

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January-February 2017

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 96th Birthday and
Surat Mandir's 20th Anniversary Celebrations

27 November-7 December 2016, Surat





HH MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN
November-December 2016

1. Prabodhini Ekadashi celebration, Bochasan, 11 November.
2. Swamishri engrossed in darshan at Shastriji Maharaj's birthplace, Mahelav, 16 November.
3. In Sankari, Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs to be inaugurated in South Gujarat, 11 December.
4. Devotees seated in an evening satsang assembly, Sankari, 11 December.



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 96th Birthday Celebration, Surat

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January-February 2017, Vol. 40, No. 1



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



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Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpieth,
 Shahibaug, Ahmedabad - 380004, India

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Outside India (By Air Mail)			India
	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	Rupees
1 Year	630	9	14	80
2 Years	1300	18	28	150
3 Years	1900	27	42	220

In April 1978, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and inaugurated the first issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The bi-monthly magazine serves to enlighten BAPS youths, seniors and well-wishers about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the Gunatit guru *parampara*. It also seeks to inspire the universal values and traditions of Hinduism to pursue a happy and peaceful life by serving God and humankind.

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(L to R) Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami and young Pramukh Swami Maharaj during a procession in Surat (c. 1943)



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Nanavat, Surat



Murtis of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Nanavat, originally installed in Kampala, Uganda

History of Satsang in SURAT

Surat has always had a rich spiritual tradition, and also a long association with the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

In 1799, as Nilkanth Varni, Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited Surat for the first time. Thereafter, with his blessings, Satsang grew, and drawn by the loving devotion of Bhaichand Sheth, Ardeshar Kotwal and other devotees, Bhagwan Swaminarayan again graced Surat in 1816 with an entourage of 200 sadhus and many devotees. During this visit Bhagwan Swaminarayan was welcomed and honoured by Nawab Mir Afjulladin Ahmed Khan, Ardeshar Kotwal, and British officials Mr Heron, Judge Anderson and others.

Some of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's senior *paramhansas* – Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Anandanand Swami, Vignananand Swami and others – also visited Surat many times.

The famous prayer '*Nirvikalp uttam atinischay tav Ghanshyām...*' was composed by the great poet Premanand Swami in Surat.

In the lanes of Surat, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami had begged many times for alms, during which his self-control and his oneness with Bhagwan Swaminarayan were clearly evident.

In 1870, in the Rampura suburb of Surat, in the mandir built by Shunyatitanand Swami, Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj openly and boldly proclaimed the divine knowledge of Akshar and Purushottam. Vignananand

Swami, whose saintly life deeply touched Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, was once the mahant of this mandir.

It was at this mandir in Rampura that the first meeting between Shastriji Maharaj and Bhagatji Maharaj took place. Subsequently, Shastriji Maharaj often visited Surat. Among the stalwart devotees was Maganbhai Narsinhbhai Patel, a native of Bhadran, who as per the wish of Shastriji Maharaj, had moved to Surat.

In 1942-3, the *Satsangijivan parayan* was held here, in which the discourses were read by 22-year-old Narayanswarupdasji (Pramukh Swami Maharaj). Nirgundas Swami also contributed tremendously to the growth of Satsang in Surat.

The spiritual bliss given by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj in Surat led to the start of weekly Sunday assemblies here. With the blessings of Yogiji Maharaj, Ashabhai Patel and other dedicated devotees organized many festival and regular satsang-related events.

Around 1975, with the growth of the diamond industry, many *satsangis* migrated from Saurashtra-Kathiawad to Surat for better job opportunities.

In 1975, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Hanuman Pol in the suburb of Nanavat. At this time, the pictorial *murtis* previously at Kampala Mandir (which had at the time been closed by the political regime in Uganda) were consecrated.

As Satsang developed, in 1985, Pramukh Swami Maharaj initiated work for a new *shikharbaddha* in Adajan on the banks of River Tapi. On 16 December 1996, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of this new mandir. Thereafter, the Satsang in Surat flourished immensely. ♦



In 1975, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performs *murti-pratishtha* at BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Nanavat, Surat



Pramukh Swami Maharaj performs *shilanyas* ceremony for new *shikharbaddha* mandir at Adajan, Surat



In 1996, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performs *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the new *shikharbaddha* BAPS Mandir at Adajan

LILAS IN PANCHALA

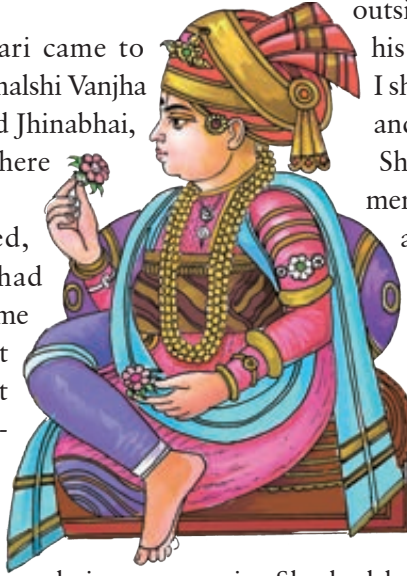
*Shri Hari was pleased with Jhinabhai's personal care for and services to
Kamalshi Vanjha. Maharaj holds special programmes in Panchala...*

KAMALSHI VANJHA

After having lunch Shri Hari came to Jhinabhai's room. On seeing Kamalshi Vanjha sleeping on a bed, Maharaj asked Jhinabhai, "Bapu, how come Kamalshi is here at your home?"

Jhinabhai humbly narrated, "Maharaj, some time ago I had gone from Mangrol to Loj for some work. There, I came to know that Kamalshibhai was sick. So, I went to see him at his house. His physical state was so pitiful that I was filled with sorrow. He was lying in bed, reeking of urine and faeces. There were flies all over his body. Kamalshi wept on seeing me. I asked him, 'Why he was in such a state?' He replied, 'There's no one to care for me. I wish that Maharaj would take me to Akshardham.' Then I called his sons and enquired of them. They rudely said that if the old man gave up his Swaminarayan *kanthi* they would take care of him, otherwise they would let him die."

Shri Hari was intently listening to the story of Kamalshi's sorry situation. On learning about his firm faith Maharaj's eyes welled up with tears. Jhinabhai continued, "I told his sons that if I made arrangements for a servant to serve him, would they allow him to do so?" They replied brashly, 'Till the old man doesn't give up his *kanthi* we will not allow anyone to go near him. Let him rot!' I was distraught with their callous response. So I told them, 'What if I take him away to care for him?' His sons barked, 'Oh, then good riddance to him! Take him right away.' So, I went



outside to search for four men to lift his bed. But I found only three. Then I shouldered the fourth leg of his bed, and we left."

Shriji Maharaj asked Jhinabhai, "I remember someone having informed me about this. Then what happened?"

Jhinabhai continued, "We were carrying Kamalshi's bed through the village. When some people saw me supporting the bed they found a person to relieve me. This was how I brought Kamalshibhai to my house." When Jhinabhai was speaking, Adiba, his sister, came in. She had heard the last words of Jhinabhai, and instantly perceived the subject of the narrative. When Adiba looked at Maharaj she noticed there were tears in his eyes. She realized that her brother's devotion and service to Maharaj's devotee (Kamalshi) was in fact a reflection of his deep devotion towards Shriji Maharaj. Subsequently, Adiba's eyes moistened too.

ADIBA REPENTS

Shri Hari addressed Adiba, "Did you listen to what he was saying? Jhinabhai has not been merely serving Kamalshi, a devotee, but he has been serving me. One who is a devotee of a devotee becomes eligible to be my devotee."

By now tears were flowing copiously from Adiba's eyes. Maharaj asked her the reason for getting emotional. She replied with a muffled and poignant tone, "Maharaj, my brother is a sincere devotee of yours, whereas I am utterly unfortunate to have not served Kamalshibhai. Thus my

brother has stopped talking to me.”

Shri Hari was bewildered and enquired, “What was your fault that made Jhinabhai stop talking to you?”

Adiba was still emotional and struggled to reply, “Jhinabhai once asked for pepper to relieve Kamalshi of a bad cold. But I said no in spite of having pepper in the kitchen. From that moment onwards my brother stopped talking to me. The fault was entirely mine, so I want to atone for my mistake. I want my brother to resume talking to me.”

Shri Hari perceived her genuine repentance and happily declared, “Adiba, your brother will forgive you for your error if you serve Kamalshi yourself. Your brother, in spite of Kamalshi Vanjha’s low caste, paid no heed to his own royal status in humbly serving Kamalshi. He sees him to be a devotee. A true devotee is one who serves and offers devotion devoid of caste distinctions.”

And then Shriji Maharaj spoke to Jhinabhai, “Bapu, from now onwards do not harbour any bitterness towards Adiba. She has agreed to atone for her mistake. Her service to Kamalshi will be her atonement.”

RECALLING THE BEAUTIFUL RAS

In the evening, Shri Hari convened an assembly on the grounds where the great *ras* had been held. Maharaj told Brahmanand Swami, “Sing the kirtans of *maha-ras* you had sung yesterday.”

Brahmanand Swami replied, “Yesterday I had composed and sang the kirtans in Gujarati. Today I have composed the verses in the *charani* language in the *renuki* metre. If you say so I will sing them.”¹

Shri Hari consented and said it would please him. And thus Brahmanand Swami sang:

“*Ek samay shashi udit ati, hoy man
adhik hullās,*

Yamunā tat vrajnār jut, rachyo manohar rās.

1. There is a shrine in Panchala commemorating the place of the *maha-ras* with a replica of Shriji Maharaj’s *charnarvind*.

*Bhar bhar tan saj ābharan, var vun karan vihār,
Kar kar grah natvar Krishna, sar sar anusar sār.”*

“The gopis embellished themselves with decorations and wandered in Vrundavan. At that time, Shri Krishna, an expert dancer, took hold of the hands of every *gopi* and walked on the banks of Yamunaji.”

Brahmanand Swami sang in his mellifluous and stentorian voice. The verses flowed effortlessly, entrancing the sadhus and devotees. Visions of the *maha-ras* appeared before everyone. The ambience turned divine and joyful on reminiscing about the *maha-ras* and an ineffable joy pervaded the assembly.

A FEAST FOR ALL THE VILLAGERS

Maharaj called Jhinabhai and his brother, Gagabhai, and proposed, “Bapu, many devotees had arrived from far and wide for the festival. The villagers had cooperated and made all kinds of arrangements for their stay here. They had brought food and other materials from the neighbouring villages, erected huts, provided mattresses and blankets, brought large utensils for cooking and also cleaned them daily, and performed many other services. So, I wish to hold a feast for them tomorrow.”

Both brothers were pleased to hear Maharaj’s wish and consented, “We will give the orders to all our servants to make preparations and feed them all.”

Shri Hari rectified them, saying, “Call the leading villagers and inform them that we wish to offer them a feast of laddu, *sata*, *jalebi*, *mohanthal*, *mesur* or whatever, and that we wish to please them.”

WE WILL NOT BE SATIATED WITH SUCH DRY FOOD

In deference to Shri Hari’s instructions, the leading servants and workers of Jhinabhai asked the village shepherds about what food items they liked.

(Contd. on pg. 39)



INAUGURATION OF SWAMINARAYAN NAGAR

27 November 2016, Surat

*11-Day Site for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
96th Birthday and Surat Mandir's 20th Anniversary Celebrations*



17 ft high *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Mahant Swami Maharaj and Deputy Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Nitinbhai Patel inaugurate the Swaminarayan Nagar

As part of the five-year celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birth centenary, culminating in 2021, the second birthday celebration was held on a magnificent scale in Surat. It marked Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 96th birthday celebration and Surat BAPS Mandir's 20th consecration anniversary. The 400-acre celebration site was ritually inaugurated on Sunday, 27 November 2016 by HH Mahant Swami Maharaj and the deputy Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Nitinbhai Patel. The inauguration was witnessed by thousands of devotees and well-wishers. The celebration site was declared as Swaminarayan Nagar for 11 days.

Also present during the opening ceremony were Shri Atmarambhai Parmar (State Minister for Human Welfare), Shri Nanubhai Vanani (State Minister for Education and Irrigation), Shri Mukeshbhai Patel (MLA, Olpad), Shri Punyeshbhai Modi (Secretary of Parliament, Gujarat), Shri Mahendrabhai Patel (Collector, Surat), Smt. Asmitaben (Mayor of Greater Surat), Shri Nitinbhai Bhajiyawalla (President of BJP, Surat), Shri Rajeshbhai Desai (Chairman, Standing Committee, Surat), Shri Lavjibhai Daliya (industrialist) and 100 other leading lights of Surat.

The grand entrance gate of Swaminarayan



Mahant Swami Maharaj, senior sadhus and invited guests prior to the inaugural rituals of Swaminarayan Nagar



Mahant Swami Maharaj ties the auspicious thread on Shri Nitinbhai Patel's wrist and thereafter all perform the inaugural rituals of Swaminarayan Nagar before Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj

Nagar, Pramukh Dwar, was inaugurated at 9.45 a.m. amidst Vedic chantings and *jais*. The decorative entrance gate was 400 ft wide and 50 ft high. The arches of the gate had photos of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and were crowned with mandir *shikhars*. The inaugural rituals of the gate took place in the presence of Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj and at the hands of HH Mahant Swami Maharaj, Shri Nitinbhai Patel, Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Jnaneshwar Swami and Kothari Uttampriya Swami of Surat. The auspicious thread was untied and coconuts were split as part of the opening ceremonial rituals. The occasion was heralded with loud *jais* and the sound of conch shells. Thereafter, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, senior sadhus and chief guests, sat in decorated golf carts and proceeded

ahead on the main avenue of Swaminarayan Nagar. Children and youths dressed in colourful dresses, danced and played various musical instruments to honour and proclaim their arrival. The colourful procession halted before the 17 feet high *murti* of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Then Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and the dignitaries offered *pushpanjali* and paid respects to Swamishri. Thereafter, the procession proceeded to the heart of Swaminarayan Nagar – the five-*shikhar* decorative mandir, which was a replica of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Surat. The replica mandir was constructed with painstaking efforts by sadhus and volunteers. The mandir was 150 ft in length, 150 ft wide and 60 ft high. Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and the main guests took their seats on the mandir podium. Thousands of volunteers and devotees



Mahant Swami Maharaj performs the first *arti* in the mandir



Shri Nitinbhai Patel addresses the inaugural assembly from the mandir podium



Devotees visit the mandir for darshan

were seated before the mandir. Narayanmuni Swami gave an introductory speech, explaining the various parts of the festival site, and welcomed all. Kothari Uttamprakash Swami garlanded Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and the stage guests. Then Shri Nitinbhai Patel addressed the inaugural assembly, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s birthday is being celebrated here to inspire and enthuse countless devotees in India and abroad, and inculcate values and infuse pride for India among all. I was not aware that such a wonderful religious place had been created on 400 acres by the intense toil and devotion of sadhus and devotees. I bow to all who have constructed this township in a short time. The Sanstha has always been active and progressive because of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s blessings and Mahant Swami Maharaj’s guidance. The divine inspiration of

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is being felt through the spiritual activities and *vicharan* of sadhus. I have been touched by the cleanliness of this 400 acre festival ground. I pray to God that may our country become clean like this place.”

Today, 27 November, was historic because 45 years ago Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 48th birthday celebration was celebrated by Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj in Yogiji Maharaj’s presence in Mumbai. Today, the inauguration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 96th birthday celebration for 11 days in Surat took place at the hands of Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj. On this occasion Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “Today we have inaugurated Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s birthday celebration. Through your cooperation and efforts this celebration has been launched. Cooperation from all is very



Countless visitors came in the evenings to see the exhibitions and mandir light and sound show

important. Nothing is possible single-handedly. All should adopt this working style on the social, family, country and world levels. Pramukh Swami Maharaj worked in this way. He never thought he was great. In spite of being great he was humble and he mingled with all – whether they were known or unknown to him. There were infinite virtues in Swami Bapa. But this was a unique one – he never made known to others that he was great. With a child he was like a child, with a teenager he was like a teenager and with a senior he behaved accordingly. This is a virtue that all should emulate. One attains success by having such a demeanour.

“Swami Bapa lived the motto, ‘In the good of others lies our own, and in the joy of others rests our own.’ He did not care for himself. He lived every second for the sake of others. In 1983, when Swami Bapa had a heart attack we had gone to him, but he was worrying about others. Once, he was asked, ‘Who are you?’ He replied, ‘A servant’. So, he had lived like this all his life. He believed God to be the all-doer and that he himself was nothing. Swami Bapa was a world guru. He

is in the hearts of all. He was very natural in all that he did. He never ever thought that he was someone great. Countless prostrations to him.”

Thereafter, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the mandir sanctum and the senior sadhus performed the ritual installations of Shri Lakshmi-Narayan, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Shiv-Parvati, Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, all performed the *pratishtha arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali*. Then Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the guests and contributors who had helped in the creation of Swaminarayan Nagar.

Finally, the eight exhibition halls were ritually declared open for the public. As a result of billboards displayed in Surat city and its suburbs and the news about the celebrations in the mass media people swelled in large numbers from the first day. ♦

SWAMINARAYAN NAGAR

27 November–7 December 2016, Surat



For 11 days thousands of devotees and well-wishers visited Swaminarayan Nagar daily

*Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 96th Birthday Celebration and Surat
BAPS Mandir's 20th Consecration Anniversary Celebration (1996-2016)
were held at the 400-acre Swaminarayan Nagar in Surat*



400 ft long entrance gate, Pramukh Dwar

INTRODUCTION

A beautiful life-size mandir, eight giant exhibition marquees, a larger than life *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and a mega satsang assembly stage and grounds comprised the 400 acre Swaminarayan Nagar in Surat. The 11-day festival was a celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life and services to society and God. The celebration venue was situated off the renowned Dandi Road in Jehangirpura, a northern suburb of Surat. Visitors to the festival site were fascinated by the towering 50-ft high and 400-ft long decorative main gate. For 11 days the spiritual township was shrouded in an ethereal ambience. After entering through the main gate the visitors trekked through the main middle avenue embellished with green lawns and flowers. Flanked on either side were makeshift shrines of great saints, sages and acharyas of India: Shri Narad, Shri Mahavir, Shri Gautam Buddha, Shri Shankracharya, Shri Ramanujacharya, Shri Tulsidas, Shri Tukaram, Swami Vivekanand and many more. Behind the shrines were the giant exhibition marquees: Paramanand, Nityanand, Muktanand, Bhartanand, Sahajanand, Sachchidanand, Bhajananand and Sevanand. There were long queues outside the exhibition halls. In the centre of the main pathway a 17-ft high *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj showered

blessings upon all visitors.

