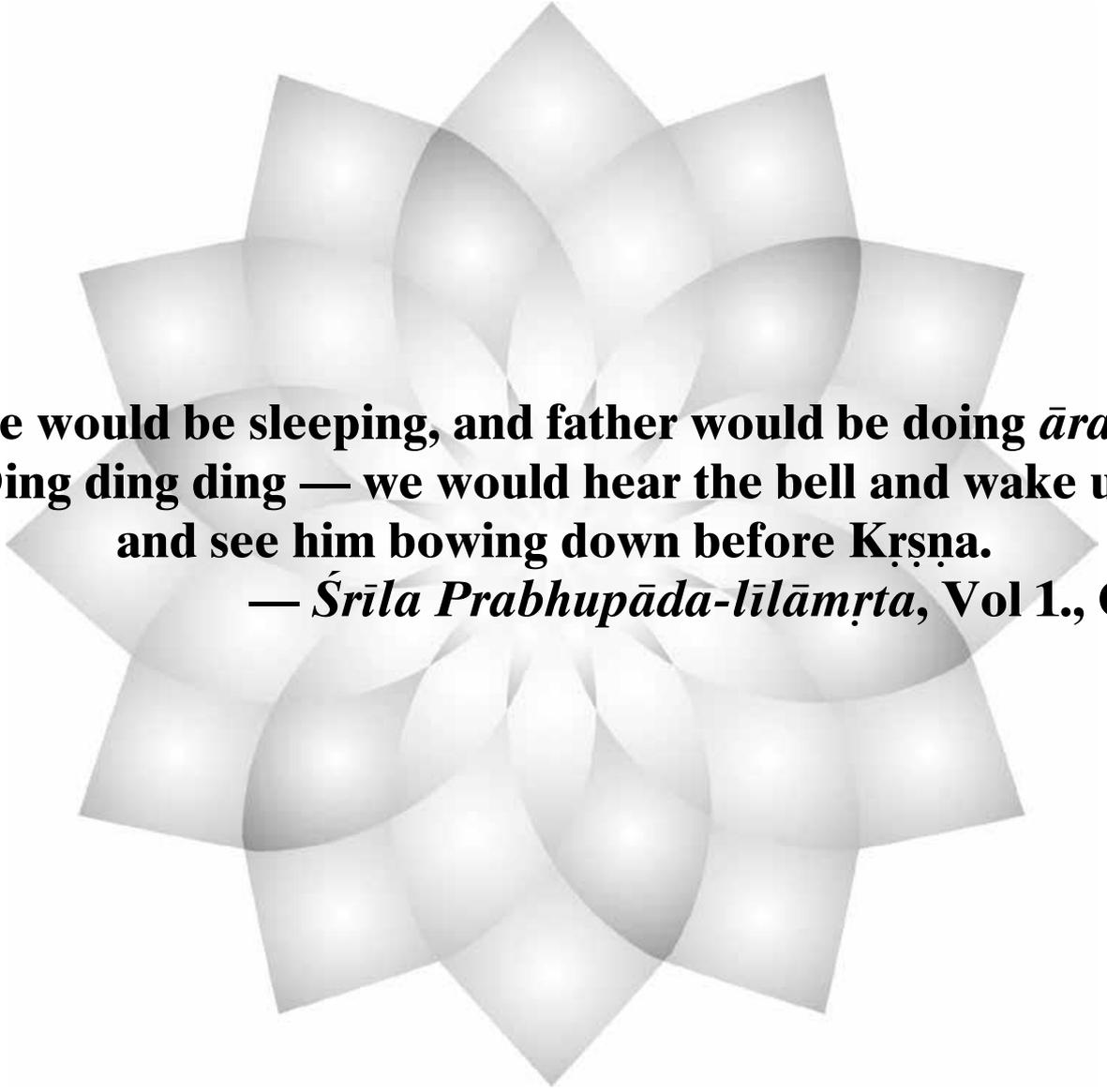


*Śrīla Prabhupāda
Remembers His Childhood*

— Presented by Śrīmatī Dāsī and team
ISKCON, Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma



**We would be sleeping, and father would be doing *ārati*.
Ding ding ding — we would hear the bell and wake up
and see him bowing down before Kṛṣṇa.
— *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Vol 1., Ch. 1**

YES — THAT PRECIOUS TIME HAS COME!

