



(Time: 9.00 a.m. to 12.00p.m.)

**SATSANG PRAVIN : PAPER - 1**

**Note:** A few of the questions in this Pre-Test Paper will be asked in the Final Examination to be held on Sunday, 6 March 2022. In the Final Examination answers written on extra pages will not be considered valid. Without the prior permission of the Pariksha Karyalay in Ahmedabad, answer papers written by substitute writers in place of the original candidate will not be accepted. Answer papers with more than one type of handwriting will not be accepted. Answers crossed out will not be considered valid. Answers will not be considered valid if they are not written in legible handwriting. Use the latest editions of the exam books. Candidates will not be allowed to keep any electronic items, such as, mobile phones, tablets, laptops, etc. in the examination room.

**SECTION 1: AKSHAR PURUSHOTTAM UPASANA - 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, May 2012**

**Total Marks: 100**

**Q.1 Describe any ONE of the following and highlight its significance.**

**[4]**

1. 'Wherever he is, I am there. And wherever I am, he is also there.'
2. Revelation of own form to Naja Kamli, the devotees of Mahuva and Devjibhai.
3. 'Gunattitanand Swami Is Akshar' - proofs given by Nrusinhanand Swami and Ghanshyamdas.

**Q.2 For any TWO of the following, give THREE references from the scriptures.**

**[6]**

**(It is compulsory to write the reference scripture and number.)**

1. Necessity of Faith in Divine Supremacy
2. Divyabhav - Divine Attributes
3. Disadvantages of Understanding God as Nirakar

**Q.3 Given below are references from the scriptures, principles or stanzas.**

**[5]**

**Write the topic they relate to.**

**Example:** The devotee should still understand that whatever happens is as willed by my master (God) without his will nobody can move even a leaf.

**Ans:** Necessity of knowing God as the All-Doer.

1. Write that I am on par with Shri Krishna. Nothing more should be written.
2. The governor of all activities and the lord of all is one Bhagwan.
3. When the divine and human characteristics of God and his Sadhu are considered as equally divine, then true bliss in worshipping God is attained.
4. E vina rakhe jnani gano, jene Hari nayane nathi dekhiya.
5. Pan sahuthi saras Santma re, rakhyu valame eni vatma re.

**Q.4 From the given options, place a tick (✓) in the box next to the correct options.**

**[4]**

**Note:** One or more of the options may be correct. Full marks will be awarded only if all the correct options are chosen, otherwise no marks will be awarded.

1. Glory of the Gunatit Sadhu: In other Shastras
  - (1) ☐ Yasya deve parabhaktir-yatha deve tatha gurau |
  - (2) ☐ Nirpeksham munim shantam nirvairam samadarshanam |
  - (3) ☐ Samha sarveshu bhuteshu madu bhaktim labhate param |
  - (4) ☐ Na tatsamashchapyaddhikashucha drishyate |
2. The necessity of Aksharbrahman on the path of liberation: To know Parabrahman as He is.
  - (1) ☐ Then all of his indriyas and antahkaran become divine like Akshar's indriyas and antahkaran.
  - (2) ☐ It is only when the Satpurush manifests on this earth, and one hears them being narrated by him, that one understands them.
  - (3) ☐ The cause of all of these is Maya.
  - (4) ☐ He does not manifest in Prakruti-Purush to the extent he manifests in Akshar.

**Q.5 Write briefly on any TWO of the following. (In 12 lines each.)**

**[8]**

1. 'Gunattitanand Swami is Akshar': Shastriji Maharaj's letter
2. The need to Become Brahmarup: For Unhindered devotion
3. Importance of Upasana

**Q.6 Explain any TWO of the following, giving reasons. (In 12 lines each.)**

**[8]**

1. Without the pragat form of God, or a God-realized Sadhu, ultimate liberation is unattainable.
2. Shriji Maharaj's manifestation on earth was for a higher mission than the other incarnations.
3. We should follow the example of Vibhishan.

**Q.7 Complete the following statements based on the summary.**

**[7]**

**(What to understand in upasana?)**

1. Jiva is an eternal chaitanya ..... maya since eternity.
2. Akshar-Purushottam upasana ..... upasana to Parabrahman.
3. The form, qualities, powers ..... and pervades them.
4. That manifest form of Parabrahman ..... through the Aksharbrahman guru.

(What not to understand in upasana?)

5. It is possible to become ..... Gunatit Sadhu.
6. Only Purushottam exists ..... as Aksharbrahman.
7. Paramhansas other than ..... Mul Aksharbrahman.

**Q.8 Write a short notes on 'Aksharbrahman: One and Unique'**

[5]

**SECTION 2: SATSANG READER PART 3, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, June 2015 &  
PORTRAIT OF INSPIRATION - PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, April 2011**

**Q.9 In the sentences below, state who is speaking to whom and when.**

[9]

1. "Forty years ago, when I was on my way to Kashi."
2. "If you so desire, Gomti would be full of water."
3. "I have everything that I want in my life. I have a good car, a beautiful home, money."

**Q.10 Answer ALL of the following, using one sentence (not just one word) for each answer.**

[5]

1. How did Raghuvirji Maharaj serve the ailing sadhu?
2. Where did Maharaj ask Kushalkunvarba to accommodate Jivuba in Dharampur? Why?
3. Who rescued Muktanand Swami from the jealous bawa?
4. From whom can one found the knowledge of atma?
5. When was Pramukh Swami Maharaj's suvarna tula held?