Thereafter, one arrived at the imposing pink-coloured five-*shikhar* traditional mandir. The mandir was 150 ft long, 150 ft wide and 60 ft high. It comprised of small and large mandir domes, ornate pillars and steps on three sides. In the middle and main shrine, the beautiful marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were installed and in the adjacent shrines on both sides were the *murtis* of Shri Sita-Ram and Hanumanji and Shri Shiv-Parvati, Ganapatiji and Kartikeya. As one circumambulated the main shrine one also arrived at the shrines of Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Lakshmi-Narayan Dev, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

At a short distance behind the mandir was the open air assembly hall, Narayan Mandapam. The kitchen and dining facilities on the festival grounds provided meals to volunteers and visitors three times a day. Various games for kids were also set up besides one of the exhibition marquees to entertain children.

The sprawling spiritual township also had various amenities like Pramukh Jaldhara (water huts), Premvati (food counters), Akshar Bookstall and other things. The premises also had makeshift offices of 35 departments that were pivotal in the making and running of the celebration: volunteer



Countless thronged to the Swaminarayan Nagar

department, security, accommodation, parking, kitchen, decoration, water and electric, medical, housekeeping, press and public relations and others. The celebrations were managed by 16,000 male and female BAPS leaders and volunteers.

EXHIBITION MARQUEES

Countless visitors to Swaminarayan Nagar were attracted to the eight wonderful exhibition halls. The exhibition marquees inspired moral and spiritual values, pride for India and family harmony. Every morning from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. schoolchildren from various schools in Surat trooped into Swaminarayan Nagar and visited the exhibition halls. In all, more than 50,000 students from over 100 schools visited the exhibitions. A brief description of the various themes showcased in the exhibitions are as follows:

1. Nityanand

The principal theme of family unity was exquisitely portrayed through video and live presentations. The video story dealt with conflicts between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law, parents and children, and husband and wife. Then, as a remedy to the situation, a daily home assembly (*ghar sabha*) – a unique contribution by Pramukh Swami Maharaj Swami – was presented. The presentation was also laced with humour and

reality. *Ghar sabha* is an elixir that harmonizes strained relations in a family. Thousands also took pledges to practise *ghar sabha* on a regular basis.

2. Muktanand

The miseries of addiction was the central theme of this exhibition. According to statistics: in India, 82 people die every hour due to smoking and ₹180 billion are lost every year. Every minute six million cigarettes are smoked and 29,000 hectolitres of alcoholic drinks are consumed globally. This crisis was addressed in the Nityanand marquee through a video drama produced by BAPS. The story of how a bright youth slips into the habit of smoking and drinking unfolded. His extravagance, conceit and conflicts and the emotional trauma of his death to his family deeply touched the audience. Finally, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's video blessings inspired many to quit addictions altogether.

3. Sevanand

The main theme of service was based on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's motto of selfless service, "In the joy of others lies our own." Scientific proofs and medical research were displayed to show how selfless service benefits an individual in the long run.

The visitors were inspired with the message of service and giving to society.



Mahant Swami Maharaj visits the Paramanand exhibition hall



Schoolchildren arrive to see the exhibition halls

4. Bharatanand

The grandeur and glory of India and its culture in sundry ways was communicated through a riveting video discourse between two popular television artistes: Dilip Joshi as Jethalal and Siddharth Randeriya as Gujjubhai. Their discourse centred around keeping India clean and about conserving water and electricity. Various video scenes supporting the theme interspersed their dialogue.

Schoolchildren and viewers were fortified by the presentation, pledging to contribute towards a beautiful India.

5. Sachchidanand

An interesting presentation on the knowledge of *atma*, Paramatma and the fleeting nature of one's physical self and the world was displayed on six large screens. The main theme was the

search for true happiness, which remains elusive to one steeped in materialism and sense pleasures. The show revealed the essence of all life and true happiness to be the realization of one's *atma* and Paramatma. And the key to this realization is having the association of a God-realized guru.

6. Paramanand

In this exhibition the extraordinary life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was portrayed through 50 photographic panels and tableaux. It comprised of Swamishri's tireless *vicharan*, his correspondence and hardships, the mandirs he built, sadhus he initiated, his selfless humanitarian services and the experiences of renowned personalities with Swamishri. The walk-through exhibition awe-inspired the visitors with Pramukh



Thousands waited patiently in long queues to see the exhibition halls



Schoolchildren absorbed during a presentation in an exhibition hall



Visitors at the Nityanand hall

Swami Maharaj's great life and Herculean services to society and BAPS.

7. Sahajanand

The 17-minute video show revealed the divine life and humanitarian works of Bhagwan Swaminarayan during his stay in Gujarat. His teachings from the Vachanamrut and Shikshapatri were also briefly portrayed in the video.

8. Bhajanand

In this marquee, devotees and well-wishers participated in spiritual rituals of singing *dhun*, doing *pradakshina* of a replica of Akshar Deri, performing *dandvats*, writing the Swaminarayan mantra, reading Vachanamrut and other shastras and reciting the Janmangal Namavali.

The bhakti *yagna* was held 24 hours daily from

27 November to 7 December. Some facts and figures about the rituals performed are as follows:

- In all, 7,960 male and female devotees participated.
- 6,651 hours of bhakti collectively performed.
- 5,287 pages of Satsang books read.
- 64,593 *malas* done.
- 5,380 pages used for writing the Swaminarayan mantra.
- 667 Janmangal Namavali *paath* chanted.
- 44,213 *dandvats* and *panchang pranams* offered.
- 233,844 *pradakshinas* performed.

Blood donation and diagnostic health camps were also held during the 11-day celebrations in which countless people participated. ♦



Schoolchildren taking pledges to contribute towards a better India



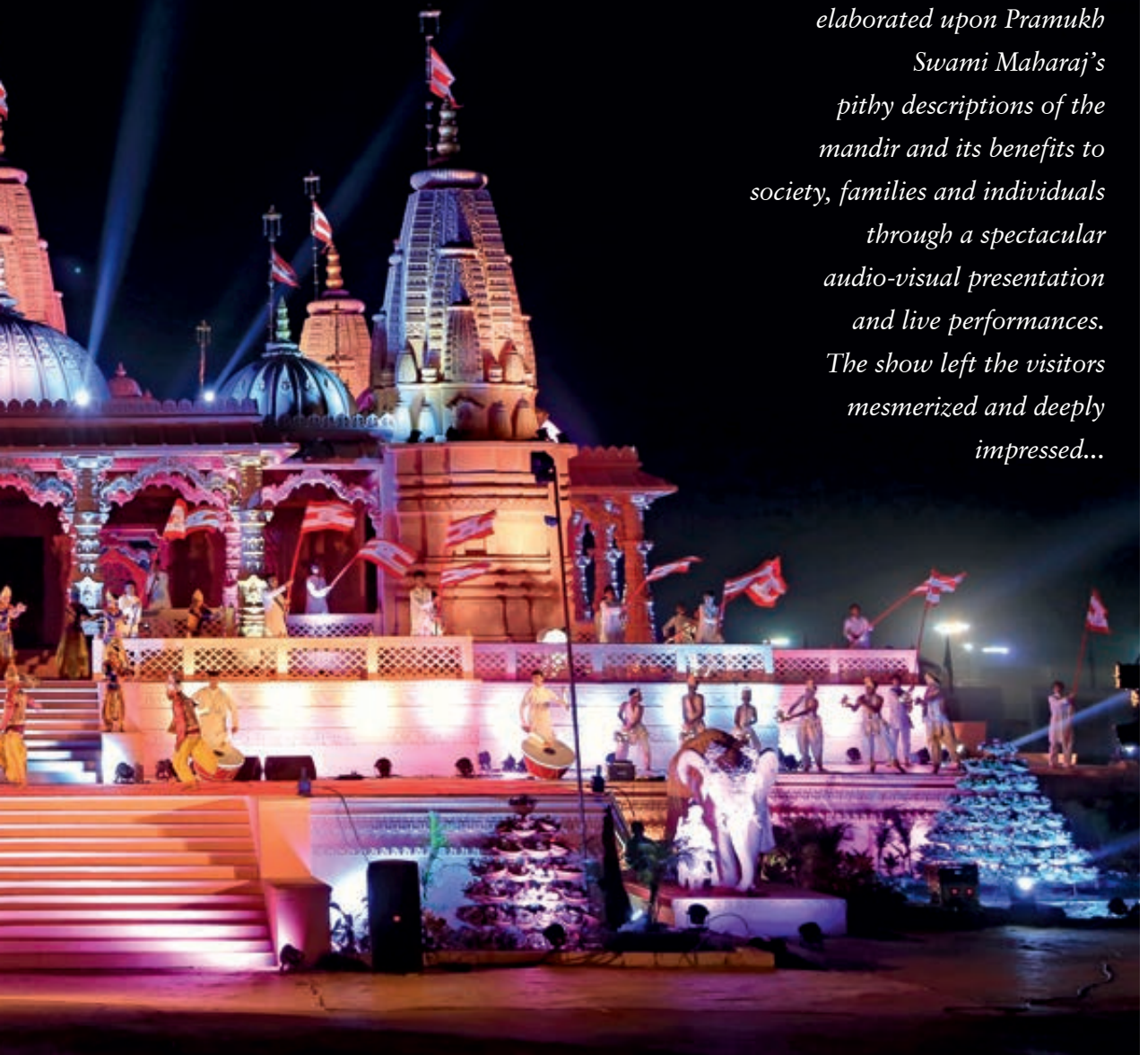
Blood donation camp on the festival site

SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

Enthralling Mandir Light and Sound Show



The cynosure of all eyes at the Swaminarayan Nagar in Surat was the Swaminarayan Mandir and its light and sound show. Every evening, the 150-ft long and wide and 60-ft high mandir transformed into a colourful and pulsating spectacle. The show exquisitely elaborated upon Pramukh Swami Maharaj's pithy descriptions of the mandir and its benefits to society, families and individuals through a spectacular audio-visual presentation and live performances. The show left the visitors mesmerized and deeply impressed...





Devotees and well-wishers at Swaminarayan Nagar

The light and sound show of the mandir portrayed the messages of Pramukh Swami Maharaj: “Mandir is a place of paramount peace. Mandir enables one’s mind to become calm and stable. Mandir redeems one from addictions. Mandir inspires one to live a sublime life. Mandir promotes mutual love. Mandir is an abode of *seva*. Mandir is a custodian of Indian culture. Mandir is a place to attain Paramatma.”

The entire half-hour show presented various aspects of the mandir. The ultimate message that the mandir is a means to attain God was based on the principle that the mandir itself is believed to be a form of God. This means that the various parts of a mandir are related to the corresponding parts of God’s divine human form. Worship and prayer at the mandir connect us with God.

The light and sound show was arranged two to three times each day for the avid crowds. ◆



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir constructed on site



Birthday Celebration Programmes and Assemblies



INAUGURAL EVENING ASSEMBLY

The open air assembly venue, Narayan Mandapam, behind the mandir, hosted various daily evening cultural programmes and assemblies at Swaminarayan Nagar. More than 20,000 people comfortably sat and savoured the evening programmes.

The first evening assembly was held on the inauguration day in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and invited guests. The guests honoured on the main stage were Nanubhai Vanani (Minister of Education and Irrigation), Shri Mansukhbhai Mandaviya (Cabinet Minister), Shri Pravinbhai Chaudhari (Principal Engineer, RMD) and Shri Nitinbhai Bhajiyawala (President of BJP, Surat). At the onset, Adarshjivan Swami spoke about the various attractions of Swaminarayan

Nagar. He also succinctly described the themes of each of the eight exhibition halls. A small stage presentation about each exhibition followed after every description. Thereafter, the state Minister of Education and Irrigation, Shri Nanubhai Vanani said, "Today, we find that an individual has segregated himself from his family, society has separated itself from its country and the country has divorced itself from humanitarianism. The answers to link all of them with each other is found here in Swaminarayan Nagar. The blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj connects the individual with his family, the family with society, society with the country and country with humanitarianism."

Central Minister Shri Mansukhbhai Mandaviya spoke glowingly of Pramukh Swami



A grand procession of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Surat during the cultural programme — Suryapur Katha Mangal

Maharaj's works. He said, "Swamishri built over 1,000 mandirs. Through mandirs he informed the world about Hindu culture, brought Hindu society together and awakened spirituality in Hindus." Thereafter, Pujya Dr Swami addressed the assembly. Then a tribute dance was performed by children and youths. In conclusion, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly.

SURYAPUR KATHA MANGAL

Another name for Surat is Suryapur. On the evenings of 28 and 29 November the saga of how the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and BAPS was born and fostered in Surat over a period of 218 years was beautifully presented through a performance of dramas and traditional dances in the open air Narayan Mandapam. On the first day the mahant of Surat BAPS Mandir, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami, and on the second day Kothari Uttamprakash Swami addressed the evening assemblies. Thereafter, dignitaries of Surat and farmers who had permitted the use of their 400 acre site were felicitated by Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj. Then the saga of Suryapur was presented before a packed

audience. The salient features of the performance included:

- A grand procession of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on his arrival to Surat at the invitation of Ardeshar Kotwal.
- Incident of Gunatitanand Swami begging for alms in the streets of Surat while observing self-restraint.
- Incident of Bhagatji Maharaj when he informed Sadhu Yagnapurushdas (Shastriji Maharaj) about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman.
- The occasions when Shastriji Maharaj discoursed during a *parayan* in Surat with 22-year-old Shastri Narayanswarupdas and also blessed many with *samadhi*.
- Incidents of Yogiji Maharaj fostering satsang in Surat.
- Incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurating a *hari* mandir in the suburb of Nanavat in 1975 and later a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Adajan in 1996.
- Video shots of how the BAPS Mandir served society in times of calamity and need.
- In conclusion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's video blessings and occasions of his visits



Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj during the *yagna* ritual



Devotees engaged in the *yagna* rituals

to Surat mandir were displayed on large LED screens.

For two evenings the stupendous performance of the story of satsang in Surat by a troupe of over 300 children, youths and devotees earned them the ovation of the audience. The contributors to the script and production of Suryapur Katha Mangal were Shri Jayendrabhai Vinchhi, Shri Harikrishnabhai Shastri and Sadhu Harivandandas.

SANT SARVANI

On 30 November devotees who had served towards the development of Satsang in Surat from the time of Shastriji Maharaj were felicitated in the evening assembly. Thereafter, a discourse by Brahnavihari Swami revealed the unique bond between Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In conclusion, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami blessed the assembly.

THREE DAY MAHA-YAGNA

From 1 to 3 December a three-day *yagna* and *bhumi puja* ritual was held on the grounds of Pramukh Vatika in the village of Karamla, 12 kilometres from the festival ground. For three days Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived early

morning to participate in the initial *yagna* rituals. On the first day he also performed the *bhumi puja* rituals. After his blessings the *yajmans* got the opportunity of his *samip* darshan. In all, 24,680 devotees performed the *yagna* rituals at 539 *yagna kunds*. It was probably the largest *yagna* in the history of Surat.

WOMEN'S CONVENTION

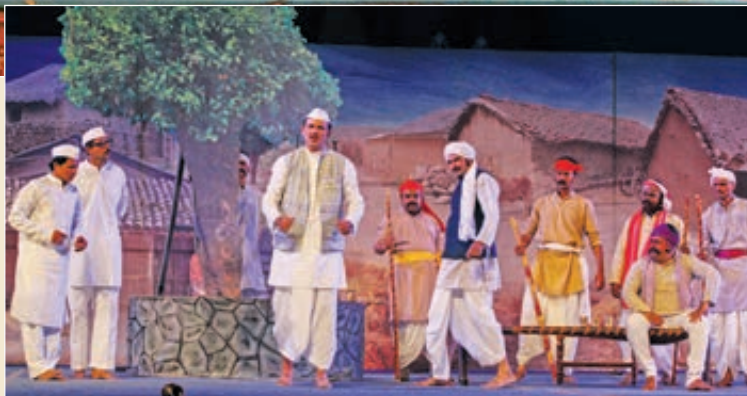
On 1 December a women's programme was held on the festival grounds from 8.30 p.m. at the Narayan Mandapam. The programme was presided over by the Mayor of Surat Smt. Asmitaben Shiroya and the MLA of Limbayat Suburb Sangitaben Patil. The stage programme was themed on reminiscences of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, which was presented through devotional dances, inspiring skits, video testimonials and speeches. The women volunteers had also offered their immense services during the 11-day celebrations.

KIRTAN ARADHANA

On the evening of 2 December BAPS sadhus presented a wonderful kirtan-bhakti concert. Pujya Viveksagar Swami discoursed on the seven notes of music and sung the glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life and work.



Scenes from the presentation of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life: (Above) Saptarshi rishis reveal the glory of a true Sant with reference to Hindu scriptures and (R) an incident about a person's transformation



SAGA OF PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

On the evenings of 3 and 4 December the Lieutenant Governor of Div-Daman Shri Prafulbhai Patel and Education Minister Shri Bhupendrasinhji Chudasama addressed the assemblies respectively. Thereafter, a drama-cum-ballet on the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 'Gatha Gunatit Santni', was presented on the Narayan Mandapam stage by 350 children and youths.

