

A REPORT FROM GOVARDHANA

On May 18, 2003, in New Vraja (Badger California), Parama-pujyapada Srila Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja and his followers performed their yearly Annakuta Mahotsava (festival). In 1996 Srila Maharaja had installed Giriraja, with an authentic ancient Vedic prana-pratistha ceremony, in front of the home of Sripad Nanda-gopala dasa Adhikari and his family. At that time he had called Govardhana from Gokoka Vrndavana, and since then Syama-kunda and Radha-kunda also manifested there at the foot of Govardhana, to give their merciful darsana and to be worshipped at the subsequent yearly festivals.

There were about 500 devotees at the festival this year, and together they made over 500 preparations to offer to Govardhana. Srila Maharaja had asked them a couple of days earlier to prepare as many items as there are days in the year, and the devotees enthusiastically prepared many more than that. Then, on the morning of the festival, just after breakfast, Srila Maharaja created two sankirtana parties, a ladies' party and a men's party, and Sri Gaura-Nitai were in the front of both. The parties chanted and danced all over the hills of New Braja, purifying all the living entities there, and then they proceeded to the large pandal in front of the home of Sripad Nirguna dasa Adhikari and family. There, Srila Maharaja and his servants placed paper plates with the various preparations on top of the devotees heads, and the devotees then continued their nagara-sankirtana chanting until they arrived at Govardhana.

Once the devotees reached Govardhana, Srila Maharaja led them in the performance of Go-puja, offering the large sacred cow arati and also hand-prints made of tumeric and other auspicious substances all over her body. Then they performed Govardhana-puja, which consisted of arati, prayers, abhiseka (the bathing of several Govardhana silas with pancamrta (ghee, honey, milk, yogurt, sugar, and water) and an offering of the preparations of neivedya (un-offered foodstuffs). Srila Maharaja also uttered preayers to Govardhana in the English, which the devotees repeated a few words at a time, such as: O govardhana, you take great pleasure in witnessing the confidential pastimes of Radha and Krsna, which They perform in your caves and kunjjas. Please grant me a residence near you so that I may also witness and serve those pastimes.

Five thousand years earlier, when Krsna and His family and friends worshipped Govardhana with their Annakuta festival, Krsna had assumed a huge four-armed form and, as Govardhana, called out "Annayora, Annayayora. Give Me more, Give Me more." Now, while Srila Maharaja was making the offering of bhoga, he laughed to see Sriman Sridama dasa Adhikari, one of New Vraja's leading dramatists, appear on top of Govardhana in a mock four-armed form and enact that pastime.

Another of the important parts of the Annakuta festival was the circumambulation of Govardhana. As Krsna and His associates circumambulated him, so Srila Maharaja led the devotees a few times around him, along with Syama-kunda and Radha-kunda. After the worship of Govardhana was completed, all the devotees again took the plates on their

heads and returned to the pandal. There they enjoyed a large feast of Govardhana's prasadam, and in the evening Srila Maharaja spoke on Govardhana's glorification.

by Syamarani dasi