



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

SATSANG PRAGNA - 2 : PAPER - 1

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

SECTION 1: VACHANAMRUT – 3rd Edition, July 2019

Total Marks: 100

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

1. As per Vachanamrut Gadhada II 63, by understanding what should one never perceive human traits in a devotee of God?
2. Write names of two devotees which are praised by Shriji Maharaj in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 59.
3. Which type of karma is done only for the attainment of liberation?
4. What are the means to overcome the desires for the panchvishays?

Q.2 Write on any ONE of the following examples and clarify its principle. (In 4–5 lines.) [3]

1. Like Vrutasur, one will not forget this jnan.
2. The example of emptying the well and its principle

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

1. If one has weak shraddha, how can it become stronger?
2. What happens if the prana is not under control?
3. How was Maharaj like when he renounced his home?
4. In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 59, what glory of the Sadhu of God has Shriji Maharaj explained?

Q.4 Complete the following quotations. [6]

1. In fact, my nature is opinions of that person.
2. Realize that the form amidst will attain ultimate liberation.
3. Therefore, a person who the characteristic of affection.

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

1. Dhruvji became an eternal star by the grace of God, but he did not become capable of becoming like Shri Purushottam Narayan.
2. Re shir saate natvar ne variye, re pachha te pagla nav bhariye.
3. Sura Khachar, who warned off an immoral woman, was never far from God on earth or beyond.
4. As Harbai and Valbai did not behave according to the codes of conduct, they were excommunicated.

**SECTION 2: BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN JIVANCHARITRA
PARTS 2, 3 AND 4 – 6th Gujarati Edition, June 2012**

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

1. Life Transformations Done by Shriji Maharaj (Only incidents from 'Grand Glory of Maharaj in Gadhpur' to 'Towards Gujarat').
2. Premi Janne Vash Pataliyo - God is Ruled by Admiring Devotees (Only incidents from 'Again in Kutch' to 'Famine of 1869').
3. Gunatitanand Swami's Glory in the Words of Shriji Maharaj (Only incidents from 'Maharaj Reveals the Glory of Mulji Sharma' to 'Sadguru Khele Vasant').

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

1. The Glory of Hamir Lake (Only incidents from 'Wrote Two Letters from Bhadra – Touring in Kutch').
2. Shriji Maharaj – Beholder and Promoter of Forgiveness (Only incidents from 'Troubled in Anand' to 'Grand Victory Achieved by Muktanand Swami').
3. Ravji Suthar's Disobedience of Commands Causes Difficulties (Only incidents from 'Again in Kutch').

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

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

[12]

1. "When will this curse named Swaminarayan leave?"
2. Shri Hari advocates non-violent yagnas in Jagjivan's yagna.
3. Sura Khachar's austerities.
4. Maharaj in Sundariyana
5. Give me half a maund of gold

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

[8]

1. Nityanand Swami (Only incidents from 'Wrote Two Letters from Bhadra – Touring in Kutch' to 'Troubles in Anand').
2. Parvatbhai from Agatrai (Only incidents from 'Affection Towards the Devotees').

SECTION 3: YOGIJI MAHARAJ AN UNFORGETTABLE GURU – 1st Edition, May 2018 & GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ESSAY

Q.10 Write incidents on any TWO of the following topics.

(Each should contain two incidents of five lines each)

[8]

1. Pilgrimage: Swamishri in Jetalpur and Dabhan (Only incidents from 'Reverence for Holy Places and Sacred Objects').
2. The Divinity Shown in Gondal (Only incidents from 'Healing Touch of Divinity').
3. Respect for All Religions: Encounters with the trustees of Sheth Anandji Kalyanji firm and Mr. Peter.
4. Help from Keshavlal Diwan in the great departure (Only incidents from 'Under the Wings of Shastriji Maharaj').

Q.11 Describe any TWO of the following incidents and give your thoughts.

[6]

1. 'We shall not fly by this plane.'
2. Spilled ink on the accounts book.
3. 'Serving earns one great merit.'
4. The dispatch number of the letter

Q.12 Write concisely on any ONE of the following.

[10]

1. Yogiraj, devoted to the feet of the guru (Only incidents from 'Bonding with the Guru').
2. Yogiiji Maharaj's dream to spread Satsang everywhere (Only incidents from 'Without Haste, Without Rest').
3. Kamil, kabil, sab hunnar tere hath (Only incidents from 'An All-Round Sadhu').

Q.13 Write an essay on any ONE of the following. (In approximately 35–40 lines.)

[15]

1. Vachanamrut: A Guide for Youths (Swaminarayan Bliss, Sept.-October 2019, pp. 21-25)
2. Haji Bhala Sadhu.... (Swaminarayan Bliss, Sept.-October 2019, pp. 7-12)
3. Five-day Vachanamrut Bicentenary Celebrations (Swaminarayan Bliss, May-December 2020, pp. 8-19)



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



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

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

Satsang Pragna-2-Paper-1

Essay-1

1. Vachanamrut: A Guide for Youths

There was once a young teen from Rajkot who was quite talented and was known as an ideal student. His friends and family had much hope for him. However, things took a turn when he acquired a mobile phone. His grades started decreasing and the hours spent on using the mobile started increasing – both exponentially. The teen's father, realizing what was happening, took the instrument away and asked his son to refocus his attention on his studies. The teen, however, quite literally, could not live without his phone; he ended his life soon thereafter. Another such case involved a young adult from Delhi who was obsessed with video games. To avoid his nagging parents, he secretly rented a room and equipped it with accessories to enhance his gaming experience. Pretending to go to school, he and his friends would lock themselves in the room and play for hours at a time. His father soon found out about the room and scolded him for it. Unable to bear the insult, the youngster murdered his father, mother and sister the same night. Upon being arrested, he showed no remorse. Both these examples are extreme, yet their underlying causes are common factors that negatively influence the lives of many adolescents and young adults. This article considers two such factors – a lack of self-control and emotional instability – and examines solutions that the Vachanamrut offers to these hurtful phenomena.

LACK OF SELF-CONTROL

Both youngsters in the scenarios presented above lacked self-control. Both started with electronic devices in their hands, but they soon had surrendered themselves to their devices without even knowing it. Parents often warn young adults about such dangers; youngsters, though, many times respond as follows:

'Don't tell me what I have to do. I know all that.'

'Why do you keep nagging me about such small things? I am not a baby anymore.'

'Don't interfere with my life. Let me be independent.'

