**The Curious Story of Romaharsana Suta**

By Narasimha das

[**Note:** *I wrote a version of this article by hand (minus the parts in brackets) and gave it to Tamal Krsna Gosvami in late 1979 when we were staying at our ISKCON farm project in Oklahoma. The next day when I brought him his lunch, I noticed he had “Krsna Book” opened to Chapter 77. He said, “Let’s discuss your article.” He got an urgent call right after lunch, and we never had that discussion. But he gave me permission to leave his “zone”, and shortly thereafter he spoke his famous Topanga Canyon confessions, wherein he frankly admitted Srila Prabhupada had never appointed any gurus.*]

In Srila Prabhupada’s *KRSNA BOOK*, Chapter 77, we find the story of Romaharsana Suta. This man was a learned transcendentalist and direct disciple of Srila Vyasadeva. But he was not a pure devotee. Srila Prabhupada explains: **“his transcendental realization was not perfect.”**

Just prior to the advent of the age of Kali, many great sages and saintly persons gathered at the holy place of Naimisaranya to perform a great sacrifice via the recitation of the pastimes of the Supreme Lord and His pure devotees. Such narrations are found in the *Puranas,* such as *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and *Mahabharata,* and in other authorized scriptures. In Vedic culture, advanced devotees well-versed in these scriptures would often lead long discourses and discussions of these important topics. Unlike the modern-day *bhagavat-saptas* performed by professional speakers to impress laymen for sake of their own financial gain, these meetings were attended almost exclusively by ascetics and yogis, or serious transcendentalists eager to develop full Krishna consciousness.

Romharsana Suta had studied all the *Vedas* and *Puranas* under the personal guidance of Srila Vyasadeva, the literary incarnation of God. Therefore he had been elected to sit on the *vyasasana* at the great assembly of transcendentalists, even though he had not been born in a lineage of pure brahmins. We find many examples mentioned in Srila Prabhupada books wherein a person not born in a family of brahmins had achieved the position of a brahmin or *acarya* by virtue of training, staunch *sadhana* and realization in Krishna consciousness. Srila Haridas Thakura, for instance, who was born in a family of Mohammedans, was recognized as the best devotee and given the title of *nama-acarya* by Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Himself. Srila Haridas Thakura, however, was the emblem of humility and never considered himself a great devotee or teacher of Vaisnavas.

Romaharsana Suta was not a devotee on the level of Haridas Thakura. In spite of his learning and exalted status, he had failed to perfectly realize his constitutional position as a tiny part and parcel of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Rather he imagined himself to be the greatest *sadhu*. He dared to sit on the *vyasasana*--even in the presence of many learned devotees who hailed from dynasties of pure and exalted brahmins or *brahma-rishis*. Moreover, when everyone else stood up and offered obeisance to welcome Lord Balarama, Romaharsana Suta remained seated. Srila Prabhupada mentions that he should have followed the example of all the other learned sages present by standing to receive Lord Balarama.

**[Note:** *Srila Prabhupada’s* ***“Nectar of Devotion”*** *states that everyone should stand up to greet the Deities. No one should remain seated****.]***

Srila Prabhupada writes: **“When Lord Balarama saw that Romahasana Suta did not understand the highest principle of religiousness in spite of having studied all the *Vedas*, He certainly could not support his position. Romaharsana had been given the chance to become a perfect *brahmana*, but because of his ill behavior in his relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, his low birth was immediately remembered… “**

What is the highest principle of religiousness? If a brahmin does not know the answer to this question and has not realized the import of all the *Vedas,* then he should not think of himself as guru or exalted leader among Vaisnavas and saintly persons. If he does so, he may make the mistake of Romaharsana and think himself as exalted as Lord Balarama or His empowered representative. Srila Prabhupada mentions elsewhere in this connection: **“One should not imitate the behavior of an advanced devotee or *maha-bhagavata* without being self-realized, for by such behavior one will eventually become degraded.”**

Both Lord Krishna and Lord Balarama killed many obnoxiously sinful persons in the course of Their transcendental pastimes. All of these persons were guilty of killing, abusing and/or raping many innocent people, including brahmins, cows, women and children. None of these sinfully violent and disruptive demons were brahmins or *sadhus* or disciples of great devotees like Srila Vyasadeva. Yet Lord Balarama considered Romaharsana Suta, a direct disciple of Vyasadeva, to be equally dangerous and destructive, like the other grossly sinful demons He had killed.

