

SPECIAL ISSUE

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Newly Consecrated
Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Bodeli
1-2 March 2011



Bhagwan Swaminarayan (L) and Gunatitanand Swami



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (L) and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev



Brahmaswarup Pragji Bhakta Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj



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Intricate carvings of mandir, Bodeli



Night scene of mandir, Godhra

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ADHYĀY 2

BRĀHMI STHITI YOGA

Part 4

Why is there no end to our miseries? Why can we not experience everlasting happiness? The answer is simple – a lack of some basic understanding.

We still remain ignorant of the very things that truly need to be known. For example, we do not understand the difference between the perishable and the eternal. We are unable to discriminate between that which has a beginning and that which has been since eternity. We are unable to differentiate between that which has an end and that which does not.

Moreover, whatever we do know is in fact only partial knowledge. We do not understand it properly and fully as it is. On obtaining basic information, we feel that we have gained complete knowledge of the matter. We do not even have the

patience to attain complete knowledge.

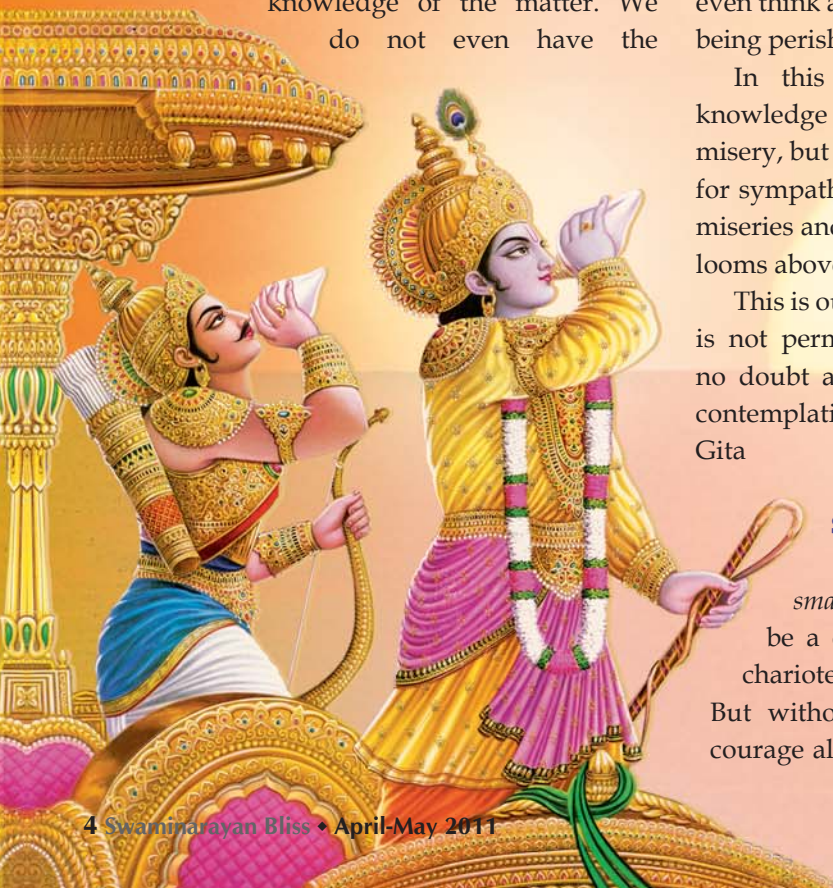
Furthermore, sometimes false knowledge is believed to be true knowledge. For example, we believe that which is not the *atma* to be the *atma*. That which causes misery has started to seem pleasurable. The sources of true happiness have become unknown to us. We have taken a likening to uncertainty and want to settle in it. We believe the perishable to be eternal, and we do not accept that which is truly eternal to be so. Only physical enjoyment is accepted by the mind. We cannot rise above logic; we firmly believe that it is impossible to do so. As a result of this, we remain engrossed in our bodies and everything related to them. We have become comfortable in them. Now we do not want to leave them. We do not even think about leaving them. Talks of the body being perishable seem useless.

In this way, our ignorance, incomplete knowledge and false beliefs are the roots of our misery, but we do not realize this. Instead we cry for sympathy saying that there is no end to our miseries and that a cloud of problems constantly looms above our heads.

This is our current situation. But this situation is not permanent, it can be changed, there is no doubt about it. We can experience this on contemplating on the precepts of the Bhagavad Gita

SANKHYA JNAN

With the words, '*Klaibyam mā sma gamaha pārtha*' – 'O Parth, do not be a coward' (Gita 2.3). Krishna, Parth's charioteer, gave him a dose of courage. But without a little understanding, talks of courage alone cannot win the fight. Only in an



intellect which has mature understanding does courage gain the stamina to spread its influence. Therefore, Shri Krishna then decides to give an understanding of some basic, philosophical principles.

This explanation is known as *sankhya jnan*. 'Sankhya' means true and complete. Here, *sankhya jnan* has been presented to Arjuna by clarification on what is *atma* and what is not.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE BODY AND THE ATMA

"Who are you?" Bhagwan Swaminarayan asked a young boy.

"A Harijan," the boy replied, referring to his caste.

"No, you are not a Harijan, you are *atma*. Now say 'I am *atma*' " said Bhagwan Swaminarayan, explaining the boy's true identity to him.

"I am *atma*," repeated the boy obediently.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was pleased, yet to verify, he once again asked, "Who are you?"

"A Harijan."

"No, not a Harijan, you are *atma*. Therefore say 'I am the *atma*' " Bhagwan Swaminarayan again instructed him.

The boy did so.

"Now, who are you?" asked Bhagwan Swaminarayan

"A Harijan," came the reply.

Then Bhagwan Swaminarayan made the boy say 'I am *atma*' a hundred times. The boy had the sentence memorized. Finally Bhagwan Swaminarayan asked, "Who are you?" The boy said, "Because you say so, I am *atma*, but, in reality, I am a Harijan.'

This is the result of believing oneself to be the body.

It is obvious that a person living in a house is separate from the house. No one says that the owner of a chariot and the chariot itself are one. Everyone knows that a bird is separate from its cage. The same applies to the *atma* and the body, yet we find it hard to understand. Why? The

reason is our belief that we are the body.

This belief is the king of all ignorances. To believe one's body to be the *atma* is known as *dehatmabhav*. This is a type of madness that can be compared with someone living in a house believing himself to be the house. This is the pitiful situation of a bird who believes itself to be the cage. Since time eternal, such a false understanding has taken firm control over us, and we have become accustomed to being its slave.

Therefore, today's most urgent need is a change of control. We must be courageous. The only choice is to discard this belief of being the body and realize the true knowledge of one's *atma*. There is no room for feelings of inferiority or cowardice in this matter. The Gita teaches us how to develop this control of *atmajnan* in a simple manner.

Although Arjuna is in fact brave, he has been attacked by cowardice born from *dehbhav* (believing one's true self to be the body). He has therefore suffered a decline and is confused. Shri Krishna now teaches him the method of getting the *atma* into power. First of all, with simple analogies, he explains how the body and *atma* are separate in form and entity.

Shri Krishna Bhagwan says, 'देहिनोऽस्मिन् यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा। तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिर्धीरस्तत्र न मुह्यति॥' - 'Dehino'smin yathā dehe kaumāram yauvanam jarā, tathā dehāntaraprāptirdheerastatra na muhyati.' - 'Just like the *atma*, which is the controller of the body, passes through the stages of childhood, young age and old age in this body, it similarly attains other bodies as well, the wise are not distraught by this' (Gita 2.13).

Here, the words 'Dehino'smin yathā dehe' clearly show that the *deha* - body, and the *dehi* that which resides in the body, the *atma*, are distinct from each other. Our bodies change, but our *atma* does not. This difference has been shown here with the principle of *punarjanma*. The analogy given is of the changes that take place in our bodies. The body is born and the rise and fall of various

stages commences. Childhood begins and slowly diminishes as adolescence sets in. Before we even know it, old age eclipses the radiance of our youth, and finally death swallows old age. This cycle of change is continuous, but in this cycle of change, the *atma* remains the same. When we are reborn, a new *atma* is not born, but the same *atma* that was in the previous body attains a new body.

Krishna implies, 'O Arjuna! It is just as natural to obtain a new birth as it is to pass through the phases of childhood, youth and old age. You are courageous, but now become wise too. Do not grieve on seeing the bodies of your relatives die opposite you in war.'

Krishna then gives another analogy. 'वासंसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि। तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही॥' '*Vāsānsi jeernāni yathā vihāya navāni gruhnāti naro'parāni, tathā shareerāni vihāya jeernānyanyāni samyāti navāni dehee.*' - 'Just like a person throws away old clothes and adorns new ones, similarly, the *dehi*, i.e., the *atma*, that resides in this body, leaves an old body and attains a new one' (Gita 2.22).

Krishna has given an analogy of something as natural as changing our clothes, a daily process. No one believes themselves to be their clothes, and if they do, they are considered mad. The body is just a cloth, and the *atma*, distinct from the cloth, is one who wears it. We should also take a look at these words from a grammatical point of view. '*Naraha*' (person) and '*dehee*' (body) are both singular, whereas '*vasansī*' (clothes) and '*shareerani*' (bodies) are both plural. Therefore just as a single person adorns many clothes one after another, similarly a single *atma* attains many bodies one after the other.

Parabrahman Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan has mentioned the same point with a different perspective. A Brahmin named Vala Dhruv of the village Vaso asked Bhagwan Swaminarayan, "Maharaj, how can the feelings of I-ness and my-ness towards one's body and its relations be eradicated?"

Shriji Maharaj replied, "The *jiva* has a misconception in that it does not believe itself to be the *jivatma*, i.e., distinct from the body; instead, it believes itself to be the body. To illustrate how the body clings to the *jivatma*, consider a person who wears a *dagli* after having it sewn by a tailor. That person then begins to believe, 'The tailor is my father and the tailor's wife is my mother.' Such a person would be considered a fool. In the same manner, the *jivatma* is given a *dagli* in the form of this body, which is born sometimes to a Brahmin couple; sometimes to a low-caste couple; or in any of the 8.4 million life forms. Therefore, a person who believes the body to be his true self and believes the parents of that body to be his own parents is called a fool,... Therefore, as long as a person believes the body to be his true self, his entire understanding is totally useless" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 44).

Shri Krishna Bhagwan explains the difference between the body and the *atma* to Arjuna saying, 'अन्तवन्त इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरिणः। अनाशिनोऽप्रमेयस्य तस्माद् युद्धयस्व भारत॥' - '*Antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāhā shareerinaha, anāshino'prameyasya tasmād yuddhyasva Bhārata.*' - 'O Arjuna, the bodies of this indestructible imperishable eternal *atma* are destructible, therefore fight' (Gita 2.18).

One is destructible, the other indestructible. He shows their diversity by highlighting their inherent qualities.

He also gives a detailed explanation of the form of the *atma*.

THE FORM OF THE ATMA

Shri Krishna Bhagwan says, 'न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचिन्नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः। अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे॥' - '*Na jāyate mriyate vā kadāchinnāyam bhootvā bhavitā vā na bhooyaha, ajo nityaha shāshvato'yam purāno na hanyate hanyamāne shareere.*' - 'The *atma* is never born nor does it die. Similarly, it is not re-created to come into existence. Since, the *atma* is not born, eternal, imperishable, it has existed since time eternal

and does not die even though the body dies' (Gita 2.20).

It is as though the knowledge of the *atma* proclaimed in the Kathopanishad is echoed here. The words of the Kathopanishad are, 'न जायते म्रियते वा विपश्चिन्नायं कुतश्चिन् बभूव कश्चित्। अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥' - 'Na jāyate mriyate vā vipashchinnāyam kutashchinna babhoova kashchit, ajo nityaha shāshvato'yam purāno na hanyate hanyamāne shareere' (Kathopanishad 2.18).

Moreover, O Arjuna, the nature of that *atma* is, 'नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः। न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥' - 'Nainam chhindanti shastrāni nainam dahati pāvakaha, na chainam kledayantyāpo na shoshayati mārutaha.' - 'It cannot be cut with weapons, it cannot be burnt with fire, it cannot be wetted with water, and it cannot be dried by the wind' (Gita 2.23).

The reason, 'अच्छेद्योऽयम् अदाह्योऽयम् अक्लेद्योऽशोष्य एव च। नित्यः सर्वगतः स्थाणुरचलोऽयं सनातनः ॥' - 'Achchhedyo'yam adāhyo'yam akledyo'shoshya eva cha, nityaha sarvagataha sthānurachalo'yam sanātanaha.' - 'The *atma* cannot be cut, burnt or wetted. The *atma* is ever-existing, it pervades the body it resides in through its *jnanshakti*. It is unchangeable, immovable and eternal (Gita 2.25).

'अव्यक्तोऽयम् अचिन्त्योऽयम् अविकार्योऽयम् उच्यते। तस्मादेवं विदित्वैनं नानुशोचितुमर्हसि ॥' - 'Avyakto'yam achintyo'yam avikāryo'yam uchyate, tasmādevam viditvainam nānushochitumarhasi.' - 'This *atma* is said to be inexpressible, unthinkable and unchanging. Therefore, realizing the *atma* to be as such, it is not appropriate for you to grieve (Gita 2.24).

Moreover, 'अविनाशि तु तद् विद्धि येन सर्वमिदं ततम्। विनाशमव्ययस्यास्य न कश्चित् कर्तुमर्हति ॥' - 'Avināshi tu tad viddhi yena sarvamidam tatam, vināshamavyayasyāsyā na kashchit kartumarhati.' - 'Know that *atma* which pervades the entire body through its *jnanshakti*, to be indestructible' (Gita 2.17).

It is due to this pervasiveness that the body feels alive And so we are able to experience the red glow and heat of a heated iron ball. We know that the red colour and heat is not its own; if the heat is removed then these attributes will

disappear. The *atma's* effect is similar.

In this way, the Gita makes us conscious of our true form by showing us the difference between the body and the *atma* by referring to the eternal and the perishable.

This principle has been imbibed in society through a nice story.

Once, there was a lion cub. Somehow it went astray from its parents and came across a herd of sheep. The shepherd let it join the herd and named it Lindiyo. Lindiyo grew up amongst the sheep. Wherever he looked, there were sheep. He became comfortable amongst them, and the sheep also accepted the cub. They began to play together and eat together. The sheep taught Lindiyo to sing and dance as they did. Lindiyo began to enjoy himself. Slowly his complete behaviour became like that of a sheep. He completely forgot he was a lion. The language of the sheep became his language. Rather than being able to give a roar that would shake the whole area, Lindiyo would now himself shudder like the sheep on hearing the roar of a lion. He completely believed himself to be a sheep.

