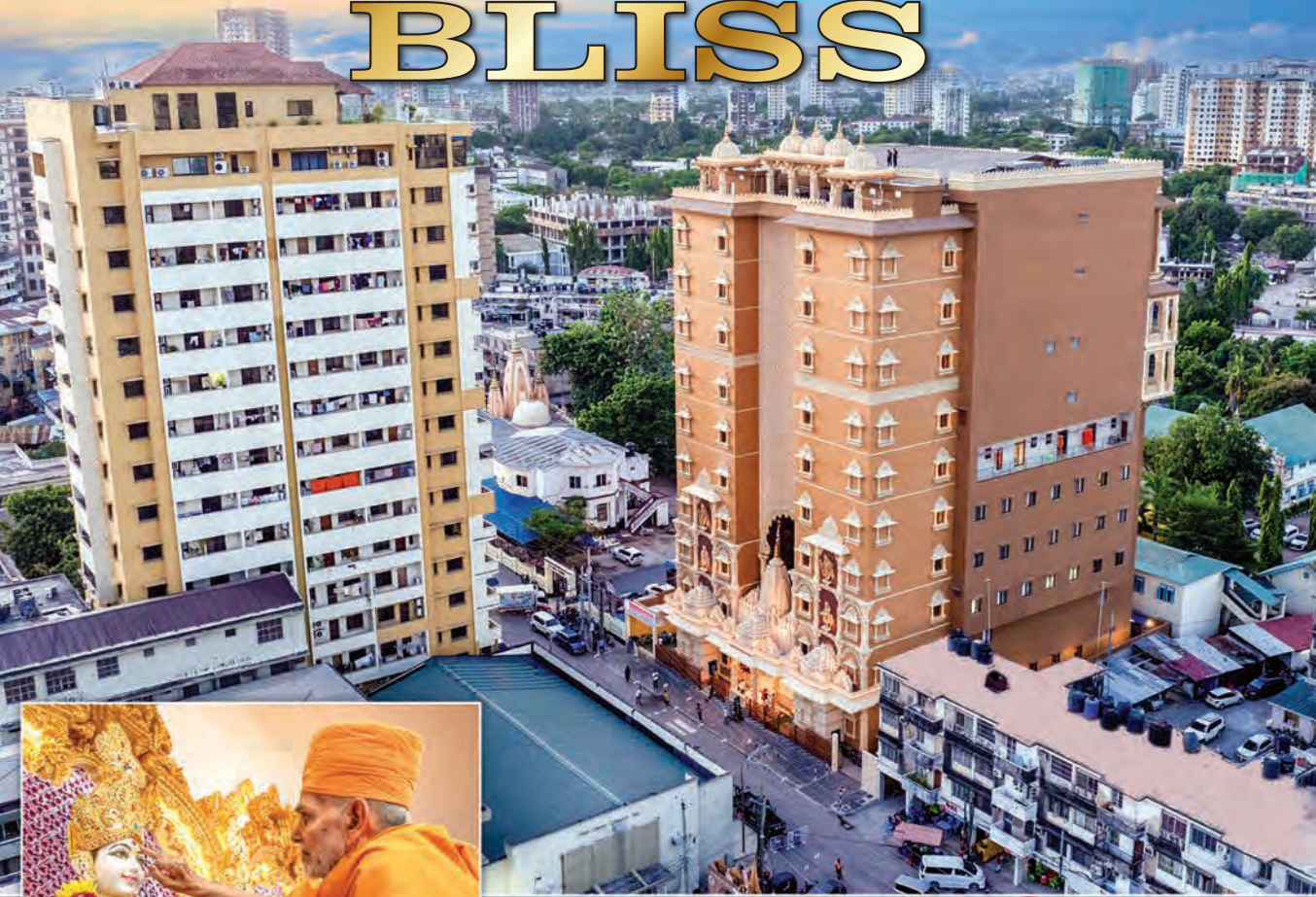
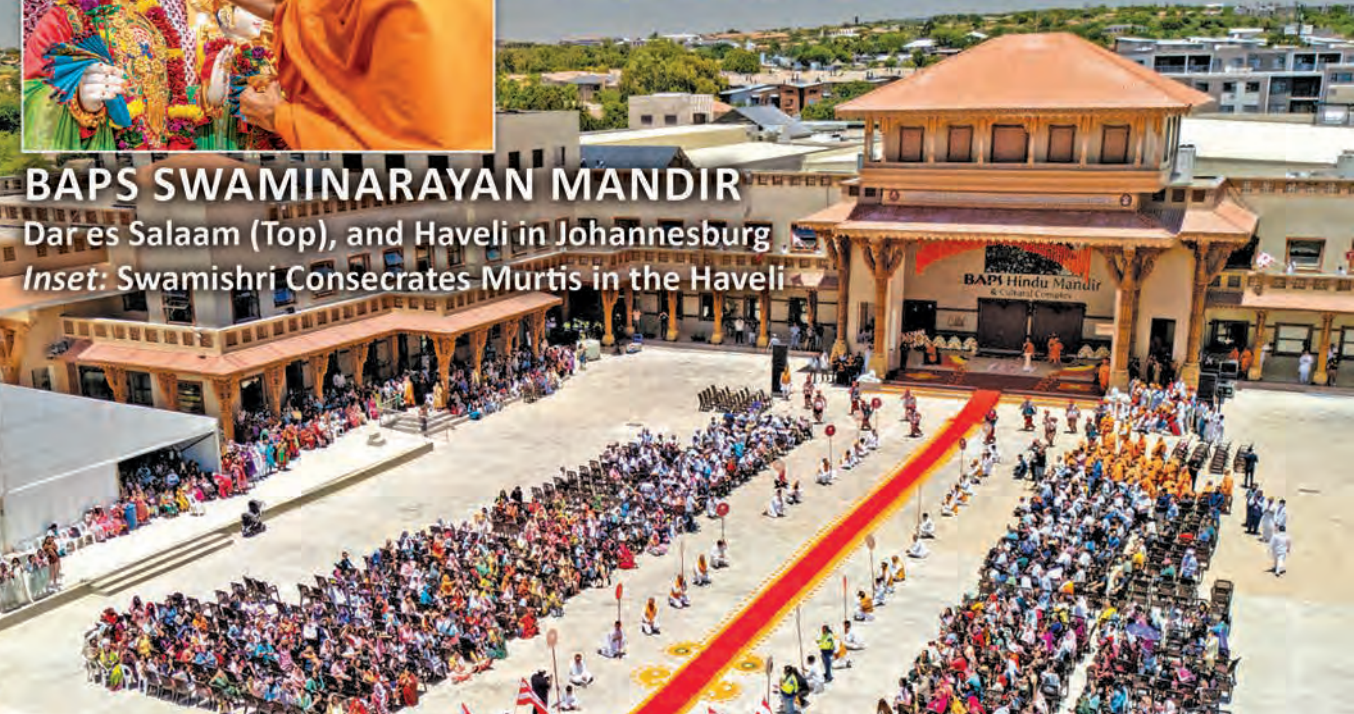


March-April 2025 Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-

# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS



**BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR**  
Dar es Salaam (Top), and Haveli in Johannesburg  
*Inset: Swamishri Consecrates Murtis in the Haveli*







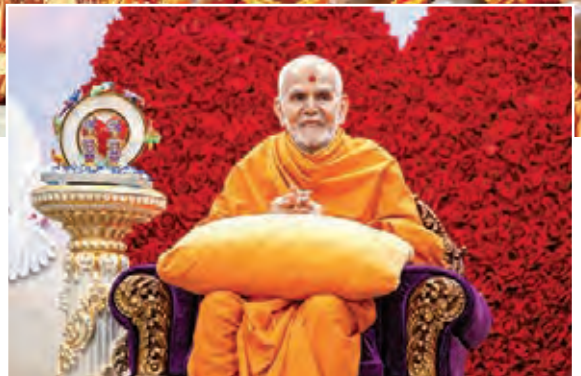
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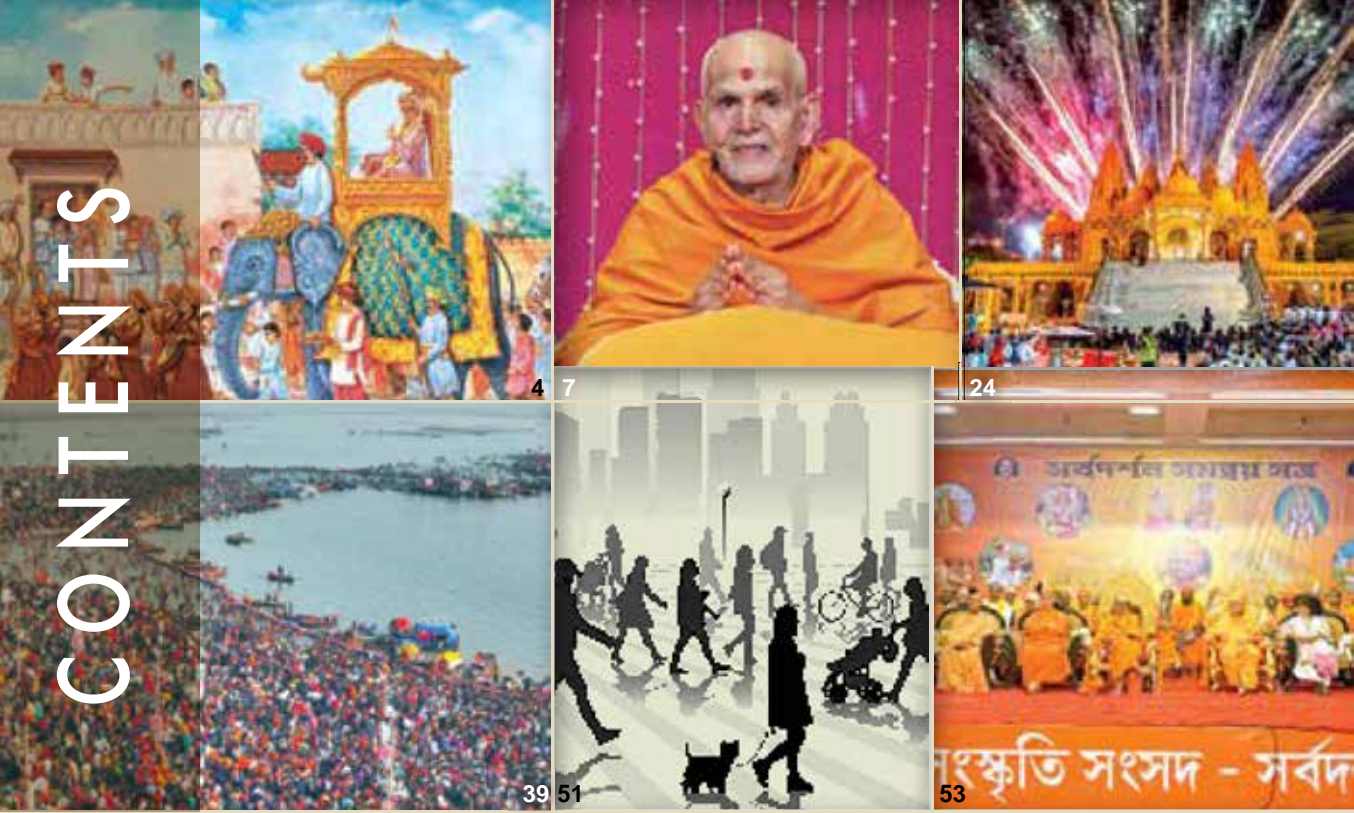
### SWAMISHRI IN KENYA AND SOUTH AFRICA

1. Assembly on the grounds of the BAPS Mandir in Nairobi, Kenya (13 January 2025).
  2. Over 150 swamis with Swamishri at the BAPS Mandir in Johannesburg, South Africa (11 February 2025).
- Inset:* Swamishri during an assembly in Nairobi (9 January 2025).





# CONTENTS



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



## SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

March–April 2025, Vol. 48, No. 2

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>4</b> Shri Hari's Tassel Mesmerizes All</p> <p><b>7</b> Mahant Swami Maharaj's Vicharan</p> <p><b>20</b> Celebrating Mahila Din</p> <p><b>21</b> A Journey of Faith</p> <p><b>23</b> Dar es Salaam Kishori Mandal Bake Sale</p> <p><b>24</b> Mahant Swami Maharaj Bestows Spiritual Bliss in Nairobi...</p> | <p><b>39</b> Maha Kumbh 2025</p> <p><b>46</b> BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham Camp at Maha Kumbh 2025</p> <p><b>51</b> The Conundrum of Modernity</p> <p><b>53</b> BAPS News</p> <p><b>61</b> New BAPS Publications</p> |
|---|--|

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

# Shri Hari's Tassel Mesmerizes All



*Shri Hari celebrates the full moon festival in Vartal. During a satsang assembly, Brahmanand Swami melodiously sings, describing the tassel on Shri Hari's pagh...*

## KARTIK PUNAM FESTIVAL IN VARTAL

There was a drastic rise in the number of devotees that had arrived in Vartal. Consequently, Shri Hari declared, "Let us all go to the large grove of mango trees on the outskirts and instruct all the devotees to reside there. We will also hold the daily satsang assemblies there."

A raised seat was prepared under a large, leafy mango tree, with a cotton stuffed and silk covered mattress and pillows as back and head rests. Shri Hari sat on the seat and met his sadhus, embracing the elderly sadhus who had come for the festival.

The devotees of Vartal had arranged meals for the guests. Shriji Maharaj praised the food cooked for him by Gangama (of Jetalpur). Whenever Gangama served food to Shri Hari she would do so with great love, as if she was serving her only child. Quite often, she would insist and place morsels in Maharaj's mouth, and that was why Maharaj called her mother.

After having his evening meal, Maharaj came and sat under the mango tree. The place was illuminated with oil torches and lamps. A question-answer session followed between Maharaj and his sadhus till midnight. Thereafter, Shri Hari retired to bed.

Next morning, on the day of Punam (full moon), Shri Hari finished his daily rituals and came to the assembly venue beneath the mango tree, where the devotees were waiting for him.

## YOUR CHHOGU (TASSEL) HAS PIERCED MY MIND

Shri Hari was dressed in white clothes, with a handkerchief in his hand and wearing a white *pagh*. The loose tassel on Shri Hari's *pagh* fluttered because of the breeze and attracted the attention of everyone. The assembly hailed the *jai* of Sahajanand Swami and stood up to honour him. Shri Hari sat on his seat and blessed all with his divine glance and smile. Subsequently, an overwhelming inner joy filled the hearts of all.

Then, Brahmanand Swami began singing in his sweet, baritone and devotional voice, describing the tassel on Shri Hari's *pagh* and the joy he experienced at his darshan, "*Tāru chhogu māre āvi ne chitt mā rahyu...*" – "Your tassel has entered and remained in my mind..." The singing was accompanied with the beats of a *dukkad* (percussion instrument) and the sound of a *sarod* (a string instrument). The rendition evoked a mesmerizing ambience. Everyone's attention was transfixed on Shri Hari's *chhogu* (tassel) and *pagh*. Shri Hari brushed his hands on his *chhogu* and commented, "The *chhogu* is *jad* (inanimate) and [my] form is *chaitanya* (animate)."

Brahmanand Swami responded, "Maharaj, everything that is associated with you is *chaitanya*, *divya* (divine) and *madhur* (sweet)."

Shri Hari merely smiled to acknowledge his



words. Then, Brahmanand Swami was further enthused and became overwhelmed by the beauty of Shri Hari's clothes and jewellery. He thus sang another bhajan. The whole assembly of swamis and devotees became absorbed and swayed to the tune and words of the bhajan. When Brahmanand Swami finished singing, Shri Hari, too, was touched by his loving devotion. He said, "Listen swamis and devotees! When one realizes Bhagwan's form in one's *atma*, then the experience of divine joy makes one oblivious to the world. You have attained that Bhagwan's form. The Vedas say that Bhagwan's form is indescribable because it is infinite, above Akshar and transcendental. In the past, many divine avatars had taken birth on earth and the devotees, out of their love and *upasana* for them, had attained their respective abodes. However, today, you have been blessed with the highest attainment, my form and bliss of my eternal Akshardham." On hearing Shri Hari reveal his supreme form and divine abode, a wave of ineffable joy engulfed the assembly. Maharaj's words dissolved their doubts and strengthened their belief and faith in him.

It was afternoon by the time the Punam festival concluded. Then, Narupant Nana arrived from Vadodara, on behalf of Maharaja Sayajirao of Vadodara, to offer an invitation to Vadodara. Shri Hari read the invitation and informed that he would come to Vadodara on Kartik *vad 3*. Narupant Nana was very pleased and took leave from Maharaj to make preparations for his arrival.

Shri Hari departed from Vartal and arrived at Sankarda. Accompanying him were Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Muktanand Swami and other swamis. There was also a large number of devotees, including, Dada Khachar, the Dharmakul, Somla Khachar, Sura Khachar, and *parshads*. Shri Hari camped for the night on a farm outside Sankarda village.

### PRINCE OF VADODARA HONOURS SHRI HARI IN CHHANI

The next day, Shri Hari departed from Sankarda

and arrived at Chhani, located on the outskirts of Vadodara. On 28 November 1825 (Kartak *vad 3*, Samvat 1882), the King of the Gaekwad kingdom sent his son, Prince Ganpat Rao, with an impressive army to Chhani village to honour Shriji Maharaj with great pomp and fanfare. As the prince approached Chhani, he saw Shri Hari astride on his mare, Manki. Instantly, Ganpat Rao got off his horse and offered prostrations to Shri Hari. On seeing him, Maharaj quickly alighted his horse and held Ganpat Rao's hand. The prince conveyed his father's pranams and respects. He then revealed, "Maharaj it is my father's command to welcome you to Vadodara with profuse honour and joy. In addition, my father has sent Narupant Nana to make whatever arrangements you desire. We have brought decorated elephants, chariots, horses and musicians for your procession through the city. You may now climb into the golden howdah on the elephant's back. Then, as per your instructions, we will help arrange for others to sit accordingly in the vehicles we have brought."

