

## Verse 42: Krishna's 10 rasas with the Gopis

*tam gorajaś-churita-kuntala-baddhabarha-vanya-prasūna-rucirekṣaṇa-cāruhāsam |  
veṇum kvaṇantam-anugair-anugītakīrtim gopyo didṛkṣitadṛśobhyagaman sametāḥ ||42||*

“The Gopis, eyes desirous to see, rushed out and gathered around him – whose locks, with a bundle of peacock feathers and forest flowers, were covered in cowdust – whose eyes are enticing – who laughed beautifully, playing the flute, with his followers [the cowherd boys] singing his praises.”

The above verse describes the moment when Krishna returns with his friends from their first cowherding adventure and is greeted by the Gopis, who have naturally missed him dearly all day. In Vallabhācārya's reading of this verse, Krishna bestows the 4 primary pursuits of life and the 10 *rasas* upon the Gopis who have come out to greet him on the path. The surprising descriptions of laughter and smiles and their function described by the Vallabhi commentators are illustrative of the unique role which the comic *rasa* and laughter in general play in this devotional system, as well as the larger goals to which their devotion is directed.

As previously discussed, Vallabhācārya's pure non-dualism conceives of *Līlā* as a divine drama unfolding within reality, paradoxically both created and concealed by the Krishna's own power of *mayā*. A related paradox is that to engage in the process and ultimate state of this unique type of devotion, in other words to attain *nīrodha*, a degree of separation is as essential, or even more so, than interaction. As Smith notes, the “devotional engagement” denoted by *nīrodha* is particularly defined by “the intensity of longing for the Lord in his absence.”<sup>1</sup> This emphasis on separation, or *viraha*, would become exalted by some sampradayaic authors even above union, or *samyoga*. Considering the necessity of union and separation in this devotional rubric, we might consider humor, with its analogous functions of cohesion (as a shared and intimate interaction among equals) and differentiation (as a marker between what

is appropriate, expected, normal, and what is not), as a naturally conducive element to the process and realization of devotion.

Therefore, though this Bhagavata section falls within the middling order of the devotional development in Vallabhācārya's scheme, it is an integral aspect of the Vallabhi Vaisnava theory and practice, for their *puṣṭi* or grace-filled path itself is considered to specialize on the feelings of separation from Krishna. The sampradayic focus is not on the typically assumed separation that occurs after Krishna leaves Braj for Mathura and Dwarka, but that which is experienced daily when Krishna goes out with his friends and cows. This “*līlā*” time corresponds to the periods between the Vaisnava's *seva* or service to his or her personal Krishna. At that time, the forest *līlās* alluded to above are to be contemplated, and feelings of deep separation cultivated. I would qualify, therefore, that although the erotic mood embodied in Krishna's autumnal Rāsa *Līlā* dalliance is indeed exalted in this devotional worldview, it is not the case that Vaishnavas simply imagine themselves straight into the moonlit *Rasa Līlā*. Rather, Krishna's childhood cowherding games constitute a significant element of the devotional contemplation and practice.

Vallabhācārya explains that *Śṅgāra rasa* in verse 42 comes from the collective description of ‘cow, locks, and dust,’ because cows create the remembrance of Krishna, hair is a form of desire, and dust (*raj*) is of the passionate *rajas* guṇa.<sup>2</sup> In some cases Vallabhācārya's more condensed commentary simply identifies the word from which he interprets the corresponding *rasa*, leaving the later commentators to offer more detailed explanations. For example, Purushottamji's commentary confirms that the ‘bundle’ and ‘peacock feathers’ generate, via the sentiments of valor and dismay, the amazing and heroic *rasas* Vallabhācārya had attributed to them. ‘Forest’ signifies the fearful, perhaps just in its primal associations, as well as, in the words of Gokulnathji, due to the Gopis’ “fear that Krishna might return again to

the forest.”<sup>3</sup> The flowers, interestingly, signal our featured comic *rasa*. Purushottamji seems to recall Bharata’s classic definitions of *hāsyā*’s stimulants by suggesting the Krishna’s decoration with flowers from some far off forest is “sort of bizarre or crooked.”<sup>4</sup>

But humor here has yet another layer of *puṣṭi* meaning, one that further reveals its role in supporting the *rasa* with which ultimately the tradition seems most concerned, namely the erotic *śṅgāra*. In the commentary of Lallu Bhattji, we read that after seeing the amazing and heroic cluster of peacock flowers, the Gopis might have relinquished all bashfulness and shame (*lajjītyāga*) and rushed up to him. But seeing the flowers and the concomitant fear that he might return to the forest, held the Gopis back from rushing forward to grab him. This, Lallu Bhattji indicates, protects the *rasa*, for according to the rules of *rasa*, it arises in secrecy – otherwise, if outwardly manifested, it would not arise.<sup>5</sup>

The compassionate (*karuna*) *rasa* is found in Krishna’s enticing eyes. But it is unclear to me what led Ramanan to interpret Vallabhācārya’s terse *rucirekṣaṇaṁ karuṇākhyam* as “the beautiful way, with which, our Lord looked, at this universe, (which is His own) gives rise to the *Rasa* of compassion.”<sup>6</sup> Ramanan makes no attempt at the complicated commentaries on this point, but Lallu Bhattji’s conjecture is that the sorrow (*śoka*) leading to this *rasa* is from the Gopis’ lament that Krishna’s enticing glance was not experienced by them for such a long time, in other words all day long!<sup>7</sup>