**Q.11 From the given options, place a tick (✓) in the box next to the correct options.**

[8]

**Note: One or more of the options may be correct. Full marks will be awarded only if all the correct options are chosen, otherwise no marks will be awarded.**

1. Shivial Sheth Associated with these Paramhansas.  
(1) ☐ Gopalanand Swami  
(2) ☐ Bhai Atamanand Swami  
(3) ☐ Gunatitanand Swami  
(4) ☐ Muktanand Swami
2. Gopalanand Swami fasted due to Abscess.  
(1) ☐ Twenty Four-Twenty Five days      (2) ☐ Twenty One days  
(3) ☐ Fifteen-Seventeen days      (4) ☐ Ten-Twelve days
3. Loving Service.  
(1) ☐ Don't have your bath now.  
(2) ☐ Take my cold water for your bath.  
(3) ☐ Recalls Swamishri's loveless affection.  
(4) ☐ Don't go out anywhere.
4. What are the jewels of the 'body-mandir'?  
(1) ☐ Satisfaction      (2) ☐ Fair complexion  
(3) ☐ Compassion      (4) ☐ Character

**Q.12 Give reasons for the following. (In 9 lines each.)**

[8]

1. Khushal Bhagat's mother found a jari garment and a foot ornament.      **OR**
2. Nishkulanand Swami was prepared to leave from Vadodara.
3. The youth thought, 'Even my parents have never showered so much love on me.'      **OR**
4. Dahyabhai lay in bed wondering about Swamishri's compassion for him.

**Q.13 Answer the following concisely. (12 lines each.)**

[8]

1. Parvatbhai's doubts were removed.      **OR**
2. Paramchaitanyanand Swami in Dharampur.
3. Swamishri in barefoot in the hot sun.      **OR**
4. Free From Wealth.


**SECTION 3: ESSAY**

**Q.14 Write an essay on any ONE of the following. (In approximately 60 lines.)**

[15]

1. Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj: Propagator of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan (Swaminarayan Bliss, January-February 2018, pp. 35-43)
2. Ghar Sabha: Two important Virtues (Enlightening Essays (baps.org), 2021)
3. Global Efforts by BAPS to Supply Emergency Medical Aid to India (Swaminarayan Bliss, May-June 2021, pp. 53-57)



 **Important Note:** Past Papers and solutions of main exam can be downloaded from the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha's website - Link : <http://www.baps.org/Satsang-Exams.aspx>

 **Matter of above three essays are shown in the following pages.**

**(One essay from the list of above essays will be asked in the Final Examination of March-2022)**

# Satsang Pravin-1

## Essay-1

### 1. Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj: Propagator of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan

#### INTRODUCTION

Shastriji Maharaj was a spiritual dynamo, constantly energizing his devotees with the qualities of optimism, enthusiasm, duty and dedication. As a leader he was incomparable. He led by example, with his dynamic, disciplined, determined, decisive, daring, dependable and diplomatic style, generating the desired dedication from his sadhus and devotees. His saintly virtues of devotion, detachment, spiritual wisdom, compassion and many other qualities charged everyone in a similar way. Shastriji Maharaj's powerful and magnetic personality left a deep impression on everyone who came into his contact. After learning from guru Bhagatji Maharaj the true interpretation of the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj unceasingly imparted it to others. Shastriji Maharaj's decision to depart from Vartal after tolerating years of hostility, saddened many satsangis. Among them was Dolatram Kripashankar Pandya, a renowned Sanskrit Scholar, Gujarati poet and a member of the Vartal Temple Committee. Having known Shastriji Maharaj for many years, he knew that Shastriji Maharaj would never do anything that was contrary to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's true principles. So, he asked Shastriji Maharaj, "I know that you would not leave without a true reason. So please explain to me this principle." Accordingly, Shastriji Maharaj explained, "In the mandirs Shriji Maharaj built, he consecrated the murtis of Gopinathji, Nar-Narayan, Lakshmi-Narayan, Radha-Krishna and others. Maharaj himself was supreme God and the source of all avatars, yet to appease others, he consecrated his own murti only in Vartal. However, in Vachanamrut Gadhadra II 21, Shriji Maharaj has revealed the essential principle to be understood by all spiritual aspirants to attain ultimate moksha. In it he says, 'If a person realizes the greatness of manifest God and his holy Sadhu in exactly the same way as he realizes the greatness of past avatars of God such as Ram, Krishna, etc., as well as the greatness of past sadhus such as Narad, the Sanakadik, Shukji, Jadbharat, Hanuman, Uddhav etc. – then nothing remains to be understood on the path of liberation.' "On the basis of this Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj is himself the manifest form of God and Gunatitanand Swami is the manifest form of his holy Sadhu. So, only if one understands their true glory and consecrates mandirs with their murtis in the central shrine has the fundamental principle been understood fully. Also, just as God and his ideal devotee are worshipped together, for example, Radha and Krishna, Nar and Narayan, Lakshmi and Narayan, Sita and Ram, similarly Shriji Maharaj has instructed that one should attain virtues like his ideal devotee, Aksharbrahman, and offer worship to him, Purushottam. So just as Radha with Krishna is Radha-Krishna and Lakshmi with Narayan is Lakshmi-Narayan, similarly Swami (Akshar) with Narayan (Purushottam) is Swaminarayan (Akshar-Purushottam). This is the true upasana. "Swami is Gunatitanand Swami and Narayan is Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is to teach this true principle that we have left Vartal." Thus, Shastriji Maharaj gave a detailed explanation of the true interpretation of Shriji Maharaj's words in the Vachanamrut. At the end, Dolatram Pandya bowed to Shastriji Maharaj and remarked, "Swami, you are doing the work for which Shriji Maharaj would have had to incarnate again. Your greatness is immeasurable, since you have explained the true and pure philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam on the basis of the scriptures." It was Shastriji Maharaj's unwavering faith in God which enabled him to fulfil Shriji Maharaj's wish to enshrine the murtis of Akshar and Purushottam. It was this faith which formed the foundation of his struggle to achieve what many deemed as being impossible. In fact, Shastriji Maharaj's life embodied the true spirit of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

#### MODEL MANDIRS

Even as a child, while playing, Shastriji Maharaj's devotion and God-centric life came to the fore. While his friends played various popular games he spent his time building mandirs. Ignoring the pleas of his friends to join them in sports, he would sit on the ground, and build a model mandir out of clay, stones, wood and other natural materials. He would then place the murti of God in it, offer food and perform arti. In this way, even in his play, he offered pure and loving devotion to Shriji Maharaj. Such inclinations from childhood were a prelude to his life-long endeavours to build mandirs enshrining the murtis of Akshar and Purushottam and explaining the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan to all.

