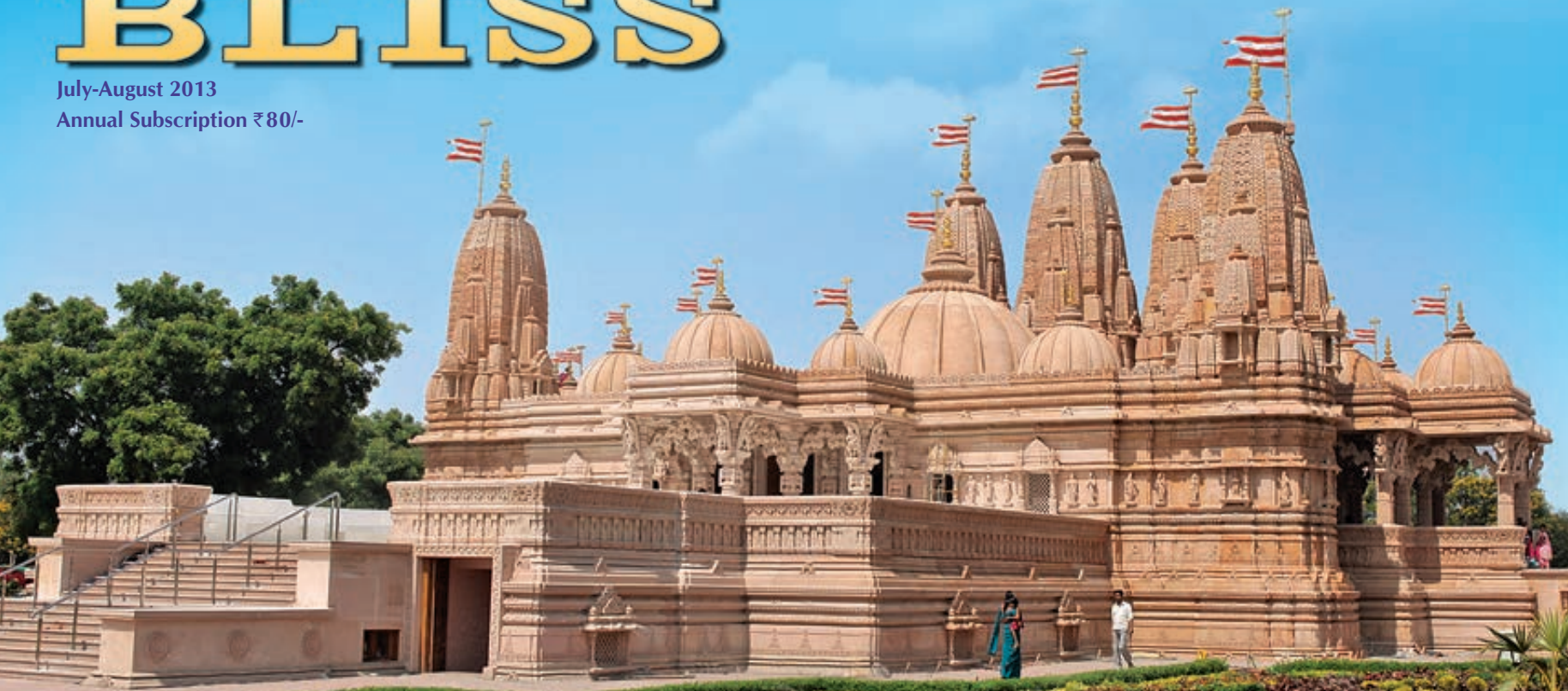


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July-August 2013

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**OPENING OF
BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, SELVAS**

A Culmination of BAPS Tribal Activities

The *murtis* of the newly inaugurated *shikharbaddha* BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Selvas, capital of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. The mandir was inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and inaugurated in the presence of senior BAPS sadhus on 13 May 2013.



Shri Harikrishna Maharaj,
Shri Radha-Krishna Dev



Central Shrine: Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganapatiji



Shri Ram-Sita-Hanumanji
Pragat Brahmaswarup
Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Brahmaswarup Bhagatiji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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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Nagar Haveli and the New BAPS
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BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Selvas



First Word

Once, Bhagwan Swaminarayan was in the village of Panchala. Jhinabhai Darbar was a devotee and the chief of the village. With the blessings of Shriji Maharaj he held a festival and a feast for all in Panchala. Seemingly, everyone had been invited and served with sumptuous food. Later, Maharaj enquired whether anyone had been left out. Jhinabhai said no. Then Maharaj saw some poor people in tattered clothes wandering by the opposite side of the riverbank. He pointed out to them and asked, “Who are they? Have you fed them?” Someone answered with aversion, “Maharaj, they are Harijans (untouchables). They live in the forest and fend for themselves by killing goats, hens, rabbits and deer. They are sinners who wander about. Why should we feed them?”

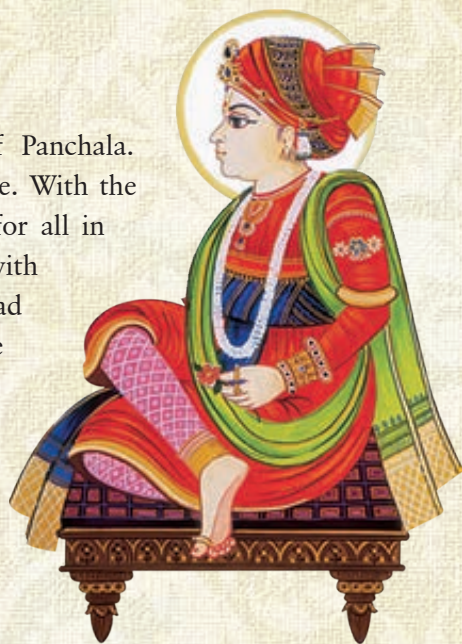
Shriji Maharaj replied with magnanimity, “The sun rises for everyone. It shines for the holy and unholy alike. The rain showers on everybody’s field. In the same manner, I am like the sun in the form of Sahajanand. I wish to liberate all. Therefore go across the river and call them here. When they came, Maharaj himself served food and showered his compassion upon them. The harijans cherished the form of Maharaj in their hearts and left happily.

In the Janmangal Namavali, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has an appellation of ‘Sarvajivahitāvaha’ – meaning, the doer of good of all souls, regardless of any distinctions of class or status.

The legacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s selfless service to all has been continued by the BAPS gurus. From 1971 H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has been selflessly endeavouring for the social, moral and spiritual uplift of mankind. One of the cornerstones of his philanthropy has been his effort in uplifting the tribals of Gujarat. His visits to their ramshackled huts, personal care and advice to redeem them of vices and addictions and aid in difficult times have worked miracles in their lives. Today, thousands of tribals live happier lives and offer devotion to God.

Once, a business magnate came for Swamishri’s darshan in Mumbai. He said, “I have set up a factory in the tribal town of Selvas.” Swamishri revealed, “We, too, have set up a factory in Selvas.” The magnate was surprised and asked, “What type of factory is it?” Swamishri replied with a smile, “The factory transforms a person into a human being.”

Swamishri’s efforts in inspiring values and kindling spiritual faith have benefited countless people. A recent testimony of his selfless services is the consecration of the *shikharbaddha* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Selvas – a centre for BAPS tribal uplift activities. This special issue covers the history of BAPS tribal activities by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his sadhus and the consecration ceremony of the *shikharbaddha* mandir in Selvas. The articles are translations from the Gujarati issue of *Swaminarayan Prakash*, June 2013. ◆





ADHYĀY 2

BRĀHMI STHITI YOGA:

The Turtle Tendency of the Sthitapragna

Part 16

Destructive Contemplation

Shri Krishna says – ध्यायतो विषयान् पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते । सङ्गात् संजायते कामः कामात् क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥ क्रोधाद् भवति संमोहः संमोहात् स्मृतिविभ्रमः । स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात् प्रणश्यति ॥

‘Dhyāyato vishayān punsaha sangaste-shoopajāyate, sangāt sanjāyate kāmaha kāmāt krodho’bhijāyate. Krodhād bhavati sammohaha sammohāt smrutivibhramaha, smrutibhramshād buddhināsho buddhināshāt pranashyati.’

‘If one contemplates on sensual pleasures, one develops an attachment for them. That attachment gives rise to desires. Desires give rise to anger. Anger gives rise to foolishness. Foolishness gives rise to delusion. Delusion leads to irrationality, and irrationality leads to downfall’ (Gita 2.62-63).

Contemplation of sensual pleasures, attachment, desire, anger, foolishness and irrationality are the six steps of deterioration and downfall is the final result. This is an identification of flaws which make one as though dead while still alive.

Often, we merely visualize enjoying amorous pleasures. We feel, ‘What is wrong with that? It is only a memory, nothing more.’ But the Gita warns us of this deadly belief.

‘Dhyāyato vishayān punsaha sangaste-shoopajāyate’ means that if we contemplate on any mundane sensual pleasure, attachment is surely developed. Thereafter, *‘sangāt sanjāyate kāmaha’* – that ‘attachment gives rise to desires’. We develop a longing for whatever pleasures we are attached to. It is instinctual to break out in a rage of anger on anything that hinders us from fulfilling that longing. Therefore, the Gita states, *‘Kāmāt krodho’bhijāyate’* – ‘Desire is the cause of anger.’ When a person is taken over by anger, he becomes delusive, i.e. foolish. He cannot discriminate between right and wrong, what to do and what

not to do. He loses control over his speech. Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj used to say that when two brothers fight, one says to the other, ‘Do you know who I am?’ Now they obviously know each other, but this is an outcome of anger. That is why the Gita says not only ‘*krodhād bhavati sammohaha*’, but also that ‘*sammohāt smrutivibhramaha*’, i.e. their mind is adversely affected. Thereafter, ‘*smrutibhran-shād buddhināshaha*’, i.e. this delusion leads to irrationality. They are not aware of anything. Their intellect has no control over what they say, think or understand. Those who have lost their rationality have lost everything. They are alive yet as though dead. Therefore the Gita says, ‘*Buddhināshāt pranashyati.*’

Attain Paramātmā and Eliminate Desires

If one strikes gold, who would linger over brass? On receiving sweet rice-milk, who would drink sour buttermilk? On attaining a palace, who would want a hut? We all experience that on attaining the best, we automatically lose interest in lesser things.

The Gita says – रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते । – ‘*raso’pyasya param drushtvā nivartate*’.

‘*Param*’ means the best. In essence, on attaining knowledge of the greatest, man is rid of desires for sensual pleasures (Gita 2.59).

Paramātmā is the greatest of all. His form is the greatest of all. One who attains that form has no more desires. His words are the greatest. One who hears them cannot be drawn by any mundane words. His touch is the greatest. One who experiences it cannot be drawn to any mundane touch. His form is the greatest. One who is fortunate to see him feels all mundane forms to be worthless. His taste is the greatest. One who has tasted it finds nothing tasteful in the mundane world. His fragrance is the greatest. One who has smelt him does not find anything else fragrant at all. All of his qualities are supreme. One who sees him

feels that all mundane things are useless. In this manner, Paramātmā’s bliss is the greatest of all. One who experiences it finds nothing else to be pleasurable.

Thus, ‘*param drushtvā*’ is the realization of the all great Paramātmā. The Gita draws us in that direction. Shri Krishna explains that one who attains Paramātmā becomes free of all desires.

A Living Example – The Satpurush

A *sthitapragna satpurush* is continuously in this state of ‘*param drushtvā*’. His whole life is spent on a stable platform of realization of Paramātmā. As a reward of attaining Paramātmā, his life overflows with bliss. Therefore, the senses or pleasures cannot hinder him. He is so immersed in the bliss of Paramātmā that no mundane desires arise at all.

This state of ‘*param drushtvā*’ described in the Gita can be seen very clearly in the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In September 1998, Edison (New Jersey, USA), the renowned editor of the *Philadelphia Enquirer* and Pulitzer Prize winner, the late Ronald Patel, interviewed Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri had recently undergone heart bypass surgery and Ronald Patel was eager to hear about the experiences of Swamishri at the time.

Ronald asked, “When you recovered consciousness after your bypass surgery and you realized that you were still in this world, what was the first thing that came to mind?”

“Bhagwan,” Swamishri said instantly.

“Weren’t you somewhat disappointed that you came back and did not reach God,” asked Ronald, with eyes squinted.

“No, God is constantly with us,” replied Swamishri naturally. These words of realization touched Ronald deep in his heart.

On 28 February 1985, a reporter of the *Janambhoomi-Pravasi* newspaper, Shri Sompu-

ra, asked Swamishri, “When did you have your first experience of God?”

“From the beginning,” Swamishri replied. This was an unexpected answer for Shri Somapura, but it reflected Swamishri’s true state.

On 2 November 1991, Rajkot, a youth asked Swamishri, “Have you seen Paramātmā?”

“That is why we are so happy. I talk of him because I have seen him,” Swamishri said, casually.

“So Paramātmā is as if before your very eyes?” The youth asked to confirm.

“Yes, before our very eyes,” replied Swamishri. Everyone present heard Swamishri’s conviction of attaining Paramātmā.

In this manner, the heart of a *sthitapragna satpurush* is ever filled with the conviction of Paramātmā. As a result he is naturally wed with detachment from all other things.

Once, while Pramukh Swami Maharaj was taking lunch in Jamnagar, Pujya Bhagavatcharan Swami told Swamishri, “I have inspected the whole building; everything is satisfactory, splendid in fact. How do you like it?”

“Everything is the same for us. What is a mansion and what is a hut? Whatever we get by Paramātmā’s wish is well and good,” Swamishri replied, reflecting his *sthitapragna* state.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Atlanta, USA. The volunteers helping in the kitchen department brought before Swamishri a dish full of the day’s food items that were going to be served to the devotees. One volunteer asked Swamishri, “Bapa, which of these items do you like?” Swamishri immediately answered, ‘Whatever Paramātmā eats; we should accept whatever is offered to Paramātmā.’

One can only hear such answers from someone who is truly experiencing the bliss of Paramātmā.

Once, in London, Swamishri went to sanctify a shop. The devotee who owned the shop asked Swamishri, “Do you like the shop?” Swamishri

replied, “What is there to like? Everything will one day become dust. How much we worship Paramātmā is what counts.”

Once, in Bochasan, some sadhus were sitting around Swamishri and having a light discussion. It was the last day of their stay at the current location. Janmangal Swami asked, “You have stayed here for this long, so you must have become settled. Do you feel like going elsewhere?”

“Why not? We are settled wherever we go! There is no question of ‘getting’ settled,” Swamishri replied. He then said softly, “Wherever we go we worship and speak about Paramātmā. As long we are settled in that, we are settled. What need is there to be settled with regards to accommodation and other things? We should never believe that we will only be comfortable in certain places. However much we serve and speak about Paramātmā is how happy we are; that is true comfort.”

These are the words that echo from one who has realized Paramātmā as stated in the words ‘*param drushtvā*’.

Conclusion

Thus, the words of the Gita direct us to imbibe detachment and indifference in our lives. It reveals the characteristics of the sensual pleasures, the senses of action, the senses of perception, and the *antahkarans* (internal organs). By giving us an indication of their strength, it warns us and shows us the importance of self-control. Moreover, with the words ‘*param drushtvā nivartate*’ it shows us the technique to overcome them. ◆

Tune of Joy

In the Tribal Jungles of Selvas

INTRODUCTION

The tribals of Dadra and Nagar Haveli in South Gujarat.

Their past was primitive and dark. For centuries they wallowed in a life bereft of values and civility. But today, thousands have been salvaged from the rut of ignorance and now play the tune of joy and enlightenment. They live in the lap of nature, abounding in green jungles hemmed by lush hills. For decades their forefathers were exploited by the Portuguese who ruled the region (1779-1954 CE).

Selvas is the principal city of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. ‘Silva’ in Portuguese means jungle. ‘Silvassa’ is its plural form. Thereafter, in Gujarati, the word became transformed into Selvas. During Portuguese rule Selvas was the capital town. The Portuguese loved hunting animals in this jungle region. They lived a lavish lifestyle by commercializing what they exploited from the jungles and the animals they hunted. They exported their goods from the nearby port of Daman. During their rule they overshadowed the local tribals, sub-



jecting them to slavishness and confining them to their primitive lifestyle.

The tribals lived on rice and added salt to the water remaining after they cooked rice. They also lived on fish, which they caught from nearby streams. In addition, they had nothing to wear except a loincloth in all the seasons. They carried bows and arrows and slings to hunt birds and small animals for food. They cooked them on piles of twigs, igniting them by rubbing two stones together. Even today the population of birds is sparse because of the hunting habits of the tribals.

Many tribals also resorted to stealing and dacoity to support their families. To forget their poverty and miseries they took to drinking liquor by brewing it from *tad* and *mahuda* flowers and fruits. The vices of superstition and blind faith further blighted their lives and made them fearful. Treatment from the witch doctors left them in more agony and debt, and sometimes led to death. Even their customs of marriage, death rites and other rituals proved to be exorbitant due to superstitions.

In this depressing and dark situation of poverty, illiteracy, superstition and blind faith the

tribals were never able to redeem themselves. In 1954, the region became independent from Portuguese rule, and it was declared as Union Territory, where the central government took administrative control. Even thereafter the pace of development and progress of the tribals was extremely sluggish. But the bleak situation soon changed drastically with the efforts of H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his sadhus, who travelled extensively in the tribal belt of Dadra and Nagar Haveli from 1971 onwards.

