

Pramukh Swami's Work

“In the good of others lies our own...”

This maxim by Pramukh Swami Maharaj is not only an inspiring call for all humanity, but also reflects the spirit of his services to man and society. Acclaimed as a unique and rare holy soul of India, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born on 7 December 1921 in the village of Chansad, Gujarat. He is the fifth successor in the illustrious spiritual tradition of Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830) who established the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born in the village of Chansad, 12 km from Vadodara in Gujarat on 7 December, 1921. Known as Shantilal in his childhood, he was wedded to devotion from a young age. His parents, Motibhai and Diwaliben Patel, were adherents of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Shastriji Maharaj had discerned the potential of young Shantilal from the very day he initiated him as a disciple.

While studying in 6th grade, Shantilal received the call from guru Shastriji Maharaj to renounce his home. With the blessings of his parents, he left home at the age of 18 and was initiated by Shastriji Maharaj in January 1940 and was renamed as Sadhu Narayanswarupdas.

For 11 years, Narayanswarupdas served under guru Shastriji Maharaj. During the initial years, he toured with him and studied Sanskrit and the shastras. He excelled in studies but had to discontinue them to serve in the mandir-building activities. In 1943, he played an important role in the construction work of the mandir in Atladra. From 1946-1950, he was given the responsibility of Kothari of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur. In a relatively short span of time, despite his young age, Narayanswarupdas had coped admirably in fulfilling the duties entrusted to him. His willingness to sincerely obey the instructions of Shastriji Maharaj won him the Guru's total confidence. In 1950, when he was only 28 years old, Shastriji Maharaj appointed him as President (Pramukh) of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) in his own place. From then on, he began to be known as Pramukh (President), and so the popular name of Pramukh Swami emerged. Before Shastriji Maharaj passed away in 1951, he instructed Pramukh Swami to work under Yogiji Maharaj.

For the next 20 years, the young disciple served Yogiji Maharaj with the same zeal and obedience as he had for his predecessor. Pramukh Swami inspired, never through orders

or commands, but through personal example and commitment.

On 23 January 1971, Yogiji Maharaj left this world. Pramukh Swami, the perfect disciple, became Pramukh Swami Maharaj to fulfil the role of the perfect spiritual master. Over the past 40 years, under his able leadership and guidance, BAPS has become a global socio-spiritual organization. What was, over 100 years ago, a small institution with a few hundred devotees and a handful of sadhus, is now a dynamic worldwide organization with over 1,100 mandirs, over 3,300 centres, 17,500 weekly satsang assemblies (children, youth and devotees), over 900 sadhus and a million followers spread in five continents. The Swaminarayan Akshardham complexes at New Delhi and Gandhinagar have won international acclaim and renown as centres which reflect India's ancient history and culture, and inspire universal ideals.

Outside India, he has instilled fresh pride for Sanatan Dharma among all Hindus by building traditional mandirs, based on ancient Vedic architectural principles in London, Nairobi, Houston, Chicago, Toronto and Atlanta.

Also, the spectacular Cultural Festivals of India held in London in 1985 and New Jersey in 1991 were a success in portraying our timeless cultural heritage.

Out of his compassion for humanity, he has made over 17,000 village, town and city visits and sanctified over 250,000 homes in India and abroad. He has read and replied to over 700,000 letters, and personally counselled over 810,000 people.

A whole array of activities flourish under Swamishri's guidance: social (famine relief and disaster relief works), educational (literacy campaigns, youth hostels), ecological (tree planting, well recharging, recycling projects), medical (diagnostic camps, blood donation), moral (anti-addiction drives), cultural (child and youth development), and spiritual.

Swamishri himself leads an austere life, without personal gains or comforts. Possessing nothing, asking for nothing, wanting nothing, he goes around giving his all. Despite his age, he travels from tiny tribal huts to modern metropolitan cities all over the world, to promote morality and spirituality. At his tender word, thousands have left addictions and walked the path of God.

His striking humility, profound wisdom and simplicity have touched many. His love for mankind and respect for all religions weaves a fabric of cultural unity, interfaith harmony and universal peace.

The sole reason behind his unique success is a deep, fluent communion with Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his gurus.

SELECTED OPINIONS

- The late Head of the Ramkrishna Mission, Raipur, H.H. Atmanand Swami, said, "Oh! What a humble man. What a divine man! I've yet to see such people in abundance. One of the very rare souls that our country has. I have not travelled far and wide, I have gone to some countries, but he is one of the most impressive men I have met in my life; very dedicated, spiritually very high, at the same time wonderful organizing capacity. Pramukh Swami is so silent, at the same time making so many people so active."
- The late eminent economist and advocate, Nani Palkhiwala, said, "It is difficult to pen down the achievements of the Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha. Under the stewardship and inspiration of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj his sadhus have dedicated themselves to the propagation of nonviolence, brotherhood and spiritual awakening that will become a hallmark of Indian culture."
- The renowned multimedia director, the late Professor Jaroslav Fric, opined, "Pramukh Swami is a great part of the Infinite. I can say with conviction that he is a true guru and the embodiment of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on earth."
- The late Ron Patel, a Pulitzer Prize winner and managing editor of the Sunday edition of The Philadelphia Enquirer, experienced the love of his father in Swamishri's affectionate personality.
- The late founder of Amul Dairy and former chairman of the National Dairy Development Board, Dr Kurien, said, "What Swamiji is able to achieve makes what little I have achieved very insignificant. One then realizes what goodness can achieve, what piety can achieve, what the devotion of his followers can achieve. And I wish, I too will receive a small portion of this."