#### COURAGEOUS GALBHAI

At the Chaitra Punam festival in Vartal, the sadhus and devotees opposed to Shastriji Maharaj had arranged a meeting to censure him for his support in building the mandir in Vadhwan and plan some mischief to harm him. However, Shastriji Maharaj prophesied, "They will quarrel among themselves and disperse. So they will not be able to do anything." Then, Shastriji Maharaj turned to Galbhai, smiled and asked him, "Do you have the courage to hail the victory call of Akshar-Purushottam in that assembly?" This task was like entering the lion's den and awakening it from slumber, risking severe

injury. But, Galbhai, who had developed firm faith in the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy by his association with Shastriji Maharaj, was ready to do as asked. Shastriji Maharaj was pleased by Galbhai's readiness to carry out his wish. So, in the Chaitra Punam assembly, as soon as the Acharya took his seat, Galbhai called out, "Sahajanand Swami Maharaj ni Jai." Everyone joined him in this. Then, he immediately hailed, "Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj ni Jai." Again, everyone joined him in hailing the call, before realizing what had happened. There was a moment of stunned silence before ripples of discussion erupted. This bold chant infuriated the gathered sadhus and devotees, but seeing the robust and powerful Galbhai and his associates, nobody dared to say anything. Shastriji Maharaj had inspired such courage in his devotees.

#### CONSTRUCTION OF BOCHASAN MANDIR

Due to the persistent opposition and harassment, Shastriji Maharaj had to leave the Vartal Sanstha in November 1905. The following year, on 30 November 1906 (Magshar sud Punam, Samvat 1963), many devotees came to Bochasan for the punam festival. In the assembly Shastriji Maharaj declared, "We now have enough land to build a mandir and the site has been cleared. So, we are now ready to dig the foundations. All of you are requested to lend your help in whatever way necessary, even by reducing your farming, so that the murti-pratishtha can be performed in six months." Hearing Shastriji Maharaj's request inspired everyone to commit their resources for this noble task. Thus, devotees and sadhus, alike, put all their energies into meeting Shastriji Maharaj's deadline. Shastriji Maharaj, too, helped in the construction work and continually discoursed to the devotees. In all his talks he spoke about the doctrine of Akshar and Purushottam as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut and he emphasized that the goal of life is to become brahmarup and offer devotion to Purushottam, the supreme God. His powerful speech and effective style appealed to all, motivating them to serve in every way possible.

#### AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM ENSHRINED IN BOCHASAN

Through the dedicated efforts of the devotees and sadhus, the mammoth construction work proceeded at such great speed that Shastriji Maharaj's challenging deadline was met. The murti-pratishtha date was set for 5 June 1907 (Vaishakh vad 10, Samvat 1963). With just a few weeks to go before this historic event, invitations were sent out. Devotees everywhere planned enthusiastically to participate in the ceremony. With all preparations complete, the murtipratishtha day dawned. In the morning, learned and experienced Brahmins recited the traditional Vedic verses, guiding Shastriji Maharaj and other devotees devoutly through the yagna rituals. Then, the auspicious time for the murti-pratishtha approached. The metallic murti of Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan was placed in position in the central shrine of the mandir. Then, the sadhus and devotees attempted to place the murti of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. But, even though it was lighter, the murti would not budge. More help was called, but still the murti could not be lifted. They tried again and again, but without success. Finally, they went to Shastriji Maharaj and informed him of the puzzling situation. He immediately got up and accompanied the devotees to the murti. There, Shastriji Maharaj prayed, "O Swami! We have left Vartal for you, and tolerated much abuse, hardship and danger. So please shower your grace on us by taking your rightful place." Then, he took a small chisel and inserted it at the base of the murti, slightly lifting it off the ground. The sadhus and devotees then lifted the murti into place. Then Shastriji Maharaj performed the murti-pratishtha arti. In this way, for the first time, the murtis of Akshar-Purushottam were consecrated in the central shrine. Now, Bochasan Mandir provided a centre for people to offer their devotion. As a result, more and more people throughout the Charotar region began to openly embrace the worship of AksharPurushottam. The philosophy that was once restricted to a corner of Vartal was now becoming widespread throughout Charotar, and beyond.

#### MANDIR AT SARANGPUR

Shastriji Maharaj used Sarangpur as a base and toured the surrounding villages to teach the message of Akshar and Purushottam. When Shastriji Maharaj arrived in Limbdi, Jhaverbhai, the Diwan proposed, "If you agree to build a shikharbaddha mandir in Sarangpur, I will convince the Thakor to give you enough land." Nirgundas Swami and other sadhus and devotees were excited by this offer. But Shastriji Maharaj had his own way of dealing with things. He told the Diwan, "We are short of funds, but if you give us a few acres we will build a small mandir." The Diwan was well aware of Shastriji Maharaj's capabilities and reasoned that such a small mandir would not be appropriate. So, again, he offered to obtain sanction for as much land as was necessary. Seeing the genuine intentions of the Diwan, Shastriji Maharaj agreed. After a few days, Shastriji Maharaj returned to Sarangpur. Meanwhile, Jhaverbhai, the Diwan, had talked to the Thakor of Limbdi and sent Meghabhai to meet Shastriji Maharaj. When he arrived, Shastriji Maharaj took him to the southern part of the village and requested for the entire 24-acre area Bhagwan Swaminarayan had sanctified and where he had performed the groundbreaking ceremony by riding his horse. In this way, the land was procured from the Thakor of Limbdi. Work began in earnest to prepare the area for construction. Times were difficult and they received insufficient alms to feed all. Still, everyone worked with enthusiasm, realizing the glory of the service they were engaged in. All were eager to contribute their services for the cause of Akshar and Purushottam, no matter what hardship they had to endure. In due course, as the mandir construction neared completion, Shastriji Maharaj declared the date for the murti-pratishtha ceremony. The