SWAMISHRI AND HIS SADHUS IN THE TRIBAL REGION

Historians of Gujarat have credited and praised Bhagwan Swaminarayan as the redeemer of the poor and lowly. His philanthropy has been continued by the Gunatit guru *parampara* and in a marked measure by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth successor. He has endeavoured to uplift them for over four decades.

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj launched the efforts to uplift the tribal region of Dadra and Nagar Haveli from 1960 to 1970. Through his inspiration BAPS sadhus from Mumbai travelled to the region of Dadra and Nagar Haveli to in-



**Dadra and Nagar
Haveli region in
South Gujarat**



Swamishri engaged in a ritual in a tribal town



Teaching moral and spiritual values to a tribal

spire values. On 26 April 1971, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the tribal region of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and sanctified the huts of tribals. From then onwards he continued the relentless efforts of edifying the tribals.

In 1971, Jashbhai Purushottambhai Patel of Vapi offered his pivotal support. At that time Ranjitsinh Chauhan, a devotee, was appointed as a government official in Selvas. With his support the sadhus' visits to Selvas became more frequent. Subsequently, leading locals like Ram Murthy, Ratibhai Patel, Narottamdas Topiwala, Dayabhai and others collaborated in the development of satsang. Thereafter, frequent satsang assemblies were organized in the presence of sadhus. The tribal men and women were inspired to mend their errant ways after listening to the discourses of the sadhus. The sadhus also addressed tribal children and youths in the local schools. This effected moral changes in their lives too.

In the initial years, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Shrihari Swami, Haribhushan Swami and others travelled from Mumbai to Selvas to inspire values in the tribals. From 1971 to 1980 Swamishri appointed Narayanprasad Swami to travel in the tribal region. At that time Ishwarcharan Swami also made efforts in inspiring character in the tribal youths. Initially there were no lodging arrangements for sadhus in Selvas. So, the sadhus stayed in Vapi at Jashbhai Patel's home and travelled to Selvas by public bus daily. There, the sadhus made efforts to morally uplift the tribals and returned by bus to Jashbhai's home at night. In spite of the dearth of facilities the sadhus resolutely carried on their work of moral upliftment through the inspiration and wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In 1981, another *mandal*, led by Narendraprasad Swami (Acharya Swami), started travelling in the tribal areas. On 3 January 1982, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated the first



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Selvas, a centre for tribal uplift activities



Sadhus conduct a *bal sabha* outside tribal huts

BAPS *hari* mandir in the tribal region at Selvas. The large assembly hall and mandir became the hub of BAPS tribal uplift activities. Whenever the sadhus visited Selvas they stayed in the mandir. From 1985, Chinmay Swami and Anandmurti Swami started staying in the mandir in Selvas. Ever since, they have been making colossal efforts for the uplift of tribals. The conditions in those times were difficult as recalled by Chinmay Swami and Anandmurti Swami, “When we were appointed to stay here in 1985 there were no roads in the hinterland. We walked on the jungle paths frequented by the tribals to reach their villages. After arduous efforts in getting there, the next problem we faced was the language. They talked in Dholi, Varli, Konkani and other mixed languages, which we were not acquainted with. So, the question was how to talk to them and inspire them to give up addictions. Another thing we experienced was that the tribals ran away on seeing us. They were afraid and felt that we had come to take them away. And if a government officer or police constables came they simply deserted the whole village. In short, they were a scared tribe. But we persisted in our visits and they eventually struck a chord of friendship with the sadhus.”

The so called tribal villages did not comprise of a cluster of many huts, but of scattered huts, each several furlongs away. The hilly terrain and jungle area made the trudge on narrow paths challenging for the sadhus. But they persevered,

going from one hut to another. During the monsoon season they trodded in knee-deep soggy grounds to reach their huts. Sometimes they slipped and became soiled, but still they went ahead meeting the tribals in their huts and inspiring them towards an ethical life. When a satsang assembly was arranged there would be only one or two tribals seated before them. Their faith, utter simplicity and naiveness touched the sadhus, which thus enthused them in imparting satsang. Another challenge the sadhus faced was cooking their meals. There was no question of getting any food rations from the poor tribals, so the sadhus brought with them a month’s stock of lentils, rice grains, wheat flour, turmeric powder, salt and red chilli powder from Mumbai. After the month was over they would have to make arrangements for another month. The sadhus also carried with them pots, pans, a paraffin stove and other utensils for cooking. No vegetables were available then. In spite of these hardships and problems the sadhus strived happily to please Swamishri.

On narrating their good and bad experiences with the tribals, Chinmay Swami and Anandmurti Swami revealed, “Once we started a *bal mandal* in the village of Randha. We told the children to bow and touch the feet of their parents every day. When the children’s assembly was over, one child went home to touch his father’s feet. The father felt that his child was about to put him on the floor. So, he kicked him

and flung him aside. The father was totally ignorant about this simple act of respect. When the tribals came to our satsang assembly they wore only loin cloths. Some came intoxicated with alcohol and babbled off something in the middle of the assembly. Sometimes they swore at us. We had to tolerate them quietly and patiently.”

Those who gave up their bad habits became sterling *satsangis* and won the respect and praise of all. In the rainy season, some travelled for miles and swam through rivers to attend the discourses of sadhus.

Narayanprasad Swami avers, “At that time we did not have a car. When we wanted to come from Vapi to Selvas we travelled by public bus. It was always jam-packed because there was only one bus for the whole day. We had to fast when we travelled by bus. In addition to the heavy crowd of passengers some carried dead fish, making the journey intolerably revolting. No vehicle could ply on the interior narrow pathways. So, we sometimes had to walk long distances, 15 to 20 kilometres. The pathways in the jungle often posed many dangers. We would come across snakes and confront dacoits on the way. At night our troubles increased manifold, but despite that we enjoyed inspiring satsang among the tribals.

“We experienced that the tribals needed bonhomie and support. We remembered Swamishri during our hardships and troubles and went to them. They would be happy to see us. We would also go to see them when they were ailing, or when someone in the family had passed away. We offered prayers and also helped in mitigating their difficulties. Around 1979-80 we organized a seminar for teachers with Swamishri’s blessings in which many gave up addictions and superstitions.”

EFFORTS OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

Along with the efforts of sadhus in edifying the tribals BAPS youth volunteers have also been striving regardless of the travails. Ratibhai Patel



BAPS volunteers and tribal devotees during *bhakti feri*

of Vesma and other volunteers accompany the sadhus during their travels to the tribal region. They too have to put up with the same difficulties as the sadhus. They either have to walk or cycle to villages to spread Swamishri’s message of anti-addiction and values. They have also helped in the anti-addiction drive introduced by the government social welfare department. They would sing bhajans to assemble the tribals, then they talked about values and anti-addiction. Many tribals would quit their addictions and bad habits. Soon, village after village were liberated from addictions. The tribals started performing daily puja, worshipping in home shrines, conducting satsang assemblies and celebrating festivals. Along with sadhus, volunteers like Ratibhai, Ramubhai, Rajibhai, Govindbhai, Jaganbhai, Raviyabhai, Ramanbhai, Khushalbhai and others still make rigorous effort in inspiring values in tribals. They travel on cycles to conduct *sabhas*, taking *prasad* with them from their homes. The number of volunteers have since increased, most of them from the tribal community, due to regular satsang assemblies and annual spiritual camps.

Govindbhai Rambhai Patel recalls his experiences, “At that time we faced dire difficulties in spreading values to reform the tribals. We didn’t have anyone else to help us. So, Ratibhai Patel, myself and a few hostel students would assemble to hold the weekly satsang *sabha*. Among the students were Ramubhai Patel, Bharatbhai Patel,

Subhashbhai Patel – seven or eight in all. Soon they were inspired by satsang and thus they travelled to other villages to morally reform the tribals. Gradually satsang *mandals* were established. Sadhus from Mumbai visited the tribal region providing moral strength to all. Narayanprasad Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami used to come too. They trained the students.”

A veteran tribal volunteer, Ramubhai Mankanbhai, who was once a spright youth volunteer, reminisces, “I became a *satsangi* in 1971. I was a student living in a government hostel. I met Pramukh Swami Maharaj for the first time when he came to our hostel. Then I became a *satsangi*. For my family the Swaminarayan Sampradaya was totally alien and new. They call *kanthi* a *gathi*. Married women wear a *mangalsutra* around their neck, which they also call *gathi*. So the males used to mock me by saying that they would not like to wear a *gathi* like females. In this way people ridiculed me so I used to cover my *kanthi*. But through the contact of sadhus our people’s mentality changed.

“The sadhus came to our students’ hostel to teach us moral lessons. When the students returned to their villages they would talk about satsang and thus they inspired satsang in their parents.

“In 1972, there was a youth *adhiveshan* (convention) in Gana. Several of us from our hostel went to participate. We all thoroughly enjoyed the experience and thereafter our satsang gained more impetus.

“In 1973, during the school holidays, many youths from Mumbai accompanied Swamishri during his *vicharan*. I, too, joined the group. At that time Swamishri made a lot of home visits (*padhramanis*). We would join him, but after a while we would get tired. Swamishri would tell us to stay at one place while he completed his home visits. Today, I can still remember the immense toil that Swamishri had put himself through. It has inspired me to also make efforts

for satsang.

“In those times people were economically weak. In addition, they were so much steeped in blind faith and superstition that if they had a headache they would go to a witch doctor (*bhuvava*). The latter would chant mumbo-jumbo and shake his head and hands as if some divine spirit had entered him and then give the ailing person a thread to tie around his neck to cure him. The witch doctor also asked the person to sacrifice a hen or goat to liberate him from the ailment or difficulty. Such was the type of life our people lived. Because of their stark lack in education, they faithfully followed the village head. I have seen such things in the villages of Sili and Tambadi. But things took a drastic turn when satsang arrived. Our people developed faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Swamishri, and subsequently a lot of change occurred.

“In the early years I used to cycle my way to hold *sabhas* (assemblies), and that was how satsang grew. We visited tribal youth hostels and held satsang *sabhas*. On singing kirtans people would come and listen. Many times some came drunk and then harassed us. They would not allow us to sit on the village platform. So, we would sit by the road and do bhajan and kirtan.

“At that time our people were so poor, they did not have anything to cover the upper part of their body. They wore only a loincloth. Swamishri organized a campaign to distribute clothes to them. At Swamishri’s behest I used to go to villages to note the types and sizes of clothes that our people required. Then I would personally go to deliver them to each household. When I went to distribute raincoats and other clothes, they were overjoyed; I had never seen them so happy before. For five years they put on their raincoats prior to sleeping at night. The tribals felt how fortunate they were to get and wear such clothes. Such were their feelings of joy.

“Swamishri organized medical camps to treat

and improve their health. The majority of tribals suffered from skin diseases. This was so because they did not bathe at all. However, they started to do so after becoming *satsangis*. Subsequently, there was a marked decrease in skin diseases. Another service rendered to them was the free distribution of buttermilk. All this was carried out by the grace of Swamishri. Because of him *satsang* has flourished here. We will never forget the visits of Swamishri and his sadhus to our region, bearing all the hardships in liberating us.”

Raviyabhai, a tribal of Vaghchhipa village, shares his memories about what it was like before and after *satsang* came into his life. “I became a *satsangi* in 1974 when I was about 27-28 years. Prior to *satsang* I was deeply habituated to drinking, eating meat and stealing. I was totally ignorant of who Bhagwan Swaminarayan was and Pramukh Swami is. Formerly, whenever the BAPS sadhus came to our village we used to run away in fear of being given *kanthis*. Once, we were all sitting together after drinking alcohol. Suddenly Narayanprasad Swami arrived. He explained to us about the futility of addictions and bad habits. We put on the *kanthis* then. And that is how we became *satsangis*. We applied the *tilak-chandlo*. When others poked fun at us we often came on the verge of giving *satsang* up. But due to the sadhus’ visits and blessings our faith was revived and reinforced. Mahant Swami, Dr Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami also came to our villages. Thereafter, I, too, travelled with sadhus to do *satsang* in other villages. At that time, the sadhus did not have any vehicles to travel in. We took them in oxen carts. Dhirendrabhai Vinchhi of Surat trained us in matters of *satsang*.”

Lakshmanbhai Nikuliya of village Randha, a tribal *satsangi* volunteer, states, “I had no means of travel when I went to the villages to do *satsang*. I walked from one village to another. Sometimes, I borrowed another’s bicycle at night to do *satsang*. I had to pass through jungle terrain. For our sadhus there were a lot more

difficulties. In the monsoon season they trodded with us through muddy and soggy grounds. Sometimes they even slipped and fell in the sticky mud. There were no proper accommodations for them to stay the night. They would have to spend the night in ramshackled huts. Despite of all this they travelled to the villages with joy and energy. Each home in the villages is located at great distances. The sadhus had to exert themselves to make home visits.”

Arvind Patel describes the location of his village, Khadoli, “My village lies in the midst of a jungle. It is in the extreme hinterland. Formerly, when sadhus came to our village we scampered off. But we gradually came to them and became *satsangis*. The sadhus faced a lot of troubles in the jungle. Once they were attacked by wild red flies. Their sting is very painful, but the sadhus tolerated. The sadhus could not get proper food materials and means to cook meals. These were the harsh conditions they had to put up with, and still they came to my village by crossing a river. Sometimes they had to walk five kilometres. Later, when there were roads an arrangement was made for them to come by a matador van. Sometimes the tribals would stop the van and try to loot them. On one occasion, I was with the sadhus and we came to Amboli village. A few bandits stopped our car. We barely managed to make them understand before they allowed us to proceed ahead. Later, we found that most of those miscreants changed their ways because of Swamishri’s grace and *satsang* and became *satsangis*.”

STORIES OF TRANSFORMATIONS

The relentless efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his sadhus in moralizing the tribals since the last few decades have borne abundant fruits. Initially, there was not a vestige of change or progress visible in their lives due to illiteracy, and lack of values and basic necessities. In fact they lived an animal’s life. However, today the



Through the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj thousands of tribals have been transformed from their once morally deficient ways into devotees. They have assembled for a satsang *sabha* in Selvas

scene has changed. We shall see some examples.

- A few decades back one could not imagine tribal children enrolling for primary education. Today, twenty tribal youths of BAPS satsang *mandals* have graduated as doctors. Lalubhai, who formerly wallowed in addictions, became a *satsangi*. His son, Ashok, became an ideal *satsangi* youth, and graduated as a doctor from M.S. University (Vadodara). Presently, he practices as a physician. Dr Dipak and Dr Sunil Daru, through the inspiration and support of Swamishri and BAPS, have graduated as doctors. Many more male and female tribal youths are presently studying or have completed their studies in medicine or engineering.

- Dr Prakash R. Patel, an agricultural scientist of national repute, is the first tribal of Dadra and Nagar Haveli to have acquired a PhD in agriculture. He has written many research papers on agriculture. Dr Prakash was a member of the BAPS Children's Forum, from where he gained motivation for his educational success.

- After Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated the BAPS Swaminarayan School in Selvas thousands of tribal and other students have been receiving primary and secondary education. The

students have excelled in carving out successful careers. The school has also been honoured with national awards.

- Decades ago most tribal villages were poor and backward. However, today, many families have been redeemed of poverty and bad habits. Their moral transformations have made them into vegetarians, inclined them towards singing bhajans and allowed women to walk without any fear. Their makeshift breweries have been dismantled and on the very same grounds spiritual discourses are held daily. Many tribal villages have become free from superstitions, addictions, ignorance and bad practices, and instead religious faith and rituals prevail.



BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, Selvas – a school for tribal children



Swamishri has built BAPS *hari* mandirs for the moral and spiritual uplift of tribal devotees. (L) Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of a *hari* mandir

their contributions. The tribal youths of Randha went deep into the jungle to cut bamboos for the mandir construction. They also built the mandir walls themselves. After the consecration ceremonies the *hari* mandirs are now vibrant with devotion and service.

■ There is no prohibition to alcohol drinking in the 72 villages of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. This led to widespread production and addiction to home-made liquor in every village and hut. Drinking and meat-eating are staples among the tribals. For decades social workers and government campaigns failed to unhinge thousands from addictions and vices. However, the efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, his sadhus and volunteers ushered in a moral change. Thousands of tribals today live addiction-free, honest and faithful lives. Subsequently, the tribals have also benefited financially.

Kushalbhai of Samarvarni village and others used to exhaust their earnings in drinking and other vices. However on quitting them they have become prosperous and happy. Their huts have gone and they now live in proper homes. They have contributed in building *hari* mandirs or *kutir* mandirs – the villages of Sili, Tambadi, Samarvarni and Randha are shining examples of

■ Once, Ramanbhai Gamit, a youth of Randha, was afflicted with severe fever. His fellow tribals insisted upon taking him to a witch doctor. But Ramanbhai emphatically refused. Finally, some of his friends went to a witch doctor and told him to give them a charmed string. The witch doctor gave them a string to tie on Ramanbhai's wrist, and said, "If he does not tie this string he will die." But Ramanbhai did not tie the string and proved the witch doctor wrong.