As time passed by, one day, a lion, travelling fearlessly through the jungle came there. He saw the flock of sheep, and on seeing the baby lion amongst them, he was amazed. The lion he saw did not have a charisma like that of a king of the jungle, nor did he have pride in his walk, but was overcome with fear instead. Seeing this, the lion immediately realized that this young lion had forgotten his true identity. He decided to jog his memory. He ran towards the flock of sheep. The flock began to flee. Lindiyo, too, began to flee, but before he could get far, he was caught by the lion. All the sheep thought that Lindiyo's end had come. Lindiyo, too, was sure that the lion would tear him up and eat him. But instead, the lion began to explain to him, "Son, you are a lion like me. We are the kings of the jungle." Saying this much, the lion took him to a nearby lake and showed Lindiyo his reflection.

(contd. on p. 58)

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir Bodeli

Bodeli (Sub-district:Sankhed), is regarded as the eastern gateway to the Vadodara district of Gujarat. Situated on the banks of River Orsang, the mandir is actually located on the outskirts of Chachak village, which is a part of the Pavi-Jetpur sub-district. However, to the native residents, the villages of Chachak, Alipura, Dhokalia and Bodeli are so intertwined that the region is known as Bodeli.



MANDIR FACTS

The new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Bodeli is located amid 12 acres of lush green surroundings and has the following features:

- Jaisalmer Stone used: 42,000 cu.ft.
- Height: 67.5 feet, width: 90 feet, length: 168 feet.
- 5 *shikhars*, crowned with *kalashes* and flags.
- *Ghummat* (main dome) and 20 *ghummat*s (secondary domes) topped with *kalashes* and flags.
- Ceilings: 30, designs include: Akshar Deri, flowers, ocean waters, lotuses.
- Pillars: 122, decorated with 108 statuettes of India's rishis, sages and devotees.
- Torans: 133.

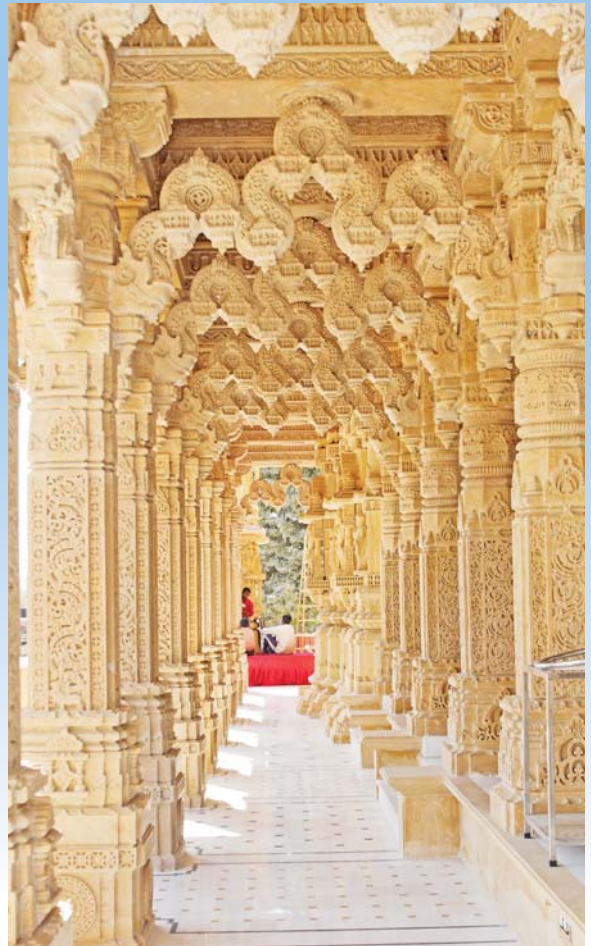
- On outer side of *kakshasan* (the back support of the seats aligning the *parikrama* wall) are 50 episodes from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan carved out of stone, together with a description of each incident.
- Central Shrine: Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami; Left: Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev; Right: Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj.
- Parikrama: Shrines of Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Sita-Rama-Hanumanji; Parvati-Shankar-Ganapatiji, Nilkanth Varni Abhishek Murti. ◆



Main Dome



Jharukho (Balcony)



Mandir Parikrama (Circumambulatory path)

Murti-Pratishtha Celebration

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Bodeli, Gujarat
6-7 & 12 March 2011

Pre-pratishtha ceremony



The *murti-pratishtha* celebrations and opening of the newly built *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Bodeli, marked a historic occasion for the tribal region of central Gujarat. The two-day celebrations, including a *yagna*, *nagaryatra* and *murti-pratishtha*, were the climax of many years of effort by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, sadhus and devotees. The following is a brief report of these celebrations.

Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



SWAMINARAYAN MAHAYAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE: 6 March 2011

The Swaminarayan Mahayagna for World Peace, marked the beginning of the celebrations.

At the designated auspicious time of 8.15 a.m. on Fagun *sud* 2, V.S. 2067 (6 March 2011), the Swaminarayan Mahayagna for World Peace began with the chanting of Vedic mantras by the Brahmin priests. Senior sadhus, Mahant Swami, Doctor Swami, Kothari Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Viveksagar Swami and others presided over the preliminary rituals.

The meticulous arrangements for the *yagna* had been made by youths of Pavi-Jetpur, Ratanpur, Navsadi, Vadodara, Bharuch, Simaliya, Rajparddi, Rajpipla, Ankleshwar and Vaghra.

The devout feelings of the tribal residents of this area, who had laboured intensely for the making of the mandir and participated in the *yagna*, were demonstrated by the fact that this was the largest *yagna* ever organized by BAPS.

A giant 380 x 300 ft canopied area was erected on the grounds adjacent to the BAPS Mandir. A total of five main and 328 regular *yagna kunds* were set up for the 3,210 couples participating in the *yagna* rituals. To guide them, 175 experienced Brahmins were engaged throughout the *yagna* arena.

On this occasion, tribal participants who ate meat and hunted animals took pledges to become vegetarian and stop hunting. They accepted *kanthis* and took the refuge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

On the main stage at the front of the *yagna* arena, the *murtis* to be consecrated in the mandir were installed, resplendent in beautiful garments, garlands and ornaments. The *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandirs in Vardhi and Naj were also arranged on stage. Over 14,000 devotees had darshan of the *mahayagna*.



Yagna for World Peace in which 3,210 couples participated around 328 *yagna kunds*

GRAND NAGARYATRA: 6 March 2011

After the conclusion of the Swaminarayan Mahayagna for World Peace, the grand *nagaryatra* through the streets of Bodeli began at 4.00 p.m.

Mahant Swami and Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami performed the flagging off rituals, as sadhus recited Vedic mantras.

The procession stretched for over 1.25 km and featured many aspects:

- ◆ Youths carrying *murti-pratishtha* banner.
- ◆ Shriji Band playing bhajan tunes, with *adivasi* (tribal) youths dancing.
- ◆ Traditionally dressed *adivasi* devotees from various villages performing traditional dances. Their energetic dancing reflected their devotion to Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- ◆ 50 youths on motorcycles, waving BAPS flags.
- ◆ 25 *adivasi* devotees bearing fire torches.
- ◆ 5 mounted horse riders, performing exercises.
- ◆ 30 *adivasis* in traditional peacock-feather costumes, performing special dances.
- ◆ Sadhus seated in decorated horse carriages.
- ◆ Devotees of Badalpur on a decorated tractor, singing bhajans in their special style.
- ◆ *Murtis* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and Shri Nilkanth Varni on the Hans Rath





Thousands of children, teenagers and elders joyously participated in the grand, colourful procession of the *murtis* through the streets of Bodeli. Below: Akshar-Purushottam float

(Swan Float).

- ◆ Children of Vadodara Bal Mandal performing traditional dances.
- ◆ Sadhus on decorated tractors singing bhajans.
- ◆ 12 *adivasi* youths clad in traditional red, green, yellow costumes with *tumbdis* attached at the waist and headgear of horns, playing regional instruments.
- ◆ *Murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the Guru Parampara Rath, on which Mahant Swami and Kothari Swami were seated.
- ◆ *Murtis* of Bhagatji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj on a separate decorated float.
- ◆ *Adivasis* dancing to the tune of regional instruments called *khareks*.
- ◆ *Murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj on the Mayur Rath (Peacock Float).
- ◆ Youths, on tractor, dressed in costumes of deities such as Shri Krishna, Shri Rama, Shri Hanumanji, Shri Vishnu, Shri Shivji, and others.
- ◆ Group of Uda Bhagat on tractor singing.
- ◆ Koli Band group.
- ◆ Women devotees carrying *pothis* (shastras wrapped in red cloth) and the auspicious *kalash* and *shrifal* on their heads.
- ◆ Women singing bhajans and performing dances.
- ◆ *Murtis* of Ram, Sita, Hanumanji on

decorated float .

- ◆ Women devotees seated on decorated tractors.
- ◆ In the middle of the procession, *adivasi* youths formed 20-ft high pyramids, with the topmost person showering flower petals in all directions.

Thousands of onlookers lined the 4-km route, reveling in the colour, joy, music, dancing and devotion of the occasion.

In the evening assembly, everyone who had supported and contributed to the building of the mandir was felicitated by Mahant Swami and Kothari Swami. Finally, Divyaswarup Swami gave the vote of thanks.

PRE-PRATISHTHA RITUALS:

7 March 2011

With the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and according to his instructions, the senior sadhus performed the Vedic rituals to install the *murtis*.



From early morning, the divine atmosphere of the occasion was palpable to all. At 7.30 a.m., the senior sadhus performed *abhishek* of the *murtis* in all the shrines.

At 8.30 a.m. the auspicious Vedic *mahapuja* rituals to install the *murtis* began. Senior sadhus performed the rituals as experienced Brahmins, Shri Ghanshyambhai Shastri, Shri Mukeshbhai Shastri and others, recited the Vedic verses. Leading devotees, seated under the main mandir dome also participated in the *mahapuja* rituals.

Thereafter, the Vedic invocation rituals were performed by senior sadhus: Central Shrine – Mahant Swami, Ghanshyam Maharaj – Kothari Swami, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev – Ishwarcharan Swami, Nilkanth Varni – Doctor Swami; Bhagatji Maharaj – Viveksagar Swami, Shastriji Maharaj – Ghanshyamcharan Swami; Yogiji Maharaj – Devcharan Swami and Akshaymuni Swami, Pramukh Swami Maharaj – Divyaswarup Swami; Ram, Sita, Hanumanji – Narayanbhushan Swami; Shiv, Parvati, Ganapatiji – Nirgundas Swami.

All the arrangements for these Vedic rituals were made under the supervision of Shrutiprakash Swami and Anirdesh Swami.

While the Vedic rituals were being performed, over 25,000 devotees had assembled in the nearby canopied assembly hall.

Following the *dhun*, *prathana* and bhajans, there were speeches by Narendraprasad Swami (Acharya Swami), Krishnapriya Swami, Viveksagar Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami. The stage guests included: MP for Chhota-Udepur, Shri Ramsinh Rathwa; former State Railways Minister, Shri Narayansinh Rathwa; Vice President of Vadodara District Panchayat, Shri Kanubhai Rathwa; former President of Vadodara District Panchayat, Shri Ranjitbhai Rathwa, and President of BJP in Vadodara, Shri Balkrishnabhai Patel.

Addressing the assembly, Shri Narayansinh Rathwa and Shri Ramsinh Rathwa, lauded the invaluable transformation Pramukh Swami Maharaj had brought to the lives of the *adivasis*.

Then, the youths of Raichha performed a

lively traditional *adivasi* dance, enthralling the entire assembly.

Following this were speeches by Doctor Swami and Mahant Swami in which they explained the spiritual significance of mandirs.

Finally, Divyaswarup Swami, who for over 30 years has toured in this region under harsh and demanding conditions, narrated inspiring incidents from Swamishri's extensive *vicharan* in this area over the years. Then, he appreciated everyone who had supported the mandir building project.

Since 2005, the women devotees of this region had devoutly observed a wide range of special *niyams* for the successful completion of the mandir project.

Following these preliminary rituals, Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in Bodeli on 12 March 2011. At 4.15 p.m. he performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals and invoked the divine presence of God and other deities in the *murtis*. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha arti* in all three main shrines. Swamishri then offered *mantra-pushpanjali* to the *murtis* including the guru-parampara and other deities. Swamishri also performed the *murti-pratishtha arti* of Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murti*.

Although an assembly had been organized for the following day, Swamishri instructed that an assembly be convened immediately. So, with the podium outside Swamishri's residence serving as an impromptu stage, the devotees sat in the premises. In Swamishri's presence, Viveksagar Swami described in vivid detail the enormous efforts of Swamishri in nurturing satsang in this tribal region. Also present on this occasion was the crown prince of Chhota-Udepur.

Thus, Swamishri, despite frail health, wholeheartedly fulfilled the wishes of and blessed the tribal devotees of the Panchmahal region. ♦



Puja Mahant Swami performs the pre-pratishtha rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, 7 March 2011



Swamishri performs the pratishtha rituals, 12 March 2011



Senior sadhus address the mammoth pre-pratishtha assembly , 7 March 2011



Thousands of devotees in the pre-pratishtha assembly , 7 March 2011

The phenomenal growth of Satsang among the tribal people of Bodeli and Godhra regions since its inception in 1975 is a saga of herculean endeavour and divine grace. Today, 35 years later, more than 35,000 tribals have abstained from meat-eating, alcohol, addictions and other vices, and practice the principles of satsang. How did this moral and spiritual revolution begin?

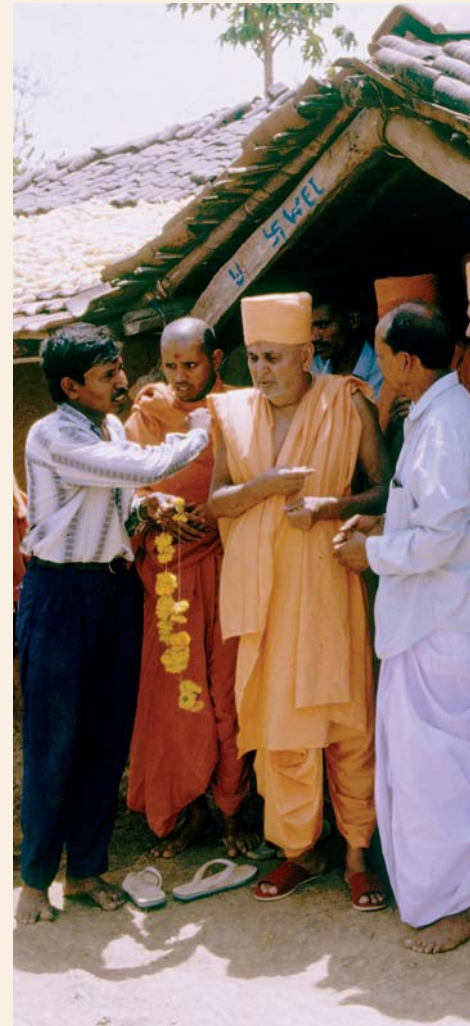
It all began in 1966. Raisinh Rathwa, a tribal from the nondescript village of Kundal in the Chhota-Udepur region, travelled to Atladra in search of daily subsistence. He got employed by a company not far from the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Atladra. Out of his inclination for spirituality he once visited the mandir. At that time Yogiji Maharaj was on his way for darshan of the deities. For Raisinh it was his first darshan of Yogiji Maharaj. He was attracted to Yogiji Maharaj's divine personality. There and then he wished that if Yogiji Maharaj could come to his village it would be nice and elevating. But his wish



Swamishri performs *murti-pratishtha*

remained unfulfilled. Years lapsed by. Raisinh, however, regularly visited the mandir and he came in touch with Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami. Thereafter he became engaged in doing *seva* in the mandir.

