be built for him. Vallabha agreed and temple construction commenced. Shortly after construction began, however, it was interrupted due to insufficient funds and was only completed twenty years later in ca. 1520.

Sometime between ca.1501-1503, Vallabha made his second pilgrimage to the Viṭṭhalanāthjī temple in Pandharpur, Maharashtra. It was during his visit to this shrine that Vallabha is said to have received a command directly from the deity Viṭṭhalanāthjī to marry and have children. Some followers of the tradition interpret this command to marry as a means for Viṭṭhalanāthjī to incarnate as Vallabha's second son. Others view this command to marry as a way to ensure that the doctrines and practices of the Puṣṭimārga tradition be passed down within the Vallabha family alone, thereby extending to his children the "supernatural status necessary to them for the administering of the *Brahmsambandha* [mantra]" and initiating disciples (Barz 1992, 29-38). By agreeing to marry, Vallabha entered the *grhasthāśrama* ("householder stage of life"). Not only did

Vallabha's preference and elevation of the *grhasthāśrama* make a significant contribution to the religious culture of his day (Timm 1992, 137), but it also affected the formation and consequent application of many Puṣṭimārga ideologies. As a *mukhāvatāra* of Kṛṣṇa, Vallabha's marriage succeeded in demonstrating that marriage does not hinder a devotee's progress toward the divine, and also established an example that should be followed by the community of Puṣṭimārga practitioners (Barz 1992, 32).¹² And so, sometime between ca. 1502 and 1504, Vallabha married a *brāhmaṇa* woman named Mahālakṣmī and fathered their first son, Gopīnāthajī in ca. 1512, and their second son, Viṭṭhalanātha in ca. 1516.

On his third and final major pilgrimage, Vallabha visited the South Indian city of Vijayanagara. During his stay, Vallabha is said to have engaged in a philosophical debate with disciples belonging to Śaṅkara's school of Kevalādvaita Vedānta ("non-dualism"). Having won the debate, Vallabha attracted the attention of the city's ruler, Kṛṣṇadevarāya (ca. 1509-1529), who subsequently bestowed upon Vallabha the honorific title of *ācārya* ("great preceptor").¹³

The SNPV also continues to describe how there were competitive claims to ritual authority at Vraja between the Bengali Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas of the Caitanya sect and the Puṣṭimārgis. According to some *vārtā* texts, after the Śrī Nāthjī temple's construction was completed, Vallabha appointed Mādhavendra Purī, the *ādiguru* of Caitanya (ca. 1486-1534), as its head priest and entrusted his disciples with performing *sevā*. Though, as

¹² One should not, however, be left with the impression that Vallabha was completely against adopting *saṁnyāsa* or *tyāga* ("renunciation"). In another Sanskrit treatise, the *Samnyāsanirṇayaḥ*, Vallabha does maintain that one may renounce the world in the "advanced stages of devotion, and it is 'for the sake of experiencing separation' (*virahānubhavārtham*)" (v.7-9a, Redington 2000, 168).

¹³ Although this account is held to be true by followers of Puṣṭimārga, historically it is unlikely that Vallabha ever met the ruler of Vijayanagara. For more on Kṛṣṇadevarāya, see Wagoner (1993).

Charlotte Vaudeville argues, historically this event could not have taken place since Vallabha's dates are ca. 1479-1531, whereas Mādhavendra Purī's dates are believed to be ca. 1420-1490 (Vaudeville 1980, 39n10). Furthermore, the *vārtā* literature reveals sectarian biases. The SNPV, for example, describes how Śrī Nāthjī himself refused to be served by Mādhavendra Purī, since the performance of his *sevā* was reserved for Vallabha only. And although the *Caurasī Vaiṣṇavism kī Vārtā* does indicate that Vallabha appointed Bengali *brāhmaṇas* for performing Śrī Nāthjī's *sevā*, there is no explicit mention of Mādhavendra Purī himself. The SNPV does indicate, moreover, that Vallabha entrusted the over-all responsibility of the temple to his own disciple Kṛṣṇadāsa, and initiated Kumbhanadāsa as a poet-singer responsible for singing *kīrtanas* ("hymns of praise") during *sevā* (39). Vallabha is also said to have initiated three more poet-singers into the *saṃpradāya*: Sūradāsa in ca.1511; Kṛṣṇadāsa in ca.1512; and Paramānandadāsa in ca.1521 (Gaston 1997, 56).

The Bengali priests remained in charge of Śrī Nāthjī's *sevā* for a period of fourteen years. They were removed of their services by Vallabha's second son, Viṭṭhalanātha, who acceded to the *gaddī* (lit., "seat" or "throne," referring to a position of leadership) of the sect, after the premature death of his older brother Gopinātha in ca.1553. In their place, Viṭṭhalanātha appointed some Gurjara *brāhmaṇas* to perform Śrī Nāthjī's *sevā* (Vaudeville 1980, 41).

Post-Vallabha Expansion of Puṣṭimārga: Viṭṭhalanātha

Under Viṭṭhalanātha's leadership, the Puṣṭimārga sect expanded in many new directions. In terms of his theological, philosophical and literary contributions, Viṭṭhalanātha added his own commentaries to many of his father's major works: the *Anubhāṣya* (Vallabha's commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtra*); the *Tattvārthadīpanibandha* (Vallabha's major philosophical work); and the *Subodhinī*. He also contributed to Puṣṭimārga literature through his own major works: the *Bhaktihetunirṇaya*, the *Bhaktihamṣa*, and the *Vidvanmaṇḍanam*.

Viṭṭhalanātha helped secure financial assistance for the sect by making at least six fund-raising tours throughout most of North Western India (Ambalal 1987, 46), and through initiating disciples from wealthy Gujarati mercantile families. Viṭṭhalanātha also succeeded in establishing an administrative and profitable relationship with the Mughal officials of his time. According to sectarian accounts, the sect was under the protection of the Mughal emperor Akbar (ca.1542-1605), and enjoyed the freedom of establishing and expanding the Puṣṭimārga sect to their liking (Sanford 2002, 23). Furthermore, Akbar is said to have granted a considerable amount of land to Viṭṭhalanātha and his family, and donated the diamond found on the chin of Śrī Nāthjī's image (Gaston 1997, 50).

It is perhaps in the context of temple worship that Viṭṭhalanātha made his most significant contribution. He did this by greatly enhancing the aesthetic appeal of *sevā*. As a gifted poet and a musician himself, Viṭṭhalanātha was primarily an aesthete who went on to initiate four more poet-singers,¹⁴ bringing together the celebrated *aṣṭachāpa* (lit. "eight seal") poets. He established an elaborate liturgical system in which the *sevā* of Śrī

¹⁴ Viṭṭhalanātha initiated Nandadāsa, Govindasvāmi, Cittasvāmi, and Caturbhujadāsa (Gaston 1997, 56).

Nāthjī is structured according to eight divisions of the day, known as *jhāṅkīs* (“glimpses”). Each *jhāṅkī* represents a moment in Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās*, and these form the context for the daily cycle of temple worship. Viṭṭhalanātha also succeeded in integrating ritual musicians, the *kīrtanas* of the poet-singers, and backdrop paintings (*picchavāīs*) into daily worship at the temple (Ambalal 1987, 61; Lyons 2004, 18). As a result, *sevā* developed into a deeply aesthetized form of worship consisting of offerings of *rāga* (“music”), *bhoga* (“food”), and *śṛṅgāra*, which includes the *picchvāīs* and the lavish adornment of the image of Śrī Nāthjī.

The final expansion of the Puṣṭimārga tradition under Viṭṭhalanātha came in the form of securing the control of the *saṃpradāya* to his own descendents. Before passing away in ca. 1586, Viṭṭhalanātha distributed the sect’s nine principal images of Kṛṣṇa, or *svarūpas*,¹⁵ collectively known as the *nava-nidhi* (nine “treasures,” “oceans”), to his seven sons. Viṭṭhalanātha entrusted the main *svarūpa*, Śrī Nāthjī and two others, Śrī Mathureśjī and Śrī Navnītpriyajī, to his eldest son, Giridharjī (ca.1541-1621).¹⁶ Through the distribution of the *nava-nidhis* to his sons, Puṣṭimārga leadership developed and expanded in an almost dynastic fashion. The seven main centers of the sect became established through the formal installation of the nine *svarūpas* in Puṣṭimārga temples located in different parts of the country (Ambalal 1987, 47).¹⁷ Viṭṭhalanātha’s

¹⁵ The *vārtā* literature describes how Vallabha discovered these nine *svarūpas* in the course of his travels (Taylor 1997, 28-29).

¹⁶ The six other *svarūpas* were distributed to his other sons as follows: Govindarāya (ca.1543-?) received the Śrī Viṭṭhalnāthjī *svarūpa*; Bālakṛṣṇa (ca.1546-?) received the Śrī Dvārakānāthjī *svarūpa*; Gokulanātha (ca.1552-?) received the Śrī Gokulnāthjī *svarūpa*; Raghunātha (ca.1555-?) received the Śrī Gokulcandramājī *svarūpa*; Yadunātha (ca.1559-?) received the Śrī Bālkrṣṇajī/Śrī Mukundrājī *svarūpa* (there is a dispute between the descendents of Yadunātha as to whom has the ‘original’ *svarūpa*); and Ghanaśyāma (ca.1572-?) received the Śrī Madanmohanjī *svarūpa* (Ambalal 1987, 48).

¹⁷ The present locations of the nine *svarūpas* are as follows: Nathdwara (Śrī Nāthjī, Śrī Navnītpriyajī and Śrī Viṭṭhalnāthjī), Kota (Śrī Mathureśjī), Kankaroli (Śrī Dvārakānāthjī), Gokul, Vraja (Śrī Gokulnāthjī),

descendents who make up Puṣṭimārga leadership are mostly householders, and are commonly referred to as Gosvāmi (lit. “lord of cows”) and/or Mahārājā (lit. “king”). And, just as Vallabha, the Gosvāmis are also accepted as *avatāras* of Kṛṣṇa. Furthermore, according to traditional accounts Akbar’s grandson, Shah Jahan (ca.1592-1666), later honoured the Gosvāmi of the Śrī Nāthjī temple with title “Tilkayāt.” Since then, the chief Gosvāmi of the Śrī Nāthjī temple in Nāthdwara (and therefore, of the *saṃpradāya*) has been known as the Tilkayāt (Ambalal 1987, 62).

Puṣṭimārga’s Move from Vraja to Nathdwara

Vraja remained the sect’s center of worship for nearly two hundred years until the image of Śrī Nāthjī was moved to modern day Rajasthan in ca.1670. Sectarian accounts attribute the reason for this move to Śrī Nāthjī’s fondness for playing chess with a princess, Ajab Kunwar, who lived in Mewar, Rajasthan (Gaston 1997, 51). However, most Puṣṭimārga followers and scholars maintain that the Śrī Nāthjī image was removed from Vraja out of fear of the iconoclastic reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (ca.1618-1701), Shah Jahan’s son. Damodar Gosvāmi (1655-1704), one of the descendents of Viṭṭhalanātha, was responsible for transporting the image from Govardhana to Rajasthan by concealing it in a bullock cart (Ambalal 1987, 51). Although Mewar was intended as the final destination of the image, the wheel of the cart became lodged and could not be moved as the cart passed through a small town called Sinhad. The Gosvāmi and followers interpreted this event as a “divine intervention,” indicating Śrī Nāthjī’s wish to remain in the town. As a result, Sinhad was accepted as the final

Kamavan (Śrī Gokulcandramājī and Śrī Madanmohanjī), Varanasi (Śrī Mukundrājī), and Surat (Śrī Bālkrṣṇajī) (Bennett 1990, 188n7).

dwelling place of the image. The Śrī Nāthjī temple was built by ca.1672, and the town became known as Nathdwara (Skt. Nāthadvāra), the “portal” or “doorway” of/to Śrī Nāthjī. Housing the sect’s principal image, and two others (Śrī Navanītpriyajī and Śrī Viṭṭhalnāthjī), Nathdwara is now the main cultic center of the Puṣṭimārga *saṃpradāya*. The highly structured internal organization of most other Puṣṭimārga temples is a simplification of the Nathdwara pattern (Toomey 1986, 67).

Although the term *mandir* (“temple”) may be used to refer to a Puṣṭimārga shrine, the correct description and designation of one is *havelī* (“palace,” “mansion”). It has been argued that, originally, the Puṣṭimārga temples were made to look like a house in order to protect the images from Mughal invaders (Beck 1993, 78). However, the preferred theological explanation within the Puṣṭimārga tradition is that since Śrī Nāthjī (and all other images) is accepted as a *svarūpa* — a living deity — the place where he dwells is not a temple, but a home. It is for this reason that a Puṣṭimārga *havelī* is also known as Nandālaya, the “home of Nanda,” Kṛṣṇa’s adoptive father (Bennett 1990, 191).

The Mahārāja Libel Case

In terms of early scholarship on the Puṣṭimārga *saṃpradāya*, the earliest English reference to the sect appears in H. H. Wilson’s *Religious Sects of The Hindus* in 1861 (Bennett 1983, 27). Unfortunately, the scope of his study remained limited to comparing the “blatant worldliness” of Puṣṭimārga orthopraxy with the world-renouncing nature of ascetic Hinduism. Although Wilson does not make reference to it in his writing, his work was published in the midst of rumours circulating about the nefarious activities of Puṣṭimārga leaders (the Gosvāmis/Mahārājas). These rumours culminated in a highly

publicised court case involving Jadunāthajī Mahārāja of Surat and a journalist named Karshandas Mulji.

Mulji was a follower of the Puṣṭimārga tradition and later founded a weekly news journal, *Satya Prakāś* (“the light of truth”) with the intention of making known the sects’ practices and ideologies. In 1860 he published an article in which he described the tradition as a “corrupt, degraded and licentious sect” (Mulji 1865, 1). Furthermore, he accused the Mahārājas of manipulating the sect’s ideologies into a “code of vicious immorality and the most hideous sensuality” (7) by dishonouring the wives and daughters of their followers. He substantiates his allegations by referring to the formal rite of initiation in which the *Brahmasambandha/ātmanivedana* mantra is given to the devotee. By reciting the mantra the devotee makes a pledge to first dedicate all his possessions, mind, body, senses, and even his wife and children to Kṛṣṇa before he accepts them and makes use of them as his own. Being a descendant of Vallabha, the Mahārāja is accepted as an *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa. In light of this, rumours arose in which newly wedded husbands would allegedly “offer” their brides to the Mahārājas for the Mahārājas’ own “use” before consummating their own marriage. Accepting this rumour as true, Mulji accused the sect of making the “subject of sexual intercourse most prominent ... [where] adultery is made familiar to the minds of all: it is nowhere discouraged or denounced” (142). Soon after these claims were made the Mahārāja of Surat, Jadunāthajī, filed a action for libel against Karshandas Mulji. The case became known as the “Mahārāja Libel Case,” and involved the examination of over sixty witnesses (Bennett 1983, 28). It was brought to trial in 1862 and Mulji later published a book, *History of the Sect of Maharajas or Vallabhacharyas in Western India*, in which he discussed Puṣṭimārga history, the sect’s

subsequent “degeneration,” and provided a detailed account of the case and court hearings.

Suffice it to say, because of the libel case, the Puṣṭimārga attracted a considerable amount of negative attention from the general public, and also influenced the writings of Orientalist scholars on the subject. As Peter Bennett illustrates, the case

provided a temporary focus for the contemporary debate on the ethical standards of Hinduism. For British scholars and administrators it provided yet another instance of the fantastic diversity of Hindu religions, of how degraded and anthropomorphic superstitions could exist alongside the high-toned mysticism of the *Vedas*. And it strengthened the resolve of Hindu middle-class reformers and apologists to sift out the finer elements of their ancestral faith and to throw away the dross. (1983, 29)

It is perhaps for this reason that until recently the Puṣṭimārga tradition has not received much serious scholarly attention, and that very few of the tradition’s primary texts have been translated into English.

The purpose of this Introduction was to provide the reader with an understanding of the social history of the Puṣṭimārga sect, and to posit an origin for Puṣṭimārga practice. In the following chapter, the focus shifts to an examination of the primary text of the tradition, namely the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. We will explore Vallabha’s interpretations of several themes as they relate to Kṛṣṇa within the text, such as emotional *bhakti*, sacred narrative, and *līlā*.

Chapter One

Vallabha's Kṛṣṇa: Themes of Emotional Bhakti, Sacred Narrative, and Līlā from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa

“Without the bristling of the hair of the body, without the mind dissolving, without being inarticulate because of tears of joy, without *bhakti*, how can the heart be purified?”

- *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (BP): XI.14.23-24

Vallabha posits the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as the foundational scripture of the Puṣṭimārga tradition. In this chapter, I focus on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s emphasis on corporeal, emotional, and sense-oriented aesthetic experience. Using intricate narrative components and poetry, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* reveals deeply embedded theological and philosophical themes such as Kṛṣṇa's transforming grace, his subordination to his devotee's love, the experience of love-in-separation (*viraha-bhakti*), the salvific experience of love-in-union (*sam̐yoga-bhakti*), and the devotee's desire to be intimately associated with Kṛṣṇa in the context of his *līlās*. In presenting several of these narratives from the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, I demonstrate how their underlying theological and philosophical themes come to affect and engender Vallabha's own philosophical formulations.

Text, Meaning, and Authority in Vallabha's Philosophy

Like the founders of other Indic theistic and philosophical traditions, Vallabha was also concerned with systemizing the means to acquiring valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) about God and reality. Although the number of *pramāṇas* may vary from one to as many as six within each tradition, most Indian logicians agree in accepting three: *pratyakṣa*

(“perception”), *anumāna* (“inference”), and *śabda* (“verbal testimony”) (Hiriyanna 2000, 43). Vallabha, however, posits *śabda pramāṇa* as the most authoritative means to acquiring knowledge in preference to perception, inference and any “philosophy of rationality,” such as *nyāya*. Jeffrey Timm argues that it is the genuine and full affirmation of god’s revealment, both incarnational *and scriptural*, that is fundamental to Vallabha’s theistic philosophy (1988, 114 emphasis mine). It is in accepting the precedence of scriptural revelation, and more importantly, of God’s revealment as scripture, that Vallabha presents a unique and alternative perspective of the “divine word” (108). For example, Vallabha states that words, letters and therefore, even literature are eternal and are of the form of god (*Tattvārthadīpanibandha* (hereafter TDN) II, v. 154-155). Thus any literary form such as philosophy, mythology and poetry can be an authentic means of revealing the true nature of god (Timm 1988, 121).

In verse 7 of his TDN (I), Vallabha announces that “*śabda eva pramāṇa*” (“*śabda* is the only *pramāṇa*”) and enumerates the Vedas, the *Gītā*, the *Brahmasūtra* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as the four *pramāṇas*. These texts are then accepted as the four foundational scriptures (*prasthānas*) of the Puṣṭimārga tradition. A few verses later, he continues to classify some of these texts/*pramāṇas* according to which ones reveal a form of Kṛṣṇa. Vallabha writes: “In the Vedas, Kṛṣṇa is described in the form of *yajña* [“sacrifice”] as *kriyā-śakti* [“power of action”]; in the Upaniṣads, Kṛṣṇa is described in the form of *sākāra Brahman* [“Brahman with form”] as *jñāna-śakti* [“power of knowledge”]; in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* Kṛṣṇa is described in his full form as both *kriyā-śakti* and as *jñāna-śakti*” (v. 11). Not only does this latter verse serve to reinstate which texts are important for Vallabha, but it also reveals which text is his most preferred,

namely, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. For Vallabha, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the final scriptural authority to which all devotees should turn and by which the meaning of all other scriptures may be known.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is special for Vallabha not only because it describes Kṛṣṇa's full form and manifestation, but also because it is accepted as Kṛṣṇa's very form and manifestation, that is, as Kṛṣṇa's "literary substitute" or *vāṇmayāvatāra* (Bryant 2003, xxxi). This notion is exemplified in several works by Vallabha and Puṣṭimārga theologians. For example, in the introduction to his commentary on Vallabha's treatise, *Antaḥkaraṇaprabodhaḥ*, Viṭṭhalanātha's fourth son and prominent Puṣṭimārga theologian, Gokulanātha, states how Kṛṣṇa "manifested himself on earth in the form of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*" (Redington 2000, 88). This idea is also beautifully illustrated by Vallabha himself in his *Subodhinī* (X.31.9) when he speaks in the voice of the *gopīs* as they address Kṛṣṇa:

'...your story has the same sort of power as You Yourself have. Like Yourself, Your story ... grants ultimate freedom, and embodies absolute Joy [*ānanda*]' . For 'Your story is like the nectar of immortality.' The nectar of immortality consists of the mood and essence (Skt. *rasa*) of the Blessed Lord Himself ... in its nature and in its qualities Your story is just like You, and it is that story which has kept us alive ... Your story has come along with You, and it does not disappear. (Redington 1990, 204)

The last part of the excerpt indicates how the *gopīs* seem to conceive of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as being even superior to Kṛṣṇa himself, for unlike Kṛṣṇa, his story "does not disappear." The interpretation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as Kṛṣṇa's very form has important theological implications: through reading, hearing and reciting the text one is actually able to connect and interact with Kṛṣṇa himself.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Sanskrit Origins of Emotional Bhakti

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is primarily a Vaiṣṇava theological text and is the most well-known of the eighteen *Purāṇas* of the Sanskrit textual tradition.¹⁸ It consists of three hundred and fifty five chapters divided into twelve cantos, and includes “sacred stories, philosophical discourse, and epic poetry that all respond to the essential question of what one is to do to prepare for death” (Schweig 2005, 16).¹⁹ Among the twelve cantos however it is the tenth, which describes the life and *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa that is the most important. It is also the longest, consisting of ninety chapters and comprising one quarter of the full *Purāṇa*. Within the tenth canto moreover, it is the *gopī* episodes, especially the five chapters describing Kṛṣṇa’s dance (*rāsa-līlā*) with the *gopīs* (collectively called the *Rāsa-Pañcādhyāyī*), that have played a pivotal role in the development of later Vaiṣṇava traditions. The *rāsa-līlā* can unequivocally be described as the “ultimate message” of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and therefore as James Redington argues, it is also the most important for Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha and other Puṣṭimārga theologians (1990, 21).

¹⁸ Unlike the other *Purāṇas*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has eighty-one commentaries attributed to it — in Sanskrit alone; the most famous commentator being Śrīdhara. And, although, it was the first *Purāṇa* to have been translated into a European language, it still remains a very under-studied text in western academia. According to Edwin Bryant, the first western scholar to translate its tenth canto, “this is mainly because the Victorian sensibilities of certain nineteenth-century western (and westernized Indian) critics were offended by the amorous liaisons of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhāgavata*, causing the Kṛṣṇa of this text to be passed over in most intellectual circles in favour of the more righteous Kṛṣṇa of the *Gītā* — a text which has seen hundreds of non-Indian translations. This neglect continues to the present day” (xiii). Other than Bryant’s translation, Graham M. Schweig (2005) has recently translated the five *rāsa-līlā* chapters of the tenth canto, and Friedhelm Hardy (1983) provides an extensive study of early Kṛṣṇa devotion in South India and the “emotional *bhakti*” of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in his voluminous *Viraha Bhakti*.

¹⁹ It follows that the renowned king Parīkṣit was cursed by the son of a sage and was expected to die in seven days. As he lay waiting at the bank of a river until he died, he asked sage Śuka “what is the duty of one who is about to die” (BP 1.9.37). Thus the greater part of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* presents the dialogue that ensued between sage Śuka and king Parīkṣit (Schweig 2005, 16-17)

According to sectarian accounts, and its own narrative (BP I.5.2-9), the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is said to have been written by the sage Vyāsa. It follows that after Vyāsa finished compiling all the Vedas and the epic *Mahābhārata* he still remained dissatisfied. He turned to his teacher, the sage Nārada, for advice on how to appease his state of discontent. Nārada informed Vyāsa that the reason he still feels unfulfilled is because he has not yet described the highest knowledge, namely, the greatness of Kṛṣṇa. Thus the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is regarded as the *galitaṃ phalam*, the “ripened fruit,” of the tree of the Vedas (BP I.1.3). As Vallabha maintains, the *Purāṇa* is thought of as the final essence of all scriptures, marking their completion “by crowning them with the full theology of Vishnu or Krishna” (Schweig 2005, 13). The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is also considered to be Vyāsa’s own commentary on the *Brahma Sūtra* by some commentators (Bryant 2003, xliii), and Vallabha declares the text to be Vyāsa’s own *samādhībhāṣā* or a “speech spoken from deep meditation” (TDN I, v. 7).

For devotees, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* dates from the time when Kṛṣṇa appeared on Earth. It is also believed to be eternal, an ongoing revelation. Historically, however, many scholars would argue that it is perhaps a futile task in trying to assign absolute dates to the final compilation of the *Purāṇa* since one would have to assign dates to individual sections within the text itself. Edwin Bryant seems to agree with Dennis Hudson in dating books nine and ten to as early as 700 B.C.E. and proposes that “during its process of development, it was being handed down orally from the time of the compilation of its core [books nine and ten]” (2002, 68). Nevertheless, most scholars maintain that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the latest of the eighteen *Purāṇas* believed to have been compiled into its present form by no later than the 9th century C.E. (Hardy 1983,

488; Farquhar 1967, 232-233), and it “is the one *Purāṇa*, which, more than any of the others, bears the stamp of a unified composition” (Winternitz 1927, 556; Bryant 2002, 63).

Most scholars also generally agree on the question of where the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was written/compiled. It is believed to have been composed in the Tamil-speaking region of South India by a group or community of Brahmins or ascetics belonging to the *Bhāgavata* sect (Hardy 1983, 488; Farquhar 1967, 233). Several authors have alluded to a passage from within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself, which appears to point towards a South Indian origin. The passage begins with stating how men born in earlier *yugas* wished to be born again in the *kaliyuga* as great devotees of Viṣṇu. These souls would be born in various places, “but in the Drāviḍa land [South India] they would be found in some numbers, living by the side of such rivers as the Tāmraparṇī, Kṛtamālā, Payaśvinī, and Kāverī” (BP XI.5.38-40). There is also the well-known passage from the *Bhāgavata Mahātmya* (I. 27) (found in the *Padma Purāṇa*) in which *bhakti* is personified as a woman who having been born in Drāviḍa grows and matures as she passes through central and then to northern India.

However, this latter reference to the South Indian origin of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* can only be fully appreciated if one understands the “type” of *bhakti* the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* represents. According to Friedhelm Hardy, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* marks the beginning of and expresses for the first time, at least in Sanskrit, “emotional Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*” as opposed to the “intellectual *bhakti*” of the *Gītā*, the *Harivaṃśa* (1st-3rd century C.E.; a supplement to the *Mahābhārata*), and the earlier *Purāṇas*, such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1st-4th century C.E.) (38). The *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* may have served

as literary models for the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, however, unlike these texts “the art of savouring the deity through different nuances of feelings began with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*” (Hacker qtd. in Hardy, 39).

