

SATSANG READER

Part 2

Brief Biographies of Leading Sadhus and Devotees
of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 11

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Part 2

Brief Biographies of Leading Sadhus and Devotees
of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya

Gujarati Text: Sadhu Bhagwatpriyadas

Translation: BAPS Sadhus



Swaminarayan Aksharpith
Ahmedabad

SATSANG READER, PART 2

Brief Biographies of Leading Sadhus and Devotees
of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya

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

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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

Purna Purushottam Shri Sahajanand Swami out of compassion and grace incarnated on this earth. During his life on earth, he inspired many to attain the highest spiritual state. The lives of these sadhus, and male and female devotees serve as an example for all on how to worship God and attain his divine bliss. Shriji Maharaj's work has been continued by the succession of God-realized Sadhus he established. Spiritual seekers who have associated with them have also attained the ultimate spiritual bliss.

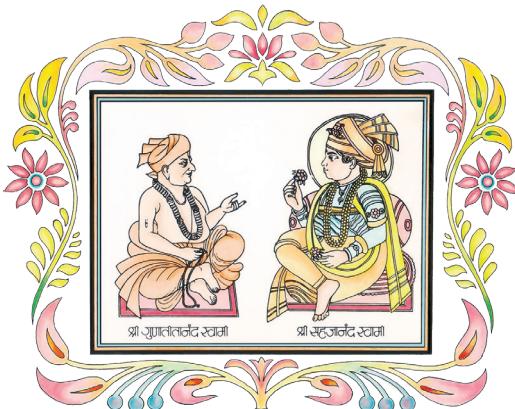
This publication, *Satsang Reader Part 2*, contains short biographies of a selection of such sadhus and devotees since the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is a translation, with slight modifications, of the Gujarati publication *Satsang Vanchanmala Part 2*.

This book is part of the curriculum for the Satsang Examinations. More specifically, it is a textbook for the third level of the examinations, Satsang Parichay.

It is our earnest prayer that all devotees, young and old, will study this book carefully and pass the examinations with flying colours, and above all, derive immense spiritual benefits and please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara*.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith

Prayer



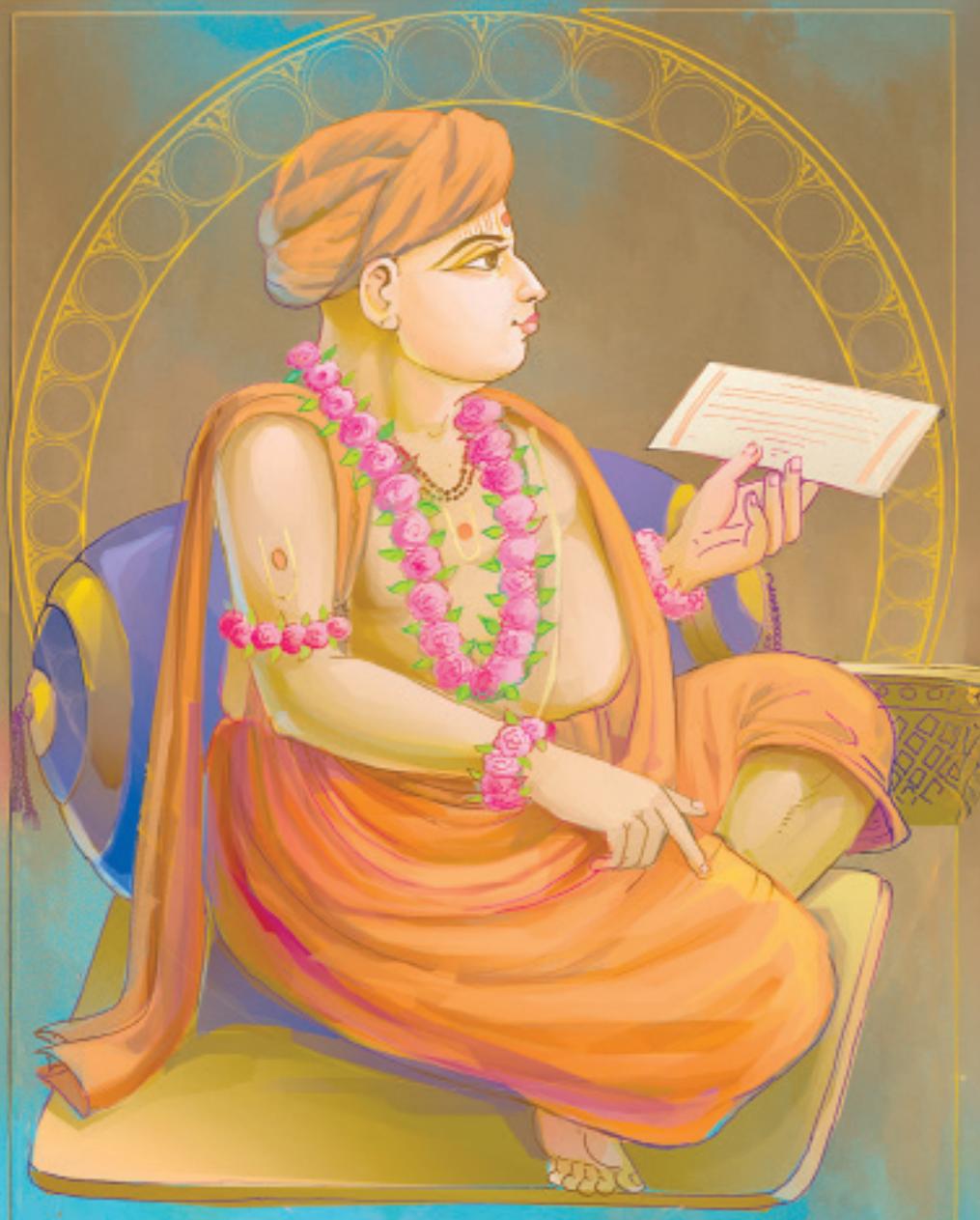
Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine māte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine māte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānani parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...Ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar-Purushottam, Gunātit gnānane gāishu...Ame 2
Ame sau 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 Gunātit 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.



Sadguru Nityanand Swami

1. Sadguru Nityanand Swami

In the village of Datiya, near Lucknow, lived a Brahmin called Vishnu Sharma. His wife's name was Virjadevi. This pious couple led a pure life and worshipped God. They enjoyed great respect for leading their lives in accordance with the principles of dharma. Due to merits earned in their previous births, they were blessed with two sons, whom they called Govind and Dinmani. Dinmani was born on the auspicious day of 21 March 1793 (Chaitra sud 9, Samvat 1849).

Of the two, Dinmani was more interested in studies than his brother. Also, his noble behaviour, courtesy and politeness made him dearer to everyone. At the age of eight, Dinmani was given the *yagnopavit* by his father in accordance with the rites prescribed by the scriptures.

With a keen desire to attain knowledge, Dinmani went to Kashi, where great scholars and pundits lived. Due to his studies and the *samskars* of previous births, he began to think, "Theoretical knowledge is for debates only. In order to realize God, one must experience *jnan*. For this, one must associate with a Satpurush. Such a Satpurush can be found at places of pilgrimage. Hence, Dinmani set out on a pilgrimage in search of such a Satpurush.

He visited many holy places, but his intense desire to find a God-realized Sadhu or manifest God remained unfulfilled. As days passed, his hope for such a meeting waned and he became increasingly sad. He bathed in the holy waters in Jagannathpuri and Rameshwar, and prayed at sacred mandirs, but his goal of attaining a Satpurush was not achieved. Although disappointed, he was not disheartened. Not prepared to give up his search, he continued his pilgrimage.

He came to Gujarat and visited Dwarika. On his way from Dwarika, he came to Visnagar. Here he received some encouraging news: "Bhagwan Swaminarayan has manifested on

this earth. He travels throughout Gujarat with his *paramhansas*, and thousands of spiritual seekers have sought his refuge.” On hearing this, Dinmani felt great joy in his heart. He became impatient to meet Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He inquired from many people about Bhagwan Swaminarayan before arriving in Unjha, a town in north Gujarat.

He saw thousands of people near the lake on the outskirts of the town. There, he had his first darshan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who was seated on a raised decorated platform surrounded by sadhus and devotees. Dinmani experienced divine bliss on seeing Bhagwan Swaminarayan. As if he had known him from before, his mind instantly merged into the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj. He felt, “I have attained manifest God.” Like an arrow, Dinmani sped towards Shriji Maharaj and fell at his feet. He prayed, “O Lord! You are everything to me. I want to become your disciple. Please keep me forever at your feet.” Merciful Maharaj got up from his seat and affectionately embraced Dinmani. Maharaj read the detachment written on the lustrous face of this virtuous devotee and accepted him.

* * *

For some time, Dinmani travelled with Maharaj. Soon, Maharaj gave him *bhagvati diksha* in Meghpur and named him Nityanand Swami. True to his name, Nityanand always beamed with the satisfaction of the bliss of God. He had already mastered the Vedas and other scriptures. However, to attain expertise in Nyaya, Mimansa and other Darshan Shastras, Maharaj sent him to study under a great pundit. Learning was his first love. His sharp intellect flourished with the study of the Darshan Shastras. Great scholars were highly impressed with his rare scholarship and personality. Within a short time, Nityanand Swami earned great respect among the scholar-*paramhansas* of Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj appreciated his intellect and honoured him by establishing him as one of the *sadgurus*. The pundits of

the Vidvatsabha of Maharaja Sayajirao of Vadodara were jealous of the increasing popularity of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. They challenged Nityanand Swami to a debate on the scriptures. Right from the outset, Nityanand Swami found fault with their philosophical propositions and defeated the pundits with his logical explanations. He established that the Swaminarayan Sampradaya was indeed Sanatan – eternal – in accordance with the Vedas, and that the philosophy propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan was correct.

* * *

Once, Shriji Maharaj travelled to Junagadh along with Nityanand Swami and other sadhus. He was accorded a warm welcome with great fanfare by the nawab. The nawab received Maharaj in his palace and performed puja with great love. A foolish pandit called Narsinh Pandya came there to defeat Maharaj in a scriptural debate. Certain jealous Nagar Brahmins who were in league with Narsinh Pandya told the nawab, “This Narsinh Pandya wants to have a scriptural debate with Swaminarayan.” When Maharaj heard this, he told the nawab, “Let there be a debate. All his questions will be answered by Nityanand Swami.” With these words, Maharaj left the royal court and returned to his lodgings.

Narsinh Pandya asked, “Why is it that we bow at God’s feet and not to his hands, face, head and other parts of the body? Why do you call Swaminarayan God?” Nityanand Swami found his questions too simple and shallow. He replied, “By bowing at the feet of God we offer our devotion as a servant. This is the best form of worship.” The foolish Pandya remarked, “No, it is not like that. God’s feet are pure; in the rest of his body resides *maya*. That is why we worship his feet.” The assembly burst into laughter on hearing this remark. The nawab observed, “The entire body of God is pure.” Thus, Pandya lost the first round. However, he was vain, so he asked another question,

“One who wants to be God must write a commentary on the Prasthantrayi¹. Only when accepted by the pundits of Kashi, can one claim Godhood. Has this Swaminarayan Bhagwan written any such commentary?”

When Nityanand Swami heard this question, he answered, “Is the sun the sun because people call it so? Without that, will it cease to be the sun?” The nawab lost his temper when he heard such foolish questions from Narsinh Pandya and banished him from the royal court. When other jealous people saw this, they were also crestfallen. Nityanand Swami then explained various topics such as the form of God, devotion, *upasana* and others. The nawab was greatly pleased to hear him.

Thus, Nityanand Swami, while travelling in the company of Maharaj, greatly enhanced the prestige of the Sampradaya among the scholars by participating in scholarly debates. He influenced many seekers to shed their incorrect beliefs and seek shelter at the feet of Shriji Maharaj. He was rightly called *vidya-varidhi* – an ocean of wisdom.

* * *

Nityanand Swami had unshakeable faith in the supremacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. While the Satsangijivan scripture was being written in Vartal, the question of how to describe Maharaj’s *swarup* or form was raised. Most of the sadhus likened him to past incarnations. At that time, however, Nityanand Swami declared, “Shriji Maharaj is the *avatari* of all avatars. He is the cause of all causes. He is the manifest supreme God, Purushottam Narayan. How can we possibly say that he is like others?”

The sadhus were divided on this issue. Even Shriji Maharaj himself opposed Nityanand Swami’s stance. Maharaj tried his best, but Nityanand Swami was as firm as a mountain in his

1. Three foundational shastras of Sanatan Dharma: Brahmasutras, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita.

conviction. He didn't budge. In the end, Shriji Maharaj called him an obstinate person and excommunicated him!

Nityanand Swami stopped attending the daily satsang assemblies. He stopped taking meals and engaged in constant meditation and bhajan. This continued for seven days. On the eighth day, Shriji Maharaj invited Nityanand Swami to the assembly, performed his puja and offered his own garland as a token of love and appreciation for his devotion. People were surprised to see this sudden change in Maharaj's attitude towards him. Maharaj then explained to the *parambhansas*, "Nityanand Swami is correct in his understanding. A devotee must possess such qualities. You, too, should understand my *swarup* or form the way he understands it."

* * *

Although Nityanand Swami was quiet and serious by nature, he wasn't without a sense of humour. When celebrating the Fuladol festival, spraying colours or playing *raas*, Shriji Maharaj often appointed him as leader of one of the groups. Swami also enthusiastically participated.

Once, Shriji Maharaj was ill in Gadhada. He was taking afternoon rest in the Akshar Ordi. He called Nishkulanand Swami and said to him, "Bring me a cart. I want to go to Mount Salemal to perform austerities." Nishkulanand Swami replied, "Maharaj! You are not well. We will go there as soon as you recover." Maharaj ignored his pleas and insisted, "I want to go there now."

So, Shuk Muni approached Nityanand Swami and explained everything to him. Nityanand Swami went to Akshar Ordi. With the help of four people, he lifted Maharaj's cot and started rocking it. Maharaj sprang up and exclaimed, "Oh! Why is this cot rocking?" Nityanand Swami quietly replied, "Maharaj! The road to Mount Salemal is like this. It is uneven and so your cot is getting jerks."

“Don’t bluff. This isn’t Mount Salemal. This is the Akshar Ordi,” said Maharaj. Nityanand Swami responded, “Maharaj, why are you bluffing? You aren’t well, yet you are talking of going to Mount Salemal.”

Maharaj heard this humorous retort and gave up his idea of going to the mountain. He backed off, “Fine, I will do as you wish.” Nityanand Swami then returned to his room.

* * *

After Shriji Maharaj’s departure to Dham an incident took place in Ahmedabad. Pundits belonging to various sects gathered together in Ahmedabad and resolved to defeat the Swaminarayan scholars in a debate. At that time, Nityanand Swami was in Vadodara.

