



# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

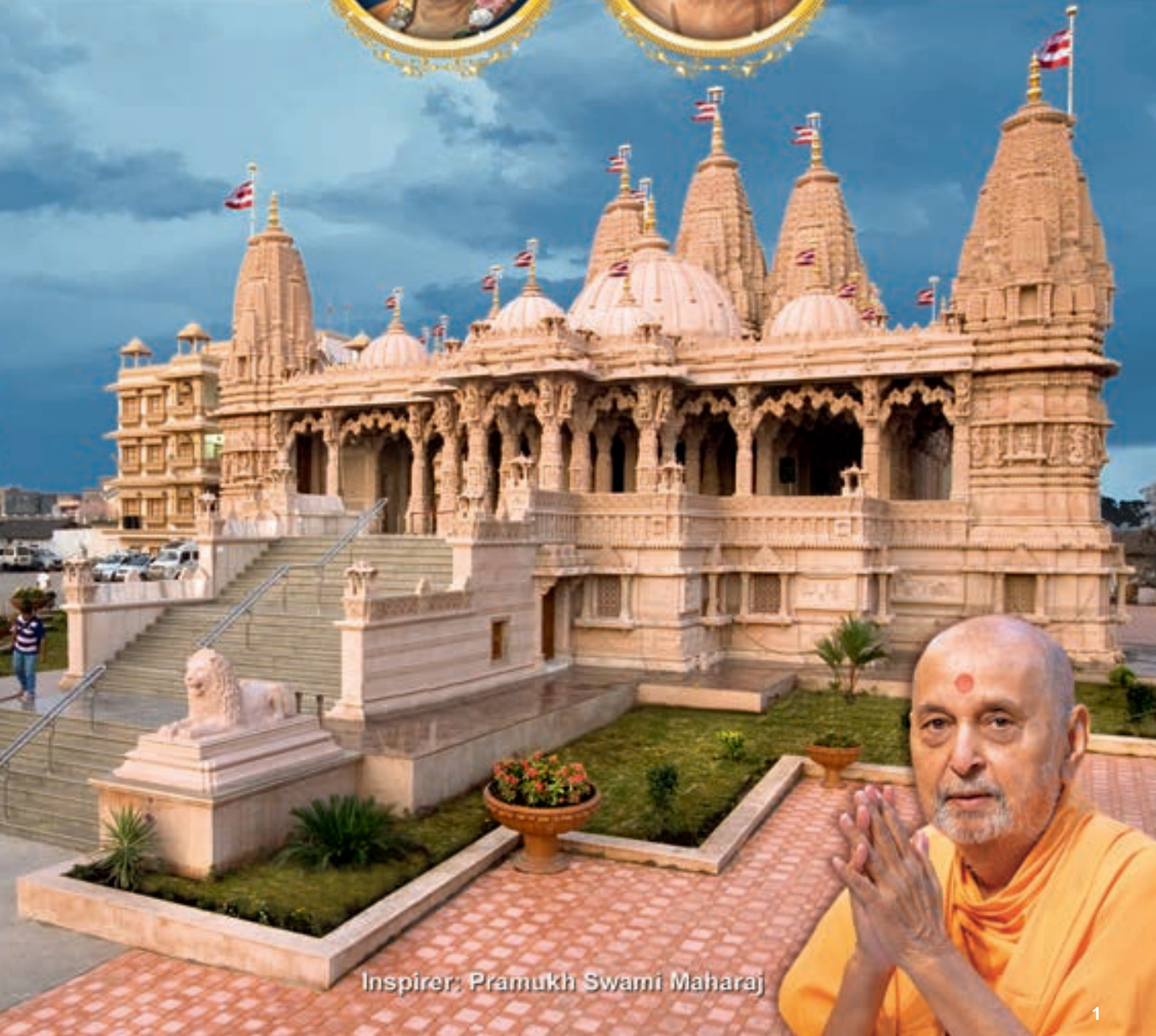
SPECIAL ISSUE

March-April 2015  
Annual Subscription ₹80/-

**Shastriji Maharaj  
Sardh Shatabdi  
Mahotsav, Vadodara**



**New BAPS  
Swaminarayan Mandir,  
Dhari**



Inspirer: Pramukh Swami Maharaj



## MURTIS CONSECRATED IN BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, DHARI



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj  
Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami



Shri Sukhshaiya



Shri Nilkanth Varni



Shri Gunatit Guru Parampara



2 Brahmaswarup  
Bhagatji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup  
Shastriji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup  
Yogiji Maharaj



Pragat Brahmaswarup  
Pramukh Swami Maharaj





BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Dhari

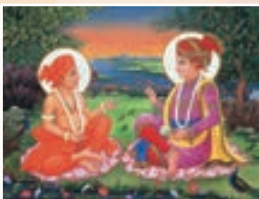
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## SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

March-April 2015 Vol. 38 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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# FIRST WORD

He was a precocious child. The games he played were unlike those of other children his age. His boldness, apparent in his small strides and replies, left deep imprints on those who knew him. He was rock solid in the dos and don'ts prescribed by the scriptures. Many envied him and wanted ownership over him – because of his confidence, smartness and character. He convinced his father to let him leave home to become a sadhu, ushering in a new chapter in his life.

He and his spiritual guru were poles apart in terms of social parameters like caste and academic brilliance. Yet, he took absolute refuge in him and served him. The guru's lesson on true philosophy awakened in him the spiritual mission he was born for. His growing determination and faithful efforts in his mission became reasons for his opponents to thwart and persecute him. Despite all that, he remained unfazed and ever forgiving.

Finally, at the insistence of his seniors, he left the old *sampradaya* to establish the BAPS. Till the age of 86, he persevered amid towering hardships and fierce opposition to build five Akshar-Purushottam mandirs. He never allowed his disciples to revere him to the extent of overriding his Lord and guru. He forever remained a humble servant. All through his long life he remained wedded to saintliness (*sadhuta*), not harbouring an iota of ill-will for his opponents. To the contrary, he helped them whenever they sought his support. Such a lofty spiritual personality is rare and a priceless gift to mankind from God.

We pay our tributes to Shastriji Maharaj on the occasion of his Sardh Shatabdi Mahotsav (sesquicentennial birthday celebrations) held recently in Vadodara on 24 January 2015.

A second historic event took place on 11 February 2015 in Dhari, commemorating the consecration of a *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir adjacent to the birthplace of another great BAPS spiritual master. He was an embodiment of his credos, "Worship God" and "May God do good of all."

In his childhood he too was brilliant at studies, and also strongly inclined towards meditation and doing bhajan in his free time. He was a fearless apostle of truth, not flinching one bit when it came to declaring his school headmaster for flogging his schoolmate. Furthermore, he enjoyed doing *seva* and bhakti of Thakorji and thus readily took up the duty of a *pujari* at the local mandir. He loved the company of sadhus during their visits from Junagadh. After renouncing home he relished all types of *seva* as an ascetic at the Junagadh mandir. Humility, devotion to Thakorji and *seva* were his outstanding virtues. He sang bhajans mellifluously and with rapture. No marriage processions or worldly honours could distract him from his spiritual ecstasy.

After leaving Junagadh mandir he joined his guru. For 40 years he unrelentingly and selflessly cooked, washed utensils, begged for alms and served at the behest of his guru.

When Shastriji Maharaj passed away he continued the guru's work. He initiated educated youths as sadhus, launched the Sunday satsang *sabha*, *bal mandal* and *yuvak mandal*, and consecrated mandirs in India, East Africa and UK. The prime objectives behind his vigorous and hectic travels were to inspire character, peace and faith in God among aspirants. Amidst the flurry of satsang activities he forever remained blissful and ever-compassionate.

The newly inaugurated *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir at the birthplace of Yogiji Maharaj in Dhari is a grand tribute by H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj to his great spiritual master.

This special issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* covers both of these memorable events and more. ♦

Reports on Shastriji Maharaj's Sardh Shatabdi and Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav in Dhari were translated from *Swaminarayan Prakash*, March-April 2015.



# PREPARATIONS FOR A GRAND FEAST

*After the consecration of the murtis of Shri Nar-Narayan Dev in Ahmedabad, Shriji Maharaj made preparations for a grand feast (chorashi) for all Brahmins...*



In the evening, Bechar Mankivala Sheth, a staunch devotee, invited Shri Hari to sanctify his home.<sup>1</sup> Both father and son warmly welcomed Maharaj and his sadhus with garlands, *pujan* and *arti*. Thereafter, Becharbhai prayed to Maharaj, “My Lord, bless me so that I never perceive human characteristics (*manushyabhav*) in you.”

Shri Hari replied explicitly, “To attain that state you will have to develop spiritual knowledge and self-vigilance. These two means will dissolve any errant thoughts about my form. Cultivate the means yourself by giving up the company of your mind. I give you my blessings, but controlling your mind lies in your hands.”

Bechar Sheth understood well. He felt the more he obeyed the wishes of Shri Hari the easier

it would be to bridle his mind.

Shri Hari returned to the mandir. After having darshan of Shri Nar-Narayan Dev he sat on a decorated seat arranged on the mandir grounds. Maharaj called Anandanand Swami, several sadhus and *parshads*, who had helped in building the mandir. Maharaj honoured them with garlands and his blessings. Shri Hari told them to stay under Anandanand Swami’s command and offer their services to the mandir. Thereafter, Maharaj called the local and other devotees who had offered their services to the mandir. When Nathu Vipra, Chopdar Kubersinh, Damodar Patel, Bechar Sheth, Laldas Gora, Hirachand Choksi and others came Maharaj appreciated them by offering garlands and pressing his feet on their chest. Shri Hari declared, “I am very pleased with you all because you have rendered such great *seva* that is rare for even the devas to do. Furthermore, God ranks your physical *seva* very highly.” The devotees rejoiced on receiving Maharaj’s blessings and respect.

## A FEAST FOR BRAHMINS IN AHMEDABAD

Shri Hari asked Anandanand Swami, “How much money do we have left in the cash box?”

“Rs. 39.5,” Swami replied.

Shri Hari declared, “Since we have consecrated the *murtis* of Shri Nar-Narayan Dev today we should organize a feast (*chorashi*) for all Brahmins

1. The *murti-pratishtha* of Shri Nar-Narayan Dev was performed on the morning of 24 February 1822 (Fagan *sud* 3, A.S. 1878). On the same day, in the evening, Maharaj sanctified Bechar Sheth’s home.



of Ahmedabad.” Anand Swami was baffled by the onerous task. Then Maharaj added, “Let us have the *chorashi* on Fagan *sud* 5 [two days later]. Send word of invitation to all by tomorrow.”

The next morning (Fagan *sud* 4) Maharaj called Haridatt Shastri, the presiding priest of Ahmedabad. He said, “I would like to hold a feast tomorrow for all the Brahmins of the city and for those residing in the nearby Daskoshi region.” For a few moments Haridatt was stunned by the short notice. Then he spoke, “My Lord, you are all-powerful. But even if a king were to have a *chorashi* for Brahmins it would take six months to make the preparations, whereas you want to hold it tomorrow!”

Shri Hari smiled briefly and said, “I’d like you to send invitations to Brahmins residing in the city and the surrounding areas. This evening, I will have all the arrangements made by the banks of Lake Kankariya.”

Haridatt Shastri remained unconvinced and distraught. Shri Hari emphasized, “Listen, Shastriji, I have carried out huge *yagnas* in Jetalpur and Dabhan. Subsequently, my sadhus and devotees have become very capable in organizing events of such magnitude. I’ll have all the arrangements made in no time. I, therefore, leave the responsibility of inviting the Brahmins for tomorrow (Fagan *sud* 5) on you.”

Haridatt nodded and assured, “Yes Maharaj. I’ll make all the arrangements right now.”

Then, Shriji Maharaj called Lalchand Gora and Hirachand Choksi privately and told them, “I have decided to hold a feast for the Brahmins tomorrow afternoon at Lake Kankariya. They will all receive the invitations shortly. When news of the *chorashi* spreads to the bazaars the merchants will raise the prices of gur, ghee and grains. I’d like you to go immediately to the merchants and fix the prices for the food provisions required. Make sure you make the deal in writing with the condition that if 200kg of rations remain unused they will take them back.”

Both devotees were left awed at Shri Hari’s foresight and adeptness in mundane affairs. They rushed off to the bazaar and struck deals with the merchants for all the food items and spices. They confirmed their deals with mutual signatures and made the arrangements to transport everything to Lake Kankariya on their instructions.

As soon as Lalchand Gora and Hirachand Choksi left, news arrived in the bazaar that Bhagwan Swaminarayan had organized a grand feast for Brahmins the next day. The merchants were gobsmacked, thinking how prudent Maharaj was in making the deal.

As news of the feast reached the Brahmin communities they were initially incredulous about it. They felt that Swaminarayan was trying to make fun of them. But then they realized that the invitation could not be fake because the royal pundit had sent it. They thus readied their cooking and eating utensils for the following day.

Shri Hari had made separate dining areas for each of the Brahmin clans. This would thus prevent any unknown person from entering the designated areas.

On that day (Fagan *vad* 4) the afternoon meal at the mandir comprised of ladoos. Shri Hari took his lunch there. Then he gathered the senior sadhus and informed them, “Tomorrow I’d like teams of one senior sadhu and five assistant sadhus to preside over every dining area of the Brahmins. Your role would be to facilitate whatever the Brahmins ask for and make sure that nothing is wasted by them. Keep the Jetalpur and Dabhan arrangements in mind.” Then Maharaj instructed, “Have the food provisions transported to Lake Kankariya now.”

Anand Swami countered respectfully, “Maharaj, if we transport the rations now then ants, kites and crows will spoil them.”

Shri Hari stated confidently, “No creatures will enter the area where the food rations will be kept. You must understand that the invited Brahmins are still sceptical about tomorrow’s



feast, so they will come to check the food provisions tonight. If they fail to see them, they will spread word that the feast is a hoax and that Swaminarayan wants to make fools of them.”

Everyone realized the truth of Shri Hari’s words. Soon, heaps of grains and other food materials started reaching the venue at Lake Kankariya. The sadhus and *parshads* arranged everything appropriately and appointed themselves to look after it. That night, some Brahmins came surreptitiously to check whether the preparations were made. They saw the presence of sadhus and heaps of grains and flour in the faint light of oil lamps. They were intrigued by the brisk preparations because they had received the invitations only today. The Brahmins thus felt Swaminarayan to be a great miracle maker. However, despite their astonishment, they had resolved to discredit Swaminarayan by spoiling the feast (*chorashi*). They had decided to steal the food rations and waste the food.

That night (on Fagan *vad* 4) the leading Brahmins of all the different clans arrived at the lake. They prepared their own brick stoves and came to collect the cooking materials from the sadhus. They lied about their requirements, and asked for excess. Nishkulanand Swami was overseeing the stock and distribution of ghee. He came

to know of the Brahmins’ deceit and informed Maharaj about it. Shri Hari instructed, “Let them eat as much ghee as they wish there, but don’t allow anyone to take it outside the dining area.”

Thus, Nishkulanand Swami started giving only half the food rations demanded by the Brahmins. On the other hand, some Brahmins started secretly steering away two cartloads of food rations towards the city. When some of Maharaj’s sadhus stopped them, the culprits broke into a row. When Shri Hari got wind of this, he mounted on his mare and proceeded towards them with a retinue of forty *parshads*, Narupant Nana, Chimanraoji and several government soldiers. The contingent stopped the Brahmins from running away with two cartloads. Shri Hari admonished them, “You can eat as much as you want in the dining area or you can take a little away for your relatives, but I will not allow you to steal cartloads of food rations. You have been caught red-handed; either you turn back or the government soldiers will arrest you.”

The Brahmins had no choice but to surrender what they had stolen. Despite the ignominy of being caught many did not reform their attitude towards Bhagwan Swaminarayan. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from Gujarati text of  
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I, Swami Swayamprakashdas, hereby declare that the above mentioned information is true to my knowledge.

(Signed) Swami Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-3-2015



# Shastriji Maharaj's Saintliness

On 12 February 2005, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was residing in Atladra (Vadodara). A group of sadhus from Sarangpur came to present to Swamishri a book containing short essays, articles, *shloks* and incidents on Shastriji Maharaj's life and work. The book had been written by the sadhus in Sarangpur on the occasion of Vasant Panchami. As one of the sadhus read from the journal, Swamishri listened with rapt attention. The sadhu mentioned that Shastriji Maharaj had enshrined and spread the principle of Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* in three ways:

1. Through letters.
2. Through relentless *vicharan*.
3. Through mandirs.

Swamishri interrupted the sadhu and revealed, "Yes, it's true that Shastriji Maharaj was able to spread our *upasana* through mandirs but the main element was his saintliness (*sadhuta*). It was because of his profound *sadhuta* that he was able to accomplish his goal. This is the main thing we should never forget."

Indeed, Swamishri reminded us about the core reason why Shastriji Maharaj was able to tolerate and overcome the hostility and hardships he faced. Even amidst an avalanche of opposition, he stood firm like a solid rock and achieved his mission of propagating the true *upasana*. It was because of his innate *sadhuta* that the Satsang spread and people lovingly embraced the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam.

On another occasion, Swamishri was seated in an assembly where Harishbhai Dave, the secretary of BAPS, had just spoken about the progress

and achievements of the Sanstha over the previous 30 years. After Harishbhai had finished his speech, Swamishri blessed the assembly and revealed the secret of the exponential growth of BAPS, "Our Sanstha has grown and progressed because of Shastriji Maharaj's *sadhuta*."

So, what is *sadhuta*?

The word *sadhuta* has a very broad meaning. It is a collection of many saintly virtues, but if we were to narrow it down, the focus falls upon two virtues:

1. Shastriji Maharaj's firmness in adhering to the commands of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

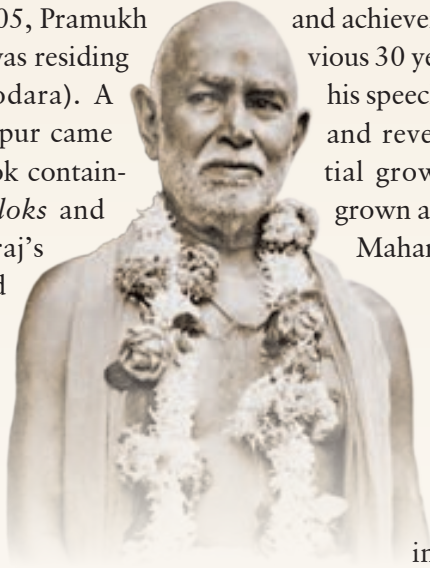
2. Shastriji Maharaj's spirit of tolerance.

In order to really understand Shastriji Maharaj's *sadhuta*, let us closely look at three incidents from his life. While we do so, let us also try to put ourselves in his shoes. What would we have done under similar circumstances?

## 1. TOTAL RENUNCIATION OF MONEY

Kothari Gordhanbhai of Vartal, one of the most honoured and senior figures in Vartal, had earned more respect than any *sadguru*. As the administrator (*kothari*) he had witnessed the reign of five *acharyas* in the Vartal *sampradaya*. It was he who had boldly stated, "Amongst the 2,000 sadhus in Vartal, I have yet to see a sadhu as staunch in his vows of celibacy and non-wealth as Shastri Yagnapurushdas (Shastriji Maharaj)."

Once, Shastriji Maharaj arrived in the town of Anand. Most of the devotees had gone to attend a wedding ceremony, and hence, there was nobody available to host Shastriji Maharaj. Swami thought it pointless to stay in Anand because the devotees were away engaged in



their social duties. With this in mind, Shastriji Maharaj switched his plans and decided to go to Sarangpur by train. He walked to the railway station hoping to find a devotee who would pay for the tickets, but found no one. Then, he and his companion sadhu walked back to town, but found nobody there either. So, they returned to the station. After going back and forth four times, Shastriji Maharaj eventually found a devotee by the name of Govardhanbhai Keshavlal, who paid for the tickets to Botad (the nearest station to Sarangpur). Incidents like these happened many times, but never did Shastriji Maharaj bend the rule of not keeping money with him. This was his *sadhuta*.

## 2. PARAGON OF TOLERANCE

On one occasion, Shastriji Maharaj visited the old Swaminarayan mandir in Vadodara. After darshan, he sat on a seat in the assembly hall. A senior sadhu from the *sampradaya* walked into the mandir. His eyes fell on Shastriji Maharaj. Unable to bear the rising popularity of Shastriji Maharaj the brewing envy within him turned into a rage. At first, he started abusing Shastriji Maharaj verbally. Next, he started pushing and shoving Shastriji Maharaj, who remained calm. Finally, in a fit of anger, the old sadhu hit Shastriji Maharaj with his walking stick. He hit him so hard that the stick broke into two. Shastriji Maharaj quietly picked up the two broken pieces and humbly handed them back to the old sadhu. This was Shastriji Maharaj's *sadhuta*. He could easily have retaliated, but he was not ready to stoop low and give up his principles of tolerance and forgiveness.

Shastriji Maharaj once wrote a letter to the *kothari* of Bochasan mandir, "We should always think highly of others and behave in a dignified manner that is helpful to all, no matter what. One should never think of taking revenge for the hurt meted out to oneself because that is unacceptable on the path of *sadhuta*. Never take the stand of 'an eye for an eye'. If someone insults us or demeans

us, we should be pleased. Let that be God's wish, because, eventually, the truth will prevail. Shriji Maharaj controls everything and rewards one and all with the fruits of their actions." Such was the calibre of Shastriji Maharaj's *sadhuta*.