Ironically, while trying to be independent of their parents, such adolescents and young adults become dependent or even addicted to mobiles, computers, games, social media, fashion, clubs, parties, friends and sometimes even alcohol or drugs. Addiction is a constant need for a substance in increasing doses. A person at the mercy of addictions loses himself or herself in an imaginary world and thus loses out on academic and social opportunities in the real world. A person in such a situation needs to learn self-control – that is, where he or she should draw a line and say no. Maharaj teaches the art of selfcontrol in the Vachanamrut. He first advises us to discriminate between right and wrong and then act accordingly. In Gadhada I 8, for instance, he says, "One should indulge in the vishays¹ only as prescribed in the shastras; but one should never indulge in them by transgressing the regulations that are described in the shastras." Maharaj justifies the need for such discrimination in Gadadha I 18, wherein he states, "If one gives liberty to the five senses without applying the discrimination of what is suitable or unsuitable, one's antahkaran² becomes polluted. On the other hand, if one indulges only in pure vishays through the five senses, then one's antahkaran becomes pure." He emphasizes this vital concept in Gadhada II 2 with an example, saying, "If, through the five senses, one firmly abstains from (inappropriate) vishays... then the 'flow' of such objects cannot enter within from outside. For example, a well can be cleaned only when the small streamlets of water that flow into the well are clogged with cloth rags. In the same way, by keeping control over the outer senses, the external vishays cannot enter the antahkaran." Maharaj thus stresses the importance of discernment. Indeed, just as polluted water cannot be used to quench thirst, a polluted mind is useless in achieving the constructive life goals we harbour during our youth. And to keep the mind unpolluted, there is a strong need to control the vishays we indulge in. We all know, though, that it is not easy to resist temptation even when we know right from wrong. Implementing wisdom requires tremendous willpower. However, Maharaj advises us that, as the atma, we hold the upper hand in this struggle with the mind and senses. In Gadhada II 12, he compares the body to a kingdom within which the atma is the king, and the senses and mind are the king's people. He further says that we must remain vigilant in this struggle, for the mind and senses will not act according to the atma's wishes if the atma relaxes its authority. Similarly, in Panchala 3, Maharaj says to treat the senses and the mind as foes; this involves treating them just as a king would treat an enemy, never trusting them and keeping them chained in close watch while extracting work or information from them. In Gadhada II 22, Maharaj further explains the process of fighting the mind by citing his own, successful example. He says, "I then told my man, 'I know your true form. So, look! If you harbour a thought about any object other than God, I will crush you to pieces.' In the same way, I told my buddhi, 'If you harbour any form of resolve other than that of God, you will be in trouble.' Similarly, I told my chitta, 'If you contemplate on anything other than God, I will also crush you to pieces.' In the same way, I told my ahamkar, 'If you harbour any form of pride except that of servitude towards God, I will destroy you.'" Maharaj thus teaches us that, to achieve self-control, we must be cruel and

relentless, not toward others, but towards our own senses and mind. An uncontrolled nuclear chain reaction destroys. The same chain reaction, if controlled, can generate electricity. Similarly, youths are gigantic pools of energy. Without self-control, this energy can become destructive. Through the Vachanamrut, though, youths can and have been able to channel their energies constructively. Let us consider an example. A youth by the name of Raj Vora shares such an experience: “I joined satsang in 2008. In katha, I used to hear about self-restraint, focus and niyams. Yet, my habit of watching TV and films continued, even just months before my final exams in 2016. One day, my eyes fell upon Vachanamrut Gadhada II 2. I was taken aback. It wasn’t the first time I was reading that Vachanamrut. However, today, the Vachanamrut started impacting me. If I control my eyes according to Gadhada I 18, I thought, my mind will become pure, and I will be able to better concentrate on my studies. I decided to put my mobile aside and also to stay away from movies. I continued attending ravi sabhas and reading the Vachanamrut daily. As a result, I did very well in my exams and made my way to the worldrenowned IIT (Indian Institute of Technology), Indore. I am thankful to Shriji Maharaj and his words in the Vachanamrut.” Maharaj thus advises us through the Vachanamrut on how to learn the art of selfcontrol. He tells us first to learn to discriminate between right and wrong and then garner the strength to act accordingly. Acting on that which is right, of course, requires courage, a quality that arises from knowing that, as the atma, we are in charge of our decisions. Lastly, by providing his own example, Maharaj suggests that we should learn the art of self-control from none other than the best.

EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY

In the two scenarios mentioned earlier, a lack of physical self-control was accompanied by a lack of emotional self-control. The parents’ actions were in their children’s best interests, but immaturity prevented the children from realizing this. Maharaj describes a similar scenario in Gadhada II 23, wherein he says, “If a child attempts to grasp a snake, touch a flame or hold an unsheathed sword, it becomes upset when it is not allowed to do so; yet if it is allowed to do so, it will hurt itself.” We are at risk of emotional instability when either people or circumstances prevent us from fulfilling our desires. Such unsteadiness often results in stress, depression, anxiety and, sometimes, even self-harm. Statistics attest to the prominence of this phenomenon. One in every eight Americans experiences a major depression episode during their youth; moreover, among youths, suicide is the second leading cause of death, with 25 youths committing suicide every hour worldwide. Understanding that difficulty is inevitable is the first step to defeating harmful thoughts. The second step is to cultivate understanding. In this light, Gunatitanand Swami says that it would be challenging to cover the entire earth to prevent ourselves from stepping on stones and thorns; it is easier, he says, to avoid injury by merely wearing shoes. Here, “wearing shoes” implies being wise. Maharaj discusses what being wise entails in Gadhada II 60. Therein, Muktanand Swami asks, “Maharaj, life is full of difficulties. Amidst all these difficulties, what understanding should a devotee of God cultivate to remain happy at heart?” Maharaj answers by citing three forms of awareness that devotees should develop: 1) awareness of the atma, 2) understanding of the world’s transiency, and 3) awareness of God’s greatness. Being aware of the atma helps us to overcome physical and emotional limitations. Indeed, the body’s and atma’s particular characteristics are dissimilar from each other (Sarangpur 4). Hence, none of the body’s flaws – which include physical disabilities and negative traits such as lust, anger and avarice – are present in the atma (Gadhada II 12). Also, as discussed above, the atma transcends the body and is its controller (Gadhada I 47, Gadhada II 12). Understanding this helps one remain composed even under challenging situations (Gadhada II 32, Gadhada I 61). Describing the peace and stability attained from awareness of the atma, a youth from Mehsana explains, “At school, people used to tease me due to my physical disabilities... At such times, Maharaj’s words regarding atma-realization supported me and kept me calm to the extent that I would no longer feel upset when teased.” In this way, being conscious of our identity as the atma helps us to remain stable by allowing us to rise above negativity and control over our emotions.

Awareness of the world’s futility and transiency, also known as sankhya, is a second factor Maharaj shows to help us remain equipoised. Sankhya helps us to realize that nothing in our lives is permanent, not even that which we most cherish. Maharaj teaches us the steps of practising sankhya as follows:

1. Understand that worldly pleasures never ultimately satisfy, no matter how much we indulge them (Gadhada II 47).
2. Consider the misery attached to worldly objects (Gadhada II 24).
3. Contemplate the extreme insignificance of material objects in comparison to God’s bliss (Sarangpur 1).
4. Look beyond time and realize that everything is perishable, other than Akshardham, God’s murti, and the released souls (Gadhada II 24).