The pundits of the royal court went to Maharaja Sayajirao of Vadodara to seek his permission to participate in the Ahmedabad debate. Sayajirao said to them, “You will have to face Nityanand Swami. Have you thought about that?” The pundits replied, “Nityanand Swami is not going to participate in this debate. Acharya Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj of Ahmedabad has not invited any scholars from Vartal. He has restricted this debate to the learned sadhus of his own region. Moreover, Nityanand Swami is here in Vadodara.” Sayajirao understood the meaning of their words and granted permission for them to participate in the debate. He said to the pundits, “If you lose the debate, however, your pensions will be discontinued.”

Immediately after this meeting, Sayajirao sent a message to Nityanand Swami, who was camping at the local Swaminarayan mandir, “You must instantly leave for Ahmedabad. I am sending the royal coach for you.” However, it was not possible for him to participate in the Ahmedabad debate without the formal consent of Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj of Vartal. So Sayajirao also sent a letter to Acharya Maharaj requesting him to send Nityanand Swami to Ahmedabad. Acharya Maharaj quickly responded

to the royal request and instructed Nityanand Swami to go to Ahmedabad. Nityanand Swami duly arrived in Ahmedabad with seven carts full of books. Also, as he himself was so bulky he alone occupied one cart. He was also accompanied by his disciples. The pundits of Ahmedabad had thought that in the absence of Nityanand Swami, they would certainly win the debate. However, when they saw Nityanand Swami in the assembly, all their hopes were shattered. They lost all hope of winning the debate. Such was Nityanand Swami's commanding personality.

All the questions raised in the debate were easily answered by one of the sadhus studying under Nityanand Swami. Even the scholars present there remarked, "All preparations were made to hunt a hare, but a lion turned up. How can one possibly fight it?" Thus, on many such occasions Nityanand Swami enhanced the prestige of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya with his scholarly prowess.

* * *

Nityanand Swami wrote many scholarly books. He was chiefly responsible for giving an organized form to discourses in the Vachanamrut, which contains the immortal divine wisdom of Shriji Maharaj. As instructed by Maharaj, to strengthen the Sampradaya he wrote many other books based on the spiritual principles revealed by Maharaj. Also, it was at Nityanand Swami's suggestion that Acharya Maharaj to preserve the sanctified holy relics of Maharaj as divine mementoes. Subsequently, the *acharyas* collected many such holy objects to display in permanent exhibitions. Even today, one can have the darshan of these sacred objects preserved in various mandirs.

Nityanand Swami also contributed significantly in constructing the mandir at the site where Shriji Maharaj had been cremated in Lakshmi Vadi. In accordance with the commands of Shriji Maharaj, he spent one month every year in the company of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami in

Junagadh. On hearing the wise talks of Gunatitanand Swami regarding the need to abstain from worldly pleasures and to understand the divine form of Shriji Maharaj, Nityanand Swami used to say, “Nishkulanand Swami is uprooting the attachment to sensual pleasures by composing kirtans; Gunatitanand Swami is accomplishing the same through his insightful discourses. He is not restricted by any scriptural limitations.”

In Vartal, on 1 December 1851 (Magshar sud 8, Samvat 1908), in the presence of Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj, Gopalanand Swami, Shuk Muni, Shunyatitanandji and other sadhus, Nityanand Swami passed away.

To the very end of his life, he served the Sampradaya and followed Shriji Maharaj’s commands. Accomplishing his spiritual mission on this earth, he attained Akshardham to forever remain in the service of Shriji Maharaj.

Maharaj himself praised this great *sadguru* in Vachanamrut Gadhadha III 24, “Nityanand Swami [has] the virtue of desiring to please me.” Again in the *Sarvamangal Stotra*, everyone remembers him while singing ‘*Nishāṇīya Kathādara*’.

Nityanand Swami’s scholarly works include:

Sanskrit Texts: *Hari Digvijay*, *Harikavach*, *Shri Hanuman Kavach*, *Shandilya Sutra Bhashya*.

Gujarati Texts: *Bhagvat Dasham Skandh Purvardh*, *Bhagvat Pancham Skandh*, *Vidur Niti*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Vaikunth Darshan*, *Kapil Gita*, *Gunvibhag*, *Avatar Charitra*, *Narayan Kavach*, *Nishkam Shuddhi*, *Commentary on Shikshapatri*.

2. Premsakhi Premanand Swami

Premanand Swami was born into a Sathodara Nagar Brahmin family in a village near Nadiad (some sources say that he was born in the village of Dora, near Bharuch) around 1784 CE (Samvat 1840). His mother was very beautiful, but his father was treated as a lunatic by the community. Following his birth, people started slandering the mother. They alleged, "This child is illegitimate, so the mother should either disown him or kill him. We are not going to accept him in our family." This caused great pain to the mother.

Bowing to social pressure, however, one early morning the mother pressed the child against her chest, went out of the village and left the child in the hole of a tree. After some time a basket-weaver passing by suddenly saw the child lying in the hole of the tree. His joy knew no bounds on seeing the child. He thought, "I have no child of my own; here is God's gift." He carefully carried the child home and said to his wife, "Look here. God has sent this child to us. Let us rejoice." With these words, he handed over the child to his wife.

* * *

Some years later this basket-weaver visited Jetpur with his son. At that time, Ramanand Swami was handing over the reins of the Sampradaya to his spiritual successor, Sahajanand Swami. A grand festival was being celebrated to mark the spiritual coronation of Sahajanand Swami. Thousands of devotees had come to Jetpur from different parts of the country. The basket-weaver felt that he was fortunate to have this opportunity of witnessing a Hindu festival.

On the day of the coronation, Sahajanand Swami mounted a horse and was honoured in a colourful procession through the streets of the town. The basket-weaver also turned up to watch the holy procession. His son, too, watched while holding the



Premsakhi Premanand Swami

hand of his foster father. All of a sudden, the boy freed himself and made his way through the jostling crowds up to the horse of Sahajanand Swami. He held the stirrup of the horse and started walking alongside it. Sahajanand Swami noticed the boy walking by the side of his horse holding the stirrup. The boy walked in this manner throughout the town until the procession came to a halt at Unnad Khachar's *darbar*.

At Unnad Khachar's *darbar* was the ashram of Ramanand Swami. The procession concluded here. After dismounting his horse, Sahajanand Swami immediately went inside the ashram. The boy was so tired that he soon fell asleep on the steps of the ashram. After some time Maharaj remembered the boy, came out to look for him and found him sleeping on the steps. Maharaj stroked the boy's head. When the boy awoke, he offered him food and water. Meanwhile, his father accompanied by some relatives came there looking for the lost child. He was very happy to see his son. He said to Maharaj, "This is my son and I am taking him home." Maharaj gave his consent, but the boy refused to budge from the spot. The father tried his best to persuade him. He even threatened to beat him, but the boy refused to accompany the father home. At last the father gave in and went away thinking, "After all, he was not my son in the first place."

Shriji Maharaj then asked the boy, "What have you decided?" The boy replied, "I want to stay with you." The omniscient Maharaj knew about his past *samskars* and so he instructed him, "You go to Ujjain. There is a school of music on the opposite bank of the River Kshipra. You go there and learn music. After attaining this knowledge, return to this region and meet me."

* * *

In accordance with this command of Shriji Maharaj, the boy set out for Ujjain and arrived at the music school. The principal of the school enquired about the purpose of his visit. The boy

expressed his desire to stay there. He was initially employed as a helper. With great enthusiasm, the boy started serving at the institution. The music teacher was pleased with the boy and offered him lessons in music. Due to certain innate powers and the blessings of Shriji Maharaj, the youngster attained mastery in both vocal and instrumental music within a few years. One day, he suddenly remembered Maharaj. He left Ujjain in search of Maharaj, and soon arrived in Gadhada.

Maharaj recognized him and lovingly embraced him. He kept the boy for some time with him and then gave him *diksha* around 1814 CE (Samvat 1870). He was named 'Nijbodhanand'. He also learned a little Sanskrit, as per the wish of Maharaj.

* * *

Once, Shriji Maharaj called him in his presence and asked him to compose kirtans. Although he hadn't studied the *pingal* branch of music, he started composing kirtans as per the wish of Maharaj. He minutely observed all parts of Maharaj's body. The first kirtan he composed was a beautiful one describing the *murti* of Maharaj. Maharaj was extremely pleased on hearing it. However, the name 'Nijbodhanand' appearing towards the end of the kirtan did not rhyme properly. Maharaj suggested, "Just as the words 'Brahma', 'Mukta', 'Nishkula' rhyme properly, the word 'Prema' will also rhyme. So, from today, your name is 'Premanand'." Once, in one of the kirtans he referred to Chandrasakhi, one of the *gopis* of Shri Krishna. Maharaj was greatly impressed by his *premlakshana bhakti* – intense affection and devotion – and thus addressed him as 'Premsakhi'. Maharaj directed him to write kirtans using both these names.

* * *

Once, on the occasion of Ashadh *sud* 11 (Devpodhi Ekadashi), Shriji Maharaj was giving special vows to be observed during the auspicious four months of Chaturmas. At that time, Premanand Swami got up and pledged, "O Maharaj! I pledge that I will daily

compose eight *pads* or poems in praise of your *murti*.” Maharaj became very happy to hear him undertake such a difficult vow.

Premanand Swami has described Shriji Maharaj as the manifest or *pragat* form of Purushottam in his devotional songs. He has sung them with such a melodious voice and with so much passion that every word appears charged with devotion and love. He has described every pore of Shriji Maharaj’s body in great detail in language that is an inexhaustible spring of pure love. He has described the same thing again and again in various kirtans, but his genius lay in giving them a touch of freshness. Every new kirtan reveals his ever-increasing love for Maharaj. Even while describing the human actions of Maharaj, his understanding of Maharaj’s divinity becomes one with Maharaj’s human actions. It is as if his heart was flowing out in his kirtans. Such was his ever-increasing love.

* * *

Once, a devotee of Mataji came to Shriji Maharaj and sang a ballad praising the goddess. Maharaj drew the attention of the sadhus to the sincerity and devotion of that devotee. Premanand Swami got up and instantly composed a kirtan while focusing on the *murti* of Maharaj. He sang:

“Vandu Sahajānand rasrup, anupam sārne re lol,

Jene bhajtā chhute fand, kare bhav pār ne re lol...”

Maharaj himself started swaying to the beats and tunes of this bhajan. The whole assembly was completely spellbound. When these eight *pads* were over, Maharaj could not hide his joy. He said to Swami, “You have sung very beautiful kirtans. Hearing these kirtans, I thought that this sadhu has so much focus on the *murti* of God, that I should get up and offer prostrations to him. If one meditates on God in the way described in these *pads*, one is forever liberated from the clutches of *kal*, karma and *maya*.”

* * *

Just as Premanand Swami was overflowing with affectionate

devotion towards Shriji Maharaj, Maharaj also always bestowed upon him his choicest blessings. He, too, liked to listen to him singing devotional songs.

Once, late on a winter's night, Premanand Swami took his *sarangi* and started singing. The notes of the *sarangi* and his *sarangi*-like voice filled the air. The sweet words of the bhajan in praise of Maharaj reached the Akshar Ordi. The devotional song stirred Maharaj, who, despite the biting cold, went to where Premanand Swami was singing and quietly stood behind him, listening to him singing kirtans with utmost concentration. Premanand Swami, who had become so engrossed in the divine *murti* of Maharaj continued to sing one bhajan after another. The chilly winter night passed. At dawn when he put aside his *sarangi* and stopped singing, he heard the soothing, affectionate voice of Maharaj. Premanand Swami turned around and fell at the feet of Maharaj, asking, "O Merciful Maharaj! How is it that you are here?"

"I have spent the whole night standing here listening to your melodious kirtans. Still I feel like listening to more." Premanand Swami was deeply moved to hear Maharaj paying such compliments to him.

* * *

Shriji Maharaj greatly appreciated Premanand Swami's devotion and poetry. He used to bestow divine bliss upon him in many ways. Once, Maharaj, accompanied by many sadhus, went to Kutch. There, Maharaj put his hand around Premanand Swami and asked him to do likewise as they walked through the bazaar of Bhuj singing kirtans. Premanand Swami sang one line and Maharaj sang the next. Thus, through such divine *lila* Maharaj bestowed upon him many such unique memories.

* * *

Once, the Nawab of Junagadh heard the soothing music of Premanand Swami at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Junagadh. He felt, "Such singing from the depth of the soul is not possible

anywhere in the world.” Some time later, some musicians from Gwalior came to sing the *dhrupad rag* before the nawab. Disinterested, he told them, “After listening to Premanand, a sadhu of Swaminarayan, I no longer listen to anyone else’s music. His singing is matchless in this world.”

A short while later, these musicians travelled to Gadhada to see Shriji Maharaj. It was noon when they arrived at Dada Khachar’s *darbar*. The assembly was about to disperse. The musicians expressed their earnest desire to hear the music of Premanand Swami. Maharaj duly obliged and asked Premanand Swami to sing. Shriji Maharaj instructed him, “Sing the *bhairavi rag*.” The musicians were amused to hear the request to sing at noon a *rag* which is traditionally sung at dawn. But the moment Premanand Swami began to sing the surrounding mood changed and everyone experienced the atmosphere of dawn. The melodious notes of the *bhairavi rag* flowing through his voice turned the noon into a cool refreshing dawn. The musicians became oblivious of everything on hearing the music of Premanand Swami.

* * *

Once, after attending the *arti*, Shriji Maharaj entered the room of Vasudev-Narayan. Here, Laduba and Jivuba asked, “Maharaj, you say you are the master of Akshardham. So, how should we understand your form?” At that time Maharaj explained to them his form as Purna Purushottam – the supreme God. Premanand Swami was listening from a distance and composed four verses describing the beauty of Maharaj’s *murti* and his glory as the supreme Godhead.

Āj māre orde re, āryā Avināshi Alabel...

and

Bolyā Shri Hari re, sāmbhalo narnāri harijan...

Maharaj was very pleased to hear these verses.

Shriji Maharaj regularly sent his *thal* as *prasad* to Premanand Swami. Naturally, after Shriji Maharaj’s departure to his divine

abode of Akshardham, this stopped. Premanand Swami could not bear this separation from Maharaj and did not take food or water for about five days. He had lost interest in everything. Then he tried to cook, but he was unable to. At that time, he remembered Maharaj. So, he took his *sarod* and started singing:

“*Sajni Shriji mujne sambhāriyā re,*
 Haiye harakh ati ubhrāy;
 Nene āsuni dhārā vahē re,
 Virāhe mandu vyākul thāy, Sajni...”