## 3. APOSTLE OF TRUTH

Shastriji Maharaj's *sadhuta* was evident from his honest and straightforward approach. On 7 December 1938, he wrote a letter to the devotees in East Africa describing the basis of his understanding of Gunatitanand Swami as Mul Akshar or Aksharbrahman – the abode and ideal disciple of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Towards the end of his explanation he underscored, "I do not know how to arrange a false talk and explain it to others for a selfish gain. There is a lot of sin in untruth. In the Shrimad Bhagvat it has been written, '*Nāsatyāt param pāpam*', ('Untruth is the highest sin'). Furthermore, Earth has said, 'I can bear the burden of sinful people, but I cannot bear the burden of untruth spoken by someone.' Therefore, please understand that I do not in any way insist upon untruthful talks. So, if you trust me and believe me to be a speaker of truth, an honest person, then believe the above talks to be true, and with a pure heart develop faith that Swami is the *anadi* (eternal) Akshar."

While Shastriji Maharaj possessed countless external virtues, it is his core spiritual content that intrigues so many today. His character, internal personality, self-discipline, resolute faith in God and *sadhuta* captivated individuals. Such was Shastriji Maharaj's *sadhuta* that many who opposed him later repented and readily welcomed his inspiring talks. Moreover, they willingly accepted and followed the principles of Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* as laid down by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut.

Shastriji Maharaj's *sadhuta* enabled him to establish and spread the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam. ♦

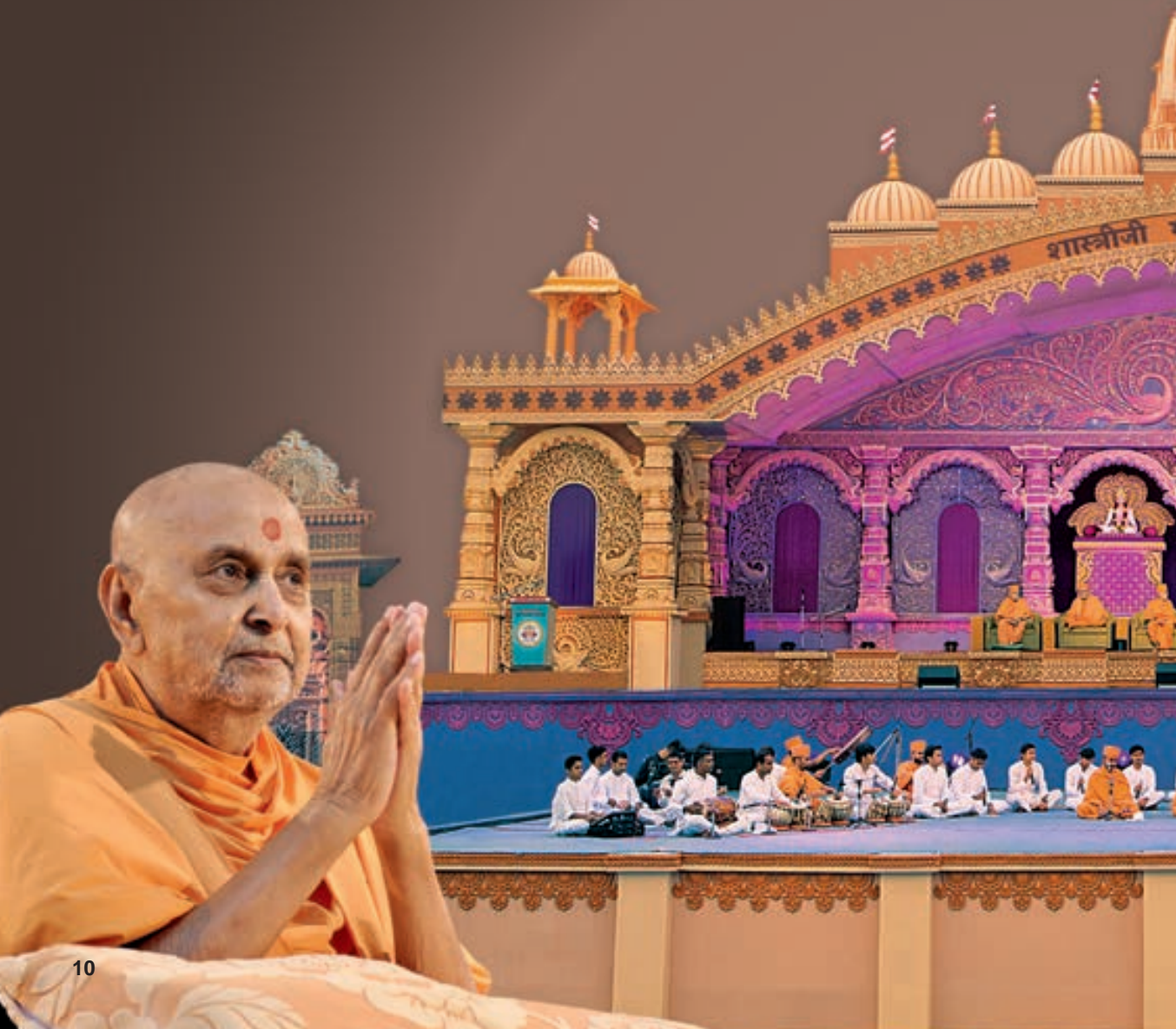




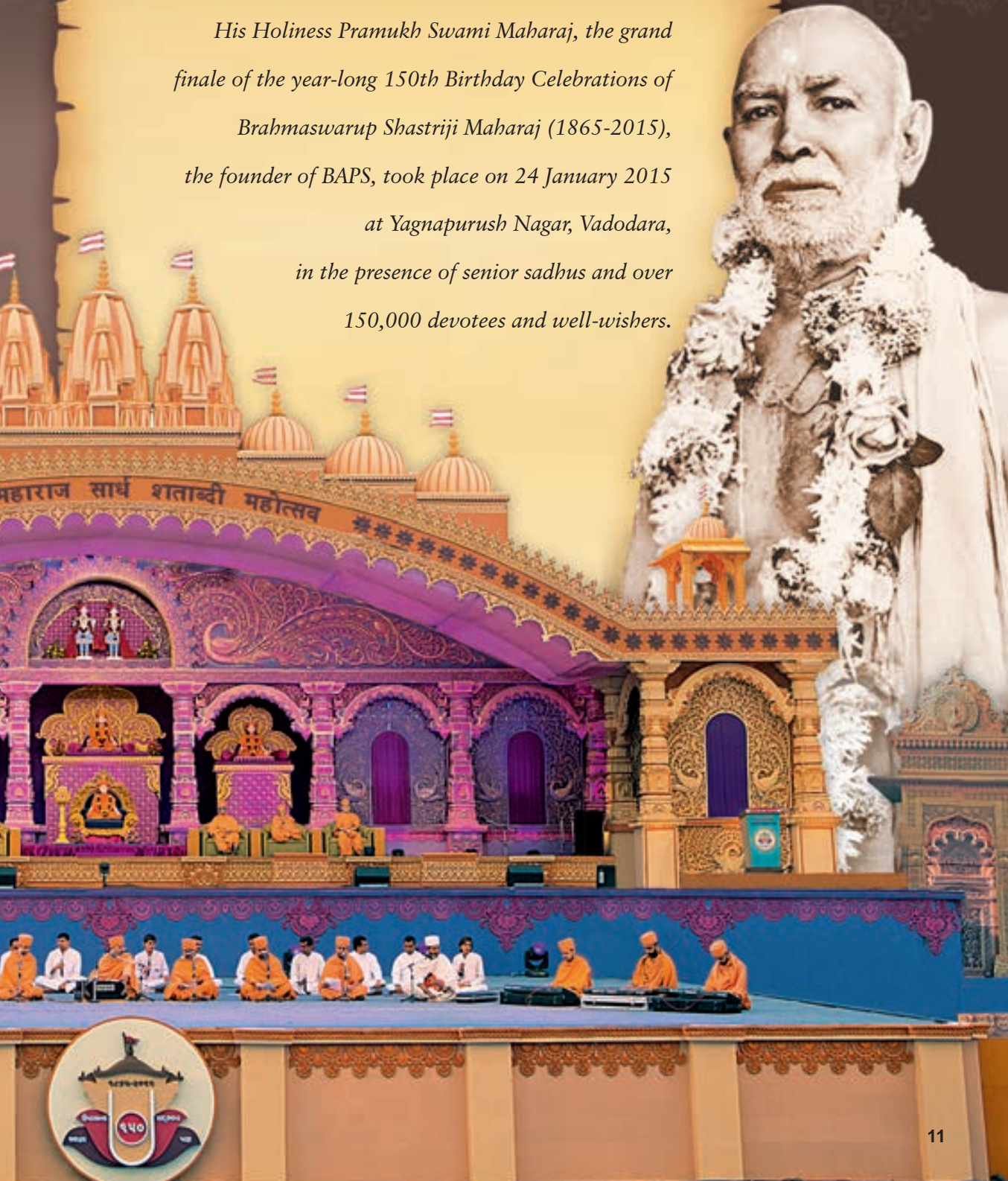
# SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ

## Sardh Shatabdi Celebrations

24 January 2015, Vadodara



*With the inspiration and blessings of  
His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the grand  
finale of the year-long 150th Birthday Celebrations of  
Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj (1865-2015),  
the founder of BAPS, took place on 24 January 2015  
at Yagnapurush Nagar, Vadodara,  
in the presence of senior sadhus and over  
150,000 devotees and well-wishers.*







Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj



Children perform a traditional dance

**T**he 170-acre celebration site on the outskirts of Vadodara was generously given for use by 75 landowners. It took over a month to level the land and set up the necessary facilities for the festival. Hundreds of volunteers from Vadodara and the surrounding areas donated their time, energy and skills to help in the preparations.

The three-and-a-half-hour celebration programme was based on Shastriji Maharaj's principles and contributions: Satpurush, Siddhant and Sanstha. The theme was portrayed through traditional dances, videos, bhajans and speeches by BAPS youths, senior sadhus and stage guests.

The Governor of Gujarat H.E. O.P. Kohli, MP of Tanzania Mr Muhammad Seif Khatib, MP Shri Mansukhbhai Rathwa, MP Shrimati Ranjanben Bhatt, State Cabinet Ministers Shri Saurabh Patel and Shri Vijaybhai Rupani, BJP State President Shri R.C. Faldu, Mayor of Vadodara Shri Bharatbhai Shah, Collector Shri Vinodbhai Rao, Chairman of L&T Shri Anil Naik and other guests addressed and graced the occasion.

The speeches covered the three topics from various angles.

## SATPURUSH

Bhagwan Swaminarayan established the Gunatit Satpurush succession, through whom he promised to remain manifest on earth. Shastriji Maharaj was the third spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and it was he who identified Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj as future successors. Ishwarcharan Swami spoke about the divinity of Shastriji Maharaj and Anandswarup Swami spoke about Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the present Gunatit Satpurush through whom Bhagwan Swaminarayan is manifest on earth.

## Ishwarcharan Swami



"Shastriji Maharaj revealed to us Shriji Maharaj's principles through his life-long work. He tolerated much hardship, insult and opposition to build mandirs enshrining the true *upasana* [of Akshar-Purushottam].

"Many leading personalities were drawn by his



Satpurush: Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Siddhant: Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Bochasan

divine charisma. For example, Gulzarilal Nanda, who twice served as Interim Prime Minister of India, was a devotee of Shastriji Maharaj. He said, ‘Many times I have experienced that Shastriji Maharaj is the manifest form of God.’

“Kanaiyalal Munshi, who was a member of the committee which drafted the Constitution of India, said, ‘150 years after Bhagwan Swaminarayan, his powers, influence and divinity are apparent in this Swamiji [Shastriji Maharaj].’

“In this way, many wise personalities experienced that Shastriji Maharaj had come on this earth to do God’s work and that he was the manifest form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.”

## SIDDHANT

Shastiji Maharaj propagated the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He endured many difficulties but persevered to build majestic mandirs enshrining the *murtis* of Akshar (Gunatitanand Swami) and Purushottam (Bhagwan Swaminarayan) in the central shrine.

## Viveksagar Swami



“In the Vachanamrut Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed his true form (Vachanamruts Ahmedabad 7 & Gadhada II 13), and that other avatars are worthy of respect, but *upasana* (worship) should only be offered to his form (Vachanamrut Gadhada III 38).

“Shastriji Maharaj heard Bhagatji Maharaj’s explanation of Vachanamrut Loya 12 in which he described the importance of becoming *akshar-rup* and worshipping Purushottam. And that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar, and Bhagwan Swaminarayan is Parabrahman. Shastriji Maharaj confirmed this principle through many sources.

“In the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, there is a clear explanation of Brahman and Parabrahman. The Mundaka Upanishad says, ‘*Aksharāt parataha paraha*,’ meaning, ‘Aksharbrahman is above all, and above him is Parabrahman Purushottam.’

“The Taittiriya Upanishad says, ‘*Brahma-vidāpnoti param*,’ meaning, ‘Only one who





Sanstha: First BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir built by Shastriji Maharaj, Bochasan

knows Brahman attains Parabrahman.’ Further, the Mundaka Upanishad reveals, ‘*Yenāksharam Purusham veda satyam provācha tām tattvato brahmavidyām,*’ meaning, ‘That knowledge by which Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman are fully known is called *brahmavidya*.’

“The Bhagavad Gita says, ‘*Brahmabhootaha prasannātmā na shochati na kāṅkshati; Samaha sarveshu bhooteshu madbhaktim labhate parām,*’ meaning, ‘Only one who becomes *brahmarup* is eligible to worship Purushottam.’

“Also stated in the Mundaka Upanishad, ‘*Tad vignānārtham sa gurumevābhigachchhet samitpani-hi shrotriyam Brahma nishtham,*’ meaning, ‘One needs a manifest *brahmaswarup* guru who is wise (one who fully understands all the shastras) and has realized Parabrahman to become *brahmarup*.’

“The Katha Upanishad reveals, ‘*Etadālam-banam shrestham etadālam-banam param; Etadālam-banam jnatvā brahmaloke mahiyate,*’ meaning, ‘Only through Aksharbrahman is Brahmalok attained.’

“Shvetashvatara Upanishad says, ‘*Yasya deve parā bhaktir-yathā deve tathā gurau,*’ meaning, ‘Just as one has conviction in God, one should have conviction in the manifest guru as the manifest form of God.’”

## SANSTHA

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj established the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) in 1907, which

today has a global presence. Through its world-wide centres in India, USA, Canada, UK, Africa and other places, BAPS instils spirituality and is engaged in many philanthropic activities.

## Doctor Swami

“The reason the work of the Sanstha contin-



ues to grow is because it is founded on spirituality. Shastriji Maharaj was a scholar and adept in administrative matters, however, his success was due to his spirituality. This spirituality means absolute conviction and faith in God and guru. Shastriji Maharaj never disconnected himself from Bhagwan Swaminarayan nor did he ever forget him.

“In spirituality, attachment to one’s guru is the main element. If one is truly attached to the guru, then one will understand the glory of even the most junior devotee. Shastriji Maharaj had such respect and understanding for even the most junior devotee.

“Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life also reflects such spirituality. And we have to ignite such spirituality in our lives. How can this be done? First, develop faith in God. Firmly believe that the supreme Bhagwan Swaminarayan resides in your heart, sees you, knows you and gives you the fruits of your karmas.

“Second, attach yourself to the Satpurush and observe his commands. Such attachment means to see him as totally divine and free of faults.”

## Mr. Muhammad Seif Khatib



Mr. Muhammad Seif Khatib, the Minister from Tanzania, described the BAPS social services in Tanzania, saying, “I would like to pay my due respects to His Holiness Shastriji

Maharaj, whose birthday we are celebrating today. It was he who founded this organization. It was he who gave a vision to this organization. It was through his inspiration that such pious and noble activities began in Africa. I am told that he never actually set foot in Africa. This strengthens my conviction to say he was a true visionary and an inspirer. He had the true character, personality and charisma to inspire thousands of his devotees in Africa to do such noble and pious work without even coming to Africa.

“I would like to remember His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, whom I have received twice in Dar-es-Salaam. He is very divine, peaceful and highly spiritual and his blessings always come true. He continues to inspire me and other devotees to promote goodness. In my whole life I have never attended a gathering as huge as this. This will be a memory that I will cherish for the rest of my life.”

### Saurabhbhai Patel



A Cabinet Minister of Gujarat, Shri Saurabhbhai Patel said, “I feel proud because my grandfather, Manchharambhai, got the opportunity to serve his guru Shastriji Maharaj. When the Sanstha’s first mandir was being built in Bochasan my grandfather offered his services. By the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj my whole family is happy and I am standing here before you.”

### H.E. Omprakash Kohli



The Governor of Gujarat, H.E. Omprakash Kohli, addressed the mammoth assembly, “I have never seen such a wonderful and huge assembly with such spiritual vibrations. The task of spreading the principles

given by Bhagwan Swaminarayan was done by Shastriji Maharaj. Today we are remembering Shastriji Maharaj as a spiritual person. Dharma, spirituality and social service teach us to transcend arrogance. Ego is like a jail. We are all bound by it. A true spiritual person is free from ego. Such a person was Shastriji Maharaj and today we have Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

### Pujya Mahant Swami



Pujya Mahant Swami blessed the festive occasion, “Today, we are celebrating Shastriji Maharaj’s festival. We are celebrating the festival of the founder of BAPS and the guru of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Hundreds of thousands of sadhus and devotees celebrating this festival here and at home are brimming with joy. There is utmost joy for Pramukh Swami Maharaj today because he has sent his beloved Thakorji, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, here from Sarangpur. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has never been away from Harikrishna Maharaj. He is always with him. So today, he has sent Harikrishna Maharaj for the occasion, which means that he is also with him here.

“The 150th birthday celebration of Shastriji Maharaj means to imbue our hearts with his life, works, values and devotion to God. It was Shastriji Maharaj’s mission to make all *brahmarup* – this means inner cleanliness. Bhagwan Swaminarayan taught about becoming *brahmarup* and offering bhakti.”

### Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Video Blessings



“Shastriji Maharaj was a great spiritual personality. The work he did was with the future in mind. He had thought about the coming thousands of years.



“Shastriji Maharaj was the manifest form of God. He knew about the past, present and future. He did every task after great thought. He established the BAPS Sanstha.

“With him was a great sadhu – Yogiji Maharaj. God will do God’s work. Some great personality will always be present to steer the Sanstha properly. It has grown and will continue to grow. We must have faith in the words of the great.

“Yogiji Maharaj used to say, ‘The bells of truth will toll.’ And that is why Akshar-Purushottam mandirs have been built and satsang has grown. You are all mandirs, too, because God resides in you. And everyone has darshan of that God, so there is mutual affection. This is the truth. The truth persists forever. This is the work of God, the work of the Gunatit gurus.” ♦



Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami presents scroll of BAPS’s pledge to join the Clean India Campaign to Governor Omprakash Kohli

A special announcement to join the Clean India Campaign was made as part of the BAPS’s

social services to society. The campaign includes:

- ❖ A home to home cleanliness awareness drive by 16,000 BAPS volunteers in socially backward villages.
- ❖ Workshops on cleanliness in 500 schools.
- ❖ Cleanliness awareness drive through 200 rallies.
- ❖ Cleaning of 9,200 public places in 3,800 towns and villages by BAPS volunteers.

Thousands of BAPS volunteers and devotees will offer their services in the Clean India Campaign.

In conclusion, a mass *arti* was performed by 150,000 devotees and well-wishers and the National Anthem was sung.



## SUMMARY OF YEAR-LONG CELEBRATION ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

On 4 February 2014, on the occasion of Vasant Panchmi, the year-long 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj were launched in Mahelav, the birth-place of Shastriji Maharaj.

Throughout the year all devotees, young and old, men and women, personally undertook special observances and participated in many celebratory group events. The following is a summary of some of the major observances and events:

Thousands of devotees individually read and listened to various shastras, wrote *siddhant* mantras, contacted others to convey the message of Shastriji Maharaj and observed other such *niyams*.

- ❖ ‘Make the home a mandir’: 164,609 families pledged to perform *arti*, offer *thal*, conduct *ghar sabha* and perform puja together.
- ❖ 12,365 male and female BAPS volunteers participated in the inter-regional *adhiveshans*.
- ❖ 100,386 devotees attended the Jnansatra discourses held at 30 venues.
- ❖ 20,358 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* participated in the youth *shibirs* themed ‘Yagnapurush

Chhe Sathe’ – ‘Yagnapurush Is With Us.’

- ❖ 572,100cc of blood was collected in the numerous blood donation camps.
- ❖ 28,500 neem trees were planted.
- ❖ Over 100,000 devotees participated in more than 240 *padyatras* that were organized.
- ❖ In addition, *balaks* and *balikas* also undertook special observances:
  - 50,911 *balaks* and *balikas* of 5,192 *mandals* pledged to observe the *yog-yagna niyams*.
  - 22,932 children took part in the Bal Vikas Parva held in 40 regions.
  - 18,000 children from 2,841 *mandals* took part in the *upasana* memorizing drive.
  - 79,756 children from 5,200 *mandals* took part in the *bal parayans*.
  - 135,000 children were inspired by the cultural programmes entitled ‘Thaiye Dungar Bhagat Jeva,’ – ‘Let Us Become Like Dungar Bhagat’.
  - *Balika mandal* volunteers observed 2,648 fasts.



