

'Verità e bellezza'
Essays in Honour of Raffaele Torella

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Essays in Honour of Raffaele Torella

Edited by
Francesco Sferra and Vincenzo Vergiani



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*On prahasann iva. Bhagavadgītā 2.10
in the Light of Traditional Commentaries**

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This paper concerning the interpretation of *prahasann iva* in *Bhagavadgītā* (hereafter BhG) 2.10 is construed mainly on primary sources and specifically on various commentaries on the BhG.

It is a fact that several of the BhG's commentators have somehow 'underestimated' the first section of the text, from BhG 1.1 up to the end of the contextual *incipit*, that is BhG 2.10, which precedes the beginning of Kṛṣṇa's teaching (v. 2.11). Śaṅkara himself — who first commented upon the BhG¹ — after a short general introduction dealing with the main purpose of the text, skips over the first *adhyāya* and the first ten verses of the second one, and

* I dedicate this tribute to Raffaele Torella, exemplary guide, precious friend, *nānāśāstramahānirṇāyaka*, and much more ..., who *prahasann iva* easily solves the most abstruse textual problems.

I am very grateful to Antonio Rigopoulos for his insights on *prahasann iva* (see *infra*), and to Judith Trinchero, for substantially revising my English.

Note that in this essay there are three numerations of paragraphs: 1) the first number indicates the school; 2) the second number indicates the author of a BhG commentary; 3) the third number indicates the author of a BhG sub-commentary (see also n. 3).

¹ Actually, there were several pre-Śaṅkara commentaries on the BhG, but Śaṅkara's is the earliest existing one (Saha 2017: 259–261).

begins his *bhāṣya ad BhG 2.11*. Other interpreters, too, such as Rāmānuja and Madhva, followed Śāṅkara leaving the opening verses without any commentary.

To be sure, v. 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, the BhG's well-known *caramaśloka*. Verse 2.10 is part of a passage connecting the condition of the distressed human being, represented by Arjuna, with Kṛṣṇa's instruction that dispels the darkness of delusion and anguish. In this regard, 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 in the form of liberating teaching.

Although Kṛṣṇa's teaching (*upadeśa*) of BhG begins at 2.11, all previous verses serve to contextualize it, placing it within an anomalous setting, i.e. a battlefield where two armies are about to fight. In particular, while the first chapter concentrates on the causes of Arjuna's grief, in the first verses of the second Arjuna's anguish and delusion assume a new form. Although in 2.7 Arjuna pleads Kṛṣṇa to instruct him, in 2.8 he states that nothing can remove his grief, neither on earth nor in the heavens. 2.9 then shows that Arjuna decides to withdraw from the battle and finally remains silent. 2.10 highlights once more Arjuna's tragic situation: in between the two armies, he is completely overwhelmed by despondency. At this very moment, nearly smiling or laughing (*prahasann iva*), Kṛṣṇa begins his teaching.

Convinced that *prahasann iva* hides much more than what appears on the surface, I will try to provide some answers as to what the expression really means. What is its inner meaning (*gūḍhārtha*) according to the commentarial tradition? Is it smile or is it laughter? Is it a compassionate smile, a graceful laugh? Or a hint of laugh as mockery? Is Kṛṣṇa making fun of Arjuna with a sardonic sneer? Or is he doing something else?

In his *Bibliography of the Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* (1995: 1464–1466) Potter quotes many other Sanskrit commentaries, but I have limited myself to twenty-five of them.² I focus mainly on

² The more detailed commentaries are carefully analyzed while others more superficially. All works are in Sanskrit except the 13th-c. Marāṭhī gloss *Jñāneśvarī* by Jñāneśvar.

their introductions and their understanding of the second chapter, especially verses from 2.6 to 2.11. Some of the summaries proposed by the commentators are useful in contextualizing 2.10 since they describe in more detail why Kṛṣṇa smiles or laughs. My aim is to map the various interpretations of *prahasann iva* and on such basis discern and highlight some hermeneutic patterns. In order to accomplish this task, I analyse the following texts, commentaries, sub-commentaries and glosses, listed hereafter in chronological order: Śaṅkara's (7th–8th c.) *Gītābhāṣya* or *Advaitabhāṣya*; Bhāskara's (8th c.) *Bhagavadāśayānusaraṇa*; Abhinavagupta's (1014) *Gītārthasaṃgraha*; Yāmuna Muni's (10th c.) *Gītārthasaṃgraha*; Rāmānuja's (traditional dates 1017–1137) *Gītābhāṣya* or *Viśiṣṭādvaita Bhāṣya*; Anubhūtiśvarūpācārya's (1270) *Gītābhāṣya-ṭippaṇa*; Madhva/Ānanda Tīrtha's (1198–1277 or 1238–1317) double commentary, namely the *Gītābhāṣya* and the *Bhagavadgītā-tātparyanirṇaya*; Jñāneśvar's (13th c.) *Jñāneśvarī*; Śaṅkarānanda Sarasvatī's (1290) *Tātparyabodhinī*; Śrīdhara Svāmin's (13th–14th c.) *Subodhinī*; Vedānta Deśika/Veṅkaṭanātha's (1268–1369) double gloss, the *Tātparyacandrikā* on Rāmānuja's *Gītābhāṣya* and the *Gītārthasaṃgraharakṣā* on Yāmuna Muni's *Gītārthasaṃgraha*; Hanumat's (before 13th–14th c.; see Saha 2017: 266) *Paiśāca Bhāṣya*; Ānanda Giri's (14th c.) *Gītābhāṣyavivecana*; Jaya Tīrtha's (1340–1388) *Prameyadīpikā*; Daivajña Paṇḍita Sūrya's (1440) *Paramārthaprapā*; Sadānanda Yogīndra's (1500) *Bhāvaprakāśa*; Keśavakaśmīrī Bhaṭṭācārya's (or Bhaṭṭa, 1510) *Tattvaparakāśikā*; Vallabha's (1479–1531) *Tattvadīpikā*; Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's (16th c.) *Gūḍhārthadīpikā*; Rāghavendra's (1640) *Arthasaṃgraha*; Ānandavardhana's (17th c.) *Jñānakarmasamuccayavyākhyā*; Śrīveṅkaṭanātha's (17th c.) *Brahmānandagiri*; Nilakaṇṭha Caturdhara's (or Sūri, second half of the 17th c.) *Bhāvadīpa*; Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's (1626–1708?) *Sārārthavarṣiṇīṭikā*; Dhanapati Sūri's (18th c.) *Bhāṣyotkarṣadīpikā*; Bāladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's (18th c., 1700–1793?) *Gītābhūṣaṇa*; Vaṃśīdhara Mīśra's (19th–20th c.) *Vaṃśī* and Śrībellāṅkoṇḍa Rāmarāya Kavi's (1875–1914) *Bhāṣyārkaprakāśa*.

Although a plain chronological order may help us in determining how analogies and differences developed with regard to the interpretation of *prahasann iva*, in order to present them within their axiological perspectives, they are grouped according to their philosophical affiliations (Saha 2017: 259): Advaita, Kashmirian-

Śaiva-Bhedābheda, Jñāneśvar's gloss in Marāṭhī, and Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita, Dvaitādvaita, Śuddhādvaita and Acintyābheda.³

1. Advaita

There are several BhG commentators of Advaita Vedānta orientation: some are independent interpreters and some sub-commentators of Śaṅkara's commentary. In the following sections I examine thirteen of them. The glosses to Śaṅkara's commentary come first, followed by the independent commentaries.

1.1 Śaṅkara

It is well known that Śaṅkara fixed the text of the BhG *vulgata* in 700 verses. In his *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya* (hereafter BhGBh), apart from a short introduction concerning the intrinsic purport of the BhG, Śaṅkara does not comment on the first chapter nor on the first ten verses of the second. He opens his *bhāṣya* commenting directly upon BhG 2.11. He argues that the portion of the BhG from 1.2⁴ to 2.9⁵ is meant to identify the root of the defects intrinsic to the seed of becoming, i.e. anguish (*śoka*), delusion (*moha*), etc. Arjuna is overwhelmed by both, because — out of affection for his kinsfolk who are gathered on the opposite side of the battlefield — he is tormented by the erroneous idea 'I am their own! They are mine!' (*aham eteṣāṃ mamaite*). In Arjuna, this condition causes a turmoil of feelings such as anguish and delusion (2.4).⁶

³ Chronologically, the sub-commentaries will be treated immediately after the major commentaries they gloss.

⁴ Although easily available in many sources, hereafter I shall quote the relevant verses of the BhG discussed in detail, in order to better follow the commentaries. BhG 1.2: *dṛṣtvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṃ vyūḍhaṃ duryodhanas tadā | ācāryam upasaṅgamyā rājā vacanam abravīt ||*.

⁵ BhG 2.9: *evam uktvā hṛṣīkeśaṃ guḍākeśaḥ paraṃtapa | na yotsya iti govindam uktvā tūṣṇīṃ babhūva ha ||*.

⁶ BhG2 pp. 39–40, BhG3 pp. 31–32 and BhG6 pp. 73–74: *atra ca dṛṣtvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṃ ity ārabhya yāvan na yotsya iti govindam uktvā tūṣṇīṃ babhūva ha ityeta-dantaḥ praṇināṃ śokamohādisaṃsārabijabhūtadoṣodbhavakāraṇapradarśanārthatvena vyākhyeyo grantaḥ | tathā hi — arjunena rājyaguruputramitrasuhṛtsvajanasambandhibāndhaveṣu aham eteṣāṃ mamaite ity evaṃ bhrāntipratyayanimittasnehavichedādīnimittau ātmanaḥ śokamohau pradarśitau | kathaṃ bhīṣmam ahaṃ saṃkhye ityādinā |*.

These feelings are so perturbing as to subjugate Arjuna's discriminating intellect; this is why he thinks of abandoning his duty as a warrior and setting out on a life of alms, as renunciants do.

Common people follow their own duties and constantly long to gain and enjoy the results thereof. Due to the increasing and decreasing of merit (*dharma*) and demerit (*adharmā*), the unceasing becoming (*saṃsāra*) — characterized by auspicious and inauspicious births, full of pleasure and pain respectively — flows unobstructed. It is precisely for this reason that anguish and delusion are the seeds of becoming. In order to uproot them, there is nothing but the knowledge of the self, preceded by the total renunciation of actions. Śaṅkara points out that this *upadeśa* begins from 2.11 and is meant to benefit all human beings. Precisely in order to accomplish such a task, Arjuna serves as the instrumental model (*nimitta*). Here is the opening of the elaborate commentary *ad* 2.11 (BhG2 pp. 40–41, BhG3 pp. 32–33, BhG6 p. 74):

*śokamohābhyāṃ hy abhibhūtavivekavijñānaḥ svata eva kṣatradharme
yuddhe pravṛtto 'pi tasmād yuddhād upararāma | paradharmam ca
bhikṣājīvanādikaṃ kartuṃ pravavṛte | tathā ca sarvaprāṇinām śoka-
mohādidoṣāviṣṭacetasāṃ svabhāvata eva svadharmaparityāgaḥ pratiṣi-
ddhasevā ca syāt | svadharme pravṛttānām api teṣāṃ vānmanahkā-
yādīnām pravṛtīḥ phalābhisamdhīpūrvikaiva sāhaṃkāra ca bhavati |
tatraivaṃ sati dharmādharmopacayād iṣṭāniṣṭajanmasukhaduḥkhādi-
prāptilakṣaṇaḥ saṃsāro 'nuparato bhavati | ity atah saṃsārabijabhūtau
śokamohau | tayoś ca sarvakarmasaṃnyāsapūrvakād ātmajñānān
nānyato nivṛttir iti tadupadidikṣuḥ sarvalokānvgrahārtham arjunaṃ
nimittīkṛtya āha bhagavān vāsudevaḥ — aśocyān ityādi |*

Indeed, although he [Arjuna] — whose discriminating intellect is subdued by anguish and delusion — is by himself ready for war, which is the duty of a warrior, [he] withdrew from the battle and began [to develop the wish of] following another's duty, that is a [roaming] life of alms. Hence, the abandonment of one's own duty and the undertaking of something prohibited naturally happens to all living beings whose souls are pervaded by anguish and delusion. Even for those who are committed in word, mind and body to their own duty, an active engagement occurs presupposing an aspiration for the fruits [of that action], and with a sense of egotism as well. Under these circumstances, due to the accretion of merits and demerits, the becoming — characterized by the gaining of pleasure and pain, [respectively] in desirable and non-

desirable births — is not interrupted. Ergo, anguish and delusion are the seeds of becoming, and their withdrawal does not take place without the knowledge of the self preceded by the renunciation of all actions. Thus, eager to teach this, having used Arjuna as a means for the benefit of all worlds, the glorious Vāsudeva said ‘Those who are not to be mourned ...’ (2.11, *aśocyān*).

A lengthy argument against the combination of action and knowledge then begins (BhG2 p. 41, BhG3 pp. 33–40, BhG6 p. 74). At the end of the commentary (BhG 1 p. 79), Śāṅkara calls Arjuna *mūḍhaḥ*, which literally means ‘deluded,’ i.e. someone who, being the victim of delusion, is obscured and bewildered, although the term often refers to someone foolish, stupid, ignorant.

According to Śāṅkara, ‘those who are not to be mourned’ (*aśocya*) are Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and the other heroes arrayed on the opposite side. They are *aśocya* for two reasons: from the point of view of *dharma*, their conduct is irreprehensible; from the absolute point of view, they are ultimately nothing but *ātman*, the immortal self, hence eternal. Therefore, there is no point in mourning for them, but still Arjuna does so because he is confused, although he thinks he is saying words that are usually pronounced by sages.⁷ Śāṅkara then paraphrases Kṛṣṇa’s words to Arjuna as follows:

*tad etan mauḍhyaṃ pāṇḍityaṃ ca viruddham ātmani darśayasy unma-
tta iva ity abhiprāyaḥ |*

The sense is that, like a madman, you show in yourself both foolishness and wisdom, which are [mutually] opposed.

Indeed, in contrast with Arjuna’s behaviour, true sages, the knowers of the self, neither grieve for the departed nor for the living. Moreover, this wisdom is a kind of intelligence whose content is the self, as stated in the *śruti*: ‘*tasmād brāhmaṇaḥ pāṇḍityaṃ nirvidya bālyena tiṣṭhāset*’ (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.1). Looking at things from the absolute point of view, it is disclosed that Arjuna is

⁷ BhG2 p. 46, BhG3 pp. 43–44 and BhG6 p. 79: *na śocyaś aśocya bhīṣmadroṇādā-
yaḥ | sadvyṭtatvāt paramārthasvarūpeṇa ca nityatvāt, tān aśocyaṇ anvaśoco ’nu śocita-
vān asi te mriyante mannimittam, ahaṃ tair vinābhūtaḥ kiṃ kariṣyāmi rājyasukhādīnā
iti | tvam prajñāvādān prajñāvatāṃ buddhimatāṃ vādāṃś ca vacanāni ca bhāṣase |*

mourning for those who are eternal, i.e. for those who are not to be mourned: that is why Kṛṣṇa considers him a fool.⁸

1.1.1 Ānanda Giri

Ānanda Giri (14th c.) seems somewhat later than Anubhūtiśvarūpācārya and is surely indebted to him.⁹ Ānanda Giri composed the *Gītābhāṣyavivēcana*, a detailed gloss on the BhGBh. In his reading of Śāṅkara's introduction, Ānanda Giri glosses the opening verses and clarifies up various points. At the opening of the gloss on BhGBh *ad* 2.1, he explains that the first chapter and a section of the second are already clear, and the main theme of the BhG is the double 'firm point of view' (*niṣṭhā*), the interior adherence which represents the goal (*sādhya*) as well as the method (*sādhana*) of final realization.

Apart from a scholastic explanation, the gloss *ad* 2.10 does not say anything noteworthy.¹⁰ Nonetheless, a few words are utilized to gloss *prahasann iva*: *upāhasam kurvann iva tadāśvāsārtham* "almost laughing," [i.e.] being sarcastic in order to make him believe [in himself].⁷

Śāṅkara's commentary on 2.11 is quite detailed, and consequently Ānanda Giri's gloss is even longer. In its *incipit* Ānanda Giri says that BhG 1.1 is an independent verse, the function of which is to connect linking the BhG with the rest of the *Mahābhārata*'s narration. Then, from 1.2 to 2.9 there is another substantial section meant to show that anguish and delusion — the seeds of becoming — are brought about by ignorance of the self, and therefore must be removed. Ānanda Giri adds that BhG 2.10 represents a useful transition to the rest of the poem, which essentially begins with 2.11, and is exclusively dedicated to teaching correct knowledge so as to dispel becoming, along with its cause.¹¹

⁸ BhG2 p. 46, BhG3 pp. 44–45 and BhG6 p. 79: *yasmād gatāsūn gataprāṇān mṛtān, agatāsūn agataprāṇān jīvataś ca nānuśocanti paṇḍitā ātmajñāh | paṇḍā ātma-
viśayā buddhir yeśāṃ te hi paṇḍitāh, paṇḍityaṃ nirvidya iti śruteḥ | paramārthatas tu
tān nityān aśocyaṃ anuśocasi, ato mūḍho 'si ity abhiprāyaḥ || 2.11 ||*.