Though, the question yet to be answered is what — or more specifically whom — provided the context that gave rise to the emotionalism of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. It was perhaps Govindacharya (1902) and then Bhandarkar (1913) who first attempted to answer this question by recognizing the correlation between the men spoken of above in the passage from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Tamil Vaiṣṇava poet-saints, the Ālvārs (Hardy 41; Bryant 2002, 63). They too lived in the “Drāviḍa land” and were passionate followers of Viṣṇu, writing devotional poetry imbued with rapturous emotion.

Friedhelm Hardy corroborates this claim by systematically comparing passages from the *gopī* episodes in the tenth canto with the poetry of the Ālvārs. John Hawley furthers the argument by illustrating how several narratives found within the tenth canto appeared in an earlier Tamil epic, the *Cilappatikāram*, composed sometime between the fourth and sixth centuries C.E. Such narratives include the reenactment of Kṛṣṇa’s dance with the *gopīs* (Skt., *rāsālīlānukarāṇa*), Kṛṣṇa’s stealing of the *gopīs*’ clothes and even the popular story of Kṛṣṇa’s stealing of butter (1983, 36-37). Hawley continues by showing how Periyālvār’s *Tirumoli* also includes a substantial amount of poetry describing Kṛṣṇa’s mischievousness and childhood *līlās* (38).

It is evident that the Sanskrit writers of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* drew much of their inspiration from the Tamil culture around them. And as Hardy formalizes, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* represents the result of the confluence between South Indian Tamil culture and North Indian “Sanskritic”/Brahmanic culture. It is an attempt

to harmonize the various complexes involved in this encounter and to resolve the tensions it had given rise to. Simplifying issues considerably, we can say: Northern culture oriented itself by a social system ... and an ideology (the Vedānta ...), while Southern culture was characterized by an emotional religion (of the Ālvārs) and by great aesthetic sensibility ... [the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*] tries to integrate all four complexes, and it uses the symbol of the Vedas to achieve this, while adopting the purāṇic literary form. Thus, as authors have time and again pointed out, the BhP stands quite apart from other *purāṇas* — it is an *opus universale* attempting to encompass everything. (489)

In regards to its ideological orientation, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* makes references to several philosophical systems such as Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Vedānta, etc. There are passages that seem to betray an Advaitic position,²⁰ however, such Advaitic themes reflect a type of “theistic monism” rather than the Kevalādvaita Vedānta philosophy of Śaṅkara (Hopkins 1966, 6; Bryant 2002, 53).

It is its exposition and celebration of *bhakti-bhāva*, “the delightful experience of the emotion of love-permeated, selfless devotion to Krishna” (Redington 1990, 8), and its emphasis on god’s transforming grace that makes the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* exceptional. As S.K. De illustrates, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* “is one of the most remarkable mediaeval documents of mystical and passionate religious devotion ... it asserts the rights of the emotional and the aesthetic in human nature, and appeals to the exceedingly familiar and authentic feelings and sentiments.” (1961, 7). The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s presentation of the *bhakti-mārga* as the superior path to god also makes it a popular, accessible form of knowledge.²¹ The process and experience of *bhakti*, though, is not only a means to

²⁰ “Kṛṣṇa has no beginning and no end, no inside and no outside. He is the beginning and end and inside and outside of the universe. He is the universe” (BP X.9.13); “Śrī Bhagavān said: ‘There can never be any separation between you and myself, because I am the soul of everything...’” (BP X.47.29); “Thus Kṛṣṇa ... sported with the beautiful girls of Vraj ... like a child enraptured by his own reflection” (BP X.33.16)

²¹ For example, as Kṛṣṇa advises his companion Uddhava: “Yoga does not subdue me, nor Sāṅkhya, nor *dharma*, nor recitation of the Veda to oneself, nor religious austerity, nor abandonment as does strong devotion to me ... I am overcome by *bhakti* alone...” (XI.14.20-22). Vallabha very clearly declares in his

salvation, but is accepted as — and often accepted *over* — salvation itself. That is, when given a choice a true devotee would rather live a life dedicated to the loving worship of Kṛṣṇa than achieve any one of the five types of liberation outlined in Bhāgavata theology.²² This viewpoint is reflected in most Vaiṣṇava traditions and emerges in Puṣṭimārga soteriology as well. As we shall see later, Vallabha describes the highest reward of Puṣṭimārga *bhakti* as a state in which a devotee continues to perform the loving *sevā* of Kṛṣṇa while still alive (*alaukikasāmarthya*); it is a form of “liberation-in-life” or *jīvan-mukti*.

The devotion the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* presents is one in which an individual’s whole body, including the mind and senses, are fully absorbed in the loving worship of Kṛṣṇa. The distinctive nature of such devotionism, classified as *navavidha-bhakti* (“nine steps/stages of *bhakti*”), is described by the devotee Prahlaḍa as follows:

Hearing about, praising, remembering, and attendance on the feet of Viṣṇu, honoring Him, saluting Him respectfully, service to Him, friendship with Him, and offering oneself to Him ... If *bhakti* fixed by a person on Viṣṇu having these nine characteristics is directed to Bhagavān, then certainly the Highest is attained in thus thinking of Him. (BP VII.5.23-24)

Examples of such acts of devotion are interspersed throughout the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and such an elaborate description of the ritual worship of Kṛṣṇa is absent in the *Harivaṁśa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (Sheth 1984, 114).

As we shall see in the next section, the “emotional *bhakti*” of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* inspired important theological developments within various medieval Vaiṣṇava

treatise, *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* (v.19), that the path of devotion is superior to the path of knowledge (*jñāna-mārga*): “*jñānadhiko bhaktimārga*” (Redington 2000, 30).

²² These five types of liberation are: *sārūpya*, having the same form as god; *sārṣṭi*, having the same opulence as god; *sālokyā*, living in the same abode as god; *sāmīpya*, living close to god; and *sāyujya*, merging with god (Bryant 2003, xxxv, n44). In BP 3.29.12-13, we see an example of how devotees of Kṛṣṇa are offered these five types of liberation but decline them to serve god instead.

traditions, such as the Bengali Gauḍīya and Puṣṭimārga sects. It still remains exceedingly influential within these communities, and has also acquired a prominent theological status within other Vaiṣṇava traditions including the Śrīvaiṣṇava, Madhva and Nimbārka sects, and represents one of the major scriptural links across these traditions. And, as Edwin Bryant notes, the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has transcended the realm of religious discourse and practice by inspiring “more derivative literature, poetry, drama, dance, theatre, and art than any other text in the history of Sanskrit literature” (2003 lxvii).²³

Sacred Narrative in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa

Having introduced the “emotional *bhakti*” of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, we now focus our discussion on the important theological and philosophical themes presented within the tenth canto of the text. As I have noted, these themes, which influence and become incorporated within Puṣṭimārga thought, are revealed via elaborate narrative and poetic components. Such narratives include the celebrated story of Yaśodā (Kṛṣṇa’s mother) attempting to tie her son after she catches him stealing butter, and her experience of glimpsing into Kṛṣṇa’s mouth when she accuses him of eating mud. Both these narratives come to illustrate how Kṛṣṇa, out of his grace, prefers to subordinate himself to his devotee’s love and would rather be approached and experienced as a son, friend or lover, rather than be worshiped as a God. The narrative of Kṛṣṇa sending his messenger, Uddhava, to visit Gokula while he is away reveals how it is the *bhakti* of the Gokula dwellers, especially the *viraha-bhakti* and *sarvātmabhāva* (“total love”) expressed by the

²³ With the possible exception of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Bryant 2003, lxvii).

gopīs, that becomes exemplary of the devotional experience. And finally, the *rāsa-līlā* narratives demonstrate how it is the physical presence of Kṛṣṇa that the *gopīs* (and all devotees) desire above all else, and how it is in the context of *līlā* that devotees come to intimately associate themselves with Kṛṣṇa and experience the *rasa* of *bhakti*.

David Kinsley notes three doctrines that form the basis of Vaiṣṇava theology:

(i) as we have already discussed above, the idea of the centrality of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, especially the tenth book; (ii) the idea that Kṛṣṇa is not just an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, but is the *avatārin*, that is, the “Supreme God” from whom all other *avatāras* manifest; (iii) the superiority of the supreme god as *Bhagavān*, having infinite attributes (*saguṇa*), and as a bestower of grace and liberation, over an unqualified (*nirguṇa*), abstract Brahman (1979, 103-104).

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* functions to narrate the emergence and deeds of Viṣṇu’s various manifestations, and even lists Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu’s twentieth *avatāra*. However, as the very size and elaborate nature of book ten illustrates, it is the *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa that takes precedence over all others; it is Kṛṣṇa as “Bhagavān” that gives the *Purāṇa* its very name (Bryant 2003, xiii). Unlike most other Hindu gods, moreover, Kṛṣṇa’s birth, childhood and adolescence are described in intimate detail, and the pre-eminence of Kṛṣṇa over all other manifestations soon emerges.²⁴ The passage from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* most referred to by Vaiṣṇava theologians to justify Kṛṣṇa’s supremacy is the following: “These [other incarnations] are *aṁśa*, or *kalā* [partial incarnations], but

²⁴ In the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa is still considered an incarnation of Viṣṇu, while in the *Harivaṁśa* Kṛṣṇa is slowly starting to absorb the identity of Viṣṇu as his own. Richard Barz argues that the worship of Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme God existed by the time the *Gītā* was composed, and even well before the beginning of the Christian Era (1992, 7). However, it is certain that it is in the *Purāṇas*, especially the *Bhāgavata* and *Brahma-vaivarta* (11th-12th century C.E.) that Kṛṣṇa is fully extolled as the “Supreme God” (Chatterjee 1976, 52).

kṛṣṇastu bhagavān svayam [Kṛṣṇa is *Bhagavān*, God, himself]” (BP I.3.28) (Bryant 2003, xxi). Later, in book ten, the compiler of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* affirms Kṛṣṇa as Brahman, thereby aligning the god of the *Purāṇa* (Kṛṣṇa) with the “Absolute Reality” of the Upaniṣads and *Brahma-sūtras*.²⁵ In the Puṣṭimārga tradition, Vallabha describes Kṛṣṇa as the “Supreme Person” or Puruṣottama and acknowledges him as *parabrahman*, the “Highest Brahman,” being the very source of Viṣṇu and of *nirguṇa* Brahman.²⁶

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* introduces Kṛṣṇa as an *avatāra* whose ostensible purpose is to kill the evil Kāṁsa and reestablish Ugrasena to his rightful throne. However, as Puruṣottama (“the highest person”), Kṛṣṇa is no ordinary *avatāra*; he is a *puṇāvātāra*, that is, “the complete and essential manifestation of what is usually unmanifest, the revelation of the Absolute in his essential and complete form” (Kinsley 1979, 104). In his *Subodhinī* (X.29.14), Vallabha elaborates upon this notion by commenting on how Kṛṣṇa did not manifest himself in order to relieve the earth of *adharma* and restore *dharma*: “When His motive is to relieve the earth of a heavy burden, or something of the sort, He manifests Himself in another form. Therefore, it was solely for the sake of the ultimate happiness of all people that the Blessed Lord made Himself manifest” (Redington 1990, 66). According to Vallabha, Kṛṣṇa resorted to a human body “solely for the sake of giving Grace to His devotees ... to confer His very own Joy on Gokula” (*Subodhinī* X.33.37; 304).

²⁵ For example: “Homage to that person, who is you, God, *Bhagavān*, the virtuous Vāsudeva, *Brahman*. Your glory is hidden by the brilliant qualities of your own self.” (BP X.10.33); “See the good fortune, O just see the good fortune of Nanda the *gopa* and the residents of Vraj! Their friend is the supreme bliss, the eternal absolute *Brahman*!” (BP X.14.32)

²⁶ In his TDN (I), Vallabha announces: “...the one god is only the son of Devakī [i.e., Kṛṣṇa]; ... and the only karma is his *sevā*” (v. 4). Furthermore, in his treatise, *Siddhāntamuktāvalī*, Vallabha declares *param brahma tu kṛṣṇo hi*, that is, “the supreme *brhman* is Kṛṣṇa indeed” (v. 3).

Kṛṣṇa's Powers of Concealment in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa

Although the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* succeeds in raising Kṛṣṇa to the level of supreme God, it is not the older, wiser, spiritual-teacher aspect — the Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata* or *Gītā* — that is considered Brahman, but rather the child (*bāla*) and adolescent (*gopāla*) form of him. Kṛṣṇa is the only deity who is portrayed as being so amorous, charming, playful and, thus, accessible. In fact, his divinity at times is in total abeyance and he is instead seen as the adorable yet mischievous child of Nanda and Yaśodā, the caring friend of the young *gopas*, and the playful lover of the *gopīs*.²⁷ Whether or not the inhabitants of Vraja know Kṛṣṇa's "true" identity is unclear. They are generally presented as being ignorant of his divinity, though, there are moments in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* when the *gopas* turn to Kṛṣṇa and proclaim: "You are the knower of all *dharma*, Kṛṣṇa ... We have accepted you as our Lord, and have surrendered to you" (BP X.19.10), and have decided that indeed "Kṛṣṇa was an immortal" (BP X.19.14).

As for the readers, listeners and reciters of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*,

it is axiomatic that [they] ... should begin with a full consciousness of Kṛṣṇa's identity; and the consciousness can never be totally lost. But it can be blunted; [for example] it is possible for the *childness* of the child to be pushed further to the front of our consciousness than the *identity* of the child. It is possible for the audience, caught up in the events of the narrative, to begin to view those events through the clouded vision of the characters themselves. (Bryant 1978, 38)

Soon, one comes to realize and appreciate that it does not matter whether the inhabitants of Vraja — or even devotees — know of Kṛṣṇa's divine status or perceive him as a divine being; rather, what is important is to "to feel god, to be moved by him" (Ingalls 1984, xii). The significance that is placed on experiencing God as one's own, that is, as a son,

²⁷ David Kinsely argues that it is because of this relegation of Kṛṣṇa's divinity or identity as an all-powerful god to the background that explains why, in North Indian Vaiṣṇava traditions, the two-armed form of Kṛṣṇa is considered superior to the four-armed or many-armed form of Kṛṣṇa (1979, 108).

friend, or lover reveals a unique conception of the divine in Vaiṣṇava theology: “the supreme self-subordination of the Lord to human love” (Chatterjee 1976, 70), thereby placing human love superior to Kṛṣṇa’s divinity. This act of concealing or limiting his powers and independence is really an act of his grace, a special favor given to his favorite devotees. A well-known narrative from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* used to exemplify this “special favor” is when Yaśodā attempts to tie the child Kṛṣṇa after she finds him feeding the stolen butter to a monkey. No matter how many ropes she joins together, they are always too short to tie the child. However, after “seeing the efforts of his mother, whose limbs were sweating and whose wreath of flowers had fallen from her hair, Kṛṣṇa became compliant in his own binding ... [and] the quality of submission to [his] devotee was demonstrated by Hari [Kṛṣṇa] despite the fact that he is only constrained by his own free will.” (BP X.9.18-19). What this narrative emphasizes is that it is only by devotion that one is able to be so close to god and for god to *want* to be so close to his devotee. For, “neither Brahmā, nor Śiva, nor even Śrī, the goddess of fortune, despite being united with his body, obtained the benediction which the *gopī* obtained from Kṛṣṇa” (BP X.9.20).

On other occasions, Kṛṣṇa uses a form of his powers of illusion or *māyā* to ensure that the inhabitants of Vraja do not perceive of him as god. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the term *māyā* is used in its common interpretation as “cosmic illusion,” a power that keeps *jīvas* ignorant and attached to the world and involved in *saṃsāra*. However, in the context of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* another form of *māyā*, known as *yogamāyā*, exists. *Yogamāyā*, which is also personified as a goddess, accomplishes two concomitant effects during *līlā*: it conceals the greatness (*aiśvarya*) of Kṛṣṇa and acts as a catalyst for intimate interactions with him (Schweig 2005, 135). An episode within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

that helps illustrate the effect of *yogamāyā* is when Yaśodā scolds Kṛṣṇa for eating mud. When Kṛṣṇa insists that he did not, his mother looks into his mouth and instead of finding mud there Yaśodā sees the stars, the planets, the entire universe of “moving and non-moving things” (BP X.8.37-38). Yaśodā becomes overwhelmed and comes to realize her son’s divine nature. However, as she begins to pay homage to his feet, Kṛṣṇa casts his *yogamāyā* “in the form of maternal affection over the *gopī*, who had come to understand the truth. Immediately, the *gopī*’s memory was erased. She sat her son on her lap and returned to her previous state of mind, with her heart full of intense love” (BP X.8.43-44). Kṛṣṇa would rather subject himself to Yaśodā’s maternal love than be worshipped by her as a god. He is content with eating butter and sitting on his mother’s lap. When he is older, we see an example of when Kṛṣṇa places *himself* under the influence of his *yogamāyā* in order to enjoy the intimacy of love with the *gopīs*: “even *Bhagavān*, God himself, beholding those nights, with autumnal jasmine [*mallika*] flowers blossoming, called upon his divine power of *yogamāyā*, and turned his thoughts towards enjoying love” (BP X.29.1).

Emotion and Narrative in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Vallabha’s Subodhinī

The residents of Vraja are considered the ultimate *bhakti* role models due to their exceptional experience and expression of *bhakti*-based emotion. In the forty-sixth chapter of the tenth canto, one comes across a description of this when Kṛṣṇa and his brother, Balarāma, leave for Mathurā in order to slay Kāṁsa. While in Mathurā, Kṛṣṇa sends his friend Uddhava back to Gokula in order to console his parents and the *gopīs*. When he arrives in Gokula, Uddhava sees how “Nanda’s mind was full of Kṛṣṇa;

reminiscing over and over in this way ... he was experiencing extreme longing, and was overwhelmed with the force of love” (BP X.46.27). And when Uddhava spoke about Kṛṣṇa to Yaśodā, she “shed tears, and her breasts discharged milk from love” (BP X.46.28). Upon witnessing such a display of intense affection, Uddhava tells them that they are “both the most praiseworthy of embodied beings in this world” (BP X.46.30). However, as Kṛṣṇa himself predicted, it is the *gopīs* that appear to be suffering the most due to his absence. While requesting Uddhava to go back to Gokula, Kṛṣṇa describes the *gopīs*’ state accurately, and tells Uddhava to free them of their anguish for “their minds are concentrated on me, their lives devoted to me, and they have given up all bodily needs for me ... their most beloved and their life and soul” (BP X.46.3). It is in this state of separation from Kṛṣṇa that the *gopīs*’ devotion is passionately expressed, as they subdue their suffering by constantly singing about, remembering, and meditatively imagining Kṛṣṇa’s various *līlās* (*bhāvana*). After seeing their total love (*sarvātmabhāva*) for Kṛṣṇa which is characterized by their complete absorption in him even in separation, Uddhava declares the *gopīs* to be “the highest embodied beings on the earth. Their love for Govinda, the soul of everything, is perfected” (BP X.47.58). One comes to realize that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself posits the *gopīs* as paradigmatic devotees of Kṛṣṇa, when Uddhava, upon praising their exemplary devotion, wishes he could “become any of the shrubs, creepers, or plants in Vṛndāvana that enjoy the dust of the feet of these women” (X.47.61).

For Hardy, the “emotional bhakti” of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is seen especially in the state of separation experienced by the *gopīs* and is thus best characterized as *viraha bhakti*: devotion in which the sentiment of separation is cultivated (Narayanan 1985,

14).²⁸ The archetypical *viraha* is the *viraha* of the *gopīs*, and the most compelling display of it occurs in the *Rāsa Pañcādhyāyī*. Kṛṣṇa, after engaging in “amorous pleasures” with the *gopīs* vanishes because the *gopīs* had become proud thinking themselves to be the best of women on earth. After having just been in the presence of their beloved, the *gopīs* were not able to endure such a loss. They became distraught and searched frantically for Kṛṣṇa everywhere. They experienced a state of divine madness (*unmāda*) in which their very selves were transformed into Kṛṣṇa and began to imitate his various *līlās*.²⁹ In this state of separation and having “their minds absorbed in Kṛṣṇa, the *gopīs*’ conversation focused on him, and they dedicated their hearts to him...” (BP X.30.43) after which they began to sing about Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās* in hopes of seeing him again.

It is this intense experience of separation from god, *viraha bhakti*, that the prominent Puṣṭimārga theologian, Harirāya, considers the highest stage of love of Kṛṣṇa (Redington 2000, 172). Clearly, Vallabha also recognizes the devotional significance of experiencing *viraha*, for in his treatise, *Nirodhalakṣaṇam* (v.1), Vallabha prays for experiencing this state of separation himself: “whatever suffering Yashoda and Nanda and other people in Gokula experienced, and whatever suffering the *gopīs* experienced, please let that suffering be my portion every now and then” (177). However, what Vallabha is essentially asking for is a transformative suffering-in-separation in which a devotee becomes increasingly attached (*āsakti*) and obsessed (*vyasana*) with Kṛṣṇa by constantly thinking about him and his *līlās* since “love for Kṛṣṇa is perfected by

²⁸ Hardy views separation as the basic relationship between man and the absolute and therefore as Narayanan attests, Hardy seems to view this state of separation in the “philosophical sense of ‘differentiation’ within the absolute” (1985, 14).

²⁹ Theatrical plays or dramas in which Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* are re-enacted are called “*rāsalīlās*” or more accurately “*rāsalīlānukaraṇa*,” the imitation of the *rāsa-līla* — although, the *rāsalīlās* are not the re-enactment of the *rāsa* dance alone. Nevertheless, today’s actors declare the *gopīs* themselves as the “original” imitators of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* as described in chapter 30 of the *Rāsa-Pañcādhyāyī* (Hein 1972, 129).

meditative imagining [*bhāvanayā*]” (170). Furthermore, as mentioned in the Introduction, Vallabha feels that it is only for the purpose of continuing to experience this *viraha* in the advanced stages of devotion that one may renounce the world. And according to him, the *gopīs* are the *gurus* of such *viraha bhakti* and thus of renunciation. But, this renunciation is different from that of the ascetics; it is a type of “renunciant devotion” in which a devotee displays deranged behavior (*vikalatvam*), and experiences sickness/discomfort (*asvāsthyam*) or “loss of self-possession” out of their love and longing for Kṛṣṇa. As Vallabha affirms, it is “no ordinary, literally ‘created’ (*prākṛtam*), condition. One might say it is of grace (*puṣṭi*), not nature (*prakṛti*)” (170).

This notion of the experience of *viraha* being a form of grace is confirmed by Kṛṣṇa himself. When he returns before the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa consoles them by explaining how his disappearance is a situation “like that of the poor man who is not conscious of anything else when the wealth that he had gained is lost, but continues to contemplate that wealth obsessively; In this way, O women, when I disappeared from your presence ... it was really to further [your dedication] to me. I was serving you.” (BP X.33.20-21). In his *Subodhinī* (X.30.13), Vallabha describes how the experience of such *viraha* and the consequent passionate attachment (*āśakti*), obsession (*vyasana*), and meditative imagining (*bhāvana*) that result from it, succeeds in “permanently establishing the mood of love [*śṛṅgāra-rasa*] for Kṛṣṇa in the *gopīs*” (Redington 1990, 157). Therefore, even in a state of separation devotees may still experience the unconditioned delight (*rasa*) of devotion.

It is clear that within Puṣṭimārga theology the *gopīs* are also considered to be archetypical devotees. As Graham Schweig illustrates, “the passionate love of the Gopīs

becomes the model, the veritable symbol, of the highest, most intense devotion to God” (2005, 3). Kṛṣṇa himself declares that it is only through emulating the love of the *gopīs* that he can be attained, their path being superior to all others (BP XI.12.8-9). Kṛṣṇa goes as far as saying that because their love is so exceptional even he can not reciprocate it (BP X.32.22). However, soon after he states this he begins the *rāsa* dance with the young women of Vraja. Indeed, this is how Kṛṣṇa reciprocates and rewards the *gopīs*’ devotion: by performing his *rāsa-līlās* with them and imbuing them with *śṛṅgāra-rasa*.

The Rasa of Rāsa: Experiencing the Body of Kṛṣṇa

Individuals and scholars within Vaiṣṇava traditions argue that the *gopīs* in fact represent human souls, and symbolize the yearning and merging of the *jīvas* with Kṛṣṇa, or even that the *gopīs* personify the *śaktis* (“powers”) of Kṛṣṇa (Barz 1992, 90). This may have been the intention of the compiler of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, or it can perhaps be reflective of an attempt to gloss over the explicit sexual content found in the *Rāsa Pañcādhyāyī*. However one wishes to interpret it, whether at a symbolic or literal level, the *rāsa-līlā* chapters, particularly the *rāsa* dance and the amorous pleasures of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, represent the highest level of intimacy between Kṛṣṇa and his devotees. To be in the presence of Kṛṣṇa, be emotionally intimate with him, and to sensually experience his *līlās* is the greatest reward in Bhāgavata and Puṣṭimārga theology.³⁰ As Uddhava says:

³⁰ It is perhaps for this reason that Vallabha, Viṭṭhalanātha and other Puṣṭimārga theologians raise the *rāsa-līlā* chapters high above other Kṛṣṇa narratives. The *Subodhinī* is also structured in such a way that the *rāsa-līlā* section is part of the sub-treatise on “Rewards” (Redington 1990, 21). Furthermore, the very structure and style of the *Rāsa Pañcādhyāyī* reveals how the five chapters hold a special place within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. As Schweig demonstrates, its poetic language is distinctive and its structure resembles that of a Sanskrit drama. Through out the chapters, moreover, as many as eighteen other *līlās* from within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are recalled (2005, 15). The *rāsa-līlā* is also anticipated as early as the third canto

“In the *rāsa* festival, he bestowed his favour on the beloved women of Vraj, who were accorded the honour of having their necks embraced by his long arms. That favour was not bestowed on the most loving Śrī ... who [resides] on his chest...” (BP X.47.60). It is also the only *līlā* in which Kṛṣṇa multiplies himself in as many forms as the *gopīs*, so that each may feel that Kṛṣṇa is in her presence alone. The *gopīs* are considered the greatest devotees not only because they attained the greatest reward, but also because of what striving for and achieving this reward demonstrates, namely that the physical presence of Kṛṣṇa is to be desired above all else.