In 1974 Raisinh was initiated into Satsang and was given a *kanthi* from the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He started attending Satsang *shibirs* (camps). In 1975 Raisinh invited Yogendra Bhagat (now Divyaswarup Swami) and Sahadev Bhagat (Anandkand Swami) to Kundal, his village. Both the *parshads* also visited other neighbouring villages for satsang. This marked the



Swamishri sanctifies the home of a devotee, Chuli

beginning of satsang in the tribal villages of that region.

The exponential growth of Satsang is briefly described in the following milestone events:

1977: Pujya Tyagvallabh

Bodeli and Godhra Tribal Regions

Satsang Timeline



Swami travelled to Moti-Bej and Kundal and inaugurated the weekly satsang assemblies for the tribal aspirants.

19 February 1979: (First visit) Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the village of Sima near Bodeli for the first time and sanctified homes of tribals.

In the following years BAPS sadhus travelled in the region inspiring values in the lives of tribals in spite of adverse conditions and severe difficulties.



Devotees during a tribal assembly, Bodeli

February 1983: (Second visit) Swamishri visited Bodeli again to fulfil a devotee's wish and please him.

August 1984: (Third visit) Swamishri visited Moti-Bej, Pavi-Jetpur, Jambu-Ghoda, Chhota-Udepur and Bodeli.

February 1986: (Fourth visit) Swamishri visited the tribal region for two to three days.

1-3 February 1988: (Fifth visit) Swamishri visited the village of Kosindra, Ghelpur, Jabugam, Pavi-Jetpur, Khandi-ya-Amadar and others to celebrate the 10th anniversary of satsang in the region.

February 1992: (Sixth visit) Swamishri visited Pavi-Jetpur.

April 1998: (Seventh visit) Swamishri travelled for ten days in the tribal villages, during which he consecrated two *hari* mandirs in Bodeli and Chuli.

February 2001: (Eighth visit) Swamishri consecrated a *hari*

mandir in Kosindra (1 Feb.).

25-28 February 2003: (Ninth visit) Swamishri visited Bodeli to celebrate the Silver Jubilee celebration of satsang in the region. Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was honoured by the tribal devotees. On 26 Feb. Swamishri performed the ground breaking ceremony for a *shikharbaddh* mandir in Bodeli.

11 February 2005: (Tenth visit) Swamishri performed the foundation-stone laying ceremony of the *shikharbaddh* mandir in Bodeli.

7 February 2011: Senior sadhus performed the preliminary *pratishtha* rituals of the *shikharbaddh* Swaminarayan Mandir in Bodeli.

12 February 2011: (Eleventh visit) Swamishri and senior sadhus performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *shikharbaddh* Swaminarayan Mandir in Godhra.

12 February 2011: (Eleventh visit) Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *arti* of Swaminarayan Mandir in Bodeli.

The patient and continuous efforts of Swamishri, sadhus and volunteers in elevating the tribal regions of Bodeli and Godhra have produced unprecedented moral and spiritual transformations of tribals who were once steeped in superstitions, addictions, looting and killing. ♦

Satsang History of Bodeli and Its Tribal Region



Tribals welcome Swamishri in Kamboi village, near Dahod



Swamishri on a round of home visits in Chuli



Swamishri performs the Vedic foundation-stone laying ceremony for Bodeli *shikharbaddh* mandir



Swamishri blesses a tribal youth during a tribal assembly, Bodeli

State: Gujarat, **District:** Vadodara, **Taluka:** Bodeli, **Town:** Bodeli

Bodeli is the gateway to the eastern belt of the tribal region in the district of Vadodara, Gujarat. The town lies on the banks of River Orsang and on the threshold of four villages and two *talukas*. The villages of Chachak, Alipura, Dhokaliya and Sima are so integrated with Bodeli that the area encompassing the four villages is popularly known as Bodeli. The town of Bodeli is one-and-a-half hours ride by car from Vadodara.

In 1974 the seeds of Satsang blossomed by the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his sadhus.

The inception of satsang in Bodeli took place through the efforts of Arvindbhai Brahmabhatt (Prof. of Physical Education in a commerce college) and Pravinbhai V. Patel (a high school teacher in Shirolavala). Arvindbhai Brahmabhatt inspired satsang in Manubhai M. Patel (Prof. in a commerce college) and Pravinbhai Patel inspired Satsang in Kanubhai Patel (of

Parikha village) and Amrutbhai Kamaliya.

Satsang flourished in the region through the efforts of these five devotees.

- ◆ In 1979, Swamishri was engaged in *vicharan* in the district of Vadodara. After blessing a satsang assembly at Chhota-Udepur, the five devotees from Bodeli requested Swamishri to sanctify their town. Swamishri visited the home of Arvindbhai Brahmhatt on 19 February 1979. In a small satsang assembly Swamishri instructed them to start satsang every Sunday.
- ◆ Swamishri visited Bodeli for the third time in 1984. From then onwards the weekly attendance in their satsang assembly increased to 25 members. Thereafter, for want of space, the assembly was shifted from a house to the premises of a primary school.
- ◆ Day by day the momentum of satsang increased. Babubhai Patel of Sanand donated his two acres of land to the Santha, and a further two acres and two factory sheds in Bodeli were acquired. The factory sheds were renovated into a *hari* mandir with a seating capacity of 800 devotees. On 12 April 1998 Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *hari* mandir in Bodeli. The mandir further augmented the strength of the congregation.
- ◆ On 1 February 2001 Swamishri came to Bodeli and Harikrishna Maharaj was honoured by the devotees. With the rapid growth of Satsang Swamshri declared his wish to construct a *shikharbaddh* mandir in Bodeli. Subsequently, more land was acquired around the *hari* mandir to add up to 12 acres.
- ◆ On 26 February 2003 Swamishri performed the *bhumi-pujan* (groundbreaking ceremony) for the proposed *shikharbaddh* Swaminarayan Mandir in Bodeli.
- ◆ On 11 February 2005 Swamishri performed the *shilanyas* ritual (foundation-stone laying ceremony) of the mandir in the presence of 20,000 tribal devotees. Thereafter the planning and construction began under

Akshaymuni Swami and Sanjay Parikh of the Santha's Planning Cell and the mandir was designed by *sompura* Devdattbhai Trivedi.

Swamishri himself willed that the magnitude and shape of the *shikharbaddh* mandir should be like the mandir in Mahelav. He also observed that the devotees in the region were anchored to satsang with a spirit of sacrifice, devotion and service. On another occasion Divyaswarup Swami requested Swamishri to install impressive *murtis* of Thakorji in the mandir. Swamishri replied that he would consecrate the *abhishek murti* of Nilkanth Varni which will attract thousands to the mandir.

We shall see in brief the Satsang history of some of the many villages in the Bodeli region.

CHHOTA-UDEPUR

In 1979 Swamishri's *vicharan* brought him to Chhota-Udepur in Vadodara district. Bachubhai Rao, a depot manager, had arranged Swamishri's blessings for a special assembly of his staff members.

Thereafter the efforts of sadhus inspired satsang in the lives of many. Swamishri had once stayed at Chaganbhai Brahmhatt's house in Chhota-Udepur. Swamishri once travelled in Chaganbhai's jeep and took interest in Rasul, the Muslim driver. Rasul was pleased and felt happy at Swamishri's care and interest. In 1984, five years later, Swamishri came to Chhota-Udepur again and remembered Rasul and blessed him.

MOTI-BEJ

The village of Moti-Bej lies in the lap of lush hills known as Hidamb forest, where Bhim and Hidimba met and got married.

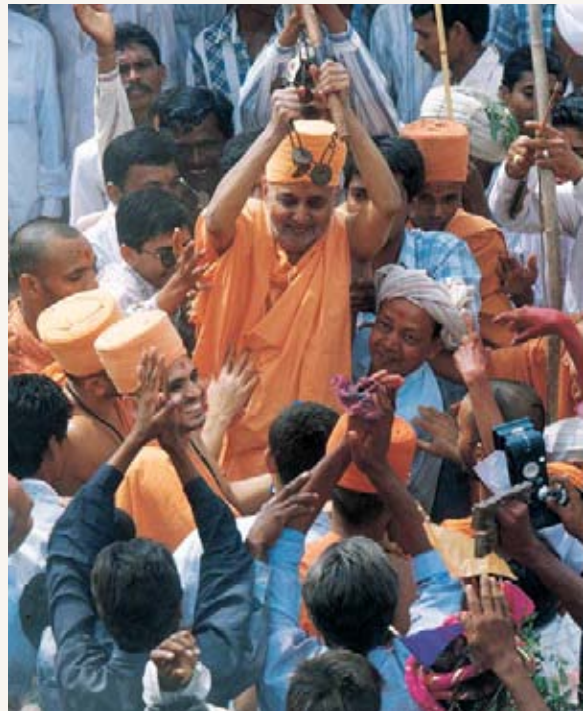
In 1974 Raisinh Rathwa was blessed with satsang in Atladra and he inspired satsang in his friend, Madhavsinh Rathwa of Moti-Bej. Through the visits of BAPS sadhus satsang slowly flourished in the village. In 1979 Puja Tyagvallabh Swami inaugurated a satsang

mandal in Moti-Bej. In 1979 Swamishri visited the village and gave fillip to satsang. Then he visited again in 1984 and held an assembly outside Madhavsinh's house.

In 1992, the 100th birthday celebration of Yogiji Maharaj was held in Dhari. To commemorate the festival 25 youths of Moti-Bej embarked upon a pilgrimage on bicycles to Dhari. Before heading for Dhari the youths went to Bochasan to receive Swamishri's blessings. Swamishri warmly welcomed and blessed them. Then Swamishri made arrangements for lunch and told them to meet him on their way back from Dhari. On returning, they met Swamishri at Vidyanagar and invited him to come to Moti-Bej. Swamishri replied that he had been there several times. "But we were not *satsangis* at that time," the youths added. Swamishri told them, "Prepare a centre [mandir] there." The youths decided to fulfil Swamishri's words, and they acquired six acres of land in the village. Then the devotees prepared, through collective efforts 100,000 bricks. The young and old pitched in, completing the *hari* mandir construction in 1994. Swamishri was scheduled to arrive for the *pratishtha* but he became ill and sent Mahant Swami and Viveksagar Swami instead. Swamishri also sent a letter of regret to the devotees, "I desired to come there but I am unable to do so. My mind is there. In future I will repay you by coming." Swamishri visited Moti-Bej in 1998 and performed *arti* of Thakorji in the *hari* mandir and pleased the devotees.

CHULI

The history of how satsang began in Chuli is quite unique. In 1985 Divyaswarup Swami was travelling from Devgadhi Bariya to Pavi-Jetpur. At dusk their car broke down at Chuli village. Hirubhai, a tribal living on one of the nearby hills, saw the sadhus in saffron clothes. He came down and requested the sadhus to stay the night there. He gave them rations of rice grains and lentils to prepare *khichdi*. Hirubhai assembled some local



Swamishri is joyously welcomed by the devotees of Chuli

people and the sadhus discoursed to them about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. They also invited the villagers to visit the Bicentennial Celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami's birth in Ahmedabad. The villagers came and were deeply impressed by the festival, Swamishri, sadhus and devotees. Some even served as volunteers during the festival. Thereafter satsang flourished in Chuli as the village folk became familiar with the saintliness of the sadhus and their discourses. They invited Divyaswarup Swami for a satsang assembly. After the assembly the local folk started singing bhajans at about 12.30 a.m. Nimabhai (Nilkanthbhai) informed Divyaswarup Swami that they would go on singing till early morning, so they should take rest and sleep for the night. Nimabhai spread a thin mattress in his 10 ft. by 10 ft. hut. The two sadhus just about managed to lie down to sleep. Between 3.30 to 4.00 a.m. Divyaswarup Swami awoke and came out. It was freezing cold. On seeing Nimabhai and his children sleeping outside on gunny bags, curled up to keep themselves warm,

Divyaswarup Swami was stunned. He brought his mattress and covered Nimabhai and others. In the morning when Nimabhai saw the mattress over them he was touched by the sadhus' care and love for them. Gradually the sheer enthusiasm of the villagers inspired the sadhus to plan for a mandir there. They saw several places, but Nimabhai's land seemed to be an ideal location. Nimabhai donated his 1 *vigra* of land for the mandir. The local devotees made 100,000 bricks by themselves. The sadhus acquired iron, cement and other building materials in donation from neighbouring businessmen. The devotees of Chuli dug the foundation pit and through the collaborative efforts of other devotees from neighbouring villages they built a *hari* mandir.

On 16 April 1998 Swamishri arrived in Chuli and performed the *pratishtha* rituals. In his blessings Swamishri said, "Today [the *murti* of] Bhagwan has been consecrated here. This place has become the biggest *tirth* in the region. You must all come here for darshan. Whatever difficulties you encounter pray and make a wish here and you will be relieved. Even if you offer a flower or a fruit before the *murti* of God you have done everything. To fulfil your wishes there is no need to sacrifice animals anymore. Just make your wishes here. Pray to God. Even if you fold your hands before him with faith, he will be pleased. God is the liberator of all

miseries. The happiness that lies in doing his bhajan is to be found nowhere else."

The dedicated efforts of Divyaswarup Swami, Vinamraswarup Swami, Varninath Swami, Prashantmurti Swami, Paramnayan Swami and Uddhavpriya Swami are profoundly reflected in the growth of Satsang in the Bodeli region.

The development of Satsang in each of the hundreds of villages in the Bodeli tribal region includes *sanyukta mandals*, *mahila mandals*, *bal mandals* and *balika mandals*. Satsang in the tribal region is divided into *kshetras* or smaller regions with each including many villages under it, where devotees ranging from five to eighty assemble for weekly satsang.

