12.1 Bhakti rasa in Krishna worship

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa says that many of the gopi are married, but their love for Krishna transcends the commitments of human marriage. The consummation of their erotic love for Krishna—indeed, total absorption in him—is the highest perfection of human existence, and its value surpasses all other social values or moral commitments (5.40, 47.54–63; see Bryan 2003:xxv, xxx, liv, lvii; Schweig 2005:162–163, 285). In Book 10, this loving absorption can come even the gopis playfully imitate Krishna, but most typically from physical contact with him such as dancing arm in arm, or sexual relations. There are many Sanskrit terms for ‘love’, ‘devotion,’ or ‘being completely absorbed in’ that are used to characterize human CS union with divinities in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa; it is significant that many of these terms denote passionate erotic love between humans, and have this same sense when characterizing human relations with Vishnu/Krishna (Hardy 1983:299–300; Schweig 2005:167, 206, 236, 241, 251). Indeed, at one point in the Bhāgavata Gitā, Krishna states simply, “I am kāma,” where kāma means ‘passionate erotic love’ (Schweig 2005:171). Elsewhere we read of people kāma muta, ‘moved by love’—whence our term for our construct. (We emphasize again that our choice of this Sanskrit phrase does not mean that we believe that the sudden-intensification-of-CS emotion among Sanskrit speakers was uniquely natural, prototypical, pure, or less culturally informed than this emotion in other societies or eras. Nor do we believe that speakers or writers of Sanskrit always used ‘kama muta’ to denote the precise scientific construct that we denote by the term. They employed काममूत in their own culturally particular manner, just as speakers of other languages use blir rørt, haru, gǎn dòng, or koskettava in distinctive ways that only approximately map onto each other and do not invariable correspond to our construct.)

When some of the gopīs became very tired from dancing and moving their bodies, they placed their hands on the shoulders of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Then their hair loosened and flowers fell to the ground. When they placed their hands on Kṛṣṇa’s shoulder they became overwhelmed by the fragrance of His body which emanated from the lotus, other aromatic flowers, and the pulp of sandalwood. They became filled with attraction for Him, and they began to kiss one another. Some gopīs touched Kṛṣṇa cheek to cheek, and Kṛṣṇa began to offer them chewed betel nuts from His mouth, which they exchanged with great pleasure by kissing. And by accepting those betel nuts, the gopīs spiritually advanced. Prabhupada 2008, Chapter 32, Description of the Rasa Dance.

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and other texts, including those in Tamil which concern union with the god Māyōn rather than Vishnu/Krishna, it is notable that bhakti (or Tamil pattar) kama muta and its physical symptoms are associated not only with union with the deity, but with longing for union, when the devotee is separated from the deity (Hardy 1983:9, 52, 101, 335, 343, 348,
This is congruent with our thesis that people often experience the emotion we denote kama muta when they feel nostalgia, longing, loss, or grief that evoke suddenly vivid emotional mnemonic re-experiences of intense CS. While our characterization of kama muta as generated by the “sudden intensification” of CS appears to imply a temporal dynamic, as indicated in Chapter 4, what we really mean could also be described as “immediate contrast”, where the contrast need not be a purely temporal sequence. Thus against the background of sorrowful desolation of separation or loss, penetrating flashes of CS, like lightening on a dark night, evoke kama muta: brilliant love on a field of bleak darkness.

The Sanskrit literary commentaries carefully explore phenomena that they denote bhakti rasa. Rasa is a complex, polysemic term, but one of the important denotations of bhakti rasa is the experiential esthetics of third-person kama muta evoked by oral recitation, text, poetry, and performance (Schweig 2005:101–102). All sorts of depictions of erotic loving union with Krishna may evoke third-party kama muta. This rasa is not limited to narratives; dancers and the audiences aim for a mutual rasa resonance that may evoke kama muta.

However, rasa is also used to denote first- and second-person kama muta. Sometimes rasa of the deity is compared to the love felt toward a father, mother, brother, beloved, or bride (Schweig 2005:101–102). Further, it is interesting to note that in addition to the kama muta CS ‘mutual,’ ‘nurturing,’ and ‘passionate’ rasa for divinities, the texts and commentaries also represent the intensification of authority ranking relationships with divinities: there are ‘reverential’ and ‘subservient’ types of rasa (Schweig 2005). And there are many other usages of the term.
12.2 The signs and sensations of kama muta in South Asia

Additional signs of kama muta appear in an account of the reactions of disciples of an early 16th century saint, Caitanya. His disciples regularly observed Caitanya in the fullness of blissful love for Krishna:

At first he went as fast as the wind, then suddenly he turned into a pillar, paralyzed and unable to move. The flesh around the roots of his hair swelled like boils, and his hair stood on end all over his body. Sweat was dripping from his hair like blood. Unable to speak, his throat emitted gurgling sounds. His eyes filled with tears; his body turned pallid like a white conch. He began to shake, and shivering and trembling fell down on the ground. (Hardy 1983:4)

A 1535 account from West Bengal recounts the devotion of Haridassa, a Muslim convert to Krishna. It describes the manifestations of Haridassa’s communion:

In tasting bhakti, many feelings rose from moment to moment.
Sometimes he danced all by himself.
Sometimes he roared like a lion vexed.
Sometimes he loudly wept.
Sometimes he laughed outlandishly.
Sometimes he shouted out ferocious growls.
Sometimes he fainted, falling hard to the ground.
One moment he yelled out an unworldly sound.
The next he gave it commentary most profound.
Squirting tears, horripilation, laughter, fainting, sweat—all of Krishna-bhakti’s somatic perturbations—as soon as Prabhu Haridassa began to dance, they all arrived and swarmed though his body.
In this way his tears of joy dampened all his limbs.
Even the most wicked seeing him were greatly charmed.
So amazing were the goose bumps in his body that Brahma and Shiva seeing them were delighted.
All of the Brahmanas of Phuliya seeing them were delighted.

Translation of Vrindavan Dasa’s Chaitanya-bhagavata by Delmonico 2007:561–562
In addition to pilo-erection, tears, and being choked up, these two texts, much like the early ones, indicate immobility, pallor, shivering, shaking, sweat, and collapse/fainting. The second adds dancing alone, roaring, growling, and uttering strange sounds (which resemble actions we will encounter again in modern exuberant Christianity). Writing in 1541, an influential text by Rūpa Gosvāmin on bhakti lists eight bodily excitations in response to the experience of loving connection with Krishna: stupefaction, perspiration, goose bumps, broken voice, trembling, change of color, tears, and loss of consciousness (Haberman 2003:245). As the response goes from smoldering to glowing to flaming to blazing, the number of these indices evinced by the worshipper increases (pp. 259ff.) Are these fire metaphors representing warmth in the chest? Rūpa also described the signs of a mind overpowered by emotions related to Krishna as “immobility (the person is conscious, but his mind is blank and he is unable to move), horripilation (the bristling of hair and gooseflesh), trembling (including quivering and throbbing), sweating, crying (several different types of tears), changing skin color, and total loss of consciousness” (McDaniel 1989:288). A 17th century religious leader, Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakura, wrote about harsa, the intense experience of loving oneness with Krishna that results in tears and horripilation. “Harṣa (jubilation) —The bliss that arises in the heart from seeing or obtaining one’s desired object is called harṣa. The symptoms of harṣa are horripilation, perspiration, tears, blossoming of the face, impassioned outburst, madness, inertness, and bewilderment.” (Nārāyaṇa 1996:177; see also p. 171). In 1704, writing in Uttar Pradesh about the forms of human love for humans and divinities, Viśvanātha Cakravartin describes the eight external signs of loving devotion to Krishna as “stupor (stambhah), perspiration (svedah), horripilation (romāńicah), breaking of the voice (svarabhedaḥ) [being choked up?], trembling (vepathuḥ), change of colour (vaivarmyā), tears (aśru), loss of consciousness (pralayā)” (translation of Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhubindu by Klostermaier 1974:104). As in Rūpa Gosvāmin’s 1541 text, Viśvanātha Cakravartin asserts that as the love for Krishna becomes more intensely pleasurable it goes by stages from smoldering to bursting into flames, with more of these eight signs of devotion at each successive stage. Another Bengali tradition, Śākta goddess worship, is a syncretic combination of “tantric Buddhism, Vaiṣṇava devotion, yogic practice, shamanism, and worship of village deities” (McDaniel 1989:86). Horripilation is often mentioned in Śākta texts as a sign of love for the goddess (McDaniel 1989:107, 110). Likewise, modern worshippers of the goddesses Kālī and Tārā reach moments of ecstatic love characterized by “tremors, thrills of joy, hair standing on end, tears” (p. 91). These signs are regarded as evidence for true love of the goddesses, since Śākta worshippers believe in principle that false saints cannot readily imitate horripilation and changes of skin color. But in actuality, people often acknowledge that, to attract followers, some clever charlatans are indeed able to make these signs and to cry false tears (pp. 92, 290).

These texts raise a question that we will consider again when we explore similar signs of kama muta motes in Sufi Islam, and in modern evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity: Are extremely intense kama muta motes generally characterized by agitation, trembling,
hyperactivity, staggering, fainting and collapsing? That is, are these signs independent of and impervious to culture? Alternatively, are such sensations derived purely from culture-specific preos? Perhaps the answer is somewhere in the middle: when the input to the kama muta psype is extremely strong, the autonomic output of the psype includes biochemical and psychomotoric affordances for agitation, trembling, hyperactivity, staggering, fainting and collapsing. On this intermediate account, these autonomic affordances potentiate all of these actions, but the particular actions, their specific morphology, and their orientation depend to a considerable degree on prevailing cultural precedents, prototypes, paragons, paradigms, precepts and proscriptions. This might well be coupled to a social learning and cultural evolutionary process through which, in some cultures and contexts, people observe and imitate these extreme kama muta signs and—because of the great significance and value accorded to the signs by local preos—learn to aptly perform them even when their kama muta experiences are relatively mild. We will consider this issue further after looking carefully at Sufism and exuberant modern Christianity. Meanwhile, we can keep the issue in mind while we follow the cultural history of kama muta past the early texts and on into medieval and early modern Hindu texts.
12.3 Can Meditation or Mindful Self-Compassion Evoke Kama Muta?

