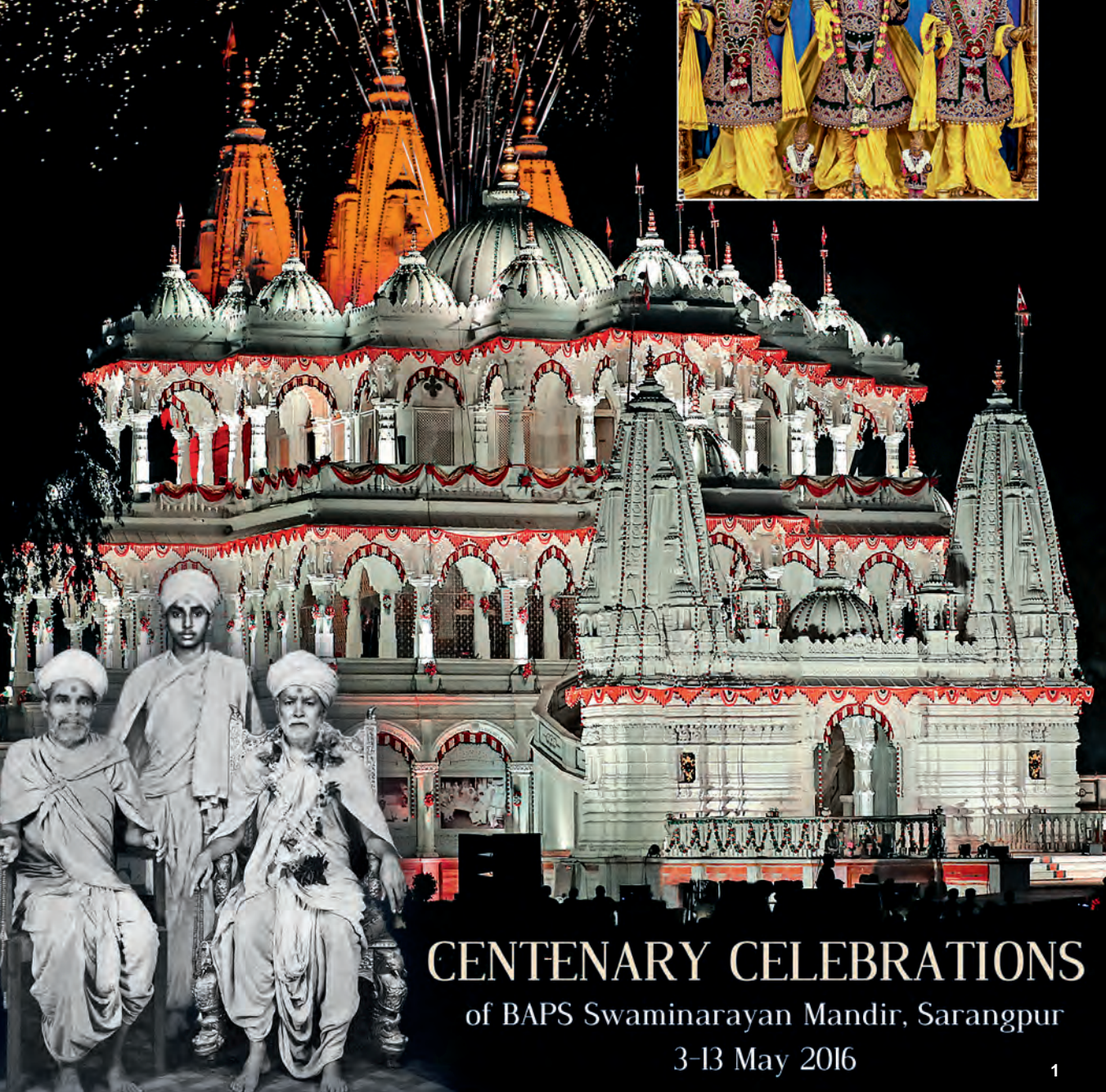


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July-August 2016

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS
of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur
3-13 May 2016



CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS MAIN ASSEMBLY
13 May 2016

1. *Sadguru* sadhus and stage guests wave BAPS flags at the start of the celebrations assembly.
2. Amazing light effects and creative visuals were used to help narrate the history of Sarangpur Mandir.
3. Skits and dances depicted the salient events from the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to the present era of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



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Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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

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Note: The text matter on the centenary celebrations of Sarangpur Mandir in this special issue has been translated by Sadhu Vivekjiandas and Sadhu Amrutvijaydas from *Swaminarayan Prakash*, June 2016.



FIRST WORD

Sarangpur is nestled in the rustic surroundings of a remote region in Gujarat. About 200 years ago, it comprised of merely a few mud homes and a handful of residents. Today, however, it hosts a population of about 3,000. It derives its name from the profusion of peacocks that reside there. The Gujarati words ‘Sarang’ means peacock and ‘pur’ means a town. Sarangpur thus means a ‘town of peacocks’.

Dhana Bapu had founded Sarangpur. In the latter part of the 18th century, Ramanand Swami had become popular in this region. Among his many Kathi disciples Rathod Dhadhal of Sarangpur was one of them. After Ramanand Swami appointed Bhagwan Swaminarayan in his place, Macha Khachar invited Shriji Maharaj to his village, Kariyani. At that time Rathod Dhadhal was also present. He was drawn to his divine charisma and became his disciple.

Once, Bhagwan Swaminarayan was hosted by the Patgir family in Kundal, a village near Sarangpur. On learning about it, Rathod Dhadhal travelled to Kundal for Maharaj’s darshan and brought him to Sarangpur for the first time in 1805. Shriji Maharaj was pleased with the rustic devotion of Rathod Dhadhal, Jiva Khachar (son of Rathod Dhadhal’s sister) and others. From that point their bonds were forged with the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

Thereafter, Bhagwan Swaminarayan often visited Sarangpur and sanctified every home and corner of the village. Even today, these places have a distinct sanctity: Jiva Khachar’s and Rathod Dhadhal’s homes, the village square, Narayan Kund, Jaliyo Dharo, Shami tree (located in the southern part) and Dholo well.

In 1825, the prevailing circumstances did not allow Bhagwan Swaminarayan to fulfil his wish of building a mandir in Gadhada. Seeing Maharaj disappointed, many village chiefs from neighbouring villages came to Maharaj, requesting him to build a mandir in their village. Jiva Khachar and his villagers also pressed Maharaj to build a mandir in Sarangpur. At Shri Hari’s behest, Jiva Khachar went to Ghelasha of Botad for help. The latter happily accepted the proposal and opined, “I can tell the local king to donate land, make arrangements for acquiring and transporting stones from 25 neighbouring villages and exempt us from all taxes.” Shri Hari thus agreed to build a mandir in Sarangpur after seeing the readiness and enthusiasm of all. The devotees of Sarangpur celebrated with joy; but it was short-lived.

Soon, Dada Khachar and his sisters came to Sarangpur to request Maharaj to fulfil his wish of building a mandir in Gadhada. They had proposed to pull down a section of their *darbar* in order to build the mandir. Furthermore, when Maharaj came to know that Dada Khachar and his sisters had abstained from taking food and water from the day he left Gadhada, he succumbed to their dedication and sacrifice and declared, “I will return to Gadhpur to build a mandir.” As a result Dada Khachar and his family rejoiced, whereas the devotees of Sarangpur were plunged in sorrow. To assuage them, Maharaj promised, “Do not despair. The place that I have seen here will have a grand mandir built in the future. I will stay here with my Dham and Mukta, and the mandir will become renowned worldwide. Thousands of pilgrims will be drawn here.”

Many years later, during Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami’s visit to Sarangpur, he showered his blessings on the devotees, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan will keep you and all the *satsangis* of Sarangpur in his *seva* eternally. A supreme mandir will be built here and the supreme Purushottam Narayan will be installed here with his *muktas* and *sevaks*.” Then Swami walked to the plot of land and showed that the mandir would be built here in future. At that time, Nagji Sheth, Vagha Khachar and other devotees were present and they had narrated this to others on many occasions.

(Contd. on pg. 51)

MAHA-RAS AND RANGOTSAV

*All arrangements were made to
play maha-ras by the banks of River Sabli in Panchala...*



Shri Hari affirmed that his presence inspired divine joy like Akshardham. Thereafter, Maharaj announced for the *maha-ras* to begin. Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Premanand Swami, Nishkulanand Swami, Devanand Swami and others took *kartals* in their hands and tied bands of small bells to their feet. In the centre of the circles, some sadhus were seated with *dukkad*, *saroda*, *pakhavaj*, sitar, shehnai, cymbals, sarangi and other musical instruments. When one of the sadhus started beating a pair of sticks on his drum the *pakhavaj* and *dukkad* players started playing, and Brahmanand Swami commenced singing, “*Sakhi Gokul gāmnā chowkmā re...*” – “The gopis play *ras* in the central ground of Gokul...”

The sadhus started taking the *ras* steps in unison with the beats of the percussion instruments. When Shri Hari saw his sadhus dance in circles

with fervent devotion, he got down from the dais and weaved through the circles to reach the senior sadhus. Seeing Shri Hari in their midst, the senior sadhus were doubly pleased. Brahmanand Swami, who was also participating in the *maha-ras*, composed the second verse of his bhajan, “*Chahu kore sakhāni mandali re, Ubhā vachmā chhelo Albel rame rās rangilo rangmā re...*” – “All round are the groups of friends and in their midst the Lord is playing *ras* with great joy...”

Shri Hari moved around in circles clapping the hands of the senior sadhus. With Shri Hari's participation, the *ras* truly turned into *maha-ras*. The other sadhus in the outer circles wished that Maharaj would play *ras* with them too. Instantly, they saw Shri Hari standing before them, ready to play *ras*. Shri Hari had taken the same number of forms as the number of sadhus playing *ras*. The *maha-ras* commenced. Shriji Maharaj

wished to make the *maha-ras* memorable for all his sadhus. With his involvement, the music and the words of the bhajan became more relevant and significant. A while later, Brahmanand Swami had exhausted his poetic skills. Shri Hari then instructed Premanand Swami to sing. After a while, he too became tired. By then no one knew what time it was, and Shriji Maharaj was in no mood to terminate the *maha-ras*. But the sadhus did not want to tire Maharaj because the next day he was going to celebrate the *rangotsav* (festival of colours).

To conclude the *maha-ras*, Brahmanand Swami played a smart trick by gesturing to a devotee to ignite a heap of dry grass lying some distance away. The devotee threw a spark into the heap and the grass caught fire. On seeing the blaze, Brahmanand Swami raised an alarm, “Run, everyone run. There is a raging fire.” The fire thus brought an abrupt halt to the *maha-ras*. Some of the sadhus scurried to save their belongings from catching fire, whereas others simply stood transfixed. Shri Hari commented, “This seems to be the doing of Brahmanand Swami.” Brahmanand Swami replied tactfully, “Without your wish not even a straw of grass can burn, so how could I have created the fire?” Shri Hari simply smiled at his clever answer.

When the *maha-ras* came to an end, the full moon night was on the verge of breaking into dawn. The sadhus gathered around Shri Hari. Brahmanand Swami opined, “Maharaj, the night seemed as if it was six months long.”

Maharaj replied, “Because the night wanted to prolong itself, I allowed it to prevail. The *maha-ras* would not have ended tonight.”

Many sadhus bathed in the River Sabli and performed their daily devotions. Maharaj announced to all, “We will celebrate the *rangotsav* from where we had filled the tanks with coloured water yesterday. The *rangotsav* will also be equally memorable like the *maha-ras*.” Jhinabhai was overjoyed to hear this. He felt Shri Hari would

soak them all with great joy, which he had never done before.

RANGOTSAV

As morning dawned, sadhus and devotees started heading towards the outskirts of Panchala where the tanks were filled with coloured water. Shri Hari also arrived there with the senior *paramhansas*, *parshads* and devotees. Maharaj was attired in white clothes, with a saffron *archa* smeared on his forehead and a garland of jasmine flowers around his neck. In one hand he had a bouquet of flowers and in the other a handkerchief. Shri Hari sat on a stage and told the *parshads*, “Empty the cartloads of *gulal* and bring basketfuls to me.” The *parshads* complied and Maharaj filled his own *jholi* (begging cloth bag), hanging it from his left shoulder. Then he took the *gulal* with his right hand and threw it on the sadhus and devotees. After a little while he switched to spraying coloured water with his golden *pichkari* (squirter). Whoever he aimed at was undoubtedly drenched with colours. Thus Shri Hari inaugurated the auspicious *rangotsav*. Then Maharaj proclaimed, “Now, form two teams – one of Brahmanand Swami and the other of Nityanand Swami – and play against each other.”

The sadhus of both teams got ready to play with each other and defeat the other. Their fervent play was such that they soon ran out of colours. Fresh stocks were ordered. Soon, there was no water left. At that time someone was transporting a large water pot on a bullock. Nityanand Swami ran towards the bullock and unloaded the water pot and emptied it in his trough. When another bullock was approaching with a water pot on its back, Brahmanand Swami and Mahanubhavanand Swami ran and claimed it, and emptied it into their trough. The ecstatic play with coloured water resumed. Shri Hari, too, was standing on his dais and sprinkling colours, squirting and throwing *gulal*.

The devotional play of colours went on, with

everyone oblivious of what time it was. The soil of Panchala by now had taken different hues. Finally, Shriji Maharaj clapped aloud to attract everyone's attention and instructed, "Now, everyone stop playing with colours! It is time for dinner, but before that take a bath in the River Sabli. I, too, will join you."

The sadhus and devotees immediately concluded the *rangotsav*. Everyone was coloured from head to toe. Some were even soiled with mud, because once they had run out of colours they started flinging and smearing mud upon each other.

Everyone bathed by the banks of the Sabli River as Maharaj had instructed. Sadhus bathed Maharaj by rubbing and massaging his body. Thereafter, Shri Hari started bathing by himself in the river. Several sadhus came towards him, but Maharaj restrained them, "Don't come here because there are many crocodiles around here. It's very dangerous for you." Thus the sadhus continued bathing by the banks.

Once Shri Hari came out of the river Mulji Brahmachari wiped his body and gave him fresh clothes to wear. Maharaj gifted his wet clothes to Jhinabhai Darbar.¹ The latter was greatly pleased in receiving them.

AKSHAR CANNOT BE SEEN HERE?

Kashidas of Bochasan was also bathing by the riverbank. He uttered, "Those who have had darshan of this celebration will attain Akshardham." In response to this, Sachchidanand Swami looked at Gunatitanand Swami and spoke to Kashidas, "Brother, despite being coloured and sanctified by the hands of Akshar, you entertain thoughts of going to Akshardham. Don't you see Akshardham here?" But Kashidas failed to understand the esoteric words related to Akshardham. Nevertheless, the presence of Akshar on earth had already been proclaimed. Moments later, Kashidas recalled what Shri Hari had told him after the *murti-pratishtha*



ceremony of Nar-Narayan Dev in Ahmedabad, "This *murti* of Nar is a part of Akshar and this *murti* of Narayan is a part of me."

WORSHIP MAHADEV PROPERLY

Then Shri Hari went to the northern part of the village and visited the *muth* of Hemgar Bawa of Tarnetar. In ancient times, the Pandavas had visited this place during their exile. Arjun had installed the *murti* of Mahadev there, known as Arjuneshwar Mahadev. Bhim, too, installed another Mahadev nearby, known as Bhimeshwar Mahadev. Shri Hari ritually poured water (*abhishek*) over Arjuneshwar Mahadev and said, "While the Pandavas were staying here Shri Krishna came here to meet them. Thus, this is an ancient and historic place." Then Maharaj told Jhinabhai, "Make arrangements for the proper worship of both these *murtis* of Mahadev.

Thereafter, Shriji Maharaj, sadhus and devotees returned to Jhinabhai's *darbar*. Jhinabhai had made arrangements for a sumptuous dinner. The sadhus served the devotees seated in several rows.



(Contd. in next issue)

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

1. These clothes are displayed at the old Junagadh Mandir.

THE STORY OF BAPS MANDIR, SARANGPUR

INTRODUCTION

Like a tiny seed flourishing into a giant banyan tree the history of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur, is an extraordinary story of human commitment and divine grace.