(I think of my friend, Shriji, and my heart begins to overflow with joy; tears flow from my eyes as my mind is pining to meet him. The separation is too much...)

On hearing this verse, Dada Khachar ran to Premanand Swami. He, too, could not stand the agony expressed in the kirtan. He requested Premanand Swami, “Swami, stop! Please don’t sing such kirtans.” Then he learned that Swami had not eaten for the last five days. Maharaj had instructed Laduba and Jivuba, “Send Thakorji’s *thal* to Premanand Swami daily.” However, for some unknown reason, this had not happened. Dada Khachar immediately arranged for the *thal* to be sent.

Separation from Maharaj was too much for Premsakhi Premanand. Every day, after the *mangala arti* at dawn, he would sing bhajans before the *murti* of Gopinathji Maharaj in Gadhada. He would continue singing to please Maharaj until the *rajbhog arti* just before noon. Gopinathji Maharaj would appear daily from the *murti* and give his garland to Premanand Swami.

* * *

Pleased with his poetry, Shriji Maharaj always respected him on par with great poets such as Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and Nishkulanand Swami. Premanand Swami composed bhajans describing the form and glory of Maharaj to be sung as *prabhatiya*, *godi*, *arti*, *prarthana*, and *cheshta*.

Shriji Maharaj always looked upon music as an invigorating

element in the Bhakti tradition. Whenever religious assemblies were held or when Maharaj visited royal courts, Premanand Swami, Muktanand Swami, Devanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and others would charge the atmosphere with their spiritual singing. They sang their own compositions to the accompaniment of musical instruments such as *dukkad*, *sarod* and *sarangi*. They used to cast such a spell that even great music maestros were wonderstruck on hearing them.

In the kirtans of Premanand Swami composed after the departure of Shriji Maharaj to his abode, one finds the pangs of separation expressed in a most moving language. On 21 November 1854 (Magshar *sud* 1, Samvat 1911), his separation from Maharaj ended and passed away to Akshardham to remain forever in the presence of Shriji Maharaj.

Outstanding works by Premsakhi Premanand Swami include: *Dhyani Manjari*, *Narayan Charitra*, *Tulsi Vivah*, *Gopi Virah* and *Shribharicharitra*. Besides these works, he composed over 14,000 bhajans in Gujarati, Hindi and Vraj. His Dhrupad verses are matchless in Indian music.

The following four bhajans, composed by Premanand Swami, express the glory and commands of Shriji Maharaj:

Pad 1

Āj māre orde re, āvyā Avināshi Alabel;
Bāi me bolāviyā re, sundar chhogāvālo chhel...1
Nirakhyā nenā bhari re,
Natvar sundar Shri Ghanshyām;
Shobhā shi kabu re, nirakhi lāje kotik kām...2
Gunthi gulābnā re, kanthe āropyā me hār;
Laine vārnā re, charane lāgi vāramvār...3
Āpyo me to ādare re, besvā chākaliyo kari pyār;
Puchhyā pritshu re, bāi me sarve samāchār...4
Kahone Hari kyā hatā re, kyā thaki āvyā Dharmakumār;
Sundar shobhtā re, ange sajiyā chbe shangār...5

*Paheri prit shu re, surangi sunthanli sukhden;
Nādi birni re, jotā trupt na thāye nen...6
Upar odhiyo re, gudho rento joyā lāg;
Sajni ā same re,*

dhanya dhanya nirakhyā tenā bhāgya...7

*Mastak upare re, bāndhyu molidu amulya;
Kotik ravi shashi re, te to nāve tene tulya...8
Reshmi korno re, karmā sāhyo chhe rumāl;
Premānand to re, ā chhabbi nirakhi thayo nibāl...9*

Pad 2

*Sajni sāmbhalo re, shobhā varnavu teni teh;
Murti sambhārtā re, mujne upajyo ati saneh...1
Paheryā te same re, Harie ange alankār;
Jevā {me} nirakhiyā re, tevā varnavu karine pyār...2
Barās kapurnā re, paheryā haide sundar hār;
Torā pāghmā re, te par madhukar kare gunjār...3
Bāju berkhā re, bāye kapurnā shobhit;
Kadā kapurnā re, jotā chore sauna chitta...4
Sarve angmā re, uthe attarni bahu for;
Chore chittane re, bastā kamal nayanni kor...5
Hastā hetmā re, sabune detā sukh ānand;
Rasrup murti re, Shri Hari keval karunākand...6
Adbhut upmā re, kahetā shesh na pāme pār;
Dharine murti re, jāne āvyo ras-shrungrār...7
Vālap venmā re, nenā karunāmā bharpur;
Ango-angmā re, jāne ugiyā aganit sur...8
Kartā vātadi re, boli amrut sarkhā ven;
Premānandnā re, jotā trupta na thāye nen...9*

Pad 3

*Bolyā Shri Hari re, sāmbhalo narnāri harijan;
Māre ek vārtā re, sabhune sambhalāvyānu chhe man...1
Māri murti re, mārā lok, bhog ne mukta;
Sarve divya chhe re, tyā to joyāni chhe jukta...2*

Māru Dhām cbhe re, Akshar Amrut jenu nām;
Sarve sāmrathi re, shakti gune kari abbirām...3
Ati tejomay re, ravi shashi kotik vārane jāy;
Shital shānt cbhe re, tejni upmā nav devāy...4
Temā hu rahu re, dvibhuj divya sadā sākār;
Durlabh devne re, māro koi na pāme pār...5
Jiva ishwar tano re, māyā kāl purush pradhān;
Sahune vash karu re, sahuno prerak hu Bhagwān...6
Aganit vishvani re, utpatti pālan pralay thāy;
Māri marji vinā re, koithi taranu nav todāy...7
Em mane jānjo re, mārā āshrit sāu narnāri;
Me tam āgale re, vārtā satya kahi cbhe māri...8
Hu to tam kārane re, āvyo Dhām thaki dhari deh;
Premānandno re, vā'lo varasyā amrut meh...9

Pad 4

Vali sahu sāmbhalo re, māri vārtā param anup;
Param siddhānt cbhe re, sahune hitkāri sukhrup...1
Sahu haribhaktane re, jāvu hoye māre Dhām;
To mane sevjo re, tame shuddh bhāve thai nishkām...2
Sahu haribhaktane re, rabevu hoye māre pās;
To tame meljo re, mithyā panchvishayni āsh...3
Muj vinā jānjo re, bijā māyik sahu ākār;
Priti todjo re, juthā jāni kutumb parivār...4
Sahu tame pāljo re, sarve dradh kari mārā nem;
Tam par rījhshe re, Dharma ne Bhakti karshe kshem...5
Sant haribhaktane re, didho shikshāno updesh;
Latkā hāthnā re, kartā shobhe Natvar vesh...6
Nij jan upare re, amrut varsyā ānandkand;
Jem sahu aushadhi re, prite poshe puran chand...7
Shobhe santmā re, jem kāi uduganmā udurāj;
Ishwar ude thayā re, Kalimā karvā jananā kāj...8
Ā pad shikhshe re, gāshe sāmbhalashe kari pyār;
Premānandno re, Swāmi leshe teni sār...9



Mukundanand Varni

3. Mukundanand Varni (Mulji Brahmachari)

‘*Mukundānand mukhyāshcha*’ – the foremost among all the *brahmacharis*. Who is not familiar with the name Mukundanand Varni, also known in the Sampradaya as Mulji Brahmachari? Like Hanumanji, he was a true celibate who strictly observed the *naishthik vrat* of eight-fold celibacy. As the personal attendant of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Mulji Brahmachari made all the arrangements for Bhagwan Swaminarayan, right from morning brush to the preparation of his bed. He followed Maharaj like his shadow. He would cook food for Shriji Maharaj and fan him while he took his meals. Whenever Shriji Maharaj served food to the devotees, he would follow holding the bowl from which Maharaj was serving. Mulji Brahmachari would remember the devotees who had offered the *thal* and give them Maharaj’s *prasad*. He was completely absorbed in Shriji Maharaj’s *murti* and had become one with him.

It was as if he had accompanied Shriji Maharaj right from Akshardham to serve him. He was born in the village of Machhiyav in Saurashtra in an Audichya Brahmin family in 1766 CE (Samvat 1822). He was known as Muljibhai. His father worked as a priest performing Vedic rituals to support his family. Muljibhai, too, assisted his father in his work.

* * *

Once, Muljibhai had been assigned to escort the daughter of one of his clients from her in-laws’ house. The father-in-law allowed Muljibhai to escort the girl. They had to stop for a night halt on their way back. He made arrangements for the girl to stay in a small house, while he himself slept on the verandah outside.

It was night and the place was secluded. The girl opened the door and came to Muljibhai who was fast asleep. As soon as

he felt her presence, he sprang up from his bed and sensed her intentions. He said to her, "Sister, there is nothing to fear here. Please return to your room and sleep without any worries." The woman felt ashamed and returned to her room, but she could not control herself. Again, she rushed out to him. Muljibhai was again disturbed. He got up and uttered words of wisdom to her. He then stayed awake all night.

This incident left Muljibhai thinking over the problems of life. He thought, "Is worldly life like this? There is no point in leading a life like this."

Right from childhood he was engrossed in devotion to God. When the issue of his marriage was discussed, he clearly told his father, "I want to observe absolute celibacy and worship God. I am not at all interested in married life." Despite his relatives trying their best to dissuade him, he was firm in his resolve.

* * *

Driven by intense detachment, Muljibhai left home and went on a pilgrimage to Dwarika. On his way he arrived in the village of Loj, where he came in contact with Ramanand Swami and became his disciple. Ramanand Swami gave him *diksha* as a *brahmachari* and named him Mukundanand Varni. He was also known as Mulji Brahmachari. He observed absolute celibacy throughout his entire life.

After Ramanand Swami passed away, Mulji Brahmachari remained in the personal service of Shriji Maharaj as his attendant.

Once, Shriji Maharaj was addressing a congregation in the Vasudev-Narayan room at the *darbar* of Dada Khachar. Maharaj announced, "If anyone is found sleeping in the congregation he will be awakened with a blow from the *berkho*." Mulji Brahmachari was sitting next to Maharaj. Soon, he fell asleep and began to dream. He dreamt that he had accompanied Maharaj to a certain town where a house had caught fire. He

feared that Maharaj would be burnt. So, still dreaming, he actually lifted Maharaj along with his seat, carried him out from the assembly and placed him under a neem tree. Suddenly, because of the resulting commotion the *brahmachari* awoke.

Shriji Maharaj asked him, "What happened to you?" The *brahmachari* replied, "I had fallen asleep and dreamt that a house in some village had caught fire. So I lifted you and brought you out." On hearing this Maharaj turned to the sadhus and devotees seated in the assembly and clarified, "This *brahmachari* appears to be sleeping, but in all the three states he is thinking about me."

* * *

Once in Bhadra, Shriji Maharaj gave his *mojdi* to Mulji Brahmachari and instructed, "You apply oil to this pair of shoes. Do not give this work to anybody else." In accordance with Maharaj's command he started applying oil to the footwear.

At that time, Vashrambhai came there and said, "You serve Maharaj every day, so let me do this *seva*." With these words he snatched the shoes away from the *brahmachari* and started applying oil. Exactly at that time, Maharaj happened to pass by. He turned to the *brahmachari* and said, "I told you not to give this work to anyone else, yet why did you give it to Vashrambhai?" Maharaj thought that Mulji Brahmachari was at fault. Without waiting for a response, Maharaj declared, "Go! You are excommunicated. From today, you should not wear shoes. And do not eat either sweet or oily food." With these words, he dismissed Mulji Brahmachari from his *seva*.

Mulji Brahmachari went to Dabhan and stayed with Ramdasbhai. In summer, the mangoes in Dabhan became ripe. Ramdasbhai selected about 30 kg of mangoes and packed them in a basket for Maharaj. But who would carry the basket to Maharaj? The Brahmachari offered, "Give it to me. I will take it." Mulji Brahmachari then walked barefoot in the intense

summer heat all the way to Gadhada. There, he laid the basket of mangoes at the feet of Shriji Maharaj, offered prostrations and greeted Maharaj, "Jay Swaminarayan." However, Maharaj turned his face and did not respond.

When Mulji Brahmachari went into the town, a carpenter woman recognized him. She asked, "Brahmachari! Why have you not been seen lately?" Mulji Brahmachari replied, "Maharaj does not allow me to stay with him. I carried a basket of 30 kg of mangoes for him, but he did not say even 'Narayan' to me." The woman invited the *brahmachari* to her house and provided him with flour, ghee and gur. The *brahmachari*, however, prepared plain *bati* only and returned the ghee and gur to the woman. The woman asked him, "Why didn't you use ghee or gur?" The *brahmachari* replied, "Six months ago Maharaj told me not to eat these things." Hearing this, the woman immediately escorted the *brahmachari* to Maharaj and scolded him, "Maharaj! Why have you become so unkind to the *brahmachari*? In this blistering heat,, he walked 90 miles barefoot, carrying the basket of mangoes for you. You didn't even say 'Jay Swaminarayan' to him!"

Shriji Maharaj smiled, and said, "I haven't refused him. Call him to me." On hearing this, the *brahmachari* appeared before Maharaj and started serving him. He prepared and served Maharaj *ras-rotli* and won his blessings. The *brahmachari* had realized the greatness of Maharaj. Although he was not at fault, Maharaj had insulted him, and driven him away and had forbidden him from taking sweet or oily food. Still, without any grudge, he had constantly kept his mind on Maharaj and continued to worship him.

* * *

Mulji Brahmachari had total faith in Shriji Maharaj and was convinced about his supremacy and divinity.

That is why Maharaj has said in the Vachanamrut, "This

Mukund Brahmachari understands my nature fully. He knows that Maharaj is as pure and detached as the sky, and that I have no prejudice against or favouritism towards anyone. Besides, this Mukund Brahmachari never worries and, therefore, I get along very well with him. He may not appear to be very intelligent, but he knows how to please me.” In this way, Maharaj has showered much praise on Mulji Brahmachari in the Vachanamrut. Shriji Maharaj always accepted Mulji Brahmachari’s *seva* because he was a *naishthik brahmachari*. Maharaj has explained, “I prefer the *seva* of one who is *nishkami* to anybody else’s.”

During *mansi* puja, Mulji Brahmachari would become one with Maharaj and ask, “What would you like to eat? *Bhajiyā? puri? shak?*” In this way he would ask and continue to feed Maharaj. Pleased by his devotion, Maharaj would appear in person to accept his food.

He would serve Maharaj devoutly. Also, while adorning the *murti* of Gopinathji Maharaj with garments and ornaments, and while putting rings on all the ten fingers of the *murti* he would treat the *murti* as if it were Maharaj himself. He would do everything so carefully to ensure that he did not hurt him while performing this *seva*. He served the *murti* with such affection.

