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Vasantotsava

From “Ananda Vṛndāvana-campu”
by Kavi Karnapura

The Holi festival is celebrated in Vraja from the Vasanta Pancami until a few days after Phalguna Purnima (Gaura Purnima). During this time Nanda Mahārāja gives Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma leave from cowherding to play Holi, so that they can throw coloured dyes and water at each other and at all the other Vrajavis.

On the Vasanta Pancami day Śrīmatī Rādhārāni and Her sakhis are attacked with coloured powder by the gopas as they are on their way to Nandisvara to cook for Kṛṣṇa in the morning. In the haze of abir and gulal (types of coloured powder) that flies up from this colourful attack, Śrī Kṛṣṇa secretly embraces and kisses Śrīmatī Rādhārāni, but Lalita proudly pulls Her away from Him and safely brings Her to Nandiṣvara where they can peacefully go to their daily duty of cooking Kṛṣṇa’s breakfast.

Days later Purnamasi announces: “Tomorrow is Maghi purnima (the full moon day in Magha) and the husband of any gopi who worships Vasanta Madana (the spring god of love — who is actually Kṛṣṇa) at the foot of an Asoka tree on this day will gain a lot of wealth and many cows!” Hearing this, the older gopis allowed their daughters-in-law to do the puja.

On that Purnima day Śrīmatī Rādhārāni sits in the Madhavi mandapa to meet Kṛṣṇa on the pretext of doing Vasanta Madana puja, wearing a crimson sari. Vṛndadevi tells Her: “O Rādhā, Matanga devi, a Kinnara goddess, has come! She is a teacher in song and all her helpers are expert in playing the vina. Listen to how they will sing and play!”

While Śrīmatī Rādhārāni listened to the performance of these angelic girls, Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared on the scene holding, His flute in His left hand and a flowerball of vermilion in His right hand. He was surrounded by His dear friends like Subala, who were loudly singing. His eyes were rolling in a state of apparent intoxication, and a friend stood on either side of Him, serving Him golden betel leaves which He accepted with His pleasing reddish playful lips. Reddish powder flew here and there, so light that it didn’t touch Him, but fell down on Him from the sky, very beautifully colouring and scenting His head tilaka, hair and eyelids. The wind moved the vines’ restless sproutlike hands and cluster-like breasts to obscure Hari, and the vines’ restless eyebrows looked at Him as if telling him: “No! No!” Another vine shyly smiled at Kṛṣṇa with her flowers as if calling Him: “Come, come!”

Madhumangala said: “O Kṛṣṇa! Is this sound I hear the echo of our singing, or is it the sound of someone else’s festival, challenging ours?” Kṛṣṇa said: “O abode of lustre! It must be someone else’s festival! Go and see where these songs and rhythms are coming from!” Madhumangala went and saw the gopis singing, and said to them: “O impudent Lalita! Why are you so proud, making such grave offences? We cowherdboys did not pick any flowers from the Madhavi garden because our friend Kṛṣṇa wants to play His spring games there, but why are you so rude to pick all the flowers there? Don’t you know the proud, snake-like arms of my friend? You will come to know them now! I am going to tell Him!”

Madhumangala returns to Kṛṣṇa and says: “O Friend! Now Your spring play has become a success. The Vasanta Laksmi (the goddess of spring) has come personally with all her opulence, playing flutes, vinas, mrdangas, karatalas etc. like no-one else in the three worlds! They sing even better than the singers in heaven, what to speak of others! There is more festival paraphernalia there than anywhere else in Lord Brahmā’s creation, more than even in Your own festival, although You are the prince of Vraja!”

Then the cowherdboys protested saying: “O Bato (Madhumangala, the brahmana boy)! It is not proper of you to praise the camp of the enemy like that! You should praise your own camp! You must be intoxicated!” Madhumangala replied: “The Madhu Mangala (auspicious wine, or spring) makes everyone drunk, just of itself!” Kṛṣṇa said: “Very well, my friend. Go and investigate further the gopis’ activities, and we will come back later.”