The mandir land and the whole village of Sarangpur had the privilege of being blessed by the visits and prayers of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, 500 *paramhansas* and Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj. Awash with their divine blessings, the saga of Sarangpur Mandir, from acquiring the land to the making of the mandir, includes events of paramount effort, hardship, sacrifice and devotion.

The historic story of its creation started in 1910.

At the request of the local devotees in Sarangpur, Bhima Sheth, Nagji Sheth, Rukhad Khachar, Oghad Khachar and others, Shastriji Maharaj came to Sarangpur. Everyone pressed Swamishri, “Build a mandir here as soon as possible, and fulfil the dream of Shriji Maharaj.” Their

request resonated with Shastriji Maharaj’s goal of building mandirs enshrined with the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

But the biggest question was how to begin? Swamishri did not have money, stones and people to start off with. In other words, he had no resources at all to build a mandir in Sarangpur. In addition, there was stiff opposition against him and his work.

Despite all of this, Shastriji Maharaj proposed that a small *hari* mandir be established in Sarangpur for a few sadhus to stay. The devotees happily agreed and decided to purchase the house of Pitha Khachar. The price was Rs. 1,400. The house was bought with donations from Bhudarbhai Patel of Nagasar (Rs. 500), Jhaverilal Mehta of Nadiad (Rs. 500) and Ramchandrabhai Thakar of Nadiad (Rs. 400).

When the house was bought, Shastriji Maharaj’s opponents ridiculed him that with the Bochasan Mandir still incomplete how would he build another mandir? But the pages of history were to prove otherwise.

ACQUIRING LAND FOR SARANGPUR MANDIR

India was under British rule at that time, and Sarangpur came under the jurisdiction of the reigning officials of Limbdi region. This meant





King of Limbdi Maharana Dolatsinhji, who gave the land for Sarangpur Mandir

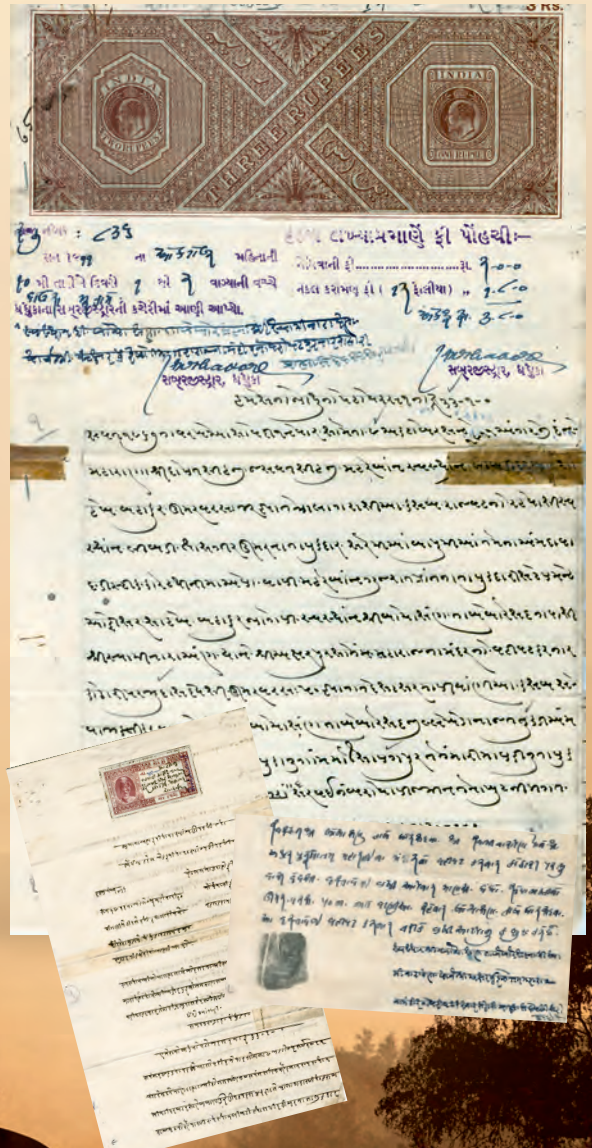


Diwan Jhaverbhai Amin, who played a major role in acquiring land for Sarangpur Mandir

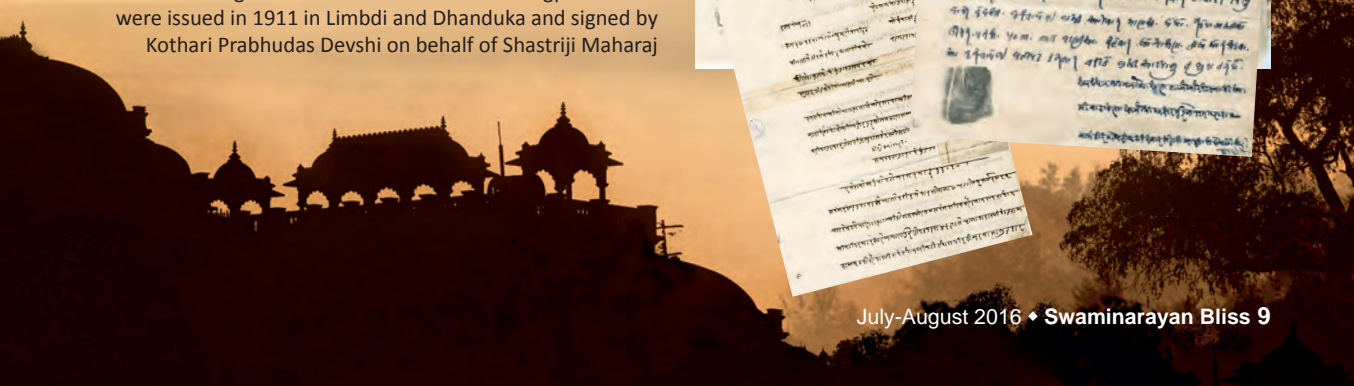
that to build a mandir in Sarangpur the land had to be acquired from the authorities in Limbdi – which was a very challenging task.

During that time Shastriji visited the town of Limbdi. The principle Diwan of Limbdi, Shri Jhaverbhai Nathabhai Amin, came for Swamishri's darshan. He was deeply impressed by Swamishri's divine personality. On learning about Swamishri's plan to build a mandir in Sarangpur he said, "Swami, if you want to build a *shikharbaddh* mandir in Sarangpur I will tell Thakor Saheb of Limbdi, Maharana Dolatsinhji, to give you land." Then Shastriji Maharaj described the incident of Bhagwan Swaminarayan riding his Rojho horse in Sarangpur and stated, "I want that sanctified land which lies to the south of the village."

In this way Thakor Saheb agreed with the request of Diwan Jhaverbhai. Then, Jhaverbhai explained the matter to his tax officer Meghabhai Darbar in Swamishri's presence.



Original documents of land for Sarangpur Mandir were issued in 1911 in Limbdi and Dhanduka and signed by Kothari Prabhudas Devshi on behalf of Shastriji Maharaj





Pitha Khachar's home, where the first *hari* mandir was made



The architects of the mandir were impressed by Shastriji Maharaj's guidance



Chhaganbhai Khatri, who first donated Rs. 35 for the mandir

Immediately thereafter, Shastriji Maharaj returned to Sarangpur. Soon, the Limbdi state land plotting official came to Sarangpur. Swamishri told the officer to demarcate and peg the land sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The size of the marked land came to 24 acres, and in addition to that Swamishri had another eight acres peg-marked. The eight acres belonged to Shermiya Bapumiya of Dholka. The first

kothari (administrator) of Sarangpur Mandir, Shri Prabhudasbhai Devshibhai, was a dedicated devotee. He had all the legal documents for the land registered under the Sanstha's name. Thus, the land was documented for the purpose of building a mandir of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. For this accomplishment, Thakor Saheb Dolatsinhji Jaswantsinhji's name became etched forever in the documents.

The historic event of acquiring the land occurred quietly and without any fanfare at 1.00 p.m. on 10 October 1911. It marked a divine and grand auspicious beginning of a milestone project.

SPIRIT OF DEDICATION AND SACRIFICE

After acquiring land for the mandir Shastriji Maharaj wished to perform its foundation-stone laying ceremony (*shilanyas*) in a special way. He wanted to undergird the mandir foundation with the spirit of spiritual sacrifice. An incident that bears witness to this is as follows.

Once, Shastriji Maharaj was discoursing to a few devotees in the house of Pitha Khachar. Before him were Chhaganbhai Gagabhai Khatri of Limbdi, Merubha Darbar of Chachana, Bapubha of Adval and others. Then Swamishri addressed Chhaganbhai, "Today, I wish to raise funds for the construction of Sarangpur Mandir, and I would like you to make a pledge for *dharmado*."

Since Chhaganbhai was of ordinary financial means he humbly requested, "Swami, of what significance will my contribution be for a project of such giant magnitude. The building of the mandir will require a lot of money, so how can my meagre contribution help in accomplishing the mandir?" Swamishri smiled and replied, "In spite of whatever you believe I want you to pledge some amount." Chhaganbhai submitted to Swamishri and told him, "You write whatever you think to be appropriate. I will fulfil it by any means. You are everything for me."

Shastriji Maharaj was greatly pleased with his faith and dedication, and he took a pen

and paper and wrote Chhaganbhai's name and Rs. 35 next to it. Chhaganbhai was perplexed, thinking, "How can such a trifle amount enable one to complete the mandir?" Before he could voice his thoughts, the all-knowing Shastriji Maharaj revealed, "Chhaganbhai, why do you think so? Every single rupee of faithful devotees like yourself is equivalent to one *crore* (10 million) rupees for me. And the mandir will be completed with such donations." And then Shastriji Maharaj gracefully looked upon Chhaganbhai and raised his hand towards the sky. Instantly, Chhaganbhai saw a beautiful, golden mandir studded with gems and golden pots shining atop the *shikhars*. He could not gauge whether he was dreaming or experiencing *samadhi*. Chhaganbhai remained immersed in the divine darshan. Then, a few minutes later, Chhaganbhai opened his eyes and saw Shastriji Maharaj and the devotees seated before him.

Chhaganbhai prostrated at Swamishri's feet and said, "Swami, you are the living form of God. Everything becomes possible when you so wish or desire. It is a privilege that you have accepted my *seva*, otherwise, you do not need any one of us." Shastriji Maharaj simply smiled and cast his divine glance upon him. Swamishri thus declared that the mandir would be built with stones acquired through the dedication and sacrifice of devotees.

DIVINE PLANS OF A DIVINE SEER

About a hundred years earlier Bhagwan Swaminarayan had willed that a mandir be built in Sarangpur. But what was his concept of the mandir? Only one who had realized him and had an unbroken communion with him could know of it. Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj had realized Bhagwan Swaminarayan and this fact revealed itself from time to time during the mandir-building project.

It was mind-boggling for many to even visualize what a mandir complex spread over 32 acres would look like when the first donor had pledged merely Rs. 35! But Shastriji Maharaj had divine



Shastriji Maharaj (top right), Nirgundas Swami (top left) and young Yogiji Maharaj during the beginning of construction of Sarangpur Mandir

insight. So, his vision and plans were divine. A devotee suggested to Shastriji Maharaj, "Let the planning for this mandir be done by Kora and Bhatt, a renowned architecture firm in Mumbai. To this, Swamishri replied, "There is no need for it." And then he took a pencil and drew the plans for the entire complex on an ordinary piece of paper.

Once, when the local Collector saw the plans of Sarangpur Mandir made by Shastriji Maharaj, he was awestruck. He opined, "This plan is for a mandir costing Rs. 300,000. And you do not have any money at all!" In response, Shastriji Maharaj replied with faith and gusto, "Sir, that too will be acquired."

For the mandir construction Shastriji Maharaj engaged a few *sompuras* (architects): Bhagwanbhai Sompura of Vadhvan, Liladharbhai Sompura, Vajeshankar Sompura and Muljibhai

Mistry, who were all impressed by Swamishri's divine insight.

UNIQUE ENTHUSIASM IN SERVING AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM

Once the land was acquired in 1911, Shastriji Maharaj confidently embarked upon the mandir construction work with only a handful of selected sadhus and devotees. They included Nirgundas Swami, Purushottamdas Swami, Bhaktivallabhdas Swami, Aksharpurushdas Swami, Haridas Swami, Kothari Prabhudas, Kothari Shankar Bhagat, Harikrishnadas Swami and a few others. Additionally, at that juncture, the joining of seven sadhus, who had left the Junagadh Mandir, with Shastriji Maharaj marked a watershed event. Among the seven sadhus, the services rendered by 19-year-old Jnanji Swami (later known as Yogiji Maharaj) were amazing. They all plunged headlong with grit into the mandir construction *seva*, regardless of day or night and hunger or thirst.

The first step in the mandir building project was to clean and fence the land. At Shastriji Maharaj's behest everyone started removing

thorns, stones, shrubs and weeds, and planted cacti to make a fence. Some of the sadhus would walk to neighbouring villages to beg for alms. Then, every evening all would assemble at the home of Pitha Khachar and engage in singing bhajans and listening to *katha*.

The inspiring force behind their back-breaking *seva* was their passion and devotion for the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* and guru Shastriji Maharaj. Swamishri travelled extensively, visiting villages and quietly bearing untold hardships for the sake of establishing *upasana*. He regularly punctuated his village tours with visits to Sarangpur. On arriving there, he would happily join the sadhus and devotees in the mandir construction work. When on site, one would find him with a cloth wrapped tight around his waist and another cloth wound over his head. During winter time he would tie his upper cloth with a knot to ward off the biting cold. When Shastriji Maharaj laboured for preparing the mandir-foundation pit he would press his teeth together and mightily strike the ground with a pickaxe. Subsequently, a large clod would be dislodged and mud would

STALWART SADHUS ENGAGED IN MANDIR CONSTRUCTION WORK



Nirgundas Swami



Narayancharandas Swami



Bhaktivallabhdas Swami



Aksharpurushdas Swami



Aksharpurushottamdas Swami



Haridas Swami



Harikrushnadas Swami



Santvallabhdas Swami

fly onto his body and clothes. After every strike Swamishri would exclaim aloud, “Bring the metal tubs [for carrying the mud away].” And all would briskly run to do the *seva*.

Many times the sadhus and devotees tried to restrain Swamishri from doing such laborious *seva*. To this, Swamishri replied with passion and pride, “Such *seva* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj can only be got if one has great merits, whereas those who have little merits do not get it.” And so saying, he would become absorbed in doing *seva*.

IN YOGIJI MAHARAJ’S WORDS

Yogiji Maharaj once described Shastriji Maharaj’s monumental spirit of *seva*, “I have seen Shastriji Maharaj’s personal efforts in building mandirs. Once, prominent businessmen from Una town arrived in Sarangpur. They knew Swamishri because he had delivered discourses in Una about 25 to 30 years ago. When they arrived, the foundation work [for Sarangpur Mandir] was going on. At that time Swamishri used to stay in the Kachariya room. They came to his residence.

“The mandir foundations were only partly filled. So, at 7.00 a.m., that day, Swamishri tied a cloth over his head, got hold of a pickaxe and took about five to ten sadhus with him. I was standing on the verandah of Swamishri’s residence. The businessman asked me, ‘Where is Shastriji Maharaj?’ I replied, ‘The one who just left.’

‘But, he was carrying a pickaxe!’

‘Yes, that was Shastriji Maharaj.’

‘Really, the one who was carrying the pickaxe was Shastriji Maharaj!’

‘Yes, but why did you fail to recognize him?’

“Then I took them to Swamishri. Swami was in a field, giving instructions about which stones to use. The businessmen prostrated to Swami and said, ‘We met you on our way, but since you were carrying a pickaxe we took you to be an ordinary sadhu.’

“When the Kachariya house was being built



Shastriji Maharaj stayed in this ordinary mud hut (Kachariya house) while building the Sarangpur Mandir

Swami used to trample on the wet clay that was required for construction. The potter would be sitting on the plinth and Swami would give him a ball of clay and say, ‘Here, take this ball.’ The potter would apply the clay on the wall with his hands and Swami would keep supplying him with more. Subsequently, Swami’s feet would be soiled with clay. He would wet the clay again and mix it with mud. This could not be done without trampling it with his feet. Swami did this *seva* himself. This was how Swami did the mandir work; without concern for his body.”