Shri Hari was happy and pleased with the king's sentiments and the prince's words. Then, Maharaj sat in the golden howdah. Muktanand Swami and Shuk Muni sat on the second elephant and Acharyas Ayodhyaprasadji and Raghuvirji sat on the third elephant. Behind the three elephants were palanquins, the king's soldiers, chariots and Shri Hari's *parshads* mounted on horses. Thereafter, the Kathi Darbars and other devotees joined the long procession.

Word had already spread in all of Vadodara that Sayajirao Gaekwad had invited Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and a royal procession would be carried out to honour and welcome him.

### SIGHT OF VADODARA CITY

The king's administrators and men had decked the entire city. The roads were cleaned, sprinkled with water and made fragrant. The king's buildings were decorated with festoons of *asopalav* leaves, oil lamps and illumined earthenware pots. The entire



route of Shri Hari's procession was decorated with flowers, *asopalav* leaves and arches made of banana trunks. The arrangements for the grand welcome reflected the king's respect and reverence for Shri Hari.

In front of the procession, various wind and percussion instrument players heralded Shri Hari's arrival. The orchestra of auspicious musical sounds drew the citizens to witness the divine spectacle. Flags symbolizing dharma fluttered high in the sky, members of a *raas* group danced vibrantly to the beats of mrudang. *Parshads* on horses circled Shri Hari to guard him.

The entire procession and Shri Hari's resplendent *murti* mesmerized the onlookers. Many had heard of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's name, Muktanand Swami's victory in a debate in Vadodara and Gopalanand Swami's display of yogic powers.

### DIVINE PROCESSION

Shri Hari's procession entered the Laheripura Gate. A vast concourse had gathered for Bhagwan Swaminarayan's darshan. Many women folk did darshan from their balconies and terraces. Some pious women welcomed Shri Hari by showering flowers made of gold and silver. Some gestured by placing their hands on the sides of their foreheads with the sentiment that nothing bad happens to him. Many women did not even blink their eyes while doing darshan of Maharaj's wonderful *murti*. Everything, from the sound of the music to the loud *jais* honouring Bhagwan Swaminarayan, impressed upon the hearts of all. The citizens thought that the annual Dashera procession arranged by King Sayajirao was undoubtedly grand, but they had never experienced such divinity and spiritual joy as in Maharaj's procession.

Shri Hari cast his glance all around him

and whoever received it was blessed with inner purity, devotion and divinity. This was Bhagwan's godliness.

### TO GRANT MOKSHA IS IN YOUR HANDS

Shri Hari's procession reached near the Rajrajeshwar Mahadev Mandir. A pious Brahmin was devoutly doing darshan of Shri Hari from a platform by the mandir. Maharaj glanced at him and the Brahmin understood that Shri Hari was calling him. He thus sprang up and ran towards Maharaj, but the *parshads* did not allow him to go through. However, Shri Hari gestured to his *parshads* and they allowed him to come to him. The Brahmin prayed humbly, "Prabhu, Shivji has sent me to meet you. Presently, *moksha* is in your's and your sadhu's hands."

Shri Hari smiled at his prayer. Narupant Nana was fanning Shri Hari. The latter told Narupant Nana, "Take this aspirant to Gopalanand Swami because he is very pious."<sup>1</sup> Thereafter, Shri Hari's procession proceeded ahead.

### MAHARAJA SAYAJI RAO HOLDS SHRI HARI'S HAND

As soon as the procession arrived at the royal palace, Maharaja Sayajirao came down the stairs of his palace. The elephant knelt down and Shri Hari stepped out of the howdah and climbed down the small ladder. Maharaja Sayajirao instantly held Maharaj's hand to support him. Then, Maharaja Sayajirao bent low, bowed to Shri Hari, took the holy dust of his feet and applied it to his head. The king honoured Maharaj with a big garland of roses while the Brahmins sang Vedic mantras. He also performed *pujan* and applied a *chandlo* and a few rice grains on his forehead. ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

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

1. The Brahmin was called Karunashankar Pandya of village Dabhoi. Later on, he pilgrimaged to all the Sampradaya's mandirs in search of inner peace. Eventually, after arriving in Junagadh, he experienced peace and divinity on doing the darshan of Gunatitanand Swami. He asked Swami, "I have visited all the mandirs, but I have experienced that satsang has become old and weak. Whereas, here the satsang is young and vibrant. Why is this so?"

Gunatitanand Swami smiled and replied, "The reason is that Bhagwan is manifest here."



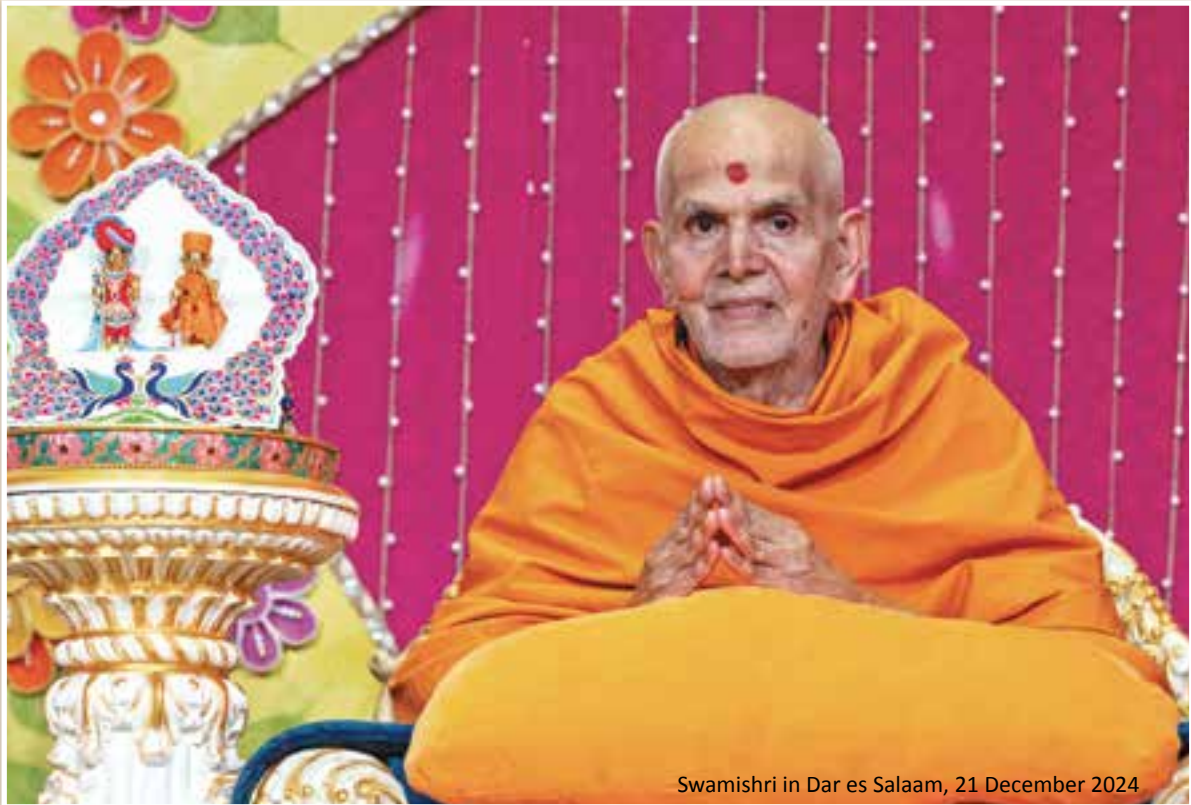


MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

# VICHARAN

14 December 2024 to 12 February 2025

Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and Johannesburg



Swamishri in Dar es Salaam, 21 December 2024

The *vicharan* report in this issue includes Swamishri's visits to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (14 to 31 December),\* Nairobi, Kenya (31 December 2024 to 28 January 2025) and Johannesburg, South Africa (28 January to 12 February 2025).

On 13 December 2024, Swamishri departed at night from Ahmedabad and landed early morning at Julius Nyerere International Airport in Dar es Salaam after a six-and-a-half hour journey by plane. The purpose of Swamishri's *vicharan* was 'Africa Rangvu Chhe', i.e. to immerse all in devotion and satsang, perform the *murti-pratishtha* rituals at the newly built mandir in Dar es Salaam, celebrate the silver jubilee festival of Nairobi mandir and to inaugurate and perform the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the newly constructed BAPS Cultural Complex in Johannesburg.

\* Edited from *The Swaminarayan Nectar*, Vol III, Issue III, 2024, magazine published by volunteers of Dar es Salaam Satsang mandal.





# MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S ARRIVAL IN DAR ES SALAAM

14 December 2024

In the serene early hours of Saturday, 14 December 2024, Mahant Swami Maharaj graced the city of Dar es Salaam with his divine presence. Arriving at Julius Nyerere International Airport at precisely 2.07 a.m. from Ahmedabad, India, Swamishri was honoured, while seated in his plane, with a majestic water salute, a tribute befitting his spiritual eminence. Following his arrival, Swamishri proceeded to the White Sands Resort, reaching at 3.30 a.m., where an atmosphere of devotion and warmth awaited him.

The reception was both heartfelt and vibrant. Enthusiastic children from the local African community performed a traditional dance, infusing the occasion with cultural richness and joy. During a brief yet profound 15-minute assembly, Swamishri gave darshan, emanating spiritual peace and bliss. He was warmly welcomed by Kothari Priyavrat Swami and other swamis, along with devotees who celebrated his arrival with deep reverence and joy.

The gathering rekindled cherished memories of Swamishri's previous visits, particularly his stay in 2019 during the *Divyam Shibir* from 8 to 19 August.

Adding to the historic significance of

Swamishri's present visit, it marked the first occasion where Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj was ceremoniously welcomed at the White Sands Resort. To honour Swamishri, three exquisite fresh flower garlands and one specially crafted garland were lovingly presented by devotees, marking a moment of profound reverence and devotion.

The White Sands Resort, which hosted Mahant Swami Maharaj for 12 unforgettable days in August 2019, once again became sanctified through his presence. Swamishri was visiting after 1,822 days since his last historic visit. The late Subashbhai Patel, who had been a devoted participant during previous visits, was fondly remembered for his contributions and devotion.

Swamishri had completed his *nitya puja* aboard the flight and so he went to sleep. The initial days of his stay, from 14 to 17 December, were dedicated to restful seclusion. Devotees eagerly anticipated the commencement of the festivities on 18 December, which promised to be a transformative period of divine blessings, spiritual rejuvenation and unparalleled grace.

The motto of Swamishri's satsang tour was, 'Africa Rangvu Chhe.' ◆



## SACRED TRANSITION

Chalan Vidhi of Swaminarayan Mandir Murtis

15 December 2024, Dar es Salaam

The Chalan Vidhi is a deeply significant ritual in Hindu tradition, marking the respectful transfer of a deity's divine presence (*prana*) from a *murti* (image) into a temporary medium, usually a sacred *kalash* (vessel). This ceremonial process is performed when a *murti* needs to be moved, replaced, renovated, or retired, ensuring that the sanctity of the deity is preserved throughout the transition.

On 15 December, a momentous Chalan Vidhi ceremony was conducted at the temporary BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Dar es Salaam by Shrutiprakash Swami and Brahmins. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Anandswarup Swami performed the sacred rituals for the *murtis* of Swaminarayan Bhagwan, Gunatitanand Swami, Radha-Krishna Bhagwan, the Guru Parampara, Hanumanji and Ganapatiji. ♦







# VISHWASHANTI MAHAYAGNA

Vedic Prayers for Peace, Protection & Global Harmony

18 December 2024, Dar es Salaam

On 18 December, a Vishwashanti Mahayagna was performed at the BAPS Swaminarayan Sports & Cultural Centre, on the occasion of the inauguration of the new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Dar es Salaam. This grand event featured approximately 90 *kunds* (sacrificial pits) and saw the participation of 1,300 *yajmans*.



Preparations for the *yagna* in Dar es Salaam had started a month earlier. A dedicated team of swamis and devotees from Mwanza and Dar es Salaam worked together to organize the event. About 20 volunteers, including both men and women, arrived in Dar es Salaam on 12 December to prepare the *kunds* and decorate them with various Vedic symbols. The entire team collaborated to ensure the success of the event, handling tasks such as *kund* setup and assembling *yagna* preparation bags and equipment.

The *yagna* started at around 8 a.m. and commenced with Anandswarup Swami performing the *pujan* of the sacred lamp.

The *yagna yajmans* were blessed with the divine *darshan* of Mahant Swami Maharaj's Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Around 11 a.m., as cool weather and gentle rains added to the serene



atmosphere, Mahant Swami Maharaj graced the *yagna shala*.

With deep reverence, the swamis performed *pujan* of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Swamishri performed the *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Swamishri was accompanied by Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Anandswarup Swami and other swamis.

In his presence, the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Radha-Krishna Bhagwan, Shri Hanumanji, Shri Ganapatiji, and the Guru Parampara were ceremonially worshipped.

Swamishri blessed the devotees, sharing inspiring words of wisdom and casting his divine glance as he passed through the aisles in his van. His blessings resonated deeply, “May all devotees from across Africa be blessed with happiness in body, mind and wealth. The fruits of the *yagna* have been granted, now what remains for us is to earn *rajipo*.”

This profound message, combined with his presence, created an unforgettable spiritual experience for everyone present. ◆





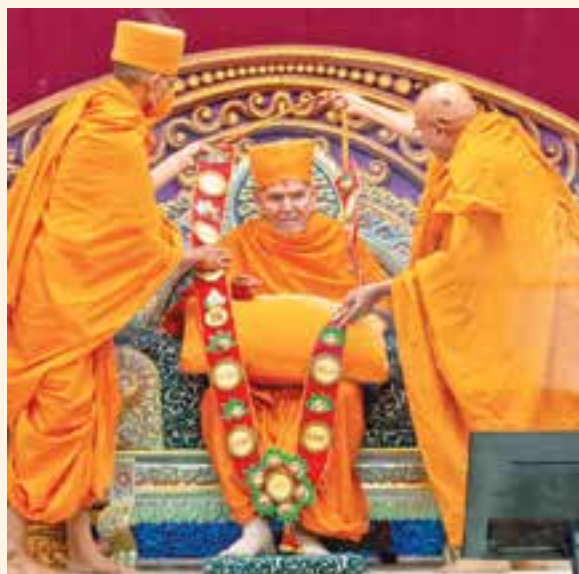


## WELCOME ASSEMBLY

18 December 2024, Dar es Salaam

### GRAND SPIRITUAL CONVERGENCE IN DAR ES SALAAM

In an extraordinary departure from Dar es Salaam's typically hot December climate, Wednesday, 18 December, unfolded with a calm and refreshing ambience. Many attributed this to the divine presence of *guruhari* Mahant Swami



Maharaj and the spiritual energy generated during the grand Vishwashanti Maha Yagna earlier that day. This evening marked Mahant Swami Maharaj's first assembly with the devotees and residents of Dar es Salaam since his arrival on 13 December. Held at the iconic BAPS Swaminarayan Sports Complex in Mikocheni, the assembly was historic for hosting the inaugural welcome of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Swamishri in the region.

The evening began with the resonant chants of the Swaminarayan *dhun* and melodious bhajans, creating a serene and spiritually uplifting atmosphere. Adding to the significance of the gathering was the sacred Akshat Tula ceremony.

### A GRAND PROCESSION OF SHRI AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM MAHARAJ

The evening's highlight was the majestic entry of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. One *palkhi* carried Mahant Swami Maharaj's Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, while the other carried the Dar es Salaam Mandir's

Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Devotees bore the *palkhis* on their shoulders amidst the harmonious sounds of traditional instruments.

On reaching the stage, Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Swamishri were honoured with the traditional *shodshopchar pujan*. Then, the trustees and devotees offered handmade chocolates, Tanzanian spices, dry fruits, fresh fruits, and cashew nuts.

### CULTURAL FUSION:

#### A UNIQUE PERFORMANCE

A captivating blend of cultural dances and African folk stunts celebrated the arrival of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj. The vibrant performance, titled ‘Karibu Santo, Karibu Bapa, Avo Padharo Mahant Swami Maharaj,’ featured young *balaks* performing African stunts and local youths showcasing Indian dance steps. This cultural fusion symbolized the unity and mutual respect within the Africa satsang.

The event was further enriched by the presence of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Anandswarup Swami.

### ENLIGHTENING DISCOURSES AND SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami delivered an

insightful discourse on the profound unity of Bhakta-Bhagwan and Atma-Paramatma, embodied in Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. He highlighted Gunatitanand Swami’s divine role as Akshar and his proclamation of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s true glory.

In his blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj emphasized the importance of *pratiti* (faith) in *murtis*. He remarked, “These *murtis* you see are none other than *sakshat* Akshar-Purushottam. Infinite universes cannot compare to Bhagwan’s magnificence, yet he descended among us to remain close. Our fortune lies in knowing them, and our gratitude is shown through adherence to *agna* and *upasana*.”

### SACRED AKSHAT TULA CEREMONY

The Akshat Tula ceremony was a moment of immense devotion and joy. Over 2,400 *akshat potlis* (small bags of unbroken rice) were lovingly prepared by devotees across Tanzania. Mahant Swami Maharaj placed the *potlis* on the *tula* to weigh Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. The ceremony concluded with an *arti*, followed by an opportunity for the devotees to participate in the *tula* and receive Swamishri’s blessings.