Mahant Swami Maharaj elaborates on this last point with an example: Imagine a large clock that covers not 12 hours but 100 years. Its enormous time span would mean that it would appear not to be moving at all. On this time scale, hours, days, and even months would pass without even notice. Similarly, everyday joys and sorrows become negligent when looked at from the perspective of one life and even

more so when looked at from the perspective of the infinite births we have all taken. Worldly joys and sorrows often leave us either inflated with ecstasy or drowned in grief. Sankhya, though, helps us stay stable despite such circumstances.

A recent survey of 5,000 satsangi adolescents and young adults revealed how the Vachanamrut impacts youths. One question, “How has the Vachanamrut helped you in difficult times?” yielded two remarkable experiences that narrate the strength of sankhya:

♣ “Everything is perishable – these words have freed my worries many times.”

♣ “When my father passed away, I was shattered. However, my mother read a Vachanamrut around this time that stated that we should not be excessively attached to our relatives. These words helped me regain my footing.”

In this way, Maharaj teaches us that understanding the world and its realities as temporary can help us to remain calm amidst turmoil. A third factor that Maharaj says can help us remain stable is awareness of God’s greatness. In Gadhada I 78, Maharaj describes God as “he without whose wish not even a blade of grass is able to flutter; he who is responsible for creating, sustaining and destroying countless millions of brahmands³; he who administers pain and pleasure to the beings residing therein; and he who is the sole doer of all that happens”. With this understanding, one realizes that pain and pleasure are not caused by people or events but are given to us by God. One also understands that such incidents come to us as gifts, as God never wishes ill for his devotees (Jetalpur 5). Even challenges are seen as concessions, as Maharaj explains in Gadhada I 70, “It is as if one who is to be executed on a shuli⁴ gets away with the suffering of a mere pinprick.” Maharaj summarizes these thoughts in Gadhada I 74: “We are God’s servants; so we should be pleased with whatever pleases him... If God seats us on an elephant, we should be happy with sitting on an elephant; and if he seats us on a donkey, we should be happy with sitting on a donkey... but in no way should we harbour any joy or grief in our minds, as everything happens by God’s will. So, just as a dry leaf is blown in the air according to the wind’s direction, we should also remain dependent on God and joyfully worship him, not allowing any frustration to enter our minds.” One satsangi youth named Mukesh Vaja applied this type of awareness to stay composed amidst difficulty. He was not well off financially, and several members of his family had fallen gravely ill. His situation was dire. However, a bal mandal sanchalak named Kishore Kansagara once made him read Gadhada I 61, wherein Maharaj says, “We should become increasingly pleased as God puts us through more severe hardships, bearing in mind, ‘The more misery God inflicts upon me, the more bound he will become to me; thereby, he will not be away from me for even a moment.’” Maharaj’s advice here about not becoming disheartened in the face of misery gave Mukesh a new perspective on life. Externally, his circumstances had not changed; yet, the understanding he gained from the Vachanamrut’s explanation of God’s greatness infused him with strength that allowed him to remain joyful as he continued his struggle to support his family. Maharaj thus advises us to maintain our emotional stability by developing an awareness of the atma’s resilience, the world’s impermanence and God’s benevolence.

CONCLUSION

By helping us understand our true identity, realize God’s glory and put into practice values such as tolerance and acceptance, the Vachanamrut acts as a beacon to guide youths through the sometimes terrifying, stormy ocean to the firm, stable shores of calmness and tranquillity. Maharaj’s advice on how to gain control over oneself and one’s emotions are solutions to two of the many difficulties facing today’s adolescents and young adults. Yet, the Vachanamrut addresses many more issues than just these two. Diving into the ocean of wisdom that forms the Vachanamrut, we find countless pearls of wisdom – some small, some large, but all priceless.

Essay-2

2. Haji Bhalā Sadhu...

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, Mahant Swami Maharaj was in Nairobi, Kenya. He began his lecture series on the Yogi Gita there by quoting the Bible, saying, “Know thyself.” He then asked the audience, “How would you introduce yourself?” The typical answer to Swami’s question would be for a person to state his or her name, place of birth, profession and so forth. But Mahant Swami Maharaj offered an intriguing answer. He said that our true identity is that we are those who have attained God on earth. Indeed, our guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj, is the Aksharbrahman Satpurush – the manifest form in whom Bhagwan Swaminarayan resides. Maharaj explains in Vachanamrut Loya 6 that thoughts regarding nishchay, or conviction, should be repeatedly reinforced. This article is an attempt to do precisely this. Muktanand Swami has described the Satpurush’s qualities in many of his kirtans. Yogiji Maharaj was particularly fond of one such kirtan, “Hāji Bhalā Sādhu...”. Gently swaying as he sung the kirtan in his melodious voice, Yogiji Maharaj often claimed ownership over it, meaning that he exemplified the qualities it

describes. Here, we will consider Yogiji Maharaj's beloved kirtan and examine how it applies to the life of Yogiji Maharaj's beloved disciple and our dear guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Hāji bhalā sādhu, hariki sādhu...

A true sadhu is always engrossed in God's devotion...

From the time of his youth, Mahant Swami Maharaj's bhakti was unique. As a young sadhu in Mumbai, he often prepared decorative garlands and ornate hindola for Thakorji. He also meticulously arranged annakut before Thakorji every year. He always remained engrossed in different kinds of seva and also involved others. To commemorate Bhagwan Swaminarayan's birth celebration in 1969, Swamishri stayed up late into the night to prepare a plush, six-footlong garland to be sent to Yogiji Maharaj in Gondal. Once the garland reached Gondal, Yogiji Maharaj offered it to Ghanshyam Maharaj and remarked, "Mahant Swami's bhakti is remarkable! Justice would not be done to his devotion even if I were to offer five dandvats to each flower of this garland!" Swamishri's steadfast bhakti is also reflected in his enthusiasm for Thakorji's arti and darshan. Swamishri had come to Selvas in 2013. Local organizers had forgotten to inform him that the mangala arti in Selvas occurred every day at 5.45 a.m., as opposed to 6.00 a.m. So, on his first day there, Swamishri thus made his way to the mandir at 5.57 a.m., thinking that he would be just in time for the arti. However, as he climbed the steps, he saw people descending the mandir. "Is the mangala [arti] over?" he asked. "Yes," someone replied. Disheartened, Swamishri decided to atone for missing the arti by fasting for the day. Breakfast had been served to him, but he refused to eat. Local organizers apologized for not communicating the time to him and their eyes welled up with tears as they requested him not to fast. To please them, he took a morsel of food in his hand; just then, however, a devotee arrived. As everyone's attention turned to the devotee, Swamishri nonchalantly put the morsel down. In this way, he resolutely refused to eat breakfast. Yet, as the organizers lovingly pressed for him to eat, Swamishri said, "I wanted to fast all day but because all of you are insisting, I will eat in the afternoon. However, I do not wish to eat right now." This incident illustrates the profundity of Mahant Swami Maharaj's devotion. No mangala, no food. This, too, at the age of 80! A similar instance of Swamishri's resolute devotion occurred on 25 August 2016, the day of Janmashtami. Swamishri had observed a waterless fast and had a day full of travelling ahead of him. Yet, Swamishri did not falter in his bhakti. Starting his day off in Bochasan, he offered fifteen dandvats during mangala arti, five thereafter in the abhishek mandap, five during shangar arti, five at Purushottam Swami's memorial shrine and six during puja. He then travelled to Chansad, where he offered ten dandvats at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthplace and five more at the village mandir. He then came to Atladara, where he offered five dandvats at the mandir, five in the abhishek mandap, five in Shastriji Maharaj's room and five in Yogiji Maharaj's room. In this way, at the age of 83, he performed 71 dandvats on the day of a waterless fast! As if this were not enough, after the Janmashtami celebration assembly, he turned towards the mandir for darshan. Due to rains, puddles of water covered the dark pathway. Yet still, with the aid of his attendant, Swamishri made his way to the mandir. Swamishri's devotion to Thakorji can clearly be seen through such incidents.

