SWAMINARAYAN AND ETHICS;
A RELIGIOHISTORICAL STUDY

by

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SUMMARY

As part of the Phenomenological Method used in this dissertation, the research work applied the hermeneutical concepts of bhakti, karma and moksha. Focus was on the role played by the guru, the sadhus and devotees of the Swaminarayan Movement and how they related to their religious, ethical and social obligations. Their responses to ethical scriptures were evaluated, especially with a view to determining the extent to which ethical injunctions permeates, enhances, uplifts and shapes the adherents spiritually, morally and socially. Swaminarayan ethics was also placed within the context of Classical Hindu Texts and in particular, the work of Ramanuja and his Vishistadvaita philosophy. Further, it has been observed that the quest for the Ultimate Reality (Purushottam) is through their relationship with Akshar, Guru Pramukh Swami, the model of ethical excellence whose charisma binds the fibre of the Movement and his role serves both the ethical and transcendental plane of the Movement.

TITLE OF DISSERTATION:

SWAMINARAYAN AND ETHICS; A RELIGIOHISTORICAL STUDY

KEY TERMS:

SAMPRADAYA; AKSHAR; PURUSHOTTAM; DHARMA; BHAKTI; MOKSHA; KARMA; SADHU; JNAN; VAIRAGYA; VISISHTHADVAITA; ATMAN-BRAHMAN; VARNASHRAMA; ASHIRAMA.
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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 METHODOLOGY

1.1.1 AIM

The aim of this dissertation is an investigation into the ethical norms of the Swaminarayan Movement (sampradaya) as reflected in sacred texts and expounded by gurus, sadhus and devotees of the Movement and an examination as to whether the lifestyles and religious practices of the adherents are permeated by these ethical norms. A further, albeit secondary aim was to analyze the Movement as a form of Hinduism as any other of the many different sects. To realize these aims the methodological approach utilized phenomenological theory and hermeneutics as aids in understanding the Swaminarayan Movement as a religious phenomenon.

1.2 PHENOMENOLOGY AS A METHOD

Phenomenology is the investigation of phenomena to arrive at the essence by confining its investigation to the data presented. Phenomenology attempts not to construct or to fit phenomena onto a bed of mathematical formulas (Kruger, 1982:17), but to describe experience and to find "reality" within the constant elements of experience. Phenomenology seeks to have vital contact with the world as it is experienced and not reducing life to mere facts. Further, the aim of phenomenology is to re-establish contact with the raw material of life itself. It is the effort to rediscover and re-experience life itself directly. It wants to learn to see clearly and to learn how to describe accurately what we see, before scientific explanations, "it wants to return to the things themselves" (Kruger, 1982:17). The phenomenological approach attempts to account for the subjects' experience of their world vis-a-vis the ethical prescriptions that have been presented to them and what they are expected to devoutly adhere to. Focus is on the things as they appear in human consciousness. The word 'phenomenon' (that which appears) refers to
something as it appears in human experience and "to the things themselves". Therefore, it means, "the things experienced in human consciousness" (Kruger, 1982:18) and to the things as constituted by the human mind.

1.2.1 ESSENCE

Phenomenology drives at the heart of things and insists in looking at the 'essences' of things (Kruger, 1982:19). For example, an attempt was made to see the phenomenon of prayer, not only in terms of its physical aspects but also as a non-physical experience. The same was applied to the way of life, conduct etc., its physical and non-physical (spiritual) experience, an experience of the subjects which is beyond scientific analysis. It is this essence that phenomenology attempts to reach by examining the various experiences.

1.2.2 INTENTIONALITY

Phenomenology attempts to determine the way in which human persons experience their world. People experience their world in a particular way because of their particular situations and experiences. A person is not just a passive recipient of data but an active participant in the data the person experiences. Human person's experiences of the world is therefore intentional: each person having his or her own reason for experiencing the world in this particular way. In the phenomenological perspective, what we want to see clearly and describe adequately is how people themselves experience their own world. This aspect is referred to as INTENTIONALITY. Every mental activity of human persons is directed to (intended towards) the world out there. The world out there is the world as it is experienced by persons and the bond between the persons and their world cannot be disjoined since the world is in the eye of the beholder.

Focus is on God, as the subjects of Swaminarayan see Him, how their form of worship and way of life are defined by them and the meanings they attach to various aspects of the religion as borne out by Scriptures, for example, the SHIKSHAPATRI AND VACHANAMRIT, and how these tie in with intentionality. The manner in which these
texts were interpreted was to investigate to what extent the practices and lifestyles of the devotees of the Movement are in keeping with the injunctions and prescriptions in these Scriptures.

1.2.3 EPOCHE

Phenomenology insists on penetrating the core of things and does not take anything for granted. The observer suspends his previous assumptions concerning the phenomena in question. This is called EPOCHE in phenomenological language. The researcher who describes religion, neither doubts nor endorses its truth value. The investigator is better able to see to what degree the subjects or adherents of Swaminarayan see their way through the truth or reality of the rituals and beliefs they follow, that is, the teachings of Swaminarayan (DHARMA) concerning MOKSHA (Liberation) and how these are related to BHAKTI (Devotion). It is hoped that the investigator achieves as direct an explanation of the religious phenomena as possible and to approach it as free as possible from unexamined presuppositions in the form of preconceived ideas or pre-judgements. However, the investigator does not bracket out totally his or her input in perceiving the phenomena for he or she has to arm himself or herself with certain hermeneutical tools when approaching and coming to grips with the phenomena. Suspending one's own previous assumptions is not the same as to deny them. We suspend them if we become radically conscious of them. By checking one's own assumptions the investigator wants to allow the phenomena to stand out sharply. Moreover, a student of religion will inevitably bring along with him or her a set of background assumptions and the more he or she is conscious of these the more he or she will be able to keep his or her own preferences from distorting his or her observation of something.

1.3 HERMENEUTICS

Hermeneutics deals essentially with the interpretation of all forms of human expression. Hermeneutics has respect for the claims of cultural tradition. People speak via the cultural product they leave behind (Kruger, 1982:21). The researcher has to come to terms with the past and present, not only through texts but human encounter as well
(the dynamic vitality challenges the writer as an interpreter). The dynamic past and present are integrated. The whole hermeneutical undertaking is seen as an extension of communication between people in which they both speak and listen to each other. This encounter is a meaningful encounter between the two parties and the investigator respects the dignity of what one is understanding.

The investigator must allow the phenomena to speak for itself, he or she must be the attentive, humble listener in what is supposed to be a two-way communication. The writer must be interested in the message and values must be sought and not dissolved.

Moreover, there is an intimate relationship with the phenomena, a relationship in which we are able to affirm the reality of the phenomena as it reflects back on us. This interaction leads to a hermeneutical circle in which each side reveals itself to the other and is freed from willingness to open oneself to the phenomena in order that it may reveal itself (Brenneman, 1982:2).

The key hermeneutical concepts in this study are BHAKTI (DEVOTION), KARMA ("ACTION") AND MOKSHA (SALVATION OR LIBERATION).

1.3.1 MOKSHA

Hinduism has a moral philosophy which postulates a highest good and specifies a proper means of achieving it. This highest ideal is the state of liberation or moksha. In it a person finds his or her self-fulfilment and deepest bliss. It is founded on the metaphysical conviction of the oneness of reality which is attainable through direct experience. Moksha stands as the ultimate standard of right conduct. It increases the value or disvalue of an act by the extent to which it either helps or hinders the attainment of freedom. Actions most distinctly oriented to moksha are those characterised by truth, non-violence, sacrifice and renunciation.

For Swaminarayan followers it is in the company of a GURU, the bonafide spiritual master that a seeker attains the brahmic state and thereby liberation. The guru keeps
God's redemptive activity continuous and the aspirant who seeks refuge at the feet of the guru and his company realizes that he is distinct from the three bodies, he is with AKSHARBRABHMAN. He worships the LORD PURUSHOTTAM and attains liberation in an embodied state (jivanmukti). Such a liberated one becomes free from the bondage of ignorance, karmic (action) influence and the cycle of births and deaths. Such an embodied released soul remains engaged in service and devotion to God. He helps others in their spiritual quest for perfection.

Through archimarga the aspirant goes to the highest abode (AKSHARDHAM) from where there is no return into the world of suffering. The liberated soul serves God eternally in this highest abode. Liberation is also possible in a disembodied state. However, the chief means of the realization of moksha must be borne in mind, that is, EKANTIKA DHARMA.

1.3.2 KARMA

Prevalent in Hinduism is the belief in the transmigration of the soul. The soul, born into another existence, will terminate and another birth will occur. Rebirth follows rebirth until one attains salvation or moksha.

Connected with the doctrine of SAMSARA (cycle of births and deaths) is the correlative doctrine of the law of karma. Karma is the link between rebirth and desire of "whatever a man desires he wills, and whatever he wills, he acts" (Crawford, 1984:49). As a moral principle in this universe, the law of karma regulates the rebirth of the jivas (individual embodied souls) according to their acts. It is all within a chain of moral causality. The past, present and the future are equally grounded in freedom and, therefore, there is always hope and incentive to moral living. The evil that has been done can be undone, and the good that has been left undone, can be done. A person, then, is responsible for his or her own actions and the theory of karma allows him or her freedom to choose to act as he or she wills. One’s new birth is totally dependent on one’s actions of the previous birth. Karma is collective over many births and each individual’s life is carved out according to one’s karma. One has to rid oneself of all karma before one gains
salvation. Karma decides the destiny of each individual. Thus moral law and the law of karma implies that a person’s past actions are responsible for his or her present condition and his or her present actions determine his or her future.

In the Swaminarayan Movement, karma is not as binding as in the rest of Hinduism. Once a person is initiated into the satsang he or she can be freed of one’s past karma. What is required after that is for one to take care of present karma which comes under one’s own will and control. In the Swaminarayan philosophy not all that happens to one is attributed to karma or the will of God. One can rid oneself of karma if one makes the effort through religious obligations enjoined in the scriptures,

"‘Therefore an aspirant who performs actions under influence of the gunas ..... But he does not attain the Highest Abode of God, and is not released from Samsara. And so long as total release is not attained, one has to undergo the miseries of birth and deaths’" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada -II-II).

1.3.3 BHAKTI

Love of God and offering of devotional prayers are the most commonly accepted forms or worship according to some religions. In such adoration no personal satisfaction or gains are involved. The devotee loves God for his or her own sake because God is lovable and there is no motive attached to such love and,

"The teachers of bhakti, have developed systems that reveal a good deal of psychological insight. Perfect love has to grow and gradually permeate the whole life of the bhakta" (Klostermaier, 1989:218).

The Bhagavatpurana enumerates nine steps of bhakti which begins with listening to talks about Vishnu, continues with the recitation of His name, remembrance and veneration at His feet, offering puja (prayer and worship) before His image, prostrating oneself before Him, considering oneself a slave of Vishnu, a friend and finally to surrender
completely to Him.

Ramanuja, the great bhakti theologian, enumerates six prerequisites for someone embarking on the bhaktimarga path. The bhakta has to observe certain dietary rules, show complete disregard for worldly objects, continue faithfully all religious activities, perform puja, behave virtuously and be free from depression.

The central act of bhakti is prapatti (self surrender) which consists of five individual components: the intention of submitting to the Lord, the belief in the protection of the Lord, the prayer that the Lord may save his devotees, the consciousness of utter helplessness. Therefore,

"The ethical overflow of loving devotion to God ....the six constituents of bhakti to be treating everyone with goodwill and friendliness and discarding what is contrary to it, refraining from all malice, backbiting, falsehood, and violence, having strong faith in the protection of the Lord, praying to the Lord, discarding all false pride and egotism, completely entrusting oneself to the Lord, being convinced that such complete resignation earns God's grace and mercy" (Klostermaier, 1980:221).

Taking God's name is an essential step in the process of becoming a bhakta. Bhaktas attribute infallible effect in samkirtan. They practice the singing of God's name. The name expresses supreme divinity, which is given by a guru at the time of initiation. It must be practised in a spirit of devotion and must be accompanied by a saintly life. The name is also sung melodiously with heart full of love and longing.

For Swaminarayan devotees, the observance of the fundamental vows and precepts with strict sincerity and the undivided love (bhakti)⁴ to Lord Purushottam yield liberation.
1.4 KEY CONCEPTS

1.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Swaminarayan, like Ramanuja, identifies God with Lord Narayana. Unlike the latter’s system of three realities (tattva-traya), Swaminarayan’s system is one of five realities (tattva-pancha), that is, jiva (finite selves), Ishvara-cosmic selves (subordinate Gods and Goddesses), maya-prakriti (matter), Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman (the Supreme Self, God Narayana). All these five realities are eternal realities distinct from one another. Swaminarayan Vedanta is called ‘Brahman-Parabrahman Veda’. It is also described as Neo -Vishistadvaita (New qualified Non-Dualism). Swaminarayan has explicitly brought out the subtle but significant distinction in scriptural texts.

Swaminarayan believed in the reality of the external world, and, likewise, the sampradaya accepts a personal independent God. All other realities are entirely dependent of Him. It is a soul-body relationship.

1.4.1.1 PARABRAHMAN (PURUSHOTTAM)

Parabrahman is the highest principle in order of reality and values. As a metaphysical principle he is the highest ontological reality and is superior to everything, including akshar. Purushottam eternally resides in His akshardham (His highest abode).

1.4.1.2 BRAHMAN: AKSHAR

Immediately, next to Parabrahman, in order, is Aksharbrahman, the ontological reality, akshar and Brahman. Akshar is transcendent to jiva, Ishvara and maya-prakriti but subordinate to Lord Purushottam (Parabrahman). Both akshar and Purushottam are distinct realities, of which the former is dependent while the latter is independent. But akshar shares eternal togetherness with Purushottam on account of his highest love, devotion and servitude for the Lord Purushottam.

When Lord Purushottam descends on earth (as avatara), akshar too descends with him.
So akshar manifests (descends) along with Purushottam when he manifests (descends).

The divine abode of God shines effulgenty, it is bright and illuminating. The attainment of aksharvardham, then, means the attainment of the highest goal (parampada), that is, the final release. Akshar is the eternal abode of God and ultimately the abode of all the released souls.

1.4.1.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AKSHAR (THE GURU) AND PURUSHOTTAM

The Supreme Lord alone, and not akshar is the bestower of moksha. However, akshar being the closest and the choicest devoted servant of the Lord, he receives the greatest degree of love, grace and fervour of the Lord and enjoys transcendental communion with the Lord and has an eternally undivorcable relationship with the Lord.

Akshar is dependent on Purushottam but not in the sense in which jiva, Ishvara and maya are as they are dependent both on akshar and Purushottam. Akshar is eternally free and also the mediator for jivas and Ishvaras in attaining freedom. Akshar plays the role of mediator between the souls and God. In the Dvayamantra of Swaminarayan the word (name) Swami stands for akshar who descended as Gunatitanand Swami on earth together with Lord Narayana (Sahajanand Swami).

In the Swaminarayan doctrine guruparampara continues through akshar. Accordingly devotees of the sampradaya hold the conviction that the present guru, Pramukh Swami, is currently the manifest form of aksharvardham, through whom the Lord Purushottam manifests on earth and works and redeems the seekers of salvation. God lives and works through the akshar-guru who finds greatest delight and devotion in serving his Lord as a devout servant. He acts as a mediator between the jivas and God.

Thus Swaminarayan is primarily present in the person of the guru and also in the images and sacred scriptures. The guru is the ‘sacred texts personified’ because he lives in harmony with all the precepts of the scriptures given by Swaminarayan.
Without such a guru there can be no satsang. It is only through association with akshar that one can get rid of one's vices, base instincts and be free from the clutches of maya and thereby gain release.

The two idols (icons) of akshar and Purushottam in the central shrines of Swaminarayan temples are likely to give an impression of a belief in combined worship of both. Swaminarayan doctrine does not advocate the concept of dual or composite worship, because the supreme object of worship is Lord Purushottam alone. One can attain similarity with akshar (sadharmya), but one can never become the equal of or identical to Purushottam.

1.4.1.4 CONCEPT OF RELIGION

The highest form of religion, according to Swaminarayan, is to be found in the life of an EKANTIKA BHAKTA.

1.4.1.4.1 THE PLACE OF DHARMA IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

Dharma is defined by Swaminarayan as the good conduct enjoined by scriptures, and approved by great persons like Yajnavalkya. Here the word 'dharma' is used in the sense of duty or morality and not in the sense of religion of which morality is one of the four aspects of ekantika bhakti. A truly religious person is supposed to have a very high moral standard, because he or she is a worshipper of God.

The love of God is the basis of the morality for a religious person. The person's morality differs from that of an atheist in that it is concerned not only with cognition and conation but also affection.

1.4.1.4.2 THE PLACE OF JNANA IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

The conception of jnana consists of the knowledge of distinguishing the identity between the individual soul and the Supreme Being. In acknowledging the oneness of God or
monotheism, and ekantika is one who never deviates from the single minded devotion and complete dedication to God.

In respect of the metaphysical sovereignty, moral supremacy and divine personality of God, the religious person must believe that God is the only metaphysical ground of the universe and there is no other reality capable of having the metaphysical sovereignty of God. Morality of the religious person is inspired by the belief that God, the object of religious person’s worship, is supremely moral.

A religious person must always think of himself or herself as Brahman (saccidananda), totally distinct from psycho-physical organism. For as long as a person continues to identify himself or herself with his or her body, he or she fails to secure a sound footing for religious development. Vairagya must be practised. There must be non-attachment to everything but God.

1.4.1.4.3 THE POSTULATES OF MORALITY

Apart from the existence of God, the postulates of morality for Swaminarayan include immortality of the soul, freedom of will, law of karma, the reality of evil. Followers should cultivate a strong will power and follow firmly their path of duty. Self-realization and God-realization go hand in hand with individual initiative. Religion is the whole of life and must express itself in all departments of life. The cognitive aspect of religious life is as much important as its conative and affective aspects and likewise,

"Tillich has put it, religion is an attitude of ‘ultimate concern’, which not only occupies top priority in the hierarchy of human concerns, but also pervades the whole of life" (Yajnik, 1972:149).

1.4.1.4.4 THE PLACE OF VAIRAGYA IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

This does not mean renouncing the world. It is a matter of mental disposition and not
external renouncement. Vairagya is the sense of non-attachment for everything except God and is regarded as the necessary consequence of the true understanding of the nature of the self and God.

1.4.1.4.5 THE PLACE OF BHAKTI IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

Bhakti is the intense love of God based on the real understanding of His greatness and glory. The love for God and for nothing except God is called pativrata-bhakti. This kind of love for God, irrespective of any other qualification, enables the religious person to reach the state of samadhi and have the mystical experience of God-realization. Bhakti is more important than dharma, jnana and vairagya.

1.4.1.4.6 THE FOUR ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Dharma, jnana, vairagya and bhakti mutually supplement one another and a harmonious blending of the four is necessary for leading a perfect religious life and attaining the highest goal of human endeavour.

1.5 MURTHI: THE EMBODIED GOD

It is stated,

"For the Hindu the most important of all the spatial-temporal manifestations of the divine is the murthi or image"
(Klostermaier, 1980:293).