150,000 devotees perform *samuh arti* at the conclusion of the Sardh Shatabdi Mahotsav



# Save Your Wealth and Resources



Nowadays we take plenty for granted: be it at a wedding, a birthday celebration, during shopping, enjoying entertainment, spending money or using materials. There are instances of families getting ruined because of wasteful expenditure. Wastefulness is not confined to social occasions. In the lives of Gunatit gurus this type of wastefulness does not arise. Shastriji Maharaj established the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, starting with a handful of sadhus and some devotees. What he had in abundance was not money, but unbounded faith and confidence in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the gurus who preceded him – Gunatitanand Swami and Bhagatji Maharaj. Like all pioneers, he had to face what appeared to be insurmountable problems. He had the faith not only to get over them but inspire his successors, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, to do the same. All three have not only run the Sanstha, but built mandirs and looked after the welfare of their sadhus, followers and the public in general. Now, BAPS has become a worldwide organization. The following incidents from their lives show how they conducted themselves in both good and difficult times – thrift being one of their guiding principles. Let us take a leaf from these inspiring stories.

- On the morning of 28 April 1947 Shastriji

Maharaj visited the stone workshop at Sarangpur mandir and gave the necessary instructions. Then he began to talk about his difficult times, “Till now I have been keeping a half-ticket sadhu as a companion (*jod*) and carrying his *potla* (baggage). I have prepared food to feed him. Ask Vasudev, Aksharswarupdas, Nilkanth or Gopinath, all of them have experienced this” (*Likhitan Shastri Yagnapurushdasji*, Part 2, p. 616).

While travelling by train Shastriji Maharaj always took with him a young sadhu as his *jod*, thus cutting his ticket expense by half.

- Shastriji Maharaj used to always travel in third class. If someone asked him to go by first class he would say, “I do not want to waste a devotee’s money. I shall spend the money on building mandirs.” If somebody would bring a conveyance and invite him to use it, he would decline and say, “I prefer walking.” If someone asked about sponsoring a meal, he would say, “The food eaten will be destroyed in 24 hours. So use the money for building mandirs so that lakhs of people may worship” (*Yajnapurush Smrutigranth*, p. 219).

- Once, Shastriji Maharaj visited Anand. He was staying at the house of Motibhai Bhagwandas. Maganbhai inspired Ishwarbhai and Prabhudas Lalaji to have Shastriji Maharaj’s darshan. Thereafter they both hired a car for Rs. 51 to take Shastriji Maharaj to Gana. When he came

to know of this, Shastriji Maharaj was very annoyed. He said, “Pay Rs. 5 to the driver and send him away.” Swami was angry because of the unnecessary expenditure. After a lot of requests he relented and said, “Take Yogiji Maharaj to Gana” (*Yogiji Maharaj*, Part 1, p. 260).

■ Once, Yogiji Maharaj was at Gondal and while talking of Shastriji Maharaj, he said, “He would draw attention to three things. If anyone gave one rupee on a home visit Nirgun Swami would say, ‘Give five.’ But Shastriji Maharaj would say no. He would be happy with whatever was given. Second, he would take special care to prevent wastage of vegetables while chopping them for cooking. He would teach how to do this. First, he would get them cleaned. Then he would teach how to chop them. If a vegetable had to be pruned, he would make sure that too much skin was not removed. He would teach how to chop *turiya* (ridge gourd). Then he would teach how to season (*vaghar*) them in a little cooking oil. If the top portion of *bhindi* (ladyfinger) was cut too much in a hurry he would not allow it to be done further. He would indicate how much to cut. Each and every leaf or part of the vegetable was valuable to him, so he would not let it go. Third, whenever he engaged a horse-cart and if the driver asked for ten annas, Shastriji Maharaj would haggle to reduce it to eight annas. Once, when he got into a cart and the driver demanded ten annas, he simply got down.

“Swamishri was generous, but he would not give more. In Bochasan the labour charge was six paise per head. Once, a labourer asked for more, but Swamishri did not agree. Then the labourers agreed to work for six paise each” (*Yogiji Maharaj*, Part 5, p. 151).

■ Yogiji Maharaj used to say, “Shastriji Maharaj would always insist on cutting the top portion of *bhindi* in such a manner as not to waste too much of it. He would cut the veins on *turiya*



(ridge gourd) and use them in making *kadhi*.” (*Yogiji Maharaj Ni Divya Vani*, p. 174).

■ Once, Shastriji Maharaj visited the village of Thikaria. During a large assembly the devotees presented the sadhus with dhotis to honour them. Shastriji Maharaj participated in the proceedings with a watchful eye. After having his meal, he inquired, “How many dhotis were presented?” The devotee who had counted the dhotis while they were being draped replied, “Forty-seven.” Swami said, “You seem to be mistaken. When I counted there were forty-eight dhotis.” Manibhai heard this and he tried to put an end to the discussion by saying, “If there is a shortage I shall make good. You don’t worry about the count.” But Swami was not one to allow the lapse. Even though there was no question for Swami in receiving one less dhoti, he felt misplacing even one would amount to being unappreciative of the donor. We should look at the sentiments of the donor and take care while receiving the donations.” On inquiry it was found that one dhoti had been donated twice by two devotees. Swamishri said, “We have found the answer. We should not be negligent after receiving something. We should believe it to be Bhagwan’s wealth and should be precise in such matters” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, January 1977, p. 20).

■ Once, Shastriji Maharaj was in Atladra for the *annakut* festival. As was the practice every New Year, he left for a *padharamani* to Mathurbhai





Makandas's house. After the visit he said, "Today is the New Year, let us do the *pradakshina* of Thakorji." He came to Chorvale Darwaja along with some devotees. The houses there had been renovated and so some broken tiles were lying around. Swamishri sat down and started collecting the pieces of tiles. The devotees tried to stop him, "Swami they will be of no use to us anymore." Swamishri said, "Yes, I know." But he still went on picking the pieces. So, others followed suit. He filled two cartloads of broken tiles and had them deposited at one corner of the Atladra mandir. Then he clarified, "We have as yet to build the sadhus' dharmashala. At that time I shall use these tiles as foundation material. Even big avatars did not get such *seva* which we have received on New Year's Day by the grace of Maharaj and Swami" (Swaminarayan Prakash, January 1977, p. 20).

■ Once, Shastriji Maharaj was in Atladra. He noticed that a *bhagat*, who was chopping spinach, was about to consign the stems to the dust heap. He told him, "Bhagat, keep the stems in the balcony of the *sabha mandap*. I shall deal with them later." Then, Swami came and began to cut the tender portions of what was going to be discarded and put them with the chopped spinach. In the afternoon, after taking his meal, he joked that the pieces of stems had not got stuck between his teeth and if they had in anyone's case he should say so. Then he added that if they misused any small or great thing, it would be a disservice

to God. Thus, one should not waste anything. (Swaminarayan Prakash, January 1977, p. 20).

■ Once, Shastriji Maharaj was under medication at the Atladra mandir. The *vaidya* had prescribed a medicine which had to be taken with ghee equivalent to the weight of half-a-rupee. He sent Aksharpriya Swami to the *kothari* for it. But the latter gave him ghee equal to the weight of two rupees. Swami said, "The *vaidya* has prescribed ghee equal to the weight of half-a-rupee, thus I cannot take more." Then a devotee sitting near Swami said, "Swami, take it. [The extra] ghee will not harm you." Swami said, "I cannot take more. It is not proper to spoil what belongs to God." Even then the devotee insisted, "Swami, during festivals much ghee is lost when it gets stuck to the leaf-plates and the cooking vessels. And much more is wasted by the people. So if you eat a little more where is the question of wasting it?" Shastriji Maharaj lightly struck both his hands on his head and said, "I do not wish to take this blame on my head. I do not want to know about others. I have to bother about things that should not be spoiled by me" (Swaminarayan Prakash, January 1977, p. 20).

■ Once, Shastriji Maharaj had to go from Vadodara station to Sayajipura. Nirgundas Swami was with him. A buggy-driver came up to him and pleaded, "It's far, so sit in my buggy. You can give whatever fare you wish." But Shastriji Maharaj replied, "It is better if we decide the fare



beforehand. What do you expect?” “Rupees one and twenty-five paise.” Swami did not agree. So, in order to confirm the trip, the driver reduced it by two annas. But he did not know that Swami was aware of the fare. Swami offered twelve annas, but the driver refused. Shastriji Maharaj thus picked up his *potla* and began to walk away. Then Swami said, “We are not in such a tearing hurry. We shall walk on the footpath all the way.”

Swami thus walked the distance of 25.6 km. He believed that one can spend money but not waste it. While walking Swami said, “Let the buggy-driver do what he can afford, but we should not be taken in by his words” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, January 1977, p. 21).

■ Pramukh Swami Maharaj was at Dadar mandir on Friday, 13 January 1989. Haribhai (Badalpur) talked about Shastriji Maharaj to Swamishri, “I had the privilege to serve Shastriji Maharaj. He would clean his teeth in the morning with salt. I had to pound the crystallized salt and give it to him. That was the daily practice. Once, I pounded more than the usual requirement. Shastriji Maharaj said, ‘You tie the extra salt at the end of my upper cloth (*gatiariyu*). I can use it the next day’” (Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s *vicharan* report).

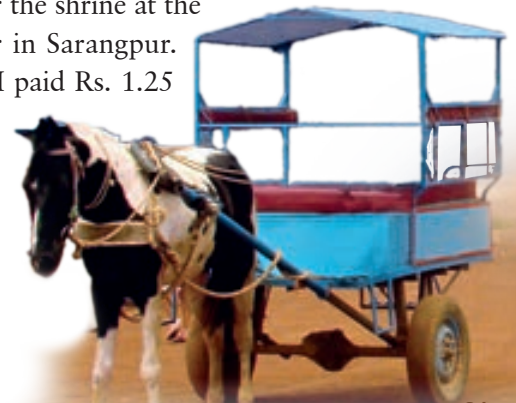
■ While speaking at the Ahmedabad mandir on Saturday, 8 August 1992, Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, “Shastriji Maharaj used to say that when required one should spend any amount

[crush pearls], but if there is no need not even a paise should be wasted” (Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s *vicharan* report).

■ On 26 September 2005, New Delhi, Pramukh Swami Maharaj spoke about the frugal habits of Shastriji Maharaj, “He would save even the thread used for tying the paper in which garlands were wrapped. The reason being it would come in use some day. After answering nature’s call, he would use only a certain amount of soil to wash his hands and not more.”

■ Shastriji Maharaj often visited Mumbai for satsang. Because of the poor financial condition of the devotees, he insisted on travelling by tram for *padhramanis*. On one occasion Harshadbhai Dave decided to hire a buggy for Swami. The buggy-driver got into an argument for four more annas with Harshadbhai Dave. Shastriji Maharaj told Harshadbhai, “We should not waste any devotee’s money. I shall walk the distance.” When Swamishri began to walk, Harshadbhai earnestly pleaded with him and eventually Swami consented to sit in the buggy (*Aksharna Yatri*, p. 156).

■ Hakabhai Khachar once narrated, “Shastriji Maharaj would not allow anyone to waste even 25 paise. Once Shastriji Maharaj went to Botad to Chunibhai’s house for a meal. After the meal I hired a buggy. The prevailing rates for Botad to Sarangpur were between twelve annas and Rs. 1.25. We got into the buggy for Rs. 1.25 and alighted near the shrine at the mandir in Sarangpur. When I paid Rs. 1.25





Shastriji Maharaj noticed and said aloud, ‘Why Rs. 1.25? Is it your father’s property?’ There was an argument between Swamishri and me. Eventually, I explained to the driver and paid him Rs. 1. Then, the following day I called him alone and gave him the 25 paise. In this way Shastriji Maharaj never allowed an extra payment of 25 paise” (Hakabhai Khachar’s interview).

■ Once, Hakabhai Khachar described, “Once, Shastriji Maharaj got down from a third class compartment at the Ahmedabad Railway Station, after travelling from Mumbai. There were seven *potla* with us. It was not possible for me to carry them all. So, I engaged a coolie and paid him four annas.

“Swamishri shot back, ‘What did you do?’ ‘I paid four annas to the coolie to carry the *potla*.’ ‘Why? Is it your father’s money? Why did you pay him four annas? I would have carried the baggage myself.’

“I said, ‘I made a mistake.’ Then I loaded the *potla* onto a buggy. Two sadhus sat in it. The rest walked all the way from Kalupur station” (Hakabhai Khachar’s interview).

\* \* \*

The following incidents show Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s frugality and the inspiration he has given about not wasting anything.

■ Pramukh Swami Maharaj was having breakfast in Gondal on 13 October 2003. The *Yogicharitam* was being read. Everyone was listening to the incident about Yogiji Maharaj arriving to the assembly hall after having Thakorji’s darshan. His attention was at once drawn to a room in a corner. Yogiji Maharaj said, “Don’t keep the office open. See to it that the lights do not remain switched on all day long.” After listening to the exhortation Pramukh Swami Maharaj looked at the sadhus and said, “See how Yogiji Maharaj used to be vigilant about the wastage of electricity. Switch off the lights when not required. We, too, should be particular about such matters. The lights should not be left on unnecessarily. If needed, use



them fully, but not when not required. This is the principle of the Satpurush. All of you start a campaign. Switch off the lights and fans when not required. Everybody should follow this principle in the mandirs they stay. We are careless. In every matter we should not allow needless spending.”

■ On 2 February 2004 Swamishri was at the Atladra mandir. He was having *faral* at 8.40 p.m. Ghanshyamcharan Swami and Krishnavallabh Swami were recalling their past experiences of Sarangpur mandir and the senior devotees. “In those days there was no electricity in Sarangpur. A generator was used. After *shayan arti* the lights were switched off.” Then Krishnavallabh Swami spoke as if pained, “This was the situation then. Nowadays one finds four to five lights switched on in each room.” Swamishri said at once, “Bring back the original way. If you find any extra lights switched on without reason, switch them off. You have taken such training in the past.”

Swamishri was inspiring all to participate in the “Save electricity” campaign.

■ On 20 March 1996 Swamishri was at Sarangpur mandir. Bhaskarbai asked Swamishri about how much money he should donate at which mandirs in memory of his late father, Himabhai. Swamishri asked an attendant for a piece of paper. He gave a letterhead paper. “Not this. Give me an ordinary one. I don’t want to write a letter,” Swamishri said. The attendant replied, “Use

it because everybody uses it.” Swamishri stated, “Others may well use it, but I don’t need it now.”

Swamishri wrote the details after getting an ordinary sheet of paper.

■ On 13 September 2005 Swamishri was at Sarangpur mandir, engaged in a meeting for the mandir’s master plan. He said, “The River Narmada’s water may be channelized [to all parts of Gujarat] but everyone should be educated [in the mandir] to use it economically. Furthermore, even if the water utilized by sadhus for their daily bath is channelled into the mandir farms and gardens it does not mean that they should use it excessively. If need be let pure water be used for watering the farm, but all should form the habit of using water with thrift. In the olden days they used to put pebbles in water pipes to minimize the flow of water. This was a precaution to prevent wastage of water. Where there is a shower, the water consumption is reduced. In conclusion, everyone should understand to conserve water.”

■ On 27 September 2005 Swamishri was in his quarters at the New Delhi mandir. Soon after coming out of his bathroom Swamishri told his attendant, “Switch off the light.” Dharmavatsal Swami replied, “Bapa, whenever the air conditioner is switched on here in Delhi the electricity bill turns out to be very high.” Narayancharan Swami added, “You even have small light bulbs switched off, whereas here a lot of electricity is consumed in a short time. That’s how massive the [mandir and Akshardham] complex here is.” Swamishri said, “That’s true. We should definitely use it whenever required. But we should also make arrangements to minimize the present electricity consumption.”

■ On 25 September 2005 Swamishri was at Akshardham, New Delhi. Harshadbhai Chavda recalled, “At one time a cubic foot of marble was available for Rs. 12, and you had refused me to



buy it. Other varieties of stone were available for Rs. 9 per cubic feet. But nowadays, the price has shot up to Rs. 190 per cubic foot.”

Swamishri said, “Having lived in that period [of scarcity] how do I feel when something is misused or wasted?” Harshadbhai responded, “But Swami you adjust and get on well with the present generation. Whereas for me, when someone wastes something, I feel he is senseless.” Swamishri responded in a gentle tone, “Even when I see things being wasted I feel I’m unable to do anything about it. The reason being that you all are my hands and feet and doing the work. I can’t do things now, so if I keep telling you off the work will get spoilt. Previously, if someone refused to do any work, I would do it myself. But now things are different. My body doesn’t oblige. Sometimes one part gives trouble and then the other part takes over.”

The essence of all the incidents mentioned show us the need to abstain from splurging money and resources. Because many things are available so easily and in abundance today the general trend is to get new things and better versions. But one should learn to use things as long as they are functional and efficient rather than discarding them for new trends. Try to reflect upon this article yourself and with your family and decide about how to save your money and unnecessary expenses. It will be a great service to yourself, family, society and the Sanstha.

Save your wealth and resources. ◆





While other children cried at the farm Jhina sucked his toe quietly

## Yogiji Maharaj's Childhood in Dhari

*The newly inaugurated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Dhari  
features stone reliefs that transport one back  
in time and depict episodes from Yogiji Maharaj's childhood.*

*The stone reliefs embellish the jagati pith of the mandir.*

*A few incidents from his childhood years are presented in this article.*

**B**rahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj was born in the village of Dhari on 23 May 1892 (Vaishakh vadi 12, V.S. 1948). His childhood was extremely uncommon. Episodes from his childhood reveal that he was on a distinctly superior spiritual stratum. His childhood name was Jhinabhai. Like his mother, Puriba, his heart

too was filled with loving devotion for God. His father, Devchandbhai, had understood the greatness of Gunatitanand Swami from Jaga Swami, Balmukund Swami, Krishnacharandas Swami and other sadhus of Junagadh.

Jhinabhai, with his slightly darker skin, broad forehead, beautiful eyes, and head-to-toe

holiness, appeared like a great yogi right from his childhood. Eternally detached from this world, he spoke sparingly. A wellspring of love and compassion seamlessly flowed from his kind, soft eyes. He possessed long slender hands. The lines on the soles of his feet showed his spiritual ascendancy. A beatific smile forever beamed on his face.

Mother Puriba used to take Jhina along to the fields. Before proceeding for agricultural labour, she would lay Jhina down on a mat in the shade of a tree. The other women of the village also left their children there before going to pluck cotton-pods in the field. All the children cried loudly on not finding their mothers nearby. So, the owner of the field would get angry and scold the mothers, "Why do you bring your children to the field if they are prone to weeping?" This happened daily. Only Puriba was above such reproach since Jhina never cried. The field owner would respectfully stare at Jhina and tell Puriba, "Puriba, Jhina is a wonderful child. Just see, how he sucks the thumb of his right leg, as did Shri Krishna." He used to talk about Jhina to all and told Puriba, "Your child will indeed grow to become a great person. People will revere him and he will be dear to all."

Thus, an aura of greatness began to spread from Jhina's early childhood. Whoever looked at him, felt drawn towards him.

Once, after the day's labour in the field, Puriba and all the other women returned as usual to the place where they had left their children. Puriba was shocked to find Jhina missing. Tears rolled down Puriba's eyes and the other women also felt uneasy, fearing that a wild animal may have preyed upon Jhina. The owner of the field also came and tried to look for Jhina.

While they were running helter-skelter, Jhina was crawling quietly and slowly from the other end of the field. Finding him, all the women rushed to him. Puriba ran and lifted Jhina. Tears of joy welled up in her eyes. But Jhina was pointing his small finger towards a corner in the field,

as if hinting at something. So, all the women and the owner of the field walked to the spot which was uncultivated. They found some bales of cotton lying there. All of them realized that some thieves had run away without the cotton bales. The farm owner explained, "The thieves must have got the bales ready when we were on the other side of the field. But Jhina must have worked some miracle to make the thieves dash off without the bales."

The news of Jhina's miracle spread in the village. People found it incredible. Some thought, "Jhina must have shown a dreadful form to scare the thieves away."

Once, Jaga Swami, who was a blessed disciple of Gunatitanand Swami, had come to Dhari. Placing his hands over Jhina's head, Jaga Swami blessed this five-year-old devotee at that time. Also, Krishnacharandas Swami visited Dhari often to enlighten the devotees with the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam. He, too, always remembered Jhinabhai.

Jhina was above all childish pranks. Quiet by temperament, he would remain silent. Endowed with great personal charm, Jhina was fondly loved at home and by all the villagers. The only pastime he knew at school was to tell stories of spiritual worship and devotion to God to his classmates. Also, he used to take them to the Swaminarayan mandir for darshan. The young and old were enchanted by his intense devotion and tender heart.

Jhina, who was free from all boyish instincts, started school. Study was child's play for him. With his remarkable memory, he always stood first in class. Once, when he was barely seven, he climbed the neem tree near his house and tried to look far into the horizon. Kamalshibhai, his elder brother, asked him, "Jhina, what are you looking for perched atop the tree?" Jhina replied, "I can have darshan of Chhapaiya from here. You, too, can have it. Climb up the tree to be with me."



At Pataliyo Jharo Jhina inspired his friends to meditate

The headmaster beats Chandu and thereafter Jhina told the truth

Kamalshibhai had no reason to doubt what Jhina said, because even jokingly Jhina never told lies. So, he climbed up the tree out of curiosity and he too had the divine darshan.

