

# Behind Kṛṣṇa's Smile

SUNY series in Hindu Studies

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Wendy Doniger, editor

# Behind Kṛṣṇa's Smile

The Lord's Hint of Laughter  
in the *Bhagavadgītā* and Beyond

ANTONIO RIGOPOULOS and  
GIANNI PELLEGRINI

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To our dear parents	6
whose loving smile always accompanies us	7
	8
<i>mahātmānaḥ kila smitapūrvābhibhāṣiṇo bhavanti   </i>	9
“Great souls usually smile before speaking.”	10
(Bhāskara’s commentary <i>ad Bhagavadgītā</i> 2.10)	11
	12
“Oh my heart, how could you turn from the smile of your Lord	13
and wander so far from Him?”	14
(Excerpt from a poem of the poet-saint Kabīr, fifteenth century)	15
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# Preface

ANTONIO RIGOPOULOS

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What triggered this study is the shared persuasion that the veritable turning point of the *Bhagavadgītā* poem or the “Song of the Lord,” which scholars date somewhere between 200 BCE and 100 CE, is Kṛṣṇa’s “hint of laughter” (*prahasann iva*) in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10. It signals the outpouring of the god’s grace (*prasāda*) to Arjuna as a consequence of the latter having taken refuge at his feet. Remarkably, it is from this point that Śaṅkara (c. 700 CE) and other leading theologians begin their commentaries. Arjuna’s devout surrender (*prapatti*) to Kṛṣṇa is what attracts the lord’s mercy: his hint of laughter conveys his awesome splendor and is the unmistakable sign of his favor, the prelude to the outflow of his liberating teaching (*upadeśa*).

For more than twenty-five years I have been reading the poem with my Sanskrit students at the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice and I have been stressing to them the significance of the stock expression *prahasann iva* as the manifestation of Kṛṣṇa’s love toward Arjuna, *bhakti* being the essential feature of this celebrated dialogue between master and pupil (*guruśiṣyasamvāda*). Although this understanding strikes me as being quite straightforward, in recent years I have found myself wondering when it was that I first read or heard about it since I’m quite sure that it was not originally my idea. The source of this interpretation must inevitably go back to when I was a student of Indian religions in the 1980s. I think I was told of the importance of Kṛṣṇa’s hint of laughter/



1 smile by one of my early teachers in Indology, my cherished pro-  
 2 fessors Mario Piantelli at the University of Turin, or Gerald James  
 3 Larson at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

4 What is certain is that the majority of modern English trans-  
 5 lations and commentaries of the *Bhagavadgītā* written by Indian  
 6 and Western scholars as well as by Hindu holy men do not offer  
 7 any particular clue or explanation regarding Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann*  
 8 *iva*, which typically goes unnoticed or at best receives a cursory  
 9 treatment. Even Peter Brook's celebrated staging of the *Mahābhārata*  
 10 in 1985 failed to capture this fundamental moment, given that the  
 11 actor that impersonated Kṛṣṇa not only lacked any smile but had  
 12 a wearied expression on his face, not too different from Arjuna's  
 13 dejected countenance.

14 Moreover, while discussing this issue with many Indologists I  
 15 have come to realize, much to my surprise, that my understanding  
 16 of Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* is not at all shared knowledge and is far  
 17 from being a matter of course: for the majority of my interlocu-  
 18 tors it usually comes as a revelation and as something to which  
 19 they had never given any thought before. Even when I venture to  
 20 explain the significance of *prahasann iva* in public lectures on the  
 21 *Bhagavadgītā*, the invariable reaction is one of wonder.

22 When in October 2019 I offered my analysis of Kṛṣṇa's hint of  
 23 laughter to my dear colleague and friend Gianni Pellegrini at the  
 24 biannual gathering of the Italian Association of Sanskrit Studies, he  
 25 was fascinated by it. He also admitted that he had never thought  
 26 about it in these terms nor had he ever come across any modern  
 27 commentary that dealt with it. As he later told me, Kṛṣṇa's hint  
 28 of laughter in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10 is much like the egg of Columbus:  
 29 something that is so evident that people don't see it, that is, don't  
 30 pay attention to. Thus it was that the idea of cowriting a book on  
 31 this topic first emerged, and I must say that the more Gianni and  
 32 I probed into it the more our enthusiasm grew since the depth of  
 33 Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* appears to be inexhaustible, always leading  
 34 to new insights.

35 The book is divided into four chapters that are the result of  
 36 our combined efforts and constant exchange. In particular, I am  
 37 responsible for chapters 1 and 4 while Gianni Pellegrini is responsi-  
 38 ble for chapters 2 and 3. After the introduction, which is meant to  
 39 set the ground for our study, chapter 1 examines Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann*  
 40



*iva* in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10 and its implications in the context of the poem as a whole. As a starting point, we consider its English translations in Western scholarship and offer our own rendering. We investigate its crucial significance and plural meanings, showing how the god's hint of laughter constitutes the text's *καίρός*, its decisive moment, communicating the outpouring of Kṛṣṇa's grace and words of wisdom to Arjuna. We then consider the impact of *prahasann iva* on the poem's central teachings as they unfold, that is, by taking into account its three traditional subdivisions (*kar-mayoga*, *bhaktiyoga*, and *jñānayoga*), evidencing how even Kṛṣṇa's theophany in chapter 11 is somehow in the nature of *prahasann iva*.

Chapter 2 focuses upon the understanding of Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter in the Sanskrit commentarial tradition. This is pivotal in order to assess how, along the centuries, the most prominent representatives of the schools of Vedānta have understood this stock phrase and have argued about its relevance within the poem. By examining their exegeses, we can detect the main lines of thought in the history of interpretation and appreciate the technicalities of traditional scholarship, the richness and thoroughness that characterize its approach to the text.

Chapter 3 explores the uses of *prahasann iva* and its akin form *hasann iva* within the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* epics. The aim is to uncover the various situations in which this expression is utilized along with its principal meanings, depending upon the human and/or divine actors involved. Particular attention is paid to those cases in which Kṛṣṇa himself figures as protagonist. This survey allows to appreciate the broader context in which *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* are employed and to better situate Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10 as part and parcel of the *Mahābhārata*.

Chapter 4 presents the typologies of laughter (*hāsyarasa*) within the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata (200–300 CE), confronting them with Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter in the *Bhagavadgītā* and with the representation of the deity in the performing arts. A survey of Kṛṣṇa's figure in epic and purāṇic iconography and literature up to modern times allows the recognition of an aesthetic and literary continuum, evidencing the deep-rootedness of kṛṣṇaite *bhakti* theology and proving the eloquence beyond words of Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva*.

To date there are no studies on Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter in the *Bhagavadgītā* despite the fact that it immediately precedes his

1 conversation with Arjuna, conceptualized as the perennial dialogue  
 2 between god and man. We are confident that both South Asian  
 3 scholars and historians of religions will be interested in perusing  
 4 Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* within the poem and its commentarial tra-  
 5 dition and, more broadly, in learning about this stock phrase in  
 6 the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* and the developments of Kṛṣṇa's  
 7 hint of laughter in iconography, literature and the performing arts.  
 8 We also expect that all people who are devout to Kṛṣṇa and to  
 9 the *Bhagavadgītā*—the Gospel of India, widely revered as the fifth  
 10 *Veda*—will be eager to read about it and discover new facets of  
 11 their lord's amazing grace.

12 All in all, this study explores a set of interrelated issues: (a)  
 13 an in-depth analysis of Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10  
 14 and its influence on the poem as a whole, offering new insights  
 15 into the theological assumptions of the text and its *bhakti* orienta-  
 16 tion; (b) the interpretation and contextualization of Kṛṣṇa's hint of  
 17 laughter in Sanskrit commentaries (*bhāṣya*), allowing to detect the  
 18 shifts of meaning that characterized traditional scholarship over  
 19 time, highlighting the differences of approach among the main  
 20 schools of Vedānta; (c) a comprehensive examination of *prahasann*  
 21 *iva* / *hasann iva* in both the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, throwing light  
 22 on its different uses and functions as per the ethos and theology  
 23 of the epics; (d) an assessment of Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter in light  
 24 of the aesthetic experience of the comic in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*  
 25 coupled with a survey of the deity's iconography and literature,  
 26 which allows the recognition of a unified canon that ties together  
 27 the literary and aesthetical, performative dimensions of Kṛṣṇa's  
 28 *prahasann iva*. Finally, we hope our Indological investigation may  
 29 be appreciated as a contribution to the ongoing debate on the  
 30 fascinating phenomenons of laughter and smile.

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It is with a smile and filled with gratitude that we wish to thank all those people who in various ways helped us in our research. Special thanks go to the teachers who first kindled our interest in religious studies and in the religions and philosophies of India, in particular to Prof. Franco Michellini Tocci of the University of Venice and Prof. Mario Piantelli of the University of Turin. We also wish to express our debt of gratitude to the late Prof. Gerald James Larson of the University of California, Santa Barbara, for his masterful guidance in the intricacies of Sanskrit grammar and in the reading of the *Bhagavadgītā* between 1987 and 1994.

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18 (Napoli: UniorPress, 2022), 965–1010 (A. Rigopoulos, “*Prahasann*  
19 *iva*. On Kṛṣṇa’s Hint of Laughter in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10”), 841–99  
20 (G. Pellegrini, “On *prahasann iva*: *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10 in the Light of  
21 Traditional Commentaries”).

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31 the students at the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice and at the  
32 University of Turin who over many years have patiently read  
33 through the *Bhagavadgītā* with us and who have engaged in their  
34 own dialogues with Kṛṣṇa.

35 We feel it appropriate to end our heart-felt thanks with the  
36 words of a well-known Sanskrit verse:

37

38 *gacchataḥ skhalanaṃ kvāpi bhavaty eva pramādataḥ |*  
39 *hasanti durjanās tatra samādadhati sajjanāḥ ||*

40

Due to inadvertence, it is certainly possible to stumble	1
while walking:	2
whereas mean people laugh at this, gracious people are	3
eager to correct.	4
	5
And as Śaṅkara states in his commentary <i>ad Bhagavadgītā</i> 13.2:	6
	7
<i>. . . na ca mithyājñānaṃ paramārthavastu dūṣayantuṃ</i>	8
<i>samartham   </i>	9
	10
. . . no erroneous knowledge can ever corrupt Supreme	11
Reality.	12
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Antonio Rigopoulos	14
Gianni Pellegrini	15
Venice—Turin, Italy	16
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## Introduction

*O luce etterna che sola in te sidi,  
sola t'intendi, e da te intelletta  
e intendente te ami e arridi!*

O eternal Light, abiding in yourself alone,  
knowing yourself alone, and, known to yourself  
and knowing, loving and smiling on yourself!

—Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*,  
*Paradiso XXXIII*, 124–26

Here it is necessary to know that  
the eyes of wisdom are her demonstrations,  
by which truth is seen with the greatest certainty,  
and her smiles are her persuasions,  
in which the inner light of wisdom  
is revealed behind a kind of veil;  
and in each of them is felt  
the highest joy of blessedness,  
which is the greatest good of Paradise.

—Dante Alighieri, *Convivio* 3.15.2

In trying to understand the typically human phenomenon of  
laughter and smile, rivers of ink have been poured from antiquity  
to the present and various theories have been proposed. Yet even  
nowadays the subtlety of its nature and of what links laughter  
to smile is hard to assess and continues to elude us. What is the  
psychology of smile and laughter? What are their causes and to

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1 which stimuli do they respond to? What is their primary function?  
 2 Are they voluntary or involuntary actions/reactions? Can they  
 3 be universally classed in fixed typologies?<sup>1</sup> Or is their meaning  
 4 inevitably linked to the social and cultural contexts in which they  
 5 manifest themselves, depending on the particular person involved  
 6 and the ever-changing circumstances? Are they lexically and phra-  
 7 sally produced or without any propositional content?<sup>2</sup>

8 Among the many theories regarding laughter, one often comes  
 9 across the “theory of superiority” according to which laughter is  
 10 resorted to by someone who feels superior to someone else and  
 11 wants to mark his higher status through mockery. Another theory  
 12 that has distinguished advocates—including Aristotle (384–322  
 13 BCE), Cicero (106–43 BCE) and Quintilian (35–96 CE) up to Thomas  
 14 Hobbes (1588–1679), Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Henri Bergson  
 15 (1859–1941)—is the “theory of inconsistency,” in which laughter is  
 16 said to be triggered by any incongruous act or utterance, that is,  
 17 what is known as *anaucitya* (lit. “inappropriateness”) in the Indian  
 18 tradition and that has been thematized by Abhinavagupta (early  
 19 eleventh century) and referred to by several of the *Bhagavadgītā*'s  
 20 commentators we will be examining.

21 From an Indian viewpoint, even the well-known biblical story  
 22 of the naming of Isaac, a term that literally means “he will laugh,”  
 23 would be rubricated as a case of *anaucitya*. This name was given  
 24 to him by god himself because of his mother Sarah's incredulous  
 25 reaction when she ironically laughed at herself at hearing the  
 26 prediction that she would give birth to a child at her advanced  
 27 age of ninety years old (*Genesis* 18:10–15). Abraham, who was a  
 28 hundred years old, was the first to fall on his face and laugh when  
 29 god announced to him that he would give him a son through her  
 30 (*Genesis* 17:16–17).<sup>3</sup>

31 To be sure, both theories of superiority and inconsistency are  
 32 utilized in the commentarial tradition in order to understand Kṛṣṇa's  
 33 “hint of laughter” (*prahasann iva*) in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10, even by  
 34 viewing them as complementary to one another. Both theories can  
 35 be applied to god himself, who, as *deus ludens*, laughs at seeing the  
 36 inadequacy and incongruity of humans and their miseries. None-  
 37 theless, we shall see that in our case Kṛṣṇa's superiority does not  
 38 manifest itself through a hint of laughter of mere sarcasm toward  
 39 Arjuna since his *prahasann iva* expresses the pure joy of welcoming  
 40



him as his dear disciple, signaling the flowing of his grace toward  
 him. Arjuna's *anaucitya* is further underlined by some powerful  
 contrasts: whereas our hero cries and sits despondent in the back  
 of his chariot, the lord stands up exhibiting a cheerful countenance,  
 gracefully dispelling all pain and sorrow by his hint of laughter.

It is noteworthy that Henri Bergson in his famous work on  
 laughter he originally published in 1900—*Le rire: essai sur la signifi-  
 cation du comique*—states that although life is essentially inimitable  
 it often happens that we humans cease to be ourselves, that is,  
 deliberately betray ourselves, and start imitating others. Thus he  
 argues that imitation is the very essence of the ludicrous.<sup>4</sup> Along  
 these lines, in the *Bhagavadgītā* the great warrior Arjuna, overcome  
 by anguish, refuses to fight a just (*dharmya*) war stating that he  
 would rather prefer “to eat alms-food” (*BhG* 2.5), that is, to lead  
 the life of a renunciant (*saṁnyāsīn*) by imitating his lifestyle. Kṛṣṇa's  
 hint of laughter is but a natural reaction to the hero's betrayal of  
 his princely (*kṣatriya*) class and his wanting to imitate the conduct  
 (*dharma*) of a renunciant that is prescribed only as the final stage  
 (*āśrama*) in a man's life. Again this inversion of roles and imitation  
 of others falls within the sphere of *anaucitya* or inappropriateness.  
 We might also infer that the lord's *prahasann iva* is tinged with  
 surprise, given that Arjuna exhibits this unexpected reaction at the  
 least appropriate time and place, that is, just when the great war  
 is about to begin. Moreover, that our hero's last words to Kṛṣṇa  
 are “I'll not fight” (*BhG* 2.9) despite the fact that he has just sur-  
 rendered to him as his disciple (*śiṣya*), prove his stubbornness and  
 mental confusion: his *anaucitya* is ridiculous, and such ridiculousness  
 is hilarious, which might also explain the lord's hint of laughter.<sup>5</sup>

These introductory observations are far from exhausting the  
 range of possible interpretations of Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva*. Laughter  
 as well as smile are such multifaceted and elusive phenomena that  
 it is practically impossible to account for them in any compre-  
 hensive way. The reasons and logics that predispose humans—and  
 gods—to laugh/smile depend upon a complex interweaving of  
 factors, in which similarities and contrasts play a major role.

It must be pointed out that laughter is also something that  
 can be viewed as highly dangerous. We are here reminded of  
 Umberto Eco's (1932–2016) famous novel *The Name of the Rose*, first  
 published in Italian in 1980.<sup>6</sup> Its plot is centered upon laughter

1 and its radical condemnation by Christian religious authorities.<sup>7</sup>  
 2 The motive behind the murders that take place in a Benedictine  
 3 monastery of northern Italy in the year 1327 is linked to the lost  
 4 second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which Aristotle is believed  
 5 to have addressed the issue of comedy and to have revealed what  
 6 is the essence of the comic.<sup>8</sup> In the novel, the venerable Jorge de  
 7 Burgos, one of the oldest and most learned monks in the monastery,  
 8 happens to discover this book in the convent's library and imme-  
 9 diately hides it away: the reason behind his homicides is precisely  
 10 to keep it secret and prevent anyone from reading it. This he does  
 11 because he is aware that laughter is an antidote to fear. And since  
 12 religion is understood to be built on fear, he perceives laughter  
 13 as representing a most dangerous, diabolic force that needs to be  
 14 shunned at all costs.<sup>9</sup>

15 Eco thinks that laughter is related to the fact that humans  
 16 are the only animals that know that they are destined to die and  
 17 thus he conceives it as a reaction to such awareness that helps us  
 18 face the tragedies of life. He argues that laughter has the power  
 19 of projecting a shadow of suspicion on all dogmatic truths and  
 20 preconceived ideas, and this is the reason why it is opposed not  
 21 only by theologians but also by philosophers.<sup>10</sup> Already in 1967,  
 22 as a sort of forerunner to *The Name of the Rose*, he wrote an arti-  
 23 cle for the Italian weekly *L'Espresso* titled *Il nemico dei filosofi* or  
 24 *The Enemy of Philosophers*, in which he identified laughter as the  
 25 deceitful enemy of the thinkers of all ages precisely because of its  
 26 skeptical potential and multiplicity of meaning.<sup>11</sup>

27 In our context, the elusive nature of laughter is amplified by  
 28 Kṛṣṇa's own unfathomable personality within the *Mahābhārata*. As  
 29 Bimal Krishna Matilal observes:

30  
 31 Kṛṣṇa is an enigma in the *Mahābhārata*. He represents  
 32 the most confusing kind of moral enigma not only  
 33 in the epic, but also in the whole of the Hindu ideal  
 34 of *dharma*. In the icons, he is represented as the Dark  
 35 Lord, an attractive appearance with a face bearing an  
 36 enigmatic, mysterious and mischievous smile, the smile,  
 37 very much unlike the famous smile found in the icons  
 38 of the Buddha. The Buddha's smile in striking contrast  
 39 with that of Kṛṣṇa, is straightforward, it radiates with  
 40

compassion, calmness and peace, it strikes confidence in the minds of the viewers. The ethical doctrine of Kṛṣṇa by contrast is different, sometimes it appears to be just the opposite. Kṛṣṇa is a riddle, a paradox.<sup>12</sup>

Though we disagree with Matilal's idea that the Buddha's smile<sup>13</sup> is in "striking contrast" with Kṛṣṇa's smile, given that it is precisely our contention that the latter's *prahasann iva*—at least as far as the *Bhagavadgītā* is concerned—"radiates with compassion, calmness and peace," yet it is certainly true that Kṛṣṇa's character in the epic is ambiguous, paradoxical, and inherently polysemic.<sup>14</sup> If in our study we offer reasons for upholding the idea that the lord's hint of laughter in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10 is to be understood as the expression of his love and grace toward Arjuna, we also take pains to review the wide range of hermeneutical options that the commentators of the poem have proposed along the centuries.

In the Indian tradition in which grammar (*vyākaraṇa*) is the science of sciences, the two actions of laughing and smiling are expressed by two different verbal roots, that is,  $\sqrt{smi}$  for smiling and  $\sqrt{has}$  for laughing. This is important given that although there is an undeniable connection between smiling and laughing, still the fact that Sanskrit accurately distinguishes one from the other is meant to emphasize their difference.<sup>15</sup> Thus with reference to our stock phrase, the noun to which the present active participle *prahasann* refers to is *prahāsa* that the Monier-Williams dictionary translates as "loud laughter," "derision" / "irony,"<sup>16</sup> and the Apte dictionary analogously translates as "violent or loud laughter," "ridicule" / "derision," "irony" / "satire."<sup>17</sup> Herein, the prefix *pra* is understood to mean "loud" / "violent" and points at an intense degree of laughter.

On the other hand, the impact of *pra* +  $\sqrt{has}$  is mitigated by the indeclinable particle *iva*, which implies a softening of its meaning, that is, that the laughter is only hinted at or somehow suppressed. It is exactly by conflating a strong part and a weak part that our formulaic expression opens itself to a broad range of hermeneutic possibilities and translations. The expression *prahasann iva*—as well as *hasann iva*—embraces both laughter and smile, and this is confirmed by what legions of commentators have written about it. Our own translation of *prahasann iva* as hint of laughter

1 aims at reconciling the two juxtaposed elements of the expression,  
2 in which “laughter” renders *prahāsa* and “hint” renders *iva*, the  
3 particle having the function of mitigating the former's loudness.

4 The context in which our *prahasann iva* occurs—immediately  
5 after Arjuna has surrendered at Kṛṣṇa's feet as his disciple, placing  
6 his burden upon him and recognizing him as his sole refuge—leads  
7 us to the conclusion that what the lord's hint of laughter primary-  
8 ly conveys is his boundless grace. Our contention is that Kṛṣṇa's  
9 *prahasann iva* is meant to ease the tension, his smiling countenance  
10 being an assurance that there is nothing to fear and that everything  
11 will be fine, he being in total control of the situation. What Arjuna  
12 sees as an unsurmountable tragedy that will result in a disaster  
13 for the armies of both Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas is instantaneously  
14 resolved by the lord's hint of laughter. Even if we interpret Kṛṣṇa's  
15 *prahasann iva* as implying a degree of mockery due to the fact that  
16 Arjuna's behavior is contrary to his inherent duty (*svadharmā*), such  
17 derision is to be viewed as a means (*upāya*) aimed at triggering the  
18 hero's discrimination and has an essentially pedagogical function,  
19 being motivated by the lord's love toward him.

20 The *Kāvya prakāśa* of Mammaṭa (eleventh century CE) states  
21 that there are three different styles of beneficial teaching (*hitaśāsana*)  
22 prescribed in the authoritative Sanskrit treatises (*śāstras*): (a) that  
23 of the *Vedas*, that teach in a rather severe way through injunctions  
24 like a king (*rājasammita*); (b) that of *Itihāsas and Purāṇas*, that teach  
25 in a compassionate way like a friend (*mitrasammita*), and (c) that  
26 of *Kāvya* or poetry that teaches in a passionate way like a lover  
27 (*kāntāsammita*).<sup>18</sup> Given the epic context and most importantly the  
28 bond of friendship (*sakhā*) that exists between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, we  
29 think that the former's teaching should be interpreted as *mitrasam-*  
30 *mita*, thus favoring the interpretation of a compassionate hint of  
31 laughter. Nonetheless, Kṛṣṇa's teaching could also be interpreted  
32 as *rājasammita*, which would imply a rather harsh hint of laughter.  
33 To be sure, the three styles of beneficial teaching may be expressed  
34 either through sweetness or sourness. If we construe the lord's  
35 *prahasann iva* as mockery it would be like a bitter medicine that  
36 Kṛṣṇa utilizes in order to cure Arjuna's despondency and trigger  
37 his metanoia, as proposed by commentators such as Jñāneśvar  
38 (thirteenth century) and Keśava Kaśmīrī Bhaṭṭācārya (c. 1510).

39 Along these lines, several Indian proverbs celebrate the insults  
40 of holy men and renouncers as tokens of their grace. Thus a popular

Hindī saying goes: *sādhu kī gālī kṛpā kī nadī*, that is, “The insult of a *sādhu* is a river of mercy.” The antinomian behavior of extreme ascetics such as *paramahaṃsas* and *avadhūtas* is exemplary in this regard. In ancient times, one is reminded of the lost sect of the *śaiva* Pāśupatas<sup>19</sup>—who indulged in transgressive laughter—and in recent times of a beloved saint such as the Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918) who would often “welcome” the people who came to visit him with a torrent of abuses that were thought to represent a shower of mercy, the idea being that his insults were not directed at the person but at the evil forces that he saw were harming his devotee and that he vanquished through his powerful invectives.<sup>20</sup>

Coming back to our *prahasann iva* and reaffirming our conviction that it should be understood as a sign of Kṛṣṇa’s grace toward Arjuna, it must be realized that there is no mutual exclusion between the sweetness of a hint of laughter of pure delight and the sourness of a hint of laughter of pure scorn. Rather, it seems reasonable to envisage a *samuccaya* of the two, that is, a combination of mockery and mirth in the sense of hypothesizing a passage, an almost imperceptible transition from one to the other.

Kṛṣṇa’s hint of laughter also points at the god’s *līlā*, his disarming ease and playful attitude vis-à-vis the anguish and preoccupations of mortals. In Vedānta, the notion of *līlā* is dealt with in section 2.1.32–33 of the *Brahmasūtra* and its commentarial tradition. What is at stake is the reason (*prayojana*) that prompts the Absolute *Brahman* to manifest the universe, given that *Brahman* is in itself perfect, full (*pūrṇa*), and free of desires (*akāma*). In fact, it is said that there is no reason at all given that only one that has something to accomplish, to avoid or to acquire, involves himself/herself into action (*pravṛtti*).<sup>21</sup> Moreover, one would incur in various logical fallacies if he/she were to affirm that *Brahman*, which is wholly satisfied (*paritṛpta*), is drawn to manifest the universe out of some unmotivated urge (*niṣprayojana*): it would be like the action of a mad person! If this was so, the omniscience of *Brahman*<sup>22</sup> would be contradicted (*bādhita*) and the authoritativeness of the “revealed” texts, that is, the *śruti* said to originate from *Brahman*, would be undermined. In order to refute these misconceptions, *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.33 states: “But [*Brahman*] appears as the world only for its own amusement” (*lokavat tu līlākaivalyam*).

In his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, Śāṅkara (eighth century) argues that in the case of *Brahman* or Īśvara (i.e., god), one cannot postulate

1 any actual reason for the manifestation (*sṛṣṭi*) of the universe and  
 2 thus it must be understood as an act of pure *līlā*, a gratuitous play  
 3 or *divertissement* that is inherent to god's nature.<sup>23</sup> He gives the  
 4 example of a high-ranking person who, though having satisfied all  
 5 his desires, spends his time in gambling houses and other places  
 6 of leisure. He also suggests the analogy of breathing, an activity  
 7 that takes place only due to one's intrinsic nature and that has no  
 8 extrinsic motivation. Śāṅkara emphasizes the total ease with which  
 9 Īśvara carries out the seemingly arduous task of manifesting the  
 10 universe.<sup>24</sup>

11 Through his *prahasann iva* Kṛṣṇa manifests his wondrous *līlā*.  
 12 The *kurukṣetra* battlefield of the *Bhagavadgītā* is the *dharmakṣetra*, the  
 13 "field of *dharma*" in which the forces of good (i.e., Arjuna and the  
 14 other Pāṇḍavas) face the forces of evil (i.e., Duryodhana and all  
 15 the Kauravas). It also symbolizes the stage of the world in which  
 16 each and every person must fight his/her own battle in order  
 17 to attain the supreme aim of *mokṣa*, freedom from rebirth. In the  
 18 poem, the lord's *līlā* resonates with the *naiṣkarmya* doctrine that he  
 19 teaches to Arjuna, that is, the *upadeśa* of disinterested action, with  
 20 no attachment to its results (*phala*). Humans are called to imitate  
 21 the divine *līlā* by abandoning all karmic ties and living a selfless  
 22 life. In other words, they are invited to participate in god's play,  
 23 to be part of his sublime cosmic drama by cultivating maximum  
 24 attention and passion for action, performing it at the best of  
 25 their capacities, but with total equanimity (*samatva*), without any  
 26 attachment whatsoever (*BhG* 2.47–48). The idea is that one must  
 27 remain unaffected and not identify himself/herself with the role  
 28 he/she is playing. Arjuna and all men must absorb themselves  
 29 in their *svadharna* without seeking any personal advantage, only  
 30 having in mind the world's welfare (*lokasaṃgraha*; *BhG* 3.20, 3.25).  
 31 The grace that manifests itself through Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* is  
 32 devoid of any necessity, it being free and unconditional (*ahetukī*)  
 33 and beyond human expectations: like his love, it knows no reason  
 34 and no season. Ultimately, all pain (*duḥkha*) and dichotomies are  
 35 dissolved in the blissful tranquillity of the lord's hint of laughter.

36 There are some subtle correspondences that characterize the  
 37 master-disciple relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna throughout  
 38 the poem. It is our contention that Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* in *BhG*  
 39 2.10 resonates with Arjuna's *vismaya* or amazement in *BhG* 11.14,  
 40



after having witnessed his lord's glorious theophany, and a cor- 1  
 respondence can also be detected between the hero's surrender to 2  
 his *guru*-god as a *prapanna* in *BhG* 2.7 and the latter's grace/favor, 3  
 that is, his *prasāda* toward him and all creatures, as he states near 4  
 the end of the poem in *BhG* 18.56 and 18.58: 5

Even tho all actions ever 6  
 He performs, relying on Me, 7  
 By My grace (*matprasādād*) he reaches 8  
 The eternal, undying station. 9  
 . . . . 10  
 If thy mind is on Me, all difficulties 11  
 Shalt thou cross over by My grace (*matprasādāt*); 12  
 But if thru egotism thou 13  
 Wilt not heed, thou shalt perish.<sup>25</sup> 14  
 15  
 16

Among the range of meanings of the term *prasāda* — derived from 17  
*pra* + verbal root *√sad*, “to be clear/bright/tranquil,” “to be sat- 18  
 isfied/pleased/glad” —we also find smile. Kṛṣṇa as the *prasanna*, 19  
 the adjective derived from *pra* + *√sad*, indicates he who is gracious 20  
 and serene by nature. The hint of laughter with which he looks at 21  
 his dear *śiṣya* implies a “bright countenance” (*prasannamukha*) that 22  
 envelops Arjuna in his blissful radiance. 23

It should be noted that even Śaṅkara is defined as *prasanna* 24  
 by his pupils: just before their master's death they fix their eyes 25  
 on his smiling face and his rarious countenance is said to be so 26  
 powerful as to dispel all their doubts.<sup>26</sup> Padmapāda (c. eighth cen- 27  
 tury CE) at the beginning of his *Pañcapādikā* and Vācaspati Miśra 28  
 (tenth century CE) in his *Bhāmātī* address him as the one who is 29  
 both *prasanna* and *gambhīra*, “serene and profound.”<sup>27</sup> Both *prasāda* 30  
 and *prasanna* imply an opening, a blossoming that is characterized 31  
 by brightness and peace (*śānti*). It is the sign of an inner beatific 32  
 condition that distinguishes *gurus* and *avatāras*, being the external 33  
 manifestation of their blissful nature (*ānandasvarūpa*). 34

In comparative perspective, Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter can be 35  
 compared to the “priestly blessing” (*birkat kohanim*) that is found 36  
 in the book of *Numbers* (6:24–26), though to be sure the inbuilt 37  
 sense of ambiguity that we have in *prahasann iva* is absent.<sup>28</sup> Herein, 38  
 Yahweh addresses Moses and tells him to speak to Aaron and his 39  
 40



1 sons and let them know that from now onward the children of  
2 Israel will be blessed through these words:

3

4       The Lord bless you and keep you;  
5       The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious  
6       to you;  
7       The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give  
8       you peace.<sup>29</sup>

9

10 To this day, this prayer also known as the “lifting of the hands”  
11 (*nesiat kapayim*) continues to be devoutly recited by Jews as well as  
12 Christians, these words of benediction echoing in synagogues and  
13 churches throughout the world especially at the end of service.<sup>30</sup>  
14 Significantly, the expression “the Lord make his face shine upon  
15 you,” refers to Yahweh’s luminous smile, which is synonymous  
16 of his grace.

17       And yet we know that in the Jewish tradition seeing Yah-  
18 weh’s face—which symbolizes the whole person as well as the  
19 person’s interiority—is prohibited and, indeed, it is said to be  
20 impossible for man, the idea being that man cannot survive to such  
21 an experience. Thus even though Moses conversed with Yahweh  
22 on mount Sinai and as a consequence the skin of his face shone,  
23 such radiance being derived from the divine encounter that he  
24 experienced (*Exodus* 34:29–30.35),<sup>31</sup> nonetheless when he wished  
25 to contemplate Yahweh’s face the lord explicitly told him that he  
26 could not see it for no man can see god’s face and live: protected  
27 by the lord’s sheltering hand, Moses is only allowed to see Yah-  
28 weh’s back,<sup>32</sup> and it is this protective encounter that illuminates  
29 him (*Exodus* 33:20–23).<sup>33</sup>

30       Despite all differences, a parallelism with the situational  
31 context of *prahasann iva* may be detected in the background of  
32 this “shining face,” that is, in the ambivalence and paradox that  
33 characterizes the moment at Sinai when Moses found himself *panim*  
34 *al-panim*, “face to face” with the lord, and yet is proscribed from  
35 seeing his face. Even in the *Bhagavadgītā* when the hint of laughter  
36 blossoms on Kṛṣṇa’s face, Arjuna cannot behold it directly given  
37 that the poem tells us that he had just taken refuge in him (*tvām*  
38 *prapannam*). This entails that he lay prostrate at his feet, with his  
39 eyes either closed or fixed on his lord’s feet, having surrendered  
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his mind and heart to his divine *guru* (*BhG* 2.7). Though Arjuna and Moses do not fix their eyes on their lords' face, Kṛṣṇa's and Yahweh's brightness and smiling countenance powerfully radiate toward them, enveloping them in the light of divine love. In both cases, the gods' dazzling brilliance and benevolent gaze are inseparable from one another and are a revelation of their transcendent splendor and beauty.<sup>34</sup>

Thus in *Bhagavadgītā* 7.8 Kṛṣṇa proclaims that he is the radiance (*prabhā*) in the moon and the sun and Arjuna, after witnessing his lord's theophany in chapter 11 and extolling his extraordinary brightness (*bhā*) "like that of a thousand suns in the sky" (*divi sūryasahasrasya*; *BhG* 11.12), praises the "matchless glory" (*apratimaprabhāva*) of his "most venerable *guru*" (*tvam asya pūjyaś ca gurur garīyān*; *BhG* 11.43). All in all, Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10 must be appreciated as the first disclosure of the god's effulgence, loving grace, and beauty which instantly illumines and sanctifies Arjuna making him a fit receptacle for undertaking the listening (*śravaṇa*), pondering (*manana*) and meditative realization (*nididhyāsana*) of his liberating teaching.<sup>35</sup>





## Chapter 1

# On Kṛṣṇa's Hint of Laughter in the *Bhagavadgītā*

When shall I see your lotus face  
With its always smiling dawn-red lips,  
Joyously swelling the charming flute song  
Which is sweetly accompanied by half  
closed eyes that widen and dance?

—*Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta* 1.44<sup>1</sup>

To every single Arjuna, with heavy heart and empty hand,  
Afraid to fight the battle of life on to victory,  
You feel He has come for you, to you.  
You see Him, silently looking around!  
The searchlight eye full circle swings!  
How lucky, you are there!  
He smiles; He wins you by that smile!  
You scarce can take your eyes from off that face,  
So alluring, so divine!

—Excerpt from a poem of Narayan Kasturi, 1958

The expression *prahasann iva* is frequently used in the *Mahābhārata* (*MBh*) given that it occurs eighty-four times in its eighteen books, especially in the *Droṇaparvan*, the seventh book (twenty-eight times). In the sixth book of the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, besides the *Bhagavadgītā* (*BhG*) occurrence (*MBh* 6.24.10 = *BhG* 2.10),<sup>2</sup> it figures another eight times.<sup>3</sup> The cognate expression *hasann iva* is also common—thir-

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1 ty-nine occurrences—again mostly in the *Droṇaparvan* (twelve times)  
 2 while in the *Bhīṣmaparvan* it occurs four times.<sup>4</sup> All in all, there  
 3 are a total of 123 occurrences of *prahasann iva* + *hasann iva* in the  
 4 *MBh* (forty occurrences in the *Droṇaparvan*, followed by thirteen  
 5 in the *Bhīṣmaparvan* and *Karṇaparvan*, nine in the *Śalyaparvan*, etc.).  
 6 In Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* (*Rām*), *prahasann iva* occurs thirteen times  
 7 whereas the cognate *hasann iva* occurs only once.<sup>5</sup>

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### 10 English Translations of the Expression 11 *prahasann iva* in the *Bhagavadgītā*

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13 The English renderings<sup>6</sup> of *prahasann iva* in *BhG* 2.10 have been  
 14 varied, ranging from a preference for smile or a semblance of  
 15 a smile (especially in the early period and up to the 1970s) to a  
 16 preference for laughter or a hint of laughter (starting with J. A. B.  
 17 van Buitenen's seminal translation in the early 1980s). Thus Charles  
 18 Wilkins (1785) in his pioneering rendering translates "smiling,"<sup>7</sup>  
 19 Sir Edwin Arnold (1900) "with tender smile,"<sup>8</sup> Franklin Edgerton  
 20 (1944) "with a semblance of a smile,"<sup>9</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan  
 21 (1948) "smiling as it were,"<sup>10</sup> Robert Charles Zaehner (1966) "faintly  
 22 smiling,"<sup>11</sup> and Eliot Deutsch (1968) "smiling as it were."<sup>12</sup> Whereas  
 23 Johannes Adrianus Bernardus van Buitenen (1981) translates "with  
 24 a hint of laughter,"<sup>13</sup> Winthrop Sargeant (1984) "beginning to laugh,  
 25 so to speak,"<sup>14</sup> Barbara Stoler Miller (1986) "mocking him gently,"<sup>15</sup>  
 26 Angelika Malinar (2007) "almost bursting out in laughter,"<sup>16</sup> Alex  
 27 Cherniak (2008) "almost laughing,"<sup>17</sup> and Georg Feuerstein and  
 28 Brenda Feuerstein (2011) "laughingly, as it were."<sup>18</sup>

29 In the *MBh* the present active participle *prahasana*<sup>19</sup> (masculine  
 30 nominative singular of *prahasant*), fulfils a quasi-adverbial function.<sup>20</sup>  
 31 As already noted, it is derived from verbal root  $\sqrt{has}$ —meaning "to  
 32 laugh" as well as "to deride" / "to mock"—with the addition of pre-  
 33 fix (*upasarga*) *pra* whose primary meaning is "forward," "onward,"  
 34 "forth," "fore," often used pleonastically.<sup>21</sup> The Monier-Williams  
 35 dictionary translates *pra* +  $\sqrt{has}$  as "to burst into laughter," "to  
 36 laugh with," "to laugh at, mock, deride, ridicule,"<sup>22</sup> and Apte's  
 37 dictionary translates it as "to laugh, smile," "to deride, ridicule,  
 38 mock," and "to brighten up, look splendid, cheer up."<sup>23</sup>

39 In dramaturgy, *prahasana* identifies one of ten types of play  
 40 (*nāṭya*) in which the comic sentiment predominates and in which

the object of laughter is furnished by the improper conduct of someone who is criticized and put to shame.<sup>24</sup> Along these lines, the Monier-Williams dictionary translates the noun *prahāsa* as “loud laughter,” *pra* being understood to mean “loud.”<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that the prefix *pra*—corresponding to Greek πρῶ—has a variety of possible nuances, not always predictable, among which notably are the meanings of “eminence”/“excellence” or “superiority,” as for instance in the words *pradyumna* (“the preeminently mighty one”), *pravīra* (“hero”), *pramā* (“true knowledge”) and *pramāṇa* (“a means to acquire true knowledge”).<sup>26</sup> As a prefix to adjectives, *pra* means “excessively,” “very,” “much,” whereas in nouns of relationship it means “great.”<sup>27</sup>

As it happens in almost half of the *pādas* in the *MBh*, the participle *prahasann* is followed by the indeclinable particle *iva*—“like,” “as it were”/“as if,” “in a certain manner”/“a little,” “nearly”/“almost”—which always follows the word to which it refers and which in such participial usages is not easy to render.<sup>28</sup> With reference to *iva* in Vedic prose, Joel Brereton noted long ago that “. . . with verbs and verbal expressions, *iva* affirms that the action is true but that its realization or its extent is uncertain.”<sup>29</sup>

In view of the above, we think that the most appropriate renderings of *prahasann iva* are the ones which translate *prahasann* as “laughing” rather than “smiling,” though to be sure the action of laughing is mitigated by the presence of the *iva* particle and *prahasann iva* might be understood as meaning “to smile before laughing.”<sup>30</sup> Our favored translation of this formulaic diction is van Buitenen’s “with a hint of laughter,” followed by Malinar’s “almost bursting out in laughter.” We agree with Walter Harding Maurer when he writes: “[. . .] *prahasann iva* “almost bursting into laughter,” the idea being *not* that Kṛṣṇa is ridiculing or in any way mocking Arjuna’s dilemma, but rather mitigating it, with a lighthearted shrug, so to speak, so as to allay Arjuna’s distress. The particle *iva* is frequently used to tone down an expression or soften its effect.”<sup>31</sup>

The full verse of *BhG* 2.10 may be rendered as follows:

Samjaya<sup>32</sup> said: (*saṃjaya uvāca*)  
 To him [= Arjuna] spoke Hṛṣīkeśa<sup>33</sup> (*tam uvāca hṛṣīkeśaḥ*)  
 With a hint of laughter, son of Bharata,<sup>34</sup> (*prahasann iva bhārata*)

1 In between the two armies (*senayor ubhayor madhye*)  
 2 As he was despondent, this speech: (*viṣṭāntam idaṃ vacaḥ*)  
 3  
 4

### 5 The Expression *prahasann iva* in Context

6  
 7 *BhG* 2.10 is a crucial moment in the poem given that it is at this  
 8 juncture that lord (*bhagavat*) Kṛṣṇa starts uttering his salvific teach-  
 9 ing (*upadeśa*) to the hero Arjuna who, in his dejection, has finally  
 10 surrendered himself to him. Significantly Śāṅkara (c. 700 CE), the  
 11 most prominent representative of nondual (*advaita*) Vedānta, starts  
 12 his seminal commentary (*bhāṣya*) to the *BhG* from this point, con-  
 13 sidering the first chapter (*adhyāya*) and the first nine verses of the  
 14 second as preparatory, setting the scene to the *incipit* and unfolding  
 15 of Kṛṣṇa's *upadeśa*. In Śāṅkara's own words:  
 16

17 Now the portion from 1.2 to 2.9 should be interpreted  
 18 as showing whence arose those evils of grief (*śoka*),  
 19 delusion (*moha*), etc., which in sentient creatures cause  
 20 the misery of *saṃsāra*. . . . Grief and delusion are thus  
 21 the cause of *saṃsāra*. And seeing that their cessation  
 22 could not be brought about except by Self-knowledge  
 23 preceded by renunciation of all works, Lord Vāsudeva<sup>35</sup>  
 24 wished to teach that knowledge for the benefit of the  
 25 whole world by using Arjuna as the occasion and began  
 26 His teaching with 2.11.<sup>36</sup>  
 27

28 Form both a poetic and religious point of view, Kṛṣṇa's hint of  
 29 laughter at 2.10 is to be regarded as the pivotal *trait d'union*, being  
 30 what immediately precedes his revelatory speech. In order to fully  
 31 appreciate its import and function we need to contextualize it  
 32 within the *BhG* and the epic's framework.<sup>37</sup> As Alf Hiltebeitel has  
 33 noted, "One always has to watch these smiles."<sup>38</sup> In commenting  
 34 upon the *Mahābhārata* play of the English theater and film director  
 35 Peter Brook (1925–2022), first staged in July 1985 at the Thirty-Ninth  
 36 *Festival d'Avignon*, Hiltebeitel poignantly observed:  
 37

38 Also, Kṛṣṇa, you know, schemes with a smile. But this  
 39 was missing in the Brook version. Kṛṣṇa is supposed to  
 40

set the stage for some kind of catastrophe with the most subtle grin. That's one of the things that you can't miss if you know what the iconography looks like. That's a statement about seeing what Kṛṣṇa's up to in a *bhakti* kind of mode. But Peter Brook doesn't develop this subtlety, his player doesn't have this Kṛṣṇa smile. Rather, he looks like he's a figure who's going through one long weary scene of dire disaster, and the *Mahābhārata* is not really like that. I thought that this was a failure.<sup>39</sup>

It is noteworthy that besides the *BhG* episode there are various other places in the *MBh* where Kṛṣṇa either smiles or laughs, as when he responds with an enigmatic smile to Gāndhārī's curse in the *Strīparvan*. Throughout the epic Kṛṣṇa's smile/laughter is always to be watched carefully since, as David Dean Shulman points out, in particular his open laugh is "a sure sign that some horror is in the offing."<sup>40</sup>

While Saṃjaya relates to Dhṛtarāṣṭra that on the Kuru field the war between the two armies of Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas is about to begin, with the tumultuous din that made heaven and earth resound (1.19), the course of events is given an unexpected turn when Arjuna,<sup>41</sup> the hero of the Pāṇḍavas, having seen (*dr̥ṣṭvā*; 1.20) Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons arrayed in battle order with their bows risen, asks his charioteer (*sārathi*) Kṛṣṇa—whom he calls *acyuta*, "imperishable"—to halt the chariot<sup>42</sup> in between the two armies so that he may give a closer look at those who have marched up eager to fight (1.21–23). Arjuna feels the urge to intently look at the Kauravas and it is precisely this act of seeing that brings about a change in his attitude.

According to political treatises, "standing in between" (*madhyastha*) of two armies exemplifies a neutrality of weakness, and such a position effectively illustrates Arjuna's psychological predicament. By contrast, Kṛṣṇa is wholly detached and uninvolved (*udāsīna*; *BhG* 9.9), and his neutrality is a neutrality of strength.<sup>43</sup> Theologically, Kṛṣṇa represents the intellect (*buddhi*); he is the charioteer of the "chariot" (*ratha*) of the individual soul (*jīva*).<sup>44</sup> By the same token, Arjuna's equidistant placement between the two fighting parties symbolizes the sole point from where it will be possible for him to achieve a condition of equanimity (*samatva*).<sup>45</sup> Such middle position

1 is a space of freedom in which time is symbolically suspended, and  
 2 from this privileged vantage point Arjuna will be able to exercise  
 3 discriminative inquiry and detachment (*vairāgya*).<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it is the  
 4 place where his transformation will be effectively brought about  
 5 thanks to Kṛṣṇa's teachings.

6 Having complied with Arjuna's request of positioning the  
 7 chariot in between the two armies, Hṛṣīkeśa asks him to behold the  
 8 assembled Kurus (1.25)—Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and all the kings—and  
 9 the following verses focus upon what the hero sees and its con-  
 10 sequences. As in other places in the *MBh*, here the act of seeing  
 11 is most powerful and is equated with knowing.<sup>47</sup> Arjuna, on the  
 12 other side, does not see enemies but, in his words, *bandhus* (i.e.,  
 13 relatives): fathers, grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons,  
 14 grandsons, companions, fathers-in-law, and friends (1.26–27). In  
 15 particular, Arjuna is anguished at the idea of having to fight against  
 16 his revered teachers Bhīṣma and Droṇa.<sup>48</sup>

17 As a consequence, Saṃjaya tells us that Arjuna is immedi-  
 18 ately filled with utmost pity (1.28; *kṛpayā parayāviṣṭo*).<sup>49</sup> Seeing his  
 19 kinsfolk (*dr̥ṣṭvaimān svajanān*) arranged in battle-order against him,  
 20 eager to fight, he is emotionally and physically overwhelmed and  
 21 breaks down: his limbs sink down, his mouth dries up, he trem-  
 22 bles and has goosebumps, his *gāṇḍīva* bow<sup>50</sup> falls from his hand,  
 23 he feels his skin burning, he gets dizzy, and his mind wanders  
 24 (1.29–30). Moreover, Arjuna sees inauspicious signs (*nimittāni ca*  
 25 *paśyāmi viparītāni*)<sup>51</sup> that are both a warning and an opportunity  
 26 to prevent what he perceives as an impending catastrophe, since  
 27 he sees nothing good in killing his kith and kin (1.31).<sup>52</sup>

28 Refusing to fulfill his own duty (*svadharma*) as a warrior, that  
 29 is, his *kṣatriyadharmā*, Arjuna declares that he desires neither victory  
 30 (*vijaya*) nor the kingdom (*rājya*).<sup>53</sup> In his speech (1.28–46) he puts  
 31 forward reasons for peace that are familiar to the reader of the  
 32 *MBh*,<sup>54</sup> having been voiced in the preceding *Udyogaparvan*, which  
 33 is dominated by the conflict between *kuladharmā* and *kṣatriyadharmā*  
 34 (i.e., the duty pertaining to the family/clan and the one pertaining  
 35 to the warrior class). Arjuna's argument is as follows (1.32cd–33):

36  
 37 Of what use to us were kingdom, Govinda,<sup>55</sup>  
 38 Of what use enjoyments or life?  
 39 For whose sake we desire  
 40



Kingdom, enjoyments, and happiness, 1  
 They are drawn up here in battle, 2  
 Giving up life and wealth.<sup>56</sup> 3

Contrary to his cousin Duryodhana,<sup>57</sup> the chief of the Kauravas, 5  
 Arjuna rejects *kṣatriyadharmā* and regards his clan's prosperity as 6  
 the paramount value. For him, the purpose of war can only be 7  
 the welfare of the family. Wishing to be loyal to it, the very idea 8  
 of fighting against his *bandhus* is something he instinctively repu- 9  
 diates (1.35): 10

Them I do not wish to slay, 11  
 Even though they slay (me), O slayer of Madhu,<sup>58</sup> 12  
 Even for three-world-rulership's 13  
 Sake; how much less for the sake of the earth!<sup>59</sup> 14  
 15

Arjuna ponders over the evil (*pāpa*)<sup>60</sup> of killing one's people, and 17  
 states that the destruction of the family is a crime (*doṣa*) that must 18  
 be prevented, even if the others do not see it, their intelligence being 19  
 overpowered by greed (*lobha*; 1.36–39). His words may be regarded 20  
 as an anticipation of the mourning for the dead and serve as a last, 21  
 desperate attempt to avoid the conflict. In his passionate defense 22  
 of *kuladharmā* over *kṣatriyadharmā*, Arjuna proceeds to describe the 23  
 vicious circle that the destruction of family members entails, con- 24  
 sidering the inevitable disruption of the larger network of social 25  
 relations defined by the endogamous rules of marriage, which 26  
 in turn determines lawlessness (*adharmā*) and the collapse of the 27  
 entire society through pernicious caste-admixture (*varṇasaṃkara*).<sup>61</sup> 28  
 With the destruction of caste (*jātidharmā*), the inexorable destiny 29  
 of each and all is said to be none other than hell (*naraka*, 1.40–44): 30

Upon the destruction of the family, perish 31  
 The immemorial holy laws of the family; 32  
 When the laws have perished, the whole family 33  
 Lawlessness overwhelms also. 34  
 Because of the prevalence of lawlessness, Kṛṣṇa, 35  
 The women of the family are corrupted; 36  
 When the women are corrupted, O Vṛṣṇi-clansman,<sup>62</sup> 37  
 Mixture of caste ensues. 38  
 39  
 40

1 Mixture (of caste) leads to naught but hell  
 2 For the destroyers of the family and for the family;  
 3 For their ancestors fall (to hell),  
 4 Because the rites of (giving) food and water are interrupted.  
 5 By these sins of family-destroyers,  
 6 (Sins) which produce caste-mixture,  
 7 The caste laws are destroyed,  
 8 And the eternal family laws.  
 9 When the family laws are destroyed,  
 10 Janārdana,<sup>63</sup> then for men  
 11 Dwelling in hell certainly  
 12 Ensues: so we have heard (from the Holy Word).<sup>64</sup>

13  
 14 Arjuna wants to have nothing to do with the impending war—which  
 15 he regards as a major sin (*mahat pāpam*) motivated by the greed  
 16 for the joys of kingship (*rājyasukhalobha*)—and is rather willing  
 17 to be slain in battle by Dhṛtarāṣṭra's men, without opposing any  
 18 resistance (*apratikāra*) and unarmed (*aśastra*). Indeed, he views sui-  
 19 cidal surrender as more beneficial (*kṣematara*) than being involved  
 20 in the family slaughter (1.45–46). At the end of chapter 1, Saṃjaya  
 21 depicts Arjuna as sinking down in the box of his chariot, letting  
 22 his bow and arrows fall, “his heart smitten with grief” (1.47;  
 23 *śokasaṃvignamānasa*).

24 At the beginning of chapter 2, Saṃjaya repeats what he had  
 25 already said at 1.28, that is, that Arjuna is overwhelmed by pity  
 26 (2.1; *kṛpayā 'viṣṭam*), his eyes being blurred with tears.<sup>65</sup> At this  
 27 point, Kṛṣṇa offers a first, brief reply (2.2–3) in which he upholds  
 28 *kṣatriyadharmā* and underlines how Arjuna's faintheartedness is  
 29 offensive to the noble, excludes him from the heavenly world that  
 30 awaits all heroes, and causes disgrace.<sup>66</sup> Kṛṣṇa tries to convince  
 31 him to stop being a eunuch (*klība*), which does not befit him: he  
 32 must shake off his miserable weakness of heart and get up/arise  
 33 (*uttiṣṭha*). His reproach to Arjuna of being a eunuch, a symbol of  
 34 impotence and cowardice,<sup>67</sup> is common in the epic, being addressed  
 35 to weak heroes who are unable or reluctant to fulfill their *kṣatriya*  
 36 duties.<sup>68</sup> It must be remembered that Arjuna had spent the thirteenth  
 37 and last year of his exile disguised as a eunuch at the court of  
 38 Virāṭa, the king of the Matsyas,<sup>69</sup> and thus Kṛṣṇa's reproach may  
 39 be interpreted as insinuating that he had learned to play his role  
 40



so well that he was still behaving as a eunuch, subtly accusing 1  
 him to have turned into one.<sup>70</sup> Kṛṣṇa wants to hurt Arjuna's pride 2  
 so as to trigger a manly reaction in him, given that in a warrior 3  
 society the first commandment in order to maintain social status 4  
 is to avoid shame by behaving bravely. 5

In 2.4–8, Arjuna repeats his main argument by saying that 6  
 he cannot fight against the great heroes Bhīṣma and Droṇa whom 7  
 he reveres as teachers (*gurus*) worthy of worship (*pūjārhāu*). The 8  
 importance of his words is signaled by the fact that in verses 9  
 5–8 the meter changes from *śloka* to *triṣṭubh*.<sup>71</sup> Arjuna argues that 10  
 rather than eating food besmeared with blood (i.e., gaining victory 11  
 by slaying his masters and relatives), he prefers to eat alms food 12  
 in this world. Again he puts forward an argument for peace, his 13  
 reference to living from alms (*bhāikṣya*) pointing to the fact that 14  
 he prefers ascetic renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*) to killing his own dear 15  
 ones. By embracing a life of renunciation, he thinks he may be 16  
 able to escape the conflict between contradictory *dharmas*. He is 17  
 thus ready to relinquish all territorial claims and social status, and 18  
 to live in the realm of another king.<sup>72</sup> He reiterates that neither a 19  
 kingdom nor the earth is worth fighting for at the cost of killing 20  
 his *bandhus*, and once again refuses to follow *kṣatriyadharmā*. 21

Finally, recognizing that his own being (*svabhāva*) is afflicted 22  
 with the weakness of pity (*kārapanyadoṣa*) and that his mind is 23  
 confused as to what is right (*dharma*), Arjuna turns to Kṛṣṇa as his 24  
 ultimate resort, desperately seeking his help.<sup>73</sup> Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa 25  
 to tell him decidedly (*niścitam*) what is better (*śreyas*),<sup>74</sup> what he 26  
 ought to do at this critical juncture. Decisive is the close of verse 27  
 2.7, in which he falls at Kṛṣṇa's feet seeking refuge in him as his 28  
*guru*.<sup>75</sup> He declares that he is his disciple, and asks him to offer his 29  
 invaluable teaching to him: "I am your pupil, teach me: I surrender 30  
 to you" (*śiṣyas te 'haṁ śādhi māṁ tvāṁ prapannam*). 31

Arjuna does not see what else could possibly dispel his grief 32  
 (*śoka*), which dries up his senses, even if he was to attain unrivaled, 33  
 prosperous kingship and sovereignty over the gods. For him, 34  
*kuladharmā* stands above and beyond *kṣatriyadharmā* given that he 35  
 sees his duty as a warrior as harboring demerit, not merit. His 36  
 conflict over *dharma* is reinforced by the anticipation of the sorrow 37  
 that the death of his *bandhus* will cause to him, and he definitely 38  
 wants to avoid it. The hero's tragedy, which makes him utterly 39  
 40



1 despondent and incapable of action, is that he is both intellectually  
2 and emotionally dumbfounded by the whole situation.

3 At 2.9, Saṃjaya reports Arjuna's last words to Govinda: "I  
4 will not fight" (*na yotsya iti*), after which he became silent (*tūṣṇīm*  
5 *babhūva*). The fact that Arjuna, who is the son of the war-god Indra  
6 and the main warrior-hero among the Pāṇḍavas, categorically states  
7 that he will not fight, is in itself emblematic of an ironic—and  
8 tragic—reversal of roles.<sup>76</sup>

9 From 2.11, Kṛṣṇa patiently begins to impart his *upadeśa* to  
10 Arjuna by pointing out that he is grieving for those he shouldn't  
11 grieve for (*aśocyaṅ anvaśocas tvam*), since the wise (*paṇḍitāḥ*) grieve  
12 for neither the dead nor the living. And yet, Kṛṣṇa seems to  
13 acknowledge that Arjuna has spoken "words of wisdom" (*pra-*  
14 *jñāvādān*). One needs to understand this statement—which has  
15 always been an interpretative crux—as being tinged with sarcasm.  
16 Kṛṣṇa's subtle irony at this juncture is in perfect keeping with his  
17 hint of laughter at 2.10. The idea is that with his words Arjuna  
18 only mimics a true sage since he is just the parody of one who is  
19 endowed with real wisdom (*prajñā*). Therefore, we think that the  
20 expression *prajñāvādān ca bhāṣase* of 2.11 should be understood to  
21 mean "you pretend to speak words of wisdom."<sup>77</sup>

22 In his first teaching to his *śiṣya*, Kṛṣṇa develops four major  
23 themes. First of all, he addresses the hero's sorrow and emotional  
24 crisis by imparting a speech of consolation (2.11–30) that teaches  
25 the immortality of the "owner of the body" (*dehin, śarīrin*), that  
26 is, the Self, vis-à-vis the mortality of the body.<sup>78</sup> At 2.20, he says  
27 that only the body can be killed, not the embodied Self which is  
28 beyond birth and death.<sup>79</sup> Therefore Arjuna has nothing to worry  
29 about—as repeatedly underlined by the formula *na śocitum arhasi*  
30 (see 2.25–27, 30)—and must learn to cultivate an equal attitude  
31 with respect to happiness and suffering.<sup>80</sup> Death is only an occa-  
32 sion for "changing old clothes" (*vāsāṃsi jīrṇāni*, 2.22), that is, for  
33 transmigrating into a new body.<sup>81</sup>

34 Kṛṣṇa then addresses the hero's conflict over tradition, emphat-  
35 ically endorsing *kṣatriyadharma* given that Arjuna's *svadharma*, his  
36 own duty as a warrior, overrules *kuladharma*. Thus he tells him  
37 that he must fight since refusing to do so is a sin.<sup>82</sup> The *kṣatriya*  
38 must engage in battle at all costs, without caring about winning  
39 or losing, that is, indifferent to its consequences since the conse-  
40

quences of war are no criteria for establishing its validity. Moreover, 1  
 Kṛṣṇa points out that he should consider himself lucky since there 2  
 is nothing better (*śreyas*) for a warrior than a legitimate, righteous 3  
 (*dharmya*, 2.33) war.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately Kṛṣṇa's *kṣatriya* ethos is the same 4  
 as the one upheld by the Kaurava leader Duryodhana, for whom 5  
 "the warrior has been created for fighting" (*yuddhāya kṣatriyaḥ* 6  
*sṛṣṭaḥ*; see *MBh* 5.158.11–12). The code of honor does not allow for 7  
 any regrets, afterthoughts, or doubts since a *kṣatriya* must engage 8  
 himself in fight and never submit to anybody.<sup>84</sup> The idea is that 9  
 a fighting warrior will always win: both victory and defeat will 10  
 lead him to Indra's heaven (2.31–37). 11

Furthermore, Kṛṣṇa criticizes the old ritualistic worldview 12  
 of *karman* of the followers of the *Vedas* and argues that solely 13  
 discriminative knowledge purged of all personal interests is the 14  
 precondition for right action. He thus redefines *karman* as per the 15  
 famous doctrine of disinterested action (*niṣkāmakarman*, 2.47): 16

On action alone be thy interest,<sup>85</sup> 18  
 Never on its fruits; 19  
 Let not the fruits of action be thy motive, 20  
 Nor be thy attachment to inaction.<sup>86</sup> 21

Action must be carried out at the best of one's abilities, and yet 23  
 it must not be judged by its results. Most importantly, one must 24  
 relinquish all desires attached to it: only in this way can one free 25  
 himself/herself from the bondage of *karman* (i.e., interrupt the 26  
 ongoing production of karmic retribution). One must always con- 27  
 sider the intentions that trigger action and exercise self-control. 28  
 In order to do this the intellect, the highest faculty that allows 29  
 to control the lower ones such as ego-consciousness (*ahaṁkāra*) 30  
 and possessiveness, must be purified through the practice of *yoga* 31  
 (*buddhiyoga*), poignantly defined as equanimity (*samatva*), so as 32  
 to leave the realm of "acquisition and conservation" (*yogakṣema*) 33  
 behind oneself and abandon all attachment (2.38–53). 34

Kṛṣṇa brings chapter 2 to a close by answering Arjuna's ques- 35  
 tion regarding the characteristics of a man whose insight is firm 36  
 (*sthitaprajña*, 2.54–72). Herein, he offers a lesson on yogic medita- 37  
 tion that shows how perfect detachment from sense-objects results 38  
 in clarity of mind (*prasāda*) and peace (*śānti*), in a contemplative 39  
 40

1 withdrawal from the world that culminates in liberation, that is,  
 2 *brahmanirvāṇa*, “the vanishing away that is *Brahman*.”<sup>87</sup> Noteworthy  
 3 is that Kṛṣṇa for the first time in the poem proposes himself as  
 4 the privileged object of concentration, the “highest goal” (*matpara*)  
 5 to whom the man of discernment must surrender himself (2.61,  
 6 our translation):

7  
 8       Them [= the senses] all restraining,  
 9       Let him sit disciplined, intent upon Me as the highest goal;  
 10       Only when his senses are under control,  
 11       Is his wisdom secure.

12  
 13 To be sure, this is the fundamental teaching of the *BhG*, the most  
 14 thorough presentation of which is found in chapter 18.54–58.  
 15 Although some scholars consider this reference to Kṛṣṇa's divinity  
 16 to be out of context, a later interpolation inserted when the the-  
 17 istic layers of the poem were added,<sup>88</sup> we think this need not be  
 18 the case. In fact, 2.61 is consonant with 2.7d, which is the critical  
 19 moment that occasions Kṛṣṇa's *upadeśa*, that is, the time when  
 20 Arjuna surrenders himself to him, falling at his feet and taking  
 21 “refuge” (*śaraṇāgati*) in him as his *guru*, which implies that he has  
 22 accepted him as his beloved lord. The hero's surrender (*prapatti*),<sup>89</sup>  
 23 his leap of faith (*śraddhā*),<sup>90</sup> is a silent, heartfelt prayer for help that  
 24 he addresses to his charioteer as his last resort: it expresses the  
 25 human need for god, which manifests itself in all its imperativeness  
 26 at the time of existential crises and impending death.<sup>91</sup>

27       The paradigmatic *guru-śiṣya* relationship between Kṛṣṇa and  
 28 Arjuna is the foundational presupposition of the *BhG*'s dialogue, its  
 29 “secret” (*rahasya*) being *bhakti*, that love that has the characteristic  
 30 of being exclusive.<sup>92</sup> As the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* proclaims in its  
 31 closing verse (6.23): “Only in a man who has the deepest love for  
 32 God, and who shows the same love towards his teacher as towards  
 33 God, do these points declared by the Noble One shine forth.”<sup>93</sup> If  
 34 Arjuna's act of surrender to the divine master had not preliminarily  
 35 taken place, Kṛṣṇa's teaching could have never been uttered. The  
 36 hero's ripeness to receive Kṛṣṇa's *upadeśa* is demonstrated by his  
 37 *prapatti*. According to Rāmānuja (trad. 1017–1137), the great mas-  
 38 ter of Śrīvaiṣṇavism and the leading theologian of Viśiṣṭādvaita  
 39 or “non-dualism of the qualified [whole],” the *prapanna* who has  
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surrendered himself to the deity is the one worthy of divine favor 1  
 (*prasāda*). In its culminating sixth stage known as *kārpaṇya* (“poor- 2  
 ness of spirit”) or *akiṃcanya* (“nullity”), *prapatti* is characterized by 3  
 a condition of total vulnerability: one then “belongs” to the deity, 4  
 his/her ego being shattered. The idea is that when one reaches 5  
 such κένωσις or complete self-emptying, god intervenes filling 6  
 him/her with his grace, his *prasāda*. It is especially noteworthy 7  
 that the term *prasāda*—derived from *pra* + *śad*, “to become clear/ 8  
 tranquil,” “to become satisfied/pleased/glad”—besides its double 9  
 meaning of clarity/tranquility of mind and divine grace also means 10  
 good humor and smile.<sup>94</sup> 11

Having said this, it must be remembered that within the 12  
 framework of a theology of grace the very possibility of Arjuna's 13  
 seeking refuge at Kṛṣṇa's feet originates from god's overwhelm- 14  
 ing love.<sup>95</sup> His initiative is thought to precede and predetermine 15  
 all human endeavor, suspending/vanquishing the law of *karman* 16  
 itself. The sublime paradox of *bhakti* lies precisely in this: love is 17  
 activated/instilled within man by god and man, in turn, is called 18  
 to reciprocate it, that is, donate it to his/her lord. But how is it 19  
 possible to donate something that does not actually belong to 20  
 us since man received it as a gift of grace in the first place? The 21  
 answer lies in the recognition that there is only love and such love 22  
 is no “thing” but the very essence of god. Love is therefore to be 23  
 understood as the foundation of all creatures and of all that exists, 24  
 it being the alpha and the omega, the way and the goal. There is 25  
 but one circularity of love, with no beginning nor end, an eternal 26  
 dynamism of love, and this is what the dialogue (*saṃvāda*) between 27  
 Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is all about: its presupposition and its τέλος. 28  
 As it is taught in the *Nāradaḥkṛtīsūtras* (30–33), the superiority of 29  
*bhakti* over all other paths (*mārga*) lies precisely in its being both 30  
 the means and the end. 31

Even before the *BhG* episode, there are other instances in the 32  
*MBh* that reveal Arjuna's devotional pose toward Kṛṣṇa. Thus when 33  
 Arjuna approaches the latter in order to ask him to be his ally 34  
 in the war against the Kauravas he stands bowing at the foot of 35  
 Kṛṣṇa's bed—as Govinda was sleeping—with folded hands (*kr̥tāñ- 36  
 jali*; 5.7.7), an attitude that contrasts with that of Duryodhana who, 37  
 having come there for the same purpose of asking Kṛṣṇa to ally 38  
 himself with him against the Pāṇḍavas, comfortably seats himself 39

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1 on a choice seat toward Kṛṣṇa's head. When Kṛṣṇa leaves them the  
 2 option of selecting either the army of the Yādavas<sup>96</sup> or himself as  
 3 a weaponless noncombatant advisor, Arjuna immediately chooses  
 4 him (i.e., quality), whereas Duryodhana is delighted to have his  
 5 army (i.e., quantity). And by choosing Kṛṣṇa, who will then act  
 6 as his charioteer, Arjuna is definitely chosen by him.<sup>97</sup> As Mario  
 7 Piantelli writes, Arjuna's choice is "the measure of the exceptional  
 8 preciousness of Vāsudeva's word, of the unlimited power of the  
 9 divine and of the risk that anyone who approaches such power  
 10 with uncompromising dedication must face."<sup>98</sup>

11 The *BhG* aims to establish the legitimate rule of the ideal  
 12 king who is none other than the god-obeying king, that is Arjuna,  
 13 given that god (i.e., Kṛṣṇa) is the sole, eternal sovereign of the  
 14 cosmos. It rejects the claims of those evil rulers who, like Duryo-  
 15 dhana, make themselves absolute monarchs and affirm a godlike  
 16 status for themselves. Within the *BhG*, the religious dimension of  
 17 *bhakti* is inextricably intertwined with the political dimension of  
 18 kingship. In the end, Arjuna must fight as a devoted *bhakta* for  
 19 the cause of the one and only god, Kṛṣṇa, and for the welfare of  
 20 the world (*lokasaṃgraha*; *BhG* 3.20, 3.25, 12.4). Although keeping to  
 21 his yogic detachment, Kṛṣṇa shows interest in the world and his  
 22 devoted king must act as his collaborator in the ongoing endeavor  
 23 of maintaining its well-being. As Angelika Malinar states: "Kṛṣṇa's  
 24 position is unique in that he is in command of the creative powers  
 25 like a *yogin*, protects the created cosmos like a king, and surpasses  
 26 all cosmic levels and established realms of liberation in that the  
 27 'knowing devotee' reaches not just identity with the elements of  
 28 creation and liberation of the self, but the eternity in which Kṛṣṇa  
 29 exists. This state of being can be reached only by those who are  
 30 devoted to him."<sup>99</sup>

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### The Interpretations of *prahasann iva*

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Given such context, we now revert to Hṛṣīkeśa's hint of laughter.  
 From the outset, it must be noted that at this decisive juncture  
 the poet who wrote our text plays on some fundamental opposi-  
 tions that at the same time complement each other, making up an  
 indissoluble whole since the relation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is



one of intimate reciprocity and mutual dependence.<sup>100</sup> Kṛṣṇa the  
 godhead is the necessary companion for Arjuna, who is the ideal  
 king and man since in the theology of the *BhG* god and king/  
 devotee, religion and politics, liberation (*mokṣa*) and kingship are  
 never conceived as separate. Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, symptomatically  
 “the white/silvery one” and “the black/dark one,” are none other  
 than the incarnations of the twin, inseparable sages Nara and  
 Nārāyaṇa, revered as one being in two persons.<sup>101</sup> Arjuna's cry and  
 sad situation is skillfully contrasted with Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter  
 and otherworldly serenity.<sup>102</sup> The hero represents man who in his  
 despondency can only take refuge at his lord's feet as his *śiṣya*,  
 vis-à-vis the laughing/smiling god who stands in front of him as  
 his *guru*.<sup>103</sup> As god and man, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are regarded as  
 unbeatable—as *BhG* 18.78, the last verse of the poem, solemnly  
 states—and represent the perfect relationship, being supportive  
 and respectful of one another.

Whereas Arjuna is lost in despair, Kṛṣṇa opens his mouth  
 (*mukha*) in a hint of laughter, which is the prelude to his nectarine  
 words of grace (*kṛpā*, *anugraha*), his liberating teaching. His *pra-*  
*hasann iva* is the bridging point between silence and the word: it  
 triggers Arjuna's transformation by interrupting his dejection, that  
 is, who he thinks he is, and leading him to a new understanding  
 of himself—who he truly is.<sup>104</sup> Thanks to Kṛṣṇa's *upadeśa*, the hero  
 will overcome his paralysis and will be prepared to act, having  
 acquired resoluteness. As artfully staged in the *BhG* through these  
 series of oppositions, Arjuna will emerge as the ideal king precisely  
 because as a *bhakta* he is made to represent the ideal human being  
 who, having surrendered to the sovereign of all creatures, will be  
 granted the vision of the lord's universal form in chapter 11 of  
 the poem.

Apparently Kṛṣṇa—who is as much a *kṣatriya* prince as he  
 is the ultimate godhead, descended to earth as an *avatāra* (lit.  
 “descent”) for the protection of the good and the reestablishment  
 of *dharma* (*BhG* 4.8)<sup>105</sup>—exhibits the typical reaction of a warrior  
 when someone fails to fulfill his martial duty. In other words,  
 Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter can straightforwardly be interpreted as a  
 laugh of ridicule and scorn, implicitly accusing Arjuna of being a  
 coward: indeed, his derision is concomitant to what he tells Arjuna  
 at 2.3, when he derogatorily calls him a eunuch. This is confirmed

1 by the frequency of the stock expressions *prahasann iva/hasann iva*  
 2 in the epic, though as we shall see in chapter 3 by no means all  
 3 such occurrences are intended to be derisory. Just to mention one  
 4 example, when at 5.7.9 Duryodhana approaches Kṛṣṇa for asking  
 5 him to be his ally in the war against the Pāṇḍavas, he introduces  
 6 his speech by a hint of laughter that he does not intend as sarcastic  
 7 or offensive.

8 In Indian literature, the sentiment of laughter (*hāsyarasa*) is said  
 9 to be induced when a character acts contrary to his own nature  
 10 and inherent duty. Here Arjuna's behavior is laughable precisely  
 11 because of its incongruence or inappropriateness (*anaucitya*), given  
 12 that his sudden despondency and refusal to engage in combat are  
 13 incompatible with his reputation as a fearless warrior. In the world  
 14 of the epic, such a misdemeanor is invariably regarded as shameful  
 15 and therefore laughable<sup>106</sup> and conducive to disgrace (*akīrti*) and loss  
 16 of social esteem, as Kṛṣṇa further points out to Arjuna at 2.34–36:

17  
 18 Disgrace, too, will creatures  
 19 Speak of thee, without end;  
 20 And for one that has been esteemed, disgrace  
 21 Is worse than death.  
 22 That thou hast abstained from battle thru fear  
 23 The (warriors) of great chariots will think of thee;  
 24 And of whom thou wast highly regarded,  
 25 Thou shalt come to be held lightly.  
 26 And many sayings that should not be said  
 27 Thy ill-wishers will say of thee,  
 28 Speaking ill of thy capacity:  
 29 What, pray, is more grievous than that?<sup>107</sup>  
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31 Undoubtedly, what a warrior fears most is to be laughed at due to  
 32 his supposed weakness.<sup>108</sup> Strength and manliness (*balapauruṣa*) are  
 33 the sole values that count within a *kṣatriya* milieu, and Arjuna's crisis  
 34 and last-minute appeals for peace cannot be deemed acceptable.

35 Thus, at a *prima facie* level, the hint of laughter of Arjuna's  
 36 charioteer appears to be mocking and derisory, a warrior's typical  
 37 reaction toward another warrior's lack of courage. Along these  
 38 lines, it can be argued that Kṛṣṇa's derisive laugh/smile has a  
 39 pedagogical function, being intended to put Arjuna to shame so  
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as to elicit a reaction from him capable of triggering discriminative knowledge. Swami Swarupananda writes: “Smiling—to drown Arjuna in the ocean of shame. Krishna’s smile at Arjuna’s sorrow is like the lightning that plays over the black monsoon cloud. The rain bursts forth, and the thirsty earth is saturated. It is the smile of the coming illumination.”<sup>109</sup> On a more subtle level, Kṛṣṇa’s hint of laughter is the expression of his pure mirth and of something superhuman, being the sign of his divinity. His laughter/smile conveys a sense of joyful levity and relief, of unburdening and liberation. It indicates his benign sovereignty and transcendent detachment, above and beyond saṃsāric circumstances though being constantly engaged in the protection of the good and the welfare of the world.<sup>110</sup>

Laughing as well as smiling are constitutively ambivalent and ambiguous actions, being as it were suspended at the fringe of reality: they “stand in between” and are akin to a dream experience. The *iva* particle of our text, in its nuance of indefiniteness, reinforces the liminal character of Kṛṣṇa’s hint of laughter, which is at the same time human and divine. The Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz (1903–1989) noted long ago that laughter is a case of redirected activity, that is, the transformation of an originally threatening movement—as for most animals is the opening of the mouth and the showing of the teeth, signaling the intention to bite—in a reassuring, peaceful gesture.<sup>111</sup>

Our contention is that *prahasann iva* is constitutively polysemic and that both understandings should be acknowledged (i.e., the hint of laughter as mockery and the hint of laughter as mirth). After all, Kṛṣṇa is both a prince (i.e., a warrior) and the supreme godhead, and his hint of laughter must be acknowledged as a skillful means (*upāya*) through which he achieves the transformation of his pupil by resorting to both mockery and mirth. The poet of the *BhG* articulates this adaptive framework by deliberately playing with such polysemy, which also reflects Kṛṣṇa’s ambiguous personality within the *Mahābhārata*. In his divine freedom he is a law unto himself and as James L. Fitzgerald writes, there is in his portrayal

a tension between a placid, typically smiling, surface demeanor, and a boundlessness that might suddenly open up in connection with him, an unexpected flash

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1 of infinity. . . . [Kṛṣṇa] Vāsudeva [being] characterized  
 2 by limitless ambition . . . ruthless wiliness . . . sudden,  
 3 explosive violence . . . his sudden demonstration to  
 4 Arjuna that he was “time grown old for the destruction  
 5 of the world,” and the ontological point of origin and  
 6 end of all being, the Puruṣottama . . . and Parameś-  
 7 vara . . . and, ultimately, Nārāyana and Viṣṇu . . . ; and,  
 8 finally, by his utter transcendence of all the categories  
 9 distinguishing between the *dvandvas*, “pairs,” “opposi-  
 10 tions,” such as warm-cold, . . . *dharma-adharma*. . . . The  
 11 divine transcendence of Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva that is revealed  
 12 in the *Bhagavadgītā* . . . and other episodes of the text is  
 13 easily harmonized with the steady stream of ruthless *nīti*  
 14 (policy advice) he offers the Pāṇḍavas throughout the  
 15 narrative, guiding them without reference to *dharma* in  
 16 politics and war.<sup>112</sup>

17  
 18 Although the understanding of *prahasann iva* as both mockery and  
 19 mirth may appear to be contradictory, that is, mutually exclusive if  
 20 taken in isolation, an almost imperceptible and yet decisive move-  
 21 ment from one to the other can be inferred: the hint of laughter as  
 22 mockery of Kṛṣṇa the prince gives way to the sweetest expression  
 23 of blissful grace of Kṛṣṇa the godhead, that which is to be under-  
 24 stood as the beautiful “smile of smiles,” resort of all *bhaktas*.<sup>113</sup>

25 Moreover, we are persuaded that given Arjuna's surrender to  
 26 Govinda as his *guru* and lord at the close of 2.7, *prahasann iva* rather  
 27 than as an “ordinary” mocking laugh/smile must be understood  
 28 primarily as a laugh/smile of pure grace and satisfaction on the  
 29 latter's part. Kṛṣṇa rejoices at Arjuna having finally sought refuge  
 30 at his feet and promptly responds to his utter despondency through  
 31 his benevolent gaze. Most commentators point out that Arjuna's  
 32 crisis and his seeking refuge at the lord's feet are used by Kṛṣṇa  
 33 as the long-awaited occasion, the pretext (*vyāja*) for imparting his  
 34 liberating teaching. The two prefixes *pra* of *pra-pannam* (2.7) and  
 35 *pra-hasann* (2.10) subtly respond to one another, the former inevi-  
 36 tably attracting the latter. The past passive participle *prapanna* (*pra*  
 37 + *√pad*) literally means “to throw one's self down [at a person's  
 38 feet],” “to go forward,” “to resort to,”<sup>114</sup> and it is precisely Arju-  
 39 na's act of surrendering at Kṛṣṇa's feet, of moving forward and  
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resorting to him, that attracts the lord's positive response, that is, his hint of laughter/smile toward him.<sup>115</sup>

Arjuna's crisis and utter despair (*viṣāda*) is what constitutes his entitlement (*adhikāra*) to seek discipleship, prompting his surrender. Though our hero's pity (*kārpaṇyadoṣa*; 2.7) is misplaced, it has its own appeal to the lord, who is resolved to transmute it into the renunciation of the attachment to the deed, and the fruits of it. The darkness (*tamas*) of Arjuna's ignorance is infallibly removed thanks to his *śaraṇāgati* to Kṛṣṇa, which ignites the spark of light (*jyotis*) in him. There is an immediate match—a reciprocal attraction and reflection—between Arjuna's surrender and Kṛṣṇa's smile/laugh which manifests the god's effulgence (*prabhā*), that is, his pure love (*preman*) for his pupil. As we read in the *Jñāneśvarī* (18.1461), the Marāṭhī commentary to the poem written by the thirteenth-century poet-saint Jñāneśvar (1275–1296): “Isn't the *Gītā* like a sun which, in the sky of Kṛṣṇa's mouth, illuminates for the world the jewels of all the scriptures?” By opening his mouth the deity communicates his blissful radiance (*tejas*),<sup>116</sup> his incomparable glory and beauty (*saundarya*).<sup>117</sup> The idea that Kṛṣṇa's mouth is the receptacle of an otherworldly effulgence through which he reveals his divinity will become a leitmotif in subsequent devotional literature.<sup>118</sup>

Though Arjuna's last words that he shall not fight (*na yotsya iti*; *BhG* 2.9) evidence the hero's deluded stubbornness and inevitably attract Kṛṣṇa's irony, because of the patent contradiction between his discipleship on the one hand and his claimed independence on the other,<sup>119</sup> such hint of sarcasm is nonetheless secondary with respect to the lord's all-forgiving hint of laughter, given the new, transformative context of the sacred *guru-śiṣya* relation that has just been inaugurated.

