

Dasara Day One:

It was the first Dasara celebrations and we were eagerly waiting to see what Swami would do.

Swami said, "Florists from Bangalore are coming, they will build a palanquin. I will sit on it and go around in a procession".

So we were looking forward to the celebrations.
The year was 1945.

The Florists arrived and they used to build the *Mandap* or the temple porch beautifully. The palanquin (that year) was like the shining sun, it was made of flowers and it looked resplendent. When we looked at it, we felt as though it was verily the chariot of Sun God itself.

All of us were then eagerly waiting. They had made all the arrangements for the procession and the palanquin was ready too.

Swami opened the doors and came out.

The ancients would say, "Thousand eyes would not suffice to behold this beautiful form!" That day we felt these words were absolutely true.

Those days Swami had a parting in His hair - one side of the partition had a larger mop of hair than the other.

That was the first time Swami had worn a white silk robe. He was wearing a white robe, a white dhoti and on top, He covered Himself with a white cloth. Covering His head was a very pure white cloth, as white as milk; none of us knew where He had procured it from, but he came out wearing that.

When Swami came out like this, we all were transfixed, and all our gazes were fixed on Swami.

When He came out, holding the robe in one hand and walking so gracefully, we all wondered, 'Is Swami Tribhuvana mohini or Tripura Sundari or Maha Lakshmi Herself?'

Just as ladies would walk holding the folds of their saree, Swami came walking with such grace and beauty; seeing that sight we shed tears profusely.

We should have done something stupendous in our previous lives to experience such beauty. Otherwise to witness such a divine sight is just not possible.

Swami asked us, "What are all of you looking at Me like this for?"

We said, "Nothing Swami". What else could we say; we were all speechless. We with folded hands then muttered, "Swami you are looking so beautiful". Swami remarked, "Oh is that so?"

Saying so, He came outside and the palanquin was readily decked with flowers. Befitting Swami's beauty, the palanquin was decorated with all kinds of flowers that day.

For Swami's white robe, the different flowers formed a fabulous background; the sight looked so beautiful!

Before swami began the procession, all the ladies, who were sumangalis, gave *arati* and broke coconuts in front of the palanquin and then the procession began.

Men were standing ready to carry the palanquin. Then people started hailing with loud cries - "Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba Ki Jai". All who had assembled, children and the elderly, forgetting themselves started shouting the *Jaikar*.

After Swami sat on the palanquin, again ladies offered *arati* and broke coconuts.

Thereafter, even as *Jaikars* were resounding in the air, a few hefty men lifted the palanquin. Usually, the people who used to lift the palanquin were from Hyderabad, they did this service for a long time.

When Swami's palanquin was thus raised, the beauty of that scene - it is indescribable. One may write any number of volumes or flip through dictionaries in search of the right word, it is extremely difficult to find the right description for that scene. That was how beautiful Swami was.

We asked swami what to do now? He said, "All the ladies stand in front and start singing songs, the men will be around all of you like a protective wall".

Swami told us, "Look at me and walk." We were wondering how to walk looking at Swami.

We were not able to see the path. So we are bumping into and stepping on each other, but somehow were walking carefully backwards.

Swami was looking so resplendent. That day it appeared as though a mix of silver and *Vibhuti* was cascading from His face, and we thought that it would cover all His body. But that didn't happen. There was no *Vibhuti* on His frame. We walked thus for a distance. Sitting on top, Swami would keep guiding us saying, "It is steep here; the ground is high there; walk this way; Go that side; left, right". He did that, as there was no one else to tell us. All of us were walking backwards; even the men were walking backwards. So He would guide us.

By the time the procession would begin, it would be roughly around 10 or 10:30 at night. We did Bhajans and sang songs all through the way.

As we would approach Parthi, except for Swami's family, all other residents would shut their doors. None were ready to even come outside.

Swami's family members alone used to wait, give *arati* and break the coconuts. It was almost around 12 or 1 o'clock in the night, but we were still walking and the path seemed endless. We were walking and walking but were not reaching the Mandir!

We didn't know whether we were going around the same road or the road was expanding and becoming infinite!

By the time we returned it was around 2 or 2:30 in the night.

Just a short distance after the procession would start, we would notice *Vibhuti* emanating from Swami's form. All of us could see it, it was not just for one or two. Even children had that experience.

After some distance, we felt Swami's face was shining as though *Vibhuti* mixed with gold was pouring forth. None can explain or comprehend that beauty. Swami dazzled with all the sixteen *kalas*.

So we finished the procession and returned, it had become 2:30 by then. The men would not bring the palanquin down immediately after we reach the mandir. They used to swing the palanquin from side to side even as lullabies were sung for Swami.

Swami would say, “Hey why are you all doing this? I will fall down!”
But they would continue swaying the palanquin.

Then with exuberant shouts of, ‘*Jai Bolo Sathya Sai Baba Ki jai*’, the palanquin would be placed down.

Again all the ladies would offer *aratis*, break coconuts and perform the ritual of removing bad effects of evil eyes.

By the time all this got over, it would be around 3 AM. Again by 4 we had to wake up and get ready. If we sleep for an hour it’s a great thing.

Swami had said that all the ten days would be like this. So this was the first day.