The next description, of Krishna’s smile, would be the obvious candidate for the comic *rasa* which was attributed instead to the flowers. In fact, his smile is taken to signify the furious (*raudra*) *rasa*, because, as Gokulnathji comments, “Krishna has abandoned us and gone off to the forest while we are burning [in separation] and now he himself is smiling – hence anger (*krodha*).”<sup>8</sup> I noticed that Viṣṇu Śāstri, when explaining this verse, couldn’t quite suppress his own laughter when describing how the Gopis are accusing Krishna here of “rubbing salt in

their wounds” by smiling in that moment; I am not alone then in perceiving a somewhat comedic effect of Vallabhācārya’s reversal of *rasa* expectations. Although Ramanan delves into the other commentaries at times, he translates only Vallabhācārya here: “The beautiful ‘smile’ gives rise to the sense of ‘anger.’”<sup>9</sup>

Vallabhācārya notes that the “remaining” *rasa*, i.e. the abhorrent (*bībhatsa*), arises when a “great one” takes such special dress/form.<sup>10</sup> One of the more interesting elaborations on this is by Lallu Bhattji, who gives the possibility that the Gopis felt disgust (*jugupsa*, the *sthayi bhava* of *bībhatsa*) due to the various loving, pleasure-taking, and deceitful desires he must have entertained while gone.<sup>11</sup> Lallu Bhattji notes however that the various *rasas* are all *śṛṅgārarasapoṣaka* – they nourish the erotic *rasa*.

The overlap of disgust and humor is evident as well in the genre of *khandita* poems that describe Krishna’s morning meeting with a Gopi who has waited all night in vain for his arrival. Here the comic arises again physically in the form of bizarre dress. In two poems which Hawley identifies as circulating in the 16th century, we read:

Away! Go back to where you spent the night!  
Manmohan, what clues are you trying to erase?  
Signs of tight embraces are not so quickly hid.  
A necklace, now stringless, is etched into your chest:  
what clever girl slept pressed against your heart?  
Your garments, hair, and jewels are all askew:  
they were tangled in a bout with her lust-hardened breasts  
Madhav, what a fine appearance!  
Your eyes droop with sleep, your turban is askew,  
your hair flies beautifully wild...  
Your clothes are all undone, and your feet –  
how they stumble and sway in a lionlike gait.<sup>12</sup>

Taken perhaps as Krishna’s effort to quell such disturbances, Vallabhācārya follows abhorrence with *sānta rasa*: “‘playing the flute’ [indicates] the *rasa* of peace.” Lastly, after

Vallabhācārya's comment, "whose 'praise is sung by followers' [indicates] the *rasa* of devotion (*bhakti*),"<sup>13</sup> the commentators highlight the connection between *bhakti* and *dāsyā*. Lallu Bhattji notes, "the *bhakti rasa* arises in the form of *dāsyā*, etc."<sup>14</sup> The intimacy of the relationship, incidentally, is noted by Gokulnathji: "'follower' is an intimate one, this is the meaning."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Smith, Nirodha and the Nirodhalakṣaṇa of Vallabhācārya 1998, 495-6)

<sup>2</sup> *kuntalāśca kāmārūpā rajoguṇa eva gāvotrānubhāvāḥ tena puṣṭaḥ śṛṅgāraraso nirūpitaḥ* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 56-7)

<sup>3</sup> *Bhagavān punarvanam gacchediti bhayam* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 58)

<sup>4</sup> *kathancid vikṛtirūpayā bhāngyā sthāpītatvācca te janayati* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 57) In an example of how, in my estimation, the existing English translation of these commentaries by Ramanan often misses the mark, he translates this as, "These flowers were worn in such a way that they were, indeed, not looking very nice – Hence this type of wearing the flowers gave rise to 'laughter'" (Vallabhācārya 2003, 1726).

<sup>5</sup> *tadā lajjītyāge rasaprākātyād gupto hi raso rasatvamāpadyata iti rasamaryādāyā abhāvāt rasatvameva na syāt* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 58)

<sup>6</sup> (Vallabhācārya 2003, 1726)

<sup>7</sup> *sadṛśe īkṣaṇe etāvatkāmasmābhiḥ kuto nāubhūte itisokasthāyibhāvakaḥ karuṇārāsa udभवति* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 59)

<sup>8</sup> *tyaktvā gata iti vayamevaṁ taptāḥ svayaṁ ca hasatīti krodhaḥ* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 58)

<sup>9</sup> (Vallabhācārya 2003, 1726)

<sup>10</sup> *mahatastādṛśo viśiṣṭo veṣo nāṭyāvaśiṣṭarasam janayati* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 58)

<sup>11</sup> *ataḥ kutra kutrāsya snehaḥ kutra kutrāsya ramaṇam kiṁ kiṁ na kāmakāpaṭyaṁ karotītibuddhau jugupsāsthāyibhāvako bībhatsarasa udeti* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 59)

<sup>12</sup> (Hawley 2007, 235-36)

<sup>13</sup> *veṇuṁ kvaṇantamīti śāntarasah...anugair-anugītakīrtiryasyeti bhaktirasah* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 58-59)

<sup>14</sup> *dāsyādirūpa bhaktirasah prakāṭibhavati* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 60)

<sup>15</sup> *anugā iti antaraṅgā ityarthah* (Vallabhācārya, Śrīmadbhāgavata Daśamaskandha Subodhinyām, ṛṭīya-caturthe prameyasādhanaprakaraṇe 1993, 55)

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