

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January–February 2019

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**Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
98th Birthday Celebration**

15 December 2018, Rajkot



20th PATOTSAV OF BAPS MANDIR, RAJKOT
14 December 2018

1. Devotees attend the 20th patotsav celebration.
 2. Newly furbished Shri Nilkanth Varni abhishekh mandap.
- Inset: Murtis in the central shrine of the main mandir.*



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



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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.

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Shri Hari's Love for Gadhpur

After inspiring sadhus and devotees engaged in constructing the mandir in Vartal Shri Hari returned to Gadhpur. The mutual love between Maharaj and his devotees became apparent...

BY YOUR GRACE THE WORK IS GOING ON

The festival of Shri Hari Jayanti was celebrated with great spirit and devotion in Vartal. Thereafter, Maharaj called Brahmanand Swami and the sculptors and asked, “How do you manage the great task of building this mandir?”

Brahmanand Swami showed Maharaj the hut he lived in and revealed, “Maharaj, due to your greatness the sadhus who are with me travel to the neighbouring villages to beg for alms. The grains are then stored in a large vessel and given daily to the masons and labourers to cook their food. Furthermore, this Gunatitanand Swami is stoical like Jad Bharat. He does bhajan day and night and also discourses to newcomers. He talks to them about your glory and inspires faith about your divine form. Thus, they become *satsangis*. Whereas, Joban Pagi and I travel to the surrounding villages to inform the Patidars (Patels) about the mandir project and appeal for donations. From the money received we pay the artisans and labourers. Thus, by your grace things are progressing well. Now come to my hut and place your hands on the vessel so that the grains never get depleted.”

Shri Hari was listening to Brahmanand Swami with great interest and exuberance. While building the mandir Brahmanand Swami had no other motive other than increasing Shri Hari's glory. Shri Hari blessed Brahmanand Swami and said, “There will be no hurdles in your work.” Then Maharaj asked, “Are you taking the help of Narayan Giriji?”

Brahmanand Swami replied buoyantly, “Maharaj, his help will be taken in difficult times. Till the work keeps progressing through your grace I do not want to take any other support.” Shri Hari was pleased with his resolve.

SADHUS IN SATSANG ARE LIKE GEMS

Shri Hari appointed Hiraji as the main sculptor to do the carvings of Vartal mandir. Maharaj also instructed Purushottam and Damodar, and Keval of Nadiad and Kuberji of Ahmedabad to help Hiraji. He blessed them, “Through your efforts a grand mandir will be accomplished. Since Brahmanand Swami has designed the mandir with three *shikhars* the carvings and decorations should also match with it.” Then, Shriji Maharaj told the leading *satsangis* of Vartal, Narsinhdas, Narottamdas, Laldas and others, “With the mandir being built here you must all help in the project.”

The devotees responded enthusiastically, “Maharaj, the mandir will be the pride of our village. It will be like a feather in the cap and with your association it will become a great pilgrim place.” Shri Hari was pleased with their sentiments and then praised, “The sadhus in Satsang are like gems.”

Shri Hari declared to all, “I want to consecrate the *murtis* in Vartal in October–November (Kartik month), so labour briskly and hard.” Then, Maharaj told the leading devotees of Vaso, Sojitra, Petlad, Sinjivada, Umreth and Dabhan to

come every month to inspect and provide whatever help or materials that would be required. In this way, Shri Hari distributed the work for the mandir construction and also lightened the burden of Brahmanand Swami by giving some responsibilities to Aksharanand Swami. Thereafter, Shri Hari instructed the local devotees, "As soon as the mandir is ready for the consecration ceremony let me know."

Shri Hari departed from Vartal and halted along his journey to Gadhada.

GADHPUR IS MINE AND I AM GADHPUR'S

Whenever Shri Hari returned to Gadhpur it seemed as if he had arrived home, feeling hale and hearty. He often declared, "Gadhpur is mine and I am Gadhpur's." These words reflected the selfless devotion and love of the devotees of Gadhpur towards Maharaj. In fact, Shri Hari was not bound by or attached to place and time, but, he loved to stay where his beloved devotees resided. Whenever Shri Hari departed from Gadhpur to travel to other places the local devotees reminisced about his *lilas*. Furthermore, they remained poignant and disinterested in eating or in doing their daily duties. Their bhakti for Maharaj was so profound that it seemed as if they survived because of their association with him. And Shri Hari reciprocated their deep devotion. Maharaj regarded Gadhpur village, Dada Khachar's *darbar* and everything else to be dear to his heart.

Shri Hari's arrival in Gadhpur invigorated the hearts of all. Whenever Maharaj arrived in Gadhpur the *paramhansas* travelling in neighbouring regions and the devotees living far and wide would flock there for his darshan. The devotees would also sponsor the daily meals for Shri Hari and his sadhus.

One day, Maharaj called Dada Khachar and told him, "Dada, the devotees sponsor our meals daily. Since it is the mango season now, if you can get mangoes then I'd like to feed the

paramhansas." Dada Khachar thought that the season had not yielded a good harvest of mangoes in his orchard. So, he immediately called Harji Thakkar, his administrator, and instructed, "No matter how much it may cost order cartfuls of mangoes immediately. Maharaj wishes to serve mango juice to his sadhus." Harji Thakkar replied, "As you wish Bapu, but I will have to go personally for this task." Dada Khachar urged him, "By tomorrow the cartloads of mangoes should be unloaded in my storeroom."

Harji Thakkar was about to leave when Maharaj called him. Shri Hari enquired, "For what purpose have you readied yourself? Are you going off to some place?"

Harji Thakkar humbly folded his hands and replied, "Maharaj, with the young Bapu's order I am about to go to two to three neighbouring villages to purchase mangoes. There was no crop of mangoes this year in Dada Khachar's farm."

Shri Hari smiled at Harji Thakkar's words and restrained him, "There's no need to visit the villages to buy mangoes. Cartloads of mangoes are on their way here now." Harji Thakkar pondered for a while thinking that if he did not go then Dada Khachar would be offended. On seeing him contemplating Maharaj checked him, "Tell Dada that Maharaj had told you not to go."

At that time Dada arrived before Maharaj. On seeing Harji Thakkar Dada Khachar asked, "Why haven't you left?" Shri Hari interjected, "Dada, cartloads of mangoes are already on their way here. Your wish will be fulfilled by Bhagwan."

Aksharanand Swami had sent eight cartloads of mangoes from Vartal. The carts arrived in Gadhpur the next day, with each cart containing 600 kg. Shri Hari told Harji Thakkar, "Unload the mangoes and place them in the storehouse. I wish to feed the sadhus mango juice and chappatis for eight days."

Harji Thakkar was astonished by Shri Hari's *lila*. He was enthused on witnessing the devotion of Dada Khachar for Shri Hari and the latter's

love towards Dada Khachar. Harji Thakkar's eyes turned moist with tears of joy. He felt that ever since the day Abhal Babu gave Shri Hari the onus of looking after Dada Khachar Maharaj had relentlessly been taking care of him. In spite of looking after Dada Khachar Shri Hari often uttered that he would never be able to repay Dada for his services and dedication.

Whenever the devotees of Sarangpur, Kariyani, Kundal, Khambda and other neighbouring villages came to know of Maharaj's arrival in Gadhada they would arrive in large numbers for his darshan.

I WAS EAGER TO MEET YOU

Vasta Khachar of Kariyani arrived in Gadhada. When he entered Akshar Ordi for Maharaj's darshan Jiva Khachar was also present. Shri Hari was pleased to see Vasta Khachar and said, "Vasta, I was eager to meet you. If you hadn't come I would have sent a messenger to call you."

Vasta Khachar was pleased to know of Shri Hari Maharaj's love for him. Jiva Khachar enquired, "Maharaj, why so much love for him?" Shri Hari replied, "Because he is a good devotee. He has firm faith in me. He perceives me to be divine and thus offers devotion to me in that manner. And that is why I feel joy in seeing him."

Jiva Khachar simply listened and remained shrewdly quiet.

NOW VASTA KHACHAR WILL NOT COME

Shortly thereafter, Jiva Khachar got up to leave. He told Vasta Khachar, "Vasta, come and stay at my home."

Shri Hari tried to stall his invitation, "Since he has come here let him stay here in Dada Khachar's *darbar*." But Jiva Khachar was persistent and obstinate. And, Vasta Khachar succumbed to his wish, out of his friendship and obligations. So, he too stood up and bowed before Maharaj to leave. Shri Hari did not look at him. Vasta Khachar explained, "Maharaj, since Jiva Babu has insisted I will have to go with him to stay at his house.

However, once I have placed my belongings I will return here." Shri Hari remained silent. And, Vasta Khachar accompanied Jiva Khachar.

Shortly thereafter, Shri Hari uttered, "Vasta Khachar will not come back." Muktanand Swami was curious and asked, "Maharaj, why do you say this?" Shri Hari sighed and revealed, "He will be vitiated by the negative words of Jiva Khachar and Buddho Dhadhal. His faith in me will be tarnished and he will become averse towards me."

WE HAVE SUNG HIS GLORY AND MADE HIM INTO A BHAGWAN

Jiva Khachar provided Vasta Khachar with the best of hospitality and servings of a delicious meal. Then they sat in a ballad's party. Buddho Dhadhal was appointed as Vasta Khachar's personal attendant. He started talking to Vasta Khachar, while pressing his feet, "Vasta Babu did you understand Shri Hari's purpose in praising you?"

Vasta Khachar remained silent. Buddho Dhadhal continued, "Jiva Babu, Vasta Khachar is naïve, so he cannot think intelligently." Vasta Khachar was puzzled by the tangent remark. Jiva Khachar perceived Vasta's confused expression. He signaled to Buddho to continue. The latter resumed, "Ever since Maharaj's family (Dharmakul) arrived in Gadhada Shri Hari has taken possession of a large part of Dada's *darbar* for them to live. Furthermore, I've heard that Maharaj has divided Dada's property into two parts and will later give them to his two brothers. Dada is truly foolish. Similarly, Maharaj will praise other naïve people like you and take over your land and homes. All this does not augur well. In fact, we have declared and praised him to be Bhagwan and thus catapulted him to the heights of unparalleled glory and fame. So, he has taken advantage of our naivety and invited his family members to spread his glory." ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

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



1913: A young Shastriji Maharaj (left), Nirgundas Swami and Yogiji Maharaj (seated) attend a *parayan* in Rajkot



1830: An illustration of the meeting between Governor Sir John Malcolm and Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Rajkot



1998: Pramukh Swami Maharaj performs the *murti-pratishtha* of Rajkot mandir

GLORIOUS HISTORY OF BAPS SATSANG IN RAJKOT

The city of Rajkot, a prominent industrial hub in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, has been associated with the Swaminarayan Sampradaya since the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

It was in Rajkot that Bhagwan Swaminarayan met Sir John Malcolm, Governor of Mumbai, on 28 February 1830 (Fagan *sud* 6, Ashadhi Samvat 1886) and where he had also previously met Colonel Walker.

Thereafter, satsang in the city was nurtured by Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and all the Gunatit gurus, and by stalwart disciples like Jaga Swami, Krishnaji Ada and others.

In particular, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj stayed at the Swaminarayan Mandir of the Vartal diocese in the Danapith area while he was studying Sanskrit under the tutelage of Jivanram Shastri at Hatkeshwar Mandir.

Krishnaji Ada strongly supported Shastriji



A youth garlands Yogiji Maharaj



Procession in honour of Yogiji Maharaj, 1970

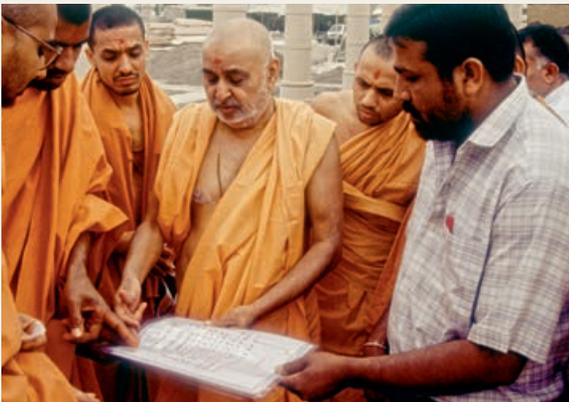
Maharaj's propagation of the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine and it was at his home that the historic first meeting between Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj took place.

Krishnaji Ada's home was a haven for all who propounded the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine, even before the BAPS Mandir in Kadia Sheri was inaugurated.

When Bhagwan Swaminarayan had come to Rajkot to meet Sir John Malcolm, he had bathed in the Aji River at a spot near to Krishnaji Ada's home, where a Mahadev Mandir now stands. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj used to conduct a *sabha* on every *ekadashi* at Krishnaji Ada's home.

Then, a woman devotee named Avalba donated her property in Kadia Sheri to Vignandas Swami to establish an Akshar-Purushottam Mandir and for sadhus to stay.

Swamishri gives guidance during the mandir construction



Devotees who supported Shastriji Maharaj at that time included: Shamaldas Pujara (Janta Guesthouse) and his son Lalitbhai Pujara, Himmatlal Premjibhai Pujara, Tapanbhai Popatbhai Jhala, Pragjibhai Dal and his son Gordhanbhai, Jadvaben (mother of Tapubhai Jhala) and others.

In 1897 (Samvat 1954), when Bhagatiji Maharaj passed away to Akshardham, Ramji Bhatt informed Shastriji Maharaj in the old mandir in Rajkot. At that time Shastriji Maharaj declared, "The Satpurush never leaves the earth."

Yogiji Maharaj usually visited Rajkot on Makar Sankranti and on Krishnaji Ada's birthday (Shravan *sud* 5). He often stayed at Ada's Deri on the banks of the River Aji. Sometimes he stayed at the home of Naranjibhai Morarji Sheth in Panchnath.

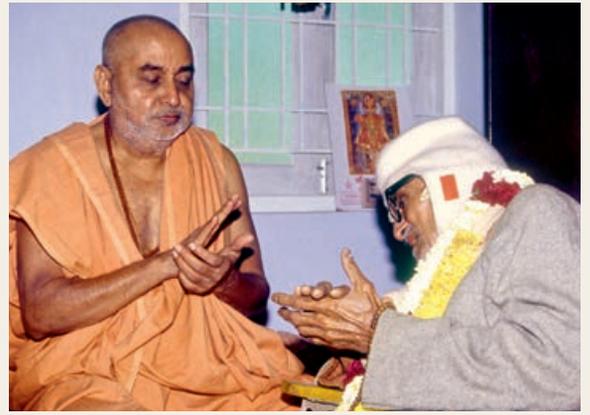
In 1966, a small property was purchased in Rajputpura and on 14 March 1967 (Fagan *sud* 3, Samvat 2023), Yogiji Maharaj consecrated the

Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspects the ongoing construction





Pramukh Swami Maharaj sanctifies a devotee's shop



Pramukh Swami Maharaj prays for the health of a devotee

murtis of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj there. In the assembly on that occasion, Yogiji Maharaj blessed that a grand mandir would be built in Rajkot by Pramukh Swami.

At the mandir in Rajputpura, Chunibhai Chaturvedi served as pujari and in 1976 Yogiswarup Swami was appointed as the *kothari*.

Subsequently, Pujya Balmukund Swami, the mahant of Gondal Mandir, frequently visited Rajkot to guide the Satsang. Pramukh Swami Maharaj also visited several times a year. As satsang grew, the need for a bigger mandir became apparent.

In May 1989, the project to build a *shikharbaddha* mandir was launched in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Various land options were explored.

Ultimately, a plot of land on Kalavad Road was purchased and on 27 April 1990 (Vaishakh *sud* 3, Samvat 2046), Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic ground-breaking ceremony

for a *shikharbaddha* mandir.

In 1991, the mandir plinth was completed. On 24 October 1992 (Aso *vad* 13, Samvat 2048), a new *hari* mandir was consecrated. And on 22 October 1993, (Aso *sud* 8, Samvat 2049) Swamishri ceremonially placed the mandir's first pillar.

Thereafter, on 26 November 1998 (Magshar *sud* 7, Samvat 2055), Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the new *shikharbaddha* mandir.

