

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

March-April 2014
Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-

KOLKATA

Newly Consecrated BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs

Inspired: Pramukh Swami Maharaj

MAHUVA



CONSECRATION CEREMONIES OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIRS, AUSTRALIA

February 2014

The BAPS Satsang in Australia has flourished over the last decade through the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. During Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami's visit to the Asia-Pacific region in January-February 2014, he performed two *pratishtha* rituals and addressed satsang assemblies and *shibirs*. 1. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performing the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Sydney (9.2.2014). 2. Assembly hall of the mandir with devotees during the *pratishtha* assembly. 3. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performing the *murti-pratishtha* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Brisbane (15.2.2014). 4. Devotees participating in the *pratishtha mahapuja* rituals. 5. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performs the *mahapuja* rituals for the ground-breaking ceremony of a *hari* mandir in Adelaide. 6. Devotees during the ground-breaking ceremony in Adelaide.



Newly consecrated
BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Kolkata



Newly consecrated
BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Mahuva

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

February-March 2014 Vol. 37 No. 2



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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

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

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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Articles on the making and consecration of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs, Kolkata and Mahuva, were translated by Sadhu Vivekjiandas and Sadhu Amrutvijaydas from *Swaminarayan Prakash* and other source materials.

FIRST WORD

Development is the buzzword in India and many other developing countries or nations hit by recession. Political leaders, industrialists, scientists, sociologists, builders, parents and many others – all have been endeavouring and pitching for development. Alvin Toffler in his book *The Third Wave* focuses on three broad periods that revolutionized life in the West. He calls the first period the First Wave (from 8000 BCE to 1650-1750 CE), during which the agricultural revolution ushered in a seminal change. The Second Wave (from 1750 to 1955 CE) is defined as the period of the industrial revolution. And the Third Wave (1955 CE and onwards), he notes, is known variously as the space age, information age, electronic era or the arrival of the global village model.

Prior to the First Wave, Toffler says that our ancestors were mainly migratory, and they sustained themselves by hunting, fishing or herding. Then about a few millennia ago the agricultural revolution, i.e. the First Wave, began. This ushered in a new way of life where people mainly lived in one place, cultivated their land, and formed villages and settlements. The Second Wave, which emerged during the second half of the 18th century, virtually overshadowed the First Wave through rapid industrialization. This dramatically changed the pace and tenor of life mainly in Europe and America. From the once predominantly agricultural way of life, countries started building steel plants, auto plants, textile factories, railway lines and food processing plants. Then as the wave of industrialization peaked after the Second World War the Third Wave started emerging from 1955. The decade that followed saw the rise in white collar workers, the introduction of computers, commercial jet travel and other technological advances throughout the West.¹ Each Wave brought with it advancement and prosperity in society. There was a rapid growth in infrastructure, marketing and commercialization in the wake of the Second Wave. The Third Wave produced a drastic upswing in the standard of living and prosperity in many western countries. The surge in the Third Wave is still unrelenting. The flip side to all this has been the mounting stress and burgeoning greed and conflict in society.

To solve these repercussions of development an effective panacea is required. The two principal elements that can resolve most of our escalating personal, national and global crises is faith in God and the practice of our religious and moral traditions.

The ideal Hindu mandirs are epitomes of religious faith and traditions. Pramukh Swami Maharaj often describes, “A mandir is a place of paramount peace. It is a place where the mind becomes stable.” The renowned Gujarati poet, Nanhalal (1877-1946 CE), opines about the ambience of Swaminarayan mandirs, “The religious atmosphere in mandirs of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya; the saintliness and detachment of its sadhus; the chastity of its followers; enthusiasm in its festivals, the goodness of its dos and don’ts; its open-mindedness and respect for other religions; the enlightening scriptural discourses in its ashrams are appealing... Go and sit beneath the dome of a Swaminarayan mandir and you will find that the soul is pacified, all troubles are silenced, streams of divine nectar are palpable and one feels as if divine bliss is showering from the higher realms.”

The recent consecration ceremonies of two *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan mandirs in Kolkata and Mahuva, inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, are the culminations of decades of efforts by Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the dedication and sacrifice of hundreds of devotees.

This issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* presents fascinating accounts of the making and consecration ceremonies of these two BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandirs – sanctuaries of peace and service to society. ♦

1. Toffler, Alvin. *The Third Wave*. London: Pan Books Ltd, 1983, pp. 27-28

FESTIVALS IN GADHPUR

*Shri Hari invites his paramhansas and devotees to Gadhpur
to celebrate festivals and reveal his glory...*



FESTIVAL OF RAKSHA BANDHAN

Shri Hari was in Gadhpur. The festival of Raksha Bandhan was near at hand. On the day prior to the festival Shri Hari was seated before the *murti* of Lord Vasudev narayan in Dada Khachar's *darbar*. Anandanand Swami, a senior *paramhansa*, came and performed puja of Maharaj, offered him new clothes and tied a *pagh* on his head. Then he tied a *rakhdi* (*rakhi*) on his right wrist. The entire assembly of sadhus and devotees relished this divine darshan. Thereafter, Shri Hari addressed the congregation, "Believe the manifest form of God that you have attained to be forever divine and with form. Also, believe him to be the cause of all avatars. However, if one fails to believe so and considers him to be formless and like any other incarnation of God, it amounts to blasphemy."

The next day, the devotees tied *rakhis* on Maharaj's wrist and Shri Hari, too, tied *rakhis* on their wrists and blessed them.

ARRIVAL OF SADHUS AND DEVOTEES

Shri Hari had instructed all his sadhus to come to Gadhpur to celebrate Janmashtami. He also sent a messenger inviting Narayanji Suthar of Junagadh to Gadhpur. When Narayanji arrived, he prostrated before Maharaj and said, "Maharaj, I'm blessed by your darshan. Is there any instruction for me?"

Maharaj replied, "A mandir will soon be built in Ahmedabad. The British officials have given us land for construction. I wish to install the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev in the mandir because Narayan is the divine king of India. I wish that our devotees offer daily puja to Nar-Narayan in their homes, so you will have to prepare a block for printing the *murtis*."

"Maharaj, can you describe them to me so that I can draw them first," Narayanji enquired.

"I have seen them in person. Nar is fair-skinned and he has long, yellow hair, whereas

Narayan is dark-skinned. Both devas have two hands,” Shri Hari described.

Immediately thereafter, Narayanji Suthar set about drawing the figures with each deva having four hands and holding the *shankh* (conch shell), *chakra* (divine wheel), *gada* (mace) and *padma* (lotus). He embellished the figures with Vijayanti garlands and *kundals*. Finally, on showing them to Shri Hari, the latter happily approved them. Thereafter, when the block was ready Siddhanand Swami took it and got the figures printed on cloth.

JANMASHTAMI FESTIVAL: 1822 CE

On the morning of Janmashtami Shri Hari was accompanied by his sadhus and devotees for a bath in the river Ghela. Subsequently, he rode to Jiva Khachar’s *darbar*. Jiva Khachar had love and respect for Maharaj but two traits blighted his personality: his infatuation for worldly affairs and his jealous and hostile attitude towards Dada Khachar. Because of his latter attribute he often found faults in Maharaj and nursed an aversion towards him. However, when his inner feelings of *rajogun* and *tamogun* subsided he became inclined to offering devotion and respect to Maharaj. Thus Maharaj often commented to him, “One cannot trust a person who is prone to having fluctuations in good and bad feelings.”

Shri Hari sat on the verandah of Jiva Khachar’s *darbar*. He performed *pujan* of Maharaj and his sadhus and then distributed sugar crystals to all. Then the sadhus started singing bhajans. After a while Maharaj got up and came to Dada Khachar’s *darbar*. Here, he sat beneath the neem tree, where the devotees of Surat, Vadodara and Ahmedabad performed his *pujan*. Then the female devotees offered gifts of richly embroidered clothes to Maharaj.

Maharaj gave instructions to Siddhanand Swami for the evening Janmashtami celebration, “Arrange a crib with the *murti* of Lalji facing eastward on the verandah outside the room of Vasudevnarayan. The sadhus should sing kirtans

till the time of performing the *arti* commemorating Shri Krishna’s birth. Then tomorrow I would like to hold a feast for Brahmins. Send word of this today to all the Brahmins residing in Gadhada and the neighbouring villages.”

Dada Khachar took responsibility for making the feast arrangements. Jivuba advised Dada that after the feast Maharaj would give donations to each Brahmin, thus he should keep the money ready.

During the Janmashtami celebration in the evening, Maharaj was seated on a platform under the neem tree in Dada’s *darbar*. He first addressed the congregation, “One who cannot do without the presence and company of devotees and sadhus is a genuine *satsangi*. Thus, all should nourish an inclination to associate with the sadhus and devotees. Such pious company will help and protect one from falling in *satsang* in difficult times.” Then the sadhus started singing kirtans. Maharaj called Nishkulanand Swami and told him to bring the printed *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev. Shri Hari honoured Narayanji Suthar for preparing the *murtis* and gave him remuneration. Maharaj expressed his pleasure upon Nishkulanand Swami and Siddhanand Swami by garlanding them and touching his own feet on their chests. A few minutes before midnight Maharaj asked that the *murti* of Lalji be brought to him and placed in the cot. Many food items were offered as *annakut* before Lalji. Then Maharaj himself performed the festival *arti* and thereafter he instructed the sadhus and devotees to sing kirtans. The festive bhajans filled the *darbar* with divinity. The next morning saw a significant influx of Brahmins for the feast in Dada’s *darbar*. The main menu comprised of *puri* and *dudhpak*. They were first offered to the *murti* of Lalji and thereafter Maharaj sat down to eat. Then Maharaj served the sadhus. When the Brahmins finished eating, Shri Hari gave them each a donation of Rs.1 and appeased them. They appreciated Maharaj’s unstinting hospitality and realized his divinity.

SADHUS GO TO DUNGARPUR

At Shri Hari's behest the construction work of the *shikharbaddh* mandir in Ahmedabad was in progress. To prepare the marble *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev for the mandir, Shri Hari sent Hiraji, a sculptor, four sadhus and Kana Bhagat to Dungarpur in Rajasthan. Shri Hari declared, "We want four *murtis* to be sculpted – two of Narayan of 2.25 *gaj* (about six feet) in height and two of Nar of 2.0 *gaj* (less than six feet). Acquire the stones and get the *murtis* carved by Hiraji and Gulab. It will take at least four months to sculpt the *murtis*." Then Shri Hari blessed them and gave *prasad*. Maharaj then added, "Once the *murtis* are ready transport them to Ahmedabad."

KEEP THESE WORDS EVER FRESH

It was the new moon day of the month of Shravan (June-July). Shri Hari was in a pensive mood, seated outside the room of Vasudevnarayan with his eyes closed. The day marked the twentieth anniversary of Shri Hari's appointment as head of the Sampradaya by Ramanand Swami. He had come on earth to reveal himself as the supreme God and thus liberate countless souls from *maya*. During the past two decades he had exercised his divine powers and given glimpses of his divine form to many aspirants. He had inspired thousands to abide by strict moral disciplines. His other works, too, were unique. No other avatar in the past had accomplished so much. Nevertheless, there were those who lapsed in believing Maharaj as the supreme God. Thus, today Shri Hari had decided to reveal his glory again. The reason being that without understanding his true glory the souls would not be able to attain *moksha*.

After a while Shri Hari opened his eyes and concluded his deep contemplation. He saw before him a congregation of sadhus and devotees. They were murmuring among themselves about Shri Hari's solemn mood. Maharaj raised his hands and spoke: "O *paramhansas*! All the seniors, along with those who are wise, please come to

the front. Please listen very attentively to what I am about to say. What I am about to say to you, I say not out of any pretence, or out of any self-conceit, or to spread my own greatness. Rather, it is because I feel that amongst all of you sadhus and devotees, if someone can understand my message, it will tremendously benefit that person; that is my purpose in narrating it. Moreover, this discourse is based on what I have seen and realized through my own experience. In fact, it is also in agreement with the shastras. Although I feel that it is not appropriate to discuss this in public, I shall tell you nonetheless."

On hearing these words the entire congregation became alert. Shri Hari then revealed his true nature and form, and disinterest in worldly things. He also described the effulgent divinity of Akshardham, his divine abode, and added, "Realize that the form amidst the divine light is this Maharaj visible before you." Furthermore, Shri Hari instructed all to keep these talks ever fresh in their minds, "Keep this principle constantly new and fresh in your minds; never forget it out of complacency. Remember it tomorrow just as it is today. Keep it vivid in your minds and remember it daily until the end of your lives.

"Indeed, this principle which I have revealed before you is the very essence of all the shastras, and it is my own firm experience; I have talked to you having seen it with my very own eyes. In fact, I swear by all of you *paramhansas* that I have seen these facts with my own eyes."

The sadhus and devotees understood that Maharaj had revealed himself to be the supreme God. And that he even swore in the name of his *paramhansas* in conclusion. All felt their faith was consolidated by Maharaj's candid discourse. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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

ADHYĀY 2

Eshā Brāhmi Sthiti – This Is the Brahmic State

Part 16

(Recap: Presenting us with the various aspects of the *sthitapragna* state, the *Gitā* gives us lessons on life; it gives us a means for living in *sansar* yet remaining aloof; and it shows us the pathway to supreme peace. Previously, we saw the *sthitapragna* state through virtues such as being ever free of desires, having control of the senses, being centred on *Paramātmā*, etc.)

Shri Krishna Bhagwan tells Arjuna:

या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी ।

यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ॥

Yā nishā sarvabhootānām tasyām

jāgarti sanyamee,

Yasyām jāgrati bhootāni sā nishā pashyato

munehe. (Gitā 2.69)

“What is night for all beings is the time of awakening for the self-controlled; and the time of awakening for all beings is night for the introspective sage.”

Using the analogy of day and night, Shri Krishna explains the greatness of those who are *sthitapragna*. Shri Krishna uses the word ‘awake’ to reveal the difference in lifestyles between ordinary worldly people and the self-controlled. It is important to be awake, but the purpose and manner in which one is awake is of more importance. The *Gitā* guides us in the true direction of

being awake.

To be awake means to engage in one’s work with understanding. A student who understandingly focuses on studies is an awake student. Parents who understandingly continue to help their child to develop are awake parents. In the same manner, the *sthitapragna* are continually awake; they have surmounted the state of understanding yogis. Their spiritual endeavours include control over the senses, conquering the mind, conviction of being Brahman, and performing the *bhakti* and *upasana* of Parabrahman. Those who are bound by material desires never choose such a path of endeavours; they believe this path to be false and the path of indulgence to be true, and thus impatiently take that path.

The *Gitā* explains these contradictory behaviours with an analogy of being awake and asleep. The *sthitapragna satpurush* is awake on the spiritual path, where those who are filled with material desires and have a wavering mind are overcome by sleep. In the same manner, those who are filled with material desires are awake in indulging in pleasures, whereas the *sthitapragna satpurush* chooses to rest, i.e. remains aloof from indulging in material pleasures due to material desires.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan explains the meaning of the above *shloka* saying, “In the context of

worshipping God, all worldly people behave as if their mind is shrouded in darkness, like the night; i.e. they do not worship God. The devotees of God, however, are awake in worshipping God; i.e. they are constantly engaged in worshipping God. Furthermore, everyone's mind is awake with respect to the *panchvishays* – sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touch; i.e. they continuously indulge in the *vishays*. The minds of the devotees of God, in contrast, are shrouded in darkness with regards to indulging in the *vishays*; i.e. they do not indulge in them.

