

Reliving The Hare Krsna Festival at Cross Maidan, Bombay

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25 March 2021

om ajnana-timirandhasya jnananjana-salakaya caksur unmilitam
yena tasmai sri'gurave namah

Reliving Hare Krsna Festival

Going back 50 years in the past, on this day. What you just saw on the screen – the festival, the venue, the crowd, Prabhupada, the Deities, Yamuna, Madhudvisa singing, the entrance, balloons – I saw all that exactly at this moment, 50 years ago. It was amazing. Except that I did not look the way I look now and neither I spoke the way I am speaking now. I was not a young, full fledged man. I was just a boy in early 20's, college student, residing in Dadar, Mumbai. Of course, I was born in a remote village in Maharashtra. Who knew? I did not know this was all that was going to happen to me that I was going to become Hare Krsna.

Not that I am regretting, I am very happy. But 50 years ago, I was completely different. I was brought to this Hare Krsna Festival Cross-Maidan day after day or eleven days and I was transformed. There were revelations, eye opening and eye opener was Srila Prabhupada. I was thinking that Hare Krsna Festival at Cross Maidan was like an eye operation camps and all those 20, 30 thousands persons coming, I was just one drop in the ocean of people of Mumbai present there. So we were all getting operated and the operator was His Divine Grace, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada assisted by his American and European disciples, American sadhus, European sadhus.

I was a completely changed man. Like what we say “divya gyana hrdaye prokasito.” That is what was happening. Or “om ajnana-timirandhasya jnananjana-salakaya.” Srila Prabhupada was opening eyes and he was putting jnana anjana in our eyes so that we could see. And towards the end of this festival I was as Arjuna says,

“I am ready to, karishye vachanam tava.”

So I was studying in Sangli Willington College. I had this thought, “I should go to Bombay and become a graduate of Bombay university!” This was compelling me or dictating me within. So I came to Bombay. In fact, I did not come, I was brought to Bombay because,

brahmanda bhramite konabhagyavjiva
guru-krsna-prasade paya bhakti-lata-bija

This statement of Gauranga Mahaprabhu to Sanatana Goswami, I realized that in my own life. “Why did I come? Why was I brought to Bombay?” Because Srila Prabhupada was going to arrive there very soon, along with his American and European disciples, sadhus and I had to meet him. Or, Lord Gauranga was going to arrange my meeting with Srila Prabhupada on this day, 50 years ago and that happened. Gauranga! What could I say, I thank, what a little creature could say or thank to the Lord for such a gift of bringing me in contact with Srila Prabhupada on this day of 25th March 1971.”

With that everything changed for better. I had been every day, jumping in the local train from Dadar to Church gate. At first I did not have dhoti-kurta, I wish I had. My father and my brothers always had these robes, dhoti-kurta, but I was becoming or my parents and brothers wanted me to become the modern man and so I was wearing pants and shirt like normal people wear. So, with that attire I had been coming and attended this Hare Krsna Festival.

There was advertisement, I had already said a few times. I

always say this when I remember the Hare Krsna Festival Cross Maidan 1971. I remember the advertisement, "American sadhus are in town." That caught the imagination folks of Bombay, including myself. "What? American sadhus? Forget it. American scientists are okay. But what are you talking about?" So, I ended up there and did realize that yes, they were sadhus. It turned out, as we heard earlier, 10-30 thousands of people and I was just one drop of the ocean. There was a big stage and the deities of Radha and Krsna were on the stage. They had transformed the Cross Maidan into a Hare Krsna temple, with full deity worship. Srila Prabhupada would come, offer pranams, dandavat to the deities. Sometimes he would circumambulate and take his seat on the vyasa asana next to and at the feet of the deities.

I remember taking darsana of Srila Prabhupada 50 years ago and oh the kirtans of these Hare Krsna devotees were out of this world. I am sure no one in India or Bombay had seen such kirtans before. They were really into these kirtans, totally oblivious to their surroundings and totally absorbed and beating drums and kartala and jumping up high in the sky and going round and round. They were really enjoying and I was remembering this is what Bible says,

"Love thy Lord with all thy heart, with all thy strength."

So these Hare Krsna devotees with all their love and strength were into these kirtans and perspiration as they were working very hard performing these kirtans. I would say of all the different things that impressed me was one item – these Hare Krsna kirtan of American and European sadhus. I was convinced, "yes, they must be sadhus, they are sadhus."

