

# Chapter 17

## **Anand Mandir Pratishtha**

Shastriji Maharaj had considered Anand to be one of his most supportive towns. After he left Vartal, the decision to build a mandir in Bocharan was taken in Anand. In Anand's Nana Adadh neighborhood on Revandas Street, there lived a group of devotees willing to lay down their lives for Shastriji Maharaj. These devotees included Keshavlal, Naranbhai, Jorabhai, Haribhai, Purushottambhai, Motibhai, Lallubhai, Jivabhai, Karsanbhai, and others. Years ago, Motibhai Bhagwandas had donated land to construct an Akshar Purushottam mandir in Anand. But since the Anand devotees were making important financial contributions to the ongoing construction work of other large mandirs, the plans for their local mandir were continually delayed. In 1944 (V.S. 2001), the devotees had again requested Shastriji Maharaj to allow

them to begin construction of the Anand mandir. The devotees were worried that their children would not remain in Satsang after their passing if there were no mandir in the town

Shastriji Maharaj finally gave permission to build a mandir to these devotees, who included Motibhai Bhagwandas, Manibhai Naranbhai, Purushottambhai Jorabhai, Jivabhai Nathabhai, Bhulabhai Parbhudas, Jivabhai Haribhai, Ranchhodbhai Bakorbhai, Fulakaka, Ambalal Karsandas, Chunilal Keshavlal, and others. The land for the mandir was small, so Mathurbhai Motibhai donated some land adjacent to the existing plot. Shastriji Maharaj had the mandir's architectural plans drawn up, and he would often say, "I am the mahant of this mandir, and I want to stay in this mandir."

The mandir inauguration was planned for Sunday, 27 April 1952 (Vaishakh *sud* 3, V.S. 2008). Pramukh Swami, Mota Swami, Ghanshyam Swami, Shrijiswarupdas Swami, Aksharpurushottam Swami, Balmukund

Swami, and other sadhus arrived together with Swamishri. Narayanji Maharaj directed the *yagna* ceremony. Manibhai Jivabhai sat as the chief sponsor of the *yagna*. The *murtis* were taken in a beautiful procession through Mota Adadh, the Swaminarayan Mandir, the clock tower in the bazaar, the railway station, and via Gamadi Road to the pond adjacent to the mandir. Motibhai Bhagwandas had requested Shastriji Maharaj that Akshar Purushottam Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj should be honored in the same bazaar in which Shriji Maharaj and the sadhus had been insulted. Accordingly, people all around Anand offered the *murtis* flower garlands and welcomed them by showering rice. Shankar Kavi led the devotees in upbeat bhajans. The streets of Anand reverberated with the *jay naad* of Akshar Purushottam Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj. Today, the devotees of Anand attained the unique joy of paying homage to Maharaj and the sadhus. They were pleased to be able to redress the errors of their ancestors.

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals and the *arti*. A sense of triumph permeated the atmosphere.

Just as Maharaj had loved Gadhada, Shastriji Maharaj had loved Anand. For 47 years, from 1903 to 1950 (V.S. 1960 to V.S. 2007), Shastriji Maharaj had visited and stayed at the homes of Keshavlal Pragji, Manibhai Naranbhai, and Motibhai Bhagwandas countless times. These devotees had pleased Shastriji Maharaj by offering their service to him with extreme *nirdoshbhav*. Thousands of devotees from all over had come to participate in this *murti-pratishtha*.

Yet, there were still some who, afflicted with hatred, stayed near Swamishri and expressed their hatred for him when they got a chance. Even after such triumphant festivals and grand events, these people continued to disrespect, mock, and insult Swamishri. Although no one dared to do this in the open, they would take advantage of private moments with Swamishri to insult him.

One day, everyone had darshan of Thakorji when he woke at 4 p.m., and then they went for a bath. Swamishri observed a vow to do *mansi puja* sitting in front of Thakorji at 4 p.m. Thus, he was quietly meditating when Vinubhai came for darshan and saw an uncouth *parshad* finish eating a banana and drape its peel over Swamishri's head! After completing his meditation, Swamishri opened his eyes and felt something on his head. He reached up to find a banana peel! He placed the banana peel on the side as if nothing had happened. How much must this Jogi have tolerated from this *parshad* who showed his bravado by taking advantage of the solitude? Swamishri's limitless humility emboldened certain vicious elements to mock Swamishri to this extent.