⁹ For more information, see Mahadevan 2003: 320–322.

¹⁰ See BhG2 pp. 38–39, BhG3 p. 31 and BhG6 p. 71.

¹¹ BhG2 p. 40, BhG3 p. 33 and BhG6 p. 74: *arjunasyānyeśāṃ ca śokamohayoḥ
saṃsārabhṛjvatvam upapāditam upasaṃharati — ity ata iti | tad evaṃ prathamādhyāyasya*

In the rest of his interpretation, Ānanda Giri does not add anything to Śāṅkara's commentary. The remarkable point which he touches upon is the independent status of 2.10, considered a sort of bridge between the causes of the disease — anguish, delusion, and ignorance — and their antidote, namely the knowledge of the self.

1.1.2 *Daivajña Paṇḍita Sūrya*

The *Paramārthaprapā* is a sub-commentary on Śāṅkara's BhGBh, written by Daivajña Paṇḍita Sūrya (ca. 1440). While it is not easy to determine with certainty the date of this gloss, there is nonetheless a relationship between the *Paramārthaprapā* and Sadānanda Yogīndra's (15th c., see 1.5) *Bhāvaprakāśa*. This might suggest an indebtedness of the latter to the former. In addition, the same themes are also dealt with by Śāṅkarānanda (BhG4 p. 55).

In the introduction to the *Paramārthaprapā* (BhG4 pp. 12–13), Paṇḍita Sūrya — like Sadānanda — presents a kind of correspondence between the initial verses of the BhG and the Advaita Vedānta's four preliminary requirements (*sāadhanacatuṣṭaya*): 'discrimination between permanent and impermanent entities' (*nityānityavastuviveka* 1.26c, 1.38c), 'detachment from the enjoyments of the here-world and the otherworld' (*ihāmutraphalabhoga-virāga* 1.35c), 'trust in the words of the *guru* and of the deity' (*gurudaivatavākya-viśvāsa* 2.7c); in addition — according to the text — Arjuna's longing for release.¹² Furthermore, verses 1.32a, 1.35a, 2.5b clarify more thoroughly that detachment has already arisen in Arjuna, hence he is eligible for the knowledge which Kṛṣṇa is about to offer.¹³

In the *Paramārthaprapā ad BhG 2.10*, Paṇḍita Sūrya states:

*athārjunam viśādena na yotsya iti niścitya tūṣṇībhūtaṃ bhagavān āha
— tam uvāceti | hṛṣīkeśa āśayajñāḥ kṛṣṇas tam arjunam prati praha-*

*dviṭyādhyāyaikadeśasahitasya ātmajñānothtanirvartanīyaśokamohākhyasamsārabijā-
pradarśanaparavṇam darśayitvā vakṣyamāṇasandarbhasya sahetukasamsāranirvartaka-
samyagjñānopadeśe tātparyam darśayati — tayos ceti |.*

¹² For a survey of the *sāadhanacatuṣṭaya*, see the *locus classicus*, i.e. *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya ad 1.1.1* (pp. 36–37).

¹³ Paṇḍita Sūrya quotes from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.14.2, *ācāryavān puruṣo veda*) 'The man with a teacher knows!' while commenting upon BhG 2.7 (BhG4 p. 67) where Arjuna requests Kṛṣṇa to accept him a disciple.

*sann iva prahāsagarbham iva vacanam uvāca | nanu viśādāvasare
hāsānupakrame 'pi katham uktaṃ prahasann iveti, tatrocyate | viśādo-
tpatter akāraṇatvād yato dīnānāthavadhe eva viśādotpatter darśanāt |
prakṛte tu bhīṣmadroṇakarmaḍuryodhanādyaḥ śauryeṇa śakram apy aga-
ṇayantaḥ kṣātradharmam anusṛtya pravṛtā na tu mūrkhatvena teṣu
katham kṛpāpātratvam | [...]*

Hereafter, the glorious lord spoke to Arjuna 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 living beings], as though he were laughing, spoke these words to Arjuna, as if they were filled with mockery. [Doubt:] Although on that occasion of grief no laugh happened, then how does he say ‘as if he were laughing’? [Reply:] On this [issue] it must be pointed out that [for Arjuna] the arousal of anguish is not justified, because it is seen that anguish arises only when afflicted people or orphans are killed. On the contrary, in the case under examination, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, Duryodhana and others, who do not reckon even Śakra [= Indra] as a hero, engage themselves [in fighting] following the martial duty, and [clearly] not because of stupidity! Then, how can they be considered as reservoirs of compassion? [...]

*ato yadvīśādakāraṇam uktaṃ tat pratāraṇamātraṃ karma naiṣkar-
myamārgabahirbhūtam ity āśayena īśaddhāsyamukho bhūtvā provācety
arthaḥ || 2.10 ||*

Therefore, the said cause of anguish is an act of mere deception, which has no place along the liberating path of non-action. For this reason, [Kṛṣṇa] spoke with a slightly smiling face: this is the meaning.

1.1.3 Śrīveṅkaṭanātha

Another important gloss on the BhGBh is the *Brahmānandagiri* (BhG6), written by a certain Śrīveṅkaṭanātha (17th c.). Unlike the Viśiṣṭādvaita author, this Veṅkaṭanātha is an elder contemporary of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (16th–17th c.). As a matter of fact, the *Brahmānandagiri* quotes and criticises the *Gūḍhārthadīpikā* (hereafter GAD) on several occasions.¹⁴ Śrīveṅkaṭanātha was probably a disciple of Nṛsiṃhāśrama (16th–17th c.), and the teacher of

¹⁴ For example, having quoted the *Gūḍhārthadīpikā* *verbatim*, Śrīveṅkaṭanātha expresses some perplexities on its reading of v. 2.8 (*etac cintyam*; BhG6 p. 69).

Dharmarāja Adhvarin (17th–18th c.), the author of the well-known primer *Vedāntaparibhāṣā* (Pellegrini 2018: 589–599).

In the gloss on 2.7 (BhG6 p. 69), Śrīveṅkaṭanātha writes that in the world, namely in ordinary conversation, whoever asks for instruction without a sincere desire is ignored by the interlocutor, because he/she is not really eager to listen attentively to his/her words. On the contrary, Arjuna is definitely anguished, so he asks with the proper feeling and a sincere desire to know: he is a true disciple, and this is the reason why he is not ignored. Hence, Kṛṣṇa's duty as a teacher is to teach, and, with the use of several tools, to make his disciple understand things properly.

At the end of the gloss on 2.7 (BhG6 p. 69), Śrīveṅkaṭanātha points out that in saying *gurūn hatvā* (2.5) Arjuna perceives himself as a disciple of Bhīṣma and Droṇa too. Then, why does Kṛṣṇa accept him as disciple? In fact, there seems to be a difference in Arjuna's approach to Kṛṣṇa in 2.7 (*tvāṃ praṇanam*), where he totally surrenders (*praṇatti*) to Kṛṣṇa and completely commits himself to him to be instructed: Arjuna has formally taken refuge in the lord (*śaraṇāgatam*). Such an act of total surrender occurs only when there is no other way out.¹⁵

Śrīveṅkaṭanātha's commentary on 2.10 (BhG6 p. 73) is quite elaborate. The anguish tormenting Arjuna is not like the uneasiness commonly experienced in everyday life, which sooner or later fades away. Arjuna's is a different kind of anguish, deeper and stronger. In order to show this, the text uses the present active participle form *viśādantam*. Had such a despondency occurred during the battle, it could have been solved at the right moment. On the contrary, it occurs when the two armies are facing each other, and the heroes — weapons in hand — are about to fight. This is why Arjuna's anguish becomes an enormous problem.¹⁶ Nevertheless,

¹⁵ See also Śrīveṅkaṭanātha *ad* 2.8 (BhG6 p. 69): *śaraṇāgatir api ananyaśaraṇatvādhyavasayāṣṭūrvikā tvam eva śaraṇam iti tvadutpattiḥ, na tv anyasmiṅ charaṇe sthite 'pi tvam api śaraṇam ity evamlakṣaṇatvād upasadanarūpeṭy āha — yad vastu mama śokam āpanudet tan na paśyāmīty ananyaśaratvoktiḥ |*

¹⁶ BhG6 p. 73: *evaṃvidho 'pi śoko yadi svasenāmadhyasthītikāla eva syāt tadā sāvakāśaṃ samādhātuṃ śakyata, na tv evaṃ, kintu svabalān nīrgatya yuyutsuḥ parakiyaśūramukhe sthītvā svayaṃ dhanur udyamya pravṛtte śastrasampāte yadā bandhūn avaiḥṣata, tadānīm utpannah, tato mahat kaṣṭaṃ jātam ity abhipretyāha — senayor ubhayor madhya iti |*

despite the difficulty of the situation the text introduces a certain levity with the expression *prahasann iva*,¹⁷ meaning ‘uttering a sentence of mockery’:

*arjunasya paityṣv asevatayā taṃ prati bhagavataḥ sarvadāpi parihāso-
ktaya eva bhavantīti tadā saṅkate ’pi tannirācikiṣur bhagavān pari-
hāsarītyaiva idaṃ vaksyamāṇam aśocyān ityādikam atigambhīrārtham
aśeṣavedāntasārabhūtaṃ vacanam uvāca | tatra ca vinodaphalakatvena
loke parihāsaḥ prasiddhaḥ, ayaṃ tv arjunasya tattvajñānotpādanapha-
laka iti prasiddhaparihāsavailakṣaṇyadyotanārthaḥ prahasann iveti-
vakārah | sarvadhīperakasya jñānotpādanam hāsamātreṇaiva sukaram
iti hṛṣīkeśapadenoktam |*

[Moreover,] since Arjuna is not rendering a true service to his forefathers, at every step there are some enunciations of mockery by the glorious lord to Arjuna. Thus, even during [such] a crisis, the glorious lord — desirous of dispelling it — indeed in a mocking mood pronounced these words — beginning with *aśocyān* (2.11) — whose meaning is very profound, and which are the very essence of the whole Vedānta [= Upaniṣads]. Furthermore, on this issue, in the world it is well known that mockery results in amusing pleasure, but for Arjuna this [very circumstance] results in generating the knowledge of reality. Hence, in the expression *prahasann iva* the word *iva* [is used] to highlight its difference from ordinary mockery. Through the word *Hṛṣīkeśa* (‘the controller of sensorial faculties’) what is conveyed is that for the one who stimulates every cognition¹⁸ it is easy to generate knowledge with a simple laugh.¹⁹

Then, Śrīveṅkaṭanātha’s interpretation of 2.11 (BhG6 pp. 81–82) begins with a relevant contextualization, as a further explanation of *prahasann iva*:

*tad evaṃ mohasāgaranimagnasyārjunasya āmatattvajñānād anya-
troddhāraṇopāyam apaśyan prahasann iva iti pūrvaslokam arjunā-
pahāsaṃ viśadayann eva taduktānuvādapūrvakam āmatattvajñānam
avatārayan — śrībhagavān uvāca |*

¹⁷ BhG6 p. 73: *evaṃ saty api bhagavato ’rjunasaṅkātānirāse ’nāyasaṃ darśayati — prahasann iveti |*

¹⁸ On this issue, see Śaṅkara’s commentaries — *pādabhāṣya* and *vākyaabhāṣya* — on *Kena Upaniṣad* 1.1.1–2 (ed. pp. 17–21).

¹⁹ The last passage of 2.10 is irrelevant for the issue at stake.

Henceforth Kṛṣṇa, not seeing any other means for the emancipation of Arjuna — who was deeply immersed in a sea of illusion — than the knowledge of the reality of the self, extended the mockery directed towards him, expressed through the *prahasann iva* of the preceding verse, and revealed such knowledge of the reality of the self preceded by the [aforementioned] repetition of what has been uttered by him, ‘the glorious lord said.’

All in all, Śrīveṅkaṭaṇātha interprets *prahasann iva* as an expression of cheerful derision and mockery. While in everyday life a mocking mood merely produces scorn, here in the *śāstra* its result is utmost knowledge. Therefore, *iva* is used to mark the difference between secular feelings and the *śāstrīya* context. In addition, this teaching technique of the *bhagavat*, through mockery or smiles, jokes and mirth is most effective. Indeed, it is meant to show that Kṛṣṇa is the almighty inner controller by highlighting the ease with which he is able to bring about such a liberating gnosis.

Then, Śrīveṅkaṭaṇātha asks himself a sensible question: how is it possible that Kṛṣṇa bestows an instruction in such an atmosphere of war-convulsion? More than this: how can Arjuna benefit from the teaching of such a doctrine? Indeed, it is very difficult to obtain a concrete result without considering the appropriate place and proper circumstances. Śrīveṅkaṭaṇātha replies saying that thanks to the superb and inconceivable characteristics of the *bhagavat*, spatial and temporal circumstances are for him ultimately insignificant.²⁰

Śrīveṅkaṭaṇātha analyses 2.11 viewing it as a summary of the entire teaching of the BhG (BhG6 p. 81). He calls it *bījasloka* ‘germinal verse’ or ‘seed-verse,’ and says that whatever was spoken by Arjuna in the first chapter is resumed in the first word of the verse — *aśocyān*. The second term, *anvaśocaḥ*, sums up what has been said from the beginning of the second chapter to verse 2.4. The second part of 2.11 is said to encapsulate the knowledge of the

²⁰ BhG6 p. 81: *atra hṛṣīkeśa uvācety uktvāpi punar bhagavān uvāceti vadatā sañjaya-
yena deśakālādyanapekṣatvarūpaṃ bhagavanmāhātmyaṃ darśitam | atha vyavasthītān
dyṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān kapidhvajaḥ | pravṛtte śāstrasampāte dhanur udyamya pāṇḍava ity
evaṃvidhāvasthāyāṃ kathāṃ śrīkṛṣṇena jñānam upadeṣṭuṃ pravṛttam? kathāṃ vāriju-
nasya tathāvidhohopadeśāḥ jñānalābhah? deśakālau vinā sarvatra kāryānudyad ity na
sañkanīyam, acintyādbhūtamahāmahimaśālīni bhagavati deśakālayor akiñcīkaratvad
iti |.*

reality of the non-dual self, which is presented throughout the entire BhG.²¹ All in all, the purport of the text is to dispel grief and illusion, in conformity with several passages of the *śruti*.²²

*ato bīje vṛkṣasvarūpasyeva kṛtsnagītārthasya atrāntarbhāvād bījasloko
'yam iti gītānyāsarahasyam |*

Therefore, just as the entire shape of a tree is [hidden] in a seed, since the meaning of the entire *Bhagavadgītā* is included here [in 2.11], this is the 'seed-verse': this is the secret behind the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Śrīveṅkaṭaṇātha also explains the single terms of the verse. According to him, although Arjuna seems to speak wise words, he is not wise at all. As evidenced by 2.7b (*prcchāmi tvāṃ dharmasammūdhacetāḥ*) and 2.7d (*śīśyas te 'haṃ śādhi māṃ tvāṃ prapannam*), he is not behaving like a wise man; he is not even respecting the boundaries of a disciple (*śīśyamaṃyādā*), since he decides to leave the battle independently (*na yotsye*, BhG 2.9c), without resorting to his teacher. Hence, all Arjuna's mixed feelings and behavior — foolishness and wisdom, discipleship and independence — are mutually opposed and contradictory: this is the cause of the mocking laugh (*tathā ca maudhyam prājñatvaṃ punaḥ śīśyatvaṃ svātantryam cety etatparasparaviruddham tvayi dṛśyata ity apahāsakāranoktiḥ*).²³

1.1.4 Dhanapati Sūri

The next author is Dhanapati Sūri, a well-trained scholar who lived between the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th c. He wrote the *Bhāṣyotkarṣadīpikā*, a lengthy gloss on Śaṅka-

²¹ BhG6 p. 81: *atrādyapādena prathamādhyāyagatārjunoktānuvādaḥ | divi-
tīyapādena tu katham bhīṣmam aha ityādidivītyādhyāyagatataduktānuvādaḥ | utta-
rārdhena ca tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śoka ekatvam anupaśyataḥ tarati śokam ātmavit
ityādiśrutiḥprasiddhasarvasokamohanivartakabhāvasya kṛtsnagītāpratīpādyasyādivi-
tīyātmatattvajñānasya nirdeśa itī |*

²² Like *Īśa Upaniṣad* 7: *tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śoka ekatvam anupaśyataḥ* 'What delusion, what sorrow can there be, for the one who sees the oneness,' and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.1.3: *tarati śokam ātmavit* 'The knower of the self goes beyond sorrow.'