opponents tried to interfere in Shastriji Maharaj's work. They approached the Thakor of Limbdi, who had allocated the land for the mandir to Shastriji Maharaj, and convinced him that the murtis of Radha-Krishna should be consecrated in the central shrine. Thus, when the Thakor went to meet Shastriji Maharaj, he made several suggestions and asked where the murtis of Radha-Krishna would be installed. Shastriji Maharaj realized the purpose of his question and decisively replied, "We have tolerated many difficulties for Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami. We have become sadhus and dedicated our lives for them. So, the murtis of Akshar and Purushottam will be consecrated in the central shrine, while the murtis of Radha-Krishna will be placed in the first shrine." The Thakor and his accomplices were left speechless by Shastriji Maharaj's bold and forthright statements and happily agreed to his plans. Invitations were sent to all devotees to attend the murti-pratishtha on 8 May 1916 (Vaishakh sud 6, Samvat 1972). On the preceding day, Shastriji Maharaj blessed, "This mandir, which has been built here in Sarangpur, fulfils the promise made by Shriji Maharaj to Jiva Khachar. Tomorrow, the murtis of supreme God, Purushottam, and his divine abode, Akshar, will be consecrated here. The glory of this mandir will increase in the years to come." The following day, Shastriji Maharaj performed the Vedic yagna rituals and then consecrated the murtis of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami in the central shrine. Once again, everyone experienced Shastriji Maharaj's devotion and determination in establishing and enshrining the AksharPurushottam philosophy.

#### AKSHAR MANDIR, GONDAL

In a relatively short span of nine years, Shastriji Maharaj had inspired two majestic mandirs, consecrating the murtis of Akshar and Purushottam in the central shrines. Shastriji Maharaj continued his spiritual tours to the villages, towns, and cities, explaining the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut. In the summer of 1932 CE (Samvat 1988) Shastriji Maharaj was in Sarangpur, where Haribhai Amin, a native of Virsad, a village near Borsad, came to meet him. Haribhai had negotiated a deal with the Maharaja of Gondal, Bhagvatsinhji, to purchase the land surrounding the Akshar Deri, the auspicious memorial shrine built over the cremation site of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. The all-knowing Shastriji Maharaj stated, "The price of Rs. 25,000 you have accepted is reasonable." Haribhai was left speechless. Since that, in fact, was the price he had agreed upon with the Maharaja. He realized that he could not hide anything from Shastriji Maharaj. He told Shastriji Maharaj about the terms the Maharaja had stipulated: that the memorial shrine be preserved and a mandir be built over it in three years at a cost of at least one million rupees. Shastriji Maharaj assuringly said, "Gunatitanand Swami's memorial shrine is very sacred and miraculous. Maharaj and Swami are eternally manifest there. Over a million rupees will be spent there, so there is no need for you to worry about it." Then with Shastriji Maharaj's approval Haribhai returned to Gondal to finalize the land deal. Throughout Gujarat, the devotees were thrilled that a mandir was to be built in Gondal over the auspicious memorial shrine of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. Thousands attended the groundbreaking ceremony on 18 January 1932 (Posh sud 10, Samvat 1988). Soon afterwards, construction work began on the site. Many devotees eagerly contributed their time, energy and other necessary resources for this noble cause. Shastriji Maharaj instructed the young and spirited Yogiji Swami to cook for the sadhus, devotees and labourers serving there and also to help in the construction work. The building work proceeded at full speed and soon, with the enthusiastic and devout efforts of the sadhus and devotees, the mandir neared completion – it had taken just two-and-a-quarter years – much less than the time stipulated by the Maharaja of Gondal. Invitations were sent for the murti-pratishtha ceremony on 24 May 1934 (Vaishakh sud 10, Samvat 1990). Devotees began to arrive in Gondal several days beforehand to attend the spiritual discourses and participate in the preliminary Vedic rituals. Shastriji Maharaj and other senior sadhus and devotees spoke in detail about the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Everyone revelled in the divine and joyous atmosphere. On the day of the murti-pratishtha, the murtis of Akshar and Purushottam were placed in the central shrine and Shastriji Maharaj performed the Vedic rituals, invoking the divine presence of Maharaj and Swami in the murtis. Then, when Shastriji Maharaj held the mirror before the murtis it cracked due to the divine gaze of the Lord, demonstrating Shriji Maharaj's divine presence in the murtis to all. In the murti-pratishtha assembly, Shastriji Maharaj described the glory of the Akshar Deri, emphasizing that Gunatitanand Swami was the incarnation of Aksharbrahman, and that only by total surrender to such a God-realized Sadhu can one attain virtues like Akshar and become eligible to worship Purushottam. Then, Shastriji Maharaj appointed Yogiji Swami as the mahant of the Akshar Mandir in Gondal, to the universal approval of all.

#### MANDIR IN ATLADARA

Mathurbhai of Atladara was of good upbringing and honest intentions, but due to bad company he had taken to addictions. Still, he frequently visited the small Swaminarayan mandir in the village. And often he told Ranchhod Bhagat, the priest there, "Bhagat! Why don't you build a bigger mandir?" After some time, Ranchhod Bhagat acquired some land and began to build a bigger mandir. He managed to prepare the foundations, but then ran out of money and support. So the work stopped. Seeing this, Mathurbhai repeatedly commented, "You will not be able to finish this mandir. You need a capable person to help you." One day, Ranchhod Bhagat told Mathurbhai, "In the entire Swaminarayan Sampradaya, only Shastri Yagnapurushdasji is capable enough of building a mandir to your