As we have seen, the experience of *viraha* is an important component of the devotional process, as expressed in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and as actualized in Puṣṭimārga practice. And although Vallabha may not consider it to be the highest state of devotion itself, he does affirm its role in achieving that level of devotion. One may even argue that experiencing separation from Kṛṣṇa can be a particular mode of experiencing his presence. However, what the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* reveals and Puṣṭimārga theology maintains is that for the most part when the *gopīs* lament, sing, and yearn for Kṛṣṇa — experience *viraha* — they are really longing to be in the presence of Kṛṣṇa once again. In his *Subodhinī* (X.30.39), Vallabha illustrates this point beautifully by reiterating an anguished *gopīs*’ request to Kṛṣṇa: “Please clothe yourself with your bodily qualities as you touch me, and ‘let me see You’, i.e. show yourself visibly. You are present here, but please make your presence visible” (Redington 1990, 179). Essentially, the *gopīs* wish to experience Kṛṣṇa both emotionally and corporeally. They yearn to see his beauty; touch his body; hear his mellifluous speech and be mesmerized by the sound of his flute; smell

(BP 3.2.24), and is also the only narrative after which a benedictory verse appears declaring that if one hears and recites this story, one achieves supreme devotion to Kṛṣṇa (BP X.33.36-39).

his intoxicating fragrance; and finally taste his bliss (*ānanda*). Kṛṣṇa effectively reciprocates the love of the *gopīs*, and of his most cherished devotees, by allowing them to experience the *ānanda* and *rasa* of his presence in the context of *līlā*.

Participating in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* characterizes the highest form of liberation, both in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and Puṣṭimārga soteriology. In the following section I demonstrate that this occurs because *līlā* provides both a theological context in which Kṛṣṇa's physical presence can be sensually and emotionally experienced, and a narrative/aesthetic context in which *rasa* functions and can be experienced. However, before we begin our discussion on the soteriological and aesthetic significance of *līlā*, I present an overview of the concept of *līlā* in order to illustrate how it is in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that all of Kṛṣṇa's activities come to be referred to as *līlās*.

Līlā and Aesthetics in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Vallabha's Subodhinī

In one of the foundational essays on the idea of *līlā*, Ananda Coomaraswamy claims that the notion of “divine play” occurs in the *R̥gveda* (ca. 1200 B.C.E.), the Upaniṣads, and the *Gītā* — even though the term *līlā* is not explicitly used and the other word for play, *krīḍa*, is only rarely used within the Upaniṣads themselves (1941, 99). However, as Clifford Hosptial argues, it is doubtful whether the references to the notion of *līlā* made within these earlier texts reflect any general understanding of divine activity as play (1995, 25). Most authors assert that it was in the *Brahmasūtras* (2.1.32-33) that the word *līlā* was first used in a theological context to describe god's activities, where the universe is said to be created “merely in play” (*līlākaivalyam*) (Hein 1995, 14; Hospital 1980, 4). Here, *līlā* is used to convey the idea of how god does not create the world out

of any desire or self-deficiency, but rather out of a purely creative impulse acting “in a state of rapt absorption comparable to that of an artist possessed by his creative vision or to that of a child caught up in the delight of a game played for its own sake” (Hein 1995, 13). Most often, it is the latter analogy that forms the basis for calling god’s acts *līlā*, defined as “play” or “sport.”

It is only later, within sectarian religious traditions that the notion of *līlā* assumes a significant and influential position. Norvin Hein, however, maintains that it is in the Vaiṣṇava tradition, particularly in the Kṛṣṇa cult, that the concept of *līlā* is elaborated into a studied doctrine and raised to its most advanced development (1995, 14). The use of the term *līlā* to describe god’s activities becomes increasing explicit in relation to Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa’s acts as described in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harivaṃśa* and in the early and middle *Purāṇas* associated with Viṣṇu. The *Harivaṃśa* contains narratives which portray Kṛṣṇa as a mischievous child who enjoys playing pranks on his parents and relatives. A clear use of the word *līlā* occurs in this text when the author describes the *gopīs* at the time of the *rāsa* dance as “imitating the play of Kṛṣṇa.” According to Hospital, this is perhaps the earliest occurrence of the compound “*kṛṣṇalīlā*” (play of Kṛṣṇa) (1995, 29), and it also indicates how the various acts of Kṛṣṇa that the *gopīs* imitate can be all called *līlās*. Furthermore, in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, the concept of *līlā* is associated with Kṛṣṇa’s divinity where he is described as performing divine or heroic acts, such as the banishment of the serpent-demon Kālīya and his lifting of Mount Govardhana, “with ease” or “in play.” An important theological development that occurs in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and especially later, in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, is the raising to the

level of conscious doctrine the understanding that *all* of Kṛṣṇa's acts are *līlā* (Hein 1986, 300).

In accordance with the texts before it, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* associates god's acts of cosmic creation, preservation and dissolution with *līlā* (1.10.24; 1.3.36; 2.3.12; etc.). However, what is unique to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is that all of Viṣṇu's twenty-four *avatāras* are called *līlāvatāras* (BP 2.6.45), signifying how god creates *and* enters the world in play to play. This notion of *līlāvatāra* also succeeds in placing all of god's activities, both those at the cosmic and divine/heroic level and those at the mundane level, within the context of *līlā*. And, just as among all other *avatāras* Kṛṣṇa is seen as the full descent and manifestation of the divine, it is also Kṛṣṇa who is seen to most fully embody the concept of *līlā*. As Kinsley affirms, "play as divine activity in India is nowhere more fully illustrated than in the god Kṛṣṇa ... [he is] the divine player *par excellence* of Indian religion" (1979, 56).

It is, of course, as the cowherd boy of Vraja that Kṛṣṇa most fully exemplifies all that is meant by *līlā*. As a baby, Kṛṣṇa is absorbed in his own play, acting solely to entertain himself with no care in the world; as a young boy he runs around breaking pots, stealing butter, and playing with his friends;³¹ and, as an adolescent, Kṛṣṇa engages in amorous love-play with the young *gopīs*. As noted above, it is this love-play, the *rāsa-līlā* Kṛṣṇa performs with the *gopīs*, that is considered the most intimate *līlā*. In his *Subodhinī* (X.33.2-4), Vallabha declares the *rāsa-līlā* to be the most excellent *līlā* and explains how it is called the *rāsa-līlā* because it is the visible manifestation of *rāsa* —

³¹ Although one may find it paradoxical for a god to be embodied as a helpless, care-free child, it appears that "for the divine to become embodied as a child is eminently suitable, for they behave in similar ways. Each belongs to a joyous realm of energetic, aimless, erratic activity ... the child Kṛṣṇa is by no means a partial, lesser manifestation of the divine in India. He epitomizes the nature and activity of the divine" (Kinsley 1979, 67-68).

particularly *śṛṅgāra-rasa* or the mood of love, and for this reason it produces *śṛṅgāra-rasa* in those fortunate enough to participate in it (Redington 1990, 261-66).

Furthermore, Vallabha maintains that it is through performing this *līlā* that Kṛṣṇa makes “the highest divine level of reality appear on Earth” (*Subodhinī* X.33.5, 259). And like the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also describes Kṛṣṇa’s divine/heroic acts as being done in play (*vikramalīlā*); he lifts Mount Govardhana effortlessly, as a child holds up a mushroom (BP X.25.19), and he subdues Kālīya by dancing on the serpent’s head (BP X.16.26-27).

In *Bhāgavata* theology and in most Vaiṣṇava traditions *līlā* can be understood in three ways: as Kṛṣṇa’s mode of cosmic creation, preservation and dissolution; Kṛṣṇa’s descent in the world; and finally, the dramatic reenactment of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* by devotees in an effort to remember and recreate Kṛṣṇa’s presence (*rāsalīlānukaran*). The latter meaning of *līlā*, as a play or drama, alludes to the influence of Sanskrit aesthetic theory on Vaiṣṇava theology and religious practice. Furthermore, not only is the “dramatic reenactment” of Kṛṣṇa’s activities called *līlā*, but Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* are also construed in terms of dramatic or aesthetic theory. *Līlā* exemplifies the fluidity that exists between the aesthetic and the sacred/religious in Vaiṣṇava thought, where the cosmic process can be understood as divine play or as a divine play. There are several passages within the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that portray Kṛṣṇa as an actor playing a role in a cosmic drama (BP I.9.32; X.18.10-11; XI.31.11). In his *Subodhinī* (X.33.36-37), moreover, Vallabha illustrates this notion when he says that Krishna “made himself visibly present ‘in sport’ — to play his game, and, like an actor, ‘He assumes a body’ of a man ... solely for the

sake of giving Grace to his devotees ... and to confer his own Joy” (Redington 1990, 304).

As we shall see in chapter three, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas interpret Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā* as the “one true drama” in which every devotee longs to play a part in it. For them, religious experience *is* aesthetic experience; as devotees come to realize themselves as actual participants in Kṛṣṇa’s divine drama, they experience the “one true *rasa*,” the *rasa* of *bhakti*. In the Puṣṭimārga context, both Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha also interpret Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* in terms of classical aesthetic theory. They demonstrate how Kṛṣṇa performs all his *līlās* in accordance with the norms of aesthetic theory and as a consequence produces the corresponding *bhāvas* and *rasas* in his devotees. That is, just as drama, poetry and visual art are able to evoke *rasa*, the experience of or the participation in Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* is also able to produce *rasa*, the *rasa* of *bhakti*. Thus *līlā* provides a narrative framework in which *rasa* can function and therefore, be experienced.

Furthermore, as we saw above, it is only by being subjected to Kṛṣṇa’s *yogamāya* that devotees are able to participate in his *līlās*. By concealing Kṛṣṇa’s divinity and facilitating intimate interactions, *yogamāya* creates a context in which “the divine may be approached and enjoyed, [and creates an] appropriate atmosphere in which the divine-human relationship can flourish” (Kinsley 1979, 248-49). *Līlā* thus becomes the locus of such divine-human interactions. By performing his *līlās* Kṛṣṇa attracts and engages his devotees, causing them to respond emotionally and become attached. The *ānanda* and beatific nature of Kṛṣṇa provokes this response, and ultimately finds expression in his *līlās*. Kṛṣṇa performs his *līlās* for his pleasure and for the pleasure of his devotees; it is a manifestation of his blissful aspect and a means of invoking this bliss in his devotees.

Ultimately, *līlā* presents a context in which Kṛṣṇa is made immanent and therefore, accessible. The devotee is thereby capable of engaging with Kṛṣṇa in an emotional relationship and savoring the bliss of his presence.

Devotees believe that Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* were made known to earth through the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and that when Kṛṣṇa descended to earth his acts were merely a manifestation of the eternal *līlā* that continues to occur in heavenly Vraja or Goloka ("world of cows"). As Kinsley explains, the entire Vraja-*līlā* is "not simply a once-upon-a-time event, or simply a drama played out in heavenly Vṛndāvana, but a description of God's continuing relationship to man, a description of the mutual intoxication that is realized in man's devotion to God" (1979, 201). The highest form of liberation, therefore, consists of the continual participation of the devotee in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*. As we shall see in the following chapter, Vallabha describes *alaukikasārthya*, the state of "liberation-in-life," as a condition in which devotees are able to experience Kṛṣṇa's presence and *līlās* eternally. *Nityālīlāpraveśa*, another form of liberation in Puṣṭimārga theology (which occurs after death), is described as a condition in which a devotee "enters" (*praveśa*) into the eternal *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa.

Conclusion

The *bhakti* presented in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is one in which an individual's whole body, including the mind and senses, is fully absorbed in the loving worship of Kṛṣṇa. It is a process that is not only accepted as a means to liberation, but also as the state of liberation itself. The sacred narratives of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* present the residents of Vraja, especially the *gopīs*, as paradigmatic devotees due to their intense

experience and expression of this type of *bhakti-bhāva*. As we shall see in the following chapter, these narrative motifs are embedded within Vallabha's philosophy. While providing an exposition of Śuddhādvaita thought, Chapter Two also serves to illustrate how the soteriological doctrines of *nirodha* and *sarvātmabhāva* draw from these narrative themes.

Chapter Two

The Self, the Loss of Ānanda, and Soteriological Process in Puṣṭimārga

This thesis is interested in demonstrating how philosophical and theological thought and ritual activity are intimately linked in the Puṣṭimārga tradition. As we shall see in the course of this chapter, *sevā* remains ineffective without an understanding of its underlying “aesthetic philosophies,” while these philosophies cannot be fully realized without the practice of *sevā*.

This chapter focuses on how Vallabha’s theological perspectives integrate and conform to several Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* themes as presented in the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Such themes include the identification of the highest reality with Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa, the importance of experiencing *viraha bhakti*, the practice of passionate self-surrendering devotion, and the reliance on god’s grace for liberation. Furthermore, as we shall see, central to Vallabha’s ontological and soteriological formularizations is the experience of intense emotional and corporeal intimacy with Kṛṣṇa. Theologically, this is exemplified by the *gopīs*’ participation in Kṛṣṇa’s *rāsa-līlās*, and it is realized in the context of Puṣṭimārga ritual praxis through the performance of *sevā*.

The first part of this chapter begins with an overview of Vallabha’s Śuddhādvaita (“pure non-dual”) philosophy. I have divided this discussion into five parts: (i) An Introduction to Aspects of Śuddhādvaita Thought; (ii) Ultimate Reality in Śuddhādvaita: Kṛṣṇa as the Abode of Ānanda and Rasa; (iii) Creation in Śuddhādvaita: The Līlā of Manifestation and Concealment; (iv) Bodies of Ānanda: The Jīva in Vallabha’s Ontology (which describes how *jīvas* have their *ānanda* aspects concealed at the moment of their manifestation from the body of Kṛṣṇa); (v) The Reality of Māyā, The Illusion of Avidyā

(which describes the place and function of *māyā* and *avidyā* (“ignorance”), and the *jīva*’s subjection to Kṛṣṇa’s *avidyā-śakti* or “power of ignorance”).

In the second half of this chapter, I demonstrate how these concepts become reified in the context of Puṣṭimārga *sevā*. I argue that it is by performing *sevā*, where devotees are in the presence of the image form of Kṛṣṇa and can experience his *līlās*, that they can transcend their states of *avidyā* and permanently restore their *ānanda*.

Furthermore, a devotee’s *bhakti-bhāva* matures through the practice of *sevā* (love-in-union) and *kathā* (meditative imagining, praising, remembering Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*, as a result of experiencing love-in-separation). The maturation of a devotee’s *bhakti-bhāva* culminates in the experience of *nirodha* (“constraint”) and *sarvātmabhāva* (“total love”).

I demonstrate how these soteriological doctrines present emotion and aesthetic experience as both the way and the goal for experiencing Kṛṣṇa. I conclude this chapter with an outline of the forms of liberation in Puṣṭimārga and thus illustrate how *sevā* is ultimately both the means to and the state of liberation itself.

An Introduction to Aspects of Śuddhādvaita Thought

Vallabha’s theistic philosophy or Śuddhādvaita is part of the Vedānta school of the *śaḍdarśana* (six philosophical systems of classical Hindu thought),³² and is described

³² Indian schools of philosophy are divided into two broad categories, namely, the “orthodox” or *āstika* and the “heterodox” or *nāstika*. The *nāstika* category consists of philosophical systems that do not accept the authority of the Vedas: Cārvāka, Bauddha, and Jaina. While the *āstika* category consists of six philosophical systems, known as the *śaḍdarśana* that do accept the authority of the Vedas: Mīmāṃsā, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Vedānta. The Vedānta school, moreover, includes several philosophical systems, such as the Kevalādvaita (non-dualism) of Śaṅkara, the Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism) of Rāmānuja (ca. 1017-1137), the Śuddhādvaita of Vallabha, the Dvaita (dualism) of Madhva (ca. 119-1278), the Dvaitādvaita (dualism-cum-non-dualism) of Nimbārka (ca. 11th century), and the Acintya-bhedābheda (indescribable difference-cum-non-difference) of Caitanya. All Vedānta systems enumerated here, excluding the Kevalādvaita of Śaṅkara, can be classified as “Vaiṣṇava theistic philosophies,” in which the highest reality is identified with Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa.

within Vallabha's numerous works: *Anubhāṣya*, a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*; the philosophical treatise, *Tattvārthadīpanibandha*; and the *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ*, sixteen small treatises on worship, devotion, grace and rewards of worship. The Vaiṣṇava theistic philosophies of Rāmānuja, Madhva, and Nimbārka, and the (Kevala-) Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara were the prevalent philosophical systems already in place during Vallabha's time, which most likely influenced and helped shape his own formulizations. In fact, his Śuddhādvaita may be understood as an attempt to reconcile the non-dualistic philosophy of Śaṅkara with the dualism presupposed in devotional theism.

Vallabha calls his philosophy *Śuddha*-advaita in an effort to distinguish it from that of Śaṅkara's Kevalādvaita. Vallabha agrees with Śaṅkara in so far as the *ātman* ("soul") and Brahman are non-different (*advaita*), though he maintains that Śaṅkara's philosophy is flawed or is "impure" because of its dependence on *māyā* to explain the world. According to Vallabha, the world is not unreal — a product of *māyā* — but is rather a form of Brahman. It is Brahman's own self-manifestation and is therefore as real as Brahman. It is in this sense that Vallabha calls his philosophy Śuddhādvaita, which could be construed as "*śuddayoḥ advaitam*," indicating how the world, the *ātman* and Brahman are ontologically identical, or as "*śuddham ca tadadvaitam*," pointing to the non-difference between Brahman, the *ātman*, and the world, which is pure because of its disassociation with *māyā* (Marfatia 1967, 18). Brahman is the material and efficient cause of the world, where the effect is non-different from and pre-exists in its cause (*sat-kārya-vāda*), and is really a manifestation (*āvirbhūta*) of its cause. Thus, creation arises without there being any modification in the essence of Brahman. In light of this

ideology, Śuddhādvaita may also be referred to as *avikṛta-pariṇāma-vāda*, the “Doctrine of Unmodified Change” or “the Doctrine of Immutable Transformation.”

Ultimate Reality in Śuddhādvaita: Kṛṣṇa as the Abode of Ānanda and Rasa

As noted in Chapter One, Vallabha accepts Kṛṣṇa as the highest reality or as Puruṣottama, the Supreme Person. As Puruṣottama, he possesses six divine qualities, viz. sovereignty (*aiśvarya*), valour (*vīrya*), fame (*yaśas*), splendor (*śrī*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and detachment (*vairāgya*) (20), and is even accepted as the ground of all contradictory qualities (*viruddhadharmāśrayata*). In his TDN (I.64), Vallabha describes Brahman as one whom “is the form of *saccidānanda*, is omnipresent, eternal, omnipotent, independent, omniscient, and is devoid of the three *guṇas* [*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*].”³³ As *saccidānanda*, therefore, Kṛṣṇa is the embodiment of *sat* (“existence”), *cit* (“consciousness”), and *ānanda* (“bliss”). It is the last aspect of Kṛṣṇa, his *ānanda-rūpa*, that Vallabha emphasizes the most. Kṛṣṇa is the supreme Brahman only because his *ānanda* is full or complete. In his treatise, *Śrīkṛṣṇāśrayaḥ* (v. 8), Vallabha illustrates this notion by describing how Brahman is inferior to Kṛṣṇa because his *ānanda* is limited, while Kṛṣṇa is the supreme person because he embodies absolute joy (Redington 2000, 110). In his TDN (1.44), furthermore, Vallabha emphasizes the *ānanda* aspect of Kṛṣṇa by indicating how Kṛṣṇa’s whole body consists of *ānanda*: “... all his limbs, including his hands, legs, face, stomach, etc., are of the form of bliss”. Because Kṛṣṇa is the abode of bliss, he is also the most beautiful and most relishable thing.

³³ Skt., “*saccidānandarūpaṃ tu brahm vyāpakamavyayam| sarvśakti svatantram ca sarvajñam guṇavarjitam||*”

Kṛṣṇa's beauty is repeatedly described throughout the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, where the residents of Vraja yearn to capture a glimpse of his form (BP X.42.24; X.53.36; X.86.21). In the *rāsa-līlā*, a *gopī* becomes entranced with Kṛṣṇa's beauty, and with "her eyes never blinking, stare[s] in rapture at His lotus-face. And though she drank in the sight, she was never filled..." (BP X.32.7). In his commentary on this verse, Vallabha explains that if the *gopī* "had blinked as her eyes were drinking in this sight, the flow of this nectar of delight [*rasa*] would have been interrupted. That is why she drank with unblinking eyes. Because of the rarity of this nectar of beauty..." (Redington 1990, 231). Kṛṣṇa's beauty is an extension of his blissful nature and therefore one longs to be in his presence, to witness his beauty, to delight in his *ānanda*. And as Kinsley demonstrates, Kṛṣṇa's beauty is a "fitting concomitant to his sportive nature. For beauty, like play, is an end in itself ... it belongs to that other world of abundance" (1972, 159-160). The feeling that results from beholding Kṛṣṇa's beauty, being imbued with his *ānanda*, and participating in his *līlās* can be described as an experience of rapturous delight, or *rasa*. Kṛṣṇa imbues his devotees with *rasa* because he is accepted as the embodiment of all *rasas* and *bhāvas*, and because he performs his *līlās* in such a way as to evoke these sentiments in his devotees.

Creation in Śuddhādvaita: The Līlā of Manifestation and Concealment

Vallabha's account of creation follows a similar description found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (I.4.3): "He, verily, had no delight. Therefore he who is alone has no delight. He desired a second." In his commentary on an important verse in the TDN (1.23), Vallabha explains how in the absence of multiplicity and differentiation, the

delight (*ramaṇā*) of *līlā* is not possible.³⁴ Therefore, according to Vallabha, Kṛṣṇa only wished to be many, that is, he manifests himself as the world for the sake of enjoyment, to perform his *līlā*.³⁵ This is not to say that Kṛṣṇa only performs his *līlā* when the universe is in a state of manifestation (*āvirbhūta*). As Vallabha indicates, Kṛṣṇa indulges in self-sport (*svasmin ramate*) when the universe is in state of concealment (*tirobhūta*) as well (TDN I.68). In fact, the dialectical movement between divine manifestation and concealment is the primary mode through which Kṛṣṇa spins out his *līlā* and is thus an important concept in Vallabha's philosophy.³⁶ Creation is not only a means by which Kṛṣṇa experiences delight, but it is also a materialization of his delight or more specifically, a spontaneous expression of his *ānanda*. As Richard Barz maintains, "without *ānanda* the divine play that is called *līlā* would be impossible" (1992, 65).

Although the *līlā* of creation represents (and is the result of) an overabundance of Kṛṣṇa's *ānanda*, after desiring to manifest in multiplicity, the next step in cosmogenesis involves Kṛṣṇa concealing or suppressing part of this *ānanda*. This results in a limited form of Kṛṣṇa, known as *akṣara* (Imperishable) Brahman or *bṛhat* (Great) Brahman, who is considered the "abode" or "resting place" of Kṛṣṇa. In his treatise, *Siddhāntamuktāvali* (v. 3-15a), Vallabha illustrates how *akṣara* Brahman has two aspects: as "one" or as "many." It is in his aspect as "one" that *akṣara* Brahman (and thus Kṛṣṇa) resides in each

³⁴ Skt., "... ramaṇārthameva prapañca[world]-rūpeṇāvirbhāvokteḥ, vaicitryam vinā tadasambhavo yataḥ..."

³⁵ In verse 1 of his TDN (I), Vallabha describes how Kṛṣṇa performs his *līlā* in the world or *as* the world through the distinctions of name and form: "... rūpa-nāma-vibhedena jagat kṛṇāti yoh yataḥ ...".

³⁶ The concept of divine manifestation (*āvirbhāva*) and concealment (*tirobhāva*) is intimately linked with the doctrine of immutable transformation, or *avikṛta-pariṇāma-vāda*. As Barz describes, "the process of *āvirbhāva* is *not* creation and the process of *tirobhāva* is *not* destruction, for in the former case nothing has come into being and in the latter case nothing has ceased ... There is no change in the processes of *āvirbhāva* and *tirobhāva*, there is only a process of manifestation of what has always been present though not apparent, on the one hand, and a process of concealment of what will always be present though not apparent, on the other hand." (1992, 66).

jīva (embodied being) in the form of the *antarayāmin* (“inner dweller”), and it is in his aspect as “many” that *akṣara* Brahman manifests himself as the world (*jagat* or *prapañca*).³⁷ The world is described as being *kṣara* or perishable and consists of *jaḍa* (inert matter). As *jaḍa*, the world is a manifestation of only the *sat* of *akṣara* Brahman, having the *cit* and *ānanda* aspects concealed.

Bodies of Ānanda: The Jīva in Vallabha’s Ontology

In Śuddhādvaita ontology, *jīvas* are also considered to be a form of Kṛṣṇa. Vallabha explains how *jīvas* are not caused or created, but are parts (*āṁśas*) of Kṛṣṇa, whom emerge out of *akṣara* Brahman like sparks from a fire (Br.Up II.1.20; *Anubhāṣya* I.1.2; TDN I.28).³⁸ Since they are aware of their existence, the *cit* aspect of *akṣara* Brahman is present within them. Therefore, unlike the world, which is only a manifestation of *sat*, *jīvas* are a manifestation of the *sat* and *cit* aspects of *akṣara* Brahman, having only their *ānanda* aspects concealed. However, as mentioned above, *jīvas* also have a form of Kṛṣṇa — the *antarayāmin* — residing within them. Vallabha describes the *antarayāmin* to be a form of *akṣara* Brahman as “one” and therefore, like *akṣara* Brahman, the *antarayāmin* does have part of its *ānanda* manifested (TDN I.29). Since the world and especially, the *jīvas* are manifested for the purpose of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā*, he had to exist within them to experience the delight or *ānanda* of *līlā*. Therefore, it is in his form as *antarayāmin*, where his *ānanda* is manifested within the *jīvas*, that Kṛṣṇa is able to enjoy his own existence through the performance of *līlā* (Barz 1992, 79). That is, “in

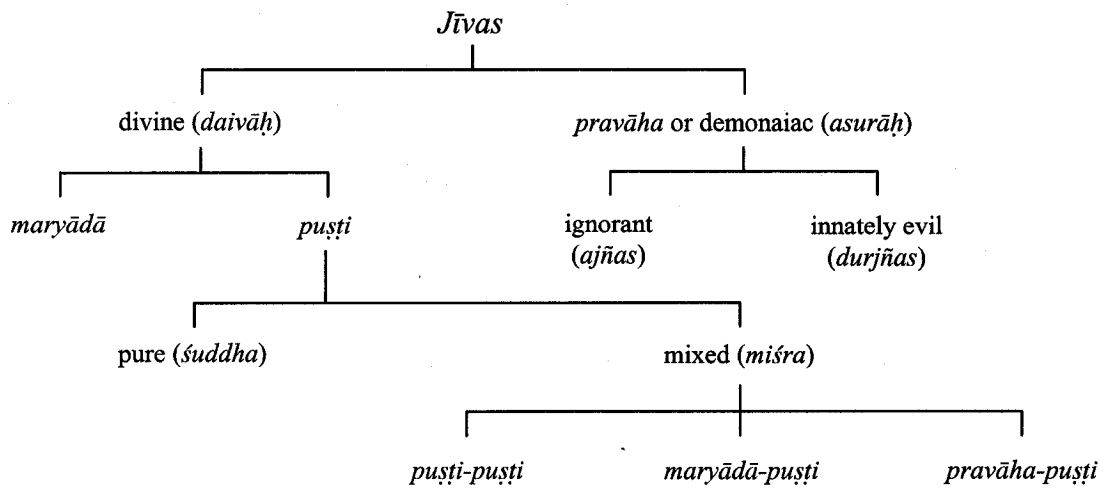
³⁷ *Akṣara* Brahman manifests the world using three “functions” intrinsic to him: *kāla* (“time”); *kārma* (“law of actions and their results”); *svabhāva* (“nature” or the force of will [*icchā*] of Kṛṣṇa that causes change to take place) (Barz 1992, 78).

