

Chapter 25

Yagna and Festive Procession

On the morning of Saturday, 23 April 1955, a grand *yagna* commenced in a beautifully decorated *yagna mandap* of the community center grounds. The *murtis* of Shri Swaminarayan, Shri Radha Krishna, Shri Lakshmi Narayan, Shri Sadgurus, and Shri Hanumanji-Ganapati had been placed on the *yagna mandap* stage. Thousands of devout men and women had come for darshan of the *yagna*.

In the afternoon, the *murtis* were taken by devotees in a festive procession around the city. The joyous residents of Mombasa had come together as one and joined in this festive procession, disregarding any distinctions of class or caste. The massive procession of approximately 8,000 to 10,000 people was viewed from all corners of the city by between 35,000 and 40,000 spectators. Approximately

400 volunteers, forty African policemen, fifteen special policemen, and five European police officers worked together to maintain order in the massive procession. All the devotees from throughout East Africa had traveled from far and wide to participate in this grand event. The procession commenced at 3:15 p.m. and arrived in the mandir at 6:40 p.m.

Thousands of Mombasa residents offered an enthusiastic welcome when the procession reached the Kutchi-Gujarati Hindi Union. The Hindi Union President garlanded Swamishri and, welcoming him on behalf of the entire Hindi-speaking population of Mombasa, said, “Today marks a golden dawn for the city of Mombasa that such a great Sant has graced our city with his presence.” Thereafter, amidst the massive crowds, the sadhus were offered puja. Then Swamishri blessed everyone. The Chief Executive of the Swaminarayan Satsang Mandal expressed his gratitude to the entire community for maintaining discipline befitting their Hindi heritage.

Some of the elderly city dwellers who had lived in Mombasa for decades remarked that they had never seen such a majestic festival procession coupled with such discipline at any time in the last forty years.

Countless people were stopping alongside the procession and quickly snapping photographs of this momentous occasion. Notably, many Europeans were taking the most photographs. The local residents could not believe their eyes.

From the balconies and windows of the residences lining the procession route, countless men and women did darshan of the sadhus and *murtis* and experienced a feeling of spiritual fulfillment.

Crowds of European, Asian, and African onlookers gathered all along the procession route to satisfy their curiosity.

This procession reached the mandir at 6:40 p.m. led by a marching band, small groups of teenage boys, masses of devotees and well-

wishers, a broadcasting van, the sadhus' car decorated with flower garlands, the *murtis* that were being transported by a car decorated with colorful silken cloth and streaming flags, the female devotees, and a small contingent of volunteers bringing up the rear. The entire Station Road had been decorated with streamers and flags.