²³ According to Śrīveṅkaṭaṇātha, from 2.11 to 2.31 the BhG removes the despondency of those who are not worthy of despondency. Then, from 2.31 to 2.38 the words of false wisdom are removed (BhG6 p. 81).

ra's BhGBh,²⁴ where he quotes Madhūsudana Sarasvatī's (see 1.6) GAD several times and criticizes him whenever he deviates from Śāṅkara's readings (Saha 2014: 291–295; Pellegrini forthc.).²⁵ In the gloss on 2.10 (BhG2 p. 38, BhG4 p. 71) Dhanapati says:

*etad anantaraṃ bhagavān kiṃ kṛtavān ity ata āha — tam iti | taṃ sena-
yora ubhayora madhye viśīdantaṃ śokamohāv aṅgīkurvantaṃ arjunaṃ
hṛṣīkeśo bhagavān vāsudevaḥ prahasann iva madājñāvaśavartini tvayy
ahaṃ prasanno 'smīti prakatayann ivedaṃ vakṣyamāṇaṃ vaco vacanam
uvāca | anucitācaraṇaprakāśanena lajjāmbudhau majjayann iveti kecit
| mūḍho 'py ayam amūḍhavad vadatīti prahasann ivety anye |*

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, as though smiling, [that means] almost revealing 'I am happy for you, who are under the control of my authority!' uttered these words, 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.'²⁶ Others [assert]: 'As though smiling "Although he is a fool, he speaks as if he were not one."²⁷

Here Dhanapati seems to say that Kṛṣṇa's hint of laughter is due to the fact that Arjuna, steeped in anguish and delusion, feels totally defenseless, so this is the moment when he truly surrenders to the lord, who recognizes Arjuna's interior attitude and his final eligibility for BhG's instruction.

Finally, on 2.11 (BhG2 p. 39, BhG4 pp. 74–75) Dhanapati criticizes Madhusūdana's position again concerning Arjuna's twofold delusion. His contention is that Śāṅkara has exposed everything so clearly and correctly that it is totally useless to suggest any other interpretative option.²⁸

²⁴ He defends Śāṅkara's BhGBh against opponents deprived of logic. See the *Bhāṣyotkarṣadīpikā* (vv. 7–8; BhG2 pp. 5–6, BhG4 p. 10) and the gloss *ad* 2.1 (BhG2 p. 31, BhG4 p. 56).

²⁵ On Dhanapati Sūri, see Pellegrini forthc.

²⁶ See the GAD *ad* BhG 2.10 (see 1.7).

²⁷ Nīlakaṇṭha *ad* 2.10 (BhG6 p. 73; see 1.7).

²⁸ Dhanapati also says that Madhusūdana's interpretation contradicts BhG 3.3 (*loke 'smin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha | jñāyogena sāmṅhyānām karma-yogena yoginām ||*), and in the rest of the gloss *ad* 2.11 explains how, without adding anything relevant.

1.1.5 Śrībellan̄koṇḍa Rāmarāya Kavi

Śrībellan̄koṇḍa Rāmarāya Kavi is the author of the *Bhāṣyārkaṭṭakāśā*, a subcommentary on the BhGBh, composed — as he says openly (BhG3 p. 4) — to establish once and for all the supremacy of Śaṅkara’s interpretation of the BhG, freeing it from all the alleged defects detected by the most remarkable among its rivals’ commentaries, specifically Rāmānuja’s *Gītābhāṣya* (see 4.2) and its subcommentary, Vedānta Deśika’s (see 4.2.1) *Tātparyacandrikā*.

In the gloss *ad* BhG 1.1, Rāmarāya Kavi points out that (BhG3 p. 4) the first *śloka* is 2.11 and the *maṅgalaśloka* of the text is *bhagavān uvāca* before 2.11 (BhG3 p. 15). Consequently, Rāmarāya says (BhG3 p. 31) that 2.10 concludes the introductory portion. Then he briefly glosses 2.10: according to him Kṛṣṇa’s laugh is like a mocking sneer, because Arjuna is talking nonsense like a fool. This of course reverberates on the words of Kṛṣṇa in 2.11, *prajñā-vāṃś ca bhāṣase*:

he bhārata dhṛtarāṣṭra! ubhayoḥ senayoḥ madhye viśīdantaṃ tam arjunaṃ prati hṛṣīkeśaḥ prahasann iva, arjunasyonmādapralāpātulyavacanaśravaṇāt kṛṣṇasya hāsa iti bhāvaḥ, idam aśocyān ity ārabhya mā śucaḥ ity antaṃ gītāśāstrarūpaṃ vacaḥ uvāca || 10 ||

O descendant of Bharata, o Dhṛtarāṣṭra! To that Arjuna, who was lamenting in between the two armies, Hṛṣīkeśa, almost laughing — his hint of laughter follows the hearing of Arjuna’s words, similar to the prattling of a fool: that is the meaning — uttered these words in the form of the instruction of the *Bhagavadgītā*, beginning with *aśocyān* (2.11), and ending with *mā śucaḥ* (18.66).²⁹

Nonetheless, Rāmarāya Kavi’s position is somewhat ambiguous as he uses the word *hāsa*, which could mean either ‘laugh’ or ‘smile.’ A clarification can be found in the gloss on 2.11 (BhG3 pp. 43–44), where Rāmarāya Kavi quotes Rāmānuja and Vedānta Deśika, refuting the latter, according to whom the anguished words of Arjuna are the object of Kṛṣṇa’s mockery. According to the *Bhāṣyārkaṭṭakāśā*, Arjuna is immersed in a sea of sorrow and consequently has surrendered to the feet of Kṛṣṇa as a disciple. Thus it is quite

²⁹ BhG 18.66: *sarvadharmān parityājya mām ekaṃ śaraṇaṃ vraja | ahaṃ tvaṃ sarvāpāpēbhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ ||*.

unlikely that he is the object of Kṛṣṇa's derision and mockery (*mahati śokasāgare nimagne svacaraṇaṃ śaraṇaṃ praṇanne pārthe bhāgavataḥ kṛṣṇasya parihāsodbhāvodayāsāṅgatyāt*). Therefore, even for Rāmarāya Kavi (BhG3 p. 44) it is not out of place to connect verse 2.10 to 2.11, as pointed out by Vedānta Deśika, according to whom the meaning of *prahasann iva* is explained in 2.11.

1.2 Śrīdhara Svāmin

Śrīdhara Svāmin is an *advaitin* (13th–14th c.) who tried to harmonize knowledge and devotion, as can be seen in his commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. He also wrote a gloss on the BhG entitled *Subodhinī*.

On 2.10, Śrīdhara writes: *prahasann iveti prasannamukhaḥ sannity arthaḥ* (BhG4 p. 74) 'the meaning of *prahasann iva* is having a happy face.' The compound *prasannamukhaḥ*, where the adjective *prasanna* can be translated as 'happy, cheerful, showing favour,' evidences Kṛṣṇa's loving disposition toward his interlocutor (Vireśvarānanda 1991: 32–33).

In the introduction to 2.11 (BhG4 p. 74), Śrīdhara adds: 'Arjuna's anguish comes from the lack of discrimination between the body and the self, therefore the glorious lord shows how to discriminate between these two domains' (*dehātmanor avivekād asyaivaṃ śoko bhavatīti tadvivekapradarśanārthaṃ śrībhagavān uvāca*). Then he begins the teaching.

Śrīdhara also presents a short scheme of the verses of the BhG. From verse 1.28,³⁰ the BhG highlights that the object of Arjuna's anguish are his kinsfolk. Then, though admonished by Kṛṣṇa in 2.2, Arjuna keeps speaking like a discriminating sage.³¹

³⁰ BhG 2.9: *dṛṣṭvemān svajanān kṛṣṇa yuyutsuṃ samupasthitam | sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukhaṃ ca pariśuśyati ||*.

³¹ BhG4 p. 74: *śokasyāviśayibhūtān eva bandhūn tvam anvaśoco 'nuśocitavān asi dṛṣṭvemān svajanān kṛṣṇa ityādinā | tatra kutas tvā kaśmalam idaṃ viśame samupasthitam ity ādinā mayā bodhito 'pi punaś ca prajñāvatāṃ paṇḍitānāṃ vādān śabdān kathaṃ bhīṣmam ahaṃ saṅkhye ity ādīn kevalaṃ bhāṣase, na tu paṇḍīto 'si, yataḥ gatāsūn gataprāṇān bandhūn agatāsūmś ca jīvato 'pi, bandhuhīnā ete kathaṃ jīviṣyantīti nānuśocanti paṇḍitā vivekinaḥ || 11 ||*.

1.3 Śāṅkarānanda Sarasvatī

Śāṅkarānanda Sarasvatī (end 13th–early 14th c.) wrote a clear gloss on the BhG, the *Tātparyabodhinī*, which closely follows and carefully broadens Śāṅkara’s commentary.³² The *incipit* of Śāṅkarānanda’s gloss to the second chapter (*ad* 2.1; BhG4 pp. 55–56) suggests a connection between verses 2.1–10 with Upaniṣadic procedures to approach a master in order to be instructed.

Thanks to the discrimination between real and unreal, the sharp detachment arisen out of such a discrimination, and the will to achieve release, a *brāhmaṇa* who has abandoned every action and longs only for liberation becomes eligible to investigate into the Absolute, as stated by *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.1: *athāto brahmajijñāsā*. Preceded by a reverent approach to a teacher established in *brahman* and well-versed in the textual lore (see *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12), this investigation proceeds in three steps, as stated by the *śruti* (*Byhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5, 4.5.6): *ātmā vā re draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyaḥ*. Hence, the second chapter begins by showing that Arjuna — who discriminates between real and unreal and longs for the supreme goal — has already (since BhG 2.7) surrendered to the lord. Moreover, it is meant to convey the instruction concerning the knowledge of the self and the non-self revealed to Arjuna.³³

According to the *śruti* passage ‘*so ’haṃ bhagavaḥ śocāmi taṃ mā bhagavān chokasya pāraṃ tārayatū*’ (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.1.3), once a person who longs for release has taken refuge in the lord, then the master, having granted him fearlessness, should instruct him. In order to develop this message, Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna from 2.1 onward.³⁴

³² For more information, see Mahadevan 2003: 178–181.

³³ BhG4 p. 55: *sadasadvivekena tajjanitatīvravairāgyeṇa mumukṣayā ca samnyāstasavakarmaṇo mokṣaikakāmasya brāhmaṇasya sadasadvivekavairāgyādisādhana-sampatsiddher brāhmaṇatvasiddhes ca sāphalyāya athāto brahmajijñāsā iti, ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyaḥ iti tadvijñānārthaṃ sa gurum evābhigacched ityādiśrutyukta-prakāreṇa sadgurum śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭam upasadya brahmavivārah kartavya itīmam arthaṃ sūcayitum sadasadvivekino ’rjunasya paramārthāpekṣiṇaḥ śiṣyas te ’haṃ sādhi māṃ tvāṃ prapannam itīśvaraḥ pratipattiṃ tasmā īśvareṇa kṛtam ātmānātmanjñānopadeśaparakāraṃ ca pratipādayitum dvitīyo ’dhyāya ārabhyate |*

³⁴ BhG4 p. 55: *tatrātau so ’haṃ bhagavaḥ śocāmi taṃ mā bhagavān śokasya pāraṃ tārayatū iti śravaṇāt saṃsārādūḥkhena śocantam svasāraṇaṃ gataṃ mumukṣum abha-*

Although Śāṅkarānanda glosses 2.10 in a cursory way, the typical Advaita nuance of his interpretation deserves a full quotation (BhG4 p. 71):

*he bhārata, senayor ubhayor madhye viśīdantaṃ madīyā ete mriyanta iti
socantaṃ etān hatvā taddoṣeṇāhaṃ nirayaṃ yāsyāmīty ātmani niṣkriye
nirvikāre kartṛtvādidharmaśūnya evānādyavidyayānātmataddharmān
adhyasyāhaṃ kartā, bhokteti viparītabhāvena muhyantaṃ tam arjunaṃ
dṛṣṭvā paramakṛpāluḥ śrībhagavān tatra ko mohah kaḥ śoka ekatvam
anupaśyata ityādiśrutiḥprasiddhabrahmātmaikatvajñānena vinā nāyaṃ
dvaitabhramapravartakena bhedaśāstreṇa bodhyamānaḥ śokasāgaraṃ
bhramamūlakaṃ tartuṃ śaknotīti matvā padārthadvayaśodhanapūrvā-
kaṃ tajñānam upadidikṣuḥ sann ādau tvampadārthaśodhanam
avatārayituṃ tadīyavyṛttaṃ bhavān paṇḍita iti mama buddhir eva vā
tava paṇḍītyam iti prahasann iva vacanam idam uvāca ||*

O descendant of Bharata, thus at the mercy of grief in between the two armies, [Arjuna] in this way anguished [thought] ‘These [people] of mine will be killed’ [and] ‘Because of the sin of killing them I will go to hell.’ Having Arjuna superimposed due to beginningless ignorance non-self and its characteristics on the inactive self — which is unchanging, free from properties like agency, etc. [such as] ‘I am the agent, I am the enjoyer’ — after Kṛṣṇa saw him lamenting, the greatly merciful lord thought in this way with an opposite feeling: ‘Without the knowledge of the identity of the self and *brahman* — well-known *śruti*-passages such as “What bewilderment, what sorrow can there be, regarding the self of he who sees this oneness” (*Īśa Upaniṣad* 7) — being instructed in a differentiating discipline that reiterates the perceptual illusion of duality, he will never overcome the ocean of grief the root of which lies in illusion.’ Therefore, [the lord] uttered such a speech desirous of teaching the knowledge of that [identity] preceded by an analytical clarification on the meaning of the words [‘Thou’ (*tvam*) and ‘That’ (*tat*)],³⁵ so as to reveal at the beginning the analytical clarification of the meaning of the word ‘Thou,’ as if he were laughing at his [= Arjuna’s] behavior [through ironic expressions such as] ‘You are a sage!’ or ‘I think that you indeed possess wisdom.’

*yavacanapūrvakam abhimukhīkṛtya gurus tattvaṃ bodhayed iti sūcayituṃ tathā śocitum
arjunaṃ vivekavacananair bhagavān bodhayām āseti vaktuṃ dhṛtarāṣṭraṃ prati sañjaya
uvāca — tam |.*

³⁵ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7 ff.: *tat tvam asi.*

The formal *upadeśa* begins with 2.11 (BhG4 p. 73). Paraphrasing Śāṅkara analytically, Śāṅkarānanda considers and logically explains the reason for Arjuna’s inappropriate anxiety, anguish, and delusion. In addition, Kṛṣṇa concludes that true wisdom is seeing *brahman* always and everywhere (*sadā sarvatra brahma-darśanam paṇḍityam*), ‘but Arjuna is without such a characteristic, so he is a fool, not a wise man’ (BhG4 p. 73: *ata uktalakṣaṇābhāvāt tvam mūḍha eva na tu paṇḍita iti*).

1.4 Hanumat

The *Paiśācabhāṣya* (or *Hanumadbhāṣya*) is a less known but remarkable commentary by Hanumat (a.k.a. Añjaneya or Piśāca). Hanumat’s exact date is unknown (see Saha 2017: 264), but he is mentioned by Vedānta Deśika (13th–14th c.) in his *Tātparyacāndrikā* (see 4.2.1), a sub-commentary on Rāmānuja’s *Gītābhāṣya* (see 4.2).

Before glossing 2.10, Hanumat clearly comments upon the other parts of the BhG, and elucidates the passage I am focusing on almost in the same way as Śrīdhara (BhG6 p. 72):

śrīnārāyaṇaḥ prasannavadanaḥ sann ubhayoḥ senayor madhye viśīdan-taṃ viśādaṃ kurvantaṃ arjunam pratīdaṃ vakṣyamāṇaṃ vaco vākyaṃ uvāca.

The glorious Nārāyaṇa, with a smiling face — in between the two armies — uttered these words, this discourse which is going to be pronounced to Arjuna who was grieving, who was expressing grief.

Hanumat notes that BhG 1.2³⁶ to 2.9 is meant to prove that becoming is characterized by anguish and delusion and is rooted in ignorance.³⁷

Under 2.11 (BhG6 p. 81) Hanumat exposes his comments quite scholastically. He says that Bhīṣma and other generals are not to be mourned for two reasons: first, they have always been righteous

³⁶ BhG 1.2: *dṛṣtvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṃ vyūḍhaṃ duryodhanas tadā | ācāryam upa-saṅgamyā rājā vacanam abravūt ||*.

³⁷ BhG6 p. 72: *atra ca dṛṣtvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṃ ity ārabhya na yotsya iti govindam uktvā tūṣṇīṃ babhūva ha ity evamanto granthaḥ prāṇināṃ śokamohabahulaḥ saṃsāro ’vidyāmūla itī pradarśanārthatvena vyākhyeyaḥ |*.

and live in conformity with *dharma*, so that their posthumous destinies will be bright; second, their true nature is identical with the supreme self (*aśocyā na śocyā bhīṣmādayaḥ, dhārmikatvāt, vastutaś ca paramātmāsvarūpatvāt*).

