



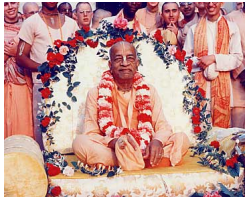
Another incident that comes to mind was in 1968 or 69. We had a very well attended temple on La Cienega Boulevard in Los Angeles. The devotees went to Griffith Park in Los Angeles and chanted and distributed prasadam. Visnujan had little puppets and we would have puppet shows there and bring people from Griffith Park to the temple. We also went to the meditation room in "The Mystic Arts Book Store" in Laguna Beach. They let us have kirtan there and we would bring van loads of people from Laguna Beach to Los Angeles for the feast. In this way the feast was very well attended.

Written by Madhudvisa Prabhu

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On this particular day Srila Prabhupada was going to preside over an initiation and a fire yajna ceremony. The temple was very full with people. At that time an Italian film making crew was filming at the temple. If somebody could get that film, it would be a historical piece of footage. A lady named Syama Devi, who was the guru of many Hindus, came into the temple and sat in the back. (Syama Devi now has an ashram right next to the Krishna Balaram temple in Vrindavan.) Her disciples, older Hindu ladies and gentlemen, rolled out a carpet, she sat down on it, and they sat around her while Srila Prabhupada performed the yajna. After Srila Prabhupada finished he sat on the stage. Prabhupada's Vyasasana was on the stage at the same level as the altar.



Srila Prabhupada was playing his kartals and leading a kirtan. Then he told someone else to lead. In those days the kirtans were ecstatic but they weren't uproarious because we did the swami step. The swami step was a choreographed step in which everybody would dance by putting one foot in front of the other while their arms were upraised. The devotees were in two long aisles facing one another as we all chanted and danced. During the course of this kirtan Srila Prabhupada got off his Vyasasana and did the swami step with us. We were all doing the swami step.

Then Srila Prabhupada did something that he had never done before. Nobody had ever experienced this before. Srila Prabhupada stopped doing the swami step and started to jump up and down. We had never done this jumping up and down. We just knew the swami step and we

were all happy doing the swami step. But now Srila Prabhupada was jumping up and down. It was the most amazing thing because it seemed like the whole universe was rocking when Srila Prabhupada started jumping up and down. We looked at each other and said, "Wow! Prabhupada is jumping up and down. I guess we can jump up and down too." Kirtan has never been the same since then. The swami step is still there but it's only done by very conservative devotees. Everybody likes to jump up and down and get into the uproarious kirtan. So Srila Prabhupada was jumping up and down and all the devotees were jumping up and down, bouncing off the walls. It was fantastic.

Meanwhile one of Syama Devi's disciples opens a bag and gives her a little mridanga. In those days it was usually one mridanga per temple and only devotees who were good mridanga players and who wouldn't drop it or put their hand through the end of it could play that mridanga. They had to be very concerned that the mridanga didn't get damaged because in those days we didn't have our American made plastic mridangas. If the mridanga got broken, we would have to send it off to India for repair, which took a long time. But they pulled out a small clay mridanga and gave it to her and she started playing the mridanga.

We stepped aside and she moved up to the front. Srila Prabhupada was jumping up and down dancing. All the devotees were dancing and Syama Devi was playing this mridanga and also started to dance, taking little steps and floating around like a butterfly. She was a very conservative elderly lady--about 50 or 60--but she danced around like a little butterfly, with her sari over her head, while she played the mridanga like a gopi. All the female devotees thought, "All right, Prabhupada obviously approves of this Vaisnavi who could play the mridanga and who was dancing." Then Prabhupada jumped off the stage and joins the devotees jumping up and down chanting Hare Krishna. Syama Devi is still playing the mridanga and dancing. Then the kirtan ended and Srila Prabhupada said to her, "Now you lead." So she started to lead the kirtan.