“Therefore, only one who remains alert regarding his own liberation can be said to possess a sharp intellect. As for others, they are all mere fools” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 50).

Being awake means being alert. Alertness is the secret behind the self-control of those who are *sthitapragna*. Like a guard who is alert while on his watch, the self-controlled *sthitapragna* remains alert. Bhagwan Swaminarayan calls this state of being awake as *awareness*. Giving the example of the gateway of awareness, he explains by saying,

“The senior sadhus in my *muni-mandal* behave in such a manner that the awareness within their hearts is the gateway to the abode of God. It is at this gateway where all of the sadhus remain standing. Consider the following analogy: a king's guards, while standing at the entrance of the king's palace, do not allow any thieves or robbers to come near the king. They courageously believe, ‘If anyone comes near the king to cause problems, we will cut them to pieces, but in no way will we let them reach the king.’ With such courage, they wait, armed with shields and swords. Similarly, all of these sadhus are standing at the gateway of the abode of God in the form of awareness. Inside that gateway of awareness – in Akshardhām – dwells God, of whom they do darshan. There, they do not allow wealth, women, or any other worldly object to enter and infiltrate that form of God in their heart... In this manner, they constantly remain alert like a brave warrior. But they do not

move from their position – regardless of whether they encounter progress or regress, happiness or misery, praises or insults, or countless other types of difficulties... In the same way, all of these sadhus... are not deflected from their state...

“Therefore, one who wishes to keep one's bhakti free from obstacles and to attain the holy feet of God, should remain constantly vigilant at the gateway of the abode of God in the form of awareness, and should not allow any objects except God to enter therein” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 9).

Thus, Shri Krishna Bhagwan in the Gitā explains that understanding and awareness are the key aspects of the manner in which the *sthitapragna* are awake.

Thereafter, Shri Krishna Bhagwan once again acquaints us with another unique aspect of the lifestyle of the *sthitapragna*.

CONSTANTLY FILLED YET UNDISTURBED

He says,

आपूर्यमाणमचलप्रतिष्ठं समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यद्वद् ।
तद्वत् कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे स शान्तिमाप्नोति न कामकामी ॥
*Āpooryamānamachalapratisthatham sam-
udramāpaha pravishanti yadvad,
Tadvat kāmā yam pravishanti sarve sa shān-
timāpnoti na kāmakāme.*

“Just as the ocean is filled with water from all sides yet maintains unwavering stability, in the same manner, a person in whom all pleasures enter yet remains unagitated, such a person attains peace, not one who desires pleasures” (Gitā 2.70).

To partake in pleasures yet not be bound by the desire for them! This is an astonishing, counterintuitive statement, yet it establishes an important principle. This is not a lesson on spiritual endeavour, but an acquaintance of the realized state. Here we see the rich fruits that one who masters the *sthitapragna* state attains. If one has complete conviction in Paramātmā, then one's mind never wavers even when exposed to the sensual pleasures.

Using the analogy of rivers and the ocean, Shri Krishna explains the above principle to Arjuna. ‘*Āpaha*’ means flowing water in rivers; ‘*āpooryamānam*’ means that which is filled from all sides; ‘*achalapratishtham*’ means unwavering stability. The ocean is filled from all sides by gushing rivers and has thus been called ‘*āpooryamānam*’. Moreover, it does not overflow from its boundaries; it has unwavering stability and is tranquil. Therefore, it has been described as ‘*achalapratishtham*’. Being exposed to a variety of material pleasures is the ‘*āpooryamānam*’ aspect of a *sthitapragna* person, and never being disturbed within by desires is their ‘*achalapratishtham*’ state.

A BOON FOR THE UNDISTURBED

For such a person, Shri Krishna says, “स शान्तिम् आप्नोति” – “*Sa shāntim āpnoti*” – “Such a person attains peace.” This is a boon to those who are exposed to material pleasures and yet remain tranquil, a boon of peace. Although the ocean is constantly pounded by gushing rivers, it remains calm and tranquil within. Similarly, so is the lifestyle of the *sthitapragna*.

THE DESIRING HAVE NO PEACE

One thing should be clarified here. To indulge in material pleasures and yet remain unaffected by them is not to be taken to authorize a life of indulgence. Nor is it intended to imply that the *sthitapragna* oversteps the boundaries of the shastras and act as they wish. This is a mere description of the peak of the *sthitapragna* state. Self-control is part of their lifestyle, and that is why Shri Krishna Bhagwan had previously given the example of a turtle:

“यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः । इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थं यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥” – “*Yadā samharate chāyam koormongāneeva sarvashaha, inidrayānee-nidrayārthebhyastasya pragnā pratishthitā.*” – “When a person withdraws one’s senses from their pleasures, like a turtle withdraws its limbs

from all directions, that person is said to have a stable intellect” (Gitā 2.58). Therefore, controlling one’s senses like a turtle and remaining undisturbed like the ocean when exposed to pleasures are two aspects that are both present in great people who are at rest in the form of Paramātmā. This is purport of what the Gitā is telling us.

For this very reason, immediately after giving a boon to those who are undisturbed within with the words, “*Sa shāntim āpnoti*”, the Gitā also specifies the principle, “न कामकामी” – “*na kāmakā-mee*”, i.e. one who desires sensual pleasures will never attain peace.

Thus, the words “*Āpooryamānamachalapratishtham*” reveal the outstanding portrait of the *sthitapragna*.

We have been informed that the *sthitapragna* attain peace. The Gitā then reiterates this in a different manner.

विहाय कामान् यः सर्वान् पुमांश्चरति निःस्पृहः ।

निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ॥

Vihāya kāmān yaha sarvān pumānshchara-ti nihispruhaha,

Nirmamo nirahankāraha

sa shāntimadhigachchhati.

“One who sheds all desires, and lives free of covetousness, attachment and ego attains peace” (Gitā 2.71).

Here, the Gitā introduces us to the enemies of peace. *Māyā* fools us with its many disguises, four of which have been mentioned here: desire, covetousness, attachment and ego. The desire to indulge in material pleasures, coveting worldly things and ambitions do not let a person sit at ease. They make one restless. Therefore, for peace, one should shed such longings.

‘*Nirmamaha*’ means to become free of attachment. ‘*Mama*’ means mine. When one feels that ‘this is mine’ for a certain object, one should realize that the *māyā* of that object has seized their *ātmā*. That *māyā* is called attachment. Such an attached person will never attain peace. He constantly smoulders with desires. Therefore to

rid oneself of attachment is the only way to attain peace.

Furthermore, the origin of attachment, the feeling that this is mine, is 'me'. Wherever there is 'me' or 'I', there is 'mine'. Attachment is just evolved ego. To believe 'I am the one doing this' is our ego, and wherever ego rules, there is always unrest, distress, quarrel and worry. Ego and peace can never go together. Therefore the root of peace lies in humility.

The final virtue mentioned in a *sthitapragna* person is being egoless. Why was this put last? To ensure that one does not develop ego for one's virtues. One who is a true *sthitapragna* (i.e. one who has firm conviction in the form of Paramātmā), has the aforementioned virtues of self-control, equality in pleasure and pain, etc., yet has no ego of those virtues.

Thus we realize that *māyā* in the form of ego and attachment has no scope to overcome one who has attained the *sthitapragna* state.

One can see the virtues of '*nirmamaha*' and '*nirahankāraha*' imbibed firmly in the life of the *brahmaswarup satpurush*. Let us take the example of *brahmaswarup guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He is the president of a worldwide spiritual organization. He has inspired many educated well-off youths to renounce and walk the spiritual path. He has built hundreds of mandirs. Dignitaries from all over the world have honoured his unique spiritual personality. He has received many international awards. By his grace, many have been freed of vices and have developed virtues. Yet, one never sees the slightest ego in his words or actions.

In 1985, he was being honoured in a *suvarna tula* at the Queens Park Rangers football stadium in London. Swamishri was first weighed against sugar crystals, which were in turn weighed against gold. All the devotees were singing his praises. The words he spoke during his blessings reflect his '*nirahankāraha*' state, as described in the Gītā. He said, "First, I bow to Parabrahman *sarvāvatāri*

Purushottam Narayan Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who gave me this body. Thereafter, I bow to my gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, who blessed me and accepted me. It is due to their grace and blessings that I stand before you today. I bow to them a million times. They gave me their blessings and the chance to serve. There are many who stand with folded hands before Paramātmā, but it is my great fortune that I was given the chance to serve in this manner. This is beyond my ability, but they gave me strength so that I could serve..."

Wherever there is no ego, how can there be attachment! That is why Swamishri does not covet anything for his body. He never thinks of accumulating anything, nor is he attached to staying at any one location.

Once, in Bochasan, some sadhus were sitting around Swamishri engaged in a light discussion. It was the last day of Swamishri's stay there. Therefore, one sadhu said to Swamishri, "After staying here for so long and having settled down, do you feel like going elsewhere?"

"Why not? We are settled wherever we go! There is no question of *getting* settled," Swamishri said, and thereafter added softly, "Wherever we go, we engage in discourses and worship Paramātmā. If one is settled in that then one is settled in everything. What is the need to be settled in accommodation, etc.? That one can only be settled in certain locations is nonsense. However much we engage in discourses of and serving Paramātmā is how much happiness we attain; that is true settlement, understand?" Swamishri's words echoed the words of the Gītā, '*sa shāntimadhigachchhati*'.

THIS IS THE STATE OF BRAHMAN

Thus, Arjuna's question, "स्थितप्रज्ञस्य का भाषा समाधिस्थस्य केशव । स्थितधीः किं प्रभाषेत किमासीत ब्रजेत किम् ॥" – "*Sthitapraghnasya kā bhāshā samādhisthasya keshava, sthitadheehi kim prabhāsheta kimāseeta vrajeta kim.*" – "O Krishna! What are the

(Contd. on pg. 60)



BAPS SATSANG IN KOLKATA

A BRIEF HISTORY

West Bengal, popularly known as Sonar Bangla (Golden Bengal), is one of the 29 states which lies in the eastern part of India. The people of Bengal are the first to see the sunrise on the Indian sub-continent. The capital of West Bengal, Kolkata, formerly Calcutta, is located on the east bank of the river Hoogly. Kolkata is the principal commercial, cultural and educational centre of eastern India. The city hosts a number of cultural institutions of national fame, such as the Academy of Fine Arts, the Victoria Memorial, the Asiatic Society, the Indian Museum and the National Library of India. The state has produced great spiritual luminaries like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu,

Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda and others. Legendary national figures like social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy, spiritual master Shri Aurobindo, nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, and freedom fighter Subhashchandra Bose were born and bred on this land.

Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth guru in the BAPS, first blessed Kolkata in 1956. He dreamed of a mandir in Kolkata. The new *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir lies on the outskirts of Kolkata, in Joka on Diamond Harbour Road. It is like a feather in the cap of the cultural and religious history of West Bengal. It was inaugurated with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on Sunday, 2 February 2014. A



Swamishri observes the site for the new mandir, 6 June 1997. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj nourished the satsang in Kolkata, finally culminating into a *shikharbaddh* mandir

fascinating story of milestone events culminated to the mandir inauguration. They are briefly presented as follows.

1956

In 1956, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj arrived in Kolkata for the first time, accompanied by 600 devotees and sadhus on a special pilgrimage tour by train. Yogiji Maharaj stayed in Kolkata for three days. The devotees of Kolkata organized a *nagar yatra* and satsang assembly on the guidance of former Prime Minister of India, Nanda Saheb. The brief stay turned into an occasion of great celebration, and Swamishri sowed the seeds of Satsang in Kolkata.

1968

In 1968, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

blessed Kolkata Satsang Mandal by sending Pramukh Swami, Balmukund Swami, Sant Swami, Mahant Swami, Doctor Swami and other sadhus to celebrate Shri Hari Jayanti on 7 April. Despite Yogiji Maharaj's weak health, he decided to bless Kolkata and arrived by flight on 20 April. During his stay till 5 May Yogiji Maharaj declared that a mandir should be built in Kolkata. On 5 May he showered flower petals on the open plot at Chakraberia Road in Bhawanipore and sanctified it.

1970

On the instruction of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami, Dr Swami and four sadhus arrived in Kolkata and performed the foundation-stone laying ceremony for a *hari* mandir at 61 Chakraberia Road. The devotees of Kolkata



1968 Yogiji Maharaj's divine presence in Kolkata



1970 Swamishri performs the foundation-stone laying ceremony for the *hari* mandir at Bhawanipore



1972 Murti-pratishtha of the *hari* mandir, Bhawanipore

also celebrated Pramukh Swami's 50th birthday on 6 December (Magshar *sud* 8). In January 1971, Yogiji Maharaj left for Akshardham and Pramukh Swami Maharaj was declared as his successor.

1972

On 11 December, Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in Kolkata and the Nilkanth Varni Yatra special train arrived at Howrah Station on 13 December with about 800 devotees and 60 sadhus. On 14 December, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the canvas *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev and Guru Parampara at the BAPS *hari* mandir at 61 Chakraberia Road (North), Bhawanipore. In his blessings Swamishri said, "Now that the mandir has been consecrated, there will be a growth in spiritual faith here. Everyone will be blessed with happiness. Maharaj will fulfil the wishes of whoever comes here for darshan and to do *mala*."

1973

From 25 February to 7 March Swamishri visited Kolkata, Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Bokaro, Caas, Dhanbad, Kumardhobi and Bardhwan. Swamishri blessed and addressed the devotees and aspirants in all these towns and cities.

1975

Swamishri, along with Balmukund Swami, Mahant Swami, Narayan Bhagat (now, Vivek-sagar Swami) and other sadhus, stayed for over one month (5 June-10 July) in Kolkata. On 13 June, the satsang *mandal* celebrated the Silver Jubilee of Swamishri's Pramukh Varni Din – the day he was appointed as president of BAPS in 1950 by Shastriji Maharaj. He also visited Kharagpur, Tatanagar, Jamshedpur, Ranchi, Caas, Dhanbad, Jharia, Utarasagadh, Adra and Kumardhobi.

1979

On 5 April, Swamishri arrived in Kolkata and stayed for 20 days. He celebrated the 199th Birthday of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. During his stay he inaugurated the Bengali translation of the Shikshapatri. On 25 April, Swamishri proceeded on his pilgrimage from Kolkata towards Nepal. Swamishri blessed the devotees of Kolkata Satsang *mandal* with *punya* for sponsoring their Nepal pilgrimage.

1982

On 1 October, Swamishri arrived at Kolkata and stayed till 20 October. On the evening of 2 October a kirtan *aradhana* was organized at the Gyanmanch auditorium. For this function, Jivanbabu, a renowned local Bengali artist, had prepared a beautiful octagonal-shaped throne with eight doors from bamboo cane. Swamishri along with Thakorji sat on this throne. To the joy of all Swamishri also sang a kirtan, “*Tārā mukhni lavantā mithi re...*” On 10 October, bhajans and discourses were held during a boat ride on the river Ganga (Hoogly). Swamishri blessed all the devotees with words of wisdom.

During his stay Swamishri sanctified the devotees’ homes and discoursed daily in the morning and evening assemblies.

1986

On 26 March, the devotees of Kolkata got the privilege of celebrating the Fuldol (Holi) festival in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

With Swamishri’s inspiration a separate satsang *mandal* for ladies was launched on 5 April and named ‘Premvati Mandal’.

1987

Swamishri, along with over 300 sadhus, blessed Kolkata with their visit after completing the pilgrimage of the Char Dhams of North India. As per Swamishri’s directive, the sadhus had brought the holy waters from the Char Dham pilgrimage.



