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### Sri Swaminarayan a Veritable Avatar from Gujarat

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**SWAMINARAYAN**

Sri Swaminarayan, also referred to as Sahajanand Swami, is the main figure of the Swaminarayan sect, a type of Vaishnavism. In this particular faith, Swaminarayan is considered as being equal to the Purushottama or the Supreme Being. He is actually considered to be an incarnation of Narayana of the Nara-Narayana pair of deities.

## Swaminarayan's Childhood

Swaminarayan was born on April 3, 1781, as Ghanshyam Pande in Chappaiya, near Ayodhya, in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. He was born in the exalted Brahmin priest caste of Sarvariya, to Hariprasad Pande (also referred to as Dharmadev) and Premvati Pande (also known as Bhaktimata and Murtidevi). Swaminarayan had two siblings - an elder brother, Rampratap Pande, and a younger brother, Ichcharam Pande.



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**LORD RAMA**

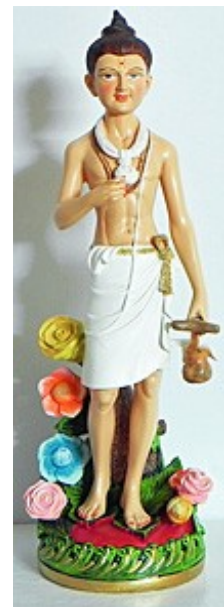
The birth of Swaminarayan coincides with the Hindu festival of Rama Navami, which also celebrates the birth of Lord Rama, one of the avatars of Sri Maha Vishnu, and the central figure of the great epic, the Ramayana. Hence, this ninth lunar day in the fortnight of the waxing moon in the Hindu month of Chaitra (March-April), is celebrated as Rama Navami by regular Hindus and as Swaminarayan Jayanti by Swaminarayan followers.

## Swaminarayan Emerges as a Spiritual Leader

Swaminarayan had exhibited his scholastic prowess from a very young age. He is believed to have mastered all the major Hindu scriptures, including the Vedas and the Shastras; the Puranas and the Upanishads; and the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata; by the tender age of seven.

From 1792 onward, Swaminarayan undertook a seven year pilgrimage across India, adopting the name Nilkanth Varni. Settling in the state of Gujarat from the year 1799, he was initiated into the Uddhav Sampraday by his guru, Sri Ramanand Swami in the year 1800. This was when he was also given the name Sahajanand Swami.

Swaminarayan speedily rose in the field of spirituality. In the year 1802, just before his death, his Guru handed him the leadership of the Uddhav Sampraday. Sahajanand Swami then took his Guru's mission ahead and held a gathering in order to teach followers the Swaminarayan Mantra. This proved to be the turning point for him, as he began to be referred to as Swaminarayan and was revered as an incarnation of God by his followers. Sometime later, the Uddhav Sampraday became known as the Swaminarayan Sampraday.



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**YOUNG  
SWAMINARAYAN**

Rising further in status among both his followers and non-followers, Swaminarayan developed a good relationship with the British Imperial Government. His name and teachings spread far and wide and very soon, he had followers not only from the Hindu sect, but also from Islam and Zoroastrianism. People from all cultures thronged to take his Darshan and listen to his discourses.

With a view to encourage people to visit temples and shrines, Swaminarayan went on to build six temples throughout his lifetime as a spiritual leader. He also appointed 500 Paramahansas, who would go ahead and spread his philosophy to the rest of the world. In 1826, Swaminarayan wrote the Shikshapatri, a treatise on social principles.

## Swaminarayan's Sojourns as Nilkanth Varni

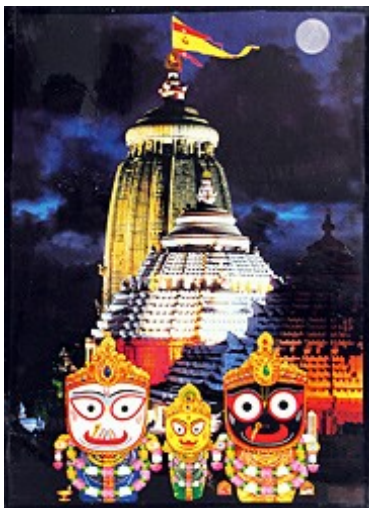
After his parents left for their heavenly abode, Ghanshyam Pande left his home on 29 June 1792, at the age of 11. Assuming the name Nilkanth Varni on his onward sojourns, Swaminarayan travelled across India and parts of Nepal, in search of an ashram or hermitage, which practised and taught what he considered to be the right understanding of Vedanta, Yoga, Samkhya and Pancharatra. These are the four principal schools of Hindu philosophical thought.