Tanaki upādhi taje so hi sādhu...

One who forsakes caring for his body is a true sadhu.

Swamishri has also never cared for comforts. More so, amid incessant fasts and unimaginable physical adversities, Swamishri has done incomparable physical seva. As a youth in Gondal, he once helped clean a garbage disposal area for two hours despite having a 103°F fever. As a young sadhu in Mumbai, he regularly washed dishes. It was the convention at the time to clean the utensils with ash. However, rubbing ash would become painful after a while. This never stopped Swamishri, though. Sometimes, he would clean dishes for so long that his hands would become rough and often bleed. At other times, Swamishri would work tirelessly for nights for festival preparations or travel exhaustively for projects like Akshardham in Gandhinagar. One such incident exemplifies particularly well the extent to which Swamishri is above comforts. Mahant Swami was going to Bansipahadpur, Rajasthan in 1983, where murtis for the upcoming mandir in Mumbai were being made. The devotees of Jaipur had rented a jeep to take Swamishri and other sadhus. However, the road was dangerous, as travellers were often waylaid by bandits. Ten kilometres from the town of Bharatpur and well into the night, the jeep suddenly broke down. For twenty minutes, Swamishri and the other sadhus waited to see if they could flag anyone down. However, the road was deserted. Hence, they decided to push the jeep to the nearest village. After pushing for about five kilometres, they came across someone driving a tractor who assisted them by towing the jeep to a petrol station on the outskirts of Bharatpur. By now, it was midnight. They parked at the petrol station and Swamishri and Ishwarcharan Swami slept inside the jeep, while the other two sadhus slept on the ledge of a nearby fuelling pump. Ravaging mosquitos made the situation all the more unbearable. The next morning, they bathed at a water pump outside the petrol station's garage. Thereafter, they did their pujas on the garage's terrace. It took about three hours to repair the jeep, after which they travelled to Bansipahadpur. Despite these difficulties, Mahant

Swami carried no expression of frustration or exasperation. On the contrary, he remained remarkably cheerful. Only one who is detached from physical comforts could behave in such a way.

Mān apmānme ektā, sukh-dukh me sambhāv; ahi ke sukh alpa hai, nahi swarg luchāv.

He possesses equanimity in honour and insult, and in joy and misery; he understands that the pleasures of this world are insignificant, and even those of paradise cannot entice him.

Swamishri has always remained equipoised amidst both insults and honours. During his travels in the early years, telephones were often unavailable, and so organizers from Mumbai would post Swamishri's itinerary to the towns and villages he was going to visit. Once, Swamishri arrived at the Patna train station late at night. A local devotee had received notice of Swamishri's visit, but he was angry due to a misunderstanding and thus chose not to pick him up. With nowhere else to go, Swamishri slept on a bench at the railway platform; the two sadhus who were with him slept on the ground. The station, however, was infested with rats and one rat even bit Swamishri during the night. Nevertheless, Swamishri remained unfazed. In the morning, Mahant Swami and the other sadhus went to the devotee's home and stayed with him for two days. Despite having been insulted in such a way, Swamishri held no ill feelings towards the devotee; rather, he interacted with him freely. Upon witnessing Mahant Swami's saintliness and unassuming nature, the devotee's misunderstanding was resolved and he gained a deep respect for Swamishri. Even more difficult than staying calm amidst insult is doing the same amidst honour. However, Swamishri has been unaffected by the many tributes that have come his way. In this way, he exemplifies the quality of equanimity that Muktanand Swami describes in this kirtan.

Lālach lobh harām hai, grahe na gānthe dām...

He has shunned greed and enticements. He does not harbour wealth. And he practises absolute celibacy. Moreover, he continuously chants God's name.

The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha is a worldwide organization with around 4,200 satsang centres, over 1,000 sadhus, and a volunteer force of 55,000. Moreover, it has world-renowned cultural and spiritual complexes like Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi and Gandhinagar, and exquisite stone mandirs in London, Nairobi, Houston, Chicago, Atlanta, Toronto, Los Angeles, and Robbinsville, amongst other locations. Yet, the organization's president, Mahant Swami Maharaj, does not have a penny to his name, nor does he have any rights to the Sanstha's property. All he has in his possessions are his two sets of clothes, puja and a wooden bowl for eating meals. Indeed, Mahant Swami Maharaj personifies simplicity. Before becoming a sadhu, Swamishri studied physics at the V.P. Science College in Vidyanagar. After spending a year there, he had various options for further studies. As an intelligent student, he could have moved on to some of the best academic programmes. However, he chose to pursue agricultural science. The main reason for this was that the agricultural college in Anand was not a co-educational facility. Other promising options, including the course in which he was presently enrolled, required students to partner up, sometimes with members of the opposite gender. Having decided to walk on the path of brahmacharya, Vinubhai chose to forgo the opportunity to facilitate his niyams. Swamishri thus exemplifies the two values presented in this verse – the renunciation of wealth and the practice of celibacy – which represent two crucial qualities that characterize a Swaminarayan sadhu.

Math na bāndhe mamatā kari, shathatā kini tyāg...

He doesn't build a dwelling for himself. He never practises deceit.