1982 BAPS Swaminarayan *hari* mandir, Bhawanipore



1975 Honoured on Pramukh Varni Din celebration



1982 In Kolkata, after his pilgrimage of Char Dham Yatra



2001

During the ground-breaking ceremony for the *shikharbaddh* mandir at Joka



2001

Consecrating a shrine in Jagannathpuri



2001

Swamishri inaugurates Chakulia village rebuilt by BAPS after the Orissa supercyclone

All the devotees of Kolkata got the privilege of offering *abhishek* to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with the holy water. Swamishri granted the spiritual merit of their entire pilgrimage to the devotees of Kolkata for sponsoring it. Thereafter the pilgrim devotees witnessed the popular local festivals of Mahalaya, Durga Puja and Dashera. Swamishri then travelled to Bhuvaneshwar, Jagannath Puri, Cuttack and other cities.

1990

Swamishri visited Kolkata from 19 January to 3 February. Various cultural programmes and satsang assemblies were held.

1993

On 18 February, Swamishri arrived in Kolkata. On 21 February, the devotees of Kolkata honoured Shri Harikrishna Maharaj by performing a *suvarna tula*.

On 17 December, the devotees of Kolkata celebrated Swamishri's 73rd birthday in his presence. Swamishri was welcomed at the assembly by the Kolkata Yuvak Mandal pipe band and about 6,500 devotees.

1997

On 2 June, Swamishri celebrated the birth anniversary of Yogiji Maharaj in Kolkata.

On 6 June, Swamishri travelled to Joka on Diamond Harbour Road to see a plot of land for the proposed *shikharbaddh* mandir. Swamishri liked the land and showered flowers, saying, "A five-*shikhar* mandir will be built here."

On 7 June, for the first time in the history of the Swaminarayan organization, a satsang assembly was held in Bengali.

On 9 June, the 48th anniversary of Swamishri's initiation as president of BAPS was celebrated at the Vidya Mandir auditorium.

On 14 June, the Silver Jubilee (25th *patostav*) of the Kolkata BAPS *hari* mandir was celebrated in Swamishri's presence.

2001

In 1999, a supercyclone in Orissa damaged and destroyed thousands of lives, animals and properties. Swamishri instructed the sadhus of Kolkata mandir to go there and provide aid. Three sadhus stayed for over two years, providing relief and rehabilitation in two villages, namely, Chakulia and Banipat.

On 10 June, these two reconstructed villages were inaugurated by Swamishri, the King of Jagannathpuri Gajpati Shri Divyasinhdev Maharaj and the Chief Minister of Orissa Shri Naveen Patnaik. Thereafter Swamishri went to Jagannathpuri, where he consecrated a small shrine by the Lake Indradyumna to commemorate Nilkanth Varni's stay there. The shrine has a marble replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's footprints and small *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

On 17 June, Swamishri performed the *bhumi puja* (ground-breaking ceremony) rituals for the BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir at Joka, Diamond Harbour Road.

2003

On 30 November, Swamishri performed the *shilanyas* (foundation-stone laying) rituals for the new *shikharbaddh* mandir at Joka. The chief guest of the *shilanyas* assembly was Shri Viren Shah, Governor of West Bengal.

On 1 December, the devotees of Kolkata celebrated Swamishri's 83rd birthday celebration on the new mandir site.

On 14 December, the 31st *patotsav* of Kolkata *hari* mandir was held in Swamishri's presence.

2005

On 1 December, Swamishri arrived in Kolkata after inaugurating Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. On 7 and 8 December (Magshar *sud* 8), the devotees celebrated Swamishri's 85th birthday according to both the English and Indian calendars respectively. Swamishri was honoured



2003 Shilanyas rituals of the new *shikharbaddh* mandir



2003 Devotees honour Swamishri after the *shilanyas* rituals



2005 Performs rituals for the placing of the first pillar



2005 Performs the 33rd *patotsav* arti of *hari* mandir



2005 Devotees honour Swamishri on his 83rd birthday

with an 85ft long garland by the senior sadhus. On 8 December, Swamishri ceremoniously laid the first pillar of the under-construction *shikhar-baddh* mandir.

On 12 December, Swamishri and the devotees celebrated the *hari* mandir's 33rd *patotsav*. The ladies wing had prepared an *annakut* of 700 food items for Thakorji.

For decades Pramukh Swami Maharaj has endeavoured in fostering satsang among the devotees of Kolkata through over 13 visits. In addition, with his inspiration and guidance, his sadhus, too, have for years been serving the satsang *mandal* of Kolkata. Swamishri appointed a few sadhus to stay in the *hari* mandir for this purpose. Puja Bhagvatpriya Swami and Purushottamjivan Swami have been staying there for the last 30 years. Along

with them Suryaprakash Swami, Aksharswarup Swami, Divyamurti Swami, Purnaprakash Swami and others have also contributed to the satsang activities and the mandir-building project. In accordance to Swamishri's instructions the afore-said sadhus have strived for the growth of satsang amidst many challenges and hardships. The leading devotees who have offered their services for the growth of satsang are Madhavjibhai Thakker, Nandalal Kothari, Kantibhai Ajmera, Chimanlal Dani, Amrutbhai Wadher, Natubhai Mody, Manibhai Mehta, Pranjivanbhai Ajmera, Pravinbhai Sheth, Kantibhai Sheth, Rajnibhai Dani, Dalpatbhai Ajmera, Madhubhai Patel.

With Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspiration the *hari* mandir in Bhawanipore had until now been the hub of the Satsang activities related to bhakti, satsang and social services. From

FESTIVALS CELEBRATED IN KOLKATA BY SWAMISHRI

7 April 1968: Shri Hari Jayanti Mahotsav.

6 December 1970: Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 50th Birthday Celebration.

14 December 1972: Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 52nd Birthday Celebration.

3 March 1973: Shivratri – *Farari annakutsav*.

6 June 1975: Yogi Jayanti Mahotsav.

13 June 1975: 25th Pramukh Varni Din.

10 July 1975: Rath Yatra.

6 April 1979: 199th Shri Hari Jayanti Celebration.

25 March 1986: Brahmaswarup Pragji Bhakta's Birthday Celebration.

26 March 1986: Fuldolotsav.

31 January 1990: 125th Vasant Panchmi Festival.

19 March 1993: Shivratri

– *Farari annakutsav*.

21 December 1993: Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 73rd Birthday Celebration.

9 June 1997: 48th Pramukh Varni Din.

1 December 2003: Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 83rd Birthday Celebration.

8 December 2005: Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 85th Birthday Celebration.

Bhawanipore the BAPS youth wing of Kolkata provided and organized aid to the downtrodden classes, relief and rehabilitation to the Orissa cyclone victims, free diagnostic health camps, prayer camps, anti-addiction drives, blood-donation camps, environmental programmes and others. The same BAPS youths and many devotees have also served in the mandir construction project with body, mind and wealth.

In addition, a few youths of the Kolkata Satsang *mandal* were inspired by Swamishri's life and work to become sadhus; they are Devnandan Swami, Dheynishth Swami, Amrutcharit Swami, Gunsagar Swami and Premvardhan Swami.

STORY OF MANDIR CONSTRUCTION

In consonance with Yogiji Maharaj's wish to have a mandir in Kolkata, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated a *hari* mandir in the suburb of Bhawanipore in 1972. With time the *hari* mandir could not accommodate the growing number of *satsangis*, so to fulfil Yogiji Maharaj's dream, "We wish to build a grand mandir by the banks of river Ganga", Swamishri gave instructions to the residing sadhus and devotees to look for land for building a *shikharbaddh* mandir.

Initially, all rigorous efforts in scouting for land suitable for the mega-mandir project were fruitless. From 1993 to 1997 the devotees searched for land around the Kolkata Eastern Bypass. Eventually in 1997, 6.60 acres (20 *vighas*) of land on Diamond Harbour Road seemed to satisfy the needs for the mandir project. On Swamishri's arrival in Kolkata he was taken to see the land on 6 June 1997. After the 35 to 40 minutes drive Swamishri arrived on site and viewed the land. Swamishri asked about the distance of the land from the city centre. Then he saw the site map while seated in his car. Thereafter, Swamishri got down and showered flower petals to sanctify the land. Swamishri also gave flower petals to the sadhus and devotees with him and said, "You, too, shower the flower petals on this land and pray



Paper-collection project for the new *shikharbaddh* mandir



Health camp at the *hari* mandir, Bhawanipore



Orissa cyclone flood relief



BAPS volunteers providing aid to Orissa cyclone victims



Construction work of *shikharbaddh* mandir

that we get the land.” Thus Swamishri and all offered prayers at the site on Diamond Harbour Road.

Thereafter, the devotees also took Swamishri to another site but Swamishri was happy with the former site. In the evening, Swamishri called a meeting of the leading devotees of Kolkata and informed that he wished to acquire 100 *vighas* (33 acres) of land in Joka on Diamond Harbour Road. At that time a devotee asked Swamishri, “There are not many Gujaratis in Kolkata. What’s the point in acquiring this land and building a mandir?” Swamishri asked, “What’s the population of Kolkata?” Everyone realized that Swamishri was alluding to the spiritual uplift of all people.

Another devotee asked, “Won’t this site be too far away?” In reply Swamishri said, “When we decided to build Akshardham in Gandhinagar many were saying that the site would be too far off. But today so many come for darshan of Akshardham. Just as rich businessmen go to far off places (on holidays) likewise everyone will come to the mandir for darshan.”

In 2003, in accordance to Swamishri’s resolve, the land sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan was bought from several farm owners. In the same year Swamishri’s 83rd birthday celebration was held on the 33 acre site for the mandir in Joka, and Swamishri himself performed the *shilanyas* rituals for the *shikharbaddh* mandir. Thereafter, the mandir construction commenced under the planning and execution of the BAPS Planning Cell in Ahmedabad. The pink stone from Bansipahadpur was sculpted in workshops in Rajasthan. And after transporting them to the mandir site the stones were arranged accordingly. Simultaneously the mandir site was buzzing with the construction of other buildings like the assembly hall, residential quarters for sadhus, kitchen, dining halls, and offices for children, youth and women satsang activities. Slowly and steadily the magnificent mandir started taking shape. When the mandir was nearly complete in 2009 a big

hitch arose.

The story of the challenging situation was that when the decision to build the mandir was made, it was apparent that the soil on site was very soft. Experts were consulted in this regard and the appropriate designs for the mandir were drawn. In Bengal, the construction of buildings without using iron is very rare. So, to build a huge stone mandir without using iron was indeed a challenge. The mandir construction started in 2006 and it had been nearly completed in 2009 with the *shikhars* being put in place. While the *shikhars* were being assembled, experts observed the peculiar effects on the soft soil due to the mandir weight. At that time the construction experts thought whether such a huge and heavy mandir would sink or be damaged in the future. After due discussions they all agreed that nothing

damaging could occur to the mandir in the immediate future, but they felt that there was no guarantee for the mandir to remain as it was for centuries and doubted the safety of the devotees doing darshan in the future!

In 2009, during the Fuldol festival in Sarangpur, Swamishri discussed the issue with the senior sadhus and instructed Ishwarcharan Swami and Akshaymuni Swami to go to Kolkata and investigate the matter first hand. After due deliberations with expert engineers in Kolkata the situation was discussed with Swamishri, who then gave the decision to dismantle the entire mandir, make the required changes in the foundation and reconstruct the mandir. Swamishri added, “Perform *mahapuja* on site tomorrow and pray to all the stones to cooperate while dismantling them. Also, tell the

(Contd. on pg. 61)

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE MANDIR PROJECT

Inspirer: Pramukh Swami Maharaj.	Parekh (SPA Consultant) and B.V. Chaudhary (Delhi).	Design and Making of
Welcome Committee:		Sinhasan: Brahmacharan Swami,
Govardhanbhai Vadhwa,	Designing of Concrete: Dr. Bhanja.	Adarshchintan Swami and
Dineshbhai Thakkar,	Soil Testing: S.K. Mitra.	Bhaktinandan Swami.
Rameshchandra Parekh,	Service Designing: Divyapurush	Coordinator of Murti-making:
Kishorbhai Atha, Himanshubhai	Swami, Nirmalmuni Swami,	Bhaktinandan Swami.
Ajmera, Rashmibhai Sheth,	Atmabhushan Swami, Kanubhai	Sponsors of Murtis:
Satishbhai Raval and Jayeshbhai Nanani.	B. Patel (Junagadh), Rohitbhai Patel (Ahmedabad).	Hasmukhbhai Mehta, Ashokbhai
Assistant Organizer: Pujya	Accounts: Jayeshbhai B. Nanani,	Ajmera, Sanjay J. Sheth, S.P.
Ishwarcharan Swami.	Rameshbhai G. Patel (Calgary,	Kanoi, Gordhanbhai Vadhwa,
Mandir Design and Construction	Canada), Ghanshyam Bhagat and	Dineshbhai Thakkar, Bipinbhai
Coordinators: Akshaymuni	Chandubhai Vaidya (Canada).	Chavda, Himanshubhai Ajmera,
Swami, Prashantdarshan Swami,	Purchasing Dept: Jigneshbhai H.	Sanjaybhai Kacha, Jayeshbhai
Sanjaybhai Parikh and BAPS	Mehta.	B. Nanani, Kolkata Satsang
Planning Cell.	Legal: Satishbhai Raval.	Women’s Wing, Harishbhai
Mandir Architects: Devdattbhai	Garden Consultants: Dr	Bhuptani (Kampala).
Trivedi and Upendrabhai Trivedi.	K.P. Kikani, Raghav Patel	Sponsors of Meals: Toronto
Design of Complex: Shrijiwarup	(Akshar Garden), Pavitradas	Satsang <i>mandal</i> (Canada), Nitin-
Swami, Bhaktinandan Swami,	(Renuka Nursery).	bhai Palan (London), Nileshbhai
Jayendrabhai Patel and	Stone Purchasing: Pratapsinh	Popat (London), Rajnibhai
Nilkanthbhai Chhaya.	Jhala (Rajkot), Ghanshyam and	Ajmera and Ajmera family
Site Engineer: Shymaldas.	Akhil Chandrakantbhai Sompura	(Mumbai) and Kishorbhai Atha.
Structural Designers: Sanjeevbhai	(Makrana).	



BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR KOLKATA

A Brief Description

“Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and all devas are residing in the murtis here. With the consecration of the mandir there will be a growth in religious and moral feelings. All will become happy. Whoever has helped in making this mandir will be blessed with extraordinary happiness. I pray that Maharaj fulfils the wishes of those who do darshan and mala here.”

- Pramukh Swami Maharaj



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Kolkata, and its ornate pillars and *mandovar*

The 30-acre *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Kolkata, is located by the highway leading to the popular pilgrim place of Gangasagar. The mandir reflects the magnificent Hindu tradition of art, architecture and bhakti.

When the visitor enters the mandir complex he or she is gobsmacked by the mandir panorama of towering *shikhars* (pinnacles), giant domes and intricate carvings and statues. The pink stone *parikrama* (circumambulatory path) is 1,340 ft long, supported by 296 pillars and crowned with 41 domes and shrines. It hems the mandir like a resplendent necklace.

On the podium facing the mandir lies a giant replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's holy

footprints for darshan and prayers. As the visitor proceeds on the main pathway leading to the mandir he finds manicured lawns and gardens on either side punctuated by soothing water bodies.