³⁸ Skt., “*śṛṣṭyāḍau nirgatāḥ sarve nirākārāstadicchayā| viśphuliṅgā ivāgnestu sadamśena jaḍā api||*” (TVD I.28).

this mode of sportive self-expression, the Absolute Spirit eternally enjoys Himself from innumerable centers of experience” (Banerjea 1944, 818). This same concept is echoed by Vallabha in his *Subodhinī* (X.30.34), moreover, when he describes how Kṛṣṇa performs his *rāsa-līlās* with the *gopīs* in order to experience the *rāsa* of his own *līlās*: “He established Himself in her [the *gopī*] so that she could be the basis of His experience of the mood of love [*śṛṅgāra-rāsa*]. His chief delight is in Himself alone, and His pleasures and love-games are in Himself alone.” (Redington 1990, 173).

Although all *jīvas* are alike in that they are manifestations of the *sat* and *cit* aspects of *akṣara Brahman*, in his treatise, *Puṣṭipravāhamaryādābhedaḥ*, Vallabha introduces and describes three categories or “types” of *jīvas*: “one is *puṣṭi* (well-nourished, complete, of the nature of the *anugraha* [grace] of Shrī Kṛṣṇa), the second is the *maryādā* (those within the limits of the actions required and forbidden by the *Veda*), and the third is the *pravāha* (those in the stream or current [*pravāha*] of continuous action)” (Barz 1992, 71). The latter, *pravāha-jīvas* are considered to be “demonic” (*asurāḥ*) *jīvas* who cannot escape their state of *avidyā* (ignorance) and are thus continuously absorbed in the endless cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). Furthermore, *pravāha-jīvas* are categorized in two ways, namely, those that are ignorant about their state (*ajñās*), and those that are innately evil (*durjñās*). It is the ignorant *pravāha-jīvas* whom still have the potential for receiving the grace of Kṛṣṇa and achieving liberation. *Maryādā-jīvas*, moreover, are those *jīvas* that follow what Vallabha calls the *maryādā-mārga*, or the “path of limitations.” *Jīvas* in this path adhere to Vedic prescriptions, perform traditional ritual worship (*pūjā*) as opposed to *sevā*, and include ascetics or *jñānis* whom wish to attain union with Nirguṇa (*akṣara*) Brahman. And, finally, *puṣṭi-*

jīvas are of course those *jīvas* whom are on the path of grace, Puṣṭimārga. Puṣṭi-*jīvas*, in turn, are divided into two categories, those that are pure (*śuddha*) and those that are mixed (*miśra*): *puṣṭi-puṣṭi*; *puṣṭi-maryādā*; *puṣṭi-pravāha*. Both *maryādā-jīvas* and *puṣṭi-jīvas* are called *daiva-jīvas*, or “divine souls,” since they are both capable of receiving Kṛṣṇa’s grace and achieving liberation. The following illustration summarizes the various categories of *jīvas* according to Vallabha’s *Puṣṭipravāhamaryādābhedaḥ*:



After introducing the three categories of *jīvas*, in the same treatise, Vallabha also describes how the three corresponding *mārgas* came to be: “By a mere wish, with his mind Hari [Kṛṣṇa] created the Path of Flow [*pravāha-mārga*]; and it is well known that He created the Vedic Path by speech; but there is no doubt that He created the Path of Grace with his whole person” (v. 8b-9, Redington 2000, 45). By extension, it is understood that *pravāha-jīvas* are manifested from the mind of Kṛṣṇa; *maryādā-jīvas* are manifested from the speech of Kṛṣṇa; and *puṣṭi-jīvas* are manifested from the body of Kṛṣṇa — a body made entirely of *ānanda*. Because *puṣṭi-jīvas* are manifested from the

body of Kṛṣṇa and have their *ānanda* aspect concealed, they are only satisfied with experiencing the bodily presence of Kṛṣṇa, whether on earth by means of performing *sevā*, or in a state of liberation. As Vallabha affirms, “the souls on the Path of Grace are distinct (from the other two), no doubt. For they were created in order to worship the Blessed Lord’s very person, and for nothing else” (v. 12).³⁹ And the reward of performing such worship is given “by the (Lord’s) whole person” (v.10),⁴⁰ that is, Kṛṣṇa himself is the very reward, visibly present. Such an exceptional reward is reserved for a *puṣṭi-jīva* who is, according to Vallabha, “incredibly rare — one in a billion—who, setting aside wife, home, children, possessions and life, wealth here and hereafter [*ātmanivedana*] — falls totally in love with Krishna and is immersed in that love always” (59).

In one of his most important treatises, *Bhaktivardhinī*, Vallabha describes *puṣṭi-jīvas* as those *jīvas* in whom the seed of love for Kṛṣṇa (*bīja-bhāva*) has been rooted since the time of creation. Thus, *puṣṭi-jīvas* are predisposed to love Kṛṣṇa, although at times “they often obscure this predisposition or stray from it for a long time. But Krishna will certainly keep after them” (Redington 2000, 129). Vallabha also explains how this seed of love matures: “the way to make this seed take firm root is to remain a householder and follow one’s rule of life. The one who is not distracted should devote himself to Krishna by means of ritual image-worship, and by “hearing” and so forth [nine steps of *bhakti*]” (v. 2-3a, 125). The Puṣṭimārga theologian, Puruṣottama (ca. 1668-1764), comments upon this verse and indicates that the latter set of means referred to by Vallabha (hearing,

³⁹ Skt., “*tasmājjīvāḥ puṣṭimārga bhinnā eva na saṁsayah| bhagavadrūpasevārtham tatsṛṣṭirnānyathā bhavet||*”

⁴⁰ Skt., “*mūlecchātaḥ phalam loke vedoktam vaidike 'pi ca| kāyena tu phalam puṣṭau bhinnecchāto 'pi naikatā||*”

praising, remembering, that is, the nine steps of *bhakti*) should also include meditative imagining (*bhāvana*). According to Puruṣottama these activities occur because “the place of worship, implements of worship, and even the Object of worship — the image Form of Krishna — have been left behind by the devotee, in order that separation from the Lord might be experienced fully” (130). Therefore, according to Vallabha, love for Kṛṣṇa is perfected by experiencing both love-in-union (*samyoga-bhakti*) through the performance of *sevā*, and by hearing about Kṛṣṇa, praising his qualities, and meditatively imagining him (collectively referred to as *kathā*), which results from experiencing love-in-separation (*viraha-bhakti*). As described earlier, such “perfected” love for Kṛṣṇa is exemplified by the *gopīs*. They are the archetypical *puṣṭi-jīvas* in whom *suddha-puṣṭi*, pure grace, is seen in its most matured form. They exemplify how the intense experience of *viraha-bhakti* moves one to perform *kathā* and, more importantly, they demonstrate that the physical presence of Kṛṣṇa is to be desired above all else. As a result, they are rewarded with Kṛṣṇa’s “full person” through their participation in the *rāsa-līlās*.

The Reality of Māyā, The Illusion of Avidyā

Kṛṣṇa spins out his *līlā* and creates out of his own will, using his *icchā-śakti*, or power of desire. However, the simultaneous processes of manifestation and concealment occur through his *māyā-śakti*, a power with which Kṛṣṇa is capable of doing and being anything (TDN I.23),⁴¹ and which is under the control of his *icchā-śakti*. Kṛṣṇa uses his *māyā-śakti* to conceal parts of himself and to manifest the world and *jīvas*. Though, just as creation occurs through a limited form of Kṛṣṇa (*akṣara* Brahman), the actual

⁴¹ Skt., “*Māyā hi bhagavataḥ śaktiḥ sarvabhavanasāmarthyarūpā tatraiva sthitā*” (*prakāśa*; TDN (I.23)). Hindi commentary: “*bhagvān kī sab kucch ho yā kar sakne kī śakti ko hī māyā kahate haiṅ.*”

manifestation of the world occurs through a limited form of *māyā* known as *prakṛti*.

Prakṛti, which proceeds from the *sat* of *akṣara* Brahman, consists of the three *guṇas* and unravels the world by means of the twenty-six *tattvas* (constituent units of manifestation).

Jīvas, moreover, come under the influence of another form of *māyā-śakti*: the power of ignorance or *avidyā-śakti*. When *jīvas* are manifested, Kṛṣṇa causes both his *ānanda* and his six qualities to be concealed within them. As a result, and out of his own *icchā-śakti*, Kṛṣṇa fills the *jīvas* with *avidyā*. In his TDN (I.31), Vallabha describes how both *avidyā* and *vidyā* (knowledge) are powers of Kṛṣṇa that are under the control of his *māyā-śakti*, and which only influence the *jīva*. In the next verse, Vallabha enumerates the five *parvas* (“parts”) or *adhyāśas* (“superimpositions of the self on the senses”) of *avidyā*: *antaḥ-karaṇādhyāśa* (superimposition on mental-faculties); *prāṇādhyāśa* (superimposition on life-breath), *indryādhyāśa* (superimposition on senses), *dehādhyāśa* (superimposition on body), and finally, as a consequence of the previous four, *svarūpavismaraṇa* (self-forgetfulness).⁴² Because of *avidyā*, and the four kinds of superimpositions it incurs on the *jīva*, the feelings of “I”-ness and “my”-ness (i.e., ego) occur. As a result, *jīvas* become attached to the world, and begin to forget their true divine identity (*svarūpavismaraṇa*). This process culminates in the *jīvas*’ creation of and participation in *saṃsāra*, the endless cycle of re-birth. *Saṃsāra*, and the *jīva*’s involvement in it persists for as long as a *jīva* is under the influence of *avidyā*. Once the influence of *avidyā* dissolves, however, *saṃsāra* ceases to exist for the *jīva*, though, the world still remains.

⁴² Skt., “*svarūpājñānamekaṃ hi parva dehendriyāśavaḥ| antaḥ-karaṇameśāṃ hi caturddhā 'dhāsa ucyate||*” (TDN I.32).

This brings us to an important concept within Śuddhādvaita, namely that the world, which proceeds from Kṛṣṇa's *māyā-śakti* is not the same as *saṁsāra*, which is essentially a *jīva*'s own "creation" arising as a result of a *jīva* being subjected to Kṛṣṇa's *avidyā-śakti* (TDN 1.23). Being a manifestation of *sat*, the world is as real as Kṛṣṇa, while the eternal cycle of re-births is what is unreal, or an "illusion." As J.G. Shah contends, in opposition to Śaṅkara's Kevalādvaita, "our non-apprehension ... of Brahman in the world, is due to a defect in our intellect. The faultiness of knowledge is not in the object but in our intellect" (1969, 112). Furthermore, Vallabha proposes that the conditions of *avidyā* and *vidyā* can be correlated to the processes of *tirobhāva* and *āvirbhāva* respectively (TDN I.31, *prakāśa*). When the *jīva* is subject to *avidyā*, the divine nature of the world is not apparent or is concealed (*tirobhūta*), facilitating the *jīva*'s creation of and involvement in *saṁsāra*. When this *avidyā* is replaced with *vidyā*, however, the divine nature of the world and that of the *jīva*'s own self is made apparent (*āvirbhūta*), extinguishing *saṁsāra* and discontinuing the *jīva*'s involvement in it.

Transcending Ignorance: The Puṣṭi Path to Liberation

After describing the ways in which *jīvas* are manifested from Kṛṣṇa, and how they create and become enmeshed in *saṁsāra* due to *avidyā*, we now turn to the discussion of how *jīvas* can transcend their state of ignorance and permanently restore their *ānanda*. Before we begin, however, we must first take into consideration what Richard Barz claims to be Vallabha's "central doctrine," that is, the "starting point from which Vallabhācārya built up his thought and [it is] the starting point from which any individual who should intend to put Vallabhācārya's teachings into practice must begin" (1992, 80).

We are introduced to this central doctrine through an important verse in Vallabha's second treatise, *Bālabodhaḥ*, which reads as follows:

Souls are inherently defective. To free themselves forever of their defects, they should practice “hearing” and so forth. For by the love which results from these practices, everything is accomplished that needs to be accomplished...⁴³ (v. 16b-17, Redington 2000, 15)

This verse is unique in that it exemplifies the Puṣṭimārga soteriological process and, therefore, will serve as the basic framework around which the remainder of this chapter will be organized.

The prominent Puṣṭimārga theologian, Puruṣottama, elaborates upon the first sentence of this verse by commenting on how “(souls) are defective—that is to say, they have particular defects based on tendencies born of ignorance, desire, and past actions...” (21). This implies that from the moment of their manifestation, *jīvas* have been subjected to Kṛṣṇa's *avidyā-śakti*, which has caused them to act ignorantly and egoistically. These deeds, which have accumulated over many life times, crystallize in the form of impurities or defects (*doṣas*) and facilitate a *jīva*'s entanglement in *saṃsāra*.

Following this initial statement, and in the same verse, Vallabha continues by describing how *jīvas* can become free of these defects by practicing “hearing” and so forth, that is, *navavidha bhakti*.⁴⁴ And, it is in the following verse that we come to understand exactly what one “accomplishes that needs to be accomplished”: “For when one offers oneself entirely [*samarpaṇenā 'tmano*], the relationship of ‘belonging to him’ [*tadīyatvam*] is sure to result...” (v.18-19, 15). Engaging in a relationship with Kṛṣṇa presupposes a devotee's participation in his *līlās*, which in turn involves experiencing the

⁴³ Skt., “*jīvāḥ svabhāvato duṣṭā doṣābhāvāya sarvadā śravaṇādi tataḥ premṇā sarvaṃ kāryaṃ hi siddhyati*||”

⁴⁴ See p. 31 in Chapter One.

physical presence of Kṛṣṇa. Thus, the relationship of belonging to Kṛṣṇa characterizes the state of liberation in Puṣṭimārga theology. This “accomplishment,” moreover, occurs as a result of offering one’s self to Kṛṣṇa, which not only precipitates the removal of *doṣas* but is also conducive to the engenderment of absolute love for Kṛṣṇa. This practice of dedicating or offering one’s self (*ātmasamarāṇa*, *ātmanivedana*), is the last and most difficult step of the *navavidha bhakti* process. As illustrated by the *Brahmasambandha/ātmanivedana* mantra, which marks the formal initiation of a devotee into the tradition, Vallabha inverts the *navavidha* process by placing the last step of *ātmanivedana* of self-dedication as the initial step of Puṣṭimārga *sevā*:

Om. Kṛṣṇa is my refuge [*Śrī Kṛṣṇa śaraṇam mama*]. Tortured for thousands of years now by the pain born of separation from Krishna so that joy has disappeared, I offer to the Blessed Lord Krishna my body, senses, life-breath, and inner faculties, with all their attributes, and wife, home, children and acquired wealth here and hereafter, along with my very self. I am your servant, Krishna, I am yours. (Redington 2000, 67) ⁴⁵

This concept becomes clearer in another important treatise, *Siddhāntarahasya*. As mentioned in the Introduction, it is in this treatise that Vallabha describes receiving the *Brahmasambandha* mantra from Kṛṣṇa himself. At this time, Kṛṣṇa informs Vallabha that “for everyone who performs the *Brahmasambandha* ceremony, the removal of all defects of body and soul are sure to result”⁴⁶ (v. 2-3; Redington 2000, 64). Therefore, in accordance with Vallabha’s statement in the *Bālabodhaḥ*, *jīvas* can only be freed of their *doṣas* by offering one’s self and one’s possessions to Kṛṣṇa, which occurs through

⁴⁵ Of all the Vaiṣṇava traditions, it appears that the inversion of the *navavidha bhakti* process only occurs in the Puṣṭimārga context. As Richard Barz demonstrates, Vallabha “saw the first eight steps of the practice of *bhakti* as being parts of the ninth...Such a visualization would require the attitude of complete self-dedication for the correct practice of the eight subsidiary steps.” (1992, 85).

⁴⁶ This verse continues to describe the defects: “...These defects are of five kinds, as tradition confirms: natural defects; defects resulting from (impropriety of) place or time, as specified in the world and in the Veda; defects arising from (improper) association; and faults that result from contact (with forbidden things)...” (v.2-3; Redington 2000, 64).

receiving and reciting the *Brahmasambandha* mantra. Furthermore, by offering one's inner faculties (*antaḥ-karaṇas*), life-breaths (*prāṇās*), senses (*indriyās*), body (*deha*) and self, a devotee is in essence connecting (*sambandha*) all the facets of a *jīva* that can be superimposed by *avidyā* with Kṛṣṇa (Brahman).⁴⁷ Therefore, by reciting the *Brahmasambandha* mantra and binding everything with Kṛṣṇa, devotees' possessions, family, their selves — including their *doṣas* — become divine in nature. This practice serves to reify Śuddhādvaita ontology by facilitating the (re-) establishment and recognition of the divinity or “Brahman-ness” of all things. As Kṛṣṇa, himself, declares: “...my servants should first offer everything to Me, and then do what is needed. *By (doing) that all become Brahman*” (v. 7b-8a, 65; emphasis mine).

James Redington questions whether or not this “removal” of defects is a permanent occurrence, where devotees are freed from defects of all kinds once and for all, or whether this occurs within a specific temporal, spatial and experiential context. Since the *Brahmasambandha* mantra initiates a person into the Puṣṭimārga tradition, according to Gokulanātha and Shyam Manohar Goswamy,⁴⁸ the context is clear: that of *sevā* of Kṛṣṇa. As Gokulanātha states: “...the method expressed by the Blessed Lord [is] for the removal of the particular defects which prevent the face-to-face worship [of Kṛṣṇa]...” (2000, 68). James Redington maintains this position by illustrating how the offering of one's self to Kṛṣṇa by means of the initiation mantra does not permanently remove a devotee's *doṣas*, but rather prevents these *doṣas* from hindering or invalidating the *sevā* of Kṛṣṇa; “the sense of ‘removal’ of defects, then, is not their disappearance, but

⁴⁷ See p. 61, where I enumerate the five *parvas* of *avidyā*.

⁴⁸ Shyam Manohar Goswamy, currently residing in Mumbai, India, is a contemporary scholar and member of the Puṣṭimārga *saṃpradāya*. He has written, and continues to write independent works on Puṣṭimārga theology and philosophy. He has also written commentaries on most of Vallabha's works, including all sixteen treatises.

their nullification, their being rendered inoperative.” (69). Furthermore, the removal of *doṣas* in the context of *sevā* is significant if we consider an important aspect of the initiation ceremony. Reciting the *Brahmasambanda* mantra and thus being initiated into the tradition results in a devotee receiving the *sevyā-svarūpa*, or the “real presence” of Kṛṣṇa in image form. The initiation ceremony, in essence, demonstrates at a microcosmic level the soteriological process as articulated in the initial verse: devotees remove their *doṣas* by dedicating themselves entirely, which results in “accomplishing what needs to be accomplished,” namely experiencing the real presence of Kṛṣṇa.

Sevā as Sādhana and Phala

As we saw in chapter one, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and all Vaiṣṇava traditions accept the path of devotion, *bhakti-mārga*, as the superior path or means to reaching god.⁴⁹ In the Puṣṭimārga tradition, *bhakti*, which includes the performance of *navavidha bhakti* and *kathā*, is actualized in the context of *sevā*. Here a devotee lovingly serves Kṛṣṇa with offerings of *rāga* (“music”), *bhoga* (“food”) and *śṛṅgāra*, which consists of the adornment of the image of Kṛṣṇa. As we shall see later, such offerings are conducive to recreating Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* and thus facilitate a devotee’s sensual experience of Kṛṣṇa’s presence (expressed as *rasa*). Moreover, the practice of offering one’s self and life (*ātmanivedana*) enhances the soteriological efficacy of *sevā* by facilitating the removal of a devotee’s *doṣas*. However, when we take into consideration what Redington suggests, namely that the *Brahmasambandha* mantra is “meant to initiate a way of life in which all things one uses, acquires, or intends possibly to use, are first offered to Krishna in

⁴⁹ See page 31, note 22.

worship” (70, emphasis mine), a devotee’s entire life is effectively imaged as *sevā*.

Therefore, the context in which devotees may remove their *doṣas*, or render them “inoperative,” is no longer limited to a specific time, place or experience, but rather permeates a devotee’s entire life.

Whether it is embraced as a mode of life or as a mode of ritual, *sevā* provides a context in which a devotee’s *doṣas* may be removed. Cultivated *sevā* thus becomes a process of continual internal transformations, where devotees attempt to transcend their states of egoism and *avidyā*. As the opening verse from *Bālabodhaḥ* demonstrates, the overcoming of *avidyā* occurs in concomitance with the cultivation of absolute love for Kṛṣṇa. And when this *avidyā* is replaced with both *vidyā* and love for Kṛṣṇa, *saṃsāra* ceases, and a *jīva* achieves a state of eternal association with Kṛṣṇa. For this reason, in the Puṣṭimārga tradition, *sevā* is accepted as the only *sādhana* (lit., “method by which something may be accomplished”) or means to reaching god. Furthermore, in keeping with Bhāgavata theology, the performance of *sevā* and the experience of *bhakti* are accepted as states of liberation as well. Thus, *sevā* is both the *sādhana* and the *phala* (fruit, reward) of *sādhana*, “that is to say, one does not perform *sevā* for any reward but the performance of *sevā* itself” (Barz 1992, 63).

Although *sevā* is considered a *sādhana* because it facilitates the removal of *doṣas*, which is a process necessary for liberation, a devotee attains (or more accurately receives) liberation only by the grace of Kṛṣṇa. Vallabha refers to liberation as *uddhāra*, the lifting out of the *jīva* from ignorance, and the grace by which *uddhāra* is bestowed is

entirely under the control of Kṛṣṇa's *icchā-śakti* (Barz 1992, 61).⁵⁰ As Barz illustrates, it would be egoistic of devotees to believe that *uddhāra* can result as a consequence of their own efforts, or that they can force *uddhāra* to be granted, and this egoism will only sustain an individual's state of *avidyā* (61). Therefore, just as it is only through Kṛṣṇa's *icchā-śakti* that a *jīva* is subjected to *avidyā*, it is only through his grace that this is *avidyā* can be lifted. This reliance on Kṛṣṇa's transforming grace characterizes Puṣṭimārga soteriology and therefore Vallabha calls his *sādhana* or *mārga* Puṣṭimārga, the path of grace.⁵¹

According to sectarian accounts, Vallabha derived the name of the tradition from a passage found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, particularly from the statement "...*poṣaṇam tadanugrahaḥ*" (BP II.10.4), which means "the *anugraha* (grace) [of Kṛṣṇa] is *poṣaṇa*." *Poṣaṇa* can be translated literally as "nourishing, supporting, maintaining," but can also be expanded to mean "growth, prosperity, increasing." It is in accordance with the latter interpretation that both the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and Vallabha use "*poṣaṇa*," though, Vallabha often substitutes the word with "*puṣṭi*." Furthermore, because Vallabha considers *puṣṭi* to be synonymous with *anugraha* or grace, the phrase may be understood

⁵⁰ Kinsley describes gods' (and by extension, Kṛṣṇa's) act of bestowing grace as another mode by which they perform their *līlā*: "The gods' erratic, playful nature is also clearly manifest in the way they bestow their grace, how they seem to toy with each individual destiny. It is as if the ultimately serious business of salvation is some kind of divine game" (1979, 25).

⁵¹ According to Vallabha, it is the Puṣṭimārga's emphasis on Kṛṣṇa's grace for liberation that distinguishes it from the Maryādā-mārga. As discussed earlier, the Maryādā-mārga is characterized by *jīvas* whom adhere to Vedic prescriptions, and only rely on knowledge (*jñāna*) as a means to attaining union with Brahman. Furthermore, those on the Maryādā-mārga do not perform *sevā*, but rather perform *pūjā*, which according to Vallabha is a "selfish" form of worship, done with expectations of rewards. Vallabha maintains that those devotees who worship selfishly and believe that the attainment of liberation is dependent upon their own efforts are susceptible to being more egoistic and thus remain in a state of *avidyā*. It is perhaps for this reason that in his treatise, *Samnyāsanimāyāḥ*, Vallabha explains how pride (*abhimāna*) is a characteristic of a *saṁnyāsi* or an ascetic. Most often, ascetics believe that through performing renunciation and various austerities they will achieve liberation. This characteristic or pride is in opposition to the humility and helplessness that characterize Puṣṭimārga devotees (Redington 2000, 167).

to mean “the grace of Kṛṣṇa is the support and the support is his grace.” Thus, as Barz demonstrates, Puṣṭimārga is the way

in which the only support and strength is the grace of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa; it is also the way that goes to the grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa ... [like *sevā*] the *anugraha* or *puṣṭi* of Bhagavān is the end towards which one follows the *Puṣṭimārga* and the *anugraha* or *puṣṭi* of Bhagavān is the only means by which one may reach the *anugraha* of Bhagavān ... [there is an] absolute reliance upon grace to receive grace. (1992, 87)

If the grace of Kṛṣṇa is accepted as both the end and *the means* of Puṣṭimārga, then it is through receiving the grace of Kṛṣṇa that a devotee is able to perform *sevā* genuinely, experience the *ānanda* of worshiping Kṛṣṇa, and also cultivate *bhakti-bhāva*. Therefore, one is initiated into the Puṣṭimārga tradition, that is, receives the *Brahmasambandha* mantra and establishes a relationship with Kṛṣṇa only by Kṛṣṇa’s grace. In fact, the *Brahmasambandha* mantra can be understood as being given directly by Kṛṣṇa since the Gosvāmī, who is responsible for initiating disciples, is accepted as an *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa.

