

Prabhupada Initiations in Bangladesh: Adventure at the Frontier

Prelude

Needless to say, over the last 4 decades, Srila Prabhupada's ISKCON movement has suffered a serious setback owing to the gross disobedience of the senior disciples of Srila Prabhupada to his instructions. But with the Prabhupadanuga movement gaining ground of late, the situation is improving. The Prabhupadanuga-preachers are strictly adhering to the instructions of Srila Prabhupada by personal example and preaching them to others and thus reviving the lost glory of our movement. The 'gurus', on the other hand, are exposing their own fallacies by their personal behavior and words which are not in adherence with those of Srila Prabhupada and the revered Acaryas in our disciplic succession. In this way, they are indirectly showing that the real pure devotee and empowered Acarya is Srila Prabhupada. With thorough reading of Srila Prabhupada's books, all this can be seen very clearly.

Wherever the Information Technology has penetrated, the real intentions of Srila Prabhupada and the fallacies of the 'gurus' have spread far and wide and is brewing up a revolution within the Hare Krsna movement.

Bangladesh is a country, for one, where this is not the case. The devotee community in Bangladesh are still living in the ancient Zonal-Acarya era. Jayapataka Svami and Bhakti Caru Svami have managed to keep them all "protected" under their wings. Owing to lack of awareness among the devotees regarding the deviations in ISKCON post-1977, the Prabhupadanuga movement had never really entered Bangladesh.

But there was hope. Many people from Bangladesh come to Singapore to work and here they get introduced to the Rtvik system of initiations as Srila Prabhupada desired, thanks to His Grace Sundar Gopal Prabhu, who happened to be the first Temple President in the world to put the Rtvik system in force. And word spread to Bangladesh and for the past few years, the ISKCON authorities there were aware of this.

The Breakthrough

However, there was a quick turn of events in the month of November 2012. We received news that some of the full-time brahmacharis and other congregation members of one particular temple in Bangladesh wanted to understand Srila Prabhupada's instructions on the Rtvik system of initiations. This was indeed the turning point. They were immediately given access to all the important documents that Srila Prabhupada left in 1977 regarding this particular topic and they were also shown all the deviations that the gurus have indulged in over the years. They were shocked to the core. They expressed their great disappointment regarding the fact that the ISKCON leader there never showed them the path to Srila Prabhupada but to so-called gurus who were interested in their own self-aggrandizement.

That was the spark that we have been waiting for and it did not take long from there for the devotees to invite Sundar Gopal Prabhu over to conduct some initiations. About 30 devotees were serious on taking the initiation and establish their eternal relationship with Srila Prabhupada. The trip was scheduled from Mar 14 to Mar 16. I was to accompany Sundar Gopal Prabhu to Bangladesh.

Setting the Scene

For two weeks before our scheduled entry into Bangladesh, there were curfews and tensions as there were some differences between the Hindus and the Muslims. About a hundred Hindus were killed and blah blah. But our real danger would be from the so-called ISKCON if they knew about our entry into Bangladesh. We were well aware of the shady ways of Jayapataka Swami. He would go to any extent to maintain his supremacy in the country. So it was actually

a very risky job for Sundar Gopal Prabhu to step right into the lion's den. Moreover, Sundar Gopal Prabhu had earlier received in the year 2005, a written death threat from two of the chief disciples of Jayapataka Swami. But, for Srila Prabhupada's mission and for the sake of those devotees who wanted to connect themselves to Srila Prabhupada, he decided to take the bold step into Bangladesh.

The Hostile ISKCON

From the moment we stepped into Bangladesh, we were getting news that the ISKCON people were on the hunt for us. We had to make our journey from Dhaka to Chittagong, perform the initiation ceremony, inspire the devotees to continue preaching and then head back to Dhaka and off to Singapore. Although our travel plans were made well in advance, we had to constantly change them in order to remain incognito.

While we were on our way to Chittagong, we received news of many dirty activities of the ISKCON people. They sent hooligans to the houses of many of the prospective initiates and threatened them with dire consequences if they took initiation from Srila Prabhupada. Owing to this threat, many of them backed out from the initiation and expressed their great sorrow. Their hearts were with Srila Prabhupada.

But some of them were very bold and they paid no heed to their threats and went on to arrange all the preparations for the yajna. The Prasadam was also prepared. In fact, no one slept the previous night and were busy in the preparations. The devotees were taking all kinds of precautionary measures for the protection of Sundar Gopal Prabhu. Moreover, about 200 people attended the ceremony and were assisting the devotees in various preparations.

While we were traveling on the road towards Chittagong and just a couple of hours away, we got the news that the ISKCON people were waiting for us at the venue of initiation along with the special police. Jayapataka Swami had used his influence to get the police on us. Of course, legally they had no ground to hold us from attending the ceremony, but in order not to waste time, we had to evade the scene. We did not have much time as the next day, we had to head back to Dhaka and if we waste the whole day sitting in a police station writing reports or something like that, our trip would have been a waste. So we again changed plans and never reached the initiation venue at all. We put up elsewhere where it was much safer and the ceremony for which the devotees have worked so hard, had to be called off.

The Rtvik Initiation

We put up in a hotel. The "criminals" not showing up, the police left the scene along with the ISKCON people. Later in the evening, all the devotees arrived at the hotel and Sundar Gopal Prabhu officiated their initiations on behalf of Srila Prabhupada by giving them the name and the beads and instructed them to perform the ceremony later among themselves. He also encouraged them to fight for the cause of Srila Prabhupada and all the devotees present were very inspired by him.

Among these devotees was one man who is now known as Bir Krsna Das. He is an elderly man but not at heart. He has been the key fighter for Srila Prabhupada's cause. He was a retiree from the army. He related his experience the next day that after the initiation ceremony that he felt so happy and relieved after the initiation and declared that just as he fought for the country when he was in the army, he would now fight for Srila Prabhupada until the end of his life! Everyone present were delighted and inspired by his enthusiasm.

The leaders of these Prabhupadanugas were two young brahmacaris – Ganapati Prabhu and Subha Mukunda Prabhu. They were very well aware of the challenges that would come in the near future and they were confident of Srila Prabhupada's mercy on them to face them all.

Many other young boys are also with them and they are all passionate to fight for Srila Prabhupada's cause.

The next day, we managed to head back quickly to Chittagong, and back to Dhaka by flight and back to Singapore. The mission was successful! But that was just the beginning. The fight for truth would actually start at this point. The future of preaching the genuine teachings of Srila Prabhupada in Bangladesh would depend on these few newly initiated devotees.

The Aftermath

Soon after we returned to Singapore, as expected, the ISKCON people began to exert more force on the few devotees that they knew were strongly adherent to the Rtvik system of initiations. They went on to the extent of saying that they will kill Sundar Gopal Prabhu if he entered Bangladesh another time. Not just that, they even kidnapped the two brahmacaris and ganged up on them. When cornered, the brahmacaris asked so many questions which the 20 ISKCON devotees could not answer. For the time being, one of them has escaped by crossing the border over to India. The other brahmacari was forced to stay in the ISKCON temple in Chittagong. Before being kidnapped, all the initiated devotees had a fabulous initiation conducted on Gaura Purnima day. The whole ceremony was video-recorded.

At the present moment, there is no official temple but the devotees are working very hard for this against all odds.

Conclusion

Just see the plight of ISKCON today. The ISKCON movement which was started by Srila Prabhupada out of great compassion for the fallen souls of this terrible age of Kali Yuga has come under the grips of its very enemy – Kali. Kali Chelas are ruling and the true followers of Srila Prabhupada are being harassed just because they want to follow Srila Prabhupada's teachings cent percent.

Love and affection is no more the basis of dealings between Vaisnavas. Hooliganism, death threats, etc. are becoming the norm. Worshiping Srila Prabhupada is a crime and worshiping an offender is religion.

But crying in the dark will do no good. Those who feel some gratitude towards Srila Prabhupada for saving their damned lives have to fight for the cause and assist those who are fighting from the front. Fighting does not mean that we physically fight. We have to stick to the strict sadhana program that Srila Prabhupada had given us by reposing complete faith in him and his teachings and doing all we can to preach the same to others.

This is indeed a historic moment where Prabhupadanugas have officially entered Bangladesh – a new frontier. With the blessings of Srila Prabhupada and the sincere Vaisnavas, there is a hope that soon, the pure movement of Srila Prabhupada will emerge again in full force to inundate the world.

Hare Krsna!

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