Kṛṣṇa's standing in front of Arjuna with a radiant countenance expresses the fullness of god's *prasāda* toward his *bhakta*. It is not a cynical laughter filled with contempt, since Govinda does not laugh at or against Arjuna. His is not a condescending or nasty grimace but rather a cheerful laughter of sympathy and encouragement that welcomes the Pāṇḍava hero as his dear pupil and devotee: Govinda laughs/smiles for Arjuna, embracing him in the warmth of his love.<sup>120</sup> Along these lines, Douglas Brooks observes: “Krishna's reply begins with the “hint of a smile,” . . . the signal of grace descending (*shakti-pata*), and promises a radical transformation

1 and awakening. This descent of grace comes from the highest,  
 2 self-luminating reality and is refined in the awareness of the seeker  
 3 who opens to its presence in her or his own thoughts (*vikalpa*)."<sup>121</sup>  
 4 Swami Chidbhananda's commentary is also worth quoting:

5  
 6 Significant is the smile beaming on the lips of Hrishikesa.  
 7 As the dawn is the harbinger of day-break, the Lord's  
 8 smile forecasts the *yoga* and the spiritual enlightenment  
 9 that are to come on Arjuna. It was *Preyas* [= the gratifying]  
 10 that he had been receiving till now. What he is going to  
 11 receive forthwith is *Sreyas* [= the good], the sovereign  
 12 remedy for all the evils of the mundane existence. It is  
 13 the inviolable means for the attainment of Beatitude.  
 14 There is nothing greater than *Sreyas* for man to seek.  
 15 Existence finds fulfillment in It. Arjuna is going to be  
 16 initiated into It. Hence this divine smile on the lips of  
 17 the Lord.<sup>122</sup>

18  
 19 Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter is the connecting point between the hero's  
 20 mute anguish and the lord's word of grace, the pivotal moment  
 21 that immediately precedes the deliverance of the divine teaching.  
 22 The smile of the *guru* toward his disciple/s marking the effusion of  
 23 his *upadeśa*—be it through the medium of speech or even through  
 24 silence—has a long-standing tradition in Indian religions: one is  
 25 reminded of the Buddha and of Bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara  
 26 and, within the Hindu milieu, of the figure of Śiva Dakṣiṇāmūrti,  
 27 who is said to convey the truth of Vedānta through his eloquent  
 28 silence.<sup>123</sup> Just to offer one example, we quote two elegant verses  
 29 taken from the *Dakṣiṇāmūrtistotra* attributed to Śaṅkara:

30  
 31 I have contemplated Him, the One who is rich of  
 32 inexhaustible compassion,  
 33 The Primeval Teacher seated at the root of the Banyan tree,  
 34 Who through His silence adorned of His gentle smile  
 35 Vanquishes the darkness of ignorance for the multitude of  
 36 the great seers.  
 37 . . . .  
 38 I bow to the Teacher of Teachers who, by inclining His  
 39 gaze,  
 40





From the corner of His eye discharges 1  
 The waves of nectar of His boundless compassion 2  
 On the ascetics who are worn-out by the sultriness of the 3  
 desert of rebirths.<sup>124</sup> 4

Here Śiva Dakṣiṇāmūrti's grace (i.e., the waves of nectar that he 6  
 discharges from the corner of his eye), is effectively conveyed 7  
 through his gentle smile and compassionate look. In the hymn 8  
 the motif of amazement (*vismaya*) is also present given that Śiva 9  
 Dakṣiṇāmūrti is depicted as a youthful teacher surrounded by 10  
 aged disciples: the unexpected contrast of the young god, stainless 11  
 and serene beyond measure, who bestows the direct knowledge 12  
 of *Brahman* through silence to his old pupils—mighty sages who 13  
 nonetheless suffer from the malady of birth and death—is in itself 14  
 a matter of astonishment.<sup>125</sup> 15

Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter anticipates the dissolution of the hero's 16  
 mortal anguish: it is the definite cure for Arjuna's "disease" caused 17  
 by *śoka* and *moha*. More to the point, it signals the theological truth 18  
 that Govinda has already dissolved his negative condition, even 19  
 before the pouring forth of the nectar of his words. His hint of 20  
 laughter is the expression of the gushing out of his superabundant 21  
 grace that eradicates the disciple's doubts<sup>126</sup> and vanquishes the 22  
 numbness of his mind and body. 23

As noted, the prefix *pra* can be interpreted as meaning 24  
 "supreme" / "excellent," pointing at the spiritual dimension of 25  
 Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter. A reason that supports such interpretation 26  
 is the implied body language of the two protagonists: whereas 27  
 Arjuna's posture as a *prapanna* entails that he has thrown himself 28  
 at his lord's feet, Kṛṣṇa the *guru* stands up as the *prasanna*—an 29  
 adjective that is derived from *pra* + *√sad*, just like the noun 30  
*prasāda*—that is, the clear/tranquil/gracious one, facing his disci- 31  
 ple and illumining him with a hint of laughter that "comes from 32  
 above" and is indicative of his otherworldly eminence.<sup>127</sup> Arjuna 33  
 awaits everything from Kṛṣṇa, with his eyes fixed upon him as 34  
 his last resort—wholly concentrating his attention on Kṛṣṇa's feet, 35  
 these being the receptacle of divine power and grace<sup>128</sup>—and the 36  
 lord bountifully turns his beaming countenance and laughing 37  
 eyes toward him and gives him peace (*śānti*), filling the hero's 38  
 emptiness with his luminous gaze that annihilates all sins. It is 39

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1 the sacred moment of *darśana*, the transformative experience of  
 2 seeing the divine person and, most importantly, of being seen by  
 3 him.<sup>129</sup>

4 Arjuna's surrender to the lord entails his "falling like a stick,  
 5 with the eight limbs of his body touching the ground" (*sāṣṭāṅga*  
 6 *daṇḍavat*; forehead, chest, palms, knees, and feet): love of god and  
 7 fear of god are perfectly integrated in the all-important act of  
 8 prostration, the *praṇipāta* or *namas*.<sup>130</sup> On his part Kṛṣṇa, standing  
 9 upright, through the first, imperceptible opening of his mouth in  
 10 laughter/smile asserts his *saṃkalpa* (i.e., his "intention" of love  
 11 toward his *bhakta*). And through the expansion of his facial mus-  
 12 cles, the lord radiates and pours down on Arjuna his invigorating  
 13 *preman*. Arjuna's devout attitude as a *pra-panna* inevitably attracts  
 14 Kṛṣṇa's graceful hint of laughter, his *pra-hasann iva*, the call of love  
 15 being irresistible.

16 The *prahasann iva* signals the bond of intimacy between the  
 17 two that characterizes their relation throughout the *BhG*. Even at  
 18 the beginning of chapter 4, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that he will teach  
 19 him his ancient (*purātana*) *yoga* precisely because he is his loyal  
 20 devotee and comrade (*bhakto 'si me sakhā ca*; 4.3). This bond of  
 21 love between *guru* and *śiṣya* will find its culmination in chapter 11  
 22 when the lord will grace his *bhakta* with the vision of his universal  
 23 form.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, after having had this astonishing revelation Arjuna  
 24 praises Kṛṣṇa as the father of the world (*pitā 'si lokasya*) and the  
 25 most venerable *guru* (*tvam asya pūjyaś ca gurur garīyān*), whose  
 26 greatness is matchless.<sup>132</sup> He then asks Kṛṣṇa to please forgive him  
 27 if in the past he treated him lightly, as if he was just his friend  
 28 (11.42–43). In particular, at 11.42 Arjuna says:

29  
 30 And if I treated Thee disrespectfully, to make sport of  
 31 Thee (*avahāsārtham*),  
 32 In the course of amusement, resting, sitting or eating,  
 33 Either alone, O unshaken one (*acyuta*), or in the presence  
 34 of those others,  
 35 For that I beg forgiveness of Thee, the immeasurable  
 36 one.<sup>133</sup>

37  
 38 Herein the noun *avahāsa*, "jest" / "joke," "derision," originates from  
 39 *ava* + *√has* meaning "to laugh at" / "deride."<sup>134</sup> Remarkably, it is the  
 40 only other occurrence in the whole poem besides *prahasan* at 2.10 of



a term derived from verbal root *√has*. The compound *avahāsārtham*, which Franklin Edgerton translates “to make sport,” can be more appropriately rendered “with jesting/deriding purpose,” “by way of a joke.”<sup>135</sup> As a prefix to verbs, *ava*—literally “down,” “off”—can be used to express disrespect and depreciation.<sup>136</sup> Arjuna prays Kṛṣṇa to forgive him if in the past he “put him down” and treated him disrespectfully (*asatkṛta*). The prefix *ava* of *avahāsārtham*—entailing inferiority/horizontality (i.e., humanity)—stands in complementary contrast to the prefix *pra* of *prahasann iva*, which can be used to express superiority, thus entailing verticality (i.e., divinity).<sup>137</sup> Our suggestion is that Kṛṣṇa's *pra* + *√has* at 2.10 and Arjuna's *ava* + *√has* at 11.42 are an interrelated pair, mirroring two opposite and yet corresponding modes of expression of laugh/jest, the first being sublimely divine, and the second being all too human. Such contrastive wordplay is not casual but consciously aimed at by the poet of the *BhG*.

With regard to the hero's supplicant words to his *guru*-god, Alf Hiltebeitel remarks:

Friendship (*sakhyaṃ*) is thus a suitable relationship for understanding Krishna's dharmic role, but, as Arjuna says, it is not adequate to carry the devotional appreciation of Krishna in his universal form. Thus, after the theophany, Arjuna apologizes for his earlier familiarity with Krishna, that is, as he puts it, for:

“Whatever I said rashly, thinking Thee my boon companion (*sakhe 'ti matvā*), calling Thee 'Kṛṣṇa, Yādava, Companion (*sakhe*)!' ” (11.41)

Arjuna is, of course, forgiven his familiarities, and he stands as the exemplar of both of these relationships to Krishna: those of *sakhi* and *bhakta*, the former implying a variety of social and dharmic relations, the latter a means to salvation.<sup>138</sup>

Hiltebeitel's authority notwithstanding, we think that his final statement needs to be corrected. As Angelika Malinar notes: “Well-established social relationships of kinship (father-son), friendship/comradeship (*sakha*) and love (*priya*) are now placed within the religious framework of *bhakti*.”<sup>139</sup> In such framework, friendship (*sakhya*) with the lord is regarded as one of the highest forms of



1 devotion. Significantly, in the much later *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (ninth-  
 2 tenth century) *sakhya* figures as the penultimate, eighth limb of  
 3 the “nine limbs” (*navāṅgāni*) of *bhakti* which culminate in self-  
 4 surrender, that is, *ātmanivedana*, which is a synonym of *prapatti*.<sup>140</sup>  
 5 That Arjuna's comradeship with Kṛṣṇa—extolled as the paradigm  
 6 of *sakhya*<sup>141</sup>—resulted in his falling at the latter's feet must be  
 7 appreciated as the hero's crowning achievement along the *bhakti*  
 8 path. Thus, at 11.44 Arjuna states:

9  
 10       Therefore, bowing and prostrating my body (*praṇamya*  
 11       *praṇidhāya kāyaṃ*),  
 12       I beg grace (*prasādaye*) of Thee, The Lord to be revered:  
 13       As a father to his son, as a friend to his friend,  
 14       As a lover to his beloved, be pleased to show mercy, o  
 15       God!<sup>142</sup>

16  
 17 Here Arjuna's prostration to his lord—also expressed at 11.35  
 18 (“making a reverent gesture,” *kṛtāñjalir*, “having made obeisance,”  
 19 *namaskṛtoā*, “bowing down,” *praṇamya*)—corresponds to his hav-  
 20 ing sought refuge in him at 2.7. There is a subtle link between  
 21 these moments, his first act of surrender being the most crucial  
 22 and decisive one. Indeed, the hero's *prapatti* to his god and *guru*  
 23 is the reason why Kṛṣṇa looks at him with tenderness since by  
 24 submitting himself to his lord he has done the one right thing,  
 25 which solely counts.

26       The epithet *acyuta* (“imperishable” / “unshaken” / “changeless”)  
 27 with which Arjuna acknowledges Kṛṣṇa's divinity at 11.42 had  
 28 already been used by our hero at the very beginning of the poem,  
 29 that is, at *BhG* 1.21, when he had asked Hṛṣīkeśa to halt the chariot  
 30 between the two armies. This appellation suggests that Arjuna was  
 31 all along aware of Kṛṣṇa's divine nature, though his comradeship  
 32 with him had brought him to forget such truth being misled by  
 33 the *avatāra*'s humanity (i.e., the veil of Kṛṣṇa's *māyā*).<sup>143</sup> Besides  
 34 1.21 and 11.42, *acyuta* is used a third time at the end of the poem,  
 35 at 18.73, when Arjuna pronounces his last, solemn words:

36  
 37       Destroyed the confusion; attention (to the truth) is won,  
 38       By Thy grace, on my part, O Changeless One (*acyuta*);  
 39       I stand firm, with doubts dispersed;  
 40       I shall do Thy word.<sup>144</sup>



The curling of the god's lips (*oṣṭha*, *dantacchada*, *adhara*), the corners  
of his mouth turned up, and the glimpse of his glimmering teeth  
(*danta* / *daśana*) are for Arjuna as well as for all *bhaktas* the sure sign of  
the lord's benign favor. Such exquisite, benevolent *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa  
coexists with the wrathful vision of the god's mouth and terrible  
tusks (*daṁṣṭrākaraṇā*) in the theophany of chapter 11 (in particular  
11.23, 11.25, and 11.27). Within kṛṣṇaite traditions, the *darśana* of the  
god's laughter / smile is thought to be so captivating—his teeth being  
compared to the buds of jasmine flowers,<sup>145</sup> reflecting the splendor  
of his rosy lips—that his devotees are advised to constantly con-  
template such sheer radiant beauty within their hearts, given that  
the lord “abides in the heart of each and every one” (*sarvasya cā*  
*'haṁ hr̥di samniviṣṭo*; *BhG* 15.15) as their inner controller (*antaryāmin*).  
Once again the act of seeing plays a key function, being the way  
through which the god's grace is effectively conveyed.

Through his hint of laughter Kṛṣṇa challenges Arjuna's  
entanglement to the world by calling attention to what solely is:  
the *ātman*. The lord's *prahasann iva* exhibits his pure joy (*ānanda*)  
and blissful equanimity,<sup>146</sup> his *līlā* or playful attitude toward exis-  
tence that subverts mundane preoccupations and well-established  
patterns of thought.<sup>147</sup> As Swami Mukundananda notes: “In sharp  
contrast to Arjuna's words of lamentation, Shree Krishna smiled,  
displaying that the situation was not making him despair; rather  
he was perfectly happy with it. Such is the equanimous attitude  
exhibited by someone with knowledge in all situations.”<sup>148</sup>

Kṛṣṇa laughs also because he knows beforehand that his *bhakta*  
will reach him: then Arjuna's hair will no longer stand on end  
due to the despondency / grief born out of ignorance (1.29c) but  
as the unmistakable sign that he has realized Kṛṣṇa's true identity.  
This is evidenced by the hero's reaction at *BhG* 11.14, after having  
witnessed his lord's cosmic form, in which he is depicted in the  
typical position of a devoted disciple worshipping his chosen deity:

Then filled with amazement (*vismayāviṣṭo*),  
His hair standing upright (*hr̥ṣṭaromā*), Dhanamjaya<sup>149</sup>  
Bowed with his head (*praṇamya śirasā*) to the God,  
And said with a gesture of reverence (*kṛtāñjalir*):<sup>150</sup> . . .

While the hero's crisis was determined by his sentiment of pity,  
due to which he also got goosebumps (*romaharṣa*), its solution is

1 now represented by another overwhelming emotion: amazement/  
 2 awe (*vismaya*) at the sight of Kṛṣṇa's theophany. This produces  
 3 utter astonishment (*vismita*) in all heavenly beings: Rudras, Ādityas,  
 4 Vasus, Sādhyas, Viśvedevas, Aśvins, Maruts, Ūṣmapas, Gandhar-  
 5 vas, Yakṣas, Asuras, and Siddhas (*BhG* 11.22).<sup>151</sup> It is noteworthy  
 6 that both the noun *vismaya* and the past passive participle *vismita*  
 7 are derived from *vi* + verbal root *√smi* which means "to smile."<sup>152</sup>  
 8 This experience of the numinous leads Arjuna to bow to his god  
 9 and *guru* by performing the *añjalimudrā*, the gesture of reverent  
 10 honoring.<sup>153</sup>

11 Our hero and all *bhaktas* are implicitly called to cultivate  
 12 *vismaya*—which entails humility, that is, literally being "free from  
 13 pride and arrogance" (*vi-smaya*)<sup>154</sup>—by extending it to everyday life,  
 14 recognizing god's invisible and wondrous presence at all times.<sup>155</sup>  
 15 Theologically, Arjuna's and all creatures' *vismaya* is the necessary  
 16 qualification to proceed along the path that leads to communion  
 17 with the divine. Arjuna's *vismaya*, his staring at his lord with awe,  
 18 must be appreciated as the most appropriate response to Kṛṣṇa's  
 19 *prahasann iva*: this state (*bhāva*) that manifests itself so powerfully  
 20 at the sight of the lord's cosmic form in chapter 11 was effectively  
 21 prepared and anticipated by Arjuna's surrender to Kṛṣṇa at 2.7 since  
 22 the two are linked to one another, *vismaya* being the consequence  
 23 of pure devotion.<sup>156</sup> The lord makes it clear that Arjuna's vision  
 24 of his glory is entirely due to his grace, which he calls *prasanna*:

25  
 26 By Me showing grace (*mayā prasannena*) towards thee,  
 27 Arjuna, this  
 28 Supreme form has been manifested by My own mysterious  
 29 power;  
 30 (This form) made up of splendor, universal, infinite,  
 31 primal,  
 32 Of Mine, which has never been seen before by any other  
 33 Than thee.<sup>157</sup>

34  
 35 In the end, nothing but *bhakti* can lead man to see/know god in  
 36 his cosmic form and achieve oneness with him. As Kṛṣṇa states  
 37 at 11.54:

38  
 39 But by unswerving devotion (*bhaktiyā tv ananyayā*) can  
 40 I in such a guise, Arjuna,



Be known (*jñātum*) and seen (*draṣṭum*) in very truth, 1  
 And entered into (*praveṣṭum*), scorcher of the foe.<sup>158</sup> 2

3  
 Devotion is therefore indispensable. Arjuna was granted the privi- 4  
 lege of seeing the lord's cosmic form precisely because he chose the 5  
 path of *bhakti*, *bhaktiyoga* being the most excellent kind of spiritual 6  
 discipline an adept can resort to (*BhG* 14.26).<sup>159</sup> 7

Eventually, by realizing Kṛṣṇa as the highest godhead one 8  
 goes beyond all *dharmas*. Along these lines, in *BhG* 18.66 the lord 9  
 declares: 10

11  
 Abandoning (*parityajya*) all other duties (*sarvadharmān*), 12  
 Go to Me as thy sole refuge (*śaraṇam*); 13  
 From all evils I thee 14  
 Shall rescue (*mokṣayiṣyāmi*): be not grieved!<sup>160</sup> 15

16  
 Arjuna's original conflict between *kuladharmā* and *kṣatriyadharmā*, 17  
 which led to his tragic breakdown and impasse, has been definitely 18  
 superseded by his loyalty to "the lord who abides in the region of 19  
 the heart of all creatures" (*īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ hṛddeśe . . . tiṣṭhati*; 20  
*BhG* 18.61). The complete surrender of body (*tanu*), mind (*manas*), 21  
 and all possessions (*dhana*) to the *guru*-god is the acme of *bhakti*,<sup>161</sup> 22  
 after which nothing else is needed: all duties drop away just as a 23  
 flower drops off as soon as its fruit appears.<sup>162</sup> 24

25  
 26  
 The Impact of Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* on the 27  
*Bhagavadgītā*'s Central Teachings: An Overview 28

29  
 Traditionally, the first six chapters of the poem are known as the 30  
 section on *karmayoga*, "the discipline of action," which is undoubt- 31  
 edly its most original, possibly even oldest, portion (in particular, 32  
 chapters 2–4).<sup>163</sup> Herein, Kṛṣṇa reveals to Arjuna the doctrine of 33  
 disinterested action (*naiṣkarmya*), a path to liberation that requires 34  
 an inner attitude of detachment from the results (*phala*) of one's 35  
 deeds, both ritual and social.<sup>164</sup> Having already presented the 36  
 contents of the first two chapters, we offer a brief summary of the 37  
 main teachings that unfold in chapters 3 through 6. 38

In chapter 3, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that action is inescapable 39  
 since there is no life without it. He therefore instructs him to 40



1 act without any longing and loathing, regarding each and every  
 2 action as a veritable sacrifice (*yajña*) that he must undertake for  
 3 the welfare of the world, relinquishing all selfish interests: in this  
 4 way all deeds and their results, which pertain to the material  
 5 sphere and not to the self, will not bind him to the wheel of  
 6 rebirth. The agent must renounce his/her agency and by doing  
 7 so he/she will be free from the karmic repercussions of his/her  
 8 inescapable activity. Everyone must be keen to adhere to his/her  
 9 own *dharma* by continuing to live in the world and performing  
 10 his/her duties in the best possible way, consecrating all actions  
 11 as an offering to the lord, that is, casting all karmic burdens upon  
 12 him. Kṛṣṇa points out that actions are done by the constituents  
 13 (*guṇa*) of nature (*prakṛti*) alone; it is only the deluded one who  
 14 thinks "I am the doer" (*kartṛ*; 3.27).

15 In chapter 4, Kṛṣṇa reveals to Arjuna that he has been teaching  
 16 this *yoga* from time immemorial, as he manifests himself from age to  
 17 age in order to reestablish *dharma* and protect the good and punish  
 18 all evildoers. The devotees that consecrate themselves completely  
 19 to him become a part of him, and as *karman* does not stain the  
 20 lord who is not bound by actions in the same way whoever acts  
 21 without desire for the fruits of his/her deeds will be free from  
 22 their consequences.

23 In chapter 5, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that the action that is free  
 24 from craving is preferable even to renunciation (*sannyāsa*). Whoever  
 25 practices *yoga* with this inner attitude is never polluted by *karman*:  
 26 he/she sees no difference among creatures, abides in *Brahman*, and  
 27 attains peace. Finally, in chapter 6 Kṛṣṇa reiterates to Arjuna that  
 28 true renunciation lies in disinterested action because it is thanks  
 29 to such action that a *yogin* attains that peace that culminates in  
 30 *nirvāṇa*. By seeing himself in all creatures and the whole universe  
 31 in the Bhagavat, the *yogin* achieves the ultimate goal: perfect com-  
 32 munion with the lord. Thus the best among *yogins* is the devotee  
 33 that consecrates himself to the lord with total faith, the path (*mārga*)  
 34 of *karmayoga* being ultimately subsumed in *bhakti*.

35 Coming to an evaluation of the fundamental teaching of  
 36 *naiṣkarmya* from the perspective of *prahasann iva*, we think that  
 37 Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter—that purposely stands in contrast to  
 38 Arjuna's despondency—is revelatory of the lord's *līlā*, pointing to  
 39 the proper attitude that our hero and all humans should cultivate  
 40



toward action. Indeed, god is constantly engaged in the manifesta- 1  
tion, maintenance, and dissolution of the cosmos and yet "action 2  
does not stain him" (*na mām karmāṇi limpanti; BhG 4.14*) since his 3  
activity is nothing but a gratuitous pastime free from the yearning 4  
for the fruits of actions. Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter is indicative of 5  
his perfect serenity in the midst of the sounds of war and sets 6  
the example for the ideal *karmayogin*.<sup>165</sup> Arjuna is called to engage 7  
in action for the welfare of the world (*lokasaṃgraha*), abandoning 8  
all egotistic attachments and being "always satisfied/content" 9  
(*nityatrpto; BhG 4.20*). 10

Even though the term *līlā* as such does not occur in the poem 11  
and its theology will be developed in a full-fledged way only in 12  
later times,<sup>166</sup> Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter signals that he as an *avatāra* 13  
accomplishes the protection of the good, the destruction of evildo- 14  
ers and the establishment of *dharma* (*BhG 4.8*) with perfect ease. 15  
Along these lines, the lord instructs Arjuna to free himself from the 16  
burden of selfishness and to perform his duty as a *kṣatriya* without 17  
any thought of reward, in a spirit of gratuitous service.<sup>167</sup> Kṛṣṇa 18  
gives the example that all should follow in order to participate in 19  
his divine play (*BhG 3.22–23*): 20

For me, son of Pṛthā,<sup>168</sup> there is nothing to be done 22  
In the three worlds whatsoever, 23  
Nothing unattained to be attained; 24  
And yet I still continue in action. 25  
For if I did not continue 26  
At all in action, unwearied, 27  
My path (would) follow 28  
Men altogether, son of Pṛthā.<sup>169</sup> 29

The levity of the lord's *prahasann iva*, his leisurely attitude, hints 31  
at the fact that the world is akin to a stage and all creatures are 32  
but actors in his play. Though each and every one are instructed 33  
to enact their role to the best of their capacities in accordance with 34  
their *svadharmā*, it is made clear that this whole cosmic drama, this 35  
entire material universe made up of the three *guṇas*, is but an illu- 36  
sion (*māyā*) that only *bhakti* can overcome. By surrendering one's 37  
mind and heart to the Bhagavat, the veil of *māyā* can effectively 38  
be pierced (*BhG 4.6, 7.14*): 39

40



1 Tho unborn, tho My self is eternal,  
 2 Tho Lord of Beings,  
 3 Resorting to My own material nature  
 4 I come into being by My own mysterious power  
 5 (*ātmamāyayā*).  
 6 . . . .  
 7 For this is My divine strand-composed  
 8 Trick-of-illusion (*māyā*), hard to get past;  
 9 Those who resort to Me alone  
 10 Penetrate beyond this trick-of-illusion.<sup>170</sup>

11  
 12 The lord's manifestation (*vyakti*; *BhG* 10.14) is commonly inter-  
 13 preted as an expression of his *līlāmayasvarūpa*, given that his "own  
 14 form consists of play."<sup>171</sup> It is by the power of his *māyā* that he  
 15 causes all beings to revolve "as if fixed on a mechanical device/  
 16 toy" (*yantrārūḍhāni*; *BhG* 18.61), "like wooded dolls mounted on a  
 17 machine" as Śaṅkara perceptively suggests in his commentary.<sup>172</sup>  
 18 That everything is but god's unfathomable *līlā* is strikingly revealed  
 19 to Arjuna when Kṛṣṇa grants him the vision of his universal form  
 20 and he sees the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra as well as his own chief war-  
 21 riors enter his mouths "frightful with tusks, and terrifying" (*BhG*  
 22 11.27). As the Bhagavat solemnly states (*BhG* 11.32–33):

23  
 24 I am Time (Death),<sup>173</sup> cause of destruction of the worlds,  
 25 matured  
 26 And set out to gather in the worlds here.  
 27 Even without thee (thy action), all shall cease to exist,  
 28 The warriors that are drawn up in the opposing ranks.  
 29 Therefore arise thou, win glory,  
 30 Conquer thine enemies and enjoy prospered kingship;  
 31 By Me Myself they have already been slain long ago;  
 32 Be thou the mere instrument, left-handed archer!<sup>174</sup>

33  
 34 Kṛṣṇa, the lord of the gods (*deveśa*; *BhG* 11.25, 11.37, 11.45) who is  
 35 infinite (*ananta*; *BhG* 11.37) and has infinite forms (*anantarūpa*; *BhG*  
 36 11.38), swallows all beings with his flaming mouths "like moths  
 37 entering a burning flame" (*BhG* 11.29): he is the director of the  
 38 cosmic play and knows beforehand how it will unfold and how it  
 39 is destined to end. As the supreme lord of *yoga* (*mahāyogeśvara*, *BhG*  
 40





11.9; *yogeśvara*, *BhG* 11.4, 18.75, 18.78), Kṛṣṇa's *vibhūtis*, that is, the 1  
 manifestations of his power (*BhG* 10.19–42), are the expression of 2  
 his sovereignty (*aiśvarya*), which he exercises with absolute ease.<sup>175</sup> 3  
 Man's duty is but to act with an equanimous attitude, devoutly 4  
 offering all results (*phala*) (i.e., the fruits of *karman*) to Kṛṣṇa, and 5  
 leaving the scene at god's appointed time. 6

7 Chapters 7 to 12 of the *Bhagavadgītā* are popularly regarded 7  
 as the *bhaktiyoga* section of the poem, extolling the "discipline 8  
 of devotion" as a path to liberation that is socially and gender 9  
 inclusive,<sup>176</sup> thought to supersede and incorporate all other paths 10  
 through its call to a complete surrender to the lord. In chapter 11  
 7, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that true wisdom is the knowledge of he 12  
 himself, the supreme Bhagavat, who has two natures: one lower, 13  
 to be identified with the gross elements—the mind and the intel- 14  
 lect—and one higher, which pertains to the soul. Nothing exists 15  
 apart from Kṛṣṇa, the whole universe being strung on him like 16  
 heaps of pearls on a string. The possessor of knowledge (*jñānin*) 17  
 is the best among the virtuous ones precisely because he is totally 18  
 devoted to him, whom he regards as the highest goal. Ultimately, 19  
 all divine forms are none other than Kṛṣṇa. 20

21 Herein, the blissful effulgence of Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* can 21  
 be appreciated in the god's revelation that he is light. Thus in 22  
*BhG* 7.8–10, he tells Arjuna that he is the light in the moon and 23  
 sun (*prabhā 'smi śaśisūryayoḥ*), the brilliance in fire (*tejas cā 'smi* 24  
*vibhāvasau*), the majesty of the majestic (*tejas tejasvinām aham*). 25  
 Even in chapter 10 he describes himself as radiant sun (10.21), 26  
 fire (10.23), thunderbolt (10.28), the splendor (*tejas*) of the splendid 27  
 (10.36) with a fragment of which he upholds the universe (10.44). 28  
 Through such splendor the lord communicates the truth that he 29  
 is the embodiment of beauty and knowledge (*jñāna*), exercising an 30  
 irresistible power of attraction toward all creatures since all souls, 31  
 even if unconsciously, long to reunite themselves to him. Already at 32  
 4.37, the lord points out that as the kindled fire reduces firewood 33  
 to ashes, so the fire of knowledge (*jñānāgni*) reduces all actions to 34  
 ashes. Moreover, at 6.19, he states that the *yogin* who controls his 35  
 mind and concentrates upon the self (*ātman*) is like a lamp (*dīpa*) 36  
 in a windless place that does not flicker,<sup>177</sup> a speck of light that 37  
 is destined to enlightenment, achieving perfect communion with 38  
 the source of all splendor.<sup>178</sup> As Kṛṣṇa declares at 10.11, it is out 39  
 40

1 of compassion that he dispels the darkness of men, which is born  
 2 out of ignorance (*ajñānajaṃ tamaḥ*) with the shining lamp of his  
 3 knowledge (*jñānadīpena bhāsvatā*), again explicitly equating light  
 4 and knowledge.

5 In chapter 8, Kṛṣṇa proclaims to Arjuna the supreme reality  
 6 of *Brahman* and the significance of the ritual act, highlighting  
 7 that *Brahman* is omnipresent. He points out that at the time of  
 8 death whoever meditates on the Bhagavat—who is of the color  
 9 of the sun—will achieve communion with him and will never be  
 10 reborn again. Beyond this world that is periodically manifested  
 11 and dissolved is the realm of unmanifest (*avyakta*) materiality,  
 12 and beyond it is the indestructible (*akṣara*) spirit, the highest goal,  
 13 Kṛṣṇa's supreme dwelling place. After death there are two paths  
 14 for the soul: one characterized by darkness, which entails rebirth,  
 15 and another one characterized by light, which entails nonreturn  
 16 (i.e., liberation from rebirth).<sup>179</sup>

17 In chapter 9, Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna that all existence originates  
 18 from him, and yet the Bhagavat is untouched by the ongoing  
 19 process of manifestation and dissolution, he being its impartial  
 20 overseer (*adhyakṣa*). Unlike the ignorant fools who despise him, the  
 21 wise worship the Bhagavat in his manifold forms as the father of  
 22 the universe, the one to be known, the goal, the witness (*sākṣin*),  
 23 the refuge, and the imperishable seed (*bijam avyayam*) of all that is.  
 24 Those who practice Vedic rituals and seek celestial pleasures are  
 25 destined for rebirth. But those who offer their oblation to Kṛṣṇa  
 26 with love—be it a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water—and seek refuge  
 27 in him who is the same (*sama*) in all beings, unfailingly reach him,  
 28 as no devotee whose mind is fixed on him ever gets lost.

29 In chapter 10, Kṛṣṇa states that nobody knows the origin  
 30 (*prabhava*) of the Bhagavat. Intellect, knowledge, and all virtues  
 31 arise from him alone. Everything proceeds from him, he being  
 32 the source of all. To those who love him, he offers the *yoga* of  
 33 discrimination (*buddhiyoga*), the light of knowledge that allows to  
 34 reach him. Having recognized Kṛṣṇa as none other than *Brahman*,  
 35 Arjuna asks him to tell him about his divine *yoga* and the vari-  
 36 ous manifestations of his power (*vibhūti*). Kṛṣṇa tells him that his  
 37 manifestations are infinite and that it is always he that excels in  
 38 all categories of beings. Thus, he is the self (*ātman*) that abides  
 39  
 40



in the heart of all creatures and the knowledge of the knowing 1  
*(jñānaṃ jñānavatām)*. With just a fragment of his splendor (*tejas*) 2  
 he upholds the entire universe. 3

In chapters 8 through 10, the presence of Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* 4  
 reveals itself in the god's *prasāda* or tranquility, in the otherworldly 5  
 serenity and clarity of mind that are the distinctive features of the 6  
 Bhagavat and of the *jñānayogin* who is instructed to plunge himself 7  
 in concentration and contemplation. This fundamental attitude is 8  
 already anticipated at 2.64–66: 9

But with desire-and-loathing-severed 10  
 Senses acting on the object of sense, 11  
 With (senses) self-controlled, he, governing his self, 12  
 Goes unto tranquility (*prasādam adhigacchati*). 13  
 In tranquility (*prasāde*), of all griefs 14  
 Riddance is engendered for him; 15  
 For of the tranquil-minded (*prasannacetaso*) quickly 16  
 The mentality (*buddhi*) becomes stable. 17  
 The undisciplined has no (right) mentality, 18  
 And the undisciplined has no efficient-force (*bhāvanā*); 19  
 Who has no efficient-force has no peace; 20  
 For him that has no peace how can there be bliss?<sup>180</sup> 21  
 22

At 6.8, Kṛṣṇa teaches that the true *yogin* is the one who is satisfied 23  
 with knowledge and discrimination, who is unchanging and with 24  
 conquered senses: for the disciplined one (*yukta*) a clod, a stone, 25  
 and gold are all the same (*sama*). This essential characteristic of 26  
 perfect serenity is later underlined at 17.16: 27  
 28

Serenity of mind (*manaḥprasādaḥ*), kindness, 29  
 Silence, self-control, 30  
 And purification of being, this 31  
 Is called austerity of mind.<sup>181</sup> 32  
 33

Even at 18.37, Kṛṣṇa praises the pure joy that originates from the 34  
 serenity of the soul and intellect (*ātmabuddhiprasādajam*), and at 35  
 18.54 he describes to Arjuna the characteristics of the one who has 36  
 achieved the highest culmination of knowledge: 37  
 38

39  
 40





1        Having become *Brahman*, serene-souled (*prasannātmā*),  
 2        He neither grieves nor longs;  
 3        Alike (*samaḥ*) to all beings,  
 4        He attains supreme devotion to Me.<sup>182</sup>

5  
 6 Furthermore, we are reminded of the lord's *prahasann iva* by the  
 7 importance that he assigns to silence (*mauna*), given that smile  
 8 and silence are subtly linked to one another. It is our contention  
 9 that the moment of the Bhagavat's silent smile—this magical, sus-  
 10 pended juncture that immediately precedes his speech—is in and  
 11 of itself eloquent and “full” (*pūrṇa*), containing *in nuce* the entire  
 12 *upadeśa* that he will discursively offer to his disciple. Significantly,  
 13 at 10.25 Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that “of sacrifices (*yajña*) he is silent  
 14 prayer (*japa*),” that is, the muttered repetition of a *mantra* or of  
 15 the name of god, and most importantly at 10.38 he states that  
 16 “of secrets (*guhya*) he is silence.” The lord's eloquent silence at  
 17 2.10—the mark of wisdom, *jñāna*—stands in opposition to Arjuna's  
 18 desperate “becoming silent” (*tūṣṇīm babhūva*) at 2.9—the mark of  
 19 man's ignorance, *ajñāna*. The Bhagavat's silent *prahasann iva* must  
 20 be appreciated as god's compassionate answer to Arjuna's and all  
 21 humans' anguished cry for help.

22        As noted, at 17.16 Kṛṣṇa presents silence as a fundamental  
 23 characteristic of the austerity of the mind (*tapo mānasam*). It is  
 24 noteworthy that he praises the *muni*, the “silent one,” as being  
 25 the best among sages: thus at 10.26 he identifies himself with the  
 26 *muni* Kapila, the founder of Sāṃkhya and the best among the  
 27 perfect ones (*siddha*), and at 10.37 he identifies himself with Vyāsa,  
 28 extolled as the best among *munis*.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, at 12.19 he points  
 29 out that the one who practices silence (*maunin*) is dear to him.  
 30 *Munis* and liberating knowledge (*jñāna*) are de facto inseparable:  
 31 as the Bhagavat states at the beginning of chapter 14, it is by  
 32 knowing the best of all knowledge (*jñānam uttamam*) that *munis*  
 33 reach supreme perfection. Already at 2.56, Kṛṣṇa had offered a  
 34 memorable definition of the *muni*:

35  
 36        When his mind is not perturbed in sorrows,  
 37        And he has lost desire for joys,  
 38        His longing, fear, and wrath departed,  
 39        He is called a stable-minded holy man (*muni*).<sup>184</sup>  
 40





At 2.69, the silent one who is fixed in *jñāna* is contrasted with the condition of deluded ordinary beings. It is said that the time in which all creatures are awake is night for the *muni* who sees (*yasyāṃ jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśā paśyato muneh*). Along these lines, at 5.6 the lord declares that the *muni* who is disciplined in *yoga* quickly attains *Brahman*, and at 5.28 he reiterates:

Controlling the senses, thought-organ, and intelligence,  
The sage (*muni*) bent on final release,  
Whose desire, fear, and wrath are departed—  
Who is ever thus, is always released.<sup>185</sup>

Moreover, at 6.3 Kṛṣṇa proclaims:

For the sage (*muni*) that desires to mount to discipline  
(*yoga*)  
Action (*karman*) is called the means;  
For the same man when he has mounted to discipline  
Quiescence (*śama*) is called the means.<sup>186</sup>

We have already highlighted some subtle correspondences of *adhyāya* 11 with 2.10. Thanks to a divine eye (*divyacakṣu*) that the lord gifts to Arjuna, the latter is granted the exclusive privilege of beholding Kṛṣṇa's cosmic form that comprises the whole universe within his glorious body and that fills our hero with astonishment and terror. The revelation of the Bhagavat as a mass of unimaginable splendor is consistent with the inherent luminosity of Kṛṣṇa's face and hint of laughter. Arjuna extols the lord's overwhelming brightness by utilizing this beautiful and justly famous metaphor (11.12):

Of a thousand suns in the sky  
If suddenly should burst forth  
The light, it would be like  
Unto the light of that exalted one.<sup>187</sup>

The god appears to him as a mass of radiance (11.17), whose face/mouth is flaming fire (11.19). The revelation of Kṛṣṇa as light is a constant refrain throughout the poem: thus at 13.17 the lord presents the supreme *Brahman*—which is none other than he

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1 himself—as “the light of lights” (*jyotiṣām api taj jyotis*) and at 13.33 he  
2 states:

3

4 As alone illumines

5 This whole world the sun,

6 So the Field-owner (= Kṛṣṇa as the *ātman*) the whole Field

7 (= the body of humans)

8 Illumines, son of Bharata.<sup>188</sup>

9

10 Besides the already discussed motif of Arjuna's *vismaya* — which  
11 also characterizes the narrator Saṃjaya in the poem's penulti-  
12 mate verse (18.77): “And as I recall again and again that / Most  
13 wondrous (*atyadbhutam*) form of Hari, / Great is my amazement  
14 (*vismayo*), O king, / And I thrill (*hr̥ṣyāmi*) with joy again and  
15 again”<sup>189</sup>—what is revelatory of Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter/smile is  
16 the grace (*prasāda*) with which he is ready to fill his devotee who  
17 earnestly implores it (*prasāda*) from him (see 11.25, 11.31, 11.44–45,  
18 11.47). Ultimately it is only through love, *bhakti*, that it is possible  
19 to know/contemplate the Bhagavat as he truly is, that is, as “the  
20 imperishable, the existent and the non-existent, and that which is  
21 beyond both” (*akṣaram sad asat tatparam yat*; 11.37).

22 In chapter 12, Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna that the best ones  
23 among the adepts of *yoga* are those who have *bhakti* toward him  
24 and as a consequence give up the fruits of their actions. As he  
25 points out in 12.6–7:

26

27 But those who, all actions

28 Casting on Me, intent on Me,

29 With utterly unswerving discipline

30 Meditating on Me, revere Me,

31 For them I the Savior

32 From the sea of the round of deaths

33 Become right soon, son of Pṛthā,

34 When they have made their thoughts enter into Me.<sup>190</sup>

35

36 The idea is that genuine *jñāna*, knowledge, naturally leads to *bhakti*.  
37 In fact, *jñāna* itself can emerge only thanks to one's surrender to  
38 the *guru*-god, as is evidenced at the beginning of the poem when  
39 Arjuna surrenders at the feet of his lord at 2.7. But finally the  
40



possibility of such an act of surrender is itself the consequence 1  
of the lord's grace. In verse 12.12, Kṛṣṇa states that knowledge is 2  
better than practice (*abhyāsa*) and that contemplation (*dhyāna*) is 3  
better than knowledge. Moreover, the abandonment of the fruits 4  
of action (*karmaphalatyaṅga*) is better than contemplation and from 5  
such abandonment immediately ensues peace (*śānti*). From 12.13 6  
to 12.20, the lord offers a list of the virtues of those who are dear 7  
to him in which compassion and equanimity play a key role.<sup>191</sup> 8  
In this chapter centering on *bhakti*, the presence of the Bhagavat's 9  
*prahasann iva* shows itself in the meaning of *prasāda* as both clarity 10  
of mind—the precondition for achieving equanimity and contem- 11  
plating the unmanifest (*akṣara*; 12.4–5)—and pure grace, thanks 12  
to which one can resort to the lord and, endowed with faith, be 13  
constantly intent upon him (12.11, 12.20). 14

Chapters 13 to 18 of the *Bhagavadgītā* are traditionally known 15  
as the *jñānayoga* section of the poem, extolling the “discipline of 16  
knowledge.” In chapter 13, Kṛṣṇa defines the human body as the 17  
field (*kṣetra*) and he himself as the knower of the field (*kṣetrajñā*). 18  
He explains what true knowledge is and what needs to be known, 19  
that is, *Brahman*, and illustrates the characteristics of nature (*prakṛti*) 20  
and of the spiritual principle (*puruṣa*). He asserts the omnipresence 21  
of the Bhagavat who is the supreme *puruṣa*, and reiterates how it 22  
is only *prakṛti* that is involved in action, whereas *puruṣa* neither 23  
acts nor can it ever be polluted (see 3.27, 4.14). Herein, besides 24  
the identification of Kṛṣṇa with the light of lights and the light of 25  
the self that have already been pointed out (13.17, 13.33), the pres- 26  
ence of the lord's *prahasann iva* can be appreciated in his serenity 27  
and equanimity: thus at 13.8–9 he extols detachment (*vairāgya*), 28  
the absence of attachment (*asakti*) and the constant equanimity of 29  
mind (*samacittatva*), at 13.22 he magnifies the supreme *puruṣa* as 30  
the uninvolved witness/spectator (*upadraṣṭṛ*), and at 13.27–28 he 31  
calls Arjuna and all creatures to discern the presence of the same 32  
(*sama*), supreme lord in all beings. 33

In chapter 14, Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna that the great *Brahman* is 34  
the womb (*yonī*) in which the lord deposits the germ (*garbha*) from 35  
which all beings originate. In each and every body the imperishable 36  
embodied (*dehin*, i.e., the *ātman*) is bound by the three qualities 37  
(*guṇa*) sprung from *prakṛti* (i.e., *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*). The different 38  
characteristics of all beings depend upon the prevalence of one or 39  
40



1 the other of the three *guṇas*. The luminous *sattva* causes attachment  
 2 to happiness and knowledge, *rajas* to action and desire, and the  
 3 dark *tamas* to negligence and ignorance. All beings are subject  
 4 to the dominance of the *guṇas* and are thus destined to rebirth,  
 5 a higher rebirth if *sattva* is prevalent and a lower one if *tamas* is  
 6 prevalent. But the one who is capable of altogether transcending  
 7 the *guṇas* attains immortality and achieves oneness with *Brahman*.

8 Here again the pivotal *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa's serene hint of laughter  
 9 discloses itself in the equanimity that substantiates his teaching. At  
 10 14.22–25, he explains to Arjuna the distinguishing features of one  
 11 who has gone beyond the *guṇas*: such a person sits apart unper-  
 12 turbed (*udāsīnavat*) and looks at the ongoing operations of the three  
 13 qualities as a witness to whom pain and pleasure are alike and  
 14 clods, stones, and gold are all the same (*sama*). To such a one, blame  
 15 and praise, honor and disgrace are equal (*tulya*). The loving gaze  
 16 that is inherent in the lord's *prahasann iva* is made manifest in the  
 17 words with which he brings this chapter to a close, in which he  
 18 reveals himself as the foundation of *Brahman* to whom a devotee  
 19 must completely surrender himself/herself:

20  
 21 And whoso Me with unswerving  
 22 Discipline of devotion (*bhaktiyoga*) serves,  
 23 He, transcending these Strands,  
 24 Is fit for becoming *Brahman*.  
 25 For I am the foundation (*pratiṣṭhā*) of *Brahman*,  
 26 The immortal and imperishable,  
 27 And of the eternal right (*dharma*),  
 28 And of absolute bliss (*sukha*).<sup>192</sup>

29  
 30 In chapter 15, Kṛṣṇa narrates to Arjuna the parable of the mythic  
 31 *aśvattha* tree, with roots above and branches below,<sup>193</sup> that represents  
 32 life in the world and that man must cut with the stout axe of  
 33 nonattachment (*asaṅga*). He tells him of his mysterious presence  
 34 in the whole of reality and particularly in the heart of all beings.  
 35 He further illustrates the characteristics of the two spirits (*puruṣa*),  
 36 the perishable that are all creatures and the imperishable that is  
 37 called the immovable (*kūṭastha*), and reveals to him the reality of  
 38 a third, supreme *puruṣa* or *paramātman*, the undying lord that is he  
 39 himself, the *Puruṣottama* who supports the three worlds. In this  
 40





*adhyāya*, we are reminded of Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* in his repeated identification with light (15.12):

The splendor (*tejas*) that belongs to the sun,  
Which illumines the whole world,  
And that which is in the moon and in fire,  
Know that to be My splendor.<sup>194</sup>

In fact, his transcendent splendor is beyond the natural light that humans can conceive of, it being beyond comprehension (15.6):

The sun does not illumine that,  
Nor the moon, nor fire;  
Having gone to which they return not:  
That is My highest station (*dhāma paramam*).<sup>195</sup>

We are also reminded of the lord's hint of laughter/smile in his instruction that one must take refuge in him in order to achieve liberation, just as Arjuna did at 2.7. Thus, at 15.4 we read:

Then that place (*padam*) must be sought  
To which having gone men no more return,  
(Thinking:) 'I take refuge (*prapadye*) in that same primal  
spirit (*ādyam puruṣam*),  
Whence issued forth of old the (whole cosmic) activity.'<sup>196</sup>

As he tells to Arjuna at the closing of this chapter (15.19), the man who is undeluded (*asammūdhas*) and knows him as the Puruṣottama is truly all-knowing (*sarvaavid*) and worships (*bhajati*) him with his whole being (*sarvabhāvena*), which again points to the fact that the real *jñānin* is the one who ultimately resorts to *bhakti*.

In chapter 16, Kṛṣṇa illustrates to Arjuna the virtues of those men who are endowed with a divine nature and then dwells on the vices that characterize those who have a demonic nature, describing their hellish destiny. At 16.21, he points out that what one should abandon (*tyajet*) are desire (*kāma*), anger (*krodha*), and greed (*lobha*), since these three are the ruin of the soul, and at 16.24 he concludes his speech by telling Arjuna that relative to what is and what is not to be done (*kāryākārya*), the authority (*pramāṇa*) are

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1 the scriptures (*śāstra*): thus he should perform action in this world  
2 by following the prescribed scriptural injunctions (*śāstravidhāna*).

3 Herein, the presence of Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva*, that is, of his  
4 *prasāda* both as tranquility of mind and compassionate grace,  
5 emerges in many of the qualities that distinguish those who are  
6 born to a divine destiny (16.1–3): purity of heart (*sattvaśuddhi*),  
7 steadfastness in *jñānayoga* (*jñānayogavyavasthiti*), generosity (*dāna*),  
8 self-control (*dama*), austerity (*tapas*), abandonment (*tyāga*), peace  
9 (*śānti*), compassion toward all beings (*dayā bhūteṣu*), gentleness  
10 (*mārdava*), modesty (*hrī*), steadiness (*acāpala*), splendor/majesty  
11 (*tejas*), patience (*kṣamā*), fortitude (*dhṛti*), purity (*śauca*), and benev-  
12 olence (*adroha*).

13 In chapter 17, Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna that on the basis of the  
14 three *guṇas* it is possible to distinguish three types of faith, food,  
15 sacrifice, austerities, and gifts. And three are also the monosyllables  
16 that designate *Brahman*, i.e., *om*, *tat* and *sat*. He points out that no  
17 practice of piety has any value if it is done without faith (*śraddhā*).  
18 Here we must appreciate the fact that through his surrender to  
19 Kṛṣṇa at 2.7 Arjuna proves himself to be the ideal representative  
20 of those men whose faith is pure, *sāttvic*, and thus worship the  
21 gods (17.4; see also 17.14). Kṛṣṇa again underlines that the best of  
22 all sacrifices (*yajña*)—and of all actions—is that offered without  
23 desiring its fruit, since this is what makes it *sāttvic* (17.11). As  
24 noticed, the presence of the lord's hint of laughter, his *prasāda*, can  
25 be detected at 17.16 where Kṛṣṇa states that mental austerity (*tapo*  
26 *mānasam*) is defined by serenity of mind (*manahprasāda*), gentleness  
27 (*saumyatva*), silence (*mauna*), self-restraint (*ātmavinigraha*), and the  
28 purification of being (*bhāvaśuddhi*). Its presence can be extended  
29 to his definition of the austerity of the body (*śārīraṃ tapas*) and the  
30 austerity of speech (*vāñmayam tapas*), which he gives in the two  
31 preceding verses (17.14–15):

32  
33 To gods, brahmans, reverend elders, and wise men  
34 Respectful homage (*pūjanam*); purity (*śaucam*),  
35 uprightness (*ārjavam*),  
36 Chastity (*brahmacaryam*), and harmlessness (*ahiṃsā*);  
37 This is called austerity of the body.  
38 Words that cause no disturbance (*anudvegakaram*  
39 *vākyaṃ*),  
40



That are true (*satyam*), and pleasingly beneficial 1  
 (*priyahitam*); 2  
 Also practice of recitation in study (of sacred texts) 3  
 (*svādhyāyābhyasanam*); 4  
 This is called austerity of speech.<sup>197</sup> 5  
 6

In chapter 18, the poem's last *adhyaīya*, Kṛṣṇa expounds to Arjuna 7  
 the difference between renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*) and abandonment 8  
 (*tyāga*) and teaches that the acts of sacrifice, giving, and austerity 9  
 should always be performed with no attachment to their fruits.<sup>198</sup> 10  
 He illustrates the three types of abandonment on the basis of the 11  
 three *guṇas* and explains the five factors for the accomplishment of 12  
 action, the three impulses to action, and the three bases of action. He 13  
 also presents the three types of knowledge, action, agent, intellect, 14  
 will, and happiness, all dependent upon the three *guṇas*. He further 15  
 explains the actions proper to each of the four social categories 16  
 (*varṇas*) and that depend on the *guṇas* that predominate in them, 17  
 pointing out that each and every one must adhere to his/her own 18  
 duty (*svadharma*) since this is the way to perfection. Indeed, this 19  
 is the path that leads to oneness with *Brahman* and to the bond 20  
 of love with Kṛṣṇa: such bond of love is the supreme goal of all 21  
 creatures. Therefore, Arjuna must rely on his lord who abides in 22  
 the heart of all beings, surrendering himself totally to him. By his 23  
 grace (*prasāda*) he will be freed from all evils and will reach the 24  
 highest objective (i.e., peace). Finally, Kṛṣṇa gives assurance of the 25  
*phalaśruti*, the reward that all those who will study and transmit 26  
 this divine teaching will reap. The poem ends with the words of the 27  
 narrator Saṁjaya, who, addressing Dhṛtarāṣṭra, praises the marvelous 28  
 and holy dialogue of the *Bhagavadgītā* and in the last verse (18.78) 29  
 declares that where Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are, there splendor (*śrī*), 30  
 victory (*vijaya*), wealth (*bhūti*), and statecraft (*nīti*) are firmly fixed. 31

The qualities of calmness/clarity of mind, equanimity and 32  
 sheer *līlā* that the lord's *prahasann iva* reveals are implied in several 33  
*ślokas* of this chapter in which Kṛṣṇa recapitulates his *upadeśa*. We 34  
 already noted how at 18.54 he points out that one who is absorbed 35  
 in *Brahman* (*brahmabhūtaḥ*), whose self is serene (*prasannātmā*), nei- 36  
 ther mourns nor desires. Such a person achieves supreme devotion 37  
 to him (*madbhaktiṁ parām*) once he is impartial (*samaḥ*) among all 38  
 beings. Along these lines, in verses 42, 49 and 51–53 we read: 39

40





1 Calm (*śama*), (self-)control (*dama*), austerities (*tapas*),  
 2 purity (*śauca*),  
 3 Patience (*kṣānti*), and uprightness (*ārjava*),  
 4 Theoretical and practical knowledge, and religious faith  
 5 (*āstikya*),  
 6 Are the natural-born actions of brahmans.  
 7 . . . . .  
 8 His mentality unattached (*asaktabuddhi*) to any object,  
 9 Self-conquered (*jitātman*), free from longings  
 10 (*vigatasprha*),  
 11 To the supreme perfection of actionlessness (*naiṣkarmya*)  
 12 He comes thru renunciation.  
 13 . . . . .  
 14 With purified mentality disciplined,  
 15 And restraining himself with firmness,  
 16 Abandoning (*tyaktvā*) the objects of sense, sounds and the  
 17 rest,  
 18 And putting away desire and loathing (*rāgadveṣa*),  
 19 Cultivating solitude, eating lightly,  
 20 Restraining speech, body, and mind,  
 21 Devoted to the discipline of meditation (*dhyānayoga*)  
 22 constantly,  
 23 Taking refuge in dispassion (*vairāgya*),  
 24 From egotism (*ahaṁkāra*), force (*bala*), pride (*darpa*),  
 25 Desire (*kāma*), wrath (*krodha*), and possession (*parigraha*)  
 26 Freed (*vimucya*), unselfish (*nirmama*), calmed (*śānta*),  
 27 He is fit for becoming *Brahman*.<sup>199</sup>  
 28

29 The lord's smile of grace is insisted upon in this final chapter that  
 30 celebrates love as the ultimate goal of life and as Kṛṣṇa's paramount  
 31 teaching. We noticed how at 18.73 Arjuna declares that his delusion  
 32 (*moha*) has been destroyed and that he has gained wisdom (*smṛti*)  
 33 thanks to the lord's grace (*tvatprasādān*): it is thanks to his *prasāda*  
 34 that his doubts (*saṁdeha*) are dissipated, and he is ready to act as  
 35 he commands.<sup>200</sup> In verses 56, 58, and 62 we find an emphasis on  
 36 Kṛṣṇa's grace. The idea is that in the end everyone is dependent  
 37 upon god's wondrous mercy: that is, his smiling, benevolent look.  
 38 What the lord expects from Arjuna and all creatures is that they  
 39 seek refuge in him, reciprocating his love:  
 40



Even tho all actions ever	1
He performs, relying on Me ( <i>madvyapāśrayaḥ</i> ),	2
By My grace ( <i>matprasādād</i> ) he reaches	3
The eternal, undying station.	4
...	5
If thy mind is on Me, all difficulties	6
Shalt thou cross over by My grace ( <i>matprasādāt</i> );	7
But if thru egotism thou	8
Wilt not heed, thou shalt perish.	9
...	10
To Him alone go for refuge ( <i>tam eva śaraṇaṃ gaccha</i> )	11
With thy whole being, son of Bharata;	12
By His grace ( <i>tatprasādāt</i> ), supreme peace	13
And the eternal station shalt thou attain. <sup>201</sup>	14
	15
All in all, by his <i>prahasann iva</i> Kṛṣṇa manifests his divine mercy	16
through which he inspires Arjuna and all beings to tread the triune	17
paths of <i>karmayoga</i> , <i>bhaktiyoga</i> , and <i>jñānayoga</i> so as to achieve—via	18
the renunciation of the fruits of action, one's love for god and the	19
inner awareness of the reality of the self ( <i>ātman</i> )—the sublime	20
communion with the Bhagavat, which is the consummation and	21
culminating secret ( <i>rahasya</i> ) of the poem's integrative teaching.	22
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## Chapter 2

# Traditional Commentaries on *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10

We now focus attention on the Sanskrit commentarial readings of the *BhG's prahasann iva*. *BhG* 2.10 represents the *trait d'union* between the first part of the text—from 1.1. to 2.9—and the teaching itself, which begins at 2.11 and ends at 18.66 (Uskokov 2021, 72–75). The lord's hint of laughter of *BhG* 2.10 is the bridge that leads Arjuna, that is, each and every human being, to the nectar of Kṛṣṇa's divine utterances that dispel the darkness of delusion and anguish. In fact, it is our contention that the lord's *prahasann iva* is not only the means for crossing the ocean of *samsāra*, but represents in and of itself the veritable end, the supreme goal. Arjuna's surrender to Kṛṣṇa as his disciple is the pivotal point, since from 2.7 onward the poem embodies the unhindered flow of the *guru's* grace, which is as much conveyed by his hint of laughter as it is conveyed by his liberating instruction.

The verses that precede 2.10 contextualize Kṛṣṇa's *upadeśa*, which is placed within an unusual setting: a battlefield where two armies confront one another at the eve of war.<sup>1</sup> While the first chapter concentrates on the causes of Arjuna's grief, in the first verses of the second, Arjuna's anguish and delusion reach their peak. Indeed, though in 2.7 Arjuna pleads Kṛṣṇa to instruct him, already in 2.8 he says that nothing can remove his grief, neither on earth nor in the heavens. Moreover, in *BhG* 2.9 Arjuna states decidedly that he will not fight and remains mute. Verse 2.10 highlights Arjuna's tragic predicament: positioned in between the



1 two armies, he is completely overwhelmed by despondency. And  
 2 it is at this moment that Kṛṣṇa, immediately after exhibiting his  
 3 hint of laughter, begins his teaching. Convinced as we are that  
 4 *prahasann iva* hides more than what appears on the surface, we  
 5 investigate the commentarial tradition so as to obtain further clues  
 6 on its inner meaning (*gūḍhārtha*) and function.

7 If Karl Potter in his *Bibliography of the Encyclopedia of Indian*  
 8 *Philosophies* (1995, 1464–66; see also Sarkar 1975, 190–203) reviews a  
 9 huge number of commentaries on the *BhG*, here we limit ourselves  
 10 to twenty-four of them (twenty-three in Sanskrit, one in Marāṭhī).  
 11 Our choice has been driven by two objectives: 1) to present those  
 12 commentaries that are most relevant to our topic, detailing the  
 13 chief interpretations of *prahasann iva* that were developed over  
 14 time; 2) to offer a comprehensive survey of the *BhG*'s commentarial  
 15 tradition by taking into consideration the main schools of thought  
 16 and their representative authors, from Śāṅkara's eighth-century  
 17 seminal commentary up to the works of Vaṃśīdhara Mīśra and  
 18 Śrībellaṅkoṇḍa Rāmarāya Kavi in the nineteenth and twentieth  
 19 centuries. We focus attention on the commentaries' introductions  
 20 and their understanding of chapter 2, especially verses 2.6 to 2.11.  
 21 Our aim is to map the various readings of *prahasann iva* and discern  
 22 some fundamental hermeneutic patterns. In order to be faithful  
 23 to the commentators' thought, we have tried to be as literal as  
 24 possible in our translations.<sup>2</sup>

25 What follows is the list of authors and works we will be  
 26 looking at. In chronological order: Śāṅkara's (eighth century)  
 27 *Gītābhāṣya* or *Advaitabhāṣya*; Bhāskara's (eighth century) *Bhaga-*  
 28 *vadāśayānūsaraṇa*; Abhinavagupta's (tenth to eleventh century)  
 29 *Gītārthasaṃgraha*; Rāmānuja's (eleventh century; traditional  
 30 dates 1017–1137) *Gītābhāṣya* or *Viśiṣṭādvaitabhāṣya*; Jñāneśvar's  
 31 (thirteenth century) *Jñāneśvarī* or *Bhāvārthadīpikā*; Śāṅkarānanda  
 32 Sarasvatī's (1290) *Tātparyabodhinī*; Śrīdhara Svāmin's (thirteenth  
 33 to fourteenth century) *Subodhinī*; Veṅkaṭanātha/Vedānta Deśika's  
 34 (1268–1369) *Tātparyacandrikā* on Rāmānuja's *Gītābhāṣya*; Ānanda  
 35 Giri's (fourteenth century) *Gītābhāṣyavivecana*; Jaya Tīrtha's (pos-  
 36 sibly 1340–1388) *Prameyadīpikā*; Daivajña Paṇḍita Sūrya's (ca.  
 37 1440) *Paramārthaprapā*; Sadānanda Yogīndra's (1500) *Bhāvaprakāśa*;  
 38 Keśava Kaśmīrī Bhaṭṭācārya's (1510) *Tattvaparakāśikā*; Madhusūdana  
 39 Sarasvatī's (sixteenth century) *Gūḍhārthadīpikā*; Śrīveṅkaṭanātha's  
 40



(sixteenth to seventeenth century) *Brahmānandagiri*; Vallabha's 1  
 (seventeenth century) *Tattvadīpikā*; Rāghavendra's (c. 1640) 2  
*Arthasaṃgraha*; Ānandavardhana's (seventeenth century) *Jñānakar-* 3  
*masamuccayaavyākhyā*; Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's (seventeenth 4  
 century) *Sārārthavarṣiṇīṭikā*; Nīlakāṇṭha Caturdhara's (second half 5  
 of seventeenth century) *Bhāvadīpa*; Dhanapati Sūri's (eighteenth 6  
 century) *Bhāṣyotkarṣadīpikā*; Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's (eighteenth 7  
 century, 1700–1793?) *Gītābhūṣaṇa*; Vaṃśīdhara Mīśra's (nineteenth 8  
 to twentieth century) *Vaṃśī*; Śrībellaṅkoṇḍa Rāmarāya Kavi's 9  
 (nineteenth to twentieth century) *Bhāṣyārkaprakāśa*. 10

Though following a strictly chronological order might be 11  
 helpful in detecting how the interpretation of *prahasann iva* evolved 12  
 over time, yet in order to better appreciate these works within their 13  
 own axiological viewpoints we think it preferable to group them 14  
 according to their philosophical affiliations (Saha 2017, 259): Advaita 15  
 (nondualism), Kashmirian Śaiva Bhedābheda (difference-and-non- 16  
 difference), Jñāneśvar's Advaita-oriented Marāṭhī gloss, Viśiṣṭādvaita 17  
 (non-dualism of the qualified [whole]), Dvaita (dualism), Dvaitādvaita 18  
 (dualism and nondualism), Śuddhādvaita (pure nondualism) and 19  
 Acintyābheda (unconceivable difference and nondifference). 20  
 In this way, one can get a sense of the developing perspective of 21  
 Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter within the various schools of thought. 22

The commentarial tradition confirms the multiplicity of possible 23  
 interpretations of *prahasann iva*. Our stock phrase is placed in 24  
 a crucial position being in between the epic frame and the philo- 25  
 sophical frame, which is the introductory part and the beginning 26  
 of Kṛṣṇa's teaching (Ježić 1979). Each and every author interprets 27  
*prahasann iva* according to his own axiological position: either as 28  
 implying mirth and benevolence or mockery and derision, some of 29  
 them positing that it should be interpreted as a combination of the 30  
 two. Moreover, we will see that some commentators interchange 31  
 the root *√has* with other verbs and play with different prefixes 32  
 such as *pari*, *apa*, and *upa*. The indeclinable particle *iva*, which is 33  
 greatly important in the analysis of several authors, marks the 34  
 polyvalence of our stock phrase since it mitigates the force of the 35  
 present participle *prahasan*. 36

It seems to us that none of the glosses analyzed can claim 37  
 to exhaust the richness of the *BhG's prahasann iva*, though taken 38  
 together they offer us a comprehensive picture of its purport. 39

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1 Almost all commentators link Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter to verse 2.11,  
 2 as Veṅkaṭanātha/Vedānta Deśika states more clearly than others:  
 3 "The verse that begins with *āsocyān* is the content of *prahasann*  
 4 *iva*." Recalling what Bhāskara says, "Great souls usually smile  
 5 before speaking," Kṛṣṇa can be seen as the model of the *paṇḍitas*  
 6 mentioned in 2.11, a term uniformly interpreted as wise men, i.e.,  
 7 knowers of the Self, who mourn neither over the destruction of the  
 8 body, for it is unavoidable, nor over the destruction of the Self, for  
 9 it is impossible as it is imperishable. As noted in chapter 1, Kṛṣṇa's  
 10 statement that Arjuna has spoken "words of wisdom" (*prajñāvādān*)  
 11 is tinged with sarcasm. The lord's irony at this juncture is definitely  
 12 in keeping with his *prahasann iva*, since Arjuna is only a caricature  
 13 of one who is endowed with real wisdom (*prajñā*).

14 Nonetheless, we will see that the interpretation of *prahasann*  
 15 *iva* as nothing more than mockery is not favored by our authors.  
 16 Rather, several of them interpret the lord's hint of laughter as a sign  
 17 of his benevolence, spontaneously arising on the occasion of the  
 18 childish babbling of meaningless words on the part of his disciple.  
 19 This is a subject that we also find in the *Upaniṣads*: for instance  
 20 in the dialogue between Sanatkumāra and Nārada in *Chāndogya*  
 21 *Upaniṣad* 7 and, from another perspective, in the dialogue between  
 22 Yama-Mṛtyu and Naciketas in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. The idea is that  
 23 Arjuna is sick, and his disease causes him to cry; Kṛṣṇa, as the  
 24 supreme doctor, offers him the remedy of his hint of laughter that  
 25 anticipates his *upadeśa*. In other words, the lord's *prahasann iva* is  
 26 a medicine that, though it can be bitter and hurt Arjuna's pride,  
 27 in the end reveals itself to be sweet as pure nectar offering the  
 28 secret of immortality (*amṛta*): the inappropriate inaction of Arjuna  
 29 prompts the gracious, appropriate action of Kṛṣṇa, that is, his hint  
 30 of laughter followed by his instruction.

31 Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* takes place after Arjuna has surrendered  
 32 himself to his lord (*īśvarapratipatti*) at 2.7, when he declares him-  
 33 self to be his *śiṣya*, and the majority of commentators agree that a  
 34 disciple cannot be laughed at by his *guru*. This is the reason why  
 35 in the end Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter appears to sublimate all dichot-  
 36 omies pointing at a superior level: that is, the lord's loving grace.  
 37 In this regard, especially telling are the readings of Madhusūdana  
 38 Sarasvatī and Keśava Kaśmīrī Bhaṭṭācārya. But let us now turn to  
 39 an analytical review of the commentators' interpretations.

40

Advaita

The *BhG* commentators are numerous: some are independent interpreters while others are subcommentators of Śaṅkara's *bhāṣya*.<sup>3</sup> Be that as it may, all Advaita Vedānta glosses are indebted to Śaṅkara's work. In the following section, we examine twelve commentaries starting with Śaṅkara's foundational *bhāṣya*.

ŚAṅKARA

It is well known that Śaṅkara fixed the standard text of the *BhG* in its seven hundred verses, the so-called vulgate version. In his *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya* or "Commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*" (hereafter *BhGBh*), apart from a short introduction that focuses on the purport of the poem Śaṅkara does not comment on the first chapter nor on the first nine verses of the second. Rather, he contextualizes Arjuna's need to be instructed and argues that *BhG* 1.2 to 2.9 is meant to identify the root of the defects that are intrinsic to worldly life (*saṃsāra*): anguish (*śoka*) and delusion (*moha*). Arjuna is overwhelmed by both because, out of affection for his kinsfolk, he is tormented by the erroneous idea of "I am their own! They are mine!" (*aham eteṣāṃ mamaite iti*).<sup>4</sup> These feelings are so perturbing as to subjugate Arjuna's discriminating faculty (*abhibhūtavivekavijñāna*), and this is why he thinks of abandoning his duty as a warrior and turn to a life of alms, as renunciates do.

Ordinary people who follow their duties constantly long to gain and enjoy the fruits thereof. Due to the increasing and decreasing of merit (*dharma*) and demerit (*adharma*), the unceasing becoming (*saṃsāra*) characterized by auspicious and inauspicious births flows unobstructed (*anuparata*). This is the reason why anguish and delusion are depicted as the seeds of *saṃsāra*. In order to uproot them, there is nothing but the knowledge of the Self (*ātmajñāna*), which must be preceded by the total renunciation of actions (*sarvākarmasaṃnyāsa*), ritual as well as secular. Śaṅkara points out that this *upadeśa* begins at 2.11 and that it is geared to benefit all human beings (*sarvalokānugrahārtha*). Precisely in order to accomplish such a task, Arjuna functions as the appropriate instrument (*nimitta*). Here are the opening lines of his elaborate commentary *ad* 2.11:<sup>5</sup>

1        Though he (= Arjuna)—whose discriminating intellect  
 2        was subdued by anguish and delusion—was ready for  
 3        war, which is a warrior's duty, [he] withdrew from the  
 4        battle and [developped the wish of] following another's  
 5        duty, i.e., the [wandering] life of a beggar. Hence, the  
 6        abandonment of one's own duty and the undertaking  
 7        of something prohibited naturally occurs to all those  
 8        living beings whose soul is pervaded by anguish and  
 9        delusion. Even for those who are committed in word,  
 10       mind and body to their own duty, an active engagement  
 11       occurs presupposing an aspiration for the fruits [of that  
 12       action], and with a sense of egotism as well. Under  
 13       these circumstances, due to the accretion of merits and  
 14       demerits, the becoming (*saṁsāra*)—characterized by the  
 15       gaining of pleasure and pain, [respectively] in desirable  
 16       and non-desirable births—is not interrupted. Thus,  
 17       anguish and delusion are the seeds of becoming, and their  
 18       withdrawal does not take place without the knowledge  
 19       of the Self preceded by the renunciation of all actions.  
 20       Thus, eager to teach this, having used Arjuna as a means  
 21       for the benefit of all worlds, the glorious Vāsudeva said  
 22       "Those who are not to be mourned . . ." (2.11, *aśocyān*)

23  
 24       Śaṅkara then offers a lengthy explanation against the view that ritual  
 25       activities and knowledge are equally involved in the attainment  
 26       of liberation (*karmajñānasamuccaya*; BhG1 2000, 74; BhG3 1936, 41;  
 27       BhG4 2015, 33–40). At the end of his commentary on this verse  
 28       (BhG1 2000, 79), he calls Arjuna *mūḍha*, which means "deluded,"  
 29       someone who, being the victim of delusion (*moha*), is lost in igno-  
 30       rance. According to Śaṅkara, "those who are not to be mourned"  
 31       (*aśocya*) are Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and the other heroes arrayed on the  
 32       opposite side. They are *aśocya* for two reasons: from the point of  
 33       view of *dharma*, their conduct is faultless; from the absolute point  
 34       of view, they are ultimately nothing but *ātman*, the immortal Self.  
 35       Therefore, there is no point in mourning for them.<sup>6</sup> Arjuna does  
 36       so because he is utterly confused, though he thinks he is saying  
 37       wise words, words that are usually pronounced by sages.<sup>7</sup> Śaṅkara  
 38       paraphrases Kṛṣṇa's words to Arjuna as follows:

39  
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Like a madman, you show in yourself both foolishness 1  
 and wisdom, which are [mutually] opposed (*tad etat* 2  
*maudhyaṃ pañḍityaṃ ca viruddham ātmani darśayasy unmatta* 3  
*iva ity abhiprāyaḥ* |). True sages (*pañḍita*), knowers of the 4  
 Self, neither grieve for the departed nor for the living. 5  
 Moreover, this wisdom (*pañḍā*) is a kind of thought 6  
 (*buddhi*)—namely a cognitive tendency, an understand- 7  
 ing—whose specific content is the Self (*ātmaviśayā*), as 8  
 stated by the *śruti*: “Thus, having surpassed wisdom . . .” 9  
 (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.1)<sup>8</sup> 10

Though Śaṅkara does not gloss 2.10, it is clear that for him Kṛṣṇa’s 12  
 hint of laughter is part and parcel of his essential teaching at 13  
 2.11. It is its prelude but also, we surmise, its embodied content. 14  
 Indeed, Kṛṣṇa’s *prahasann iva* foreshadows the uprooting of *śoka* 15  
 and *moha*: it expresses the lord’s sublime ease, which announces 16  
 the doctrine of *naiṣkarmya* and the renunciation of all actions that 17  
 ultimately leads to *ātmajñāna*. As Kṛṣṇa’s hint of laughter informs 18  
 his teaching throughout the poem, it can similarly be argued that 19  
 it incapsulates Śaṅkara’s own commentarial position. 20

### *Ānanda Giri*

*Ānanda Giri* appears to be somewhat later than Anubhūti- 24  
 varūpācārya and is surely indebted to him.<sup>9</sup> He wrote the *Gītābhāṣya-* 25  
*vivecana* or “Examination of the Commentary on the *BhG*,” a detailed 26  
 gloss on the *BhGBh*. In his reading of Śaṅkara’s introduction, he 27  
 glosses the opening verses and clears up various points. At the 28  
 beginning of his commentary to *BhGBh* 2.1, he says that the first 29  
 chapter and the first verses of the second are self-evident and that 30  
 the subject of the *BhG* is the double “firm point of view” (*niṣṭhā*) 31  
 which represents the goal (*sādhyā*) as well as the method (*sādhana*) 32  
 of final realization. 33

In his commentary to *BhG* 2.10,<sup>10</sup> he elucidates *prahasann* 34  
*iva* as follows: *upāhasaṃ kurvann iva tadāśvoāsārtham*, “‘with a hint 35  
 of laughter,’ [that is] ridiculing [him] (*upāhasa*) in order to make 36  
 him believe [in himself].” Here mockery is a means through 37  
 which Kṛṣṇa stimulates Arjuna’s reaction, so that he may regain 38



1 confidence. Since Śaṅkara's commentary to 2.11 is quite detailed,  
 2 Ānanda Giri's gloss is even longer. Useful in highlighting the pur-  
 3 port of 2.10 is the *incipit* of Ānanda Giri's work, where he states  
 4 that *BhG* 1.1 is an independent verse, the function of which is  
 5 to connect (*sambandha*) the *BhG* with the rest of the *Mahābhārata*.  
 6 Then, from 1.2 to 2.9, we have a section (*vākya*) that is meant  
 7 to show that anguish (*śoka*) and delusion (*moha*)—the seeds of  
 8 *saṃsāra*—are brought about by ignorance of the Self, and there-  
 9 fore must be removed (*ātmājñānotthanirvartanīyaśokamohākhyā*  
 10 *saṃsārabhījapradarśanaparatoam*). At this point Ānanda Giri says that  
 11 *BhG* 2.10 represents a transition in the text, which is especially  
 12 helpful in opening up to the rest of the poem, which begins at  
 13 2.11 and is dedicated to teaching correct knowledge so as to dispel  
 14 becoming and transmigration, along with its cause (*sahetukasamśaran-*  
 15 *irvartakasamyagjñānopadeśe tātparyam*).<sup>11</sup> In his interpretation of  
 16 2.11, Ānanda Giri closely follows Śaṅkara's commentary. What is  
 17 remarkable is the independent status he attributes to 2.10, which he  
 18 views as a bridge between the causes of *saṃsāric* disease—anguish  
 19 (*śoka*), delusion (*moha*) and ultimately ignorance (*ajñāna*)—and their  
 20 antidote, namely the knowledge of the Self.

### 22 *Daivajña Paṇḍita Sūrya*

24 This author wrote the *Paramārthaprapā* or “The Fountain (= Bestower)  
 25 of the Supreme Aim,” a subcommentary to Śaṅkara's *BhGBh*. While  
 26 it is not easy to determine its date, there is a close relation between  
 27 this text and Sadānanda Yogīndra's *Bhāvaprakāśa*. This might sug-  
 28 gest an indebtedness of the latter to the former. In addition, the  
 29 same topics are also dealt with by Śaṅkarānanda (*BhG2* 2001, 55).

30 In the introduction to the *Paramārthaprapā* (*BhG2* 2001, 12–13),  
 31 Paṇḍita Sūrya—like Sadānanda—points out a correspondence  
 32 between the initial verses of the *BhG* and the four preliminary  
 33 requirements (*sāadhanacatuṣṭaya*) of Advaita Vedānta: “discrimination  
 34 between permanent and impermanent entities” (*nityānityavastu-*  
 35 *viveka*; 1.38c, 1.26c); “detachment from the enjoyments of the here-  
 36 world and the after-world” (*ihāmutraphalabhogavirāga*; 1.35c); “trust  
 37 in the words of the *guru* and the deity” (*gurudaivataavākyaaviśvāsa*;  
 38 2.7c); “the longing for release” (*mumukṣājuṣa*).<sup>12</sup> He notes that  
 39 detachment has already arisen (*utpannavairāgya*) in Arjuna, hence  
 40



he is eligible for the knowledge (*jñānādhikārin*) that Kṛṣṇa is about to offer.<sup>13</sup> *Ad BhG* 2.10, Paṇḍita Sūrya says:

Hereafter the glorious lord spoke to Arjuna—*tam uvāca*—who, having decided—due to anguish—“I will not fight!” (2.9), remained silent. The lord of the sense faculties, who knows the inner purports [of all living beings], with a hint of laughter, spoke these words to Arjuna, as if they were filled with mockery. [Doubt:] Although on that occasion of grief no laugh happened, then how come does he say “with a hint of laughter”? [Reply:] On this [issue] it must be pointed out that [in Arjuna’s case] the arousal of anguish is not justified, because it is seen that anguish arises only when afflicted people or orphans are killed. In the case under examination Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, Duryodhana and all the other [Kauravas] who do not reckon even Śakra (= Indra) as a hero, engage themselves [in fighting] following their own martial duty, and [clearly] not out of stupidity! Then, how can they be considered as reservoirs of pity? [. . .] Therefore, the said cause of anguish is a mere deception which has no place along the liberating path of non-action (*naiṣkarmya*). This is why [Kṛṣṇa] spoke with a slightly smiling face: this is the meaning.<sup>14</sup>

In this passage, Paṇḍita Sūrya links the lord’s *prahasann iva* to Arjuna’s inappropriate reaction when faced with his martial duty. The emphasis is placed on the impropriety (*anaucitya*) of Arjuna’s anguish, in particular his misplaced pity toward his enemies, which inevitably triggers Kṛṣṇa’s reaction: his hint of laughter at the hero’s *anaucitya*.

### *Śrīveṅkaṭanātha*

Another important gloss on the *BhGBh* is the *Brahmānandagiri* or “The Mountain of the Bliss of *Brahman*” (*BhG1* 2000). Unlike the Viśiṣṭādvaita author, this Śrīveṅkaṭanātha was a younger contemporary of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. As a matter of fact, the *Brahmānandagiri* quotes and criticizes Madhusūdana’s *Gūḍhārthadīpikā*

1 (hereafter *GAD*) in several places.<sup>15</sup> Śrīveṅkaṭanātha was probably  
 2 a disciple of Nṛsiṃhāśrama (sixteenth century) and the teacher  
 3 of Dharmarāja Adhvarin (seventeenth to eighteenth century), the  
 4 author of the well-known primer *Vedāntaparibhāṣā* (Pellegrini 2018,  
 5 589–99).

6 In his gloss *ad BhG 2.7* (BhG1 2000, 69), Śrīveṅkaṭanātha writes  
 7 that in the world, namely in ordinary conversation, whoever asks  
 8 for instruction without a sincere desire is ignored by the interloc-  
 9 ator, since he/she is not really eager to listen attentively to his/  
 10 her words (*loke hy aśiṣyabhāveṇa pṛcchan vaktrā svoktārthānavadhāraṇe*  
 11 *saty upekṣyate*). On the contrary, Arjuna is definitely anguished and  
 12 so he asks with the proper feeling and a sincere desire to know:  
 13 he is a true disciple, and this is the reason why he is not ignored.  
 14 Hence, the duty (*dharma*) of Kṛṣṇa is to teach, and, through the  
 15 use of various tools, to make his disciple understand things prop-  
 16 erly. Śrīveṅkaṭanātha further points out that in saying *gurūn hatvā*  
 17 at *BhG 2.5*, Arjuna perceives himself as a disciple of Bhīṣma and  
 18 Droṇa too. Then, why is it that Kṛṣṇa accepts him as his own  
 19 *śiṣya*? Śrīveṅkaṭanātha observes that this is due to the fact that at  
 20 *BhG 2.7* Arjuna has completely surrendered himself to him (*tvāṃ*  
 21 *prapannam*): Arjuna has taken refuge in Kṛṣṇa (*śaraṇāgatam*) and this  
 22 act of total surrender occurs only when there is no other way out.<sup>16</sup>

23 Śrīveṅkaṭanātha's commentary on *BhG 2.10* (BhG1 2000, 73)  
 24 is quite elaborate. The anguish tormenting Arjuna is not like the  
 25 uneasiness commonly experienced in everyday life, which sooner  
 26 or later fades away. Arjuna's is a different kind of anguish, deeper  
 27 and stronger. In order to show this, the text uses the present active  
 28 participle *viśīdantam*. Had such a despondency occurred during the  
 29 battle, it could have been solved at the opportune moment; on the  
 30 contrary, it occurs when the two armies are facing each other, and  
 31 the heroes—weapons in hand—are about to fight. This is why  
 32 Arjuna's anguish is a big problem.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, despite the diffi-  
 33 culty of the situation the text introduces a note of lightheartedness  
 34 with the expression *prahasann iva*,<sup>18</sup> meaning "uttering a sentence  
 35 of mockery" (*parihāsavākyaṃ vadann ity arthaḥ*).<sup>19</sup>

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[Moreover,] since Arjuna is not rendering a true service to  
 his forefathers, at every step there are some enunciations  
 of mockery (*parihāsa*) by the glorious lord to Arjuna. Thus,



even during [such] crisis, the glorious lord—desirous of dispelling it—in a mocking mood pronounced these words—beginning with *aśocyān* (2.11)—the meaning of which is very profound, being the very essence of the whole Vedānta (= the *Upaniṣads*). Moreover, if in the world it is well known that mockery results in amusing pleasure, herein for Arjuna this [very circumstance] results in generating the knowledge of reality. Hence, in the expression *prahasann iva* the indeclinable *iva* [is used] to highlight its difference from ordinary mockery. Through the word *Hṛṣīkeśa* (= “controller of the sense faculties”) what is conveyed is that for the one who stimulates every cognition<sup>20</sup> it is easy to generate knowledge even with a simple laugh (*hāsa*).<sup>21</sup>

The idea is that through his *parihāsa* the lord conveys a reprimand which is meant to shake Arjuna’s conscience. To be sure, Kṛṣṇa’s intention is not one of mere derision for it aims at awakening his disciple. Thus the lord’s hint of laughter ultimately displays his grace toward his *śiṣya*.