According to Hanumat (BhG6 p. 81), the word *prajñā* means ‘knowledge of the supreme self,’ and the words uttered by Arjuna are meant to awaken it (*prajñā paramātmajñānaṃ tannimittāṃś ca vādān vacanānīha bhāṣase*). The *paṇḍitas* neither mourn for the dead nor for the living. Consequently, the true meaning of the word *paṇḍita* is ‘knower of the supreme aim’ (*paramārthavid*). This is why Kṛṣṇa says: ‘O Arjuna, you are a fool, where is your supreme wisdom?’ (*mūḍhas tvam prajñā paramā kutas te*).

1.5 Sadānanda Yogīndra

The *Bhāvaprakāśa* is a versified gloss in *anuṣṭubh* meter composed by Sadānanda Yogīndra (15th c.), the author of the popular Advaita primer *Vedāntasāra*.³⁸ As Sadānanda himself says at the beginning of the *Bhāvaprakāśa*, he substantially follows Śāṅkara’s BhGBh (vv. 9–10: 33–39; BhG4 pp. 7–8).

In the *Bhāvaprakāśa* Sadānanda divides the BhG into three sections on the basis of ‘Thou art That’ (*tat tvam asi*; see n. 37): the first six chapters present an exegesis of the word *tvam*, the second of the word *tat*, and the last group elucidates the identity of the two (vv. 42–43). Before commenting upon 2.11, in the subsequent verses (vv. 44–79) Sadānanda proposes a sort of synthesis of the eighteen chapters of the poem.

In the commentary on 2.7 (BhG4 p. 66), Sadānanda underlines that *saṃsāra* is an ocean of defects (*doṣavāridhi*, v. 1), and therefore he lists the preliminary vedāntic requirements, beginning with the discrimination between real and unreal. Each portion of the following verses 1.31c, 1.32a, 1.32c, 1.35c, 1.38a, 1.46d, 2.5b offers details on the qualifications needed for the vedāntic teaching, together with the reverent approach one must have toward the teacher (*nityānityavastuviveka, ihāmutraphalavirāga*,³⁹

³⁸ For more information, see Mahadevan 2003: 207–211.

³⁹ In vv. 6–7 of the gloss *ad* BhG 2.8 (BhG4 p. 68), Sadānanda confirms that Arjuna is endowed with ‘detachment from the enjoyments of the here-world and the after-world’ (*ihāmutraphalavirāga*).

sama, dama, nirlobha, titikṣā, gurūpasadana, vv. 3–7; see n. 9). Thus, Arjuna becomes an ideal pupil, a perfect reservoir of a teaching which dispels doubts concerning the *summum bonum* (v. 12).

The brief gloss on 2.10 is worth quoting (BhG4 p. 71):

*evam aṅy arjune yuddham upekṣitavatīśvaraḥ | naivopekṣitavān ittham
andham pratyāha sañjayaḥ || 1 || āgatyā senayor madhye yuddhodyoge-
na cārjunam | prāpnuvantam viśādam ca saṁmohaṁ yuddharodhakam
|| 2 || tacceṣṭāyā hy anaucityam hasanena prakāśayan | antaryāmī tam
āheśo lajjābdhau majjayann iva || 3 || vakṣyamāṇam idaṁ cāti-
gambhīraṁ sāravad vacaḥ || 4 ||*

Thus, even though Arjuna has disregarded war, the lord surely did not overlook it. In this way Sañjaya replied to the blind [king] (1). 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 prevents him from [entering into] the battle — (2) the inappropriateness of his behaviour, the lord, the interior controller, as if he were plunging him [= Arjuna] in a sea of shame, uttered (3) these very deep and essential words, which are about to be revealed (4).

Finally, commenting on 2.11 (BhG4 p. 74) Sadānanda informs us that Arjuna is the victim of two types of delusion (v. 1). The first type depends upon the superimposition of the threefold body⁴⁰ on the pure and unchanging self. This raises the wrong ideas concerning the phenomenal universe and the illusory notion about the self being the body, etc. (vv. 2–3): all living beings are prey to this first kind of delusion. The second type is that Arjuna perceives the performance of his *svadharma* as a warrior as leading to injustice (v. 4). Following Śaṅkara, later on Sadānanda states that, when wisdom and foolishness occur in the same receptacle, it is an extraordinary event. Furthermore, Sadānanda puts this question in Arjuna’s mouth: ‘Why do even sages feel anguish on separating from their friends?’ (v. 14). Kṛṣṇa immediately replies:

*maivam dhīmattvam etad bhoḥ prahāsāyaiva kalpate | ye paṇḍitā guroḥ
śrutvā vedāntaviśayaṁ padam || 15 || brahmaikyaṁ yuktibhir matvā*

⁴⁰ Here the three bodies are the gross or physical body (*sthūlaśarīra*), the subtle body (*sūkṣmaśarīra*) and the causal body (*kāraṇaśarīra*).

*nididhyāsya nirantaram | sākṣātkṛtātmatattvās te naṣṭāvidyāmālā
budhāḥ || 16 ||*

O [Arjuna], it is not like that! That is not intelligence, [rather] it is definitely [something] fit for derision. [On the contrary,] the wise ones, having heard from their teacher the word whose content is Vedānta (15) and reflecting with [solid] reasonings on the oneness of *brahman*, and meditating upon it for a long time, these sages — once the filth of ignorance has been annihilated — realize the reality of the self (16).

Following 2.11, the final verses maintain that sages neither grieve for nor are deluded by, respectively, the separation from or association with the living or dead, be they friends or relatives, or whoever (vv. 17–18). Sadānanda also offers an analogy:

*yathā svapne mṛto bandhur jīvan vā śocyatām gataḥ | na tannimitakā
moho jāgare 'py anuvartate || 19 || evam ajñānājabhrāntyā kalpitā
bandhavo mṛtāḥ | jīvanto vā na te bodhe śokamohaḥpradāḥ satām || 20 ||*

Just as a companion — dead or alive — in a dream becomes an object of sorrow, but the delusion generated from this does not follow when one wakes up (19), in the same way, dead or alive companions — conceived [thus] by an illusion arisen from ignorance — do not provoke anguish and delusion in the sages that have awoken to reality (20).

Thus, the beginning of Kṛṣṇa's teaching exhorts Arjuna to behave as a sage, namely, a knower of the self, capable of discriminating between impermanent bodies and permanent self, thus abandoning the anguish caused by an epistemic blindness and establishing himself in the firmness of self's reality (v. 22).

Sadānanda seems to interpret *prahasann iva* as a laugh of derision, without considering the value of *iva*. In any case, Kṛṣṇa's intent is not just for the sake of mockery. On the contrary, while laughing at Arjuna, and consequently making him feel shame, he teaches him how to contrast his cry of weakness with the antidote of a laughter of strength and Arjuna's inertia with Kṛṣṇa's active laughter.

1.6 Madhusūdana Sarasvatī

One of the brightest stars in the galaxy of Advaita Vedānta is Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (16th c., Pellegrini 2015). He composed

the *Gūḍhārthadīpikā* (GAD), a detailed gloss on the BhG, which usually follows Śaṅkara, but here and there dissents with him (Pellegrini forthc.). A relevant issue to be taken into account while reading the GAD is the Vaiṣṇava — or better kṛṣṇaite — background of the *kevalādvaitin* Madhusūdana. The verses are widely commented on in a lucid style and plain language, far from the complex technicalities of Madhusūdana's other works.

At the beginning of GAD (GAD p. 7, BhG2 p. 8, BhG4 p. 5), after several introductory verses, Madhusūdana says that the main purpose of the BhG is 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 known to be 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 sinks deep into confusion. But, having secured Kṛṣṇa's supreme teaching, all anguish and doubt will be ultimately dispelled, and Arjuna will thus revert to his own duty and becomes fulfilled. The idea is that Arjuna, as the lord's pupil, is the model of every eligible person.⁴¹

As done by Daivajña Paṇḍita Sūrya (see 1.1.2) and Sadānanda Yogīndra (see 1.5), while commenting on BhG 2.6 Madhusūdana also highlights the Vedāntic requirements as expressed in the BhG. He shows that some peculiarities of the person eligible for the teaching are presented in the previous part of the text. Under 1.31cd⁴² Madhusūdana recollects the passage on acquisitions (*yoga*) and their conservation (*kṣema*)⁴³ and equates the destiny of a warrior slain in battle with that of a wandering ascetic, who aims

⁴¹ Unlike Śaṅkara, Madhusūdana comments upon the entire first chapter and the opening ten verses of the second.

⁴² BhG 1.31cd: *na ca śreyo 'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanam āhave |*

⁴³ See BhG 9.22: *ananyāś cintayanto māṃ ye janāḥ paryupāsate | teṣāṃ nityā-bhīyuktānāṃ yogaḥsamam vahāmy aham ||*

at attaining the *summum bonum* as established by several passages of the *śruti* such as ‘The good is one thing, the gratifying is quite another’ (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.1). Whatever differs from this goal is not the *summum bonum*: here Madhusūdana sees the discrimination between permanent and impermanent (*nityānityavastuviveka*). BhG 1.32ab⁴⁴ conveys the detachment from this-world results and those of the otherworld, and 1.35⁴⁵ underlines this point. Then, 1.44⁴⁶ teaches that the self is beyond the gross body. BhG 1.32c⁴⁷ refers to mental control (*śama*), and 1.32d⁴⁸ to sensory control (*dama*). Verse 1.38⁴⁹ conveys the absence of greed (*nirlobhatā*), and 1.46⁵⁰ the virtue of forbearance (*titikṣā*). In synthesis, BhG’s first chapter is dedicated to the means of renunciation, and — on the basis of 2.5⁵¹ — the second treats the life of wandering renunciants.

In the gloss on 2.7 (GAD pp. 50–52, BhG2 p. 36, BhG4 pp. 65–66), Madhusūdana continues to connect BhG verses with the steps leading a pupil to approach an authoritative teacher and attain the Vedāntic teaching. Eligible for such an instruction is he who is aware of the defects of the phenomenal experience and totally rejects it. Then, as Arjuna does with Kṛṣṇa, such a man reverently approaches a teacher according to the rule.

In 2.7, Arjuna’s desire to approach Kṛṣṇa as a teacher arises because of the crisis taking place in him, when he sees Bhīṣma and the other heroes. So, having highlighted Arjuna’s aspiration for a life of alms, as described by the *śruti* passage ‘... *vyutthāyātha bhikṣācaryaṃ caranti*’ (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.1), and resorting to the stratagem of his despondency, with the word *kārpaṇya*

⁴⁴ BhG 1.32ab: *na kāṅkṣe vijayaṃ kṛṣṇa na ca rājyaṃ sukhāni ca* |.

⁴⁵ BhG 1.35: *etān na hantum icchāmi ghnato ’pi madhusūdana | api trailokyarājya-sya hetoḥ kiṃ nu mahīkṛte* ||.

⁴⁶ BhG 1.44: *utsannakuladharmāṇāṃ manusyaṇāṃ janārdana | narake ’niyataṃ vāso bhavatiṭi anuśuśrūma* ||.

⁴⁷ BhG 1.32c: *kiṃ no rājyena govinda* [...].

⁴⁸ BhG 1.32d: *kiṃ bhogaṅ jīvītena vā* ||.

⁴⁹ BhG 1.38: *yady apy ete na paśyanti lobhopahatacetasaḥ | kulakṣayakṛtaṃ doṣaṃ mītradrohe ca pātakam* ||.

⁵⁰ BhG 1.46: *yadi mām apratikāram aśāstraṃ śāstrapāṇayaḥ | dhārtarāṣṭrā raṇe hanyus tan me kṣemataraṃ bhavet* ||.

⁵¹ BhG 2.5: *gurūn ahatvā hi mahānubhāvān śreyo bhoktuṃ bhaikṣyam apītha loke | hatvārthakāmāṃs tu gurūn ihaiva bhūñjīya bhogaṅ rudhīrapradigdhan* ||.

‘compassion’ the text discloses his reverent approach to the teacher.⁵²

Probably borrowing his considerations from Keśava Kaśmīrī Bhaṭṭācārya (see 6.1), Madhusūdana focuses on the meaning of the word *kārpaṇya*. In everyday life, a ‘miser’ (*kṛpaṇa*) is someone who does not tolerate even the slightest loss of money or goods. On the other hand, the *śruti* states: ‘*yo vā etad akṣaram gārgy aviditvā asmāl lokāt praiti sa kṛpaṇaḥ*’ (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.15, 3.8.10).⁵³ A miser is whoever does not know the self and has not attained the supreme goal. The abstract form of the word *kṛpaṇa* is *kārpaṇya*, which is nothing but the superimposition of the non-self on the self. Due to this superimposition, a defect such as the stubborn attachment characterized by the sense of mine has obscured the *kṣatriya* nature of Arjuna.⁵⁴

GAD *ad* 2.8 (pp. 54–55; BhG2 pp. 37–38, BhG4 p. 68) shows that, once Arjuna has surrendered himself, he takes refuge in Kṛṣṇa, who alone is capable of removing anguish and delusion, just like Nārada did with the sage Sanatkumāra in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.1.3.⁵⁵ After this, Madhusūdana focuses on the nature of the two kingdoms, that of this world and that of the otherworld,

⁵² GAD (pp. 50–52; BhG2 p. 36, BhG4 pp. 65–66): *gurūpasadanam idānīm pra-tīpādyate samadhigatasamśaradoṣajātasyātitarām nirvinṇasya vidhivad gurum upasan-nasyaiva vidyāgrahaṇe dhikārāt | tad evaṃ bhīṣmādisamkaṭavaśāt | vyutthāyātha bhikṣācāryaṃ carantīti śrūtisiddhabhikṣācārye ṛjunasyābhilāṣaṃ pradarsya vidhivad gurūpasattim api tatsaṅkaṭavyājenaiva darśayati kārpaṇyeti | yaḥ svalpām api vit-takṣatim na kṣamate sa kṛpaṇa iti loke prasiddhaḥ | tadvidhatvād akhilo nātmavid aprāptaḥ puruṣārthatayā kṛpaṇo bhavati | yo vā etad akṣaram gārgy aviditvā asmāl lokāt praiti sa kṛpaṇa iti śruteḥ | tasya bhāvāḥ kārpaṇyam anātmādhyāsavattvaṃ tannimitto ṣmin janmany eta eva madīyās teṣu hateṣu kiṃ jīvitēnety abhiniveśarūpo mamatālakṣaṇo doṣas tenopahatas tirakṣṛtaḥ svabhāvāḥ kṣātro yuddhodyogalakṣaṇo yasya sa tathā |.*

⁵³ Bālaadeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa (see 8.2) reuses several parts of the GAD in his own commentary.

⁵⁴ The rest of the gloss focuses on a sort of analysis of the interior troubles of Arjuna: ‘What is justice? To kill enemies or protect them? Is it right to protect the earth, or is it right to live in the forest?’ But, Arjuna by himself is unable to find a solution and therefore asks Kṛṣṇa to reveal what is best. Then, the text offers some other considerations accompanied by Upaniṣadic quotations such as *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12 and *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.1.

⁵⁵ The same was done by Śaṅkarānanda’s *Tātparyabodhinī* (BhG4 p. 66) and later by Bālaadeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa’s *Gītābhūṣaṇa*.

and — as it is said in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.1.6⁵⁶ — he points out that both are impermanent. Hence, what follows is an inferential formula based on a positive invariable concomitance (*anvaya-vyāpti*):⁵⁷ ‘Whatever is produced is impermanent’ (*yat kṛtakam tad anityam*). Madhusūdāna adds that, besides inference, direct perception also proves that objects of this world are subject to destruction. More than this, all the enjoyments of this world, as well as of the otherworld, are ultimately unable to remove anguish.

In the gloss on 2.9 (GAD pp. 55–56, BhG2 p. 38, BhG4 p. 69), Madhusūdāna simply contextualizes the verse and provides a paratymological derivation of the term *govinda*, who is Kṛṣṇa, Hṛṣīkeśa, the one who triggers all sensorial faculties (*sarve-ndriyapravartaka*), the inner controller (*āntaryāmin*). Addressing Kṛṣṇa with these two epithets, the BhG suggests that he is the omniscient almighty, so it is very easy for him to remove Arjuna’s delusion (*govindahṛṣīkeśapadābhyām sarvajñatvasarvasāktitvasūcakābhyām bhagavatas tanmohāpanodanam anāyāsasādhyam iti sūcitam*): this of course justifies a smile or a laugh.