Murthi means embodiment. Technically, it designates the images of the divinities made of metal, stone, or wood but sometimes also of some perishable material for special purposes. There are definite rules with regard to propiations, postures and gestures to follow,
"The Puranas, Agamas, Sam hitas, and Tantras contain many chapters detailing the way in which images that are to be used in worship have to be made" (Klostermaier, 1980:293).

It is a belief in Hinduism that these rules are supposed to go back to divine revelation and must, therefore, not be violated, if the image is to become an abode of the divine. The image produced according to the prescribed canons is not yet an object of worship unless it has been consecrated in a formal ceremony of pranpratishta, the solemn installation. Consecration of the murthi is an essential requirement and usually marks the formal opening of a new temple.

Klostermaier refers finally to the Bhagavatapurana where it said that after purifying oneself and having gathered the materials for worship the devotee is advised to face east or north and conduct the worship of the image which is placed in front of the devotee (Klostermaier, 1980:298). The devotee should invoke with the mantras the Lord's presence in the image.

1.6 TEXTS

The two most important ethical texts of the sampradaya consist of books written under the direct inspiration of Swaminarayan himself. These are the Shikshapatri and the Vachanamrīt.

1.6.1 THE SHIKSHAPATRI

This text was composed under the personal supervision of Swaminarayan. Its 212 verses, to all intents and purposes, is meant to be a kind of law Book or Samhita for the
sampradaya (Parekh, 1980:201). The entire book is to be read or repeated daily. It contains the essence of the doctrine and the laws and rules for all devotees. It is a thoroughly comprehensive book and in the different sections of the book Swaminarayan lays down codes of conduct for householders, ascetics, ministers, kings and other leaders of society. Swaminarayan has recognized that the duties and obligations of different people to themselves and society and he tries to bring about a harmonious blending of different sections in order to improve the social and spiritual fabric of life.

This book is an integral part of the Satsangijivanam which is written in the form of an epistle to establish a code of conduct to be strictly observed for ultimately controlling the cognitive and conative organs (Dave, 1974:233). Reading the text can dispel ignorance and the text should be worshipped for the vision of pure knowledge.

Karma yoga, according to the Shikshapatri, is considered better than renouncing of karmas and purified actions lead to bhakti which, together with dharma, should lead to the Ultimate. Desai affirms,

"Dharma is the good practice which is enjoined both by Shrutis and Smritis"

Desai also refers to Manu Smriti's enumeration of ten characteristics of dharma. These are: rational acceptance, tolerance, mind-control, non-stealing, purity, control of one's senses, knowledge of scriptures, truth, peace, knowledge about the self. Evidently, these characteristics are elaborately explained and emphasized in the Shikshapatri (New Dimensions, I, 1981:12).
The presentation of the Shikshapatri is such that it covers dharma as sadharma (general) and vishesha (particular). It includes certain ways of life and functions which are common to all. The rules also refer to certain functions which are specific to persons with certain stations in life. For example, an ascetic would follow sadharma as the lay devotee does but also follows certain specific rules (like eightfold celibacy) which is vishesha dharma. The book also prescribes bhakti, vairagya and jnana.

1.6.2 VACHANAMRIT

This text, delivered in the assemblies of saints and bhaktas, constitutes the teachings of Lord Swaminarayan in the form of discourses. The chief object of the book is to present the master as the ideal.

The 262 discourses held at separate places, Gadhada, Sarangpur and other places are chronologically arranged. The text discusses the subjects of the metaphysical entities of jiva, Ishvara, maya, Brahman and Parabrahman, Samkhya, Yoga, Vedanta and Pancharatra. Other subjects, dealt with in the book, are self-realization and the unitive consciousness with God which is attained only through upasana.

Swaminarayan, in this text, also makes a distinction between the five eternal realities (tattva-pancha). These are jiva (finite selves), Ishvara-cosmic selves (subordinate Gods and Goddesses, maya (prakriti-matter), Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman.

The Vachanamrit is taken as revealed text in that the words have come straight from Swaminarayan who, as Ultimate Reality Himself, spoke with authority of the divine forms of Brahman and Parabrahman and the path of ultimate redemption - upasana.

According to Swaminarayan the personal God manifests on earth either Himself or through His Saint, for the redemption of the jivas. The text complements many of the precepts in the Shikshapatri.
Interviews were conducted in South Africa and during the writer’s visit to India, especially in Bombay, Ahemadabad and Sarangpur. In Chapter Four, on Ethics, the writer has specifically mentioned his interviews with the various sadhus. Attempt was made in these interviews, to gain clarity on certain ethical norms and their significance and also to ascertain the purpose or "rationale" in following the precepts and prescriptions.

The sadhus, especially during Pramukh Swami’s tour of Gandhinagar, Gujarat, invited the writer to join them in their travels so that they could illustrate aspects of their religion. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the writer had the privilege of sharing a devotee’s house with some of the sadhus.

The writer’s visit to sacred temples, shrines and participation in religious festivals was significant in that sacred persons, sacred places and sacred festivals were the PHENOMENA which helped to understand and describe the religious experience of the followers of the Swaminarayan religion.

CHAPTERS

In Chapter Two, as Historical Context, the writer traces the history of the Movement and includes the early life of Sahajanand Swami and the progress of the sampradaya under his guruship.

Chapter Three focuses on Hindu Ethics as borne out by Classical and other Texts.

Chapter Four, as Swaminarayan and Ethics, is a detailed discussion of the Shikshapatri and reference is made to aspects of ethics contained in the Vachanamrit that complement and elucidate injunctions and prescriptions of the Shikshapatri.

Finally, in Chapters Five and Six an overall interpretation of the entire dissertation will
be covered under the headings, Interpretation and Conclusion respectively.
FOOTNOTES

1. It is an attitude that enwraps both the interpreter and his object of interpretation and enables the interpreter to leave his own world for a moment, cross the world of the "other" and return with a knowledge made possible by his crossing.

2. Realization of one's self as distinct from gross, subtle and casual body and identification of the self with Brahman (akshar) and dedication, devotion to Parabrahman (Purushottam) as one's Lord, is moksha for Swaminarayan. Also the four Vedas, Puranas, Itihisas, all scriptures, says Swaminarayan, specifically enunciate that the contact of God or His brahmanised saint shall redeem jivas.

3. Archimarga is the path to salvation. The Bhagavat Gita advocates that one who becomes brahmanised is free from maya. Released souls according to Swaminarayan do not lose their individuality.

4. For Swaminarayan it is ekantika bhakti.

5. Swaminarayan believes in one self-existent Ultimate Reality (Advaitism) which is unique (Vishista) and therefore it is Visishtadvaita.

6. Akshar is the choicest and is dasya-bhakta (devotion in servitude)serves the Lord in His highest abode and elsewhere where he descends.

7. The four aspects are dharma, jnana, bhakti and vairagya.

8. In the Swaminarayan sampradaya the images which are understood as a physical presence receive regular worship.

9. Swaminarayan is primarily present in the person of the guru in the images and sacred scriptures.
10. **The underlying principle of this epistle is that unless religious tenets are observed strictly, upasana and bhakti are not fulfilled.**

11. **Yama Danda is a scripture of the Swaminarayan faith written by Nishkulanand Swami. It describes the punishment in hell for crimes and wrong doings done on earth of selfish people, unjust rulers, murderers, robbers, drinkers of alcohol, arrogant people, meat eaters, people who bear false witness. They are all taken to the pits of suffering to be tortured in various ways.**

12. **Bombay - at the Dadar temple. Ahemadabad - one of the main centres has a school of philosophy. Media publications are done here. Sarangpur - training centre for sadhus. The writer also visited Gondol, Gadhada, Badhra, Bochasan, Attladra, Chansed (Pramukh Swami's birth place) and the Silvasa area of the Adivasi tribes.**

13. **Shruti (revealed literature) and Smirti (secondary literature).**
CHAPTER TWO

2.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Swaminarayan Movement, known officially as the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Sanstha, is basically a revised form of the traditional Visishtadvaita Vedanta of Shri Ramanuja. The Movement grew from the life and work of Shri Sahajanand Swami, of nineteenth century India, venerated as an incarnation of Lord Narayana. He travelled all over India for thirty years with a band of disciples, initiating a powerful religious revival. His reformist mission had a tremendous impact upon the masses of Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch, in particular, playing an immense role in the eradication of violence, drunkenness and lawlessness which existed on a large scale. Such a remarkable religious renaissance attracted not only the respect of those of India but also earned the respect of the British rulers of the day.

H.T. Dave states that Swaminarayan's life and work reveals an important Chapter of India's religious and social history (Dave, 1974:7). K.M. Munshi in his introduction to Dave's work, states,

"'Swaminarayan was one of the early architects of the development of an Indian religious renaissance. During the days when India was in chaos and the British were acquiring a dominion, Swaminarayan made a way for non-Brahmins to become religious leaders'"
(Dave, 1974:10).

The modern followers of Shri Swaminarayan number hundreds of thousands and prior to the recent expulsion of Asians from Uganda, this faith was widespread throughout East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania). The Movement has spread to the West by virtue of
emigration from India, particularly to Great Britain (London) and the United States of America (New York).

In this way, the Swaminarayan religion is one of the recent and important exports of India. R.B. Williams makes a point that although the Swaminarayan religion is two hundred years old, it is modern compared to the older religions of India (Williams, 1984:X).

Shri Swaminarayan was acclaimed as "the last of the Hindu reformers" by Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade (Parekh 1980:XX1). Parekh compares Swaminarayan to other reformers, namely, Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chander Sen and Dayananda Sarasvati. He makes an interesting and justifiable assertion that Swaminarayan was different from all other reformers that, while they (Ram Mohan Roy and others) were influenced in one way or the another by light from the Western World, he (Swaminarayan) was wholly untouched by any alien influence and was purely a Hindu in his mental and spiritual constitution (Parekh 1980:XX1). Therefore, it is not surprising to the writer, that followers see in Swaminarayan Hinduism in its purest and most indigenous form.

His followers, according to Williams (1984:X1), assert that he preserved the best of the beliefs and practices of the past and forged a new form of Hinduism well suited for the modern period.

2.2 THE LIFE OF SHRI SWAMINARAYAN

Sahajanand Swami, the founder, who is now worshipped as Swaminarayan, taught in Gujarat at the beginning of the nineteenth century. "Accounts of his life and teaching come out of the mist" (Williams, 1984:X1). It covers the transition from the medieval to modern period in Gujarat, a change that was influenced partly by British control of the area (Williams, 1984:X1).

Undoubtedly the story of Sahajanand's life is depicted in detail in the various literature of the Movement. However, a biography has not been possible, since,
"In a life like that of Swaminarayan it is very difficult to decide what is strictly historical and what is superimposed by faith of his followers. Most of the stories are legendary and are transmitted in the satsang to demonstrate the divine character of Sahajanand, even as a child, and the miraculous character of his deeds" (Parekh, 1980:X1).

The writer agrees with Williams (1984:X11) that it is not possible, from the materials available, to give a modern historical account, and consequently, what ought to suffice is a brief sketch of his life as it provides much of the literature, iconography and ritual of the fellowship.

2.2.1 FAMILY LIFE AND EARLY TRAINING

According to Dave R.M. (1975:2) the sage Durvasa appeared before Swaminarayan’s parents. The sage stated emphatically that his (the sage’s) curse would not be withdrawn and in order for them to be saved from the consequences of the curse it was deemed necessary that Lord Narayana take birth (in the form of Sahajanand) to destroy the demons and also to save Swaminarayan’s parents.

Swaminarayan’s parents are believed, also, to be manifestations on earth of heavenly beings. They are given the names Dharmadeva and Bhaktimatha and images of the parents and the holy family are found in the temples. This is significant because the father represents the discipline of moral conduct (dharma) that gives shape to bhakti (devotion and worship) which is the heart of the religion and is represented by the mother of Swaminarayan (Bhaktimatha).
2.2.1.1 BIRTH OF GHANASHYAM

Lord Swaminarayan's childhood name was Ghanashyam, which is one of the childhood names of Krishna. This is thought to be especially appropriate because the legendary stories of the childhood of Ghanashyam resemble the stories in the Puranas about the childhood of Krishna.

In harmony with common Hindu practices, Swaminarayan was called by different names to indicate different status and stages in life.

Ghanashyam was born in the year 1781 (3rd April) in Chappaiya, a beautiful little village outside Gujarat near Ayodhya (in the Hindi speaking area of present day Uttar Pradesh). This day was also the day of the festival of the birth of Rama, called Ramnaumi. According to the Sage Mahandeya, he was born under the sign of Cancer in the Zodiac (Kark Rashi). It is noted that Swaminarayan's birth is also celebrated with a festival on the above date every year. The bi-centenary of his birth was celebrated in April 1981.

2.2.1.2 FAMILY LIFE AND TRAINING

Ghanashyam belonged to a priestly brahmin family. The religion of the family was Vaishnavism, that is, the worship of Vishnu. Both Rama and Krishna had an equal share of this worship as an Incarnation of Vishnu. His two brothers were Rama Paratapa and Ichcharama.

From early childhood, he displayed a very great enthusiasm for spiritual and religious activities, which included visits to temples in Ayodhya, to receive darshan and to read spiritual books like the Vedas etc. With the help of his father, he acquainted himself with the essential teachings of the Hindu Scriptures. Apart from these, he underwent upanayana sanskaras (sacred thread investiture at the age of eight which was the symbol of his entrance into religious life). He was attracted towards religion from his early boyhood and, besides visiting temples, always kept his vows. At an early age of
only eleven, he left his home without informing his family and went to the Himalayas. He kept on wandering alone for seven years and visited practically all the important places of pilgrimage in the North East, South and West of India. He educated himself through the hardships by journeying on foot and through the varied experiences of the cultural and religious life of India.

It seems that the death of his parents made a deep impression on his sensitive mind before he left home and became a spiritual vagrant. As a wandering pilgrim, he was called Nilakanth. Only later, when he was entrusted as an ascetic in the tradition of Ramananda, he was given the name of Sahajanand Swami and when he became the leader of the group of ascetics he was accepted as the manifestation of God and he was revered as Swaminarayan. A story about his childhood is often told in the satsang which relates his encounter with the teachers of philosophy in the holy city of Varanasi. He debated successfully against representatives of the Advaita (non-dualism) School of Shankara and representatives of the Dvaita (dualism) of Madhva. That was his first victory in propounding the philosophy of Ramanuja (the modified non-dualism of Vishistadvaita). Ramesh Dave (1975:113) refers to the above incident, "The Brahmins' astonishment grew at the knowledge and eloquence with which Ghanashyam explained the middle doctrine of Vishistadvaita, the qualified non-dualism which transformed the two extreme creeds".

During the time of his itinerant wandering, Nilakanth, as has been the case of Indian holy men (ancient and modern), began his pilgrimage with a period in the Himalayas where he met and talked with a number of religious teachers. There, he studied the science of yoga with a teacher Gopal Yogi. At this time, he also learnt about the Bhagavad Gita, the quintessence of Hinduism from the same teacher.
Later, he visited the pilgrimage centres of Haridwar, Badarinath and Mathura (the legendary birth place of Krishna). His tour of other pilgrimage centres took him from the north to south of India. Leaving the Himalayas, he went to Bengal to Jagannathpuri in the east to the famous pilgrimage temples in South India. He visited the sacred places associated with the career of Ramanuja including his birthplace at Sriperumbudur and the famous pilgrimage temple at Srirangam. His journey through Kanchipuram, Kumbakonam, Madurai and Rameshwaram took him to the southern tip of India and after seven years of wandering he entered Gujarat to visit the famous Krishna temple at Dwarka. Nilakanth suffered much in the course of his wanderings but bore all ill-treatment in the best of sadhu spirit. From that time, he remained in Gujarat, the land of his adoption. The travels provide the framework in the literature for many stories, similar to those of his childhood, which portray him as the perfect student (brahmachari).

He came into contact with false ascetics and evil princes and was delivered from their temptations and power by the influence of his pure austerities. The pictures and icons of Nilakanth in the temples show him to be extremely emaciated (during this period) as he took to extreme penance. He is also said to have practised perfect celibacy in avoiding all contact with women. This chastity (a part of yoga) was accompanied by such virtues as patience, forbearance and forgiveness together with bhakti (devotion to God).

When he arrived in Kathiwar in Gujarat, he came into contact with a group of ascetics who were followers of Ramananda Swami, a Vaishnava teacher of the philosophy of Ramanuja. At Loj, a village in the south of Saurasthra, he met these ascetics near Junagath about the year 1800. He was persuaded to remain with them until Ramananda returned from a visit to Bhuj in Kutch.

It is noted that it was at this time that he formally renounced the world by becoming a sadhu of Ramananda and entered his fellowship and that it was as if Ramananda was waiting for this young brahmachari (Yajnik, 1972:3). In Parekh’s work (1980:4), it is said that his wanderings were not so much for pilgrimage but the search for a guru.
Swami Ramananda was a prominent guru of exalted piety, having a number of followers of Kutch and of Saurasthra.

At this time, Muktananda Swami (later himself a close disciple of Sahajananda) was the leader of the group in the absence of Swami Ramananda. Muktananda, in the absence of his master, took care of Sahajanand Swami, a stranger, before the arrival of Ramananda. This was the start of the development of a deep spiritual friendship of mutual reverence that lasted for thirty years. Moreover, Sahajanand’s association with Ramananda’s group (of ascetics) was important in the development of the teaching and the community that developed into the Swaminarayan fellowship.

2.2.1.3 SAHAJANAND’S GURU (RAMANANDA SWAMI)

Sahajanand’s guru, Ramananda Swami was born, in 1739, into a brahmin family in Bihar. At the age of twelve he undertook a pilgrimage to the sacred shrines to learn from famous scholars. Eventually he came to Dwarka, the home of Krishna in Kathiwar. In this Province he met an ascetic named Atmananda who initiated him in the Advaita school of philosophy of Shankara. Later he travelled to Srirangam where he became convinced of the truth of modified non-dualism of Ramanuja which developed as an alternative to Shankara’s philosophy. A story is told that Ramananda had a dream and Ramanuja appeared, initiated him, gave him the marks of Vishnu which remained in his body when he awoke.

Sahajanand was a strong and original man and undoubtedly a prophet of the Highest. He had come at a time when the light of God had faded from the minds of people for centuries perhaps, and it was his mission to witness once more the glory of God and his gracious presence in the midst of people. Ramananda found a great treasure in the youthful aspirant Nilakanth who had already gone through experiences similar to and even greater than those he had at his age (Parekh, 1980:23). Thus Sahajanand Swami’s entry into the line of acharyas is significant because through him the connection is established for the leaders of the Swaminarayan Movement back to Ramanuja (Vachanamrit, Vartal-18).
When Ramananda returned to Gujarat he gained a fellowship of both ascetics and householders. After having been summoned back from Bhuj to meet the new ascetic, Ramananda accepted Nilakanth into his group and gave him initiation as a Vaishnava ascetic receiving the new name of Sahajanand Swami, where he remained for two years as an ascetic in the ashram of Ramananda.