Śrīveṅkaṭānātha’s interpretation of *BhG* 2.11 (*BhG1* 2000, 81–82) begins with a further explanation of *prahasann iva*:<sup>22</sup> “Henceforth Kṛṣṇa, not seeing any other means for the emancipation of Arjuna—who was deeply immersed in the sea of illusion—than the knowledge of the reality of the Self, extended the mockery (*apahāsa*) directed toward him, expressed through the *prahasann iva* of the preceding verse, and revealed such knowledge of the reality of the Self.” All in all, Śrīveṅkaṭānātha interprets *prahasann iva* as an expression of cheerful derision. While in a worldly context a mocking attitude is intended to ridicule someone, here its aim is nothing but supreme knowledge. The indeclinable *iva* is used precisely to mark this difference. Kṛṣṇa is the almighty inner controller and his *prahasann iva* highlights the ease with which he is able to bring about liberating gnosis. As we shall see in the next chapter, one of the possible semantic nuances of the stock phrase *prahasann iva* has to do with one’s effortless in accomplishing even the toughest task. Such ease reminds us of a well-known passage from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.4.10)<sup>23</sup> that is often quoted by Vedānta authors in order to show that the supreme being manifests

1 everything without any effort. In turn, this is reminiscent of the  
 2 notion of *līlā* or “divine sport,” the lighthearted attitude through  
 3 which god carries out every action—starting with the manifesta-  
 4 tion of the universe—for pure amusement (see *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.33:  
 5 *lokavat tu līlākaivalyam*).

6 Śrīveṅkaṭanātha asks himself: how is it possible that Kṛṣṇa  
 7 bestows his *upadeśa* in this atmosphere of war and convulsion? And  
 8 how can Arjuna benefit from his teaching, given the circumstances?  
 9 He answers these questions by saying that for the blessed lord  
 10 (*bhagavat*) spatial and temporal conditions are ultimately insigni-  
 11 ficant.<sup>24</sup> He then proceeds to analyze *BhG* 2.11 viewing it as a  
 12 summary of the poem's entire teaching (*BhG* 2000, 81). He calls it  
 13 the “seed-verse” (*bījaśloka*) and says that whatever was spoken by  
 14 Arjuna in the first chapter is summarized in the first word of this  
 15 verse (i.e., *asocyān*). The second word—*anvaśocaḥ*—sums up what  
 16 had been said from the beginning of the second chapter to verse 2.4.  
 17 The second part of 2.11 is said to encapsulate the knowledge of the  
 18 reality of the nondual Self that the lord will expound throughout  
 19 the subsequent chapters.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, the aim of the text is to dispel  
 20 all anguish and delusion in conformity with several passages of  
 21 the *śruti*:<sup>26</sup> “Therefore, just as the entire shape of a tree is [hidden]  
 22 in a seed, since the meaning of the entire *Bhagavadgītā* is included  
 23 here [in 2.11], this is the “seed-verse”: this is the secret behind the  
 24 *Bhagavadgītā*.”<sup>27</sup> Śrīveṅkaṭanātha points out that although Arjuna  
 25 seems to speak wise words, he is not wise at all. As evidenced in  
 26 *BhG* 2.7b (*prcchāmi tvāṅṅ dharmasammūḍhacetāḥ*) and 2.7d (*śiṣyas te*  
 27 *'haṃ sādhi māṅṅ tvāṅṅ prapannam*), he is not behaving like a wise  
 28 man. He is not even respecting the proper boundaries of a disci-  
 29 ple (*śiṣyamaryādā*) since he decides to leave the battle (*na yotsye*,  
 30 *BhG* 2.9c) without resorting to his teacher. Arjuna's feelings and  
 31 behavior—a mixture of foolishness (*mauḍhya*) and wisdom (*prā-*  
 32 *jñatva*), discipleship (*śiṣyatva*) and independence (*svātantrya*)—are  
 33 contradictory: this is what prompts Kṛṣṇa's laugh.<sup>28</sup>

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35 *Dhanapati Sūri*

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37 A well-trained scholar who lived between the second half of the  
 38 eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, Dhanapati  
 39 wrote a lengthy gloss on Śaṅkara's *BhGBh*,<sup>29</sup> the *Bhāṣyotkarṣadīpikā*

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or “The Lantern on the Excellence of [Śaṅkara’s] Commentary,” where he quotes Madhūsudana Sarasvatī’s *GAD* several times and criticizes him whenever he deviates from Śaṅkara’s readings (Saha 2014, 291–95).<sup>30</sup> In his gloss on *BhG* 2.10, Dhanapati says:<sup>31</sup>

After that what did the glorious lord do? Then [the text] says: *tam*. To him, to Arjuna who was dismayed in between the two armies, while he was [passively] accepting anguish and delusion, Hṛṣīkeśa, the glorious lord Vāsudeva, with a hint of laughter [that means] “I am happy for you, who are under the control of my authority!,” uttered these words [to him], i.e., the speech which is about to be expressed. Some say: “Like plunging him into the sea of shame by exhibiting [his] inappropriate conduct.”<sup>32</sup> Others [say]: “With a hint of laughter, since ‘Although he is a fool, he speaks as if he were not one.’”<sup>33</sup> [ . . . ]

Dhanapati’s interpretation of *prahasann iva*—“I am happy for you, who are under the control of my authority!”—is aimed at showing that the lord’s hint of laughter is the revelation of the divine master’s happiness, that is, of his grace. Kṛṣṇa’s *kṛpā* descends upon Arjuna who, having surrendered (*prapanna*) to his lord, is now eligible (*adhikārin*) for receiving the instruction. Indeed, Arjuna has come to realize that he cannot get rid of his anguish by himself.<sup>34</sup>

*Śrībellāṅkoṇḍa Rāmarāya Kavi*

Born on December 27, 1875, this author subcomments the *BhGBh* with the *Bhāṣyārkaprakāśa* or “The Light of the Sun that is [Śaṅkara’s] Commentary.” His aim is to establish once and for all the supremacy of Śaṅkara’s interpretation, in opposition to Rāmānuja’s *Gītābhāṣya* and Veṅkaṭanātha’s *Tātparyacandrikā*.

In his gloss *ad BhG* 1.1, Rāmarāya Kavi notes that the *BhG*’s first *śloka* is 2.11 (BhG4 2015, 4). Along these lines, he states that the benedictory invocation (*maṅgala*) of the text is “The glorious lord said” (*bhagavān uvāca*), just before *BhG* 2.11 (BhG4 2015, 15). Consequently, he argues that 2.10 concludes the introductory portion (*upodghāta*; BhG4 2015, 31). Kṛṣṇa is said to laugh because Arjuna

1 is talking nonsense. And this same irony characterizes the lord's  
 2 words in *BhG* 2.11, that is, *prajñāvādāmś ca bhāṣase*.<sup>35</sup> "O descendant  
 3 of Bharata, o Dhṛtarāṣṭra! To that Arjuna, who was lamenting in  
 4 between the two armies, Hṛṣīkeśa, with a hint of laughter—his  
 5 hint of laughter follows the hearing of Arjuna's words, similar to  
 6 the prattling of a fool: this is the meaning—uttered these words  
 7 in the form of the instruction of the *Bhagavadgītā*, beginning with  
 8 *aśocyān* (2.11) and ending with *mā śucaḥ* (18.66)."<sup>36</sup> Significantly,  
 9 in his gloss on 2.11 (*BhG4* 2015, 43–44) he quotes from Rāmānuja  
 10 and Veṅkaṭanātha and refutes the latter according to whom the  
 11 anguished words of Arjuna are the object of Kṛṣṇa's mockery.  
 12 Rāmarāya Kavi highlights that Arjuna is immersed in the sea of  
 13 sorrow and as a consequence has surrendered at the feet of Kṛṣṇa  
 14 as his *śiṣya*. Therefore, it is unlikely that the lord would simply  
 15 make fun of him (*mahati śokasāgare nimagne svacaraṇaṃ śaraṇaṃ*  
 16 *prapanne pārthe bhagavataḥ kṛṣṇasya parihāsodbhāvodayāsaṅgatyāt*).  
 17 Rāmarāya Kavi appears to favor the interpretation of *prahasann iva*  
 18 as the expression of Kṛṣṇa's grace who makes Arjuna the worthy  
 19 recipient of his teaching. On the other hand, Rāmarāya Kavi agrees  
 20 with Veṅkaṭanātha that verses 2.10 and 2.11 must be taken together  
 21 since the latter gives the meaning of *prahasann iva* (*BhG4* 2015, 44).

22  
 23 ŚRĪDHARA SVĀMIN

24  
 25 Śrīdhara Svāmin (thirteenth to fourteenth century) is an *advaitin*  
 26 whose effort is to harmonize knowledge (*jñāna*) and devotion  
 27 (*bhakti*), as can be seen in his commentary to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.  
 28 He wrote a gloss on the *BhG* titled *Subodhinī* or "Easy Explanation."

29 While glossing *BhG* 2.10, Śrīdhara writes *prahasann ivoeti*  
 30 *prasannamukhaḥ sann ity arthaḥ* (*BhG2* 2001, 74), that is, "the  
 31 meaning of *prahasann iva* is having a happy face," without adding  
 32 anything else. The mention of Kṛṣṇa's happy face conveys what in  
 33 the performing arts is known as *hasita* or "slight laughter," which  
 34 is the sure sign of Kṛṣṇa's grace toward Arjuna (see chapter 4).  
 35 The compound *prasannamukha*, where the adjective *prasanna* means  
 36 "delighted, bright, glad, cheerful, showing favor," evidences Kṛṣṇa's  
 37 loving disposition toward his interlocutor (Vireswarananda 1991,  
 38 32–33).

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In his introduction to the gloss *ad* 2.11 (BhG2 2001, 74), Śrīdhara adds that “Arjuna’s anguish comes from the lack of discrimination between the body and the Self, therefore the glorious lord first shows how to discriminate between these two domains” (*dehātmanor avivekāḍ asyaivaṇi śoko bhavatīti tadvivekapradarśanārthaṇ śrībhagavān uvāca*) and then begins his teaching.

Śrīdhara also offers a short outline of the *BhG*. He notices that starting from verse 1.28 the poem highlights that the object of Arjuna’s anguish are his kinsfolk. Though admonished by Kṛṣṇa in verse 2.2, Arjuna keeps on speaking like a discriminating sage, albeit not being one.<sup>37</sup>

ŚAṆKARĀNANDA SARASVATĪ

This author lived between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and wrote a clear gloss on the *BhG*, the *Tātparyabodhinī* or “The Explainer of the Purport,” which closely follows Śaṅkara’s commentary.<sup>38</sup> The *incipit* of Śaṅkarānanda’s gloss to the *BhG*’s second chapter (BhG2 2001, 55–56) suggests a connection between verses 2.1–10 and the Upaniṣadic requirements for approaching a master for instruction.

He argues that thanks to the discrimination (*viveka*) between the real and the unreal, the sharp detachment arisen out of such discrimination and the will to achieve release, a Brahmin who has abandoned every action and longs only for liberation (*mokṣa*) acquires the eligibility to investigate into *Brahman*, as stated by the first aphorism of the *Brahmasūtras* (1.1.1): “Now, then, the desire to know *Brahman*” (*athāto brahmajijñāsā*). Preceded by a reverent approach to a teacher established in *Brahman* and well-versed in the Vedic texts (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12), this investigation proceeds in three steps, as stated by the *śruti* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5, 4.5.6): “The Self, indeed, o beloved, is to be realized; it is to be heard about. . . .” Hence, the *BhG*’s second chapter begins by showing that Arjuna—who discriminates between the real and the unreal and longs for the supreme goal—has surrendered to the lord (starting from 2.7). Moreover, the chapter is meant to convey the instruction concerning the knowledge of the Self and the non-Self.<sup>39</sup> Following the *śruti* passage “Here I am, o lord, a suffering

1 man! Please, make me overcome the limits of grief!" (*Chāndogya*  
 2 *Upaniṣad* 7.1.3), once he who longs for release has taken refuge in  
 3 his *guru* the latter should proceed to instruct him. Accordingly,  
 4 Kṛṣṇa offers his teaching to Arjuna.<sup>40</sup> What is given prominence  
 5 here is the subject of grace that the lord is willing to bestow upon  
 6 whoever surrenders to him. Though Śāṅkarānanda glosses 2.10 in  
 7 a cursory way, the Advaita character of his interpretation deserves  
 8 notice:<sup>41</sup>

9  
 10 O descendant of Bharata, thus at the mercy of grief in  
 11 between the two armies [Arjuna,] in this way anguished,  
 12 [thought:] "These [people] of mine will be killed" [and]  
 13 "Because of the sin of killing them I will go to hell."  
 14 Having Arjuna superimposed—due to beginningless  
 15 ignorance—non-Self and its characteristics on the inac-  
 16 tive Self—which is unchanging, free from properties like  
 17 agency, etc., and [ideas such as] "I am the agent, I am  
 18 the enjoyer"—and having Kṛṣṇa seen him lamenting,  
 19 the greatly merciful lord thought in this way with an  
 20 opposite feeling: "Without the knowledge of the identity  
 21 of the Self and *Brahman*—expressed by well-known *śruti*  
 22 passages such as 'What bewilderment, what sorrow can  
 23 there be, regarding the Self of he who sees this oneness?'  
 24 (*Īśa Upaniṣad* 7)—[. . .] he will never overcome the ocean  
 25 of grief the root of which lies in illusion." Therefore,  
 26 [the lord] uttered such a speech desirous of teaching the  
 27 knowledge of that [identity] preceded by an analytical  
 28 clarification on the meaning of the words ["Thou" (*tvam*)  
 29 and "That" (*tat*)],<sup>42</sup> [. . .] as if he were laughing at his  
 30 behavior [through ironic expressions such as] "You are  
 31 a sage!" or "I think that you possess wisdom."

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 33 The actual *upadeśa* begins at *BhG* 2.11 (*BhG2* 2001, 73). Paraphrasing  
 34 Śāṅkara, Śāṅkarānanda proceeds to explain Arjuna's inappropriate  
 35 anxiety, anguish, and delusion. While Kṛṣṇa points out that true  
 36 wisdom is seeing *Brahman* always and everywhere (*sadā sarvatra*  
 37 *brahmadarśanam pañḍityam*), "Arjuna is without such a characteristic  
 38 and thus he is a fool and not a wise man" (*ata uktalakṣaṇābhāvāt*  
 39 *tvam mūḍha eva na tu pañḍita iti*; *BhG2* 2001, 73).<sup>43</sup>

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SADĀNANDA YOGĪNDRA

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Sadānanda Yogīndra (fifteenth century), author of the popular Advaita primer *Vedāntasāra*, also wrote the *Bhāvaprakāśa* or “Light on the Inner Meaning,” which is a versified gloss on the *BhG* in the *anuṣṭubh* meter.<sup>44</sup> As he himself recognizes at the beginning of the *Bhāvaprakāśa*, he follows for the most part Śaṅkara’s *BhGBh* (vss. 9–10, 33–39; *BhG2* 2001, 7–8).

In this work, Sadānanda divides the *BhG* into three sections (*kāṇḍa*) on the basis of the Upaniṣadic saying (*mahāvākya*) “Thou art That” (*tat tvam asi*; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7–16): chapters 1–6 are said to explain the word *tvam*; chapters 7–12 are said to explain the word *tat*; and chapters 13–18 are said to elucidate the identity of the two (vss. 42–43).

In his commentary on *BhG* 2.7 (*BhG2* 2001, 66), Sadānanda underlines that *saṃsāra* is an ocean of defects (*doṣavāridhi*) and he lists the preliminary Vedāntic requirements beginning with the discrimination between the real and the unreal (*vivekādisādhanāni*). The *BhG* verses 1.31–32, 1.35, 1.38, 1.46 and 2.5 are said to offer details on the qualifications needed in order to have access to the teaching (*nityānityavastuviveka*, *ihāmutraphalavirāga*, *śama*, *dama*, *nirlobha*, *titikṣā*) coupled with the reverent approach one must have toward the *guru* (*gurūpasadana*, vss. 3–7). In verses 6–7 of the gloss *ad BhG* 2.8 (*BhG2* 2001, 68), Sadānanda points out that Arjuna is endowed with “detachment from the enjoyments of the here-world and the after-world” (*ihāmutraphalavirāga*). This means that he is eligible to receive the lord’s *upadeśa* (vs. 12). The brief gloss *ad* 2.10 is worth quoting:<sup>45</sup>

Thus, even though Arjuna disregarded the war, the lord certainly did not overlook it. In this way Saṃjaya replied to the blind [king]. And, having arrived in between the two armies for the war-enterprise, showing with a laugh at Arjuna—who was the victim of anguish and delusion, which prevented him from [entering into] battle—the inappropriateness of his behavior, the lord, the inner controller, as if he were soaking him in a sea of shame, uttered these very deep and essential words, which are about to be revealed.

1 What is remarkable according to Sadānanda is the peculiar mixture  
 2 of discipleship and disobedience that characterizes Arjuna: he is on  
 3 the one hand the exemplary *śiṣya*, the ideal reservoir of the lord's  
 4 grace, and on the other he disobeys Kṛṣṇa's words. Overall, it is  
 5 the hero's inappropriateness (*anaucitya*) that causes the lord's hint  
 6 of laughter, which is aimed at triggering his discrimination.

7 Commenting on 2.11, Sadānanda informs us that Arjuna is the  
 8 victim of two types of delusion (BhG2 2001, 74). Before explaining  
 9 how to uproot them, he describes them in detail. The first kind  
 10 of delusion depends upon the superimposition of the threefold  
 11 body<sup>46</sup> on the pure and unchanging Self. This raises wrong ideas  
 12 concerning the phenomenal world and the illusory notion of the  
 13 Self being the body. The second kind of delusion is that Arjuna  
 14 perceives the performance of his *svadharma* as a warrior as leading  
 15 to injustice. Following Śāṅkara, Sadānanda states that when wisdom  
 16 (*pāṇḍitya*) and foolishness (*maudhya*) occur in the same person it is an  
 17 extraordinary and unusual (*adbhūta*) event. Furthermore, Sadānanda  
 18 puts this question in Arjuna's mouth: "Why do even sages feel  
 19 anguish on separating from their friends?" To this, Kṛṣṇa replies:<sup>47</sup>  
 20 "O [Arjuna], it is not like that! That is not intelligence, [rather] it  
 21 is definitely [something] fit for derision. [On the contrary] the wise  
 22 ones, having heard from their teacher the word whose content is  
 23 Vedānta and reflecting with [solid] reasoning on the oneness of  
 24 *Brahman*, and meditating upon it for a long time, these sages—once  
 25 the filth of ignorance has been annihilated—realize the reality of  
 26 the Self." Following 2.11, the final verses maintain that the wise do  
 27 not mourn neither for the dead nor for the living, be they friends  
 28 or relatives (vvs. 17–18). Sadānanda gives an example:<sup>48</sup> "Just as  
 29 in a dream a companion—dead or alive—becomes an object of  
 30 sorrow but the delusion generated from this does not follow when  
 31 one wakes up, in the same way dead or alive companions—[thus]  
 32 conceived by an illusion arisen from ignorance—do not provoke  
 33 anguish and delusion in the sages that have awoken to reality."  
 34 Kṛṣṇa exhorts Arjuna to behave as a true sage (*paṇḍita*)—namely,  
 35 as a knower of the Self, capable of discriminating between imper-  
 36 manent bodies and the permanent Self—abandoning the anguish  
 37 caused by his epistemic blindness and establishing himself in the  
 38 firmness of the Self's reality. On the whole, Sadānanda interprets  
 39 *prahasann iva* as mockery, without considering the value of the  
 40



particle *iva*. Kṛṣṇa's laugh, however, is not purely for the sake of derision since by putting Arjuna to shame he teaches him that he needs to react and overcome his weakness.

MADHUSŪDANA SARASVATĪ

One of the most important pre-modern authors of Advaita Vedānta is surely Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (sixteenth century; Pellegrini 2015). He wrote a detailed gloss on the *BhG*, the *Gūḍhārthadīpikā* or “The Lantern on the Hidden meaning” (*GAD*), which mainly follows Śāṅkara though he sometimes disagrees with him. An important issue to be kept in mind is the kṛṣṇaite background of Madhusūdana. The verses are widely commented in a lucid style and plain language, far from the complex technicalities of Madhusūdana's other works. Moreover, unlike Śāṅkara, Madhusūdana comments upon the entire first chapter and the opening ten verses of the second.

At the beginning of *GAD* (*GAD* 2005, 7; *BhG2* 2001, 5; *BhG3* 1936, 8), after a long series of introductory verses, Madhusūdana states that the main purpose (*prayojana*) of the *BhG* is to be found in 2.11, a verse concerned with dispelling impurities—such as anguish and delusion—through the performance of one's own duty, which leads to the accomplishment of life's goal. Like the dialogue between Janaka and Yājñavalkya in the *Upaniṣads*, the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the *BhG* is dedicated to extolling knowledge. But what is happening to Arjuna, who is notoriously a valorous man? How does it happen that his intellect is subdued by anguish and delusion due to his affection for masters and companions? Indeed, he wants to abandon the battlefield—the duty of a warrior—in order to follow another's duty—that is, a wandering life of alms: this is why he plunges deeply into confusion. But having secured Kṛṣṇa's supreme wisdom, all his anguish and doubts will be ultimately dispelled. Arjuna will thus revert to his own duty and become fulfilled. The idea is that Arjuna, as the lord's pupil, is the model of every eligible person.

As done by Daivajña Paṇḍita Sūrya and Sadānanda Yogīndra, while commenting on *BhG* 2.6 Madhusūdana highlights the Vedāntic requirements as they are expressed in the *BhG*. He shows that some qualifications of the person who is eligible for receiving

1 the teaching (*adhikārivišeṣaṇāni*) are present in the previous part  
 2 of the text (*prāktanena granthena*). Thus when he comments on  
 3 *BhG* 1.31cd<sup>49</sup> Madhusūdāna recollects the passage on acquisitions  
 4 (*yoga*) and their conservation (*kṣema*) of *BhG* 9.22<sup>50</sup> and equates  
 5 the destiny of a warrior slain in battle with that of a wandering  
 6 ascetic who aims at attaining the *summum bonum* as established by  
 7 several *śruti* passages such as “The good is one thing, the gratify-  
 8 ing is quite another” (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.1). Whatever differs from  
 9 this supreme goal is not the *summum bonum*: here Madhusūdāna  
 10 detects the discrimination between what is permanent and what  
 11 is impermanent (*nityānityavastuviveka*). *BhG* 1.32ab<sup>51</sup> conveys the  
 12 detachment from both here-world results and those of the other-  
 13 world (*aiḥikaphalavairāga*) and *BhG* 1.35<sup>52</sup> underlines this point. *BhG*  
 14 1.44<sup>53</sup> teaches that the Self is beyond the gross body. *BhG* 1.32c<sup>54</sup>  
 15 refers to mental control (*śama*) and *BhG* 1.32d<sup>55</sup> to sensory control  
 16 (*dama*). *BhG* 1.38<sup>56</sup> conveys the absence of greed (*nirlobhata*) and *BhG*  
 17 1.46<sup>57</sup> the virtue of forbearance (*titikṣā*). The idea is that the *BhG*'s  
 18 first chapter is dedicated to the means of renunciation, and—on  
 19 the basis of 2.5<sup>58</sup>—the second one treats the life of wandering  
 20 renunciates.

21 In the gloss to *BhG* 2.7 (GAD 2005, 50–52; *BhG2* 2001, 65–66;  
 22 *BhG3* 1936, 36), Madhusūdāna continues to link several verses of  
 23 the poem to the steps that lead a pupil to approach an authoritative  
 24 teacher (*gurūpasādāna*) and attain the Vedāntic teaching. Eligible for  
 25 such an instruction is he who is aware of the defects of phenomenal  
 26 experience and totally rejects it. Then, as Arjuna does with Kṛṣṇa,  
 27 such a man reverently approaches a teacher according to the rules.

28 In *BhG* 2.7, Arjuna's desire to approach Kṛṣṇa as a teacher arises  
 29 due to the anguish that grips him at the sight of Bhīṣma and the  
 30 other heroes. So, having highlighted Arjuna's aspiration for a life  
 31 of alms, as described by the *śruti* passage “. . . they rise above, and  
 32 conduct a wandering life” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.1), resorting  
 33 to the stratagem of his despondency, with the word *kārpaṇya*, that  
 34 is, “pity,” the text discloses his reverent approach to the master.<sup>59</sup>

35 Possibly borrowing his observations from Keśava Kaśmīri  
 36 Bhaṭṭācārya, Madhusūdāna focuses on the meaning of the word  
 37 *kārpaṇya*. In the world of everyday life, “miser” (*kṛpaṇa*) is someone  
 38 who does not tolerate even the slightest loss of money or goods.  
 39 On the other hand, in the *śruti* it is written that “the one who  
 40

indeed, o Gārgī, departs without having known the immutable, 1  
 he is a miser" (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.8.10):<sup>60</sup> a miser (*kṛpaṇa*) is 2  
 whoever does not know the Self and has not attained the supreme 3  
 goal. The abstract form of the word *kṛpaṇa* is *kārpaṇya*, which is 4  
 nothing but the superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of the non-Self on the 5  
 Self. Due to this superimposition, a defect such as the stubborn 6  
 attachment characterized by the sense of mine has obscured the 7  
*kṣatriya* nature of Arjuna.<sup>61</sup> 8

*Ad* 2.8, Madhusūdana states that Kṛṣṇa alone is capable of 9  
 removing the anguish and delusion of Arjuna, just like Nārada did 10  
 with sage Sanatkumāra in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.1.3 (GAD 2005, 11  
 54–55; BhG2 2001, 68; BhG3 1936, 37–38).<sup>62</sup> Here he emphasizes a 12  
 fundamental point, namely the act of total surrender (*prapatti*) of the 13  
 devotee Arjuna to his lord (see Lester 1966, 266–82; Raman 2007).<sup>63</sup> 14

After this, Madhusūdana focuses on the nature of the two 15  
 kingdoms, that of this world and that of the otherworld, and—as it 16  
 is said in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.1.6—<sup>64</sup> he points out that both are 17  
 impermanent. Hence, what follows is an inferential formula based 18  
 on a positive invariable concomitance (*anvayaavyāpti*):<sup>65</sup> “Whatever is 19  
 produced is impermanent” (*yat kṛtakam tad anityam*). Madhusūdana 20  
 adds that besides inference direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) also proves 21  
 that objects of this world are subject to destruction. More than this, 22  
 all the enjoyments of this world, as well as of the other world, are 23  
 ultimately unable to remove anguish. 24

In the gloss *ad BhG* 2.9 (GAD 2005, 55–56; BhG2 2001, 69; 25  
 BhG3 1936, 38), Madhusūdana simply contextualizes the verse and 26  
 provides a para-etymological derivation of the name Govinda who 27  
 is none other than Hṛṣīkeśa, the one who triggers all sense faculties 28  
 (*sarvendriyapravartakatvena*), the inner controller (*āntaryāmiṇam*). 29  
 Addressing Kṛṣṇa with these epithets, the *BhG* suggests that he is 30  
 the almighty. Thus it is very easy for him to remove Arjuna’s delu- 31  
 sion (*govindahṛṣīkeśapadābhyāṃ sarvajñatvasarvaśaktitvasūcakābhyāṃ* 32  
*bhagavatas tanmohāpanodanam anāyāsasādhyam iti sūcitam*), and it is 33  
 precisely this effortlessness that justifies his hint of laughter. 34

Madhusūdana’s reading of *BhG* 2.10 is worth quoting:<sup>66</sup> 35

[. . .] To him, who—having reached the position in 37  
 between the two armies for war-engagement—experi- 38  
 ences anguish and a delusion which is opposed to that 39  
 40

1 [war], Hṛṣīkeśa—the glorious lord and inner control-  
 2 ler—with a hint of laughter, as though plunging him  
 3 into the sea of shame by exhibiting [his] inappropriate  
 4 conduct,<sup>67</sup> uttered to [that] Arjuna those words starting  
 5 with *aśocyān* (*BhG* 2.11) which are about to be expressed,  
 6 whose meaning is utterly profound, and which throw  
 7 light on [his] inappropriate conduct (*anucita*). By dis-  
 8 playing an inappropriate conduct, derision (*prahāsa*)  
 9 generates shame and such shame is substantiated by  
 10 sorrow. And the content of its primary [meaning] is  
 11 repulsion. Nonetheless, since Arjuna is the reservoir of  
 12 the grace of the glorious lord and since throwing light  
 13 on his inappropriate behavior is done with the aim of  
 14 triggering discrimination in him, such derision is only  
 15 metaphoric [. . .]. In order to express this, there is the  
 16 indeclinable particle *iva*. [. . .] Indeed, if [Arjuna] had  
 17 disregarded the war by staying at home he would have  
 18 not done something inappropriate. But having reached  
 19 the battlefield with great enthusiasm, his avoidance of  
 20 the war is definitely inappropriate.

21  
 22 The goal of the *bhagavat*'s hint of laughter is highlighted by the  
 23 particle *iva*, that suggests that his derision is aimed at triggering  
 24 Arjuna's discrimination (*viveka*). The lord's *prahasann iva* is under-  
 25 stood as an act of grace, so as to stimulate Arjuna's pride as a war-  
 26 rior. Madhusūdana interprets Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter as a skillful  
 27 means (*upāya*), willingly resorted to in order to transform his pupil's  
 28 mind and heart. Indeed, the aim of the *guru* is the transformation  
 29 of his disciple by removing all his doubts and sorrows. In Kṛṣṇa's  
 30 *prahasann iva* there is no opposition or tension between mirth and  
 31 mockery since they both concur to the same objective. This shows  
 32 the inconsistency of an either/or interpretation: mirth and mock-  
 33 ery can coexist since the lord conveys his *prasāda* through both of  
 34 them. Madhusūdana ends his gloss on 2.10 by saying that his last  
 35 statements will become clear in *GAD ad* 2.11. Herein, he writes:<sup>68</sup>  
 36 "Although it has arisen by nature, Arjuna's inclination towards his  
 37 own duty—called war—is obstructed by two kinds of delusion,  
 38 and by the anguish caused by them."<sup>69</sup> Such a twofold delusion of  
 39 Arjuna must be removed (*dvividho mohas tasya nirākaraṇīyaḥ*). The  
 40

first delusion is the superimposing of false identities on the Self. 1  
 This superimposition is common to all living beings and takes 2  
 place because of lack of discrimination due to a threefold limiting 3  
 condition constituted by the two bodies (gross and subtle) and 4  
 their respective cause, i.e., the causal body. The realization of the 5  
 Self is what removes this kind of delusion.<sup>70</sup> The second delusion 6  
 has to do with the defect of pity which afflicts Arjuna, who sees 7  
 in the violence of war a form of injustice. This delusion is erased 8  
 by understanding that—even though full of violence—war is a 9  
 warrior’s own duty (*svadharmā*) and therefore it cannot be unjust 10  
 (*adharmā*).<sup>71</sup> Madhusūdana closes his reasoning by saying that once 11  
 the causes of anguish have withdrawn, anguish itself comes to an 12  
 end:<sup>72</sup> there is no need of any further means.<sup>73</sup> 13

NĪLAKĀṆṬHA CATURDHARA 14

Nīlakāṅṭha Caturdhara (second half of the seventeenth century) was 17  
 an *advaitin* who wrote the *Bhāratabhāvadīpa* or “The Light on the 18  
 Meaning of the *Mahābhārata*” (also known as *Bhāvadīpa*, “The Light 19  
 on the Meaning”), a commentary on the entire *Mahābhārata*. The 20  
*Bhāratabhāvadīpa* obviously covers the *BhG* as well.<sup>74</sup> What charac- 21  
 terizes this work is a kind of formalized expression that is typical 22  
 of the period, dominated by the *navya* style and a meta-idiom. 23

While commenting *ad BhG* 2.1–3 (BhG1 2000, 64), Nīlakāṅṭha 24  
 says that the words of Arjuna in *BhG* 1.37 (*svajānaṃ hi katham 25*  
*hatvā sukhinaḥ syāma mādharma*) are not due to a compassion char- 26  
 acterized by the desire to eradicate others’ sorrows (*na tu dayayā 27*  
*paraduḥkḥaprahāṇecchārūpayā*) but are rather caused by his affec- 28  
 tion (*snehena*) for masters, relatives and friends. This is a form of 29  
 delusion (*moha*), which reaches its peak in *BhG* 2.6 (*yān eva hatvā 30*  
*na jijīviṣāmas*). 31

Nīlakāṅṭha’s gloss to *BhG* 2.10 (BhG1 2000, 73) is very brief: 32  
 “This is about to be expressed [by verse 2.11], that ‘Even though he 33  
 is a fool, he is speaking as if he were not one;’ [this is the reason 34  
 for] *prahasann iva*” (*mūḍho ’py ayam amūḍhavād vadatīti prahasann 35*  
*iva | idaṃ vaksyamānam*). 36

Like Madhusūdana, in his gloss *ad* 2.11 (BhG1 2000, 82–83) 37  
 Nīlakāṅṭha states that Arjuna is the victim of two types of delusion: 38  
 1. the idea that the Self dies with the death of the body; and 2. 39  
 40

1 the idea that his own duty—war—constitutes *adharmā* (*arjunasya*  
 2 *dehanāṣe ātmanāśadhīḥ svadharme yuddhe cādharmadhīr iti mohadvā-*  
 3 *yam*).<sup>75</sup> The lord uproots the first type of delusion through twenty  
 4 *śloka*s—beginning with 2.11—that are similar to the aphorisms on  
 5 the knowledge of *Brahman* (*brahmavidyāsūtrabhūta*).<sup>76</sup> The axiom  
 6 is that only the body is subject to death, so that when Arjuna is  
 7 pained for Bhīṣma, etc. he is completely wrong. This is why even  
 8 though he utters wise words—as in 1.42 (*patanti pitaro hy eṣām*)  
 9 and 1.44 (*narake niyataṃ vāso*)—he acts like a fool. The *probans*  
 10 (i.e., the logical reason [*hetu*] for this) is given in 2.11cd: *gatāsūn*  
 11 *agatāsūmś ca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ*, that is, “the wise do not mourn  
 12 for the dead or for the living.” From this we deduce that what  
 13 is truly desired is the vital breath (*prāṇa*), not the body (*deha*).<sup>77</sup>  
 14 Inferentially speaking: “the Self is different from the body because  
 15 it is sentient unlike a pot; [and] the body is not sentient because  
 16 it can be experienced to be like a pot” (*tasmād ātmā dehād anyah,*  
 17 *cetanatvāt, vyatirekeṇa ghaṭavat | deho na cetanaḥ, dṛśyatvāt, ghaṭavat*).<sup>78</sup>  
 18

19 VAMŚĪDHARA MĪSRA

20  
 21 There is very scanty information on Vamśīdhara Mīśra. He wrote  
 22 a gloss of Advaita inspiration to the *BhG*, the so-called *Vamśī* or  
 23 “[The Gloss] of Vamśīdhara.” *Ad BhG* 2.10, he explains *prahasann*  
 24 *iva* thus:<sup>79</sup>  
 25

26 This is the meaning of *prahasann iva*: [Hṛṣīkeśa], by  
 27 laughing, produced a strong laugh like a common man,  
 28 he became happy-faced, [that is], displayed a happy  
 29 face. The glorious lord—who wished to illustrate the  
 30 supreme principle whose fruit is the rescue of all his  
 31 devotees—is the compeller of the sense faculties, the  
 32 inner controller of all and the beloved of his devotees.  
 33 Having recourse to the anguish and delusion of Arjuna  
 34 as a pretext (*nimitta*), in the lord’s consciousness arose  
 35 [the thought]: “the right occasion has arrived,” and it  
 36 manifested itself in his moon-face. This is the purport.  
 37

38 Kṛṣṇa’s joyful laugh is due to the fact that Arjuna’s anguish is  
 39 the pretext for the lord’s intervention, which will lead his devotee  
 40



to the supreme goal. The god’s laughter makes his face resemble the moon, which hints at his extraordinary charm and beauty. The central theme of Kṛṣṇa’s grace is once again emphasized. The originality of Vaṁśīdhara’s interpretation lies in the fact that for him *prahasann iva* is not just a hint of laughter or a slight laughter (*hasita*) but a hearty laugh. The use of the term *nimitta* is also important since it underlines that Arjuna’s despondency is the occasion for the outpouring of the lord’s grace (see *BhG* 11.33 and *BhGBh ad* 2.11).

In his commentary to 2.11 (*BhG7* 1990, 34–35), Vaṁśīdhara divides the *BhG* in two main sections: from 1.1 to 2.10 we have the introductory part (*prastāvākakathānirūpaṇam*), which is useful for showing that the cause of all evil—anguish, delusion, etc.—is ignorance (*avidyā*). Then from 2.11 to 18.66 we have the actual text (*aṅgī granthaḥ*), where Arjuna is instructed in the ultimate spiritual teaching (*adhyātmaśāstra*).

### Kashmirian Śaiva Bhedābheda

In this section we shall briefly deal with some of the commentators of the Kashmirian traditions<sup>80</sup> starting with Bhāskara. The reason for including Bhāskara in this group is because he chiefly<sup>81</sup> glossed the Kashmirian recension of the *BhG* (hereafter *BhGk*). What is remarkable in the *BhGk* (Piano 2017, 98–99; Kato 2016, 1109) is the reading of 2.12b (vulgate 2.11b) as *prajñāvan nābhibhāṣase*, “you do not speak as a wise man,” instead of the vulgate’s problematic *prajñāvādāṁś ca bhāṣase*. Kato (2016) has offered a precious survey of traditional interpretations of 2.11b and the scholars’ understanding of it, arriving at the conclusion that the *BhGk*’s reading is more plausible, even though *abhibhāṣase* is comparatively rarer than *bhāṣase*.

#### BHĀSKARA

In addition to a commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*, Bhāskara (eighth century) also wrote the *Bhagavadāśayānusaraṇa* on the *BhG* (Saha 2017, 272–73). This seems to be the oldest commentary after Śaṅkara’s *BhGBh*. The *Bhagavadāśayānusaraṇa* or “Following the

1 Intention of the Glorious Lord," was edited by Subhadropādhyaya  
2 (1965) and studied by van Buitenen (1965) and Kato (2014, 1144–45).  
3 Bhāskara's commentary on *BhG* 2.10 is terse and ignores the  
4 indeclinable *iva* as well as the prefix *pra-*:<sup>82</sup> "To that Arjuna, seated  
5 in the said way in between the two armies, who had abandoned  
6 enthusiasm toward war, Hṛṣīkeśa, laughing, uttered this sentence  
7 which is about to be expressed." Despite the scanty gloss, Bhāskara  
8 adds an illuminating statement: "Great souls usually smile before  
9 speaking" (*mahātmānaḥ kila smitapūrvābhībhāṣiṇo bhavantīti*). This  
10 remark emphasizes once more the pivotal role of grace. It hints at a  
11 topic that we shall deal with in our next chapter, namely that gods,  
12 sages, and *gurus* herald their teachings by resorting to a benign hint  
13 of laughter. The idea that Kṛṣṇa, like all *mahātmas*, smiles before  
14 speaking indicates a shared characteristic, herein expressed by an  
15 *upapada* compound ending with an agentive adjective where the  
16 first member is the nominalized form *smita* (from verbal root  $\sqrt{\text{smi}}$ )  
17 meaning "smile." Moreover, the next verse of the *BhGk* seems to  
18 hint at a double entendre given that in place of 2.11 of the vulgate  
19 edition it reads:<sup>83</sup> "You—whose soul is troubled by pity due to  
20 overwhelming anguish and delusion—are without discernment.  
21 You have been seized by tenderness having seen [your] companions  
22 approaching the jaws of death."<sup>84</sup> This verse together with *BhGk* 2.12  
23 (= vulgate 2.11; *prajñāvādāms ca bhāṣase*) sketches a clear picture of  
24 what Kṛṣṇa is saying to Arjuna (i.e., that he is obnubilated and lacks  
25 *viveka*), he being concerned with what he should not be concerned.  
26 Yet the lord's hint of laughter is not meant to be disparaging. It  
27 rather shows Kṛṣṇa's surprise, given that at such a crucial time  
28 the great warrior Arjuna is unrecognizable. The lord's *prahasann*  
29 *iva* is brought about by the disciple's *anaucitya* and is tinged with  
30 astonishment (*vismaya*) given the latter's unusual behavior. Arjuna  
31 being the prototype of the valiant hero, Kṛṣṇa doesn't believe his  
32 eyes when he sees him in such a despondent condition. It should  
33 be noted that in the *BhG* and in the entire *MBh* it is typically  
34 Arjuna who is filled with wonder toward Kṛṣṇa,<sup>85</sup> not the other  
35 way around. Right now, however, Arjuna's discriminating faculty  
36 (*saṃjñānaṃ saṃjñā viśiṣṭā buddhiḥ*) is obstructed having somehow  
37 collapsed (*vigatā vyavahitā vā saṃjñā*): this is the reason for the  
38 lord's chiding laugh (*itaś copahāsakāraṇam*).<sup>86</sup>  
39  
40



ABHINAVAGUPTA

The commentary on the *BhGk* of the well-known Kashmirian thinker Abhinavagupta (tenth to eleventh century) is the *Gītārthasaṃgraha* or “The Compendium of the Meaning of the *BhG*.” Abhinavagupta briefly introduces his work by pointing out that the *BhG*’s first chapter is just an introduction to the rest of the poem (BhG3 1936, 8). According to him, the enmity between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas should be symbolically interpreted as a perpetual conflict between knowledge (*vidyā*) and ignorance (*avidyā*): each tries to subdue the other (*abhibhāvya-abhibhāvaka*). Abhinavagupta observes that there are two types of people who are ineligible to receive the teaching (*upadeśabhajana*): 1. the ignorant ones, who don’t have even a speck of knowledge (*anutpannavidyāleśāvakaśa*); and 2. the wise ones, who have totally eradicated ignorance (*nirmūlitasa-mastāvidyāprapañca*). Any instruction given to these two categories is fruitless. Best candidates for the *upadeśa* that leads to liberation (*mokṣamārgopadeśana*) are the doubtful ones. This division reminds us of the opening of the second *vallī* of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1.2.4), which focusses on the eligibility of Naciketas. Herein, Yama-Mṛtyu points out the difference between *vidyā* and *avidyā*: “Far apart and widely different are these two: ignorance and what is known as knowledge. I take Naciketas as one yearning for knowledge; the many desires do not confound you.”<sup>87</sup>

While glossing *BhG* 2.5–6 (BhG3 1936, 35–36, 39), Abhinavagupta anticipates that the sentence in 2.10 “in between the two armies” (*senayor ubhayor madhye*) suggests that Arjuna is overcome by doubt but has not yet decided to withdraw from the war. This is why Arjuna wishes to be instructed: his doubt is precisely what makes him eligible for the teaching. Finding himself in between the two armies, he is exactly in between knowledge and ignorance. Abhinavagupta does not say anything else on 2.10.<sup>88</sup> What he concentrates on is Arjuna’s full eligibility (*adhikāra*) to receive Kṛṣṇa’s *upadeśa*.

ĀNANDAVARDHANA

For his commentary on the *BhG* titled *Jñānakarmasamuccayavyākhyā* or “Combination of Knowledge and Action,” also known as *Ānanda-*

1 *vardhinī* or “Increasing the Bliss,” the Kashmirian Ānandavardhana  
 2 follows the *BhGk*. Though Saha (2017, 274) states that the author  
 3 is the same as the Kashmirian rhetorician Ānandavardhana (ninth  
 4 century, author of the *Dhvanyāloka*), Belvalkar (1941, 5) disagrees:  
 5 he convincingly argues that the Ānandavardhana of the *Jñānakar-*  
 6 *masamuccayavyākhyā* is a commentator of the seventeenth century  
 7 since he quotes from Abhinavagupta, who is certainly later than the  
 8 author of the *Dhvanyāloka*. On *BhG* 2.10, Ānandavardhana writes:<sup>89</sup>

9  
 10 To the son of Pṛthā who in the said way sat in between  
 11 the two armies overwhelmed by anguish, with the  
 12 enthusiasm for war lost, the lord who is the compeller  
 13 of the sense-organs and of all faculties, the glorious  
 14 of the nature of the supreme Self with its four states,  
 15 with a hint of laughter, [that is] nearly mocking him  
 16 by observing his modified gestures, desirous of leading  
 17 him again to his own [fighting] occupation by showing  
 18 him how the body and its owner are associated and  
 19 separated from one another, following the teaching “The  
 20 removal of the false notion that arises from the idea of  
 21 ‘I [superimposed] on the body is possible,” thus spoke  
 22 to him. This is the meaning.

23  
 24 Ānandavardhana's interpretation of *prahasann iva* as “nearly mock-  
 25 ing” is based on an implicit recognition of Arjuna's *anaucitya*. He  
 26 does not add anything else on our topic.

27

28

29

### Jñāneśvar

30

31 Besides the Sanskrit commentarial tradition, there are countless  
 32 vernacular glosses on the *BhG*. Though our analysis is based on  
 33 Sanskrit sources, we deal here with a single outstanding exception,  
 34 that is, the Marāṭhī *Jñāneśvarī* or *Bhāvārtha Dīpikā*, “The Lantern  
 35 of the Inner Meaning,” composed around 1290 by Jñāneśvar (or  
 36 Jñāndev, traditional dates 1275–1296). This text is rightly regarded  
 37 as the most significant vernacular commentary on the *BhG* (Davis  
 38 2014, 65–71). As Ian M. P. Raeside noted: “In *Jñāneśvarī* we have

39

40

a marvelous text, a tremendous sustained sermon on life with a sweep and gusto, a piling on of imagery, and a development of simile that is almost numbing in its power” (Kripananda 1989, ix). Jñāneśvar was the founder of the Vārkarī Panth and advocated a synthesis of Advaita Vedānta tenets, Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* and the śaiva Nātha tradition.

Commenting on Arjuna’s refusal to fight (*BhG* 2.9), verse 2.83 of the *Jñāneśvarī* ends with these words: “Lord Krishna was astonished to see him in such a condition” (Kripananda 1989, 17). Kṛṣṇa’s astonishment (*vismaya*) is thus explicitly recognized, being the primary emotion that prompts his hint of laughter. Jñāneśvar dedicates seven verses (2.84–90) to the interpretation of *BhG* 2.10:

He said to Himself, what is he thinking of? Arjuna is quite ignorant. What can be done? (84) How can he be brought back to his senses? How can he be made to take heart? Just as an exorcist considers how to cast out an evil spirit, (85) or just as a physician who finds someone suffering from a dangerous illness, as the crisis approaches, instantly prescribes a magic remedy like nectar, (86) similarly, between the two armies, Krishna reflected on how Arjuna could cast off his infatuation. (87) Having decided what to do, He began to speak in an angry tone, just as a mother’s love is often concealed in her anger. (88) The potency of nectar is hidden in the bitter taste of medicine. Even though it is not outwardly visible, it is revealed by the effectiveness of the medicine. (89) In the same way, Krishna spoke to Arjuna with words which, though seemingly bitter, were actually very sweet. (90) (Kripananda 1989, 17–18)

Kṛṣṇa’s apparently harsh behavior, his angry tone and bitter words, are thought of as a medicine, that is, the medium of his nectarine grace (*prasāda*). As *BhG* 18.37ab will later state: “That [joy] which is at the beginning like poison, but then transforms [itself] into nectar [. . .]” (*yat tad agre viṣam iva pariṇāme ’mṛtopamam*). If *prahasann iva* is mockery, then it must be understood as the remedy that restores Arjuna’s mental clarity and discriminative power.

## Viśiṣṭādvaita

1  
2  
3 Other important commentators of the *BhG* are found among the  
4 followers of the school known as “non-dualism of the qualified  
5 [whole]” (*viśiṣṭādvaita*). This school was started by Nāthamuni (ninth  
6 century) and it flourished through such figures as Yāmuna Muni  
7 (917–1037; Uskokov 2021, 68),<sup>90</sup> Rāmānuja (eleventh century) and  
8 Veṅkaṭanātha (1269–1370; Uskokov 2021, 69). Along with Bhāskara,  
9 the *vaiṣṇava viśiṣṭādvaitins* were the earliest adversaries of Śāṅkara's  
10 interpretation of the *BhG*.

11  
12 RĀMĀNUJA

13  
14 Rāmānuja (traditional date 1017–1137) is acknowledged as the great  
15 commentator or *bhāṣyakāra* of Viśiṣṭādvaita. He commented on the  
16 *Brahmasūtras* with the *Śrībhāṣya* and two other works—the *Vedān-*  
17 *tasāra* and the *Vedārthadīpa*—and on the *BhG* with the *Gītābhāṣya*,  
18 also known as *Viśiṣṭādvaitabhāṣya*. Although not directly initiated  
19 by him, he is traditionally believed to be a disciple of Yāmuna  
20 Muni. Due to his pivotal position, Rāmānuja's commentary on  
21 the *BhG* is highly esteemed. There exist two main hermeneutic  
22 tools for investigating his commentary on the *BhG*, one earlier  
23 and one later: Yāmuna Muni's *Gītārthasaṃgraha* and the lucid  
24 subcommentary *Tātparyacandrikā* by Veṅkaṭanātha/Vedānta Deśika  
25 (Raghavachar 1990, xi).

26 Like Śāṅkara, Rāmānuja observes that in the *BhG* Kṛṣṇa is not  
27 simply addressing Arjuna but all living beings who long for release.  
28 The central theme is devotion to the supreme Kṛṣṇa Nārāyaṇa since  
29 in Viśiṣṭādvaita *bhakti* is considered the utmost way for realizing  
30 the divine, its acme being one's surrender (*prapatti*) by taking  
31 refuge (*śaraṇāgati*) in the lord (Raman 2007, 26–34; Uskokov 2021,  
32 73–75). Devotion is said to develop through knowledge (*jñāna*) and  
33 action (*karman*). These main themes are synthetically anticipated in  
34 Rāmānuja's introduction to the poem and find an analytical focus  
35 in specific *loci* of his commentary (Raghavachar 1990: xii–xiii).

36 Like Yāmuna, Rāmānuja divides the *BhG* into three hexads  
37 (*ṣaṭka*). The first hexad is said to be dedicated to the method one  
38 must follow in order to vanquish bondage. For comprehending the  
39 nature of the Self, one must first resort to *karmayoga* and then to  
40

*jñānayoga*. The second hexad focuses on *bhaktiyoga* and its object, namely the supreme lord, his nature, attributes and glories. Following Yāmuna, Rāmānuja maintains that the third *śaṭka* develops the contents of the other two with a theoretical clarification of the paths of *karman*, *jñāna* and *bhakti*. It also investigates the status of *prakṛti*, *puruṣa* and *puruṣottama*, highlighting the supremacy of the latter (Raghavachar 1990, xiv).

In his introduction to the *BhG*, Rāmānuja says that the nature of the *bhagavat* and the supreme aim of human life (*puruṣārtha*) are achievable through *bhaktiyoga*, accompanied by a combination (*samuccaya*) of *karman* and *jñāna* (BhG1 2000, 6). He briefly comments on the first chapter in order to summarize the scene of the battlefield (from *BhG* 1.25 to 1.47) and observes that this introduction extends to the opening verses of the second chapter. *Ad BhG* 2.8, he points out that Arjuna has surrendered as a disciple to the *bhagavat*, thus recalling his *prapatti* to the lord. Rāmānuja’s detailed commentary begins *ad BhG* 2.10. On *prahasann iva* he writes:<sup>91</sup>

Having thus seen him, the descendant of Pṛthā, between the two armies ready for battle all of a sudden discouraged, pervaded by anguish due to the ignorance of the real nature of the body and the Self, while he (= Kṛṣṇa) was about to put forward the truth of the knowledge of the Self as distinct from the body, they being mutually opposed to one another, [to him]—with a hint of laughter—the supreme person said this. [Almost laughing at Pārtha, that is] as though pronouncing a mocking sentence, he revealed to him—beginning with “Never indeed was I not . . .” (2.12) and ending with “I will free you from all sins, do not worry!” (18.66)—what are the contents of the path of action and the path of devotion in order to obtain that [goal] which concerns the real nature of the [individual] Self and the supreme Self. This is the meaning.

Rāmānuja reads *prahasann* as a mocking laugh that is mitigated by the particle *iva*. *Ad BhG* 2.11 (BhG1 2000, 79) he clarifies a few points mentioned in 2.10 but doesn’t add anything substantial on Kṛṣṇa’s hint of laughter. He focuses on the source of Arjuna’s

1 anguish: quoting *BhG* 1.42cd,<sup>92</sup> he says that all the hero's problems  
 2 are due to his identification of the Self with the body, which is  
 3 also what triggers his seemingly wise words (*dehātmasvabhāvopra-*  
 4 *jñānimittavādān*). Rāmānuja points out that those who are free from  
 5 this error, that is, who know that the body is distinct from the  
 6 Self (*tatsvabhāvayāthātmyavid*), do not suffer any anguish whatso-  
 7 ever on similar occasions (*dehātmasvabhāvajñānavatām nātra kiñcic*  
 8 *chokanimittam asti*).

9  
 10 *Veṅkaṭanātha*

11  
 12 In addition to the *Gītārthasaṃgraharakṣā* on Yāmuna Muni's  
 13 *Gītārthasaṃgraha*,<sup>93</sup> Veṅkaṭanātha (traditional dates 1268–1369)—also  
 14 known as Vedānta Deśika—composed a subcommentary on  
 15 Rāmānuja's commentary on the *BhG*: the *Tātparyacandrikā* or “The  
 16 Moonlight on the Purport.” This text glosses the *Gītābhāṣya*'s  
 17 introduction at length, mentioning Śāṅkara several times in  
 18 order to refute him. While glossing the *Gītābhāṣya*'s first chapter,  
 19 Veṅkaṭanātha closely follows Rāmānuja without adding anything  
 20 new. The *Tātparyacandrikā* touches upon some interesting points *ad*  
 21 *BhG* 2.1 (BhG1 2000, 62), where it says that whereas the center of  
 22 the first chapter is Arjuna's anguish and delusion (*prathame 'dhyāye*  
 23 *arjunasya śokamohau varṇitau*) the focus of the second is the teaching  
 24 capable of uprooting them, namely the instruction on *Brahman* and  
 25 *ātman* (*dvoitīye tu tannivartakabrahmātmatattovajñānopadeśo 'nuvarṇyate*).  
 26 In his gloss *ad BhG* 2.2 (BhG1 2000, 62), Veṅkaṭanātha concentrates  
 27 on Arjuna's out-of-place (*asthāne*) delusion (*moha*), which leads to  
 28 his refusal to fight (*na yotsya iti; BhG* 2.9). It is precisely this delu-  
 29 sion that needs to be taken into consideration, not the people for  
 30 whom Arjuna is distressed (*tathā ca etādṛśas tava moha evānuśocyah,*  
 31 *na tu tvadanuśocito jana iti*).

32 In commenting on *BhG* 2.6–8 (BhG1 2000, 68), Veṅkaṭanātha  
 33 points out that a war is usually fought with the aim of defending  
 34 one's beloved. But in the *Mahābhārata* conflict the enemy is one's  
 35 kith and kin: this inevitably generates confusion, diminishing  
 36 the ability to reach decisions due to the feelings of affection for  
 37 one's relatives and friends.<sup>94</sup> Only Kṛṣṇa can solve the problem  
 38 and dispel all doubts by revealing what Arjuna's best option  
 39 is (*śreyas*; see *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.1). Moreover, in his gloss *ad*  
 40



*BhG* 2.9 (BhG1 2000, 72) Veṅkaṭanātha asks himself: if the first chapter is centered upon Arjuna’s despondency brought about by an out-of-place affection (*asthānasneha*), then why is the lord’s teaching focused on the methods (*yoga*) of action, knowledge and devotion (*apṛṣṭakarmayogajñānayogabhaktiyogādiviśayaṃ śāstram*)?<sup>95</sup> It does not seem appropriate to offer such an instruction, given that what the *bhagavat* will reveal is a content that requires ascending degrees of secrecy (*cāyaṃ guhyaguhyataraguhyatamaprakāro ’rthah sahasopadeṣṭum ayuktaḥ*). This becomes evident in subsequent passages of the poem, i.e., at 2.18d<sup>96</sup> and 2.37d,<sup>97</sup> where the lord emphasizes that Arjuna must engage in battle. To this objection Veṅkaṭanātha replies by reverting to *BhG* 2.7 (BhG1 2000, 72). He argues that though the expression “what is best” (*yac chreyaḥ*) is indeterminate, yet Arjuna is by now a *bhakta* consecrated to his *guru*-god, and thus it must be inferred that he has the desire to know *Brahman* (*paramaniśśreyasaparyantajijñāsopapatteḥ*). This is why the lord offers him his sublime teaching. Even the imperative form “fight” (*yudhyasva*; *BhG* 2.18d) must be understood as a means to achieve the supreme goal. For this reason, it is correct (*yukta*) to undertake the teaching. Veṅkaṭanātha then proceeds to comment upon Rāmānuja’s *bhāṣya ad* 2.10:<sup>98</sup>

To [highlight] the suitability for mockery [the pronoun] *tam* is recalled, and [Rāmānuja consequently] says *evam*, etc. [. . .]. In such case there is no good reason—such as injustice or defeat—to withdraw from the war. On the other hand, becoming an object of mockery [is something that] happens when an undertaken enterprise is abandoned without reason. This is the idea [. . .]. Conversely, since he (= Kṛṣṇa) is the lord of the sense faculties, having agitated the valiant Arjuna, with a hint of laughter he revealed to him his teaching so as to benefit the whole universe. . . . since mockery (*prahāsa*) is legitimate when amusement (*parihāsa*) is its purpose [. . .].

It is noteworthy that Veṅkaṭanātha links mockery to amusement, thus skillfully relating it to the notion of divine play (*līlā*). His analysis leads to an appreciation of Kṛṣṇa’s ease and grace toward Arjuna:<sup>99</sup> “[. . .] Therefore, the freshness and ease of the [expression]

1 *prahasann iva*, is [the prelude to] an effortless speech whose majestic  
 2 meaning is hidden in the cave of the conclusion of all revealed  
 3 texts (= the *Upaniṣads*). The object of the word *idam* are the sen-  
 4 tences of the glorious lord that are about to be uttered. Moreover,  
 5 by means of what is indicated he (= Rāmānuja) alludes to what  
 6 is meant by [the expression] 'mocking [sentence].'" The above  
 7 passage reiterates the theme of Kṛṣṇa's otherworldly naturalness/  
 8 effortless. His *prahasann iva* reveals the god's graceful *līlā*, his  
 9 privileged way of communicating himself to his confused disciple  
 10 and bringing about his spiritual renewal:<sup>100</sup>

11  
 12 Indeed, since the verse *aśocyān* (2.11) also bears a shadow  
 13 of mockery, its aim is to draw attention to the meaning  
 14 of the teaching. Simply introducing the text from "Never,  
 15 indeed, I was not . . ." (*na tv evāham*, 2.12) does not dis-  
 16 play the nature of a direct, [benefic] instruction. This is  
 17 what has been said [by Rāmānuja]. In other words, here  
 18 the verse *aśocyān* is the content of *prahasann iva*, and *na*  
 19 *tv evāham* is the meaning of the word *idam* [. . .].

## 20 21 22 Dvaita

23 The Dvaita school of Vedānta emerged between the thirteenth and  
 24 fourteenth centuries thanks to the works of Madhva, also known  
 25 as Ānandatīrtha (1198–1277 or 1238–1317; Sharma 1981, 77–79).<sup>101</sup>  
 26 Besides presenting a dualist axiology and a method of realiza-  
 27 tion based on devotion, the textual production of Dvaita authors  
 28 addresses the refutation of Śāṅkara's nondualism. Madhva wrote  
 29 the *Gītābhāṣya*, which like Śāṅkara's *BhGBh*, begins *ad* 2.10. He  
 30 doesn't gloss on Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva*, however, possibly because  
 31 he took its meaning to be self-evident. After Madhva comes an  
 32 early stage of development of dualist writings that culminates in  
 33 the "standardization of Dvaita thought" (Sharma 1981, 235) under  
 34 the multifarious genius of Jaya Tīrtha.

35  
 36 JAYA TĪRTHA

37  
 38 Jaya Tīrtha (possibly 1340–1388; Sharma 1981, 245) was a wide-rang-  
 39 ing author who won the title of *ṭīkācārya* for his *Nyāyasudhā*, a  
 40 highly sophisticated subcommentary on Madhva's *magnum opus*



*Anuvyākhyāna*. Jaya Tīrtha also wrote the *Prameyadīpikā*, “The Lantern on the Knowable [Principle],” a subcommentary on Madhva’s *Gītābhāṣya*<sup>102</sup> which also begins *ad* 2.10. Commenting on 2.11 (BhG1 2000, 80), he says that Madhva condensed the *BhG* verses from 1.1 to 2.11 in the *incipit* of his work since their content is crystal-clear. Still, an objector (*pūrvapakṣin*) raises a question: as neither *dharma* nor any principle (*tattva*) is dealt with in this part of the text (*BhG* 1.1–2.11) why is it included in the body of the *BhG*? To this the *Prameyadīpikā* answers by saying that the *BhG* is keen to present the context in which Kṛṣṇa offered his salvific teaching to Arjuna: therefore, there is no inconsistency in including it.

Arjuna’s delusion and attachment—his affection (*sneha*) toward masters, companions, and relatives (*bāndhavādiviśayo moho*)—takes the form of this false conception (*mithyāpratyaya*): “They are mine! I am their own! They will die because of me! How could I live without them? I will be afflicted by sin; in addition, victory is doubtful!” (*mamaite, aham eteṣām, ete ca mannimittaṃ naṅkṣyanti, katham etair vinā ’haṃ bhaveyam? pāpaṃ ca me bhaviṣyati, jayaś ca sandigdhaḥ*). Being caught in the net of these feelings, Arjuna is a victim of despondency, which can be interpreted as a weakness of the mind resulting from the anguish generated by bewilderment (*viśādo nāma mohanimittāc chokād yanmanodaurbalyam, yasmin sati sarvaavyāpāroparamo bhavati*).

Jaya Tīrtha then raises another question that pertains to *BhG* 2.10: Why is it that the hero’s despondency occurs just when the battle is about to begin? Indeed, Arjuna was all along aware that in the Kauravas army could be found many of his masters, friends, and relatives. And he knew that the war would cause enormous losses.<sup>103</sup> To this, Jaya Tīrtha replies by saying that though it is well known that when one recollects a great offence suffered from a relative or friend the original rage reemerges, in the case of a sensitive person like Arjuna such rage tends to soften giving way to one’s affection for kith and kin, out of which arises delusion. Nonetheless, as Arjuna is ultimately a sage his imprisonment in the net of *moha* is said to be minimal.<sup>104</sup>

RĀGHAVENDRA

The *dvaitin* Rāghavendra (c. 1640) wrote a *BhG* gloss called *Arthasaṃgraha* or “The Compendium of the Meaning.” *Ad* 2.10,

1 he offers a brief comment on *prahasann iva* (BhG2 2001, 71): “The  
2 word *iva* (like, nearly, almost) in *prahasann iva* suggests a laugh,  
3 revealing the expressions in [Arjuna's] sentences that are objects  
4 of mockery” (*prahasann iveti parihāsakaravākyoktidyotakahāsasya*  
5 *sūcanāyevaśabdah*).

6 In his gloss *ad* 2.11 (BhG2 2001, 75), the interpretation of the  
7 conjunction *ca* in *gatāsūn agatāsūnś ca* is also worth mentioning  
8 since Rāghavendra argues that it should be read as *iva*: “The [con-  
9 junction] *ca* implies comparison [as expressed by the indeclinable]  
10 *iva*. Therefore, dead persons are just like those who are not dead”  
11 (*gatāsūn āsannavināśān gatāsūn ivety upamārthas cakārah*).

## 14 Dvaitādvaita

16 The school of Dvaitādvaita (“duality and non-duality” or “dual-  
17 ity in non-duality”), also known as Bhedābheda (“difference and  
18 non-difference”), had the *vaiṣṇava* Nimbārka (twelfth to thirteenth  
19 century) as its chief exponent. His *magnum opus* is the *Vedāntapāri-*  
20 *jātasaurabha*, a short commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*. Although  
21 he did not write any commentary on the *BhG*, the Dvaitādvaita  
22 interpretation of the poem was later developed by Keśava Kaśmīrī  
23 Bhaṭṭācārya (Uskokov 2018, 2–4).

### 25 KEŚAVA KAŚMĪRĪ BHAṬṬĀCĀRYA

27 The Kashmirian Keśava Kaśmīrī Bhaṭṭācārya (or Bhaṭṭa, c. 1510)  
28 is the author of the *Tattvaparakāśikā* or “[The Gloss] Illuminating  
29 Reality.” It is noteworthy that he did not follow the vulgate ver-  
30 sion of the *BhG* but a text of 745 verses that differs even from the  
31 *BhGk* (Saha 2017, 270). This sophisticated gloss of Keśava Kaśmīrī  
32 is one more proof of how the exegesis of the *BhG* was widely dif-  
33 fused among the various intellectual traditions and all the Vedānta  
34 schools (Clémentin-Ojha 2011, 429). Some of Keśava Kaśmīrī's  
35 interpretations were later adopted by other commentators, such  
36 as Nīlakāṇṭha Caturdhara and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī.

37 Keśava Kaśmīrī says that the *BhG*'s first chapter is essential in  
38 order to learn the causes of Arjuna's despondency since the teaching  
39 of the *bhagavat* that unfolds from 2.11 is meant to dispel the hero's  
40 anguish and delusion (BhG2 2001, 3).<sup>105</sup> In commenting on *BhG* 2.7

(BhG2 2001, 65), the *Tattvaparakāśikā* focuses on the meaning of the word *kārpaṇya* quoting a passage from the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* (1.4.15, 3.8.10)<sup>106</sup> that is most likely the source of Madhusūdana’s similar observations. The *kṛpaṇa* is someone who does not know his/her own nature nor the qualities of the “imperishable” (*akṣara*) supreme being<sup>107</sup> and who is unable to tolerate even the smallest loss of wealth and goods. Due to this kind of weakness (*kārpaṇya*), Arjuna’s discrimination is obscured, and he is incapable of finding any reason for fighting against his own people. With his intellect darkened by delusion and utterly confused with regard to his duty, Arjuna resorts to the omniscient lord who is completely free from defects.<sup>108</sup>

In the opening line of the *Tattvaparakāśikā ad BhG 2.10* (BhG2 2001, 70), we find an original insertion. The following thought is attributed to Dhṛtarāṣṭra: “If Arjuna will abandon the battlefield, my sons will live happily.” Saṁjaya points out to Dhṛtarāṣṭra that it is totally improper for a king born in the heroic lineage of Bharata to think in this way.<sup>109</sup> In the first part of the *scholium*, Keśava Kaśmīrī quotes the expression *prahasann iva*. The gloss presents the construction (*anvaya*) of the passage, that is, that Arjuna was despondent in between the two armies and that the glorious lord, with a hint of laughter, spoke to him. Then Keśava Kaśmīrī observes:<sup>110</sup>

But this does not fit with the son of Pāṇḍu (= Arjuna), who is celebrated as a [great] warrior. The expression *prahasann iva* has been said in order to generate rage [in him], caused by shame. It is not proper to use Arjuna as a means for mockery, because the glorious lord—who is ready to destroy all the [enemies’] armies—being a *guru* and having accepted [him as his disciple], is a beneficial instructor ready to make him turn again toward his own duty. Nonetheless, such speech is intended to produce eligibility for the knowledge of reality by eliminating all pride, thanks to the strength of such an understanding. This is the purport of the word *iva*.

Once again, the idea is that Kṛṣṇa’s hint of laughter has a therapeutic function and is an expression of his grace meant to trigger Arjuna’s discrimination (*viveka*). The lord’s *prahasann iva* is like a

1 bitter medicine, a means resorted to in order to hurt the hero's  
 2 pride, in a way similar to *BhG* 2.3 when Kṛṣṇa tells him to stop  
 3 behaving like a eunuch. The context recalls the episode narrated in  
 4 the *MBh*'s fourth book: if at the court of King Virāṭa Arjuna was  
 5 under the guise of Bṛhannaḍā/Bṛhannalā, a eunuch dance teacher,  
 6 here Kṛṣṇa is telling him that it is time to dismiss such role and  
 7 behave like a warrior. According to Keśava Kaśmīrī, the lord's  
 8 hint of laughter is not meant to mock Arjuna since this would be  
 9 incongruous. Having just accepted him as disciple, it would be  
 10 inappropriate for the *guru* to laugh at the despondency of his *śiṣya*.

11 The gloss *ad BhG* 2.11 opens with a series of quotations from  
 12 the *śruti* and the *smṛti* in order to throw light on a science (*vidyā*)  
 13 whose subjects are the nature and qualities of the supreme *Brahman*,  
 14 denoted by the words Nārāyaṇa, Hari, Vāsudeva, the unchanging  
 15 Being whose nature is both different and nondifferent from every-  
 16 thing, the all-pervasive Self of all (*BhG* 2001, 72). Such a science  
 17 removes all bewilderment, anguish, and delusion.

18 Finally, Keśava Kaśmīrī observes that Arjuna's sorrow is  
 19 summarized in verse 1.31,<sup>111</sup> where our hero states that without  
 20 Bhīṣma, Droṇa and his other teachers, friends, and relatives there  
 21 is no point in living or gaining the kingdom. The *Tattvaparakāśikā*  
 22 defines Arjuna's despondency as dullness or foolishness (*mūrkhatva*),  
 23 even though the words he utters in verses 1.36,<sup>112</sup> 1.44<sup>113</sup> and 2.5<sup>114</sup>  
 24 disclose a wisdom of sorts, as indicated by the phrase *prajñāvādāmś*  
 25 *ca bhāṣase*. However, Arjuna's arguments as well as his superficial  
 26 wisdom are ultimately useless.

27 The *nimbārka* perspective—which is specifically *kṛṣṇaite*—  
 28 emphasizes devotion as the means to achieve liberation. The com-  
 29 plete surrender (*prapatti*) of oneself to lord Kṛṣṇa, who is perceived  
 30 as inseparable from his consort Rādhā, is the foremost among  
 31 the five forms of *sādhana*<sup>115</sup> recognized by this school. Catherine  
 32 Clémentin-Ojha rightly notes the importance of *prapatti* in the  
 33 Nimbārka *sampradāya* (2011, 442): "There are broadly two types  
 34 of *sādhana* or spiritual disciplines in the sect. The first is the com-  
 35 plete surrender directly to Kṛṣṇa (*prapatti* or *śaraṇāgati*) or through  
 36 dedication to the *guru* (*gurūpasatti*), which can be adopted by all,  
 37 irrespective of birth and social status." In the *BhG*, *prapatti* and  
 38 *gurūpasatti* are one and the same since in Kṛṣṇa the figures of the  
 39  
 40

supreme lord and of the *guru* coincide: just as Arjuna’s surrender is understood to be the ultimate form of devotion (*parābhakti*), Kṛṣṇa’s hint of laughter is the anticipation of the outpouring of his boundless grace, of his sweetest nectar (*mādhuryarasa*).

### Śuddhādvaita

Another *vaiṣṇava* interpretation of Vedānta was developed by the Śuddhādvaita (“pure non-dualism”) school whose main author was Vallabha (fifteenth to sixteenth century). He doesn’t seem to have written a commentary on the *BhG* though he focused on our poem in an independent work (i.e., the *Tattvārthadīpikā*, also known as *Tattvadīpanibandha*) together with his own gloss *Prakāśa* (Bhatt 1949, 131). Successors of Vallabha such as Viṭṭhalanātha (1518–1588) glossed the *BhG* or some verses of it in works like the *Gītārthavivarāṇa* together with the *Gītātātparya*, the *Nyāsādeśa* on *BhG* 18.66 and the *Gītāhetunirṇaya* (Saha 2017, 271; see also Bhatt 1949, 131–34).

### VALLABHA

The fifth grandson in Vallabha’s lineage was another Vallabha (seventeenth century). He wrote an independent commentary on the *BhG*: the *Tattvadīpikā* or “The Lantern on Reality” (Saha 2017, 272). The gloss *ad BhG* 2.10 is as brief as it is notable. Having refused to fight, Arjuna sits silent on the floor of his chariot. The *Tattvadīpikā* asks:<sup>116</sup> “After that what happened? [The lord] ‘said to him.’ With this idea in mind: ‘Alas, how great is such cowardice due to the ignorance of the reality of the Self.’ Here the [lord’s] hint of laughter is adequate since he (= Arjuna) is greatly virtuous. This is the meaning.” Arjuna is said to be *dharmiṣṭha*, “greatly virtuous,” even though his behavior is not virtuous. It should be noted that in the final part of the first chapter and at the beginning of the second, Kṛṣṇa addresses Arjuna with his usual heroic epithets. Thus in *BhG* 2.3 we witness the contrast of Arjuna behaving like a eunuch and Kṛṣṇa nonetheless calling him *paramtapa*, “scorcher of the enemies.” This is understood to be a teaching strategy.<sup>117</sup>

## Acintyabhedābheda

1  
2  
3 The last section of our survey on the *BhG*'s commentarial litera-  
4 ture concerns another branch of Vedānta, the Acintyabhedābheda  
5 ("inconceivable difference and non-difference"), intimately linked to  
6 *gauḍīya* Vaiṣṇavism and philosophically indebted to both Madhva  
7 and Rāmānuja. Apparently, the initiator of this school was the  
8 Beṅgālī saint Caitanya (1486–1534).

9  
10 VIŚVANĀTHA CAKRAVARTĪ ṬHĀKURA

11  
12 The first *gauḍīya* commentary on the *BhG* is the *Sārārthavarṣiṇīṭīkā*  
13 or "The Gloss Pouring the Meaning in [its] Essence," of Viśvanātha  
14 Cakravartī Ṭhākura (1626–1708?), a Beṅgālī author active in  
15 Vṛndāvana (Burton 2000, 9–29). At the end of his gloss *ad BhG*  
16 2.7, Kṛṣṇa is said to scold Arjuna (BhG8 1966, 30):<sup>118</sup> "If you,  
17 considering yourself a sage, keep on refuting my words, then  
18 why should I continue to speak?" At this point [Arjuna] says:  
19 'I am your disciple! From now on, I shall no more reject [your  
20 words]. This is the idea.' Then, without commenting on *BhG* 2.9,  
21 the *Sārārthavarṣiṇīṭīkā* glosses *BhG* 2.10 (BhG8 1966, 33):<sup>119</sup> "[Kṛṣṇa]  
22 then mocked him in a friendly mood [and said to Arjuna]: 'Alas,  
23 such lack of discrimination has indeed taken hold of you!' Thus  
24 the lord soaked him in the sea of shame by manifesting the inap-  
25 propriateness [of his behavior]. [Anyhow], on this occasion his  
26 laughing at [Arjuna] who had reached the condition of disciple, is  
27 inappropriate. Therefore, the meaning [of *prahasann iva*] is 'curling  
28 the lower lip and hiding the laughter.'" Again we find the idea  
29 of a gentle mockery caused by Arjuna's inappropriate (*anaucitya*)  
30 behavior. Even for Viśvanātha the lord's hint of laughter is a means  
31 to trigger Arjuna's discrimination and thus an instrument of Kṛṣṇa's  
32 grace. He denies that Kṛṣṇa laughs at Arjuna out of scorn since he  
33 has accepted him as his disciple and a *guru* can never laugh at his  
34 disciple. This is why Kṛṣṇa's laughter is hidden by a contraction  
35 of his lower lip. And such hidden laughter is a manifestation of  
36 Kṛṣṇa's love for Arjuna, as the following passage confirms (BhG8  
37 1966, 33):<sup>120</sup> "Even though by [resorting to the epithet] "Hṛṣīkeśa"  
38 love had indeed inspired Arjuna's words, it is now [Kṛṣṇa] who,  
39 out of love, controls Arjuna's mind being his benefactor: this is the  
40



idea. Indeed, “in between the two armies” the glorious lord has  
equally witnessed—together with the two armies—the anguish  
and the awakening of Arjuna. This is the meaning.” In his gloss *ad*  
*BhG* 2.11, Viśvanātha does not add anything relevant to our subject.

BALADEVA VIDYĀBHUṢAṆA

Another important *gauḍīya* author is Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa  
(1700–1793?), a later follower of Caitanya who, along with a com-  
mentary on the *Brahmasūtras* known as *Govindabhāṣya*, wrote a  
commentary on the *Gītā*, the *Gītābhūṣaṇa* or “The Ornament of the  
*Gītā*.” *Ad* 2.7, while elaborating on Viśvanātha’s commentary, he  
quotes some passages from the *śruti*<sup>121</sup> and emphasizes the need  
to become the disciple of a master. Baladeva interprets the word  
*kārpanya* as meaning “not knowing *Brahman*” (*abrahmavittva*): this  
is the problem that afflicts Arjuna and prevents him from accom-  
plishing his duty. His interpretation of *BhG* 2.10 follows that of  
Viśvanātha (*BhG8* 1966, 33):<sup>122</sup>

[. . .] To Arjuna who had spoken in an inappropriate  
way being immersed in the sea of doubt and who  
was in anguish, [the lord,] smiling in a friendly mood,  
[said]: “Alas, is this your discrimination . . . ?” This is  
the meaning. [The word] *iva* [means that,] since at that  
moment he (= Arjuna) had reached discipleship, then a  
[mocking] laugh was improper. This is why the meaning  
is “with his lower lip trembling a bit.” In order to point  
out that Arjuna’s anguish and the [consequent] teaching  
of the glorious lord can be experienced by all, [the verse  
states] this: “Between the two armies.”

Through the words “who had spoken in an inappropriate way  
being immersed in the sea of doubt” (*anaucityabhāṣitoena trapāsindhau*  
*nimajjayan ity arthah*), the inappropriateness (*anaucitya*) that occa-  
sions Kṛṣṇa’s *prahasann iva* is once again emphasized. Baladeva’s  
understanding of *prahasann iva* as “with his lower lip trembling  
a bit” is meant to point out that it should be interpreted as a  
sympathetic smile aimed at dispelling Arjuna’s anguish (*śoka*) and  
delusion (*moha*).



## Concluding Remarks

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3 Throughout these pages we have provided an analysis of the  
4 main commentarial readings of the *BhG's prahasann iva*, placing it  
5 in its larger context. Though some commentators lack a specific  
6 interpretation of the formula, nonetheless all of them help us to  
7 reconstruct the prewar setting and lay the ground for a more  
8 in-depth understanding. Despite the difficulty in systematizing the  
9 topic, we think that a useful overview of the possible explanations  
10 of *prahasann iva* is offered by Veṅkaṭanātha in his *Tātparyacandrikā*,  
11 where he sketches four interpretative keys:

- 12  
13 1. Mockery: whoever abandons without reason an action  
14 that he/she has undertaken becomes an object of  
15 derision;
- 16  
17 2. A seeming mockery in view of a superior end: Arjuna  
18 is mortally anguished and Kṛṣṇa, through his hint  
19 of laughter, reveals the *BhG* for his benefit and the  
20 benefit of the whole world;
- 21  
22 3. Derision and mockery are impossible since Arjuna has  
23 surrendered himself to Kṛṣṇa: *prahasann iva* introduces  
24 an effortless and sublime speech, replete with the  
25 meanings that are hidden in the *Upaniṣads*;
- 26  
27 4. *BhG* 2.10 must be understood in the light of 2.11,  
28 which also implies a shade of mirth along with a  
29 shade of derision: both are needed in order to shake  
30 Arjuna out of his *moha* and prepare him to assimilate  
31 the teaching and achieve discrimination.

32 We agree with Ānanda Giri that the function of 2.10 is that of being  
33 a connective link (*sambandha*) between Arjuna's self-surrendering to  
34 Kṛṣṇa and the latter's flow of love through his *upadeśa*. The end of  
35 2.9 (*tuṣṇīm babhūva ha*) is the climax of Arjuna's passivity, mirroring  
36 his utter despondency. This extreme condition symbolized by his  
37 having no more words to say is broken by the opening of Kṛṣṇa's  
38 mouth and the beginning of his instruction in 2.11: *prahasann iva*  
39 stands right in the middle and operates the passage from the hero's  
40

deluded muteness to the lord's enlightened word. The dramatic tension at the center of the battlefield is eased by the reassuring sign of Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter.

If in verses 2.2–3 Kṛṣṇa had openly mocked Arjuna for behaving like a eunuch, in verse 2.10 mockery—if at all present—is utilized by Kṛṣṇa as a means to bring about Arjuna's transformation, it being motivated by his love for his *śiṣya*. The lord's hint of laughter comes after Arjuna has surrendered at his feet as his pupil (2.7d; *śiṣyas te 'haṃ śādhi māṃ tvāṃ prapannam*), a decisive move that had not yet taken place in 2.2–3. From 2.7, what is pivotal in the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is the bond of *bhakti* that unites them. The mercy of the *guru*-god is contained in his *prahasann iva*, his *upadeśa* being its natural consequence. The very moment in which Kṛṣṇa opens his mouth and manifests his hint of laughter is the veritable *καίρως* that signals the rescue of his *śiṣya* from the dreadful quagmire of delusion and sorrow.

Of the authors we have scrutinized, most of the Advaita Vedāntins and Kashmirian commentators interpret *prahasann iva* as the expression of Kṛṣṇa's benevolent attitude toward his disciple, despite the latter's *anaucitya* or inappropriate behavior. A second group of exegetes that is linked to the so-called *vaiṣṇava* school of Vedānta is more diversified in its interpretation: it oscillates between an apparently harsher mockery—meant to shake Arjuna by soaking him in the sea of shame so as to trigger his metanoia—and a more positive attitude that comes close to the understanding of the majority of the *advaitins*. The gloss of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, a nondualist thinker devoted to Kṛṣṇa, can be appreciated as operating a kind of synthesis. This is important since the various interpretative options we have reviewed, some of which are striking in their psychological depth, are not to be regarded as being mutually exclusive.

Having acknowledged the plurality of possible meanings of Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva*, for the majority of commentators what is crucial is the recognition that his hint of laughter reveals his grace: even when it is interpreted as derision it still expresses the lord's *prasāda* since the intention (*saṃkalpa*) that guides the *guru* is the ultimate good of his *śiṣya*. In the end, Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* must be appreciated as the divine sign that instantly relieves Arjuna from the ignorance in which he is trapped.





### Chapter 3

## On *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*

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We now come to an evaluation of the occurrences of *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* within the *Mahābhārata* (*MBh*) and Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* (*Rām*).<sup>1</sup> This textual survey aims at appreciating the meaning of these expressions in their specific settings, so as to effectively compare them with the *prahasann iva* of the *BhG* and arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the latter within the epic milieu.

Situated in the *Bhīṣmaparvan* which is the narrative pivot of the *MBh*, the *BhG* is recognized as the veritable heart of the epic. Its structure in eighteen *adhyāyas* reflects the structure of the *MBh* in eighteen *parvans* (eighteen are also the *akṣauhiṇīs*,<sup>2</sup> that is, the armies that confront each other on the Kurukṣetra field—eleven on the Kaurava side, seven on the Pāṇḍava side—and eighteen are the days of war).<sup>3</sup> Though the *BhG* circulated as an independent work from an early date, and as we have seen in chapters 1 and 2 it is often treated as a stand-alone text, yet its epic background is essential. The *BhG* is by all standards an integral part of the *MBh* and one must explore the latter with care since it matters to the internal development of the *BhG* itself, the complexity of the textual layers of the epic notwithstanding (Ježić 1979). Indeed, the *BhG* needs to be interpreted within the context of the *MBh* not only because it constitutes its highest reflection on ultimate realities and the aims of human life<sup>4</sup> but also because the key to its full comprehension is to be found in the epic as a whole (van Buitenen 1981, 1–6). The *BhG* being the theological peak of the



1 *MBh*, its *prahasann iva* is to be regarded as the most significant  
2 occurrence of this formulaic diction in the entire epic corpus.