Madhusūdāna’s reading of 2.10 is worth quoting at length (GAD pp. 56–57, BhG2 pp. 38–39, BhG4 pp. 70–71):

[...] *senayor ubhayor madhye yuddhodyamenāgatya tadvirodhinam viśādam mohaṃ prāpnuvantaṃ tam arjunaṃ prahasann ivānucitācāraṇaprakāśanena lajjāmbudhau majjayann iva hṛṣīkeśaḥ sarvāntaryāmī bhagavān idam vakṣyamāṇam aśocyān ityādi vacaḥ paramagambhīrārtham anucitācāraṇaprakāśakam uktavān na tūpekṣitavān ity arthaḥ | anucitācāraṇaprakāśanena lajjotpādanam prahāsaḥ | lajjā ca duḥkḥātmiketi dveṣaviśaya eva sa mukhyaḥ | arjunasya tu bhagavatkṛpaviśayatvād anucitācāraṇaprakāśanasya ca vivekotpattihetutvād ekadalābhāvena gauṇa evāyaṃ prahāsa iti kathayitum ivaśabdah | lajjām utpādayitum iva vivekam utpādayitum arjunasyānucitācāraṇam bhagavatā prakāśyate | lajjotpattis tu nāntariyakatayāstu māstu veti na vivakṣiteti bhāvaḥ | yadi hi yuddhārambhāt prāg grhe eva sthito yuddham upekṣeta tadā nānucitaṃ kuryāt | mahatā samrambheṇa tu yu-*

⁵⁶ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.1.6: ‘So, in the way that here the condition acquired through action is exhausted, likewise the world up there, gained through merits, is exhausted’ (*tad yatheha karmajito lokaḥ kṣīyata evam evāmutra puṇyajito lokaḥ kṣīyata iti śruteḥ*).

⁵⁷ See Pellegrini 2018: 289–290.

*ddhabhūmāv āgatya tadupekṣaṇam atīvānucitam iti kathayitum senayor
ity ādiviṣeṣaṇam | etac cāśocyān ityādau spaṣṭam bhaviṣyati || 10 ||*

To him, who — having reached the position in between the two armies for war-engagement — experiences anguish and a delusion which is opposed to that [war], Hṛṣīkeśa — the glorious lord and interior controller — almost laughing, as though plunging him into a sea of shame by exhibiting [his] inappropriate conduct,⁵⁸ uttered to [that] Arjuna those words starting with *aśocyān* (BhG 2.11) which are about to be expressed, whose meaning is utterly profound, and which throw light on [his] inappropriate conduct, but do not disregard it. By displaying an inappropriate conduct, derision generates shame, and such shame is substantiated by sorrow. And the content of its primary [meaning] is repulsion. Nevertheless, since Arjuna is the reservoir of the grace of the glorious lord, and since throwing light on his inappropriate behavior is done with the aim of triggering discrimination in him, such derision is only metaphoric due to the lack of one of these [constitutive] elements [i.e. the arousal of shame]. In order to express this, there is the word *iva*. As if it were giving rise to shame, the lord displays Arjuna's inappropriate conduct in order to produce discrimination. On the other hand, the meaning is that the lord intends to express [such an option]: is shame arising as the immediate consequence [of the laugh] or not? Indeed, if [Arjuna] had disregarded the war by staying at home before the beginning of the battle, then he would have done nothing inappropriate. But having reached the battlefield with great enthusiasm, his avoidance of the war is definitely inappropriate (2.10).

Here *prahasann iva* is interpreted as 'almost laughing.' Indeed, although Kṛṣṇa does not manifest a full-fledged laugh, his expression is meant to teach that what Arjuna is doing and thinking is inappropriate for several reasons. Such a hint of laughter is meant to generate a counter-feeling, leading Arjuna to recognize that his reaction is out of place. This mood of laughter is induced when someone acts contrary to his/her *svadharma* (see Rigopoulos *infra* 1.3), so he/she is the object of mockery due to his/her inappropriate behaviour. But this is not a criticism for the sake of criticism. On the contrary, the real purport of the *bhagavat* is highlighted by

⁵⁸ See also Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's *Sārāthavarṣiṇīṭikā* 2.7.1 and Bālaḍeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa's *Gītābhūṣaṇa* 2.7.2.

iva, which suggests that his derision is aimed at triggering Arjuna's discrimination.

In the first part of GAD *ad* 2.11 (p. 57; BhG2 p. 39, BhG4 p. 72), Madhusūdana returns to the gloss on 2.10 and writes:

tatrārjunasya yuddhākhye svadharme svato jātāpi pravṛttir dvidhena mohana tannimittena śokena ca pratibaddheti |

Although it has arisen by nature, Arjuna's inclination towards his own duty — called war — is obstructed by two kinds of delusion, and by the anguish caused by them.⁵⁹

Thus, this twofold delusion of Arjuna should be removed. The first delusion is the superimposition of self that is free from any relation whatsoever with the phenomenal properties on the ultimately false phenomenal world. This superimposition is common to all living beings and takes place because of lack of discrimination due to a threefold limiting condition, constituted by two bodies (gross and subtle) and their respective cause, that is, the causal body, which is the same ignorance of the self. The realization of the pure self removes this first form of delusion.⁶⁰ The second delusion is specific and depends on the defect of compassion which afflicts Arjuna, who sees a form of injustice in the violence of war. This delusion is erased by understanding that, although full of violence, war is the warrior's own duty (*dharmā*), so it cannot be injustice (*adharma*).⁶¹ Hence, Madhusūdana concludes that, once the cause of anguish has withdrawn, anguish necessarily comes to an end.⁶² there is no need of any further means.

⁵⁹ This viewpoint was already developed by Sadānanda (see 1.5) *ad* BhG 2.11 (v. 1, BhG4 p. 74).

⁶⁰ Here I paraphrase GAD (p. 57; BhG2 p. 39, BhG4 pp. 72–73): *tatrātmani svaprakāśāparamānandarūpe sarvasaṃsāradharmāsamsargiṇi sthūlasūkṣmaśarīradvayatātkāraṇāvīdyākhyopādhitrayāvivekena mithyābhūtasyāpi saṃsārasya satyatvātmadharmatvādīpratibhāsarūpa ekaḥ sarvaprāṇisādhāraṇaḥ |*

⁶¹ Here I also paraphrase the following passage of GAD (p. 57; BhG2 p. 39, BhG4 p. 72): *āparas tu yuddhākhye svadharme hīṃsādibāhulyenādharmatvapratibhāsarūpo 'rjunasyaiva karuṇādīdoṣanibandhano 'sādhāraṇaḥ | evam upādhitrayāvivekena śuddhātmasvarūpabodhaḥ prathamasya nirvartakaḥ | dvitīyasya tu hīṃsādīmatto 'pi yuddhasya svadharmatvenādharmatvābhāvabodho 'sādhāraṇaḥ |*

⁶² A common rule states that effects cannot persist without their causes. See the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 1.2.1-2, 4.1.3 and 5.2.18 (ed. pp. 37–38, 147, 184) along with the *Yogasūtra* 2.25 (ed. pp. 23, 96).

The final sections of the GAD *ad* 2.11 (pp. 58–59; BhG2 pp. 41–44, BhG4 p. 73) focus on the perception of the *pañḍitas*, whose knowledge of the reality of the self is generated by reflection (*vicāra*): they do not care about the dead or the living, whereas Arjuna’s perception is completely different from theirs. For these *pañḍitas* the phenomenal world disappears during *samādhi* and thus there is no trace of masters, friends, companions, relatives or whoever else. And although, once they emerge from *samādhi*,⁶³ the world reappears, the *pañḍitas* have ascertained it as being illusory and false (*vyutthānasamaye tatpratibhāse ’pi mṛṣatvena niścayāt*). In the classical example of the rope mistaken for a snake, once the illusion of the snake is dissolved, fear and trembling are no longer justified.

Madhusūdana proposes another classical example: when the normal sense of taste is subdued by hepatitis, even molasses taste bitter owing to an excess of bile. But once the person is cured, despite this invalid perception he/she will not search for molasses when craving for something bitter because the ascertainment of sweetness is definitely stronger. Hence, since the illusion consisting in 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 can no longer persist.

1.7 Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara

Nīlakaṇṭha Caturdhara (second half of the 17th c.) was a non-dualist who wrote the *Bhāratabhāvadīpa* (or *Bhāvadīpa*), a commentary on the entire *Mahābhārata*, which obviously covers also the BhG.⁶⁴ This work is characterized by a formalized expression typical of the period in which Nīlakaṇṭha lived, completely dominated by the *navyanyāya* style and meta-idiom. Indeed, he presents more or less the same arguments of his predecessors but expressing them in a formalized style.

⁶³ On the different perspectives concerning the conditions of *samādhi* and *vyutthāna*, see *Yogasūtra* 3.37 with commentaries (ed. pp. 41, 156).

⁶⁴ Saha (2017: 264) refers to Nīlakaṇṭha as Nīlakaṇṭha Sūri, who lived in Maharashtra in the 16th c. He was the son of Govinda Sūri, a Marāṭhī-speaking brahmin, whose family had established itself in the modern district of Ahmadnagar in Maharashtra (Gode 1942: 146–161).

While commenting on 2.1–3 (BhG6 p. 64), Nīlakaṇṭha says that the words of Arjuna in 1.37 (*svajanaṃ hi kathāṃ hatvā sukhinaḥ syām mādharma*) are not due to a compassion characterized by the desire to eradicate others' sorrows (*na tu dayayā paraduḥkhaprahā-ṇecchārūpayā*), but out of affection for master, fathers, companions, friend, relatives, etc. This is a kind of delusion, which reaches its peak in 2.6 (*yān eva hatvā na jīṭviṣāmah*).

Nīlakaṇṭha's interpretation of 2.10 (BhG6 p. 73) is not detailed:

*mūḍho 'py ayam amūḍhavad vadatīti prahasann iva | idaṃ vaksya-
māṇam |*

This is about to be expressed [in v. 2.11], that 'Even though he is a fool, he is speaking as if he were not one,' [that is the reason for] *prahasann iva*.

In the gloss on 2.11 (BhG6 pp. 82–83), Nīlakaṇṭha exemplifies a sort of formalization through a couple of inferences. Arjuna is the victim of two types of delusion: 1) the idea that the self dies with the death of the body, and 2) the idea that his own duty — war — constitutes *adharmā*.⁶⁵ The lord aims to uproot the first type of delusion with twenty *śloka*s — beginning with BhG 2.11 —, substantially analogous to the aphorisms on the science of the absolute (*brahmavidyā*).⁶⁶ The idea is that only a limiting condition such as the body is subject to death, so that when Arjuna is pained for Bhīṣma, etc., he is completely wrong. This is why even though he utters wise words — as in 1.42c (*ḥatanti pītaro hy eṣām*) and 1.44c (*narake niyataṃ vāsah*) — he acts like a fool. The *probans* for this is given in 2.11cd: *gatāsūn agatāsūn ca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ*. From this we deduce that what is truly desired is the vital breath, and not the body.⁶⁷ Therefore, inferentially speaking: 'the self is different

⁶⁵ This same twofold delusion is also explained by Sadānanda Yogīndra (see 1.5, *ad* BhG 2.11 v. 1; BhG4 p. 74) and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (see 1.6) in GAD *ad* 2.11 (p. 57; BhG4 p. 72, BhG2 p. 39).

⁶⁶ He corroborates his position through a passage of the *śruti* 'It is indeed this [body] that perishes deprived of the individual self; the individual self does not perish!' (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.11.3, *jīvāpetam vā va kiledam mriyate, na jīvo mriyate*).

⁶⁷ As stated in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.15.1: 'Breath is indeed the father, it is the mother, it is the master!' (*prāṇo ha pītā prāṇo mātā prāṇa ācāryah*).

from the body because it is sentient, unlike a pot; [and] the body is not sentient, because it can be experienced, like a pot' (*tasmād ātmā dehād anyah, cetanatvāt, vyatirekeṇa ghaṭavat | deho na cetanaḥ, dṛśyatvāt, ghaṭavat* |).⁶⁸

yadi dehaś cetanaḥ syāt mṛte 'pi tatra caitanyam upalabhyeta, tasmād dehanāśenātmanāsaṃ manvāno mūrkhā evāśīty arthaḥ |

The meaning is: if the body were sentient, once dead there would still be consciousness;⁶⁹ thus, if you consider that with the destruction of the body even the self is destroyed, you are a fool.

In closing, Nīlakaṇṭha says that this is a typical explanation of logicians (*tārkikavyākhyāna*). It is a fact that Arjuna is saying something that wise, learned people would never say.

1.8 *Vaṃśīdhara Mīśra*

We have very scanty information on Vaṃśīdhara Mīśra, who wrote the *Vaṃśī*, a gloss of Advaita inspiration on the BhG, which explains *prahasann iva* under 2.10 (BhG7 pp. 33–34):

prahasann iva prahasana prakṛṣṭahāsaṃ kurvan jano yathā prasanna-mukho bhavati tathā prasannamukhaḥ sann ity arthaḥ | hṛṣīkeśatvena sarvāntaryāmitayā bhaktavatsalatayā ca bhagavataḥ svasakalabhaktasamuddhārāphalakaḥ paramārthatattvaprakāśanasya svacikīrṣitasyaiva arjunasya śokamoharūpaṃ nimittam āśrītya ayam iṣṭo 'vasaraḥ saṃprāpta iti bhagavataś cetasi saṃjātā, tasya mukhacandre 'pi prādura-bhūd ity āśayaḥ |

This is the meaning [of *prahasann iva*]: [Hṛṣīkeśa], by laughing, produced a strong laugh like a common man, he became happy-faced, [that is] displays a happy face. The glorious lord — who wished to illustrate the supreme principle whose fruit is the rescue

⁶⁸ Here two inferences are presented. 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' (*vipakṣa*) is opposite to that of the *probandum* (*sādhyā*). The second inference has a positive instance (*sapakṣa*), where in both the *sapakṣa* and the *sādhyā* the same *dharma* inheres, namely, the property of being the object of empirical experience (*dṛśyatva*, lit. 'visibility'), gained through the means of knowledge. See Pellegrini 2018: 289–290.

⁶⁹ From a *naiyāyika* perspective, this is a hypothetical reasoning (*tarka*), whereas from the perspective of those who accept it as a different means of knowledge, it is a postulation (*arthāpatti*). See Pellegrini 2018: 293–294, 297–299.

of all his devotees — is the impeller of the sense faculties, the inner controller of all and the beloved of devotees. Having recourse to the anguish and delusion of Arjuna as a pretext, in the lord's consciousness [the thought] 'the right occasion has arrived' arose, and it manifested itself even in his moon-face. This is the purport.

Kṛṣṇa's joyful laughter is due to the fact that Arjuna's anguish is the pretext for the lord's intervention, which will lead his devotee to the supreme goal. Hence, a slight smile rises on his face like the moon.

In the gloss on 2.11 (BhG7 pp. 34–35), Vaṃśīdhara divides the BhG in various sections: from 1.1 to 2.10 there is the introduction, which is useful for showing to all living beings that the cause of all defects (anguish, delusion, etc.), i.e. the seed of becoming, is ignorance. From 2.11 to 18.66 there is the principal section of the text (*aṅgī granthaḥ*), where Arjuna is instructed on the *adhyaṭmaśāstra*.

2. Kashmirian Śaiva-Bhedābheda commentaries

In this section I shall deal briefly with some of the commentators of the Śaiva Kashmirian traditions,⁷⁰ as well as the *avpādhikā-bhedābheda-vādin* Bhāskara. The reason for including Bhāskara in this group is because he usually⁷¹ commented upon the Kashmirian recension of the BhG (hereafter BhGk).

What is remarkable in the BhGk (Piano 2017: 98–99; Kato 2016: 1109) is a clearer reading of 2.12b (*vulgata* 2.11b) on *prajñāvan nābhībhāṣase* 'you do not speak as a wise man,' instead of the *vulgata*'s problematic reading *prajñāvādāṃś ca bhāṣase*. In particular, Kato 2016 proposes a survey of traditional interpretations of 2.11b and the scholars' understanding of it, arriving at the conclusion that the BhGk's reading (*prajñāvan nābhībhāṣase*) is more plausible, even though *abhībhāṣase* is comparatively rarer than *bhāṣase*.

⁷⁰ According to Saha (2017: 274), Vasugupta (9th c.), the commentator of the *Śivasūtras*, also wrote the *Vāsavīkīkā*, a commentary on the BhG that seems to be available only in manuscript form.

⁷¹ I say 'usually' because in some parts of his commentary Bhāskara also seems to follow the *vulgata* or, as pointed out by Kato (2014: 1145–1146), perhaps an earlier version of the Kashmirian recension, followed by Rāmakaṇṭha and Abhinavagupta.

2.1 Bhāskara

In addition to a commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*, Bhāskara (8th c.; Saha 2017: 272–273) also wrote the *Bhagavadāśayānusaraṇa* on the BhG. This seems to be the oldest commentary after Śāṅkara's BhGBh. The *Bhagavadāśayānusaraṇa* was edited by Subhadropādhyaya (1965) and studied by van Buitenen (1965) and Kato (2014: 1144–1145), according to whom the text in its present form is very corrupt.

Bhāskara's commentary on 2.10 is terse and ignores the particle *iva* and the preverb *pra-* (BhG5 p. 41).

tam arjunam senayor madhye yathoktena prakāreṇa sīdamānaṃ yuddham prati tyaktotsāham hṛṣīkeśo hasann idam vakṣyamāṇaṃ vākyaṃ āha |

To that Arjuna, seated in the said way in between the two armies, who had abandoned enthusiasm toward war, Hṛṣīkeśa, laughing, uttered this sentence which is about to be expressed.

