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Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Vrindavan Yatra

During his *lila* on Earth, Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu lived in Navadvip and Puri but he always experienced intense separation from Vrindavan. Finally, in Kartik month of the year 1515 AD, Mahaprabhu visited Vrindavan for the first and only time. This story of his journey is revealed in the *Chaitanya Charitamrit*.



शरत्काल हइलो प्रभुर चलिते हइलो मति
रामानन्द स्वरूप सङ्गे निभृते युकति
मोर सहाय करो यदि तुमि दुइ जन
तबे आमि जाजा देखि श्रीवृन्दावन

*śarat-kāl haila prabhur calite haila mati
rāmānanda swarūp saṅge nibhṛte yukati
mor sahāy kara yadi tumi dui jan
tabe āmi jāñā dekhi śrī vṛṇḍāvan*

"When Autumn came, Mahaprabhu said to Swaroop Damodar and Ramanand Ray privately: 'If both of you will help me, only then will I get to see Shri Vrindavan.' (*Chaitanya Charitamrit Madhya 17.3-17.4*)

In Gaur Lila, Swaroop Damodar and Ramanand Ray are the incarnations of Radharani's dearmost *sakhis*, Lalita and Vishakha. Mahaprabhu told them, "Your happiness will be my happiness on my way to that beloved land, so please bless me by letting me go."

They replied, "You are the independent Lord, and you do not need anyone's permission to do anything. But if you really want our happiness, then please take two Brahmin servants with you, to help you on your journey." Although Mahaprabhu wanted to go alone, he had to agree.

On the Jharkhand Path

Instead of an accessible path, Mahaprabhu chose to take the wild forest path through Jharkhand. On the way, he meditated that this very forest

was Vrindavan. Every mountain he saw was Govardhan for him, and every river he saw was Yamuna Maharani. His chanting of "Haribol" echoed through the woods like the song of Krishn's flute, pulling all the animals to him. As they followed in his footsteps, Mahaprabhu smiled and lovingly recited a verse from *Shrimad Bhagwatam*:

यत्र नैसर्गदुर्वैराः सहासन् नृमृगादयः
मित्राणीवाजितावासद्वतरुद्तर्षणादिकम्

*yatra naisarga-durvairāḥ sahāsan nr-
mrgādayah
mitrāṇīvājitāvāsa-druta-rut-tarṣanādikam*

"In Vrindavan there is no hunger or thirst. Humans and different kinds of animals, who would be enemies elsewhere, live there together as friends." (*Shrimad Bhagwatam 10.13.60*)

Then Mahaprabhu told the animals, "Chant 'Krishn! Krishn!'" and the animals began to speak. They chanted the Holy Name and danced in sacred love. In their bliss, the animals forgot they were enemies and worshipped Krishn together. The *Chaitanya Charitamrit* says:

व्याघ्रमृग अन्योन्ये करे आलिङ्गन
मुखे मुख दिया करे अन्योन्ये चुम्बन

*vyāghra-mṛga anyonye kare ālingan
mukhe mukh diyā kare anyonye cumban*

"The tigers and the deer embraced, and kissed each other's faces." (*Madhya 17.42*)

Mahaprabhu was overjoyed to see this. As he walked, the birds kept flying along his path, and the peacocks ran after him, chanting Harinaam as they went.

The people were also deeply affected by Mahaprabhu's presence. Whoever merely saw Mahaprabhu or heard him chanting became a true Vaishnav, and whoever heard that person chanting, and whoever heard *that* person chanting also became true Vaishnavs. Thus the whole forest danced and sang in Krishn's love. (*Chaitanya Charitamrit Madhya 17.48-51*)

On the way, the mountains served Mahaprabhu with warm waterfalls for bathing, and the trees offered him their wood for fire to warm him, both morning and night. Sometimes people offered Mahaprabhu food along the way, but he loved to stay alone in the woods, eating wild vegetables cooked by his servant. In this way, Mahaprabhu reached Mathura.

Upon reaching Mathura, Mahaprabhu bowed in the holy dust of Braj. He joyfully bathed in the Yamuna River at Vishram Ghat and had *darshan* of Shri Keshav Devji. The Brajwasis of Mathura were overwhelmed with bliss in his association. He stayed at a Brajwasi Brahmin's home, and that Brajwasi showed Mahaprabhu all the places of Shri Krishn's *lila*. After experiencing all the main *darshans* of Mathura, Mahaprabhu went to see the *dwadash van* - the twelve sacred forests. And

wherever he went, he made sure to bathe in the holy waters there.