In another incident, Yogiji Maharaj addressed a satsang assembly, saying, “In the beginning, Shastriji Maharaj himself would carry a pickaxe on his shoulder and dig the mandir foundation pit. At 5.00 p.m. he simply ate grams, salt and *rotla*. Buttermilk was not available. Sometimes, we used to beg for buttermilk in Sarangpur village. However, when Bhimji Kothari came to know that the villagers had given buttermilk to the sadhus, he had it stopped and ordered that the *bandiyas* [outcasts] should not be given buttermilk. The mandir was accomplished by begging and eating *rotla*. Everyone persevered with faith and patience. When Shastriji Maharaj made the Bochasan and Sarangpur mandirs there were no [devotees to help him] from Africa and Mumbai. The mandirs were built with the help of [a few devotees like] Ashabhai and Motibhai and through begging of alms.”



A sketch illustrates Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj begging for alms with *jholis* hanging from their shoulders

WITH JHOLIS AND AN UPWARD GOAL

In those days, to dream about constructing grand mandirs was one thing, and to actualize it was another matter altogether. The biggest reason for his yawning gap was a severe scarcity of money. How could one ever imagine building majestic mandirs when there was a problem in getting two proper meals a day? Despite this, Shastriji Maharaj had himself sketched a three-storey mandir plan in pencil. It seemed that the proposed mandir would turn out to be unique mandir not only in the history of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, but also in the chronicles of mandir-building in Hinduism. And that, too, the mandir would be built of stone, thus enabling it to last

for centuries to come.

Many questioned Shastriji Maharaj about how, without money, he would build a mandir of the calibre which kings and renowned wealthy people had built after due consideration from several perspectives? To this Shastriji Maharaj replied with pride, “I build mandirs with the grace of Swami-Shriji and my firmness in begging for alms with a *jholi*.”

Whenever devout disciples restrained Shastriji Maharaj from begging for alms, he would reply, “Shriji Maharaj himself had begged for alms and he also told his *paramhansas* to do so, simply because many aspirants would be able to have their darshan and be liberated. I, too, want to liberate whoever gives grains in my *jholi* to Akshardham.”

Yogiji Maharaj once recalled about his own incident related to begging for alms. He was 19 years old and begging with another young sadhu as his companion. One day, they received quite a generous amount of rations. Then he wrote in his diary, “We received 50 kg of coarse wheat flour and Shastriji Maharaj was very pleased with us.” In order to get provisions for cooking food in Sarangpur, Yogiji Maharaj used to leave the mandir in the early morning to beg for alms at various villages. But the principal difficulty he faced were the outright refusals that were instigated by the opponents of BAPS. They had issued an order, “No one should donate alms to these sadhus.” They had also enforced a strict command of not giving buttermilk to the sadhus.

When the sadhus received millet and jowar in alms, they did not have the means to grind them. The labourers and artisans toiled daily till they were exhausted, but there was no money to pay them. So, the only source of sustenance was whatever that was received in alms.

For 19-year-old Jnanjivandas (Yogiji Maharaj), who joined the Sanstha when the mandir construction in Sarangpur had started, the begging bag (*jholi*) on his shoulder was one of his hallmarks. Yogiji Maharaj and his companion sadhu would

beg for alms by travelling in the scorching summers from one village to another so that they could prepare meals for the artisans and labourers working on the mandir site. Sometimes, the sadhus visited homes even at night, begging with *jholis* on their shoulders and a lamp in one hand. This pitiful sight of sadhus, who also sang kirtans, recited talks and carried 20kg of grains in their *jholis*, became forever etched in the minds of many.

The young Yogiji Maharaj and Manat Swami often travelled from Sarangpur to Ningala, Keriya, Pipaliya, Ugamedi and other villages to beg for alms. After some time, their shoulders developed welt marks due to the weight and pressure of the *jholis*. Despite their daily efforts to gather alms for others they never felt bored or tired of it at all. Instead, they were always happy and their discourses on *upasana* were filled with pride and joy.

TESTING TIMES

But what were those days like? On 4 April 1964, Yogiji Maharaj was at Powai Vadi, Mumbai. He vividly described his early days in Sarangpur, “Once, Nagji Sheth had brought a bottle of cooking oil worth four *annas* to Sarangpur. [Several weeks later] he asked Haridas Swami, ‘Do you want any [cooking] oil?’ But Haridas had not used the bottle of cooking oil. The reason being that he would pound the three-day-old *rotla* made of millet flour and mix them with buttermilk, which a *bhagat* and two sadhus had begged from Lathidad, to eat. Thus, he had no opportunity to use the cooking oil? Additionally, there were no vegetables available for cooking, so the need for using cooking oil never arose. Thus, the bottle of cooking oil remained full and unused. When Nagji Sheth enquired whether another bottle was required, he was shown the full bottle.

“When Nagji Sheth asked him what he ate, he would reply, ‘Sugar crystals.’ And then he would add with pride, ‘How wonderful it is to eat *rotla*.’

“In those days many would say that Shastriji

would give up his work and leave, but it progressed rapidly. In those times we could not get flour. To acquire it we had to go to the villages during early evenings. Such were the difficult times. Would anyone have stayed in such circumstances? He would have simply given up and left. But Soma Bhagat, Aksharapurush Swami and Kothari Bhaktivallabh Swami were strong and steadfast.

“Whenever we went to Botad for begging alms, some people always sent a woman in front to proclaim aloud, ‘Do not give flour because they are *bandiyas*. It is an order from Gadhada (Mandir).’ Such were the adverse circumstances. How could one build a mandir in such a climate? But Swamishri built the mandir on the strength of begging alms (*jholi*). We have not seen the ‘nand’ *paramhansas* [of Shriji Maharaj] but Haridas was of that ilk. He was robust and always spoke optimistically, ‘The mandir will be done in a blink. Maharaj will do it.’

“We used to walk from Sarangpur to Kariyani to beg for alms. We did not have a buggy. Extortionists would take tax from whatever we collected in alms. They would ask, ‘How much flour do you have? Weigh it.’ They would trace us even when we took another road to evade them. While the Sarangpur Mandir was being built the tax officer also collected tax.

“Swamishri spoke inspiringly and the mandir was accomplished. The deities were installed. Daily offerings of food were also sponsored by devotees. New sadhus were initiated. And thus conditions improved.

“In Keriya I was assaulted. A *mandal* of sadhus came from Gadhada. We had also put up [in the same mandir]. Five devotees affiliated to another sect declared, ‘The *mundiyas* have entered our mandir.’ They told us to leave. I was thrown out. Vignan Swami was expelled. Bhagvatswarup Swami was locked in a room. There was no other person [to help us] in the village.¹

1. *Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj*, Part 3, pages 590-591.

“Once, we had gone to Sodhi. It was hot in the month of Fagan (February-March). The farmers had harvested wheat and made some *jadariyu* (sweet item). In the meantime, several *palas* (security men from the old sect) came riding on four camels and two horses from Dholera to beat us up. We left our meals and went away to Khoriyane, a nearby village. By tolerating such difficulties Swami thus gave me the [guru’s] seat. This seat is for having tolerated beatings and for being thrown out.

“Once, we went to Sundariyana. Swami told us, ‘Go and beg for alms.’ The regional administrator, Balubha, came up to me and tore my *jholi*. Such commotions happened, but we tolerated and perceived all with divinity. Thus, how much peace do I have! If I had fought back, how would I have progressed?

“In Swami’s time there were only a few people. I used to beg for alms, make *rotla*, serve food, discourse to others and sleep late.”

Once, while travelling from Sarangpur to Gadhada, Yogiji Maharaj recalled about how he asked for alms (*jholi*) in the villages that came along the way. On another occasion, while he was travelling on the road from Tajpur to Ningala, Swami told the driver to stop the car by a neem tree outside a village. Then Swami pointed towards a well and said, “The water in that well is very sweet. Whenever I travelled on this road with Shastriji Maharaj by bullock cart, I used to offer water from that well. Manat Swami and I used to ask for *jholi* in this village.”²

In 1941, when a festival on the full-moon day of Fagan and a *parayan* were about to be held, the *bhandari* (a sadhu in charge of kitchen arrangements) informed Shastriji Maharaj that the store was empty of all stocks of food materials. There was not a single grain of lentils and rice left. Then Shastriji Maharaj wrote a letter on 25 February 1941 to sadhus in Khatraj to beg for alms, “We do not have any rice grains and lentils at all [in

Sarangpur]. Explain to all in Khatraj and send 500 to 600 kg of grains at the earliest.

“Also, ask for *jholi* in Mehemdabad. Send us rice grains and lentils. Construction work for the dharmashala is ongoing. *Katha* and *parayan* will be held shortly. We don’t have a single grain of rice and lentils. We beg for mung in order to run things. But it is not proper to serve *khichdi* made of mung to guests. I am giving you the trouble to collect grains, so read this letter to the devotees and inspire them to donate grains for Thakorji in Sarangpur.”³

In spite of doing severe labour on site there was barely enough food to be served once a day to all. And even for that, Yogiji Maharaj and other sadhus travelled to villages and homes to beg for alms. Many years later Yogiji Maharaj recalled those hard times. He said, “I have asked for *jholi* at every home here for ten years. I have sanctified all the courtyards of the homes here. How could a festival be held after collecting only 10 kg of grains! Manat Swami and I used to ask for *jholi* here, and only thereafter could we go to cook food in Sarangpur. We merely garnered 10 kg of flour; such was the sorry state of affairs for us.”

On another occasion Pramukh Swami Maharaj described the difficult position and emergencies that the *kothari* sadhus had to face, “At that time, Shankar Bhagat was the *kothari* of Sarangpur Mandir. He was very devout and saintly. He was adept in running the administrative affairs of the mandir. Three *kotharis* had left Vartal to join Swamishri: Shankar Bhagat, Jibhai Ranchhod and Prabhudas Devshi. In Vartal, the *kotharis* had all the facilities and luxuries, whereas here they had to lift stones and look after the kitchen and agricultural activities. Back then things were quite cheap. The labourers were paid four paise per day. If there was a good carpenter he would earn 25 paise every day. Whenever the payment of wages were due, there would be no money to pay them. Consequently, Shankar Bhagat would

2. *Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj*, Part 4, page 274.

3. *Likhitant Shastri Yagnapurushdasji*, Part 2, page 446.

write to Shastriji Maharaj requesting him [to send money]. Whenever Shastriji Maharaj visited the homes of devotees, the latter would donate Rs.1 or 2. And when someone donated Rs. 5 it was considered to be a big amount.”⁴

Quite often, with no money in balance, it was not possible to pay the monthly wages to the masons and carpenters. So, Shankar Bhagat would explain to them and pay them at the end of the following month when money was available. This was how the mandir affairs and construction work were done. All the sadhus had to labour for the mandir construction work. They carried bricks and stones and did other *seva* amidst fierce opposition from outside. They begged for buttermilk in Lathidad and for grains and flour in Botad. Whatever they received in alms was prepared as food for the artisans and sadhus.

FROM REPORTS IN SWAMINARAYAN PRAKASH

Shastriji Maharaj travelled from village to village, inspiring satsang and collecting tithes and donations for mandir construction and maintenance. He endeavoured indefatigably. In those times vehicles were scarce, so Swamishri travelled by oxen cart and train to Botad or Jadila Road station and then to Sarangpur. This he did in spite of his ailing health. In the last 15 years, Swamishri suffered from many ailments and diseases, but in spite of that he never paid any heed to them because of the mandir construction and development work. How miserable and painful his state must have been? The following description in the *Swaminarayan Prakash* testifies to this.

“Pujya Swamishri’s soft feet were swollen due to arthritis, making it difficult for him to put his feet down on the floor. Thus, medicines sent by devotees were used to massage his feet. Once, a big boil had developed on his feet, and the devotees washed and dressed it with medicines. Despite all his physical pains and ills Swamishri always kept on discoursing and his



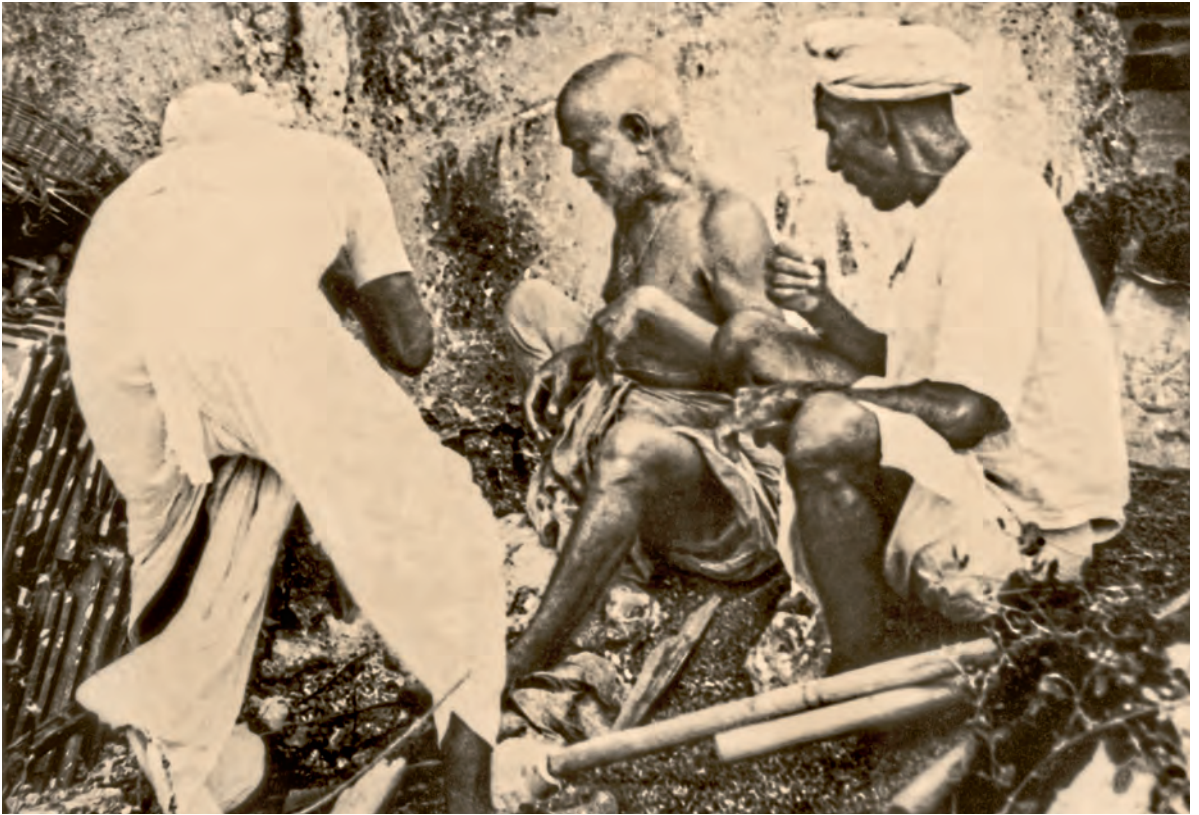
Shastriji Maharaj on his way to the mandir construction site in Sarangpur with a cloth tied on his head and bare-chested

face remained ever-radiant. The same enthusiasm was spread over his face and he regularly went for Thakorji’s darshan. He always visited the devotees and labourers working in different sections of the construction site and gave them appropriate instructions.

“He would also sit during the construction work and inspire them to sing kirtans while they pummelled the ceilings and floors with wooden mallets. This he did daily with great ease and in a healthy fashion. Only when his attendant reminded him of his ailment did he allow him to massage him with medicinal oil, thus taking note of his illness.”⁵

4. *Swaminarayan Prakash*, December 2014, pages 20-21.

5. *Swaminarayan Prakash*, October 1942, page 12.



Even during old age Shastriji Maharaj performs physical *seva* during the foundation work of the devotees' residential quarters in Sarangpur

In these hard times Shastriji Maharaj always encouraged and enthused those engaged in the mandir construction and other services. Some descriptions and reports in this context provide eloquent testimonies.