Madhumangala blissfully went back and proudly told Lalita: “O clumsy Lalita! Get out of here, on the order of lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa! Don’t steal our madhavi flowers, otherwise you’ll be punished!” Lalita said: “O shameless, deceitful brahmana boy! Why do you spoil your own aristocracy by speaking such intoxicated words? The spotless gopis of Vraja will stay on the bank of the Yamuna under the red Asoka trees to do Vasanta Madana puja on this day with the jewel-like heroine Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, whose heart is full of friendship, who is expert in everything and who is adorned with all good qualities. Although She has many enthusiastic maidservants She gave up Her family tradition to join us personally. Why are you blubbering so madly?”

Madhumangala replied: “O Lalita! Who else but Kṛṣṇa is there to destroy the pride of Cupid? He cannot only madden everyone with desire, but He is also intoxicated with it Himself! How can you worship the mundane Cupid and disregard this transcendental Cupid? I think you must have gone out of your minds! Listen, I will do you a favour. I can be the priest for your Madana puja! Come along with me to see Him!” Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī said: “O Lalita! This most expert brahmana is worshipable. Tell Candravali and Carucandra to worship him nicely.”

These two gopis then came and began to smear Madhumangala with fragrant dyes and waters of different colours, making him look like Bhutaraja Siva, the king of the ghosts. Madhumangala cried out: “O Kṛṣṇa! The gopis are smothering me with

sindura, kunkuma and fragrant powders, being maddened by the Vasantotsava! I am unable to escape, being stunned by the fragrant water they have thrown over me! Quickly save me before they commit the sin of killing a brahmana!”

Hearing this from a distance, Kṛṣṇa understood that His reputation was being diminished, so He quickly came there with His friends, calling out : “Halā! Halā!” Then Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who was looked upon by the gopis with fear, respect and bashfulness, saw Madhumangala motionless and miserable, so He said: “O! You have abused My innocent friend, who is very dear to Me, being intoxicated by this spring festival! Now I shall give you a fitting punishment!” Then He threw a flowerball into the group of gopis, dispersing them. Seeing this, the demigoddesses in the heavenly planets praised him and a flowerball-fight broke out between the two parties. Entering the ranks of the enemy, Kṛṣṇa played His flute, making it sound like Cupid’s sweet drum playing during the battle of love.

The gopis cast sharp glances at Kṛṣṇa from all sides, and Kṛṣṇa shot the samprasvapana (sleep-causing) missile at them with the bow of His eyebrows. The gopis bodies weakened, their eyes fell shut, their mouths yawned, their voices choked, their lips trembled and they fell asleep. Seeing this, Candravali became bewildered. With valour she then stepped forward to pierce Kṛṣṇa’s heart with her arrow-like glances, enchanting the enchanter of the world and keeping Him in her snake-like arms. After some time Kṛṣṇa came back to consciousness and embraced the lotus-like gopis just as an elephant shakes a forest of lotus flowers, kissing them and breaking their necklaces and blouses. When the fog of coloured powder dissipated, the battlefield caused amazement to the eyes. The red powder was scattered over the bodies of the gopis like blood covering an angry elephant. The bluish musk looked like black bees surrounding the elephant, and the gopis’ jewelled syringes looked like the elephant’s teeth and bones.

Seeing the gopis in this condition, Madhumangala drowned in an ocean of bliss and began to dance with raised arms, calling out: “ Ho ho! Dear friend Kṛṣṇa! Well done! I have never felt so blissful in my whole life! Just see how their puja paraphernalia is scattered all over, how their ornaments are broken and how they are covered with abhir and gulal! They have received their just reward! But alas! Alas! They are more clever than anyone in Brahmā’s creation, let us therefore flee before they meet they supreme leader Vṛṣabhānu-nandini (Śrīmatī Rādhārāni)!”