The memorable welcome assembly concluded with *prasad* of *dudhpak*, sanctified by Mahant Swami Maharaj, served to all the attendees. ♦





# BHAGWATI DIKSHA MAHOTSAV

21 December 2024, Dar es Salaam

On 21 December, Dar es Salaam witnessed a historic spiritual milestone – the first-ever *bhagwati diksha* ceremony. Mahant Swami Maharaj initiated the two *parshads* into the sadhu-fold. The atmosphere at the mandir was alive with devotion, excitement and collective joy – a testament to the strength of faith and commitment.

Bhagirath Bhagat, formerly raised in Dar es Salaam, was named Sadhu Paramshildas and Ruju Bhagat was named Sadhu Divyakirtidas. ♦



# GRAND NAGAR YATRA

21 December 2024, Dar es Salaam



On the morning of 21 December, the sun cast a radiant glow over Dar es Salaam. The air buzzed with excitement as devotees eagerly awaited the *nagar yatra* to commence.

The *nagar yatra* spanned 1.1 kilometres and paraded the *murtis* on the main city roads. Thereafter, they would be installed in the three principal mandir shrines.

Devotees from far and wide had gathered to partake in this spiritual celebration, travelling from cities throughout Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and Malawi. Devotees from India, the UK, USA, South Africa and Canada had also arrived to participate in and witness this historic celebration.

Excitement filled the air at 9.30 a.m. as the *nagar yatra* was about to commence. The *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Guru Parampara, Hanumanji and Ganeshji were paraded through the city in exquisitely decorated floats. The floats were meticulously designed and made by sadhus and craftsmen.

The first float, designed like a majestic peacock, had the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj. The second float carried the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Its unique design reflected the memorial shrine of Guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur. The third exquisite float was dedicated to Shri Radha-Krishna Bhagwan.

The colourful procession started, amidst cheers and joy, after senior BAPS sadhus performed the inaugural Vedic rituals. ♦



The journey began at the Patel Samaj grounds and wound through the city's landmark streets past Azam Roundabout, and then towards India Street to DTV Roundabout. It then turned onto Jamhuri Street and Zanaki Street before culminating at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir on Pramukh Swami Road.

Over a hundred BAPS sadhus walked alongside and behind the floats, their saffron robes and devotional chants exuding tranquillity to all who witnessed the procession.

Leading the procession was an African marching band, whose percussion music added rhythmic grace to the charged atmosphere. Devotees from East Africa and abroad followed the sadhus, some of whom waved the BAPS flags and others held flags commemorating the new mandir in Dar es Salaam. Women devotees were traditionally dressed, carrying the decorative *kalash* and plant pots on their heads. Both men and women of various ages were dressed in colourful, traditional attire and joyfully danced in their respective groups.

Local dance performers showcased their remarkable dance talents using stilts and other extraordinary means. BAPS youth volunteers and

the local police smoothly managed the procession.

Amidst the delightful chants of *dhun* and singing of bhajans, the local Maharashtrian marching band played percussion instruments in an engaging and captivating manner.

Young girls who had memorized the Sanskrit Satsang Diksha and Siddhant Karika verses followed in a float at the end. They sat around a *yagna kund* and devotionally recited verses from both these texts throughout the procession.

To everyone's delight, as the procession entered Pramukh Swami Road, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the procession from the fifth floor of the new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir. Sadhus, devotees, and well-wishers waved flags to express their joy while looking up to catch a glimpse of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj, who was also waving a flag from his balcony. Swamishri's darshan evoked a profound crescendo to the magnificence and divinity of the *nagar yatra*, which terminated at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir on Pramukh Swami Road at 11.45 a.m..

Over 120 sadhus and 2,000 devotees from East Africa and abroad participated in *the nagar yatra*. ♦





**BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR**

# MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV

**22 December 2024, Dar es Salaam**

On Sunday, 22 December, the spiritual heart of Dar es Salaam resonated with divine energy as a grand *murti-pratishtha* ceremony marked the opening of the newly constructed BAPS Mandir. This momentous occasion, steeped in faith, devotion and history, unfolded in the esteemed presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj, whose spiritual magnetism drew devotees from across the globe.

The mandir, a beacon of devotion for nearly five decades, traces its origins to 1977 when it began as a small centre of worship. It blossomed into a spiritual sanctuary, re-established in 1999 under the divine guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Now, in 2024, the mandir celebrated its third re-establishment, standing as a testament to the faith, growth and devotion of its followers.



## DAY OF AUSPICIOUSNESS

The opening ceremony took place on the auspicious *tithi* of Maghsar *vad* 7, under the celestial alignment of Uttara Phalguni Nakshatra – the same under which Bhagatji Maharaj was born.

The ceremony began with Vedic prayers led by Shrutiprakash Swami and other learned scholars. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan

Swami, and Anandswarup Swami performed the sacred consecration *mahapuja* ceremony.

### SACRED MURTI-PRATISHTHA

Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* ritual of the new *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj. The original *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna, formerly consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1999, were re-consecrated by Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, respectively.

The event also included the re-consecration of the *abhishek murti* of Nilkanth Varni by Anandswarup Swami.

The new marble *murtis* of Bhagatji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj were consecrated by Rajeshwar Swami, while Yogendra Swami consecrated the *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The *murtis*, adorned in regal red and yellow garments with ornate crowns, radiated divine majesty. The consecration ritual included the *nyas vidhi*, wherein the *prana* (life force) was ritually infused into each *murti* by using a *darbh shalakra*, a stick made of sacred grass.

The ritual concluded with the opening of the *murtis'* eyes using a gold-tipped point dipped in honey, followed by showing them a mirror to receive their first divine gaze.

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj addressed the assembly, emphasizing the sanctity of the

consecrated *murtis*. He clarified that the *murtis* are not mere stone figures but manifestations of God's divine presence. He urged devotees to visit the mandir daily, participate in *arti* and darshan, and make the mandir a source of spiritual enrichment. He guided that if the mandir was seen merely as a structure, its purpose would be lost, but if used as a place to connect with God, its full potential would be realized. Then, Swamishri prayed for the happiness of all who had contributed to the mandir. Mahant Swami Maharaj expressed his appreciation for the mandir with a graceful hand gesture, conveying his admiration for its beauty and sanctity.

### EVENING CELEBRATION

In the evening, the celebrations continued with a cultural programme themed, 'Hamare Mandir Hai Pehchan.' Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj urged devotees to view the mandir as their own home, encouraging *seva* with ownership, which he explained would lead to purity of life and spiritual growth.

The evening ended with a spectacular fireworks display lighting up the night sky as devotees caught a glimpse of Swamishri on the mandir balcony.

The grand opening of the Dar es Salaam BAPS Mandir marked the beginning of a new chapter for the local and global spiritual community – one filled with hope, devotion and unwavering faith. ♦







Youths present a cultural programme



Swamishri during the assembly

## DECEMBER: DAR ES SALAAM

### Sabha Programmes

#### 19: Alaukik Prapti Day

Swamishri's daily morning puja and evening *sabha* were held in the new assembly hall, Yagnapurush Sabha Mandapam.

The evening assembly was themed on 'Alaukik Prapti'. After several presentations and performances by the youths, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "We have attained the two eternal forms of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami, but since we do not have *mahima* we remain spiritually poor. Our perceptions and calculations are limited to this world and its objects. Thus, we are unable to know who Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami are. If we realize the *prapti* we have attained then we would experience joy, joy and joy."

#### 20: History of Tanzania Satsang

The evening assembly was themed on 'Grand Story of Satsang History'. A riveting and inspiring ballet-cum-drama on the history of Tanzania satsang was presented by youths. The presentation weaved incidents of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj related to the satsang in Tanzania.

Thereafter, Adarshjivan Swami asked Swamishri questions about the satsang tours of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Tanzania.

#### 23: Gunatit Satra

Swamishri kindled a lamp to inaugurate the

'Aksharbrahma Gunatit Satra', which was relayed daily online from 30 December to 13 January. Scholarly swamis of BAPS spoke for one hour, relayed from 9 to 10 p.m. (IST), on various aspects of *prapti*. The lectures were streamed on baps.org and countless devotees in India and abroad availed of the inspiring and enlightening lectures.

## SPECIAL SATSANG SABHAS

### 24 & 25: Zambia & Malawi Satsang Mandals

In the evening assemblies, the devotees of Zambia and Malawi presented programmes themed on 'Dhanya, dhanya am jivan' and 'Desh nano, Daya moti' respectively. In conclusion, Swamishri narrated satsang incidents related to both the countries through question-answer sessions.

On 24 December, Swamishri blessed 105 *balaks* who had presented several cultural programmes during Swamishri's stay in Dar es Salaam.

On 26 December, Swamishri visited and sanctified the different floors of the newly built BAPS Mandir.

### 28: Bal-Kishore Day

The evening assembly was themed 'Mission Rajipo'. Children, who had memorized Satsang Diksha and Siddhant Karika, were felicitated. Additionally, children recited Satsang Diksha *shlokas* in accordance with the *shloka* numbers selected by Swamishri. In conclusion, a few *balaks* and *kishores* asked questions related to *mukhpath* to Swamishri.



Swamishri selects a *shloka* for a *balak* to recite



A skit presentation by devotees

The *balikas* who had memorized Satsang Diksha and Siddhant Karika *shlokas* were felicitated in the Women's Day assembly.

### 29: Agna and Farewell Day

A drama, themed 'Karishye Vachanam Tav', was enacted by youths and devotees. Thereafter, as part of 'Agn Din', the audience swayed in the direction Swamishri moved the *nadachhadi* in his hand. All the devotees pledged to follow one *niyam*.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, "Everyone has realized *upasana*, but the firmer one remains in *niyams*, then Shriji Maharaj will be very happy. By following the rules given in the Shikshapatri one gains the *rajipo* of Shriji Maharaj."

Since today marked Swamishri's last satsang

*sabha*, swamis offered garlands to him on behalf of all. Then, Shri Kumarbhai Pujara, Chairman of Tanzania Satsang Mandal, thanked Swamishri, swamis and devotees for their presence and the *labh* they had given to all and the local volunteers for their immense *seva*.

Swamishri inaugurated the annual 'Swaminarayan Nectar' magazine prepared by the women's wing and published under the aegis of the Swaminarayan Research Institute.

Youths from USA, who had offered *seva* for Robbinsville Akshardham, had come for Swamishri's darshan and *labh*. Out of them Swamishri blessed 18 youths who had observed the Mahantji *vrat*. ♦

*Translation by Sadhu Vivekjiandas from a concise Gujarati report by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas*

## Home Minister of Tanzania Welcomes Swamishri in Dar es Salaam



On 17 December 2024, Honourable Hamid Masauni, the Home Minister of Tanzania, welcomed Swamishri in Dar es Salaam. In 2019, he had met Swamishri during his visit to Dar es Salaam and was deeply impressed. During his meeting, the Home Minister said, "I am very happy to meet you again. The government of Tanzania welcomes you. I was eagerly awaiting to meet you again and receive your blessings. I wish that you come here again and again, because you bless our country with more peace and wealth. Thus, you are always welcome here. The last time we met, you blessed me when I was a deputy minister and now I am the home minister. We are always ready to be of service to you."

Swamishri was very pleased with the minister's sentiments and blessed him, "I pray to God that this country progresses profusely and your health remains well." Finally, Swamishri honoured the Honourable Hamid Masauni with a flower garland.





## CELEBRATING MAHILA DIN

26 December 2024, Dar es Salaam

On 26 December 2024, Mahila Din was organized as part of the Dar es Salaam Mandir Mahotsav. It was a resounding success, beautifully themed, ‘Man ne sthir kare te mandir’ (Mandir stabilizes the mind). Women from the *mahila* wings of Tanzania (Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Arusha and Tanga), Malawi and Zambia came together in a spectacular display of unity and dedication to organize this memorable event.

The meticulously planned programme showcased an array of vibrant performances, including skits and dances. Each performance conveyed profound messages about the five pillars of mandir life: Sanskruti (Culture), Sanskar (Values), Shikshan (Education), Sanstha (Institution), and Satpurush (Aksharbrahma Guru).

The event was blessed by the esteemed presence of prominent volunteers from the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, Randesan,

India, including Neetaben Shah (Campus Coordinator), Meenaben Bhavsar (Yuvati Talim Kendra Coordinator), Rohiniben Markandbhai Patel (Randesan Sanskrit Chhatralaya Coordinator), and Shraddhaben Patel, who shared their wisdom and encouragement with the audience.

The grand finale was a spirited *karyakar* parade, held in commemoration of the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav. Volunteers from Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia proudly paraded around the venue to the uplifting tune of ‘*Yodha Yuvano Mahant Swamina*’, celebrating the energy and dedication of BAPS *karyakars*. This remarkable day stood as a shining example of devotion, unity and the transformative power of a mandir to instil peace and values in its community, whilst providing women a platform for growth and progress. ◆

# A JOURNEY OF FAITH

Dar es Salaam Mandal's balaks lead the Vedic mahapuja project



In an inspiring initiative that spanned over 80 days, the young *balaks* and *shishus* of the Dar es Salaam Mandir engaged in an extraordinary *seva* from the auspicious day of *ekadashi*, 19 May to 31 August 2024. A dedicated group of 24 *balaks* and *shishus*, along with 23 *karyakars* and *kishores*, worked tirelessly to perform 224 *mahapujas* in the homes of over 3,115 families, contributing more than 300 hours to this divine service.

Their mission was to bring the divine experience of 'Ghare Ghare Mahapuja', into the homes of devotees, offering Vedic prayers for peace, harmony and success. This unique project had a twofold purpose: to personally invite families to the upcoming Dar es Salaam Mandir Mahotsav in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj, and to raise funds for the installation of Ghanshyam Maharaj's *murti*.

## BALANCING FAITH, STUDIES AND SEVA

The commitment demonstrated by the *balaks* was truly inspiring. A typical day for them began

with an early rise at 5 a.m. After attending school, they would return home, complete their homework and attend tuition before heading to the mandir by 6 p.m. From there, they travelled to the homes of *yajmans* (hosts) to conduct the *mahapuja*, often not returning home until 8.30 p.m. After dinner, they would go to bed. Despite their demanding schedules, these *balaks* excelled in their studies while fulfilling their *seva* with the utmost dedication.

On some days, the groups performed up to nine *mahapujas* in a single day! Their determination to please Mahant Swami Maharaj was the driving force behind their extraordinary efforts.

## PREPARATION AND PERFECTION

Before embarking on this project, the 24 *balaks* and *shishus* spent three weeks, rigorously learning and memorizing the *mahapuja* in Sanskrit. Despite some of them not being fluent in Gujarati, let alone Sanskrit, they impressively mastered the prayers under the guidance of *karyakars* and swamis through Zoom classes.



On the final day of training, they had to pass a practical exam, ensuring their pronunciation and recitation were flawless.

Each *yajman*, who registered for a *mahapuja*, received an e-invitation card to share with their family and friends. The *balaks* and *karyakars* meticulously prepared *mahapuja* kits at the mandir, ensuring that the *yajmans* only had to arrange for a few items, such as fresh flowers, *thal* and *arti*. This included the *mahapuja* plates for the number of *yajman* guests (ranging from 5 to 35), which were prepared in advance by the dedicated children.

### INSPIRING STORIES OF DEVOTION

Several heart-warming stories emerged from this *seva*, showcasing the unwavering devotion of the young *balaks*.

Harshbhai Patel demonstrated remarkable determination when, despite being unwell, insisted on proceeding with the *mahapuja* rituals rather than finding a replacement at his mother's suggestion. He completed the entire ritual with enthusiasm, proving that his dedication transcended any physical ailment.

Similarly, Harikrishnabhai Gadhvi, who was visiting Dar es Salaam from India for a vacation, chose to spend his holiday in *seva* rather than sightseeing. Upon learning about the *mahapuja* project, he generously donated the amount he would have spent on his vacation to the *murti* fund.

Another inspiring *balak*, Yogirajbhai Patel, skillfully balanced his *seva* with school exams and memorizing the Satsang Diksha. Living an hour away from the mandir didn't deter him from arriving on time for every *mahapuja*. Despite his busy schedule, he also excelled academically.

Even the youngest *balak*, 8-year-old Parambhai Gandhi, exhibited extraordinary dedication. During one *mahapuja*, he lost a tooth due to a toothache, yet after a quick rinse,

he returned to complete the ritual despite the discomfort.

This project also inspired *karyakars* like Mayankbhai Patel, who, despite suffering from a slipped disk, joined the *seva*. His joyful participation, even in pain, motivated those around him and showcased the true spirit of dedication.

### YAJMAN PRASANGS: TRANSFORMING HOMES

The experience of the *yajmans* was equally transformative. Jigarbhai Patel remarked, "Their pronunciation was crystal clear, and their dedication was remarkable. Even adults struggle to recite these prayers as perfectly as they did. The atmosphere in our home felt divinely charged after the *mahapuja*."

Dhirmirbhai Patel was amazed by the linguistic prowess of the *balaks*, stating, "In a world where English dominates, it's rare to see young children fluently reciting in Sanskrit and Gujarati. I'm inspired to involve my own children in such initiatives in the future."

Vinodbhai Patel expressed his joy by saying, "It felt like Swamishri himself had come to our home in the form of these young *balaks*. The *mahapuja* was conducted so perfectly, with a deep sense of devotion. I have never experienced such a divine ritual in my lifetime."

### A PROJECT TO REMEMBER

This monumental project not only brought the community closer but also fostered a sense of unity and devotion among the children and *bal karyakars*. The atmosphere at every home was filled with joy, devotion and a feeling of divine grace. Moreover, the project instilled valuable lessons of time management, perseverance and devotion in the young participants. ♦



## Dar es Salaam Kishori Mandal *Bake Sale*

**B**APS Dar es Salaam Kishori Mandal embraced an inspiring initiative by hosting weekly bake sales to raise funds for the new *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj. When the call to participate in this significant cause arose, the *kishoris* gathered for a brainstorming session, exploring various ideas. They decided on weekly bake sales – a plan that was not only practical but also offered a steady stream of funds while engaging the community.