By saying that a true sadhu does not create a dwelling for himself, Muktanand Swami implies that such a person is not attached to any particular place, position, person or activity. Instead, such a person is attached only to God and remains a humble servant. Let us consider how Swamishri epitomizes this virtue. Yogiji Maharaj had appointed Swamishri as the mahant of the Akshar Bhuvan mandir in Dadar, Mumbai, in 1961. However, in 1977, he joined Pramukh Swami Maharaj in his vicharan abroad and thereafter Swamishri asked him to begin doing vicharan across the country. For Mahant Swami, leaving Mumbai meant renouncing the comforts of the mandir to embrace the hardships of itinerancy. However, detached as he was, Swamishri never questioned his guru's wish; in fact, he continues to do vicharan to this day. Despite being a senior sadhu then, Mahant Swami always shied away from amassing a following of his own. Some attempted to make him the guru shortly after Yogiji Maharaj's passing, yet he remained faithful to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, saying, "I am Pramukh Swami's shishya, and I will remain Pramukh Swami's only. I have become a sadhu for moksha, and only Pramukh Swami can give me moksha." Even after being formally appointed as Pramukh Swami Maharaj's successor amidst a gathering of senior sadhus in 2012, he insisted that the decision not be publicised so long as Pramukh Swami Maharaj was with us. He further asserted, "I am just a sevak, and I want to continue to be sevak. The gateway to moksha and everyone's guru is only Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It is a matter of principle that moksha can be granted by only one at any given time. Please accept this request of mine." Even after Pramukh Swami Maharaj's passing, Swamishri has always tried to keep the spotlight on his gurus,

rather than trying to fill their shoes himself. In his speeches he often mentions, “With all that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has accomplished, all I have left to do is accept garlands of honour and praises.” Furthermore, he stops people abruptly when they call out his ‘jai’ without first calling out Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s ‘jai’. He said once, in fact, “I am his servant. When you call out everything else without saying his ‘jai’ first, it feels as if my arms have been cut off!” On another occasion, he said, “Everything seems empty without Bapa’s ‘jai’. It becomes scary at times.” The second part of this verse says that the true Sadhu never practises deceit. This virtue, too, can be seen in Swamishri. Despite becoming the guru in 2016, Swamishri has never tried to convince people of his oneness with Pramukh Swami Maharaj by copying his guru’s ways. People often give him a chhadi (a small, decorative staff), hoping that he will wave it like Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to. Nonetheless, without fail, he appreciates its beauty, touches it to his eyes, and respectfully hands it back. Mahant Swami Maharaj was in Sarangpur when the North American Youth Convention was being held in Atlanta in 2018. Nonetheless, Swamishri graced the event through a live telecast. The organizers asked Swamishri about his current location, hoping that he would please the crowd by saying that he was in Atlanta. Many people cued Swamishri to reply accordingly. However, Swamishri answered immediately and honestly and with just one word, “Sarangpur.” Indeed, deceit has no place in Swamishri’s heart.

Kabahu krodh na upje, so sãchã vairagya.

In one who is truly detached, anger never arises.

Swamishri is also free of anger. Even in trying circumstances, he never succumbs to rage. Swamishri was once serving tea to devotees in Ahmedabad. The devotees were seated in a line. As he made his way through, he ran out of tea and went for a refill. Instead of resuming from where he had left off, Swamishri began serving from the other end of the line. Losing his patience, one devotee got up and stormed towards Swamishri. He grabbed the vessel from Swamishri’s hands and, in a fit of anger, poured the boiling tea over Swamishri’s bare feet. The tea blistered Swamishri’s delicate skin; yet, Swamishri did not utter a word of complaint. This incident, along with countless others, shows Swamishri calm and composed personality, according to Muktanand Swami’s description.

Tyãge tikhã tamtamã, rasnã bhogvilãs...

He renounces tasty foods and other sensory pleasures.

Maharaj says in a scripture known as the Dharmamrut that one who conquers the sense of taste has found victory over everything. Let us understand Mahant Swami Maharaj’s disinterest in taste in two ways. The first is Swamishri’s dedication towards fasting. As a yuvak and young sadhu, he fasted regularly according to Yogiji Maharaj’s wish. During such times, he would not eat or drink anything for the entire day. Often, Yogiji Maharaj would even have him fast for days in a row. Once, he even fasted for five days at once. Even at an elderly age, Swamishri continued fasting regularly. In 2014, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Robbinsville, USA. The heat was intense, and the workload was substantial. As a result, senior sadhus had asked Swamishri to permit volunteers to take fruits and juices on Janmashtami, rather than observe a waterless fast as was the norm. Swamishri agreed to their request, but he himself decided to fast without water for the day. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami beseeched him to at least drink some juice; however, Swamishri refused, saying that he would be okay fasting, as he was not involved physically in any of the preparations. Countless such instances testify to Swamishri’s indifference towards taste. A second factor that shows Mahant Swami Maharaj to be above taste is the type of food that he eats daily. For years, Mahant Swami Maharaj has had his food prepared without salt or savoury spices; as a result, it is bland and without taste. Several years ago, some children and teens from North America had travelled to India to visit several of the Sanstha’s mandirs. They had Swamishri’s darshan while he was eating lunch in Bocharan. Out of curiosity, one child asked, “What are you having for lunch?” Swamishri smiled and asked, “Would you like to try some?” The child nodded in delight. Mahant Swami took a spoonful of parvarnu shak and gave it to the child. The child eagerly put the parvarnu shak in his mouth; and instantly, his delight changed to disgust. The food was so bland that the child struggled to eat it. “How can you eat food that is so flavourless?” he asked Swamishri. “I experience the joy of having attained Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj,” Swamishri replied. “Consequently, I have no need for any other taste.” On another occasion, Swamishri sat for lunch while in a flight from Ahmedabad to Nairobi. After offering his prayers, Swamishri began to eat. “The same menu every day?” one of Swamishri’s attendants asked. “How can you possibly enjoy this?” “I am enjoying the flavour of Bhagwan,” Swamishri answered. Swamishri’s dedication to fasting and his penchant for bland foods show him to be above the sense of taste.

Muktãnand so santke, sadã rahat Hari pãs.

God forever resides within such a Sant, says Muktanand.

Muktanand Swami concludes his kirtan by saying that God forever stays with such a Sadhu. Mahant Swami Maharaj fully embodies the virtues Muktanand Swami has extolled in this kirtan. And thus, Swamishri has God within him at all times. Yogiji Maharaj confirmed this fact when he once exclaimed, “One who has done the samagam of Pujya Narayan Swami (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) and Pujya Mahant Shri Keshavjivandas (Mahant Swami Maharaj) has done the samagam of Maharaj himself!” Indeed, this is the secret behind the bliss we experience in Mahant Swami Maharaj’s presence – just as being in his company is like being in Maharaj’s company, his darshan is also Maharaj’s darshan, his

loving words are Maharaj's loving words, and his uplifting blessings are Maharaj's uplifting blessings. We are truly fortunate to have attained such a pure, divine guru – the Aksharbrahman Satpurush – who is the manifest form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Essay-3

3. Five-day Vachanamrut Bicentenary Celebrations

6 to 10 March 2020, Gadhpur

The BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Gadhpur is perched on a sacred hill by the banks of the holy River Ghela. Decked for the celebrations, the illuminated and decorated mandir seemed like it had descended from a divine abode. It lies on the very spot where 200 years ago Bhagwan Swaminarayan profoundly wished to build a mandir. His dream was fulfilled by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, who sanctified the murtis of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. The mandir was consecrated by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and developed by Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The celebration events held in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj were:

Vachanamrut Bicentenary Celebrations Inauguration of the bronze murti of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on Manki Opening of Jiva Khachar's restored darbar and Immersion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's asthi pushpa in the River Ghela.

Swaminarayan Nagar, the celebrations venue, hosted the five days of special assemblies.