“Revered Shastriji Maharaj once resided in Sarangpur during the month of June. He was suffering from arthritis. Yet, for 25 days he engaged the devotees in the construction work and also discoursed to them and blessed them with bliss. He taught them *jnan*, *vairagya*, dharma and bhakti and made all happy.”⁶

“Presently, masonry work of various rooms are going on. Despite his age, Shastriji Maharaj comes on site and does the work himself. Many devotees, rich and poor alike, were doing the *seva* of filling up the mandir foundations. Nanda Saheb and other prominent householders performed the foundation-filling *seva* themselves and thus

strengthened the foundation of their *moksha*.”⁷

“Swamishri came every morning and evening and sat on a chair to observe the site work. Once, when Swami was supervising the hoisting of a stone on the gateway, Gopinath Swami told him that he would remain there and that he could go. But Swamishri stayed on. Only when the two stones were properly positioned did Swamishri go for lunch.”⁸

For all the sadhus and devotees engaged in *seva* the biggest source of inspiration was Shastriji Maharaj's presence and blessings. The devotees made efforts in doing *seva* to please Shastriji Maharaj, whereas Swamishri pleased them without caring for his own body.

Shastriji Maharaj showered his joy and blessings upon the sadhus and devotees who worked rigorously for the mandir construction work.

7. Ibid. March 1944, p.109.

8. Ibid. April 1948, p.167.

6. Ibid. August-September 1946, p. 189.

Some accounts of them are as follows:

“Shastriji Maharaj had invited Narayanji Maharaj to do *seva*. Swamishri used to sit on a chair where mud was being used to fill the kitchen foundation pit. Natvarlal and Jagjivan had come from Ahmedabad to do *seva*. Both did commendable *seva* by filling the foundations. Sanatandas Swami and other sadhus carried baskets of mud as *seva*. Keshav Bhagat and Revandas cut the stones together with a saw. Swamishri would smile at both of them and give them *prasad* to express his pleasure. Harikrishnadas Swami always remained in Swamishri’s *seva*. Soma Bhagat helped out in filling the foundation pit. Shastri Narayanswarupdasji, Nilkanthdas Swami and Bhailal Bhagat helped out in acquiring and loading stones from Lathidad. Swamishri often praised their *seva* and blessed them by placing his hand on their head.”⁹

An interesting description about the Pushpadolotsav celebrated in Sarangpur is as follows: “The foundation work of the grand entrance gate was going on. Sadhus and devotees, tipped basketfuls of mud into the foundation pit while singing kirtans. Swamishri was seated on a cot near the foundation pit, giving instructions and darshan to all. The scene was divine, oozing with the divine happiness of Akshardham. The mandir compound also resonated with the vibrations of the sound of kirtans and *dhun*.”¹⁰

SWAMISHRI’S INSIGHTS ABOUT CONSTRUCTION

Shastriji Maharaj’s insights into architecture and art were unique. They are reflected in the mandirs he built. The intricate carvings of the wooden dharmashala and *haveli* were done through Swamishri’s own insight and supervision. He guided the carpenters and artisans about the type and intricacy of carvings of the mandir pillars, *shikhars*, domes, *pradakshina*, the

outer chamber of the sanctum-sanctorum, doors, door frames, steps and other things. The artisans were astonished by Swamishri’s sense of art. He also knew about the quarries from which quality stones could be extracted. He also made a note of the sizes of stones received, sizes after the stones were sculpted, the locations where the stones were to be fixed. He also knew which stone had been fixed according to the designed plans.

Shastriji Maharaj was very particular about acquiring and purchasing materials for the construction of mandirs. He personally travelled to Bilimora, Bhavnagar and other places to inspect and acquire wood. He also supervised the cutting of trees. He had a special knack of what types of wood to use for which purposes, which even expert carpenters did not have. For stones, he would meet the dealers in Dhrangadhra and Porbandar. In spite of financial adversities, he never compromised in spendings related to the mandir and Thakorji, no matter what the cost was. Conversely, he was meticulous in not allowing any unnecessary spending of a single paisa.

In this way, Shastriji Maharaj gave his fullest attention in building the rooms, assembly hall, *haveli*, water tank, and kitchen and dining facilities for sadhus and devotees. In all his efforts he always thought about others and not one bit for himself.

Reminiscing on these matters Pramukh Swami Maharaj once averred, “All their lives Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj had never done anything for their physical comfort and happiness. While making mandirs and dharmashalas they never had any physical comforts. They travelled to villages, begging for alms to make such facilities for us. They tolerated severe hardships. I have seen Shastriji Maharaj cleaning, wiping and preparing floors by smearing cow dung. They have carried stones on their head and mixed lime and mortar [for construction work].”¹¹

9. *Swaminarayan Prakash*, April 1948, p.120.

10. *Ibid*, February 1947, p.89.

11. *Swaminarayan Prakash*, January 2015, p.28.



The under-construction work of Sarangpur Mandir's grand entrance gate. Shastriji Maharaj had declared that whosoever did darshan of the entrance gate would be liberated to Akshardham

THE GRAND ENTRANCE GATE

During his autumn years, when Shastriji Maharaj was still facing a severe money crises and failing health, he commenced work on the huge entrance gate of Sarangpur Mandir. Many wondered why he had launched this project, but Shastriji Maharaj was clear and determined. When the foundation pit was being dug Harjivandas Swami asked Swamishri, "What is the need to build such a huge entrance gate when the stones used would be enough to build another mandir?" Shastriji Maharaj replied with passion, "This mandir and entrance gate will inspire sat-sang in others, and whoever appreciates them

will be liberated to Akshardham by Maharaj and Swami."¹²

A devotee asked Swamishri, "Is it appropriate to invest so much money in building this entrance gate?" Swamishri replied, "How much was spent in building the Suez Canal? Read its history. This is the entrance to go to Akshardham! Whoever sees it and remembers it on his deathbed his soul will be blessed. That is why I have started building this gate."

Shastriji Maharaj's motive was generous and elevating.

EVERYTHING FOR THE SAKE OF AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM MAHARAJ

The grand mandir in Sarangpur began to take shape due to the unity, faith and sacrifice of Shastriji Maharaj's sadhus and devotees. However, some opponents distorted the minds of Limbdi Thakor Saheb, who had given the land for the mandir. They told him that the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj should not be installed there. When Thakor Saheb told Shastriji Maharaj about not installing Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Swamishri looked with determined eyes and boldly replied, "Thakor Saheb! Whatever hardships and pains I have tolerated have been for the sake of Mahaprabhu Sahajanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami. And, I have tonsured my head for the sake of Akshar-Purushottam. So, Babu, my Lord is Shri Sahajanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami, and their *murtis* will be installed in the central shrine of the mandir."

Both Thakor Saheb and Kaka Saheb were stunned on witnessing Swamishri's powerful form. Subsequently, Thakor Saheb folded his palms and humbly bowed before Swamishri, saying, "Swamiji, do as you think fit. Do not pay any heed to what I've said."¹³

On 8 May 1916 (Vaishakh *sud* 6) Shastriji Maharaj ritually consecrated the *murtis* of

12. *Swaminarayan Prakash*, October 1960, p.400.

13. *Shastri Yagnapurushdasji*, Part 1, pages 426-427.

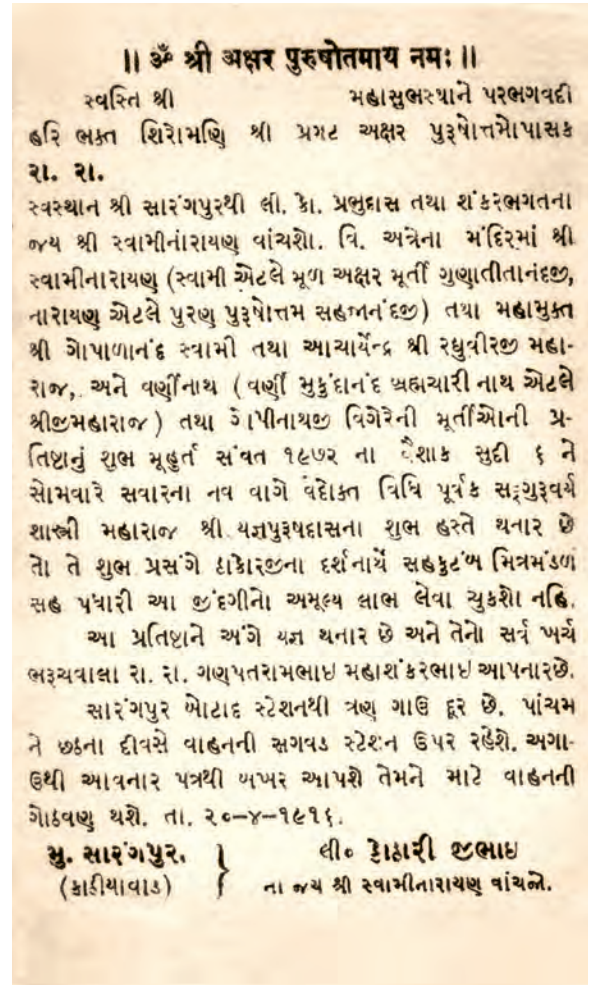
Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine of Sarangpur Mandir. Loud hails of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj filled the air. The invitation card for the *murti-pratishtha* reflects the culmination of the profound faith and efforts of Shastriji Maharaj and his disciples (see right).

Shastriji Maharaj constantly nourished faith in the devotees by writing letters. But whenever antagonists made false criticisms about the Sanstha, the sadhus and devotees would become disturbed and worried. A year after the *pratishtha* of Sarangpur Mandir Swamishri wrote a letter in this regard to Kothari Bhaktivallabhdas Swami on 29 October 1917 from Purushottampura, “When someone demotes or criticizes us we will be victorious. The reason being, our failings and errors will be rectified and those who censure us will have to bear the sins [of doing so]! Finally, only truth will be victorious... Shriji Maharaj is the ultimate controller of infinite *brahmands*. Only he knows of those who have a good intellect or a bad one. We should behave and think for the good of all in all ways. To those who trouble us we should help them in return, but never retaliate. Because that is not the path of saintliness (*sad-huta*)... Presently, Shriji Maharaj and Swami are present before us, so we should do what pleases them. Whatever that has happened till now is due to their firm wish and day by day our growth is also due to their doership.”

TEST OF FAITH

Many challenges came during the mandir construction in Sarangpur, which tested the faith and courage of all.

One day, devotees were hoisting a stone of the middle *shikhar* amidst chantings of ‘Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj *ni jai*, Shastriji Maharaj *ni jai*.’ The 150 *mana* (three tons) stone was being slowly raised with seven ropes tied to it. When the stone reached half-way a single rope snapped. Before anyone could do anything about it the second, third, fourth and finally the sixth



The invitation card for the *murti-pratishtha* of Sarangpur Mandir

rope snapped. Now the stone was hanging mid-way on only one rope. Everyone stood aghast. If the stone fell, it would break other sculpted stones lying on the ground. Immediately, Shastriji Maharaj was called and he perceived the situation in split seconds. Swamishri raised his right hand and said, “Now, the stone will not fall!” Then someone softly asked, “Should we slowly bring the stone down?” Swamishri replied with grit, “Why do you want to bring it down? Hoist it!” Then Swamishri turned to Soma Bhagat, who was standing besides him, and said, “Bhagat, climb onto the stone and tie the broken ropes together.”

Soma Bhagat, Aksharpurushdasji and others were Swamishri’s robust sadhus. They easily



A rare photo of the brave-hearted Soma Bhagat



In spite of ailing health Shastriji Maharaj observes the mandir construction work



Cutting stones with a saw

moved large Porbandar stones without any modern equipments. They served with pride and understanding, believing, “If we die while doing *seva* for Swamishri then our souls will attain Akshardham.” Thus, without a moment’s delay, the dauntless Soma Bhagat hurried to get onto the stone. Everyone was anxious as to what would happen. They feared that the stone would fall when Soma Bhagat got onto it. While everyone was entangled in doubts and fears Soma Bhagat climbed the mandir with alacrity and with a loud hail of ‘Shastriji Maharaj *ni jai*’ he jumped onto the stone. The stone lurched due to Soma Bhagat’s impact, and everyone below missed a heartbeat. Only two persons were calm and steady – Shastriji Maharaj and Soma Bhagat! Then in a matter of seconds Soma Bhagat balanced himself on the stone and tied the snapped ropes. All the while Swamishri was standing confidently with his right hand raised and eyes focused on Soma Bhagat. After his task was over Soma Bhagat climbed down and bowed at Swamishri’s feet. Swamishri raised him with both his hands and blessed him with profound joy and love. He then appreciated and praised him, “Glory to Soma Bhagat and honours to your bhakti!”

Today, even after 100 years, the boundless faith and spirit of *seva* of Soma Bhagat and others are still felt in the air at Sarangpur Mandir.

PRAMUKH SWAMIJI’S MEMORIES

After the *murti-pratishtha* rituals were over in 1916 the mandir complex was still incomplete. Only the sanctum-sanctorum (*garbhgruh*) was ready. Thereafter, work continued for the next four decades, but still there was pending work.

At that time, in 1939, a young sadhu was initiated by Shastriji Maharaj, who would later shoulder Swamishri’s work. The young sadhu was Narayanswarupdasji, popularly known and revered today as Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

After taking *diksha* he came to Sarangpur when he was 19 years old. At that time work on



The young Kothari Narayanswarupdas of Sarangpur



The *sabha*guruh testifies to the work done by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

the mandir dome and stone arches between pillars was going on. Shastriji Maharaj's living quarters comprised of a hut made of mud and wood. Swamishri built the mandir while living in this ordinary hut. When Narayanswarupdasji arrived, work on the *sabha mandap*, Shastriji Maharaj's room and the passage was going on. On recounting the experiences of his times Pramukh Swami Maharaj once shared, "After becoming a sadhu I came to Sarangpur at Swamishri's behest. During that time construction of the dharmashala was going on. In those times liquid lime was applied on the walls and floors. First, lime was sprinkled, then water was added to it and thereafter the surface was pounded and finally lime was applied over it. Lime was also used for plastering walls and floors. Swamishri engaged everyone in *seva*. When Vinayakrao Trivedi Saheb, a prominent devotee of Ahmedabad, came Swamishri also told him to pound the floor. The more the lime work was pounded, the stronger the floor became. I too had got the *seva* of pounding lime."¹⁴

On another occasion Pramukh Swami Maharaj narrated, "Shastriji Maharaj wanted the mandir work to begin at 7.30 a.m. daily. But the labourers always came late. After arriving they would smoke bidis and start work later. At 11.30 a.m. they would become restless. It was for these reasons that Shastriji Maharaj always insisted, 'Never hire labourers.' So, the sadhus and devotees used

to do *seva*. Purushottambhai from Anand and devotees from Badalpur also worked on site. Keshav Bhagat, Chaturbhujdas, Revandas and others would join in the *seva*. They would cut stones and give them to the masons and artisans. Thus, along with carpenters and *somapur*as, we also had devotees and sadhus doing *seva*. I, too, would climb the scaffolding and hoist stones. Formerly, the stones were raised with ropes in Sarangpur, but later chain pullies were used. In my time pullies were in operation.

"At that time my body was lightweight and I was agile and energetic. So, I could easily move and climb on a scaffold. I had no problem in hoisting or pulling stones. I did that during the construction work in Atladra, in which a chain pulley was used."¹⁵

In 1946, Shastriji Maharaj appointed Narayanswarupdas as the *kothari* of Sarangpur Mandir due to his many humble and meticulous services. Despite 30 years having passed since the mandir's inauguration, times were still hard for a *kothari* to run the mandir affairs. In this reference, Pramukh Swami Maharaj once revealed, "I was young when Shastriji Maharaj appointed me as the *kothari*. I came [to become a sadhu] while I was studying in school. So, I did not have any experience in running the social and administrative affairs. There was Bhaichand Sheth in Sarangpur. Swamishri told me, 'He is your assistant and will

14. *Swaminarayan Prakash*, January 2015, p.16.

15. *Ibid.* January 2015, p.17.



In 1952, Yogiji Maharaj built a memorial shrine and installed Maharaj's *charnarvind* to commemorate the cremation spot of Shastriji Maharaj. Later, Pramukh Maharaj built a memorial mandir on the same spot – Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir

write the accounts. You take care and get the work done from him.'

"In those times people used to donate either four or eight *annas* or one rupee, and those who were wealthy would donate at the most two to three rupees. Every month we got 25 to 30 rupees in donations. Shastriji Maharaj would receive donations by performing *parayans* and home visits during his travels in Gujarat. He would send them to Sarangpur.