To commemorate this mandir's 20th anniversary and, as part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations, the 98th birthday celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were held in Rajkot from 5 to 15 December 2018. The following pages, provide a report of these celebrations. ◆

Gujarati text in Swaminarayan Prakash, January–February 2019. Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 78th birthday celebration, 1998



SWAMINARAYAN NAGAR

Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Spectacular 98th Birthday Celebrations
5 to 15 December 2018, Rajkot



Celebration ground with the main entrance, mandirs, exhibitions and *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

HIGHLIGHTS

- 550-acre Swaminarayan Nagar.
- 350-ft wide and 45-ft high entrance gate.
- 5 ornate mandirs.
- 6 inspiring exhibitions.
- 35,000 capacity open ground for the light and sound show.
- 50 departments. Hundreds of BAPS sadhus and 22,000 volunteers served in planning, creating and running the festival ground.
- Over 1 million cc blood donated over the 11-day celebrations.
- 34 crore Swaminarayan *mahamantras* written by devotees in 2018.
- 88,000 students visited from 625 schools.
- 15,000 *yajmans* participated in the three-day *yagna* and offered over 38 lakh oblations (*ahutis*).
- Countless pledged to give up addictions. Educational. Beautiful. Inspirational. Exciting. Life-changing and Spiritually divine. Swaminarayan Nagar encompassed all this and more.

The celebrations at Swaminarayan Nagar were a grand demonstration of the values, selfless



efforts and sentiments reflected in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's unique life of devotion to God and service to mankind. The mini spiritual wonderland hugged the Morbi-Madhpar bypass road in the western part of Rajkot.

The towering 45-ft high entrance gate of Swaminarayan Nagar invited all to visit the exquisite celebration ground. The entrance gate comprised of clouds perched on three giant arches supported by huge boulders and embellished with trees. The entrance gate was flanked by statues of *akshar muktas* with flowers and puja materials to greet the visitors. The 300-ft wide and 30-ft deep

entrance gate paid tributes to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's extraordinary philanthropic life symbolized by nature's elements of generosity.

The Swaminarayan Nagar was dotted with natural gardens, landscapes and fountains. The 27-ft high golden *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed the visitors as they proceeded towards the heart of the festival ground. Flanked by the golden *murti* were the pink coloured Shiv-Parvati and Sita-Ram mandirs.

Behind Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *murti* stood the ornate Akshar-Purushottam Mandir with the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam



Swaminarayan Nagar, 550-acre celebration ground



Statues of great saints and acharyas with devas offering reverence

Maharaj and the Guru Parampara. On its left and right sides stood the Lakshmi-Narayan and Radha-Krishna Mandirs.

Soon after entering the entrance gate, to its left and right sides, the two Bhajanand marquees hosted devotees singing *dhun*, bhajans and performing other forms of bhakti all day. Outside the Bhajanand marquee was a large mantra *vedika* where mantra books written by devotees throughout the year were uniformly arranged. They contained the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* and messages taught by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Devotees circumambulated the *vedika* to offer veneration to the mantras and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The festive ground also had 14 beautiful golden *murtis* of great saints and *acharyas* of India: Narad, Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Tulsidas, Mirabai, Narsinh Mehta, Tukaram, Jalaram Bapa and others, enshrined in altars along with the *murtis* of devas offering reverence to them. On each pedestal were inscribed the messages of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Behind these golden statues were the large marquees of the six enlightening and captivating value- and spiritual-based exhibitions. There were also several inspiring spots on the celebration grounds. One seemingly ordinary spot displayed a small wall made of discarded plastic bottles filled with plastic bags. The message of utilizing waste in a constructive way inspired the visitors. Another spot comprised of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *murti*

on a swing under the shade of a tree. The spot evoked devotion and a rural ambience through an oxen cart, farming tools and an oil lamp.

The spiritual mini-township inspired the young and old, devotees and non-devotees with values, faith and the spirit to serve and better our country.

Two spacious marquees of the Premvati food court satiated the hunger of visitors and the two Sahitya Bhandar marquees provided food for the soul through satsang books, audio CDs of bhajans and speeches, *murtis*, ayurvedic products and devotional gift items.

A special attraction at the Swaminarayan Nagar was the spectacular light and sound show, themed on the importance and efficacy of mandirs. The video film was shown on a 120-ft wide and 35-ft high LED screen with an adjoining large stage and a life-sized mandir for the live performances.

Some other inspiring spots dotted on the celebration grounds were:

Taking a pledge to shun addictions





The exhibitions inspired schoolchildren with moral values, faith and education



'Mandiram', the spectacular light and sound show

Vachanamrut Spot: A message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan from the Vachanamrut was displayed. This spot was located outside the Sahajanand exhibition.

Anti-addiction Spot: Bhagwan Swaminarayan's message of conquering one's mind by overcoming addictions was displayed here. This spot was situated in front of the Muktanand exhibition.

Unity Spot: Family unity was the central theme of this spot, which was located in front of the Muktanand exhibition.

Cleanliness Spot: It promoted cleanliness and fostering of a green environment. This spot was located outside the Bharatanand exhibition.

Spiritual Spot: This spot portrayed Pramukh Swami Maharaj's sentiment of promoting mutual love in society.

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

Blood-donation camp on the celebration ground



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

The 10,000 capacity assembly marquee, 'Pramukh Swami Mandapam', hosted Swamishri's daily morning puja and soul-stirring evening sat-sang and cultural programmes. There were ample parking plots for all types of vehicles.

Several large dining areas served hot meals to schoolchildren, devotees and well-wishers during their visit. Sadhus, Brahmin cooks, men and women volunteers persevered day and night to cook meals for all.

Swaminarayan Nagar was planned a year in advance and managed by 50 departments, which included construction, waterworks, electricity, decoration, housekeeping, exhibition, parking and traffic control, cultural programmes, book-stores and others. In all, 22,000 volunteers (14,000 males and 8,000 females) served in the different voluntary departments. All the volunteers were housed in high-rise apartments.

During the 11-day celebrations countless devotees from India and abroad, and people from Rajkot and its surrounding villages visited and derived immense inspiration and joy. ◆

*Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas
From Gujarati text: Swaminarayan Prakash,
January–February 2019.*



INSPIRING EXHIBITIONS

Among the main attractions of the birthday celebration in Rajkot were the six inspiring exhibitions: Sahajanand, Sevanand, Muktanand, Nityanand, Bharatanand and Paramanand. The marquee of each exhibition had two halls, each with a seating capacity of 1,000. For 11 days, more than 88,000 students from 625 schools in Rajkot and neighbouring towns saw the exhibitions from 8.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. Thereafter, from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., devotees and invited guests visited the exhibitions.

The themes and productions of the video shows in the exhibitions were conceived and prepared by Narayanmuni Swami, Brahmavihari Swami, Adarshjivan Swami, Jnannayan Swami,

Gurusmaran Swami, Bhagvatsetu Swami and 20 other sadhus and youth volunteers.

The brief contents of the six exhibitions are as follows.



SAHAJANAND EXHIBITION

In the morning session, from 8.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., schoolchildren were inspired to achieve success in their studies through video and live presentations. The video film depicted Nilkanth Varni's inexhaustible courage and determination during his perilous travels to Badrinath, Kedarnath and Mansarovar. In addition, the video film also included how famous sports stars and celebrities



portrayed the benefits of experiencing personal joy and good health. It also illustrated serving without expectations of praise, amidst a barrage of criticisms, and with sentiments to please God and to believe him to be the all-doer.



MUKTANAND EXHIBITION

The video show depicted a real life incident of how a couple prayed for a child and thereafter how he became mired in addictions from his teen years. Finally, his early demise shattered his parents and family. The emotionally charged story deeply touched the viewers. In conclusion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings and testimonials of those who had given up addictions inspired many to give up tobacco and drinks.



NITYANAND EXHIBITION

In the morning session, school students were shown a video themed on respecting and serving parents. The story showed how a stubborn and disrespectful child leaves home after not getting what he had desired from his father. His subsequent woes, regrets and the dawning of truth about how much his parents cared for him made him return home. In addition, depictions of how great people had served their parents were also shown in the video.

In the afternoon session, a moving video story for the senior audience showed the conflicts and quarrels in a family. Finally, the family issues were resolved through the practice of *ghar sabha* – a unique formula given by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The video also included testimonials of devotees about the benefits of *ghar sabha*. The video film inspired many to take pledges to sit daily with their families and do *ghar sabha*.



BHARATANAND EXHIBITION

An exciting and message-oriented video show,

attained success through hard work in the face of challenges and failures.

The afternoon session, from 2.00 p.m. to 10 p.m., enlightened the viewers about how Bhagwan Swaminarayan's teachings in the Vachanamrut are applicable in resolving issues related to family, illness and disastrous situations. The entire show was riveting and impactful.



SEVANAND EXHIBITION

The video show and live dialogues between the anchor and Ranglo (puppet character in the video show) were themed on serving others in order to experience lasting personal happiness. The show was based on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's maxim, "In the joy of others lies our own."

The various scenes of *seva* in the video film

themed on India's glorious heritage, cleanliness, safety and saving electricity and water, captivated the audience.

The video began with a frenzied celebration after India won an international cricket match. Subsequently, many youths celebrated boisterously by littering the streets, spitting after chewing *pan* and flouting the traffic laws. To check this mayhem each of the offenders received a call of advice from Bharat (India).

Then, India's great past and present contributions in the fields of science, maths, health, dance, education, yoga, commerce and infrastructure were shown.

A graphic animation of diseases like typhoid, diarrhoea, swine flu and others addressed mankind's disregard for hygiene and cleanliness.

Thereafter, a family in Nasik narrated how it lost a member due to negligence in wearing a helmet while riding a bike. Testimonials by people who were saved in accidents because they wore seat belts or helmets were also shown.

The final part of the video showed the need to conserve drinking water and electricity.



PARAMANAND EXHIBITION

The philanthropic and divine life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj has impressed and deeply touched countless people. He was hailed for his selfless efforts for the welfare and spiritual elevation of all. An excellent video film about how Pramukh Swami Maharaj transformed the life of Rishubha Vala who was steeped in vices and addictions, harmonized two Kshatriya communities who were at loggerheads for 200 years and appealed for peace after the terrorist attack on Akshardham in 2002. Swamishri endeavoured to reform individuals and communities, and impacted society through his love and compassion.

'MANDIRAM', LIGHT AND SOUND SHOW

'Mandiram', a spectacular light and sound

show, was one of the star attractions at Swaminarayan Nagar. The combination of video projection on a 120-ft wide and 35-ft high LED screen and live performances by 170 children and youths mesmerized all. The 33-minute show included music, dialogues and live dances. A mandir had been constructed adjacent to the giant screen. The large venue accommodated 35,000 people.

The show began with visuals about how the main mandir components are symbolic of mountains (*shikhars*), trees (pillars), the wind (flags), space (domes), etc. Then, Pramukh Swami Maharaj says that mandirs bless people with stability and peace of mind.

The video continued with a scene showing how a person was plagued with problems and stress in life. He experienced peace on entering a mandir. In another scene, the mandir ambience liberated an addict from his addictions.

Then, testimonials by people explained how the mandir liberated them from vices and addictions.

BAPS mandirs are also hubs for social services in times of calamity and need. The video shows how BAPS mandirs, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his sadhus and volunteers performed relief works during the Morbi floods (1979) and earthquake in Kutch (2001).

Finally, the video film depicted how the mandir is a place for offering bhakti and *upasana*.

The seamless video film and live performances produced a stupendous impact on the importance of mandirs in one's personal life, for the welfare of society and the spiritual elevation of one's soul.

The 'Mandiram' light and show was produced under the guidance and efforts of Narayanmuni Swami, Rushiraj Swami, 10 swamis and youths. ◆

*Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas
From Gujarati text: Swaminarayan Prakash,
January–February 2019.*



SEVA BY BAPS VOLUNTEERS AND WELL-WISHERS

The year-long events organized by the Rajkot satsang *mandal* culminated in the 11-day 98th Birthday Celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The story leading to the grand finale from 5 to 15 December 2018 is of Herculean effort, devotion and divine blessings. Glimpses of the voluntary services and events that led to the final celebrations is as follows.

VENUE AND ACQUISITION OF LAND

Shortly after the celebrations announcement was made in 2017 in Anand the swamis and volunteers of Rajkot *mandal* commenced their search for the festival venue. Initially, it was decided to have the celebrations on the Race Course Ground in the city centre. But after further discussions it was decided that the ground would not suffice to accommodate the large inflow of daily visitors. Thereafter, a large swathe of land on the western outskirts of Rajkot along the Morbi-Madhapur bypass road was selected. The venue was accessible to the people of Rajkot, the neighbouring towns and villages and for those arriving from

other parts of Gujarat.

Then followed the process of acquiring permission from 70 farmers who owned the plots of land. None of them had known or been in contact with the BAPS. But out of their respect for Pramukh Swami Maharaj, they agreed to give their one-acre, two-acre or seven-acre plots for the celebrations. In all, 550 acres were acquired from the farmers. Many farmers sacrificed the sowing of crops for the site preparations. Some sowed crops which could be harvested well before the land was required for the preparations. The Rajkot Municipal Corporation also gave land for the celebrations.

GROUND PREPARATIONS

After the land was acquired the levelling of the ground and preparations commenced. Each farmer's plot had a cement name board on its boundary. The volunteers removed each of these boards, sometimes working till midnight, and wrote the farmers' names and numbers on them. The large number of cement boards were then kept on 25 *vighas* of land. Each cement board was

so heavy that it required four persons to pull it out from the ground. Sometimes, when the boards were being uprooted snakes emerged from the ground. Another menace for the volunteers were the swarms of mosquitoes that attacked them. In spite of all this the volunteers remained resolute in their *seva* of clearing and levelling the site.

ACCOMMODATIONS

While work on the Swaminarayan Nagar was in progress discussions were held as to where to arrange for Mahant Swami Maharaj's stay.

Soon thereafter, the organizers saw a hotel, Atithi Devo Bhava (ADB), opposite the celebrations site. Apurvamuni Swami and swamis went to meet the owner, Hemrajbhai Dangar, and proposed for Mahant Swami Maharaj's accommodation at his hotel. Hemrajbhai assured that in spite of his son, Sagar's, marriage during the celebration days on 12 December he would offer his entire hotel for Mahant Swami Maharaj's stay. Furthermore, Hemrajbhai postponed his son's reception, scheduled at his hotel on 13th and 14th to 17th December. He had also cancelled three bookings for his hotel during the celebration days. Hemrajbhai and Jayantibhai, who manages the hotel, gave 15 days paid leave to the 90 hotel staff members. In addition, Hemrajbhai made changes in his hotel to make Mahant Swami Maharaj's stay comfortable.

Another challenge was finding accommodations for the swamis serving in or attending the celebrations. After several enquiries a few blocks of highrise flats were found close to the festival venue. Kiritbhai, Yogeshbhai and Jaysukhbhai Ghodasara owned the newly built highrise Merry Gold flats. When swamis met the brothers they immediately agreed to host all the 800 sadhus. Thereafter, the three brothers fast-tracked the minor construction work left in two of their highrise blocks.

Accommodations for thousands of male and female volunteers who would be offering their



Volunteers on site

services prior to and during the celebrations were to be arranged. The Westwood School, opposite Swaminarayan Nagar, seemed to be appropriate. A few sadhus approached its owner, Devayatbhai, and the latter agreed, providing we obtained permission from parents of the students to keep the school closed for that period. To explain to them a special assembly was organized for the parents. The parents were informed about the celebrations and the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The speeches by swamis impressed them and they agreed to having a vacation for their children from 9 to 16 December. Thus, during the celebration days 550 volunteers stayed at Westwood School.

Then, the search for accommodations for 15,000 volunteers commenced. A government housing scheme with newly built vacant flats was ready near the celebrations site. After enquiring from the officials of the municipal corporation permission was granted for occupancy. Several builders also gave their newly built highrise flats for the volunteers' accommodations. The devotees of Rajkot provided mattresses as bedding for the volunteers and devotees.

SACRIFICE AND DEDICATION OF DEVOTEES

The dedication and sacrifice of the devotees of Rajkot was exemplary. A few stories of their sacrifices are as follows.

- The son and daughter of an economically challenged *satsangi* female devotee study at



Decoration department

the BAPS schools in Sarangpur and Randesan respectively. For two months the mother failed to earn any money from her occupation, so she sold her personal items to meet her daily expenses. Then, two months prior to the main celebrations, she pawned her *mangal sutra* in order to meet her domestic expenses and do *seva* for 45 days.

- Another lady devotee earned ₹51,000 by making and selling pickles for one year and donated the sum for the celebrations.
- The women's wing of Rajkot performed kirtan concerts throughout the year and donated the donations received for the celebrations.
- Swamis and volunteers travelled to neighbouring villages of Rajkot to spread the word about the celebrations. A total of six swamis and several volunteers made the daily home visits from morning till evening. They visited 4,500 homes in 125 villages, out of which 5,200 people gave up addictions and many donated grains and money for the celebrations.

HELPING HANDS

Many well-wishers in Rajkot contributed and helped on learning about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th Birthday Celebrations.