Each *kishori* willingly took on a role, ensuring the smooth running of the project. Specific roles were assigned, such as head of baking, head of decor and setup, and head of cash collection. These leaders were tasked with ensuring others signed up to either bring homemade baked goods, gather in groups to bake together or volunteer at the stall. The commitment was such that the *kishoris* personally bought all the necessary ingredients. This aspect not only contributed to the fundraiser but also created opportunities for bonding and camaraderie outside the usual satsang *sabhas*.

A delightful array of treats like cupcakes, doughnuts, cake pops, mini pizzas, fruit custard and biscuit pudding were prepared each week by the *kishoris*. Inspired by the *kishoris*' dedication, others outside the *mandal*, including ladies from the congregation, began contributing to the cause as well, offering items like black forest shots, vegetable puffs, cold cocoa and cookies. Beyond the baked items, the *kishoris* took full

ownership of other logistical elements, such as securing cash containers, takeaway packaging, and stall decorations. Their meticulous attention to detail ensured each week's sale ran smoothly and maintained a vibrant, welcoming atmosphere.

One particularly innovative idea was the introduction of a live waffle counter. This concept evolved from the bake sale and featured fresh, hot waffles prepared on-site after *sabha*. With help from experienced volunteers, the *kishoris* made the waffle batter, arranged toppings like chocolate, honey, crushed nuts, fruits and icing sugar, and then worked at the stall, making the waffles to order. The live waffle counter was an instant success, with long queues each week. It quickly became a highlight of the bake sale, bringing in both funds and excitement. Seeing how well-received the waffle counter was, the *kishoris* decided to expand their participation and featured their own live waffle stall at the food mela, another major event in the mandir's calendar. Their creativity, hard work, and teamwork made this bake sale initiative not just a fundraising event but a celebration of unity, devotion and community spirit. The BAPS Dar es Salaam Kishori Mandal's weekly bake sales exemplify how even small efforts, when backed by dedication and collective action, can create a meaningful impact for a cherished cause. ♦



# Mahant Swami Maharaj Bestows Spiritual Bliss in Nairobi...

31 December 2024 to 28 January 2025



Through the divine blessings of Brahaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and the tireless efforts of Nirgundas Swami, the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha spread across East Africa in the past century. Brahaswarup Yogiji Maharaj visited the region and established mandirs dedicated to the pure Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. Thereafter, Pramukh Swami Maharaj expanded this divine mission.

In 1999, Pramukh Swami Maharaj gifted the devotees of East Africa a magnificent *shikharbaddha* mandir in Nairobi. Thereafter, through the efforts of swamis and devotees satsang has grown in the surrounding regions, attracting many to immerse themselves in the nectar of satsang. Visits by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj have continued to nurture the satsang.

After becoming the guru of BAPS, Mahant Swami Maharaj visited Nairobi in 2017 and 2019, offering spiritual bliss to the devotees. During his third visit to the African continent, Swamishri graced Nairobi from 31 December

2024 to 28 January 2025 to bless the silver jubilee celebrations of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Nairobi and spiritually enrich devotees through devotion-filled events.

The following *vicharan* report offers a glimpse into the various inspiring programmes celebrated in Swamishri's divine presence.

### 31 December 2024: Arrival

Resident swamis and senior devotees welcomed Swamishri at Jomo Kenyatta Airport with garlands and joyous chants. Upon his arrival at the BAPS Mandir in Nairobi, the melodies of the renowned Yogi Marching Band of Nairobi resonated through the air. Swamishri proceeded to the sacred *charanarvind* installed in the mandir courtyard, which hold historic memories associated with Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

On the occasion of the silver jubilee celebrations of the Nairobi Mandir, Swamishri performed the *pujan* and reinstallation of these *charanarvind*.

After darshan of Thakorji, Swamishri arrived on the mandir podium. Devotees were seated throughout the mandir campus. As the Yogi Marching Band played welcome songs, Swamishri was welcomed with intricately designed garlands and a decorative shawl.

In honour of Swamishri's arrival, many devotees had observed the Mahantji Vrat – a five-day waterless fast. Swamishri showered them with heartfelt blessings.

As the *arti* of Thakorji commenced, a spectacular fireworks display lit up the sky.

### 1 January 2025: Unique Welcome by Kenya and Uganda Devotees & Youth Shibir

On 1 January, Swamishri's rest day, the devotees of Kenya and Uganda welcomed Mahant Swami Maharaj in a truly unique manner. Swamishri had given his assurance that he would be divinely present in the devotees' homes through *ghar sabha*.

Thus, under the 'Ghar Ghar Padhramani Pujan...' endeavour, devotees held a *ghar sabha* in their homes during which they performed Swamishri's *pujan* and discussed his glory. Swamishri blessed all via his audio blessings, "With Maharaj and Swami, we have performed *padhramani* in your home in a divine form. May you all regularly conduct a *ghar sabha*. Blessings that you all enjoy good health, mental peace and financial security."

Later in the day, a special youth *shibir* session was underway in the assembly hall when Swamishri unexpectedly arrived, to the unbounded joy of the participants.

The youths engaged in a Q&A session with Swamishri, during which he said, "You are all *muktas*. Your true identity is 'akshar'. You are the lion-hearted sons of Maharaj, Swami, and the Satpurush. Lions! You are great, great, great! Outwardly, you may bow, fold your hands, and follow all customs, but internally, you are lions! There is Dham and Dhama, and you are all *muktas*."



Swamishri holds a *chhadi*



Devotees during an assembly

You are Swami Bapa's beloved. That means you have already reached eternal space – Chidakash. You must embrace this with pride within."

The divine words of Swamishri were received with a resounding applause from the youths.

Swamishri further graced the large number of devotees with *samip darshan* and showered blessings upon the dedicated volunteers.

### 2 January: Welcome Assembly

The evening Welcome Assembly began with a grand *palkhi yatra* honouring Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj to the melodious tunes played by Yogi Marching Band.

*Balaks* dressed as young *rishikumars* welcomed Swamishri by reciting verses about the glory of saints from the Vedas, Upanishads, Purans, Itihasas, Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato, and compositions of devotee-poets.

In honour of Swamishri's visit, over 1,300 devotees – including children aged three to elders aged seventy-five – from 50 centres in 13 African countries had observed extra *niyams*, devotion





Swamis, children and devotees watch a skit performance

and *seva*. This included 212 devotees reading and listening to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's detailed biography, Purushottam Bolya Prite, Satsang Diksha and other shastras. Additionally, for 240 days, devotees had written down each other's virtues, compiling a virtue journal, which Swamishri sanctified.

While joyously singing the unity song, devotees held hands to form a garland of unity, all linking to Swamishri himself, indicating the Satpurush's pivotal role.

Adding to the joyous atmosphere, children, teenagers, and youths performed exuberant traditional dances to the bhajan '*Anand anand chhayo re, utsav angan ayo re...*'

In his blessings, Swamishri said, "Our attainment (*prapti*) is extraordinary, and we must keep it firm. How? Through steadfast observance of *niyams* and dharma. Bhagwan greatly cherishes *niyams*. If we uphold our *niyams* with unshakable faith, nothing can obstruct our path to Akshardham. This satsang is the fruit of all our spiritual endeavours. We must treasure it like our very life and remain resolute in our *niyams*."

### 3 January: Children's Day

The evening assembly celebrated Children's Day. Through an inspiring 'Masai of Mara' dialogue, *balaks* from various BAPS centres

in Kenya presented valuable lessons on unity and overcoming negative tendencies, drawing inspiration from the diverse wildlife and natural environment of Kenya's famous Masai Mara National Reserve.

Swamishri then blessed, "In reality, we are lions, not sheep. True lions. Roaming freely in the jungle, fearless of anything. But when we get caught in *maya*, we mistake ourselves for the body and start meowing like a cat. Let us imbibe Yogi Bapa's words: 'We are the *atma*, not the body.' Do you realize how much strength the *atma* possesses? We must see ourselves as lions, rise above *maya*, and fear no one. Our true identity is the *atma*, and the *atma* is fearless."

### 4 January: Ghar Sabha Day

The evening Ghar Sabha Day assembly was celebrated at the Jamhuri High School grounds. Cultural presentations, videos, and inspiring speeches by swamis highlighted the importance of *ghar sabha* – the ultimate solution prescribed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj for nurturing peace, harmony, and love within the home.

During a Q&A session, Swamishri emphasized, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj has given us the divine, unparalleled gift of *ghar sabha*. We must recognize its importance and conduct it regularly – if not daily, then at least twice a week. It will naturally



A skit presentation by devotees

bring happiness and peace. This is a gift from Swami Bapa, and through it, you will develop the understanding to solve all your problems.”

Earlier in the morning, at the Nairobi Mandir, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Anandswarup Swami performed the Vedic rituals to install the *murtis* of the Ram Parivar and Shiv Parivar. Swamishri performed the *arti* and offered *mantra-pushpanjali* to these *murtis*.

### 5 January: Nairobi Mandir Silver Jubilee Celebration

In 1999, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated the magnificent *shikharbaddha* BAPS Mandir in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. Over the

past 25 years, this mandir has transformed the lives of countless individuals, played a vital role in preserving Sanatan Dharma traditions and fostered Satsang across Africa.

To commemorate the mandir’s Silver Jubilee, the grand evening assembly on the vast grounds of Jamhuri High School featured a captivating cultural programme on the theme ‘Nairobi in the Presence of the Satpurush’. The inspiring journey of the BAPS Mandir in Nairobi was brought to life through compelling presentations. Additionally, local African youths performed a dance tribute to the lyrics of a Swahili bhajan. Also, on this occasion, Swamishri unveiled the book, *Nairobi in the Presence of the Satpurush*.



Youths perform a traditional dance





Swamishri observes the youths and devotees participate in an activity in the evening assembly

Among the dignitaries present were Shri Rohitbhai Vadhvana, India's Deputy High Commissioner to Kenya, prominent Kenyan industrialists and social leaders.

In his blessings to the thousands of devotees and well-wishers present, Swamishri said, "The glory of satsang is immeasurable. Maharaj has said, 'Even if one is the ruler of infinite universes, without satsang, life remains incomplete.' As we deepen our understanding of satsang's significance and uphold its disciplines, inner peace and happiness will naturally flourish."

The evening celebrations concluded with a dazzling fireworks display that illuminated Nairobi's night sky.

### **7 January: Nakuru Mandir Silver Jubilee Celebration**

During the evening assembly in Nairobi, the Silver Jubilee of the BAPS Mandir in Nakuru, Kenya, was commemorated. Established in 1999 by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the BAPS Mandir in Nakuru has been a sacred hub of Sanatan Vedic values and spiritual inspiration for the past 25 years.

This special assembly featured various cultural presentations and speeches by swamis, and also highlighted the inspiring accounts of dedicated devotees who have selflessly served the

Nakuru Mandir. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed, "This mandir [in Nakuru] has greatly enriched everyone's satsang journey. May everyone continue to firmly uphold satsang in their lives and deepen its divine impact. I pray that all the devotees of Nakuru remain spiritually fulfilled and experience true happiness in their lives."

### **9 January: Youths from the UK and Europe with Swamishri & Kishore Din**

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had instructed BAPS youths from abroad to undertake a pilgrimage to India at least once to visit sacred sites and experience the essence of Sanatan Dharma. Accordingly, BAPS Bal-Balika and Yuvak-Yuvati Mandals worldwide have been organizing such pilgrimages for years, enriching their spiritual and cultural foundations.

Recently, youths from the UK and Europe had embarked on a pilgrimage to sacred sites in Kutch and Khandesh (Maharashtra) associated with Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Shastriji Maharaj. On their return journey to London, they arrived in Nairobi for the darshan of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In a special session with Swamishri, swamis presented a detailed report of the pilgrimage and shared that the youths had performed thousands of *malas* to pray for his good health. During their

pilgrimage, the youths had also collected special keepsakes, which Swamishri sanctified. Blessing them with cherished memories and heartfelt guidance, Swamishri inspired and spiritually uplifted each participant.

In the evening assembly, as part of the Nairobi Mandir Silver Jubilee, Kishore Din was celebrated on the theme ‘May We Soar Like a Bird in Your Heart’. The *kishores* presented bhajans and other cultural performances, after which Swamishri provided spiritual guidance through a Q&A session. He emphasized the importance of steadfastness in observing *niyams* and dharma, understanding *mahima*, and strengthening one’s satsang.

### 10 January (Posh sud 11)

Today marked the Bhagwati Diksha Day of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. During Swamishri’s morning puja, sadhus offered a devotional tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj by singing bhajans honouring his divine virtues and glory.

### 11 January

In a video call with the sadhus serving at the BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham Camp at the Maha Kumbh in Prayag, Swamishri guided, “Ensure proper care and hospitality. Treat all visiting guests, sadhus, mahants, and devotees with utmost respect.” He lovingly blessed the sadhus and offered prayers for the spiritual well-being of all pilgrims attending the sacred Kumbh Mela.

### 12 January: Bhagwati Diksha & Upkar Din

After his morning puja, Swamishri gave the *bhagwati diksha* to Balbhadra Bhagat, blessing him and renaming him Nirdoshpurushdas Swami. Swamishri also gave his heartfelt blessings to the newly initiated swami’s parents and family, expressing gratitude for their dedication.

Thereafter, Swamishri performed the Vedic worship rituals of the bricks for the new BAPS Mandir in Kisumu.

In the evening assembly, devotees from Kisumu



A newly initiated swami with Swamishri

celebrated Upkar Din (Day of Gratitude) with a programme titled ‘Thank You, Swami Bapa!’ The programme highlighted:

- Swamishri’s countless benevolent deeds for devotees.
- His guidance in satsang and unwavering love showered upon all.
- Heart-touching incidents where Swamishri fulfilled his promise to come and liberate devotees in their final moments.

The presentation culminated with devotees joyfully waving flags inscribed with ‘Thank You, Swami Bapa!’ while singing a special ‘Thank You’ kirtan in unison.

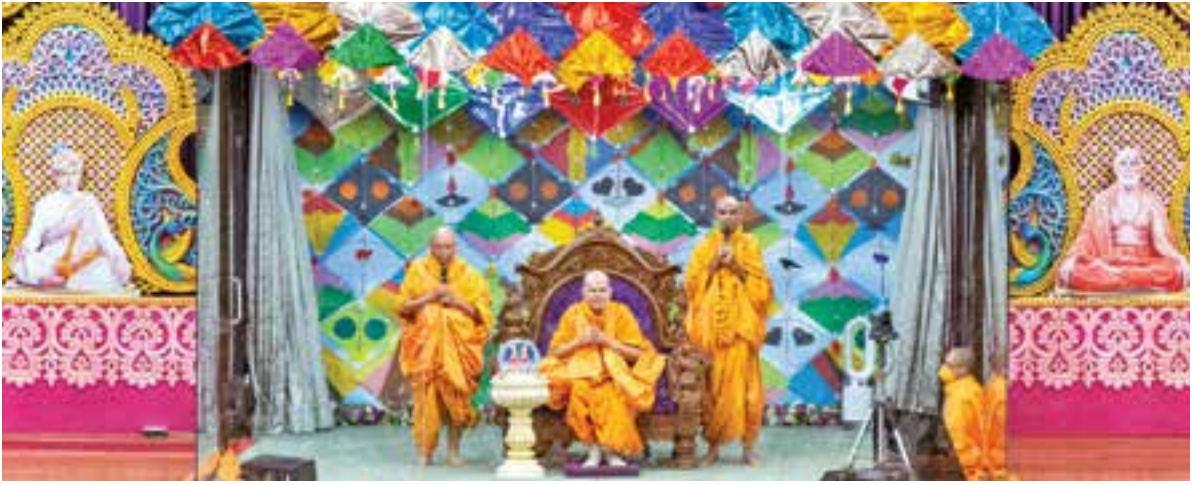
At the end, Swamishri imparted divine wisdom through a Q&A session.

### 13 January: Poshi Purnima and Shakotsav

To celebrate Poshi Purnima, the *diksha* anniversary of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, swamis sang bhajans in honour of Gunatitanand Swami during Swamishri’s morning puja.

On this auspicious day, as part of the Nairobi Mandir Silver Jubilee, a grand ‘Mandir Vandana’ programme was organized. The day also marked the conclusion of the Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Satra, presented by BAPS swamis through online discourses over the preceding fortnight.





‘Swaminarayan Hare, Sachhidanand Prabho...’ Swamishri, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Anandswarup Swami proclaim the *jholi* call

For this, swamis and devotees gathered in the mandir courtyard to participate in the evening *arti* and offer *mantra-pushpanjali*, after which the mandir was illuminated with a breathtaking fireworks display.

#### 14 January: Uttarayan-Jholi Festival

During the Uttarayan and Jholi assembly, Swamishri wrote the final Brahnavidya lesson: “What is given here shall become eternal.” Explaining, Swamishri said, “Eternal means that which will never perish. What is given here will always grow and flourish. The key is to keep strengthening and deepening this divine spirit.”

Priyavrat Swami recounted inspiring incidents of the service and dedication of devotees from across Africa. Swamishri elaborated upon the kirtan ‘*Viveki narne, em vicharine jovu...*’, Then, blessing everyone, he said, “May all devotees be blessed with favourable times and circumstances; may all be spiritually, materially, and emotionally fulfilled.”

Following this, Swamishri donned *jholis* sanctified of Pramukh Swami Maharaj over both his shoulders. Also, carrying *jholis*, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Anandswarup Swami stood to his right and left, respectively. As per tradition, Swamishri fervently hailed:

“Swaminarayan Hare... Sachchidanand Prabho!” Swamis and devotees echoed these divine words in an electrifying chorus. Then, devotees reverently and devoutly placed their heartfelt offerings into Swamishri’s *jholi*.

