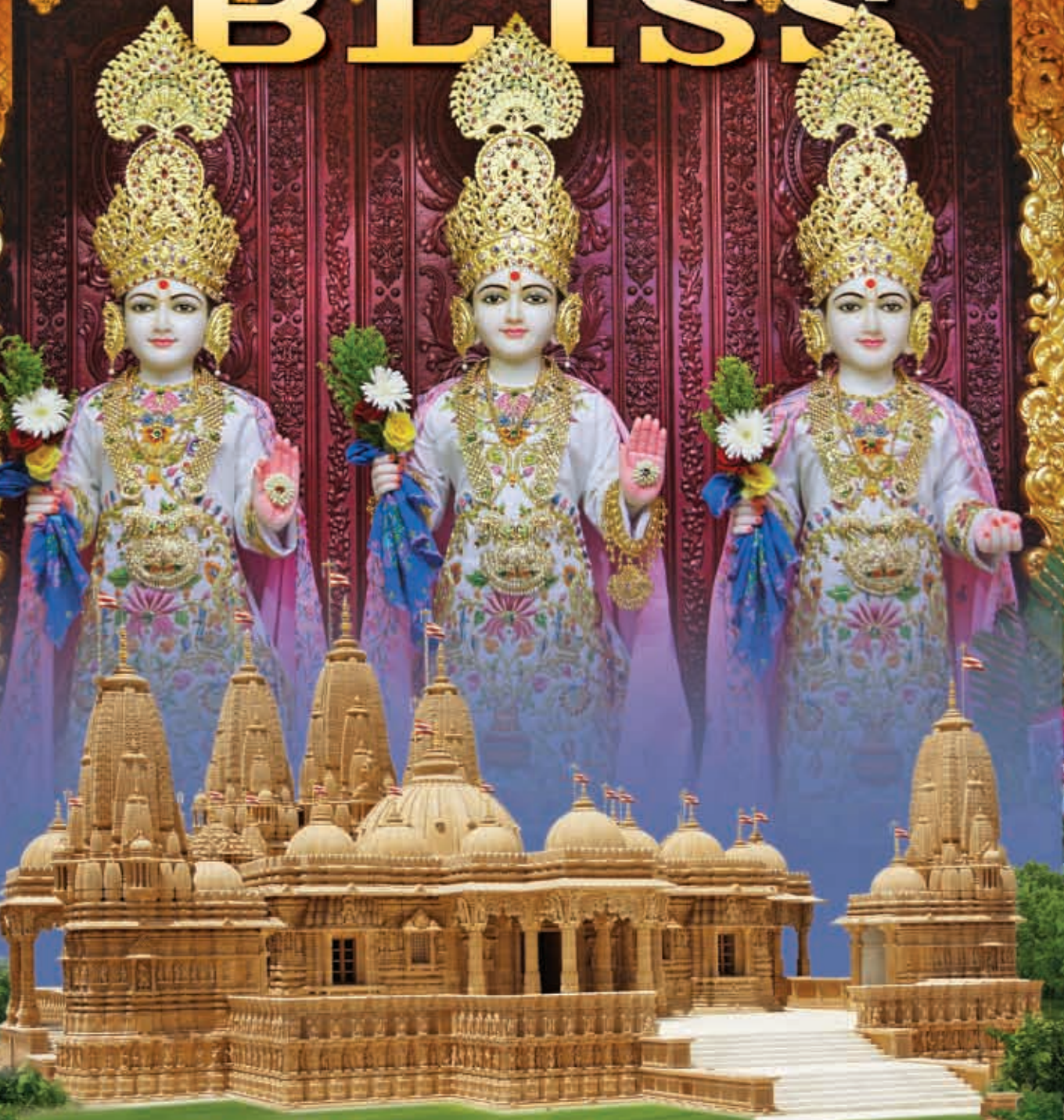


Annual Subscription Rs. 60

June 2010

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

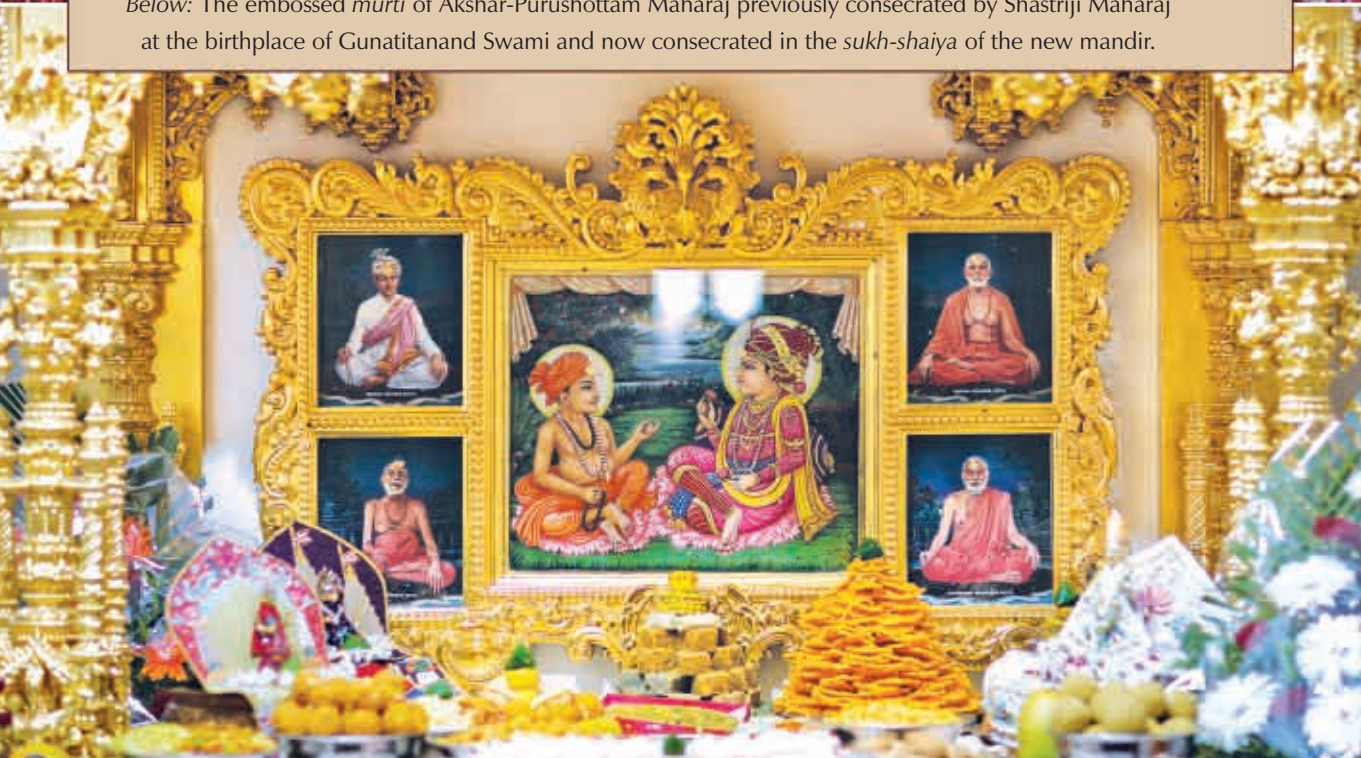


Grand Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav, Bhadra
18-19 May 2010



Above: Murti of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the central shrine.

Below: The embossed *murti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj previously consecrated by Shastriji Maharaj at the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami and now consecrated in the *sukh-shaiya* of the new mandir.





SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

June 2010, Vol. 33 No. 6

Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav, Bhadra Special Issue



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Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharprithi, Shahibaug,
 Ahmedabad-380 004, India.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Outside India (By Air Mail)		India	
	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	Rupees
1 Year	500	6	10	60
2 Years	1000	12	20	110
3 Years	1500	18	30	160

Website: www.swaminarayan.org, E-mail: magazines@in.baps.org

FIRST WORD

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami (1785-1867 CE), the manifest form of Akshar, was the first spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

He was born in Bhadra and was called Mulji in childhood. His mature outlook, hard-working nature and devout lifestyle reflected his unique personality. Even as a youth, his insightful observations and pragmatic talks revealed his deep understanding of the human psyche and mystical spiritual concepts. In 1810, Bhagwan Swaminarayan initiated Mulji into the sadhu-fold and named him Gunatitanand Swami.

On numerous occasions, Bhagwan Swaminarayan identified Gunatitanand Swami as the manifest form of Akshar (or Aksharbrahman), his divine abode and ideal devotee – Akshardham.

In 1828, Bhagwan Swaminarayan appointed Gunatitanand Swami as the mahant of Junagadh Mandir. He then toured relentlessly to the villages, teaching the glory and philosophy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and encouraging a moral and spiritual way of life.

Hundreds of sadhus and householders attained the state of *brahmarup* and experienced the bliss of God through their association with Gunatitanand Swami.

Gunatitanand Swami served as the mahant of Junagadh mandir for over 40 years, and then he concluded his mission and passed the mantle on to Bhagatji Maharaj.

As a tribute to his divine personality and works a grand *shikharbaddh* mandir was consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 19 May 2010. This special issue describes the historic story of Swami's birthplace and its transformation into a breathtaking traditional mandir complex. ♦



Bhadra

A Sacred Village



“Gunatitanand Swami was born in this place and Shriji Maharaj had stayed here. So, it is infinitely more sacred and divine than millions of *tirthas*. If the dust of this place falls upon us we would become pure.”

- Brahmaśwarup Yogiji Maharaj

THE HOLY VILLAGE OF BHADRA (OR GUNATITNAGAR):

- Where Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, the abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was born as Mulji Sharma to parents Bholanath and Sakarba.
- Where Bhagwan Swaminarayan sanctified Bhadra on several occasions and performed many *lilas*, and sang profusely the glory of Mulji as his divine abode.
- Where a sacred farm exists, that was tilled by Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami himself
- Where flows the holy River Und, blessed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s divine *lilas*.
- Where beneath the sprawling banyan tree Bhagwan Swaminarayan held spiritual assemblies and from its hanging shoots he jumped into the River Und.

Often blessed is the village of Bhadra that brings alive the divine memories of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his abode Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami.