In all, there are 11 *kshetras* under Bodeli region, namely, Moti-Bej (includes satsang in 15 villages), Tejgadh (15 villages), Pavi-Jetpur (21 villages), Chuli (14 villages), Ratanpur (19 villages), Chhota-Udepur (22 villages), Nasvadi (15 villages), Bodeli (16 villages), Kundal (15 villages), Dabhoi (19 villages) and Unchapan (14 villages).

Through the blessings and efforts of Swamishri, senior sadhus and others, the BAPS Satsang has transformed and elevated the lives of thousands of tribals in 185 villages of the Bodeli region. ♦



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *hari* mandir in Chuli



BAPS Swaminarayan *hari* mandir, Chuli



Murti-Pratishtha Celebration

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Godhra, Gujarat
11-12 March 2011

Swamishri and senior sadhus perform the *murti-pratishtha* rituals



**SWAMINARAYAN MAHAYAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE:
11 MARCH 2011**

A total of 1,506 devotees participated in the Swaminarayan Mahayagna for World Peace. Senior sadhus performed the initial rituals as the Vedic verses were recited by Ghanshyambhai and Mukeshbhai Shastri. There were five main *yagna kunds*, around which 42 devotees sat to perform the *yagna* rituals. Also, during the *yagna*, four children were ceremoniously invested with the *janoi*.

GRAND NAGARYATRA: 11 MARCH 2011

Stretching for about 1.5 km, the grand *nagaryatra* covered a 4-km route through the local area in Godhra city. The procession featured many colourful, traditional and devotional presentations:

- ◆ Youths carrying BAPS flag and banners.
- ◆ Musical band playing *dhun* and other tunes.
- ◆ 50 youths on motorcycles, 5 on horseback, hailing the *jai nad*.
- ◆ Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj *murtis* on Mayur Rath (Peacock float).

Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj





The main *yagna kund* for the Yagna for World Peace, Godhra



The *yagna mandap* in which over 1,500 devotees participated in the Yagna for World Peace, Godhra

- ◆ Devotees singing bhajans and dancing.
- ◆ Float with *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Mahant Swami and Kothari Swami seated on this float.
- ◆ Youths dancing.
- ◆ Elderly sadhus on horse carriages.
- ◆ *Adivasi* devotees performing traditional dances.
- ◆ Musical band with devotees dancing joyously.
- ◆ *Balaks* in various attractive traditional costumes.
- ◆ Sadhus on decorated tractors, singing bhajans.
- ◆ *Murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj on *rath*.
- ◆ Bhajan and dance group of Bariya.
- ◆ Sadhus, devotees, children walking with festive banners.
- ◆ Dance group from Hathiyavas.
- ◆ Decorated float with *murtis* of Shiv, Parvati, Ganapatji.
- ◆ Elderly devotees seated on decorated tractors.
- ◆ Women devotees carrying celebration banners and young girls carrying auspicious *kalashes*.
- ◆ Float with *murtis* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev.

- ◆ *Kishoris* pulling the BAPS float.
- ◆ *Adivasi* women devotees singing bhajans.
- ◆ Float with *murtis* of Shri Ram, Sita and Hanumanji.
- ◆ Women devotees carrying *kalashes* and *pothis*.

From 4.00 to 6.30 p.m. the colourful and devotionally charged procession traversed through the streets of Godhra with thousands of admiring onlookers welcoming, cheering and enjoying the spectacular view.

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CEREMONY: 12 March 2011

At the auspicious time of 8.18 a.m., the *murti-pratishtha* rituals in the Swaminarayan Mandir in Godhra began. Swamishri arrived at 8.38 a.m. and took his seat before the central shrine. Swamishri performed the rituals as Vedic verses were being recited. At the appropriate time, the doors of all the mandir shrines were opened and the invocation ceremony began in Swamishri's presence. As Swamishri attentively looked on with folded hands, the senior sadhus performed the rituals on his behalf inside the shrines: Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (central shrine) – Mahant Swami; Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj – Ko-

thari Swami; Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev - Ishwaracharan Swami; Shri Nilkanth Varni - Doctor Swami; Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganapatiji - Ghanshyamcharan Swami and Shri Ram-Sita-Hanumanji - Acharya Swami.

After the invocation rituals, the shrine doors were closed to adorn the *murtis* in garments and ornaments and thereafter *annakut* was offered.

Meanwhile, prayers were offered for the welfare and peace of all.

At 9.40 a.m. the shrine doors opened, revealing the beautifully adorned *murtis*. Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha arti* in all the shrines and offered flowers at the feet of the *murtis*.

Swamishri then went to the *abhishek mandapam* where he performed the *arti* and *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni.

After the conclusion of the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony, Swamishri arrived in the assembly held on the nearby S.T. grounds. Viveksagar Swami had completed his speech and Narayanmuni Swami was describing Swamishri's *vicharan* in the *adivasi* regions.

Then Swamishri blessed the assembly, "The

adivasis living in this region have developed strong satsang in their lives. They have given up their addictions, base natures and attained knowledge of how to please God. So, such a mandir has been built here. And due to such *sanskars*, there is peace and happiness.

"Yogiji Maharaj used to say, 'May God grant spiritual liberation to all'. He had this feeling towards everyone - young or old, devotee or non-devotee. Even for addicts he prayed that God help them.

"A sadhu does not have money, so how will he give any to us? But he gives us the biggest wealth of all - God. Sadhus teach all to give up addictions, bad habits and follow a righteous path so that everyone becomes happy, there is peace in society and good sentiments arise in all.

"Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifest on this earth and his 500 sadhus toured the villages tolerating many hardships for the good of others. They convinced them to give up addictions and accept the virtuous path of satsang.

"Whatever you do for God is not wasted. It gives you utmost peace and financial security



The grand procession of the *murtis* through the streets of Godhra



In Swamishri's presence Pujya Mahant Swami performs the *prathista* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



In Swamishri's presence Pujya Kothari Swami performs the *prathista* rituals of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Swamishri performs the *prathista arti*



The *prathista* assembly



Swamishri blesses the *prathista* assembly



In Swamishri's presence Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performs the *prathista* rituals of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev



Swamishri offers roses at the holy feet of the newly consecrated *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni

since addictions and bad habits are shunned.

“If we accept the teachings of God and the sadhus, we will benefit. If your wealth is spent improperly, you become miserable and bring misery to others also. But if it is used for good things, then it is useful for others and leads to happiness. This is what Bhagwan Swaminarayan has done – for the good of all.

“If our behaviour is pure, speech is respectful and work is good then everyone benefits.

“You know the story of Valio Bhil from the Ramayan. He met Naradji, a true sadhu, and had faith in his words, and thus gave up stealing and robbing to become Valmiki Rishi. He used to be a dacoit, but became a devotee.

“You earn money, but a true sadhu teaches you how to use it wisely and become happy. Shabari was also an *adivasi*, but she had faith that Bhagwan Ram will come. She daily chanted ‘Ram-Ram’ on the banks of River Pampa and seeing her devotion, Bhagwan Ram came to her.

“We have to understand that we are *atma*. This is Vedic knowledge. To overcome all miseries and become happy we must understand that we are *atma* and Paramatma Parabrahman Purushottam Narayan is God.

“We encounter misery because of our attachment to the body. Believing ‘This body is mine’ and ‘I have done this’ is ignorance. We are not capable of even raising our hand or a

dry leaf. It [our action] is all due to the grace of God.

“Because we are body-centred there is misery, but when one’s *atma* is realized there is no pain. This knowledge is given in the shastras. It is true knowledge. If this knowledge is realized then all are seen as divine and with good feelings. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given such a principle. The Vachanamrut is a shastra of wisdom which he has given us. It is in simple Gujarati; all, young and old, can read it, and understand it.

“Prayers to Bhagwan Swaminarayan that all prosper and become happy.”

The chief guests included: Shri Prabhatsinh Chauhan, MP; Shri C.K. Raul, MLA; City President Shri Rajeshbhai Chamber, Mamlatdar Shri Narayanbhai Munchhal, and Shri Rameshbhai and Daksheshbhai of R.B. Motors who donated the land for the mandir.

Swamishri was then honoured by senior sadhus with garlands devoutly prepared by devotees of various centres.

After Swamishri's departure for Bodeli, the assembly concluded following speeches by Doctor Swami and Mahant Swami.



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir Godhra

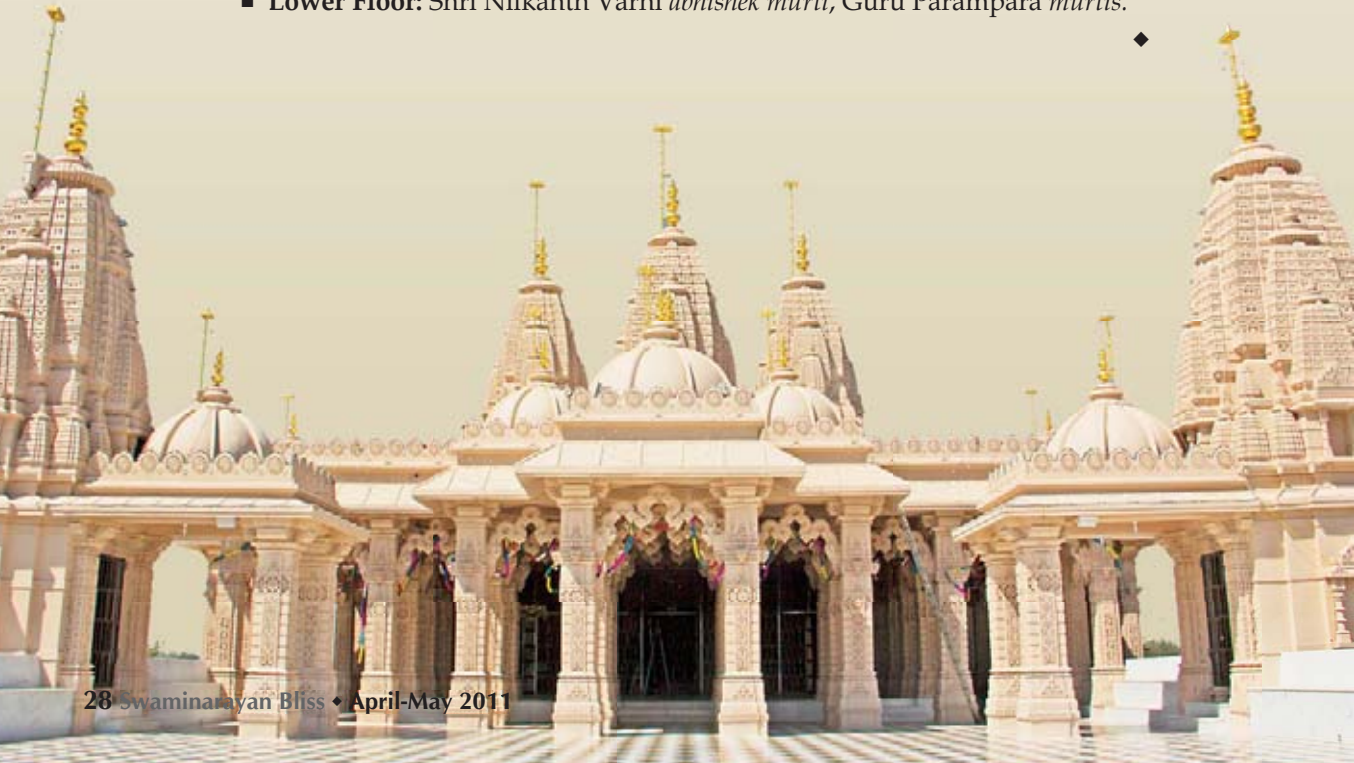
MANDIR FACTS

Godhra is a town located in a hilly and verdant region of Gujarat.

The BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir is the result of many years of effort by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, sadhus and devotees. The mandir is built of GRC, using special moulds to produce the intricate and pleasing designs for the *jharukhas*, *gavakshas* and other elements of the mandir.

The important features of the mandir include:

- **Height:** 78 ft.
- **Ghummat:** (main dome), decorated with sculptures of Bhagwan Swaminarayan playing *ras*.
- **Shikars:** 5.
- **Pillars:** 74.
- **Murtis:** Central shrine: Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami.
- **Left Shrine:** Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev.
- **Right Shrine:** Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj.
- **In Parikrama:** Shri Ganapatiji, Shri Hanumanji.
- **Lower Floor:** Shri Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murti*, Guru Parampara *murtis*.



Satsang in the Panchmahal Region

INTRODUCTION

The region of Panchmahal lies in the eastern part of Gujarat and shares its borders with the states of Madhya Pradesh to its east and Rajasthan to its north. Panchmahal region comprises of five main towns: **Godhra, Kalol, Halol, Dahod** and **Jhalod**. The region is lush with forests and populated mainly by tribals. Historically, it is believed that Bhagwan Ram passed by Halol. The Hidamb forest mentioned in the epic Mahabharat is said to be a part of this region. The Pandavs remained incognito for a year in this region and Bhim got married to Hidimba in Kaleshwari near Lunavada.

Pavagadh, a famous pilgrim place, is where Sage Vishvamitra performed austerities and consecrated the Kalika Mata Mandir, which still exists today.

Swamishri blesses a satsang assembly in Kanbipalli, Panchmahal



About 200 years ago a devotee from Pavagadh and a worshipper of Kalika *mata* sang a bhajan in praise of his Devi before Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Gadhada. The Lord was pleased and honoured him with gifts.

Brahmanand Swami came to the village of Lunavada and stayed the night at the Luneshwar Mahadev Mandir. He discoursed about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to the local people. From there he travelled to the village of Santrampura and stayed at a Suthar devotee's house. Today, there is a Swaminarayan Mandir at that place.

BEGINNING OF BAPS SATSANG

- ◆ In the time of Shastriji Maharaj Dr Bhavanishankar Jaishankar Raval, a BAPS devotee, started his medical practice in the Ghoghamba region. He inspired satsang in Motisinh, Harjivan Darji, Kesarsinh Parmar, Kesarisinh Parmar and Ratansinh. Someshwar Pithva, a devotee and government forest officer, was posted in Ghoghamba. He too, inspired satsang in many aspirants.
- ◆ Yogiji Maharaj once came to this region and stayed in the village of Piplod.

In 1964 Pramukh Swami Maharaj came to Piplod to acquire timber for mandir construction and stayed at Girjashankar Trivedi's house.