#### 16 January: Satpurush Day & Uganda Mandir Day

During the evening assembly, a spiritually enriching cultural presentation showcased the history and growth of Satsang in Uganda, highlighting the contributions of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Following inspiring discourses by swamis, youths engaged in a Q&A session with Swamishri, receiving profound spiritual guidance and wisdom.

#### 18 January: Siddhant Day

Siddhant Day celebrated and reinforced the divine Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

In the evening assembly, children presented the principles of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* in the form of a scriptural debate based on the Hindu shastras and history. Their enlightening and entertaining presentation deeply pleased Swamishri, who profusely blessed all the performers.

Then, Swamishri blessed, “The knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam is true, true, true! Firmly ingrain it in your soul. Shastriji Maharaj did not establish this through mere coincidence. He established the foundation and built grand mandirs. The *upasana* he established must be firmly established within you.

“This satsang is a priceless gift, so do not let it slip away carelessly. Hold on to it with unwavering faith. Cherish it as dearer than life itself. Since this *upasana* is true, you may keep drawing from it endlessly, and it will never be exhausted. There is infinite spiritual wealth within it. So, firmly adhere to this *upasana*.”



Swamishri doing darshan of holy relics of Shri Guru Parampara

### 19 January: Prapti Day

After his morning puja, Swamishri performed *pujan* of the bricks for the new BAPS mandirs being constructed in Soroti, Uganda, and Athi River, Kenya. Additionally, he gave *vartman* to infants, children, and new aspirants, initiating them into the spiritual refuge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan by imparting the *sadhana* and *ashray* mantras.

During the evening Sunday assembly, devotees from Uganda enthusiastically celebrated Prapti Day. On this occasion, Swamishri inaugurated *Ghar Sabha Curriculum*, an English translation of the Gujarati book *Ghar Sabha Sahayika*. Then, Swamishri blessed the assembly based on Nishkulanand Swami’s composition, ‘*Bhagya jagya re aj janva...*’, which highlights the profound significance of spiritual attainment.

Thereafter, Swamishri performed *arti* of the Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj *murtis* that will be consecrated in the mandirs of Kampala (Uganda) and Eldoret (Kenya).

For four consecutive days, Swamishri had lovingly accepted the devotion of devotees of Uganda, immersing them in satsang and bhakti, granting them extraordinary spiritual bliss.

### 22 January

During darshan in the mandir, Swamishri viewed the sacred relics displayed in the Rang Mandap, including:

- Letters of Shastriji Maharaj
- Letters from Nirgundas Swami, Yogiji Maharaj, Maganbhai, and Harmanbhai
- Sanctified items of Yogiji Maharaj.

Later, Swamishri performed the inauguration of a new recording studio, marking the occasion with a special inaugural recording.

### 23 January: Volunteer Appreciation Ceremony

The evening Volunteer Appreciation Ceremony honoured the selfless services of the thousands of volunteers engaged in 47 different *seva* initiatives organized by the mandir.

Amrutswarup Swami presented a detailed report on the volunteers’ dedicated efforts and narrated inspiring incidents from their selfless service.

Appreciating the tireless dedication of the *karyakars*, Swamishri blessed, “You have served with such humility and devotion that no one even notices you – this is truly commendable. May Shriji Maharaj bless you all with happiness, wealth and well-being. Though this service may seem small, its true value is immense. Offering time for





Swamishri waves the Indian flag on Republic Day

*seva* is not easy, yet you have dedicated yourselves wholeheartedly. The value of such service cannot be measured, and for that, I sincerely pray for the well-being of all.”

On this occasion, Swamishri sanctified the commemorative plaque of Jamhuri High School, which was newly built with the support of BAPS Charities.

### 24 January: Volunteers Day

BAPS volunteers are the embodiment of devotion and dedication. Such committed volunteers from satsang centres across Kenya and Uganda gathered in Nairobi to celebrate the Suvarna Karyakar Din. Swamis narrated inspiring incidents from the lives of these dedicated volunteers.

Swamishri inaugurated the publication *Chaitanya Mandir*, which details the stories of the spiritual journey of devotees resulting from their association with Nairobi mandir.

Following this, through a Q&A session, Swamishri provided insightful guidance on *seva*, further strengthening the volunteers’ commitment to their selfless service.

### 26 January: India’s Republic Day & Farewell Assembly

BAPS mandirs and satsang centres organized flag-hoisting ceremonies to celebrate India’s 76th

Republic Day, expressing their patriotism and devotion to the nation.

In the morning, at the BAPS Mandir in Nairobi, a flag-hoisting ceremony was also held in the divine presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj, BAPS swamis and devotees, who paid tribute to the nation with deep reverence and patriotism.

### Farewell Assembly

For four weeks, Mahant Swami Maharaj had blessed devotees and well-wishers with his divine presence and discourses in Nairobi.

Thousands of devotees gathered for the evening farewell assembly, themed “Stay With Us, Mahant Swami...” Various devotional presentations were made by devotees of East Africa. As a symbol of their unbreakable spiritual bond, a long sacred thread (*nadachhadi*) was passed through the assembly and finally presented to Swamishri, allowing everyone to experience his divine association, while swamis sang the heartfelt kirtan: “*Pyare tori mori preet na chhute re...*”

Accepting everyone’s devotion and heartfelt emotions, Swamishri expressed, “By the grace of Bhagwan, we have given you all joy, but you have given us immeasurable happiness! We exist because of you. It is mutual. In short, you have all contributed immensely, making great efforts to accomplish this work. And it will only continue to grow further.”

On this occasion, Swamishri sanctified the African continent on a world map. After his stays in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, Mahant Swami Maharaj departed for Johannesburg, South Africa, on 28 January.

### SWAMISHRI IN JOHANNESBURG

Nearly a century ago, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj blessed Africa, foretelling the grand expansion of Satsang on this continent. Inspired by this divine vision, a handful of dedicated devotees from Gujarat migrated to



Swamishri during an assembly, Johannesburg

Africa for business, sowing the first seeds of the Swaminarayan Satsang here.

These early seeds of devotion were nurtured by Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who illuminated this land with dharma and spirituality. With the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, and through the selfless service of devotees, Pramukh Swami Maharaj established BAPS mandirs in key cities across East and South Africa, spreading the divine light of spirituality.

The mandirs, rooted in the Vedic Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan tradition of Sanatan Dharma, have instilled timeless Hindu values among devotees and well-wishers. As a result, the vibrancy of satsang and devotion has continued to blossom.

In 1988, Pramukh Swami Maharaj resolved to establish a mandir in Johannesburg, South Africa's city of gold. Subsequently, on 22 September 1991, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated a mandir in the Mayfair suburb. Thereafter, as the Indian community in this area gradually expanded, the Satsang community also flourished, and the number of devotees grew significantly. To accommodate for this growth, Pramukh Swami Maharaj planted the seed for a larger mandir.

In accordance with this vision, on 25 March 2017, Mahant Swami Maharaj laid the foundation stone to mark the auspicious beginning of the



Swamishri honoured with a garland, Johannesburg

new mandir complex on the land acquired along the Johannesburg-Lenasia Highway in the North Riding area.

Since then, with the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj, and through the efforts of the resident swamis and local devotees the first phase of BAPS Hindu Mandir Complex has been successfully completed.

To inaugurate the newly built BAPS Haveli and perform the *murti-pratishtha*, Mahant Swami Maharaj remained in Johannesburg from 28 January to 11 February 2025.

The following is an overview of this historic visit.

### 28 January: Grand Welcome

Joyous swamis and devotees welcomed Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Mahant Swami





Swamishri and senior swamis perform the *yagna arti*

Maharaj upon their arrival at the mandir premises in Johannesburg.

Youths of South Africa played soulful music and enthusiastically performed a traditional devotional dance, offering their heartfelt homage to God and guru. Swamis and devotees presented national emblems of South Africa to welcome Swamishri.

Swamishri blessed, “The elders and devotees here have profound devotion within. Your deep faith has drawn all the swamis here. Jai Swaminarayan.”

Swamishri also blessed the devotees from other parts of South Africa and Botswana who had observed fasts and other austerities to express their devotion and to welcome him.

Then, Swamishri ceremoniously inaugurated the newly built BAPS Cultural Complex (Haveli). The doors of the Haveli were opened and Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj was ceremoniously welcomed inside as the atmosphere reverberated with joyous chants.

This welcome assembly was not just an inauguration ceremony of a cultural complex – it was the culmination of years of heartfelt prayers, selfless services, and unwavering faith of thousands of devotees in South Africa.

### 30 January: Welcome Assembly

The grand welcome assembly in the evening commenced with a vibrant devotional dance performance by around 60 children and youths, set to the lyrics of a joyous welcome bhajan. Following this, through various presentations and heartfelt offerings devotees welcomed and honoured Swamishri.

To extend an official welcome on behalf of the nation, Vice President of South Africa, Hon. Paul Mashatile, graced the welcome assembly, accompanied by other dignitaries and esteemed guests. Swamishri bestowed divine blessings upon all, offering prayers for their progress and well-being.

### 31 January: Vishwashanti Mahayagna & Community Day

From early morning, devotees eagerly gathered in the *yagna* hall to participate in the grand Vishwashanti Mahayagna, as part of the Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav. Swamishri arrived and formally initiated the *yagna* by invoking Agnidev into the main *yagna kund*. The sacred fire, kindled on the banks of the Limpopo River at the spot under Beitbridge sanctified by Yogiji Maharaj, was ceremoniously placed by Swamishri in the *yagna kund*.



*Nagar yatra* through the streets of Johannesburg

Along with Swamishri, over 200 swamis and hundreds of devotees offered oblations into the sacred fire with prayers for world peace and prosperity. Thousands of devotees and well-wishers witnessed this auspicious *yagna* which continued for eleven days.

On this occasion, Swamishri blessed, “We have all been eagerly waiting for this *murti-pratishtha*, and now that moment has arrived. Everyone is overjoyed, and the *murtis* are exquisitely divine. Therefore, let us all engage in their daily worship and darshan with utmost devotion. The air is filled with bliss and divine celebration. The joy in our hearts is beyond words and cannot even be expressed. Those who partake in this eleven-day *yagna* will attain the fruits of Akshardham, and both their spiritual and worldly wishes will be fulfilled.”

In the evening Community Day assembly, representatives of various communities showcased their devotion and cultural heritage through musical and artistic performances. On behalf of all the participating communities, swamis honoured Swamishri with flower garlands and the distinguished guests shared their heartfelt sentiments through speeches.

Swamishri officially inaugurated the BAPS Cultural Complex by lighting a ceremonial lamp.

Blessing the assembly, he said, “Today, I am overjoyed to see people of different faiths and communities gathered here in unity. On behalf of the BAPS family, I express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you. We deeply appreciate your support, goodwill, generosity, and friendship. Pramukh Swami Maharaj built this mandir and inspired countless others to bring communities together in harmony and dialogue.

“Our guru, Yogiji Maharaj, taught us, ‘May Bhagwan do good for all.’ If we wish well for all, our unity will grow and extend to every individual. We pray for the welfare of all, and we sincerely wish that every person experiences inner peace and joy.”

Swamishri also inaugurated the new Bengali publications published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

### **1 February: Shobha Yatra & Yagnapurush Day**

As part of the Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav, a magnificent *nagar yatra* was held to honour the murtis to be consecrated. The procession featured beautifully adorned chariots carrying the divine murtis. The grand procession commenced from Sandown High School, covering a four-kilometre route before returning to the same location. The *nagar yatra* gracefully proceeded on the public





Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals

streets of Johannesburg and was welcomed by all with deep reverence and devotion.

In the evening Yagnapurush Day assembly, heartfelt tributes were offered to Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj through inspiring performances. Local African youths also presented cultural performances, offering their heartfelt respect and admiration for the mandir.

Following speeches by dignitaries, Swamishri, in his blessings, talked about the glory of Shastriji Maharaj and his divine contributions.

## 2 February: Murti-Pratishtha

Today was Vasant Panchami (Maha *sud* 5); it is the day on which Bhagwan Swaminarayan first revealed the Shikshapatri and also the birthday of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, the founder of BAPS. On this 160th birth anniversary of Shastriji Maharaj, Swamishri performed the sacred *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* in the BAPS Haveli.

The newly built BAPS Cultural Complex, the first phase of the grand BAPS Mandir Complex envisioned by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, stood in its full splendour, adorned beautifully for this momentous event. Thousands of devotees and swamis from across the world had gathered to witness the sacred *murti-pratishtha* ceremony.

In the grand assembly hall, the divine *murtis*

of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Ram-Sita-Hanuman, Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganesh, Shri Venkatesh Balaji, and Shri Murugan (Kartikeya), along with the Guru Parampara, had been ceremoniously placed in a golden *sinhasan*.

At the designated time, Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived to perform the *pratishtha* rituals, taking his seat before the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, while senior swamis performed the rituals for the other *murtis*. Swamis and pandits recited the sacred Vedic mantras as part of the *pratishtha* rituals.

In his blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj expressed, “With immense grace, Shriji Maharaj manifest in this universe. That is why we experience such divine joy and bliss today. Shriji Maharaj’s boundless grace has expanded Satsang everywhere, even in Western countries. As a result, devotees and swamis around the world are immersed in divine happiness.”

Then, Swamishri offered an *annakut* to Thakorji and performed the sacred *arti*.

In the evening, a grand assembly to celebrate the haveli inauguration was held in the presence of distinguished guests. Through various presentations, heartfelt gratitude was expressed to Swamishri. All the swamis and devotees who had contributed to the construction of the haveli were also honoured.

In his blessings, Swamishri recalled how Shastriji Maharaj had endured immense hardships and opposition but remained steadfast in establishing the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* and constructing mandirs. By sharing these divine incidents on Shastriji Maharaj’s birth anniversary, Swamishri expressed his guru bhakti.

For this auspicious day, over a period of three months, 720 women devotees from South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe had lovingly prepared a 22.3-foot-long sesame garland. The resident swamis of Africa honoured Swamishri

with this garland, symbolizing devotion and selfless service to guru. A total of 1,250 families had contributed a fistful of sesame seeds, which were strung together in 9,000 strands to make this garland. Swamishri blessed everyone for their devotion.

On this occasion, Swamishri also inaugurated the two-volume *Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj: Life and Work*, an English translation of Shastriji Maharaj's detailed biography, and the Swahili translation of Satsang Diksha.

#### 4 February: Kishore Din

The evening Kishore Din assembly featured special presentations by *kishores*, centred around the spiritual guidance given by Swamishri in a letter written from Bochasan in 2013.

Based on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's motto, 'In the joy of others lies our own' and Swamishri's letter from 2013, all *kishores* and *kishoris* had written heartfelt prayers for others and offered them to Swamishri. A special garland of these prayers, representing the devotion of *kishores* and *kishoris* from across South Africa, was presented to Swamishri by Anandswarup Swami. Swamishri also sanctified the diary of prayers and wrote blessings in it: "See divinity in all."

Guiding the youths through a Q&A session, Swamishri shared profound spiritual insights: "Know Shriji Maharaj as the all-doer. Not even a dry leaf can move without his will. Keep this firm in your mind. Shriji Maharaj has given us *agna* and *upasana*. Your *upasana* is firm, but sometimes *agna* weakens. Therefore, remain firm in observing *agna*, and sincerely uphold *niyams* and dharma. Everything is included in *niyams* and dharma. If you follow *agna* steadfastly, you will experience true joy and fulfilment."

As an extraordinary offering of devotion, the *kishores* and *kishoris* of South Africa had created a stunning artwork of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj using 16,400 glass



Swamishri showers rice grains on the bricks

bottles. Swamishri expressed immense joy and appreciation on seeing this breathtaking bottle artwork.

#### 6 February: Bhakti Din

On this sacred occasion of Bhakti Din, thousands of devotees expressed their heartfelt devotion by performing the *sakar tula* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

#### 7 February: Children's Day

The evening Bal-Balika Din (Children's Day) assembly featured interactive dialogues, skits, and cultural performances. Children who had memorized the Satsang Diksha shastra were honoured with certificates and mementoes.

On this occasion, Swamishri bestowed divine blessings upon all the children and the *bal karyakars*.

#### 8 February: Consecration of Bricks for New Mandir

On the auspicious day of Jaya Ekadashi, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the sacred *pujan* of the bricks for the new BAPS Hindu Mandir in Johannesburg. Swamishri also sanctified the blueprint of the new mandir by showering flowers on it. Then, Swamishri blessed





Swamis and devotees joyously being drenched with coloured water by Swamishri during the Pushpadolotsav celebration

everyone that the mandir be completed as soon as possible. Thereafter, Swamishri placed his holy feet on the very spot where the *murtis* of the central sanctum will be placed.

After the rituals, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Anandswarup Swami honoured Swamishri with a garland of Protea, the national flower of South Africa.

In the evening, BAPS swamis presented a melodious kirtan *aradhana* of soulful bhajans and poetic compositions accompanied by a variety of musical instruments.

### 9 February: Symbolic Pushpadolotsav

A large number of devotees and well-wishers gathered on the premises of the BAPS Cultural Complex for the memorable symbolic Pushpadolotsav celebrated, the first-ever in the presence of Swamishri on South African soil.

After a series of engrossing presentations, Swamishri blessed the assembly with his divine words. He then performed *pujan* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and ceremoniously sprayed them with saffron-scented water. Following this, Swamishri sprayed the sanctified

coloured water upon the swamis and devotees. Swamishri gently swung the ornate *pichkaris* (sprays) arranged along the edge of the stage from side to side to shower streams of coloured water over the devotees, who all rejoiced with spiritual delight and heartfelt gratitude for this rare and divine opportunity.

During his two months in Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and Johannesburg Swamishri granted spiritual bliss upon and strengthened the unwavering faith in the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* in devotees of all ages.