Srila Prabhupada was delivering lectures everyday in English. Well, I knew English. I would write my papers in English. I was not able to speak fluently those days, but I understood. I was listening to Srila Prabhupada's lectures day after day and things were getting clearer and clearer as I went on hearing.

But one day, one item helped me the most. From my childhood, this was me those days, I had this intense desire to serve others, serve humanity, serve my countrymen, to become desh bhakta or reformer of some sort, serving people, helping others. This was so much on my mind but I did not know where to start, what to do. I had no resources, I had no direction, I had no tools, no clear vision. But one day, Srila Prabhupada quoting from Srimad Bhagavatam, he said this is what Narada Muni had said to Pracetas. I found that later on:

**yatha taror mula-nisecanena
trpyanti tat-skandha-bhujopasakhah
pranopaharac ca yathendriyanam
tathaiva sarvarhanam acyutejya [SB 4.31.14]**

“As you pour the water on the root of the tree, the whole tree is energised. The trunk, the branches, leaves, flowers, the fruits and everything.”

So the process is to pour water or fertilizer at the root of the tree. Then Prabhupada explained how the whole world is like a tree and we all are like leaves and branches, parts and parcels of the Lord and Lord is the root or the source. If we serve the source or root, the Lord, then everything is nourished, everything is served. That was it. I decided to go for that formula of serving the Lord. Madhava seva manava seva. Not the other way round. Madhava seva manava seva – serving Madhava is serving humanity, serving everyone, your family, your society, the country, humanity.

Well, I was in business as Prabhupada revealed that the truth or reality unto me. Thank you Srila Prabhupada. So, that happened, I do not know which days, but one of those eleven days during the Hare Krsna Festival. There was a book table. I think Giriraja dasa brahmacari, I did not even know their names those days. I found out this later on. He was managing the book table. I managed to get, those days I did not have much money or pocket money, I could not buy much books. But I

did buy Back to Godhead magazine which was very colourful, the four colours.

I had not seen anything like that before in any book or magazine. I think it was printed in Japan and beautiful photographs. I think the Radha Londonisvara was on the back. "Govindam adi purusam" prayer was also printed there and the photographs of Ratha Yatras in different places, London, San Francisco. Then I took also small books Lord in the Heart. Those days the Bhagavatam was not published, they were just published in different chapters. Lord in the Heart, I remember that book. So books are the basis. That also I found out later on – Prabhupada,

"if you want to know me, read my books."

I wanted to know Prabhupada more so I got these books for myself.

There used to be question and answer booths and the American and European sadhus – I used to spend so much time there listening to those American and European sadhus expertly giving answers to all various or series of questions. So not only they looked like sadhus or did kirtan like sadhus but I could see how they were convinced, philosophically sound, not just sentimental but philosophers also, religion and philosophy. I remember an Indian gentleman asking a devotee, "oh, these Hare Krsnas have converted you. You were Christians and now you have become Hindu!" And I remember that devotee, very smartly said, "No, no. To become Krsna conscious, this is above Christianity, above Hinduism, transcendental to all the religions." And he says, "I have become better Christian now. Anyone who takes to Krsna Consciousness, he becomes better Christian or better Hindu or better Jew or better Sikh." I was very much impressed with the devotees replies. Like that, every day there were questions and answers.

Deities on the stage, I mean they were a center of attraction.

Radha Krsna deities and I found out later on that they were having full worship of Radha and Krsna, seven offerings, mangala arati and so many aratis, the whole cooking were happening right there and they were making offerings, dressings. In the venue also the American American sadhus, they were doing aratis, they were doing kirtans, they were learned, they were giving befitting answers to tough questions. There used to be an another kirtan towards the end, arati and kirtan. Everything was out of this world although it was all happening at Cross Maidan. But all activities were transcendental, out of this world or transcendental to Christianity or Hinduism.

The Deities, They were beautifully decorated and those deities, I did further research I found out that Prabhupada had personally carried those deities to Australia, Sydney. Literally, he was carrying Them along with his assistants, servants, secretaries on their lap. And They are there in Sydney, Radha Gopinatha deities. They ended from the Hare Krsna land to Sydney, Australia.

This Hare Krsna Festival made two full time devotees or disciples quite instantly or very soon after this Hare Krsna Festival. Of course, who knows and who could count every single person there was influenced positively, elevated and lifted and greatly benefited. Those two devotees who immediately joined Hare Krsna movement were one American Richard, Bhakta Richard, Radhanath Swami Maharaja and the other one I was Radhanath, I became Lokanath Swami.