The Animals Remember Him

As Mahaprabhu walked through the forests of Braj, his beloved cows recognised him as their dearmost Beloved. They ran to him and started licking his body, and the cowherds were unable to pull them away. The bees hummed and the cuckoos sang for him as the peacocks danced in joy. The deer, too, were drawn by his sweet voice and followed him wherever he went.

The trees and creepers wept in the form of honey, and the small leaves on their branches stood on end in ecstasy. Mahaprabhu tried to embrace every single tree and creeper that he saw, and they all bowed down in front of him with their flowers and ripe fruits, as if making an offering to him.

Then the whole forest began to chant Shri Krishn's name, like an echo of Mahaprabhu's own voice. When he wrapped his arms around the deer's necks and wept, the deer cried too.

In Arit Gaon, Mahaprabhu rediscovered Radha Kund and Shyam Kund, and at Govardhan, he had *darshan* of Haridev and Shrinathji.

The story will continue with the next article about Amiya Nimai and Maha Raas Purnima.

In Vrindavan's Gopinath Bazar lies the very special temple of Amiya Nimai. Nimai is the birth name of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and Amiya means *amrit* or nectar. The deity is very tall, so he is also sometimes called "Boro Gaur (Big Gaur)".





Kartik Purnima and Amiya Nimai



The last day of Kartik is known as Kartik Purnima or Maha Raas Purnima. On this night, Radha and Krishn perform the Raas Lila with their *sakhis* under the light of the full moon. This is also the day when Mahaprabhu came to Vrindavan about five hundred years ago.

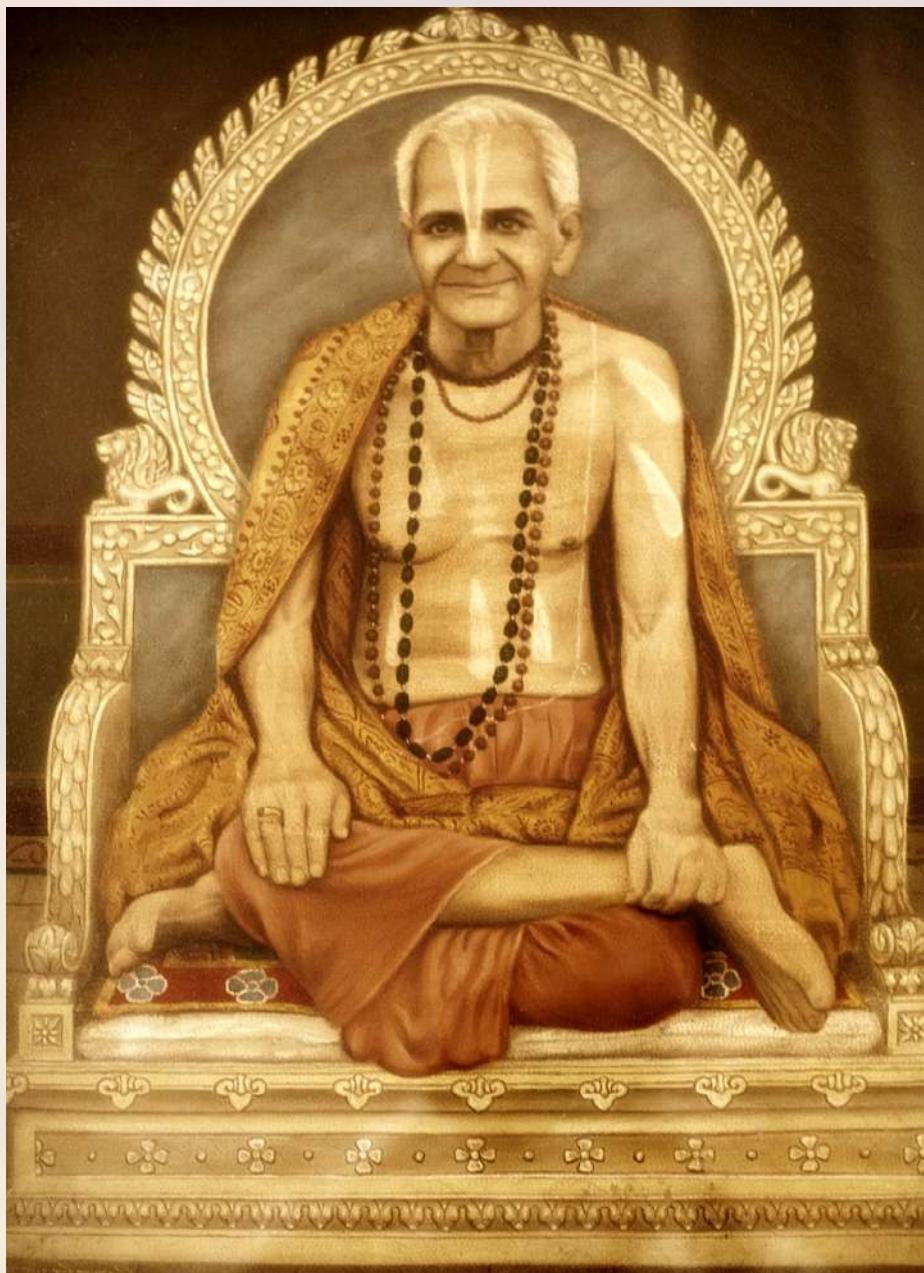
In Vrindavan's Gopinath Bazar lies the very special temple of Amiya Nimai. Nimai is the birth name of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and Amiya means *amrit* or nectar. The deity is very tall, so he is also sometimes called "Boro Gaur (Big Gaur)". Amiya Nimai was first worshipped by one of Mahaprabhu's companions. Later he came under the care of the great acharya of Shri Radharaman Temple, Sarvabhaum Madhusudan Goswami.