- ◆ In 1971 Ishwarbhai M. Patel (Dharmaj), a devotee, often visited the Panchmahal region for business. He inspired satsang among his business friends - Gordhanbhai and Manibhai Mundas Patel of Devgadhi Bariya.
- ◆ In 1972 Himatsinh, a hostel student of APC, Vidyanaagar, graduated in engineering, and got a government job at Godhra. He too inspired satsang among his friends and associates.
- ◆ In 1972 Mahendrabhai Brahmbhatt got employment in the Kadana Dam project. He also inspired satsang in the regions of Lunavada and Khanpur.
- ◆ In 1973, with the efforts of Ishwarbhai (Dharmaj), satsang *vicharan* of Pujya Narayan Bhagat (Viveksagar Swami) was arranged. Ishwarbhai (Dharmaj), Chimanbhai M. Patel of Godhra (son-in-law of Lalubhai - the son of Ishwarbhai Daji of Purushottampura), and Dayabhai M. Patel arranged Swamishri's *vicharan* programme in Panchmahal after the Ka-



Swamishri performs *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the *hari* mandir at Chandrapura



BAPS Swaminarayan *hari* mandir, Chandrapura

lash Mahotsav of Ahmedabad mandir in 1973. At that time Swamishri had consecrated the all-in-one *murti* (15"x7") of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Guru Parampara in the house of Mahendrabhai Brahmbhatt's (Jalsan) maternal uncle in Lunavada. It was the first *hari* mandir *pratishtha* in the region.

- ◆ Swamishri's *vicharan* in



Devotees of Ghoghamba enthusiastically welcome Swamishri



BAPS Swaminarayan hari mandir, Dahod



Swamishri performs murti-pratishtha of hari mandir in Dahod

1973 in the Panchmahal region gave immense thrust to Satsang. Thereafter from 1975, on Swamishri's behest, Divyaswarup Swami and Mahapurush Swami began travelling in this region. In 1977 Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami travelled in the region and nourished satsang in the lives of many.

- ◆ From 1990 Mahapurush

Swami stayed at Godhra, making it his hub, and travelled to the neighbouring villages. In 18 years – from 1972 to 1990 – there was satsang only in 17 villages: Rabod, Alva, Arol, Ghoghamba, Devgadh Bariya, Dahod, Lunavada, Godhra and others. At present satsang has spread to five regions, namely, Lunavada, Khanpur, Halol,

Kalol and Godhra. In the Dahod and Godhra regions satsang has spread to nearly 450 villages.

We shall see in brief the Satsang history of the other main towns and villages in the Panchmahal region.

KALOL

Kalol village was the first satsang centre in the Panchmahal region. Manikaka

and his sons of Devagadh Bariya introduced satsang through the *vicharan* of BAPS sadhus. Since 1975 Divyaswarup Swami has been visiting Kalol and the neighbouring villages. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Mahant Swami's *vicharans* added further momentum to satsang. Kanubhai T. Barot of APC, Vidyanagar, introduced satsang in his own village, Jharadka, near Kalol. With the growth of Satsang a *hari* mandir was constructed and consecrated by Swamishri.

PIPLOD

Pramukh Swami Maharaj came to Piplod in 1964, in the time of Yogiji Maharaj for purchasing logs. He stayed in the house of Girjashankar Trivedi, near the railway station. On 18 March 1998 Swamishri consecrated a *hari* mandir in Dahod and was on his way by road to Godhra. On the way at night he visited the house of Girjashankarbai in Piplod. The village was nourished with satsang through the visits of Swamishri and sadhus.

Tribal devotees perform a traditional tribal dance in Atladra mandir



CHANDRAPURA

Around 1974-1975 Bhagubhai Patel (of Nar) and Nanubhai Patel brought Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami to the village of Chandrapura and sowed the seeds of satsang. In 1982 Swamishri visited the village and sanctified the home of Ambalal S. Patel and blessed an assembly. Thereafter Divyaswarup Swami visited the village often and inspired satsang among the aspirants. The immense efforts of Harishbhai S. Patel in spreading satsang in the region is noteworthy. He became an active volunteer after recovering from an accident through Swamishri's blessings.

From 1992 Mahapurush Swami started visiting the village and became instrumental in the growth of satsang here. A *hari* mandir was constructed and Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* on 22 April 1998.

LUNAVADA

In 1971-72 Mahendrabhai Brahmbhatt, an engineer working for the Kadana Dam project, introduced satsang in Lunavada. On 18 December 1973 Swamishri visited Lunavada and consecrated a *murti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in a small room, thus establishing a *hari* mandir in this region. In 1981 Markandbhai Dave was appointed as principal of the Primary Training College (PTC). He inspired satsang in Ganpatsinh Pagi (Muvada), Rupabhai Damor (Lambhu) and several aspirants. In 1981 Pujya Mahant Swami's *vicharan* further nourished satsang in the region. The two youths travelled to many villages and conducted satsang assemblies.

In 1981 Divyaswarup Swami visited Lunavada, Muvada of Chhapri and other villages.

From 1990-91 Mahapurush Swami and Anandkand Swami started travel-

ling to the interior villages, reforming the lives of the locals by liberating them from addictions and superstitions. Thereafter senior sadhus: Pujya Mahant Swami (1994), Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami (2002), Pujya Dr Swami (2005) and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami (2010), gave momentum to satsang in the region.

GHOGHAMBA

Satsang started from the time of Shastriji Maharaj through Dr Bhavanishankar J. Raval and Someshwar Pithva (a forest officer), and later developed through the efforts of Ishwarbhai Patel (Dharmaj) and the *vicharan* of Pujya Narayan Bhagat (Viveksagar Swami) and Swamishri's first visit in 1973. Thereafter Swamishri visited the region seven to eight times. The efforts of sadhus were noteworthy. With the growth of satsang in Ghoghamba Swamishri performed the foundation-stone laying ceremony of a *hari* mandir and consecrated it on 20 February 1990. Swamishri also made many home visits.

Today, thousands of devotees pilgrimage for darshan at the *hari* mandir on every full moon day (Punam).

KANBIPALLI

Kanbipalli is a small village by the banks of River Karad. It was the native village of Chandu Bhagat, a dedicated volunteer who offered his services at the APC in Vidyanagar. Swamishri visited the village amidst some opposition from a few antagonists who were not inclined towards satsang. But Mohanbhai, a devotee, and the *darbars* courageously made all the arrangements. Then on Chandu Bhagat's request Swamishri visited his house and sanctified many others. Thereafter Swamishri blessed a satsang assembly arranged beneath a tamarind tree.

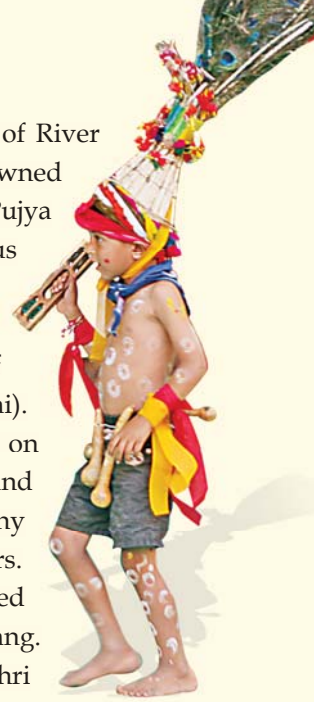
DAHOD

Dahod lies on the banks of River Dudhmati. Satsang dawned during the visit of Pujya Viveksagar Swami and sadhus in 1973. The sadhus stayed at Ratubhai Patel's house. Ratubhai was a friend of Bhanubhai Patel (of Mumbai). Swamishri's visit here on several occasions nourished and consolidated satsang in many devotees and well-wishers. Kanubhai Vadvala dedicated himself for the spread of satsang. On 18 April 1998 Swamishri consecrated a *hari* mandir in Dahod.

GODHRA

Two devotees were pivotal in launching satsang in Godhra: Chimanbhai M. Patel and Himatsinh. On their requests Swamishri first visited Godhra in 1973. A procession was carried out on the main streets. Thereafter Swamishri addressed a satsang assembly. In 1989 Swamishri was honoured by the town municipality. Thereafter Swamishri's visits intensified satsang in the region.

The *vicharan* and efforts of Mahapurush Swami, Abhaydarshan Swami, Naishtikjivan Swami, Amrutmuni Swami and Shrijidarshan Swami in the districts of Panchmahal and Dahod have nourished satsang in more than 247 villages: Devgadhi Bariya (33), Toyani (26), Dahod (31), Limkheda (19), Rabod (22), Ghoghamba (19), Kharod (18), Kalol (16), Godhra town (17), Halol (19), Lunavada (16), Khanpur (11). ♦



Transformation of Tribals

LIFESTYLE OF TRIBALS

The tribals' daily schedules begin prior to or at sunrise. The womenfolk of the house daily grind grains into flour before dawn. Mostly, every hut has a hand-driven grinder or a large pestle and mortar. The signal singing while grinding resonates in every hut. They also finish off cleaning the hut, replenish the water pots and complete their daily rituals of brushing and bathing by sunrise.

The menfolk wake up at sunrise and lead their domestic animals out of their pen while brushing their teeth. After their meal they go to their farms to work or labour at someone else's. The women also join the men at work. They dig, cut or thresh in the farms. The tribal children mainly take cattle to pasture. They have packed lunch at noon and return in the evening.

The tribals enjoy attending fairs to relax and entertain themselves.

SUPERSTITION AND BLIND FAITH

The tribals believe in an array of devas and devis. The deities are installed either on the village outskirts beneath a huge banyan, peepal or tamarind tree, or in a cave or shrine on top of a hill. They generally perform their major rituals there two to three times a year. The tribals' faith is steeped in superstitions. The slightest illness in the family or in their domestic animals is believed to be a sign of wrath from their gods. They consult a *bhuvo* (an exorcist or witch-doctor) and perform certain rituals at his bidding. If they are cured or relieved of their problems they sacrifice animals and offer the meat to the *bhuvo*.

The tribals practice three main types of rituals to overcome their ailments or problems: 1. Bandru, 2. Jatar, 3. Endarni radu. The three practices are performed to ward off illness or life-threatening diseases. The tribals also perform rituals to offer and appreciate the new harvest to the devas. During these practices a *bhuvo* is called and he shakes his head and arms, dances and sings prayers to the devas. The final offerings to appease the devi or deva mainly



Padhramanis to the huts of devotees in Chuli



Tribal youths demonstrate their traditional archery skills



Swamishri advises and blesses a tribal devotee



Swamishri initiates a tribal into Satsang

involves sacrificing goats or male buffaloes.

The tribals also pray and make wishes to the Pithora deva to resolve their worldly miseries or difficulties. Again after their wish is fulfilled they offer a sacrifice of goats or hens.

Another malpractice among the tribals of Dahod region is the public proclamation of a woman as a witch by her own in-laws. This is done because of the woman's bad or eccentric behaviour. Consequently she is then excommunicated and sometimes done to death. Another heinous practice is to rid a new born child because of his or her strange physical appearance or body parts.

The stories of transformation of thousands of tribals wallowing in addictions, meat-eating, superstitions and vices is amazing and laudatory. The epic efforts and divine grace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, sadhus and volunteers have worked wonders in the tribal regions of Bodeli and Panchmahal. For more than three decades Pramukh Swami Maharaj has endeavoured in edifying them with a selfless spirit and belief that God resides in them. We shall see a selected few among the thousands of transformations recorded.

6 February 2005 (Vasant Panchmi) was a special day for the devotees of Vadodara and the entire region. The *murtis* of Ghanshyam Maharaj and Guru Parampara were to be consecrated at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Atladra. It was the climax to months of preparations, devotion, austerities and sacrifices of thousands of devotees. Swamishri performed the consecration rituals and thereafter held the celebration assembly.

On that morning two tribals, Isoon Ravji Rathwa and Pravinbhai of Raichha village, Chhota-Udepur region, arrived in Atladra to celebrate the *murti-pratishtha* celebration. They had pilgrimaged 130 km by foot from Raichha, preparing a garland of cloves for Swamishri on the way. They wished how wonderful it would be if Swamishri called them on stage to accept

their garland and bless them.

That morning after Swamishri's puja senior sadhus garlanded Swamishri. The two youths' garland was offered to Swamishri by Pujya Mahant Swami. The youths were happy but their wish remained unfulfilled. The assembly of devotees dispersed once the puja was over, however, a sadhu came searching for the two youths. Swamishri had told him that he would like to meet the youths who had prepared the garland of cloves. On enquiring, he found that they had left to see their relatives in Vadodara. A message was passed on to them to be present in Swamishri's puja the next day.

The next day Swamishri called the two youths on stage after his puja and blessed them profusely and told them to do satsang and inspire satsang in others. The youths were amazed and wondered at Swamishri's love and care for ordinary devotees like them.

Swamishri's personal care and effort in pleasing tribals and inspiring values in their lives have effected drastic changes.

Sanmukhbhai Manabhai Nayak lived in Kadila village, about four kilometres from Bodeli. The village has 250 homes, and its entire population was steeped in various vices and addictions. Sanmukhbhai was one such statistic. In 2002, with the death of his father, the burden of running the house came upon him. He started work at a shop in Bodeli and got ₹1200 every month. But he spent ₹20-30 in drinking each evening. On festive days he would spend ₹100-150 in drinks. In 2004 he changed his job and joined a shop belonging to Bhupendrabhai Shastri, a devotee who lived in Bodeli. Bhupendrabhai started explaining to him about the benefits of moral and addiction-free living. He also invited him to attend a satsang assembly one Sunday. When Sanmukhbhai attended it, he was overwhelmed with inner peace on seeing the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Swamishri. Initially he could not give up his addictions, but the words



Evening satsang assembly in the tribal village of Kamboi, near Dahod



Swamishri initiates a tribal into Satsang, Chhota-Udepur



Tribal devotees greet Swamishri, Ghoghambha

of sadhus strengthened him. He attended the Guru Purnima festival in Bocharan and saw Swamishri for the first time. His heart was filled with remorse and a desire to change his ways. He became a *satsangi* there and then, vowing to give up his vices and start doing daily puja. In 2007 Sanmukhbhai constructed a two-room house from the money he had saved due to his addiction-free life. Today, his house resonates with *arti*, *thal* and daily home assemblies (*ghar sabha*). The single transformative element of satsang had a great influence on his life and family.

Vitthalbhai Rathwa of village Vijol, came into contact of Satsang in 1995. His wish of touching Swamishri's feet at the Amrut Mahotsav in 1995 in Mumbai was fulfilled. He started doing daily puja from the following day. On returning home from the celebration in Mumbai he thought how could he stay at home when his father was the high priest and *bhuvva* of the village. Because of his father, goats were slaughtered and meat was cooked every day in their house. He decided to staunchly abide by the moral disciplines of satsang. In one room he cooked a vegetarian meal and offered *thal* to Thakorji, while in the next room his parents cooked meat. He abided

by the satsang rules under these conditions for two-and-a-half years.

One night, he prayed to Swamishri that his father becomes a *satsangi*. Instantly his room became filled with divine light, and he heard a voice, "Make a little more effort, and it will be done." Thereafter he felt comfort and became charged with hope. A few months later he took his father to the Dev Diwali celebration in Bochasan. His father saw Swamishri for the first time and he experienced peace within. He put on the *kanthi* and resolved to give up killing goats, eating meat, addictions and the position of high priest and live by the norms of satsang.

