

CHAPTER SEVENTY-NINE

Lord Balarāma Goes on Pilgrimage

This chapter describes how Lord Baladeva satisfied the brāhmaṇas by killing Balvala, bathed at various holy pilgrimage sites and attempted to dissuade Bhīmasena and Duryodhana from fighting.

At the sacrificial arena of the sages at Naimiṣāranya forest, a harsh wind began to blow on the new-moon day, spreading the obnoxious smell of pus and obscuring everything with dust. The demon Balvala then appeared there with a trident in his hand, his massive body pitch black and his face very frightening. Lord Baladeva caught the demon with His plow and then struck him a ferocious blow on the head with His club, killing him. The sages chanted Lord Baladeva's glories and presented Him with lavish gifts.

Lord Balarāma then began His pilgrimage, during which He visited many holy tīrthas. When He heard news of the battle between the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas, the Lord went to Kurukṣetra to try to stop the duel between Bhīma and Duryodhana. But He could not dissuade them from fighting, so deep was their enmity. Understanding that the fight was the arrangement of fate, Lord Baladeva left the battlefield and returned to Dvārakā.

Some time later, Balarāma again went to the Naimiṣāranya forest, where the sages performed a number of fire sacrifices on His behalf. Lord Baladeva reciprocated by granting the sages transcendental knowledge and revealing to them His eternal identity.

Text 1:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Then, on the new-moon day, O King, a fierce and frightening wind arose, scattering dust all about and spreading the smell of pus everywhere.

Text 2:

Next, onto the sacrificial arena came a downpour of abominable things sent by Balvala, after which the demon himself appeared, trident in hand.

Texts 3-4:

The immense demon resembled a mass of black carbon. His topknot and beard were like molten copper, and his face had horrible fangs and

furrowed eyebrows. Upon seeing him, Lord Balarāma thought of His club, which tears to pieces His enemies' armies, and His plow weapon, which punishes the demons. Thus summoned, His two weapons appeared before Him at once.

Text 5:

With the tip of His plow Lord Balarāma caught hold of the demon Balvala as he flew through the sky, and with His club the Lord angrily struck that harasser of brāhmaṇas on the head.

Text 6:

Balvala cried out in agony and fell to the ground, his forehead cracked open and gushing blood. He resembled a red mountain struck by a lightning bolt.

Text 7:

The exalted sages honored Lord Rāma with sincere prayers and awarded Him infallible blessings. Then they performed His ritual bath, just as the demigods had formally bathed Indra when he killed Vṛtra.

Text 8:

They gave Lord Balarāma a Vaijayantī garland of unfading lotuses in which resided the goddess of fortune, and they also gave Him a set of divine garments and jewelry.

Text 9:

Then, given leave by the sages, the Lord went with a contingent of brāhmaṇas to the Kauśikī River, where He bathed. From there He went to the lake from which flows the river Sarayū.

Text 10:

The Lord followed the course of the Sarayū until He came to Prayāga, where He bathed and then performed rituals to propitiate the demigods and other living beings. Next He went to the āśrama of Pulaha Ṛṣi.

Texts 11-15:

Lord Balarāma bathed in the Gomatī, Gaṇḍakī and Vipāśā rivers, and also immersed Himself in the Śoṇa. He went to Gayā, where He worshiped His forefathers, and to the mouth of the Ganges, where He performed

purifying ablutions. At Mount Mahendra He saw Lord Paraśurāma and offered Him prayers, and then He bathed in the seven branches of the Godāvarī River, and also in the rivers Veṇā, Pampā and Bhīmarathī. Then Lord Balarāma met Lord Skanda and visited Śrī-śaila, the abode of Lord Giriśa. In the southern provinces known as Draviḍa-deśa the Supreme Lord saw the sacred Veṅkaṭa Hill, as well as the cities of Kāmakoṣṇī and Kāñcī, the exalted Kāverī River and the most holy Śrī-raṅga, where Lord Kṛṣṇa has manifested Himself. From there He went to Rṣabha Mountain, where Lord Kṛṣṇa also lives, and to the southern Mathurā. Then He came to Setubandha, where the most grievous sins are destroyed.