3 The *BhG* bears important connections with the theoretical  
4 (Sāṃkhya-Yoga) and devotional, *bhakti*-oriented sections of the  
5 *MBh*, presupposing the epic setting in which it is embedded.  
6 We find evidence of this in the *Sanatsujātīya* of the *Udyogaparvan*  
7 (5.42–45) and in the *Mokṣadharmā* of the *Śāntiparvan* (12.174–365;  
8 containing the *Yogakathana* section, 12.289–306, and the *Nārāyaṇīya*  
9 section, 12.321–339), as well as in the other *Gītās* of the epic, first  
10 and foremost in the *Anuḡītā* or *Uttaragītā* (14.16–51).<sup>5</sup> It is notewor-  
11 thy that the central teaching of the *BhG*, that is, action performed  
12 without any expectation of its fruits (*niṣkāmakarman*), is already  
13 outlined in a dialogue between Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, and Draupadī,  
14 which occupies nine chapters of the *Vanaparvan* (3.27–35). Even  
15 the glorious theophany described in the eleventh chapter of the  
16 *BhG* finds several correlates in the *MBh*, where various sages and  
17 heroes have the privilege of experiencing divine visions. Thus  
18 Arjuna witnesses the theophany of Śiva who had taken the form  
19 of a wild hunter (*kirāta*; *MBh* 3.40), Bhīma has the vision of the  
20 ancient form of Hanumān (*MBh* 3.146–150) and Aśvatthāman,  
21 who is about to carry out the night massacre, experiences the  
22 terrifying appearances of Kṛṣṇa and Śiva (*MBh* 10.6–7). Moreover,  
23 Kṛṣṇa reveals his eternal form to Bhīṣma (*MBh* 12.51.3–10) and in  
24 a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Uttaraṅka (*MBh* 14.52–53) the former  
25 manifests his glory to the latter (*MBh* 14.54.1–3). In the *Udyoga-*  
26 *parvan* (5.129.1–16), Kṛṣṇa reveals his cosmic form to the terrified  
27 Kauravas and this is a prelude to Arjuna's vision in the eleventh  
28 *adhyāya* of the *BhG* (Piano 1994, 28–34).

29 There are several reasons behind the reading of the *BhG* as an  
30 independent work. In the first place, it is a short and manageable  
31 text, and its language is simple and easily accessible. Its narrative  
32 fabric is grounded in a literary *topos* that is shared by all philo-  
33 sophical and religious traditions: the *BhG* is a dialogue (*saṃvāda*)  
34 between a *guru* and a *śiṣya*, a divine teacher and his disciple  
35 (i.e., between god and man). As Śaṅkara himself explains in the  
36 introduction to his *BhG* commentary using Arjuna as model (*nim-*  
37 *ittīkrtya*), the message of the text is universal since it is addressed  
38 to the human being as such who is faced with a terrible crisis. In  
39 addition, according to the vast majority of the Hindu traditions  
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the *BhG* offers plural solutions to the human predicament. This is why the poem is taken as a paradigm of salvific instruction, being capable of speaking directly to each and every soul. It would be impossible to achieve the same effectiveness by approaching the epic of the *MBh* in its entirety.<sup>6</sup> As a counterfactual example, it must be noted that in the Indian exegetical tradition there exists only one commentary on the whole *MBh* (i.e., Nīlakāṅṭha Caturdhara's *Bhāratabhāvadīpa*).

As seen in chapter 2, all *BhG* commentators belong to schools that search for a definitive solution to the problem of suffering. Being viewed as the essence of the *MBh*, the *BhG* was selected as one of the fundamental texts to be scrutinized by all schools of Vedānta, together with the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahmasūtras*: these three are regarded as the *prasthānatraya* or the "triad of the points of departure." In the colophons to the eighteen *adhyāyas* of the *BhG* one finds the formula *śrīmadbhagavadgītāsūpaniṣatsu*, i.e., "[. . .] in that *Upaniṣad* [= secret teaching] that is the *Bhagavadgītā* [. . .]." Given its immense prestige, the *BhG* is explicitly equated to an *Upaniṣad*, thus elevating it to the rank of *śruti*.<sup>7</sup>

Before focusing attention on the two classical epics (*itihāsa*), it is useful to go through a quick overview of the *Upaniṣads* themselves, which represent a fundamental source for both the *MBh* and *Rām*. Herein, the occurrences of root  $\sqrt{has}$ <sup>8</sup> are scarce. In *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.17.3 we find the present indicative *hasati* in a list of verbs associated with the recitations performed by a Brahmin during the Soma sacrifice, which are preceded by a sacrificial consecration (3.17.1) and preparatory rites (3.17.2). *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.17.6 states that these instructions were taught by Ghora Āṅgīrasa to Kṛṣṇa, the son of Devakī (*tad haitad ghora āṅgīrasaḥ kṛṣṇāya devakīputrāyoktvovāca*; Olivelle 1998, 212; see also Brodbeck 2018, 202–3 and Ježić 2009, 221). In addition, in *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* 3.25.8 there is a similar sacrificial context where we find the occurrence of the words *hasaḥ* "laughter," *kṛlā* [= *kṛlā*] "play," and *mithunam* "sexual congress" (*haso me kṛlā me mithunam me*; Oertel 1896, 185).

A passage that deserves mention is that of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.13, where Yājñavalkya instructs King Janaka on the nature of dream: "Travelling in sleep to places high and low, the god creates many a visible form—now dallying with women, now

1 laughing, now seeing frightful things" (*svapnānta uccāvocam tīyamāno*  
 2 *rūpāṇi devaḥ kurute bahūni | uteva sribhiḥ saha modamāno jakṣad*  
 3 *utevāpi bhayāni paśyan || Olivelle 1998, 112–13). Here the present*  
 4 *participle jakṣad, "laughing," which is followed by iva (utevāpi =*  
 5 *uta iva api, where uta is merely a conjunction), comes from √jakṣ*  
 6 *"to laugh," which is the reduplicated form of √has. The subject of*  
 7 *the sentence is devaḥ, "the god," that Śaṅkara in his commentary*  
 8 *to the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad interprets as the ātman. Significantly,*  
 9 *Śaṅkara glosses jakṣad . . . iva as hasann iva and says that it is the*  
 10 *self-luminous ātman (svayaṃ jyotir ātmā) that exhibits this hint of*  
 11 *laughter (Śāstrī 1986, 321).<sup>9</sup>*

12 In the late *Mahā Upaniṣad* 3.35, *hasanti* refers to some family  
 13 members who laugh at a man who behaves like a mad person  
 14 (*hasanty unmattakam iva naram; Śāstrī 1970, 433*). Finally, *hasati* in  
 15 *Yogaśikhā Upaniṣad* 6.67 is inserted in a list of verbs used to describe  
 16 the physical and emotional behavior of an enlightened person,  
 17 all connected with laugh, mirth, playfulness, and delight (*hasaty*  
 18 *ullasati prītyā krīdate modate tadā; Śāstrī 1970, 472*). What emerges  
 19 is the scanty use of the root *√has* if compared to its frequency in  
 20 the epics.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, there is no occurrence of root *√has* with  
 21 prefix *pra-*. All in all, the theme of smile/laughter did not receive  
 22 special attention in the Vedic period, its emergence being linked  
 23 to the development of epic theology and the *bhakti* movements  
 24 centered upon divine grace (*krpā, prasāda*).

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### 27 The Occurrences of *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* 28 in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*

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30 When one surveys the *MBh* with a view to find all the occur-  
 31 rences of *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva*, what appears is that it is  
 32 a frequent formulaic expression, there being a total of eighty-four  
 33 occurrences of *prahasann iva* and thirty-nine occurrences of *hasann*  
 34 *iva*.<sup>11</sup> The *Bhīṣmaparvan*, which comprises the *BhG* (6.23–40), besides  
 35 *BhG* 2.10 (6.24.10) displays eight other occurrences of *prahasann iva*,  
 36 whereas *hasann iva* is found four times. The *Droṇaparvan* stands out  
 37 as the book with the highest numbers: twenty-eight occurrences of

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*prahasann iva* and twelve of *hasann iva*. From the tenth *parvan*, the *Sauptikaparvan*, up to the end of the *MBh*, the use of *prahasann iva* diminishes considerably—fourteen occurrences—and *hasann iva* is found only three times.

On the whole, there are one hundred and twenty-three occurrences of *prahasann iva* + *hasann iva* in the *MBh*. In particular, there are forty in the *Droṇaparvan*, thirteen in the *Bhīṣmaparvan* and the *Karṇaparvan*, ten in the *Ādiparvan* and the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, and nine in the *Śalyaparvan*. Table 3.1 shows their distribution within the *MBh* eighteen *parvans*.

Table 3.1. Occurrences of *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* in the *Mahābhārata*

<i>Parvan</i>	<i>prahasann iva</i>	<i>hasann iva</i>
1. <i>Ādiparvan</i>	9	1
2. <i>Sabhāparvan</i>	1	1
3. <i>Āraṇyakaparvan</i>	8	2
4. <i>Virāṭaparvan</i>	4	/
5. <i>Udyogaparvan</i>	4	1
6. <i>Bhīṣmaparvan</i>	9	4
7. <i>Droṇaparvan</i>	28	12
8. <i>Karṇaparvan</i>	5	8
9. <i>Śalyaparvan</i>	2	7
10. <i>Sauptikaparvan</i>	/	2
11. <i>Strīparvan</i>	/	/
12. <i>Śāntiparvan</i>	6	/
13. <i>Anuśāsanaparvan</i>	1	/
14. <i>Āśvamedhikaparvan</i>	5	1
15. <i>Āśramavāsikaparvan</i>	/	/
16. <i>Mausalaparvan</i>	1	/
17. <i>Mahāprasthānikaparvan</i>	/	/
18. <i>Svargārohaṇaparvan</i>	1	/
Total	84	39

1 According to Sellmer (2015, 198), in the *MBh* present partici-  
 2 ples<sup>12</sup> appear most frequently at the beginning of even *pādas*—as  
 3 in *BhG* 2.10b—and among these participles *prahasann* is one of the  
 4 commonest. As a matter of fact, of the 123 occurrences of *prahasann*  
 5 *iva* and *hasann iva* the majority of them are found at the end of  
 6 *pādas* and especially at the end of the second or at the end of the  
 7 fourth one.

8 To complete the picture, in Vālmīki's *Rām* we find thirteen  
 9 instances of *prahasann iva* and only one of *hasann iva*. Table 3.2  
 10 shows how they are distributed within the *Rām*'s seven *kāṇḍas*.

11 One might ask: If the expressions *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva*  
 12 are so frequent in the *MBh*, doesn't this diminish their relevance?<sup>13</sup>  
 13 The answer to this is that their frequency is counterbalanced by  
 14 the fact that there are different applications of *prahasann iva* / *hasann*  
 15 *iva*, that is, at least three different employments. Besides, one must  
 16 keep in mind the remarkable multivalence of *prahasann iva*. The  
 17 hint of laughter of *BhG* 2.10 recapitulates the main usages that  
 18 we will be looking at, constituting the quintessential *prahasann*  
 19 *iva* just as the *Bhagavadgītā* is the quintessence of the *Mahābhārata*:  
 20 it simultaneously incorporates pure grace—undoubtedly its pri-  
 21 mary meaning—irony/mockery, and easiness, which links it to  
 22 the notion of *līlā*.

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Table 3.2. Occurrences of *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* in the *Rāmāyaṇa*

<i>Kāṇḍa</i>	<i>prahasann iva</i>	<i>hasann iva</i>
1. <i>Bālakāṇḍa</i>	2	/
2. <i>Ayodhyākāṇḍa</i>	2	1
3. <i>Aranyakāṇḍa</i>	1	/
4. <i>Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa</i>	2	/
5. <i>Sundarakāṇḍa</i>	1	/
6. <i>Yuddhakāṇḍa</i>	1	/
7. <i>Uttarakāṇḍa</i>	4	/
Total	13	1

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 39  
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On the Different Uses of *prahasann iva* and  
*hasann iva* in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*

When the subject is a hero, be he positive or negative, human or divine—such as Duryodhana, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Karṇa, Śiva, Indra and of course Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna—he exhibits a hint of laughter that indicates the extraordinary ease with which he accomplishes his martial deeds, as if they were a child’s play.<sup>14</sup> A second salient use is when the hint of laughter blossoms on the face of deities, sages, and *gurus* since it indicates their grace and words of wisdom. A third typology is when the two participles are used to express mockery, with varying degrees of intensity, or even delight and surprise. Finally, *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* are used in ambiguous or seemingly incongruous situations, where the reason that prompts them is less recognizable. We will illustrate significant examples of each of these applications, focusing attention on the *prahasann iva/hasann iva* of deities—and among them of Kṛṣṇa—as it is typologically closer to *BhG* 2.10. Following each survey of the *MBh*, we will consider one analogous passage from the *Rām*.

*PRAHASANN IVA* AND *HASANN IVA* AS MARKERS OF HEROIC EASE

The first semantic nuance of *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* concerns a hero’s ease—that is, the capacity of various *kṣatriyas* to accomplish difficult tasks with no effort whatsoever. In the *MBh*, this is the widest use of our formulaic diction. What differentiates these types of occurrences from those treated in the following sections is that here *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* do not precede any locutionary act. In this section we also include instances of a hero’s disregard of danger and fear<sup>15</sup> and his involvement in leisure activities such as hunting. With regard to the effortless nature of these *kṣatriyas* in accomplishing their heroic feats, Peter Sloterdijk’s (2013, 196) transcultural observations on asceticism and acrobatics are worth quoting: “Acrobatics is involved whenever the aim is to make the impossible seem simple. It is not enough, therefore, to walk the tightrope and perform the *salto mortale* at a great height; the acrobat’s decisive message lies in the smile with which he bows

1 after the performance. It speaks even more clearly in the non-  
 2 chalant hand gesture before his exit, the gesture one could take  
 3 for a greeting to the upper tiers." We have seen that the theme  
 4 of ease is especially underlined by some of the commentators of  
 5 *BhG* 2.10, and this same subject will surface in our assessment of  
 6 Kṛṣṇa's iconography and devotional literature in the next chapter.  
 7 Among the seventy-one instances of *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva*  
 8 as markers of heroic effortlessness and fearlessness that are found  
 9 in the *MBh* we survey nine of them.<sup>16</sup>

10

11 *MBh*

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13 1) 1.151.7b<sup>17</sup> = while Bhīma is eating the food of a demon (*rākṣasa*),  
 14 he listens to his threatening words with a hint of laughter (*pra-*  
 15 *hasann iva*); disregarding him, he keeps eating with his back turned  
 16 on the enemy. The hero's hint of laughter proves his fearlessness  
 17 and self-confidence.

18 2) 1.151.14d<sup>18</sup> = a few verses later, Bhīma postpones the attack  
 19 against the *rākṣasa* and keeps eating his food. Finally, he stands  
 20 up ready for battle with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*) on his  
 21 face, and with his left hand throws back a tree which the demon  
 22 had thrown at him in wrath. The effortlessness of Bhīma's deed  
 23 is emphasized by the reference to his left hand, which is believed  
 24 to be weaker and impure.

25 3) 6.49.15d<sup>19</sup> = during the battle, the hero Droṇa exhibits a  
 26 hint of laughter (*hasann iva*) and with a mighty spear thwarts  
 27 Dhṛṣṭadyumna's attack three times. The hint of laughter signals  
 28 Droṇa's strength and ease in contrasting the valiant Dhṛṣṭadyumna,  
 29 commander-in-chief of the Pāṇḍavas's army.

30 4) 6.79.48e<sup>20</sup> = Due to a trick, the Madrarāja (i.e., Śalya, Madrī's  
 31 brother) is forced to fight against the Pāṇḍavas and, with a hint  
 32 of laughter (*prahasann iva*), wipes out a shower of arrows shot at  
 33 him by Sahadeva.<sup>21</sup> His hint of laughter sketches the ease with  
 34 which a great warrior accomplishes a wondrous act, which would  
 35 be impossible for any ordinary person.

36 5) 6.107.2d<sup>22</sup> = extremely enraged, with a hint of laughter  
 37 (*prahasann iva*), Mādhava (i.e., Kṛṣṇa) pierces a demon (*rākṣasa*)  
 38 with nine arrows. This is a significant occurrence since the hero  
 39 Kṛṣṇa shows his strength in battle. Again, the emphasis is on the  
 40

effortlessness with which a valiant warrior accomplishes a difficult task as if it were a child's play.

6) 7.37.13b<sup>23</sup> = after a brave deed performed by Saubhadra (i.e., Abhimanyu), all members of his army praise him, whereas his enemies say: "You will not escape alive" (7.37.12).<sup>24</sup> While they are saying so, Saubhadra looks at them with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*). The hero's attitude indicates his fearlessness and utter disregard of danger.

7) 7.173.48b = this episode takes place following the death of Droṇa, when—as in *BhG* 1.1—Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Saṃjaya what his sons and the sons of Pāṇḍu have done. At this time, when the Kauravas had nearly been defeated, Arjuna asks Vyāsa to explain to him the vision he had had of a man bright as fire who stood in front of him without touching the ground and who, without using his spear, annihilated all enemies through the radiance of his weapons, while all other warriors thought that such a massacre was being carried out by Arjuna (7.173.1–9). Vyāsa explains that the man who preceded him in battle was none other than the three-eyed Śaṅkara (i.e., Śiva), the ultimate refuge of the universe. He points out that Śiva, when angry, can terrify even divine beings and praises him as Vīrabhadra, in whose form the great god destroyed Dakṣa's sacrifice:<sup>25</sup>

Then that fearless one, being enraged, struck the [embodied] sacrifice by shooting an arrow with his bow, which screamed loudly. (42) The gods could find no shelter and no peace, so while the great lord was furious the [embodied] sacrifice all of a sudden ran away. (43) Due to the crack of the bowstring all worlds trembled, o Arjuna, and gods and antigods fell down and became his slaves. (44) All waters became rough, the earth shook, the mountains disappeared, and the quarters of the sky and the clouds became dark. (45) The worlds—blind and covered in darkness—were not visible, he destroyed the radiance of all stars together with the sun. (46) Vedic poets—who desire their own good as well as the good of all beings—screamed in terror and searched for peace. (47) [Then] Śaṅkara, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), attacked Pūṣan and made his teeth fall out while

1 he was eating the sacrificial cakes (*puroḍāśa*). (48) Thus  
 2 the trembling gods came out and bowed down to him,  
 3 but he again shot a sharp, flaming arrow against them:  
 4 (49) they then established Rudra's special part of the  
 5 sacrifice. O king, out of fear the thirty [gods] fell down  
 6 on earth for shelter. (50)<sup>26</sup>

7  
 8 The fact that the great god Śiva, just before attacking Pūṣan, almost  
 9 laughs, underlines the extreme ease with which he accomplishes  
 10 his mighty task.

11 8) 8.24.94c = throughout this chapter, Duryodhana narrates  
 12 the myth of the three sky-cities of the antigods (*asura*) that were  
 13 destroyed by Śiva as Tripurāntaka (Hiltebeitel 1984, 15–21). When  
 14 the three worlds were tormented by the three *asuras*, Tarakākṣa,  
 15 Kamalākṣa, and Vidyunmālin, the gods along with Brahmā came  
 16 to Śiva to win his favor. After honoring him with a hymn and  
 17 several prayers, Śiva agreed to help them to remove the cause of  
 18 their distress (8.24.1–56). Śiva, however, told them that he would  
 19 be unable to kill the three enemies on his own and thus sought  
 20 the assistance of all the gods who agreed to give him half of their  
 21 strength: thus Śiva became known as Mahādeva, the great god.  
 22 Armed with bow and arrows, he assured them he would kill the  
 23 *asuras*, piercing them with just one dart, and asked the gods to pro-  
 24 vide him with a chariot. Accordingly, they asked Viśvakarman to  
 25 build Mahādeva's chariot (8.24.57–77). On that chariot, Śiva placed  
 26 all the weapons given to him by the gods. His bow was forged  
 27 out of the year and the six seasons, and its string was made by  
 28 the frightening and destructive black night (*kālarātrī*) of human  
 29 beings (8.24.78–93). Then we read: "The shining benefactor armed  
 30 with a sword, arrow and bow, with a hint of laughter (*hasann iva*),  
 31 asked the deities: 'Who will be the charioteer?'<sup>27</sup> (94). To him, the  
 32 host of deities replied: 'Whoever you shall appoint, o lord of gods,  
 33 shall be your charioteer, there is no doubt!' (95) The lord, best  
 34 among all, furious, told them: 'Choose for me a charioteer; care-  
 35 fully ponder your decision, but don't take too long.'<sup>28</sup> (96) Apart  
 36 from the curiosity as to whom shall be Śiva's charioteer,<sup>29</sup> this  
 37 passage displays a deity who sets out to accomplish a heroic deed  
 38 with absolute self-confidence. Mahādeva's *hasann iva* announces  
 39 his ease in defeating the *asuras* as well as his eagerness to fight.<sup>30</sup>  
 40

9) 12.125.18d<sup>31</sup> = Sumitra, king of the Haihayas, goes hunting and releases an arrow against a group of deer (*mrga*). The leader of the herd moves off the arrow's trajectory with ease and stands looking at him with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*). Here the hint of laughter displays the transfer of a human feeling to an animal: disregarding the danger, the deer fearlessly challenges Sumitra.<sup>32</sup>

*Rām*

3.27.28f<sup>33</sup> = lord Rāma, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), breaks the bow and arrows of the demon Khara with his thunderlike arrow and then pierces Khara to death. Similar to Indra, he displays his heroism with nonchalance.<sup>34</sup>

*PRAHASANN IVA AND HASANN IVA AS EXPRESSIONS OF DIVINE GRACE*

The second major use of our stock phrase is especially linked to *BhG* 2.10 since it concerns the hint of laughter of deities, sages, and *gurus*. In many cases, the *prahasann iva/hasann iva* on their faces precedes locutionary acts in the form of teachings or advice that manifest their grace (*prasāda*). Besides expressing itself through the granting of boons, their favor is also revealed through injunctions. Exceptionally, the hint of laughter may precede a punishment that is meant to teach a lesson. Herein, we review fifteen of the twenty instances<sup>35</sup> of this kind present in the *MBh*.

*MBh*

1) 1.211.16b = Kṛṣṇa looks at Arjuna and addresses him with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*). The context is as follows:

While they were moving about, they saw in the midst of [her] companions the beautiful daughter of Vasudeva, well-adorned and prosperous. (14) The very moment he saw her, love struck Arjuna. So Kṛṣṇa stared at Pārtha, whose mind was one-pointed. (15) Then, o descendent of Bharata, the lotus-eyed [Kṛṣṇa], with a hint of laughter, said: "Does love for this forest-dweller agitate your mind? (16) O Pārtha, she is my sister, the uterine sister



1 of Sāraṇa (= one of Kṛṣṇa's brothers). If you have this  
2 idea, I myself will talk to [her] father." (17)<sup>36</sup>

3  
4 Though the situation is entirely different from the one described  
5 in the *BhG*, there are nonetheless some analogies. Here the heart/  
6 mind (*manas*) of Arjuna is captured by Kṛṣṇa's beautiful sister  
7 Subhadṛā. Having recognized his confused state of mind, Kṛṣṇa  
8 addresses a few words to Arjuna. Seeing that he has been struck  
9 by the arrow of love, Kṛṣṇa, with a hint of laughter, discloses his  
10 advice and intentions in order to satisfy Arjuna's passion. Thus the  
11 lord's *prahasann iva* signals his grace, announcing the satisfaction  
12 of his companion's desire.

13 2–3) 3.38.36b, 3.38.39b = here we have another relevant context  
14 where two occurrences of *prahasann iva* appear one after the other.  
15 Yudhiṣṭhira tells Arjuna that Vyāsa has revealed something to him.  
16 Following Vyāsa's instruction, Arjuna is to move toward the north  
17 in search of the divine weapons kept by Indra, who will donate  
18 them to him (3.38.1–13). Arjuna prepares himself for the journey,  
19 receives the blessings of various sages and Brahmins, and quickly  
20 arrives at his destination on the sacred mountain Indrakīla, where  
21 he hears a celestial voice that tells him to stop. Here Arjuna sees a  
22 radiant ascetic with matted locks of hair at the foot of a tree. The  
23 latter tells him that in this abode of peaceful ascetics devoted to  
24 penance there is no reason to move around armed with bow and  
25 weapons: Arjuna is advised to get rid of them. As our hero does  
26 not follow the ascetic's advice and keeps his weapons to himself,  
27 the ascetic again repeats the same words to him (3.38.14–35). Then  
28 we read:

29  
30 The delighted twice-born, with a hint of laughter, spoke  
31 to him thus: "Choose a boon that is dear to you, o  
32 destroyer of enemies, I am Śakra (= Indra)!" (36) Once  
33 he spoke in this way, the heroic Dhanamjaya, the best of  
34 the Kurus, bowing down with folded hands replied to  
35 the thousand-eyed Indra: (37) "Indeed this is the desire  
36 I wish to have satisfied, please bestow this boon upon  
37 me: today, o Glorious one, I wish to obtain all weapons  
38 from you!" (38) Pleased, the Great Indra, with a hint of  
39 laughter, replied to him: "O Dhanamjaya, what do you  
40

wish to do with weapons, now that you have come here? 1  
 Choose rather satisfaction of desires and heavenly worlds: 2  
 you have attained the utmost abode." (39)<sup>37</sup> 3

4  
 Arjuna's steadiness is emphasized in the following verses, when 5  
 Indra reveals to him that once he has Śiva's vision he will obtain 6  
 all weapons. The sequel of the story notwithstanding, what is of 7  
 interest is that Indra's speech is twice opened by a hint of laughter 8  
 that communicates his benevolent grace toward Arjuna. 9

4) 3.186.116b = the ageless sage Mārkaṇḍeya tells Yudhiṣṭhira 10  
 how Viṣṇu appeared to him in disguise as a divine boy:<sup>38</sup> "Then, o 11  
 hero, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*) that resplendent boy, 12  
 wearing the *śrīvatsa* mark,<sup>39</sup> clothed in yellow and of great efful- 13  
 gence, addressed me."<sup>40</sup> The hint of laughter that blossoms on the 14  
 radiant boy's face and immediately precedes his speech represents 15  
 the flowing of his grace, which instantly sanctifies the old sage. 16

5) 5.73.1b = having heard a speech that was unusual for 17  
 Bhīma, Kṛṣṇa, with a hint of laughter, incites him with his powerful 18  
 words. In order to clarify the context, it is worthwhile quoting a 19  
 few additional verses (5.73.1–11). Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* responds to 20  
 Bhīma's despondency, just like in *BhG* 2.10 it responds to Arjuna's 21  
 despondency: 22

23  
 The strong-armed Keśava, having heard such sensitive 24  
 words by Bhīma and having considered them unusual, 25  
 like the lightness of a mountain or like coldness in 26  
 fire, Bālarāma's younger brother (= Kṛṣṇa), the son of 27  
 Vasudeva bearer of the corneous bow (*śārṅga*), with a 28  
 hint of laughter, spurring the wolf-bellied one (= Bhīma) 29  
 with words like wind for fire, spoke to Bhīma who 30  
 sat overwhelmed by pity: (1–3) "O Bhīma, on other 31  
 occasions you praised the war, longing for the death 32  
 of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's cruel sons who rejoice in killing. (4) O 33  
 destroyer of enemies, you do not sleep, you stay awake, 34  
 you lie down with your face downward; you always 35  
 pronounce terrible, violent and offensive words. (5) Sigh- 36  
 ing like fire, scorched by your own rage, o Bhīma, you 37  
 have an agitated mind like fire with smoke. (6) While 38  
 sighing, you lie all alone like a weak man troubled by 39

40

1 a burden. Some people who come to know this, even  
 2 think that you are mad. (7) O Bhīma, you run about the  
 3 earth groaning like an elephant that having torn down  
 4 uprooted trees, shatters and demolishes them with its  
 5 feet. (8) O son of Pāṇḍu, you do not rejoice with these  
 6 people and move alone—night and day—never pleased  
 7 with anyone. (9) Moreover, you sit all alone smiling  
 8 without reason as though you were crying, for a long  
 9 time keeping your head between your knees with eyes  
 10 closed. (10) Furthermore, you have been seen repeatedly  
 11 furrowing your brow and biting your lips. O Bhīma, all  
 12 this is due to your rage.” (11)<sup>41</sup>

13  
 14 What is remarkable here is that Bhīma, just like Arjuna in the  
 15 *BhG*, sits overwhelmed by pity (*kṛpā*) and utters words that are  
 16 inappropriate for a warrior, to the point that he is unrecognizable.  
 17 To his state of utter shock, Kṛṣṇa responds with a benign hint of  
 18 laughter that accompanies his speech, which is full of grace toward  
 19 Bhīma.

20 6) 5.89.23d = this is an episode in the *Udyogaparvan*, where  
 21 Kṛṣṇa visits the Kauravas before the beginning of the war. Seeing  
 22 him approaching, they stand up in obeisance and invite him to sit  
 23 on a precious canopy, offering him a cow and some milk. Duryo-  
 24 dhana, the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, goes to the extent of offering him  
 25 a kingdom and beautiful palaces and begs him to accept some  
 26 food, but Kṛṣṇa does not accept any of these things from him  
 27 (5.89.1–13). Thus, beckoning to Karṇa, Duryodhana kindly asks  
 28 Kṛṣṇa (5.89.13–15):

29  
 30 O Janārdana, why don't you accept the food, the bever-  
 31 ages, the clothes and canopies that have been prepared for  
 32 you? (13) You who are a beloved relative of Dhṛtarāṣṭra,  
 33 o Mādhava, you gave assistance to both [parties], being  
 34 intent upon the welfare of both. (14) O Govinda, you  
 35 definitely know both *artha* and *dharma*, the pursuing of  
 36 worldly success and the sacred norm, hence I wish to  
 37 hear from you the reason for such behavior, o holder of  
 38 the disc and the mace. (15)<sup>42</sup>

39  
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Having been addressed in this way, Govinda, with a thundering yet calm and clear voice (5.89.16–17) says:<sup>43</sup>

“The messengers who accomplish their mission accept honors and eat [what is offered to them], and you with your counsellors will honor me [only] when I will fulfill my aim.” (18) Having said so, the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied to Janārdana: “You happened to come amongst us at the right moment, (19) whether you succeed or not, o slayer of Madhu. We try to honor you, o Govinda, but we cannot, (20) and we do not know the reason why—o slayer of Madhu—you do not accept our worship full of affection, o best among men. (21) There is neither hostility nor division between you and us, o Govinda: therefore, taking this into consideration, you should not speak thus.” (22) Then Janārdana, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), looking at the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and all his ministers said to him: (23) “I never disregard the norm (*dharma*) because of desire, neither out of arrogance or hatred, nor for the sake of controversy or covetousness. (24) O king, neither delectable foods nor those that are eaten during calamities satisfy me, not even if you fall into disgrace. (25) O king, from birth you hate the Pāṇḍavas who are your brothers and who pursue love and possess all virtues. (26) Furthermore, such useless hatred toward the sons of Pṛthā has no suitable reason: the sons of Pāṇḍu abide in *dharma*, and indeed who can accuse them of anything? (27) Who hates them hates me, who is close to them is close to me: be aware of my total intimacy with the Pāṇḍavas, who follow *dharma*. (28) Indeed, [the ones who know] define whoever follows desire and anger because of delusion and opposes and hates a virtuous person as the vilest among men. (29) Whoever wishes to hate relatives who are full of noble qualities due to delusion and covetousness, such a man—unable to subjugate anger and to control himself—will not prosper for long. (30) On the other hand, whoever welcomes the virtuous ones with

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1 affection—even if they are not dear to his heart—rests  
 2 for long in glory. (31) Hence, I cannot eat all this food  
 3 associated with the wicked; I can only eat the [food] of  
 4 the charioteer: this is what I think.” (32)<sup>44</sup>

5  
 6 This passage is especially relevant since Kṛṣṇa instructs Duryodhana  
 7 and his attendants regarding the proper attitude one should have  
 8 toward the virtuous and, specifically, one's relatives. Duryodhana  
 9 himself is said to be a victim of illusion. Kṛṣṇa's hint of laugh-  
 10 ter reminds us of the *BhG*, though Duryodhana and Arjuna are  
 11 confused by opposite feelings: while Arjuna is overwhelmed by  
 12 pity, Duryodhana is blinded by envy, desire, anger, and greed.  
 13 Nonetheless, in both cases the remedy is the lord's *prahasann iva*,  
 14 which signals the outpouring of his bounteous *upadeśa*.

15 7) 6.41.16d = the battle is about to begin, and the two armies  
 16 of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas face one another on the battlefield  
 17 sounding their conches, drums, and horns. Then king Yudhiṣṭhira,  
 18 the elder among the Pāṇḍava brothers,

19  
 20 [. . .] unfastened his armor and put down his fine weapon.  
 21 He quickly dismounted from his chariot and proceeded  
 22 on foot with folded hands. Yudhiṣṭhira the King Dharma  
 23 espied Grandfather and strode in silence eastward to the  
 24 enemy army. Kuntī's son Dhanamjaya also dismounted  
 25 at once, when he saw the other stride forward, and fol-  
 26 lowed him with his brothers. The blessed Lord Vāsudeva  
 27 followed behind, and after him came eagerly the other  
 28 kings according to their rank. Arjuna said: “King, what  
 29 do you have in mind, leaving us behind and going on  
 30 foot eastward to the enemy army?” Bhīma said: “Where  
 31 are you going, Indra of kings, doffing armor and weapons  
 32 while the enemy troops are armed to the teeth, leaving  
 33 your brothers behind?” Nakula said: “Terror is striking  
 34 my heart, when I see you, my eldest brother, in this  
 35 state, Bhārata! Tell me, where are you going?” Sahadeva  
 36 said: “While there are a score of terrible battles to be  
 37 fought, where are you going, facing the enemies?” (van  
 38 Buitenen 1981, 145–47)

39  
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Despite these legitimate worries and the utter astonishment of his 1  
 brothers, Yudhiṣṭhira keeps walking straight toward the Kauravas' 2  
 army without answering their queries.<sup>45</sup> It is at this point that Kṛṣṇa 3  
 intervenes (6.41.16–19): 4

The extremely sagacious, great-souled Vāsudeva, with 5  
 a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), said to them: "I have 6  
 understood his purport! (16) Our king will fight against 7  
 the enemies only after obtaining the assent of Bhīṣma 8  
 and Droṇa, Gautama and Śalya and all [his *gurus*]. (17) 9  
 Indeed, in former eras whoever fought without previously 10  
 obtaining the assent of his *gurus* was looked upon with 11  
 contempt by the virtuous ones. (18) On the contrary, 12  
 whoever fights against his own *gurus* having asked [their] 13  
 prior permission, as required by the sacred texts, surely 14  
 gains victory in battle: this is my firm opinion!"<sup>46</sup> (19) 15  
 16

Seeing that Yudhiṣṭhira is approaching them unarmed, even the 18  
 Kauravas are caught by surprise being unable to comprehend the 19  
 reason behind his strange behavior (6.41.20–24). What is remarkable 20  
 is Kṛṣṇa's interpretation of Yudhiṣṭhira's intentions. While both 21  
 Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas are confused by Yudhiṣṭhira's seeming 22  
 loss of control, Kṛṣṇa rightly deduces that the behavior of the king 23  
 is in accordance with the *śāstras* and thus begins his enlightening 24  
 explanation with a hint of laughter that dispels the fear and bewil- 25  
 derment of the Pāṇḍavas. 26

8) 7.57.46b = Arjuna is anguished at the eve of his fight 27  
 against Jayadratha. In order to relieve his despondency, Kṛṣṇa 28  
 reminds him of the formula for activating the powerful *pāśupata* 29  
 weapon,<sup>47</sup> which, once known, confers victory over all enemies: if 30  
 Arjuna will learn the *mantra* he will certainly vanquish Jayadratha 31  
 (7.57.1–15). As an alternative, he should meditate upon Śiva in order 32  
 to obtain the boon of the weapon from him (7.57.16–18). Arjuna 33  
 then concentrates upon Śiva and, together with Kṛṣṇa, travels to 34  
 Śiva's abode by ascending to the celestial worlds (7.57.19–32). Here 35  
 Arjuna sees Śiva radiant like a thousand suns, deeply immersed in 36  
 austerities, with all his attributes, with matted locks and a thousand 37  
 eyes, together with Pārvatī in the midst of chanting sages and the 38  
 39

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1 dances of divine beings (7.57.33–38). When Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna see  
 2 Śiva, they bow down to him, revere him as the supreme *Brahman*  
 3 and seek refuge in him (7.57.39–45). Then we read: “Then Śarva  
 4 [= Śiva], with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), addressed those  
 5 who had arrived thus: ‘Welcome to you best among men! Get up  
 6 and forego exhaustion! O heroes, please tell me immediately what  
 7 you wish to obtain! (46) I will grant it to you! Choose whatever  
 8 boon and I will give it to you!’ (47) Having heard these words,  
 9 Vāsudeva and Arjuna, those two great intellects, extolled Śarva  
 10 standing up with folded hands” (48).<sup>48</sup> In this passage, Śiva does  
 11 not instruct his interlocutors but wishes to offer a boon to Kṛṣṇa  
 12 and Arjuna. His hint of laughter is the expression of his *kṛpā*: his  
 13 *prahasann iva* announces his favor, displaying his blissful attitude  
 14 eager to satisfy the wishes of his devotees.

15 9) 8.40.85b = following the death of Droṇa, Karṇa has become  
 16 the commander-in-chief of the Kauravas’ army.<sup>49</sup> With his mighty  
 17 spear<sup>50</sup> he slaughters many enemies while, on the other side of the  
 18 battlefield, Arjuna succeeds in killing many other foes. Since no  
 19 other warrior can defeat Karṇa, who is scaring away the Pāṇḍavas’  
 20 allies, Arjuna asks for Kṛṣṇa’s help (8.40.79–84): “Once he heard  
 21 this, o great king, Govinda, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*),  
 22 said to Arjuna: ‘O son of Pāṇḍu, quickly kill the Kauravas!’ ” (85)<sup>51</sup>  
 23 Immediately after Kṛṣṇa’s peremptory instruction, Arjuna’s chariot  
 24 is led to where Karṇa is in order to fight against him. Here, Kṛṣṇa’s  
 25 command to Arjuna is of a military nature. The hint of laughter  
 26 that precedes it is aimed at encouraging Arjuna and signals the  
 27 lord’s grace, being an assurance of victory. Kṛṣṇa’s *prahasann iva*  
 28 indicates that there is no other choice but to fight against Karṇa  
 29 and that the latter’s destiny is sealed.

30 10) 8.50.2b = this occurrence can be properly understood only  
 31 by looking back at the previous chapters. From the beginning, we  
 32 are confronted with something unusual, namely Arjuna’s rage  
 33 against Yudhiṣṭhira: Arjuna is ready to kill his elder brother and  
 34 king. Previously, Yudhiṣṭhira had harshly reproached Arjuna telling  
 35 him to give his *gāṇḍīva* bow to Karṇa and become his charioteer  
 36 since Arjuna appeared to be afraid of Karṇa (8.48.13–15). Chapter  
 37 8.49 begins with Kṛṣṇa wanting to know the reason for Arjuna’s  
 38 fury. Arjuna tells him that he cannot forgive Yudhiṣṭhira’s insolent  
 39 words and that therefore he has vowed to behead him (8.49.1–12).  
 40



However, he concludes his speech by asking Kṛṣṇa—who knows 1  
the past and future—to tell him what he should do, saying that 2  
he will act as he commands (*tat tathā prakariṣyāmi yathā māṃ* 3  
*vakṣyate bhavān*; 8.49.13). The dialogue continues with Kṛṣṇa trying 4  
to calm down Arjuna with instructions on what a sensible human 5  
being should and should not do (*kārya, akārya*), pointing out how 6  
sages disregard those who are unable to choose the right conduct 7  
(*dharma*). Restraint from killing living beings is the highest action 8  
(8.49.20ab, *prāṇinām avadhas tata sarvajyāyān mato mama*): one should 9  
never kill (8.49.20d, *na ca hiṃsyāt kathaṃcana*). Therefore, how could 10  
Arjuna kill his elder brother and wise king? This folly is counter to 11  
*dharma*. Kṛṣṇa concludes his instruction with an important insight 12  
into truthfulness (*satya*), above which nothing exists (8.49.27b, *na* 13  
*satyād vidyate param*), exemplifying it with the story of the hunter 14  
Balāka and the ignorant ascetic Kauśika (8.49.14–56). 15

Thanks to these words of Kṛṣṇa—who knows the supreme 16  
*dharma* (8.49.59)—Arjuna’s wrath is dispelled and eventually he 17  
desists from his intent of killing Yudhiṣṭhira (8.49.57–71). Nonethe- 18  
less, Arjuna cannot help reproaching his brother for his harsh words 19  
and many mistakes. After another enlightening speech of Kṛṣṇa, 20  
Arjuna bows down at Yudhiṣṭhira’s feet recognizing his merits and 21  
states that he will either kill Karṇa or be killed by him. Finally, 22  
Arjuna asks for Yudhiṣṭhira’s forgiveness. In turn, Yudhiṣṭhira 23  
admits all his faults and asks Arjuna to behead him or otherwise 24  
he will leave the kingdom to Bhīma and will retreat to the forest 25  
to lead the life of an ascetic. Once again, Kṛṣṇa intervenes and 26  
recalls Arjuna’s vow, shifting his attention to the killing of Karṇa. 27  
In the end, Yudhiṣṭhira, too, desists from his intention and peace 28  
is restored between the two brothers. The next chapter begins with 29  
Saṃjaya’s words: “Having so replied to Yudhiṣṭhira after Kṛṣṇa’s 30  
words, the son of Pṛthā [= Arjuna] was dejected, as though he had 31  
committed a sin. (1) Then, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), 32  
Vāsudeva addressed the son of Pāṇḍu: ‘O son of Pṛthā, pray, how 33  
would it be if you had killed the son of Dharma, established in 34  
justice, by means of your sharp-bladed sword?’ ” (2)<sup>52</sup> Kṛṣṇa often 35  
takes part in the quarrels between Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna, step 36  
by step instructing and advising them both. The hint of laughter 37  
is placed at the beginning of the chapter and marks the restored 38  
harmony between the two brothers. Kṛṣṇa’s *prahasann iva* comes 39  
40

1 along with his admonition to Arjuna, in which he makes him  
 2 think about the evil consequences that would have ensued had  
 3 he killed Yudhiṣṭhira. The lord's hint of laughter reveals his grace  
 4 and foreseeing wisdom, thanks to which he prevents a tragedy.

5 11) 12.3.29b = we are now in the *Śāntiparvan*, philosophically  
 6 the most relevant book of the *MBh*. This is a dialogue between Rāma  
 7 Bhārgava (i.e., the Brahmin Paraśurāma) and his disciple Karṇa, a  
 8 *kṣatriya* in the guise of a Brahmin. The chapter narrates how Karṇa,  
 9 who had obtained the mighty weapon *brahmāstra* from his *guru*,  
 10 is punished by Paraśurāma. It so happens that Paraśurāma falls  
 11 asleep on Karṇa's thigh and a flesh-devouring worm begins to eat  
 12 Karṇa's leg. In order to allow his master to sleep peacefully, he  
 13 bears the terrible pain without moving. When the blood begins to  
 14 flow from Karṇa's thigh, Paraśurāma wakes up and, furious, says  
 15 that only a non-Brahmin could have endured such pain without  
 16 lamenting (12.3.25). Karṇa then discloses his true identity and begs  
 17 for Paraśurāma's forgiveness (12.3.26–28):

18  
 19 To that afflicted one, who was shaking and had fallen  
 20 down on the ground with folded hands, the best among  
 21 the Bhṛguṣ [= Paraśurāma], full of anger, with a hint of  
 22 laughter (*prahasann iva*) said: (29) "Since for cupidity of  
 23 the weapon you behaved deceitfully—o fool—when you  
 24 will use it (30) in battle you will have at your disposal  
 25 only something that resembles it, which will not have  
 26 the same efficacy: indeed, the *brahmāstra* cannot ever  
 27 stay with a non-Brahmin. (31) Now go! This is not the  
 28 place for you, o liar! Anyway, there will be no warrior  
 29 equal to you on this earth." (32)<sup>53</sup>

30  
 31 What is noteworthy here is that our stock expression occurs in a  
 32 moment of anger: Paraśurāma punishes his deceitful disciple with  
 33 a hint of laughter on his face, wishing to teach him a lesson.

34 12) 13.14.174d = this passage is in the context of a teaching  
 35 that is offered by the dying Bhīṣma. At first declaring his utter  
 36 incapacity, Kṛṣṇa narrates to all the assembled warriors and  
 37 sages the extraordinary qualities of Śiva (13.14.1–9). Kṛṣṇa's story  
 38 begins with queen Jāmbavatī<sup>54</sup> who asks him for a mighty and  
 39 intelligent son. In order to satisfy her desire, Kṛṣṇa goes to the  
 40

hermitage of sage Upamanyu, son of Vyāghrapāda,<sup>55</sup> located on the  
Himālayas (13.14.10–43). As soon as Kṛṣṇa enters the hermitage,  
Upamanyu—radiant with ascetic power—bows down to him.  
Upamanyu assures Kṛṣṇa that, by the grace of Īśāna (= Śiva),  
Jāmbavatī will obtain a son similar to him (13.14.44–71).

Upamanyu then tells the story of how he himself obtained  
Śiva’s favor. During the *kṛtayuga*, the first perfect era, he and his  
younger brother Dhaumya<sup>56</sup> once went to some sages’ hermitage  
together with their mother and tasted something that they had never  
tasted before: the sweet milk of a cow. Consequently, Upamanyu  
asked his mother about this milk and she told him that without  
Śiva’s grace no milk could be had by the ascetics who live in the  
forest: indeed, only by his grace (*tatprasādāt*) can all desires be  
satisfied. From that moment onward, Upamanyu’s devotion to Śiva  
became unmovable, so much so that he won Mahādeva’s favor by  
standing on top of his hallux for a thousand years, progressively  
reducing his diet to fruits, dry leaves, water and, finally, air alone  
(13.14.72–87).

Upamanyu goes on narrating to Kṛṣṇa that on such occasion  
Śiva took the form of Indra and appeared before him to test his  
steadiness by offering him a boon. Upamanyu respectfully refused  
any boon from him, affirming that his austerities were directed  
only at pleasing the supreme lord Śiva, the ultimate cause of the  
universe. Upamanyu also explained the reason why he would  
have accepted only Śiva’s grace or judgment (13.14.88–104).  
Having heard his words, the three-eyed Śiva revealed himself to  
Upamanyu, sitting on his bull together with Pārvatī, armed with  
the tremendous *pāśupata* weapon and accompanied by Brahmā,  
Nārāyaṇa, Skanda and Indra together with many other sages and  
seers (13.14.105–49). Even before this wondrous vision, Upamanyu  
had composed a lengthy hymn in Śiva’s honor, offering him vari-  
ous gifts. Extremely pleased, Śiva, in front of all the other deities,  
expressed his deep satisfaction for Upamanyu’s firm devotion.  
Thus the gods asked Śiva to shower his grace on such a unique  
devotee (13.14.150–73): “Once addressed in this way by all the  
gods beginning with Brahmā, the glorious lord Śaṅkara (= Śiva),  
with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), said to me: (174) ‘O son  
Upamanyu, I am pleased! Look at me, o bull among silent sages!  
O priestly seer, you are a firm devotee, you have indeed been

1 tested by me (175) and I am extremely pleased by such devotion  
 2 of yours. Therefore, today I will fulfill all your wishes' " (176).<sup>57</sup>  
 3 Immediately, Upamanyu experiences intense bliss which brings tears  
 4 of joy to his eyes (13.14.177). Once again, a god's hint of laughter  
 5 accompanies his intention of showering his grace upon a devotee  
 6 by bestowing whatever boon he/she desires.

7 13) 14.19.46d = this verse is taken from the *Anugītā* or *Uttaraḡītā*  
 8 (*MBh* 14.16–51), a philosophical poem similar to the *BhG* in which  
 9 a Brahmin has a lengthy dialogue with Kṛṣṇa. Herein, the Brahmin  
 10 narrates the insight he gave to a bright disciple of his who had  
 11 questioned him regarding several issues concerning the body and  
 12 the self (*ātman*). The presentation of his teaching continues up to  
 13 the end of the chapter (14.19.42–47):

14

15 Just as the mind of one who has placed a treasure in  
 16 his own coffer stays in that box, in the same way one  
 17 that has turned his mind inwardly must search for the  
 18 self and completely avoid carelessness. (42) So, always  
 19 zealously active and with a contented mind, before  
 20 long he will reach *Brahman* and, having realized it, will  
 21 become the knower of the universal [principle]. (43)  
 22 But that [principle] is not perceivable by sight nor by  
 23 the other senses. That pervasive [principle] can be seen  
 24 within yourself only by means of that lantern which is  
 25 the mind. (44) The living individual clearly perceives  
 26 that self—which is separate from the body—as having  
 27 hands and feet everywhere; with eyes, heads and mouths  
 28 everywhere. (45) Hence, having left aside his own body  
 29 and resolving only upon *Brahman*, he, with a hint of  
 30 laughter (*prahasann iṅva*), realizes the self by means of the  
 31 mind. (46) O best among the twice born, I have revealed  
 32 to you the secret of secrets and so [now] I will leave! I  
 33 feel the desire to realize [the truth] and you, o disciple,  
 34 may go wherever you like." (47)<sup>58</sup>

35

36 Here *prahasann iṅva* is not related to a locutionary act but is meant  
 37 to point out that by concentrating upon *Brahman* one can easily  
 38 achieve the supreme goal of *mokṣa* or self-realization. This instance  
 39 is akin to the cases analyzed in the previous section, where the  
 40

hint of laughter signals the heroes' ease in accomplishing even the most difficult tasks.

14) 14.20.5b = Vāsudeva narrates an ancient story about a learned Brahmin and his wife (Vassilov 2002, 239–41). One day, while the Brahmin is sitting all alone, his wife asks him what will her posthumous destiny be like, given that she has served him her entire life while he sat (*āsīnam*) doing nothing (*nyastakarmāṇam*), niggard (*kīnāśam*), and without discernment (*avicaḥṣaṇam*). Since chaste wives are said to attain the same abode as their husbands, she worriedly asks him what will happen to her (14.20.1–4):

Having spoken thus, that calm [Brahmin], with a hint of laughter (*hasann iva*), replied to her: “O virtuous one, I am not indignant at this statement of yours, o faultless. (5) Whether an action be visible or audible, those who perform actions know that it is [simply] an action. (6) Those who are devoid of knowledge because of [attachment to] action are deluded; and it is well-known that for an embodied being the absence of action cannot be attained in this world.” (7)<sup>59</sup>

The husband goes on with his teaching up to the end of the chapter (14.20.27). What is remarkable is that his *hasann iva* accompanies a spiritual instruction meant to correct the wife's deluded perspective. The hint of laughter is the expression of the Brahmin's grace toward his spouse. This is confirmed by his gentle attitude, despite the wife's harsh words.

15) 14.54.17b = this is a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Uttāṅka (14.52–53), where the latter concludes that the former is the creator of the universe and—like Arjuna in *BhG* 11—asks Kṛṣṇa to manifest his majestic form to him (*rūpam aiśvaryam*; 14.54.1–3). Vaiśampāyana, who narrates this story, says that Uttāṅka saw Kṛṣṇa's universal form (*viśvarūpa*) and was completely overwhelmed with wonder (*vismaya*). Uttāṅka then sings a hymn of praise to Kṛṣṇa, asking him to please retain his glorious form (14.54.4–8). At this juncture, Kṛṣṇa bestows a boon on Uttāṅka, who at first is so amazed by the wonderful vision that he does not want anything from him. However, at Kṛṣṇa's insistence he asks that he may find water whenever he desires, even in a desert (14.54.12; *toyam icchāmi*

1 *yatreṣṭaṃ maruṣv etad dhi durlabham*). Just before leaving, Kṛṣṇa  
 2 assures Uttāṅka that whenever he will desire water he will just have  
 3 to think of him. The story goes that once Uttāṅka found himself  
 4 roaming in a desert, longing for water. He was then reminded of  
 5 Kṛṣṇa's words and started thinking of him. At that very moment  
 6 he saw a naked barbarian, covered with dust and armed with a  
 7 tremendous sword, a bow and arrows, surrounded by a pack of  
 8 dogs (14.54.13–16ab): "The best among the twice-born saw a flow  
 9 of abundant water pouring out of the barbarian's lower parts [=  
 10 the penis] (16cd) and the latter, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann*  
 11 *iva*), said to him: 'O Uttāṅka, come! O scion of the Bhṛguṣ, accept  
 12 [this] water from me! (17) I feel great compassion seeing you with  
 13 such great thirst.' The sage, however, did not welcome that water"  
 14 (18).<sup>60</sup> Here we have a peculiar occurrence of *prahasann iva*. As the  
 15 rest of the chapter makes clear, the hint of laughter expresses a  
 16 challenge, a test to which Kṛṣṇa puts his devotee. Though it may  
 17 appear as a mocking laugh, nonetheless it proves the lord's favor  
 18 toward Uttāṅka.

19

20 *Rām*

21

22 Among the fourteen instances of *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* in the  
 23 *Rām*, seven can be referred to this section. Here we focus attention  
 24 on 7.4.11b.<sup>61</sup> In a dialogue between the seer Agastya and Rāma,  
 25 the former replies to the latter's questions on Rāvaṇa's previous  
 26 births. Agastya begins by telling him the story of Prajāpati, who  
 27 created aquatic beings who are very hungry, thirsty, and fearful:

28

29 Prajāpati, the subduer of the enemies' pride, with a hint  
 30 of laughter (*prahasann iva*) addressed those creatures thus:  
 31 "You should protect them [= the waters] with effort!"  
 32 (11) Some of them, who were angry, replied: "We shall  
 33 protect [them] (*rakṣāma*)!" while the others, who were not  
 34 angry, [replied]: "We shall worship [them] (*yakṣāma*)!"  
 35 Then the creator of beings stated: (12) "Those who said  
 36 'We shall protect' will be demons (*rākṣasa*) for you; those  
 37 who said 'We shall worship' will be semi-divine beings  
 38 (*yakṣa*) for you." (13)<sup>62</sup>

39

40



Once again, a god exhibits a hint of laughter just before speaking. Prajāpati's *prahasann iva* seems to indicate that he already knows what will be the consequences of his command.

*PRAHASANN IVA* AND *HASANN IVA* AS EXPRESSIONS OF MOCKERY,  
DELIGHT AND SURPRISE

We now focus on the third purport of *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva*. This is the most straightforward one since it has to do with the main meaning of root *√has* in which the value of the particle *iva* is either softened or neglected. In several loci, our stock expressions are strengthened by synonymous nouns and verbs. Herein, we examine thirteen occurrences from the *MBh* out of a total of twenty-six.<sup>63</sup>

*MBh*

1) 1.127.5d<sup>64</sup> = having seen Karṇa, and having ascertained that he is the son of a charioteer, Bhīma, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), addresses him thus: "O son of the carter, you are unworthy of being killed in battle by Pārtha [= Arjuna]! Quickly take the whip, (6) you are not worthy of enjoying the kingdom of Aṅga, o vilest among men: you are like a dog [and should not eat] the sacrificial cakes that are placed near the sacrificial fire!" (7)<sup>65</sup> Here *prahasann iva* precedes a locutionary act that is meant to ridicule Karṇa's humble origins.

2–3) 3.40.17 and 3.40.21b = the context of these occurrences is well known. Arjuna is trying to kill a wild boar<sup>66</sup> on top of a mountain and is stopped by Śiva who appears to him in the guise of a hunter (*kirāta*). Arjuna shoots an arrow against the wild boar and the hunter does the same. Both arrows hit the wild boar simultaneously and kill the animal: "Then Jīṣṇu<sup>67</sup> [= Arjuna] looked at the man with the radiance of gold, disguised in the dress of a mountain hunter, accompanied by women, o killer of enemies. The delighted Kaunteya [= Arjuna], with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), addressed him thus: [. . .]."<sup>68</sup> Arjuna is amazed at seeing the *kirāta* and asks him who he is. He is astonished at his insulting behavior and resolves to kill him (*MBh* 3.40.18–20). The



1 hero's *prahasann iva* expresses mixed feelings: his hint of laughter  
 2 is tinged with wonder but primarily with mockery and desire for  
 3 revenge. A few verses later, after Arjuna has harshly addressed  
 4 the *kirāta* for having stolen his prey, there is a second occurrence  
 5 of *prahasann iva*:

6  
 7       Once addressed by the Pāṇḍava, the mountain hunter,  
 8       with a hint of laughter, said these tender words to the  
 9       ambidextrous archer Arjuna: (21) "I definitely targeted  
 10       this prey and hit it before you did; mind you, I can kill  
 11       you in one stroke. (22) You should not attribute your  
 12       errors to others. You are proud of your own strength: o  
 13       slow witted, you have offended me and will not escape  
 14       alive from me! (23) Be brave! I will shoot arrows like  
 15       thunderbolts and you too should shoot your arrows and  
 16       fight." (24)<sup>69</sup>

17  
 18 Our formulaic expression immediately precedes a definite challenge  
 19 to Arjuna. The *kirāta*'s serene attitude proves his self-confidence,  
 20 while his hint of laughter shows his sarcasm.

21       4) 3.97.5d = this chapter presents the story of the Brahmin  
 22 demon Ilvala. The sage Lomaśa narrates that Ilvala had cooked his  
 23 brother Vātāpi in order to kill the seer Agastya.<sup>70</sup> When the seer  
 24 invited by Ilvala reaches his place and sees that Vātāpi has been  
 25 well-cooked, he resolves to eat him:

26  
 27       Then the great sage having reached the seat of honor  
 28       seated himself [there] while Ilvala, the lord of demons,  
 29       with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), served him the  
 30       food. (5) Agastya ate Vātāpi entirely and, once he had  
 31       eaten him, Ilvala tried to call his brother back to life.  
 32       (6) But a belch of the great soul Agastya made Ilvala  
 33       realize that the demon had been fully digested and thus  
 34       he became sad. (7) Along with his ministers, he uttered  
 35       these words with folded hands: "What is the reason that  
 36       brought you here? Tell me, what can I do for you?" (8)<sup>71</sup>

37  
 38 Here *prahasann iva* displays Ilvala's ill intentions. The demon's hint  
 39 of laughter is both sarcastic, prefiguring the death of the sage, and  
 40 horrific, due to the gruesome nature of the food he serves to him.

5) 3.294.9d = Vaiśampāyana narrates that Karṇa addresses a Brahmin who is actually Indra in disguise and asks him what he desires, be it a golden necklace, women or densely populated villages, promising that he will grant these to him. The Brahmin asks Karṇa to give him the armor (*varman*) he has worn since birth, together with his earrings (*kuṇḍala*). Karṇa, however, refuses to donate these items to him:

When the best among the twice-born did not choose another gift, the son of Rādhā [= Karṇa], with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), said to him again: (9) “O sage, the armor was born along with me and the earrings were born from the nectar of immortality, thanks to which I am invulnerable in this world. This is why I will not give them away! (10) O virtuous bull among Brahmins, accept from me a huge kingdom on earth, prosperous and free from troubles. (11) Deprived of the earrings and of my armor, o best of the twice-born, I will be at the mercy of my enemies.” (12)<sup>72</sup>

Here *prahasann iva* signals Karṇa’s surprise and perhaps even embarrassment at the Brahmin’s request. Somehow, the hint of laughter mitigates the hero’s refusal of donating the armor and earrings that make him invulnerable. It may also conceal Karṇa’s suspicion as to the Brahmin’s true identity.

6) 4.23.22d = this chapter narrates that once Sairandhrī [= Draupadī in disguise during her exile at Virāṭa’s court], having freed herself from her kidnappers, reached the hall where Bṛhannaḍā [= Arjuna in disguise as a eunuch] was dancing together with some girls. Bṛhannaḍā then asks Sairandhrī how she managed to free herself. To him, Sairandhrī replies: “O Bṛhannaḍā, what is the matter with you today regarding Sairandhrī? O good woman, you surely lead a happy life in the women’s apartments. (21) Indeed, you don’t suffer the sorrow Sairandhrī is experiencing! This is why you question me, who am so distressed, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*).” (22)<sup>73</sup> Arjuna/Bṛhannaḍā’s hint of laughter sharply contrasts with Draupadī/Sairandhrī’s distress and this is the reason why the latter rebukes the former, judging his *prahasann iva* to be totally inappropriate (*anucita*), an effect of the happy life he enjoys in the women’s apartments.

1           7) 4.53.14b = Arjuna approaches his *guru*, the mighty Droṇa,  
2 just before ordering his charioteer Uttara to attack him: "Having  
3 approached Droṇa's chariot, the vigorous great warrior Pārtha  
4 appeared delighted (*harṣayukta*) and, with a hint of laughter (*pra-*  
5 *hasann iva*), (14) after revering [him], the strong-armed Kaunteya,  
6 the slayer of enemies, gently uttered these tender words [to him]  
7 (15) [. . .]."74 The use of *prahasann iva* expresses the joy of an  
8 exemplary *kṣatriya* like Arjuna of having the opportunity to fight  
9 a loyal combat with his *guru*. The hint of laughter is definitely a  
10 sign of Arjuna's delight.

11           8) 7.50.16d<sup>75</sup> = several chapters are dedicated to describe the  
12 killing of Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna and Subhadrā, Kṛṣṇa's sister  
13 (7.32–51). Toward the end of the narrative, when the valiant boy  
14 has already been killed by the Kauravas, an exceedingly distressed  
15 Arjuna utters a few words. He remarks that the smiling (*hasann*  
16 *iva*) Saubhadra [= Abhimanyu] will not be there to welcome him  
17 when he returns from the battlefield, as he used to do.

18           The expression *hasann iva* refers to Abhimanyu's joyful mood,  
19 that Arjuna remembers with touching words. Abhimanyu's cheer-  
20 ful personality contrasts with the tragic situation in which Arjuna  
21 laments his death.

22           9) 7.160.23b = impelled by Duryodhana, Droṇa promises that  
23 he will mercilessly kill all his enemies. Yet, Droṇa points out that  
24 if Duryodhana thinks that Arjuna can be defeated by any ordinary  
25 human being he is wrong and starts enumerating Arjuna's impres-  
26 sive deeds (7.160.1–20). At this eulogy of Arjuna, Duryodhana  
27 mounts in a rage and tells Droṇa that he, Duḥśāsana, and Karṇa  
28 along with his maternal uncle Śakuni will kill Arjuna in battle  
29 that very day: "Having heard those words of his, Bhāradvāja [=  
30 Droṇa], with a hint of laughter (*hasann iva*), followed the king and  
31 said [to him]: 'May fortune be with you! (23) Indeed, who is the  
32 warrior that can destroy the undecaying bull among warriors, the  
33 bearer of the *gāṇḍīva* [bow], blazing as if he were [lit] by fire?' "  
34 (24).<sup>76</sup> Here *hasann iva* opens a direct speech and bears a sarcastic  
35 meaning: Duryodhana's resolve is thought to be so hopeless that  
36 it causes Droṇa's hint of laughter.

37           10) 10.12.12d = Droṇa reveals to his son Aśvatthāman the  
38 secret of an extraordinary weapon called *brahmaśiras*. Knowing his  
39  
40

son's wicked nature, he warns him that it should never be used  
against humans. On listening to his father's words, Aśvatthāman  
loses the hope of obtaining his inheritance and begins wandering  
the earth till he reaches Dvārakā, Kṛṣṇa's capital (10.12.1–11):

While he [= Aśvatthāman] was staying at Dvārakā, he  
approached me [= Kṛṣṇa] all alone on the seashore and,  
with a hint of laughter (*hasann iva*), said: (12) "O Kṛṣṇa,  
by practicing a most arduous penance the master of the  
Bhāratas, my truly brave father, received from Agastya  
(13) the weapon called *brahmaśiras*, honored by gods and  
*gandharvas*. As it belongs to my father, that weapon will  
[soon] be mine, o Dāśārha [= Kṛṣṇa]. (14) O best among  
the Yadus, when I will receive that divine weapon do  
give me [your] weapon also, the disc that annihilates all  
enemies in battle!" (15)<sup>77</sup>

Even in this case *hasann iva* opens a direct speech where the speaker  
displays a good deal of arrogance. Aśvatthāman's hint of laughter  
is meant to express his delight at the thought that he will soon  
inherit the *brahmaśiras* from his father. This is what he wants Kṛṣṇa  
to believe, since in fact the evil Aśvatthāman has lost all hope of  
securing the celestial weapon.

11) 12.24.8d = this is an occurrence from the *Śāntiparvan*, within  
a definitely philosophical context. Yudhiṣṭhira asks Vyāsa about  
the circumstances that brought King Sudyumna to attain supreme  
perfection (*paramāṇi saṃsiddhim*).<sup>78</sup> Vyāsa's reply begins with an old  
tale of two brothers, Likhita and Śaṅkha, who were ascetics.<sup>79</sup> Once,  
on returning to his hermitage, Śaṅkha saw his brother eating some  
fruits and asked him: "Where did you find those fruits and why  
are you eating them?" (7cd) Reverently saluting him, Likhita, with  
a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), replied: 'I took them from there!'  
(8) To him, Śaṅkha said in an angry tone: 'This is a theft you have  
committed! You were not supposed to take those fruits! (9) Go to  
the king and confess your theft!' " (10ab)<sup>80</sup> Likhita's joyful hint of  
laughter proves his candor since he didn't think there was anything  
wrong in what he did: he didn't willingly steal the fruits but simply  
carried out a naïve action, without considering its consequences.

1           12) 14.73.6b = Vaiśampāyana narrates that once Arjuna followed  
 2 the roaming of a sacrificial horse during an *aśvamedha* ritual and that  
 3 when the horse reached the Trigarta kingdom it was surrounded by  
 4 well-armed enemies who tried to capture it. Though Arjuna tried  
 5 to reason with them using kind words, they shot several arrows  
 6 against him which he effectively countered (14.73.1–6): “Then, o  
 7 Bhārata, Jiṣṇu [= Arjuna] said [to them], with a hint of laughter  
 8 (*prahasann iva*): ‘O people ignorant of the *dharmā*, move backward  
 9 [if] you care for your life!’”<sup>81</sup> Arjuna’s *prahasann iva* expresses his  
 10 resoluteness in front of the enemies. With his hint of laughter he  
 11 scorns his opponents, being confident in his own superiority.

12           13) 14.93.39c = in this chapter, a mongoose illustrates to some  
 13 Brahmins the supreme effect of the act of giving (*dānasya paramaṃ*  
 14 *phalam*). The mongoose tells them of a period of famine, when a  
 15 virtuous family received a Brahmin guest. Though both husband  
 16 and wife offered him their *saktu*<sup>82</sup> the guest was still hungry  
 17 (14.93.1–29). When their young son wished to offer him his *saktu*  
 18 in order to safeguard his father’s honor, the latter at first prevented  
 19 him from doing so because of his tender age (14.93.30–36). The boy  
 20 then told his father that a *putra*, that is a son, is so called because  
 21 he protects.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, he argued that a son is the same as his  
 22 father and therefore he should be allowed to offer his food since  
 23 it will be like saving himself by himself (*trāhy ātmānam ihātmanā*;  
 24 14.93.37). The father then tells him: “‘I have examined you several  
 25 times: you are similar to me in appearance, conduct and self-con-  
 26 trol. I myself will offer him your *saktu*!’ (38) Having spoken thus,  
 27 the best among twice-born took his *saktu* and, delighted, with a  
 28 hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), gave it to the Brahmin” (39).<sup>84</sup> The  
 29 father’s *prahasann iva* is linked to his generous act—prompted by  
 30 the words of his son, who acts as his *guru*—and expresses pure  
 31 joy. Indeed, his happiness is emphasized by the word “delighted”  
 32 (*prītātman*).

33  
 34 *Rām*

35  
 36 7.80.3d = after listening to the story of the origin of the *kimpuruṣas*,<sup>85</sup>  
 37 Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata are utterly astonished. Therefore, Rāma tells  
 38 them the whole story again. Herein, the seer Budha addresses Ilā,  
 39 the daughter of Kardama: “Having seen all those *kinnarīs* agitated,  
 40

the best among seers, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), said to that beautiful woman: [. . .].”<sup>86</sup> The agitation of the *kinnarīs* contrasts with the joyful serenity of Budha in addressing Ilā, which is expressed through his reassuring hint of laughter.<sup>87</sup>

*PRAHASANN IVA* AND *HASANN IVA* AS AMBIGUOUS OR SEEMINGLY INCONGRUOUS EXPRESSIONS

In the epics one is faced with a few ambiguous or seemingly incongruous occurrences of *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva*, which signal different psychological and/or psycho-physical attitudes. Here we examine two occurrences from the *MBh*.<sup>88</sup>

*MBh*

1) 5.7.9b<sup>89</sup> = this chapter describes the well-known episode of Duryodhana going to Dvārakā in order to persuade Kṛṣṇa—whom he finds sleeping—to side with the Kauravas against the Pāṇḍavas. Thus when Kṛṣṇa asks him the reason for his visit, Duryodhana, with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*), replies begging his help in the war. Here the use of *prahasann iva* is ambiguous. It might prefigure a positive reply, given that Duryodhana is so proud of himself that he is certain of the Kauravas’ final victory, that is, from his viewpoint the clever Kṛṣṇa cannot but choose their side. More likely, however, his hint of laughter is tinged with nervousness and foreshadows a negative answer since Duryodhana is well aware of the special bond between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Thus his *prahasann iva* may hide the conviction that his attempt is as necessary as much as it is useless. All in all, his hint of laughter may be interpreted either as a sign of Duryodhana’s arrogance or as a sign of his embarrassment.

2) 12.142.41b = this chapter is part of a larger section concerning the rules and practices that are to be adopted in times of emergency (*āpaddharma*; 12.129–167). Bhīṣma narrates to a king the story of a pigeon (*kapota*) and his wife-dove (*kapotī*) who had been captured by a fowler. At a certain point, the *kapotī* suggests to her husband to honor the fowler as their guest. The pigeon follows her advice and addresses the fowler with sweet, merciful words (12.142.13–22). The latter confides to him that he is very cold and

1 so the pigeon lights a fire with dry leaves. The fowler then tells  
 2 him that he is hungry, but the pigeon does not have any food  
 3 left for him since forest dwellers—just like ascetics (*muni*)—only  
 4 eat what is necessary to satisfy their hunger, without ever storing  
 5 anything (12.142.23–37). Distressed at not being able to satisfy his  
 6 guest's request, the pigeon starts thinking what he can do to solve  
 7 the problem. At last, he arrives at a tragic resolution: he kindles a  
 8 fire and, repeating what he had heard from deities, ancestors and  
 9 sages, praises the great merit (*dharmo mahān*) that ensues from  
 10 honoring one's guests (*atithipūjana*). Bhīṣma concludes his story by  
 11 saying: "O king, then the bird, steady in his vow of truthfulness,  
 12 having circumambulated the fire three times, threw himself into  
 13 it with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*)."<sup>90</sup> In this touching story,  
 14 the use of *prahasann iva* is seemingly out of place and must be  
 15 understood as a counterpoint to the *kapota's* tragic epilogue. The  
 16 capacity to smile/laugh is transferred to a bird and is meant to  
 17 ease the tension, highlighting the inner serenity of the pigeon who  
 18 readily sacrifices his life in order to honor his guest.

19  
 20 *Rām*

21  
 22 2.63.9d = Bharata tells about a nightmare he had: "I have seen him  
 23 [= Daśaratha, Bharata's father] floating in that lake of cow-dung  
 24 while drinking sesame-oil with folded hands, repeatedly laughing  
 25 (*hasann iva*)."<sup>91</sup> Being the description of a bad dream, this occurrence  
 26 is inevitably ambiguous and surreal, even horror-like. The repeated,  
 27 hysterical laughs of Daśaratha—where one might expect him to  
 28 cry—amplify his miserable condition: they express his uncontrol-  
 29 lable reaction to the traumatic situation he is immersed in.<sup>92</sup>

### 30 31 32 Concluding Remarks 33

34 Whereas the formulaic dictions *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* are  
 35 absent in Vedic and Upaniṣadic literature they are widely extant  
 36 in the epics. In the *MBh* and *Rām* they are utilized in a broad  
 37 range of ways which we have grouped in the sections listed above.  
 38 Leaving aside their ambiguous usages, what emerges from this  
 39  
 40



survey is that the expressions *prahasann iva/hasann iva* reveal three basic meanings:

1. The ease with which a great hero accomplishes the most difficult task;
2. The bestowal of grace/boons by deities, sages and *gurus*;
3. Mockery, delight, and surprise.

There are instances in which one can legitimately classify *prahasann iva/hasann iva* in more than one way. These formulaic expressions are found with *verba dicendi* just before or simultaneously with—and, less frequently, after—a direct speech. In the majority of cases, however, they do not come along locutionary acts but are employed to highlight heroic deeds that are performed effortlessly. In one of these instances, it is Kṛṣṇa himself who kills a demon with nine arrows (*MBh* 6.107.2d).

With reference to *BhG* 2.10, the most relevant section is the one in which gods and sages have their teachings/insights preceded by a hint of laughter. Herein, seven occurrences of *prahasann iva* in the *MBh* see Kṛṣṇa as protagonist.<sup>93</sup> In six of these cases, Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter is addressed to Arjuna either directly or indirectly.<sup>94</sup> He knows something that Arjuna and the people around him ignore and his *prahasann iva* anticipates that he is about to offer a most precious *upadeśa*. Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter stands out as an expression of his grace: it opens a speech that is aimed at enlightening Arjuna and all his listeners on the right course of action, clearing their doubts and confused minds.<sup>95</sup>





## Chapter 4

# On Kṛṣṇa's Hint of Laughter in the Arts and in Devotional Literature

If in several languages of the world the word for “smile” is derived from the word for “laugh,” as for instance in French and Italian in which *sourire* and *sorriso* mean “low laugh” (*sou-rire*; *sor-riso*, from Latin *sub-ridere*) and no other terms exist for laughter but *rire* and *riso/risata* respectively,<sup>1</sup> we have noted from the start that Sanskrit, on the other hand, distinguishes smile from laughter.<sup>2</sup> Thus its word for smile is *smita* derived from verbal root  $\sqrt{smi}$ —the English *smile* being its cognate—whereas its word for laughter is *hāsa*, derived from verbal root  $\sqrt{has}$ .<sup>3</sup> Even within the *Dhātupāṭha*, the lexicon of verbal roots annexed to the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini (c. fourth century BCE),  $\sqrt{has}$  refers to “laugh” whereas  $\sqrt{smi}$  refers to “smile.”<sup>4</sup> When prefixes are added to root  $\sqrt{has}$ , as in the terms *upahāsa* and *parihāsa*, the prevailing meaning is that of derision or mockery, whereas when prefixes are added to root  $\sqrt{smi}$ , as in *vismaya*, the usual meaning is that of amazement, bewilderment, or wonder.

### The Aesthetic Experience of the Comic (*hāsyarasa*) in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*

To the aesthetic experience of the comic (*hāsyarasa*), the legendary sage and mythical first actor Bharata devotes chapter 6, verses 48–61, of his *Nāṭyaśāstra* or “Drama Manual” (first century BCE–

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1 third century CE), the earliest surviving treatise on the origins,  
 2 nature, and performance of the dramatic arts (i.e., theater, dance  
 3 and music).<sup>5</sup> The *hāsyarasa*,<sup>6</sup> which has as its basis the dominant  
 4 emotional mood (*sthāyibhāva*) of laughter (*hāsa*),<sup>7</sup> is classified in  
 5 three pairs (i.e., six varieties) according to the rank of the laugh-  
 6 ing characters, themselves classified in three grades—the highest  
 7 (*uttama*), the medium (*madhya*), and the lowest (*adhama*)—displaying  
 8 a progressive hierarchy from the utmost serene smile of the noble  
 9 people to the vile bursts of laughter of the village folk.<sup>8</sup>

10 The symbolic color ascribed to *hāsyā* is white, which refers  
 11 to the whiteness of the teeth that are revealed in smile/laughter,<sup>9</sup>  
 12 whereas its presiding deities are the Pramathas, a collective group  
 13 who are the retinue (*gaṇas*) of lord Śiva led by his son Gaṇeśa, the  
 14 “lord of the *gaṇas*.”<sup>10</sup> The six varieties of *hāsyarasa*—said to arise from  
 15 the erotic sentiment (*śṛṅgārarasa*) and to be an imitation (*anukṛti*)  
 16 of it (vv. 39–40)—are the following: smile (*smita*), slight laughter  
 17 (*hasita*),<sup>11</sup> open laughter (*vihāsita*), mocking laughter (*upahasita*), loud  
 18 laughter (*apahasita*), and excessive laughter (*atīhasita*). Although  
 19 Bharata observes that *hāsyarasa* is to be found primarily among  
 20 women and lower-class people, the first pair of *smita* and *hasita* is  
 21 understood to be typical of noble persons such as Brahmins, kings,  
 22 heroes as well as gods,<sup>12</sup> and he describes it with great precision  
 23 by having recourse to the following verses (54–55):

24  
 25 With cheeks slightly expanded, with glances of perfect  
 26 qualities, not showing the teeth, stable, should be the  
 27 smile (*smita*) of the highest characters. (*iṣadvikasitair*  
 28 *gaṇḍaiḥ kaṭākṣaiḥ sauṣṭhavānvitaiḥ | alakṣitadvijaṃ dhīram*  
 29 *uttamānāṃ smitaṃ bhavet ||*)

30 That which blooms the mouth and the eyes, expands  
 31 the cheeks, shows the teeth slightly, is prescribed as slight  
 32 laughter (*hasita*). (*utphullānananetraṃ tu gaṇḍair vikasitair*  
 33 *atha | kiñcil lakṣitadantaṃ ca hasitaṃ tad vidhīyate ||*)

34  
 35 It must be noted that Bharata's technical vocabulary and his defi-  
 36 nitions are of crucial importance since they apply to all domains of  
 37 fine arts in India, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* being the one established authority.  
 38 Given such framework, it is our contention that Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann*  
 39 *iva* in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10 is to be understood as falling within the  
 40

sphere of *hasita*. Indeed, we are persuaded that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* 1  
 canons are applicable to the *Bhagavadgītā*'s setting.<sup>13</sup> The deity's 2  
 hint of laughter illuminates his whole face, widening his eyes and 3  
 expanding his cheeks,<sup>14</sup> the partial opening of his mouth making 4  
 his glittering teeth slightly visible.<sup>15</sup> Kṛṣṇa's majestic, beaming 5  
 face reveals him as the all-powerful god, welcoming Arjuna as 6  
 his beloved *bhakta*. But before probing into the characterization 7  
 of Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter as *hasita*, we must contrast it with 8  
 Bharata's definitions of the other two pairs of *hāsyarāsa*, that is, 9  
 the ones applying to the medium/common and lowest characters 10  
 respectively (vv. 56–59): 11

Now for the common characters: 12

In open laughter (*vihasita*) the eyes are slightly 13  
 contracted and the cheeks fully distended. The sound 14  
 of the laughter is soft. The laughter is appropriate to 15  
 the occasion, and the face is colored. (*ākuñcitākṣigaṇḍaṃ* 16  
*yat sasvanam madhuraṃ tathā | kālāgataṃ sāsyarāgaṃ tad* 17  
*vai vihasitaṃ bhavet ||*) 18

In mocking laughter (*upahasita*) the nostrils are 19  
 distended, the eyes squint and the shoulders and head 20  
 are bent.<sup>16</sup> (*utphullanāsikaṃ yat tu jihmadṛṣṭinirikṣitam |* 21  
*nikuñcitāṅgakaśīras tac copahasitaṃ bhavet ||*) 22

Now for the lowest characters: 23

In loud laughter (*apahasita*) one laughs out of place, 24  
 with tears in one's eyes, and the shoulders and head are 25  
 shaking (with laughter). (*asthānahasitaṃ yat tu sāśrunetraṃ* 26  
*tathaiḥ ca | utkampitāṃsakaśīras tac cāpahasitaṃ bhavet ||*) 27

In excessive laughter (*atihāsita*) the eyes are 28  
 swollen and bathed in tears, and there are loud and 29  
 violent cries and one holds one's sides with one's 30  
 hands. (*saṃrabdhasāśrunetraṃ ca vikṛṣṭasvaram uddhatam* 31  
*| karopagūḍhapārśvam ca tac cātihasitaṃ bhavet ||*) 32

These four characterizations of laughter constitute a *crescendo*, 33  
 from open laughter (*vihasita*) to excessive laughter (*atihāsita*). In 34  
 particular, though *vihasita* comes immediately after *hasita* it does 35  
 not seem to fit Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva*, it being a laughter that emits 36  
 a soft sound and in which the teeth are fully visible and the face 37  
 38  
 39

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1 colored. Rather, Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva*, as the attenuating particle  
 2 *iva* implies, is a mere hint of laughter and clearly falls within the  
 3 sphere of *hasita*: it is revealing that Bharata pairs together *smita* and  
 4 *hasita* given that with *hasita* we keep a reference to smile, it being  
 5 the first level of intensification of *smita*, whereas the following two  
 6 pairs concern open laughter in ascending degrees and are thus the  
 7 object of a separate description.<sup>17</sup>

8 In *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.48, Bharata tells us that *hāsyarasa* is of two  
 9 kinds, "existing in oneself" or "self-centered" (*ātmastha*) and  
 10 "existing in others" (*parastha*), so that when a person smile/laughs  
 11 on his/her own it is of the *ātmastha* variety, whereas when it is  
 12 determined by the smile/laughter of somebody else it is of the  
 13 *parastha* variety. Kṛṣṇa's *hasita* in the *Bhagavadgītā* is clearly of the  
 14 *ātmastha* kind since his hint of laughter spontaneously surges from  
 15 within himself.

16 Moreover, it appears to us that inseparable from Kṛṣṇa's  
 17 *ātmastha prahasann iva* is his "mood of compassion" (*kāruṇarasa*)  
 18 toward Arjuna. In other words, Kṛṣṇa's *hasita* simultaneously  
 19 reveals his love toward the hero who has sought refuge in him  
 20 since he looks compassionately at Arjuna who is utterly confused  
 21 and despondent. Thus Kṛṣṇa's *ātmastha hasita* is inseparable from  
 22 his *kāruṇya*, which is maximized as pure *preman* given Arjuna's  
 23 act of devout surrender to him as his *guru*.

24 In turn, Kṛṣṇa's *ātmastha hasita cum kāruṇya* leads to the ineffable  
 25 experience of *śāntarasa*, the "peaceful mood" that at this juncture  
 26 envelops both Arjuna and all of the poem's listeners/readers: this is  
 27 the *καίρός*, the silent climax and turning point of the *Bhagavadgītā*.  
 28 It is out of this blissful suspended time, in which all action (*karman*)  
 29 has come to a stop, that the cooling flow of Kṛṣṇa's grace (*prasāda*)  
 30 can start springing from his slightly opened, contracted lips.