- Maheshbhai Sutariya gave his road construction machines for a month for levelling the celebration grounds.
- Arvindbhai, owner of Krunal Construction Company, gave his excavator for *seva*.

Chandreshbhai of Kishan Gaushala donated cow dung for preparing the *yagnashala* and an excavator, tractor and other vehicles for the celebrations.

- During the making of Swaminarayan Nagar a male Muslim volunteered his services. He said, "I want to offer my services for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthday celebrations. I know how to drive a tractor." He offered his services as a tractor driver.
- Many farmers helped by supplying water from their own private wells and borewells. A local corporator used money from his own personal grant to make arrangements for the water supply.
- During the celebrations a person approached the swamis and asked, "Do you require buses for transportation?" On saying yes, the person came the next day and gave two buses. Many other philanthropists also contributed by providing buses for transport.
- Prafulbhai Hadvani of Gopal Namkin donated snacks for all the school students who visited the celebrations every morning.

By Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings and grace the celebrations inspired many well-wishers to contribute in kind.

YEAR-LONG CELEBRATION PROGRAMMES IN RAJKOT

As part of the year-long 98th Birthday Celebrations various programmes and events were held in Rajkot.

- Children contacted 98,000 people and imparted anti-addiction messages. A total of 1,000 boys in different groups contacted people in public places, like the railway station, bus stands and housing societies, to inspire them to give up addictions. Girls visited many hospitals in Rajkot to offer prayers for the patients.
- BAPS male youths organized traffic awareness campaigns. They also distributed cards to

explain the need to save water and electricity, and organized cleanliness drives.

- BAPS female youths visited and prayed at orphanages, old age homes and schools for disabled children.

The *mahila mandal* performed kirtan concerts and contacted people, giving them details about the final celebrations.

- Devotees collected 25,000 clothes and distributed them to the poor and needy.
- As part of the celebrations programme seminars were organized for architects, lawyers, engineers, builders, businessmen and others to enlighten them about the noble life and messages of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and to invite them for the 11-day celebrations.
- Members of various communities were invited separately for a one-day convention at the BAPS Mandir, Rajkot, namely, Kadva Patel, Leuva Patel, Ahir, Brahmin, Kadiya (bricklayers), Mochi (cobblers), Lohana and others. Individual assemblies to inform police officers and housekeeping labourers and 3,000 professors from the colleges of Rajkot were also held in the mandir auditorium.
- Medico-spiritual conferences were organized at the mandir, in which 2,200 doctors of Rajkot attended. Out of them 55 doctors conducted free health camps for 1,400 people.
- In a teacher's seminar, 3,000 teachers attended from 150 schools. In a students development programme 5,000 students from colleges affiliated with the Gujarat Technical University (GTU) and Saurashtra University attended and were inspired with values in life.
- For students of Rajkot schools a week-long competition, Pramukh Pratibha Parva, was held. From 450 schools 4,500 students participated in various competitions like elocution, essay writing, skit performance, singing, painting and others. The students were provided with matter related to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and they performed commendably.



Volunteers making the seating arrangements for the light and sound show

In conclusion, 98 conventions, seminars and programmes were organized to inspire values, spirituality and create awareness about the birthday celebrations.

PUBLICITY IN RAJKOT CITY

To invite all and create awareness for the 98th Birthday Celebrations among the citizens of Rajkot and the surrounding villages giant posters and billboards were displayed. Thousands of posters were displayed in shops, offices and hotels. Posters were also displayed on city buses with the permission and cooperation of the metropolitan municipality. Posters were also displayed on 4,000 rickshaws that plied through the city daily. To invite all, announcements were made from two chariots that travelled 3,500 km around the city and to 140 neighbouring villages.

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S BLESSINGS AND GRACE

Mahant Swami Maharaj often gave blessings for the year-long and grand finale 11-day Birthday Celebrations. Prior to the commencement of the construction of Swaminarayan Nagar Mahant Swami Maharaj visited the site twice. On one occasion he saw the site plan at the celebrations site and enquired about its details and offered guidance.

In May 2018, Swamishri had blessed in Rajkot, "The celebrations will be grand, immensely grand. They will be divine, immensely



Volunteers engaged in the construction *seva* of mandirs divine and supreme. Innumerable people will attend.” And Swamishri’s words came true.

In May 2018, during Swamishri’s stay in Rajkot, a special volunteers assembly was organized. A brief presentation was made about the responsibilities of various departments. Thereafter, a volunteer remarked, “Along with the departments mentioned who will take care of nature’s department? Who will manage the weather – cold and heat? Who will take care that no one will fall ill and no accidents will occur? And who will maintain everyone’s enthusiasm and grit to serve?”

Swamishri replied with a smile and blessed, “No accidents will occur during the celebrations and no one will face any difficulties.” And the entire celebration passed without a single accident or untoward incident. However, there were occasions in which the volunteers experienced Swamishri’s divine protection.

Once, a volunteer of the decoration department was driving a large crane, carrying a big iron panel. A short distance away there was an overhead high tension cable of 66,000 KV. The driver spontaneously felt that something disastrous was going to happen, so he jumped off from the crane cabin. Luckily, a swami who daily sat in the cabin was absent on that day. When the iron panel came close to the high tension cable there was a loud explosion. And the hydra crane’s tyres burst. By Swamishri’s grace a serious calamity was averted. There were many other incidents where the volunteers experienced Swamishri’s divine protection.



Women volunteers engaged in the landscaping *seva*

EXCELLENT ORGANIZATION

Ten Swamis and 500 *satsangi* craftsmen and volunteers made the giant entrance gate, mandirs, *murtis* and various performing stages.

According to Mahant Swami Maharaj’s wish the kitchen department served hot breakfast and meals to all the visitors every morning, afternoon and evening. Chapattis, *rotla*, *thepla*, cooked vegetables and sweets were made and served with devotion to all the volunteers and visitors. The dining arrangements were noteworthy and the *seva* performed by the women volunteers was highly commendable.

Devotees from 55 countries and all parts of India came to avail of the celebrations. Accommodations for 10,000 devotees were arranged.

To treat ailing visitors five clinics, one emergency clinic and ambulances were available at the Swaminarayan Nagar. In all, 125 doctors of all specialities were available round the clock. ◆

*Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas
From Gujarati text: Swaminarayan Prakash,
January–February 2019*



Volunteers involved in the construction *seva*



SWAMINARAYAN NAGAR

Inauguration & Daily Assemblies

5 to 15 December 2018, Rajkot

Mahant Swami Maharaj and the Chief Minister Shri Vijaybhai Rupani inaugurate the Swaminarayan Nagar

INAUGURATION

5 December 2018

The glittering rays of the early morning sun lit the sprawling 500-acre Swaminarayan Nagar on the Madhapar-Morbi Highway, the site of the 11-day celebrations to mark the 98th birthday of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the 20th anniversary of the BAPS Mandir in Rajkot.

At 7.30 a.m. Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, senior swamis, the Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijaybhai Rupani and leading dignitaries of Rajkot performed the Vedic inauguration rituals at the imposing main gate of the festival site. Following the *pujan* of Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj,

ceremonial splitting of the coconuts and other rituals, Mahant Swami Maharaj and the Chief Minister untied the *nadachhadi* attached to the central pillars of the main gate to inaugurate the celebrations. At the same time, senior swamis and other distinguished guests performed the inauguration of the various exhibition domes.

Swamishri, the Chief Minister and the entourage then proceeded to 27-ft *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj situated along the central path of the *nagar*. There, Mahant Swami Maharaj, the Chief Minister and others offered *mantra-pushpanjali*.

From there, Swamishri, the Chief Minister and



Mandir, honoured the Chief Minister with a shawl. The Chief Minister then addressed the assembly, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj had a great connection with Rajkot and he always showered his blessings on the people of Rajkot. With his inspiration, we are all prepared to further his humanitarian, cultural and spiritual works. This celebration will inspire countless people of all backgrounds. The youths will be guided in the right direction. The exhibitions will impart the messages of de-addiction, our responsibility to keep India clean and our duty to help others.”

Then, Swamishri blessed, “From all directions there has been cooperation. Everyone has been eager to serve. The volunteers are extremely enthusiastic. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a person that we can never do enough to repay our debt to him. Swami Bapa lived his motto, ‘In the joy of others lies our own’ day and night. He never discriminated against anyone. He lived an exemplary life. If one follows in his footsteps, then one will be happy in every respect.”

LIGHT AND SOUND SHOW INAUGURATION

One of the main attractions in Swaminarayan Nagar was the nightly ‘Mandiram’ light and sound show. On the evening of 5 December, the show

others went to the Akshar-Purushottam Mandir to perform *pujan* and *arti*. At the same time, senior swamis and other dignitaries performed *pujan* and *arti* in the separate mandirs of Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Shiv-Parvati and Shri Lakshmi-Narayan.

While the inauguration rituals were performed, thousands of devotees were seated in the inauguration assembly in front of the Akshar-Purushottam Mandir.

Mahant Swami Maharaj, the Chief Minister and dignitaries then arrived in the assembly and were joyously greeted by the devotees waving BAPS flags.

Brahmatirth Swami, *kothari* of Rajkot

was inaugurated by the Governor of Karnataka Shri Vajubhai Vala and Gujarat State Education Minister Shri Bupendrasinh Chudasma.

The show, featuring videos projected on a 120 ft x 35 ft LED screen, colourful lights and live performances, presented the purpose and positive contributions to society made by mandirs. The show was presented three times every evening during the celebrations. Over 380,000 people seated in the open grounds in front of the screen and performing stage watched the inspiring show during the 11-day celebrations.

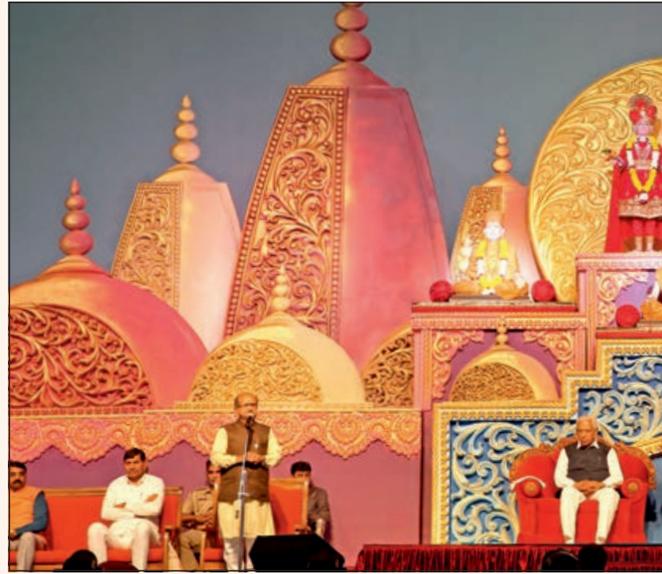
After the inaugural show, the Governor, Education Minister and others proceeded to the Pramukh Swami Mandapam, a large marquee where the daily evening assemblies were held in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Other guests included Shri Mohanbhai Kundariya MP, Shri Dhansukhbhai Bhanderi (Chairman, Municipal Finance Board), and other local leaders and leading industrialists.

Bhupendrasinh Chudasma addressed the assembly, “Whatever I am today is due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s blessings. Swami Bapa served not just the satsang or state, but the whole of society. He was an international figure. Yet, he even cared for the tribals and other underprivileged sections of society. There are no communities he has not touched with his messages of de-addiction and peace. His encouragement for all to conduct a regular family assembly (*ghar sabha*) and weekly satsang assembly have worked wonders.”

Governor Shri Vajubhai Vala said, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj was dedicated to the progress of India and he impacted the whole world. He built 1,100 mandirs and promoted Hindu dharma throughout the world. It is not an exaggeration to say that he was God in human form.

“People can become wealthy, but to become virtuous is difficult. Pramukh Swami Maharaj took up this challenge and through his wisdom motivated people to lead virtuous lives.



Mahant Swami Maharaj, Governor Shri Vajubhai Vala, *sadguru* swamis and other guests on stage

“Today, people waste their lives seeking pleasures and fashions. Only those who are not attracted to pleasures and fashion can dedicate their lives for the good of society. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a role model for this. We all need to strive to develop his virtues and love for all. His eyes reflected his love and his words were affectionate and that is why the whole world bows to him.

“In my life I have been inspired by Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. When I wake up in the morning, I remember my mother, father and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and only then do I step out of bed.”



Governor Vajubhai Vala inaugurates the ‘Mandiram’ light and sound show



Then, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj helped all, regardless of caste, community or creed. He saw God in all and served them. However much we praise him, it is still not enough. All should study and learn from his life.”

Today’s special cultural presentation was by Padma Shri Bhikhudan Ghadvi, a renowned and popular folk singer.

MAHILA DIN

6 December 2018

From 4 p.m. around 15,000 women devotees and well-wishers from Rajkot and nearby villages



Shri Bhikhudan Ghadvi

attended the special women’s assembly held in the Pramukh Swami Mandapam on the theme ‘Karuna Aparampar’ – ‘Unlimited Compassion’.

The chief guest on this occasion was the former Chief Minister of Gujarat and current Governor of Madhya Pradesh Shrimati Anandiben Patel.

The assembly featured inspiring speeches, bhajans, skits and dances presented by a total of 950 young girls, and teenage and adult women devotees. Throughout the year, the women devotees had made tremendous efforts to promote the 11-day celebrations in Rajkot and surrounding regions (for details, see *Premvati*, January–February 2019).

SANT PARAM HITKARI DANCE-DRAMA

7 December 2018

The evening assembly to mark Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 98th birthday, as per the Gregorian calendar, began with a speech by Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami narrating Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s virtues of *nirman* and *nisswad*.

Thereafter, the ‘Sant Param Hitkari’ dance-drama written by Brahmaprakash Swami was presented to portray Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life and work. The cast of 418 children and youths from Gana and Adas delivered a captivating performance of the various dramatized scenes and thematic dances.

After the performance, the main guests, Shri R.C. Faldu (Gujarat State Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Transport), Shri Govindbhai Patel (MLA) and others were honoured in the assembly.

Addressing the assembly, Shri R.C. Faldu said, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave the message of brotherhood and peace to the whole world. Such great saints take birth to grant liberation to all. We are guided by the path he set.”

Then, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj had many virtues. Anyone who came into his contact would be impacted by him. Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj,

Haka Khachar and I were travelling by train from Delhi to Gujarat. It was a 24-hour journey. Pramukh Swami Maharaj and I didn't talk much, so Haka Khachar got bored, since he was very talkative. Even though Swami Bapa spoke little, his presence radiated warmth – just like one feels warmed by a fire in winter. This was natural for him.”

FELICITATION ASSEMBLY

8 December 2018

The vast 550-acre Swaminarayan Nagar was only possible due to generous support, sacrifice and goodwill of countless well-wishers. The 550 acres of land were generously permitted for use by numerous builders, farmers and other landowners. Many farmers forewent their winter crops and allowed the use of their land, while builders provided flats for accommodation for sadhus, volunteers and visitors. Also, the officials of Rajkot Municipal Corporation and other government agencies gave their wholehearted support.

The evening felicitation assembly began with a speech by Brahmavihari Swami explaining the glory of *seva* and a traditional tribal dance presented by youths of the Akshar-Purushottam Chhatralaya in Vidyanagar.

The chief guests of the evening included Pujya Brahmadevi Maharaj (Girnari Ashram, Kuvadva), Shri Manoj Agrawal (Police Commissioner, Rajkot), Shri Vikrant Pande (Collector, Ahmedabad), Shri Banchhanidhi Pani (Municipal Commissioner, Rajkot) and others.

Addressing the assembly, Shri Banchhanidhi Pani said, “If everyone follows Pramukh Swami Maharaj's example, then a new India will definitely emerge. We have received tremendous support from the BAPS mandir here to keep Rajkot clean. With discipline, effort and good intentions in our lives, all tasks are achievable. Everyone who comes to this Swaminarayan Nagar learns these three values.”

Shri Vikrant Pande said, “By the darshan of



Sadhus and devotees seated during an evening assembly in the Pramukh Mandapam

Mahant Swami Maharaj I felt the peace of God. The BAPS endeavours to promote Indian culture.”

Shri Manoj Agrawal said, “When the discussions to hold the celebrations here took place two months ago, there was just open farm land. But with the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj, a grand *nagar* has been built. The sadhus and devotees have put in tremendous effort. This Sanstha is doing great work to inspire the young generation with noble virtues.”

Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “Thank you to all who have allowed the use of their land here. It is their great timely service. Bhagwan Swaminarayan was himself a *sevak*. He himself engaged in service. Gunatitanand Swami swept the



Shri Osman Mir



Junagadh mandir compound up to the age of 82. Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj also served in many ways. Everyone has been inspired by them and offered their services here with pure heart.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj was of a different spiritual level. He was divine. Everyone experienced this. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was always relaxed, since he placed all worries at the feet of God. The sadhus and devotees endeavour here daily and yet are tension-free, since their only aim is to please Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Thank you to all who have served here.”