The *jagati pith* or lower outer wall of the mandir is five feet high. As the visitor ascends the 25 ft wide main stairway he experiences the mandir details. On climbing the mandir podium one finds the shrines of Shri Shiv-Parvati and Ganapati to one's left and Shri Ram-Sita and Hanumanji to the right. On entering the main mandir one becomes speechless on seeing the intricately carved pillars, variety of exquisitely sculpted ceilings and statues of devas and celestial beings. One finds oneself absorbed in a world of extraordinary art and skill, oozing with *satyam* (truth), *shivam* (auspiciousness) and



sundaram (beauty). The decorative stonework floor beneath the central dome is mesmerizing. The interior of the main dome comprises of exquisitely carved concentric layers of marble.

The *garbhgruh* or sanctum sanctorum is the centre of attraction in the mandir. The *murtis* in the *garbhgruh* radiate peace and bliss while one is engaged in darshan of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj in the right or southern shrine and Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Radha-Krishna Dev in the left or northern shrine. There is also a *sukh shaiyya* with the relief *murtis* of Maharaj and Swami, where the Lord rests. The closed-walled *pradakshina* encircling the *garbhgruh* comprises of profusely carved ceilings, and the *mandovar* (outer wall of *garbhgruh*) includes *murtis* of sages, devotees, avatars and devas.

The mandir dimensions are 198.7 feet long, 158 feet wide and 80.1 feet high. The mandir is assembled of 26,000 pieces of ornately carved stones. It has five *shikhars*, one giant dome, 13 subsidiary domes, two *samarans* and two *prasadputras*.

The Nilkanth Abhishek Mandapam is located beneath the main mandir. It has 94 finely carved pillars with an intricately carved saucer-shaped ceiling. The *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni is installed on a beautifully decorated pedestal. Devotees perform *abhishek* of the *murti* to pray and make wishes. Behind the *abhishek murti* lies the marble *murtis* of the Guru *parampara*: Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The beautiful outside wall (*mandovar*) of the main mandir hosts the *murtis* of the 24 avatars, Indra, other devas and the *digpals* (guardians of the six directions). The 20 ornately carved *gavakshas* (windows) on the outer wall are pleasing sights for the visitors.

The mandir complex also includes living quarters for sadhus and devotees, a vegetarian eatery, satsang hall, bookstore, cowshed (*gaushala*) and parking facilities. The mandir with its traditional features and modern facilities has become a complete spiritual centre for aspirants and wellwishers. It is a unique place of peace, prayer and inner joy. ♦

Consecrated *Murtis* in the *Shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Kolkata



Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Shri Shiv-Parvati and Ganapati



Shri Ram-Sita and Hanumanji

Brahmaswarup Shri Bhagatiji Maharaj

Brahmaswarup Shri Shastriji Maharaj

Brahmaswarup Shri Yogiji Maharaj

Pragat Brahmaswarup
Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj





Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha arti* on 15 March 2013, Ahmedabad

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Kolkata, West Bengal

30 January to 2 February 2014

30 January

MANDIR SEVAK APPRECIATION ASSEMBLY

From the acquisition of the land, to the digging of the foundations and the completion of the mandir construction, many devotees had extended their generous support and dedicated much time for the project. These *sevak*s, who had worked tirelessly under the guidance of Prashantdarshan Swami to ensure the timely completion of the project, were honoured in a special assembly. The dedicated *sevak*s were presented mementos by the *sadguru* sadhus.

31 January

PRASAD PRAVESH

In the morning from 8.30 to 11.30, the *sadguru* sadhus performed the Vedic Prasad Pravesh Ceremony (ritual entry) under the main dome of the mandir. The senior sadhus also performed *pujan* of the flagposts to be fixed on the mandir *shikhars* (pinnacles).

Devotees and invited guests also participated in the rituals.

NAGAR YATRA

In the afternoon a grand *nagar yatra* (procession) of the *murtis* to be consecrated was held through the streets of Kolkata.

The 4-km *nagar yatra* route began at Shahid Minar in Pargana 24 and passed through Jawaharlal Nehru Road, AJC Bose Road and Lansdowne Road, before culminating in Northern Park. At 2.10 p.m. senior sadhus together with MP Shri Subrato Bakshi, Mayor Shri Soran Chatterjee, Shri Sachchidanand Bannerji, Chairman, Kolkata Municipal Corporation, Shri Ashish Shah, corporator, and Shri Kartik Bannerji, brother of Chief Minister Mamata Bannerji, performed the initial *pujan* of Thakorji to flag off the *nagar yatra*.

At the front were youths carrying the festival banners and flags. They were followed by:

- Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj on the Manki (Horse) Rath.
- Shri Ram-Sita-Hanuman on the Garuda (Eagle) Rath.
- Bhagatji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj on the Hansa Rath.
- Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shri Gunatitanand Swami and Shri Nilkanth Varni on the Naav (Boat) Rath.
- Shri Harikrishna Maharaj on the Gaj (Elephant) Rath.
- Shri Shiv-Parvati on the Damaru (Celestial Drum) Rath.
- Shri Radha-Krishna on the Jagannath Rath.
- Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the Mayur (Peacock) Rath.
- Two marching bands: Yogi Band of the Kolkata *yuvak mandal* and Bhakti Band of the Kolkata *yuvati mandal*.
- Youths on motorbikes, horseback and stilts.
- Sadhus singing bhajans.
- Jhalar (Gong) players of Chakuliya, Orissa.
- Traditional dance by BAPS tribal youths of Godhra.
- Children conveying message of de-addiction.



Senior sadhus and devotees during the mandir prasad pravesch rituals



Sadhus pulling the the rath of Ghanashyam Maharaj



Senior sadhus welcome the *nagar yatra*



More than 94 sadhus participated in the *nagar yatra*



BAPS Kolkata youth band playing during the *nagar yatra*



Pujya Mahant Swami performs *kalash sthapan* during the *murti-pratishtha yagna*



Senior sadhus perform *arti* during the yagna



Devotees participating in the *yagna* for world peace

- Women devotees carrying *kalash* and *pothi* (bound manuscripts) on their heads in traditional style.
- *Yuvatis* performing traditional dances.
- *Balikas* in traditional dresses of all states.
- Women devotees singing bhajans.

Thousands of onlookers lining the route were amazed and delighted by the colourful and decorative sight.

The *nagar yatra* concluded at 5.30 p.m.

1 February

YAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE

The *yagna* arena had been suitably decorated with banana leaf stalks and other traditional designs. The initial Vedic rituals of the Yagna for World Peace were performed by the *sadguru* sadhus. Thereafter, a total of 508 *yajman* couples performed the rituals under the guidance of experienced Brahmins.

WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

From 2.00 to 5.00 p.m. a special Women's Assembly took place in which women devotees presented inspiring dramas, dances and speeches. (Details in *Premvati*, March-April 2014).

FELICITATION ASSEMBLY

In the evening, from 5.30 to 7.30 p.m., devotees and well-wishers were felicitated for their contributions to the building of the mandir.

On this occasion Purushottamjivan Swami, who had served for over 20 years as *kothari* of Kolkata mandir, narrated the history of the development of satsang in Kolkata and the monumental efforts by all in the successful completion of the project. After speeches by Atmaswarup Swami and Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Dr Swami addressed the gathering, emphasizing the various activities based in the mandir and the noble character they inspire.

Thereafter, youths performed a dance depicting the glory of mandirs. After this, Mahant

Swami spoke, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj often says, ‘Donations to God earn infinite merits.’ Sometimes the fruit of such donation is in the form of money, but the real merit is to receive the knowledge of *atma*, to become enlightened, to understand the meaning of life, and to be able to serve and worship God. Our heart is purified only by such service.”

2 February

MURTI-PRATISHTHA

On 15 March 2013, in Ahmedabad, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of all the *murtis* to be consecrated in this new mandir.

Today, on his behalf, the *sadguru* sadhus performed the various Vedic ceremonies to ritually consecrate the *murtis* in the shrines.

At 6.00 a.m. the *sadguru* sadhus bathed the *murtis* with saffron-scented water. At 7.45 a.m., Mahant Swami ritually opened the main gate of the mandir. Then the senior sadhus performed *pujan* of the marble *charanarvind* (footprints) of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in front of the mandir. Then from the mandir podium, they released multi-coloured balloons into the sky in celebration of this auspicious occasion.

At 8.00 a.m. the *sadguru* sadhus and *yajman* devotees commenced the performance of the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals in the various shrines: Mahant Swami – Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine, Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami – Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Tyagvallabh Swami – Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna and Dr Swami – Shri Nilkanth Varni in the *abhishek mandapam*. Other sadhus performed the rituals in the remaining shrines.

Then *annakut* was offered in all the shrines and the first *arti* was performed. Thus, with the consecration of the *murtis*, the wish and vision of Yogiji Maharaj had become a reality.



Senior sadhus, with Thakorji, ritually entering through the main mandir gate



Pujya Mahant Swami performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



Pujya Dr Swami holding a mirror to Shri Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murti* during the *pratishtha* rituals



Devotees during the *pratishtha* rituals



Pujya Kothari Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Senior sadhus and devotees perform the *pratishtha arti*



Sannyasis offering good wishes on the *pratishtha* day



Newly inaugurated Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

MURTI-PRATISHTHA ASSEMBLY

In a specially erected marquee behind the mandir, several thousand devotees watched a live relay of the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* ceremony.

Then, after the arrival of the sadhus and *yajman* devotees, the assembly began at 10.15 a.m. First, Bhagvatpriya Swami, who has sincerely served as Mahant of Kolkata Mandir for over three decades, addressed the assembly, “Today, everybody’s heart is filled with joy since God has come to reside here. We should pray daily that our life becomes more pious. By praying here God will fulfil our wishes. True happiness lies in the *murti* of God. So, come to the mandir daily and benefit from the company of the sadhus. In this way, our senses and thoughts will be purified.”

Then Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami described the glory of mandirs, “Mandirs are not for display; they are for the ultimate liberation of countless souls. Bhagwan Swaminarayan built mandirs to establish *upasana*.”

Thereafter Dr Swami spoke on how to connect with God through the mandir, “No matter what fame or power or status is attained, without God, life is incomplete. God represents the number ‘1’ before a string of zeroes. Without ‘1’, the zeroes have no value. So, everyone should keep God at the forefront of their activities.”

Following this, children, teenagers and youths presented a fine devotional dance to the lyrics of the bhajan, ‘*Yāh mandir merā hartā andherā...*’

Among the many spiritual and prominent personalities of West Bengal present on this auspicious occasion were: Swami Vishwatmanandji Maharaj (Ramakrishna Mission, Coordinator of Swami Vivekanand’s 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations), Swami Dilip Maharaj (General Secretary, Bharat Sevashram Sangh), Swami Shri Bodhsharanji Maharaj (Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission), Swami Gopalanandji Maharaj (Ramakrishna Mission), Swami Brahmatmanandji Maharaj



Children performing a traditional dance during the *pratishtha* assembly

(Bharat Sevashram Sangh), Swami Satyamitranandji Maharaj, Swami Rudranandji Maharaj, Swami Punyanandji Maharaj, Swami Vyankateshanandji Maharaj, Swami Nityatmanandji Maharaj and Suprabhanandji Maharaj of Vivekananda Mission, Shri Dinesh Trivedi (MP), Shri Gordhanbhai Vadhva (Businessman) and Shri H.K. Bangur (Businessman). All invited guests were honoured by the *sadguru* sadhus.

After a speech in English by Brahmavihari Swami, Swami Vishwatmanandji Maharaj of the Ramakrishna Mission recalled his meeting with Yogiji Maharaj 50 years previously, “Around 50 years ago, in a city in Gujarat, I had the darshan and blessings of Yogiji Maharaj. Seeing his divine personality, I felt that he is an idol of purity, simplicity and spirituality. This mandir has been built only by his divine wish. Devotees have made tremendous sacrifices to build this mandir. BAPS mandirs are built with thoroughness, and when there is such thoroughness in work there is thoroughness in character, and God certainly resides there.”

The *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj had been placed in the centre of the stage. Senior sadhus, and resident sadhus of Kolkata offered

garlands to the *murti*. Thereafter, Mahant Swami inaugurated the festival souvenir.

Finally, Mahant Swami addressed the gathering, “Shastriji Maharaj had spread the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He has made the *upasana* of Brahman and Parabrahman easy to attain. Without *upasana*, *kalyan* is not possible. So, all have a need for mandirs.

“Everybody knows about physical purity, but no steps are taken to purify the mind. Conflict and misery is due to mental impurity. The mind becomes impure due to ego, lust, greed, jealousy, deceit, etc. Hence, it associates with such atmosphere externally. To become *aksharrup* is purity of the mind.”

SVAYAMSEVAK ASSEMBLY

The festival celebrations were possible due to the extensive co-operation of volunteers from many BAPS centres throughout India.

The volunteers’ admirable efforts were highlighted and appreciated. ♦



HISTORY

of BAPS Satsang in Mahuva

Mahuva is a remote town located on the southern tip of Bhavnagar district in Saurashtra, Gujarat. Its ideal weather and pleasant environment earned it the tag, 'Kashmir of Saurashtra.' The groves of coconut trees, lush vegetation and the River Malan are nature's bounty that define Mahuva. The town received its sanctity with the visit of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Nilkanth Varni in 1799. Gunatitanand Swami had also blessed Mahuva through his visits on several occasions. The town further owes its spiritual eminence with the birth of Bhagatji Maharaj on 20 March 1829.

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have all visited Mahuva on many occasions. With Bhagatji Maharaj as the second successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, his birthplace, Mahuva, has become an important pilgrim place in the BAPS organization. We shall briefly see the history of satsang in Mahuva culminating in the construction of the *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir.



BAPS Swaminarayan *hari* mandir at the birthplace of Shri Bhagatji Maharaj



Adjoining the *hari* mandir is the room where Shri Bhagatji Maharaj was born

1829

For the first time Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *paramhansa*, Swami Nirmalanandji, came to Mahuva for satsang.

1837

A *mandal* led by Gunatitanand Swami came to Mahuva and won a debate proving that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is God.

1839

Bhagatji Maharaj met Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj and Gopalanand Swami for the first time in the nearby village of Pithavadi.

1847

Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj came to Mahuva for the first time.

1868

Gunatitanand Swami and Acharya Bhagvat-prasadji Maharaj came to Mahuva and celebrated the *annakut* festival. After their travels to the villages of Sorath region they returned to Mahuva. Pragji Bhakta and the other devotees of Mahuva

welcomed the Acharya on an elephant and the 400 sadhus with him were received on decorated oxen carts.

1888

In December, Shastri Yagnapurushdas (Shastriji Maharaj) came to Mahuva for Bhagatji Maharaj's darshan. He composed Sanskrit shlokas in praise of Bhagatji Maharaj (*Shrimannirgunmurtaye...*) and sang them before him.