In the Konkan tribal community there is a practice of tying an enchanted string on the wrist of a pregnant woman. On the sixth day after the child is born that same thread is tied to the child. If this is not done it is believed that the child would die. Maganbhai, a *satsangi*, did not align himself to this custom and refused, "Let my wife, my child or I die, but I refuse to tie the thread." From that day a new trend was set by Maganbhai and the age-old superstitious custom disappeared.



Swamishri performs the *pratishtha* rituals of a *ghar mandir* in a tribal home



A *bal sabha* in a *kutir mandir*

■ Some tribals had resolved to banditry for their livelihood. They would loot people in broad daylight. But things changed when satsang entered into their lives. One such notorious bandit was Sonya Bhagat of Randha village. His name evoked fear. The local government officials requested BAPS sadhus to reform him. When Sonya came into the contact of BAPS sadhus his life took a drastic turn. He became a *satsangi*. He began singing bhajans for hours at home and at the BAPS *kutir* mandir in Sili village. Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the first *kutir* mandir in Dadra and Nagar Haveli at Sili. The mandir thereafter became a centre for many tribals in that region. Thousands of people were relieved and at peace after Sonya's transformation.

As the tribals adopted satsang they were blessed with honesty and other virtues. Dayabhai of Kudacha village worked as a peon. Once, he found a wallet containing Rs. 10,000. Without succumbing to the temptation of taking the money he searched for the owner and returned it to him.

Formerly, Barkubhai was given to stealing, but after becoming a *satsangi* he started driving a rickshaw to earn his livelihood. One day a passenger forgot his bag containing money and expensive jewellery. Barkubhai located the passenger and returned the bag. The passenger thanked Barkubhai and saluted his honesty.

■ Tribal children kill birds by using slings and stones. From this childhood habit one can infer the type of future behaviour they would have. Satish, a *satsangi* tribal child of Randha village, went with his mother to the village of Anderpada in Gujarat. The host had cooked fish for dinner, but Satish refused to eat. On seeing his resolve to remain hungry the host prepared a vegetarian meal. After this incident Adulbhai Bhoja, Satish's father, became a staunch *satsangi*.

Rajesh Indra Vajavdiya, a tribal *satsangi* child of Randha, and Hareesh, a disabled child, both cooked their own vegetarian meal rather than join their parents in eating meat.

■ With the efforts and inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj the BAPS has been active in the uplift of tribals for the last forty years. The *vicharan* of sadhus has also morally awakened the tribal people. Swamishri has personally visited the satsang regions of Selvas, Vapi, Karamkhal, Nana Pondha and Surangi. Today, these five regions comprise of 89 satsang *mandals*, 36 *balika mandals* and 53 *bal mandals*.

In the Dadra and Nagar Haveli region the 12 BAPS *hari* mandirs and nine *kutir* mandirs are vibrant with satsang activities. Today, thousands of tribal devotees thank Swamishri and his sadhus for their indefatigable efforts in reforming them and liberating them from ignorance and false faiths. ◆

Translated by Sadhu Vivekjiandas

An Ocean of Compassion and Humility

3 February 1994. It was a cold evening. Seven to eight thousand tribals (adivasis) had congregated on an open ground in Selvas for a satsang assembly. They were listening to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings, "I am very happy to see you all today. God belongs to all. He is kind and charitable to the poor. The poor are great in his eyes. All of you have profound faith in God. You are called tribals, but in the house of God everyone is the same. Shabri was a tribal, yet Bhagwan Ram went to her of his own accord. God is pleased upon one who worships him."

The tribals listening to Swamishri felt, "We have not seen God, who is kind to the poor for their simplicity and faith, but we are seeing you. God has come through you to our homes to liberate us."

For many years Swamishri's colossal efforts in redeeming them from addictions and vices have been making their lives happy. His efforts and sacrifice form the fascinating backdrop and culmination to the newly consecrated shikharbaddha mandir in Selvas in Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Let us see the extraordinary story of Swamishri's efforts.

Swamishri visits a tribal hut



Adivasi, Vanvasi or Girijan.

Ancient dweller, Forest dweller or Mountain dweller. Whatever meanings or elaborations sociologists may give, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj defines them differently. Whenever he has travelled to the various tribal regions of Gujarat he has invariably explained the term, “‘Adi’ refers to Paramatma (God), and one who resides (*vasi*) with the eternal Paramatma is an *adivasi*.” Swamishri’s statement is not rhetorical but rings with truth and conviction. Since the past few decades Swamishri’s service to the all-pervading Paramatma in the hearts of the tribals of Gujarat is a glowing testimony to his above words.

Swamishri has travelled to and served all the tribal regions of Gujarat (viz. Sabarkantha, Panch Mahal, Bodeli and others). But this article will feature his services in the tribal region of Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

In 1971, after Yogiji Maharaj gave up his earthly existence Pramukh Swami Maharaj became his spiritual successor. Three months later he visited the tribal region of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Ever since, till his health permitted, he

had been visiting and making efforts to uplift their lives and usher in a moral and spiritual revolution.

The peculiar part of his visits was that in the initial years that he came, there was no large following of people, nor were there any special attractions. Despite the prevailing social backwardness in the tribal region, Swamishri visited and showered his compassion abundantly. Sometimes he visited the tribal region three times in a year. In 1989 he visited the tribal regions four times within three months of his *vicharan*. In spite of there being no basic amenities he came solely because of their devotion and love, and to uplift them. In fact Swamishri has never asked for facilities, nor desired for them or complained about the inconveniences. He joyfully accepted the ordinary living accommodations and poor arrangements. Swamishri pleased the tribal devotees with alacrity and repeatedly visited the region.

Govindbhai, a tribal devotee, has witnessed Swamishri’s initial *vicharan* in the tribal region of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. He says, “On 26 April 1971 Pramukh Swami Maharaj came to



Swamishri on his way to a tribal village



Swamishri on his rounds of home visits in a tribal village

Selvas. I travelled with him as a youth. At that time seven to eight tribal school students, living in government hostels, had become *satsangis*. Everyone around here lived in abject poverty and rampant drunkenness. Most of the tribals did business by producing toddy (an alcoholic drink). The visits of Pramukh Swami Maharaj gradually effected moral transformations. *Satsang* began to multiply. Swamishri tolerated a lot of hardships and difficulties. Whenever he came to Selvas he had no place to stay. He lived in a very small room and I and others used to make whatever arrangements we could for him to live in. It was improper of us to make such shoddy arrangements for Swamishri, a great spiritual master, but at that time we were poor and helpless. We had no money or any facilities. I earned Rs. 25 as monthly wages. What could I do with such meagre pay! I didn't have any sense or understanding about how to take care

of Swamishri. When Swamishri made home visits in the villages we never got any sympathy or support from the local people. Despite all this Swamishri paid no heed to the poor conditions he had to live in, but he came again and again with enthusiasm – simply to be with us and bless us.”

During Swamishri's visit to Selvas in 1977-1978 Ramubhai recalls, “We came to know of Swamishri's visit to Selvas. We informed all the tribals in the surrounding villages to come for darshan and blessings. Whenever Swamishri was scheduled to visit Selvas we always decorated the streets with flags and festoons. But for some reason his programme at that time was cancelled. So, I wrote a 10 paisa postcard to him while he was in Surat, ‘Bapa, the devotees here are poor. They cannot come for your darshan there. So what can they do? Therefore you come here for one hour to give them darshan and then you may return to Surat.’ After reading my postcard Swamishri rescheduled his programme to visit Selvas. Everyone in Selvas was happy and excited. However by coming to Selvas, Swamishri had to go through a lot of trouble. He considered and fulfilled the wish of a poor, ordinary tribal devotee like myself.”

In 1979, Swamishri consecrated the first BAPS *kutir* mandir in the village of Sili. He came in spite of all the inconveniences and blessed all.

Once, Swamishri was scheduled to visit the tribal villages of Samarvarni and Randha and perform the *pratishta* of two *hari* mandirs. But because of an unseasonal downpour the conditions became uncondusive. Viveksagar Swami telephoned that it would not be possible to come. But Chinmay Swami requested Swamishri that if he came everyone would be very delighted. In spite of the forecast for more rains and the unsuitable prevailing conditions Swamishri asked, “Is it raining now?” Chinmay Swami replied, “No.” Swamishri blessed and said, “Then it will not rain any more. I will come there.”

Swamishri had agreed to go, but there was no road to Samarvarni at that time. Still Swamishri came for the *murti-pratishtha yagna*, tolerating all the difficulties on the way. To everyone's surprise there were only three *yajmans* (participants) in the *yagna*. But Swamishri was ebullient. Swamishri performed the *yagna* rituals as if he was doing them for a big *shikharbaddha* mandir in the presence of hundreds of *yajmans*. Finally, he offered a coconut in the *yagna kund* and thereafter performed the *pratishtha*. Then he joyfully addressed the tribals and distributed clothes to them. All through his stay he was smiling and pleased.

Swamishri's *vicharan* in the tribal villages, in spite of the dearth of basic facilities, is etched in the minds of the tribal devotees. Ramubhai emotionally recalls one such occasion, "Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj came to Selvas and he was invited to make home visits. I was a child studying in 5th or 6th grade. I lived in the village of Tambadi. I too desired that Swamishri comes to sanctify my home. I came running to him and told him my wish. He said, 'I will come.' Then in a few minutes he got ready. I and others left with Swamishri for my home. Swamishri's car travelled for some distance and then there was no road at all. There was only a narrow pathway on which even an oxen cart could not be driven. So, Swamishri immediately joined us in walking towards my village. On the way we came across a river, which we had to cross on foot. The devotees accompanying Swamishri were from Mumbai. They pleaded to Swamishri not to go ahead. But Swamishri replied, 'No, I want to go.' We waded through the muddy water to the opposite side and then I saw a man driving an oxen cart. I requested him to help us and Swamishri sat in the cart. There was no mattress for him to sit on. So, we spread some straw. Swamishri told me to sit next to him, saying, 'Tell me the names of the villages we pass by. What's the name of this village?' I gave answers according to what

I knew, and Swamishri listened with great interest. When we reached near my house Swamishri told me, 'This is your home, shall we go in!' And he lovingly came into my hut. He blessed me profusely. Then he addressed a gathering by the Hanuman Mandir in the village about living an addiction-free life. After the satsang assembly, he got back onto the oxen cart and we saw him off. Swamishri pleased the poor devotees without any expectations, bearing all the hardships in his *vicharan*."

Sometimes, Swamishri came to Selvas without any prior notice. In 1992, Swamishri was in Ukai. From there he was scheduled to go to Mumbai. On the day of his departure, at 2.00 p.m., Swamishri told the sadhus that they were all to go to Selvas and stay the night there. The sadhus said, "Let us inform them by telephone." This would allow them to make the basic arrangements for Swamishri's night stay. But Swamishri said there was no need to do so. And thus to the surprise of all in Selvas Swamishri arrived for the night. In addition, Swamishri had brought with him the bare requirements for his stay from Ukai to save the organizers from making the arrangements.

Once, Swamishri went to Selvas during the monsoon season. The deafening crack of lightning and the irritating drones of mosquitoes kept the sadhus and youths awake all night. Outside, the rain was pelting the terraces and inside the rooms it was terribly hot. Everyone spent the night awake and restless. They realized that all these years Swamishri had never complained about the hardships of his *vicharan*. He naturally accepted everything in his stride – this was his nature.

Amidst the trials and inconveniences, Swamishri satisfied the wishes of the tribal devotees. Govindbhai is a veteran tribal volunteer of Selvas. He remembers a memorable incident of Swamishri that has deeply touched him. He narrates, "In 1982, Pramukh Swami



Performing the *murti-pratishtha* of the *hari* mandir in Selvas

Maharaj came to Selvas to perform the *murti-pratishtha* of the BAPS *hari* mandir. At that time my father was very ill. The *pratishtha* occasion was of great importance for all. Despite that, when Swamishri came to know that my father was ill, he came to my house to see him inspite of his busy schedule on the day of the *murti-pratishtha*. He patiently and calmly asked about the details of my father's condition and said that he would be liberated and blessed with Maharaj's Dham. For me it was a touching incident. I felt that such a great *sant*, who had come for the *pratishtha* rituals, came to my house to bless my father. One cannot even imagine this!"

Once, Swamishri was in Selvas and he was about to retire for the night at 11.15 p.m. Swamishri had reclined on his bed and was pulling over a cotton sheet over himself when he heard two sadhus whispering that someone had come to see him. The sadhus in charge of Swamishri's arrangements informed the visitor that Swamishri had gone to sleep and he could only meet him the next morning. But Swamishri replied, "I am not asleep yet. Call the person now. I shall meet him here. The poor person will be pleased." And thus Swamishri got up from his bed and waited for Dasharath, a poor, disabled tribal youth. Dasharath, however, had left on being told that Swamishri had gone to sleep. It took over 10 minutes to search for him and bring him to Swamishri because of his disability. But Swamishri was patiently sitting on his bed waiting



Excited tribal youths carry out welcome procession for Swamishri

for him. The sadhus looking after Swamishri's daily schedule scolded the youth, telling him that he should have come earlier. Swamishri did not like the harsh words and told the sadhus, "He has come, yet why are you censuring him!" Then Swamishri asked Dasharath how he had reached here. The youth explained that he had left his village called Khadoli, 14 kilometres away, in the evening. Because of his disability he walked a little and then travelled the rest of the way in a vehicle. He arrived late at Swamishri's residence at 11.15 p.m. Swamishri told the sadhu in charge of his arrangements, "Did you know the story of how he had come? The poor boy had left early to come here, but because of his disabled leg and the poor frequency of public transport how could he get here in time! So, it doesn't matter if it gets late in meeting him." Then Swamishri patiently listened to his problems and guided him and inspired him to quit his addictions. Swamishri blessed him wholeheartedly and finally asked him affectionately, "Have you had dinner?" Dasharath said, "No." Swamishri told the attendant sadhus to arrange for his meal and overnight stay. After this incident, Dasharath became passionate about satsang. Once, due to some difficult circumstances, Dasharath drank a little liquor. That same night Swamishri appeared to him in a dream and said, "You drank in spite of being a *satsangi*! Go to the mandir next morning and take the moral vows (*vartman*) again." And thereafter Dasharath became a

lifetime teetotaler, never forgetting the care and grace that Swamishri had showered upon him.

Swamishri's love and care have transformed the lives of countless tribals. He has personally strived to help them give up addictions, and reinforced their pledge repeatedly. Once, a tribal devotee came for Swamishri's darshan. Swamishri asked him about how a tribal youth from his village was faring after giving up his addiction. The devotee hesitantly replied, "He seems okay, but he drinks a little." Swamishri replied, "Then how can you say that he's okay! We came specially to your village to help him give up his addiction. Bring him here to me tomorrow." And the next day when the youth came, his emaciated body belied that he had reverted to his addiction. Swamishri asked him, "How is everything now?" He confessed, "I still drink." Then the youth strayed with other talks. Swamishri interrupted him, "Listen to me. I believe you remember that I had come to your house for your sake. At that time you had resolved not to drink again. How can one be happy when one breaks the pledge taken before God and his Sadhu! You can see that your father and brother live well without drinking. If you believe it and do so, you'll be happy. I am telling you for your good. Give it up, and don't succumb to anyone's offer. No to drinks means a firm no." The youth became charged after Swamishri's words and responded, "I will not drink even if I am on my deathbed!" Swamishri patted him happily and added, "Be strong mentally and pray that this sin is removed from your heart." Swamishri was diligent and selfless in liberating an ordinary youth from his addiction. Such care and unrelenting effort has been the hallmark of Swamishri's life.

Wherever Swamishri is, if a tribal devotee comes to him, he always meets him lovingly, takes care of him and makes him happy. Once, some tribal youths of Dadra and Nagar Haveli had gone to Atladra for Swamishri's darshan. At that time Swamishri was ill. The doctors had

prohibited him to meet any one personally. But Swamishri, while resting in his room, came to know that devotees from Selvas had come. So, he insisted on meeting them. While the tribal devotees were talking to him they said that they wished to go on a pilgrimage to Badrinath and Kedarnath (Char Dham). Swamishri called Rushiraj Swami and told him to plan an itinerary for them and also how to get there. Swamishri took personal interest and spent fifteen minutes with them.

Whenever the tribal devotees of Selvas go to Sarangpur, Bochasan or during a festival Swamishri personally gives instructions for their accommodation and dining arrangements.

Whenever Swamishri sees a familiar tribal devotee in a big crowd, he calls him by name and enquires about how he is. Jagan Bhandari, a tribal devotee of Selvas, reminisces, "During the 1981 festival in Ahmedabad Swamishri held my hand and said 'Bhandari, how many of you have come?' He has asked similarly on a number of occasions. He has taken care of us and blessed us in 1983, 1992, 1993 and on other occasions. It is due to his love that we spent four to five months doing *seva* in all the big festivals. We enjoyed the experience of his love and care."