Finally, Swamishri presented mementos to all who had provided *seva* and support for the celebrations.

BHAKTI SANGIT

9 December 2018

In the evening assembly, Somprakash Swami presented a kirtan-based discourse (*sankirtan*). Then, renowned artistes, Shri Kirtidan Gadhvi and Shri Osman Mir presented a programme of devotional bhajans.

Among the chief guests were Mahamandaleshwar Pujya Vishvambhar Bharti Babu, Shri Narharibhai Amin (Vice-President, Planning Commission, Gujarat), Shri Arvindbhai Rajyani (MLA), Shri N.N. Jadeja (Deputy Commissioner of Police, Rajkot) and others.

Addressing the assembly, Mahamandaleshwar Pujya Vishvambhar Bharatji said, “Where in this world can you find a *sant* who has initiated over 1,000 sadhus and built over 1,100 mandirs. What work can a sadhu do? The answer is seen in the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

Shri Narharibhai Amin said, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a *sant* that by merely going to him, all one’s mental troubles are removed and peace prevails.”

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj has accomplished outstanding works throughout the world. Everyone had affection for him. Nobody departed from him disappointed. He sincerely practised what he preached in his life. Everyone experienced this.”

HISTORY OF RAJKOT SATSANG

10 December 2018

To commemorate the 20th anniversary of the BAPS Mandir in Rajkot a specially scripted dance-drama titled ‘Rajdurg Mahatmya’ – ‘Glory of Rajkot’ – presented an outline of the history of satsang in Rajkot, from the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to the present day. The script was written by Shri Jayendrabhai Vinchhi and the performance was presented by 180 children and youths of Rajkot and Gondal.

Prior to the performance, Narayanmuni



Shri Kirtidan Gadhvi



Swamishri blesses devotees during the Shri Swaminarayan Vishwashanti Mahayagna

Swami had addressed the assembly on the topic of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's dedicated devotees.

The chief guests included Shri Rahul Gupta (Collector, Rajkot), Shri R.J. Mankadia (Collector, Morbi) and others.

Blessing the assembly, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "The BAPS in India and abroad serves in many ways. But at the heart of it all, the gurus have emphasized the need for *upasana*. Despite facing many difficulties Shastriji Maharaj and others have not strayed but have maintained their focus on *upasana*. Shastriji Maharaj said that the Satpurush never leaves from this world. So, while engaging in all these activities, sincerely focus on observing *agna* and strengthening *upasana*."

SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MAHAYAGNA 10-12 December 2018

Spread over an area of 465 x 520 ft, the *yagna shala* was decorated with palm trees and colourful

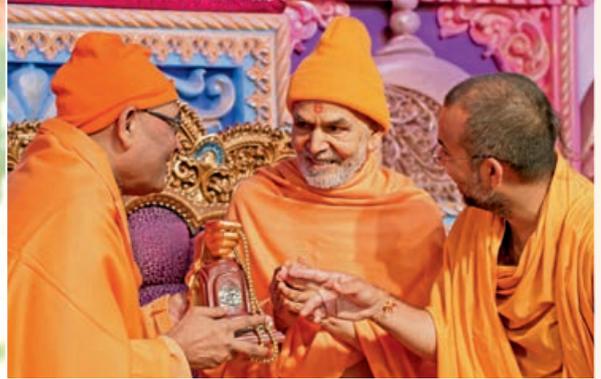
festoons. It housed 8 main *yagna kunds* on the stage and 529 *yagna kunds* throughout the *yagna* arena. At the centre the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj were mounted on a decorative rotating pedestal, showering their blessings on all. Over the three days, 15,809 *yajmans* participated in the *yagna*.

On 10 December, in the early morning, the *yagna* commenced in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami with learned Brahmins chanting the auspicious Vedic mantras.

The *yagna* rituals were performed while the newly composed Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja and Shri Sahajanand Namavali, written at the wish of Mahant Swami Maharaj, were recited.

On each of the three days, Mahant Swami Maharaj graced the *yagna* and performed the initial rituals on the main stage.

On the first day, he blessed, "May all who have participated in the *yagna* be blessed with good



Top: Devotees perform the *yagna* rituals
Bottom: Swamishri performs the *yagna* rituals

Top: Swami Nikhileshwaranandji addresses an evening assembly
Bottom: Swamishri presents a memento to Swami Paramatmanandji

health, sound mind and abundant wealth, and may everyone's wishes be fulfilled. The *avatari* of all avatars himself manifested on earth to grant bliss and *moksha* to all. So, remain joyful in this supreme attainment."

Thereafter, daily, he sat on a decorated *rath* and traversed the central paths to give darshan and blessings to all.

After he and the sadhus departed, every day about 5,270 *yajmans* seated around 529 *yagna kund*s performed the *yagna* rituals as guided by Shri Mukeshbhai Shastri, Vasudevchai and other learned Brahmins.

KIRTAN ARADHANA

12 December 2018

Throughout the year, the women devotees of Rajkot had presented 335 bhajan concerts in the suburbs of Rajkot and surrounding villages.

Today, in the evening assembly, BAPS

sadhus and youths presented a programme of melodious bhajans, with a commentary by Adarshjivan Swami.

The chief guests included Pujya Nikhileshwaranandji (Head, Ramakrishna Mission, Rajkot), Pujya Paramatmanand Saraswatiji (Arsh Vidyamandir, Manjuka), Dr Balvantbhai Jani (Chancellor, Dr. Harisinh Gor University, Madhya Pradesh), Shri K.R. Sriram (Principal, Account-General, Gujarat) and others.

Pujya Paramatmanand Swami addressed the assembly, "God is omnipresent, yet is difficult to attain. Similarly, great saints are difficult to attain. You are all extremely fortunate that you have Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj as gurus. What is the highest grace of God? That he gives us the darshan of such saints. Because you revere them as gurus, you are able to sincerely serve them. BAPS arranges such events that benefit the whole of



Newly initiated sadhus with Swamishri

society. Prayers that such programmes continue throughout the world.”

Dr Balvantbhai Jani said, “Today, based on the principles of Sahajanand Swami many are inspired to lead noble lives. Once, I gave a speech in Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s presence. At that time, he said that I would become a chancellor of chancellors. Today, his blessings have borne fruit.”

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s saintliness was unparalleled. He beheld God fully. He accomplished all works by keeping God as the focus. Everyone has experienced Pramukh Swami Maharaj – his saintliness has awoken the world. He selflessly served all.”

BHAGVATI DIKSHA CEREMONY

13 December

In the morning, after Mahant Swami Maharaj’s puja, the *diksha mahapuja* rituals were performed by Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and the 35 *parshads* who were to receive the *bhagvati diksha*.

After the completion of the initial rituals, Dr Swami and other swamis addressed the assembly.

Thereafter, the concluding rituals were performed in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Then, each *parshad* approached Mahant Swami

Maharaj to receive the *bhagvati diksha* and guru mantra, while Narayanmuni Swami announced the new names of the newly initiated sadhus.

At the end, Swamishri blessed, “Today, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj will be overjoyed. Yogi Bapa used to ask youths, ‘Will you become a sadhu?’ He was very keen on initiating youths into the sadhu-fold. You have all enthusiastically become sadhus, but only with true affection and firm faith in God and his Sadhu will you succeed. By pleasing God and his Sadhu everything is included. Congratulations to all the parents of the sadhus. Many have willingly permitted their only sons. Fathers may see them from near, but for the mothers they will not be able



Swamishri performs *abhishek* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan during the 20th *patotsav* rituals of Rajkot mandir



Shri Sukhdev Dhameliya and Shri Sairam Dave (left)

to meet them at all. Their sacrifice is enormous. May Shriji Maharaj bless them all.”

Then, the fathers of the newly initiated sadhus received the personal blessings of Swamishri. After meeting them all, Swamishri again took a microphone in hand and praised their dedication.

As Swamishri got up to leave, the newly initiated danced with joy around Swamishri.

HASYA SANGAT

13 December

At the beginning of the evening assembly Anandswarup Swami spoke in detail about Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s humility and other virtues.

Thereafter, renowned artistes Shri Sairam Dave and Shri Sukhdev Dhameliya entertained the assembly with their rustic humour.

The chief guests included Shri Dhamjibhai Patel MLA, university vice-chancellors, industrialists and others.

20TH PATOTSAV OF RAJKOT MANDIR 13–14 December

To commemorate the 20th *patotsav* (anniversary) of the BAPS Mandir in Rajkot, a special 200-*kalash* ‘Uttamottam Snapan’ *maha-abhishek* had been arranged.

On the afternoon of 13 December, the Vedic *pujan* of the 200 *kalashes* to be used in the *maha-abhishek* was performed in the Yogi Sabhagruh at the BAPS Mandir on Kalavad Road. Mantras from all four Vedas were sung: Rig Veda mantras by Shri Omkar Shastri Kakade, Yajur Veda mantras by Shri Rudreshbhai Joshi, Sam Veda mantras by Shri Tejasbhai Trivedi and Atharva Veda mantras by Shri Darshanbhai Vyas.

At 5.45 a.m. on 14 December, the *patotsav* rituals were performed in the mandir shrines. At 7.35 a.m., Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the Uttamottam Snapan *maha-abhishek* of the *murtis* in the central shrine using four of the *kalashes*. Thereafter, *sadguru* swamis and other



Devotees participate in the 20th *patotsav pujan* rituals



Mahant Swami Maharaj with Thakorji on the occasion of the mandir *patotsav*

swamis performed *abhishek* using the remaining *kalashes*.

After the *abhishek*, the *murtis* were bathed, and adorned with garments and ornaments. Then, Swamishri performed the 20th *patotsav arti*.

FOLK SONGS PROGRAMME

14 December

In the evening assembly, following speeches by Anirdesh Swami and Sarvamangal Swami, Shri Rajbha Gadhvi presented a programme of devotional folk songs.

The chief guests included Shri Madhavsinh Diwan (Dharmaguru and Royal, Bilara State, Rajasthan), Shri Amarsinhji (Rajya Sabha Member) and others.

Shri Madhavsinhji addressed the assembly, “When I was young I would go for Shastriji Maharaj’s darshan. I also received many blessings from Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. And today, I have received the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj visited Jaipur three times, Yogiji Maharaj visited three times,

and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj have visited many times. The joy, peace and inspiration received here are unparalleled.”

Distinguished author, Shri Jay Vasavda addressed the gathering recalling his (childhood) memories with Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Gondal. Then he added, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj was like an innocent child. It was seen on his face. Yet, he was disciplined and organized. This is a rare combination. His integrity continues to have an impact even today. Pramukh Swami Maharaj always firmly remained sincere to his principles and austerities. He was always straightforward and clear in his thoughts and actions. After the terrorist attack on Gandhinagar Akshardham, the situation in Gujarat was tense. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj defused the tension through his forgiving and loving approach.”

At the end Swamishri presented mementos to all the dignitaries. ◆

*Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
From Gujarati text: Swaminarayan Prakash,
January–February 2019*

Inauguration of Vachanamrut Bicentenary Celebrations

11 December 2018, Rajkot



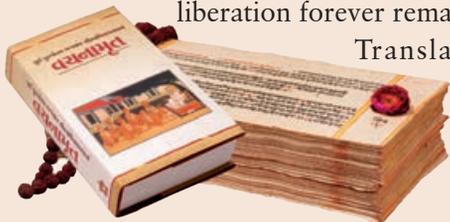
The Vachanamrut is a compilation of the divine discourses of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and is the core shastra of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

The first Vachanamrut is dated 21 November 1819 (Magshar *sud* 4, Samvat 1876) and so 2019 will mark its bicentenary. A special assembly was held to launch the year-long Vachanamrut bicentenary celebrations. In this evening assembly, the Vachanamrut and its special characteristics were highlighted.

In his own divine words, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed his spiritual doctrine. Whether day or night and regardless of place, he discoursed to the *paramhansas* and devotees, providing practical guidance and resolving all their spiritual enquiries.

The evening assembly featured speeches by learned swamis describing the authenticity of the Vachanamrut, the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam revealed in the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's revelation of his own supreme form, the spiritual endeavours that lead to inner peace and joy, the key to ultimate liberation and the Sant through whom the door to liberation forever remains open.

Translations of the Vachanamrut in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu



and Marathi were inaugurated by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The various activities planned for the year-long Vachanamrut Bicentenary Celebrations were creatively presented by children and youths. These include: Vachanamrut reading and study, Bal-Yuva Adhiveshans, *jnansatras* and others.

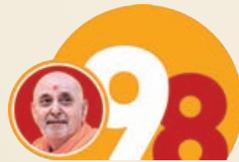
Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami declared that throughout the year everyone should hail 'Vachanamrut Dwishatabdi Mahotsavani Jai' at the end of the regular *jai naad*. Then, Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and the *sadguru* sadhus inaugurated the celebration year by lighting the *divo*, while the entire assembly hailed the bicentenary *jai naad*.

Youths presented a thematic dance conveying the messages of the Vachanamrut: Bhagwan Swaminarayan's revelation of the Akshar Purushottam doctrine, his true supreme form, the Sant as the gateway to *moksha* and the spiritual sadhanas by which inner peace and joy are attained.

At the end, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan said, 'My words are my form.' So, the Vachanamrut is the form of Shriji Maharaj. So, revere the Vachanamrut in that way and do not disrespectfully leave it lying around. Keep it in a clean place and read it daily. Respect the Vachanamrut in this way. It will guide us.

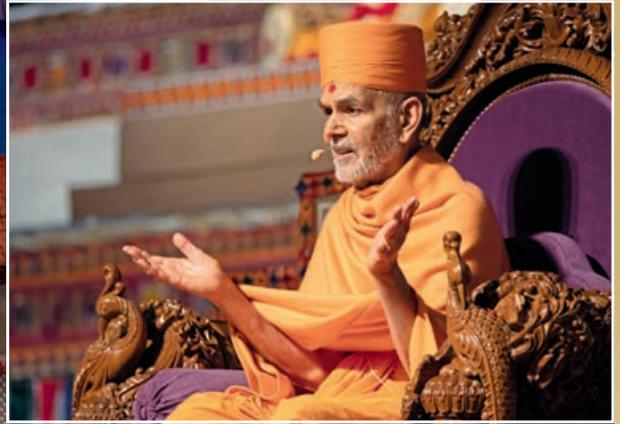
"There is much ignorance in our lives, which we have to remove. Only the Vachanamrut can achieve this. If you read it sincerely with faith and affection, then your ignorance will be naturally removed. Such is its great effect. Study it daily and repeatedly review what you have read. By doing this, all your tasks will be achieved."

The entire inauguration assembly was webcast and thousands of devotees viewed it from their homes. ◆



PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 98th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

15 December 2018, Rajkot



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine life exemplified the principles of the Vachanamrut revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the living form of the Vachanamrut. His 98th birthday assembly celebrated the upcoming Vachanamrut bicentenary by focusing on the qualities of a God-realized Sadhu described in the Vachanamrut...

Rajkot is a key city in the history of BAPS Satsang. Over a century ago, the first meeting between Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj took place there. Since then, the blessings of the saintly duo has nurtured the growth of Satsang and over the years Rajkot has been a host to many historic occasions.

Adding to this list was the 11-day celebrations to mark Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th birthday. The climax to these celebrations was the 98th birthday celebration assembly, which was held on a vast area across the highway from Swaminarayan Nagar.

The decorative backdrop of the main stage was a re-creation of Dada Khachar's *darbar* (courtyard) with Bhagwan Swaminarayan seated

under a neem tree, representative of him delivering a Vachanamrut discourse. The traditional ambience was enhanced by the use of traditional colourful fabrics.

At the feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan was the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, to the sides of whom were the *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

The assembly commenced at 5.00 p.m. with *dhun* and bhajans. Then, Adarshjivan Swami, the compere, elaborated upon the assembly theme: for almost two centuries the divine words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in the form of the Vachanamrut, has guided and inspired spiritual aspirants to excel in their daily lives and on the path towards *moksha*.



Youths perform a traditional dance to welcome the Vachanamrut manuscript on to the stage

To begin, a colourful, vibrant procession to honour the Vachanamrut took place. Decorated chariots representing the villages where Bhagwan Swaminarayan delivered the Vachanamrut discourses paraded amid the seated audience. When the procession reached the main stage, an original 1888 manuscript of the Vachanamrut, housed in an elegant transparent case, was reverently and devoutly carried on the stage and presented to Mahant Swami Maharaj. Swamishri then performed *pujan* of the encased Vachanamrut, while Vedic mantras were recited.