The entire cultural programme included enthralling dances, dramas and videos. The content of the presentation was as follows:

- The virtues of an ideal sadhu from the Shrimad Bhagvat, Ramayan and Bhagavad Gita were presented through dialogues and dramas.
- The array of virtues and works of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were presented through

dramas, videos and dances.

- Birth, guru bhakti and *seva* of Shantilal and Pramukh Swami Maharaj were presented through skits.
- Transformations of people by Swamishri through dramas.
- Impressions of Swamishri by dignitaries through videos.
- Video of Swamishri's last rites.
- Pramukh Swami Maharaj gifted Satsang with Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj as his successor.
- Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed and addressed the assembly.

DIKSHA DAY

On the evening of 5 December Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj gave *bhagwati diksha* to 44 *parshads* for the first time after becoming the guru.



(L) Giving the guru mantra. (A) Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj with the newly initiated sadhus

The *diksha* rituals took place on the main stage of Narayan Mandapam. More than 20,000 devotees and well-wishers had assembled to witness this auspicious ceremony. The 44 youths had received the *parshad diksha* seven months before at the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur. The parents and relatives of the *parshads* were seated at the front of the assembly.

After the preliminary *mahapuja* rituals Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and Dr Swami addressed the assembly. At 8.40 p.m. Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived on the stage. Thereafter, farmers who had permitted their land to be used for the festival were felicitated and blessed by Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj (Swamishri). Thereafter, Swamishri garlanded Kothari Swami and the sadhus who accompanied

him during his satsang tour abroad. Then the *diksha* rituals commenced. Ishwarcharan Swami placed a *kanthi* around the neck of each youth, Tyagvallabh Swami wrapped a saffron *gatariyu*, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami placed a *pagh* and Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj gave the guru mantra. The new name of each sadhu was declared by Narayanmuni Swami. Subsequently, each sadhu received a rose from Dr Swami. The parents of all the newly initiated sadhus were also garlanded and honoured.

In conclusion, Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “Today is a day of great joy. All the newly initiated sadhus said common prayers. They asked for *nirdosh buddhi* and to abide by *niyams* till their last breath. We have to abide by the wishes of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. They have done so much for us that whatever we do will not be enough to repay our debts to them. Kudos to the parents who have given their sons. Yogiji Maharaj used to say that whoever gives me one son to become a sadhu he has given me a sum equal to one crore rupees.

“Have faith in God and his Sadhu. We have taken countless births and nothing has been left



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Adajan, Surat



Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj performs *abhishek* during the *patotsav* rituals

to do except the realization of *ekantik* dharma. To become *ekantik* we have to cultivate humility (*dasbhav*) and divinity (*divyabhav*) towards all.” Thereafter, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj was honoured with garlands. In conclusion, the newly initiated sadhus celebrated on stage while the bhajan ‘*Hālo juvāndā Harivar varvāno helo palyo...*’ was sung.

20th PATOTSAV OF BAPS MANDIR, SURAT

On 6 December 2016 the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Surat, completed 20 years since its consecration by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1996. To celebrate this occasion a *maha-abhishek* ritual of the *murtis* in the mandir shrines was held in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior sadhus. The ritual commenced at 7.00 a.m. with the chanting of Vedic mantras. Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior sadhus performed the *pujan* of the *murtis*. Devotees seated beneath the mandir dome also participated in the rituals. Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior sadhus bathed the *murtis* with holy water containing 20 herbs. Thereafter, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj performed his morning puja in the mandir hall. Finally, he returned to the



Devotees perform the *patotsav arti*

mandir sanctum to perform the *patotsav arti* and have darshan of the *annakut*. Prior to his arrival, Viveksagar Swami talked about the efforts made in building the mandir. Finally, Swamishri blessed all the participants. Then Swamishri inaugurated a new BAPS school, Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, on the mandir premises. ♦



Birthday Celebration Assembly

7 December 2016, Surat



Mahant Swami Maharaj, *sadguru* sadhus and guests on the main stage

Today was indeed a very auspicious day. It was special in many subtle ways also. For, the constellation arrangement today, in 2016 (VS 2073), was an exact replica of the arrangement 95 years previously on the day Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born in 1921 (VS 1978): the *tithi* was Magshar *sud* 8 – a Wednesday, the moon was in the *kumbh rashi*, the sun was in the *shattara nakshatra*, it was the *vajra* yoga,

dhanur lagna and *vishti karan*. And, of course, the date was 7 December.

Such an auspicious coincidence! As per the Panchang system, it is regarded as the best combination.

Swamishri's birthday celebration venue was a vast open assembly arena prepared within the 400-acre Swaminarayan Nagar on Dandi Road in Surat.

At the front of this giant open arena was a 130-ft long, 95-ft wide and 40-ft deep main stage, in front of which was a slightly smaller performance stage. In the beautifully embellished backdrop were enshrined the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the centre, and the *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj on the sides.

At the centre of the stage was Mahant Swami Maharaj's seat, with *sadguru* sadhus and guests seated on both sides.

The central theme of the celebration assembly was Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divinity (*divyata*) and grandeur (*bhavyata*).

Following *dhun* and *pratharna*, youths presented a traditional dance to the lyrics, '*Shat shat varas sare guru jivan jyot jale...*', in tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, during his 49 years on earth, contributed much divinity and grandeur to the spiritual landscape of Gujarat through his life of discipline, devotion and service: he built six majestic mandirs, initiated 3,000 sadhus, inspired two million devotees, conveyed profound spiritual truths in a lucid language, had scriptures written and was lauded by the ruling British for his contributions to the moral and spiritual uplift of society.

In similar fashion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj also left a lasting impression of divinity and grandeur through his life and work based on the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Throughout the world, people sing the praises of Pramukh Swami



Sadhus and youths sing *dhun* and bhajans at the start of the birthday celebration assembly

Maharaj, because for seven decades he reached out to and connected with everyone, regardless of their social strata.

Grandeur captures one's attention, but it is divinity that changes one's intentions. Every work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj left people spell-bound, and at the same time purified and enlightened them; since, the works of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were grand and suffused with divinity.

The grandeur of any work is dependent on intelligence, while its divinity is determined by devotion.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was an expert organizer, but was totally spiritual – this is the secret behind the confluence of grandeur and divinity that characterize his works.

While grandeur pleases the eyes, divinity pierces the heart. Today's celebration was a devotional tribute to the unique union of grandeur and divinity that permeated his every work.

The next presentation reflected this fusion

of grandeur and divinity with a dance by children and youths to the lyrics, '*Najarthi nirakhtā bhavyatā bhavyatā, hradaythi anubhavitā divyatā divyatā....*'

The eyes see the physical grandeur, while the heart is touched by the underling divinity of Swamishri's works. This is exemplified by the majestic Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. A video depicting its architectural grandeur and its divine impact on visitors was shown.

Thereafter, Anandswarup Swami spoke, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj was totally divine. We have just seen the grandeur and divinity of the Akshardham he created. The motive behind its creation was not to impress or eclipse others, but to liberate people, for peace, to impart life values and add divinity to life.

"Replying to a question from a spiritual leader who was impressed by Akshardham, Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, 'What we have done is not in response to others. But we build mandirs



Youths perform an energetic dance to the lyrics, '*Najarthi nirakhtā bhavyatā bhavyatā, hradaythi anubhavitādivyatā divyatā...*'

for people's liberation.' Swamishri gave a very straightforward meaning of liberation: that one experiences peace and joy during life, and attains Akshardham after death. Up to now, millions of people have visited Akshardham and experienced peace.

"Dr Subramanian, who performed Swamishri's bypass surgery, was moved by his darshan of Akshardham and said, 'When I entered Akshardham there was nothing but God and peace in my mind.' Then, he asked, 'Swamiji, what is your next project?' Instantly, Swamishri replied, 'To engage in satsang and devotion, and encourage others to do so as well. That peace prevails throughout the world and devotion increases. They are our permanent projects. Together with this mandirs are built.'

The magnitude of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *vicharan* (travels), letter-writing and *padhramanis* (home visits) was also beyond comprehension. A video depicted these incredible efforts by

Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Then Viveksagar Swami highlighted the underlying divinity, "Swamishri's hardship-laden *vicharan* had only one objective: to instill *ekantik dharma* – dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti – in all, make everyone *brahmarup* and attach them to Parabrahman.

"Once, he travelled in the tribal regions for one month. During this time, the tribal devotees donated ₹150. Then, Swamishri went to Surat to raise funds for the bicentenary celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. In one hour, devotees pledged ₹700,000. So, someone commented, 'Swami, you tolerated difficulties for one month, but if you had come here it would have been more fruitful!' Swamishri replied, 'I am not travelling for money, but to impart *sanskars*. Wherever we went, the life of the tribals became more pious. Now they will never indulge in alcohol or other addictions. They will not eat meat and will offer devotion to God. For me, such changes are more



Over 150,000 devotees attended the birthday celebration assembly

valuable than even billions of rupees.’

“Swamishri had unconditional affection for all devotees. And amid all this hectic activity, he never forgot to offer his devotion to God. He maintained his routine of darshan, *arti*, *chesta* and discourses.

“Dr Kalam regarded him as an ideal guru. Bill Clinton saw integrity in his eyes. Dr Verghese Kurien experienced his absolute humility. Through his *vicharan*, devotees witnessed Swamishri’s supreme saintliness. Through his relentless *vicharan*, Swamishri imparted to countless the wisdom to attain the highest spiritual state. Thus, people saw divinity in Swamishri.”

Even in his works for the benefit of society, everything he did was grand and divine. For example, the relief and rehabilitation work in the aftermath of the Gujarat earthquake on 26 January 2001. A video was shown summarizing the wide spectrum of relief work inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Reflecting on his firsthand experience of the grand and divine earthquake relief efforts, Brahmavihari Swami said, “We can directly see the grand mandirs, celebrations and services inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. But his underlying sentiments were not directly perceivable. Swamishri’s works were huge like the Himalayas, but all his works incorporated spirituality and divinity. To serve was natural for Swamishri. Even before anybody asked, his compassion would flow.

“After the earthquake, when Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel phoned, Swamishri said, ‘Saheb, we have already started kitchens in our mandirs to feed the affected.’

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s compassion naturally flowed out from within. He would take care to provide the smallest of things like nail cutters, combs, slippers and toothbrushes.

“He would phone every day at 10.30 p.m. to hear the day’s report and give guidance. Then,



Chief Minister Shri Vijaybhai Rupani addresses the assembly

as we had to go with the army to the villages for relief work, we told him that we may not be able to receive his daily call. So, he readjusted his timing and phoned after 11.30 p.m.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj never discriminated, had no expectations and treated everyone with equal affection.”

Even today, as Swamishri’s birthday celebration was in progress, the public dedication of a school rebuilt by BAPS for 1,200 underprivileged children in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, took place. Such is the reach of Swamishri’s social works.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was an able and expert leader, yet he was also an active and humble servant. His words always imparted divinity. Next, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s video blessings were relayed.

Present in the celebration assembly were the Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijay Rupani and National President of the Bharatiya Janta Party Shri Amitbhai Shah. *Sadguru* sadhus honoured

them on stage.

Then Shri Vijaybhai Rupani said, “The videos we have just seen show the discipline of the devotees. And at the root of this are the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

“For the past four decades, Pramukh Swami Maharaj served Gujarat wholeheartedly.

“Swami Bapa initiated so many sadhus. A person renounces only when he has trust in the life, thoughts and actions of a person. Swami Bapa was trusted in that way.”

Then, the Chief Minister declared that the outdoor stadium under construction in Surat will be named ‘Pramukh Swami Stadium’ in honour of Swamishri.

Thereafter, Shri Amitbhai Shah spoke, “Since my childhood I have seen Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s work. I have not seen any sadhu or sannyasi with such a wide spectrum of abilities anywhere in the world. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the best example of what one person with a



Inauguration of commemorative stamps in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Inset: First Day Cover)



resolve to serve can achieve.

“His novel idea of family assemblies has revived the values of mutual affection and respect for elders. He revived the institution of sadhus. Not only the followers of BAPS, or the followers of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, or the followers of Vaishnav *sampradayas*, but all followers of

Sanatan Dharma will forever be indebted to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

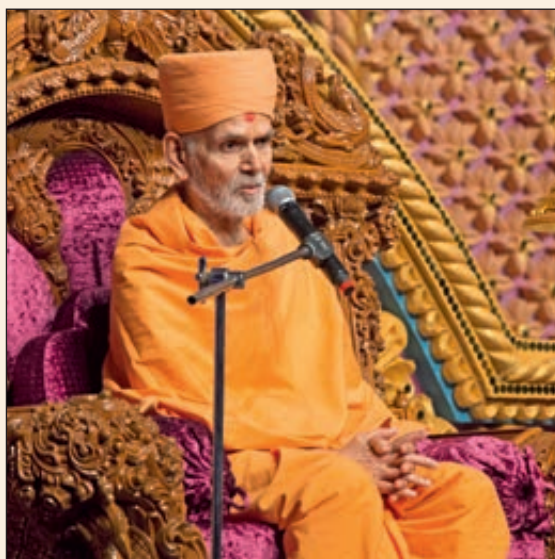
In honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Post Office of India released two commemorative stamps – one featuring a portrait of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the other an image of Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi.

The Chief Postmaster of India, Shri Brij Bihari Dave presented the new stamps to Mahant Swami Maharaj for inauguration.

Then the children and youths presented another traditional dance to the lyrics, “*Najarthi nirakhtā bhavyatā bhavyatā, Hridaythi anubhavatā divyatā divyatā.*”

Of all the gifts Pramukh Swami Maharaj has bestowed on us all, the most valuable is that of appointing Mahant Swami Maharaj as his successor.

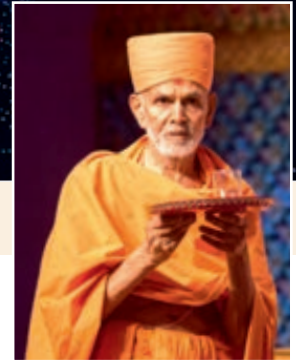
For over four decades, Pujya Doctor Swami had a close association with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He revealed, “The special attribute of



Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj blesses the assembly



Samuh arti at the conclusion of the assembly
(Inset: Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj performs *arti*)



Pramukh Swami Maharaj was that he had a pure heart. Everything is achieved by the strength of God. No matter how much intelligence or strength man uses, his achievements are like a drop in the ocean compared to the strength and achievements of God. By associating with God, great works can be accomplished. This is what Pramukh Swami Maharaj had done. We, too, have to purify our hearts in the same way. Pramukh Swami Maharaj lived and worked with total humility. In the same way Mahant Swami Maharaj has continued this work. And so, Pramukh Swami Maharaj is still manifest today.”

Subsequently, everyone offered *mantra-push-panjali* and Mahant Swami Maharaj, on behalf of the entire BAPS family, garlanded the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Then, the *sadguru* sadhus and guests honoured Mahant Swami Maharaj with garlands.

Today, the BAPS also released the ‘BAPS Nirnay’ – a calendar app for android and iPhone.

Then, blessing the celebration assembly, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “The Swaminarayan

Nagar was created by the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Seeing the mandir and exhibitions many have introspected and learnt values. This is all grand and divine. Such is Swami Bapa’s work. His divine qualities are beyond description. They are the qualities of God.

“Swami Bapa had studied only up to Standard 6, but he achieved so much. The reason – his pure heart. All his virtues were innate and that was why he impacted the whole world. Shastriji Maharaj said, ‘My work shall continue...’ and it will truly continue.”

Finally, at the conclusion of the celebration assembly, all the 150,000 devotees present participated in the *samuh arti*. ♦

Volunteer Service and Community Support



A festival of this magnitude is possible only by the devoted service of dedicated volunteers and the wholehearted support of well-wishers.

The resident sadhus and devotees of Surat were united and focused in their efforts to make the necessary arrangements for the celebrations.

But most of all, it was the blessings of Shriji Maharaj and the guru *parampara* that resulted in such a memorable event.

Divine intervention was evident from the start. During the search for a suitable site, the sadhus went to Dandi Road. There, they met Rameshbhai, one of 80 landowners in the area. He had never met BAPS sadhus before, but when he learnt that the sadhus were searching for a site to celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthday, he instantly took the responsibility to approach all the landowners and acquire their approval for

temporary use of their land. Within a short time, Rameshbhai played a major role in securing the support of 80 landowners, permitting the use of 400 acres for the 11-day celebrations.

The first task was to level the land, following which the mandir, the grand *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, exhibition halls, *sabha* areas, kitchen and dining areas, offices, accommodation tents and other infrastructure and facilities were set up.

The 400-acre area was, in effect, to be converted into a mini-township. So, electricity and water were a necessity. Power was supplied by the Gujarat Electricity Board and backed-up by 41 generators.

Traders, suppliers and manufacturers from Surat and throughout Gujarat provided cables and lights of various types on use and return basis.

Plumbing suppliers and traders donated pipes,



Sadhus and volunteers construct the mandir



plumbing accessories and other necessary items. Farmers and builders provided vehicles and equipments to level the land.

Nails, plastic bags, paint, blankets, washing powder, matches, disposable plastic and paper items, stationary, cleaning materials, other consumables and virtually everything else that was used was generously provided by traders, suppliers and manufacturers.

The vegetables, grains, oil, spices, milk, ghee, other rations and gas for cooking were also, in large part, donated by well-wishers.

The betel nuts, coconuts, ghee and other items for the *yagna* were also donated by well-wishers.

The enthusiasm to serve among the volunteers was such that many took unpaid leave and some even left their jobs when refused leave by their bosses.

Initially, as the ground was being prepared for construction, volunteers were undeterred by the heavy unseasonal rains that waterlogged the soil. For the first two months up to 3,000 volunteers came daily to serve. These included professionals and leading businessmen.

From the beginning of November, 6,000 women volunteers daily served in the various departments: kitchen, parking, security, landscaping, construction and wherever else required. They helped in extracting water from the waterlogged land, levelling the land, painting, cutting

wooden posts to the required size, preparing the *yagna kunds*, decoration, laying and fastening nets on the ground, accommodation and many other ways.