* * *

Once Shriji Maharaj said to Mulji Brahmachari, “Say something in the assembly.” The *brahmachari* instantly got up, clapped his hands and started speaking in a loud voice, “Listen, listen. Such an incarnation has never manifested before, nor will ever do so again. Obey his commands. There should be no lapses in following his commands.” He repeated this again and again before sitting down. Mulji Brahmachari was no scholar, nor did he understand the shastras in any detail, but his honest talk pleased everyone.

Shriji Maharaj was very pleased and remarked, “This

brahmachari is not a scholar, yet he understands the essence of everything.”

* * *

Once, in Gadhada, Shriji Maharaj was assigning the sadhus into pairs. At that time, Brahmanand Swami asked Maharaj, “Who is this Mulji Brahmachari’s companion?” Maharaj replied, “The *brahmachari*’s companion has been already decided. The pair of Mulanand and Sahajanand has been already determined.” Such was Maharaj’s intense love for Mulji Brahmachari.

One day after Shriji Maharaj had passed away to Akshardham, Mulji Brahmachari went to the Akshar Ordi for darshan. He saw Maharaj lying on the cot. As per his regular practice, he offered Maharaj a *datan* and bathed him with warm water. As soon as he had finished his daily routine, Maharaj disappeared. Thus, Maharaj gave him this divine darshan and convinced him that he was still manifest in the Akshar Ordi.

In 1846 CE (Samvat 1902), Mulji Brahmachari fell ill in Gadhada. He prayed to Shriji Maharaj, “O Maharaj, please take me to Dham.” At that time, Maharaj appeared to him and instructed, “I have built this mandir. Get it whitewashed. On completion of this work I will come to take you to Dham.” With these words, Shriji Maharaj disappeared. Soon after this darshan, he started collecting funds for this purpose, called the masons and started the work of getting the mandir whitewashed.

In 1848 CE (Samvat 1904), the Jal Jhilani festival was celebrated in Gadhada. Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj, Gopalanand Swami and Nityanand Swami had all arrived from Vartal. Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami had also come from Junagadh to grace the function.

On the full moon day, Nityanand Swami, while addressing the assembly, said, “With great effort, Mulji Brahmachari has had the mandir whitewashed. In future, perhaps this mandir

will have golden spires and a golden throne for God, but a sadhu like this Gunatitanand Swami and a celibate like this Mulji Brahmachari will not be available.” In this way, he explained the glory of these two great ascetics.

The whitewashing of the mandir was complete. Mulji Brahmachari felt some abdominal discomfort, so he took some laxative; but that didn’t work. An eclipse was expected that day but, for some reason, it did not take place. Mulji Brahmachari came to the assembly and proclaimed, “Today, I want to go to Dham. Let us go to the Akshar Ordi one last time to have darshan.” Everyone accompanied him to the Akshar Ordi. Mulji Brahmachari had darshan and became emotional. After performing the *pradakshina* of the Akshar Ordi, he went for the darshan of Gopinathji Maharaj. Then, he asked for Thakorji’s *thal* and took a little *prasad*. He called all the masons, and gave them *prasad* and gifts. They all started singing bhajans. Shriji Maharaj then appeared with innumerable *muktas* to receive Mulji Brahmachari. The whole *darbar* was filled with this divine darshan, which was also seen by many sadhus. Mulji Brahmachari had left his corporeal body to serve Maharaj in Akshardham. His last rites were performed on the banks of the River Ghela behind Bhakti Baug. Only after the cremation was complete did the eclipse take place.

Mulji Brahmachari witnessed many of Shriji Maharaj’s human-like *lila*, yet he never doubted his divinity. He was fully convinced of Shriji Maharaj’s divine supremacy. He always followed him like a shadow and selflessly served him. To help us remember his example Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj consecrated a marble *murti* of Mulji Brahmachari at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur.

All should strive to offer dedicated selfless *seva* and devotion with *nirdosh buddhi* like Mulji Brahmachari.



Acharya Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj

4. Acharya Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj

First Acharya of the Ahmedabad Region

Bhagwan Swaminarayan founded a pure Sampradaya by establishing mandirs and by initiating wise sadhus. However, the problem of managing the mandirs efficiently was a trying one. The senior swamis wanted the sadhus to remain free from administrative worries to focus on worshipping God and inspire others to worship God, too. Therefore, the leading *sadgurus* of that time decided to appoint *acharyas* for this purpose and framed rules for their conduct.

Two of Maharaj's nephews, Ayodhyaprasadji and Raghuvirji, were appointed as *acharyas* of the Nar-Narayan Gadi in Ahmedabad and the Lakshmi-Narayan Gadi in Vartal, respectively.

The first *acharya* of the Ahmedabad diocese, Acharya Ayodhyaprasadji was born in Chhapaiya on 25 May 1809 (Jeth sud 11, Samvat 1865). His father was Rampratapbhai and his mother was Suvasiniben.

Ayodhyaprasadji was very polite by nature. Although eminent *sadgurus* were under his command, he never behaved as their superior. He was of a strong ascetic nature and strived day and night for the progress of Satsang.

He rigorously observed the codes of the Sampradaya. He always insisted that the sadhus and devotees under his care should live up to the ideals of dharma. By the grace of Maharaj he had imbibed *atmanishtha* and other great virtues. This is evident from many incidents in his life.

Once, he had gone to the village of Gamdi, near Jetalpur, accompanied by some sadhus and devotees. The devotees of that village accorded a grand reception to Acharya Maharaj. Their joy knew no bounds and they were completely engrossed in their *seva*. At the conclusion of the assembly, *thal* was offered

to Thakorji. Acharya Maharaj was then served food with great love. *Dudhpak* had been prepared and Acharya Maharaj was served with great insistence. After Acharya Maharaj finished his meal, the devotees sat to eat. It was only then they discovered to their embarrassment that instead of sugar, salt had been added to the *dudhpak*. All the devotees felt sorry and apologized to Acharya Maharaj. However, for Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj, both salt and sugar were alike. He smiled at them and replied, “Don’t be upset. One should not care for taste in God’s *prasad*. One should happily accept whatever has been offered to God.”

* * *

Once, Acharya Maharaj was performing *mansi* puja in Avadh Bhuvan. He was engrossed in the divine *murti* of Shriji Maharaj. All of a sudden a scorpion crawled on his back and stung him. Still, he was not disturbed. He continued to meditate. When he woke up from *mansi* puja he asked his attendants, “What has happened to my back?”

The attendants saw that an area on his back had become swollen and red. They also spotted a scorpion hidden in a corner. Acharya Maharaj simply remarked, “Everyone acts according to their nature. If the evil cannot give up their nature, why should the good give up their goodness?”

He was a great champion of the principle of equality. He always respected the sentiments of both senior and junior devotees alike and willingly visited their homes. His kindness endeared him to all the sadhus and devotees. His compassion is revealed in one of his letters addressed to the *satsangis* during a drought:

“The reason I am writing this letter to you is that these are difficult times. Therefore, all male and female devotees should follow the codes of dharma, worship Shriji Maharaj and remember him constantly. He is there to look after us all.

“Moreover, if you find any of our *satsangis* suffering on account

of food shortage, those who are well off should collectively take care of such devotees. Do not allow them to suffer. If those devotees are not in a position to provide foodstuff, they should give to the needy and debit the amount against my name. I will settle that account on their behalf" (20 September 1832; Bhadarva *vad* 11, Samvat 1889).

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Acharya Shri Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj had great reverence for Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. In 1867 CE (Samvat 1923) the *acharya* fell ill and had to fast for 13 days. Mentally, he felt uneasy. Therefore, he specially sent for Gunatitanand Swami to come to Ahmedabad. When Swami arrived, the *acharya* sent an elephant, carts, and 700 sadhus, *parshads* and *brahmacharis* to receive him. In this way, Swami was accorded a grand reception on his arrival in Ahmedabad. After darshan of Thakorji, Swami went upstairs to meet Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj.

On seeing Swami, Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj could not control his emotions. He said to Swami, "Swami, I feel at peace on having your darshan." Swami replied, "Shriji Maharaj is the all-doer. The world moves according to his will. You haven't taken any food for 13 days. Please do eat something. Don't worry about anything. Maharaj will look after your welfare." At Swami's insistence, Acharya Maharaj took his meals. Swami celebrated the Ram Navami festival in Ahmedabad as requested by Acharya Maharaj. He brought peace to every heart by giving discourses on *upasana*. Acharya Maharaj's son, the heir to the Ahmedabad Gadi, Shri Keshavprasadji, was greatly impressed by Swami's talks. He gave up interest in worldly matters and attended the discourses conducted by Swami every evening.

Swami honoured the request of Acharya Maharaj. On the following day, he went with the sadhus to his haveli to take lunch. Acharya Maharaj brought a gold plate and requested Swami to take his food in it. He prayed, "O Swami! You are

the manifest form of Maharaj; therefore, you can certainly eat in this plate. By serving you, I know I am serving Maharaj. To you, gold and dust are alike. Please take your food in this plate.” Swami was pleased by his sincere feelings. However, he was not prepared to make any concessions in observing Shriji Maharaj’s commands. As Acharya Maharaj was very insistent, he placed his *pattar* in the gold plate and ate *rotlo* and *dal* from his *pattar*. Acharya Maharaj experienced peace in the presence of Swami.

Acharya Maharaj was a scholar and encouraged the spread of divine wisdom. He had the *Tattvarthadipika*, a commentary on the *Satsangijivan*, prepared and published. He was a good poet, too. His bhajans reflect his ability as a poet. He was also very fond of architecture. He was the chief inspiration behind the construction of the *haveli* in Ahmedabad. He built mandirs in Dungarpur, Idar, Jetalpur, Siddhapur, Mandvi, Kutch, Chhapaiya and other places.

Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj appointed his son, Shri Keshav-prasadji Maharaj, as *acharya* before passing away on 1 March 1868 (Fagan sud 7, Samvat 1924).

5. Bhaktaraj Dada Khachar

There was a beautiful fruit orchard belonging to Lakha Patel in Umej in the Valak region of Gujarat. In that orchard was a neem sapling, near a banana plant. Two sadhus, Vitthalanand and Balanand, once came to that orchard. Seeing the neem sapling and observed, "God will sit under this neem tree." At that time, Ebhal Khachar and his brother-in-law, Ghela Dhadhal, had come there for some personal work. When they heard about the neem tree, they requested Lakha Patel to give it to them. They brought the sapling to Gadhada and planted it in their *darbar*.

Ebhal Khachar was a disciple of Ramanand Swami. After the demise of Ramanand Swami, he had heard that Sahajanand Swami had succeeded him.

A few years later, Sahajanand Swami went to Mancha Khachar's house in Kariyani. Mancha Bhakta invited Ebhal Khachar's family for the darshan of Sahajanand Swami. It was here that he met Shriji Maharaj for the very first time. He left with an impression that Maharaj was a great sadhu. Some time later, Shriji Maharaj stayed incognito at Ebhal Khachar's *darbar* in Gadhada and convinced him of his divinity by giving him darshan in divine form. From that moment, he became a staunch devotee of Maharaj. Maharaj often sat under the neem tree he had planted, and this further strengthened his conviction in Maharaj's divinity.

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Ebhal Khachar (Abhay Raja) had two wives, Somadevi and Surprabha. On 21 December 1800 (Posh *sud* 6, Samvat 1857), Somadevi gave birth to a son. This son was named 'Uttam'. People lovingly called him by the name of Dada Khachar. Right from childhood, Dada possessed all the virtues of a devotee. When Dada was of the appropriate age, Ebhal Khachar



Bhaktaraj Dada Khachar

handed over the administration of his kingdom to him. He also surrendered Dada Khachar, his entire family and the reins of his kingdom at the feet of Shriji Maharaj. To honour the sentiments and love of Dada Khachar and his two sisters, Maharaj had made the *darbar* his home and decided to stay in Gadhada.

Dada Khachar was very affectionate and generous. He had great love for Maharaj. It was as if he had known Maharaj from his previous birth. Not only did he love Maharaj sincerely, but he was totally convinced of Maharaj's glory as Parabrahma Purushottam – the supreme God.

During his stay in Gadhada, Shriji Maharaj frequently went to the river Unmatt Ganga, also known as the River Ghela, to bathe in the company of sadhus and devotees. Once, while returning from the river, he saw some *bawas* camping in the open air on a hillock. When Maharaj saw them, he turned to Jiva Khachar (Dada Khachar's uncle) and said, "These *bawas* are living here in the open. It will be good if we build a *dharmashala* or something for them." Jiva Khachar casually replied, "Maharaj, there are many such wandering *bawas*. How can we take care of them all?" Maharaj remained quiet.

Later, Maharaj made the same suggestion to Dada Khachar, who, with folded hands, replied, "Maharaj, I am willing to give my *darbar* for the sadhus to stay."

Maharaj asked him, "If you allow the sadhus to stay in the *darbar*, where will you live?"

"Maharaj, we will go and stay in a small hut amid the trees on the banks of the river. But how can we allow the devotees of God to suffer like this?" When Maharaj heard him speak in this way, Maharaj remarked, "After all, Dada is Dada! Another like him cannot be found anywhere." Thus, Dada Khachar was always ready to honour Maharaj's commands. For this, he would not worry about his own life, wealth or family. To honour Shriji Maharaj's wishes, he also set aside a very large portion of his

darbar for the sadhus. He himself stayed with the sadhus, while his wife and two sisters lived with the women devotees in a separate room.

Once, Girdharbhai of Vaso came to Gadhada. While extending his invitation to Shriji Maharaj to visit Vaso, he observed, "You are bound by Dada. Will you ever come to our place?" Maharaj replied, "Dada Khachar has surrendered everything to me. He maintains the cattle only to serve milk and curds to the sadhus. Seeing his devotion, I cannot think of leaving Dada."

* * *

When such a devotee surrenders himself to God like this, God, too, becomes subservient to him. Wherever he may be, God always looks after him.

Once, Dada Khachar was away from Gadhada on some work. At that time, some enemy invaded Gadhada. When Shriji Maharaj learnt about this, he put on some armour, took a sword and shield, and came out like a soldier and said, "Don't worry about anything. I alone will destroy thousands." When Maharaj cast a glance of divine wrath at the enemy, they immediately fled. In this way, Maharaj protected Gadhada in the absence of Dada Khachar.

Dada Khachar served Shriji Maharaj with deep love and devotion. Maharaj was never tired of praising him in public. Unfortunately, his uncle, Jiva Khachar grew jealous of Dada Khachar. As Dada Khachar had no child, Jiva Khachar had an eye on Dada's property. Once, Dada Khachar fell seriously ill. Jiva Khachar thought, "On the death of Dada, I will inherit his estate." The omniscient Maharaj read his mind. In order to thwart Jiva Khachar, he advised Dada Khachar, "Dada, assign your estate to your two sisters." Without a moment's hesitation or doubt, Dada Khachar signed over the estate to his two sisters. Such was his trust in Maharaj that he didn't even think, "What

will I do to survive?" When Maharaj enquired, "What will you do now?" Dada Khachar replied, "I will go to Bhavnagar and work for the king."