The father-son duo's satsang practices gradually influenced the remaining family members. On 2 April 1998 BAPS sadhus sanctified their home during which the remaining family members adopted satsang. Vitthalbhai made a 40 ft by 20 ft hall in his house and on 14 April 2003 Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami consecrated a *sanskardham* in his house. More than 30 *satsangi* families of the village come for darshan and satsang at the *sanskardham*.

A sea-change took place in Vitthalbhai's house and village because of Swamishri's blessings and grace.

With the blessings of Swamishri sadhus and volunteers have transformed the lives of thousands of tribals. Through the satsang activities of *bal mandals*, *yuvak mandals*, *mahila mandals* and *satsang mandals* the tribals have been reformed from addictions and vices.

With the establishment of a satsang *mandal* in the village of Bhanpura, near Bodeli, many have given up drinking and other addictions altogether.

Eighty percent of homes in Charola had addictions. There was no scope of satsang in the village. For two years the patient efforts of Maljibhhai, a devotee, bore fruit and many gave up addictions. Presently, the construction of a *sanskardham* is under way.

The tribals of Bokadiya village in the Chhota-Udepur region were habituated to drinking toddy, alcohol, meat-eating and stealing. Once, Jhendal Rathwa, a local, went to do business of toddy at Halol. Here, he came in touch with a *satsangi* and his life took a new turn. After attending satsang festivals and having the darshan of Swamishri and sadhus he became inclined towards satsang. He spread satsang in his village. He invited Mahapurush Swami and arranged a public assembly. Thereafter the visits of Divyaswarup Swami consolidated satsang among the village folk. At present the villagers have given up their vices and addictions and do daily puja, apply *tilak-chandlo* and perform *arti*.

Seventy-five percent of the tribals in Kasara village of Chhota-Udepur region were addicted to drinking. The majority of the houses had domestic kilns to prepare liquor. In 2004-5 two youths, Makanbhai Rathwa and Surpanbhai M. Rathwa became *satsangis*. They started doing daily puja with *tilak* and *chandlo*. The senior members of their house did not approve of it. They pressured them to remove the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam from their home mandir and stop doing *arti*. Then the village folk pressured them to give up satsang. But the two youths remained implacable. After seeing their unshakeable allegiance, the village people relented. They felt there was some truth in satsang. They invited two BAPS sadhus to their village and told them to sanctify their homes. The villagers then demolished their kilns and gave up their addictions. Every Sunday a regular satsang assembly is held in the village.

Madhubhai Rathwa of Ratanpura was a chronic addict of liquor. Furthermore, he was a troublemaker. Whenever he saw any sadhus he always troubled them or made fun of them. He created a ruckus on marriage occasions or during bhajan-kirtan programmes. The consequences of

his agitations did not deter him nor concern him. Sometimes he would ride a male buffalo in the village and shoot arrows at people. Soon his bad habits reduced him to poverty.

Once he was in an inebriated state. On seeing sadhus outside the house of Khumanbhai, a devotee, he came to them intending to create a scene. To his surprise the sadhus welcomed him and even embraced him. They also applied a *chandlo* and gently told him to give up drinking because it would cause grave problems. Several days later, Madhubhai got entangled in a row with his neighbours. The latter complained to the police and he was locked up in the local jail. Madhubhai recalled Divyaswarup Swami's words and he gave up his habit of drinking and eating meat. A few days after his release from jail he adopted satsang and became a devotee. Gradually, his financial state improved and he now lives a happy life.

Jashubhai M. Patel was a native of Khandana village near Dharmaj in Kheda district. He got a job as a teacher in Moti-Bej. He was habituated to drinking toddy and eating meat. By nature he was uncouth and blatant. He hated religion and thus derided those who practiced it.

In 1984 Swamishri came to Moti-Bej at Madhavsinh Mangalsinh's house. After having

breakfast at Madhavsinh's house Swamishri came out to leave for Kundal. At that time Swamishri pointed to a house and asked "Whose house is this?" "It belongs to Jashubhai, a teacher." Swamishri wished to visit the home. On seeing Swamishri standing outside his door Jashubhai was simply amazed. Swamishri asked him, "What is your profession?"

"I am a teacher, and I also run a shop," Jashubhai replied.

Swamishri told him, "As a teacher be of service to Satsang, and Bhagwan Swaminarayan will do your work." Then Swamishri sanctified his house and shop by showering rose petals. Swamishri's unsheduled visit and words touched Jashubhai and subsequently his life changed instantly. He became a *satsangi*. Thereafter he laboured intensely for the construction of a *sanskardham* in Moti-Bej. He gave donations for the project and thereafter he joined in offering his services for the Bodeli mandir project with body, mind and donations. On 27 November 2010 Jashubhai passed away before he could see the completion of the mandir in Bodeli. But because of satsang he was blessed with an amazing transformation and a blissful life.

Kanchanbhai Raising Bariya of Dungarvat village was a friend of Narsingbhai, a devotee of

Tribal youth devotees perform a traditional dance and play music at BAPS Mandir, Atladra



BAPS. The former was wedded to all vices and addictions. By nature he was temperamental and hot-headed. Whenever Narsingbhai visited his house he talked to him about satsang. But every time Kanchanbhai would bluntly tell him to stop. Sometimes he would even slap Narsingbhai and show him the way out.

Once, Narsingbhai arranged a satsang assembly at the house of Kanchanbhai. The latter was furious but he sat quietly in a corner away from the rest. Then, while the assembly was on he exploded with anger. He pulled Narsingbhai, who was discoursing, and bellowed, "Get out of here! I don't want to hear such talks in my house. I don't believe in all this rubbish."

In spite of his terrible attitude and tantrums towards satsang Kanchanbhai's life took a sudden twist on the consecration day of the *sanskardham* in his village of Devgadhi Bariya. He became inclined towards satsang. He started attending the weekly satsang assembly, and slowly his nature changed. He invited sadhus to sanctify his house and at present he is a BAPS volunteer offering his services as a *nirdeshak* of the Chuli region.

Desing Bhikhabhai Rathwa is a tribal labourer living at Kundal village in the Pavi-Jetpur region, Vadodara district. Let us see in his own words about how satsang drastically changed his life.

"In 1979 Pramukh Swami Maharaj came to our tribal region. It was the first time that I had darshan of a Swaminarayan sadhu. In 1981 we went to see the Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Ahmedabad. At that time I became a *satsangi* by wearing a *kanthi* at the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I was sixteen then. We were told about the disciplines of satsang and I came in touch with Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Divyaswarup Swami. With the growing association of Swami Bapa and sadhus I became staunch in my *niyams*.

"I work for the government's mid-day meal project in primary schools. The rest of the time I

labour at my 2-3 acre farm. I am happy because of satsang and bhakti in life. I started saving some money after I gave up my addictions.

"On 3 December 2007 I withdrew some money from my bank in Pavi-Jetpur. I left without counting the money I had received. The next day, I went to repay someone at Devgadhi Bariya. I counted the money and realized that the cashier had given me ₹10,000 extra. I couldn't return the money to the bank that day because I was away. On the other hand the bank officials realized on the same day that they were ₹10,000 short. They tried to search for it by asking the customers who had withdrawn money on that day. They also rang me and asked whether I had got extra money by mistake. I said yes and that I would return it to them the next day. When I returned the extra cash, the bank manager asked, 'What job do you have?'

"I'm a government labourer, and a volunteer of BAPS and disciple of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He says that one should not take or keep another's money and that's why I've come to give it back.' The manager was so pleased that he ordered *pendas* (a sweet) and gave it to me. I told the manager, 'Sir, I am happy in life not because of money but due to satsang.'

"Since 1986 I have been offering my services as a BAPS volunteer. Every day I travel eight to ten kilometres by foot to inspire satsang in other villages. In 1992 I got a bicycle and I became a *nirikshak*. So I started cycling 10-12 km daily to do satsang. Sometimes a lion or bear would cross or block my path. I simply chanted 'Swaminarayan' and passed by safely. Presently, I have acquired a motor bike and I travel 16-17 km to do satsang.

"I can vouch that the happiness I get in doing satsang, I cannot find it elsewhere. Swamishri has said, 'If you work sincerely and honestly you'll be happy. If you give up addictions and do satsang and bhakti you will be happy.' It is because of this knowledge that Swamishri has imparted that I am happy today." ♦

The selfless efforts of BAPS sadhus and volunteers in edifying the lives of thousands of tribals in the interior regions of Bodeli and Panchmahal is a moving story of epic grit, perseverance and faith. A few of their heroic efforts and faith are briefly described in this article.

Kanu Viru Rathwa, Kanalva

B.F. Patel and Ramanbhai, two BAPS volunteers, started a weekly satsang assembly at the house of the village head of Kanalva. But Kanu Rathwa, a dreaded bully and miscreant, opposed it emphatically. Once, Ramanbhai was returning home after concluding an assembly when Kanu and his gang of sixteen men ringed him. Kanu threatened him, "If you come for satsang again we will thrash you and break your hands and feet." Ramanbhai left petrified. He talked to B.F. Patel, but the latter decided not to back off. Remembering Swamishri he and Rajesh Solanki knocked on Kanu Viru's house. He asked him to call his sixteen friends. Kanu was impressed by B.F. Patel's courage and so invited his friends. From 11.00 p.m. to 2.00 a.m. B.F. Patel discoursed to them about the aim of human life and Swamishri's glory. His penetrating talks brought tears to seven of them. A few months later Divyaswarup Swami came to Kanalva and Kanubhai and his friends became *satsangis*. Kanubhai is now a BAPS volunteer. His house, once a den of drugs and drinks and meat-eating orgies, has morphed into a venue for the weekly satsang assembly and daily offerings of *arti* and *thal*.



Balubhai Rathwa is a resident of Donja village. He visits the Chhota-Udepur region as a satsang volunteer. On Dev Diwali he went to the neighbouring village of Bhumasvada to distribute *prasad*. On the village outskirts he saw a billy goat being ritually prepared for sacrifice by some tribals. Balubhai watched from one side. The tribals told him to leave, but hardly

Dedication of BAPS Volunteers

Bodeli and Panchmahal Regions

had he advanced a few yards a tribal came brandishing a lethal weapon and spewing out expletives towards him. In no time he gripped Balubhai's collar, half choking him, and accused him, "Two days back it was you who ran your bike over my child!"



A typical tribal mud hut covered with clay tiles

Balubhai explained that it was his first visit to the village. But the tribal was in no mood to understand. By then 20-25 tribals had gathered to punish Balubhai. They were armed with sickles, axes and sticks. Balubhai was terrified. With their strange chatter and violent shouts Balubhai felt they were all going to beat him and possibly kill him. He started remembering Swamishri in his mind. He was confounded as to what he could do to get away from there. B.F. Patel, a volunteer, was also with him. He, too, started praying to Swamishri. The crowd swelled further. Neither of the volunteers could succeed in calming the rising agitation. Both were fiercely chanting "Swaminarayan" in their minds. Suddenly, to their surprise, a senior tribal emerged from the rear of the group and shouted, "He is the main official of a hospital." And with this the entire tribal group broke up and left. The volunteers were unacquainted with the senior tribal person. They felt Swamishri had definitely inspired the tribal to save them. When they



Swamishri blesses tribal devotees in Chuli

asked him how he had come there, the tribal replied, "There was no special reason why I came here. I was simply ambling my way. On seeing you I remembered that I had brought my boy to the hospital because he had drunk poison. It was you who stayed

up all day and saved him. B.F. Patel, who worked at the local hospital, could not recall the incident. Both strongly felt that on remembering Swamishri the tribal was inspired to come and save them.

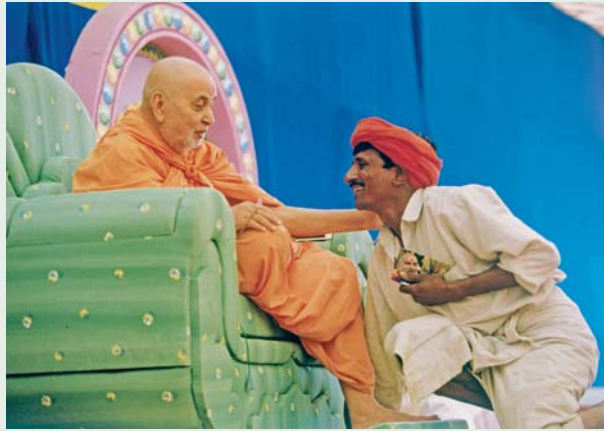
It is amazing how BAPS volunteers strive to inspire satsang in adverse and sometimes dangerous situations. They voluntarily help the tribals to give up their criminal and unsocial behaviours and adopt values in their lives.

Arvindbhai M. Rathwa is a *mandal sanchalak* (volunteer) of Godli village. He travels in the evening to neighbouring villages to inspire satsang. With the hilly terrain and forest environs there is no public or private transport service in the region. Arvindbhai either cycles or walks to the villages. The fear of wild animals stalks his mind.

Once, late at night he was returning home after concluding a Satsang assembly. A lion came and stopped on his path. Arvindbhai stood bravely and started remembering Swamishri. Moments later the lion quietly went his way. In spite of such encounters with wild animals

volunteers remain resolute in conducting satsang assemblies.

Ramanbhai D. Rathwa has been serving as a *nirikshak* since 2000. He visits the village of Chaklavav which lies at the foot of Pavagadh. The thick jungles on the way pose many dangers.



Swamishri blesses a tribal devotees on stage, Bodeli

Transport buses ply travellers to Pavagadh but to reach the interior villages people often have to walk two kilometres or more.

On 7 May 2005 Ramanbhai was on his way to Chaklavav. It was summer time. While he was walking he suddenly spotted a leopard waiting in the bushes for a prey. There was no one else at the time. Ramanbhai was scared and thought of Swamishri. He closed his eyes and mentally tried to prepare himself for the consequences. He chanted the name of “Swaminarayan” in his mind. Then to his surprise he heard the sound of a tractor. It was coming his way. On seeing it, he saw there were five people sitting in the trolley. They too perceived the leopard and started shouting at it. The leopard became scared and disappeared into the jungle.

A couple of weeks later Ramanbhai was again on his way to conduct satsang at Chaklavav. On reaching the village outskirts he saw a lion not far away from him. Again Ramanbhai frantically chanted the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* and the lion retreated into the jungle.

Volunteers like Ramanbhai persevere in their efforts to inspire satsang by discounting the dangers and difficulties they face.

Jashwantbhai N. Mehta of Mumbai had a comfortable lifestyle. He gave it up on Swamishri’s word, and for the last eight years he has been voluntarily offering his services as a

sanyojak (coordinator) in the Bodeli region. In spite of the lack in basic facilities in the remote tribal villages he offers his satsang services sincerely. He gives priority to satsang activities despite his social responsibilities at home.