31 Interestingly, Abhinavagupta (tenth to eleventh century CE), in  
 32 his commentary to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* known as *Abhinavabhāratī*, rejects  
 33 Bharata's interpretation of *hāsyarasa* as consisting of six varieties  
 34 hierarchically ordained one after the other and recognizes only  
 35 three states of *hāsyā*, arguing that each of the three pairs is a type  
 36 of smile/laughter together with its communicated form. Thus in  
 37 the case of the first pair of *smita* and *hasita*, he says: "That which is  
 38 *smita* in the superior character becomes *hasita* when communicated"  
 39 (*smitam hi yad uttamaprakṛtau tat saṃkrāntam hasitam sampadyate*).<sup>18</sup>  
 40

Along these lines, he interprets the first type of each of the three 1  
pairs to be *ātmastha* and the second (i.e., its communicated form) 2  
to be *parastha*. What Abhinavagupta has in mind is theatrical per- 3  
formance and the communicability of smile and laughter. 4

The communicated or transmitted variety is thought to go 5  
up one grade from the grade of the original, though it always 6  
pertains to the same state: the idea is that when an actor on stage 7  
represents an *uttama* or noble character, he/she first expresses *smita* 8  
on his/her own, that is, as *ātmastha* or *svasamuttha*, but when he/ 9  
she has to effectively convey it to the spectator, he/she expresses 10  
it at a higher degree of intensity as *hasita*, which therefore must 11  
be understood as *parastha* or *parasamuttha* (i.e., existing in another 12  
person).<sup>19</sup> The spectator is then thought to enter into a condition 13  
of veritable oneness/communion with the represented hero or 14  
god, and by the power of this communion he/she achieves an 15  
otherworldly (*alaukika*) experience that illustrates Abhinavagupta's 16  
conception of the transcendence of *rasa* in the beholder, though to 17  
be sure this sublime condition is only temporary.<sup>20</sup> 18

With regard to the *vibhāvas* or determinants that cause the 19  
insurgence of the comic *rasa*, Bharata in *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.48–50 states: 20

It arises from such *vibhāvas* as wearing clothes and orna- 21  
ments that belong to someone else or do not fit (*vikṛta*), 22  
shamelessness (*dhārṣṭya*), greed (*laulya*), tickling certain 23  
sensitive parts of the body (*kuhaka*), telling fantastic tales 24  
(*asatpralāpa*), seeing some (comic) deformity (*vyāṅga*), 25  
and describing faults (*doṣodāharana*). It should be acted 26  
out by [such *anubhāvas* or consequents as] puffing out 27  
the cheeks, the nose, the lips, widening and contracting 28  
one's eyes, sweating, coloring of the face, grabbing one's 29  
sides (in laughter) and so forth. The ephemeral emotions 30  
(*vyabhicārin*) (that accompany it) are: dissimulation, lazy- 31  
ness, drowsiness (*tandrā*), sleep, dreaming, awakening, 32  
envy, etc. . . . On this subject there are the following two 33  
traditional *āryā* stanzas: 34  
35

One laughs because of misplaced ornaments, eccen- 36  
tric behavior, language and dress, and other peculiar 37  
actions (*arthaviśeṣa*), and the resulting aesthetic experience 38  
is known as the comic. 39  
40



1           Because one can make people laugh by eccentric  
2           actions, words, and bodily movements and dress, there-  
3           fore the resulting sentiment (*rasa*) should be known as  
4           the comic.<sup>21</sup>

5  
6 In the *Abhinavabhāratī*, Abhinavagupta convincingly argues that  
7 the essence of what causes and excites *hāsya* (its *vibhāva*) is the  
8 fault of inappropriateness/impropriety or *anaucitya*<sup>22</sup> and that  
9 such disproportion/disharmony can be operating through both its  
10 determinants and consequents in all *rasas* (*anaucityapraorttikṛtam*  
11 *eva hi hāsyavibhāvātvaṃ | tac cānaucityaṃ sarvarasānāṃ vibhāvānub-*  
12 *hāvādaṃ sambhāvayate ||*).<sup>23</sup> Following Bharata, who links *hāsyarasa*  
13 to the imitation of *śṛṅgārarasa*, Abhinavagupta in his *Dhvanyālo-*  
14 *kalocana*, a commentary to the *Dhvanyāloka* of Ānandavardhana  
15 (ninth century CE), states that when writers use the word “love”  
16 in situations where love is spurious or one-sided—as in the case  
17 of the demon Rāvaṇa's love for Sītā—it should be understood as  
18 only a semblance (*ābhāsa*) of true love.<sup>24</sup> It is precisely this nongen-  
19 uineness (*amukhyatā*), this mere *ābhāsa* of *śṛṅgāra*, that reveals the  
20 *anaucitya* or inappropriateness of the whole situation and generates  
21 the mood of *hāsya*.

22           As pointed out in chapters 1 and 2, there is no doubt that it  
23 is Arjuna's *anaucitya* that triggers Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva*, given the  
24 inappropriateness of the hero's crisis and despondency at such a  
25 juncture vis-à-vis his own reputation as a great warrior. To this we  
26 may add his disobedience/disrespect toward Kṛṣṇa himself, that  
27 is, the *anaucitya* of Arjuna's stubbornness in saying that he will  
28 not fight despite just surrendering to Kṛṣṇa as his *guru* and lord,  
29 the same Kṛṣṇa who has told him to stop being a eunuch (*klība*),  
30 shake off his miserable weakness, and arise (*uttiṣṭha*). Although  
31 it is clear that Arjuna is lost in confusion (*moha*) and does not  
32 mean to be consciously disrespectful to his master, still the patent  
33 contradiction of his self-centered words and behavior—through  
34 which he claims to have reached a final, irrevocable decision—is  
35 in itself laughable. Among the commentators of *Bhāgavadgītā* 2.10,  
36 Sadānanda Yogīndra, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, Viśvanātha Cakra-  
37 vartī Ṭhākura and Bāladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa highlight Arjuna's  
38 *anaucitya* precisely along these lines.

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Nonetheless, even if we interpret Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* to be solely or primarily an expression of mockery—though such sarcasm is mitigated by the *iva* particle—it is a hint of laughter that is not derogatory for the sake of being derogatory but is rather meant to elicit Arjuna's reaction and his return to his senses. In other words, even if understood as mockery, the underlying intention behind Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* is to trigger Arjuna's discrimination (*viveka*) and therefore should be recognized as the outpouring of his grace (*kṛpā*, *prasāda*): a peculiar *upāya* or means of instruction utilized by the *guru* in order to stimulate a positive reaction in his pupil and bring about his transformation. Thus Madhusūdana Sarasvatī notes that the lord's derision (*prahāsa*), which he interprets to be only metaphoric due to the lack of its constitutive element (i.e., shame), is aimed at triggering Arjuna's discernment, he being the full receptacle of the lord's grace. Even Jñāneśvar in his commentary observes how the sweetness of nectar (i.e., Kṛṣṇa's grace) is hidden in the bitter taste of the medicine (i.e., his apparently angry or mocking expression), just as a mother's love is often concealed in anger.

On the other hand, it must be pointed out that Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* may also be interpreted as a hint of laughter of amusement and pure joy, given that the *anaucitya* that triggers the lord's *prahasann iva* can lead to either mockery or mirth or even to a peculiar combination (*samuccaya*) of the two. Kṛṣṇa's facial expression could be interpreted as an initially derisive smile that in turn leaves place to a compassionate glance of pure joy and satisfaction at Arjuna's having sought refuge at his feet. The hint of laughter triggered by the hero's impropriety can go both ways and even allow for opposite sentiments to arise in rapid succession one after the other, and such in-built polysemy is part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa's unpredictable personality and precisely what makes him so fascinating. A few commentators such as Bhāskara and Jñāneśvar have explained the lord's reaction as one of pure astonishment (*vismaya*), given that the hero Arjuna is wholly unrecognizable in his being overwhelmed by pity toward his kith and kin. Be that as it may, what is certain is that Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* is revelatory of the god's love and grace toward his *bhakta*.

## 1 Iconographic Representations of Kṛṣṇa Pārthasārathi

2

3 The iconographic translation in stone of Kṛṣṇa's smile/hint of  
 4 laughter in the *Bhagavadgītā* is hard to assess. Its privileged locus  
 5 is undoubtedly the so-called Pārthasārathi icon in which Kṛṣṇa is  
 6 worshipped as the charioteer (*sārathi*)<sup>25</sup> of Pārtha, that is, of Arjuna  
 7 as the son of Pṛthā.<sup>26</sup> The mention of this icon is found in the medi-  
 8 eval *Vaikhānasāgama*, a South Indian Vaikhānasa work also known  
 9 as *Marīcisaṃhitā* and *Vimānārcanakalpa*, possibly dating around the  
 10 tenth century CE.<sup>27</sup> Basing himself upon this source, T. A. Gopi-  
 11 natha Rao describes it thus in his *Elements of Hindu Iconography*:

12

13 In this image Kṛṣṇa is represented as holding the reins  
 14 in one hand and a cane in the other, and as in the act  
 15 of mounting a chariot, the right leg resting on the floor  
 16 and the left leg placed in front of the chariot. The chariot  
 17 itself is made to carry a flag<sup>28</sup> on the dome above, and  
 18 is shown to be yoked to excellent horses. Arjuna, with  
 19 bow in hand,<sup>29</sup> stands on the ground with his hands in  
 20 the *añjali* pose. The right hand of Kṛṣṇa is held so as  
 21 to be in the *vyākhyāna-mudrā*.<sup>30</sup>

22

23 The icon celebrates Kṛṣṇa at the decisive moment when he offered  
 24 his teaching to Arjuna, the latter having just surrendered to him.  
 25 This peculiar *mūrti* appears to have originated in South India and  
 26 predates the *Vaikhānasāgama*'s attestation (though unfortunately we  
 27 lack clear evidence for this). Its very designation as Pārthasārathi  
 28 is significant since it is meant to be the term of reference for the  
 29 *Bhagavadgītā* episode.<sup>31</sup> It highlights how Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna are  
 30 an indissoluble, interrelated pair, reminding us of the fact that  
 31 they are the incarnations of Nārāyaṇa and Nara respectively. In  
 32 its representation of the two protagonists, the icon captures the  
 33 very essence of the poem inaugurated by the lord's *prahasann iva*  
 34 at *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10. As chariotteer, Kṛṣṇa is always ready to step  
 35 in and provide the proper direction: as the well-wishing friend of  
 36 his devotee Arjuna, he would never allow the surrendered soul  
 37 to veer off the path of *dharma*.

38

39 Pārthasārathi is a well-known epithet—the great *vaiṣṇava*  
 40 theologian Rāmānuja is popularly revered as an *avatāra* of Pārtha-

40

sārathi—and a fairly common name.<sup>32</sup> One is reminded of the 1  
Pūrvamīmāṃsā teacher Pārthasārathi Mīśra (eleventh and twelfth 2  
century CE), who belonged to the school of Kumārila.<sup>33</sup> However, 3  
despite the fact that there exist a number of Pārthasārathi temples 4  
in South India—the most well-known among them being the one in 5  
Thiruvallikeni or Triplicane near Chennai in Tamil Nadu, possibly 6  
dating to the eighth century CE, of which Rāmānuja himself was 7  
especially fond of—<sup>34</sup>we were able to identify only few specimens 8  
of this *mūrti*.<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that these sculptures do not nec- 9  
essarily follow all of the *Vaikhānasāgama* prescriptions—for instance, 10  
the chariot can be missing—and present many variations. Even 11  
the Pārthasārathi Temple in Thiruvallikeni shows an arrangement 12  
of images that is strikingly different from the abovementioned 13  
description.<sup>36</sup> 14

Perhaps the best preserved specimen of a Pārthasārathi icon 15  
is the one found on the outer wall of the Chennakesava Temple 16  
in the Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh. This temple is part of 17  
the Puṣpagiri complex located on the banks of the Pennar River 18  
and dates to the fourteenth century CE or even earlier. Here Kṛṣṇa 19  
is represented seated in an upper position and with four hands, 20  
the two upper ones holding the conch and the discus while the 21  
lower right hand is in the *vyākhyāna* or teaching *mudrā*<sup>37</sup> and the 22  
lower left hand is hanging and points downward, the wrist resting 23  
on the knee. Arjuna is represented standing on the ground to his 24  
left, smaller and in a lower position. He is in the devoted *añjali* 25  
pose, holding his bow in his left arm and carrying arrows on his 26  
back, looking intently at his lord with a gaze full of expectation. 27  
As teacher of the *Gītā* (*gītācārya*), Kṛṣṇa is in the foreground in 28  
all his divine majesty, seated in a most relaxed pose with his legs 29  
wide open, his right leg resting on the ground (see fig. 4.1). His 30  
face is broad and bears a radiant countenance, serene and benign: 31  
with slightly open lips, he smiles protectively at his beloved *śiṣya*.<sup>38</sup> 32

In the rather ancient Kallazhagar Temple dedicated to Viṣṇu 33  
located in the Alagar Koyil village near Madurai in Tamil Nadu, 34  
Kṛṣṇa as Pārthasārathi is also represented with four hands but in 35  
*samapādasthānaka*, that is, with even feet in a perfectly straight pos- 36  
ture with legs and arms close together, his radiant face exhibiting 37  
a benevolent gaze, indicative of his divine majesty. His two upper 38  
hands are in *kartarīmukhahasta* or scissors posture, with the index 39  
40

1 Figure 4.1. Kṛṣṇa Pārthasārathi teaching the *Bhagavadgītā* to Arjuna. Chen-  
 2 nakesava Temple, Puṣpagiri, Andhra Pradesh, fourteenth century. *Source:*  
 3 H. Krishna Sastri, *South-Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses*. Madras:  
 4 Madras Government Press, 1916.



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32 and middle fingers stretched holding the conch and the discus,  
 33 while his two lower hands are one in the *vyākhyāna* or teaching  
 34 posture and one in the *kaṭakahasta* in which posture the tips of  
 35 the fingers are loosely applied to the thumb so as to form a ring,  
 36 a gesture (*abhinaya*) which is also used in teaching. To his side is  
 37 Arjuna, devoutly holding the *añjali* posture.<sup>39</sup>

38 In an early Chola temple dating to the time of Parantaka I (c.  
 39 907–955 CE), the Tiru Alandurai Mahadevar Temple in Kilappalu-  
 40

vur in the Udaiyarpalaiyam *taluka* of the Trichinopoly district of 1  
Tamil Nadu, an arched gateway (*torana*) over one of the niches for 2  
subordinate deities (*devakoṣṭa*) contains a sculpture of Kṛṣṇa with 3  
Arjuna.<sup>40</sup> Another specimen dated to the end of the twelfth century 4  
CE is part of a frieze representing the battlefield at Kurukṣetra and 5  
is found in the Hoysalesvara Temple in Halebid, in present-day 6  
Karnataka: Arjuna, standing up bow in hand, is portrayed in his 7  
chariot fighting against Karṇa, with Kṛṣṇa as charioteer.<sup>41</sup> 8

On the whole, the representations in stone of the Pārthasārathi 9  
icon are rare and incomparable with the numerous carvings of 10  
Kṛṣṇa as drawn from Purāṇic mythology, especially the *Bhāgavata* 11  
*Purāṇa*.<sup>42</sup> The scant presence of the *Bhagavadgītā*'s teaching moment 12  
in sculpture is indeed striking.<sup>43</sup> We think that one of the reasons is 13  
that the dual Pārthasārathi icon of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna was deemed 14  
to be too intellectual in its focus upon the lord's *upadeśa* and thus 15  
less appealing than the popular representations of the Purāṇic 16  
Kṛṣṇa celebrating his *līlās* and miraculous feats. The embodiment 17  
of the *Bhagavadgītā* episode represented by the Pārthasārathi *mūrti*, 18  
in which Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna exemplify the *guru-śiṣya* relation, 19  
epitomizes epic theology and was in all likelihood perceived as 20  
something too abstract and speculative, akin to setting in stone an 21  
Upaniṣadic dialogue. 22

With regard to painting, we have no attestation of the *Bhaga-* 23  
*avadgītā* in the earliest surviving specimens. Therefore, one must 24  
focus attention on the early modern period (1526–1857), when a new 25  
style emerged in the Mughal era as a fusion of Persian miniature 26  
with older Indian traditions. Starting from around the seventeenth 27  
century, this style was diffused across the Indian princely courts, 28  
each developing its own peculiar methods and techniques. 29

In the well-known *Razmnamah* (Book of wars), the Persian 30  
translation in abridged form of the *Mahābhārata* sponsored in the 31  
late sixteenth century by the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542–1605), 32  
none of the precious miniature paintings that illustrate the text 33  
represent the *Bhagavadgītā* episode. Herein, our poem occupies 34  
just a few pages and is not valued as the ethical climax of the 35  
epic. What is offered is merely a sketch of the dialogue between 36  
Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, the interest of this Persian rendition being on 37  
the great war itself and not on Kṛṣṇa's abstract reflections.<sup>44</sup> If 38  
the *Razmnamah*—both in its first copy carried out in 1584–86 and 39  
40



1 in its most elaborate second copy completed in 1598–99—one  
 2 finds beautiful miniatures illustrating a variety of battle scenes in  
 3 which the great warriors, among whom is Arjuna together with  
 4 his charioteer, are represented with impressive accuracy, nonethe-  
 5 less the *Bhagavadgītā* teaching moment per se is never thematized.

6 A remarkable and possibly unique case is represented by the  
 7 nearly five hundred paintings of the *Bhagavadgītā* by Allah Baksh,  
 8 from late seventeenth-century Mewar (1680–1698), a region in the  
 9 south-central part of Rājasthān, whose rulers cultivated painting as  
 10 part of their project of resistance to Mughal rule.<sup>45</sup> Commissioned  
 11 by the Maharana Jai Singh (1653–1698) of Udaipur, these works  
 12 of the Mewar school<sup>46</sup> are part of an illustrated *Mahābhārata* folio  
 13 of more than four thousand illustrations. Allah Baksh's paintings  
 14 on the *Bhagavadgītā* are fairly large—37x24 cm—and have no  
 15 precedent in the history of Indian miniature art, given that the  
 16 poem had never been illustrated in such detail prior to this date.  
 17 As Alok Bhalla and Chandra Prakash Deval remark:

18  
 19 These *Gita* paintings are . . . exceptional because the great  
 20 religious poem had never been illustrated in its entirety,  
 21 shloka by abstract shloka. There is no other miniature  
 22 artist who has engaged with the song's metaphysical  
 23 argument with such calm intelligence and imaginative  
 24 empathy. . . . Allah Baksh's works of visionary thought-  
 25 fulness deserve an honoured place in the history of  
 26 Indian miniature art and in the great library of Indian  
 27 scriptures and their interpretations. Unfortunately, very  
 28 little attention has been paid to them.<sup>47</sup>

29  
 30 As the *Bhagavadgītā* has a total of seven hundred verses, we may  
 31 assume that originally there must have been an equal number of  
 32 paintings, one for every *śloka*. However, only one painting each  
 33 has been located for chapters 1 and 17 and even for our *prahasann*  
 34 *iva* verse of *BhG* 2.10 no painting has reached us. With reference to  
 35 our topic the miniature of *BhG* 2.7, when Arjuna seeks refuge in  
 36 Kṛṣṇa as his disciple and implores him to instruct him, deserves  
 37 notice. The scene is lit by a serene blue-green light, suffusing the  
 38 painting in an atmosphere of momentous silence. While Arjuna  
 39 is represented down on his knees with folded hands and awaits  
 40



everything from his lord, Kṛṣṇa, who is enveloped in a brilliant halo, is depicted on an elevated lotus-shaped seat, of a resplendent yellow like the chariot, which in turn rests on an inverted lotus thus forming an intersecting cone. He sits in a yogic posture with his right palm raised in the blessing gesture of fearlessness or *abhayamudrā*, assuring his devotee of his grace. The figures at the bottom left are mirror images of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on a white marble platform. The lord sits on a bright yellow seat whereas Arjuna stands before him with folded hands. Kṛṣṇa is beautifully dressed in a pale red robe laced with gold, while Arjuna wears a saffron garment.

To offer a second sample of Allah Baksh's art we can refer to his richly colored rendering of *BhG* 2.15, where the effulgent lord teaches Arjuna that only the wise one for whom pain and pleasure are alike is fit for immortality. Herein, Kṛṣṇa's right hand is raised in the *cinmudrā*, the gesture of consciousness where the joining of the index finger and thumb to form a circle signifies the oneness of *ātman* and *Brahman*, while his left hand is in the *varadamudrā* or wish-giving gesture. On his part, Arjuna reverently kneels down with folded hands, his head slightly bent down, imbibing the lord's *upadeśa*. The miniature seems to suggest that the warrior must incorporate the values of detachment (*vairāgya*) and equanimity (*samatva*) represented by the figure of the renunciant at the bottom.

Also deserving mention are the folk pictures of Paithani and Pinguli art whose evidence dates back to approximately the seventeenth century, still extant in Maharashtra and Karnataka, utilized by itinerant bards in their recitation of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes. This style of painting, known as Chitrakathi, is akin to the shadow puppets of the region and herein the scenes of the battle of Kurukṣetra with Kṛṣṇa acting as Arjuna's charioteer are familiar.<sup>48</sup>

On the whole, even in painting the emphasis is clearly on the representation of the Kṛṣṇa of devotional *bhakti* literature, celebrating his innumerable *līlās* and his love for Rādhā and the *gopīs*, rather than on the epic Kṛṣṇa and his role as teacher to Arjuna. As Ursula King has noted, the iconography of the *Bhagavadgītā* with special reference to the pair of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna did not belong to the popular repertoire of Hindu iconography and came to be thoroughly

1 developed only from around the mid-eighteenth century at the  
 2 courts of Hindu *rājas*: that is, by painters in the Rājput studios of  
 3 North India. It is here that we witness the emergence of illustrated  
 4 *Bhagavadgītā* manuscripts (in contrast with the illustrations of the  
 5 *Mahābhārata* epic, which are found in earlier manuscripts).<sup>49</sup> The  
 6 enterprise of Allah Baksh from late seventeenth-century Mewar  
 7 must be viewed as its most significant antecedent, inaugurating  
 8 this new phase.

9 What needs to be emphasized is that the *Bhagavadgītā*, much  
 10 like the *Upaniṣads*, has been for centuries a more elitist text pri-  
 11 marily meant for individual/collective recitation/memorization,  
 12 meditation, and philosophical inquiry through its impressive,  
 13 age-old exegetical tradition.<sup>50</sup> Significantly, in the colophons of its  
 14 chapters the *Bhagavadgītā* is extolled as an *Upaniṣad* that concerns  
 15 itself with the “knowledge of Brahman” (*brahmadevyā*) and the “doc-  
 16 trine of yoga” (*yogaśāstra*), and due to its sacredness in ancient times  
 17 the reading and listening of the poem was proscribed to women  
 18 and people of lower castes.<sup>51</sup> Thus it was devoutly recited<sup>52</sup> and  
 19 learned by heart among educated Brahmins and within intellectual  
 20 circles but had little appeal among the Hindu masses, with the  
 21 one noticeable exception of the thirteenth-century Marāṭhī gloss  
 22 written by Jñāneśvar (i.e., the *Jñāneśvartī*).<sup>53</sup>

23 Things take a new turn from around 1750, when we witness  
 24 the transition of the *Bhagavadgītā* from elite status to popular work.  
 25 This innovation was due to the attractiveness that the Kṛṣṇa/  
 26 Arjuna pair, exemplifying *dharma* and *bhakti* and the paradigm of  
 27 *kṣatriyahood*, exercised on the many Hindu princes who sought  
 28 to define themselves as distinct from their Mughal rulers. Indeed,  
 29 upholding the poem that represented the quintessence of the  
 30 *Mahābhārata* was the best way to reclaim their self-identity and  
 31 reinforce *kṣatriya* pride. This is the reason why the *Bhagavadgītā*'s  
 32 teaching moment came to visual prominence around this time, the  
 33 Hindu iconographic tradition conforming itself to the relevance  
 34 accorded to it by the Brāhmaṇical commentarial tradition.

35 To be sure, it being a dialogue on a variety of religious and  
 36 philosophical issues, the *Bhagavadgītā* provides little material for  
 37 visualization, with only two noticeable exceptions: (a) the open-  
 38 ing scene, showing Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on their chariot amid the  
 39  
 40

warring armies on the battlefield; and (b) the scene of the glorious theophany of Kṛṣṇa as potently described in chapter 11 of the poem. In their portrayals, artists have focused special attention on these two motifs, the first allowing for a number of variations among which the one where Kṛṣṇa starts offering his *upadeśa* to Arjuna who surrenders to him as his *bhakta* in the *añjali* pose is the most noteworthy, it being acknowledged as the unmistakable guiding force in the interpretation of the text. Chapter 85 of the *Viṣṇudharmottara* gives the following prescriptions with regard to the iconographic depictions of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna: "Arjuna should be made beautiful, adorned by all ornaments, wearing *kirīṭa*<sup>54</sup> and red armlets, green like the *dūrvā*<sup>55</sup> and carrying a bow and arrow. . . . Krishna should be very beautiful resembling in colour the blue lotus-leaf."<sup>56</sup>

It is the interdependence/inseparability of both figures that makes the symbolic value of their iconographic representation so powerful. In this regard, a fine specimen is an early nineteenth-century Kangra painting that P. Banerjee in his book *The Life of Krishna in Indian Art* appropriately titles *Krishna Delivering the Message of the Gītā to Arjuna in the Battle-field*.<sup>57</sup> With his left hand raised in the act of delivering his teaching, Kṛṣṇa wears a beautiful ochre dress and is comfortably seated on top of the chariot, which is drawn by four white horses while Arjuna, fully equipped as a warrior with his armor and sword, sits kneeling in the *añjali* pose and facing him from a lower position within the seat of the chariot (see fig. 4.2). With a dark-blue complexion and lotus-petal eyes,<sup>58</sup> encircled by a divine halo and wearing a majestic crown surmounted by a peacock feather, Kṛṣṇa exhibits a serene, compassionate gaze.

Another noticeable example of this same motif can be seen in an eighteenth-century Kishangarh painting that J. Leroy Davidson in his *Art of the Indian Subcontinent from Los Angeles Collections* titles "Krishna delivering the sermon of the *Bhagavad Gita* to Arjuna."<sup>59</sup> The scene is the field of Kurukṣetra on the eve of the battle and Kṛṣṇa as charioteer stands in the foreground with his head turned toward Arjuna who sits in the *añjali* pose in the back of the chariot (see fig. 4.3). The focus of the painting is Kṛṣṇa's head, distinguished by a radiant halo: the divine *sārathi* bears a benevolent gaze, the painting capturing the moment when he starts imparting his salvific

Figure 4.2. Kṛṣṇa Pārthasārathi teaching the *Bhagavadgītā* to Arjuna. Kangra painting, early nineteenth century. Presently kept at the National Museum in Delhi. *Source*: Public domain.



Figure 4.3. Kṛṣṇa Pārthasārathi teaching the *Bhagavadgītā* to Arjuna. Kishangarh painting, eighteenth century. *Source*: J. Leroy Davidson, *Art of the Indian Subcontinent from Los Angeles Collections*. Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1968.



teaching to Arjuna. With his right hand he holds a staff and the  
 reins through which he commands two beautiful white horses, while  
 his left hand is turned toward Arjuna, his fingers being kept in the  
*vyākhyāna* or teaching *mudrā*. In the background are the armies of  
 the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas confronting each other, while all the  
 gods descend from the heavens on their golden vehicles in order  
 to behold the imminent conflict.

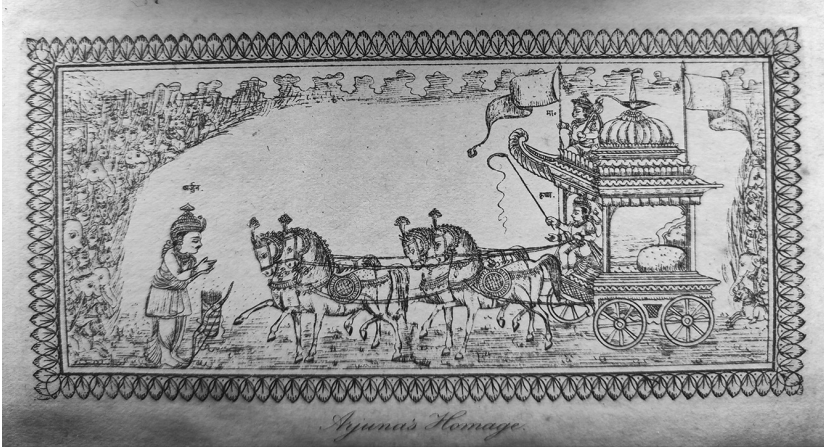
In addition, the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna has  
 been illustrated also through the so-called terrace scene, an imag-  
 inary visualization in which the two sit opposite each other on  
 some cushions on a terrace with no one else around. The divine  
*guru* exhibits a serene, benevolent gaze toward his pupil, and the  
*bhakti* element is highlighted by Arjuna's *añjali* posture. Ursula  
 King argues that this terrace motif had its earlier precedents in  
 Mughal portraits and later in the representations of Guru Nānak  
 (1469–1539) as teacher.<sup>60</sup>

These various depictions of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on their chariot  
 amid the warring armies on the battlefield were later carried over  
 in the print versions of the *Bhagavadgītā* when the poem became  
 more and more popular among India's urban middle classes and  
 was made known to the West through Charles Wilkins's first  
 English translation published in 1785.<sup>61</sup> Inspired by the illustra-  
 tions present in the manuscript tradition, in India the drawings  
 in the Sanskrit and vernacular printed versions of the text started  
 appearing after 1850 (the first printed Sanskrit specimens of the  
 poem having appeared in 1805 and 1808). In modern times, the  
 printed illustrations of this motif, either emphasizing an activist  
 interpretation in which Kṛṣṇa calls Arjuna to fight—providing a  
 powerful inspiration for the development of Hindu nationalism—or  
 a quieter interpretation emphasizing the *bhakti* element, became  
 extremely popular (see fig. 4.4).

The so-called *Gītācārya* representation in which Kṛṣṇa, bear-  
 ing a compassionate smile, teaches the *Bhagavadgītā* to Arjuna has  
 nowadays become ubiquitous, being found not only in innumerable  
 cover illustrations of the poem<sup>62</sup> but also in many different medias  
 such as oleographs, sandalwood and ivory carvings, posters and  
 calendar pictures.<sup>63</sup> Even in the popular *Amar Chitra Katha* collec-  
 tion of children's comics and storybooks, the illustration of Arjuna  
 kneeling at Kṛṣṇa's feet on the Kurukṣetra battlefield is prominent  
 in its *Mahābhārata* mini-series.<sup>64</sup>



1 Figure 4.4. Illustration taken from Lionel D. Barnett's translation of the  
 2 *Bhagavadgītā* (London: J. M. Dent, 1928 [1905]). Source: Barnett, Lionel  
 3 D., trans. *Bhagavad-Gītā or The Lord's Song*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons,  
 4 1928 (1905).



20  
21 The chariot scene can be found painted, carved in wood and  
 22 even sculpted in various contemporary temple complexes through-  
 23 out the subcontinent, such as at the Birla Mandir in Delhi and of  
 24 course at the holy site of Kurukṣetra and its attached Shri Krishna  
 25 Museum (see fig. 4.5).<sup>65</sup>

26 As Agehananda Bharati noted, in contemporary urban India  
 27 Kṛṣṇa as the mentor of Arjuna has become a ubiquitous icon  
 28 pretty much in its own right, quite independently from the text  
 29 of the *Bhagavadgītā* and its teachings.<sup>66</sup> The image is found in both  
 30 sacred and secular settings, from greeting cards and ornaments to  
 31 commercial advertisements, and its relocation and revalorization  
 32 over time by different communities confirms its vitality and appeal  
 33 (see fig. 4.6).<sup>67</sup>

### 34 35 Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* in Theater and Dance

36  
37 Historically, the *Bhagavadgītā* appears to have been under-represented  
 38 in theatrical plays and classical dance performances such as the  
 39 ones in the Bharatanāṭyam, Kūchīpūḍī, and Odissi styles.<sup>68</sup> If the  
 40

Figure 4.5. Outer View of the Shri Krishna Museum, Kurukṣetra. *Source:* Public domain.



Figure 4.6. Kṛṣṇa Pārthasārathi blessing Arjuna, contemporary image. *Source:* Public domain.





1 theatrical representation of the *Mahābhārata* was always quite  
 2 popular and was even exported to Southeast Asia, for instance,  
 3 through its appearance in Indonesian shadow plays, the *Bhaga-*  
 4 *vadgītā* episode did not receive the same attention.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless,  
 5 it is remarkable that in verse 10.9 of the poem Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna  
 6 that the wise men (*budhā*)

7  
 8       With thoughts on Me, with life concentrated on Me,  
 9       Enlightening one another, (*bodhayantaḥ parasparam*)  
 10       And telling constantly of Me, (*kathayantaś ca māṃ nityam*)  
 11       [they] find contentment and joy.

12  
 13 The narration (*kathā*) of Kṛṣṇa's nectarine words and deeds in the  
 14 setting of a *satsaṅga* (lit. "association with the good") (i.e., a gathering  
 15 of like-minded devotees) is an experience of pure bliss and is thought  
 16 to be conducive to the attainment of liberation (*mokṣa*). Already half  
 17 a century ago, Norvin Hein noted the significance of such practice,  
 18 observing that "the recitative dance drama, which was already in  
 19 use, may have been among the customs here suggested whereby the  
 20 devout told Krishna's story."<sup>70</sup> Though we have no evidence that the  
 21 *Bhagavadgītā* was represented through dance or theatrical staging, it  
 22 is reasonable to assume that among the communities of *bhaktas* the  
 23 poem or parts of it were subject to some form or other of public  
 24 performance.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, we should never forget that the word *gītā*  
 25 means "song"—being derived from verbal root  $\sqrt{gai}$ , meaning "to  
 26 sing," "to speak or recite in a singing manner"<sup>72</sup>—and that in *BhG*  
 27 9.14 Kṛṣṇa himself states that the great-souled men are the ones who  
 28 constantly sing his praises (*satataṃ kīrtayanto mām*).<sup>73</sup>

29       The *Bhagavadgītā* is certainly not easy to stage since apart from  
 30 the *viśvarūpa* episode, which in time developed its own choreo-  
 31 graphic conventions,<sup>74</sup> it is but a conversation (*saṃvāda*) on abstract  
 32 religious and philosophical concepts in which action has come to  
 33 a complete standstill. It thus constitutes a veritable challenge for  
 34 any actor and dancer. Moreover, there are few detectable emotional  
 35 variances occurring during the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna  
 36 and thus inevitably a limited narrative-focused vocabulary of  
 37 gestures for the performers to work with.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, Arjuna's  
 38 despondency / devout surrender to Kṛṣṇa and the latter's response to  
 39 him through his *prahasann iva*, which introduces his *upadeśa*, lends  
 40

itself very well to theatrical representation. Because *BhG* 2.1–10 are the crucial verses that occasion the dialogue, it is natural to infer that all dramatic enactments of the poem must have begun from here: even if the *Bhagavadgītā* was not represented in its entirety certainly this essential triggering moment must have been part of the repertoire of *kīrtankārs*, actors, and dancers.<sup>76</sup> Even nowadays in the *Vividavadham* (“Slaying of Vivida”) play of Kṛṣṇāṭṭam, the ritualistic dance-theater of Kerala, what is staged in its sixth scene is Arjuna’s initial despondency and Kṛṣṇa’s teaching to him in order to convince him to fight, centered upon the immortality of the soul as opposed to the body’s impermanence (see fig. 4.7).<sup>77</sup>

Significantly, in traditional Bharatanāṭyam dance, there are some basic recommendations with regard to the portrayal of Kṛṣṇa as Pārthasārathi. Thus the god should be represented in *samapādashānaka*: with the feet evenly placed standing straight with all parts of the body aligned from head to toe, and bearing four hands. The two upper hands should be in the *kartarīmukhahasta* or scissors posture, while the two lower hands should be kept one in the *haṃsāsyaḥasta*, with the forefinger and thumb kept together

Figure 4.7. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in a contemporary Kṛṣṇāṭṭam play. *Source*: Public domain.

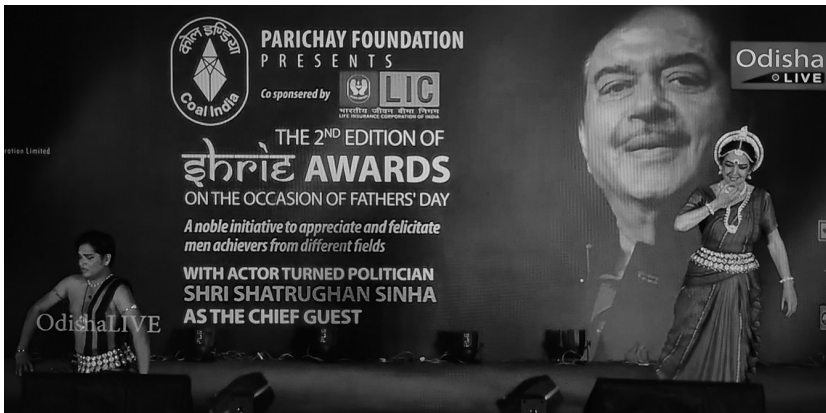


1 without any gap and the remaining fingers stretched out, and the  
 2 other one in the *kapitthahasta*, with the thumb stretched by the side  
 3 of the palm and capped with the pad of the index finger above the  
 4 thumb's tip—while the little, ring, and middle fingers stay curled  
 5 into the palm.<sup>78</sup> The positions of the feet and hands are indicative  
 6 of Kṛṣṇa's divinity and of his teaching function.

7 A fine rendering of the *Bhagavadgītā* episode in Odissi dance  
 8 is the one offered in July 2017 by Ileana Citaristi<sup>79</sup> (playing the  
 9 part of Kṛṣṇa) and Saswat Joshi (playing the part of Arjuna) in  
 10 their brilliant performance titled *Parthasarathi*.<sup>80</sup> Between minutes  
 11 5:48 and 6:12 of their dance, one can savor the talent of Ileana  
 12 Citaristi in representing Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter toward Arjuna.  
 13 The spectator can appreciate the various nuances of the god's  
 14 *prahasann ioa*, which she transmits most effectively through her  
 15 gestures and facial expressions: in rapid sequence, she is able to  
 16 express in an emotional continuum the god's surprise and slightly  
 17 mocking irony at Arjuna's dejection, which she then transmutes  
 18 into a benevolent smile of pure grace, inviting the hero to stand  
 19 up and regain his dignity (see fig. 4.8).

20 When I asked the artist if in the Odissi dance there is any  
 21 specific rule with regard to this peculiar smile/hint of laughter, she  
 22 told me that "it is left to the dancer's interpretation, there being  
 23 no fixed codification for its representation." She emphasized that  
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25  
 26 Figure 4.8. Ileana Citaristi (right) and Saswat Joshi (left) performing *Par-*  
 27 *thasarathi*, Odissi dance, July 2017. Source: Public domain.



in her own rendering of Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* "what she wished to convey was his paternal benevolence toward Arjuna, in order to inspire confidence in him."<sup>81</sup>

It should be remembered that some of the major criticisms of Peter Brook's staging of the *Mahābhārata* focused on his elliptical, cursory "five-minute encapsulation" of the *Bhagavadgītā*, which was "rendered into whispered words never revealed to the audience."<sup>82</sup> In chapter 1, we highlighted how Alf Hildebeitel especially criticized the absence of Kṛṣṇa's smile, of his "subtle grin," which reveals a *bhakti* mode, it being "one of the things that you can't miss if you know what the iconography looks like."<sup>83</sup> This failure to emphasize such a turning point was a serious flaw, its absence being immediately felt by an Indian audience well acquainted with the text and its traditional portrayal.

#### Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* in Film

With regard to the representation of the *Bhagavadgītā* through the medium of film, worthy of attention is the 1993 Sanskrit movie produced by T. Subbarami Reddy and directed by G. V. Iyer (1917–2003), the so-called barefoot director, famous for his films on spiritual subjects both mythological and historical. Titled *Bhagavad Gita: Song of the Lord*, it was the recipient of the National Film Award.<sup>84</sup> Herein, at minutes 26–27, at the crucial juncture of Arjuna's crisis and refusal to fight, Kṛṣṇa's smile/hint of laughter is inherently polysemic (see fig. 4.9). Gopi Manohar, the actor playing the part of the lord, exhibits a facial expression that, though slightly mocking at first—when pronouncing the words of *BhG* 2.2–3, rebuking Arjuna for his faintheartedness and unmanliness—rapidly transmutes itself into a radiant, benevolent smile indicative of his grace toward his friend.

Herein, the nuances of Kṛṣṇa's facial expressions toward Arjuna—expressed by G. V. Ragavendra—are effectively conveyed by *extending* the *prahasann iva* through a much wider sequence than the single verse of *BhG* 2.10, similar to the way Ileana Citaristi did through her Odissi dance. To be sure, a director such as G. V. Iyer could not miss the opportunity to give prominence to the god's smile/hint of laughter.

1 Figure 4.9. A scene of the film *Bhagavad Gita: Song of the Lord* (1993), directed  
 2 by G. V. Iyer. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAOxV8u402o>.



19 In Hindī, the poem was communicated to a mass audience  
 20 through B. R. Chopra's and his son Ravi Chopra's serialization of  
 21 the *Mahābhārata* on Doordarshan, the Indian national television,  
 22 which devoted three episodes to the *Bhagavadgītā*. The whole epic  
 23 was broadcast from October 2, 1988, to June 24, 1990, each episode  
 24 lasting approximately forty-five minutes. This series has enjoyed  
 25 and still enjoys a powerful afterlife on DVDs, especially among  
 26 the South Asian diaspora throughout the world. Nitish Bharadwaj  
 27 played the role of Kṛṣṇa and Firoz Khan that of Arjuna.<sup>85</sup>

28 In the *Bhagavadgītā*'s first episode at minutes 17–20 and  
 29 23–24<sup>86</sup>—both before Hṛṣīkeśa's *prahasann iva*, when a despondent  
 30 Arjuna states that he will not fight, and immediately after it, when  
 31 Kṛṣṇa starts delivering his teaching on the immortality of the  
 32 self—the lord exhibits a smile/hint of laughter that is both ironic  
 33 and graceful in the sense that the actor Nitish Bharadwaj very  
 34 ably displays a facial expression that though initially mocking at  
 35 Arjuna soon opens itself into a wide smile filled with love for his  
 36 dearest pupil (see fig. 4.10).

37 Even here, the secret for acknowledging the richness and  
 38 plural meanings inherent in the lord's *prahasann iva* is to expand  
 39 it through a longer sequence that starts much earlier, from Kṛṣṇa's

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Figure 4.10. A scene of the *Bhagavadgītā* episode televised by Doordarshan. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwFDQWauIjw>.



very first words in the poem: from *BhG* 2.2–3, when he sarcastically criticizes Arjuna's faintheartedness and calls him a eunuch, to *BhG* 2.11 and beyond, when he benevolently starts offering him his teaching. To be sure, Kṛṣṇa's mocking expression is perfectly attuned to the words he addresses to Arjuna at *BhG* 2.2–3, whereas from 2.10, after Arjuna has taken refuge at his feet at 2.7, what is given prominence is the lord's loving smile toward his *bhakta*.

What these contemporary enactments show—which are no doubt indebted to a much older tradition of theatrical performance—is that the polysemy of *prahasann iva* that in the textual narrative is condensed at *BhG* 2.10 and raises even opposite understandings that are inevitably hard to accommodate, in the performative arts is convincingly and more easily conveyed by expanding it throughout a longer sequence, which extends itself from *BhG* 2.2 to 2.11 and even beyond. This is a most important point, since the embodied form of the poem represented by dance, theater, and film offers precious interpretations that add unique, revealing perspectives. The simple reading of the text—though reputed to be highly meritorious, as in the individual and collective practice of *pothīpārāyaṇa*—shows its limits and is hermeneutically insufficient: in order to be fully understood, the poem must be approached in

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1 broader terms, that is, through a performative enactment (*kathā*).  
 2 We have noted that Kṛṣṇa himself tells Arjuna that this is precisely  
 3 what “wise men” (*budhā*) do (*BhG* 10.9).<sup>87</sup>

4 It must also be pointed out that in the many videos on the  
 5 *Bhagavadgītā* that circulate on the internet, the image of Kṛṣṇa  
 6 benevolently smiling to Arjuna from within the chariot is one of  
 7 the most recurrent, being a stock icon: one fine example is an image  
 8 at minute 3:04 of a video on the *prahasann iva* juncture sponsored  
 9 by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, i.e., the  
 10 Hare Krishna movement (see fig. 4.11).<sup>88</sup>

11 The benevolence of the lord's smile is thus to be appreciated as  
 12 the conclusive meaning of his polysemic *prahasann iva*, which needs  
 13 to be acknowledged not so much as a discrete event but rather as  
 14 a dynamic process in which the mark of love/grace constitutes its  
 15 final signification, its climax. Far from being a recent convention,  
 16 this hermeneutical approach characteristic of the performative arts  
 17 has a long story behind it, the contemporary performers and the  
 18 new media being the heirs of a time-honored tradition.

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 22 Figure 4.11. Kṛṣṇa Pārthasārathi benevolently smiling at Arjuna. *Source:*  
 23 Public domain.  
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## Kṛṣṇa's Smile and Hint of Laughter 1

### Beyond *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10 2

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In fine arts, it appears that god Śiva smiles more than Viṣṇu, who 4  
 is commonly represented as a hieratic, impassible deity. Śiva also 5  
 exhibits a loud laugh (*aṭṭahāsa*), which is a special feature of his 6  
 terrifying form—as in his south-facing Aghora *mūrti*—in which the 7  
 mouth is wide open, the teeth are visible, and their brightness is a 8  
 standard of comparison for whiteness. But even though Viṣṇu does 9  
 not often smile,<sup>89</sup> the images of Kṛṣṇa are typically characterized by 10  
 a smiling face to the point that Bharata's definitions of both *smita* 11  
 and *hasita* find an exemplary illustration in many of his icons. To 12  
 be sure, there is a privileged relation between smile and youth,<sup>90</sup> 13  
 and if it is true that gods in general are believed to enjoy youth 14  
 forever the case of Kṛṣṇa's youth and smile is paradigmatic being 15  
 celebrated in literature as well as in the arts. 16

Scholars have underlined the difference between the more 17  
 intellectual *bhakti* of the *Bhagavadgītā*, associated with knowledge 18  
 (*jñāna*) and detachment (*vairāgya*), and the later emotional *bhakti* 19  
 of the *Purāṇas*. In trying to reconstruct Kṛṣṇa's complex, multi- 20  
 layered figure in a historical perspective, they have differentiated 21  
 between the early clan god, the epic hero—whose identification 22  
 with Viṣṇu as one of his embodiments (*avatāra*) in the *Bhagavadgītā* 23  
 is understood to be a later development—<sup>91</sup>and his portrait in the 24  
*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (c. third to fourth century CE), *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (c. 25  
 ninth century CE) and later devotional poems such as Jayadeva's 26  
*Gītagovinda*<sup>92</sup> (twelfth century CE).<sup>93</sup> This notwithstanding, the 27  
 Hindu tradition has always acknowledged Kṛṣṇa as being one and 28  
 the same, without ever distinguishing the early clan god from the 29  
 epic hero and the god of the *Bhagavadgītā* from the one extolled 30  
 in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* detailing his *līlās* in Vraja<sup>94</sup> and Dvārakā.<sup>95</sup> 31

It is noteworthy that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*—which appears 32  
 to have been written in southern India—begins by establishing a 33  
 narrative frame that explicitly links it to the *Mahābhārata*. Thus King 34  
 Parīkṣit, who had been rescued by Kṛṣṇa in the epic, is the listener 35  
 of the text that is recited to him by Śuka, one of the sons of Vyāsa 36  
 who is traditionally revered as the composer of the *Mahābhārata*. 37  
 As a whole, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* offers its own account of the 38

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1 *Mahābhārata* by focusing on the episodes that emphasize Kṛṣṇa's  
2 divinity though with no explicit allusions to the *Bhagavadgītā*  
3 (despite some quotations from it), rather presenting its own *Gītā*  
4 in the eleventh book (the *Uddhavagītā*), in which Kṛṣṇa offers  
5 instruction to sage Uddhava.

6 It is indisputable that along the centuries the devotional centers  
7 and *sampradāyas* spread throughout the subcontinent that recognized  
8 Kṛṣṇa as their “chosen deity” (*iṣṭadevatā*) aimed at offering a unified  
9 picture of him. This they did by operating an accommodation and  
10 mutual reinforcement of kṛṣṇaite narratives present in diverse tex-  
11 tual sources. In this regard, especially revealing are the devotional  
12 retellings of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in the vernacular languages  
13 of both the south and north of India in which the focus is Kṛṣṇa.<sup>96</sup>  
14 Through its *Kṛṣṇacaritas*, the Hindu tradition articulated the richness  
15 of the god's plural aspects into a grand unified canon, simultaneously  
16 acknowledging him as darling infant, cowherd, flute player, lifter  
17 of the Govardhana<sup>97</sup> mountain, vanquisher of demons, favorite of  
18 the *gopīs* with whom he seductively sports and dances, prince, wise  
19 counsellor, youthful hero, etc. Over a period of a thousand years or  
20 more, many different strands coalesced to form the god's multifaceted  
21 character, the mythical, theological, and ritual dimensions of Kṛṣṇa  
22 *bhakti* having influenced aesthetic theories and artistic expressions.

23 Along these lines, Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10  
24 must be appreciated as one of the earliest specimens of the god's  
25 smile/hint of laughter—if not the very first, undoubtedly the  
26 most meaningful one within the Sanskrit epic—which the kṛṣṇaite  
27 tradition in its manifold dimensions has come to envision as a  
28 distinguishing feature of Kṛṣṇa's supreme personality, it being  
29 celebrated in both literature and the arts. If the laughter of Kṛṣṇa  
30 in the *Mahābhārata* is often a prelude to some catastrophic event,<sup>98</sup>  
31 his smile comes to be acknowledged as the hallmark of his benev-  
32 olence, it being the sure sign of his divine play.<sup>99</sup>

33 In order to sketch an overview of Kṛṣṇa's smile/hint of  
34 laughter after *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10, we shall point out a few select  
35 episodes and iconographical representations of the god that are by  
36 all standards significant. We will necessarily content ourselves to  
37 present their main characteristics through a cursory outline, bring-  
38 ing attention to some notable examples so as to show how Kṛṣṇa's  
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smile/hint of laughter is a constitutive feature of his throughout 1  
 the centuries and throughout the subcontinent and even beyond, 2  
 the god's iconography having diffused itself in Southeast Asia 3  
 and in the whole world through the Hindu diaspora.<sup>100</sup> Herein, 4  
 the *smita* and *hasita* of Kṛṣṇa in his various embodiments indicates 5  
 the outpouring of his grace. 6

The natural starting point is the mischievous form of Kṛṣṇa 7  
 as a child (*bāla*),<sup>101</sup> undoubtedly one of the most endearing repre- 8  
 sentations of the god in art and devotional literature. In particular, 9  
 the episode of the child Kṛṣṇa as butter thief (*navanītacora*) is of 10  
 prime significance in the narrative of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and 11  
 even prior to it in the vernacular literatures of South India such 12  
 as in the Tamil poems of the Ālvār saints (sixth to ninth century 13  
 CE). Its tradition in sculpture is widespread and old, dating from 14  
 around the fourth to fifth century CE and is also widely attested to 15  
 in *rāsālīlās* performances, painting, and modern and contemporary 16  
 devotional images.<sup>102</sup> In the iconography that portrays child Kṛṣṇa 17  
 as butter thief, both old and new, he typically exhibits a naughty, 18  
 captivating smile, as John Stratton Hawley chose to emphasize 19  
 by selecting a "calendar art" image of *navanītacora* Kṛṣṇa, with 20  
 his right hand sunk in the butter bowl, for the frontispiece of his 21  
 1983 monograph *Krishna, the Butter Thief*. 22

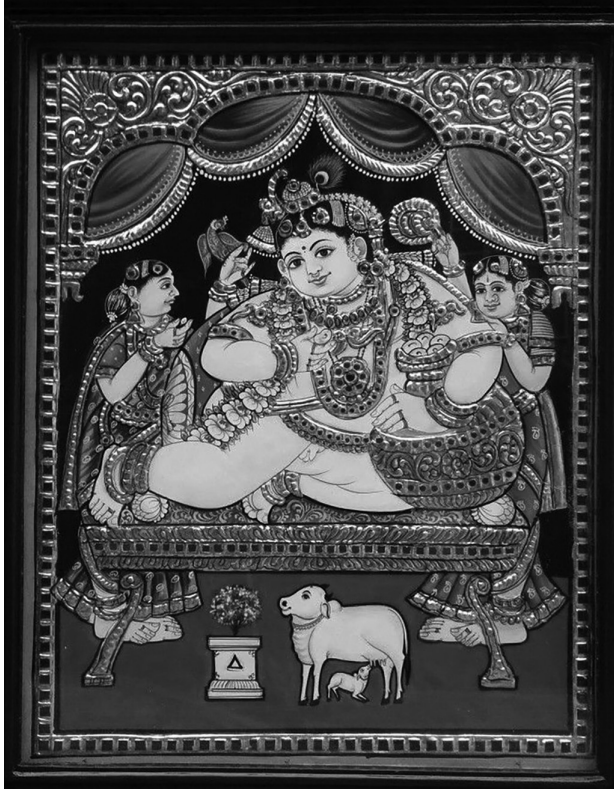
In a fine Tanjore painting dating to the end of the eighteenth 23  
 century, the child Kṛṣṇa tightly holds a big pot of fresh butter 24  
 under his left arm and a ball of butter in his right hand. His smile 25  
 and wide eyes highlight his joy of savoring the stolen delicacy, 26  
 successfully playing a prank on his foster-mother Yaśodā who is 27  
 depicted on his left side in the act of slightly reprimanding him. 28  
 On the opposite side, a *gopī* stands in sheer contemplation of him. 29  
 Though Yaśodā and the *gopī* do not openly smile, they exhibit a 30  
 tender look of love toward the mischievous child (see fig. 4.12). 31

In similar icons one also finds eminent figures such as kings 32  
 and dignitaries who stand on the side of *bāla* Kṛṣṇa with their 33  
 hands joined in the *añjali* pose. The latter's divine status is always 34  
 conveyed by his central, larger size vis-à-vis the smaller size of 35  
 the adult figures surrounding him, and by the jewels and flowers 36  
 that enrich his persona. This peculiar smile is at one and the same 37  
 time a mischievous one, celebrating the child Kṛṣṇa as the thief of 38

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1 Figure 4.12. Child Kṛṣṇa as *navanītacora*. Tanjore painting, late eighteenth  
2 century. *Source*: Public domain.



28 the fresh, delicious butter of Yaśodā, as it is a transcendent smile  
29 that points at his being the supreme *cittacora*, that is, the stealer  
30 of the minds and hearts of all creatures (see fig. 4.13).

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32 When Bālakṛṣṇa succeeds in stealing the butter from his foster-  
33 mother, he is described dancing joyously, and this lighthearted  
34 dance of his is represented in the icon known as *navanītanṛttamūrti*.<sup>103</sup>  
35 Standing on a lotiform base and putting his weight on his left  
36 leg with his right leg bent and raised, the smiling god performs  
37 a dance step, his left arm being extended in a graceful movement  
38 known as *gajahasta*, representing an elephant's trunk, while his  
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Figure 4.13. Child Kṛṣṇa as *navanītacora*, contemporary poster. Source: Public domain.



right hand is held in the *abhayamudrā*, that is, the fear-allaying gesture (see fig. 4.14).

Precisely the episode of the child Kṛṣṇa stealing the butter results in his foster-mother being granted a vision of the cosmos (*brahmāṇḍa*) in his mouth (see fig. 4.15). The story goes that when it was reported to her from Kṛṣṇa's elder brother Balarāma and other children that Kṛṣṇa had eaten dirt, she got mad at him and started scolding him. The child, however, protested his innocence, insisting that the other boys had lied to her and that she should look at his mouth herself. Thus, when Yaśodā asked him to open



1 Figure 4.14. Bālakṛṣṇa as *navanītanṛttamūrti*. Chola style, fourteenth cen-  
 2 tury. Source: Public domain.



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28 his mouth she was astonished to see the whole universe within it  
 29 (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.8.21–45).<sup>104</sup>

30 In his *Kṛṣṇakarnāmrta*, the fourteenth-century poet Līlāsuka  
 31 Bilvamaṅgala beautifully describes this episode in verse 64 of his  
 32 second canto:

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“When Kṛṣṇa went forth to play, today, He swal-  
 lowed mud to His heart’s content.” —“Is this true,  
 Krishna?” —“Who said thus?” —“Balarama” —“Quite  
 false, mother; look at my mouth!” —“Open!” Forth-with  
 when the (seeming) Child’s mouth was wide opened, His  
 mother beheld therein all the universe, and was struck  
 with wonder (*vismaya*): may such Keśava<sup>105</sup> protect us!<sup>106</sup>

Figure 4.15. Child Kṛṣṇa granting vision of the universe to his foster-mother Yaśodā, contemporary poster. *Source:* Public domain.



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This tale of the mischievous child Kṛṣṇa who cheerfully opens his mouth wide immediately calls to mind the god's glorious manifestation narrated in chapter 11 of the *Bhagavadgītā*, when Arjuna sees within his mouths a doomsday fire that swallows up throngs of warriors and all beings, crushing them between his jaws (*BhG* 11.26–30). Yaśodā and Arjuna are both granted a vision that stuns them in *vismaya* (i.e., bewilderment and terror), this being the instinctive reaction when confronted with the transcendent reality of the supreme being. Just as Arjuna's *vismaya* is the human response to Kṛṣṇa's revelation of his supernal form—who in his human form had displayed a benevolent smile to his *bhakta*—Yaśodā's *vismaya* is the inevitable reaction at *bāla* Kṛṣṇa's widely opening his mouth in a prankish, naughty smile: the two divine smiles respond to one another, the *prahasann iva* anticipating Arjuna's extraordinary



1 vision which is the acme of Kṛṣṇa's grace toward him, the lord  
 2 having endowed him with a supernatural eye (*divyacakṣus*). And  
 3 just like Arjuna begs Kṛṣṇa to revert to his usual form, so as to  
 4 be like a father with a son, similarly Yaśodā cannot live long on  
 5 the plane of metaphysics and must lapse back into her ordinary  
 6 emotional involvement, that of a mother tendering her dear child.

7 Another paradigmatic icon is the one of Kṛṣṇa as Veṅugopāla,  
 8 that is, the young cowherd playing the flute (*veṅu*, *muralī*), which is  
 9 an extension of his beauty and exquisite charm through which he  
 10 attracts to himself the *gopīs* and all souls (see fig. 4.16).<sup>107</sup> Typically,  
 11 Kṛṣṇa stands erect with the left leg resting on the ground while  
 12 his right leg is crossed against the left so as to touch the ground  
 13 with the toes. The flute is held in both hands.

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16 Figure 4.16. Kṛṣṇa Veṅugopāla with attendant cow. Shirdi Sai Baba temple,  
 17 Guindy, Chennai. Source: Public domain.

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Through the melody of his *veṇu*, a smiling Kṛṣṇa summons everyone to come to him, to join in his symphony of pure delight saturated with love. A popular Beṅgālī saying states that “without Kṛṣṇa there is no song” (*kānu binā gīta nāhi*), and indeed each and every soul is believed to long for the lord's *darśan* and the irresistible melody of his flute.<sup>108</sup> As Līlāśuka Bilvamaṅgala passionately sings in his *Kṛṣṇanakarṇāmṛta* (1.44), craving to behold his beloved *iṣṭa*:

When shall I see your lotus face  
 With its always smiling (*aśrāntasmitam*) dawn-red lips,  
 Joyously swelling the charming flute song  
 Which is sweetly accompanied by half closed eyes that  
 widen and dance?<sup>109</sup>

Kṛṣṇa's radiant, smiling face and his flute are inseparable: as T. A. Gopinatha Rao observes in his *Elements of Hindu Iconography*: “In the case of these images, the rapture of music has to be clearly depicted on the face; and they are in consequence generally so very pretty as to attract attention wherever they may be.”<sup>110</sup> In the hands of their lord, all *bhaktas* should long to be just like his *veṇu*, “for then the Lord will come to you, pick you up, put you to His lips, and breathe through you and out of the hollowness of your heart, due to the utter absence of egoism that you have developed, He will create captivating music for all creation to enjoy. Be straight without any will of your own, merge your will in the will of God. Inhale only the breath of God.”<sup>111</sup> In all of his actions, the underlying theme that the cowherd Kṛṣṇa exhibits and that his hint of laughter graciously reveals is *līlā*: the god's gratuitous play.<sup>112</sup> His entire life among the cowherds of Vṛndāvana<sup>113</sup> is but an ongoing, unpredictable, and spontaneous sport since indeed there is nothing that the god needs to do, he being totally free from the constraints of human condition. As Kṛṣṇa's veritable playground, Vṛndāvana is the stage of the frolicking child and adolescent god, of his feats against demons and of his pranks with the *gopīs*, of his ecstatic dance at the rapturous melody of his flute and of his communion with all individual souls as the ocean of bliss (see fig. 4.17).

The *rāslīlā* (lit. “dance pastime”), Kṛṣṇa's dance with the *gopīs*, typifies one's personal relationship with god (see fig. 4.18). As described in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.29–33, the female cowherds dance

1 Figure 4.17. Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana riding the swing (*jhūlā*) surrounded by  
 2 two *gopīs*, contemporary silk painting. *Source:* Author's private collection.



20 in a circle and Kṛṣṇa inserts himself between each pair, so that each  
 21 one perceives that he is attending to her alone. In a wider sense,  
 22 the *rāslīlā* refers to the full extent of Kṛṣṇa's divine play with the  
 23 milkmaids, that is, their love, union, incomprehensible separation  
 24 and final reunion. One of the *gopīs* in particular, Rādhā,<sup>114</sup> is the  
 25 favorite of young Kṛṣṇa and their love, transcending all conventions,  
 26 mirrors the ultimate form of unconditional love of god.

27 A major subject for visual artists and performers, along the  
 28 centuries the *rāslīlā* has inspired several classical dance forms  
 29 that remain popular today and are constantly enacted.<sup>115</sup> In such  
 30 performances Kṛṣṇa's face is captivating and radiant, being char-  
 31 acterized by a benign, seductive smile as well as by outbursts of  
 32 joyful laughter, especially when he delights himself by playing  
 33 tricks on the female cowherds.

34 Even in other prominent iconographical representations of  
 35 Kṛṣṇa, as when he is depicted vanquishing the five-headed ser-  
 36 pent-demon Kāliya<sup>116</sup> by dancing upon his middle head (*Bhāgavata*  
 37 *Purāṇa* 10.1.16; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.7.1–83) or when he is portrayed  
 38 lifting mountain Govardhana on his little finger for seven days (see  
 39  
 40

Figure 4.18. The *rāslilā*, Kṛṣṇa dancing with all the *gopīs*. Basohli painting, Punjab Hills, c. 1750. Source: Public domain.



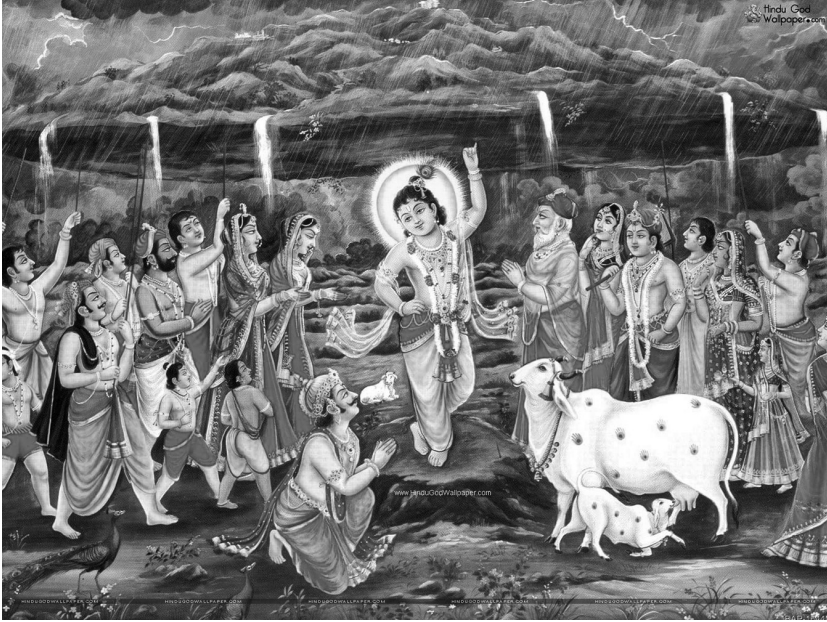
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fig. 4.19), thus protecting the cowherds and their cattle from a storm that had been summoned by the Vedic god Indra—angry because the cowherds had shifted their devotion from him to Kṛṣṇa (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.11.1–25)—the young god exhibits a radiant countenance that is meant to highlight his gracious *līlā*, the unfathomable ease with which he performs such extraordinary feats.<sup>117</sup>

On the occasion of his victory over Kāliya, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* narrates: “When Kṛṣṇa was called to mind by the cowherds, the petals of his lips blossomed into a smile, and he split open that snake, freeing his own body from the coils. Using his two hands



Figure 4.19. Kṛṣṇa lifts the Govardhana mountain, contemporary poster.  
Source: Public domain.



to bend over the middle head of that serpent with curving hoods, the wide-striding Kṛṣṇa mounted that head and began to dance on it” (see fig. 4.20).<sup>118</sup>

### The Application of the Classical *rasa* Theory to the Practice of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*

The gaiety of Kṛṣṇa has been a constant source of inspiration for all kṛṣṇaite *sampradāyas* and an exemplary model for countless saints. Caitanya (c. 1486–1533), the founder of Gauḍīya (Bengal) Vaiṣṇavism who in time came to be revered as an *avatāra* of both Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, was continuously immersed in ecstatic moods and would often laugh, dance, and sing. Acting spontaneously and unashamedly, reveling in the ecstasy of bliss, his overwhelming *bhakti* was an end in itself and his whole life is referred to as *līlā*. As David R. Kinsley writes:

Figure 4.20. Kṛṣṇa overcoming the serpent-demon Kāliya and dancing upon him. Bronze statue, South India, c. 1300. *Source:* Public domain.



Caitanya often played both by himself and with his devotees . . . he laughed, joked, and sported with his friends. . . . [F]or [him] devotion, or religious activity generally, was fun, that he enjoyed . . . immensely, that . . . amused him. Caitanya was particularly prone to play when he was overcome by the *bhāva* or emotion of a boy or child, as in this passage:

For a moment he fell under the spell of boyishness and became restless. Imitating boyish pranks, he made sounds in imitation of musical instruments. He moved his feet in various ways and laughed loudly. Under this spell, he crawled on all fours like a child.<sup>119</sup>

Kṛṣṇa's graceful smile in particular has been a constant source of inspiration for devotees and theologians,<sup>120</sup> being regarded as the sweetest (*madhura*) of his characteristics, even sweeter (i.e., more

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1 precious and desirable) than his beautiful body and face. As we  
2 read in *Kṛṣṇakarmāmṛta* 1.92:

3  
4 Sweet, sweet the body (*vapus*) of this god.  
5 Sweet, sweet, the face (*vadana*). Very sweet.  
6 Oh, this gentle smile (*mṛdusmita*) with the smell of honey  
7 (*madhugandhin*):  
8 Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet.<sup>121</sup>  
9

10 Even beyond the kṛṣṇaite paradigm, the smile of deities<sup>122</sup> as well  
11 as saints is universally regarded as the special token of their favor  
12 and grace (*prasāda*): “A gracious look from the saints; sweet words  
13 from the saints’ mouth, their smiling countenance—these alone  
14 bring great good fortune to the devotees.”<sup>123</sup>

15 The poet and theologian Rūpa Gosvāmin (c. 1470–1557),<sup>124</sup> one  
16 of the six Gosvāmīs (lit. “lord of cows”) who helped to establish  
17 the Gauḍīya tradition at the behest of Caitanya, in one of his major  
18 works titled *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* or “The Ocean of the Essence of  
19 Devotional *rasa*” (*Uttara Vibhāga, Hāsyabhaktirasākhyā Prathamalaharī*)  
20 applies the classical *rasa* theory of Sanskrit poetics to the practice  
21 of Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*.<sup>125</sup> As he states:

22  
23 When Humorous Love (*hāsarati*) becomes fully developed  
24 by the Excitants (*vibhāva*) and other aesthetic components  
25 that are about to be described, the wise call it the *Rasa*  
26 of Humorous Devotion (*hāsyabhaktirasa*). Kṛṣṇa and those  
27 associated with him are the Substantial Excitants of this  
28 *Rasa*. The wise say that old people and children are  
29 usually the vessels of this type of love, but sometimes  
30 serious people are considered to be vessels under special  
31 conditions determined by the Excitants and other aes-  
32 thetic components. An illustration of Kṛṣṇa: “I will not  
33 go near that terrifying withered up old man, Mother! He  
34 will trick me and put me in his bag and take me away.”  
35 When the wonderful boy Hari said these words while  
36 looking around with frightened eyes, the sage Nārada<sup>126</sup>  
37 laughed openly, even though he was very skilled at  
38 suppressing his laughter.<sup>127</sup>  
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Following Bharata, Rūpa Gosvāmin says that laughter in ecstatic love (*hāsyabhaktirasa*) can be broken down into the six states of *smita*, *hasita*, *vihasita*, *avahasita*, *apahasita*, and *atihāsita*.<sup>128</sup> In accordance with Bharata's hierarchical pattern, he notes that while the highest states of *smita* and *hasita* are a characteristic of the highest *bhaktas*, *vihasita* and *avahasita* are found in the middle devotees, and *apahasita* and *atihāsita*, the lowest states, are found among the lowest *bhaktas*. This notwithstanding, he observes that "because of the diverse and special nature of the Excitants and other aesthetic components, knowers of emotions say that the other states are also sometimes found even in the highest devotees."<sup>129</sup> Notably, he illustrates each of these six states by telling stories about Kṛṣṇa in which the god, through his mischievous words and actions, elicits the smiling and/or laughing response of the ones who witness his *līlās*:

1. *Smita*, a smile in which the eyes are widened and the cheeks raised but the teeth are not visible. Illustration: "Hey, where can I hide, Subala<sup>130</sup>? A nasty old woman is chasing after me, trying to catch me for stealing her yogurt. Quick, save me!" Seeing Hari running away saying these words with an agitated voice, the lotus faces of the group of sages in heaven blossomed with gentle smiles.
2. *Hasita*, a slight laughter in which just the tips of the teeth are visible. Illustration: [Kṛṣṇa has sneaked into the house of Rādhā's husband Abhimanyu<sup>131</sup>, disguising himself as Abhimanyu. Seeing the real Abhimanyu approaching, he says to Abhimanyu's mother Jaṭilā:] "There comes Hari disguised in my clothes. But I am your son." Seeing her own son approaching, but believing the words of Kṛṣṇa, Jaṭilā became filled with anger, and grabbing hold of Abhimanyu, who was shouting with terror "Ma! Ma!" she threw him out of his own courtyard. Seeing this, Rādhā's group of girlfriends laughed slightly, revealing the tips of their bright teeth.

- 1           3. *Vihāsita*, full laughter in which the sound of laughter  
2           is heard clearly and the teeth are fully visible. Illustration: [Kṛṣṇa says to a friend:] “Enter the house and  
3           steal the thick yogurt without fear, for Jaṭilā is sleeping  
4           soundly and snoring loudly.” Hearing Keśava speak  
5           these words, Jaṭilā, who was only pretending to be  
6           asleep, laughed out loud in a manner that revealed  
7           her decaying teeth.  
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- 10          4. *Avahasita*, open laughter in which the nose becomes  
11          puffed and the eyes squint. Illustration: [After Kṛṣṇa  
12          had just returned home from spending the entire  
13          night in the love bower, Yaśodā, thinking he had  
14          slept in his own bed, says to him:] “Son, why are  
15          your eyes so red so early in the morning? And why  
16          are you wearing Balarāma’s dark blue clothing (also  
17          the color of Rādhā’s clothing)?” Hearing these words  
18          spoken by Yaśodā, the female messenger was unable  
19          to check her laughter as her nostrils flared and her  
20          eyes contracted.  
21
- 22          5. *Apahasita*, raucous laughter in which tears fill the eyes  
23          and the shoulders shake. Illustration: When the great  
24          sage Nārada saw the divine child of Vraja clearly  
25          dancing the dance of the gods for the old cowherd  
26          women, his eyes filled with tears and his head and  
27          arms flew about in all directions as he turned the  
28          clouds white with the brightness of his teeth.  
29
- 30          6. *Atihasita*, boisterous laughter in which the hands are  
31          clapped together and the limbs are thrown about  
32          wildly. Illustration: [Kṛṣṇa to Mukharā<sup>132</sup>.] “Hey old  
33          woman, your wrinkled face looks like a monkey’s!  
34          After seeing you, the best of the monkeys will be  
35          anxious to marry and unite with you, and will force  
36          me to help him secure you.” [Mukharā to Kṛṣṇa:]  
37          “My mind has become confused with all this monkey  
38          business; therefore I will marry no one except you,  
39          since you are the destroyer of the king of monkeys.”  
40          Hearing these words of Mukharā, the girls laughed  
wildly while clapping their hands.

Even if the subject of laughter is not indicated directly, still it can be ascertained by the reference shared with the Excitants and other aesthetic components. An illustration: “Hey Kuṭilā,<sup>133</sup> your breasts look like long pea pods, your nose looks like a frog, your eyes look like an old turtle, your lips look like charcoal, and your stomach looks like a drum. What woman could possibly be more beautiful than you, O daughter of Jaṭilā? Why then is my flute unable to overcome your resistance, as it has had the good fortune of doing with the other beautiful women of Vraja?”<sup>134</sup>

To sum up, there is no doubt that a constitutive characteristic of Kṛṣṇa's figure, notwithstanding its extraordinary richness and plural dimensions along the centuries, is its multidimensional smile and laughter: sometimes ironic, sometimes enigmatic, sometimes purely mischievous but always inherently blissful. Even when his laughter announces some impending disaster, as it happens at some crucial points in the *Mahābhārata*, it is theologically understood as the darker, transcendent aspect of his divinity (i.e., his unfathomable *mysterium tremendum* beyond human comprehension), which in the *Bhagavadgītā* finds its culminating expression in the glorious theophany of chapter 11.<sup>135</sup> Nonetheless, Kṛṣṇa's smile/hint of laughter has predominantly been conceptualized as the essential characteristic of his *fascinans* aspect, of his irresistible power of attraction which fuses together beauty, love, and grace.<sup>136</sup>

Just as the various Kṛṣṇas are integrated into a unified portrayal, in the same way his smile/laughter is extolled as one of the most prominent features of his personality. As verse 4 of the popular *Kṛṣṇāṣṭaka* hymn proclaims:

To the one who has the fragrance of a coral tree flower, a beautiful laughter (*cāruhāsa*), four arms [as Viṣṇu], and who wears a peacock feather on his head: to Kṛṣṇa I bow down, the master of the universe.  
(*mandāragandhasaṃyuktaṃ cāruhāsaṃ caturbhujam | barhipicchāvācūdāṅgaṃ kṛṣṇaṃ vande jagadgurum ||*).

1 What is central in the god's portrayal is the benign character of his  
 2 *smita* and *hasita*, which is first and foremost an expression of his  
 3 amazing grace (*kṛpā*) toward his *bhaktas*. His smile communicates his  
 4 *ānanda*,<sup>137</sup> which he partakes with his devotees in a communion of  
 5 love, as part and parcel of his ongoing cosmic play, and is inherently  
 6 transformative. Along these lines, the sensuous and at the same time  
 7 otherworldly beauty of Kṛṣṇa's persona is conveyed in countless  
 8 devotional hymns (*bhajans*). Here is a contemporary example:

9  
 10       Worship the dark-blue complexioned and enchanting  
 11       flute player, Lord Kṛṣṇa, who has a beautiful smiling  
 12       lotus face, is dressed in yellow and is adorned with a  
 13       peacock feather on his head and who, while walking,  
 14       makes the melodious sound of *jhum jhum jhum* through  
 15       his anklets.  
 16       (*ghana ghana nīla baṅsī ādhāriyā | madhura madhura smita*  
 17       *vadana savāriyā | mora mukuṭa pītāmbara ghātiyā | jhumaka*  
 18       *jhumaka jhuma bhaja ghuṅghāriyā ||*)<sup>138</sup>

19  
 20 All in all, Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10 must be appre-  
 21 ciated as the most significant hint of laughter in the god's mission  
 22 as *avatāra*, whose programmatic task, as he reveals to Arjuna, is "the  
 23 protection of the good and the destruction of evil-doers, making  
 24 a firm footing for the right, age after age" (*paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām*  
 25 *vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām | dharmasamsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge*  
 26 *|| BhG 4.8*). Kṛṣṇa's graceful *prahasann iva* is the sublime prelude to  
 27 the outpouring of his *upadeśa* to Arjuna and to all mankind, meant  
 28 to transmute everyone's heart and mind and lead to blissful union  
 29 with himself, the supreme lord.

30       The god's smile/hint of laughter is to be understood as a  
 31 most powerful *darśana* that he bestows upon Arjuna and all the  
 32 hearers and readers of the *Bhagavadgītā*, which has an inexhaustible  
 33 creative, transformational force. Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* "touches"  
 34 the *bhaktas'* eyes and hearts, instantly purifying them and making  
 35 absolutely easy what Arjuna and all men thought and think to be  
 36 insurmountably difficult: in a flash, his hint of laughter brings joy  
 37 and levity where there was gloom and utter despair (see fig. 4.21).

38       The idea is that whoever is touched by the deity's smiling  
 39 glance and takes refuge at his feet is blessed beyond measure and  
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Figure 4.21. Kṛṣṇa gracefully smiles to Arjuna, blessing him through his *abhāyamudrā*. Contemporary poster. Source: Public domain.



will achieve the supreme goal of life. In his *Bhāmātī*, a subcommentary on Śaṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, the great philosopher Vācaspati Miśra (tenth century CE) magnifies the Absolute *Brahman* with these words:

The *Vedas* are his breath; the five elements are his glance; the animate and inanimate beings are his smile; and the great dissolution is his sleep.  
*(niḥsvasitam asya vedāḥ vīkṣitam etasya pañcabhūtāni | smitam etasya carācaram asya ca suptam mahāpralayaḥ ||)*<sup>139</sup>

In this series of metaphors, breathing, glancing, and smiling are the minimal efforts one can make, smiling being the greatest of them. Thus, all beings are but the smile of the supreme godhead.<sup>140</sup> By the same token, Kṛṣṇa's smile/hint of laughter brings about liberation (i.e., blissful communion [*sayujyatā*] with him), freeing

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1 all creatures from their blinding ignorance (*avidyā*) and allowing  
2 the recognition of the Bhagavat's omnipresence and of the entire  
3 world as the field (*kṣetra*) of his ongoing *līlā*.

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# Notes

## Introduction

1. On the typology of laughter, see the classic work of H. Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (New York: Macmillan, 2018 [Paris 1900]). For an overview, see H. Plessner, *Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behavior*, trans. J. Spencer Churchill and M. Grene (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020); P. L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (New York and Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1997); M. L. Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985). On laughter in the history of religions and in Greek and Roman antiquity, see S. Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); M. Beard, *Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). For an anthology of sources on humor and laughter from antiquity to late modernity, see J. Figueroa-Dorrego and C. Larkin-Galiñanes, eds., *A Source Book of Literary and Philosophical Writings about Humour and Laughter: The Seventy-Five Essential Texts from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2009).

2. On laughter as a lexically and phrasally produced import, see J. Ginzburg, E. Breitholtz, R. Cooper, J. Hough, and Y. Tian, "Understanding Laughter," Proceedings of the 20th Amsterdam Colloquium, 2015, <https://hal-univ-diderot.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01371396>. For an overview of the various theories on humor and laughter, see A. J. Chapman, H. C. Foot, and P. Derks, eds., *Humor and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Applications* (New York: Routledge, 1996); J. Morreall, ed., *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

3. See K. Gift, "Sarah's Laughter as Her Lasting Legacy: An Interpretation of *Genesis* 18:9–15," Coe College, 2012, <http://research.monm>.



- 1 edu/mjur/files/2019/02/MJUR-i02-2012-7-Gift.pdf; D. J. Zucker, "Isaac: A  
2 Life of Bitter Laughter," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, [https://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/402/jbq\\_402\\_isaaclaughter.pdf](https://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/402/jbq_402_isaaclaughter.pdf).
- 3  
4 4. Even in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata it is said that "laughter arises  
5 from the imitation of the actions of other people" (7.10; *paraçeṣṭānukaraṇād*  
6 *dhāsas samupajāyate*); see R. Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to*  
7 *Abhinavagupta* (Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1985<sup>3</sup>),  
8 90, 98.
- 9 5. A touch of humor is a characteristic of many Hindu gods and  
10 *gurus*; see for instance K. Narayan, *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk*  
11 *Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching* (Philadelphia: University of  
12 Pennsylvania Press, 1989). A contemporary *guru* such as Sathya Sai Baba  
13 (1926–2011) had a good sense of humor; see P. Mason, S. Lévy, and M.  
14 Veeravahu, eds., *Sai Humour* (Prasanthi Nilayam: Sri Sathya Sai Towers  
15 Hotels, 1999). His hagiographer Narayan Kasturi (1897–1987) was himself  
16 a noted humorist; see A. Rigopoulos, *The Hagiographer and the Avatar: The*  
17 *Life and Works of Narayan Kasturi* (Albany: State University of New York  
18 Press, 2021). We are also reminded of Meher Baba (1894–1969), who often  
19 used the expression "Don't worry, be happy"; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSqM7Qw3HIM>.
- 20  
21 6. U. Eco, *Il nome della rosa* (Milan: Bompiani, 1980). For an English  
22 translation, see *The Name of the Rose*. Translated from the Italian by W.  
23 Weaver (New York: Warner Books, 1983).
- 24 7. On these issues, see G. Stroumsa, *Le rire du Christ. Essais sur le*  
25 *christianisme antique* (Paris: Bayard, 2006). A saying falsely attributed to  
26 Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) but actually of medieval origin  
27 (*Patrologia Latina* XL, 1290) concisely states: *Dominum numquam risisse sed*  
28 *flevisse legimus*, "We read that the Lord never laughed but cried." The  
29 classic work of Elton Trueblood, *The Humor of Christ* (New York: Harper  
30 & Row, 1964), offers a challenge to the traditional stereotype of a somber,  
31 gloomy Christ.
- 32 8. On these issues, see W. Watson, *The Lost Second Book of Aristotle's*  
33 *"Poetics"* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
- 34 9. On the development of the ideas on laughter in the Middle Ages  
35 and Early Modern times, see A. Classen, ed., *Laughter in the Middle Ages*  
36 *and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, Its*  
37 *Meaning, and Consequences* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).
- 38 10. See <https://blog.cancellieri.org/umberto-eco-sul-riso-e-la-comicita>
- 39 11. See M. Parodi, "Disarmonia. Una causa del riso da Umberto Eco  
40 al Medioevo," *I castelli di Yale online* V, 2 (2017): 267–77, <https://cyonline.unife.it/article/view/1540>.
- 41  
42  
43

12. B. K. Matilal, “Kṛṣṇa: In Defense of a Devious Divinity,” in *The Collected Essays of Bimal Krishna Matilal. Philosophy, Culture and Religion. Ethics and Epics*, ed. J. Ganeri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 91.
13. On the Buddha’s smile in a comparative perspective, see P.-S. Filliozat and M. Zink, *Sourires d’Orient et d’Occident* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2013). See also R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-cultural Studies* (Toronto: Paulist, 1979), 257–76; A. Rigopoulos, “Sorrisi e silenzi nell’Induismo e nel Buddhismo. Dimensioni apofatiche a confronto nella riflessione di Raimon Panikkar,” in *Le pratiche del dialogo dialogale. Scritti su Raimon Panikkar*, ed. M. Ghilardi and S. La Mendola (Udine: Mimesis, 2020), 287–304.
14. Following the *vaiṣṇava* philosopher Rāmānuja (1017–1137 CE), Richard H. Davis notes how in Kṛṣṇa coexist “supremacy” (*paratva*) and “easy accessibility” (*saṅgahya*); see R. H. Davis, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 25, 60–61.
15. The same is true in Pāli, where from root *√smi* we have *sita* and *mihita* for “smile” and from roots *√has* and *√hr̥ṣ* we have *hasita*/*hassa*/*hāsa* for “laughter;” see T. W. Rhys Davids and W. Stede, eds., *The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986 [1921–25]), 534, 709, 730–31. In the vernacular languages of India such a differentiation is not always maintained. For instance, though in Hindī the verbs “to laugh,” *hañsnā*, and “to smile,” *muskarānā*, are clearly distinguished one from the other, in cognate Indo-Aryan languages such as Marāṭhī (“to laugh,” *hañsaṇe*; “to smile,” *hasaṇe*) and in South Indian Dravidian languages such as Telugu (“to laugh,” *navvaḍam*/*navvaḍāniki*; “to smile,” *chirunavvu navvaḍam*) there is an overlapping between the two. In Telugu, *chirunavvu* is a gentle smile and is thus akin to Kṛṣṇa’s *prahasann iḃa*.
16. M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988<sup>3</sup> [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899]), 700.
17. V. S. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Rev. ed. (Kyoto: Rinsen Book Company, 1986), 1122.
18. See V. R. Jhalakikar, ed., *Kāvyaḃprakāśa of Mammaṭa. With the Sanskrit Commentary Bālabodhinī* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1983<sup>8</sup>), 6–10 (chap. 1, *kārikā* 2).
19. See E. A. Cecil, “Mapping the Pāśupata Landscape: Narrative, Tradition, and the Geographic Imaginary,” *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (2018): 285–303.
20. See for instance V. Chitluri, *Baba’s Divine Symphony* (New Delhi: Sterling, 2014), 40, 69. As the *Shri Sai Satcharita* states (chap. 10, v. 27): “Sometimes he [= Sai Baba of Shirdi] treated people with great affection;

1 sometimes he charged at them, stone in hand. There was a volley of  
 2 curses and abuses, on occasions, as there was an embrace of blissful joy  
 3 on other occasions;" see G. R. Dabholkar (Hemad Pant), *Shri Sai Satcharita:*  
 4 *The Life and Teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba*, trans. Indira Kher (New Delhi:  
 5 Sterling, 1999), 150–51. See also the story of Siddique Phalake, a Muslim  
 6 resident of Kalyan, in *ibid.*, 172–75 (chap. 11, vv. 77–113). On the *faqīr* of  
 7 Shirdi, see A. Rigopoulos, *Oral Testimonies on Sai Baba. As Gathered During*  
 8 *a Field Research in Shirdi and Other Locales in October–November 1985* (Venice:  
 9 Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2020); also see *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of*  
 10 *Shirdi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

11 21. *na prayojanaavattoādhikaraṇa* ||. See *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 2000, 404–6.

