

Chapter 8

Darbars Charmed at Sarangpur Murti-Pratishtha

Seeing the mandir construction progressing rapidly, Shastriji Maharaj declared that 23 May 1916 (Vaishakh *sud* 6, V.S. 1972) would be the auspicious date of the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony. Yogi Maharaj and Premvatidas Swami traveled to Vadodara to fetch the *murtis* of Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, and Gopalanand Swami to be installed in the central shrine. With great effort, they transported the *murtis* by train to Kundali Station, where they reached on 22 May 1916 (Vaishakh *sud* 5, V.S. 1972). Yogi Maharaj and Premvatidas Swami unloaded the *murtis* from the train and transported them to the outskirts of Sarangpur. Shastriji Maharaj was seated on the mandir steps waiting intently for the *murtis'* arrival. As the sadhus brought the *murtis* into the mandir, Shastriji Maharaj met

them and embraced Yogi Maharaj, showering him with blessings and filling him with divine joy. The declaration that Shriji Maharaj had made a century ago that, “I will reside here along with my devotee,” was going to come true tomorrow. Thus, who would not be ecstatic!

Then, as groups of devotees had begun arriving from all over, Yogi Maharaj resumed his responsibilities around the mandir.

Dadubha Bapu and Bapubha Saheb of Adval had decided to come to Sarangpur for this sacred occasion. Both of these youths had understood the Akshar Purushottam *upasana* through their association with Nirmaldas Swami of Muli. Then, after coming into contact with Shastriji Maharaj, they had understood the essence of *pragat upasana*, or faith in the manifest form of God. As a result, they had developed a staunch conviction in Akshar Purushottam Maharaj. Therefore, they felt that “It is a great and rare opportunity to be present for the pratishtha of Akshar Purushottam Maharaj. Thus, we should go to Sarangpur.”

In those days, the Adval mandir pujari was the senior *satsangi*, Guru Kashiram Dave. Initially, both youths decided to consult him before going, but then reconsidered, thinking, “If he says no, and then we go, it would be disrespectful to him. So, let us go to Sarangpur without asking him. Should he scold us upon our return, we will endure it.” Thus, they reached Sarangpur the day before the *pratishtha*.

Amidst Yogi Maharaj’s countless responsibilities on that occasion, he noticed that these two youths had arrived in Sarangpur. Shastriji Maharaj and Nirgundas Swami were also pleased to see that they had come. During the festival, the youths came into closer contact with Yogi Maharaj. They were touched by Yogi Maharaj’s affectionate personality and kind hospitality. He treated them and spoke to them as respectfully as if they were kings. Yogi Maharaj was adept in tending to the arrangements and emotional needs of not just a couple of devotees but countless devotees, who

thus felt a strong bond with Yogi Maharaj even if they were meeting him for the first time.

On 23 May 1916 (Vaishakh sud 6, V.S. 1972), Akshar Purushottam Maharaj was installed in the mandir with Vedic *pratishtha* rituals. Yogi Maharaj had made matchless contributions to the development of this mandir, from start to finish. Moreover, despite the physical demands and responsibilities of the *kothar*, kitchen, and many other tasks, Yogi Maharaj was able to naturally win the hearts of countless devotees like Madhabha and Dadubha.

When these two Darbars were leaving, Yogi Maharaj gave them a package of prasad. Both youths bid Yogi Maharaj an emotional farewell and extended a heartfelt invitation to visit Adval.

When the Sarangpur mandir construction had commenced, Yogi Maharaj had initially gone to Adval and begged for alms with Vignandas Swami, and then with Nirgundas Swami. They had been prohibited from making accommodations in the village's Swaminarayan

mandir. Consequently, devotees who had affection for the sadhus would make arrangements for them to stay at the houses of the various Darbar devotees. These devotees would also arrange for a bullock cart to transport the grains collected from the village to Dhandhuka Station. Vignandas Swami would sit in the bullock cart, and Yogi Maharaj would walk behind it with a *mala* in his hand. If Nirgundas Swami had come, he would sit in the bullock cart, and Yogi Maharaj would walk behind it. In those days, Yogi Maharaj walked everywhere barefoot. He was very determined to practice austerities and endure hardships, and in such fashion, he traveled through innumerable villages.

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