Maharaj then sent for the two sisters and asked, "What will you do when you have to go to Bhavnagar in connection with the estate? So, appoint a manager." He called Dada Khachar back and said, "Instead of looking for a job elsewhere, stay here at the *darbar* and serve your sisters." Dada willingly accepted Maharaj's offer. For almost a year, he managed the sisters' estate.

Once, Maharaj called both sisters and instructed, "Why do you need this estate? Return it to Dada Khachar." In this way, he had the estate transferred back to Dada's name. Only a most trusting devotee like Dada Khachar could have passed through such a severe test. No one else could have acted in the manner he did.

* * *

Once, out of sheer jealousy towards Dada Khachar, Jiva Khachar instigated Vajesinh Darbar of Bhavnagar, "Swaminarayan is staying with Dada Khachar's sisters in his *darbar*. This has brought stigma on our family. Call Dada Khachar to your court and reprimand him." The King of Bhavnagar, who was unaware of the glory of Swaminarayan, was shocked to hear this story about Dada Khachar's family. He decided to reprimand Dada Khachar in the royal court. Jiva Khachar's aim was to malign Dada Khachar. Moreover, he thought that perhaps a reprimand from Vajesinh Bapu would make Dada ask Swaminarayan to quit his *darbar*. In the royal court of Bhavnagar, Vajesinh asked Dada Khachar, "Have you allowed your sisters to mingle with this Swaminarayan?"

Dada Khachar fearlessly replied, "Instead of giving them to some Kathi, I have offered them to God. The one who was to be attained after death, we have attained while we are alive. I think it is their great fortune." Vajesinh Darbar could not say a

word after hearing Dada Khachar's unshakeable faith in Shriji Maharaj as God. Jiva Khachar looked crestfallen as his plans failed.

* * *

The room in which Shriji Maharaj stayed at Dada Khachar's *darbar* was known as Akshar Ordi. Once, Shriji Maharaj was seated in the Akshar Ordi. He wanted to see Dada Khachar. He called out aloud for him from his room. At that time, Dada Khachar was halfway through his haircut. As soon as he heard Maharaj calling him, he said to the barber, "Please stop now. Maharaj is calling me." He got up, covered his head and immediately went to Maharaj in the Akshar Ordi. Maharaj said to him, "Where were you Dada?"

"I was getting my hair cut."

"Is it finished?"

"No, Maharaj. I got up halfway."

Maharaj remarked, "Look at how much faith he has in me." He then sent him back to the waiting barber.

* * *

A long-standing dispute was ongoing between Dada Khachar and the Bhavnagar state regarding his estate. It had remained unresolved. Every time Dada went to Bhavnagar, Shriji Maharaj used to bless him. Somehow, the case would be adjourned to a future date. Even then Dada Khachar never thought, "In spite of Maharaj's blessings, no favourable judgement is forthcoming."

Once, in the month of Jeth, millet had been harvested ready to be stored. However, there was a sudden shower and the entire yield was washed away in no time. Even then Dada Khachar was not upset for even a moment. He derived great inner strength from his understanding, "Everything Maharaj does is for our good." Thus, he had absolute devotion towards Maharaj.

* * *

There were many maidservants in the *darbar*. Once, one of

them ran away with 2,400 rupees. However, when she got to the outskirts of Gadhada, she lost her way. Wherever she looked, she saw nothing but Gadhada before her eyes. She had no option but to come back and return the money. When Shriji Maharaj learnt of this, he said to Dada Khachar, "Chop her head off." Dada Khachar replied, "Maharaj, she is old. Moreover, how can I kill a woman who chants your name?" Maharaj sternly warned Dada Khachar, "If you behave like this, who will listen to you?" Dada Khachar again replied, "Maharaj, how can I kill someone who worships you?" Maharaj became very happy with Dada Khachar and gave him his garland.

* * *

It was Shriji Maharaj's wish to construct a mandir on the hillock on the banks of the River Ghela. He himself went up the hill to select the spot. Jiva Khachar had a share of the land on this hill, so Maharaj requested him to donate his land for the construction of a mandir. He bluntly said to Maharaj, "There is noone to inherit Dada's property, whereas I have a large family. Therefore, I cannot comply with your request." Maharaj was disappointed and left Gadhada for Sarangpur, and decided to build a mandir there. When Dada Khachar heard this, he and his two sisters rushed crying to Sarangpur. They pleaded with Maharaj to return to Gadhada and build a mandir there. Seeing their deep devotion and love for him, Maharaj immediately returned to Gadhada. Dada Khachar subsequently handed over his entire residential *darbar* for the building of a mandir in Gadhada.

Maharaj remembered Jiva Khachar's words. He thought, "I want Dada Khachar to marry again, so that he can get an heir and silence Jiva Khachar." Dada Khachar, who was observing *sankhya vartman* in accordance with Maharaj's commands, was not at all interested in the joys of the world. However, due to Maharaj's insistence, he agreed to remarry. Just as Shri Krishna

Bhagwan had driven Arjun's chariot, Maharaj himself drove Dada Khachar's marriage chariot to Bhatvadar for the wedding. Maharaj solemnized the marriage of Dada Khachar with Jasuba, the daughter of Darbar Nagpal Varu, with great fanfare. Jasuba, too, had great love for Maharaj. Subsequently, she bore two sons – Bawa Khachar and Amra Khachar – to Dada Khachar.

* * *

Shriji Maharaj began to construct a grand mandir in Dada's *darbar*. Maharaj himself carried stones on his head from the River Ghela for the foundation of the mandir. Maharaj consecrated the *murti* of Gopinathji Maharaj, which resembled him in height and appearance, and thus fulfilled the wish of Dada Khachar.

When Shriji Maharaj returned to Akshardham, Dada Khachar could not bear the pangs of separation and tried to plunge into the cremation fire consuming Maharaj's corporeal body. However, the sadhus and devotees held him back and prevented him from doing so. Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami consoled him. Maharaj appeared in person and gave Dada a garland of roses, bestowing upon him divine peace and bliss.

Dada wasn't so well off, yet he always insisted that Maharaj stay in Gadhada. Grand festivals were celebrated in his *darbar*, and it remained crowded with thousands of sadhus and devotees. Yet he never tired. Instead, he felt all the more happy to be with them. He had unalloyed love for Maharaj, who, pleased by his devotion and *seva*, was always at his command. It is no wonder then that Maharaj stayed at his place for over 25 years. This speaks volumes for his deep devotion and love for Maharaj.

In 1853 CE (Samvat 1909), Dada Khachar breathed his last in Gadhada while incessantly remembering Shriji Maharaj. He passed away to Akshardham to forever serve Maharaj.

6. Bhaktaraj Laduba

Ebhal Khachar of Gadhada had two daughters, Jivuba and Laduba, both older than their only brother, Dada Khachar. The younger of the two sisters was Laduba, also known as Lalita. She was not only beautiful and virtuous, but also intelligent. Due to the *samskars* of previous births, right from childhood she had developed love towards God. She had no interest in rich clothes or tasty food. Her mind was always focused on the worship of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. She had cultivated the great virtues of constantly remembering Shriji Maharaj, *seva*, firm faith and selfless devotion. She always remained at a distance from all males.

Laduba was attached to Maharaj through her loving devotion and, like the *gopis*, she had accepted God as her husband. On the insistence of her father, Ebhal Khachar, however, she had married Khoda Dhadhal of Botad. Despite this, her mind remained focused only on God. Therefore, Khoda Dhadhal willingly sent her back to her parents to allow her to worship God. On seeing her back at home, Ebhal Khachar lost his temper. When he saw the letter of permission from her in-laws he became quiet and couldn't utter a word. Laduba continued to worship God while staying in the *darbar* in Gadhada.

* * *

Shriji Maharaj looked upon Dada Khachar's *darbar* as his own home. Both the sisters and Dada Khachar had deep love for Maharaj. They would never let Maharaj go. Many sadhus also stayed with Maharaj in the *darbar*. Maharaj used to celebrate festivals frequently and would invite sadhus and devotees from various regions. With a view to make the stay of Maharaj's beloved sadhus and devotees comfortable, Dada Khachar requested his sisters to personally look after all the arrangements during the festivals. When Maharaj learnt



Bhaktaraj Laduba

about this assignment, he called Dada Khachar and guided, “Both the sisters need not be deployed together. There will be unnecessary rivalry between them. Therefore, let Jivuba look after the festivals of the bright half of the month and let Laduba take care of the festivals taking place during the dark half of the month.” Both sisters willingly accepted this suggestion.

Once, the Annakut festival was to be celebrated. Laduba approached Jivuba with a request, “O sister, you have already celebrated the festivals of Dashera and Purnima (full moon day). Please allow me to celebrate the festival of Annakut taking place during the bright half of the month.”

At first Jivuba refused, saying, “You celebrate the Diwali festival; I will manage this one.”

Laduba lovingly explained, “According to the shastras, the Annakut festival is a part of the Diwali celebrations.” Jivuba then agreed to allow her to celebrate the Annakut festival. Both sisters always competed with each other in this way for the opportunity to serve.

Laduba, with great efforts and assistance from her friends, prepared a beautiful *annakut*. Shriji Maharaj manifested in the *murti* and accepted all the dishes. Maharaj himself sat the sadhus in rows and served them all.

The following day Jivuba, Laduba, Rajba, Surba and many other women had assembled in a room. Suddenly, the whole room was filled with brilliant light. A luminous figure emerged from the light. The women asked Maharaj to explain this phenomenon. Maharaj replied, “It is Bhaktimata. Ask her why she has come and whether she will stay here.” When the women asked her accordingly, she replied, “I was very pleased with your sincere *seva* during the Annakut festival. So I have personally come to give you darshan.” When they requested her to dwell among them, she replied, “I am a *pativrata* woman, so if you all observe dharma, then I will stay among you.” The women

replied, "We will observe dharma." Bhaktimata revealed, "Then I am prepared to stay here with my son, Shriji Maharaj." With these words, she disappeared.

* * *

Shriji Maharaj used to take his meals alternately with both the sisters. If he ate more at Jivuba's place, Laduba felt disappointed and when he ate more at Laduba's place, Jivuba would feel that she was neglected. Thus, the two sisters used to compete with each other in their loving devotion. Maharaj decided to eat for the first half of the month with Jivuba. During the second half of the month, he dined at Laduba's place. Even then, when there was any adjustment in the calendar the sisters would feel disappointed. Maharaj then decided to alternate every ten days between the sisters. This arrangement satisfied them both.

* * *

Once Laduba had a doubt. She asked Shriji Maharaj, "Is it true that Durvasa had managed to eat everything cooked by the *gopis*?" Maharaj replied, "The talks in the scriptures are the truth. I will give you an experience of this some day." After some time, Laduba invited Maharaj, along with 30 devotees, for lunch. Maharaj sent Sachchidanand Swami first as he had to look after the farm. Laduba sent a Brahmin to serve Swami. Sachchidanand Swami ate slowly and consumed everything that had been cooked for all the guests. Still, he remained hungry. Laduba prepared *rotla* and sent them. Still, he said, "Bring more." Then, Laduba sent a message to Maharaj, who advised her, "Now offer him some water." When Swami was offered water, he washed his hands. Maharaj then reminded Laduba of the Durvasa episode and thus removed her doubts.

* * *

Every morning Laduba would serve fresh milk to Shriji Maharaj. One morning, she came to Maharaj with a bowlful of milk. Maharaj found the odour of the milk somewhat unpleasant.

He refused to drink it and remarked, "It seems as if the buffalo has eaten garlic, because the milk smells as such. If you want to serve me milk, you should feed the buffalo at home and only serve it water drawn here. You should not send it out for grazing. Only then will I accept its milk." Thereafter, Laduba began to take care of the buffalo at home and continued to serve milk to Maharaj.

* * *

Teja Thakkar, a resident of Gadhada, had brought a new buffalo. He sent his wife to the *darbar* with a container full of milk with a request to Laduba that it be served to Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj found the milk delicious. Laduba thought "How nice it would be if we had that buffalo, so that we can serve its milk to Maharaj every day." When Teja Thakkar came, Maharaj praised the taste of the milk. Maharaj went to his house personally to have a look at the buffalo. Maharaj asked Teja Thakkar whether he was willing to sell his buffalo. Teja Thakkar agreed. Maharaj enquired, "What will your children drink?" Teja Thakkar replied, "We are traders. We will buy another buffalo." Maharaj fixed the price at 100 rupees. Bhagujji then brought the buffalo to the *darbar*. Laduba gladly paid one hundred 100 rupees for the buffalo.

* * *

Whenever Shriji Maharaj had to depart from Gadhada, both the sisters and Dada Khachar would become very sad. They had taken a vow of eating only after the darshan of Maharaj, so that he would not go anywhere. However, Maharaj consecrated the *murti* of Vasudev-Narayan in one of the rooms of the *darbar*, and instructed them all to eat after darshan of the *murti*.

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Once, Laduba, Jivuba and other women prepared to accompany Shriji Maharaj on his *vicharan*, but Maharaj refused to take them along. Maharaj mounted his mare and set off with some Kathi devotees. The mare, however, brought Maharaj

back to the *darbar* from the outskirts of the town and stood still. Maharaj and other riders tried their best to make the mare move, but it would simply trot forward and return. In this way the mare returned thrice. Maharaj disclosed, "It seems as if these women devotees are influencing the mare." Only when Maharaj permitted the women devotees to accompany him did the mare finally depart from Gadhada for Vartal. Premanand Swami has composed a kirtan describing this incident:

*Mānkiye chadhyā re Mohan Vanmāli...
Nathi jāti darbārmāthi ghodi...*

(Maharaj has mounted Manki; but the mare is refusing to leave the *darbar*...)

* * *

Once, it was winter. Shriji Maharaj was sleeping on a cot in the Akshar Ordi with a fire blazing nearby. Mulji Brahmachari and Naga Jogia were fast asleep. Suddenly a corner of the quilt covering Maharaj caught fire. He woke up and prodded his attendants. When Maharaj saw the burnt quilt, he asked, "This quilt has been burnt. What explanation shall we give? Let us leave from here." Naja Jogia went to the *darbar* and narrated the story to Laduba and Jivuba. The sisters sent a message that there were many such quilts, and nothing was more precious than Maharaj. Maharaj was very pleased to hear that the sisters had such understanding. He said, "Even if I burn their quilt, they don't see any fault."

