ABSTRACT

During the nineteenth century Social reform movement in the Gujarat was divided into mainly two phases. During the first phase (1844-1880) the reformer emerging from the various upper casts and social groups inspired by the certain ideas of west and reform the society on the basis of these ideas, but during second phase (from 1880 onwards) they challenged those ideas and norms which they thought were uprooting the indigenous cultural tradition. In this process they tried to synthesize the sects of clashing value system. During the first phase this reforming movement on western thought and the Swaminarayan sect on traditional way play important role in the reforming the Hindu society. The Swaminarayan movement was founded by the Sahajanand Swami in 1802. Sahajanand Swami championed the cause of women, convincing people to abandon the cruel practices of sati, female infanticide and dowry and even encouraged women's education. He inspired people to give up their addictions to tobacco, alcohol, gambling and other vices. Sahajanand Swami's influence spread through all stratas of society, from the elite classes to the lower classes, inspiring them to forsake their wayward lifestyles and adopt a morally pure, God-centered life. This paper sketches the role of Swaminarayan sect in reforming the Gujarati society in 19th century and also highlight relevance his idea which still playing major role in the economic and moral development of Gujarat Society.
by him his own ista devata. Shree 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. Under the visionary leadership of Shree Swaminarayan Maharaj, this sect spread all over the Gujarat mainly Saurashtra peninsula and central Gujarat. Basically influenced by his Vaishnavaite tradition, so many cast and community of this land accepted this sect. This sect play important role in maintaining peace and prosperity in this region. This sect also crucial role in reforming the society and accelerated the process of Sanskritization. The scriptures of this sect like Shikshapatri, Vachnamurt awaken the mind of the people and lead them to simple life. The Shikshapatri, originally written by Lord Swaminarayan on 11 February 1826 is read daily by the Swaminarayan sect members. Apart from practical spiritual guidance, it provides guidelines on every aspect of life - familial, financial, managerial, social, ecological, and even health and hygiene.

EMINICATION OF WOMEN AND POOR

One of important contributions of Swaminarayan sect was to started movement to reform the condition of women in society. In the 19th century Sahajanand Swami was the first person who starts actual work to enhance the condition of women. Some practices he removed while others he refined. First, He advised people to abolish the practice of Sati. This involved the forced or voluntary immolation of a widow on the cremation pyre of her dead husband. Swami explained women about the invaluable opportunity of a human birth graced by Bhagwan. He also forbade selling the daughter; His view was expressed in the Shikshrapatri. He also offered parents financial aid to settle dowry costs, female infanticide quite prevalent in the Rajputs and Kathis. He also started efforts on the religious gatherings not only among the Jadeja Rajputs. He also starts efforts on the religious education of women. Female education in general had practically disappeared from society as a result of foreign rule over the centuries. His first step provided special worshiping areas for women. He appointed women well-versed in the Satsang lore to preach to other women. In some towns, women teachers arrived from the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. His segregation of the sexes during religious gatherings not only provided women freedom to manage their own activities; but also shielded them from the promiscuous behavior of males, which he had frequently observed in His teenage years.

They shall never stay alone in a lonely place even with their young mother, sister or daughter, except in emergencies and shall never give away in alms their wives to anybody.

FIGHT AGAINST SUPERITION AND BAD PRACTICE

Swaminarayan movement introduced changes in the manners and the morals of the people. Evil customs such as singing vulgar songs - known as fatana - during marriage ceremonies and using abusive language during the festival Holi were prevalent in the society. He requested his follower to forbid this system. He told his poet Paramhansas, namely Muktanand and Premanand, to compose kirtans glorifying the marriage episodes described in the scriptures, such as Tulsi vivaha and Rukhmani vivaha, to be sung instead. This revived sacredness in marriages. He also asked people to give up bad practices of gambling and taking wine and Bhang. His view was expressed in the Shikshrapatri

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WHENEVER political, social and religious darkness prevails, superstition reigns. Individuals weaken mentally and are prone to develop faith in mantra, tantra, black threads, evil beings and village exorcists or sorcerers known as bhuwa. When a family experienced problems such as: poverty, illness, internal quarrelling or possession by a ghost or spirit, it first resorted to mantra for succour. Evil spirits in turn had to be appeased by sacrificing animals, and prasad feasted upon. And so the vicious cycle of blind faith perpetuated. To free people from this choking grip, he wrote an inspiring letter to devotees everywhere, in whom He instructed them: “Each individual experiences happiness and misery according to his karmas. Beings such as Bhairav and Bhavani cannot overrule these karmas to give pain or grant happiness, or determine life or death. Only Parmeshwar Narayan (the Supreme God) is powerful enough to do this. He also forbade his devote to not believe in this Superstition.

ABOLITION OF ANIMAL SACRIFICES

One of the important aspects of this movement was to stop animal sacrifices which were common during that time. He 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 cult. The priests consumed meat of the sacred yajnas involving priests from Varanasi. He was successful in reinstating ahimsa through several such large scale yajnas.

CASTE SYSTEM

He took a major role in ending the caste system in Gujarat, allowing everyone into the Swaminarayan Sampraday. However par taking in the consumption food of lower castes and caste pollution was not supported by him. A politi
ical officer in Gujarat, Mr. Williamson reported to Bishop Her- 
ber that Swaminarayan had “Destroyed the yoke of caste19. 
He selected his paramhansas from lower cast also and ap- 
pointed people from the lower strata of society as his per- 
sonal attendants. He ate along with lower castes. He asked 
this people to change his food habit, personal and domestic 
cleanliness in all his sect. he forbade to eat garlic’s and onion. 
Thus, this sect attracts very large number of followers from 
lower cast20. It is said that Swaminarayan dispelled the myth 
that moksha (liberation) was not attainable by everyone. He 
taught that the soul is neither male nor female and that eve- 
ryone was equal in the eyes of God. He made no distinctions 
concerning personal religion and moksha. When He took the 
bold step of taking meals with the lower castes, He invited 
the calumny of society. It was taboo for a person to have 
food with those lower in caste than himself. Therefore society 
branded Him as unco nth. This slur on His personality pained 
the sadhus and devotees. But as always He Himself remained 
undaunted21.

This sect play important role in maintaining the peace and 
stability in Saurashtra region. His followers cut across reli-
gious boundaries, including people of Muslim and Parsi 
backgrounds. His work among The Kathis and Rajputs main-
tain peace in this region. The peninsula of Kathiawad derives 
it’s name from the Kathis, a tribe renowned for its pugnac-
ity, chivalry, fighting prowess and fine horse breeding. Apart 
from the overall political chaos that reigned in the region, 
Kathiawad also owed its destitution to the Kathis22. Famed 
for their ruthlessness, the Kathis held life cheaply; frequently 
feuding with each other, plundering, pillaging crops and 
stealing cattle from villages inimical to them.

(They shall never enter into any transaction regarding land 
and/or money even with their own sons and friends, without 
putting it in writing with proper attestation27.)

To reform then Sahajanad swami always keep kathis with 
them. He allowed them to accompany Him, serving as 
guards during His preaching tours, for travelling alone in the 
countryside invariably posed dangers from thugs, looters, 
and wild animals. With love and laughter He change their 
hearts. The Satsang soon envied their spirited devotion. A 
typical transformation can be observed of a Kathis. The same 
young chief later absorb Satsang ideals and moulded a virtu-
ous character. When Bhagwan Swaminarayan first arrived in 
Gadhada, in 1805, Dada Khachar was only four years old. 
On the death of his father, King Abhel Khachar, he assumed 
a role as Dada’s father. He lovingly taught the young prince 
horsemanship, weaponry, diplomacy and the technicalities of 
managing his state23. The singular reason for the his loving 
grace on him centred on his unalloyed devotion at such a 
young age. His inseparable association with excelled to such 
height that whenever He left Gadhada to visit other parts of 
Gujarat, Dada and his sisters, unable to bear the separation, 
would either resort to self-abnegation in the form of fasts 
until His return or would have to accompany Him to escape 
grief. His words contained formidable spiritual prowess; able 
to eradicate the militant nature of people.

C A P I T A L I S T I C D E V E L O P M E N T O F F O L L O W E R
One of the most important contributions of this sect was play 
crucial role in the capitalistic development, the Shikshapatri,
sacred religious text, infuse so many business ethics among 
the follower. It asked follower that their expenses are never in 
excess of their income for it should be borne in the mind that 
great misery awaits him who spends more then what he earn.

(Expenses shall always be in proportion to the income but 
shall never exceed it. All shall clearly understand that those 
who spend more than what they earn shall verily land them-
selves in great miseries25)

Thus they asked follower to live simple life and asked do 
not accompany those kind of people have bad character. It 
also asked follower to store gain and save money in view of 
time and circumstances. It compelled follower to keep cows 
and other animal only they can afford to take care them with 
glass, water etc. Even he ask follower to keep account of his 
income and expenditure with own self. Shikshapatri advised 
follower to have written account of his dealing of money and 
business dealing Shikshapatri asked follower to remain moral 
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(Recollecting their income and expenses incurred during rou-
tine and/or special transactions, they shall daily write clearly 
in their own hands, an account thereof26.)

(They shall never enter into any transaction regarding land 
and/or money even with their own sons and friends, without 
putting it in writing with proper attestation27.)

It asked none should abide by a mere verbal agreement in re-
spect of amount of money due upon his or another betrothal, 
but all must make a written contact and dully attested. In 
business dealing Shikshapatri asked follower to remain moral 
right. They shall not have pay remuneration as promised to 
workmen engaged by them they never conceal the clearness 
their debt, their lineage or the matrimonial engagements of 
their daughter nor shall they maintain social connection with 
those who are moral degraded. Majority of follower of this 
were kunbis , kathi and other occupational based lower cast. 
This teaching of Shikshapatri play important role in develop-
ment and commerce of Gujarat. He asked his follower if it is 
necessary to migrate other places for development of trade 
commerce’s do not hesitate. Many followers of this sect liv-
ing in the different part of the world, following tradition of 
the sect.

(When loss of prestige or estate or life is threatened in a place 
where they reside either due to very bad times like famines 
or by enemies or by a king My followers, who are wise and 
discreet shall immediately leave that place 28.)

C O N C L U S I O N
Thus with all his limitation this sect play crucial role in the 
transforming Gujarati society. Being a religious sect it cannot 
cross religious tradition of that time but, still under divine 
leadership of Shri Sahajanad swami this sect stabilies the 
society of the Gujarat. By process of sanskritization he reform 
the society and upgrade the moral of people in Gujarat and 
bring this people in national mainstream.