

Chapter 15

“He Is Vithoba”

As the 100th anniversary of Sarangpur’s Hanuman mandir was being celebrated on 10 October 1949 (Aso *vad* 3, V.S. 2005), Kothari Virsang Bhagat of the Vartal diocese’s Gadhada mandir had requested Shastriji Maharaj for his help in the celebration arrangements. Moreover, he had also invited Shastriji Maharaj to participate in the actual celebration. According to Shastriji Maharaj’s wish, Kothari Narayanswarupdas Swami had taken care of all the food and accommodation arrangements for the devotees of the Vartal diocese. Thousands of devotees had come for the event, including Gurzarilal Nanda.

Nanda Saheb’s longtime Maharashtrian driver, Shankar, had also come to the event. Over the years, he had offered great service to the sadhus. During the festival, he suddenly experienced acute stomach pain that caused

him to double over in agony in the middle of the assembly hall while clutching his stomach and moaning.

But, with the huge crowds at the festival, who would take care of him? Yogi Maharaj noticed the situation and came to the assembly hall with Natha Bhagat. Yogi Maharaj tenderly asked him, “Is your stomach hurting?” Then he said, “Natha Bhagat, bring me some vegetable oil.”

While waiting for the vegetable oil, Yogi Maharaj spoke words of comfort, “You will be better in no time... Chant Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan....”

When the vegetable oil arrived, Yogi Maharaj began to gently rub it onto Shankar’s stomach. After just a few moments, Shankar’s pain subsided. He joyfully grasped Yogi Maharaj’s hand and told the surrounding devotees, “Listen, listen. He is Vithoba. Vithoba is so merciful; Vithoba is so compassionate... He relieved my suffering. He showered immense grace on such a small man.”

Unconcerned whether anyone was listening to him, he continued to say, “He is Vithoba...”

Laughing, Yogi Maharaj returned to the service activities he was engaged in. That evening, he remembered Shankar and made special arrangements for him to have a light meal of *khichdi* and *kadhi*. How could Shankar ever forget the affection he had received from Yogi Maharaj amidst the throngs of thousands of devotees?

Mohanbhai Amrutbhai of Mahuva had come to Sarangpur for the *patotsav* celebration. Although he was staying in the Hanuman mandir, he was taking his meals in the Akshar Purushottam mandir since the food was better there. Here, he had darshan of Yogi Maharaj and experienced a feeling of divine peace. Yogi Maharaj inquired about his background and affectionately served him his meal. Then Yogi Maharaj brought him to Shastriji Maharaj and introduced him, explaining that he was from Mahuva. Shastriji Maharaj was pleased to hear that he was from Mahuva. In Shastriji

Maharaj’s august presence and through Yogi Maharaj’s affection and pats on the back, he experienced a sense of divinity. He maintained an unwavering affection for Shastriji Maharaj and Yogi Maharaj despite the opposition he later faced from the Vartal diocese.

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From Sarangpur, Shastriji Maharaj traveled to Bochasan for the Kartik Punam festival. Here, he decided upon a date for the groundbreaking ceremony of the Gadhada mandir. Then, he traveled to Ahmedabad and Sarangpur before arriving in Gadhada. On 16 November 1949, Shastriji Maharaj performed the groundbreaking ceremony of the majestic marble Akshar Purushottam mandir atop the hill on the banks of the Ghela River. The Darbar of Bhavnagar, Krishnakumarsinhji, was also present for the occasion.

On 23 January 1950, Shastriji Maharaj’s 86th birthday was celebrated with great festivity in Atladara. Shastriji Maharaj then

visited the famed sculptor Kolhatkar in Vadodara before going to Chansad.

Nirgundas Swami’s health had become very precarious, so Shastriji Maharaj decided to take him to Mumbai for treatment. In Mumbai, everyone stayed at Nandaji’s bungalow, and Nirgundas Swami received excellent medical care. At Shastriji Maharaj’s behest, Yogi Maharaj delivered discourses on the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, delighting the devotees.

One day, Shastriji Maharaj told an assembly of devotees, “Getting angry with or arguing with those who have a different understanding will not convince them of the truth. That can only happen by increasing our affection for them and gradually explaining the truth to them. Just see! Yogi Maharaj’s demeanor, affection, and sense of service would make anyone love him. Then, he will accept what Yogi Maharaj explains to him. Thus, one should remain very large-hearted. Remain calm. Maintain an attitude of service and affection,

but don’t become agitated or overly hasty in making your point.”