No doubt Ramananda recognised Sahajanand's spiritual excellence and the divinity of the youth and made him his successor (acharya) of his fellowship (satsang) in a public ceremony in Jetpur (despite the legitimate claim by other successors, especially the most senior Muktananda being overlooked). Sahajanand Swami, then, became the acknowledged leader of the group but not without considerable opposition. Those who protested, however, were ex-communicated by Sahajanand Swami. Some of these broke away (departed) from the group severing all ties. But Muktananda Swami, the ascetic with the greatest claim on the succession, accepted the leadership of Sahajanand Swami. Soon Sahajanand Swami became the undisputed leader of the satsang. As a manifestation of God the preacher became both the message and object of the cult ritual.

Sahajanand Swami immediately started propagating his tenets. The spiritual sublimity of his mystical experience and miraculous powers, ethical purity of his excellent character, inexhaustibility of his capacity to resist evil with non-violent means, the tenderness of his impartial love for all souls, universality of his tolerant and appreciating outlook, and sharpness of his critical sense of non-attachment towards worldly possessions and achievements combined with untiring zeal for formative and redemptive activities exhibiting his extra-ordinary qualities of leadership had enabled Shri Swaminarayan to turn the small fellowship of Swami Ramananda into a great sampradaya with its huge temples overcrowded with sincere devotees of very high morals, vast literature and well established traditions.
2.3 SWAMINARAYAN'S MINISTRY

Swaminarayan’s Ministry took place during a critical period in the history of India. Political conditions were a reflection of the social and religious life of the people. People were divided socially into different religious sects, castes, states and principalities. Intellectual, moral and spiritual darkness prevailed all over the land. Customs such as Suttee\(^3\), Infanticide, Kuleenism\(^4\) gross superstition and immoral practices in the name of religion as in Vama Maga\(^5\) (the left handed Shakti Panth) were common. It was against such a backdrop that people like Swaminarayan lived and worked in medieval conditions in the Province of Gujarat.

The Movement met with serious opposition from different religious bodies but there was no abatement of his zeal and activity. He helped immensely to restore order and peace in the country. No wonder he was called by the critic and judge, Mahadev Govinde as the last of the Hindu Reformers (Parekh, 1980:1X).

Parekh refers to Swaminarayan as the efflorescence of the Hindu genius and spirit and believes that the best in Ancient and Medieval Hinduism has been summed up in him in a classical form just at the moment when the old order was passing away for ever (Parekh, 1980:1X).

His life, work and the Movement he led have few parallels in Indian History (Parekh, 1980:1X). Because of this his followers have thought of him as an Incarnation of God, or rather the Supreme Incarnation whereas the outer world saw in him as a Reformer of religious and social abuses. His disciples with true initiation saw that he manifested and revealed God to them. It is stated in Parekh (1980:X) that primarily Swaminarayan was a prophet and only incidentally a Reformer.

Accounts vary on how his devotees came to the realization that Sahajanand was the human form of the supreme Purushottam. After the death of Ramananda, Sahajanand gave his devotees a new mantra\(^6\). He did this by putting into samadhi a stranger named Shital Das who had received the darshan (vision) of God through the chanting of the
Swaminarayan mantra. Coming out of samadhi Shital Das announced that Sahajanand was the avatar of the Supreme Divine Purushottam and that in this vision Ramananda told him to convey this in his own life time as the Supreme Being, as an incarnation equal to Rama and Krishna, the greatest incarnations that Hindus have known (Hutchinson, 1985:48).

Yajnik asserts that technically speaking, Shri Swaminarayan was neither a metaphysician nor a methodologist nor a moral philosopher. He was primarily a great prophet who received a philosophy of religion in the light of his own intuitive experience and founded a religious community on the basis of the fundamental principles of his philosophy. He found that Vaishnavism came nearest to his own conception of religion and hence preached his religion as a pure form of Vaishnavism (Yajnik, 1972:4).

As mentioned earlier, Sahajanand Swami had to work under very adverse conditions in Gujarat, as people, irrespective of caste, indulged in drinking wine, meat eating, committing theft and adultery and saw no wrong in passing the moral laws interpreted by the priests.

Some sadhus vehemently opposed his "New Movement" and were determined to crush it as they felt that it would bring moral and spiritual regeneration and awakening amongst the people which would spell the downfall of their nefarious activities. But to Swaminarayan that opposition was so trivial against his weapons of ahimsa and non-resistance. He moulded the spiritual mettle of his sadhus, which gave them strength to bring about an awakening amongst the people to appreciate their lofty character and spiritual greatness.

Gradually the Movement began to grow and the numbers of people belonging to the lower and even lowest castes belonging to the aboriginal and criminal tribes and even to the untouchable classes had come to join its ranks and all these on such occasions felt their oneness with the Movement as they could not have done it in any other way. Here they were drawn away from a world where their social and other limitations and disabilities were emphasized and brought into a new world of fellowship and
brotherhood, a world in which neither birth nor social position but only spiritual character counted. Swaminarayan inspired loyalty and faithfulness and devotion. It is these mutual relations that constitute the heart and soul of the Swaminarayan satsang.

Within a short period after his installation as the acharya, Sahajanand succeeded in creating an order of sadhus in accordance with the highest ideals of what is known as bhagvata dharma. He had practised these ideals for years and as soon the opportunity came he made hundreds to adopt them as their own.

The extraordinary powers of Shri Swaminarayan as leader are seen not only in the organisation of the large number of sadhus into a compact, united and disciplined body but also in the work of uniting them to the much larger member of lay-disciples or householders (haribhaktas).

To create an apostolic order of this kind would be no small achievement at any time in any country, and it was especially difficult at this time in a country (as mentioned earlier) when religion was at a very low ebb in Gujarat. Sahajanand lit a new fire in the midst of universal darkness and this was bound to cast its light far and wide.

His work was to revive and reform the bhagvata dharma, and he succeeded in laying its ground plan in the shape of this apostolic band of sadhus. He gathered these round himself as the centre and the larger Fellowship called the satsang.

The activities of Swami Sahajanand for the first few years of his ministry seems to have been confined more or less to the creation of this order of sadhus and the expansion of the satsang by simple means of preaching and teaching. As the writer mentioned earlier, the Movement's work was not done without much opposition and persecution. But there were evils crying for remedy all round and Sahajanand was not one to sit in peace while so much was to be done. The activities of Swami Sahajanand during his ministry were outstanding and through this he gave shape and form to the Movement over which he had come to preside.
But the genius of Sahajanand Swami was not confined simply to the rigid establishment of Hindu worship in virginal integrity, it was also directed against the irregularities of the age and to the discovery of thousands of those unfortunate people to be found throughout Gujarat whose means of subsistence hitherto was equally lawless and precarious.

It was no wonder that the New Movement dealt a serious blow to many of the superstitions prevailing amongst the people of those days and thus while the activities of Swaminarayan were mainly spiritual their influence pervaded the entire sphere of life and the manners and morals of an entire Province were affected by the beneficent atmosphere which he was able to create round about him. The Religion which Swaminarayan founded has attracted a large number of followers, particularly in Gujarat. Large temples are to be found in most cities of Gujarat and only a few villages are devoid of a shrine and followers. This form of regional Hinduism came about as a result of the emphasis on regionalism in India since Independence and hence a State was created embracing the Gujarati speaking people (Williams, 1984:X1). It is not too much to claim that the existence of a separate Gujarat State in Independent India today is part of a legacy of the Movement which Sahajanand started (Williams, 1984:24).

The popularity of the religious teachings and reforms of Sahajanand Swami and the growth of the British political power in Gujarat developed at the same time in the first half of the nineteenth century. They, to all intents and purposes, shared a commitment to religious and social harmony.

2.4 GROWTH AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SAMPRADAYA

Sampradaya is a tradition which has been handed down from a founder through successive religious teachers and shapes the followers into a distinct fellowship with institutional form. Those who take initiation in this fellowship are called SATSANGIS - companions of the truth in the company of others, who share the same language, religious specialists, sacred scriptures, history and rituals. To a large extent the individual's exposure to the elements that made up what is called Hinduism comes
through participation in a particular sampradaya. Of significant note is the bhakti tradition in the Swaminarayan sampradaya where emphasis is on the intensive devotion of an almost face-to-face relationship between deity and the devotee. Hence Swaminarayan is viewed by devotees (Williams, 1984:X11) as the perfect manifestation of the eternal face of God. Devotion to Swaminarayan is the source of the commitment which is made by both ascetics and laypersons to follow the rather strict obligations prescribed in the sacred texts. Swaminarayan is also known as an incarnation of Uddhava, the disciple of Krishna, who was left behind, to spread his doctrine.

During the early days Sahajanand exercised direct control of both the spiritual and administrative affairs of the satsang. He personally directed the conduct of sadhus, received the titles and gifts of his followers and appointed all sadhus, who were to be mahants (chief ascetics) and kotharis (managers) in the temples. Yet even during his lifetime it became necessary to delegate some of the responsibilities and authority and the ways in which Sahajanand decided to delegate the responsibility among the sadhus, householders and members of his own family have had a profound effect on the growth and development of the Movement. This history of the group has provided illustrations of the ways new religious groups and sects are formed, the modes of administration employed by leaders with different loci of power and the types of administrative structure developed in some Hindu sects (Williams, 1984:25).

In addition to Swaminarayan’s other attributes was his obvious flair for organisation (Hutchinson, 1985:50). By the time of his death he had a sadhu following of over three thousand. These he divided according to their caste and into sections under sadgurus to whom they were subject to in spiritual and disciplinary matters. Later particular temples were allocated (parishes) for preaching. The basic structure was the division into two large temples at Ahemadabad and Vartal and the provision of two lines of acharyas who were to be descendants of the two nephews that he installed as the first acharyas (which line of descent is still maintained in what is called the older branch of the Movement).

During the last years of his life Swaminarayan supervised the construction of six large
temples at Ahemadabad, Bhuj, Vartal, Junagath, Dholera and Gadhada. In 1820 the
collector at Ahemadabad offered him land on which to build a temple and the first
temple was constructed there. Thus the British were involved in the building of the first
temples of the fellowship which was a vivid symbol that the 'Pax Britannica' and 'Pax
Sahajananda' were parallel Movements towards common goals.

While the first years of his ministry prior to British rule were filled with opposition and
persecution, the last ten years were marked by great success, high honours and the
development of the Movement into a large and influential reform Movement.

Swaminarayan’s last public appearance was his meeting at Rajkot on 26 February 1830,
with Governor Sir John Malcolm. This meeting is recorded approvingly in the literature
of both branches of the Movement and paintings in the temple depicting the history of
the Movement. The effigies of Sir John are included in some of the stonework of the
temples. At this meeting Swaminarayan gave Sir John a copy of the Shikshapatri which
has been compiled by himself and which forms the basic scripture for both the old and
new branches of the Movement. Soon after the meeting with Governor Malcolm, he
returned to his residence in Gadhada and died in 1830 at the age of forty nine.

Sahajanand’s teachings through his followers continued to influence the changes in
Gujarat. By 1845 the Gujaratis were a unified regional linguistic and ethnic group. His
career spanned an important era of change as there was the transformation from the
social and political organisation of the rival princely territories to the unified
administration of the British Raj. Change from nature and caste regulations supported
by religious sanctions to a secular law based on the British court systems brought about
significant changes not only in law, but in law religious ethics could now be perceived.

Parekh is convinced that the study of the Swaminarayan Fellowship is,

"... the redemptive work of God, the Revelation,
the Manifestation and even Incarnation of God
which is known in India by the name of Bhagavata
2.5 THE BOCHASANWASI SHRI AKSHAR PURUSHOTTAM SANSTHA

The Movement is a bifurcation of the old school. The most important event in the modern history of the Swaminarayan Movement is the founding of the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha. It is a large and religious community with its own group of sadhus, a separate administrative organisation, many large temples in Gujarat and abroad with over a million followers. The old school (mentioned earlier) encompasses the institutions associated with the traditional acharyas of Ahmedabad and Vartal and the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha. Both sections of the Movement are growing but the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha is one of the fastest growing religious groups in Gujarat and perhaps in all India.

2.6 THE MOVEMENT SINCE SWAMINARAYAN

There are different accounts of the old and the new branches of the Movement with respect to the arrangements intended for the continuation of the Movement by Lord Swaminarayan after his death. They are of considerable importance for an understanding of the attitude adopted to the guru by the new branch. Whilst both agree that Swaminarayan appointed his two nephews, each to control one of the diocese centred upon the temple of Ahmedabad and Vartal, the old branch denies that he intended any such arrangement in which the mahant of the Junagath temple, Swami Gunatitanand should be the leader of the Movement and go further to reject the doctrine of the incarnation of akshar. In the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha the spiritual leader who, unlike the acharyas, is an ascetic, has assumed the powers of the acharya and holds these in addition to his other attributes as guru.
The new branch (The Akshar-Purushottam Sanstha) traces its spiritual line of succession of gurus, a line of tradition known as guruparampara, through the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Lived</th>
<th>Period as Guru</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gunatitanand</td>
<td>1785 - 1867</td>
<td>1830 - 1867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praja Bhakta, a householder</td>
<td>1829 - 1897</td>
<td>1867 - 1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yagnapurushdasji (Shastri)</td>
<td>1865 - 1951</td>
<td>1897 - 1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jnanjivandas (Yogigi)</td>
<td>1891 - 1971</td>
<td>1951 - 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narayanswarupdas (Pramukh Swami)</td>
<td>1921 -</td>
<td>1971 -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Chapter Three, following, will now focus on Hindu ethics as reflected in Classical Texts and Ramanuja’s teachings, especially the Visishtadvaita philosophy which the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha has adopted.
FOOTNOTES

1. **Upanayana sanskaras** - ceremony of the investiture of the sacred thread.

2. **Sampradaya** - sect, fellowship.

3. **Suttee** - a custom in which a woman had to burn herself alive with the dead husband.

4. **Kuleenism** - singing during a marriage ceremony. The words of the songs were vulgar, indecent and "filthy" with sexual connotations.

5. **Vama Maga** - pervert tantrism, cult of Shakti (mother Goddess) worship.

6. **Mantra** - hymn - a formula sacred to a deity.

7. **Samadhi** - a trance in which one is conscious of God only.

8. **Ethical edict of Shikshaptri written in 1826 AD - Vartal, Gujarat - Swaminarayan finally settled here. Written to bring about an ethical revolution against the low profile and social behaviour of the people.**

9. **In the Vachanamrit (Gadhada -1-17-21) Swaminarayan is quoted. 'I desire that this Holy Fellowship should grow and spread far and wide'.**
CHAPTER THREE

3.1 ETHICS AND HINDU LITERATURE

3.1.1 INTRODUCTION

The highest good in Hinduism is the realization of transcendent state, that is, to break the ties of individuality which bind one to this world and to realize oneness with Brahman. Of significance also is the concept of DHARMA\(^1\). The doctrine of adhikara illustrates the unity between philosophical wisdom and ethical excellence, whereby the doctrine teaches that, before a disciple can aspire after knowledge, he must first be morally qualified.

This unity\(^2\) or combination is reflected in the evolution of Hindu ethics through the main periods covering more than twenty five hundred years, that is, the Vedic period, the Sutra and Epic period and the Darsana period\(^3\).

3.1.2 ETHICS AND CLASSICAL LITERATURE

3.1.2.1 ETHICS OF THE VEDIC PERIOD

The Vedic age is divided into the Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads\(^4\). Vedic literature consists of four distinct divisions\(^5\) and is made up of theological, ethical and ritualistic elements (Singh, 1984:42).

Ethically, the chief contribution of these scriptures lie in its evolution of such seminal concepts as: rita (cosmic order), samsara (transmigration), ahimsa (harmless) and moksha (liberation) (Crawford, 1974:2).
Rita, as moral law, is a dominant idea in the Vedas since it was the highest good around which the whole of Vedic religions and society was modelled. Satya (Truth) has two aspects. As integrity it is part of rita and also Sat or Ultimate Reality.

In obeisance and worship people align themselves to the universal order, pay tribute to the one law and become living agents of rita. In doing this they make themselves whole, integrated and true. A person is true, hence, rita as truth. A person also fulfils himself or herself as much as he or she lives truly and can therefore integrate himself or herself in the cosmic order (Miller, 1985:2).

The Vedic ethical ideal also reflected a combination of generosity and truthfulness. Order is the truth of the universe and law its expression. To envision the rita is to speak the truth. Truth, harmony and law are fundamentally one. Moreover, rita, as manifested order and anrita (injustice) as disorder, are two sides of one Reality (Miller, 1985:144).

Evidently, the later ideals of dharma (duty) and the law of karma were derived from this conception of rita. Karma is action and reaction, cause and effect and is therefore inherent in the conception of rita, the cosmic harmony. To do wrong is to disrupt the harmony, the order. Complete harmony with rita means freedom and cosmic salvation. Suffering is recognized as the fruit of previous sin or asatya (without rita) and when good persons die these persons go to the next world carrying their merit with them.

Truth, then, is the basis of Vedic ethos: Cosmic order, truth and ultimate principle are three stages in the Vedic person’s search for truth. Rita is cosmic order and moral order as well as divine authority.

Vedic deities were personification of material phenomena. The conception of God is predominantly moral. The moral character of the Gods spring from their association with rita. God-human relationship is conceived purely in moral terms.
The Vedas also inculcate the ethics of collective living through mutual love and concord. By means of yajna (sacrifice) man strove to reach the goal of harmony.

The rsis (seers of truth found in the Vedas) prescribed dedication of studies and espousal of the celibate life.

Wisdom was exalted above wealth and political power. The idea of marriage was a sacrament viewed with sanctity. Although the Aryan family had a patriarchal bias women enjoyed education and religious rights. The Rig Veda fosters the ethics of joint family living in mutual love and concord. However, the Rig Veda appears silent on any existence of a rigid caste system, communal dining and inter-marriage.

3.1.2.2 ETHICAL THOUGHT IN THE BRAHMANAS

Emphasis on the Vedic ritual meant a correct and meticulous performance of rituals for the sake of obtaining the desired results rather than to please the Gods (Singh, 1984:55).

In the Rig Veda all of the Gods were upholders of rita and were ideal representatives of moral excellence. In the Brahmanas this excellence is reduced to ritual excellence and truth and therefore, is the correct performance of the sacrificial ritual (Chennakesavan, 1980:101).

Life was to be lived in a harmonious relationship with one’s environment and this was attained through honour to parents, hospitality, truth-speaking, self-restraint, austerity and kindness to animals. Disharmony resulted from intoxicants, usury, gambling, women, sloth, hunger, theft, adultery and murder.

A further development was the ashrama dharma (four stages of life) and varnashrama dharma (the caste system).
As for the varnashrama dharma (caste system) the essential incidents centred around restrictions imposed by it upon inter-marriage, inter-dining and occupations. The caste of an individual was determined by birth, that is, parentage (Aiyar, 1935:79).

The priestly class (brahmins) were motivated by a guild spirit and class jealousy and made their order inaccessible by closing the canon of Vedic hymns and consolidated their superiority by protecting their office and only a specialist from their own learned ranks could understand and execute their sacerdotal duties. They also protected the purity of their blood against incursions by any of the other lower castes, that is, the kshatriyas, vaisyas and sudras. Noss formulates,

"The priests therefore declared they were the pivotal beings in a vast process of reaching into all parts of the universe, hell, earth, and heaven.... Brahmins finally came to claim a position of more vital importance even than that of gods" (Noss, 1974:82).