12 22. The subject of the omniscience of *Brahman* is dealt with in Śaṅ-  
 13 kara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya ad* 1.1.2–3.

14 23. Though in his gloss *ad Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 2.1.33 Vācaspati Mīśra  
 15 distinguishes three reasons for the Bhagavat's manifestation of the uni-  
 16 verse—chance (*yadr̥cchā*), intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) and gratuitous play  
 17 (*līlā*)—thus differentiating between *svabhāva* and *līlā*, yet for Śaṅkara such  
 18 distinction is much more nuanced since in his commentary he alludes  
 19 to a cause-and-effect relationship between them. Indeed, on Īśvara's part  
 20 there is no other reason for the manifestation of the universe than his  
 21 intrinsic nature, which manifests itself in a propensity to create as a form  
 22 of pure amusement (*līlārūpā pravṛttir bhaviṣyati*); see A. K. Śastri and V. L.  
 23 S. Pansīkar, eds., *The Brahmasūtra Śaṅkara Bhāṣhya with the Commentaries*  
 24 *Bhāmatī, Kalpataru and Parimala* (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1917), 480–81.

25 24. As it will be seen in chapter 3, one of the chief meanings of  
 26 *prahasann iva* in the epics is precisely that of ease.

27 25. F. Edgerton, trans., *The Bhagavad Gītā* (New York: Harper Torch-  
 28 books—The Cloister Library, 1964 [1944]), 89.

29 26. See M. Piantelli, *Śaṅkara e la rinascita del brāhmanesimo* (Fossano:  
 30 Editrice Esperienze, 1974), 103–4.

31 27. On the adjective *gambhīra*, see A. Nikolaev, "Deep Waters: The  
 32 Etymology of Vedic *gabhīrā*," *Historische Sprachforschung* 132 (2019 [2021]):  
 33 191–207.

34 28. On laughter in the Bible and in early Christianity, see P. J. Achte-  
 35 meier, ed., *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).  
 36 See also R. Gallaher Branch, "Laughter in the Bible? Absolutely!," [https://](https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-interpretation/laughter-in-the-bible-absolutely/)  
 37 [www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-interpretation/](https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-interpretation/laughter-in-the-bible-absolutely/)  
 38 [laughter-in-the-bible-absolutely/](https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-interpretation/laughter-in-the-bible-absolutely/).

39 29. *The Bible. New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), [https://www.](https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrsv/)  
 40 [biblestudytools.com/nrsv/](https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrsv/).

41 30. In 1979, in the archaeological site of Ketef Hinnom southwest of  
 42 the Old City of Jerusalem, two tiny silver scrolls were found on which  
 43

portions of this prayer are inscribed. They were in a burial chamber and 1  
 apparently were used as amulets. These scrolls contain what may be the 2  
 oldest surviving texts from the Hebrew Bible, dating from around the late 3  
 seventh to early sixth century BCE prior to the Babylonian exile. They are 4  
 now preserved at the Israel Museum. On the priestly blessing, see J. D. 5  
 Smoak, "The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History 6  
 of *Numbers* 6:24–26," *Oxford Scholarship Online*, October 2015, <https://academic.oup.com/book/10129>; K. Seybold, M. Jacobs, and D. E. Saliers, "Aaronic 8  
 Blessing," in *Religion Past and Present. Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion* 9  
 (Brill Online 2011), [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1877-5888\\_rpp\\_COM\\_00010](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1877-5888_rpp_COM_00010). 10

31. On this episode, see J. M. Philpot, "Exodus 34:29–35 and Moses' 11  
 Shining Face," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23, no. 1 (2013): 1–11. 12

32. On the body of god in Jewish and Christian traditions, see F. 13  
 Stavrakopoulou, *God: An Anatomy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021); C. 14  
 Marksches, *God's Body: Jewish, Christian, and Pagan Images of God* (Waco, 15  
 TX: Baylor University Press, 2019). 16

33. Within the patristic tradition, the splendor of Moses' face is 17  
 related to the episode of Jesus' transfiguration (*Matthew* 17:1–8; *Mark* 18  
 9:2–8; *Luke* 9:28–36). 19

34. On the cross-cultural resonances among the Judaic and Hindu 20  
 traditions, see H. Goodman, ed., *Between Jerusalem and Benares: Comparative 21  
 Studies in Judaism and Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York 22  
 Press, 1994). On differences and similarities in comparative perspective, 23  
 see C. W. Bynum, *Dissimilar Similitudes: Devotional Objects in Late Medieval 24  
 Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); O. Freiberger, 25  
*Considering Comparison: A Method for Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford 26  
 University Press, 2019). See also G. J. Larson and E. Deutsch, eds., *Inter- 27  
 preting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (Princeton, 28  
 NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). 29

35. The three fundamental steps one must follow in order to achieve 30  
 self-realization in nondual Vedānta. On the stages of *śravaṇa*, *manana* and 31  
*nididhyāsana*, see Piantelli, *Śaṅkara e la rinascita del brāhmanesimo*, 160–63. 32

## Chapter 1

1. F. Wilson, ed., *The Love of Krishna. The Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta* of Līlāśuka 37  
 Bilvamaṅgala (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 110. 38

2. The Sanskrit verse of *BhG* 2.10 is the same in the vulgate edition, 39  
 the Kashmirian recension, and the critical edition. For the critical edition 40  
 of the *BhG*, see S. K. Belvalkar, *The Bhagavadgītā, Being Reprint of Relevant 41  
 Parts of Bhīṣmaparvan* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1945). 42  
 43

- 1 3. The following are the eighty-four *loci* of *prahasann iva* in the  
2 *MBh*: 1.127.5d, 1.141.1b, 1.147.21c, 1.151.7b, 1.151.14d, 1.152.15d, 1.181.2b,  
3 1.206.16c, 1.211.16b, 2.54.11b, 3.38.36b, 3.38.39b, 3.40.17f, 3.40.21b, 3.77.11b,  
4 3.97.5d, 3.186.116b, 3.294.9d, 4.13.5c, 4.23.22d, 4.52.23b, 4.53.14b, 5.7.9b,  
5 5.73.1b, 5.89.23d, 5.179.1b, 6.24.10b, 6.41.16d, 6.43.21d, 6.54.15d, 6.75.39f,  
6 6.79.36b, 6.79.48e, 6.107.2d, 6.115.34b, 7.21.10d, 7.37.13b, 7.47.26b, 7.57.46b,  
7 7.77.29c, 7.82.14d, 7.82.20d, 7.90.28d, 7.91.32b, 7.91.35d, 7.91.43d, 7.96.13d,  
8 7.99.16b, 7.102.98c, 7.103.4b, 7.111.3b, 7.114.50f, 7.130.29b, 7.137.18d,  
9 7.137.26d, 7.141.7b, 7.142.6d, 7.142.16d, 7.144.16d, 7.146.28d, 7.148.39d,  
10 7.169.20d, 7.173.48b, 8.9.26d, 8.33.14d, 8.34.16d, 8.40.85b, 8.50.2b, 9.27.51d,  
11 9.30.15f, 12.3.29b, 12.24.8d, 12.125.18d, 12.142.41b, 12.151.10b, 12.310.27b,  
12 13.14.174d, 14.19.46d, 14.54.17b, 14.73.6b, 14.83.8b, 14.93.39c, 16.8.49d,  
13 18.1.11b; see the electronic text of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research  
14 Institute's critical edition, available at [http://bombay.indology.info/  
15 mahabharata/welcome.html](http://bombay.indology.info/mahabharata/welcome.html).
- 16 4. The following are the thirty-nine *loci* of *hasann iva* in the *MBh*:  
17 1.141.18d, 2.60.37d, 3.227.21d, 3.290.8b, 5.194.16d, 6.49.15d, 6.60.13d,  
18 6.60.31b, 6.65.22d, 7.50.16d, 7.82.5b, 7.90.13d, 7.90.26b, 7.92.14d, 7.110.31d,  
19 7.117.14b, 7.134.43b, 7.141.10d, 7.144.6b, 7.160.23b, 7.164.45b, 8.10.21d,  
20 8.17.39d, 8.17.84d, 8.24.94c, 8.35.23b, 8.44.42d, 8.45.5b, 8.55.52d, 9.11.48d,  
21 9.25.9b, 9.26.42d, 9.26.47d, 9.27.24f, 9.27.35d, 9.27.38d, 10.7.59d, 10.12.12d,  
22 14.20.5b.
- 23 5. *prahasann iva*: 1.38.3b, 1.51.12d, 2.30.22b, 2.85.3b, 3.27.28f, 4.8.19d,  
24 4.10.26d, 5.1.118d, 6.95.21c, 7.4.11b, 7.17.3d, 7.60.13b, 7.80.3d; *hasann iva*:  
25 2.63.9d; see the electronic text of the Baroda critical edition, available at  
26 <https://sanskritdocuments.org/mirrors/ramayana/valmiki.htm>.
- 27 6. For a comparison of select English translations of the *BhG*, see  
28 G. J. Larson, "The Song Celestial: Two Centuries of the *Bhagavad Gītā* in  
29 English," *Philosophy East and West* 31, no. 4 (1981): 513–41. For a survey of  
30 *BhG* translations in Indian and non-Indian languages, see W. M. Callewaert  
31 and S. Hemraj, *Bhagavadgītānuvāda: A Study in Transcultural Translation*  
32 (Ranchi: Satya Bharati Publication, 1982).
- 33 7. C. Wilkins, trans., *The Bhagvat-Geeta or Dialogues of Kreesna and*  
34 *Arjoon* (London: C. Nourse, 1785), 35.
- 35 8. E. Arnold, trans., *The Song Celestial or Bhagavad-Gita (From the*  
36 *Mahabharata). Being a Discourse Between Arjuna, Prince of India, and the*  
37 *Supreme Being Under the Form of Krishna* (New York: Truslove, Hanson &  
38 Comba, 1900), available at [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/india/Bhagavad.  
39 pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/india/Bhagavad.pdf).
- 40 9. Edgerton, *Bhagavad Gītā*, 10.
- 41 10. S. Radhakrishnan, trans., *Bhagavadgītā. With an Introductory*  
42 *Essay, Sanskrit Text, English Translation and Notes* (London: George Allen  
43 & Unwin, 1963<sup>7</sup> [1948]), 102.

11. R. C. Zaehner, trans., *The Bhagavad-Gītā. With a Commentary Based on the Original Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973 [1966]), 124.
12. E. Deutsch, trans., *The Bhagavad Gītā. Translated, with Introduction and Critical Essays* (San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 37.
13. J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata: Text and Translation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 75. In his introduction, van Buitenen observes: “Arjuna’s dilemma is both a real one and, despite Kṛṣṇa’s sarcasm, an honorable one”; *ibid.*, 3.
14. W. Sargeant, trans., *The Bhagavad Gītā: Twenty Fifth Anniversary Edition*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple, foreword by Huston Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009 [1984]), 95.
15. B. Stoler Miller, trans., *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna’s Counsel in Time of War* (New York: Bantam, 1986), 31.
16. A. Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 64.
17. A. Cherniak, trans., *Mahābhārata. Book Six. Bhīṣma, Volume 1. Including the ‘Bhagavad Gītā’ in Context*, foreword by Ranajit Guha (New York: Clay Sanskrit Library—New York University Press and the JJC Foundation, 2008), 183.
18. G. Feuerstein and B. Feuerstein, trans., *The Bhagavad-Gītā: A New Translation* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2014 [2011]), 95. On the “important qualifying remark” that Hṛṣīkeśa imparted his teaching “laughingly, as it were,” the authors note: “We could understand this easily in the sense that he was benignly mocking Arjuna. In order to create a mind of clarity (*sattva*) in a student, the teacher first has to dynamize a lethargic mind by introducing the quality of *rajas* into it. The progression, then, is *tamas* → *rajas* → *sattva*. Ultimately, of course, all three primary-qualities (*guṇa*) must be transcended in order to bring about spiritual liberation. From the highest perspective, even *sattva*, the principle of lucidity, represents a limitation;” *ibid.*, 105 n. 36.
- For a broader overview, here are more examples of English translations of *prahasann iva* in chronological order: Kāshināth Trimbak Telang (1882) “with a slight smile”; see K. T. Telang, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā with the Sanatsujāīya and the Anugītā* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908<sup>2</sup> [1882]), 43; Alladi Mahadeva Sastry (1897) “as if smiling”; see A. Mahadeva Sastry, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracharya* (Madras: Samata Books, 1977<sup>7</sup> [1897]), 22; Lionel D. Barnett (1905) “with seeming smile”; see L. D. Barnett, trans., *Bhagavad-Gītā or The Lord’s Song* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1928 [1905]), 88; Annie Besant and Bhagavân Dâs (1905) “smiling”; see A. Besant and Bhagavân Dâs, trans., *The Bhagavad-Gītā. With Samskrit Text, free translation into English, a word-for-word translation, and an Introduction on Samskrit Grammar* (London and Benares: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1905), 28; Swami Swarupananda (1909) “as



1 if smiling"; see Swami Swarupananda, trans., *Srimat-Bhagavad-Gita*. With  
 2 Text, Word-for-Word Translation, English Rendering, Comments and Index  
 3 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1967<sup>10</sup> [1909]), 34; W. Douglas P. Hill (1928)  
 4 "as one smiling"; see W. D. P. Hill, trans., *The Bhagavad-gītā: An English*  
 5 *Translation and Commentary* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1953<sup>2</sup> [1928]),  
 6 84; Sri Aurobindo (1938) "smiling as it were"; see Sri Aurobindo, trans., *The*  
 7 *Bhagavad Gita*, available at <https://www.auro-ebooks.com/bhagavad-gita>;  
 8 Swami Nikhilananda (1944) "smiling"; see Swami Nikhilananda, trans.,  
 9 *The Bhagavad Gita* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1944),  
 10 71; Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (1944) "smiling";  
 11 see Swami Prabhavananda and C. Isherwood, trans., *The Song of God:*  
 12 *Bhagavad-Gita*, introduction by Aldous Huxley (New York: The New  
 13 American Library, 1958<sup>5</sup> [1944]), 36; Swami Vireswarananda (1948) "as if  
 14 smiling"; see Swami Vireswarananda, trans., *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita*. Text,  
 15 Translation of the Text and of the Gloss of Sridhara Swami (Mylapore:  
 16 Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1948), 33; Venkataraman Raghavan (1949) "gently  
 17 smiling"; see V. Raghavan, *Readings from the Bhagavadgītā* (Adyar, Chennai:  
 18 Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2010 [1949]), 6; Nataraja  
 19 Guru (1961) "with a semblance of smiling"; see Nataraja Guru, trans.,  
 20 *The Bhagavad Gita* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961), 116; Juan  
 21 Mascaró (1962) "smiled"; see J. Mascaró, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* (New  
 22 York: Penguin Books, 1978 [1962]), 49; Swami Chidbhavananda (1965)  
 23 "smiling, as it were"; see Swami Chidbhavananda, trans., *The Bhagavad*  
 24 *Gita* (Tirupparaiturai: Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam, 1972<sup>6</sup> [1965]), 127;  
 25 Abhay Caranaravinda Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (1968) "smiling";  
 26 see A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, trans., *Bhagavad-gītā As It*  
 27 *Is* (New York: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1976 [1968]), 21; Swami  
 28 Venkatesananda (1972) "as if smiling"; see Swami Venkatesananda, trans.,  
 29 *The Song of God (Bhagavad Gita)* (Elgin, South Africa: The Chiltern Yoga  
 30 Trust, 1984<sup>4</sup> [1972]), 109; Keyes W. Bolle (1979) "seemed to smile"; see K.  
 31 W. Bolle, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā: A New Translation* (Berkeley: University  
 32 of California Press, 1979), 21; Swami Sivananda (1979) "as if smiling"; see  
 33 Swami Sivananda, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* (Shivanandanagar: The Divine  
 34 Life Society, 1996<sup>3</sup> [1979]), 9; Robert N. Minor (1982) "with a semblance  
 35 of a laugh"/"faint smile"; see R. N. Minor, trans., *Bhagavad-Gita: An*  
 36 *Exegetical Commentary* (Columbia, Missouri: South Asia Books, 1982), 33;  
 37 Eknath Easwaran (1985) "smiled"; see E. Easwaran, trans., *The Bhagavad*  
 38 *Gita* (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 2007<sup>2</sup> [1985]), 89; Swami Chinmayananda  
 39 (2000) "as if smiling"; see Swami Chinmayananda, trans., *The Bhagavad*  
 40 *Geeta* (Langhorn, PA: Chinmaya, 2000), 63 ([https://factmuseum.com/pdf/  
 41 upaveda/Holy-Geeta-by-Swami-Chinmayananda.pdf](https://factmuseum.com/pdf/upaveda/Holy-Geeta-by-Swami-Chinmayananda.pdf)); Stephen Mitchell  
 42 (2000) "smiled"; see S. Mitchell, trans., *Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation*  
 43



(New York: Harmony Books, 2000), 47; Lars Martin Fosse (2007) “with a hint of derision”; see L. M. Fosse, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* (Woodstock, NY: YogaVidya, 2007), 13; Graham Schweig (2007) “as if about to laugh”; see G. Schweig, trans., *Bhagavad Gita: The Beloved Lord’s Secret Love Song* (San Francisco: Harper, 2007), 45; Walter Harding Maurer (2009) “almost bursting into laughter”; see W. H. Maurer, *The Sanskrit Language: An Introductory Grammar and Reader*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 419; Swami B. V. Tripurari (2010) “smiling”; see Swami B. V. Tripurari, trans., *Bhagavad Gita: Its Feeling and Philosophy* (San Rafael, CA: Mandala Publishing, 2010), 40; Gavin Flood and Charles Martin (2013) “while laughing at him, as it were”; see G. Flood and C. Martin, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 13; Swami Mukundananda (2014) “smilingly”; see Swami Mukundananda, trans., *Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God*, 2014 (<https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/10>); James L. Fitzgerald (2018) “smiling”; see J. L. Fitzgerald, “Mahābhārata,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018; <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism>). Fitzgerald adds that *prahasann iva* could even be translated as “grinning,” though often the smile seems ironic.

19. The doubling of *n* in *prahasann iva* is due to a rule of external *sandhi*, which takes place when the *n* occurs as a final after a short vowel before any initial vowel. In Sanskrit, present participles are normally reserved for actions that are contemporaneous with those of the main verb, as in this case. They function as verbal adjectives and must agree in case, number, and gender with the noun they modify. On the present participle in Sanskrit, see R. P. Goldman and S. J. Sutherland Goldman, *Devavāṇīpraveśikā: An Introduction to the Sanskrit Language* (Berkeley: Center for South Asia Studies, University of California, 2002), 255–72.

20. Its use is indeed very common; see S. Sellmer, *Formulaic Diction and Versification in the Mahābhārata* (Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2015), 198.

21. Typically, this *upasarga* denotes expansion, a broadening. Among the many examples of the prefix *pra* meaning “forward” we may mention the nouns *prajā*, “procreation”/“propagation,” *pravṛtti*, “moving onward”/“coming forth,” *prakāśa*, “light”/“manifestation,” and *prajñā*, “wisdom”/“intelligence.”

22. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 700.

23. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1121.

24. On the *prahasana* genre, see D. P. Pierdominici Leão, *The Somavalliyogānandaprahasana of Aruṇagirinātha Ḍiṇḍimakavi (critical text, translation and study)*, PhD thesis (Rome: Università “La Sapienza,” 2018), 58–75.

- 1 See also D. Rossella, “Satire, Wit and Humour on Kings and Ascetics in  
2 *kāvya* Literature. «He who laughs last, laughs best»,” in *Kings and Ascetics*  
3 *in Indian Classical Literature*, ed. P. M. Rossi and C. Pieruccini, International  
4 Seminar Proceedings, 21–22 September 2007 (Milan: Cisalpino, 2009),  
5 117–33. For an overview on India’s comic tradition, see L. Siegel, *Laughing*  
6 *Matters: Comic Tradition in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989 [Chicago,  
7 1987]). On humor in South Asian religions, see the collection of articles in  
8 *Sacred Play: Ritual Levity and Humor in South Asian Religions*, ed. S. J. Raj  
9 and C. G. Dempsey (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).
- 10 25. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 700.
- 11 26. As Raimon Panikkar noted: “There are three realms of reality:  
12 these domains are expressed in an already irreducible way in language and  
13 clearly evidenced in the so-called personal pronouns. I must immediately  
14 add that ‘pro-noun’ does not necessarily mean ‘in place’ of the name, a  
15 substitution. It can also mean ‘prior,’ that is, more important than the  
16 name. A pronoun is truly a primordial word. The Sanskrit grammarians  
17 called it *sarvanāman*, a name for everything (the fullness of a name);” R.  
18 Panikkar, *Lo spirito della parola* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2021), 96 (our  
19 translation).
- 20 27. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 652; Apte, *The Prac-*  
21 *tical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1052. The *Viṃśatyupasargavṛtti* traditionally  
22 ascribed to Candragomin (seventh century CE) lists thirteen different  
23 meanings of *pra*: excellence/eminence (*udṛṇa*), multiplicity (*bhṛśārtha*),  
24 supremacy (*aiśvarya*), birth (*saṃbhava*), use/application (*niyoga*), satis-  
25 faction (*trṣṭi*), purity (*śuddhi*), desire (*icchā*), power (*śakti*), peace (*śānti*),  
26 worship (*pūjā*), culmination (*agra*), and vision (*darśana*); see D. Dimitrov,  
27 ed., *Lehrschrift über die Zwanzig Präverbien im Sanskrit. Kritische Ausgabe der*  
28 *Viṃśatyupasargavṛtti und der tibetischen Übertzung Ñe bar bsgyur ba ñi śu*  
29 *pa’i ’grel pa* (Marburg: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 2007), 24–27. Moreover,  
30 Kṣīrasvāmin (eleventh century CE) in his *Nipātāvyaṃyopasargavṛtti* lists  
31 twenty-six meanings of *pra* of which only eight are in common with the  
32 *Viṃśatyupasargavṛtti*. The other eighteen are: cessation (*uparama*), direction  
33 (*digyoga*), amusement (*narman*), love (*preman*), knowledge (*jñāna*), ornament  
34 (*bhūṣaṇa*), defect (*doṣa*), occasion (*avasara*), service (*sevā*), haste (*sāhasa*),  
35 application (*upayoga*), proclamation (*prakathana*), negligence (*anavadhāna*),  
36 measure (*māna*), violence (*hiṃsā*), titling (*śāstranāman*), cheat (*vañcanā*),  
37 and opposite meaning (*arthaviparyaya*); see S. A. Śarmā, ed., *Nipātāvyaṃ-*  
38 *pasargavṛttiḥ. Śrīveṅkaṭeśvaraprācyamahāvidyālayavyākaraṇopādhyāyena*  
39 *“vyākaraṇāsāhityavidyāpravīṇā” — dyupādhibhājā kautsena Appala*  
40 *Someśvaraśarmā, ity anena saviśeṣaṃ pariṣkṛta. Śrīveṅkaṭeśvaraprācy-*  
41 *agranthāvalī* (Tirupati: Tirupati Devasthānamudrālaya, 1951), 36.
- 42  
43

28. The expression *prahasann iva* could even be viewed as a particular kind of compound, that is, a *kevalasamāsa*, as per Kātyāyana's *Vārtika* to Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 2.2.18: "There is a [type of] compound [that forms itself] with [the particle] *iva* and the not dropping of the case ending [of its preceding word]" (*ivena saha samāso vibhaktyalopas ca*). The example offered by grammarians is the famous incipit of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa* 1.1: *vāgarthāvivā* (= *vāg-arthau-iva*) *saṃprktau . . .*, "as speech and meaning are joined together . . ." However, there is no textual evidence for the interpretation of *prahasann iva* as a *kevalasamāsa* or *ivasamāsa* and overall it seems unlikely. On *kevalasamāsas*, see G. A. Tubb and E. R. Boose, *Scholastic Sanskrit: A Handbook for Students* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, Columbia University Press, 2007), 88–89.

29. J. P. Brereton, "The Particle *iva* in Vedic Prose," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102, no. 3 (1982): 446. See also the recent article of E. Biagetti, O. Hellwig, and S. Sellmer, "Hedging in Diachrony: The Case of Vedic Sanskrit *iva*," *Proceedings of the 21st International Workshop on Treebanks and Linguistic Theories, March 9–12, 2023, Association for Computational Linguistics* 2023, 21–31; [https://www.academia.edu/98485196/Hedging\\_in\\_diachrony\\_the\\_case\\_of\\_Vedic\\_Sanskrit\\_iva](https://www.academia.edu/98485196/Hedging_in_diachrony_the_case_of_Vedic_Sanskrit_iva). On the particle *iva* in the hymns of the *Ṛgveda*, see G.-J. Pinault, "On the Usages of the Particle *iva* in the *Ṛgvedic* Hymns," in *The Vedas: Texts, Language and Ritual. Proceedings of the Third International Vedic Workshop Leiden 2002*, ed. A. Griffiths and J. E. M. Houben (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2004), 285–306. On *iva* clauses, see M. Hale, "Some Notes on the Syntax of *iva* clauses in Vedic," [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mark\\_Hale/publication/286626021\\_Some\\_Notes\\_on\\_the\\_Syntax\\_of\\_iva\\_Clauses\\_in\\_Vedic\\_Handout/links/566c9c0408ae1a797e3d9d85/Some-Notes-on-the-Syntax-of-iva-Clauses-in-Vedic-Handout.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mark_Hale/publication/286626021_Some_Notes_on_the_Syntax_of_iva_Clauses_in_Vedic_Handout/links/566c9c0408ae1a797e3d9d85/Some-Notes-on-the-Syntax-of-iva-Clauses-in-Vedic-Handout.pdf).

30. Nataraja Guru notes: "The term *iva* (as if) applied to the smile of Krishna is a peculiarity of the *lingua mystica* familiar in the *Upanishads* . . . by which the edge is, as it were, taken off the actuality of the description, tending to make it more perceptual and thus more in keeping with a contemplative text;" Nataraja Guru, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 118.

31. Maurer, *The Sanskrit Language: An Introductory Grammar and Reader*, 419.

32. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's charioteer and bard, son of Gavalgaṇa, to whom he narrates the events of the great battle. He is the eyes—and ears—of the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, having been granted divine vision by sage Vyāsa.

33. An epithet of Kṛṣṇa meaning "he whose hair is splendid" / "the bristling haired one" (*hṛṣṭi-keśa*) as well as "lord of the sense-organs" (*hṛṣṭika-tīsa*); see 1.15, 1.21, 1.24, 2.9, 2.10, 11.36, 18.1. For an overview of

1 Kṛṣṇa's names and epithets in the *BhG*, see P. L. Bhargava, "Names and  
2 Epithets of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā*," *Indologica Taurinensia* 7 (1979): 93–96.  
3 Analogously, Arjuna is referred to as "the thick-haired one" (*guḍā-keśa*);  
4 see 1.24, 2.9, 10.20.

5 34. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, husband of Gāndhārī and father of Duryodhana  
6 and of ninety-nine other sons (i.e., the Kauravas). He was born blind as  
7 a result of his mother, Ambikā, closing her eyes during intercourse with  
8 his father, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa.

9 35. Lit. "son of Vasudeva," a patronymic of Kṛṣṇa.

10 36. Mahadeva Sastry, *The Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Sri*  
11 *Sankaracharya*, 22–23. We have slightly modified his translation in a few  
12 points.

13 37. For a fine introduction to the *BhG*, see Davis, *The Bhagavad Gita*.  
14 See also I. Theodor, *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction* (London  
15 and New York: Routledge, 2021); A. Rigopoulos, "La *Bhagavadgītā*," in F.  
16 Sferra, ed., *Hinduismo antico. Volume primo. Dalle origini vediche ai Purāṇa*  
17 (Milan: Mondadori, 2010), CLXXIII–CXCII, 1500–1504. For an excellent  
18 contextualization of the *BhG* within the *MBh*, see Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā:*  
19 *Doctrines and Contexts*. By the same author, see also "*Bhagavadgītā*," in *Brill's*  
20 *Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar,  
21 and V. Narayanan (Brill: Leiden, 2018; <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism>). For an overview on Kṛṣṇa  
22 in the *BhG*, see R. N. Minor, "Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*," in *Krishna:*  
23 *A Sourcebook*, ed. E. F. Bryant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007),  
24 77–94. On Kṛṣṇa's place within the *MBh*, see A. Hildebeitel, "Kṛṣṇa and  
25 the *Mahābhārata* (A Bibliographical Essay)," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Ori-*  
26 *ental Research Institute* 60, 1/4 (1979): 65–107; A. Hildebeitel, "Krishna in  
27 the *Mahabharata*: The Death of Karṇa," in *Reading the Fifth Veda. Studies*  
28 *on the Mahābhārata*, ed. V. Adluri and J. Bagchee. *Essays by Alf Hildebeitel*  
29 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 411–59.

30 38. Even though he is here referring to Śiva's smile, not Kṛṣṇa's;  
31 see A. Hildebeitel, "The Two Kṛṣṇas on One Chariot: Upaniṣadic Imagery  
32 and Epic Mythology," *History of Religions* 24, 1 (1984): 19.

33 39. S. J. Rosen, ed., *Vaiṣṇavism: Contemporary Scholars Discuss the*  
34 *Gauḍīya Tradition*. Foreword by Edward C. Dimock, Jr. (New York: FOLK  
35 Books, 1992), 54. In Brook's *Mahābhārata*, the role of Kṛṣṇa was played  
36 by Bruce Myers (1942–2020) and that of Arjuna by Vittorio Mezzogiorno  
37 (1941–1994); on these actors' ideas about Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, see V. Di  
38 Bernardi, *Mahābhārata. L'epica indiana e lo spettacolo di Peter Brook* (Rome:  
39 Bulzoni, 1990<sup>2</sup>), 151–60. For a shortened, modern prose version of the great  
40 epic, see R. K. Narayan, *The Mahabharata: A Shortened Modern Prose Version*  
41 *of the Indian Epic* (London: Mandarin, 1978). For a critical examination of  
42 modern *Mahābhāratas*, see R. E. Goldman, "'The Great War and Ancient  
43

- Memory: Modern Mahābhāratas and the Limits of Cultural Translation,* 1  
*Visual Anthropology* 5, no. 1 (1992): 87–96. 2
40. D. D. Shulman, *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 384. 3 4
41. For an overview on Arjuna in the *MBh*, see R. C. Katz, *Arjuna in the Mahabharata: Where Krishna Is, There Is Victory*. Foreword by Daniel H. H. Ingalls (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989). 5 6 7
42. In *BhG* 1.14, this war chariot “yoked with white horses” (*śvetair hayair yukte*) is called *syandana*. It was a gift from god Agni, who in turn had obtained it from god Varuṇa. In *BhG* 1.24, it is praised as the “highest chariot” (*rathottamam*). 8 9 10 11
43. See M. B. Emeneau, “*Bhagavadgītā* Notes,” in *Mélanges d’indianisme à la mémoire de Louis Renou* (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1968), 276–77. 12 13
44. On the imagery of the *ātman* as the traveler in the chariot, the body as the chariot, the intellect as the charioteer, the mind as the reins, and the senses as the horses, see *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3.3–6, 9. On the Vedic chariot as a living prismatic metaphor, see E. Mucciarelli, “The Steadiness of a Non-steady Place: Re-adaptations of the Imagery of the Chariot,” in *Adaptive Reuse: Aspects of Creativity in South Asian Cultural History*, ed. E. Freschi and P. A. Maas (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017), 169–94. 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
45. “Equanimity is *yoga*,” as per Kṛṣṇa’s definition in *BhG* 2.48: *samatvaṃ yoga ucyate*. The wise considers pain and pleasure as being the same (*samaduḥkhasukha*; *BhG* 2.15, 14.24). There are twenty-two occurrences of *sama*/*samatva*/*samatā* in the *BhG*, which proves its relevance: see 1.4, 2.15, 2.38, 2.48, 4.22, 5.18, 5.19, 6.8, 6.9, 6.13, 6.29, 6.32, 9.29, 10.5, 12.4, 12.13, 12.18, 13.9, 13.27, 13.28, 14.24, 18.54. 21 22 23 24 25 26
46. The term *vairāgya* is found at *BhG* 6.35, 13.8, and 18.52; see also the cognate terms *asaṅga* at 15.3 and *tyāga* at 16.2 and 18.1–11. 27 28
47. Within the *Bhīṣmaparvan* itself, see 6.1.33, 6.19.3, 6.21.1, 6.41.6. 29
48. Master archer and teacher of the military art, Droṇa was especially fond of Arjuna whom he considered his best pupil. 30 31
49. In *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.62, one of the reasons for the arising of the sentiment of compassion (*karuṇarasa*) is seeing the killing of one’s beloved. 32 33
50. Initially this divine bow was given by Soma to Varuṇa. Agni, however, persuaded Varuṇa to part with it and presented it to Arjuna to enable him to burn the Khāṇḍava forest. 34 35 36
51. In the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, even sage Vyāsa makes an appeal to stop the battle after the enumeration of adverse omens (6.2.16, 6.4.43). But Dhṛtarāṣṭra considers Vyāsa’s words to be futile, as he viewed war as a matter of fate (6.4.44–46). 37 38 39 40
52. Arjuna’s refusal to fight is traditionally motivated by the prevalence of the lower *guṇas* of *rajas* and *tamas*: the thought of the painful consequences (*śoka*) of having to fight against his *ācāryas* and *bandhus* 41 42 43



- 1 (said to be due to *rajas*) and his confusion (*moha*) about *dharma* (said to be due to *tamās*).
- 3 53. In *MBh* 5.131.36 and 5.133.3, Vidurā's son questions the value  
4 (*artha*) of a warrior's *svadharmā* by putting forward views that are quite  
5 similar to those of Arjuna. Just like *BhG* 1.32, both verses end with the  
6 refrain: "What is the use of enjoyments or life?" (*kiṃ bhogair jīvitena vā*).
- 7 54. Back from their fourteen-year exile, the Pāṇḍavas had demanded  
8 the Kauravas return their half of the kingdom, but Duryodhana had ada-  
9 mantly refused. All the Pāṇḍavas's efforts toward compromise and peace  
10 were rejected by their cousins: even when Yudhiṣṭhira said that he and  
11 his brothers would content themselves with just five villages the Kauravas  
12 had dismissed such a solution. War had thus become unavoidable.
- 13 55. An epithet of Kṛṣṇa meaning "tender of cattle."  
14 56. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 6.  
15 57. Lit. "difficult to conquer." He was the eldest son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra  
16 and Gāndhārī, the leader of the Kauravas in their struggle against the  
17 Pāṇḍavas.
- 18 58. An epithet of Kṛṣṇa meaning "destroyer of [the demon] Madhu."  
19 59. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 7.  
20 60. On evil/sin (*pāpa*) in the *BhG*, see D. Hudson, "Arjuna's Sin:  
21 Thoughts on the *Bhagavad-gītā* in Its Epic Context," *Journal of Vaiṣṇava*  
22 *Studies* 4 (1996): 65–84.
- 23 61. On these issues, see C. K. Chapple, "Arjuna's Argument: Family  
24 Secrets Unveiled," *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 9, no. 2 (2001): 23–31.
- 25 62. Vṛṣṇi was a descendant of Yadu. Kṛṣṇa as well as other figures  
26 such as Sātyaki and Kṛtavarma belonged to this clan.
- 27 63. Another name of Kṛṣṇa, meaning "people-agitator."  
28 64. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 7–8.  
29 65. On the religious significance and function of crying, see J. S.  
30 Hawley and K. C. Patton, eds., *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imag-*  
31 *ination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- 32 66. Long ago Hermann Jacobi noted that Kṛṣṇa's reply lists topics  
33 that are used elsewhere in the *MBh* when a warrior refuses to fight and  
34 gives the example of Arjuna's reply to Uttara in 4.36.17–23; H. Jacobi,  
35 "Über die Einfügung der *Bhagavadgītā* im *Mahābhārata*," *Zeitschrift der*  
36 *Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 72 (1918): 325. Other examples  
37 are Kṛṣṇa's reply to Bhīma joining the peace party (5.73) and Vidurā's  
38 speech to her son (5.131–34).
- 39 67. On the fruitlessness and bad reputation of the *klība*, see *Māna-*  
40 *vadharmasāstra* 2.158, 4.211.  
41 68. See Vidurā's speech to her son (5.131.5–7). See also *MBh* 2.34.21,  
42 2.38.24, 5.73.17. A hero is required to be a man (*puruṣo bhava*; see *MBh*  
43 5.167.6, 5.167.13–15).

69. The story is told in the *Virāṭaparvan*, the fourth book of the *MBh* 1  
 (4.23.22). Dressed as a woman, Arjuna presents himself as the eunuch 2  
 Bṛhannalā/Bṛhannaḍā and disguises himself as a dance teacher in the king's 3  
 harem. On this episode and Arjuna's incongruous, grotesque appearance 4  
 as an androgynous clown, see Shulman, *The King and the Clown in South* 5  
*Indian Myth and Poetry*, 256–76. In a self-conscious, ludicrous reversal of 6  
 roles with respect to the opening chapter of the *BhG*, Bṛhannalā/Arjuna 7  
 acts as the brave charioteer of Uttara—a coward who panics when he 8  
 sees the Kaurava army—and asks him why he does not wish to fight 9  
 against the enemy; see *ibid.*, 262. 10

70. On these issues, see A. Hejib—K. K. Young, “*Kṛta* on the Battle- 11  
 field: Towards a Reinterpretation of Arjuna's Despondency,” *Annals of the* 12  
*Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 61 (1980): 235–44. See also Malinar, 13  
*The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 38–42. 14

71. In chapter 2 of the *BhG* the meter changes from *śloka* to *triṣṭubh* 15  
 in three other places, which again is meant to highlight their importance: 16  
 at 2.20, 2.29, and 2.70. Each of the four lines of the *triṣṭubh* verse is made 17  
 up of eleven syllables whereas the *śloka* verse has eight. 18

72. This is the same solution that Saṃjaya, acting as Duryodhana's 19  
 ambassador, recommends to Yudhiṣṭhira in the *Udyogaparvan*: “I think it 20  
 is better to live on alms in the kingdom of the Andhaka-Vṛṣṇis” (*bhaikṣā-* 21  
*caryam andhakaṃvṛṣṇirājye śreyo manye*; 5.27.2). On the other hand, Kṛṣṇa 22  
 in a speech to Yudhiṣṭhira states that victory or death is the “alms” a 23  
*kṣatriya* lives on; see 5.71.3–4. 24

73. The Kashmirian recension of *BhG* 2.11 especially emphasizes the 25  
 issue of *kārpānyadoṣa*. 26

74. The *BhG* author seems to have in mind *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.1 where 27  
 Yama, the god of death, instructs the Brahmin boy Naciketas thus: “The 28  
 good (*śreyas*) is one thing, the gratifying (*preyas*) is quite another; their 29  
 goals are different, both bind a man. Good things await him who picks 30  
 the good; by choosing the gratifying, one misses one's goal;” P. Olivelle, 31  
 trans., *Upaniṣads* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 235. Besides 32  
 2.7, the term *śreyas* is found in *BhG* 1.31, 2.5, 2.31, 3.2, 3.11, 3.35, 5.1, 5.2, 33  
 12.12, 16.22. 34

75. Kṛṣṇa claims authority as supreme teacher both at the beginning 35  
 of chapter 3, where he declares he has taught the doctrines of *jñānayoga* 36  
 and *karmayoga* long ago (*purā*; 3.3), and at the beginning of chapter 4, 37  
 where he proclaims himself to be the original teacher of *yoga* (4.3). On 38  
 the *guru*'s foundational role in Indian culture, see R. M. Steinmann, 39  
*Guru-śiṣya-sambandha. Das Meister-Schüler-Verhältnis im Traditionellen und* 40  
*Modernen Hinduismus* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1986); 41  
 A. Rigopoulos, *Guru. Il fondamento della civiltà dell'India. Con la prima* 42  
 traduzione italiana del “Canto sul Maestro” (Rome: Carocci, 2009). 43



1 76. On these issues, see L. Minnema, *Tragic Views of the Human Con-*  
 2 *dition: Cross-Cultural Comparisons Between Views of Human Nature in Greek*  
 3 *and Shakespearean Tragedy and the Mahābhārata and Bhagavadgītā* (New York:  
 4 Bloomsbury, 2013), 51–62, 101–14, 241–54, 307–44.

5 77. Along these lines, Franklin Edgerton points out that in *MBh* 2.61.38  
 6 the expression *prajñāvādikah* means “talking as (pretending to be) wise;”  
 7 Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 92. Significantly, the Kashmirian recension  
 8 has the variant *prajñāvān nābhībhāṣase*, “you don’t speak as a sage.” For  
 9 an overview, see T. Kato, “A Note on the Kashmirian Recension of the  
 10 *Bhagavadgītā: Gītā* Passages in Bhāskara’s *Gītābhāṣya* and *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*,”  
 11 *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 62, no. 3 (2014): 1144–50; T. Kato,  
 12 “Interpretation of the *Bhagavadgītā* II.11,” *Journal of Indian and Buddhist*  
 13 *Studies* 64, no. 3 (2016): 1106–12. See also S. Piano, ed., *Bhagavad-gītā. Il*  
 14 *canto del glorioso Signore* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 1994),  
 15 100–101, n. 11b.

16 78. It draws on the style of funeral orations. These verses are  
 17 included in the *Viṣṇusmṛti* (19.24) as words of consolation which should  
 18 be addressed to mourners. For the recurrent and parallel passages in the  
 19 *BhG* and other Sanskrit texts, see G. C. O. Haas, “Recurrent and Parallel  
 20 Passages in the Principal *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-gītā* with References  
 21 to Other Sanskrit Text,” in *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads Translated*  
 22 *from the Sanskrit. With an Outline of the Philosophy of the Upanishads and*  
 23 *an Annotated Bibliography* (Madras: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford Univer-  
 24 sity Press, 1949<sup>2</sup>), 560–62. For other speeches of consolation in the *MBh*,  
 25 see 11.2.3. On the hour of death, see F. Edgerton, “The Hour of Death:  
 26 Its Importance for Man’s Future Fate in Hindu and Western Religions,”  
 27 *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 8, 3 (1926–27): 219–49.

28 79. On the parallelism between *BhG* 2.20 and *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.18,  
 29 see L. Rocher, “*Bhagavadgītā* 2.20 and *Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2.18: A New Inter-  
 30 pretation,” *The Adyar Library Bulletin* 27 (1963): 45–58.

31 80. At 2.38, Kṛṣṇa reiterates to him that he must not be attached  
 32 to what will be the outcome of battle: “Holding pleasure and pain alike  
 33 (*sama*), / Gain and loss, victory and defeat, / Then gird thyself for battle:  
 34 / Thus thou shalt not get evil;” Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 13.

35 81. See also *MBh* 11.3.6. This idea is probably derived from  
 36 *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.5. Death is not to be understood as nonbeing  
 37 (*asat*) but as a mere change in appearance given that what truly is (*sat*)  
 38 cannot vanish into nonbeing. On the metaphor of the soul’s “changing  
 39 clothes” in a comparative vein, noteworthy is a passage from *Psalm*  
 40 102:26: “They [= the earth and the heavens, all creatures] will perish, but  
 41 you [= Yhwh] endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change  
 42 them like clothing, and they pass away;” *The Bible. New Revised Standard*  
 43

Version (NRSV), <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>. See also *Isaiah* 51:6. On the rebirth of the soul in ancient Greek philosophy, see Plato's *Phaedo* (70a–75e).

82. In contrast to other parts of the *MBh*, Kṛṣṇa does not view fighting against one's relatives as an emergency situation, a calamity that allows the application of *āpaddharma*, that is, special rules in times of distress.

83. As Arjuna himself observes in *BhG* 1.36, it is the Kauravas who are the *ātatāyinaḥ* (lit. "the ones whose bow is drawn") (i.e., the aggressors) and according to the authority of *Mānavadharmasāstra* 8.348–51 whoever is attacked has the right to defend himself/herself:

Twice-born men may take up arms when the Law is thwarted or when the vicissitudes of time bring calamity upon twice-born classes. When a man kills in accordance with the Law to protect his life, in a conflict over sacrificial fees, or in defense of women or Brahmins, he remains untainted. When an assailant attacks with the intent to kill—whether he is an elder, a child, an old person, or a learned Brahmin—one may surely kill him without hesitation. In killing an assailant, the killer incurs no fault; whether it is done openly or in secret, wrath there recoils on wrath. (P. Olivelle, ed., trans., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 185–86)

84. As Duryodhana states in *MBh* 5.125.19: "He [= the warrior] must stand erect; never must he submit. Manliness means steadfastness! Even if he feels like falling apart, he should never here on earth bow to anybody!" In the *Śāntiparvan*, Bhīṣma gives the same advice to Yudhiṣṭhira (12.131.9). In the epic even women formulate the rules of manliness: for instance, Pṛthā/Kuntī to her son Yudhiṣṭhira and Vidurā to her son Vidura (5.132.36–38).

85. Here Kṛṣṇa makes it clear that Arjuna's entitlement (*adhikāra*) is only to the ordained act.

86. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 14.

87. Other possible translations of this compound which is synonymous of *mokṣa* ("liberation" / "release") are "the extinction in *Brahman*" or even "the inexpressible [state] of *Brahman*." Besides 2.72, *brahmanirvāṇa* is found in *BhG* 5.24, 5.25, and 5.26. The use of the term *nirvāṇa* indicates Buddhist influence.

88. See for instance Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 77. See also M. Jęzić, "Textual Layers of the *Bhagavadgītā* as Traces

1 of Indian Cultural History," in W. Morgenroth, ed., *Sanskrit and World*  
 2 *Culture. Proceedings of the Fourth World Sanskrit Conference, Weimar, May,*  
 3 *23–30, 1979* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1986), 628–38.

4 89. Besides 2.7, the verb *pra + √pad* occurs in *BhG* 4.11, 7.14, 7.15,  
 5 7.19, 7.20, 15.4. On the notion of *prapatti* in Śrīvaiṣṇavism, see S. Raman,  
 6 *Self-Surrender (prapatti) to God in Śrīvaiṣṇavism: Tamil Cats and Sanskrit Mon-*  
 7 *keys* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); R. C. Lester, "Rāmānuja and  
 8 Śrī-vaiṣṇavism: The Concept of *prapatti* or *śaranāgati*," *History of Religions*  
 9 5, no. 2 (1966): 266–82. The *prapanna* goes through six stages, the final  
 10 one being *kārpāṇya* or *akimcāṇya* which is the perfection of *prapatti*; see  
 11 M. Piantelli, "Lo Hinduismo. I. Testi e dottrine," in *Storia delle religioni.*  
 12 *4. Religioni dell'India e dell'Estremo Oriente*, ed. G. Filoramo (Bari: Laterza,  
 13 1996), 109–10.

14 90. *Śraddhā* can be understood to mean "putting one's heart in some-  
 15 one/something," *śrad* being probably allied to Latin *credo* and *cor/cordis*;  
 16 see Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1095. As Kṛṣṇa teaches to  
 17 Arjuna in *BhG* 17.3: "Man here is made up of faith; As a man's faith is,  
 18 just so he is." The term also recurs in *BhG* 3.31, 4.39, 6.37, 6.47, 7.21, 7.22,  
 19 9.23, 12.2, 17.2, 17.3, 17.17, 17.28, 18.71. On *śraddhā*, see M. Hara, "Note on  
 20 Two Sanskrit Religious Terms: *bhakti* and *śraddhā*," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 7,  
 21 no. 2/3 (1964): 132–45. According to David Shulman, however, the primary  
 22 meaning of *śraddhā* is "a mental function that tends to involve focusing  
 23 and seeing clearly, which is to say, paying attention." Along these lines,  
 24 he translates *BhG* 17.3 as follows: "You are what you pay attention to;"  
 25 D. D. Shulman, *More than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India*  
 26 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 139.

27 91. On the various forms of Hindu prayer, see M. Piantelli, "Aspetti  
 28 della preghiera dell'India," in *L'uomo davanti a Dio. La preghiera nelle religioni*  
 29 *e nella tradizione cristiana*, ed. E. Guerriero (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni  
 30 San Paolo, 1998), 34–89.

31 92. On the term *bhakti*, see Hara, "Note on Two Sanskrit Religious  
 32 Terms: *bhakti* and *śraddhā*," 124–32. For an overview of *bhakti* theology and  
 33 its nine characteristics, see A. Rigopoulos, *Hinduismo* (Brescia: Queriniana,  
 34 2005), 191–211. On Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, see B. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment:*  
 35 *Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti* (New York:  
 36 Routledge, 2015).

37 93. Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 265.

38 94. Thus the compound *prasannamukha* means "with a pleased  
 39 countenance" / "smiling;" see Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*,  
 40 696–97; Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1115. Within the *BhG*,  
 41 *prasāda* is found at 2.64, 2.65, 17.16, 18.37, 18.56, 18.58, 18.62, 18.73, 18.75.  
 42 On grace in Hinduism, see N. M. Martin, "Grace and Compassion," in  
 43

*Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism>.

95. See M. Hara, "Words for Love in Sanskrit," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 80, no. 14 (2007): 81–106. Kṛṣṇa's feet represent his infinite grace and compassion. In devotional circles they are compared to a ten-petalled blue lotus of exquisite fragrance and soft freshness.

96. Descendants of Yadu, one of the sons of Yayāti, the Yādavas were the pastoral tribe in which Kṛṣṇa was born. Under his princely leadership, they had established a kingdom at Dvārakā (lit. "the gated"), in the Saurāṣṭra peninsula of Gujarāt on the coast of the Arabian Sea. All the Yādavas that were present in Dvārakā after the death of Kṛṣṇa perished in it when it was submerged by the ocean.

97. With Kṛṣṇa on Arjuna's side, victory is assured as Saṃjaya solemnly states in the last verse of the poem (*BhG* 18.78).

98. M. Piantelli, "Nota sulla 'Bhagavadgītā,'" in *Bhagavadgītā*, ed. A.-M. Esnoul (Milan: Adelphi, 1996<sup>4</sup> [1976]), 191 (our translation). For an analysis of this episode, see A. Hildebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 102–13. Arjuna's choice calls to mind the words of *Psalms* 20:7: "Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God;" *The Bible. New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>. See also *Psalms* 33:16–17: "A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save;" *ibid.* Along these lines, in the Christian tradition Roberto Bellarmino (1542–1621) wrote: "With Christ, our leader and king, it is not anymore in chariots and horses that we place our faith but in the devoutly invoked name of God;" G. Ravasi, *I salmi. Introduzione, testo e commento* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 2006<sup>3</sup>), 105 (our translation).

99. Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 135. Although Kṛṣṇa transcends the cosmos he also encompasses it and is keen to preserve it. As Kṛṣṇa cares for the world's welfare, in the same way Arjuna and his *bhaktas* must care for it. Kṛṣṇa unifies the conflicting values of social responsibility and world renunciation, blending in himself the characteristics of both the king and the ascetic.

100. See Hildebeitel, *The Two Kṛṣṇas on One Chariot*, 1–26. Their association is mentioned already in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, Pāṇini's grammar, dating back to the fourth century BCE (*sūtra* 4.3.98). Arjuna was the son of Pṛthā/Kuntī and thus Kṛṣṇa's cousin, she being Kṛṣṇa's aunt. Moreover, Kṛṣṇa was also Arjuna's brother-in-law and groomsman: Arjuna married Subhadrā, Kṛṣṇa's sister, by abduction (*haraṇa*), and the couple had a

1 son, Abhimanyu. When in the *Mausalaparvan* Kṛṣṇa dies by means of a  
 2 hunter's arrow piercing his heel—the only vulnerable part of his body,  
 3 as in Achilles' legend—Arjuna instantly loses his strength, a premonitory  
 4 sign of his impending death.

5 101. The sons of Dharma and Ahimsā, they are an ancient pair of  
 6 warriors and seers (*r̥ṣis*) who undertook asceticism at the Himālayan site  
 7 of Badrīnāth. On the indissoluble couple of Nara and Nārāyaṇa, see M.  
 8 Biardeau, "Nara et Nārāyaṇa," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 35  
 9 (1991): 75–108. On Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna being viewed from the perspective  
 10 of the twin myth in Indo-European mythology, see D. Frame, "Echoes of  
 11 the Indo-European Twin Gods in Sanskrit and Greek Epic: Arjuna and  
 12 Achilles;" <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5901>.

13 102. On the interplay of these opposite motifs in Indian literature,  
 14 see M. Bloomfield, "On Recurring Psychic Motifs in Hindu Fiction, and  
 15 the Laugh and Cry Motif," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 36  
 16 (1916): 54–89. See also Plessner, *Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits*  
 17 *of Human Behavior*.

18 103. Such opposition is reminiscent of the iconographic contrast  
 19 between the two philosophers Democritus of Abdera (c. 460–370 BCE)  
 20 and Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535–475 BCE), the first being represented  
 21 as laughing and the latter being represented as weeping. In his *De tran-*  
 22 *quillitate animi*, the Stoic philosopher Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE) sides with  
 23 Democritus affirming that "laughing down life" (15.2) is the way through  
 24 which humans can effectively distance themselves from the world and  
 25 achieve cheerfulness (*euthymia*). Democritus's laughter is interpreted as  
 26 revelatory of his serene wisdom, of his indifference toward the world and  
 27 the vanity of human endeavors.

28 104. As Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918–2008) aptly observes in his  
 29 commentary to *BhG* 2.10: "'Hrishikeshā smilingly spoke': this expression is  
 30 used to indicate that lifting Arjuna out of his state of silence and hesitancy  
 31 and releasing him from the benumbed condition of the senses was not  
 32 a big task for one who is the Lord of the senses. . . . The disheartened  
 33 seeker becomes uncouraged by the first sign of the master's smile, which  
 34 shows him without a word that his problems are neither so serious as  
 35 he thinks nor so difficult as to be insurmountable. The contrast brought  
 36 out is significant. It shows Arjuna in despair, while Lord Krishna smiles  
 37 in His usual divine, playful, blissful mood;" Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *On*  
 38 *the Bhagavad-Gita: A New Translation and Commentary. Chapters 1 to 6* (New  
 39 York: Penguin, 1969), 89.

40 105. On the concept of *avatāra*, see A. Couture, "*Avatāra*," in *Brill's*  
 41 *Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar,  
 42 and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018), <https://referenceworks.brillonline>.  
 43

com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism. The term *avatāra*, however, is never used in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

106. On these issues, see V. M. Tschannerl, *Das Lachen in der altindischen Literatur* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 101–12. The laughter of Homeric heroes was also aggressive, charged with sarcasm. In ancient Greece the warriors' laughter was personified as a god, Γέλως, and the Spartans had erected a sanctuary to him which stood side by side to the ones dedicated to the personification of terror and the personification of death; see R. Vollkommer, "Gelos," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Zürich-München: Artemis, 1988), 4: 179. On the etymology of Γέλως, see R. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1:264–65. On the warriors' laughter, see L. Tritle, "Laughter in Battle," in *The Many Faces of War in the Ancient World*, eds. W. Heckel, S. Müller, and G. Wrightson (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 117–34. In Hinduism, the warrior goddess Kālī laughs on the battlefield: her solitary laughter when everyone has been killed and everything has been destroyed makes her the embodiment of terror. In the *Sauptikaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (10.8.65), in the context of Aśvatthāman's night attack on the Pāṇḍava camp, Kālī is described as smiling/laughing derisively (*smayamānām*); see T. B. Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 111–12. For an introduction to Kālī, see J. E. McDaniel, "Kālī," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Vol. 1: *Regions, Pilgrimages, Deities*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 587–604. We are also reminded of the transgressive laughter of the adepts of the ancient movement of the Pāśupatas, in imitation of the "loud laughter" (*aṭṭahāsa*) of their chosen deity Rudra ("Roarer," "Howler"), the wild and terrible form of Śiva; see *Pāśupatasūtra* 1.8. With his ghastly laughter, Rudra-Śiva breaks the shell of Brahmā's egg (*brahmāṇḍa*), that is, transcends the limits of our finite universe; see *Kālabhairavāṣṭaka* 7. On the Pāśupatas' practice of courting dishonor, see D. N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 185–92; D. H. H. Ingalls, "Cynics and Pāśupatas: The Seeking of Dishonor," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 281–98.

107. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 12–13.

108. See for instance Yudhiṣṭhira's predicament in *MBh* 5.70.75.

109. Swami Swarupananda, *Srimat-Bhagavad-Gīta*, 34.

110. Kṛṣṇa's *prahasann iva* may be compared to Aphrodite's smile, which strikes us as a mixture of tender kindness and mockery; see A. Waclawczyk and A. Mickiewicz, "What is Aphrodite Laughing at? An Attempt at Interpretation of the Epithet φιλομειδής in the Archaic



- 1 Greek Poetry," in *Święto – Zabawa – Uroczystość w świecie starożytnym.*  
 2 *Feast – Play – Celebration in the Ancient World*, ed. L. Ożarowska, K. Sekita  
 3 and J. Simo (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Sub Lupa: 2011), 133–41.  
 4 On Aphrodite's smile in Sappho's *Prayer to Aphrodite* (Fragment 1), see  
 5 "The Descent of the Goddess: Ritual and Difference in Sappho's Prayer  
 6 to Aphrodite;" [http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS\\_TravisR.](http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_TravisR.The_Descent_of_the_Goddess.1990)  
 7 *The\_Descent\_of\_the\_Goddess.1990*. Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter can also  
 8 be compared to the enigmatic smile of many statues of Greek deities,  
 9 expressing their detachment and Olympian serenity.
- 10 111. See K. Lorenz, *On Aggression*, trans. M. K. Wilson (London  
 11 and New York: Routledge, 1966), 172–73, 269, 284–87. And yet bearing  
 12 one's teeth is not always a threat: in primates showing the teeth, espe-  
 13 cially if they are clenched together, is usually a sign of submission, and  
 14 the human smile may have evolved from that. In any given culture, the  
 15 variety of smiles is due to the simple fact that there are many different  
 16 ways to smile and reasons for smiling; see [http://www.bbc.com/future/](http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170407-why-all-smiles-are-not-the-same)  
 17 *story/20170407-why-all-smiles-are-not-the-same*.
- 18 112. Fitzgerald, "Mahābhārata." On Kṛṣṇa's unfathomable personality  
 19 within the *MBh*, see Matilal, "Kṛṣṇa: In Defense of a Devious Divinity,"  
 20 91–108.
- 21 113. One is reminded of the first verse of the poem "The Smile" of  
 22 William Blake (1757–1827): "There is a Smile of Love / And there is a  
 23 Smile of Deceit / And there is a Smile of Smiles / In which these two  
 24 Smiles meet."
- 25 114. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 682.
- 26 115. As Govindanātha states in *Śrīśaṅkarācāryacarita* 1.3: "May the  
 27 charioteer of the son of Pṛthā, of whom men and gods are the cushion  
 28 of his lotus feet in which all beings seek refuge, fulfill all my desires for  
 29 good!" Govindanātha, *Il Poema di Śaṅkara: Śrīśaṅkarācāryacarita*. Edited  
 30 by M. Piantelli (Turin: Promolibri, 1994), 23 (our translation).
- 31 116. On the concept of *tejas*, see P. Magnone, "The Development  
 32 of *tejas* from the Vedas to the Purāṇas," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde*  
 33 *Südasiens* 36 (1992): 137–47. By the same author, see "Tejas Transactions  
 34 in the Itihāsa-Purāṇa," in *The Churning of the Epics and Purāṇas*, eds. S.  
 35 Brodbeck, A. Bowles, and A. Hildebeitel (New Delhi: Dev Publishers,  
 36 2018), 341–65.
- 37 117. Significantly, in *BhG* 10.41 Kṛṣṇa declares that whatever is  
 38 endowed with beauty is born of a particle of his own splendor (*yad-yad*  
 39 *vibhūtimat sattvaṃ śrīmad ūrjitam eva vā | tat-tad evā 'vagaccha tvaṃ mama*  
 40 *tejoṃśasaṃbhavam* ||). On the concept of beauty, see R. Torella, "Beauty," in  
 41 *Burlesque of the Philosophers: Indian and Buddhist Studies in Memory of Helmut*  
 42 *Krasser*, eds. V. Eltschinger, J. Kramer, P. Patil, Ch. Yoshimizu (Hamburg:  
 43



Numata Center for Buddhist Studies, 2023), 2:755–80; V. Raghavan, *The Concept of the Beautiful in Sanskrit Literature* (Chennai: The Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute, 2008 [1988]).

118. The famous tale narrated in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.8 comes to mind, in which the boy Kṛṣṇa gives the vision of the entire universe in his mouth to his foster-mother Yaśodā.

119. See *Kalyana-Kalpataru. Gīta-Tattva Number 1* (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1946), 57. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh/Osho argues that Kṛṣṇa’s laughter is due to the fact that though Arjuna is in such an indecisive state he still makes such a decisive statement (i.e., that he will not fight). The idea is that Kṛṣṇa would laugh at Arjuna’s self-deception; see Osho, *Inner War and Peace: Timeless Solutions to Conflict from the Bhagavad Gīta* (London: Watkins, 2005 [1970]), 170–71.

120. In his commentary to *BhG* 2.10, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan writes: “The smile indicates that he [= Kṛṣṇa] saw through Arjuna’s attempt at rationalization or what is now known as wishful thinking. The attitude of the saviour God who knows all the sins and sorrows of suffering humanity is one of tender pity and wistful understanding;” Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgītā*, 102.

121. D. R. Brooks, *Poised for Grace: Annotations on the Bhagavad Gīta from a Tantric View* (The Woodlands, TX: Anusara, 2008), 47.

122. Swami Chidbhavananda, *The Bhagavad Gīta*, 127–28.

123. On the Śiva Dakṣiṇāmūrti icon and its resemblance to the iconography of the enlightened Buddha, see M. Geetha, “Image of Siva Dakshinamurti in the Early Chola Temples: A Glance,” *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* 103, no. 2 (2012): 74–85; A. J. Gail, “The Enlightened Buddha and the Preaching Śiva: More Light on the Dakṣiṇāmūrti Icon,” in *South Asian Archaeology 1999*. Proceedings of the Fifteenth International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, held at the Universiteit Leiden, 5–9 July, 1999, ed. E. M. Raven (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 457–62; H. Bakker, “Dakṣiṇāmūrti,” in *Vidyārṇavavandanam: Essays in Honour of Asko Parpola*, ed. K. Karttunen and P. Koskikallio (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2001), 41–53. On silence and its eloquence, see A. Rigopoulos, “Negazioni e silenzi sotto i cieli dell’India. Orizzonti upaniṣadici e buddhisti a confronto,” in *Forme della negazione: Un percorso interculturale tra Oriente ed Occidente*, ed. L. Marcato (Milan: Mimesis, 2015), 101–17. As the South Indian mystic Ramaṇa Maharṣi (1879–1959) once said: “Silence, the universal language, which always springs out from the heart, is the state of grace;” Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Opere* (Rome: Ubaldini, 2012), 157 (our translation).

124. Śrīśāṅkaragrāṇthāvaliḥ, *samputaḥ* 11, *stotrāṇi laḥṣṭhprakarāṇāni ca* (Śrīrangam: Śrīvāṇīvilāśasamudraṇālaya, 1972<sup>4</sup>), 257–58 (our translation).

1 In medieval Europe, a parallel is represented by the “compassionate eyes”  
2 (*misericordes oculi*) of the Virgin Mary, the “Gracious Queen.”

3 125. See Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *Self-Knowledge: An English*  
4 *Translation of Śaṅkarācārya’s Ātmabodha with Notes, Comments, and Introduc-*  
5 *tion* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1947<sup>10</sup>), 201–2.

6 126. Doubts (*saṁśaya, saṁdeha*) must be dissolved since they confuse  
7 the mind and paralyze action. Given two or more alternatives, the wise  
8 must cultivate discrimination (*viveka*) in order to establish what is right  
9 and wrong and decide his/her course of action.

10 127. On these issues, see K. P. Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti*  
11 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Tranquility of  
12 mind is a fundamental virtue: at *BhG* 2.65, Kṛṣṇa points out that the  
13 intellect (*buddhi*) of the tranquil-minded (*prasannacetaso*) quickly becomes  
14 steady.

15 128. The sacredness of the *guru*’s feet is sung in countless devo-  
16 tional hymns, past and present, as in this solemn *incipit*: *mānasa bhajare*  
17 *gurucaraṇam | dustarabhavaasāgaratarāṇam |* “Worship in thy mind the *guru*’s  
18 feet: [these alone] carry over the ocean of existence, hard to overcome.”  
19 *Gurugītā* 76 proclaims: *pūjāmūlaṁ guroḥ padam*, “The root of worship is  
20 the foot of the *guru*.” To Śaṅkara is attributed a hymn of eight verses in  
21 praise of the *guru*’s lotus feet (*guror aṅghripadme*), the *Gurvaṣṭakam*; see  
22 T. M. P. Mahadevan, *The Hymns of Śaṅkara* (Madras: Ganesh & Co. Pri-  
23 vate, 1970), 28–35. For an appreciation of the religious significance of feet  
24 in Indian culture, see J. Jain-Neubauer, *Feet & Footwear in Indian Culture*  
25 (Toronto: Bata Shoe Museum Foundation, 2000).

26 129. See K. Valpey, “*Pūja* and *darśana*,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hin-*  
27 *duism*. Vol. 2: *Sacred Texts and Languages, Ritual Traditions, Arts, Concepts*,  
28 eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill,  
29 2010), 380–94. See also D. L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*  
30 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998<sup>3</sup>); L. A. Babb, “Glancing:  
31 Visual Interaction in Hinduism,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37,  
32 no. 4 (1981): 387–401.

33 130. A disciple must always approach the *guru* by reverently pros-  
34 trating himself/herself to him. As Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna in *BhG* 4.34:

35  
36 Learn to know this (*tad = jñāna*) by obeisance  
37 (*praṇipātena*) (to those who can teach it),  
38 By questioning (them), by serving (them);  
39 They will teach thee knowledge (*jñānam*),  
40 Those who have knowledge, who see the truth.  
41 (Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 26)

42  
43

131. On divine visions in the *MBh*, see J. W. Laine, *Visions of God: Narratives of Theophany in the Mahābhārata* (Vienna: Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 1989). 1  
2  
3
132. Kṛṣṇa had already revealed himself in his cosmic form as 4  
Viśvarūpa to Duryodhana in the *Udyogaparvan*, anticipating the *BhG* 5  
theophany. Duryodhana, however, had refused to accept Kṛṣṇa's divinity. 6
133. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 59. 7
134. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 106. It should be 8  
noted that the expression *avahasann iva* occurs only once in the whole 9  
epic (*MBh* 12.96.19b). The context is as follows: Yudhiṣṭhira questions 10  
Bhīṣma on how a warrior should fight against another warrior. Bhīṣma 11  
answers by recalling the various norms of conduct and points out that 12  
a warrior must win following the rules of *dharma* since it is preferable 13  
to die following *dharma* than to win by deception. The evil-doer rejoices 14  
in unrighteousness and, by doing so, sinks in sin (*pāpa*): "Making fun 15  
(*avahasann iva*) of the virtuous ones, he thinks that *dharma* doesn't exist 16  
and consequently, due to his faithlessness, he goes to destruction" (*na* 17  
*dharmo 'stīti manvānaḥ śucīn avahasann iva | aśraddhadhānabhāvōc ca vināśam* 18  
*upagacchati* ||). 19
135. In a *BhG* manuscript by Kariccaṅkāl Śrīnivāsan (end of eighteenth 20  
century, *ms.* GOML R3507) written in the hybrid *manipravālam* language 21  
combining Sanskrit lexicon and Tamil morpho-syntax, *avahāsārtham* is 22  
explained as *ammāṅ kumāraṅum attai kumāraṅum ceyituk koḷḷukura pariha-* 23  
*sa-murāiyāl* (93v1-2), that is, "In the way an aunty and her nephew or 24  
an uncle and his nephew may have laughed together;" Giovanni Ciotti, 25  
personal communication, October 3, 2022. 26
136. See Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 238. 27
137. Though etymologically the opposite of *ava* is *ud*, meaning 28  
"up" / "above," our contention is that here *pra* fulfils the same function. 29
138. Hildebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*, 258. 30
139. Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, 184. 31
140. See *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.5.23. On the other hand, the meaning 32  
of *sakhya* in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself is unclear. In the story of King 33  
Puramjāna in book 4, it means realizing that the lord is one's friend in 34  
the manner of the other bird in the famous passage of *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 35  
3.1.1-2 (first found in *Rgveda* 1.164.20-22 and reiterated in *Śvetāśvatara* 36  
*Upaniṣad* 4.6-7): "Two birds, companions and friends (*sakhāyā*), nestle on 37  
the very same tree. One of them eats a tasty fig; the other, not eating, 38  
looks on. Stuck on the very same tree, one person grieves, deluded by her 39  
(= *prakṛti*, the female cosmic power) who is not the Lord; but when he sees 40  
the other, the contented Lord—and his majesty—his grief disappears;" 41  
42  
43

- 1 Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 274. For an introduction to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, see  
 2 J. Edelman, “*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*,  
 3 eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill,  
 4 2018; [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclope-](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)  
 5 [dia-of-hinduism](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)). On *bhakti* in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, see D. P. Sheridan,  
 6 *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass,  
 7 1986); A. J. Gail, *Bhakti im Bhāgavatapurāṇa. Religionsgeschichtliche Studie*  
 8 *zur Idee der Gottesliebe in Kult und Mystik des Viṣṇuismus* (Wiesbaden: Otto  
 9 Harrassowitz, 1969).
- 10 141. The noun *sakhi* (“friend,” “companion”) occurs in *BhG* 1.26,  
 11 4.3, 11.41, 11.44.
- 12 142. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 59.
- 13 143. See Piano, *Bhagavad-gītā. Il canto del glorioso Signore*, 89 n. 21c.  
 14 On Kṛṣṇa as *acyuta*, see R. Balkaran, “Arjuna and Acyuta: The Import of  
 15 Epithets in the *Bhagavad-gītā*,” in Theodor, *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical*  
 16 *Introduction*, 137–44. If *acyuta* is a well-known epithet of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, in  
 17 the epic it is also the epithet of great warriors such as Yudhiṣṭhira.
- 18 144. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 91.
- 19 145. Interestingly, the name of a particular kind of jasmine with  
 20 fragrant flowers is *prahasantī*, also known as *vāsantī*. Jasmine flowers are  
 21 widely used in Kṛṣṇa’s worship: their delicate white petals are associated  
 22 with purity and symbolize love and devotion.
- 23 146. This *ānanda* is reminiscent of the perfect joy exalted by Saint  
 24 Francis of Assisi (1181/1182–1226), the *ioculator Domini*; see M. Benedetti,  
 25 “«Ma qual è la vera letizia?» Realtà e metamorfosi di Francesco,” in *Fran-*  
 26 *cesco da Assisi. Storia, arte, mito*, ed. M. Benedetti and T. Subini (Rome:  
 27 Carocci, 2019), 29–40.
- 28 147. Theologically, the concept of *līlā* develops with the rise of the  
 29 great monotheistic systems as an expression of god’s joyful and sponta-  
 30 neous creative power and is a corollary of his omnipotence and freedom.  
 31 On the concept of *līlā*, see J. J. Lipner, “A God at Play? Reexamining  
 32 the Concept of *Līlā* in Hindu Philosophy and Theology,” *International*  
 33 *Journal of Hindu Studies* 26 (2022): 283–326; C. Olson, “*Līlā*,” in *Hinduism*  
 34 *and Tribal Religions. Encyclopedia of Indian Religions*, ed. J. D. Long, R. D.  
 35 Sherma, P. Jain, and M. Khanna (Dordrecht: Springer, 2022), [https://doi.](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1188-1_87K)  
 36 [org/10.1007/978-94-024-1188-1\\_87K](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1188-1_87K); G. Schweig, “*Līlā*,” in *Brill’s Ency-*  
 37 *clopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and  
 38 V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018), [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)  
 39 [browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism). See also Narayan, *Storytellers,*  
 40 *Saints, and Scoundrels*, 181–82.
- 41 148. <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/10>.
- 42 149. A name of Arjuna, meaning “wealth-conqueror.”
- 43

150. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 56. 1
151. On this glorious manifestation of the divine as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, see the classic study of R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. Translated by J. W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950<sup>2</sup> [1923]). 2  
3  
4  
5  
6
152. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1002, 1271. 7
153. The *añjalimudrā* involves placing the hands together, palms slightly hollowed, and holding them in front of one's chest. As a mark of supplication, the hands may be raised to the forehead, a gesture known as *añjalibandhana*. 8  
9  
10  
11
154. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 953. 12
155. The experience of *vismaya* calls to mind the Greek notion of θαῦμα (i.e., “wonder,” “awe”). In Plato's *Theaetetus* 155d we read: “This experience—wondering—is very much the characteristic of the philosopher. There is no other beginning to philosophy than this.” For both Plato and Aristotle, without θαῦμα philosophical inquiry would have never started. On these issues, see J. Lightfoot, *Wonder and the Marvellous from Homer to the Hellenistic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). 13  
14  
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16  
17  
18  
19  
20
156. Along these lines, *sūtra* 1.12 of Vasugupta's *Śivasūtra* (ninth century CE) immediately comes to mind: *vismayo yogabhūmikāḥ*, i.e., “The stages of Yoga are amazement.” For Kṣemarāja's commentary on it, see Vasugupta, *Gli aforismi di Śiva con il commento di Kṣemarāja (Śivasūtravimarśinī)*, ed. R. Torella (Milan: Adelphi, 2013), 126–27. The intriguing saying attributed to Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas* is also worth remembering: “Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will be amazed. And when he becomes amazed, he will rule. And once he has ruled, he will attain rest;” <https://letterepaoline.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/ev-th-comm.pdf> (pp. 6–7). 21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30
157. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 60. 31
158. *Ibid.*, 61. 32
159. As Kṛṣṇa says in *BhG* 9.26: 33  
34
- A leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, 35  
Who presents to Me with devotion, 36  
That offering of devotion I 37  
Accept from the devout-souled (giver). 38  
(*Ibid.*, 48) 39  
40
- Leaf, flower, fruit and water are interpreted as symbols of the *bhakta*'s 41  
body, heart, mind, and tears respectively. 42  
43

1 160. Ibid., 90. See also Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Con-*  
 2 *texts*, 222. On Śaṅkara's commentary to this verse, see S. Marchignoli,  
 3 "*Bhagavadgītābhāṣya* di Śaṅkara ad 18.66," in *Filosofie dell'India. Un'antologia*  
 4 *di testi*, ed. F. Sferra (Rome: Carocci, 2018), 233–35, 355–56, and F. Sferra,  
 5 "Introduzione," in *ibid.*, 68–70.

6 161. Significantly, in Śrī Vaiṣṇava circles the theology of *prapatti* is  
 7 understood as a development of *BhG* 18.66.

8 162. As per the insightful comment made by the famous *guru* and  
 9 mystic Rāmakṛṣṇa (1836–1886) in M. Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*  
 10 (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*). Translated from the Bengali by Swami  
 11 Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942), 406,  
 12 available at <http://www.vedanta-nl.org/GOSPEL.pdf>.

13 163. Here we follow a popular interpretation that goes back to  
 14 the *Gītārthasamgraha* of Yāmunācārya (trad. 918–1038), the teacher of  
 15 Rāmānuja, according to whom the poem can be subdivided into three  
 16 portions, each of them comprising six chapters: *adhyāyas* 1–6 are said to  
 17 be dedicated to the discipline of action (*karmayoga*), *adhyāyas* 7–12 to the  
 18 discipline of devotion (*bhaktiyoga*), and *adhyāyas* 13–18 to the discipline of  
 19 knowledge (*jñānayoga*). Nonetheless, it should be noted that this subdivi-  
 20 sion is a simplification that is only partially true since the *Bhagavadgītā*  
 21 aims at offering a synthesis of the three paths of *karman*, *bhakti*, and *jñāna*  
 22 throughout its chapters.

23 164. See van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata*, 13–23;  
 24 Deutsch, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 161–69. On these issues, see also K. H. Potter,  
 25 *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 11–24.

26 165. Apparently, Swami Vivekānanda (1863–1902) interpreted Kṛṣṇa's  
 27 *prahasann iva* precisely along these lines; see [https://www.youtube.com/](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tONcYzfW8hQ)  
 28 [watch?v=tONcYzfW8hQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tONcYzfW8hQ) (minutes 1:02:25–1:04:55). On his interpretation of  
 29 the *Bhagavadgītā*, see Swami Vivekananda, *Thoughts on the Gita* (Calcutta:  
 30 Advaita Ashrama, 1995<sup>14</sup>); Swami Madhurananda, ed., *Bhagavad Gita. As*  
 31 *Viewed by Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2022<sup>10</sup>).

32 166. Still the epic antecedents of Kṛṣṇa's playful attitude as Veṅu-  
 33 gopāla (i.e., player of the flute) and his link with Arjuna as master of  
 34 music and dance are noteworthy; see M. Biarreau, *Études de mythologie*  
 35 *hindoue. 2. Bhakti et avatāra* (Pondichéry: Publications de l'École Française  
 36 d'Extrême-Orient, 1994), 285–86. On *līlā* in early Vaiṣṇavism, see C. Hospi-  
 37 tital, "Līlā in Early Vaiṣṇava Thought," in *The Gods at Play: Līlā in South*  
 38 *Asia*, ed. W. Sax (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 21–34.

39 167. On these issues, see A. Pelissero, *Il riso e la pula. Vie di salvezza*  
 40 *nello śivaismo del Kāśmīr* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1998), 47.

