

## Deity Department

### Brief History

In 2004, then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Uma Bharti had invited HH Bhakti Charu Swami Maharaj for the Maha Kumbh that year. Maharaj, along with a group of 10 Brahmacharis took a community hall on rent and on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2004 Sri Sri Radha Madan Mohan deities were installed. Later, a huge temple with 3 alters, a Brahmachari building along with a guest house were built. In 2007, Jagannath, Baladev and Subhadra deities were installed at a place close to the temple and Rathayatra festival too was started from the same year. In 2008, Giriraj deities were installed and in 2015 Sri Sri Prahladesh Narasimhadev deity was installed. The temple is very attractive due to its festivals, ambience and high standard of deity service. Rathayatra and Janmashtami are one of the main festivals here. On Purnima and Ekadashi, lamp offering festival is held wherein people offer lamps to the deities.

### Overview of Workflow

- Bhoga and Aarti is performed 8 and 7 times a day respectively and there is a team of pujaris in-charge of this seva.
- Support staff is responsible for procuring vegetables for cooking and making preparations for Aartis.
- Instructions are received from HH Bhakti Charu Swami. Under him is the Advisory Committee and then the Executive Committee (EC). Deity Department is looked after by an HOD in the EC. Under the HOD, there are 4 teams viz. Team of Pujaris, team of devotees handling kitchen, team in-charge of Goshala and Anna Bhoga Bhandar dept. (in-charge of Prasadam distribution).

### Various Departments

- Deity Dress Department Is directly supervised by an HOD who is a Brahmachari. There are 10 people working under him. 7 sets of dresses are made in a year for the deities.
- Goshala Dept. is looked after by a Brahmachari with 5 people working under him. All products from the Goshala are solely for food preparations for the deities.
- 20 full time Brahmacharis are involved in the Deity Department- they attend to the 6 big alters. Bhoga cooking is looked after by 3 Brahmacharis, with one of them a Head Cook. Bal Bhoga & Raj Bhoga are prepared by them. Evening bhoga is prepared by a team of matajis. A team of 10 devotees are dedicated for back-end activities like procurement of items, cleaning utensils, etc.
- A team of 5 devotees- 4 Grihasthas & 1 Brahmachari, look after the finances. Each of the devotees look after either Nitya Seva, Anna Bhoga Bhandar, festival donations, etc.

### Unique Features

- Srila Prabhupada said that if you want to attract the people of India to temples, a high standard of deity worship and nice kirtan are necessary.
- Specialty of the temple is the beautifully dressed deities. The devotees are also hospitable to guests which inspire them to visit the temple again.
- Guests are given maha-prasad and there is a team of devotees which interacts with guests to get their feedback.
- Ujjain being a religious city, the temple is visited by many during weekends.

### Noteworthy Achievements

- Initially, there were many mis-positionings about ISKCON and the worship of Lord Krishna in a place well-known for the devotion of Lord Shiva. There is a huge celebration during Maha Shivratri in the temple and cordial relations are maintained with Mahakaleshwar Temple authorities.
- Initially, there was a dearth of full time devotees to serve and support the temple. Gradually but steadily, Bhakti Vrikshas and other congregational activities are growing.
- From this Janmashtami, Kalash Abhishek festival has been introduced. Festivals help devotees get systematically educated and inspired to come to temple and grow spiritually.
- Standards of service have improved over the years with a constant effort to educate people and connect them to temple activities.

## Organizational Hierarchy

- Project is guided by HH Bhakti Charu Swami Maharaj. Under him is the Advisory Committee (AC) which consists of senior devotees. Under AC is the Executive Committee (EC) consisting of young devotees who execute instructions after taking guidance from AC.
- There are 3 ECs taking lead for 4 months each, in a year. Under them are more than 32 departments. The preaching, deity and managerial aspects are taken care by the ECs. In each department there is an HOD and a manager to assist him. Under the manager are 20 Brahmacharis and 10 part-time devotees.
- Devotees from New Bhakta Training volunteer in activities like Goshala, back-up services, cleaning pots, procuring vegetables, etc.
- With the development of Bhakti Vriksha, more matajis are volunteering for garland making services. 2<sup>nd</sup> initiated matajis cook for the Lord in the evening and other grihastha devotees render adhoc services.

## Finance

- Around 2 Lakh Rupees are obtained from Hundi donations, 60K Rupees from Nitya Seva and 50K Rupees from Bhoga Bhandar but they aren't sufficient as monthly expenses run upto Rupees 15 Lakh.
- The Murti Project and Goshala were introduced for sustaining temple activities. Flowers are also grown in the Goshala area.
- Many devotees honour prasadam and also sponsor prasadam during festivals or anniversaries.
- The temple deities require 7 sets of dresses in a year which are manufactured by the dress department. 2-3 sets extra are manufactured and sent to temples outside India. This acts as a source of revenue.
- Devotees are trying to celebrate festivals in such a way so as to increase participation in seva, cash and kind.

## Lessons

- A lot of commitment, dedication and a high standard of purity is required to sustain the deity department and hence, a rotation policy is followed. Also, care in terms of health, spiritual education and sadhana is taken of devotees who serve the deities.
- A good management system and scheduling is required to manage 6 alters. Managers are hired to keep it structured so that things can go on smoothly.

- Decision making is more proactive now. All decisions are taken well in advance and coordination among departments is done properly.
- The growth of Bhakti Vrikshas have been slow but steady over the years. Efforts are being taken to structure festivals in a way so as to enhance contribution and participation from outside.