Hearing this, the cowherdboys said: “This foul-mouthed Madhumangala is sometimes afraid, sometimes brave and sometimes angry! Console him, so that he will not feel distressed, O Kṛṣṇa!” Kṛṣṇa said: “O Madhumangala, show your fearlessness to those who you were previously afraid of! Why should you be afraid while I am here?” Hearing this, Madhumangala gave up his fear. He now became the bold leader, and led Kṛṣṇa and the boys back to the garden of madhavi flowers, where the gopis were. The sakhis pierced Kṛṣṇa with thousands of sharp arrow-like glances and Kṛṣṇa did the same to them, piercing the shield of bashfulness on Śrīmatī Rādhārāni’s chest, while She pierced His heart with the arrows of Her soft smile. Seeing Kṛṣṇa’s enchanted condition, Madhumangala blissfully said: “Friend, don’t be bewildered while Your best friend is here! Take this ball and throw it at

them! What is impossible to do when You have a friend like me?”

Śrīmatī Rādhārāni half-closed her eyes, moved Her eyebrows and lifted Her arm, making Her bangles jingle while Her lotus hands threw a sindura bomb at Kṛṣṇa's chest. Then, to the great bliss of the sakhas and sakhis, Kṛṣṇa began to run after Śrīmatī Rādhārāni like an angry lion who was awakened from his slumber, carrying a powderball with Him. Then Lalita said: “O crown jewel of relishers of mellows! Who knows which rasika girl has shown the passion in her heart by throwing this reddish powderball on Your chest? It is not proper to get bewildered right now!”

Despite hearing this, Kṛṣṇa kept on running after Śrīmatī Rādhārāni. Then Radhika gave a clever hint to Syama-sakhi with a slight squint of Her eyebrows and hid Herself between Her girlfriends. Kṛṣṇa then smeared Syama-sakhi's forehead, chest, hair and cheeks with fragrant water and Bakulamala anxiously said: “Dear Syamasundara, Your cleverness burns my heart! Why are You hurting my innocent friend, leaving that girl with the shining smile whose face eclipses the autumn moon, the splendour of whose teeth eclipses pearls, and who actually threw the ball at You?”

Hearing this, Kṛṣṇa eagerly ran up to Śrīmatī Rādhārāni and told Her: “Come here and show Me Your strength by throwing these balls at Me!” Hearing this Śrīmatī Rādhārāni told Her friends: “O sakhis! Surround Him and pelt him with your powderballs!” The sakhis surrounded Kṛṣṇa and chanted: “ghero! ghero! (surround Him! surround Him!) maro! maro!” (kill Him! Kill Him!) Mixed with the sounds of the singing cuckoos this grew into a great noise. Being surrounded by the gopis in this way, the great relisher, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, squirted paint at all of them from His jewelled syringe, while the young gopis hurled flowerballs at Him. The shameless gopis surrounded Kṛṣṇa, just as the moonbeams surround the moon, while Matangi devi and her Kinnaris sang sweet love songs.

The bangles on the gopis' lotus stem-like arms jingled as they softly threw flowerballs at the king of lovers with their lotuslike arms. Kṛṣṇa's moonlike face showed signs of weakness, merely as sport, and the gopis snatched away His flute, flowerballs, and bow and arrows. When one gopi wanted to remove Kṛṣṇa's ornaments Śrīmatī Rādhārāni stopped her with a hint of Her eyebrows. With Her own hand She wiped the colours from His face, and gave Him pan handed to Her by Her maidservants, while Syama sakhi began to fan Him on Her indication. Seeing the gopis covered with coloured powder, Madhumangala laughed and danced with raised arms, exclaiming: “Ho ho! We have won my friend! The pride of Mahārāja Vṛṣabhānu's most glorious daughter has been broken today by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and She is personally serving Him now as a humble maidservant! What could be more amusing! But, after all, how could Kṛṣṇa not have won with a counsellor like me?”

Seeing him dancing, all the sakhas and sakhis became most happy. Being very satisfied with him, Śrīmatī Rādhārāni gave Madhumangala one of Her pearl necklaces. After this, they all had a feast and took rest.