"The work on the stone arches between the mandir pillars was going on at a snail's pace. Simultaneously, Swamishri started the construction work of Gadhada Mandir. He had also commenced the construction of the *haveli* and big entrance gate at the same time. The foundation pit was first dug and later filled by sadhus and devotees. Once this was completed, the masons started their work. This was how Swamishri worked. We could barely manage to

pay the wages of workers and artisans. On the other hand building materials, cement and iron had to be purchased. We used to bring the materials on credit from Rajab Alibhai, who had a shop in Botad. We also bought wood on credit from Jasani. Furthermore, Swamishri had started building a mandir in Gadhada. Subsequently, we had to face a lot of difficulties and problems, but Shastriji Maharaj had great courage and confidence. It is understandable that when one has money one can spend and do projects, but when there was no money, no means of monetary inflow, the Bochasan Mandir was incomplete, work in Sarangpur was still going on and work in Gadhada had commenced then how could one cope!

"This was the situation then, but Shastriji Maharaj's works were such that everyone remained in high spirits. He would infuse courage and confidence in us in the smallest of things and also about money matters. He was born to give and disseminate the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam. That was why he tolerated untold pains and difficulties in the face of opposition and accomplished his work."¹⁶

When Shastriji Maharaj started work on the grand entrance gate of Sarangpur Mandir in 1946, Narayanswarupdasji enthusiastically obeyed his commands to join in the *seva*. He was lean and agile. He tied a cloth on his head and helped excavate and later fill the foundations. He engaged himself in all types of minor and major *sevas* regardless of cold or heat and thirst or hunger. As a result he had become a little tanned and thin.

When he served in Atladra the heat from churning the lime had given rise to red spots on his body. Even then he paid no heed to his body and kept on churning the lime required for the construction work.

As *kothari* of Sarangpur Mandir, one of the many developments he made was building the electric powerhouse. The devotees had written 'Ko.

16. *Swaminarayan Prakash*, January 2015, p.21.



In 1974, Pramukh Swami Maharaj commenced the construction of a memorial mandir on the cremation spot of Shastriji Maharaj in Sarangpur. With his inspiration many sadhus and devotees performed the construction seva. Swamishri, too, often observed the construction work himself



Na. 1949', meaning 'Kothari Narayanswarupdas, 1949' on the powerhouse, in his memory.

After Shastriji Maharaj's earthly departure Pramukh Swami continued his efforts for the progress of Sarangpur Mandir under the guidance and blessings of Yogiji Maharaj. Later, to fulfil the wish of Yogiji Maharaj, he built and consecrated a memorial shrine (Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir) to pay tributes to Shastriji Maharaj.

In the last 50 years, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has changed the face of Sarangpur through his unceasing efforts, guidance and blessings.

From 1911, the year the land for Sarangpur Mandir was acquired, to the present day, one observes in all the works of the Gunatit gurus that they have given tangible forms to the wishes of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and thus offered their supreme devotion to him. Today, countless sadhus and devotees sing, "*Sadaiva Sarangpurasya ramie, Sumandire hi-Akshardham tulye...*" ("Forever



Swamishri views and gives guidance for the new development plans for Sarangpur Mandir

Sarangpur is beautiful and its mandir is like Akshardham..."). ♦



Yagnapurush Sabha Mandapam, where daily discourses are held



Pramukh Ashram, residential and study facilities for sadhus

1. BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir
2. Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir
3. Sarvasva
4. Yagnapurush Pravesh Dwar
5. Satsang Karyalaya
6. Yagnapurush Bhuvan
7. Pramukh Ashram
8. Yagnapurush Ashram
9. Yagnapurush Mandapam
10. Yagnapurush Atithi Bhuvan
11. Pramukh Mahol
12. Brahm Kutir
13. Gunatit Kutir
14. Akshar Kutir
15. Pragji Kutir
16. Shayona Arts
17. Yogi Kunj
18. Yagnapurush Powerhouse
19. BAPS Vidyalaya
20. Pramukh Kutir

NEW EXPANSIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS

A few decades after the consecration of the mandir in 1916 the mandir started gaining popularity. No one had envisioned in its fledgling years that the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, which was the fulfillment of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's wish and the result of the Herculean efforts of Shastriji Maharaj, situated in a nondescript village would one day become a global destination for



thousands of devotees and aspirants.

The contributions of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj in the creation and development of the Sarangpur Mandir are most noteworthy. Thereafter, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has contributed immensely to the rapid and extensive development of the mandir in the last two decades. Yogiji Maharaj had prophesied, “In future, Pramukh Swami will extensively develop the mandir.”

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BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir educational complex



A centre for Sanskrit and philosophical studies



Birdseye view of mandir complex

SARANGPUR MANDIR CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

3-13 May 2016, Sarangpur

Riding on his Rojho horse, Bhagwan Swaminarayan circled a large area of land in Sarangpur and proclaimed to Jiva Khachar, the village chieftain, that he had just performed the Shilanyas Ceremony for a grand mandir.

Fulfilling this promise, on 8 June 1916 CE

(Vaishakh *sud* 6, V.S. 1972), Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the magnificent BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir in Sarangpur.

Over the past 100 years, this beautiful mandir has served society and inspired countless individuals through a vibrant array of spiritual,



educational, social and other activities.

This is the land where Gunatitanand Swami, during a visit to Sarangpur, declared that a grand mandir would be built where devotees could forever serve Shriji Maharaj.

This is the holy place where Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj firmly resolved to attain *brahmavidya* by obediently serving Gunatitanand Swami.

This is the sacred site where Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj overcame endless hardships, reflecting his unwavering dedication to the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*.

This is the mandir where Brahmaswarup Yogiji

Maharaj spent many years helping in the construction and tolerating insults while begging for alms for the mandir.

This is the supreme holy place which Pramukh Swami Maharaj holds dear in his heart, and which, due to his divine personality, works and saintliness, is Akshardham on earth.

To commemorate the centenary year of this sacred BAPS mandir, with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, numerous spiritual celebrations and projects for the benefit of society were organized.

The following is an overview.



A statue of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on Rojho horse and an *annakut* offered to Thakorji at the front of the mandir





BAPS students cleaning Botad railway station



Launching of construction of toilets for residents of Sarangpur

Art Competition, 17 February 2015

117 students of the BAPS Vidyamandir in Sarangpur, participated.

Adhiveshan, 24 December 2015

680 students participated by memorizing Vachanamruts, Swamini Vatos, *shlokas-sakhis*, kirtans.

Akhand Bhajan-Bhakti Yagna 3 February to 13 May 2015

For 101 days, devotees continuously and enthusiastically, offered devotion in various ways: *dhun*, *mala*, *pradakshina*, *dandvat-panchang pranam*, reciting Janmangal Namavali and listening to discourses. In total 5,784 male and female devotees chanted the *dhun* for 32,744 hours, turned 146,740 *malas*, performed 16,450 *dandvats* (men) and 75,260 *panchang pranams* (women), wrote 3,640 pages of the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*, recited the Janmangal Namavali 4,955 times, performed 231,305 *pradakshinas* and read various sacred texts for 20,965 minutes.

Better Living Seminars

- 25-28 May 2015: Brahmadarshan Swami gave a series of speeches on the 'Pillars of Culture'.
- 10-14 April 2016: Atmatrupta Swami spoke

on topics such as, 'Unity Is Our Strength', 'Dharma Protects' and 'Removing Fear'.

Also, sadhus conducted workshops on the various topics and message-oriented skits were presented.

Around 2,500 devotees participated in these seminars.

Tree Planting Campaign

On 27 July 2015, Pramukh Swami Maharaj planted a tree in Sarangpur Mandir and sanctified other saplings by showering flower petals on them. Thereafter, BAPS *balaks* planted around 1,100 trees in Sarangpur and surrounding villages; they also taught the villagers how to nurture the saplings. The tree varieties planted included: *jambu*, *jamphal*, *dadam*, *badam*, *limdo*, *nilgiri*, *gulmahor*, *kanji*, *charu*, *asopalav* and *ambli*.

De-addiction Campaign, 23 to 27 August 2015

Students went to the homes of villagers to explain the health, family, financial and social benefits of quitting addictions. Many villagers pledged to give up their addictions.

Shravan Month Parayan, August 2015

Around 1,500 devotees in surrounding villages attended the three-day *parayans* presented by Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Jnaneshwar Swami.



Medical camp



Students visit the Sanskruti Yatra Exhibition

Sant Padhramanis, 20 and 29 September 2015

Every home in Sarangpur village was blessed by the visit of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and sadhus. The devotees joyously welcomed Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with great devotion. Each home was gifted a *murti* of Thakorji and a *mala* sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Also, the sadhus imparted the messages of shunning addictions and developing family unity.

Cleanliness Campaign

- Toilets were constructed for 167 houses lacking such amenities in Sarangpur village. Since all homes in the village now had proper toilet facilities, Sarangpur village won an award as the cleanest village in Botad district.
- 11 October 2015: 70 students of the BAPS Vidyamandir cleaned the railway station in Botad.
- 19 December 2015: 200 BAPS volunteers cleaned Sarangpur village and a 5-km stretch of the Barwala to Botad road that passes by Sarangpur. They also cleaned the bus station, main roads of the village and the area surrounding the mandir.

Swaminarayan Vishwashanti Mahayagna 14-15 November 2015

A total of 6,925 devotees from India and

abroad participated in this Mahayagna for World Peace. Swamishri blessed the devotees on both days.

Women's Wing

- 16 November 2015: Over 2,500 women attended the special Women's Assembly.
- 100 special satsang assemblies were held. On 25 January 2016, during the 95th assembly, 95 bhajans were sung.

Special Gatherings, 3 and 10 January 2016

A total of 1,400 well-wishers, teachers and dignitaries from villages surrounding Sarangpur attended the special assemblies held at Sarangpur Mandir. The assemblies featured inspiring speeches by sadhus and the release of *Paratpar*, the Gujarati translation of Dr Abdul Kalam's book *Transcendence*.

Thus, throughout the centenary year, many events and activities were organized.

Sanskriti Yatra Exhibition, 16 January to 28 February 2016

An inspiring exhibition entitled 'Let Us Become Ideal' was set up in the mandir precincts. Students studying in standards 5 to 12 from 190 schools from surrounding villages were invited to

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CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS FINALE

3-13 May 2016, Sarangpur

The 10-day celebrations to conclude the centenary year were launched by Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 3 May 2016 with the lighting of the inaugural lamp.







Swamishri lights the auspicious *divo* to inaugurate the ten-day celebrations

DAY 1, 4 May: Parshad Diksha, Group 1

See p. 46.

DAY 2, 5 May: Pramukh Samvatsar

Today marked the third anniversary of Swamishri's stay in Sarangpur.

The assembly commenced at 5 p.m. in Pramukh Vatika and featured video memories of Swamishri's stay in Sarangpur. Swamishri's attendant sadhus narrated some incidents from the past three years.

When Swamishri arrived in the Pramukh Mandiram, youths performed a welcome dance, sadhus sang verses from the *Bhaktachintamani* and *Hari Smruti* texts describing Shriji Maharaj's divine incidents.

Then, after Mahant Swami had performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri, *arti* was performed and *mantra-pushpanjali* was offered.

Following this, Bhadresh Swami recounted outstanding occasions from Swamishri's stay and thereafter the youths performed a

drama entitled 'Abhagiya Karunashankar' – 'Unfortunate Karunashankar'.

Then Mahant Swami presented a *kalash* filled with rice grains offered by the sadhus and devotees as a prayer to make everyone spiritually pure and perfect. Swamishri took some grains in his hands and blessed all.

Finally, Narayanmuni Swami prayed on everyone's behalf to Swamishri.

DAY 3, 6 May: Sarangpur Mandir

The various spiritual, social, cultural, educational, medical, environmental and other activities conducted under the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur were highlighted.

The programme began at 6.30 p.m. with a bhajan specially composed by Madhurvadan Swami describing these activities, interspersed with videos depicting the activities.

Thereafter, sadhus narrated inspiring stories resulting from these activities and the inspirational guidance of Swamishri while conducting these activities.

The assembly concluded with Swamishri's darshan in the Pramukh Mandiram.

Nagar-yatra

The various communities residing in Sarangpur village organized a grand *nagar-yatra* (procession) through the village in honour of the services Pramukh Swami Maharaj has performed for the village.

Over a thousand devotees and well-wishers participated in the procession, which began and concluded at the mandir.

In the assembly that followed, youths presented short skits depicting the various activities.

The village's senior officials and community leaders expressed their deep appreciation to Swamishri for his selfless services to the village.

DAY 4, 7 May: Parshad Diksha, Group 2

See p. 46.

DAY 5, 8 May: Shriji Maharaj in Sarangpur

Shriji Maharaj's innumerable visits to Sarangpur are a source of countless divine memories.

The 6.30 p.m. assembly began with sadhus narrating the inspiring stories of Shriji Maharaj's exemplary devotees. Then, sadhus sang verses from the *Bhaktachintamani* describing Shriji Maharaj's Fuldol celebrations in Sarangpur.

Youths presented a drama depicting stories of Shriji Maharaj alleviating devotees of their difficulties, narrating the Vachanamrut and promising ultimate liberation to all. Another drama based on the story of Haja Bharwad was also performed.

Then, Viveksagar Swami spoke about Shriji Maharaj's divine incidents in Sarangpur.

Youths presented another drama based on the Fuldol celebration at Rathod Dhadhal's house during which Shriji Maharaj identified Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman by touching him with a *raas* stick. This scene was recreated in the Pramukh Mandiram, with Shriji Maharaj's *murti* moving to touch Swamishri with a stick – identifying



Top: Swamishri prepares *shiro*. Bottom: Grand procession

him as the manifest form of Aksharbrahman. Meanwhile, sadhus played *raas* on the platform in front of the Pramukh Mandiram.

After *samuh arti*, Narayanmuni Swami prayed to Swamishri to bless all with the attainment of Akshardham. Swamishri responded by spontaneously raising his hand to bless all.

Then, Swamishri inaugurated *Sarang Smruti*, a two-volume publication commemorating the history of Sarangpur since the time of Shriji Maharaj and the 100-year history of the BAPS mandir.

When Shastriji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of Sarangpur Mandir in 1916, thousands of devotees were served *shiro*, which remained hot and fresh due to Shastriji Maharaj's blessings. This incident was enacted by youths. At the same time, Swamishri participated by stirring a potful of *shiro* prepared in the Pramukh Mandiram.

Shiro was then offered to Thakorji as sadhus sang *thal*. Thereafter, everyone in the assembly was served hot *shiro* as *prasad*.



Students of BAPS Vidyamandir school present a melodious kirtan *aradhana*



Sadhus and devotees perform *samuh arti*

DAY 6, 9 May: Kirtan Aradhana

Students of the BAPS Vidyamandir in Sarangpur presented a melodious kirtan *aradhana* in the evening assembly. Over the previous three months, the team of 22 pupils had presented the kirtan *aradhana* at 24 BAPS centres throughout Gujarat.

Swamishri showered his blessings on the youngsters and the sadhus who had trained them.

DAY 7, 10 May: Bhagwati Diksha

See p. 46.

DAY 8, 11 May: Sarangpur and Pramukh Swami Maharaj

The evening assembly began at 6.30 p.m. in the Pramukh Vatika.

Jnaneshwar Swami narrated Swamishri's life and work in Sarangpur from the time when Shastriji Maharaj appointed him as the *kothari* at the age of 24.

A video was shown of Swamishri himself narrating the famous story of the Sarangpur Mandir gate, in which Swamishri's devotion to his guru was clearly evident.

Then, a video compilation of the many festival celebrations held in Sarangpur in Swamishri's presence was shown. After Swamishri had arrived in the Pramukh Mandiram, youths dressed as devotees from the time of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj recalled several incidents involving Swamishri in Sarangpur.

The assembly concluded with Swamishri's darshan.

DAY 9, 12 May: Maha-Abhishek and Shri Hari's Statue Inauguration

See p. 37.

DAY 10, 13 May: Sarangpur Mandir Centenary Celebration Assembly

See p. 40.





MAHA-ABHISHEK AND SHRI HARI'S STATUE INAUGURATION

12 May 2016, Sarangpur

The penultimate day of the ten-day celebrations featured the 'Anant Kalash Maha-Abhishek,' inauguration of the statue of Shriji Maharaj on his Rojho horse, maha-annakut, light and sound show and maha-arti of the mandir. Thousands of devotees from throughout India and abroad were present to participate in these celebratory events.