As Sarvabhaum Madhusudan Goswami was always travelling throughout India to spread Mahaprabhu's message of love, he asked his disciple, Radha-Govind Goswami, to take care of Amiya Nimai.

Radha-Govind lived in Kolkata, so Amiya Nimai began to live there with him. He always felt Amiya Nimai was Mahaprabhu himself, and he served him with all his heart. Radha-Govind was a talented musician, so he sang for Amiya Nimai every day. He tried to sing the songs Mahaprabhu loved most, like the ones from Jayadev's *Geet Govind*.

Mahaprabhu loved Radha-Govind's *raag seva* so much that one day, as he was singing *Geet Govind* for him, he blessed him by calling him back to *nitya-lila* for service. The devotees were happy for Goswamiji, because they knew he had gone to be with his dearest One forever. But at the same time, they missed him terribly. And to make matters worse, the police came and sealed the temple with Amiya Nimai still inside.

Since Radha-Govind didn't have a son, the police were not sure who should inherit his property, so they closed the temple until they could find a solution. The devotees had to offer Amiya Nimai's *bhog* (meals) on the temple's doorstep and worship him through meditation.



Sarvabhaum Madhusudan Goswami

Finally the police found some letters that showed that, in the event of his passing, Radha-Govind wanted Amiya Nimai to live with his Guru's family in Vrindavan

And so a group of *mahatmas* including Sarvabhaum Madhusudan Goswami's son Shri Krishn Chaitanya Goswami, *kirtan-acharya* Shri Ramdas Babaji of Pathbari Ashram in Kolkata, and many other great souls brought Amiya Nimai from Kolkata by train. At that time, the nearest railway station to Vrindavan was in Hathras, so Amiya Nimai made the rest of the journey by truck.

On the last day of Kartik, November 26, 1926 AD, Amiya Nimai reached Vrindavan. It was the same blessed day when Mahaprabhu had come to Vrindavan for the first time over 400 years before. For the next five years or so, Amiya Nimai lived at Radharamanji's Raas Mandal. Later he moved to the garden of Shahji Mandir, and finally to his current temple in Gopinath Bazar. Sarvabhaum Madhusudan Goswami's family still lovingly takes care of Amiya Nimai to this day.

The Kartik Purnima Procession

On Amiya Nimai's first night in Vrindavan, a special *kirtan* was held in meditation on Mahaprabhu's Vrindavan *yatra*: his journey through the forest of Vrindavan. That same *kirtan* has continued each year until the present time.

On Kartik Purnima, the procession begins at Amiya Nimai's temple in Gopinath Bazar, and follows the path Mahaprabhu took as he wandered in Radha Bhaav, searching for Krishn. Many devotees wait all year, longing to experience this night again and again.

There is a saying in Bengali:

adyapi-o sei lila kore goraray, kono kono bhagyavan dekhibare pay

The meaning is that Mahaprabhu's *lila* is eternal, and even today some fortunate people can see him. As the *chitrapat* (painting) of Mahaprabhu goes out from Amiya Nimai temple on his chariot decorated with blossoms, he fills the eyes of the devotees and they dance with him, along with Sarvabhaum Madhusudan Goswami, Radha-Govind Goswami, Ramdas Babaji all the other unseen *mahatmas* who now live with Mahaprabhu in his *nitya lila*. On the way, the *sevatis* of different temples come out with tearfilled eyes to offer *aarti* to Mahaprabhu, and many temples stay open late to welcome the Lord.

This year, Kartik Purnima falls on Friday the 23rd of November. The procession will start around 4pm at the Amiya Nimai Mahaprabhu Mandir in Gopinath Bazar, and last until after midnight.