Every year, around this time, we *Prabhupādānugas* celebrate Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Appearance Day Anniversary — and it’s always so joyous, rejuvenating and enlivening. So many dedicated devotees share their very special memories and appreciation of Śrīla Prabhupāda. But rarely do we hear about Śrīla Prabhupāda’s birth, his parents and his childhood on this day.

Have you ever wondered about the circumstances of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s birth? What he was like as a child? What he experienced and learned at that tender age? We have — and we felt compelled to do a little research. Those sweet “childhood” findings proved both informative and very endearing. And so, we’d like to share them with you at this very special time. Let’s first take a glimpse of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s birth and his parents. And then let’s look at Śrīla Prabhupāda’s childhood through his eyes, as explained in his own words.

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Appearance in This World

It was Janmāṣṭamī, the annual celebration of the advent of Lord Kṛṣṇa some five thousand years before. Residents of Calcutta, mostly Bengalis and other Indians, but also many Muslims and even some British, were observing the festive day, moving here and there through the city’s streets to visit the temples of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Devout Vaiṣṇavas, fasting until midnight, chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa and heard about the birth and activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. They continued fasting, chanting, and worshiping throughout the night.

The next day (September 1, 1896), in a little house in the Tollygunge suburb of Calcutta, a male child was born. Since he was born on Nandotsava, the day Kṛṣṇa’s father, Nanda Mahārāja, had observed a festival in honor of Kṛṣṇa’s birth, the boy’s uncle called him Nandulal. But his father, Gour Mohan De, and his mother, Rajani, named him Abhay Charan, “one who is fearless, having taken shelter at Lord Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet.” In accordance with Bengali tradition, the mother had gone to the home of her parents for the delivery, and so it was that on the bank of the Ādi Gaṅgā, a few miles from his father’s home, in a small two-room, mud-walled house with a tiled roof, underneath a jackfruit tree, Abhay Charan was born. A few days later, Abhay returned with his parents to their home at 151 Harrison Road.

An astrologer did a horoscope for the child, and the family was made jubilant by the auspicious reading. The astrologer made a specific prediction: When this child reached the age of seventy, he would cross the ocean, become a great exponent of religion, and open 108 temples.

— *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Vol. 1., Ch. 1

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Parents

Abhay’s mother, Rajani, was thirty years old when he was born. Like her husband, Gour Mohan, she came from a long-established Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava family. She was darker-skinned than her husband, and whereas his disposition was cool, hers tended to be fiery. Abhay saw his mother and father living together peacefully; no deep marital conflict or complicated dissatisfaction ever threatened home. Rajani was chaste and religious-minded, a model housewife in the traditional Vedic sense, dedicated to caring for her husband and children.

Like Gour Mohan, Rajani treated Abhay as the pet child; but whereas her husband expressed his love through leniency and plans for his son’s spiritual success, she expressed hers through attempts to safeguard Abhay from all danger, disease, and death. She once even offered blood from her breast to one of the demigods with the supplication that Abhay be protected on all sides from danger.

Abhay was an acknowledged pet child of both his parents. In addition to his childhood names Moti, Nandulal, Nandu, and Kocha, his grandmother called him *Kacaurī-mukhī* because of his fondness for *kacaurīs* (spiced *dāl* or pea-stuffed fried pastries, popular in Bengal). Both his grandmother and mother would give him *kacaurīs*, which he kept in the many pockets of his little vest. He liked to watch the vendors cooking on the busy roadside and accept *kacaurīs* from them and from the neighbors, until all the inside and outside pockets of his vest were filled.

Sometimes when Abhay demanded that his mother make him *kacaurīs*, she would refuse. Once she even sent him to bed. When Gour Mohan came home and asked, “Where is Abhay?” Rajani explained how he had been too demanding and she had sent him to bed without *kacaurīs*. “No, we should make them for him,” his father replied, and he woke Abhay and personally cooked *purīs* and *kacaurīs* for him. Gour Mohan was always lenient with Abhay and careful to see that his son got whatever he wanted.

