



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

SATSANG PRAGNA - 1 : 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: VACHANAMRUT – 3rd Edition, July 2019

Total Marks: 100

Q.1 Answer ALL of the following, using one sentence (not just one word) for each answer. [4]

1. How does God come when He incarnates for the purpose of granting liberation to the jivas?
2. What does a person known as who adheres to all four firmness?
3. What is so surprising in this Satsang?
4. Who punishes the person with firm conviction that God has a form?

Q.2 Write on any ONE of the following examples and clarify its principle. (In 4–5 lines.) [4]

1. The example of the witness box and a chain.
2. Remembering constantly and a red-hot branding iron.

Q.3 Write concisely on any TWO of the following questions. (In 4–5 lines each.) [4]

1. As per Vachanamrut Gadhada I 47, describe the characteristics of a devotee with firmness in bhakti.
2. As per Vachanamrut Panchala 7, what is the importance of knowing the form of God and loss incurred from not having firm conviction in God.
3. As per Vachanamrut Gadhada I 60, what are the means of eradicating worldly desires?
4. Based to Panchala 3, what is the method for eradicating flaws like ego, jealousy, etc.

Q.4 Complete the following quotations. [9]

1. Just as one's mind God and his Sant.
2. With this understanding, he God that I have attained.
3. I do not understand those of that Satpurush.

Q.5 Explain any TWO of the following incidents and give a suitable Vachanamrut reference from the syllabus. (In 3–4 lines each.) [4]

1. Je suraj sami raj nakhe, te ulti avi pade ankhe.
2. Educated youths in their twenties from overseas are taking initiation into the sadhu-fold from Mahant Swami Maharaj.
3. Bharatji renounced his kingdom but became attached to a baby deer, so he had to take birth as a deer.
4. Lalo Palo, who had been blessed with Akshardham, became a ghost in the Gangajaliyo Well.

SECTION 2: BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN JIVANCHARITRA PART 1 – 6th Gujarati Edition, May 2013 AND PART 2 – 6th Gujarati Edition, June 2012

Q.6 Write concisely on any ONE of the following. (In 30 lines.) [12]

1. The divine element recognized by spiritual seekers in the form of Nilkanth Varni (Only incidents from 'The Divine Journey in the Forests').
2. Female devotees of spiritual head Sahajanand Swami (Only incidents from 'Religious Assembly in Manavadar' to 'Satsang of Kutch').
3. The services of the devas rendered to Nilkanth Varni during his journey in the forests (Only incidents from 'Again in Ayodhya and Then Northwards' to 'Pilgrimage in the South').

Q.7 Write short notes on any TWO of the following topics. (Each short note should contain two incidents of five lines each.) [8]

1. The harassment of Dharmadev by the demons till the 'Vishnuyag and Krishna darshan in Vrindavan' (Only incidents from 'Background to the Manifestation').
2. Mohandas meets Nilkanth Varni (Only incidents from 'In Nepal').
3. The holes in dharma observed by Nilkanth Varni (Only incidents from 'In East Bengal').

Q.8 Describe any THREE of the following incidents and give your thoughts.

(Write incidents in eight lines and thoughts in four lines.)

[12]

1. 'He is greater than Shri Krishna also.'
2. Again in Badrinath
3. The Naming Ceremony
4. Are We Initiating Ladies?
5. The Birth of Dharma

Q.9 Describe the personality of any ONE of the characters below through incidents.

[8]

1. Raghunathdas (Only incidents from 'Darshan of Shri Hari's Divinity Through Samadhi' to 'Raghunathdas Is Excommunicated').
2. Narsinh Mehta (Piplana) (Only incidents from 'In the Region of Saurashtra' to 'Prohibition on Consecrating Murti's of Ram, Lakshman and Janki').

**SECTION 3: DHARMIK VIDHANO ANE BHAVNAO – 8th Gujarati Edition, June 2019
AND GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ESSAY**

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

[5]

1. What is the routine work to be done immediately after puja?
2. What pages are added to life due to satsang assemblies?
3. What do the Upanishads say about the remedy for keeping the mind pure?
4. Why is it necessary to worship the murti of the guru?
5. Why do we sit facing east to perform puja?

Q.11 Write concisely on any ONE of the following. (In 10 lines.)

[3]

1. What is ghar sabha? What is the definition of ghar sabha?
2. Why are the bell, drums and conch played during the arti?