Whenever Bhagwan Swaminarayan travelled towards Kutch he would always go via Bhadra. He used to stay in Bhadra for a month or one-and-a-half months. There are many of Maharaj’s divine incidents associated with this village.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited Bhadra for the first time in 1804 (V.S. 1860) and celebrated the festival of Vasant Panchmi. From then onwards he visited Bhadra several times. During each visit he would reside at the house of Vashram Suthar, a dedicated devotee.

In 1804, while celebrating Vasant Panchmi by the River Und, Bhagwan Swaminarayan swam in the river with the devotees. At that time he told



Map of Gujarat with Bhadra and other cities



The sprawling banyan tree on the banks of River Und sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and the guru parampara and place of many memorable lilas

Lalji Suthar (Nishkulanand Swami) to make a boat instantly, saying, “I want to boat in the waters.” But it was not possible to make it immediately. So Shri Hari told Lalji Suthar, “Bring me a *chalakho* (a thick cloth).” The latter brought a *chalakho* and Shri Hari spread it on the surface of the water of Und. To everyone’s astonishment the *chalakho* remained afloat. Then Shriji Maharaj, Mulji Sharma, Vashram Suthar and Lalji Suthar sat on it while it travelled on the water like a boat. All the devotees were amazed at Shri Hari’s divine powers. Such a divine *lila* occurred on the river Und in Bhadra.

Shri Hari used to jump several times into the River Und from the shoots of the banyan tree by the river bank. He also swung himself by holding the hanging shoots of the tree. The sprawling banyan is still present today.

- On one occasion, while Shri Hari was in Bhadra, Vashram Suthar narrated to Maharaj, “While returning home from my farm I saw a mound of ants. On seeing them I thought, out of compassion, as to how these thousands of souls will be liberated? Then instantly the thousands of ants took the divine form of *chaturbhuj*

and ascended to the abode of Vaikunth. This wonder I saw with my own eyes.” Shri Hari replied, “It is all due to the divine powers of Akshar and Purushottam. This Mulji, who is my Akshardham, was born here in your village. So, whatever wishes you make, I shall fulfil them. You had wished for the liberation of the ants, but if you had so prayed for all the *jivas* of the countless universes, then through the blessings and powers of (your dedication and) *upasana* they would have been blessed with *moksha*.” Presently, there is a shrine there to commemorate the incident.

- In 1807 (Samvat 1864) Bhagwan Swaminarayan celebrated the birthday of Gunatitanand Swami (Mulji Sharma) on Sharad Purnima in Bhadra. Once, Shri Hari, while going to the river Und, saw the sugarcane farms and said, “There is a sweet ocean here. If one wishes to remove the bitterness of worldliness then stay here.” Then he added, “Mulji Sharma is full of sweetness. By staying with him, one will become free of mundane bitterness.
- The existing old Swaminarayan Mandir and the Smruti Chowk nearby were once the homes



Maharaj describes the glory of Mulji Sharma to his mother, Sakarba



Maharaj miraculously sails on River Und on a thick cloth



While Mulji waters his field Maharaj appears and directs him to renounce

of Vashram Suthar and his eldest sister, Harbai, respectively. Here, Shri Hari had blessed Sachchidanand Swami with samadhi for six months. Whenever Shri Hari visited Bhadra, he used to stay here, conduct an assembly and speak of Mulji's glory as Aksharbrahman.

- Prior to the Smruti Mandir on the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami there was the house of Mulji. Once, Shri Hari came to have lunch at his house. Mulji's mother, Sakarba, gave a small stool and mattress for him to sit on. Shri Hari then explained to her, "Mother, you may not understand that your Mulji is my divine abode personified. Even prior to his presence in your womb Mulji used to see me always. He is Aksharbrahman, supreme than the countless *akshar muktas* and the cause of all things." Then in accordance with the Upanishads Maharaj elaborated upon Mulji's glory as Aksharbrahman.
- Not far from the River Und lies the farm of Mulji Bhakta. He farmed his land for 25 years. In 1808 (V.S. 1865) on Kartiki Purnima day Mulji was watering his farm. At that time Shri Hari appeared to him in his divine form and

commanded, "Now leave, (because) the divine light in the world has faded." For Mulji, that day marked his renunciation of Bhadra. He left instantly and took the road to Gadhada to join Shri Hari. Shortly thereafter Shri Hari gave him *bhagvati diksha* on Poshi Punam during the grand *yagna* in Dabhan. Maharaj named him Gunatitanand Swami, and declared his glory as Aksharbrahman. Today, on his holy farm in Bhadra, stands a small shrine with a replica of Maharaj's footprints in memory of the former incident.

- Bhagwan Swaminarayan wrote a letter from Bhadra for the Vishnu-yag he wished to perform at Jetalpur. He also wrote a letter from Bhadra to 18 distinguished and wealthy devotees to renounce their homes to become sadhus. A shrine stands in memory of this incident at Vashram Suthar's home which is now the old Swaminarayan Mandir. The village *choro* (where all generally meet to relax and talk) is also holy because Shri Hari had addressed the local people.
- The Smruti Chowk is also sacred because Shri Hari had transported Mirmanji Pathan of the



Memorial spot where the ants were liberated



The sanctified field cultivated by Mulji Sharma



The village well where Mulji revealed a spiritual truth to his friends



Mandir at the home of Vashram Suthar



The village square where Mulji saw the elderly villagers gossiping



The holy banyan tree on the banks of River Und

Sindh region into samadhi and blessed him with the darshan of countless prophets.

- In the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan the village of Bhadra was honoured with the birth of 16 *muktas* (blessed souls). From the time of Shri Hari till now Bhadra has contributed to the Swaminarayan Sampradaya by offering their sons to become sadhus. At present the village has a population of 2,000 and till now seven youths have become sadhus in the BAPS.

ROUTE TO BHADRA

On the main highway from Rajkot to Jamnagar lies the town of Dhrol. From here, take the road to Jodiya Bandar and after travelling for 11 km one arrives at Bhadra. It is about 65 km from Rajkot. State transport buses run to Bhadra from both Rajkot and Jamnagar. From Jamnagar, Bhadra is 55 km away. ◆

Yogiji Maharaj's Love for Bhadra

The birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami in Bhadra was very dear to Yogiji Maharaj. He had great reverence for the holy places in Bhadra. He used to visit Bhadra every year, prior to or after Diwali, with a group of devotees. Devotees from Rajkot, Jaiwa, Bhesdad, Dhrol and other neighbouring villages

would throng there for his darshan. The occasion became transformed into a festival. Those memorable days are still fresh today.

At that time there were no proper cooking or living facilities. Yogiji Maharaj used to cook *khichdi* in a small lane outside the mandir and the devotees would eat while standing in the lane. The cooking utensils and food grains were brought to Bhadra from Gondal and Rajkot. Jhaverbhai Juthabhai used to bring the food grains from Rajkot. For an overnight halt the devotees would stay in whatever accommodations they got near the mandir.

Yogiji Maharaj took the group of devotees to each and every sacred place in Bhadra and explained its history and glory. He also took all to bathe in the holy River Und. He would sprinkle its sacred waters on their heads. Many times he used to cook meals beneath the banyan tree by the river. He made *rotlo* or ladus and personally served them to all. Then he would deliver a discourse.

In 1959 Yogiji Maharaj's birthday was celebrated by the banks of the River Und. At that time a canopied hall was erected on the



The one-spired shikharbaddh mandir in Bhadra consecrated by Yogiji Maharaj in 1969

nearby sacred farm of Gunatitanand Swami. There, a wonderful three-day discourse on Gunatitanand Swami's *vatos* was conducted. The venue for the discourse, dinner and accommodation was the same.

During those years there was no public transport to Bhadra.

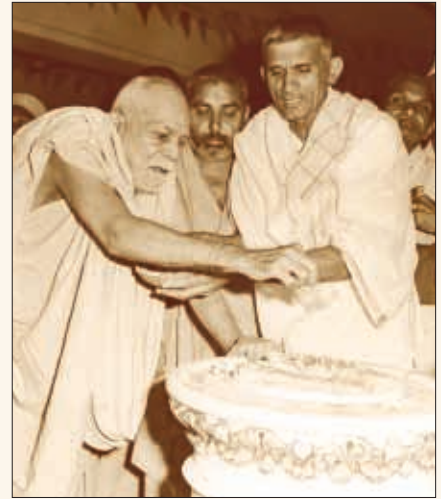
The railway station of

Bhadra was too far off from the village. So Yogiji Maharaj wished that a railway station by the name of Gunatitanagar be built here. To make this possible, he made all efforts and requests to officials in Delhi by writing letters and through other means. Eventually, through his inspiration the permission for the railway station was granted. Swami was immensely pleased. Then at his behest 150 devotees constructed the railway platform. After the station was ready he told Premshankarbhai and Ghanshyamsinh Bapu and other devotees to look after it.

Initially there was no road from the station to the village. This, too, was accomplished with a lot of effort by Yogiji Maharaj.

The road from the mandir to the ghat by the River Und was rough and difficult to drive. One could walk the way, but it was a great hassle to drive a vehicle. So, Yogiji Maharaj called the concerned farmers to repeatedly convince them to part with a little land. Finally, he succeeded in eliciting their support and got a nice road prepared.

In 1967 a *parayan* (discourse for a few days)



In the yagna ceremony, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrate the murtis of Dham, Dhami and Mukta to be installed in the one-shikhar mandir

Yogiji Maharaj performs pujan of the memorial shrine of Mulji Sharma's birthplace

by Yogiji Maharaj was sponsored by Maldevbhai in Gorana, in the Halar region. At that time Yogiji Maharaj put forward a proposal before some leading sadhus and devotees, "We would like to construct a *shikharbaddh* mandir in Bhadra. In it we would like to consecrate the *murtis* of Dham, Dhami and Mukta." Instantly Pramukh Swami Maharaj and others accepted the proposal. Shortly thereafter, the construction work of the mandir began. Through Yogiji Maharaj's inspiration the devotees of Jamnagar, Dhrol, Jaiwa, Jodiya, Bhesdad, Rajkot and others enthusiastically pitched in to offer their voluntary services.

