

Srila Prabhupada and the Jagannath Rath Yatra

Prabhupada's Childhood

Prabhupada was born in 1896 in Calcutta, India. His parents named him Abhay. His father's name was Gour Mohan De and his mother was Rajani. His father wanted to be sure he raised his son to be a devotee of Krishna. Gour Mohan would invite many religious men to come to his home. He gave Abhay a drum and his own Radha-Krishna Deities to worship. When Abhay was just a little boy, he started offering everything he ate to his Deities and he offered Them arati every day.



Abhay's Ratha Yatra Parade

One of his favorite times was when the Ratha Yatra festival was celebrated. Every year, Abhay would come with millions of others to watch the parade. Lord Jagannath would ride on the first cart, Lord Balaram would ride on the second, and Lady Subhadra would ride on the third cart. The carts were very colorful and they had tall canopies that seemed to reach the sky.

Abhay liked the festival so much that he wanted his own cart so he could have a Ratha Yatra parade. He asked his father if he could and his father agreed.

Gour Mohan and young Abhay went from shop looking for the right cart. Gour Mohan asked carpenters, "Can you build a small cart for my son?" They could make a cart but when they told him the price he sadly said, "Oh no. That is too much. We can't spend that much for a cart." This happened many times and Abhay began to cry, thinking that he would never be able to get his cart.

Father and son started home, still not finding a cart that they could afford. As they walked through the streets, an old woman heard Abhay crying. She came up to him and said, "What is wrong? Why are you crying?"

Gour Mohan told the lady about their search for a small Ratha Yatra cart. "But every carpenter wants more money than we can afford," he said.

"Come with me," said the old woman. "I have a cart that may be just the right size. You might as well take a look at it."

Abhay and his father followed the kind woman to her house. She showed them the cart. It was about the right size but it was a little old. "How much money would you like?" Abhay's father asked. When he heard the price, he was very happy because it was finally an amount he could afford. Abhay was able to pull his new cart home.

Together Abhay and Gour Mohan worked on fixing up the cart. They put columns on it and placed a canopy on the top. They made it as much like the real carts in Calcutta as they could, even attaching a wooden horse and driver in front. Gour Mohan bought paints for Abhay and he painted the cart in bright festive colors.

When he had finished the cart, Abhay began to prepare for the festival. He asked his friend's mothers to cook special food so he could distribute it at his Ratha Yatra. He put small Jagannath Deities on the cart and the parade began!

Every day, Abhay's family and the neighborhood children joined in the procession. Some pulled the cart while others played drums and kartals. Everyone chanted and sang with joy. His festival lasted for eight days. Even Gour Mohan's friends wanted to join in on the fun, so they pulled the cart, too. "Anyone who pulls the Lord in His cart is liberated from this material world!" they said.

Every year, Abhay would bring out his decorated cart and hold a Ratha Yatra festival and celebrate it in just the same way.

Abhay continued in his devotion to Krishna. He grew up, went to college and got married. He had children and worked hard to support his family. But even though he had many duties, he never forgot his duty to Krishna.