The tribal children, youths and devotees are always avid to honour Swamishri because of his love for them. Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami writes in his report on Swamishri's *vicharan* in the tribal areas in 1978, "Tribal devotees of Vaghchhipa, Tambadi, Samarvarni, Rakholi, Athola, Baladevi and other neighbouring villages came for darshan and to honour Swamishri in Selvas. They all garlanded Swamishri. The number of flower garlands were so many that nothing of this magnitude has ever happened in big cities like Mumbai." Swamishri would respond to their devotion by showering his joy upon them. On 7 May 2001, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of two BAPS *hari* mandirs in Randha and Samarvarni villages. At that time



Tribal children dance to welcome Swamishri in their village



Swamishri during a home visit in a tribal devotee's hut

the traditionally attired tribal youths of Randha excitedly danced around Swamishri. A senior tribal was playing the *toor* (a pipe instrument) and striking a brass dish at the same time. Swamishri beckoned him to come near and asked for the brass dish and sticks. Then Swamishri held the dish shoulder-high and started striking it with joy. The tribals became euphoric, and even today they recall those moments with joy.

MOULDING SADHUS AND YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

The sacrifice and devotion of BAPS sadhus and youth volunteers in morally elevating the tribals is noteworthy. Swamishri has always encouraged them and appreciated their efforts. He also educated them and moulded them. Anand-murti Swami is offering his services in Selvas and travels often to the tribal villages. At first he was hesitant in delivering discourses in *sabhas*. When Swamishri came to know of it he encouraged him to give discourses, “It was the same with me before. Initially, I did not discourse in the time of Shastriji Maharaj. Whenever Shastriji Maharaj called me ‘Narayanda’, I merely responded with a faint acknowledgement. I couldn’t even reply to Shastriji Maharaj. But he encouraged me, and I started discoursing. Therefore, you must discourse. You have my blessings.”

Swamishri also motivated and showered his love upon the youth volunteers. Sometimes he divinely inspired them. Ramubhai, a volunteer,

recalls what happened some years ago, “In 1989, a Children’s Convention (Bal Adhiveshan) was held in Vidyanagar. At that time I was the chief coordinator of the children’s activities in the tribal region. I was assigned with the responsibility of preparing children for the *adhiveshan*. Despite my efforts, I was not getting the results I wished for. So, I became depressed. Once, I went to sleep in that frame of mind. Pramukh Swami Maharaj appeared before me in his divine form, saying, ‘Why are you disheartened? I am with you. Therefore, you must keep trying.’ I became inspired thereafter, and I started working hard in preparing the children. The *adhiveshan* results turned out to be excellent. From then onwards I became confident and felt that this Satsang is divine and Swamishri is always with us.”

Whenever Swamishri comes to Selvas he invariably meets the volunteers, guides them and blesses them. On 5 June 1990, Swamishri came for *vicharan* in Dadra and Nagar Haveli. He sat down with about fifteen tribal volunteers and advised, “All tribals should learn to practise cleanliness, have a daily bath, obey moral rules, and abstain from drinks and meat-eating. They should also get a good education. Arrange for means to help them. Guide them about how they can get jobs and other things. Whatever you do or accomplish then make sure you make a note of it in an exercise book. If any poor student wishes to study, help him financially. Organize public assemblies and talk about Hindu dharma.



Tribal youths of Galonda village welcome Swamishri



Swamishri blesses a tribal devotee by visiting his home

And try to abolish superstitions and faith in witch doctors. Tell them instead of sacrificing hens and goats to cure themselves of ailments, they should take medicines. Organize health camps in different places.”

Swamishri voiced his thoughts in uplifting the tribals from their social and moral poverty. And to realize them Swamishri was grooming the volunteers.

On 14 May 1991 Swamishri returned to the Selvas mandir after addressing a public assembly. Then, after his dinner Swamishri started meeting a few aspirants. The figure increased from five to 129. After meeting them all it was the turn of the volunteers (*karyakars*). Chinmay Swami wished to curtail Swamishri’s burden, so he told the volunteers that they were a part of the satsang family so there was no need for them to meet Swamishri. On hearing this, Swamishri replied, “They have been patiently waiting for so long, therefore you should consider that. In fact I should attend to them more. Let them all come.” And Swamishri met each one of them patiently till 11.00 p.m. The volunteers were touched by Swamishri’s care and love.

On 4 February 1994 Swamishri was in Selvas. It was winter time. Because of Swamishri’s *vicharan* he had caught a cold and his voice had turned hoarse. The next day Swamishri was scheduled to leave Selvas. Despite his tight schedule, he called and met all the local volunteers and gave guidance on their social

problems. He also advised, “As a volunteer you must be firm about one thing – this mandir is your home. If someone tells you off or you may scold someone then patch up with an open mind and say ‘Jai Swaminarayan’. Always remember that whatever *seva* you do, it is to please God. And in that *seva* let not your *dehbhav* (base nature) come in the way. Also, groom other *karyakars*. You’ll need to be united to inspire others with values and make them happier. As a *karyakar* you must be consistent in *seva*, only then will others be inspired. Your true home is the mandir. Always be a *sevak*.”

SOCIAL SERVICES AND RELIEF WORK

Swamishri performs several social services for the welfare and uplift of tribals. Once, Swamishri came to know that when a tribal is seriously sick, by the time he reaches the hospital he passes away. Immediately thereafter, Swamishri introduced a mobile dispensary for the tribals. Today, there are nine BAPS mobile dispensaries in operation in the tribal regions of Gujarat.

From 1985 to 1987 Dadra and Nagar Haveli was gripped by a severe famine. There was also scarcity of water in the jungle region. Swamishri opened relief centres in 22 villages, providing *sukhdi* and buttermilk for two years. For the malnourished tribal children Swamishri made arrangements for milk powder. He also distributed clothes to all the tribals.

(Contd. on pg. 42)



Magnificent New BAPS MANDIR

Amid the Forests of Selvas

Wedged between the states of Gujarat to the north and Maharashtra to the south lies the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Running through its terrain is the Daman Ganga River, which eventually flows into the Arabian Sea. Ruled by the central government, the population of Dadra and Nagar Haveli (DNH) predominantly comprises of tribals, many of whom live amid the abundant forests.

For several decades, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has done much for the social and spiritual uplift of the underprivileged tribal communities in this region. He himself has undertaken numerous visits to personally help the tribals. Also, BAPS sadhus residing in the region have daily continued these efforts under his guidance.

Amid this verdant territory, on National Highway 2, off the road between Bhilad and Selvas, the grand new *shikharbaddha* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir has been built of pink stone.

To the east flows the Daman Ganga River and to the south is the unceasing flow of vehicles. Elsewhere, the mandir is surrounded by dense forests. In the distant horizon, the undulating hilly ranges with tall trees add to the natural beauty of the surroundings.

Even amid this natural beauty, the elegance of the mandir stands out. Its large open lawns, attractive landscaping, colourful and illuminated fountains, small domed *chhatris*, and sculptures of deer and other animals give the mandir precincts





Under the main dome of the mandir, with its beautifully and intricately sculpted pillars, beams and arches



Array of pillars and arches on both sides of the main dome

a delightful atmosphere.

Entering the mandir compound from the Bhilad-Selvas road, the visitor passes through various levels of landscaping before he arrives at the foot of the mandir steps. In front is the *vedibandh* and pink-stone mandir resting on the high *jagati* with its intricately decorated *rajsen-kakshasan*.

Rising high into the sky are the golden *kalashes* and flags crowning the five *shikhars*. The mandir comprises a large dome, numerous smaller domes and entrance squares with *torans*.

Climbing the white marble steps, the visitor arrives onto the 2,778 sq. ft. open front podium. With seating facilities on both sides, this large podium leads to the three-sectioned mandir entrance. Entering from the central section, the visitor is instantly drawn to the attractive *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj with the golden *sinhasan* of the central shrine.

Built in the Nagara style of mandir architecture, this mandir is of the *sandhara* type and so has an enclosed circumambulatory (*pradakshina*) path. The external walls



Magnificent main dome of the mandir

(*mandovar*) of the mandir comprise of decorated *vedibandhs* and *janghas*. Sculptures of India's rishis, *acharyas* and divine incarnations adorn the *janghas*. Above the *mandovar*, the decorative *mahakeval* and *kangras* enhance the beauty of the mandir.

In the *mandovar* behind the *garbhagruha* are *jharukhas* with *kakshasans* to the left and right. In the centre, is a projected *gavaksh*, which conceals a lift leading up to the mandir.

The mandir structure comprises of nine vertical and seven horizontal sections (9x7 grid).

Immediately on entering the closed mandir structure, to the left and right, in shrines topped by small *shikhars*, are the *murtis* of Shri Sita-Ram-Hanumanji and Shri Shiv-Parvatiji-Ganapatji. As devotees proceed after darshan of these devas, they arrive at the guru shrines – two on each side. In these shrines are the marble *murtis* of Brahaswarup Bha-

gatji Maharaj, Brahaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Pragat Brahaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The middle *mandap* of the mandir features twelve beautiful, intricately carved pillars and domes. Their beauty is enhanced by colourful lights. The pillars and domes are adorned with statuettes of some of the great sadhus and devotees of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

From the *garbhagruha*, seated in golden *sinhasans*, the divine *murtis* shower their bless-

ings upon all devotees. In the central shrine are the *murtis* of Parabrahman Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Shri Gunatitanand Swami. Under the south-side *shikhar* are the *panchdhatu murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and the *murtis* of Shri Radha-Krishna Dev. Under the north-side *shikhar* is the *murti* of Shri Ghan-

Details About the Mandir

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Total site area: | 15 acres |
| Sculpted pink stone: | 60,000 cu. ft. |
| Mandir area: | 7,841 sq. ft. |
| Internal width: | 155 ft. |
| Internal length: | 173 ft. |
| Total height: | 66 ft. |
| Total <i>shikhars</i> : | 11 |
| Total domes: | 12 |
| Total pillars: | 76 full, 56 half |
| Total arches: | 104 |



Mandovar behind the garbhagruha elegantly embellished with gavaksh and jharukhas with kakshasans

shyam Maharaj. In the *sukhshaiya* is the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan with Gunatitanand Swami in his service.

On the walls of the enclosed circumambulatory around the *garbhagruha* are 60 statues of famous sadhus and devotees.

In between the pillars are intricately carved ceilings of different designs. Some ceilings feature carvings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine actions.

Under the front podium of the mandir is the *abhishek mandapam* housing the *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni, the teenage-yogi form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. As Nilkanth Varni, Bhagwan Swaminarayan had sanctified this region on his entry into Gujarat.

Also, on the north side of this 15-acre mandir campus, is a large assembly hall with a seating capacity of 3,000 people. With it are various offices, rooms and halls to facilitate the coordination of the various satsang activities for children, teenagers, youths, seniors and women.

Behind it are the guesthouse, kitchen, dining area and other such facilities.

A separate residential quarters for the sadhus has also been built.

Situated behind the mandir complex is the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir (school) which annually imparts value-based education to around 375 students. The school provides English-medium education based on the CBSE curriculum and also has an arts theatre, library, computer lab and assembly hall. The school is renowned in this region for providing quality, value-centric education.

Thus, in this predominantly tribal region, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has inspired spiritual and social uplift and will continue to do so through the newly built BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir and well-established BAPS school. ♦

Translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



A Barren Terrain Transformed into a Spiritual Splendour

Swamishri sanctifies the land for the *shikharbaddha* mandir

Everyone is hailing the marvellous new *shikharbaddha* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Selvas (also Silvassa). But, anyone who had seen the lifeless hilly barren land on which it is built would be astonished and wonder how such an unlikely transformation has been accomplished, resulting in a lush landscape and a mandir built to last many centuries.

How exactly does such a mandir come into existence? This is a question many have entertained. The answer can be found in the following story.

In 1996, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had come to Selvas. At that time, it was much less developed and lacked many facilities.

Despite the grim realities, Swamishri was seated in a small room with a group of sadhus and devotees. Swamishri told them, “We want to build a grand mandir here. Let us go and look for some land.” In those days, open undeveloped land was available throughout the city. However, crossing the city limits, Swamishri arrived on the banks opposite the Daman Ganga River. Swamishri showered flowers sanctified by Shri Harikrishna Maharaj onto the open land and prayed to Him that a *shikharbaddha* mandir be built here.

So, a location is first selected by the Satpuruash and is then accepted by the devotees and then the place is sanctified and developed so that it becomes a pilgrim place.

But this process is not that simple.

The new *shikharbaddha* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Selvas is the fruit of Swamishri’s immense patience and efforts over the past several decades. Just as a steady flow of water nourishes a garden, similarly, Swamishri had first, with great patience, implanted moral values and then nurtured a garden of faith. Only thereafter did he propose the idea of a grand mandir.

Then the process of acquiring the site Swamishri had selected was initiated. But there were unforeseen obstacles to that. The sadhus tried to overcome them, and even thought of alternative options.

Around that time, Swamishri called Chinmay Swami and Anandmurti Swami, the sadhus who were overseeing the project, to Vadodara. The sadhus showed Swamishri the maps of other possible sites, many of which were near the riverbank. However, Swamishri insisted, “Bring the map of the site where I had showered flowers.” After detailed discussions, Swamishri declared, “We want to acquire this land.” Maybe, he had visualized the grand mandir already on this site! Thereafter, while travelling from Gujarat to Mumbai, Swamishri frequently visited Selvas. Every time, he would strengthen the resolve to build a mandir on that site. He would also advise about planning the entire complex, “We are buying a large plot of land... when the mandir is built, set aside ample space towards the road. Set aside 80 feet on all

four sides... Make a beautiful garden in front... Also make a large assembly hall.” Swamishri also gave many other ideas. Eventually, the site was officially purchased and with all the legal documents done, the development plans for the site were approved by the appropriate authorities.

Meanwhile, in 2004, by Swamishri’s inspiration a BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir (school) was established here. The school provides an English-medium education together with emphasis on development of a noble character. It has earned a reputation as an excellent centre of learning.

In addition to providing constant motivation and guidance for the various social, educational and spiritual activities here, Swamishri also raised the necessary funds for the mandir-building project. Due to his selfless love and endeavours, devotees and well-wishers readily contributed to this cause. Young and old, men and women, all went out of their way to contribute financially and in kind. They all had only one goal: to support and fulfil Swamishri’s wish for the mandir and earn his blessings.

They were all clear in their minds that whatever happiness they were enjoying in life was due to his inspiration and blessings. So, they were all enthusiastic to contribute as much as possible.

In fact, such was their determination that whenever Swamishri, or *sadguru* sadhus, like Mahant Swami and Dr Swami, visited Selvas

they were astonished by their enthusiasm to serve. Looking at their simple clothes and demeanour, everyone wondered how people of such meagre means would be able to fulfil such a big commitment. Seeing their modest homes and families, the sadhus dissuaded them from making large contributions. But, just like a river in full flow, their desire to sacrifice and contribute could not be stalled. The following examples are just a couple from the many.

Rakesh is a dedicated youth living in the tribal village of Borikachchhi. It had barely been a week since his marriage. Immediately after marriage he had gone with his wife to Gondal for darshan. On their return, he approached the sadhus and presented a box of ornaments. When the sadhus asked, he said, “This is my wife’s *mangalsutra* and bangles. Since the mandir is being built here, please accept this contribution from my wife and me.”

“But you’ve only just got married, therefore take all this back with you. Your financial circumstances are also not good, so it is not appropriate for you to bring all this. Anyway, you have already contributed in the past. So, there is no need for you to do this *seva*,” the sadhus told him.

Rakesh said, “No, no, Swami! We had both decided before our marriage that once we were married and had darshan at Gondal we would give the *mangalsutra* for Thakorji’s *sinhasan*.”

When the sadhus sternly refused again,



In Bochasan, Swamishri performs Vedic rituals for the *nidhikumbha* and first stone of the *shikharbaddha* mandir of Selvas

Rakesh broke into tears. Pleading, he said, “It is our wish that we begin our life together with this *seva*. So, please accept this.”

To keep him happy, the sadhus agreed for a while. Rakesh was delighted. He stood up and left. But, a short while later he returned. With abundant enthusiasm, he said, “When I came to give the ornaments, my wife was wearing these two earrings and nose ring and so I have returned to give them as well.”

Again, the sadhus tried to convince him. But, he was adamant, “No Swami, we have both decided to give all our ornaments.” Again, he became tearful, but left only after the sadhus had accepted his contribution.

The sadhus were deeply moved by the commitment and sacrifice of Rakesh and his wife.

Another such tribal youth is Yogesh of Demni village. He gathered all the ornaments in his house and came to the mandir to donate them. Mahant Swami was present there at the time. The sadhus informed Mahant Swami about Yogesh, “His financial condition is very poor.” This made Mahant Swami even more surprised about his willingness to give. Mahant Swami and the sadhus tried to convince him to take the ornaments back. But, Yogesh urged, “Swami, both of us wish that you accept them. We do not have any other means to serve. So, please accept this service.” Suddenly, the sadhus remembered something and told Mahant Swami, “Yogesh has no children. Please pray that he is blessed with children.” Mahant Swami said, “We will pray to Shriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj to bless you with children.” Delighted, Yogesh left and met his wife outside. Within ten minutes he returned, with a broad smile, and said, “I told my wife about Mahant Swami’s prayers. She said that if by Shriji Maharaj’s grace they get a son, then we will give him to Swami to make him a sadhu. She sent me back to inform you of this resolve.”

There are many such tribal devotees whose dedication and sacrifice have made this mandir

possible. Many tribal devotees donated their family heirlooms, and many women donated their jewellery. Youths of Surangi village collected money by playing the banjo and donated all their income for the mandir project.

In addition to their financial support, the devotees, young and old, male and female, also helped physically in the construction work.