Thus, the joy of self-realization and unflinching devotion to and worship of Sahajanand Swami was evident from his early childhood.

On the outskirts of Dhari is the confluence of three rivers – Shetrunji, Dhedhiyo and Nataliyo. A slender, zigzag rivulet from this water body, known as ‘Pataliyo Jharo’, flows boisterously and gracefully under a nearby bridge. Here, Jhina would bathe early in the morning and then sit rapt in deep meditation on the form of Shriji Maharaj. As he slipped into that posture, his face glowed like that of an ascetic. His friends, of the same age, felt wonderstruck at this.

During mealtimes, Jhina ate food mixed together with some water added to it. He ate *rotlo* with buttermilk, but he would not take milk. His mother would serve him milk much against his will. Jhina would never throw tantrums over food served to him. He would eat what was served without any fuss.

Though Jhinabhai was jovial by nature, he always kept a distance from material pleasures, weddings and other such worldly occasions. Once, Jhina had to visit Changadh with Puriba on the occasion of his elder brother, Kamalshibhai’s, engagement. As some ladies started singing obscene wedding songs, Jhina walked away to the nearby Ramji mandir to meditate.

When it was time for lunch at 12 noon, Puriba started looking for Jhina, but he could not be found anywhere in the neighbourhood. Even the other children did not know where he had gone. On inquiry a villager offered a tip, “There is a boy sitting at the Ramji mandir. He is clad in new clothes and wearing a topi. He does not belong to this village. It seems he has come with the guests.” When the in-laws of Kamalshibhai came, he refused to go with them. Then, on persuasion, he went back with them.

In his school in Dhari, everyone knew Jhina as a brilliant and amiable student. There was a school for girls in front of Jhina’s school in Dhari. So, his classmates would make fun of him, asking, “Jhina, would you like to marry an educated girl or an uneducated one?” But Jhina would not care to hear such words. If he unwittingly heard them, he would slap himself on the cheeks. He was averse to worldly pleasures from early childhood.

Once, Puriba told him, “Jhina, I deeply desire to get you married.” But Jhina rejected the idea outright. With utter dejection he said, “Mother, you have already spoilt my elder brother’s life. Now, why do you also think of spoiling my life by marrying me off?” Puriba wept copiously over Jhina’s reply.

The sadhus from Junagadh had established a small Swaminarayan mandir in Dhari. An aged devotee named Mohankaka used to offer his services as a *pujari* in this mandir. And at night, Jhina





During the school recess Jhina contemplated on God while his friends played

Jhina took up the responsibility of serving Thakorji

used to stay at the mandir. He also took a few of his friends along with him at night. He used to tell them, “One who reads his school lessons at the Swaminarayan mandir would never fail.”

Jhina used to get up at four o’clock in the morning and after his daily routine, he would wake his friends up to study. After the *arti*, he taught his friends to prostrate before the deities and chant the Swaminarayan mantra. His friends got bored with it, but Jhina was different. He was always happy in doing bhajan. He used to attend the evening *arti* religiously. Thus, the school and the mandir were the two favourite haunts of his childhood.

In his fifth standard, there was a student by the name of Chandu. One day, the principal, Tribhovandas, dashed Chandu to the ground and punched him for no fault of his. Jhinabhai, with his tender heart, could not bear the sight. He began to chant ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan’. Other students hurriedly left the place out of fear. But Jhina stood there. Since Chandu was severely beaten, he died after some time. Chandu’s parents lodged a complaint with the education authorities. So, they initiated an inquiry into it. But who would act as witness against the principal?

Sticking to the principle of truth and unafraid of the principal, Jhina spoke the truth. He told the inquiry officer, “Sir, the principal mercilessly beat Chandu for no fault of his.” Hearing this, other students got emboldened and they supported the statement of Jhina. Appreciating Jhina’s

boldness and sincerity, the education officer dismissed Tribhovandas. He appreciated Jhina’s devotion to truth and gave him a prize.

Dull-witted students in the class desired to write answers from Jhina’s answer sheets but Jhina would not allow them to do so. So, they used to threaten to beat him but Jhinabhai would simply tell them, “Try it yourself. If my answer is incorrect, you, too, will lose marks.” He found it grossly unfair if some students copied from the slates of other students, cleverly escaping the observation of the teacher. He believed that to cheat in an exam is equal to cheating God.

When Jhina was in the sixth standard, the principal, Naranbhai Umedbhai, appreciated Jhina for his brilliance. He told the students, “How clever is Jhina! I need not ask him any question. He is good at the maths tables while you commit several errors. You should be as studious as he is.”

Jhina’s only interests were study and worship. Even games did not interest him. However, his friends used to take him forcibly to play ‘khokho’. Every Friday was a day of feast and Jhina would share baked grams and sweets with his classmates.

Teachers of the school occasionally took the students to the neighbouring mango grove for picnics. The students would bring *rotla*, pickles and other snacks and share them with their classmates and the teachers. The boys then played games, and ambled across the place for fun. When it was time for lunch, Jhina would spread a piece

of cloth imprinted with the images of Sahajanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami and offer home-made snacks with reverence. Looking at him with surprise, the other students would also bring their lunch boxes to offer them to God. Jhina patiently and lovingly offered each box to the *murtis*. The teachers wondered how different Jhina was. On seeing Jhina engrossed in offering food to the *murtis*, they shared the feeling that Jhina had rare qualities and was cut out to be a great devotee in the future.

Jhina would learn whatever was worth learning. He was always curious to learn. He had a sweet voice and it was a pleasure to hear him sing, whether it was a poem or a devotional song. Whenever Jhina lent his voice to the poem, his classmates experienced a feeling of divinity.

Whenever other students engaged themselves in gossip with the teachers, Jhina would worship God in a corner. Looking at him intently, Naranbhai, the headmaster, often said, "I strongly feel that Jhina will grow up to be a staunch devotee."

Jhina had learnt the geometry theorems properly in his sixth standard as instructed by Naranbhai. In the exam, Jhina wrote them well. Durgashankar made a gesture at Jhina to help him, but Jhina was absorbed in writing and did not lift his eyes. So Durgashankar got irritated. Seated close to him was Manishankar Dayashankar. He took out a copy of the theorem to give it to Durgashankar, but he was caught red-handed by the inspector. So, Manishankar chewed the copy at once, as he would chew sugar crystals, and gulped it down. The deputy school inspector was Kanjibhai Purushottam. He instructed Durgashankar and Manishankar to sit on separate benches. Then, the inspector enquired with the headmaster about Jhina. Looking at Jhina, Naranbhai, the headmaster said, "He is very brilliant in studies and honest as well. He would not even think of cheating in the exam."

After the exam, Durgashankar was threatening Jhina. Just then, Naranbhai, the headmaster, happened to pass by. Finding Durgashankar quarrelling with Jhina, he shouted, "Who is harassing the Bhagat?" Then, Durgashankar and Manishankar ran away.

Simplicity and great contentment clung like jewels to the emaciated frame of Jhina. His simple dress code included a coarse Bagasara dhoti, a broad coat, a cotton topi, traditional footwear and a durable string tightened round the waist so that the dhoti would not get displaced. Jhina seemed not to belong to this world. When all other students played games during recess, Jhina sat quietly in a corner. His eyes reflected a far-away look, exploring the world beyond the endless sky. The teachers would nudge him to know the reason for his indifference, and asked him jokingly, "Jhina, why don't you join the order of sadhus, since you are so withdrawn and live an austere life?"

To that, Jhina gave only a laconic reply, "Indeed, I am all for it." So saying, his face would flash a cherubic smile.

In 1906 CE (V.S. 1962), a part of the Swaminarayan mandir in Dhari was extended, retaining the *murtis* and the pedestal. But the *murtis* were consecrated again by Swami Krishnacharandas. As stated earlier, Mohanbhai used to offer puja to the *murtis* and serve there. As his health deteriorated, it became more and more difficult for him to do puja. He expected somebody would take his place. Jhina was a good find for him. He talked to Jhina about it, and Jhina's joy knew no bounds. Also, he quite fitted the bill. For quite some time, Jhina had seemed uninterested in studies. As a result, Jhina, who used to top the class, stood seventh in the sixth standard. But he was more happy with the service of God he had very much dreamt of. And so, in a rush of great enthusiasm, he busied himself in serving God (Thakorji).

Jhina used to light up the incense stick and the lamp and then offer *arti* devoutly to the charming *murti* of Shriji Maharaj. Drawing water from the well, he would water the flower plants and grow creepers on the walls. He plucked flowers and made varied garlands for the *murtis*. He also offered food to Maharaj while singing the *thal* penned by Premanand Swami, “*Avināshi āvo re, jamvā Shri Krishna Hari...*” (“Welcome, Krishna Hari, the immortal, to savour the exotic food...”). This is how he spent the day.

Jhina was in the good books of Krishnacharandas Swami right from his younger days. Once, pleased with Jhinabhai’s service, unshakable faith and devotion to God at such a tender age, Swami asked, “Jhina, would you like to become a sadhu?” Jhina replied innocently, “Swami, it would be nice if you initiate me into the order. For quite some time I wanted to ask you about that. You have proposed what’s very much on my mind. After becoming a sadhu, I would like to serve you well. It would be kind of you if you take me along.”

Krishnacharandas Swami felt satisfied with the reply. He asked Kamalshibhai, Jhinabhai’s elder brother, to coax his parents to allow Jhina to become a sadhu. Kamalshibhai always honoured Swami’s instructions and began persuading his mother. Finally, she agreed, but asked Jhina to stay in Dhari for some more time. With no interest in domestic life, Jhinabhai now began to stay in the Swaminarayan mandir in Dhari. Sweetly oblivious of life around him, he threw himself headlong into worship. He strongly felt like rushing back to Junagadh to see Krishnacharandas Swami. He ate only one meal a day. Puriba used to go to the mandir with lunch for Jhina. He would eat quietly. He was very taciturn. In this way, a whole year rolled by.

Kamalshibhai now again persuaded Puriba, “I’ve promised Krishnacharandas Swami to send Jhina. Jhina, too, is uninterested in worldly life. So

pray, let us not displease him. Krishnacharandas Swami will also be much pleased. He had once told me, ‘Jhina is destined to become a sadhu and as a sadhu he would lend glory to sainthood.’” These words moved Puriba and her attachment to Jhina slowly dissolved. At last, with a heavy heart, she gave her consent. And with his mother’s assent Jhinabhai’s dispassionate heart immediately gladdened.

On 31 October 1908 (Kartik *sud* 6, Samvat 1965), Kamalshibhai brought Jhinabhai home from the mandir at night. Puriba embraced Jhinabhai and lovingly served him food. Respecting his mother’s wish, Jhina stayed overnight at home after a long time.

At daybreak on 1 November 1908 (Kartik *sud* 7, Samvat 1965), Puriba herself cooked *kansar*, a sweet dish cooked on auspicious occasions. Nanduba, his sister-in-law, served him *kansar*. Puriba also served him lovingly. Jhinabhai ate a little and washed his hands. Finally, the appointed hour arrived. Puriba and sister-in-law, Nanduba, put a vermilion mark on his forehead and bid him farewell with heavy hearts.

Kamalshibhai accompanied Jhinabhai upto Kunkavav where they would separate for good, severing all familial bonds. Hiding his pain and grief of separation, he advised Jhinabhai, “Brother, do an honour to the family and stand out as a sadhu. Shriji Maharaj is going to be with you all along.” Jhinabhai momentarily set his kindly eyes on his elder brother and then cast them down. In that steady gaze was the testimony of his pre-eminent saintliness. However, during those fleeting emotional moments, how could Kamalshibhai have understood that his brother Jhinabhai, in the years to come, would illumine the world with the sheer brilliance of his saintliness.



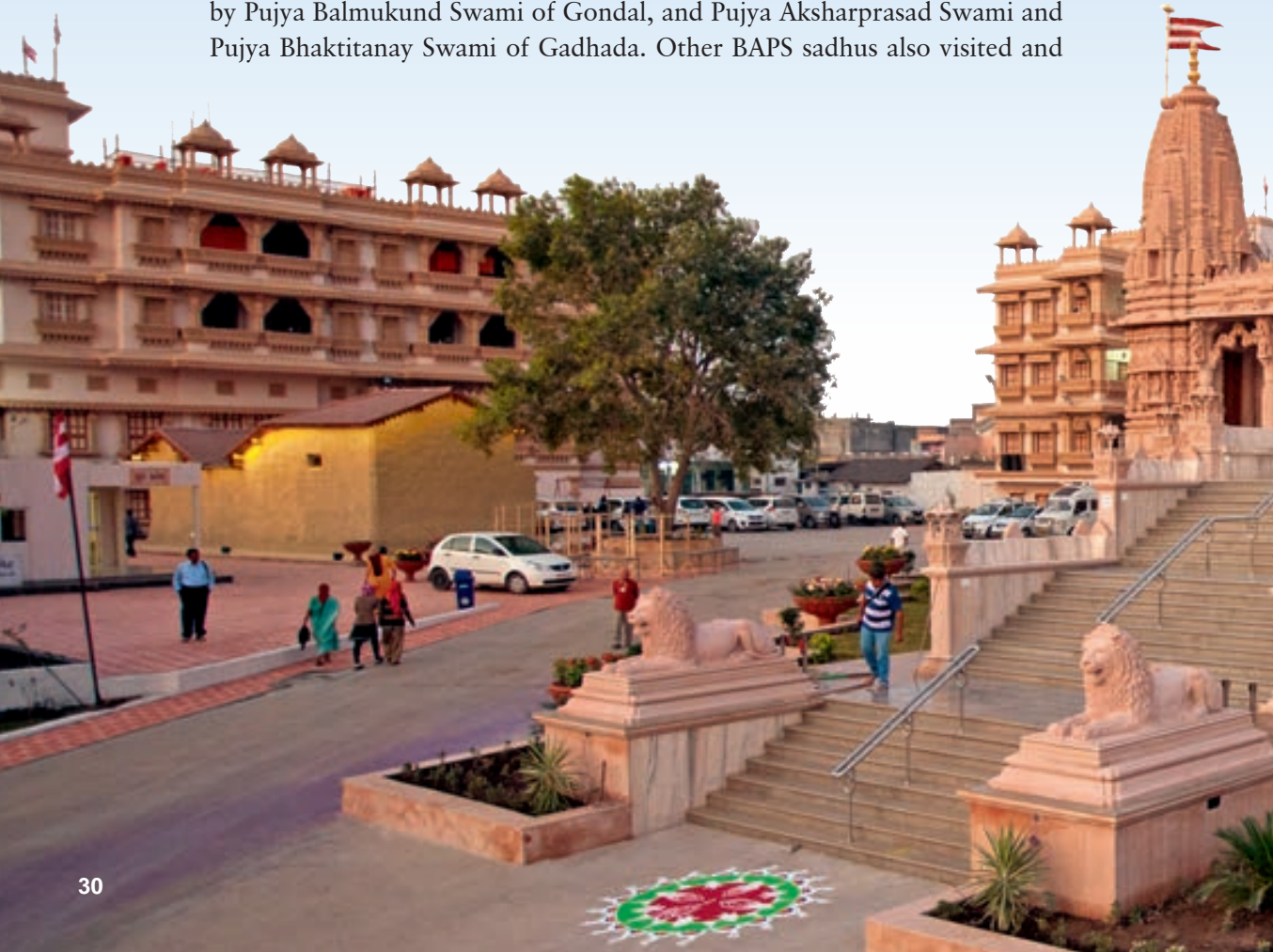
(Translated from Gujarati text  
written by Mohanlal Patel)



# MAKING OF MANDIR

*The story of how the shikharbaddh  
BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Dhari was made*

In 1965, the BAPS acquired the birthplace of Yogiji Maharaj in Dhari from Bhagwanjibhai Khatau. At that time it was in a dilapidated condition. A decision was made to demolish the crumbling house and build a small *hari* mandir instead. Thus in 1971, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the ground-breaking ceremony for the proposed *hari* mandir. The two-story *hari* mandir was ready by 1973. Thereafter, on 23 October 1975, Pramukh Swami Maharaj held a *yagna* and performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the canvas *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Guru Parampara. In the subsequent years the satsang in Dhari was nourished at Swamishri's behest by Pujya Balmukund Swami of Gondal, and Pujya Aksharprasad Swami and Pujya Bhaktitanay Swami of Gadhada. Other BAPS sadhus also visited and



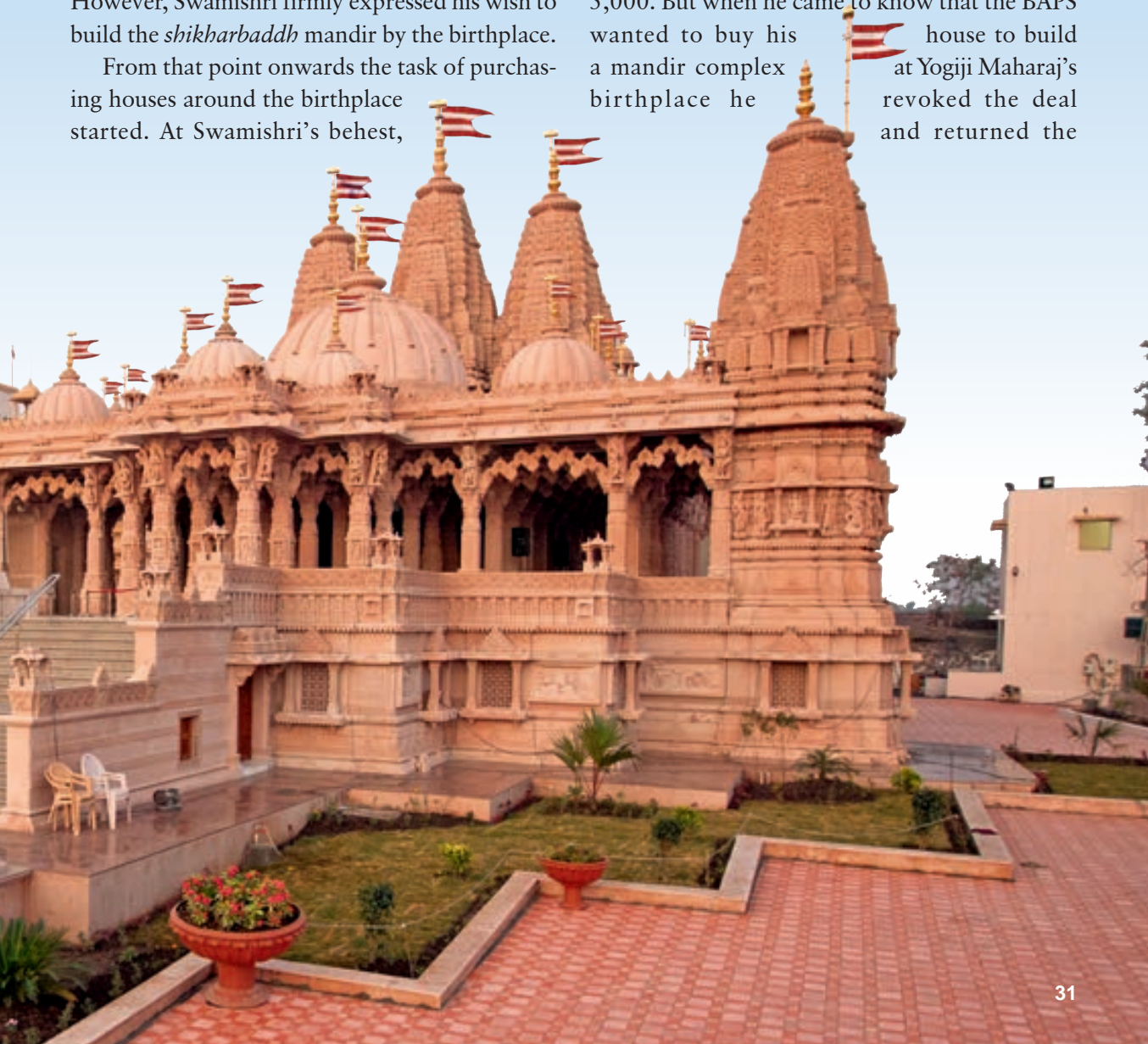
nurtured the satsang in Dhari. With the growth of satsang, Swamishri consecrated the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purshottam Maharaj on 13 April 2003.

Thereafter, Swamishri discussed with and instructed Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and the sadhus visiting Dhari about building a *shikharbaddh* mandir by the birthplace of Yogiji Maharaj. The principal obstacles for building the *shikharbaddh* mandir were the confined birthplace area and the heavy cluster of residential homes around it. So the sadhus suggested to Swamishri to build the mandir somewhere other than the birthplace. However, Swamishri firmly expressed his wish to build the *shikharbaddh* mandir by the birthplace.

From that point onwards the task of purchasing houses around the birthplace started. At Swamishri's behest,

Kothari Jnanprasad Swami of Gondal, Kothari Adhyatmaswarup Swami of Gadhada, other sadhus and the local devotees endeavoured exhaustively in acquiring the houses. Initially everyone felt that the owners would not sell their houses, but with Swamishri's divine wish, one by one, they agreed and the Sanstha acquired 42 houses around the birthplace. Some owners donated their homes free of cost while others sold them below the market price.