Then Atmatrupt Swami gave an introductory speech on the Vachanamrut. He spoke about how the Vachanamrut dispels one's inner ignorance and replaces it with spiritual enlightenment. He added that Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 28 that he has extracted the essence from all the shastras and revealed his principles. Thus, the Vachanamrut represents the essence of all shastras. Further, in Vachanamrut Gadhada III 38, Bhagwan Swaminarayan describes his own supreme form. Also, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has stated in the Vachanamrut that by understanding the glory of the Aksharbrahman guru, all difficulties in life are overcome.

A short video supporting this speech was shown

in which extensive references in the Vachanamrut to the Gunatit Sant were categorized and displayed. The video concluded that Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a Gunatit Sant. After this introduction, a series of five speeches and matching videos were presented, each based on a concept from the Vachanamrut describing the glory of the Gunatit Sant and how that virtue was exemplified in the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

1. One who sees God in all and everything is a Sant

Based on the words of Vachanamrut Kariyani 7, a video of Mahant Swami Maharaj describing Pramukh Swami Maharaj was shown, "Swami Bapa gave tremendous joy to all. He saw God in all. He never discriminated against anyone. He would meet everyone – regardless of their status, wealth or education. He met the famous and ordinary with equal affection. This was his divine nature. Only when one thinks deeply about this does one realize."

Then, Pujya Viveksagar Swami narrated incidents that revealed this respect of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine personality: To the tribals of Moti Bej village in the district of Vadodara, Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, "I see God in you



A procession in honour of the Vachanamrut



Swamishri performs *puja* of the Vachanamrut manuscript

all.” In Navsari, after the *shilanyas* ceremony for a hostel for Dalits, the Dalit representatives were invited to garland Pramukh Swami Maharaj. However, they were reluctant, feeling that because they are viewed as untouchables, they could not touch Swamishri. But Swamishri called them and said, “I do not become impure by you touching me. I see God in you all.” Such affectionate words put the Dalits representatives at ease and they happily garlanded Swamishri.

In Sankari, South Gujarat, Pramukh Swami Maharaj called the tribals and clearly told them, “This Mandir is for all. So, you should all come to the Mandir and give up your addictions.”

Rich or poor, famous or unknown, learned or illiterate – Pramukh Swami Maharaj met all with equal affection.

Then a video showing Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s interactions with people from all walks of life was shown.

2. To tolerate and forgive is the virtue of a Sant

This is emphasized by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 27.

A video was shown in which Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “Swami Bapa was so great, yet he tolerated a lot. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogi Bapa

also tolerated a lot. They never retaliated.”

Then, Narayanmuni Swami spoke about Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s unparalleled virtue of tolerance, “Even if someone abused him with spiteful words, he would patiently attempt to understand that person. Whatever incorrect and hurtful things people wrote about him, he remained unmoved. This forgiving nature was evident to all after the terrorist attack on Gandhinagar Akshardham.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, ‘I have never had a thought to hurt anyone.’ Pramukh Swami Maharaj had no enmity towards anyone. In fact, he saw God in even those who maligned him. He truly believed God to be the all-doer.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the manifest form of Aksharbrahman. The Upanishads state that Aksharbrahman has control over the whole of creation. Despite possessing such powers, he always tolerated and was humble. With folded hands, he always bowed to all.”

Then, a video depicting Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s forgiving nature was shown.

3. A sant is one who offers true devotion to God. Darshan of such a Sant is equal to the darshan of God and he can liberate countless



Procession honouring the Vachanamrut



A view of the celebration assembly

sinful jivas (Vachanamrut Gadhada I 37)

The inspiration behind all of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s work was his devotion to God. He was the epitome of devotion to God and Guru.

An example of this is his choice of location for his final rites. He said that his final rites should be performed at the spot where “The divine gaze of my guru Shastriji Maharaj falls on me and I can have the divine darshan of Shriji Maharaj”.

A video was shown in which Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj selected this spot out of his heartfelt devotion. Only Pramukh Swami Maharaj could have done this. This thought only arises in one who has genuine heartfelt devotion. The thought that Shastriji Maharaj’s divine gaze falls on him and that he has the divine darshan of Shriji Maharaj is a wonderful thought. Such heartfelt devotion includes everything.”

Then, Aksharvatsal Swami spoke, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the living form of devotion defined by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Whether you consider it his life’s breath or heartbeat, devotion (bhakti) was his inspiration for everything. People do outstanding work, but it is out of self-interest, for praise, or other such motives. Pramukh Swami Maharaj completed many great tasks, but to him, it was all bhakti to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.”

Then a video was shown of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s speech during the inauguration of

Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi in which his words revealed his unparalleled devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

4. The Sant is the manifest form of God

In Vachanamrut Sarangpur 10, Bhagwan Swaminarayan states that God forever resides in the Sant who is beyond the three states and three bodies. And the darshan of such a Sant is equal to the darshan of God.

Countless people experienced God in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, since he was the manifest form of the Sant described by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut.

A video was shown in which Mahant Swami Maharaj described the glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, “If someone asks you, “Have you seen God?” then reply with conviction ‘Yes, I have.’ We have had the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj – that is equal to the darshan of God. He was such a Sant.”

Elaborating on this topic, Anandswarup Swami addressed the assembly, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a fully God-realized Sant. In his presence, people felt as if they were with God. For example, a highly respected income tax practitioner of Mumbai, Shri Hiralal Sodha, said, “I am a Vaishnav, but have had the association with Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj for many years. If you want to see God, he is manifest



Swamishri honoured with a garland

in Swamishri.” Bhagwan Swaminarayan has stated this numerous times in the Vachanamrut.

5. A Sant is one who evokes the conviction that one has attained *moksha*

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 54, Bhagwan Swaminarayan states that through the profound association of the *ekantik* Sant, *bhagvat* dharma is nurtured and the gateway to *moksha* remains open.

In the introductory video, Mahant Swami Maharaj states, “Many ask me, ‘Is Akshardham guaranteed for me?’ For all who have had the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Akshardham is guaranteed. So, do not ask this repeatedly. All who have had Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s darshan are guaranteed of *moksha* and Akshardham.”

Speaking on this topic, Brahmavihari Swami said, “The shastras describe *moksha*, but to experience and be convinced about one’s *moksha* is something else. Thousands of devotees experienced *moksha* in Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s presence. Even those who were not devotees experienced *moksha* in his presence. What is *moksha*? To be liberated from worldly joys and miseries, and the feelings, attachments and *swabhavs* of the body. Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam experienced this. He said to Swamishri, “You are a great teacher. You have taught me how to remove ‘I’ and ‘My’.” Dr Kalam also describes his ‘other-worldly’

experiences of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in his book, *Transcendence*.

Then, a video of Pramukh Swami Maharaj speaking about *moksha* was shown, “It is our great fortune that we have attained Maharaj and Swami and that they have accepted us. So, we will attain liberation in this birth and reach Akshardham. So, there should be no doubt. Some ask if they will attain liberation. What is there to ask when you have attained Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj? Believe that you have attained *moksha*.”

In this way, the divine nature of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was presented on the basis of the Vachanamrut.

Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the assembly, “We are indeed fortunate that Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given us the essence of all shastras in the form of the Vachanamrut. He brought Aksharbraman Gunatitanand Swami with him. In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has described the unique glory of Aksharbrahman, the Gunatit Sant.

“In Vachanamrut Gadhada III 2, Bhagwan Swaminarayan states that one who develops firm conviction in manifest God, in the form of the guru, has nothing more left to accomplish on the path of *moksha*.

Then, Dr Swami addressed the celebration assembly, “In the Vachanamrut Bhagwan Swaminarayan has repeatedly highlighted the



Swamishri inaugurates the first part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's biography

Gunatit Sant for our *moksha*. At present, Mahant Swami Maharaj is such a Gunatit Sant.”

Gracing today's celebration was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Vijaybhai Rupani. On behalf of all, Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami welcomed him with a rose garland. Then, the Chief Minister addressed the assembly, “This grand celebration has promoted dharma, *jnan*, values and character and inspired youths in many ways. Pramukh Swami Maharaj taught the ideals of humanity to the entire world. Pramukh Swami Maharaj met all with genuine affection. He built over 1,100 mandirs and promoted Hindu dharma and Indian culture throughout the world. He served society in times of need and eased the difficulties of people affected by calamities. He treated all with equality and compassion.”

Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj presented a memento and a copy of the Vachanamrut to the Chief Minister.

Then, a message from Prime Minister Shri Narendrabhai Modi was read.

In honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's saintly life, the first part of his extensive biography, being written by Adarshjivan Swami, was inaugurated by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Afterwards, the *sadguru* sadhus honoured Mahant Swami Maharaj with garlands and then it was announced that Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th birthday celebration in 2019 will be held in



Devotees perform *arti* to the lyrics of the Shri Swaminarayan Arti

Mumbai. So, Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami and Abhayswarup Swami honoured Swamishri with a special garland made by weaving together the handwritten personal invitations of 51,511 devotees of Maharashtra.

Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj lived every second of his life for the devotees and the whole of society. The qualities of a Sant described in the Vachanamrut were all manifest in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In other words, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the living form of the Vachanamrut.

“Even celebrating his centenary every day is not enough to honour Pramukh Swami Maharaj. May we all attain his blessings.” Finally, the Shri Swaminarayan Arti inspired by Mahant Swami Maharaj, was sung while everyone performed *arti*. This *arti* will be sung from now on throughout the BAPS Santha (for details, see p..... of this issue).

Thus, the 98th birthday of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and the launch of the Vachanamrut bicentenary and the new Shri Swaminarayan Arti were joyfully celebrated.

The celebration assembly was broadcast live on AASTHA channel and webcast on the Santhas's website, baps.org. ◆

*Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
From Gujarati text: Swaminarayan Prakash,
January–February 2019*

Festival Facts & Figures

Blood Donation and Health Services

A total of 2,797 men and women donated a total of 1,033,600 cc of blood.

During the celebration period, 42,508 patients were treated free of charge.

On the festival site, there were 125 doctors serving round-the-clock in 5 clinics.

In addition, specialist surgeons of Rajkot committed to performing 400 operations of all types free of charge for those in need after the celebrations.

De-Addiction Campaign

After viewing the Muktanand show, 3,100 people resolved to give up their harmful addictions.

Shri Swaminarayan Vishwashanti Mahayagna

During the three-day *yagna*, 15,809 *yajmans* offered over 3.8 million *ahutis* to Yagnanarayan (the *yagna* deity) as prayers for world peace.

Bhajanand – Daily Devotion

Located on either side of the main *nagar* gate, the two Bhajanand domes were host to daily personal devotion from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. During the festival, 33,550 men and 37,260 women offered devotion in the form of 5,500,000 mantra chants, 18,000 *dandvats* and 163,000 *pradakshinas* and sang 12,000 bhajans.

Dining

For all visitors to the festival, breakfast, lunch

and dinner were provided free. During the entire festival period, over 1.7 million ate meals at the festival's free dining area.

The daily meal menus included sweets, savoury items, a variety of *shaks*, pickles, salads and many other foods.

The women's wing especially provided tireless service in the kitchens to help prepare the meals.

Accommodation

Around 10,000 devotees from throughout India and around the world were provided free accommodation. At each accommodation location, volunteers ensured the timely availability of necessary facilities.

Exhibitions

A total of 1,652,930 people viewed the six exhibitions: Paramanand, Nityanand, Muktanand, Sahajanand, Bhartanand and Sevanand.

In addition 88,000 students from 625 Schools in Rajkot also viewed the exhibitions.

The evening 'Mandiram' light and sound show was viewed by 381,000 people.

Transport and Parking

A total of 145,374 vehicles, such as, buses, mini-buses, cars, tractors, two-wheelers etc. used the parking facilities during the festival. ◆

*Gujarati text in
Swaminarayan Prakash, January–February 2019.
Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas*



MEDIA COVERAGE

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th Birthday Celebration in Rajkot, from 5-15 December 2018, attracted a large number of media persons.

The print and electronic media covered the event profusely.

NEWSPAPERS
Gujarat Samachar
Sandesh
Divya Bhaskar
Phulchhab
Gujarat Mirror
Ab Tak
Azad Sandesh
Sanj Samachar
Aajkal

Nav Gujarat Samay
Akila
Saurashtra Aaspas
Saurashtra Kranti
Jai Hind
Kathiyarvas Post
Khabar Gujarat
Shri Nutan Saurashtra
TV NEWS CHANNEL
DD Girnar

ABP Asmita
TV9 Gujarati
Zee 24 Hours
GSTV
Sandesh News
City News
Ktv Gujarati
Vtv News
Divya Kesari
News 18 Gujarati

Live Gujarat News
Mera News
Z News
Flash News Rajkot
Hello Saurashtra
M News (Mantvya)
Morbi Update
Astha
AAJKAL
Gujarat News





Swamishri performs the Shri Swaminarayan Arti of Thakorji in Bochasan

Shri Swaminarayan Arti, Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja and Shri Sahajanand Namavali

26 November 2018

Parabrahman Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan manifested on this earth and through his original Vedic spiritual doctrine revealed the eternal path to *moksha* for countless spiritual aspirants. To spread this Vedic 'Akshar-Purushottam Darshan' of Bhagwan Swaminarayan throughout the world, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj built majestic traditional mandirs, in which he consecrated the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, that is, Parabrahman Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, in the central shrines. The light of this divine *upasana*, lit amidst many challenges, by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj has been spread

throughout the world by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj. And today, their spiritual successor, Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, continues to nurture this tradition of Akshar-Purushottam Upasana.

To facilitate the daily devotion offered by devotees based on the doctrine revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and propagated by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj has, with great reverence, inspired the composition of the Shri Swaminarayan Arti, Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja and Shri Sahajanand Namavali. The



Swamishri performs the Swaminarayan Mahapuja before Thakorji in Bochasan

Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja has been composed in compliance with the scriptural traditions of Sanatan Dharma rituals. And the Shri Sahajanand Namavali incorporates the supreme faith for the form of Parabrahman Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan, his glory, works and unique, divine personality. It has been written in accordance with the bhakti traditions of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

By the wish of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, from 15 December 2018, the 98th Birthday Celebration of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, all young and old, men and women devotees of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha will, every morning and evening, sing the Shri Swaminarayan Arti. This *arti* will be sung in all BAPS mandirs and ghar mandirs, and in all satsang assemblies, festivals and celebrations. Also, from that auspicious day, the

Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja will be performed in all BAPS mandirs and in all auspicious ceremonies. For chanting, daily and in spiritual observances, the Shri Sahajanand Namavali will be recited.

Through this new offering, let us venerate Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan and offer our respects at the holy feet of our Gunatit gurus. ◆

*By the wish of Param Pujya Pragat Brahmaswarup
Mahant Swami Maharaj,
Heartfelt Jai Swaminarayan from
Sadhu Ishwarcharandas
(International Convener,
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha)*

History of the Arti

The *arti* is a ritual performed since ancient times offering devotion to and honouring God. Its lighted wicks enabled devotees to have the darshan of the *murtis* in mandirs before sunrise and after sunset in times before electricity became widespread.

The lyrics sung during the ritual are also known as the *arti*. There are many *artis* in Hinduism, which sing the praises of and pay respect to God, deities, gurus, devotees and even rivers. Today, as in the past, *artis* continue to be written as expressions of genuine devotion to God and his devotee and to understand their glory.

The *Harililamrut* describes Nilkanth Varni performing the Janmashtami *arti* two days after his arrival in Loj in 1799. The *Harililamrut* also describes Ramanand Swami performing the *arti* of Sahajanand Swami in 1801 when he appointed him as the Head of the fellowship in Jetpur. However, there are no details of which *artis* were sung on these occasions.

In 1802, 11 months after Ramanand Swami's passing, Muktanand Swami realized the divinity of Sahajanand Swami and composed the *arti* 'Jay Sadguru Swami...' as a gesture of adoration and devotion. This new *arti* gradually replaced other *artis* that were sung previously and became popular – although it was not the only *arti* sung.

There are, in fact, many *artis* written in honour of Bhagwan Swaminarayan – each a personal gesture of devotion by the individual who wrote it.

Kirtan Sar-Sangrah, published by the Vartal Sanstha, includes 15 *artis* – 11 composed by Muktanand Swami, and others by Brahmanand Swami and Premanand Swami. *Premanand Kavya*, published by Bhuj Mandir, includes 26

artis composed by Premanand Swami. *Brahmanand Kavya* includes 24 *artis* composed by Brahmanand Swami. Muktanand Swami's *Kirtan Chopdo* contains 4 *artis*, including 'Jay Sadguru Swami...'. In this manner, at least 66 *artis* have been composed by the *paramhansas*.