Despite the scanty gloss, the last sentence of Bhāskara's commentary adds a remarkable consideration: 'Great souls usually smile before speaking' (*mahātmānaḥ kila smitapūrvābhībhāṣiṇo bhavanti*).

The idea that Kṛṣṇa, like all *mahātmans*, smiles before speaking, indicates a shared characteristic, herein expressed by a *tadguṇa-saṃvijñānabahuvr̥hi* compound where the first member is a past participle (from root $\sqrt{\text{smi}}$). Moreover, the next verse of the BhGk seems to hint at a *double entendre* given that in place of 2.11 of the *vulgata* it reads:

*tvaṃ mānuṣeṇopahatāntarātmā
viśādamohābhībhavād viśaṃjñāḥ |
kṛpāgr̥hītaḥ samavekṣya bandhūn
abhīpraṇānān mukham antakasya ||*

You — whose soul is troubled by human compassion, due to overwhelming anguish and delusion — are without discernment. You have been seized by tenderness having seen [your] companions approaching the jaws of death.⁷²

⁷² See Zaehner 1969: 125: 'Vanquished by dejection and delusion, devoid of wit, your inmost self has been upset by what is [all too] human; pity has seized upon you because you see your kinsmen enter into the jaws of death'; and Gnoli

The information provided by this verse, added to BhGk 2.12 (= *vulgata* 2.11, *prajñāvādāṃś ca bhāṣase*), sketches a clear picture of what Kṛṣṇa is saying to Arjuna, i.e. that he is obnubilated and lacks *viveka*, being concerned with what should not concern him. Yet the lord's hint of laughter is not meant to ridicule Arjuna. It rather shows Kṛṣṇa's surprise, because at that crucial time Arjuna is unrecognizable. His intellect, consciousness and discriminating faculty are obstructed, have somehow collapsed: this is the reason for the lord's mockery.⁷³

2.2 *Abhinavagupta*

The commentary on the BhGk of the famous Kashmirian philosopher Abhinavagupta (10th–11th c.) is called *Gītārthasaṃgraha*. He points out that the BhG's first chapter is just an introduction to the rest of the poem (BhG2 p. 8). According to him, the enmity between Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas should be symbolically interpreted as a perpetual conflict between knowledge and ignorance: each tries to subdue the other. Abhinavagupta adds that there are two types of people who are ineligible to receive the teaching: 1) the ignorant, who do not even have a speck of knowledge (*anuppannavidyāleśāvakaśa*), and 2) the wise, who have totally eradicated ignorance (*nirmūlitasamastāvidyāprapañca*). Any instruction given to these two categories is fruitless. The best candidates for the instruction leading to liberation are the doubtful ones.

While glossing 2.5–6 (BhG2 pp. 35–36, 39), Abhinavagupta anticipates that the phrase 'in between the two armies' suggests that Arjuna is overcome by doubt but has not yet decided to withdraw from the war. This is why Arjuna begs for instruction and — being doubtful — is eligible for it. Finding himself in between the two armies he is exactly in between knowledge and ignorance; therefore, unable to decide, he is instructed later on by the lord.⁷⁴

(1976: 57): 'Tu sei turbato, dentro di te, dalla tua stessa umanità e stupidito dall'offuscamento ed avvilitamento che ti sopraffanno. Tu sei pervaso dalla compassione, vedendo i tuoi parenti entrare nelle fauci della morte.'

⁷³ BhG5 p. 42: *visaṃjñō vyavahītadivyañānaḥ saṃvytta iti | itaś copahāsakāraṇam | saṃjñānaṃ saṃjñā viśiṣṭā buddhiḥ | vigatā vyavahitā vā saṃjñā asyeti visaṃjñāḥ | upahatāntarātmā |*.

⁷⁴ See also Marjanovic 2002: 25–44 and Gnoli 1976: 56–57.

2.3 *Ānandavardhana*

In his commentary on the BhG entitled *Jñānakarmasamuccaya* or *Ānandavardhinī*, Ānandavardhana follows the BhGk. Saha (2017: 274) thinks that the author of the *Jñānakarmasamuccaya* is the same as the rhetorician Ānandavardhana (9th c., author of the *Dhvanyāloka*), even though Belvalkar (1941: 5) had already pointed out that the Ānandavardhana of the *Jñānakarmasamuccaya* quotes from Abhinavagupta (Belvalkar 1941: 3). He was probably a 17th c. commentator. On 2.10 he writes (BhG1 p. 27):

*taṃ pāṛtham ubhayoḥ senayoḥ madhye proktaṣṭakāreṇa sīdamānaṃ
śokābhībhūtaṃ yuddhaṃ prati tyaktotsāhaṃ prahasann iva vikṛta-
ceṣṭādarśanād upahasann iva hṛṣīkāṇām indriyāṇām īśaḥ prerayitā
paramātmasvarūpaś caturātmā bhagavān | dehāhaṃbhāvanāvīrbhūta-
mīthyājñānanivṛtter sambhava iti tattvopadeśapūrvam svakarmanī pra-
vartayīṣur (sic for pravivartayīṣur) dehadehinoḥ samyogaviyoga-
svarūpam uddīśann uvācety arthaḥ ||*

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

Here *prahasann iva* seems to mean ‘nearly mocking.’

3. *Jñāneśvar*

Beside the Sanskrit commentarial traditions, there are countless vernacular glosses on the BhG. Although my analysis is based on the Sanskrit sources, I deal here with a single outstanding exception, an enormously important Marāṭhī gloss, namely the *Jñāneśvarī* or *Bhāvārthadīpikā* composed (probably in 1290) by Jñāneśvar (or Jñānadev, traditional dates 1275–1296), the founder of the Vārkarī Panth consisting in a synthesis of Advaita Vedānta tenets, Śaiva Nātha traditions, and Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*.

Commenting on Arjuna's refusal to fight, *Jñāneśvarī* 1.83 ends with these words: 'Lord Krishna was astonished to see him in such a condition' (Kripananda 1989: 17). Jñāneśvar devotes seven verses (84–90) to the interpretation of BhG 2.10, focusing on *prahasann iva* in 88–90. Here is the translation of Swami Kripananda (1989: 17–18):

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).

Kṛṣṇa's apparently harsh behavior, his angry tone and bitter words are understood to be like a medicine, i.e., the medium of his grace (*prasāda*) which flows through unusual paths, as the BhG itself will state later (18.37ab):

yat tad agre viṣam iva pariṇāme 'mṛtopamam |

That [joy] which is at the beginning like poison, but then transforms [itself] into nectar [...]

4. *Viśiṣṭādvaita*

Other important commentators of the BhG are found among the followers of the Vedānta *viśiṣṭādvaita*, which traditionally developed from Nāthamuni (9th c.) and Īśvaramuni (9th c.), through Yāmuna Muni (10th c.), Rāmānuja (11th c.), Veṅkaṭanātha (13th–14th c.) and other important authors and interpreters. The theistic Vaiṣṇava *viśiṣṭādvaitins* — along with Bhāskara — were the earliest direct adversaries of Śaṅkara's interpretation of the BhG.

4.1 *Yāmuna Muni*

The first Viśiṣṭādvaita reading of the BhG is the *Gītārthasaṃgraha* of Yāmuna Muni (10th c.), also known as Āḷvantār, ‘the victorious,’ who is held to be the predecessor of Rāmānuja in the line of the school (Saha 2017: 265–266). In thirty-two stanzas, he exposes the essence of the BhG, which is Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, the supreme *brahman*. He divides the eighteen chapters of the text thematically into three groups of six chapters, each dedicated to a particular kind of *yoga*: *karmayoga*, *bhaktiyoga*, and *jñānayoga*. Due to the extreme conciseness of his work, Yāmuna does not touch on the subject under examination, but hints at it marginally in stanza 5 (BhG6 p. 24):

asthānasnehakāruṇyadharmādharmadhiyākulam |
parthaṃ praṇaṇnam uddiśya sāstrāvatarāṇaṃ kṛtam ||

The opening of the textual teaching has been done by addressing Pārtha who — having totally surrendered [to the lord] — is troubled by misplaced affection and pity, as well as by the [thought of what is] *dharma* and [what is] *adharmā*.

4.1.1 *Veṅkaṭanātha*

The *Gītārthasaṃgraharakṣā* by Veṅkaṭanātha (a.k.a. Vedānta Deśika, 13th–14th c.) is often indispensable for understanding the terse wording of the *Gītārthasaṃgraha*. Veṅkaṭanātha (BhG6 p. 24) says that in the first four stanzas of his work Yāmuna Muni refers to the meaning of the entire BhG and to the purport of each of its three groups of six chapters. From v. 5 to v. 23, Yāmuna briefly explains the meaning of each chapter of the BhG. While glossing on v. 5, Veṅkaṭanātha adds relevant information. Although Vyāsa — the traditional author of the BhG — separated the first chapter from the second, there is a connection between the principal teaching, concerned with the removal of Arjuna’s anguish, and the opening section, describing how the hero’s despondency had arisen. Following this pattern, under v. 5 Veṅkaṭanātha summarizes the first chapter along with the opening section of the second. It is precisely to point this out that Rāmānuja’s commentary on BhG 2.9 (BhG6 p. 71) quotes and elucidates this passage of the *Gītārthasaṃgraha*. While Veṅkaṭanātha does not say anything specific

about *prahasann iva*, nonetheless he explicitly affirms that, since Arjuna has surrendered to the lord, he is to be taken as a model of the eligibility for the teaching, and quotes the passage *asya mohona sāmyatīti matvā* ‘Having thought “his delusion does not come to an end!’” Thus, says Veṅkaṭanātha, vv. 2.10 to 2.12 are to be understood as the true beginning of the teaching.

4.2 Rāmānuja

Rāmānuja commented upon the *Brahmasūtra* with the *Śrībhāṣya* and on the BhG with the *Gītābhāṣya* (or *Viśiṣṭādvaitabhāṣya*), and is therefore known as the *bhāṣyakāra* of Viśiṣṭādvaita. Due to his pivotal position in Viśiṣṭādvaita, his commentary on the BhG is highly esteemed. There are two main hermeneutic tools for investigating Rāmānuja’s commentary on the BhG: one earlier, namely, Yāmuna Muni’s *Gītārthasaṃgraha*, and one later, i.e. the lucid sub-commentary *Tātṭparyacāndrikā* by Veṅkaṭanātha (Raghavachar 1990: XI).

Like Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja observes that Kṛṣṇa is not simply addressing Arjuna but all living beings who long for release. The central theme is devotion to the supreme Kṛṣṇa-Nārāyaṇa, since in Viśiṣṭādvaita *bhakti* is considered the utmost way for realizing the divine. Devotion is said to develop through knowledge and action. These main themes are briefly anticipated in Rāmānuja’s introduction to the poem and find an analytical focus in specific places of his commentary (Raghavachar 1990: XII-XIII).

Like Yāmuna, Rāmānuja divides the BhG into three groups of six chapters each. The first six chapters, according to Rāmānuja, deal with the method the individual self must follow to vanquish bondages. The ascent consists in the intellectual comprehension of the nature of the self, the adherence to *karmayoga*, and then to *jñānayoga*. The second group of six chapters focuses on the *bhaktiyoga* and its object, namely the supreme lord and its nature, attributes, and glories. The third develops a theoretical clarification of the paths of *karman*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti*, and also investigates the status of *prakṛti*, *puruṣa*, and *puruṣottama*, highlighting the absolute supremacy of the latter (Raghavachar 1990: XIV).

In the introduction Rāmānuja says that the nature of the *bhagavat* and the supreme *puruṣārtha* are achievable through *bhaktiyoga*, accompanied by a combination of *karma* and *jñāna* (BhG6 p. 6).

He then briefly comments upon the first chapter, in order to summarize the scene of the battlefield (BhG 1.25–1.47). The theme of the first chapter extends to the opening ten verses of the second. Within the *Mahābhārata*-frame (6.25–42), this portion represents the epic and dramatic core of the BhG (Ježić 1979: 628–638). While in the beginning of the first chapter, the text lists the names of the most illustrious warriors of the two armies on the Kurukṣetra battlefield, in the second part the focus is on Arjuna’s turmoil of emotions. The rest of the BhG is devoted to solving his distress.⁷⁵ On *prahasann iva* Rāmānuja says (BhG6 p. 71):

*tam evaṃ dehātmanor yāthātmyājñānanimittasokāviṣṭaṃ dehātirikṭā-
tmajñānanimittaṃ ca dharmam⁷⁶ bhāṣamāṇaṃ parasparaviruddha-
guṇānvitam ubhayoḥ senayor yuddhāya udyuktayor madhye akasmān
nirudyogaṃ pārtham ālokya paramapurūṣaḥ prahasann iva idam uvāca
| [pārtham prahasann iva] pariḥāsavākyaṃ vadann iva ātmapa-
ramātmayāthātmyatatprāptyupāyabhūtakarmayogabhaktiyogagocaram
na tv evāhaṃ jātu nāsam ity ārabhya ahaṃ tvā sarvaḥpāpebhyo
mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śuca ityetaḍantam uvāca ity arthaḥ |*

Having thus seen him, the descendant of Pṛthā, between the two armies ready for battle, all of a sudden discouraged, pervaded by an 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, [which are concepts] 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) — the contents of the path of actions and the path of devotion that are the means to obtain that [goal], which concerns the

⁷⁵ Glossing the compound *dharmakṣetre* (BhG 1.1), Vedānta Deśika states that the field of *dharmā* is the sacred soil of an immense war-sacrifice (BhG6 p. 25).

⁷⁶ Here is a textual problem. I prefer the reading *dharmam* (Ādidevānanda 1993: 59–60) rather than *dharmādharmau* (BhG6 p. 71). But, commenting on BhG 2.11 (BhG6 p. 79), the text refers to Arjuna’s sorrows because he will kill his friends and relatives, and his consequent speech on *dharmā* and *adharmā* is generated by the knowledge of the self as different from the body. In the gloss *ad* 2.11, the word *bhāṣaṇam* is not constructed only with *dharmam*, as in the reading I prefer *ad* 2.1, but we find it attached to a *dvandva* compound with *dharmā* and *adharmā*, as presented by BhG6 (p. 71).

real nature of the [individual] self and of the supreme self. This is the meaning.

Here, Rāmānuja reads *prahasan* as a mocking laugh mitigated by the semantic force of *iva*. In Rāmānuja’s commentary on 2.11 (BhG6 p. 79), a few points just mentioned in 2.10 are clarified, but nothing more is said on our issue. Rāmānuja focuses on the sources of Arjuna’s anguish: quoting BhG 1.42cd,⁷⁷ he adds that Arjuna cries for those who are not to be mourned. This mistake is due to his identification of the self with the body, which is also what triggers Arjuna’s apparently wise words. On the contrary, Rāmānuja points out that those who know the true status of the body and self do not suffer any anguish whatsoever on similar occasions (*dehā-tmasvabhāvajñānavatām nātra kiñcic chokanimittam asti*).

4.2.1 Veṅkaṭanātha

In addition to the *Gītārthasaṃgraharakṣā* on Yāmuna Muni’s *Gītārthasaṃgraha* (see 4.1 and 4.1.1), Veṅkaṭanātha (traditional dates 1268–1369) also composed the *Tātparyacandrikā*, a sub-commentary on Rāmānuja’s *Gītābhāṣya*, which glosses the latter’s introduction at length, mentioning Śaṅkara several times in order to refute him. Under 2.1 (BhG6 p. 62) it says that the first chapter of the BhG focuses on Arjuna’s anguish and delusion, while the second is devoted to the teaching capable of uprooting them, namely the instruction on *brahman* and *ātman*.

On BhG 2.2 (BhG6 p. 62), Veṅkaṭanātha concentrates on Arjuna’s misplaced delusion, which leads to the refusal of fighting (v. 2.8). It is this delusion which should be taken into consideration, and not the persons for whom Arjuna is distressed.

On 2.6–8 (BhG6 p. 68), Veṅkaṭanātha points out that a war is usually fought with the aim of defending one’s beloved. But in the *Mahābhārata* conflict the enemy is one’s kith and kin. This inevitably generates confusion, diminishing the ability to reach decisions due to the feelings of affection and compassion for one’s relatives and friends. Only Kṛṣṇa can solve the problem and dispel all doubts by revealing the *summum bonum* (*śreyas*; see *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.1 and 1.7).

⁷⁷ BhG 1.42cd: *patanti pitaro hy eṣāṃ luṭpaṅḍodakakriyāḥ* |.

On 2.9 (BhG6 p. 72), Veṅkaṭanātha asks himself: if the first chapter is centered upon Arjuna's despondency brought about by misplaced affection, then why is the textual teaching entirely focused on the *yogas* of action, knowledge and devotion, about which no question has been asked?⁷⁸ It is not at all appropriate to offer such an instruction, given that what the *bhagavat* will reveal requires ascending degrees of secrecy (*cāyaṃ guhyaguhyataraguhyatamaṃ prakāro 'rthaḥ sahasopadeṣṭum ayuktaḥ*). This becomes evident in subsequent passages of the text itself (2.18⁷⁹ and 2.37⁸⁰), where the lord emphasizes that Arjuna must engage in battle.