During this time, Maharaj had forbidden the women devotees from coming for his darshan. However, pleased by their devotion, he said, "Allow them to come for darshan." Naja Jogia opened the doors and let them have the darshan of Maharaj. When Maharaj showed them the burnt quilt, the sisters sent a new quilt for Maharaj to use.

* * *

Shriji Maharaj had come to care for and love his devotees.

He freely bestowed divine bliss upon Dada Khachar, Jivuba and Laduba. When Maharaj decided to return to Akshardham, Laduba, Jivuba, Jasuba and others beseeched Maharaj to change his mind. Maharaj consoled them saying, “I never leave the Satsang. I am ever manifest. Through the *murti* of Gopinathji, I will give you all darshan.” With these words Maharaj returned to Dham. True to his word, the sisters always saw the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj in place of the *murti* of Gopinathji Maharaj.

In this way, Maharaj always fulfilled the desires of his most beloved devotees and always gave them the happiness of his manifest form until they breathed their last.



Swami Jaga Bhakta

7. Swami Jaga Bhakta

Swami Jaga Bhakta's father's name was Raghav Bhakta and his mother's name was Ratanbai. Raghav Bhakta was a staunch devotee of Shri Ram Bhagwan. Whenever there were discourses on the Ramayan, he would neglect his business and go to listen to the discourses. In 1826 CE (Samvat 1882), Brahmachari Anandanandji arrived in Ambardi, where Jogidas Khuman used to live. Raghav Bhakta was drawn to the *brahmachari*. When he heard from him that Parabrahma Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the supreme Godhead of all incarnations was manifest on earth, he accepted *varman* from him and became a dedicated follower of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Raghav Bhakta was very devout. He would frequently visit Gadhada and seek the company of the *paramhansas*. Driven by such deep devotion towards Maharaj, he was inspired to compose a kirtan in which he narrated in detail the daily routine and other divine *lilas* of Maharaj:

Shri Sahajanand Mahārāj Hari, jāsho mā ek pal visari...

(Sahajanand Swami is God; do not forget him even for a moment...)

Anandanand Swami was very pleased with this composition and said, "Raghav Bhakta, you are a virtuous *mukta* from your previous birth; a *mukta* from Akshardham will take birth in your family."

As a result of these blessings, Jaga Bhakta was born to this pious Rathod family of Ambardi on Monday, 7 October 1827 (Aso vad 2, Samvat 1883). From childhood, Jaga Bhakta was quiet and humble. He had a natural aversion for the pleasures of the senses and worldly objects. It was second nature to him to get up early every morning, bathe, worship God and then joyfully sing bhajans in the company of his friends. In 1839 CE (Samvat 1895), Jaga Bhakta came in contact with MotaParamanand Swami. The young devotee was immensely pleased to hear

about the glory of Satsang and about the manifest form of Shriji Maharaj.

For business reasons, Raghav Bhakta left Ambardi and settled in Badhada. At the young age of 14 Jaga Bhakta's marriage to Amarbai of Hamapar as arranged. Even then nothing could lure him towards the life of a householder.

At 15, Jaga Bhakta was taken seriously ill. His family thought, "This boy will not survive." Shriji Maharaj, however, gave him darshan and said, "You have taken birth due to my wish, so you will soon recover." Soon he recovered. After this incident everyone respected Jaga Bhakta even more. Shriji Maharaj often blessed him with his divine darshan and bestowed divine bliss upon him.

* * *

As he grew older, Jaga Bhakta began to attend festivals in both Gadhada and Vartal. In Vartal, he regularly met Gopalanand Swami, served him and won his favour.

In 1847 CE (Samvat 1903), Jaga Bhakta had gone to Vartal. Pragji Bhakta and Jhinabhai from Mahuva had also arrived there. They sang bhajans upto midnight and then, after everyone else had gone to sleep, these three devotees approached Gopalanand Swami. With folded hands they asked, "O Swami! Please grace us and show reveal to us how we may not be separated in this life, even for a moment, from you and Shriji Maharaj." Gopalanand Swami then looked around in all directions and whispered, "You must accept the fact that Shriji Maharaj is the *avatri* of all avatars and is Purushottam Narayan; and that this Gunatitanand Swami [who was sleeping nearby] is the divine abode of Shriji Maharaj. Moreover, you should become *aksharrup* and seek communion with Aksharbrahma and worship Purushottam Narayan. If you can do this much, then it does not matter whether you are a householder or a sadhu. You will never be away either from Shriji Maharaj or me." For the first time they heard Gopalanand Swami talking about the

glory and eminence of Gunatitanand Swami.

* * *

In 1852 CE (Samvat 1908), Gopalanand Swami passed away to Akshardham. Jaga Bhakta had developed deep devotion and love for Gopalanand Swami. When he heard about Swami's demise, he became very sad and developed a fever. At night, Gopalanand Swami appeared to him in a dream and reminded him, "I had told you to go to Junagadh if you want to become a sadhu." With these words, he disappeared.

In the morning when he woke up, he firmly resolved to renounce soon. In 1853 CE (Samvat 1909), he left home and walked to Junagadh. Jaga Bhakta arrived in Junagadh and narrated everything to Gunatitanand Swami, who was happy to receive him and listen to his story. However, his father, Raghav Bhakta, rushed to Gadhada to search for him. As he could not find Jaga Bhakta there, he decided to go to Junagadh. The *mahant* of Gadhada, Mahapurushdasji, gave him a note of recommendation addressed to Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj. He took this letter and reached Junagadh.

Gunatitanand Swami immediately informed Jaga Bhakta, "Jaga Bhakta! There is an invitation for you." Jaga Bhakta was disappointed to hear this, as he had firmly resolved not to return to the life of a householder. However, Swami advised, "Oblige them this time and return home."

Jaga Bhakta immediately thought, "If this matter reaches Acharya Maharaj, problems will arise." So, he himself suggested to his father, "It is good that you have come here to take me back. I have been waiting here for so many days thinking that it would be good if someone comes to take me back. Come on, I am coming home with you. I will worship God at home." When Raghav Bhakta mentioned the letter for Acharya Maharaj, Jaga Bhakta replied, "Now there's no need to give it to him as I have already decided to return home." And he tore the letter into

pieces. Raghav Bhakta stayed in Junagadh for two days, sought Swami's permission and returned home with Jaga Bhakta.

They halted at a village called Kharachiyu on their way home. At night when they were fast asleep, a fierce cobra descended from the roof. Jaga Bhakta turned towards the cobra and said, "Go on your way." The cobra quietly went away.

* * *

His parents and wife, Amarbai, had great reverence towards Jaga Bhakta; it became deeper on account of the cobra episode. His wife thought, "I seem to be a great obstacle in the path of Jaga Bhakta, who wants to renounce." So, one day, in the presence of Raghav Bhakta, she spoke to Jaga Bhakta, "Please pardon me if I have done anything wrong to you. I willingly give you my consent if you want to renounce. I, too, shall lead a life of *sankhya-yogini* and worship Shriji Maharaj." Raghav Bhakta was deeply moved to hear this. With the heavy heart of an affectionate father, he revealed, "Once Gopalanand Swami had indirectly told me, 'Your son will liberate innumerable souls.'" He added, "You are a great devotee of God. If you want to renounce, please happily go to Junagadh. Our humble prayer is that at the time of our end may Shriji Maharaj come to take us to his Dham." Thus, with the consent of all, Jaga Bhakta was allowed to go to Junagadh, where he accepted *parshad diksha* and lived there in the *seva* of Gunatitanand Swami.

* * *

In the winter of 1854 CE (Samvat 1910), Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj came to Junagadh. In the meadows of Sankhdavadar, belonging to junagadh mandir, there were nearly 80,000 bundles of hay. Gunatitanand Swami was worried about protecting the hay. So, Swami asked some devotees to stay in Sankhdavadar. However, who would agree to go when, in the presence of Acharya Maharaj, there would be religious discourses and delicious rich food daily? Swami then approached Jaga Bhakta, "Will you go to Sankhdavadar?" Jaga Bhakta

humbly replied, “O Swami, you simply have to tell me to go. I am your servant. To me, your command is the festival.”

In accordance with the wishes of Swami, Jaga Bhakta took an assistant and went to the meadows of Sankhdavadar. Acharya Maharaj stayed in Junagadh for 23 days, while Jaga Bhakta remained in the meadows of Sankhdavadar to protect the grass. He thus pleased Swami with this selfless *seva*. While in the fields, Shriji Maharaj continuously gave Jaga Bhakta his divine darshan and granted him great joy. While seeing him off, Swami had told him, “With each and every command, I give the *murti* of God.” Thus he bestowed upon Jaga Bhakta the bliss of Maharaj’s *murti*.

When Raghuvirji Maharaj was about to depart from Junagadh, Swami sent two of his attendants to bring Jaga Bhakta back. While introducing Jaga Bhakta to Raghuvirji Maharaj, Swami explained, “This Jaga Bhakta obeyed my command and resisted the temptation of attending the festival, and stayed for 23 days to protect the mandir’s hay.” Acharya Maharaj was greatly pleased to hear this. He embraced him with love. He remarked, “By pleasing Swami, you have pleased Shriji Maharaj himself. You should never see any difference between the two.” Swami then revealed, “This Jaga Bhakta is our true devotee; otherwise, an ordinary individual could not have honoured such a command.”

* * *

One day, Jaga Bhakta became moodless and gloomy. He went to Swami and said, “As I was born later, I was not able to have Shriji Maharaj’s darshan, and did not get the chance to enjoy the bliss of his *murti*. Therefore, I feel gloomy.” Swami replied, “Four types of happiness related to Maharaj’s *murti* can be attained: darshan, *prasadi*, *vatu* (listening to stories of his divine *lilas*), and *malvu* (embracing him). From today, I will bestow upon you all these four types of bliss. You may not be able to see the form of Shriji Maharaj, but he remains forever manifest in me.” Jaga Bhakta was delighted to hear this and was

convinced that Maharaj never remains away from the Satsang. His gloom was lifted.

* * *

Gunatitanand Swami and some sadhus were once going to Barpatoli in the district of Babariyawad. Swami was seated in a cart. Meanwhile, Jaga Bhakta and some sadhus were on their way to Vartal from Junagadh. They all met here. The sadhus garlanded Swami. Swami embraced them, but met Jaga Bhakta with his eyes and asked him, "Hope you are happy within?"

In Junagadh, Swami had previously embraced Jaga Bhakta over 70 times; once, he had embraced him 40 times in one month. However, this one meeting of the eyes gave him greater happiness than all that had happened previously.

* * *

Once, in the afternoon assembly, Gunatitanand Swami asked Yogeshwardas Swami to read Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 61, and then gave his learned comments on it, "Devotees of God suffer in this world, because this world itself is the cause of suffering." With this observation, he turned to Jaga Bhakta and said, "They are all making you suffer, because they know that you are my man. So, if you cease to belong to me, none will trouble you. Learn and practise the wisdom of this Vachanamrut." Jaga Bhakta was deeply moved to hear Swami. He said to Swami, "O Swami, I know that your focus is only Shriji Maharaj, and that I am insignificant. Even then, you have kindly looked upon me as one of yours. Please do continue to own me so." Swami was pleased to hear him offer prayers like this.

Swami then said, "I don't like other people taunting you, so you go to Junagadh."

Jaga Bhakta replied, "Swami, I don't care what other people say. This world is a source of misery, so it is to be expected. Also, some of the misery is from within, due to the waves of *rajoguna* and *tamoguna*. Therefore, if there is any pain, it will affect my

body or my *swabhav*, but my soul shall suffer in the least. I want to live only according to your wishes."

Swami responded, "If you have educated your associates in this way, then happily join me. I don't mind."

* * *

While Gunatitanand Swami was in Junagadh, he had bestowed upon Jaga Bhakta the fourfold happiness of darshan, *prasadi*, *vatu* and *malvu*. After Gunatitanand Swami's passing away to Akshardham, Jaga Bhakta continued to reside in Junagadh. He had spent 14 years and 6 months in the company of Swami. For nearly 40 years, Swami had enlightened the devotees of Junagadh and the Sorath region with his profound spiritual talks. During his time with Swami, Jaga Bhakta noted down many of these talks, some of which have been compiled in the third chapter of the Swamini Vatu. These talks reflect the deep wisdom and unique spiritual insights of Gunatitanand Swami. They are a great treasure to all spiritual seekers and are capable of kindling the latent divinity in the hearts of sincere devotees.

* * *

As instructed by Acharya Maharaj, Jaga Bhakta travelled in the Junagadh region with the sadhus. For many years, he talked to the devotees of the Sorath region, giving them much joy. Like Gunatitanand Swami's discourses, his talks, too, gave much pleasure to the devotees of this region and helped them realize the Satsang philosophy. Leading *sadgurus* such as Balmukund Swami, Krishnacharan Swami, Madhavcharan Swami, Madhavpriya Swami, Narayancharan Swami and others all happily invited him to join them during their *vicharan* in the region. They had great respect for him.

His style of preaching was simple, but sharp and convincing. He could easily transform the hearts of all devotees – rich and poor, young and old. He convinced many people that Bhagwan Swaminarayan was the *avatari* of all incarnations, the cause of

all causes, Bhagwan Parabrahma Purushottam himself, and that Gunatitanand Swami was the choicest disciple and divine abode of Shriji Maharaj. Thus, he strengthened this conviction and guided all on the path of ultimate liberation. His integrated personality and actions inspired even the sadhus to follow him. Although he belonged to the *parshad* order, he avoided wealth and women in all eight forms. Except when ill, he ate only once a day. He attended all five sessions of discourses in the mandir and regularly preached to the devotees.

By nature, Swami Jaga Bhakta was very meek and humble. During his talks, he would say, “Never judge others’ actions, appearance, or flaws.” He revered all the sadhus and devotees, seeing the presence of Swami in them all. He had asked Shastriji Maharaj to compile a list of devotees from Gujarat who had firm faith in the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy, and daily recited that list after his morning puja. Such was his reverence for the devotees.

He used to say, “If one desires to find flaws, then one should find flaws in one’s own body, community and nature; but never find flaws in the devotees of God. I stayed with Swami, but I never made him feel obliged to me. In the same manner, we should never make the God-realized Sadhu helpless by our actions. On the contrary, we should always feel indebted to them.”

Jaga Bhakta always said, “Seek the company of the sadhus, realize the distinction between the animate and inanimate, and give up false pride, joys of the five senses and improper bias. Understand the real form of God, become *brahmarup* and worship Parabrahma.”

* * *

His glory had spread far and wide. As a result, devotees of all communities – Nagar Brahmins, Lohanas, Kanbi, Kadiya, Garasiyas and others – used to seek his association. They revered him as their guru. This made his rivals burn with jealousy, and they spread false stories that his disciples worshipped him like

God. When a Nagar devotee once asked him a question about such rumours, he clarified, “There is only one God – Sahajanand Swami. Devotees and sadhus attain the enlightened or *ekantik* state by associating with him and Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. Noone, however, can become God.”