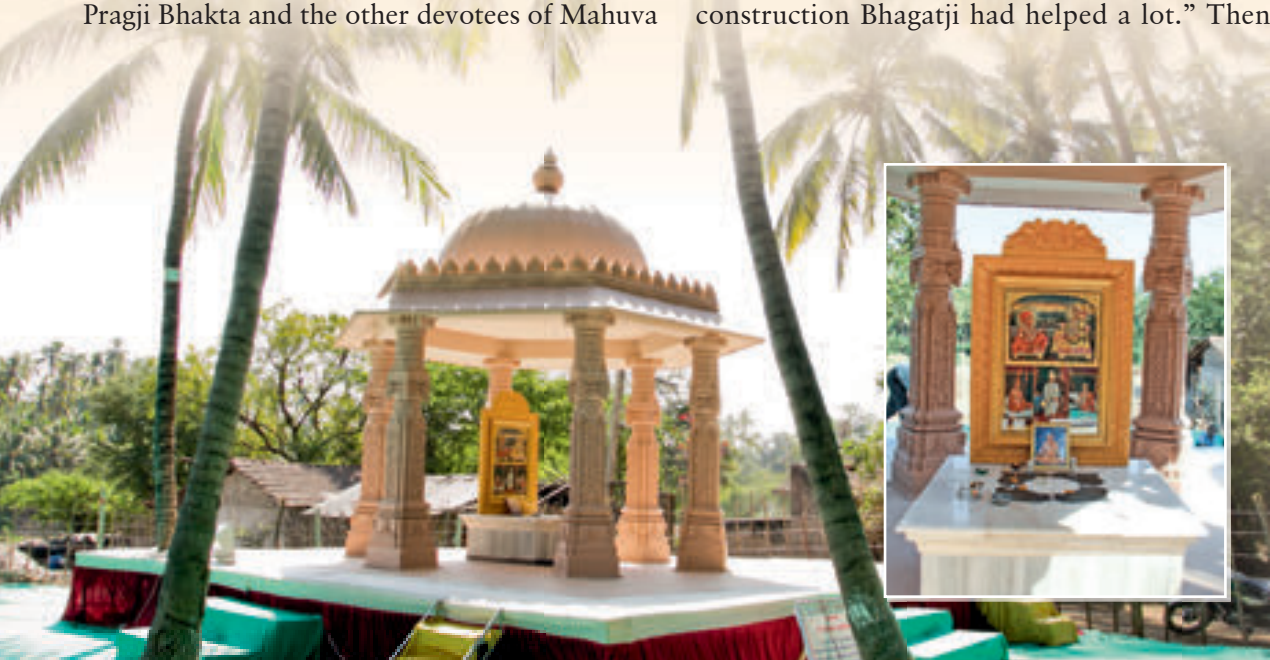
1891

The foundation-stone laying ceremony for the Swaminarayan *hari* mandir (old school) was laid in June.

1897

On 7 November, Bhagatji Maharaj gave up his mortal body to go to Akshardham.

Once Shastriji Maharaj spoke in Mahuva about the need for a mandir for the purpose of promoting *upasana*, "This is Bhagatji Maharaj's birthplace, therefore it is a supreme pilgrimage place. When the (*hari*) mandir was under construction Bhagatji had helped a lot." Then



A shrine commemorates the spot where Bhagatji Maharaj was cremated on the outskirts of Mahuva.

(Inset) *Murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and guru *parampara* at the shrine

Shastriji Maharaj added, “I, too, have noble wishes and it is Maharaj’s wish, too, that a large three-*shikhar* mandir be built here.”

1962

On Monday, 2 April, Yogiji Maharaj travelled to Mahuva. Swamishri inaugurated the memorial shrine built over the spot where Bhagatji Maharaj was cremated. Swamishri also ritually installed a marble replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s footprints and performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Bhagatji Maharaj installed in the shrine. Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj circumambulated the shrine and declared, “This place is Akshardham.”

1965

On 28 March, Yogiji Maharaj was welcomed in a procession in Mahuva. Thereafter Swamishri did darshan at Bhagatji Maharaj’s birthplace and his memorial shrine.

1967

On 4 July, Yogiji Maharaj was welcomed in a procession during his visit to Mahuva. During a public assembly that evening the nationally acclaimed poet, Shri Dula Kag, sang bhajans and praised Swamishri. Bhagatji Maharaj’s nephew, Bhagwanbhai, and his family members donated the birthplace house and other holy places to the Sanstha for their preservation.

1970

From 2 to 5 September Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami stayed in Mahuva. On 2 September Yogiji Maharaj was welcomed and honoured following his satsang tour abroad. Yogiji Maharaj had come to Mahuva to perform the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of a *hari* mandir built on the birthplace of Bhagatji Maharaj. On Monday, 3 September, a *yagna* was held and in the evening a *nagar yatra* of the canvas *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Bhagatji Maharaj

was carried out in Mahuva. The *murtis* were honoured with a shower of flower petals from a helicopter. After the procession Yogiji Maharaj said, “Today Bhagatji Maharaj is blessing all with happiness of body, mind and wealth and that all sustain unity and friendship in their lives. Shriji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj are blessing all from Akshardham.”

On 4 September, on the auspicious day of Ganesh Chaturthi, Yogiji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals and inaugurated the BAPS *hari* mandir. Thereafter, more than 5,000 devotees and well-wishers took *mahaprasad*.

In the evening, an assembly was held to honour Swamishri. The chief guest, president of Mahuva Corporation Shri Ibrahim Kalaniya, and Shri Chhabildas Mehta, Shri Jashvantbhai Mehta and Shri Rasikbhai Shukla honoured Swamishri with garlands.

1971

On 27 September, Pramukh Swami Maharaj came to Mahuva for the first time after Yogiji Maharaj’s departure to Akshardham.

1978

On 2 July, Swamishri inaugurated a satsang exam centre in Mahuva. Thereafter Swamishri addressed an assembly of esteemed people at Shri Chhabildas Mehta’s house.

1979

On 10 March, Swamishri celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of Bhagatji Maharaj in Mahuva. A kirtan *aradhna* by sadhus and a large assembly extolling the life and work of Bhagatji Maharaj were held.

1990

On 14 April, Shri Chhabildas Mehta, the Finance Minister of Gujarat, welcomed Swamishri on his arrival at the outskirts of Mahuva. Then Swamishri addressed the *parayan* organized by

Gunvantbhai Dani in memory of his deceased parents. The municipal town corporation honoured Swamishri for his services to society. Shri Chhabildasbhai presented a key to the town to Swamishri as a mark of honour.

1998

Swamishri stayed in Mahuva from 4 to 6 April, during which a Shikshapatri *parayan* was held. On 5 April, Swamishri celebrated the 218th birthday celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan (Hari Jayanti) in Mahuva.

2003

On 17 April, Swamishri arrived in Mahuva for a 3-day *parayan*. A kirtan *aradhna* was held in the evening from 9.00 p.m. to 12 midnight. On 19 April, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* of a BAPS *hari* mandir in Kapadiya Nagar, Mahuva. The devotees of Mahuva also honoured Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

Swamishri inspired the devotees of Mahuva to acquire a large area of land for a *shikharbaddh* mandir. Subsequently, with the blessings of Swamishri and the efforts of Kothari Adhyatmaswarup Swami of Gadhada, Ashokbhai Sheta and Ashokbhai Kapadiya, land for the mandir, adjacent to the road leading to Una, was acquired in 2007.

2009

On Thursday, 19 February, the *shilanyas* rituals for the *shikharbaddh* mandir in Mahuva was performed on Swamishri's instruction by the senior sadhus: Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Kothari Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami. More than 100 BAPS sadhus were present during the *shilanyas* ceremony.

Prior to the *shilanyas* rituals in Mahuva Swamishri had performed the *pujan*, *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* rituals of the *shilas* at Atladra mandir on 1 February. At time Swamishri told Vallabhbhai Tank (Vallabhdada), a veteran devotee, "I have done the foundation-stone

laying rituals for the big mandir. By the grace of Maharaj, Swami, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogi Bapa the mandir will be completed soon."

The mandir construction started under the efforts of Akshaymuni Swami, Sanjay Parikh and the BAPS Planning Cell in Ahmedabad. The pink stones of Bansipahadhpur was sculpted in the neighbouring workshops of the region, and transported to the mandir site in Mahuva.

Kothari Adhyatmaswarup Swami of Gadhada and Bhaktitanay Swami, (the new *kothari* of Mahuva mandir), had made colossal efforts in nourishing satsang and in the making of the *shikharbaddh* mandir in Mahuva. Some of the many leading devotees who had contributed towards the mandir-construction project are Laljibhai Patel (USA), Dhirubhai Rana (Ahmedabad), Mohanbhai Senta, Manjibhai Kambad, Dr Bhaturbhai Bhut, Bhupatbhai Valiya, Narshibhai Valiya, Nareshbhai Parmar, Gunvantbhai Gohel and Dr P.K. Kapadiya. The veteran devotees of Mahuva who have for years nourished and contributed for the flourishment of satsang in Mahuva are Vallabhbhai Tank, Bhagwanbhai Mehta, Mohanbhai Mehta, Dr I.P. Mehta, Nagardasbhai Mehta, Jagjivanbhai Gohel, Sureshbhai Kothari, Mavadiya, Vanmali Sondagar and others. Bhagwan Bhagat had also offered his services in nourishing satsang during his stay at the *hari* mandir in Mahuva.

The members of Mahuva *bal-balika mandals* collected daily newspapers to fund the *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj. The women's wing of Mahuva offered their services in preparing the gardens and landscapes for the new mandir. Dr Kikani and Shri Kapadiya offered their expertise and guidance in creating the gardens and landscapes. Chetanbhai and Vipulbhai Sompura designed and supervised the construction of the mandir. More than 50 devotees of Mahuva offered their services daily for the mandir construction for three years. The mandir construction work was funded through financial donations from the devotees.

(Contd. on pg. 61)



BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR MAHUA

A Brief Description

Located just off National Highway 8, the newly completed pink stone *shikhARBaddh* BAPS Mandir in Mahuva, captures the attention of passers-by as they drive past, enticing many to visit for darshan.

On entering through the main gate, pilgrims can take either of two walkways leading to the front stairs of the mandir. Luscious green lawns flank both sides of the walkways.

Two separate flights of stairs, each of 24 steps, take the pilgrim up to the mandir podium. To

the right is the shrine of Shri Ganapatiji and to the left is the shrine of Shri Hanumanji. The mandir has 96 intricately carved stone pillars, connected at the top by 148 decorative *torans* (arches). The inside of the ceilings are full of decorative carvings and sculptures. The *mandovar* (walls outside of the *garbhagruha*) features statues of avatars, devas, sadhus and devotees, reminding the pilgrim of the spiritual ideals one has to strive for in life.

There are three main shrines, all facing east.



Newly inaugurated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Mahuva



Ornately carved interior of the main dome and pillars

In the central shrine are the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. In the south-side shrine is the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and in the north-side shrine is the *murti* of Brahmaswarup Bhagatiji Maharaj, whose birthplace is Mahuva and so he has been accorded a special place in the main shrines.

Arriving under the main dome, the pilgrim is greeted by an array of statues of exemplary male and female devotees of the past. On the surrounding pillars are delicate carvings of devas, sadhus and devotees. The marble floor under the dome has a beautiful, colourful intricate design. From the upper floor *parikrama* (circumambulatory), stairs on the north and south sides lead to the ground-floor *parikrama*.

From here, the pilgrim can see the *jagati-pith* (mandir base), which is decorated with 21 *jharukhas* (closed windows). Also visible from here

are the ancillary buildings, such as, the dining hall, guesthouse, reception, assembly hall and sadhus' residence.

The entire campus occupies six acres and 50,000 cu.ft of pink stone was used to build the mandir, which is 155 ft. long, 131 ft. wide and 65 ft. high. It is capped by five *shikhars*, together with flagpoles and *kalashes*. It has one main dome, two *prasad patras* (small pinnacles) and 13 *ghum-matis* (small domes). On the ground floor, from a passageway between the two front staircases, the pilgrim enters the *abhishek mandapam*, where *abhishek* can be offered to the metallic *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. Behind this *murti* are the marble *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Thus, the mandir provides a delightful and serene spiritual atmosphere to aid one's devotion to God. ♦

Consecrated *Murtis* in the *Shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Mahuva



Shri Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murti*



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Shri Ganapati



Shri Hanumanji



Brahmaswarup Shri Bhagatji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup Shri Shastriji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup Shri Yogiji Maharaj



Pragat Brahmaswarup
Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Mahuva, on 20 January 2014, Sarangpur

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Mahuva

15-17 February 2014

15 February 2014

In the afternoon, a special women's assembly was held, which was well attended by women devotees from throughout the district. (See details in *Premvati*, March-April issue.) In the evening assembly, a specially scripted, inspiring drama on the life and work of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj was superbly performed by BAPS youths.

16 February 2014

YAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE

From 7.00 a.m. *yajman* devotees began

arriving to take their designated places around the *yagna kunds*. The *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir were placed on the main *yagna* dais. On stage, there were nine main *yagna kunds*, while on the floor of the large canopied *yagna* arena there were 310 *kunds*. *Yajman* couples were seated around these *kunds*, from where they performed the Vedic *yagna* rituals, with the help of experienced Brahmins.

At 8.00 a.m. the *sadguru* sadhus performed the initial rituals of the *yagna* by performing *pujan* of the *murtis* to the accompaniment of the Vedic *yagna* mantras. Then they performed the *arti*.



Senior sadhus perform the *yagna* rituals



Devotees engaged in the *yagna* rituals

Thereafter, Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Dr Swami addressed the assembly.

At this juncture, the chief guest Shri Morari Bapu arrived. The *sadguru* sadhus honoured him. Then Shri Morari Bapu offered flowers to the *murtis*, before addressing the assembly, “With the inspiration of Pramukh Swami, this beautiful place has been created. Whenever I pass by here, my eyes become fixed on it.

“I very much like the sculpture and form of the mandir. Bhagatji Maharaj was born here and his *murti* will be installed here. This centre of dharma will inspire many people.

“Swami Bapa has dedicated his entire life to such good works. He has inspired even the lowest of people to bathe, worship, and read the Shikshapatri and Vachanamrut. This is a great achievement. I am delighted that Mahuva has been blessed with such a beautiful centre of dharma.”

Afterwards, the *sadguru* sadhus, Shri Morari Bapu and other sadhus departed from the *yagna* marquee. Thereafter, the *yajman* couples performed the rest of the Vedic *yagna* rituals. A total of 2,500 couples participated in the *yagna*.

GRAND NAGAR YATRA

In the afternoon, the *murtis* to be consecrated were taken on a grand *nagar yatra* through the streets and gullies of Mahuva. The 4 km route began from the memorial shrine where Bhagatji Maharaj was cremated on the banks of the River

Malan and terminated at the new mandir.

At 3.30 p.m. sadhus and local dignitaries performed *pujan* of Thakorji and flagged off the *nagar yatra*. Behind the leading escort and festival banners the *nagar yatra* included the following *murtis* and participants:

- Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami on the Mayur Rath.
- Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj on the Hansa Rath.
- Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj on the Jagannath Rath.
- Shri Ganapatiji and Shri Hanumanji on the Pushpa Rath.
- Shri Bhagatji Maharaj on the Nauka (Boat) Rath.
- Shri Shastriji Maharaj and Shri Yogiji Maharaj on a decorated *rath*.
- Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the Garud Rath.



Sadhus pull the Akshar-Purushottam float during the *nagar yatra*



Bhagatji Maharaj's float during the *nagar yatra*

Sadhus, devotees and well-wishers all took the opportunity to offer their devotion by pulling the various *raths*.

Other elements in the *nagar yatra* included:

- Devotees carrying Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a *palkhi*.
- Flag-bearing youths on motorcycles.
- Motorcyclists balancing tall columns of water pots on their heads.
- Youth manoeuvring *sandhani* – a life-size puppet of a camel.
- *Balaks* in traditional dress, carrying message placards.
- Decorated bullock-carts.
- *Balaks* in costumes on a camel cart.
- Sadhus seated on decorated tractors.
- Sadhus and devotees walking.
- Flag-bearing youths and devotees walking.
- Sadhus singing in decorated tractors.



- Tribal devotees from Dahod-Limkheda, Poshina and Chikhli displaying their traditional skills and dancing.
- Youths displaying sword skills.
- Youths performing traditional dances.