To this objection (BhG6 p. 72), Veṅkaṭanātha replies by reverting once again to BhG 2.7. He argues that, although the expression 'what is best' (*yaḥ chreyaḥ*) is quite indeterminate, Arjuna is by now a *bhakta* consecrated to his *guru*-god Kṛṣṇa and thus it must be inferred that he has the desire to know *brahman*. This the reason why the lord offers him his sublime teaching concerning the ultimate goal. Even the imperative form 'fight' (*yudhyasva*) must be understood as a means to achieve the *summum bonum*. For this reason, it is correct to undertake the teaching.

Veṅkaṭanātha then proceeds to comments upon Rāmānuja's *bhāṣya ad 2.10*:

parihāsayogyatvāya tam iti parāmṛṣṭam āha — evam ityādinā | [...] adharmādih parājayādir vā yuddhanivṛtteḥ samyagdhetur atra nāsti, ahetukopakrāntatyāge tu parihāsyatvam iti bhāvah |

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.

[...] yadvā dhīram arjunam hṛṣīkeśatayā svayaṃ prakṣobhya prahasann iva jagadupakārāya śāstram uvāceti saṃbandhaviśeṣāt samanantaravākyaṃ paryālocanayā ca parihāsārthatvaucityāt prahāsasya pārthakarmakatvam uktam |

⁷⁸ To corroborate his hypothetical question, Veṅkaṭanātha (BhG6 p. 72) quotes *Mānavadharmasāstra* 2.110: 'No unasked issue should be revealed to anyone [...]' (*nāpṛṣṭaḥ kasyacid brūyāt*).

⁷⁹ BhG 2.18d: *tasmād yudhyasva bhārata ||*.

⁸⁰ BhG 2.37d: *yuddhāya kṛtaniścayaḥ ||*.

On the other hand, since he [= Kṛṣṇa] is the lord of the sense faculties, having agitated the valiant Arjuna, with a hint of laughter he revealed to him the text so as to benefit the whole universe. Thus, due to a specific relationship and by means of the structure of the immediately following sentence, and since mockery is legitimate when amusement is its purpose, [then] the property of being the grammatical object of Pārtha [= Arjuna] has been expressed.

[...] *ataḥ prahasann iva ity anena phalitaṃ sarasatvaṃ sugrahatvaṃ nikhilanigamāntagahvaranilīnasya mahato ṛthajātasyānāyāsabhāṣaṇam, idaṃśabdasya vakṣyamāṇasamastabhagavadvākyaaviśayatvam, iṅgitenāpi vivakṣitasūcanam ca darśayati — parihāsetyādinā |*

[...] Therefore, the freshness and the easy understandability resulting from the [expression] *prahasann iva* is [the prelude to] an effortless speech whose majestic meaning is hidden in the cave of the conclusion of all sapiential texts [= the Vedānta/*Upaniṣads*]. The object of the word *idam* are the sentences of the glorious lord that are about to be uttered. Moreover, by means of what is indicated, he [= Rāmānuja] alludes to what is meant by [the expression] ‘mocking [sentence].’

aśocyān iti slokasyāpi upadeśārthāvadhānāpādanārthaparihāsacchāyātayā śāstrāvatarāṇamātratvena sāksācchāstratvābhāvāt na tv evāham ity ārabhya ity uktam |

Indeed, since the verse *aśocyān* (2.11) also bears a shadow of mockery, its purport is to draw attention to the meaning of the teaching. Simply introducing the text from ‘Never, indeed, I was not ...’ (*na tv evāham*, BhG 2.12) does not display the nature of a direct [benefic] instruction. This is what has been said [by Rāmānuja].

yadvātra aśocyān iti slokaḥ prahasann ivety asya viśayo na tv evāham ityādikam idaṃśabdārthaḥ |

In other words, here the verse *aśocyān* (2.11) is the content of *prahasann iva*, and *na tv evāham* (2.12) is the meaning of the word *idam*.

No further mention is made of *prahasann iva* (see 9). Under 2.11, Venkaṭanātha focuses on grammatical and lexical issues.

5. *Dvaita*

The Dvaita school of Vedānta emerged between the 13th and 14th c. thanks to the works of Madhva or Ānanda Tīrtha’s (1198–1277

or 1238–1317; see Sharma 1981: 77–79), who composed two different commentaries on the BhG: the independent *Gītābhāṣya* and the *Bhagavadgītātātparyanirṇaya*, inserted within the monumental *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya*. However, nowhere does he dwell on the phrase *prahasann iva* (see BhG6 p. 80). After Madhva comes an early stage of development of the dualistic writings, culminating in the ‘standardization of Dvaita thought’ (Sharma 1981: 235) under the multifarious genius of Jaya Tīrtha.

5.1 Jaya Tīrtha

Jaya Tīrtha (1365–1388; Sharma 1981: 245) is an eclectic author who won the title *īkācārya* within the Dvaita textual tradition for his *Nyāyasudhā*, a monumental and highly sophisticated sub-commentary on Madhva’s *magnum opus Anuvyākhyāna*. He also wrote the *Prameyadīpikā*, a sub-commentary on Madhva’s *Gītābhāṣya*.⁸¹

Since Madhva’s commentary on the BhG begins with 2.11, Jaya Tīrtha’s gloss also begins with that verse. Commenting on 2.11 (BhG6 p. 80), Jaya Tīrtha says that Madhva condensed the verses from 1.1 to 2.11 in the *incipit* of his commentary because there their meaning is crystal-clear. Still, a *pūrvapakṣin* raises a relevant question: as neither *dharma* nor any principle (*tattva*) is dealt with in that part of the text (BhG 1.1–2.11), why is it inserted in the body of the BhG? The *Prameyadīpikā* replies that the BhG is keen to present the context in which Kṛṣṇa offered his teaching to Arjuna.

Arjuna’s delusion and attachment, his affection toward masters, companions, and relatives, takes the form of this false conception:

*mamaite, aham eteṣāṃ, ete ca manmittaṃ naṅkṣyanti, katham etair
vināhaṃ bhaveyam? pāpaṃ ca me bhaviṣyati, jayaś ca sandigdhaḥ*

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 addiction victory is doubtful!

Being caught in the net of these feelings, Arjuna becomes a victim of despondency. Such despondency is interpreted as a weakness of

⁸¹ Jaya Tīrtha also wrote a sub-commentary on the *Bhagavadgītātātparyanirṇaya*, the *Nyāyadīpikā*, which I was unable to access. See Saha 2017: 269–270.

the mind coming from the anguish generated by bewilderment: its consequence is the oblivion of any acts (*viṣādo nāma mohanimittāc chokād yanmanodaurbalyam, yasmin sati sarvavyāpāroparamo bhavati*).

Jaya Tīrtha raises another plausible doubt, which takes into account 2.10: why is it that Arjuna's bewilderment occurs just when the battle is about to begin? Indeed, the hero was all along aware that in the Kauravas' army there were many of his masters, friends and relatives. And he surely knew that the war would cause enormous losses. Verse 2.10 is inserted to answer these questions.⁸² To this Jaya Tīrtha replies that it is well-known that, when one recollects a great offence, the original rage reappears. In the case of a sensitive person like Arjuna such rage ultimately tends to soften, leaving place to the affection for one's relations, out of which delusion develops. Nevertheless, as Arjuna is ultimately a sage, it must be considered that his imprisonment in the net of delusion is indeed minimal.⁸³

5.2 Rāghavendra

Rāghavendra (c. 1640) composed the *Arthasaṃgraha*. It is not a very remarkable gloss, but has a few words on *prahasann iva* (BhG4 p. 71):

prahasann iveti parihāsakaravākyoktididyotakahāsasya sūcanāyevaśābdaḥ |

The word *iva* in *prahasann iva* suggests a laugh, revealing the expressions in [Arjuna's] sentences that are objects of mockery.

On 2.11 (BhG4 p. 75), it is worth quoting the interpretation of *ca* in *gatāsūn agatāsūn ca*. Rāghavendra argues that it should be read as *iva*:

gatāsūn āsannavināśān agatāsūn ivety upamārthaś cakāraḥ |

⁸² BhG6 p. 80: *nanv idānīm eva kuto 'rjunasya mohasamutpattiḥ? na hy ete bāndhavādāya iti prān nājñāsīt, yena yuddhāya mahāntam udyogam akāśīd ity āha senayor iti |*

⁸³ BhG6 p. 80: *mahāpakārasmaraṇenānuvartamāno 'pi koṇo mṛdumanasām bāndhavādāśv antakāle nivartate, snehaś cotpadyate, tato moho iti prasiddham eveti bhāvah | arjunasya jñānitvān mohajālasaṃvṛtatvam īśad eveti mantavyam |*

The [use of] *ca* implies comparison [as expressed by] *iva*. Therefore, dead persons are just like those who are not dead.

6. Dvaitādvaita

The Dvaitādvaita (‘duality and non-duality’ or ‘duality in non-duality’) or Bhedābheda (‘difference and non-difference’ or ‘difference in non-difference’) school of Vedānta had the Vaiṣṇava Nimbārka (12th–13th c.) as its chief exponent. He did not write any commentary on the BhG. Its Dvaitādvaita interpretation was developed by Keśava Kaśmīrī Bhaṭṭācārya.

6.1 Keśava Kaśmīrī Bhaṭṭācārya

Keśava Kaśmīrī Bhaṭṭācārya (a.k.a. Bhaṭṭa, c. 1510) is the author of the *Tattvapraṅkāśikā* on the BhG. He did not follow the *vulgate* version but another text with 745 verses, which also differs from the BhGk (Saha 2017: 270). He states (BhG4 p. 3) that from 2.11 onward the teachings of the *bhagavat* are meant to dispel Arjuna’s anguish and delusion and, in order to learn about the hero’s despondency, the first chapter is essential.⁸⁴

While commenting on 2.7 (BhG4 p. 65), the *Tattvapraṅkāśikā* focuses on the meaning of the word *kārpaṇya*, quoting a passage from *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.4.15, 3.8.10),⁸⁵ which is most likely the source of Madhusūdana’s (see 1.6) analogous considerations. Indeed, in the *śāstra*, *kṛpaṇa* is someone who does not know his/her own nature, nor the qualities of the supreme being who is defined by the word ‘imperishable’ (*akṣara*).⁸⁶ On the contrary, in ordinary experience *kṛpaṇa* is someone who is unable to tolerate even the least loss of money or goods (*loke tu svalpam api dravyavyayaṃ kartum akṣamaḥ kṛpaṇaḥ*). The corresponding abstract property is *kārpaṇya*. Due to this kind of weakness/compassion, Arjuna’s

⁸⁴ BhG4 p. 3: *tatra tāvad aśocyān anvaśocyas tvam ity ārabhyārjunasya śokamohāpanodānāya bhagavadupadeśam varṇayitum arjunasya sahetukaśokadarśanāya prathamādhyaṅgambhaḥ* |.

⁸⁵ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.4.15, 3.8.10): *yo vā etad akṣaram aviditvā gārgyasmāl lokāt praiti sa kṛpaṇa* | ‘The *kṛpaṇa* is he who indeed departs from this world without having known that imperishable!’

⁸⁶ BhG4 p. 65: *pūrvapratīpādītākṣaraśabdavācyaśūryacandravāyuvahnindrādisarvajaganniyatparamātmasarūpaguṇādijñānahinaḥ kṛpaṇa ity ucyate śāstre* |.

discrimination is obscured, and he becomes incapable of finding any reason to fight and kill his own people. Thus, with his intellect darkened by delusion and confusion about his own duty, Arjuna begs for instruction from the omniscient lord who is completely free from defects.⁸⁷

In the opening lines of the *Tattvaparakāśikā ad 2.10* (BhG4 p. 70) we find an original insertion. It seems that 2.10 is caused by a thought of Dhṛtarāṣṭra: ‘If Arjuna leaves the fight, my sons will live happily.’ Thus, Sañjaya points out to Dhṛtarāṣṭra that it is totally improper for a king born in the heroic lineage of Bharata to think in such a way.⁸⁸ Then, Keśava Kaśmīrī quotes the expression *prahasann iva*, merely mentioning that Arjuna was anguished between the two armies ready to fight, so the glorious lord, almost laughing, spoke to him. Then he observes:

*pāṇḍuputrasya kṣatriyasammatasya naitad yuktam iti lajjānimittam
kopaṃ utpādayitum prahasann ivety uktam | arjunaṃ nimittīkṛtya sa-
rvasenāsaṃhārārthaṃ pravṛttasya gurutvenāṅgīkṛtya hitopadeṣṭur bha-
gavataḥ svadharme pravarttayitum udyatasya prahāso nocitaḥ, kintu
tadvidhābuddhikausālyagarvāpanayanena tattvajñānādhikāritāsa-
mpādanāya tathā vacanam itīvaśabdābhiprāyaḥ ||*

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 [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 a speech is intended to make [him] eligible for the knowledge of reality by eliminating the pride by means of the force of such an understanding. This is the purport of the word *iva*.

Here is a clear statement by Keśava Kaśmīrī that Kṛṣṇa’s smile/ laugh is not really meant to mock Arjuna, because that would be

⁸⁷ BhG4 p. 65: *ata eva dharme sammūḍhaṃ ceto yasya so ’haṃ tvāṃ svabhāvato
’pāstasamastadoṣaṃ sarvajñaṃ pṛcchāmi |*

⁸⁸ BhG4 p. 70: *evaṃ yuddhatyāgāya kṛtavyaavasāye ’rjune mama putrāṇaṃ sukhaṃ
jīvanaṃ siddham iti cetanācetananiyantari durjanavināśāyāvātīrṇe bhagavaty
adhiṣṭhātari sati nāśāsanīyam iti dhṛtarāṣṭrāya sūcayitum sañjaya āha — tam iti | he
bhārata! mahāvīrasya bharatasya vaṃśe jātasya tava yuddhoparatau putrasnehena harṣo
nocita iti bhāvah |*

incongruous. Indeed, he has just accepted him as a disciple, and it is utterly out of place for the *guru* to laugh at the pupil. This is the function of the particle *iva* after the present participle.

The gloss on 2.11 (BhG4 p. 72) opens with a series of quotations from the *śruti* and the *smṛti* throwing some light on the knowledge whose subjects are the nature and qualities of the supreme *brahman*, denoted by the words Nārāyaṇa, Hari, Vāsudeva, the unchanging being whose nature is both different and non-different from everything, the all-pervasive self of all. This knowledge removes all bewilderment, anguish, and delusion.

Finally, the gloss adds that Arjuna's sorrows are summarized by verse 1.31,⁸⁹ where our hero states that without Bhīṣma, Droṇa and the other teachers, friends, and relatives, there is no point in living or gaining the kingdom. The *Tattvapraśāśikā* defines this sorrowful despondency of Arjuna's as foolishness. Nevertheless, the words he utters in verses 1.36,⁹⁰ 1.44⁹¹ and 2.5⁹² disclose a wisdom of sorts, as the expression *prajñāvādāms ca bhāṣase* indicates. However, as the simultaneous occurrence of opposing properties like foolishness and wisdom in a single individual is unlikely, Arjuna's arguments as well as his superficial wisdom are ultimately useless. This is the reason that prompts the lord to intervene.

7. Śuddhādvaita

Another Vaiṣṇava interpretation of Vedānta is developed by the Śuddhādvaita devotional school. The main author of this school was Vallabha (late 15th c.–early 16th c.), who did not comment upon the BhG, although he treated it in an independent work, the *Tattvārthadīpikā* (or *Tattvadīpanibandha*) with his own gloss *Prakāśa*. In the first part of the work — called *śāstrārtha* — Vallabha deals with the meaning of the main issues of the BhG. In the 16th c., some successors of Vallabha such as Viṭṭhalanātha glossed the

⁸⁹ BhG 1.31: *nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni keśava | na ca śreyo 'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanam āhavae ||*.

⁹⁰ BhG 1.36: *nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrān naḥ kā prītiḥ syāj janārdana | pāpam evāśrayed asmān hatvaitān ātatāyinaḥ ||*.

⁹¹ BhG 1.44: *utsannakuladharmāṅgāṃ manuṣyāṅgāṃ janārdana | narake niyataṃ vāso bhavatiṭy anuśūruma ||*.

⁹² BhG 2.5: *gurūn ahatvā hi mahānubhāvān śreyo bhoktuṃ bhāikṣyam apītha loke | hatvārthakāmāṃs tu gurūn ihaiva bhujjīya bhogān rudhirapradīgdhān || 5 ||*.

BhG or parts of it in works like the *Gītārthavivarāṇa* with the *Gītātātparyā*, the *Nyāsādeśa* on BhG 18.66, and the *Gītāhetunirṇaya* (Saha 2017: 271).

7.1 Vallabha

The fifth grandson in Vallabha's lineage was another Vallabha (early 17th c.), who composed the *Tattvadīpikā*, an independent gloss on the BhG in mixed prose and verse (Saha 2017: 272).