Q.12 Write short notes on any ONE of the following topics. (In 15–20 lines.)

[6]

1. What is a mantra? Why should the mantra be chanted?
2. What is arti?

Q.13 Write short answers to the following questions. (In 4–5 lines each.)

[6]

1. Write in detail about rajasi food.
2. What should children live with their parents?
3. What if we worship murtis in the ghar mandir replace nitya puja?

Q.14 Write an essay on any ONE of the following. (In approximately 35–40 lines.)

[15]

1. Proficiency in all Work is Yoga (Enlightening Essays (baps.org), 2021)
2. Satsang Diksha: A Precious Gift from Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj (Swaminarayan Bliss, May-Dec. 2020, pp. 59-63)
3. Volunteer Dedication in Abu Dhabi (Swaminarayan Bliss, May-June 2019, pp. 46-48)



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 Pragna-1-Paper-1

Essay-1

1. Proficiency in all Work is Yoga

Saints and great men achieve many things through the synchronization of their speech, thought and behaviour. The resultant good actions spread like an aroma all around. What may appear difficult for many people, the saints can achieve. Their lives, woven like the threads of worship and service to God, show proficiency in planning and management. The saints, who are above the three gunas, are modest and offer their selfless services to God with joy. God alone spreads the glory of their divine works.

In Yogiji Maharaj's times, though Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the recipient of Shastriji Maharaj's divine love and constant care, he always remained unseen and served under the guru's wings. He never made a show of his devotion and successes. He always avoided fame by merely doing his duties and in abiding by the highest tradition of asceticism. It was difficult to understand him. Even after becoming the guru it was very difficult to grasp the divine spark in him because of his simplicity. There was no pretence, not an iota of conceit, nor a hint of his peaceful personality. Hence, it was more difficult to know his greatness. But, after being with him, when we realized his true personality, we were transported to the heights of his grandeur of unfathomable, transparent asceticism and generosity which dwarfed even the highest peak of the Himalayas. Though Swamishri was engrossed in various activities all the time, through his humility he continuously spread his divine warmth everywhere. Swamishri remained totally absorbed in God, yet he believed himself to be a servant. He performed wonderful and relentless selfless services without detaching himself from Paramatma for even a moment.

In 1985, after visiting the exhibition halls at Swaminarayan Nagar in Ahmedabad, Swami Chinmayanandji came to the visitors' room. Here, on meeting Swamishri, he asked, "Who has organized all this?"

Swamishri replied in his usual tranquil and patient manner, "God has done all this." Swami Chinmayanandji accepted the answer, but felt that the inexhaustible divine power of Vasudev was working through Swamishri; otherwise such planning would not have been possible. Swamishri's radiant saintliness was reflected through his big and small humble activities. Thus, all were convinced that someone (God) performed all the activities through Swamishri. He had merged his existence in Shriji Maharaj and his preceptors – Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. He always said that all things happened by their wishes and blessings.

Swamishri organized, served and took rounds during big or small occasions and festivals. During the Suvarna Kalash Mahotsav of the Gadhpur Mandir in 1961, the strong summer winds of Vaishakh (June) were playing havoc. In spite of the shortage of water, dearth in lodgings and the strong winds knocking down the mandap, Swamishri solved these issues and completed each task with equanimity. On seeing all this, many got the inspiration to serve. On all occasions, big and small, Swamishri would be seen serving steadfastly in all the departments.

In 1965, Swamishri was overseeing all the arrangements during the Centenary Celebration of Shastriji Maharaj in Atladra. He did not care for food, water, rest or sleep. Yogiji Maharaj used to enquire, "Has Pramukh Swami taken food?" But Swamishri would be engaged in seva in the hot sun at the festival site. Mota Swami requested Swamishri to come and have lunch with him, and he waited anxiously for him till he came. This way, Mota Swami ensured that Swamishri would have lunch with him.

Swamishri's humble enthusiasm for devotion and service was very much evident whenever he was supervising the festival work all through the night prior to the inaugural day. Once, while the assembly stage was under-construction, many devotees explained to him that they would finish off the work while he could go and rest. But Swamishri left only after the brick wall behind the stage was constructed and painted. Thereafter, he completed his ablutions and attended the morning sabha.

During the Amrut Mahotsav in 1967, Gondal, Swamishri did his best in making the water arrangements as per Yogiji Maharaj's order. He had all the other responsibilities of the festival on his shoulders, so he worked relentlessly. However difficult the problem, he would solve it. Others could not even dream of such solutions!

