

Chapter 25

Satsang Crosses the Oceans

In Ahmedabad's Premabhai Hall, the accomplished poet Nanalal, serving as the President of the All India Satsang Association, had said, "The Swaminarayan Sampradaya crosses oceans." The Chief Executive of the association was a resident of Africa, Harmanbhai Patel. With the blessings of the great torchbearer of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Harmanbhai had been the first to lead the propagation of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya in Africa, starting in the late 1930s. Under his leadership, the first Swaminarayan mandir in Africa was established in Nairobi in 1945.

Originally a native of the village of Gana in the Charotar region of Gujarat, Harmanbhai had received blessings from Shastriji Maharaj before going to Africa in 1927, "Although you are traveling to a foreign land, no matter what

the situation is, don't ever forget that Swaminarayan is supreme God." However, after Harmanbhai arrived in Africa, he did not get anyone's support in his mission of propagating Satsang.

The next time he returned to India and went for Shastriji Maharaj's darshan, Shastriji Maharaj asked him for a report on his efforts in propagating Satsang. Despondently, Harmanbhai said, "There is not a drop of Satsang in Africa. No one is interested in worshipping God."

"Keep trying. Through you there will be a great expansion of Satsang," consoled Shastriji Maharaj as he gave his blessings.

Harmanbhai was working in the African Railways when he was transferred to the Kibwezi train station. The stationmaster in Kibwezi was a native of the village of Vaso by the name of Maganbhai Motibhai Patel. Through his contact with Harmanbhai, Maganbhai became interested in Satsang. He soon undertook a deep study of the scriptures

and traced the location of followers of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya throughout Africa. At the time, many Patidars from Charotar were working in the African Railways. With help from the railway staff and the telegraph, he began to send to everyone Satsang news, letters of blessings from Shastriji Maharaj, and letters full of spiritual knowledge sent by Nirgundas Swami. Due to his work, Maganbhai was routinely transferred to new locations around East Africa. In whichever location Maganbhai would be transferred, he would start Satsang activities there. He established *satsang mandals* in Mombasa, Nairobi, Tororo, Jinja, Eldoret, and many other places. He began to organize Satsang gatherings.

As Satsang activities in Nairobi grew, in 1945, the East Africa Satsang Mandal was formally established. By the inspiration of Maganbhai, a new mandir was constructed on Temple Road. Shastriji Maharaj consecrated a beautiful *murti* of Dham, Dharni, and Mukta in

India, which he had sent to Africa to be installed in the Nairobi *hari mandir*.