The celebrations inspired all to imbibe the lofty teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The celebrations paid tributes to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, a torchbearer of Indian culture and the spiritual ideals of Hinduism. The celebrations also paid a devotional tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the occasion of his centenary celebrations.

SWAMINARAYAN NAGAR

Formerly, the 5-day Vachanamrut Bicentenary Celebrations in Gadhada was planned on a grand scale, however, with Mahant Swami Maharaj's foresight and instruction it was downsized to a local level in view of the emerging coronavirus pandemic. When more than 100,000 devotees from India and abroad were scheduled to arrive in Gadhada the celebrations now became limited to about 5,000 devotees from Gadhada and its neighbouring villages. The state government ministers and leading lights of Gujarat appreciated and lauded the BAPS's decision to dilute the celebrations. The celebrations venue, Swaminarayan Nagar, was created after months of intense voluntary effort by sadhus and youths. During the five-day celebrations, devotees, well-wishers and school students availed of the exhibitions, spiritual and cultural attractions and the light and sound show. Every evening, the assembly hall hosted a variety of programmes and discourses in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. A brief description of the Swaminarayan Nagar and the evening assembly programmes is as follows.

SWAMINARAYAN NAGAR

The celebrations venue comprised a giant decorative entrance gate, an ornate spot honouring Bhagwan Swaminarayan – the author of the Vachanamrut, four inspiring educational marquees, an enthralling light and sound show, beautiful murtis of great saints and seers of India installed in decorative shrines and a fascinating anamorphic art spot. The four giant educational marquees and other attractions that inspired the visitors were: 1. Sahajanand Hall: Included a wonderful presentation about the glory of the Vachanamrut and how it practically inspires people's lives in a variety of ways. 2. Muktanand Hall: Screened a video based on a true story inspiring the viewers to live an addiction-free life. Outside the hall, visitors took pledges at the anti-addiction hut. 3. Bharatanand Hall: Showed an inspiring video highlighting the themes of keeping India clean, and conserving water and electricity. 4. Paramanand Hall: Portrayed the philanthropic life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj through tableaux, photographic panels and videos. Presentations on Swamiji's tireless vicharan, daily correspondence, building of mandirs, initiation of sadhus, moral transformations and selfless humanitarian services enlightened and inspired the visitors.

Bhajanand Mandap: During the five-day celebrations devotees read an allotted number of pages of the entire Vachanamrut, and thus collectively read the entire Vachanamrut 108 times and offered their devotion and tributes to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Anamorphic Art Spot: Thirty-nine 12 feet high laser-cut steel columns were arranged vertically to form an image of Mahant Swami Maharaj, which was visible from a viewing point 100 feet away.

3-D Art Spot: The 3-D art spot consisted of laser-cut aluminium pieces arranged to create an image of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's face.

Blood Donation Camp: During the 5-day blood donation camp 326 donors donated 114,100 cc of blood, which was donated to the local blood bank.

Light and Sound Show: 'Divya Sankalp Gatha' (Story of Divine Aspiration). The spectacular light and sound show was one of the star attractions in Swaminarayan Nagar. The 100 feet wide stage, with an

impressive backdrop of a fort wall, came alive through the mesmerizing performances of 250 children and youths.

‘Divya Sankalp Gatha’, the central theme of the light and sound show, presented the topography of Gadhada, brief history of Gadhada, the divine lilas of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Gadhada and the history of how the BAPS Mandir on the hilltop was built. The entire show was created through the tireless efforts of BAPS sadhus and youths. This included the script, lyrics and music, drama, dance, sound recordings, animations, projection, synchronization of light and sound and computer programming. The seamless performances of the dramas, dances and maha-arti, and the projection of historical videos were show-stopping and inspiring. The 22-minute light and sound show transported the audience into the corridors of time and history. The light and sound show was shown daily from 7.00 p.m.

STUDENTS’ CULTURAL PILGRIMAGE (SANSKRUTI YATRA)

Two months prior to the celebrations, BAPS volunteers visited the principals and teachers of various schools in the Gadhada region to inspire them to arrange a cultural visit for their students to the festival grounds. Daily, from 9.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m., the educational halls at the Swaminarayan Nagar were reserved exclusively for the school students. The students were first taken to the BAPS Mandir for darshan and a visit to the audio-visual exhibition, ‘Gadhpur jotā re Shriji Sāmbhare.’ Thereafter, the students were led to the four educational halls in the Swaminarayan Nagar. They were inspired by the fascinating presentations on anti-addiction, family unity, cleanliness and conservation of electricity and water. During the five days, a total of 8,000 students from 80 schools visited the educational marques.

INAUGURATION OF SWAMINARAYAN NAGAR: 6 March

From 6 to 10 March, the five-day Vacha-namrut Bicentenary Celebrations were held on the 100 acres of Swaminarayan Nagar, situated on the road leading from Gadhada to Mandavdhar. On 6 March 2020, the festival ground was inaugurated at 9.00 a.m. with Vedic chantings and pujan of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Pujya Dr Swami untied the nadachhadi and declared the celebrations venue open for all. Also present were Shri Pratapbhai Khachar (President of Gadhada Municipal Corporation), Shri Sureshbhai Godhani (District President of BJP), Shri Babubhai Jebaliya (Former Chairman of Gujarat Agro Industries), Shri Pratapbhai Chhaiya (President of Congress, urban region), Shri Kiritbhai Humbal (Chairman, Gadhada Marketing Yard), Shri Irfanbhai Khimani (Secretary of the Minority Community) and other dignitaries. Today, at 7 p.m., Pujya Kothari Swami and Pravinbhai Moru (Member of the Legislative Assembly) inaugurated the 3D mapped light and sound show. Thereafter, they briefly addressed the audience. The inspiring programmes and assemblies held for five days in the assembly hall at the Swaminarayan Nagar are as follows.

WOMEN’S DAY: 6 March

To celebrate the International Women’s Day (on 8 March), the Sanstha’s women devotees and volunteers organized a Women’s Convention at the Swaminarayan Nagar. To demonstrate the potential and talents of women, young satsangi girls, female youths and adult women presented inspiring dramas, mono-acts, speeches and traditional dances. The stage guests, Pujya Nirmalaba – Mahant of Paliyad gadi, members of Dada Khachar’s descendants, Lilaba Khachar – mother of Chairman of Gadhada Municipal Corporation and others, lauded the stage performances and presentations. (For details refer to Premvati, March–April 2020.)

PROCESSION IN HONOUR OF THE VACHANAMRUT: 7 March

On 7 March, the second day of the celebrations, a grand ceremonial procession was carried out in Gadhada to pay tributes to the Vachanamrut. The procession commenced at 2.30 p.m. and included skilled horse riders, youths on bikes wearing decorative headgear, Manki rath with a large murti of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, hundreds of swamis, bhajan groups from various regions of Gujarat, children and teenagers enthusiastically dancing to the tune of bhajans and women carrying the auspicious kalashes with coconuts on their heads. The procession commenced from the PTC College and proceeded to M.M. High School, Botad Jhapo, Mandavdhar Road and finally concluded at the Swaminarayan Nagar. The colourful and devotional procession stretched for one kilometre and was welcomed and appreciated by countless people along the route. In the evening assembly, prominent citizens of Gadhpur were felicitated on the main stage.

HONOURING LEADERS AND DIGNITARIES OF GADHADA: 7 March

The evening assembly at Swaminarayan Nagar honoured the leading lights and dignitaries of Gadhada. Aksharvatsal Swami gave an enlightening speech on ‘Vachanamrut and Gadhada’. Thereafter, the assembly was conducted by Mahavirbhai Khachar, a descendant of Dada Khachar. Some of the invited guests and leaders spoke glowingly about the BAPS and the selfless services and works of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Shri Hareshbhai Sodhatare, President of the Bar Association, said, “The BAPS and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have spread the glory of Sanatan Dharma in the whole world. We are all fortunate and blessed that Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan chose Gadhada for his spiritual works. Because of that, not only the

name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, but the names of Gadhada and Dada Khachar are also being sung all over the world.”

Shri Ashraf Lakhani opined, “Two hundred years ago, a large portion of the Vachanamrut was delivered by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in this Gadhada village. If one were to live a life in accordance to the teachings of the Vachanamrut, one would become God-realized. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life was like that. After the terrorist attack on Akshardham he appealed to all to maintain peace. He was impartial towards all and I, too, was a recipient of his grace. I profoundly congratulate and celebrate the Santha’s works.”

Shri Pratapbhai Khachar, a scion of Dada Khachar, expressed, “We sincerely acknowledge and thank the BAPS for installing the 25-feethigh murti of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the 17-feet-tall murti of Dada Khachar. I also thank the BAPS for conducting the anti-addiction drives and tree-planting programmes in Gadhada.”

Shri Sanjaybhai Thakar, President of Gadhada Educational Group, averred, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s teachings [Vachanamrut] are divine words and lofty, similar to that of the Bhagavad Gita, Ramayan and Shrimad Bhagvat. Though Bhagwan Swaminarayan was a profound Sanskrit scholar he spoke the Vachanamrut in a simple language so that ordinary people could understand. I laud the Sanstha for making great efforts in digitalizing the Vachanamrut. The BAPS, a worldwide organization, could have celebrated this festival elsewhere, but it chose to do so in Gadhada. I thank the Sanstha for this.”

Professor Shri R.G. Pandya, a renowned writer and historian, shared his thoughts, “From the viewpoint of history I would say that the Akshar-Purushottam Sanstha has catapulted the Swaminarayan Sampradaya on to a global level. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has said that one should preserve the sacred places of Bhagwan’s lilas. I congratulate the BAPS for reconstructing and preserving the darbar of Jiva Khachar. Bhagwan Swaminarayan inspired literature of global standards and built six mandirs, which were by no means ordinary feats. Similarly, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj tolerated intense hardships to build mandirs.”

Dr Kalathiya shared his experience, “A few days ago, where an excavator could not be deployed the swamis of the BAPS entered the dirty, mosquito-infested and boggy waters of the River Ghela to clean it. I congratulate the dedication of the BAPS swamis. Bhagwan Swaminarayan prescribes about cleanliness in his Shikshapatri. Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj picked up the used datans of the devotees. Oh, how great he was! He gave us the message of cleanliness. By Mahant Swami Maharaj’s darshan I have understood the glory and divinity of a Sant. I experienced divinity when I looked at Mahant Swami Maharaj’s eyes for the first time. I can never forget that experience. For three minutes I became oblivious to everything around me. The reason being that Mahant Swami Maharaj is the Satpurush belonging to the spiritual succession of Gunatitanand Swami. It is a matter of great fortune when he showers his grace upon us.” Thereafter, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Convener of BAPS, honoured and appreciated all the stage guests and then spoke about the glory of the Vachanamrut and the awesome story of how the BAPS Mandir, Gadhada, was built. In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “Shastriji Maharaj derived the Akshar-Purushottam principle from the Vachanamrut. Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj emphasized the Vachanamrut, because it is the essence of all the shastras and the divine words of Bhagwan. Through it we can deal with our daily worldly tasks and also attain moksha. The Vachanamrut contains everything up to moksha. The Vachanamrut being a purely spiritual text, yet it also teaches things that benefit us in our social life. “The Vachanamrut even contains knowledge related to science. Shriji Maharaj has said in the Vachanamrut, ‘Even after splitting the atom countless times one still finds space.’ Where there is space or ether one can still split it. Now we see these words have come true. One has to have faith. By having faith and a subtle vision one can personally understand the Vachanamrut on reading it. “Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj had all realized the Vachanamrut. We cannot perceive that all the knowledge of our brahmand lies in the Vachanamrut. However, when we explore we can perceive it. So, it is all true. “Shriji Maharaj has said in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 1, ‘One who realizes this knowledge can see the five eternal entities.’ The knowledge Shriji Maharaj has given is supreme. One mukta runs countless brahmands and when such countless muktas combine they still cannot equal Aksharbrahma. And Shriji Maharaj is infinitely above Aksharbrahma. “In this Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has said one should spiritually associate with the Satpurush. Only then would the essence of life surface and be attained and realized. Thereafter, one will experience joy and bliss.” Finally, Adhyatmaswarup Swami, Kothari of Gadhada Mandir, appreciated the prominent leaders and donors for their presence and gave the vote of thanks. The invited guests came on to the stage and offered their respects to the murti of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and to Mahant Swami Maharaj.

ASTHI-PUSHPA IMMERSION RITUAL: 8 March

The sacred Khalkhaliyo in the River Ghela and the Purushottam Ghat were sanctified hundreds of times by Bhagwan Swaminarayan during his snan lila with his paramhansas and devotees. Today, in the

morning, the holy asthi-pushpa of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were scheduled to be ritually immersed by Mahant Swami Maharaj in the River Ghela. Several days before, swamis and volunteers worked tirelessly in cleaning the Purushottam Ghat and Khalkhaliyo. Then, to facilitate the immersion ritual they constructed a stage in the middle of the River Ghela and a connecting walkway from Purushottam Ghat. Thereafter, the state government made arrangements to fill the riverbed of Ghela with the fresh waters of River Narmada. Prior to the actual immersion ritual a mahapuja and puja of the asthi-pushpa were performed in the morning by Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and senior swamis. Thereafter, Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke about the glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the reminiscences associated with Gadhada. Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the final rituals of puja and arti of the kalash containing the asthi-pushpa. This was followed by a collective chanting of the Swaminarayan dhun for the fulfilment of many wishes. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the divine occasion, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a person whose asthi-pushpa could have been immersed in [the rivers] of the whole world, but we have done so wherever proper arrangements could be made. Pramukh Swami Maharaj incorporated Shriji Maharaj in every part of his body." Then, with the chanting of the final ritual shloks in the presence of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, Swamishri poured the asthi-pushpa and holy water into the River Ghela. In addition, Dr Swami, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Viveksagar Swami, Ghanshyamcharan Swami and senior swamis also offered the asthi-pushpa into the River Ghela. Swamishri then bathed Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in the River Ghela and finally took a dip in the holy waters. All felt blessed by the darshan and also recounted how 18 years before Pramukh Swami Maharaj had bathed in the River Ghela (8 January 2002) on the occasion of the Swaminarayan Mahamantra Bicentenary Celebrations.