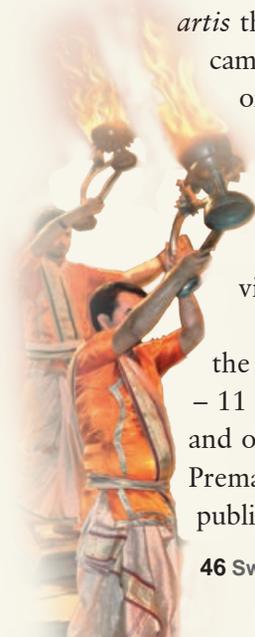
Throughout the mandirs of the Sampradaya, it is noted that different *artis* are sung at different times of the day. There is no one *arti* that is sung five times daily at every mandir. Different *artis* may be sung at different mandirs. For example, Brahmanand Swami's *arti* 'Arti Pragat Prabhuji Kije...' is sung instead of 'Jay Sadguru Swami...' at mandirs in Bhuj and Muli.

The *arti* composed by Muktanand Swami became more popular over time from the 66 *artis* composed by the *paramhansas* to convey their bhakti and love for Maharaj. Over time, others, such as the poet Dalpatram, continued to compose more *artis* and kirtans to offer their love to God. In the same way, our guru *parampara* has also guided us on offering our heartfelt devotion to Maharaj and Swami in various ways.

Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj guided Bhadrash Swami to offer devotion by writing the *bhashyas* – scriptures extolling the glory of Akshar and Purushottam. Similarly, Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj guided Bhadrash Swami to offer devotion by composing a *mahapuja* replete with an *arti* extolling the glory of Akshar and Purushottam.

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj built glorious mandirs based on the principles revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam. And the new Shri Swaminarayan Arti inspired by Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj explains the glory of Akshar and Purushottam.

May we strengthen our conviction in the principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan by offering *arti* every morning and evening in this manner.◆



Background to the Shri Swaminarayan Arti



It was Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj's innermost wish that the *siddhant* established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan be presented in the form of a devotional scripture. He spoke to me at length on the phone and in person about this frequently and asked me to take notes of all our conversations.

In the process of writing this text, our talks turned towards the *mahapuja*. Mahant Swami Maharaj said that along with Shriji Maharaj's *mahima*, the glory of his ideal devotee, Gunatitanand Swami, should also be included in it. Accordingly, he instructed me to write a new *mahapuja*. I worked on this for eight days in Gondal in Mahant Swami Maharaj's presence.

The subject of the *arti* to be performed at the end of the *mahapuja* then arose. Mahant Swami Maharaj instructed that the *arti* should include that same *mahima* of Akshar-Purushottam.

Mahant Swami Maharaj explained that

Brahman and Parabrahman had never before come to this earth. They did so only out of their utmost compassion. Only then were we able to recognize them and take their refuge. Shastriji Maharaj propagated the glory of Brahman (Akshar) and Parabrahman (Purushottam) – Gunatitanand Swami and Shriji Maharaj – and consecrated their *murtis* in the central shrines. Because of this, the *upasana* became easily accessible to us.

Swamishri instructed me to compose an *arti* that includes this *mahima* and celebrates this every time we perform the *arti*. He explained in detail what points should be conveyed: Shriji Maharaj is Parabrahman, Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar. Maharaj is *sarvopari*, *sakar*, *karta* and *pragat*. Also, Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj always taught us to keep *dasbhav*, *divyabhav* and *subhradbhav*; so those teachings should be included as well.

He even wrote these points down on paper and decided the order in which they should be written. He said to start with “Jay Swaminarayan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam” so that these words are at the very beginning. He added, “Then mention their grace in coming on this earth. Then clarify who Brahman and Parabrahman are. Explain the sadhana. Express how our lives have become fulfilled.”

He called and spoke to me often, asked for updates, reviewed them, offered suggestions and improvements – all in the space of a few days. At the time, I did not know exactly what was in his mind. I thought this *arti* in honour of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj was for the *mahapuja* only.

He was so precise in what he wanted conveyed. It was as if he was visualizing a *murti* and representing it in words. He would review it keenly and lovingly include certain words.

He must have known that he wanted to introduce it widely throughout the Sampradaya. But he did not initially mention this. He discussed his intentions with our senior sadhus first.

Mahant Swami Maharaj was in Bhadra while I was completing the *arti*. On the day before Labh Pancham, he called me and said he was thinking about the *arti*. He expressed his wish, “In this *arti* you are writing, you must include the name of Shastriji Maharaj.” He explained the reason by saying, “Shastriji Maharaj’s name should be in the *arti* because the joy with which we are able to offer devotion today is due to Shastriji Maharaj’s efforts and dedication. It is because he consecrated the *murtis* in the central shrines that we are able to do all this. So, this should be credited to Shastriji Maharaj and his name should be mentioned in the *arti* itself.” He told me to use the word ‘Yagnapurush’ in the *arti*. He then looked through the *arti* I had written and pointed out exactly where this name should go. He further explained, “Shastriji Maharaj’s grace upon us cannot ever be repaid. We are forever indebted to him. However, it would be our great *seva* to

thank him for all he has done for us by singing his name twice daily in the *arti*, just like we remember Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami.”

Many sadhus were instrumental in creating this *arti* and *mahapuja* with Mahant Swami Maharaj’s guidance. Senior sadhus, scholarly sadhus and musically talented sadhus all helped and offered their advice from different perspectives. Through this combined effort, with everyone’s support and input, the *arti* developed into its final form to align with Swamishri’s vision and wishes. The final decisions were made by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Thereafter, he expressed his wish regarding the first performance of this new *mahapuja* and *arti*, “We want to perform this *arti* for the first time in Bochasan and have it sanctified in the central shrine where Maharaj and Swami’s *murtis* have been consecrated. For this, bring a golden *arti*. Also, while the *arti* is being sung, rose petals should be showered upon Maharaj and Swami from both sides by sadhus. And while the *arti* is being performed in the central shrine, Shastriji Maharaj should be watching. A sadhu should be standing on one side with Shastriji Maharaj’s *murti* because he consecrated these *murtis*. Other sadhus should be standing with *murtis* of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj so that the gurus can witness the *arti* singing the glory of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj being performed.”

During a meeting for the final preparations for the *mahapuja* in Bochasan, Mahant Swami Maharaj revealed to Narayanmuni Swami, Shrutiprakash Swami and other sadhus, “The type of *arti* that is in the mind and heart of Shastriji Maharaj will be performed here.”

In summary, Mahant Swami Maharaj chose the majority of the words, the order, and which details should be included in the *arti* and *mahapuja*. Thus, he has given this as a sacred offering to Shastriji Maharaj in the form of the Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja, Shri Swaminarayan Arti and Shri Sahajanand Namavali. ◆



SHRI SWAMINARAYAN ARTI

Inspired by
Pragat Brahmaswarup Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj

INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATION

Jay Swāminārāyan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam,
Akshar-Purushottam jay, darshan sarvottam... Jay Swāminārāyan...
O Swaminarayan! Praise to you! O Akshar-Purushottam! Praise to you!
O Akshar-Purushottam! Praise to you! Your darshan is supreme...

Mukta anant supujit, sundar sākāram,
Sarvopari karunākar, mānav tanudhāram... Jay Swāminārāyan...1
He [Bhagwan Swaminarayan] is worshiped by countless *muktas* (liberated souls),
possesses a [divine] form, and is splendid.
He, who is supreme and bestows compassion [on all],
manifested [on earth] with a [divine] human form... 1

Purushottam Parabrahma, Shri Hari Sahajānand,
Aksharbrahma anādi, Gunātītānand... Jay Swāminārāyan...2
Purushottam Parabrahman is Shri Hari Sahajanand,
The eternal Aksharbrahman is Swami Gunatitanand... 2

Prakat sadā sarvakartā, param muktidātā,

Dharma ekāntik sthāpak, bhakti paritrātā... Jay Swāminārāyan...3

[Bhagwan Swaminarayan] is always manifest, the all-doer, and the bestower of ultimate liberation.

He is the establisher of *ekantik* dharma and the protector of bhakti (devotion)... 3

Dāsabhāv divyatā saha, brahmarupe priti,

Suhradbhāv alaukik, sthāpit shubh riti... Jay Swāminārāyan...4

Servitude with [an understanding of all to be] divine,
offering [loving] devotion upon becoming *brahmarup*, and divine amity;
[these] auspicious means he established... 4

Dhanya dhanya mam jivan, tav sharane sufalam,

Yagnapurush pravārtit, siddhāntam sukhadam... Jay Swāminārāyan...5

Jay Swāminārāyan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam,

[O Akshar-Purushottam!] My life is blessed! It has become fruitful at your feet.

This doctrine [established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and] propagated
by Yagnapurush [Shastriji Maharaj], bestows ultimate happiness.

O Swaminarayan! Praise to you! O Akshar-Purushottam! Praise to you!

O Swaminarayan! Praise to you!... 5

Jay Swāminārāyan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam, Jay Swāminārāyan

This *arti*, inspired by Prगत Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, pays reverence to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, that is Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. This is the *arti* of Swami with Narayan. In other words, it is the *arti* of Akshar with Purushottam.

The heart of a true devotee constantly echoes with the glory of Paramatma. The devotee's heart brims with joy and with the supreme truth that Paramatma is always and everywhere glorious. The first words of the *arti* - 'Jay Swāminārāyan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam' resonate this sentiment that Bhagwan Swaminarayan, or Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, is ever glorious.

Shriji Maharaj had himself given his followers the Swaminarayan Mahamantra, which incorporated his heartfelt principle, to chant. He had himself clarified that, in this mantra, 'Swami' refers to Aksharbrahman and 'Narayan' refers to Purushottam-Parabrahman. In this way, 'Swaminarayan' indicates Swami alongside Narayan, and 'Akshar-Purushottam' refers

to Akshar alongside Purushottam. This is the meaning of the words 'Swaminarayan' and 'Akshar-Purushottam'.

Thus, the words 'Swaminarayan' and 'Akshar-Purushottam' are synonyms. Therefore, the glory of Swaminarayan signifies the glory of Akshar-Purushottam, and the glory of Akshar-Purushottam represents the glory of Swaminarayan. This highest truth resonates in these words of the *arti*. These words further reflect the devotee's feelings that Bhagwan Swaminarayan, or Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, is glorious in every way.

What can be greater than to see Parabrahman Purushottam manifest with his ideal devotee, Aksharbrahman? To have the darshan, together, of Swami and Narayan, or Akshar and Purushottam, is the greatest benefit of having eyes. Only those who are truly blessed have the opportunity to have this darshan. And, those who attain this darshan are blessed with further good fortune. Each mandir of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha grants people such darshan. This divine

and heavenly darshan of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, or Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has thus been referred to in this *arti* as ‘sarvottam darshan’, or the greatest darshan.

‘Darshan’, however, refers not only to the act of seeing. It is also used to refer to doctrinal principles. The core of Shriji Maharaj’s philosophical teachings was to become like Swami and offer humble *upasana* and bhakti to Narayan, that is, to become like Akshar and offer humble *upasana* and bhakti to Purushottam. These words of the *arti*, therefore, also reflect that the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan revealed by Parabrahman Swaminarayan is the greatest and highest philosophical principle.

The *arti*’s first couplet thus signifies the above-mentioned sentiments.

The subsequent couplets encapsulate the following thoughts:

- Parabrahman Purushottam Narayan presiding in his Akshardham is eternally *sakar* (possesses a form). His divine form is complete in every way and is beautiful. Infinite liberated souls, who have attained oneness with Akshar, offer puja, that is, *upasana* and bhakti to Purushottam Narayan.
- Bhagwan Swaminarayan, or Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, described above, assumes a human form and comes to earth solely out of compassion for the *jivas*.
- We are blessed that the one whom the shastras call Purushottam, Narayan or Parabrahman came to earth as Sahajanand Shri Hari and graced us with his shelter.

We are also blessed that the one whom the shastras call Akshar, Brahman or Aksharbrahman came to earth along with Sahajanand Swami as Gunatitanand Swami, and that we have recognized him as such.

Therefore, for us, the two entities of Purushottam Narayan and Aksharbrahman are not non-manifest. Rather, they are present before our very eyes.

- Of these two entities, Parabrahman Purushottam Sahajanand Shri Hari is supreme God and is the all-doer. He himself came to this earth, and he alone established *ekantik* dharma and established the principle of becoming *brahmarup* and offering bhakti. And, he alone has granted us *moksha*. Moreover, to forever continue this unique principle revealed by him and the path to *moksha*, he has remained present on earth through the Aksharbrahman Gunatit gurus.
- Bhagwan Swaminarayan and our Gunatit gurus have also clarified for us the path of spiritual endeavour. Through their grace, humility (*dashbhav*) adorns our bhakti and divinity (*divyabhav*) beautifies our vision. By their grace we have become *brahmarup*, and so eligible to offer true *upasana* to Parabrahman. Additionally, they have taught us about *samp*, *suhridaybhav* and *ekta*, allowing us to experience the true bliss of satsang. They alone have established this divine path for the *moksha* of countless spiritual aspirants.
- Indeed, we experience good fortune and happiness today because we have attained the divine shelter of both Parabrahman Purushottam Narayan Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan himself, and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and the Gunatit guru *parampara* through whom Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifests.

However, we truly owe infinite gratitude to Brahmaswarup Yagnapurushdasji, or Shastriji Maharaj, for teaching us Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Shastriji Maharaj learnt this philosophy through his association with Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj. Thereafter, he dedicated his entire life to spread the knowledge of Sahajanand Shri Hari’s supreme *upasana* and Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman. He built grand *shikharbaddha* mandirs and, in their central shrines, consecrated *panchdhatu murtis* of Sarvavatari Parabrahman Purushottam Sahajanand Shri Hari and Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand

Swami Maharaj. For the entire Swaminarayan Sampradaya, this was a new, unique and supreme accomplishment. He himself gave the name ‘Akshar-Purushottam’ to Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s philosophical principle and enshrined it.

For this very reason, Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj insisted that Shastriji Maharaj’s name, Yagnapurush, be included in the final couplet of this *arti*.

CONCLUSION

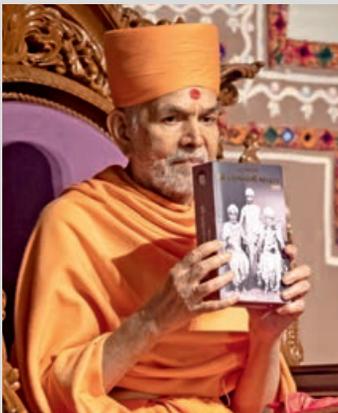
In this way, this *arti* conveys the following:

- Parabrahman Swaminarayan Bhagwan’s greatness – he is eternally with a form, supreme, the all-doer and manifest through the Gunatit gurus.
- Sahajanand Shri Hari himself is the entity the shastras call Parabrahman Purushottam Narayan and Gunatitanand Swami himself is the entity the shastras call Aksharbrahman.
- Bhagwan Swaminarayan established *ekantik* dharma, and the concepts of offering bhakti after becoming *brahmarup*, ultimate *moksha* and others.
- Swaminarayan-specific spiritual endeavours such as humility, seeing all as divine, friendship, becoming *brahmarup* and others.

- The experience of fulfilment upon having attained something truly great.
- A commemoration of Shastriji Maharaj, who propagated the Akshar-Purushottam principle. In this way, this *arti* is the ultimate, divine tribute of Pragat Brahmaswarup Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj – Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami – and Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj (Yagnapurushdasji), who enshrined the *murtis* of Gunatitanand Swami and Sahajanand Shri Hari as Swami and Narayan, that is, Akshar and Purushottam, in the central shrines of grand *shikharbaddha* mandirs. This *arti* encapsulates the heartfelt prayers of and glory sung by Parabrahman Swaminarayan’s devotees. It also reflects the joy of the devotees who are dedicated to the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Furthermore, it offers devotion towards God, guru and the Akshar-Purushottam principle. This *arti* is, in the true sense, a prayer to and a song of glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It represents the inner voice of the entire BAPS family. And, most of all, it is a devotional tribute offered affectionately at the feet of our beloved *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj to commemorate his centenary celebrations. ◆

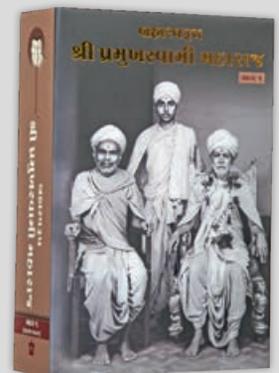
New Publication

‘Brahmaswarup Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj’, Part 1



Detailed biography in Gujarati of Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated by Mahant Swami Maharaj on 15 December 2018, Rajkot

- From birth to 1971
- Contains 34 QR codes that link to historic videos
- Extensive gallery of photographs
- Author: Sadhu Adarshjivandas
- Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith



Available soon at all BAPS bookstores in India and abroad

World's First-in-Human Telerobotic Coronary Intervention Performed at Akshardham

5 December 2018, Gandhinagar



India has achieved an important breakthrough in medical science with the world's first in-human (FIH) telerobotic coronary intervention performed from a remote location outside of the catheterization lab. Using CorPath technology by Corindus Vascular Robotics, Inc., Padma Shri Dr Tejas Patel, Chairman and Chief Interventional Cardiologist of the Apex Heart Institute in Ahmedabad, performed the percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI) from Swaminarayan Akshardham mandir, Gandhinagar, at a distance of 32 km from the catheterization lab of Apex Heart Institute in Ahmedabad, where the patient was attended to by Dr Sanjay Shah.