Yogiji Maharaj stayed for two months prior to the completion of the mandir. Bardanwala Sheth of Jamnagar had donated 10,000 sq. yards of land. At the word of Yogiji Maharaj the devotees levelled that land, and it was used for the *murti-pratishtha* festival. At that time the biggest problem was the lack of water. There was no water in the village nor in the River Und. The wells by the river were dry, except for one well on the opposite bank. But the well had a palm's length of water inside it. Yogiji Maharaj was brought there, and he showered some rose petals inside it. Then he prayed for the water to suffice for the entire celebration. The challenge of transporting the water through a pipeline to the village was taken up by Pramukh

Swami Maharaj. Despite the fact that he was the president of the BAPS and a senior sadhu he had no expectations for personal facilities and comforts. When he used to return late at night to rest he would sleep on a mound of sand. To lay the pipeline he persevered relentlessly in the scorching heat for days and nights. He succeeded in laying the pipeline through the dry river bed after many difficulties. The *pratishtha* festival was celebrated in a grand way.

Yogiji Maharaj used to say about Bhadra, "This is a living land. Every grain of sand here is divine. Countless devas come here for darshan. In future, Pramukh Swami will develop this place immensely, and hundreds of thousands of devotees from India and abroad will come here." Today, his words have come true. The same love and devotion that Yogiji Maharaj had for the holy place of Bhadra is evident in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swami has done wonderful work in spreading its glory and in developing it manifold times. As the Gunatit Satpurush, Swami is upholding the Gunatit tradition and countless are experiencing through him the living presence of Shriji Maharaj's divine glory. ◆

*From the Gujarati version by
Sadhu Ishwarcharandas*



A Historic Glimpse

The Birthplace of Aksharbrahman
Guntitanand Swami, Bhadra

Saurashtra is a region in west Gujarat. For decades it has been a cradle of hundreds of famous devotees, chivalrous men and statesmen. The story of one great divine personality finds its origin 200 years ago in the non-descript village of Bhadra in the region of Halar. Today the village is also known as Gunatitnagar. Bhadra is the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami, the divine abode and spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The village was blessed several times with the visits of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

According to the local record-keeper, Boghanbhai Mansang Barot, the village of Bhadra was established in circa 1690 by a group of *kanbis* with Bhanderi as their surname. They had migrated from the village of Bhandarpar near Dholka. They derived their surname, Bhanderi, from their native place. Nathabhai and his wife, Nanbai, and their two sons, Kikabhai and Vikabhai, were the first to arrive in Bhadra. Today the Bhanderis in Bhadra are all descendants of Nathabhai and Nanbai. Dosabhai Anandjibhai Bhanderi became the disciple of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Through the grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Bhadra was blessed with sixteen pious souls who attained God-realisation. Out of them Dosabhai, Rambhai, Ratna Bhagat and other members of the Bhanderi family were foremost.

ANCESTORS OF GUNATITANAND SWAMI

Gunatitanand Swami's childhood name was Mulji Sharma. His forefathers were not native to Bhadra. His grandfather, Vallabhram Jani, was a Brahmin and native to Latipur village in the Halar region of Jamanagar district. He was a disciple of Atmanand Swami – the guru of Ramanand Swami. Later,

due to unrest in Latipur, several of Atmanand Swami's disciples migrated elsewhere. Rambhai Suthar (father of Nishkulanand Swami) went to settle in Shekhpatt, Sukhdev Dave and Haribhai Khatri went to Kalavad village, Narandas Patel travelled to Gorva in Kanam district and Vallabhram Jani travelled to Bhadra with his son, Bholanath, and family.

One of the reasons why Vallabhram Jani decided to make Bhadra his home was probably due to the warm support of the Bhanderi family. Both the Bhanderi and Jani families were *satsangis* of Atmanand Swami and Ramanand Swami. The strong evidence of the Bhanderi family's support to Vallabhram lies in sharing their residence with the latter. According to tradition, people of the same caste lived in clusters; that is the Brahmins lived in a common part of the village or town and the Kanbis had their homes together. However, Vallabhram and Bholanath Jani, instead of living in Brahma Pol with the rest of the Brahmins stayed in the Kanbi community's living area. So, Dosabhai Bhanderi and others considered Vallabhram and his family as part of the Satsang fraternity and thus gave them some of their own rooms to stay.

THE BIRTH OF GUNATITANAND SWAMI

Vallabhram's son, Bholanath, was married to Sukhram Dave's daughter, Sakarba. The former lived in Bhadra and the latter in Latipur and then at Kalavad. During the marriage ceremony Atmanand Swami came to bless the couple at Kalavad. At that time he prophesied, "The couple will be blessed with the birth of Aksharbrahman." In addition, on that occasion, Atmanand Swami declared Ramanand Swami as his successor.



Memorial at the birthplace of Mulji Sharma

After many years, on Monday 17 October 1785 (Aso *sud* Punam, V.S. 1841), at 11.01 p.m., Aksharbrahman was born as Mulji Sharma to Sakarba in Bhadra. Four years later Sakarba gave birth to another son, Sundarji.

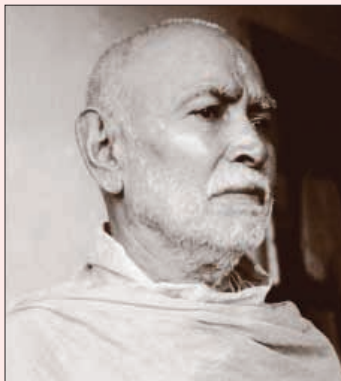
THE HOUSE OF MULJI SHARMA

Mulji Sharma lived in Bhadra for twenty-five years, and he renounced his home as soon as his parents passed away. On 20 January 1810 (Poshi Punam, V.S. 1866) Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave Mulji Sharma the *bhagvati diksha* in a grand *yagna* at Dabhan. He was named as Gunatitanand Swami.

Shortly thereafter Mulji's younger brother, Sundarji, left home to be initiated as a sadhu by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He was named as Nana (junior) Shivanand Swami.

With no one left in the family the home of Gunatitanand Swami remained unoccupied. So the proprietor, Dosabhai Bhanderi, and his family started living in the house. They stayed in it for years. The house, which was the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami, had been sanctified on several occasions by Bhagwan Swaminarayan during his visits to Bhadra. Here, he had sung the glory of Mulji to Sakarba and had his meal. Subsequently Dosabhai and his family considered it to be a sacred place. Dosabhai's grandson and his wife, Bhavanbhai and Kesarbai, daily kindled an oil lamp (*divo*) with devotion in the room of Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace. This was testified by Devshibhai, a 93-year-old member of the Bhanderi family who had as a child seen Kesarbai.

Generation after generation many devotees had divine experiences in the sacred home of Gunatitanand Swami. Some had even seen divine light in the room of Swami's birthplace.



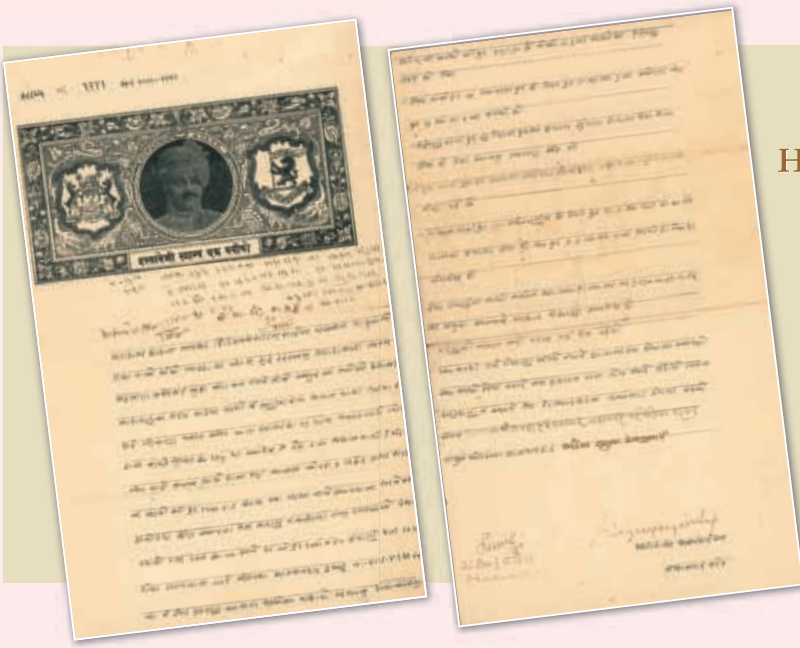
Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, who consecrated a replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's footprints on a shrine commemorating the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami

Avalba Bhanderi used to stay in the sacred room of Swami's birthplace. She used to have a small grain grinder made of stone. The neighbouring women used to come to borrow the grinder and return it to her after grinding mung, grams and other grains at their homes. On several occasions these women had observed that the sacred room had footsteps coloured with kumkum and sprinklings of kumkum powder. The divine experiences related to the sacred birthplace gradually enhanced its glory. As a result the family members stopped using the room of Swami's birthplace.

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ IN BHADRA

In 1931-32 Kana Bhagat of Bhadra saw Shastriji Maharaj for the first time in Gondal, while the foundation for the *shikharbaddh* mandir was being dug. He was touched by Swami's profound saintliness and magnetism. Two years later, in 1934, the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of Gondal mandir was arranged. At that time Kana Bhagat, Mandan Bhagat, Devshibhai and others came to Gondal from Bhadra. At that time, by the grace of Shastriji Maharaj, Mandan Bhagat experienced the divine state of samadhi. Over time they all developed firm faith in and reverence for Shastriji Maharaj. One day they requested Shastriji Maharaj to come to Bhadra. During that time, by the wish of Shastriji Maharaj, Professor Jethalal Swaminarayan, a brilliant mathematician from Ahmedabad, came to Bhadra in search of Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace.

In February 1936, Mandan Bhagat, Kurjibhai, Ajabhai, Nathabhai, Jadabhai, Devshibhai, Velabhai and other devotees of Bhadra came to Gondal for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of Ghanshyam Maharaj. Again they invited Shastriji



HISTORIC DOCUMENT

The property document related to Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace, dated 25 April 1943. It was signed by the Maharaja of Jamnagar (first and last page).