Swaminarayan was actually in the quest of answers to five main questions of Vedanta:

- What is Jiva?
- What is Ishwara?
- What is Maya?
- What is Brahma?
- What is Parabrahman?

In the course of his journey as Nilkanth Varni, Swaminarayan came under the guidance of an aged master of Yoga, named Gopal Yogi. He mastered the technique of Ashtanga Yoga, the eightfold path of Yoga, in the short span of 9 months. Such was Swaminarayan's brilliance and spiritual prowess.

Continuing onward to Nepal, Swaminarayan met the King Rana Bahadur Shah and cured him of his long-standing stomach illness. The King has till then imprisoned many ascetics. Understanding his own fault and as a token of gratitude to Swaminarayan, he freed all the ascetics and monks he had imprisoned until then.



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**JAGANNATH, SUBHADRA AND  
BALARAM WITH PURI TEMPLE IN  
BACKGROUND**

Nilkanth Varni continued his quest and visited the famous and sacred Jagannath Temple at Puri and then went on to visit the major Hindu temples in Badrinath, Rameshwaram, Dwarka, Nashik and Pandharpur.

In 1799, Nilkanth Varni's journey finally concluded after seven long years of travel. He decided to settle down at Loj, a small village in the Junagadh district of Gujarat. In Loj, Nilkanth Varni met Muktanand Swami, who was also a senior disciple of Ramanand Swami.

Muktanand Swami, who was twenty-two years older than Nilkanth, had the right answers to all of Swaminarayan's five questions. Nilkanth then decided to stay on there, in order to get the opportunity to meet Ramanand Swami, who he had met a few months after his arrival in Gujarat.

## Leadership as Sahajanand Swami

According to the followers of the Swaminarayan sect, Nilkanth's understanding of the metaphysical concepts of the Panchatattvas or the five Eternal Elements, along with his mental and physical discipline, would actually inspire senior sadhus of Ramanand Swami to do better in their own spiritual quest. Swaminarayan, as Nilkanth Varni, received the

initiation into the sannyasa order, from his Guru, Ramanand Swami on 20 October 1800. He was also given the names Sahajanand Swami and Narayan Muni, in order to signify this new status of monkhood.

At the age of 21, Ramanand Swami appointed Sahajanand Swami as his successor also as the leader of the Uddhav Sampraday. Ramanand Swami breathed his last shortly thereafter. The Uddhav Sampraday came to be known as the Swaminarayan Sampraday after the latter took over it.

Krishna was the Ishta Devata (favorite deity) of Swaminarayan and hence, he proclaimed the sole worship of Krishna as the Supreme One, the Ultimate Divinity. This was in stark contrast to the beliefs of the Vaishnava sect in existence then, also known as the Radha-Vallabha Sampraday.

Swaminarayan adopted a more puritanical approach in his worship of Krishna, rather than the usual theological views of Krishna that are rather capricious in character. Swaminarayan preferred to portray Krishna as a majestic, royal character, more along the lines of earlier preceptors of Vaishnavism, such as Ramanujacharya and Yamunacharya.



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**KRISHNA**

## Emergence as Sri Swaminarayan



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**STOLE WITH SWAMINARAYAN  
PRINT**

Sahajanand Swami came to be known as Swaminarayan after he taught the mantra at a public gathering, in Faneni, a fortnight after the death of Ramanand Swami. He gave his followers a new mantra, calling it the Swaminarayan Mantra. He asked them to repeat this mantra in their daily rituals. While chanting this mantra, some devotees went into a form of deep meditation, called samadhi.

It is important to note here that the term, "samadhi", implies different states of meditation, in different situations, in Hinduism. While it is largely used to denote the parting of great souls from their mortal shells, it also could mean attaining spiritual enlightenment during meditation and penance.

It is believed that followers who attained Mahasamadhi in such a fashion could see and interact with their personal Gods, in spite of not having been trained in Ashtanga Yoga. This made followers realize the true power and potential of the Swaminarayan mantra.

By and by, they started revering the giver of this mantra as God Himself.