satisfaction.” Mathurbhai was alerted by this statement and asked who this Shastri was. Hearing Ranchhod Bhagat describe the glory of Shastriji Maharaj in detail humbled Mathurbhai. He resolved to bring Shastriji Maharaj to Atladara. When Shastriji Maharaj arrived, other local devotees joined Mathurbhai as they showed Shastriji Maharaj the site of the incomplete new mandir. Shastriji Maharaj inspected the foundation and then said, “Only a one-pinnacled mandir is possible on this site. For a three-pinnacled mandir we need the bigger area of land which is located by the roadside.” Then Shastriji Maharaj added, “In the time of Shriji Maharaj, Mulu Metar and Krishna Mali lived there. Shriji Maharaj had visited and sanctified their homes. Let us build a mandir over that sacred area.” With this, Shastriji Maharaj showed them the land. Mathurbhai obtained permission from the residents to acquire the land and built new homes for them at another suitable site. Shastriji Maharaj performed the groundbreaking ceremony for Atladara mandir on 2 April 1940 (Fagan vad 10, Samvat 1996). The construction work then began in earnest. Shastriji Maharaj delegated responsibilities to the appropriate sadhus and devotees. With the sincere, dedicated efforts of sadhus and devotees over a period of five years, the mandir was ready. Shastriji Maharaj performed the murti-pratishtha on 12 July 1945 (Ashadh sud 3, Samvat 2001), consecrating the murtis of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami in the central sanctum. In the assembly afterwards, Shastriji Maharaj prophesied, “This mandir in Atladara will become among the best, since this place has been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj. At present it is distant from Vadodara, but in the future it will become one of its suburbs.” Thus, yet another glorious achievement, the fourth mandir, had been made possible by Shastriji Maharaj’s inspiring leadership.

## MARBLE MANDIR IN GADHADA

Shriji Maharaj had lived in Dada Khachar’s court in Gadhada for nearly 30 years, using it as a base for his spiritual travels throughout Gujarat and beyond. Shriji Maharaj wished to build a magnificent mandir on the hillock next to the River Ghela on the outskirts of the village. The land there was jointly owned by Dada Khachar and his uncle, Jiva Khachar. When Shriji Maharaj asked for the land, Dada Khachar agreed to give his part, but Jiva Khachar refused to give his share. As a result, Maharaj’s wish remained unfulfilled. For many years, Shastriji Maharaj had endeavoured to acquire the land on the hillock so that Maharaj’s wish for a mandir there could be fulfilled. At that time, the land was under the jurisdiction of the Bhavnagar State. Shastriji Maharaj’s efforts to acquire the land had been thwarted by opposing elements, who used their influence with the authorities to prevent the allocation of the land to Shastriji Maharaj. Still, Shastriji Maharaj persevered, never giving up the hope that one day Shriji Maharaj’s wish for a mandir on the hillock would come true. Revealing his faith in Shriji Maharaj as the all-doer, Shastriji Maharaj said, “Maharaj will effect a change in the government and facilitate the mandir.” And sure enough that is exactly what happened. In 1947, India gained independence from British rule. Consequently, the numerous small, separate territories, which were governed by different rulers, lost their autonomy and were merged into the new union. Under the new administration, Govindsinh Chudasama, a devotee of Shastriji Maharaj’s, was appointed as the Collector of Gohilvad District. Subsequently, Bhanbhai Khachar, a descendent of Dada Khachar, together with Govindsinh Chudasama proposed to Shastriji Maharaj that he build a mandir on the hillock in Gadhada. Shastriji Maharaj said, “If you help us to acquire the land we will certainly build a mandir there.” With Shastriji Maharaj’s consent, the devotees sought and obtained the necessary permission for the land. At long last Shriji Maharaj’s wish was nearing fulfilment. Once the land had been acquired Shastriji Maharaj arranged for the traditional Vedic ground-breaking ceremony to be performed on 16 November 1949 (Kartik vad 11, Samvat 2006) by His Highness Krishnakumar Sinhji, the former Maharaja of Bhavnagar, who was then the Governor of Madras. Thus, Shastriji Maharaj’s patient persistence had paid off and now construction of the fifth BAPS mandir inspired by Shastriji Maharaj proceeded at full speed. The murti-pratishtha was set to take place on 16 May 1951 (Vaishakh sud 10, Samvat 2007). Swamishri was in Sarangpur and his health was deteriorating. Yet, Swamishri was eager to go to Gadhada. On arrival, he inspected the work in progress and blessed everyone serving there day and night to finish the mandir. Swamishri then asked to see the murtis to be installed. He requested that water from the sacred river Ghela be brought and with it he bathed the murtis. Then he placed a sacred thread around each murti, applied a chandlo and garlanded all the murtis. Finally, he performed the arti and then said, “My ritual is over. The murti-pratishtha has been performed. Now I will not come. Yogi Maharaj will come and perform the arti.” Satisfied that everything was in order, Swamishri said, “Now I will go to Sarangpur and remain there forever.” Nobody grasped the real meaning of Swamishri’s prophetic words. In Sarangpur, Swamishri’s condition became critical. He requested to be taken to the Rang Mandap (mandir basement). There, with the sadhus and devotees looking on anxiously and praying to Maharaj, a divine glow illuminated the room. Swamishri, while repeating “Swami! Maharaj!” breathed his last and passed away to Akshardham on 10 May 1951 (Vaishakh sud 4, Samvat 2007). Everyone was heartbroken at Swamishri’s departure, but Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami comforted everyone and helped them to overcome their grief. The murti-pratishtha in Gadhada was to take place after only six days. Everyone was unsure whether or not to postpone the occasion. But Yogiji Maharaj gave everyone strength and direction, “Swami has not left us at all. He is ever present in the Satsang. It was his wish to hold the murti-pratishtha on the tenth, so he will be pleased only if we fulfil it.” These words encouraged everyone and they recalled Swamishri’s prophetic words, “Yogi will perform the arti.” And so, the auspicious murti-pratishtha ceremony was performed by Yogiji Maharaj as planned.

