Midterm Investigation

There have been many little topics we’ve discussed over the course of the 8-weeks I’ve been in Intro to Hinduism. One such topic that interested was the Dashavatar lecture, but more specifically one of the avatars we’d discussed, Balarama. I had heard the stories of Vishnu’s ten avatars many times from my grandmother and my mother but those stories never included a Balarama. From my previous knowledge of the Dashavatar the ten avatars had always been: the fish, the turtle, the boar, Narasimha, the dwarf, Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Kalkin. The discovery of this new avatar did peak my interest very much so I decided to do some research on him.

After asking my parents and perusing through article online, I began to have a better understanding of who Balarama was. My parents weren’t very much help in learning more about this specific avatar as they didn’t hear much about him when they were growing up but asking them did show me how much less popular he was compared with the usual ten avatars that people grew up with. According to my research, Balarama’s name came from the sanskrit words “Bala” and “Rama” which means strength and God respectively. He was also the elder brother of Krishna. Balarama and Krishna were considered a joint incarnation as “sons” of Vishnu. (Eval) Other sources, however, state that Balarama was actually an incarnation of Shesha, the serpent that Vishnu is usually depicted riding on with his wife Lakshmi. (Britannica) It is said that
Vishnu took two of his hairs and planted them in Devaki’s womb but before she birthed them he used his power to transport them to the womb of Rohini so that Devaki’s brother Kamsa couldn’t kill them. Rohini birthed the two boys and they grew up together amongst cowherds. While there are no famous epics depicting the adventures of Balarama, Like Rama with the Ramayana or Krishna with the Bhagavad Gita, there are still many smaller stories that highlight Balarama’s personality. Unlike stories of Rama or Krishna which focus on characteristics such as morality and cleverness, Balarama’s stories seem to give off more negatively charged characteristics. One such story was when Balarama wanted the Yamuna to move closer to him. Balarama, known for his alcoholism and extreme strength and masculinity, asked the Yamuna to move closer and when she didn’t comply he used his plow to move her himself until she surrendered and moved to his will. (Eval) Balarama was said to have died after Krishna when he went into a meditative state and produced a white snake (Shesha) from his mouth, leaving his human body behind to rot as a corpse. (Aayush)

Researching Balarama was a pretty fulfilling experience in my opinion. I was able to learn about one of the lesser known incarnations of Vishnu which in turn gave me a greater understanding of both the Dashavatara and the creation of Indian myths as a whole. I also found the contradicting nature of his mythology to be very interesting as Balarama’s lack of popularity allowed for many people to fill in the holes of his story themselves. As an Indian and a Hindu who has heard the same stories of Krishna, Rama, Ganesha, and many others like them, it was refreshing to see mythology that I had not yet encountered before and to hear mythology of a deity who can be characterized as very untraditional.
Works Cited


“Eval(ez_write_tag([[468,60],'newworldencyclopedia_org-Box-2','ezslot_0',106,'0','0']));Balarama.” *Balarama - New World Encyclopedia*, www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Balarama.