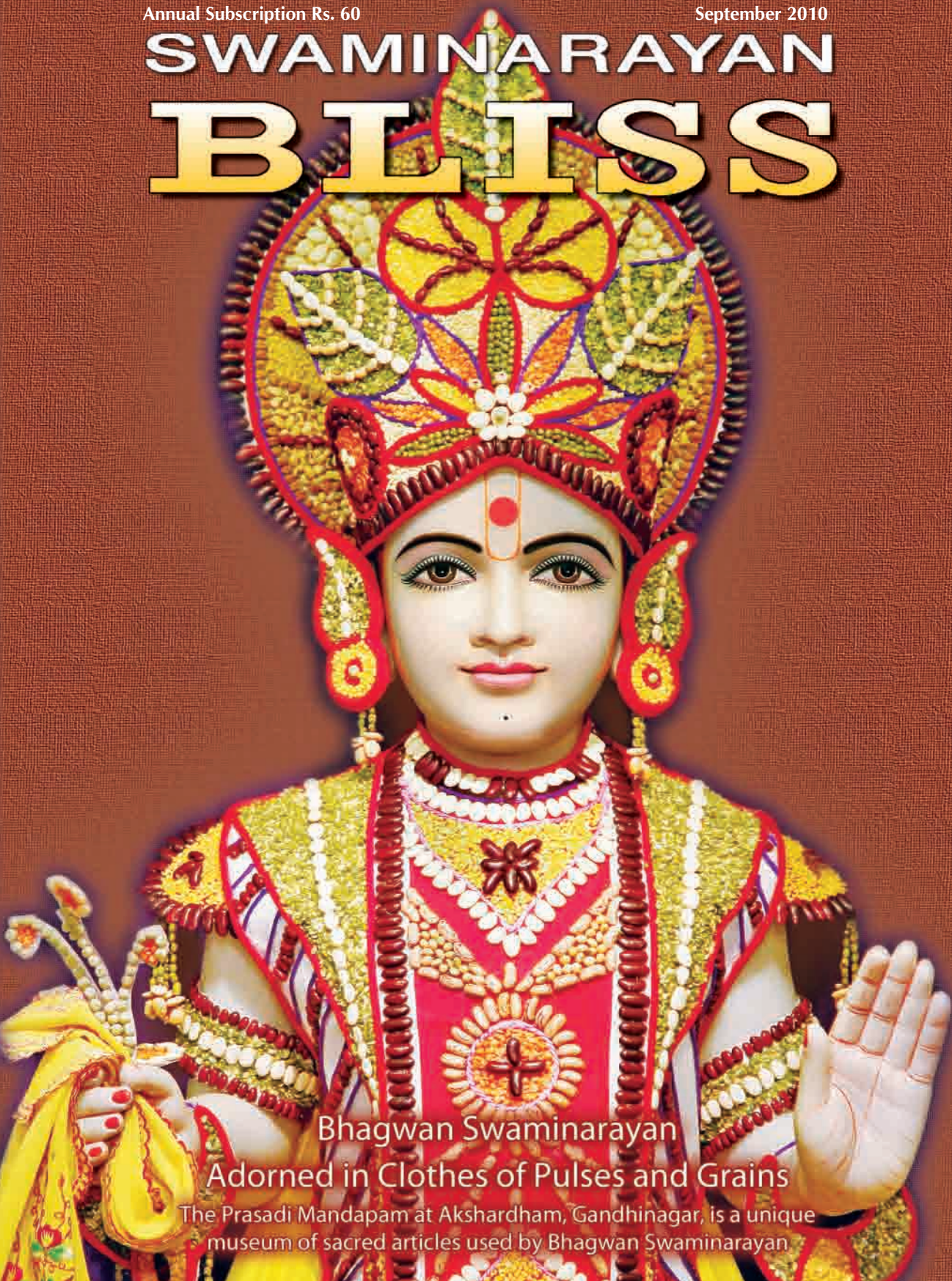


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SWAMINARAYAN BLISS



Bhagwan Swaminarayan

Adorned in Clothes of Pulses and Grains

The Prasadi Mandapam at Akshardham, Gandhinagar, is a unique museum of sacred articles used by Bhagwan Swaminarayan



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CONTENTS

FIRST WORD

Swaminarayan History

4 An Air of Gloom

True understanding relieves misery...

Bhagavad Gita

7 Shrimad Bhagavad Gitā: Vishād Yoga

The Mahabharat War begins...

Swaminarayan Akshardham

9 Prasadi Mandapam

Sacred relics of Bhagwan Swaminarayan...

Vicharan

28 Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Vicharan

Inspiring Incident

31 Living With Swamishri

BAPS News

32 Shilanyas Mahotsav, New Jersey, USA

34 Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Visits Watershow, Gandhinagar

34. UK Bal-Balika National Summer Camp 2010, London

35. Shri Amitabh Bachchan Visits Watershow, Gandhinagar

36. East Africa Kishore-Kishori Shibir 2010, Kenya

36. North America Kishore-Kishori & Bal- Balika Summer Shibir 2010

37. Campus Sabhas & University Talks – 2009-10, UK

38. National Kishore-Kishori Shibir 2010, UK

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Hinduism has a wide number of beliefs, practices, rituals, festivals and customs. This is reflected in its non-conservative or non-exclusivistic approach, providing niches for all Hindus. Hindus practice meditation, austerity, *nama japa*, yoga, and a code of dos and don'ts. They also celebrate festivals, go on pilgrimages, listen to discourses and worship sacred *murtis* and relics of God and guru. Through these spiritual endeavours Hindus seek to strike a connection with the Divine and to experience inner solace, joy and liberation from the base instincts of ego, anger, lust, greed and others.

Hindus believe that the water of Ganga is holy and not the same as other water. They believe that the *shaligrams* and *shivalings* are sacred and not the same as other stones. In addition, food offered to God may seem the same as other food, but Hindus believe that it is sacred or the *prasad* of God. Many Hindus fast on Ekadashi and believe that to go hungry on any other day is not the same. Such distinctions between the sacred and ordinary by Hindus have resulted in religious beliefs, practices, celebrations and observances. The sacred is revered, worshipped, celebrated and held in the highest esteem. By beholding sacred objects (*darshan*), touching them, remembering them the aspirant feels cleansed and elevated.

The Swaminarayan Sampradaya has a rich spiritual heritage reflected through its mandirs, shastras, sadhus and pilgrim places. In addition, sacred objects that were used and sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan are preserved, revered and worshipped by its followers. This issue gives an account of some of the many sacred objects of Bhagwan Swaminarayan displayed at Akshardham in Gandhinagar.

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An Air of Gloom

*Mr Heron, the British official in charge of Ahmedabad,
honoured Shri Hari. Thereafter Maharaj returned to Jetalpur.
From there he went to Vartal and then returned to Gadhpur...*



The next day Shri Hari departed from Jetalpur and passed through Dehgam, Dabhan, Keriya and arrived at Bamnoli. From here Maharaj travelled to Vartal. He addressed an assembly in a mango grove by the Gomti pond. Brahmanand Swami sang a bhajan, “*Re sagapan Harivar nu sachu.*” The bhajan summarized the discourse that Maharaj had given. In every verse sung Shri Hari responded with appropriate gestures and pleased the devotees.

After the bhajan was over Maharaj unexpectedly asked the sadhus, “While we were travelling here those of you who had crossed the farms stand up.” But no one responded. So Maharaj declared, “I had seen those who had done so. If they do not confess now they will have erred like thieves.” Thereafter, Krishnadas, a sadhu, stood up. Shri Hari forgave him for his offense. But no one else stood up. Maharaj remained quiet and visibly displeased upon those who didn’t own up.

The next day Maharaj held an assembly at the same place. During the evening *arti*, *dhun* and kirtan Shri Hari joined in singing and clapping his hands vigorously. If he saw anyone talking he chided them and said that whoever talked while the kirtan was on was disrespecting God. At that time an old sadhu walked towards Maharaj with the support of two sadhus. He was about 80 years old. He respectfully touched the feet of Shri Hari and felt satisfied. Shri Hari draped a cloth, he was wearing, around him, took off his own *pagh* and put it on, head and gave him a garland. Maharaj showered his joy and blessings upon the old sadhu.

Shri Hari stayed for seven days in Vartal. Thereafter he left and reached Gadhada on 21 November 1819 (Magshar *sud* 4, A.S. 1876). The devotees of Gadhada were happy with Maharaj’s darshan. News soon spread in the surrounding villages that Shri Hari had arrived in Gadhada.

The next day, early morning, Amba Sheth of Gadhadi arrived in Gadhada. He sat outside the Akshar Ordi, the residence of Maharaj, chanting “Nyalkaran, Nyalkaran”. It was a new name he had coined for Maharaj, which meant that he had been blessed overwhelmingly by his association. Shri Hari was awakened by the chanting. “Brahmachari, look outside and see who has come at this hour,” Maharaj asked. Mukund Brahmachari saw Amba Sheth steeped in bhajan. Maharaj told him to call Amba Sheth inside.

Amba Sheth gave a soft, green *datan* (a stick for brushing teeth) to Maharaj. Delighted with its pleasant fragrance Maharaj asked, “Sheth, have you flavoured it with something?”

“Maharaj, at night I washed it with filtered water and placed it in water containing crushed cardamom.”

Shri Hari was pleased with Amba Sheth's devotion. The Sheth added, “I have pledged to daily offer you such a *datan* first and then have food and water.”

“But, to fulfil such a pledge would not be possible always,” Maharaj expressed his concern. Amba Sheth, however, was absorbed in his love for Maharaj, so he did not understand the purport of Shri Hari's words.

During this time Panchuba, Dada Khachar's sister, was going through a distressing time. Her five-year-old daughter, Hiraba, was seriously ill. Everyone in the household was plunged in sadness. On hearing of this Maharaj went to the quarters of Panchuba and assuaged them of their gloom. Shri Hari revealed, “Hiraba was a Brahmin in her last birth.¹ While I was travelling in the forest (as Nilkanth Varni) I had gone to her house. She had served me well, and thus as a result of her *punya* (merits) she was born into Satsang in your house. She desired to experience the joy of my darshan. Now that her wish has been fulfilled she will be liberated and go to Akshardham. There is no need to mourn and remain sad.” Shri Hari left and returned to his Akshar Ordi. Immediately thereafter Hiraba passed away, and the *darbar* was rent with loud wails. On hearing the cries Maharaj asked Brahmachari, “Who is crying?”

“Maharaj, Hiraba, the daughter of Panchuba, has passed away and everyone is wailing inconsolably.”

Maharaj replied, “I have liberated her and taken her soul to Akshardham. Such an auspicious occurrence calls for joy and not sadness!” Then Maharaj voiced his feelings, “Brahmachari, my message seems to have been worthless for them.”

When Dada Khachar and Jivuba (Motiba) heard of what Maharaj had felt, they calmed

1. Another popular belief passed on my senior sadhus is that Hiraba was the mother of Harji Thakar in her previous birth. She was then called Janbai. She had a wish to cook food and serve it to Shri Hari and that was why she was born as Hiraba. – H.T. Dave.

everyone in the household. Dada Khachar came to see Maharaj and asked for forgiveness. Shri Hari told him, “Dada, the fruit of spiritual knowledge is experience. When one attains the state of spiritual experience one sees that all worldly things are fleeting and destructible. I have stayed here for so many years and abundantly discoursed to you all. Despite this when spiritual knowledge is of no use to you in such times I feel my effort has been worthless.”

Dada Khachar reassured Shri Hari, “Your discourses have touched our souls, but because of our mundane associations we are susceptible to the influence of our passions. Please do not look at our frailties and instead bless us so that we become strong in abiding by your wishes.” Shri Hari felt relaxed on hearing Dada's words.

The next day Brahmachari went to get *thal* (lunch) for Maharaj from Dada's house. He returned with a covered plate of food. He was unaware of what was inside. After placing the plate before Shri Hari he uncovered it to find a hotchpotch of boiled millet and wheat grains. Maharaj asked, “What is this?” Brahmachari flinched for a moment and then added, “Maharaj, because Hiraba has passed away Dada's household is in mourning. That is why your meal is meagre and ordinary.”

“For how many days will this go on?” Maharaj asked.

“At least thirteen to fourteen days.”

Shri Hari smiled and expressed, “Brahmachari, we too will have to mourn the death of Panchuba's daughter by putting up with this daily meal.” Brahmachari remained silent. Maharaj added, “Brahmachari, let us go to Sarangpur. Where there is mourning I do not wish to be present.”

“But for now have your meal. It is better than the ball of chilly and *mindhyaval* you used to eat. Once you finish, we will go,” Brahmachari insisted.

Shri Hari smiled, “I shall have it, for everything is the same for me.” After his meal Maharaj went to the *darbar* and sat facing the easterly direction. Jivuba, Laduba, Panchuba, Surprabhadevi and

other women devotees came to Maharaj. A few moments later a lady came with a pot of ghee on her head. She placed the pot on the ground and offered *panchang* pranams to Maharaj. Shri Hari recognized her, “Oh, you seem to have come from Nenpur. Are you Devji Bhagat’s wife?”

“Yes Maharaj. Bhagat has sent this pot of ghee for you and sponsored a meal,” the lady replied with a smile.

“Is Bhagat well?” Maharaj questioned.

“Maharaj, Bhagat is happy by your grace. And presently, he is happier than before.”

Shri Hari was puzzled, “Is it because he has had a windfall?”

The lady simply smiled and replied, “Maharaj we have your association, so what is greater than that? We had a teenage son, who by your grace could always see you and have your darshan. Then with his coming of age our relatives insisted that we marry him off. But (Devji) Bhagat felt the moment he becomes shackled to a householder’s life, he will lose the divine joy of constantly seeing you. So Bhagat made a wish that you take him away, and bless his soul with Akshardham. And you fulfilled our wish. With his passing away, we both have been relieved of our mundane burden and will happily engage ourselves in doing your bhajan.”

Shri Hari looked at Jivuba and Laduba. They understood what Shri Hari was intimating to them. Then Maharaj expressed his sympathy and shock, “How can one wish for a teenage son’s death?”

The lady replied, “Maharaj, I do not understand much, but my husband was saying that instead of losing his divine rapport with you, what was wrong in him for having passed away to be with you always? Then Bhagat completed the funeral rites and went to stay at our farm, and sent me to offer you a pot of ghee and a meal. In this way we would not be disturbed by our relatives who would come to shed tears in mourning.”

Shri Hari was listening to every word of the lady. He smiled, looking alternately at Jivuba, Laduba and Panchuba, and then at Devji Bhagat’s wife. Maharaj placed his hand on the pot of

ghee and told Jivuba and Panchuba, “Keep this pot till the mourning of Hiraba ends. Thereafter, we shall use the ghee for making a good meal.” The three ladies instantly understood Maharaj’s words and shed tears for their ignorance. Jivuba apologetically said, “Maharaj, forgive us for our lapses. With your association and your divine talks, we were still not able to shed our mundane attachments and *dehbhav*.”

Shri Hari pacified them, “It may seem to you to be so, but you are free from *dehbhav*. Now do not regret and mourn for that.”

“But Maharaj, we are not truly free from *dehbhav*. And if we were, we would not have given you a lowly meal of cooked millet and wheat grains.”

Shri Hari smiled and assured, “You offered to me what you were eating. So what was wrong in that? Whatever you eat is what I have to eat! Look, during my forest sojourn people did not offer me sweets and sumptuous foods. I used to live on fruits. Then on meeting Ramanand Swami I used to eat a ball of chilles and *mindhyaval* everyday. Thus the hotchpotch of cooked millet and wheat grains was better.”

Juvuba broke down crying. “Maharaj, you are great,” she sobbed. “We are not even a grain of sand before the towering greatness Devji Bhagat and his wife. Despite their son having passed away, they are happy with the joy of your *murti* in their hearts. Whereas, we are lost in sorrow and misery at the death of our five-year-old Hiraba!”

Shri Hari tried to calm her, “Jivuba, your understanding is also very noble. Now that you have understood the glory of Devji Bhagat you shall be blessed with his virtues. When one realizes the glory of my faithful sadhus and devotees, one becomes free from the base instincts.” Maharaj then told them to offer lunch to Devji Bhagat’s wife since she had come a long way. ♦

(Contd. next issue)

From Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan
by H.T. Dave

SHRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITĀ VISHĀD YOGA

INTRODUCTION

Yuddhishtir gambled, and lost. Uncle Shakuni had deceitfully robbed the Pandavas of everything they had. The Pandavas were exiled into the forest for twelve years, and ordered to spend a thirteenth in hiding thereafter. They did accordingly. On completing their time in the forest and in hiding, the Pandavas returned. In consonance with the agreement, they asked for their rightful share of half the kingdom, but the evil-minded Duryodhan was not willing to comply. Many tried to dissuade him, but to no avail. Finally, Shri Krishna Bhagwan himself tried to dissuade him. He asked him to give a quarter of the kingdom instead of a half, but Duryodhan resolutely refused.

Finally, Shri Krishna tried again and proposed “O Duryodhan, son of Dhritarashtra, these Pandavas are also the royal blood of the Kuru dynasty. If nothing else, at least give them five villages to maintain their status.”

But nothing would change Duryodhan's stubbornness. He stated clearly, ‘यावद्धि तीक्ष्णया सूच्या विध्येदग्रेण केशव। तावदप्यपरित्याज्यं भूमेर्नः पाण्डवान् प्रति॥’ – ‘Yāvaddhi teekshnayā soochyā vidhyedagrena Keshava, tāvadapyaparityājyam bhoomernaha Pāndavān prati.’ – ‘O Keshav (Krishna)! Forget five villages, I will not give the Pandavas a piece of land even the size of a needle tip. And still, if the Pandavas want land, then they should be ready for war’ (Mahabharat: Udyog Parva/127/5).

This is how the decision for a war was made. Both parties began to prepare. Then arose the question of the battlefield, where should the war take place? The learned and experienced elders of both sides got together to discuss the matter. It was unanimously decided that the battlefield



should be a righteous land so that those that die there would be liberated.

The area known as Kurukshetra was a famous religious place. The devas had performed yagnas and other religious acts there.

Moreover, this land is called Kurukshetra because of its historical association with a King named Kuru. King Kuru had performed penance here, as well as yagnas and other righteous acts. On seeing Kuru's righteousness, even Indra became pleased and associated this land with swarg, and decreed that those who died on this land would attain swarg. Since then this land has

been renowned as a righteous land.

Also, it is said that King Kuru had pulled a plough here and farmed the land for the well-being of his subjects. Therefore, the land has also been come to known as Kurukshetra – the farm of King Kuru.

In this way, the righteous land, Kurukshetra, was selected as the battlefield. Equipment for use in the war began to be stockpiled at Kurukshetra. The moment of the great war was drawing nearer.

It is the happenings that occurred during these initial moments that form the basis of the Bhagavad Gita.

DHRITARASHTRA SAID...

On opening the Gita, the first sentence reads, 'धृतराष्ट्र उवाच।' – 'Dhritarashtra Uvācha' 'Dhritarashtra said'.

It is surprising that a great shastra such as the Gita does not commence with the words 'God said', but with 'Dhritarashtra said'!

Dhritarashtra is a compound word which is derived from 'धृत् राष्ट्रं येन सः' – 'Dhritam rāshtram yena saha' – 'One who has plundered someone's land'. Here is someone who has been blind since birth and now wants to see mass destruction. The wise Sanjay was the eyes of Dhritarashtra. When requested by Dhritarashtra, Sanjay would give such a detailed description of any event that the blind Dhritarashtra would forget the grief of his blindness.

At the start of the Gita, Dhritarashtra asks: 'धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः। मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किमकुर्वत संजय॥' – 'Dharmakshetre kurukshetre samavetā yuyutsava, māmakāhā pāṇḍavāśchaiva kimakurvata Sanjaya.' – 'O Sanjaya! Please tell me what my sons and Pandu's sons who have gathered for war did in the righteous land of Kurukshetra' (Gita: 1/1).

'MY SONS AND PANDU'S SONS'

Words reveal the speaker's inner thoughts. When we speak, the inclinations of our mind and

our inner feelings are naturally expressed.

When Dhritarashtra said the words 'मामकाः पाण्डवाश्च' – 'māmakāhā pāṇḍavāścha' – 'My sons and Pandu's sons' his feelings were instantly expressed and the bias in his heart became plainly evident. 'Māmakāhā' means 'my sons' and 'Pāṇḍavāhā' means Pandu's sons. Duryodhan and others are my sons, while Arjun and others are not my sons; they are Pandu's sons. With these words, he separates his younger brother's sons. One can understand that to be blind of sight is a pitiful situation, but to be blinded by emotions is even more pitiful. He was biased against even the Pandavas who had always respected him like a father and obeyed his commands. He was not even able to respect them as his children and accept them. We can call this biased attitude the 'māmakāhā attitude'. The outcomes of this 'māmakāhā attitude' of Dhritarashtra were also equally pitiful. Even though they were a royal family, all they went through was continual quarrels and disputes, continual conflicts and anguish, continual discontent and disquiet, and in the end complete destruction.

Where there is bias, all these miscomings come uninvited.

This is why, although Vyas has counted many people like Duryodhan as responsible for this complete destruction, he has counted Dhritarashtra as the root of it all. He explains this with a metaphor, 'दुर्योधनो मन्युमयो महाद्रुमः कर्णः स्कन्धः शकुनिस्तस्य शाखाः। दुःशासनः पुष्पफले समृद्धे मूलं राजा धृतराष्ट्रोऽमनीषी॥' – 'Duryodhano manyumayo mahādrumaha Karnaha skandhaha Shakunistasya shākhāhā, Duhshāsanaha pushpaphale samruddhe moolam rājā Dhritarāshthro'maneeshee.' – 'Duryodhan is a great tree in the form of ego, Karna is its trunk, Shakuni is its branches, Duhshāsan is the tree's flowers and fruits, but its root is the evil-minded Dhritarashtra' (Mahabharat: Ādi Parva/1/65).

Thus, the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita's first *adhyay* (chapter) starts with the biased curiosity of Dhritarashtra. Now let us take a look at Sanjaya's reply.

SANJAYA SAID...

Sanjaya was well acquainted with Dhritarashtra's inner feelings. 'Māmakāhā' were more dear to Dhritarashtra, and even amongst them, Duryodhan was the most. Duryodhan was everything to Dhritarashtra. Therefore Sanjaya wisely commences by speaking about Duryodhan. He says, 'दृष्ट्वा तु पाण्डवानीकं व्यूढं दुर्योधनस्तदा। आचार्यमुपसंगम्य राजा वचनमब्रवीत्॥' – '*Drushtvā tu Pāṇḍavāneekam vyoodham Duryodhanastadā, āchāryamupasangamya rājā vachanamabraveet.*' – 'At that time, seeing the military formation of the Pandava's army, King Duryodhan went to Acharya Drona and said the following.'

Here, Sanjaya refers to Duryodhan as 'king'. Dhritarashtra must have loved this. This was Dhritarashtra's dream.

It is also noteworthy that Duryodhan went to Acharya Drona first and no one else.

Bhishma was the commander-in-chief on the first day of the battle. So why did Duryodhan not go to him, but to Drona instead? Duryodhan firmly believed that both Bhishma and Drona favoured both sides. But, Bhishma had a soft corner for the Pandavas and this constantly agitated Duryodhan. That is why, even during the war, Duryodhan complained time and time again about Bhishma's behaviour towards the Pandavas.

Duryodhan also knew that the Pandavas were dear to Drona as well. Above all, Arjuna had become his favourite disciple.

Therefore, he did not trust the two major pillars of his army. He repeatedly doubted them and therefore a subtle fear constantly grasped his mind as to what would happen.

Of Bhishma and Drona, Duryodhan was more worried about Drona. He felt that he would have to pay more attention to Drona. His only relationship with Drona was that of a disciple, not as a family member. No matter what, Bhishma was a member of his family, thus he was less of a worry. But this was not the case with Drona. Duryodhan knew well that Arjuna had won Drona's affection. Therefore he went straight to Drona.

Duryodhan said to Drona. 'पश्यैतां पाण्डुपुत्राणामाचार्य महतीं चमूम्। व्यूढां द्रुपदपुत्रेण तव शिष्येण धीमता॥' – '*Pashyaitām Pāṇḍuputrāṇāmāchārya mahateem chamoom, vyoodhām Drupadaputrena tava shishyena dheematā.*' – 'O teacher, look at the large army of the sons of Pandu, arranged in formation by your intelligent pupil, the son of Drupad (Dhrushtadyumna)' (Gita 1/3). The words '*mahateem chamoom*' mean large army. It is astonishing that Duryodhan felt that the Pandavas' army was large. In reality, it was Duryodhan's army that was the larger. Duryodhan had eleven divisions in his army whereas the Pandavas only had seven (one division has 21,870 chariots, 21,870 elephants, 65,610 horses and 109,350 foot soldiers – Mahabharat: Adi Parva/2/23-26). So why did the Pandavas' army seem large? Yet again, the same reason: lack of trust. Duryodhan's lack of trust was not limited just to Bhishma or Drona. He did not trust almost his whole army. 'I lack trustworthy men. On the other hand, the Pandavas have plenty of trustworthy people.' It is with this thought in mind that Duryodhan felt that the smaller Pandava army was indeed large. The untrusting always doubt their own strength as well.

Duryodhan also specially uses the name '*Drupadaputra*' (son of Drupad) for Dhrushtadyumna. He wants to emphasize to Drona that Dhrushtadyumna is the son of Drupad. He has a certain motivation for doing this. He wants to increase the enmity between Drona and the Pandavas. To do this, he mentions King Drupad, who had previously spited Drona. It is also true that Drupad had employed the two Brahmins Yaj and Upyaj to perform a *yagna* with the desire for Drupad's death. Duryodhan had come to know of this too. For this reason, he wants to warn Drona to be careful that his own disciple does not bring about his death.

Thus, the very start of the Bhagavad Gita is thrilling and gets the reader thinking.





PRASADI MANDAPAM

Hall of Holy Relics at Akshardham, Gandhinagar

The Swaminarayan Sampradaya's first museum
in memory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Introduction

An integral part of the picturesque Swaminarayan Akshardham mandir in Gandhinagar is the Prasadi Mandapam – Hall of Holy Relics – a unique museum housing sacred articles used by Bhagwan Swaminarayan (Shriji Maharaj). Inaugurated in 1992 and representing the vision of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Mandapam has great historical importance since it is the Swaminarayan Sampradaya's first ever museum built in the memory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The special, distinct feature of the museum is the use of life-size 3D dioramas to depict a variety of scenes that represent historical events and locations. Each scene presents authentic details of the holy relic on display, transporting the visitor 200 years back in time to the era of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The idea for the museum was first suggested by Pramukh Swami Maharaj about 25 years ago. His vision was to provide authentic testimony of the reverence people had for Bhagwan Swaminarayan and to optimize the experience of divinity for visitors to the museum in the presence of such sacred relics. With this, efforts began to collect the holy relics of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, together with a verifiable account of each relic's authenticity.

The articles displayed in this museum were collected from various sources. These included articles collected by Nirgundas Swami in the time of Shastriji Maharaj, articles housed in the Rang Mandap of the BAPS Mandir in Bochasan, articles from the family of Muljibhai Sheth of Limli, who helped to manage Bhagwan Swaminarayan's work, and articles given to Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj by the descendants of devotees from the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

To help in the design of the museum

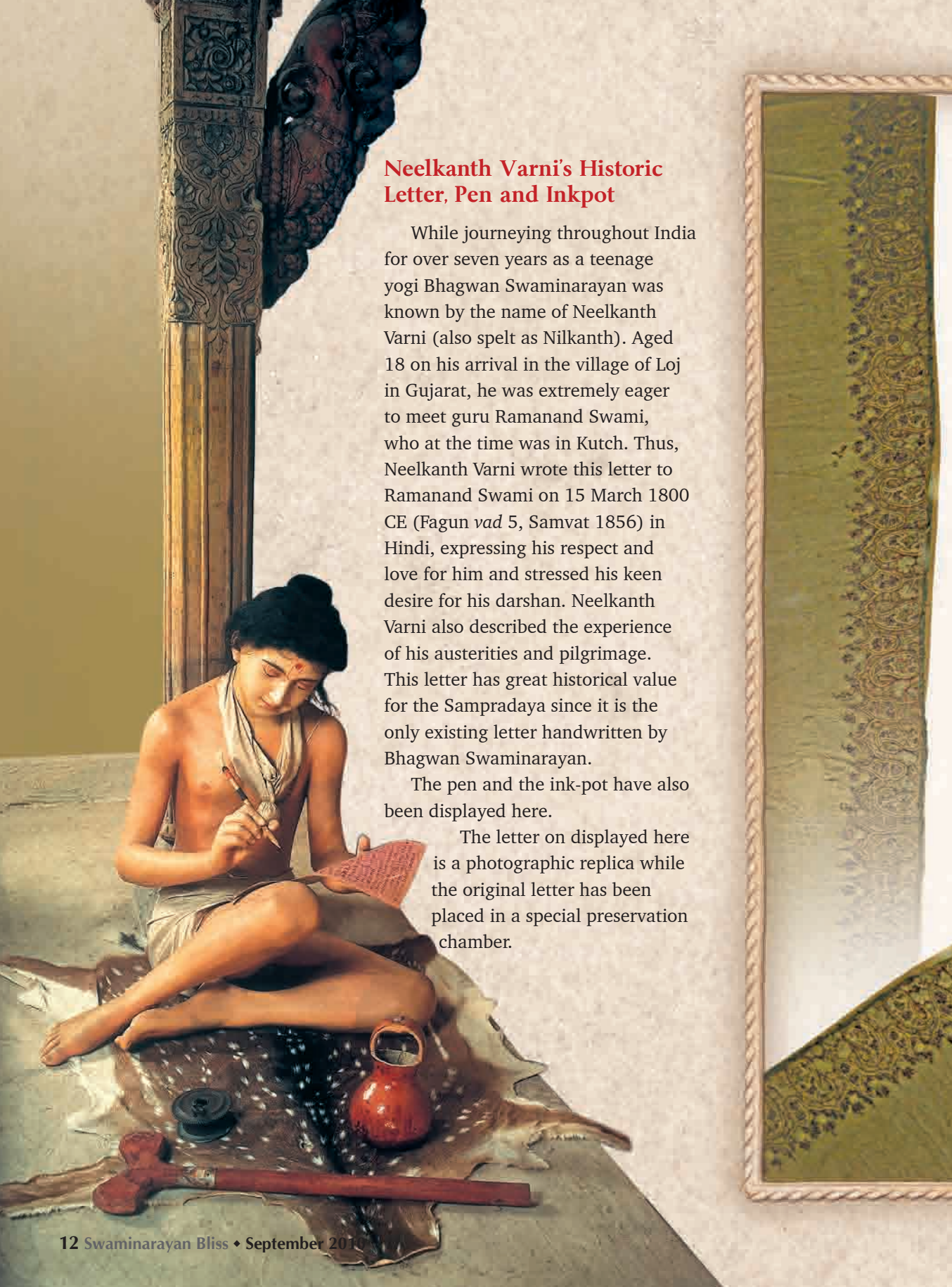
display area a team of BAPS sadhus undertook an extensive study tour of some of the most famous museums throughout the world. They met experienced curators and others knowledgeable in museum science to learn of the essential requirements of setting up such a museum. Using the expert guidance they received every aspect of the exhibition was meticulously planned.

All the memorabilia displayed in the Prasadi Mandapam has a well documented history to ensure its genuineness. The records reveal how each article was handed down to successive generations. Also, each item was individually assessed and given appropriate treatment for its longterm preservation. For example, the *pagh*, shawl, quilt and other articles used by Bhagwan Swaminarayan were treated specially at leading archaeological institutes in India.

Some of the cloth articles had become tattered due to the passage of time and other factors and so had to be carefully and patiently restored. For example, the shawl that Ramanand Swami draped around Shriji Maharaj when appointing him as the head of the Sampradaya took three months to restore to its original lustre.

Care has also been taken to ensure that light and other damaging environmental features on the articles are avoided.

Thus, the Prasadi Mandapam is an authentic glimpse into the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Darshan of the sacred relics displayed in this museum are a source of great spiritual inspiration. Presented in this issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss*, translated from *Swaminarayan Prakash*, May 2010, is a selection of the many holy objects on display in the Prasadi Mandapam at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar.



Neelkanth Varni's Historic Letter, Pen and Inkpot

While journeying throughout India for over seven years as a teenage yogi Bhagwan Swaminarayan was known by the name of Neelkanth Varni (also spelt as Nilkanth). Aged 18 on his arrival in the village of Loj in Gujarat, he was extremely eager to meet guru Ramanand Swami, who at the time was in Kutch. Thus, Neelkanth Varni wrote this letter to Ramanand Swami on 15 March 1800 CE (Fagun *vad* 5, Samvat 1856) in Hindi, expressing his respect and love for him and stressed his keen desire for his darshan. Neelkanth Varni also described the experience of his austerities and pilgrimage. This letter has great historical value for the Sampradaya since it is the only existing letter handwritten by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The pen and the ink-pot have also been displayed here.

The letter on displayed here is a photographic replica while the original letter has been placed in a special preservation chamber.

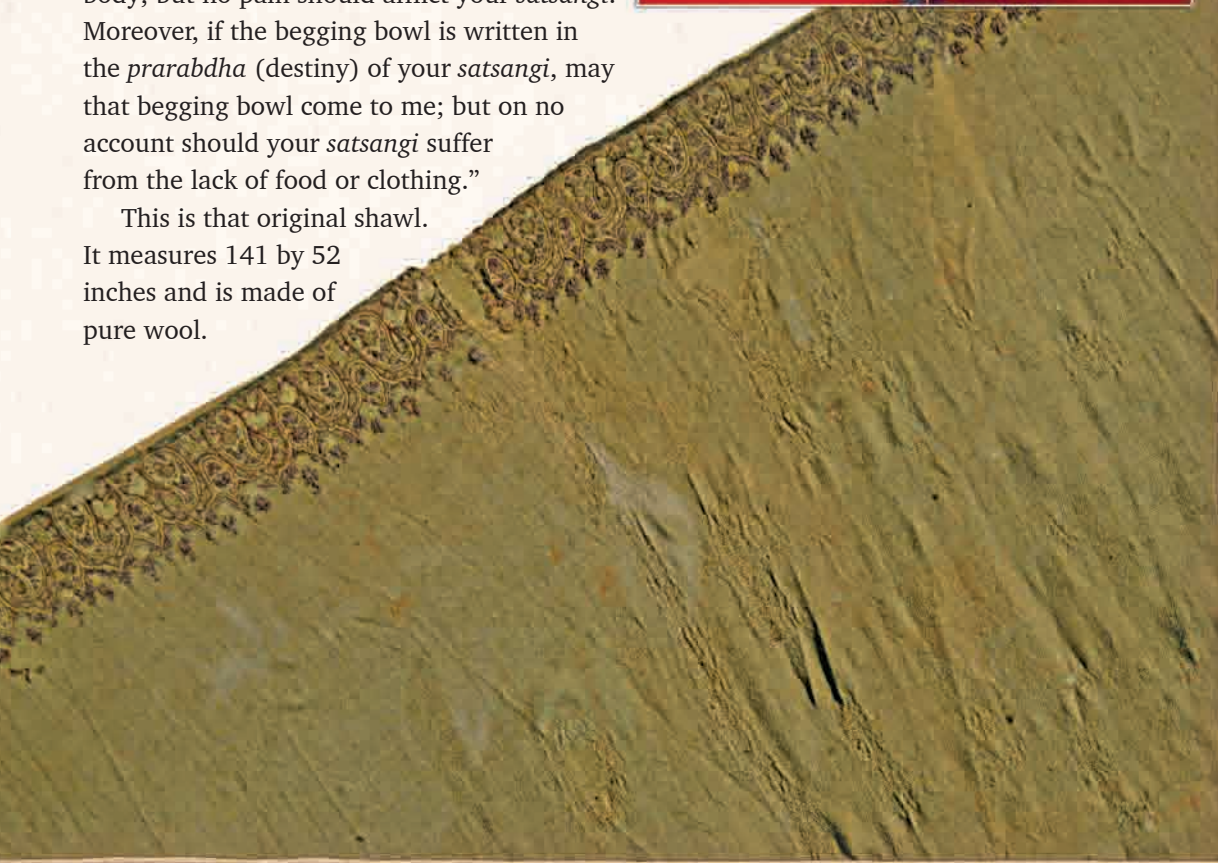
Shawl: A Witness to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Compassion

On 16 November 1801 CE (Kartak *sud* 11, Samvat 1858) Sahajanand Swami was barely 21 years old when his guru Ramanand Swami arranged a grand celebration in the village of Jetpur to appoint him as head of the Fellowship. During the ceremony he placed a woollen shawl round the shoulders of the young Sahajanand Swami, who prayed for the well-being of the devotees: "If your *satsangi* is destined to suffer the distress inflicted by the sting of one scorpion, may the distress of the stings of millions and millions of scorpions befall each and every pore of my body; but no pain should afflict your *satsangi*. Moreover, if the begging bowl is written in the *prarabdha* (destiny) of your *satsangi*, may that begging bowl come to me; but on no account should your *satsangi* suffer from the lack of food or clothing."

This is that original shawl. It measures 141 by 52 inches and is made of pure wool.

Bhagavad Gita

When Ramanand Swami appointed Bhagwan Swaminarayan as head of the Fellowship, he gave him his manuscript of the Bhagavad Gita. Shriji Maharaj worshipped and studied it daily with great respect.





Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Garments

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's dressing style varied throughout his life: from his time as a child in Chhapaiya and Ayodhya, during his travels as Neelkanth Varni and in his tenure as the head of the Sanstha.

In Jetpur, on 16 November 1801 CE (Kartak *sud* 11, Samvat 1858) when Ramanand Swami appointed him as the head of the fellowship he adorned the young Sahajanand Swami in rich clothes, ornaments and fresh fragrant garlands. However, this was not the regular attire which Bhagwan Swaminarayan adopted. A short time after instating Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Ramanand Swami passed away. Thereafter, Bhagwan Swaminarayan wore only simple clothes: usually a white dhoti, saffron upper cloth and traditional *pagh*. The most authentic and detailed account of his dress is recorded in the Vachanamrut. From this, it is clear that he mostly wore simple white clothes. However, in Dhoraji on Fagan *sud* Punam, Samvat 1863 (23 March 1807), at the firm loving insistence of the devotees of Surat, he wore richly decorated *surval* and *jamo*, as well as ornaments and a crown. From then on he frequently accepted the devotion of devotees and dressed in rich, decorated garments and ornaments they offered. In the Prasadi Mandapam a collection of these sanctified garments are on display.

Jamo

Jamo is a long coat-like garment with a wide lower portion. It does not have a collar, has long sleeves and is tied with a string instead of buttons. It was a garment worn by royalty and leading businessmen of repute of the time. It was a tradition to wear a *khes* in combination with the *jamo*. Although, Bhagwan Swaminarayan preferred white clothing, on festival and other special occasions he wore rich and ornate clothes like this *jamo* to please the devotees.

The purple-coloured *jamo* in this photograph was worn by Bhagwan Swaminarayan on one such festive occasion. Other such sanctified upper garments are also on display at Akshardham.



Surval

Godadiya surval is a traditional trouser padded with cotton wool. The Kathis wore such thick, warm clothing during winter. In practice they are tied round the waist with a waist cord to get a perfect fit. This special red *surval* was worn by Shriji Maharaj.



Jariyani Khes

Bhagwan Swaminarayan used to wear a *khes* both as a dhoti and an upper garment, loosely wrapped around the upper part of the body. Usually, he would wear a white *khes*, since that was his preferred colour.

Once, while walking from Gadhada to the village of Vartal, Bhagwan Swaminarayan wore this *khes* which is beautifully handwoven with golden threads. Accompanying Maharaj during this journey was Pitambar Lavji Thakkar of Budhej. Pleased by Pitambar's devotion and service, Maharaj gave him this *jariyani khes* as a sign of his grace.

Pitambar's descendants devoutly worshipped this sanctified *khes* and then donated it for display in the Prasadi Mandapam.



Doriya Khes

A *doriya khes* is one which is intricately handwoven using fine threads. In between the fine threads are thicker threads woven in vertical and horizontal lines to create an elaborate pattern such that even an uncoloured *khes* has an attractive appearance. This *doriya khes* was worn as an upper garment by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is an exemplary work of handweaving. It was initially preserved with great care and glory by Mayaram Bhatt, one of Shriji Maharaj's closest devotees, and thereafter by his descendants. It was generously presented to the BAPS Trust by Maniben for public display.



Khes

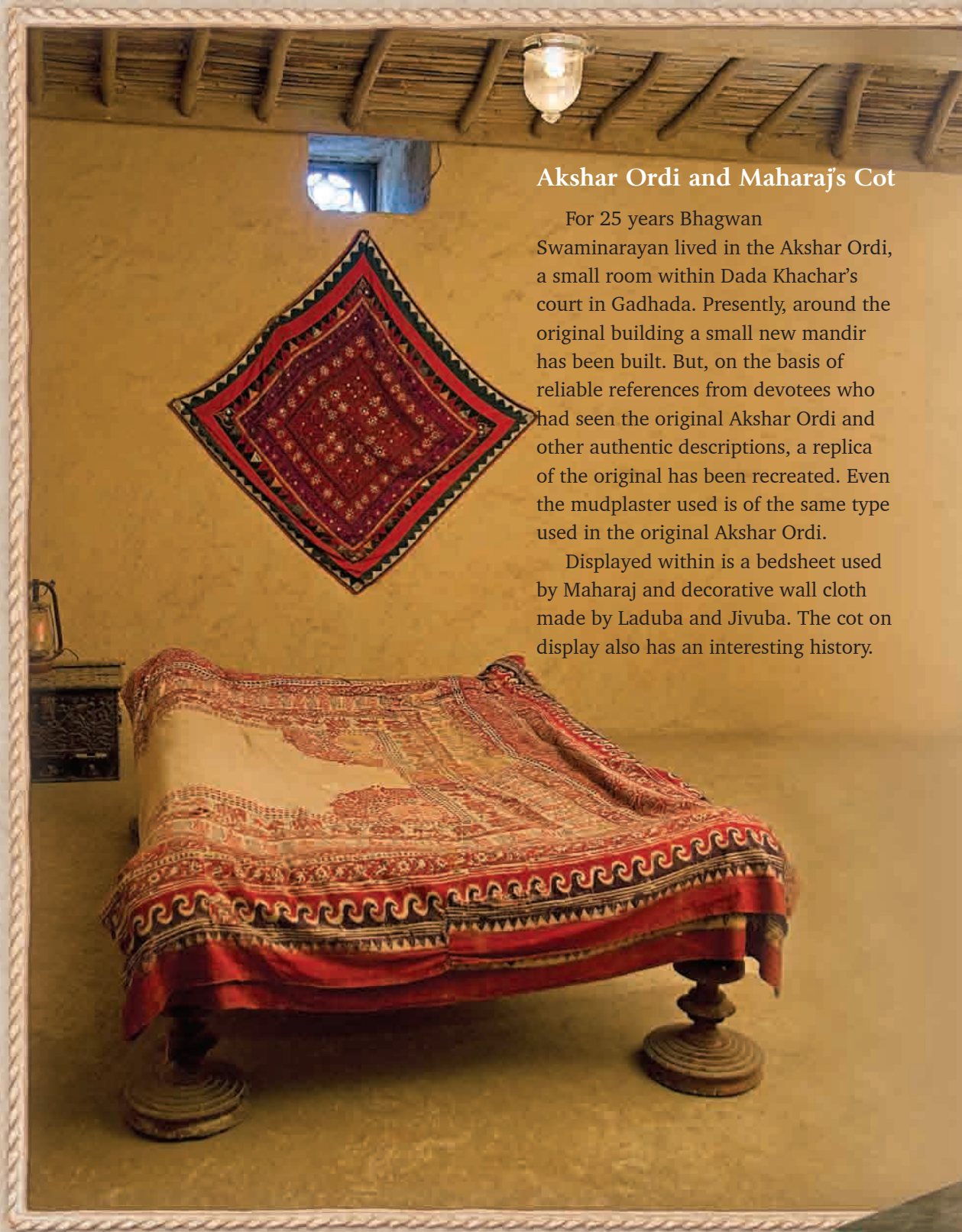
Jagrup Barot of Sinjiwada and his wife, Sajuba, were childless. In 1816, when Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited their house he blessed them and some time later a son was born to them. Tragically though, the child was born without any limbs. The couple told Maharaj about this pitiful situation when he next visited them. Maharaj gently placed the limbless child on his lap and then covered him with this *khes*. A few moments later when Maharaj uncovered the child everyone was amazed to see that he had a normal body. Maharaj presented the child to the couple saying, "Here! This is my gift to you. Name the child Prabhudas." The miraculous *khes* was preserved by Pradhudas and his descendants.



Pagh

The *pagh* is a traditional headgear of India. It is tied around the head with a long lightweight cloth, helping to protect the head. Normally, Bhagwan Swaminarayan wore a white *pagh* of cotton cloth on his head. During festivals and celebrations, devotees often lovingly brought gifts of rich garments, which Maharaj sometimes wore. This purple silk *pagh* was presented to Maharaj by Rajarambhai. Thereafter it was preserved by his descendants and then donated to the BAPS.





Akshar Ordi and Maharaj's Cot

For 25 years Bhagwan Swaminarayan lived in the Akshar Ordi, a small room within Dada Khachar's court in Gadhada. Presently, around the original building a small new mandir has been built. But, on the basis of reliable references from devotees who had seen the original Akshar Ordi and other authentic descriptions, a replica of the original has been recreated. Even the mudplaster used is of the same type used in the original Akshar Ordi.

Displayed within is a bedsheet used by Maharaj and decorative wall cloth made by Laduba and Jivuba. The cot on display also has an interesting history.

Wooden Cot

After Dada Khachar gave one section of his residence to Bhagwan Swaminarayan to build a mandir, he constructed some new rooms. Next to the new rooms was the house of Jasa Pana Teraiya, the royal priest of Dada Khachar. When Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited the new rooms he also went to the house of Jasaji, who became frustrated as he did not own a good cot for Maharaj to sit on. So, Dada Khachar brought a cot from his house for Maharaj. That cot (opposite page) of Dada Khachar, sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was preserved by the family of Jasaji and is displayed in the Prasadi Mandapam.

Hindola Khat

A *hindola khat* is a combined bed and swing and is commonly seen in homes throughout the Saurashtra region. This *hindola khat* was sanctified many times by Maharaj during his visit to the home of Amra Khachar of Kundal. It was graciously presented to the BAPS by Dhirubhai Khachar, a direct descendent of Amra Khachar. The legs and brass chains are from the original cot. The other parts have been restored.



Manki

Bhagwan Swaminarayan travelled to the villages of Gujarat by foot, by cart, by *mafo* and on camelback. However, he mainly travelled by horseback on his favourite mare, Manki. She understood every wish of Maharaj and eased his journey accordingly. She was more than just an animal, but was a dedicated servant. So attached was Manki to Maharaj that when Maharaj returned to Akshardham, she refused to eat or drink. Displayed here are the reins that have been sanctified by the constant touch of Maharaj and a model of his favourite Manki.

Manki's Hardo

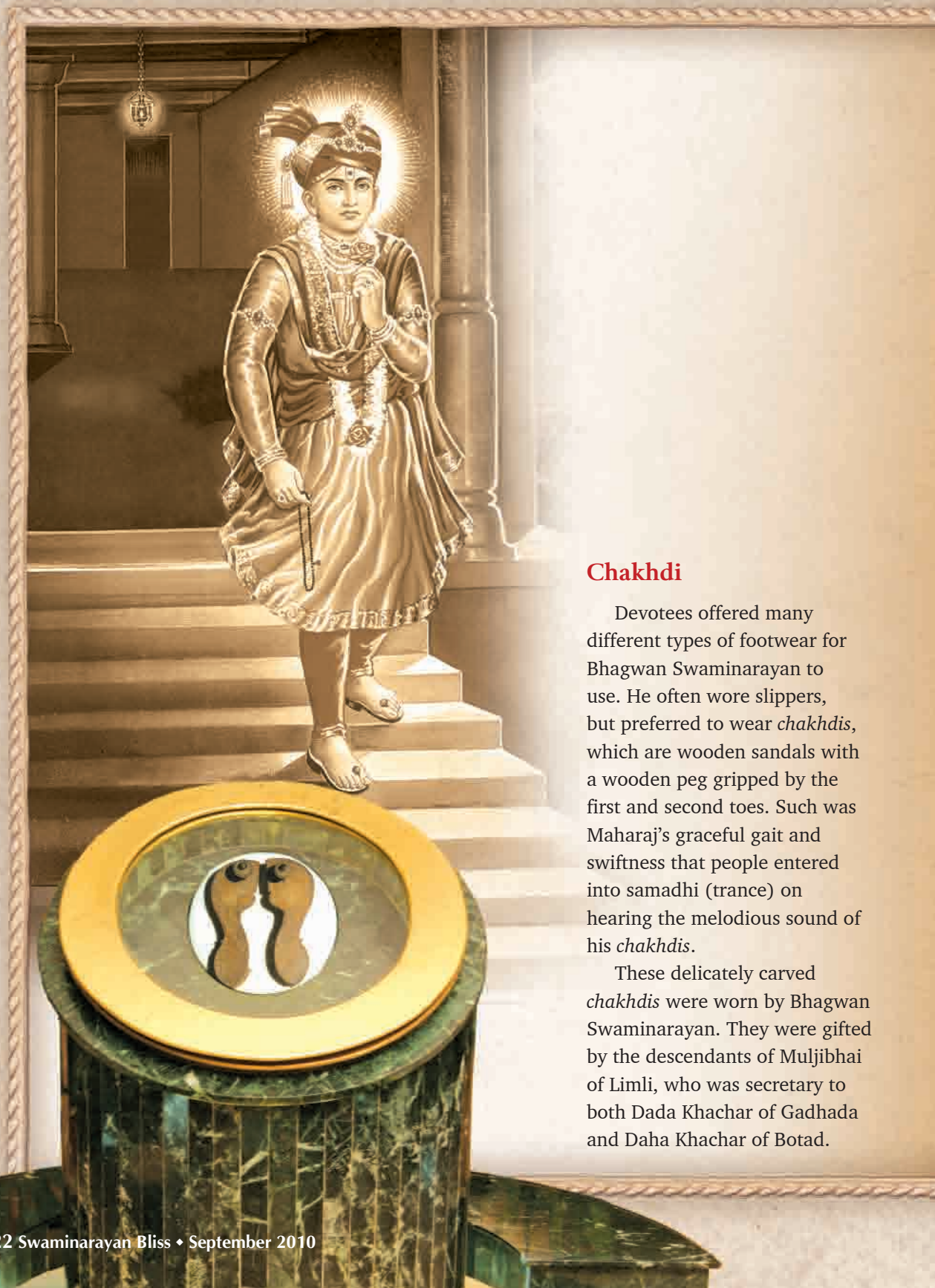
Devotees eagerly offered decorations to adorn Manki. The *hardo* is a decorative garland which adorned Manki. The entire *hardo* has been handwoven with colourful threads into a pleasing design. It was preserved by the descendants of Amra Patgar of Kundal and given to the BAPS by Mangubhai Jivabhai Patgar.



Mafo: Canopied Bullock Cart

A *mafo* is a covered bullock cart. Kashidas Mota of Bochasan was an ardent disciple of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He seated Maharaj in his decorated *mafo* and took him to 35 surrounding villages in the Charotar region to sanctify the homes of his relatives. In this way his relatives developed faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan. That sanctified *mafo* was preserved by Kashidas and his descendants as a precious family heirloom. His direct descendants donated that bullock cart to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It took three months of meticulous craftsmanship to restore the holy cart to its original condition in accordance with scriptural references.





Chakhdi

Devotees offered many different types of footwear for Bhagwan Swaminarayan to use. He often wore slippers, but preferred to wear *chakhdis*, which are wooden sandals with a wooden peg gripped by the first and second toes. Such was Maharaj's graceful gait and swiftness that people entered into samadhi (trance) on hearing the melodious sound of his *chakhdis*.

These delicately carved *chakhdis* were worn by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. They were gifted by the descendants of Muljibhai of Limli, who was secretary to both Dada Khachar of Gadhada and Daha Khachar of Botad.



Sacred Milk Bowl

Jivuba, the sister of Dada Khachar was very devout. Bhagwan Swaminarayan had given her a small *murti* of Lalji for worship. Once, while offering milk to the *murti* Abhel Khachar, her father, angrily stormed into her room, pulled out his sword and asked, "What are you doing?" She calmly replied, "I am offering milk to Lalji Maharaj." So, Abhel Khachar challenged, "If your Lalji is God himself, then let him drink the milk from this bowl or else I will behead both you and that doll of yours!" Unfazed, Jivuba fearlessly continued her offering. To his amazement, the *murti* picked up the bowl, drank the milk and threw the bowl towards Abhel Khachar. Immediately, Abhel Khachar fell at the feet of the *murti*. On display in the Prasadi Mandapam is that very bowl.



Batak: Water Bottle

The Prasadi Mandapam features many different types of utensils used by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. On the facing page is a photo of a *batak*, which is a water container for use while travelling. This brass water container as well as the small glass-like containers, used for milk and water, have been sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Thali and Achmani: Plate and Spoon

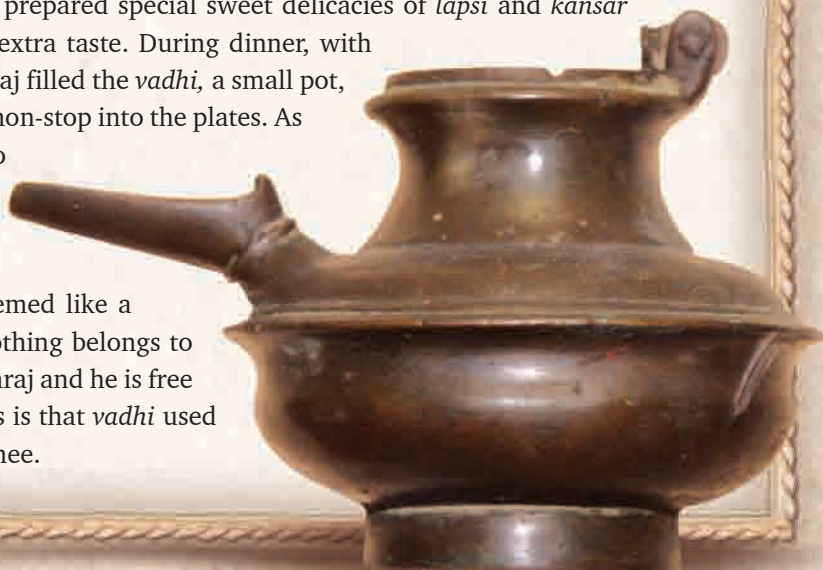
On Posh sud Punam, Samvat 1866 (20 January 1810), during the *yagna* at Dabhan, Bhagwan Swaminarayan initiated Mulji Sharma into the sadhu-fold, named him Gunatitanand Swami and revealed his true form and glory as the manifest form of Aksharbrahman. These are the plate (*thali*) and spoon (*achmani*) used by Bhagwan Swaminarayan during the ceremony.





Vadhi

Once, Bhagwan Swaminarayan arrived at Parvatbhai's house in Agatrai with a very large group of devotees. Parvatbhai had a heart of gold. He opened his storeroom for everyone to take anything they wished. He prepared special sweet delicacies of *lapsi* and *kansar* into which ghee is poured for extra taste. During dinner, with everyone seated in rows, Maharaj filled the *vadhi*, a small pot, with ghee and began to pour it non-stop into the plates. As Maharaj moved from one plate to the next, Parvatbhai told him not to stop the flow of ghee from the *vadhi* even between the two plates. To others it seemed like a waste, but Parvatbhai said, "Nothing belongs to me. Everything belongs to Maharaj and he is free to do whatever he wishes." This is that *vadhi* used by Shriji Maharaj to pour the ghee.





Shakotsav

Bhagwan Swaminarayan mixed so freely and fully with devotees and the common people that he took every opportunity to serve and inspire them. He was the supreme Purushottam Narayan, yet he felt it a great privilege to serve even the most junior devotees.

He often arranged special festivals which brought the devotees together and deepened their faith in God. One of the special types of celebrations he arranged was the Shakotsav – Vegetable Festival. Thousands of devotees would attend. He would prepare the *shak* himself and then serve the sadhus and devotees.

Among these the Shakotsav at Loya, from 30 November 1820 to 4 March 1821 has earned a historic place in the annals of the Sampradaya. On one occasion during this period Maharaj himself cooked 60 maunds of brinjals 18 maunds of ghee and added spices in many vessels simultaneously. On display is one of the vessels which Maharaj used for cooking during the vegetable festival.



Rangotsav – Festival of Colours

Bhagwan Swaminarayan promoted the proper celebration of festivals to effectively spread spirituality and appropriate values for noble living within society. He frequently organized grand celebrations in various places and personally participated to add a divine touch to the splendour of the occasion. He abolished blind faith and the practice of wrong rituals and through these festivals inspired devotion and purity.

One such celebration was the Rangotsav. He put an end to the immoral songs and practices that had taken root and introduced in their place God-centred bhajans and rituals. Recreated in the Prasadi Mandapam is a scene of the Rangotsav – the festival of colours – in Panchala where Maharaj sprayed the sadhus and devotees. This is the original spray cylinder used by Maharaj on that occasion.



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's VICHARAN

July 2010, New Delhi, Bochasan



Children's Day celebration, New Delhi



Shilanyas Ceremony for New Jersey Akshardham project, Delhi

- **1-19: New Delhi**
- **20: New Delhi, Vadodara, Bochasan**
- **21-31: Bochasan**

During Swamishri's stay in New Delhi sadhus sang the Swaminarayan dhun daily in his morning puja. Swamishri had instructed that dhun be sung for the monsoon rains to shower in Gujarat and India.

Daily, prior to his morning puja, Swamishri would see presentations of services rendered by Akshardham volunteers while on his way for Thakorji's darshan. Children also performed skits to please Swamishri.

After his puja Swamishri personally blessed dignitaries and devotees and thereafter he attended to his correspondence, guests and meetings. Every Sunday Swamishri discoursed in the satsang assembly.

4, Sunday

Swamishri inaugurated the 'BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute' by lighting the lamp in his morning puja. Several renowned scholars of India participated in the two sessions held on that day at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. For details, see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, August 2010, pp. 25-26.

6, Tuesday

After concluding his morning puja Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of puja of the marble *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed puja of Swamishri's *murti*. The *murtis* were to be consecrated at the Sanatan Mandir in Valetva (near Mahelav).

Swamishri blessed a 61-year-old devotee, Shri Darshansingh, for pilgrimaging 275 km by foot from Chandigadh to Akshardham.

10, Saturday

In the evening Swamishri arrived at the musical fountain to inaugurate and perform the *maha-arti* of the 30-foot high *murti* of Neelkanth Varni. First Swamishri prayed for the welfare of all and performed puja of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. The pujari sanctified the *maha-arti* with Swamishri's divine touch and then the *arti* "Jai Sadguru Swami..." was relayed on the public address system while Swamishri, senior sadhus and the pujari performed the *maha-arti*. Thousands in the audience, gathered for the fountain show, witnessed the devotional ritual.

The *maha-arti* would be performed daily prior to the show.

11, Sunday

In the evening Swamishri attended the Sunday Satsang assembly. Children of Delhi Bal Mandal presented a cultural programme in which they enacted the stories of Shravan and Nachiketa. Finally they performed a cultural dance.



Swamishri greets the devotees on Guru Punam, Bochasan

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly in Hindi and Gujarati. He elaborated upon the divine power of Yogiji Maharaj's wishes and how Satsang flourished in India and abroad. Swamishri also explained the stories of Nachiketa and King Janak and stressed their steadfastness and devotion.

12, Monday

Prior to Swamishri's morning puja the *maha-puja* rituals for the foundation-stone laying (*shilanyas*) ceremony of the first phase for the Akshardham complex project in New Jersey commenced in the presence of senior sadhus. After the morning puja Swamishri performed pujan of Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj and then did pujan of the five *nidhi-kumbhs* (to be placed in the foundation pits brought by senior sadhus. All the *kumbhs* were placed near Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj and Swamishri performed *arti*. Prayers were offered and *dhun* chanted for the successful completion of the project. Finally, Swamishri performed pujan of the main *shila* and sanctified it with flowers and rice grains.

13, Tuesday

Swamishri inaugurated the new *garbhagruh* of Swaminarayan Akshardham. For details, see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, August 2010.

15, Thursday

Swamishri sanctified the Metro train at the invitation of Shreedharan, CEO of the Metro Train Project in New Delhi. Mr Shreedharan

and all his high ranking personnel honoured Swamishri on his arrival at Akshardham Station, near Swaminarayan Akshardham.

Mr Shreedharan explained how the stations and trains function. During the brief train journey to the next stop in Noida Swamishri did darshan of Swaminarayan Akshardham and the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Swamishri blessed Mr Shreedharan and his staff for their commendable services.

25, Sunday; Guru Purnima, Bochasan

After Thakorji's darshan, Swamishri performed his morning puja in his room.

At 10.00 a.m. Swamishri proceeded towards the festival assembly held nearby on the mandir ground. The main theme of the assembly was "Guru guna apār hai" – the guru's virtues are innumerable. The celebration assembly programme was as follows:

- ❖ The glory and meaning of Guru Purnima – speech by Anandswarup Swami
- ❖ Couplets written by Brahmanand Swami – sung by Aksharash Swami and Madhurvadan Swami
- ❖ The guru's virtues are innumerable – speech by Viveksagar Swami
- ❖ *Gurudev mero ghāt dusaro banāyo* – couplets sung by sadhus
- ❖ Transformations of people's lives by Swamishri – speech by Tyagvallabh Swami
- ❖ Incidents of devotees blessed with spiritual realization by Swamishri – speech by Kothari Swami
- ❖ How Swamishri consolidates faith in all – speech by Ishwarcharan Swami
- ❖ *Kon aesi bhet gururāj āge dhariye* – couplets sung by sadhus
- ❖ How to perform guru puja of Swamishri –

speech by Mahant Swami

- ❖ Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus.
- ❖ Swamishri inaugurated a video: 'Swaminarayan Satsang Darshan, Part 105'.
- ❖ Swamishri inaugurated a publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, 'Prasangam' 2008, by Priyadarshan Swami
- ❖ *Guru malyā gunavālā* – kirtan sung by Krishnapriya Swami.

Finally Swamishri blessed the assembly of 65,000 devotees, "The glory of guru is sung abundantly in India. Through the guru we realize spiritual knowledge and attain *moksha*. The guru shows us the right path. Only after meeting a true Sadhu do we learn about how to worship God. The reasons are that he is always absorbed in God, his actions are for the welfare of all and he wishes for the good of all souls. There is a need

for schools and colleges in our world and we attain something good when we learn from school teachers and professors. But they cannot teach us about or give us *moksha*. Only a true Sadhu can redeem us from our infatuation and attachment to wordly objects and pleasures."

The assembly concluded at 11.35 a.m. and all the devotees were given *prasad* boxes of hot *khichdi*, *ladu* and *fulvadi*.

29, Thursday

Prior to performing his morning puja Swamishri performed the *pratishta* rituals of puja of *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Hanumanji and Ganapatiji for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Nandurbar, near Dhuliya. ♦

Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas

Swamishri Blesses Dignitaries

Each day in New Delhi many dignitaries came to have darshan and seek the blessings of Swamishri in his morning puja. Thereafter Swamishri met them personally. Some of the many dignitaries who were blessed by Swamishri include:

1, Thursday: Shri Bajpayji, Chief Editor of *Amar Ujala* (daily).

3, Saturday: Shri Bhupendra Hooda, Chief Minister of Haryana; Shri Rajat Sharma, popular anchor and head of India TV (Channel).

5, Monday: Shri Lalit Pawar, Chairman of India's Tourism Department; Shri Tarun Vijay, member of Rajya Sabha; H.H. Ikbalsingh Babaji, a Sikh spiritual leader and head of Kalgidhar Trust.

6, Tuesday: Shri Arun Jaitley, member of Opposition, Rajya Sabha; Shri Rameshji Agrawal and son, Mohan Agrawal, proprietor of Divya Bhaskar Group of newspapers and magazines.

7, Wednesday: Shri Premkumar Dhumal, Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh; Shri Kirankumar, Deputy Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh.

8, Thursday: Shri Rajnath Singh, Former President of BJP; Shri Shivarajsinh Chauhan, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh; Shri Vinit Joshi, Chairman of CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education); Shri Ashok Valiya, State Finance Minister, Delhi.

9, Friday: Shri Rameshji, Chief Minister of Uttarakhand.

10, Saturday: Shri Virbhadrasingh, Former Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh and India's Minister of Steel.

14, Wednesday: Shri Raman Singh, Chief Minister of Chattisgarh.

17, Saturday: Shri Samir Munjal, Owner of Hero Honda.

18, Sunday: Shri Dr Abdul Kalam, former President of India; Dr Trehan, renowned cardiologist and head of Mediciti (hospital).

19, Monday: H.E. Shri Joshi, Governor of Uttar Pradesh.

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

July 2010

ABOVE PAIN AND DISCOMFORT

1, Thursday

As part of Swamishri's routine checkup a doctor inserted a needle in Swamishri's arm to draw blood. But he failed the first time. On inserting the needle again he found the vein and drew a little blood. The doctor apologized to Swamishri, "Please forgive me for the trouble."

Swamishri nonchalantly replied, "I am not pained, neither am I (mundanely) happy or miserable. This body of mine has been punctured with needles many times. I had been operated here (gall bladder) and my chest had been opened up. So do not worry."

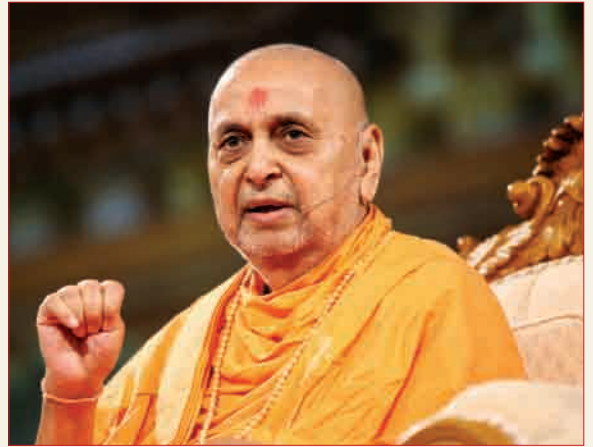
With these words the doctor was relieved of his own pain and regret in causing discomfort to Swamishri. Swamishri's spiritual state of realization reflects upon his ability to transcend the pains and discomforts of the body and our world.

RECOGNIZING A DEVOTEE'S SEVA

13, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the inaugural rituals of the new *garbhagruh* of Swaminarayan Akshardham in the presence of 500 devotees. The splendid *garbhagruh* was hailed by all as a unique addition to Akshardham. Swamishri was pleased and amazed at the hard work rendered by sadhus, volunteers and devotees. After his blessings Swamishri called a devotee, Shri Surendrabhai, who was sitting to his left, onto the pedestal near him. Then Swamishri introduced him to the assembly and acknowledged his services.

Surendrabhai had spent six months in helping out and supervising the artisans working on the



garbhagruh. During this time he paid very little attention to his own booming business.

Everyone was amazed as to how Swamishri had marked Surendrabhai's presence amidst 500 devotees, and publicly recognized his sacrifice and service by calling him onto the pedestal. Any service or devotion performed by a devotee to please God never goes unnoticed. God and his holy Sadhu honour those who offer devotion to them.

HOW TO INCREASE DEVOTION FOR GOD?

15, Thursday

During Swamishri's morning audience an aspirant asked, "How can I increase my devotion for God?"

Swamishri replied, "Everything lies in God's name. Chant Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan daily. Furthermore, do puja and consolidate your refuge (*ashro*) in God. With these endeavours you will be able to enhance bhakti in life."

HOW TO TRANSCEND THE THREE STATES

28, Wednesday, Bochasan

A South Indian aspirant enquired of Swamishri, "What is the path to transcend the three states (of waking, dream and deep sleep)?"

Swamishri replied briefly, "God's refuge (*ashro*). Daily do *mala* and pray to him." ♦

Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas

SHILANYAS MAHOTSAV

for Unique Hindu Mandir in New Jersey, USA

21-22 August 2010



Doctor Swami performs the *shilanyas* rituals

The foundation stone-laying ceremony (Shilanyas Vidhi) for the unique Hindu Mandir and Prayer Hall in Robbinsville, New Jersey was performed on 21 and 22 August 2010 in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami, 40 sadhus, and devotees from throughout the country. The unique Hindu Mandir will be built using intricately hand-carved marble in accordance with the Shilpa Shastras. The adjacent Prayer Hall will include an assembly hall and youth activity areas. This ceremony marks the start of the first two phases of construction for the Swaminarayan Akshardham complex in North America.

Devotees of all ages attended this historic event, each participating in one of four puja sessions over the two days. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had consecrated the foundation stones

for the Mandir on 12 July 2010 in New Delhi. Those consecrated stones were shipped to New Jersey for the ceremony. Led by Pujya Doctor Swami, those consecrated stones, as well as thousands of bricks consecrated by devotees in the onsite Vedic ceremony, were laid in the foundation during the event. The participants prayed that the Mandir may contribute to peace in the individual, family, community and world. In his address following the ceremony, Pujya Doctor Swami stressed, "In addition to laying the foundation stones for a unique Hindu mandir, all must lay a strong foundation of spirituality in their life to achieve lasting peace and happiness."

In the first two phases of the Swaminarayan Akshardham complex in North America, the unique Hindu Mandir and Prayer Hall are slated

for completion in two years. The following phases of the complex will include a Youth Activity Center, a Welcome Center and the Akshardham Mahamandir.

The excitement of the architects, technical consultants, community officials, devotees and volunteers who attended this event was palpable. “It’s just a great experience to finally see it come together after four years of planning,” said Robbinsville Township Council President, Sheree McGowan. Richard Levesque, Robbinsville Township Council Vice President, was touched by the sense of community that pervaded the event. “The feeling of community, the feeling of family when you walked into the ceremony today was just amazing. That community and family aspect which BAPS brings to our community is second-to-none. The organizations throughout the Township and throughout Mercer County really appreciate BAPS’s commitment to the communities that it is a part of.”

It is said that a mandir is a gift to the world. Jeromie Lange, a Principal at Maser Consulting echoed this sentiment. “One of the great things about this organization is that it is not just about the religion or about the specific community, but it is really about people as a whole. So the mandir is not going to just benefit BAPS, or Hindus, but it will truly enrich the lives of all who come here.” ♦



Volunteers prepare the site for the *shilanyas* ceremony



Devotees from throughout North America participate in the ceremony



Mahotsav assembly after the *shilanyas* ceremony

DR APJ ABDUL KALAM VISITS WATERSHOW

23 July 2010, Akshardham, Gandhinagar

The esteemed former President of India Dr APJ Abdul Kalam visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar to see the spectacular Sat-Chit-Anand Watershow.

He was greeted by the sadhus in traditional manner with a garland and recitation of Vedic mantras.

When the show began, Dr Kalam was intrigued by the character of Nachiketa and by the message of *atma* and Paramatma conveyed by the Watershow.

Afterwards he met all the young children who play the character of Nachiketa and other actors. He appreciated their efforts, saying, "You are doing a great service to the world."

He also added, "Students from one thousand schools from every district of India should see this



show."

Dr Kalam was also introduced to the sadhus and volunteers involved with setting up and running the Watershow.

He then spoke with Pramukh Swami Maharaj on telephone and appreciated the show's

message.

Finally, before departing, Dr Kalam signed the visitors book, "Swaminarayan Akshardham at Gandhinagar has given a great divine message to the nation, 'Create young Nachiketas' India needs. I am sure thousands of young students in India must see this, the best spiritual show ever. India definitely will get hundreds of Nachiketas. My regards to Maha Pramukh Swamiji for this great spiritual contribution." ♦

UK BAL-BALIKA NATIONAL SUMMER CAMP 2010

26 July to 4 August 2010, London

Over 40 *balaks* and *balikas* participated in the National Bal-Balika Summer Training Camp 2010 which began on Monday 26 July 2010 at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, and ran for ten days: seven days at the Mandir and the remaining three days at Frylands Wood Campsite in South London for the *balikas* and at Gilwell Activity Centre in Chingford for the *balaks*.

The morning sessions focused on various virtues from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, aspects of Hinduism and the Swaminarayan tradition. Many of the sessions were interactive to help enhance the children's understanding. Also, classes on communication skills and public speaking were



held. The children practiced these skills by guiding visitors around the Mandir complex.

In addition, the children were taught Gujarati through an enjoyable and interactive seven-day course.

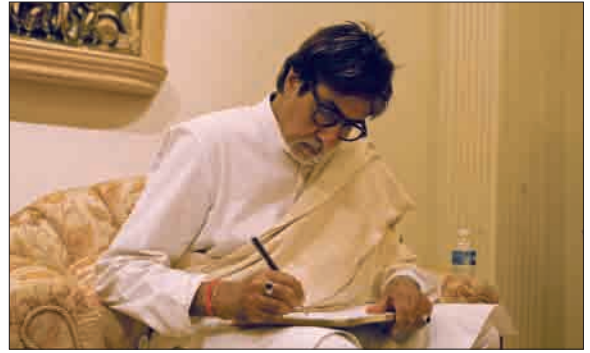
Other sessions guided them on how to personally improve in various fields of life, contemporary issues, education and developing their talents through role play, interactive presentations and group activities.

The schedule also included *seva* and recreational activities.

The ten-day Summer Training Camp taught the children key skills and important values, and provided inspiration and guidance for their studies. ♦

SHRI AMITABH BACHCHAN VISITS WATERSHOW

17 August 2010, Akshardham, Gandhinagar



One of India's most popular actors and a national icon, Shri Amitabh Bachchan, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar to see the Sat-Chit-Anand Watershow.

Shri Bachchan was welcomed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami with a garland, *chandlo* and *nadachhadi* to the accompaniment of Vedic mantras.

At the end of the 45-minute show, Shri Bachchan exclaimed, "Amazing, amazing, amazing." Then he met the sadhus and volunteers who had setup the Watershow.

Thereafter he spoke with Pramukh Swami Maharaj by telephone, "Please accept my *pranams*. I have seen the amazing and beautiful Watershow. Please grant me your blessings and love. Thank you."

Before leaving, he autographed the visitors book, "I have come to Akshardham for darshan many times, but in today's experience my mind has experienced peace. And I have understood the truth about *atma* and Paramatma."

After his visit, Shri Bachchan also wrote about his feelings regarding his visit on his daily personal blog: But the day ended in another spectacular and amazing moment—a visit to the Akshardham Temple in Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat and just a 20 min car ride away from the city of Ahmedabad. The Akshardham Temples in many parts of the country have been amazing architectural achievements and the one here in Gandhinagar was no less. The constructions and designs are indigenous and

without the use of any steel. They are neat, clean and aesthetically kept regions. There is a pious feel to the area as a result of this, and a very dedicated loyal and hardworking volunteer group of people maintain and propagate its beliefs and principles. Tonight though, they had kept the temple open and lit long after closing hours for me and that was most gracious of them. Housed in a massive complex, with space and position for research and teaching the laser cum water show at the end of the tour was what we were there for and I have to say I had never seen anything like this ever. In a large amphitheater that seated 2,500 people in a picturesque open space, we witnessed a dramatic and utterly delightful show of a symbolic story that depicted the philosophy of the Akshardham Temple. The laser imagery on flowing fountains and building images on them with a story tale between Nachiketa the son of a Saintly father that banishes him to Yamraj, the disciple of Death, was a delight to watch. The deeper meanings of Atma and Parmatma were exquisitely woven into the happenings unfolding before us on varied screens of water, with such beauty, that I felt so proud to have been invited to such an event by my dear friend and family like Jigibhai, JJ Bhatt. Such a fulfilling experience and then to be able to speak on phone to Pramukh Swamiji, whom I have met on a few occasions, to seek his blessings, was an ideal end to the most, how should I put it, ethereal hours in a day. (courtesy: bigb.bigadda.com) ♦

EAST AFRICA KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR 2010

Theme: Sant Param Hitkari

Sunday, 1 August 2010, Nairobi, Kenya

Over 320 *kishores* and *kishoris* from throughout East Africa attended the East Africa Kishore-Kishori Shibir on 31 July and 1 August 2010 at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Nairobi.

The *shibir*, based on the theme ‘Sant Param Hitkari’, focused on how *kishores* and *kishoris* could further strengthen their attachment to guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The topics covered included: who is a true guru, what is the need for a guru, who that true guru is, how we can attach ourselves to the guru, the guru is our best friend and he is our path. Other topics such as *agna*, unity and *upasana* were also discussed.

The various topics of the *shibir* were presented through entertaining and enlightening speeches, group discussions, question-answer sessions and multimedia presentations. In particular, the group



discussion sessions enabled the youngsters to reinforce the topics discussed during the *shibir*.

One of the highlights of the *shibir* was the evening programme: a fascinating drama enacted by the Nairobi Kishore Mandal about how the guru tirelessly toils to enhance

the glory of India and Hinduism throughout the world.

An excellent exhibition was set up in the main foyer by the Nairobi Kishori Mandal based on Brahmanand Swami’s kirtan ‘Sant Param Hitkari’. Thus, the thorough planning and preparation resulted in a smoothly executed *shibir* which everyone found truly memorable. It gave the *kishores* and *kishoris* a clear vision of how to advance on the spiritual path and that the guru is the bridge between *bhakta* and Bhagwan. ♦

NORTH AMERICA KISHORE-KISHORI & BAL-BALIKA SUMMER SHIBIRS 2010

During the summer vacation, *kishores*, *kishoris*, *balaks* and *balikas* throughout the USA and Canada participated in separate regional summer *shibirs* based on the theme ‘The Swaminarayan Sampraday 1781’. The *shibirs* emphasized that the message, philosophy and concepts taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan over 200 years ago are still relevant to children and youths today.

The topics discussed included Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s personality, Hindu philosophies

and the Akshar-Purushottam (Swaminarayan Vedant) philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, *moksha* and *sadhana* in Satsang. In the question-answer sessions insightful answers were given to the common questions faced by the children and teenagers.

Each session was followed by a group activity or discussion to help bring the main points to a practical level.

In the *kishore-kishori shibirs* the teenagers also received useful education and career guidance



from successful youths and seniors. In the evening programmes, the difficulties of college life were depicted by a drama and which gave guidance on how to properly balance Satsang during student life.

In the evening programmes during the *balak-balika shibirs* incidents from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were enacted to show how the philosophy of Shriji Maharaj can be

related to the children's everyday lives. Also, the inspiring true stories of how today's children live by the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were presented.

Through these *shibirs*, the youngsters developed a better understanding of the Swaminarayan Sampraday and the continued relevance in their lives of Maharaj's teachings. ♦

CAMPUS SABHAS & UNIVERSITY TALKS – 2009-10, UK

Throughout this academic year, a series of campus *sabhas* and university talks were held at universities across the UK by the BAPS Youth Forum. These initiatives were not only an opportunity for students to strengthen their own personal satsang, but also to encourage their friends to attend and learn about the underlying values and beliefs of Hindu Dharma.

The inaugural campus *sabha* of the year took place in November 2009 in London in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed the gathering via telephone, emphasizing the importance of remaining steadfast in Satsang as well as motivating them to excel in their studies. He stressed the need for regularity in Satsang, in particular with the observance of *niyam-dharma* and the significance of reading the Vachanamrut to answer the doubts in one's life. In these interactive campus *sabhas* topics from the Vachanamrut are discussed and are held every

two weeks at universities in London, Nottingham and Leicester.

In the university talks 'Karma Siddhanta', 'Student Stress Management According to the Bhagavad Gita', 'The Wonders of Attitude', 'Surviving Everest' and other topics relevant to university students were presented. They are held intermittently at universities across the country.

These *sabhas* and talks have informed, inspired and empowered students with a feeling of self-worth and increased motivation to achieve the best they can in life. ♦

NATIONAL KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR 2010

Theme: Vachanamrut – The Word of God

25-27 August 2010, Warwick Conference Park, UK



Over 400 *kishores* and *kishoris* from throughout the UK experienced a journey of enlightenment and education as the essence of the Vachanamrut – the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan – was delivered through a series of eye-opening stage presentations and classroom sessions during the National Kishore-Kishori Shibir at Warwick Conference Park from 25 to 27 August 2010.

The opening session featured a motivating introductory video, an entertaining drama which dispelled some of the common misconceptions regarding the Vachanamrut and a powerful keynote speech emphasizing the importance of the Vachanamrut.

The second session included a presentation entitled 'Our Vachanamrut' and structured classroom sessions.

The second morning of the *shibir* began with an analysis of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as an adept teacher and classroom sessions based on the topics: Vachanamrut: A Guide to Life, Art of Introspection, and Hinduism and the Vachanamrut.

The afternoon session



focused on the favourite Vachanamruts of the guru *parampara* and the significance of these in our lives.

The evening programme featured bhajans and instrumental performances by winners of the recent *adhiveshan*, a video presentation of the recent India Trip by 42 *kishores* and *kishoris* and a kirtan-bhakti programme by sadhus.

The final morning of the *shibir* began with an insightful and practical guidance on how to study the Vachanamrut. Through analysis and interpretation, *kishores* and *kishoris* became better equipped with the techniques to strengthen their understanding of the scripture.

The concluding session comprised of an explanation of how the Satpurush is the gateway to Akshardham using references from the Vachanamrut and episodes from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The *shibir* ended with another exceptional video presentation, completing a memorable and enjoyable three-day event which inspired all to delve deeper into the teachings of the Vachanamrut and practice its messages in daily life. ♦



NATIONAL YOUTH CONVENTION, USA
17-20 June 2010, Chicago, USA

Yuvaks and Yuvatis from throughout USA and Canada participated in the annual National Youth Convention held in Chicago from 17 to 20 June 2010.

The youths received inspiration and practical guidance from Doctor Swami and other experienced sadhus. Such *shibirs* help to mould the personal, social and spiritual lives of the youths in a positive way.



EAST AFRICA KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR

31 July-1 August 2010, Nairobi, Kenya

Teenagers from BAPS centres in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania attended this first-ever East Africa Kishore-Kishori Shibir on 31 July and 1 August 2010 at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Nairobi. The *shibir* was based on the theme 'Sant Param Hitkari'.

The youngsters were guided by Bhaktavatsal Swami, Rajeshwar Swami and other sadhus through a variety of presentations and speeches. The topics covered included: who is a true guru, what is the need for a guru, who that true guru is, how we can attach ourselves to the guru, the guru is our best friend and he is our path. Other topics such as *agna*, unity and *upasana* were also discussed.