The success of this procedure paves the way for large-scale, long-distance telerobotic platforms across the globe. Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijaybhai Rupani and Collector of Gandhinagar Shri S.K. Langa along with Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Anandswarup Swami and other BAPS sadhus were present and blessed this occasion. Also present were Mr Mark Toland, President & CEO of Corindus and Dr Turk, Neuroendovascular Chief Medical Officer at Corindus. Prior to the procedure, Dr Tejas joined the sadhus in performing *abhishek* of Shri Neelkanth Varni and offering prayers.

Brahmavihari Swami said, "Dr Tejas Patel has served as His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj's

personal cardiologist during which he experienced moments of deep spirituality. His own story is one remarkable journey of faith and transformation of the heart. His Holiness was one of the most enlightened spiritual leaders of our times who encouraged both science and spirituality for the development of human life and universal values. As the centenary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj is being celebrated globally and the current 11-day festival to mark his 98th birthday is beginning today in Rajkot, this day was selected in honour of his life and work. All our prayers are with Dr Tejas Patel and the entire medical community to serve humanity and enhance the quality of human life."

CM Vijay Rupani said, "This is a historic moment for humanity. In the place such as Akshardham and land of Gujarat, Dr Tejasbhai has created history. I feel proud as Indians, and I congratulate him on this achievement on behalf of all Gujaratis.

"In our culture, we have always combined science and spirituality in seeking truth. Today, this has been realized again in Akshardham. May Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj bless us all in our endeavours."

After the procedure, Dr Tejas Patel said, "The first-in-human case of remote robotic PCI represents a landmark event for interventional

medicine. Cardiovascular disease, including stroke, is the number one cause of death worldwide resulting in nearly 18 million deaths per year. The application of telerobotics in India has the potential to impact a significant number of lives by providing access to care that may not otherwise have been possible. I am honoured for contributing to this historic ground-breaking research which is going to earn a lot of glory and global respect for my country.

“Moreover, I dedicate this breakthrough to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj whose heart I had the privilege to take care of. His heart made a difference to my heart and through this technology I want to make a difference to millions of hearts.

“Furthermore, of the many options available I selected Swaminarayan Akshardham as I wanted to conduct this pathbreaking event of

medical history from the lap of God and I felt that Akshardham, being a confluence of science and spirituality, tradition and technology, provides that peace and spirituality, comfort and creativity to further all fields of humanity and not just the medical field.”

Mr Toland said, “It is a great milestone. It is a proud moment today, not only for India, but it’s the first such telerobotic surgery of its kind in world.”

Param Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami said, “This is a historic operation in which Dr Tejas has operated on a patient from 32 km away here from Akshardham. Dr Tejas has had blessings of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj and has operated very confidently. The people of Gujarat, India and the entire world are grateful to him and we pray to wish you more and more success.” ♦



Vachanamrut Study App

Through easy-to-understand notes and explanations, the ‘Vachanamrut Study App’ by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha provides many features to enhance the reading and study of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s Vachanamrut in Gujarati and English.

FEATURES

Difficult words: Regional, scriptural and philosophical words are explained in simple terms.

Complex Concepts: Difficult concepts are explained in a simple, structured manner with scriptural references and the words of the Gunatit gurus.

People: Brief descriptions of people, contemporary to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and historical, mentioned in the Vachanamrut.

Scriptural Stories: Used to exemplify certain concepts, the stories mentioned in the Vachanamrut are described to give readers the full context.

Shastras and Places: Short introductions to the shastras and places. Exact locations where the Vachanamruts were narrated are depicted through maps and images.

Shlokas-Kirtans: References and meanings of the shlokas and kirtans mentioned in the Vachanamrut.

History: Where available, the historical event associated with individual Vachanamruts is described to clarify the context of the Vachanamrut.

Explanations: Discourses relating to sadhana have been explained with supportive material from *Purushottam Bolya Prite*, Swamini Vato and the teachings of the Gunatit gurus.

Glory: The significance and greatness of the Vachanamruts in the words of the Gunatit gurus.

Prasangs: Inspiring *prasangs*, relating to the Vachanamruts, as mentioned by the Gunatit gurus and others.

OTHER FACILITIES

Summary: A concise point by point outline to help remember and review each Vachanamrut.

Quiz: An array of questions and answers for self-assessment.

Reading Plan: Make your own daily reading plan.

Translation & Transliteration: Available in English.

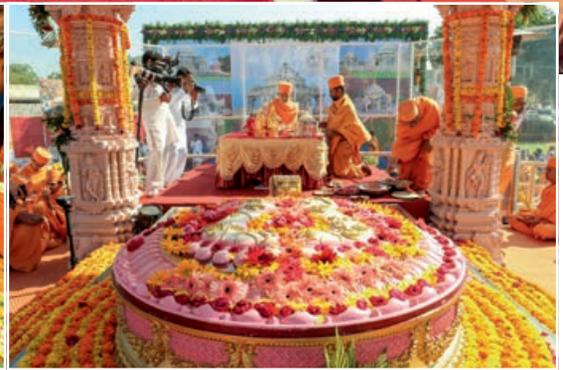


Download from:

www.baps.org/Downloads/apps/Vachanamrut-Study-App.aspx

Vedic Shilanyas Ceremony of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Smruti Mandir

17 December 2018, Sarangpur



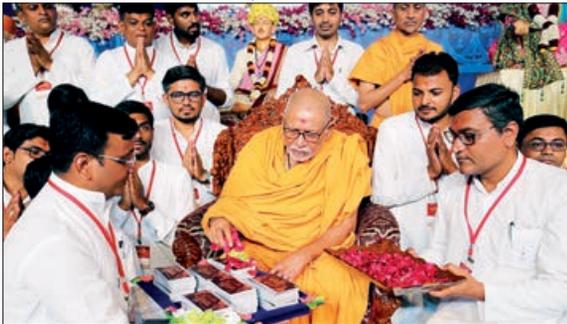
Before Pramukh Swami Maharaj passed away to Akshardham on 13 August 2016, he had informed of his wish that his final rites be performed in Sarangpur at the intersection between the main mandir and the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, such that he forever remains under the divine gaze of *ishtadev* Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Shastriji Maharaj. On this spot, a marble memorial mandir is to be built in Pramukh Swami

Maharaj's honour. In the presence of hundreds of swamis and thousands of devotees from India and abroad, Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic Shilanyas Ceremony for the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir.

Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, praising the outstanding virtues and monumental work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. ◆

INDIA

YUVAK-YUVATI SHIBIR: 'PARAMPARA' 3–7 November 2018, Surat



In the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami, around 2,800 selected *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* of Surat attended the 'Parampara' *shibir* held at the lush and delightful P.P. Savani University Complex near Kosamba, 45 km from Surat. The five-day *shibir* focused on the Vedic, eternal and liberating *parampara* (traditions) established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan: Siddhant, Satpurush and Sanskars. The *shibir* topics were presented through speeches by learned swamis, debates, workshops, skits, videos and thematic dances.

HOUSTON MAYOR SYLVESTER TURNER VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM 13 November 2018, Delhi

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, along with a 13-member delegation, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham, marking the mayor's first stop in a one-week trip to India.

The delegation, which included Houston Council Member Jerry Davis, representatives from the Johnson Space Center and Houston's Indo-American Chamber of Commerce, and

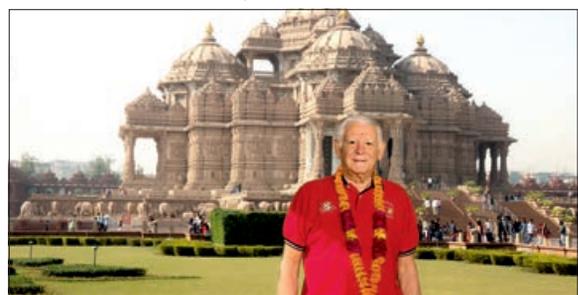


government and business officials from the city of Houston, was greeted in a traditional manner by senior sadhus of BAPS on behalf of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Mayor Turner offered his respects at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir and performed *abhishek* on the sacred image of Shri Neelkanth Varni. The delegation experienced the Sanskruti Vihar boat ride exhibition that depicts India's heritage and contributions to society. Finally, they witnessed the Sahaj Anand Water Show.

"This visit [to Akshardham] has been a tremendous gift and blessing to me and my delegation," said Mayor Turner. "As I return, I am renewed in my belief that we can be a positive difference in this world."

ROMANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER TEODOR MELESCANU VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM 25 November 2018, Delhi



Romanian Foreign Minister Teodor Melescanu visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, as part of his official visit to India commemorating 70 years of diplomatic relations between India and Romania.

The five-member delegation was traditionally welcomed by senior sadhus of BAPS on behalf of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Foreign Minister Melescanu offered his respects at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir and performed *abhishek* on the sacred *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni. The delegation also experienced the Sanskruti Vihar boat ride that depicts India's heritage and contributions to society.

Before departing, Foreign Minister Melescanu commented, "After visiting this temple, I am more confident in the prospective of peace in our families, our countries and the world."

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN November–December 2018



The 193 students of the second batch of the Yuva Talim Kendra 2018 participated in the traditional end-of-training Public Awareness Campaign.

A total of 73 groups visited 167 villages in the tribal areas of Ukai and Vaghai in South Gujarat from 22 to 25 November. Also, from 5 to 8 December, 12 youths in 3 groups visited Pindvada and 13 surrounding villages.

The youths contacted a total of 5,726 families at their homes to encourage all to shun addictions, develop family unity, and motivate

children and youths to study. The youths also conducted a total of 130 public assemblies, as well as, numerous children's assemblies and school assemblies to impart the messages of righteous conduct, self-discipline, regularity and other noble values.

CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY DELEGATION VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

7 December 2018, New Delhi



Six members of the California State Assembly visited Swaminarayan Akshardham. The delegation was greeted in a traditional manner by senior swamis and volunteers.

The six-member delegation was led by California State Assemblymember Ash Kalra (San Jose), an Indian-American who had met Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj in San Jose in 2017.

During their visit, the delegation offered their respects at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir and performed *abhishek* on the sacred image of Shri Neelkanth Varni. The delegation also viewed the Sahajanand Darshan (Hall of Values) and Sanskruti Vihar (Cultural Boat Ride) exhibitions.

The group also included Assembly member Cecilia Aguiar-Curry (Winters), Assembly member Richard Bloom (Santa Monica) Assembly member Sharon Quirk-Silva (Fullerton), Assembly member Eloise Gomez Reyes (San Bernardino) and Assembly member Mark Stone (Monterey Bay).

The six Assembly members who made up the first-ever California delegation to visit Swaminarayan Akshardham learned a tremendous amount about Indian spirituality and history during their visit.

“I look forward to returning and believe this is a must-see for all foreign delegations” said Assembly member Kalra.

Assembly member Quirk-Silva said, “I feel like a whole new person [with] a depth of knowledge and a focus on elevating those around me.”

“I appreciate your devotion,” added Assembly member Aguiar-Curry.

“If the world as it currently is will reflect on the enlightenment presented here, it will, indeed, be a more peaceful place,” said Assembly member Stone.

“Thank you for the absolute privilege of showing us and teaching us about a beautiful way of life. Like the peacock, I will strive to walk tall and proud, but with my head down in humility. Like the elephants, I will strive to keep my family together and strong,” said Assembly member Gomez Reyes. “Spirituality can, indeed, lead us to rise above,” said Assembly member Bloom.

The delegation also learnt about the life and work of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the day that marked the 98th anniversary of his birth. His motto, “In the joy of others, lies our own,” resonated with the delegation’s goal of public service.

ANAND YUVA SHIBIR

14–17 December 2018, Sarangpur

Over 1,770 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* of Anand attended the special Yuva Shibir held in Sarangpur based on the theme ‘Nishthavan Bhava’ – ‘Develop Conviction’.

The *shibir* theme was presented through speeches by *sadguru* and other learned swamis, workshops, skits and video presentations. The youths also performed *samuh* puja.



At the conclusion of the *shibir*, the youths resolved to strengthen their personal understanding and practice of satsang and its beliefs and traditions.

UK

MENTAL HEALTH SEMINARS FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

27 October & 8 December 2018, London & Leicester



BAPS, in collaboration with My MindSight and NHS clinical psychologists, organized mental health seminars for parents and children at the BAPS mandirs in London (27 October) and Leicester (8 December).

My MindSight is a newly-launched anti-bullying and mental health awareness group formed by four mental health professionals.

The seminars educated parents on various issues relating to the mental health of children, including factors contributing to mental health difficulties, identification of early warning signs, techniques to safeguard mental health and, importantly, where to seek additional help. The

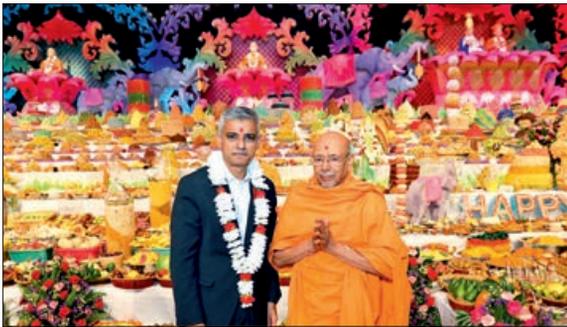
seminars also outlined the impact of social media on the mental health of children.

At least one in four people in the UK experience mental health problems at some point in their lives and there are a growing number of children and families struggling with mental health difficulties. Over 50% of mental health problems in adulthood begin by the age of 14. This issue is compounded by a delay in receiving the required help, preventing many sufferers from achieving their personal and career goals. Equipping parents with the relevant knowledge and skills to promote their children’s mental health and identifying early signs of mental health difficulties has been shown to yield better long-term outcomes for children and young people.

Special workshops for children aged between 10 and 14 years were held in parallel to the workshops for parents. These sessions conveyed important messages relating to mental health through appropriate mediums for the children. The sessions concluded with an enlightening debate on the positive and negative aspects of social media with their parents.

MAYOR OF LONDON SADIQ KHAN CELEBRATES HINDU NEW YEAR AT LONDON MANDIR

8 November 2018



The Mayor of London, Rt. Hon. Sadiq Khan, joined thousands of devotees and visitors to celebrate the Hindu New Year.

This was Mr Khan’s third visit to the Mandir,

joining swamis shortly after 11.30 a.m. inside the upper sanctum for rituals thanking God for his bountiful providence.

The Mayor then joined the congregation in the assembly hall where an artistically arranged *annakut* was offered to God in thanksgiving as the first meal of the New Year. Mr Khan was welcomed in traditional Hindu manner with garlands of fresh flowers.

Addressing the gathering, Mr Khan spoke of the valuable multi-faceted contributions that the Hindu community makes to the capital. He added, “When I walk around this temple and I meet the volunteers, it inspires me. You show that it is possible to be a proud Hindu, and it is also possible to be a proud Londoner and to be proudly British.”

Reflecting on the contribution of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the creator of the Mandir, the Mayor said, “I am aware of the importance of the contributions of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj not only to life here in Neasden, Brent or London, but around the world.” Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami also addressed the assembly, praying for peace, harmony, success and righteous prosperity to prevail throughout the world.

The Mayor participated in the *annakut arti* before departing.

INTERFAITH REMEMBRANCE ASSEMBLY TO MARK THE ARMISTICE CENTENARY, BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR 16 November 2018, London



A special interfaith assembly to pay tribute to the soldiers from India and the Commonwealth who served during the First World War was held to mark the 100th anniversary of Armistice Day (11 November 1918), the day when the World War One formally came to an end. To commemorate this occasion, a programme of remembrance was held at the Mandir. The event coincided with National Inter Faith Week in the UK.