Jashwantbhai is 68 years old and

has poor vision in one eye, yet his zest for *seva* remains strong. Since the last two months he had been fully engaged in preparations for the Bodeli *pratishtha* festival.

Navinbhai Soni of Dabhoi went to USA three years ago. Because of the severe winters there his vocal cords became non-functional. The doctors advised him for an operation and he had it done in India. Presently, with his vocal cords removed, he uses a small machine to speak. He travels from village to village in the tribal region, discoursing with the aid of his machine. Despite his disability Navinbhai offers his *seva* with gusto and joy.

Hundreds of BAPS tribal volunteers regularly go to villages to conduct satsang assemblies. In spite of hardships and dangers of the jungles they fearlessly pursue in inspiring satsang to please Swamishri. On returning late at night they have often been caught by forest rangers and police officials who take them to be criminals and poachers. Some have even been locked up overnight in jails. Yet their grit and zeal to please Swamishri is unfading. Kudos to their brave efforts and selfless spirit of devotion and sacrifice. ◆

BAPS ACTIVITIES

Bhagwan Swaminarayan endeavoured to serve all strata of society – the rich and poor, educated and illiterate. As a result, his devotees also set aside community differences to enable the personal, social and spiritual progress of all. This unifying grass roots work has been continued by BAPS under the guidance and inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In addition to the *adivasi* areas of Panchmahal, BAPS is also active in the *adivasi* areas of Poshina and Selvas.

Over the past four decades, Swamishri has himself frequently visited these tribal areas with the result that countless tribals have shunned addictions and immoral habits and now lead pious, addiction-free lives. BAPS sadhus and volunteers have also reinforced these values by their constant touring in the tribal villages. Through these combined efforts, BAPS has established Satsang centres in the following tribal areas:

Sabarkantha Region: Khedbrahma - 17, Poshina - 16; **Godhra Region:** Devgadhi Bariya - 33, Toyani - 26, Dahod - 31, Limkheda - 19, Rabod -



BAPS Satsang in tribal villages and towns of Gujarat



BAPS Chhatralay for tribal boys, Ukai



BAPS Mobile Dispensary Van, Silvassa



22, Ghoghamba - 19, Kharod - 18, Kalol - 16, Godhra Town - 17, Halol - 19, Lunavada - 16, Khanpur - 11; **Bodeli Region:** Bodeli - 16, Nasvadi - 15, Pavi-Jetpur - 21, Chhota-Udepur - 22, Dabhoi - 19, Kundal -15, Moti-Bej - 15, Uchapan - 14, Chuli - 14, Ratanpur - 19, Tejgadh - 15; **Selvas Region:**

Rankuva - 17, Silvassa - 21, Surangi -18, Karamkhal - 16, Vapi -16, Nana Pondha - 20.

Total centres: Sabarkantha -33, Silvassa - 88, Godhra - 247, Bodeli - 185.

There are hundreds of BAPS centres in the tribal regions of Silvassa, Sankari, Tithal, Bharuch and Ukai.

BAPS Tribal Activities in Gujarat

An Overview



Patient being treated by mobile dispensary team, Jamkhadi



Sadhus conduct a satsang assembly in a tribal village



De-addiction Drive by hostel students in a village near Ukai

In addition to the regular satsang activities, BAPS regularly conducts a variety of educational, health, environmental and social welfare activities in these tribal areas.

Since 1999, BAPS has operated mobile dispensaries which regularly visit the tribal villages to provide continual free medical care. At present there are 11 such mobile dispensaries which, up to February 2011, have treated a total of over 2,930,000 patients. Eye care camps providing free cataract operations and spectacles are also held.

In times of drought, floods and other natural calamities, BAPS has provided food, clothes, water and other emergency essentials to the afflicted.

Since 1985, in Ukai, BAPS operates a student hostel to cater for *adivasi* students, providing free boarding, lodging and tuition classes. The hostel provides a suitable atmosphere for these underprivileged students to enhance their academic careers. Over 1,050 students have benefitted from this learning environment. Of these, over 160 students have gone to at-

tain graduate degrees in engineering, medicine, sciences, law, commerce and arts. Some have also become teachers and college lecturers.

In addition to academic encouragement, the students are taught moral and spiritual values. They also participate in community activities such as de-addiction drives, tree-planting and visiting hospitals to pray for patients. ♦

PUSHPADOLATSAV

Festival of Colours

20 March 2011, Sarangpur

On the vast roadside ground adjacent to the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidya Mandir in Sarangpur, well planned arrangements had been made to seat the nearly 100,000 devotees expected for the celebration.

With great care, the sadhus had prepared a beautifully decorated stage. The backdrop comprised of intricately sculpted designs in the form of *jharukhas*, balconies, roof tops and walls. Life-size sculpted peacocks in various poses also adorned the stage. To the right of the stage were the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and to the left, on a swing decorated with colourful flowers, was the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayn.

To enable everyone seated anywhere in the assembly to see the stage programmes, six giant LED screens were placed at suitable locations.

The celebration assembly began at 5.00 p.m. with singing of *dhun* and *prarthana*.

There were speeches by Viveksagar Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Doctor Swami and Mahant Swami describing the spiritual significance of the Pushpadolotsav-Rangotsav celebration and how to benefit from the association of the Gunatit Satpurush and be coloured by his spirituality.

At 6.10 p.m., as Swamishri arrived on stage, the entire assembly resounded with the hail of the guru *parampara jai nad*.

On this occasion, Swaminarayan Aksharpath released the following new audio, video and print publications:

1. *Brahmaswarup Shri Pragji Bhakta: Life and Work* (Gujarati: H.T. Dave; English Translation: Amar Parekh, London)
2. *Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan Nari Bhakta Ratno*, Parts 1, 2 & 3 (Sadhu Aksharjivandas)





Swamishri and senior sadhus on the festive stage



Swamishri sprays saffron water on Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj

3. *Swapnavat Sansar* (Sadhu Viveksagardas)
4. *Swaminarayan Asmita* (Sadhu Viveksagardas)
5. *Ghanshyam Charitra* (Kannad translation)
6. *Yogi Gita* (Kannad)
7. *Yugvibhuti Pramukh Swami Maharaj* (Telugu translation)
8. *Chalo Gharne Mangal Banavie* (Telugu)
9. *Jay Gurudev Hare* (Audio CD of bhajans in praise of Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
10. *Sant Param Hitkari* (Audio CD of drama on the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
11. *Swaminarayan Satsang Darshan, Part 110* (Diwali and Annakut).

The names of the devotees who had generously supported this auspicious occasion were announced and appreciated, and then Swamishri was honoured by the senior sadhus with garlands devoutly pre-

pared by various *mandals*.

Adding to the devotional atmosphere, Krishnapriya Swami sang the bhajan, '*Vartāl gām fulvādie re hindolo āmbāni dāl....*'

Then Swamishri blessed the assembly, "This place is very sacred. After building the mandir here, Shastriji Maharaj used to celebrate the Fuldol festival. Shriji Maharaj had also celebrated Fuldol here and gave *fagva* as *prasad*. The women devotees of North Gujarat prayed, '*Mahābalvant māyā tamāri, jene āvariya nārīri....*' They requested Shriji Maharaj to give such *fagva* that our *atma* attains *kalyan*, peace prevails in our *jiva* and we remain happy in this world and beyond.

"Ego and attachments are *maya*: 'This is me, this is mine and I am doing this'. But we are not capable of doing anything. Without the wish of God, we are not able to even move a dry leaf. Even great rishis have succumbed to *maya* and have encountered obstacles. So the

devotees have requested, 'May this *maya* not trouble us, may we be able to overcome this *maya*, may it not trouble us and may we see your actions as divine'.

"Even God's human-like actions are divine. He has come to grant *kalyan* to the *jivas* and so he works in a way that people gain memories.



Swamishri sprays saffron water on the throngs of joyful devotees

The mammoth assembly of devotees on Pushpadolatsav



“God is the all-doer. God created the world. Yet people think, ‘This is all mine, I have done this, this has happened because of me’ – such ego arises and as a result there are disputes and quarrels. Shriji Maharaj happily gave blessings to the devotees that they are not troubled by such

maya.”

After his blessings, Swamishri performed *pujan* and *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Then Swamishri began the *rangotsav*, by first spraying Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, who was seated on a golden elephant. From a small spray placed in Shri Harikrishna Maharaj’s hand, he also sprayed Swamishri.

Thereafter, the central section of the stage where Swamishri was seated came forward 40 ft to take him nearer to the devotees. Using the remote controls on both sides, Swamishri operated the five large sprays which showered sanctified saffron-scented water on the devotees as they joyously passed by. With the sound of festive bhajans in the background, devotees systematically walked past Swamishri’s seat, and delighted at having been coloured by Swamishri they exited the assembly area. At the exit the male devotees were given in-

dividually packed *prasad* of hot Swaminarayan *khichdi*, pouch of buttermilk (*chhas*), water pouch, *fagva*, bottle of sanctified saffron water. The women devotees had been given this same *prasad* on their entry into the assembly area.

Devotees from throughout India, UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UAE, East Africa, South Africa and other places had come specially for this auspicious festival.

Swamishri spent over 70 minutes enthusiastically spraying the devotees and sadhus. The divine joy of the occasion was visible on the faces of all, young and old. As everyone left after being sprayed they all echoed with one voice, “Fantastic!”



Parshad & Bhagvati Diksha Ceremonies

Sarangpur, 25 March & 4 April 2011



Group photo of newly initiated *parshads* with Swamishri



Group photo of newly initiated *sadhus* with Swamishri

25 March 2011

PARSHAD DIKSHA CELEBRATION

Hundreds of parents, relatives, friends and well-wishers from throughout India and abroad were present for the *parshad diksha* ceremony in which Swamishri initiated 23 *sadhaks* into the *parshad* order. Over 60 devotees had come from Birmingham, England, especially for this occasion since two of the *sadhaks* were residents of Birmingham.

The atmosphere was full of joy and anticipation. The preliminary *diksha mahapuja* rituals were completed in the presence of Mahant Swami before Swamishri's arrival on stage at 8.10 for his morning puja. Then the remaining rituals were completed while Swamishri performed his puja.

After Swamishri's puja, each of the *sadhaks* came in turn to receive *diksha*. Kothari Swami replaced their old *kanthi* with a new one. Dr Swami draped a *gatariyu* over their shoulders and Mahant Swami placed a *pagh* on their heads. Then each *sadhak* approached Swamishri who gave the guru mantra. At the same time Narayanmuni

Swami introduced each *sadhak* and declared his new *parshad* name. Swamishri blessed each new *parshad* and the relatives accompanying him.

After completion of the initiation ceremony, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Yogiji Maharaj had great enthusiasm to initiate *sadhus* and envisioned that there will be *sadhus* from India and abroad. At the time when he talked it seemed his vision would never be fulfilled. [But now we see it has been achieved.]

"It is very difficult to renounce home and for parents to give permission. For parents to give their only son is a very great thing. It was Yogi Bapa's wish that *sadhus* increase, *satsangis* increase and mandirs increase, so all this is due to his wish. Parents happily give permission to their educated sons and come all the way here to give them. This is the magic of Yogiji Maharaj.

"It is very difficult to become a *sadhu*, but since there is *satsang* in the *jiva*, profound faith for Maharaj and Swami, and glory for Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj all this is possible.

"To renounce the home is as difficult as

climbing Mt Everest. Happiness in life is experienced to the extent one engages in *katha* (discourses), discussions kirtans, bhajan and bhakti.

“Gunatitanand Swami said that today 20-year-olds leave home and come here [to worship God]. The parents also come to give them. To inspire one *jiva* onto the path of God earns merits equal to saving a *brahmand*. This is a very important thing. May Maharaj bless all parents and grant them happiness in all ways.

“Today, many wish intensely to go to America and England. But to renounce all that and come here [to become a sadhu] is a great thing. We have just initiated these youths and more already waiting. So, this college of Yogiji Maharaj is continuously running.

“The youths who have come here will achieve *ekantik dharma*. They will worship God and inspire others to worship God and earn great merits.

“God has graced us in this birth with Satsang, which is difficult even for deities like Brahma to attain. By becoming *aksharrup* and worshipping Purushottam, that is, becoming like Gunatitanand Swami and worshipping Bhagwan Shriji Maharaj, no faults remain. However, body-centredness remains until one becomes *aksharrup*. Because of body-centredness, one is disturbed when someone tells us something. But, when a youth goes to get married, how much insult do the in-laws hurl? Yet, since the youth is intent on taking the bride, he disregards the insults. If this much is possible for attaining material pleasures, then to enjoy the bliss of one’s *atma* [and God], one should even endure the insults others hurl. One should believe oneself as *atma*.

“Yogiji Maharaj opened this *brahmavidya* college. On attaining this degree one never has problems anywhere. Much pain and insults are tolerated to attain worldly pleasures. If it is possible for this, then is it not possible for God?”

Thereafter, the senior sadhus and the newly initiated *parshads* garlanded Swamishri.

As Swamishri prepared to depart from the assembly, the devotional atmosphere intensified as the *parshads* joyously danced to the bhajan, ‘*Hālo juvānadā, Hariovar Varoā...*’. The *parshads* circled Swamishri, dancing and bowing to him, providing a sight that etched sublime memories in the minds of all.

4 April 2011

BHAGVATI DIKSHA CELEBRATION

Hundreds of devotees were present to witness this auspicious occasion on which Swamishri gave 23 *parshads* the *bhagvati diksha* and initiated one *sadhak* into the *parshad* order.

Mahant Swami presided over the preliminary *diksha mahapuja* rituals; then, during Swamishri’s puja the remaining rituals were completed. Thereafter, Swamishri gave each *parshad* the guru mantra to initiate him into the sadhu order.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “Today, parents have happily come to give their educated sons for *diksha*. Without glory [of God], this is not possible. They have degrees of the world, but this degree is to worship and serve God. This has been understood by the parents and the youths. That is why they have left this worldly attachment. They experience bliss and spread it to countless others. This will benefit one’s *atma*.

“This is a *yagna* of Yogiji Maharaj, Shriji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and you have all joined in it. God will bless you all with peace and happiness.

“We have joined in the wish of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, so whatever anyone says, this is the highest degree. Never feel you have done wrong. Practice satsang and dharma. Bhagwan will make you happy in all ways.”

The senior sadhus and newly initiated sadhus then honoured Swamishri with garlands. Finally, group photographs of the new initiates with Swamishri were taken. ◆

Tenth Anniversary Celebrations at BAPS Sanskardhams Ahmedabad, February 2011



Nagaryatra through the streets of Bapunagar



Murti of BAPS Sanskardham, Bapunagar



Over 600 devotees participate in the yagna, Satellite



BAPS Sanskardham, Paldi

In February 2001, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskardhams in the Satellite-Vastrapur, Bapunagar, Paldi and Hirawadi suburbs of Ahmedabad. Special year-long activities were held to commemorate the tenth inauguration anniversary of these mandirs and the mandir in the nearby village of Ashlali. Devotees celebrated throughout the year by performing austerities, and holding special assemblies and *seva* sessions. The celebrations culminated with special programmes at each mandir.