The Maturation of Devotion into Nirodha and Sarvātmabhāva

As we discussed earlier, in his treatise, *Bhaktivardhinī*, Vallabha describes *puṣṭi-jīvas* as those *jīvas* in whom the seed of love for Kṛṣṇa (*bīja-bhāva*) has been rooted since the time of creation. According to Puruṣottoma this *bhāva*, which has a form of a seed, is the love for Kṛṣṇa born of his own grace (Redington 2000, 129). However, what this suggests is that even though *puṣṭi-jīvas* may be predisposed to worshipping Kṛṣṇa, and their experience of *bhakti-bhāva* may proceed from the grace of Kṛṣṇa, this *bhāva* is still in the form of a *bīja*, or a “seed.” It is in demonstrating how this *bīja-bhāva* can fully mature into *bhakti-bhāva* that Vallabha dedicates the remainder of his treatise. He

explains that the way to make this seed of love take firm root and mature, and the way to remove one's *doṣas* and *avidyā*, is by performing *sevā* and practicing *kathā*. Therefore, according to Vallabha, *bhakti-bhāva* is cultivated (and *avidyā* removed) through the continuous dialectical experience of *saṁyoga bhakti* (love-in-union), which occurs during *sevā*, and *viraha bhakti* (love-in-separation), which is characterized by the practice of *kathā*. The terms which Vallabha uses to characterize the fully matured state of *bhakti-bhāva*, and which constitute his central soteriological doctrine are *nirodha* ("constraint") and *sarvātmabhāva* ("total love").

Within the same treatise, *Bhaktivardhinī*, Vallabha describes how devotees arrive at this matured state of devotion by experiencing a gradient of emotions with increasing intensity: "From these (practices) [*sevā* and *kathā*] come love [*prema*] of Hari, then passionate attachment [*āśakti*] to him. And when obsession [*vyasana*] with him takes place ... the seed has taken firm root and will never be destroyed"⁵² (v. 3b-4a., 125-26). Puruṣottama defines *āśakti* as "the love that gives rise to various desires with respect to its object" and *vyasana* as the "inability to *be* (literally, to stand, remain) without him" (132). In the following verses, Vallabha explains what happens as a result of experiencing such emotions: "Love for Hari destroys all other longings, and passionate attachment to him brings distaste for one's home-life ... And when one becomes obsessed with Krishna, one has undoubtedly attained one's goal" (v. 4b-5). As a devotee's ordinary or *laukika* (lit., "worldly") passions begin to subside, a state of detachment with the world occurs. As a result, the love for Kṛṣṇa deepens and a devotee

⁵² Skt., "tataḥ prema tathāśaktirvyasanam ca yadā bhavet| bījaṁ taducyate śāstre dṛḍhaṁ yannāpi naśyati||"

becomes increasingly attached to Kṛṣṇa. In Puṣṭimārga soteriology, this stage of devotion is called *nirodha* or “constraint.”

The concept of *nirodha* provides a theological context in which the reason behind Kṛṣṇa’s manifestation, the performance of his *līlās*, and the effects of his manifestation and *līlās* may be understood. According to later Puṣṭimārga literature, Vallabha derives his definition of *nirodha* from the second canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In the final chapter of this canto, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* declares that *nirodha* is the subject matter of the tenth canto, in which the life of Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās* are described (BP II.10.1). A few verses later (BP II.10.6), the text provides its own meaning of *nirodha*: “*nirodho ’syānuśayanamātmanah saha śaktibhiḥ.*” Commentators of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* have interpreted this definition in several opposing ways, however, for the purposes of our discussion Vallabha’s interpretation will suffice: “For ‘constraint’ is defined as the ‘*anuśayana*’, that is, the Game-playing in the world, ‘of this’ Hari, along with and by means of the inconceivable ‘Powers’ of Kṛṣṇa” (Redington 1990, 35). As Redington illustrates, Vallabha proclaims this meaning of *nirodha*, where Kṛṣṇa constrains himself by manifesting his full form and performing *līlās*, as *sādhana-nirodha* or “the constraint that is the means.” The other meaning and aspect of *nirodha*, which is *phalanirodha* or “the constraint that is the reward,” applies to devotees who, by means of experiencing Kṛṣṇa’s constraint, forget the world and become increasingly attached (*āśakti*) to Kṛṣṇa. Vallabha incorporates both definitions and processes of *nirodha* in the following verse: “The combination (of elements) which goes by the name of ‘the birth’ of Hari endowed

with His Games, as well as His devotees' forgetting of the world [*prapañcavismṛti*] and attachment to Him [*bhagavadāsakti*], (is 'constraint')..."⁵³ (35).

By manifesting his full form and performing his *līlās*, Kṛṣṇa by his grace produces a type of "negative effect" in his devotees, which is characterized by their forgetting of the world. This "negative effect" is then immediately followed by a type of "positive effect," which is characterized by devotees becoming passionately attached to Kṛṣṇa. Furthermore, according to Redington, the present-day devotee's *nirodha* takes place primarily through Kṛṣṇa's manifestation as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (2000, 186), and by means of his presence in the *sevyā-svarūpa*. Vallabha demonstrates the significance of Kṛṣṇa's *nirodha* as a *sevyā-svarūpa* by stating that when Kṛṣṇa, "Having said to Himself: 'I will save this person,' [he] has become manifest in the form of clay or stone" (37). This is important because it is as the *sevyā-svarūpa* that Kṛṣṇa manifests himself with the *salvific* intent of constraining his devotees.

As we saw earlier, because Kṛṣṇa conceals his divine nature while he performs his *līlās*, *līlā* provides a means by which Kṛṣṇa may be approached and enjoyed; it becomes a locus of intimate human-divine interactions. Through performing his *līlās* Kṛṣṇa attracts his devotees away from their worldly affairs (*sādhana-nirodha*), causing them to respond emotionally and become attached to him (*phalanirodha*). Thus, Kṛṣṇa's self-subordination to his devotees' love — to his devotees' *emotions* — is the primary mode by which he constrains himself and therefore, it is the primary mode by which devotees come to approach and experience Kṛṣṇa. As Redington illustrates, Kṛṣṇa "must descend to their [his devotees'] level to make them ascend ... in order to constrain all, Kṛṣṇa must

⁵³ This verse appears in Kārikā X.15 of the *Bhāgavatārthaprakaraṇa* section of his TDN.

imitate all ... [and] by imitating the action and showing His superiority, Kṛṣṇa attracts the devotee to Himself” (1990, 37-38).

Furthermore, as we described earlier, it is Kṛṣṇa’s form, which embodies *ānanda*, beauty and *rasa* that causes devotees to become attracted and attached to him. Kṛṣṇa’s form is repeatedly described as the “reservoir of beauty” and as the “fount of *rasa*.” From a theological point of view, moreover, even the sound of Kṛṣṇa’s flute may be considered a form of constraint: it is a summons, an irresistibly charming sound that calls back *jīvas* to their creator (Kinsley 1979, 101). In his *Subodhinī* (X.29.16), Vallabha quotes the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s own summation of how Kṛṣṇa, through his beauty, accomplishes his “constraint” during his descent on earth:

...After charming away the eyes of men with His own form, whose beauty far surpasses all the world’s loveliness; and stealing with His words the minds and hearts of those who remember them; and attracting with His holy feet the actions of all those who gaze upon them ... by this form of His, all will swiftly and surely cross beyond the Darkness... (BP XI.1.6-7; Redington 1990, 41)

Another mode by which Kṛṣṇa increases his constraint of devotees is by subjecting them to the experience of *viraha*. The anguish of separation causes his devotees to forget about the world and turn their attention to the constant remembrance of him and his *līlās* (*kathā*). As we saw above, this process leads to a state of attachment (*āśakti*) and obsession (*vyāsana*), after which a devotee’s *bhakti-bhāva* culminates in the experience of *nirodha* and finally, *sarvātmabhāva*. In his *Subodhinī* (X.32.20), Vallabha illustrates this constraint of devotees by commenting on the verse where Kṛṣṇa compares his leaving the *gopīs* with a poor man who becomes rich, and then loses his wealth again. Vallabha writes that “...in this way the Gopīs, too, might first be bereft of the Blessed Lord. And if they attained Him, and He then disappears, from that time their minds

become fixed on and immersed in Him alone, so that they will forget the outside world completely” (255).

Vallabha dedicates an entire treatise, *Nirodhalakṣaṇam*, to discuss his theory of *nirodha*. Vallabha presents *nirodha* as a condition that is immediately consequent upon the stage of obsession (*vyasana*). Although Vallabha often maintains that both experiences of *nirodha* and *sarvātmabhāva* signify the end of the “means-stage” of devotion and the beginning of the “rewards-stage,” they are also accepted as states of liberation. Vallabha expresses this view (with regards to *nirodha*) in verse eleven of his treatise, when he states: “Those souls whom Hari set free have become sunk in the ocean of existence. But those whom he has constrained, and they alone, experience joy day and night” (Redington 2000, 179). Here, Vallabha cleverly inverts the traditional meaning of *mokṣa*, which is usually defined as “liberation” or “freedom,” with that of *nirodha*. That is, Vallabha contends that those devotees whom Kṛṣṇa does not love, he “sets free” and lets them become entangled in *saṁsāra*. While the devotees he loves the most, “He takes them beyond mere liberation to His highest reward, ‘Entry into His Eternal Game’ (Skt., *nityalīlāpraveśa*), by gracing them with repeated participation in His Games ... and thus leading them to complete constraint” (Redington 1990, 40).

When devotees become passionately attached and obsessed with Kṛṣṇa, that is, when they experience intense *nirodha*, they enter the final “matured” stage of devotion known as “*sarvātmabhāva*” or “total love.” According to Redington, Vallabha derives his doctrine of *sarvātmabhāva* from a few verses in book nine of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (IX.4.18-21) (1990, 24).⁵⁴ However, because Vallabha did not write a commentary on

⁵⁴ “He (Ambarīṣa) directed his mind to Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet, his speech to describing the glories of Vaiṣṇava, his hands to the sweeping and cleaning of Hari’s temples, his ears to hearing the sacred stories about

book nine, he resorts to a verse in book ten to explain the concept of *sarvātmabhāva*.

Vallabha's commentary to this verse runs as follows:

Conversing with the Blessed Lord, seeing Him, embracing Him when we meet Him, as well as worshipping Him and in that way touching Him; kissing the nectar of His lips, enjoying Him sexually, and the thrilling of the hair as well; hearing the sound He makes when speaking, singing or playing the flute, as well as smelling His fragrance everywhere; moving constantly to be near Him, and meditatively imagining Him at all times: this alone is the reward of all who have senses — even liberation, if it is other than this, is not the proper reward, just as abiding forever in darkness can never be the reward of the eye! Thus even liberation is never the reward for beings endowed with senses and other faculties...⁵⁵ (24-25)

Therefore, as Redington illustrates, the primary meaning and condition of *sarvātmabhāva* may be construed as: “the love of the soul for the Blessed Lord with (or ‘by means of’) all the senses, motor-organs, life-breath, mind, heart and understanding” (25). And, as the verse itself indicates, the experience of *sarvātmabhāva* is not only a means to liberation, but can also be expressive of the state of liberation it self. Shyam Manohar Goswamy maintains that this condition of *sarvātmabhāva* can be experienced in both states of *sam̐yoga-bhakti* and *viraha-bhakti* (Redington 1990, 26). According to Redington, a prime example of this type of *sarvātmabhāva* that occurs in a state of *viraha-bhakti* is found in the second chapter of the *Rāsapañcadhyāyī* (chapter 30), where the *gopīs* imitate Kṛṣṇa's actions. After Kṛṣṇa vanishes from the *gopīs*, they become so distraught that they begin to imitate all of his *līlās*, “in which all the senses and limbs,

Acyuta, his eyes to seeing the places where Mukunda's image dwells, his bodily contact to touching the limbs of the Lord's servants, his nose to the fragrance of Blessed Tulasī on Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, his tongue to the food offered to the Lord, his feet to traveling to Hari's sacred places, his head to reverencing Hṛṣīkeśa's feet, and his passion (Skt., *kāma*) to service, without any indulgence of lust — a love like that which characterizes Uttamaśloka's own people. Thus at all times making a Total Love of the entire range of his actions to the Supreme Adhiyajña...” (1990, 24n11).

⁵⁵ The actual verse upon which Vallabha comments reads as follows: “The beautiful *gopīs* said: ‘We do not know of any higher reward for those who have eyes than this [sight of] the faces of those two sons of the chief of Vraja as they, with their companions, make the animals follow them. O girlfriends. With their two flutes their faces are enchanting, and they cast loving glances which are absorbed by those [who have eyes]’” (BP X.21.7).

mind, heart and entire person become so absorbed in love of Kṛṣṇa that some of the Gopīs actually think they are Kṛṣṇa” (30). And after they searched everywhere for him, they become so attached and obsessed with Kṛṣṇa, that their “conversations focused on him, their activities centered on him, and they dedicated their hearts to him...” (BP X.29.43).

Furthermore, in his treatise, *Nirodhalakṣaṇam*, Vallabha describes the experience of *sarvātmabhāva* in the context of *sevā*: “The devotee should meditate constantly on his image of Hari, for because of his mental conviction that his image is non-different from the Lord, he sees Hari clearly, touches him really, and likewise, the actions of his hands and the movements of his feet are constantly for Hari” (v.17-19; Redington 2000, 181). As the verse reveals, this experience of *sarvātmabhāva* can only occur if one accepts the image of Kṛṣṇa to be a *svarūpa*, the complete manifestation of Kṛṣṇa visibly present and therefore capable of being sensually experienced. According to Shyam Manohar Goswamy, this understanding of *sarvātmabhāva*, where devotees accept not only the image they worship but everything they sense as being non-different from Kṛṣṇa, corresponds to a “secondary” type of *sarvātmabhāva*.⁵⁶ This type of *sarvātmabhāva* is characterized by “the love of the soul for the Blessed Lord in everyone and everything” or “the love that is characteristic of the Self (i.e., the devotee loves Kṛṣṇa as intimately and non-dualistically as he loves his own Self) for the Blessed Lord in everyone and everything” (Redington 1990, 26). It is only in a state of *viraha-bhakti*, moreover, that the experience of this secondary type of *sarvātmabhāva* occurs. For example, in his *Subodhinī*, Vallabha explains that when Kṛṣṇa disappeared from the *gopīs*’ sight, they

⁵⁶ Shyam Manohar Goswamy calls this tendency to “project the beloved [Kṛṣṇa] onto everything” as *āsaktibhramanyāya* (Redington 2000, 187).

were “moved by their awareness of Hari in all things” (X.30.14, 58), and that it is “by constantly imagining and fantasizing (Skt. *bhāvanā*) Him that the perception bursts upon us that this entire world has Him as its Self” (69).⁵⁷ Therefore, for Vallabha, *viraha-bhakti* has soteriological significance to the extent that it facilitates the experience of obsession (*vyasana*) and *nirodha* and is thus conducive to the experience of this “secondary” type of *sarvātmabhāva*. The secondary type of *sarvātmabhāva* then becomes subsumed under the “primary” type of *sarvātmabhāva*, which according to Redington, is a “more permanent manifestation, and we love Kṛṣṇa totally, with all our senses, faculties, mind and heart, whether united with Him or separate from Him” (37).

In another very short treatise, *Catuḥśloki* (“Four Verses”), Vallabha correlates each of the four verses in the treatise with the four goals of human life, the *puruṣārthas* (*dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokṣa*) respectively. In the first verse, which correlates to *dharma*, Vallabha explains that the “devotee should worship the Lord of Vraja at all times, with total love (and/or: with all/every sentiment). For this alone is his rule of life — never and in no circumstance is there any other” (Redington 2000, 118).⁵⁸ According to Gokulanātha, the devotional worship referred to here is *sevā*, suggesting that a devotee’s *dharma* or “rule of life” is to worship Kṛṣṇa. He also interprets *sarvabhāva* as *sarvātmabhāva*, and should be understood in the sense that we are already familiar with, namely, the love for Kṛṣṇa that is experienced with all our body, inner faculties, life-breaths, etc. However, Shyam Manohar Goswamy notes that the experience of *sarvātmabhāva* is “so advanced a grace that to assume it as a precondition [for *sevā*]

⁵⁷ This “secondary” *sarvātmabhāva* may be construed as an experience or a knowledge that characterizes Śuddhādvaita ontology, that is, devotees come to accept everything as Kṛṣṇa’s own form.

⁵⁸ Skt., “*sarvadā sarvabhāvena bhajanīyo vrajādhipaḥ | svasyāyameva dharmo hi nānyaḥ kvāpi kadācana*||” As we shall see in the following chapter, this interpretation of *sarvātmabhāva* becomes increasingly important for understanding “aesthetic theology” in Puṣṭimārga.

would make this treatise applicable to a precious few devotees, and would end the work and purpose of ‘worship’...” (120). It is for this reason he suggests that *sarvabhāva* should also be construed as “all love sentiments” or “all love relationships.” That is, Kṛṣṇa should be worshipped and loved as a lord, friend, child, and lover, with a continual alternation of those sentiments in the devotee (120).

As we saw earlier, Kṛṣṇa only leaves the *gopīs* and allows them to experience *viraha-bhakti* out of grace, so that they may think of him always. Therefore, just as the *bīja-bhāva* is born of Kṛṣṇa’s grace, the matured condition of *sarvātmabhāva* is also considered to result from his grace. Though, in accordance with what appears to be a common theme in Vallabha’s thought, the experience of *sarvātmabhāva* is also a means to receiving Kṛṣṇa’s grace.

The progression of a devotee’s *bhakti-bhāva* through the stages of *prema*, *āsakti*, and *vyasana* is facilitated by the continual experience of *samyoga-bhakti* and *viraha-bhakti*. According to Vallabha, however, it is when the states of *vyasana*, and then *nirodha*, culminate into the experience of *sarvātmabhāva* that a devotee achieves the final requirement and proof of “eligibility” for receiving Kṛṣṇa’s liberating grace and attaining the “highest reward”: participation in the *rāsa-līlā*. In his *Subodhinī*, Vallabha demonstrates this point by stating how participation in the *rāsalīlā* “requires of its participants that complete surrender to the Lord which is characterized by Total Love [*sarvātmabhāva*] of Him” (X.29.17, 86), and that “by their Total Love of Him they [the *gopīs*] are suitable women for Him to produce the mood of love [*rasa*] in” (X.33.2, 262). Viṭṭhalanātha, in a way, furthers his father’s position by stating that those *gopīs* who stayed at home and did not come see Kṛṣṇa in the forest, did not experience (or possess)

sarvātmabhāva and therefore, only attained the “lower” form of liberation: *sāyujya* (union) with Kṛṣṇa. Viṭṭhalantha discusses this claim in the most substantive interpolation he writes on the *Rāsapañcadhyāyī* section of the *Subodhinī*. He argues that “the game the Lord will play, which will embody the Joy [*ānanda*] of His very Form, will be of such a nature ... [that] there is no reason for you to be amazed that those who do not possess Total Love [*sarvātmabhāva*] for Him ... are not fit to experience this game” (X.29.12-16, 81-2). Therefore, the *gopīs* whom participated in the *rāsa-līlā* are considered archetypical devotees because of their experience and possession of *sarvātmabhāva* for Kṛṣṇa. And it is because they express such a highly matured form of devotion, an almost transcendent form of devotion, that they are “eligible” to receive Kṛṣṇa’s liberating grace

The Rewards of Sevā and the Restoration of Ānanda

If we are to continue organizing our discussion on “rewards” after the same verse from Vallabha’s *Bālabodhaḥ* with which we began the section on soteriology, at this point, it would perhaps help to recall the verse in full:

Souls are inherently defective. To free themselves forever of their defects, they should practice “hearing” and so forth. For by the love which results from these practices, everything is accomplished that needs to be accomplished... (v. 16b-17, Redington 2000, 15)

In keeping with the structure of this verse, it has been demonstrated how *jīvas* facilitate the removal of their defects and *avidyā* by offering their entire selves to Kṛṣṇa through the performance of *sevā* (*saṁyoga-bhakti*) and practice of *kathā* (*viraha-bhakti*). The love which results from performing cultivated *sevā* and *kathā* progresses through the stages of *āsakti* and *vyasana*, culminating in a devotee’s experience of *nirodha* and *sarvātmabhāva*. It is after nurturing such a matured level of devotion that a devotee

becomes “eligible” for receiving Kṛṣṇa’s liberating grace, and “accomplishes what needs to be accomplished.” As we saw above, in the next few verses of the *Bālabodhaḥ* (v. 18-19) Vallabha reveals what is it that a devotee accomplishes, namely, the relationship of “belonging to” Kṛṣṇa (*tadīyatvam*).

Vallabha asserts that “belonging to Kṛṣṇa,” which presupposes having a relationship with him, is superior to or is a higher reward than attaining “refuge in Kṛṣṇa” (*tadāśraya*). Furthermore, in his *Subodhinī* (X.29.13), Vallabha declares that “any person who attains a close relationship to the Blessed Lord [*bhagavati sambhandham*] by any means at all becomes completely free”⁵⁹ (Redington 1990, 65). Belonging to Kṛṣṇa, and thus engaging in a relationship with him is at the core of the devotional path. What this suggests, and is confirmed by Vallabha in his treatise, *Navaratnam*, is that the spiritual journey is a love-relationship with Kṛṣṇa where he, too, is traveling on the path of grace (*Puṣṭimārga*) with the devotee (*bhagavānapi puṣṭishah*) (Redington 2000, 74-77). This idea is furthered by Shyam Manohar Goswamy who agrees that both Kṛṣṇa and the devotee are traveling together on the path of devotion but that they do this with Kṛṣṇa having his “arm of *līlā*” around the devotee’s shoulder and with the devotee having his “arm of *sevā*” around Kṛṣṇa’s shoulder (2003, 5).⁶⁰ Kṛṣṇa participates in this love-relationship by bestowing his grace (*anugraha*) and performing his *līlās*, while devotees participate in it by experiencing devotion (*puṣṭi*) and performing *sevā*. Thus, to be engaged in an emotional relationship with Kṛṣṇa in the context of *līlā*

⁵⁹ A few stanzas later (X.29.15), Vallabha lists the six means by which one attains a relationship with Kṛṣṇa: by passionate desire, anger, fear, love desire for union, and friendship (Redington 1990, 68).

⁶⁰ “*Bhagvān jo kar rahe hain vāku ‘līlā’ kahyo ja rahyo hain. Apan jo kar rahe hain vāku ‘sevā’ kahyo ja rahyo hain. Jaise bhagvān apne kaṇdhāpe līlāko hāth rakh de aur apan bhagvānke kaṇdhāpe sevāko hāth dhar de.*”

represents the highest state of human existence as articulated in Puṣṭimārga soteriology and as actualized in Puṣṭimārga *sevā*.

The doctrines of *nirodha*, where both Kṛṣṇa and his devotees become attracted and attached to each other, and *sarvātmabhāva*, where devotees love Kṛṣṇa with all their sense faculties, and the emphasis placed on a devotee's desire to engage in an emotional relationship with Kṛṣṇa in the context of *līlā*, reveals an underlying preoccupation in Puṣṭimārga soteriology. According to Vallabha, the highest state of existence for a devotee is to be in the presence of, be *emotionally* intimate with, and to sensually experience Kṛṣṇa's physical form. This is so because Kṛṣṇa is the embodiment of all *bhāvas* and *rasas*, and his body is made of only *ānanda*. And as we have already seen, because *jīvas* had their *ānanda* aspects concealed at the moment of creation, and (*puṣṭi*-) *jīvas* were manifested from Kṛṣṇa's very body, devotees are only satisfied with experiencing Kṛṣṇa's physical presence. Furthermore, *jīvas* are said to be created for the purpose of worshiping Kṛṣṇa's very person and are therefore rewarded with or by means of his body. What characterizes *puṣṭi-bhakti* is the seeking of *ānanda*, to bring it from a state of concealment to a state of manifestation. Thus, the final reward of *puṣṭi-bhakti* consists in the restoration of *ānanda* within a devotee, which occurs as a result of experiencing Kṛṣṇa's presence and participating in his *līlās*.

The *rāsa-līlā* is expressive of the highest state of liberation because, in making love to the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa is not only imbuing the *gopīs* with *rasa*, but is in fact giving them the gift of his own form — a form composed entirely of *ānanda*. And as Vallabha declares in his *Subodhinī* (X.33.2), the *gopīs* received this gift because they “became like

the Blessed Lord. Their Joy [*ānanda*] was complete” (Redington 1990, 262). Redington illustrates how Viṭṭhalanātha agrees with his father, that is,

The major philosophical point Viṭṭhalanātha makes is that Kṛṣṇa is making love with the Gopīs in order to give them, from within Himself, the Joy (*ānanda*) which all souls, according to Vallabha’s teaching, lost primordially, and which is the be-all and end-all that every person spends life searching to regain. The special privilege that Kṛṣṇa gave to the Gopīs, and to no one else at all, was that He filled them immediately with His own Joy. Thus the Gopīs did not have to take the normal religious means necessary for all other persons in order to reawaken the Joy which was once in themselves but had been lost due to the operation of Kṛṣṇa’s Power of Ignorance (Skt. *avidyāśakti*) on all souls. (Redington 1990, 8)

Vallabha dedicates an entire treatise, *Sevāphalam*, to discuss the type of rewards devotees may receive as a result of performing proper *sevā*. Vallabha also writes his own prose commentary (*vivarāṇa*) for each verse, indicating just how important this treatise is. In his commentary to the first verse, Vallabha enumerates a triad of rewards: “transcendent power [or ‘capacity for the transcendent’; *alaukikasāmarthyā*], absorption (in the Lord) [*sāyujya*], and a body fit for worship in Vaikuntha, Goloka, or other (heavens) [*sevopayogideho...*]” (Redington 2000, 191). According to Shyam Manohar Goswamy, the first reward, *alaukikasāmarthyā*, is the highest reward a devotee can receive. He considers it to be “an advanced mystical grace, an ‘almost magical ability of the worshipper to bring God alive in the worship’” (196). What is important but not surprising about this reward is that its context is still *sevā*, that is, the highest form of liberation in Puṣṭimārga is characterized by a devotee continuing to perform the loving *sevā* of Kṛṣṇa. Thus, *sevā* is not only a means to liberation, but is also the state of liberation itself. However, Vallabha also accepts *alaukikasāmarthyā* as a form of “mental worship” or *mānasī-sevā*, where Kṛṣṇa, with his *līlās*, enters into his devotees, and permanently restores their *ānanda*. It is for this reason that Puruṣottama interprets

this reward as "...the ability, born of the Blessed Lord's entry into (the devotee), by which (the devotee) experiences the joy [*ānanda*] of the fully present form of the Blessed Lord who is mood [*rasa*] itself" (196). According to Shyam Manohar Goswamy, moreover, this reward is given during a devotee's lifetime and is thus a form of *jīvan-mukti*.

As Vallabha illustrates, if devotees are not eligible for receiving the first reward, they may receive a second reward, *sāyujya*, which consists in their merging with Kṛṣṇa after death. The final reward that Vallabha mentions in this treatise consists in a devotee attaining a body fit for worshipping Kṛṣṇa in heavenly Vraja (Goloka) or Vaikuṇṭha. This reward also has *sevā* as its context, but is only attained after death. Although they are not mentioned by Vallabha in this text, in his commentary to another treatise by Vallabha (*Bhaktivardhinī*; v.6-7a), Gokulanātha mentions two forms of liberation that also occur after death: a transcendent body fit for experiencing Kṛṣṇa's eternal *līlās* (*līlaupayika alaukika-deha* or as we have already encountered, *nityālīlāpraveśa*), and face-to-face union with Kṛṣṇa (*sākṣātsvarūpasambandhiphalam*) (134). As we have already discussed, these latter forms of liberation also consist in a devotee experiencing the physical presence of Kṛṣṇa and participating in his *līlās* and therefore, also culminate in the permanent restoration of *ānanda*.