In addition to the strenuous physical service, many observed fasts and other dietary restrictions such as, eating only once daily or not eating sweets or other favourite items.

Volunteers were also alert to avoiding unnecessary waste, by reusing things wherever possible. For example, 70% of the coloured paper pieces showered during the mandir light and sound show were collected and reused.

After the celebrations, the majority of the nails used to fasten the netting were collected. Other items which had been provided by well-wishers were carefully collected and returned to their owners.

The volunteers served day and night, without concern for their own meals or rest.

During their voluntary *seva*, some volunteers suffered injuries – such as fractures, cuts and bruises – and some fell ill. Yet, their enthusiasm to serve was such that, after receiving treatment, they discounted pain and discomfort to continue offering their service.

The discipline, dedication and integrity with which the volunteers served touched everyone who visited.



Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Spiritual leader who built the world's largest Hindu temple outside India in Neasden and admired the British habit of queueing

Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Spiritual leader who built the world's largest Hindu temple outside India in Neasden and admired the British habit of queueing



The guru had one million disciples

Pramukh Swami Maharaj shot to international attention in the 1990s when he built the largest Hindu temple outside India — in the unassuming northwest London suburb of Neasden.

Under his guidance, Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), which had started as a small religious sect in Gujarat, a corner of western India, came to have more than 900 sadhus (holy men), 1,000 weekly assemblies. As the fifth spiritual leader, Pramukh Swami Maharaj could claim one million disciples around the world.

His followers — once described as “Methodists of Hinduism, practical, puritanical, evangelical” — believe that their founder, Swaminarayan, a 19th-century wandering guru, was an incarnation of God. Swaminarayan formalised the sect in 1907. Devotees practise social service and live by five vows of: “No alcohol, no addictions, no adultery, no meat, no impurity of body and mind.”

As a sadhu, Pramukh (meaning president) Swami Maharaj was also celibate. Dressed in a neatly bound turban and distinctive orange robes, he caused a stir when he flew to London

the Shri Swaminarayan Temple was laid in August 1992 with the longest concrete pour in Britain — 4,500 tonnes in 24 hours. It eventually cost £12 million, but had no structural steel frame because, as one devotee explained, “the metal would give off electromagnetic waves which would interfere with our patterns of meditation.”

A jobless Swaminarayan who lived in London while the temple was being built, Maharaj admired the British habit of queueing as an example of discipline. Women were allowed out of sight when he passed through the temple, surrounded by 22 orange-robed disciples. “My religious code means absolute celibacy in thought and deed,” he explained. He flew in his own car, but declined to land at Heathrow.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born in the village of Chansad, in Gujarat, in 1921, the youngest of ten children. His childhood name was Shantilal Patel. His parents, Motibhai and Diwaliben Patel, were devotees of Shastriji Maharaj, the founder of BAPS, regarded as the third spiritual successor of Swaminarayan. The guru apparently told his father: “This child is ours.” He will lead thousands to the devotion of God,” Pramukh Swami Maharaj attended school for a few years, and worked on his parents’ farm, where he was praised

for his calm but energetic nature. In the evenings he would race down the village to listen to the stories told by holy men, often riding on his secondhand Hercules bicycle.

At the age of 12 he became a sadhu, and in his 20s was appointed secretary to the fourth spiritual successor to the Shri Swaminarayan Temple, who was regarded as the founder of the BAPS organisation. At the age of 28, he retired, young. However, aged 28, he retired, young. However, aged 28, he retired, young. However, aged 28, he retired, young.

On the night of the ceremony for his appointment he was found in the kitchen, washing cooking utensils and dishes. He travelled the world to establish temples, meeting politicians such as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair and religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Pope John Paul II, and the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie.

His followers found him easy to talk to. Often he would gently gaze them about their daily lives. One, who met the guru when he had dropped a couple of hours in the school, recalled being told: “This child is ours.” He will lead thousands to the devotion of God,” Pramukh Swami Maharaj attended school for a few years, and worked on his parents’ farm, where he was praised

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from India in 1990 to consecrate the site — a scruffy used-car garage — which had been found for the new temple. He took a helicopter from Battersea to scatter rose petals and then rode through the streets on an elephant, named Maureen, followed by hundreds of supporters.

Excerpt from the London daily, ‘The Times’: Monday, 7 November 2016, page 52 (print edition).

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The idea for the temple was first suggested by his predecessor, Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth leader, in 1970, when the Indian community in Britain had begun to grow rapidly. Until then, devotees practised in an office in Baker Street and later a converted church in Islington. On Yogiji Maharaj’s death in 1971, Pramukh Swami Maharaj vowed to realise his vision. The foundation for the Shri Swaminarayan Temple was laid in August 1992 with the largest concrete pour in Britain — 4,500 tonnes in 24 hours. It eventually cost £12 million, but had no structural steel frame because, as one devotee explained, “the metal would give off electromagnetic waves which would interfere with our patterns of meditation.”

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He travelled the world to establish temples, meeting politicians such as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair and religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Pope John Paul II, and the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie. His followers found him easy to talk to, an attentive listener and empathetic.

Intensely meticulous, the guru urged followers to learn from the strengths of other faiths.

The guru was equally tireless in addressing the

concerns of his devotees, penning handwritten letters late into the night. He lived austere by a strict vegetarian code, which also banned onions and garlic, and kept no money on his person.

In 2007 he entered the *Guinness World Records* for having built and consecrated the world's largest number of Hindu temples – 713 – including the world's largest in New Delhi. When his disciples presented him with a list naming each temple he had built, he remarked: "Those that build temples don't keep a list."

After his death, his body was displayed in a refrigerated cabin for his followers.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, religious leader, was born on December 7, 1921. He died on August 13, 2016, aged 94

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(Contd. from pg. 7)

In reply they said they wished to meet Maharaj. On arriving they all touched Maharaj's feet and sat afar. Maharaj called them, "Come and sit near. I wish to offer you all a feast. Tell me what would you like to eat – *sata*, *jalebi*, *magas*, *mohanthal*, *bundi* or *mesur*?"

The shepherds started looking at each other and said, "We will not be satiated with such dry food. However, if you really wish to dine us according to our family tradition, then make *shelan* for us. It will satiate our hunger and make us happy."

GIVE THEM SHELAN

Shri Hari did not know what *shelan* really was. So he looked at the leading workers. The latter chuckled on perceiving Maharaj's bewilderment. They explained, "Maharaj, *shelan* comprises of soft gur (of the Nagher region), boiled rice and ghee. It is the best meal in this region."

Shri Hari was pleased and told his sadhus, "Did you hear that? What we consider the best food, these locals believed it to be dry and insipid. So for them *shelan* is the best food. Now, we too will get the opportunity to eat it."

Shri Hari told all the leading workers of Jhinabhai, "Make an announcement in the village this evening that a feast of *shelan* will be prepared for all tomorrow. Everyone is invited

by Jhinabhai Darbar. All shall come to dine and no one will be left out."

The declaration for the feast was made in the evening in the whole of Panchala.

The next day, Shri Hari himself came to serve ghee to the shepherds for lunch. The sadhus first served boiled rice and gur and Maharaj followed by serving ghee continuously from one plate to the next. Maharaj repeatedly and generously served ghee to the rows of sitting shepherds. Everyone was immensely pleased. They were happy because they were served their favourite food and God himself had come to serve them.

Then the leading shepherd came before Maharaj and humbly expressed, "Maharaj, we have eaten *shelan* during our community gatherings, but never have we ever eaten such type of *shelan* before."

Then a leading worker commented, "How could you have ever had it before? Because what was provided to you at Maharaj's behest was made of the best quality rice, premium quality gur and ghee extracted from the milk of Jhinabhai's finest milch buffaloes. And to top it all, Maharaj himself served ghee. Tell me how would you have ever got such a great combination?" ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave



Video and Shraddhanjali Sabha Tributes

In the earlier memorial and shraddhanjali sabha issues of Swaminarayan Bliss (September-October and November-December 2016), excerpts of tributes to Pramukh Swami Maharaj offered by many mahatmas and dignitaries were included. In this issue, some fully translated versions of tributes by mahatmas and dignitaries are included.



A WORLD GURU

**Pujya Shri Mahamandaleshw ar Swami Satymitranand Giriji Maharaj,
Former Shankaracharya, Haridwar**

I had the great privilege of meeting Pramukh Swami Maharaj on many occasions. I live on the banks of Mother Ganga. I believe the Ganga to be my mother. But, I am afraid of her waves. But, for the whole world, another Ganga of affection had manifest in the form of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Nobody ever left from his presence disappointed.

I am such a fortunate sadhu that Pramukh Swamiji – one who is remembered by all – remembered me. Among thousands of people, I was blessed that his gaze fell on me.

While the Bharat Mata Mandir was being built, whenever I expressed my worries to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he would bless me, “Do not worry. Bharat Mata Mandir will definitely be built.” Truly, my success is due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the sadhus who have constantly given me strength.

Without him having the post of Jagadguru Shankaracharya, I had the darshan of a Jagadguru (world guru) in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He was the manifest form of God. He possessed all the virtues of God described in the shastras.

In the difficult moments of our lives when we remember him, we experience him standing next to us, just like light entering all homes when the sun rises. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was like an eternal sun. By merely remembering him, his [divine] rays fall on us and remove all our difficulties.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was always laughing. He was never sad. Because, he was manifest Brahman. By offering this tribute to him, my sadhana and devotion will progress.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was like the Malayachal [Forest]. In the sandalwood forest of Malayachal, neem, *baual* and other trees also grow. However, by having spent many years in the proximity of sandalwood trees they also become fragrant like sandalwood. Often, their wood is also sold as sandalwood. Likewise, by associating with Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj even ordinary people become extraordinary.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had such Himalayan spirituality, but without the harshness. He bathed everyone in the streams of righteousness, devotion and affection. After Buddha, Mahavir and Adi Shankaracharya, Pramukh Swami Maharaj received the most reverence, worldwide.

That is why I believe that he is a Yugpurush, Yugavatar and the best saint in the world.

I have reverence for him on par with Adi Shankaracharya. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 9 September 2016, New Delhi)



A CONFLUENCE OF GRANDEUR AND DIVINITY

Pujya Swami Shri Chidanandji Maharaj, Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a saint like an ocean, who lived not for himself but for others. He embraced the whole world. Such a saint never leaves us. He remains forever present amidst us through his ideas, divine actions, teachings and commands.

All, from President Kalam to ordinary coolies, from the Prime Minister to local councillors, were touched by him. And their prayers reflect the faith they had in this great saint. He was a ‘borderless world’ living among us. In his presence, there were no restrictions and no discrimination.

Now we realize that such a divine, ideal personality came onto this earth and had recently departed. He manifested on this earth, lived like an ordinary person but was extraordinary. He was a confluence of grandeur and divinity.

His openness of heart was such that he taught everyone to live according to their dharma.

A sign at Mumbai airport read, “At Heart, Indian; In Spirit, Global.” Pramukh Swami Maharaj had given a similar vision: keep one’s culture, values and tradition at heart, but live globally. He spread this vision to all.

In Gujarati, there is a saying, “Wherever there lives a Gujarati, there is forever Gujarat.” I believe that wherever there was Pramukh Swamiji, there was Hindusthan. He displayed our entire tradition to all.

India is great not because it has the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, increasing material wealth, the Himalayas or the Ganga, but India is great because it had saints like Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who were tall like the Himalayas and pure like Ganga.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the world ambassador of our *sanskriti*. Often, people say that if an *ek-mukhi rudraksh* is found then all accomplishments and success are attained. However, Pramukh Swamiji, who had a multi-faceted personality, did not wear an *ek-mukhi rudraksh*. He was not merely the living form of the Shikshapatri, but he *was* the Shikshapatri. He was such a guru, that whoever touched him would become a *paras*. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 11 September 2016, Mumbai)



RADIANT FACE AND SPLENDID PERSONALITY

Sri Sri Nirmalanandanatha, Head, Adichunchangiri Mahasamsthana Math, Bengaluru

Once, my Pujya Guru Balagangadharanatha went to meet Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj when he had come to Bangalore. We felt so happy to see him personally. At that time I saw him for the first time and I felt my dream come true. Even afterwards I met him several times personally. One memorable moment when we met was during the inauguration of Delhi Akshardham. That was a splendid moment. When Pujya Guruji addressed the audience he referred to Swamiji as next to God. Pujya Swamiji also praised my Guruji’s educational works. Then my Guruji said, anyone can establish educational institutions. These days education is being imparted to students minus culture. However the temples Swamiji had built across the world are not merely ritualistic centres, rather through temples our ancient culture is being embedded and inculcated in the minds of children. It is because of that my Pujya Guruji mentioned that the real work, culture is embedded through the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Because of this my Guruji

had all praises for BAPS and high regards and adoration towards Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Recently, a year ago, I had come here to Sarangpur for Swamiji's darshan. Then I was taken in personally for Swamiji's darshan. He blessed me, touched my head and gave me this *mala*. Since then I have been wearing it. This was a great gesture that Swamiji bestowed upon me. Even today I have been regularly using this *mala*.

His encompassing compassion was a virtue I could see. He had splendid and profound wisdom. He was soft spoken, had a radiant face and a splendid personality.

When I came here (during final darshan) and stood in front of Pujya Swamiji I didn't feel that he had given up his physical abode. I felt as if he is in a deep contemplative state, in *nirvikalp* samadhi. Even after four days his face is radiant and glittering. That effulgence we can see and experience.

He had influenced countless people. He had guided society as a whole, irrespective of their faith. He had instilled that original, untainted, homogenous faith and just by his gesture he was in a condition to make us go deep into our self. (Interview, 16 August 2016, Sarangpur) Edited English version



A CONFLUENCE OF VIRTUES

Pujya Morari Bapu (Renowned exponent of Ramayan)

After Bhagwan Sahajanand Swami's stay on earth there followed a divine tradition of successors. One whose darshan we have all done, Pujya Pramukh Swami Bapa, passed away on 13th.

The confluence of simplicity, straightforwardness and sadhana was travelling on this earth. These three combinations are very rare. When a person achieves such great heights by the grace of guru and God, and even after that he sustains simplicity, straightforwardness and one fails to comprehend his unassuming sadhana – such a confluence I saw in Pujya Bapa whenever I came for his darshan and whenever I met him. He had lots of love and respect for me. That was his greatness and saintliness.

The blessings of Sahajanand Swami and Pujya Bapa are there for the tradition to carry on. I have sometimes had the time to dine with him and to also meet him on stage during a *katha*. Whenever he came to Mahuva I would go for his darshan if I was present.

When such a sadhu has departed I would like to state that he has not departed; he has merged himself in everyone. When an *atma* cannot perish then how could a mahatma die! He does not have the right to die, because he is a mahatma. So with his departure he has pervaded in every grain and particle. I have never known such [magnitude of] respect and reverence offered by hundreds of thousands of people to a departed religious leader of a *sampradaya*. This is proof of his austerity, renunciation and straightforwardness. From this we can learn and attain a lot.

I repeatedly bow to the departed soul of Pramukh Swami Bapa. Pujya Mahant Swami Bapa, *pujya* sadhus and devotees are the universal family of Bapa. My Jai Swaminarayan to all. (17 August 2016, Sarangpur)



FORM OF COMPASSION AND GRACE

Pujya Acharya Shri Vatsa Goswamiji, Dharmacharya, Vrundavan

I remember the special time in the past when Pramukh Swami Maharaj was present and granting divine memories.

One of the forces of cosmic strength in the Indian tradition is the unique entity of Aksharbrahman, whom we recognize in the form of the guru. Pramukh

Swami Maharaj was an Aksharbrahman guru, who was definitely the form of Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the manifest form of compassion and grace for all *jivas*.

I was not able to go to Sarangpur for his final darshan, but my mind was there. But I have reliably heard that even his physical form was as lustrous and supple as before the 13th. Here, there was no difference between the perishable and imperishable. To understand the difference, Pramukh Swami Maharaj is required.

I travel around the world and have seen that the synonym for Indianness is the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. The reason for this is Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Who is the lead *sevak* of this vast Swaminarayan Sampradaya? Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In his heart I have seen that he saw himself only as the lead *sevak*. Who can become Pramukh Swami? In the words of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, only he can become who is more humble than a leaf and more tolerant than a tree. We will forever sing the praises of such a *mahapurush*, since he is forever in our midst. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 9 September 2016, New Delhi)

CALM AND PEACEFUL

Rao Saheb, Swadhyaya Parivar

I had the opportunity of Pujya Swamishri's darshan when he came to a function held by Pandurang Shastriji, my father-in-law, in Allahabad. The second time I had his darshan with Dadaji was in 1985 when there was a big function of yours in London. I got the chance to touch his feet. I felt very much blessed. Pujya Swamiji accomplished great cultural works. He built so many mandirs, which are very necessary for our times.

Dadaji used to mention about Swamiji and Yogiji Maharaj in his speech. I sometimes go for darshan to your mandir in Dadar (Mumbai). Swamiji's calm and peaceful face attracts me very much. Didiji had asked me to bow down on her behalf to Swamiji and seek his blessings. (Interview, August 2016, Sarangpur)



LIVING FORM OF AFFECTION AND COMPASSION

Pujya Shri Rameshbhai Oza, Renowned Exponent of the Shrimad Bhagavatam, Sandipani Ashram

The passing of Pujya Pramukh Swamiji marks the end of a glorious life of renunciation and service.

Under Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj's guidance many mandirs were built in India and abroad. He contributed greatly to spreading Indian culture and the principles of the Sampradaya to every part of the world.

This *mahapurush* directly interacted with ordinary people. Probably, no other spiritual guru has written so many letters to guide aspirants.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the living form of affection and compassion. Whoever met him, even once, would be drawn to him forever by his affection.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj also graced and visited 'Sandipani'.

Throughout the world, wherever Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived at a discourse, his loving presence gave the audience a unique experience.

I will forever remember his affection towards me.