Over a period of four years they contributed hundreds of thousands of man-hours in service. Devotees also helped out by using their skills. For example, *mandap* decorators provided canopies and decorations. For the *murti-pratishtha* celebrations, Ishwar and his family undertook to provide the various marquees.

Also, the devotees performed many austerities and prayed for the successful completion of the mandir. Women devotees performed a variety of austerities and observances and offered regular prayers. Youths participated in the chain of fasting in which every day a different youth fasted.

So, with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the efforts of BAPS sadhus in this tribal region, the devotees flocked to contribute in whatever way they could. At the same time, under the supervision of the Sanstha’s Planning Cell, and on-site coordination by *kothari* Chinmay Swami, the mandir construction was proceeding swiftly. As a result, the construction was completed in five years.

So, this, in brief, is how a mandir is erected. This is only a drop from an ocean full of such details. Many anonymous contributions have also helped in the making of this beautiful mandir. The sacrifice and *seva* of all the tribal devotees will forever remain embedded in the foundations of this mandir.

Today, the realization of Swamishri’s vision of a grand *shikharbaddha* mandir in this tribal area has made it into a special place of pilgrimage. Here, all can experience inner peace and be inspired towards spiritual enlightenment. ♦

Translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

SELVAS



A celebratory atmosphere pervaded throughout Selvas (Silvassa), for the efforts of the past many decades were about to bear fruit. The newly built BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir was the result of four decades of tireless endeavours by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and BAPS sadhus, and the selfless sacrifices and services of countless devotees. Where, once, there was dependence on and servitude to blind faith, superstitions and addictions, through Pramukh Swami Maharaj's efforts they have been replaced by faithful devotion and pure living.

Thousands of tribal devotees had been joined by devotees from throughout

India and abroad on the banks of the Daman Ganga River in the Athal suburb of Selvas, the capital of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. They were all eager to celebrate the murti-pratishtha of the newly built shikharbaddha mandir.

This was the site which Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited and selected to build a grand shikharbaddha that would benefit all for generations to come.

In Ahmedabad, on 7 February 2013, Swamishri had performed the Vedic pran-pratishtha rituals for the murtis to be consecrated in this new mandir. On that occasion, he had blessed, "May the murti-pratishtha celebrations in Selvas be supreme." These blessings were felt by everyone during the Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav from 10 to 13 May 2013. Everyone felt Swamishri's divine presence.

PRASAD PRAVESH AND WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY: 10 MAY

On the morning of 10 May 2013, the Vedic Prasad Pravesh ceremony was performed under the main dome of the mandir. Narendraprasad Swami, Chinmay Swami and other sadhus together with Arvindbhai Saheb and local tribal devotees performed the rituals. The rituals were performed with the understanding that the mandir is a divine form capable of housing Paramatma.

In the evening from 7 to 10 p.m., on the large open lawns of the mandir campus, a special women's assembly was held. Over 7,000 women from 72 surrounding villages were present to enjoy the well-presented programme of traditional dances and inspiring skits by the Women's Wing which depicted the outstanding efforts and contributions of women, young and old, in the mandir project (For details, see *Premvati*, July-August 2013).

CULTURAL PROGRAMME: 11 MAY

From 8.30 to 11.00 p.m. youths presented a thrilling and inspiring cultural programme on the vast lawns of the mandir campus. To the right the mandir stood resplendent in an array of colourful lights and to the left flowed the waters of the Daman Ganga. Puja Mahant Swami, Puja Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami, Puja Tyagvallabh Swami, Puja Viveksagar

Swami, Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami and Puja Narendraprasad Swami were seated on the main stage.

The assembly began with a report by Puja Munivandan Swami of the profound impact of BAPS satsang activities on the lives of tribals in Dadra and Nagar Haveli (DNH). Then Puja Viveksagar Swami recounted the visits of Pramukh Swami Maharaj to even the remotest villages in this region.

Following this, Puja Chinmay Swami, the *kothari* of this new mandir, narrated some stories of transformation in the lives of tribal devotees of the region and praised and appreciated the collective efforts of all who had helped in the mandir project.

Among the distinguished guests present were Shri Natubhai Patel (MP, DNH), Shri Navinbhai Patel (MP, Div-Daman), Shri Ketanbhai Patel (President, Jhilla Panchayat), Shri G.C. Meena (Collector), Shri Umeshkumar Tyagi (CEO, DNH), Shri S.S. Siddhu (CEO, Div-Daman), Shri K.C. Chandrashekhar (Director, Tourism and IT) and others. Puja Mahant Swami and the senior sadhus honoured and felicitated these dignitaries and the many devotees who had contributed to the mandir project.

Then, Bhavnagar Yuvak Mandal presented a superb drama performance of 'Mandirma Prabhu Biraje Chhe', written by Puja Aksharvatsal Swami.



Tribal devotees perform the Prasad Pravesh ceremony rituals



Senior sadhus on stage during the evening cultural programme

Also present in the assembly were sadhus from the various Swaminarayan *gurukuls* in South Gujarat: Shriprakash Swami and Kapil Swami from Salvav, Bhaktikishore Swami from Chala, Sant Swami from Bhilad, Harivallabh Swami from Dharampur and others. To mark this occasion, Shriprakash Swami and Kapil Swami presented a garment sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan to Mahant Swami.

Thousands of devotees from the surrounding villages were present in the assembly.

YAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE: 12 MAY

From early morning, in the large canopied arena erected opposite the mandir, the Vishwashanti Mahayagna – Yagna for World Peace – was performed. The entrance gate of the arena was decorated in traditional style with tall banana trees and grass.

Thousands of married tribal couples participated in this auspicious ceremony and offered their prayers to Yagnanarayan – the *yagna* deity.

For the majority of these tribals, it was the first time they had participated in such a Vedic *yagna*.

In the early morning, presiding Brahmins led by Shri Ghanshyambhai Shukla, Shri Mukeshbhai Shastri and others commenced the *yagna* in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and other senior sadhus. The *murtis* to be installed in the mandir had been arranged on the main stage of the *yagna* arena. In addition, the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandirs in the DNH tribal villages of Chala, Tighara, Falandi and Omkachchha were also placed on the main stage.

Pujya Mahant Swami and other senior sadhus offered the full Vedic rituals, including *pujan*, *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali*, to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir. After completing the initial rituals, the sadhus departed and the Brahmins guided the *yajman* couples in performing the rest of the



Traditional 'Mandir Dance' by youths



Guests amid the audience during the cultural presentation



Over 3,000 couples participated in the Yagna for World Peace

rituals. Over 3,000 couples participated in the *yagna*, seated around the 9 main and 389 secondary *yagna kundas*.

Under the guidance of sadhus, volunteers from Selvas, Vapi, Nana Pandha, Mota Pandha, Kilvani, Surangi and Randha spent many days preparing for the *yagna* to ensure that it was a success.

GRAND NAGAR YATRA: 12 MAY

At 4.00 p.m. the grand *nagar yatra* (procession) of the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir began from the grounds of the Lions School. Pujya Mahant Swami and senior sadhus, together with Natubhai Patel MP, former MP Mohanbhai Delkar and other dignitaries flagged off the procession as sadhus sung Vedic *shlokas*.



Senior sadhus perform the initial *yagna* rituals

The sequence of the items in the *nagar yatra* was as follows:

- At the front of the *nagar yatra* were youths holding the celebration banners.
- Nasik Yuvak Mandir Band.
- 108 uniformed youths on motorbikes.
- Two youths mounted on horses.
- A silver-clad bullock cart carrying the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni.
- Youths carrying the flags of nations where there are BAPS centres.
- Tribal youths of Moti Tambadi village singing bhajans.
- *Balaks* in various costumes on camel cart.
- Tribal devotees performing the *gheraiya* dance with sticks.
- *Balaks* performing *ras*.
- Youths carrying a *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj seated in a *palkhi*.
- *Murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan seated on an elephant.
- Tribal devotees of Abheti village singing bhajans.
- *Murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj on the *mayurrath* (peacock chariot).
- Sadhus seated on the *ashva rath* (horse chariot).
- *Sandhani* entertaining the public.
- Sadhus seated on two long *raths*.
- Sadhus on *rath* singing bhajans.
- Tribal devotees performing drum dance.
- *Rath* with *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.
- *Rath* with *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.
- Youth band.
- Ambulance displaying



Senior sadhus and guests flag-off the procession



108 uniformed youths on motorbikes



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj on the peacock chariot



Tribal youths perform the traditional *toor* dance

the BAPS health services carried out in tribal areas. ■ Tribal devotees singing bhajans. ■ Senior sadhus seated on a *rath*. ■ *Rath* from Kilvani village displaying the liberation of tribals from improper social customs and superstitions. ■ Tribal youths performing the *toor* dance. ■ Youths of Badalpur singing bhajans. ■ *Murtis* of Shri Ram-Sita-Hanuman on the *gaj rath* (elephant chariot). ■ *Balaks* dancing dressed as bullocks and horses. ■ Two bullock carts, in memory of their frequent use by Pramukh Swami Maharaj during his visits here. ■ Elderly tribal devotees performing the *dholi* dance. ■ Horse-mounted youth. ■ *Yuwatis* carrying BAPS flags and banners displaying BAPS Women's Activities. ■ *Yuwatis* carrying *mashals* (flame torches) symbolizing the strength of women. ■ Over 100 BAPS flag-bearing *yuwatis* on mopeds with *balikas* carrying *kalashes*. ■ *Murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj on the *hans rath* (swan chariot). ■ *Yuwatis* performing *garba* and *ras* dances. ■ Over 101 women devotees carrying decorated pots and coconuts. ■ 108 women devotees in saffron, white and green *saris* (symbolizing the Indian national flag) carrying shastras on their heads. ■ *Murti* of Shri Radha-Krishna on the *gaj rath* (elephant chariot). ■ *Balikas* in a variety of special costumes. ■ *Murtis* of Bhagatji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj on a decorated *rath*. ■ Women devotees reciting the Janmangal Namavali. ■ *Yuwatis* performing a traditional tribal dance. ■ *Yuwatis* carrying *chhatras*; performing the *tadpa* dance. ■ *Rath* displaying various activities of the Yuvati Mandal. ■ *Rath* with *murtis* of Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganapati.

As the *nagar yatra* passed through the main streets of Selvas, thousands of on-lookers lined the streets, balconies, terraces and other vantage points to savour this spectacular sight. Many captured the colourful views on their mobiles and cameras. Everywhere, people greeted and honoured the *murtis* and senior sadhus by reverently showering flowers.

Shri Natubhai Patel, MP and Shri Mohanbhai Delkar, former MP were present with their families. They had arranged to serve everyone participating in the *nagar yatra* with water, juices and buttermilk (*chhas*).

Volunteers under the guidance of Vivekratna Swami and other sadhus had endeavoured diligently for many days to ensure the grand success of the *nagar yatra*.

The *nagar yatra* was 8 km long and having passed through the main landmarks of the city, reached the mandir at 7.45 p.m. A flurry of fireworks greeted the arrival of the *nagar yatra* as everyone celebrated.

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CEREMONY: 13 MAY

On the morning of 13 May 2013, Vaishakh *sud* 3, V.S. 2069, the Vedic rituals to place the *murtis*, previously consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Ahmedabad, commenced in the mandir shrines.

At 8.30 a.m. Puja Mahant Swami, Puja Bhaktipriya Swami, Puja Tyagvallabh Swami, Puja Ishwarcharan Swami, Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami and other sadhus began to perform the Vedic *murti*-consecration rituals.

Devotees who had made significant contributions to the mandir building project and other tribal devotees also participated in the rituals. After the initial *mahapuja* rituals, Puja Mahant Swami performed the consecration rituals of *anganyas*, *netronmilan*, *drashtimilan* and others in the central shrine to the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. At the same time, other senior sadhus performed these rituals on the *murtis* in all the other shrines: Puja Bhaktipriya Swami to Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj; Puja Ishwarcharan Swami to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev; Puja Tyagvallabh Swami to the *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni; Puja Viveksagar Swami, Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Puja Shrihari Swami, Puja Devswarup Swami, Puja Naren-



Senior sadhus perform the Vedic *mahapuja* rituals



Mahant Swami consecrates the *murtis* in the central shrine



Senior devotees participate in the Vedic ceremony

draprasad Swami and Puja Bhaktavatsal Swami to the *murtis* of the Guru Parampara, Shri Ram-Sita-Hanuman and Shri Shiv-Parvati-Hanuman.

After the rituals, a grand *annakut* was offered in all the shrines and then the first *arti* was performed by the senior sadhus and devotees.

MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV ASSEMBLY

After the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony, a special assembly was held in the large assembly can-



Senior sadhus on stage during the *murti-pratishtha* assembly, with the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the centre

opy set up on the grounds opposite the mandir. The devotees seated here had witnessed the entire *pratishtha* ceremony through live relay.

On the large stage, *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj had been installed. In the centre was a life-size *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj with a peacock design in the backdrop.

Over 15,000 devotees were seated in the assembly.

After speeches by senior sadhus, a video of Pramukh Swami Maharaj performing the *pran-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Ahmedabad was shown. Then Pujya Chinmay Swami, who for the past 28 years has, under Swamishri's guidance, been serving in this region and coordinating the mandir project, delivered a vote of thanks to all the devotees and well-wishers for their wholehearted assistance in this noble work. He also paid tribute to Swamishri's efforts, guidance and foresight throughout the past three decades.

Thereafter, the youths of Selvas performed the joyful tribal *toor* dance and youths of Surat performed the mandir dance.

In conclusion, Pujya Mahant Swami addressed the assembly and felicitated everyone



Devotees in the *murti-pratishtha* assembly

for their selfless efforts.

Thus, the grand *murti-pratishtha* celebrations came to a close, but this historic mandir will continue to inspire spirituality and morality for generations to come. ◆

Translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



Satsang kutir



Shastra reading kutir

Akhand Dhun and Anushtan

From 30 April to 11 May 2013, to commemorate the inauguration of the new *shikharbaddha* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Selvas, an Akhand Satsang Kutir was set up in the mandir campus. Before the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara*, devotees, young and old, men and women, from throughout DNH offered their devotion by constantly singing the Swaminarayan *dhun*, turning *malas*, writing the Swaminarayan mantra, performing *pradakshinas*, offering *dandvats* and reciting shastras. In total, the devotees wrote 150,150 mantras, turned 63,360 *malas*, recited the Janmangal Namavali (108 names of Bhagwan Swaminarayan) 3,500 times, offered 110,880 *dandvats*, performed 126,720 *pradakshinas* and read around 13,600 pages of shastras.

Also, at regular intervals, the sadhus gave discourses, and performed *mahapuja*, *arti* and *mansi puja* and sang the *cheshta*. At the end of these 12 days of special devotion, Thakorji was paraded in a *palkhi* around the mandir campus. The entire experience gave tremendous spiritual inspiration to all. ♦

CHATURMAS NIYAMS

19 July to 13 November 2013

As instructed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri and by the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, devotees should undertake extra spiritual observances during the four holy months of *chaturmas*. This year *chaturmas* is from 19 July 2013 (Ashadh *sud* 11) to 13 November 2013 (Kartik *sud* 11). To please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the following extra observances should be undertaken:

1. One month *dharna-parna*, *chandrayan*, etc. or *ek-tana* during the month of Shravan (7 August to 5 September 2013).
2. Extra *malas*, *dandvats*, *pradakshinas* as per one's convenience and faith.
3. Daily read one extra Vachanamrut and five

Swamini Vato.

4. Read *Yogiji Maharaj's Biography*, Parts 4, 5 & 6 and *Jena Gune Rijhya Girdhari Re'*.
5. In accordance with the wish of senior sadhus listen to 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Amrutvani', Samput 16.
6. Inspire five people to give up addictions, attend satsang *sabha* and conduct a daily *ghar sabha*.

Note: During Chaturmas, devotees should not eat brinjals, white and red radish, sugarcane or *mogri*.

(Contd. from pg. 25)

In 1992-93, after distributing *sukhdi* and milk to a few tribal villages Swamishri told his sadhus, “We should distribute to more villages.” Vedpurush Swami informed, “We told the collector about our relief work for the tribals. But the collector added, ‘You are doing relief activities but do something about inculcating values in them.’” Swamishri replied, “You should have told him that our main work is to instil values.”

Ever since the introduction of satsang in countless tribals there has been a sea change in their lives. They have become liberated from addictions and vices. The *bal* and *yuvak mandals* activities have empowered their children with knowledge, character and faith in God. They confidently recite Sanskrit mantras and deliver discourses and speeches.

For many years Swamishri had been contemplating on constructing a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Selvas and provide a place for worship and satsang activities for the tribal devotees and their children. Whenever Ratibhai and other tribal devotees of Selvas asked Swamishri about building a mandir, he would reply, “I want to build a big mandir here.” And Swamishri’s words came true. From the initial handful of devotees the satsang soon mushroomed into thousands. Then everyone realized the need for a bigger mandir. Swamishri wished to have the *shikharbaddha* mandir built near a river. With this in mind, Chinmay Swami located a piece of

land. Swamishri came to the site and walked on the uneven and potholed land. He stood on a small hillock and announced, “This land is very good. Bring Harikrishna Maharaj here.” Then Swamishri sanctified rose petals by offering them at the feet of Harikrishna Maharaj and showered them on the land. Swamishri prayed and said, “A beautiful mandir will be raised here.”