A core teaching of Buddhism is *maitrī*, loving-kindness (Pali *mettā*), which consists in wishing for happiness for oneself or others (Buswell & Lopez 2013:518; Don Parris kindly pointed out *maitrī* and *gtong len* meditation to us, and led us to some key sources.). *Maitrī/mettā* mediation is an enduring and important Buddhist practice. This mediation aims at generating a state of rapture. It consists of five sequential stages, to each of which may devote minutes, hours, or days. In its classical form (Buddhaghosa 2010:Volume 1, 291–320), one begins by contemplating that which is good within oneself, loving oneself, wishing for one’s own happiness—the goodness, need for love, and desire for happiness that one shares with all beings. One recognizes that one is just as deserving of loving-kindness and well-being as anyone in the universe. The meditator fosters a feeling of their own “happiness as the basis for intimacy with all life” (Salzberg 1995:44). Feeling loving-kindness toward oneself is the essential foundation for being able to offer genuine love to others. When we truly love ourselves, we want to take care of others. . . we are intimate with ourselves and intimate with others. The insight into our inner world allows us to connect to everything around us, so that we can see quite clearly the oneness of all that lives. . . . “Just as I want to be happy, all beings want to be happy.” This reflection gives rise to openness, awareness, and love. As we commit to these values, we become embodiments of a lineage that stretches back through beginningless time. All good people of all time have wanted to express openness, awareness, and love. (Salzberg 1995:44).

Clearly this initial stage fosters CS with others mediated by CS with the self; I shared this need for happiness and love with everyone. The second stage of this mediation is to direct loving-kindness toward a living ‘benefactor’ who has been especially benevolent toward the meditator (but not someone the mediator desires sexually, to maintain one’s sense of the distinctness between the two kinds of ‘loving’ feelings). The meditator thinks about the goodness of the benefactor, and wishes the benefactor the same equanimity, healthy, safety, happiness and wellbeing that the meditator wishes for herself. Following this, the third step is to direct loving-kindness toward a neutral person, someone the meditator hardly knows and has neither positive nor negative feelings toward. Then the fourth stage is to extend loving-kindness to ‘the enemy’—someone toward whom one hates, fears, is in conflict with, or who has hurt or wronged the meditator. The meditator extends compassion for the fears, tensions, distress, and other suffering that the enemy feels—as all beings feel. Recognizing that the enemy wants, needs, and deserves happiness, well-being, safety, and equanimity, one fosters the desire that the enemy have that, just as one wishes it for oneself. This enemy “stands right at the division
between the finite and the infinite radiance of love. At this point, conditional love unfolds into unconditional love. . . . This love is truly boundless" (Salzberg 1995:46). It "allows union with all of life" (Salzberg 1995:55). The final step in this meditation is for meditator to extend feelings of loving-kindness toward all beings, appreciating that all have the same needs. The meditator aims to appreciate that all beings have suffering and fears, and all need compassionate love. All being are equivalent in their need for maitri/mettā.

We imagine that sometimes the meditator may experience kama muta as she wishes maitri/mettā for herself, a benefactor, a friend, a neutral person, an enemy, and then all beings, if she suddenly feels the love. We don’t know.

Consider another Buddhist meditation, in the Tibetan tradition.

I take all the pain and the causes of pain of all sentient beings upon me, and give all happiness and the causes of happiness without exception to all sentient beings. (Nāgārjuna [c. 150 – c. 250 CE], quoted by Choden Rinpoche 2010)

Nāgārjuna is characterizing the Tibetan meditation called gtong len or tonglen.

As the meditator inhales, he or she imagines all the sufferings of all beings, in the form of smoke, darkness, and various frightening beings, being lifted from the bodies of all beings and entering the meditator’s body. The, as he or she exhales, the mediator imagines all of her or her own happiness and merit (PUNYA) going out to all beings in the form of light and descending upon them. (Buswell & Lopez 2013:330).

In gtong len, the meditator exchanges self and other, or rather, removes all separation, becoming equivalent with all beings. Fully compassionate, fully identifying with all others, the mediator visualizes taking on others’ suffering, relieving them of all forms of suffering, and sending to them all of his own happiness, well-being, and merit. We imagine that this practice, too, may sometimes evoke kama muta when its communal sharing contrasts abruptly with the separation of selfish disdain. It will be enlightening to discover what insights kama muta theory affords into the experiences of meditators in these and other Buddhist practices.

In the taxonomy of first-, second-, and third-party kama muta motes, when the emotion arises from one’s consideration of one’s own future, present, or past compassionate generosity, or more generally, from loving oneself, this is reflexive kama muta. That is, reflexive kama muta is kama muta evoked by sudden intensification of CS with oneself, as may occur in the first stage of maitri/mettā meditation.