BAPUNAGAR, 19-20 February 2011

On 19 February, 125 devotees participated in

the Vedic Yagna for World Peace in which the new marble *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, previously consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj while he was in Atladra, was offered worship. In the afternoon a grand, colourful *nagaryatra* of the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj took place through the streets of Bapunagar.

On 20 February, the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj was installed by Ishwarchan Swami amid a traditional Vedic ceremony.

SATELLITE, 23-27 February 2011

23: 600 devotees participated in the Yagna for World Peace.

24: 'Towards Better Living' lecture by Anand-swarup Swami.

25: Special evening assembly for women.

26: Youth Day in which youths presented a drama entitled 'Yauvanno Jadu' - 'The Magic of Youth'. Also, 12 youths were felicitated for their outstanding achievements in various fields. Among the dignitaries present to inspire the youths were Shri Devang Nanavati (Education-ist and High Court Advocate) and Shri Pranav Adani (Adani Group).

27: Over 7,500 attended the tenth *patosav mahapuja* ceremony in the presence of Ishwarcharan Swami and Satsangjivan Swami (Kothari of Ahmedabad mandir).

PALDI, 22-26 February 2011

22: 'Yogirajna Yuvano' cultural programme by youths.

23: Special assembly for women.

24: Kirtan *aradhana* performed by sadhus from Ahmedabad mandir.

25: Evening assembly featured speeches and a drama entitled 'Mandirma Prabhu Biraje Chhe' performed by youths of Bhavnagar.

26: Tenth *patosav mahapuja* ceremony in the presence of Ishwarcharan Swami.

Celebrations were held to commemorate the tenth anniversary in Hirawadi on 11 February and in Ashlali on 25-26 February.

Through these celebrations, the devotion and satsang of all devotees were strengthened. ♦

BAPS Helps Victims of Disaster in Tanzania

16 February 2011, Dar es Salaam

On 16 February 2011, a military ammunition depot in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, blew up overnight in a series of explosions that levelled homes, killed over 25 people and wounded about more than 5,000 helpless civilians. Thousands ran for their lives, and more than 200 children were unable to find their parents.

Under such harsh circumstances, the volunteers of BAPS in Dar es Salaam assisted the Red Cross Department and the Tanzania Police Force to help these civilians.

Essential household items were distributed to residents affected by the explosions. In addition, the BAPS volunteers helped to reduce the psychological and emotional stress of the affected residents by offering appropriate support and



prayers.

The volunteers also helped at the Uhuru National Stadium by supporting the Red Cross Tanzania and the Tanzania Police Force, and providing victims with food packages, drinking water and milk. They also assisted in rejoining parents

and children who had been separated during this incident.

BAPS volunteers also helped at the Amana Government Hospital and Tameke Government Hospital, where the injured victims were being treated. The Vice President of Tanzania, Dr. Mohammed Ghalib Bilal, as well as doctors, nurses and staff of both hospitals were delighted with the timely services performed by BAPS and expressed their appreciation. ♦

Murti-Pratishtha Celebrations

Gujarat, February 2011



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Visnagar



Mahant Swami performs the Vedic installation rituals, Visnagar



Swamishri performs *puja* of the *murtis* for Tuver mandir



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Badarniya

During February 2011, *murtis* consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj were installed at various new BAPS Swaminarayan *hari* mandirs in Gujarat.

VISNAGAR (DISTRICT: MEHSANA)

23 February

Swamishri had visited here in 1985 and 1992, and a Satsang centre had been formally established here in 1990. Sadhus from Mehsana mandir visited regularly to strengthen the satsang. The groundbreaking ceremony for the purpose-built *hari* mandir was performed on 7 November 2008.

The *murti-pratishtha* celebrations were held

from 21 to 23 February:

21: Special Women's assembly in which *balikas*, *kishoris* and senior women presented cultural programmes, speeches and bhajans.

22: In the morning 320 devotees participated in the Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon a grand procession of the *murtis* was held through the main streets of Visnagar.

23: *Murtis* were installed following the Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony by Mahant Swami. Over 12,000 devotees attended the celebration.

VASO (SUB-DISTRICT: NADIAD)

21 February

20: Over 250 devotees participated in the

Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon, a colourful procession of the *murtis* took place, with devotees singing bhajans and performing traditional dances through the streets of Vaso. In the evening assembly, the BAPS youths of Vaso presented a concert of bhajans and a musical-drama entitled 'Sanskrutik Virasat'.

21: Mahant Swami installed the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir following the Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony.

Under the auspices of the *murti-pratishtha* celebrations a special camp was held on 15 February in which over 400 sick animals were treated. On 17 February an Ayurvedic camp was held in which 450 adults and 175 children were treated.

TUVER (DISTICT: SABARKANTHA)

25 February

Satsang was established in the village in 1999 following the *adivasi* convention in Khedbrahma in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Following the *adivasi* convention in 2001, the devotees of Tuver were further encouraged to

excel in devotion and *seva*. On 25 February, 500 devotees participated in the Vedic Yagna for World Peace, following which the *murtis* were installed by Ghanshyamcharan Swami, *mahant* of Swaminarayan Mandir, Surat. Over 5,000 devotees attended this auspicious occasion.

BADARNIYA (DISTICT: KHEDA)

25 February

17-20: Series of discourses on Mandir, Shastra and Sant by Brahmadarshan Swami.

21: Kirtan *aradhana* by Jaydeep Swadia.

22: Children and youths of Adas village performed the musical-drama on the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 'Sant Param Hitkari'.

23: Special women's assembly.

24: In the morning devotees participated in the Yagna for World Peace. From 4 to 7 p.m. a grand *nagaryatra* of the *murtis* took place.

25: Following the traditional Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony, Mahant Swami installed the *murtis* and performed the *arti*. ♦

Dental Health Checks for Children

12-13 March 2011, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London

Approximately 300 children aged between 6 months to 18 years benefited from free dental health check camp organized by BAPS Charities, UK, with the help of BAPS Children's Forum, on 12 and 13 March 2011 at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London.

The dentists checked for general hygiene, identifying decayed or crooked teeth and underlying oral diseases and advised children

on further treatment required from their local dentist. They also advised them on the effective cleaning of teeth and the importance of a healthy, low sugar diet.

Appreciating the camp, one parent shared, "We're very grateful to BAPS Charities for organizing an event like this. Visiting the dentist is one of those dreaded things for children, but they have made it fun and educational." ♦



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Celebrating Women: Managing Challenges, Inspiring Change

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2011

Sunday 20 March 2011, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) observed the centennial celebrations of International Women's Day 2011 with an inspirational conference entitled "Celebrating Women: Managing Challenges, Inspiring Change" at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London.

The key objective of the conference was to inspire women to fulfil their potential in all aspects of life, highlighting in particular the importance of personal financial management, and the value of a healthy lifestyle.

Prayers were offered for those affected by the recent natural disasters amid chanting of traditional Vedic verses. Then, a video presentation entitled 'The Strength of Women', recognizing their resilience in adversity, became the focus thereafter. A series of moving and inspiring testimonials were narrated of women seated in the audience who had overcome personal challenges to achieve their goals. Following this, the audience was enthralled by an opening dance performed by a pair of wheelchair-bound *mahilas*, a glowing example of the strength within.

A touching video account of the courage and

determination of various BAPS members was shown followed by a colourful traditional dance by the young women of BAPS.

The delegates departed with a meaningful insight into managing challenges and inspiring change, both within themselves and those around them.

Anuradha Bannerjee of Barclays Wealth shared, "I saw a huge amount of empowerment in the room. I have been very impressed how professional the volunteers are in their own work and the time they are spending. I think BAPS are doing a fantastic job in having a women's wing that is actually concentrating on women's issues and giving women managerial and leadership roles in furthering themselves and developing other people. Having a place where you can grow spiritually as well as grow as a person is crucial."

Ms Versani, a guest at the event, added, "This conference has proved to be an eye-opener for me. The inspiration of women will provide me with the confidence and belief to achieve my objectives, and the workshops on health and financial matters were directly relevant to my life." ◆

Education Seminar

17 February 2011, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Surat

On 17 February 2011, around 2,300 students and more than 100 professors from 35 colleges throughout Surat attended an inspiring seminar held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Surat.

The main purpose of the seminar was to bring out the inner qualities of the youngsters and motivate them to achieve their academic and personal goals.

The seminar, focused on the topic of 'Effort' through a speech and specially prepared multimedia presentations.

The guidance imparted in the seminar was appreciated by all the students and professors, and they departed with renewed resolve and enthusiasm to endeavour for a brighter future for all. ◆

BAPS Youth Becomes Youth Chancellor of UK 2011

31 March 2011, London

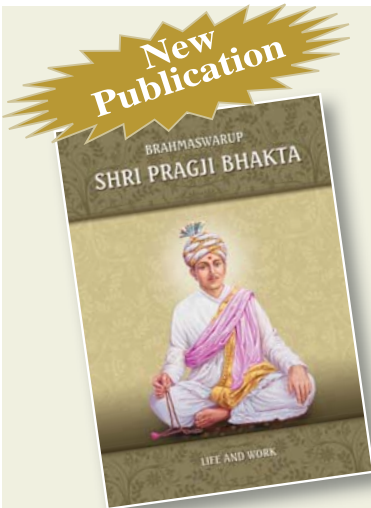


Sir Nicholas Macpherson, Permanent Secretary at HM Treasury, presents Youth Chancellor of UK award to Priyesh Patel

Priyesh Patel, a 15-year-old *kishore* who regularly attends the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London, was recently selected as the Youth Chancellor of UK for 2011.

In the fourth annual 'Chance to Be Chancellor' competition organized by the education charity, Citizenship Foundation, over 2,820 British youngsters aged between 14 and 18 years proposed their version of the UK Budget,

focusing on eight key areas of spending, such as, health, education and defence. Of these, 249 went on to submit speeches, websites and short films which were assessed by a panel of experts to find the Youth Chancellor of 2011 and nine runners-up. Impressed by the high standard of the entries, the judges selected Priyesh's version as the best, making him the youngest ever Youth Chancellor. On 31 March 2011 he was invited to Her Majesty's Treasury in London to receive the award, and to present a speech and the first ever Youth Budget (compiled on the basis of all the competition entries) to Sir Nicholas Macpherson, Permanent Secretary at HM Treasury, and a group of MPs and experts. Priyesh was also interviewed live on BBC Breakfast Radio, LBC Radio, Channel 4, *The Times* and other media outlets to explain why and how public spending should be prioritized. We congratulate Priyesh on his outstanding achievement and pray to Maharaj and Swami for his continued success. ♦



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Brahmaswarup Shri Pragji Bhakta: Life and Work is a detailed print publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Ahmedabad, about the biography of Brahmaswarup Pragji Bhakta, also known as Bhagatji Maharaj, the second successor in the illustrious spiritual tradition of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Pragji Bhakta's exemplary life of profound service, faith, obedience, devotion towards God and guru, and other sublime virtues reveals the ideal spiritual sadhana for all genuine aspirants determined to attain the highest state of spiritual realization.

His life was full of trials, yet he remained steadfast in his faith, devotion and duties. He boldly proclaimed the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as the supreme God and Gunatitanand Swami as the manifest form of Aksharbrahman. Since decades, his life, work and message have been a source of immense inspiration.

contd. from p. 7)

He too, stood next to Lindiyo and when Lindiyo saw the similarity, he understood at once. His misconception dissolved. His behaviour began to change immediately. The lion roared and then ushered Lindiyo to do the same. As he did so, he saw that the whole jungle trembled in just one roar. That was enough, he was no longer Lindiyo, he had realized himself that he was the king of the jungle. From then on he travelled fearlessly wherever he wished.

We have become deluded like Lindiyo. When our *atma* entered the body, it joined the flock of sheep in the form of our body, *indriyas* and *antahkaran* and believed itself to be one of them. It forgot its true form.

Moreover, it sees others as their bodies too.

The same happened to Arjuna. He began to look at the level of the body and hence saw his relatives, and became distressed.

The main purpose for telling Arjuna all of this was to affirm that '*Nanushochitumarhasi*' - 'it is not appropriate for you to grieve.' One who has truly understood *atmajnan* is never overcome with grief born from believing oneself to be the body. Shri Krishna knew that if Arjuna attained this *atmajnan*, he would experience great relief. Therefore, he taught him the precepts of Sankhya *jnan* using various analogies in order to shine light on his true form.

In his teachings, Parabrahman Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also emphasized understanding the distinction between the body and the *atma*. In the Vachanamrut, Swayamprakashanand Swami inquires as to how we should contemplate on the *atma*. In reply, Bhagwan Swaminarayan gives the essence of the Sankhya *jnan* that has been given in the Gita, Bhagwan Swaminarayan said, "Using the thought which rests between the *drashta* and *drashya*, one should realize, 'The *drashta* and *drashya* are absolutely distinct.' With this understanding, one should ascribe the attributes of the body unto the body and the attributes of

the *drashta* - which is *chaitanya* - unto *chaitanya*. Also, childhood, youth, old age, stoutness, thinness, birth and death are all aspects of the body; so they should never be thought of as belonging to the *atma*. On the other hand, being uncuttable, being unpierceable, not aging, being immortal, being the embodiment of *jnan*, being the embodiment of bliss, and being characterized by eternal existence are all aspects of the *atma*; they should in no way be considered to belong to the body. Instead, those attributes should be understood to belong to the *atma*" (Vachanamrut, Sarangpur 12).

Moreover, he has reproached those who do not contemplate on the *atma*. In the Vachnamrut he says, "The *jiva*, which resides within the body, observes both the attractive and the unattractive. It witnesses childhood, youth and old age, as well as a countless number of other things. However, the observer fails to observe its own self. The *jiva* looks at objects externally; but it does not look at its own self. Therefore, it is the most ignorant of the ignorant.... the most senseless of the senseless, the most foolish of fools and the vilest of the vile" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 20).

Thus, by distinguishing between the *atma* and that which is not the *atma*, our shastras give mankind a sure way of overcoming the ocean of miseries and entering the land of happiness. This proclamation resonates in the Bhagavad Gita. Also, the principle of previous births and births to come vastly increases the horizons of life.

We should be truly proud that Sanatan Hindu Dharma has given the world such a clear science of the difference between the body and the *atma*. Sanatan Hindu dharma was the first to reveal the concept of previous and future births. The Gita is a living testimony to this.





Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (L) and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev



Abhishek Murti of Shri Nilkanth Varni



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