Swaminarayan also came known by the names Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shreeji Maharaj, Hari Krishna Maharaj and Shri Hari. He grew from strength to strength and attained an exalted status among his disciples and followers. As early as 1804, Swaminarayan was reported to have performed miracles. He was described as a manifestation of God in the Tama Danda, the first written work of his disciple, Nishkulanand Swami. This work went on to become the first ever piece of literature written within the Swaminarayan sect.

## Swaminarayan as a Religious Preceptor

Swaminarayan believed in a practical approach to religion and spirituality. He encouraged his followers to combine devotion and dharma (righteousness) and lead a pious life. Using Hindu texts and rituals to form the basic principles of his sect, Swaminarayan founded what in later centuries would become a global organization with strong Gujarati roots.

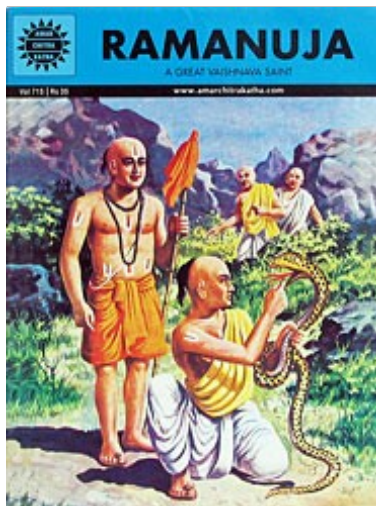
Particularly against the consumption of alcohol (even while consumed as a form of medical treatment), drugs and meat, Swaminarayan also spoke vociferously against animal sacrifices, criminal activities, adultery, suicide, tantric rituals and the appeasing of ghosts and such other activities. He also strictly advocated the separation of sexes in temples.

Many of his followers undertook vows before joining under him as his disciples. Swaminarayan stated that four elements needed to be conquered for ultimate salvation and that they were Dharma (righteousness), Bhakti (devotion), Gnana (knowledge) and Vairagya (detachment).



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**SWAMINARAYAN**



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**RAMANUJA**

Swaminarayan's philosophy could be closely associated with that of the eleventh century philosopher, Ramanuja. He was critical of Shankaracharya's concept of advaita or non-dualism between God and the human being. Swaminarayan's philosophy maintained that the Supreme Being is not formless and that God always takes a divine form. He also preached that moksha or liberation could be attained by one and all - by both men and women alike. According to him, everyone was equal in the eyes of the Lord and the only prerequisite for attaining moksha was to have the burning desire, as also the ability to work, for the same.

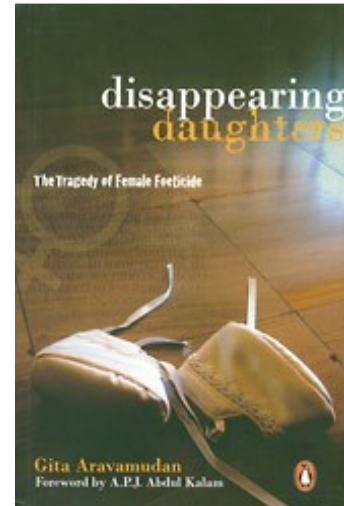
Swaminarayan introduced fasting and devotion among followers. His followers composed many devotional poems, which are sung, even today, during festive occasions. He celebrated the major festivals like Vasant Panchami, Janmashtami and Holi with great verve and vigour. Followers would also arrange traditional folk dances, such as the Raas, on these occasions.

## Swaminarayan as a Social Reformer

After taking over the leadership of the Sampraday, Sri Swaminarayan involved himself in a lot of social work. He regularly distributed food and drinking water to the poor and the needy. He also opened almshouses for the poor and opened up relief camps to people during times of drought.

Swaminarayan strongly advocated women's rights as well and fought for equality in the status of women in society. He spoke against the practice of Sati, wherein a widow would immolate herself in her deceased husband's funeral pyre. Swaminarayan's contention was that the human life was given by God and it could be taken only by God. Hence, he stated that Sati could not have had Vedic sanction. He even termed Sati as a cowardly act of suicide. He was also against female infanticide, which was very prevalent then. He would offer girls' parents help with dowry and other expenses in order to discourage female infanticide.

Only the influential and the wealthy could educate their girls through private and personal tuition, in those times. Taking this into account and wanting to get all female members of society educated, the male followers of Swaminarayan made arrangements to educate them. Consequently, the literacy rate among females began to increase, and some of the more brilliant women even started giving discourses on spiritual subjects. Within the sect, Swaminarayan is hence considered a pioneer of education of females in India.



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**DISAPPEARING DAUGHTERS -  
THE TRAGEDY OF FEMALE  
FOETICIDE**

**BY  
GITA ARAVAMUDAN**

## Yagnas and Animal Sacrifice

Swaminarayan was also against animal sacrifice, which used to be ritually carried out by Brahmin priests during Yajnas (sacrificial rituals). After the Yajna, priests would consume animal meat, considering it to a divine prasad. In order to prevent this from happening, Swaminarayan conducted several huge Yajnas, inviting priests from Varanasi. They did not indulge in animal sacrifice and strictly adhered to the rules mentioned in the Vedic scriptures. In this way, Swaminarayan successfully reinstated the concept of ahimsa (non-violence) by means of conducting these Yajnas.

## Working to Abolish the Caste System

It is believed that Sri Swaminarayan worked hard towards abolishing the infamous caste system which was widely prevalent at the time. He never liked the caste system and heartily welcomed everyone into the Swaminarayan Sampraday.

He always instructed his Paramhansas to collect alms from all sections of society and also appointed people from lower castes as his personal attendants. He interacted freely with them, ate along with them and generally, tried his level best to enhance their status in society.

## Building Temples

During his time, Swaminarayan ordered the construction of many Hindu temples and installed the idols of various deities therein, such as Laxminarayan, Nara-Narayan, Radha-Krishna, Revati-Baldevji and so on. Needless to say, Krishna was the predominant deity here.

Swaminarayan constructed stone mandirs (temples), where he encouraged the concept of Upasana or worshipping God by way of bhakti and vairagya. He constructed these temples with four major goals in mind:

- As places of worship
- As centres for religious meetings
- As centres for studying Sanskrit, devotional music and Vedic literature
- As centres of social service where alms, medicines and clothes were made available to the needy

Swaminarayan constructed the first of these temples in Ahmedabad in the year 1822, using the land gifted to him by the British Imperial Government, especially for the construction of this temple. Then, in accordance with requests of devotees from Bhuj, he appointed his follower Vaishnavananand Swami to build a temple in that region as well. This temple was built in a year, followed by yet another temple in Vadtal in 1824; one in Dholera in 1826; and temples in Junagadh and Gadhada in 1828. As the time of his Samadhi neared, Swaminarayan had also ordered the construction of temples in Dholka, Muli and Jetalpur.



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**KRISHNA**

One of the most prominent features of Swaminarayan temple architecture is the priority given to the worship of Krishna. All of the temples constructed during his life show Krishna in some form or another. The temples in Ahmedabad and Vadtal have a central altar or a shrine dedicated to Krishna. Hanuman is the central figure at the Sarangpur Temple. All the temples have extra accommodation facilities for sadhus, built within the temple complex itself.

Like other Hindu temples, Swaminarayan temples too have walkways around the central shrine to allow worshipers to perform pradakshina (circumambulation) of the shrine. These are often decorated with rich inlaid marble designs. The main shrine area is divided by railings - one side is for women and the other for men. There is great variety in form and nature of the central images, in front of which are gold or silver plated doors that open during the darshan hours.

## Encouraging Ascetics

Ascetics have always played a major role in the Swaminarayan faith as in Hinduism. These ascetics have contributed a great deal to the development and evolvement of the movement, as also spreading it around the entire world. The ascetics of the Swaminarayan sect travel from place to place, encouraging people to lead pure, pious and religious lives.

Swaminarayan stipulated strict rules for ascetics. The first rule is never to come in contact with money or be tempted by the opposite sex. No sadhu is allowed to move out of the temple alone - they have to, at all times, move out only in pairs. The food they eat must be mixed up and eaten so that there may be no sense of taste.

Female ascetics, known as Samkhya Yoginis, receive initiation from the Gadiwala or the wife of the Acharya. They stay within the temple complex and strictly follow ascetic rules. They must wear only dark red clothing and stay inside the temple Haveli. They are responsible for maintaining the images in ladies' temples and conduct discourses for ladies.

It is believed that Swaminarayan initiated 500 ascetics as Paramhansas in just a single night. The "Paramhansa" is a title of honor, also sometimes applied to Hindu spiritual teachers who have attained high states of enlightenment.

Paramhansas were the highest order of sannyasis in the Swaminarayan sect. The most prominent Paramhansas, who had been initiated by Swaminarayan himself, include Muktanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami, Premanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and Nishkulanand Swami.

## **Life of a Satsangi**

A member of the Swaminarayan Sampraday is known as a Satsangi. Either the acharyas or the ascetics perform the elaborate initiation ceremony. The ceremony itself involves taking five vows (also referred to as the panch vartaman), namely, not to commit adultery; not to consume intoxicants; not to consume meat; not to commit robbery and not to lie. The perpetrator pours holy water over the initiate's hands and gives him or her the following Sanskrit shloka or hymn:

"Shri Krishna twam gatirmama", which means, "Shri Krishna, thou art my refuge".

The initiate then offers at least half a rupee to the acharya and the acharya adorns a kanthi thread around his neck. The initiate is then required to apply the tilak chandlo to his forehead, which is comprised of a "U" drawn out of chandan (sandalwood), with a red kumkum (vermilion) dot placed in the middle. Ladies only apply the red kumkum dot. A satsangi need not necessarily be a Hindu. There are people from other religions as well, in this movement.

A Satsangi must always do the following things:

- Wear a Kanthi thread around the neck
- Wear a Tilak Chandlo on the forehead
- Have a Mala or rosary with 108 beads
- Do Nitya Pooja or pray everyday
- Visit the Mandir or temple everyday
- Take the Darshan of the Lord
- Perform Aarti after prayer
- Recite the Vandu Pad and the Chesta Pad verses at the temple everyday

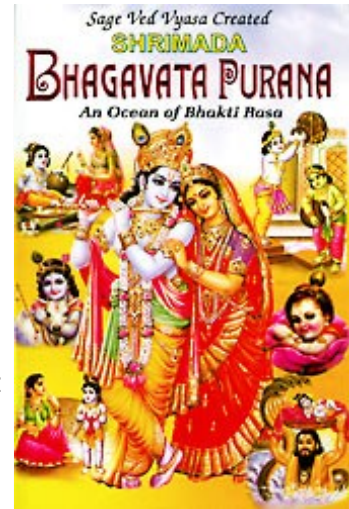
The Satsangi must also exhibit the following traits:

- Show reverence to God
- Show respect for the Shastras
- Respect the Acharya or the Gadi and any Satsangi that they meet
- Show reverence for festivals
- Respect elders
- Exhibit good conduct always



## Religious Texts

Swaminarayan held great respect for all the Hindu religious texts and propagated them among the masses. He especially held the Bhagavata Purana in high esteem. Besides, he also created many texts for his followers that are regarded among them as the holy shastras or scriptures. These are meant for those within the Swaminarayan faith. Notable scriptures throughout the sect include the Shikshapatri, the Vachanamrut and the Satsangi Jeevan. Also included in this list are Swaminarayan's own authorized biography, the Muktanand Kavya, the Nishkulanand Kavya and the Bhakta Chintamani.



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**SHRIMADA BHAGAVATA  
PURANA - AN OCEAN OF BHAKTI  
RASA**

**BY  
DR. MAHENDRA MITTAL**

## The Shikshapatri

Swaminarayan penned the Shikshapatri in 1826. The original Sanskrit manuscript is not available this time, but it had been translated into Gujarati by Nityanand Swami, as directed by Swaminarayan himself. Today, it is revered as one of the holiest books within the Swaminarayan sect.

One interesting fact with the Shikshapatri is that the Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency had summarised it as a book of social laws that the Swaminarayan seekers should follow on a daily basis.

Shikshapatri literally means "Shiksha (learning)" plus "Patri (book or manual)". Basically a commentary on the understanding and practice of dharma, the Shikshapatri is a small booklet containing 212 Sanskrit verses. It clearly outlines the basic tenets of the Swaminarayan sect and lists the qualities a follower should possess in order to live a well-disciplined and moral life.

## The Vachanamrut

The Vachanamrut, literally, the "nectar or wisdom" flowing out of the Guru's mouth, holds Swaminarayan's philosophical, social and practical teachings. This is a collection of dialogues collected from his spoken words, as gathered by five of his foremost disciples.

The Vachanamrut is the most commonly used religious scripture within the Swaminarayan sect. It contains views on dharma, jnana, vairagya and bhakti, which are the four essential elements for the jiva to attain moksha in its present coming.

## Swaminarayan's Relation with Other Religions and Religious Leaders

Swaminarayan always worked to maintain a cordial relationship with followers of other religions and faiths. He would sometimes even meet prominent leaders, moving across religious boundaries, including people from Parsi and Muslim faiths. Swaminarayan's

personal attendants included Khoja Muslims and Kathiawadi Muslims even wore the kanthi necklaces given to them by Swaminarayan.

Swaminarayan also maintained a good relationship with the British Government and met with dignitaries such as Reginald Heber, the Lord Bishop of Calcutta, who was also a pioneer of Christianity in India at the time. As a result of the meeting, both the religious leaders exchanged ideas and also developed a lot mutual respect and admiration for one another.

## Swaminarayan's Relation with the British Imperial Government

Swaminarayan also enjoyed a nice relationship with the British Imperial Government. In fact, Swaminarayan's first temple in Ahmedabad, was built on 5,000 acres of land gifted by the British Government. The British officers gave a 101 Gun Salute when the temple was inaugurated and opened to the public.

Reginald Heber had felt a little intimidated when he came to know that Swaminarayan was believed to be a manifestation of God Supreme by his followers. When he had a meeting with Sir John Malcolm, the Governor of Bombay, in 1830, Swaminarayan gifted him a copy of the Shikshapatri. This copy of the Shikshapatri is currently housed at the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford. Swaminarayan also worked with the British Governor, James Walker, in order to implement strong measures to abolish the terrible practice of sati.

## Swaminarayan Attains Jivan Samadhi

In 1830, Swaminarayan announced to his followers that he would soon leave his mortal coil and proceed onto the next world. His followers believe that he left for his final journey at Akshardham, after attaining his jivan Samadhi.

Continuing his life's mission till the final day of his life, Swaminarayan attained samadhi on June 1st, 1830. His body was cremated according to Hindu rites at Lakshmi Wadi in Gadhada, Gujarat. Before leaving his sharira or human form, Swaminarayan appointed his nephews as acharyas or teachers, and deemed them as the heads of the two dioceses of the Swaminarayan Sampraday.

## The Akshardham Temple



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The 10-story Akshardham temple in Gujarat is a stunning architectural marvel, housing the golden Murti or idol of Lord Sri Swaminarayan, the founder of the Swaminarayan faith. Made of tonnes of pink sandstone from Rajasthan, it uses no cement or steel whatsoever. It is believed that this solidity will help the temple last for a thousand years without the slightest damage caused to it.

**GOLDEN STATUE OF SWAMINARAYAN**

Designed in accordance with ancient Indian Architectural Treatises called the Sthaapatya shastras, the monument verily radiates a spiritual aura, right from the start to the end of the temple complex. This monument is filled with a certain sense of silence and peace, which is especially palpable in the three floors housing the Hari Mandapam, the Vibhuti Mandapama and the Prasadi Mandapam.

Every intricate carving in this temple is pregnant with meaning - it is poetry in stone. Every statue appears real and breathes life and the impressively huge dome resonates with divine vibrations. Akshardham is more than a mere architectural masterpiece - it is the living devotion of Swaminarayan followers to create Heaven on Earth.

Over the years, another grand Akshardham temple has been built in New Delhi.



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**AKSHARDHAM TEMPLE AT NEW DELHI**

## Swaminarayan's Successors



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**SWAMINARAYAN AND HIS FOUR DISCIPLES**

Just prior to his death, Swaminarayan established a line of acharyas or preceptors as his successors. He established two gadis or seats of leadership. One of them, Nar Narayan Dev Gadi, was established at Ahmedabad; and the other one, Laxmi Narayan Dev Gadi, at Vadatal. Swaminarayan appointed one acharya to each of these gadis, in order to pass on his message to others and to preserve his fellowship, the Swaminarayan Sampraday.

The acharyas chosen by Swaminarayan, came from his immediate family. He formally adopted his brothers' sons and appointed them to the office of acharya. Ayodhyaprasad, his elder brother's (named Rampratap) son and and Raghuvira, the son of his younger brother Ichcharam, were appointed acharyas of the Ahmedabad Gadi and the Vadatal Gadi respectively. Swaminarayan strictly decreed that the office of the acharyas should be hereditary, so that they would maintain a direct line of blood descent from his family. The current acharyas of the Swaminarayan Sampraday are Acharya Shree Koshalendraprasad Pande of the Ahmedabad Gadi and Acharya Shree Rakeshprasad Pande of the Vadatal Gadi.

Decades after Swaminarayan's death, several divisions occurred within the sect, each one coming up with a slightly different philosophy. This gave rise to the establishment of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Sanstha or BAPS, the founder of which left the Vadatal Gadi in 1905. Yet another tributary, known as the Maninagar Swaminarayan Gadi Sansthan came into being, the founder of which left the Ahmedabad Gadi in the 1940s.

The followers of BAPS hold Gunatitanand Swami as the spiritual successor to Swaminarayan, stating that Swaminarayan had, on several occasions, revealed to devotees that Gunatitanand Swami was the Aksharbrahm manifest. Followers of BAPS believe that the acharyas were granted only administrative leadership of the faith, while Gunatitanand Swami was given actual spiritual leadership. The current leader of BAPS is Shastri Narayanswarupdas.

The followers of the Maninagar Swaminarayan Gadi Sansthan, on the other hand, consider Gopalanand Swami as the successor to Swaminarayan.

## Beliefs on Swaminarayan's Manifestation

It is believed that Swaminarayan had a following of 1.8 million people when he died. The movement continues to grow even today, long after his time on Earth. Now, there are Swaminarayan centres spreading across many continents of the world. Of course, the majority of his followers are in Gujarat or non-resident Gujaratis across the world.

Swaminarayan was of the view that humans would not be able to withstand meeting the Supreme Being as he is in divine form, and so, God has to take human forms and Avatars or manifestations so that his devotees can approach him and interact with him.

There is nothing official recorded about Swaminarayan being an avatar, but most of his followers believe that he is the complete manifestation of Narayana - the Supreme Being, who is also superior to other avatars. He is also believed to be the Narayana aspect from the Nara Narayana pair, who was cursed by the hot-tempered sage, Rishi Durvasa, to incarnate on the Earth as Swaminarayan.

Yet other Swaminarayan followers believe that he was an incarnation of Lord Krishna, who is an incarnation of Sri Maha Vishnu and is also the main deity of the Gujaratis. Most Hindus hailing from Gujarat believe in Sri Nathji, an aspect of Lord Krishna.

Interestingly enough, the story of Swaminarayan's birth is somewhat similar to that of Krishna's birth, as mentioned in the Bhagavata Purana. In fact, Swaminarayan himself is believed to have claimed that he was a manifestation of God.



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**SWAMINARAYAN AS  
KING AND YOGI**

## Criticism of the Swaminarayan Sect



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**SWAMI DAYANAND**

This claim was severely criticized by Swami Dayananda, several decades after the formation of the movement. The Swami questioned the acceptance of Swaminarayan as the Supreme Being and was disapproving towards the idea that following the Swaminarayan faith could lead one to attaining jivan mukti.

Some believed that the Swaminarayan faith has been linked to patriarchal class structures that subjugate women. However, the fact remains that Swaminarayan actually strived to uplift women by giving them security in society. He did give them specific codes of conduct on moving inside the household and also outside, but that was merely for their own safety, which was quite relevant at that particular point in time.

## In Conclusion

In conclusion, Swaminarayan was indeed a force to be reckoned with. Brimming over with compassion and wisdom for the world, he also strived tirelessly for social welfare, to abolish inequality and to give a respectable status to the women of the society.

Building temples, trusts and hospitals all over the world, Swaminarayan followers try their best to serve the peoples of the world. The Pramukh Swami medical centres established all over India provide treatment for a variety of ailments at a much lesser cost than other private hospitals. A major portion of the funds received by the trust, therefore, are put to good use, being directed towards social welfare and janaseva (people's welfare).

Sri Swaminarayan was indeed an Avatar Purush of his time, one that richly deserves all the respect, devotion and adoration showered on him.



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**SWAMINARAYAN  
AS YOGI**

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This article was written by Priya Viswanathan, a teacher/performer of Bharata Natyam, Classical Music and Classical Instrumental Veena. A recipient of several awards for both music and dance, Priya is also a freelance writer online. She currently writes for About.com, a subsidiary of the New York Times Company (<http://mobiledevices.about.com>)

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