* * *

While Gunatitanand Swami was alive, Bhagatji Maharaj used to openly preach, “Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar – the divine abode of Shriji Maharaj. If one does not understand this, one cannot attain Akshardham.” Jaga Bhakta’s contribution to propagating this true *upasana* was most valuable. He talked about this divine philosophy to all the sadhus and devotees who sought his company. Thus, for the first time, the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam was systematically preached in both Gujarat and Kathiawad.

* * *

In 1897 CE (Samvat 1953), the Janmashtami festival was celebrated with great fanfare in Junagadh. On this occasion, Bhagatji Maharaj and Jaga Bhakta met each other after many years. Both of them happily recalled incidents from the time of Gunatitanand Swami. The devotees, too, rejoiced at the meeting of these two great stalwarts of the Sampradaya.

Observing the enthusiasm and vigour at the time, Jaga Bhakta thought, “If the *murtis* of both Akshar and Purushottam are consecrated, it would end all doubts regarding *upasana*.”

So, in the presence of Shastriji Maharaj, Jaga Bhakta sent a message to Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj through Kothari Jibhai, “If you install the dual *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam, and have a scripture like the Satsangijivan, describing the glory of Akshar-Purushottam, composed in Sanskrit, Maharaj will definitely bless you with a son like Mahapurush [a *mukta*].”

Jaga Bhakta was confident that as Viharilalji Maharaj was childless, he would readily agree to this proposal. However, when Kothari Jibhai returned after delivering the message, he

looked spiritless and defeated.

Shastriji Maharaj asked, "What happened?"

Jibhai reported, "Acharya Maharaj tells me that Jaga Bhakta is definitely one whose words come true. If he says, 'I will get a son like Mahapurush', I will certainly get one. However, I am utterly helpless before these opposing sadhus. I am unable to comply with your wishes."

On hearing this, Jaga Bhakta became extremely disappointed. He remained speechless for some 15 minutes. Then, he said, "I thought that people spent *lakhs* of rupees to consult astrologers to get a son. I thought that if he is promised sons, he would have consented to my proposal and the *murtis* of the divine duo would soon be installed together. But he refused."

After some time, Jaga Bhakta turned to Shastriji Maharaj and asked, "Would you not do it?" Shastriji Maharaj replied, "Our situation is difficult. If we go to the *kothari* for even a one-paisa postcard he asks a thousand questions. 'Are you getting married? Who do you want to marry? Who do you want to write to?' If this is my current position, how can we possibly build mandirs? Only a king or an *acharya* can do this."

On hearing him speak like this, Jaga Bhakta said, "Whatever you resolve, I will help you to fulfil your resolve. So, first resolve that you want to do this. You have the blessings of Bhagatji Maharaj, so you will succeed."

Shastriji Maharaj instantly responded, "Your wish shall be fulfilled."

On hearing this, Jaga Bhakta became very happy and felt great joy in his heart, as if the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam had already been consecrated.

* * *

In 1898 CE (Samvat 1954), a marriage was to be solemnized in the family of the Nawab of Junagadh. The nawab had invited Kamalnayan Shastri, a scholar from the Dravid region (South

India), to attend the function. To facilitate his personal rituals and cater for appropriate discussions, he wished to stay with some scholar. Such a scholar resided at the local Swaminarayan mandir in Junagadh, so arrangements were made for him to lodge there. Kothari Jibhai had to leave for Veraval, so he introduced the guest to Shastriji Maharaj and left.

The Dravidian Shastri was very impressed by the pious atmosphere and the sadhus who had shunned wealth and women. All his desires for worldly pleasures were subdued. He experienced divine bliss. He thought, “I have pilgrimaged throughout the whole of India and been to many important mandirs, but I have never experienced such divine peace. That peace is due to the presence of Shastri Yagnapurushdas. He must be an enlightened individual or must have met a powerful enlightened guru.”

The Shastri approached Shastriji Maharaj and remarked, “O Swamiji, your talks bring joy to everyone. Even through your mere darshan one experiences great joy. This joy is divine. Therefore, I am sure you have realized God or you are in association with some great sadhu. Will you please take me to him for darshan?”

Shastri Yagnapurushdasji thought, “Perhaps this Shastri may not readily accept the divinity of Jaga Bhakta.” Therefore, he first took him to some senior *sadgurus*. He introduced him to each one of them and praised them a lot. The *shastri*, however, was very intelligent. He said to Shastriji Maharaj, “No doubt these sadhus are very great, but you haven’t yet introduced me to your guru, whose blessed disciple you are.”

Shastriji Maharaj then led him to the assembly hall balcony where Jaga Bhakta was seated, and revealed, “It is by his grace that I experience constant peace in my heart. As he is wearing white robes, however, I didn’t take you to him first.” The Dravidian scholar was pleased to meet Jaga Bhakta. He put a question to him in Sanskrit. Shastriji Maharaj explained it to Jaga Bhakta in Gujarati. Jaga Bhakta then gave his answer in Gujarati which

in turn was translated into Sanskrit by Shastriji Maharaj. In this manner, Jaga Bhakta gave his learned comments on Vachanamruts, Gadhada I 54 and Gadhada II 54. On hearing him speak like a scholar, Kamalnayan Shastri was convinced that Jaga Bhakta was a true mahatma and experienced peace in his heart.

* * *

The work of Jaga Bhakta was now nearing its end. He had lived as a renunciate in Junagadh mandir for 48 years and conducted *vicharan* in the villages, guiding thousands of people onto the path of righteousness and explaining to them the true *upasana*.

His gaze was always towards the ground. He wore a short *kediyu*, donned a short dhoti and wrapped a long scarf on his head. Although he was a *parshad*, like the sadhus, he always travelled with a companion. While walking, he would wrap the rosary around his right wrist and hold a small stick in his left hand.

Shastriji Maharaj had been greatly disappointed because he had not been able to serve Bhagatji Maharaj in his final days before he returned to Dham in Mahuva. At that time, Jaga Bhakta had promised that he would certainly send for him at the time of his own departure, saying, “I will call you when I breathe my last.”

In November 1900 CE (Magshar, Samvat 1957), Jaga Bhakta fell ill in Junagadh. The devotees from Dangra requested him to come to Dangra for rest. So he went to Dangra. Even there, his health did not improve. Krishnaji Ada and other affectionate devotees had already arrived there from Rajkot. Swami Jaga Bhakta asked the devotees to call Shastriji Maharaj immediately by sending him a telegram.

Shastriji Maharaj had gone to Botad with Prabhudas Kothari to procure timber for the Sarangpur mandir. A *parshad* from Sarangpur went to Botad with the telegram: “Jaga Swami is seriously ill and remembers you. Come to Dangra immediately.” When Shastriji Maharaj read the telegram, he cancelled his planned trip to Bhavnagar and sent the attendant

back to Sarangpur on horseback to bring his *pattar*, puja and dhotis. Accompanied by a junior sadhu, Shastriji Maharaj went directly to Dangra.

On 26 January 1901 (Maha *sud* 7, Samvat 1957), Shastriji Maharaj reached Dangra. Swami Jaga Bhakta was seriously ill. He did not allow anyone to visit him in his room, but he had requested, “When Shastri Yagnapurushdas arrives, bring him here immediately to me.” So, on arrival, Shastriji Maharaj was taken directly to him. The moment Jaga Bhakta saw him, he sat up on his bed. He embraced Shastriji Maharaj with great affection. Shastriji Maharaj understood that this was the last phase of Jaga Bhakta’s life, and tears ran from his eyes.

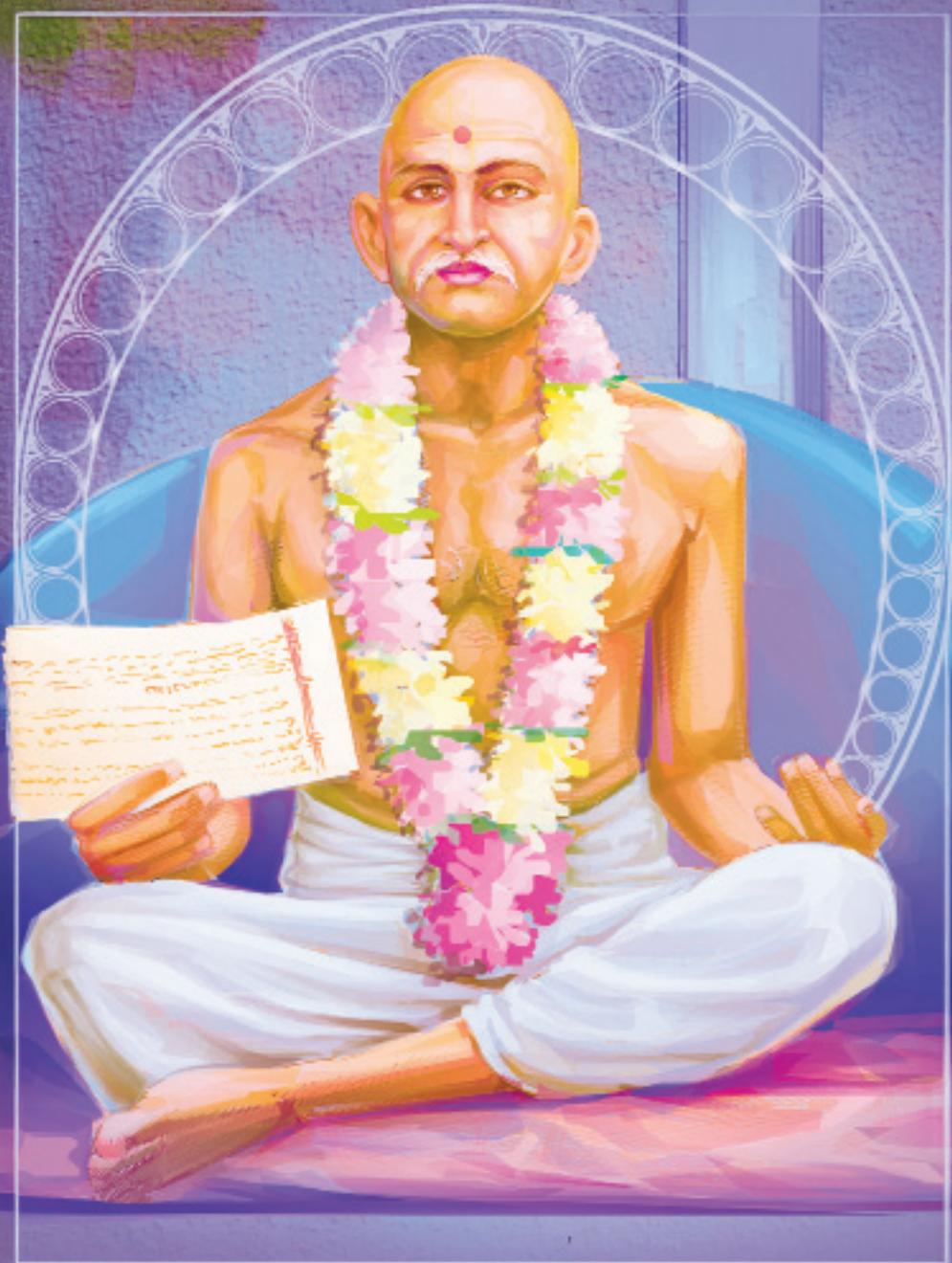
Jaga Bhakta consoled Shastriji Maharaj, “My work is now over. Maharaj is taking me to Dham. Now you will begin your work. Both Maharaj and Swami will support you and bless you in your work.”

True to his promise, Swami Jaga Bhakta gave Shastriji Maharaj an opportunity to serve him for two days. On the night of 29 January 1901 (Maha *sud* 10, Samvat 1957), when he was surrounded by the devotees, Jaga Bhakta suddenly sat up on his bed, uttered, “Jay Swaminarayan” to all before passing away to Dham of his own independent will.

He had earned the blessings of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami by serving him with great devotion and love. Swami Jaga Bhakta’s passing created a great vacuum in the Satsang. The traditional Vedic funeral rites were performed, and the body was adorned with new clothes, *kanthi* and garlands of flowers. Shastriji Maharaj performed the *artī*. The body was taken to the cremation grounds in a palanquin.

Today, at this cremation site in Dangra stands a memorial shrine.

Swami Jaga Bhakta’s contributions to the great task of spreading the true, pure *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam were indeed priceless.



Shri Krishnaji Ada

8. Shri Krishnaji Ada

Shri Karsanjibhai Indraji Vyas, popularly known as Krishnaji Ada, was a native of Mevasa, near Junagadh. His grandfather, Kadva Vyas, was a pious Brahmin scholar who had mastered astrology. He was a disciple of Ramanand Swami, who had introduced him to Parabrahma Purushottam Swaminarayan Bhagwan. After coming into contact with Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Kadva Vyas gave up all other mantras and started chanting the 'Swaminarayan' *mahamantra* continuously.

Indraji Vyas was born into such a noble family. He was pious from childhood. Although a householder, he led a life of complete detachment. He had two worthy sons. The elder son was Harjivanbhai and the younger son was Karsanjibhai. Karsanjibhai was born on 9 August 1834 (Shravan *sud* 5, Samvat 1890). Both brothers had inherited the Satsang culture from their family. Both brothers had great love for each other, but they loved Satsang the most. Karsanjibhai later married Ladkiba, the daughter of Ajramar and Premaba Dave of Amrutvel.

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The two brothers once accompanied some *satsangis* to Junagadh for the darshan of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. At that time, in accordance with Swami's wishes, Bhagatji Maharaj was delivering religious discourses. In the course of one discourse, referring to Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj proclaimed, "The one who is seated here is Akshar, and the one who sleeps is also Akshar. Only if you accept Swami as Akshar will you be able to attain Akshardham." When Karsanjibhai heard these talks regarding the glory of Swami, he thought, "This Swami seems to be great. But what is his real *swarup*?"

Bhagatji Maharaj instantly read his mind. Pointing to Gunatitanand Swami, he said, "This Swami who is seated here

is Mul Akshar, the abode of Shriji Maharaj. Let us ask him. He will confirm what I am telling you.” Swami endorsed Bhagatji Maharaj’s words, “It is exactly as Pragji says.” This statement cleared any doubts from the minds of the devotees. They were all convinced of Swami’s true glory and divinity.

* * *

A short while after Karsanjibhai had come into contact with Gunatitanand Swami, Swami spoke to Karsanji’s father, Indrajibhai, “Here in Junagadh, the *brahmacharis* are all young. If you are prepared to renounce, we will keep you here as a *brahmachari*.” Indrajibhai already used to spend one month every year in the company of Swami, but naturally, he was worried about his young sons. He asked Swami, “What should I do about my family responsibilities?”