Nikeshbhai, a well-wisher in Rajkot, had made a verbal deal of selling his maternal grandmother's house to his relative at an initial payment of Rs 5,000. But when he came to know that the BAPS wanted to buy his house to build a mandir complex at Yogiji Maharaj's birthplace he revoked the deal and returned the







1



2



3



4

In 1958, Puja Mahant Swami, Puja Ishwarcharan Swami and others had visited and observed the birthplace of Yogiji Maharaj for the first time. Then around 1961-65 Ishwarcharan Swami measured the size of the house, got it photographed and noted all the details (see 2). In 1971-72 he had a model of the house made from the recorded details and photographs. The model was kept by Keshavlalbhay V. Thosani. In 1975 Bhagwanjibhai Khatau of Rajkot bought the model and donated it to the BAPS.

The original house by then had decayed, so in 1975 Pramukh Swami Maharaj had a *hari* mandir constructed on the same spot and consecrated it (see 3-4). Then, about a couple of decades later, Swamishri decided to build a *shikharbaddh* mandir. At that time the surrounding area of the birthplace was heavily congested due to the narrow lanes and confined houses (see 1. The birthplace and surrounding houses seen on a Google Map obtained on 6 November 2002). With Swamishri's efforts and inspiration 42 houses around the birthplace were acquired by BAPS for building the *shikharbaddh* mandir and complex.

Over the course of Swamishri's *vicharan* in the last four decades he has visited Dhari 22 times. He made great efforts in building the landmark mandir – a tribute to his guru, Yogiji Maharaj.

In accordance to Swamishri's wish the new religious complex comprises of the *shikharbaddh* mandir, newly constructed birthplace, guesthouse, assembly hall and residential quarters for sadhus (Yogi Ashram). The birthplace house has a shrine with a replica of Shriji Maharaj's footprints and canvas *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.



money to his relative, and donated the house to the Sanstha.

Yogiji Maharaj's family members, Jitubhai and Bhikhubhai Vasani, gave their home for free for the mandir project and they rented a house to live in.

After the Sanstha purchased another house from a landlord the residing tenants said they would only vacate it if the Sanstha gave them another house to stay. When Ghanshyambhai and Pankajbhai Vaghela came to know of this they donated their house to the tenants.

There was a Vaishnav *haveli* adjacent to the birthplace. The devotees of the *haveli* sold it to the Sanstha.

Thus, many wellwishers and devotees supported the BAPS in building the *shikharbaddh* mandir. As a result about 6,700 sq. m. of land was acquired. The next phase of the mandir project comprised of levelling the land and drafting plans for the five-pinnacled mandir. The latter task was given to Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, who guided the Sanstha's Planning Cell to prepare the plans. The plans were made under the expertise of Pujya Akshaymuni Swami and Sanjaybhai Parikh.

On 17 October 2010, at the instructions of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Sanstha's senior sadhus, Pujya Mahant Swami and others, performed the foundation-stone laying ceremony for the *shikharbaddh* mandir. Thereafter, along with the construction of the mandir the reconstruction of the house on the birthplace began. The plans for the birthplace were drawn according to the inputs given by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

The town of Dhari is located on high ground, thus to make the mandir strong its foundations had to be deep – about 22 feet. During the excavation for the foundation pit 2,500 trolley-loads of soil was unearthed. The challenge of transporting the soil from the mandir precincts to another site was harrowing because of the narrow lanes. The 10-12 feet wide lanes closely hemmed by

houses and shops could not be used during the day. Thus the tractors and trucks transporting the soil away or bringing in the construction materials plied during the night. Devotees and well-wishers helped out at night in transporting the soil away from the birthplace.

To consolidate the foundations it was decided to pour concrete for 20 feet and use 2,500 trolley-loads of sand. This task was also accomplished over many nights with the help of devotees and well-wishers.

On 11 November 2011, the construction of the main mandir commenced. Each day several trucks transported materials through the narrow lanes of Dhari. Sometimes when truckloads of stones from Rajasthan arrived on the outskirts of the town the Vohra Muslim brothers, Alibhai, Fakruddin and others, helped out by leading them to the mandir site. Even other people helped out in adverse circumstances and incidents.

Once, a truck with the mandir stones and materials arrived in Dhari. While on its way to the mandir site the truck's upper part inadvertently hit the signboard of a shop. With the board damaged the shopkeeper angrily demanded a compensation of Rs. 1,400 from the truck driver. When news of what had happened reached the mandir site, someone from the mandir arrived at the scene and started explaining to the shopkeeper, "The mandir will pay you for the signboard." The shopkeeper calmed down and refused to take compensation from the mandir and added, "Consider the Rs. 1,400 as my *seva* for the mandir."

Many residents of Dhari came for doing *seva* at the mandir construction site, regardless of their caste or creed. Children and youths of the Vohra Muslim community came to do *seva*. Along with their financial contributions, devotees also performed severe physical *seva* at the mandir site.

To facilitate the speed of mandir construction a large crane was required. Normally, a gantry crane or other types of crane are used at the



BAPS mandir construction sites. In this case the Sanstha's engineers were bewildered as to which type of crane to use. The first challenge was how to transport a crane to the mandir site through the narrow lanes. The second issue was about the size of the crane, which would have to be 100 ft. high in order to build a mandir 84 ft. high and 144 ft. long. After much debate and discussion the sadhus and volunteers decided to assemble on site an old crane purchased by the Ajmera family from the French Potaine Company in 1972. The parts of the crane were transported from Nagpur to Dhari. Then Brahmaseva Swami, Yogikishore Swami, Yogeshbhai Dhinoja and Babubhai (devotees of Mumbai) and the *yuvak mandal* of Dhari collaborated in building the crane. The team persevered for many days and nights, making many parts of the crane. With Swamishri's blessings and the efforts of the team a 100-foot high crane with a boom 135 feet long was constructed on site. If a crane of such size was purchased it would have cost Rs. 1.5 million and many hundred thousand rupees to transport it to the site. However the crane was made through voluntary efforts.

Many devotees performed honorary services for the mandir construction project. A mobile tea stall owner, Balabhai Bharvad, would daily close his business at 10 p.m. and head to the mandir site for *seva*. After his *seva* till late night he would return home and have his meal with his family. The next day he would open his tea stall at 5.30 a.m. Balabhai toiled hard to offer *seva* at the mandir site. The electrical fixtures in the mandir were fixed by a team of 25 *satsangi* youths.

The mandir construction project also provided livelihoods to the poor. They were employed for polishing stones and mandir parts and other labour work. Many poor families were sustained at the site through a drought for one year.

On 8 February 2015 an assembly to felicitate all those who had participated in the mandir construction was held in Dhari in the



### SWAMISHRI'S RESPECT AND LOVE FOR ALL

Swamishri's spirit of respect and brotherhood for people of all religions, denominations and castes have endeared him globally. The Vohra Muslim community of Dhari have always honoured Swamishri during his visits to Dhari and sought his blessings. In the above photographs taken in 2003 the mutual love and respect is amply evident.

Out of respect for Swamishri the Vohra Muslim youths, women and children offered physical *seva* during the mandir construction. They also participated in the *pratishtha nagar-yatra* by playing their music band to honour the event.

presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami.

### COMMON DEVOTEES' EXTRAORDINARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Many devotees of ordinary means had contributed substantial amounts of money and time for the mandir project.

Some cases mentioned here will throw light on their sacrifices and spirit of service. Devotees donated their gold jewellery during the ritual placing of gold in the seat of the *murtis* in the sanctum-sanctorum.

Kiritbhai, a tailor by profession, lives in a small room which he utilizes both as a house and shop. He has a sewing machine, but he has very little work due to the economic crisis. In spite of this his spiritual faith is robust. His wife offers her services for the mandir construction. Once, the ritual ceremony for Thakorji's pedestal was going on in the mandir. Kiritbhai's wife donated all the jewellery she was wearing to Thakorji. Likewise, Gaurangbhai's mother, Nimuben Keshur, and

Jayesh Paghdale donated their jewellery.

An event to honour the little *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was arranged in Dhari. Prior to that the *murti* was taken to sanctify the homes of 350 devotees and well-wishers. During the *padhramanis* the devotees donated according to their means.

Hetalben Rangadiya of Bagasara donated all her jewellery for the mandir project. In addition to her sacrifice she decided to permit her youngest son to become a sadhu at Swamishri's hands.

Under the auspices of the mandir project many devotees had observed various austerities and performed other spiritual sadhanas. Some observed *dharna-parna* (fasts on alternate days) and *ektana* (eating only one meal daily). Many more abstained from eating favourite foods and cut down on their daily needs to lead a frugal life. Women devotees, too, observed *niyams* like doing *mala*, *pradakshina* and bhajan. Some women devotees had abstained from eating sweet items and ice-cream for the last four years till the opening of the mandir.



Thus, the mandir was accomplished with the spirit of sacrifice, *seva* and austerities of hundreds of devotees.

## ENTHUSIASM FOR THE MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV

The climax of the mandir project arrived – the Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav – from 9 to 11 February 2015. Not only were the devotees of Dhari and neighbouring towns exuberant about it, but the people of Dhari were avid to help and participate in whatever way they could. A week before the festival, Dhari was transformed and decorated as for a Diwali celebration. All well-wishers decorated the facades of their shops, homes, offices, schools and lanes with buntings, festoons of lights and welcoming banners and billboards.

An ordinary resident decorated his own cycle-repair kiosk with a banner and lights to celebrate the Mandir Mahotsav. Every evening he would switch on the lights. One night, when someone stole the light, he bought and fixed another set outside his cabin. Such was the enthusiasm to welcome and honour the event.

People of diverse statuses, religions and classes had also united to make the *murti-pratishtha* event into a grand celebration. On 8 February 2015, the day prior to the three-day Mahotsav, everyone in town participated in cleaning up the streets and lanes of Dhari. Their efforts exemplified the mantras of cleanliness and selfless service.

Balabhai Bharvad had planned to hold his daughter's marriage in his community's mass-marriage event. However, on learning that the marriage date fell on the *pratishtha mahotsav* he cancelled it so that he could do *seva*. Many opposed his decision, but Balabhai remained firm. There were many families who had postponed their social occasions in favour of doing *seva* for the Mandir Mahotsav.

The three-day mandir inauguration ceremonies

were going to attract thousands of devotees and volunteers from outside Dhari. To provide lodgings for them all the different communities in Dhari had decided not to rent their halls and facilities for marriages and other purposes. They even announced this decision to their community members.

Hundreds of devotees and well-wishers of Dhari also hosted sadhus and devotees at their homes during the Mandir Mahotsav. Vipulbhai Kabariya fast-tracked the construction of several unfinished homes at his Lion's Den Resort to provide accommodation to sadhus and devotees.

Parasbhai, owner of a popular sweetmart, gave his newly built house for accommodation despite the ritual of *vastu puja* still remaining to be done. The *mahants* of popular pilgrim places like Tulsishyam, Satadhar and the Chalala seat reserved their ashrams and guesthouses for devotees.

In all, 350 houses, dharmashalas, guesthouses and a resort were offered as lodgings for volunteers, sadhus and devotees. The land on which the *yagna* and stage programmes were held was also given free of cost. Many farmers sacrificed their crops to provide land for the Mandir Mahotsav venue.

## SWAMISHRI'S DIVINE BLESSINGS

During the mandir construction project many challenging and strange situations arose.

One day, the 100-ft high crane was in operation at the mandir site. The 135-ft long boom, attached to the crane by a thick iron rope, was lifting and lowering stones on site. Suddenly one of the bolts joining the boom with the iron rope got loose and fell off. No one knew that this had happened. Normally in such a situation the boom would have crashed to the ground and caused human casualties and damage to the mandir. But at that time a sadhu climbed up the crane to observe the mandir design. He suddenly noticed the missing bolt. Immediately, he informed everyone and

the crane was shut down for repairs. Everyone wondered how the crane had remained functional and who had inspired the sadhu to climb the crane at that time? Everyone felt it was Swamishri's divine intervention.

On another day, a woman hawker came to the mandir site at 5.30 a.m. with her cart of vegetables. Since it was pre-dawn there was no one on site. Then to her surprise she heard the sounds of a drum and bell in the mandir. She wondered that, since the mandir was incomplete and the consecration ceremony had not been done, where were the sounds coming from? The lady came inside and circumambulated the site and still she heard the sounds of a drum and bell. Then a few days later she told some devotees about her strange experience. Everyone was surprised and puzzled as to who could have been playing the drum and ringing the bell.

A large makeshift canopy had been set up at the construction site. Under its shade 400 artisans sculpted and polished the stones. None of the artisans took a day off during the height of the construction work. However, once, on the day of *amas* (no-moon), a day off was declared at the request of the artisans. Surprisingly, on that day the large canopy and the wooden support poles crashed to the ground. If it had happened on a working day there would have been a grave calamity. Everyone wondered about the lucky escape and felt that Pramukh Swami Maharaj was divinely protecting them all.

The story of the mandir construction and the voluntary efforts of devotees and the local people is inspiring and heartening. In a little over three years the *shikharbaddh* mandir was ready for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremonies. ♦

## VOLUNTEERS INVOLVED IN MANDIR CONSTRUCTION AND FESTIVAL SEVA

### Land Acquisition and Construction Services

Jnanprasad Swami, Adhyatmaswarup Swami, Popatbhai Sudani, Bhikhabhai Vala, Dr. A. Jasani, Late Arunbhai Sanghrajka, Bhaskarbhai Butte, Dineshbhai Vaghela, Jitubhai Vasani, Pravinbhai Dhakan, Kalubhai Baldha, Mehulbhai Mehta.

### Planning and Construction

Ishwarcharan Swami, Akshaymuni Swami, Yogikishore Swami, Yatiraj Swami (Electricity & Water).

### Satsang Activities

Bhaktitanay Swami, Aksharnayan Swami, Sadhu-charit Swami, Uttamcharan Swami, Dinbandhu Swami (Kothari).

### Principal Sponsors of Mandir

Kumarbhai Pujara (Dar-es-Salaam))  
Bhavesbhai Kannabar (Mombasa)  
Hasmukhbhai Patel (New York) and others.

### Mandir Construction Volunteers

Sanjaybhai Parikh (Chief Engineer), Devdattbhai

Sompura (Architect), Bhadrayu Vyasa (Services Design), Manish Doshi (Structural Work).

### Stone-Sculpting Work

Narendra Chauhan, Rakesh Patel, Rajesh Patel, Prahladbhai Sompura.

### Site Engineers

Ajagiya Saheb, Pratapbhai Bhatt, Amar Bharat, Vipulbhai, Haribhai Vadodariya, Chandrakantbhai.

### Festival Leaders and Volunteers

Jnaneshwar Swami, Narayanmuni Swami, Nikhilesh Swami, Yagnapriya Swami, Rushiraj Swami, Adhyatmaswarup Swami, Brahmatirth Swami, Ghanshyamprasad Swami, Rajeshbhai Gandhi (Satsang Activity Sanyojak), Dineshbhai Vaghela (Satsang Activity Nirdeshak), Dhirubhai Rangadiya (Satsang Activity Nirdeshak), Vallabhbhai Jodhani (Children's Activity Nirdeshak), Bharatbhai Vala (Women's Activity Sanyojak), and leading devotees of Dhari and 3,000 male and female BAPS volunteers.

# MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV

9-11 February 2015, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Dhari



Swamishri performs *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for Dhari mandir, 15 December 2014, Sarangpur

The newly built traditional *shikharbaddh* mandir in Dhari, the birthplace of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, is the culmination of many years of effort inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In Sarangpur, on 15 December 2014, Swamishri performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir. And everything was set for the grand 3-day inaugural celebrations.

The new mandir in Dhari is situated adjacent to Yogiji Maharaj's birthplace on a relatively small plot amid the crowded town bazaar. So, to cater for the thousands of devotees from India and abroad expected for the celebrations, arrangements for the *yagna*, a marquee to hold assemblies and parking facilities were made on about 20 acres of land provided for use



by nine well-wishers. Over a period of one month the farm land was transformed into the ‘Yogiji Maharaj Nagar’, with all the necessary facilities for the various celebratory rituals and events. In addition, the whole of Dhari was decorated with colourful gates and festoons.

**9 FEBRUARY 2015**

### **Prasad Pravesch and Birthplace Inauguration**

At 9.00 a.m., Puja Mahant Swami, Puja Ishwarcharan Swami, Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami, and other sadhus and *yajmans* performed the Prasad Pravesch rituals, signifying the official initial entry into the newly completed mandir.

Then, at the birthplace of Yogiji Maharaj adjacent to the new mandir, Puja Mahant Swami consecrated the painted *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, and the marble footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. At the end, Ishwarcharan Swami and Mahant Swami addressed the devotees by describing their experiences with Yogiji Maharaj.

### **Sacred Footprints at Yogi Ghat**

The whole of Dhari town is a witness to the childhood incidents of Yogiji Maharaj. Even the town’s mandirs, streets, school and river, echo with the divine liberating memories of Jhina Bhagat. One of these places is Pataliyo Jharo, where the triple confluence of the Shetrunji, Dedhiyo and Nataliyo rivers takes place. Here, every morning, Jhina Bhagat used to sit in meditation.

At this place BAPS has prepared the Yogi Ghat, where a small decorative memorial has been erected.

Here, Puja Mahant Swami and other *sadguru* sadhus consecrated the marble footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

### **Women’s Assembly**

At 5.30 p.m., over 7,000 women devotees attended the special Women’s Assembly. The spiritually inspiring programme included dances, skits, speeches, videos and a question-answer session.

During the construction of the mandir and the 3-day celebrations, women devotees devoutly contributed in many significant ways (for further details see *Premvati*, March-April 2015).



### **THE MANDIR IN FIGURES**

Land Area: 6,700 m<sup>2</sup>

Stone: 45,000 cu.ft.

Length: 198'7"

Width: 158'

Height: 80'10"

Shikhars: 7

Ghummat-Ghummat: 41

Carved Pillars: 204

Arches: 108

Murti Sculptures: 539

Craftsmen: 900

Total Man-days: 1,050,000

Pradakshina Length: 1,334 ft.

Jagati Pith: 12.3 ft.

Main Stairs: 25 ft.

Podium: 44 x 65 ft.

Pad Total: 11 down, 16 across



1. Senior sadhus perform *arti* during the inauguration of Yogiji Maharaj's birthplace 2. Senior sadhus and devotees perform the inauguration *arti* at Yogi Ghat 3. 2,646 *yajmans* perform Vedic rituals in the Yagna for World Peace 4. Shri Vakil Bapu addresses the Vishwashanti Mahayagna assembly

## 10 FEBRUARY 2015 Yagna for World Peace

In the mild early morning chill, thousands of devotees from Dhari and the surrounding regions enthusiastically arrived to participate in the Vishwashanti Mahayagna (Yagna for World Peace).

At the festival venue of Yogiji Maharaj Nagar, a large 345 x 180 ft. marquee had been erected for the *yagna*. On the main stage and floor were nine and 159 *yagna kunds* respectively. Also, the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir had been arranged on the stage for worship during the *yagna*.

The *yagna* commenced at 7.30 a.m. in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Dr Swami and senior sadhus. The presiding Brahmins fervently chanted the Vedic mantras as the senior sadhus performed the initial rituals, as well as *pujan* and

*arti* of the *murtis*. Also, gracing this auspicious occasion was Pujya Shri Vakil Bapu, respected mahant of the Chalala Gadi. He addressed the gathering, "Many years ago, when Yogiji Maharaj used to visit Chalala, I had the privilege of serving him. Today, a great work has been achieved. Previously, the region of Saurashtra was afflicted with superstitious beliefs, addictions and feuds. At that time, Sahajanand Swami had pacified people's inflamed hearts. Today, his work continues through places like this. I pray that we all continue to receive the blessings of Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami." Then, after Mahant Swami's blessings all the sadhus departed and the participating couples took their places around the *yagna kunds* on the main stage. Chief *purohit* Shri Mukeshbhai Shastri, and the team of Brahmins then chanted the Vedic mantras and guided the





Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Dr Swami and other sadguru sadhus perform the initial *yagna* rituals on the main stage

couples through the *yagna* rituals. A total of 2,646 couples participated in the *yagna*. In addition, thousands of devotees also attended for darshan of the sacred *yagna*.

### Nagar-yatra

In the afternoon, at 3.30 p.m., the *murtis* to be consecrated were paraded in a grand *nagar-yatra* through the streets of Dhari, during which they blessed the town with their divine gaze. The *nagar-yatra* began at the new bus stand, where senior sadhus and the town *sarpanch* Shri Jitubhai Joshi, and other dignitaries performed *pujan* of Thakorji and flagged off the procession as well as released balloons into the sky.

The main attractions of the *nagar-yatra* were the *murtis* on the decorated *raths* (chariots):

- Mayur (Peacock) Rath with the *murtis* of

Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

- Mayur Rath with the *murtis* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and Shri Nilkanth Varni.
- Nauka (Boat) Rath with the *murti* of Shri Bhagatji Maharaj.
- Sinh (Lion) Rath with the *murti* of Shri Shastriji Maharaj.
- Hansa (Swan) Rath with the *murti* of Shri Yogiji Maharaj.
- Gaj (Elephant) Rath with the *murti* of Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- Padma (Lotus) Rath with the *murtis* of Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatji.

The *raths* were devoutly and joyously pulled throughout the *nagar-yatra* by sadhus and devotees. Also, the *nagar-yatra* included:

- Youths walking with the *murti-pratishtha*





1



2



3



4

1. Murti of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj on the Mayur Rath 2. Murti of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the Gaj Rath 3. Taiyabi Scout Daudi Vohra Jhamat Band 4. Murtis of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj on the Mayur Rath followed by sadhus

banner at the front.

