

Chapter 9

Extraordinary Seva in Dangara Mandir

In August 1918 (Shravan, V.S. 1974), a month-long series of discourses was organized in the village of Dangara. Jaga Bhakta had often sanctified the village of Dangara by his holy presence, and it was where he had breathed his last. Shastriji Maharaj had stayed in Dangara and served Jaga Bhakta in his final days. Even after Jaga Bhakta's passing, Shastriji Maharaj continued to visit Dangara regularly. Amongst Dangara's other prominent residents were the great devotee Pujaji Bapu, his son Jasmatsinh, Ranchhod Bhakta, and many other Darbars whose lives increased the glory of this holy village.

So, when the devotees of Dangara decided to build a mandir in their holy village, Vignandas Swami, Yogi Maharaj, Jadav Bhagat, Ranchhod Bhagat, Narayan Bhagat, and the rest of their

mandal decided to stay in Dangara to help with the mandir construction. Whenever Yogi Maharaj engaged in service, he never considered his bodily needs or limitations. For the mandir construction, he would help mine stones from the quarry, load them onto bullock carts, and unload them upon arrival at the mandir site. Moreover, he would fill the furnace for making lime mortar and assist in many other aspects of the construction work. He looked after the masons, artisans, and laborers laying bricks and digging the mandir foundations.

Except for the occasional occurrence when he would get help from another sadhu, Yogi Maharaj would single-handedly make food for everyone serving in the mandir construction. In the morning, he would prepare *rotla*, *chhas*, and *gur* for everyone; for lunch he would make *adad dal*, *rotla*, and *sambharo*; and every three or four days, he would prepare a feast of *motaiya* laddus, dal, rice, and vegetables. Occasionally, he would prepare *churma* laddus.

In the evening, he would prepare *khichdi*, *kadhi*, *rotla*, and lemon, chili, or guar pickle. In those days, chai or spiced hot milk was not made in the mandir. Most of the devotees would eat only twice a day. Yogi Maharaj would serve everyone with love and feed them to their heart's content. When guests arrived from Rajkot or Bhavnagar, he would welcome them with great hospitality and attend to their every need. They would be so pleased with Yogi Maharaj's service that they would unfailingly offer a donation to the mandir or sponsor a feast before leaving. Whenever there was a feast, Yogi Maharaj would fast. Yet, while he fasted, he never failed to serve the devotees with extra love and enthusiasm. Such was his saintliness!

Yogi Maharaj would not have even a second's respite throughout the day. After washing utensils from the evening meal, he would take a sadhu or two with him to sprinkle water onto the day's newly laid bricks. Then, after finishing all his tasks, he would sing

cheshta and go to sleep at midnight on a jute-cloth sack laid out on the bare floor with only his arm as a pillow and his upper garment as a blanket. Despite his exhausting daily routine and late bedtime, he would wake up to start the next day at 3 a.m.!

Thus had this great sadhu ascended through every stage of bhakti-yoga such that he would not miss a single opportunity to serve, believing the service of God and his devotee to be his devotion.

Moreover, his pure love and devotion would inspire others to serve God, as well. For example, when extra bullock carts were sometimes required to transport stones, he would lovingly request the villagers, “Bapu, ‘Maharaj’! Please lend us your bullock cart.”

At Yogi Maharaj’s loving request, everyone would bring their bullock carts and offer, “Swami! Please let us know whenever you need them again.”

Yogi Maharaj would reply, “Whenever we need them, we will inform you the day before. But, after you finish plowing the fields for the day, if you could sit with us for a bit and listen to the evening spiritual discourses, you will benefit greatly.”

As Yogi Maharaj had won everyone’s hearts, no one objected. In the evening spiritual assembly, Yogi Maharaj would sing kirtans in his rich, melodious voice, transporting everyone into a divine ecstasy. Along with kirtans, Yogi Maharaj would often recite Swamini Vatos in his distinctive style. Vignandas Swami would also deliver spiritual discourses.

When the mandir construction was completed, Shastriji Maharaj arrived and performed the *murti-pratishtha*. Ranchhod Bhagat and Narayan Bhagat often stayed in this mandir.

On the day of the *murti-pratishtha*, a devotee had sponsored a feast of *ras-puri*. After everyone finished eating, the three sadhus

serving everyone sat down to eat. Just then, they heard that Kuberbhai, Nanubhai Sheth, Naranbhai Mistry, and other devotees had arrived straight from Bhavnagar. Although the sadhus were just about to eat, they immediately got up. Vignandas Swami called Yogi Maharaj to the assembly and asked, “We have food ready to serve everyone, don’t we?”

Yogi Maharaj folded his hands and replied, “Yes.” He sat the guests in the kitchen and served them the food the sadhus had been about to eat. Kuberbhai even joked, “Gnanji! You seem to have eaten without us!” Yogi Maharaj laughed and served everyone *ras* and *puri* to their heart’s content. After the devotees finished eating, the three sadhus made some *khichdi* and finally had their lunch at 3 p.m.

¹ Many of the farmers of Dangara were Brahmins, and Yogi Maharaj would use the respectful term, “Maharaj,” to address them. West of the mandir to this day there is still a small neighborhood of Brahmins.