More than 1.5 million Indian Army soldiers served in the Great War, while 74,000 were killed and 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded to their ranks. Representatives from various faiths began the assembly by lighting lamps. A trumpeter played the ‘Colonel Bogey March’ and ‘Qadam Qadam Badaye Ja’ music, representing the marches of the British and Indian armies during World War One. The trumpeter, flanked by children holding 53 flags of the Commonwealth nations, also performed the national anthems of Great Britain and India.

The instrumental performances were supported by uplifting recitals by children and soldiers from poetry by Sarojini Naidu and Rabindranath Tagore. Inspiring videos depicting the bravery and resilience of Indian soldiers were also shown, while faith leaders offered the ‘mantra-pushpanjali’ in honour of the departed souls.

HE Euripides L Evriades, High Commissioner of Cyprus and Chair of the Commonwealth Board of Governors, delivered a poignant message on behalf of the Commonwealth. Lord Gadhia explained the significance of the poppy made from *khadi* (the homespun cotton made famous by Mahatma Gandhi) which has been commissioned by The Royal British Legion in recognition of Gandhi’s loyalty to Britain.

Lord Ahmad, Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN and the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, said the event at the Mandir was “an incredible demonstration of the unity of mankind, the unity of remembrance, appreciation of

friendship and ties of kinship”. Sardar Sulakhan Singh, Honorary President of the Namdhari Sikh Sangat UK, reflected on the “sacrifice of servicemen from various faiths who fought in the Great War [to enable us] all to live in happiness today”. Imam Mohammed Mahmoud of Finsbury Park Mosque described the event as “unique and long-awaited” and encouraged everyone to “preserve peace and keep it alive”. Several other faiths and civic leaders were also present.

Also in attendance was Rt. Hon. Tom Tugendhat MP, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons. He spoke of the stories that Britain and India had written together and which bind the two countries.

Yogvivek Swami, concluded the evening by sharing His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj’s message: “I pray for the peace and liberation of the many souls who sacrificed their lives for all of us – not only in World War One but in all the many wars since. May their sacrifices always be remembered and may the need for such sacrifices never arise again.”

The Mandir recently paid homage to the heroes of the First World War by installing a poppy display outside the Mandir. It was one of 14 locations selected by The Royal British Legion to display large poppies featuring moving messages from the First World War generation woven along threads that pointed to 20-ft installation at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London.

LIVING ORGAN DONATION CONFERENCE, BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR 24 November 2018, Leicester

A living organ donation and transplantation conference was held by BAPS in partnership with NHS Blood & Transplant (NHSBT). The conference brought together kidney transplant patients and their families, medical experts, local transplant teams and representatives of South Asian Health Action, National BAME Transplant Alliance) and other organizations to



raise awareness about living kidney donation and provide practical guidance on improving living organ donation rates in the Hindu community.

Experienced experts presented a thorough explanation of kidney function, kidney disease, the connotations of renal replacement therapy, the process of transplantation and the benefits of living organ transplantation as opposed to dialysis and transplantation of a kidney from a deceased donor. Then, kidney donors and recipients shared their experiences. The experts also answered questions from the audience.

The attendees were informed that Hindu scriptures highlight organ donation as a form of ‘daan’ and ‘seva’, and should be considered by all Hindus.

‘HEALTH AND WELLBEING’ COMMUNITY AWARD FROM THE FAITH & BELIEF FORUM
27 November 2018, London



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, received an award from the London Faith & Community Awards in recognition of its commitment to the health and welfare of elderly community members through regular visits to residential care homes.

The awards were organized by The Faith & Belief Forum, an organization that endeavours to create good relations between people of different faiths and beliefs. The London Faith & Community Awards is a key initiative of the Forum which celebrates the vital work of local communities in making London a welcoming place for people of all faiths and beliefs.

Volunteers from the Mandir were presented with the award under the ‘Health and Wellbeing’ category by the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE during the awards ceremony. The Mandir was also selected for the Judge’s Commendation Award for its work with the ‘Vadil Seva Kendra’, an elderly welfare centre hosted at the Mandir.

Volunteers have been delivering tailored programmes for local care home residents since 2014, including visits to local places of interest.

USA

INAUGURATION OF BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR
25–26 August 2018, Chattanooga, GA



The new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Chattanooga, Tennessee, was consecrated on August 25 and 26 2018 by Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami.

On the afternoon of 25 August a colourful procession of the *murtis* in elaborately decorated floats took place. In the evening an enthralling kirtan *aradhana* was presented.

The auspicious *murti-sthapan* rituals were

performed by Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami. Devotees and members of the local Hindu community and government dignitaries participated in the traditional *mahapuja*. These *murtis* were originally consecrated by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj on 5 July, 2017, in Atlanta, GA.

In the assembly, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami said that the new mandir would serve as a centre of spiritual, societal and charitable services in the region for generations to come.

HISTORIC INAUGURATION OF 100th BAPS MANDIR IN NORTH AMERICA 7 October 2018, New Haven, CT



The historic *murti-pratishtha* of the 100th BAPS Mandir in North America took place in New Haven, Connecticut, in the presence of Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami and swamis from across North America. Devotees from across the tri-state area also attended this auspicious occasion. The festivities began on the morning of 7 October with the the Vedic mahapuja. Thereafter, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami conducted the *pratishtha* rituals, amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras and prayers. His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* in Edison, NJ, on 9 September 2017.

In the inauguration assembly Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami spoke on the importance of *samp*, *seva* and *mahima* (the glory of the Satsang). The mayor of the town of Milford, Mr Benjamin G. Blake, also attended the programme and welcomed the new mandir

in the community. A special video message from His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj was also played, in which he blessed all.

BAPS CELEBRATES DIWALI AT THE U.S. CAPITOL 14 November 2018, Washington DC



Around 95 BAPS members from across the country came to Washington D.C. to participate in the Diwali and Hindu New Year celebrations at the Dirksen Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill, which were attended by 26 members of the House and Senate.

Commenting on the event's significance, Ambassador Sarna noted, "Diwali is many things, but [this Diwali celebration] is a recognition of the position that the Indian American community has in the United States."

BAPS was joined by eight partner organizations: co-hosts Indiaspora and the Hindu American Foundation (HAF); co-sponsors Art of Living Foundation, US-India Friendship Council, Jain Society of Metropolitan Washington, Jain International Trade Organization, and Federation of Jain Associations in North America; and with support from the U.S. India Business Council.

UAE

DIWALI AND ANNAKUT CELEBRATIONS 9 November 2018, Abu Dhabi, UAE

More than 1,200 devoutly cooked vegetarian dishes and delicacies were offered at the Annakut held near the new BAPS Hindu Mandir



site. Over 10,000 people, including 1,800 dignitaries and members of over 50 associations and communities, patiently queued up to behold the divine darshan. Local Arab leaders and officials came with their families to express their love and greetings. Continuous live bhajans sung by men, women and children from the Gurudwara Group, Mohana Group, Shri Swami Samarth Group, Amma Bhagwan Group, Shree Karam Group and the Nandagovindam Bhajan Group included the Gujarati, Tamil, Marathi, Telugu, Malyalam and Punjabi languages.

Visitors also had the opportunity to view a captivating exhibition giving an overview of the history and proposed plans of the upcoming BAPS Hindu Mandir and Cultural Complex in Abu Dhabi.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami graced this event, along with over 300 distinguished guests of the UAE including the Ambassador of India to the UAE Shri Navdeep Singh Suri, the Consul General of India, Shri Vipul, Hamad Al Mannai, Director of Public Utility Associations Department for the UAE, Dr Adel Ahmed, a renowned lawyer and others.

PRIME MINISTER OF BAHRAIN WELCOMES SENIOR BAPS SWAMIS

13 November 2018, Bahrain

The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, His Royal Highness Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, warmly welcomed the BAPS delegation led by Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami and Brahmavihari Swami at Gudaibiya

Palace, the royal residence and Office of the Prime Minister. The delegation also included devotees of BAPS Bahrain. This was the fourth time the Prime Minister had greeted a delegation of BAPS swamis and devotees. The swamis reminded the Prime Minister of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's meeting in 1997 with his late elder brother, Sheikh Isa and the deep affection he had for Swamishri.

They also appreciated the support of Bahrain government for the BAPS and the wider Indian community in enabling them to preserve their spiritual and cultural traditions. The Prime Minister was deeply touched to learn that special prayers had been offered by the swamis and devotees for his good health and for the peace, progress and prosperity of Bahrain and its people. At the conclusion of the meeting Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami presented an Amrut Kalash to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister was so moved by the sentiments expressed by the delegation that he personally escorted the senior swamis as they departed from the meeting.

ASIA-PACIFIC

MAHAPUJA PRAYER ASSEMBLIES

1 September to 28 October 2018, Australia and New Zealand

Over 200 *kishores* and *kishoris* participated in the Mahapuja Prayer Assemblies held in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney in Australia and Auckland in New Zealand. BAPS



sadhus guided the students in performing the *mahapuja* rituals and prayed for their success in their forthcoming high school and university exams. Through discourses, the sadhus guided and motivated the youths to continue their preparations for the exams.

BAPS DONATES TO DROUGHT RELIEF FUND 4 October 2018, Australia



The BAPS in Australia donated over \$15,000 to the drought relief efforts led by the Australian Red Cross and Country Women’s Association of NSW’s Drought Relief Fund to support the farmers affected by this natural calamity. Hon. Ray Williams, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Disability Services, appreciated BAPS’s efforts in supporting the affected, “There are families that are struggling, communities that are struggling. You have recognized their plight through the very strong principles of your faith – the spirit of selfless service.” State Member for Parramatta, Dr Geoff Lee, thanked the community for its support and optimism, “With your generous donation, thoughts and prayers, we can help them through the hard times so

they can get on their feet. Your commitment to selfless service shows the power of NSW as a multicultural and multi-faith community that allows us to contribute to other communities that you have never even met right across NSW and Australia.” Dr. Lee also thanked the swamis of BAPS for their leadership in the community through their travels to remote Australian communities to inspire the spirit of selfless service in individuals. BAPS swamis and volunteers also visited Owendale Park in Broke, NSW, and gave donations to look after the needs of cattle. Prayers were offered for the good health of all living beings affected by the adverse weather conditions of NSW.

BAL-BALIKA AND KISHORE-KISHORI ADHIVESHANS 24 November 2018 to 6 January 2019, Australia and New Zealand

As a part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Centenary Celebrations (1921–2021), the third regional *bal-balika* and *kishore-kishori adhiveshans* themed ‘Thaiye Swami Jeva: Vairagya – Only Him’ were held at 13 centres in Australia and New Zealand from November 2018 to January 2019. A total of 340 *balaks*, 378 *balikas*, 104 *kishores* and 80 *kishoris* took part in these *adhiveshans* in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Hobart, Melbourne, Melbourne West, Perth and Sydney in Australia; and Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington and Hamilton in New Zealand. These were also the first *adhiveshans* in which the *shishus* (young children) took part.

The *adhiveshans* comprised of competitions in *mukhpath* (scriptural memorization), essay writing and *abnik* (daily worship routine) which aimed to increase spiritual knowledge in children and teenagers, encourage regular satsang reading and examine their proficiency in performing daily rituals. Oral presentations and Satsang FAQs focused on developing the youngsters' ability to express their understanding of spiritual concepts.

Balaks, balikas, kishores, kishoris and *shishus* competed in separate categories that were assessed by 430 judges and 28 admin volunteers in their local centres. The tremendous effort put in by all the participants over the past several months was reflected in their excellent performances.

DIWALI AND ANNAKUT CELEBRATIONS AT AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL PARLIAMENT
3 December 2018, Canberra, Australia



BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, along with other Hindu organizations, supported the Hindu Council of Australia in organizing the Annual Diwali and Annakut celebrations and an inaugural Hindu Festivals Exhibition in the historic Great Hall of the Australian Federal Parliament in the nation's capital, Canberra. The event was hosted by the Hon. David Coleman MP, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs and Senator the Hon Zed Seselja, Assistant Minister for Treasury and Finance.

BAPS volunteers from all across Australia interacted with Members of Parliament, Senators and employees of the federal parliament to talk

about the major Hindu festivals, harmony, diversity and peace.

Senator Pauline Hanson of Queensland noted, "This has helped me gain a better understanding of Hindus and the festivals they celebrate."

Throughout the day, over 25 high commissioners, members of parliament and senators visited the celebration and exhibition.

BAPS CHARITIES

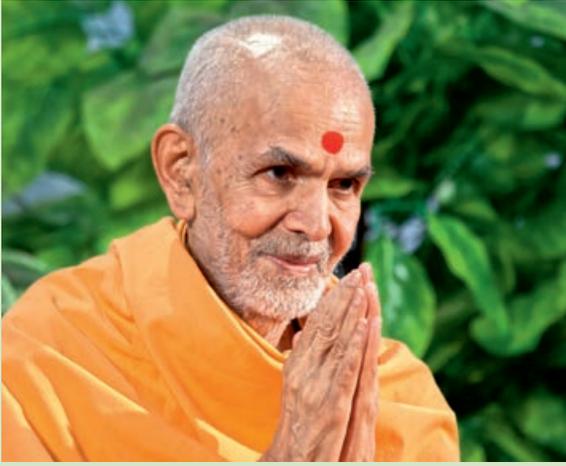
BAPS CHARITIES DONATIONS TO COMPASSIONATE HANDS FOR THE DISABLED FOUNDATION

16 December 2018, Nairobi



BAPS Charities volunteers visited the Compassionate Hands for The Disabled Foundation (CHDF) to donate food items for the orphanage, located off the eastern bypass in Ruai Nairobi.

CHDF is run by its co-founder Anne Njeri who herself is partially disabled. The CHDF home caters for 94 disabled children suffering from autism and cerebral palsy. The disabled children are taken care of by 15 full time caregivers. ◆



Mahant Swamiji, The Divine Power

Lean is the man,
Faint is his smile.
But how powerful he is,
You will know in a while.

Thousand suns in his domain,
Rotating earth is his game.
Stars twinkle around him,
Universe moves with his name.

He showers streams of blessings,
With one blink of his eye.
Scripts destiny for all,
With colours of his spiritual dye.

One glimpse of his,
Gives freedom from misery.
His shadow alone,
Makes sorrow a history.

When words pour from his heart,
Inner soul gets sanctified.
Gentle touch of the divine,
Leaves the devotees dignified.

His one little step,
Shakes the heavens around.
One slight turn of his,
Puts to silence the turmoil's sound.

When he bows his head,
All gods and goddesses arrive.
Raising his head causes,
All living beings to survive.

His applying *chandlo* on forehead,
Binds us in eternal synergy.
Doing *parikramas* around his gurus,
He radiates cosmic energy.

When he folds his hands,
All our vices depart.
When he raises his hands,
Our *janma-chakras* fall apart.

The mightiest force on the planet,
Practices *samp* and humility.
Donates every breath for us,
Considers praying for us, his duty.

Revered are his virtues,
Nispruh, Nirlobh, Nissneh,
Nirman, Nishkam. He and only he,
Is the door to Akshardham.

By Ms Sunita Sharma,
Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture,
Govt of India, New Delhi,
November 2018



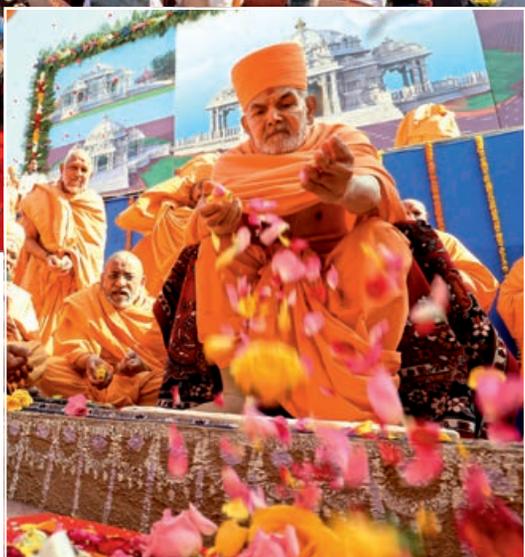
**PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S
98th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
15 December 2018, Rajkot**

1. Youths perform a traditional celebratory dance.
2. Devotees from India and abroad in the celebration assembly.
Inset: Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj presents a memento to Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijaybhai Rupani.



**SHILANYAS CEREMONY FOR
PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S SMRUTI MANDIR
17 December 2018, Sarangpur**

1. Mahant Swami Maharaj, *sadguru* swamis and other sadhus perform the *shilanyas* rituals in the foundation pit.
 2. Devotees from throughout India and abroad participate in the *shilanyas mahapuja* rituals.
- Inset: Swamishri showers flower petals on the main *shilas* in the foundation.



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