ANANT KALASH MAHA-ABHISHEK

Today, Vaishakh *sud* 6 (12 May), marked the 100th *patotsav* (anniversary) of the BAPS mandir in Sarangpur. Exactly 100 years ago, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the mandir, consecrating the *murtis* of Parabrahman Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and Shri Gopalanand Swami in the central shrine.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived for darshan in the main mandir and performed the *maha-abhishek* of the *murtis* at the same time that Shastriji Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha*.

On 10 May, 1,001 decorated *kalashes* containing water collected from places sanctified by

Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara* had been worshipped. The *kalashes* also contained precious stones, various medicinal extracts, soil from sacred pilgrim places and other items.

The Vedic *pujan* of the *kalashes* had been performed at the Narayan Kund, the nearby stepwell sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara*. Thereafter, women devotees carried the 1,001 worshipped *kalashes* on their head in traditional style and walked from Narayan Kund to the mandir.

That afternoon, the *kalashes* were decoratively arranged outside the Pramukh Mandiram, where Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed *pujan* of the *kalashes*.

On 11 May, from 7.30 a.m., the *mahayagna*



Swamishri uses a special set up to perform the centenary *patotsav abhishek* of the *murtis* in the central shrine



Sadguru sadhus perform the Vedic *puja* and *arti* of the *kalashes*



Grand *annakut* at the front of the *mandir*

was commenced by the *sadguru* sadhus in the specially erected *abhishek mandap* to the side of the main *mandir*. At 4.00 p.m. the *sadguru* sadhus, together with 1,001 *yajmans* and other sadhus performed the *kalash mahapuja* rituals. Learned Brahmins continuously recited Vedic mantras throughout the rituals.



Devotees perform *abhishek*

After Swamishri had offered *abhishek* using these sanctified *kalashes*, he performed the 100th *patotsav arti* of the *murtis*.

Then, the *sadguru* sadhus (Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and Viveksagar Swami) offered *abhishek* to the *murtis*, followed by other sadhus.

Devotees, male and female, also had the opportunity to offer *abhishek* to the *murtis*, by pouring a small *kalash* of saffron-scented water into a giant *kalash* placed under the main dome of the *mandir*. From here, the water was pumped through a series of pipes and sprayed on to the *murtis* in the central shrine.

Many thousands of devotees participated in the *abhishek* ritual, which started at 9.30 a.m. and concluded at 5.30 p.m.



Unveiling of the majestic bronze statue of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on his Rojho horse

INAUGURATION OF BRONZE STATUE OF SHRIJI MAHARAJ ON HIS ROJHO HORSE

By the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj a magnificent bronze statue of Shriji Maharaj on Rojho was created and installed at the front of the mandir, to serve as a memory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan having performed the *shilanyas* ceremony of the mandir on his Rojho horse.

Swamishri arrived at the statue spot, which was concealed by youths holding large lotus petals made of cloth. Swamishri performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and then untied the *nadachhadi* and revealed the beautiful statue.

Swamishri was delighted by the superb statue, prepared under the guidance of Ishwarcharan Swami by Bhaktinandan Swami and Shrijiwarup Swami.

MANDIR MAHA-ARTI

At 8.45 p.m. with sadhus and devotees seated

in the vast mandir grounds, a spectacular light and sound show based on the history and importance of the mandir was presented. All the mandir pillars, small and large domes, *shikhars*, *kangras*, *jharukhas* had been embellished with lights of various colours. To the accompaniment of verses singing the mandir's glory a superb display of lights interspersed with skits was presented. The skits depicted how everyone who saw and experienced the spirituality of the mandir were overwhelmed and deeply touched.

At the conclusion of the 45-minute presentation, everyone participated in the *samuh maharti* of the mandir. This finale was accompanied by a superb fireworks display from the top of the mandir. The show was a tribute to the dedication and devotion of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and generations of sadhus and devotees who have served here. ♦



SARANGPUR MANDIR CENTENARY CELEBRATION ASSEMBLY

13 May 2016

Despite the searing 45°C heat, over 75,000 devotees enthusiastically flocked to Sarangpur for the mandir's centenary celebration assembly.

A beautiful 22-feet high replica of Sarangpur Mandir had been erected on the 130-ft long and 90-feet deep stage. The *murtis* of Dham, Dhama and Mukta together with the *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj gave darshan to all on a high pedestal in front of the mandir. In front was a large transparent cabin in which a life-size *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was installed on a *sinhasan*.

Behind the mandir replica was a giant 90-feet wide and 27-feet tall LED screen which was used with great creative impact throughout the celebration assembly.

The programme began at 6.45 p.m. with sadhus and youths (Amit Daate, Jaydeep Swadia and others) singing *dhun* and the bhajan, '*Sārangpur Mandirni Shatābdi ānande ujavie re...*'.

All the *sadguru* sadhus were seated on the stage, together with the chief guests – Shri Vijay Rupani (BJP State President and Minister) and Shri Shaktisinh Gohil, a leading politician.

First, Jnaneshwar Swami, *kothari* of Sarangpur



Youths perform dance to welcome Swamishri to the celebration assembly



Top: Jnaneshwar Swami narrates the history of Sarangpur Mandir.
Bottom: Over 75,000 devotees attended the celebration

Mandir, welcomed all to the celebration and narrated the history of the mandir and its development over the years.

Then, after the chief guests had addressed the assembly, everyone on the stage took their seats in the audience as the three-hour dance-drama stage programme began with a lively dance honouring the mandir.

After the dance, as various images were displayed on the giant LED screen, the voice of the mandir spoke to the assembly, "I, the Sarangpur Swaminarayan Mandir, welcome you all. Today, my heart is throbbing with joy, since, over the past 100 years I have been blessed with the constant proximity of Parambrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Satpurushes." This led to a video of Pramukh Swami Maharaj describing the profound glory of Sarangpur Mandir.

Thereafter, youths performed a dance while

historic visuals were displayed on the giant LED screen.

The scene then retreated 200 years in time with the enactment of a festive procession led by village chieftain Jiva Khachar welcoming Bhagwan Swaminarayan on his first visit to the village in 1805.

This was the first of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's innumerable visits to the village, where he celebrated many festivals and gave great spiritual joy to all. Representing these, a colourful Pushpadolotsav was depicted, recreating the atmosphere of 200 years ago.

Then, the historic occasion on 4 March 1809 of Bhagwan Swaminarayan riding his Rojho horse and thus performing the groundbreaking ceremony for a future mandir was relived through a superb animation video on the LED screen. Again, in 1825, Bhagwan Swaminarayan promised Jiva



Youths perform skits depicting the dedication of the sadhus and devotees during the mandir construction



Skit showing how Shastriji Maharaj's efforts and encouragement inspired the sadhus and devotees

Khachar that a grand mandir would be built here, where he would reside with his divine abode.

The joyous acceptance of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's promise by Jiva Khachar and other devotees was enacted on the stage. Also, the momentous Fuldol celebration at Rathod Dhadhal's home during which Bhagwan Swaminarayan identified Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman, his divine abode, was presented.

Then, the story advanced 85 years, to 1910. In Sarangpur, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's third spiritual successor, Shastriji Maharaj, proposed to the devotees that Bhagwan Swaminarayan's wish to build a mandir here be fulfilled. All agreed, and Shastriji Maharaj instructed Motibhai to compose a bhajan about the mandir. Motibhai wondered how it was possible to describe a mandir that had yet to be built. So, Shastriji Maharaj graced him with a vision of the completed mandir, and Motibhai wrote the bhajan, '*Shri Sārāṅgṣurni shobhā saji ati sārī, joi alaukik*

adbhut Dhām avikāri...'.

The storyline then focused on the dedication, sacrifice and devotion of Shastriji Maharaj, and his sadhus and devotees in building the mandir. The initial monetary contribution to Shastriji Maharaj's appeal was a mere Rs. 35 from Chhaganbhai. The portrayal of this incident reflected the deep loyalty of the devotees.

The early times were tough – a continuous shortage of manpower, materials, money and food tested the resolve of all. Yet, inspired by Shastriji Maharaj, the sadhus and devotees endured all difficulties and happily served beyond their capacity.

As lyrics describing some of these touching stories filled the atmosphere, the events were brought to life on stage. Shastriji Maharaj, with the committed support of Yogiji Maharaj, continuously encouraged the sadhus and devotees to sustain their efforts.

The story of the courageous Soma Bhagat



who, at the instruction of Shastriji Maharaj, risked his life to tie the broken ropes of a large, heavy stone dangling on a single rope, was creatively depicted by a skit.

Thereafter, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami spoke on the topic ‘Sacrifice Is the Ornament of the Mandir’. He described the tremendous sacrifice of the devotees, such that in a mere five years, the mandir was ready to be consecrated.

To honour that historic *murti-pratishtha* day 100 years ago, the replica mandir was exquisitely decorated with flowers, festoons and flags. It was as if Akshardham had descended to earth. Shastriji Maharaj consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Gopalanand Swami in the central shrine for the first time. The celebratory sound of drums, conch shells, gongs and *jai naads* hailed the historic occasion.

Amid these celebratory scenes, the character of Bhagubhai entered shedding tears of joy and recalling the words Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami had said to him, “This Sadhu will be seated in a golden throne of a three-pinnacled mandir



Thematic traditional dances

and will dine from golden plates.”

After this enactment, Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke eloquently on the topic, “The Purpose of Mandirs.”

The story then advanced to 1929 to recall the *murti-pratishtha* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in the first shrine. On this occasion Shri Radharamanprasadji, son of Acharya Shri Lakshmiprasadji Maharaj of Vartal, was graced by Shastriji Maharaj with an experience of the divine state of *samadhi*.

Following this scene, the words of Shastriji Maharaj were highlighted. “Sarangpur is engraved in my *jiva*,” “Sarangpur will become the focal point of Satsang,” and other such revelations.

After Shastriji Maharaj returned to Akshardham in 1951, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj continued to nurture the BAPS, its mandirs and various activities. Under his loving and efficient care, everybody felt that Shastriji Maharaj was still present among them.

Yogiji Maharaj prayed and endeavoured for



A prayer is offered to Swamishri to bless everyone with divine wisdom

the good of all. This was depicted through the story of Sadhu Narayanprasaddas who had previously abused and assaulted Yogiji Maharaj. On a stormy monsoon night, Yogiji Maharaj gave shelter to the fatigued, hungry and injured Narayanprasaddas and lovingly cared for him – feeding him and treating his wounds. Such selfless love touched Narayanprasaddas, whose heart was filled with remorse at his previous mistreatment of Yogiji Maharaj. The incident highlighted Yogiji Maharaj’s forgiving and saintly nature.

Thereafter, Pujya Mahant Swami addressed the assembly, “Once, in a *shibir*, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had stated that the progress of the Sanstha was due to *sadhuta* (saintliness). The work Shastriji Maharaj did was based on *sadhuta*. He nurtured the devotees’ devotion and service.

“Shastriji Maharaj tolerated a lot and never retaliated. A hundred years ago, at the time of the *murti-pratishtha*, many spread misinformation. Nirgundas Swami wrote a suitable clarification that all this was for the *upasana* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Shastriji Maharaj maintained *sadhuta* and continued to do so in all his works.

“Yogiji Maharaj also faced many obstacles, and

so has Pramukh Swami Maharaj. But they have tolerated and followed the path of *sadhuta*.”

In 1956, Yogiji Maharaj’s 65th birthday was celebrated here. On that occasion, Yogiji Maharaj installed the golden *sinhasan* in the Dharmakul shrine, adding impetus to the development of this sacred place.

Between 1946 and 1949, Pramukh Swami Maharaj served as the *kothari* of Sarangpur Mandir. Since then, Swamishri has taken the development to new levels. A dance was presented to lyrics describing the mandir’s development.

As *kothari*, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s *sadhuta* and humility touched all. The villagers of Sarangpur lovingly called him ‘Our Narayan Swami’ and never tired of praising his virtues.

Youths then presented a dance based on these feelings, which was interspersed with skits depicting Swamishri’s devotion and service.

Then, a moving video was shown in which Swamishri narrated the time when he braved the stormy weather to reach Sarangpur from Atladara at the wish of Shastriji Maharaj.

Thereafter, a video compilation of the numerous festival celebrations held in Swamishri’s



Swamishri presides over the centenary celebration assembly as youths perform a traditional dance

presence in Sarangpur was shown as a prelude to Swamishri's arrival on stage.

Such had been the flow and creative content of the stage presentation that 2½ hours had passed in a flash. And now everyone was eager to welcome Swamishri on stage.

Children and youths performed an energetic welcome dance to the bhajan, '*Padhāro āj Pramukhrāj, Shriji sangāthe āj...*'. The entire atmosphere was filled with joyous anticipation. And when Swamishri entered the cabin on the stage, the audience erupted with applause and hails of the *jai naad*.

After the dance Narayanmuni Swami humbly voiced a prayer to Swamishri on behalf of everyone. Swamishri lovingly accepted the prayer.

Then, everyone participated in the *samuh arti*. Amid the darkness of night, the thousands of flickering *divas* were like stars shining in the sky.

The joyous celebration concluded with a spectacular dance by children and youths and the hailing of the *jai naad*.

The entire year-long centenary celebration activities as well as the 10-day centenary celebrations and the centenary assembly were

successfully guided by Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and other senior and experienced sadhus. Throughout the year, devoted and dedicated efforts of Kothari Jnaneshwar Swami, Narayanmuni Swami, and the sadhus, *parshads* and *sadhaks* of the Sant Training Centre were instrumental in the success of the celebrations.

The final celebrations were enthusiastically supported by 12,000 men and women volunteers from Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Ahmedabad Vadodara, Surat and other BAPS centres.

And so, just as the building of Sarangpur Mandir and the *murti-pratishtha* a hundred years previously was the result of the profound dedication and devotion of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and countless devotees, the centenary celebrations in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were also a shining example of dedication and devotion. ♦

DIKSHA CEREMONY

4, 7 & 10 May 2016, Sarangpur



PARSHAD DIKSHA

A total of 43 youths, who had completed their *sadhak* training, were initiated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj into the *parshad*-fold. The first group of 20 *sadhaks* was initiated on 4 May 2016 and the second group of 23 *sadhaks* was initiated on 7 May 2016.

On each occasion, the *diksha mahapuja* ceremony was performed in the presence of *sad-guru* sadhus, the *sadhaks* receiving *diksha* and their families.

Afterwards, the *diksha* ceremony took place at the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the

Pramukh Vatika, where each *sadhak* personally received the guru mantra from Swamishri. As they approached Swamishri their new *parshad* names were declared.

BHAGWATI DIKSHA

A total of 25 *parshads* received the *bhagwati diksha* on 10 May 2016 at the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Following the *diksha mahapuja* ceremony, each *parshad* received the guru mantra from Swamishri at the Pramukh Mandiram. Their new sadhu names were announced as they were blessed by Swamishri. ◆

(Contd. from pg. 31)

view the exhibition. A total of 30,695 students, teachers and guests saw the exhibition which conveyed three main messages: How to become an ideal child, student and citizen.

Youth Sports Festival, 13-14 February 2016

14 teams from BAPS centres registered under Sarangpur Mandir competed in a cricket tournament. The winner's team comprised of youths serving in the mandir's *gaushala*.

Cultural Programmes, 19 April to 1 May 2016

Youths of the BAPS Yuvak Mandal in Botad presented inspiring cultural programmes in 10 villages. Each programme featured a drama focusing on family values entitled 'Majiyaro', presented by youths, and speeches by sadhus. Over 10,000 people attended the programmes.

Yuva Shibirs

- 23-24 April 2016, Gadhada: 1,100 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from 30 BAPS centres registered under Sarangpur and Gadhada mandirs participated.
- 16-17 May 2015, Gadhada: 800 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from BAPS centres registered under Sarangpur Mandir participated.

Kirtan Aradhanas

A total of over 50,000 devotees attended the 25 kirtan aradhanas performed by students of the BAPS Vidyamandir presented in Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Vadodara, Ahmedabad and other major cities.

Padyatras and Dandvatyatras

Around 400 standards 10 and 12 students participated in *padyatras* and *dandvatyatras* (pilgrimages by foot and prostrations) from Lathidad, Botad and Barwala to Sarangpur, covering between 7 and 11 km.

Akshardham Darshan Yatra

Youths visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar and also pilgrimaged to other sacred sites in Ahmedabad.