On 11 February 2025, Swamishri departed for Melbourne, Australia. ◆

*Sadhu Amrutvijaydas*

*(Translation of selected excerpts from the Gujarati report written by Brahmavatsaldas Swami)*

# MAHA KUMBH 2025

**Sacred Confluence of Devotion, Cosmic Order  
and Timeless Traditions in Prayagraj  
13 January to 26 February 2025**

**T**he recent Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, revered as the largest spiritual congregation on Earth, was a confluence of faith, unity, celestial alignments and sacred traditions. It was where millions united in devotion, swamis and sannyasis engaged in scriptural sermons and dialogues, and seekers immersed themselves in the purifying dip at the sacred confluence of Rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. Rooted in Sanatan Dharma, the Maha Kumbh was more than just a mega event, in which 66.3 crore devotees took the holy dip over a period of 45 days, from 14 January to 26 February 2025.

This grand congregation brought together millions in search of divine connection, where every drop at the confluence was sacred and divine and every dip was believed to dissolve sins and grant *moksha*. At the Maha Kumbh,

spirituality was interwoven into every ritual, prayer and sacred offering, creating an awe-inspiring panorama of devotion and faith. The radiance of Sanatan Dharma illuminated every corner, making it a sacred spectacle that cut through gender, generation, class and race. A very large number of youths from many parts of India had come to take the holy dip.

## **UNPARALLELED IN SCALE: THE LARGEST HUMAN GATHERING**

The Maha Kumbh drew millions from across the globe. The 2013 Prayagraj Kumbh witnessed a record-breaking 12 to 13 crore devotees over a month, earning a place in the *Guinness World Records*. The figures for Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj were staggering, surpassing the combined populations of the United States, Canada and Russia. In addition, if one were to





rank the Maha Kumbh as a country, with respect to the number of people who attended, then it would stand after India and China.

The Uttar Pradesh state government's meticulous planning and Herculean efforts in creating a 32 km<sup>2</sup> spiritual township was most praiseworthy. The township had thousands of Hindu *sampradayas*, which had set up spiritual camps (*shivirs*) vibrant with devotion and discourses.

### DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE KUMBH

The sacred origins of Kumbh trace back to the legend of the Samudra Manthan, the churning of the cosmic ocean, after which the devas (gods) and asuras (demons) fought for the *amrut* (nectar of immortality). As Indra's son Jayant carried the sacred *kumbh* (pot) of *amrut*, a battle with the asuras ensued for 12 days, during which drops of nectar fell at four locations – Prayagraj, Haridwar, Nashik and Ujjain. The responsibility of protecting this pot was placed upon the Sun, Moon and Jupiter, and hence, the Kumbh Mela is celebrated based on their celestial alignment.

Though the Puranas do not explicitly mention

the Kumbh Mela, the tradition has evolved over centuries through sacred oral traditions and astronomical calculations.

### FREQUENCY AND TYPES OF KUMBH

The Kumbh Mela follows a precise astronomical cycle rather than occurring at fixed intervals. There are three types of Kumbh:

- Purna Kumbh (Full Kumbh): Every 12 years, rotating between the four locations.
- Ardha Kumbh (Half Kumbh): Every 6 years, held only in Prayagraj and Haridwar.
- Maha Kumbh: Once every 144 years, celebrated only in Prayagraj.

Contrary to common belief, the Kumbh Mela is not held every three years. Instead, the gaps between them are determined by planetary alignments.

Additionally, Chinese traveller Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) recorded a mass spiritual gathering in the 7th century during King Harshavardhan's reign, which is believed to be an early reference to the Kumbh Mela.

### THE AKHADAS: DEFENDERS OF DHARMA

Akhadas are monastic orders of ascetics, first





organized by Adi Shankaracharya in the 7th century to protect mandirs and preserve Sanatan Dharma. There are 13 main *akhadas*:

- 7 Shaiv Akhadas (followers of Shiva)
- 3 Vaishnav Akhadas (followers of Vishnu)
- 3 Udasin Akhadas (ascetic monks, including Sikh saints).

The Juna Akhadas of Varanasi is the largest, with over 5 lakh sadhus. The Kinnar Akhada, introduced in 2019, provides representation for transgender ascetics. During the Kumbh Mela, the government allocates land to these *akhadas* and many other Sanatan religious organizations, where they conduct *yagnas*, mantra *japs*, *diksha* initiations, and scriptural discussions, and other devotional activities.

### SPIRITUAL LANDMARKS AND CAMPS

The Maha Kumbh 2025 offered devotees a rare opportunity to experience the spiritual essence of India’s most revered religious organizations, all within the sacred grounds of Prayagraj. Across the vast 25-sector expanse of the Maha Kumbh Mela, various religious institutions, spiritual leaders and ashrams established elaborate camps and mandir replicas, transforming the site into a vibrant spiritual township. A few of them are as follows:

- **Sector 1:** A replica of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir, offered devotees a chance to experience the sanctity of the newly inaugurated temple at Shri Ram Janmabhoomi.
- **Sector 6:** Darshan of 12 Shivalings made of *rudraksh*, represented the sacred Jyotirlings. The BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham Camp was a beacon of spiritual wisdom and devotion. The Tirupati Balaji Mandir allowed pilgrims to experience the divine aura of Bhagwan Venkateshwar. Netra Kumbh, a free eye camp run by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). A camp by Pujya Rambhadracharya Ji Maharaj, a revered scholar and religious leader, included a large assembly hall and *yagnashala*.
- **Sector 7:** A magnificent chariot of Ma Kamakhya, honouring the revered Shakti Peeth of Assam.
- **Sector 9:** A replica of Kedarnath, brought the essence of the sacred Himalayan shrine to the Maha Kumbh.
- **Sector 9:** Camp of Pujya Kailashanand Giri Maharaj, a distinguished spiritual guru.
- **Sector 9:** Divya Jyoti Jagrati Sansthan, dedicated to spreading Vedic wisdom and self-realization.
- **Sector 18:** A camp of Pujya Acharya





Avdheshanand Giri Ji Maharaj, the Mahamandaleshwar of Juna Akhadas and a prominent leader of Hinduism.

■ **Sector 19:** ISKCON camp and *bhandara*, where devotees could listen to kirtans, Bhagavad Gita discourses, and partake of *prasad*.

From grand religious congregations to serene meditation spaces, the Maha Kumbh was a living testimony to India's rich spiritual heritage and the enduring faith of millions.

#### FOUR PRINCIPAL HOLY DIPS (SNAN)

The Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad determined the dates for Shahi Snan (Royal Bath), where sadhus bathed first, followed by other pilgrims and devotees. The four most significant bathing dates were:

1. Makar Sankranti (First Shahi Snan) on 14 January.
2. Mauni Amavasya (Pradhan Snan, the most significant Snan) on 29 January.
3. Vasant Panchami, Maghi Purnima on 3 February.
4. Maha Shivratri on 26 February.

#### KALPAVAS TRADITION

During the Kumbh Mela, hundreds of

devout participants, known as Kalpavasis, undertook a month-long spiritual retreat called Kalpavas. From Posh Purnima (13 January) to Maghi Purnima (12 February), they resided at the Kumbh Mela site, leading a disciplined and minimalist lifestyle. Their daily routine included an early morning bath in the River Ganga, meditation, scripture recitation, and consumption of simple, sattvic meals cooked by themselves. The Kalpavasis slept in tents laid with straw and observed celibacy.

#### WORLD'S LARGEST RELIGIOUS GATHERING

Commencing on 13 January and concluding on 26 February 2025, the Maha Kumbh Mela was the largest religious event in the world. To accommodate the unprecedented influx, Uttar Pradesh government established a temporary city on the banks of River Ganga spanning 4,000 hectares, with 25 sectors, equipped with 150,000 tents, *mandaps* and other facilities.

#### ECONOMIC IMPACT

The Kumbh not only showcased spiritual devotion, but also significantly boosted the local economy. The influx of pilgrims and tourists stimulated various sectors, including hospitality,



transportation and retail, underscoring the event's multifaceted importance.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT**

With millions of pilgrims scheduled to take ritual baths, pollution concerns for the Ganga and Yamuna rivers were considered and resolved. Managing an event of such magnitude necessitated meticulous environmental planning. The organizers implemented extensive measures to ensure sanitation, waste management and preservation of the sacred rivers' sanctity.

### **A COMMITMENT TO HEALTH AND SAFETY**

The Maha Kumbh Nagar administration ensured healthcare services for the millions of devotees who attended the Maha Kumbh. To provide a safe and secure pilgrimage experience, extensive medical facilities were deployed across the township, including:

- 13 temporary clinics and 10 first-aid posts
- 125 road ambulances
- 17 river ambulances
- 1 air ambulance.

### **SECURITY AND SAFETY MEASURES**

The Maha Kumbh was safeguarded

with comprehensive security arrangements, ensuring a safe and seamless experience for millions of pilgrims. Extensive measures were implemented, including:

- 3 Jal Police Stations and 18 Control Rooms for round-the-clock vigilance.
- 4,300 fire hydrants and 50 fire stations to ensure fire safety.
- 50 watchtowers monitored every corner of the event.
- To ensure the safety of pilgrims, 37,000 police and security personnel and AI-powered surveillance systems were deployed.
- Modern infrastructure enhancements, including efficient transportation networks and upgraded public facilities were implemented to facilitate seamless movement and accessibility.

### **TECHNOLOGICAL INTEGRATION**

Embracing modernity, the Kumbh Mela had incorporated technology to enhance the pilgrim experience. Innovations such as mobile applications for navigation, real-time updates, and digital payment systems had been introduced for convenience.





### **CULTURAL CONFLUENCE**

Beyond its religious significance, the Maha Kumbh Mela served as a melting pot of cultures. Attendees from various Indian states, countries and backgrounds converged, fostering intercultural dialogues, artistic expressions, and a shared sense of humanity, thereby enriching the festival's universal appeal.

### **CONCEPT OF TEMPORARY TOWNSHIP**

The Kumbh Mela transformed the dry Ganga bed into a fully functional township with well-planned roads, sanitation, electricity and water supplies, despite being temporary. This aspect attracted urban planners who studied the festival's logistics as a model for disaster management and large-scale human congregation management.

### **MASSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR HYGIENE**

The Maha Kumbh, which expected over 500 million pilgrims, implemented extensive sanitation facilities, including 28,000 toilets, 20,000 urinals and 20,000 dustbins to ensure cleanliness across the grounds.

Over 3.77 million liner bags were distributed for waste segregation, promoting recycling and

eco-friendly practices. 'Ganga Seva Doots' ensured swift removal of waste from the sacred waters.

### **GLOBAL ACADEMIC INTEREST IN MAHA KUMBH MELA**

The Maha Kumbh Mela attracted leading institutions like Harvard, Stanford, London School of Economics, AIIMS, IITs and IIMs, which aimed to study various aspects of the event, including its socio-economic impact, crowd management and cultural significance.

#### **Key Research Areas**

- **Economic Impact:** Assessed tourist spending and financial outcomes.
- **Crowd Management:** Analyzed strategies for handling massive gatherings.
- **Sanitation & Waste Management:** Evaluated sustainable practices.
- **Cultural and Anthropological Studies:** Examined traditions and social interactions.
- **Food Distribution Chains:** Investigated logistics behind feeding millions.

### **SEAMLESSLY MANAGED SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE**

Pilgrims and swamis alike praised the smooth arrangements, robust security and well-organized

management at the Maha Kumbh. With the dedicated efforts of the Uttar Pradesh Government and UP Police, every sacred dip at the Triveni Sangam remained a safe and enriching experience.

### GLOBAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

The event attracted international visitors from countries like South Korea, Japan, Spain, Russia, and the United States, who were fascinated by its grandeur. At the Sangam Ghat, many engaged with local guides to understand the cultural and spiritual significance of the festival.

The Maha Kumbh was a sacred gathering

that transcended all barriers of caste, creed, wealth and status. Here, the rich and the poor stood as equals, taking the holy dip together, sharing meals at *bhandaras* and receiving divine blessings.

As the largest spiritual congregation on earth, the Maha Kumbh united seekers in a sacred symphony of self-realization and devotion. It aligned nature, humanity and divine wisdom, to ensure that the essence of Sanatan Dharma continued to inspire future generations. In every prayer, every offering, and every sacred moment, the Maha Kumbh stood as a testament to the enduring power of Hindu faith and cultural heritage. ♦

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# BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham Camp at Maha Kumbh 2025

**A Divine Hub of Seva, Spirituality and Harmony**

Inspired by *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj, the Swaminarayan Akshardham Camp at the Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj embodied the values of faith, devotion, service and unity at the world's largest spiritual gathering, and provided uplifting experiences to thousands of devotees and pilgrims.

## SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM CAMP: WALKTHROUGH

On two acres of land allocated by the Maha Kumbh organizing committee of the Uttar Pradesh state government, the Swaminarayan Akshardham Camp was set up in Sector 6 under the supervision of Munivatsal Swami, and other BAPS swamis and volunteers from Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi.

The camp comprised a majestic entrance gate, *sabha mandap* housing *murtis* of many deities of Sanatan Dharma, *yagna* arena, exhibitions, accommodation tents for pilgrims and volunteers, and kitchen and dining areas. Following the *bhumi puja* ceremony on 29 December, the camp was fully constructed in just 15 days.

The grand entrance welcomed pilgrims with exquisite images of Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, Gandhinagar and Robbinsville and the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs in Nairobi, Abu Dhabi and London.

As visitors entered, they were inspired on both sides by darshan of the statues of some of Sanatan Dharma's great saints and devotees, highlighting their wisdom and contributions.

In the forecourt of the camp was the traditional *yagna mandap*, where Vishwashanti Yagna ceremonies were conducted five times a day for 45 days by scholars from the BAPS Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya in Sarangpur. Participating couples and families performed sacred Vedic rituals and offered *homas* for world

peace, family unity and spiritual enlightenment into the continuously burning sacred *yagna* flame. Devotees from across India, England, America, Canada, and other countries, participated in this *yagna*, offering their heartfelt prayers. Throughout the 45-day *yagna*, more than 11,000 *yajmans* offered 180,000 sacred oblations. The *yagna* culminated in the presence of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami, along with over 100 BAPS swamis, who offered sanctified coconuts as a final tribute to the holy *yagna* flame.

Two special exhibition areas, 'Muktanand' and 'Nityanand', flanked the *yagna mandap*, enlightening pilgrims on how to lead an addiction-free life, strengthen family bonds, and uphold values that foster harmony within homes, society and the nation. Here, thousands of devotees pledged to lead addiction-free lives and embrace family values.

Beyond the *yagna mandap* was the *sabha mandap*, which housed the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj) and the Gunatit gurus; Bhagwan Shri Krishna and Radhaji; Bhagwan Shri Ram, Sitaji and Hanumanji, Bhagwan Shri Shiv, Parvatiji and Ganeshji, and Bhagwan Shri Narayan and Lakshmi.

The *sabha mandap* provided all pilgrims a sacred space for worship and devotion. Pilgrims also benefitted from the daily morning and evening *arti*, bhajans, and







Disciples of Pujya Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (Art of Living) visit the BAPS camp

discourses on the Bhagavad Gita, Shrimad Bhagwat and other spiritual topics conducted by BAPS swamis.

The camp also provided *bhandara* (*prasad* – sanctified meals) to over 450,000 pilgrims during the Maha Kumbh period of 45 days.

In total, over 1.2 million pilgrims visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham Camp for darshan of the *murtis* and the exhibitions.

More than 160 BAPS swamis participated in the Maha Kumbh and took a sacred dip at the Triveni Sangam, offering prayers for world peace and well-being.

### UNWAVERING DEDICATION OF BAPS VOLUNTEERS

A team of over 150 dedicated BAPS volunteers from Swaminarayan Akshardham in Delhi and across India selflessly served at Maha Kumbh



With Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Swami

2025, embodying the spirit of *seva* with devotion. Despite cold waves, rainfall and logistical challenges, they remained committed to their duties, ensuring the timely setup and seamless operation of the camp.

The cleanliness and hospitality of the Swaminarayan Akshardham Camp earned widespread appreciation from all who visited. The camp provided a serene and spiritually uplifting environment, attracting admiration from religious leaders, government officials, dignitaries and thousands of pilgrims.

### MEETING REVERED MAHATMAS AND ACHARYAS

During the Maha Kumbh, senior BAPS swamis visited and engaged in deep spiritual discussions with many renowned mahatmas, *acharyas*, *mahamandaleshwars* and other dignitaries from

With Acharya Mahamandaleswar Shri Kailashanand Giri Ji Maharaj and Acharya Mahamandaleswar Shri Balkanand Giri Ji Maharaj





With Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Pujya Avdhesanand Giri Ji Maharaj



With Shankaracharya Swami Vidushekhar Bharatiji (Sringeri Pithadhishwar)

across India to strengthen the bonds of Sanatan Dharma. They included:

Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Pujya Avdhesanand Giri Ji Maharaj (Juna Akhada Pithadhishwar), Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Shri Vishokanand Saraswatiji Maharaj (Mahanirvan Akhada Pithadhishwar), Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Shri Kailashanand Giri Ji Maharaj (Niranjani Akhada Pithadhishwar), Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Shri Balkanand Giri Ji Maharaj (Anand Akhada Pithadhishwar), Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Pranab Chaitanyanandji Maharaj (Parmarth Sadhak Seva Sangh), Shankaracharya Swami Vidushekhar Bharatiji (Sringeri Pithadhishwar), Mahamandaleshwar Pujya Jnandevji Maharaj, Pujya Swami Govinddev Giri Ji Maharaj (Treasurer, Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra), Mahant Ravindrapuriji Maharaj (President, Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad), Mahant Swami Dhirendra Puriji Maharaj, Shri Champat Rai (General Secretary, Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra), Shri Dinesh Chandra (Head, Vishwa Hindu Parishad), Shri Alok Kumar (International President, Vishwa Hindu Parishad) and Shri Milind Parande (General Secretary, Vishwa Hindu Parishad).

## PILGRIM EXPERIENCES

### Jayeshbhai Jani (Cincinnati, USA)

“Being part of the Swaminarayan Akshardham Camp at Maha Kumbh has been an extraordinary

experience. The cleanliness at the camp is impeccable, and the volunteers remain ever-ready to serve every devotee with dedication. I was able to take a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam, which was a truly divine experience. The most profound blessing I received during my stay was the opportunity to participate in the *yagna*.”

### Jayesh Chauhan (UAE)

“The moment I stepped into the camp, I experienced an overwhelming sense of peace and tranquillity. The organization of the camp was remarkable, and participating in the *yagna* was a truly unique and transformative experience. The darshan of the *murtis*, the well-arranged accommodations, the divine presence of swamis, and the uplifting discourses made this experience beyond fulfilling. One of the most memorable moments of my life.”

### Geeta Parmar (Vadodara, India)

“My husband and I travelled from Vadodara to the Maha Kumbh. Our journey from the railway station to the camp had its challenges. However, the moment we stepped into the Akshardham Camp an indescribable sense of peace embraced us.

“This experience at Maha Kumbh on the sacred land of the Triveni Sangam, the divine aura of the Akshardham Camp, and the *yagna* was nothing short of a spiritually uplifting and divine blessing.”



## VOLUNTEERS EXPERIENCES

### Dr Rajeev Gupta (Delhi)

“I have been associated with BAPS for the past 15 years, serving primarily in medical *seva* and assisting with accounts-related responsibilities.

“I have been at the camp for the entire duration of the Maha Kumbh, overseeing first aid and medical services for volunteers, devotees, and pilgrims. Serving here has been an enlightening and divine experience, and I have witnessed every volunteer performing *seva* with immense love and devotion.”

### Dr R.K. Rathod (Delhi)

“At Maha Kumbh 2025, I have been serving in the accommodations department, where I have had the great privilege of meeting and interacting with countless devotees who have come here to experience this sacred gathering. The *seva* of *bhandara* has been an especially fulfilling experience.

“This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Knowing that the next Maha Kumbh will take place 144 years from now, I feel immensely grateful to serve at this historic event.”

### Vinod Chotaliya (Delhi)

“I feel truly blessed to have received the opportunity to serve at Maha Kumbh 2025, assisting in accommodations and accounts *seva*.

“What brings me the greatest fulfillment is serving the *yajmans* who come to perform *yagna*. Ensuring that they receive proper guidance, comfort, and a seamless experience has been a deeply gratifying responsibility.”

## EXPERIENCE OF A KALPVASI AT MAHA KUMBH

### Sitaram Tiwari (72, Maharchha, Uttar Pradesh)

“I have been coming to Prayagraj every year during the Magh month for many years. It is believed that during this sacred time, all deities descend upon Prayagraj, blessing this

land with their divine presence. Our shastras say that Tirthraj Prayag Devta mounts a horse and carries away the sins of devotees – just thinking about this fills my heart with reverence for this sacred place.

“This year at the Maha Kumbh, we organized a seven-day Shrimad Bhagavad Gita Katha. Every morning, we took a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam, performed our daily puja, and then visited different places to listen to discourses by saints and scholars.

“Our government has made incredible efforts to ensure that this Maha Kumbh is a grand success, and we should support such initiatives that preserve our faith and traditions.

“We must recognize that even the deities long to take birth in this sacred land, and we are truly fortunate to be born as Hindus. We must dedicate ourselves to dharma and to the progress of our nation.”

## EXPERIENCE OF A NAGA SADHU AT MAHA KUMBH

### Khadan Giri Ji (70, Kanpur, Mansa Devi Mandir)

“Our duty is to protect Sanatan Dharma – this is our only mission. We stand firm, dedicated solely to Dharma and truth.

“Justice is not determined by rulers – it is upheld by Dharma itself. This *trishul* (trident) is not just a symbol; it is a weapon to stand against *adharma*. It reminds us of our duty to fight for righteousness and uphold the sacred traditions of our ancestors.

“We *naga* sadhus have renounced the world and its comforts. We seek nothing for ourselves – no wealth, no possessions, no attachments. Our purpose is to remain vigilant, prepared, and ever-ready to defend dharma.

“Once the Maha Kumbh concludes, we will return to our places of sadhana – continuing our spiritual disciplines, austerities, and unwavering commitment to Sanatan Dharma.” ◆

- Bansal Bhalja (Ahmedabad)

# The Conundrum of Modernity



**M**erriam-Webster defines ‘modern’ as “a characteristic related to the present time,” with synonyms such as ‘contemporary’ or ‘up-to-date’. It is believed that the modern era began with colonialism, then shaped by the two world wars, globalization and eventually gave way to the postmodern era. This period is marked by a strong emphasis on individualism, the growth of a scientific temperament, rational thinking, and rapid urbanization. It has also given rise to new ideas, innovations, universal adult suffrage, and equality in work opportunities.

Yet modernity often comes with a cost. In its bid to revolutionize society, many pre-modern beliefs and traditions are abandoned in favour of new ideas. A progressive society is judged not only by how quickly it discards harmful or outdated systems, but also by the consequences of leaving behind long-held moral values and time-tested knowledge systems that once served as its anchor.

According to the Global State of Connection Report, in 2023 approximately 1.25 billion people felt ‘lonely’ or ‘very lonely’. Even with

access to the most modern technological amenities and a world connected physically and virtually, urban loneliness has become a silent epidemic. This isolation is linked to various physical and mental health issues. Although modern society is rich in connections, suicide remains the third largest cause of death worldwide. In India, female suicides rank as the third largest cause of death and male suicides as the fourth, with 80% of these tragedies attributed to family problems, mental health issues, drug abuse, bankruptcy, and sudden economic hardship; many of which are problems of our modern era.

‘India’ or ‘Bharat’, a land where the elderly have traditionally been revered as deities and where the ancient teachings such as, “*Matru devo bhava, pitru devo bhava*” were once imparted in *gurukuls* (and still survive in some religious institutions), now faces a rising trend of urban isolation. Many elderly citizens are being abandoned by their children and placed in old age homes: a by-product of rapid urbanization and increasing influence of modern occidental society. In this situation, one



must ask: Is modernity merely about technological advancement, or does it also mean discarding all past traditions in the name of progress?

Some aspects of this conundrum are addressed by a postulate of post-modern thought, which warns that the unguided use of technology and science can lead to destruction and oppression. Unchecked development, without proper guidance, can endanger the well-being and unity of society. Here, the ancient shastras of Sanatan Dharma offer a holistic view to balance the challenges of modernity.

The Mundaka Upanishad (1.1.4) emphasizes the pursuit of two kinds of knowledge: *para vidya* (spiritual knowledge) and *apara vidya* (material knowledge). Spiritual knowledge is sought for self liberation, while material knowledge is acquired to navigate worldly affairs. Our shastras stress the importance of balancing both: knowledge that is merely learned in words, without being internalized, cannot alleviate the sufferings of everyday life. Similarly, Bhagwan Swaminarayan explains the true measure of intellect in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 50:

“Some people may be extremely adept in worldly affairs, yet they do nothing at all to safeguard their own liberation. Others may know the precise meanings of the various shastras, Purans and Itihas scriptures, yet they too do nothing to safeguard their liberation. Therefore, they cannot be said to possess a sharp intellect; rather, they possess a blunt intellect. Conversely, a person who safeguards his liberation, even though he may possess only a limited intellect, should be considered to have a sharp intellect. On the

other hand, a person who, even though possessing a sharp intellect, pays more attention to worldly affairs should be considered to possess a blunt intellect. Therefore, only one who remains alert regarding his own liberation can be said to possess a sharp intellect.”

In other words, the solution to the conundrum of modernity is to remain well-versed in contemporary knowledge while also embracing spiritual wisdom. Spiritual knowledge offers direction and balance, ensuring that material progress does not come at the expense of inner growth. This balanced approach helps maintain harmony between one’s external achievements and internal wellbeing.

Today, this balanced service to society is provided by the spiritual centres of the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS). Guided by the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the present guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj, BAPS supports over 1,300 mandirs worldwide and more than 5,000 satsang centres for children, youth, and the elderly. These mandirs and satsang centres not only serve as hubs for spiritual development but also host a wide range of activities. They foster traditional culture and personality development through scriptural study, cultural performances, youth development and leadership training programmes, workplace skills seminars, women empowerment conferences, family value initiatives, de-addiction campaigns, sports tournaments and other activities. All these efforts aim to promote holistic development in contemporary society while balancing modern progress with traditional values. ♦

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

(Signed) Sadhu Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-4-2025



## INDIA

### SARVA DARSHAN SAMANVAY SATRA 29 December 2024, Kolkata



Many sannyasis, *brahmacharis* and scholars representing the Shankar, Ramanuj, Madhva, Nimbark, Gaudiya, Shakta and other Darshan traditions of West Bengal participated in the Sarva Darshan Samanvay Satra, organized in the presence of Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Kolkata by the Sanatan Sanskriti Sansad.

Among the distinguished attendees were Mahamandaleshwar Sri Pranav Chaitanya Puri Maharaj, Sri Vishunupad Kathiababa, Sri Shushidhanand Maharaj, Sri Atmapriyananda Maharaj, Sri Nirgunanand Brahmachari, and Sri Bandhu Gaurav Maharaj.

All spoke about the harmony between the different Darshan traditions that has fostered and strengthened unity, respect and love among the many Sanatan Hindu *sampradayas*. They especially appreciated the efforts of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj in protecting, nourishing and nurturing the core values of Sanatan Dharma.

The Sanatan Sanskriti Sadan also conferred Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami

with the prestigious 'Abhinav Prasthantrayi Bhasyakar and Vedanta Ratna' title for his outstanding philosophical contributions in the field of Vedant.

### NEW BAPS VIDYAMANDIR INAUGURATION 29 December 2024 & 6 January 2025, Navsari



On 29 December 2024, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami performed the Vedic inauguration rituals of the administration buildings of the new BAPS Vidyamandir in Navsari.

He performed *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the Gunatit gurus, showered sanctified flower petals in the various offices and blessed the school administrators.

On 6 January 2025, Pujya Viveksagar Swami performed the Vedic inauguration rituals of the first teaching block of the BAPS Vidyamandir in Navsari. This will cater for students studying from Nursery to Standard 8 in Gujarati or English mediums.

This new BAPS Vidyamandir includes well-equipped classrooms, laboratories, a library, an assembly hall, a hygienic canteen and other facilities to enable students to excel.



## BAL KARYAKAR SHIBIRS

4 January to 15 February 2025



Over 4,550 *bal-balika nirikshak* and senior *karyakars* attended the nine Bal Karyakar Shibirs organized by the Bal Pravrutti Madhyastha Karyalaya. Based on the theme ‘Mama Kartavyam’ – ‘My Duty’, the *shibirs* were conducted at Sankari, Bochasan, Gondal, Ahmedabad, Nashik, Jaipur and other BAPS centres.

At each *shibir*, the *karyakars* were traditionally welcomed and honoured with flower garlands and kumkum. The *shibirs* featured engaging videos, skits, activities, workshops, and spiritual discourses by experienced swamis and *karyakars*.

Based on examples from the lives of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, the *shibirs* guided the *karyakars* on how to effectively perform their duties in nurturing spiritual values among the children, parents and volunteers in their centres.

In his video blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj emphasized that serving with unity, harmony, and mutual respect is essential for holistic development in all three aspects.

## SATSANG VICHARAN BY PUJYA VIVEKSAGAR SWAMI

13–20 January 2025, Secunderabad

On 13 January, children, youths, and elder devotees welcomed Pujya Viveksagar Swami to the BAPS Mandir in Hyderabad with great enthusiasm and grandeur. During his stay, in addition to the daily morning and evening satsang discourses on a wide range of



topics, many other inspiring and enlightening programmes were held.

On 14 January, the Makar Sankranti (Uttarayan) and Jholi Utsav celebration was held in his presence.

On 18 January, the 21st *patotsav* of the mandir was celebrated. In the early evening, senior representatives of many Gujarati, Marwadi and Telugu associations in Hyderabad came to meet Pujya Viveksagar Swami. Later, during a special assembly for *yuvak* and *yuvatis*, Pujya Viveksagar Swami provided spiritual guidance to the youths.

On 19 January, Pujya Viveksagar Swami presided over a one-day Karykar Shibir themed ‘Suvarnase Adhik’. Around 310 *karyakars*, including 84 Telugu *karyakars*, participated in this *shibir*.

## INAUGURATION OF MEDICAL VANS

29 January 2025, Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar



BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha’s healthcare services benefit millions each year. Among these, mobile medical clinics provide free diagnosis and

treatment, significantly serving underprivileged communities in rural areas.

Continuing this effort, two new medical vans, donated by Aster Volunteers under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative of Aster DM Healthcare, were inaugurated at Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir in Gandhinagar. These vans will be operated by the BAPS Public Charitable Trust.

Among the dignitaries present at the inauguration ceremony were Gujarat's Minister of Health Shri Rushikeshbhai Patel, Home Minister Shri Harshbhai Sanghvi, senior BAPS swamis, as well as Shri Jalilji and representatives from Aster DM Healthcare.

These two medical vans will provide essential healthcare services to remote tribal areas of Gujarat. Equipped with modern medical facilities, the vans will serve as mobile clinics offering primary treatment, specialist consultations, and emergency ambulance services.

Representing Aster DM Healthcare, Shri Jalilji also conveyed gratitude to BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha for its remarkable services.

Following the medical van inauguration ceremony, the ministers and dignitaries offered incense before the divine *murti* of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj at Swaminarayan Akshardham, seeking blessings for the health and prosperity of the people of Gujarat.

### TENTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

2 February 2025, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Kolkata



As part of the tenth anniversary celebrations of the BAPS Mandir in Kolkata, swamis and devotees performed a grand Satsang Diksha Gruh Shanti Homatmak Yagna. Over 250 *yajmans* from West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand and states of Eastern India wholeheartedly participated in this *yagna*. They offered prayers for the good health of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj and for peace in their families and throughout the world.

## UK

### BAPS COMMUNITY FOOD DRIVE

1–31 December 2024, UK



BAPS mandirs and centres across the UK joined in a nationwide drive to donate food to local food banks and homeless shelters during the winter festive period.

This coordinated effort was a part of BAPS's multifarious activities to support local communities, addressing the important issue of food insecurity.

The combined donations, equating to provisions for thousands of meals, came at a crucial time when many individuals and families continue to face financial hardships exacerbated by a difficult winter period.

Local foodbanks voiced their gratitude on receiving the collected food items. Brent Foodbank thanked Neasden Temple on X: "Thank you so much for your ongoing support! It will make such a big difference to households in crisis this winter."

Similarly, Highfield Hall Community Centre



in Birmingham commented on Facebook, “We are very grateful to have received such a wonderful donation for our foodbank from BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Birmingham. This donation will help lots of families we support and other charities. Thank you so much for your kindness.”

After a donation from BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Luton, Dunstable Foodbank sent a letter of appreciation. “We are writing to send our thanks to you all for the amazing donation that you collected for Dunstable Foodbank during the Christmas season. The people we help at the Foodbank are some of the most vulnerable families in our community and your donation will enable us to continue supporting them.”

Angie Lyall of the Daylight Centre Fellowship similarly wrote to BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Wellingborough, “We would once again like to thank you for your ongoing donations to our food bank. Your generosity has allowed us to assemble and deliver food parcels to over 7,000 homes last year, including rough sleepers and those living in temporary accommodation.”

### **INDIA'S LOK SABHA SPEAKER VISITS NEASDEN TEMPLE**

**11 January 2025, London**



The Speaker of India's Lok Sabha, Hon. Shri Om Prakash Birla, visited BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London as part of his official visit to the United Kingdom at the invitation of Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the House of Commons in the UK.

After a warm welcome by swamis, Mr Birla had darshan of the *murtis* and offered *abhishek*. He was also briefed on the significant work of BAPS in India and the inspiring developments in the UK and across Europe, particularly the upcoming BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir in Paris, France.

Addressing the evening assembly, Mr Birla remarked, “Coming to this Swaminarayan mandir inspires one towards spirituality and religion. This temple not only helps to build spirituality and religion but also humankind. BAPS works for the progress and spiritual uplift of communities around the world.”

Mr Birla added, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj elevated Indian tradition and culture across the world. He worked for the betterment of humanity across borders. I pay my respects to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life message, ‘In the joy of others lies our own.’”

### **SATSANG DIKSHA SYMPOSIUM AT UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**

**17 January 2025, Cambridge**



A full-day symposium on the Satsang Diksha shastra was held at the University of Cambridge.

The event was supported by Cambridge's Faculty of Divinity, the St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology, the Sanskrit Department at Heidelberg University, the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute in London, and the Cambridge Interfaith Programme.

The symposium, joined by scholars from around the UK as well as from Finland, Germany, India, the Netherlands, and the USA, facilitated

research and dialogue on various aspects of this vital scripture of the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu tradition authored by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The papers presented covered contemporary subjects, such as civil law, domestic life, ethical finance, and religious pluralism, as well as some classical topics of theology, philosophy, philology, pedagogy, material culture, textual studies, and others.

The delegates explored the vitality and relevance of a contemporary Sanskrit scripture, and its adherents' spiritual, devotional, and moral way of life.

Key articulations of lived Hinduism and the Swaminarayan tradition's distinctive school of Vedanta, namely, Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, were also discussed.

James Hegarty, Professor of the Religions of South Asia at Cardiff University and one of the convenors of the symposium, explained, "For a text so recent, the extensive range of global public engagement – from the thousands of people, young and old, who have been memorizing its 315 Sanskrit verses, to the thousands joining weekly for an in-depth online course – makes the Satsang Diksha especially worthy of academic study."

Professor Alice Collet, Academic Editor of the Hinduism and Buddhism sections of the St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology, reflected, "It was a pleasure to attend the symposium, which was a good balance of academic rigour and a positive collegiate environment."

Dr Ankur Barua, Senior Lecturer in Hindu Studies at the University of Cambridge, appreciated the symposium's collaborative focus, "The symposium brought together doctoral students, established academics, and scholar-practitioners in a series of discussions on how a recently composed scriptural text distils the essence of various Hindu religious themes and presents it in a manner that would be accessible to devotees at the grassroots."

## EDUCATION AND CAREERS FAIR

1 February 2025, BAPS Mandir, London



More than 1,200 students, parents and young professionals from around the UK attended an Education and Careers Fair.

The event provided attendees with invaluable guidance, practical training, and vital confidence for academic success and career development through tailored workshops, expert panels, and networking opportunities.

Workshops focused on exam techniques, career planning, and professional branding, with dedicated sessions on CV writing, job applications, and networking strategies. Attendees also benefited from one-on-one career consultations.

The afternoon featured a diverse careers fair representing over 35 industries, including aviation, engineering, finance, healthcare, IT, law, and marketing. Professionals offered first-hand insights, while recruiters provided CV reviews, interview preparation tips, and assessment centre guidance.

## UAE

### FIRST PATOTSAV CELEBRATION AT BAPS HINDU MANDIR

2 February 2025, Abu Dhabi, UAE

The BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi marked its first *patotsav* (Maha *sud* 5) with a day of prayers, celebrations and cultural performances. This momentous occasion drew more than 10,000 devotees and well-wishers from across the region.

From 6 a.m., more than 1,100 devotees and



## INDIAN SPIRITUAL LEADER, SADHGURU, VISITS BAPS HINDU MANDIR

4 February 2025, Abu Dhabi, UAE



well-wishers participated in the sacred *mahapuja* ceremony in the open passage behind the mandir, offering prayers for universal peace and prosperity. The *mahapuja* blended technology and spirituality, with special projections on the mandir displaying the various rituals being performed.

From 9 to 11.30 a.m., in the assembly hall, special verses were recited in honour of the birth anniversary of His Holiness Shastriji Maharaj, the founder of BAPS. The congregation of more than 2,000 people also appreciated the vision and generosity of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan in fostering a country of love and harmony.

In the evening, the Swaminarayan Ghat transformed into a vibrant stage from where 19 different performances, with troupes comprising 224 participants, captivated viewers with enthralling renditions of Madhurashtakam, Mohiniyattam, Kuchipudi, Bharatanatyam as well as traditional Marathi, Odissi, and Bengali dances. The presentations were interspersed with *artis* performed at six, seven and eight o'clock.

Concluding the celebrations, Brahmavihari Swami spoke, "The BAPS Hindu Mandir has witnessed its first year filled with love, hope and unity. It has won awards for its architectural splendor, but its most impressive achievement is that it continues to bring people of all backgrounds together, inspiring an inclusive and harmonious society. May everyone fill their lives with love and unity for all that is around them."

Indian spiritual leader, Jagadish Vasudev, popularly known as Sadhguru, visited the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. During his visit, Sadhguru expressed profound admiration for the mandir's stunning beauty and deep spiritual significance.

Sadhguru was warmly welcomed with a garland by Brahmavihari Swami at the Harmony Wall. Walking towards the mandir, Sadhguru appreciated the Tolerance Trees from the Czech Republic that depict the significance of preservation and coexistence. He admired the thoughtful confluence of culture and spirituality through the Divine Eye, appreciating the message of harmony emanating from the Harmony Dome. Sadhguru paid his respects at the seven shrines within the mandir and performed the sacred *abhishek*. He also appreciated the intricate craftsmanship of the Pillar of the Pillars while reflecting on the power of prayer and the visionary teachings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Describing the mandir as "a flower and a jewel", Sadhguru highlighted its universal appeal, encouraging individuals from all walks of life to witness its inspirational presence. His visit was a convergence of spirituality and philosophy, underscoring the mandir's role as a unifying symbol of culture, faith, and global harmony.



## FIRST ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF BAPS HINDU MANDIR

16 February 2025, Abu Dhabi



The BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi marked its first anniversary with a grand celebration and also commemorated The Year of Community – A year of unity, service, and faith – in the presence of UAE leadership, community leaders and devotees. As the patron of this event, His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahayan, Minister of Tolerance, travelled directly from Portugal for this special occasion. He was joined by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Tahnoon Al Nahyan, Advisor for Special Affairs at the Presidential Court, along with 450 dignitaries, ambassadors, community and faith leaders. Additionally, over 20 members from the royal family, ministers, and UAE leadership were present among the over 2,000 who gathered for the special occasion.

Comprising six distinct segments, the programme, titled ‘Mandir: The Heart of Community’, commenced in the presence of His Excellency Sanjay Sudhir, Ambassador of India to the UAE, His Excellency Dr. Mugheer Khamis Al Khaili, Chairman of the Department of Community Development, His Excellency General Ahmed Saif bin Zaitoon Al Muhairi, Commander-in-Chief of Abu Dhabi Police, and other prominent UAE dignitaries.

His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahayan addressed the gathering, stating, “This is a handsome Mandir that is bringing the community together.”

In the first section, Global Community, His Excellency Sanjay Sudhir, highlighted the mandir’s significance in India-UAE relations, “This is the most tangible form of India and UAE friendship, one that you can feel.”

The Interfaith Harmony segment featured Mufaddal Ali, a prominent businessman from the Bohra Muslim community in the UAE, who shared how the Mandir’s spirit of inclusivity inspired him to donate The Harmony Wall, the largest 3D-printed wall in the region and how it continues to foster unity across diverse communities.

In the Community Values segment, Zubin Karkaria reflected on how effortlessly the Mandir instils values in the community, specifically highlighting how it has helped to nurture timeless values and character in his children.

The Inner Strength segment was led by rising tennis star Hursh Patel, who spoke about how the Mandir has been a source of resilience in his journey, providing him with mental clarity, focus, and perseverance through its serene atmosphere and spiritual wisdom.

In the Faith segment, Umesh Raja, Head of Guest Services at the BAPS Hindu Mandir and a former international schools inspector, spoke about how the Mandir has become a sanctuary that strengthens faith for devotees and thousands of visitors, who leave feeling spiritually enriched and uplifted.

In the final segment, Inner Happiness, Brahmavihari Swami highlighted the remarkable impact of the Mandir over the past year, sharing that 2.2 million visitors had walked through its doors, 1.3 million free meals had been served, and 1,000 rituals, and 20 weddings, had been performed. He spoke about how these milestones reflected the Mandir’s deeper purpose – bringing people together, nurturing values, and spreading happiness.

He spoke about how by instilling values, fostering selflessness, and inspiring service, it

enriches lives in a way that extends far beyond its walls to provide that missing element in life: inner happiness.

## ASIA PACIFIC

### MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV

26–27 January 2025, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Sunshine Coast, Australia



Two days of vibrant and spiritually enriching celebrations marked the grand inauguration of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sunshine Coast, Queensland.

The festivities commenced on the afternoon of 26 January with a traditional *nagar yatra* in which devotees and local residents honoured the sacred *murtis* to be enshrined in the new mandir. Among the dignitaries present were Councillor Joe Natoli (Division 4, Sunshine Coast) and esteemed officers from the Queensland Police Service (QPS), including Chief Inspector Jason Overland and PLO Vernon Corporal.

In the evening, youths and devotees sang melodious bhajans during a captivating kirtan *aradhana*.

On the morning of 27 January, the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals were performed by BAPS swamis to consecrate the deities within the mandir.

Present on this historic occasion were Hon. Fiona Simpson (State Multicultural Minister), Mr. Andrew Wallace (Federal MP for Fisher), Ms. Kendall Morton (State MP for Caloundra), Mayor Rosanna Natoli (Sunshine Coast) and other dignitaries.

## BAPS CHARITIES

### LOS ANGELES WILDFIRE RELIEF EFFORTS

January 2025, Los Angeles



On 7 January 2025, multiple wildfires across the Los Angeles area devastated numerous communities, leaving thousands of families without homes, power, or access to basic necessities. In what may be one of the most devastating natural disasters in US history, the fires reduced entire neighbourhoods to smouldering ruins, destroying the homes of both the wealthy and the ordinary alike. Officials estimate that at least 12,300 structures were damaged or destroyed.

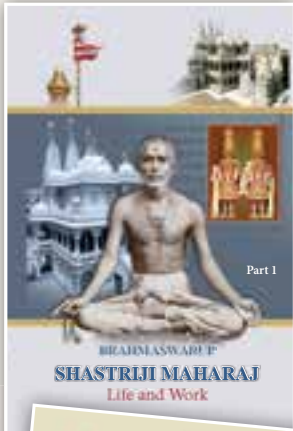
In response to this unprecedented disaster, BAPS Charities swiftly mobilized its resources to provide critical relief and recovery support. Working closely with local authorities and emergency response teams to ensure aid reached those in need, BAPS Charities distributed food, clean water, essential supplies, and hygiene kits to resource hubs and shelters.

Volunteers assisted at three locations, supporting fire survivors and first responders while also helping shelters and relief organizations in their efforts. ♦

# NEW BAPS PUBLICATIONS

## BRAHMASWARUP SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ

### Life and Work, Part 1 & 2



This detailed biography documents the inspiring life and enduring legacy of Shastriji Maharaj, his innate spirituality and intellectual brilliance, and his deep spiritual allegiance to guru Bhagatji Maharaj and the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It chronicles the challenges he overcame to enshrine the pure teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in majestic mandirs and establish the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. It provides an insight into his spiritual charisma, unwavering faith, profound wisdom, spiritual purity, Himalayan tolerance, selfless service, guru bhakti, steadfast resolve and tireless efforts. The biography reveals his influence on countless lives through his discourses and personal example, and his nurturing of a new generation of spiritual leaders – Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It paints a vivid portrait of a spiritual luminary endowed with profound philosophical insights, spiritual foresight, visionary leadership, practical organizational skills, exemplary devotion, integrity, compassion, and resolute commitment to spiritual ideals.

Translated by Amar Parekh (London, UK)

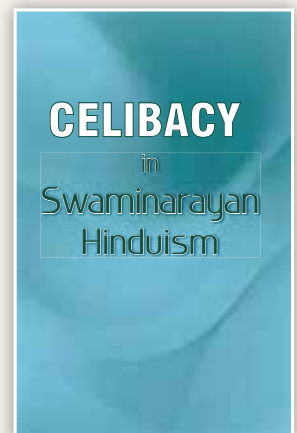
## CELIBACY

### in Swaminarayan Hinduism

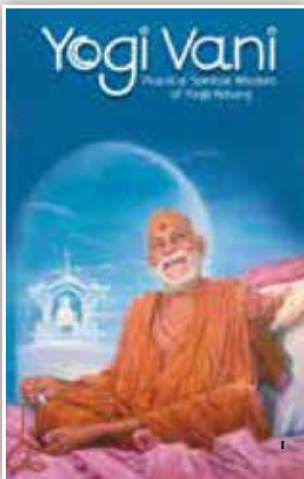
Bhagwan Swaminarayan re-introduced the Hindu practice of eightfold celibacy for his sadhus, thus reconstituting the institution of Hindu asceticism. He established certain boundaries between ascetics and women, and between householder men and women in the context of religious activities that created grounds for women's dignity and independence in an intrinsic sense.

Original Edition: Prof. Suresh Raval, USA

Abridged Edition: Rupal Patel, UK







Translated by **Rahul Bhagvat**  
(London)

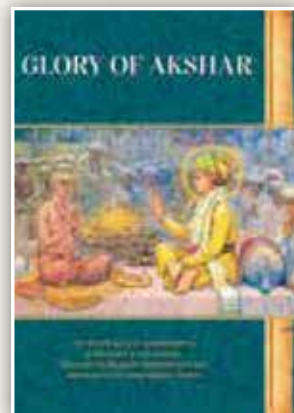
Describing Brahaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, “Yogiji Maharaj was divine. His humble, saintly life of devotion and service is evident in every moment spent with him. Such a saint, home to all the highest virtues, is rare to attain. Yogiji Maharaj was free from ego and attachments. He was totally immersed in God. His pure words bestowed the joy of God. His simple village language revealed the profound essence of spirituality, leaving nothing incomplete. Even offering millions of prostrations to him would not be sufficient to honour his glory.”

*Yogi Vani: Practical Spiritual Wisdom of Yogiji Maharaj* is a treasure trove of insightful and inspiring nuggets of practical spiritual wisdom shared by Yogiji Maharaj. His simple yet profound words reveal the deepest spiritual truths and offer timeless guidance and clarity that illuminate the path to spiritual excellence.

## GLORY OF AKSHAR

*Glory of Akshar* is a compelling exploration of the limitless glory of Aksharbrahma as documented in the revered Prasthantrayi – the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras. It is a guide through the intricate tapestry of teachings that underscore the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

This doctrine emphasizes the necessity of becoming like Aksharbrahma to truly worship and attain Parabrahma, the Supreme Being. The text meticulously examines how the Prasthantrayi as well as shastras and scholars of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya corroborate this philosophy, shedding light on its profound implications for spiritual understanding and practice in daily life.



Translations:  
**BAPS Swamis and  
UK Youths**

Inspirer: HH Mahant Swami Maharaj

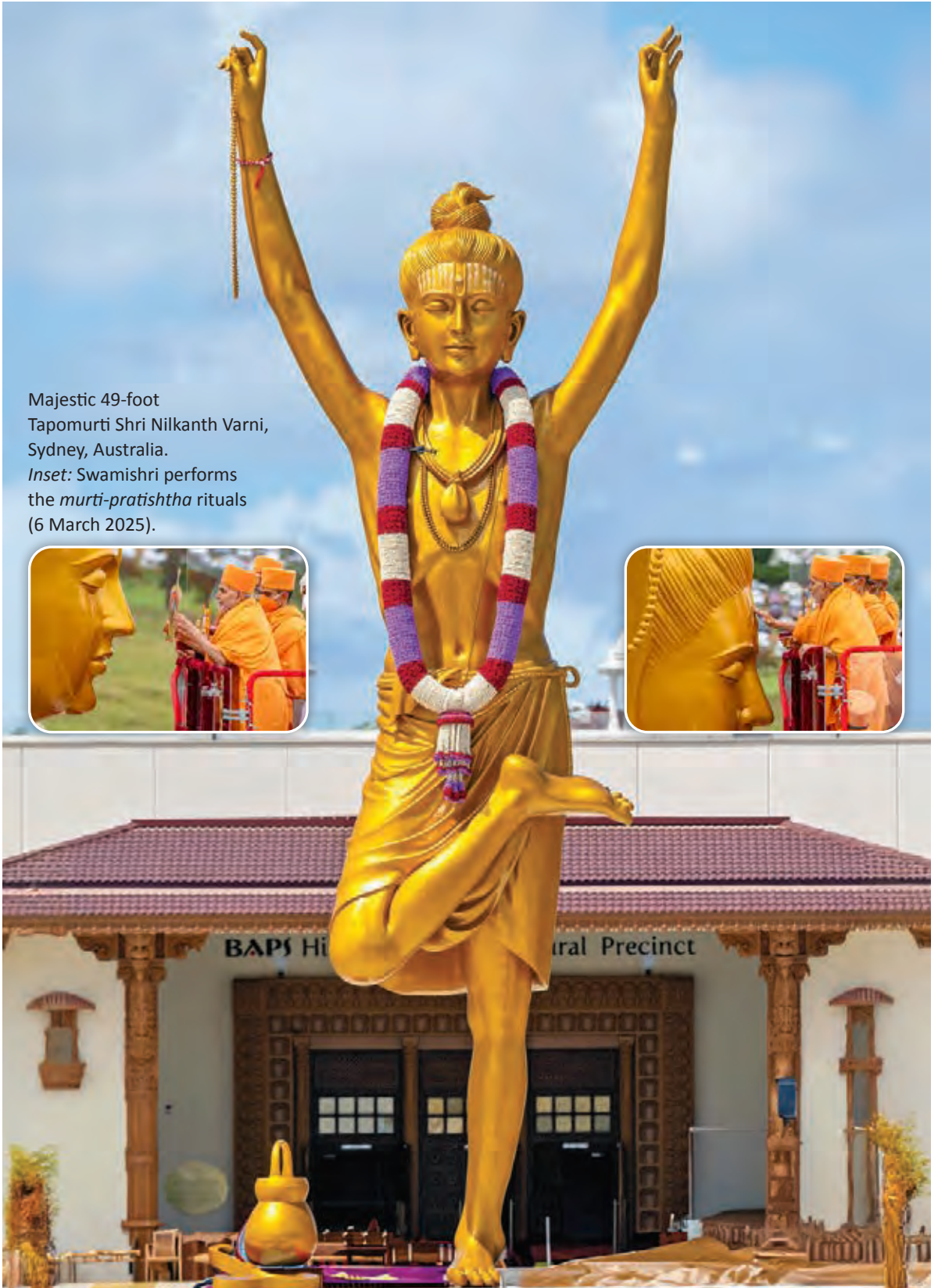
Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Ahmedabad ♦ Available on [baps.store](http://baps.store) & at BAPS bookstores (India)



**SWAMISHRI IN SOUTH AFRICA AND AUSTRALIA**

1. Swamishri greets South Africa's vice president, Hon. Paul Mashatile, Johannesburg (30 January 2025).
2. High Commissioner of India and dignitaries during an evening assembly, Johannesburg (1 February 2025).
3. Devotees seated in the newly inaugurated assembly hall, Johannesburg (30 January 2025).
4. Swamishri performs Bhumi Pujan rituals for Akshardham, Melbourne (22 February 2025).
5. Swamishri waves a BAPS flag, Melbourne (22 February 2025).





Majestic 49-foot  
Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni,  
Sydney, Australia.  
*Inset: Swamishri performs  
the murti-pratishtha rituals  
(6 March 2025).*