Conclusion

Devotees can only remove their *avidyā*, mature their *bhakti-bhāvas*, and permanently restore their *ānanda* through the performance of cultivated *sevā*. By providing a context in which a devotee experiences the presence of Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*,

sevā serves as a site of emotional transformation where a devotee's love (*prema*), attachment (*āśakti*), and obsession (*vyasana*) culminate in the experience of *nirodha* and *sarvātmabhāva*. Thus, emotion becomes both the way and the goal for experiencing Kṛṣṇa. As we have seen, *sarvātmabhāva* is a state in which devotees experience intense emotional and physical intimacy with Kṛṣṇa, and feel as though they are actual participants in his *līlās*. And, when this process becomes actualized, that is, when a devotee is able to make Kṛṣṇa "come alive" during *sevā* and experience his *līlās* (*alaukikasāmarthyā*), a devotee's *ānanda* is permanently restored. It is a form of liberation-in-life or *jīvan-mukti*. Therefore, *sevā* is accepted as both a path to, and the state of, liberation. In the following chapter, we examine how both Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha invoke Sanskrit aesthetic theory to validate a devotee's emotional transformation during *sevā*.

Chapter Three

Restoring Ānanda Through Practice

In chapter one, I discussed the centrality of the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in the Puṣṭimārga tradition, both as scriptural revelation and as Kṛṣṇa's self-manifestation or literary substitute (*vāṇmayāvatāra*). As I have noted, it is in its expression of *bhakti-bhāva* and its emphasis on Kṛṣṇa's transforming grace that makes the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* such an influential text. By means of intricate narrative components and exquisite poetry, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* unmask deeply embedded theological and philosophical ideas, while also asserting "the rights of the emotional and the aesthetic in human nature" (De 1961, 7). By providing excerpts of such narratives, I attempted to present several theological themes central to Vaiṣṇava thought, such as Kṛṣṇa's self-subordination to his devotee's love, the experience of *viraha-bhakti*, the engaged practice of *navavidha-bhakti*, and the devotee's desire to be intimately associated with Kṛṣṇa in the context of *līlā*.

In chapter two, I focused on how these themes affected, and became incorporated into, Vallabha's own ontological and soteriological formulizations. I argued that, for Vallabha, the devotional process is cyclical. That is, the experience of *puṣṭi-bhakti* is engendered through Kṛṣṇa's grace, matures by means of Kṛṣṇa's grace, and is rewarded by or results in attaining Kṛṣṇa's grace. In line with this cyclical discourse, the soteriological doctrines of both *sarvātmabhāva* and *nīrodha* are also understood as the means to, and the state of, liberation. However, as I will continue to discuss in the present chapter, it is in the context of *sevā* that these doctrines are actualized and

therefore, acquire salvific value. This process of actualization is both facilitated by, and results in, an intense experience of intimacy with Kṛṣṇa, described as *rasa*.

It is through the performance of cultivated *sevā* that devotees remove their *doṣas* and *avidyā*, mature their *bhakti-bhāva* into experiences of *nirodha* and *sarvātmabhāva*, and finally restore their states of *ānanda*, either as *jīvan-muktas* or by participating in Kṛṣṇa's eternal *līlās* after death. Moreover, it is for this reason that the performance of *sevā* is also considered both a means to, and a state of liberation. It will become clear as we proceed that, on the one hand, Puṣṭimārga theology remains incomplete without a devotee's active participation in *sevā*, while on the other hand the performance of *sevā* remains ineffective without being located within a theological context. It is this complementary function of Puṣṭimārga theology and *sevā* that renders each soteriologically efficacious.

In Vallabha's system, *sevā* is effective only if it triggers an emotional response, or more specifically, an emotional *transformation*. This transformation, which is characterized by a devotee's experience of intense emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa is explained and validated in Puṣṭimārga by the invocation of Sanskrit aesthetic theory. I argue that, in the Puṣṭimārga tradition, the aesthetic experience is both expressive of this transformed state *and* facilitates this transformation.

As mentioned in the introduction it was Vallabha's son, Viṭṭhalanātha, who enhanced the aesthetic appeal of *sevā* by establishing it into an elaborate liturgical system consisting of offerings of *rāga* ("music"), *bhoga* ("food"), and *śṛṅgāra* (adornment of the image of Kṛṣṇa). Peter Bennett illustrates how "in the aesthetics of Puṣṭi Mārgi worship, the loving *emotions* of the worshiper are conveyed to the *svarūpa* via the several media

of food, adornment and gesture” (1993, 129 emphasis mine). Thus, Puṣṭimārga theology — particularly the experience of emotion in this theology — lends authoritative status to aesthetics in *sevā*, while these rituals in turn substantiate or reaffirm this theology.

In this chapter, I focus on the place of emotion in Puṣṭimārga theology and practice, both of which are fundamentally rooted in the aesthetic experience. The chapter is divided in two sections: In Part I, I provide a brief overview of Sanskrit aesthetic theory, and demonstrate how this theory informs and affects Puṣṭimārga theology. I argue that the aesthetic experience is expressive of an emotionally transformed state in which devotees delight in the experience of emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa. In Part II of the chapter, I discuss and analyze forms of Puṣṭimārga *sevā* and demonstrate how the efficacy of cultivated *sevā* rests upon the experience of *rasa*. I argue that, as conduits for such an experience, the “aesthetic rituals” of *rāga*, *bhoga*, and *śṛṅgāra* serve transformative and mediating functions for the devotee.

I

Aesthetics and Religious Experience

In order to fully understand Puṣṭimārga’s emphasis on aesthetics, we must briefly shift our attention to the basic principles of Sanskrit aesthetic theory, which informs Puṣṭimārga theology to a great extent. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* (ca. 300 CE) of Bharata,⁶¹ primarily a dramaturgical text, is one of the earliest works on Sanskrit aesthetics and

⁶¹ Within the text, Bharata describes how the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was revealed to him by Brahma as the “fifth Veda” — the *Nāṭya-Veda* or “drama-Veda.” Brahmā informs Bharata that this “drama” will “provide instructions to everyone in the world through all its actions, emotional states (*bhāvas*), and *rasas*.” (Haberman 1988, 14). Thus, the account of the origins of drama itself imparts a religious dimension to Sanskrit aesthetic theory.

contains the first exposition of the *rasa* theory.⁶² Here, the aesthetic experience is described as a process whereby quotidian feelings or emotions (*sthāyibhāvas*) are transformed into a unique state of consciousness.⁶³ Classical texts on aesthetics present this in the context of enjoying drama, poetry, or visual art. This transformed state, or aesthetic rapture, is most often described as a kind of “tasting” or “relish,” *rasa*.⁶⁴ The aesthetic experience, therefore, consists of enjoying this *rasa*, “of immersing oneself in it to the exclusion of all else” (Gnoli 1968, xv).

Over the centuries, Sanskrit aesthetic theory has been elaborated upon in the form of prolific commentarial and independent works, which include the writings of prominent aesthetic theorists such as Bhaṭṭa Tauta, Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, Śaṅkuka, Ānandavardhana (ca.820-890),⁶⁵ and Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka (ca.900-1000). Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, author of the lost *Sahridayadarpaṇa*, furthers the *rasa* theory by indicating how the aesthetic experience is characterized by a feeling of “generalization” or “universalization.” This feeling facilitates a state of consciousness whereby one feels released from the confines of individuality, momentarily regaining one’s “immaculate being not yet overshadowed by *māyā*” (xxi n1). Once lifted above their “limited egos,” the audience in this state does not

⁶² It is important to keep in mind that the concept of *rasa* emerged in the context of drama, and is introduced in the famous *rasa-sūtra* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. This *sūtra* serves as the “*locus classicus*” of all later Indian aesthetic thought, and is translated by Edwin Gerow as follows: “The *rasa* exists or is produced from (we would prefer ‘as’) a combination of ... *vibhāvas* ‘causes of emotion’ e.g. the persons and circumstances represented,’ *anubhāvas* ‘effects, consequences or external signs of emotions,’ and *vyabhicāribhāvas* ‘transitory states (of mind)’” (qtd. in Lighthiser 1999, 7).

⁶³ The eight *sthāyibhāvas* described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are: delight (*rati*), mirth (*hāsa*), sorrow (*śoka*), anger (*krodha*), vigour (*utsāha*), fear (*bhaya*), disgust (*jugupsā*), and wonder (*vismaya*). Later speculation introduces a ninth *bhāva*, serenity or *nirveda*.

⁶⁴ The eight corresponding *rasas* are: erotic (*śṛṅgāra*), comic (*hāsyā*), pathetic (*karuṇā*), furious (*raudra*), heroic (*vīra*), horrific (*bhayānaka*), loathsome (*bībhatsa*), marvellous (*adbhuta*). The ninth *rasa* introduced later is the quietistic/peaceful (*śānta*). Amongst the nine, the erotic sentiment or *śṛṅgāra rasa* is given precedence.

⁶⁵ Ānandavardhana, the author of the acclaimed and influential *Dhvanyāloka*, furthers the discussion of *rasa* as it was introduced in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and says that *rasa* constitutes an aesthetic experience that can only be “evoked” or “suggested.” Ānandavardhana is thus attributed with the establishment of the *dhvani* theory, that is, the theory of “suggestibility.”

associate the painful events seen in a drama or read in a poem with the events in their own lives; they rather take them to be a source of aesthetic pleasure or *rasa* since these events have now been represented and thus reinterpreted in a generalized or universalized form. *Rasa*, experienced through this process of generalization, evokes a feeling of rest (*viśrānti*), and is imbued with a sensation of *ānanda*: “it belongs to the same order as the enjoyment of the supreme *brahman*” (xxiv). Thus, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka becomes the first writer to affirm the relationship between *rasāsvāda* (“the enjoyment of aesthetic tasting”) and *brahmāsvāda* (“the enjoyment of spiritual realization”).

This relationship was later crystallized by Abhinavagupta (ca. 950 CE), one of the most important figures of the Kaśmīr Śaiva tradition.⁶⁶ Abhinavagupta’s writings on aesthetic theory are considered “epoch-making” works in the history of Sanskrit poetics and aesthetics and have succeeded in establishing principles that are followed to this day. He describes *rasa* as an enjoyment different from mundane or *laukika* experience, and posits it as a transcendent or *alaukika* experience, characterized by feelings of *viśrānti* and *ānanda*. Abhinavagupta obscures the boundaries between *rasāsvāda* and *brahmāsvāda* by homologizing the aesthetic experience with the mystical experience. According to him the aesthetic experience is a foretaste of the mystical experience, differing in degree but not in kind: “while the mystical experience is perfect fullness, in which the knots of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are already completely undone, in the aesthetic experience the process of undoing has only just begun” (xxv).

⁶⁶ Abhinavagupta is described as an adherent of the Trika form of Kaśmīri, non-dualistic, tantric Śaivism, and is credited with establishing the “doctrine of recognition” (*pratyabijñā*). His most popular works on aesthetics include the *Abhinava-bhāratī*, a commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and the *Locana*, a commentary on Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyāloka*.

As Owen Lynch asserts, Sanskrit aesthetics is “an explicit theory of emotion ... [and] *Bhakti* was conceived and meant to be experienced as an emotion” (1990, 17-18). Thus, it is perhaps in the *bhakti* context, particularly in the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* context, that we can truly appreciate the congruence of religious and aesthetic experience. In Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, emotion or *bhāva* becomes the primary mode of approaching and experiencing Kṛṣṇa. Medieval Vaiṣṇava theologians and rhetoricians, such as the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, substantiated the role of emotion in *bhakti* by invoking and reinterpreting Sanskrit aesthetic theory and reducing the eight (*sthāyi*-) *bhāvas* to five: *dāsyā-bhāva* (servitude); *sākhya-bhāva* (friendship); *vātsalya-bhāva* (parental love); *madhura-bhāva* (erotic love); and, *śānta-bhāva* (peace and reverence).⁶⁷ Each *bhāva* (except, perhaps the fifth) is modeled after human relationships and, therefore, each devotional relationship or *bhakti-bhāva* becomes a particular mode by which devotees approach and experience their love for Kṛṣṇa. From the point of view of Sanskrit aesthetics, moreover, each of these *bhakti-bhāvas* is really an expression of one *bhāva*, the *bhāva* of love (*rati*, *madhura*). Thus, *bhāva* in the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* context is not only understood as “emotion,” but also as supreme love for Kṛṣṇa.

Several Vaiṣṇava sects, including the Puṣṭimārga tradition, cultivate *vātsalya-bhāva* as the dominant devotional sentiment in their religious practice.⁶⁸ However, it is

⁶⁷ This taxonomy of *bhakti-bhāvas* first appeared in the *Nārada-bhaktisūtra* (v.82), a late eighteenth century (Nimbārka) Vaiṣṇava text, in a more implicit form.

⁶⁸ In regards to Puṣṭimārga religious practice, Redington contends that it is a “misconception to think that the dominant emotional relationship of the devotee to Krishna taught and practiced by Vallabha and his followers is that of ‘parental love’ (*vātsalyabhāva*) toward Krishna” (1990, 21). Redington substantiates this claim by pointing to the importance given to the *gopī* episodes by Vallabha and his followers. For example, the *Rāsapañcadhyāyī* chapters are given precedence over and above other Kṛṣṇa narratives; in his *Subhodinī*, Vallabha presents his commentary on these chapters in his sub-treatise on “Rewards”; in his treatise, *Samnyāsānirṇayaḥ* (v. 8), Vallabha proclaims the *gopīs* to be *gurus* of renunciation; the *gopīs*’ experience of *nīrodha*, and expression of *viraha-bhakti* and *sarvātmabhāva* have influenced Vallabha’s theological formulizations; in his *Subhodinī* (X.29.24), Vallabha declares Kṛṣṇa as the “husband of all

the *madhura-bhāva*, the love between a woman and her beloved, that becomes the veritable symbol of the soul's longing for and experience of Kṛṣṇa. And, although one does not find an explicit delineation of these *bhakti-bhāvas* in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the emphasis given to the *gopī* episodes in the tenth canto clearly illustrates how the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself "introduces a type of erotic mysticism as the leading religious idea, and the importance of the work lies precisely in this" (De 1961, 7).

It was not until the thirteenth century that an effort was taken to establish *bhakti* itself as a separate *rasa*. The Marathi commentator Vopadeva (ca. 1265) is said to have employed the *rasa* theory for the first time with reference to the *gopī* episodes found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Hardy 1983, 561). The formal systemization of *bhakti-rasa*, however, was brought to its zenith in the works of Rūpa Gosvāmī (ca. 1489) and Jīva Gosvāmī (ca. 1511), two of the most prominent theologians of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava school of Caitanya.⁶⁹

Although Abhinavagupta is not explicitly mentioned in Rūpa's writings, his influence is evident. Like Abhinavagupta, Rūpa reinterpreted Sanskrit aesthetic theory and applied it to his ideas of religious practice. However, unlike Abhinavagupta, who still maintained a measure of distinction between aesthetic experience and mystical experience, Rūpa saw them as being equal, "so close is the fit that we may wonder whether aesthetics became theology, or theology aesthetic" (Gerow qtd. in Haberman

souls. And those souls who have become embodied as women must worship and serve the Blessed Lord alone in order to be free of infidelity" (94); finally, in his treatise, *Antaḥkaraṇaprabodhaḥ* (v.8b-9), Vallabha appears to compare his body's final journey to Kṛṣṇa as a bride is sent to her husband (Redington 2000, 92).

⁶⁹ Rūpa is perhaps the most important sectarian philosopher of Indian theistic thought. His theories of devotional practice are primarily outlined in his two Sanskrit works: *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* and *Ujjvalanīlamanī*. Jīva, his nephew and disciple, was the most prolific of the six Gosvāmīs of the Gauḍīya sect. He furthered Rūpa's theories by writing commentaries on his works and composing several independent works on *bhakti* and aesthetics.

1988, 36). And, while Abhinavagupta claimed that any generic drama is capable of evoking *rasa*, for Rūpa, only one drama could produce true *rasa*: the divine drama — the *līlā* — of Kṛṣṇa. Rūpa developed a *bhakti* practice, *rāgānuga bhakti*, in which devotees seek to permanently participate in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*. According to this theory, “the whole world, or at least all of Vraja (which, from the correct spiritual perspective, amounts to the same thing), becomes a stage on which to act out one's part; thus religion becomes drama and acting becomes a way of salvation” (34). Furthermore, Abhinavagupta insisted that *rasa* could only be experienced by the audience, and not the actor. In Rūpa's system, however, the devotee becomes an active participant in Kṛṣṇa's drama, and the intensity of the experience of *rasa* depends on how engaged and involved that participation becomes. And, as devotees come to realize themselves as actual participants in Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*, their (*sthāyi*-) *bhāva* of love for Kṛṣṇa (*Kṛṣṇa-rati*) culminates in the experience of *bhakti-rasa*, which for Rūpa is the *rasa* par excellence, the quintessence of all aesthetic experience.⁷⁰

Rasa and Puṣṭimārga Bhakti

Now that we have examined some basic principles of Sanskrit aesthetic theory, and the ways in which these have been understood in *bhakti* contexts more generally, we turn our discussion to aesthetics and aesthetic experience in Puṣṭimārga theology and practice. As discussed above, Rūpa Gosvāmī was undoubtedly the first sectarian philosopher to systematically theologize *rasa* theory in the *bhakti* context. Vallabha may have come across Rūpa's theories, however, both the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava and Puṣṭimārga

⁷⁰ For more on *Rāgānuga bhakti*, see Haberman (1988); Wulff (1984).

sects appear to have been contemporaneous, thus calling into question any direct influence the former may have had on the latter. As Redington asserts, “the idea of *rasa* as connected with *bhakti* seems to have been ‘in the air’ in sixteenth century North India, especially in the Braj area” (1992, 290n24).⁷¹ Although Vallabha’s own adaptation of aesthetic theory may not have been as explicit or as methodized as Rūpa’s, emotional experience, the cause and process of emotional transformation, and the modes of expressing such a transformed state, were extremely important for Vallabha. And, as we shall see, it was by invoking and theologizing *rasa* theory in the Puṣṭimārga *bhakti* context that Vallabha (and later, Viṭṭhalanātha) sought to substantiate the reality of emotional experience.

The sacred text common to both the Gaudiya and Puṣṭimārga sects namely, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, most certainly influenced both Vallabha’s and Rūpa’s “aesthetic formularizations.” And, it is in using Vallabha’s commentary on the *Rāsapañcadhyāyī* chapters as the basis of his argument that Redington contends how both Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha (whose own commentaries are included within the *Subodhinī*) are quite clearly developing a two-tiered “aesthetic theology,” with both “general” and “particular” formularizations (1990, 2-3).

Their “general” aesthetic viewpoint occurs as a result of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself being regarded as a *mahākāvya* or “great poem,” that requires thorough knowledge of Sanskrit aesthetic theory for it to be understood or appreciated. As Edwin Bryant asserts, “the final redactor of the text is not only a philosopher or theologian, but an epic

⁷¹ Redington continues to demonstrate how Vallabha, who died approximately ten years before Rūpa completed his *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, “had used the word *rasa* in the aesthetic sense of ‘mood’ at least 80 times in the 125 Sanskrit pages of his commentary (*Subodhinī*) on the six chapters of Kṛṣṇa’s love games with the Gopīs, not to mention at least 40 more separate references to ‘the mood of love’ (*śṛṅgārarasa*) in the same pages” (1992, 290n24).

poet; there are entire sections of the text, particularly the *pañcādhyāya* ... that exhibit all the characteristics of exquisite *kāvya* poetry” (2003, lix).⁷² In fact, the *Subodhinī* serves as one of the major works that develops the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as an aesthetic text — a text which should not only be recited and heard, but also *experienced*.

The “particular” aesthetic viewpoint that both Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha maintain, and which forms the basis of their “aesthetic theology,” is that they see Kṛṣṇa’s descent on earth and the performance of his *līlās* as occurring precisely in terms of the *rasas* and *bhāvas* presented in classical aesthetic theory. That is, “Vallabha and Viṭṭhala construe Kṛṣṇa specifically in terms of the Embodiment of all the moods elaborated by aesthetic theory, and as playing out His love-games [and other *līlās*] in accordance with that theory’s norms for producing the mood of passionate love (*śṛṅgārarasa*) [or the mood corresponding to his *līlā*]” (7). Thus, Kṛṣṇa produces *rasa* in his devotees by performing his *līlās* in terms of the perfect expression of all *bhāvas* and *rasas* elaborated in classical aesthetic theory, and he accomplishes this because he is also the embodiment of all *bhāvas* and *rasas*.

In one of Viṭṭhalanātha’s interpolations in the *Subodhinī* (X.33.17), we come to understand what it means that Kṛṣṇa performs his *līlās* in accordance with the norms of aesthetic theory. Viṭṭhalanātha explains that just as Kṛṣṇa performed his childhood *līlās* (stealing butter, playing pranks) because “such was the nature of the mood [*rasa*] of His

⁷² Bryant continues by describing the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as “a far more sophisticated piece of poetic literature than any other Purāṇa; with 35 meters, it uses more different poetic meters than almost any other text in the history of Sanskrit literature” (2002, 66). In fact, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, itself, establishes its aesthetic orientation in the very beginning by summoning only those readers who have a “taste for the beautiful” to study the text: “Drink, oh you connoisseurs on earth who have a taste for the beautiful, drink again and again of this mood [*rasa*] which relates to the blessed Lord, which lasts right up to (the world’s) dissolution, this fruit which has dropped from the wishing-tree of the Vedas, endowed with the flowing stream of nectar that comes from the mouth of Śuka” (BP I.1.3).

childhood games,” in the same way he performs the *rāsa-līlā*, that is, in the manner of the mood of love or *śṛṅgāra-rasa* (Redington 1990, 282-83). Later in the *Subodhinī*, Vallabha even likens the *rāsa-līlās* with poetry itself, saying how Kṛṣṇa “made love in the way described in poetry ... these nights are not well known to the world; rather they are described only in poetry. For in poetry there is an absence of restrictions and obligations ... there is a singleness of delight ... [just as] these nights of the Blessed Lord’s Games” (X.33.26, 294-295).

Moreover, it is by invoking aesthetic paradigms that Vallabha explains how and why Kṛṣṇa performs the *rāsa* dance. Vallabha describes how Kṛṣṇa arranged the *rāsa* dance in such a way that it resembled a painting and that “it is called *rāsa* because it results in an outward expression of the mood of love [*śṛṅgāra-rasa*]. For the only purpose of dance is the visible manifestation of a mood” (*Subodhinī* X.33.2-4, 261-66). Furthermore, according to Vallabha, not only did Kṛṣṇa perform the *rāsa* dance to manifest *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, but he performed *all* the *rāsa-līlās* to introduce the mood of love (*śṛṅgāra-rasa*) to the world by means of sexual love. Vallabha expresses this view in the voice of the *gopīs* as they address Kṛṣṇa:

...we address You now as ‘Lord of Love.’ For wherever there is love, in the form of sexual union, in this world, You are its Lord. And without Your command sexual love does not go forth into the world ... [and] if sexual love should remain constrained and locked up in the Blessed Lord alone, then the mood of love [*śṛṅgāra-rasa*] would not exist in the world. (*Subodhinī* X.31.2; 191)

We come to understand and appreciate all three aspects of Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha’s “particular” aesthetic viewpoint in the longest interpolation that Viṭṭhalanātha writes in the *Rāsapañcadhyāyī* section of the *Subodhinī* (X.29.12-16). Viṭṭhalanātha explains how the “love-making that occurred after that was no more or less

than His [Kṛṣṇa's] gift of the Joy of His own Form (i.e., of Himself) after the manner of the mood of love, for His own Form has the moods as its very Essence, as holy scripture tells us in the words: 'Mood indeed is He' [*rasa vai saḥ*; Taitt. Up. II.7.1]" (85). Here, we see how Kṛṣṇa makes love to the *gopīs* in the manner of the "mood of love" or *śṛṅgāra-rāsa*, which ultimately results in the permanent restoration of his devotees' *ānanda*. As we have already seen, Kṛṣṇa is able to restore the *ānanda* of those devotees who participate in his *līlās* because he is the embodiment of *ānanda*. Now we discover that Kṛṣṇa is also the embodiment of all *rasas*, that is, all the *rasas* are in Kṛṣṇa (*sarve rasāḥ yasmin*) and all the *rasas* are from Kṛṣṇa (*sarve rasāḥ yasmāt*) (78n26).⁷³

Therefore, through participating in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*, which are performed in accordance with the laws of aesthetic theory — or, in terms of the perfect expression of *rasa* — devotees come to experience *rasa*. As Vallabha succinctly describes, even Kṛṣṇa's laughter has the ability of awakening all *rasas* (*hāso hi sarvarasodbodharūpaḥ*). One comes to experience this *rasa* only by being close to him (*anubhavaraso hi bhinnatayā sthitau bhavati*), by being intimate with him, and *not* by uniting with him (*sāyujya*) (*Subodhini* X.29.39, 124-25). Thus, a devotee's absorption in the *rasa* of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* — that is, a devotee's relish in *līlā-rasa* — is not only a means to liberation but is also the state of liberation itself.⁷⁴

⁷³ As Redington demonstrates, by describing Kṛṣṇa as the embodiment of many different *bhāvas* and *rasas*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* continuously affirms its aesthetic orientation (1990, 4). The following verse serves as an accurate example: "Kṛṣṇa went in to the arena with his elder brother. He was perceived by the wrestlers as a lightning bolt; by men as the best of men; by the women as Kāma personified; by the *gopas* as their relative; by the unrighteous rulers of earth as the chastiser; by his mother and father as a child; by Kāṁsa, the king of the Bhojas, as death; by the ignorant as the manifest universe; by the *yogīs* as the supreme truth; and by the Vṛṣṇī clan as the supreme divinity" (BP X.43.17).