Gour Mohan was a pure Vaiṣṇava, and he raised his son to be Kṛṣṇa conscious. Since his own parents had also been Vaiṣṇavas, Gour Mohan had never touched meat, fish, eggs, tea, or coffee. His complexion was fair and his disposition reserved. At night he would lock up his cloth shop, set a bowl of rice in the middle of the floor to satisfy the rats so that they would not chew the cloth in their hunger, and return home. There he would read from *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the main scriptures of Bengali Vaiṣṇavas, chant on his *japa* beads, and worship the Deity of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He was gentle and affectionate and would never punish Abhay. Even when obliged to correct him, Gour Mohan would first apologize: “You are my son, so now I must correct you. It is my duty. Even Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s father would chastise Him, so don’t mind.”

— *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Vol. 1., Ch. 1

Śrīla Prabhupāda Remembers His Childhood

Surrounded with Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

Prabhupāda: ..surrounded with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That was my great fortune. My father, mother, my relatives, my neighborhood... I had the opportunity mixing with...(break) Everywhere there was Kṛṣṇa consciousness. And they were all well-to-do, rich. This was the opportunity. Then gradually it developed. My father was a great Vaiṣṇava. He was worshiping Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Our family Deity was Dāmodara. So hereditary we are Vaiṣṇavas. followers of Nitāi-Gaura.

—Room Conversation, Vṛndāvana, July 19, 1977

Chicken Juice

Prabhupāda: So in my childhood, when I was one and one-half years old, I suffered from typhoid, and the Dr. Karttika Candra Bose, he said, “Please give him chicken juice.” So my father refused. “No, no, we cannot.” “No, no, he has to be given. (Just see) How he has become very weak.” “No, no, I cannot allow.” “Don’t mind I shall prepare in my own house and send.” So it was sent from his house, and when it was given to me, immediately I began to vomit. And my father threw it away..... This story I heard.

—Room conversation, Paris, August 2nd, 1976.

I Did Not Like to Waste

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: You had everyone busy trying to keep up. Even now I see that you’re not at all wasting a second. Even in the middle of the night you call...

Prabhupāda: No, that, my... This is my childhood practice. I do not like to see anything wasted, nor I waste. I have told you many times that on the street I am going and seeing tap is open. I don’t liked to see. I stop. Why it should be wasted?

—Room Conversation, Mayapur, February 20, 1977.

It is Sent By God

In our childhood, actually what I am doing, it was all taught in our childhood by our parents, my family. We were taught, “There is a grain of rice on the ground, and if it is touched by your feet, you should pick up the grain and touch on your head.” This was our training. The idea behind — that the grain of rice is not man-made. It is sent by God. It is God’s mercy. This is God consciousness.

—Room Conversation, Melbourne, June 28, 1974.

Actually His Business Was Pūja

Prabhupāda: My father was doing business, and he was a great devotee.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: And you were also doing business during, when you were...

Prabhupāda: Yes, up to one o’clock, two o’clock, he was engaged only with his *pūjā* my father. He was going late, at twelve o’clock, to bed. Then he was to... He used to rise little late, at about seven, eight. Then taking bath, sometimes purchasing. Then from ten o’clock to one o’clock he was engaged in *pūjā*. Then he would take his lunch and go to business. And in the business shop he was taking little rest for one hour. And he’d

come from business at ten o'clock at night, and then again *pūjā*. Regularly. Actually his business was *pūjā*. For livelihood he was...

Hari-śauri: Just doing some business.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Yes.

Prabhupāda: We were sleeping, father was doing *ārati* “ding ding ding ding, ding.”

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: You heard the bell.

Prabhupāda: Hm. Then he would take his night dinner and — not dinner. Some *puris* or *paraṭā*. He was also fond of this puffed rice. In later age he was simply taking puffed rice and milk. So, anyway, *pūjā* was his main business.

— Room Conversation, Māyāpura, February 18, 1977.

He Fed the Rats and Saved the Cloth

Prabhupāda: That is the system. That is mentioned in *Bhāgavata*. If the animals like monkeys, they come to your garden to eat, don't prohibit. Let him. He's also Kṛṣṇa's part and parcel. Where he will eat if you prohibit? It is very practical. I have got another. This is told by my father. My father's elder brother was keeping a cloth shop. My father also was keeping a cloth shop. So it is in the village. So my uncle, what he would do, that before closing the shop, he'll bring one, what is called...?