41 168. Pārtha or "son of Pṛthā" is the most common epithet of Arjuna  
 42 in the *Bhagavadgītā*: it recurs forty-one times, the first at *BhG* 1.25 and the  
 43 last at *BhG* 18.78. Pṛthā, better known as Kuntī, was the daughter of the



- Yādava prince Śūra, king of the Śūrasenas, whose capital was Mathurā. 1  
 Sister of Vasudeva, she was the wife of Pāṇḍu whom she chose at a 2  
*svayaṃvara* and bore three sons, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna, who 3  
 were called “Pāṇḍavas” although they were actually the sons of the gods 4  
 Dharma, Vāyu, and Indra respectively. Indeed, Pāṇḍu could have no sons 5  
 since he had been cursed by a seer that he would die if he ever tried to 6  
 have intercourse with a woman. Kuntī, however, had received from sage 7  
 Durvāsas a *mantra* through which she could attract to herself any god 8  
 and be impregnated by him. 9
169. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 20. 10
170. *Ibid.*, 23, 39. 11
171. See for instance *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, padaccheda-anvaya aur sad-* 12  
*haraṇa-bhāṣāṭīkāśahita* (Gorakhpur: Gītā Press, 1974<sup>27</sup> [1922]), *ad BhG* 10.14. 13  
 In devotional circles, Kṛṣṇa is referred to as *līlāmaya*, “the one who is full 14  
 of pleasing pastimes” and *līlāmānuṣaviḡraha*, “the one who takes a human 15  
 form merely for amusement.” 16
172. Mahadeva Sastry, *The Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Sri* 17  
*Sankaracharya*, 497. Śaṅkara refers twice to *BhG* 18.61 in *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 18  
 1.2.6 and 2.1.14. The concepts of *līlā* and *māyā* are related and sometimes 19  
 they are understood as being synonymous. For an example from the 20  
*Mahābhārata*, see Biardeau, *Études de mythologie hindoue*, 168, 250–51. 21
173. On the “doctrine of time” (*kālavāda*) as being constitutive for 22  
 the epic, see A. Hildebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader’s Guide* 23  
*to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago and London: University of 24  
 Chicago Press, 2001), 36–40. See also M. Piantelli, “La concezione del tempo 25  
 nell’esperienza dell’Induismo. Spunti di riflessione,” *Tempo e Apocalisse*. 26  
 Atti dell’incontro del 19–20 settembre 1981 al monastero di Montebello, 27  
 ed. S. Quinzio (Milazzo: SPES, 1985), 117–56. 28
174. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 58. 29
175. See A. Malinar, “Yoga Powers in the *Mahābhārata*,” in *Yoga Pow-* 30  
*ers: Extraordinary Capacities Attained Through Meditation and Concentration*, 31  
 ed. K. A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 47–59. 32
176. Noteworthy in this regard is *BhG* 9.32: 33
- 34
- For if they take refuge in Me, son of Pṛthā, 35  
 Even those who may be of base origin, 36  
 Women, men of the artisan caste, and serfs too, 37  
 Even they go to the highest goal. 38  
 (Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 49) 39
- 40
- On these issues, see D. N. Lorenzen, *Praises to a Formless God: Nir-* 41  
*guṇī Texts from North India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 42  
 1996), 31–32. 43

- 1 177. This image is often found in the epic; see for instance *MBh*  
2 12.46.6, 12.316.19.
- 3 178. The body's luminosity and the golden color of the skin are a  
4 characteristic of *yogins*, saints and "great beings" (*mahāpuruṣa*) such as the  
5 Buddha; see E. Burnouf, "Sur les trente-deux signes caractéristiques d'un  
6 grand homme," in *Le lotus de la bonne loi: Traduit su sanscrit, accompagné*  
7 *d'un commentaire et de vingt et un mémoires relatifs au buddhisme*. Nouvelle  
8 édition avec une Préface de Sylvain Lévi (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1925),  
9 568–69, 579–80.
- 10 179. This doctrine finds its *locus classicus* in the *Upaniṣads*; see  
11 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.2.9–16 and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.4–10.
- 12 180. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 16. When George L. Hart observes  
13 that Kṛṣṇa at the beginning of the *Bhagavadgītā* "seems extremely distant,"  
14 he fails to recognize that the lord's attitude is revelatory of his *prasāda*,  
15 of his divine serenity and equanimity, which is not to be confused with  
16 indifference or lack of love for his *bhakta* Arjuna; see G. L. Hart, "Arche-  
17 types in Classical Indian Literature and Beyond," in *Syllables of Sky: Studies in South Asian Civilization in Honour of Velcheru Narayana Rao*, ed.  
18 D. Shulman (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 175–76.
- 19 181. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 80.
- 20 182. *Ibid.*, 89.
- 21 183. On yogic silence, see Y. Grinshpon, *Silence Unheard: Deathly Otherness in Pātāñjala-Yoga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).
- 22 184. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 15.
- 23 185. *Ibid.*, 31.
- 24 186. *Ibid.*, 32.
- 25 187. *Ibid.*, 56. The theme of Kṛṣṇa's dazzling splendor is a veritable  
26 leitmotif in devotional circles. In one of his lyrics (*abhaṅg*), Jñāneśvar  
27 writes: "Who has dispelled the darkness of ignorance from my mind?  
28 Before whose radiance has the sun's splendour grown pale? O enchant-  
29 ing Śrī Kṛṣṇa! Thou alone hast done it! Is not Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa like a full  
30 moon appearing after the period of dark nights to make the bird 'cakora'  
31 feed on the nectarine juice drizzling from its rays and to blossom the  
32 night-blooming lotus? To talk about Thy form is so very mysterious  
33 indeed!" P. V. Bobde, trans., *Garland of Divine Flowers: Selected Devotional Lyrics of Saint Jñāneśvara* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 15–16.
- 34 188. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 68.
- 35 189. *Ibid.*, 91.
- 36 190. *Ibid.*, 62.
- 37 191. On compassion in the *Bhagavadgītā*, see A. Rigopoulos,  
38 "Declinazioni della compassione nella *Bhagavad-gītā*: da vile debolezza  
39 40  
41  
42  
43

- del cuore a virtù suprema,” in *Religioni e compassione*, ed. M. Dal Corso 1  
(Villa Verucchio: Pazzini, 2023), 71–97. 2
192. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 72. 3
193. The Upaniṣadic reference is *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.1. 4
194. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 74. 5
195. *Ibid.*, 73. 6
196. *Ibid.* 7
197. *Ibid.*, 80. 8
198. On the *Bhagavadgītā*’s understanding of *saṁnyāsa*, see P. Olivelle, 9  
“Contributions to the Semantic History of *saṁnyāsa*,” in *Collected Essays* 10  
*II. Ascetics and Brahmins: Studies in Ideologies and Institutions* (Florence: 11  
Firenze University Press, 2008), 132–35. 12
199. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 87–88. 13
200. Two verses later, in *BhG* 18.75, Saṁjaya states that it is by the 14  
grace of sage Vyāsa (*vyāsaśprasādāt*) that he has been able to hear this 15  
supreme and most secret *yoga* taught by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna. 16
201. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 89. 17

## Chapter 2

1. It appears that Arjuna developed the required attitude for the 22  
reception and retention of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching only when faced with the 23  
tragedy of the impending bloodshed. 24
2. All translations from the Sanskrit unless otherwise specified are 25  
of Gianni Pellegrini. 26
3. Actually, we know of several pre-Śaṅkara commentaries on the 27  
*BhG* but Śaṅkara’s is the earliest extant one (Saha 2017, 259–61). 28
4. Here are the passages from Śaṅkara’s *BhGBh* that concern Arju- 29  
na’s anguish and delusion, that is, *BhG1* 2000, 73–74; *BhG3* 1936, 39–40; 30  
*BhG4* 2015, 31–32: *atra ca dṛṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavānīkam ity ārabhya yāvāt na yot-* 31  
*sya iti govindam uktoḥ tūṣṇīṅ babhūva ha ity etadantaḥ prāṇināṅ śokamohā-* 32  
*disaṁsārabījabhūtadosodbhavadakāraṇapradarśanārthatvena vyākhyeyo granthaḥ* 33  
*| tathā hi — arjunena rājyaguruputramitrasuhrtsvajanasaṁbandhibāndhaveṣu* 34  
*aham eteṣāṅ mamaite ity evaṅ bhrāntipratyayanimittasnehavicchedādinimittau* 35  
*ātmanaḥ śokamohau pradarśitau | kathaṅ bhīṣmam ahaṅ saṁkhye ity ādinā |.* 36
5. *BhG1* 2000, 74; *BhG3* 1936, 40–41; *BhG4* 2015, 32–33: *śokamohābhyāṅ* 37  
*hy abhibhūtavivekavijñānaḥ svata eva kṣatradharme yuddhe pravṛtto ‘pi tasmād* 38  
*yuddhād upararāma | paradharmaṅ ca bhikṣājīvanādikaṅ kartuṅ pravavṛte* 39  
*| tathā ca sarvaprāṇināṅ śokamohādidoṣāviṣṭacetasāṅ svabhāvata eva svad-* 40  
*harmaparityāgaḥ pratiśiddhasevā ca syāt | svadharme pravṛttānām api teṣāṅ* 41  
42  
43

1 *vānmanahkāyādīnāṅ pravṛttiḥ phalābhisaṃdhipūrvikaiva sāhaṅkāra ca bhavati |*  
 2 *tatraivaṅ sati dharmādharmaopacayād iṣṭāniṣṭajanmasukhaduḥkhādiprāptilakṣaṇaḥ |*  
 3 *saṃsāro 'nuparato bhavati | ity atah saṃsārabābhūtau śokamohau | tayas ca*  
 4 *sarvakarmasaṃnyāsapūrvakād ātmajñānān nānyato nivṛttir iti tadupadidikṣuḥ |*  
 5 *sarvalokānugrahārtham arjunaṅ nimittikṛtya āha bhagavaṅ vāsudevaḥ — aśocyān*  
 6 *ityādi |.*

7 6. BhG1 2000, 79; BhG3 1936, 46; BhG4 2015, 44–45: *yasmāt gatāsūn*  
 8 *gataprāṇān mṛtān, agatāsūn agataprāṇān jīvatas ca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ ātma-*  
 9 *jñāḥ | paṇḍā ātmaviśayā buddhir yeṣāṅ te hi paṇḍitāḥ, pāṇḍityaṅ nirvidya*  
 10 *iti śruteḥ | paramārthatas tu tān nityān aśocyān anuśocasi, ato māḍho 'si ity*  
 11 *abhiprāyaḥ |.* On *paṇḍā* and *paṇḍita*, see Aklujkar (2001, 17–21).

12 7. BhG1 2000, 79; BhG3 1936, 46; BhG4 2015, 43–44: *na śocyā aśocyāḥ*  
 13 *bhīṣmadroṇādāyaḥ | sadvṛttatoāt paramārthasvarūpeṇa ca nityatvāt, tān aśocyān*  
 14 *anvaśoco 'nu śocitavān asi te mriyante mannimittam, ahaṅ tair vinābhūtaḥ kiṅ*  
 15 *kariṣyāmi rājasukhādīnā iti | tvaṅ prajñāvādān prajñāvātāṅ buddhimatāṅ*  
 16 *vādāṅś ca vacanāni ca bhāṣase |.*

17 8. See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.1: “Thus, having surpassed wis-  
 18 dom, he should rest like a child. Then, having surpassed wisdom and  
 19 childhood, he becomes a silent sage. And having surpassed [both] non  
 20 silence and silence, he becomes a [true] Brahmin” (*tasmād pāṇḍityaṅ nir-*  
 21 *vidya bālyena tiṣṭhaset | bālyāṅ ca pāṇḍityaṅ ca nirvidyātha munih | amaunaṅ*  
 22 *ca maunaṅ ca nirvidyātha brāhmaṇaḥ*). See also Olivelle (1998, 83).

23 9. It is commonly believed that Anubhūtiśvarūpācārya wrote  
 24 the *Prakaṭārthavivarāṇa*, an independent commentary on Śaṅkara’s *Brah-*  
 25 *masūtrabhāṣya* that follows Vivaraṇa tenets (Chintamani 1989, x-xi). The  
 26 date of the *Prakaṭārthavivarāṇa* can be established between Prakāśātman  
 27 (975; Potter 1995, 370) and Rāmadvaya (mid-fourteenth century; Pellegrini  
 28 2016, 490). There is a problem concerning the relative chronology of the  
 29 author of the *Prakaṭārthavivarāṇa* and Ānandagiri, whose *terminus post quem*  
 30 according to Thangaswami (1980, 387) cannot be placed beyond 1320 (see  
 31 also Mahadevan 2003, 153–56). Based on this relative chronology (Saha  
 32 2017, 263; Potter 1995, 1326), Anubhūtiśvarūpācārya seems to be earlier  
 33 than Ānandagiri (Mahadevan 2003, 320–22). This is relevant for us since  
 34 we find similar passages in their glosses. Indeed, in his commentary to  
 35 Śaṅkara’s *bhāṣya* Ānandagiri often borrows from Anubhūtiśvarūpācārya  
 36 (see BhG4 2015, 33). Like his predecessors, Anubhūtiśvarūpācārya does  
 37 not comment upon the *BhG*’s first chapter and the opening ten verses of  
 38 the second (BhG4 2015, 33).

39 10. BhG1 2000, 71; BhG3 1936, 38–39; BhG4 2015, 31: *tam arjunaṅ*  
 40 *senayoh vāhinyor ubhayor madhye viṣṭadantaṅ viṣādaṅ kurvantam atiduhkhītaṅ*  
 41 *śokamohābhyāṅ abhibhūtaṅ svadharmāt pracyutaprāyaṅ pratītya prahasann*  
 42 *iva upāhasaṅ kurvann iva tadāśvāsārthaṅ, he bhārata bharatānvaya ity evaṅ*  
 43

*sambodhya bhagavān idam praśnottaram niḥśreyasādhigamasādhanam vacanam* 1  
*ūcitavān ity āha — tam uvāceti |.* 2

11. BhG1 2000, 74; BhG3 1936, 40; BhG4 2015, 33: [. . .] *arjunasyānyeṣāṇ ca śokamohayoḥ saṃsārabījatoam upapāditam upasaṃharati — ity* 3  
*ata iti | tad evaṃ prathamādhyāyasya dvitīyādhyāyikaśeṣasahitasya ātmā-* 4  
*jñānotthanirvartanīyaśokamohākhyasaṃsārabījapradarśanaparatoam darśayitvā* 5  
*vakṣyamāṇasandarbhasya sahetukasamśāraniroartakasamyagjñānopadeśe tātpa-* 6  
*ryam darśayati — tayoś ceti |.* 7  
 8

12. Though “trust in the words of the guru and the deity” (*gurudai-* 9  
*vataovākyavaiśvāsa*) does not figure among the four prerequisites (*sādhana-* 10  
*catuṣṭaya*), yet *vaiśvāsa* “trust” can be understood as a synonym of *śraddhā* 11  
 “faith,” which is the last among the set of six virtues (*śamadamaṇḍiṣaṭkasam-* 12  
*patti*) taken from *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.24. For a survey of the four 13  
 prerequisites, see *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya ad* 1.1.1 (2000, 36–37). 14

13. While commenting on BhG 2.7, Paṇḍita Sūrya quotes from 15  
*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.14.2: “The man with a teacher knows!” (*ācāryavān* 16  
*puruṣo veda*; BhG2 2001, 67). 17

14. *athārjunam viśādena na yotsya iti niścītya tūṣṇibhūtam bhagavān* 18  
*āha — tam uvāceti | hr̥ṣīkeśa āśayajñāḥ kṛṣṇas tam arjunam prati prahasann* 19  
*iva prahāsagarbham iva vacanam uvāca | nanu viśādāvāsare hāsānupakrame* 20  
*’pi katham uktam prahasann iveti, tatrocyate | viśādotpatter akāraṇato’ād yato* 21  
*ḍīnānāthavadhe eva viśādotpatter darśanāt | prakṛte tu bhīṣmadronakarnāduryo-* 22  
*dhanādyaḥ śauryeṇa śakram apy aḡaṇayantaḥ kṣātradharmam anusṛtya pravṛttā* 23  
*na tu mūrkhatoena teṣu katham kṛpāpātratvam | [. . .] ato yadvaiśādakāraṇam* 24  
*uktam tat pratāraṇamātram karma naiṣkarmyamārgabahirbhūtam ity āśayena* 25  
*iśaddhāsyamukho bhūtvā provācety arthaḥ |.* 26

15. For instance, having quoted from the *Gūḍhārthadīpikā* 27  
 Śrīveṅkaṭanātha expresses some doubts on its reading of BhG 2.8 (*etac* 28  
*cintyam*; BhG1 2000, 69). 29

16. See also Śrīveṅkaṭanātha *ad* 2.8 (BhG1 2000, 69): *śaraṇāgatir api* 30  
*ananyāśaraṇatvādhyavasayāyapūrvikā tvam eva śaraṇam iti toadutpattih, na tv* 31  
*anyasmiṇ charaṇe sthite ’pi tvam api śaraṇam ity evaṃlakṣaṇatvād upasadanarū-* 32  
*pety āha — yad vastu mama śokam apanudet tan na paśyāmitī anyāśaratvoktiḥ |.* 33

17. BhG1 2000, 73: *evaṃvoidho ’pi śoko yadi svasenāmadhyasthitikāla* 34  
*eva syāt tadā sāvakāśaṃ samādhātum śakyeta, na tv evaṃ, kintu svabalān nir-* 35  
*gatya yuyutsuḥ parakīyaśūramukhe sthito’ā svayam dhanur udyamya pravṛtte* 36  
*śastrasampāte yadā bandhūn avaiḡṣata, tadānīm utpannaḥ, tato mahat kaṣṭam* 37  
*jātam ity abhipretyāha — senayor ubhayor madhya iti |.* 38

18. BhG1 2000, 73: *evaṃ saty api bhagavato ’rjunasaṅkaṭanirāse ’nāyāsam* 39  
*darśayati — prahasann iveti |.* 40

19. *arjunasya paitṛṣv asevatayā tam prati bhagavataḥ sarvādā ’pi parihāsok-* 41  
*taya eva bhavanti tadā saṅkaṭe ’pi tannirācīkṛṣur bhagavān parihāsarītyaiva idam* 42  
 43

1 *vakṣyamāṇam aśocyān ityādikam atigambhīrārtham aśeṣavedāntasārabhūtam vaca-*  
 2 *nam uvāca | tatra ca vinodaphalakatvena loke parihāsaḥ prasiddhaḥ, ayaṃ tv arju-*  
 3 *nasya tattvajñānotpādanaphalaka iti prasiddhāparihāsavailakṣaṇyadyotanārthaḥ*  
 4 *prahasann ivetvokāraḥ | sarvadhīprerakasya jñānotpādanaṃ hāsamātreṇaiva*  
 5 *sukaram iti hr̥ṣīkeśapadenoktam | [ . . ]*

6 20. On this issue, see Śaṅkara's commentaries—*pādabhāṣya* and  
 7 *vākyabhāṣya*—on *Kena Upaniṣad* 1.1.1–2 (Śāstrī 2004, 17–21).

8 21. The last passage of *BhG* 2.10 is irrelevant for the issue at stake.

9 22. *tad evaṃ mohasāgaranimagnasyārjunasya ātmatattvajñānād anyatrod-*  
 10 *dhāraṇopāyam apaśyan prahasann iva iti pūroṣlokam arjunāpahāsaṃ viśadayann*  
 11 *eva [ . . ] ātmatattvajñānam [ . . ] |.*

12 23. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.4.10 and 4.5.11): [ . . ] *asya mahato*  
 13 *bhūtasya niḥśvasitam etad yad ṛgvedo yajurvedaḥ sāmavedo 'tharvāṅgirasa iti-*  
 14 *hāsaḥ purāṇaṃ vidyā upaniṣadaḥ ślokāḥ sūtrāṇy anuvoyākhyānāni vyākhyānāni*  
 15 *| asyaitāni niśvasitāni | “[ . . ] So indeed the Ṛgveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda,*  
 16 *Atharvāṅgirasa, histories, ancient tales, sciences, hidden teachings (upaniṣad),*  
 17 *verses, aphorisms, explanations and glosses—all these are the exhalation*  
 18 *of this Immense Being.” See also Olivelle (1998, 69).*

19 24. *BhG1* 2000, 81: *atra hr̥ṣīkeśa uvācety uktoḥ 'pi punar bhagavān uvāceti*  
 20 *vadatā saṃjayena deśakālādyanapekṣatvarūpaṃ bhagavanmāhātmyaṃ darśitam*  
 21 *| atha vyavasthitān dr̥ṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān kapidhvojaḥ | pravṛtte śāstrasampāte*  
 22 *dhanur udyamya pāṇḍavaḥ ity evaṃvidhāvasthāyāṃ kathāṃ śrīkṛṣṇena jñānam*  
 23 *upadeṣṭuṃ pravṛttam? kathāṃ vā 'rjunasya tathāvidhopadeśāḥ jñānalābhah?*  
 24 *deśakālau vinā sarvatra kāryānudayād iti na śaṅkanīyam, acintyādbhūtamahāma-*  
 25 *hīmasālīni bhagavati deśakālayor akiñcitkaratvād iti |.*

26 25. *BhG1* 2000, 81: *atrādyapādena prathamādhyāyagatārjunoktānuvādaḥ*  
 27 *| dvitīyapādena tu kathāṃ bhīṣmam aha ityādidvītyādhyāyagatataduktānuvādaḥ*  
 28 *| uttarārdhena ca tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śoka ekatvam anupaśyataḥ tarati śokam*  
 29 *ātmavit ityādiśrutiprasiddhasarvāśokamohanivartakabhāvāsya kṛtsnagītāpratipādy-*  
 30 *asyādvitīyātmatattvajñānasya nirdeśa iti |.*

31 26. *Īśa Upaniṣad* 7: “What delusion, what sorrow can there be for the  
 32 one who sees the oneness?” (*tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śoka ekatvam anupaśyataḥ*);  
 33 *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.1.3: “The knower of the Self goes beyond sorrow”  
 34 (*tarati śokam ātmavit*).

35 27. *ato bīje vṛkṣasvarūpasyeva kṛtsnagītārthasya atrāntarbhāvād bījaśloko*  
 36 *'yam iti gītānyāsarahasyam |.*

37 28. The passage runs as follows: *tathā ca maudhyāṃ prājñatvaṃ punaḥ*  
 38 *śiṣyatoḃ svātantryaṃ cety etatparasparaviruddhaṃ tvayi dr̥ṣyata ity apahā-*  
 39 *sakāraṇoktiḥ |.* According to Śrīveṅkaṭaṇātha, from 2.11 to 2.31 the *BhG*  
 40 removes the despondency of those who are not worthy of despondency.  
 41 From 2.32 to 2.38, it removes the words of false wisdom (*BhG1* 2000, 81).

42  
 43



29. He defends Śaṅkara's *BhGBh* from all opponents; see vss. 7–8 1  
of the *Bhāṣyotkarṣadīpikā* (BhG2 2001, 10; BhG3 1936, 5–6) and the gloss 2  
*ad* 2.1 (BhG2 2001, 56; BhG3 1936, 31). 3
30. Dhanapati Sūri is the father of Śivadatta Sūri, author of the 4  
*Arthadīpikā* which is a gloss on Dharmarāja Adhvarin's *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*. 5
31. BhG2 2001, 71; BhG3 1936, 38: *etad anantaram bhagavān kiṃ kṛtavān* 6  
*ity ata āha — tam iti | tam senayor ubhayor madhye viśīdantaṃ śokamohāto aṅgikur-* 7  
*vantaṃ arjunaṃ hr̥ṣīkeśo bhagavān vāsudevaḥ prahasann iva madājñāvaśavartini* 8  
*tvayy ahaṃ prasanno 'smīti prakāṣayann ivedaṃ vaksyamānaṃ vaco vacanam* 9  
*uvāca | anucitācaranaprakāśanena lajjāmbudhau majjayann iveti kecit | mūḍho* 10  
*'py ayam amūḍhavad vadatīti prahasann ivety anye | [ . . ]* 11
32. See the *GAD ad BhG* 2.10. 12
33. Nīlakāṇṭha *ad BhG* 2.10 (BhG1 2000, 73). 13
34. Dhanapati *ad* 2.11 criticizes Madhusūdana's position on Arjuna's 14  
twofold delusion (BhG2 2001, 74–75; BhG3 1936, 39). His contention is that 15  
Śaṅkara has explained everything so clearly that it is useless to suggest 16  
any other interpretative option. Dhanapati adds that Madhusūdana's 17  
interpretation contradicts *BhG* 3.3 (*loke 'smīn dvoividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā* 18  
*mayā 'nagha | jñānayogena sāmkyānām karmayogena yoginām ||*). 19
35. *he bhārata dhṛtarāṣṭra! ubhayoḥ senayoḥ madhye viśīdantaṃ tam arju-* 20  
*naṃ prati hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ prahasann iva, arjunasyonmādapralāpatulyavacanaśravaṇāt* 21  
*kṛṣṇasya hāsa iti bhāvah, idam aśocyān ity ārabhya mā śucaḥ ity antaṃ* 22  
*gītāśāstrarūpaṃ vacaḥ uvāca ||*. 23
36. *BhG* 18.66: *sarvadharmān parityajya mām ekaṃ śaraṇaṃ vraja | ahaṃ* 24  
*tvā sarvopāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ ||*. 25
37. BhG2 2001, 74: *śokasyāvoṣayībhūtān eva bandhūn tvam anvaśocaḥ* 26  
*anūsocitavān asi dṛṣṭvemān svajanān kṛṣṇa ity ādinā | tatra kutas tvā kaśmalam* 27  
*idaṃ viṣame samupasthitam ity ādinā mayā bodhito 'pi punaś ca prajñāvataṃ* 28  
*paṇḍitānām vādān śabdān kathaṃ bhīṣmam ahaṃ saṅkhye ity ādin kevalaṃ* 29  
*bhāṣase, na tu paṇḍito 'si, yataḥ gatāsūn gataprāṇān bandhūn agatāsūnś ca* 30  
*jīvato 'pi, bandhuhīnā ete kathaṃ jīviṣyantīti nānuśocanti paṇḍitā vivekinaḥ ||*. 31
38. For more information, see Mahadevan (1968, 178–81). 32
39. BhG2 2001, 55: *sadasadvivekena tajjanitatṭoravairāgyeṇa mumukṣayā* 33  
*ca saṃnyāstasarvakarmanō mokṣaikakāmasya brāhmaṇasya sadasadviveka-* 34  
*vairāgyādisādhanasampatsiddher brāhmaṇatvasiddheś ca sāphalyāya athāto brah-* 35  
*mājijñāsā iti, ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyaḥ iti tadovijñānārthaṃ sa gurum* 36  
*evābhigacchet ityādiśrutyuktaparakāreṇa sadguruṃ śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭham* 37  
*upasadya brahmanvicāraḥ kartavya itīnam arthaṃ sūcayituṃ sadasadvivekino* 38  
*'rjunasya paramārthāpekṣiṇaḥ śiṣyas te 'haṃ śādhi māṃ tvāṃ prapannam* 39  
*itīśvarapratipattiṃ tasmai īśvareṇa kṛtam ātmānātmanājñānopadeśaparakāraṃ ca* 40  
*pratipādayituṃ dvitīyo 'dhyāya ārabhyate |*. 41  
42  
43

1 40. BhG2 2001, 55: *tatrādaḥ so 'haṃ bhagavaḥ śocāmi taṃ mā bhagavāñ*  
 2 *chokasya pāraṃ tārayatu iti śravaṇāt saṃsārādūḥkhena śocantaṃ svaśaraṇaṃ*  
 3 *gataṃ mumukṣum abhayavacanapūrvakam abhimukhīkṛtya gurus tattvaṃ*  
 4 *bodhayed iti sūcayituṃ tathā śocitum arjunaṃ vivekavacanair bhagavān*  
 5 *bodhayāmnāseti vaktuṃ dhṛtarāṣṭraṃ prati saṃjaya uvāca — taṃ |.*

6 41. BhG2 2001, 71: *he bhārata, senayor ubhayor madhye viśīdantaṃ*  
 7 *madīyā ete mriyanta iti śocantaṃ etān hatvā taddoṣeṇāhaṃ nirayaṃ yāsyāntīty*  
 8 *ātmani niṣkriye nirvikāre kartṛtvādidharmaśūnya evānādyavidyayā 'nātmatad-*  
 9 *dharmān adhyasyāhaṃ kartā, bhokteti viparītabhāveṇa muhyantaṃ taṃ arjunaṃ*  
 10 *dṛṣṭvā paramakṛpālulḥ śrībhagavān tatra ko mohah kaḥ śoka ekatvam anupaśyata*  
 11 *ityādiśrutiprasiddhabrahmātmaikatvajñānena vinā nāyaṃ dvaitabhramapra-*  
 12 *vartakena bhedaśāstreṇa bodhyamānaḥ śokasāgaraṃ bhramamūlakam tartuṃ*  
 13 *śaknotīti matvā padārthadvayaśodhanapūrvakam tajjñānam upadidikṣulḥ sann*  
 14 *ādaḥ tvampadārthasodhanam avatārayituṃ tadīyavṛttaṃ bhavān paṇḍita iti*  
 15 *mama buddhir eva vā tava pāṇḍityam iti prahasann iva vacanam idam uvāca ||.*

16 42. Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.8.7–16.3: *tat tvam asi.*

17 43. A less known commentary is the *Paiśācabhāṣya* or *Hanumadbhāṣya*  
 18 by Hanumat, whose date is uncertain (he is mentioned in Venkaṭanātha's  
 19 *Tātparyacandrikā*; Saha 2017, 264). Following Śāṅkara, Hanumat notes that  
 20 BhG 1.2 to 2.9 is meant to prove that worldly life is characterized by anguish  
 21 and delusion and is rooted in ignorance. He elucidates BhG 2.10 almost in  
 22 the same way as Śrīdhara: "The glorious Nārāyaṇa, with a smiling face—in  
 23 between the two armies—uttered these words, this discourse which is  
 24 going to be pronounced to Arjuna who was grieving, who was expressing  
 25 grief" (BhG1 2000, 72; *śrīnārāyaṇaḥ prasannavadanaḥ sann ubhayoḥ senayor*  
 26 *madhye viśīdantaṃ viśādaṃ kurvantaṃ arjunaṃ pratīdaṃ vakṣyamāṇam vaco*  
 27 *vākyaṃ uvāca). He interprets prajñā in BhG 2.11 as meaning "knowledge of*  
 28 *the supreme Self" (BhG1 2000, 81; prajñā paramātmajñānam) and paṇḍitas as*  
 29 *meaning "knowers of the supreme aim" (paṇḍitāḥ paramārthavidō nānuśocanti).*  
 30 This is why Kṛṣṇa says: "O Arjuna, you are a fool, where is your supreme  
 31 wisdom?" (*ato mūdhas tvam prajñā paramā kutas te.*)

32 44. For more information, see Mahadevan (1968, 207–11).

33 45. BhG2 2001, 71: *evam apy arjune yuddham upekṣitavatiśvaraḥ |*  
 34 *naivopekṣitavān ittham andhaṃ pratyāha sañjayaḥ || 1 || āgatyā senayor mad-*  
 35 *hye yuddhodyogena cārjunam | prāpnuvantaṃ viśādaṃ ca saṃmohaṃ yud-*  
 36 *dharodhakam || 2 || tacceṣṭīyā hy anaucityaṃ hasanena prakāśayan | antaryāmi*  
 37 *taṃ āheśo lajjābdhau majjayann iva || 3 || vakṣyamāṇam idaṃ cātigambhīraṃ*  
 38 *sāravadvacaḥ || 4 ||.*

39 46. The three bodies (*śarīratraya*) mentioned in Advaita Vedānta texts  
 40 are the physical body (*sthūlaśarīra*), the subtle body (*sūkṣmaśarīra*) and the  
 41 causal body (*kāraṇaśarīra*).

42  
43

47. *maiyaṃ dhīmattoam etad bhoḥ prahāsāyaiva kalpate | ye paṇḍitā guroḥ* 1  
*śrutvā vedāntaviśayaṃ padam || 15 || brahmaikyam yuktibhir matvā nididhyāsya* 2  
*nirantaram | sāksātkṛtāmatattoās te naṣṭāvīdyāmalā budhāḥ || 16 ||.* 3
48. *yathā svapne mṛto bandhur jīvan vā śocyatāṃ gataḥ | na tannimittko* 4  
*moho jāgare 'py anuvaritate || 19 || evam ajñānabhrāntya kalpitā bandhavo* 5  
*mṛtāḥ | jīvanto vā na te bodhe śokanohapradāḥ satām || 20 ||.* 6
49. *na ca śreyo 'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanam āhave |.* 7
50. *ananyāś cintayanto māṃ ye janāḥ paryupāsate | teṣāṃ nityābhiyuk-* 8  
*tānāṃ yogakṣemaṃ vahāny aham ||.* 9
51. *na kāñkṣe vijayaṃ kṛṣṇa na ca rājyaṃ sukhāni ca |.* 10
52. *etān na hantum icchāmi ghnato 'pi madhusūdana | api trailokyarājyasya* 11  
*hetoḥ kiṃ nu mahīkrte ||.* 12
53. *utsannakuladharmānāṃ manuṣyāṇāṃ janārdana | narake 'niyataṃ* 13  
*vāso bhavātīty anuśūsruma ||.* 14
54. *kiṃ no rājyena govinda [. . .]* 15
55. *kiṃ bhogair jīvitena vā ||.* 16
56. *yady apy ete na paśyanti lobhopahatacetasah | kulakṣayakṛtaṃ doṣaṃ* 17  
*mitradrohe ca pātakaṃ ||.* 18
57. *yadi māṃ apratikāram aśastraṃ śastrapāṇayaḥ | dhārtarāṣṭrā raṇe* 19  
*hanyus tan me kṣemataraṃ bhavet ||.* 20
58. *gurūn ahatvā hi mahānubhāvān śreyo bhoktuṃ bhaiḥkṣyam apīha loke* 21  
*| hatvārthakāmāms tu gurūn ihaiva bhuiñjīya bhogān rudhirapradigdhān ||.* 22
59. *GAD 2005, 50–52; BhG2 2001, 65–66; BhG3 1936, 36; gurūpasadanam* 23  
*idānīṃ pratipādyate samadhigatasamśaradoṣajātasyātitarāṃ nirvoinnasya vidhivad* 24  
*gurum upasannasyaiva vidyāgrahaṇe 'dhikārāt | tad evaṃ bhīṣmādisamkaṭavaśāt* 25  
*| vyutthāyātha bhikṣācaryam caranti iti śrutisiddhabhikṣācarye 'rjunasyābhilāṣaṃ* 26  
*pradarśya vidhivad gurūpasattim api tatsaṅkaṭavyājenaiva darśayati kārpaṇyeti* 27  
*| yaḥ svalpām api vittakṣatiṃ na kṣamate sa kṛpaṇa iti loke prasiddhaḥ | tad-* 28  
*vidhatvād akhilo 'nātmavid aprāptapuruṣārthatayā kṛpaṇo bhavati | yo vā etad* 29  
*akṣaraṃ gārgy aviditoā asmāl lokāt praiti sa kṛpaṇa iti śruteḥ | tasya bhāvah* 30  
*kārpaṇyam anātmādhyāsavattovaṃ tannimitto 'smin janmany eta eva madīyās* 31  
*teṣu hateṣu kiṃ jīvitēnety abhiniveśarūpo mamatālakṣaṇo doṣas tenopahatas* 32  
*tiraskṛtaḥ svabhāvah kṣātro yuddhodyogalakṣaṇo yasya sa tathā |.* 33
60. It should be noted that Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa utilizes several 34  
portions of the GAD in his commentary. 35
61. The rest of the gloss focusses on Arjuna's inner crisis: "What is 36  
justice? To kill one's enemies or to protect them? Is it right to protect the 37  
earth or is it right to live in the forest?" Being unable to answer these 38  
questions, Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to tell him what is best. The text adds other 39  
considerations accompanied by Upaniṣadic quotes, such as *Muṇḍaka Upa-* 40  
*niṣad* 1.2.12 and *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.1. 41  
42  
43

1 62. Along these lines, see Śaṅkarānanda's *Tātparyabodhini* (BhG2  
2 2001, 66) and Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's *Gītābhūṣaṇa*.

3 63. It is noteworthy that although complete self-surrender (*prapatti*)  
4 is a major concern of Viśiṣṭādvaita authors, none of them has elaborated  
5 upon it when dealing with *BhG* 2.7–8.

6 64. "So, in the way that here the condition acquired through action  
7 is exhausted, likewise the world up there, gained through merits, is  
8 exhausted" (*tad yatheha karmajito lokah kṣīyata evam evāmutra puṇyajito*  
9 *lokaḥ kṣīyate iti śruteḥ*).

10 65. See Pellegrini-Sferra (2018, 289–90).

11 66. GAD 2005, 56–57; BhG2 2001, 70–71; BhG3 1936, 38–39: [. . .]  
12 *senayor ubhayor madhye yuddhodyamenāgatya tadvirodhinaṃ viśādanṃ moham*  
13 *prāpnuvantaṃ tam arjunaṃ prahasann ivānucitācāraṇaprakāśanena lajjāmbudhau*  
14 *majjayann ioa hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ sarvāntaryāmī bhagavān idam vākṣyamāṇam aśocyān*  
15 *ityādi vacaḥ paramagambhīrārtham anucitācāraṇaprakāśakam uktaoān na tūpekṣi-*  
16 *tavān ity arthaḥ | anucitācāraṇaprakāśanena lajjotpādanam prahāsaḥ | lajjā ca*  
17 *duḥkhātniketī dveṣavoṣaya eva sa mukhyaḥ | arjunasya tu bhagavatkr̥pāvoṣayatvād*  
18 *anucitācāraṇaprakāśanasya ca vivekotpattihetutvād [. . .] gaṇa evāyam prahāsa*  
19 *iti kathayitum ivaśabdah | lajjām utapādayitum ioa vivekam utpādayitum arju-*  
20 *nasyānucitācāraṇam bhagavata prakāśyate [. . .] | yadi hi yuddhārambhāt prāg*  
21 *gr̥he eva sthito yuddham upekṣeta tadā nānucitam kuryāt | mahatā saṃrambheṇa*  
22 *tu yuddhabhūmāv āgatya tadupekṣaṇam atīvānucitam iti kathayitum senayor ity*  
23 *ādivoṣeṣaṇam | etac cāśocyān ityādaḥ spaṣṭam bhaviṣyati ||*

24 67. See also Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's *Sārārthavarṣiṇīṭīkā* and  
25 Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's *Gītābhūṣaṇa*.

26 68. GAD 2005, 57; BhG2 2001, 72; BhG3 1936, 39: *tatrārjunasya yud-*  
27 *dhākhye svadharme svato jātāpi pravṛttir dvidhena mohena tannimittena śokena*  
28 *ca pratibaddheti |*

29 69. This viewpoint was already developed by Sadānanda *ad BhG*  
30 2.11, vs. 1 (BhG2 2001, 74).

31 70. Here we paraphrase GAD 2005, 57; BhG2 2001, 72–73; BhG3 1936,  
32 39: *tatrātmani svaprakāśaparamānandarūpe sarvasaṃsārādharmā 'saṃsargiṇi*  
33 *sthūlasūkṣmaśarīradvayatatkāraṇāvīdyākhyopādhitrayāvivekena mithyābhūtasyāpi*  
34 *saṃsārasya satyatvātmadharmatvādipratibhāsarūpa ekaḥ sarvaprāṇīsādhāraṇaḥ |*  
35

36 71. Here we paraphrase GAD 2005, 57; BhG2 2001, 72; BhG3 1936,  
37 39: *aparas tu yuddhākhye svadharme hiṃsādibāhulyenādharmatvapratibhāsarūpo*  
38 *'rjunasyaiva karuṇādidoṣanibandhano 'sādhāraṇaḥ | evam upādhitrayāvivekena*  
39 *śuddhātmasvarūpabodhaḥ prathamasya nirvartakaḥ | dvitīyasya tu hiṃsādīmatto*  
40 *'pi yuddhasya svadharmatvenādharmatvābhāvobodho 'sādhāraṇaḥ |*

41 72. A common rule states that effects cannot arise without their  
42 causes; see *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 1.2.1–2, 4.1.3 and 5.2.18 (Sinha 1986, 37–38, 147,  
43 184) along with *Yogasūtra* 2.25 (Āgāśe 2004, 23, 96).

73. The final sections of *GAD ad 2.11* (GAD 2005, 58–59; BhG2 2001, 73; BhG3 1936, 41–44) focus on the perception of the *pañḍitas*, whose knowledge of the reality of the Self is generated by reflection (*vicāra-janyātmatattvajñānavantaḥ*): *pañḍitas* do not care about the dead or the living, whereas Arjuna’s perception is completely different from theirs. For *pañḍitas* the phenomenal world disappears during *samādhi* and thus there is no trace of masters, friends, relatives, etc. And although once they emerge from *samādhi* (*vyutthāna*; see *Yogasūtra 3.37* with commentaries: Āgāṣe 2004, 41, 156) the world reappears, the *pañḍitas* have ascertained it as being illusory and false (*vyutthānasamayē tatpratibhāse ‘pi mṛṣatvena niścayāt*). In the classic example of the rope mistaken for a snake (*rajju-sarpa*), once the illusion of the snake is dissolved by directly perceiving the rope, fear and trembling are no longer justified. Madhusūdana proposes another example: when the normal sense of taste is subdued by hepatitis A, even molasses taste bitter owing to an excess of bile (*pitta*). But once the person is cured, despite such invalid perception he/she will not search for molasses when wanting to taste something bitter because the ascertainment of sweetness is definitely stronger. Hence, since the illusion consisting in the mourning for those who should not be mourned is due to the ignorance of the nature of the Self, once this ignorance is dispelled through knowledge such an illusion disappears.

74. Saha (2017, 264) refers to Nīlakāṅṭha as Nīlakāṅṭha Sūri, who lived in Maharashtra in the sixteenth century. Nīlakāṅṭha was the son of Govinda Sūri, a Marāṭhī-speaking Brahmin whose family had established itself in the modern district of Ahmednagar (Gode 1942, 146–61).

75. This twofold delusion is also explained by Sadānanda Yogīndra *ad BhG 2.11*, vs. 1 (BhG2 2001, 74) and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī *ad 2.11* (GAD 2005, 57; BhG2 2001, 72; BhG3 1936, 39).

76. He corroborates his position through a passage of the *śruti*, i.e., *Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.11.3*: “It is indeed this [body] that perishes deprived of the individual Self; the individual Self does not perish!” (*jīvāpetam vā va kiledam mriyate, na jīvo mriyate*).

77. As stated in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad 7.15.1*: “Breath is indeed the father, the mother, the master!” (*prāṇo ha pitā prāṇo mātā prāṇa ācāryaḥ*).

78. *yadi dehaś cetanaḥ syāt mṛte ‘pi tatra caitanyam upalabhyeta, tasmād dehanāśenātmanāśaṃ manvāno mūrkhā evāsīty arthaḥ* |. Two inferences are presented here. The first is meant to prove that the Self is sentient and gives a negative (*vyatireka*) instance (*dṛṣṭānta*): the Self is different from a pot because it is sentient, whereas the property of the “negative instance” (*vīpakṣa*) is opposite to that of the *probandum* (*sādhya*). The second inference has a positive instance (*sapakṣa*) where in both—*sapakṣa* and *sādhya*—the same *dharma* inheres, namely, the property of being the object of empir-

1 ical experience (*dṛśyatva*, lit. “visibility”) gained through the means of  
2 knowledge; see Pellegrini-Sferra (2018, 289–90).

3 79. BhG7 1990, 33–34: *prahasann iva prahasann prakṛṣṭahāsaṃ kurvan*  
4 *jano yathā prasannamukho bhavati tathā prasannamukhaḥ sann ity arthaḥ |*  
5 *hṛṣīkeśatvena sarvāntaryāmitayā bhaktavatsalatayā ca bhagavataḥ svasakalabhak-*  
6 *tasamuddhāraphalakaparamārthatattvaparakāśanasya svacikīrṣitasyaiva arjunasya*  
7 *śokamoharūpaṃ nimittam āśritya ayam iṣṭo ’vasarah saṃprāpta iti bhagavataś*  
8 *cetasi saṃjātā, tasya mukhacandre ’pi prādurabhūt ity āśayah |.*

9 80. According to Saha (2017, 274), Vasugupta (ninth century) the  
10 commentator of the *Śivasūtras* also wrote the *Vāsaviṭikā*, a commentary  
11 on the *BhG*.

12 81. We say so because in some parts of his commentary Bhāskara  
13 seems to follow the vulgate version or, as pointed out by Kato (2014,  
14 1145–46), perhaps an earlier version of the Kashmirian recension followed  
15 by Rāmakaṇṭha (tenth century) and Abhinavagupta.

16 82. BhG5 1965, 41: *taṃ arjunaṃ senayor madhye yathoktena prakāreṇa*  
17 *sīdamānaṃ yuddhaṃ prati tyaktotsāhaṃ hṛṣīkeśo hasann idaṃ vaksyamānaṃ*  
18 *vākyam āha |.*

19 83. *tvam mānuṣyeṇopahatāntarātmā viśādamohābhibhavād viśaṃjñāḥ |*  
20 *kṛpāgrhītaḥ samavekṣya bandhūn abhiprapannān mukham antakasya ||.*

21 84. See also Zaehner (1973, 125): “Vanquished by dejection and  
22 delusion, devoid of wit, your inmost Self has been upset by what is [all  
23 too] human; pity has seized upon you because you see your kinsmen  
24 enter into the jaws of death.” See also Gnoli (1976, 57).

25 85. See *BhG* 11.14, where Arjuna is *vismayāviṣṭo*, “pervaded by  
26 wonder,” on seeing Kṛṣṇa’s universal shape; see Peterson (2003, 174–75).

27 86. BhG5 1965, 42: [. . .] *viśaṃjñō vyavahitadivyañānaḥ saṃvṛtta iti |*  
28 *itaś copahāsakāraṇam | saṃjñānaṃ saṃjñā viśiṣṭā buddhiḥ | vigatā vyavahitā*  
29 *vā saṃjñā asyeti viśaṃjñāḥ | upahatāntarātmā | [. . .]*

30 87. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.4: *dūram ete viparīte viśūcī avidyā yā ca vidyete*  
31 *| vidyābhīpsitaṃ naciketasam manye na tvā kāmā bahavo ’lolupanta ||.*

32 88. See also Marjanovic (2002, 25–44) and Gnoli (1976, 56–57).

33 89. BhG6 1941, 27: *taṃ pārtham ubhayor senayor madhye proktaprakāreṇa*  
34 *sīdamānaṃ śokābhibhūtaṃ yuddhaṃ prati tyaktotsāhaṃ prahasann iva vikṛta-*  
35 *ceṣṭādarśanād upahasann iva hṛṣīkāṇām indriyāṇām īśaḥ prerayitā paramātm-*  
36 *asvarūpaś caturātmā bhāgavān | dehāhaṃbhāvanāvīrbhūtamithyājñānaniorṭter*  
37 *saṃbhavaḥ iti tattvopadeśapūrovaṃ svakarmani pravartayiṣur (sic for pravi-*  
38 *vartayiṣur) dehadehinoḥ saṃyogaviyogavarūpam uddiśann uvācety arthaḥ ||.*

39 90. Yāmuna Muni’s (tenth century) *Gītārthasaṃgraha* or “Compendium  
40 of the Meaning of the *BhG*” is the first *viśiṣṭādvaitin* gloss on the *BhG*. Also  
41 known as *Ālavantār*, that is, “the victorious,” Yāmuna is believed to be the  
42 predecessor of Rāmānuja in the line of the Śrī Sampradāya school (Saha  
43



2017, 265–66). In just thirty-two stanzas, he presents the essence of the *BhG* 1 which is Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa, the supreme *Brahman*, who can be attained only 2 by devotion. In stanzas 2 and 3, he divides the text’s eighteen chapters into 3 three hexads (*ṣaṭka*), the first of which is devoted to *karmayoga* and *jñānayoga* 4 and the second to *bhaktiyoga*, “which can be brought about by action and 5 knowledge, and whose purpose is to attain the correct understanding of 6 the truth of the Blessed Lord” (Uskokov 2021, 70). The final hexad merely 7 provides a supplement, expanding upon the contents of the first two. For an 8 analysis of the threefold *BhG* division among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas, see Uskokov 9 2021, 68–79 and Belvalkar 1975<sup>2</sup>, 147–49. It is noteworthy that in stanza 5 10 Yāmuna refers to Ajuna as “the surrendered one” (*pārtham prapannam*), 11 emphasizing the theme of *prapatti* (BhG1 2000, 24). 12

91. BhG1 2000, 71: *tam evaṃ dehātmanoh yāthātmyājñānanimitta-* 13 *śokāviṣṭaṃ dehātirikatmajñānanimittam ca dharmam* (on this emendation, 14 see Ādidevānanda 1993, 59–60) *bhāṣamāṇam parasparaviruddhaguṇānvai-* 15 *itam ubhayoh senayoh yuddhāya udyuktayoh madhye akasmān nirudyogam* 16 *pārtham ālokya paramapurusaḥ prahasann iva idam uvāca | [pārtham* 17 *prahasann iva] pariḥāsavākyam vadann iva ātmaparamātmayāthātmyatprāpty* 18 *upāyabhūtakarmayogabhaktiyogagocaram na to evāham jātu nāsam ity ārabhya* 19 *ahaṃ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ ity etadantam uvāca ity arthaḥ |.* 20

92. *patanti pitaro hy eṣāṃ luptapiṇḍodakakriyāḥ |.* 21

93. Veṅkaṭanātha’s *Gītārthasaṃgraharakṣā* is sometimes indispens- 22 able for understanding the synthetic wording of the *Gītārthasaṃgraha*. 23 Veṅkaṭanātha says that in the first four stanzas of the *Gītārthasaṃgraha* 24 Yāmuna Muni refers to the content of the entire *BhG* and to the purport 25 of each of its three hexads (BhG1 2000, 24). Each chapter of the *BhG* is 26 briefly explained by Yāmuna from stanza 5 to stanza 23. In stanza 5, 27 Veṅkaṭanātha summarizes the first chapter and the first verses of the 28 second, up to 2.9. He notes that though Vyāsa—the traditional author 29 of the *BhG*—separated the first chapter from the second, *BhG* 1.1 up to 30 2.9 is to be understood as the introductory portion of the poem since it 31 explains why Arjuna’s despondency has arisen. Rāmānuja’s commentary 32 *ad BhG* 2.9 quotes and elucidates this passage from the *Gītārthasaṃgraha* 33 specifically to make this point (BhG1 2000, 71). Though Rāmānuja does 34 not comment on *prahasann iva*, he states that since Arjuna surrendered 35 to his lord as a *prapanna* he should be taken as an example of eligibility 36 (*adhikāratva*) for the *upadeśa*. Verses 2.10 to 2.12 mark the beginning of the 37 instruction (*śāstrāvatararūpa*). 38

94. *Ad* 2.7, Veṅkaṭanātha writes that some thinkers define *kārpaṇya* 39 as “not abandoning what should be abandoned” (BhG 1 2000, 68). Others 40 define it as a psychological attitude that generates pity (*tyājyasyāparityāgo* 41 *’tra kārpaṇyam ity eke, dayājanakādīnavṛttiniratatvam ity apare |.* 42 43

- 1 95. In order to corroborate his question, Veṅkaṭanātha (BhG1 2000,  
2 72) quotes *Mānavadharmasāstra* 2.110: “No unasked issue should be revealed  
3 to anyone” (*nāpṛṣṭaḥ kasyacid brūyāt*).
- 4 96. *tasmād yudhyasva bhārata* ||.
- 5 97. *yuddhāya kṛtaniścayaḥ* ||.
- 6 98. *parihāsayogyatoāya tam iti parāmṛṣṭam āha — evam ityādinā* | [. . .]  
7 *adharmādih parājayādir vā yuddhaniṣṛtṭeḥ samyagdhetur atra nāsti, ahetu-*  
8 *kopakrāntatyāge tu parihāsyaivam iti bhāvoh* | [. . .] *yadvā dhīram arjunaḥ*  
9 *hṛṣīkeśatayā svayaṃ prakṣobhya prahasann iva jagadupakārāya śāstram voāceti*  
10 *[. . .] parihāsārthatvaucityāt prahāsasya* [. . .] |.
- 11 99. *yadvā prapannasya doṣanirikṣaṇena parihāsasambhavaṃ śiṣyaṃ praty*  
12 *adhyātmopadeśe prahāsamātram dṛṣṭāntānupayogaṃ ca abhipretya pārthasabdah*  
13 *| ataḥ prahasann iva ity anena phalitaṃ sarasatvaṃ sugrahatvaṃ nikhilani-*  
14 *gamāntagahvaranīltnasya mahato 'rthajātasyānāyāsabhāṣaṇam, idaṃśabdasya*  
15 *vakṣyamāṇasamastabhagavadvākyaaviśayatvam, iṅgitenāpi vivakṣitasūcanaṃ ca*  
16 *darśayati — parihāsetyādinā* |.
- 17 100. *aśocyān iti ślokaśyāpi upadeśārthāvadhānāpādanārthaparihāsacchāya-*  
18 *tayā śāstrāvatarānamātratvoena sāksācchāstratvābhāvāt na tv evāham ity ārabhya*  
19 *ity uktam | yadvā 'tra aśocyān iti ślokaḥ prahasann ivety asya viśayo na tv*  
20 *evāham ityādikam idaṃśabdārthaḥ* | [. . .].
- 21 101. Madhva wrote two commentaries on the BhG: the *Gītābhāṣya* or  
22 *Dvaitabhāṣya* and the *Bhagavadgītātātparyanirṇaya* that is part of his monu-  
23 mental *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*. Like Śaṅkara's *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya*, the  
24 *Gītābhāṣya* begins at 2.10 whereas the *Bhagavadgītātātparyanirṇaya* begins  
25 at 2.11 (BhG1 2000, 80; Prabhanjanacharya 1999, 1–12).
- 26 102. Jaya Tīrtha also wrote a subcommentary on the *Bhagavad-*  
27 *gītātātparyanirṇaya*, the *Nyāyadīpikā*, which we were not able to see; see  
28 Saha (2017, 269–70).
- 29 103. BhG1 2000, 80: *nanv idānīm eva kuto 'rjunasya mohasamutpattiḥ?*  
30 *na hy ete bāndhavādaya iti prān nājñāsīt, yena yuddhāya mahāntam udyogam*  
31 *akārṣīt ity āha senayor iti* |.
- 32 104. BhG1 2000, 80: *mahāpakārasmarāṇenānuvartamāno 'pi kopo mṛdu-*  
33 *manasāṃ bāndhavādiṣv antakāle nivartate, snehas cōtpadyate, tato moho iti*  
34 *prasiddham eveti bhāvoh* | *arjunasya jñānitvān mohajālasaṃvṛtatvam iṣad eveti*  
35 *mantavyam* |.
- 36 105. BhG2 2001, 3: *tatra tāvad aśocyān anvāśocyas tvam ity ārabhyār-*  
37 *junasya śokamohāpanodānāya bhagavadupadeśaṃ varṇayitum arjunasya sahet-*  
38 *ukāśokadarśanāya prathamādhyāyārambhaḥ* |.
- 39 106. “Indeed the *kṛpaṇa* is he who departs from this world without  
40 having known that imperishable!” (*yo vā etad akṣaram aviditvā gārgy asmāl*  
41 *lokāt praiti sa kṛpaṇa*).  
42  
43

107. BhG2 2001, 65: *pūrvapratipāditākṣaraśabdavācyaśūryacandravāyuvahnīndrādisarvajaganniyantṛparamātmasvarūpaṅādijñānahīnaḥ kṛpāṇaḥ ity ucyate śāstre* |. 1  
2  
3
108. BhG2 2001, 65: *ata eva dharme sammūḍhaṃ ceto yasya so 'haṃ tvāṃ svabhāvato 'pāstasamastadoṣaṃ sarvajñaṃ pṛcchāmi* |. 4  
5
109. BhG2 2001, 70: *evaṃ yuddhatyāgāya kṛtavayasāye 'rjune mama putrāṇāṃ sukhaṃ jīvanaṃ siddham iti cetanācetananiyantari durjanavināśāyāvātirṇe bhagavaty adhiṣṭhātari sati nāśāsanīyam iti dhṛtarāṣṭrāya sūcayitum saṃjaya āha — tam iti | he bhārata! mahāvīrasya bhāratasya vaṃśe jātasya tava yuddhoparatau putrasnehena harṣo nocita iti bhāvah* |. 6  
7  
8  
9  
10
110. *pāṇḍuputrasya kṣatriyasammatasya naitad yuktam iti lajjānimittaṃ kopam utpādayitum prahasann ivety uktam | arjunaṃ nimittikṛtya sarvasenāsamhārārthaṃ pravṛttasya gurutvenāṅgikṛtya hitopadeṣṭur bhagavataḥ svadharṃ pravarttayitum udyatasya prahāso nocitaḥ, kintu tadvidhābudhikauśalyagarvāpanayanena tattojñānādhikāritāsampādānāya tathā vacanam itīvaśabdābhīprāyaḥ* ||. 11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16
111. *nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni keśava | na ca śreyo 'nupaśyāmi hatvā soajanam āhave* ||. 17  
18
112. *nihatya dhṛtarāṣṭrān naḥ kā prītiḥ syāj janārdana | pāpam evāśrayed asmān hatvaitān ātatāyinaḥ* ||. 19  
20
113. *utsannakuladharmāṇāṃ manuṣyāṇāṃ janārdana | narake niyataṃ vāso bhavatīty anuśūsruma* ||. 21  
22
114. *gurūn ahatoḥ hi mahānubhāvān śreyo bhoktum bhaikṣyam apīha loke | hatvārthakāmāṃs tu gurūn ihaiva bhūñjīya bhogān rudhirapradigdhān* ||. 23  
24
115. The five *sādhanās* are divided into two groups. The first group is open to all human beings and includes *prapatti*, “self-surrender to the lord,” and *gurūpasatti*, “self-surrender to the master,” understood to be constitutive of *prapatti* itself. The second group is made up of three types of *sādhanā* that are reserved to the twice-born (*dvija*). These are *vidyā* “learning,” *upāsana* or *dhyāna* “meditation/contemplation,” and *jñānayoga* “knowledge” (*karman* or “ritual action” is sometimes found in lieu of *jñānayoga*); see Clémentin-Ojha 2011, 442; Uskokov 2018, 4. 25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32
116. BhG1 2000, 73: *tataḥ kiṃ jātam iti tam uvāceti | aho asyātmatatvājñānataḥ klaibyaṃ kīdṛk? iti prahasana dharmīṣṭhatvād asyaitad apy ucitam iti bhāvenety uktam* |. 33  
34  
35
117. While commenting on BhG 2.11 (BhG1 2000, 82), Vallabha’s focus is on the doctrine of Sāṃkhya-Yoga. The passage highlights that Arjuna’s anguish is due to lack of discrimination concerning the Self. Arjuna is concerned with what should not be an object of concern, confusing the imperishable Self with the body that is *prakṛti*, that is, non-Self. In order to remove this epistemic distortion, from 2.11 onward Kṛṣṇa teaches him 36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43

1 “discriminative knowledge” (*sāṃkhyabuddhi*). In Puruṣottama’s (1668–1764;  
2 Saha 2017, 272) *Amṛtaraṅgiṇī*—a gloss on the *Tattvadīpikā*—nothing is  
3 said on *prahasann iva* (BhG1 2000, 73). In addition to Puruṣottama’s gloss,  
4 G. H. Bhatt (1949, 131–34) mentions a few other Śuddhādvaita commen-  
5 taries that we were unable to see.

6 118. *nanu madvācas tvam paṇḍitamānitvena khaṇḍayasi cet, katham*  
7 *brūyām? tatrāha śiṣyas te ’ham asmi | nātaḥ paraṃ vṛthā khaṇḍayāmiti bhāvah*  
8 ||. See also the GRETEL e-text: [http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1\\_sanskrit/2\\_epic/mbh/ext/bhg4c02u.htm](http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskrit/2_epic/mbh/ext/bhg4c02u.htm).

10 119. *aho tavāpy etāvān khalv aviveka iti sakhyabhāvena taṃ prahasan anau-*  
11 *cityaprakāśena lajjāmbudhau nimajjayan iveti tadānīṃ śiṣyabhāvaṃ prāpte tasmin*  
12 *hāsyam anucitam ity adharoṣṭhanikuñcanena hāsyam āṛṇavamś cety arthah |.*

13 120. *hr̥ṣīkeśa iti pūrvaṃ premṇāvārjunavāññiyamyo ’pi sāmpratam arju-*  
14 *nahitakāritvāt premṇāvārjunamanoniyantāpi bhavatīti bhāvah | senayor ubhayor*  
15 *madhye ity arjunasya viśādo bhagavatā prabodhas ca ubhābhyāṃ senābhyāṃ*  
16 *sāmānyato dr̥ṣṭa eveti bhāvah* ||. The meaning is that prior to the interven-  
17 tion of Kṛṣṇa-Hr̥ṣīkeśa, Arjuna’s mind was deluded by his affection for  
18 his kinsfolk. Now, however, from the very beginning of the *gītopadeśa* his  
19 mind is under Kṛṣṇa’s control.

20 121. See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.8.10; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.14.2;  
21 *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12.

22 122. [. . .] *taṃ viśīdantam arjunam prati hr̥ṣīkeśo bhagavān asōcyān*  
23 *ityādikam atigambhīrārtham vacanam uvāca | aho tavāpīdṛg viveka iti sakhy-*  
24 *abhāvena prahasan | anaucityabhāsitvena trapāsindhau nimajjayann ity arthah*  
25 *| iveti tadaiva śiṣyatāṃ prāpte tasmin hāsānaucityād īśadadharollāsaṃ kurvann*  
26 *ity arthah | arjunasya viśādo bhagavatā tasyopadeśas ca sarvasāksika iti bodhay-*  
27 *itum senayor ubhayor ity etat* ||. See also the GRETEL e-text: [http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1\\_sanskrit/2\\_epic/mbh/ext/bhg4c02u.htm](http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskrit/2_epic/mbh/ext/bhg4c02u.htm).

### Chapter 3

33 1. For both the *MBh* and Vālmīki’s *Rām* we have based ourselves  
34 on the critical editions available online. Unless otherwise specified, all  
35 translations from the Sanskrit are of Gianni Pellegrini.

36 2. Each *aḥsauhiṇī* was a complete army in itself, a *caturāṅginīsenā*:  
37 it comprised 21.870 elephants, 21.870 chariots, 65.610 horses (= 21.870 x  
38 3) and 109.350 infantrymen (= 21.870 x 5).

39 3. The eighteen *adhyāyas* of the *BhG* (= *MBh* 6.25–42) are part of the  
40 larger *Bhagavadgītāparvan* (= *MBh* 6.13–42), which is the third subdivision  
41 of the *Bhīṣmaparvan* and the sixty-third of the hundred subdivisions of  
42 the *MBh*.

43

4. As is well known, the reflection on the four aims of human life (*puruṣārtha*) occupies a large part of the *MBh*, as programmatically stated at the beginning (1.62.53, *dharma cārthe ca kāmē ca mokṣe ca bhāratarābha | yad ihāsti tad anyatra yan nehāsti na tat kvacit ||*) and—with some variants—also at the end (18.5.50).

5. Even leaving aside the independent *Gītās*, there are many other *Gītās* in the *MBh* most of which are included in the *Śāntiparvan* and in the important *upaparvan* known as *Mokṣadharmā*. Stefano Piano (1994, 52–54) lists all these *Gītās* according to the vulgate edition of the *MBh*: *Utathyagītā* (12.90–91), *Vāmadevāgītā* (12.92–93), *Ṛṣabhagītā* (12.125–29), *Ṣaḍ-jagītā* (12.167), *Śampākāgītā* (12.176), *Maṅkīgītā* (12.177), *Bodhyāgītā* (12.178), *Vicakhnugītā* (12.265), *Hārītāgītā* (12.278), *Vṛtragītā* (12.279), *Parāśaraḡītā* (12.290–98), *Haṃsāgītā* (12.299) and the *Anugītā* or *Uttaraḡītā* (14.16–51). This last *Gītā* is especially relevant since it incorporates the *BhG* main contents (Nilakantan 1989).

6. Before publishing the first English translation of the *BhG*, Charles Wilkins wished to translate the entire *MBh* (and indeed he had started doing it) but at Benares, due to the influence of his Sanskrit teacher Kashinatha, his choice shifted to the *BhG*. This shift “reflects the high value that his Brahmin pundits placed on the work” (Davis 2014, 79).

7. A well-known verse, variously attributed to a *Gītāmāhātmya* (5; *BhG1* 2000, 4; Brodbeck 2018, 202) or to the *Gītāmṛta* (4), states that the *BhG* is the very essence of the *Upaniṣads*: *sarvopaniṣado gāvo dogdhā gopālanandanāḥ | pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīr bhoktā dugdham gītāmṛtam mahat ||* that is, “All *Upaniṣads* are cows, the milker is the herdsman’s son [= Kṛṣṇa], Pārtha [= Arjuna] is the calf, the consumer/enjoyer is the sage, and the milk is the magnificent nectar of the *Gītā*.” In his commentary to the *BhG*, Śāṅkara says (*BhG1* 2000, 4): *gītāśāstraṃ samastavedārthasārasaṃgrahabhūtam [ . . . ]*, “The teaching of the *Gītā* is a compendium of the essence of the meaning of the entire *Veda* [ . . . ].”

8. Basing ourselves on D’Sa 1996 and Bandhu 1977, we have focused attention on all possible forms of root *√has* as well as on a few important derivatives such as *apahāsa*, *parihāsa*, and *prahāsa*. D’Sa 1996, 136 reports an apparently erroneous occurrence of root *√has* in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.3.28 (*āhasat*). Bandhu detects only six occurrences (Bandhu 1977, 544): *hasati* in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.17.3 (Olivelle 1998, 212), *hasati* and *hasan* in *Yogaśīkhā Upaniṣad* 6.67–68 (Śāstrī 1970, 472), *hasanti* in *Mahā Upaniṣad* 3.35 (Śāstrī 1970, 433), *hasaḥ* in *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* 3.25.8 (Oertel 1896, 185) and *hāsyam* in *Tejobindu Upaniṣad* 4.27 (Śāstrī 1970, 271).

9. The same participle *jakṣat* is found in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.12.3: “[ . . . ] He is the highest person. He roams about there, laughing, playing,

1 and enjoying himself with women, carriages, or relatives, without remem-  
 2 bering the appendage that is this body" ([. . .] *sa uttamapurusaḥ | sa tatra*  
 3 *paryeti jakṣat krīḍan ramamāṇaḥ strībhir vā yānair vā jñātibhir vā nopajanaṇ*  
 4 *smarann idaṃ śarīram* || Olivelle 1998, 284–85). Even here, Śaṅkara glosses  
 5 *jakṣat* with *hasan* (Śāstrī 1982, 418) but he plays with the double meaning  
 6 of  $\sqrt{jakṣ}$  as the reduplicated form of  $\sqrt{ghas}$  ("to eat/devour"), thus inter-  
 7 preting it to mean also *bhakṣayan*, "eating."

8 10. In the *R̥gveda*, we find only seven occurrences of root  $\sqrt{has}$  but  
 9 no *prahasann iva* or *hasann iva*; see Bandhu 1963, 607. In the other *Samhitās*  
 10 there are very few occurrences of the root; see Bandhu 1960, 644; Bandhu  
 11 1963, 1097; Nair 1992, 2222 and Bandhu 1963, 3565. The situation is pretty  
 12 much the same in the *Brāhmaṇas*; see Bandhu 1973, 1024 and 1675. On the  
 13 *Upaniṣads*, see Bandhu 1977, 558, 975, and 1183. On the *Vedāṅga* literature,  
 14 see Nair 1996, 1747; Nair 1994, 2784.

15 11. Within the *MBh* there are countless present participles in the  
 16 nominative case that display a reduplication of final *-n* when followed  
 17 by *iva*, which is the result of the euphonic rule of *sandhi*. Just to mention  
 18 a few: *parirujann iva* (5.73.8b); *rudann iva* (5.73.10b); *vīlahann iva* (5.73.11b);  
 19 *prajvalann iva* (6.60.17d); *ārujann iva* (7.47.21a); *śvasann iva* (7.91.38d); *pibann*  
 20 *iva* (7.103.2a); *utsmayann iva* (7.111.46a); *kampayann iva* (8.24.93d); *smarayann*  
 21 *iva* (9.27.46b); *prakrīḍann iva* (12.125.15c); *harṣayann iva* (13.14.170d). The case  
 22 of *hasann iva* is exemplified in Goldman—Sutherland Goldman 2002, 42.

23 12. Present participles are used to express simultaneity with the  
 24 main action. Though *prahasann iva* and *hasann iva* are no exception, what  
 25 happens here is that we have a complex action (*kriyā*) such as speaking  
 26 that is accomplished by subsidiary actions (*ceṣṭā*), that is, the opening of  
 27 the mouth and the smiling that immediately precedes the locutionary act.

28 13. We owe this critical remark to our friend and colleague Raffaele  
 29 Torella.

30 14. A Hindī expression reveals the meaning of *prahasann iva* and  
 31 *hasann iva* in these contexts: *bāye hāth kā khel*, that is, "a left-hand game,"  
 32 which refers to a Brahmin's reluctance to use the left hand considered to  
 33 be impure and less capable of carrying out certain deeds. On the excel-  
 34 lence of the right hand, see Gonda 1972, 1–23.

35 15. See for instance 7.142.16d. Here Rādheya (i.e., Karṇa), after  
 36 addressing Sahadeva, moves against the armies of the Pāñcālas and  
 37 Pāṇḍavas with a hint of laughter that indicates his disregard of danger  
 38 (*evam uktoṃ tu taṃ karṇo rathena rathināṇi varah | prāyāt pāñcālapāṇḍūnāṇi*  
 39 *sainyāni prahasann iva* ||). Even at 7.142.13c, Karṇa addresses Sahadeva  
 40 laughing (*prahasan*).

41 16. The list of all these *MBh* occurrences is as follows: 1.141.1b,  
 42 1.141.18d, 1.151.7b, 1.151.14d, 4.52.23b, 6.43.21d, 6.49.15d, 6.54.15d, 6.60.13d,  
 43



- 6.60.31b, 6.65.22d, 6.75.39f, 6.79.36b, 6.79.48e, 6.107.2d, 7.37.13b, 7.47.26b, 1  
 7.77.29c, 7.82.5b, 7.82.14d, 7.82.20d, 7.90.13d, 7.90.26b, 7.90.28d, 7.91.32b, 2  
 7.91.35d, 7.91.43d, 7.92.14d, 7.99.16b, 7.102.98c, 7.103.4b, 7.110.31d, 7.111.3b, 3  
 7.114.50f, 7.117.14b, 7.130.29b, 7.134.43b, 7.137.18d, 7.137.26d, 7.141.7b, 4  
 7.141.10d, 7.142.6d, 7.142.16d, 7.144.6b, 7.144.16d, 7.146.28d, 7.164.45b, 5  
 7.169.20d, 7.173.48b, 8.9.26d, 8.10.21d, 8.17.39d, 8.17.84d, 8.24.94c, 8.33.14d, 6  
 8.34.16d, 8.35.23b, 8.44.42d, 8.45.5b, 8.55.52d, 9.11.48d, 9.25.9b, 9.26.42d, 7  
 9.26.47d, 9.27.24f, 9.27.35d, 9.27.38d, 9.27.51d, 12.125.18d, 14.83.8b, 16.8.49d. 8
17. *bhīmasenas tu tac chrutvā prahasann iva bhārata | rākṣasaṃ tam* 9  
*anādrtya bhuñkta eva parānmukhaḥ ||.* 10
18. *kṣiptaṃ kruddhena taṃ vṛkṣaṃ pratijagrāha vīryavān | savyena pāninā* 11  
*bhīmaḥ prahasann iva bhārata ||.* 12
19. *tām āpatantīm sahasā śaktim kanakabhūṣaṇām | tridhā cikṣepa samare* 13  
*bhāradvājo hasann iva ||.* 14
20. *sa cchādyamāno bahubhiḥ śaraiḥ saṃnataparvabhiḥ | svasrīyābhyām* 15  
*naravyāghro nākampata yathācalah | prahasann iva tāṃ cāpi śaraorṣṭim jaghāna* 16  
*ha ||.* 17
21. At verse 6.79.45a, we find *prahasya* which is the absolutive of 18  
 root *pra-vhas*. 19
22. *mādhavas tu samaṅkruddho rākṣasaṃ navabhiḥ śaraiḥ | ājaghāna raṇe* 20  
*rājan prahasann iva bhārata ||.* 21
23. *tāṃ tathā bruvato drṣṭvā saubhadraḥ prahasann iva | yo yaḥ sma* 22  
*prāharat pūrvaṃ taṃ taṃ vīvyādha patribhiḥ ||.* 23
24. *na no jīvan mokṣyase jīvitām iti |.* On the epic use of *jīvanmukta*, 24  
 see Hara 1996, 185–88. 25
25. The Dakṣa myth is popular in Sanskrit literature: see *MBh* 26  
 12.283–84; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 4.2.4–7; *Kūrma Purāṇa* 1.14–15; *Matsya Purāṇa* 27  
 82; *Śīva Purāṇa* 2.2.22–37; *Vāmana Purāṇa* 1–5; *Vāyu Purāṇa* 30. On this 28  
 myth, see O’Flaherty 1975, 118–25, 324–25; Kramrisch 1981, 301–39; Pel- 29  
 legrini 2012, 290. 30
26. *vīvyādha kupito yajñaṃ nirbhayas tu bhavas tadā | dhanuṣā bāṇam* 31  
*utsrjya sa ghoṣaṃ vinanāda ca || 42 || te na śarma kutaḥ śāntim lebhire sma* 32  
*surās tadā | vidrute sahasā yajñe kupite ca maheśvare || 43 || tena jyātalaghoṣeṇa* 33  
*sarve lokāḥ samākulāḥ | babhūvur vaśagāḥ pārtha nipetus ca surāsuraḥ || 44 ||* 34  
*āpas cuḥsubhīre sarvās cakampe ca vasuṇḍharā | parvatās ca vyaśrīyanta diśo* 35  
*nāgās ca mohitāḥ || 45 || andhās ca tamasā lokā na prakāśanta saṃvṛtāḥ | jagh-* 36  
*nivān saha sūryeṇa sarveṣāṃ jyotiṣāṃ prabhāḥ || 46 || cukruśur bhayabhītās ca* 37  
*śāntim cakrus tathaiiva ca | ṛṣayah sarvabhūtānām ātmanās ca sukhaiṣiṇaḥ || 47 ||* 38  
*pūṣāṇam abhyadrovata śāṅkaraḥ prahasann iva | puroḍāsaṃ bhakṣayato daśanān* 39  
*vai vyaśātayāt || 48 || tato niścakramur devā vepamānā natāḥ sma tam | punās* 40  
*ca saṃdadhe dīptaṃ devānāṃ niśitam śaram || 49 || rudrasya yajñabhāgaṃ ca* 41  
*viśiṣṭaṃ te nv akalpayan | bhayena tridaśā rājan śaraṇaṃ ca prapedire || 50 ||.* 42  
 43

- 1           27. In this same chapter, at 8.24.43cd, Śiva smiles before allowing  
2 the gods to speak (*brūta brūteti bhagavān smayamāno 'bhyabhāṣata*).
- 3           28. *sa śobhamāno varadaḥ khadgī bāṇī śarāsanī | hasann ivābravīd devo*  
4 *sārathiḥ ko bhaviṣyati || 94 || tam abruvan devagaṇā yaṃ bhavan saṃniyokṣyate*  
5 *| sa bhaviṣyati deveśa sārathis te na saṃśayaḥ || 95 || tām abravīt punar devo*  
6 *mattaḥ śreṣṭhataro hi yaḥ | taṃ sārathiṃ kurudhvaṃ me svayaṃ saṃcitya*  
7 *māciram || 96 ||.*
- 8           29. The charioteer will be Brahmā; see 8.24.97–112.
- 9           30. In this passage the formula occurs at the very beginning of the  
10 *pada*.
- 11          31. *tato gavvyūtimātreṇa mṛgayūthapayūthapaḥ | tasya bāṇapathaṃ tyaktvā*  
12 *tasthivān prahasann iva ||.*
- 13          32. An example of the multivalence of *prahasann iva*, which signifies  
14 ease as well as mockery.
- 15          33. *chittoṽ vajranikāśena rāghavaḥ prahasann iva | trayodaśenendrasamo*  
16 *bibheda samare kharam ||.*
- 17          34. A second occurrence that we can refer to this section is 6.95.21c:  
18 *vyāyacchamānaṃ taṃ drṣtvā tatparaṃ rāvaṇaṃ raṇe | prahasann iva kākutsthaḥ*  
19 *saṃdadhe sāyakāṇī śītān ||.* On seeing Rāvaṇa violently fighting in battle, Rāma  
20 (Kākutstha) notches a sharp arrow with a hint of laughter (*prahasann iva*).  
21 Here *prahasann iva* is at the beginning of a half-verse, which is unusual.
- 22          35. Twenty-one including *BhG* 2.10b (= *MBh* 6.24.10b). The other five  
23 occurrences are: 3.290.8b (*madhupiṅgo mahābāhuḥ kambuḥgrīvo hasann iva |*  
24 *aṅgadī baddhamukuṭo diśaḥ prajālayann iva ||*; “Yellow like honey, with great  
25 arms, with a shell-shaped neck, with a hint of laughter, with a bracelet,  
26 wearing a crown as if he were inflaming the sky [. . .]”), where *hasann iva*  
27 anticipates that the sun god Sūrya is going to bestow a boon on princess  
28 Kuntī. Since the god is somehow forced to comply with Kuntī’s will, it  
29 could also be interpreted as a sarcastic hint of laughter given that he has  
30 no alternative but to satisfy her wish; 7.148.39d (*tatas taṃ meghasaṃkāśaṃ*  
31 *dīptāsyam dīptakuṇḍalam | abhyabhāṣata haiḍimbaṃ dāśārhaḥ prahasann iva*  
32 *||*; “Then Dāśārha [= Kṛṣṇa], with a hint of laughter, addressed the son  
33 of Hiḍimbā [= Ghaṭotkaca], similar to a cloud, with a blazing face and  
34 shining earrings”), where Kṛṣṇa’s *prahasann iva*, akin to a sly grin, intro-  
35 duces a command to the mighty Ghaṭotkaca—son of Bhīma by the *rākṣasī*  
36 Hiḍimbā—to attack Karṇa; 10.7.59d (*taṃ ūrdhvaabāhuṃ niśceṣṭaṃ drṣtvā*  
37 *havir upasthitam | abravīd bhagavān sāksān mahādevo hasann iva ||*; “Seeing  
38 him [= Aśvatthāman] with lifted arm, motionless, presented (*upasthitam*)  
39 as an oblation, the glorious Mahādeva in person, with a hint of laughter,  
40 said [. . .]”), where *hasann iva* shows that Śiva is pleased with the offering  
41 of Aśvatthāman and is ready to bestow his favor upon him; 12.310.27b  
42 (*uvāca cainaṃ bhavavāṇś tryambakaḥ prahasann iva | evaṃvidhas te tanayo*  
43

*dvaipāyana bhaviṣyati* ||; “[Śiva Maheśvara], with a hint of laughter, said 1  
to him: ‘O Dvaipāyana [Vyāsa], you will have a son’”), where through 2  
his *prahasann iva* the god bestows his grace upon Vyāsa; 18.1.11b (the 3  
last occurrence at the opening of the last *parvan*, the *Svargārohaṇa*, where 4  
Yudhiṣṭhira reaches paradise and sees Duryodhana in all his glory: *maivam* 5  
*abraoṭ taṃ tu nāradaḥ prahasann iva | svarge nivāso rājendra viruddhaṃ cāpi* 6  
*naśyati* ||; “[Yudhiṣṭhira said:] ‘It can’t be like that!’ Nārada then replied to 7  
him with a hint of laughter: ‘O chief among kings, residence in paradise 8  
destroys even hostility’”), where *prahasann iva* introduces a moral teaching. 9

36. *tatra caṅkramyamāṇau tau vasudevasutāṃ śubhām | alaṅkṛtāṃ* 10  
*sakhīmadhye bhadrāṃ dadṛśatus tadā || 14 || dṛṣṭvāiva tāṃ arjunasya kandarpaḥ* 11  
*samajāyata | taṃ tathaikāgramanasam kṛṣṇaḥ pārtham alakṣayat || 15 || athābraoṭ* 12  
*puṣkarākṣaḥ prahasann iva bhārata | vanecarasya kim idaṃ kāmenāloḍyate manaḥ* 13  
*|| 16 || manaiṣā bhaginī pārtha sāraṇasya sahodarā | yadi te vartate buddhir* 14  
*vakṣyāmi pitaraṃ svayam || 17 ||.* 15

37. *taṃ uvāca tataḥ pritaḥ sa dvijaḥ prahasann iva | varam vṛṇiṣva* 16  
*bhadraṃ te śakro 'ham arisūdana || 36 || evam uktaḥ pratyuvāca sahasrākṣaṃ* 17  
*dhananjanayaḥ | prāñjalih praṇato bhūtvā śūraḥ kurukulodvahaḥ || 37 || īpsito* 18  
*hy eṣa me kāmō varam cainaṃ prayaccha me | tvatto 'dya bhagavann astraṃ* 19  
*kṛtsnam icchāmi veditum || 38 || pratyuvāca mahendras taṃ prītātmā prahasann* 20  
*iva | iha prāptasya kiṃ kāryam astrais tava dhananjanaya | kāmān vṛṇiṣva lokāṃś* 21  
*ca prāpto 'si paramāṃ gatim || 39 ||.* 22

38. The same story is narrated in *MBh* 3.183–90 and *Matsya Purāṇa* 23  
165.1–22 and 167.13–67. See Zimmer 1972, 35–53. 24

39. The *śrīvatsa* is a distinctive sign of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa: a wisp of hair 25  
in the middle of his chest; see Mani 1996, 139–41, 738. 26

40. *tato mām abravīd vīra sa bālaḥ prahasann iva | śrīvatsadhārī dyutimān* 27  
*pītavāsā mahādyutiḥ ||.* 28

41. *etac chrutoā mahābāhuḥ keśavaḥ prahasann iva | abhūtapūrovaṃ* 29  
*bhīmasya mārdaoḥpaḡataṃ vacaḥ || 1 || girer iva laghutovaṃ tac chītatvaṃ iva* 30  
*pāvake | matvā rāmānujaḥ śaurī śāringadhanvā vṛkodaram || 2 || saṃtejayamaṃ tadā* 31  
*vāgbhir mātariśveva pāvakaṃ | uvāca bhīmam āsīnaṃ kṛpayābhipariplutam || 3* 32  
*|| tvam anyadā bhīmasena yuddham eva praśaṃsasi | vadhābhinandinaḥ krūrān* 33  
*dhārtarāṣṭrān mimardiṣuḥ || 4 || na ca svapiṣi jāgarṣi nyubjaḥ śeṣe paraṃtapa* 34  
*| ghorāṃ aśāntāṃ ruśatīṃ sadā vācaṃ prabhāṣase || 5 || niḥśvasan agnivat* 35  
*tena saṃtaptaḥ svena manyunā | aprasāntamanā bhīma sadhūma iva pāvakaḥ* 36  
*|| 6 || ekānte niḥśvasan śeṣe bhārārta iva durbalaḥ | api tvāṃ kecid unmatam* 37  
*manyante tadoido janāḥ || 7 || ārujya vṛkṣān nirmūlān gajaḥ parirujann iva |* 38  
*nighnan padbhīḥ kṣitiṃ bhīma niṣṭanan paridhāvasi || 8 || nāsmiṃ jane 'bhira-* 39  
*mase rahaḥ kṣiyasi pāṇḍava | nānyaṃ niśi divā vāpi kadācid abhinandasi || 9* 40  
*|| akasmāt smayamānāś ca rahasy āsse rudann iva | jānvor mūrdhānam ādhāya* 41  
*cīram āsse pramūlitaḥ || 10 || bhrukūtiṃ ca punaḥ kurvann oṣṭhau ca vilihann* 42  
43



1 *iva* | *abhīkṣṇaṃ dṛṣyase bhīma sarvaṃ tan manyukāritam* || 11 ||. With refer-  
2 ence to verse 6ab, we follow the emendation proposed by Garbutt 2008,  
3 622 rather than the reading of the critical edition (*niḥśvasan agnivārṇena*  
4 *saṃtaptah svēna manyunā*). With reference to the verb *kṣiyasi* in verse 9b,  
5 it should be noted that Garbutt 2008, 622 reads *kṣipasi*.

6 42. *kasmād annāni pānāni vāsāṃsi śayanāni ca* | *tvadartham upanītāni*  
7 *nāgrahīs tvam janārdana* || 13 || *ubhayoś cādadaḥ sāhyam ubhayoś ca hite*  
8 *rataḥ* | *saṃbandhī dayitāś cāsi dhṛtarāṣṭrasya mādhave* || 14 || *tvam hi gov-*  
9 *inda dharmārthau vettha tattoena sarvaśaḥ* | *tatra kāraṇam icchāmi śrotuṃ*  
10 *cakragadādharma* || 15 ||.

11 43. *sa evam ukto govindah pratyuvāca mahāmanāḥ* | *oghaṇeghasvanah kāle*  
12 *pragṛhya vipulaṃ bhujam* || 16 || *anambhūkṛtam agrastam anirastam asaṃkulam*  
13 | *rājīvanetro rājānaṃ hetumadoākyaṃ uttamam* || 17 ||.

