

## **Preface**

**I**n late November of 1975 Śrīla Prabhupāda returned to Delhi after completing a tour of South and East Africa and Mauritius. He arrived via Bombay accompanied by only one personal servant, Harikeśa dāsa, and Ambarīṣa dāsa, great grandson of Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company. He was joined by Hansadūta dāsa, his Governing Body Commissioner (GBC) for northern Europe, who flew in from Germany to be his personal secretary for the month of December.

Prabhupāda's intention was to spend a day or two at his ISKCON center in Bengali Market, while arrangements could be made to go to Kurukṣetra and then to spend some time at our temple in Vṛndāvana.

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Location wise our ISKCON center in New Delhi was well placed. Bengali Market is a small commercial area just southeast of Connaught Circus in the heart of New Delhi. Within easy walking distance lay some of the most prestigious landmarks and properties of India's chief city. Nearby Mandi House traffic roundabout was the distributor for most of the traffic in the area, forming the confluence of seven important arteries.

Many prestigious buildings were dotted about the area. There were the National Research Centre for Social Sciences, the National Museum of Natural History, the

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Nepali Embassy, the Japan Cultural and Information Center, the Soviet House of Culture, various *bhavāns* or meeting halls, and *kalā-kendras* or auditoriums for cultural programs of every description. Wide, tree lined roads with large houses set back in secluded gardens, and the homes of the very wealthy could be found within only a few minutes proximity.

A little farther away lay Curzon Street [now Kasturba Gandhi Marg]. Stretching away toward the famous India Gate, flowers and lush parks formed a wide, green expanse. There was not much evidence of the image popular in much of the West of a poverty-stricken India. It was the show piece area of the capital.

However, the building ISKCON New Delhi was renting didn't match its surroundings. It was situated at 19 Todar Mal Lane, a short, less busy, residential street cut off at one end by the intersection of a railway line. Number nineteen was a slightly ramshackle building and the odd man out in the otherwise neatly terraced urban street. Single storied and squat, it was a rather uninviting place that looked like an afterthought of the builders to fill in a gap they really hadn't planned to leave. A few plants heroically fought for life in a small and barren patch of dirt that passed for a front garden. If the word 'temple' implies something quite grand, then such a appellation for the tiny house was a misnomer. For any devotees visiting the home of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in the capital city of India, this place came as a bit of a disappointment.

Nevertheless, it had the same kind of sacrosanctity of any ISKCON center in the world. The small number of devotees were hard at work, visiting and preaching to important men, making Life Members, and establishing a firm basis for the future growth of the Society. Devotional service was the only activity, and the Deities of Śrī Śrī Rādhā Pārtha sarathī were the most important residents. In this respect it was a typical ISKCON temple, and thus it was a

haven for spiritual life in a city rapidly divorcing itself from its traditional spiritual roots.

Opposite our temple, at the end of the road on the corner, there was Nathu's Sweets and Restaurant; white-tiled, somewhat rundown, a little grubby, but accomodating. Across from this stood the Bengali Sweet Shop, selling *rasagullās*, *gulabjamuns* and every other traditional sweet delicacy imaginable. Fifty yards farther was a small traffic roundabout with a colorful variety of modest shops and vendors sweeping round its periphery. This connected to Tansen Marg which in turn led the short distance to Mandi House.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wasn't actually staying in our temple. Due to the lack of amenities he, Harikeśa, and Hansadūta were occupying a small, four-room, second floor apartment at number 9.

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On November 25th I had come in to Delhi from Vṛndāvana, only for the day, on some unexpected personal business. I had been a resident at our Krishn-Balarāma temple and guest-house complex since August, serving as the temple commander. Along with several others I was mid way through a major cleaning of the temple in preparation for Śrīla Prabhupāda's visit. However, I was pressed by Gopāla Kṛṣṇa dāsa, the local GBC, to stay on in Delhi to help clean Śrīla Prabhupāda's quarters and to guard his door for the few days he was scheduled to be there.

ISKCON Delhi had a manpower shortage. There was only a handful of devotees: Temple President Tejīyas dāsa and his wife, Madirā, both Americans; Omkāra dāsa, the French *pūjārī*, and his wife, Nirmalā, and their young daughter and son; an English *brahmacārī*, Tribuvanātha dāsa; and one Indian devotee. Gopāla Kṛṣṇa therefore decided that some extra help was needed. Although I was eager to get back to help with the preparations for Śrīla

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Prabhupāda's arrival in Vṛndāvana, I was more than happy to take advantage of the sudden and unsought opportunity to do some service for His Divine Grace.

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At 4:00 P.M. I eagerly reported to Śrīla Prabhupāda's apartment for his afternoon *darśana*. I sat at the door and listened attentively as Prabhupāda played host to a small gathering of devotees and guests. With so few present it was a rare opportunity for me to associate with Śrīla Prabhupāda in a setting far more intimate than possible during his visits to larger ISKCON centers. Sitting behind a small, low table in the main room, Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke animatedly on a variety of topics until about 7 P.M. To the visitors as they left, I handed freshly made sweets from the Bengali Sweet Shop.

Next morning, on November 26th, I cleaned Prabhupāda's apartment while he took his usual walk. And on Gopāla Kṛṣṇa's request I dutifully sat outside the door in the stairwell during the morning as a guard.

Meantime, Śrīla Prabhupāda and Harikeśa were discussing how to arrange for Prabhupāda's regular massages. There was apparently no one available, although at least four former personal servants had been present in India when Śrīla Prabhupāda returned from his African tour. When he got back to India he had given *sannyāsa* to Navayogendra and Nanda Kumāra in Bombay and sent them with Brahmānanda Swami to help rectify some major problems in East Africa. The other two, Upendra and Nitāi dāsa, were also not available: Upendra, although in Delhi, was on his way overseas, and Nitāi had to get his visa renewed in Bombay.

This was all unknown to me. I was happy just to be in Delhi at the same time as Śrīla Prabhupāda. I could not know what Providence had in store for me.