Bhagavān: A bowl?

Prabhupāda: Bowl, big bowl. Or it is... What do you call, where you keep water?

Bhagavān: Pot.

Prabhupāda: Basin, basin. So one basinful rice he will keep in the middle of the shop. And there are rats. So the rats will take the rice, and not cut even a single cloth. It is practical. Yes. They are also animals. Give them food. They'll not create any disturbance. Give them food. Yes. Because cloth are very costly. And there are rats. If one cloth is cut by the rat, then it is great loss. So to save from this loss, he'll put in a basin... Rice was nothing. Rice... In our childhood, we have seen, two *ānnās* per seer. That is with profit. You see. So one basinful rice, it doesn't cost even one *ānnā*. So by giving one *ānnā* worth food, he saves so many, hundreds of rupees cloth. Otherwise, if they're hungry, they'll cut it.

— Room Conversation, Paris, June 11, 1974.

There Is a Ghost in the Fan

So one has to create the eyes to see things. Not that whatever eyes you have got you can see everything. No. Just like motorcar is being driven, a child is seeing that the car is running automatically. And the father is seeing, “No, there is driver. “So the seeing of the child and the seeing of the father is different. In our childhood we were thinking that in the gramophone box there is a man. And in the fan there is a ghost, (laughter) I remember quite. “How these records are being played? There must be one man. He is singing.” And the electric fan was running, I was thinking there is some ghost. This is the way.

— Room Conversation, Melbourne, May 20, 1975.

I Never Wanted to Go to School

I do not want to go to school. I am forced to go to school. Yes. At least, I was like that. (laughter) I never wanted to go to school. And my father was very kind.” So all right. Why you are not going to school?” I would say, “I will go tomorrow.” “All right.” But my mother was very careful. Perhaps if my mother would not have been little strict, I would not have gotten any education. My father was very lenient. So she used to force me. One man would take me to school.

— **Bg Lecture 2.14, Germany, June 21, 1974.**

I Was a Naughty Boy

Laguna Beach, July 25, 1975: Near the end (of the *darśana*), Upendra’s three-year-old son, Saumya, walked up to Prabhupāda from the back of the room. Prabhupāda gave him some money that was on the desk, and the boy ran back to his mother and gave her the money. “Yes. When I was young,” Prabhupāda reminisced, “if I got money I would take it to my mother. But then when I would become angry at her, I would demand it back. Sometimes I would steal money from my mother’s purse and go watch Charlie Chaplin movies.”

— *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Vol. 6. (Uniting Two Worlds)

I Was a Very Naughty Boy

You have written to say that you are my disobedient son, but I think I am your disturbing father. I am putting more and more burden upon you but you are so tolerant that you have no hesitation to accept my demands even although sometimes they are unreasonable. So practically you are acting as my father. In my childhood I was very naughty boy, and I used to catch my father in so many ways demanding unreasonable things, and my father used to satisfy me. So although I lost my father in 1930, about 40 years ago, by Krishna’s Grace I have got so many American young fathers. But the same nature continues, and I am demanding from my fathers the same thing which may be a little burdensome But I am sure Krishna will be very much pleased if you will kindly tolerate some unreasonable demands from me.

— **Letter to Brahmananda, Los Angeles, 27 February, 1969.**

I Must Have Two Guns

When I was a child my father gave me one red gun, and then I was not more than eight years. Then, after getting one, I said, “I must have another one.” Eh? Then father said, “Why another one? You have got already one.” So I said, “No, I have got two hands. I must have two guns.” Then my father, “No. you are not... I am not going...” Then I made so much agitation, he was obliged to give me two guns. (laughter) I was very pet child of my father.

— **Morning Walk, Bombay, April 14, 1976.**

The Tramcar Is Going on Trolley

In my childhood I was thinking... The tramcar is going on trolley. So I was thinking I shall stand on the tram line and just take a stick and touch the wire and I will go. I was planning like that. (laughter)

— **Morning Walk At Cheviot Hills Golf Course, Los Angeles, May 17, 1973.**

I Was Not Desiring to Take Medicine

I was not desiring to take my medicine. When I was a child it was very difficult to give me medicine. Three men required. (laughter) Yes. One will capture me, another (laughing) will take my legs, and then my mother will by force, I will do like this. (gestures locking of teeth, trying to force spoon into mouth, much laughter all around) This was my position. I won't agree to take any medicine. I was so obstinate.

— **Philosophy Discussions, John Stuart Mill.**

There Is A Scar

In my childhood, when I was three, four years old, I was saved. My all cloth burned, and there is a scar. You have seen. I would have died that day but fortunately I was saved. The cloth was burning. That, what is that called, matches color? So I was trying to burn (the match) and it caught my cloth. So the cloth burned, but I did not burn. Similarly, this body also burns, but the soul... *Nainam chindanti śāstrāni na dahati pāvakah.* The soul is never cut into pieces by any weapon, neither it is burned by the fire, soul. That is eternity.

— **ŚB Lecture 1.8.30, Māyāpura, October 10, 1974.**

When Will I Have Such a Nice Deity?

As a child when I was going to the neighboring Mallik temple, I was thinking when will I have such a nice Deity to worship. And now Kṛṣṇa is so kind that I am establishing so many nice temples all over the world. Now I want that there should be established 108 temples before my death, so you think how to do it. Make some program, train up devotees.

— **ŚP Letter to Madhudvisa, Bombay, 10 November, 1975.**

I Imitated My Father

So children, they generally imitate, imitate the parents' habits or activities. So fortunately we had the opportunity of getting such a father. So we are imitating our father. In my childhood I imitated my father. He was worshiping Deity of Kṛṣṇa. So I asked him, "My dear father, I shall worship. Give me the Deity of Kṛṣṇa." So he gave me a little Deity of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and I was imitating.

— **Bg 6.40-42, New York, September 16, 1966.**

He Wanted Me to Become a Vaiṣṇava

My father was Vaiṣṇava. He was Vaiṣṇava, and he wanted me to become a Vaiṣṇava. Whenever some saintly person would come, he would ask "Please become bless my son that he can become a servant of Rādhārāṇī" That was his prayer. He never prayed for anything. And he gave me education how to play *mṛdaṅga*. My mother was against. There was two teachers — one for teaching me A-B-C-D, and one for teaching me *mṛdaṅga*. So the one teacher was waiting and the other teacher was teaching me how to play on *mṛdaṅga*. So my mother would be angry that "What is this nonsense? You are teaching *mṛdaṅga*? What he will do with this *mṛdaṅga*?" (chuckles) But perhaps my father wanted that I should be a great *mṛdaṅga* player in the future, (laughter) Therefore I am very much indebted to my father, and I have dedicated my book, Kṛṣṇa

book, to him. He wanted this. He wanted me to be preacher of *Bhāgavata*, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, and player of *mṛdaṅga* and to become servant of Rādhārānī. So every parent should think like that; otherwise one should not become father and mother. That is the injunction in the *śāstra*.

— ŚP Arrival Lecture, Dallas, March 3, 1975.

Only Prasādam

My father would never take food at anyone's house or in the hotel. He will find out some temple and pay them and take *prasādam*. Still there are many temples. So I was about ten years old at that time, say, seventy years ago. So he paid two *ānnās* to the *pūjārī* and he gave us so much. It can be eaten by five, six men. *Kicheri*, vegetables, varieties. So much. Two *ānnās*.

— Room Conversation, Nellore, January 3, 1976.

My Son Is Not Going to Be a Mleccha

My father wanted me to become like this. Know everything that is going on. (everyone laughs). He never wanted me to be a worldly man earning money. He never wanted. There was some arrangement for my going to England after my college education to become a barrister, but my father refused, no, my son is not going to be a *mleccha* (meat-eater).

— Śrīla Prabhupāda Ācārya 1 Video.

Only Writing of Books Is New

Yes, that was the training in the childhood. This Ratha-yātrā, Rādhā-Govinda *seva*, *prasāda* distribution. Only the new thing I am doing — writing books by the order of Guru Mahārāja. Otherwise, whatever I have introduced, I was trained up in childhood. I simply imitated.

— Conversation, Vṛndāvana, July 1, 1977.

All Glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda's Childhood Pastimes

All Glories to Sweet Remembrance of Them

— All Glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda —