

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ

A Brief Biography of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 6

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Gujarati Text: Kishore M. Dave

Translation: BAPS Sadhus



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Ahmedabad

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ

A Brief Biography of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

A textbook for the Satsang Examinations curriculum set by
Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha

Inspirer: HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Blessings: HH Mahant Swami Maharaj

6th Edition: September 2025

ISBN: 978-81-7526-129-7

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Published & Printed by

Swaminarayan Aksharpith
Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4
Gujarat, India

Website: www.baps.org

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Blessings

The youth movement established and nourished by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj has been expanding at a very rapid pace. To satisfy the aspirations and thirst for knowledge of the youth joining the movement, and also to enable them to understand and imbibe the principles of Akshar-Purushottam expounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the publication division of Shri Akshar-Purushottam (Swaminarayan) Yuvak Mandal, organized under the auspices of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Sanstha, has drawn up a plan to bring out a series of books.

These books are intended to systematically impart scholarly knowledge in a simple language to the children and youth of the Satsang. It is hoped that this Sanstha – established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj to implement and propagate the ideals revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan – will, through this activity, teach the ideals and noble traditions of the Sampradaya and through it, the Sanatan Hindu Dharma.

The aim of this Sanstha is to spread the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to all corners of the world. It is planned to bring out these books in different languages. We hope that all religious-minded truth seekers of the Sampradaya and those outside it, will welcome this activity and extend their full support to it by all possible means, including monetary help.

To encourage children and youths, examinations are held based on the curriculum as presented in these books. Certificates are also awarded to successful candidates.

I bless Shri Ishwarcharan Swami, Prof. Rameshbhai Dave, Kishorebhai Dave, and all others who have assisted in the preparation of these books.

Vasant Panchami
Vikram Samvat 2028
(21 January 1972 CE), Atladara

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
Jay Swaminarayan

Publisher's Note

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the supreme God, manifested on this earth, together with his divine abode, Akshardham, in the form of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. Bhagwan Swaminarayan taught the Vedic tradition of Bhakta-Bhagwan in the form of Akshar and Purushottam. He taught that the goal of life is to attain the virtues of Akshar and offer devotion to Purushottam.

Many witnessed their divine deeds but failed to realize their true glory. Despite the efforts of Gunatitanand Swami and Bhagatiji Maharaj, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan was truly understood by only a few.

However, through the efforts of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy became widely accepted and practised. He suffered many hardships and overcame much opposition to build five magnificent mandirs and enshrine the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam, as per the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He built the first mandir in Bochasan in 1907, thus establishing the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS).

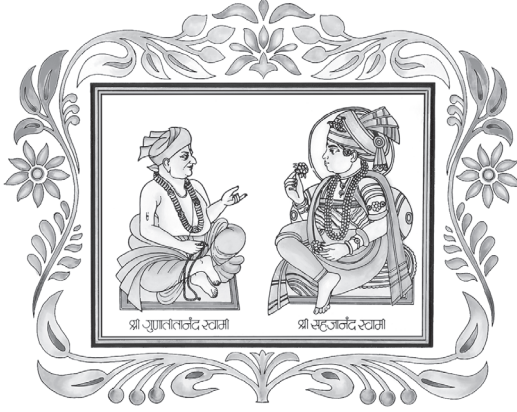
Shastriji Maharaj's saintly life of dedication, *seva*, faith and devotion inspired many to join BAPS and progress on the spiritual path.

This publication, *Shastriji Maharaj: A Brief Biography of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj*, provides an overview of his life and work. It is a truly inspiring example of what one man's determination to reveal the truth can achieve.

The book serves as part of the curriculum for the Satsang Pravesh Examinations. We thank the BAPS swamis who have diligently produced this latest edition.

May all *satsangis* study this book, pass the examinations with flying colours, and above all, derive immense spiritual benefits, and please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and gurus Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Prayer



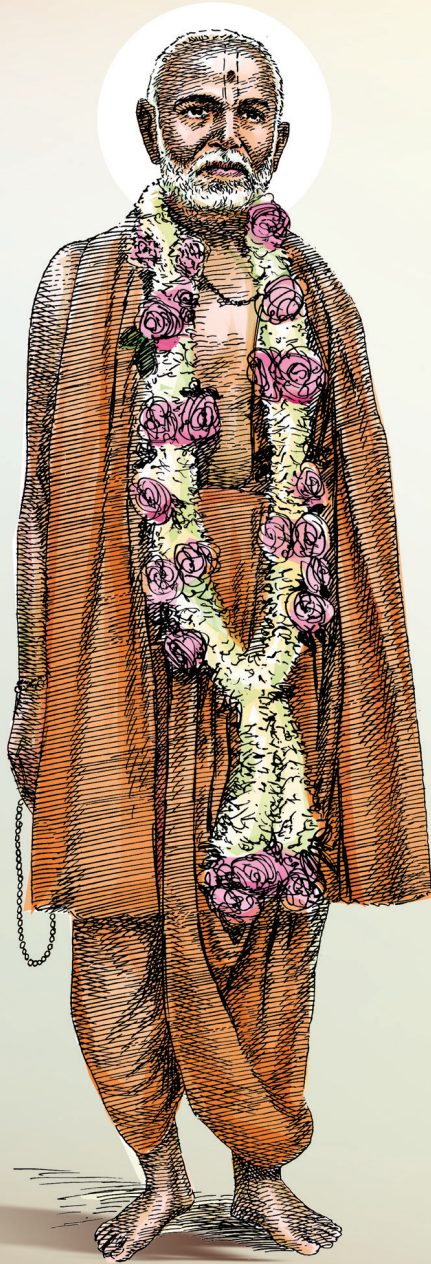
Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine mâte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine mâte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānani parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...Ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar-Purushottam, Gunātīt gnānanegāishu...Ame 2
Ame sau Shrijitanā putro, Akshare vās amāro chhe;
Svadharmi bhasma choli to, amāre kshobh shāno chhe...Ame 3
Juo sau Motinā Swāmi, na rākhi kāi te khāmi;
Pragat Purushottam pāmi, malyā Gunātīt Swāmi...Ame 4

Meaning: We are all children of Swami; we will die for Swami. We are all youths of Shriji [Maharaj]; we will fight for Shriji [Maharaj].

We are not afraid; we do not worry about our own lives. We do not fear anyone; for we are born to die.

We have begun this sacred endeavour (*yagna*), and we will offer any sacrifice. We will sing the glory of Akshar-Purushottam and the knowledge of Gunatit. We are all the children of Shriji [Maharaj]; Akshar is our abode. We are dedicated to our dharma; we have no sorrows whatsoever.

Everyone see Motibhai's Swami [Shastriji Maharaj]; he has left no shortcomings. We have attained the manifest (*pragat*) Purushottam and Gunatit[anand] Swami.



Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

1. Preamble

Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifested on this earth with many objectives. One of which was to spread true *upasana* and thus establish Ekantik Dharma. True *upasana* is to understand that Akshar and Purushottam manifested in this world as Gunatitanand Swami and Bhagwan Swaminarayan, respectively. True *upasana* is to become *aksharrup* and worship Purushottam. To become *aksharrup*, one must first associate with one who is himself Akshar, that is, Gunatitanand Swami. Thereafter, one can worship Purushottam, Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

When God manifests in this world in human form, people find it difficult to recognize him. Perceiving God as merely human, they fail to understand his divinity. The *paramhansas* explained his greatness to the common man. Among them, Gunatitanand Swami continuously explained that Bhagwan Swaminarayan was the Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan. Swami's words were filled with saintliness and the power of conviction. They reflected his state of enlightenment. As a result, the belief that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is the supreme God began to spread throughout the Sampradaya.

Similarly, few were able to recognize Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar until his disciples, Bhagatji Maharaj and Jaga Bhakta, openly revealed his true form. The knowledge of Akshar and Purushottam began to spread. However, some of the followers of the Sampradaya obstinately held on to their tradition-bound beliefs. They vehemently opposed the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* and its followers. As a result, no one dared to provoke even more opposition by consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the sanctum of a mandir.

Many senior sadhus firmly adhered to the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. However, deep in their minds, a doubt lingered: Would this *upasana* ever be enshrined in the

sanctum of a mandir? Would the *murtis* of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami ever be consecrated? Many influential sadhus had tried in the past to do so. However, they had failed in the face of fierce opposition.

Thus, these sadhus continued to pray to Shriji Maharaj. They anxiously waited for someone who could accomplish such a feat; someone who would be a vessel for Shriji Maharaj's divinity and powers; someone who would carry forward his noble mission.

2. Birth and Blessings

The day for which so many had been praying finally arrived. It was almost noon on Monday, 31 January 1865 (Maha *sud* 5, Samvat 1921). On this auspicious day of Vasant Panchami, in the village of Mahelav, in the Charotar region of Gujarat, Shastriji Maharaj was born. His father, Dhoribhai, and his mother, Hetba, had two daughters and three sons. Their daughters were Sonaba and Raliyatba, and their sons were Mathurbhai, Laldas, and finally little Dungar, who would later be known as Shastriji Maharaj. Years ago, their family had been fortunate enough to come in touch with Shriji Maharaj. Dungar's grandfather, Ajubhai Zaveridas Patel, had met Maharaj.

From a young age, Dungar was very gentle and charming. Everyone was drawn to him. Everyone adored him. When Dungar was six months old, Shukanand Swami and Vaikuntanand Brahmachari came to Mahelav. Mathurbhai took his youngest brother, Dungar, to Shukanand Swami. He asked Swami to initiate Dungar by giving *vartman*. Dungar gazed up at Swami constantly.

Shukanand Swami initiated Dungar into the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Then, placing his hand on Dungar's head, Swami blessed him and said, "He is a very great devotee from the past.



"This brother of yours will one day become a sadhu..."

In the future, he will renounce the world, become a sadhu, and liberate your entire family."

Mathurbhai returned home with Dungar and related Swami's words to the entire family. Swami's prediction delighted everyone.

The following year, Gunatitanand Swami came to Vartal for the Chaitra Punam festival on 31 March 1866 (Chaitra *sud* 15, Samvat 1922). On his way back to Junagadh, Swami passed through Mahelav. Mathurbhai brought little Dungar to Swami

and asked him to initiate Dungar. Surprised, Swami asked, “Has he still not been initiated?”

“Actually, he was initiated last year by Shukanand Swami,” Mathurbhai clarified.

Hearing this, Swami replied, “Shuk Swami is considered the right hand of Shriji Maharaj. If Shuk Swami has initiated him, consider him to have been initiated by Shriji Maharaj himself.” With these words, Gunatitanand Swami placed his hand on Dungar’s head and blessed him.

He said to Mathurbhai, “Your brother will one day become a sadhu and spread the true glory of Shriji Maharaj as the supreme God. By delivering spiritual discourses, he will invigorate and enhance the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.”

Swami looked affectionately at Dungar and gave him a sweet snack as *prasad*.

3. Divinity, Devotion and Austerity

As time passed, people realized that these words of Gunatitanand Swami seemed to be coming true. Dungar’s childhood was filled with devotion and divinity, as well as miracles. Once, during a family wedding, Dungar fell ill. Soon his illness increased and he became serious. Using his divine powers, Dungar suppressed his heartbeat. He entered into a state of samadhi, a divine trance in which he remained blissfully engrossed in the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj.

To his parents, Dungar appeared dead. They were devastated. However, immediately performing the final rites of their young son would disturb the wedding ceremony which was already in progress. Mourning the death of their son, they covered Dungar and quietly laid him in Dhulabhai’s house next door. After the wedding was over, they returned heavy-hearted to Dhulabhai’s house. However, to their surprise, they



Dungar Bhakta enjoying the darshan of Shriji Maharaj

saw little Dungar laughing and playing. They saw a radiant aura of light encircling his body. All of his relatives were overjoyed on witnessing this miracle.

A few years later, Dungar's mother passed away. Now, Dungar had only his father. His father grew even fonder of Dungar, taking more and more care of him.

Dungar was quite different from other children. While other children played all sorts of games, Dungar would build small

mandirs from sand. Dungar would install a tiny *murti* of God in his small earthen mandir. He would offer snacks to the *murti*, imagining that he had prepared a great *annakut* for God. Then, he would perform *arti* of the small *murti*. Seeing little Dungar engaged in such devotion, people believed that one day Dungar would become a great sadhu.

At the age of six, Dungar went to a family wedding in the village of Karamsad. While everyone else was enjoying the occasion, Dungar slipped out into the village and went to the local mandir. There, he began to offer devotional service and give spiritual discourses. Soon it was time for lunch. Everyone wondered where Dungar could be. Searching everywhere for him, they finally found him at the mandir. However, Dungar refused to have lunch, explaining that since it was *ekadashi* he was observing a fast. Everyone was astonished. How could a six-year-old boy choose to fast when such a sumptuous meal was being served?

There were 400 people at the wedding. Everyone pressured Dungar to eat. Undaunted, Dungar declared, “I have heard from the shastras that to eat food made from grains on *ekadashi* is as sinful as eating meat. So, I will not eat.”

Everyone was touched by Dungar’s firm vow to obey the shastras. They stopped pressuring him and ordered sweets, prepared without grains, from the nearby town of Anand. As the story of Dungar’s firm vow spread throughout the village, everyone came to have darshan of this pious child.

Dungar observed austerities such as fasting, and also harboured a great love for spiritual discourses. Daily, he would listen to incidents from the Ramayan, Mahabharat, and Shrimad Bhagvat from his father. He would also listen to various shastras of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, including the Vachanamrut, Bhaktachintamani and Nishkulanand Kavya. At night he would go to sleep only after reciting the verses of the *chestha*.



The fearless Dungar Bhakta

4. Fearlessness

Right from childhood, Dungar was brave. Once, his father left him asleep at home and went to the farm. Soon, Dungar awoke. He looked around. It was midnight. He did not see his father. He assumed that his father would be at the farm. Deciding to go there, Dungar grabbed a stick and set off alone in the darkness, chanting the Swaminarayan mantra as he walked.



Reading the discarded manuscripts of the shastras in Vartal

It was believed that a ghost haunted the road to the farm at night. That was why Dhoribhai was so surprised when he saw little Dungar come to the farm alone on such a dark night. Dhoribhai asked, “Didn’t you feel scared coming here all by yourself?”

Dungar innocently replied, “You have told me that Shriji Maharaj accompanies and protects one who chants the Swaminarayan mantra. Well, that is exactly what I did. I have brought

Maharaj with me. If a ghost had come along the way, I would have hit it with this stick and driven it off.”

Dhoribhai’s heart swelled with pride when he heard his young son’s brave words.

Dungar had now cultivated a habit of listening to scriptural stories. Without listening to them, he just would not feel at ease. When his father gave him work to do on the farm, Dungar would set his terms, “You must promise to tell me stories about God.” Dungar found pleasure only in activities related to God.

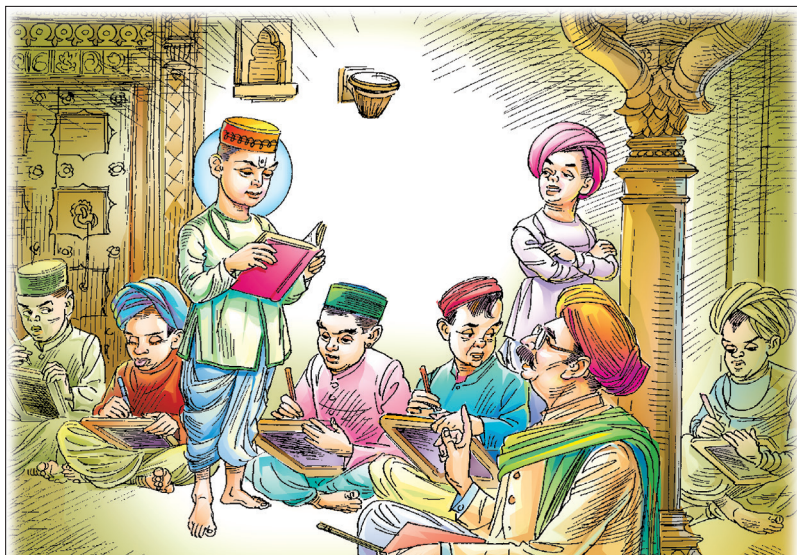
By the age of seven, Dungar regularly attended every Punam festival in Vartal. There, he would sit with each of the sadhus, listen to their discourses and strengthen his spiritual knowledge and detachment from the world. He would never feel inclined to go home. When it was time to leave, someone would have to come and look for him.

The scribes in Vartal often threw away old and unwanted pages from their handwritten manuscripts of the shastras. When he came to Vartal, Dungar would often gather these pages, and in the posture of a great scholar, read them while sitting on the platform beside the mandir. He had not even started his studies, yet his behaviour indicated that he would one day become an unrivalled scholar.

5. Schooling

In 1874 (Samvat 1930), Dungar began studying at the village school under Gangaram Mehta. Dungar’s sharp memory and powerful intellect helped him learn all his lessons immediately and excel in his schoolwork. As a result, Gangaram became extremely fond of Dungar and began to pay more and more attention to him.

Even at that young age, Dungar had resolved, “If I am to study, I will become a student of the first rank; and if I am to



His memory was sharp and his intelligence was high

become a sadhu, I will become a sadhu of the first rank.” With such a high aim, Dungar was able to learn a lot in a short time.

In addition to his studies at school, Dungar began to study the Shrimad Bhagvat as well as shastras of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya from the sadhus who came to the Swaminarayan mandir in Mahelav. When there were no sadhus at the mandir, Dungar, at the age of nine, would himself give spiritual discourses. His discourses left listeners spellbound. Because of his many virtues, the people of Mahelav adored Dungar.

Ravjibhai, a wealthy businessman of Mahelav, did not have any children. Every morning he would wistfully watch Dungar walk by on his way to school. He couldn’t help but wish, “If only I had a son like Dungar. A boy like him would make suitable use of my wealth and further my prestige.”

Once, he asked, “Dungar! Will you stay with me? I will enrol you in a prestigious school in Petlad where they will teach you English. Then, when you grow up, you can become a senior officer for the British Empire!”



“Dungar! Will you stay with me?”

Dungar responded to Ravjibhai with a kind-hearted laugh and a penetrating insight.

“If, even after so much studying, I have to remain subservient to others, then I do not want such an education. I will become a sadhu and a scholar, and I will teach *brahmavidya* to many.”

Dungar also possessed an extraordinary aesthetic sense.

Once, a crowd had assembled at Ravjibhai’s front door.

Ravjibhai was refurnishing the front of his mansion. Everyone was debating where Ravjibhai's new chandelier should be hung.

"If you hang the chandelier on the first floor, it will look very nice," observed Dungar as he passed by.

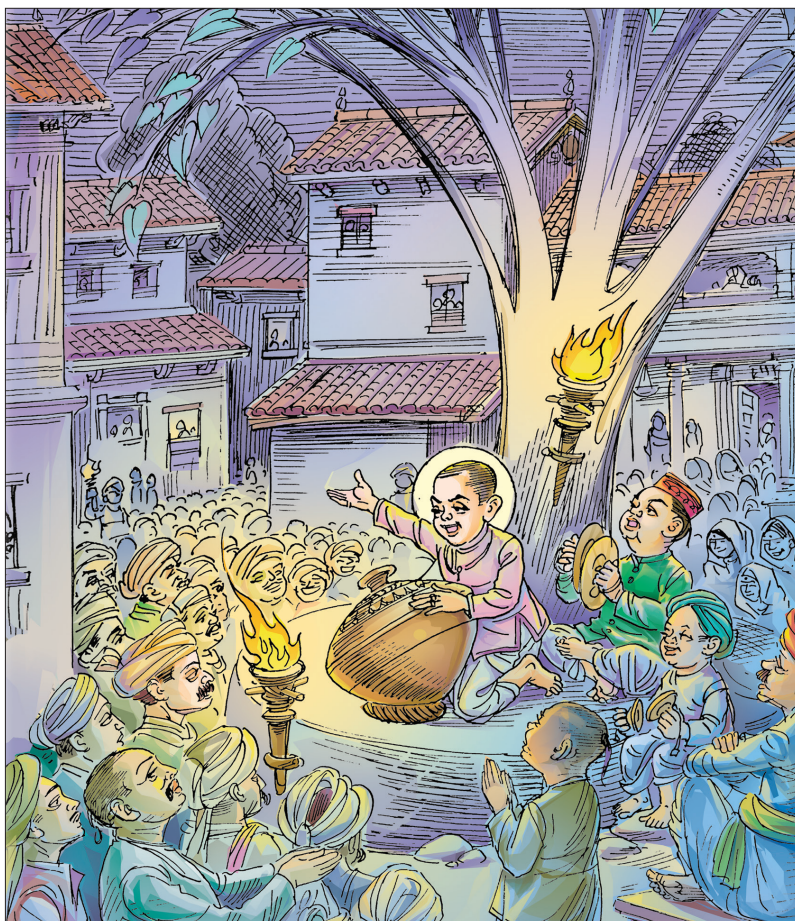
Sure enough, hanging the chandelier as Dungar had suggested solved the dilemma. Everyone agreed that the chandelier now truly enhanced the splendour of the mansion.

Similarly, Dungar once observed that the porch of the Vaishnav haveli would have looked better with round pillars. Again, everyone agreed with Dungar's suggestion.

Once, a new *sinhasan* was being made for the village mandir. Dungar advised the carpenter to make the *sinhasan* identical to the one in the Vartal mandir assembly hall. Everyone respected his keen powers of observation and his natural sense of architectural design.

Speakers delivering spiritual discourses would often visit the village. They would hold general assemblies and recite passages from the shastras. Even at such a young age, Dungar was able to memorize each verse after listening to the recital just once.

Once, a Maanbhatt from the village of Vaso came to Mahelav. Like travelling minstrels, Maanbhatts would travel around the villages singing stories from the shastras while playing the *maan*, a traditional metal pot used as a percussion instrument. Just by listening to a few days of this Maanbhatt's recital of the Mahabharat, Dungar picked up the style in which the verses were sung. The entire recital of the Mahabharat would take several weeks. Unexpectedly, halfway through the recital, the Maanbhatt fell ill and died. The people of the village mourned his sudden death. However, out of respect for the Mahabharat shastra, everyone desired that the recital be completed. Many of the villagers were well aware of Dungar's devotion and powerful memory. Surely, Dungar would recall the remaining verses, since



Reciting the Mahabharat

he had heard recitals of the Mahabharat several times before. Together, they urged him to finish reciting the remaining verses.

Dungar sat on the platform of the village square. Everyone gathered to listen. He began to sing the remaining verses exactly as the Maanbhatt had done. He delighted the residents of Mahelav by completing the remainder of the recital.

Everyone now referred to Dungar as 'Bhagat', a sincere devotee of God. Their affection for him grew. Whenever sadhus came to the village, they would seat Dungar at the front of the

assembly and then speak. When there were no sadhus at the mandir, Dungar would retell their teachings from memory.

6. In Search of a Guru

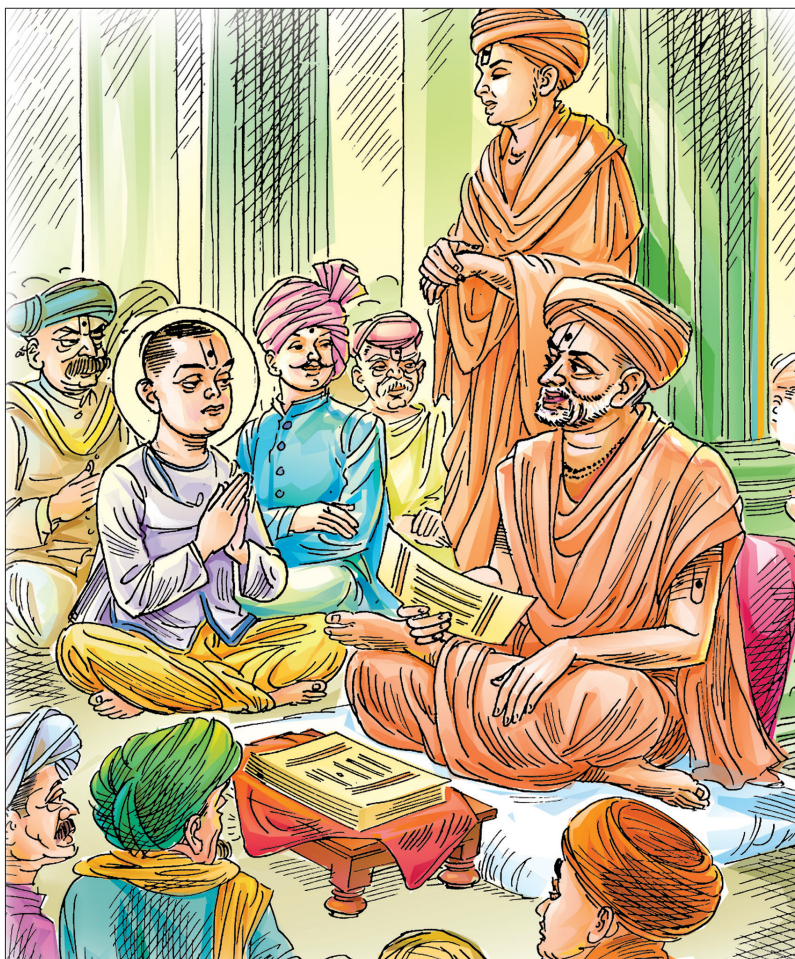
Dungar no longer preferred to stay at home. He wished to renounce and become a sadhu. He did not have attachment for his relatives, and preferred to remain in the company of sadhus. Whenever he went to Vartal for the Punam festival, he would not return home for two or three days. He would sit individually with many of the sadhus and listen to their teachings. His visits to Vartal became more and more frequent. His relatives became concerned. Would Dungar leave home for good?

Dungar was in search of an enlightened and scholarly guru. He had resolved that after finding such a guru, he would leave aside his worldly ties and become a sadhu.

On 14 April 1881, the full-moon day of the month of Chaitra, Samvat 1937, a grand festival was to be celebrated in Vartal. Groups of Swaminarayan sadhus from all over the country were to attend. Of the many who had already arrived, the sadhus from Surat, led by Sadguru Vignananand Swami, stood out from the rest. His saintliness attracted the attention of all.

Vignananand Swami had stayed with Shriji Maharaj for twelve years. He had pleased Shriji Maharaj and attained many virtues, including the virtues of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti. In addition, he was a profound scholar of the shastras and a master of classical music.

One after another, Dungar sat with the sadhus to get to know them. Finally, he came to Vignananand Swami. After having his darshan, Dungar sat down in front of him. While listening to his discourses, Dungar experienced peace within.



“Do you wish to become a sadhu, my dear boy?”

He was certain that all of his spiritual goals would be fulfilled by staying with this great sadhu. He resolved there and then to accept Vignananand Swami as his guru.

Vignananand Swami, too, perceived an extraordinary spiritual fire within Dunganar. He thought to himself, “If this youngster becomes a sadhu, he is surely capable of carrying forth our tradition of spiritual knowledge.” With this belief, he asked, “Do you want to become a sadhu?”

“Yes.” The intense spiritual zeal trapped in Dungar’s heart escaped from his lips.

At that moment, a bond of spiritual affinity formed between the guru and his new disciple. Both shared a common experience – a feeling of fulfilment. Dungar now wished more than ever to accompany Swami after the celebrations. However, afraid that his father would protest, he returned to Mahelav with his family.

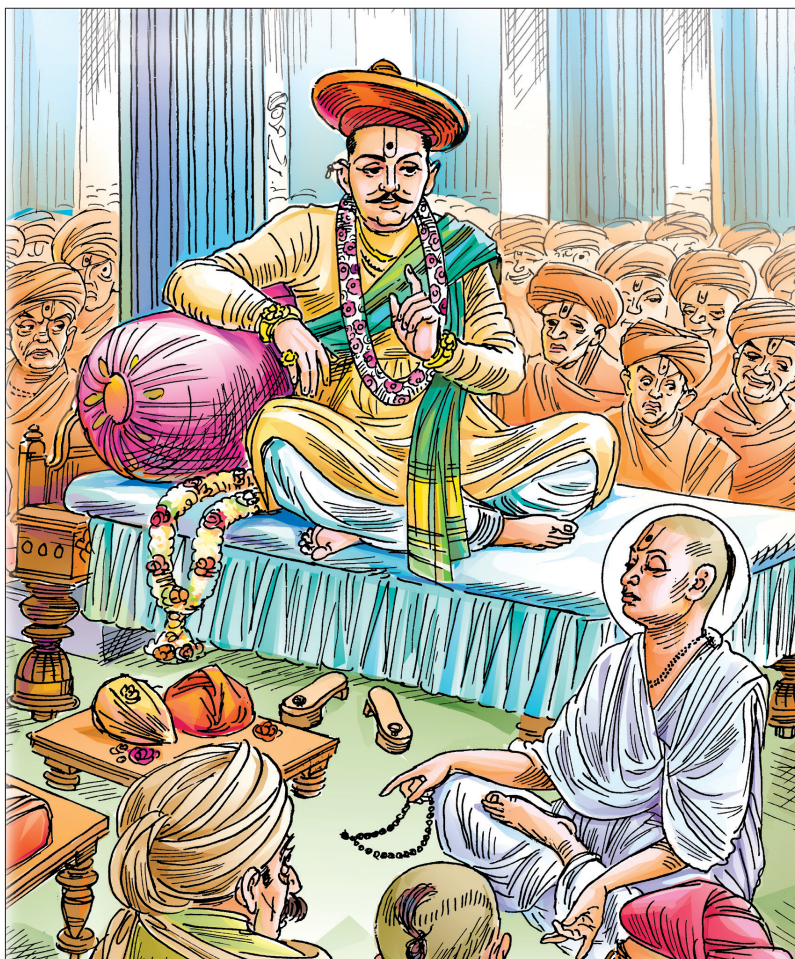
After a few days, Dungar quietly set out for Vartal. He had heard that today was the day that Vignananand Swami would return to Surat. Dungar planned to accompany him before anyone could object. However, upon reaching Vartal, Dungar received some unfortunate news. Due to an unexpected turn of events, Swami would arrive in Vartal the following day. That one day of waiting in Vartal spoiled Dungar’s plans. Noticing Dungar’s disappearance, his father immediately came to Vartal and took him home.

7. Only the Brave Can Tread the Path of God

Dungar found life at home increasingly humdrum. He lost interest in his work at the farm. He would often utter in despair, “Swami... Swami...” He mingled less with his family and spent more time at the mandir. All that he thought about was being with his guru. Six or seven months passed in this way and Dhoribhai began to worry about Dungar’s unhappiness.

One day, Dungar slipped out of the house and headed for Vartal. From there, he reached Surat. Here, he stayed for some time with Vignananand Swami, who was the mahant of Surat mandir. When Dhoribhai found out where Dungar was, he rushed to Surat and brought him to Vartal.

Dhoribhai took Dungar to Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj. To



Dungar Bhakta demonstrates how to turn the *mala*

stop Dungar from returning to Surat, Dhoribhai complained, “Your sadhu is spoiling my child.”

Acharya Maharaj scolded Dungar, “Do you want to get one of our sadhus thrown in jail? Do not come back here to become a sadhu!”

Dungar’s dreams were shattered before his eyes. Seeing his dismay, the *kothari* of the mandir consoled him and told him not to worry. He advised, “Come back after two or three days.”



Dungar Bhakta discourses to his father on detachment

After a few days, Dungar returned to Vartal. When Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj noticed him, he immediately summoned Dungar and said, “Show me what you learned from Swami while in Surat.”

Dungar sat with his legs crossed. He closed his eyes and began chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. Acharya Maharaj was pleased with Dungar’s concentration and devotion. He addressed the sadhus seated in the assembly, “You should all learn to do *mala* in this way.”

Acharya Maharaj saw in Dungar, an intelligent and focused young man, and a perfect candidate to help him manage the mandir affairs. He was tempted to keep him in his *seva*. He told Dungar, “Become a *parshad* and stay with me.”

“Maharaj, I want to go to Surat and stay in Swami’s service,” Dungar replied with humility.

Meanwhile, his father, guessing that Dungar must have run off again to Vartal, came looking for him. Seeing Dungar, Dhoribhai again took him back home.

On the way back to Mahelav, Dungar decided that it was now time to address his father directly. He spoke extensively to Dhoribhai about detachment from the world. He explained that the family ties of this world were false and would one day perish. Dungar’s powerful words pierced through his father’s stubborn emotions and enlightened him, driving away his false material hopes.

Dhoribhai’s moist eyes now beheld Dungar in a different light. He bowed before him. The following day, he approached Dungar. Dhoribhai spoke affectionately, “You have come into this world to worship God and to inspire others to worship God. You will not be able to live a worldly life at home. Please, always cast your blessings on us.”

Dhoribhai addressed a letter to Vignananand Swami giving Dungar permission to become a sadhu. As he wrote, his memory drifted back to Dungar’s childhood, and Gunatitanand Swami’s words came to mind.

It was December 1881 (Magshar, Samvat 1938). Dungar, with the speed of an arrow shooting out of a bow, finally darted off to join his guru in Surat.

8. Renunciation

Eager to meet Vignananand Swami, Dungar, accompanied by Vitthaldas Sheth, arrived at the railway station in Boriavi,



Leaving home to walk the path of renunciation

near Anand. Hearing that Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj would be coming to Vadodara, Dungar went straight there. Whenever Viharilalji Maharaj arrived in such a big city, there would always be a grand festival. Sadhus from throughout the country would come. Dungar had guessed that Vignananand Swami would surely accompany Viharilalji Maharaj. He was right. Here, when he finally met his guru, his joy knew no bounds.

Gordhanbhai Kothari of Vartal had also come to Vadodara.



Dungar Bhakta cleaning large utensils

In Dungar, he too saw a dynamic young man who could ably shoulder many of his responsibilities. He was tempted to keep him.

“Stay in my *seva*. There is so much work that you can help me with,” he proposed.

Dungar politely refused, “I have only been given permission to stay in the *seva* of Vignananand Swami, so I will stay only with him.”

The following day, Viharilalji Maharaj noticed Dungar. He was pleased with Dungar’s determination. However, he did

not want Dungar's father to cause trouble. He asked Dungar, "Why have you come here again?"

The question frightened Dungar. What if Viharilalji Maharaj did not allow him to stay? He immediately disclosed his worries to Vignananand Swami. Swami assured him, "Do not worry. You have come now with written permission. He will surely let you stay."

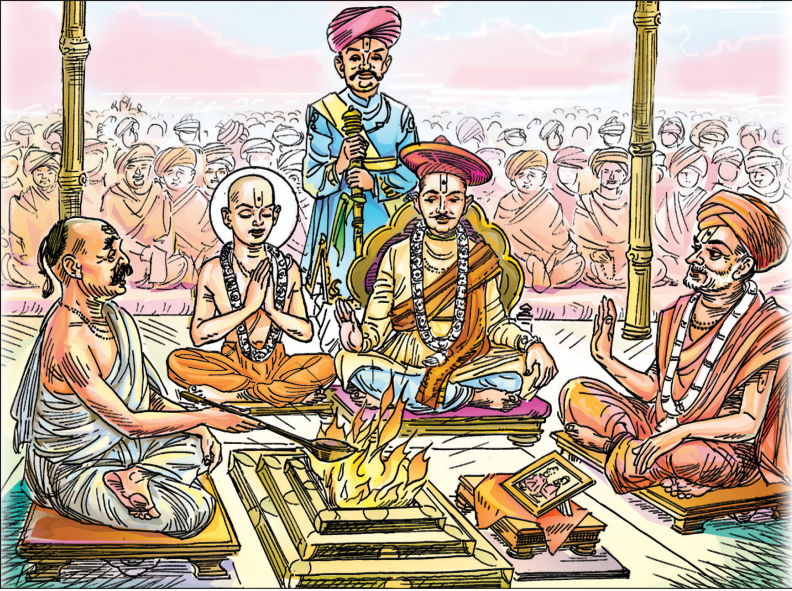
Relieved of his greatest worry, Dungar became fully engaged in *seva*. When people saw Dungar engaged in various duties throughout the day, they would stop and watch in admiration. Seeing little Dungar climb into and scrub gigantic cooking vessels and pots, some at least twice his own size, brought a smile to everyone's face. Everyone marvelled at his devotional service.

After the festivities, Viharilalji Maharaj told Dungar to travel with Devanand Brahmachari in the region of Kanam to help collect donations. During their travels, they would stay in the village mandir. Here, Dungar would sweep the mandir grounds, fill water from the well for drinking and cooking, and assist in preparing meals. Moreover, he would sing kirtans and deliver discourses late into the night. The next morning he would wake up early and engage in constant *seva*. This hectic routine began to take a toll on his health, but Dungar ignored his fatigue and continued with his busy schedule.

One early morning, after bathing in the frigid waters of the River Dhadhar, his body could not bear the shivering cold and he fell down unconscious. When he regained consciousness, Devanand Brahmachari gently advised him, "You shouldn't strain yourself so much. Don't bathe so early in the morning when it is so cold. Wake up a little later to bathe."

In this way, Dungar's enthusiasm for *seva* won the hearts of all. After three months, he was finally called to Surat.

In Surat, Vignananand Swami told him to serve in



Sadhu initiation ceremony of Dungar Bhakta

the mandir administration. Dungar performed this duty with meticulous attention to detail. He would also keep precise records of the mandir's accounts. In addition, he regularly listened to discourses given by sadhus. Not only Vignananand Swami, but all the devotees of Surat were pleased with Dungar's skill and intellect. He had earned their trust and respect. Gradually, Swami began to shift his own responsibilities onto Dungar in order to step back from overseeing the mandir affairs.

Even with such a heavy workload, Dungar still found time to study regularly under Vignananand Swami. He completed all of his lessons on time. Within just four months, he completed the study of Sarasvat Sanskrit grammar.

Such was his zeal to do *seva*, affection for the devotees, and care not to waste mandir resources! It was no surprise that people began to feel that he was the *kothari* of the mandir. Swami's tremendous blessings carried Dungar forward.

9. Initiation as a Sadhu

Dungar was now eager to receive *bhagvati diksha*, initiation as a sadhu. Vignananand Swami, too, was eager to arrange for his initiation. After all, a disciple so completely detached from the world, like Dungar, was hard to find.

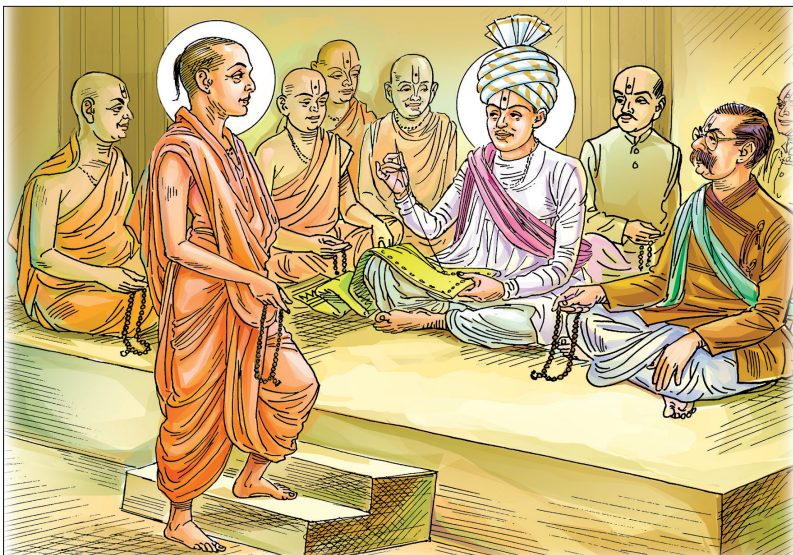
On 15 November 1882 (Kartik *sud* 5, Samvat 1939), Adbhutanand Swami, a *paramhansa* from the time of Shriji Maharaj, passed away. Many sadhus arrived in Vartal to pay their respects during his final rites. Vignananand Swami, accompanied by Dungar, also came. After the ceremony, Swami requested Viharilalji Maharaj to initiate Dungar as a sadhu.

Viharilalji Maharaj, however, also wanted an assistant who was as skilled and clever as Dungar. Since initiating him as a sadhu would ruin any chance of convincing Dungar to stay with him, Viharilalji Maharaj initially refused Vignananand Swami's request, "He hasn't yet completed the required one year as a *parshad* so there is no need to rush in initiating him."

Swami was stunned. He appealed, "But there was an extra month last year according to the lunar calendar. Therefore, he has actually been a *parshad* for twelve months." Viharilalji Maharaj, however, paid no heed to this plea.

Disappointed by this turn of events, Vignananand Swami requested Gordhanbhai Kothari to help him. Gordhanbhai also pressured Acharya Maharaj. Finally, several senior sadhus appealed to Viharilalji Maharaj on Swami's behalf, "It is not right to upset a senior sadhu like Vignananand Swami, who has stayed with Shriji Maharaj himself. Thus, you should fulfil his request and initiate Dungar Bhakta."

Viharilalji Maharaj finally agreed to give Dungar *bhagvati diksha*. He acknowledged that this was no ordinary occasion. Thus, he arranged for a grand ceremony and *yagna* for the day of initiation. On 29 November 1882 (Kartik *vad* 5, Samvat



"Sadhuram...the enlightened has innumerable eyes."

1939), amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras, Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj initiated Dungar Bhakta into the sadhu order and named him 'Yagnapurushdasji'.

That same evening, Viharilalji Maharaj summoned a learned astrologer to examine the *janmakshar* of the newly initiated sadhus. Examining the *janmakshar* of Yagnapurushdasji, the astrologer revealed, "This sadhu is a manifestation of God in the form of a great yogi. He will become a very great sadhu."

These words delighted all who were present.

10. Meeting Bhagatji Maharaj

Yagnapurushdasji soon returned to Surat. He resumed serving his guru and his *seva* in the mandir. During the month of Fagan, in March 1883, there was a grand festival in Surat. The *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj was to be consecrated in the mandir. Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj, as well as sadhus and devotees from different regions arrived for the ceremony.

Bhagatji Maharaj, also known as Pragji Bhakta, also came from Mahuva.

Bhagatji Maharaj discoursed continuously. Thousands of sadhus and devotees would sit and listen with great concentration.

Yagnapurushdasji would go to the seats of the senior sadhus to listen to their teachings. Once, seeing a large crowd seated around Bhagatji Maharaj, Yagnapurushdasji, too, sat in the assembly.

Bhagatji's discourses were different from anything Yagnapurushdasji had heard before. Surprisingly, Bhagatji, a tailor by profession, would continue stitching clothes as he spoke. Each and every devotee listened carefully, making sure not to miss a word. They sat motionless, their eyes gleaming with joy as Bhagatji talked.

Yagnapurushdasji, amazed by what he was witnessing, wondered to himself, "He seems to be someone extraordinary. How is he able to speak with such spiritual depth, yet stitch at the same time?"

Reading his mind, Pragji Bhakta said, "Sadhuraam! All living creatures have two eyes. Scholars are said to have three. Those who are righteous have seven. But a *jnani*, one who possesses true knowledge, has countless eyes. Therefore, I can see with my fingers. I can see with my back. I can see from everywhere."

Astonished that Bhagatji had read his mind, Yagnapurushdasji thought to himself, "How did he know what I was thinking? He is certainly someone great." Something unexplainable drew Yagnapurushdasji to Bhagatji Maharaj.

Within a short period of time, Bhagatji's words moved Yagnapurushdasji. He discovered that Bhagatji Maharaj was a disciple who had been blessed immensely by his guru, Gunatitanand Swami. Yagnapurushdasji had often heard of Swami's greatness. Today, for the first time, he experienced that greatness through Bhagatji. He immediately accepted Bhagatji Maharaj as his guru.

During the day, Yagnapurushdasji would be busy serving in the festival. In the evening, however, he would sit before Bhagatji, listening to his teachings late into the night. Then he would return to his seat to sleep. Unable to hold his enthusiasm, he would wake up Ramratandas, his companion sadhu, and repeat everything that he had heard from Bhagatji. Before he realized, it would be 4 a.m., time for everyone to go and bathe in the River Tapi. Sometimes, when he did find free time during the day, he would sit and discuss spiritual matters with Vignandas Swami and Prabhudas Kothari, both senior disciples of Bhagatji Maharaj. Such was Yagnapurushdasji's eagerness to gain spiritual knowledge.

11. The Path of Brahavidya

Once, Bhagatji Maharaj had Vachanamrut Loya 12 read out loud. He clarified the concept of becoming *aksharrup* and developing firm conviction in Purushottam, explaining that Gunatitanand Swami was the personified form of that Akshar and one must become like him. Only when one obeys and pleases a *brahmaswarup satpurush* does one become *aksharrup* and develop utmost conviction in Purushottam. Yagnapurushdasji now understood the essence of true *upasana*.

One evening, the devotees of Surat asked Vignananand Swami, "Swami, how do we achieve the highest level of conviction?"

As Vignananand Swami replied to the question, he looked at Yagnapurushdasji. He knew that Yagnapurushdasji would not be satisfied with the answer. Thus, he promised to answer the question in more detail at a later time.

"The answer to this question lies in Vachanamrut Loya 12," remarked Yagnapurushdasji. He then repeated the explanation that Bhagatji Maharaj had given.

Vignananand Swami was extremely pleased with this young sadhu. He exclaimed, “Sadhuraam! Pragji Bhakta is a *satpurush* possessing *brahmastithi*. He has learned the essence and the actual principles of the 262 Vachanamrut discourses from Gunatitanand Swami. Without a doubt, his explanations of Shriji Maharaj’s principles are the truth. As you have developed affection for him, see to it that you fully cultivate that affection. Always keep his company.”

Hearing of Bhagatji Maharaj’s greatness from Swami, Yagnapurushdasji was overjoyed.

During the months of Chaturmas, Kapilmuni, Ghanshyamdas and Vignandas came to Surat. They were all sadhus who faithfully supported Bhagatji Maharaj. In their spiritual discussions, they often suggested that Shriji Maharaj was the Supreme God. Yagnapurushdasji once asked Vignananand Swami, “In the Vachanamrut, Maharaj himself states that he has manifested through Nar-Narayan. These sadhus claim that Shriji Maharaj is the Supreme God. What should we understand?”

Vignananand Swami replied, “While in Gadhada, I have myself heard Shriji Maharaj say that he himself is Supreme God. Therefore, you should also understand him to be so.”

Yagnapurushdasji now firmly understood Shriji Maharaj as the Supreme God and Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar.

Yagnapurushdasji indeed enjoyed Bhagatji’s company. He utilized any free time in his schedule to listen to Bhagatji’s discourses. Seeing his affection for Bhagatji, some became jealous.

They thought, “Yagnapurushdasji, the disciple of a ‘*nand*’ sadhu like Vignananand Swami, roams after and listens to the discourses of Pragji Bhakta, a mere householder. If he continues to do so, he will lower the prestige of sadhus. Who will respect our authority in the future?”

These hostile sadhus complained to Acharya Maharaj, setting their terms, “You must choose. Either Bhagatji stays here or

we stay here.” To avoid trouble, Acharya Maharaj instructed Bhagatji to stay for a few days and then depart from Surat.

Soon, Vignananand Swami prompted Yagnapurushdasji to start reading and giving discourses on shastras such as the Dharmamrut, Hari Gita and Vasudev Mahatmya. Swami also started teaching him from the Shrimad Bhagvat. One evening, Vignananand Swami fell ill. Within a few days, his condition worsened. Yagnapurushdasji now personally stayed in Swami’s *seva* day and night. Late at night on Adhik Jeth *vad* 11, everyone saw Shriji Maharaj and his sadhus arriving in a golden chariot.

The following morning, Yagnapurushdasji informed Swami, “Shriji Maharaj has been here since 4 a.m. He wishes to take you to Akshardham.” For half an hour, Swami’s eyes rested affectionately on Yagnapurushdasji. On the morning of the twelfth (10 June 1885), Vignananand Swami left his physical body for Akshardham. Yagnapurushdasji, as well as all of Swami’s disciples, were grieved by Swami’s passing.

On the day of Prabhodini Ekadashi (Kartak *sud* 11), Yagnapurushdasji went to Vartal. He took with him all the sanctified relics of Shriji Maharaj that had been preserved by Vignananand Swami. He presented them to the mandir in Vartal, thereby pleasing Acharya Maharaj.

12. Like a Favourite Son

Bhagatji Maharaj had also come to Vartal. Yagnapurushdasji enjoyed the privilege of his company. Acharya Maharaj also cherished staying with Bhagatji Maharaj. After the Prabhodhini Ekadashi festival, he told Bhagatji to stay for a month. Many sadhus, who were fond of Bhagatji, sat and listened to his discourses. Bhagatji knew that others who envied him would cause trouble. Thus, he never allowed his disciples, with the exception of Yagnapurushdasji, to sit in his discourses.

Narayancharandas once asked, “You tell everyone else to leave, but why don’t you ever tell Yagnapurushdasji to leave?”

Bhagatji replied, “He is like a favourite son, so he will remain. Do not compare yourself to him.” Bhagatji’s words revealed his affection for Yagnapurushdasji.

In his posession, Vignananand Swami had kept a pair of Shriji Maharaj’s *charanarvind*. After Swami passed away, these *charanarvind* had been passed on to his leading disciple, Yagnapurushdasji. Ramratandas wanted these *charanarvind* for himself. He asked Bhagatji to tell Yagnapurushdasji to give up the *charanarvind*. Upon Bhagatji’s request, Yagnapurushdasji immediately handed over the *charanarvind* to Ramratandas. Bhagatji Maharaj was very pleased. How could anyone part with such a priceless possession? Yagnapurushdasji’s obedience to his guru was paramount.

When Acharya Maharaj learned of what had happened, he scolded Bhagatji, “You do not understand the practical affairs of Satsang. Vignananand Swami’s pair of *charanarvind* must remain with his leading disciple. Only with these *charanarvind*, will sadhus stay with him.”

Bhagatji replied, “I will give him the very Shriji Maharaj who has imprinted these *charanarvind*. Thereafter, many sadhus will stay with him, so do not worry.”

Over time, Acharya Maharaj marked Yagnapurushdasji’s sharp intellect and ability to clearly explain spiritual principles. He was convinced that if Yagnapurushdasji studied further, he would further advance the prestige of the Sampradaya. Acharya Maharaj expressed his wish to Bhagatji Maharaj.

Bhagatji replied, “You educate him in the study of the shastras; I will teach him *brahmavidya*.” They both agreed that Yagnapurushdasji should now commence the study of Siddhant Kaumudi Sanskrit grammar.

However, Yagnapurushdasji now often listened to the

discourses of Vignandas Swami, one of Bhagatji's leading disciples. As a result, he was drawn even more to Bhagatji and concentrated less on his studies. He spent more time on meditation and worship, and so Bhagatji began to give Yagnapurushdasji darshan in his dreams.

Around this time, Vignandas Swami had come to the village of Sojitra. Yagnapurushdasji would go to Sojitra every evening and listen all night to his discourses. Vignandas Swami and all of Bhagatji's sadhu disciples remained constantly engrossed in meditation, worship, spiritual discourses and *seva*. They ate only plain meals. Their virtuous ways impressed the devotees of the entire region. Everyone understood their greatness.

13. Bond of Love Between Guru and Disciple

Jaga Bhakta, a blessed disciple of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, arrived from Junagadh to attend the Ram Navmi celebrations in Vartal. Yagnapurushdasji spent a great deal of time with him and pleased him by doing his *seva*.

Meanwhile, Bhagatji Maharaj had arrived in Chansad in the Gujarat region. Some devotees were going for Bhagatji's darshan. With them, Yagnapurushdasji sent two gifts for Bhagatji. He sent a *tumbdi* which had been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj and a garland of jasmine buds which had been offered to Harikrishna Maharaj.

Arriving in Chansad, Dajibhai met Bhagatji Maharaj and delivered these gifts on Yagnapurushdasji's behalf. Delighted by Yagnapurushdasji's devotion, Bhagatji affectionately exclaimed, "Oh, how wonderful indeed, Yagnapurushdasji! How wonderful indeed! You have troubled yourself so much for this Pragji Bhakta!"

From Chansad, Bhagatji came to Vartal. There,

Yagnapurushdasji and Bhagatji's other disciples continuously spoke of Bhagatji Maharaj's glory. They emphasized to all the need to achieve oneness with Bhagatji. However, many envious sadhus did not like this.

They complained to Bhagatji Maharaj, "These sadhus of yours are out of control. Day and night they preach about your greatness. They claim that you hold the key to Akshardham and that you are the gateway to liberation. In every corner of Vartal and under every tree of Vartal, they sing your glory. This is not appropriate."

Bhagatji replied, "I will speak to them."

When they complained specifically about Yagnapurushdasji, Bhagatji replied, "He is still young. However, I will scold the others."

The following day, Bhagatji left for Nadiad. Yagnapurushdasji and Bhaktijivandas walked with him, listening to his teachings. Just then, Bhagatji told them, "Both of you are guilty of excessively praising Pragji Bhakta. Therefore, go back to Vartal, apologize to and appease the sadhus in front of the general assembly."

Both sadhus returned to Vartal. They prostrated to the sadhus in the assembly and apologized to them. By evening, they returned to Nadiad to meet Bhagatji.

Vignandas Swami and the other sadhus had also arrived in Nadiad. The following day, Bhagatji told them all to go to Vartal and apologize.

"Will Yagnapurushdasji also come with us?" asked one sadhu.

"He has already paid in advance with interest. Why should he go again?" replied Bhagatji, siding with Yagnapurushdasji who had already apologized before coming to Nadiad.

As Bhagatji Maharaj and his disciples became more popular, the opposition against them increased. Bhagatji's sadhus would speak of the differences between a true and a false sadhu, thereby exposing pretentious sadhus in the public eye. Day by day, the hostility of

other Vartal sadhus towards Bhagatji's sadhus increased. Bhagatji's sadhus were harassed in many ways. Once, Yagnapurushdasji was engaged in darshan of the *murtis* at the mandir in Vartal. One individual stabbed him from behind with a large needle. Another started to kick him. Yagnapurushdasji tolerated everything patiently. He didn't say a word to anyone and continued with his activities. Such tolerance won the respect of many devotees. This evoked even more hostility from those who opposed Bhagatji.

14. Bhagatji: The Param Ekantik Satpurush

After celebrating the Ram Navmi festival in Vartal, Yagnapurushdasji, Vignandas and the other sadhus went to Mahuva via Gadhada. Purani Raghuvircharandas accommodated Yagnapurushdasji and Keshavprasaddas in the Mahuva mandir.

The next day an assembly was held in the presence of Bhagatji Maharaj. Hoping to reveal the spiritual understanding of the sadhus, several devotees asked them questions. One such question was: "Who do you understand Pragji Bhakta to be?"

Mahapurushdas replied, "We believe him to be an Ekantik Bhakta."

Fulchandbhai asked Mahapurushdas to explain using references from the Vachanamrut. When Mahapurushdas did not reply, Narayancharandas answered, "We believe Bhagatji to have the qualities of the Satpurush as described in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 27."

"What qualities are mentioned in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 27?" asked Vitthalbhai.

The devotees waited for an answer, but Narayancharandas remained silent. Yagnapurushdasji knew that the perfect opportunity had presented itself. He could openly reveal Bhagatji's true glory to all. At the request of Bhagatji Maharaj,

Yagnapurushdasji finally addressed the devotees.

“We believe Pragji Bhakta to be the Ekantik Satpurush as described in the Vachanamrut.” Yagnapurushdasji then continued to describe the qualities of an Ekantik Satpurush stated in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 27, that such an Ekantik Satpurush possesses dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti, and that Shriji Maharaj does not remain away from him for even a moment.

The divinity in Yagnapurushdasji’s voice and his ability to cite exact references from the Vachanamrut convinced all of Bhagatji’s saintliness. They understood the principle that Shriji Maharaj did not at all remain away from such a person. They acknowledged that Bhagatji’s sadhus were indeed matchless in spiritual knowledge and in their love for their guru. Everyone was now aware of Bhagatji’s enlightened state.

Bhagatji too was very pleased with Yagnapurushdasji’s ability to explain on the basis of the shastras. He placed his hand on Yagnapurushdasji’s head and blessed him. Thereafter, the sadhus returned to Vartal.

15. A ‘Thakario’ Scorpion

From Vartal, Yagnapurushdasji went to Thasra. There he delighted the devotees with his spiritual discourses. Thereafter, he arrived in Dabhoi.

Purani Morlidhardas, who disliked Bhagatji Maharaj, stayed in Dabhoi. Yagnapurushdasji, through his discourses, removed Morlidhardas’ aversion for Bhagatji. He explained Bhagatji’s greatness to him.

When Bhagatji Maharaj learned of Yagnapurushdasji’s feats, he exclaimed, “Yagnapurushdasji is like a ‘Thakario’ scorpion. Wherever he goes, spiritual aspirants are struck by his stinging spiritual discourses. He introduces the manifest God and Sadhu to them.”



Rangacharya teaches Sanskrit to Yagnapurushdasji and other students

The devotees in Dabhoi were also delighted with Yagnapurushdasji's discourses.

Purani Morlidhardas exclaimed, "Well done, Yagnapurushdasji! Well done! Through your discourses, you have brought me peace within. In all my years, I have never before heard such brilliant discourses. You have surpassed all our expectations. You have removed our obstinacy, ego, and jealousy."

Even in a fully packed assembly at the mandir, Morlidhardas,

a very senior sadhu, started to offer *dandvats* to Yagnapurushdasji. Immediately, Yagnapurushdasji stopped him.

Yagnapurushdasji soon resumed his studies in Vartal. However, there were no competent scholars nearby available to teach him. Yagnapurushdasji was sent to Vadodara. There, he started his study of Siddhant Kaumudi from the great scholar, Rangacharya. Yagnapurushdasji's sharp intellect, powerful memory and intense desire to study earned him Rangacharya's respect. He often spoke to Rangacharya about Bhagatji's greatness. He explained that Bhagatji possessed all of the characteristics of Brahma. Thus, Rangacharya eagerly longed for Bhagatji's darshan.

16. A Matchless Scholar

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's body had been cremated at Lakshmi Vadi, Dada Khachar's farm in Gadhada. A mandir was constructed over the cremation site in memory of Shriji Maharaj. Bhagatji Maharaj arrived in Gadhada for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the mandir at Lakshmi Vadi.

Yagnapurushdasji, accompanied by Rangacharya, also left for Gadhada. They first arrived in Bhavnagar. There, Yagnapurushdasji defeated a teacher of the Shankar school of thought in debate. From there, they arrived in Gadhada. Here, Yagnapurushdasji introduced Bhagatji Maharaj to Rangacharya.

Rangacharya was overjoyed to finally have Bhagatji's darshan. He was convinced that Bhagatji was indeed the enlightened Sadhu that Yagnapurushdasji had described.

Senior *sadgurus*, who strongly believed in the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, also arrived from Junagadh for the ceremony. Yagnapurushdasji took the devotees who had come from Gujarat region to meet these *sadgurus*. The discourses of these *sadgurus* strengthened the devotees' conviction in the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. They were now also convinced of Bhagatji's *brahmasthiti*.



A debate between Mahidhar Shastri and Yagnapurushdas at Lakshmi Vadi

Following the *murti-pratishtha*, a large assembly was held in the evening at Lakshmi Vadi. Many scholars came as guests, one of them being the renowned Vedanti scholar from Rajkot, Shri Mahidhar Shastri.

Mahidhar Shastri challenged the scholars of the Sampradaya to a debate on the shastras. However, no one dared to debate with such a powerful scholar. Everyone stared at each other, not knowing what to do.

Yagnapurushdasji thought to himself, “If no one accepts the challenge, the reputation of the Sampradaya will suffer.” He himself came forward, at Bhagatji’s behest.

Seeing such a young sadhu daring to stand before him in debate, Mahidhar Shastri laughed.

Rangacharya, however, defended his disciple, “*Gunābhā puja-sthānam gunishu na cha lingam na cha vayaha* – Only the virtues of the virtuous should be revered, not their gender or their age.”

The debate started with Mahidhar Shastri asking questions. Yagnapurushdasji would answer each question and weaken Mahidhar Shastri’s arguments. He would then establish his own principles. As the debate continued, Mahidhar Shastri soon found his arguments gradually being depleted. Finally, he admitted defeat and bowed before Yagnapurushdasji.

Acharya Maharaj, Bhagatji Maharaj, Rangacharya and all who were present marvelled at Yagnapurushdasji’s feat. Bhagatji continued to gaze affectionately at his favourite disciple.

The following day, Yagnapurushdasji went to meet Bhagatji Maharaj. Bhagatji saw him coming and immediately sat up.

“Welcome Sadhuji!” he said as he hugged Yagnapurushdasji, “May you always happily worship God.”

After the celebrations, Bhagatji returned to Mahuva. Yagnapurushdasji returned to Vadodara. While Yagnapurushdasji stayed at the Vadodara mandir for his studies, he always sat and talked to devotees and college students about Akshar and Purushottam.

One afternoon, Jethabhai from the village of Pij came to the mandir to meet Yagnapurushdasji. After darshan of Thakorji, both of them walked casually to the mandir’s *pradakshina*. They sat there discussing spiritual matters. Yagnapurushdasji was so absorbed in speaking, and Jethabhai in listening, that both lost track of time. Only when the clock struck four, did they realize that it was almost morning. They had been talking for twelve hours.

After this incident, Jethabhai developed firmer conviction in the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He also understood Bhagatji's greatness. Some years later, Jethabhai later took *diksha* and became Nirgundas Swami.

Yagnapurushdasji was perhaps the most outstanding of Rangacharya's disciples. Not only did Yagnapurushdasji learn the knowledge latent in each shastra, but he also pulled out any references that he could find to support the concepts of devotion and Akshar-Purushottam. He also cited references from the shastras to slowly weaken Rangacharya's allegiance to the Shankar school of thought.

In Yagnapurushdasji, Rangacharya had met a sadhu abundant in both knowledge and devotion. Yagnapurushdasji's presence brought Rangacharya a feeling of joy that he had never experienced before. Rangacharya would often exclaim, "*Asmin Sampradāye ekameva* – Yagnapurushdasji is unparalleled, the one and only in our Sampradaya."

17. A Broom for Inner Cleansing

During the Jal Jhilani festival, Bhagatji Maharaj advised Yagnapurushdasji that if Acharya Maharaj told him to study further, he should opt to study in Rajkot, rather than go to Kashi. Bhagatji then turned to the devotees and exclaimed, "This Yagnapurushdasji is a broom to internally cleanse you. Do you want to lose his company? If he goes afar to study, how will you do without him?"

Bhagatji advised Yagnapurushdasji to study in Rajkot for two reasons. Firstly, he would be able to study Sanskrit without having to go too far. Secondly, Jaga Bhakta, who had received tremendous blessings from Gunatitanand Swami, would be nearby in Junagadh. Yagnapurushdasji also wished to benefit from the company of Jaga Bhakta.

Acharya Maharaj then instructed Yagnapurushdasji to go to Rajkot and study. He wrote a letter ordering that arrangements be made for Yagnapurushdasji to stay at the Rajkot mandir while he studied.

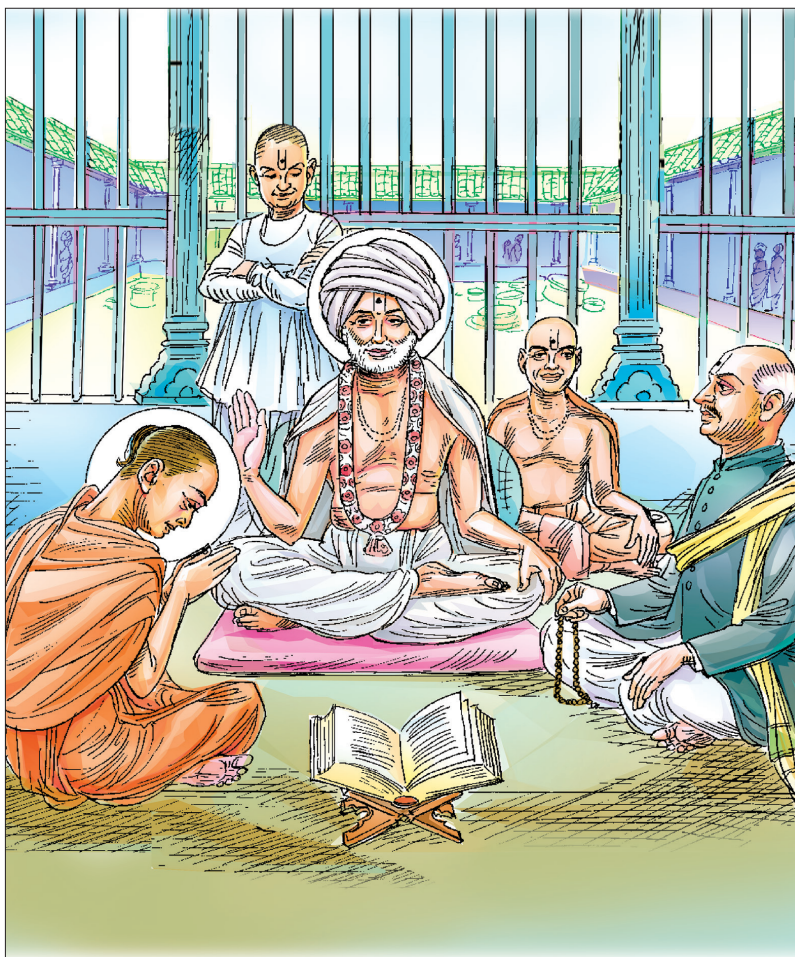
Yagnapurushdasji arrived in Rajkot and resumed his studies. Jivanram Shastri, the son of Mahidhar Shastri, would come to the mandir to teach him. Although a great scholar, Jivanram was quite humble and accommodating. He was further humbled by Yagnapurushdasji's sharp intellect and scholarliness. Although Yagnapurushdasji was his student, Jivanram soon developed a divine reverence for him from within.

In Rajkot, Yagnapurushdasji would assist young devotees in their studies. He would speak to them about the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam. He won the hearts of many youths. During the festivals of Ekadashi and Punam, he would send these youths to Junagadh to listen to the discourses of Jaga Bhakta. Yagnapurushdasji himself often visited Junagadh.

Yagnapurushdasji's youth activities alarmed many envious sadhus. Such people would approach naive devotees, feeding them misleading lies, "This Shastri coaxes your sons into observing strict fasts. He needlessly sends them off to Junagadh. Many times, he makes them stay at the mandir without any reason. Stop your sons before he spoils them and makes them into sadhus."

These words provoked many naive devotees. They intended to insult Yagnapurushdasji. They started to complain about him in the general assembly. Sadguru Balmukund Swami responded, "Your sons now do *seva* at the mandir. They sleep there at night. They listen to spiritual discourses. They observe strict fasts. Ask yourselves, have they been spoiled or have they improved? Think about what you are saying."

No one dared to speak against such a great *sadguru*. Yagnapurushdasji quietly sat, turning the beads of his *mala*.



"Always be pleased with me. Watch over me and bless me."

18. The Blessings of Jaga Bhakta

In Junagadh, many envious sadhus could not bear to see so many devotees and great *sadgurus* sitting before Jaga Bhakta's seat to listen to his discourses. They approached Jibhai, the *kothari* of Junagadh mandir. They misled him, falsely accusing Jaga Bhakta. As a result, Jibhai declared that no one should visit Jaga Bhakta's seat or listen to his discourses. He also banned Jaga Bhakta from coming to speak in the general assembly. Meeting devotees and

spreading the message of Akshar-Purushottam was all that Jaga Bhakta lived for. He was dismayed by Jibhai's ban.

News of the ban soon reached Yagnapurushdasji in Rajkot. He at once rushed to Junagadh. After darshan of Thakorji, he headed straight for Jaga Bhakta's room. People warned him on the way, "The *kothari* has issued a ban. No one is allowed to go there."

"No ban applies to me," Yagnapurushdasji replied boldly as he reached Jaga Bhakta's room. He prostrated, respectfully touched his feet and then sat before Jaga Bhakta.

Surprised, Jaga Bhakta asked, "How did you come here? Coming here is forbidden."

"From today, understand this ban to be over. Swami, do not be disheartened. I will convince the *kothari* to lift the ban and allow you to discourse as before."

News of Yagnapurushdasji's visit to Jaga Bhakta's room quickly spread throughout the mandir. Yagnapurushdasji stayed for a few days. Then, one night, Yagnapurushdasji privately spoke to Jibhai about Jaga Bhakta's greatness. As Jibhai listened to Yagnapurushdasji, Jibhai realized his mistake. In his heart, he truly regretted his actions.

Early the following morning, Jibhai went to Jaga Bhakta's room. He prostrated to him and declared, "From today, everyone is free to visit your room. Please come to the general assembly to give discourses. Yagnapurushdasji has rid me of my ignorance. He has uplifted me." Jaga Bhakta, pleased by Jibhai's humble apology, blessed him.

After Jibhai left the room, Jaga Bhakta eagerly awaited the arrival of the very sadhu who had convinced Jibhai to lift the ban. Finally, Yagnapurushdasji arrived. He started to prostrate to Jaga Bhakta. At once, Jaga Bhakta stood up and said, "Come here! You've made me wait so much!" He firmly embraced Yagnapurushdasji for several minutes. Finally, Jaga Bhakta

released his embrace and spoke about what had happened.

Jaga Bhakta could not hold back his joy. He affectionately addressed Yagnapurushdasji, “You have today opened the doors of liberation which had been sealed for many aspirants. Many souls will be liberated by listening to these discourses. You shall receive the merits of these discourses and of whatever good deeds I do from today.”

Yagnapurushdasji humbly bowed and requested, “Always be pleased with me. Watch over me and bless me.”

After witnessing such a valiant deed, everyone acknowledged that Yagnapurushdasji was without an equal in Satsang.

Yagnapurushdasji soon left Junagadh. As he returned to Rajkot, a letter awaited him. Jibhai had written, “A *parayan* on the Satsangijivan shastra will soon be held here in Junagadh. Please come to read the discourses.” So, Yagnapurushdasji again returned to Junagadh.

19. A Great Speaker

The *parayan* in Junagadh had been sponsored by Harilal Sheth, the grandson of Shivilal Sheth. Four *puranis*, one of whom was Yagnapurushdasji, had been chosen to read the discourses. Yagnapurushdasji’s turn to read came last. All were delighted with his unique style of reading, his thorough understanding of the Vachanamrut, and his ability to explain these verses using examples from the shastras.

On the second day of the *parayan*, someone went to invite Harilal Sheth to come and sit in the discourses. He immediately replied, “Call me only when Shastri Yagnapurushdasji sits to read.”

Harilal’s words angered some sadhus who were jealous of Yagnapurushdasji’s popularity. On the final day of the *parayan*, the four *puranis* were to be traditionally honoured by a cer-

emonial *pujan*. However, who would be the first *purani* to be honoured? Harilal voiced his opinion, “He whose discourses have been the most satisfying should be honoured first. Shastri Yagnapurushdasji’s discourses have pleased everyone. Therefore, he must be honoured first.”

These words irritated several sadhus. With the intention of maligning Yagnapurushdasji, Sadhu Ghanshyamdas remarked, “Today, the one who is the disciple of a mere tailor and a cobbler is being honoured in our assembly.”

Hearing this insult referring to his gurus, Yagnapurushdasji roared back, “The right to become a guru has not been granted just to those who wear saffron. Both Pragji Bhakta and Jaga Bhakta have received immense blessings from Gunatitanand Swami. You should not look towards their caste. Shriji Maharaj will not tolerate such behaviour.”

Many great *sadgurus* scolded Ghanshyamdas. Harilal Sheth came forth to first honour Yagnapurushdasji. However, Yagnapurushdasji humbly refused. Purani Haridas, the senior of the four, was honoured first and Yagnapurushdasji was honoured last.

Yagnapurushdasji later returned to Rajkot to resume his studies. First, he studied Shankar’s commentary on the Brahmasutras. Then, he asked Jivanram to explain Ramanuja’s commentary on these same Brahmasutras.

Jivanram replied, “I have not studied Ramanuja’s commentary.”

Yagnapurushdasji requested, “Then, explain the literal meanings of the original Sanskrit text to me. I will understand the commentary and its implied message by myself.”

Thereafter, Yagnapurushdasji gave an interpretation of Ramanuja’s commentary. As Jivanram listened, he developed more and more interest in Ramanuja’s commentary. Yagnapurushdasji slowly changed Jivanram’s allegiance from

the Shankar philosophy to the Ramanuja system of thought.

After Jivanram read Gopalanand Swami's commentary on the Gita, he became a firm believer of the Vishishtadvait philosophy. Yagnapurushdasji brought him before Jaga Bhakta. Jivanram received *vartman* and became a devotee of the Sampradaya. He was no longer a guru, but rather a disciple.

20. A True Disciple of a Guru

Yagnapurushdasji had tremendous devotion for Bhagatji Maharaj. Years ago, Bhagatji had been excommunicated without reason and sent away from the Junagadh mandir. Yagnapurushdasji now had one sole desire. He awaited Bhagatji's return to Junagadh. He wanted his guru to be welcomed back into this same Junagadh mandir with unprecedented honour and glory. Only then would he prove a true disciple to his guru.

Yagnapurushdasji asked Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj to invite Bhagatji for the Janmashtmi celebrations in Junagadh. Acharya Maharaj heeded his request and sent a letter summoning Bhagatji to the celebrations.

After the letter had been posted, Yagnapurushdasji informed all of Bhagatji's disciples of their guru's imminent arrival. Yagnapurushdasji had often spoken to Kothari Jibhai of Bhagatji's greatness. As suggested by Yagnapurushdasji, Jibhai decided to arrange the same magnificent welcome and the same facilities for Bhagatji Maharaj as would be arranged for Acharya Maharaj.

In 1866 (Samvat 1922), Bhagatji Maharaj had been ordered by Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj to leave Junagadh mandir. Now, at the behest of Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj, Bhagatji was being welcomed back.

A carriage pulled by two horses arrived for Acharya Maharaj. The same type of horse carriage came for Bhagatji Maharaj. A cot with silk and cotton quilts were also provided for Bhagatji.

Bhagatji Maharaj, along with Acharya Maharaj, was welcomed with great honour and festivity.

During Bhagatji's stay, many devotees from the Gujarat region came to Junagadh. During the festival, Bhagatji spoke extensively about the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. Jaga Bhakta also gave many discourses. Bhagatji gave discourses and delighted all of the devotees who were present.

21. A Command to Liberate Jivas

From Junagadh, Bhagatji Maharaj went to Gondal. He came to the Akshar Deri for darshan and said, "Here, a great *arti* of thousands of lamps will take place and a grand mandir will be constructed."

At night, Yagnapurushdasji asked about his own studies. Bhagatji replied, "Until now you have studied to become a Shastri. I too have completely taught you *brahmavidya*. Now, teach others to experience that same bliss which you yourself experience." So saying, Bhagatji told Yagnapurushdasji to liberate other souls and grant them the bliss of God.

From Gondal, Bhagatji reached Mahuva. There he fell ill. Yagnapurushdasji, although eager to visit Bhagatji, could not come to Mahuva without Bhagatji's consent. Bhagatji Maharaj's illness worsened. On 7 November 1897 (Kartik *sud* 13, Samvat 1954) Bhagatji Maharaj passed away to Akshardham.

In Rajkot, Swamishri (Yagnapurushdasji will be referred to as Swamishri or Shastriji Maharaj from here onwards) received a letter informing him of Bhagatji's passing away. Overwhelmed with sorrow, Swamishri thought to himself, "I didn't even get to meet him during his final moments. I could not even do his final *seva*, and now Bhagatji is gone. He who was my life and soul is now gone."

Swamishri sat by a nearby well grieving. Suddenly, he saw

Bhagatji Maharaj standing before him. Bhagatji was holding a rose and jasmine garland in his hand. He garlanded Swamishri and said, “Why are you so disheartened? Have I really left you? I forever reside within you.”

Swamishri was overjoyed by this unexpected darshan of his guru. He reached Junagadh and met Jaga Bhakta. Jaga Bhakta’s soothing spiritual discourses relieved Swamishri of his sorrow. Swamishri now at felt peace within.

Swamishri confided to Jaga Bhakta, “Swami, I regret that I could not go to Mahuva and serve Bhagatji during his final days.”

Jaga Bhakta was pleased with Swamishri’s devotion for Bhagatji. He assured, “Do not be disheartened. I will call you for my final *seva* before I return to Akshardham.” Jaga Bhakta’s promise comforted Swamishri.

With time, Swamishri received more and more recognition within the Sampradaya. Many sadhus, who found this intolerable, complained to Acharya Maharaj. Acharya Maharaj had no choice but to keep Swamishri near him. He called him back to Vartal from Rajkot. Swamishri’s studies in Rajkot thus came to an end.

In 1899 (Samvat 1955), Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj passed away. Soon thereafter, Gordhanbhai Kothari assigned Swamishri the task of managing the affairs of the Hanuman Mandir in Sarangpur. Gordhanbhai appointed Prabhudas Kothari as Swamishri’s assistant.

Bhimji Kothari of Gadhadra, who until then had controlled the affairs of the mandir in Sarangpur, now lost his authority. He was angered by the decision. He already held an aversion for Bhagatji’s followers. Now, he disliked Swamishri even more.

Many of the sacred sites of Sarangpur had become run-down over time. Swamishri renovated them. He also built a bungalow next to the mandir. After acquiring more land, he made the mandir larger and enhanced its beauty.

Bhagatji Maharaj's old disciples would often come to Sarangpur to meet Swamishri. They would donate generously to the mandir. With time, the financial condition of the mandir improved considerably. Indeed, Swamishri proved to be a capable manager of the mandir's affairs. Gordhanbhai was pleased with Swamishri's expertise.

In 1901 (Samvat 1957), Jaga Bhakta fell ill in the village of Dangra. He sent for Swamishri. Swamishri quickly reached Dangra. Jaga Bhakta had told his attendants beforehand to bring Swamishri to him immediately upon arrival. When Swamishri finally came, Jaga Bhakta exclaimed warmly, "So you've come! You made me wait so much." He then affectionately embraced Swamishri. Seeing Jaga Bhakta in such poor health distressed Swamishri.

Jaga Bhakta spoke, "I had promised that I would call you for my final *seva*. Now I wish to go to Akshardham, so I have called you. My work here is complete. Now you should start your mission. Further the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami will assist you in your efforts."

Swamishri continuously served Jaga Bhakta for two days. On the night of 29 January 1901 (Maha *sud* 10, Samvat 1957) Jaga Bhakta passed away. Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, and several *akshar-muktas* arrived to take Jaga Bhakta to Akshardham. After performing the final rites, Swamishri returned to Sarangpur.

22. Inspiration from Junagadh Sadhus

Once, accompanied by devotees from the Gujarat region, Swamishri left Sarangpur for a pilgrimage of the sacred sites in the Sorath region. When they arrived in Junagadh, Keshavjivandas, the 85-year-old disciple of Gopalanand Swami,

spoke to Swamishri, “You have conviction in Gunatitanand Swami. You have also been blessed by the great, so please consecrate the *murtis* of both Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami. We wanted to do so in Gondal, but we were unable to.”

Swamishri replied, “If Balmukunddasji – who is a great *sadguru* and a disciple of Gunatitanand Swami – gives his consent, then I will do so.”

Balmukunddasji exclaimed, “Only if you consecrate the golden *murtis* of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami, will I be delighted.” These words strengthened Swamishri’s aspiration.

Earlier in Junagadh, Jaga Bhakta had told Swamishri, “You should consecrate the *murtis* of Maharaj and Swami in a *shikharbaddha* mandir.”

Swamishri had replied, “Even if I need a postcard worth one paisa from the mandir storeroom, I have to beg. How then can I possibly build an entire mandir costing hundreds of thousands of rupees?”

Jaga Bhakta had advised, “It is Shriji Maharaj’s wish to establish the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, so work for this cause. If you do not aspire to do so, then you are at fault and if you do aspire and we fail to fulfil your wish, then we are at fault.”

Jaga Bhakta’s words had motivated Swamishri. He was determined to see this task to completion. However, he had decided to be patient and begin his efforts when the time was right. Now, Swamishri’s task was to spread the understanding of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy to others. He visited the regions of Gujarat and Saurashtra, preaching to the devotees about Akshar-Purushottam. Be they young or old, all who had his darshan were drawn to him. All who listened to his discourses developed firm conviction in the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Neither fatigue nor the need for sleep deterred Swamishri from his work. He worked day and night for the cause.

As Swamishri often travelled from Sarangpur to the region of Gujarat, some people who disliked him complained, “Yagnapurushdasji neglects the work in Sarangpur and continues to wander needlessly around Gujarat. As a result, the state of the Sarangpur mandir suffers. His activities outside of Sarangpur must be controlled.”

However, the financial condition of Sarangpur mandir had improved considerably. The mandir renovation work was progressing rapidly. Therefore, no one heeded these false complaints.

Meanwhile, Acharya Purushottamprasadji Maharaj of the Ahmedabad diocese passed away. The heir to the position of *acharya* was to be Kunjavihariprasadji. However, some people instated the three-year-old Vasudevprasadji as the new heir instead.

Several sadhus and devotees did not approve. Nirmaldas, Tyagvallabhdas, and several senior sadhus and devotees sided with Kunjavihariprasadji. They separated from the Ahmedabad diocese and settled in the town of Vadhwan. There, they established their own following and decided to build their own mandir. However, they lacked sufficient resources and manpower. They knew that they would be unable to resist the opposition. Only with the help of a powerful sadhu could they build such a mandir. But who would help them? They searched throughout the Sampradaya. Finally, their eyes fell on Shastri Yagnapurushdasji.

Nirmaldas thought to himself, “Throughout the entire Sampradaya there is only one who is so fearless. He is unparalleled. If he assists us, then we shall certainly succeed. Furthermore, his disciples are also faithful. They are willing to lay their lives for him. They are also capable of helping us with funds.”

Nirmaldas met Swamishri in Limbdi. He requested Swamishri to help them build a mandir in Vadhwan.

Swamishri thought to himself, “Their cause is indeed true.

Nirmaldasji is also a firm believer of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. We should definitely assist them.”

Swamishri set his terms before Nirmaldas. He would help them only if they agreed to consecrate the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam. Nirmaldas agreed to Swamishri’s conditions. He pleaded to Swamishri to use his contacts to help them acquire land for the mandir.

The Diwan of Limbdi was a disciple of Swamishri. Swamishri immediately wrote him a letter. He emphasized the need for land in Vadhwan to build a mandir. The Diwan complied with his request. Soon, the land for a mandir in Vadhwan was acquired.

23. Increase in Persecution

Swamishri wished to stay in Vartal and spread the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Thus, he continuously gave discourses. He travelled to many villages in the Gujarat region and spoke about Akshar-Purushottam. Whenever devotees heard that Swamishri was coming and that he would stay for several days, they would gather from all over the state of Gujarat. They were overjoyed to listen to Swamishri’s discourses.

Once, Swamishri held discourses in Vadodara. During the evening session, Swamishri sang kirtans and spoke on the differences between a true and a false sadhu. Several people who bore a grudge against Swamishri were nearby. Convinced that Swamishri was referring to them in his discourses, they were angered. They decided to disrupt the assembly.

They yelled, “Scoundrels! Sinners! At least let us get some sleep now!” They began to hurl abuses. Swamishri, however, continued with his discourses. The hostile sadhus were now furious. They picked up bricks and started to throw them at the building adjacent to the mandir where the assembly was being held. The chaos that ensued awoke the neighbours.

The hostile sadhus thought to themselves, ‘This is our chance to finish off Yagnapurushdas. Let us burn down the entire building. He shall never trouble us again.’ They prepared to set the building on fire.

Next door, the mother of Jay Shankar, a young boy sitting in the assembly, was awakened by the commotion. She began to scream. She pleaded for someone to save her son.

Amidst the commotion, not a trace of fear could be seen on Swamishri’s face. He sat unfazed and said, “Whatever happens, does so due to the wish of Shriji Maharaj.” However, the devotees were now aggravated.

Motibhai carried Jay Shankar out of the building. Seeing the child, the hostile sadhus allowed Motibhai to leave. Once outside, Motibhai hurried to wake up Ghanshyambhai Vaidya. Ghanshyambhai immediately arrived at the scene with the police. The doors of the mandir campus were locked. The chief of police called out, “Open the mandir doors or we will break them and come inside.”

Frightened, they opened the doors and frantically searched for a place to hide. Seeing bricks and shattered glass everywhere, the police chief documented the case. He bowed before Swamishri and humbly requested, “Please give us the names of those who are responsible so that we can detain them.”

“We do not wish to complain against anyone. We do not bear hatred towards anyone. Please do not take any steps against them,” replied Swamishri.

The chief of police was moved by Swamishri’s saintliness. He bowed before Swamishri. Motibhai escorted Swamishri to his residential quarters. From there, Swamishri left for Sarangpur.

The hostile sadhus of Vartal were again thwarted. Not only had they been unable to harm Swamishri, but they had come away ruining their own names. Their hatred for Swamishri only

grew. They thought to themselves, “Yagnapurushdas has slipped away. What shall we do now?”

News of Swamishri’s escape reached Vartal and Gadhada. Those who opposed Swamishri were disheartened. However, they soon regrouped and began planning their next plot to harass Swamishri.

Day or night, Swamishri never tired of giving spiritual discourses. He served only to spread the glory of Maharaj and Swami. He bore no hatred for anyone. He observed eight-fold celibacy. He was a true renunciant of wealth. How could anyone harbour such hatred for such a saintly sadhu? How could they harass him so? How could such persecution be tolerated?

The attack in Vadodara alarmed the devotees of Gujarat. They wrote a letter to Gordhanbhai Kothari, “The hostility towards Shastri Yagnapurushdasji is growing day by day. Therefore, if you make any decisions concerning him without consulting us, the consequences will not be good.”

With so many prominent devotees supporting Swamishri so faithfully, Gordhanbhai was taken aback.

24. Invincible Power

Soon, Gordhanbhai called Swamishri to Vartal and told him to build a mandir in Virsad. Because Swamishri had come to Vartal, his devotees also followed. Soon, an assembly of thousands convened before Swamishri. Swamishri spoke about the greatness of Akshar-Purushottam. He emphasized the importance of serving the cause. He informed them that the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam were soon to be consecrated in Vadhwan. He encouraged them to donate for the cause.

Within moments, 2,500 rupees were pledged for the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis*. Other sadhus and even Gordhanbhai Kothari were not totally aware of what was taking place. They

thought that Swamishri was gathering funds for a new mandir in Virsad.

Swamishri then reached Ahmedabad to meet Nirmaldas. He told him, “We will fund our *murtis*. When you go to Jaipur to have the other *murtis* made, one of our men will accompany you. Our *murtis* should be made according to our designs.” After he reached a precise agreement, Swamishri sent Purushottamdas, a mason devotee of Gondal, to Jaipur.

Nirmaldas went to Vadodara to have the remaining *murtis* made. Swamishri asked Kothari Jetha Bhagat of the Swaminarayan mandir in Vadodara, to make any necessary arrangements for Nirmaldas. At Swamishri’s behest, Jetha Bhagat boldly helped Nirmaldas.

Swamishri then arrived in Bharuch. He conducted a one-day *parayan* on the Vachanamrut. Some 1,000 devotees from all over Gujarat came to listen. Swamishri spoke extensively about the concept of the Sadhu as the gateway to liberation.

News of Swamishri’s discourses reached Vartal. Those who disliked Swamishri were further enraged.

“Thousands run after Yagnapurushdas. They sponsor his meals and serve him, whereas not even five devotees gather before us. How can we permit this? Even more, Yagnapurushdas speaks so openly about Akshar-Purushottam. He sides with Nirmaldas. He requests Jetha Bhagat to make arrangements for Nirmaldas in Vadodara. Even Gordhanbhai Kothari supports Yagnapurushdas. If this continues, Yagnapurushdas will control not just Vartal, but the entire Sampradaya. He will become its leader. Who then will value us?”

They started plotting to put a stop to Yagnapurushdasji. Swamishri, however, fearlessly continued his efforts.

Gordhanbhai called Swamishri to Vartal. He warned, “Some hostile sadhus here are preparing to do away with you. They cannot tolerate your prominence. Wherever you go, there are

grand celebrations. Thousands are drawn to you. Some sadhus cannot bear to see this. Therefore, it is better that you limit your activities.”

Swamishri courteously replied, “We gather only for discourses, and to worship and remember God. If people are drawn to me, if they see greatness, that is the work of Shriji Maharaj. I do not do anything against the traditions of Satsang. If you wish to see for yourself, we will now hold discourses only in Vartal.”

Swamishri’s reply pleased Gordhanbhai. He was extremely fond of Swamishri. Furthermore, Gordhanbhai had noticed the improved condition of the mandir, guesthouse and haveli in Sarangpur. He was impressed by Swamishri’s abilities. However, he reasoned that if he appeased the opponents, they would harass Swamishri less. He decided to relieve Swamishri of his duties in Sarangpur and called him back to Vartal.

25. Murti-Pratishtha of Akshar-Purushottam in Vadhwan

From Vartal, Swamishri went to the village of Vaso. The construction work in Vadhwan was now complete. Swamishri gathered all of the devotees who had faith in Akshar-Purushottam. He told them to attend the *murti-pratishtha* in Vadhwan. Kunjavihariprasadji and the Vadhwan sadhus had promised Swamishri that they would consecrate the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the central sanctum of the mandir. Even so, Swamishri instructed the devotees, “If there is opposition, then have our *murtis* consecrated in the first sanctum of the mandir. Please inform us by telegram.”

The Ahmedabad sadhus had openly disputed the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis* being consecrated in Vadhwan. Thus, the devotees in Vadhwan pressured Kunjavihariprasadji. They

advised him not to consecrate the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam. However, Swamishri's devotees intervened. They reminded Kunjavihariprasadji of his promise to Swamishri. Swamishri had fearlessly sided with them. From the very beginning, he had been of tremendous help. Finally, both sides reached a compromise and agreed to consecrate the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis* in the first sanctum. The *murti-pratishtha* was performed accordingly. For the first time, the *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam found its home in the sanctum of a *shikharbaddha* mandir.

Swamishri's devotees were so overjoyed that they forgot to send him a telegram. Finally remembering, they wired the message to Vaso. Swamishri, however, had left Vaso for Vartal before the message arrived. Bhailalbhai of Vaso reached Vartal late at night. He specially had the gates opened so that he could deliver the telegram message to Swamishri. Overjoyed, Swamishri at once showed the message to Gordhanbhai Kothari and informed him of the *murti-pratishtha* in Vadhwan.

Throughout his life, Gordhanbhai had worked to suppress the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He had used all of his powers to prevent it from spreading, especially into the sanctum of a mandir. He sat quietly, defeated and demoralized. Finally, he spoke, "Whatever Shriji does is for the best."

"Shriji himself has done this," added Swamishri.

Angered with Swamishri's blunt remark, Gordhanbhai ordered him to leave the room. Moments later, Gordhanbhai composed himself. He called Swamishri back and asked for a detailed account of all that had happened. Swamishri narrated how he had helped the Vadhwan cause. Gordhanbhai was truly impressed with Swamishri's management skills. He felt assured that because of Swamishri, the future of the Sampradaya was bright.

The opponents in Vartal were now furious. They thought to themselves, "Even the Kothari does not scold Yagnapurushdas. While merely sitting in Vartal, Yagnapurushdas has managed to

have *murtis* consecrated in Vadhwan. In the future who knows what he will do? He may even sway the entire Satsang community in his favour. We will be at his mercy. No one will bother to consult us.”

The sadhus discussed amongst themselves, plotting to defeat and drive away Swamishri once and for all.

Swamishri, however, remained unperturbed. He fearlessly visited each nearby village, carrying the message of Akshar-Purushottam. When he arrived in Bochasan, he acquired the *murtis* of Ram and Lakshman from the village Ramji mandir. These *murtis* had been sanctified by Nilkanth Varni himself. In the old mandir, he consecrated these *murtis* on a platform which had also been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj.

Swamishi remarked, “One day, there will be a grand *shikharbaddha* mandir in Bochasan. When Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj is consecrated in the central sanctum, we will also consecrate these *murtis* there.”

Hearing Swamishri’s prediction, the local devotees asked, “When will this mandir be built?”

Swamishri replied, “It will happen in two or three years; you will all see it occur.”

Everyone acknowledged that nothing short of a miracle would be needed for Swamishri’s words to prove true. When there was such widespread harassment, how could one possibly think or speak of a new mandir?

Swamishri then reached Virsad. From there, he went to Chansad for medical treatment. He gave several spiritual discourses in Chansad.

26. The Hail of Akshar-Purushottam in Vartal

The Chaitra Punam festival of 1905 would soon be celebrated in Vartal. As Swamishri was ill, he would be unable to attend

the celebrations. It seemed likely to everyone that there would be some dreadful turn of events.

Swamishri predicted, “An assembly opposing our cause has already been planned in Vartal. However, they will quarrel among themselves. Nothing will happen to us.”

With Swamishri’s consent, Kalidasbhai of Chansad and several other devotees set out for Vartal.

After they left, Swamishri sent for Galbhai and asked, “Do you have the courage to hail the *jay* of Akshar-Purushottam at the assembly in Vartal?”

No ordinary man would dare to attempt such a deed against such hostile opposition. Galbhai, however, was far from ordinary. He replied valiantly, “If it is your wish and your command, then I indeed have such courage!”

“Then call out the *jay* of Akshar-Purushottam in the packed Punam assembly.”

Eager to exclaim the *jay*, Galbhai hurried to Vartal.

As soon as Acharya Maharaj arrived in the Punam assembly, Galbhai roared, “Sahajanand Swami Maharaj *ni Jay*!” Everyone repeated the call.

Immediately Galbhai followed, “Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj *ni Jay*!” Again, everyone repeated. Immediately, all realized their mistake. But what could they do now? Embarrassed by their own blunder, they scowled at Galbhai. Overawed by his deep voice, huge eyes and massive figure, no one dared to say a word. They were furious within.

The assembly dispersed before anyone could speak. The sadhus again huddled in groups at their respective *asans*. Again, a burning question came up, “If Shastri’s disciples could dare carry out such a deed, they are capable of anything. Indeed, Shastri will have to be removed from Vartal before he ruins the entire Satsang community.”

Despite the humiliation in the morning, some gathered again

in the afternoon. Bhimjibhai Kothari of Gadhada yelled, “Why doesn’t anyone scold Shastri Yagnapurushdas?”

Kalidas immediately stood up and refuted, “You are speaking of the same sadhu who has boosted the Sarangpur mandir’s annual income from around 3,000 to 22,000. He has enhanced the beauty of Sarangpur by constructing a guesthouse, a bungalow and silver gates for the mandir. Are you not ashamed of hurling such baseless accusations against him? You are slandering a sadhu possessing so many saintly virtues. Gordhanbhai Kothari is well aware that Shastri is innocent, yet he just sits and listens. Why does he not speak in Shastri’s defence?”

Gordhanbhai at once spoke. “This is all a scheme planned by Bhimji. Shastri is innocent.” Gordhanbhai immediately stood up and left the gathering. Chaos ensued as everyone began quarrelling amongst one themselves. Swamishri’s words proved true and no trouble arose from the meeting.

27. A Whirlwind of Opposition

Swamishri now held his next series of Vachanamrut discourses in Vartal. Devotees arrived from all over Gujarat to listen. Even Gordhanbhai and many sadhus of Vartal would sit and listen as Swamishri gave discourses.

No one was happy to see Gordhanbhai support Swamishri so openly. One day, Kothari Khushal Bhagat rudely addressed Gordhanbhai, “You too are a *bandia*? Why have you joined Yagnapurushdas?”

Gordhanbhai immediately replied, “Of the 2,000 sadhus of Vartal, I have yet to see one who has completely renounced women and wealth like Shastri Yagnapurushdasji. I find his words to be as sweet as sugar crystals. Therefore, I come here to listen to him.” Hearing Gordhanbhai’s words, Khushal Bhagat walked away.

Swamishri had deliberately kept his own *asan* near that of Gordhanbhai. Also, Swamishri was always surrounded by prominent devotees. No one would scold them as they regularly sponsored meals and donated generously to the mandir. Thus, he was well protected. Like smoking logs, the opponents angrily watched on, unable to do him any harm.

Acharya Lakshmiprasadji was young. Complying with Gordhanbhai's request, Swamishri once advised Lakshmiprasadji to behave properly. Lakshmiprasadji, however, did not like being preached to.

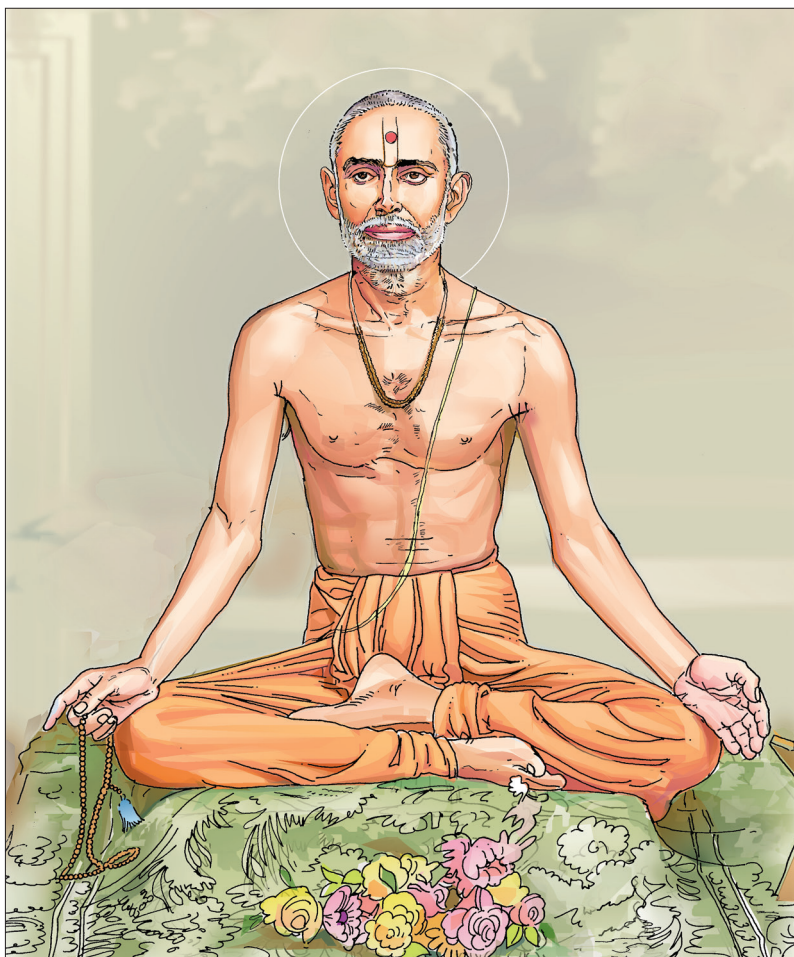
Over time, the opponents found ways to disturb Swamishri's discourses. Some would burn chilli powder near Swamishri's assemblies. The unbearable fumes would choke devotees and make them get up from Swamishri's discourses. They would then sit in another place and continue the discourses.

There, the opponents would spill pots of water. Again, Swamishri's assembly would be dispersed. Even then, Swamishri and the devotees remained unperturbed.

28. Adverse Times

The fierce opposition against Swamishri was increasing day by day. Those who opposed Swamishri did not want him staying in Vartal. Every time they saw him, a fiery anger burned within them. Because of such a hostile environment, it did not make sense to allow Swamishri to stay any longer. The devotees met and decided that if trouble arose, they should take Swamishri away from Vartal. Staying there was no longer in Swamishri's best interests. Everyone was sure that some wrathful sadhus would attempt something dreadful.

Many of Swamishri's disciples were to gather in Vartal on 12 November 1905 (Kartik Punam, Samvat 1962). They did not leave Swamishri alone for even a second. As a result, those



Shastri Yagnapurushdasji

who had plotted to harm him were unable to carry out their plans. They were angered even more.

The devotees pleaded to Swamishri, “Please do not go to the kitchen to eat.”

“A sadhu must only eat in the common dining area. He cannot eat separately at his own *asan*.” Swamishri did not heed the devotees’ request.

When Swamishri was to break his Ekadashi fast, he went

into the kitchen to have some *khichadi*. The devotees anxiously waited outside.

As Swamishri was served *khichadi*, he smelled the pungent odour of deadly poison coming from his food. He immediately understood the situation. Even then, how could he disrespect food that had been offered to and sanctified by God? He ate a little and then got up to leave. As he was walking out, he stumbled, feeling dizzy. Two devotees grabbed his arms and brought him safely back to his *asan*. His throat began to burn. The devotees brought ghee for him. After consuming a little, Swamishri assured them, “Nothing will happen to me. Do not worry.”

The hostile sadhus bitterly grumbled to themselves, “Nothing happened to Yagnapurushdas. He even digested the poison. Now we will have to devise another plan. This time, he should not escape.”

The wicked sadhus came up with yet another plan, “When Shastri comes to eat, we will push him into the cooking fire. He will burn to ashes. Finally, we will get rid of this obstacle.”

When the Kauravs had treacherously plotted to burn the Pandavs to death in the wax mansion, God protected them. Similarly, these efforts to harm Swamishri proved futile.

Swamishri would still go to the kitchen to eat. The following day, he entered the kitchen for lunch. Fifteen or so brave devotees accompanied him. They waited at the door. Nothing could be done to Swamishri in their presence.

The opponents shouted to them, “Leave this area at once.”

“We will not move even an inch until Shastri Yagnapurushdasji finishes eating and comes out,” replied the devotees. The opponents began to push the devotees away. The resulting commotion served as a perfect distraction. Five devotees sneaked in and carried Swamishri out of the kitchen. No one knew what happened. The scuffle continued. Finally, everyone realized that

Yagnapurushdasji had already slipped out and that they were now struggling for no reason.

29. Not Different from This Mandir and Satsang

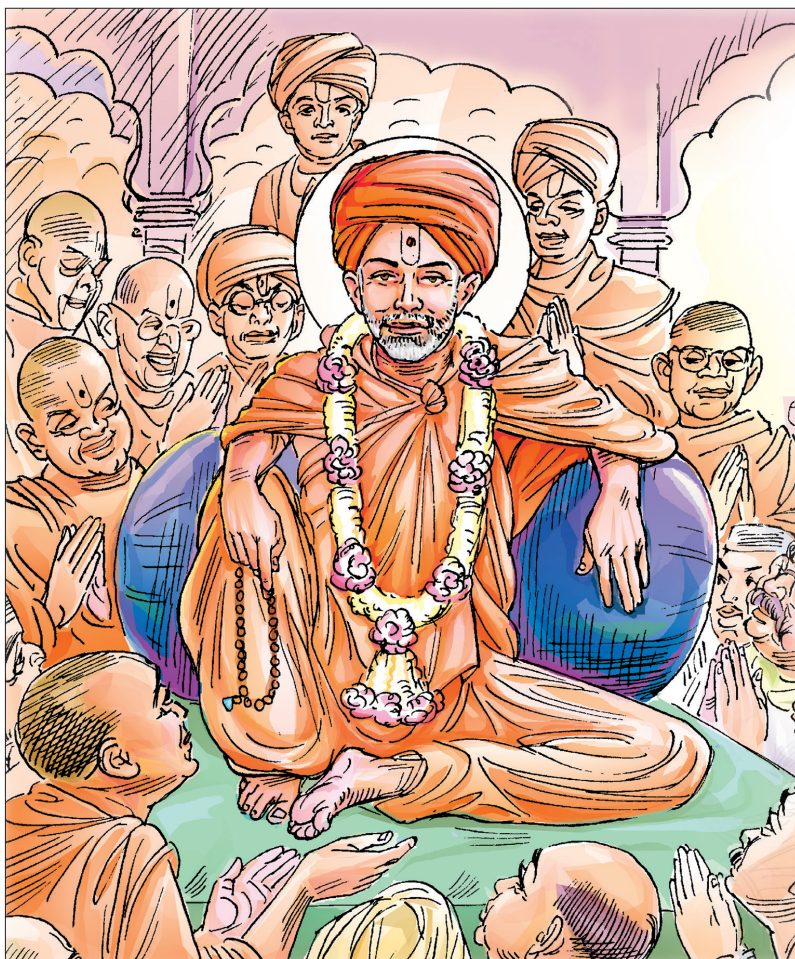
Swamishri's disciples were now alarmed. They gathered to decide what to do. Everyone agreed that the mandir in Rundel needed to be completed. They decided to put in a request for Swamishri and his group of sadhus to come and help with the construction. Everyone approached Gordhanbhai. Gordhanbhai directed them to Acharya Lakshmiprasadji. Acharya Maharaj sent them back to Gordhanbhai. They went back and forth four times, but neither gave them a straight answer.

Finally, Gordhanbhai advised, "You all should pressure Acharya Maharaj and request him. Regardless of whatever is decided, I advise that you do not leave Shastri alone here."

Everyone's fears were now confirmed. They were convinced that it was unwise to keep Swamishri in Vartal. They explained the harsh reality to Swamishri. Swamishri, however, did not waver. He refused to leave Vartal. He said, "If this body perishes, so be it, but do not speak of leaving Vartal. Bhagatji Maharaj had told me, 'Even if they cut you into pieces, I will stitch you together, but you must never leave the doors of Vartal.'"

Swamishri's words perplexed the devotees. Fortunately, Krishnaji Ada arrived in Vartal on the morning of Punam. The devotees informed him of all that had taken place. Krishnaji Ada spoke with Swamishri in private. Again, Swamishri emphasized what Bhagatji Maharaj had said.

Krishnaji Ada explained, "What you say is true. However, Shriji Maharaj has commanded in the Shikshapatri that one should act according to the circumstances at hand. Therefore, you must not stay here any longer."



Devotees urge Swamishri to leave Vartal

Swamishri pondered over his words. He thought to himself, “Krishnaji Ada was blessed by Gunatitanand Swami. He is a great *mukta* from Akshardham. If he advises me to leave, Shriji Maharaj himself must also wish that I depart.”

Swamishri bowed and replied, “After listening to you, I believe that Bhagatji Maharaj has spoken through you. I will therefore act according to your wishes.”

Pleased by Swamishri’s reply, Krishnaji Ada blessed him. The

devotees, meanwhile, breathed a sigh of relief.

After the celebrations, the devotees approached Lakshmi-prasadji and requested that Swamishri and his sadhus be sent to Bochasan. They asked for a permission note. Lakshmi-prasadji, however, lost his temper, “The entire country is open for him. He may go wherever he pleases.”

The devotees were hurt by Lakshmi-prasadji’s harsh words. There was no room for doubt. Swamishri must indeed leave Vartal. They came to Swamishri’s seat and related all that had occurred.

For a while, Swamishri sat in deep thought. Finally, he announced, “We do not want to separate from this mandir, nor from this Satsang. However, perhaps because Maharaj so wishes, we will have to.”

Swamishri then told Purushottamdas Swami to stay behind in Vartal, guiding, “If they do give a permission note to travel to Bochasan, then bring the note. However, if they do not change their minds, then leave to join us.”

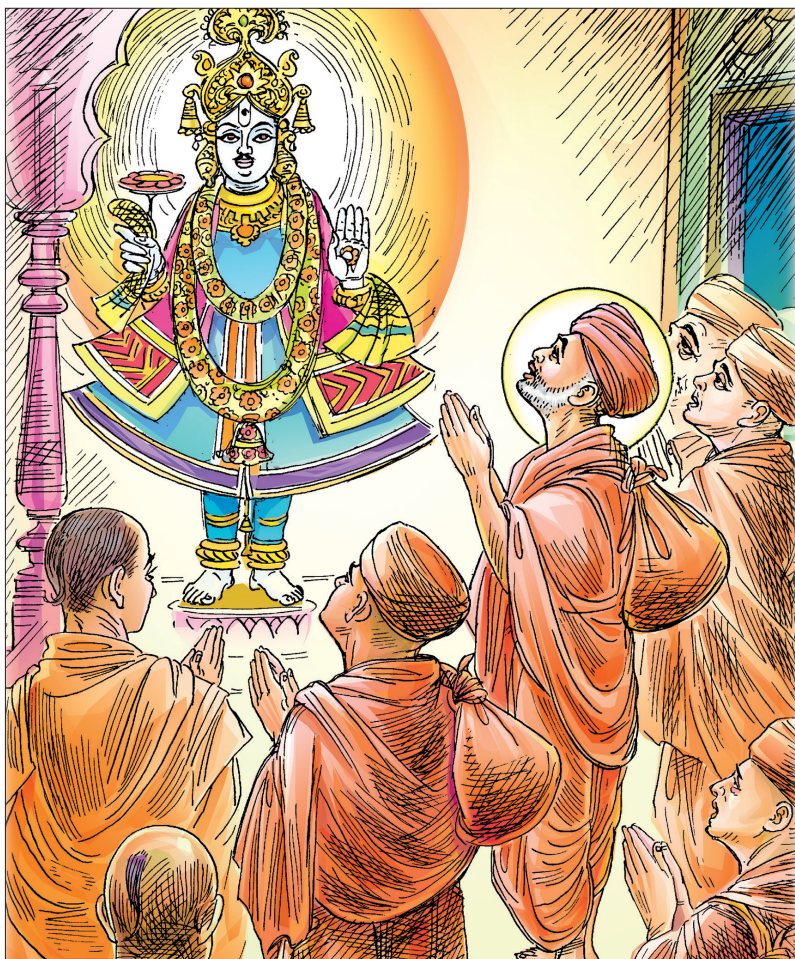
30. Without Any Enemies

Swamishri was aware that such circumstances had come about due to Shriji Maharaj’s wish. It was Swamishri’s efforts to spread the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam which had led to trouble. Thus, he felt no remorse for what had happened. He only regretted that he could not openly discuss true *upasana* in a sacred place such as Vartal.

In the mandir on 13 November 1905, Swamishri and five other sadhus stood before the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj.

Swamishri offered prayers, “Oh Maharaj! We do not wish to leave. However, if it is your will that we separate, then always assist us and forever stay with us.”

Swamishri, accompanied by five sadhus and about 150 devotees, departed from the Hanuman Gate. As Swamishri

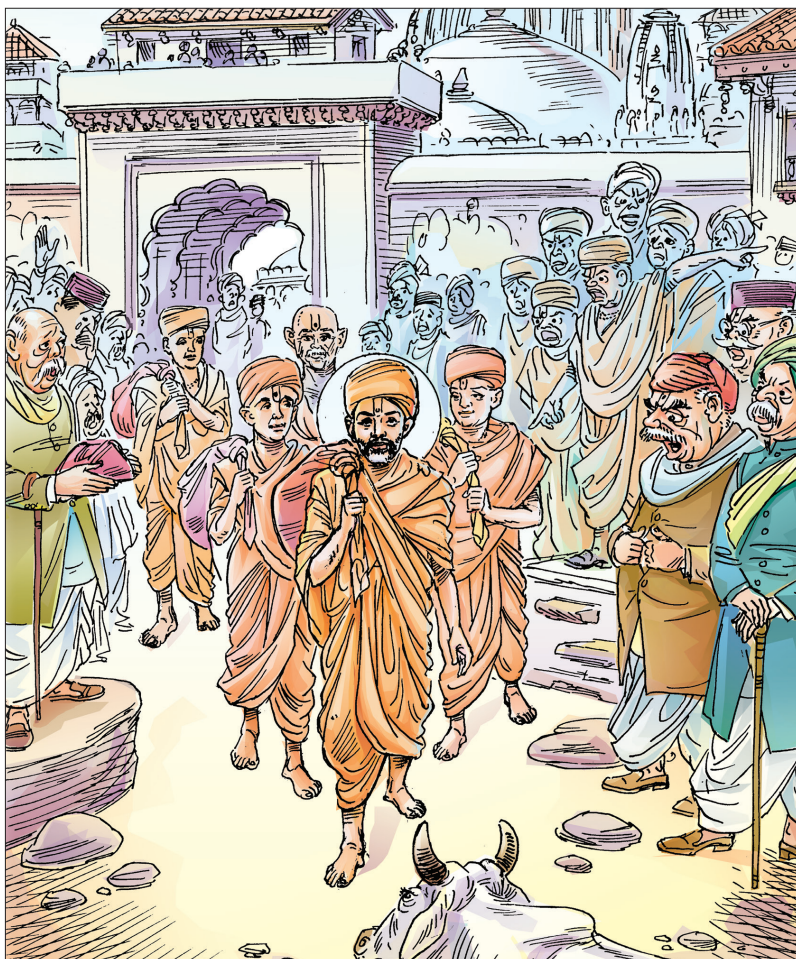


Swamishri prays to Harikrishna Maharaj before leaving Vartal

left, the land of Vartal seemed barren, as if diminished in splendour.

Swamishri walked along the road bordering the Lake Gomti. On the way, he met Kishorebhai, a police officer. On learning that Swamishri was leaving, Kishorebhai had hurried towards the mandir in the hope of meeting Swamishri.

Kishorebhai bowed and pleaded, “Swami, give me the names of those who have troubled you. I will send them all to jail in Nadiad.”



Shashtriji Maharaj leaves Vartal

“We do not wish to do any such thing. A sadhu must always tolerate insults and spread Satsang.”

Kishorebhai was moved by Swamishri’s saintliness. Before he left, he sent for a bullock cart and requested Swamishri to travel in it. Seeing his affection, Swamishri agreed to do so.

News of Swamishri’s departure soon spread throughout Vartal. Groups of devotees came running with garlands in their hands. They garlanded Swamishri. Soon, a heap of garlands accumulated.

As Swamishri started walking, he saw a cow coming towards them.

“This is an auspicious sign,” he remarked. As he took their leave, Swamishri addressed those who had gathered, “Please continue to donate and sponsor meals for Thakorji in Vartal as you always have. Those of you who regularly attend the Punam festival here, please continue to do so. This mandir and Thakorji are ours. We are not separating from them.”

Swamishri reached the village of Karamsad. From there, he arrived in Bochasan.

Although Swamishri only had five sadhus with him, they were valiant and ready to give up their lives for him. They did not care for physical comforts. They were undeterred by insult or honour. They endured much persecution for Swamishri. Some had tolerated smoldering ashes thrown upon their heads. Others had been pierced from behind by huge needles. However, none had ever complained. None had admitted defeat. They never retaliated, but simply tolerated. With the loving support of such remarkable sadhus, Swamishri’s mission gained momentum.

31. A Mandir for True Upasana

Swamishri and his disciples decided to celebrate the Fagan Punam festival of Samvat 1962 (10 March 1906) in the city of Anand. The opposition against Swamishri had not yet subsided. Many opponents worked to prevent the gathering in Anand from taking place. They tried to discourage devotees from attending. However, their efforts went in vain, as eight hundred devotees attended the celebrations. The devotees requested that a new mandir be built.

Swamishri replied, “Perhaps we may be able to reach a compromise with Vartal. Let us not build a mandir just yet.”

The devotees, however, insisted on building a separate

mandir. They began noting pledges for funds. Within an hour, 40,000 rupees had been pledged.

Swamishri announced, “Please stop the pledges for now. Later, if the funds are insufficient, we will ask for more.”

The funds had been raised, but one question still remained: Where would they build a mandir? All invited Swamishri to build a mandir in their own villages. Swamishri, however, chose Bochasan, explaining, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan had promised Kashidas Mota that a mandir would be built in Bochasan. Therefore, according to Maharaj’s wish, we should build it there.”

Everyone agreed and soon land for a mandir in Bochasan was acquired.

Around this time, Jagatguru Shankaracharya Madhavgirih had also come to Anand. Madhavgirih thought to himself, “If a great scholar like Shastri Yagnapurushdaji were to join me, we could easily defeat the scholars of Vartal in debate.” Madhavgirih was eager to meet Swamishri. Swamishri, however, understood his intentions and sent him a message, “We are one with Vartal.”

Although Madhavgirih did not achieve his objectives, he could not help but respect Swamishri. Despite such persecution, Swamishri still bore such affection for Vartal.

Madhavgirih exclaimed, “In the entire Sampradaya, there is no equal to Shastri Yagnapurushdasji in scholarship and saintliness.”

32. From a Trinket into a Diamond

Hirabhai Mukhi, a descendant of Kashidas Mota, resided in Bochasan. He struck terror not only in the village, but throughout the Gujarat region. He would not shy away from sin. He often stole, plundered, and even murdered at will. Whoever dared to file a complaint or stand as an eyewitness

against him was as good as dead. All of Gujarat shuddered at the mere mention of his name. Not even the police dared lay a hand on him.

Once, Hirabhai decided to sponsor a meal for Swamishri and his followers in Bochasan. Swamishri accepted his charity and served all of the sadhus, but he himself refused to eat. Hirabhai was informed. He came to meet Swamishri.

Swamishri boldly set his terms, “I will eat only if you accept *vartman* and become a *satsangi*.”

As Hirabhai looked into Swamishri’s eyes, his life changed. He gave up his sinful ways, accepted *vartman* from Swamishri, and became a devotee. News of Hirabhai’s transformation travelled quickly. All who lived in the region of Gujarat were amazed at Swamishri’s feat. People appreciated that one who could transform a brute like Hirabhai into a devotee of God must indeed be some great incarnation.

When Gordhanbhai Kothari heard about Hirabhai’s transformation he called him to Vartal and exclaimed, “Hirabhai! Shastri Yagnapurushdasji has made you into a devotee. If Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj were still alive today, he would honour Yagnapurushdasji with two pairs of Shriji Maharaj’s *charanarvind* and give him an eminent position in Satsang. Unfortunately, those who are in power today are eager to do away with him.”

Hearing Gordhanbhai’s words, Hirabhai realized Swamishri’s greatness.

33. The Protective Shield of Gunatit

Those who opposed Swamishri burned with envy when they heard of Hirabhai’s transformation. Three armed *parshads* set out on a camel to kill Swamishri. Swamishri had already left Bochasan early that morning, so there was no reason to



Arjanbhai of Mota Gokharvara has darshan of Gunatitanand Swami

worry. Still, Hirabhai decided to teach the *parshads* a lesson. He detained them. As he swung his stick at the *parshads*, he accidentally struck the camel. Startled by the blow, the camel started to run. Terrified, the *parshads* fled with their camel.

Because they had missed their chance to assault Swamishri, the *parshads* again set out after six or seven days. This time, they were more heavily armed.

Swamishri was in the village of Sadhi. Only two miles away,

Lakshmiprasadji was a guest in the village of Ranu. Learning of Swamishri's location, the *parshads* left Ranu and headed for Sadhi.

That morning, Swamishri suddenly told Ashabhai, "Bring me an oxen cart immediately. I want to leave for Padra."

Ashabhai insisted, "Swami, I would prefer that you eat lunch and then leave."

"The other sadhus will stay for lunch. I will go to Padra and then eat," replied Swamishri. As he and another sadhu left Sadhi, they headed for Sejakuva instead of Padra.

Meanwhile, the hostile *parshads* arrived in Sadhi at that time. They tied their camel on the outskirts of the village and entered. Mahijibhai, an elder, found out that they had come to attack Swamishri. He angrily cursed and scolded them. In the meantime, one of the villagers ran to the outskirts and untied the camel, setting it free. The *parshads* soon learned from the *kothari* of the mandir that Swamishri had left for Padra. Retrieving their camel, the *parshads* immediately started for Padra.

The devotees began to worry, "What will happen when they reach Padra? They will attack Swamishri." Little did the devotees know that Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami were protecting Swamishri all along. Swamishri, meanwhile, had left Sejakuva and passing through Bhaili, reached the village of Dabhasa.

That very day, something remarkable happened in Mota Gokharvara, a village in Kathiawad. There, a devotee by the name of Arjanbhai had darshan of Gunatitanand Swami standing in front of his house. Swami was wearing a knotted dhoti. Arjanbhai immediately offered *dandvat pranams* and requested Swami to grace his home.

Swami replied, "I cannot come right now. My devotee is in trouble in Gujarat, so I am going to protect him." Swami then disappeared before Arjanbhai's eyes.

Just then, the *parshads* arrived in Padra. They were

disappointed to find that Swamishri was nowhere to be found. Overcome by hunger and thirst, they returned to Sadhi. When they arrived at the outskirts of the village, they found a herd of wild buffaloes rushing towards them. Seeing the camel, the startled buffaloes ran wildly in every direction. A few buffaloes collided with the camel, knocking off and heavily injuring the *parshads*. Finally, someone rented a bullock cart, and sent the *parshads* back to Renu. Indeed, Maharaj and Swami were watching over Swamishri.

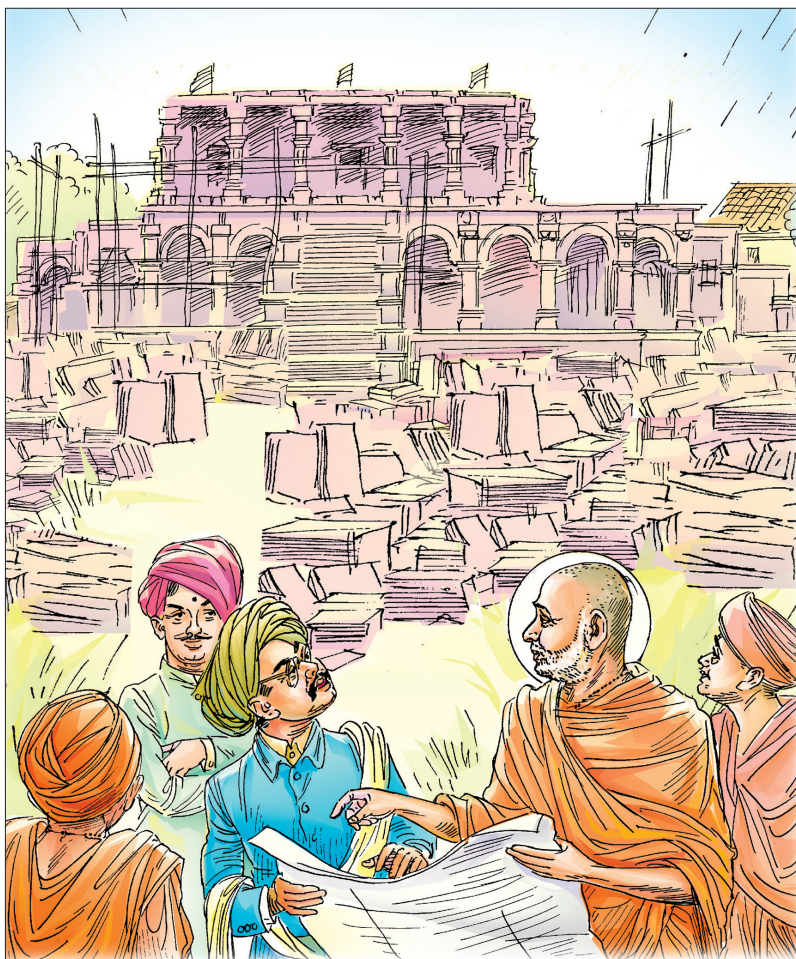
34. First Akshar-Purushottam Mandir in Bochasan

Despite harassment from the opposition, the groundbreaking ceremony for the mandir in Bochasan was carried out without problem. Soon, they started to dig the foundation. Swamishri himself joined in this *seva*. The sadhus and devotees also worked with enthusiasm. Many devotees lent their oxen and carts for this noble cause. They sacrificed their farm work, thereby putting aside their livelihood for up to six months.

Once, while digging the foundation, some devotees found a pot of gold treasure. They told Swamishri about it. Swamishri, not at all allured by wealth, at once exclaimed, “In this mandir, we will consecrate the *murti* of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. She will bring wealth from all over the universe. So, let this wealth remain buried.”

Swamishri then had the treasure buried in the foundation. He was determined to rely only on God and the *seva* of God’s devotees to build the mandir.

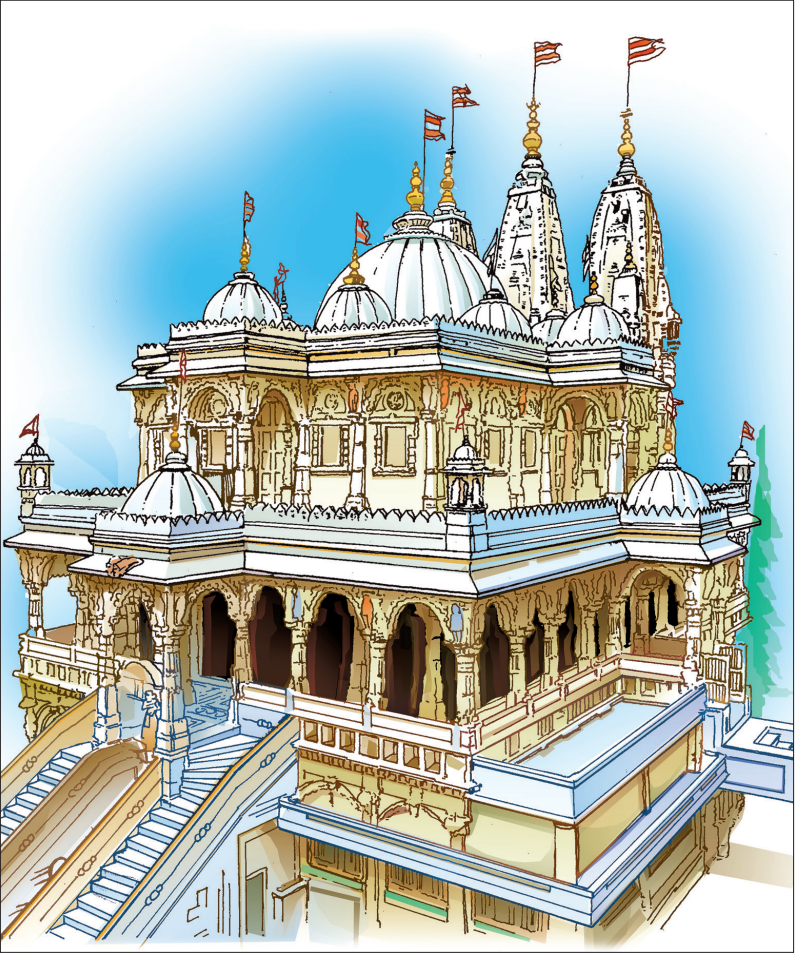
Those who opposed Swamishri tried to win over Hirabhai with a bribe. They offered him 5,000 rupees to oppose the mandir’s construction. Hirabhai, however, had already been won over by Swamishri.



Shastriji Maharaj at the construction site of Bochasan mandir

He bluntly refused, “I am honoured that a mandir is being built in my village. Swamishri has already given me wealth in the form of a new life. He has uplifted me, making me a human. He is my guru. I will use this money for whatever purpose he instructs. If you agree, then give me the money. Never will I betray my guru by accepting a bribe to oppose him.”

Leaving everyone speechless, Hirabhai continued, “If anyone opposes the mandir’s construction, I will surely take revenge.

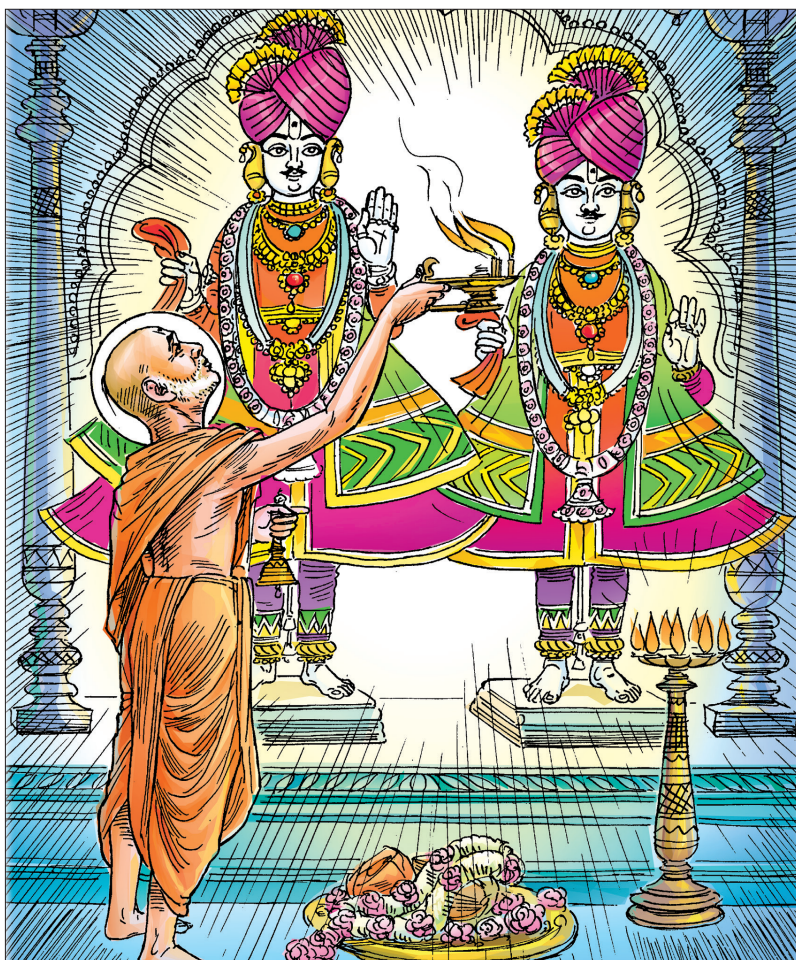


BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Bochasan

If you are brave enough, only then come forth.”

Hearing Hirabhai’s threats, Swamishri’s opponents lost whatever courage they had left.

The day of the *murti-pratishtha*, 5 June 1907 (Vaishakh *vad* 10, Samvat 1963), quickly approached. All were unable to contain their enthusiasm. For the first time a Param Ekantik Sadhu like Swamishri was to consecrate Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the sanctum of a mandir. The preparations for the



The *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in Bochasan mandir

festival were proceeding in full force.

As a precautionary measure, Hirabhai stationed 2,000 of his men to guard the site. They stood on all four sides to deter anyone who dared to disrupt the celebrations.

After the *yagna* had been completed, the sadhus and devotees lifted Shriji Maharaj's *murti* and placed it in the central sanctum prior to the *murti-pratishtha*. Next, they tried to lift Gunatitanand Swami's *murti*. Surprisingly, even though

it weighed less, Gunatitanand Swami's *murti* did not budge. Everyone wondered to themselves, "Is Swami testing us?"

Exhausted, they all came to Swamishri and related what had happened. Swamishri immediately came to Gunatitanand Swami's *murti* and prayed, "Oh Swami! It is for you that we left Vartal. It is for you that we tolerate insult and persecution. Please bestow your grace upon us and take your rightful place in the sanctum."

Swamishri then pushed a chisel underneath the *murti*. Immediately, the *murti* was lifted up and easily carried to the mandir. It was placed in the central sanctum next to Shriji Maharaj. Swamishri then performed the *murti-pratishtha*. The victory call of Akshar-Purushottam resounded everywhere.

In this way, on 5 June 1907, the promise that Shriji Maharaj had made to Kashidas Mota a hundred years previously was finally fulfilled by Swamishri. The true *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam was finally established in the central sanctum of a mandir.

35. A Spike on the Head of Sheshnag

Swamishri now needed some land to build an entrance gate for the mandir in Bochasan. However, because the village road passed through that strip of land, the people of the village refused to cooperate. However, Swamishri needed the land. The villagers sent the insolent Bechar Keesa to inform Swamishri of their disapproval. As soon as he arrived, Bechar Keesa spoke rudely.

Swamishri calmly replied, "We need this land for the mandir. You should give it to us." Just one divine glance from Swamishri changed Bechar Keesa's mind.

Bechar Keesa asked, "How much land do you need? Let us measure it right now."

Swamishri handed him a measuring stick. Bechar Keesa measured out four stick-lengths of land.

“Add another two stick-lengths on my behalf,” said Swamishri. Bechar Keesa immediately complied. In this way, the land for the gate was acquired.

Swamishri marked the land, using spikes to indicate the borders. Another villager, Dhanji Matadar, came to protest. He was about to pull out one of the spikes when Swamishri warned him, “Matadar! This spike has been driven into the head of Sheshnag, so don’t try to pull it out.” Still he did not listen and pulled out the spike. To his horror, the point of the spike was covered with blood. Terrified, he immediately placed the spike back into the ground.

Realizing Swamishri’s greatness, Bechar Keesa fell at his feet and apologized. Swamishri forgave him and instructed him to support in the mandir construction work.

Spiritual aspirants from all over Gujarat would now come to Bochasan. For years, devotees had discussed the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* in private, afraid of the outrage it might cause. Now, this *upasana* had been enshrined in Bochasan, the heart of Charotar. Devotees freely exclaimed, “Akshar-Purushottam *ni* Jay!” They spoke openly about the glory of Akshar-Purushottam.

In Vartal, Sadguru Balmukund Swami of Junagadh once remarked, “By consecrating the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis*, Shastri Yagnapurushdasji has clarified what our Sampradaya’s *upasana* should be. Until now, people offered *upasana* to several deities and incarnations. Now, the true *upasana* of Shriji Maharaj with his choicest devotee has been established. Our Sampradaya’s *upasana* has been clearly defined.”

Muktaraj Krishnaji Ada of Rajkot would also say, “Now, if you want to openly discuss true knowledge, you may go to Bochasan. Shastri Yagnapurushdasji has rendered a great *seva* to the entire Sampradaya.”

36. The Splendour of Sarangpur

Within a short period of time, Swamishri had opened the mandir in Bochasan.

In Gadhada, Bhimji Kothari, who despised Swamishri from the very beginning, wrote a letter to Gordhanbhai of Vartal, “Yagnapurushdas has built a mandir in the region of Gujarat amongst cowardly pushovers like you. However, let him try to build a mandir in the region of Kathiawad on this side of the River Sabarmati. Then he will realize who he is up against.”

Little did Bhimji Kothari know that it was Bhagwan Swaminarayan who was building these mandirs through Swamishri. Swamishri was not building mandirs to compete against others. Rather, he wished to fulfil the promises given by Bhagwan Swaminarayan to his devotees.

The devotees of Sarangpur were dearer than life to Swamishri. At their request, Swamishri came to Sarangpur. One day, he was going to bathe in Narayan Kund, a large well sanctified by Shriji Maharaj.

While walking, Swamishri stopped exactly where the BAPS mandir stands today. Here, he addressed Motibhai, who was accompanying him, “Motibhai! Shriji Maharaj had wished for a mandir to be built here. He had promised the devotees accordingly. Therefore, a mandir shall certainly stand here.” With these words, Swamishri continued walking. Returning after bathing, Swamishri again stopped at that same location, “Motibhai, compose a kirtan describing the mandir we want to build in Sarangpur.”

Swamishri’s strange request puzzled Motibhai. He thought to himself, “The mandir in Bochasan is still incomplete. There is no money in the mandir accounts. Still, Swamishri dares to harbour such aspirations.”

Suddenly, something remarkable happened. Motibhai saw a

towering three-storey mandir with golden pinnacles standing before him. He saw the *murtis* of Dham, Dhāmi and Mukta in a *sinhasan* in the central sanctum. Motibhai was astounded to see a mandir as beautiful and as majestic as the one which stands there today. The words of a kirtan gracefully flowed from his lips:

*“Shri Sārangpurni shobhā saji ati sārī,
Joi aloukik adbhut Dhām avikāri...”*

“I behold the immense splendour of Sarangpur, a remarkable and eternal celestial abode...”

All of Motibhai’s doubts were removed in an instant. He realized that Swamishri was capable of creating countless such mandirs in an instant.

37. Meeting of the Ganga and the Ocean

Krishnacharandas Swami was the leading disciple of Sadguru Madhavcharandas Swami, who himself had been one of Gunatitanand Swami’s disciples in Junagadh. Krishnacharandas Swami’s disciples were all known for their saintly virtues. Little Jhina Bhagat, however, stood out from the rest. Jhina had been told of Shastri Yagnapurushdasji’s greatness by Krishnaji Ada and many other devotees. He was eager to have Swamishri’s darshan. To fulfil his wish, Krishnaji Ada had invited Swamishri to Rajkot. Swamishri complied and came to Rajkot from Sarangpur.

Jhina Bhagat was overjoyed. His wish to have Swamishri’s darshan was fulfilled. During their first meeting, he was drawn to Swamishri. Feeling content, his mind was engrossed in Swamishri’s divine image.

From Rajkot, Swamishri returned to Sarangpur. The devotees here requested that he build a mandir. Swamishri agreed to do

so. The house of Pitha Khachar was purchased. It would serve as a place of worship until the new mandir was ready.

Bhimjibhai Kothari was alarmed when he heard that Swamishri had acquired the house. However, he consoled himself, thinking, “Acquiring a few rooms is a long way from building a mandir.” He remained confident that Swamishri would definitely fail.

Swamishri often visited the villages near Sarangpur as well as the region of Jhalavad. Wherever he went, he spread the message of Akshar-Purushottam.

Jhaverbhai, the diwan of Limbdi, learned that Swamishri had acquired Pitha Khachar’s house. Delightedly he offered, “Swami, if you are willing to build a mandir in Sarangpur, I will ask Thakor Saheb, the king of Limbdi, to give you the land.”

Swamishri replied, “We don’t have much money. Also, the work in Bochasan is still incomplete. Still, if you are willing to have the land assigned to us, we will build a small mandir.”

Jhaverbhai knew Swamishri too well. Such a small piece of land would not serve Swamishri’s purpose.

He replied, “Swami! Please ask for more land, I will have it granted to you.”

Swamishri asked for 24 acres. Through Jhaverbhai’s efforts, the land was acquired from the king of Limbdi. Extra land was also purchased from Shermiya of Dholka.

Although the land had been acquired, building a mandir was no easy task. There was little money and limited manpower. There was also opposition from all sides. Those who opposed Swamishri were spreading lies from village to village, “These people are *bandias*. Do not give them food. If they come into the mandir in your village, throw them out. These sadhus have defied the *acharya* and Vartal mandir.”

Gullible minds fell prey to such propaganda. Some people avoided Swamishri out of fear of persecution from those who



Swamishri and Jnanjivandas Swami (Yogiji Maharaj) in Rajkot

opposed him. Even so, several brave and loyal devotees risked their lives to side with Swamishri against such fierce opposition.

Swamishri's sadhus were equally courageous. They were not discouraged by the hardships. They always smiled and lived cheerfully. With no cooking vessels available, they cooked *kh-ichadi* in empty kerosene tins. Even buttermilk that had turned sour was a luxury. They sometimes walked five or six miles before receiving alms. The mandir lacked funds. Worst of all,

the opposition often uttered discouraging words to break their morale. Even then, these sadhus remained undaunted.

People would taunt them, “How will you build a mandir? At most, you might be able to make a small shrine here.”

Despite hearing such words, the sadhus remained in good spirits. The heavy work took its toll on their bodies as they worked day and night, sometimes without even receiving a whole meal. However, because of their firm conviction in Akshar-Purushottam and their affection for Swamishri, they never lost courage.

Soon, Jnanjivandas Swami (later known as Yogiji Maharaj), previously known as Jhina Bhagat, and several other sadhus of Krishnacharndas Swami’s group, were inspired by Krishnaji Ada to leave Junagadh mandir and join Swamishri in Bochasan.

Jnanjivandas was known for his inclination towards austerity and detachment. When he was leaving Junagadh, he was permitted to take with him his favourite *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj, which had been worshipped by Gunatitanand Swami himself, from the mandir.

Leaving Junagadh, they first arrived in Rajkot and stayed with Krishnaji Ada. Krishnaji Ada had called Swamishri to Rajkot. Swamishri soon arrived. Having Swamishri’s darshan, the sadhus experienced tremendous peace within. They all then accompanied Swamishri back to Sarangpur.

38. Swamishri’s Greatness

Once, when Swamishri was in Nadiad, Dolatrambhai invited Swamishri to his house for lunch. He was aware of Swamishri’s greatness. Even back in Vartal, he had known and respected Swamishri.

Dolatrambhai was an eminent scholar of Gujarati and Sanskrit literature, and also a member of the management committee

of Vartal mandir. He knew that Swamishri had separated from Vartal only to spread the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He did not, however, understand what this *upasana* was. He had faith that Swamishri's actions and beliefs must have been in accordance with the shastras.

Dolatrambhai was eager to understand Swamishri's principles. Swamishri, too, wanted to explain his beliefs to Dolatrambhai.

Delighted to see Swamishri after ten years, Dolatrambhai asked, "Swami! Do you wish to one day rejoin Vartal?"

Swamishri replied, "If they acknowledge the true meaning of Vachanamrut Gadhadra I 21, then I do."

Dolatrambhai asked, "What is so important about this particular Vachanamrut that you insist that they acknowledge it?"

Quoting the Vachanamrut and elaborating upon it with relevant examples, Swamishri spoke extensively on the greatness of God and the God-realized Sadhu. He explained that the main principle of *moksha* is said to be grasped only when one develops conviction in the manifest form of God and his Sadhu.

Dolatrambhai was also impressed by Swamishri's ability to clearly explain himself. He now understood some very essential spiritual concepts. Firstly, that Gunatitanand Swami was Mul Akshar. Secondly, that one must develop conviction in both Akshar and Purushottam. And finally, both of these entities were present before him in Shastri Yagnapurushdasji.

Dolatrambhai exclaimed, "Swami! You have revealed the true *upasana*, a task for which Shriji Maharaj would have had to return to this world. Your greatness is immeasurable. You have consecrated the *panchdhatu murtis* of Maharaj and Swami. However, in the future, your glory will grow so vast that your disciples will consecrate your golden *murti*."

Hearing his words, everyone marvelled at Swamishri's hidden glory.

Swamishri once went to Vadodara to examine a few *murtis*. By the insistence of the devotees, he was taken to Kamatibaug. Against his liking, the first ever photograph of Swamishri was taken.

Swamishri spoke sternly to the devotees, “If you try to distribute this photograph, I will tear it up and throw it away.”

39. We Became Sadhus for Gunatit

The opposition tried relentlessly to disrupt the construction of Sarangpur mandir. However, those who previously taunted, “The most you will be able to build is a small shrine” or “You will give up and abandon the work,” watched dumbfounded as the construction progressed. As the day of the *murti-pratishtha* quickly approached, the opposition thought about how they could stop Swamishri.

The old Sampradaya’s sadhus thought to themselves, “Maybe by misleading Thakor Saheb, the king of Limbdi, we can halt the work.” They invited Thakor Saheb to the old Hanuman Mandir in Sarangpur, and told him, “Thakor Saheb, Shastri plans to consecrate the *murtis* of his own gurus, Jaga and Praga.”

As planned, these words influenced the king in their favour. He then went to the new mandir site to meet Swamishri. Swamishri received him honourably.

The king asked, “In the old Hanuman mandir, they have the miraculous stick of Gopalanand Swami which can exorcize ghosts. Do you possess anything of that nature?”

These words provoked Himatlalbhair, a prominent businessman of Botad. He exclaimed, “Bapu! This Swami is capable of creating another miraculous stick. Word of his greatness has spread throughout the Sampradaya.”

“I too have experienced Swamishri’s greatness,” agreed the king.

Thakor Saheb then asked which *murtis* would be consecrated.

Thakor Saheb had given Swamishri the land for the mandir. He was a powerful figure, one not to be antagonized. It was Thakor Saheb who had helped their cause in many ways on many occasions. Despite this, Swamishri was not intimidated by the king.

Swamishri spoke boldly, “It is only for our God, the supreme Sahajanand Swami, and for Gunatitanand Swami that we have suffered countless hardships. It is for them that we have become sadhus. Therefore, the *murtis* of Sahajanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami will be consecrated in the central sanctum and the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna will be consecrated in the first sanctum.”

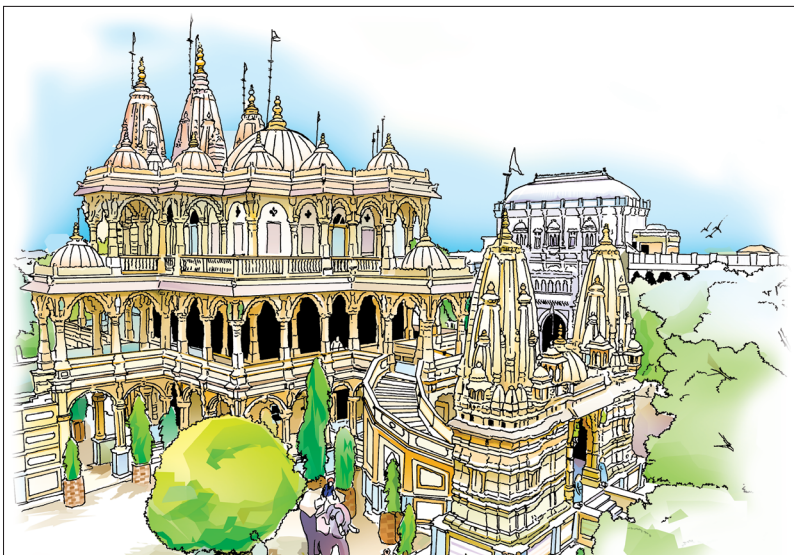
Hearing Swamishri’s bold, authoritative, and clear-cut reply, the king retracted his words, “Please ignore my words. Please do whatever you feel is appropriate.”

The king’s hidden apology pleased Swamishri. Once again, the opposition’s tactics were thwarted.

40. Murti-Pratishtha of Sarangpur Mandir

The work of the mandir in Sarangpur was proceeding at full speed. The sadhus and devotees worked hard, ignoring physical strain. One day, Sadguru Balmukund Swami of Junagadh was passing by the construction site on his way to bathe in Narayan Kund. He was pleased by the devotion with which the sadhus were serving. He called Kothari Shankar Bhagat and several sadhus. He blessed them, “You are privileged to receive this *seva* of Maharaj and Swami. Not even Shriji Maharaj’s 500 *parambansas* were fortunate enough to receive this *seva*. The force that drives you is not your own. *Aksbar-muktas* are working through you. You are indeed very fortunate.”

These words lifted the spirits of all. Everyone now began to work twice as hard.



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur

The mandir was soon ready. The auspicious day of 8 May 1916 (Vaishakh *sud* 6, Samvat 1972) was chosen for the *murti-pratishtha*. Swamishri and Nirmundas Swami made excellent preparations for the celebrations. Thousands of devotees were expected to attend, so Swamishri instructed the sadhus and devotees to make 8,000 kg of *shiro* from *soji*.

After making *shiro* for five days, the cooks were exhausted and refused to cook anymore. As a result only 5,000 kg of *shiro* was ready.

“With God’s grace, this will be enough. There will not be any shortage. Do not worry,” assured Swamishri.

On the day of the *murti-pratishtha*, Swamishri recited, from the Harililamrut, the incident of Shriji Maharaj promising Jiva Khachar to build a mandir in Sarangpur. After the *yagna* was completed, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha*. As part of the traditional Vedic rituals, he held a mirror in front of the *murtis*. The mirror cracked, indicating the divine presence of Maharaj and Swami in the *murtis*.

After the *arti*, everyone sat in rows to eat. With the intention of depleting the stock of *shiro* and discrediting Swamishri, several troublemakers sneaked into the kitchen. They carried off several baskets full of *shiro* from the storage containers. Soon, the stock of *shiro* was half empty. Everyone wondered, “We have not even started to serve the *shiro*. How has half of it already disappeared?”

The devotees serving in the kitchen ran to Swamishri and asked, “How can we feed all these people with so little *shiro*?”

Swamishri immediately had a portion of the farm cleared out and fenced with wooden beams. He selected a team of trustworthy devotees and stamped their back with his own handprints using vermilion. Only these devotees would be allowed to carry baskets full of *shiro* to serve the guests. After making these strict arrangements, Swamishri covered the containers. He placed a *murti* of Shriji Maharaj and kindled a *divo* on top of one of the lids.

From morning until midnight, the *shiro* was served to over 200,000 devotees. On top of this, the entire village ate the mandir’s *shiro* for eight days. Even then, the *shiro* stayed fresh and fragrant, without running out. Finally, the remaining *shiro* was distributed to the cattle farms in the neighbouring villages.

Everyone was delighted to witness such a miracle. They were further convinced of Swamishri’s greatness. Devotees residing near Sarangpur would call Swamishri to their village to conduct *padbramanis* and give discourses.

At the request of the devotees, Swamishri went to Mojidad. The devotees there had affectionately arranged a grand reception.

Surprisingly, Swamishri told them, “It is not appropriate for a sadhu to be given such a grand reception.” He turned and looked at Guru Ganesh Bhakta, a local devotee, and continued, “What do you say Ganesh Bhakta? Would it look good for a sadhu to allow himself to be honoured in such a way?”

Just seconds earlier, the same question had played in Ganesh

Bhakta's mind. He was amazed that Swamishri knew what he was thinking. He was now convinced that Swamishri was no ordinary sadhu, but some great incarnation and the favourite devotee of Shriji Maharaj.

41. Steadfast Faith

After travelling in the villages of Gujarat, Swamishri arrived in Sarangpur. Even after the *murti-pratishtha*, the construction work of the mandir continued.

Soma Bhagat and Aksharpurush Swami were strong workers. They could lift massive stones as if they were feathers and hurl them to the side. One huge stone, weighing 3,000 kg, was being lifted up to its place in the centre of the mandir. The stone was tied with seven thick ropes. As everyone pulled, they chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun*.

Suddenly, one after another, the ropes began to snap. The stone was now held in mid-air by only one rope. If it fell, the other carved stones arranged below would be smashed. The stone might also land on someone and cause severe injury or death. Everyone watched, worried about the potential disaster.

Someone ran to call Swamishri. Swamishri arrived and immediately raised his hand.

"The stone will not fall. Lift it to the top," he exclaimed.

He then told Soma Bhagat to climb onto the stone and re-tie the ropes. Climbing onto the stone now seemed suicidal. The one remaining rope would certainly snap, sending Soma Bhagat and the stone crashing down. It could kill him instantly. Everyone watched anxiously.

Soma Bhagat, however, had complete faith in Swamishri's words. The people holding the rope felt a thundering jolt as he quickly climbed onto the stone. All held their breath. Using all his strength, he re-tied all six of the broken ropes.

He climbed back off the stone and immediately bowed at the feet of Swamishri.

With all his heart, Swamishri blessed his faithful devotee. Those who witnessed this miraculous feat further realized Swamishri's greatness.

42. The Sadhu, the Greatest Benefactor

From Sarangpur, Swamishri travelled to several villages before reaching Bochasan. The Maharaja of Vadodara, Shrimant Sayajirav Gaekwad, was visiting Bhadran. Swamishri arranged for Jhaverbhai to invite him to Bochasan.

The Maharaja sent a message in reply, "I do not have more than 15 minutes to spare. I shall, therefore, come only for 15 minutes."

Nirgun Swami remarked, "He may say so, but he will remain for 45 minutes. When he does, understand the reason to be Swamishri's greatness."

The Maharaja was received honourably and then escorted to the mandir for darshan. He was then brought to meet Swamishri.

"So this is the Swamiji whose fame has spread today throughout Gujarat!" he exclaimed before bowing to Swamishri.

Sitting in Swamishri's presence, the Maharaja lost all track of time. He stayed for 45 minutes. They talked at great length on many matters. The Maharaja was saddened by the recent death of his son. Swamishri eased his sorrow and advised him that as he was now 50 years old, he should hand over his responsibilities, embrace the *vanaprasth ashram*, and accept the refuge of a true guru.

Swamishri's words moved him. He was especially impressed that Swamishri, without the slightest fear of upsetting a monarch like himself, gave such truthful advice. In the past, many had



Swamishri with Sayajirao Gaekwad of Vadodara

praised him. Swamishri, however, had advised him for his own good. He thought very highly of Swamishri and bowed before taking his leave. Swamishri placed his hand on the Maharaja's head, blessing him as he departed.

Once, Swamishri was giving discourses in Anand. Suddenly, someone screamed that Motibhai's house was on fire. Swamishri, while staying seated before the assembly, miraculously put out the fire in Motibhai's house. His arms, to the surprise of the

devotees, suddenly appeared burned to the elbows. Motibhai applied some soothing oil to the skin of both of Swamishri's arms. Everyone thus experienced Swamishri's compassion first-hand. Swamishri's feat was symbolic of how he endured hardships for his devotees. Everyone bowed before Swamishri.

43. Negotiations for a Compromise with Vartal

Some of Swamishri's disciples had now been elected to the management committee of Vartal. Swamishri's return to Vartal would greatly bolster the Sampradaya. Therefore, his disciples hoped and began working for such a compromise.

Gordhanbhai Kothari had now retired. Still, he advised Swamishri and the devotees that they should compromise with Vartal only if Acharya Maharaj agrees to endorse and perform *arti* of the newly consecrated *murtis* of Dham, Dhami and Mukta. Gordhanbhai's support and conviction pleased Swamishri.

Swamishri then came to Sarangpur. Narsinhdas Sheth, a Vaishnav devotee, came from Mahuva. He wished to consecrate the *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan in his mandir in Mahuva. However, learning that Swamishri was ill, he did not mention his wish.

Three days passed. Swamishri finally asked, "Have you come to take me to Mahuva to open the mandir there? Let us go. I was born for building mandirs."

Swamishri cast aside his illness and went to Mahuva.

Thereafter, Swamishri travelled to several villages and arrived in Bochasan. From there, he reached Anand. Soon, Swamishri needed to go to Sarangpur by train. Because he did not keep money with him, he needed someone to pay his fare. The devotees of Anand were out of town attending a wedding. Thus, Swamishri wandered back and forth four times between the

mandir and the railway station. Finally, he met Gordhanbhai Keshavlal on the road. Gordhanbhai bought the tickets and Swamishri returned to Sarangpur.

Whenever Swamishri travelled by train, he would have to walk from Botad to Sarangpur mandir. He would do so, carrying his own bundle on his head and his own *jholi* on his shoulders. Even if a younger sadhu was with him, he still carried his own things. Whether it was cold, hot, or even raining, Swamishri always walked the eight-mile distance to Sarangpur.

44. Sixty-Eight Places of Pilgrimage

From Sarangpur, Swamishri went to the village of Ashi. Jnanjivandas Swami, more commonly known by devotees as Yogi Swami, accompanied Swamishri. Yogi Swami would wake up at 3 a.m. and, with his sweet voice, sing *prabhatiya* bhajans. One morning, he sang Narsinh Mehta's famous kirtan, "*Prān thaki mune Vaishnav vahālā...*" ("A Vaishnav, or devotee of God, is dearer to me than life.") He continued singing, "*Adasath tirath mārā Sant ne charane, koti Ganga koti Kashi re...*" ("The sixty-eight places of pilgrimage, including the River Ganga and the holy city of Kashi, all reside at the feet of my Sadhu.")

Yogi Swami's singing annoyed Ranchhod Patel, who often slept in the village mandir.

"Maharaj! Do not sing such a silly bhajan. In this age of Kaliyug, such a sadhu does not exist. Do not sing such nonsense."

Yogi Swami obliged, "All right, I will sing another bhajan." He then started another bhajan.

That night, after giving discourses Swamishri went to sleep in the mandir. Ranchhodbhai sat on the floor nearby. Because of his old age and frail health, he rarely slept well at night.

Everyone else drifted off to sleep. Ranchhodbhai got up and closed the front gate of the mandir and sat down to turn the beads

of his *mala*. After about an hour, the gate was slowly pushed open. A divine cow, extremely white in colour, came inside. She came to Swamishri's feet and bowed her head three times.

Ranchhodbhai could not believe his eyes. The cow then quietly left the mandir. Ranchhodbhai followed to see where it would go. As he stepped outside, he faintly saw the cow in the moonlight for a short distance. Then, the cow vanished. He searched everywhere, but found no trace of it. He was convinced that the 68 places of pilgrimage must have taken the form of a cow and come to be sanctified at Swamishri's feet.

When Yogi Swami awoke at 3 a.m., Ranchhodbhai requested, "Maharaj! Please sing that kirtan about the 68 places of pilgrimage."

"Why? Just yesterday you told me not to sing it," inquired Yogi Swami.

"Now, my ignorance is gone," replied Ranchhodbhai. He then related all that had happened. He exclaimed that Shastriji Maharaj was indeed a powerful incarnation. Thus, Ranchhodbhai's ignorance was removed. Swamishri then returned to Sarangpur.

One day, Swamishri remarked, "Acharya Lakshmiprasadji has indeed helped us. Because of him, we left Vartal and were able to build mandirs revealing the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. We have been able to explain this knowledge to so many people."

In this way, Swamishri bore no ill will for anyone. He was always inclined to see the good in all.

45. Alms for Akshar-Purushottam

Kuberbhai, a senior devotee, requested that Swamishri come to Bhavnagar. Swamishri arrived and announced one morning, "I want to ask for alms in this city."

Kuberbhai replied, "We are all in your service here. If you go and beg for alms, we will all be embarrassed."

Swamishri replied, “You all do tremendous *seva*. However, Shriji Maharaj himself begged for alms, so that countless spiritual aspirants would have his darshan and be liberated. We also want to follow his command and do the same.”

Even in Sarangpur, Swamishri begged for alms. Nirgundas Swami once insisted that Swamishri not do so.

“We are all in your service. Why then do you insist on begging for alms?”

Swamishri replied, “Even if we were to be sold to a low social status person for the sake of Akshar-Purushottam, it would not be enough. Even if someone puts just a grain in my *jholi*, I will take the soul to Akshardham.”

Hearing Swamishri’s noble sentiments, no one could speak further.

Once, when Swamishri was giving discourses in Sarangpur, Bapubha asked, “At present, what can we do to please Maharaj and Swami?”

Swamishri immediately replied, “At present, Shriji Maharaj is pleased if we build mandirs which spread the message of true *upasana* and if we consecrate the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in the central sanctum. However one contributes to this cause, be it helping to dig the foundations, lifting baskets of mud, moving stones, or donating a single paisa, Shriji Maharaj will certainly purify one and certainly take them to Akshardham.”

46. Divine Samadhi

Thereafter, Shriji Maharaj started to reveal the phenomenon of samadhi in Satsang through Swamishri. The first instance was when Radharamanprasadji was doing darshan of the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj in Sarangpur. He experienced samadhi. In his trance, Shriji Maharaj gave him the very napkin that the pujari had offered earlier to Maharaj’s *murti*. That very napkin

appeared in his hand. Down in the *yagna* arena, many devotees spotted a beam of light. Soon thereafter, three balls of light revealing the images of Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami were seen disappearing into the sky.

Once, Odhavjibhai, a devotee of Botad, came to meet Swamishri in Sarangpur. As he listened to Swamishri's discourses, he felt peace. He then went to the guesthouse. There, he observed five or six devotees absorbed in a spiritual discussion. In fact, wherever he looked, be it the mandir or guesthouse, he saw small groups of sadhus and devotees talking about satsang. In the entire campus of the mandir, no one talked about anything except God. They had forgotten the world around them. Such was Swamishri's divine impact on the sadhus and devotees. Odhavjibhai returned to Botad that day, realizing Swamishri's greatness even more.

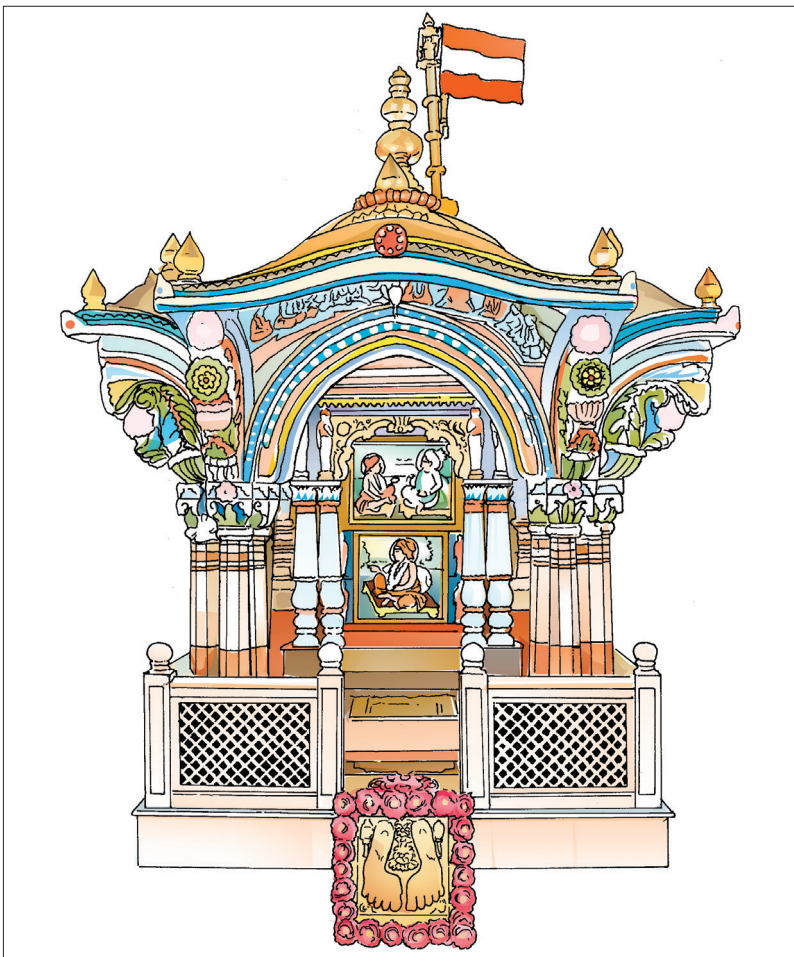
Swamishri left Sarangpur and came to Navagam. Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March had arrived in this village. Gandhiji had heard of Swamishri's saintliness and therefore wished to meet him. He invited Swamishri. Swamishri complied and came to meet him.

Gandhiji humbly asked, "Swamiji! Please bless us so that we can succeed in our work."

Looking at Yogiji Maharaj, Swamishri replied, "This Jogi Swami will do *malas* from today so that our country gains independence through your efforts. God will be with you if you observe *niyam* dharma."

Gandhiji was pleased with these blessings. Swamishri then returned to his lodgings.

Yogi Swami was indeed compassionate. At Swamishri's behest, he daily turned 25 *malas* for the independence of the country. Because of his bhakti and the efforts of countless patriots, the country subsequently gained independence in 1947.

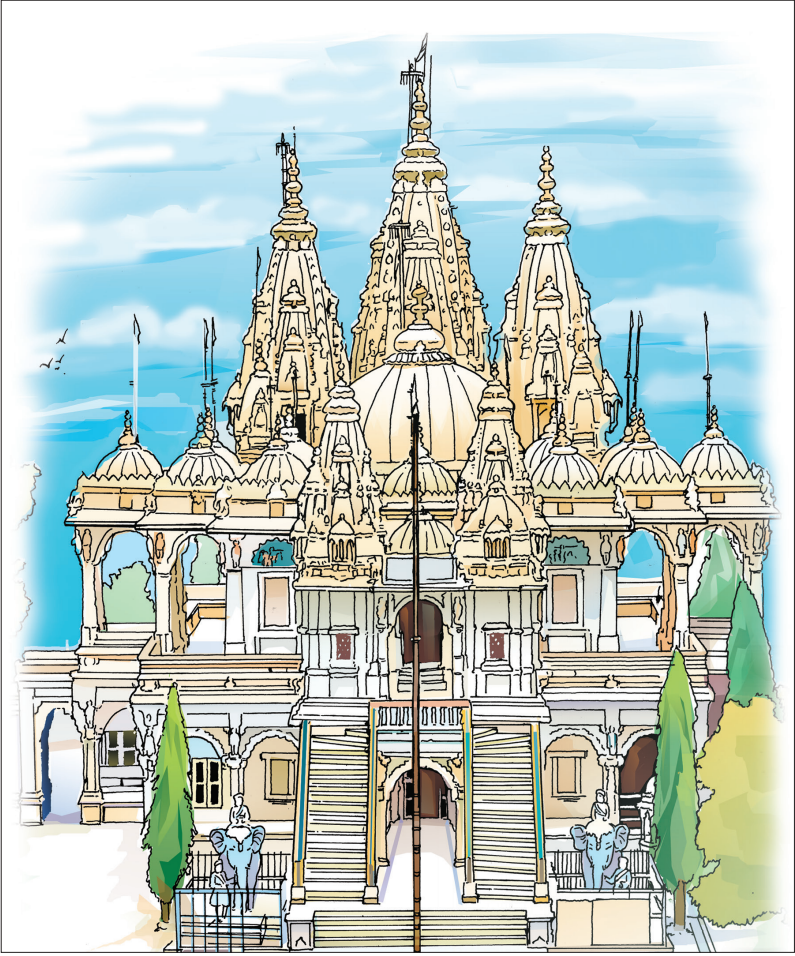


Akshar Deri, Gondal

47. Akshar Mandir

Haribhai Amin of Virsad came to meet Swamishri in Sarangpur. Haribhai had recently met Maharaja Bhagvatsinhji of Gondal to acquire the piece of land on which Akshar Deri stood. The land was worth at least 200,000 rupees, but Haribhai negotiated the cost down to 25,000 rupees.

Maharaja Bhagvatsinhji agreed to sell the land only if certain conditions were met. He stated, “The Akshar Deri must remain



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Gondal

intact on this land, the mandir that is built over the land should be finished in three years, and at least one million 1,000,000 rupees must be spent on the project.”

Haribhai was confident that Shastriji Maharaj was capable of such a feat. He came to Swamishri and announced, “Swami! I’ve purchased the land in Gondal for 200,000 rupees.”

Swamishri read his mind and replied, “You purchased this land not for 200,000, but for 25,000 rupees and the Maharaja

has set certain conditions to the transaction. Even then, Haribhai, do not worry. Some 2,000,000 rupees will easily be used on this land.”

Swamishri’s words relieved Haribhai. He went to Bharuch to gather the funds to pay for the land.

After the Jal Jhilani festival, the Swaminarayan *dhun* was chanted for 24 hours. Swamishri arrived in the assembly and played the *dilruba*. Moved by the sweet notes played by Swamishri, four or five devotees and two sadhus experienced samadhi and had darshan of Shriji Maharaj.

One of the sadhus, Nandkishoredas, had a bulky body. Even then, he was able to flex his limbs and sit in very difficult yogic postures, since, while in samadhi, Gopalanand Swami was teaching him yoga.

On the morning of Punam, Swamishri sent all of the devotees to harvest millet from the farm. The devotees were exhausted on doing the *seva*. In the afternoon, Swamishri himself carried a pot of cool water to the farm and quenched their thirst. As soon as they saw Swamishri, some of the devotees experienced samadhi at the farm.

A few days later, Haribhai requested Swamishri to accompany him to finalize the documents for the purchase of the land in Gondal. The funds had already been collected. After finalizing the transaction, Haribhai handed over the deeds of the land to Swamishri. News that the Akshar Deri had been acquired reached the devotees. Everyone was overjoyed.

Swamishri decided to hold the groundbreaking ceremony for the mandir on 18 January 1932 (Posh *sud* 10, Samvat 1988). Thousands of devotees attended. The ceremony was conducted with great joy. Maharaja Bhagvatsinhji, overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the devotees on this occasion, caught a glimpse of Swamishri’s glory.

Swamishri then went to Rajpur, in northern Gujarat, to

attend a *parayan*. Harmanbhai had come from East Africa for Swamishri's darshan. He had decided not to return to East Africa. He wanted to stay in India and enjoy Swamishri's divine presence.

Swamishri blessed him, "Go to Africa and try your best. Satsang will grow. It is Maharaj's wish." With these blessings, Harmanbhai returned to East Africa.

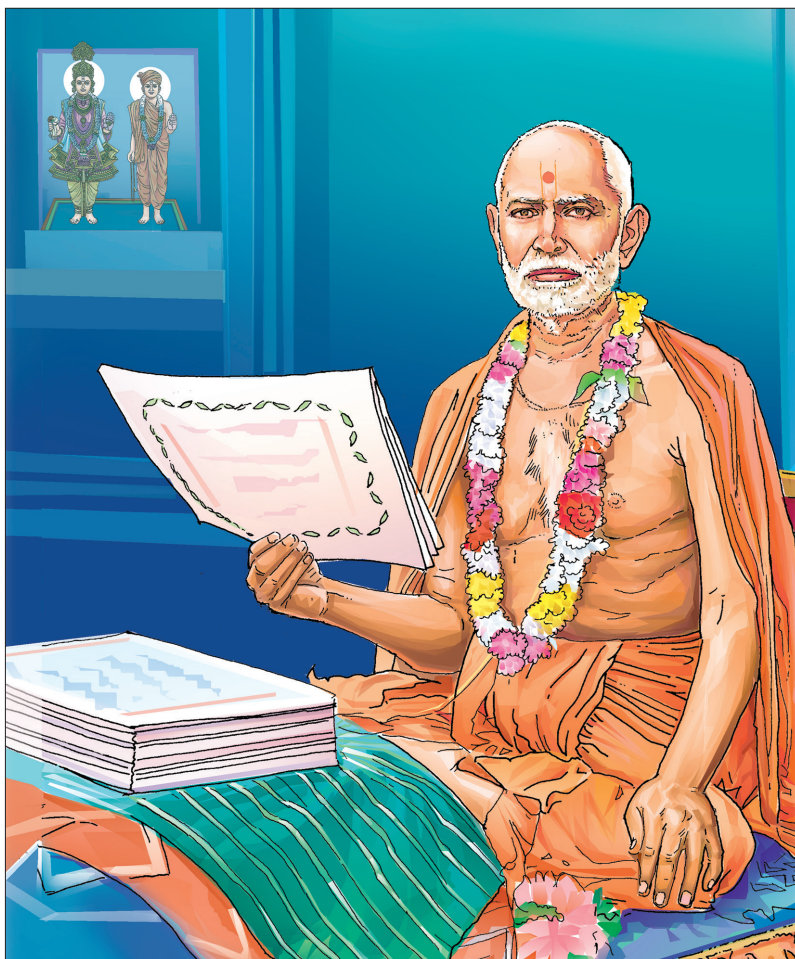
The maharaja of Gondal had insisted that Swamishri complete the mandir in three years. However, Swamishri's faithful sadhus and devotees worked day and night to complete the mandir in under two-and-a-half years. The *murti-pratishtha* was scheduled to be held on the auspicious day of 24 May 1934 (Vaishakh *sud* 10, Samvat 1990).

Swamishri invited all devotees to attend the celebrations. He wrote, "I want to bless whoever comes to this festival with Akshardham! Therefore, no one should miss this priceless opportunity."

Yogi Swami won everyone's hearts through his tremendous *seva* during the festival. Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha*. The mirror that was held in front of the *murtis* cracked, thereby signifying the divine presence of Maharaj and Swami in the *murtis*. The victory calls of Akshar-Purushottam resounded everywhere. That night, in the Akshar Deri, Dharmaswarupdas Swami and three devotees experienced samadhi. They all had darshan of Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and infinite *akshtar-muktas*.

Swamishri spoke extensively about the importance of the Akshar Deri. He predicted, "Here, a grand *thal* will be offered to God daily, as is done in Shrinathji. This will be the greatest location in the entire universe. Everyone's wishes will be fulfilled here."

To the delight of the devotees, Swamishri appointed Yogi Swami as the first mahant of the mandir. It was only fitting that the mahant of such a divine mandir himself be so divine.



Shastriji Maharaj discoursing during a *parayan* in Ahmedabad, 1936

48. Invoking Indra

During the monsoon months of August and September 1936, the devotees of Ahmedabad decided to hold a *parayan*. Everyone had been worried about the lack of rain. The month of Bhadarva had arrived and it still had not rained. The devotees prayed to Swamishri.

Swamishri told the devotees, “Pray to Jogi Maharaj. He is compassionate. He will surely make a request to Maharaj.”

Yogi Swami said, “I am only a servant. Everything is in Swamishri’s hands. Let us do *dhun*. Swamishri will make it rain.”

Swamishri said to Dharmaswarupdas, “Go into samadhi and put in a request to Shriji Maharaj.”

Dharmaswarupdas went into samadhi and prayed to Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj told him, “Shastri Yagnapurushdasji is relieving the world of its burden of sin. Thus, no one will experience misery. It will surely rain.”

That evening it rained lightly. It continued to rain lightly for two or three days. However, the devotees were still not satisfied with the rain.

On the third day, Dharmaswarupdas again went into samadhi and prayed again to Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj again assured him, “From today, there will be heavy rains.”

While Dharmaswarupdas was still in samadhi, 7 kg of *magas* appeared as *prasad* in his lap. Many witnessed this miracle. Airavat, Indra’s celestial elephant possessing two trunks, then appeared. Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj and Indra climbed down from Airavat.

Shriji Maharaj spoke to Dharmaswarupdas in samadhi, “Indra, the god of rain, has accompanied us. Now there will be no shortage of rain.” Then, the five of them sat on Airavat and disappeared into the sky. Many devotees saw this miracle with their own eyes. Suddenly, lightning bolts flashed and thunder resounded in the skies. Heavy rains soon followed. Seeing such a miracle, people from all parts of Ahmedabad were drawn to Swamishri.

In 1838 (Samvat 1994), Someshvar Pithva organized a *parayan* on the Satsangijivan shastra in Gondal. Bhagwandas, a new devotee from Pune who had heard of Swamishri’s greatness, came to listen.

He prayed for two matters: Firstly, a mandir be built in Pune and secondly, that he be graced with the darshan of Shriji

Maharaj. In his mind, he resolved, “I shall eat only if Swamishri gives his blessings for a mandir in Pune and if I have darshan of Shriji Maharaj.” He did not disclose this matter to anyone.

On the final day of the *parayan*, Swamishri was reciting from the Satsangjivan. Suddenly, Bhagwandas could no longer see Swamishri. In his place, Bhagwandas had darshan of Shriji Maharaj clad in rich clothes embroidered with golden threads. Maharaj had worn a crimson coloured turban and various ornaments. Bhagwandas informed Girdharbhai Patel, a devotee of Ahmedabad who was sitting next to him, of what he saw. Girdharbhai rubbed his eyes, but still saw Shastriji Maharaj and not Shriji Maharaj.

Girdharbhai remarked, “Here, I see Swamishri reading the discourse. I do not see Shriji Maharaj.”

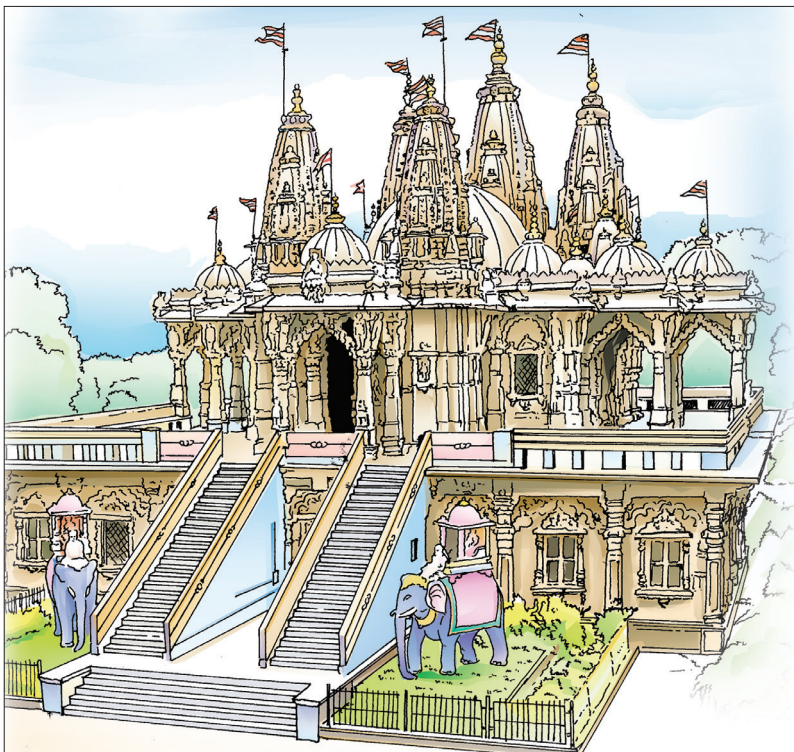
Bhagwandas then stood up, interrupting the assembly, and described what he had seen. After Swamishri completed the *parayan*, Bhagwandas recounted the entire incident. Swamishri blessed Bhagwandas, “Maharaj has fulfilled your wish. You should eat now, and do not take such an oath again.”

Everyone who was sitting in the *parayan* was now convinced that Shriji Maharaj was present before them through Swamishri.

49. Construction of Atladara Mandir Begins

Swamishri came to Vadodara. Three miles away, in the village of Atladara, lived Mathurbhai. People feared Mathurbhai, just as they had feared the old Hirabhai Mukhi of Bochasan. Mathurbhai’s life revolved around sin. No one would have expected him to ever become a devotee. One day, however, just on hearing Swamishri’s name, his life began to change. He requested that Shastriji Maharaj build a mandir in Atladara.

Swamishri replied, “There is a place where Shriji Maharaj



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Atladara

once came where Mulu Metar and Krishna Mali resided. If we acquire that sanctified piece of land, we will build a mandir.”

Mathurbhai assured Swamishri, “If you build a mandir on that place, I will get you as much land as you want.” Swamishri went to the location sanctified by Maharaj and identified exactly how much land was required.

The land identified by Swamishri was occupied by huts. Mathurbhai made new homes elsewhere and shifted the residents. Mathurbhai duly handed over this land to Swamishri and requested that he build a mandir.

Once, Harkha Patel of Samadhiyala near Sarangpur, pleaded, “Swami! There is no water in my well, so bestow grace. Bless me so that water comes.”

Swamishri bluntly replied, “You are a *satsangi*. Yet, you eat without first bathing. How then will water come to your well? From now on, promise that if water appears in your well, you will always bathe before eating. Only then will your well remain filled with water.”

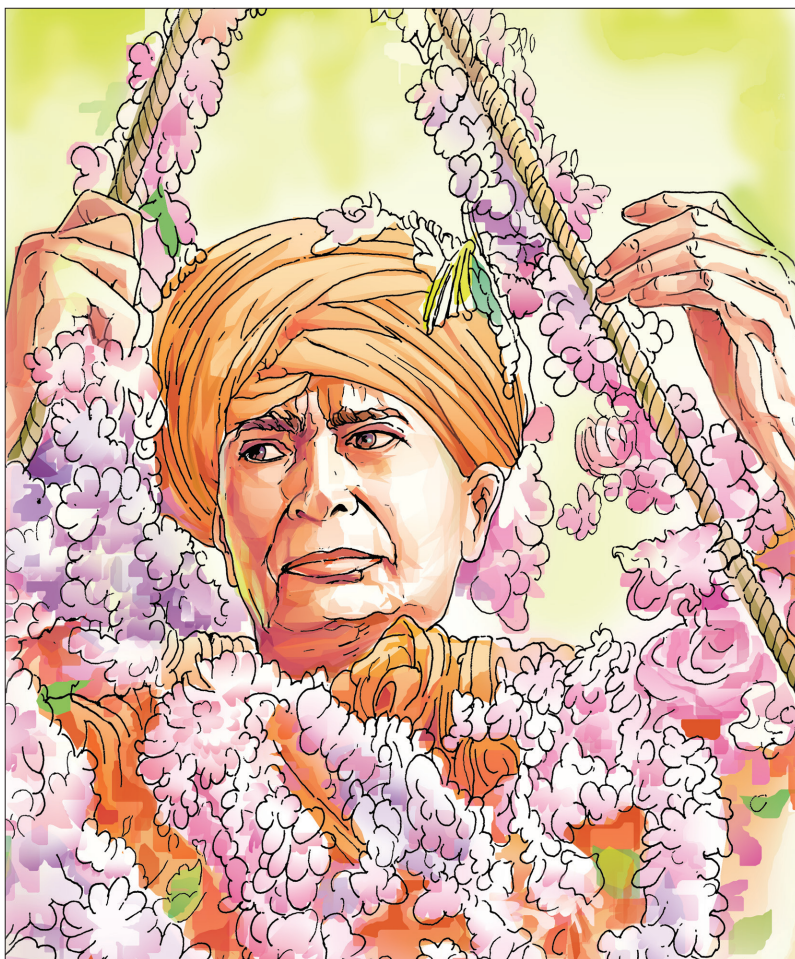
In this way, Swamishri inspired him to observe dharma.

Whenever Swamishri stayed in Sarangpur, he often seated the young Swami Narayanswarupdasji (Later known as Pramukh Swami Maharaj) beside him. Swamishri would affectionately tutor him in Sanskrit. Swamishri often made him read out verses from the shastras. Narayanswarupdasji’s sweet voice and his ability to read in Swamishri’s style pleased the devotees and Swamishri.

Swamishri often made Narayanswarupdasji read the Bhaktachintamani and Harililamrut out loud. Swamishri would then lovingly speak to him about various satsang topics. As he heard these discourses, Narayanswarupdasji grew closer to Swamishri.

The devotees of Surat requested that Swamishri come to Surat. A magnificent *parayan* was arranged. Swamishri spoke extensively and delighted everyone. Many devotees experienced samadhi. Krishnapriyacharyaji, *acharya* of the Pranami Sampradaya in Surat, was a great scholar, and had a deep knowledge of other religions.

Seeing the remarkable phenomenon of samadhi, Krishnapriyacharyaji was drawn to Swamishri. In Swamishri, he saw saintliness, scholarliness and humility. He put aside the pride of being a scholar and an *acharya*. He humbly bowed before Swamishri’s feet and then addressed the general assembly, “Akshar is Swami; Purushottam is Narayan. That is the true meaning of Swaminarayan. Shastriji Maharaj has explained this to all. Today, Bhagwan Swaminarayan is present through Shastriji Maharaj.”



85th Birth Celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj, Atladara, 1949

Hearing such words from an *acharya* of another *sampradaya* pleased all in the assembly.

50. Celebration of Swamishri's 80th Birthday

All of Swamishri's devotees wished to celebrate his 80th birthday with great joy in Bochasan. Champakbhai Banker had

come up with the idea and everyone had wholeheartedly agreed. The devotees decided to offer 125,000 rupees to Swamishri on this occasion. Swamishri, responding that a sadhu cannot accept money, rejected the proposal. He told them to offer the money to God. He insisted that these funds be used in the service of Thakorji.

On 18 January 1945 (Vasant Panchami, Samvat 2001), 200,000 devotees gathered in Bochasan. Many eminent guests had arrived from all over Gujarat. Chandulal Patel, the Director of Education in the city of Gondal, as well as other officers, noblemen and prominent devotees came. Remembering Swamishri's virtues, they spoke of his greatness.

Thereafter, Swamishri travelled to Atladara and then to Ahmedabad. Here, the yearly *parayan* took place. Swamishri read verses from the Bhagvat, giving brilliant discourses in between. Well-wishers, some from different religious backgrounds as well as the devotees all enjoyed the *parayan*.

Shastri Shri Vishvanathbhai, a great scholar and orator of the Vaishnav Sampradaya, listened to Swamishri and exclaimed, "Today, the nectar of devotion that I have tasted by listening to Swamishri leads me to conclude that although Shukji and Shridhar knew the essence of the Bhagvat, those who have heard the Bhagvat from the mouth of Swamishri must admit that not even Shridhar could explain the Bhagvat as well as this. Swamishri is the manifest form of God. Only one who is the form of God can enable others to taste this nectar. Through these discourses, Swamishri has showered us with peace and joy."

The devotees were extremely delighted to hear such praise from a Vaishnav devotee.

51. Fourth Shikharbaddha Mandir

Swamishri returned to Atladara to perform the *murti-*

pratishtha. The auspicious day of 12 July 1945 (Ashadh *sud* 3, Samvat 2001) had been scheduled for the consecration ceremony. Two days before the *pratishtha* was to take place, heavy rains began. How could the *murti-pratishtha* take place in such rain? Worried, everyone approached Swamishri and offered prayers.

Smiling, Swamishri responded, “This is Maharaj’s work. When the time comes, the rain will stop. Do not worry.”

The following day, it stopped raining. The remaining work was completed on time. The following day, a magnificent *yagna* took place. Brahmins chanted mantras according to Vedic tradition. Swamishri ceremoniously consecrated the *murtis* of Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami.

Swamishri exclaimed, “This Atladara mandir will become the greatest of mandirs. At present, it is far from Vadodara. However, one day it will be near Vadodara. Atladara will become a suburb of Vadodara.”

Today, these words have proven true.

When Swamishri came to Anand, Shri Bhailalbhai Patel, a bold and highly respected public worker, invited Swamishri to Vidyanagar. Bhailalbhai had made extensive plans to transform Vidyanagar. If Swamishri blessed his plans and sanctified the land, Bhailalbhai was confident that this undeveloped land would one day sprout into a magnificent educational centre. Bhailalbhai knew Swamishri from a very young age and was well aware of Swamishri’s greatness.

Pleased by Bhailalbhai’s affection, Swamishri arrived in Vidyanagar. Bhailalbhai explained his project in detail. Swamishri walked around the land, showering flower petals to sanctify the land.

He blessed Bhailalbhai, “Your wish shall be fulfilled. Here, a great centre for learning will develop. Thousands of students will benefit from education.”

Bhailalbhai was extremely pleased with Swamishri's blessings.

The devotees in Karachi insisted that Swamishri visit them. Swamishri, accompanied by many sadhus and devotees, arrived in Karachi. A *parayan* on the Satsangijivan shastra took place. Once again, Swamishri spoke extensively. During his stay, Swamishri regularly visited the old Swaminarayan mandir for darshan. On the final day of the *parayan*, he addressed a vast assembly of devotees, "A time of disaster soon approaches this land. All of you must leave your possessions, and return to your native place in our country."

A few weeks later, Karachi was overwhelmed by political turmoil. Swamishri's words proved true.

52. Gateway to Akshardham

In 1947 (Samvat 2004), Swamishri celebrated the Annakut festival in Sarangpur. Now Swamishri often fell ill, and then regained good health. During his illnesses, many devotees would stay and serve him. Sometimes, his condition would become serious. Still, however, he would suddenly recover. To those who watched, it seemed as if he was independent of fate, able to contract or discard any illness at will.

In Sarangpur, a magnificent gateway was being created in front of the mandir. Many devotees doubted the need for such an elaborate gateway considering that there had barely been enough resources to complete the mandir itself.

Swamishri read their minds. He remarked, "If someone does not wish to come into the mandir, even if they do darshan of this gateway from a distance, Maharaj and Swami will themselves come to take them to Dham!" Swamishri's words reminded all who were present of his glory.

Swamishri then arrived in Ahmedabad. Here, he was diagnosed with a severe heart condition. Everyone was worried

about what would happen now. Narayanswarupdasji burst into tears. Swamishri consoled and quietened everyone. He then went to Rajpur to attend a *parayan*. Because of his old age and recent heart troubles, whenever Swamishri exerted himself in any way or form, everyone would request, “Swami! Please rest.”

Swamishri would reply, “I am constantly resting while I focus on Maharaj’s *murti*. Within my heart, Shriji Maharaj reminds me that whenever devotees like you all gather, I should deliver discourses. Therefore, I cannot resist the urge to speak to you.” In this way, Swamishri continuously gave spiritual discourses.

53. Eighty-Fifth Birth Celebrations

Throughout his life, Swamishri endured countless hardships. Not caring for physical comfort, he travelled day and night. He imparted true *upasana* to the devotees. He guided them onto the path of righteousness and gave them peace. Swamishri’s devotees felt that no amount of sacrifice could possibly repay their debt to him.

Driven by such affection, they decided to celebrate Swamishri’s 85th birthday (i.e. completion of 84 years) with great festivity in Atladara on 3 February 1949 (Maha *sud* 5, Samvat 2005). They resolved to honour Swamishri with a *Su-varna Tula*, the traditional honour of weighing someone against gold on a scale and then offering that gold to God. When they approached Swamishri, he immediately refused the proposal. However, after much insistence from the devotees, Swamishri gave in to their affection.

Devotees from everywhere, both men and women, either offered their most treasured gold ornaments or donated money for the occasion. Everyone exceeded their limits as they made tremendous sacrifices.

On the day before his birth celebrations, the devotees seated

Swamishri on a decorated elephant and took him on a procession through the city. Yogi Swami and Nirgundas Swami accompanied Swamishri on the elephant. *Murtis* of God were placed on elaborately decorated vehicles during the procession.

Years previously, Swamishri had gone to the village of Talgajarda, near Mahuva. He had been sent there by Bhagatji Maharaj to beg for alms. Seeing young Yagnapurushdasji, one Patel who lived in the village had remarked, “This sadhu, who is worthy of being honoured by an elephant procession, has to wander around for food!” Today, these words proved true.

The following day, a *yagna* took place, followed by a grand assembly celebrating Swamishri’s 85th birthday. Senior devotees from all over the country spoke about Swamishri’s remarkable qualities.

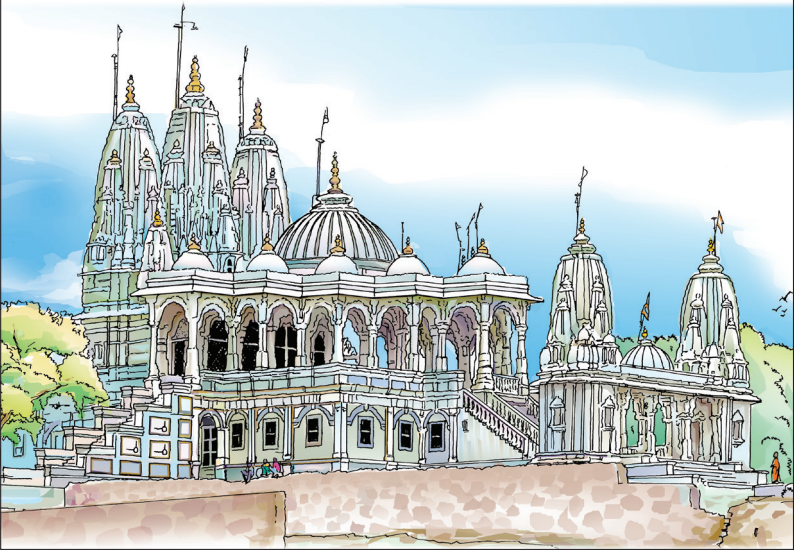
When it was time for the Suvarna Tula, Swamishri objected, “It is not appropriate to weigh a sadhu with gold.”

Everyone wondered what to do. So much effort had gone into organizing the Suvarna Tula. They pleaded to Swamishri to let them honour him, but he firmly refused. Finally, the devotees agreed to first weigh Swamishri with only sugar crystals and then weigh those sugar crystals against gold. Swamishri consented and sat on the ceremonial scales.

In this way, Swamishri exemplified the ideal of saintliness for his sadhu disciples. Hundreds of thousands of devotees felt greatly privileged to have witnessed this magnificent event. This occasion will be remembered forever in the history of Satsang.

54. Foundation for a Grand Mandir in Gadhada Is Laid

Swamishri was now quickly completing all of his projects. Years ago, Bhagwan Swaminarayan had wished to build a



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Gadhada

mandir on the hilltop in Gadhada. Dada Khachar and Jiva Khachar had jointly owned the land. Dada had readily agreed to give up his share of the land, but Jiva Khachar had refused. Maharaj's wish, therefore, had remained unfulfilled.

Shriji Maharaj had then remarked at the time, "A grand mandir shall be constructed here in the future and the *murtis* of me with my choicest devotee will be consecrated."

Swamishri wanted to fulfil Shriji Maharaj's wish. Therefore, he made many efforts to acquire the land on the hill. However, the opposition used their influence over the state authorities in Bhavnagar. The local government of Bhavnagar resolved to never give Shastri Yagnapurushdasji any land in Gadhada.

When Swamishri was informed of the government's decision, he remarked, "Since it is Maharaj's wish, Maharaj himself will use his divine powers and have the land given to us. If necessary, he may even cause a shift of powers in the government."

Sure enough, India gained independence. The smaller states merged with the Union. As a result, the state of Bhavnagar lost

its powers. Govindsinh Chudasama, a disciple of Swamishri, was appointed as the Deputy Collector of Bhavnagar. Through his efforts, Swamishri easily acquired the land on the hill.

The groundbreaking ceremony was held on 16 November 1949 (Kartik *vad* 11, Samvat 2006). The ceremony was performed by Krishnakumarsinhji, the former ruler of Bhavnagar and the then Governor of Madras.

On this occasion, he exclaimed, “Swamishri is the most eminent sadhu to be found in all of India. This mandir in Gadhadra will become the greatest of India’s mandirs.”

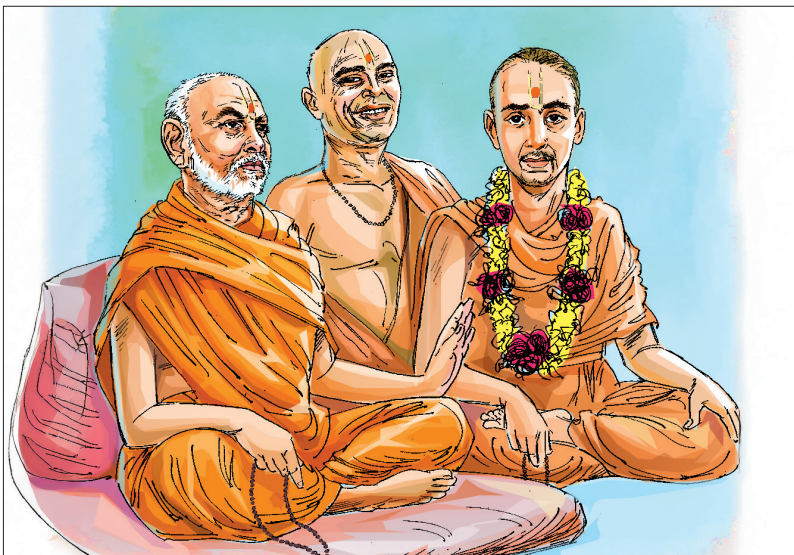
Building an entirely marble mandir costing hundreds of thousands of rupees on the hill towering over the banks of the River Ghela was not an easy task. Only Swamishri would be capable of accomplishing such a feat, that too as it was the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

55. Narayanswarupdasji Appointed as President of the Sanstha

Swamishri had founded this great organization. He now wished to entrust its management to an appropriate successor, one who could also look after and further develop the Satsang. Swamishri’s eyes fell on the 28-year-old sadhu, Narayanswarupdasji.

Narayanswarupdasji had stayed with and served Swamishri from a young age. He had earned Swamishri’s blessings. From a young age, he had possessed virtues such as renunciation, austerity, devotion and righteousness. Because of his saintliness, his management expertise, his thorough study of the shastras, his sweet voice, and his ability to please others, he had become everyone’s favourite. Therefore, all were pleased with Swamishri’s decision.

On the day of 21 May 1950 (Jeth *sud* 4, Samvat 2006), at the mandir located in Ambli Vali Pol in Ahmedabad, the



Shastriji Maharaj appoints Shastri Narayanswarupdasji as president of BAPS

ceremonious appointment of the new president of the Sanstha took place. Swamishri seated Narayanswarupdasji between himself and Yogi Swami and addressed the assembly, “Just as Sadguru Ramanand Swami had entrusted the leadership of the Sampradaya to Nilkanth Varni at a young age, I, too, from today, appoint in my position as president of the Sanstha, Sadguru Shastri Narayanswarupdasji. He is young, but abundant in virtues. Therefore, I call upon all of you, sadhus and devotees, to assist him so that he may excel in his role and fulfil his responsibilities. From now on, obey Sadguru Shastri Narayanswarupdasji as you have obeyed me.”

Swamishri then turned and addressed Narayanswarupdasji, “This Jogi Maharaj is a *vachan-siddha* and eminent sadhu. You must remain under his protective guidance and bring glory to the Satsang.”

Swamishri then addressed Yogi Swami, “Jogi! I leave this Narayan Swami in your care. Bless him so that he may develop virtues like yours.”

Yogi Swami gladly blessed Narayanswarupdasji.

Swamishri then applied a *chandlo* to Narayanswarupdasji's forehead and gave his blessings. He then placed his own *chadar*, a saffron cloth-sheet, on Narayanswarupdasji's shoulders. From then on, Narayanswarupdasji would be known as 'Pramukh Swami'.

Narayanswarupdasji prostrated to Swamishri and bowed to all of the sadhus who were present. He then humbly addressed everyone, "Whatever abilities and knowledge that I possess has been given to me by you. Please give me the strength and the skills to fulfil the responsibilities that you have entrusted me with." Swamishri's appointment as president pleased everyone.

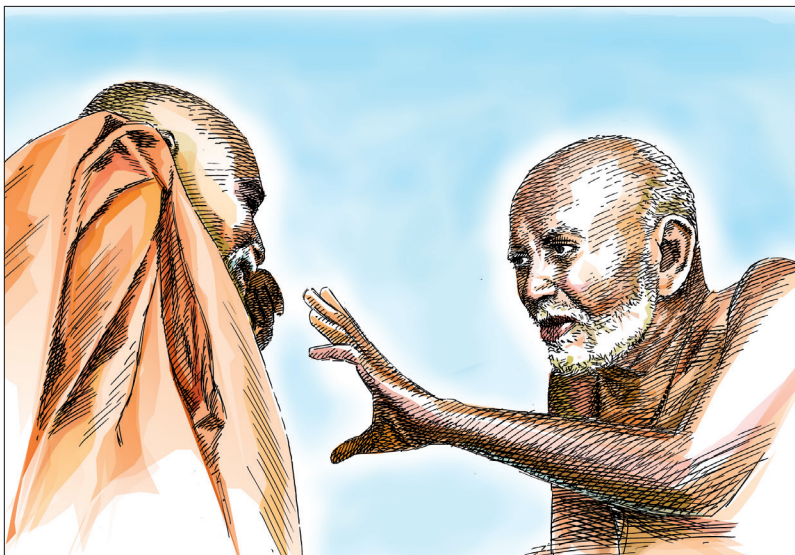
56. Nirgundas Swami Passes Away

Nirgundas Swami developed a severe illness. He was brought to Mumbai for treatment. When Swamishri came to Mumbai, he also fell ill. Even when ill, Swamishri would give spiritual discourses. He would discuss matters relating to Satsang history, thereby pleasing the devotees. The devotees in Mumbai also pleased him with their tremendous physical, mental, and financial *seva*.

Several skilled physicians treated Nirgundas Swami. Despite this, his health continued to deteriorate. Swamishri encouraged him to undergo further specialist treatment in the town of Pen.

Nirgundas Swami had spent his entire life extolling the greatness of Swamishri and the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He was valiant in nature. Yet, he himself had never wished to be the centre of praise or worship. He had helped many devotees, always siding with them in their times of need. He had laughed with them during joyous times and grieved with them in times of difficulty.

In serving the Satsang community, Nirgundas Swami had



Shastriji Maharaj blesses Yogiji Maharaj

far exceeded his limitations. Satsang in Africa had flourished because of his tireless efforts and the writing of countless letters to devotees. Everyone prayed for his quick recovery.

However, by the wish of Shriji Maharaj, on 30 May 1950 (Jeth *sud* 14, Samvat 2006), Nirgundas Swami, as he uttered the Swaminarayan mantra, passed away Akshardham. The devotees mourned the loss of such a valiant sadhu, one who was as dear to Swamishri as his own body. Swamishri consoled everyone.

57. “I Am Yogi and Yogi Is Myself”

Swamishri now fell ill quite often. Even when ill, he delighted the devotees with his divine personality, even amazing them with miracles. He allowed them to serve him.

Yogi Swami soon came to Ahmedabad. He approached Swamishri to take leave and return to Gondal.

Swamishri exclaimed, “Now, Maharaj will come to take me.

So, I leave this Narayandas [Pramukh Swami] in your care. I leave all of these mandirs in your care. Look after them.”

The next day, Swamishri remembered Yogi Swami and remarked, “O Jogi is indeed Jogi. He is Gunatit. There is no sadhu like him in the infinite universes. He has been following my wishes for the last 40 years. He intuitively understands all my inner wishes.”

Swamishri decided to go to Atladara for the festival of Janmashtami so that thousands of devotees could have his darshan for the last time. Now, Swamishri intended to leave this world.

Everyone was worried about how his ailing health would allow him to undertake such a journey. Swamishri, however, got ready, sat in the car, and reached Atladara.

In Atladara, one sadhu remarked, “Swami! While turning the beads of my *mala*, I only chant your name. In my mind, you are God.”

Swamishri scolded him, “Never speak like this. Everyone should chant the name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan while turning the beads of the *mala*. You should only worship him. I myself worship him. You should as well. This is my command.”

58. The Last Moments

Soon, Swamishri expressed a wish to return to Sarangpur. Everyone was concerned about how Swamishri, being in such poor health, would be able to reach Sarangpur. However, Swamishri continued to insist.

Yogi Swami arrived from Mumbai. Hearing of Swamishri’s wish, he instructed the devotees to take Swamishri to Sarangpur. Swamishri boarded the train from Vadodara. When the train halted in Ahmedabad, Swamishri addressed the devotees who had come to meet him, “Not even the slightest difference exists

between Jogi and me. You all should obey Jogi Maharaj.” Swamishri then departed for Sarangpur.

Swamishri’s health improved in Sarangpur. He instructed others to prepare for the *murti-pratishtha* in Gadhada. He sent for a car. When the car was ready, he summoned Hakabhai and said, “Let us go to Gadhada and consecrate the *murtis*.” At the time, no one understood the significance of these words. Swamishri then reached Gadhada.

The following morning, he bathed the *murtis* with the sacred water of the River Ghela. He offered each *murti* a *janoi*, applied the *chandlo* and adorned them with garlands. He affectionately engaged in darshan of the *murtis* and also performed the *arti*.

Finally, he said, “My part in the rituals is complete. The *murtis* have been consecrated. Now I do not wish to return. Jogi Maharaj will come and do the *pratishtha arti*.” No one understood the significance of these words. At 10 a.m., Swamishri decided to return to Sarangpur.

As he left, he said, “Now I want to stay in Sarangpur forever.”

The devotees of Africa had also arrived in Sarangpur. Swamishri delighted them with his darshan and divine company. Finally, he addressed them, “No one can ever equal Maharaj and Swami. To say that someone is their equal is a great offence to both of them. Philosophically speaking, one may understand that Maharaj resides in the Sadhu. If so, then what is the difference between Shriji Maharaj and such a Sadhu? It is through his association with Maharaj that the Sadhu can be called the form of God. This understanding, which originates in the shastras, maintains the belief that Maharaj is an eternal and separate entity.”

Swamishri continued, “Without acknowledging their association with Shriji Maharaj, if we believe each successive guru to be God, then the concept of an eternal and distinct God is not maintained. Our understanding then becomes like that of

a Shushka-Vedanti. Shriji Maharaj resides in a Sadhu who possesses the virtues described in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 27. A Sadhu with such qualities can be said to be a form of God. He can be understood as equivalent to God. Therefore, everyone must remain within the restrictions established by Shriji Maharaj and obey his commands. Sahajanand Swami is the supreme God and Anadi Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami is the greatest Sadhu. The Ekantik Sadhu is the gateway to liberation. This is true *upasana*.”

Swamishri now remained indifferent to everything. He repeatedly uttered, “Now Jogi Maharaj will perform *arti* of the *murtis* in Gadhada.” Yogi Swami, however, had recently departed for Mumbai.

59. Hundreds of Thousands of Salutes to Shastriji Maharaj

Everyone was concerned as Swamishri’s condition became critical on 10 May 1951 (Vaishakh *sud* 4, Samvat 2007).

At 9 a.m., Swamishri said, “Take me to the Rang Mandap.”

Swamishri was taken to the Rang Mandap. Holding their breath, the devotees did darshan of Swamishri. They chanted the Swaminarayan mantra and prayed to Shriji Maharaj. At exactly 10:50 a.m., the entire Rang Mandap was filled with divine light.

“Swami! Maharaj!” said Swamishri, as he breathed his last and passed away to Akshardham.

News of Swamishri’s passing soon reached all. The sadhus and devotees were devastated. Swamishri’s body was laid on a pyre of sandalwood in the farm that had once been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the final rites.

The entire Satsang community was drowned in grief. Yogiji Maharaj consoled and guided the sadhus and devotees.

The *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the mandir on the hilltop in Gadhada was only six days away. However, because of Swamishri's passing, everyone was confused. Was it appropriate to hold such a celebration?

Yogiji Maharaj clarified, "Has Swamishri really gone? He is ever-present. It was Swamishri's wish that the *pratishtha* be held on the tenth day of the month. Therefore, he will only be pleased if we conduct the *murti-pratishtha* as planned."

These words infused courage into the hearts of all. Everyone remembered Swamishri's words, "Jogi will do the *arti* of Gadhada mandir." With renewed enthusiasm, everyone joined in the final *seva* of Gadhada mandir. They saw Swamishri in Yogiji Maharaj.

Throughout his life, Shastriji Maharaj was in constant communion with Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He was graced by Shriji Maharaj. He came into this world and undertook the difficult task of enshrining the true *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam. Creating history through his work, he infused a new life into Satsang. His life was an ideal of saintliness. He gifted all with two great sadhus – Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Long may the legacy of Swami Shastriji Maharaj continue.

Glossary

Akhatrij third day of the bright half of the month of Vaishakh (May–June)

akshar-mukta a *jiva* that has attained ultimate liberation and resides forever in Akshardham with a divine body

aksharrup form of Akshar. That which has qualities similar to Akshar. The highest spiritual status is to become *aksharrup* and worship Purushottam

annakut offering of many food items before the *murti* of God

arti Hindu ritual of waving lighted wicks before the *murti* of God as an act of worship.

asan seat; one of the eight steps in yoga

bhagvati diksha initiation into the monastic order where a youth is given saffron robes to wear

brahmasthiti state of God-realization

brahmavidya knowledge of Brahma

chadar cotton shawl

chandlo auspicious vermilion mark applied on one's forehead

charanarvind holy footprints

charu treasure

chesta the daily routine and life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan composed into lyrical verses by Premanand Swami, sung by devotees at night

dandvat pranam or prostrations

dhun chanting of God's holy name, often to the accompaniment of musical instruments

diksha initiation

dilruba a stringed instrument

divo a lighted wick in an earthen or metal crucible filled with ghee

ishtadev chosen deity

janmakshar personal birth horoscope

janoi sacred thread

jholi bundle tied with a cloth

jnan spiritual knowledge

jnani one who is spiritually realized with the knowledge of God

khichadi spiced boiled rice and lentil grains

kothari administrative head of mandir

maan a metallic pot used as a musical percussion instrument

magas a sweet delicacy made from gram flour

muktaraj a spiritually elevated person

mala rosary

matlu earthen pot

mukta a liberated soul

murti-pratishtha traditional Vedic ceremony in which *murtis* are consecrated in a mandir

murti sacred icon or image

niyam moral and spiritual disciplines, and religious codes of conduct prescribed by God, the Satpurush or the shastras

padhramani visit by sadhus to sanctify a home

paramhansa the highest order of ascetics

parayan spiritual discourses held for several days

parshad a renunciant who wears white robes

prabhatiya bhajans sung in the morning

pradakshina circumambulation

prasad sanctified food, blessed and consecrated by having been offered to God

pujan ritual of worship with materials such as kumkum, sandalwood paste, rice, flowers

purani a person reading shastras

sadguru a senior sadhu

samadhi experience of God in a divine trance-like state

satsang spiritual practices

Satsang holy fellowship, the Swaminarayan Sampradaya

satsangi a member of the Satsang fellowship. One who practices satsang

seva spiritual service

shikarbaddha traditional mandir with spires, in which five *artis* are performed daily and worship of the deities is performed by sadhus

shiro a sweet delicacy, usually prepared from wheat flour, ghee, sugar and condiments

sinhasan throne for God

soji a type of grain

sud bright half of lunar month

thal food devotionally offered to God as a form of devotion, which, thus consecrated, is known as *prasad*

tumbdi gourd

upasana worship of God, with special emphasis on his greatness and glory

vachan-siddha one whose words come true

vad dark half of lunar month

vairagya detachment; an aversion or strong, persistent dislike for the world and its pleasures

vartman vow; initiation into a *sampradaya*