⁷⁴ In his same extensive interpolation, Viṭṭhalanātha uses the term "*līlā-rasa*" to explain why Kṛṣṇa manifests Gokula: "...still at each and every moment Gokula dwelt in and was absorbed in His Form. But the Blessed Lord separated out Gokula again and again (from its unconscious absorption in Him), in order

Sarvātmabhāva: The Means and Mode of Experiencing Rasa

As Redington observes, an important theme in Puṣṭimārga theology is the variety of Kṛṣṇa's relationships with his devotees. In keeping with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Vallabha maintains that Kṛṣṇa manifests himself in whatever form his devotees constantly think of him, or more specifically, in whatever form that is "according to the desire of the devotee," thereby opening up the possibility "that devotees will experience Kṛṣṇa in terms of each and every one of the moods [*rasas*] and sentiments [*bhāvas*] proper to human beings" (1990, 13). It is because Kṛṣṇa is the embodiment of all *bhāvas* and *rasas* that he is able to attract, or more specifically, *constrain* (*sādhana-nirodha*) his devotees through their natural affections and their emotions. And, it is because Kṛṣṇa is the embodiment of all *bhāvas* and *rasas* that devotees are able to *approach* him and *experience* him in terms of all *bhāvas* or *rasas*, that is, with *sarvātmabhāva*.⁷⁵

As we read in his commentary to Vallabha's treatise, *Catuḥśloki* (v.1), Shyam Manohar Goswamy explains how *sarvātmabhāva* can, and should, also be construed as the love for Kṛṣṇa with "all love sentiments" or "all love relationships," implying that Kṛṣṇa can be approached in terms of all *bhakti-bhāvas*: as a servant (*dāsyā*), as a friend (*sākhya*), as a parent (*vātsalya*), as a lover (*madhura*), and through tranquility (*śānta*), with a continual alternation of those sentiments in the devotee (Redington 2000, 120). Viṭṭhalanātha maintains that those *gopīs* who did not come see Kṛṣṇa in the forest at the time of the *rāsa-līlās*, saw him only as an "illicit lover" and therefore did not possess

for it to experience the mood of the successive games [*līla-rāsa*] that He was playing..." (*Subodhinī* X.29.12-16; Redington 1990, 82).

⁷⁵ As described in chapter two, *sarvātmabhāva* may be interpreted in several ways: (i) the "primary type" of *sarvātmabhāva* is characterized by a devotee's total love for Kṛṣṇa by means of or with all senses, motor-organs, life-breath, mind, heart and body; (ii) the "secondary type" of *sarvātmabhāva* is characterized by the total love for Kṛṣṇa in everyone and everything; (iii) *sarvātmabhāva* may be construed as the love for Kṛṣṇa with all love sentiments.

sarvātmabhāva. For this reason, they were not eligible to participate in Kṛṣṇa's *rāsa-līlās* and thus could not experience *śṛṅgāra-rasa* (*Subodhinī* X.29.12-16; Redington 1990, 73). In keeping with this assertion, Shyam Manohar Goswamy insists that it is only by loving Kṛṣṇa with *all bhakti-bhāvas* and with a *continual alternation* of those *bhāvas* that a devotee can become eligible to experience Kṛṣṇa's liberating grace and participate in his *līlās*.⁷⁶ That is, those *gopīs* who could not experience the *śṛṅgāra-rasa* associated with Kṛṣṇa's *rāsa-līlās*, *only* loved Kṛṣṇa as an "illicit lover," and not with all other *bhakti-bhāvas*. Thus, for Vallabha, "emotion is about relationship not inwardness, about process not states ... [and] with Krishna as a locus, the *full range* of human emotions, dispositions, attitudes, and qualities becomes a means for spiritual fulfillment, liberation from *saṃsāra*, and eternal life with Krishna" (Timm 1991, 63-66 emphasis mine).

Furthermore, not only do the *gopīs* approach and experience Kṛṣṇa in terms of *sarvātmabhāva* but, as we have seen, *sarvātmabhāva* is also the final requirement and proof of "eligibility" for receiving Kṛṣṇa's liberating grace, which ultimately results in the permanent restoration of their *ānanda*. As Vallabha declares in his *Subodhinī*, participation in the *rāsa-līlā* "requires of its participants that complete surrender to the Lord which is characterized by Total Love [*sarvātmabhāva*] of Him" (X.29.17, 86), and it is only "by their Total Love of Him they [the *gopīs*] are suitable women for Him to produce the mood of love [*śṛṅgāra-rasa*] in" (X.33.2, 262). Thus, *sarvātmabhāva* is both the *means* to and the *mode* by which devotees experience the *rasa* of Kṛṣṇa's presence and *līlās*.

⁷⁶ Personal communication, April 7th, 2006.

As discussed in chapter two, *sarvātmabhāva* represents the final “matured” state of *bhakti-bhāva*, which devotees arrive at by experiencing a gradient of emotions with increasing intensity: *prema* (“love”), *āśakti* (“attachment”), and *vyasana* (“obsession”).⁷⁷ And, it is only when the state of *vyasana* culminates in the experience of *nirodha* that devotees undergo a transformation in which they are now able to approach and experience their love for Kṛṣṇa in terms of all *bhāvas* and *rasas* or *sarvātmabhāva*. As we saw with the *gopīs*, in this transformed state, devotees begin to see Kṛṣṇa in everything and everyone, and their senses, motor-organs, mental faculties, hearts and bodies become completely preoccupied with and absorbed into Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*. Thus, *sarvātmabhāva* is the result of an emotional transformation in which *laukika* emotions of *prema*, *āśakti*, and *vyasana* are transformed into the *alaukika* emotion of *sarvātmabhāva*, fulfilling a devotee’s desire for intimacy with Kṛṣṇa. It is a state in which devotees experience intense emotional and corporeal intimacy with Kṛṣṇa, and feel as though they are in the presence of Kṛṣṇa and are actual participants in his *līlās*. As R.K. Bhatta explains, *sarvātmabhāva* is characterized by “an experience of an unconditioned delight of devotion” (qtd. in Narain 2004, 422) — a delight which can only be described as *rasa*.

Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha invoked and reinterpreted Sanskrit aesthetic theory in order to substantiate the role of emotion in Puṣṭimārga theology and practice. As we have seen, both Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha use the paradigms of aesthetic theory to explain how and why Kṛṣṇa performs his *līlās*. According to them both, because Kṛṣṇa performs his *līlās* in accordance with the norms of classical aesthetic theory, and because he also

⁷⁷ In a short article, Redington develops the aesthetic theories of Puruṣottama, the most prolific of the Puṣṭimārga theologians after Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha. Puruṣottama accepts *bhakti-rasa* not only as a valid *rasa* among the already accepted *rasas*, but, “because of the transcendence (*alaukikatva*) of its object (the blessed Lord)...” he declares it as the principal *rasa*. He also establishes *sneha* or *prema* as the *sthāyi-bhāva* of *bhakti-rasa* (Redington, 1992, 293).

embodies all *bhāvas* and *rasas*, devotees are able to approach and experience their love for Kṛṣṇa in terms of all *bhāvas* and *rasas*, or with *sarvātmabhāva*. *Sarvātmabhāva* signifies a state of emotional transformation, which not only becomes a means to experiencing the *rasa* of Kṛṣṇa, but is also the mode by which this experience of *rasa* occurs.

The purpose of the remainder of this chapter is to describe how Puṣṭimārga theology becomes actualized in the context of *sevā*, and how this process of actualization rests upon the invocation of Sanskrit aesthetic theory, both in cause and effect. Cultivated *sevā* becomes a process of continual internal transformations, where the *laukika* emotions of a devotee get transformed into the *alaukika* experience of being emotionally intimate with Kṛṣṇa, described as *rasa*. It is the experience of *rasa* that both facilitates the actualization process and is expressive of the state of actualization. While this section is not an extensive study of the “aesthetic rituals” themselves, the focus is rather on how poetry, music, painting and food are conducive to the evocation of *rasa*.

II

Divine Embodiment in Puṣṭimārga: Sevā of the Body of God

Initiation into the Puṣṭimārga tradition occurs in the form of two rites, both of which occur in the presence of a Gosvāmī (a direct descendent of Vallabha who is thus also considered an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa himself). The first rite occurs at a fairly young age, in which an individual receives and recites the eight-syllable mantra: *Śrī Kṛṣṇa śaraṇam mama* (“Śrī Kṛṣṇa is my refuge”). The second rite, which signifies an individual’s formal initiation into the *saṁpradāya*, consists of receiving and reciting the

ātmanivedana/Brahmasambandha mantra. As we have already seen, it is during this initiation ceremony that a devotee dedicates (*ātmanivedana*) or, more specifically, connects (*sambandha*), their bodies, senses, life-breaths, inner faculties, and possessions to Kṛṣṇa.⁷⁸ As Vallabha announces, by performing this initiation, both “the relationship of ‘belonging to him [Kṛṣṇa]’” (*Bālabodhaḥ* v.16b-17, Redington 2000, 15), and “the removal of all defects [*doṣas*] of body and soul” (*Siddhāntarahasya* v.2-3, 64) are sure to result. Thus, initiation into the Puṣṭimārga tradition marks the commencement of a transformative process — *sevā* — in which devotees seek to remove their *doṣas* and *avidyā*, cultivate an emotional relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and ultimately restore their *ānanda*.

It is in accepting the image of Kṛṣṇa as a *svarūpa* and not as a *mūrti* that Puṣṭimārga followers distinguish *sevā* from *pūjā*. In Puṣṭimārga, a *mūrti* or an image of Kṛṣṇa is transformed into a *svarūpa* by the touch of the Gosvāmī.⁷⁹ The Gosvāmī bathes the image with five sacred substances (*pañcāmṛta*: milk, curd, honey, clarified butter, and sugar), and offers it *prasāda* (lit., “grace,” consecrated food) from a previously established *svarūpa*. Unlike a *mūrti*, the “animation” of a *svarūpa* is not normally referred to as *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*, where an image is “enlivened” through mantra, nor is the deity “invited” into the *mūrti* (*āvāhana*), and later “dismissed” (*visarjana*) as it occurs during *pūjā*. In Puṣṭimārga, the Gosvāmī is said to “‘make the *svarūpa* *puṣṭi*,’ meaning he enlivens the image by nourishing it with Krishna’s grace” (Bennett 1993, 121), and the enlivenment of the *svarūpa* is understood as being permanent and irreversible. Upon

⁷⁸ See pg. 64 of thesis.

⁷⁹ This is not the case for the nine “original” *svarūpas* (*navanidhis*) that Vallabha discovered in the course of making his pilgrimages. Because the *navanidhis* are believed to have been self-manifested, they did not require the rite of consecration to “transform” them into *svarūpas*.

consecration, the *svarūpa* is accepted as the complete manifestation (*āvirbhūta*) of Kṛṣṇa himself — the same Kṛṣṇa who revealed himself as the young cow-herd boy of Vraja — and requires the constant loving care and attention of his devotees. And, because the *svarūpa* is taken to be the living presence of Kṛṣṇa, the place of his worship is not considered a temple, but a *havelī* (mansion, palace), or more specifically, the home of Nanda or Nandālaya.

The “live” status accorded to *svarūpas* is in fact a reification of Śuddhādvaita ontology. As Bennett asserts, to appreciate “the process of vivification [of a *svarūpa*] it is necessary to refer again to the non-dualistic nature of the relationship between the soul, the world and the divine, and to the crucial role of grace, or *puṣṭi*, in awakening the soul to the experience of divine joy” (121). Another aspect of Puṣṭimārga theology that is actualized in the context of *sevā* is the understanding of the *sevya-svarūpa* as one of the primary modes by which Kṛṣṇa constrains (*sādhana-nirodha*) his devotees. Out of grace, Kṛṣṇa subordinates himself to the love of his devotees, and grants them the “privilege of assisting him in the daily schedule he maintains” (Hawley 1981, 6). As we saw in chapter one, moreover, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is also considered a literary manifestation of Kṛṣṇa and thus serves as another mode by which Kṛṣṇa constrains his devotees. And, because the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* provides the context for each aspect of temple worship (*sevā*), and the *svarūpa* serves as the locus of such worship, the devotee begins to withdraw from the mundane world and becomes increasingly attached and obsessed with Kṛṣṇa, thereby achieving final constraint (*phalanirodha*). Thus, it can be argued that the performance of *sevā* represents both the means and end of Kṛṣṇa’s constraint. In his treatise, *Nirodhalakṣaṇam* (v.12), Vallabha even describes the process of initiation in terms of

nirodha: “For the benefit of the sense-faculties, which have become jaded by their involvement in Samsara, the devotee should offer to and therefore connect with Krishna ... all his possessions” (Redington 2000, 179). Shyam Manohor Goswamy interprets this statement of Vallabha’s as *sevānirodha*, “a constraint appropriate for worship ... [where the sense faculties] can be transformed and ‘constrained’ by seeing things, and offering them, in their true perspective” (187).

In his *Vidvanmaṇḍanam*, Viṭṭhalanātha defines *āvirbhūta*, Kṛṣṇa’s divine act of self-manifestation, as the “fitness for or capability of becoming an object of *experience*” (Marfatia 49, emphasis mine). And, as we saw above, Kṛṣṇa is also considered the full embodiment of all *bhāvas* (*bhāva-rūpa*) and *rasas* (*rasa-rūpa*). Therefore, as an object of experience and as the embodiment of all sentiments the *svarūpa* is capable of being approached and experienced, both corporeally and emotionally. Thus, Puṣṭimārga *sevā* is not characterized by — or not *only* characterized by — physical acts of worship, but by the authenticity and intensity of an individual’s devotional attitude. This reverberates with Kṛṣṇa’s statement in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*: “Something brought with love by my devotees, even if insignificant, becomes great ... I accept whatever is presented with love by a devout soul who offers me a leaf, flower, fruit or water with devotion” (BP X.81.3-4).

The mode by which devotees approach Kṛṣṇa and the emotional intimacy that is experienced with Kṛṣṇa can be expressed in the form of one of the five types of *bhakti-bhāvas*. As noted, a devotee’s *bhakti-bhāva* reaches its final stage of maturation through the dual performance and experience of *sevā* and *kathā* and *samyoga-bhakti* and *viraha-bhakti* respectively. This devotional process culminates in a devotee’s experience of

nirodha and *sarvātmabhāva*, both of which are characterized as a “transformed” state of devotion. In this state, *sevā* becomes involuntary, that is, a devotee becomes completely preoccupied with thoughts of Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*; every act and thought becomes directed towards the loving worship of Kṛṣṇa. Both Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha describe this intense experience of emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa as *rasa*, a state of rapturous absorption into Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*, which by the grace of Kṛṣṇa ultimately results in the permanent restoration of a devotee’s *ānanda*. However, the experience of such intense emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa is not only described in terms of *rasa*, but in the context of *sevā*, it is also facilitated by the experience of *rasa*, that is, by means of the “aesthetic rituals” of *rāga*, *bhoga*, and *śṛṅgāra*.

As we shall see, each “aesthetic ritual” in Puṣṭimārga worship creates a site for experiencing Kṛṣṇa sensually: through offerings of *rāga* one can hear and sing about Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*; through offerings of *bhoga* one is literally able to taste the grace and *ānanda* of Kṛṣṇa in the form of *prasāda* (consecrated food offerings); and through offerings of *śṛṅgāra* one is able to “drink in” the sight of Kṛṣṇa’s *ānanda* and *rasa* form. Thus, by performing *sevā*, a devotee’s entire body, mind, and senses become imbued with the delight — the *rasa* — of experiencing Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*.

Temple Worship: Context and Meaning

During his life time, Vallabha had initiated four poet-singers⁸⁰ into the *saṁpradāya* and encouraged singing *kīrtana*, or “hymns of praise,” as an act of *sevā* to Kṛṣṇa. The poetry forming the substance of these *kīrtanas* describe Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās* and

⁸⁰ See p. 16 of this thesis.

correspond to the various *bhakti-bhāvas*. However, it was under the leadership of Viṭṭhalanātha that the aesthetic appeal of *sevā* flourished in the context of temple worship. Viṭṭhalanātha, who was primarily an aesthete, went on to initiate four more poet-singers,⁸¹ bringing together the celebrated *aṣṭachāpa* poets. He is also said to have established the elaborate liturgical system in which the *sevā* of Kṛṣṇa is structured according to eight divisions of the day, known as *jhāṅkis*, or “glimpses.” He succeeded in integrating ritual musicians, the elaborate food-offering rituals (*bhoga*), the *kīrtanas* of the poet-singers, and backdrop paintings (*picchavāṭis*) into the daily ritual cycle of the Nathdwara temple (Ambalal 1993, 61; Lyons 2004, 18). Each *jhāṅki* represents a moment in one of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās*, and forms the context of each aspect of temple worship (*sevā*). Presently, at Nathdwara and in most Puṣṭimārga *havelīs* ritual worship consists of offerings of *rāga* (music), *bhoga* (food), and *śṛṅgāra* (adornment), which includes the backdrop paintings and the lavish adornment of the image of Kṛṣṇa.

The manner in which Kṛṣṇa is adorned, the substance of the poetry sung, and the scenes painted in the *picchavāṭis* effectively recreate a ritual space where the boundaries between the *laukika* and *alaukika* collapse. Kṛṣṇa’s Vraja, where he performs his eternal *līlās*, is made present and the devotee “shares in the essence of Krishna and consciously and physically enters with him into the eternal *līlā*” (Barz 1992, 75). The devotee emulates and ultimately experiences Kṛṣṇa’s presence and *līlās* through cultivated *sevā*. *Sevā* thus becomes a process of continual inner transformations and increasing intimacy until the act of emulation is actualized through Kṛṣṇa’s own grace or *puṣṭi*. If “in ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of

⁸¹ See p. 17 note 14.

symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world” (Geertz 1973, 112-13), then *sevā* is the archetypical form of such ritual. However, as we shall see, the efficacy of such cultivated *sevā* necessitates the experience of *rasa* — the *rasa* of *bhakti* — where the devotee’s entire self becomes imbued with the delight of sensually experiencing Kṛṣṇa. Thus, *rasa* intensifies the devotional experience and facilitates a devotee’s emotional transformation by actualizing Kṛṣṇa’s presence and his *līlās*.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of the “aesthetic rituals” performed in *sevā* in an effort to demonstrate how, as conduits of the experience of *rasa*, these rituals serve transformative functions for the devotee.

Rāga-Sevā: Poetry and Music For Kṛṣṇa

As we noted in the Introduction, Vallabha is said to have encouraged the singing of “hymns of praise” or *kīrtanas* as a form of *sevā* in the first Śrī Nāthjī temple at Mount Govardhana. However, it was not until his second son Viṭṭhalanātha acceded to the *gaddī* of the sect that music or *rāga* was formally integrated as part of the elaborate liturgical system of temple worship. In the Śrī Nāthjī temple at Nathdwara, *rāga-sevā* is performed up to seventeen times a day (Gaston 1997, 27), and according to Anne-Marie Gaston, from the time of its establishment it appears that the “music tradition of Nathdwara remains essentially unchanged in its social context, performance, and presentation” (24). This genre of devotional music, which has spanned for nearly five hundred years, is now known generally as *havelī saṅgīt*.⁸²

⁸² Guy Beck suggests how *havelī saṅgīt* or *aṣṭachāpa saṅgīt* played a role in the early development of North Indian classical music tradition. He demonstrates how the oldest form of *havelī saṅgīt* “is very close to the tradition of Shāstriya Saṅgīt, classical music based on the Sanskrit treatises on music written as early as the 14th Century C.E.” and how “the somewhat sophisticated use of *rāga* classifications in the Havelī

According to sectarian literature, Viṭṭhalanātha was instrumental in bringing together the eight renowned poet-singers, collectively known as the *aṣṭachāpa*, and later incorporated ritual musicians. The poetic compositions of the *aṣṭachāpa* poets form the core of the devotional music compositions called *kīrtanas* in most Puṣṭimārga *havelīs*, and “each [*aṣṭachāpa*] is considered the pre-eminent, though not the exclusive composer” for one of the eight *jhāṅkis*. The *aṣṭachāpa* poets composed their poems in the vernacular Vraja *bhāṣā*, since according to Kṛṣṇa devotees, the “most appropriate language in which to praise Śrī Kṛṣṇa would be his own language” (Barz 1992, 98).

Barz has translated the *vārtās* or hagiographical accounts of the four *aṣṭachāpa* poets initiated by Vallabha (Sūrdāsa, Kumbhanadāsa, Paramānandadāsa, and Kṛṣṇadāsa), which are found in the most important hagiographical text of the Puṣṭimārga sect, the *Caurāsī Vaiṣṇava kī Vārtā*. According to their *vārtās*, each poet saw himself — in his *alaukika* identity — as Kṛṣṇa’s *sakhā* (male-friend) who accompanies Kṛṣṇa during his day-time *līlās*. And, because no male is allowed to witness the night-time *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa, which he performed with the *gopīs* and with his beloved Rādhā (who is known as Śrī Svāminījī by Puṣṭimārga followers), each *aṣṭachāpa* also saw himself as Kṛṣṇa’s *sakhī* (female-friend) and thus were capable of witnessing Kṛṣṇa’s nightly love-games. According to the *vārtās*, moreover, each of the four *aṣṭachāpas* preferred to witness and write about different aspects of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās*. For example, Suradāsa wrote mostly about Kṛṣṇa’s *māna līlās*, in which he described Rādhā’s jealousy and anger with Kṛṣṇa; Kumbhanadāsa wrote mostly about Kṛṣṇa’s *nikuñja līlās*, in which he described Kṛṣṇa’s

Sangīt tradition suggests a familiarity with the courtly tradition of classical music found in Central and South India during early Medieval times, a tradition rich in theoretical and aesthetical formulations” (1993, 82-84).

amorous sports with Rādhā in the *nikuñja* (forest); Paramānandadāsa wrote mostly about Kṛṣṇa's *bāla līlās*, or childhood *līlās*; and Kṛṣṇadāsa wrote mostly about Kṛṣṇa's *rāsa-līlās* with the *gopīs* (Barz 1992, 103-04).

Thus, the poems forming the substance of the *kīrtana* compositions correspond to a particular *bhāva* or devotional attitude. As a result, the *kīrtanas* sung during a particular *jhāṅki*, not only describe Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*, but also evoke vivid scenes, “freezing forever the feelings of an instant — whether that of the moment of the infant Kṛṣṇa's first steps, or that of the attempts of Kṛṣṇa's mother Yashodā to wean him, or that of Kṛṣṇa's setting to his lips the bamboo flute that beguiles the hearts of the women of Braj” (4-5). Furthermore, the *bhāva* and subsequent *rasa* that the *kīrtanas* evoke correspond to the other “aesthetic rituals” performed during *sevā* (and during festival celebrations), thereby enhancing and complementing the mood of a particular *jhāṅki* and season of the year.

The transformative experience that is represented by the performance of *rāga sevā* has been exemplified by Vallabha himself. According to the *vārtā* of Paramānandadāsa, when he sang a poem for Vallabha, Vallabha exclaimed “Hari! I have remembered your *līlā*” and slipped into a trance-like state, in which he remained absorbed for three full days. Viṭṭhalanātha described his father as being “full of the ocean of the *rāsa* and the other *līlās* ... which were full of *rasa*” (152). Vallabha emerged from his absorption in the *rasa* of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* on the fourth day, and he only emerged “because he still had to bring experience of the *rasa* of *līlā* to the various *jīvas* that he had taken into his protection and for whom he had brought the *bhaktimārga* (i.e., the *Puṣṭimārga*) into being” (153).

Vallabha also dedicates an entire treatise, *Jalabhedah*, to describing various kinds of singers. He explains how hearing their songs and words “completely destroy dispositions of passion, ignorance, and so forth, hearing such words is called licking [or “tasting,” *rasa*] for it causes a powerful manifestation of one’s innermost Joy” (v.19, Redington 2000, 142).

The music and poetry “offered” as part of *rāga-sevā* allow devotees to experience the *ānanda* of Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*. And, as with all other “aesthetic rituals,” the intensity of one’s devotion and longing for Kṛṣṇa ultimately depends on the degree to which one experiences the *bhāva* and *rasa* evoked by these *kīrtanas* (Entwistle 63). As a conduit for the experience of *rasa*, the cultivated performance of *rāga-sevā* facilitates an emotional transformation in devotees by allowing them to experience intense emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa, and provides a feeling of being an actual participant in his *līlās*.

Bhoga-Sevā: Food Offerings For Kṛṣṇa

We now turn to our discussion of *bhoga-sevā* or “culinary aesthetics,” which is central to understanding and appreciating *sevā* in Puṣṭimārga. Not only does food have ritual significance for the sect, but the aesthetic presentation of food-offerings and the elaborate nature of such offerings (as seen during the festival of *chappan-bhoga* where fifty-six dishes are presented to Kṛṣṇa) make Puṣṭimārga devotees the “undisputed gourmets of Krishnaism” (Toomey 1986, 64).

Paul Toomey describes food as “a *moral* substance having cosmological meaning as well as social consequences ... [and] it is thought to be the fundamental link between men and gods” (62-63). In the *bhakti* context, moreover, food becomes a “signifier of

emotion,” and thus serves as the most effective way of establishing an emotional link or relationship between a devotee and Kṛṣṇa. In Puṣṭimārga *sevā*, the offering of *bhoga* (lit., “enjoyment” or “pleasure”) to Kṛṣṇa and receiving the consecrated “leftovers” in the form of *prasāda* (lit., “grace”), signals a *transaction* and *transformation* of food, which then becomes a “tangible, edible manifestation of the intimate relationship existing between the Krishna image and devotee” (Bennett 1983, 34).

During each *jhāṅki*, *bhoga* is offered to Kṛṣṇa along with the other “aesthetic rituals” of *rāga* and *śṛṅgāra*. And, although as a ritual form, food-offerings are subject to a high degree of purity rules, Bennett maintains how an

exclusive emphasis on the pure-impure idiom as an interpretive model is likely to lead to a serious misunderstanding of the significance of the food offering ... in the context of the sect the idiom is relativized and subordinated to ideas which approximate to the sacred and profane, in which purity is not a quasi-physical condition but a state of mind. The devotee feels ‘pure’ emotions of love for Krishna. (1983, 34)

Thus, *bhoga* becomes a medium or a vehicle through which devotees convey their pure love or *bhāva* for Kṛṣṇa, and *prasāda* becomes a medium or vehicle through which devotees can “taste” and therefore internalize the grace (*puṣṭi*), *ānanda* and *rasa* of Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa’s act of “consuming” the offering of food (understood as occurring through his eyes) metonymously transforms *bhoga* into a more love-laden *prasāda* (Toomey 1990, 164). Furthermore, Bennett homologizes this transformation of food with the devotee’s emotional transformation: “*bhoga* as an expression of *bhāva* is complemented by *prasāda* as an embodiment of *rasa*. The giving and receiving of food provides a medium for enhancing and transforming experience” (1990, 199). Thus, during *bhoga-sevā*, the metonymical transformation of *bhoga* into *prasāda* not only serves as a conduit

for the experience of *rasa*, but is rather a tangible, edible manifestation of *rasa*. And, upon the internalization of this *rasa*, which characterizes the experience of emotional intimacy established through the transaction and transformation of food, a devotee experiences the nourishment of Krishna's grace and is "made aware of his innate capacity to experience the ecstasy of *līlā*" (1990, 199).