- Youths waving BAPS flags.
- Youths carrying Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a palanquin.
- Youths on motorcycles.
- Bike rider with a tower of *kalashes* balanced on his head.
- Youth as a dancing camel (*sandhani*).
- Youths displaying sword skills.
- Youths mounted on horses.
- Gondal *gurukul balaks* playing *ras*.
- *Balaks* of Dhari school dancing.
- Sadhus seated on a buggy and decorated tractors, and walking.
- Groups of devotees walking.
- Youths waving BAPS flags.
- Youths holding banners and placards with inspiring messages of de-addiction and

universal values.

- Sadhus singing bhajans.
- Pramukh Band from Khandesh (Maharashtra)
- Youths of Junagadh, Tajpar and Chikhli dancing *ras*.
- Tribal youths of Dahod-Limkheda in their traditional attire, with bows and arrows.
- Tribal youths of Poshina playing drums in their traditional style.
- One of the special features of the *nagar-yatra* was the participation of Muslim youths of the Taiyabi Scout Daudi Vohra Jhamat Bands from Dhari and Bhavnagar. It demonstrated the goodwill they have for the Hindu community. There were also Muslim youths performing African-style dances.

The women's section of the *nagar-yatra* included:



1. A scene from the evening 'Yogi Charitam' cultural programme 2. Youths perform a dance during the evening presentation

- *Yuvatis* walking with the *murti-pratishtha* banner.
- *Yuvatis* wearing *murti-pratishtha* sashes and waving BAPS flags.
- *Balikas* carrying *kalashes* on their heads in traditional style.
- Women devotees carrying decorated water pots on their heads in traditional style.
- *Yuvatis* dancing in traditional costumes.
- Women dancing with water pots on their heads.
- Women singing *dhun* and bhajans on a decorated tractor.
- *Balikas* and women carrying shastras on their heads.
- Student girls performing lasim dance.
- *Yuvatis* in BAPS dress, walking and carrying various pictures of Yogiji Maharaj.

- Groups of women walking while singing *dhun* and bhajan.

The entire *nagar-yatra*, from front to back stretched for over a kilometre.

Thousands of local residents came out along the route to enjoy and welcome the colourful, decorative and musical *nagar-yatra*.

Throughout the 4-km route, businessmen and other residents welcomed and honoured the *nagar-yatra* by displaying banners and showering flowers.

At the Yogiji Maharaj Nagar Chowk, a dais was prepared from where the senior sadhus had darshan of the *nagar-yatra* and greeted the 500 BAPS sadhus from various centres who had come for the celebrations.

The *nagar-yatra* concluded at the mandir at 6.00 p.m.





1. Pujya Mahant Swami performs *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj 2. Pujya Kothari Swami performs *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj 3. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performs *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Yogiji Maharaj 4. Pujya Dr Swami performs *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Nilkanth Varni

## Cultural Programme

In the evening assembly, in Yogiji Maharaj Nagar, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's beloved Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was carried onto the stage in a wonderfully decorated palanquin by joyfully dancing and singing youths. The senior sadhus welcomed and honoured Shri Harikrishna Maharaj onto the stage and performed *pujan*. Then they garlanded the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and performed *arti*.

Then, at 8.00 p.m., a special dance-drama presentation depicting the inspiring life, work and messages of Yogiji Maharaj written and directed by Brahmaprakash Swami was performed by over 200 BAPS youths of Bhavnagar, Surat and Ahmedabad on the 75 x 45 ft. stage.

The cultural programme, entitled 'Yogi Charitam', was presented in the form of a

narrative by a bard in typical Sorathi style, with performances of dances and skits in accordance with the stories described. Videos of Yogiji Maharaj were included in the storyline, which enhanced everyone's enjoyment of the programme. The presentation highlighted Yogiji Maharaj's exemplary service of God and guru, spiritual enthusiasm and devotion to God.

The programme also featured a video of Yogiji Maharaj singing '*Hāji bhalā sādhu...*' and Pramukh Swami Maharaj explaining the bhajan.

The programme concluded with a video-speech by Ishwarcharan Swami, who served for many years as Yogiji Maharaj's personal attendant.

Over 10,000 devotees watched the programme.



11 FEBRUARY

## Murti-Pratishtha Ceremony

Maha vad 7, Samvat 2071. At 6.15 a.m., the senior sadhus performed *abhishek* of the *murtis*. Then at 7.45 a.m., they performed the Vedic inauguration rituals at the main gate of the mandir and *pujan* of the two sculpted stone lions on either side of the front staircase.

At 8.00 a.m., the *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* began with Puja Mahant Swami, Puja Bhaktipriya Swami and Puja Ishwarcharan Swami seated under the main mandir dome, and Puja Dr Swami, Puja Tyagvallabh Swami, Puja Viveksagar Swami and Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami seated in the *abhishek mandap*. The rituals were performed in the presence of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj to whom Yogiji Maharaj had personally offered devout service for many years and to whom Pramukh Swami Maharaj continues to offer service and devotion.

Also under the main dome were devotees who had made special contributions to the building of the mandir.

At 8.44 a.m., the doors of the *garbhagruha* were opened and the senior sadhus entered the sanctums to perform the final *pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* to which Pramukh Swami Maharaj had consecrated in Sarangpur on 15 December 2014.

Central shrine – Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj: Mahant Swami, right-hand shrine – Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj: Bhaktipriya Swami, and left-hand shrine – Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj: Ishwarcharan Swami. In the Abhishek Mandap – Shri Nilkanth Varni: Dr Swami, Guru Parampara: Tyagvallabh Swami, Viveksagar Swami and Ghanshyamcharan Swami.

At 8.47 a.m., the *angnyas* rituals were performed. Then, at 9.01 a.m., mirrors were held before the *murtis* to receive their first gaze. At this time, the entire campus echoed with the *jai naad*. Thereafter, on behalf of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami performed *pujan* of all the consecrated *murtis*. Afterwards, an *annakut*

was arranged before the *murtis* in each shrine and the first *arti* was performed.

At the conclusion of the rituals, the senior sadhus arrived on the mandir podium to release balloons carrying Yogiji Maharaj's messages. Then, all went to the assembly marquee in Yogiji Maharaj Nagar, where thousands of devotees had witnessed the live relay of the *murti-pratishtha* rituals.

## Murti-Pratishtha Assembly

The backdrop for the stage was a large mandir replica. In the *jarukhas* (windows) to both sides were model lions, representing the valour and glory of the Sorath region in which Dhari is located. At the centre, on a high pedestal, were the *utsav murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and beneath them was the *murti* of Yogiji Maharaj.

In the middle of the stage was the life-size seated *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and to both sides sat the *sadguru* sadhus and stage guests. The guests included: Puja Vijay Bapu (Junior Mahant, Satadhar), Shri Purushottambhai

### 'BHAGWAN BHAJI LEVA' BHAKTI YAGNA

On the occasion of the Dhari mandir *murti-pratishtha*, in Yogiji Maharaj Nagar, sadhus and devotees continuously performed various devotional activities between 5 and 9 February. Titled 'Bhagwan Bhaji Leva,' the following activities were performed:

- 8,313 *malas*
- 897,804 Swaminarayan Mahamantras recited
- 12,729 *sashtang dandvats* (prostrations) offered
- 21,088 *pradakshinas*
- 20,788 Swaminarayan mantras written
- 284 Janmangal Namavali recitals
- 1,990 pages of scriptures read.

Mahant Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and other sadhus also joined in these devotional activities.

Rupala (State Vice-President, BJP), Shri Nalinbhai Kotadia (MLA, Dhari), Shri Mansukhbhai Bhuvu (Former MLA, Dhari), Shri Justice Dholakia (Former Chief Justice, Gujarat), Shri Jitubhai Joshi (Sarpanch, Dhari) and others.

The *murti-pratishtha* assembly began at 10.00 a.m. Following *dhun* and bhajans, Brahmadarshan Swami spoke about the glory, importance and necessity of mandirs. He said that mandirs were centres from where social services were conducted and were also centres for instilling character and faith in people. Yogiji Maharaj established the children and youth activities to constructively guide youngsters to lead noble lives. The *sadguru* sadhus seated on stage are the products of Yogiji Maharaj's youth activities.

Then, Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Viveksagar Swami and Bhaktipriya Swami each recalled some of their memories with Yogiji Maharaj.

Following this, the *sarpanch* of Dhari, Shri Jitubhai Joshi, honoured the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the *sadguru* sadhus in appreciation for the grand mandir gifted to Dhari. Then, Mahant Swami honoured all the guests on behalf of BAPS and presented a donation to the *sarpanch* for the development of Dhari.

In 1952 Yogiji Maharaj established the *bal mandal* and in 1954 he established the *yuvak mandal*. Today, the BAPS children's activities are among the world's largest character-building activities, and have received government awards. The first *sanchalak* appointed by Yogiji Maharaj for the *bal* and *yuvak mandals* was Ishwarcharan Swami. He also served as Yogiji Maharaj's personal *sevak* and among his many present responsibilities he oversees the BAPS *bal*, *yuvak* and *satsang* activities. He addressed the assembly, recalling Yogiji

Maharaj's special personality which touched everyone's heart.

Thereafter, Shri Dholakia, addressed the assembly, "When I was studying in Standard 7 or 8, I received Yogiji Maharaj's *dhabho* (pat) on my back and his blessings. To this day, I have benefited from his blessings and will continue to do so. Also, Pramukh Swami Maharaj is Yogiji Maharaj's *swarup* and he has also blessed me.

"In 1997, after the groundbreaking ceremony for the Jhadeshwar (Bharuch) mandir, Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave me a personal daily puja and said, 'You must do puja every day from now on.' So, wherever I am in the world I never forget to do my daily puja and never will.

"My children are abroad and I thought that their *sanskars* may not be sustained, but the BAPS has taken up the task of sustaining their values.

"On 26 January 2001, the earthquake occurred at 8.45 a.m. By 11 a.m., at the BAPS mandir on Judges' Bungalows Road [in Ahmedabad], hot meals were served to the afflicted. Over 4,000 people were given shelter. BAPS volunteers always serve selflessly."

In his address, Shri Nalinbhai Kotadia said, "Since Yogiji Maharaj was born here in Dhari, may God bless us that it be called 'Yogiji Maharaj Nagar' or 'Yogidham'. The sadhus and volunteers have worked tirelessly and selflessly. I congratulate them for their outstanding services."

Then, Shri Purushottambhai Rupala addressed the assembly, "Out of compassion, Yogiji Maharaj

inspired educated youths onto the spiritual path. Hence, the outlook for our future is bright.

"The mandir in Dhari is beautiful. Even though it is located amid the narrow, congested and noisy bazaar, sitting there gives peace. The memorial over Yogiji Maharaj's birthplace

### FESTIVAL CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

During the 3-day celebrations, BAPS, in conjunction with B.J. Medical Hospital, Ahmedabad, collected 56,700 cc of blood.

Also, with the support of Matrubhumi Seva Sangh, 849 people pledged to donate their eyes and 181 people pledged to donate their bodies.

is also excellent. Such memorials in which the original features have been preserved are rare.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj has hoisted the flag of our traditions in the West. Previously, the crowding, uncleanliness and noise of our mandirs discouraged people from coming. But now, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has built mandirs in the way our ancient rishis and *munis* must have envisioned. Mandirs are the pride of India. Today, in Delhi, Swaminarayan Akshardham is an outstanding attraction.

“In times of social need, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has always helped. Once we assign a task to BAPS, we do not have to worry about its execution. The great network set up throughout Gujarat by Pramukh Swami Maharaj is his blessings for us.”

Thereafter, Pujya Vijay Bapu spoke, “Yogiji Maharaj had profound worldly detachment and devotion to God. Today, we can see the saintly attributes of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

Then Dr Swami addressed the assembly, “Yogiji Maharaj’s motto was ‘May God do good of all’. This principle was woven into his life. As per the wish of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, may we all make our homes, society and world into a mandir.”

Finally, Mahant Swami spoke to the gathering, “Everyone seated here is happy. But, Pramukh Swami Maharaj feels the greatest joy, even while he is in Sarangpur. Ishwarcharan Swami has endeavoured a great deal in the building of this mandir. He oversaw the entire project and pleased Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri has unshakeable love for Yogiji Maharaj and has fulfilled his wishes.

“Once, the sadhus asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj, ‘Bapa, do you have any wishes?’ Swamishri replied, ‘Yogiji Maharaj has made so many *sankalps* that it is enough if we can fulfil them.’ Such is the unity between them. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has not been able to come here for the *murti-pratishtha*, but he has sent Harikrishna

Maharaj. Before, Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to bring Harikrishna Maharaj. Today, Harikrishna Maharaj has brought Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

“Many questions are asked about today’s youths. Spiritual leaders say, ‘Youths have become atheists.’ Elders say, ‘Youths have become wayward.’ Parents say, ‘We are frustrated by our youths.’ In such depressing times, Yogiji Maharaj gave hope and declared, ‘Youths are my heart.’ How divine was his outlook that he gave his heart to the youths. He saw that youths were not mischievous or wayward, but that they had great energy. Yogi Bapa nurtured that inner energy and gave it a new, constructive direction. He was forgiving, tolerant and patient and the proof of this is provided by the 51 sadhus he initiated [in 1961]. We travelled with him only because of his selfless love. He would wake us at four in the morning and discourse. Anyone else would have been discouraged, but Yogi Bapa was very patient. He often said, ‘I want to make you all *ekantik*.’ There are many devotees, but the status of the *ekantik* devotee is different. His main goal was to free everyone of their base natures and make them *ekantik*. The *ekantik* dharma Bhagwan Swaminarayan came on this earth to spread is being propagated by the Gunatit Gurus. No matter how staunch one may be but *ekantik* dharma won’t be attained, but if one has the aim of pleasing the Satpurush then it will be easily attained. May we all be able to please them and fulfil our life’s goal.”

Before the assembly concluded, Dinbandhu Swami, *kothari* of Dhari mandir, delivered a vote of thanks to all who had helped in building the mandir.

Thus, the 3-day festivities came to an end. The support of the townspeople was tremendous, and on the *murti-pratishtha* day a public holiday was declared and all businesses were closed. Thousands of devotees from India and abroad and around 500 sadhus from many mandirs had attended this auspicious occasion. ♦





*Newly inaugurated shikharbaddh mandir  
at the birthplace of Brahmaṣwarup Yogiji Maharaj*

# BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir DHARI



*The land of Sorath was sanctified by the  
holy footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan  
and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami.  
The small town of Dhari, near Amreli, lies  
in the sacred region of Sorath.*

*About 123 years ago a unique event took  
place in the nondescript town of Dhari.  
On 23 May 1892 (Vaishakh vad 12, V.S.  
1948) an illustrious baby boy was born to  
Devchandbhai Vasani and Puriba. Decades  
later, the boy rose to spiritual eminence to  
become Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth spiritual  
successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. His  
profound saintliness and selfless efforts  
spread the glory of Akshar-Purushottam*

*Maharaj and the  
BAPS worldwide, and his disciples and  
well-wishers immortalized Dhari into  
a pilgrim place. H.H. Pramukh Swami  
Maharaj recently created an extraordinary  
place of worship, a beautiful traditionally  
carved mandir, on the precincts of his  
birthplace in Dhari.*





**T**he little town of Dhari, with a population of about 30,000, was embellished on 11 February 2015 with a place of exquisite architectural beauty and a source of serenity and faith for all. The newly inaugurated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir has become the pride of Dhari and the entire region. It holds special significance because it has been built on the precincts of the birthplace of Yogiji Maharaj – commemorating his purity, saintliness and selfless service to Satsang and society.

As the devout walk through the small lanes and congested bazaars of Dhari and into the old Kacheri Lane nothing extraordinary meets their eyes. However, once they reach the fag end of the lane they break into an enormous gasp of wonder. The sight of the ornate, towering pinkstone mandir fills the eyes and hearts of all.

The mandir is cradled in a large 6,700 sq. m. precinct. To its left lies the guesthouse, assembly hall and satsang offices, all in one building. In the mandir backdrop one finds the Yogi Ashram – the residential quarters for sadhus. And between the mandir and the guesthouse lies the newly built house over Yogiji Maharaj’s birthplace.

On the entrance gate of the mandir one finds in writing the oft-spoken messages of Yogiji Maharaj,

“May God do good of all” and “Worship God”. With the front elevation of the mandir one sees two robust stone lions, symbols of the Sorath region, majestically seated on both sides of the main stairs. The exquisite mandir is situated on a nine-feet high *jagati pith*. The 20-ft. wide central mandir stairs, flanked by small stone Akshar Deris, lead to the mandir podium. The stone seats (*bethak*) all along the first floor of the mandir provide a meditative respite for the pilgrims. To the left and right sides of the mandir podium one finds the shrines of Shri Ganapatiji and Shri Hanumanji respectively. Thereafter, the *pradakshina* and *mandap* (open hall beneath the main dome) come into view with their profusely carved stone pillars. The pillars are embellished with statues of deities, devotees, *gandharvas* and intricate designs. Every pillar has ornate stone arches. The stone ceilings of the mandir have arresting indepth designs, reflecting the skill of artisans and the rich heritage of Indian architecture.

The inside of the mandir dome is replete with aesthetic stone carvings that arrest and awe the minds of the visitors. The beautiful marble floor is a mosaic of colourful, stunning designs, comprising of 48 peacocks. After these astonishing sights the pilgrim arrives before the marble-clad





Newly reconstructed birthplace of Yogiji Maharaj



sanctum-sanctorum or *garbhagruh* – the heart of the mandir. The threshold of each of the three grand sanctums and its pillars are enhanced by their stone carvings and designs.

In the central sanctum one has the darshan of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj installed in a golden *sinhasan*. In the right and left sanctums, one has the darshan of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and Shri Yogiji Maharaj, respectively, installed in golden *sinhasans*.

When the pilgrim circumambulates the sanctum-sanctorum he finds the *mandovar* or outer wall carved with intricate designs and *murtis* of avatars, *dikpals*, sadhus and devotees. On descending to the ground floor an entrance leads one to the *abhishek mandap*. The centre of attraction is the delicate, golden *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. The saucer-shaped ceiling is ornately carved. In the backdrop of the *abhishek murti* are installed the *murtis* of Shri Bhagatji Maharaj, Shri Shastriji Maharaj and Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj in golden *sinhasans*.

On the ground floor, the outer stone wall (*ja-gati pith*) of the mandir portrays the childhood



Inside of birthplace

incidents of Yogiji Maharaj in relief works. They will forever remain as sources of information and inspiration for all visitors.

Next to the mandir, in the open ground, lies the birthplace and house of Yogiji Maharaj. The traditional house transports one to a bygone era. Inside the house one finds the canvas *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj and a shrine with a replica of Shriji Maharaj's footprints commemorating the birthplace.

With this the visit to the mandir concludes, leaving the pilgrim imbued with inner peace and joy. The mandir precinct was inaugurated on 11 February 2015 in its complete form: comprising the mandir, birthplace, residential quarters of sadhus and guests, satsang hall, bookstore, kitchen and dining areas.



# Shri Tyagraj

*Tyagraj belongs to that long list of saint-poets who propagated devotion to God. He was a devotee of Shri Ram and most of his kritis were composed in Telugu.*



**T**yagraj or Thyagraj (1767-1847) was a great devotee of Dasharath Ram and wrote *kritis* (songs) in Telugu invoking and extolling his grace. The compositions reputedly number 24,000, but only 800 of them have come down to us. Tyagraj, along with Shyam Shastri and Muttuswami Dikshitar, constitutes the triumvirate of classical Carnatic music. All three were contemporaries and were born in Tiruvarur in Tamil Nadu, a part of the Cola Mandalam region of Tyagraj's description. The region was noted for its saints, sages and verdant fields long before the composer's birth.

The saint-poet was named Tyagraj after the presiding deity, Tyagraj Swami of Tiruvarur mandir. The deity was also the patron deity of the Nayaks of Tanjavur, who were the rulers of the Cauvery region. Tyagraj excelled all other

composers and he built on the foundations laid by Purandardas. Tyagraj was no ordinary singer and composer, but a musicologist of repute who dedicated his art at the feet of Shri Ram. He did not believe in blindly singing without understanding what was being sung. He treated music as *sadhana* to reach the divine and wanted every practitioner to cultivate the art with meticulous care. In one of his *kritis* he says, "What is the pleasure in banging a *mridanga* without knowing the rhythms and their varied patterns?" Tyagraj considered his calling as a composer of *kritis* and a singer superior to any other occupation, and never bothered about what others thought about him. He was fully aware of the quality of his music. He requests Shri Ram in one of his compositions, "If Sugriva (one with a beautiful neck) should be protected for his neck, then he (Tyagraj) should also be protected for his beautiful voice." For his daily worship of Shri Ram, the saint composed *kritis* for the various services (*sodashopachara seva*). Tyagraj also described himself as well-versed in the Vedas and Upanishads and a true servant of Shri Ram.