After acquiring the land, plans for the mandir were drawn. On seeing the mandir plan with a single *shikhar* (pinnacle), Swamishri uttered, “We don’t want one *shikhar*, but a big mandir with five *shikhars*. We want to make a mini-Akshardham here.” And thus Swamishri’s wish was realized and a beautiful *shikharbaddha* mandir stands here today as a culmination to his blessings and efforts, and the devotion and endeavours of thousands of sadhus and tribal devotees.

The story of Swamishri’s sacrifice for the social, moral and spiritual uplift of the tribals of Dadra and Nagar Haveli for the last three decades defies all words. Volumes would not suffice in describing the saga of his efforts and divine grace. This special issue provides an inkling of Swamishri’s great work. For generations to come the tribals of Selvas will avail of the unique BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir and the satsang activities that Swamishri has gifted to them. And lastly, no amount of prostrations or praises to Swamishri will suffice in acknowledging all that he has done for the tribals of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. ♦

Translated by Sadhu Vivekjiandas



Swamishri gifts clothes to tribals in Randha village



BAPS mobile dispensary for tribals



VACHANAMRUT NIRUPAN

The Vachanamrut is a compilation of the spiritual discourses of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is read daily by countless devotees and also elaborated upon by sadhus and volunteers during the daily katha in BAPS mandirs and assemblies.

A Vachanamrut has been elaborated here for devotees and volunteers to understand and explain during satsang assemblies. It has been translated from 'Satsang Saurabh' in Gujarai.

VACHANĀMRUT, GADHADĀ I 3 Remembering the Divine Actions and Incidents of God

On the night of Māgshar sudi 6, Samvat 1876 [23 November 1819], Shriji Mahārāj was sitting in Dādā Khāchar's darbār in Gadhadā. He was dressed entirely in white clothes. At that time, an assembly of munis as well as devotees from various places had gathered before him.

Thereupon Shriji Mahārāj said, "Even one who can constantly see the form of God in his heart should recall the divine actions and incidents of God performed in his various avatars in various places. He should also maintain affection for the brahmachāris, sadhus and satsangis, and should remember them as well. Why? Because if at the time of death he forgets God's form, but remembers the divine actions and incidents performed by him at various places, or if he remembers those satsangis, brahmachāris or sadhus, then by that association, God's form will also be remembered. Thereby, that person attains an elevated spiritual status and benefits tremendously. That is why I perform grand Vishnu-yāgs; annually celebrate Janmāshtami, Ekādashi and other observances; and gather brahmachāris, sadhus and satsangis on these occasions. After all, even if a sinner remembers these occasions at the time of his death, he will also attain the abode of God."

This Vachanamrut urges devotees to reminisce about the actions (*charitras*) of God and the God-realized Sadhu. By so doing, the devotee experiences inner peace and joy, and is ultimately blessed with *moksha*.

Distinctive feature of this Vachanāmrut

Spiritual endeavours for the attainment of *moksha* are like walking on a razor's edge. In this Vachanamrut, however, Bhagwan Swaminarayan shows an easy way to attain spiritual heights.

■ Gunatitanand Swami has said, "The essence of all shastras is to become free of worldly desires and develop attachment with God."

■ To attain these goals, Bhagwan Swaminarayan draws our attention to three main points in this Vachanamrut:

1. Remember the actions and events of God's incarnation on earth.
2. Maintain affection for sadhus and *satsangis*.
3. Organize grand festivals and celebrations:
 - ◆ For easy recollection of the divine actions of God.
 - ◆ For helping the devotees to remember one another.
 - ◆ For transformation of sinners.

Who should remember the divine incidents of God? And why?

■ All devotees – including the accomplished

ones, who can constantly see the form of God in their heart – should remember the divine actions (*charitras*) of God.

■ Why is Maharaj asking everyone – even the accomplished devotees, who have continuous focus on God in their heart – to form a habit of recollecting and remembering the divine incidents (*charitras*) of God? The answers are:

1. So that a devotee may never consider the manifest form of God to be of secondary importance.

■ Gunatitanand Swami could constantly see the form of Shriji Maharaj in his heart, yet – amidst rain showers at night – he stood below the eaves of Dada Khachar’s *darbar* for hours to have a momentary glimpse of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. This shows Gunatitanand Swami’s fervour for Maharaj’s darshan.

■ One may forget the spiritual discourses delivered by Maharaj and Swami because more effort is required to understand and remember them. However, remembering the incidents associated with the manifest form of God is very easy.

■ The prime motive behind Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s incarnation on earth was to liberate the *jivas* from their eternal ignorance. Yet, he performed acts like playing *raas* and water sports, serving food and pouring *dudhpak* on the devotees, celebrating festivals, etc. Why? So that the devotees can easily reminisce about these incidents. Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj too celebrates grand festivals for the spiritual elevation of devotees and all-round benefit of others. Like the human forms or *murtis* which are divine, the actions of God and his *Sant* are also divine. By remembering these actions one attains peace of mind and *moksha*.

■ The Satpurush (Guru) is like the engine of a train, whereas we are like its carriages. The divine actions of the Satpurush binds us with him and God. Thus, an association with the Satpuru-

sh – through reminiscences of his actions – also helps devotees to attain Akshardham.

2. At the time of death, if a person forgets the form of God, then by remembering the divine actions of God or his sadhus and *satsangis*, one will be able to remember God.

■ Facing death is as difficult as swimming across an ocean (Gadhadā I 61). Countless types of mental and physical sufferings and agitations arise during those final moments (Gadhadā II 63). One may forget the *murti* of God on the deathbed because of the recollection of all good and bad deeds performed during one’s lifetime or due to one’s mundane attachments and infatuations.

■ Once, there was an avaricious merchant. He kept on worrying all the time about his money and business. When he was nearing his final moments of death, he began inquiring, “Where is Rohan?” “Father, I’m here,” replied his first son. Upon inquiring about his second, third and fourth sons, the sons replied, “Father, we all are present here.” Annoyed with the presence of all four sons, the merchant asked angrily, “What are you all doing here? Who is looking after the business?” And immediately after uttering those words the merchant died. Even at the time of death the merchant bothered about nothing but his business, because he had done that all his life. Likewise, if we practice remembering God regularly, we can easily remember God even at the time of our death.

3. Reminiscences of God give peace

■ Yogiji Maharaj said, “Reminiscences relieve pain and sorrow.”

■ Muktanand Swami was once feeling very much disturbed. He asked Maharaj to show a remedy that could help him to attain peace. Maharaj began to narrate his own life story starting right from his birth and childhood incidents in Chhapaiya.

Muktanand Swami interrupted, “Maharaj, I am asking for a solution to my restlessness.” Maharaj continued further with the narration of incidents from his life. So Muktanand Swami again interrupted. Then Maharaj said, “Go to the villages for spreading satsang. You will attain peace.”

When Nityanand Swami came to know about this, he stopped Muktanand Swami and explained to him the purport of Maharaj’s reply. He said, “Swami, peace lies in the divine incidents of Maharaj.”

■ Swarupanand Swami could constantly see Maharaj in his heart. However, when he got very sick, he could not remember Maharaj because of physical weakness and intense pain. At that time, Maharaj began to recount his own incidents to him. Thereafter, Swarupanand Swami felt relieved and experienced deep peace (Gadhadā II 35).

■ Harshadbhai Dave had a painful boil on his back. The agony was intense. All of a sudden he heard a bhajan on the radio: “*Rudā lāgo chho, Rājendra...*”. His mind became engrossed in listening to the bhajan, recollecting the same bhajan being sung in the presence of Shastriji Maharaj. The memory and the entire scene of Shastriji Maharaj relieved him of the throbbing pain.

4. Antahkaran gets purified

■ Our mind is very erratic. Controlling it is very difficult. The simplest way to make the mind stable is to keep it continuously engaged in the incidents of God and guru (Gadhadā I 38).

■ A person once reined in a ghost. Whenever he left the ghost idle, the ghost came to devour him. So, he erected a 25 feet long bamboo pole in his courtyard. Whenever there was no work, he told the ghost to climb up and down it.

Our mind is also like a ghost. Whenever it is idle it becomes a devil’s workshop. Therefore, the mind should be kept engaged in the reminiscences of God and guru to purify it.

■ Gunatitanand Swami said, “Remembering this Sadhu in the mind destroys the sins of the mind...” (Swamini Vato (English edition), 30.7).

■ Shastriji Maharaj used to say that if one daily remembers the following four incidents from the life of Bhagatji Maharaj and Jaga Swami then one’s desires for worldly pleasures get dissolved: 1. Bhagatji’s reception and honour at Junagadh. 2. Bhagatji Maharaj serving *rotla* in Bhadrod. 3. Lifting of restrictions imposed on Jaga Swami. 4. Serving Jaga Swami during the last days of his life.

■ King Parikshit was destined to die by the bite of Takshak (a serpent) in seven days. The king listened to the divine incidents of Bhagwan Krishna from the Shrimad Bhagvat from Shukdevji. On the seventh day Parikshit transcended the fear of death by rooting his mind in the divine stories of God and attained liberation.

5. Inspires firmness in observance of moral codes

■ Listening to and contemplating upon the incidents of God and Satpurush inspires one to observe *niyams*. Today, thousands of devotees remain resolute in their moral disciplines due to their practice in listening to and reading of such incidents from the life of Maharaj and the guru *parampara*.

6. Helps in fostering and flourishing of the Sampradaya

■ “A *sampradaya* is fostered by listening to or singing the divine incidents of one’s principal deity, starting from his birth to his ascension” (Gadhadā II 58).

■ Our reverence for guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj grows stronger when we read about the divine actions and incidents from his life. Reminiscences of Swamishri, listening to bhajans about him and discourses about his greatness repeatedly nurtures love and reverence towards him.

7. Our Guru Parampara too inspires us to reminisce about God and the guru

■ Once, in Junagadh, Balmukund Swami pledged not to take his afternoon nap throughout Chaturmas (four months from July to October). Pleased with his vow, Gunatitanand Swami promised to tell him one new incident every day from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. In four months, Swami narrated 120 incidents. Imagine how thoroughly Gunatitanand Swami remembered the divine *charitras* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

■ Shastriji Maharaj had narrated incidents from the life of Bhagatji Maharaj to Harshadbhai Dave for more than 100 times. He talked so passionately about them that he would unknowingly move forward to the edge of the cot he was sitting on.

■ Yogiji Maharaj used to praise Shastriji Maharaj tirelessly.

■ Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara* have left no stone unturned in blessing us with innumerable extraordinary occasions that can help us to remember them.

■ One should form a habit to remember the divine incidents performed by the guru *parampara*. Such recollections at the time of death help in liberating one's *jiva*.

■ In the village of Panchala, Bhagwan Swaminarayan was once serving *shelan* – a mixture of cooked rice, ghee and gur. A cowherd who had come to eat the *shelan* was deeply impressed by the sight of Maharaj serving. Years later, on his deathbed, he recollected the divine spectacle of Maharaj serving *shelan* in Panchala. Without any delay Maharaj appeared before him and took the cowherd to Akshardham.

■ A woman in Vadodara once heard the words of a bhajan 'Re sāgpan Harivar nu sāchu' composed by Brahmanand Swami. She liked the composition and unknowingly sang it every day. When the woman was about to die, Bhagwan Swaminarayan appeared before her to liberate her. The woman, however, had never seen

Maharaj before and could not recognize him. She asked who he was, and Maharaj said, "I am *Harivar* (God) – the one whom you were singing about every day."

Important points for remembering the divine actions and incidents forever:

1. Remember God every day, regularly
2. Remember him with reverence (*mahima*)
3. Perceive divinity in the human traits of God and guru while remembering.

Recollections of such divine actions and incidents at the time of death help in liberating the *jiva*.

The second main point discussed in this Vachanamrut is about maintaining affection for sadhus and *satsangis*.

■ Such affection gives fulfillment to oneself.

■ Gunatitanand Swami has said, "Attach one's *jiva* with two good sadhus and four good *satsangis*. Such attachment helps one to remain in Satsang during adverse times and places. Such affection stops one from leaving Satsang or from going astray" (*Swamini Vato* (English edition), 19.10).

■ Because of his friendship with Jiva Khachar (of Gadhada), Vasta Khachar of Karyani perceived flaws in Maharaj and decided to leave the Satsang. That very day Maharaj went to Karyani along with Muktanand Swami and Dada Khachar. Maharaj dissolved the negative thoughts that Jiva Khachar had told him. Muktanand Swami and Dada Khachar also explained and reminded him about the divinity of Maharaj. Vasta Khachar understood his mistake and was saved from falling from the Satsang fellowship.

Thus, according to Bhagwan Swaminarayan the easiest means to attain *moksha* is to reminisce about the divine incidents (*charitras*) of God or the God-realized Sadhu and to maintain affection with the devotees in Satsang. Let us form a habit to live by this very essence presented in this Vachanamrut. ♦

Vitamins and Minerals Explained

Vitamins and minerals are essential nutrients the body needs in small amounts to work properly

VITAMINS

Vitamins are classified as either water-soluble or fat-soluble. In humans there are thirteen vitamins: four of which are fat-soluble (A, D, E, and K) and nine water-soluble (eight B vitamins and vitamin C). Water-soluble vitamins dissolve easily in water, are easily absorbed from the intestines and, in general, are readily excreted from the body, to the degree that urinary output is a strong predictor of vitamin consumption. It is common to have water soluble vitamin deficiency because they are not as readily stored in the body. Therefore, daily intake in appropriate quantities is important. Fat-soluble vitamins (the B vitamins and vitamin C) are absorbed through the intestinal tract with the help of lipids (fats) and can be stored in the body.

MINERALS

Minerals are inorganic substances, that is, they occur naturally in non-living things such as water, rocks and soil. Plants get minerals through the soil and water they absorb, animals ingest minerals from eating plants and other animals as well as from drinking (e.g. mineral water) and humans ingest minerals from the food and fluids they consume. Dietary minerals include sodium, chloride, potassium, calcium, phosphorus, iron, magnesium, sulphur, zinc, chromium, cobalt, copper, fluoride, iodine, manganese, molybdenum, selenium and others. Over twenty dietary minerals are necessary for mammals, and several more for various other types of life. The total number of minerals that are absolutely needed is not known for any organism.

The minerals in our diet are essential for a variety of bodily functions. They are important for building strong bones and teeth, good skin, hair and muscle development, proper production of blood, good nerve function, and the body's metabolic processes, such as those that turn the food we eat into energy. That is, minerals are needed for the body to work properly, for growth and development and for maintaining normal health.

Different minerals are required in different amounts but they are all essential. Minerals are grouped depending on how much they are needed on a daily basis, so the minerals that are needed in bigger amounts on a daily basis are known as the macro-minerals or major minerals.

Trace minerals are also essential nutrients that the body needs to work properly, but are required in much smaller amounts. Trace minerals are found in small amounts in a variety of foods such as cereals, milk and dairy foods, and vegetables and nuts. Examples of trace elements are iodine and fluoride.

This article will focus on one of the most important vitamins, the fat soluble vitamin D, and the one of the most important minerals, iron.

VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is, in fact, a group of fat-soluble vitamins responsible for intestinal absorption of calcium and phosphate. The two most important forms of vitamin D for humans are vitamin D2 (ergocalciferol) and vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol). They can be ingested from the diet or supplements. We mostly make vitamin D from sunlight on our skin, in reaction to the sunlight.

Vitamin D is needed to keep bones and teeth healthy.

A lack of vitamin D can lead to bone deformities such as rickets in children, and bone pain and tenderness as a result of a condition called osteomalacia in adults.

Vitamin D is also found in a small number of foods. Good food sources include fortified breakfast cereals and powdered milk.

Most people should be able to get all the vitamin D they need by eating a healthy balanced diet and by getting some summer sun. However, some groups of the population are at risk of not getting enough vitamin D. These include all pregnant and breastfeeding women, babies and young children under the age of five, older people aged 65 years and over and people who are not exposed to much sun, such as people who cover up their skin when outdoors, or those who are housebound or confined indoors for long periods. Also people who have darker skin such as people of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian origin are generally thought to have lower levels of vitamin D.

Reviewing recent research articles and guidelines in many countries, there is no definite consensus as to what the daily recommended dietary intake of vitamin D is. The guidance by the department of health in the UK, advises vitamin D supplementation for babies and young children, pregnant and breast feeding ladies, people aged 65 years and older and those not exposed to much sun. The guidance for the dose for adults is a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms (0.01mg) of vitamin D.

IRON

An example of a person's blood picture with low iron, causing a medical condition called iron deficiency anaemia.

Iron is an essential mineral that is a part of every cell in the body. It has many important functions, but perhaps the most important is

helping to make haemoglobin, which enables red blood cells to carry oxygen around the body. A prolonged deficiency of iron can lead to iron deficiency anaemia, in which insufficient haemoglobin is produced, leading to reduced ability of the red blood cells to provide oxygen to body cells.