Maharaj to come to Bhadra. Shortly thereafter Shastriji Maharaj visited Bhadra for the first time. Mandan Bhagat, Nanjibhai and others received Swami at the railway station, which was three kilometres from Bhadra. Nanjibhai had brought his bullock cart for Shastriji Maharaj to travel in. The cart was near the train compartment, which was not far away from the steam engine. The engine driver unexpectedly released a cloud of steam from its tanks. Subsequently, one of the two oxen standing unyoked by the cart was startled and ran away towards Bhadra. When Shastriji Maharaj stepped down from the compartment he was honoured with garlands. The question, however, was how to drive the cart on a single ox. Instantly, in place of the second ox, Nanjibhai harnessed himself to the cart along with the other ox. Then he pulled the cart all the way to the outskirts of Bhadra. Shastriji Maharaj was pleased with his service.

The main purpose of Shastriji Maharaj's visit to Bhadra was to have darshan of Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace. When he arrived with a group of sadhus and devotees to the birthplace he was disallowed from entering by Harbai, a lady staying there. So Shastriji Maharaj went to the rear of the house and climbed onto a trough for feeding cattle,

which was against the back wall. Then he peered through a small opening for draining the roof water and did darshan of the birthplace. Shastriji Maharaj was very pleased with the darshan and told Mandan Bhagat, "A beautiful single *shikhar* (pinnacled) mandir will be built here and the *murtis* of Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami will be consecrated."

From then on the devotees of Bhadra became attached to Shastriji Maharaj. They started attending the festivals celebrated by Shastriji Maharaj. They would also sing bhajans, play the *pakhvaj* and perform *dandiya-raas*. The devotees often invited Shastriji Maharaj to Bhadra. Swami fulfilled their wish and frequently visited Bhadra, singing the glory of Bhadra as a great place of pilgrimage for the devotees. Swami said, "There are three to four types of *panch-tirthis* (pilgrimage to generally five or more places). The main one being Loj, Mangrol, Agatrai, Manavadar, Akha and Piplana. Then (the second one is) Bhadra, Shekhat, Vanthali (Jamnagar), Dangra, Aliya-Moda. The third one is Gadhada, Kariyani, Sarangpur, Loya and Nagadka."

Shastriji Maharaj, and thereafter Yogiji Maharaj, visited Bhadra quite often. Records of



A group photo of Yogiji Maharaj in Rajkot with devotees associated with the acquisition of Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace in Bhadra. Shri Jhaverchand Juthabhai, behind Yogiji Maharaj, wearing a white *paghdi*, bought the birthplace house of Gunatitanand Swami. Khoja Hirjibhai Ratanji seated to the right of Yogiji Maharaj. Other devotees from right: Masumali Sheth, Rana Dajibhai Baneshinh (wearing a *safo*) who developed the bank of river Und and other parts of Bhadra, Prabhudas Sheth, and others.

their visits were printed in the BAPS Sanstha's Gujarati monthly, *Swaminarayan Prakash*, that started in 1938. In 1943, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj consecrated a shrine with a replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's footprints in the north-west corner of the sacred room to commemorate the birthplace. Thereafter the house was renovated and a small *sinhasan* was set up near the birthplace shrine. A marble embossed *murti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, whose *arti* was earlier performed by Shastriji Maharaj, was consecrated in the *sinhasan* (see photo on p. 16).

A brief record of the development of Swami's birthplace and landmark events is as follows:

1. April-May 1939 (Samvat 1995)

Shastriji Maharaj arrived again in May-June 1939 on Vaishakh *sud* 2 (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, May 1939, p. 214).

2. 28 June 1941 (Samvat 1997)

One of the tax collection offices of the king

of Jamnagar was located at Jodiya village, near Bhadra. Rajabhai Bhavanbhai Bhanderi was residing in the house in which Gunatitanand Swami once lived. Because he was unable to pay the state tax of his house it was auctioned by the state officials. At that time, through the inspiration of Shastriji Maharaj, the disciples of Krishnaji Ada, Jhaverchand Juthabhai and others of Rajkot, paid Rs. 140 and acquired the house – plot 1, which included the birthplace, and plot 2, which comprised of three empty and open rooms.

3. 25 April 1943 (Samvat 1999)

Jhaverchand Juthabhai and Sheth Hirjibhai Ratanji Khoja gave an application to acquire another property related to the birthplace at the *mamlatdar's* office in Jodiya. During a public auction, Sheth Hirjibhai Ratanji paid Rs. 292, 6 paise and 2 *annas* on behalf of devotees. The documents for the land were signed by the Maharaja of Jamnagar Shri Digvijaysinh



An old, rare photo of the shrines at the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami. The shrine to the right commemorates the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami, and in the middle of the *sinhasan* is the embossed marble *murti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj that was sanctified by Shastriji Maharaj in 1948. The same *murti* was re-consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the *sukh-shaiya* of the newly built *shikharbaddh* mandir on 19 May 2010.

and given to Hirjibhai on 25 April 1943 (See p. 14).

4. 16 October 1943 (Samvat 1999)

After acquiring the birthplace it was renovated in six months, as reported by local devotees, and transformed into a *hari* mandir. On its eastern corner a shrine was built and Sheth Hirjibhai invited Shastriji Maharaj to consecrate a replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's footprints.

A report in the *Swaminarayan Prakash* by Ramji Bhagat reveals, "On (the day of Aso vad) 6th Swamishri had lunch (at Jaiwa) and arrived at Bhadra with Jnanji Swami, Sheth Prabhudas of Bhavnagar, Darbar Bapubha Sarabhai, Ramchandrabhai of Nadiad, Agarshang and others. The local devotees, Jadavjibhai, (Mandan) Bhagat and Kanji Bhagat (Kana Bhagat), joyously welcomed Swamishri from the outskirts to the mandir. Swamishri was very pleased and after completing his daily rituals he retired to sleep. Next day, on the 7th, Sheth Shri Hirjibhai of Rajkot took Swamishri to the birthplace, and at their request Swamishri consecrated the replica of the footprints on the newly built shrine and performed *arti*.

Lunch was prepared and offered to Thakorji and then to Swamishri. A *darbar* of Kanthariya, Pujya Dajibhai, was present.

"In the afternoon at 5.15, Swamishri arrived by the banks of River Und where Shriji Maharaj had performed various *lilas*. Swamishri, sadhus and devotees bathed in its holy waters. Then Swamishri sat by a nearby shrine. Fresh grams from Gunatitanand Swami's farm were plucked and baked in a fire and given to all. Then Swamishri returned to the mandir. The local bhajan group made Swamishri stay till the 8th – next day" (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, December 1943, p. 47).

Around that period Shastriji Maharaj consecrated the painted *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Ghanshyam Maharaj and performed *arti*. For many years Nathabhai worshipped and performed *arti* of the *murtis*.

5. 28 September 1945 (Samvat 2001)

Shastriji Maharaj arrived in Bhadra. After darshan of the birthplace he went to Shekhpatt the same day. There he performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam and Nishkulanand Swami in the house of Nishkulanand Swami (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, November, 1945, p. 14).

6. 1946 (Samvat 2002)

Shastriji Maharaj visited Bhadra for darshan, bringing with him Nirgundas Swami (*Swaminarayan Prakash* 1951).

7. 1948 (Samvat 2004)

The rooms of Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace were demolished and a new *hari* mandir was constructed on the same place. The *murtis* of Swami-Shriji were consecrated. Mohanlal Ramjibhai Ajagiya of Rajkot wrote a

brief account for *Swaminarayan Prakash*: “Firstly everyone went to the birthplace of Sadguru Shri Gunatitanand Swami. At this place, like what one finds in a village, were low-roofed, square mud houses covered with ordinary rurally made tiles. This place was acquired by the disciples of Shri Krishnaji Ada of Rajkot on the name of Sheth Shri Hirjibhai Ratanji. Thereafter it was renovated and new rooms were built. In 1948 the *murtis* of Swami-Shriji were established there (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, June 1952, p. 196).

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj had performed *arti* of this *murti* in Gondal and thereafter sent it to Bhadra. Senior devotees of Bhadra recall that sadhus (probably Yogiji Maharaj) came here and consecrated a marble embossed *murti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Presently, the same *murti* was consecrated again by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the *sukh shaiya* of the newly inaugurated BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Bhadra on 19 May 2010.

8. 1952 (Samvat 2008)

Yogiji Maharaj introduced the pilgrimage circuit (*panch-tirthi*) of the Halar region. He inspired hundreds of devotees to come with him whenever he went to Bhadra (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, July 1953 p. 237). From then onwards he used to come to Bhadra every year with large groups of devotees and youths. Every time he spoke about the glory of Bhadra.

9. 3 June 1959 (Samvat 2016)

The birthday celebration of Yogiji Maharaj was held in Bhadra. It was the first large scale celebration in Bhadra.

10. 1960 (Samvat 2017)

On behalf of the BAPS Pramukh Swami Maharaj bought the house of Rajabhai Bavanbhai that was next to the birthplace. Shortly thereafter Swamishri began acquiring and registering the birthplace, other houses and surrounding land

them under the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha to build a one-*shikhar* mandir.

11. 14 April 1967 (Samvat 2023)

On this day Yogiji Maharaj performed the foundation-stone laying ceremony for the *shikharbaddh* mandir on Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace.

12. 23 April 1969 (Samvat 2025, Vaishakh sud 6)

Yogiji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the single *shikhar* mandir by consecrating the marble *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami (Dham, Dhama and Mukta).

13. 1970 to 2010 (Samvat 2027 to 2066)

After Yogiji Maharaj passed away in 1970 Pramukh Swami Maharaj frequently visited Bhadra and made intense effort in developing the birthplace into a memorial mandir and on the land in front of it into a grand five-*shikhar* traditionally carved mandir. Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir on 19 May 2010, Vaishakh *sud* 6, Samvat 2066. In the central shrine Swamishri consecrated the same *murtis* of Dham, Dhama and Mukta that were ritually installed by Yogiji Maharaj in the former one-*shikhar* mandir. In the first sanctum Swamishri consecrated the embossed marble *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam that was sanctified by Shastriji Maharaj. And in the third sanctum Swamishri consecrated the *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj. ♦

OVERALL VIEW



The Birthplace in Bhadra

A Graphic Illustration

What was the birthplace home of Gunatitanand Swami like? For years this question remained unsolved. However, the answer was found from 93-year-old Nathabhai, who served as the pujari in the original birthplace home. He and other seniors described it to Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 7 May 2002 in Bhadra. Furthermore, the document on p. 14 clearly describes the birthplace home of Gunatitanand Swami.

