

ISKCON Chicago devotees bring Deity of Lord Jagannatha on the float at India's 77th Independence Day Parade



ISKCON Chicago devotees bring Deity of Lord Jagannatha on the float. (Courtesy of Suresh Bodiwala)

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The Federation of Indian Associations (FIA-Chicago), founded in 1980, hosted an India Independence Day parade on the streets of Devon Avenue on Aug. 5. This event marked the commemoration of India's 77th Independence Day anniversary, drawing a diverse multitude of thousands, each hailing from different corners of the Indian subcontinent, who converged along the parade route to bask in the resounding waves of patriotism.

The event was graced by Kanishka Soni, an Indian actress and model from Mumbai. Joining in the celebrations was esteemed guests, including Consul General Mr. Somnath Ghose, Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, Lincolnwood Mayor Jesal Patel, and Parade Chair Smita Shah.

These illustrious figures joined their voices to wish one and all a jubilant Independence Day. President Dr. Rashmi Patel extended her warmest welcome and heartfelt gratitude to these distinguished individuals, underscoring the profound importance of their presence.

India is celebrating its 77th Independence Day and among the other colorful floats with the colors of India flag -- white, orange and green -- were the members of the International society for Krishna consciousness, popularly known as the Hare Krishnas. The society brings a 5000 year old tradition of worship. These followers of Lord Krishna were often seen chanting and dancing for their mantra - Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Hare Hare Hare Hare during the 1970s and '80s. They are still around and their temple is located at 1716 W. Lunt Ave. and has a representation of more than 40 nations. The temple also recently celebrated its 50th anniversary and prides itself on being the first Krishna temple in the Midwest.

The founder of the society, Srila Prabhupada believed in seeing everyone as the children of God and looking beyond the barriers of color, nationality and language. There were devotees from different nationalities like Venezuela, South Africa, America and India who all happily chanted the names of God and promoted universal peace and brotherhood.

As the parade moved on Devon Avenue from Western to Washtenaw, many shoppers came and out of the stores to witness the beautiful floats. The temple council member, Subala das said, "We are honored to participate in this year's Federation of Indian Associations parade on Devon Avenue, celebrating the Indian Independence Day. We are spreading the Holy Names of Krishna to the thousands of Indian families and local Chicagoans present during the parade." Many people responded with waving the Indian flag, waving their hands and with smiles.

The float also had a Deity of Lord Jagannatha. It's customary in Indian temples to bring the Deity of Krishna on a cart or palanquine. Gajendra Moksa das said, "Jagannatha means the Lord of the Universe. Jagannatha is another name for Krishna. Lord Jagannatha is very kind. He comes for a tour on the street to meet His children who cannot come to see Him at the temple. The devotees perform Kirtan for the pleasure of Lord Jagannatha."

The word Kirtan means to glorify the Lord and the Hare Krishnas believe that one becomes joyful and free from anxiety by performing Kirtan. The temple priest, Lila Manjari devi dasi, said, "The experience of joy through Kirtan is practical. It's not just a religious belief or sentiment. Whoever participates in the Kirtan irrespective of their background experiences a sense of healing and calmness." The temple also holds a free dinner with kirtan every Sunday from 5 to 8 p.m. and welcomes everyone to participate.

The parade ended on Washtenaw with a big round of applause by the FIA for all the floats.