His advice to aspiring musicians: "Take a beautiful *tambura* for your *shruti*. Let your mind be pure, intone the *svaras* correctly and well, and stick to the *sampradaya*." The saint-composer appears to have been influenced by some sannyasi-musicians who sought God-realization through



*nada* in addition to *jnan*. Dr V. Raghavan, a distinguished musicologist and Sanskrit scholar, writes, “Tyagraj was both a devotee and an artist; the combination of Vedant, devotion and literary treatment in his songs naturally reminds one of the Bhagavat Puran and the religio-aesthetic approach that Bopadeva and Madhusudan Sarasvati gave.”

Not much is known about the personal life of the saint-poet. The little we know comes by way of scraps of information he has given about himself in his compositions. One thing appears certain, music and poetry ran in Tyagraj’s veins. His maternal grandfather, Giriraj Kavi, was a poet-composer attached to the Thanjavur court. Tyagraj was born to his daughter, Santamma or Sitamma. The saint describes himself as the son of “Sita(mma) and Sri Ramudu,” the Telugu way of writing Sita and Shri Ram. He was thus saluting both his temporal and universal parents. He was born on 4 May 1767. His father Ramudu was also employed at the Nayak court.

According to one tradition, Tyagraj was the grandson of Vina Kalahastayya, a renowned *vina* player. The composer learnt music from Sonthi Venkataramanayya. Before that he was put through his paces by his mother, a talented singer who knew a lot of compositions of Purandardas.

Like all saints before and after him, Tyagraj had his quota of troubles because of his utter unconcern for worldly affairs. He refused to commercialize his musical talents to flatter the ruling powers. This led to a clash with his eldest brother Japyesa. Tyagraj was forced to leave the house and stay separately on a hillock. This he gladly did and devoted his time to Ram *sankirtanam*. In these domestic trials, his wife Parvati stood solidly behind him. After her untimely death, the composer married her sister Kanakambal, from whom he had a daughter named Sitalakshmi. Towards the end, Tyagraj gave up all worldly connections and became a mendicant and donned the orange robes. He went about seeking alms

while singing praises of Shri Ram; this he used to do even before formally renouncing the world. It is said a sage once gave Tyagraj the Ram mantra and asked him to repeat it 96 crore times, which he accomplished in 21 years.

Despite his ardent bhakti for Shri Ram, Tyagraj was a non-conformist to some extent. He never believed in the trappings of religion. Some of his compositions poke fun at orthodoxy. He asks those who make a fetish of rituals, “If bathing often, fasting, closing one’s eyes, etc., constitute all that is to be done, surely there are others, birds and animals, who will get first place in God’s abode.” In another kirtan, he pursues the theme, “Crows and fish dive; does it become the regular morning ablution? Cranes close their eyes; does it become divine contemplation? Goats eat only leaves; is that *upvas* (fasting)? Birds soar high, but do they compare with the sun or the moon? Monkeys residing in the forest do not become *vanaprasthas* and unclad children cannot be deemed *avadhuts*.”

He had many detractors who tried to put obstacles in his way. His relatives gave him a lot of trouble, which he mentions in one of his compositions. Although a great devotee of Shri Ram, Tyagraj was well-disposed towards other divinities. At one place he says, “I bow to Shankar, the embodiment of *nada*, with my mind and body. To him, the essence of the blissful Sama Veda, the best of the Vedas, I bow every time. To him, who is delighting in the art of seven *svaras*, *Sa-Re-Ga-Ma-Pa-Dha-Ni*, born of his five faces, I bow; to him, the destroyer of *kala*, the protector of pure-hearted Tyagraj, I bow.”

Tyagraj was not only a composer and singer but also a teacher. He had an uncanny way of gauging the capacity of others, be they students or audiences. He would not repeat the same tune and would sing differently, depending on the capacity of the listeners.

Students flocked to him and spawned the Umayalpuram, Tillaisthanam and Walajapet



groups starting with Sundara Bhagavatar and Krishna Bhagavatar, Rama Iyengar and Venkataramana Bhagavatar respectively who propagated the master's compositions.

Tyagraj composed five long pieces called the *Pancha Ratnas* to which belongs his most celebrated piece "*Endaro mahanubhavulu andariki vandanamu*". In this *kriti*, the saint pays his obeisance to the large number of realized souls, devotees, sages and saint-poets who were liberated by Shri Ram.

That the saint was versed in Sanskrit is borne out by his compositions themselves. They are suffused with Sanskrit words. Tyagraj wrote two Sanskrit works, *Prahlada Bhakti Vijaya* and *Nauka Charitra*. He has specifically stated that they were to be sung. The *Bhakti Vijaya* portrays the trials and tribulations Prahlada had to undergo before he won Bhagwan's grace. It has a striking resemblance to the saint-poet's own life as he had repeatedly been beset by temptations which he resisted. His refusals invited the wrath of others, like his brother, who wanted Tyagraj to go to the Nayak court and sing the praises of the ruler. Though the Nayaks were highly enlightened rulers and would have allowed the saint to persist with his worship of Ram, Tyagraj's brother thought otherwise. He, out of fury, threw away the *murti* of Ram used by the saint in his daily worship when the Kaveri was in flood. It is said Tyagraj waded into the rampaging river and retrieved the *murti*. His work, *Nauka Charitra*, brings out the idea of complete surrender to the Lord. It describes how the *gopis* wanted to go on a boating excursion on the Yamuna along with Krishna. They were overwhelmed with his love and became intoxicated with pride. The Lord desires to render them humble and purify them, conjures up a gale which tosses the boat on the turbulent waters of the river; consternation seizes the women; suddenly they find that the craft springs a leak and the Lord grimly asks them to remove their garments, symbolic of all

material trappings, and plug the holes with them. When the *gopis* surrendered their pure spirit to the Lord in the meek prayer that he was the sole saviour, the Lord calls off the storm and blesses his devotees. In *Prahlada Bhakti Vijaya*, Tyagraj salutes Tulasidas, Purandardas, Bhadrachala Ramadasu, Namdev, Jnandev, Jaydev, Tukaram and Narayan Tirth.

After leading a purposeful life steeped in Ram bhakti, Tyagraj attained *maha samadhi* on 6 January 1847. According to the saint, Shri Ram appeared before him and promised to liberate him. He fulfilled the promise on that day. It is said Tyagraj passed away on the day and hour he had predicted.

It appears Tyagraj confined himself mostly to the south in his minstrelsy. Once, he undertook a pilgrimage that took him to Tirupati in the north and Srirangam in the south. While he was at Tirupati, the time for darshan was over and the priest had started to draw the curtain. The saint took it as an ominous sign and composed a kirtan, "*Tera tiyaga rada...*" the purport is, "O Tirupati Venkataramana! Could you not remove the screen of anger, arrogance and jealousy, which taking a firm hold in me, keeps out of my reach dharma, *moksha*, etc..."

On Tyagraj Jayanti, distinguished Carnatic musicians consider it a privilege to sing at his *samadhi* in Tiruvarur.

**Source:** *The Spiritual Heritage of Tyagaraja* by Dr V. Raghavan (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras).



# Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

December 2014-January 2015, Sarangpur



In Sarangpur, Swamishri consecrates the *murtis* for the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Dhari



During Uttarayan festival

## DECEMBER

### 5, Friday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs of Ranpur and Rajpardi (Bharuch). Thereafter Swamishri blessed the devotees from the respective villages from far.

### 7, Sunday

Swamishri's 94th birthday was celebrated today according to the English calendar.

After performing his morning puja Swamishri went to the Smruti Mandir for darshan at 10.55 a.m. Thereafter he came for Thakorji's darshan in the main mandir and performed *arti* before all the shrines. Then Swamishri's wheelchair was brought on the stage of Narayan Mandapam. The *utsav murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj were installed on a high pedestal. Large-sized photos of the five mandirs built by Shastriji Maharaj were arranged on one side. The celebratory ambience

was enhanced with balloons, bhajans and the clapping of devotees. The ritual of *mantra-pushpanjali* was performed to greet Swamishri and prayers were offered for his long healthy life. Thereafter, senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands. Then Swamishri inaugurated a Swaminarayan Aksharpith audio publication, 'Sant Vyakhyanmala, Part 8'.

In the evening, the birthday celebration assembly commenced at 7.00 p.m. with speeches by sadhus and Pujya Viveksagar Swami. After garlanding Swamishri all the sadhus and devotees performed *arti* together. Finally, after a fireworks display the assembly concluded with the distribution of cake for *prasad*.

### 14, Sunday

The Chief Minister of Gujarat, Honourable Anandiben Patel, came for Swamishri's darshan. A special seating arrangement was made in the women's section of the assembly. On Swamishri's arrival an announcement was made to recognize

and honour the Chief Minister. Women volunteers honoured the Chief Minister with a garland and *mala* sanctified by Swamishri. The accompanying male government officials were also garlanded by sadhus.

### 15, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals by touching the ritual gold-tipped rod (*suvarna shalaka*) to the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Guru Parampara, Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji and the *panchdhatu murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni for the *shikharbaddh* mandir in Dhari. Thereafter Swamishri performed *arti* and *pujan*, and the *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni.

Swamishri blessed 550 devotees of Dhari who had come to attend the *pratishtha* rituals.

Swamishri inaugurated an audio CD, ‘Shastriji Maharaj ne Vandana’, published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

### 18, Thursday

The 212th celebration of the Swaminarayan Mahamantra, first declared by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Faneni, was held in Swamishri’s presence.

### 22, Monday

The day marked Swamishri’s 75th *bhagwati diksha* anniversary, received at the hands of Shastriji Maharaj in the Akshar Deri, Gondal.

The *diksha* celebration was held at the *chikoo* grove of Pramukh Darshan Vatika. Prior to coming to the celebration assembly Swamishri went for Thakorji’s darshan. A vivid scene of the *diksha* ceremony, with the *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, Akshar Deri and *mahapuja*, was arranged in the middle shrine. Swamishri performed *arti* of Thakorji.

In the *chikoo* grove a small replica of the Akshar Deri was set up along with the *murtis* of

Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. Swamishri arrived at 12.52 p.m. The *diksha* mantras were sung briefly by sadhus. Thereafter a video of Swamishri narrating his *diksha* occasion was shown. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performed *pujan* of Thakorji and thereafter of Swamishri. Pujya Viveksagar Swami honoured Swamishri with a garland. Then a short skit of the *diksha* was performed. Finally, a prayer on behalf of everyone was offered by Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami to Swamishri. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed all and returned to his quarters at 1.30 p.m.

### 25 & 26, Thursday and Friday

Swamishri was unwell for two days.

### JANUARY 2015

#### 2, Friday

The chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Shri Mohanji Bhagwat, came for Swamishri’s darshan and blessings. Shri Mohanji praised the ‘Sahaj Anand Watershow’ at Akshardham, New Delhi, and appreciated Swamishri for his works.

#### 3, Saturday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti*, *pujan* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in the tribal regions of Valsad and Navsari: Vansda, Arvada, Piplagbhan, Darbadiya and Hanumatmal. Swamishri also blessed the devotees of the respective villages from far.

#### 5, Monday

The day marked the 205th *diksha* anniversary of Gunatitanand Swami. Shriji Maharaj had declared Mulji Sharma to be his Akshardham during the *diksha* ceremony in Dabhan. The *diksha* ambience was set up on stage at Pramukh Darshan Vatika. Swamishri gave darshan to sadhus and devotees and blessed all.





In Sarangpur, Swamishri and devotees release balloons to celebrate Shastriji Maharaj's 150th birthday celebration



Newly initiated sadhus and parshads with Swamishri

### 7, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Vadola and Moraj (Bochasan region), and Chinnakut and Akshar Vadi (suburbs of Surat).

### 10, Saturday

In the evening, Swamishri gave *bhagwati diksha* to 23 *parshads*. The preliminary *diksha* rituals were performed in the presence of senior sadhus. Thereafter, in Swamishri's presence the senior sadhus applied *chandan*, gave *kanthi* and upper cloth, and *pagh* to the *parshads*. Swamishri then gave the guru mantra and blessed them.

### 14, Wednesday; Uttarayan Jholi

At 12.30 p.m. Swamishri went for Thakorji's darshan in the mandir. The shrines were decorated in accordance to the festive occasion with *jholis*, sacks of grains and kites. Thereafter, Swamishri gave darshan to the devotees at Pramukh Darshan Vatika. Swamishri was given the string of a kite in hand.

At 8.15 p.m. Swamishri arrived on stage of Pramukh Darshan Vatika. Devotees gave donations on the occasion of Uttarayan.

### 19, Monday

Swamishri inaugurated two English publications by Swaminarayan Aksharpith: *Hinduism:*

*Sacred Places and Holy Rivers and Impressions, Part 2.*

### 24, Saturday; Vasant Panchmi

Swamishri arrived at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir for darshan at 12.00 noon. The entire Smruti Mandir was decorated with festoons of flowers and an *annakut* of sweet items before the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj. To honour Swamishri on the occasion of Shastriji Maharaj's sesquicentennial (150th) birthday celebration Kothari Jnaneshwar Swami offered a flower shawl and garland to Swamishri. Swamishri blessed all and released a bunch of balloons. Thereafter, he went for Thakorji's darshan in the mandir. Swamishri inaugurated two audio bhajan CDs on Shastriji Maharaj – 'Tame Jivya Amare Kaj' and 'Shastriji Maharaj Jivan Jharmar.'

### 27, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in the villages of Kanjari, Thasra, Demol and Nagalpar.

### 28, Wednesday

Swamishri gave *bhagwati diksha* to five *parshads* at 1.05 p.m. and *parshad diksha* to seven youths at 8.40 p.m. ◆

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



# MY MANDIR, MY HOME

The day had finally arrived. Final preparations were under way, and the buzz around the campus reflected the joy and excitement that was in the air. For many, today would be their first darshan and this pushed away all signs of fatigue. As the clock ticked past midnight, they all waited eagerly. And then, he arrived – Swamishri had come to Robbinsville, NJ. For many of the children, teenagers and youths, this was the first time they were having his darshan. As their eyes fixated on Swamishri, many overcome with emotion, their connection to Swamishri was apparent. Cultivating this connection is multifactorial, but a strong influence is the mandir. And the opening of the BAPS *shikhar-baddh* mandir in Robbinsville, New Jersey, helped to re-emphasize the importance of mandirs in the lives of *balaks*, *balikas* and *kishores*, *kishoris* living in the USA and Canada.

Hence, the focus of the 2014 Summer Shibirs in North America was the mandir. Over 7,400 attended the regional summer *shibirs* themed ‘My Mandir, My Home’ – six for children (between 12 June and 1 September 2014) and six for teenagers (between 15 June and 31 August 2014) – held at BAPS Mandirs in Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Robbinsville and Toronto, where they learned how culture and values are inspired through mandirs. Through interactive workshops and creative programmes, attendees were able to relate to common scenarios that they encounter in their daily lives. Words of wisdom from experienced and learned sadhus provided guidance on

staying connected to the mandir. At the end of each *shibir*, attendees realized that a mandir represents a home for spiritual growth and through this a connection with God. A mandir also helps instil faith, character and values.

These *shibirs* were the product of extensive commitment and preparation. The intricate planning for the *shibir* in each region was accomplished through regular meetings, practices, conference calls and more. Over a period of many months, around 1,560 *karyakars* dedicated their time and energy to give the thousands of children and teenagers who attended across North America the experience of a lifetime. The week before each *shibir*, all the *karyakars* and performers gathered at the venue for detailed stage rehearsals. This was called ‘Samp Camp’, to indicate its true nature of teamwork by preparing, practicing and doing *seva* together for the *shibir*. The individuals who contributed to making these *shibirs* a success ranged from full-time students to married parents with children. It is their drive and passion that has contributed to the continuous growth of the BAPS Bal-Balika and Kishore-Kishori *mandals*.

## BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR

For thousands of BAPS *balaks* and *balikas*





around North America, the term ‘mandir’ has become synonymous with ‘home’. The 2014 summer *shibirs* for *balaks-balikas* and *kishores-kishoris* celebrated the role the mandir has played in their lives, and gave them an opportunity to ponder how it will continue to do so in the future.

To ensure that the *shibir* content was realistic and relevant, months of research was put into understanding the various family dynamics of *balaks* and *balikas* in North America. Emphasis was placed on answering the questions and concerns of *balaks* and *balikas* – those born into Satsang and those recently introduced to the mandir. The evening programme demonstrated to them the importance of their peers who come to the mandir and how they help to create an environment that promotes the spiritual, social and intellectual development of each other.

The *shibir* theme was presented through an ongoing drama performed in the combined sessions. The first evening introduced Sheil’s perspective – a distressed *balak* who was having difficulty understanding how the mandir benefits him. Sheil didn’t come to the mandir often, but when he did, a particular *balak* named Tilak constantly teased him for not following many *niyams*. This put Sheil in a difficult situation, since he wanted to come to the mandir, but just didn’t feel that he was being accepted. Similarly, a *balak* named Adarsh was found crying in a corner

because someone had bullied him. The next day, the drama continued with a deeper look into the family dynamics of a *balak* named Paral and his enthusiastic grandfather, Magandada, a jolly satsang-centric grandfather, who reminded Paral about the importance of doing puja, *arti* and *thal* regularly. Paral was continuously inspired by his grandfather’s bhakti and understanding.

The *shibirs* focused on four topics: Who: My God, What: My Home, Where: My Mandir, and Why: My Life. Each topic was elaborated upon in a classroom session based on the storyline from the drama. Realistic scenarios that *balaks* and *balikas* encounter in their lives were discussed. Delegates put themselves in the characters’ shoes and considered what they would do in similar situations. Speeches by sadhus clarified the ideal approach to the situation, through incidents from the Guru Parampara and other children. Then, through an experiment satsang concepts were explained. In the ensuing small group discussions, the children considered the implications of that topic in their own lives. Following this a creative hands-on activity reinforced the classroom topic’s message. Then, the *balaks* and *balikas* thought about situations where they could apply their new knowledge through the *vichar* activity. Finally, the delegates were taught an activity that could be implemented in their daily lives, to strengthen the concepts learned in the classroom.

**Classroom Session: ‘Who: My God’** – taught the *balaks* and *balikas* that to establish rapport with the *murtis* in the mandir it is important to make darshan personal. A practical method taught to the delegates was to connect darshan with *prasangs* and *smrutis* of Swamishri. To help





understand why establishing a rapport with the *murtis* is critical, the classroom focused on the *mahima* of the *murtis* and how Bhagwan and the Guru Parampara live through them. Throughout, there was an emphasis on having ‘one-on-one’ time with Maharaj and Swami.

**Classroom Session: ‘What: My Home’** – emphasized the importance of getting involved at the mandir and how the mandir connects everyone with Swamishri, emotionally and spiritually. Just as a home is the basis of one’s connection with parents, the mandir is the basis of one’s connection with Swamishri. Another key idea discussed in this classroom was the concept of *dhanipanu* – ownership – and how children should take ownership in their *seva* and the mandir.

**Classroom Session: ‘Where: My Mandir’** – helped delegates to understand that the *satpurush* is indeed the living mandir and the importance of building upon our life with Swamishri to establish a *chaitanya* mandir – a mandir in one’s heart. Speeches by the sadhus emphasized that doing *seva* results in spiritual purification. Additionally, the children were taught that *seva* allows them to enjoy the bliss of Swamishri and stay connected to him wherever he is.

**Classroom Session: ‘Why: My Life’** – highlighted that the mandir and Swamishri are the only constants in our lives. So, staying connected to the mandir and Swamishri is the key to one’s success, both spiritually and in personal aspects. The mandir is a place where one can learn about many things – Hinduism, culture, Swaminarayan Sampradaya, values, morals, working hard, respecting parents and others.

Overall, the *shibirs* focused on establishing a strong connection to the Satpurush by first connecting to the mandir. The *balaks* and *balikas* learned how to make their homes, schools and everywhere they went a mandir, and that this would create a *chaitanya* mandir in their hearts where both God and the Satpurush would eternally reside.

## KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR

For *kishores* and *kishoris*, their satsang and non-satsang peers can profoundly influence them. Sometimes to such an extent that, in their pursuit for instant happiness, which is but temporary, they forget their traditions and responsibilities. The live drama presented in the *kishore-kishori shibirs* demonstrated how life-events affect one’s bond with the mandir and all that it has to offer. They influence one’s involvement in *seva*, and engagement in darshan and personal devotion. However regular visits to the mandir and interaction with sadhus and youths help to strengthen one’s attachment to the Satpurush and provide motivation to become actively involved so that lasting peace and happiness can be experienced.

Through a drama, speeches by sadhus and classroom sessions the youngsters learnt that the mandir is their home and the source of much of the goodness and happiness that they experience in life.

## TESTIMONIALS

“The *shibir* really taught us how to make mandir our home and sustain it as such.”

- Jeenisha Patel, Chicago, IL

“*Shibir* has shown me the proper way to think of Bapa and has shown me his true role in my life. He’s not just my guru, but he’s my best friend and I can talk to him about anything.”

- Krishna Patel, Detroit, MI

“We learned how we can create mandirs inside of us for Maharaj to live. We want to become really clean and pure so that Maharaj wants to stay within us.”

- Helee Desai, Columbus, OH

“The morning skits taught me many important lessons, such as how to do *murti* darshan. After coming back from *shibir*, whenever I do darshan, I feel a stronger connection to Maharaj and Swami.”

- Ruchi Patel, Boston, MA

“Shibir helped be recalibrate my life and remind me of who I really am. I now wear my *chandlo* to class with pride.”

- Priya Shah, Los Angeles, CA

“Darshan is my one-on-one time with [Maharaj] which I’ve learned to cherish.”