Behind the male devotees was the women's section of the *nagar yatra*. This included:

- *Yuvatis* carrying the festival banners.
- Women devotees carrying the traditional *kalash-shrifal* (auspicious pot-coconut) and bound manuscripts on their head.
- Women singing *dhun* and bhajans.
- *Balikas* dressed as exemplary women devotees of the past.
- *Balikas* and *yuvatis* dancing.

Thousands of people lined the route to enjoy the colourful procession and receive the blessings of the *murtis*. Many onlookers showered flowers on the *murtis* to offer their devotion. Other well-wishers arranged refreshments for the participants as the *nagar yatra* passed by their location. The *nagar yatra* concluded at 7.00 p.m.

17 February

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CEREMONY

On 20 January 2014, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals and *arti* of the *murtis* of the *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Mahuva.

On Monday, 17 February 2014 (Maha *vad* 2, VS 2070), these *murtis* were placed in their



Senior sadhus, with Thakorji, ritually untie the *nadachhadi* before entering the mandir precincts



Senior sadhus perform *kalash sthapan* during the *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* rituals



Senior sadhus perform the *mahapuja*



Puja Mahant Swami performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

respective shrines in the new mandir and the *sadguru* sadhus performed the Vedic rituals to consecrate them.

At dawn, the *sadguru* sadhus and other sadhus performed the *snapan* – purificatory bath – ritual of the *murtis*.

Thereafter, at 8.30 a.m., the *murti-pratishtha* rituals commenced. Guided by the experienced Brahmins, the *sadguru* sadhus performed the rituals in the various shrines: Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami in the central shrine – Puja Mahant Swami, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj – Puja Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami, Shri Bhagatji Maharaj – Puja Tyagvallabh Swami and Shri Nilkanth Varni – Puja Dr Swami. Other senior sadhus simultaneously performed the rituals in the remaining shrines.

After the rituals and *pujan*, an *annakut* was arranged in all the shrines. Then the *murti-pratishtha arti* was performed.

MURTI-PRATISHTHA ASSEMBLY

With the generous cooperation of local resident farmers, a giant canopied marquee had been erected in fields adjacent to the mandir complex. Thousands of devotees were seated here to watch the live relay of the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony on large screens.

After the ceremony, the *sadguru* sadhus and guests arrived on the marquee stage for the *murti-pratishtha* assembly.

Among the invited guests were: Shri Prah-lad (Bhagat) Bapu, Mahant of Khimnath Mahadev Mandir, Shri Hirabhai Solanki MP, Shri Rameshwarbhai Patel, a former minister in Madhya Pradesh, Shri Gaurangbhai Rathod, President of the Nagarpalika.

Following the *dhun*, sadhus sang verses describing the glory of Bhagatji Maharaj – ‘*Karu vandanā, Prāgji sadgurune...*’

Then, Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami addressed the assembly, “These mandirs are built to preserve *upasana*. Only if *upasana* is preserved

will all works be accomplished.”

Thereafter, Shri Bhagat Bapu said, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in the form of Nilkanth Varni, sanctified our Khimnath Mahadev Mandir. Bhagatji Maharaj also frequently visited the mandir. Whenever Pramukh Swami Maharaj comes to Mahuva, he also visits our mandir. I feel that as Mahuva expands, there should be more mandirs. To make the mind pure and to attain peace, mandirs should be built.”

Next, Pujya Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami spoke, “In Panchala, Bhagwan Swaminarayan resolved to build mandirs. The mandirs promote *upasana*. Ultimate liberation (*atyantik kalyan*) is only attained through *upasana*. *Upasana* means to sit near God and understand him to be supreme Purushottam Narayan. Sant, shastras and mandirs are the three pillars of our heritage, through which life becomes full of devotion. Swamishri promotes all the three pillars.”

Then the invited guests were honoured on stage and presented mementos by the *sadguru* sadhus.

Subsequently, former Madhya Pradesh minister, Shri Rameshwarbhai Patel, spoke, “The darshan of these mandirs gives the experience of *swarg* as described in the Purans.”

Then Pujya Dr Swami addressed the assembly, “In his life, Bhagatji Maharaj had perfected saintliness. This mandir is in his memory, since his life was pure. That his *murti* is consecrated here in the main shrine is unique.

“Bhagatji Maharaj was of ordinary birth, but there was an extraordinary force within him. To understand it, we have to understand what a mandir is. A mandir is a college for *brahma-vidya*. Gunatitanand Swami used to say, ‘There are many types of knowledge, but only the knowledge of Brahman is worth studying.’ Without it, no matter what else one masters, life is incomplete. Everyone requires the knowledge of Brahman. Without it, even the best of people fail. All this knowledge is attained through the mandir. All should consolidate *swarupnishtha*,



Pujya Kothari Swami performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Pujya Dr Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murti*



Pujya Mahant Swami and devotees perform the *pratishtha arti*



Senior sadhus and devotees perform the *pratishtha arti*



Children perform a traditional dance during the *pratishtha* assembly after the mandir inauguration

swadharmanishtha and *sanghnishtha* from here.”

Thereafter, the mandir’s resident sadhus honoured Swamishri’s *murti* with a variety of decorative garlands. Following this, Adhyatmaswarup Swami, *kothari* of Gadhada mandir, appreciated the contributions of all who had helped in the construction of the mandir. Then, Bhaktitanay Swami, *kothari* of Mahuva mandir, delivered a vote of thanks to all for making the celebrations a grand and memorable occasion.

Finally, Pujya Mahant Swami addressed the gathering, “Bhagatji Maharaj was very powerful. Once, he said to the devotees, ‘Just as easily as you see a drop of water in your hand, I see the countless *brahmands*.’ Once, the *acharya* asked him why he had made Shastriji give Shriji Maharaj’s *charnarvind* to someone else. Bhagatji Maharaj replied, ‘I will give Shastriji the maker of the footprints.’ He had many such powers. But his biggest power was that he sustained *ekantik* dharma. Once, Gordhandas Kothari asked him, ‘How are you able to remain so joyful amid all

these insults and difficulties, and why do I not feel such joy?’ Bhagatji Maharaj told him, ‘If you understand all to be *murtis* of Brahman then you will remain joyful.’ We, too, have to do that. Shastriji Maharaj used to say that to maintain *nirdosh buddhi* towards all one must do *seva*. Shriji Maharaj has also said, ‘Understand devotees of God to be *nirdosh* and talk like this to others. I am extremely pleased by this.’ All sadhus and devotees who worship God are divine. Whoever understands this becomes happy and conquers the world. Such a person constantly experiences joy within.

“Now that the mandir has been built here, this is what we have to do. Develop *samp* and *subradbhav*, understand each other’s glory and understand all to be *nirdosh*. Look only at the virtues in all. There is no alternative to understanding this. The God in our heart is the same God in everyone else’s heart.”

Thereafter, the assembly concluded. Over 15,000 devotees attended the *murti-pratishtha* celebrations. ♦



Devotees during the *pratishtha* assembly

FAQs On Hinduism

From *Hinduism, An Introduction* by Sadhu Vivekjiandas and Consultant Editor Dr Janak Dave,
published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath



A Hindu marriage ceremony



Yamaraja is the god of death



There are two types of souls in the world: daivi (pious) and asuri (evil)

1. Explain what is a Hindu marriage.

Marriage is a sacrament (i.e. one of the 16 samskaras) in Hinduism. It is solemnized before the sacred fire and in the presence of parents, relatives and friends with the chanting of Vedic mantras by Brahmin pundits. Marriage is a social tradition to fulfil the third of four endeavours, *kama*. But it is not a bond to solely satisfy one's passion. The marriage vows and mantras sanctify the union of a man and woman. The Hindu wife is called a *sahadharmacharini* or 'moral partner' in the journey of life who supports, guides and follows the husband on the path of dharma together.

2. What is the concept of sin and naraka?

Hindus believe in the principle of karma and rebirth. Good actions lead to *punya* or merits and evil ones result in *papa* or sin. One is punished for the sins, either in this life or future lives. *Naraka* is a place of suffering and painful experiences for sinners. The Puranas describe 28 places in *naraka*, each designed for the punishment of specific sins. Once the punishment is over the *jiva* enters again

into the cycle of births and deaths, and eventually attains a human birth – which is an opportunity to liberate itself from its base desires and material bondage.

Hinduism does not believe in eternal damnation. The *jiva* is given chances to correct and elevate itself through rebirth. Hinduism says that the *atman* or *jiva* is intrinsically pure and not sinful.

3. Is there a concept of Satan in Hinduism?

No. Dharmaraja or Yamaraja (the god of death) is the divine judge, who appears benign to the pious and terrifying to the sinful. He dispenses reward or punishment in accordance with a person's good or bad karmas.

4. Why is there evil in the world?

The contrast and conflict between good and evil has been in existence since creation. There are two types of *jivas* or souls in the world: *daivi* (pious) and *asuri* (evil). Evil exists because of the actions of people who go against the moral codes prescribed by God, guru, shastras and society.



Adhidaivika are sufferings caused by forces of nature



Vegetables



A sannyasi contemplating on self-restraint (sanyama)

Since Hinduism does not believe in eternal damnation even the asuras or demons can eventually be liberated from their vile nature, after having atoned for their sins.

5. If God is all-powerful and all-merciful, then why is there so much suffering in the world?

God is not responsible for the misery and pain in the world. According to Hinduism a person's past or present karmas are responsible for the individual's suffering. Suffering also arises due to the identification of oneself with the body. I-ness (ego) and Mine-ness (attachment) are mainly responsible for evil, pain, misery and suffering in life. Until one realizes one's true self as atman and realizes God one experiences suffering.

6. Why bad things happen to good people?

According to the doctrine of karma God is the dispenser of the fruits of our actions. Every experience in life is related to the karmas of the individual. A person may be honest and good in this life and yet he experiences pain and misery. The cause may lie with the bad karmas of his previous births.

7. Is it not himsa (injury) to cut and eat vegetables and fruits?

There are *jivas* in plants, but they are categorized as lower life forms, not having a developed

and greater consciousness and emotions as in animals and humans. Furthermore, man needs to sustain himself in some way, so the Hindu shastras sanction that a vegetarian diet does not amount to *himsa* or sin.

7. How important is self-restraint (sanyama) for spiritual progress?

Sanyama (self-restraint) is absolutely essential to tame the senses and mind. Without self-control one cannot hope to focus one's mind on subtler and higher spiritual aspects. *Brahmacharya* or celibacy, *tapascharya* or regular austerities, daily *swadhyaya* (study of shastras), and *sant samagama* (keeping the company of a God-realized Sadhu or guru) are necessary to elevate oneself.

The four stages of life in ancient times were prescribed for the development and spiritual elevation of the individual. The first was *brahmacharya* (celibacy) in which the student observed it up to the age of twenty-five (*brahmacharyashrama*). Observance of *brahmacharya* was required to aid maximum concentration in study and self-development. Thereafter, he would marry (*vivaha*) to satisfy his carnal desires and produce progeny. Even in this stage, fidelity to one's spouse was important (*gruhasthashrama*). The *vanaprasthashrama* and *sannyasthashrama* finally enables the person to unshackle his infatuation and attachment to material objects.

Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

November-December 2013 &
January 2014, Sarangpur

NOVEMBER

3, Thursday; Diwali

At 6.30 p.m. Swamishri arrived at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir for Chopda Pujan. The preliminary *mahapuja* rituals were completed by the senior sadhus. After doing darshan of Shastriji Maharaj, Swamishri sanctified the accounts books of devotees by showering rice grains and blessing the devotees with peace and prosperity for the New Year. Swamishri also blessed two accounts books of Sarangpur mandir with his signature. Then Viveksagar Swami honoured Swamishri with garlands.

Thereafter, Swamishri went for darshan of Thakorji in the mandir. Swamishri also inaugurated a new print publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, *Vachanamrut Sarsindhu*, written by Sadhu Aksharjivandas.

4, Friday; Annakut and New Year's Day Celebrations

Swamishri gave his New Year's blessings, "Jai Swaminarayan and blessings to all for the New Year. May all sadhus realize *ekantik* dharma; cultivate *nirdosh buddhi* towards all, strengthen *nirdosh buddhi* for the guru, realize saintliness; and may all devotees become happy in body, mind and wealth."

Swamishri went for Thakorji's darshan in the main mandir and thereafter of the grand *annakut* of 1,301 food items in the Narayan Mandapam. Swamishri performed *arti* and blessed the devotees.

6, Wednesday

A five-day youth *shibir*, comprising of 3,000 youths from Surat, was launched with Swamishri's darshan from Akshar Jharukho. The *shibir*'s theme was 'Lyo Rajipo'. Over 125 youths honoured Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri by dancing and playing the *dhol*, *shankh*, *ghant*, *jhanj* and *jhalar*.

7, Thursday; Labh Pancham

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Jantral (Godhra), Mokal (Godhra), Nondhana (Jambusar) and Arad (Halol). Prior to Swamishri's arrival the *mahapuja* rituals were performed by Mahant Swami, Dr Swami and Ghanshyamcharan Swami. Swamishri also blessed the local devotees who had come for the *pratishtha* rituals.

13, Wednesday (Kartak sud 11)

Today marked Swamishri's 75th *diksha* anniversary (according to the Indian calendar). Shastriji Maharaj had given Shantilal the *parshad diksha* on this day at Ambli Vali Pol in Ahmedabad. Senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands and a shawl.

At 10.30 a.m. Swamishri gave darshan from Akshar Jharukho to over 750 youths from Bhavnagar. They had come for Swamishri's darshan after concluding their *shibir* in Sankari. Some youths performed a drama and dance.

At 6.55 p.m. Swamishri went for Thakorji's darshan and performed *arti*. According to

tradition, a variety of vegetables were displayed as offerings to Thakorji. Swamishri sanctified a variety of vegetables by holding them and displaying them to all. Swamishri also blessed all, saying, “God is seated here while the *shakotsav* is being held. May all devotees be happy in body, mind and wealth and that all sadhus realize *ekantik* dharma in their lives.”

17, Sunday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *panchdhatu abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni for the *shikharbaddh* BAPS mandir in Himmatnagar and the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Sathal village (Dholka region). Swamishri performed the first *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni and also the *arti* of all the *murtis*.

Swamishri also performed *pujan* by placing a flower on the first marble pillar to be placed on site of the under-construction BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir in Navsari.

22, Friday

Dr Subramaniam, a renowned heart surgeon of Lenox Hill Hospital, New York, who had performed Swamishri’s by-pass surgery, arrived for Swamishri’s darshan. Swamishri blessed Dr Subramaniam, and the senior sadhus honoured him with a garland. Dr Subramaniam said that Swamishri looked well and bright. He also advised him to eat daily, which Swamishri has not been doing for many months.

25, Monday

Swamishri inaugurated two print publications by Swaminarayan Aksharpith: *Inspirations* by Nilesh Manani and *Hinduism: Shad Darshanas and Sampradayas* by Sadhu Vivekjiandas.

DECEMBER

7, Saturday

The day marked Swamishri’s 93rd birthday celebration (according to the English calendar),

which meant that Swamishri had completed 92 years and was entering into his 93rd year. Lamps were lit in Swamishri’s room to celebrate his birthday. At 10.00 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan to sadhus and devotees from Akshar Jharukho. Senior sadhus garlanded Swamishri and a fire-works display was held to honour him.

10, Tuesday (Maghshar *sud* 8); Swamishri’s 93rd Birthday Celebration

Swamishri’s 93rd birthday celebration (according to the Indian calendar) was carried out with great festivity. Thousands of devotees had gathered for Swamishri’s darshan during the evening celebration assembly. For details, see report in *Swaminarayan Bliss*, Nov-Dec. 2013.

26, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Jespur (Valsad district).

27, Friday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Sita-Ram-Hanumanji, Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganapatiji and Shri Guru Parampara for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Brisbane, Australia.

JANUARY 2014

2, Thursday

According to the Indian calendar (V.S. 2070, Posh *sud* 1) today marked Swamishri’s 75th *bhagvati diksha* anniversary. Swamishri was entering into the 75th year of *bhagvati diksha* given to him by Shastriji Maharaj in Akshar Deri, Gondal. A replica of the *diksha* scene with the *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj and a giant photo of Akshar Deri in the backdrop was set up in Swamishri’s room. Swamishri was honoured with garlands.

10, Friday

According to the English date the day marked Swamishri's 75th *bhagvati diksha* celebration. A *diksha mahotsav*, wherein 28 *parshads* received *bhagvati* (saffron) *diksha* in the Yagnapurush Mandapam. See details on page 53.

Swamishri also performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Shiv-Parvati, Shri Hanumanji, Shri Ganapatiji and Shri Guru Parampara for the *hari* mandir in Jagudan.

14, Tuesday; Makar Sankranti (Uttarayan)

At 12.10 p.m. Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Shiv-Parvati, Shri Hanumanji, Shri Ganapatiji and Shri Guru Parampara for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Allen Town, Pennsylvania. After darshan of Thakorji and of Shastriji Maharaj at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir Swamishri arrived at the Narayan Mandapam where the Uttarayan festival was arranged. Swamishri gave darshan to sadhus and devotees seated in the assembly hall. Discourses on the Uttarayan festival were held prior to Swamishri's arrival. Then a pre-recorded version of Swamishri's *jholi* call was relayed in the assembly. The devotees clapped and cheered at Swamishri's *jholi* call. Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated three English publications by Swaminarayan Aksharpith: *Bhagwan Swaminarayan, The Story of His Life*, written by Yogi Trivedi, *Vibrations*, Part 2 and *In the Joy of Others*. Then Swamishri was given a string attached to a kite, which he pulled to the joy of all the devotees. The senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands. After giving darshan and blessings to all Swamishri returned to his quarters.

20, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the *shikharbaddh* BAPS

Swaminarayan Mandir in Mahuva. The main *mahapuja* rituals were performed by the senior sadhus. Swamishri invoked the Divine in the *murtis* by touching them with a golden rod amidst Vedic chantings. Swamishri offered *arti* and *pujan* by placing flowers before the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Nilkanth Varni (*panch dhatu*), Shri Guru Parampara, Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji.

Swamishri also performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Guru Parampara (in canvas) and Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Amlad (Maharashtra).

In conclusion, Swamishri performed the *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni and blessed over 400 devotees of Mahuva and Rajula.

26, Sunday

Swamishri celebrated India's 63rd Republic Day celebration. Prior to Swamishri's arrival, students of Swaminarayan Vidyamandir school had performed the flag-hoisting ceremony on the school grounds. On Swamishri's arrival at 3.42 p.m. a parade was held, comprising of a marching group of ace students of the Vidyamandir, boys playing *ras*, *bal karyakars* dressed in white clothes, a group of children displaying their sporting skills, tribal youths performing a traditional dance, and finally youths waving the Indian and BAPS flags.

28, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Shiv-Parvati, Shri Hanumanji, and Shri Ganapatiji and Shri Guru Parampara for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Hong Kong. ♦

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

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

November-December 2013 & January 2014, Sarangpur



23 February 2013, Sarangpur

DOING BHAJAN

27 November

At 11.10 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan to sadhus and devotees from Akshar Jharukho. After returning to his bedroom, an attendant sadhu asked Swamishri, “What is your next programme?” Swamishri counter questioned, “What is your programme?” The attendant replied, “I’ll decide once you have declared yours.” Instantly Swamishri replied, “My programme is to do bhajan.”

Swamishri has always been engaged in doing bhajan all his life and in all his activities.

DEVOTION TO THAKORJI

5 December

At 12.25 p.m. an attendant sadhu brought the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj before Swamishri for darshan. He informed that *thal* had just been offered to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Immediately, Swamishri gently cleaned the lips of Thakorji with a napkin. Swamishri did

this because after offering a meal and water to Thakorji his lips are wiped clean. Even though this ritual cleaning had been performed by the attendant sadhu, Swamishri’s devotion to Thakorji became apparent to all.

PROFOUND HUMILITY

8 December

Swamishri was seated in his room after performing his routine hand exercises. Hariprakash Swami (an attendant sadhu) entered the room and on seeing Swamishri sitting quietly asked, “Swami, you are sitting calmly. Don’t you feel any burden?”

“What burden?” Swamishri questioned.

“Don’t you feel the burden of running such a big religious organization?”

“It’s no burden,” Swamishri replied.

“But you are running it as the Sanstha’s president,” the attendant added.

“Who is the president? Swamishri quizzed.

“Swami, you have developed the

Sanstha enormously.”

“God is doing it all. I’m not doing anything,” Swamishri replied humbly.

Despite the fact that Swamishri has been the president of BAPS for 54 years, from the day Shastriji Maharaj appointed him in 1950, and that he has accomplished milestone achievements, his faith in Shriji Maharaj as the all-doer is reflected through his humility.

A LESSON IN BRAHMAVIDYA

24 December

At 4.15 p.m. Swamishri was giving darshan to devotees from his bedroom. He had a pillow on his lap with the words “*Brahmavidya* is the only type of knowledge worth studying” written on it. Thereafter Viveksagar Swami asked Swamishri to teach the first lesson of *brahmavidya*. Swamishri declared, “I’m *atma* and not the body.”

A PRICELESS GIFT

14 January

Swamishri returned to his quarters after giving darshan to the devotees on the Uttarayan festival. Swamishri was in a radiant mood. Yogivivek Swami asked, “Swami, did you enjoy seeing the devotees?” “Yes,” Swamishri replied.

“Swami, we are asking you to give us something on this day of charity. What will you give us? What do you have that you can give us?”

Hariprakash Swami asked.

Swamishri replied, “God, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.”

One who is God-realized blesses all with the invaluable gift of God.

NIRDOSH BUDDHI – THE MEANS TO REALIZE THE GURU

27 January

A couple of attendant sadhus engaged themselves in an entertaining dialogue before Swamishri. One of them was pretending to look around as if searching for someone. He then asked others, “Where is Pramukh Swami?”

The second attendant sadhu replied sharply, “Despite living with Swami for so long you are indeed unfortunate in not realizing where Swami is. You are like the hapless Yadavas who lived with Shri Krishna. They have been dubbed as being unfortunate for not having recognized him as God.”

The first attendant prayed to Swamishri, “Despite staying with you may I not become unfortunate by failing to realize you. Can you tell us how we can realize your true form?”

Swamishri replied, “When one has *nirdosh buddhi* (an attitude of purity for the guru).”

Swamishri briefly revealed the means to realizing the guru and thus be blessed with *moksha*. ♦

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

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS INFORMATION STATEMENT

1. **Place of Publication:** Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4.

2. **Period of Publication:** Bi-Monthly.

3. **Printer’s Name:** Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4.

4. **Publisher’s Name:** Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4.

5. **Editor’s Name:** Swami Swayamprakashdas
Nationality: Indian

Address: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4.

6. **Owner’s Name:** Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4.

I, Swami Swayamprakashdas, hereby declare that the above mentioned information is true to my knowledge.

(Signed) Swami Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-3-2014



149th Birthday Celebration of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

4 February 2014, Mahelav, India

Over 20,000 devotees gathered in Mahelav, the birthplace of BAPS founder Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, to celebrate his 149th birthday in the presence of the *sadguru* sadhus. The occasion also marked the launch of the year-long celebrations to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Shastriji Maharaj.

The celebration assembly was based on the theme of Agna, Upasana, Sadbhav and Paksha – four principles which Shastriji Maharaj practiced and preached with great dedication throughout

his life.

These principles were elaborated upon through speeches by senior and other learned sadhus, skits, bhajans, dances and the video blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The plans for the various activities and events to celebrate the 150th year – ‘Sardh Shatabdi Mahotsav’ – were also announced.

The assembly concluded with all devotees performing *samuh arti*. ♦





DIKSHA CEREMONY

10 January 2014, Sarangpur, India

Devotees from around the world gathered today in Sarangpur to celebrate two special occasions: the 75th Diksha Din of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the initiation of 28 *parshads* into the sadhu-fold. More than 3,000 people were blessed by having Swamishri's darshan on his 75th Diksha Din. It was 74 years ago on this date that Shanti Bhagat was initiated as Sadhu Narayanswarupdas at the Akshar Deri in Gondal. For 28 youths, this day was especially memorable as they were honoured by being able to share their *diksha din* with Swamishri's *diksha din*. The ceremonies began at 8 a.m. with a *mahapuja*. Thereafter, senior sadhus of the fellowship, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Pujya Swayamprakash Swami (Pujya Doctor Swami), and Pujya Keshavjivandas Swami (Pujya Mahant Swami) blessed the assembly. After performing the *mahapuja* rites, the *parshads* prepared for the main ceremony of their initiation. That afternoon, Swamishri graced the assembly

marking his 75th Diksha Din to initiate these 28 youth into the sadhu-fold. Pujya Viveksagar Swami gave each initiate a new *kanthi*. Pujya Doctor Swami gave each initiate their new saffron uppercloth. Then Swamishri gave each new sadhu his *diksha* mantra and blessings while the new initiate's name was announced to the assembly. Then the newly initiated sadhus proceeded to Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami to receive their *paghs* and auspicious sandalwood markings. Everyone present was overjoyed to witness Swamishri's divine mood and the sacrifice and devotion he has inspired in these newly initiated sadhus. Among the 28 new sadhus, 19 sadhus have Graduate and 6 hold Masters degrees in their fields of study, and 6 are their parent's only sons. Also included in this group was the Sanstha's first sadhu to come from New Zealand. These sadhus increased the honour and pride of the Sanstha's 906 renunciates and its devotees. ♦

Opening of Newly Reconstructed BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Sydney, Australia

6-9 February 2014



The newly reconstructed BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sydney, Australia, was officially inaugurated with Vedic rituals by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and the State Premier of New South Wales, the Honourable Barry O'Farrell, on Sunday, 9 February 2014.

The *murti-pratishtha* ceremony on Sunday, which marked the climax of the four-day Mandir Mahotsav, took place in the presence of BAPS sadhus, the Premier, Federal Member of Parliament (MP), Julie Owens, and State MP, Dr Geoff Lee, as well as many visitors from across Australia, New Zealand and the rest of Asia Pacific.

The *murtis*, previously sanctified and consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj during his visit in 2002, were reinstalled in the new mandir amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras. This was

followed by a traditional folk dance performed by children and the first *arti* of the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Premier O'Farrell praised the positive impact of satsang in the state and Australia, "This year, 2014, marks an important milestone in the BAPS community. It's been 30 years since His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj first visited Australia in 1984. Over these 30 years the community has become an integral part of our multi-cultural society and our multi-faith society."

The Mandir Mahotsav celebrations included a Welcome Assembly, an assembly to launch the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj and a kirtan *aradhana*. ♦

MANDIR MAHOTSAV

14-15 February 2014

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Brisbane, Australia



The Mandir Mahotsav, celebrating the opening of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Brisbane, Australia, began on 14 February 2014 with a grand and colourful *sagar yatra* – procession on Brisbane River – in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

The *murtis* of the new mandir were placed on three different boats. In one, sadhus led a chorus of bhajans, while in the other boats children in costumes, youths performing traditional dances, women in traditional dress and devotees joined in the celebrations.

The *murti-pratishtha* rituals were performed on 15 February by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and sadhus in the presence of guests and devotees from across Australia, New Zealand and south-east Asia.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, together with

Federal MP of Rankin, Dr Jim Chalmers, community leaders and other dignitaries, officially opened the Mandir by untying a ribbon at the entrance of the *murti* darshan hall.

Dr Chalmers was greatly impressed by the spirit of volunteerism and community service inspired by the mandir. He said, “One of the biggest values you hold is that in the happiness of others, lies your happiness. This is a value that I feel we all share.”

Other representatives present included State MP, Michael Latter, Logan City Deputy Mayor, Cr Russell Lutton, acting superintendent, David Nevin, and local aboriginal community leader ‘Aunty’ Robin Williams.

In the evening, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and the sadhus presided over a special assembly and kirtan *aradhana* to conclude the celebrations. ♦



India

ANNUAL BAPS SATSANG KARYAKAR SHIBIRS 18 December 2013 to 12 January 2014



The Annual BAPS Satsang Karyakar Shibirs for satsang activities volunteers throughout Gujarat and Mumbai were based on the theme ‘Ap Rijho Em Raji’ – ‘To Do What Pleases You’. A total of around 12,500 men and women volunteers participated in the 21 separate *shibirs* which were held at the BAPS mandirs in Bochasan (5), Bharuch (3), Gondal (3), Ahmedabad (2), Gadhada (2), Navsari (1), Sankari (3) and Tithal (2). The volunteers were guided by Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Doctor Swami, Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Shrihari Swami, Anandswarup Swami, and other experienced and learned sadhus on how to perform their satsang duties in a manner that will please guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The *shibir* message was also reinforced through audiovisual presentations and the volunteers were given an overview of the forthcoming annual projects.

‘LIVE FOR BAPS’– ANNUAL BAL PRAVRUTTI KARYAKAR SHIBIRS

13 December 2013 to 5 January 2014

Between 13 December 2013 and 5 January



2014, more than 7,500 children’s activities volunteers from 245 regions of Gujarat took part in the Annual Karyakar Shibir. A total of ten *shibirs*, each lasting one-and-a-half days, were held in six locations.

Each *shibir* was blessed by the guidance of *sadguru* sadhus: Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Doctor Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. They explained that to ‘Live for BAPS’ means to sacrifice, have firm faith in our *upasana*, remain steadfast in one’s *niyams* and duties, and serve continually for life.

The *shibir*’s other inspiring messages were conveyed through various means: a drama, interviews of dedicated sadhus and volunteers, group discussions, and audio-visual presentations. An important part of the *shibirs* was the launch of the 150th birth anniversary of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. The children would be taking part in numerous activities throughout the year to celebrate this important occasion. The *shibir*’s training component focused on how the volunteers could become better, more effective and more creative as teachers.

**ANNUAL DAY CELEBRATIONS OF BAPS SHRI
SWAMINARAYAN CHHATRALAYAS**
26 January 2014, , Atladra (Vadodara)



The 31st Annual Day of the BAPS Chhatralaya in Atladra was celebrated in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami.

Following the inaugural recital of Vedic verses and bhajans by the students, Pujya Doctor Swami presented awards to the students who had achieved academic and extra-curricular successes during the past year. A splendid drama entitled ‘Deadline’ was then enacted by the hostel students, in which the pitfalls of misusing technology were highlighted. Then, the students creatively presented a story in verse, with the message that only a true guru can help one through the ups and downs of life. The assembly concluded with an address by Pujya Doctor Swami.

Over 5,000 students, devotees and well-wishers attended the celebration.

11 February 2014, Nadiad



The 22nd Annual Day of the BAPS Chhatralaya in Nadiad was celebrated in the presence of Pujya

Mahant Swami and Pujya Doctor Swami and other sadhus. The highlight of the celebration assembly was a drama entitled ‘Dhiraj’ (Patience). Performed by the hostel students, the drama depicted some of the issues relevant to youths today regarding technology and personal relationships. The students also presented a traditional dance, speeches and bhajans.