Padyatras

Over a period of nine days, 1,000 devotees from surrounding villages participated in *padyatras* to Sarangpur Mandir.

Spiritual Awareness Programmes

At intervals throughout the year, special assemblies were held in Sarangpur village to inspire and strengthen spirituality in the lives of the villagers.

Sant Vicharan

A total of 40 groups of sadhus visited 128 villages in the Botad, Dhandhuka and Dholera districts. In each village, they performed *padhramanis*, held *sandhya feris* (evening satsang processions) and satsang assemblies, and conducted de-addiction and cleanliness drives.

Medical and Blood Donation Camps

Throughout the centenary year, six free medical camps were organized at different locations on different days. Over 2,000 patients benefitted from these camps in which expert doctors and paramedical staff from Ahmedabad, Bhavnagar and Botad offered their services.

Also, five blood donation camps were held in Sarangpur Mandir, from which 234,600 cc of blood was collected.

Shakotsav

Around 750 villagers attended the *shakotsav* held in Sarangpur Mandir. ♦

Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

April-May 2016, Sarangpur

APRIL 2016

2, Saturday

In the evening, Swamishri went to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir for a group photo session with the 550 sadhus who were present for the first Sant Shibir.

3, Sunday

Today marked Bhagwan Swaminarayan's birthday as per the Western calendar.

In the morning, Swamishri showered flower petals to sanctify a model of the new *hari* mandir to be built in Edison, NJ, USA.

In the evening, Swamishri performed *pujan* of the bricks to be placed in the foundations of the *hari* mandirs to be built in Birmingham and Ashton-Under-Lyne (Manchester) in England.

Swamishri also performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals and *arti* of the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam for the new BAPS Vidyamandir for Girls in Randesan, Gujarat.

Then, Swamishri inaugurated the book, *Swaminarayan Hinduism*, which has been published by Oxford University Press. The book is a collection of academic papers presented by scholars at the international conference on the Swaminarayan Sampradaya held in Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, in August 2013.

The book has been edited by Prof. Raymond Williams and Prof. Yogi Trivedi.

5, Tuesday

Ubhay Vedantacharya Pithadhiswar Puja Chinna Jeer Swami came for Swamishri's darshan.

In the morning assembly in Pramukh Vatika, Dr Swami garlanded and welcomed Puja Chinna Jeer Swami.

Later, Puja Chinna Jeer Swami met Swamishri in his room.

Afterwards Puja Chinna Jeer Swami commented, "There are many standards established by different countries, but to present spirituality it is the Swaminarayan standard."

7, Thursday

During afternoon darshan in the Pramukh Vatika, Swamishri blessed Shri Dahyabhai Shastri, a renowned Sanskrit scholar who has performed outstanding social and cultural services for India and was recently conferred with the prestigious Padmashri Award by the Government of India.

9, Saturday

In the morning, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals and *arti* of the painted guru *par-ampara murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir, Kavitha.

10, Sunday

In the afternoon, Jnaneshwar Swami presented Swamishri the invitation card for the forthcoming Sarangpur Mandir Centenary Celebrations.

In the evening, Swamishri inaugurated a new Swaminarayan Aksharpith audio CD publication: *AARSH Pravachanmala*, Parts 1 to 10 – a collection of speeches presented during the quarterly AARSH seminars at Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar.

13, Wednesday

In the evening, Shri Mahamandaleshwar Puja Patitpavan Maharaj, the Mahant of the Mota Ramji Mandir in Nagnesh, who is currently serving in the organizing committee for the upcoming Sinhasth Kumbh Melo in Ujjain, came for

Swamishri's darshan and was welcomed with a garland and shawl by Viveksagar Swami. Puja Patitpavan Maharaj presented Swamishri an invitation for the festival.

15, Friday; 235th Birthday

Celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

In the morning, Swamishri went for darshan in the main mandir and performed *arti*.

Thereafter, he arrived in the Pramukh Mandiram where the morning celebration assembly was being held.

In the evening celebration assembly, the sadhus presented speeches hailing the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as the inspirer of *sadachar* (good character), *samjan* (true understanding) and *sid-dhant* (divine doctrine), and as the giver of the Satpurush through whom he remains ever-present on earth.

Swamishri arrived in Pramukh Mandiram to join the evening celebrations. Youths performed a skit based on inspiring incidents from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and made other presentations.

At 10.10 p.m. Swamishri performed the *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj to commemorate the birth of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

17, Sunday

During afternoon darshan, Swamishri performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Vashi, New Mumbai. Swamishri blessed the 200 devotees who had come for this occasion.

In the evening, 600 sadhus who had arrived for the second Sant Shibir offered their *pranams* to Swamishri.

Swamishri inaugurated the Sant Shibir and blessed the sadhus.

22, Friday; Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir Patotsav

At 8.15 a.m., Swamishri arrived at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir for darshan and

performed the 35th *patotsav arti*.

Thereafter, Swamishri went to Pramukh Vatika, where the *patotsav* assembly was in progress.

In the evening, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam to be placed in the newly built BAPS Swaminarayan Herbal Care manufacturing plant in Majra, near Himmatnagar.

Swamishri also lit the auspicious lamp to inaugurate this new venture of the Divine Energy Trust.

Swamishri then performed *pujan* of the *kalashes* and flagposts for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Long Island, New York, USA.

23, Saturday

In the morning, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the new *sinhasan* and marble *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam, and the painted *murtis* of the guru *parampara* for the current BAPS *hari* mandir in Anjesar, near Atladra.

In the evening, Swamishri blessed the 600 devotees of Junagadh who had come to invite Swamishri to the upcoming 10th anniversary celebrations of the BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir there.

Swamishri also blessed the 1,000 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from villages around Sarangpur and inaugurated their satsang *shibir* by waving a flag.

24, Sunday

In the morning, Swamishri inaugurated new publications released by Swaminarayan Aksharpith: Swamishri's 95th Birthday Celebration (VCD), *Vatsalya* (DVD of a drama on family Values).

26, Tuesday

In the evening, Swamishri blessed the *balaks* of Bhavnagar who had come for a 3-day *shibir*.

29, Friday

In the morning, Swamishri blessed the 1,400 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* of Vadodara who had come

for a 3-day *shibir*.

In the evening, the *yuvaks* presented a skit in Swamishri's presence based on the *shibir* theme 'Pramukh Swamima Khovavu...' (To Become Lost in Pramukh Swami).

30, Saturday

In the evening, Swamishri inaugurated a new English publication released by Swaminarayan Aksharpith: *Murtipuja and Bal Samskaras* written by Mukundcharan Swami.

The *yuvaks* of Vadodara presented a skit and dance. The *niyams* undertaken by the *shibir* youths were presented to Swamishri in a *kalash*. Swamishri showered flower petals in the *kalash* and blessed the youths with strength to fulfil their pledges.

MAY 2016

1, Sunday

In the afternoon, Swamishri blessed 1,400 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from Vadodara who had attended their regional *shibir* held in Sarangpur.

In the evening, youths presented a drama to commemorate Gujarat Day (the day on which Gujarat State was formed in 1960) and to celebrate the spirituality inspired by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus in Gujarat.

2, Monday

In the evening, Swamishri blessed Chhapalsinh of Limbdi state, who is the grandson of Maharana Dolatsinhji of Limbdi who gave the land for Sarangpur Mandir to Shastriji Maharaj.

3, Tuesday

Swamishri lit the auspicious *divo* to inaugurate the final 10-day celebrations of the Sarangpur Mandir centenary year.

Details of the celebration events from 3-13 May are on pp. 28-47 of this issue.

5, Thursday

In the morning, Swamishri performed the

murti-pratishtha rituals of Shri Nilkanth Varni for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Lusaka, Zambia.

9, Monday

In the morning, Swamishri performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Bomet, Kenya.

11, Wednesday

Today marked the 55th anniversary of the day Yogiji Maharaj initiated 51 youths into the sadhu-fold on the occasion of the Gadhada Mandir Kalash Mahotsav in 1961. During afternoon darshan, Swamishri blessed those senior sadhus who were initiated on that day: Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Bhaktipriya Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Viveksagar Swami, Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Haribhushan Swami, Bhagvatpriya Swami, Ramcharan Swami and Shrihari Swami.

In the evening, Swamishri inaugurated two new Swaminarayan Aksharpith publications: *Yogi Gita* (Hindi) and *Bal Sabha* (Marathi).

14, Saturday

Every year since 1973, sadhus residing in Sarangpur have produced a handwritten volume called *Sarang Stuti*, in which sadhus contribute poems, essays, drawings, *shloks* and other items. This year's *Sarang Stuti* was presented to Swamishri during afternoon darshan.

15, Sunday

Today marked the last day of the current batch of the Yuva Talim Kendra. A special graduation ceremony was held in Swamishri's presence during afternoon darshan. Swamishri blessed the youths.

16, Monday

In the evening, Swamishri lit the auspicious lamp to inaugurate the celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the BAPS Mandir in Bhavnagar

(from 19-29 May 2016). Children and youths of Bhavnagar presented a wonderful dance and thematic drama in Swamishri's presence.

Swamishri also inaugurated new DVDs released by Swaminarayan Aksharpath – *Guruhari Darshan*, Parts 1 and 2. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 4)

The prophecy and pledge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami was fulfilled by the Herculean efforts of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj – the third successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He built and consecrated the first mandir in Bochasan, followed by another in Sarangpur. In all, he built five grand mandirs dedicated to the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* in Gujarat. Later, with Shastriji Maharaj's advancing age some of his detractors gossiped, "When Shastriji [Maharaj] will depart, his work will come to an end." But their words were proved wrong when Yogiji Maharaj succeeded him and thereafter when Pramukh Swami Maharaj continued their works.

The centenary celebrations of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur (3-13 May 2016), were held on a grand and divine scale in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and thousands of sadhus and devotees.

This special issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* commemorates the festival of Guru Purnima this year, on 19 July, by portraying the epic struggles, efforts and devotions of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, sadhus and countless devotees in creating and developing the historic Sarangpur Mandir. In addition, the centenary celebration events have also been covered. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 27)

The developmental changes started slowly in 1971 when Swamishri became the guru of BAPS. Through Swamishri's inspiration a training centre for sadhus was established in 1980. Then from 1995 the need for further expansion arose due to various services and requirements. The annual celebrations of Fuldol and Jal Jhilani in Swamishri's presence started attracting an increasing number of devotees. Consequently, Swamishri discerned the need for new buildings in place of the old constructions. Thus the existent *haveli* by the mandir, residential accommodations for devotees, the small entrance to the east of the mandir were all pulled down. The road dividing the Mandir and Smruti Mandir was integrated as part of the mandir complex.

A new master plan for the mandir complex was designed through Swamishri's guidance and efforts of expert sadhus and architects. The construction according to the new master plan began auspiciously in Swamishri's presence in 2002. He

guided and inspired throughout the entire development project. The first phase saw the construction of the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, a residential school for boys. Thereafter, new residential complexes for devotees and pilgrims were built. They included, Akshar Kutir, Gunatit Kutir, Brahm Kutir, Pragji Kutir, Pramukh Kutir, Pramukh Mahol and other arrangements. A new electric powerhouse, new kitchen, assembly hall (Yagnapurush Mandapam), *sant* ashram along with classrooms for training sadhus (Pramukh Ashram) were also built. Furthermore, new facilities for satsang activities, a *gaushala*, a clinic for animals, a modern library (Jnanjivan Granthalaya) were also constructed.

Today, the large mandir complex in Sarangpur is buzzing with spiritual, academic and service-oriented activities. The ten-day Mandir Centenary Celebrations, held from 3 to 13 May 2016, commemorated the efforts of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj for building and developing Sarangpur Mandir. ♦

NEW BAPS MANDIRS



Swamishri blesses a public assembly, Singapore, 1996



Swamishri performs morning puja, Singapore, 2004

SINGAPORE

14-15 May 2016

Satsang in Singapore has been inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's visits in 1984, 1996 and 2002, and regular visits by sadhus.

Two days of celebrations marked the inauguration of the new mandir.

On 14 May, women devotees participated in the traditional Kalash Yatra in which they devoutly carried Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a peacock palanquin through the streets of Singapore to bless the city.

On 15 May, devotees participated in the *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* praying for world peace and the well-being of everyone. Thereafter, Puja

Ishwarcharan Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the *hari* mandir, concluding with the first *arti* and *annakut* in the new mandir.

Previously, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Sarangpur on 5 March 2016.

The celebrations concluded with the the main mandir *mahotsav* assembly. Dignitaries from Singapore Gujarati Society, Singapore Gujarati School, Singapore Jain Religious Society and other groups, as well as devotees from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, UK and USA together with devotees of Singapore were present.



Pratishtha arti of the murtis, Singapore



Devotees participate in the mahapuja, Singapore



BAPS hari mandir, Karmaad, District: Jambusar



Performing puja of murtis, Unai, District: Vansda, Navsari

KARMAAD, DISTRICT: JAMBUSAR 10-11 February 2016

In 1974, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the village and sanctified every home. Subsequently, due to the efforts of Bhogilal Jesangbhai Patel, a small mandir was inaugurated in 1997.

With the continued growth of Satsang, a new mandir was built.

On 10 February, a Vedic Yagna for World Peace was held in which over 450 *yajmans* participated. Thereafter, a grand *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* through the town took place.

On 11 February, Pujya Mahant Swami installed the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Sarangpur on 28 December 2015.

UNAI, DISTRICT: VANSDA, NAVSARI 10-11 February 2016

Unai is a famous pilgrim place, where devotees pay homage at the Mataji Mandir and visit the hot water spring.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Unai on 1 May 1999. Thereafter, Satsang flourished, aided by regular visits by BAPS sadhus from Tithal and Navsari.

A plot of land near the Bilimora-Vaghai railway line was acquired and a *hari* mandir was built there by the efforts of devotees.

On 10 February, 1,750 *yajmans* participated in

the Yagna for World Peace. In the late afternoon a *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* to be installed was held through the town.

On 11 February, Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami ritually installed the *murtis*.

Previously, on 30 January 2016, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* in Sarangpur.

TEJGADH-HARDASPUR, DISTRICT: CHHOTA UDEPUR

12-13 February 2016

Over the years, visits by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and *sadgurus* and other sadhus steadily nurtured the Satsang.

Thus, a mandir was built on land donated by Shri Nandubhai Motibhai Rathwa.

On 12 February, the *murtis* to be installed were taken on a joyous *nagar-yatra* through the local streets. In the evening an inspiring cultural programme was presented.

In Sarangpur, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* and on the morning of 12 February, Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the new mandir.

NANDESARI, DISTRICT: VADODARA 18-19 February 2016

In 1976, Shri Dilubha Chudasma, son of Shri Temubha Chudasma – a staunch devotee of



Pratishtha rituals of the murtis, Nandesari, District: Vadodara



Pratishtha rituals of the murtis, Kathvavdi, District: Vijaynagar, Sabarkantha

Shastriji Maharaj – moved to Nandesari. In 1982, a weekly *satsang* assembly was started. In 1996, Shri Dilubha's home was inaugurated as a mandir. Meanwhile, between 1998 and 2007, Dilubha tirelessly served society as a hardworking member of the Gujarat state parliament. Even during this time, he sincerely observed the *niyams* of Satsang.

Thereafter, he acquired and donated a plot of land on which a beautiful mandir was built.

On 18 February, 300 *yajmans* participated in the Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon, the *murtis* were paraded in a colourful *nagar-yatra* through the local streets.

On 19 February, Pujya Mahant Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the mandir.

The *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* had previously been performed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur on 14 October 2014.

KATHVAVDI, DISTRICT: VIJAYNAGAR, SABARKANTHA 20 February 2016

The tribal village of Kathvavdi was a host to the shooting of a scene of the *Mystic India* large-format film in 2003.

In 2008, a regular weekly *satsang sabha* was started and subsequently, on land donated by Shri Lilabhai, a *kutir* mandir was built.

On 20 February 2016, Pujya Narendraprasad Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Sarangpur on 25 January 2016.

TISKARI TALAT, SOUTH GUJARAT 26-28 February 2016

Three-day celebrations were held to mark the inauguration of the new *hari* mandir in this tribal village of Tiskari Talat.

On 26 February, an inspiring Women's Assembly was held.

On the morning of 27 February, a Yagna for World Peace was performed. In the afternoon, the *murtis* were taken out in a *nagar-yatra*, during which devotees joyously performed traditional tribal dances.

