

= Swaminarayan =

Swaminarayan (IAST : Sv?m?n?r?ya?a , 3 April 1781 ? 1 June 1830) , also known as Sahajanand Swami , is the central figure in a modern sect of Hinduism known as the Swaminarayan Hinduism .

Swaminarayan was born Ghanshyam Pande in Chhapaiya , Uttar Pradesh , India in 1781 . In 1792 , he began a seven @-@ year pilgrimage across India at the age of 11 years , adopting the name Nilkanth Varni. During this journey , he did welfare activities and after 9 years and 11 months of this journey , he settled in the state of Gujarat around 1799 . In 1800 , he was initiated into the Uddhav sampradaya by his guru , Swami Ramanand , and was given the name Sahajanand Swami . In 1802 , his guru handed over the leadership of the Uddhav Sampradaya to him before his death . Sahajanand Swami held a gathering and taught the Swaminarayan Mantra . From this point onwards , he was known as Swaminarayan . The Uddhav Sampradaya became known as the Swaminarayan Sampradaya .

Swaminarayan developed a good relationship with the British Raj . He had followers not only from Hindu denominations but also from Islam and Zoroastrianism . He built six temples in his lifetime and appointed 500 paramahansas to spread his philosophy . In 1826 , Swaminarayan wrote the Shikshapatri , a book of social principles . He died on 1 June 1830 and was cremated according to Hindu rites in Gadhada , Gujarat . Before his death , Swaminarayan appointed his adopted nephews as acharyas to head the two dioceses of Swaminarayan Sampradaya .

Swaminarayan is also remembered within the sect for undertaking reforms for women and the poor , performing yajñas (fire sacrifices) on a large scale as well as performing miracles . Swaminarayan had an estimated 1 @. @ 8 million followers when he died . By 2007 , he had an estimated of 20 million followers . He has , however , been criticised by people such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Mahatma Gandhi . The acceptance of Swaminarayan as God and secondary treatment of women is questioned by critics .

= = Childhood as Ghanshyam = =

Swaminarayan was born on 3 April 1781 (Chaitra Sud 9 , Samvat 1837) in Chhapaiya , Uttar Pradesh , a village near Ayodhya , in a Hindi speaking region in India . Born into the brahmin or priestly caste of Sarvariya , Swaminarayan was named Ghanshyam Pande by his parents , Hariprasad Pande (father , also known as Dharmadev) and Premvati Pande (mother , also known as Bhaktimata and Murtidevi) . The birth of Swaminarayan coincided with the Hindu festival of Rama Navami , celebrating the birth of Rama . The ninth lunar day in the fortnight of the waxing moon in the month of Chaitra (March ? April) , is celebrated as both Rama Navami and Swaminarayan Jayanti by Swaminarayan followers . This celebration also marks the beginning of a ritual calendar for the followers . Swaminarayan had an elder brother , Rampratap Pande , and a younger brother , Ichcharam Pande . He is said to have mastered the scriptures , including the Vedas , the Upanishads , the Puranas , the Ramayana , and the Mahabharata by the age of seven .

= = Travels as Nilkanth Varni = =

After the death of his parents , Ghanshyam Pande left his home on 29 June 1792 (Ashadh Sud 10 , Samvat 1849) at the age of 11 . He took the name Nilkanth Varni while on his journey . Nilkanth Varni travelled across India and parts of Nepal in search of an ashram , or hermitage , that practiced what he considered a correct understanding of Vedanta , Samkhya , Yoga , and Pancaratra , the four primary schools of Hindu philosophy . To find such an ashram , Nilkanth Varni asked the following five questions on the basic Vaishnava Vedanta categories :

What is Jiva ?

What is Ishvara ?

What is Maya ?

What is Brahman ?

What is Para Brahman ?

While on his journey , Nilkanth Varni mastered Astanga yoga (eightfold yoga) in a span of 9 months under the guidance of an aged yogic master named Gopal Yogi . In Nepal , it is said that he met King Rana Bahadur Shah and cured him of his stomach illness . As a result , the king freed all the ascetics he had imprisoned . Nilkanth Varni visited the Jagannath Temple in Puri as well as temples in Badrinath , Rameshwaram , Nashik , Dwarka and Pandharpur .

In 1799 , after a seven @-@ year journey , Nilkanth 's travels as a yogi eventually concluded in Loj , a village in the Junagadh district of Gujarat . In Loj , Nilkanth Varni met Muktanand Swami , a senior disciple of Ramanand Swami . Muktanand Swami , who was twenty @-@ two years older than Nilkanth , answered the five questions to Nilkanth 's satisfaction . Nilkanth decided to stay for the opportunity to meet Ramanand Swami , whom he met a few months after his arrival in Gujarat . He later claimed in the Vachnamrut that during this period , he took up a severe penance to eliminate his mothers flesh and blood from his body so that the sign of his physical attachment to family , was completely removed .

= = Leadership as Sahajanand Swami = =

According to the sect , Nilkanth 's understanding of the metaphysical and epistemological concepts of the pancha @-@ tattvas (five eternal elements) , together with his mental and physical discipline , inspired senior sadhus of Ramanand Swami .

Nilkanth Varni received sannyasa initiation from Ramanand Swami on 20 October 1800 , and with it was granted the names Sahajanand Swami and Narayan Muni to signify his new status .

At the age of 21 , Sahajanand Swami was appointed successor to Ramanand Swami as the leader of the Uddhav Sampraday by Ramanand Swami , prior to his death . The Uddhav Sampraday henceforth came to be known as the Swaminarayan Sampraday . According to sources he proclaimed the worship of one sole deity , Krishna or Narayana . Krishna was considered by him his own ista devata . In contrast with the Vaishnava sect known as the Radha @-@ vallabha Sampradaya , he had a more puritanical approach , rather than the theological views of Krishna that are strongly capricious in character and imagery . While being a worshipper of Krishna , Swaminarayan rejected licentious elements in Krishnology in favor of worship in the mood of majesty , alike to earlier Vaisnava teachers , Ramanuja and Yamunacarya .

Sahajanand Swami was later known as Swaminarayan after the mantra he taught at a gathering , in Faneni , a fortnight after the death of Ramanand Swami . He gave his followers a new mantra , known as the Swaminarayan mantra , to repeat in their rituals : Swaminarayan . When chanting this mantra , some devotees went into samadhi (a form of meditation) This act is also called maha @-@ samadhi (" great samadhi ") and claimed that they could see their personal gods , even though they had no knowledge of Astanga Yoga . Swaminarayan also became known by the names Ghanshyam Maharaj , Shreeji Maharaj , Hari Krishna Maharaj and Shri Hari . As early as 1804 , Swaminarayan , who was reported to have performed miracles , was described as a manifestation of God in the first work written by a disciple and paramhansa , Nishkulanand Swami . This work , the Yama Danda , was the first piece of literature written within the Swaminarayan sect .

Swaminarayan encouraged his followers to combine devotion and dharma to lead a pious life . Using Hindu texts and rituals to form the base of his organisation , Swaminarayan founded what in later centuries would become a global organisation with strong Gujarati roots . He was particularly strict on the separation of sexes in temples . Swaminarayan was against the consumption of meat , alcohol or drugs , adultery , suicide , animal sacrifices , criminal activities and the appeasement of ghosts and tantric rituals . Alcohol consumption was forbidden by him even for medicinal purposes . Many of his followers took vows before becoming his disciple . He stated that four elements need to be conquered for ultimate salvation : dharma , bhakti (devotion) , gnana (knowledge) and vairagya (detachment) . Doctrinally , Swaminarayan was close to eleventh century philosopher Ramanuja and was critical of Shankaracharya 's concept of advaita , or monistic non @-@ dualism . Swaminarayan 's ontology maintained that the supreme being is not formless and that God always has a divine form .

= = Work and views = =

= = = Women = = =

According to the author Raymond Brady Williams , " Swaminarayan is an early representative of the practice of advocacy of women 's rights without personal involvement with women " . To counter the practice of sati (self @-@ immolation by a widow on her husband ' s funeral pyre) , Swaminarayan argued that , as human life was given by God it could be taken only by God , and that sati had no Vedic sanction . He went to the extent to call sati nothing but suicide . Swaminarayan offered parents help with dowry expenses to discourage female infanticide , calling infanticide a sin .

The Swaminarayan faith has been linked to patriarchal class structures that subjugate women . Professor David Hardiman states that Swaminarayan was not free from misogyny and " after travelling as an ascetic throughout India he was reported to vomit if approached by even the shadow of a woman " . Swaminarayan ' s writings like the Shikshapatri portray women as polluted beings who pull men down . Swaminarayan taught that ? the woman who attracts attention is made up of bones , blood vessels , spittle , blood , mucus and feces ; she is simply a collection of these things , and there is nothing to be attractive . ? Women are thus depicted as dirty , slimy , polluted beings who pull men down . This discriminative treatment is endorsed to the full by the Shikshapatri . Swaminarayan refused to interact with women himself and barred them from leadership positions in his movement , causing critics to label him a hypocrite regarding the status of women . No women are allowed to serve on the managing committees of temples ; neither can they act as trustees of the trusts which look after temple funds .

Members of the faith are defensive of the fact that some practices seem to restrict women and make gender equality in leadership impossible . Female followers are segregated rigorously . They are only permitted to enter special sections of the temple reserved for women or have to go to separate women ' s temples . Concepts of pollution associated with the menstrual cycle lead to the exclusion of women from the temples and daily worship . Swaminarayan also directed male devotees not to listen to religious discourses given by women .

In case of widows , Swaminarayan directed those who could not follow the path of chastity to remarry . For those who could , he lay down strict rules which included them being under the control of male members of the family . This may seem regressive , however it gave them " a respected and secure place in the social order " of the time . Swaminarayan restricted widows " to live always under the control of male members of their family and prohibited them from receiving instruction in any science from any man excepting their nearest relations . "

However , while " many would assert that Swaminarayan Hinduism serves a patriarchal agenda , which attempts to keep women in certain roles " , Swaminarayan himself , despite considerable criticism from those in his own contemporary society who " loathed the uplift of lower caste women , " insisted that education was the inherent right of all people . At that time , influential and wealthy individuals educated their girls through private and personal tuition . Male followers of Swaminarayan made arrangements to educate their female family members . The literacy rate among females began to increase , and they were able to give discourses on spiritual subjects . Within the sect , Swaminarayan is considered a pioneer of education of females in India .

= = = Caste system and the poor = = =

After assuming the leadership of the Sampraday , Swaminarayan worked to assist the poor by distributing food and drinking water . He undertook several social service projects and opened almshouses for the poor . Swaminarayan organized food and water relief to people during times of drought . The faith largely had excluded the mass of the poor , such as marginal peasants , agricultural labourers , the informal sector working class , adivasis and dalits . Dalits were banned from Swaminarayan temples from the beginning though in one case a separate temple was created for their use .

Some suggest that Swaminarayan worked towards ending the caste system , allowing everyone into the Swaminarayan Sampraday . However partaking in the consumption food of lower castes and caste pollution was not supported by him . A political officer in Gujarat , Mr. Williamson reported to Bishop Herber that Swaminarayan had " destroyed the yoke of caste . " He instructed his paramhansas to collect alms from all sections of society and appointed people from the lower strata of society as his personal attendants . Members of the lower castes were attracted to the movement as it improved their social status . Swaminarayan would eat along with the lower Rajput and Khati castes but not any lower . He established separate places of worship for the lower caste population where they were in large numbers . However , Dalits - the lowest in the caste system - were formally excluded from Swaminarayan temples . In the Shikshapatri , he wrote do not take food or water from a person of a lower caste . Members of a lower caste are prohibited from wearing a full sect mark (tilak chandlo) on their forehead . Even now , however , for the vast majority of Gujarat 's lower @-@ caste , Untouchable and tribal population , the sect is out of bounds .

According to Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India , from Calcutta to Bombay , Volume 2 1824 to 1825 by Reginald Bishop Heber - Lord Bishop of Calcutta , which says that disciples of Swaminarayan are across the casts including Muslims / Musalmans and lower casts such as Vaghari , Bheels and Kolis . They all pray to one god with no difference of casts . They live as if they are brothers .

Page 109 under head " Swaamee Narain " discussion between Mr. Williamson and Bishop Heber about The social and law & order situation of Kutch (then Cutch) and Kathiyawar (then Catteywar) during AD 1824 : " On other occasions , however , their opposition to law has been sufficiently open and daring . The districts of Cutch and Cattywar have ever been , more or less in a state of rebellion ; and neither the refency of the former state nor the Guicwar , as feudal sovereign of the latter , nor the English government in the districts adjoining to both , which are under their controul , have ever got through a year whiout one or more sieges of different forts or fastnesses .

Some good had been done , Mr. Williamson said , among many of these wild people , by the preaching and popularity of the Hindoo reformer , Swaamee Narain , who had been mentioned to me at Baroda . His morality was said to be far better than any which could be learned from Shaster (Shashtra) . He preached a great degree of purity , forbidding his disciples so much as to (not) look on any woman whom they passed . He condemned theft and bloodshed ; and those villages and districts which had received him , from being among worst , were now among the best and most orderly in the provinces . Nor was this all , insomuch as he was said to have destroyed the yoke of caste , - to have preached one God , and in shord , to have made so considerable approaches to the truth , that I could not but hope he might be an appointed instrument to prepare the way for gospel .

While I was listening with much interest to Mr. Williamson 's account of this map , six persons came to the tent , four in the dress of peasants or bunyans ; one , a yong man , with a large which turban and the quilted lebada , of a Coolie , but clean and decent , with a handsome sward and shield and other marks of rustic wealth ; and the sixth , an old Mussalman , which a white beard and pretty much appearance , dress , and manner of an ancient serving @-@ man . After offering some sugar and sweetmeats , as their nuzzur , and as usual , sitting down on the ground , one of the peasants began , to my exceeding surprise and delight , " Pundit Swaamee Narain , send his salaam " . and proceeded to say that person whom I so much desired to see was in the neighbourhood and asked permission to call on my next day . I , of course , returned a favourable answer , and stated with truth that I greatly desired his acquaintanee , and had heard much good of him . I asked if they were his disciples , and was answered in the affirmative He added that though of different castes , they were all disciples of Swaamee Narain , and taught to regard each other as brethren . "

Page 115 - Meeting with Swaminarayain and discussion between Bishop and Swaminarayan " I (Bishop Heber) asked (to Swaminarayan) about castes , to which he answered , that he did not regard the subject as of much importance , but that he wished not to give offence (to ancient Hindu system) ; that people might eat separately or together in this world , but that above " oopur " pointing to heaven , those distinctions would cease , where we should be all " ek ekhee Jat " (one like another) . "

Swaminarayan 's few of the closest Muslim disciples were Karrimji , Kesharmiya (Commander of Vadhawan state) and Miyaji

It is said that Swaminarayan dispelled the myth that moksha (salvation) was not attainable by everyone . He taught that the soul is neither male nor female .

= = = Animal Sacrifices and Yagnas = = =

Swaminarayan was against animal sacrifices as carried out by Brahmin priests during Vedic rituals , such as yajnas (fire sacrifices) , influenced by the Kaula and Vama Marg cults . The priests consumed " sanctified " prasad in the form of meat of these animals . To solve this problem , Swaminarayan conducted several large scale yajnas involving priests from Varanasi . These did not have animal sacrifices and were conducted in strict accordance with Vedic scriptures . Swaminarayan was successful in reinstating ahimsa through several such large scale yajnas . Swaminarayan stressed lacto vegetarianism among his followers and forbade meat consumption .

According to ShikshaPatri Shloka 12 : " (My followers) shall never kill goats and / or other living beings in sacrifice performed for the propitiation of deities and Pitris (ancestors) , for non @-@ violence is declared (by the Shastras) as the highest Dharma of all the Dharmas . "

Shloka 15 : " None shall ever eat meat , even if it be an offering in a sacrifice or shall ever drink liquor or wine even if it be offered to a deity . "

Shloka 22 : " None shall ever accept prasad of a deity to whom offering of meat and / or liquor @-@ wine are offered and / or before whom goats and / or other living beings are sacrificed . "

= = = Establishing Law and Order of Gujarat = = =

During the time when Swaminarayan came to Gujarat , the law and order situation of Gujarat was in worst ever . Neither British government nor local kings were able to control the robberies , killings , internal conflicts , rapes , and other uncultured events in Kathiyawar , Kutch and Gujarat . Upon reaching to Gujarat , Swaminarayan by His preaching and super natural divine power restored noted notorious criminals as normal civilians . These criminals left their evil nature and started living life with high moral values to the extent that they would never rob , or kill any living being . Even they would not see the unknown women or would not drink alcohol and be strict vegetarian . Bombay Governor Sir Malcolm was impressed by social reforms of Swaminarayan and so had come down to Rajkot to meet Swaminarayan personally and to appreciate His work towards educating high moral values to the people of Gujarat and helping British Government in reducing criminal graph of Gujarat . Swaminarayan had vowed not to kill the evil people but to kill their evil nature .

Joban Pagi of Vadtal

One of the notorious criminal at time of Maharaja Syajirao Gaikwad 2 was Joban Pagi . Joban Pagi had robbed treasury of Gaikwad at Okha Mandal and killed many of the soldiers . He had also killed officers of British government at Vadtal . But neither British Government nor Gaikwad could arrest him alive . He had his robbers network from Puna till Palanpur . Jobanpagi tried to steal Swaminarayan 's favorite mare named " Manaki " at Dabhan but despite of his efforts through out night he could not steal it . Jobanpagi the master of robbery shocked with his defeat and met Swaminarayan during a vast assembly of Dabhan Yagna and confessed his crime and took his shelter . He then left robbery . Sayajirao Gaikwad had invited him and awarded him " Bahadur " by making him State Guest after he became a disciple of Swaminarayan .

Jogidas Khuman

Jogidas Khuman was one of the strongest Baharvatiya - rebellion turned robber . He became rebellion against Bhavnagar state because he was not given share of kingdom and Bhavnagar Maharaja did not supported him in giving justice . The Khumans periodically rob villages belonging to Wajesinhji - Bhavanagar Maharaja , razing them and pilfering the cattle and then escape to nearby Gir Forests . Despite of multiple efforts by British and Wajesinhji , Jogidas was not convinced to settle down the dispute . Wajesinhji was desperate for truce with Jogidas Khuman. in 1829 He come to know that Jogidas had recently visited Gadhada at Data Khachar Darbar and had met

Dada and Swaminarayan on demise of Jiva Khachar . Wajesinhi requested Dada Khachar to help make truce with Jogidas . Dada Khachar being a subservient devotee of Swaminarayan asked permission of Swaminarayan Bhagavaan . Swaminarayan gave him permission . Dada become mediator and by bless of Swaminarayan , Dada made truce between Wajehsinh and Jogidas . D.A. Blane , then Political Agent in Rajkot , ratified the truce and sent it to the Bombay Presidency , which approved it . This clearly reflected Swaminarayan 's calming influence on outlaws of Gujarat and make them streamline without killing them .

= = Temples and ascetics = =

Swaminarayan ordered the construction of several Hindu temples and he had built six huge temples by himself and installed the idols of various deities such as Nara @-@ Narayana in two temples , Laxminarayan dev , gopinathji maharaj , Radha Raman dev and madanmohan lalji . The images in the temples built by Swaminarayan provide evidence of the priority of Krishna . Disciples of Swaminarayan composed devotional poems which are widely sung by the tradition during festivals . Swaminarayan introduced fasting and devotion among followers . He conducted the festivals of Vasant Panchami , Holi , and Janmashtami with organization of the traditional folk dance raas .

The first temple Swaminarayan constructed was in Ahmedabad in 1822 , with the land for construction given by the British Imperial Government . Following a request of devotees from Bhuj , Swaminarayan asked his follower Vaishnavananand to build a temple there . Construction commenced in 1822 , and the temple was built within a year . A temple in Vadtal followed in 1824 , a temple in Dholera in 1826 , a temple in Junagadh in 1828 and a temple in Gadhada , also in 1828 . By the time of his death , Swaminarayan had also ordered construction of temples in Muli , Dholka and Jetalpur .

From early on , ascetics have played a major role in the Swaminarayan sect . They contribute towards growth and development of the movement , encouraging people to follow a pious and religious life . Tradition maintains that Swaminarayan initiated 500 ascetics as paramhansas in a single night . Paramhansa is a title of honour sometimes applied to Hindu spiritual teachers who are regarded as having attained enlightenment . Paramhansas were the highest order of sanniyasi in the sect . Prominent paramhansas included Muktanand Swami , Gopalanand Swami , Brahmanand Swami , Gunatitanand Swami , Premanand Swami , Nishkulanand Swami , and Nityanand Swami .

= = Scriptures = =

Swaminarayan propagated general Hindu texts . He held the Bhagavata Purana in high authority . However , there are many texts that were written by Swaminarayan or his followers that are regarded as shastras or scriptures within the Swaminarayan sect . Notable scriptures throughout the sect include the Shikshapatri and the Vachanamrut . Other important works and scriptures include the Satsangi Jeevan , Swaminarayan 's authorized biography , the Muktanand Kavya , the Nishkulanand Kavya and the Bhakta Chintamani .

Shikshapatri

Swaminarayan wrote the Shikshapatri on 11 February 1826 . While the original Sanskrit manuscript is not available , it was translated into Gujarati by Nityanand Swami under the direction of Swaminarayan and is revered in the sect . The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency summarised it as a book of social laws that his followers should follow . A commentary on the practice and understanding of dharma , it is a small booklet containing 212 Sanskrit verses , outlining the basic tenets that Swaminarayan believed his followers should uphold in order to live a well @-@ disciplined and moral life . The oldest copy of this text is preserved at the Bodleian Library of Oxford University and it is one of the very few presented by Sahajanand Swami himself . Acharya Tejendraprasad of Ahmedabad has indicated in a letter that he is not aware of any copy from the hand of Sahajanand older than this text .

Vachanamrut

Swaminarayan 's philosophical , social and practical teachings are contained in the Vachanamrut ,

a collection of dialogues recorded by five prominent saints (Muktanand Swami , Gopalanand Swami , Nityanand Swami , Shukanand Muni , & Brahmanand Swami) from his spoken words . The Vachanamrut is the scripture most commonly used in the Swaminarayan sect . It contains views on dharma (moral conduct) , jnana (understanding of the nature of the self) , vairagya (detachment from material pleasure) , and bhakti (pure , selfless devotion to God) , the four essentials Hindu scriptures describe as necessary for a jiva (soul) to attain moksha (salvation) .

Satsangi Jeevan

Satsangi Jeevan is the authorised biography of Swaminarayan . The book contains information on the life and teachings of Swaminarayan . It is written by Shatanand Swami and completed in Vikram Samvat 1885 . Swaminarayan decided to make Gadhada his permanent residence on the insistence of Dada Khachar and his sisters. Swaminarayan instructed Shatanand Swami to write a book on his life and pastimes .

To enable Shatanand swami to write from His childhood , Swaminarayan had blessed Shatanand Swami with Sanjay Drishti - special power to see the entire past right from His childhood .

Once written by Shatanand Swami , this book was verified and authenticated by Swaminarayan . He was much pleased to read the book . Swaminarayan then asked his disciples to do Katha of Satsangi Jeevan

= = Relations with other religions and the British Government = =

Swaminarayan strived to maintain good relationships with people of other religions , sometimes meeting prominent leaders . His followers cut across religious boundaries , including people of Muslim and Parsi backgrounds . Swaminarayan 's personal attendants included Khoja Muslims . In Kathiawad , many Muslims wore kanthi necklaces given by Swaminarayan . He also had a meeting with Reginald Heber , Lord Bishop of Calcutta and a leader of Christians in India at the time . Bishop Heber mentions in his account of the meeting that about two hundred disciples of Swaminarayan accompanied him as his bodyguards mounted on horses and carrying Matchlocks and swords . Bishop Heber himself had about a hundred horse guards accompanying him (fifty horses and fifty muskets) and mentioned that it was humiliating for him to see two religious leaders meeting at the head of two small armies , his being the smaller contingent . As a result of the meeting , both leaders gained mutual respect for one another .

Swaminarayan enjoyed a good relationship with the British Imperial Government . The first temple he built , in Ahmedabad , was built on 5 @, @ 000 acres (20 km2) of land given by the government . The British officers gave it a 101 gun salute when it was opened . It was in an 1825 meeting with Reginald Heber that Swaminarayan is said to have intimated that he was a manifestation of Krishna. Template : Rp = 81 In 1830 , Swaminarayan had a meeting with Sir John Malcolm , Governor of Bombay (1827 to 1830) . According to Malcolm , Swaminarayan had helped bring some stability to a lawless region . During the meeting with Malcolm , Swaminarayan gave him a copy of the Shikshapatri . This copy of the Shikshapatri is currently housed at the Bodleian Library at University of Oxford . Swaminarayan also encouraged the British Governor James Walker to implement strong measures to stop the practice of sati .

= = Death and succession = =

In 1830 , Swaminarayan gathered his followers and announced his departure . He later died on 1 June 1830 (Jeth sud 10 , Samvat 1886) , and it is believed by followers that , at the time of his death , Swaminarayan left Earth for Akshardham , his abode . He was cremated according to Hindu rites at Lakshmi Wadi in Gadhada .

Prior to his death , Swaminarayan decided to establish a line of acharyas or preceptors , as his successors . He established two gadis (seats of leadership) . One seat was established at Ahmedabad (Nar Narayan Dev Gadi) and the other one at Vadtal (Laxmi Narayan Dev Gadi) on 21 November 1825 . Swaminarayan appointed an acharya to each of these gadis to pass on his message to others and to preserve his fellowship , the Swaminarayan Sampraday . These acharyas

came from his immediate family after sending representatives to search them out in Uttar Pradesh . He formally adopted a son from his brothers and appointed them to the office of acharya . Ayodhyaprasad , the son of Swaminarayan 's elder brother Rampratap and Raghuvera , the son of his younger brother Ichcharam , were appointed acharyas of the Ahmedabad Gadi and the Vadtal Gadi respectively . Swaminarayan decreed that the office should be hereditary so that acharyas would maintain a direct line of blood descent from his family . The administrative division of his followers into two territorial dioceses is set forth in minute detail in a document written by Swaminarayan called Desh Vibhaag Lekh . Swaminarayan stated to all the devotees and saints to obey both the Acharyas and Gopalanand Swami who was considered as the main pillar and chief ascetic for the Sampraday .

The current acharyas of the Swaminarayan Sampraday are Koshalendraprasad Pande , of the Ahmedabad Gadi , and Rakeshprasadji Pande , of the Vadtal Gadi .

Decades after his death , several divisions occurred with different understandings of succession . This included the establishment of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) , the founder of which left the Vadtal Gadi in 1905 , and Maninagar Swaminarayan Gadi Sansthan , the founder of which left the Ahmedabad Gadi in the 1940s . The followers of BAPS hold Gunatitanand Swami as the spiritual successor to Swaminarayan , asserting that on several occasions Swaminarayan revealed to devotees that Gunatitanand Swami was Aksharbrahm manifest . Followers of BAPS believe that the acharyas were given administrative leadership of the sect while Gunatitanand Swami was given spiritual leadership by Swaminarayan . The current spiritual and administrative leader of BAPS is Shastri Narayanswarupdas . The followers of the Maninagar Swaminarayan Gadi Sansthan hold Gopalanand Swami as the successor to Swaminarayan . The current leader of this sect is Purushottampriyadasji Maharaj .

= = Following and manifestation belief = =

According to the biographer Raymond Williams , when Swaminarayan died , he had a following of 1 @. @ 8 million people . In 2001 , Swaminarayan centres existed on four continents , and the congregation was recorded to be five million , the majority in the homeland of Gujarat . The newspaper Indian Express estimated members of the Swaminarayan sect of Hinduism to number over 20 million (2 crore) worldwide in 2007 .

In his discourses recorded in the Vachanamrut , Swaminarayan mentions that humans would not be able to withstand meeting god in his divine form , hence God takes human form (simultaneously living in his abode) so people can approach , understand and love him in the form of an Avatar . While no detailed statistical information is available , most of the followers of Swaminarayan share a belief that Swaminarayan is the complete manifestation of Narayana or Purushottam Narayana - the Supreme Being and superior to other avatars . A Swaminarayan sectarian legend tells how Narayana from the Nara Narayana pair , was cursed by sage Durvasa to incarnate on the earth as Swaminarayan .

Some of Swaminarayan 's followers believe he was an incarnation of Lord Krishna . The images and stories of Swaminarayan and Krishna have coincided in the liturgy of the sect . The story of the birth of Swaminarayan parallels that of Krishna 's birth from the scripture Bhagavata Purana . Swaminarayan himself is said to have intimated that he was a manifestation of God in a meeting with Reginald Heber , the Lord Bishop of Calcutta , in 1825 .

The belief of many followers that their founder was the incarnation of the Supreme God has also drawn criticism . According to Professor Raymond B. Williams , Swaminarayan was criticized because he received large gifts from his followers and dressed and traveled as a Maharaja even though he had taken the vows of renunciation of the world . Swaminarayan responded that he accepts gifts for the emancipation of his followers .

Mahatma Gandhi , leader of the Indian independence movement in British @- @ ruled India , had a low opinion of the sect and he criticized Swaminarayan and Vallabha Acharya for propagating the values which he thought were contrary to the true spirit of Vaishnavism . In a letter dated 25 July 1918 , to Mangalal Gandhi , he stated , ? To be sure , I have felt in all seriousness that

Swaminarayan and Vallabhacharya have robbed us of our manliness . They made the people incapable of self @-@ defense ... It was all to the good that people gave up drinking , smoking , ect . , this , however , is not an end in itself , it only is a means . The love taught by Swaminarayan and Vallabh is all sentimentalism . They have made an undesirable effect on Gujarat ... Do not mix up the Vaishnava tradition with the teaching of Vallabha and Swaminarayan . ?

The manifestation belief and Swaminarayan 's teachings were also criticized by Hindu reformist leader Swami Dayananda (1824 ? 1883) . He questioned the acceptance of Swaminarayan as the Supreme Being and was disapproving towards the idea that visions of Swaminarayan could form a path to attaining perfection . Accused of deviating from the Vedas , his followers were criticised for the illegal collection of wealth and the " practice of frauds and tricks . " In the views of Swami Dayananda , published as early as 1875 , the Shikshapatri Dhwanata Nivarana pamphlet came as a reaction to bring out the absurdities of the Shikshapatri . Furthermore , he believed it was a historical fact that Swaminarayan decorated himself as Narayana in order to gain followers .