Many problems cropped up while providing lodgings (during the Amrut Mahotsav), as it was impossible to allocate premises that were satisfactory to all. In that case too, he tried to please all. His power to take decisions was amazing. He was firm in his decisions. Initially, he would ask all and take everyone's advice. However, when all were perplexed, he would give a decision by remembering Maharaj. He would say, "Maharaj will make things work out well." With these magical words, everyone experienced ease, and no doubt or worry would remain thereafter.

In 1969, during the murti-pratishtha festival of the mandir in Bhadra, there were great difficulties in acquiring water. But with the blessings of Yogiji Maharaj, water was discovered in a well on the opposite bank of the River Und. A pipeline was quickly laid from the well across the dry riverbed and up to the mandir and dharmashala; a distance of more than 5,000 feet. Swamishri got the work done by continuously standing with the workers from noon till late at night in the torrid Vaishakh heat. He did not relax for a moment or feel tired. His total dedication to seva was evident to one and all. Along with that, there was no burden of work, worries and distress on his demeanour. He was always busy, patient and sincere with no uneasiness and pretences. That was why so many people derived inspiration from him.

In 1981, prior to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Bicentenary Celebrations in Ahmedabad, an anti-reservation agitation had erupted in Ahmedabad. The movement became increasingly violent day by day, which affected the Sabarmati Ashram area close to the celebration venue. A question arose as to whether to hold the festival in such circumstances. Preparations had begun months before, but it was feared that the agitation might escalate further. Numerous leading lights met Swamishri and expressed their views that the festival should be postponed.

In such circumstances, Swamishri never took unilateral decisions. He would consult all and asked for their views. All had suggested to postpone the festival. But Swamishri said in a calm and confident tone, "We should hold the festival as decided. Maharaj would set everything right and resolve the agitation." And truly, due to Swamishri's blessings the agitation was resolved before the celebrations commenced. The entire celebrations were carried out without a hitch. As such, Swamishri's faith in Shri Hari and his strong will assured all that he was an extraordinary saint with a very strong bond with Shriji Maharaj.

In 1985, before the Bicentenary Celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami in Ahmedabad, there was an acute water shortage and a students' agitation. Some social leaders opined that the celebrations should not be held. But Swamishri was firm in his decision. He said Maharaj-Swami would help us. Shortly thereafter, by his blessings, there were heavy rains and the water crisis was solved.

In the same way, Swamishri engaged his sadhus and youths in the service of mute animals during the drought and famine in 1987. He inspired and organized cattle camps and said, "This is service to God." He planned the cattle camps in such a way that his sadhus and volunteers took utmost care of the cattle so that they could be useful for farming the following year.

The youths were always amazed at the efficiency and ability of Swamishri's planning and management. In one such instance, a youth from Canada, Nareshbhai, enquired from Swamishri about the secret of his success. Swamishri replied, "From the beginning, I was engaged in the mandir activities, and secondly, I was inclined towards welcoming and taking care of the devotees. I was engaged in managing the boarding and lodging facilities, and in providing other facilities to the devotees. Shastriji Maharaj was much pleased with this. Such types of seva increased during the time of Yogiji Maharaj. From the beginning I was inclined towards the planning of festivals and solving various issues that arose. I had the habit of completing whatever task I undertook. Because of Shastriji Maharaj's and Yogiji Maharaj's grace the work goes on."

In 1985, HE Giani Zail Singh, President of India, was sitting in the visitors' room after visiting the Swaminarayan Nagar in Ahmedabad. On meeting Swamishri, he exclaimed, "Wonderful planning!"

Swamishri humbly replied, "Our sadhus and youths have unitedly done all this." Swamishri gave all credit to his disciples. Then Zail Singh, a student of spiritualism and a discernor of saintly power, replied, "This work might have been done by anybody, but you are the motivating power and current behind all, otherwise this is impossible."

Thus, anyone, after having the slightest acquaintance with Swamishri, could perceive the secret behind such success.

Swamishri found bliss in pleasing Purushottam-Narayan, the supreme being. This was his only aim and source of fulfilment.

No worldly storms ruffled him. He was never affected by the dualities of love and hatred and praise and insult. Because of Swamishri's innate qualities, his body and soul were radiant with divine lustre. Those who viewed and followed him with divinity could visualize further and further the path of Yogaha karmasu kaushalam – proficiency in work is yoga.

Essay-2

2. Satsang Diksha: A Precious Gift from Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj

On the auspicious occasion of Guru Purnima, on 5 July 2020, Guruhari Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj presented a historic gift to the BAPS Satsang community in the form of a book. Written in Gujarati by Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj himself, 'Satsang Diksha' is a concise text which forms a part of the voluminous 'Akshar-Purushottam Samhita'. The Gujarati prose is also presented as 315 Sanskrit verses. In Satsang Diksha, based on the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Mahant Swami Maharaj concisely describes the philosophical principles to be understood and the daily personal practices of devotion to be undertaken by all BAPS devotees. Thus, it is a shastra explaining the principles of agna and upasana as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. This text represents a special message directly from Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj to all BAPS devotees, clearly revealing the path everyone must follow to attain ekantik dharma and experience the bliss of God. He has requested every devotee to read it daily. When presenting the Satsang Diksha shastra to the BAPS Satsang community, Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj dedicated the text at the feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatit gurus under the auspices of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations (1921–2021).

Supreme Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifested on this earth out of his infinite compassion to liberate countless souls. He established the divine Satsang fellowship, and nourished and fostered the timeless traditions of Hinduism. Through his revelation of the Vedic principle of 'Akshar-Purushottam Darshan' he identified the path for attaining the highest moksha. In his moral and spiritual teachings, detailed in the Shikshapatri and Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan provides a practical guide of spiritual sadhanas for the experience of happiness through moral behaviour, social dealings and spiritual knowledge. Both shastras include the essence of the Hindu shastras. Over the past two centuries, the Gunatit gurus have nurtured the spiritual tradition and knowledge founded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan to inspire and bless countless mumukshus with the experience of the highest divine bliss. A concise form of the spiritual knowledge and sadhanas propagated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus is presented for all mumukshus in the Satsang Diksha shastra authored by Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj. Swamishri started writing this shastra in Navsari on 30 January 2020 – Vasant Panchmi (Maha sud 5, V.S. 2076) – and completed it on 2 April 2020 – Swaminarayan Jayanti (Chaitra sud 9) in Nenpur. He wrote this shastra amidst his unceasing and tireless vicharan, daily satsang assemblies and events, personal meetings with sadhus and devotees, and the daily correspondence and administrative responsibilities of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. Quite often, Swamishri wrote until late at night or during the early morning. Once Swamishri had finished writing the shastra, he involved senior and scholarly sadhus of the BAPS – Puja Ishwarcharan Swami, Puja Viveksagar Swami, Puja Atmaswarup Swami, Puja Anandswarup Swami, Puja Narayanmuni Swami, Puja Bhadresh Swami and others – to enrich its language, wherever required. The Satsang Diksha shastra forms a part of the Akshar-Purushottam Samhita shastra, a Sanskrit text which expounds the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's philosophy and bhakti tradition. On Swamishri's instructions, the Gujarati Satsang Diksha shastra he had written was rendered into Sanskrit by the Sanstha's renowned scholar, Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadresh Swami. Thereafter, Swamishri checked the Sanskrit translation with the original Gujarati verses and made necessary changes. On 5 July 2020, the auspicious day of Guru Purnima, in Nenpur, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the puja rituals of the 'Satsang Diksha' shastra and dedicated it with profound devotion at the lotus feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj. By gifting this shastra, Swamishri has blessed the present and future generations with a concise version of the philosophy and teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus. It clarifies and inspires everyone's spiritual sadhanas for attaining ultimate moksha. The Swaminarayan satsang is a unique and practical way of life in consonance with the Vedic Akshar-Purushottam principle and has been practised by countless satsangis since the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. For the spiritual nourishment and growth of the Satsang, Bhagwan Swaminarayan inspired an unceasing parampara and legacy of Aksharbrahma Gunatit gurus. Agna and upasana are the two principles of satsang explained and elaborated upon by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in his divine discourses, which have been compiled as the Vachanamrut. These two principles are also reflected upon in the books,

kirtans and discourses of his paramhansas. Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami's discourses consolidate the supreme divinity of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, spiritual sadhanas and principles in the lives of countless sadhus and devotees. Through his discourses, Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj propagated that Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahma and Bhagwan Swaminarayan is Parabrahma Purushottam. Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj tolerated colossal hardships and opposition to enshrine the principle of Akshar-Purushottam as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He consecrated the murtis of Akshar-Purushottam in the central shrines of shikharbaddha mandirs. Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj fostered the Satsang with the nectar of samp, suhradbhav and ekta. He established the BAPS children's and youth forums, and Sunday satsang assemblies to nourish the devotees with the principles of agna and upasana. Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Herculean efforts developed the BAPS into a global organization. He inspired the writing of shastras, consecrated 1,200 mandirs, blessed 1,000 youths with saffron diksha and organized socio-spiritual services for the uplift of society. Presently, through the leadership and blessings of Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, over 1,000 sadhus and countless devotees continue to be enlightened with the fundamental principles of satsang. His teachings that we are the followers of one God, one guru and one principle, and must cultivate humility, harmony and mahima for all have nurtured an atmosphere of divinity and love in the Satsang. Since the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Sampradaya has seen the creation of shastras that nourish the principles of agna and upasana among its followers. Further, shastras related to philosophy, spiritual sadhana, bhakti, niyams and dharma, and other aspects of spirituality have helped in disseminating and consolidating the satsang way of life among devotees. Mahant Swami Maharaj had long wished that a single shastra be written to summarize the teachings of all the shastras of the Sampradaya. He discussed this with the senior sadhus and accepted their request to carry out the seva of writing such a shastra himself. The resulting shastra, Satsang Diksha, includes a wide range of essential topics: Bhagwan Swaminarayan is Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan, supreme, the all-doer, always has a divine form and is forever manifest on earth; the Gunatit guru is Aksharbrahma, the embodiment of Narayan, because he is eternally God-realized, and the ideal for all spiritual aspirants to attain the brahmic state; and profound love and atmabuddhi for him are the essence of all sadhanas. The principle of becoming aksharrup – to offer humble devotion to Purushottam – is delineated in this shastra. In addition, it advocates daily contemplation as part of one's sadhana on thoughts such as having attained Parabrahma (prapti), Bhagwan's all-doership (karta-harta), earning Bhagwan's pleasure (rajipo), atma, the ephemeral nature of the world, mahima through association, perceiving others' virtues, divyabhav and introspection. Satsang Diksha also encompasses aspects such as support (paksha) for devotees, abstaining from discouraging talks and not looking at others' flaws. It includes the purpose of establishing mandirs and bhakti rituals such as darshan and mansi. It also guides on the daily practices for devotees, such as obeying niyam-dharma, having good behaviour, attending the weekly satsang sabha, performing personal daily puja and mansi, conducting ghar sabha, and performing arti and other rituals before the ghar mandir. The word diksha, which is part of this shastra's title, means firm resolve, unshakeable faith and total sacrifice. The message of this shastra is to resolve to personally consolidate the principles of satsang related to agna and upasana in one's life, and to attain firm faith in and totally dedicate oneself for these two principles. Satsang Diksha contains the quintessence of all that needs to be understood and practised in Satsang as propagated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit guru parampara. Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj has truly blessed the entire Satsang fellowship by writing this shastra to reveal the satsang principles as taught and established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus. We will forever remain indebted to him for his contribution and grace.

Essay-3

3. Volunteer Dedication in Abu Dhabi

The BAPS Hindu Mandir planned for Abu Dhabi has captured the attention of people all over the world. Its steady progression from a cherished dream into an impending reality has been possible due to the blessings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj and the generosity of the rulers of the UAE. However, the backbone of the project is the volunteer force – male and female, young and old. The Satsang Mandal in Dubai is relatively small compared to the size of the project it has been tasked to complete. Yet, the dedication and enthusiasm of all to contribute in whatever way possible is a major factor that has enabled the completion of daunting targets. The visit of Mahant Swami Maharaj to the UAE from 18 to 29 April 2019 was primarily to perform the Shilanyas (Foundation Stone-Laying) Ceremony for the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Mureikha, Abu Dhabi. With less than three months to prepare, the limited volunteer force was mobilized by the department leaders to thoroughly plan and prepare for the 12-day visit of guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj and all the events that would be taking place in his presence. Although the mandir site is in Abu Dhabi, the majority of UAE devotees live in Dubai and Sharjah, with a few in other states. Thus, the centre of planning and preparation was the BAPS Mandir in Dubai. To put the task into perspective: the site of the Shilanyas

Ceremony was a barren desert strip of land 100 km from Dubai and 45 km from Abu Dhabi. Surrounding the site is acres of sandy desert. So, it was imperative that detailed planning be undertaken in terms of what needed to be done on the site and what equipment, materials and manpower would be required to accomplish the tasks. Since, the omission of even the smallest item would mean a 200-km round trip to fetch it! Serving in over 20 departments – construction, transport, kitchen, decoration, facilities, security, outreach and others – lead volunteers held meetings to plan and then initiate the execution of their necessary tasks. Throughout this period, volunteers managed their time efficiently – attending to their personal jobs and businesses by day and joining in the seva in the evenings. Often, they would serve till past midnight to meet the schedules. Despite the inevitable fatigue, their desire to serve and please guru Mahant Swami Maharaj motivated them to continue amid numerous challenges. As Swamishri's arrival date approached, the intensity of the seva increased, yet the teamwork and willingness to serve enabled all challenges to be met. Throughout this entire period, the volunteers were guided and encouraged lovingly and meticulously by the resident sadhus of the UAE – Aksharatit Swami and Paramvandan Swami. The number of available volunteers peaked for the day of the Shilanyas Ceremony – around 400 men and 275 women served throughout the day. Thereafter, core teams attended to the windup of the arrangements set up on the mandir site, while other volunteers served from morning till night at the Pramukh Swami Mandapam (marquee) and dining areas at Jumeirah Park, where over 2,000 devotees daily came in the mornings and evenings for the assemblies in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. In addition to volunteers from Dubai, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Ruwais, Ras Al Khaima and Ajman, volunteers from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, USA, UK and Australia also came specially to help in whatever capacity was required. Also, volunteers from local communities, such as CAPSS, Friends of India, ISKCON and others, and well-wishers from nearby labour camps, also helped. The following is a brief overview of some of the salient tasks accomplished by some of the departments.

CONSTRUCTION

- Levelling the mandir site to enable erection of the marquees and parking arrangements.
- Digging the 16m by 10.8m by 1.6m foundation area and reinforcing the walls to ensure its safety.
- Volunteers spent innumerable hours every day in the blazing sun without shade, to level the land and excavate the foundation area in preparation for the Shilanyas Ceremony.

FACILITIES

- Erection of the marquees and set up of required amenities on the mandir site for the Shilanyas Ceremony and at Jumeirah Park for the daily sabhas and dining.
- Housekeeping – ensuring daily, prompt removal of waste.
- Provision of clean toilet facilities.

KITCHEN

- The women devotees had prepared and stored in advance 15,000 parothas, 18,000 theplas, 13,000 kachoris, 3,500 samosas and 3,500 spring rolls.
- Daily meals – morning, afternoon and night – were prepared at Dubai mandir and transported to Jumeirah Park.
- For the Shilanyas Ceremony, over 4,300 full-meal prasad packets were prepared to give to the participants.
- Daily washing of utensils and preparing vegetables, grains, etc. for cooking.

DECORATION

- Preparing and erecting decorative welcome gates, flags, stage props, etc. on the mandir site and at Jumeirah Park.
- Decorating Swamishri's residence.
- Preparing decorative garlands and artis.

SECURITY

- To ensure security of materials and people on the mandir site and the marquees at Jumeirah Park.

MEDIA

- Contacting print and electronic media houses to provide them information about the Shilanyas Ceremony.
- Receiving and assisting the journalists, photographers and videographers who came to cover the event.

TRANSPORT AND PARKING

- Arrange cars, vans, trucks and other vehicles to transport volunteers and materials as required for all departments.
- Assist visitors from outside UAE by arranging cars for commuting to and from their lodgings to the events.
- Mark out parking areas on the mandir site and guide cars, buses, etc. to efficiently use available spaces.
- Manage the numerous parking areas in the vicinity of the Jumeirah Park marquees and guide all visitors accordingly.

Volunteers of each department contacted well-wishers who generously supported the events by providing many items in kind and by giving their expert guidance whenever required. Throughout Swamishri's stay as the State Guest of the UAE government, 17 government-appointed security personnel were present day and night to safeguard Swamishri and to ensure the smooth completion of his daily itinerary. They, too, sincerely carried out their duties and were touched by Swamishri's saintliness and the cordial nature of the devotees and all visitors. Prior to Swamishri's visit, many devotees offered their devotion to please Swamishri by undertaking austerities for several months – observing fasts and abstaining from favourite foods. All the guests who attended the Shilanyas Ceremony and the satsang assemblies thereafter abundantly praised the dedication and services of the volunteers.