I was in the middle of the crowd, I did not get anybody's attention but Radhanath, Richard, American, they pointed out, "Hey, some American there! Call him, call him!" Those days Radhanath Maharaja was Shiva bhakta. He had a little beard and just few little possessions with him and he also had been attending the festival and he also bought books. I think he bought a big Krsna Book. He also had no money. What was he doing? He was begging alms and he had then sufficient money,

funds to buy Krsna Book. He ended up going on the stage and even touching the feet of Srila Prabhupada and sitting amongst those American sadhus. I remember where I was but Maharaja was kind of elevated and he got closer to Srila Prabhupada, instantly. So, those were the two immediate byproducts of the festival. Two of us became Srila Prabhupada's disciples.

What did I walk away with at the end of the festival. But why the end of the festival? I made up my mind and I had chosen Srila Prabhupada as my spiritual master and if I ever get initiated there is going to be "Why Srila Prabhupada?" Earlier, I had gone looking for some spiritual leaders and connect with them. That was what had happened while I was studying at Sangli, I had gone to join Vinobha Bhave, Mahatma Gandhi only genuine or surviving disciples. And he was doing lots of social reform, work and I wanted to join him at one point but I almost went there but Krsna intervened and I turned around, went back to Sangli so that I could end up in Mumbai and end up here at Hare Krsna Festival and have association and darsana of Srila Prabhupada.

I am saying I did not meet Srila Prabhupada face to face but I had his darsana. How does one take darsana? By hearing. By seeing you do not see much. But by hearing you know a lot or everything. So I had that kind of darsana. I was able to see and also, especially, hear Srila Prabhupada. That was one thing I made up my mind Srila Prabhupada as my spiritual guide. Another thing was I wanted to be like these like those American and European sadhus, to be like them. Not just be like them but be with them. This also I made goal of my life. I was aspiring to be like them and to be with them.

Then I, of course, as I said earlier, the chanting of,

Hare Krsna Hare Krsna Krsna Krsna Hare Hare
Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare

really had crooked me. As the festival had come to an end, i

were now walking away, returning, I am carrying the holy name with me and had Srila Prabhupada's small book and a Back to Godhead with me. That is what had kept me going, surviving and, eventually, thriving. I was hidingly reading books of Srila Prabhupada in big, fat Chemistry books. I would keep small books of Srila Prabhupada and read them as I did not want my roommates to know that I am becoming serious about the spiritual life. Because this had happened before that I had left studies. So, they were asked to keep an eye on me. So, I was hidingly doing analytical study as I read Srila Prabhupada's books.

Whenever my roommates were not in the room, I would locked the door and closed curtains and guess what I would do? I would remember those American and European sadhus on the stage dancing. So, remembering them or remembering being in front of them or I am with them, I would jump and dance on my own. But I am sure I was not alone I had association of the Lord and Lord's devotees as I was busy with that.

More things happened. There was an another Hare Krsna Festival following year, 1972, now at Hare Krsna Land. Again there was an advertisement of Hare Krsna Festival is taking place and I got my life back. For an entire year I lost the contacts and I did not know the whereabouts of the Hare Krsnas in big Bombay. As soon as I heard of this Hare Krsna Festival, Juhu, Bombay, I ran rushed and attended the festival. Now I was joining in kirtans with these sadhus. I was not just sitting around and witnessing or watching. But I was participating in kirtans and listening to Prabhupada.

Towards the end of that festivals I wrote an appeal or an application to the president that I wanted to joined. I found out the president and that was Giriraja Dasa Brahmachari. He read my letter on the spot and he said, "Oh, new bhakta here! We have a new bhakta here!" He was delighted and he called all other devotees and they were delighted also and they all embraced me. That was it. My dreams or aspirations were

fulfilled. I ended on becoming the Hare Krsna devotee also.

So things that Srila Prabhupada told and Hare Krsna festival in 1971 and more in 1972, tomara karuna. So, I am just made up of mercy of Srila Prabhupada and he has mercifully kept me around or busy past 50 years. I thank Srila Prabhupada for giving me shelter, for saving me and engaging me in service of Krsna, service of Radha Rasabihari at Hare Krsna Land, beginning there. He has given me a lot of instructions so I am trying to follow those. I am trying to please His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Srila Prabhupada ki, jai!

Nitai Gaura Premanande, Hari Hari Bol!