- Devarshi Patel, Raleigh, NC

“I need to keep mandir a main priority so that I do not go off on the wrong path.”

- Vinally Mandalia, Dallas, TX

“My *chaitanya* mandir is where all the peace and tranquility lies.”

- Tanvi Patel, Toronto, ON

“My story begins with my acceptance to the Florida State University in 2010. The nearest mandir was hours away. It was not until my first Sunday alone... did I notice a void in my life.”

- Vandan Patel, Orlando, FL

“It has given me a strong support group. It has provided a place to focus on Maharaj-Swami and Maharaj-Swami only.”

- Ajay Dave, Dallas, TX

“The mandir is my home. The *balaks*, the *kishores*, the *karyakars*, admin team, etc. are all our family. The mandir no longer feels like a place where people just gather. It’s my family. It’s my home.”

- Mukund Salia, Toronto, ON

## SATSANG ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

As *kishores* and *kishoris* move to college to pursue their educational and professional aspirations, they part from their homes and transition from one phase of their lives to another. This can bring change and, at times, be overwhelming. While living at home, the mandir is easily accessible, but as *kishores* and *kishoris* move away from home,

they may also move away from the mandir. At that time, it is important to remain connected spiritually, emotionally and physically to the mandir. This is possible through weekly campus *sabhas*, as well as *padhramanis* by the sadhus and an annual grand Diwali celebration on campus. Thus, college youths also have the opportunity to remain connected to the mandir, as a home away from home.

Across North America, over 37 campus *mandals* hold separate weekly *goshtis* for *kishores* and *kishoris* in which they dive deeper into Satsang topics (such as Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato and Swamishri’s *prasangs*), and share their personal sadhana and experiences. They meet and discuss solutions to the issues they face in practicing satsang. These *goshtis* serve to create a strong Satsang network and provide a medium for them to help each other.

As *kishores-kishoris* move to the campus, they are greeted by the campus *sabha sanchalak* and senior college *satsangis*, helping them assimilate with the new college environment. And, as they progress through college, this network also provides support and guidance for educational and professional paths (study tips, career choices, interview tips and postgraduate aspirations). In addition, the sadhus often perform *padhramanis* and attend *goshti* sessions, helping to strengthen the satsang resolve of the youths.

When *kishores* and *kishoris* move away to college, they continue to maintain and strengthen their association with satsang through *seva* and holding events such as the annual campus Diwali celebrations. Through this event, over 4,000 college youths participate in celebrating Diwali in a traditional way on campus. The celebration includes classical music, motivational speeches by sadhus and *annakut prasad*. *Kishoris* on campus help to prepare a total of over 600 items for the campus *annakuts* nationwide.

Thus, the college campus activities across North America enable *kishores* and *kishoris* to remain connected to the mandir and Swamishri. ♦

# Dr Swami's Satsang Tour to Africa

14 October 2014-20 January 2015



Dr Swami addresses the satsang assembly in Nairobi



Dr Swami with Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda in Kampala



A traditional dance by children during the Sardh Shatabdi celebration in Nairobi



Dr Swami addresses the celebration assembly in Nairobi

Pujya Doctor Swami led a team of four sadhus – Bhaktavatsal Swami, Shukmuni Swami, Akshardarshan Swami and Aksharyogi Swami – on a satsang tour of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Botswana, Madagascar, Zambia and Malawi.

During this *vicharan*, Dr Swami inaugurated a new BAPS *hari* mandir in Lilongwe (Malawi), installed the new *murtis* in Nakuru (Kenya) and Tanga (Tanzania), consecrated the *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni in Lenasia (South Africa) and performed the Vedic groundbreaking ceremony for the new *hari* mandir in Lusaka (Zambia).

Grand Diwali-Annakut celebrations were held in Nairobi and Mombasa (Kenya), and Jinja (Uganda). In Kampala (Uganda), over 2,500 devotees attended Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 94th birthday celebration. The Prime Minister of Uganda, Rt. Hon. Ruhakana Rugunda, also graced this celebration.

Special celebrations were held in Nairobi, Kisumu, Tororo, Iganga, Jinja, Kakamega, Lenasia, Gaborone and other centres to mark either the 5th, 10th or 15th anniversary of the *hari* mandirs in the respective centres.

An inspiring *shibir* for all devotees of East Africa was held in Nakuru, based on the theme 'Agna, Upasana, Sadbhav, Paksh'.

Also, at each centre, *shibirs* entitled 'Mandiram' were organized, in which devotees learnt the importance of the mandir, and how to transform their own hearts and homes into mandirs. In total, 20,000 devotees benefitted from these *shibirs*.

The 150th symbolic birth anniversary of Shastriji Maharaj was celebrated in South Africa, Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi.

In Madagascar, Dr Swami was welcomed by the then Prime Minister, Rt.Hon. Roger Kolo.

Throughout the hectic *vicharan* schedule, which incorporated 30 satsang centres and covered 23,210 km, the devotees were touched by Dr Swami's inspiring blessings and his open, disciplined, saintly, patient and sincere life. The *vicharan* inspired the devotees to strengthen their attachment to satsang and persevere in their spiritual endeavours.





## India

### MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS OF NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIRS

#### Omkutch, 24-25 December 2014



Two days of celebrations marked the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony for the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in the village of Omkutch, District Nanapondha in Dadra Nagar Haveli. On 24 December, 73 *yajmans* participated in the *mahapuja*. On 25 December, the *murtis* were installed in the new *hari* mandir by Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami. Previously, in Sarangpur, on 10 October 2014, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals.

#### Chala, 23-24 December 2014



Celebrations were held over two days to mark the opening of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Chala (Vapi).

On 23 December, a *nagar-yatra* was held in which the *murtis* to be installed were taken through the village streets in beautiful floats. On 24 December, the *murtis* were installed in the new *hari* mandir by Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami. Previously, in Sarangpur, on 9 October 2014, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals.

#### Falandi, 25-26 December 2014



A two-day celebration was held to mark the opening of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Falandi, district Silvassa of Dadra Nagar Haveli. On 10 October 2014 the *murtis* to be installed were previously consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur.

On 25 December, a *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* to be installed in the new *hari* mandir were taken through the village streets in various decorative floats. Many devotees and well-wishers lined the streets throughout the six-kilometre route to view the colourful procession. On the morning of 26 December, the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals began with the *mahapuja* after which the *murtis*

were installed by Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami.

#### Waghai, 6-7 January 2015



Two days of celebrations marked the opening of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Waghai village of Dang district in Gujarat, India. On the morning of 6 January, over 600 *yajman* couples participated in the Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon, a grand *nagar-yatra* of *murtis* took place through the main streets. On 7 January, Pujya Mahant Swami installed the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir with Vedic rites. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *pratishtha* rituals of these *murtis* in Sarangpur on 15 July 2014.

#### Vansda, 10 January 2015



As part of the *murti-pratishtha* celebrations in Vansda, over 1,200 *yajman* couples participated in the Vishwashanti Mahayagna (Yagna for World Peace). This was followed in the afternoon by a *nagar-yatra* in which thousands of devotees took part.

The Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the

*murtis* had been performed previously by Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 3 January 2015 in Sarangpur. Pujya Mahant Swami performed the installation rituals at the new *hari* mandir and inaugurated the *charanarvind* (a replica of the holy footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan), commemorating Bhagwan Swaminarayan's visit to Vansda.

#### PERSON OF THE YEAR 2014

#### Gandhinagar, 8 January 2015



Touched and impressed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine saintly personality and his wide-ranging socio-spiritual works, *The South Asian Times* (printed from New York, USA) declared Pramukh Swami Maharaj as its 'Person of the Year 2014'.

The award was presented by H.E. Omprakash Kohli, Governor of Gujarat, during a special event at the Raj Bhavan in Gandhinagar. Also present were Shri Lokesh Muni (President, Ahimsa Vishwabharti) – who was presented the 'Community Service Award' – and over 150 national and state dignitaries.

After presenting the award, the Governor addressed the assembly, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj is beyond such honours. In his life he has risen beyond ego and performed his work. That is true spirituality. His life is the ideal demonstration of living dharma."

The event was organized by Shri Kamlesh Mehta, owner and publisher of *The South Asian Times*.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER OF  
INDIA SMT. SUSHMA SWARAJ VISITS  
SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM  
Delhi, 14 January 2015



India's External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi on the holy Hindu festival day of Makar Sankranti.

She was welcomed in a traditional Indian manner with a garland of flowers, a *chandlo* and the tying of the sacred *kalva* by trustees and senior volunteers of Swaminarayan Akshardham and BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

Thereafter, she paid her respects at the main mandir, visited the exhibitions, offered *abhishek* on the sacred *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni and watched the Sahaj Anand Water Show.

Sharing her reflections about Akshardham, she wrote, "An extraordinary experience. Out of the world realization. A feeling that I never have experienced before. Showcasing the glorious past along with the modern strength of Bharat, this Akshardham Mandir is indeed an unparalleled creation."

SADBHAV JYOT-YATRA  
Gondal, 20-23 January 2015

As part of the year-long celebrations commemorating the 150th Birth Anniversary of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, two Sadbhav Jyot-yatras (Goodwill Torch Runs) were held. The first was from Gondal to Atladra, incorporating the visits to five *shikharbaddh* mandirs built by Shastriji Maharaj (Gondal, Gadhada,



Sarangpur, Bochasan, Atladra) in its 326 km route. In Sarangpur, Pramukh Swami Maharaj received the *jyot-yatra* and blessed the participating youths. The second *jyot-yatra* was from Shastriji Maharaj's birthplace in Mahelav to Atladra. The 188 km route included many villages which Shastriji Maharaj had frequently visited.

Both *jyot-yatras* merged in Ankav, a short distance from Atladra, on 23 January and entered Vadodara city in the evening. In the city, fifty of the 350 participating youths carried the torches on motorcycles through the city before arriving at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Atladra, where senior sadhus and thousands of devotees honoured their arrival. Then, on 24 January 2015, in the 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration Assembly, 150 youths representing all the participating BAPS centres gave a glimpse of the *jyot-yatra* on the assembly stage to an audience of 150,000 devotees.

LAUNCH OF BAPS STUDENTS HOSTEL'S  
GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS  
Vallabh Vidyanagar, 1 February 2015



Yogiji Maharaj often declared, "*Yuvako maru*



*briday chhe*” – “Youths are my heart.” To cater for their all-round development, he established BAPS Students Hostels. The first such hostel was inaugurated in Vallabh Vidyanagar on 20 June 1965, followed by the second one in Gondal on 12 June 1966. Since then, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has expanded upon this work and the BAPS now operates students hostels in Atladra, Mahesana, Nadiad, Surat, Bhavnagar, Ukai, Junagadh, Mount Abu, Bangalore and other places. These students hostels serve as centres where students are guided to progress in their academic and personal lives, encouraged to develop character, talents and skills and to become productive members of society.

To launch the year-long 50th (golden) anniversary celebrations of the first BAPS students hostel, a special assembly was held at Akshar Farm, Vidyanagar, in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami.

The evening programme presented the initial history of the students hostels in Vidyanagar and Gondal through a drama and dances. The performances were presented by current students of the Vidyanagar, Atladra and Nadiad hostels.

Pujya Mahant Swami addressed the assembly of several thousand students and devotees, highlighting the purpose of the hostels and their outstanding contributions to society over the years.

#### **BAPS MEDICO-SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE** **Gadhada & Sarangpur, 20-22 February 2015**



Over 500 doctors and their family members attended this conference which was based on the

theme ‘Adhyatma Vidya’ – ‘Spiritual Knowledge’.

Narayanmuni Swami defined spiritual knowledge as the knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma, and explained that this wisdom can be attained through spiritual endeavours. Other speech topics included: Swamishri’s works, Swamishri’s affection for all, Swamishri’s divine powers, Swamishri’s divine virtues, and others.

In addition to speeches by senior and learned sadhus, the conference featured audio-video presentations and discussion workshops which further reinforced the conference message.

The conference was held at the BAPS mandir in Gadhada for two days and concluded in Sarangpur on the final day, where the delegates were thrilled to have the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

## **USA**

### **BAPS NORTH AMERICAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE**

**Jacksonville, FL, 16-19 January 2015**



Over 1,130 youth leaders, 170 volunteers and 25 BAPS sadhus from throughout North America gathered for the 2015 BAPS Youth Leadership Conference, known as KarCon.

KarCon, held every 2-3 years at either the regional or national levels, is an opportunity for youth leaders from all over the country to come together and learn effective ways of strengthening their *seva*. KarCon helps volunteers to improve the quality and consistency of their performance in serving the youth at their respective centres,

while further developing their own spirituality to best lead others.

The theme of this year's KarCon, "Shanti, I Am a Das", formed the foundation for the delegates through five inspiring *prasangs* from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. These *prasangs* narrated difficult situations Swamishri faced while doing *seva* and how he overcame them without becoming overwhelmed or frustrated. Group leads used speeches, creative games, videos, and focused discussions to make learning interactive and engaging for each delegate.

By the end of the three-day conference, volunteers left with a better understanding of how to help their local centres grow as a whole while further developing their own satsang.

## UK

### UK YUVAK-YUVATI MANDAL INDIA TRIP

2014-15

14 December 2014-2 January 2015



A group of 40 *yuvaks*, *yuvatis* and children from the UK embarked on an enlightening pilgrimage to India to learn about the work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his spiritual successors.

The pilgrimage, which began at Sarangpur in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, was a journey of 4,000 kilometres spanning 20 days, during which they visited 26 *shikharbaddh* mandirs and 165 sacred places.

The trip helped to strengthen their satsang knowledge and understanding of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, and nourish their spirituality.

Short assemblies were organized at various mandirs where sadhus narrated the history of that particular mandir. The participants also had the opportunity to perform the *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni at numerous mandirs.

In addition to the sacred sites of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, other places of pilgrimage visited included the Surya Mandir (Sun Temple) at Modhera, Somnath Mandir and Lothal. These visits provided a greater insight into and appreciation of India's heritage and spirituality.

After the pilgrimage, they returned to Sarangpur to spend six memorable days with Swamishri. During this time, senior sadhus offered further guidance and motivation.

The youths and children departed from India with renewed energy, a deeper knowledge of Satsang and the Hindu faith, and a stronger personal connection with guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

## Africa

### EAST AFRICA KISHORE-KISHORI INDIA TRIP

2014

11-27 December 2014



A group of about 100 *kishores* and *kishoris* from East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) explored India's culture and sacred landscapes firsthand, travelling over 1,000 miles within India. The theme of the trip was 'Mandiram' and it helped to give the youngsters a deeper understanding of Hindu traditions. Highlights

of the trip included time spent in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur and a 5-day *shibir* entitled 'Brahmvidyani College' which featured enlightening and inspiring discourses by sadhus. The youths learned the principles of the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine as well as other concepts and practices of Satsang and Hinduism through discussions, workshops and sessions with senior sadhus. As part of the *shibir*, the youngsters also engaged themselves in a variety of daily *seva* activities.

Places visited included Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi and Gandhinagar, and over 20 mandirs in Gujarat. Brief assemblies were organized at various mandirs where sadhus described the history of that particular mandir. The participants also had the opportunity to perform the *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni at numerous mandirs.

The delegates also spent time with local devotees learning first-hand how Pramukh Swami Maharaj's message continues to transform lives and inspire individuals of all backgrounds. Overall, the trip enlightened and educated all about the traditions, culture and heritage of India, the history of BAPS, the fundamental principles of Satsang and how to practically apply them in their lives. The trip inspired the youths to strengthen their personal relationship with Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

#### MURTI-PRATISHTHA AND 10TH PATOTSAV Tanga, Tanzania, 6-9 January 2015



Tanga is a town in Tanzania that is situated by on the coast of the Indian Ocean. On 9 December 2004, a BAPS *hari* mandir was inaugurated in Tanga. So, to mark the 10th anniversary of the mandir inauguration, new marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were installed in the presence of thousands of devotees.

On 6 January, a *nagar-yatra* was held in which the *murtis* to be consecrated were taken out in beautifully crafted floats through the streets of Tanga. Hundreds of devotees in colourful costumes celebrated with folk dances and devotional hymns. Thousands of local residents lined up on the streets to view the colourful procession. Later in the evening, a melodious kirtan bhakti programme was presented by sadhus and devotees.

On the morning of 7 January 2015, a *mahapuja* was performed in which devotees and well-wishers offered their prayers for peace and well-being to prevail throughout the local community. To the accompaniment of Vedic mantras, Pujya Swayamprakash Swami (Doctor Swami) installed the *murtis* in the *hari* mandir. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals and *arti* of the *murtis* in Sarangpur on 20 September 2014.

### Asia-Pacific

#### BAPS HOSTS INAUGURAL WALKATHON Adelaide, Australia, 7 February 2015



On Saturday, 7 February 2015, BAPS hosted its inaugural Walkathon in Adelaide in support of



the Royal Adelaide Hospital Research Fund affiliated with the Centre for Cancer Biology (CCB). The 7-kilometre walk commenced along the scenic Torrens River at Adelaide's city centre with hundreds of enthusiastic participants.

Chief Guest, Professor Greg Goodall, Head of the Gene Regulation Unit at the Centre for Cancer Biology, was invited to receive the funds raised. Councillor Chad Buchannan thanked the BAPS for dedicating their efforts in support of such a worthy cause. Other significant guests who attended included Professor Angel Lopez of the Centre for Cancer Biology and Matthew Jackson representing the Royal Adelaide Hospital Research Fund.

Invited guests and the event organizers addressed the enthusiastic crowd with words of inspiration and the importance of research in prevention and treatment of cancer.

## BAPS Charities

### BLOOD DONATION DRIVES

**Mayfair-West, Johannesburg, South Africa,  
1 February 2015**



BAPS Charities held its quarterly Blood Donation Drive in Mayfair-West, Johannesburg. Quarterly drives are held in major BAPS centres across the country.

A total of 36 pints of blood was collected thanks to the community and members of the public who responded to the call to donate and support the efforts of the South African National Blood Service (SANBS).

### **Raleigh, NC, 14 December 2014**

BAPS Charities helped to collect 36 pints of blood.

### **Robbinsville, NJ, 18 January 2015**

The BAPS Charities Blood Donation Drive helped to collect 31 pints of blood.

### **FLOOD DISASTER RELIEF – MALAWI January 2015**



Since early January 2015, Malawi (in Southern Africa) has experienced devastating floods as a result of Cyclone Bansi. Normally, the country experiences its annual rainy season for five months of the year and is prepared to deal with rainfall during the year. However, this year the unprecedented floods in this small African country has affected the entire nation. To date, over one million people have been affected countrywide. Around 336,000 people have been displaced, 645 injured, 172 are missing and at least 104 confirmed dead.

BAPS Charities volunteers in Malawi responded to the disaster by providing 1,400 blankets, medicines and food to people living in the Nsanje District, south of Malawi – the hardest hit area of the disaster. The donations were channelled via the local authorities to the affected people. The medicines were distributed to clinics located near the flood hit areas.

The impact of the floods has been far reaching and BAPS Charities will be monitoring the needs of the local population to determine if any further support can be provided.

## BAPS CHARITIES DONATES \$100,000 TO SICKKIDS FOUNDATION

18 January 2015, Toronto

In the spirit of service, BAPS Charities proudly presented a cheque of \$100,000 to the SickKids Foundation to support their life-saving work. The donation by BAPS Charities will support the hospital's new Peter Gilgan Centre for Research and Learning, a 21-storey research tower believed to be the largest child health research tower in the world dedicated to advancing pediatric research, with 2,000 researchers, trainees and staff. The Hospital for Sick Children is recognized as one of the world's foremost pediatric health-care institutions and is Canada's leading centre dedicated to advancing children's health.

Accepting the donation at the presentation ceremony, Mr. Ted Garrard, President & CEO of SickKids Foundation, said "I thank the volunteers of BAPS Charities for their dedication and service. I am proud about the long-term relationship between the Hospital for Sick Children and BAPS Charities." Also present on the occasion was Mr. Saäd Rafi, board member for the Hospital for Sick Children as well the Chief Executive Officer of the TORONTO 2015 Pan Am/Parapan Am Games.

## BONE MARROW DRIVE 2015

Robbinsville, NJ, 18 January 2015

BAPS Charities organized a Bone Marrow Drive and helped to get 20 registrations. ♦

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha Presents True Stories of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Childhood in an Animation Film

SHRI SWAMINARAYAN

**Charitra**

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A captivating and educational

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Depicting inspiring true stories of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's childhood as Ghanshyam in holy Ayodhya.

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Inspirer: Pramukh Swami Maharaj





### **MURTI-PRATISTHA CELEBRATIONS**

**BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Dhari, 9-11 February 2015**

1. *Murti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj on the Mayur Rath, with sadhus walking behind during the *nagar-yatra* through the streets of Dhari (10-2-2015).
2. Senior sadhus and invited guests on stage during the *murti-pratishtha* assembly (11-2-2015).
3. Devotees seated in the *murti-pratishtha* assembly (11-2-2015).





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### SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ SARDH SHATABDI MAHOTSAV

Vadodara, 24 January 2015

1. *Sadguru* sadhus seated on stage during the celebration assembly.
2. Over 150,000 devotees attended the grand celebration in honour of Shastriji Maharaj's 150th birthday.
3. Over 90,000 *siddhant* mantra books written by BAPS devotees displayed before the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj at the celebration site entrance.