I pay homage to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's saintly life of service, austerity and self-discipline.

His departure is a great loss for Sanatan Dharma. Through his life he has given great lessons and inspiration.



HIS DISARMING HUMILITY

Gurudev Rakeshbhai Jhaveri, Shrimad Rajchandra Mission

Pramukh Swami was a light amidst darkness. An ignited lamp removes darkness for innumerable people. His humility was such that anyone with even the slightest ego would find it subside in his presence and experience feelings of ‘Let my life be like yours’.

I have experienced on seeing him that my life should become like his. I met Swamiji four to five times in Gadhada, Ahmedabad, Mumbai and London. He was like a father, his love was motherly and his speech was sweet. I can say that I can feel him and still I miss him. I miss his smile.

Oh, what wonderful mandirs he had built. I came to Swamiji after visiting the Neasden mandir. The mandir in Neasden was grand, whereas his life was so simple. He didn’t want anything for himself; he offered everything to God. I have received immense inspiration and lots of love from him, and I hope that I’ll keep on getting more. (Interview, 16 August 2016, Sarangpur)



EGOLESS AND SELFLESS

Pujya Shri Vaishnavacharya Goswami 108, Dwarkeshlalji

We were living in the times of the divine personality of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who, through the BAPS, waved the flag of Hindu dharma worldwide.

He spread all the traditions and ideals of Sanatan Hindu dharma everywhere in the world.

Everybody has experiences of Bapa in their heart. By combining all these different experiences, we can see his complete divine personality.

In 2000, during the World Spiritual Summit held at the UN, Pujya Swamiji expressed that the thoughts, principles and practices of Sanatan Dharma and all Hindu gurus should be common.

Bapa wanted such synthesis. He was egoless and selfless. He said, “If faith in God is constantly kept and one continually endeavours without ego and selfishness, then God’s grace is experienced.” The whole world has seen this in the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

On behalf of all Vallabhi traditions of the Vaishnav Sampradaya, I offer heartfelt tributes at his holy feet. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 27 August 2016, Vadodara)



BEYOND ALL SOCIAL BORDERS

Shri Shambhudas Maharaj, Jhanjharka

Ideeply grieve the departure of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. When such a Unique personality is born he comes as a form of God. Such great personalities usher in religious, social and other transformations in India.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had provided immense shade like a sprawling banyan tree in times of adversity to India. He had established hundreds of mandirs, providing entry to the lowest class of people ranked on the fringes of Hindu society. He not only allowed them entry into his mandirs, but allowed them entry into his own heart. I have witnessed this with my own eyes where Pramukh Swamiji had embraced dalits and tribals as if they were his own children, showering his motherly love upon them.

Thirty years ago, I had seen Pramukh Swamiji come with his sadhus to bless Jhanjharka in the

presence of Pujya Baldevdasji Maharaj. Both of them addressed a mammoth assembly to unite the two communities. Subsequently, there followed a new awakening in society. Pramukh Swami gave *diksha* to the downtrodden youths who were socially located on the outskirts of society. I have seen for myself that Swamiji, after giving the sadhu *diksha* to them, engaged them in kitchen *seva* in mandirs. Only when one comes and sees does one realize the profound love that exists here. There are so much inner feelings and love here.

Though Pramukh Swami is no longer with us here physically, his divinity and teachings are with us. I would like to say that we believe through Pramukh Swami Bapa's footprints in Jhanjharka, and the fact that he gave Dalits a place in his own heart, God himself had sanctified our village. And in so doing Pujya Bapa made the Dalit community of India proud. Thus, such a unique personality does not belong to the Swaminarayan Sampradaya alone. In the whole of India, among all its *acharyas* or Hindu traditions, if there is anyone who was the crowning father, it was our Bapa. He gave us the message of integration. His message was of embracing those brothers who are on the outskirts of society. May we take this message and tread the path he had shown. My heartfelt tributes to Pujya Bapa. (Interview, 16 August 2016, Sarangpur)



A MAN OF GOD

Rev. Dr Jose, Bishop of Saurashtra & Kutch

I am Bishop Jose from Rajkot, Gujarat. In Rajkot there is a Swaminarayan Mandir. Pramukh Swami had visited the temple many times and as the Bishop of Saurashtra and Kutch I know what are the feelings of the people [towards him]. After hearing about the sad demise of Pramukh Swami, lakhs of people in Kutch and Saurashtra are very sad because they consider him as a saint and as a man of God. We could experience it because he was always longing to have world peace. He was a person who considered everybody as God's own people; he loved them and served them. You see, he was working for world peace in one way. He met the late Pope John Paul II in Rome, Vatican.

In his preachings he was always aiming for the good of all people. He was, in one way, a person of religion but at the same time he was a man of humanity. He gave guidance as to how people could be served. 'Manav seva ej Prabhu seva' – 'Service to humanity is service to God' – this was his motto, and he was working for the service of people. He had many projects for the people, for the upliftment of the people. So not only in the religious aspect, but in the social aspect also, he was a man who helped lakhs of people through his services.

Today I pay my homage, I express my heartfelt condolences and prayerful wishes. He was the Pramukh Swami for so many years, and he had done hundreds of thousands of things, but never did he show that he was a great man. He was very humble in front of God and in front of people. His simplicity, even though he could have had everything, but he lived as a person who had nothing. That is the greatness which we feel for him. A person of complete humility, a person of complete detachment from worldly things – he wanted nothing and gave love without [wanting] anything. So he gave us a lesson that we should not be concerned about material things only, but we have to look for the heavenly things or we have to think about a life hereafter. This is his message to us.

During interfaith gatherings he used to give the message that we all belong to one God, we all are one humanity, we are to live as brothers and sisters. So this was the message he always conveyed to people. Whatever be the religion, he always respected other religions. That is a thing which we

have to do. I have to also respect other religions, and that is because when anything good comes, it is coming from God, because his spirit is inspiring. So all the good, whether it is in this religion or that religion, should be respected. He was respectful to all and that is the message of interfaith peace he gave to people.

He was a man of God who lived for mankind and showed mankind the way to God. (Interview, 16 August 2016, Sarangpur) Edited English version



MULTI-DIMENSIONAL EFFORTS TO UPLIFT SOCIETY

Shri Amitbhai Shah, National President of BJP

From a young age I have seen Pramukh Swami Maharaj's charisma spread. As a social and political worker, and one inclined to religious faith, it is very difficult for me to evaluate his life and encapsulate his life messages. However, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had done a lot of work, making multi-dimensional efforts to uplift society. However, other than that he never uttered a single word against the deep-rooted weaknesses prevailing in society, but through his actions, the Sanstha's discipline and his sadhus' activities he elevated society. Such an exercise done by BAPS may have been done by another organization like it. Without saying a word he translated the essence of truth from the Vedas, Upanishads and Purans into his actions, and made efforts to keep it in a living form before him. Pramukh Swami Maharaj succeeded in reviving faith towards the *sant sanstha* and the genuine life of sadhus and sannyasis, which through the years had declined.

Swami Bapa spoke little and smiled, and through his virtues of straightforwardness, service, dedication, moral living, leadership, discipline and other qualities made efforts to inspire people to tread the path of righteousness. Presently, the global media give explanations and reports about Bapa's world record in making mandirs and other accomplishments. However, in my view, the greatest work that Bapa had done was deaddicting people, instilling values and character and inspiring the values of Sanatan Dharma in countless people.

Due to my fate I have faced a lot of difficulties. And during all those problems the first person to ring me was Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He would say a few words, "God will do good." And that would give me strength to face them.

On Moksha Ekadashi day my mother passed away at 7:59 a.m. At 8:03 a.m., I got a call from Pramukh Swami Maharaj, "It's Moksha Ekadashi today. You keep your mind calm." I can never forget those words. He had told me on many occasions to keep my mind calm and peaceful. He had said, "By having faith in Shriji things will work out well." His loving words were like a mother placing her hands on a child's shoulders and blessing him. Such words inspire great strength. I have experienced a lot of [divine] energy in my life.

Bapa created a disciplined group of sadhus, thousands of character-building centres, more than 1,000 mandirs – they will all continue to serve Hindu dharma and culture for a long time.

Here, many youths from different fields, after graduating as doctors and engineers, could have lived a luxurious worldly life. But they were inspired by one person to become sadhus. Thus, the soul of the inspirer, in spite of his ordinary educational qualification, must have God residing in him.

Today, Bapa's mortal body will merge with the five elements of nature. I have faith that the messages from his life will greatly inspire the youths and votaries of Sanatan Dharma for a long time.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had given me strength and courage many times. And on many occasions his blessings, either by phone or in person, had provided me with an armour. Every time I met him I always left with amazement and wonder. Such experiences are rare. Today, I pray that Bapa's divine soul keeps on guiding everyone, giving strength to everyone's thoughts, and forever propels the BAPS Sanstha forward.

I believe it is impossible to keep so many people together and yet not allow any conflicts to occur. Other than Bapa's personality such a feat is not possible. There have been many organizations and sadhus who have accomplished such great deeds, but in the end they have collapsed and failed to give inspiration. However, the BAPS, from the time of Shastriji Maharaj to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, has unceasingly progressed on one path and with one aim, without any disputes or controversies. I have full faith that this Sanstha will for decades to come remain united on one path. This is the biggest message from Pramukh Swami's working style. (Interview, 17 August 2016, Sarangpur)



HE SYMBOLIZED CORRECTNESS AND UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

Arun Jaitley, Union Minister of Finance and Supreme Court Advocate

Over the last 15 to 20 years, both in Gujarat and Delhi, I've had the good fortune of meeting him [Pramukh Swami] on several occasions. He was a great listener. He would ask a few questions. He was a man of very few words. And then in short, cryptic messages he would make a very deep point – a point which you would remember indefinitely.

I think his personality was in tune with the kind of institution that he headed. It was the power of his own spirituality, and it was the power of his inspirational personality that the Swaminarayan sect grew and grew and grew. Even beyond those who believe in it, it inspired millions of others. The spirit of sacrificing your life for a larger spiritual and religious cause inspired hundreds of youths across the world to give up their comforts and become a part of this great movement. The messages of correctness and universal brotherhood, love, affection, spirituality, religion, discipline – I think he symbolized them.

Not only being able to inspire the very best talent in society, which he attracted, I think the importance of the Swaminarayan temples and institutions he created is that they have actually become cultural hubs of India's cultural personality. They go much beyond the sect, much beyond religion and are reflective of the cultural identity of this country. They are probably the best ambassadors India has world over.

I think he inculcated restraint. He was always understated and there was nothing boisterous in the environment around him. And yet, he represented an inspirational culture.

I think he had this ability to attract the most talented people – people who were men of letters, people who had a very successful commercial life and a life of comfort. To deflect them in their mid-careers and get them to be a part of this great institution, the kind of creativity which blended India's ancient culture and yet with modernity in technique [is extraordinary].

I think a leader has to be inspirational through his own credibility. Being inspirational and being credible are probably the two essential prerequisites. And I think the fact that he had been able to inspire millions and millions, obviously is the best evidence of that.

His greatest legacy I think [is in having provided] a very stable institution; an institution which was always on its feet for anything good. I recollect having seen it 15 to 16 years ago when there was

a big drought in Gujarat. The first people to reach were the people of the sect. I saw them working during the earthquake, setting up medical institutions and other relief centres. I think it was a very well-oiled machinery which was always ready to work for the society. And in peace time of course, in normal times, you have the great message of your institution. There was nothing impossible for you. The kind of spectacular structures [the BAPS has] created are going to be a permanent mark on India's future history.

I think spirituality, organizational skill and inspirational abilities would sum up [Pramukh Swami Maharaj's personality]. (Interview, 17 August 2016, Sarangpur) Edited English version



A PHENOMENAL PERSON

Suresh Prabhu, Union Minister of Railways

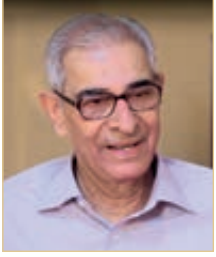
Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a spiritual head of a giant structured organization which inspired millions and millions of people worldwide. He was one of the great persons who could visualize things which even the best of architects could not. So in one way, his heart, his mind inspired people.

I remember having gone to [Robbinsville] New Jersey when the massive structure [mandir] had not even started; there was nothing lying there. Then having come back to India I was once talking to Pramukh Swami, and he told me, "Do you know what is going to happen there?" I said, "No, I cannot even imagine." He said just go there after a few months and then you'll see it. And I visited that place thereafter and what he had seen, what he had visualized, was actually taking shape on the ground. Nobody could even imagine.

The same thing I found in Canada. If you go to that fantastic place [BAPS Mandir] in Toronto, he created something where people can go to and look at how the human civilization has evolved, how the great Indus civilization evolved. So I think this is a testimony to his ability to conceive things and then make it work in such a magnificent way. I know the organization's supply-chain management. All the temples which are constructed countrywide, he had sourced the material from different locations. Then it was shifted to different workshops, worked upon and transported to the final location. How it all happened is so difficult and impossible to think; when the best of managers in the world cannot even imagine it. So this is the best multinational organization working on the ground with the people, motivating them. At the same time putting the structure [mandir] in place in such an organized way is a phenomenal thing. So it was an amalgamation of spirituality and practicality on the ground that has created a massive structure like this.

I remember Pramukh Swamiji guiding me on many occasions. He was phenomenal. He had always inspired me to work on water. Whenever I met him, the first question he would ask me is, "What has happened about the interlinking of rivers?" He was so much concerned about that and he would say that it was one issue that was going to plague the country. We are very fortunate to be blessed by a great soul who lived in the midst of us. He is also living today, though we cannot see him physically.

India was very fortunate that he was born on this soil; he could have been born anywhere else. We are all really fortunate that we could call him an Indian, though he didn't only belong to one geography. He belonged to the whole universe, and that we can call him our own is a great fortune for us. (Interview, 17 August 2016, Sarangpur) Edited English version



A STRAIGHTFORWARD PERSONALITY

H.E. Omprakash Kohli, Governor of Gujarat

I am unfortunate to have not met HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj in person. However, when I became the Governor of Gujarat I had written a letter to Swamiji expressing my deep respect for him. He, out of his compassion, replied to my letter. I had fervently desired to meet Swamiji. I consider it to be a huge loss for not having met him.

I have read APJ Abdul Kalam's book, *Transcendence*, on Swamiji in English as well as its translation in Hindi. The book reveals different aspects of his life. Today, it is not only India that has lost a great soul but the whole of humanity. He did not belong to one nation and his departure is a big loss to humanity.

Swamiji gave the simple form of service to both dharma and spirituality. Dharma and spirituality is nothing but service. Service to humanity means serving the lowly, serving those who are downtrodden. Only when we unite with the lowly sections of society can we save them. And this can be done only when we see the eternal power in them and everyone. This is the essence of Swamiji's teachings, personality and the book [*Transcendence*].

Swamiji had a straightforward personality. There was no pretence, only sheer straightforwardness. This virtue could be perceived on his face, in his speech, in his actions and in his works. He was a monument of straightforwardness. And if we desire to learn something from his life then we should discard all types of deception and become a straightforward person. This is what I have learnt from the book [by Dr Abdul Kalam].

If I were told to describe Pramukh Swami's personality in three words then I would say *seva, seva, seva* [service]. (Interview, 14 August 2016, Sarangpur)



A SUPREME JEWEL

Shri Vijaybhai Rupani, Chief Minister of Gujarat

I had the privilege of meeting Pramukh Swami Maharaj on several occasions and receiving his blessings. In my first address after becoming the Chief Minister I said this is Gandhiji's Gujarat, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's Gujarat, Indu Chacha's Gujarat, Narmad's [poet] Gujarat and also Pramukh Swami's Gujarat. The reason I said this was that Pramukh Swamiji is the supreme jewel among Swamis. He had always been in the vanguard in serving Gujarat during calamities and adversities, and for decades he had been concerned about Gujarat. That is why it is rightful to say that it is Pramukh Swami's Gujarat.

He had great love for Gujarat simply because he was familiar with the smallest of villages and countless people of Gujarat. He was also aware of the potential of the youths of Gujarat. That is why I naturally proclaimed in my first address that it is Pramukh Swami's Gujarat.

There's another attribute among many of his special qualities that has touched me. In our times today, we find that people are intensely engaged in pursuing their own careers. They care less about our society, country and the happiness of others. Everyone is absorbed in being self-centred. In such times, when youths having very bright careers give them up to become sadhus, it reflects the strength of Pramukh Swami. To renounce everything is very difficult. And after becoming a sadhu he serves and works for society – this I believe is Swamiji's colossal strength. And it is because of him that we find a lot of sadhus in the BAPS. These sadhus are brilliant and experts, and had brilliant careers yet they gave up everything – this only shows that there is something [special].

I believe that Pramukh Swami saved [the element of] dharma in today's day and age and spread it worldwide. For the first time, Swami Vivekananda talked about Hindu dharma and revealed it in the World Religions Conference in Chicago. Since then, Pujya Pramukh Swami, who created Swaminarayan mandirs throughout the world, spread the glory of Hindu dharma.

Today, we can see peace and lustre on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's face. My infinite prostrations at the lotus feet of Swamiji. (Interview, 17 August 2016, Sarangpur)



PURE, INSIGHTFUL AND CONTEMPORARY

Shri Nitinbhai Patel, Deputy Chief Minister of Gujarat

I had the privilege of being with Pramukh Swami Maharaj one whole day during his visit to Bhuj in 2001 after the earthquake devastated several parts of Gujarat. I witnessed the relief work and hot *khichdi* made and served by BAPS sadhus and volunteers to the victims at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Bhuj.

On another occasion, when I was the Minister of Irrigation in the Government of Gujarat, I had launched a project to harvest water for thousands of farmers and villages. At that time the BAPS had generously supported the project by constructing check dams in many parts of Saurashtra. I had also received Pramukh Swami's blessings.