SANT CONVENTION: 8 March

In the evening, a convention of spiritual heads of several prominent mandirs and religious institutions was held in Swaminarayan Nagar. The many swamis and mahants who were present included Pujya Vishwambhar Bharti Bapu (Mahamandaleshwar, Junagadh), Pujya Vikramgiri Bapu (Mahant of Moghiba ni Jayga, Shihor), Pujya Kanaiyagiri Bapu (Mahant of Dhareshwar Mahadev, Samadhiyala) and others. After the initial speeches by senior swamis, Shri Maheshdan Gadhvi, a renowned educationist, said, "The tears of the suffering classes in society were gently wiped by Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his swamis. One cannot fail to see God in people who serve in this way. He [Pramukh Swami Maharaj] respected people of all religions. He had camaraderie for everyone."

Pujya Kanaiyagiri Bapu shared his sentiments, "The present age is of science and technology. Only saints show us how to save dharma and sustain one's existence. Saints like Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj are doing such work."

Pujya Vikramgiri Bapu praised, "The Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha has spread the glory of Hindu culture throughout the world. This Sampradaya beholds all sampradayas to be equal. Along with the tradition of worshipping the five principal deities of Sanatan Dharma this Sampradaya has, through this festival, shown and celebrated the traditions of Sanatan Dharma. Today, I am reminded of the Kumbh Mela of Allahabad on seeing so many santos who are like the forms of paramhansas. By virtue of the merits of many births one can have darshan of worshipful and respectful swamis."

Pujya Jhinaram Bapu explained about the goal of life, "To make our life worthwhile this Sanstha often celebrates such festivals. However, life becomes worthwhile only when we give up anger, lust, greed, infatuation and take the refuge of God and his Sant. This festival makes our life become worthwhile."

Pujya Mahamandaleshwar Bharti Bapu mentioned the divine works of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and recalled his divine association with Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He blessed, "More than 200 years ago Bhagwan Swaminarayan delivered the Vachanamrut here in Gadhada. The saints have, through our shastras, explained to us how to live and manage our relationships in this world. The saints have gifted us with spiritual wealth. This can be presently seen in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's sant parampara."

"In 1959, after circumambulating the River Narmada, I had the darshan of Yogiji Maharaj at the Shahibaug Mandir [in Ahmedabad]. He blessed me by giving me a pat. From then onwards my relationship [with this organization] has been alive." In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the special assembly, "All these santos are highly pure and great. All are endeavouring in their own ways and are of immense benefit to all. I am indeed very happy and pleased. There is nothing greater than santos coming together in this way to foster mutual love and give the benefit of their wisdom and presence. "Bhagwan Swaminarayan has said, 'God resides where there is harmony (samp), fraternity (suhrubhav), compassion (daya) and moral discipline (maryada).' Bhagwan is so great that even the Vedas cannot describe his glory, but he resides [where these four things exist]. How great this is! So, all should mutually practise samp and suhrubhav and go to wherever there is sant samagam. Even if you listen to two words, it will benefit a lot. It would not suffice even if one were to touch the dust of these holy swamis' feet to one's head. I pray that we often meet each other with mutual love." Thereafter, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami honoured the four santos and Shri Maheshdan Gadhvi with shawls. Finally, Swamishri and all the guests performed arti of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Swamishri

and the invited santos saw the light and sound show, 'Divya Sankalp Gatha.' Swamishri appreciated the show and praised, "It is supremely excellent!"

VACHANAMRUT PUJAN AND TULA RITUAL: 9 March

On the occasion of the Vachanamrut Bicentenary Celebrations a Vachanamrut Pujan ritual was organized. The senior swamis performed the initial mahapuja rituals and thereafter Swamishri performed the final rituals. Hundreds of devotees also participated in the mahapuja rituals and felt elated. Swamishri blessed the occasion, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself came to earth out of his abundant compassion. He gave darshan, performed many lilas and gave his happiness to all. He came here [to Gadhada] because of the devotion and love of sterling devotees like Dada Khachar and Jiva Khachar. Shriji Maharaj stayed in Gadhada for 25 years because of Dada Khachar's love, devotion and sacrifice. "Now, what remains for us to do? To remain resolute in the niyams given to us by Shriji Maharaj. One has to have spiritual faith, but one also needs to be strongly anchored to niyam dharma. "Shriji Maharaj defines those who are steadfast in observing niyams as ekantik devotees. There were many ekantik devotees in Shriji Maharaj's time and there are also many today. These devotees guide us all. "One should have steadfast faith that, 'Bhagwan is true and he is the all-doer.' I pray that may all observe the niyams given by him with the sentiments that he is the all-doer." Since it was Fagan sud Punam the evening assembly celebrated the birthday of Bhagatji Maharaj and a special Vachanamrut Tula ceremony was held. In the first half of the assembly, swamis discoursed about the glory and greatness of Bhagatji Maharaj on the basis of many Vachanamruts: 'Bhagatji Maharaj's unswerving love for the Satpurush and its fruits', 'Bhagatji Maharaj's God-realized state' and 'Bhagatji Maharaj's passion to spread satsang.' In addition, the sadguru swamis also spoke inspiring words. Then, Bhadresh Swami spoke about 'The weighing of a scripture that cannot be weighed' and Jnaneshwar Swami spoke on 'Devotees, spirit of dedication'. Thereafter, the rituals of pujan and tula of the Vachanamrut commenced. Swamishri performed the pujan of a handwritten manuscript of the Vachanamrut, which was placed in the tula. Thereafter, the devotees offered their devotion in the tula. The women devotees also performed the tula of the Vachanamrut in the women's section. Swamishri then extolled the glory of Bhagatji Maharaj and the dedication of the devotees. He said, "Whatever Gunatitanand Swami instructed, Bhagatji Maharaj obeyed and attained the param ekantik spiritual state. No one could bear the insults and rebuffs he tolerated. He was introduced as 'One who remains calm and unruffled in the midst of severe insults, then know him to be Bhagatji'. Such was Bhagatji Maharaj, who belongs to our guru parampara. Shastriji was a symbol of guru bhakti, whereas Yogiji Maharaj never tired in taking Shastriji Maharaj's name. And Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not merely talk but accomplished so many works. Pramukh Swami Maharaj totally sacrificed and dedicated his entire life. "Today, you have offered pujan to the Vachanamrut by performing the tula ritual. Thus, your seva has reached Shriji Maharaj's lotus feet. Now, remain in good spirits and become one with the Satsang-fold." Then, the sadguru swamis honoured Swamishri with a variety of decorative garlands.