## BASIS OF UNDERSTANDING

Shastriji Maharaj spent much of his time teaching the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan to people, either individually, in groups or in assemblies. However, once, the devotees of Africa wrote to him, requesting that he elaborate upon the reasons why Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar. So, Shastriji Maharaj wrote a comprehensive reply, highlighting what he felt were the salient reasons. The following is a translation of excerpts of the letter written by Shastriji Maharaj on 7 December 1938: “You had written asking me to let you know of examples from the time of Shriji Maharaj illustrating that Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar. “When Shriji Maharaj held the Hutashani festival at Rathod Dhadhal’s home in Sarangpur, He recited the verse, ‘Sadguru khele vasant. Koti Krishna jode hāth, koti Vishnu name māth, koti Brahmā kathe jñān, koti Shiv dhare dhyān, Ho Sadguru khele vasant.’ Saying this He asked Muktanand Swami and Anand Swami ‘Who is such a Sadguru?’ Then both said, ‘You are such a Sadguru.’ So, Maharaj said, ‘I am Purushottam Bhagwan, and am worshipped by this Sadguru. And such a Sadguru is this Gunatitanand Swami. He is Mul Akshar.’ The above incident in Sarangpur was narrated by Rathod Dhadhal to Jasa Gor and Nagji Sheth, from whom I have heard the details. “At Jhinabhai’s darbar in Panchala, Gunatitanand Swami was seated among the 500 paramhansas. Then Maharaj asked Kalyanbhai, ‘Do you know this sadhu?’ He replied, ‘Yes, he is very austere and detached. He understands your true glory.’ Maharaj said, ‘Not just that. He is my Akshardham, where I dwell eternally.’ Thus, Maharaj himself convinced Kalyanbhai. And I heard this incident from Kalyanbhai’s son (Devjibhai).” In this way, throughout the detailed letter, Shastriji Maharaj described many occasions where Shriji Maharaj, paramhansas and devotees had all identified Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar.

## LIFE-LONG DEDICATION

Thus, Shastriji Maharaj never tired in teaching the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. Until his last breath, he endeavoured to develop this true understanding in all. Shastriji Maharaj’s enthusiasm and determination for the cause of AksharPurushottam stemmed from his deep-rooted conviction in the truth revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut. Shastriji Maharaj established five mandirs in Gujarat in which he consecrated the murtis of AksharPurushottam Maharaj in the central shrine. He accomplished his mission amidst great difficulties, hardships and challenges. With only five sadhus and a handful of devotees he pioneered the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) in 1907 CE. Today, Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s unique philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, which is based on the Vedas, continues to be lived and taught by Mahant Swami Maharaj. He has expanded upon the efforts of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and inspired many to understand and live by the divine revelations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

## Essay-2

### 2. Ghar Sabha: Two important Virtues

Pramukh Swami Maharaj gifted two wonderful ways to defuse family conflicts and other issues through the practice of satsang and ghar sabha: understanding others and being broad-minded. Pramukh Swami Maharaj introduced the efficacious practices of satsang and ghar sabha (home assembly) for all in overcoming discontent, enmity, spats, fights and a wide range of other problems. Through these two means Swamishri stated that one would be able to understand others and also develop a broad, generous outlook. Let us try to fathom the importance of understanding others and having a broad-minded outlook through the medium of ghar sabha.

#### Ghar Sabha for Developing Understanding

Every person has a deep desire to be understood by others. Whenever you experience that someone understands your perspective or your feelings you feel happy and relaxed. Hence, your relation with that person becomes cordial and robust. Other than that your relationship remains dry and formal.

Parents often have a common complaint that their teenage child speaks less with them. Whenever parents ask a question to their child he or she replies briefly, and often coldly, whereas with friends their child talks enthusiastically for hours. The child reluctantly bonds or deals with parents, whereas with friends he or she bonds naturally and fluidly. What is the reason behind this? How come teenage children relegate their relations with their parents, who have taken care of them for years, and instead bond more with their friends? The reason behind this seems to be that a teenager experiences that his friends understand him. Whereas, with his parents, he experiences a yawning generation gap.

So, understanding one another is an indispensable aspect of healthy and flourishing relationships. Ghar sabha provides a conducive environment in developing mutual understanding. In homes where family members talk to each other only when some work is to be done or something is required, then ghar sabha facilitates conversations and dissolves the generation gap.

Diptesh Patel, a satsangi youth in New Jersey, narrates his experience, “My retired parents live with me. Often, one finds gaps and bitterness in relationships between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and between a son and his father. The case between my parents and us was similar. My parents were adamant about certain things, whereas my wife and I thought differently. My parents insisted that we raise our children the way they had raised us. But in America our situation was completely different. Additionally, there were small communication gaps between us and them. For example, I never informed them that I had planned to visit my friend’s home the next day. On the contrary, my parents had planned something else for all of us. My wife would often cook something and my mother wished to eat something else. Gradually, through ghar sabha, we were able to solve our problems due to lack of communication. After completing the ghar sabha we would discuss our schedules for the next two to three days and what meals to cook. Subsequently, the problems between my mother and wife and my father and myself were defused.”

Another issue that arises in a family is mostly related to retired parents or seniors in the house. They complain that they are never informed or consulted about the social affairs of the family. As a result they feel they are not valued or considered as members of their own home. On the other hand, the youth who has the responsibility of running the home feels there’s no need to inform or consult their parents about every matter. When the youth is told to at least inform whatever is possible or important, then the youth answers that he or she does not purposefully abstain from informing them but that there’s simply no time or opportunity to do so. Here, ghar sabha provides the opportunity and time to share whatever it may be with one’s seniors or parents.

Hareshbhai Patel of Houston shares his experience in this matter, “By doing ghar sabha the distance between me and my parents was bridged. Mostly, I never talked to them about my business and social matters. Consequently, there was a distance between us. But now, during ghar sabha, such matters are shared, discussed and answered. By talking candidly during ghar sabha our distance disappeared.”

One of the reasons for family discord is doubts or suspicions. Many times, due to lack of frank talks with the family, doubts arise and grow to disproportionate levels, eventually leading to quarrels, fights or divorce. Casual conversations during ghar sabha resolve suspicions and dissolve prejudices. Quite often a family on the verge of a break-up is salvaged due to such conversations during ghar sabha.