Though Swami Bapa was the head of the BAPS his religious, cultural and social services were not restricted to the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. The hundreds of mandirs he made throughout the world to serve humanity and reveal India's illustrious cultural and religious traditions contributed in enhancing pride for India. According to me this was his great work. Furthermore, his educational and health services provide values and succour to countless students and patients. Pramukh Swami did not limit the mandirs he built to mere worship abodes, but they were also centres to serve society and to give importance to Hindu dharma.

If I were to describe Pramukh Swami's personality in three words they would be, "He was pure, worthy of worship, insightful and contemporary in his approach to dharma." (Interview, 14 August 2016, Sarangpur)



SOUND, PRACTICAL ADVICE

Shri Saurabhbhai Patel, Former Minister of Energy, Gujarat

My family has been associated with this organization from the time of my grandfather. I had met Pramukh Swami Maharaj on many occasions. In 2002, I was appointed as the Minister of Energy in the Government of Gujarat. When I went to Swami Bapa for his blessings I told him I have been assigned with the energy portfolio, and it was making terrible financial losses because a lot of electricity was being stolen or accessed illegally. I was determined to usher in urgent changes. On hearing this Swamiji told me to be patient and gave me an analogy of how a potter makes pots. "When a potter prepares pots, he does so with understanding and great care. To shape the pots he hits them on the outside and also provides support from the inside by placing his hands within the pot." In this way he explained to me in very simple terms to advance my work, and at the same time to take care that I did not hit it so strongly that the earthen pot broke to pieces. I was deeply impacted by what he said because I realized that to curb stealing and illegal syphoning of electricity meant I should not strike the system so fiercely that it would collapse. Thereafter, I cherished his advice and ran the energy department. His messages that impressed me greatly were of serving others and that our joy lies

in the joy of others. I've adopted his messages while working for 17 years in the ministry of energy.

I also believe it is a matter of immense pride for India that such a great sadhu took birth in our country. And Swami taught us how to mould someone from childhood to adulthood. This was why hundreds of thousands of devotees in India and abroad believed in and revered him. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 28 August 2016, Vadodara)



A UNIQUE DIVINE SOUL

Shaktisinh Gohil, Congress Leader

I had been blessed abundantly by Pramukh Swami Maharaj since my childhood. Whatever he told me had naturally translated into reality. In 1990, when I was elected as the deputy president of the Jhila Panchayat I went to Pramukh Swami's residence at the mandir on Station Road, Bhavnagar. Then someone said the Legislative Assembly election was coming up soon. Bapa said, "Bapu, you'll become an MLA [Member of Legislative Assembly]." I humbly told Swami Bapa, "The place where I come from gives majority support to the scheduled caste people. So, it would not be possible for me to win." But Swamishri replied, "Do not worry, you will be elected from elsewhere." I never dreamt that what Swamishri had said would turn out to be true. I had not even asked the party to give me a ticket as a candidate. One late night I got a phone call saying that the Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, had chosen me to stand as a candidate. After remembering Swamishri I started campaigning for the election. At that time things were not favourable for any party. After the elections only 32 of our candidates had won out of 182 seats. I had won due to Bapa's blessings. Thereafter, I went to Swami Bapa and told him that what he had said had come true. But there was no ego on his face. He replied, "It was God's wish." We humans take credit for even a small accomplishment. However, in the case of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who was a great soul, he equally perceived one who had brought a chartered plane for him to travel in and a poor villager who had come for his darshan. He showered his blessings equally upon both persons. He never discriminated against anyone. This was his personality!

His talks sprang from his heart. He always said that one should serve others well without burdening ourselves [with stress and ego].

The battery of a discharged mobile phone is charged by connecting it to a charger, similarly, when one went for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's darshan and bowed at his feet one was energized to work more. I had pledged to spend two days for Bapa's darshan every year: one during his birthday celebration and the other on Guru Punam. This I have done all through the years.

Swamishri was a unique divine soul; a form of God. He came to us by the wish of God, showed us the way to *moksha* and departed from us. (Interview, 14 August 2016, Sarangpur)



HIS GREAT SIMPLICITY AND INNOCENCE

Amar Singh, Indian Politician

The biggest thing is that Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a big saint and spiritual personality, globally well-known and respected. Despite his esteemed status, he used to come down to my level. His biggest trait was that he would never let you feel that he was so big and you were so small. He always made a point to come down to the level of the person with whom he was interacting. The chemistry was instantly established and you never felt that you're talking to a guru or a Godly persona. I always

felt that I was talking to someone who is an elder of my own family. With great simplicity and innocence he used to be jovial, he used to laugh, he used to be caring, and he used to be full of sensitivity.

My entire father-in-law's family is traditionally very close to him. And Pramukh Swami's guru was very close to my father-in-law's father. I particularly remember one incident. I went to Canada, Australia and London; at each place I was told that I was suffering from kidney failure and I was struggling for my life. The doctors said that there was very little chance of my survival. At that time Swamiji sent a message to my mother-in-law and to my wife, "Don't worry, nothing will happen to *jamai* Sir; nothing will happen to our son-in-law. I will pray and all our followers will pray." And the world over, wherever there are Swaminarayan temples, prayers were done. I was blessed by his kindness and virtue. Ultimately, when I got healthy, I came back, met him and thanked him. He smiled at me and said, "You don't have to [express your] thanks. Our daughter is given to you [in marriage]. You're somebody close to our heart and family. We've simply done our duty. It is our duty to pray for you and thank God that he had listened to our prayers." The sense of gratitude, sense of compassion and sense of belonging – these are very rare now-a-days. In spite of heading such a big sect, in spite of having so much success, in spite of attaining such a high level of divinity and spirituality, he was a common man with a child-like innocence. His soul was pure and I don't think Pramukh Swami is dead and gone. Such people are always in our hearts and in our minds. They inspire us more when they depart physically. When they are around we don't value them to that extent. When they are not there we remember every little, tiny thing about them.

I am not sad, because I don't think he has gone. I think the way I did his darshan, the blissful smile on his face, I felt he is consoling us and saying, "Heh, Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere. I am with all of you through my thoughts, preachings, teachings, my soul and spirit. I'm always with you through my ideas and values."

As believers in faith, we believe in God. We submit our soul or body at the lotus feet of God and God is the *karta*. This is something taught to us by the Bhagavad Gita and Lord Shri Krishna. These preachings Swamiji had totally imbibed. He was actually a truly secular and a scholarly religious persona.

In three words Pramukh Swami Maharaj was kind, humble and easily accessible to his true followers. (Interview, 16 August 2016, Sarangpur) Edited English version



A FATHER-GURU

Tarun Vijay, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha

The day I was declared a member of Rajya Sabha, it was divine providence that Pramukh Swami was in Delhi. He was not well and was undergoing medical treatment. I was told that it would be very difficult to see him. It was 5 July 2010. So, I prayed to God, "Please, this is my first day. I must have his blessings, and touch his feet." And suddenly I got a call to come at 3 p.m. I went and touched his feet. He gave me his *mala* and *prasad*. He said, "*Desh ke liye sansad ka kaam karna.*" – "Whatever you do in the Parliament, do it for the nation and see that the Parliamentarians work for the good of the people." It was like a guru mantra for me, like a constitutional edict. It was like a divine order for me. It was like God incarnate speaking to me. And I see to it that every minute I spend in the parliament is spent for the people, voicing their pains and frustrations and dreams.

Swamiji released most of my books, like *Mann ka Tulsichaura*. I never felt blankness in my life even when my father left me, my mother left me. Bapa was both mother and father to me. He was like the roof on our house. He was an eternal source of support. Whenever I have felt low, whenever

I was sad, whenever I have had any challenges or any difficulties in life, I have always felt that Bapa was next to me saying, “Why are you worrying? I am with you. It will be solved.”

And the best part I like was the way Pramukh Swami Maharaj motivated and inspired the young people through BAPS, through Sunday satsang assemblies – eradicating ill-practices and fighting against the drug menace. Consequently, thousands and thousands of families were saved by Bapa, making sure that the persons in those families are de-addicted and family life was brought back.

Pramukh Swamiji was a sadhu who sent his sadhus and dharma to the huts of the tribals in Dharampur, Dang, Dadranagar Haveli. He was a great bridge between people who were disadvantaged and discriminated against. He was for equality, and equality is a basic mantra of Hindu dharma. He was the greatest, best and most shining face of modern Hindu dharma globally. He built Akshardham, and globally the BAPS has hundreds of temples. The grace, grandeur, greatness and acceptance by all of the Hindu temples and Hindu philosophy was personified in the persona of Pramukh Swami.

Pramukh Swami stood as a new avatar of Swami Vivekanand and he reinterpreted Adi Shankara’s philosophy the way Bhagwan Swaminarayan wanted. Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s sect has become the best symbol of Hindu dharma globally.

He was a father-guru, *pita tulya* guru; and in three words he gave compassion, love and guidance. Like a conscience keeper, a father will also reprimand you if you do anything wrong. A father will try to hand-hold you and take you on the right path. A father will always bless you. A father will never get angry with you because you’re his son. So this was the thing that comes to my mind, as Narendrabhai Modi also said Pramukh Swami was like a father to him, more than a guru. (Interview, 15 August 2016, Sarangpur) Edited English version



A GREAT LEADER, VISIONARY AND MENTOR

Anil Ambani, Chairman, Reliance Group

Pramukh Swamiji had been a great guide and a great philosopher, a great leader, a great visionary and a great mentor to my late father, Dhirubhai Ambani. So I am here to pay my respects on behalf of my mother Kokilaben and of course my late father Dhirubhai Ambani, my wife Tina, two sons Anmol and Anshul and on behalf of the entire Ambani family. What struck me the most when I went down to pay my last respects was the calmness on his face, and I thought that at any moment if I approached him we would start a conversation. It was a sight that I have never ever experienced, a calmness I have never ever seen. And my father is looking at me very joyfully from heaven that I have kept up his relationships and his respects to people that he admired in his life.

I have had the good fortune of seeing him on many occasions at our home, at our hospital, in various temples, etc. And what always struck me was his insightfulness, his ability to read a person’s mind. One advice of his I continue to follow even today. After the passing away of my father, Pramukh Swamiji told me, “Please remain with your mother.” So I am following that advice and people ask me where do I live. I say I live with my mother, my mother doesn’t live with me. That was the most endearing advice which I practise till today.

I would say that he was a man of few words, and that always reminded me of my father because my father also was a man of few words. But those few words were like books, so you don’t need to write a book about what is conveyed in a sentence. Swamiji was a man of great simplicity and was always direct. So I never ever found him to be evasive or anything of the sort. I always found him

to be direct. If he didn't like something he would tell me directly, "*Aa barabar nathi, aam karvu joi e, aam tame kem bolya.*" And we would have to do that. That was his fatherly affection, fatherly love and fatherly upbringing. I hope that the next generation of Indians and Hindus, and our own families and our own children imbibe those values because that is the culture, that is the history, that would be the DNA of what we all stand for. Money will come and money will go, but the legacies that we leave behind is what really matters. Everything else is just immaterial in this world. (Interview, 17 August 2016, Sarangpur) Edited English version



A LEADER PAR EXCELLENCE

Anil Naik, Chairman, Larsen and Toubro

Once in a century or more, a Sant like him, a great person like him, one who constantly worries about others with a smiling face and personality like a magnet, is never going to happen easily again. May be a few hundred years will pass and someday some Sant may come, but we don't know how many hundred years that will be.

As far as I am concerned, my experience of receiving blessings from him dates back 28-30 years. I've been one of the biggest beneficiaries of his blessings. In 1989, I went to the board of L&T and that happened after meeting Bapa. Because of his blessings, I'm the Chairman of Larsen and Tourbo for the last 16 years. I'm the first chairman of the company among professionals in the history of 78 years, except the founder. It could not have happened without his blessings. What more proof do you want?

While we were coming here by air, one of your trustees, Dilipbhai Patel, was travelling with us. I asked him what he had to say about Swamiji. He said that when the earthquake occurred in Kutch [2001], Swamiji sent 500 volunteers and 50 swamijis. And the first thing he told them was to set up a kitchen where hungry people could be served. Dilipbhai told me that about 4,500-5,000 people would eat there morning, afternoon, evening. After two or three days a group of German doctors and others came. Some swami or *bhakta* was badly hurt while doing some work. There were no nearby hospitals so they took him to that German doctor. The doctor said that he could not treat the case because he was only supposed to take care of the earthquake-affected people. Even after so much pleading, he was not in a position to do it. So they took that person towards Ahmedabad, but on the way he died. So the swami who was with him got furious and told Bapa that we should not give them food from tomorrow onwards. The group of German doctors and all, more than 150 people, were eating at Swamiji's establishment. You know what Swamiji said? He said to the swami that tomorrow you serve the food to the German group yourself. Instead of disliking them, you make them feel that we are always for the people. No ordinary man, but only a great man can think like that. If the doctor had given a little bit of treatment, may be the person would have been saved. So all those who were sitting in that room and tens of thousands of other people would think that we should be angry with them. But he said no, only love can conquer everyone, affection can conquer everyone.

So, he was a class apart, a completely different personality. And therefore, today, him not being with us is a great loss for the entire humanity, obviously to me and to the many people who are coming and going as well as those who can't come. I can speak for myself and for me, it's a great, great, great loss! The magnetism he has left behind will keep bringing me back, also in my dream.

You come to my house, and you'll see every room has got Swamiji's photo, including my office. I've installed a life-sized photo of Swamiji in my main room. When you enter, you see Pramukh Swami

first. You go a little further, you will see Pramukh Swami blessing me. You go in the adjoining room, there is another photograph of Swamiji. So Swamiji is with us and my family. All I can say is he will continue to bless the entire clan of swamijis of Swaminarayan, and hopefully, this institution, with his continuous blessings, will grow from strength to strength.

Swamiji as a person himself was an inspiration. He was a leader par excellence without wanting to be shown as a leader. That was his unassuming nature. His biggest leadership quality is that he didn't consider himself as a leader, but promoted everybody as leaders. If somebody wants to know what the quality of a leader should be, it is to behave like him by considering everybody a leader and not oneself. And that's what I think he was.

This institution will continue for thousands of years. Swamishri will never be forgotten for generations. That's his legacy. Everyone will remember him, everyone will pray to him, everyone will bow down to him and everyone will say I saw Swamiji. That is Swamiji. And that is a legacy which one in millions can leave behind.

He was a person not describable. (Interview, 16 August 2016, Sarangpur) Edited English version

HIS SIMPLICITY AND LOVE

Justice Nanavati, Chief Justice of High Court, Gujarat

He was a divine soul. I had many occasions to meet him. Everytime I met him, I found that he was really loving all, and was always trying to see that others became happy. He blessed me when I become the Chief Justice of the High Court of Gujarat. He blessed me when I went to the Supreme Court. He was always thinking of me, loving me. I cannot forget all these things and I really feel that he was a man who loved all and who thought of the well-being of everyone.

Simplicity and love for all were his outstanding virtues. A very simple man. Really a very good quality of a sadhu. Only such people can become sadhus. It is said that it is very difficult to find a sadhu, but once a person meets Swamiji, there is no need to find a saint anywhere. So, as far as teachings are concerned, I was really impressed by the fact that he said that one should have complete faith.

He wanted to improve the younger generation. He wanted to see that they become addiction-free. That is the best thing which can be thought of. He was really a pioneer in starting this activity of improving the youths.

He was a divine soul and a real saint. (Interview, 14 August 2016, Sarangpur)



A YUG PURUSH

Dr Vijay Bhatkar, Indian Computer Scientist, Pune

I see myself fortunate as that I could meet Param Pujya Pramukh Swamiji in my life. I had a series of interactions with him. Almost all the moments are captured best in my memory; every moment I will cherish in my life. Most importantly, I have been a great admirer and devotee of India's great civilization, great culture, which is existing for tens of thousands of years. I see Swamiji as a Yug Purush. In a true sense, a Yug Purush who transformed everyone who came in contact with him. I have travelled all over the world. What I have seen here is the glory of Vedic traditions.

In every country, Swaminarayan temples stand as majestic creations. I am also impressed by the great synthesis of science and spirituality. Our whole civilization is founded on spirituality. The question Pramukh Swamiji had asked to Dr Abdul Kalam when Dr Kalam put the development plan of

India before him, “Where is God?” God is the foundation. I think this is what the book *Transcendence* describes. It also shows that our foundation is spirituality, and that deep spiritual knowledge is not inconsistent with science.

The story of Nachiketa at Gandhinagar Akshardham temple or the exhibitions in Delhi show how one should use the present technology for the young generation. It is really magnificent, the discipline, cleanliness, architecture and the aesthetics. Swamiji heralded a new era for new India for the future. I have no doubt about the future of India on seeing this manifestation and in what direction humanity should move. His love, his silence, his blessings, his mingling with the people across villages, towns and giving comfort and peace to everybody and anybody from all religions – that is India’s Vedic philosophy. He impressed the entire world. So, I really miss him. I consider myself fortunate that I got the opportunity that he blessed me.

In our tradition, in our culture or in our philosophy, the guru has been equated to God: “Guru *sakshat* Parambrahma.” I can touch God in the form of guru. In my own personal life I would say that I have touched that God.