Swami reassured him, “We will look after your two sons. Shriji Maharaj will look after their welfare. So, give up all your worries, renounce, and live here; this is my wish.”

Indrajibhai had great faith in Swami. He freed himself from all his household responsibilities and came to Junagadh. Acharya Maharaj soon gave him *diksha*, and Swami named him Akhandanand Brahmachari. Thereafter, he composed many kirtans about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahma.

* * *

Gunatitanand Swami had visited Mevasa twice. On his first visit to Mevasa, Karsanjibhai was away. The second time, in 1867 CE (Samvat 1923), Swami left Junagadh and arrived in Mevasa via Vanthali, Upleta and Dhoraji. Swami was in a hurry to reach Gondal, but he could not refuse the lunch invitation from Karsanjibhai, Harjivanbhai, Shankar Maharaj, Luhar Keshavji, Suthar Meghji and Jhina Thakkar, who all loved him immensely. He said to them, “We will eat. Keep the meal ready. Prepare *rotla*, but not laddus. We will reach early in the

morning, eat and then leave.”

Early the following morning, Swami left Kandorda and arrived in Mevasa. Karsanjibhai and Harjivanbhai had kept the food ready for Swami. They had prepared big laddus with a view to serve one each to every sadhu and devotee. Swami sat for his meal. The laddus were covered under the *rotla*. When Swami saw the laddus, he disapproved of their loving trick. Hargovinddasji began to serve the food. As he began to serve the sadhus with two laddus, Swami stopped him and said, “Give only one laddu to each of them. Only that many have been prepared.” Swami then ate a little laddu, *rotlo* and *adad* dal. In the afternoon, he conducted religious discourses. After a short rest, he took their leave. Thus, Karsanjibhai was fortunate enough to serve Gunatitanand Swami during his final days on this earth.

Swami had instructed Karsanjibhai and Harjivanbhai, “Go to Rajkot and work there as priests. Maharaj will look after you.” In accordance with his command, both brothers went to Rajkot and settled there. Earlier, they had also worked as scribes in Junagadh and as priests at the Una mandir as per the wishes of Swami.

* * *

Karsanjibhai had three sons – Vaijnathbhai, Madhavlalbhai and Mohanbhai. Karsanjibhai used to conduct religious discourses at the Rajkot mandir every morning and evening. People were greatly impressed by his enlightening talks. This made him popular with even the eminent *sadgurus* of Junagadh mandir. They would also invite him to talk to the congregation. He always preached, “Swami is Akshar; Maharaj is Purushottam.” He was very meek and humble. He would not hurt even an ant. His favourite couplet was:

“*Nāne se ho nāne rabie, jaisi nāni dub,
Għas fis sab ud għayā, dub khub ki dub.*”

“During floods big trees which stand high and erect are often washed away; however, the grass remains in its place in spite of the heavy water flow, because of its flexibility.”

He saw the presence of Swami in everyone. So, before the *satsangis*, why would he ever expect honours? He always guided people to behave as a servant of servants. He could have easily arranged for all his personal needs from the affectionate devotees. However, in accordance with Swami’s commands, he regularly visited eight houses to collect alms for his sustenance. Still, he gave one-tenth of his alms to the mandir before taking the rest home. He would personally cook his food, offer *thal* and then eat. People lovingly referred to him as Krishnaji Ada.

* * *

It was during this period that Shastriji Maharaj was studying the philosophy of the Gita from Jivanram Shastri in Rajkot. Many youths and devotees who had faith in Gunatitanand Swami were attracted to Shastriji Maharaj, impressed by his piety and spiritual knowledge. However, some jealous sadhus and devotees could not stand this increasing popularity of Shastriji Maharaj. Once, they decided to humiliate and insult him. They collected signatures on a statement which read: “Shastriji Maharaj should not be allowed to stay at Rajkot mandir.” They even managed to get signatures from certain leading sadhus and devotees.

Sincere devotees, including Krishnaji Ada, who believed in the divinity of Gunatitanand Swami, resolved to wholeheartedly back Shastriji Maharaj. Himrajbhai was one of the leading devotees who had signed the resolution calling for Shastriji Maharaj’s expulsion from the mandir. He was an influential man in the Rajkot mandir. When Krishnaji Ada learnt that Himrajbhai had signed the resolution, he severed all relations with his *gurubhai* and dear friend, Himrajbhai, forever. He refused to see him again for the rest of his life. Although he

appeared very meek, Krishnaji Ada was very courageous in supporting Shastriji Maharaj and true devotees of God.

* * *

Shastriji Maharaj, too, respected Krishnaji Ada very much. During his stay in Rajkot, Shastriji Maharaj would tell all who sought his company to go to Junagadh for the darshan of Jagat Bhakta. He also instructed them, "You should all go to Krishnaji Ada's house in Rajkot and listen to his spiritual talks." Ada, too, would talk about the greatness of Shastriji Maharaj to the devotees who called on him at his place. He would tell the devotees, "There is no sadhu in either of the two regions who can match Shastriji Maharaj. Even at the cost of a hundred lives, we must always side with him. He is such a sadhu." In this way, Krishnaji Ada, who was aged and respected as a senior in the Satsang, guided the devotees on the right path by explaining to them the greatness of Shastriji Maharaj.

* * *

Krishnaji Ada constantly remained loyal to Shastriji Maharaj and did not give his signature on the resolution passed by the mandir. Soon after this incident, seven sadhus from Junagadh, led by Vignandas Swami and Yogiji Maharaj, arrived at Krishnaji Ada's house in Rajkot. When it was learnt that these sadhus had come to join Shastriji Maharaj, and that Krishnaji Ada had supported them, Ada was barred from entering the Rajkot mandir.

Due to this announcement, no sadhu could even go to Krishnaji Ada's house. Still, he continued to give his learned discourses at home. His devotion and enthusiasm for Satsang did not diminish at all despite this ugly episode.

Once, Balmukunddas Swami and his group of sadhus arrived in Rajkot from Junagadh. How could Balmukund Swami, one of the senior sadhu-disciples of Gunatitanand Swami, possibly resist the temptation of visiting Krishnaji Ada's house? He went there

with five sadhus and was very happy to meet him. They spent a long time remembering the old days before Balmukunddas Swami returned to the mandir. None at the mandir could utter a word against Balmukunddas Swami.

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Due to continuous harassment from the sadhus and as advised by Krishnaji Ada, Shastriji Maharaj had to separate from Vartal mandir in 1905 CE. In 1907 CE (Samvat 1963), Shastriji Maharaj built the first Akshar-Purushottam mandir in Bochasan and consecrated the metallic *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam. Ada now started telling all his followers to go to Bochasan. He used to say, "The Akshar-Purushottam philosophy, which had so far remained restricted to a corner, has now spread throughout the Charotar region and beyond. Therefore, those who want to talk about it openly should go to Bochasan."

Thereafter, in 1909 (Samvat 1865), a *parayan* on the Swamini Vatu scripture was conducted at Bochasan mandir in accordance with Ada's wishes. All the devotees of the Rajkot region attended these discourses. Everyone experienced divine bliss while listening to the discourses of Shastriji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami and Krishnaji Ada. A newcomer, Govind Bhakta, had come from Vadhwan. He served Krishnaji Ada with great devotion and love, and won his favour. As Ada was feeling a little unwell, he stayed in Anand for ten days. He was very pleased with the constant care and *seva* that Govind Bhakta offered and bestowed upon him his blessings. Krishnaji Ada gave much happiness to the *satsangis* of Anand and nearby places through his spiritual talks. On his return to Rajkot, he often remembered the hospitality of the devotees of Gujarat.

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Ada had earlier inspired Vignandasji, Yogiji Maharaj and five other sadhus to come to Rajkot from Junagadh. They met Ada there. Shastriji Maharaj, too, was called from Sarangpur.

This was the first historic meeting between Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. It was Ada who had arranged this historic meeting. These two sadhus had manifest on earth to propagate the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam. Ada was attacked from all sides for encouraging these sadhus, but he ignored everything. The Satsang will forever remain grateful to Ada for introducing the illustrious pair of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

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Now Krishnaji Ada was now growing old. In 1913 CE (Samvat 1969), he wished to go to Akshardham. He fell ill during the month of Shravan. In accordance with his wish a seven-day recitation of the scriptures was arranged. Telegrams were sent to Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Nirgundasji, who were all travelling in Gujarat. They were asked to reach Rajkot immediately. Ada was greatly pleased to meet Shastriji Maharaj. He said to him, "I have been waiting for you."

Krishnaji Ada had great affection for Yogiji Maharaj from the very beginning. He called Jnanji Swami (Yogiji Maharaj) near, blessed him with both hands and instructed, "Swami, always keep the company of Shastriji Maharaj and act according to his wishes."

At 2.00 a.m. on 11 October 1913 (Aso sud 11, Samvat 1969), Shastriji Maharaj and other sadhus were called from the mandir. Krishnaji Ada uttered, "Swami, Jay Swaminarayan. Now I am returning to Dham." With these words, he passed away.

Shastriji Maharaj selected a spot on the banks of the River Aji for the cremation. The cremation ground was purified by sprinkling holy water sanctified by Shriji Maharaj. Krishnaji Ada was then cremated.

Today, a small memorial shrine stands at this cremation site in honour of Krishnaji Ada. The place in Rajkot has become a place of pilgrimage for all *satsangis*.

Glossary

acharya administrative head of Ahmedabad and Vartal regions/dioceses

adad dal split black gram (urad dal); a type of edible pulse

aksharrup having become like Aksharbrahma in qualities and purity, while remaining distinct from God (Purushottam)

Annakut grand offering of a large variety of food dishes to God, especially on New Year's Day following Diwali

arti Hindu ritual of waving lighted lamps before the deity, accompanied by devotional singing

atma the conscious and indestructible eternal self or soul, distinct from body and mind

atmanishtha firm conviction and identification with oneself as the eternal *atma*, not the body

avatari the supreme source from whom all divine incarnations manifest

bati round baked wheat bread rolls, usually served with dal; a traditional Rajasthani and Gujarati food

bawa ascetic or mendicant; often used colloquially for wandering sadhus

berkho a rosary with large beads

bhagvati diksha formal initiation of a renunciate into the saffron robes of the sadhu order in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya

bhairavi rag a major raga (melodic framework) in Hindustani classical music, traditionally sung in the early morning; often used in devotional songs

bhajiya deep-fried fritters made by dipping vegetables or chillies in spiced chickpea (gram) flour batter

brahmachari one who observes *brahmacharya* (celibacy)

brahmarup having become like Aksharbrahma – free of *maya* and endowed with divine virtues – yet remaining distinct from

Purushottam

Chaturmas four holy months of the monsoon during which additional spiritual vows and austerities are observed

cheshta hymns sung before retiring to bed describing the divine form and *lilas* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

dal savoury lentil/pulse stew eaten with rice or breads

darbar royal/feudal court; also, a regional ruler's court

datan a small chewing stick (typically babul/acacia or neem) used as a toothbrush

dharmashala rest home for pilgrims

diksha spiritual initiation by a guru

dhrupad rag the oldest Hindustani vocal genre; performed in specific ragas

dudhpak sweet rice pudding made with milk, rice, and sugar

dukkad a two-headed hand drum (*abholak*)

ekantik possessing the fourfold path—dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya*, and bhakti (with *upasana*) – leading to liberation

godi devotional songs (bhajans) sung before the evening *arti*

gopi women of the cowherd community who were devotees of Shri Krishna Bhagwan

gurubhai disciples of the same guru

haveli traditional mansion

jnan true spiritual knowledge of God, the self, and reality

kal time; also personified as death – time's destructive force

kanthi double-stranded sacred necklace made of tulsi or sandalwood beads worn by devotees

kediyu Traditional short flared tunic worn by Gujarati men
kothari chief administrator of a mandir

lakh one hundred thousand

mahamantra a powerful spiritual chant

mahant head of a mandir

malvu to embrace; the act of embracing with love and affection

mangala arti The first *arti* of the day, performed at sunrise

mansi puja visualized inner worship of God performed mentally

maya the cosmic power that veils reality; causes worldly attachment/illusion

mukta liberated soul; one who has attained *moksha*

murti sacred image of God

naishthik vrat vow of eight-fold celibacy

nirdosh buddhi seeing God, guru and devotees as flawless; not finding faults

nishkami celibate; desireless; one who acts without attachment to results

pad poetic verse

paisa one-hundredth of a rupee

paramhansa highest order of renunciate; literally ‘supreme swan’, symbolizing discrimination between the eternal and temporary

parshad renunciate in white robes

parayan recitation of or discourse on sacred texts over several days

pativrata faithful, chaste

pattar wooden bowl used by sadhus for meals

pingal Gujarati prosody; the science of poetic meter and composition

prabhatiya devotional songs sung at dawn
pradakshina clockwise circumambulation of a deity or holy place
prarthana prayer – humble petition to God
prasad blessed food offered to God and then distributed to devotees
premlakshana bhakti intense, loving devotion
puri deep-fried unleavened bread

rag raga; melodic framework in Indian classical music
rajbhog arti *arti* performed after offering lunch to the deities
rajogun one of three fundamental qualities (*gunas*) of nature; characterized by activity, passion, and restlessness
raas traditional Gujarati folk dance using sticks
ras thick mango pulp/juice
rotli chapatti; roti; thin, round flatbread made from wheat flour
rotlo thick bread made from millet flour

sadguru senior sadhu
samskar mental impressions or tendencies formed by past actions and experiences
sankhya vartman vows and disciplines followed by sadhus
sankhya-yogini female renunciate who has taken vows of celibacy and service
sarangi an Indian stringed musical instrument
sarod plucked string instrument used in Hindustani classical music
Sarvamangal Stotra verses containing 1,008 auspicious names of Bhagwan Swaminarayan
satsangi one who practises satsang
shak delicacy prepared from vegetables
sud bright half of each lunar month of the Hindu calendar; waxing phase of the moon; fortnight when moon is increasing

swabhav person's nature in the form of habits formed after repeated actions, in this or past births

swadharma one's own dharma; individual duty or righteous path according to one's nature and circumstances

tamoguna one of three fundamental qualities of nature; characterized by ignorance, inertia, and darkness

thal food offered to God

upasana doctrinal understanding of God and the worship arising from it

vad dark half of each lunar month of the Hindu calendar; waning phase of the moon; fortnight when moon is decreasing

vartman vows

vatu spiritual discourse; religious sermon

vidya-varidhi literally 'ocean of knowledge'; title for a learned or distinguished scholar

yagnopavit sacred thread worn by initiated males across the chest; symbol of spiritual rebirth