Shaileshbhai Dhanani of Rajkot relates his experience, “Some time after my marriage troubles started between me and my wife. I worked in a factory. Sometimes, due to an overload of work, I used to come home late. As a result my wife became suspicious of me and this led to heated arguments and increasing conflicts. My parents become fed up with her bickerings, hollow suspicions and unfounded accusations. I found my life hellish and our relationship came to the point of breaking up. One day, the conflict climaxed to such a point that my exasperated wife attempted suicide. But she was saved because of Vinubhai, our landlord, who came and calmed her.” Thereafter, Shaileshbhai witnessed the ghar sabha carried out at Vinubhai’s house next door and the resulting joy and ease in their family. He was inspired and started ghar sabha in his home. Shaileshbhai adds, “In the beginning, I used to do ghar sabha on my own. But, gradually, all the members joined me. Slowly, my wife became interested in satsang. Our differences started to dissolve and our problems were solved. Finally, there was peace and joy between us.”

In this way, ghar sabha mended a broken family with trust and love.

### **Ghar Sabha Inspires Broad-Mindedness**

It is not incumbent that members of a family should live in a large house, however, it is necessary that they should have a broad-minded outlook. A family is not a commercial outfit or a government system where its members have to abide by disciplines out of fear or compulsion. There is a need for rules and regulations in the house, but they should be followed with ease and love, and be practised out of respect rather than out of pressure. This can only happen when members accept each other with broad-mindedness and generosity.

When a person gets angry for a minor mistake made by someone, the consequences are far greater and more destructive than the loss or effect due to that small mistake. By doing ghar sabha the members gradually become attuned to positive understanding, which enables them to tolerate and forgive another’s mistake, cultivate patience, take care of that person and rein in their own anger. Countless families have been liberated from anger and other personal faults due to ghar sabha.

Divyangbhai Master of Vadodara elaborates, “My wife’s nature was very volatile. Daily, she had differences and friction with my mother. When we started doing ghar sabha she did not sit with us for one-and-a-half years. But when she started attending a gradual change occurred in her nature. Her relationship with my mother improved. Now, whenever someone in the house misplaces something she does not get angry.”



Miteshbhai Bhatiya of Jamnagar writes, “I was very hot-headed. I used to simply burst out with anger on trifling matters, which caused anguish and conflicts in the house. Sometimes, there used to be friction between me and my customers and as a result my business declined. But by Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s inspiration I commenced doing ghar sabha, and in five years I became calm and quiet. Today, there is peace at home and due to my friendly relations with the customers I have benefited monetarily.”

Pankajbhai of New Jersey writes, “Due to my furious nature I used to get mad at my children for small things. As a result my wife became averse to me and my parents didn’t like my edgy nature either. Because of this, friction started between me and them. Thereafter, with Swamishri’s agra we started ghar sabha and read the book Swabhav Vash Sansar. We got answers in the ghar sabha to the problems arising out of our swabhavs. Slowly, we became tolerant and broad-minded and things took a turn for the better in our lives. We started understanding each others’ greatness and realized that each one of us was right in his or her own way. We thus came closer to each other and our bitterness vanished.”

Janaksinh of Odarka describes the efficacy of practising ghar sabha, “Because of ghar sabha internal unity, camaraderie and love has increased in our family. When our land and property were divided among us three brothers we did not require the presence and help of a committee of five neutral persons from the village. We discussed among ourselves and decided upon three parts and received the title deeds of each share at Doctor Swami’s hands. When we divided the property as part of our social arrangement all the female members of our house were sad and expressed that they did not want to be separated from each other. The reason behind these sentiments was the observance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s instruction to hold ghar sabha.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s instruction to do ghar sabha has worked wonders in countless families by solving internal frictions, personal problems and blessing all with inner peace and enlightenment. Ghar sabha has empowered innumerable individuals and families to become flexible and broad-minded in their inter-personal relations. Ghar shabha has also resolved issues related to land and property entitlements after the death of parents and curbed conflicts that were on the verge of resulting in murders or legal proceedings.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s contribution in providing ghar sabha as a master key to unlocking and resolving a wide spectrum of problems and conflicts will forever be appreciated and remembered, and leave countless more families indebted to him. May we regularly practice in order to experience a happy ambience and divinity in our homes and also inspire others to do ghar sabha.

### **Mahant Swami Maharaj's Blessings**

On 18 May 2018, during an evening satsang assembly in Chennai,  
Mahant Swami Maharaj spoke in Gujarati about the need to do ghar sabha.

When a mother-in-law believes her son’s wife to be her daughter then all conflicts between them will end. However, when a mother-in-law remains suspicious of her daughter-in-law then things will get out of hand. Pramukh Swami Maharaj revealed a solution to this, ‘To be mutually accommodative [anukul thavu].’ Only by understanding others can one become accommodative.

Suspicion is a terrible thing; it ruins a home. No one in the house can live with peace and happiness. And mostly, there’s no solid reason behind one’s suspicion. One makes a mountain out of a molehill. One who is suspicious of someone believes his suspicion to be true. Everyone believes what they say [or think] is right; they never understand. They feel, ‘I am right and the house should run the way I say.’ To solve this, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had shown a wonderful means – ghar sabha.

Through ghar sabha the family members come to trust each another, and, thereafter, all problems get solved. One’s son or daughter will not ask for something unnecessarily, because they understand. And parents should try to help them as much as possible. Subsequently, even if there is little in the house there will be peace because all conflicts have been solved. On the other hand, if a billionaire suspects of something [wrong in his house] he will not be happy and peaceful. The reason for samp [harmony] lies in samjan [understanding]. One who becomes accommodative [anukul] and gives up his wilful resolves [man dharya muke] then he becomes happy. However, if he believes that he is right then he will never ever be happy. Ghar sabha enables one to understand others and accept what they say.

In the beginning, you may not get success [in doing ghar sabha], but, gradually, you’ll get the hang of it. When one [person in the family] understands then the second person will also understand and then everyone will understand. The effects of [ghar sabha] will take place slowly and then solidly. It takes time for everyone in the family to adjust with each other, and then peace and happiness will prevail. Today, countless families experience such peace. If you want to experience the miracle of ghar sabha then start doing it.