Foods that are a good source of iron include: beans, nuts, dried fruit (e.g. dried apricots), whole grains (e.g. brown rice), fortified breakfast cereals, soyabean flour and most dark-green leafy vegetables, such as watercress and curly kale. It is a common thought that spinach is a good source of iron, however it also contains a substance that makes it harder for the body to absorb the iron from it. Similarly, tea and coffee contain a substance that can make it harder for the body to absorb iron. Cutting down on tea and coffee could help improve iron levels in the body.

The department of health in the UK recommends the daily intake of iron for men to be 8.7 mg a day, and for women 14.8 mg a day. Women who suffer from menorrhagia may need to take iron supplements. However, we are usually able to get all the iron needed from our daily diet.

Symptoms of low iron in the body include feeling tired, increased breathlessness and feeling the heart racing or thumping (called palpitations). A person who develops iron deficiency anaemia may look pale and may also develop other problems, such as brittle nails (koilonychia), mouth sores or ulcers and difficulty swallowing.

A picture showing a person's nail changes with low iron count: koilonychia or 'spooning of the nail'.

Adequate dietary intake of vitamins and minerals is essential to our wellbeing and the optimum functioning of our bodies.

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Pradakshinā –
circumambulating a shrine



Feast offered to
Bhagwan Swaminarayan



A coconut is broken during
worship ritual

FAQs On Hinduism

From *Hinduism, An Introduction*

by Sadhu Vivekchand and Consultant Editor Dr Janak Dave,

published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath

1. What is *pradakshina*?

On visiting a mandir, holy place, river or mountain, devotees perform *pradakshina*. *Pradakshina* means circumambulation; a devotional act expressing respect and honour to God's divine presence. It is also done by the devotee during his daily morning puja ritual.

While circumambulating the devotee chants the name of God. This ritual gradually helps the worshipper to believe God to be the centre of his life.

Pradakshina is always performed in a clockwise manner so that the deity is always on one's right, symbolizing auspiciousness.

2. Why do we offer food to a deity before eating?

God is supreme, the creator and sustainer of all life. Whatever seeds we sow, cultivate and finally harvest are because of his blessings and grace. So, out of gratitude and devotion to God

we offer a vegetarian meal to him twice daily, once in the morning and then another in the evening. After the food is graced by him it becomes *prasada* (pure and holy). The *prasada*, when eaten with gratitude purifies the mind and senses.

3. Why is the *kalasha* worshipped in puja rituals?

A *kalasha* symbolizes auspiciousness. It is generally a brass, bronze or copper pot filled with water with a coconut placed over it. A red and white thread (*nada chhadi*) is tied around the pot's neck. Mango or *asopalava* leaves are placed between the coconut and the lip of the pot.

Such a *kalasha* is placed with due rituals on all important occasions and events like *murti-pratishtha*, *yajna*, *vastu-puja* and *mahapuja* before the image of God. It is also placed in a wedding ceremony, near the entrance door as a



Kalasha is worshipped in all rituals



Tulsi plant

into the *kalasha*, and thereafter the holy water is used for performing rituals and sprinkling upon devotees.

When the *asuras* and devas churned the ocean, Lord Dhanvantari appeared with a *kalasha* of *amruta* (the immortalizing nectar). The *kalasha* therefore also symbolizes immortality and divinity.

sign of welcome and auspiciousness and in all domestic rituals. It is also used while receiving distinguished or holy people.

4. Why do Hindus worship a coconut and offer it to a deity?

Formerly animal sacrifice was practised in *yajnas* in India, symbolizing the offering of wealth to the devas. Slowly this practice was discontinued and the coconut, symbolizing life, came to be used instead.

A coconut is broken during worship rituals in mandirs and shrines. It is also broken on occasions like the inauguration or opening of new buildings, factories, roads, bridges, ships, etc. The splitting of a coconut symbolizes the shattering of one's ego. The coconut water represents the base instincts (or *vasanas*), which is offered with the white kernel (the mind) to God. It is also placed on top of a *kalasha* and used for worship on auspicious social and religious occasions like weddings, mandir consecration ceremonies, etc. Finally, the coconut is also offered into the sacrificial fire during a *homa* ceremony (mainly performed by householders).

The coconut is worshipped with the *kalasha* because the latter symbolizes prosperity and auspiciousness.

Through chanting of mantras the waters of all holy rivers, the knowledge of all the Vedas and the blessings of all deities are invoked

5. Why do Hindus worship the tulsi plant?

Tulsi or basil plant is known as Haripriya – very dear to Bhagwan Vishnu – and Vrunda (hence the name of Vrundavan, which had an abundance of tulsi plants). Hindus generally have a tulsi plant in front of their house or in the back garden. The lady of the house daily worships and offers respect by lighting a lamp, watering the plant, and by bowing and circumambulating it. The tulsi leaves are offered to the Lord in pujas and in the food offered to God. For Hindus, especially Vaishnavas, it is one of the most sacred plants.

Offerings are considered incomplete if no tulsi leaves are used or worshipped. Tulsi also symbolizes the goddess Lakshmi, the beloved consort of Bhagwan Vishnu (hence she is also called Vishnupriya and Haripriya). To live a righteous life and have a happy family life Hindus worship and offer respect to the tulsi plant.

An important annual celebration by Vaishnavas in mandirs and homes is Tulsivivaha – the ceremonial marriage of the tulsi plant with Bhagwan Vishnu in the form of *shalagrama* or *murti*. It is celebrated on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of the month Kartika, also called Kartak in Gujarati (October/November).

Tulsi is also a very important herbal plant used in ayurvedic medicine. ♦



Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

March-May 2013, Ahmedabad, Sarangpur

MARCH: AHMEDABAD

4, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Greensboro and Raleigh (North Carolina, USA) and Dehgam (Ahmedabad rural district). He also performed the *shilanyas* rituals for the BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandir in Dhuliya (Maharashtra).

In the afternoon Swamishri got news of Puja Balmukund Swami's demise. Swamishri prayed and eulogized, "Balmukund Swami performed a lot of *seva*. He did it with a detached spirit. He gained Yogiji Maharaj's profound *rajipo*." The next day Swamishri praised, "He obeyed the commands of Yogiji Maharaj. Whatever *seva* he performed, he did it with humility. He went to

the villages to collect grains. He never refused any *seva* instructed to him. He was inclined towards delivering and listening to spiritual discourses."

7, Thursday

Swamishri came for Thakorji's darshan in the mandir. Thereafter, a small assembly was held in the mandir precincts. Swamishri, Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Kothari Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and Viveksagar Swami were seated on a small stage. Viveksagar Swami briefly talked about Swamishri's intense *vicharan* over the last forty years. He added, "Now Swamishri cannot travel like before because of his health. He called the senior sadhus yesterday and expressed his wish." Thereafter, Dr Swami

read Swamishri's letter expressing his wish to all devotees and sadhus. In the letter Swamishri revealed that his health has not been well for quite some time. Therefore, he is unable to meet anyone personally. So, from henceforth all sadhus and devotees should get guidance for their questions from Pujya Mahant Swami.

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj remains the spiritual head, and all sadhus, devotees and well-wishers will continue to experience his divine darshan and inspiration.

10, Sunday

In the evening Sunday Satsang assembly members of the 'Gujarat Itihas Parishad', who had participated and co-organized the National Conference on 'Swami Sahajanand and the Swaminarayan Sampradaya' in Akshardham, Delhi (1-3 March 2013), shared their views on Bhagwan Swaminarayan and BAPS. The scholars were honoured and thereafter they received Swamishri's blessings.

On Swamishri's arrival to the Sunday satsang assembly, he blessed the devotees from the main stage. Then a traditional dance and a skit on the glory of the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* was enacted by Ahmedabad Yuvak Mandal. In conclusion, everyone prayed to Swamishri that they be blessed with the realization of his divine form. Then all the sadhus and devotees performed a *mala* and prayed to him.

Then Pujya Mahant Swami blessed the satsang assembly. He explained, "How fortunate and blessed we all are because of our association with Shriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj." He also spoke about Swamishri's glory as the guru and bestower of moksha.

15, Friday

The *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the *shikharbaddha* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Kolkata, were performed in the mandir precincts. The initial rituals were performed by

Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and Bhagvatpriya Swami. More than 140 male and 75 female devotees from Kolkata participated in the rituals. Thereafter Kothari Jnanpriya Swami talked about the satsang history of Kolkata and the *seva* and sacrifice of the devotees.

When Swamishri arrived he first blessed the devotees of Kolkata from far. Then he performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Guru Parampara, Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatji and the *panchdhatu murtis* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Nilkanth Varni by touching a gold-tipped stick to each of the *murtis* amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras. Then Swamishri and the senior sadhus performed *arti*. Thereafter, Mahant Swami and Dr Swami honoured Swamishri with a garland of *malas*. Finally, Swamishri performed *abhishek* of the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni with the holy water of Gangasagar and also called Mahant Swami and Dr Swami to offer *abhishek*.

17, Sunday

Swamishri arrived in the mandir auditorium for the Sunday satsang *sabha*. A skit, 'Jyotishi', was performed by youths portraying the theme of having resolute faith in God. Then Swamishri gave darshan to all from the main stage and returned to his quarters.

26, Tuesday; Birthday Celebration of Bhagatji Maharaj

The festival assembly commenced in the mandir precincts at 9.00 a.m. with *dhun* and prayer. Devotees from India and abroad were seated in the assembly. Speeches praising Bhagatji Maharaj's life were presented by Viveknidhi Swami, Yagneshwar Swami and Viveksagar Swami. Swamishri came to the 'Akshar Jharukho' (glass cabin) to give darshan to all. A bhajan on Bhagatji Maharaj, '*Derie dankā vāge, Bhagatjini de-*

rie *dankā vāge...*’ was sung by sadhus. Swamishri rang a bell along with the bhajan. Then Pujya Viveksagar Swami honoured Swamishri with garlands. Swamishri blessed all.

27, Wednesday; Pushpadolotsav

The morning celebration of Pushpadolotsav was held on the mandir grounds. The programme was interlaced with speeches by senior sadhus and bhajans by sadhus. Swamishri graced the assembly from ‘Akshar Jharukho’ in his living quarters. (For details, see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May-June 2013, p. 63.)

APRIL: AHMEDABAD

10, Wednesday

In the evening Swamishri arrived at the Yagnapurush Sabhagruh (assembly hall) to initiate 73 youths into *parshad* and *bhagwati dikshas*. Swamishri gave the guru mantra and blessed all of them personally. (For details, see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May-June 2013, pp. 64-65.)

11, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Scarborough and East End in Toronto, Canada.

20, Saturday; 232nd Shri Hari Jayanti Celebration

In the morning Swamishri inaugurated an animation DVD, ‘Ghanshyam and Miracles of Life’, published by the Sanstha’s publishing house, Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

In the evening Swamishri presided over the Shri Hari Jayanti celebration on the mandir precincts. (For details, see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May-June 2013, pp. 65-66.)

26, Friday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *puja* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Udaipur (Rajasthan), Ja-

mankuva (Mandvi region), Kosamkuva and Nalimdhani (tribal region of Kaprada region) and Abrama (Tithal region).

MAY: AHMEDABAD, SARANGPUR

5, Sunday; Ahmedabad-Sarangpur

After staying for 10 months and 20 days Swamishri was scheduled to depart for Sarangpur in the evening. At 6.50 p.m. Swamishri came for Thakorji’s darshan in the mandir. He performed *arti* in all the three shrines and then he came to the assembly hall where thousands of devotees were awaiting his darshan. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Kothari Satsangijivan Swami honoured Swamishri with a garland. After blessing all from the assembly stage Swamishri departed for Sarangpur at 7.10 p.m. Swamishri’s health was fine.

Swamishri arrived in Sarangpur at 9.40 p.m. and first did darshan of the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. Kothari Jnaneshwar Swami welcomed Swamishri with a garland of flowers. Thereafter, Swamishri went for Thakorji’s darshan in the mandir.

Swamishri blessed the sadhus and devotees from far and then retired to his quarters.

6, Monday

Swamishri gave darshan to sadhus and devotees from ‘Akshar Jharukho’ in the afternoon and at night. During evening darshan Swamishri blessed the sadhus who had come for the ‘Sant Shibir’ (6 to 10 May) from various mandirs.

9, Thursday

At 7.20 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan to all from ‘Akshar Jharukho’. He also performed *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj alongwith all the sadhus seated on the ground below. Thereafter the *ashtaks* were sung. Then Swamishri offered *thal* to Harikrishna Maharaj while “*Jamo thāl...*” was sung by all. The sadhus and devotees requested and prayed to Swamishri to have

some *shiro*. Swamishri took some *shiro* to please all and blessed all.

13, Monday

Swamishri blessed 1,000 BAPS youths from 'Akshar Jharukho', who had assembled for a four-day youth *shibir*.

16, Thursday; 97th Patostav of Sarangpur Mandir

In the evening, despite the summer heat, Swamishri came out for Thakorji's darshan in the mandir. Swamishri performed the *shayan arti* in all the shrines. Thereafter, Swamishri greeted all the senior sadhus: Pujya Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Kothari Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Viveksagar Swami and Ghanshyamcharan Swami.

At 9.00 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan from 'Akshar Jharukho'. To celebrate the *patostav*, a procession of Thakorji was carried out below Swamishri's *jharukho*. Pujya Mahant Swami performed *pujan* of the *utsav murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in 'Akshar Jharukho' and then did *pujan* and *archan* of Swamishri. Then everyone performed mass *arti* and offered mantra *pushpanjali*. Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami sang "Sarangpur mā vālo..." to the joy of Swamishri and all. Swamishri and all waved BAPS flags and later he also rang a bell. Finally, *thal* was offered to Harikrishna Maharaj and thereafter Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami offered *shiro* to Swamishri.

17, Friday

Swamishri inaugurated an audio CD 'BAPS Ki Shaan', by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

18, Saturday

Swamishri inaugurated a new publication, *Hinduism, Sacred Texts*, by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

21, Tuesday, 63rd Pramukh Varni Din

In the evening darshan, a celebration was held in honour of Swamishri's appointment as president by Shastriji Maharaj 63 years ago. A drama of his appointment in Ambli Vali Pol was enacted by youths from Ahmedabad. Then Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Kothari Swami honoured Swamishri with a flower shawl. Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami sang "Latkādo Latkanto re āve..." Then Swamishri performed *arti* of Harikrishna Maharaj. *Thal* was offered to Harikrishna Maharaj and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami offered *shiro* to Swamishri. Thereafter Swamishri played the cymbals and a pair of *kartals* while bhajans were being sung. Finally, Swamishri also blessed all saying he was happy with the love and devotion of all.

27, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Matar (Kheda distict), Sadgavaan, Vadsar (Vadodara), Jindva (Dehgam region) and Morristown (USA).

SPIRITUAL ENDEAVOURS

14 March: Bhanjibhai (60 years) and Thakarshibhai (54 yrs), two devotees from Nandpur, near Bhadra, walked 720 km in 24 days for Swamishri's good health. They visited 11 BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandirs and prayed for Swamishri's health.

19 March: Students of the BAPS Chhatralaya in Rajkot performed 126,169 Swaminarayan *mantra jap* for Swamishri's good health. ♦

(Translation of excerpts from Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati)

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

March-May 2013, Ahmedabad, Sarangpur

LIVING AKSHARBRAHMAN

14 March, Ahmedabad

Swamishri was engaged in his daily walking regimen. Bhadrash Swami pointed to Swamishri and said, “*Etad Aksharam Brahma...* This Aksharbrahman is such that he walks (*ejat*), he breathes (*pranān*) and he blinks (*nimishchh*). This is a mantra from the Mundaka Upanishad. You are the embodiment of Akshar. Is it right?”

Swamishri smiled and affirmed, “True (*satyam*), true, true.”

JOY IN BHAJAN

2 April, Ahmedabad

Swamishri finished his routine breathing exercises. Thereafter, Yogivivek Swami asked, “Did you enjoy it?”

Swamishri replied, “What joy is there in it?”

Yogivivek Swami enquired, “Then what do you find joy in?”

Swamishri replied, “Bhajan.”

Swamishri is attuned to doing bhajan and has always found joy in remembering and worshipping God.

On another occasion (11 April), after completing his daily exercise, Swamishri was asked what he would like to do next. Instantly he replied, “Bhajan.”

SWAMISHRI’S HUMILITY AND FAITH IN GOD AND HIS GURUS

12 April, Friday, Ahmedabad

Today, after his routine exercise, Swamishri’s blood pressure was normal.

Brahmavihari Swami told Swamishri, “Your pulse and lifeline are in your hands.”

Swamishri said, “They are in Shriji Maharaj’s hands.”

Narayancharan Swami explained, “Maha-

raj says in the Vachanamrut that in such a sadhu like yourself he walks and he sees through your eyes.”

Swamishri agreed, “Yes, that is true.”

Brahmavihari Swami asked, “Then what should we understand from that?”

Swamishri stated, “That he is divine.”

Brahmavihari Swami recounted a statement of Gunatitanand Swami that if he were to retract his powers from all living beings the entire world would become lifeless. “So, this means that the God-realized Sadhu has the lifeline of everyone in his hands. Is it so!”

Swamishri confirmed, “Yes, of course.”

Brahmavihari Swami enquired, “Did Shastriji Maharaj have the lifeline of all in his hands?”

Swamishri nodded in affirmation.

Brahmavihari Swami asked further, “Was it also in Yogiji Maharaj’s hands?”

Swamishri said, “Yes.”