In a strictly ethical sense, there was no law, only laws hierarchically conceived with brahmins given preferential treatment. Violation of these laws was threatened with punishment. Life was to be lived in a harmonious relationship with one's environment.

In the Upanishads the highest ethical endeavour is self-knowledge. Vedic ceremonialism and caste duties gave way to a new spiritual quest which turned inward for the purpose of understanding Reality. The knowledge of one's self as such came to be ranked as the highest good worthy of pursuit by a person (Singh, 1984:79).
3.1.2.3.1 BRAHMAN - ATMAN

Accompanying the trend away from ritualism was the shift from outer to inner sacrifice which was a new emphasis of the high worth of the spirit or self (a person's inner self, atman). Compared with this inner self is the natural world is matter (prakriti) including the body and its sensory and mental states, which are of an inferior order. To choose to ignore the inner self and be content with the natural world would be an act of ignorance that could result in illusion and suffering. Consequently,

"Man comes to see not his separateness from the gods and his fellows but his and their identity with an eternal, all-inclusive Being or Reality, and begins to seek his deliverance (moksha) from separateness by mystical union with it"
(Noss, 1974:86)

Brahman is the Ultimate source of the external world and atman the inner self of a person. With the realization of atman, the individual is transported beyond the ethical plane to a religious plane. This is the level of moksha or liberation. Until the higher self is realized through intuitive perception, the individual is ruled by the lower self. The wheel around which most lives revolve is known as samsara (transmigration). Liberation is the knowledge of Brahman. Ignorance (maya) prevents a person from reaching moksha. However, the individual has to live responsibly and strive for the four human goals (purusarthas).

3.1.2.3.2 KARMA

Karma is the bondage which the soul contacts from deeds. Deeds done in this life as well as those done in past lives affect and determine the destiny of persons. The theory of karma implies the faith in the idea of the transmigration of the soul, its birth and rebirth. It affirms that rebirth is due to the effect of the bondage of the soul to karma.
3.1.2.3.3 ASHRAMA DHARMA

The ashrama dharma stage now included two more stages, the vanaprastha and sanyasa stages. At the vanaprastha stage the individual begins to withdraw gradually from the family and social responsibilities. Focus is on renunciation. During the sanyasa stage renunciation is reached and there is striving for moksha.

3.1.2.3.4 SADHARANA DHARMA

Sadharana dharma focused on purity, self-control, detachment, truth and non-violence. Upanishadic teachings advocate that the student (brahmacharya) must find a spiritual teacher (guru). The student has to practice virtue (dharma), yajna (sacrifice) and dana (dedication). Women were given an exalted status in private and public life.

3.1.2.4 ETHICAL THOUGHT IN THE DHARMA SUTRAS AND EPICS

The ethics of the Vedic period was based on Hinduism's Shruti (revealed) literature. The development of Hinduism's ethical thought in Smriti (that which is remembered) covers all authoritative Texts outside the Vedas.

3.1.2.4.1 ETHICAL THOUGHT IN THE SUTRAS AND SASTRAS

The DHARMA SUTRAS focused on rules of conduct, law and customs. The Sutras teach students the general principles of dharma (moral law). The sanctions for ethical behaviour were religious, not judicial (Ram, 1985:160).

The DHARMA SASTRAS were concerned with moral duties. The most authoritative work on the subject of dharma, professing divine origin, is the laws of Manu. The Manusmriti outlines regulations governing the structure and organisation of society. It also has laws for the punishment of crime. The four stages of life (ashramas) and the caste system (varnashrama) are elaborated in detail in the Manusmriti (Aiyar, 1935:14).
Spiritual development and the social order (ashrama dharma) went hand in hand. The scheme aims at ethical organisation of an individual's personal life with a view to the fruitful synthesis of the way of action (pavṛtti) and the way of renunciation (nivṛtti) and also of the realization of the four human ends (purusarthas) (Dandekar, 1979:2).

Sadharana dharma centred around the performance of sacrificial rites and observing of traditional duties supposedly based on the Vedas. The eight good qualities of the soul were taught, that is, compassion to all creatures, forbearance, freedom of anger, purity, quietism, auspiciousness, freedom from avarice and covetousness.

The motivation behind all of these codes of conduct as prescriptions and virtues is eschatological, to be united with Brahman.

3.1.2.4.2 ETHICAL THOUGHT IN THE EPICS

The MAHABHARATA and RAMAYANA have developed into text books of dharma.

The heart of the Mahabharata is the BHAGAVAD GITA.

3.1.2.4.2.1 ETHICAL THOUGHT IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA

3.1.2.4.2.1.1 BHAKTI

The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes bhakti (religious devotion) and dharma (moral law). The three disciplines of bhakti, jnana and karma are an integral part of the Bhagavat Gita. The Bhagavad Gita advocates detached activism (karma yoga). Action should be done without concern for its fruits. What is ethically required is a renunciation in action and not a renunciation of action. Duties are performed as a member of society without any personal gain.
3.1.2.4.2.1.2 ORGANISATION OF SOCIETY

The Bhagavad Gita’s four divisions of society are based on the notion of a specific duty and a specific quality indispensable to the performance of such a duty (Crawford, 1984:78).

The Bhagavad Gita does point out that every person is free to exercise one’s choice of one or the other of the four divisions of society. However, the person has to take into consideration whether he or she possesses the requisite qualification for discharging the obligations within that particular division in society.

Notwithstanding this, the Bhagavad Gita advocates that one continues work in both perfect and imperfect conditions of life.

Unlike the negative Upanishadic ethics of renunciation the Bhagavad Gita’s karma yoga philosophy is a positive philosophy of social actions.

The Bhagavad Gita also differs from the orthodox view of caste in that it universalizes its concept of salvation to make it accessible to all, regardless of caste, sex or other distinctions. A free person according to the Bhagavad Gita transcends the gunas and while serving the Lord with unswerving bhakti yoga is fit to become Brahman.

3.1.2.5 ETHICS OF THE DARSANA PERIOD

Darsana (philosophy) is concerned with rational inquiry into the nature of Ultimate Reality (Brahman). The six philosophies, which accept the authority of the Vedas, are Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta.

Ethically, the systems recognise all three levels of moral development. On the objective level there is the need for adherence to varnashrama school of life. On the subjective level, it is attasuddhi or purity of heart. On the transcendental level emphasis is on samsara. The ethical concepts of avidya, atman, dharma, samsara and jivanmukti
provide the bases for the orthodox character of these systems.

3.1.2.5.1 ETHICAL THOUGHT IN ADVAITA

Sankara expounded the doctrine of Brahman (non-dual spirit). By analyzing the three states of experience, (waking, dreaming and deep sleep) he showed the illusory nature of the world and established the supreme truth of Brahman which is sat-cit-ananda (truth-consciousness-bliss).

Since Brahman realization is the highest good, Vedanta defines good and evil in terms of whatever help or hinders this realization. The personal embodiment of this ethical ideal is Isvara who identifies Himself with the cosmos and who acts on behalf of the whole world.

Maya (ignorance) is an illusory principle which is responsible for the appearance of the phenomenal world and their individual souls (jivas) and their collective entity as atman. The jivas revert to Godship when the veil of maya is removed. The highest good is the intuitive realization that there is one and only one reality which is negation of all plurality and difference.

3.1.2.5.2 ETHICAL THOUGHT IN VISISHTADVAITA

The Swaminarayan Movement has adopted the doctrinal teachings of Ramanuja, especially his Visishtadvaita philosophy. This qualified non-dualism, philosophy of Ramanuja (born A.D. 1017) was largely a reaction of theistic devotional religion to Shankara’s non-dualistic Advaita philosophy. Central to this doctrine is the idea that the human soul is a distinct reality but subordinate to Brahman.

The highest good in Ramanuja’s philosophical ethics is the "intuitive knowledge of Brahman," which is the nature of supreme unsurpassable bliss. When one knows Brahman one attains the Highest. The goal of life is more than transcending samsara, it is the attainment of God in his form of perfect bliss.
3.1.2.5.2.1 ULTIMATE REALITY

Ramanuja’s philosophy of Reality is monotheistic. All is Brahman. There is no reality other than Him, either of a similar or dissimilar nature. Brahman is the Absolute One. At the same time the One is many. Within the unity of Brahman exist distinct but inseparable realities called cit (self) and acit (matter). These elements are mutually distinguishable from one another and from Brahman. They are without an absolute beginning and shall have no absolute ending. Thus the philosophy of Ramanuja is called qualified monism. This is consistent within Upanishadic teachings that the entire world forms the body of Brahman.

The fundamental authority for Ramanuja’s conception of Ultimate Reality, then, is the Upanishads. Evidently, the roots of Ramanuja’s monotheism can also be traced back to the Vedas.

Ramanuja’s conception of Reality is that of a complex whole that is organic. Reality for him is not homogenous, non-composite consciousness. Its unity is that of a living organism, one element predominates and controls the rest. The world of souls and the world of matter are subordinate elements and stand in the relation of adjectives (visesanas) to the Lord. The complex whole (visista) in which they are included is described as a unity. Hence, the name Visishadvaita because Ramanuja believed that Reality is a supreme, adorable person and loving God.

3.1.2.5.2.2 SOUL - BODY RELATIONSHIP

The anchor on which the relation between Brahman and the Universe is conceived is the soul-body relation. The whole Universe is ontologically real precisely because it participates as body in the all including Reality, the Self of the Universe. In this way Ramanuja’s vision of Reality gives ultimate value to the cosmic process. Lott affirms,

"The central explicating analogy of Sri Ramanuja’s system of Visistadvaita"
Moreover, Singh (1984:248) states,

"Reality ..., Ramanuja, is not a pure being devoid of all attributes and qualities (Nirvishesha), but characterised in some special way (Vishishta), such that could be understood and interpreted in definite human terms."

The analogy on which the relation between Brahman and the universe is conceived is the soul-body relation (sarira-sarirasambandha). Ramanuja declares that all sentient and non-sentient beings together constitute the body of the Supreme Person, for they are completely controlled and supported by Him for His own ends and are absolutely subordinate to Him. He says further that scriptural texts declare that the Universe is the body (Crawford, 1984:120).

The ethical explication of the soul-body relation is that in as much as the atman is controlled, supported and directed by the Supreme Person for His own ends, the atman must, therefore, discover the meaning, value and purpose of its existence to its Inner Ruler.

Brahman pervades the world as its Self, being its Inner Ruler (tadatmya-antaraymin). Brahman is also described as having characteristics of a double kind. While he is free from all imperfections and a treasure house of all blessed qualities, Supreme Self manifests Himself in all beings, includes all beings in His Being, that His reality of Being is communicated to the 'all' - as a Self communicates its being to its body.

Ramanuja further asserts that just as the body distinguishes its Self, relating to it as a distinct characteristic relates to its ground-substance, so distinction characterises even the transcendent Self. Reality is essentially visitsya-advaita, a continuity of being
characterised by inner distinctions. Every entity is the universe and every word signifying an entity terminates and find their ultimate meaning in Brahman, their inner Self. Moreover, the sarira-sariri bhava signifies in a general way the utter dependence of the Universe on the Supreme Self, it is the self-body analogy that most directly and most richly explicates the meaning of this dependent relationship (Lott, 1980:21).

Brahman, as emphasized earlier, abides in the soul as its Inner Ruler. As it is not subject to the influence of karma, it is free from all imperfections. Ramanuja goes further to say that the Supreme Person is free from all evil, free from grief, free from hunger and thirst, that all his wishes realize themselves and that all its purposes realize themselves. Since it is devoid of all evil characteristics common to prakriti, Brahman can be called nirguna.

Nirguna Brahman is simultaneously saguna because He possesses all good characteristics. According to Smirti tradition He comprises within Himself all blessed qualities and by a particle of His power the whole mass of being is supported. In Him, there are combined energy, strength, might, wisdom, valour and all other noble qualities.

Brahman as nirguna and saguna shows that Ramanuja conceived of Brahman, the saririn not only in metaphysical and aesthetic terms but in moral terms as well since Reality and value are considered one and the highest value of life like truth, goodness and beauty are intrinsic and eternal and are conserved in the absolute Self as its essential nature (Crawford, 1984:120).

Brahman is saguna, a personal God reverently called Isvara, Vishnu. There are three ultimate realities, God (Isvara, Vishnu), soul (cit) and matter (acit). Isvara is independent, the other two are dependent on Him. The relation between Vishnu on the one hand and the world of souls and matter on the other is analogous to that between the soul and the body. Vishnu is the soul of the souls of matter. Although the souls and matter are distinct from each other and from Vishnu, they are not separable from Him. Souls and matter are totally dependent on Vishnu (Crawford, 1984:121).
Isvara, identified with Vishnu-Narayana, is the same as the Upanishadic Brahman endowed with the eternal attributes, truth, goodness, beauty and bliss. He is the supporter of all beings, their controller, their goal. Although Vishnu is the whole and sole cause of the world, He is not affected by the changes of the latter. Vishnu in Himself does not change, it is the entities that are comprehended in Him and of which He is the inspiring principle that change. Vishnu is immanent in the world as well as transcendent. He is the supreme moral governor and the world-redeemer. He incarnates Himself (avatara) from time to time (like the avatara of Rama and Krishna) in order to protect the good.

The ethical import of viewing the nature of Isvara in this way is such as to make holiness and righteousness the moral predicates of the saririn formative for ethical conduct on the part of the sarira. Humans ought to be compassionate, just, generous and so on, because these are the qualities in the Inner Ruler. What is clear is that the standard for ethical conduct is shifted from the ego to the Absolute (Crawford, 1984:121).

Atman, like Isvara, is conceived by Ramanuja, as an ethical personality and the atman's moral autonomy is first of all maintained by categorically differentiating it from the body in which it dwells. Dave (1974:26) formulates,

".... God is real and independent of the souls and the world which also have real existence. According to Ramanuja, Jnana, Isvara and Maya are eternal. Jiva and Maya are not to be identified with Brahma or Isvara but collaterally sustain God as his body while their separate existence is possible".

The jiva is part of Brahman in so far as it is His body. By this analogy Ramanuja allows room for sufficient freedom of moral activity, while stressing at the same time that the soul is dependent for this power of action upon the controlling will of the Supreme Self.
By drawing a sharp distinction between the atman and the body which particularizes it, Ramanuja preserves the freedom of the atman against all materialistic views of morals which, by identifying the atman with prakriti, would subject it to nature's casual necessity. But, also the atman's ethical personality is maintained against the possibility of its being conceived of as a depersonalised instrument of God. God is the controller (niyantr). As an instrument in the hands of God, the atman is described as being dependent, controlled and employed by God, for the achievement of its own purposes. Ramanuja was of the opinion that the scriptures do not deny the individual's freedom because of its dependence on Isvara and believes that if this was so then the whole body of scriptural injunctions' prohibitions would have no meaning. He attempts to reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility by making the free activity of the individual contingent upon the will of God. The activity of the individual soul proceeds from the highest Self as its cause.

The inwardly ruling highest Self promotes actions in so far as it regards in the case of any actions the volitional effort made by the individual soul and then aids the effort by granting it favour or permission (annumati). Actions are not possible without permission on the part of the highest Self (Crawford, 1984:123).

Consequently, human freedom is preserved because humans are free to choose without divine interference. However, this freedom is permitted by God and ultimately it is He who is the subject of all actions since the independent character of individual selves is necessarily limited to such autonomy as is permitted by the Supreme Self.

The Lord is the origin of all and everything proceeds from Him. The wise knowing this worship the Lord with Love. He in turn gives them wisdom and destroys the darkness born of ignorance with knowledge. Though the atman has affinity with God and is distinct from prakriti, it ignorantly identifies itself with the body in which it resides. This ignorance is the source of all sin and suffering in the world. It binds the atman to the body and makes it the slave of pain and pleasure arising from the body. It breeds a selfish attitude towards others and obscures the atman's dependence on God.
The devotee, aware that he is part of the body of the Lord and enthused by his knowledge of the Supreme Self's glorious perfection, will desire to serve the Lord in every way he is able. Ramanuja also argues that in as much as all deities constitute the body of the Lord, acts performed with the aim of evoking a particular benefit from a particular deity in reality are done to the Lord Himself. All actions done with genuine devotion are pleasing to that Supreme Self.

The material world is the dwelling place of the souls and through them Vishnu also. Matter has three qualities: sattva, rajas and tamas. Time is also matter, it is in the form of all existence. As a co-ordinate of prakriti, time is in Brahman. The temporal world equips the soul for its empirical career. It also serves as the means for making the soul progress towards its goal, moksha. With release the soul’s attributive knowledge expands. In the state of bondage the soul’s attributive knowledge is contracted. The soul in this condition, acquires the body that befits its past karma and has to transmigrate from one life to another till it attains release, moksha. Souls are infinite in number. They are eternally freed, the freed and the bound (yet to be freed). The way to release is through karma (action), jnana (knowledge) and bhakti (devotion). The purified mind is capable of acquiring knowledge of itself as dependent on Vishnu. All these lead to a vision of Vishnu. Noss (1980:1983) refers to this as,

"...a going to heaven to enjoy Vishnu's presence in full consciousness".

3.1.2.5.2.3 KARMA YOGA

Further, since all acts have their inevitable consequences, an individual’s past acts, freely chosen, determine his future existence. In this way he gets caught in the wheel of rebirth and death. The atman itself does not die, nor is it reborn. These changes only belong to the bodies with which the atman is associated. Though it is immortal, because of its false identification with the body, it appears to be mortal. Thus, through karma and avidya the atman remains in the bondage of samsara.
Since activity motivated by the hope for reward binds the atman to prakriti, the first thing the atman must do to escape this bondage is to eliminate all desire for heaven which is the reward for virtuosity.

So, the atman can be delivered from this life of endless suffering and this is accomplished by karma yoga. These are first of successive levels reaching up to communion with God. These are not separate paths but separate stages, integrally related to one another. Ramanuja considered them essential elements of the Bhagavad Gita doctrine.

Karma yoga is the primary stage of moral discipline. It is a via media between excessively activistic and ascetic moral perspectives. For karma yoga, its ideal of conduct is niskamakarma - the performance of necessary actions without any egoistic desires. It advocates renunciation in action rather than renunciation of action. Ramanuja expands further on the Bhagavad Gita and advocates that one should perform one's acts disinterestedly (Crawford, 1984:124).

Ramanuja considered the ethics of duty for duty's sake of great importance and this, also, included duties pertaining to the varnas and ashramas. The aspirant is able to distinguish between the immortal atman and perishable prakriti. The worshipping aspirant is purified of his previous karma so that the aspirants "new karma" is compatible with his worship. Besides the destruction of the past accretions of karma, duties performed in the spirit of dedication to God, strengthen the sattvic nature of the atman and it is able to hold onto the truth.

The character of the person of duty reflects poise and equanimity. There is neither gloating over success nor groaning under failure. The aspirant at all times and in all places remains calm, subdued, patient, satisfied and collected. Work eventually becomes worship. Klostermaier (1989:377) affirms,

"For Ramanuja, the process of salvation is not just a process of isolation, the
elimination of avidya, the disengagement
of non-reality but is the product of
divine grace and human self-surrender."

Karma yoga prepares the way for jnana yoga. Selfless acts destroy the cumulative
effects of bad karma and thereby, expand the atman's capacity of knowledge. The true
knowledge that is acquired by jnana yoga consists in constantly realizing that the atman
is a different entity from prakriti, that God is our Inner Self and that, as modes of His
substance, we are dependent upon Him.

For Ramanuja, jnana yoga was considered an advanced stage of karma yoga. In this
way, he reconciled both methods of the Bhagavad Gita.

The integrated efforts of karma yoga and jnana yoga lead the aspirant to yoga which
is the recognition of the atman in himself and in others.

The ethics of interpersonal relationships, then, has a solid foundation in jnana yoga.
There is the assertion that all atmans are similar, possessing common qualities.
Distinctions of cast are at best relevant to the body and have nothing to do with the
essential nature of the atman. Atmans are not simply equal but sacredly equal, being
similar to God. An enlightened person cannot, therefore, love God and hate his fellows
and when he serves his fellows he worships God.

Apart from contemplating such equalitarian thoughts in yoga, they must be habitually
practised in every day life. The highest stage is reached when one acts upon this
knowledge by never distinguishing between one's own atman and the atmans of others.

3.1.2.5.2.4 BHAKTI YOGA

Jnana yoga leads to bhakti yoga. For Ramanuja bhakti stands for the steady
contemplation of the mind on God. The love of God is so dear that one is unable to exist
separated from His being, qualities, acts and dominion and Ramanuja explains that one
must focus one’s mind constantly on God and his glory. The ardent love for God necessitates a sacrifice for the glory of God and the aspirant should find sole support in God who is the Inner-Atman (Crawford, 1984:126).

Bhakti yoga is an intuitive realization of God who in His form of perfect bliss is most dear to His worship. Bhakti is everlasting. One who has attained bhakti never loses it. Ramanuja asserts that the highest Self can be apprehended only by a purified mind that meditates on the Self. This meditation is assisted by: abstention (viveka), virtuous conduct (kalyana), freedom from dejection (anavasada), abstention from exultation (annuddharsa), freeness of mind (viveka), repetition (abhyasa), works (kriya) (Crawford, 1984:126).

Abstention refers to discrimination of food. As a person eats, so becomes his or her mind. Freeness of mind means the absence of attachment to desires. The desires to be eliminated are sexual passion, anger, vanity, jealousy, acquisitiveness. Repetition means the continuous focusing of the mind on God. As a person thinks so the person becomes and there is no better object of thought than God. By works, is understood the performance according to one’s ability, of the five great sacrifices. In addition to sacred study and the offering of oblations to the Gods and the manes, it includes hospitality to guests and the offering of food to the lowest of animals. Virtuous conduct means the practice of truthfulness, honesty, kindness, liberality, gentleness and the absence of covetousness. Freedom from dejection means that one is unaffected by the lowness of the spirit, want of cheerfulness which results from the unfavourable conditions of place or time and the remembrance of causes and sorrow. By abstention from exultation is meant the possession of such character that one is not swept of one’s feet by the elation of joy and allurements.

These seven means to the development of bhakti show that morality is an essential content of bhakti which is not mere emotionalism but includes the training of the will as well as the intellect. It is the knowledge of God as well as the obedience to His will.

Another ethical facet of bhakti yoga lies in its activism. For all it emphasis on prasada
(grace) the importance of the devotee's personal efforts is never minimised. Love, prayer, devotion and dedication are human efforts which serve as indirect means of attaining God. Human person's active life is dedicated to one from whom he or she derives his or her acting power. But despite all his or her own efforts the devotee can never be confident that he or she loves God sufficiently and therefore beseeches God for the grace to know him or her and love him or her.

Acts, emphasizes Ramanuja, are important in a human person's progress to God but so are intentions. The outer life is integrated with the inner life and the latter determines the consequences of the former. The worshippers of God are also distinguished according to their intentions. Those who worship God will attain God, while those worshipping ancestors and ghosts will go to them. Any offering to God has to have the object of pleasing God and nothing else (Crawford, 1984:128).

Therefore, the moral facet of bhakti yoga lies in its universality. All beings are equal before God and according to Ramanuja, since all beings whether they be of exalted or humble class who worship God by bhakti will share God's virtues and God Himself will dwell in them (Crawford, 1984:128).

A person who has transgressed the rules of class to which he belongs should be exclusively devoted to God and should still enjoy the right to be regarded as an esteemed Vaishnava.

While bhakti yoga and its two non-separable auxiliaries, jnana yoga and karma yoga constitute one path to salvation, an alternate means is found in prapatti.

3.1.2.5.2.5 PRAPATTI

The path of salvation represented by karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga is not accessible to anybody who desires it. Study of the scriptures, pilgrimages, building temples, rigorous disciplines and a host of other details take their toll in terms of learning, money, concentration and hardwork which the majority of the people can ill
afford. But this does not mean that the door of salvation is open only to the elite.

For those who find the path of bhakti too difficult, to follow, they can choose prapatti which is the absolute surrender of one's individuality to God (a similar attitude of self-surrender which is also present in bhakti). A different method from bhakti the method is simple in the sense that the devotee is not in need of any external sadhana to purify his outer organs. A single moment of serious and sincere offering of one's self to God is considered enough, it is immediate and non-laborious and is regarded as superior to bhakti yoga.

Prapatti is distinguished by six elements. They are: harmonising one's will with the divine will, renouncing behaviour displeasing to God, confidence in divine protection, choosing God as saviour of all, feeling hopelessly inadequate to pursue the path of bhakti yoga and resigning oneself wholly to God.

When the heart of the devotee has been purified by prapatti, a certain character emerges as its logical and ethical consequence, marked by freedom from egoistic impulses, immortal bliss and charity for all beings.

Bhakti and prapatti are an effective sadhana with the self-body relationship. The gracious Lord is seen as the inner Self inseparably related to the bhaktas including them with His very Being (Lott, 1979:36).

3.1.2.6 RAMANUJA AND SWAMINARAYAN

Swaminarayan's teachings is deeply rooted in the Vaishnava tradition and looked especially to Ramanuja's philosophy for guidance and inspiration. Swaminarayan and Ramanuja both rejected Shankara's monist, non-dualistic philosophy because of their own theistic conviction of a personal God. For both the favourite metaphysical definition of God is Purushottam (the Highest Person).

For Ramanuja atman, prakriti and God form a unity. The atman and the body are
interdependent. Swaminarayan agrees that the atman sustains the body but goes further to say that the body is an appendage to the Self.

Self is unlimited according to Ramanuja but in a state of bondage. This state of bondage is due to ignorance and karma conceals the true nature of Brahman. Karma produces the atman’s conjunction with the body and the misconception that the atman is the body.

Swaminarayan views the bondage of the self in similar fashion although the central idea in Swaminarayan’s analysis are desire and egoism. To desire something is to be attached to it and the source of all evils is egoism, it is the greatest vice of a person according to Swaminarayan. Human persons must cast off love and attachment to their ego and avoid all attachment except to God. To be one’s self only, is maya.

The path of release for Ramanuja entails the practice of karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga. The path expounded by Swaminarayan differs from that of Ramanuja in terminology but not in essence. The goal for Swaminarayan is the development of ekantika bhakta, which is defined as practising dharma, vairayaga (detachment), jnana (knowledge) and bhakti (devotion). For Swaminarayan the three aspects of the path to liberation are inferior to bhakti. If one is deficient in observing dharma, detachment and knowledge, one can still be redeemed by devotion. The highest form of devotion for Ramanuja is refuge in God. Swaminarayan elaborates on the concept of prapatti by noting that there are three methods of gaining total refuge in God, which is, an indomitable faith in God, knowing the saguna and nirguna forms of God. If a devotee follows the path of salvation, he earns the grace of God.

Ramanuja’s theology attempts to combine into a harmonious life, social duties, religious rites and the higher realms of meditation and devotion. Swaminarayan, on the other hand, attempted to create a religious community, centered around the Vaishnava accepted values, expressing its faith in common religious acts of devotion, encouraging the serious devotee to meditate on the divine and advocating serving and loving God. Dave R.M. formulates,
"Thus we can see that though Swaminarayan has followed Ramanuja and his system to a great length, he has differed at number of points, and has given his own interpretation of Vedic and Bhagavata Dharma. The overall effect is that the system tends to become more pluralistic and more colourful, quenching the religious thirst more than philosophical" (New Dimensions, Part II, 1981:129).
FOOTNOTES

1. Hindus call their religion sanatana dharma, which literally means "eternal law". However, ethical ideas are not eternal, fixed, static, unchanging substances. Under the rubric of eternal, universal law, Hindu ethics combines continuity with dynamic diversity.

2. While Hinduism draws a sharp distinction between the spiritual and material, the eternal and temporal, these dimensions of existence are not polarized but correlated within the concept of dharma which can be regarded a joint product of the speculative and practical wisdom of the Hindus.

3. Vedic period (c.2000-c.1500 B.C.E), the Sutra and Epic period. (c.500 B.C.E.- 300 C.E.), the Darsana period (c.400 B.C.E - c.750 C.E.)

4. The Vedic age is broadly divided into three ages: Samhitas (c. 2000 - c. 1500 B.C.E.), Brahmanas (c. 1500 - c. 700 B.C.E.), age of the Upanishads (c. 700 - c. 500 B.C.E.)

5. The four divisions of the Vedas. (Samhita - mantras) is a collection of hymns, prayers, benedictions, sacrificial formulas etc. These are the Rig Veda Samhita, the Atharva Veda Samitha, the Yajur Veda Samhita, the Sama Veda Samhita.

6. Hymns lay down certain duties as its concrete manifestation of rita.

7. Chief among the guardians of rita are Varuna (Universal Monarch, God of righteousness), Indra (God of power), Surya (the Sun God), Usas (the God of Dawn), Agni (the fire God). Varuna can always be relied upon to act with justice and compassion.

8. Ritualistic rectitude has been upheld as the norm of goodness.
9.1 Ashrama dharma (four divisions of society) The four stages were: brahmacharya (student), grihasthrama (householder), vanasprastha (hermit) and sanyasa (final stage of renunciation.)

9.2 Varnashrama dharma (caste system). The brahmins were at the head of the caste group followed by the ksahtriyas (warriors), vaisya (traders and businessmen) and sudras (the lowest group - those who performed manual labour).

10. Strangely, it was legal for a brahmin to take a bride from any of the four classes. (Crawford, 1984:28). Women were classified as sudra, objects of impurity. The real purpose of life was to produce children.

11. Harmony was attained through honour with parents, hospitality, truth-speaking, self-restraint, austerity and kindness to animals. Disharmony resulted from intoxicants, usury, gambling, women, sloth, hunger, theft, adultery and murder. Householders were expected to be truthful.

12. By uniting with the Brahman, the atman transcends mortal existence. It is also possible to achieve this ideal in one's personal life. Jivanmukti is a view which states that moksha (liberation) can be reached here and now. A person's goal is to strive to realize his or her ultimate identity with Isvara and nirguna Brahman.

13. Doctrine of maya - emancipation from the cycle of rebirth comes only with lifting of the veil of ignorance (maya - illusion) that prevents one from knowing that the soul is and always has been identical with Brahman.

14. Purusarthas - human goals. The literate meaning of this term is "human effort", and this effort must be directed towards four legitimate goals - dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), kama (pleasures) and moksha (freedom from samsara).
15. **Karma** - The doctrine of karma is based upon the assumptions that every act or deed must necessarily be followed by its consequences (physical, mental and moral). If the consequences of a person's acts are not fully worked out in this life, they demand a future life for their fruition (Aiyar, 1984:134).

16. In the Brahmanas women had the privilege of reading sacred scriptures and performing certain sacrifices. In the Upanishads they were also allowed to discuss the highest spiritual truths in public and could study the Vedas. Female sexuality was lauded as the creation of the divine. Women were allowed into philosophical circles.

17. **Smriti literature** covered 500 B.C. to 300 A.D.

18. In the Smriti period, the law permeating the whole universe was called dharma. Dharma expressed specific duties and obligations, and served as criteria for ethical conduct. With the social order, dharma was explicitly defined in terms of these duties and obligations which were codified in the great law books.

19. The Manusmriti tell us that sages requested Manu to impart instruction in the dharmas of all the varnas. Regulations also cover administration, sources of revenue, methods of conducting trade and business.

20. It was incumbent upon everyman to pass the successive stages and discharge the obligations of such stages.

21. Purusartha (human values) have the aim of dharma, artha and kama. The purusartha provide the psycho-moral basis for the ashrama scheme as a kind of ethical organisation of the social life of the Hindus.

22. Ethical decisions were based not on private, but social conscience.
23. The authority of the social conscience lay in the Vedas and the Smritis and in the practices of good persons. Smritis maintain the Upanishadic ideal of enlightenment as the highest good. The philosophical ideals of the third and fourth ashramas emphasize the ideals of contemplation and renunciation as the means of liberation (Crawford, 1984:51-54).

24. The most important contributions of the Epic age are the doctrines of incarnation (avatar) and the popularisation of bhakti (loving worship and adoration of Vishnu and his avatars). Isvara as the generator, operator and destroyer of the world order was conceptualised as trimurthi or the triad of Brahma - Vishnu - Shiva.

25. The Mahabharata or "Great War of the Bharatas" is a history of the conflicts between royal houses, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The second Epic, the Ramayana imports the kind of ideals that most characterise the personal, domestic, social and public life of the Hindus. Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu, destroys Ravana, the demon. Sita, Rama’s wife is the epitome of women’s virtues. Rama and Sita are worshipped as divinities.

26. The Bhagavad Gita’s four divisions of society are based on the notion of a specific duty and a specific quality indispensable to the efficient performance of such a duty. The four functional groups are brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya and sudra.

27. The Bhagavad Gita, does however, sanction caste on religious, biological and sociological grounds.

28. The Universe is governed by gunas which influence every substance, every living being. They influence human person’s thoughts, intellect and desires and make him or her do good deeds of all kinds. These acts give rise to desires and make impressions on the mind. The atman then has to take birth to reap the fruits of his actions. Once it has taken mantle of a body the three gunas influence it in many ways:

sattva - produces purity and happiness.
rajas - various passions and actions.
tamas - ignorance, inertia and idleness.

29 DARSANAS (C. 400 B.C.E. - 750 C.E.)
The Hindu word for the "nature of things" is Darsana. It seeks by an intuitive searching to dispel ignorance that prevents liberation from maya through "seeing the Real".

30.1 NYAYA - VAISESKA (c. 400 C.E.)
The highest good is the attainment of moksha by the knowledge of the sixteen great topics of Gautama's philosophy or the six or seven categories advanced by Kanada. Ethically it affirms one's voluntary capacity to initiate, select and choose dharma against adharma. Knowledge destroys ignorance and ego. Moral training dispels selfish desires.

30.2 SAMKHYA YOGA (c. 300 C.E.)
The highest good of all ethical endeavour is the realization of the perfection of purusha. By vivekajnana (highest knowledge) the jiva discriminates between purusha (spiritual principle) and prakriti (material principle). The design and function of the prakriti are aimed at liberation of the purusha (soul).

30.3 The YOGA SYSTEM holds the mental state of desirelessness (vairagya) as its ethical ideal. The practical method is the eightfold means (astanga) of yoga - restraint, observance, posture, regulations of breath, abstraction (of the senses), concentration, meditation and trance. Restraint (yama) and observance (niyama) are of ethical significance. Ahimsa provides an ethical framework for all other virtues. Dhyna (meditation) restores buddhi (intelligence). Yoga elevates the seeker to the state of samadhi.

30.4 PURVA - MIMAMSA (c. 750 C.E.)
The object here was to establish authority of the Vedas. Emphasis was on dharma, artha, kama as values to be strived for. Release of soul from the environment was
by jnanakanda (enlightened action).

30.5 UTTARA - MIMAMSA (VEDANTA). (c. 750 C.E.)
Concentration was more on the philosophical teachings of the Upanishads than ritualistic injunctions of the Brahmanas. The three main philosophical schools of Vedanta were those of Sankara (eight century A.D.) and Ramanuja (twelfth century A.D.) - Advaita and Vishistadvaita respectively.

31 Ultimate Reality is not abstract and reveals Himself as God in five ways: He shows Himself to the liberated souls in heaven attended by Lakshimi and other consorts. He manifests Himself in accumulation of knowledge, and in the universe at large in creation, preservation, persistence, ruling might, and ability to overcome opposition. He appears in the ten avatars. He dwells within the human heart and accompanies His devotees wherever they go, and sometimes appears in visions. He presents Himself in the images made of Him.
CHAPTER 4

4.1 SWAMINARAYAN AND ETHICS

In this Chapter the main focus is on ethics as reflected by the SHIKSHAPATRI and VACHANAMRIT.

4.1.1 ETHICS AND SHIKSHAPATRI

The basic teachings of Swaminarayan, as it affects day to day life in society, is contained in the Shikshapatri, (hereafter indicated as SP), the Book of precepts, which Swaminarayan ordered should be worshipped as a representative of His very Self, svarupa. The purpose of the Shikshapatri is self-evident, within its name which means 'booklet of instruction'. It explains to all disciples their various codes of conduct, it explains the purpose and goal of human life and moreover, it helps support the disciples, as a synonymity of Swaminarayan himself, after his death.

Swaminarayan evolved the patri particularly for his disciples living far and wide and ultimately, for the whole world (sarvajiva) and he is the redeemer of all (hitavaha). The Shikshapatri states,

"'Lord Swaminarayan whose abode is Akshardham has enunciated this Shikshapatri particularly for all this disciples living in various countries'" (SP4). Narainmuni Swami affirmed,

'The unique feature of the Shikshapatri is that Lord Swaminarayan has separated different categories or classes of people and prescribed rules for them accordingly. However, there are rules which are common to all, for example, not eating meat.'
4.2 AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURES

Scriptures considered by Swaminarayan as authoritative are the Vedas, the Sutras of Vyāsa, The Bhagavatpurana, the thousand names of Vishnu (as given in the Mahabharata), The Bhagavad Gita, Vidurniti, Yajnavalkyasmriti, Vasudevamahatmya, (from the Vishnu Khanda of the Skandapurana) (SP 93 and 95).

The twice born disciples are expected to read hear and understand these scriptures (SP 96). A love for the scriptures may result in reviving the glory and grandeur of the past. The Fifth and Tenth Books of the Bhagavatapurana should be heard with reverence as often as possible or merely just once a year (SP117). The treatise on the Bhagavad Gita and the Vyassutra by Ramanuja are also approved (SP100). Besides spiritual knowledge, the sources of the Shastras in regard to bhakti, yoga and dharma are also indicated. The Fifth Book of the Bhagavatapurana is the Bhakti Shastra (Manual of Devotion), the tenth Book of the Bhagavatapurana is the Yogashastra (Manual of Spiritual Devotion) and Yajnavalkyasmriti is the Dharma Shastra (Manual of laws).

It is ordained in the Shikshapatri (SP99) that the Fifth and Tenth Book of the Bhagvatpurana and Yajnavalkyasmriti are respectfully Swaminarayan’s Bhaktishastra, Yogashastra and Dharmaashastra.

The precepts of the scriptures have, for their subjects, excessive exaltation of Krishna, of dharma, of bhakti and vairagya. These shall take precedence over all other precepts (SP101). Devotion to Krishna should be joined with dharma (SP102). For practice and penance reference should be made to Yajnavalkyasmriti with his commentary called Mitakshara (SP97).

While the scriptures have a hierarchical order, those books that do not sing praises to Lord Krishna in one or the other form are not scriptures. Narainmuni Swami explained, ‘The Shrimad Bhagavat is the main scripture of Vaishnavas. There are eighteen Puranic texts written by Vyāsa. Navam means new (novelty). Puran is reference to ancient. So
4.3 DHARMA AND RELIGION

The conception of dharma is related to devotion or bhakti. It is of fundamental importance to the Swaminarayan sect and this conception is developed in the Shikshapatri. Dharma is the good practices enjoined by the Shrutis and Smritis. The Shikshapatri states,

"'You are the quintessence of all the nectar churned from all the oceans of scriptures and therefore those who drink this nectar become fit for immortality’" (SP103 and 106).

The Shikshapatri refers to dharma,

"'Oh, son of Dharma, may you always love your disciples and always bear a smiling face which draws everybody ‘'(SP 9). Atmaswarupdas Swami elaborated on the concept of ekantik dharma,

'The Lord came to propagate ekantik dharma, which has four aspects, the four "d’s". These are discipline (moral) which is dharma, the discriminatory organ which is jnana\(^2\) , vairagya\(^3\) which is detachment from worldly objects and bhakti which is devotion.'

He also referred to the Shikshapatri,

'The Lord came to propagate all four together. Dharma\(^4\), basic moral discipline is essential but unless one masters all four one does not receive grace and although God’s grace is always available to a devotee’ (SP 104).

Dharma, in the Swaminarayan sampradaya, is not merely duty. Ekantik dharma comprises all four aspects. The Vachanamrit states,

"'The full development of ekantika bhakti is the most coveted attainment. One who has fully developed the attributes of dharma, jnana, vairagya, and with these redemptive
attributes, what one offers as exuberant devotion to God is regarded as ekantika bhakti "(Loya-6-256).

It is commanded that the Shikshapatri will be given only to those who are endowed with a spiritual mind and never to a person possessed of a carnal mind (SP 200). Moreover no one shall use or entertain profane language against the Gods, sacred places, brahmins, holy women, sadhus and the Vedas (SP 21). One the other hand Krishna’s exploits should not be heard from one whose words are likely to lead one to fall from his faith or duty (SP 25) or someone who misinterprets Lord Krishna.

4.4 GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

4.4.1 DOCTRINE

The concept of akshar and the Movement’s unique understanding of the incarnation of akshar in the guru is of fundamental ethical importance and lays the foundation for all other ethical endeavours. Sahajanand Swami (Lord Swaminarayan) is the incarnation of the ultimate Supreme Being, Purushottam Narayan. Gunatitand Swami is the incarnation of akshar and this identity of the first guru of the line continues through his successors down to the present guru, Pramukh Swami and the guru is believed to be the reviver, reinforcer and interpreter of dharma (Hutchinson, 1985:137).

The religious person will legitimate his values by reference to his religion (and guru). The doctrine of the sampradaya affects the ethical life of its devotees to a large degree. This is particularly true of the Swaminarayan Movement whose daily devotional readings is the Shikshapatri with its two hundred and twelve rules for living. The guru himself as the choicest devotee displays the attributes of character which are intended to be emulated by all devotees as a matter of duty and in the quest for akshardham. The guru exists as the prime communicator of ethics.
4.4.1.1 AKSHAR - PURUSHOTTAM

Brahman is akshar, the divine abode of God. He is also called chidakash in his all pervading form. In his divine form he is the choicest devotee of the Lord, always by His side and His service. He is the form to be attained by the jivas. One who attains him knows God and attains final redemption (Vachanamrit: xii). To attain akshar one has to know akshar and establish contact with him, since he also manifests on earth with Purushottam. The Vachanamrit states,

"'When the Lord descends on earth for the redemption of the jivas, and assumes human form, His divine abode akshar, the liberated jivas and his His full fledged lordship, all descend on earth but they cannot be seen by those who have not attained the divine vision' "(Gadhada - 1 - 71).

Consequently (and appropriately), this akshar is to be sought to imbibe his attributes and become qualified for the worship of Purushottam. The concept of pure upasana is upheld in the fulfilment of this principle.

4.4.1.2 PARABRAHMAN - UPASANA

Parabrahman or Purushottam has always a divine and human form. The culmination of upasana rests in the realization that there is no distinction between the divine form of Purushottam in this abode and His human form on earth. There is no difference between the Lord Purushottam visible on earth and the divine form seated in his divine abode akshardham. They are one and there is absolutely no difference in these two forms. Upasana connotes that God has always a divine form and is never formless. The Vachanamrit states,

""Manifestation of God through such form of Bhagavatas who has imbibed within them fully the attributes of the Bhagavat Dharma, has been traced right from Vedic times"" (Vachanamrit: xii).
Parabrahman even though seated in His divine abode is immanent by his antaryami shakti and His power to manifest Himself (Dave, 1974:207).

4.4.1.3 BHAGAVAT DHARMA

Dharma, jnana, vairagya and bhakti are four attributes of bhagavat dharma, mentioned earlier by Atmaswarupdas Swami. These should be fully imbibed by a seeker who desires total liberation. God has incarnated on earth to establish this bhagavat dharma.

After realizing one's own self as atman or akshar and when one realizes Paramatma or Purushottam, one is said to have attained jnana. Detachment from all mundane objects and attachment to God only constitute vairagya. Bhakti signifies total involution in the form of God and hence Swaminarayan affirms,

"'One however, who has realized God here in human form and possesses such immutable knowledge and feels completely fulfilled at the darshan of God here in human form and does not desire anything, is a true devotee'" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada-1-12).

Dedicated devotees who have imbibed these virtues by the contact of akshar or the brahmanised satpurush are inspired into the divine knowledge of God by God Himself. As they are dedicated to God, their indriyas and antakharan definitely attain God and become divinised by His contact. Such devotees reside, after death, in the divine abode akshardham assuming divine forms and remain in the service of God (Vachanamrit: xiv).

4.4.2 RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

The Shikshapatri contains general instructions about worship. Worship, either individual or congregational, is always recognized as of great importance and worship is a means by which an individual may try to know, feel and be with the Deity. Worship, though of great importance, is not to be performed at the cost of the
performance of one's duties (SP 39). To facilitate congregational worship a place is necessary and in Hinduism it is a mandir (as established by Swaminarayan also). The writer has visited most of the large mandirs in the state of Gujarat. A feature of these temples are the images of the various deities.

The temples are the focal point for the devotees, especially when they assemble for the daily arthis or when they remain in temple for the reading of portions of the sacred scriptures and religious discourses given by ascetics or learned householders. Large temples have assembly halls for discourses (like Ahemadabad and Bombay). A large one is being built at a place called Akshardham in Gandhinagar (near Ahemadabad). A directive is given in a general form to the followers,

"They shall go everyday to the temple of God in the evening and they shall sing enthusiastically the name of Lord Of Radhika" (SP 63).

It is advised that the Shikshapatri must be read daily or heard daily or worshipped daily and be honoured with the greatest reverence. Besides the Shikshapatri, the Tenth Book of the Bhagavatpurana and Vishnu-Sahastra Nama should be read. Such reading coupled with the worship of Lord Krishna will cause the attainment of all desired objects and attain salvation (SP 188).

Swaminarayan states in the Shikshapatri that a precondition for worship is realizing one's soul as Brahman and as distinct from its three bodies (gross, subtle and causal) and one should worship Parabrahman at all times (SP 116). Further, one should offer worship to the founder Lord Swaminarayan himself and establish him as God. The Vachanamrit formulates,

"Similarly, when he hears about the riches of the triad of deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, who are the Lords of this universe, and still who are subservient to Purushottam the ultimate God, he is simply amazed" (Gadhada-1-63-112).
4.4.2.1 MORNING PRAYER

After having woken up before sunrise, taking the Lord's name and taking the necessary ablutions the devotee should sit facing either east or north, and after making religious marks shall proceed to perform worship.

4.4.2.2 RELIGIOUS MARKS

Certain marks are adhered to distinguish the followers of Swaminarayan from other sects. The twice born (dwija) who have received initiation from a religious preceptor (the writer was witness to such an initiation ceremony of over a dozen boys in Bombay) wear, on their necks, a double necklace made of tulsi wood and an upright mark is made of gopichandan (SP42). With this upright mark is made a round mark with the same substance or red kumkum powder (SP52).

4.4.3 RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

Religious toleration is witnessed in the Shikshapatri. The twice born who have inherited from their forefathers the use of a necklace or Rudraksha, and the horizontal mark of Shaivites shall not discontinue this practice (SP46). This broad mindedness goes further in that no one is to give up the performance of the duties that are imposed upon the class or religious order to which they belong (SP24). Whenever a follower of Swaminarayan happens to pass by a temple of Shiva, or any other God, he has to bow down respectfully and enter the place to pay his respect to the image (SP23). The writer was in Gandhinagar when a sadhu lifted his hands in prayer when travelling past a temple. Narayana and Shiva are to be considered as one Deity, since both have been declared by the Vedas as Brahma (SP47). However the writer is of the opinion that what is theoretically asserted is hardly actually practised even in the Swaminarayan sampradaya. The unity between Shiva and Vishnu is not overtly practised. It must be mentioned, however, that the Shiva-linga was also part of the consecration ceremony of the idol installation (pranpratishta) at the Mayfair temple in Johannesburg (1991).
4.4.4 INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARTICULAR OCCASIONS

4.4.4.1 PILGRIMAGE

A pilgrimage is of educational, cultural and social importance. It plays an important role in establishing solidarity among the followers of the sampradaya. A pilgrimage to the tirthas (holy place) and temples, especially in the State of Gujarat by families is common and the memorials, temples and shrines are reminders of the space where the individual comes into contact with the divine. It is part of the mental universe of the believers since,

"Places objects, and dates associated with the lives of his predecessors are treated with respect .... " (Williams, 1984:90).

The Skandpurana quoted in the Vachanamrit (Gadhada -1-1-2) states,

"'A sin committed elsewhere is washed off at a place of pilgrimage, but a sin committed in the place of pilgrimage becomes incorrigible.'"

Locations associated with Swaminarayan have special significance. The writer visited the temple in Vartal, India, and saw the room where Swaminarayan composed the Shikshapatri. At Ahemadabad, Brahamvihari Swami showed youths from abroad artifacts related to Lord Swaminarayan. The youth touched one of Swaminarayan’s teeth preserved in a box. There is a religious museum in Gondal and places of cremation of Gunatitanand Swami and Yogiji Maharaj. Respect is also paid to all shrines associated with Lord Swaminarayan’s career. A shrine in Badhra marks the location where Swaminarayan called Gunatitanand Swami to leave his occupation and become an ascetic.

The birthplace of each religious preceptor becomes a place of religious interest and pilgrimage. Rooms in the temple where each stayed and objects used by them are treated as holy."
4.4.4.2 FESTIVALS AND OTHER OBSERVANCES

Devotees of Swaminarayan follow a religious calendar which leads them to share the major sacred temples with other Hindus. Swaminarayan himself began a practice of pilgrimages and the holding of large gatherings in his presence at festival times. The Shikshapatri has the injunction,

"My disciples of means shall celebrate the religious festivals in temples with great pomp and enthusiasm and shall give alms to deserving Brahmins" (SP156). Swaminarayan states,

"I perform Vishnuyaga or hold big congregations or festivals like Janmasthami, Ekadashi etc. and celebrate every year such festivals and I gather all brahmacharis, sadhus, satsangis etc. therein with the purpose that if anyone who attends these festivals, even he be a sinful man, he would be redeemed of his sins and would attain the divine abode of God, if he remembers at the time of his death the brahmacharis, sadhus and satsangis" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada-1-3-4).

Evidently, Swaminarayan’s intention in calling these gatherings was to bring members together from various areas to create bonds between devotees and a sense of unity of fellowship. Williams (1984:156) affirms,

"Such religious gatherings have also had a larger social impact of reducing regionalism and aiding in the more general unification of Gujarati culture and language."

The ritual calendar begins with the celebration of the birth of Swaminarayan on the ninth day of the bright half of Chaitra (March-April). This day is also the birthday of Ram (Ramanaumi). The birthday celebration of Swaminarayan takes place in the late evening, before midnight, and is regarded as sacred time that reaches a climax for those who have gathered.
April and May is the observance of Akhatrij which marks the beginning of the new season and sandal wood paste is applied to images to cool them.

4.4.4.3 CHATURMASA (June, July)

The period of Monsoon is traditionally a period of rest, the ascetics and householders take special vows. During the four rainy months appetite falls, free movement is not possible and for reasons of hygiene it is desirable to fast for at least one day. The Shikshapatri advises,

"'Those having a weak constitution shall practice the same only for the month of Sharavana only’" (SP76). Jnanpurushdas Swami explained,

'The Monsoon period affects the digestive system. According to the seasons we either need more water or less water. The rainy season, if you eat a lot you would probably get problems of infection. The Monsoon months of Sharavana are the purest months (July to August). For four months we have the observance of the Monsoon fasts to preserve the body. So if there is a religious significance attached behind it, then people follow it.'

4.4.4.4 EKADASHI

The month is divided into two phases of the moon, the bright half and the dark half. Every month the birth of Swaminarayan is celebrated on the ninth day of the bright half-day of fasting referred to in the Shikshapatri as Ekadashi Vrat (SP148). This fasting on all the eleven days (after the waxing and the waning moon) are observed by those who can manage. The Vachanamrit states,

"'Fasting on the day of the Ekadashi carries the significance that the ten Indriyas and the eleventh mind should be withdrawn from the respective worldly foods, and should be focused on God only’" (Gadhada-1-38-64).
Although this is a fast for all ascetics and householders, Jnanpurushdas Swami confirmed,

'Most saints will not have water. Those who are not physically capable will have water.'

4.4.4.5 ECLIPSE

The times of eclipse is given religious significance, the images of God are clothed with silk garments. All activities are suspended during the eclipse except chanting of the Swaminarayan mantra and singing devotional songs. Narainmuni Swami explained,

'Eclipse definitely has repercussions. Movements of the moon and sun affects your life even today. Stories go back to the Puranas. Even in traditional mythology it was difficult for people to accept that eating during an eclipse leads to indigestion. A woman with child can be affected as it will affect the unborn. The Hindu Shastras have prohibited even the looking at eclipses.'

4.4.4.6 GURUPURNIMA

The full month period of June-July (Ashadha) is gurupurnima where the devotees gather to offer devotion to the preceptor or guru. This is one of the most important festivals in the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha. On this day several thousand followers gather at the temple in Bochasan in the presence of Pramukh Swami to express their devotion.

The birthday of Gunatitanand Swami is also during June and July, that is, in the month of Ashwin (full month).

4.4.4.7 JANMASTHAMI

This is the birthday of Krishna and falls on the eighth day of the dark half of the month. The birthday is celebrated at midnight with great devotional fervour of singing and chanting. A small image of Krishna is placed in a cradle and rocked. Other
occasions celebrated are Shraadha ceremony, Diwali, Annakut, Devoothi and the birthday of Ganapathi.

The Swaminarayan sampradaya follows the lunar calendar, the agricultural cycle of wet and dry season, cycle of births of mythical figures and of Lord Swaminarayan. Festivals are also concerned with the births of the preceptors.

All these celebrations, including that of Shastri Maharaj celebrated during Vaishakha (April - May), are normally very extensive. The birth of the living preceptor, Pramukh Swami, who is akshar is also celebrated with great fervour.

4.4.4.8 PRANPRATHISTA

Each temple includes in its sacred calendar the annual celebration (anniversary) of the dedication of the images of the temple.

4.5 VARNASHRAMA (CASTE SYSTEM)

The Shikshapatri prescribes,

"None of my followers shall violate the code of varnashrama dharma and shall not obey any code of behaviour other than sanctified by the scriptures" (SP 24).

The performance of duties imposed upon the individuals by either a class or religious order are to be observed (SP 24). One is not expected to give up the performance of the duties that are imposed upon the class or the religious order to which the person belongs, nor adopt the duties that are enjoined in others nor accept a religion propounded by a heretical teacher.

The function and nature of the four varnas are given in the Shikshapatri. The brahmin should possess tranquillity, contentment and other such virtues. The kshatriyas (military class) should possess bravery and fortitude. The vaishyas should occupy themselves in
agriculture, mercantile pursuits, banking and commerce. The sudras should maintain themselves by serving the twice-born (SP 89 and 90).

The first named varnas are called twice-born, because besides their natural birth (a physical or biological phenomenon), they are born spiritually for the second time when they are given the sacred thread which open up for them the four ashramas commencing with the brahmacharya ashrama. However, a deviation from the traditionally accepted concept of varnashrama is noticed in the Shikshapatri whereby it is stated that every person should be given worth according to the person's qualification and character (SP 66).

It is evident that while Swaminarayan has initially accepted the caste system he has tried mildly to reform it. Moreover, it is noticed that varnashrama does not necessarily and always rest upon birth. A person's own deeds too play an important part in the determination of the status and position that he or she will occupy in society. Salvation and God-realization, then, is not the monopoly of a particular race or class but it can be attained even by the down-trodden.

Recently, some of the caste distinctions have been removed. Ascetics from all castes follow the same discipline and do identical work. They live and eat together in the temples. In 1981 Pramukh Swami decreed that ascetics from the sudra castes were eligible to receive full initiation as sadhus so that there was no caste barrier for initiation.

In the past, ascetics from lower castes dressed only in white. Sudras are now under the same rule as sadhus and engage in preaching, administration and service common to the sadhus. In 1981, bhagavata diksha was given to ascetics from the sudra caste who now conform to the common dress code for all sadhus.

Viveksagar Swami, a sudra, who now acts as Pramukh Swami's personal secretary was given diksha after twenty years as a parshad. The writer confirmed this with him in India. Swaminarayan states,
"And so long as one comes the ego of his caste or stage he has not attained saintliness. I am the ideal of the sadhu is as much as I have no ego either of caste or stage." (Vachanamrit, Gadhada -1-44-76).

4.6 ETHICS OF SADHARANA DHARMA

Personal well being and references to it in the Shikshapatri have their importance in terms of being practically sound, physiologically necessary, hygienically essential and sociologically important.

4.6.1 PERSONAL WELL BEING, HEALTH, RITUAL PURITY AND FOOD.

The rules or instructions for personal well-being include physical (health and hygiene), mental and moral being. There are regulations regarding ceremonial impurity resulting from birth and death in the family and menstruation restrictions associating with other devotees or visits to the temple during those periods.

4.6.1.1 BIRTH AND DEATH

The uncleanliness through birth and death consists in observing of non-touchability to certain objects for a certain period of time after the birth of a child in the family (SP 88). Jnanpurushdas Swami commented,

'Sudhak is a formal rite (ceremony) performed after the birth of a child. It has a two-fold reason because the mother is still weak and considered impure and she should suspend all religious activities. Likewise, when a person dies all are upset, a psychological and mental effect through grieving for a person.'

On the reason for the cremation ceremony, for a dead person, Jnanpurushdas Swami explained,
‘The observance of the ritual ceremony of cremation and last rite, goes back to the sacrifices (yajnas). The original aim of sacrifices is to offer the body, mind etc. to God. In the cremation ceremony the body is offered to God.’

When an ascetic dies the final rites are performed by fellow ascetics. The body is washed by cold water, dressed in ascetic’s clothes, with a new kanthi (necklace of beads) sacred thread, and sect mark (tilak). The body is cremated in a special ground for ascetics (funeral pyre). Sacred verses are chanted. According to Williams,

"The body be burned, be placed in a river
to go to the sea, or be left in a cave,
cremation is the usual method of caring for
the body" (Williams, 1974:100).

The Dharmarit prescribes that the ascetic who cares for images in the main shrine does not take part as the ceremony will make him ritually impure.

It is believed that a faithful devotee will be taken to the abode of God (akshardham) immediately after death, and the ascetics pray that the deceased will gain release. The ascetics then return to the temple and take a purifying bath. The objects which the deceased used in his morning worship are given to another ascetic or are ritually disposed off by being placed in a river or other body of water.

4.6.1.2 MENSES

With regard to women they shall not conceal their first appearance of menses since a woman in that condition shall not touch for three days anyone or anything until she bathed on the fourth day (SP174).

4.6.1.3 HYGIENE

No water or milk that is not strained should be drunk nor should water containing
minute insects be used for such purposes as bathing etc. (SP30). It is common practice in all mandirs to see a filter cloth tied over the faucets so that devotees can drink filtered water. Neither body excretions or evacuations or saliva are allowed to fall in places protected by the scriptures. The rules of personal cleanliness, about the disposal of human waste and about avoiding contaminated water lead to improved public sanitation as well as ritual purity.

4.6.1.4 DIET AND DRINKS

Meat eating and drinking are completely prohibited for all, even if offered to the Gods (SP 15). The Sakta during Swaminarayan’s time advocated drinking and eating of meat as prasad to God. Neither is medicine to be mixed up with drink or flesh as it is impure. A physician of known standing should be consulted18.

Devotees avoid prescriptive medicines that are addictive. Jnanpurushdas Swami affirmed,

'Medicines mixed with liquor are out. Sadhus with ailments do not have these types of medicines. We used the Colgate toothpaste, that you people use, for two years. When we discovered that it had bone marrow, we stopped using Colgate and replaced it with Ayurvedic toothpaste.'

4.6.1.5 FOOD

Sadhus are permitted to eat food from a brahmin house even if it is cooked by a woman provided it is served by a male. If the preparation is by a non-brahmin food must first be prepared in milk or even water, otherwise sadhus cook their own food. Drinking water from a leather vessel is impure, so too are the eating of garlic and onions. It is also advised that ablutions and prayers must be performed before eating. Eating meat leads to acts of passion and violence. Vegetarianism is healthy and promotes passivity that leads to good conduct. All Swaminarayan devotees are vegetarians. Swaminarayan states,
"'When a man enjoy's sumptuous meals, the ingredients of such food get assimilated with his body and are then likely to react adversely. As a man enjoys bhang..., under the influence of its intoxication, infringes the rules of moral behaviour'' (Vachanamrit, Gadhada-1-18-23).

Swaminarayan followers are asked to take a vow to avoid in so far as possible eating undedicated food from outside the home or temple. Anandkirti Swami explained,

'The main reason is to have purity of food and not to eat from everywhere and anywhere. Temptations should be restricted. When we visit persons of the lowest caste, when they invite us, people who still maintain orthodox caste beliefs look down upon us. In the villages some of these people are obstructing us, not letting us teach. Those people who believe in caste are orthodox and are a barrier to us. They need to be educated.' Vishudaswarupdas Swami affirmed,

'Tamsic food, onion and garlic are avoided by one who wants to reach a spiritual height. The mind should not be digressed by impure foods. On your suggestion that some of the food is sweet, is correct. There is an element of taste in everything one eats. But more important is that the food prepared is first offered to the Lord. We strive for a very high mental discipline which takes a lot of practice. Our minds are concentrated upon the Lord no matter what we eat. Mandir food has no garlic, no spices, no elaborate preparations like your home situation.'

Food prepared is first offered to the deities. Vishudaswarupdas Swami explained,

'In order to show our appreciation and love, we set humbly before Him, the Lord, prepared food, fruits etc. We bow to Him in thanks and prayer and we humbly ask that he bless the food placed before Him. We partake in this blessed food (prasadam) in the knowledge that it has been blessed by God and will therefore give us health and strength as well as physical and mental well-being.'
4.6.2 DRESS

There are broad instructions in the Shikshapatri in this regard. No one is expected to wear clothes in such a manner as to expose their limbs to view (SP 38).

It is pointed out that the exposing of limbs is unhygienic and also exposed limbs create in the minds of the observers evil, wicked and sensuous thoughts that will result in spiritual degeneration. Wives and widows are not expected to bathe without wearing clothes (SP 173).

4.6.3 ETIQUETTE

It is expected that every person should be addressed conformably to his position and suitable to the time and place (SP 18). One is expected to enter the house through the front door and shall not take up residence at any place without the owner’s permission (SP 33). A guest should not impose himself on his host. Respect for sadhus is shown by touching part of the their body or feet (SP 69). Resting of one foot on a thigh or binding of the knee with a cloth is considered bad manners (SP 70).

4.6.4 HABIT

Daily ablutions must be performed after rising in the morning (SP 49). One’s teeth should be cleaned, the face washed, a bath taken before the wearing of clean clothes (SP 50). The devotee is expected to sit down in a clean place (SP 51). The morning prayers are to be said with a picture of the Lord (SP 52 and 53).

There are also detailed orders for morning prayers, worldly affairs of work etc, evening visit to temples and night prayers before retiring to bed. At the various mandirs visited by the writer the sadhus sing kirtans, read scripture and chant before going to bed. All this has to be made habitual in order to make it easier and natural.
4.6.5 PENANCE

Proper penance should be performed according to ones' ability (SP 92). Self praise is not expected (SP 37). Those who commit sin and know it have the scope of correcting them or overcoming them.

4.6.6 WELL BEING OF OTHERS

The wise should never disregard subordinates either in status or in position (financial) nor insult anybody. One should give a hearing to all and utilize even the meaningful utterances of children.

One can conquer his friends and equals by good nature and confidence and win over his relatives by respect for them, women and servants in love for them and giving charity to them. There should also be sympathy towards the disabled (not to be treated as inferior nor their feelings hurt). No injury should be done to others.

The writer was present in Gandhinagar, near Ahemadabad, during the visit of Pramukh Swami when he visited a school, for the deaf and dumb, to give them his blessings. This act reflected his sympathy for their disability.

Devotees should be wary of anti-social elements. Satsangis should never associate themselves with the wicked, thieves and vicious persons, heretics or those who are in illicit love or those who are engaged in dishonest occupations (SP 27). An old saying is referred to: "A person is known by the company he or she keeps". The social status and position status of a person will be determined by types of associations. Ungrateful persons should be avoided (SP 26). Associations should be with men of holy living (SP 36). The Vachanamrit states,

"One should develop contact with a sadhu and should avoid the wicked. It is only the influence of a sadhu that the ego and attachment towards the body and the relatives of the physical body dissolve, and a deep attachment towards God develops which
consolidates an unflinching devotion to God in one’s heart” (Gadhada-1-18-8).

Moreover,

"‘The ego of one’s own self is the source of all evils. If that is discarded, all evils fritter away. And the great redeeming virtue of believing and behaving as Atma separate form the body, if imbibed perfectly bring’s all other virtues in its wake’” (Vachanamrit, Gadhada-1-18-8).

Sinful acts in eager desire to obtain a woman or wealth should not be carried under the cloak of devotion and religions knowledge (SP 28).

Servants should be given their due respect. When giving charity to the poor, the helper should not feel that he is doing a great obligation to the person whom he helps. It must emanate out of love, not out of compassion.

On the occurrence of any disaster caused by the elements or where any human calamity or sickness takes place one should render assistance accordingly. From the time of Swaminarayan and even today the sampradaya is able to call up at very short notice, all its resources during times of famine, drought, flooding and any other emergencies.

Respect for a religious preceptor is expected at all times and the devotee should not enter into a controversial discussion with the guru and should serve him by providing for him, according to one’s means, with such things as food, money and clothes (SP 71).

4.6.7 MEN-WOMEN RELATIONS

There are strict rules in regard to association with females. Males do not listen to discussions on religious knowledge from women (SP 34). On occasions of religious festivals or on ordinary days neither men nor women who go to the temples shall touch any member of the opposite sex in the temple (SP 40). Separate seating is provided for women at the temples, at festivals and in some cases women may conduct a satsang separate from male devotees or only men conduct the satsang.
Dress must be modest, men and women must conduct themselves modestly.

A devotee and his wife do not engage in sexual activity when she is ritually impure or during the religious fasting of Ekadashi, new moon day or on the birthday of Swaminarayan.

4.6.8 CONDUCT

Abusive words and falsehood should not be resorted to, nor false accusations for the sake of furthering one's own interest (SP 20). The following are forbidden: adultery, use of tobacco, gambling, drinking and bribes and taking of intoxicating drugs or hemp (SP 86 and 18).

While confirming that alcohol consumption was illegal in the state of Gujarat a sadhu stated,

'Alcohol, drugs and gambling are addictive. A single taste of any of these vices drives one to greed and a desire for more.' Williams states,

"Much of the preaching in the villages includes a call to give up drugs and alcohol which waste meagre resources and bring hardships and destitution to the families and villages" (Williams, 1984:138).

Trust should not be violated nor theft even if stealing from the rich to give to the poor (SP 37 and 17). It is also stated that one should never do any act rashly or be slow in a religious duty (SP 36). Knowledge received should be imparted or disseminated (SP 36). Swaminarayan states,

"One who does not behave, he even in spite of his knowledge of the four Vedas, six Darshan Shastras, eighteen Puranas and the Mahabharat, the Ramayana etc, would not
4.6.9 NON-VIOLENCE

Swaminarayan taught that non-violence issues from a calm mind. Devotees are therefore to avoid the anger and hatred that gives rise to violence. Swaminarayan states,

"'I feel that one who hurts a devotee of God either by speech or mind, suffers great agonies'" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada-11-41-440).

During his time Swaminarayan promoted non-killing sacrifices. Killing and use of harmful words, use of weapons through anger or any other means should be avoided at all costs (SP16). One should not kill any creature, a mouse, a bug or any minute insect (SP11). Ahimsa (non-violence) is the highest of all religious duties. Human killing is totally prohibited nor is suicide permitted (SP13). A devotee affirmed,

'Hindus are not permitted to kill animals or birds, cook and place the meat at a prayer. We are forbidden from taking another life, be it insect, bird, animal or human. God alone gives that precious life and we have no right whatsoever to destroy it. It is a despicable sin. To merely fill our guts is shameful. We were meant to be vegetarians, herbivorous, not carnivorous. Our teeth, digestive systems and other organs are not designed for meat.'

When prompted further on the question of plants also having life he replied,

'Yes, some plants have a form of life, but not the same way as animals. Also, while the road to perfection is long and difficult, the mastering of a few virtues will take one there by leaps and bounds. Do not kill. But, even loftier than this is not to injure in thought, word and deed. Ahimsa is one of the highest of virtues. We must also avoid the fault-finding habit. We should be humble and always return good for evil.' Atmaswarupdas Swami explained,
In the Vachanamrit, Sarangpur, Section II, it is explained very well, how one should follow him through word mind and deed. But, at a certain time, you can reject his word. For example, Dadar Khachar was asked to chop off the head of a female devotee caught stealing. When Dadar Khachar saw the woman chanting the name of Lord Swaminarayan he came back to Lord Swaminarayan saying that he could not bring himself to hurt a devotee of God.

**4.6.10 CONCEPT OF A GOOD-PERSON**

The Shikshapatri implies in its precepts that a good person is one who is charitable, obliging, tolerant, hospitable even to any enemy, does not indulge in pride or self-praise (SP 57), speaks pleasantly without criticizing the deeds of others (SP 26), speaks the truth (SP 20), practices ahimsa (SP 26), refrains from discussions on the opposite sex unless necessary (SP 18), respect elders (SP 69 and 70) and adopts a brotherly attitude to relatives (SP 68). One has to observe the teachings of the scriptures and one has to be good and remain good.

Self-restraint is the very essence of human personality. Desai relates this aspect of the Shikshapatri to,

".... the Bhagvad Gita where it is said that to lose one’s prestige and fame is worse than death" (Desai, 1970:55).

Physical, moral and intellectual strength is important since it enables one to maintain one’s respect and this strength needs to be cultivated (Desai, 1970:35).

**4.7 ETHICS OF VIÑEŠH DHARMA**

Jnanpurushdas Swami explained,
‘The unique feature of the Shikshapatri is that Lord Swaminarayan has separated different categories or classes of people. This is different from sanatana dharma - common duties for all persons, for example, vegetarian eating is for all or giving part of one’s earnings to the mandir is common to all except of course the sadhus who are unable to give anything.’

In the Shikshapatri vishesh dharma is according to ashramas of brahmacharis, grihasthas and sadhus according to varnashramas of brahmins. In the Shikshapatri the two ashramas of brahmacharya and grihastharama are recognized. In the main, the focus is on the attitude to women although the aspects of knowledge, modesty and respect are also referred to.

4.7.1 VISESH DHARMA OF THE BRAHMACHARYA

The way of life of a brahmacharya is clearly spelt out in the prescriptions of the Shikshapatri. A brahmacharya has to reside at a guru’s place for acquiring knowledge, to study the Vedas, to observe celibacy (SP 178 and SP 179), his head is clean shaven and he keeps a small bunch of hair. In his discussion on this aspect of the Shikshapatri, Desai, confirms that Chapter 11 of Manu Smriti is devoted to the description of vishesh dharma of the brahmacharya in respect of virtues (Desai, 1970:62).

4.7.1.2 KNOWLEDGE

Desai links his interpretation of knowledge to that mentioned in the Shikshapatri. He relates to another text,

"The Mahabharat (12-329-3) says that there is no sense of vision as that of knowledge. Vidya brings salvation, according to the Vishnupurana (1-19-41)"

Knowledge gives wisdom about the soul and also the Smriti and Shruti give knowledge of dharma and adharma. Vrata is that vidya which gives one knowledge of the good and the bad of artha and anartha (including the sense of money, domestication of animals, agriculture and commerce). The Danda-Niti is a text which deals with the knowledge of the moral and immoral (Desai, 1970:62).

4.7.1.3 CONTROL OF THE SENSES

The role of the senses is clearly stated in the Shikshapatri. Followers are reminded to reduce their desire for enjoyment (SP192). Non-control of the senses affects the intellect. To overfeed one's self, for example, is to spoil one's health and decrease one's life. Dr Swami, in one of his discourses stated,

'More people have died from over eating than undereating' (Sept 1991).

4.7.1.4 CELIBACY

A brahmachari, the Shikshapatri states, should stay away from women (SP 179). Desai's comments on celibacy are appropriate,

".... in the Mahabharata where it is mentioned as the best means for observing knowledge of Brahmin, Veda and Ishwar"
(Desai; 1970: 63).

The characteristics of the brahmacharya are: To never take interest in hearing words of women, never to talk much about women, never to observe her with steadfast gaze, never to talk with her alone, never to think of possessing her, never to decide about getting her and never to have bodily contact with her. Swaminarayan advises,

"'Again, among the devotees either the grihasthas (householders) or the renunciates attracted by the charms of a beautiful women or an attractive apparel ... cannot be said
to possess spiritual wisdom" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada -1-28-43).

Desai elaborates further on the role of the brahmachari as laid down in the Shikshapatri by relating to the Bhagavad Gita, which advises that kama (desire) krodha (anger and wrath), and lobha (acquisition or the desire for more and more) are gates to Hell and are destructive of soul-realization and the good of the soul and must be discarded (Desai, 1970:64).

Desai goes on further to say that according to Aristotle, habit is the second nature of human persons. Evil should be discarded since the formation of habits amount to character formation, good habits must always be formed. The Manu Smriti also mentions that pain giving evil habits are to be discarded with efforts. Habits that result from desire are drinking, fighting, fault-finding, unnecessary movement, hunting, gambling and the company of women (Desai, 1970:64).

The main function of the brahmachari is made clear in the Shikshapatri and scriptures (SP 185). Naishestik brahmacharis of the Swaminaraya sampradaya accept the vow of celibacy for the whole of their life. They accept that they shall not knowingly either touch or converse with or look at women (SP 175). They should maintain a decorum by not using scents, nor anoint the body with oil, not carry weapons. They should also subdue the sense of taste (SP 183). They should never talk or hear others talking about women and they shall not perform their ablutions at places frequented by women (SP 176).

The presence of women is likely to distract one’s concentration in the performance of worship. Those following the celibate path are not expected to look at the pictures or wooden images of women except that of a Goddess (SP 177). They shall not knowingly look even at animals engaged in sexual acts (SP 178). Men in the guise of women are to be avoided (SP 185) nor shall they sing the praises of God for the pleasure of being heard by women (SP 179). This is necessary, for the praises of God are sung for its own sake and never as a means of some other end. Food served by women is unacceptable to them (SP 184). Women who make advances are kept off by expostulating with them.
or by reproachment (SP 181).

Sadhus shall pay no attention to the command of even their own spiritual preceptor if it is likely to lead them to breach the vow of chastity. They shall continue steadfast, contented and humble minded (SP 180). Swaminarayan states,

"'And if I summon you to a place where I have been addressing women and order you sit along with Me to enjoy My Darshan, you should not obey such orders of Mine immediately under some pretext’" (Vachanamrit, Loya -6-261).

4.7.1.5 MODESTY AND PRIDE IN THE SHIKSHAPATRI

However, learned one may be and whatever the vista of knowledge he possesses, if one has no modesty it is of no value (SP 193). Modesty is the very foundation of ethics or the source of morality (Desai, 1970:71).

However, in spite of the rigid rules regarding women, Swaminarayan has recognized exceptions. In cases where their own lives or those of women are in jeopardy they can protect themselves or the women by touching or talking to them (SP 182).

The Shikshapatri advises that pride resulting from study, from wealth, from family are all highly destructive. They are like the pride of a bad person engrossed in the world. Even the pride about spiritual attainment leads one to believe as if one is everything and thus brings about one’s fall. Pride, in whatever form, cuts at the root of discrimination and this leads one to do that which invites destruction (SP 57).

4.7.1.6 CONQUEST OF EMOTIONS

Emotions according to Desai, are an integral part of one’s conduct (SP 188). He links this with the Ramayana in which it is mentioned that there is no enemy like sorrow for sorrow ends patience, destroys the teachings received and destroys everything. Extreme joy and attachment to worldly possessions should be avoided. Attachments while
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bringing pleasure so long as they last, are painful because all attachments presuppose a separation at some stage. It is mentioned further that all attachments are in the end destructible, all attachments mean a fall, all unions and associations are meant to bring separation and the life ends in death (Desai, 1970:72).

4.7.1.7 RESPECT

Brahmacharis shall serve their spiritual teachers (SP 185). The brahmacharya is the period of life where one has to develop all good virtues and learn at the feet of the guru.

4.7.2 VISESH DHARMA OF GRIHASTHARAMA

It is the grihasthrami who maintains the brahmachari, the vanaprastha and the sanyasa. A devotee commented,

'Domestic virtue is important. The duties of a householder, who earns money and brings home an income, are just as important as those of an ascetic. It is he who supports the renunciate, the students and the needy. He who lives virtuously as a householder, is sure to make progress towards God. A home in which love and virtue abound is truly a heaven on earth.'

Grihastharama is not merely a period for married existence and it is not merely regarded as a union providing for the sensuous satisfaction of a person. There should be religious well being brought about by the performance of yajnas and other rituals and the spiritual elevation brought about by the systematic study of the Vedas. Five vows provide for the summary of the teachings meant to help the householder to live a disciplined life in the world. These vows are: not to eat meat, not to take intoxicants, not to commit adultery, not to steal and not to defile oneself or others (ahimsa).

The initiation of a lay member of the sect does not require renunciation of the world. The ritual initiation is simple. The devotee chants the formula,
"I give over to Swaminarayan my mind, body, wealth and sins of the previous birth"
(Williams, 1984:136).

Williams affirms,

"Devotees often comment that at long last, after a cycle of rebirths, they are fortunate to have been born in circumstances that permit them to gain release by becoming devotees of Swaminarayan"
(Williams, 1984:142).

Thus, they dare not squander this opportunity. They should devote themselves to Swaminarayan and live the disciplined life of a householder to gain release.

4.7.2.1 MARITAL RELATIONS

Marriage is regarded as a pure and necessary relationship. Desai refers to Manusmiriti (9 - 28), who states that the procreation of children, religious deeds, service, noblest love cannot be attained unless one marries (Desai, 1970:75). Marriage is also sanctioned in the Shikshapatri (SP 159).

Husband and wife should be engaged in all purusharthas of dharma, artha, kama and moksha (SP 206). Monogamy is prescribed and those homes in which the women are respected become the abode of Gods. A wife must engage herself in home economy, purity of body and things, service to husband, to devas, cooking and general household duties.

4.7.2.2 WORSHIP AND RITUAL

Performing sandhya, that is, performing at the time of the meeting of day and night,
is a time for repentance that wipes out the evil effects of actions performed during the
day due to ignorance and innocence. Devotees should also utter the japa (a mantra),
perform homa (fire-worship), worship of Gods, show hospitality to guests and perform
vishwadew.\textsuperscript{21}

Although the Swaminarayan sampradaya is essentially a Vaishnava sect, not only is
Shaiva (Shiva) worship tolerated, it is also prescribed in the Shikshapatri. The writer
was present at the consecration ceremony at the Mayfair temple, Johannesburg (Sept
1991) when one of murthis was that of the Shiva-linga.

Prayers and worship are offered in the morning (sunrise), noon, evening (with arthi
ceremony) are a daily ritual.

Recognition is also given to certain holy days and holy months when certain rituals are
expected to be performed. The Shikshapatri states,

"'Every year in the month of Shravana, my following shall perform cheerfully, the
worship of Shiva with Bili leaves'" (SP 149).

4.7.2.3 \hspace{0.5em} FASTS

The due performance of fasts on the eleventh days is the principle and shall be affected
according to the scriptures and one's means. Ekadashi\textsuperscript{22} will lead to the attainment of
the desired objects (SP148).

Further practical advice is given against accepting food from others or on the road for
they would be deprived of religious merits (SP151). Followers should also make offerings
to Gods and to the spirits of the departed ancestors according to their ability (SP135).

4.7.2.4 \hspace{0.5em} HOSPITALITY

In Hindu ethics the guest is always honoured, respected and well treated. From the
writer's own experience overseas in India and in South Africa the writer was always enamoured with the kind of hospitality meted out to him. The Shikshapatri accordingly states that when a guest has arrived at a house, he should be honoured and served with food and other things according to one's ability (SP 138).

4.7.2.5 FAMILY AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

A husband should maintain his old parents, his devoted wife, young children, his guru, brahmins and other guests. It is the duty of disciples as long as they live and according to their ability to honour with faithful attention their father, mother, spiritual preceptor and the deceased (SP139).

4.7.2.6 RELATIONS WITH WOMEN

Sexual relations are restricted to one's wife only. Consequently, male followers shall never touch widows unless they are close relations (SP135). Men are not expected to remain alone in a private place with a youthful mother, sister or daughter, except in a time of distress nor shall a wife be given away to another man even in charity (SP136).

4.7.2.7 CONDUCT IN THE SCRIPTURES

In times of famine or oppression by their rulers followers should quit (even their own native country) and emigrate to another and live their happily (SP 153 and 154). The following are relevant,

"'Again one should leave such a place where law and order are in chaos and murders are committed or riots spring up, as such atmosphere vitiates better conditions of time. One should not insist on remaining there and suffering injuries'" (Vachanamrit, Loya-6-262).

When the writer discussed with Atmaswarupdas Swami the emigration of Swmainarayan devotees from Uganda to the United Kingdom he explained,
'It was a common feeling among the devotees (from Uganda) that it was the grace of Swaminarayan that sustained them. Some sadhus, here in India, are from those families who sought refuge in the United Kingdom. There are some who through the "grace" of Idi Amin settled overseas. Lord Cunningham mentions this in the book, Life and Philosophy of Swaminarayan.'

4.7.2.8 MONEY, MONETARY RELATIONS AND TRANSACTIONS

4.7.2.8.1 EARNING MONEY

Money helps to maintain the family and enable one to practice religion (rituals) more effectively. However, even though one may be poor, one must maintain oneself only by legitimate and morally earned money. Williams states,

"Certainly many members in India and abroad have become successful businessmen and industrialists, and they invariably attribute this success to the 'grace of Swaminarayan'" (Williams, 1984:140).

The religious discourses in the Shikshapatri contains practical rules for conduct of business affairs. The devotee is expected to keep a daily account of income and expenditure in record books which are blessed in the temple at the beginning of the New Year (SP 145). As an employer, he must pay his employees just wages agreed upon (SP 143 and 144). He must also provide for them generously (SP 67). They are not to be exploited and wages agreed upon shall be paid in full (SP 152).

One should cut one's coat according to one's cloth. One should also guard against extravagance which ultimately leads to degradation. Money should be saved (SP 141). If one's expenses exceed income in special circumstances like sickness, marriage etc, money should be borrowed from other householders and this should not be kept a secret nor shall the repayment (of a debt) be kept a secret (SP 152). However, neither money
nor ornaments nor clothes nor utensils should be borrowed from the mandir (SP 150).

Dealings in land and money matters shall never be transacted with even a son or friend without a deed signed by witnesses (SP 143). Further, if money is given or received in the matter of a betrothal it should be in writing (no verbal) and attested by proper witnesses who are respected in the community (SP 144).

Each person is to do his assigned task with careful deliberation (SP 66). This discipline encourages good order in business and financial affairs.

Devotees boast that followers of Swaminarayan have a reputation for honesty in business and financial affairs which attract new business. Becoming a member of the sect also establishes valuable associations because there is a tendency to patronize the business of fellow members.

The Swaminarayan religion praises the world renouncing ascetic, allows for the acquisition of wealth and prudent use of capital is justified and as directly willed by God. Success, then, is viewed as a result of his grace. However, the emphasis is on the appropriate acquisition and use of worldly goods. Consequently, devotees are warned,

"Accumulation of wealth is a great danger, distribution of wealth is a blessing" (Desai, 1970:14). Jnanpurushadas Swami commented,

‘By following the rules of business and legal transactions that is how people are able to progress. Not only that, they don’t eat meat, they don’t have any addictions, any luxuries, therefore they can save a lot of money as well’.

4.7.2.8.2 OCCUPATION

It is only a person who is engaged in work that is entitled to the four purusharthas of dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Nothing is difficult for one who uses his intelligence, has the power of strength and makes sincere endeavour. A householder has to maintain
the family in some or other occupation. Every person should, according to his ability, be involved in some occupation suitable to his caste or religious order (SP 140). Williams affirms,

"It is evident that Swaminarayan followers are hard working and efficient and do not squander their profits, they invest capital in improvement and enlargements of their farms and business" (Williams, 1984:141).

Those who live by agriculture shall not castrate a bull (SP 140). Fathers and others are expected to keep cows and other animals only if they are sure of attending to their proper treatment and give them enough fodder and water (SP 142). Apart from these instructions given in regard to the domestication of animals,

"A cow is looked upon as pure and auspicious" (Desai, 1970:92).

The Shikshapatri lays down that followers shall assign one tenth of their grain, money etc acquired from their occupation. The poor shall assign whatever they can afford (SP 147).

4.7.2.8.3 WEALTHY MALE HOUSEHOLDERS

Charity should not be given for the wrong reasons, for flattery, for example. Wealthy householders should perform sacrifices in honour of Vishnu (no animals should be killed). Narainmuni Swami commented,

‘Yajnas, which is an aspect of non-violence, is mentioned in the Vedas.’
Brahmins and sadhus should be fed on festival days at sacred places of pilgrimage (SP155). They should celebrate the great festivals of God in the temples and should distribute gifts to the brahmins (SP150).

It is common practice for wealthy business to contribute towards the costs of a festival which feeds thousands of people over festival days.

4.7.2.9 GOVERNMENT LEADERS AND ACHARYAS

The code of conduct for leaders is clearly laid down in the Shikshapatri. People in power should live a righteous life, treat their subjects like members of their own family and should make an honest attempt to consolidate morality and religion in their constituencies (SP 157).

Among the grihasthramis there are two special orders. One is that of king (now replaced by government leaders) and the other is that of the head of religion, known in the Swaminarayan sect as acharya or spiritual teacher or guide.

4.7.2.9.1 PRAMUKH SWAMI

Pramukh (president) Swami is the guru of the Akshar Purshottam Sanstha. Jnanpurushdas Swami clarified the present position of the present guru, Pramukh Swami,

'The system of acharayas has been done away with in the new Movement. Acharya also means teacher. Lord Swaminarayan appointed acharayas in Ahmedabad and Vartal just to look after the administration of the new sampradaya as trustees. Nowhere in the Shikshapatri it is said that you will attain liberation through them. Liberation will only come through a saint, who has qualities of redemptive attributes. He could also be a householder, who comes to the rescue of people. Pramukh Swami today is both the administrative head (acharya) and the akshar guru.'
On the question of Pramukh Swami being the very embodiment of the Shikshapatri Atmaswarupdas Swami commented,

'You see, in the Vachanamrit he has revealed that he was fully manifest in this earth through akshar, in other words through a gunatit guru. In the Shikshapatri he says that his words are his form. So the Shikshapatri is also the form of Swaminarayan. Pramukh Swami is identical to Shikshapatri. Lord Swaminarayan who is puna Purushottam, fully fledged Purushottam, came to earth and he also brought along akshar with him to set an example in society. Akshar his choicest devotee will be eternally in his service in the divine abode akshardham. Akshar is Pramukh Swami following the Shikshapatri in toto and that is why people get the inspiration to follow the Shikshapatri. Albert Schweitzer said that to promote morality exemplification was the best way. He then corrected himself by stating that exemplification was the only way. In that sense if there is akshar or a gunatit saint following the ethical precepts he is an inspiration. Religion, Swaminarayan said was the practise of morals.' Atmaswarupdas added,

'Guru Pramukh Swami does not have to observe all the rules yet he is doing it for the benefit of disciples. When he was in Nairobi in 1980, when asked why he as the spiritual head had to observe the rules. Swamiji replied that he had to do it for the benefit of the devotees.'

When Pramukh Swami discussed his understanding of his identification with akshar, he stated,

"His aim is to be aware at every movement of the requirements of the followers. The commands of Swaminarayan, even the smallest of the requirements of the Shikshapatri are observed"
(Williams, 1984:75).

It is not surprising that Pramukh Swami is regarded by members as the first disciple,
most strict in his observances of the commandments, most active in propagation among of the children, the best interpreter of the meaning of the scriptures and most effective in erradicating the ignorance that separates people from God. In short, he is the devotee who exemplifies all the ideals of the religion. He has totally renounced the world, so that he can be completely devoted to God (Williams, 1984:81).

In respect of Government leaders, ministers etc. it is prescribed that subjects (the people) should be governed in accordance with the law of the land and that laid down by the Dharmashastras and shall protect them as if they were their children (SP157). The Shikshapatri makes provision for proper legal proceedings when punishment is meted out (SP 158).

The writer met ministers who serve the State of Gujarat and who were also members of the sampradaya. However, it is evident from discussions with sadhus that the Movement is not enamoured with the way politicians sometimes conduct themselves in India. Dr Swami is on record as stating,

‘We (the sampradaya) have to undo what the politicians have done.’

4.7.2.10 WOMEN

A chaste woman shall not look at the antics of a buffoon, nor associate with immodest women (SP161). Moreover, a chaste woman does not allow her naval, thighs or breasts to be seen by males, nor does she remain without the upper garment (SP16). Wives should honour their husbands as if they were Gods and never offend them with improper language though they be diseased, indigent or impotent (SP159). For wives, whose husbands are away (for whatever reasons) shall not wear ornaments nor fine clothes nor shall she frequent other people’s houses nor laugh nor feast with other women (SP102). Women should be wary of other men (SP166).
They shall live under control of their father or other male members of their family and never in independence (SP163). They shall never give away to others the money required for their own support and they may give away only that which is in excess (SP167). They are expected to eat one meal a day and sleep on the ground and undertake fasts (SP166). They shall never dress like married women nor like female ascetics nor like mendicants nor in any unbecoming attire (SP169). They shall never join in the frolics practised at the Holy festivals nor shall they put on ornaments or finely woven clothes of cotton or metal threads (SP172). They shall neither touch a woman who has been guilty of procuring abortion (SP170).

When questioned on the Movement’s view on abortion Atmaswarupdas Swami stated, ‘We have no objection to abortions, but only when the life of a mother is at stake. In India there is a tendency that if it is a female child the parents would like to get rid of the child, This could happen repeatedly.’

If an infant male child touches a widow there is no blame attached. While touch is forbidden, there are exceptions, especially if a widow is compelled to talk out of necessity to an old man (SP165). Widows are not expected to touch at any time any men except their nearest relations and when younger, they shall never engage, without necessity, in conversation with younger men (SP164). They shall never receive any instructions of any kind from any men except their nearest relations (SP166). They are not only barred from any sex-relations, they shall also never look at animals engaged in sexual acts (SP168) nor shall they converse or hear anything on the subject of love of the male sex (SP170). But they shall serve Lord Krishna with minds intent on Him as their only husband (SP163).

During Lord Swaminarayan’s time he encouraged young widows, who could not follow the path of chastity, to remarry. The conduct of other widows, while restrictive, permitted them a respected and secure place in the social order (SP163 and 74).
When questioned on the reasons for these restrictive rules, Jnanpurushdas Swami explained,

'All this was done to improve the life of widows. Lord Swaminarayan elevated them to great positions since they lost their husbands (and everything). A husband is everything in Indian tradition. The main focus and object should now be God, worshipping only God, channelling her life towards God, making her life pure as well. If she eats a lot and indulges in material objects then she is bound to get some attraction from other males and therefore she should dress simply. She can remarry. There is no question about it. She may also eat more than one meal a day. In the time of Lord Swaminarayan he paid money to let widows remarry. It was a revolutionary step at the time. At that time widows were degraded. Even in the Koran this is mentioned. No other social reformer has done what Lord Swaminarayan has done for the upliftment of women.'

Rules that enforce the separation of young males and females have the manifest function of protecting both men and women from sensual temptation, but devotees explain that the more important latent function is to protect women from exploitation by men. Williams affirms,

"Thus the regulation that ascetics must avoid contact with women functions to protect women from unscrupulous use of religious authority. The prohibition of concubinage, prostitution and adultery strengthens family ties which provide the main security for women. The argument is also advanced that the discipline for the householder makes him a good husband and father and results in improved economic and social security, for women members of the family" (Williams, 1984:144).
Women in the Movement have taken advantage of education and have entered the workforce and professions. Their newly developed skills are being used in the women’s work of the sect. They also provide the role models, as leaders, for other females.

However, women cannot exercise authority over men. A woman cannot address an assembly where men are present or are allowed to sit on the platform with men. No women are trustees nor do they serve on the managing committee of the major temples. Thus, all the wealth and institutions are effectively under the control of men. Women are not permitted to approach the ascetic leaders for advice or instruction. Williams states,

"... most accept the rationale that the prohibition is necessary to assist the ascetics to maintain their vows of chastity ...." (Williams, 1984:145).

Pramukh Swami is respected by women of the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha as the abode of God, and they press as close as they dare for darshan. If they have a problem it is conveyed via a male relative. Women receive what they consider to be the highest spiritual blessing only indirectly. A female devotee expressed this in the work of Williams when she said that women were spiritually close to God and when one had a problem, Pramukh Swami knew about it and gave the appropriate advice in the course of public lectures (Williams, 1984:145).

4.7.2.10.2 MENSTRUAL CYCLE

During the menstrual cycle women are excluded from the temple and daily worship for several days of the month.

4.7.2.10.3 BOYS AND GIRLS

There is, however, a certain amount of mingling between boys and girls. Separation is
mental and does not imply inferiority. However, Williams believes that there is,

"... some justification for the feeling that
women are separate and not equal in the ....
Movement"  (Williams, 1984:146).

4.7.2.11 CONCLUSION

In summary one could state that, in all, the householder extols the single virtues of hospitality, gratitude, self-restraint, love and good. The householder lives a life of dedication to his family and society. His wife is his helpmate in everything he does and children are his greatest treasures. He ought to be courteous in speech, does not lose his self-control and be free from envy. He should have a benevolent and hospitable disposition.

The grihasthrama is not to be regarded as the be all and end all of existence. It is only a step in the attainment of the highest good of life, namely, liberation or mukti. Consequently, the householder should not be so attached to his family that he neglects the end of self-realization.

4.7.3 VISESH DHARMA OF THE SADHUS

Sadhus are a specialized class brought up and recognized in the religious organisation set up by Swaminarayan. The writer spent a part of his time doing research work at Sarangpur, the training school for sadhus.

4.7.3.1 NIRLOBHA (CONTROL OF THE SENSES)

The pre-requisite of a sadhu is that he must control his senses and it is stated,

"Man has both internal and external enemies. For a man on the path of spiritual
realization there are no external enemies for him. But to remain in that path he must control his internal enemies which are more powerful and can bring ruin" (Desai, 1970:120).

Thus, all sadhus should subdue their internal enemies which are lust, anger, avarice (NIRLOBHIA), infatuation, pride and envy (SP185). Lord Swaminarayan warns,

"‘If one, who has renounced the world and has donned the robes of a sadhu cherishes the slightest affection for material objects, which are assets, he is denounced as totally sinful. He is like a mendicant before a millionaire’" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada-1-36-58).

4.7.3.1.1 NISWADA (INDIFFERENCE TO TASTE)

Sadhus eat from a wooden bowl. Eating has the purpose of nourishment. He eats to live, not live to eat, and consequently, it is also believed,

"Pure food promotes purity of mind and conduct" (Williams, 1984:132).

Onions and garlic, it is believed, excites the passions. Meat and meat eating products require the killing of animals and are very polluting. Foods prepared from milk, curds and coconut milk are pure. