

Why was Balaram So Affectionate To Duryodhan?

IF WE CONTEMPLATE ON THE PASTIMES OF
KRISHNA'S BELOVED ELDER BROTHER, A RELEVANT
QUESTION ARISES:



Unknown artist. 17th century South Indian mural

Why did Balaram give so much favor to the demoniac Duryodhan?

Duryodhan was not a devotee of Krishna. From his childhood he hated Krishna's pure devotees the Pandavas and tried in various ways to kill them. When Yudhisthir asked Krishna to go to Hastinapur to deliver a peace message on behalf of the Pandavas, Duryodhan grossly disrespected Krishna, and even tried to capture him.

In spite of all these offenses to both Krishna and his pure devotees, Duryodhan is famous as a great disciple of Balaram. Consider:

* Balaram stayed for several years in Mithila just to give association to Duryodhan and train him in the art of fighting with a club. (*Bhāg.* 10.57.26)

* Balaram wanted to give his sister Subhadra in marriage to Duryodhan. (*Bhāg.* 10.86.2-3)

* Duryodhan considered Balaram the supreme Lord. He addressed him as Bhagavan. (*Garga Saṁhitā* 8.9.1; 8.10.1)

* It was Duryodhan who asked the sage Pradvipak Muni to inform him about Balaram's *rāsa* dance in Vraja, as well as various prayers and procedures for worshiping Baladev, and Balaram's 1,000 names. (*Garga-saṁhitā* canto 8 chapters 9-13)

* One of Balaram's names is "Duryodhana-guru", the guru of Duryodhan. (*Garga-saṁhitā* 1.10.42)

* Balaram went to Kuruksetra to stop the fighting between Bhimasena and Duryodhan. When he saw that it was Krishna's will that they fight,

he left as he had so much affection for both Bhima and Duryodhan that it was too painful for him to see them fight. (*Bhāg.* 10.79.23-30)

* When Bhima killed Duryodhan, Balaram was furious and left.

How do we reconcile the fact that Duryodhan was very dear to Balaram?

There may be many answers to this question, but we can conclude that although Duryodhan looked like he was very close, ultimately his attitude was not pleasing to Balaram.

There are many lessons that we can see from this: First, it's not always easy to see who is really close to the guru. By the *aparā-vicāra*, the apparent consideration, it appeared that both Banasura and Ravan pleased Mahadeva Shiva and got his mercy. But our *ācāryas* have described that they only got *sakapaṭa kṛpā*, mercy with cheating. They got some wealth, fame and position. They didn't get the *niṣkapaṭa kṛpā*, mercy without cheating, or *kṛṣṇa-prema*. In the same way, although it apparently looked like Duryodhan was close to Lord Balaram, internally he was far away from the Lord.

Secondly, although Duryodhan had some faith in Balaram, he didn't have faith in Krishna or the Pandavas. In the same way, sometimes a disciple may be full of enthusiasm for his or her guru, but may neglect or offend other *Vaiṣṇavas*. Or, like Duryodhan, some disciples may express devotion for their guru, but they may not be interested in worshiping Krishna or chanting *kṛṣṇa-nāma*. Although it may appear that such devotees are very close to their guru, and they may even get some big position, they do not get the same quality of mercy that a surrendered disciple receives.

To explore a third lesson from the relationship between Balaram and Duryodhan, we have to understand Duryodhan's identity. The *Garga-saṁhitā* (1.5.30) describes him as an *aṁśa* or partial expansion of Kali — *duryodhanaḥ kaler aṁśo*. Although externally he looked like a big follower of his guru, in actuality Duryodhan was a servant and follower of Kali, not his guru Lord Balaram. He had his own separate agenda from the Lord, an agenda that ultimately caused pain and death for millions of persons.

Regarding such duplicity, Thakur Bhaktivinode states in his *Bāul Saṅgīta* (song 6):



Krishna, Balaram and the Pandavas watch Bhima and Duryodhana fight

eo to' eka kalir celā

māthā neḍā kapni parā, tilak nāke, galāy mālā

“Here is a disciple of Kali-yuga: He has a shaved head, wears kaupins, marks his forehead with tilak, and keeps tulasī beads around his neck.”

In a 1995 lecture in Bhubaneswar, Gour Govinda Maharaja warned the devotees that to really have the association of guru one must give up ulterior motives and false displays of devotion, and must genuinely surrender:

“We are only pretending that we have done ātma-nivedana, that we have surrendered. But we have not really surrendered. We have only been pretending, pretending, pretending for so many years. And also for so many years to come in the future, as long as we continue to act artificially we cannot approach guru, sādhu or Vaiṣṇava. We cannot get their mercy at all and therefore we cannot see their real form. We will be cheated. We will get all external things.”

— Śrī-guru vaiṣṇava kṛpā prārthī,

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