14 44. *kṛtārthā bhujānte dūtāḥ pūjāṃ grhṇanti caiva hi* | *kṛtārtham māṃ*  
15 *sāhātyas tvam arcīsyasi bhārata* || 18 || *evam uktaḥ pratyuvāca dhṛtarāṣṭro*  
16 *janārdanam* | *na yuktaṃ bhavātasmāsu pratipattum asāṃpratam* || 19 || *kṛtārtham*  
17 *ca tvam vyaṃ madhusūdana* | *yatāmahe pūjayituṃ govinda na ca śaknu-*  
18 *maḥ* || 20 || *na ca tatkāraṇam vidmo yasmīn no madhusūdana* | *pūjāṃ kṛtām*  
19 *prīyamāṇair nāmansthāḥ puruṣottama* || 21 || *vairam no nāsti bhavatā govinda*  
20 *na ca vīgrahaḥ* | *sa bhavan prasamīkṣyaitan naidṛṣaṃ vaktum arhati* || 22 || *evam*  
21 *uktaḥ pratyuvāca dhṛtarāṣṭram janārdanaḥ* | *abhivīkṣya sahānātyaṃ dāsārhaḥ*  
22 *prahasann iva* || 23 || *nāham kāmān na saṃraṃbhān na dveṣān nārthakāraṇāt* |  
23 *na hetuvādāl lobhād vā dharmam jahyāṃ kathamcana* || 24 || *saṃprītibhojyāny*  
24 *annāni āpadbhojyāni vā punaḥ* | *na ca saṃprītyase rājan na cāpy āpadgatā vyaṃ*  
25 || 25 || *akasmād dviṣase rājāṃ janmaprabhṛti pāṇḍavān* | *prīyānuvartino bhrātṛn*  
26 *sarvaiḥ samuditān guṇaiḥ* || 26 || *akasmāc caiva pāṛthānāṃ dveṣānaṃ nopā-*  
27 *padyate* | *dharme sthitāḥ pāṇḍaveyāḥ kas tān kiṃ vaktum arhasi* || 27 || *yas tān*  
28 *dveṣṭi sa māṃ dveṣṭi yas tān anu sa māṃ anu* | *aikātmyaṃ māṃ gataṃ viddhi*  
29 *pāṇḍavair dharmacāribhiḥ* || 28 || *kāmakrodhānuvartī hi yo mohād virurutsate*  
30 | *guṇavantaṃ ca yo dveṣṭi tam āhuḥ puruṣādhamam* || 29 || *yaḥ kalyāṇaguṇāṅ*  
31 *jñātīn mohāl lobhād didṛkṣate* | *so 'jitātmājītakrodho na ciraṃ tiṣṭhati śrīyam*  
32 || 30 || *atha yo guṇasaṃpannān hrdayasyāpīyān api* | *priyeṇa kurute vaśyāṃś*  
33 *ciraṃ yaśasi tiṣṭhati* || 31 || *sarvam etad abhoktavyam annaṃ duṣṭābhisamhitam*  
34 | *kṣattur ekasya bhoktavyam iti me dhīyate matiḥ* || 32 ||.

35 45. *evam ābhāṣyamāṇo 'pi bhrātṛbhiḥ kurunandana* | *novāca vāgyataḥ*  
36 *kiñcid gacchaty eva yudhiṣṭhiraḥ* ||.

37 46. *tān uvāca mahāprajño vāsudevo mahāmanāḥ* | *abhiprāyo 'sya vijñāto*  
38 *mayeti prahasann iva* || 16 || *ēṣa bhīṣmaṃ tathā droṇaṃ gautamaṃ śalyam eva ca*  
39 | *anumānya gurūn sarvān yotsyate pāṛthivo 'ribhiḥ* || 17 || *śrūyate hi purākalpe*  
40 *gurūn ananumānya yaḥ* | *yudhyate sa bhaved vyaktam apādhyāyo mahattaraiḥ* ||  
41 18 || *anumānya yathāśāstraṃ yas tu yudhyen mahattaraiḥ* | *dhravas tasya jayo*  
42 *yuddhe bhaved iti matir mama* || 19 ||; van Buitenen 1981, 147.

43



47. On the *pāśupata* weapon, see Bakker and Bisschop 2016, 239 and 247–52; Kramrisch 1981, 257–59. 1  
2
48. *tatas tāv āgatau śarvaḥ provāca prahasann iva | svāgataṃ vāṃ naraśreṣṭhāvo uttiṣṭhetāṃ gataklamau | kiṃ ca vāṃ īpsitaṃ vīrau manasaḥ kṣipram ucyatān || 46 || yena kāryeṇa saṃprāptaṃ yuvāṃ tat sādhyāmi vāṃ | vriyatān ātmanaḥ śreyas tat sarvaṃ pradadāni vāṃ || 47 || tatas tad vacanaṃ śrutoā pratyutthāya kṛtāñjali | vāsudevārjunau śarvaṃ tuṣṭuvāte mahāmati || 48 ||.* 3  
4  
5  
6  
7
49. On Karṇa’s figure, see McGrath 2004. 8
50. On the story of Karṇa’s spear, see Hildebeitel 2011, 417, 426–27. 9
51. *etac chruvā mahārāja govindah prahasann iva | abravīd arjunaṃ tūrṇaṃ kauravāñ jahi pāṇḍava ||.* 10  
11
52. *iti sma kṛṣṇavacanāt pratyuccārya yudhiṣṭhiram | babhūva vīmanāḥ pārthaḥ kiñcit kṛtoeva pātakam || 1 || tato ’bravīd vāsudevaḥ prahasann iva pāṇḍavam | kathaṃ nāma bhaved etad yadi tvam pārtha dharmajan || 2 ||.* 12  
13  
14
53. *tam uvāca bhṛguśreṣṭhaḥ saroṣaḥ prahasann iva | bhūmau nipatitaṃ dīnaṃ vepamānaṃ kṛtāñjalim || 29 || yasmān mithyopacarito astralobhād iha tvayā | tasmād etad dhi te mūḍha brahmāstraṃ pratibhāsyati || 30 || anyatra vadhakālāt te sadṛśeṇa sameyuṣaḥ | abrahmaṇe na hi brahma dhruvaṃ tiṣṭhet kadācana || 31 || gacchedānīṃ na te sthānam anṛtasyeha vidyate | na tvayā sadṛśo yuddhe bhavitā kṣatriyo bhuvi || 32 ||.* 15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20
54. Jambavati is the daughter of Jambavān, king of the Vidyādharas, who will become Kṛṣṇa’s wife; see Mani 1996, 342. 21  
22
55. The story of Upamanyu’s father Vyāghrapāda is narrated in this same chapter of the *MBh*. 23  
24
56. In the *MBh* there are several characters named Dhaumya. One of them is the chief priest (*purohita*) of the Pāṇḍavas, who performed the rites at the royal consecration of Yudhiṣṭhira and, later, walked on ahead of the Pāṇḍavas when they were going to the forest. Here, however, the reference is to another Dhaumya (i.e., an ascetic that is Upamanyu’s younger brother); see Mani 1996, 232–33; Rāy 1982, 355. 25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30
57. *evam uktas tataḥ śarvaḥ surair brahmādibhis tathā | āha mām bhagavān īśaḥ prahasann iva śaṅkaraḥ || 174 || vatsopamanyo pṛito ’smi paśya mām munipuṅgava | dṛḍhabhaktō ’si viprarṣe mayā jijñāsito hy asi || 175 || anayā caiva bhaktyā te atyarthaṃ pṛitimān aham | tasmāt sarvān dadāmy adya kāmāṃs tava yathepsitān || 176 ||.* With reference to the last word, the critical edition reads *yathepsitān (yathā īpsitān)*. 31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36
58. *yathā svakoṣṭhe prakṣipyā koṣṭhaṃ bhāṇḍamanā bhavet | tathā svakāye prakṣipyā mano dvārair anīscalaiḥ | ātmānaṃ tatra mārgeta pramādaṃ parivarjayet || 42 || evaṃ satatam udyuktaḥ pṛitātma nacircād iva | āsādayati tad brahma yad dṛṣṭvā syāt pradhānavit || 43 || na tv asau cakṣuṣā grāhyo na ca sarvair apīndriyaḥ | manasaiva pradīpena mahān ātmani dṛśyate || 44 || sarvataḥpāñipādaṃ taṃ sarvatokṣīsiromukham | jīvo niṣkrāntam ātmānaṃ śarīrāt saṃprapaśyati ||* 37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43

1 45 || *sa tad utsrjya dehaṃ svaṃ dhārayan brahma kevalam | ātmānam ālokayati*  
 2 *manasā prahasann iva* || 46 || *idaṃ sarvarahasyaṃ te mayoktaṃ dvijasattama |*  
 3 *āpṛcche sādhaḥśiṣyāmi gaccha śiṣya yathāsukham* || 47 ||.

4 59. *evam uktah sa śāntātmā tām uvāca hasann iva | subhage nābhyasūyāmi*  
 5 *vākyaśyāśya tavānaghe* || 5 || *grāhyaṃ drśyaṃ ca śrāvyaṃ ca yad idaṃ karma*  
 6 *vidyate | etad eva vyavasyanti karma karmeti karminah* || 6 || *mohan eva*  
 7 *niyacchanti karmaṇā jñānavarjitāḥ | naiṣkarmaṇa na ca loke 'smin maurtaṃ*  
 8 *ity upalabhyate* || 7 ||. The last verse reminds us of BhG 3.5.

9 60. *tasyādhaḥ srotaso 'paśyad vāri bhūri dvijottamaḥ* || 16cd || *smarann*  
 10 *eva ca tam prāha mātaṅgaḥ prahasann iva | ehy uttaṅka praticchaso matto vāri*  
 11 *bhṛgūdavaḥ* || 17 || *kṛpā hi me sumahati tvāṃ drṣṭvā tṛṣamāhatam | ity uktas*  
 12 *tena sa munis tat toyam nābhyanandata* || 18 ||.

13 61. The other six occurrences are: 1.38.3b (*viśvāmitras tu kākutstham*  
 14 *uvāca prahasann iva | śrūyatāṃ vistaro rāma saagarasya mahātmanaḥ* || “But  
 15 Viśvāmitra, with a hint of laughter, said to the heir of [King] Kākutstha:  
 16 ‘Listen, o Rāma, to the story of the great soul Sagara [. . .]’”); 1.51.12d  
 17 (*tato vasiṣṭho bhagavān kathānte raghunandana | viśvāmitram idaṃ vākyaṃ uvāca*  
 18 *prahasann iva* || “Then, o joy of the Raghus, at the end of the conversation  
 19 the glorious Vasiṣṭha, with a hint of laughter, said this to Viśvāmitra [. . .]”);  
 20 2.30.22b (*pratīkṣamāṇo 'bhijanaṃ tadārtam anārtarūpaḥ prahasann iva | jagāma*  
 21 *rāmaḥ pitarāṃ didṛkṣuḥ pitur nideśaṃ vidhivac cikṛṣuḥ* || “Looking at his  
 22 family that was troubled by his decision, untouched by any turmoil, with  
 23 a hint of laughter, Rāma left, desirous to see his father and eager to duly  
 24 respect his father’s instruction;” Pollock 2007, 147 translates *prahasann iva*  
 25 as “he was smiling [instead as he walked on . . .]”); 4.8.19d (*evam uktas*  
 26 *tu tejasvī dharmajñō dharmavatsalaḥ | pratyuvāca sa kākutsthaḥ sugrīvaṃ pra-*  
 27 *hasann iva* || “In this way spoke the mighty knower of the law, devoted  
 28 to it. Kākutstha [= Rāma], with a hint of laughter, replied to Sugrīva”);  
 29 4.10.26d (*evam uktah sa tejasvī dharmajñō dharmasaṃhitam | vacanaṃ vaktum*  
 30 *ārebhe sugrīvaṃ prahasann iva* || “Having thus spoken, the mighty knower  
 31 of the law, established in the law, almost laughing said to Sugrīva [. . .]”;  
 32 Lefeber 2007, 74 translates *prahasann iva* as “smiled slightly”); 5.1.118d  
 33 (*ity ukto vā pāninā śailam ālabhya haripuṅgavaḥ | jagāmākāśam āviśya vīryavān*  
 34 *prahasann iva* || “Once he said so, having touched the mountain with  
 35 his hand, the mighty bull among monkeys departed, ascending to the  
 36 sky with a hint of laughter;” Goldman—Sutherland Goldman 2007, 109  
 37 translate *prahasann iva* as “smiling gently”).

38 62. *prajāpatis tu tāny āha sattvāni prahasann iva | ābhāśya vācā yatnena*  
 39 *rakṣadhvam iti mānadaḥ* || 11 || *rakṣāma iti tatrānyair yakṣāma iti tathāparaiḥ*  
 40 *| bhūṅkṣitābhūṅkṣitair uktas tatas tām āha bhūtakṛt* || 12 || *rakṣāma iti yair*  
 41 *uktaṃ rākṣasās te bhavantu vaḥ | yakṣāma iti yair uktaṃ te vai yakṣā bhavantu*  
 42 *vaḥ* || 13 ||.

43



63. The other thirteen occurrences are: 1.147.21c (*mā rodīs tāta mā mātar mā svasas tvam iti bruvaṇ | prahasann iḥa sarvāṃs tān ekaikaṃ so 'pasarpati* 1  
 ||); 1.152.15d (*paripṛcchya sa māṃ pūrovaṃ parikleṣaṃ purasya ca | abravīt* 2  
*brāhmaṇasreṣṭha āśvāsya prahasann iḥa* ||); 1.181.2b (*tān evaṃ vadato viprān* 3  
*arjunah prahasann iḥa | uvāca prekṣakā bhūtṅvā yūyaṃ tiṣṭhata pārśvataḥ* ||); 4  
 1.206.16c (*agnikāryaṃ sa kṛtvā tu nāgarājasutāṃ tadā | prahasann iḥa kaunteya* 5  
*idaṃ vacanam abravīt* ||); 2.54.11b (*tam evaṃvādinam pārtham prahasann iḥa* 6  
*saubalah | jitam ity eva śakunir yudhiṣṭhiram abhāṣata* ||); 2.60.37d (*duḥśāsanaś* 7  
*cāpi samikṣya kṛṣṇām avekṣamāṇāṃ kṛpaṇān patimś tān | ādhūya vegena viṣaṃ-* 8  
*jñākalpām uvāca dāsīti hasann iḥograh* ||); the present participle of root √has 9  
 in the nominative singular is also used in verse 2.60.38b, where Karṇa 10  
 laughs (*hasan*) loudly, greatly pleased by Duḥśāsana's words); 3.227.21d 11  
 (*tathā kathayamānau tau ghoṣayātrāviniścayam | gāndhārararājah śakuniḥ pratyū-* 12  
*vāca hasann iḥa* ||); in 3.227.18b Karṇa addresses Duryodhana laughing, 13  
*prahasann*, and in 3.227.24a there is another occurrence of root √has + pra, 14  
 i.e., *prahasitāḥ*, "cheerful"); 4.13.5c (*sa tu kāmāgnisamtaptaḥ sudeṣṇām abhi-* 15  
*gamyā vai | prahasann iḥa senānir idaṃ vacanam abravīt* ||); 5.194.16d (*ācārya* 16  
*kena kālena pāṇḍuputrasya sainikān | nihanyā iti taṃ droṇah pratyuvāca hasann* 17  
*iḥa* ||); 6.115.34b (*abravīt ca naravyāghrah prahasann iḥa tān nṛpān | naitāni* 18  
*vīrasāyāsu yuktārūpāni pārthivāḥ* ||); 7.21.10d (*tān paśyan sainyamadhyastho* 19  
*rājā svajanasaṃvṛtaḥ | duryodhano 'bravīt karṇaṃ prahrṣṭah prahasann iḥa* 20  
 ||); 7.96.13d (*tān abhidravataḥ sarvān samikṣya śinipuṃgavaḥ | śanair yāhiti* 21  
*yantāram abravīt prahasann iḥa* ||); 12.151.10b (*evam uktas tataḥ prāha śalmalih* 22  
*prahasann iḥa | pavana tvam vane krudhho darśayātmānam ātmanā* ||). 23  
 24

64. *taṃ dṛṣṭvā sūtaputro 'yam iti niścītya pāṇḍavaḥ | bhīmasenas tadā* 25  
*vākyam abravīt prahasann iḥa* ||. 26

65. *na tvam arhasi pārthena sūtaputra raṇe vadham | kulasya sadṛśas* 27  
*tūrṇam pratodo grhyatāṃ tvayā || 6 || aṅgarājyaṃ ca nārhas tvam upabhoktum* 28  
*narādhama | svā hutāsasamīpasthaṃ puroḍāśam ivādhvare || 7 ||.* 29

66. The wild boar is the demon Mūka in disguise; see MBh 3.40.7–10. 30

67. Lit. "victorious," "triumphant." 31

68. *dadarśatha tato jīṣṇuḥ puruṣaṃ kāñcanaprabham | kirātaveṣapracchan-* 32  
*naṃ strīśahāyam amitrahā | tam abravīt prītamanāḥ kaunteyaḥ prahasann iḥa* ||. 33

69. *ity uktah pāṇḍaveyena kirātaḥ prahasann iḥa | uvāca ślakṣṇayā vācā* 34  
*pāṇḍavaṃ savyasācinam || 21 || mamaivāyaṃ lakṣyabhūtaḥ pūrvam eva parigrahaḥ* 35  
*| mamaiva ca prahāreṇa jīvitād vyavaropitaḥ || 22 || doṣān svān nārhasē 'nyasmai* 36  
*vaktuṃ svabaladarpitaḥ | abhiṣakto 'smi mandātman na me jīvan vimokṣyase ||* 37  
 23 || *sthiro bhavasva mokṣyāmi sāyakān āsanīn iḥa | ghaṭasva parayā śaktyā* 38  
*muñca tvam api sāyakān || 24 ||*; see Hara 1996, 185–88. 39

70. The story of the two demon brothers Ilvala and Vātāpi is first 40  
 narrated in the *Vanaparvan* of the MBh (3.97) and further developed in 41  
 several other texts; see Mani 1996, 5, 9, 20, 318, 840; Rāy 1982, 134, 613–14. 42  
 43

1 71. *dhuryāsanam athāsādyā niśasāda mahāmuniḥ | taṃ paryaveśad*  
 2 *daityendra ilvalaḥ prahasann iva* || 5 || *agastya eva kṛtsnaṃ tu vātāpiṃ bub-*  
 3 *huje tataḥ | bhuktavaty asuro 'hoānam akarot tasya ilvalaḥ* || 6 || *tato vāyuh*  
 4 *prādurabhūd agastyasya mahātmanaḥ | ilvalāś ca viśaṅṅo 'bhūd dr̥ṣṭvā jīrṇaṃ*  
 5 *mahāsuraṃ* || 7 || *prāñjaliś ca sahāmātyair idam vacanam abravīt | kim artham*  
 6 *upayātāḥ stha brūta kiṃ karavāṇi vaḥ* || 8 ||. In the verse that follows there  
 7 is another occurrence of *prahasann* but without the *iva* particle: *pratyuvāca*  
 8 *tato 'gastyah prahasann ilvalam tadā*, i.e., “Then Agastya, laughing, replied  
 9 to Ilvala.”

10 72. *yadā nānyaṃ pravṛṇute varam vai dvijasattamaḥ | tadainam abravīd*  
 11 *bhūyo rādheyaḥ prahasann iva* || 9 || *sahajaṃ varma me vipra kuṇḍale cānṛtod-*  
 12 *bhave | tenāvadhyo 'smi lokeṣu tato naitad dadāmy aham* || 10 || *viśālam*  
 13 *pṛthivīrājyaṃ kṣemaṃ nihatakaṅṭhakam | pratigrhṇīṣva mattas tvam sādhu*  
 14 *brāhmaṇapuṅgava* || 11 || *kuṇḍalābhyāṃ vimukto 'haṃ varmaṇā sahajena ca |*  
 15 *gamanīyo bhaviṣyāmi śātrūṇāṃ dvijasattama* || 12 ||. In the verse that follows,  
 16 Karṇa again addresses the Brahmin laughing (*prahasya*).

17 73. *brhannaḍe kiṃ nu tava sairandhryā kāryam adya vai | yā tvam vasasi*  
 18 *kalyāṇi sadā kanyāpure sukham* || 21 || *na hi duḥkham samāpnoṣi sairandhrī yad*  
 19 *upāśnute | tena mām duḥkhitām evaṃ pṛcchase prahasann iva* || 22 ||.

20 74. *harṣayuktas tathā pārthaḥ prahasann iva vīryavān | ratham rathena*  
 21 *dronasya samāsādyā mahārathaḥ* || 14 || *abhiwādyā mahābāhuḥ sāntvapūroam*  
 22 *idam vacaḥ | uvāca ślakṣṇayā vācā kaunteyaḥ paravīrahā* || 15 ||.

23 75. *na ca mām adya saubhadraḥ prahr̥ṣṭho bhrātr̥bhīḥ saha | raṇād āyāntam*  
 24 *ucitaṃ pratyudyāti hasann iva* ||.

25 76. *tasya tad vacanaṃ śruto vā bhāradvājo hasann iva | anvavartata rājānaṃ*  
 26 *svasti te 'stv iti cābravīt* || 23 || *ko hi gāṇḍīvadhanvānaṃ joalantam iva tejasā*  
 27 *| akṣayaṃ kṣapayet kaścit kṣatriyaḥ kṣatriyaṣabham* || 24 ||.

28 77. *sa kadācit samudrānte vasan drāravatīm anu | eka ekaṃ samāgamyā*  
 29 *mām uvāca hasann iva* || 12 || *yat tad ugraṃ tapaḥ kṛṣṇa caran satyaparākramaḥ*  
 30 *| agastyā bhāratācāryaḥ pratyapadyata me pitā* || 13 || *astram brahmaśiro nāma*  
 31 *devagandharvapūjitam | tad adya mayi dāsārha yathā pitari me tathā* || 14 ||  
 32 *asmattas tad upādāya divyam astram yadūttama | manāpy astram prayaccha*  
 33 *tvam cakram ripuharam raṇe* || 15 ||.

34 78. In the epics there are several characters named Sudyumna. The  
 35 *Śāntiparvan* refers to a king who, born as a female, subsequently became  
 36 a male and, at last, became a female again; see Mani 1996, 317; Rāy  
 37 1982, 714. The *MBh* narrates a story which took place during the reign  
 38 of Sudyumna, when the hands of the young ascetic Likhita were cut off.  
 39 Because of Sudyumna’s adherence to his royal duties he attained heaven;  
 40 see Mani 1996, 755; Rāy 1982, 603.

41 79. For a detailed analysis of this story, see Granoff 2012, 190–91;  
 42 Kane 1930, 136–42.

43

80. *kutaḥ phalāṅy avāptāni hetunā kena khādasi* || 7cd || *so 'bravīt bhātaraṃ jyeṣṭham upasprśyābhivādya ca | ita eva grhītāni mayeti prahasann iva* || 8 || *tam abravīt tadā śaṅkhas tīvrakopasamanvitaḥ | steyaṃ tvayā kṛtam idaṃ phalāṅy ādadatā svayam* || 9 || *gaccha rājānam āsādyā svakarma prathayasva vai* || 10ab ||.
81. *abravīc ca tato jiṣṇuḥ prahasann iva bhārata | nivartadhvam adhar-majñāḥ śreyo jīvitam eva vah* ||.
82. Toasted chickpea flour.
83. Here the text refers to a well-known paretimology of the word *putra*, “son,” which goes back to *Mānavadharmasāstra* 9.138: *pumṇāmnno narakād trāyate pītaram sutah | tasmāt putra iti proktaḥ svatam eva svayambhuvā* ||, i.e., “The Self-Existent One himself has called him ‘son’ (*putra*) because he rescues (*trā*) his father from the hell named Put;” Olivelle 2005, 197, 771.
84. *rūpeṇa sadṛśas tvam me śīlena ca damena ca | parīkṣitās ca bahudhā saktūn ādadmi te tataḥ* || 38 || *ity uktoādāya tām saktūn prītātām dvijasattamaḥ | prahasann iva viprāya sa tasmai pradadau tadā* || 39 ||.
85. Lit. “what sort of man;” a category of semi-divine beings. The males are usually called *kiṃnara*/*kinnara* and the females *kinnarī*. They are often identified with Gandharvas and carry a lute in their hands. The LGBT community of the *hijras* holds the story of the origin of *kimpuruṣas* in high regard; see Nanda 1999.
86. *sarvās tā vidrutā drṣṭvā kiṃnarīr ṛṣisattamaḥ | uvāca rūpasampannām tām striyaṃ prahasann iva* ||.
87. Two more cases can be referred to this section: 2.85.3b (*athovāca bharadvāja bharaṭam prahasann iva | jāne tvām prītisamyuktaṃ tuṣyes tvam yena kenacit* ||; “Then Bharadvāja, with a hint of laughter, said to Bharata: ‘I know that you are full of love, and that you are pleased by whatever [comes]!’”) and 7.60.13b (*tasmims tathā bruvāṇe tu rākṣasaḥ prahasann iva | pratyuvāca naraśreṣṭham diṣṭyā prāpto 'si durmate* ||; “But then, while he [= Śatrughna] was still speaking, the demon, with a hint of laughter, replied to the best among men: ‘O fool, thank heavens you have come!’”).
88. For other ambiguous occurrences of *prahasann iva*, see *MBh* 3.77.11b, 5.179.1b, 9.30.15f.
89. *tato duryodhanaḥ kṛṣṇam uvāca prahasann iva | vighrahe 'smin bhavān sāhayaṃ mama dātum ihārhati* ||.
90. *tataḥ satyapratijñō vai sa pakṣī prahasann iva | tam agniṃ triḥ parikramya praviveśa mahīpate* ||.
91. *plavamānās ca me drṣṭaḥ sa tasmin gomayahrade | pibann añjalinaḥ tailaṃ hasann iva muhur muhuḥ* ||.
92. On this type of laughter, see Plessner 2020, 32–38. Another occurrence that we can refer to this section is 7.17.3d (*sa drṣṭvā rūpasampannām kanyām tām sumahāvratām | kāmakrodhaparītātām papraccha prahasann iva* ||; “Having seen that beautiful girl well-established in her great vow, with

1 his mind filled with lust and anger, with a hint of laughter, he asked  
2 her: [. . .]).

3 93. These are 1.211.16b, 5.73.1b, 5.89.23d, 6.41.16d, 7.148.39d, 8.40.85b,  
4 8.50.2b.

5 94. The case in which Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter is not referred to  
6 Arjuna is 7.148.39d, where his *prahasann iva* is directed toward Ghaṭotkaca.

7 95. See in particular 5.73.1b, 5.89.23d and 6.41.16d.

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## Chapter 4

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1. From Latin *risus*. For its etymology, see A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine. Histoire des mots* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2001<sup>5</sup>), 573.

2. For an introduction, see P.-S. Filliozat, "Le sourire dans la littérature sanscrite et la statuaire de l'Inde," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 153, no. 4 (2009): 1629–54. By the same author, see "Smile in Indian and Khmer Art," [http://www.ignca.nic.in/Lectures\\_PDFs/pl\\_20121123\\_Smile\\_in\\_Indian\\_and\\_Khmer\\_Art.pdf](http://www.ignca.nic.in/Lectures_PDFs/pl_20121123_Smile_in_Indian_and_Khmer_Art.pdf).

3. An epic text with several occurrences of verbal root  $\sqrt{smi}$  as well as  $\sqrt{has}$  is the popular *Nalopakhyāna* or "The story of Nala and Damayantī" (= *MBh* 3.50–78), familiar to many Sanskrit students; see for instance 3.52.18, 3.53.1, 3.53.8, and 3.53.14. On the *Nalopakhyāna*, see C. R. Lanman, *A Sanskrit Reader: Text and Vocabulary and Notes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963 [1884]), 1–16, 297–310.

4. See K. Śarmā, *The Dhātupāṭha of Pāṇini. With the Dhātvartha Prakāśikā Notes* (Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1969<sup>2</sup>). Herein, all Sanskrit roots—approximately 2,300—are grouped by the form of their stem in the present tense.

5. For a general introduction to Indian drama and theater, see K. Binder, "Drama and Theatre," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018; <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism>). See also G. H. Tarlekar, *Studies in the Nāṭyaśāstra: With Special Reference to the Sanskrit Drama in Performance* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999 [1975]); R. V. M. Baumer and J. R. Brandon, eds., *Sanskrit Drama in Performance* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993 [1981]); and E. W. Marasinghe, *The Sanskrit Theatre and Stagecraft* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1989).

6. On the comic, see the seminal article by Har Dutt Sharma, "Hāsyā as a *rasa* in Sanskrit Rhetoric and Literature," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 22, no. 1/2 (1941): 103–15. See also S.

Ramaratnam, *Sanskrit Drama: With Special Reference to Prahāsana and Vīthī*, 1  
 foreword by Satyavrat Shastri (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2014), 12–34; 2  
 D. Meyer-Dinkgräfe, “Comedy, Consciousness and the *Natyasastra*,” in *The* 3  
*Natyasastra and the Body in Performance: Essays on Indian Theories of Dance* 4  
*and Drama*, ed. S. Nair, foreword by M. Krzysztow Byrski (Jefferson, NC: 5  
 McFarland & Company, 2015), 89–98. 6

7. On the distinction between *hāsya* and *hāsa*, see S. Visuvalingam, 7  
 “*Hāsa* and *Hāsya* Distinguished in *Rasa*-Theory,” [http://www.infinityfounda-](http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_visuv_cha_7.htm) 8  
[tion.com/mandala/i\\_es/i\\_es\\_visuv\\_cha\\_7.htm](http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_visuv_cha_7.htm). 9

8. For an appreciation of *hāsyarasa* in modern and contemporary 10  
 Bengali theater, see A. De, *The Boundary of Laughter: Popular Performances* 11  
*Across Borders in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2021). 12

9. The whiteness of the teeth calls to mind the whiteness of the 13  
 jasmine flowers which are widely used in Kṛṣṇa’s worship. As already 14  
 noted, it is remarkable that *prahasantī* is the name of a kind of jasmine. 15

10. The term *pramatha* literally means “tormentor.” Sunthar Visu- 16  
 valingam notes: 17

The deformed (Mahā-)Gaṇapati, “Lord of the Pramathas,” 19  
 who presides over the comic sentiment (*hāsya*) in the Sanskrit 20  
 drama, is himself born from Omkāra’s bi-unity (*mithuna*). Issu- 21  
 ing thunderously from the sacrificial stake in the form of the 22  
 cosmic *liṅga*, Omkāra’s mysterious laughter, while affirming 23  
 the supremacy of Rudra, is indistinguishable from the vio- 24  
 lent laughter (*aṭṭahāsa*) of the Great God (Mahādeva) himself. 25  
 (S. Visuvalingam, “The Transgressive Sacrality of the Dīkṣita: 26  
 Sacrifice, Criminality and *Bhakti* in the Hindu Tradition,” in 27  
*Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of* 28  
*Popular Hinduism*, ed. A. Hildebeitel [Albany: State University 29  
 of New York Press, 1989], 430) 30

11. *Hasita*, which can also mean “blooming,” is the name of the bow 32  
 of Kāma, the god of erotic love, “whose bow is flowers” (*puṣpadhanus*). 33  
 In the *Purāṇas* it is said that Kāma, who had been reduced to ashes by 34  
 the fiery glance of Śiva, was reborn as Pradyumna, the son of Kṛṣṇa and 35  
 Rukmiṇī. On Kāma, see C. Benton, *God of Desire: Tales of Kāmadeva in San-* 36  
*skrit Story Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006). 37

12. For instance, when in Kampan’s *Irāmāvatāram* (the Tamil retelling 38  
 of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, c. twelfth century CE) as it is performed in the shadow 39  
 puppet theater of Kerala Rāma suppresses a laugh at Śūrpaṅkhā’s stu- 40  
 pidity, this he does because—as the editor points out—“loud laughter 41  
 would not be appropriate to his excellence;” S. H. Blackburn, “Hanging 42  
 43

1 in the Balance: Rāma in the Shadow Puppet Theater of Kerala,” in *Gender,*  
 2 *Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*, ed. A. Appadurai,  
 3 F. J. Korom, and M. A. Mills (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania  
 4 Press, 1991), 388.

5 13. Though the date of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which was composed through  
 6 successive incorporations, might be later than that of the *Bhagavadgītā*, it  
 7 is our contention that its aesthetic canons are not the compiler’s creation  
 8 or a recent innovation but reflect a deep-rooted tradition of the dramatic  
 9 arts that extends itself to epic literature. Significantly, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is  
 10 ascribed to the mythical sage Bharata, who is celebrated as the earliest  
 11 actor, and the treatise characterizes itself as a fifth *Veda*: that is, as the  
 12 one primeval authority. On these issues, see K. Gönc Moaçanin, “The  
 13 *Nāṭyaśāstra* as a (Distorting?) Mirror to the Epic/Purāṇic Mythic Image:  
 14 The Question of Its Dating,” in *Stages and Transitions: Temporal and His-*  
 15 *torical Frameworks in Epic and Purāṇic Literature: Proceedings of the Second*  
 16 *Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, August*  
 17 *1999*, ed. M. Brockington (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and  
 18 Arts, 2002), 221–38.

19 14. In many devotional hymns, the beautiful cheeks (*gaṇḍa, kapola*)  
 20 are compared to radiant, full-blown lotuses.

21 15. See C. Packert, *The Art of Loving Krishna: Ornamentation and*  
 22 *Devotion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 49. We are here  
 23 reminded of the first verse of Vallabhācārya’s *Madhurāṣṭaka: adharaṃ mad-*  
 24 *huraṃ vadanaṃ madhuraṃ nayanaṃ madhuraṃ hasitaṃ madhuraṃ | hr̥dayaṃ*  
 25 *madhuraṃ gamanaṃ madhuraṃ madhurādhipater akhilaṃ madhuraṃ ||*, “Sweet  
 26 the lower lip, sweet the face, sweet the eye, sweet the slight laughter, sweet  
 27 the heart, sweet the gait: everything about the Supreme Lord is sweet!”

28 16. Draupadī’s mockery of Duryodhana in the Tamil drama *Cūtutuki-*  
 29 *lurital* (“Dice Match and Disrobing”) of Iramaccantira Kavirāyar (early  
 30 nineteenth century), when she looks at him “shaking in mirth” (*kuluṅka*  
 31 *nakaittālē*) and destroying his pride, can be regarded as an example of  
 32 *upahasita* or even *apahasita*; see A. Hildebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadī. 1*  
 33 *Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra* (Chicago and London: University  
 34 of Chicago Press, 1988), 230–31.

35 17. As a popular saying (*subhāṣita*) goes: “The wise laughs with  
 36 the eyes, medium-level people laugh showing the teeth, the vilest peo-  
 37 ple laugh loudly, while the best among the silent ascetics don’t laugh”  
 38 (*caṣṭurbhyaṃ hasate vidvān dantodghāṭena madhyamāḥ | adhamā aṭṭhāsena na*  
 39 *hasanti muniśvarāḥ ||*); O. Böhtlingk, *Indische Sprüche, Sanskrit und Deutsch*  
 40 *herausgegeben*, Vol. 2 (St Petersburg, 1872–73), 1 (2221). To refer to an eye  
 41 that is “bright with a smile” the compound *smitojjala* is used.

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 43



18. See M. Ramakrishna Kavi, ed., *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata Muni. With the Commentary Abhinavabhārati by Abhinavaguptācārya* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1956<sup>2</sup>), 1:315.

19. As he writes: “[But] it is in the nature of [most] people that when they see someone else laugh they will at once begin to laugh themselves. A parallel case is the taste of the juice of pomegranate, or of the tamarind [which is sour], which [we can call] ‘infectious,’ in the sense that just by seeing that juice, other people’s mouths begin to water, [the taste, as it were], passing over [from one person to another]. In the same way laughter is infectious by its very nature, and so it is similar to dry wood [that ignites immediately];” J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan, *Aesthetic Rapture: The Rasādhyāya of the Nāṭyaśāstra in Two Volumes. Vol. 2, Notes* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate Research Institute, 1970), 86 n. 438.

20. On *rasa*, see S. Pollock, ed., *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); S. L. Schwartz, *Rasa: Performing the Divine in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). For a survey of Indian aesthetics, see A. Pelissero, *Estetica indiana* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2019). On Abhinavagupta’s aesthetics, see Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, and E. Ganser, *Theatre and Its Other: Abhinavagupta on Dance and Dramatic Acting* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

21. Masson and Patwardhan, *Aesthetic Rapture: The Rasādhyāya of the Nāṭyaśāstra in Two Volumes. Vol. 1, Text*, 50–51.

22. Along these lines, a popular saying goes: “Four things are ridiculous: the poem composed by a fool, the song of one who has no voice, the dalliance of one who is destitute of wealth, and the desire for sensual enjoyment of an old man” (*mūrkhasya kāvyakaraṇaṇi gītamaṇṭhasya | lalitamadhanasya vṛddhasya viśayavāñchā parihāsyakarāṇi catvāri ||*); Böhtlingk, *Indische Sprüche*, 3:58 (4913). On the value of *aucitya* or proportion/harmony, see V. Raghavan, *Studies on Some Concepts of the Alaṅkāra Śāstra* (Adyar: The Adyar Library, 1942), 194–257.

23. See Ramakrishna Kavi, *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata Muni. With the Commentary Abhinavabhārati by Abhinavaguptācārya*, 296.

24. See Masson and Patwardhan, *Aesthetic Rapture: The Rasādhyāya of the Nāṭyaśāstra in Two Volumes. Vol. 2, Notes*, 76–78 n. 399. It is noteworthy that even in Kampan’s *Irāmāvātāram* the erotic sentiment is mixed with mockery (*hāsyarasa*) and distaste (*jugupsā*); see Hart, *Archetypes in Classical Indian Literature and Beyond*, 173–74.

25. The noun is derived from *sa* + *ratha*, lit. “with a chariot.” *Ratha*, lit. “goer,” is derived from verbal root √ṛ and refers especially to a two-wheeled war chariot. Two horses were usually used per chariot, though there could also be three or four. With reference to Kṛṣṇa’s and Arjuna’s

1 chariot, *BhG* 1.14 speaks of white horses in the plural: they are usually  
 2 believed to be four or five, five being symbolic of the five senses. The  
 3 warrior stood on the left of the chariot or sat on a seat (the *upastha*, *garta*  
 4 or *vandhura*); the charioteer stood on the right and remained standing. On  
 5 *rathas*, see U. P. Thapliyal, *Chariot in Indian History* (New York: Routledge,  
 6 2023); A. Lal, "Chariots in Ancient Indian Warfare," in *World History*  
 7 *Encyclopedia* (accessed February 26, 2024) [https://www.worldhistory.org/](https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1269/chariots-in-ancient-indian-warfare/)  
 8 [article/1269/chariots-in-ancient-indian-warfare/](https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1269/chariots-in-ancient-indian-warfare/). On the iconography of  
 9 carriages, see J. Deloche, *Contribution to the History of the Wheeled Vehicle*  
 10 *in India* (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry—École Française  
 11 d'Extrême-Orient, 2014), 13–48. On the ethics and philosophy of warfare  
 12 in Vedic and Epic India, see K. Roy, *Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in*  
 13 *South Asia: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University  
 14 Press, 2012), 13–39.

15 26. Pārthasārathi is a well-known epithet of Kṛṣṇa. In the *Śrīkṛṣṇasa-*  
 16 *hasranāmastotra*, the hymn of the thousand names of lord Kṛṣṇa, at verse  
 17 169 he is praised as "the one who is devoted to the office of charioteer of  
 18 the son of Pṛthā" (*pārthasārathyanirataḥ*). In the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa leads  
 19 Arjuna's chariot throughout the duration of the battle; see M. Biardeau,  
 20 "Nala et Damayantī. Héros épiques. Part 2," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 28 (1985):  
 21 6. In his role as charioteer, he transforms a weapon into a garland, seems  
 22 to make the sun set, and cures wounds; see E. W. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*  
 23 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 215. J. A. B. van Buitenen aptly notes:  
 24 "This role [of charioteer] assumed by Kṛṣṇa, because of the conventional  
 25 camaraderie between warrior and driver, provides the intimacy which makes  
 26 his exhortations possible and appropriate;" van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā*  
 27 *in the Mahābhārata*, 5. Kṛṣṇa *bhaktas* revere their lord as the Sanātanasārathi,  
 28 the eternal charioteer, who directs them toward their ultimate destination.  
 29 Representing the intellect (*buddhi*) in its pristine purity, he is regarded as  
 30 the charioteer of everyone's chariot, i.e., of each and every individual *jīva*;  
 31 on the imagery of the chariot (*rathakalpanā*), see *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3.3–6, 9.

32 27. On this manual containing a wealth of ritual and iconographic  
 33 prescriptions on Viṣṇu's icons, Gérard Colas observes: "The iconographic  
 34 and architectural teachings of Vaikhānasa texts like the *Vimānārcanakaḥ*  
 35 (*Marīcisamhitā*) remained a major source of reference even for 20<sup>th</sup>-century  
 36 temple builders and sculptors;" see G. Colas, "Vaikhānasa," in *Brill's*  
 37 *Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar,  
 38 and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018; [https://referenceworks.brillonline.](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)  
 39 [com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)), 9. On this important  
 40 source, see G. Colas, *Le temple selon Marīci* (Pondichéry: Institut Français  
 41 d'Indologie, 1986).

42  
 43

28. In *BhG* 1.20 and often in the epic, Arjuna is referred to as “monkey-bannered” (*kapidhvaja*). It is assumed that this monkey is none other than Hanumān, the son of the wind god Vāyu and of the *apsaras* Añjanā. Indeed, Hanumān had promised Bhīma that he would place himself on the banner of Arjuna’s chariot, and his presence terrified the Kauravas. From his perch on the hero’s flag, the monkey god—extolled as the exemplary *bhakta*—enjoyed the privilege of hearing the *Bhagavadgītā* and witnessing the revelation of Kṛṣṇa’s cosmic form. Hanumān is the paradigm of *dāsyabhakti*, in which one considers himself/herself as the slave/servant of god. On these issues, see P. Lutgendorf, *Hanuman’s Tale: The Messages of a Divine Monkey* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 231–33.

29. Arjuna’s bow is the *gāṇḍīva* (*BhG* 1.30), which was made of the backbone of a rhinoceros (*gāṇḍīmaya*). *BhG* 11.33 refers to Arjuna as an ambidextrous archer (*savyasācin*) and *BhG* 18.78 as the bowman (*dhanurdharas*). On the Indian bow, see M. B. Emenau, “The Composite Bow in India,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 97, no. 1 (1953): 77–87. On the science of archery, see P. Zarrilli, “Martial Arts (*Dhanuroeda*),” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018; <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism>).

30. T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography, Vol. 1, Part 1* (Madras: Law Printing House, 1914), 211. The *vyākhyānamudrā* is the gesture of teaching. In his *Vishṇu-Kośha*, S. K. Ramachandra Rao adds a few more details:

Pārtha-sārathi: representing Kṛṣṇa as a teacher of Arjuna on the battlefield. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, both two armed, are shown here alongside a chariot (*ratha*). Kṛṣṇa is shown as about to get into the chariot; his right leg planted on the ground (*dakṣha-pādām sthitam*), and the left leg lifted up and placed on the rampart of the chariot (*vāmam-uddhṛtya ratha-bhittau samsthāpya*). He has his right hand in the posture of teaching or exposition (*vyākhyāna-nirṇāyaṅguli-mudrā*). Or he may be shown as holding the whip in one hand and the reins of the horses in the other (*yasṭi-pāsān gṛhītva*). Arjuna is shown as standing on the ground with his hands in the gesture of supplication; a bow is tucked up in his arms (*pārtham sachāpam prāñjalīkṛtya adhah-sthale sthitam*).

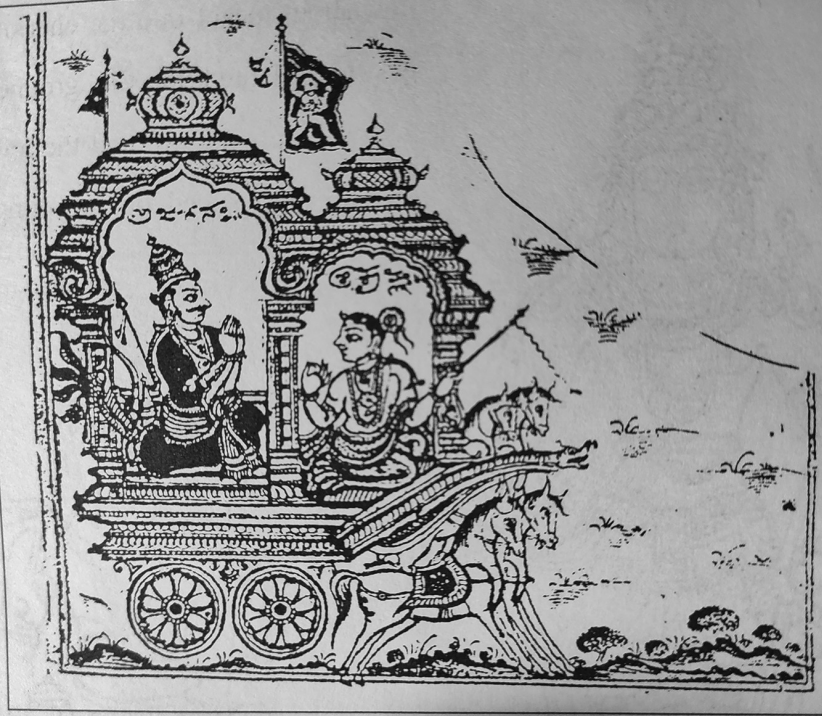
(S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *Vishṇu-Kośha* [Bangalore: Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1998], 265–67)

1 The author further specifies:

2  
3 *Vimānārchanā-kalpa* (*Paṭala* 79) prescribes that Kṛṣṇa as  
4 Pārthasārathi must be represented as two-armed, holding the  
5 reins of the horses and a whip (*chāpa-yantra-yashṭi-pāśam gṛhītṵvā*)  
6 mounted upon a chariot (*rathārūḍham*); but the right foot is  
7 firmly placed on the floor of the chariot, while the left foot  
8 is raised and placed on the railings of the chariot (*dakṣhiṇam*  
9 *pādām sthitam vāmam uddhṛtya ratha-bhittau saṁsthāpya*). His  
10 right hand is in the gesture of counseling (*dakṣhiṇa-hastena*  
11 *vyāsa-nirṇayāṅguli-mudrayā saṁnyuktam*). Arjuna must be shown  
12 to the god's left, sitting on the floor of the chariot, joining his  
13 hands in supplication (*vāme prāñjali-kṛtyādhas-sthale sthitam*).  
14 (*Ibid.*, 275)

15 Here is the drawing that accompanies Ramachandra Rao's description  
16 of the Pārthasārathi icon (*ibid.*, 267):

17  
18  
19 Figure 4.22. Drawing of the Pārthasārathi icon. *Source*: S. K. Ramachandra  
20 Rao, *Vishṇu-Kośha*. Bangalore: Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1998.



Apart from other differences, it should be noted that in the iconography Arjuna is not always shown to the god's left.

31. See *ibid.*, 242, 275.

32. For instance, in contemporary India the diplomat G. Pārthasārathi, the theatrical author Indra Pārthasārathi, and the litterateurs N. Pārthasārathi and R. Pārthasārathi, all hailing from Tamil Nadu; see Ch. Jaffrelot, ed., *L'Inde contemporaine de 1950 à nos jours* (Paris: Fayard / CERL, 2006), 353, 796, 855, 857.

33. On Pārthasārathi Miśra, see K. H. Potter, *Philosophy of Pūrva-mīmāṃsā. Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, Vol. 16 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2014), 364–90.

34. On this famous temple highly revered by the Ālvār saints and renovated at the time of the Pallava dynasty, see <http://sriparthasarathytemple.tnhrcce.in/history-parthasarathy.html>. On the politics of worship at this sacred site, see A. Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Other South Indian temples worth mentioning are the small sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Venugopāla Pārthasārathi Temple in Chengam, about 34 km west of Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu; the old ninth-century Pārthasārathi Temple in Parthivapuram, c. 50 km north-west of Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu and 50 km south-east of Trivandrum, Kerala's capital; and the Pārthasārathi Temple in Aranmula near Pattanamthitta in Kerala, also believed to be quite old, on the left bank of the Pampa River, which hosts a famous annual snake-boat race. On the Pārthasārathi Temple in Parthivapuram, see H. Sarkar, *An Architectural Survey of Temples of Kerala* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1978), 135–38.

35. S. K. Ramachandra Rao shows three drawings of Pārthasārathi icons, two located in Kerala (in the Thali temple, Kozhikode District, and in the Ananthapur temple of Kumble, Kasaragod District) and one in Karnataka (in the Viṣṇumūrti temple of Kodipadi, Mangalore); Ramachandra Rao, *Vishṇu-Kosha*, 266, 268. It is noteworthy that Sir Monier Monier-Williams (1819–1899) observed that Pārthasārathi is the title under which Kṛṣṇa is worshipped at Madras, today's Chennai, and viewed it as a merely local epithet; M. Monier-Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India. An Account of the Religions of the Indian Peoples, Based on a Life's Study of Their Literature and on Personal Investigations in Their Own Country. Part 1: Vedism, Brāhmanism, and Hindūism* (London: John Murray, 1883), 107.

36. See Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 211–12; Ramachandra Rao, *Vishṇu-Kosha*, 268. The image of Kṛṣṇa as Pārthasārathi, with conch in the right hand and the left hand in *varadamudrā*, is made of black granite—according to legend it was brought here by ṛṣi Atreya—with images of his wife Rukmiṇī and of his devoted friend and powerful warrior Sātyaki standing to his right and left respectively, while his elder brother



- 1 Balarāma is to the right of Rukmiṇī. Images of his son Pradyumna and  
 2 of his grandson Aniruddha are also present in the inner sanctum.
- 3 37. In this hand gesture the thumb is held perpendicular to the palm,  
 4 and the index finger is bent forward to touch the tip of the thumb. The  
 5 remaining three fingers are held close together vertically above the palm.
- 6 38. See H. Krishna Sastri, *South-Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses*  
 7 (Madras: Madras Government Press, 1916), 49; fig. 31. See also C. Siv-  
 8 aramamurti, *Rishis in Indian Art and Literature* (New Delhi: Kanak, 1981),  
 9 234; figs. 8 and 9.
- 10 39. See <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/parthasarathi>. On the  
 11 classical gestures used in Hindu dance and drama, see M. Ghosh, *Nan-  
 12 dikeśvara's Abhinayadarpaṇam: A Manual of Gesture and Posture Used in  
 13 Hindu Dance and Drama*. English Translation, Notes and the Text Critically  
 14 Edited for the First Time from Original Manuscripts with Introduction  
 15 (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957<sup>2</sup>).
- 16 40. See S. R. Balasubrahmanyam, *Early Chola Temples: Parantaka I to  
 17 Rajaraja I (A. D. 907–985)* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1971), 34.
- 18 41. See S. Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture* (London: Oxford University  
 19 Press, 1933), 197–98, plate XLVII.
- 20 42. See B. Preciado-Solis, *The Kṛṣṇa Cycle in the Purāṇas: Themes and  
 21 Motifs in a Heroic Saga* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984).
- 22 43. John Stratton Hawley, who surveyed eight hundred panels of  
 23 Indian sculpture dating from 500 to 1500 CE in which Kṛṣṇa is the subject,  
 24 found out that only three refer to the scene of the *Bhagavadgītā* and just  
 25 a few more depict scenes from the *Mahābhārata*; J. S. Hawley, "Krishna's  
 26 Cosmic Victories," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1979):  
 27 201–21. In the temple complex of Pattadakal (seventh-eighth century CE)  
 28 in northern Karnataka, the episode of the *Bhagavadgītā* is sculpted on  
 29 a column of the Virūpākṣa temple, see [https://www.alamy.com/bhaga-  
 30 vad-gita-narrative-sculpture-on-a-column-in-the-virupaksha-temple-pat-  
 31 tadakal-1885-photo-image218375144.html](https://www.alamy.com/bhagavad-gita-narrative-sculpture-on-a-column-in-the-virupaksha-temple-pattadakal-1885-photo-image218375144.html).
- 32 44. See A. Truschke, "The Mughal Book of War: A Persian Translation  
 33 of the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and  
 34 the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 500–520. For the Persian translation of  
 35 the *Bhagavadgītā* sponsored by Prince Dārā Šikōh (1615–1659), that is, the  
 36 *Āb-i zindagī* or "The Water of Life," see M. R. Jalālī Nā'īnī, ed., *Bhagavad  
 37 Gītā. Surūd-i ilāhī* (Tehran: Tahūrī, 1980). For an overview of the extant  
 38 Persian translations, see F. Mujtabai, *Aspects of Hindu-Muslim Cultural  
 39 Relations* (Delhi: Zakir Husain Educational and Cultural Foundation, 1978),  
 40 74–75. See also R. Vassie, *Persian Interpretations of the Bhagavadgītā in the  
 41 Mughal Period: With Special Reference to the Sufi Version of 'Abd al-Rahmān*  
 42  
 43



- Chishtī (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1988); M. L. Roychaudhary, "The *Bhagavad Gītā* in Persian," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 1956*, 19 (1956): 260–63.
45. See A. Bhalla and C. P. Deval, *The Gita: Mewari Miniature Painting (1680–1698) by Allah Baksh* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2019).
46. This school of painting of the Rājasthānī rulers is distinctive and should not be subsumed under the broader classification of Rājput paintings.
47. Bhalla and Deval, *The Gita: Mewari Miniature Painting (1680–1698) by Allah Baksh*, 14.
48. See A. L. Dallapiccola and J. Jain, eds., *Paithan Paintings: The Epic World of the Chitrakathis Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art* (Mumbai: Marg, 1978); *Chitrakathi: Folk Painting of Paithan* (Pune: Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, 1996). See also M. Gaonkar, "Contemporary Practices of *Chitrakathi* in the Twenty-first Century Art Market," *The Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design* 2, no. 2 (2018): 40–46.
49. See U. King, "The Iconography of the *Bhagavad Gītā*," *Journal of Dharma* 7, 2 (1982): 146–63. By the same author, see also "Some Reflections on Sociological Approaches to the Study of Modern Hinduism," *Numen* 36, no. 1 (1989): 72–97 (85).
50. And also through narrative retellings such as the *Arjunopākhyāna* in the sixth book of the *Mokṣopāya* (c. 950 CE); see T. Cohen, "Arjunopākhyāna: An Idealist Non-dualistic Translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*," *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 2, no. 2 (2019): 122–52.
51. The *Bhagavadgītā* is a secret teaching. Words such as *rahasya* and especially *guhya*, which both mean "secret," are often found in the poem; see *BhG* 4.3, 9.1, 10.38, 11.1, 15.20, 18.63–64, 18.68, 18.75.
52. According to the *Mahābhārata*'s own framing account, Vyāsa's pupil Vaiśampāyana was the first to recite the text—including the *Bhagavadgītā*—to King Janamejaya at the great snake sacrifice performed to avenge Parikṣit's death by snakebite.
53. What Richard H. Davis aptly calls a "meta-*Gītā*"; Davis, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography*, 65–71. On this vernacular manifesto, see C. L. Novetzke, *The Quotidian Revolution: Vernacularization, Religion, and the Premodern Public Sphere in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 213–84. Through the centuries, the quintessence of Maharashtrian *advaitabhakti* spirituality is represented by Kṛṣṇaism and the tradition of the Vārkarī movement of poet-saints (*santkāvī*) centered in Pandharpur; see E. R. Sand, "Pandharpur and Vitthal," *Oxford Bibliographies in Hinduism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019; <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>).

- 1 54. A diadem. *BhG* 11.35 presents Arjuna as the diademed one (*kirīṭin*).
- 2 55. *Panicum Dactylon*, a kind of grass.
- 3 56. See S. Kramrisch, trans., *The Vishnudharmottara (Part III). A Treatise*
- 4 *on Indian Painting and Image-Making* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press,
- 5 1928<sup>2</sup>), 116.
- 6 57. See P. Banerjee, *The Life of Kṛṣṇa in Indian Art* (New Delhi:
- 7 National Museum, 1978), 48.
- 8 58. As stated in *BhG* 11.2, one of Kṛṣṇa's epithets is *kamalapatrākṣa*.
- 9 59. See J. Leroy Davidson, *Art of the Indian Subcontinent from Los*
- 10 *Angeles Collections* (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1968), 87; fig. 131.
- 11 60. See King, "The Iconography of the *Bhagavad Gītā*," 157.
- 12 61. On the interpretations of the *Bhagavadgītā* within neo-Hinduism,
- 13 see R. N. Minor, ed., *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavad Gita* (Albany:
- 14 State University of New York Press, 1986). See also W. Halbfass, ed.,
- 15 *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta*
- 16 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 258–70, 273–89, 296–302,
- 17 307–9, 337–48. On Charles Wilkins and his translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*,
- 18 see J. Patterson, *Religion, Enlightenment and Empire: British Interpretations*
- 19 *of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University
- 20 Press, 2021), 239–62; R. H. Davis, "Wilkins, Kasinatha, Hastings, and the
- 21 First English '*Bhagavad Gītā*,'" *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 19,
- 22 no. 1–2 (2015): 39–57.
- 23 62. The covers and the many illustrations of the *Bhagavadgītā* pub-
- 24 lished by the International Krishna Consciousness Movement are a case
- 25 in point.
- 26 63. See for instance V. G. Vitsaxis, *Hindu Epics, Myths and Legends*
- 27 *in Popular Illustrations* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977), 57. On
- 28 these issues, see S. Inglis, "*Citrakathā*, Paintings, and Popular Prints," in
- 29 *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A.
- 30 Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018; [https://referenceworks.](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)
- 31 [brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)).
- 32 64. See F. W. Pritchett, "The World of *Amar Chitra Katha*," in *Media*
- 33 *and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. L. A. Babb and S. S.
- 34 Wadley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 85, 96–97.
- 35 65. The site of Kurukṣetra is located in the northeastern part of the
- 36 state of Haryana, at a distance of approximately 160 km from Delhi. For
- 37 an appreciation of the Shri Krishna Museum, see [https://www.youtube.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL7AMPgj9U4&t=1106s)
- 38 [com/watch?v=YL7AMPgj9U4&t=1106s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL7AMPgj9U4&t=1106s).
- 39 66. See A. Bharati, "Ritualistic Tolerance and Ideological Rigour:
- 40 The Paradigm of the Expatriate Hindus in East Africa," *Contributions to*
- 41 *Indian Sociology* 10, no. 2 (1976): 341–65.
- 42
- 43

67. On these issues, see R. H. Davis, "The Greatness of the *Gītā*, as Icon and Mantra," in Theodor, *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction*, 94–103. By the same author, see *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

68. On Indian classical traditions of dance, see A. Satkunaratham, "Dance: Classical Tradition," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018; <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism>). See also K. Ambrose and R. Gopal, *Classical Dances and Costumes of India* (London: A & C Black, 1983<sup>2</sup> [1950]).

69. On folk interpretations of the *Mahābhārata*, see A. Hildebeitel, *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadī among Rajputs, Muslims, and Dalits* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999). On the *Pāṇḍav līlā*, a ritual dramatization of the *Mahābhārata* performed in the Garhwal region of the Himalayas, see W. S. Sax, "Fathers, Sons, and Rhinoceroses: Masculinity and Violence in the *Pāṇḍav līlā*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 2 (1997): 278–93.

70. N. Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathura* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 259.

71. For examples of the contemporary recitation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80D8b3a0Bis>; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VHuO7F\\_q7E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VHuO7F_q7E). It takes approximately two hours and forty minutes to collectively chant the entire poem. The recitation is typically performed during the festival of *Gītājayantī* or *Gītāmahotsav*, the supposed day on which Kṛṣṇa imparted his teaching to Arjuna: it falls on the eleventh day of the waxing moon (*śukla ekādaśī*) of the lunar month of *mārgaśīrṣa* (December-January). In 2024, the festival will be celebrated on December 11. The *Bhagavadgītā* is worshipped not only as a textual object but as a goddess (*devī*). *Gītā* temples have been built in her honor and their walls are inscribed with the full text of the poem in Sanskrit.

72. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 363. The term *gīta* refers to vocal music, as in the case of treatises such as the *Gītāprakāśa* and the *Gītālaṅkāra*; see N. Biondi, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Alain Daniélou's Collection at the Giorgio Cini Foundation* (Udine: NOTA, 2017), 69–73.

73. On *BhG* 9.14 and the relevance of *kīrtana*, the collective singing of Kṛṣṇa's glory, see for instance Swami Mukundananda's commentary: <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/9/verse/14>. *Kīrtana* is presented as the second of the nine forms of *bhakti* in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.5.23, being preceded by *śravaṇa* (hearing the holy word) and followed by *smaraṇa* (recollection of the divine name); on the practice of *kīrtana*, see G. L. Beck,

1 “Kīrtan and Bhajan,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A.  
 2 Jacobsen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018; [https://](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)  
 3 [referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)).  
 4 On the *Gītā* genre, see J. Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*,  
 5 vol. 2, fasc. 1 of *A History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harras-  
 6 sowitz, 1977), 271–86. On the performativity of a sacred text, see the case  
 7 study of P. Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmcaritmānas of*  
 8 *Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). On the function  
 9 and creative role of text recitation, see A. Malik, “Bards and Reciters,”  
 10 in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H. Basu,  
 11 A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018; [https://referenceworks.](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)  
 12 [brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)); F. Orsini and  
 13 K. B. Schofield, eds., *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance*  
 14 *in North India* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book, 2015).

15 74. On the rationale behind Kṛṣṇa’s theophany, see G. R. Ashton,  
 16 “The Soteriology of Role-Play in the *Bhagavad Gītā*,” *Asian Philosophy* 23,  
 17 no. 1 (2013): 1–23. The totalizing metaphysical connotation of *viśvarūpa* as  
 18 divine “omniform”—Kṛṣṇa being also extolled as *sahasrabāhu*, “he who  
 19 has a thousand arms” (*BhG* 11.46)—is understood to have been vital to  
 20 the development of multiform iconography; see D. M. Srinivasan, *Many*  
 21 *Heads, Arms and Eyes* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 137–41.

22 75. For an ethnographic analysis of danced *Bhagavadgītās* and the  
 23 dancers’ effort to convey abstract ideas such as *saṃsāra*, the *ātman*, and  
 24 the performance of one’s duty devoid of attachment (*naiṣkarmya*), see  
 25 K. C. Zubko, “Dancing the *Bhagavadgītā*: Embodiment as Commentary,”  
 26 *Journal of Hindu Studies* 7 (2014): 392–417.

27 76. On these issues, see Narayan, *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels*.  
 28 On the performance of *kīrtans* in contemporary India, with particular  
 29 reference to the Marāṭhī cultural area, see A. C. Schultz, *Singing a Hindu*  
 30 *Nation: Marathi Devotional Performance and Nationalism* (New York: Oxford  
 31 University Press, 2013); G. N. Dandekar, “The Last Kīrtan of Gadge  
 32 Baba,” in *The Experience of Hinduism: Essays on Religion in Maharashtra*,  
 33 ed. E. Zelliott and M. Berntsen (Albany: State University of New York  
 34 Press, 1988), 223–50.

35 77. See M. Bush Ashton-Sikora, R. P. Sikora, A. Purushothaman,  
 36 A. Harindranath, *The Royal Temple Theater of Krishnattam* (New Delhi: D.  
 37 K. Printworld, 2016<sup>2</sup> [1993]), 197–98. Kṛṣṇāṭṭam is subdivided in eight  
 38 plays: *Avataram* (in fourteen scenes), *Kaliyamardanam* (in eleven scenes),  
 39 *Rasakrida* (in four scenes), *Kamsavadham* (in twelve scenes), *Svayamvaram*  
 40 (in thirteen scenes), *Banayuddham* (in eight scenes), *Vividavadhnam* (in seven  
 41 scenes), and *Svargarohanam* (in five scenes); see [http://www.dvaipayana.](http://www.dvaipayana.net/krishnanattam/krish_summary.html)  
 42 [net/krishnanattam/krish\\_summary.html](http://www.dvaipayana.net/krishnanattam/krish_summary.html). Kerala has a long and complex  
 43

- history involving enactments of *Mahābhārata* narratives via the Kūṭiyāṭṭam 1  
tradition of Sanskrit drama, which emphasizes the devotional element; see 2  
B. M. Sullivan, “Kerala’s *Mahābhārata* on Stage: Texts and Performative 3  
Practices in Kūṭiyāṭṭam Drama,” *Journal of Hindu Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010): 4  
124–42. On these issues, see also N. Shapiro Hawley and S. S. Pillai, 5  
eds., *Many Mahābhāratas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 6  
2021). 7
78. See M. Stella, *The Significance of the Mūla Beras in the Hindu Temples 8  
of Tamil Nadu with Special Reference to Bharatanatyam and Hindu Iconography 9*(PhD diss., Tiruchirappalli: Kalai Kaviri College of Fine Arts, 2009), 203. 10
79. An Italian-born Odissi and Chhau dancer based in Bhubaneswar, 11  
Orissa, in 2006 Ileana Citaristi was the first dancer of foreign origin to be 12  
conferred the *Padma Shri* award for her contributions to Odissi dance. Her 13  
teacher was the famous Kelucharan Mohapatra (1926–2004), on whom she 14  
wrote a biography; I. Citaristi, *The Making of a Guru: Kelucharan Mohapatra, 15  
His Life and Times* (Delhi: Manohar, 2005). 16
80. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTp7YFEHD3w>. 17
81. Ileana Citaristi’s personal communication via email, May 16, 2021. 18  
For an appreciation of her interpretation of *hāsyarasa*, see [https://www.you- 19  
tube.com/watch?v=eVbMhsPtIVs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVbMhsPtIVs). Also noteworthy is the solo dance recital 20  
of the *Bhagavadgītā* by the Bharatanāṭyām artist Padma Subrahmanyam; 21  
see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUaywzaDug> (in particular her 22  
interpretation of *BhG* 2.2–7 and of Kṛṣṇa’s smile at minutes 15–18). 23
82. See C. A. Robinson, *Interpretations of the Bhagavad-Gītā and Images 24  
of the Hindu Tradition: The Song of the Lord* (Routledge: London and New 25  
York, 2006), 145–46. 26
83. See Rosen, *Vaiṣṇavism: Contemporary Scholars Discuss the Gauḍīya 27  
Tradition*, 54. 28
84. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GODqBiI3pgs>; Robinson, 29  
*Interpretations of the Bhagavad-Gītā and Images of the Hindu Tradition*, 151. 30
85. On the rendering of the *Bhagavadgītā*, see A. Malinar, “The 31  
*Bhagavadgītā* in the *Mahābhārata* TV Serial: Domestic Drama and Dharmic 32  
Solutions,” in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Tradi- 33  
tions and National Identity*, ed. V. Dalmia and H. von Stietencron (New 34  
Delhi: SAGE, 1995), 442–67. For a survey of actors who have played 35  
the part of Kṛṣṇa on Indian television, see [https://www.youtube.com/ 36  
watch?v=vwuEHxSw9aM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwuEHxSw9aM). 37
86. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwFDQWauIjw>. 38
87. We are reminded of Ninian Smart’s model of the six dimensions 39  
of religion—doctrinal, mythic, ethical, ritual, experiential, and social—as 40  
a useful device for trying to get a rounded picture of religion; see N. 41  
Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (New York: Charles Scribner’s 42  
43



1 Sons, 1976<sup>2</sup>); N. Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human*  
2 *Beliefs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983).

3 88. See <https://youtu.be/NM-CespJ7Do>.

4 89. An instance can be found in *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 5.1 which refers  
5 to the wry smile of Makha who is none other than Viṣṇu and the per-  
6 sonification of sacrifice; see C. Malamoud, *La Danse des pierres: Études*  
7 *sur la scène sacrificielle dans l'Inde ancienne* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005),  
8 36–37, 53, 170 n. 18.

9 90. As Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) writes in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,  
10 at the beginning of chapter 14: “But youth smiles without any reason. It  
11 is one of its chiefest charms.”

12 91. Yet it is noteworthy that the biographical traits of Kṛṣṇa in the  
13 *Viṣṇuparvan* of the *Harivaṃśa* (c. second–third centuries CE) are essen-  
14 tially the same as the ones we find in the *Ghaṭa Jātaka* (454) of the Pāli  
15 *Suttapiṭaka*; see [https://obo.genaud.net/dhamma-vinaya/pts/kd/jat/jat.4/](https://obo.genaud.net/dhamma-vinaya/pts/kd/jat/jat.4/jat.4.454.rous.pts.htm)  
16 [jat.4.454.rous.pts.htm](https://obo.genaud.net/dhamma-vinaya/pts/kd/jat/jat.4/jat.4.454.rous.pts.htm).

17 92. For an English translation, see L. Siegel, trans., *Gītāgovinda: Love*  
18 *Songs of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa by Jayadeva* (New York: Clay Sanskrit Library, 2009).

19 93. For an overview, see A. Malinar, “Kṛṣṇa,” in *Brill's Encyclopedia*  
20 *of Hinduism*. Vol. 1: *Regions, Pilgrimages, Deities*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen, H.  
21 Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 605–19. See also  
22 G. L. Beck, ed., *Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a*  
23 *Hindu Deity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). On the  
24 textualization of Kṛṣṇa and kṛṣṇaite devotion in a Persian translation of  
25 the tenth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, see S. Pellò, “Black Curls in  
26 a Mirror: The Eighteenth-Century Persian Kṛṣṇa of Lāla Amānat Rāy's  
27 *Jilwa-yi zāt* and the Tongue of Bīdīl,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies*  
28 22, no. 1 (2018): 71–103.

29 94. Also known as Braj, it is the area surrounding the ancient city  
30 of Mathurā on the banks of the Yamunā River. It is here that Kṛṣṇa grew  
31 up, played among the *gopīs*, and accomplished many extraordinary feats.  
32 It includes his specific home of Vṛndāvana. The Gauḍīyas view the earthly  
33 Vraja as coterminous with the heavenly Vraja, where Kṛṣṇa is thought to  
34 play eternally with Rādhā and the milkmaids.

35 95. Dvārakā, the capital of Kṛṣṇa's kingdom, is one of India's seven  
36 holy cities and *tīrthas*.

37 96. See S. S. Pillai, *Krishna's Mahabharatas: Devotional Retellings of an*  
38 *Epic Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024). Herein, the author  
39 examines over forty retellings in eleven different regional South Asian  
40 languages composed over a period of nine hundred years (800–1700 CE).

41 97. Lit. “increasing cattle.” The name of a hill in the Vraja region  
42 near Mathurā.

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98. For a general examination of Kṛṣṇa's laughter, see Siegel, *Laughing Matters*, 339–72. 1  
2
99. For instance, we are reminded of the icon of Viṭṭhala/Viṭhobā 3  
of Pandharpur, the main form under which Kṛṣṇa is worshipped in the 4  
Marāṭhī cultural area. The legend goes that the god decided to remain 5  
in this locale because of the extraordinary filial piety (*mātāpitr̥bhakti*) of 6  
a saintly man called Puṇḍalīka. While he was in search of his spouse 7  
Rukmiṇī, the god came to Puṇḍalīka's house, and the latter asked him to 8  
wait at his threshold until he finished massaging the feet of his parents. 9  
Thus in the iconography Viṭṭhala/Viṭhobā is represented standing on a 10  
brick with his hands on his hips and a compassionate smile on his lips, 11  
while waiting for Puṇḍalīka to come and receive him. On this famous 12  
story, see E. R. Sand, "Mātāpitr̥bhakti: Some Aspects of the Development 13  
of the Puṇḍalīka Legend in Marathi Literature," in *Devotional Literature in 14  
South Asia: Current Research, 1985–1988*, ed. R. S. McGregor (Cambridge: 15  
Cambridge University Press, 1992), 138–47. On Kṛṣṇa in the Marāṭhī 16  
cultural area, see also A. Feldhaus, "Kṛṣṇa and the Kṛṣṇas: Kṛṣṇa in the 17  
Mahānubhāva Pantheon," in *Bhakti in Current Research, 1979–1982*, ed. M. 18  
Thiel-Horstmann (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1983), 133–42. 19
100. For an introductory survey of Kṛṣṇa's iconography, see W. 20  
M. Spink, *Krishnamandala: A Devotional Theme in Indian Art* (Ann Arbor: 21  
University of Michigan, 1971). 22
101. In a comparative perspective, see K. Johnston Largen, *Baby 23  
Krishna, Infant Christ: A Comparative Theology of Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: 24  
Orbis, 2011). 25
102. On the icon of child Kṛṣṇa stealing butter in literature and 26  
in the arts, in Sūr Dās's *Sūr Sāgar* and in the *rāslīlās*, see J. S. Hawley, 27  
*Krishna, the Butter Thief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983). 28
103. See A. Okada, *Sculptures indiennes du musée Guimet* (Paris: 29  
Trésors du musée Guimet—Réunion des musées nationaux, 2000), 211–12. 30
104. On this episode, see W. D. O'Flaherty, "Inside and Outside the 31  
Mouth of God: The Boundary Between Myth and Reality," *Daedalus* 109, 32  
no. 2 (1980): 93–125. For a full English translation, see W. D. O'Flaherty, 33  
*Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook Translated from the Sanskrit* (Harmondsworth, 34  
UK: Penguin, 1975), 218–21. This story is based on an earlier *Mahābhārata* 35  
myth (3.183–90, later taken up by *Matsya Purāṇa* 165.1–22, 166.13–67): the 36  
sage Mārkaṇḍeya was floating in the cosmic ocean after the dissolution of 37  
the universe, when he came upon a young boy sleeping under a banyan 38  
tree. He entered the mouth of the boy—who was Viṣṇu—and saw within 39  
him the entire universe, whereupon he came out of Viṣṇu's mouth. On 40  
these issues, see A. J. Gail, "Kṛṣṇa on the Banyan Leaf (*vaṭa-patra-śayana*)," 41  
*Pandanus* 8, no. 1 (2014): 31–45. 42  
43

- 1 105. Lit. “long-haired one.” An epithet of Kṛṣṇa which is also found  
2 in *BhG* 1.31, 2.54, 3.1, 10.14, 11.35, 18.76.
- 3 106. Līlāsuka, *Sri Krishna Karnamrita*, trans. M. K. Acharya (Madras:  
4 V. Ramaswamy Sastrulu & Sons, 1948), 92–93. In the book’s frontispiece,  
5 titled *Vivṛta-mukha Viṣvarūpa Darsanam*, is a nice image of child Kṛṣṇa  
6 showing the universe in his mouth to his awestruck foster mother. Līlāsuka  
7 Bilvamaṅgala also wrote the *Bilvamaṅgalastava*; see D. Wujastyk, “The Love  
8 of Kṛṣṇa in Poems and Paintings,” in *Pearls of the Orient: Asian Treasures*  
9 *from the Wellcome Library*, ed. N. Allan (London and Chicago: Serindia,  
10 2003), 87–105.
- 11 107. On the origins of Kṛṣṇa Venugopāla and his link with Arjuna as  
12 master of music and dance in the *Mahābhārata*, see the insightful remarks  
13 of Biardeau, *Études de mythologie hindoue*, 285–86.
- 14 108. On the call of Kṛṣṇa’s flute, see D. R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the*  
15 *Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa, Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu*  
16 *Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 32–41.
- 17 109. F. Wilson, ed., *The Love of Krishna*. The *Kṛṣṇakarnāmṛta* of Līlāsuka  
18 Bilvamaṅgala (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 110.
- 19 110. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 207.
- 20 111. Sathya Sai Baba, *Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 1. Discourses of Bhagawan*  
21 *Sri Sathya Sai Baba (Delivered during 1953–1960)* (Prasanthi Nilayam: Sri  
22 Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust, 2015), 22.
- 23 112. See D. R. Kinsley, *The Divine Player (A Study of Kṛṣṇa Līlā)* (Delhi:  
24 Motilal Banarsidass, 1996).
- 25 113. Lit. “the forest of Vṛndā.” The forest area on the banks of  
26 the Yamunā River in which Kṛṣṇa is said to have grown up, located in  
27 the western part of the Mathurā district of Uttar Pradesh. The name is  
28 frequently used as a synonym of the surrounding region of Vraja/Braj.
- 29 114. For an introduction to Kṛṣṇa’s most beloved *gopī*, see H. Pauwels,  
30 “Rādhā,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacobsen,  
31 H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018; [https://refer-](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)  
32 [enceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)). See  
33 also D. M. Wulff, “Rādhā: Consort and Conquerer of Krishna,” in *Devī:*  
34 *Goddesses of India*, ed. J. S. Hawley and D. M. Wulff (Berkeley: University  
35 of California Press, 1996), 109–33; D. R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions*  
36 *of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: University  
37 of California Press, 1988), 81–94.
- 38 115. See D. V. Mason, *Theatre and Religion on Krishna’s Stage: Per-*  
39 *forming in Vrindavan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); J. S. Hawley,  
40 *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan* (Princeton, NJ:  
41 Princeton University Press, 1981). See also M. H. Case, *Seeing Krishna:*  
42  
43

- The Religious World of a Brahman Family in Vrindaban* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). 1  
2
116. A *nāga* king who lived in the Yamunā River near Vṛndāvana. On *nāgas*, see G. Lange, “Cobra Deities and Divine Cobras: The Ambiguous Animality of Nāgas,” *Religions* 10, no. 8 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10080454>. 3  
4  
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6
117. See C. Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, eds., trans., *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Purāṇas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 116–17. 7  
8  
9
118. *Ibid.*, 115. 10
119. Kinsley, *The Divine Player*, 217–18. Within the Caitanya tradition, a fine example of *līlāsmaraṇa* or remembering the sport of one’s chosen deity is the sixteenth-century text *Govindalīlāmṛta*, the “Ambrosia of the Sport of Govinda,” of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja; see N. Delmonico, “How to Partake in the Love of Kṛṣṇa,” in *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. D. S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 244–68. 11  
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120. See for instance *Ġitagovinda* 1.4.1: “[Kṛṣṇa] is wearing forest garlands, a yellow garment, and has his blue body smeared with the paste of sandalwood. He is always smiling, and his cheeks are adorned with jeweled ear-ornaments, which move during his play” (*candana-carcita-nīla-kalevara-pīta-vasana-vana-mālī | keli-calan-maṇi-kunḍala-maṇḍita-gaṇḍa-yuga-smīta-śālī ||*); M. M. Deshpande, *Samskṛta-Subodhinī. A Sanskrit Primer* (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 2007), 275–76. 17  
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121. Wilson, *The Love of Krishna*, 130. 25
122. A case in point is the smile of the goddess: she is celebrated as *mandasmitamukhāmbujā*, “she who displays a tender smile on her lotus face;” see C. Mackenzie Brown, *The Devī Gītā. The Song of the Goddess: A Translation, Annotation, and Commentary* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 64, 134, 329. 26  
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123. Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 327 (chap. 20, v. 35). Moreover: “As one gazes into your [= Sai Baba’s] smiling countenance, all the sorrows of worldly life are forgotten and hunger and thirst satisfied, there and then! So marvellous is your *darshan!*”; *ibid.*, 722 (chap. 44, v. 3); “His jokes always had a natural ease and novelty about them. Their spirit heightened by the smiling countenance, the play of the eyes, their charm was simply indescribable;” *ibid.*, 319 (chap. 24, v. 14). As Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde (1854–1938), lieutenant of the nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), wrote in a diary entry dated December 7, 1910: “Sayin Sahib [= Sai Baba] spoke with such a wonderful sweetness and he smiled so often and with such extraordinary grace that the con- 31  
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- 1 versation will always remain engraved in my memory;" *Shirdi Diary of*  
 2 *the Hon'ble Mr. G. S. Khaparde* (Bombay: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, n.d.), 4.  
 3 To mention just another case, here is how Viswanatha Swami (1904–1979)  
 4 describes his first *darśan* of Śrī Ramaṇa Maḥarṣi in January 1921: "I saw  
 5 in him something quite arresting which clearly distinguished him from  
 6 all others I had seen. His look and smile had remarkable spiritual charm.  
 7 When he spoke, the words seemed to come out of an abyss;" see J. Green-  
 8 blatt and M. Greenblatt, eds., *Bhagavan Sri Ramana: A Pictorial Biography*. A  
 9 Birth Centenary Offering (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1985<sup>2</sup>), 94.  
 10 124. For an introduction to his figure, see R. Lutjeharms, "Rūpa  
 11 Gosvāmī," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, eds. K. A. Jacob-  
 12 sen, H. Basu, A. Malinar, and V. Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2018; [https://](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)  
 13 [referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism)).  
 14 125. Naturally Rūpa Gosvāmin's focus is on the Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāga-*  
 15 *vata Purāṇa* and not on the Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhagavadgītā*, who is beyond his  
 16 self-delimited purview.  
 17 126. A legendary *devarṣi*. In the *Mahābhārata* and *Purāṇas*, Nārada is  
 18 revered as the son of Brahmā and thus as one of the Prajāpatīs. To him  
 19 are ascribed the eighty-four *sūtras* of the *Bhaktisūtras*, a text perhaps dat-  
 20 able to the tenth century CE and dependent upon the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.  
 21 127. D. L. Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin* (New  
 22 Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts—Motilal Banarsidass,  
 23 2003), 548–51.  
 24 128. The only difference from Bharata's list is that here *avahasita*  
 25 takes the place of *upahasita*. The two terms, however, are synonymous.  
 26 129. Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin*, 550–51.  
 27 130. Lit. "very powerful." One of Kṛṣṇa's most dear cowherd friends.  
 28 131. In the *Mahābhārata* he is the son of Arjuna and Subhadrā. Killed  
 29 in a cowardly fashion on the thirteenth day of the war against the Kau-  
 30 ravas, he will leave his widow, Uttarā, pregnant with the future Parīkṣit. In  
 31 Vṛndāvana, Abhimanyu plays the part of the so-called husband of Rādhā.  
 32 132. The maternal grandmother of Rādhā.  
 33 133. Abhimanyu's sister. Kuṭilā as well as Jaṭilā perform the service of  
 34 facilitating the *parakīyā rasa* (i.e., the paramour love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa).  
 35 134. Haberman, *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin*, 552–57.  
 36 135. On the darker characteristics of Hindu dieties, see Hildebeutel,  
 37 *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees*.  
 38 136. For more examples of the power of Kṛṣṇa's smile/laughter, see  
 39 A. Balasubramanya, "A Smile Can Change Your Life," at [https://www.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yh_q6twjXiw)  
 40 [youtube.com/watch?v=Yh\\_q6twjXiw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yh_q6twjXiw) (minutes 0–4); "Traditional Tales:  
 41 Anger Should Subside," *Prabuddha Bharata or Awakened India*. A monthly  
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- journal of the Ramakrishna Order started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896*, 122, 1  
no. 2 (2017): 331–32 (translated from the Tamil book *Arulneri Kathaigal*). 2
137. As the Marāṭhī poet-saint Tukārām (seventeenth century) says, 3  
the “holy face” of Viṭṭhala/Viṭhobā, that is, of Kṛṣṇa, is “moulded out 4  
of happiness;” J. Nelson Fraser and K. B. Marathe, trans., *The Poems of* 5  
*Tukārāma*. With Notes and Introduction (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000 6  
[1909]), 49. 7
138. For an appreciation of this *bhajan*, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7L3z1k-SdKA> 8  
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139. See Śāstri—Pansīkar, *The Brahmasūtra Śānkara Bhāshya with the* 10  
*Commentaries Bhāmatī, Kalpataru and Parimala, Bhāmatī*, 4. 11
140. The Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus (412–485 CE), in his 12  
commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*, analogously states: “For the smile of 13  
the gods gave to the things of the cosmos their being and their power 14  
to continue;” quoted in Kinsley, *The Divine Player*, ix. 15  
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