

Chapter 10

The Development of Gunatitanand Swami's Birthplace

Kana Bhagat, who resided in Bhadra and was originally from Jiragadh in Jamnagar district, had been initiated at the age of eleven by Muli's Dharmapriyadas Swami. When he was sixteen, he accompanied the sadhus of Muli to Bhadra to distribute Annakut prasad. Velabhai Bhandari of Bhadra asked the sadhus to allow Kana Bhagat to remain in Bhadra as the pujari of the Vartal Gadi's Swaminarayan mandir, and he promised to supply necessary provisions and clothes as long as he remained there. Thus, Kana Bhagat stayed back in Bhadra.

Once, when the foundations of Akshar Mandir were being dug, Kana Bhagat went to Gondal to have Shastriji Maharaj's darshan. Upon having darshan of both Shastriji Maharaj and Yogi Maharaj, Kana Bhagat experienced a

transcendent peace and felt that he had received the fruit of his years of devotional service. Thus, he expressed his desire to remain in Gondal at Akshar Mandir. However, Shastriji Maharaj promised that he would come to Bhadra for him. Yogi Maharaj fed him with great affection and said, “You have received the opportunity to serve in Gunatitanand Swami’s birthplace of Bhadra in the mandir that was previously the house of Vashram Suthar, which Bhagwan Swaminarayan had sanctified. This service opportunity is possible only for a liberated soul of Akshardham.”

Explaining to him the divine glory of that holy place, Yogi Maharaj packed prasad of *sukhadi* for Kana Bhagat and his companion, Mandan Bhagat. On this occasion, Kana Bhagat and Mandan Bhagat developed a firm conviction in Akshar Purushottam *upasana* and a profound affection for Yogi Maharaj.

After this, both devotees came for darshan of the Sharad Punam festival that Shastriji Maharaj celebrated in Gondal. They thought

with sadness, “There is such a grand *shikharbaddha* mandir on the cremation site of Gunatitanand Swami, but at his birthplace there is merely a thatched hut?”

Mandan Bhagat again requested Shastriji Maharaj to visit Bhadra. However, Shastriji Maharaj replied, “Bhadra falls under the jurisdiction of Muli Mandir. If we go there, the sadhus of Muli will cause problems. So, not now, but we will come after five to seven years.”

Mandan Bhagat responded, “Since you have left Vartal for Gunatitanand Swami, you must come to his birthplace of Bhadra. You are suffering many hardships for him, so please visit Bhadra. We will take care of your accommodations. No one will say anything.”

Due to their loving and insistent prayer, Shastriji Maharaj traveled with them to Bhadra and made his accommodations at the Vartal Gadi's Swaminarayan mandir.

On that very day, Ghanshyamdas Swami and Narayanprasaddas Swami of Muli had come to

Bhadra to collect the devotees' tithes. Shastriji Maharaj was staying on the upper floor of the mandir, and the Muli sadhus were staying on the ground floor. The Muli sadhus told Mandan Bhagat, "Why did you allow these rebels to stay here? Your actions will ruin your soul's chance at liberation."

Mandan Bhagat responded, "Swami, this sadhu is such that he can liberate us. Shriji Maharaj is manifest through him. The thousand-year-old *khijado* tree will produce only thorns and seedpods, whereas a five-year-old mango tree will produce mangos. He is like a mango tree. So, by all means, take the flour and lentils that you have come for, but don't speak such rubbish. If you want to complain to Acharya Maharaj or Keshavcharandas Pujari, be my guest."

This bold response left the sadhus seething.

After that, Shastriji Maharaj went to Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace for darshan. However, the farmer who possessed the property did not let Shastriji Maharaj enter.

Only after much pleading did he relent and let Shastriji Maharaj do darshan. Shastriji Maharaj did *dandvats* and applied the dust of that holy spot on his head. Then he blessed Mandan Bhagat saying, “A beautiful one *shikhar* mandir will be built on this spot, and Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, and Gopalanand Swami will reside here.”

Through Shastriji Maharaj's blessings and efforts, Mandan Bhagat was eventually able to acquire the house at Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace for only `150 because the farmer who owned the house was unable to pay his debt to the government. After that, Vignandas Swami visited Bhadra and told Mandan Bhagat, “Don't give this land to Shastriji Maharaj.”

However, Mandan Bhagat had immense reverence and devotion for Shastriji Maharaj, so he ignored Vignandas Swami's words.

Meanwhile, Shastriji Maharaj sent a message to Mandan Bhagat instructing him, “Transfer this property to Ada's *mandal*.”

Mandan Bhagat accepted the command from Shastriji Maharaj.

When news of what had transpired reached Muli, Krishnakeshavdas Swami rushed to Bhadra to convince Mandan Bhagat not to give the property of Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace to "the rebels."

Mandan Bhagat firmly said, "If I err, God will punish me; but if you err, he will punish you. So, you should not speak ill of a God-like sadhu."

Krishnakeshavdas Swami tried to explain, "But when they install Gunatitanand Swami's *murti* and adorn it with ornaments, that is all wrong."

Observing such malign sentiments, Mandan Bhagat remarked, "Only one who is about to fall from the path of Satsang would say such words."

Krishnakeshavdas Swami could not respond to this truth, but later in life, he suffered greatly due to his hatred for Shastriji Maharaj.

After that, the sadhus of Muli kicked Kana Bhagat out from the Vartal Gadi's Swaminarayan mandir. Thus, he stayed on the banks of the Und River, where he would sleep, eat, sing kirtans, and chant God's name all out in the open. But, he maintained his firm faith in the divine glory of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. Later, at Yogi Maharaj's inspiration, Daji Bapu decided to build a ghat on the portion of the Und River bank that had been sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He assigned the responsibility of overseeing the construction of this ghat to the great devotee Jhaverbhai of Rajkot. Moreover, he also began the construction of one room of the mandir to be built atop Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace. From its initial stages, Jhaverbhai had been instrumental in developing Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace. In the beginning, he had to endure many problems due to significant opposition. Due to the lack of proper roads in those days, his regular travels from Rajkot to Bhadra caused him considerable hardship.

Moreover, he would have to carry all provisions for food with him.

Whenever Yogi Maharaj would visit Bhadra for darshan, he would lovingly feed Kana Bhagat. Once he served Kana Bhagat sixteen squares of *mohanthal* and said, “Bhagat, eat up! When will you get this again? After this, there is only *rotla* and *adad dal*!”

Yogi Maharaj had great respect for Kana Bhagat's continued devotion to God amidst hardship because Yogi Maharaj knew from personal experience what it meant to offer devotion in difficult times.