He was divinity manifested in human form. (Interview, 15 August 2016, Sarangpur) Edited English version



PEACE AND CALM EXPRESSION ON SWAMI'S FACE

Dr. Tejas Patel, Renowned Cardiologist, Ahmedabad

Frankly speaking, I knew Pramukh Swami since three-and-a-half decades. My father Dr Madhusudan Patel had been his physician and treated him for about one-and-a-half or two decades. I was looking after his heart since many years. And I was quite close to him since the last few years. When a pacemaker implant was planned, it was a major procedure because at that time Swami’s age was about 90, he was not completely fit for this procedure. We told Swami that we could not give him general anaesthesia or any form of deep sedation because it could inhibit the respiratory rate and be counterproductive. So we would be doing it with local anaesthesia; it was a two-hour procedure. And I warned him saying that it would be a very, very painful procedure and that he would have to bear with us. At that time he told me that nothing was going to happen to him. Just work on me and don’t worry. My partners, Dr Sanjay Shah, Dr Yash Lokhandwala, myself and our team, when we started working on him, he was completely calm, quiet and composed. Local anaesthesia, incision, separating the skin and the subcutaneous tissue, and he did not even utter an ‘uh’ throughout the procedure. And when I talked to him during the procedure about how he was feeling, the only answer was, “I’m fine.” He expressed no complaints throughout the procedure, and no complaints even afterwards. So, I had learnt from the Gita that the soul and body are two separate things, but it had never entered my brain because I never had any such practical experience. It was just written in the Gita and was told by Krishna to Arjun. But I experienced and realized when we did this procedure and when we followed up Swami. He completely separated his soul from his body. All this external pain and all this trouble, they just touched his body and went away. I don’t think they were able to touch his soul. So he was completely rock-steady throughout, till his last breath.

Let me make an honest confession. I always wanted to keep very good memories of Swami in my heart till I died. And that’s why I never wanted to come over here [in Sarangpur] to see him one last time in this situation [i.e. after his demise]. I’ve come here reluctantly, but when I saw him, I felt that he’s in deep sleep and maybe if I touched him, he would start talking with me. See the peace on his

face, see how calm his expressions are. This is not a usual phenomenon. Because as a cardiologist I've seen hundreds of people dying, their expressions when they're dying – the fear and agony on their faces. So it was an experience unspeakable, inexpressible for me.

As a doctor if I have to treat anybody, whosoever it is, I do so as my patient. And that's why when I talk to him as a doctor, I always behave like a doctor. Swami reciprocated and behaved like a patient, a disciplined patient, an excellent patient. Whatever instructions we would give to him, he obeyed completely. But once the doctor and patient phenomenon was over, the discussion which used to happen was like father and son. I was very frank. Whatever I wanted to speak to him, I've spoken. He never objected and he answered very simplistically and very naturally.

The thing which touched me the most was that he was such a revered saint in the world on the one hand, but he still maintained the innocence of a child. It is not all that easy to do so. Because, as you start becoming weak, there will be lots of physical complications, and your personality also starts catching up with all those things. Even when he was in agony, the smile, he completely preserved that smile till his last. So those things I cannot forget.

He was a guru for all his sadhus and disciples. He was a father for all who considered him as his father. I think he played every single role in a very versatile manner. That much I can tell.

And one thing which touched me was that he never imposed his ideas or philosophy on anybody. He was so natural. He gave me a *mala* and told me, "Whenever you feel you should do it, then do so." That touched me the most.

I and my partner, Sanjay, visited Sarangpur so many times in the last few years. After an exhaustive day at work, we used to arrive in Sarangpur completely tired. But once we entered his room, we used to feel so fresh, which I cannot describe in words. I used to feel so rejuvenated talking to him, and then we used to feel that we just didn't want to leave but just sit there. That was his aura, and that was his connectivity.

He was the most revered saint, most simple-hearted human being and the best patient any doctor could have on this earth.

If I had to imbibe one thing from him, if I had to ask one thing from him, I would steal simplicity from him. Because being simple at this stage and still maintain the same respect and same power, it's not all that easy. It is impossible! (Interview, 16 August 2016, Sarangpur) Edited English version



HIS LIFE WAS HIS MESSAGE

Shri Ajay Umat, Editor, Nav Gujarat Samay, Ahmedabad

Whenever I was worried or restless I would go to Pramukh Swami for a solution. As a journalist, Pramukh Swami would sometimes reproach me for what I had written. And I thus learnt a lot from him.

Firstly, I'd like to confess that I am in no way religiously associated with the BAPS nor am I a disciple of Pramukh Swami. When I first met him I was opposed to personal worship or deification of a person. So, I was not much impressed with Pramukh Swami. But as I repeatedly came into his contact I noticed that his life was truly his message. This I grasped after observing his peaceful response in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on Akshardham, Gandhinagar.

The inauguration of Akshardham in Delhi took place in the presence of President Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Lal Krishna Advani and others. At that time the former ambassador of India for UK, Shri L.M. Singhvi, told me that Akshardham portrays our cultural heritage and it beats the Taj

Mahal. Subsequently, as a journalist, I wrote the headline next day, “Akshardham beats the Taj Mahal.” Thereafter, Pramukh Swami called me and reproached me, “Do not compare our religious organization with any other organization, religion, caste or community. We are not competing with anyone.”

Swamiji was such an extraordinary person. He was transparent, and there was not an iota of deceit in him. Whatever he said, one found it in his actions. I believe that there could not have been a better teacher than him. I have not seen God, but in Pramukh Swami I had the darshan of one in whom God resided (*pragat brahmaswarup*). (Interview, 15 August 2016, Sarangpur)



A PROFOUND ASSOCIATION

Mummadibhai Baddrudin Lokandwala, Botad

I am 74 years old. I have a business dealing with iron, hardware, cement and oil paints. I have been in Swami Bapa's (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) association since 65 years. When I was nine years old I had received Yogiji Maharaj's signature pat and blessings.

When Shastriji Maharaj was building the mandir in Sarangpur Pramukh Swami would come with Haka Bapu in a bullock cart to my shop in Botad. He would sometimes sit there all day, from 10 a.m. to 4. 00 p.m., while materials for the mandir were being loaded in a cart. Once, the materials loaded was worth ₹600 to 700. Pramukh Swami told my father, Badri Sheth, that he did not have any money to pay. My father replied, “Why are you worrying about the money. You can take as much materials you need and pay me whenever you have the means to do so.” This was how we became acquainted with Swamiji, and our association with him flourished over the years.

My business, established 85 years ago, flourished through Pramukh Swami's profuse blessings. Whenever I had business problems I would go to Swamishri and expressed them to him. In reply, Swamishri would say not to worry, God would do good to you. And our problems would get solved. Whenever we had a legal case to attend in court or any other problems, my father would go and talk about it to Swami Bapa. Subsequently, through his blessings, our problems and difficulties were solved. Such were Bapa's blessings on my family. So, our association was close and profound.

Prior to starting *roza* (fasts) in the month of Ramzan I would go to Swamishri to seek his blessings. Swami always told me to observe *roza* properly and blessed me. Whenever I met him he would tell me to observe *roza* and perform *namaz* properly and read the Koran. He also said, “I bless you to remain faithful to your religion.”

Many times when Swamishri travelled from Gadhada to Sarangpur he would stop his car and sit on the floor of my shop. Then he would say, “This shop is mine.” On another occasion he came to our shop and referred to us, “They are all our family members.”

I am a Muslim by religion, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj was never biased against us. In his eyes all were equal. Whenever he saw us, Swami Bapa would be very happy. When my father passed away 41 years ago, Swamishri came to my shop and expressed his condolences and gave us strength, saying, “All of you stay together with unity and harmony. Badri Sheth is in heaven. Thus, none of you should worry about him. I, too, have lost a good person like Badri Sheth.” My father passed away in 1976, and since then my satsang with Swamishri continued, and it will do so. Secularism means not to discriminate against religion, which I learnt from Swamiji's life. I believe one who is fortunate attains such a sadhu like Pramukh Swami. (Interview, 14 August 2016, Sarangpur) ◆

Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

September 2016

Ahmedabad, Gadhinagar, New Delhi, Mumbai, Sarangpur, Bochasan,
Mahelav, Dabhan, Nadiad

AHMEDABAD

1, Thursday

After Mahant Swami Maharaj (Swamishri) completed his morning puja Ishwarcharan Swami inaugurated Swamishri's *murti* to install in one's puja, *ghar* mandir and house. A letter by Dr Swami instructing all to install Mahant Swami Maharaj's *murti* was read before the assembly.

Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, "After attaining Satsang what does one have to do? To eliminate stubbornness, ego and jealousy, and increase spiritual faith, hunger and association in one's life. To achieve this one needs to introspect. One who introspects about his inner faults will attain peace. However, by looking at others' flaws one experiences turmoil.

"One who becomes a servant of servants is spiritually realized."

At 7.00 p.m. Swamishri initiated aspirants (*samuh vartman*) into Satsang by uttering the *vartman* mantra.

2, Friday

Swamishri blessed the assembly after his puja, "We are so fortunate and blessed that God has considered all of us and showered his grace. He accepts our devotion and worship so that our bhakti increases towards him.

"No one can change Maharaj's words that those who worship God are divine. When an ordinary piece of paper gets transformed into currency it becomes a ₹100, ₹500 note. Similarly, when Maharaj stamps his words [that all are divine] then devotees do not remain ordinary."

3, Saturday

A *shraddhanjali* assembly in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was held in the evening at the Gujarat University Convention Centre. For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, November-December 2016, pp. 13-17.

4, Sunday

A *shraddhanjali* assembly in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj for devotees was held in the mandir hall in Shahibaug. In his blessings Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "Swami Bapa has left nothing undone. He had done everything. He gave dedicated devotees like yourselves. He gave sadhus, who have given up everything. Now what remains to be done? To behave properly and spiritually engage in *seva* with utter humility. Swamishri had taken care of the minds of all. He looked after the physical needs, but in looking after the minds of others one has to give up everything – one has to cultivate egolessness. He spent his entire life for us, and made adjustments for us. Bapa took care of us. He was pure and he embraced all."

An announcement was made to sing the *shlok* of Mahant Swami Maharaj in the daily *ashtak* after *arti*.

GANDHINAGAR

6, Tuesday

At 6 p.m. the *shraddhanjali* assembly in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj commenced at the Mahatma Mandir hall. For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, November-December 2016, pp. 18-20.



DELHI

8-9 Thursday-Friday

A *shraddhanjali* assembly in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was held in the mandir hall. For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, November-December 2016, pp. 25-27.

DELHI, MUMBAI

10, Saturday

At 3.20 p.m. the spiritual leader of Badu Sahib Gurudwara Shri Baba Iqbalsinghji came to meet Mahant Swami Maharaj at the BAPS Mandir in New Delhi. After the ritual honours were offered Shri Baba Iqbalsinghji said to Swamishri, “My head bows to the divine discipline, renunciation and respect to elders you have in your Sanstha. The greatest thing I have seen in your organization is the importance of the guru’s word. Again I bow down to your organization.” After the meeting Mahant Swami Maharaj departed to the airport and landed in Mumbai at 7.37 p.m.

11, Sunday

The *shraddhanjali* assembly in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was held in the morning at the Bombay Exhibition and Convention Centre in Goregaon. For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, November-December 2016, pp. 30-33.

13, Tuesday; Jal Jhilani Festival

According to the English calendar it was Mahant Swami Maharaj’s 83rd birthday. Swamishri had strictly prohibited all from celebrating his birthday

and emphasized that Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s bhajans be sung during his morning puja.

It was also Jal Jhilani festival, and a small water pool was arranged on the assembly hall. After each kirtan sung in Mahant Swami Maharaj’s puja, *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was performed. Thereafter, Thakorji was placed in a remote controlled boat and taken for a ride in the water pool. In all, four bhajans and *artis* were sung. After his puja Swamishri was honoured with garlands. Finally, he blessed the assembly, saying, “By keeping the guru in the forefront of all that we do is bhakti. Of what calibre are we before the guru! Swami Bapa is always in front. In which way? He is seated in the hearts of all.

“One who understands another’s glory and his own faults is a servant (*das*). In this, there lies 100% security for oneself.”

Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the final *arti* of the festival and thereafter he steered the remote controlled boat of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj to the joy of all.

17, Saturday

In his morning puja blessings Swamishri said, “The safest, purest and easiest way in satsang is to remain on the platform of humility. One who finds faults in others is not *atmarup*. It is because of body consciousness that one sees faults in others. One must be alert and understand that [fault-finding] is the wrong path. Perceive all to be divine. Everyone [in Satsang] is a member of the royal family, divine family.”

In the afternoon, Chairman and MD of Larsen and Toubro Shri Anil Nayak came for Swamishri’s darshan and blessings.

SARANGPUR

19, Monday, Shastriji Maharaj’s Smruti Parva

Swamishri performed his morning puja at the Yagnapurush Sabha Mandap. Thereafter, he sanctified *dudhpak*, which was later served to the devotees as *prasad*.



Birthday Celebration assembly, Bochasan

Shastriji Maharaj's Smruti assembly commenced thereafter with *dhun* and prayers. This was followed by speeches by sadhus and videos of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the festive assembly, "By having *upasana* in life, one's spiritual goal will be attained. Without *upasana* final *moksha* is not possible. So, the attainment [*prapti*] we have is indeed very great. By thinking about the attainment we have, nothing remains to be done. By having an association with the Satpurush we are in Akshardham." Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with garlands and then he gave *samip* darshan to all. Later, Swamishri served *dudhpak* to all sadhus.

20, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals and *arti* of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Chada (Ratanpur) in Vallabhipur region.

BOCHASAN

24, Saturday; Mahant Swami Maharaj's 83rd Birthday Celebration

Mahant Swami Maharaj's 83rd birthday

celebration was held outside the mandir precincts.

During the celebration assembly Swamishri inaugurated a pen drive containing audio recordings of the *Vachanamrut*, *Swamini Vato* and *Purushottam Boliya Prite*, and *Sucharitam* – a book of values for children. Thereafter, Dr Swami and Tyagvallabh Swami inaugurated four photos of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In his blessings, Swamishri said, "I believe God to be the all-doer. It is he who does everything. Swamishri had never ever uttered that 'I have done it'. We have to tread on his path. Unity is an important thing. One should take the initiative of having amity with all. While listening to discourses believe them to be for one's own self. By so doing, it amounts to introspection. However one who believes *katha* is for others, then it is an outward vision [*bahya-drishti*]. The principles of harmony, unity and friendship are foundational and grand."

For details see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, November-December 2016, pp. 82-83.

BOCHASAN, MAHELAV

28, Wednesday

At 5.00 p.m. Mahant Swami Maharaj left Bochasan and arrived in Mahelav at 5.14 p.m. He was festively welcomed by children donned in colourful costumes. Swamishri's car headed

(Contd. on pg. 64)

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

Inspiring incidents of Mahant Swami Maharaj

September 2016



HUMBLE APPRECIATIONS

7, New Delhi

Munivatsal Swami narrated an incident of Mahant Swami Maharaj (Swamishri) while he was travelling with him in Fiji in 1997. At Swamishri's behest, Munivatsal Swami had travelled to another nearby island to visit a devotee's home. On their return, when Mahant Swami Maharaj saw the sadhus he started prostrating to them. The sadhus stopped him and asked, "Why were you prostrating to us?"

Swamishri replied, "Because you have done *seva* and successfully inspired satsang [in the life of a devotee]."

Despite being a senior sadhu (*sadguru*) then, he humbly paid respects to the junior sadhus.

GOD AND GURU FIRST

14, New Delhi

Mahant Swami Maharaj, while blessing someone, does not say or write, "You have my blessings." Instead, he responds, "Blessings of Swami Bapa and my prayers for you."

When Swamishri's attendants told him, "Now

you are the guru, so all expect to have your blessings. Thus, you should say that you are blessing them." Despite their requests, Swamishri humbly wrote at the end of a letter, "I have prayed to Harikrishna Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. You have my prayers and blessings." Mahant Swami Maharaj firmly believes Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj to be foremost in his life.

HUMBLE SERVICE

14, Mumbai

Divyanand Swami was having a conversation with Swamishri in his room. He had one of his legs recently operated on and was thus sitting in a wheelchair. Once Divyanand Swami's conversation was over he became perplexed as to who would push his wheelchair and take him out. He managed to take his wheelchair to the door and used his normal foot to push the door open. However, by that time, Swamishri took control of his wheelchair and started pushing it. On coming out of the room everyone was surprised at what they saw. When someone tried to take control of

the wheelchair Swamishri refused and smilingly wheeled the chair into the lobby.

Swamishri did not hesitate at all in serving a young sadhu, and expressed great joy in serving him. Humble service is Swamishri's innate nature.

RECOGNIZING A YOUTH'S SEVA

14, Mumbai

Anandvihari Swami narrated an incident of Swamishri's humility in his presence, "In May 1987, you arrived at the mandir in Bochasan at 11.00 p.m. I was a *yuvak* then and had reached the mandir earlier to clean your room. When you came you went to have a bath. After you came out of the bathroom I went inside to wash your clothes. When I came out I found you prostrating towards the bathroom. I asked, 'Who are you prostrating to?' You replied with glory, 'You have observed a waterless fast all day today, yet you have been doing tiring *seva*. Furthermore, you have come all the way from Mumbai. Yogi Bapa used to be very happy on seeing *yuvaks* and showered his joy upon them. Thus I was prostrating to you.'"

FIRMLY WEDDED TO BHAKTI

14, Mumbai

An aspirant described an incident of Mahant Swami Maharaj, "In 2013, after the *murti-pratishtha* of the BAPS Mandir in Selvas, Mahant Swami called me and said that I should pledge to attend the *mangala arti* daily. I accepted the *niyam*. Several months later when he came to Selvas I forgot to tell him that the *mangala arti* was at 5.45 a.m.

"The next day, Mahant Swami came hurriedly for the *mangala arti* at 5.57 a.m. On seeing me return from the *arti*, he asked, 'Is the *mangala arti* over?' I said yes. And Mahant Swami became sad and disappointed. His attendant came to me and said, 'Mahant Swami abstains from having breakfast whenever he misses the *mangala arti*.' So, I went to his room and apologized to him for

my mistake and told him to have breakfast. But he refused and replied, 'After three hours it will be lunchtime. I will eat then.'

"I nearly broke down in tears and requested him to eat something. Then Mahant Swami took a morsel to eat, but at that time a devotee came to meet him. Their conversation went on till 10.15 a.m., so he placed the snack back into the dish. Thereafter, Mahant Swami said, 'I wanted to fast all day long but after your request I shall eat in the afternoon.'"

Swamishri's strict practice of bhakti rituals is praiseworthy and worthy of emulation.

