



— रूप पचीसी —

Twenty-five Poems on the Beauty of Form

These ‘Twenty-five poems by Rup’, or ‘Twenty-five poems on the Beauty of Form’ were transcribed from an undated manuscript in a personal collection in England. They are all in the *dohā* couplet metre, except the last, which is a *dohā* expanded into the six-line form *Kuṇḍaliyā* – a ‘coiled serpent’ with its tail in its mouth, having the first word of the stanza recurring as the last.

The themes of the *Rūp Bāīsī* are mostly conventional: meditations on love, beauty, and the sorrows of parting; on the world and its ways; and on the divine presence in our human lives. Such collections benefit from not being divided into watertight thematic compartments, since ambiguity of reference lies at the very heart of poetry: each poem is a *muktaka* – an independent and autonomous composition, though each also expands the frame of reference of the whole, and the warp and weft of contexts creates an attractively diverse fabric texture for the sequence of verses. The fact that allusions to the *Rāmāyaṇa* (verse 16) and the *Mahābhārata* (v. 20) rub shoulders with references to Charles Darwin (v. 8) and to the roman script (v. 19) indicates that these poems belong to the apocrypha of the Braj Bhasha literary tradition. They are offered here with some rough-and-ready translations (though whatever quality may be found in the poems is not really of the translatable kind), and with a few comments on structure and meaning.

Rupert Snell, 1 April 2011

नाम निहारहु प्रेम के, रूप अनेक अनंग ।
उलफत दोस्ती प्यार सुख दुख रति तेरौ संग ॥ १ ॥

1. *Consider the names of love – the many forms of Eros:
Affection, friendship, amour, happiness, sorrow, passion ... your company!*

The poem rests on its parallel treatment of dissimilar items, the anomalous ‘your company’ appearing as if it were the name of an emotion like the other nouns listed laconically in the second line. Note also how *sukha* is separated by the caesura from its rhyming antonym *dukha*, formally disrupting the conventional collocation of *sukha-dukha*.

संगी सगरे चलि गए, साथी रहत न कोय ।
एक जुदाई मीत जो जुदा न कबहू होय ॥ २ ॥

2. *My companions have all left me, not a single comrade remains;
PARTING is the only friend who is never parted from me.*

The poem sets a personalised *judāī*, ‘separation’, against an adjectival *judā* ‘separated’.

अँखियाँ रोवति जाति दिन, रोवति आवति रात ।
रोवन आवत है सदा रोवन कबहू न जात ॥ ३ ॥

3. *These eyes go on weeping all day; weeping, comes the night;
Weeping ever comes, weeping never goes.*

The verse rests on idiomatic usages of the verbs *ā-* ‘to come’ and *jā-* ‘to go’; *rovana* is an infinitive form, equivalent to modern standard Hindi *ronā* (and similarly capable of functioning as a verbal noun); this form is seen again in verse 11 below.

यूँ मत मानहु मन प्रिये, हौं तुझ सौं अति दूर ।
कितनी दूरी दुहुन में, लौ अरु लौ के नूर ॥ ४ ॥

4. *Do not think in your mind, beloved, that I am far from you;
How far apart are these:
Flame and flame's light?*

The Persian loanword *nūra*, 'light', rarely seen in Braj Bhasha poetry, here provides a useful rhyme for *dūra* 'distant'. Poets may reach a long way to extend their lexical range when occasion (or metre) demands it.

बरुनी-बंद रहैं सदा तव अपराधी नैन ।
राति जु मारत नींद कौं दिन जु चुरावत चैन ॥ ५ ॥

5. *May your felon eyes be ever eyelash-barred:
They slay my sleep at night
And steal my calm by day.*

The heroine's eyelashes, *barunī*, are prison bars to contain the 'felon eyes' (*aparādhī naina*) that create such havoc in the world of men.

पग पग चलि जग मग गह्यौ जगमग लख बहु शान ।
फिरि लौट्यौ इहिं गाँव में सुमिरि यही मुसकान ॥ ६ ॥

6. *I walked along the world's road, seeing its glory and glitter;
Then I returned to this town, recalling your smile.*

The verse recycles the syllables of *jaga maga* 'the world's path' as *jagamaga*, stem of a verb meaning 'to sparkle'. Rejecting the flashy glitter of the world for the deeper beauty of a beloved's smile, the poem sets Love on a pedestal that raises it above the mundane.

जग-जानी यह बात अरु देव-दत्त यह ज्ञान ।
उज्ज्वल रस रस-राज है, होत नहीं अस आन ॥ ७ ॥

7. *Well-known is this matter to the world, God-given is this knowledge:
Love's joy is the joy supreme, there is no other like it.*

The parallel statements of the first line contrast two registers: *jaga-jānī* 'known-in-the-world' is a *tadbhava* (vernacular) expression that sits well with its 'worldly' context, while *deva-datta* is a *tatsama* (Sanskrit) expression that reflects its 'divine' sphere of meaning.

The term *ujjvala rasa*, 'the lustrous sentiment', reflects the philosophical aesthetics of the Vaiṣṇava rhetoricians such as Rupa Goswami, for whom love of Krishna constitutes the highest form of spiritual experience.

ज्यों ज्यों आस्था घट बढ़ै, त्यों त्यों निजु अनुमान ।
कहत अद्वैतिन राम हूँ, डार्विन हौं हनुमान ॥ ८ ॥

8. *As faith waxes and wanes, so does one's estimate of self:
Says the Advaitin, 'I am Rama'; Darwin, 'I Hanuman'.*

The philosophy of *Advaita* asserts the ultimate identity of the individual soul with the supreme soul: hence 'I am God, I am Rama'. The contrasted Darwinian theory of evolution speaks for itself.

गुनीजन निर्गुन सगुन में अंतर गिनत न लेस ।
गजमुख गनपति कहत कोउ कोऊ कहत गनेस ॥ ९ ॥

9. *Wise folk count no difference between the Formless and the Formed,
Just as people variously use the names 'Elephant-faced', 'Gana-Lord',
'Ganesh'.*

Two distinctive theological approaches – that God is either *saguṇa* 'with form' or *nirguṇa* 'beyond form' — are here dismissed as mere semantics: the two are merely different names for the same entity. A brief recording of this couplet by Prahlad Singh Tipanya is available [online](#).

नाम कमा करि आपनो काम न करिहै कोइ ।
नृप जो कहियत छत्रधर छत्र धरै नहिं सोइ ॥ १० ॥

10. *Having once earned a name, no-one will toil again;
A king known as "Parasol-bearer" himself bears no parasol.*

The parasol is a symbol of royalty; the conceit here is that the act of 'bearing' the parasol is not done by the king himself, but by a minion appointed to the task. See an illustration [here](#).

बहुत दियौ भगवान ने दुनिया कौ रस लैन ।
दुखड़ा भोगन दिल दियौ रोवन कौं दुहु नैन ॥ ११ ॥

11. *Much has God given us with which to enjoy the world:
A heart to heed tales of pain, two eyes for weeping.*

With its contrast between the human 'taking' (*laina*) of *rasa* and God's 'giving' (*diya*) of the means to 'enjoy' it, the poem suggests that this contractual relationship between God and man is inherently unfair to the latter.

The second line shows how a poet's grammatical usages may be influenced by metrical considerations: *bhogana* 'to endure' and *rovana* 'to weep' occur in grammatically identical contexts, yet of the two, only *rovana* is marked with *kaū* (modern Hindi *ko*).

झटकट आसा कौ सकट खटकत देत न शाँति ।

भटकट पटकत लटकतै नट की लट की भाँति ॥ १२ ॥

12. *The cart of Hope jolts and lurches – gives us no rest;
Waywardly it tosses us dangling like a dancer's ringlets.*

The *naṭa* is a dancer and acrobat, on whose face loose 'ringlets of hair' (*laṭa*) fly freely, tossed about by the dancer's movements. The image of flying locks of hair complements, somewhat clumsily, that of the cart's lurching motion, whose sudden and violent jolting is phonetically suggested by retroflexion throughout the verse; lacking this phonetic underpinning, the imagery of the translated text seems rather arbitrary.

राम तिहारौ रंग तो जनमत है सब ठौर ।

कहुँ दिखियत है लाल हर कबहुँ स्यामल गौर ॥ १३ ॥

13. *Rama, your colour comes to life all the world over –
Here it is red, here green; now dark, now fair.*

The word *raṅga* has a lexical range that makes it truly untranslatable: it means 'joy' and 'spirit' as much as it means 'colour' – thus the rainbow of divine immanence as experienced through human epiphanies. Here, the colours allude to various divine beings: *Lāla* (Krishna), *Hara* (Shiva; or, as Hari, Vishnu) *Śyāma* (Krishna/Vishnu), *Gaura* (Chaitanya; or, as 'the fair one', *Gaurī*, Radha or Durga). The poem expresses the idea that God manifests his grace by appearing in those forms in which mankind chooses to perceive him; this particularly 'democratic' theology is reflected in the word *janamata*, whose primary function here is as a verb participle ('takes birth, is born') but which also coheres as a noun compound, *jana-mata*.

ऋषि मुनो तपसी व्यर्थ करत शून्य कौ मन ध्यान ।
यह जग सगरौ शून्य है बिनु सुनि बंसी तान ॥ १४ ॥

14. *Sages, munis and ascetics meditate in vain on the Void:
This world's a void indeed, unless one hears the call of the flute.*

The phrase *bansī tāna* immediately invokes the personality of Krishna, whose *saguṇa* reality transcends, for the poet, the transcendent realities of abstract speculation.

बन कपास अरु ऊन जो भेड़ सहज निज साज ।
कितनी चोरी करत हम तन ढाँकन के काज ॥ १५ ॥

15. *Cotton from the forest; and wool, sheep's native garb:
What thefts we perpetrate
To hide our nakedness!*

Alliteration in the second quarter-verse anticipates one final return to the consonant *ja* in the closing rhyme.

जनकसुता की जान की दुबिधा देखि निरास ।
इत बन कैदी सास सँग उत बनचर बनवास ॥ १६ ॥

16. *A dilemma of despair for Sita's soul:
Imprisonment with Mother-in-law,
Or roaming the forest in exile!*

The true dilemma faced by Sita at Rama's exile is whether her *pativratā* status should make her accompany her husband on his arduous trial in the forest; but here the poet suggests a very realistic reason for choosing to leave her *sasurāl* !

The words *jāna kī* 'of the life/soul' punningly reflect the name *Jānakī* as a synonym of the patronymic *Janakasutā*, 'Janaka's daughter, Sita'.

सुख बिक जात है चौक में आनंद नाचत हाट ।
सकि न बता कोउ कित परै चैन लैन की बाट ॥ १७ ॥

17. *Pleasure's for sale in the town square,
Bliss dances in the marketplace:
But none can show me the road
That leads to Peace of Mind.*

The word *caina* (as uncertain in etymology as it is rare in experience) suggests an inner peace in settings both mundane and transcendent. To be found at the end of a long road (*bāṭa*), it is harder of attainment than the facile pleasures available closer at hand.

छमहु ढिठाई रूप की प्रभु जू सहज सुप्रीति ।
कहँ घसीट इह हाथ की कहँ तव जग की भीत ॥ १८ ॥

18. *Forgive Rupa's impudence, Dear Lord, with innate love
— how dare his hand scribble so on the wall of Your world!*

The poet rightly apologises for the trite banality of his graffiti, etched on the wall of God's creation.

रो मन कबहु न पाइहै नागरि छबि अभिराम ।
अच्छरु बरन रु बिंद करि सुंदरता कौ धाम ॥ १९ ॥

19. *Weep, O mind, for you will never acquire the heroine's lovely grace;
apsara-fair, with her bindi an abode of comeliness.*

—
*O Roman [script], you will never acquire the lovely grace of Nagari,
with its characters, syllables and dots an abode of comeliness.*

This stanza attempts a *śleṣa*, an extended pun that establishes two parallel realms of meaning. The pun hinges on the word *nāgarī*, meaning both ‘Devanāgarī’ and ‘the urbane one’ the idealised heroine; Braj *accharu* is an attested variant of *apsarā*, ‘divine nymph’, but also represents *akṣara*, an individual ‘character’ in Devanāgarī. (A translation seeking to preserve the multivalence of meaning might exploit the ambiguous possibilities of ‘character’ here.)

जाकौ जस है जगत में ताकौ नाम प्रधान ।
युद्धिस्थिर की बिल्ली कौ को पूछे कल्याण ॥ २० ॥

20. *His name is paramount, who is famed in the world;
Who'd ask the welfare of Yudhishtira's cat?*

The *Mahābhārata* character Yudhiṣṭhira (‘firm-in-battle’) was reluctant to take his place in heaven if it meant leaving his faithful dog behind; and the famous episode secured for this pooch a place as the most esteemed canine in the Indian tradition. Whether other pets featured in the household is not recorded.

आप न दीखत बृछ की डाल डुलाय समीर ।
हिय की पीरा जानियति कंपित देख सरीर ॥ २१ ॥

21. *The breeze is not seen, except in the tree's branch it shakes;
the pain of the heart is known on seeing how the body trembles.*

The *āpa* with which the couplet begins is reflexive, equivalent in sense to *khud*, *svayaṃ*; (it does not mean ‘you’).

हंस विवकी करत द्वै मिश्रित जल अरि नीर ।
फिरहि मिलावत दुहुन कौं हँस करि चतुर अहीर ॥ २२ ॥

22. *The discriminating hansa separates mixed milk and water;
then the clever Ahīr gleefully mixes the two of them again.*

The poem contrasts two conventional conceits: *hansa* bird is skilled in discrimination, and can separate milk from water; the Ahīr (by caste a cowherd, i.e. a milkman) 'with a laugh' (*hāsa kari*) dilutes the former with the latter.

दोहे अगनित रचि गये, करि तव गुन-गन-गान ।
तुझ मुझ को जो दो गिने, भ्रमित गनित को ग्यान ॥ २३ ॥

23. *I've written countless dohās singing your praises;
whoever counts you and me as two has faulty mathematics.*

The couplet plays variously on the verb *gin-* / *gan-* 'to count, to reckon', and associated words.

जिहि कर में पाती परति भीगत अँसुवनि मोर ।
या कर करकस कब परै कोमल कर द्वै तोर ॥ २४ ॥

24. *The hand in which your letter falls is moist with tears;
when will your two soft hands fall into this rough hand of mine?*

This verse is not well served by translation, most of its slim (and somewhat hackneyed) elegance lying in its alliterative composition.

कवि के कठिन कलाप कों पहचानत कब कोइ ।
करत नहीं परवाह पर वाह करत सब लोइ ॥
वाह करत सब लोइ, हुलसि बजावत ताली ।
नहिं जानत सुख दुःख, पिवत सदा रस-प्याली ॥
भावत रसिकनि हीय कछु नाहिन बिन छबि के ।
कबहू निहारत नाहिं आँसू टपकत कवि के ॥ २५ ॥

25. *The poet's intense agony is never recognised;
People care damn all, yet call out 'Damn fine!'.
They call out 'Damn fine', happily clapping their hands;
they know not joy or sorrow, they ever drink the cup of pleasure.
Nothing appeals to the rasika except beauty;
he never observes the dripping tears shed by the poet.*

For more on the Kuṇḍaliyā metre, see '[Serpentine Entanglements](#)' elsewhere in *Kāvyaārtha*.