We may wonder why the Personality of Godhead, Lord Balarama, would severely punish a *sadhu* seated as guru, even a voted-in, low-born “guru” like Romaharsana Suta, when, in fact, He had spared and even befriended men like Duryodhana. Krishna had even spared the Kaliya serpent, who had poisoned the waters of the Yamuna and caused death in Vrindaban among Krishna’s intimate devotees. So why did Lord Balarama kill Romaharsana Suta, who was seated as guru and blessed by the great sages at Naimisaranya with long life? Srila Prabhupada explains: **“Because Romaharsana’s transcendental realization was not perfect, Lord Balarama remembered his *pratiloma* (mixed caste) heritage. The idea is that any man can be given the chance become a *brahmana,* but if he improperly uses the position of a *brahmana* without actual realization, then his elevation to the brahminical position is not valid.”**

These statements above (and others below) suggest low-born persons without full realization in Krishna consciousness should carefully avoid coveting the post of guru. Unless one is a fully self-realized soul ordered by guru and Krishna to act as *acarya*, he should avoid thinking of himself as a *diksa-guru*, or an exalted Vaisnava capable of delivering transcendental knowledge to new students of Krishna consciousness. **"One should not try to be an artificially advanced devotee, thinking, 'I am a first-class devotee.' Such thinking should be avoided. It is best not to accept any disciples.”** Citing Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, Srila Prabhupada has specifically warned, **“Our men, some of them, are becoming *sahajiyas*. My guru-maharaja has said, ‘When our men will become *sahajiyas*, oh, they will be more dangerous!’ ”**

In other words, low-born, voted-in “gurus” who exploit the sentiments of persons attracted to the path of Krishna consciousness may be as dangerous as those who kill or cause physical harm to others, or those who deliberately disrupt Vedic culture, such as evil kings like Kamsa. We find no mention in this story that Romaharsana Suta was preaching false *siddhanta* (like *mayavad* or *sunyavad)* or was ignorant of Vedic instructions or had grossly deviated from the correct path of *sadhana*. So, then, what was his terrible mistake for which he received the death penalty? Lord Balarama killed him because he was posing as guru without being fully self-realized. Although he was elected to the *acarya* post by the assembly of learned sages, his acceptance of this post was false due to the fact that his **“transcendental realization was not perfect.”**

Srila Prabhupada writes: **“After seeing the deficiency of realization in Romaharsana Suta, Lord Balarama decided to chastise him for being puffed up. Lord Balarama therefore said, *‘This man is liable to be awarded the death punishment because, although he has the good qualification of being a disciple of Lord Vyasadeva and although he has studied all the Vedic literatures from this exalted personality, he was not submissive in the presence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.’ “***

Srila Prabhupada continues: **“From this we can understand that when one is puffed up by material acquisition, he cannot acquire the gentle behavior befitting a *brahmana.* The learning of such a person is as good as a valuable jewel on the head of a serpent. Despite the valuable jewel on the hood, a serpent is still a serpent and is as fearful as an ordinary serpent. If a person does not become meek and humble, all his study of the *Vedas* and *Puranas* and his vast knowledge in the *sastras* become simply outward dress, like the costume of a theatrical artist dancing on stage. Lord Balarama began to consider thus, *‘I have appeared in order to chastise false persons who are internally impure but externally pose themselves to be very learned and religious. My killing of such persons is proper to check them from further sinful activity.’* “**

Srila Prabhupada concludes, **“Considering these points, He killed Romaharsana Suta simply by striking him with *kusa* straw, which is nothing but a blade of grass.”**

All the brahmins and sages present there were much aggrieved by this act of the Lord. They all humbly requested the Lord to atone for this action as an example for ordinary human beings. They said, **“He was seated on the *vyasasana* by our election, and when one is seated on the *vysasana*, it is improper for him to stand up to receive a person. Moreover, we awarded Romaharsana Suta an undisturbed duration of life…”** Lord Balarama agreed, saying, **“Yes, I must atone for this action, which may have been proper for Me, but is improper for others; therefore, I think it is My duty to execute a suitable act of atonement enjoined in the authorized scriptures…”**

Lord Balarama offered to restore the life of Romaharsana, but the learned sages decided they should not nullify the action of Lord Balarama. Following Lord Baladeva’s suggestion, they agreed that their blessings of long life and other benedictions could be transferred to Urgrasava Suta, the son of Romaharsana Suta, who became forever famous as the most illustrious Sri Suta Gosvami. In this way, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Baladeva, removed a false guru and established a genuinely realized soul as leader of the assembly. Thus the stage was set for the continuous performance of pure *sravana*, *kirtana*, *smarana* at this monumental transcendental sacrifice for the benefit of the whole world.