## Essay-3

### 3. Global Efforts by BAPS to Supply Emergency Medical Aid to India

The current unprecedented surge in COVID-19 cases throughout India has overwhelmed the health infrastructure and resources of the entire country. The enormous number of patients requiring treatment has led to a previously unheard of shortage of ICU beds, ventilators, beds with oxygen support, medical oxygen and other supplies. It has stretched the doctors, nurses, paramedical personnel and other frontline workers beyond capacity. These covid warriors are courageously and professionally dealing with this crisis that has left the entire nation in a state of unease. The worldwide Indian diaspora and many countries have initiated efforts to help India with much-needed medical oxygen, medical equipment and other emergency supplies. By the inspiration of Mahant Swami Maharaj, BAPS centres worldwide have contributed to the efforts by supplying liquid oxygen, oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders and other essential supplies. Also, in Gujarat, BAPS hospitals have been providing treatment to COVID-19 patients. The following is brief overview of recent COVID-19 relief by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

#### OXYGEN AND EQUIPMENT

With the support of the UAE government and Indian community, BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi, under the guidance and inspiration of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, has created a supply chain of oxygen tanks and cylinders which will provide over 440 metric tons of liquid oxygen per month – enough to fill more than 50,000 cylinders of medical oxygen. Each oxygen source will be technically audited to ensure that India's standards for medical oxygen are met or exceeded. This oxygen will be provided to the needy through the government, BAPS's own network of COVID hospitals and special village clinics. Under the guidance of the Gujarat government, BAPS is distributing the oxygen free of charge to designated hospitals and treatment facilities. The efforts in the UAE are being coordinated by Brahmavihari Swami, along with Shri Deepak Mehta, CEO of Global Gases Group, and Shri Ramesh Ramakrishnan, Chairman of the Transworld Group and other donors and supporters. They have meticulously planned the logistics to send aid to the patients in India as soon as possible. On 1 May 2021, two cryogenic tanks filled with a total of 44 metric tons (MT) of liquid oxygen (LOX) were dispatched from Abu Dhabi. These special vacuum insulated tanks, custombuilt to safely carry liquid oxygen at -185°C (-300°F) in accordance with international safety standards, arrived at Kandla Port on 6 May. Each tank will provide sufficient oxygen to fill 5,300 cylinders that will help to save many lives. From Kandla, the special vacuum insulated tanks were taken by road to their supply destinations. On 8 and 9 May, the first shipment of liquid oxygen was supplied to the District Civil Hospital in Morbi, Guru Gobindsinh General Hospital in Jamnagar, Civil Hospital in Palanpur, GMERS Hospital in Patan and Yogiji Maharaj Hospital in Ahmedabad and will help to treat thousands of patients. Also, arrangements have been made to send more than 1,600 cylinders of medical oxygen from the UAE, of which 600 cylinders have already been received. In addition, around 1,000 oxygen concentrators will be sent by BAPS centres in the UAE, UK, USA, Kenya, Uganda and South Africa. The support of donors and authorities in the various countries has facilitated the rapid transport of essential supplies. An initial consignment of oxygen concentrators reached Ahmedabad on 30 April. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed puja of the equipment with prayers that these instruments be as helpful as possible to as many patients as possible. These concentrators will be distributed to hospitals and healthcare centres in different cities. To support BAPS's COVID-19 relief work in India, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in UK & Europe began a 'Cycle to Save Lives in India' campaign on 28 April 2021 – a 48-hour, nonstop static relay cycle challenge. It aimed to cover 7,600 kilometres – the distance between London and Delhi – but ended up almost tripling that by cycling 20,127 kilometres! As part of a relay, 787 participants cycled during the day and throughout the night from Saturday 1 to Monday 3 May at BAPS Swaminarayan mandirs in London, Chigwell and Leicester. Through their efforts, substantial emergency supplies were sent to India. The cycles were arranged outside the respective mandirs, following strict social distancing guidelines. They were also thoroughly sanitized after every use.

#### BAPS COVID-19 MEDICAL SERVICES

In Gujarat, a total of 395 beds at BAPS hospitals have been allocated to treat coronavirus patients: Pramukh Swami Maharaj Hospital in Surat, Shastriji Maharaj Hospital in Vadodara, Yogiji Maharaj Hospital in Ahmedabad and the BAPS Hospital in Botad. To date, around 3,500 patients have been treated. In Atladara, near Vadodara, the BAPS Shastriji Maharaj Hospital is providing full medical, nursing and other infrastructure support at remote two units: BAPS Niramaya Hospital – 35 beds with oxygen support – and BAPS Chhatralaya – 100 beds. In addition, on the BAPS Yagnapurush Grounds opposite the BAPS Mandir in Atladara, a 500-bed field hospital with oxygen support has been set up. The entire non-medical infrastructure – electrical, plumbing and civil work – for the field hospital is being provided by the BAPS Mandir in Atladara under the guidance of Kothari Bhagyasetu Swami, Jnanvatsal

Swami and other swamis, as well as, Shri Siddarthbhai Patel, Dr Samirbhai Brahmabhatt, Shri Narayansinh Jadeja, Shri Bharatbhai Desai and other devotees. They have also provided a 13,000 litre liquid oxygen storage tank on the premises. The admissions and medical treatment at this field hospital, is being managed by the government-run GMERS Hospital, Gotri. The BAPS Mandir in Atladara is also providing free meals three times a day to all patients, doctors, nurses, paramedics and other staff in the field hospital. In addition, BAPS centres in Valsad, Rajkot, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and elsewhere are also providing food and rations to the needy.

#### VACCINATION DRIVES

In India, BAPS has conducted vaccination camps at centres in Surat, Vadodara, Ahmedabad, Rajkot and Nadiad. Also, at over 30 BAPS centres in the USA and Canada have held vaccination camps to vaccinate thousands of local residents.

#### VOLUNTEER NETWORK

To ensure smooth and efficient delivery of the supplies experienced BAPS swamis and a network of volunteers have selflessly dedicated their services.