On 28 February, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* on 3 February 2016 in Sarangpur.

KUBADHROL, DISTRICT: VADADI, SABARKANTHA 4-6 March 2016

In 1983, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Kubadhról, which is located near Dharoi Dam in the Aravalli mountain range. BAPS sadhus began regular visits to the village in 1985 and in 1990, a regular weekly *satsang sabha* was started.

Many locals actively participated in the local



*Pratishtha rituals of the murtis,
Kubadhrol, District: Vadadi, Sabarkantha*



*Pratishtha rituals of the murtis, Sanathli,
District: Jasdan, Rajkot*

satsang activities. With the joint efforts of all the devotees a new *hari* mandir was built, and a 3-day celebration was held to mark its inauguration.

On 4 March, a special Women's Assembly was held. On 5 March, a grand *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* took place through the village and in the evening, a *kirtan aradhana* was presented.

On the morning of 6 March, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Previously, on 25 January 2016, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* in Sarangpur.

SANATHLI, DISTRICT: JASDAN, RAJKOT **11 March 2016**

In 1998, a regular weekly satsang assembly was started. On 5 March 2014, the *hari* mandir construction was begun.

On 10 March 2016, a Vedic Yagna for World Peace was performed in which 480 *yajmans* participated.

On 11 March 2016, Pujya Viveksagar Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* on 27 January 2016 in Sarangpur.

SONDHALVADA, SOUTH GUJARAT **22-23 April 2016**

On the morning of 22 April 800 *yajmans*

took part in the Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon, a *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* was held through the village.

On 23 April 2014, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir.

Previously, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Sarangpur on 2 March 2016.

BAISAHEBGADH, DIST. DHRANGADHRA **22-23 April 2016**

On 22 April, a Yagna for World Peace and grand *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* were held. On 23 April, Pujya Mahant Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Sarangpur on 9 February 2016.

SURANGI AND APTI, SOUTH GUJARAT **26-28 April 2016**

These two villages, situated 1 km apart, are in the tribal belt of the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

The *murti-pratishtha* celebrations for the newly built *hari* mandirs in both villages were jointly held in Surangi.

On 26 April, over 2,500 women devotees attended the special Women's Assembly.

On the morning of 27 April, 400 *yajmans*



Pratishtha rituals of the murtis, Baisahebgadh, Dist. Dhrangadhra



Pratishtha rituals of the murtis, Tidhra, Selvas

participated in the Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon, a colourful *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* was held which began from nearby Khadoli, passed through Surangi and concluded in Apti.

On the morning of 28 April, Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami first ritually installed the *murtis* in Surangi and then in Apti.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* of these mandirs in Sarangpur on 10 October 2014.

TIDHRA, SELVAS

28-30 April 2016

Blessed and inspired by the visits of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and sadhus, satsang has flourished

in Tighra for over 30 years.

A new *hari* mandir was built on land donated by Raniyabhai and Uttambhai Patel.

On 28 April, a special Women's Assembly and cultural programme were held.

On the morning of 29 April, 300 *yajmans* participated in the Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon, a grand *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* took place through the village.

On 30 April Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Sarangpur on 10 October 2014. ♦

CHATURMAS NIYAMS

15 July to 11 November 2016

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 Ashadh *sud* 11 (15 July 2016) to Kartak *sud* 11 (11 November 2016). 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 (3 August to 1 September 2016).
2. Extra *malas*, *dandvats*, *pradakshinas* as per one's convenience and faith.
3. Daily read one extra Vachanamrut and five Swamini Vato.
4. Those who, under the auspices of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations, have undertaken

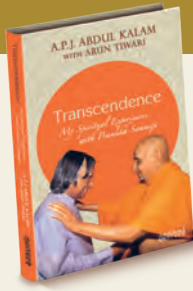
to read *Jena Gune Rijhya Girdhai/Eternal Virtues* should finish reading it first. Then, read *Bhagwan Swaminarayan's biography*, Part 3 and *Brahmasannidhi* 2014. Youths should read *Viral Vishwakarma Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Shriji Charitra Vihar*, Part 1.

5. In accordance with the wish of senior sadhus listen to 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Amrutvani', Samput 5 or 6.

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 and *mogri*.





CELEBRATING Transcendence

June 2016, India



Celebrating *Paratpar*, Sankari, Gujarat



Celebrating *Arohan*, Nagpur, Maharashtra

Since the release of *Transcendence* by Dr APJ Abdul Kalam in June 2015, the book has been translated in Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and Malayalam. Numerous functions have been held to celebrate the book and its inspiring messages.

Common to these functions are videos depicting the lives and works of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Dr Kalam, their interactions with each other and inspiring messages from the book. Details of recent events are as follows.

BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

Sankari, Gujarat, 19 June 2016

Around 1,500 invited guests and devotees attended the celebration and public release of *Paratpar*, the Gujarati translation of *Transcendence*.

The programme included speeches by Pujya Mahant Swami, Brahnavihari Swami, Dr Mahendrabhai Patel (Collector, Surat), Shri B.C. Pattni (Collector, Tapi) and Dr Chandresh Solanki (Head, Applied Mechanics Dept. SVNIT, Surat).

Also, among the dignitaries present were Shri Mohanbhai Dhodia (MLA for Mahuva, Gujarat),

Shri Sureshbhai Patel (President, Surat Panchayat) and Shri V.K. Jain (Station Director, Kakrapur Atomic Power Project).

NAIVEDHYAM EASTORIA HALL

Nagpur, Maharashtra, 21 June 2016

About 900 invited guests were present for the celebration and public release of *Arohan*, the Hindi translation of *Transcendence*.

Addressing the assembly, Shri Mohan Bhagwat (Sarsangsanthalak, RSS) said, “The actions of these two great personalities speak for themselves. They do not have to lecture. And in their presence their messages will certainly affect you. The words in this book are not merely words, but they represent their inner wisdom. Through this book you will experience the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

The programme also featured speeches by Prof. Arun Tiwari (Co-author of *Transcendence*), Vamsee Juluri (Professor, University of San Francisco), Atmaswarup Swami, Premprakash Swami, Brahnavihari Swami and Jnanvatsal Swami. ♦



India

YUVA SHIBIRS

24 April to 22 May 2016, Gujarat & Mumbai



Special one-day youth *shibirs* were held across 25 BAPS centres throughout Gujarat and Mumbai. Over 23,000 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* attended these *shibirs*, which were based on the theme of 'Divine Love'. Through speeches, skits, video shows, quizzes and workshops, the youths were given a taste of the divine love imparted to all by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and how it surpasses the temporary joy of worldly love.

INAUGURATION OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN HERBAL CARE PRODUCTION UNIT

29 April 2016, Majra, Gujarat

The new purpose-built state-of-the-art WHO-GMP compliant manufacturing facility for BAPS Swaminarayan Herbal Care was inaugurated in the village of Majra, near Himmatnagar, where many of its over 150 products will be produced and packaged. The inauguration *mahapuja* ceremony was performed by *sadguru* and other *sadhus*. Many invited guests and devotees were also present. After the *mahapuja* ceremony, Ishwarcharan Swami, Doctor Swami and Mahant Swami



addressed the gathering, and felicitated all who had supported the construction of this modern facility. Then, the *sadguru* *sadhus* showered sanctified flower petals throughout the unit as they were guided around the building.

AKSHARDHAM RECEIVES SOLAR TECHNOLOGY EXCELLENCE AWARD

29 April 2016, Delhi



The Ministry of New & Renewable Energy awarded Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, the CST & Solar Cooker Excellence Award in recognition of its notable achievements in off-grid and decentralized solar applications.

A 'Solar Concentrator' has been installed at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, since 2012. It saves about 30 to 50 standard cubic metres of natural gas per day and provides energy to cook for upto 4,000 people.

ATLADRA YUVA SHIBIR

29 April to 1 May 2016

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur



Over 1,300 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from Vadodara attended a special three-day Yuva Shibir held in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur. The *shibir* theme was ‘Pramukh Swami Ma Khovavu’ – ‘To Become Lost in Pramukh Swami’. It highlighted the various ways in which youths lose their way in life and how, by losing themselves in Pramukh Swami Maharaj, they can avoid the distractions that damage their personal, family and professional lives. The youths were guided by enlightening speeches by Mahant Swami, Viveksagar Swami, and other experienced sadhus. The *shibir* theme was further elaborated upon through skits, videos, solo mimes, workshops, discussions and the video blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The highlight throughout the *shibir* was the regular darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The youths were blessed with the opportunity to perform a skit and dance in Swamishri’s presence. Swamishri also blessed the *kalash* in which the *niyams* the youths had pledged to follow were placed.

YUVA VICHARAN

May 2016, Gujarat & Mumbai

About 1,400 youths from BAPS centres throughout Gujarat and Mumbai participated in the ‘Pramukh Swamina Pagle Pagle’ (In the Footsteps of Pramukh Swami) project.



A total of 350 groups of four youths each visited one village for a day, enabling city-dwelling youths to experience village life. Each group visited their assigned village from Saturday afternoon to Sunday afternoon. The visits took place on the weekends on 21-22 May and 28-29 May 2016.

During the visits, the youths of each group conducted a *bal sabha* and a main evening *sabha*. They also carried out a *sandhya feri* (evening procession) through the village, performed home visits and inspired villagers to give up addictions.

The visits also made the youths more aware of the efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and BAPS sadhus in encouraging satsang values in rural places, and the faith and devotion of the devotees in villages.

MUMBAI YUVA SHIBIR

2-5 June 2016

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur



Around 2,000 selected *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from Mumbai participated in a special *shibir* on the theme ‘Mano Mali Chhe Moti Vat’ (Believe

that you have the greatest attainment) held at the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur.

The *shibir* included topics such as Bhagwan Swaminarayan, scriptures, inspiring stories of sadhus and devotees, mandirs and the Satpurush.

The youths were guided by speeches from Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Viveksagar Swami, and other experienced and learned sadhus. Also, the *shibir* featured skits, discussions, thematic video presentations and a *samuh* puja session.

Prior to the *shibir*, the youths had contributed to a handwritten magazine to express their affection for Swamishri in the form of poems, essays, art, quotations and other mediums. All the content was bound into one volume for presentation to Swamishri.

The *yuvatis* further expressed their devotion by preparing 137 decorative *artis*, a garland and pillow covers for Swamishri and decorating the campus with *rangoli* designs.

Overall, the youths were inspired by the messages of the *shibir* to further strengthen their practice of satsang in daily life.

GHER GHER JANMA MAHOTSAV

12 June 2016, India



Swamishri's birth *tithi* is Magshar *sud* 8, and so on Jeth *sud* 8 (12 June) thousands of BAPS families throughout India symbolically celebrated Swamishri's birthday in their homes.

In the early morning, each family performed *samuh* puja. Then, they started the assembly with guru *pujan*. The three-hour assembly featured

videos of Swamishri, and narrations by *sadguru* and other sadhus of Swamishri's incidents. Family members gave their own insights during the discussion of these incidents.

The programme also featured games and quizzes that imparted inspiring messages and further revealed Swamishri's virtues.

Families created a festive atmosphere in their homes by designing *rangolis*, making birthday cards and decorating their homes.

The assembly content was prepared by the Satsang Pravutti Central Office in Ahmedabad. Through this celebration, every family felt the presence of Swamishri in their home.

UK

BAPS CHILDREN'S FORUM RECEIVES GOLD AWARD FOR SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION

13 June 2016, London



The BAPS Children's Forum has been awarded a gold award for the second time from the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRCSE) for its 'high standards of service in providing supplementary education to the community'. It previously received the award in 2012.

Assessors from the NRCSE observed 'fully engaged and eager students' and the 'clear, confident technique [of the teacher]' which contributed to a 'most effective and enjoyable lesson'. Representatives from the NRCSE gathered

evidence during assemblies and classes as well as a thorough examination of policies. There were also discussions with pupils, teachers and the school director.

Among its activities that provides a value-based education for children, BAPS Children's Forum organizes a Sunday school to teach Gujarati, with a 100 per cent success rate in GCSE exams. More than half the students received a grade A or A*.

Asia Pacific

EDUCATION SEMINAR

28 May 2016, Adelaide, Australia



Around 60 high school students and over 150 parents attended this seminar and were guided by the Minister for Education and Child Development, Hon. Susan Close MP on the South Australian education system and the role of parents in a child's education.

Michael Austin from the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) and a panel discussed common issues like parental and student expectations, time management, distractions students face, career opportunities and the importance of satsang in student life.

Middle East

SATSANG SHIBIR

6 May 2016, Muscat, Oman

Over 80 devotees attended the one-day *shibir* on theme 'Satpurushma Jodan' (Bonding with the Satpurush).



The *shibir* was split into four parts: Who is Satpurush? What are the characteristics of Satpurush? How Satpurush is for us? How to strengthen our bonds with Satpurush?

They were enlightened on the theme through speeches, drama, debates, a musical quiz and audiovisual shows.

Devotees were inspired to increase the practice of satsang in their daily lives.

Africa

KARYAKAR SHIBIR

May to July 2016, Nairobi, Kenya



A total of 1,100 *karyakars* attended the three training *shibirs* held in Nairobi, Kenya (20-22 May), Lilongwe, Malawi (10-12 June) and Johannesburg, South Africa (1-3 July).

Titled 'Rajipo', each *shibir* elaborated upon what *rajipo* is and how to attain the *rajipo* of Bhagwan and his ideal Sadhu? The *karyakars* were guided by motivational videos, skits and speeches by sadhus. The *karyakars* participated in dramas, quizzes, group discussions and other activities, and also shared their personal experiences.

The *shibirs* further motivated the *karyakars* to selflessly perform their assigned duties enthusiastically.

BAPS Charities

PUBLIC HEALTH SCREENING

23 April 2016

Broadwalk Shopping Centre, London, UK

Medical experts from BAPS Charities teamed up with representatives of the Rotary Club to provide free medical consultations to 30 males and 33 females aged between 15 to 85 years, from diverse ethnic groups. The experts identified their potential health risks, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, etc., and encouraged a healthier lifestyle.

The Mayor of Harrow Cllr Krishna Suresh attended the event and greatly appreciated the voluntary work of BAPS Charities in the local community.

Members of the Rotary Club and their president, Dr Nandini Varma, were also grateful to BAPS Charities for providing a professional and friendly service.

BLOOD DONATION DRIVE

1 May 2016

Johannesburg, South Africa



BAPS Charities hosted its regular quarterly blood donation drive to support the efforts of the South African National Blood Service (SANBS). A total of 31 pints of blood was collected due to the support of the public.

WILDFIRE RELIEF EFFORTS

4 May 2016

Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada

Massive wildfires swept through the city of Fort McMurray on 2 May, leading to the emergency evacuation of nearly 80,000 people. BAPS Charities launched its relief efforts in Edmonton, serving over 300 hot meals daily to evacuees and offered immediate shelter to over 100 people.

Families were provided a relief kit containing cooking utensils & dinnerware, bedroom sets, toiletries and other essentials to help them set up their new home.

COMMUNITY HEALTH SCREENING

14 May 2016

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London

In the first screening of 2016 consultants from the Royal Free Hospital and volunteer doctors from BAPS Charities provided personalised guidance about diabetes, cardiovascular disease and other health issues to 30 attendees aged between 33 and 75 years.

CHARITY GOLF DAY

1 June 2016

Moor Park Golf Club, Hertfordshire, UK

BAPS Charities volunteers supported a charity golf day planned by 'Helping Hand', a group of golfing enthusiasts.

More than 72 players braved the challenging weather and playing conditions to raise £15,000 for two BAPS Charities projects that serve tribal and underserved areas of south eastern Gujarat through the provision of educational services and hostels. ♦



SARANGPUR MANDIR CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

1. Skits and creative lighting effects portrayed the profound impact of the mandir on the lives of ordinary people (12 May 2016).
2. Sadhus perform the Vedic rituals of the Anant Kalash Maha-Abhishek Ceremony (11 May 2016). (Inset) Devotees perform the *maha-abhishek* of the mandir murtis.



SARANGPUR CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS ASSEMBLY
13 May 2016

1. Swamishri presides on stage over the celebrations assembly of 75,000 devotees.
2. Skit showing how Shastriji Maharaj instilled faith, dedication and devotion in the devotees, inspiring them to serve for the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*.

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