In His purports *to Sri Isopanisad*, Srila Prabhupada repeatedly stresses that one must hear from and accept only an **“undisturbed *acarya*”** to get relief from the bondage of the powerful illusory energy of the Lord. **“Unless one hears from the bona fide *acarya*, who is never disturbed by the changes of the material world, one cannot have the real key to transcendental knowledge.”** And throughout His books He emphatically stresses: **“One who is disturbed by the whirlpool movements of the material energy is not qualified to become an *acarya*.”** (*Sri Isopanisad,* Mantra Thirteen, Purport.)

[**Final note:** Only the Supreme Lord or His deputed agents like Lord Yama can properly chastise false gurus and other miscreants. This is not the duty of ordinary devotees and preachers. It is the duty of some preachers, however, to expose the false ideas promoted by ignorant or envious persons, especially those posing as brahmins and gurus.

A few years ago, I heard that Tamal Krishna Gosvami had been killed in the holy land near Krishna Nagar, apparently without a mark or blood on his body. A senior devotee, who went to identify his body right afterwards, told us his face appeared frozen in fright but there were no major injuries visible on his body. Hearing this, I remembered the picture in *Krsna Book* of Romaharsana Suta’s frightened face when Balarama killed him, without the usual blood and gore, simply with a blade of grass. I was not happy to hear this news of the demise of Tamal Krsna Gosvami but was amazed to contemplate the causeless mercy of Srila Prabhupada and Lord Balarama. **“And as soon as he [the upstart] learns that Guru Maharaja is dead, ‘Now I am so advanced that I can kill my guru and I become guru.’ Then he’s finished.”** (Conv. Aug. 16, 1976, Bombay)]

**Additional References:**

**“As soon as a foolish disciple tries to overtake his spiritual master and becomes ambitious to occupy his post, he immediately falls down.”** (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 5.12.14, Purport.)

**"A guru can become guru when he is ordered by his guru. Otherwise nobody can become guru."** (Conversation, October 28, 1975, Nairobi.)

**"When one has attained the topmost position of *maha-bhagavata*, he is to be accepted as guru and worshiped exactly like Hari, the Personality of Godhead. Only such a person is eligible to occupy the post of guru."** (*Caitanya-caritamrta* Madhya, 24.330, Purport, citing *Padma Purana.*)

**"One should not try to be an artificially advanced devotee, thinking, 'I am a first-class devotee.' Such thinking should be avoided. It best not to accept any disciples."** (*Caitanya-caritamrta* Madhya 7.130, Purport.)

**"If everyone just initiates, there will only be a contradictory result. As long as it goes on, there will only be failure." (From the *Palguna Krishna Pancami*, a poem by Srila Prabhupada, 1961.)**

**“One should consider the Acharya to be as good as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In spite of these instructions, if one considers the spiritual master an ordinary human being, one is doomed. His study of the Vedas and his austerities and penances for enlightenment are useless, like the bathing of an elephant.”**

**“However, one should not imitate the behavior of an advanced devotee or *maha-bhagavata* without being self-realized, for by such imitation one will eventually become degraded.”** (Nectar of Instruction, Verse Five, Purport)

**“They did even consider with common sense—that if Guru Maharaja wanted to appoint somebody as *acarya*, why he did not say? He said so many things, and this point he missed? The real point? And they insisted upon it. The declared some unfit person to become *acarya*. And then another—‘Acarya!’ Another—‘Acarya!’ So better to remain a foolish [simple] person perpetually to be directed by Guru Maharaja. That is perfection. And as soon as he [the upstart] learns that Guru Maharaja is dead, ‘Now I am so advanced that I can kill my guru and I become guru.’ Then he’s finished.”** (Conv. Aug. 16, 1976, Bombay)