From the descriptions by Nathabhai and in the document a 3-D computer drawing of the home, as shown on this and the next page, was prepared.

Research and guidance: Sadhu Yogicharandas.

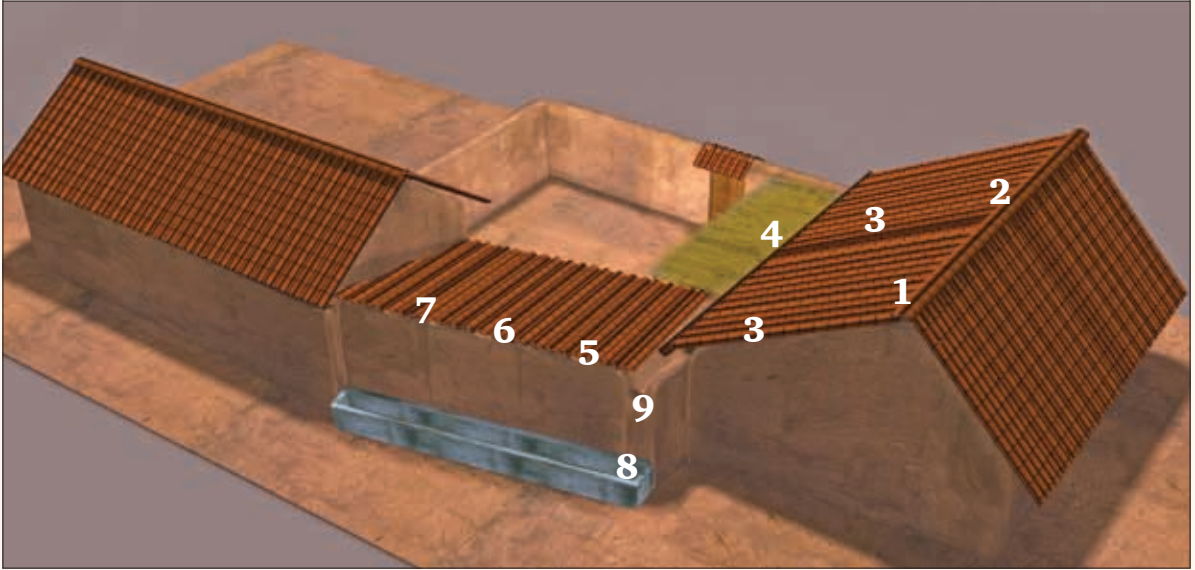
3-D graphics: Dhimant Patel and Kirtan Patel, and assisted by Sadhu Amrutswarupdas.

OVERALL VIEW



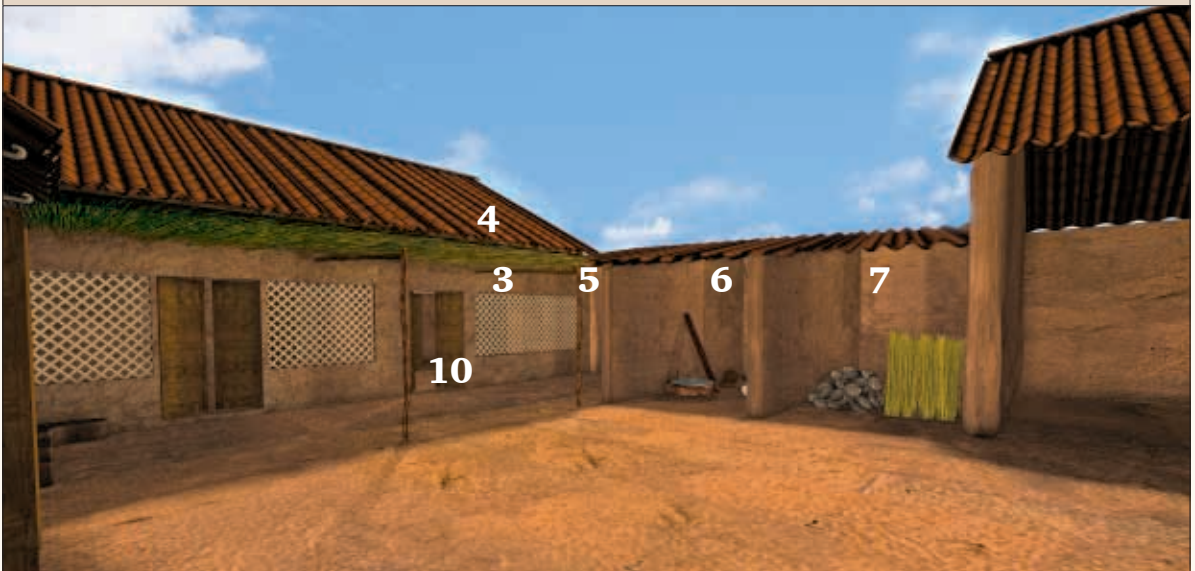
A computerized illustrations of the home of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami from the top. Descriptions of numbers in each of the illustrations are shown on the opposite page.

REAR OF BIRTHPLACE HOME



1. The main room of the birthplace. 2. Adjacent room of same house in which Dosabhai and his family resided. 3. A lattice of bamboo strips outside the verandah. 4. Outside the verandah was an extended roof of grass stacks. 5, 6, 7. Three open rooms. 8. A feeding trough for cattle behind the home. Shastriji Maharaj climbed on it and did darshan of the birthplace from a small opening. 9. The upper opening above the feeding trough.

THE VIEW FROM THE GROUNDS OF GUNATTANAND SWAMI'S HOME



10. The entrance door to the birthplace room. 5, 6, 7. Three open rooms to the right of the birthplace entrance door. 4. The extended roof of grass stacks. 3. The outside view of the lattice of bamboo strips that covers the inner verandah.



Bhadra

Overview of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir



magnificent new mandir, built of golden yellow stone, stands like a fully-blossomed lotus. Facing east, the mandir, with its five giant *shikhars*, main dome and 11 mini-domes, and intricate carvings, mesmerizes and draws all to climb its stairs.

At the base of this grand 79-ft. high mandir is the *adharpith*, or *jagati*, and the next level is the *kakshasan*. Profusely embellished with *murtis*, these two levels appear as one and seem to merge into the *mandovar*. The view of this unique mandir is simply spellbinding.

The main front stairs of the mandir lead to a large white-marbled podium. From the podium, one sees the carved outer windows and walls of the mandir. The deep and delicate designs sculpted out of single large pieces of stone are truly amazing. The pillars of the front *roopchoki* feature a series of *murtis* of Nilkanth Varni. In the *kumbha* section there are 98 *murtis* of Ganapatiji in various mudras. Above them are 148 *murtis* of devas, rishis and devotees.

Walking clockwise in the mandir's outer *parikrama*, each section naturally blends with the next and one arrives back to the main door.

To the left and right of the main entrance are the shrines of Hanumanji and Ganapatiji respectively.

Walking through the main door of the enclosed mandir leads to a splendid array of intricately sculpted pillars, arches and ceilings. At its heart are the three main shrines, with the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami in the central shrine.

On entering through the main door, the breathtaking sight of lotuses, *mogra* flowers, leaves, small bells intricately sculpted out of stone leaves one speechless.

Each of the pillars is decorated with *murtis* of the devotees and sadhus of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, as if one is amid an assembly in Akshardham. These *murtis* include those of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's 16 devotees of Bhadra who possessed the divine gift of *niravaran drashti*. Standing under the intricately

Off the main Rajkot-Jamnagar highway, travelling along the road from Dhrol to Jodiya, pilgrims are drawn by the sight in the skyline of the sky-scraping *shikhars* of the new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Bhadra. Famous as the birthplace of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Bhadra is a small, peaceful village, home to around 2,000 people.

Along the road leading to this sacred village, the mandir gate welcomes the pilgrims. On passing through the gate, amid the abundant greenery, the



Intricately carved pillars, arches, windows, murtis and designs at the front entrance (*roopchowki*) of the mandir

carved main dome, which comprises of 20 sections, instead of the usual 16 or 12 sections, reveals its breathtaking beauty. *Murtis* of 16 *paramhansas* and devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan adorn the magnificent dome.

The pillars are all full of beautiful, fine sculpted designs, as are the arches connecting the pillars.

Directly in front the pillars, the *barshakh* and *otarang* of the *garbhagruh* are also profusely decorated with splendid *murtis* and designs. Within each shrine is a gold-plated *sinhasan* for the *murtis*.

The *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami consecrated in the central shrine by Pramukh Swami Maharaj are the *murtis* which Yogiji Maharaj had consecrated in 1969 when the old *shikharbaddh* mandir in Bhadra was built. In the shrine to the right of the central shrine is the beautiful *murti* of

Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj. In the shrine towards the left is the *Sukh-Shaiya*, in which the *murti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, which was consecrated by Shastriji Maharaj 75 years ago in the room where Gunatitanand Swami was born, has been re-consecrated.

To left side of the main domes, as one faces the main shrines, are the shrines of Bhagatji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj; and to the right are the shrines of Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

A special feature of this mandir is that pilgrims can perform *pradakshinas* in three locations: 1. around the *garbhagruh*, inside the mandir, 2. at the *jagati* level, outside the mandir, and 3. around the base of the entire mandir, at ground level.

Inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, this unique mandir in Bhadra on the birthplace of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami is a

Mandir Facts

Total stone used: 63,175 cu. ft.

Height: 79 ft.

Width: 115 ft.

Length: 172 ft.

Shikhars-Dome-Mini-domes: 24

Pillars: 148

Murtis: 2,477

Man-hours: 623,840

Shilanyas: 23-2-2004

Construction Began: 2006

Murti-Pratishtha: 19-5-2010



Mandir mandovar intricately carved with sculptures of avatars, sadhus, rishis and devotees of Sanatan Dharma

special tribute to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami.

BUILDING OF BHADRA MANDIR

The mandir is built of golden yellow stone from Jaisalmer in Rajasthan and Khavda in Kutch. The selection of this particular stone was inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Since Bhadra village is less than 10 km from the sea, its atmosphere is humid and salty. So, the possibility of the stone being affected by moisture was very high.

Swamishri's wish that the mandir continues to inspire generations for centuries to come meant that a suitable stone which would be minimally affected by the atmosphere had to be selected. With this in mind, many different types of stones were tested at reputed laboratories in India and England, and consultations were held with experts. At the end of such detailed analysis, the yellow stones of Jaisalmer and Khavda were chosen. Then the construction work began in 2006.

Throughout India, the stone architecture of Jaisalmer havelis is regarded as among the best because of its special carvings. The special nature

of this yellow stone is that the more intricate the sculpting, the more its beauty stands out. So, the use of this stone necessitated designs that would bring out the beauty of the stone. Unless this was done, the result would be mediocre. Adding to the challenge, very few mandirs have been built with this type of stone, even though it is widely used in havelis and other constructions. However, the architecture of havelis and mandirs differ greatly, so the question remained about how this mandir, to be built in the Nagara style, would look.

With the blessings of Swamishri, research was done on buildings previously built with this stone. However, the one thought clear in everyone's mind was that, architecturally, either this mandir would become one of the best or one of the worst; there was no middle path. After four years of painstaking effort, the result is this splendid mandir.

EARTHQUAKE-RESISTANT DESIGN

Bhadra is situated in an earthquake-prone area. In an earthquake in 2004, the epicentre was in Keshia, a village only 7 km away. So, another challenge in building this mandir was to ensure an earthquake-resistant design. Swamishri repeatedly



One of 67 ornately carved ceilings inside the mandir



Ceiling design showing Bhagwan Swaminarayan playing ras



Multi-layered square ceiling design



Profusely decorated window

discussed this issue with Akshaymuni Swami and Sanjay Parikh of the BAPS Planning Cell. With the help of various experts specializing in earthquake-resistant designs, and guidance from Dr A.S. Arya, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, and Nabih Youssef, a renowned structural engineer based in Los Angeles, USA, a special sturdy structural design was developed.

Usually, a mandir is built by placing the stone beams on the stone pillars, and then the mandir *shikhars* and domes are erected. In such a design, the various components are not linked as one unit. So, if due care is not taken, in the event of an earthquake, the entire structure is likely to collapse like a pack of cards.

To prevent this, India's expert ancient architects (Sompuras) took special precautions. Such precautions were taken in building this mandir. As part of the earthquake-resistant design, a shear-wall was constructed enclosing the *garbhagruh* and central area. This also shields the inside from the corrosive, humid atmosphere.

The height of the mandir was also an important factor in the earthquake-resistant structural design; the taller the mandir, the greater the likelihood of damage in an earthquake. So, the mandir was designed to avoid any areas with two floors. Thus the area under the *garbhagruh* and the *murtis*, is not hollow but solidly built.

A robust casing was considered for the



Swamishri inspects the mandir during its construction



Construction of the mandir's main dome



Copper rods inserted through the pillars as part of the mandir's earthquake-resistant structural design

sculpted pillars and beams. Usually, decorative arches connect the pillars, but in the event of an earthquake, they are of no help. However, the design was so created that these sculpted arches themselves act as shear-walls between the pillars. Thus, this design ensures that the entire structure functions as a single entity.

As part of the earthquake-resistant structure design, rustproof copper rods were inserted through the centre of the sculpted pillars. Stretching from the the top of each pillar to the foundations, these rods give the structure vertical uniformity. This task, though, was not easy. To insert the rods, a hole was made in the middle of each pillar, ensuring that there was no damage to

the sculpted designs and no compromise in the pillar's strength. It was also a challenge to fix the 140 rods of $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch to the mandir floor.

The job of passing 20-ft. long rods through each of the pillars was both difficult and time-consuming. If in the process, the rod became bent, this would affect its strength; so, appropriate care was taken to avoid this. Thus, this new and special method of joining each pillar to the foundations was used.

Thus, extensive care was taken to ensure the structural strength of the mandir.

Another special feature of the mandir is the use of LED lights. At night, when the lights are on, one can see the glorious beauty of the mandir,



Decorative arches connecting the ornate pillars



Every inch of the mandir is full of intricately carved designs

as if it has been bathed in gold. It is the special nature of this yellow stone that in the soft rays of the rising or setting sun, it shines like gold. It is indeed a great sight to behold.

The mandir has also been protected with EPBM waterproofing, so that even after an earthquake there will be no leakage of water.

PROCESS OF BUILDING THE MANDIR

In the past 30 years, the BAPS Planning Cell, led by Akshaymuni Swami, together with Sanjay Parikh, and the Sanstha's other dedicated volunteers, engineers, architects, *sompuras* and experts in various fields, have built countless mandirs. From *shikharbaddh* mandirs in England, Africa and America to mandirs of various types throughout India, they have extensive experience and an established process. As usual, the stone was quarried, sculpted and sent to the mandir site for construction.

Stone from Khavda on the Kutch border and Jaisalmer on the Rajasthan border was sent to the Sanstha's sculpting workshops in Pindvada in the

Sirohi district of Rajasthan, and 13 other villages, such as, Sagvada, Dungarpur and others. By the efforts of the artisans and volunteers, the 63,175 cu.ft. of stone was sculpted in a mere three years from 2006 to 2009. It took a total 457,380 man-hours to sculpt the stones, 111,470 man-hours to polish the sculpted stones and 55,000 man-hours to position them in the right place on the construction site.

The selfless sacrifice, services and generous contributions of thousands of BAPS volunteers and devotees have made this mandir possible. Many devotees have served in Bhadra in various ways for the last 40 years.

The selfless dedication of many has been exemplary. Jaisalmer, from where the stone was quarried is in a desert-like area, where the climate varies from extreme heat to intense cold. Disregarding such discomforts, Laljibhai Brahmabhatt served there. This year, on the day of Shri Hari Jayanti (Bhagwan Swaminarayan's birthday), he was observing a waterless fast as per the time-old tradition. On that day he had to rush,



Murtis of Nilkanth Varni and Shri Hari at the front entrance



Breathtaking carvings on the mandir mandovar

unprepared, to the stone mines to oversee some urgent work. For two days, without any food or drink, he toiled away. On other visits there, he and other volunteers would have to significantly extend their stay longer than planned. They all, nevertheless, enthusiastically served without concern for hunger or thirst.

The mammoth task of sculpting more than 2,400 *murtis* was supervised by Rajubhai Patel. The smooth coordination of the project was managed by the dedicated efforts of Sanjay Parikh, Manishbhai Patel, Girishbhai Patel and other planning cell volunteers.

Throughout the entire project, Dharmakunvar Swami, the *kothari* of Bhadra mandir, and all the other resident sadhus endeavoured day and night in whatever capacity necessary.

Also, the local devotees of Bhadra served in various ways. The women devotees especially put in tremendous efforts. They all enthusiastically served in filling the foundations, polishing the stones, housekeeping and wherever else required.

The contributions of Jnanprasad Swami, who served here as *kothari* from 1969 to 1981, and Devcharan Swami, who served as *kothari* from 1981 to 1985, have also been invaluable. They not only managed the mandir administration, but also consolidated and spread satsang in the surrounding areas, thus preparing a base for the new mandir. Also, the resident sadhus of Bhadra – Dharmajivan Swami, Shrijipriya Swami, Jnanvallabh Swami, Dharmaprasad Swami, Chetan Swami, Kapileshwar Swami and others – have all patiently and sincerely served over the years for the successful completion of this project.

Most of all, it has been the drive and inspiration frequently imparted to all by Swamishri that has ensured the fulfillment of Yogiji Maharaj's wish.

In this way, through the combined efforts of all, this unique mandir was completed.

◆



Grand Murti- Pratishtha Mahotsav

18-19 May 2010, Bhadra



As the birthplace of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, the sacred village of Bhadra has earned an honoured place in the annals of history.

On Vaishakh *sud* 6, Samvat 2025 (23 April 1969) Brahaswarup Yogiji Maharaj had consecrated the marble *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami in the one-*shikhar* mandir built over the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami.

Now, 41 years later, on this same *tithi* (Vaishakh *sud* 6) Pragat Brahaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj re-consecrated the same *murtis* in the grand new five-*shikhar* mandir. These *murtis* had been retouched by Bhaktinandan Swami.

As the date for the *murti-pratishtha* approached efforts to finish the mandir continued at full speed. At the same time, preparations began for the *murti-pratishtha* celebrations and to cater for the thousands of devotees expected to arrive from throughout India and abroad.

A decorated temporary entrance gate greeted all entering the village. The residents of Bhadra had generously allowed their fields to be used as venues for the various celebration events, parking and catering. A large canopied area for the *yagna* and assemblies was erected. Under the coordination of the BAPS Central Office, Kothari Dharmakunvar Swami and Narayanmuni Swami, *sadhus*, *parshads* and *sadhaks* from Sarangpur, together with over 2,715 BAPS volunteers from Jamnagar, Rajkot, Junagadh, Amreli and other districts worked tirelessly for several weeks to ensure that everything was ready on time.

Adding to the difficulties coping with the intense mid-summer heat, the ferocious winds made preparations even more problematic. The canopies for the assembly hall and dining areas were repeatedly torn by the forceful winds. Eventually, green netting was used with success.

Swamishri arrived in Bhadra on 14 May 2010. In the late afternoon on 17 May Mahant Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami performed the mandir's Vedic *prasad* rituals. In the evening, the *sadhus* presented a kirtan *aradhana*, singing the glory of Gunatitanand Swami.

SWAMINARAYAN MAHAYAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE

On 18 May 2010 (Vaishakh *sud* 5, Samvat 2066), Pramukh Swami Maharaj presided over the 'Swaminarayan Mahayagna for World Peace.'

On the main *yagna* stage, the *murtis* to be consecrated were arranged: Dham, Dhama and



Swamishri performs the main rituals of the 'Swaminarayan Mahayagna for World Peace'

Mukta for the central shrine, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, guru *parampara*, Ganapatiji and Hanumanji.

The *yagna* commenced at 7.00 a.m. in the presence of senior sadhus, with Brahmins, Ghanshyambhai, Mukeshbhai and Vajubhai Shastri chanting the Vedic *shlokas*.

There were 9 main *yagna kunds* and 157 other *kunds* set up on stage and in the entire *yagna shala*. A total of 1,602 couples participated in the *yagna*, arriving in the early morning from their lodgings in Dhrol, Jodiya and other nearby villages, as well as in Rajkot and Jamnagar.

After the initial rituals were completed, Swamishri arrived to perform the main rituals. Then he blessed the *yagna* assembly, "Today, the wisdom of Gunatit has spread widely in India and abroad. Shriji

Maharaj had identified Gunatit to all saying, 'He is my abode, Akshar, Gunatitanand Swami.' That Akshar was born in this village and sanctified it. Whatever wishes are made in this divine place are fulfilled.

"The village is very small, but because Gunatit was born here its glory is limitless. Today, everyone will become *gunatit*, since, in such a small village, not all arrangements can be made. Still, devotees from India and abroad have been drawn here. There will be hardships here, but to earn the

benefits, they have to be discounted. By this, Shriji Maharaj will give infinite joy.

"Yogiji Maharaj often described the glory of this place. Ghanshyamsinh Bapu used to live here. Daji Bapu's granddaughter was married to Ghanshyamsinh's son. Even before we had



Swamishri showers sanctified rice grains to bless the devotees



Murtis of the central shrine on the peacock float during the grand and colourful procession

acquired this place, Daji Bapu had installed the *murti* of Akshar-Purushottam in Bhadra. Yogiji Maharaj said to Ghanshyamsinh, ‘The whole world will be attracted here. Everyone will bow here and it will become a great pilgrim place.’ Such were his blessings.

“Don’t think ‘why have I come to this small village?’ This is better than even whatever you consider as the best. If you have travelled to London, America, Africa you will have seen good things there, but they are of this world and this is the abode of God. However much you describe its glory, it is still not enough. You have all understood this glory and come here today, so may this *yagna* lead to peace in the world and may everyone experience inner peace. To whoever comes to the mandir God will grant *kalyan* and they will experience peace within.

“Kano Bhagat often song, ‘*Āvyā Hāri Undne tire... dhire dhire gaur sharire Shri Ghanshyām...*’. Thus, this village has been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj. Once, Yogiji Maharaj said to Ghanshyamsinh Bapu, “A bigger mandir than this will be built here. It will be supreme and people

from all over the world will be drawn here as pilgrims. Yogiji Maharaj’s visions were high. He was the manifest form of Gunatit, the avatar of Akshar, and so he could see all this as reality.

“Shastriji Maharaj had also come here. The grandfather of this Mansukh, Nanjibhai, was serving here at the time. He pulled Shastriji Maharaj’s cart and brought him here. The villagers here, young and old, men and women, have always helped us.

“When the first *murti-pratishtha* took place the entire village was in service. There was a shortage of water and so water had to be brought from the river. Nathabhai had a well, but it contained only a little water. We took Swami there. He showered flowers sanctified by Thakorji into the well and said, ‘There will be plenty of water. The celebrations will be supreme and there will be no problems.’ The youngsters helped fit the pipeline; the water flowed and the celebrations were great. Thousands of people came. After the celebrations, Swami reached Dhrol and the water stopped!

“The place has a great attraction. So many

devotees have been drawn here. May God grant happiness and peace to all. The Brahmins are conducting this *yagna* well and pray to Maharaj for peace. Let us pray to Maharaj that thousands of people come here for darshan and experience peace. May Maharaj give in abundance to all and grace all with Akshardham. May Maharaj also grant happiness to all the villagers.”

Then Swamishri performed *pujan* of the *murtis*. After Swamishri and the sadhus had departed from the *yagna*, the participating couples performed the rituals under the guidance of the Brahmins.

The preparations for the *yagna* had been meticulously made under the guidance of Shrutiprakash Swami and Bhadresh Swami.

NAGAR YATRA

At 5.00 p.m. on 18 May, a colourful procession of all the *murtis* to be consecrated in mandir was held in Bhadra. It commenced from the *yagna*



Sadhus and devotees during the procession

arena 1 km from the mandir. Even late in the afternoon, the mid-summer sun blazed down upon the thousands who had gathered for the *nagar yatra*. But, there was intermittent relief from the cool wind as everyone walked the route through the village to the new mandir. The *raths* bearing the *murtis* were pulled by devotees. Senior sadhus were also seated in *raths*. At the front, youths held a large banner of the celebrations. After them were bike riders wearing *safos* and carrying flags. They were followed by

two decorated horses and a musical band which played *dhun* and bhajan tunes. To the beat of this music, youths danced joyfully. One devotee danced balancing seven clay water pots on his head.

Behind them were youths carrying BAPS flags, children dressed as famous devotees and rishis, a group performing traditional Rajasthan dances and decorated floats from where sadhus sang bhajans. Thousands joined the procession



An aerial shower of flowers on the mandir to commemorate the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony

on foot, walking, dancing and joyfully singing *dhun* and bhajans in celebration of the auspicious occasion.

Many women devotees walked in the procession carrying *kalashes* on their heads as per the traditional custom. Young girls also participated dressed in various costumes. Some of the women were seated on floats singing *dhun* and bhajans.

To cap it all, flowers were showered upon the procession from a helicopter.

The *nagar yatra* concluded at around 7.00 p.m. by the new mandir.

In the evening assembly, Kothari Dharmakunvar Swami announced the names of all who had helped in the mandir project and Mahant Swami felicitated them with a shawl.

Then, the nationally acclaimed, award-winning group of dancers from Latipur performed a *ras*.

Thereafter, children, teenagers and youths of Dabhan and Rajkot presented selected portions of the dance-drama '*Jai Jai Gunatitanand*'.

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CEREMONY

Vaishakh *sud* 6, Samvat 2066, 19 May 2010. Before sunrise, the atmosphere resounded with the sounds of traditional tunes. At 5.30 a.m., after the *mangala arti*, the small *murtis* of Dham,

Dhami and Mukta were ceremoniously removed from the old mandir.

Thereafter, at 6.00 a.m. *maha-abhishek* was offered to the *murtis* of the new mandir, already in place in the shrines, by the senior sadhus.

At 7.00 a.m., the Brahmins began the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony, with senior sadhus and devotees performing the initial rituals.

At 8.05 a.m. Swamishri arrived with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Swamishri performed the main *murti-pratishtha* rituals in the central shrine. At the same time, senior sadhus performed the rituals in the other shrines: Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj – Mahant Swami, Sukh Shaiya – Kothari Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj – Tyagvallabh Swami, Shastriji Maharaj – Ishwarcharan Swami, Yogiji Maharaj – Siddheshwar Swami, Pramukh Swami Maharaj – Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Ganapati – Anandswarup Swami and Hanumanji – Atmaswarup Swami. After the main rituals, Swamishri went to each of the shrines in turn to perform *pujan* of the *murtis*.

Thereafter, Swamishri sat before the central shrine and chanted the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* while the *annakut* was arranged before the *murtis*. After offering the *annakut*, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha arti* at 8.45 a.m. Simultaneously, a 51-gun salute



Swamishri and devotees perform the murti-pratishtha arti



Swamishri, senior sadhus and invited guests on the main stage during the murti-pratishtha assembly

was fired and celebratory fireworks began, while flowers were showered onto the mandir from a helicopter.

Finally, Swamishri declared the mandir open for all.

MURTI-PRATISHTHA ASSEMBLY

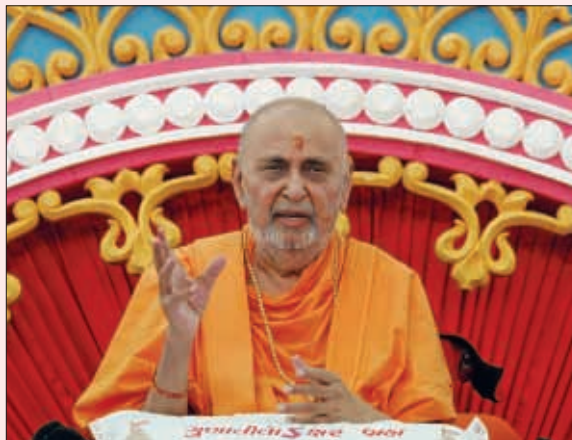
While the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony was in progress, thousands had gathered for the assembly. Siddheshwar Swami spoke on Gunatitanand Swami's divine personality; Viveksagar Swami spoke on the need for mandirs and Ishwarcharan Swami narrated many incidents revealing the tireless efforts of the *gunatit* gurus for the development of this sacred place. Mahant Swami recalled an occasion with Yogiji Maharaj, "This place was very dear to Yogiji Maharaj. Whenever he prepared to come to Bhadra, his mouth watered in anticipation. Once, in Gondal, Yogiji Maharaj told me, 'Come on, get ready. We're

going to Bhadra.' I did not say anything. So he squeezed my hand and said, 'Why are you silent. When you hear the name of Bhadra your mouth should start to water!' Swami had a great regard for Bhadra. The water in River Und was waist-high and Swami bathed here, saying, 'If there was no water here, everyone would be sad. And if the *jiva* does not get this association its misery is not resolved.' So, it is our great fortune to be present at the *murti-pratishtha* in such a sacred place."

Present in the assembly was Shrimati Vasuben Trivedi, MLA for Jamnagar city, who was warmly welcomed in the women's section. The guests on stage were Shri Bhikhubhai Dalsania, BJP

Secretary, Gujarat, and other dignitaries. They were all felicitated by Mahant Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami. Bhikhubhai Dalsania then addressed the assembly.

Then Swamishri inaugurated a great Sanskrit work of 19,000 *shloks*, *Shri Akshar-Purushottam Mahatmya*,



Swamishri blesses the murti-pratishtha assembly



Over 30,000 devotees during the murti-pratishtha celebration assembly

written by Shrutiprakash Swami.

Senior sadhus then presented Swamishri garlands of various types lovingly prepared by devotees from many places.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “In this Kaliyug, Bhagwan Shriji Maharaj resolved to incarnate on earth from his Akshardham to destroy *adharm*. He brought Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami and other *muktas* with him. This place is Gunatitanand Swami’s birthplace. Shriji Maharaj had also come here.

“Shriji Maharaj came to destroy *adharm* and establish dharma, for the *kalyan* of the *jivas* and to sustain our traditions. If people understand this, there will be peace and happiness in the world. In Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71, Shriji Maharaj says, ‘Understand this and explain to others.’

“Some say that ‘Swaminarayan’ is new. But, he is Paramatma, the cause of all. He manifested on earth. God has a form, is the all-doer and is manifest through the (guru) *parampara*.

“Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave the principle that one must become *aksharrup* and offer devotion to Purushottam. This principle of Akshar-Purushottam is true, so Shastriji Maharaj built mandirs and consecrated *murtis* in them. Yogiji Maharaj wished that satsang spreads throughout

the world, mandirs are built, all understand our traditions and everyone attains happiness. Today, due to his wish a mandir has been built here, since he, too, was a Gunatit Sadhu.

“The devotees in this village have served tremendously. Especially, Daji Bapu of Kantharia and Ghanshyamsingh Bapu of Jaiwa. Daji Bapu was an officer in Jamnagar State. He travelled to the villages to spread satsang. He installed the *murtis* in the old mandir. After retiring, he served in the Akshar Deri, Gondal.

“Ghanshyamsinh Bapu was also very humble. Yogiji Maharaj instructed him, ‘Whoever comes explain to them the glory of this place.’ These two consolidated satsang in their families and all their children offer their services today.

“May God grant *kalyan* to all who have served here, who have come here from India or abroad and may all experience inner peace and happiness.”

In all, throughout the three days, over 50,000 devotees participated in the celebrations.



PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

VICHARAN

1 March-14 May 2010

Sarangpur, Gandhinagar, Ahmedabad, **Jamnagar, Bhadra**



Swamishri engaged in darshan of Thakorji, Gandhinagar



Grand assembly on Kishore-Kishori Din, Ahmedabad



Cultural programme by children on Bal Din, Ahmedabad

MARCH

1-30 Sarangpur

31 Sarangpur, Gandhinagar

APRIL

1-15 Gandhinagar

16-30 Ahmedabad

MAY

1-14 Ahmedabad

14 Ahmedabad to Jamnagar and Bhadra

MARCH: SARANGPUR

1, Monday; Pushpadolotsav

More than 80,000 devotees attended the evening Pushpadolotsav festival celebrated in the presence of Swamishri. (For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, April 2010, p. 23 and back title.)

10, Wednesday; Diksha Mahotsav

After Swamishri's morning puja he gave *parshad* and *bhagvati diksha* to 42 youths. Kothari Swami placed the *kanthi* round each youth's neck, Dr Swami draped a *gatariyu*, Mahant Swami placed a *pagh* and Swamishri gave the guru mantra and blessings. (For details see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, April 2010, inside back title.)

12, Friday

After his morning puja Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan*, *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs at Kachhal (Sankari) and Palaj (Mehalav).

24, Wednesday; 230th Shri Hari Jayanti Celebration

At 7.30 p.m. the celebration of Shri Hari Jayanti commenced on the mandir grounds.

The festival assembly included speeches and kirtans by sadhus and dramas and dances by youths. The celebration assembly theme was ‘Bhagwan Swaminarayan – the Propagator of Ekantik Dharma.’ Brahmadarshan Swami gave an introductory speech on the theme, Ghanshyamcharan Swami spoke about the spreading of dharma, *jnan* and *vairagya*. A drama on Abhaysinh Babu’s (Lodhika) steadfastness in satsang *niyams* was enacted by youths. Siddheshwar Swami spoke about ‘Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Propagator of Bhakti.’ Thereafter another drama on Khimo Suthar was performed. Then Swamishri inaugurated new publications by Swaminarayan Aksharpith: *Andhkar se Prakash ki Aur* and *Adhyatma Vibhuti Yogiji Maharaj* by Vivekpriya Swami and *Sanskriti Ke Adharstambh – Shastra, Mandir, Sant* in Hindi. Thereafter Viveksagar Swami spoke about ‘Satpurush – The Upholder of Ekantik Dharma.’ Then Swamishri was honoured with garlands by the senior sadhus. A kirtan was sung and a traditional dance was performed. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Shriji Maharaj came to earth and accomplished an extraordinary task of establishing *ekantik dharma*. He also initiated sadhus who abided by a code of moral conduct and *upasana* and inspired the development of staunch devotees. Shriji Maharaj has declared in the Vachanamrut that he had not come alone to earth but had brought with him his abode, Mul Akshar Gunatitanand Swami, his divine powers and many *muktas*. His mission was to grace countless souls with liberation. During his short life of 49 years he travelled in the harsh forests, met yogis and liberated them and came to Loj and met Muktanand Swami.... If we wish to become *brahmarup* we need to be wedded firmly to *agna* and *upasana*. And the Satpurush who is wedded to both is the means to *moksha*.”

At 10.10 p.m. Swamishri performed the birthday celebration *arti*. Then he rocked the *hindolo* of Harikrishna Maharaj while the

sadhus sang *Dharma gher ānand bhayo, jai bolo Ghanshyam ki* and *Āj Dharma Bhakti ne dwār... āj Yagnapurush ne dwār*. Everyone rejoiced with devotional fervour. More than 1,223 male and 1,019 female devotees had observed a waterless fast today.

26, Friday

After his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs at Sonasan (Himatnagar district), Vadu (Mehasana district) and Dared (Gadhada district).

30, Tuesday; Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir Patotsav

Prior to his morning puja Swamishri performed the 29th *patotsav arti* and *pushpanjali* of Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. An *annakut* was offered to the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj. After his morning puja Swamishri blessed the assembly. Today, more than 3,500 devotees had pilgrimaged by foot to Sarangpur from various neighbouring towns and villages.

1-15 APRIL: GANDHINAGAR

- 11 (Sunday): Children’s Day programme.
- Daily many devotees observed fasts and pilgrimaged by foot to the *hari* mandir to please Swamishri and for his good health.

3, Saturday; Inauguration of Satchitanand Water Show

At 6.30 p.m. Swamishri, Chief Minister Narendra Modi, Shri Dr R. Chidambaram, Scientific Adviser to the Prime Minister, and Yves Pépin, Creative Director of ECA2, arrived on stage for the opening ceremony of Satchitanand Water Show on the precincts of Swaminarayan Akshardham. (For detailed report see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May 2010.)

10, Saturday

After his morning puja Swamishri performed

the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs at Gandhinagar Sector 6 and 26, and Vavol.

16-30 APRIL: AHMEDABAD HIGHLIGHTS

- Swamishri arrived in Ahmedabad on the second day of Adhik Month (16 April). During his stay many devotees performed fasts and pilgrimaged by foot to the mandir daily to please Swamishri and for his good health.
- In the Vaishnav tradition some or all the annual Hindu festivals are celebrated during the Adhik month. In Swamishri's presence Pramukh Varni Din (18.4.10), Vasant Panchmi (19), Mandir *patotsav* of Sarangpur and Bhadra (20), Swamishri's birthday celebration (22), Shriji Maharaj's birthday celebration (23), Probodhini Ekadashi in which an *annakut* of vegetables and fruits were arranged before Thakorji (25), Sharad Punam festival (28) and Pushpadolotsav (Fuldol) (29) were celebrated.

1-12 MAY: AHMEDABAD HIGHLIGHTS

- The evening Kishore Din assembly (2, Sunday) was themed 'Jai Jai Akshar-Purushottam'. More than 2,500 *kishores* and *kishoris* attended the programme.
- Festivals celebrated as part of Adhik month were: Nilkanth Varni's arrival in Loj (4 May), Janmashtmi (6), Bal Din (9) showed the history of children's activities in Ahmedabad, Yogiji Maharaj remembrance day (11), Diwali celebration (13) and Annakut (14).
- Daily more than 150-170 women devotees and many others observed a waterless or liquid fast for Swamishri's good health.
- Each day Swamishri's Harikrishna Maharaj sanctified one BAPS *sanskardhams*. In all, Thakorji was taken to 34 *sanskardhams* of Ahmedabad.
- During Swamishri's one month stay, the sadhus and devotees of Ahmedabad performed 24-

hour *pradakshinas* of the *abhishek murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan for Swamishri's good health. In all, 8,998 male and female devotees performed 1,403,485 *pradakshinas* in 655 hours from 16 April to 13 May 2010.

5, Wednesday

After his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the *hari* mandirs of Vijalpur (Navsari), Chikhli (Dang), Borpada (Dang), Chimli (Valsad) and Dhuliya (Khandesh).

14. Friday; Ahmedabad, Jamnagar, Bhadra

Prior to his morning puja Swamishri performed the *arti* of a symbolic *annakut* festival before Thakorji. More than 425 food items were arranged before Thakorji in all the three sanctums, *abhishek* mandapam and guru *shikhars*.

At 4.15 p.m. Swamishri, prior to his departure from the mandir, went for Thakorji's darshan. The scorching summer heat was 45°C. Thousands of devotees had assembled on the mandir grounds for Swamishri's darshan since 3.00 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan to all before departing from Ahmedabad at 5.05 p.m. by air. He landed in Jamnagar at 5.35 p.m. and travelled to the under-construction BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir on its outskirts. There he performed *pujan* of the first pillar of the mandir *mandapam*. After blessing the devotees Swamishri departed at 6.30 p.m. and arrived at Bhadra at 7.20 p.m. Swamishri was welcomed with garlands by Kothari Dharmakunvar Swami and Kothari Jnanprasad Swami.





Top: The grand main entrance gate to the celebration's *yagna* and assembly venues.

Middle: Swamishri performs the main rituals of the 'Swaminarayan Mahayagna for World Peace', 18 May 2010.

Bottom: Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami, Bhadra, 19 May 2010.





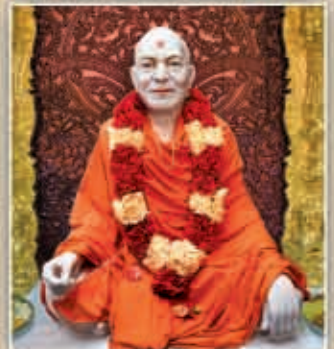
Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Bhadra



Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj



Pragat Brahmaswarup
Pramukh Swami Maharaj