Perhaps no discussion of Puṣṭimārga *bhoga-sevā* is complete without an overview of the principal sectarian festival of *annakūṭa*, in which a mountain (*kūṭa*) of food (*anna*) is offered to Kṛṣṇa. This festival is normally held on the second day of *Divālī* in the month of October/November, and celebrates the Govardhana myth in which Kṛṣṇa persuades the inhabitants of Vraja to make their annual offerings of harvest (*annakūṭa*) to Mount Govardhana instead of Indra.⁸³ After they make their offerings of food to the hill, Kṛṣṇa simultaneously manifests himself inside the hill, saying "I am the mountain!" and consumes all the food through a small crevice. At the same moment, however, Kṛṣṇa is also seen prostrating before the hill together with the inhabitants of Vraja. According to Toomey (1992), the *annakūṭa* myth may be defined in terms of a three-way metonymy, which reflects the

processual formation of food ritual and the love relationship it signifies: the gift of food-love moves in a circle, from the cowherds to the hill Krishna-Govardhana and back to Krishna and the cowherds once more. The food-love metonymy also substantiates the circular process underlying devotional experience: Krishna, it is believed, creates devotees through his grace (*puṣṭi*) in order that he might reflexively experience through their loving feelings his own blissful and loving nature (*ānanda*). (124)

⁸³ This myth (and thus the *annakūṭa* festival) is central to the Puṣṭimārga tradition because it reveals the cause for the manifestation of Śrī Nāthjī. Early accounts of the myth is found in the *Harivaṃśa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and, as we have seen, later in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (BP X.24-25).

In the Puṣṭimārga sect, the *Gokulnāthajī annakūṭa* takes approximately twenty-one days to prepare. A variety of fruits, nuts, sweets, vegetables, and grains are arranged before the *svarūpa* of Śrī Nāthjī, who stands in front of an enormous backdrop painting (*picchavāī*) of Mount Govardhana. In the center of the arrangement one finds a large mound of boiled rice, representing the mountain of food being offered to Kṛṣṇa. In keeping with the Govardhana myth, the mountain of food is also worshipped as a *svarūpa* of Kṛṣṇa thus actualizing the three-way food-love metonymy outlined above. As Bennett illustrates, the *annakūṭa* festival “involves the pooling and intensification of *bhava* and the subsequent dissemination of *ananda*. The deity is both receiver and redistributor, the repository of an overflowing store of devotion and the source of boundless grace” (1990, 200).

Śṛṅgāra-Sevā: Adorning Kṛṣṇa’s Body and Visualizing His Līlās

In most Puṣṭimārga *havelīs*, *śṛṅgāra-sevā* consists of the lavish adornment of the *svarūpa* of Kṛṣṇa and the hanging of backdrop paintings or *picchavāīs* behind the *svarūpa*. As with the previous “aesthetic rituals,” it was Viṭṭhalanātha who furthered the aesthetic dimensions of *sevā* by introducing painting and decoration into Puṣṭimārga ritual practice. Among the arts of Nathdwara, it is its painting tradition, especially the art of painting *picchavāīs* that is most well known (Gaston 1997, 200; Lyons 2004, 19). The painting of *picchavāīs*, moreover, is reserved for a group of professional hereditary artists, who express their love and devotion for Kṛṣṇa in the form of visual art (*citra-sevā*). The emphasis and importance placed on painting in Nathdwara led to the development of several distinct genres, such as miniature paintings, icon paintings,

manoratha paintings, and Kṛṣṇa *līlā* paintings. Like its music tradition, the painting tradition of Nathdwara has continued to this day; in fact, Nathdwara remains the last surviving center of miniature painting in India (Ambalal 72).

Picchavāīs, which can be decorated with embroidery, jewels, appliqué work and painting, portray narrative scenes of Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*. These scenes serve to complement the elaborate ornamentation and decoration of the *svarūpa*, and “interact with and alter the meaning” of each *jhānki* (Lyons 2004, 20). For example, during the monsoon festival of Ṭhakurāñjī, the *picchavāī* used in the Nathdwara temple presents an image appropriate for the monsoon season; it is painted with dark clouds, raindrops and bolts of lightening. It also portrays a frightened Rādhā running to Śrī Nāthjī for shelter. The image serves to enhance the *bhāva* of the romantic rainy season and, as Tyrna Lyons asserts, “the effect is of a *tableau vivant* into which the spectator [devotee] enters so that he or she may play the role of *sakhī*” (20). Thus, in keeping with the “aesthetic ritual” of *rāga-bhoga*, the *picchavāīs* and the decoration of the *svarūpa* facilitate a devotee’s identification and aesthetic appreciation of a particular *jhānki* (or season). As Bennett illustrates, every article of adornment, “including perfumes, flowers, garments, jewels, toys and various decorations, are regarded as objects capable of stimulating imaginative thought feelings (*bhāvanas*) in those devotees who employ them in *sevā*” (1993, 129).

Rāga, Bhoga, Śṛṅgāra: The Daily Ritual Cycle at Nathdwara

Each *jhānki* and thus the *collective* performance of *rāga*, *bhoga*, and *śṛṅgāra sevā* represents the culmination of a devotee’s devotional experience. *Rāga* fills a devotee’s ears with the sounds of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlās*; the metonymical transformation of *bhoga* into

prasāda allows devotees to taste the grace and *ānanda* — the *rasa*— of Kṛṣṇa; and, upon viewing the *śṛṅgāra* of Kṛṣṇa, devotees come to relish the sight of Kṛṣṇa's *ānanda-rūpa* and *rasa-rūpa*, and feel as though they are actual participants in his *līlās*. Kṛṣṇa, thus, becomes the locus of a devotional-cum-aesthetic experience, in which he can be sensually approached and enjoyed.

Temple worship in each *havelī* recreates a day in Kṛṣṇa's life, from the moment he is awakened in the morning by his mother, Yaśodā, to the moment he performs his *rāsa-līlās* with Rādhā and the *gopīs* at night. Each of the eight *jhāṅkis* allows devotees to capture a “glimpse” of a moment in one of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* and thus forms the context for each aspect of temple worship (*sevā*).

Maṅgalā is the first *jhāṅki* of the day, occurring sometime between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m. (the timing normally differs according to the season and *havelī*). During this *jhāṅki*, Kṛṣṇa is slowly awakened with quiet music and is given a light breakfast. The *bhāva* appropriate to this *jhāṅki* is that of *vātsalya-bhāva*, and the *jhāṅki* is dedicated to the memory of the *aṣṭachāpa*, Paramānandadāsa (Ambalal 1987, 21). In the next *jhāṅki*, *śṛṅgāra* (7–8 a.m.), the *svarūpa* is dressed in the garments that he will wear throughout the day. His clothing corresponds to the season of the year, with warmer clothes worn during the winter months and lighter clothes worn during the hot summer months. He is presented with a light meal, after which he is given his flute to hold. The poet Nandadāsa is considered the main singer of this *jhāṅki* (22). During the *gvāla jhāṅki* (8–9 a.m.) the *svarūpa* is shown with a stick and cows, for it is during this time that Kṛṣṇa is believed to be out in the pasture with the cows, and playing with his friends (*sākhya-bhāva*). The *aṣṭachāpa*, Govindasvāmi, is said to be the chief composer for this *jhāṅki* (22). It is

during the next *jhāṅki*, *rājabhoga* (10–11 a.m.), that the *svarūpa* eats his main meal of the day. Viṭṭhalanātha arranged this *jhāṅki* to be the most ornate of them all, where Kṛṣṇa is offered an elaborate array of food. Here, the *svarūpa* is seen in “all his regal splendor,” holding lotuses in one hand and wearing a flower garland. He is adorned with fine perfumes and is presented with a cane to play with, along with a ball and a mirror. Kumbhanandāsa is said to be the chief composer of this *jhāṅki* (22-23). After this *jhāṅki*, Kṛṣṇa takes a short nap, and is awakened at the *utthāpana jhāṅki* (4–4:30 p.m.); a conch is blown to summon his return home from the pasture with his cows. Suradāsa is the chief *aṣṭachāpa* of this *jhāṅki* (23). During the next *jhāṅki*, *sandhyā-bhoga* (5–5:30 p.m.), Kṛṣṇa is given a light meal, with Caturbhujadāsa being the chief *aṣṭachāpa* of this *jhāṅki*. The seventh *jhāṅki*, *sandhyā-ārati* (6–6:30 p.m.), involves the performance of *ārati* to the *svarūpa*, in an effort to cast away any “evil-eye” that may have been conferred upon him while he was out during the day. He is dressed in light clothing, and is offered his evening meal. Chitasvāmi is considered the chief *aṣṭachāpa* of this *jhāṅki* (23). In the eighth and last *jhāṅki*, *śayana* (7–7:30 p.m.), the *svarūpa* is put to bed. His bed chamber is readied, and he is offered a pitcher of water and some food should he become thirsty or hungry during the night. It is understood that Rādhā will join him at night, and so her garments and jewels are also placed with the *svarūpa*. The doors of his chamber are also kept open so that he may go to Vraja and perform his *rāsa-līlās* with the *gopīs*. The predominant *bhāva* of this *jhāṅki* is *madhura-bhāva*, and Kṛṣṇadāsa is said to be the chief *aṣṭachāpa* of this *jhāṅki* (23).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ In most *havelīs*, the last *jhāṅki* is not held for six months, for it is believed that Kṛṣṇa has gone to Vraja (Ambalal 1987, 23).

As we saw in the first section of this chapter, Kṛṣṇa performs each of his *līlās* in accordance with the paradigms of aesthetic theory. That is, he performs his childhood *līlās* in accordance with *vātsalya-bhāva* and his *rāsa-līlās* in accordance with *madhura-bhāva* or *śṛṅgāra-rasa*. As a result, each of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* produces the corresponding *bhāva* and *rasa* in all devotees who experience them. This process becomes actualized in the context of temple worship (*sevā*), since each *jhāṅki* provides devotees with an opportunity to experience a moment in Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*. As we saw, in representing a moment in one of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*, each *jhāṅki* becomes associated with a particular *bhāva*. The *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa being awakened by his mother is performed (by Kṛṣṇa) and therefore, portrayed (by devotees), in accordance with *vātsalya-bhāva*. Thus, when a devotee catches a "glimpse" of the *maṅgalā jhāṅki*, a devotee comes to experience *vātsalya-bhāva*, the loving emotions of Yaśodā's love for Kṛṣṇa. During the *gvāla jhāṅki*, a devotee experiences *sākhya-bhāva* since Kṛṣṇa performs these *līlās* with his friends in accordance with this *bhāva*. And, finally, at night when a devotee catches a "glimpse" of Kṛṣṇa as he gets ready for bed (*śayana jhāṅki*), a devotees becomes filled with *madhura-bhāva* and *śṛṅgāra-rasa*, because it is during this *jhāṅki* that devotees anticipate Kṛṣṇa's departure for Vraja, where he will perform his *rāsa-līlās* with the *gopīs* in terms of the perfect expression of *śṛṅgāra-rasa*.

Conclusion

The collective performance of *rāga*, *bhoga*, and *śṛṅgāra sevā* during a particular *jhāṅki* serves to *represent* a moment in one of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*. However, the ability of each of these "aesthetic rituals" to invoke a particular *bhāva* during a *jhāṅki* facilitates the

actualization of Kṛṣṇa's presence and *līlās*. When this *bhāva* culminates in the experience of *rasa*, a devotee experiences Kṛṣṇa's physical presence and "consciously and physically enters with him into the eternal *līlā*" (Barz 1992, 75). Thus, as conduits for the experience of *rasa*, the "aesthetic rituals" performed during each *jhāṅki* transforms the devotee's act of "glimpsing" Kṛṣṇa's *līlās* into the devotee's experience of being an actual participant in those *līlās*. As Bennett affirms, "the performance of the many and varied activities of *sevā* is therefore meaningful inasmuch as devotees identify the *svarūpa* as Lord Krishna, the setting as Krishna's heaven, and themselves as actual participants in Krishna's *līlā*" (Bennett 1983, 150).

Throughout a day of ritual worship, devotees are provided with an opportunity to catch a "glimpse" of and thus, participate in each and all of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*. Therefore, through the performance of cultivated *sevā*, the devotee comes to experience Kṛṣṇa with *all bhakti-bhāvas* and *rasas* and with a *continual alternation* of those *bhāvas* and *rasas*, that is, with *sarvātmabhāva*. Regular attendance at these *jhāṅkis* is also ideally encouraged "on the grounds that the lovesick soul cannot endure the agony of separation [*viraha*] from Krishna" (162). It is during these moments of separation, when devotees experience *viraha-bhakti*, that devotees are said to perform *kathā*, that is, they begin to meditatively imagine (*bhāvana*), remember, and praise Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās* in an effort to assuage their pangs of separation. And as Vallabha says in his *Subodhinī* (X.33.20-21), even in *viraha* a devotee experiences the *rasa* of Kṛṣṇa (Redington 2000, 157).

As we saw in chapter two, according to Vallabha, it is the continual alternation of performing *sevā* and experiencing *saṁyoga-bhakti*, and performing *kathā* while experiencing *viraha-bhakti*, that removes a devotee's *doṣas* and *avidyā*, and facilitates the

maturation of a devotee's *bhakti-bhāva*; it is the experience of both love-in-union and love-in-separation that makes the cycle of devotion complete. And, as devotees' love (*prema*) matures, they begin to detach from the world (*sādhana-nirodha*), and become increasingly attached (*āśakti*) and obsessed (*vyasana*) with thoughts of Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās* (*phalanirodha*). The experience of *rasa* during *sevā*, furthermore, facilitates a devotee's emotional transformation. This transformation culminates in a devotee's complete emotional and physical preoccupation with Kṛṣṇa, characterized as *sarvātmabhāva*: one comes to see Kṛṣṇa in everyone and everything; all aspects of a devotee (the senses, motor-organs, life-breaths, mind, heart and body) that were previously superimposed upon by Kṛṣṇa's *avidyā-śakti* are now imbued with total love for Kṛṣṇa; and, finally, as we have seen, one begins to love Kṛṣṇa with all *bhāvas* and *rasas*. This experience of emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa, which can now be experienced in both states of love-in-union and love-in-separation, is described as *rasa*, the *rasa* of *bhakti*.

In his treatise *Catuhśloki*,⁸⁵ Vallabha says the following in the fourth verse: "Therefore the devotee must never stop *remembering* and *worshipping* with his whole being the feet of the Lord of Gokula. This is my belief" (Redington 2000, 118 emphasis mine).⁸⁶ For Vallabha, then, *mokṣa* is described as "the alternation of 'worshipping' — done when in union with Krishna, and 'remembering' — done in separation from Krishna" (122). According to Shyam Manohar Goswamy, when this alternation becomes "both constant and intense while the devotee is still living, we can speak of the Grace Path's version of *jīvanmukti*" (122). In this stage, *sevā* becomes involuntary and a

⁸⁵ In this treatise, each of the four verses corresponds to each *puruṣārtha* (*dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokṣa*).

⁸⁶ Skt: "ataḥ sarvātmanā śaśvadgokuleśvarapādayoḥ| smaraṇam bhajānam cāpi na tyājyāmiti me mataḥ||"

devotee's entire being and mind becomes devoted to the worship and remembrance of Kṛṣṇa.

As we have already seen, this state of “liberation-in-life” is described by Vallabha as “transcendent power” or “the capacity for the transcendent,” that is, *alaukikasāmarthya*. Here, by the grace of Kṛṣṇa, a devotee has an almost “magical” ability to bring Kṛṣṇa “alive” in worship. And according to Vallabha, as the reward of worship, Kṛṣṇa “comes to them [the devotees] in that particular form, or by that particular quality in which He becomes manifest to them on earth [as the *svarūpa*]” (*Puṣṭipravāhamaryādābhedaḥ* v.17, 47).⁸⁷ That is, it is the *svarūpa* of Kṛṣṇa that a devotee worships that “comes to life.” As Manilal Parekh illustrates, *alaukikasāmarthya* is a condition in which Kṛṣṇa becomes “dependent on the soul ... For the sake of his Bhaktas, God surrenders His infinite glory and becomes like one of them, being bound to them with the ties of human relationships. He lives with them on terms of utmost intimacy and equality, and gives Himself to them” (1969, 145). And when this occurs, Kṛṣṇa is said to enter, with his *līlās*, into his devotees and permanently restores their *ānanda*.

For Vallabha, then, the performance of *sevā* is the only or supreme *karma* for a devotee (TDN I.4),⁸⁸ it is the only *dharma* for a devotee (*Catuhśloki* v.1, Redington 2000, 120),⁸⁹ and as we have seen, it is both the means to and state of liberation. Furthermore, according to Vallabha, it is a transformative process which necessitates the experience of

⁸⁷ Skt.: “*bhagavāneva hi phalam sa yathā 'avirbhavedbhuvī| guṇasvarūpabhedena tathā phalam bhavet||*”

⁸⁸ Skt.: “... *karmāpyekam tasya devasya sevā||*”

⁸⁹ In this treatise, where each verse corresponds to each of the *puruṣārthas*, Vallabha writes the following in the first verse (which corresponds to *dharma*): “*sarvadā sarvabhāvena bhajanīyo vrajādhipaḥ| svasyāyameva dharmo hi nānyaḥ kvāpi kadācana||*”

rasa (TDN I.95 *prakāśa*).⁹⁰ As Alan Entwistle demonstrates, “Evocation and experience of sentiments by means of poetry, song, and visual display constitute in themselves a means of fulfillment and salvation” (63). Thus, it is only through performing *sevā* that devotees come to experience “*brahma-bhāva*,” a condition in which devotees experience the permanent restoration of what they lost primordially and spend their lives searching for: *ānanda* (TDN I.36).⁹¹

⁹⁰ In his *prakāśa* to verse 95, Vallabha maintains that in the absence of the experience of *rasa*, worship by its own nature would not take the shape of an aim of life (*puruṣārtha*); Skt., “...*tadabhāve bhajanam svataḥpuruṣārtharūpam na bhavet rasābhibhikṣyabhāvā*||.”

⁹¹ Skt., “*ānandāṁśaprakāśāddhi brahmabhāvo bhaviṣyati| sāyujyam vānyathā tasmin, ubhayam harisevayā*||

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the intersections between ritual, aesthetic experience, and philosophy in the Puṣṭimārga *saṁpradāya*. In doing so, I demonstrated how philosophical thought and ritual activity are intimately linked in the tradition. The devotee is expected to be emotionally and physically engaged in the loving worship (*sevā*) of Kṛṣṇa. The performance of *sevā*, however, remains ineffective without an understanding of its underlying “aesthetic philosophies,” while these “aesthetic philosophies” cannot be fully realised without the practice of *sevā*. Thus, it is the complementary character of Puṣṭimārga theology and practice that renders each soteriologically efficacious.

Chapter One illustrated how Vallabha established the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as the foundational scripture of the Puṣṭimārga tradition. The tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* deliberately maintains Kṛṣṇa’s divinity in total abeyance. God is described as a young cow-herd boy, who would rather be loved as a son, friend, and lover than be worshipped as a God. He is also accepted as the full embodiment of grace, beauty, *ānanda*, *rasa*, and *līlā*.

The tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* presents religious experience or *bhakti* as a passionate and all-consuming desire to be emotionally and physically intimate with Kṛṣṇa in the context of his *līlās*. The chapter contended that Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā* serves as a theological context in which devotees can fulfill this desire, and a narrative/aesthetic context in which *rasa* functions and can be experienced. We also saw how Kṛṣṇa’s parents, Nanda and Yaśodā, became overwhelmed with their love for Kṛṣṇa, and how the *gopīs* could not endure a moment without their lover. As illustrated in Chapter One, and

then later in Chapter Two, it is the archetypical *viraha-bhakti* and *sarvātmabhāva* of the *gopīs* that inspired, and became incorporated into, Vallabha's and Viṭṭhalanātha's own ontological and soteriological formularizations.

Chapter Two introduced Vallabha's "aesthetic philosophy" or Śuddhādvaita. We learned how *jīvas*, after being manifested from the *ānanda* body of Kṛṣṇa, have their *ānanda* concealed and become subjected to Kṛṣṇa's *avidyā-śakti*. Thus, *jīvas* are in constant search for the restoration of their *ānanda*, which can only occur if they are in the physical presence of Kṛṣṇa's *ānanda* body and participate in his *līlās*. I argue that it is by performing *sevā*, where they are in the presence of the image form of Kṛṣṇa (*svarūpa*) and can experience his *līlās* that *jīvas*, by Kṛṣṇa's grace, transcend their states of *avidyā*, mature their *bhakti-bhāvas*, and permanently restore their *ānanda*.

I examined how a devotee's *bhakti-bhāva* matures through the alternating experiences of *samyoga-bhakti* (love-in-union), which occurs during *sevā*, and *viraha-bhakti*, which results in the performance of *kathā* (praising, remembering, and meditatively imagining Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*). The maturation of a devotee's *bhakti-bhāva* culminates in the experience of *nirodha* ("constraint") and *sarvātmabhāva* ("total love"). I argued that these soteriological doctrines present emotion and aesthetic experience as both the way and the goal for experiencing Kṛṣṇa. In regards to *nirodha*, Kṛṣṇa constrains his devotees by performing his *līlās*, which causes them to detach from the world and become attached (*āśakti*) and obsessed (*vyasana*) with him. Thus, Kṛṣṇa's self-subordination to his devotees' love — to his devotees' *emotions* — is the primary mode by which he constrains himself and is therefore the primary mode by which devotees approach and experience Kṛṣṇa.

Finally, we examined the important soteriological doctrine of *sarvātmabhāva*. It is a condition in which devotees come to see Kṛṣṇa in everyone and everything; love Kṛṣṇa with every aspect of their bodies; and finally, love Kṛṣṇa with all *bhāvas* and *rasas*. This advanced stage of *bhakti* culminates in a form of “liberation-in-life,” where a devotee attains a “capacity for the transcendent” (*alaukikasāmarthya*). Vallabha posits this form of liberation as the highest. It is a state in which devotees have the ability to bring Kṛṣṇa “alive” during *sevā*, experience all his *līlās* within them, and finally have their *ānanda* permanently restored. *Sevā* thus becomes a form of liberation itself.

Vallabha posits emotion or *bhāva* as both the way and the goal for experiencing Kṛṣṇa. As we saw throughout the thesis, Vallabha affirms the soteriological role of emotion by accepting that the highest form of liberation is to be emotionally and physically intimate with Kṛṣṇa in the context of his *līlās*. In the third and final chapter of the thesis, I argued that the “aesthetic philosophies” of both Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha are reified in *sevā*, and that corporeal, emotional, and sense-oriented aesthetic experience informs and engenders religious praxis in Puṣṭimārga.

Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha validate emotional experience and emotional transformation by invoking Sanskrit aesthetic theory. They understand Kṛṣṇa as being the embodiment of all *bhāvas* and *rasas*, and as performing his *līlās* in accordance with the paradigms of aesthetic theory for producing these sentiments in his devotees. Thus, devotees are able to both *approach* and *experience* their love for Kṛṣṇa in terms of all *bhāvas* or *rasas*, that is, with *sarvātmabhāva*. *Sarvātmabhāva* is described as a state in which devotees relish in the *rasa* of *bhakti*; they experience intense emotional and

corporeal intimacy with Kṛṣṇa, and feel as though they are in the presence of Kṛṣṇa and are actual participants in his *līlās*.

Though, as it was demonstrated in the last section of Chapter Three, the efficacy of cultivated *sevā* necessitates the experience of *bhakti-rasa*. The collective performance of *rāga*, *bhoga*, and *śṛṅgāra sevā* during a *jhāṅki* invokes a particular *bhāva*, which is associated with one of Kṛṣṇa's *līlās*. The culmination of this *bhāva* into an experience of *rasa*— the *rasa* of *bhakti* — facilitates a devotee's emotional transformation by actualizing Kṛṣṇa's presence and his *līlās*. Thus, as the chapter contended, the experience of *rasa* is both expressive of a transformed state in which devotees delight in the experience of emotional intimacy with Kṛṣṇa and it also facilitates this transformation via the performance of the “aesthetic rituals” of *rāga*, *bhoga*, and *śṛṅgāra*.

As Bennett maintains, “image worship is highly developed in the [Puṣṭimārga] sect to such an extent that it is probably unsurpassed elsewhere” (1983, 33). Ritual offerings of poetic compositions, music, painting, decoration, and elaborate food preparations, not only demonstrate the Puṣṭimārga's commitment to the arts, but also reveal how the tradition has chosen to fulfill a devotee's desire to experience Kṛṣṇa's presence and participate in his *līlās*. *Sevā* is not only a ritual activity which facilitates the removal of a devotee's *doṣas* and *avidyā*, but it is also an emotional process in which devotees can sensually and corporeally approach and ultimately experience Kṛṣṇa and his *līlās*.

Thus far, studies of Puṣṭimārga ritual culture have been compartmentalized, dealing exclusively with its music tradition (Guy Beck, 1993; Anne-Marie Gaston, 1997), painting tradition (Amit Ambalal, 1987; Tryna Lyons, 2004), and ritual food-offerings

(Peter Bennett, 1983, 1990, 1993; Paul Toomey, 1986, 1990, 1992). However, as demonstrated in this thesis, the “aesthetic rituals” of *rāga*, *bhoga*, and *śṛṅgāra* operate collectively in the context of Puṣṭimārga *sevā*. Furthermore, most of these studies did not integrate Vallabha’s and Viṭṭhalanātha’s “aesthetic philosophies” into their discussion of Puṣṭimārga ritual, nor did they examine how the soteriological doctrines of *nirodha* and *sarvātmabhāva* intersect with aesthetic experience and ritual.

This study has by no means been exhaustive. There is still much scope for the study of Puṣṭimārga and the various components of its ritual and philosophy. My future research will continue to focus on how poetry, music, and painting traditions constitute, affect, and transform Puṣṭimārga *sevā*. As Viṭṭhalanātha was instrumental in furthering the aesthetic dimensions of *sevā*, excavating manuscript sources of his major works will constitute a major part of this work. I will also study and translate the works of Puruṣottama, the most prolific of Puṣṭimārga theologians after Vallabha and Viṭṭhalanātha. Another vital component in the study of Puṣṭimārga practice involves ethnographic work with communities who practice in temple and domestic contexts. Domestic worship in Puṣṭimārga is a highly understudied subject, even though it provides an ideal context in which devotees can integrate *sevā* into their daily lives.

As we have seen, the study of Puṣṭimārga constitutes an ideal site for an analysis of the interface between philosophy and ritual. Without granting *a priori* status to philosophy, this thesis demonstrated how the underlying philosophical structures of Śuddhādvaita share a dialectical relationship with Puṣṭimārga ritual practices, and how aesthetic theory is the key to understanding and explicating this relationship. This

aesthetics of emotion characterizes Puṣṭimārga as a unique Vaiṣṇava theological system that radically redefines and transforms the relationship between devotee and God.

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