

## His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's

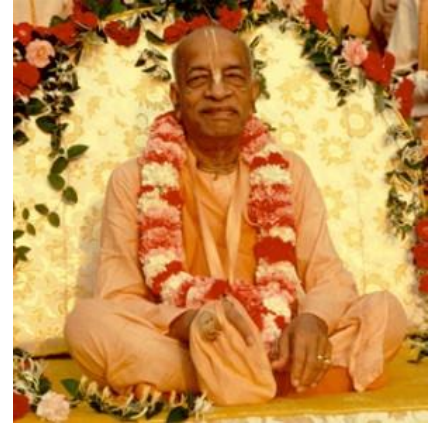
### Association with Swami Shivananda Giri Maharaj since 1964

(As told by Maharaj in an interview at ISKCON studio, London.)

His Devine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Provupada, founder acharya ISKCON, was accompanied by Maharaj (**then Sisir Bhattacharya**) to the Kidderpore Dock, Kolkata while he boarded Jaladuta ship for America in the year 1965. Maharaj unfolds his intimate relation with Provupada in an exclusive interview at ISKCON studio, U.K.

Maharaj first met Prabhupada in 1964 at the Governor's House in Lucknow. The Governor had organized a religious gathering at his residence, and invited Maharaj to perform Kirtan. At that time, Prabhupada was 68 years old and Maharaj 28 years only. About a year later, in August 1965, during the twelve days preceding Prabhupada's historic departure for America on 13 August 1965, Maharaj remained constantly by his side in Kolkata. It was Prabhupada himself who requested Maharaj to arrange accommodation for him in the city. Accordingly, he stayed in a room on the ground floor of Maharaj's residence at Ananda Ashram, 21/2 Beadon Street, Kolkata.

This room still exists today. It now houses the Anandam Library and the office of Kailash, the institution founded by Maharaj. It remains a place of immense historical significance—a living testimony to those memorable days.



**The details of Prabhupada's stay in Kolkata are as follows from the excerpts of Sri Satswarup Dasa Goswami's 'Prabhupada Lilamrita' – Chapter 11.**

"Out of the hundreds of people in Calcutta whom Bhaktivedanta Swami knew, he chose to call on Mr. Sisir Bhattacharya, the flamboyant Kirtana singer he had met a year before at the governor's house in Lucknow. Mr. Bhattacharya was not a relative, not a disciple, nor even a close friend; but he was willing to help. Bhaktivedanta Swami called at his place and informed him that he would be leaving on a cargo ship in a few days; he needed a place to stay, and he would like to give some lectures. Mr. Bhattacharya immediately began to arrange a few private meetings at friends' homes, where he would sing and Bhaktivedanta Swami would then speak. Mr. Bhattacharya thought the sadhu's leaving for America should make an important news story. He accompanied Bhaktivedanta Swami to all the newspapers in Calcutta—the Hindustan Standard, the Amrita Bazar Patrika, the Jugantas, the Statesman, and others. Bhaktivedanta Swami had only one photograph, a passport photo, and they made a few copies for the newspapers. Mr. Bhattacharya would try to explain what the Swami was going to do, and the news writers would listen. But none of them wrote anything. Finally they visited the *Dainik Basumati*, a local Bengali daily, which agreed to print a small article with Bhaktivedanta Swami's picture. A week before his departure, on August 6, Bhaktivedanta Swami travelled to nearby Mayapur to visit the samadhi of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati. Then he returned to Calcutta, where Mr. Bhattacharya continued to assist him with his final business and speaking engagements".



"I was singing one of Narottam Das Thakur's immortal padas, 'শ্রীগৌরঙ্গেরদুটিপদ (Sri Gauranger Duti Pada), accompanied by the khol (mridanga), kartals (cymbals), and harmonium. Srila Prabhupad repeatedly asked me to sing it again and again in loops..."

Thus begins Swami Shivananda Giri Maharaj (then known as Sisir Bhattacharya) as he fondly recalls his first meeting with His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupad during a kirtan gathering in Lucknow in 1964.

The kirtan concluded, but the evening had only just begun. Seated side by side over dinner, Prabhupad and the young Sisir Bhattacharya became absorbed in a profound spiritual dialogue. Their conversation revolved around Sri Krishna, the divine mystery of prema (pure love), and Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's unprecedented manifestation of divine love

for humanity. Both were deeply united in the vision of spreading Mahaprabhu's message of universal love through Harinaam Sankirtan.

Prabhupad's appearance was striking in its simplicity. Clad as an ordinary Vaishnava monk, humble in speech and manner, he spoke with unwavering conviction about the cherished desire of his spiritual master. Quoting Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami, the author of the *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita*, he recited the celebrated prophecy:

"পৃথিবীতে যত আছে নগরাদি গ্রাম, সর্বত্র প্রচার হইবে মোরনাম।"

*"In every town and village of the world, My Holy Name shall be preached."*

Recalling the conversation during his later interview at ISKCON London, Maharaj explained that Prabhupad firmly believed this prophecy to be the command of his Guru Maharaj. He considered it his sacred duty to travel across the oceans and carry the Holy Name of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to every town, village, and corner of the world.

Before embarking upon this historic voyage, however, Prabhupad desired to spend some time in Kolkata. During this period he sought Maharaj's assistance in finding accommodation and in establishing contacts that could help introduce his mission to the people.

At that time, Sisir Bhattacharya was already a well-known kirtania, writer, actor, dramatist, and speaker. He enjoyed considerable goodwill among Kolkata's cultural circles and maintained close associations with journalists and newspaper establishments. Recognizing the historic significance of Prabhupad's mission, Maharaj wholeheartedly dedicated himself to helping publicize it.



He personally accompanied Prabhupad to several newspaper offices, requesting editors and journalists to report on the extraordinary spiritual mission that lay before this saintly preacher. He also invited Prabhupad to accompany him to various kirtan performances. During these programmes, Maharaj would sing devotional songs while Prabhupad would speak on *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and the philosophy of Krishna-bhakti in the intervals between the kirtans.

Remembering those unforgettable days, Maharaj remarked:

*"Our kirtan became a wonderful spiritual celebration. We were united in the same mission of spreading Harinaam Sankirtan. Between the songs, Prabhupad spoke on the scriptures, and I sang devotional songs on the very themes he expounded. It became a unique offering of kirtan and katha together."*

Despite his own contributions, Maharaj spoke with characteristic humility:

*"I am but a small man—not wealthy, not highly learned, merely an ordinary sanyasi. That I was allowed to become even a tiny part of this glorious chapter of history must surely be the result of some good karma performed in my childhood."*

With a gentle smile, he would often quote the famous line sung by Julie Andrews:

*"Somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good."*

He would say this while expressing his joy at finding his own name—*Sisir Bhattacharya*—mentioned in the biography of Srila Prabhupad.

At that time Prabhupad possessed no suitable photograph that newspapers could publish while reporting on his forthcoming mission. Maharaj resourcefully obtained the passport photograph that Prabhupad had used for his travel documents and approached several newspaper offices with it. His efforts finally bore fruit when **Dainik Basumati** published a report on Prabhupad's mission on **11 August 1965**, introducing readers to the remarkable spiritual journey that was about to begin.

During these preparations, Prabhupad stayed in the library room of Maharaj's residence at **Ananda Ashram**. Their association during this period became increasingly intimate and spiritually enriching.

Prabhupad openly acknowledged that he saw in Maharaj a pure-hearted soul and expressed his appreciation for the simple vegetarian meals served at the Ashram. As a token of affection, he presented Maharaj with a copy of his Bengali translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Recalling the treasured gift, Maharaj said:

*"It was a large volume—not like the editions available today. The cover was plain, the printing very simple, yet to me it was priceless. I have preserved it with great care to this day."*

The two saints also spent long hours discussing the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, and numerous other sacred scriptures, sharing insights born of devotion rather than mere scholarship.

Perhaps the most moving portion of the interview comes when Maharaj recollects the day he stood among those who came to bid farewell to Prabhupad as he embarked on his historic voyage to the West. Carrying little more than a small suitcase, an umbrella, and the ticket for a cargo ship, Prabhupad sailed toward an unknown future, armed only with unshakeable faith in Sri Krishna and the blessings of his Guru.

For Maharaj, witnessing that departure was witnessing history itself.

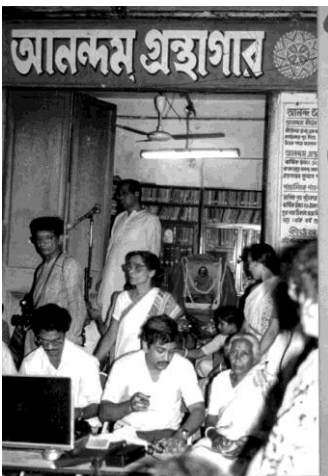
In the interview he repeatedly described Srila Prabhupad as **one of the greatest miracles of the modern age**.

He observed: *"People often call it a miracle when someone produces gold, honey, or sacred ash out of nothing. But compared to what Prabhupad accomplished, those are insignificant. His true miracle was that he transformed human beings."*

Maharaj continued with deep admiration:

*"He awakened love for Sri Krishna in the hearts of people across the Western world. Men and women gave up alcohol, meat-eating, and lives of material excess. They left pubs for temples, embraced simplicity, practised non-violence, and dedicated themselves to universal love and devotion. He transformed people from within. Such a miracle has rarely been witnessed in recent history."*

Throughout the interview Maharaj spoke with profound reverence of Prabhupad, his extraordinary mission, and the invaluable privilege of having shared those formative days with him.



The interview concluded not with words, but with devotion.

As if offering his final tribute, Maharaj began singing **Gaurachandrika** followed by **NamaSankirtan**, allowing the sacred Names of the Lord to become the perfect conclusion to a remembrance that was itself an offering of love, gratitude, and divine fellowship.

**Note:**

*The Library Room now named as Anandam Granthagar at 21/2, Beadon Street, where Prabhupada stayed during his visit to Calcutta before leaving for America in August 1965.*