Pujya Mahant Swami presented prizes to students who had performed well academically or achieved success in other extra-curricular activities. The assembly concluded with an address by Pujya Mahant Swami.

NEW BAPS CHARITIES WEBSITE INAUGURATED BY PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ
19 February 2014, Sarangpur



On 18 February 2014, Pramukh Swami Maharaj launched a completely redesigned BAPS Charities website in order to further its mission to empower individuals to volunteer in the Spirit of Service in communities across the world. As an independent, international charitable organization, BAPS Charities has grown over the decades with a presence in North America, Europe, Africa and Asia-Pacific, supporting communities and diverse charitable causes. This new website will serve to further this mission by enabling volunteers and well-wishers to better participate in and support the activities. Visit the new site at www.bapscharities.org for more information on its global activities in the Spirit of Service.

UK & Europe

THE SWAMINARAYAN SCHOOL IS BEST PERFORMING INDEPENDENT SCHOOL FOR GCSES

24 January 2014, London

The Swaminarayan School in London, UK, has topped the national performance table of independent schools for GCSE results.

The table using data from the Department of Education is based on the average points score per pupil, which, for GCSE results at the School, was an impressive 658.7. Each grade carries points ranging from 58 for an A* to 16 for a G. The score is equivalent to 11 A* passes per pupil, with 100% of students recording at least 5 A* to C grades.

The School also performed robustly in the Government's new English Baccalaureate – which marks out pupils who gain A* to C grades in English, Mathematics, two sciences, a foreign language, and either History or Geography.

This recognition follows the record GCSE & A-Level results at the School in September 2013.

The excellent academic results are complimented with a variety of other awards that have been conferred upon the School. Most recently, the School was presented with the NACE Challenge Award for “helping pupils achieve their best”. The Prep School has also previously been accredited with an award from the Cognitive Education Centre for being a “Thinking School”, and itself also being ranked among the top in the country.

TUBERCULOSIS SCREENING SERVICE WITH PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND

19 January 2014

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, organized a tuberculosis (TB) screening session by BAPS Charities in collaboration with Public Health England on Saturday, 19 January 2014.

Public Health England is an executive agency



of the Department of Health. The PREDICT Study, which was the basis of the screening programme, is designed to try and find a way to predict which 10% of the patients with latent TB will contract the active disease.

BAPS Charities has been involved in the study since July 2013 and has recruited 284 people aged between 19 and 86 years. Sixty-two people have been identified as having the latent infection and are aged 35 years or more, where treatment is not indicated under national guidelines (NICE), but they have been informed of signs and symptoms to be aware of for active TB.

Positive results were found for six people under the age of 35 years, all of whom have been referred to a hospital for treatment.

This initiative follows similar drives held at the Mandir by BAPS Charities including a TB awareness lecture held in 2009.

BECOME ADARSH: PERSONAL SATSANG DEVELOPMENT GRAND AWARDS CEREMONY

15 February 2014, London

On the evening of Saturday, 15 February 2014 at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, over 600 youths gathered for an awards receiving ceremony and cultural presentation celebrating the culmination of the ‘Become Adarsh’ project – a year-long spiritual development programme for BAPS youths in the UK.

The evening began with the ‘Niramay Samaroh’ ceremony, a special Vedic *mahapuja* in which participants offered their devotion and



prayers to Pramukh Swami Maharaj that they may imbibe the virtues of their ideal guru. This was followed by a selection of performances from participants who had excelled in the project, including the singing of devotional songs and delivery of speeches, presentations and mono-acts.

Interspersed between these performances was the presentation of awards for the various activities and competitions from the first assessments, on knowledge of daily rituals (*arti*, *thal*, *prarthana* and the *cheshta*), and the demonstration of skills in the final phase, covering a variety of disciplines such as public speaking – with short speeches, *nirupans*, *akhyans* and *sankirtans* – and singing and playing musical instruments.

The ‘Become Adarsh’ project did not only comprise of competitions but it also gave an opportunity for spiritual improvement as echoed by Sadguru Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami in 2013.

and Singapore attended the Convention held in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and sadhus.

During the two-day *shibir* some of the topics included: ‘The Balancing Act of Life’ by Amrutnandan Swami, ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Devotion to Thakorji’ and ‘Nirdosh Buddhi’ by Aksharvatsal Swami, Question-Answer Session on *nirdosh buddhi* with Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, ‘Learning to Differentiate between Right and Wrong’ from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj by Bhaktivardhan Swami, ‘Nature of Ekantik Dharma’ and the need to connect with Swamishri by Snehmuni Swami, and examples of *ekantik* devotees by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Aksharvatsal Swami. A kirtan bhakti programme was also presented by sadhus. Finally, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami narrated incidents of Yogiji Maharaj’s exemplary life and *navdha* bhakti in his life.

Before departing, the youth delegates resolved to strengthen their satsang endeavours and attain Swamishri’s blessings. ♦

Asia-Pacific

‘BE EKANTIK’ – YUVAK-YUVATI REGIONAL CONVENTION

11-13 January 2014, Australia

The Yuvak-Yuvati Regional Convention for the Asia Pacific Region was held in Creswick, Australia, from 11 to 13 January 2014. A total of 312 *yuvaks* and 246 *yuvatis* from Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Darwin, Canberra, Brisbane, Armidale and Adelaide in Australia, Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington in New Zealand,

(Contd. from pg. 11)

characteristics of a stable-minded person? In what way does such a person speak? In what way does he sit? In what way does he walk?” (Gitā 2.54) has been answered extensively and completely. The conclusion of this *adhyāy* of the Gitā states:

एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति ।

स्थित्वाऽस्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥

Eshā brāhmee sthitihi Pārtha nainām prāpya vimuhyati,

Sthitvā'syāmantakāle'pi brahmanirvānam-ruchchhati.

“O Arjuna, this is the *brahmic* state. Having once attained this state, one is never again subject to infatuation. If this state is attained even at one's last breath, one attains Brahmadham” (Gitā 2.72).

The *brahmic* state! These two words encompass spiritual endeavour in its entirety. They provide an acquaintance of the highest spiritual state. A state that encompasses all the virtues of the *sthitapragna* in one is the *brahmic* state. The *brahmic* state marks the completion of spiritual endeavours. It represents the peak of purity. It is the ornament of a pure *ātmā*. Once one has attained the *brahmic* state, one has crossed the finish-line of endeavour and become fulfilled.

The *brahmic* state is the state of Brahman, the state of Aksharbrahman. Shedding the desires of the mind; equality in pleasure and pain; free of attachment, fear and anger; turtle-like control of one's senses; control of the mind; remaining tranquil like the ocean; not being tied by *māyā* in the form of ego and attachment; being content with the grace of Paramātmā and ever appropriately doing his *upāsana* with servitude, etc. are the characteristics of Aksharbrahman. These qualities are ever present in Aksharbrahman, hence this collection of virtues is called the *brahmic* state here. This state can be attained by serving the manifest form of Aksharbrahman by word, thought and deed. Without attaining this state, it is impossible to be freed of misery and experience supreme bliss. This is why Shri Krishna advises Arjuna to attain that

brahmic state, i.e. become *brahmarup*.

THE FRUITS – NO INFATUATION; ATTAINMENT OF BRAHMDHAM

Revealing the fruits of this *brahmic* state, Shri Krishna Bhagwan says, “*Nainām prāpya vimuhyati*” – “One who attains it is never subject to infatuation.” This is living proof of liberation. Arjuna is bound by infatuation because he has not attained this state. Infatuation was the cause of his grief. His grief was the cause of his tears. Hence, there is no option but to attain this state. Once attained, there is nothing left to worry about. And that is why Shri Krishna has put such a great emphasis on attaining it. He further stresses, “*Sthitvā'syāmantakāle'pi brahmanirvānamruchchhati*” – “If this state is attained even at one's last breath, one attains Brahmadhām.”

Thus, *jivanmukti* – the experience of liberation here on earth – and *videha mukti* – liberation after death – are the fruits of the *brahmic* state.

EPILOGUE

Thus, the *brahmic* state is the ideal of the Gitā. The second chapter of the Gitā concludes by giving the message of this ideal. From hereon, whatever spiritual precepts follow are to clarify that ideal.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is manifest Aksharbrahman. His life is the embodiment of the *brahmic* state and is a living example of the words of the Gitā. He is ever engrossed in Paramātmā and the virtues of the *sthitapragna* state are ever wedded to him. We are fortunate that he is our *guruhari*. By profoundly attaching ourselves to him, we too will be able to attain that *brahmic* state in our lives. We will become ever engrossed in Paramātmā and become *sthitapragna*. We will be rid of the desires of the mind. Our grief will dissolve. We will be freed from material desires. We will be able to effortlessly control our senses. We will realize Paramātmā. We will be able to focus on Paramātmā without any hindrances, benefit from his *upāsana* and be ever blissful. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 21)

stones that in the near future they will be utilized in the service of the mandir.”

After offering prayers, the mandir stones were dismantled. Prashantdarshan Swami, who was supervising the mandir construction, worked very hard and meticulously in dismantling and numbering each carved stone.

Many felt that while deconstructing the mandir, which was 85 percent ready, a lot of the carved stones would get damaged. But due to Swamishri’s blessings and the rigorous efforts of Prashantdarshan Swami and other sadhus the toll on the stones while dismantling was less than one percent. On 9 September 2009, the last stone was dismantled. The entire process of deconstruction took seven months: from March to September 2009.

During these seven months, renowned structural engineers, Shri B.V. Chaudhary and Sanjeev Parekh, redesigned the mandir foundation. The construction work first resumed with stainless steel pilings on the old foundation and thereafter

a raft was filled. In December 2011, the ritual placing of the first mandir pillar took place. As the construction work proceeded briskly the mandir started taking shape. Soon, the entire mandir complex was completed. Under the guidance of Ishwarcharan Swami, Shrijiswarup Swami designed the water fountains and the mandir *parikrama*, which enhanced the beauty and divinity of the mandir complex.

The mandir construction project was entirely sponsored by dedicated BAPS devotees who had sacrificed their time, intellectual capacities and wealth. Swamishri was immensely pleased and showered his blessings upon them.

In conclusion, West Bengal has been embellished with a grand and divine landmark mandir. The BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir reflects the profound devotion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the deep dedication of his sadhus and devotees to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The mandir will for centuries be a source of values, divinity and beauty for countless people. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 35)

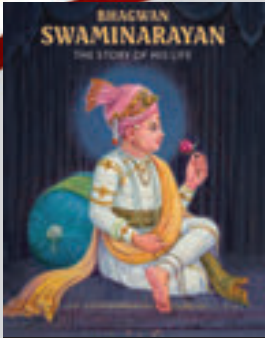
On 20 January 2014, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Nilkanth Varni (*abhishek murti*), Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Shiv-Parvati and Ganapatiji, Shri Ram-Sita and Hanumanji and Guru Parampara for the Mahuva Mandir. On 17 February 2014, these *murtis* were consecrated by Mahant Swami (Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj), Kothari Swami (Ghanshyam Maharaj), Tyagvallabh Swami (Harikrishna Maharaj and Radha-Krishna Dev), Dr Swami (Shri Nilkanth

Varni) and Guru Parampara and others by senior sadhus in Mahuva. The *shikharbaddh* mandir complex includes living quarters for sadhus, an assembly hall, kitchen, dining halls and living accommodations for pilgrim devotees. The BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Mahuva is the culmination of the efforts and grace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and hundreds of sadhus and devotees. In building the mandir Swamishri has fulfilled the dream of Yogiji Maharaj and offered his guru bhakti to him. For centuries the mandir will remain as a beacon of devotion, faith and service to society. ♦

BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN

The Story of His Life

By Yogi Trivedi, M.A.
Columbia University



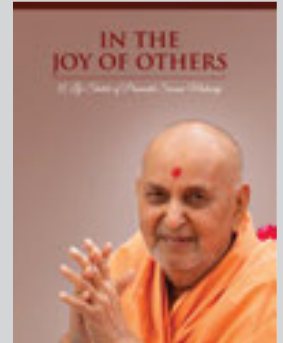
Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830 CE) is hailed by many as one of the greatest social reformers of early modern India, and by millions more as the Supreme Being incarnate. Today, the Swaminarayan Sampradaya is a widely recognized bhakti *sampradaya*. This brilliantly-crafted narrative familiarizes the reader with the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the bhakti milieu of nineteenth-century Gujarat. The author draws from various Sanskrit, Braj, and Gujarati texts and colonial sources, presenting the first such detailed, yet accessible hagiography of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in English.

IN THE JOY OF OTHERS

A Life Sketch of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

By BAPS Sadhus

Bold spiritual vision, simplicity of life, service to society, communion with God. This is Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Under his leadership the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) has developed into a worldwide socio-spiritual organization. He follows his credo, “In the joy of others lies our own,” by guiding, serving and blessing humanity. The book provides glimpses of his divine life and personality.



HINDUISM: BELIEFS & IMPRESSIONS

Introduction, Sanātana Dharma, Main Beliefs...

By Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Editorial Consultant: Dr Janakbhai Dave

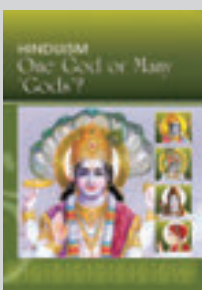
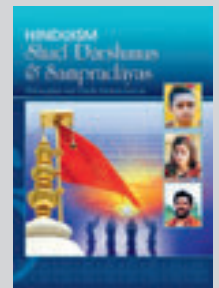
The plurality of Hinduism has often been compared to a bouquet of flowers and a salad bowl. The discrete contents of a bouquet or salad bowl combine together to form a single product. The book briefly describes the multiplicity of beliefs, practices, *sampradāyas*, etc. that make up to produce a single, fascinating spiritual canvas called Hinduism.

HINDUISM: SHAD DARSHANAS & SAMPRADAYAS

Philosophies and Hindu Denominations

By Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Editorial Consultant: Dr Janakbhai Dave

In Hinduism there are many schools of philosophical and theological thoughts known as Shad Darshanas and Vedāntic schools. The four main religious branches or *sampradāyas* of Hinduism are Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shāktism and Smārtism. They all believe in the transcendental Reality, the Vedas to be the supreme authority and *moksha* as the final goal of life.



HINDUISM: ONE GOD OR MANY 'GODS'?

By Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Editorial Consultant: Dr Janakbhai Dave

Hinduism: One God or Many 'Gods'? deals concisely with the different manifestations of Paramātmā on earth, their purpose and function. The principal ten avatars of Bhagwan Vishnu and other deities have been elaborated upon. The book also deals with three important pillars of Hinduism: Mandirs (places of worship), Shastras (sacred texts) and Sant (God-realized guru).



1



2



3

MURTI-PRATISHTHA ASSEMBLY OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, KOLKATA
2 February 2014

1. Senior sadhus inaugurate a replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's footprints in front of the *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir. 2. Senior sadhus on stage during the *murti-pratishtha* assembly. 3. Thousands of devotees during the *pratishtha* assembly.

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Jamnagar



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Jamnagar



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Jamnagar

BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, JAMNAGAR

23 February 2014

With the efforts and blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj a newly built *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir was consecrated on 23 February by the senior sadhus. The three-day *pratishtha* celebrations (21-23 February) included a *yagna*, procession of the *murtis* through the town streets, cultural programme portraying the history of satsang in Jamnagar, the *murti-pratishtha* rituals and assembly. (A detailed report will appear in the next issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* (May-June).)

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