Brahmavihari Swami finally asked, “Then what do you have in your hands?”

Swamishri replied spontaneously, “God’s *mala*.”

SWAMISHRI’S DIVINE VISION

25 April, Ahmedabad

Swamishri was having lunch. For over a year Swamishri has been eating very little, and sometimes he refuses to have anything at all because he does not feel hungry. Today, Swamishri took a little and then he stopped eating. The attendant sadhus tried to encourage him to have a little more. Swamishri, however, pointed to all the items and replied, “God has eaten everything.”

Ramswarup Swami responded by referring to Swamishri, “God has not eaten yet!”

Swamishri replied, “I can see he has.” Swamishri spoke like it was all visible to him. ♦



India

SHRI NILKANTH VARNI & GURU PARAMPARA MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS 27-28 April 2013, Mahesana, India



On 10 December 1994, H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Mahesana. Since then, the mandir has served as a source of inspiration to all in the city and surrounding villages.

On 27 and 28 April 2013, grand celebrations were held to commemorate the consecration of the *murtis* of Shri Nilkanth Varni and the Guru Parampara in the mandir .

The *murtis* had previously been sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 18 March 2013 in Ahmedabad. The celebration began on 27 April with a Yagna for World Peace in which Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami performed the main Vedic rituals, and *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis*. A total of 2,200 *yajmans* participated in the *yagna*, seated around 275 *yagna kunds*. Over 9,000 devotees were present to witness the *yagna*.

At 3.30 p.m., the *murtis* to be consecrated were taken on a grand and colourful procession

through the streets of Mahesana to bless the city with their divine gaze. Over 2,000 devotees participated in the 6 km long procession route. In the evening, at 9.00 p.m. over 5,000 devotees enjoyed the special performance of devotional bhajans presented by BAPS sadhus.

On 28 April, from 7.45 to 9.30 a.m., senior BAPS sadhus performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in the rear *pradakshina* of the mandir. Around 600 senior devotees also participated in the rituals.

Thereafter, an assembly, attended by over 9,000 devotees, was held in the ‘Pramukh Swami Sabhagruh’ in which the major contributors to this project were honoured by the senior sadhus. The main *murti-pratishtha* assembly was held in a large open ground from 6.15 to 9.30 p.m. The assembly theme focused on one outstanding message from the lives of Shri Nilkanth Varni and each of the gurus: Shri Nilkanth Varni – Seva, Bhagatji Maharaj – Guru bhakti, Shastriji Maharaj – Efforts to Promote the Akshar-Purushottam Upasana, Yogiji Maharaj – Samp, Suhradbhav and Ekta and Pramukh Swami Maharaj – God is the All-doer. Speeches on these topics were presented by Pujya Shrutiprakash Swami, Pujya Anandswarup Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Mahant Swami.

Over 22,000 devotees were present for this concluding assembly of the *murti-pratishtha* celebrations.

YUVA JNANSATRA, SARANGPUR, INDIA 13-22 May 2013

Organized by the Satsang Activities Central Office in Ahmedabad, two five-day Yuva



Jnansatras provided spiritual stimulation to over 2,000 youths from Gujarat and Mumbai. Each of the five days focused on one central theme: *asmita*, *upasana*, *satpurush*, *niyam-dharma* and human relations.

In both *jnansatras*, *sadguru* sadhus, as well as other experienced and learned sadhus imparted valuable guidance. The highlights of both *jnansatras* was the twice-daily darshan of guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

YUVAK MANDAL SANCHALAK SHIBIR, INDIA 25-26 May 2013



Over 650 *yuvak* and *yuvati mandal sanchalaks* participated in the two Yuvak Mandal Sanchalak Shibirs, held simultaneously in Bochasan and Sankari on 25 and 26 May 2013. Through speeches by *sadguru* sadhus and other experienced sadhus, audio-visual presentations, workshops and involvement activities, these youth volunteers were guided on leadership skills, organizing skills, teamwork, human relations and other topics

of relevance to performing their satsang duties. The two-day *shibirs* organized by the Satsang Activities Central Office provided valuable practical instruction to all the volunteers.

SATSANG SHIBIR: 'AHANIK' – 'DAILY ROUTINE' 26 May 2013, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, New Delhi



On 26 May 2013, over 700 devotees from throughout New Delhi attended the day-long Satsang Shibir on the theme 'Ahanik' – 'Daily Spiritual Routine'.

Through speeches, discussions and audio-visual presentations, BAPS sadhus guided the devotees on daily devotional activities like personal daily puja, ghar mandir and daily satsang.

ANTI-ADDICTION PRAYER MARCH BAPS CHILDRENS WING, MUMBAI, INDIA 31 May 2013

On 31 May 2013, 'World No-Tobacco Day', more than 800 BAPS children from throughout Mumbai, in groups, braved the summer heat and humidity to participate in a 27.3 km Anti-Addiction Prayer March from the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Dadar to Borivali. Each group of boys and girls walked an average of 3.2 km, chanting the *shanti-path*, prayers, omkar and the Janmangal Namavali (108 divine names of Bhagwan Swaminarayan). The children appealed to all addicts to shun their addictions and support their families instead. Clad in white uniforms, the marching kids attracted the atten-

tion of thousands of Mumbaikars passing by the bustling S.V. road from morning to evening.

In the fifteen days prior to this march, these children had also contacted many addicts, meeting them one-to-one and humbly requesting them to throw away their bidi, cigarette, tobacco and alcohol addiction as a gift to their families.

GHAR SABHA ABHIYAN

May 2013, Gujarat & Mumbai, India



During their summer vacation, around 14,500 BAPS children from throughout Gujarat and Mumbai studying in grades 4 to 8 collaborated with 3,200 children's activities *karyakars* to take part in a campaign to start *ghar sabhas* in each home in their *mandals*. The children visited 28,800 homes and convinced 24,163 families to hold regular *ghar sabhas* in their homes.

The children took this message of *ghar sabha* to each home in three stages. The first visit was a general introduction, in which the children explained the 'Chalo Gharne Mangal Banaviye' booklet, and shared a small speech and short video on the benefits of *ghar sabha*. On the second visit the children's group gave the family a practical demonstration of how to conduct a *ghar sabha*. During the third visit the family conducted a *sabha* and the children shared ideas on how to make the *sabhas* more fun and effective. Each family was also given a card with Swamishri's handwritten blessings for *ghar sabha*.

Many families appreciated the efforts of the children and pledged to do regular *ghar sabhas*.

OPENING OF NEW BAPS STUDENTS HOSTEL

2 June 2013, Bhavnagar, India



The new BAPS Students Hostel, built in the precincts of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Bhavnagar, was inaugurated by Pujya Mahant Swami. At the auspicious time, he untied the ribbon while sadhus sang Vedic verses.

In the public assembly which followed, Pujya Mahant Swami said, "In the virtuous atmosphere of the hostel, students will attain all-round progress... Thousands of student's will be inspired to progress." The Member of Parliament for the area commented, "Together with academic coaching, BAPS hostels provide education of the heart." This new hostel will cater for high school (standards 11 and 12) and college students.

NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL INAUGURATION

9 June 2013, Chansad

Established in 1888, the government-run Primary School in Chansad, has been adopted by the BAPS Education Department. Extensive renovations were made to the old 10,570 sq. ft. school building and grounds. These include eight large classrooms with natural lighting, science laboratory, computer laboratory, assembly hall, prayer hall, headmaster's office, staff room, washrooms, dining area and filtered drinking water plant. Presently, 360 pupils study at the school.

As a tribute to Swamishri, the villagers and government have named the school 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Primary School'. On 9 June 2013,

the refurbished school was inaugurated by Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami in the presence of Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasama, Education Secretary, Gujarat Government, Shri Dineshbhai Patel MP, Shri Ramsinhji Rathwa MLA and other guests.

UK & Europe

AKSHARDHAM NU BHATHU – NATIONAL SANYUKTA MANDAL ADHIVESHAN
19 May 2013, UK & Europe



More than 500 participants gathered at the BAPS Swaminarayan mandirs in London and Leicester on Sunday 19 May 2013 to complete the first phase of 'Akshardham nu Bhathu' – a spiritual development programme designed specifically for senior devotees.

Launched in November 2012, the aim of the two-phase project is to strengthen and advance Satsang knowledge, develop the motivation and skills for delivering spiritual discourses, and encourage regularity in reading religious texts and observing other daily Satsang endeavours for personal spiritual growth.

Participants from across the UK presented various aspects of the development programme through speeches, singing of devotional songs and answering question papers. The subject matter included the history, beliefs, practices and traditions of Satsang and subjects such as the importance of a guru.

The project was meticulously planned with study packs being distributed in advance to all

participants, and training sessions organized to help preparations.

Feedback from the participants revealed the closeness that this project brought in the family as members worked together to learn and develop themselves.

VATICAN'S INTERFAITH HEAD VISITS BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR
13 June 2013, London, UK



Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, visited BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, on 13 June 2013. As Protodeacon of the Roman Catholic Church, the Cardinal had announced the appointment of the new pope from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica earlier this year.

Cardinal Tauran was accompanied by a number of high-ranking Catholic clergymen. After a traditional Hindu welcome, the Cardinal and other members of the group were given a guided tour of the Mandir.

The group then proceeded to the main feature of the visit, a seminar titled 'Hindus and Catholics: The Practice of Compassion as a Contribution to World Peace'. The seminar, in which leaders and representatives from several Hindu organizations were also present, commenced with Vedic peace prayers sung by Hindu youths and Christian prayers performed by the Catholic leaders.

After a welcome speech by Satyavrat Swami, the Cardinal presented his keynote address.

Thereafter, Paramtattva Swami and Dr Martin Ganeri presented papers on the concept of compassion and world peace from their respective faith traditions.

The seminar concluded with an exchange of gifts, for which His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj had sent a silver ‘Amrut Kumbh’ from India for His Holiness Pope Francis I. The Common Good. AUM Shanti Shanti Shanti.”

In the Visitors’ Book, the Cardinal wrote he found it to have been “an inspiring visit which is a sign of hope for the coming generations.”

Africa

BAPS VOLUNTEERS VISIT PRISON

21 April 2013, , Mombasa, Kenya



BAPS volunteers visited ‘Shimo la Tewa Borstal Institution’, a prison in Mombasa, Kenya, that houses over 300 prisoners. BAPS donated computers, uniforms and sewing machines to the institution and sponsored a meal for the prisoners and prison staff. The head of the prison thanked the volunteers wholeheartedly for organizing the event and for the donated items.

BAPS KARYAKAR SHIBIR

3-5 May 2013, South Africa

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Lenasia, South Africa, organized a 3-day Karyakar Shibir entitled ‘Kartavya’ attended by a select group of 150 *karyakars* from 11 BAPS satsang centres across South Africa and Zambia.

The *shibir* was conducted by BAPS sadhus, to better equip the *karyakars* for their particular area of *seva*, e.g. mandir management, *sabha* co-ordination, etc.

FREE MEDICAL CONSULTATION CAMP

29 May 2013, Mwanza, Tanzania

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Mwanza, in collaboration with CIMS Hospital, India, conducted a free medical consultation camp for heart problems, diabetes, joint problems and other health issues. Around 80 people came for consultation and were given medical advice. This was followed by brief lectures and presentations on health by various doctors.

Asia-Pacific

NEW BAPS MANDIR HOLDS NEIGHBOURHOOD OPEN DAY

18 May 2013, Sydney, Australia



Following the sanctification ceremony of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sydney, a ‘Neighbourhood Open Day’ was held on Saturday 18 May 2013.

During the Open Day, neighbours who visited the new Mandir were introduced to the *murtis* in the central shrine and guided around the premises, including dining hall and children’s activity rooms. Guests commended BAPS for the planning and design of such a purpose-built complex, and thanked the volunteers for the positive contribution the Mandir continues to make to the neighbourhood. ♦

BAPS Relief Aid for Uttarakhand Flood Victims

June-July 2013, New Delhi and Ahmedabad

Swaminarayan Akshardham, Delhi, June 2013



BAPS volunteers at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi

Since 14 June 2013, torrential rains in the North Indian state of Uttarakhand, home of the Himalayas and many of Hinduism's holy places, led to mammoth landslides and extensive flooding. This caused widespread destruction and thousands lost their lives. The Indian Army had been called in to help evacuate thousands of pilgrims stranded in the area. The government acted to coordinate

relief efforts. Many NGOs also joined to help in this devastating disaster, but the mountainous terrain of the region made it especially difficult to access many of the affected areas.

Under the guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, BAPS prepared 2,000 kits for distribution to survivors of the tragedy. Each kit contained: salt, blankets, torches, batteries, rice, milk powder, *aloo bhujjiya*, *kurkure*, mix *namkeens*, biscuits, *magas*, chilli powder and turmeric powder.

These kits were distributed in collaboration with Parmarth Niketan, the ashram of Pujya Swamishri Chidanandji Maharaj, in Rishikesh.

More kits are being prepared by BAPS centres in Gujarat for distribution by the Gujarat Government.

BAPS centres worldwide offered prayers for all affected by this terrible natural disaster.

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Ahmedabad, 6 July 2013

From the BAPS headquarters at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, over 40 tons of supplies were packed by the Sanstha's 500 BAPS men and women volunteers into two bags for distribution. **Bag 1:** Salt, chilli powder, turmeric, *jiru*, *dhana*, *sarsav*, sarasiya oil, rice, *mung dal*, wheat flour, *chana* (gram), milk powder, roasted *chana*, glucose biscuits, sugar, tea, candles, matches, etc. **Bag 2:** Tarpaulin, raincoat, bed sheet, umbrella, slippers, set of steel plates, steel cups, small and large steel bowls, steel spoons, steel tins, sieve, primus stove, blanket, torch and batteries, towels, napkins, toothbrush, comb, mirror, sari, soap, etc.

One set of two bags will be given to the flood-afflicted. Senior BAPS sadhus, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Kothari Pujya Satsangjivan Swami, lit a *divo* at the start of this process



BAPS volunteers at Swaminarayan Mandir, Ahmedabad

and prayed for the wellbeing of all affected by the flood disaster.

Also present on this occasion were Relief Commissioner Shri Punamchand Parmar, City Deputy Collector (East) Shri P.K. Jadeja, R.D.C. Shri K.K. Dughat, A.R.D.C. Shri D.D. Kapadia and other officials. The relief aid had been sponsored by generous donors, and the government of Gujarat made the arrangements for its delivery to the flood victims.

Swaminarayan Aksharpith Publications

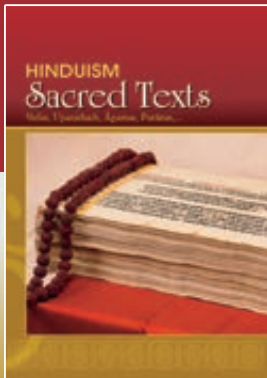


SWAMINARAYAN *Saga*

Swaminarayan Saga portrays the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan through 32 graphics and brief scripts.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was a torchbearer of Indian Culture who ushered in a moral and spiritual renaissance in 19th century Gujarat. Through his travels and spiritual charisma he liberated thousands from the mire of vices and superstitions. His unique contributions for the uplift of society and blessing countless devotees and aspirants with *moksha* ranks him as one

of the leading spiritual lights of India. His legacy is still vibrant today through mandirs, sacred texts, celebrations, social services and the tradition of Gunatit gurus.



HINDUISM

Sacred Texts

Vedas, Upanishads, Āgamas, Purānas,...

Hinduism, Sacred Texts, briefly portrays the rich legacy of India's spiritual wisdom, namely, the Vedas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, Āgamas, Purānas, Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata and others. The pocket-size book enlightens youths and aspirants about the basics of the Hindu shastras in a lucid manner.



AARSH Pravachan Mala Audio CDs

With the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj AARSH Research Centre at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar, has been organizing quarterly lectures since many years. BAPS sadhus and renowned scholars from various fields of study have delivered lectures on the subjects of the Hindu shastras, Leading Indian personalities and Social issues. Six audio CDs of selected lectures in Gujarati, published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, are a treat to listen to.



MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS

1. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performs Vedic *pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in the new BAPS Swaminarayan *hari* mandir at Indrapuri, Vadodara (28 April 2013).
2. Devotees during the *murti-pratishtha* assembly, Indrapuri.
3. Senior sadhus on stage during the Shri Nilkanth Varni and Guru Parampara *murti-pratishtha* assembly in Mahesana (28 April 2013).
4. Over 9,000 devotees attended the *murti-pratishtha* assembly, Mahesana.
5. Swamishri performs the Vedic *pujan* of the *shilas* to be placed in the foundations of the new *shikharbaddha* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir to be built at Dhuliya, Maharashtra (4 March 2013, Ahmedabad)
6. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the new BAPS Swaminarayan *hari* mandir in Udaipur, Rajasthan, and five other *hari* mandirs (26 April 2013, Ahmedabad).



SWAMISHRI IN SARANGPUR, MAY 2013

1. Murtis in the central shrine of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur (L to R): Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharmukta Gopalanand Swami.
2. Swamishri performs *arti* on the evening of Sarangpur mandir's 97th *patotsav* (16 May 2013).
3. Swamishri blesses devotees seated for darshan in the mandir precincts.
4. Senior sadhus devoutly honour Swamishri on Pramukh Varni Din (21 May 2013).