DOING MENIAL SEVA

14, Mumbai

Anandjivandas Swami recalled an incident of *seva* done by Mahant Swami Maharaj many years ago. He said, "Opposite our old mandir in Sankari was a house. Behind the house was a field where a *shibir* for volunteers was going to be organized. When Mahant Swami went there he saw used *datan* sticks strewn all over the field. For many years people had been brushing their teeth with *datans* and discarding them in the field. So, Swami took up the task of cleaning the field alone. Then, Mahant Swami got a bucket and started placing the used *datan* sticks into it. On seeing him do this we all came running to him. We tried to stop him, saying, 'We will pick them all up.' But Swami replied, 'No. I'll do it and you, too, can join me.' And Mahant Swami remained with us still the end."

Swami remained undeterred in doing menial *seva*, which reflected his humility and spirit of service.

STRAIGHTFORWARD AND SAINTLY

14, Mumbai

Shilnidhidas Swami described an incident of Mahant Swami Maharaj's straightforwardness while sitting before him, "In 2007, you were in Pandro, Kutch. You started discoursing in the morning assembly. A volunteer came up to me

and said, ‘Everyone here has go to work and their means of transport will arrive shortly. Tell Swami to end his *katha*.’ On the previous day, the same volunteer had announced that Mahant Swami would give a discourse after *arti* at 7.00 a.m. But I was not knowing that you were supposed to discourse for only five minutes. So, I came and informed you about the situation. And you immediately stopped your *katha*. Later on, you never said a single word of rebuke to me and never spoke about it again.”

Swamishri’s straightforwardness reflected his simple and humble personality.

RAJIPO UPON A UNITED FAMILY 15, Mumbai

Divyatanaydas Swami recalled an incident of Mahant Swami Maharaj’s inclination and *rajiipo* on a family, who lived unitedly and harmoniously together. He said, “In 2012, Mahant Swami Maharaj visited the satsang *mandal* in Indore. Here, a devotee named Dilipbhai Rathod lived together with 35 family members. Since his former house was small Dilipbhai bought a bigger

home with three floors. So, arrangements were made for Mahant Swami’s visit there.

“At that time it was decided by the Sanstha that Mahant Swami would only visit and sanctify the ground floor of any house. However, if the house had an elevator he could visit the other floors.

“In Dilipbhai’s case, his house did not have a lift. But he was happy with Mahant Swami’s visit to the ground floor. However, when Mahant Swami heard about the family’s unity and harmony, he said, ‘Let us go upstairs.’ The sadhus said there was no lift. Swamishri replied that it didn’t matter. Again the sadhus informed him that Dilipbhai had not insisted that he sanctify the upper floors. Still, Swamishri climbed all the three floors, visiting all the rooms and the terrace on top. When we asked Mahant Swami, ‘Why he had put up with so much strain?’ Swamiji replied, ‘Look at their unity. How united they all stay!’

“Everyone realized the importance of family unity, which earns the inner blessings and *rajiipo* of the Satpurush.” ◆

(Translation of excerpts from Swamishri’s daily report in Gujarati)

(Contd. from pg. 61)

for Shastriji Maharaj’s birthplace. After doing darshan of Shastriji Maharaj, Swamishri walked to the spot where Dungar Bhagat (Shastriji Maharaj) had narrated the Mahabharat.

Thereafter, Swamishri arrived for Thakorji’s darshan in the mandir. Then he was honoured with garlands in an assembly. In his blessings, he said, “From his young age Shastriji Maharaj was very courageous. We all have to do bhakti as well as practise dharma, *jnan* and *vairagya*. The latter three virtues keep all obstacles at bay. Thus, one experiences happiness and joy.”

MAHELAV, DABHAN, NADIAD 30, Friday

At 5.30 p.m. Swamishri left Mahelav and arrived in Dabhan at 5.45 p.m. Here, he addressed

an assembly of devotees on the occasion of Gunatitanand Swami’s 207th Smruti Parva. He said, “Shriji Maharaj had talked about the glory of a true Sadhu and Gunatitanand Swami had openly declared the supreme glory of Shriji Maharaj. Swami talked about this in such a way that it dissolved the base instincts of many. People were also redeemed of superstitions and bad practices. If Gunatitanand Swami had not been born we would not have realized Shriji Maharaj’s glory.”

At 7.50 p.m. Swamishri departed from Dabhan and arrived at the *hari* mandir in Nadiad. After doing Thakorji’s darshan Swamishri retired to his quarters. ◆

(Translation of excerpts from Swamishri’s daily report in Gujarati)



India

SHISHU KARYAKAR SHIBIR
9-11 October 2016, Gondal



In 2004, on the occasion of BAPS Children's Activities Golden Jubilee, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj began *shishu mandals* in India for children under the age of 10. Today, 10,000 children in more than 800 centres across the country benefit under the guidance of over 1,000 volunteers.

Around 850 of these volunteers attended the first-ever Shishu Karyakar Shibir held in India.

Held in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami and based on the theme, 'Rajipo', the *shibir* helped the volunteers to develop skills needed to better serve the children through lectures by experienced sadhus and senior volunteers, special workshops, skits, interviews and audio-video presentations. A highlight of the convention was the 'Brahmanandam' fair in which volunteers were exposed to different ways of making spiritual and life lessons fun and interactive by message-oriented games.

Pujya Doctor Swami gave motivational guidance. Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the convention with a video message, emphasizing that *rajipo* is when God and guru are overjoyed. What is the reward of their joy? Akshardham.

HH PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S
ASTHIPUSHPA VISARJAN
20 November 2016, Bharuch



The Vedic ceremony to scatter the sacred ashes of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the holy River Narmada was performed by Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, *sadguru* sadhus and dignitaries in the presence of 8,000 devotees. Especially present on this auspicious occasion were three former ministers of the Narmada project – Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasma, Shri Jaynarayanbhai Vyas and Shri Siddharthbhai Patel. The River Narmada is regarded as the lifeline of Gujarat as it provides water to many parts of the state.

The initial *mahapuja* rituals commenced at 3.45 p.m. in the grounds of Narmada Park where the devotees were seated. At 4.45 p.m., Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived at the banks of the river where a decorative platform had been created using barges.

Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the concluding rituals and then scattered the *asthipushpa* (sacred ashes) of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj into the holy River Narmada. Then the former ministers, other dignitaries, senior devotees and sadhus from various BAPS mandirs also scattered Brahmaswarup

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's sacred ashes into the holy river.

Thereafter, an assembly in the adjacent Narmada Park was held based on the theme 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj – Our Lifeline', depicting the various ways in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj nurtured the spiritual and social lives of individuals and society. The programme featured speeches by senior sadhus and the three former ministers, as well as video shows. The assembly concluded with the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

**PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL H.E. REUVEN RIVLIN
VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM
20 November 2016, Delhi**



The President of Israel, H.E. Reuven Rivlin, accompanied by the First Lady of Israel, Nechama Rivlin, and other members of the Israeli delegation were warmly welcomed in traditional custom. After marveling at the Mayur Dwar (Peacock Gate), the President and First Lady viewed the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir where they offered their respects and admired the Mandir's art and architecture.

Touched by the universal messages of peace and harmony, President Rivlin, wrote, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May all love thee prosper. May all be blessed."

Sharing her experience of Akshardham, the First Lady of Israel, Nechama Rivlin, wrote, "On a nice and pleasant evening we came to visit the Akshardham Temple, and we were speechless

because of the beauty of this important and divine place."

UK

**COLLECTING FOOD FOR THE HOMELESS
15 October 2016, London**



Young members of The Swaminarayan Sunday School at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir joined BAPS Charities volunteers to collect food for the homeless.

They collected four large trolleys of food for Sufra, a community food bank and kitchen based in the London Borough of Brent which supports disadvantaged families suffering from food poverty in the local area, including the more than 29,000 children in north-west London who are living in severe poverty.

The initiative was one of various activities organised by BAPS Charities in support of International Sewa Day, an annual event where "thousands of good-hearted people across the world come together to perform *sewa* and experience the joy of giving in its truest sense."

Mohammed Mamdani, Director of Sufra, thanked everyone for their efforts. "I am very grateful to you and your team for your noble efforts in raising food for local families in crisis for International Sewa Day. I was also very glad that some of the children who took part in the collection were able to visit the food bank on Sunday and see where the food they have collected will be distributed."

**BRITISH PRIME MINISTER HOSTS DIWALI
RECEPTION AT 10 DOWNING STREET
24 October 2016, London**



Prime Minister Theresa May hosted a special reception to celebrate Diwali, welcoming more than 150 key figures from the Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities, alongside His Excellency Dinesh Patnaik, Acting Indian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom; Priti Patel, Secretary of State for International Development; Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Local Government and Communities; Lord Gadhia; and Alok Sharma, Foreign Office Minister.

In keeping with a customary Hindu welcome, Rena Amin and Hinal Patel, volunteers at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, offered a garland of flowers and tied a *nada-chhadi* on the Prime Minister's wrist.

The Prime Minister, Acting Indian High Commissioner and Jitubhai Patel of BAPS began the festivities with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp amid chanting of Vedic peace prayers by BAPS children.

BAPS volunteers also set up the *annakut* of vegetarian Indian sweets and savouries before the Hindu deities.

The Prime Minister commented on the diversity of India and spoke about the values of "hope, optimism, forgiveness and new beginnings represented by the Hindu New Year". She applauded the achievements of British Indian communities. "One and a half million people demonstrate just how much a country can achieve when talent is unleashed and people of all backgrounds are able to fulfil their potential – that's what is important."

**BECOME ADARSH: FINALE APPRECIATION
CEREMONY
12 & 19 November 2016, London and Leicester**



'Become Adarsh' – a spiritual development programme designed for youths in the UK – culminated with grand appreciation assemblies at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs in London and Leicester.

'Become Adarsh' was launched in May 2016 with the aim of helping youths progress towards becoming ideal spiritual aspirants by mastering spiritual knowledge, upholding Hindu traditions, and developing their skills and talents.

The appreciation evenings recognized the collective efforts of more than 1,000 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* who had completed various assessments throughout the year. The initiative had identified and nurtured a variety of proficiencies amongst the youths, a selection of which was demonstrated during the finale programmes.

Live performances included recitation of creative poems, narration and analyses of episodes from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the gurus, and oral presentations. Participants also presented a sample 'simulated debate', which demonstrated how to think laterally and engage in insightful, fact-based dialogue.

The project taught the youths the importance of devotion and knowledge, the ability to develop and articulate Satsang knowledge, and how to apply its concepts in their day-to-day life.

Top performers were felicitated for their achievements.

USA

INAUGURATION OF BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

10-11 September 2016, Greenville, SC



A new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in the presence of Sadguru Pujya Kothari Swami (Pujya Bhaktipriyadas Swami) and other respected Swamis was inaugurated.

The weekend celebrations began with a cultural programme including a skit highlighting the importance of spirituality within our everyday lives, a cultural dance by youths and a speech by Somprakash Swami describing the critical role that a mandir plays in society by keeping the frameworks of dharma alive.

On 11 September, Pujya Kothari Swami performed the Vedic consecration ceremony of the *murtis*. Earlier, on 30 September 2015, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of these *murtis* in Sarangpur.

INAUGURATION OF BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

7-9 October 2016, Long Island, NY

The three-day Mandir Mahotsav took place in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami. Devotees and well-wishers from the tri-state area were joined by devotees from across the nation for the inauguration celebrations.

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj had envisioned the creation of a mandir in the Long Island community since the late 1980s. With the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, devotees



commenced the construction in 2012. Hundreds of volunteers, ranging from little children to college students to elderly individuals, contributed thousands of hours to making this dream a reality.

The festivities for the mandir opening began with a melodious kirtan *aradhana* by BAPS sadhus on 7 October. On 8 October, a *yagna* was performed with prayers for family unity and world peace. The celebrations culminated on 9 October with the *murti* consecration ceremony and mandir inauguration. Previously, in Sarangpur, on 13 September 2013 Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis*.

On the occasion, Steven Bellone, Suffolk County Executive, said, “Long Island, Suffolk County, this nation, this world is enriched, has been made better by all of the people inside this room today. There are a lot of problems in the world today, but when I look into this room, I see an army of people who are good and fighting for good and what is best about humanity in our world today. So I feel good, and I feel confident, and I feel proud about our future.” Other dignitaries present for the event were Assemblyman Chad A. Lupinacci, Steve Zimmerman from Newsday Corporation and community leaders from New York and New Jersey.

AKSHARDHAM GROUND FLOOR PADMASHILA PUJAN CEREMONY

15 October 2016, Robbinsville, NJ

On the auspicious day of Sharad Purnima – the birthday of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand



Swami – the ground floor Padmashila Pujan and Sthapan of Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, took place at the hands of Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami.

Pujya Kothari Swami placed flower petals at the location where His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj had placed the *nidhi-kumbh* on 15 August 2014. The central *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan will be installed exactly above the *nidhi-kumbh* on the first floor.

The ceremony concluded with attendees doing puja of the *shila* and praying for the successful completion of the Akshardham cultural complex.

INAUGURATION OF BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIRS

5-13 November 2016, Louisville, KY

The festivities for the mandir opening began with a Vishwashanti Mahayagna on 5 November. That evening, BAPS women and girls presented a stage programme on the importance of mandirs in society.

On the morning of 13 November, Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami performed the Vedic consecration rituals of the *murtis*. Previously, on 6 February 2015, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Sarangpur.

Thereafter, the inauguration assembly featured a melodious kirtan *aradhana* by BAPS sadhus, a cultural programme by youths titled, ‘Mandirma Prabhu Biraje Chhe’, highlighting the value of a mandir in a person’s life and Kothari Swami’s

blessings in which he described the importance of mandirs in shaping our lives, and how Pramukh Swami Maharaj had inspired millions around the world by building such places of worship to preserve pure faith and devotion to God.

CLAIREVILLE DRIVE IN TORONTO DEDICATED TO ‘PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ’ 7 December 2016

As a tribute to the life and work of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Toronto Community Council approved the ceremonial dedication of the road Claireville Drive to ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj’. On the auspicious occasion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 96th birth celebration, Councillor Vincent Crisanti, Deputy Mayor of Toronto, ceremonially dedicated Claireville Drive to ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj’ by unveiling a new street sign. The ceremony took place in the presence of the Minister of Science Hon. Kirsty Duncan, the Minister of Senior Affairs Hon. Dipika Damerla as well as community leaders, well-wishers and devotees.

Asia-Pacific

ANNAKUT AT WESTERN AUSTRALIA PARLIAMENT

8 November 2016, Perth, Australia

The celebration of the Diwali and Annakut festivals at the Western Australia Parliament was co-hosted by the Honourable Dr. Mike Nahan, Treasurer, Minister for Energy, Citizenship and Multicultural Interests and BAPS.

Over 90 people, including respected Members



of Parliament, leaders of various Hindu communities, and BAPS guests, attended the event held in the Aboriginal People's Room of the WA Parliament.

Hon. Dr Michael Nahan, Hon. Mark McGowan (Leader of the Opposition) and others inaugurated the occasion by lighting the traditional *divo*.

During their keynote address, Hon. Mike Nahan and Hon. Mark McGowan both acknowledged the richness and significant contributions made by the Indian community to Australia. Both reflected on the values of Hinduism and Diwali, and were proud to see them being displayed in the WA Parliament.

The highlight of the event was the delightful and decorative *annakut* display that was setup in the WA Parliament.

To commemorate the Diwali and Hindu New Year festivals, the WA Parliament house was lit up with red and orange lights for 8 days until 8 November 2016.

Livingstone, were joined by devotees from Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa for the inauguration celebrations.

The Mandir Mahotsav commenced on 9 September with a kirtan *aradhana* and Swagat Sabha, welcoming Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Narayancharan Swami. On 10 September, 200 *yajmans* participated in the 25-*kundi* Vishwashanti Mahayagna held at the Radha-Krishna Mandir, during which prayers were offered for world peace and the happiness of all.

At noon, the *murtis* to be consecrated in the mandir were taken around the town in a festive *nagar-yatra*. Six beautifully decorated floats carried the majestically adorned *murtis* through the 3-km procession route from the Radha-Krishna Mandir in Lusaka to the newly built BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Rhodes Park. Over 1,000 devotees joined the procession which stretched for 800 m.

In the evening, a tribute assembly in honour of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj was held.

On the morning of 11 September, the sacred *murtis* were installed in the new mandir with Vedic rites by Pujya Viveksagar Swami. Previously, on 30 March 2016, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Sarangpur.

During the *murti-pratishtha* assembly, Pujya Viveksagar Swami emphasized upon the importance of mandirs in the community, and how they reinforce moral teachings and preserve spiritual values. Also present in the assembly were government ministers and other dignitaries. ◆

Africa

OPENING OF BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

9-11 September 2016, Lusaka, Zambia

The grand three-day Mandir Mahotsav to mark the opening of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Lusaka, Zambia, took place in the presence of Pujya Viveksagar Swami and 13 sadhus. Devotees from BAPS centres in Zambia, including Chingola, Kitwe, Ndola, Kabwe, Choma and



HH MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN
November-December 2016

1. Devotees engaged in darshan of Swamishri's morning puja in the mandir hall, Tithal, 24 November.
2. In Tithal, Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Baroliya, Achhavani, Chobadiya, Ambatalat, Navera, Gorgam, Panchlai, Tighara, Bigari, 26 November.
3. Devotees during an evening satsang assembly in the mandir, Navsari, 20 December.



BAPS MANDIR'S 20TH CONSECRATION ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

6 December 2016, Surat

Annakut offered in the central shrine to the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the mandir's *murti-pratishtha*.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 96TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

7 December 2016, Surat

Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurates the commemorative postal stamps issued by the Post Office of India in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. (Inset) Mahant Swami Maharaj garlands Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *murti* during the celebration assembly.



Printed and Published by Sadhu Swayamprakashdas on behalf of Swaminarayan Aksharpath and Printed at Swaminarayan Mudran Mandir, Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad - 380 004 and Published from Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad - 380 004. Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas.