

VRINDAVAN- MAYAPUR GANGA VOYAGE

Reported by Ila devi dasi, Mayapur

After a heavy rain storm in Mayapur on Wednesday 3 September, devotees were surprised to see what looked like a flimsy inflatable catamaran - barely 12 feet long, open, with no covering against the sun - and five sun-burnt, tired but ecstatic happy devotees float through the main gate, having arrived after a month-long journey on Mother Ganga from Vrindavana.

Most devotees could not believe they had actually made it all the way, and indeed, according to HH Mahavishnu Swami, it was an adventure full of tapasya and dangerous challenges. He said that Srila Prabhupada once told a devotee that Krishna Consciousness is an "Adventure in Surrender" - and that this an apt description for this journey.

How did he become involved in this journey? Parasurama dasa of Food For Life UK fame, also known for regularly going on Vraja-Mandal Parikrama, where he distributes Prasadam and books on bull-cart, had the desire to complete this spiritual pilgrimage on Mother Ganga. He convinced Mahavishnu Swami to join - after all, the main focus of the journey would be harinama, chanting of the Holy Name - and who else but HH Mahavishnu Swami, veteran harinama devotee and also veteran traveler in Bharata Bhumi as well as in other challenging places like Africa (including Congo and Rwanda!), would agree to accept this daunting transcendental adventure?

"We wanted to glorify the Holy Name, Holy Places and Holy Rivers" he says, "We were on a Sankirtana mission to remind people of India not to forget their own culture by showing how westerners have taken it up."

Also on the boat was Rukminiramana dasa from Columbia, Arjuna dasa from Russia and Taruna dasa from Croatia.

The jal-yatra pilgrimage was 1800km long. What was it like? Mahavishnu Swami had a blissful smile on his face when asked this question, but also related how there were some scary times - storms, danger from robbers when sleeping on the banks of the river, and most of all the dangerous electric wires that could hit the mast and sail of the boat.

"We had to wait until after dark and then stop at a dry bank to sleep for the night, so that robbers would not see us stopping and know where we were. The most frightening time was when we were sleeping on the river bank, and around 1am in the morning the river changed course. Parasurama was sleeping on the boat to protect it, but a river bank collapsed on him, and the boat was almost lost that night. We had to fight in the water" says Maharaja.

Another time they were caught up in a huge storm, with huge black clouds, lightning almost hitting the mast and roaring waves. Banks about 20 feet high were surrounding them so there was nowhere to go - then suddenly there was silence and the boat floated onto a beach where there was a temple and an old babaji who welcomed them.....



(Pictures from Dandavats.com)



Along the way they visited large temples at Varanasi and Patna where they were met with huge crowds. Maharaja also mentioned how along the Ganga there were so many small ashrams and people living lives of great austerity. As usual, Maharaja had all the villagers along the way join in the chanting of "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare."

Another tapasya for the team was the incredible heat - and the only place to hide from the sun was to hang under the catamaran platform with heads sticking out in the small space between the water and the plank. And of course, very austere meals cooked in one small pot. During the toughest times the team would chant the famous mantra which can be found in Jaya Vijaya Prabhu's

book "Mother Ganga" (this book accompanied the team and provided much inspiration):

*"ganga rani ganga rani ganga rani
raksha mam bhagirathi bhagirathi
bhagirathi pahi mam"*

"O Celestial Queen Ganga, please protect us O descendant of Maharaja Bhagiratha, please maintain us"

And the final arrival in Mayapur? Mahavishnu Swami was the first to spot the Samadhi through the binoculars, and indeed it was Srila Prabhupada's Samadhi that saved them as Mayapur was flooded all around and they had to use the compass to try and find the direction to Mayapur and they had gone off course. Upon final arrival they also first visited the Samadhi and circumambulated it before going to the main temple. Due to the floods in Mayapur they could go on their catamaran right to the door of Sri Sri Radha-Madhava, where the journey culminated in a raucous kirtana.

Incidentally Maharaja's book bag with the Bhagavad Gita and other scriptures remained intact and dry throughout the journey, but finally got wet in the rain in Mayapur! The Ganga book was soaking wet and the pages sticking together signaled that this was really the end of the journey.

Are they planning to do it again? This question was met by silence. We'd have to wait and see....

The team will soon release a VCD documentary of the whole expedition! And for those who are interested in the wild-life aspect of the Ganga - they saw many beautiful fresh-water dolphins but NO crocodiles.

*"matar jahnavi sambhu-sanga-milite
maulau tvat-tire vapuso vasana-samaye
narayananghri-dvayam sanandam
smarato bhavisyati mama prana-
prayanotsave bhuyad bhaktir avicyuta
hari-haradvaitmika sasvati"*

"O Mother Jahnavi, who associates with Lord Sambhu by residing on the crest of his head, when I leave my body on your shore while happily remembering the lotus feet of Lord Narayana, then I will enjoy the festival of my life's air passing on. Please allow me to always have unflinching devotion for Hari and Hara as one and the same."

(from Sri Sankaracarya's Gangastakam)