Texts 16-17:

There at Setubandha [Rāmeśvaram] Lord Halāyudha gave brāhmaṇas ten thousand cows in charity. He then visited the Kṛtamālā and Tāmraparṇī rivers and the great Malaya Mountains. In the Malaya range Lord Balarāma found Agastya Ṛṣi sitting in meditation. After bowing down to the sage, the Lord offered him prayers and then received blessings from him. Taking leave from Agastya, He proceeded to the shore of the southern ocean, where He saw Goddess Durgā in her form of Kanyā-kumārī.

Text 18:

Next He went to Phālguna-tīrtha and bathed in the sacred Pañcāpsarā Lake, where Lord Viṣṇu had directly manifested Himself. At this place He gave away another ten thousand cows.

Texts 19-21:

The Supreme Lord then traveled through the kingdoms of Kerala and Trigarta, visiting Lord Śiva's sacred city of Gokarṇa, where Lord Dhūrjati [Śiva] directly manifests himself. After also visiting Goddess Pārvatī, who dwells on an island, Lord Balarāma went to the holy district of Śūrpāraka and bathed in the Tāpī, Payoṣṇī and Nirvindhya rivers. He next entered the Daṇḍaka forest and went to the river Revā, along which the city of Māhiṣmatī is found. Then He bathed at Manu-tīrtha and finally returned to Prabhāsa.

Text 22:

The Lord heard from some brāhmaṇas how all the kings involved in the battle between the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas had been killed. From this He concluded that the earth was now relieved of her burden.

Text 23:

Wanting to stop the club fight then raging between Bhīma and Duryodhana on the battlefield, Lord Balarāma went to Kurukṣetra.

Text 24:

When Yudhiṣṭhira, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna and the twin brothers Nakula and Sahadeva saw Lord Balarāma, they offered Him respectful obeisances but said nothing, thinking “What has He come here to tell us?”

Text 25:

Lord Balarāma found Duryodhana and Bhīma with clubs in their hands, each furiously striving for victory over the other as they circled about skillfully. The Lord addressed them as follows.

Text 26:

[Lord Balarāma said:] King Duryodhana! And Bhīma! Listen! You two warriors are equal in fighting prowess. I know that one of you has greater physical power, while the other is better trained in technique.

Text 27:

Since you are so evenly matched in fighting prowess, I do not see how either of you can win or lose this duel. Therefore please stop this useless battle.

Text 28:

[Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued:] They did not accept Lord Balarāma’s request, O King, although it was logical, for their mutual enmity was irrevocable. Each of them constantly remembered the insults and injuries he had suffered from the other.

Text 29:

Concluding that the battle was the arrangement of fate, Lord Balarāma went back to Dvārakā. There He was greeted by Ugrasena and His other relatives, who were all delighted to see Him.

Text 30:

Later Lord Balarāma returned to Naimiṣāranya, where the sages joyfully engaged Him, the embodiment of all sacrifice, in performing various kinds of Vedic sacrifice. Lord Balarāma was now retired from warfare.

Text 31:

The all-powerful Lord Balarāma bestowed upon the sages pure spiritual knowledge, by which they could see the whole universe within Him and also see Him pervading everything.

Text 32:

After executing with His wife the avabhṛtha ablutions, the beautifully dressed and ornamented Lord Balarāma, encircled by His immediate family and other relatives and friends, looked as splendid as the moon surrounded by its effulgent rays.

Text 33:

Countless other such pastimes were performed by mighty Balarāma, the unlimited and immeasurable Supreme Lord, whose mystic Yoga-māyā power makes Him appear to be a human being.

Text 34:

All the activities of the unlimited Lord Balarāma are amazing. Anyone who regularly remembers them at dawn and dusk will become very dear to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Śrī Viṣṇu.