The gloss on 2.10 (BhG6 p. 73) is as brief as it is useful. Having refused to fight, Arjuna sits, silent, on the floor of the chariot. The *Tattvadīpikā* asks:

*tataḥ kiṃ jātam iti tam uvāceti | aho asyāmatattvājñānataḥ klaibyaṃ
kīḍk? iti prahasan dharmiṣṭhatvād asyāitad apy ucitam iti bhāvenety
uktam |*

After that what happened? [The lord] 'said to him.' This has been said with this idea [in mind]: 'Alas, how great is such cowardice due to the ignorance of the reality of the self?' Here laughing in this way also becomes adequate, since he [= Arjuna] is greatly virtuous.

Vallabha comments on 2.11 in eight and a half verses, and then a passage in prose begins (BhG6 p. 82). His main focus is on *sāṃkhyayoga* as intended in the BhG. The prose passage highlights that Arjuna's anguish is due to lack of discrimination concerning the self, which determines a confusion about his own duty. Arjuna is concerned with what should not be an object of concern, confusing the imperishable self with the body which is *prakṛti*, i.e. the non-self. In order to remove this epistemic distortion, from 2.11 onwards Kṛṣṇa teaches him 'discriminative knowledge' (*sāṃkhyabuddhi*).

8. Acintyabhedābheda

The last section of this survey of the commentarial literature is devoted to the Acintyabhedābheda Vedānta, intimately linked with the *gauḍīyavaiṣṇava* tradition and philosophically indebted to Madhva and Rāmānuja. It is commonly held that the initiator of this theology was the Bengali saint Caitanya Mahāprabhu (1486–1534). Several authors of this school composed independent treatises. Here I deal with two commentaries on the BhG.

8.1 *Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura*

The first *gauḍīyavaiṣṇava* gloss on the BhG is the *Sārāthavarṣiṇī-ṭīkā* by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura (1626–1708?), a Bengali author active in Nadia. At the end of the commentary on 2.7, Viśvanātha says that Kṛṣṇa seems to scold Arjuna:

*nanu madvācas tvaṃ paṇḍitamānitvena khaṇḍayasi cet, katham
brūyām? tatrāha śiṣyas te 'ham asmi | nātaḥ paraṃ vṛthā khaṇḍayāmīti
bhāvah ||*

‘If you, considering yourself a sage, keep on refuting my words, then why should I speak?’ At this point [Arjuna] says ‘I am your disciple! From now on, I shall no more vainly rejects [your words].’ This is the idea.

Then, under 2.10:

*aho tavāpy etāvān khalv aviveka⁹³ iti sakhyabhāvena taṃ prahasana
anucityaḥ prakāśena lajjāmbudhau nimajjayan iveti tadānīm śiṣyabhāvaṃ
prāpte tasmīn hāsyaṃ anucitam ity adharoṣṭhanikuñcanena hāsyaṃ
āvṛṇvaṃś cety arthaḥ |*

[Kṛṣṇa] then mocked him in a friendly mood: ‘Alas, indeed such a lack of discrimination has indeed taken hold of you!’ Thus the lord plunged him in a sea of shame by revealing the inappropriateness [of his behavior]. [Anyhow], on this occasion his laughing at [Arjuna], who had reached the condition of disciple, is inappropriate. Therefore, the meaning [of *prahasann iva*] is ‘curling the lower lip and hiding the laughter.’

Here, Viśvanātha denies that Kṛṣṇa is laughing at Arjuna out of scorn after accepting him as disciple, since the master cannot laugh at the disciple. So, we find the idea of a gentle mockery, not for the sake of derision but caused by Arjuna’s inappropriate behavior. On the contrary, the smile is somewhat repressed and shows Kṛṣṇa’s love for Arjuna, as the following passage seems to confirm:

*hṛṣīkeśa iti pūrvam premāivārjunavānṇīyamyo 'pi⁹⁴ sāmpratam arjuna-
hitakāritvāt premāivārjunamanoniyantāpi bhavatīti bhāvah | senayor*

⁹³ Where GRETIL reads *aho tvāpy etāvān khalv aviveka*, I partially follow Bāla-deva Vidyābhūṣaṇa (see 8.2) who reads *aho tavāpīdyg vīvekah*.

⁹⁴ In the construction *premāivārjunavānṇīyamyo 'pi* I see a textual problem. The sense must be that before the intervention of Kṛṣṇa-Hṛṣīkeśa — as the con-

*ubhayor madhye ity arjunasya viśādo bhagavatā prabodhas ca ubhā-
bhyām senābhyām sāmānyato dṛṣṭa eveti bhāvaḥ || 10 ||*

Even though by [resorting to the epithet] ‘Hṛṣīkeśa’ words, it is now [Kṛṣṇa] who, out of love, controls Arjuna’s mind being his benefactor: this is the idea. Indeed, ‘in between the two armies,’ the glorious lord has equally witnessed — together with the two armies — Arjuna’s anguish and awakening. This is the meaning.

8.2 Bāladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa

Bāladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa (1700–1793?), a later follower of Caitanya, wrote the *Gītābhūṣaṇa*, a commentary on the BhG.

His analysis corresponds to that of Viśvanātha Cakravartī’s *Sārārthavarṣiṇīṭīkā*, but it is slightly more detailed. For example, Bāladeva’s gloss on 2.7 quotes some passages from the *śruti*⁹⁵ and emphasizes the need to become the disciple of a master. Moreover, the gloss interprets the word *kārpaṇya* as ‘the ignorance of *brahman*’ (*abrahmavittva*): this is the problem that afflicts Arjuna and prevents him from accomplishing his duty.⁹⁶ His interpretation of 2.10 is indebted to Viśvanātha:

*vyaṅgyam arthaṃ prakāśayann āha — tam uvāceti taṃ viśīdantam arju-
naṃ prati hṛṣīkeśo bhagavān aśocyān ityādīkam atigambhīrārthaṃ vaca-
nam uvāca | aho tavāpīdṛg viveka iti sakhyabhāvena prahasan | anau-
cityabhāsitvena trapāsindhau nimajjayann ity arthaḥ | iveti tadaiva
śīyatām prāpte tasmīn hāsānaucityād īśadadharollāsaṃ kurvann ity*

troller of the sense faculties along with the mind — Arjuna was under control of the affection for his kinsfolk. Now, at the beginning of *gītōpadeśa*, his mind is under the control of Kṛṣṇa. Nevertheless, the syntax is problematic: the nominative singular masculine of the gerundive *niyamya* must be read with the nominative masculine *premaiva* [= *premā eva*]. The result could be ‘it is love indeed to be restrained/controlled in the words of Arjuna.’ But the focus of the first sentence should be on the direct agency of love, and not as the subject of the passive gerundive-construction. Therefore, I see three ways to solve the problem: to emend the sentence as 1) *preṃāivārjunavānniyamyo ’pi*; or 2) *preṃāivārjunavānniyantāpi*; or 3) to give an active meaning to the gerundive, as I did for the sake of clarity.

⁹⁵ See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.8.10, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.14.2, and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12.

⁹⁶ The *Gītābhūṣaṇa ad BhG* 2.8 is quite close to Viśvanātha’s gloss, but besides adding some Upaniṣadic quotations (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.1.3, 8.1.6) it is also more analytical.

*arthah | arjunasya viṣādo bhagavatā tasyopadeśaś ca sarvasākṣika iti
bodhayituṃ senayor ubhayor ity etat || 10 ||*

Revealing the meaning to be suggested ‘He said to him,’ the glorious lord, smiling with a friendly mood, uttered this deeply meaningful verse — *aśocyān* (2.11) — to Arjuna who was in anguish: ‘Alas, is this your discrimination ...?’, because he had spoken in an inappropriate way being immersed in a sea of doubt. This is the meaning. [The word] *iva* [means that,] since in that moment he [= Arjuna] has become a disciple, then a [mocking] laugh was improper. This is why the meaning is ‘with the lower lip trembling a bit.’ In order to point out that Arjuna’s anguish and the [consequent] teaching of the glorious lord can be directly experienced by everyone, [the verse states] this: ‘Between the two armies.’

Here, Bāladeva remarks that the *prahāsa* is a kind and sympathetic smile, which is appropriate for a *guru* who is about to offer an instruction to his confused disciple.

9. General evaluation

In all the passages analysed above, I have mostly used primary sources, concentrating less on the BhG *tout court* than on its commentarial tradition. Here I attempt to briefly summarise this tradition, beginning with Śāṅkara and continuing with the major commentaries and sub-commentaries available until the 20th c., focusing on the construction *prahasann iva*. Of course, there are several other commentaries that I was not able to consult.

As shown by Rigopoulos in his essay (*infra*), there are many ways to translate *prahasann iva*. This multiplicity of interpretative possibilities is also attested in the commentaries. For this reason, I have translated the expression in different ways, attempting to detect the hermeneutic nuances given by different commentators, who usually insert *prahasann iva* in a broader perspective, within the BhG itself as well as from a general Vedāntic or soteriological standpoint. What clearly emerges from the glosses is that the expression is found in a crucial narrative position in the *Mahābhārata* between the epic and the philosophical/theological frames (Ježić 1979), which in the BhG correspond to the introduction of the text and the beginning of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching, respectively. This broader perspective inevitably involves a consideration: every author interprets *prahasann iva* according to his own

axiological position. Indeed, the construction is usually interpreted in these ways: ‘as though smiling’/‘nearly’/‘almost laughing,’ while the *prahāsa* is variously seen either as mockery, scorn and derision, or as benevolence, mercy, amusement, joke, grace, and happiness. It also seems that commentators modify the root √*has* playing with different preverbs, i.e. *pra-*, *pari-*, *apa-* (as for Śrīveṅkaṭanātha) and *upa-* (as for Ānanda Giri). However, the meanings are all quite close.⁹⁷

Kṛṣṇa’s *prahāsa* should be interpreted as a further proof of the ambiguous or, better, polyvalent and enigmatic character of the *bhagavat*, as Matilal (2002: 91) states:

Kṛṣṇa is an enigma in the *Mahābhārata*. He represents the most confusing kind of moral enigma not only in the epic, but also in the whole of the Hindu ideal of *dharma*. In the icons, he is represented as the Dark Lord, an attractive appearance with a face bearing an enigmatic, mysterious and mischievous smile, the smile, very much unlike the famous smile found in the icons of the Buddha. The Buddha’s smile, in striking contrast with that of Kṛṣṇa, is straightforward, it radiates with 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. If anything, he appears to be a devious diplomat.

Although I disagree with Matilal’s idea that the Buddha’s smile is in ‘striking contrast’ with Kṛṣṇa’s smile, my concern here is another. Significantly, what is also crucial for commentators in their reading of *prahasann iva* is the particle *iva*, which in certain readings highlights, reinforces and emphasizes the meaning of the participle, while in others mitigates, smooths or even opposes it. In this regard, especially telling are the interpretations of Keśava Kaśmīrī Bhaṭṭācārya (see 6.1) and Madhusūdana (see 1.6). In addition, it is remarkable that some commentators do not mention or interpret *prahasann iva* (Rājānaka Rāmakaṇṭha, Yāmuna Muni, Anubhūtiśvarūpa, Madhva, Jaya Tīrtha, Puruṣottama),

⁹⁷ See Rigopoulos (*infra* § 1.3), where several among the semantic nuances given by different preverbs manifest different expressions used in theatrical performances, on the one hand, and are referred to devotional concepts like *bhakti*, *prasāda* and *līlā*, on the other.

while others do not mention the word *iva*, and still others simply paraphrase the expression (Hanumat).

It seems to me that none of the glosses can claim to fully represent or exhaust the richness of BhG's *prahasann iva*. A shared view is that Arjuna is deeply troubled by anguish, delusion, and sorrow, because on the other side of the battlefield he sees masters, companions and relatives. This turmoil of feelings is brought about by the deep confusion occurring in him. He behaves like a fool or a madman who has lost himself and as a consequence becomes deeply anguished and hopeless: this is why he becomes the receptacle for benevolence in the form of BhG's teaching. Following verses 2.7–8 Arjuna clearly declares his helplessness and the need to be instructed on the supreme good (*śreyas*), while in 2.9 the utmost confusion pervades his mind and, lost in that mood, he sits silent, unable to react. His anguish is key to the eligibility for the teaching. Such eligibility is confirmed by the BhG itself, where from 2.11 to 18.66 Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna on *śreyas*.

Almost all commentators link Kṛṣṇa's smile/laughter to verse 2.11, as Veṅkaṭanātha affirms more clearly than others (see 4.2.1): 'The verse *asocyān* (2.11) is the content of *prahasann iva*.' Recalling what Bhāskara says (see 2.1: 'Great souls usually smile before speaking'), Kṛṣṇa can be seen as the prototype of the *pañḍitas* mentioned in verse 2.11, a word uniformly interpreted by commentators as 'wise men,' i.e. knowers of the self. In 2.11 ff. we have a confirmation of the ambiguity of Kṛṣṇa's smile/laughter, since what is presented is a problematic issue to begin with, when it is said that wise ones mourn neither over the destruction of the body, for it is unavoidable, nor over the destruction of the self, because it is impossible as it is imperishable. Thus, grief over the liability of death is unreasonable from both the empirical and the absolute points of view: this is the essential instruction.

The interpretation of *prahasann iva* as pure mockery is not favored by our authors. Rather, several of them interpret the lord's hint of laughter as a sign of the lord's benevolence, spontaneously arising on the occasion of an infantile prank or the childish speaking of meaningless words.⁹⁸ Arjuna is sick, and his disease

⁹⁸ This is also a typical theme in the *Upaniṣads*, for instance in the dialogue between Sanat Kumāra and Nārada in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 7.1 ff.

causes him to cry; Kṛṣṇa, as a supreme doctor, replies with the remedy of his hint of laughter. In other words, the inappropriate inaction of Arjuna causes the teaching-action of Kṛṣṇa. The *prahāsa* takes place after Arjuna's surrendering to the lord (*īśvara-pratīpatti*) at 2.7, when he declares himself to be Kṛṣṇa's disciple, and all commentators seem to agree that a disciple cannot really be laughed at or mocked by his master.

It is not easy to systematize the commentarial readings of *prahasann iva* according to their axiology. For example, although the *advaitin* Rāmarāya Kavi (see 1.1.5) mentions only mockery as Veṅkaṭanātha's final interpretation (see 4.2.1), my impression is that the more detailed hermeneutic effort comes precisely from the *Tātparyacandrikā*, Veṅkaṭanātha's sub-commentary on Rāmānuja's *Gītābhāṣya*, where he sketches four interpretative keys:

1. Mockery: whoever abandons without reason an act already undertaken becomes an object of derision;
2. A seeming mockery in view of a superior end: Arjuna is mortally anguished, and Kṛṣṇa, though smiling, reveals the BhG for his benefit and the benefit of the whole universe, so the expression indicates a graceful smile;
3. Derision and mockery are impossible, because Arjuna has surrendered himself to Kṛṣṇa: *prahasann iva* introduces an effortless and wise speech, replete with the meanings hidden in the Upaniṣads;
4. BhG 2.10 must be understood in the light of 2.11, which also implies a shade of mirth along with a shade of derision: both are needed in order to shake Arjuna out of his confusion and prepare him to assimilate the instruction.

These four readings sketched by Vedānta Deśika seem to summarize the major hermeneutic options accepted by the many interpreters of the BhG. I agree with Ānanda Giri that 2.10 represents a sort of independent verse within the text,⁹⁹ specifically useful as

⁹⁹ The same idea of independence expressed in BhG 2.10 seems to be followed by Hanumat (see 1.4) in a counter-factual way. Moreover, Vaṃśīdhara (see 1.8) says that BhG 1.1–2.10 is the introduction to the story. In Veṅkaṭanātha's *Gītārthasaṃgraharakṣā*, BhG 2.10–12 is the true beginning of the *upadeśa*.

a link to the rest of the teaching, since it stands as a sort of transition between the epic/dramatic section and the philosophical section.

In conclusion, I can offer a tentative subdivision of the BhG's commentators on *prahasann iva*. First, there is one macro-group formed by *advaita* authors, i.e. both the Advaita Vedānta exponents (along with Jñāneśvar) and the Kashmirian interpreters (§§ 1 to 3). With some nuances, they tend to interpret *prahasann iva* as the expression of Kṛṣṇa's benevolent attitude toward his disciple. His benevolent wisdom and his will to teach are displayed by his slight, gentle smile meant to trigger discrimination and knowledge.

The second macro-group is roughly represented by the so-called Vaiṣṇava school of Vedānta (§§ 4 to 8), which is much more variegated: it oscillates between apparently harsher mockery, scorn and derision meant to shake Arjuna by plunging him into a sea of shame in order to trigger his metanoia and, on the other hand, a more positive, compassionate attitude detected in Kṛṣṇa's laughter/smile, closer to the interpretation of the majority of the *advaitins*. The gloss of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (1.6), an *advaitin* profoundly devoted to Kṛṣṇa, illustrates the convergence of these two apparently opposite but in fact complementary perspectives. From Madhusūdana's hermeneutics it appears that mockery is a teaching tool to ignite Arjuna's discrimination, leading him to the liberating knowledge.

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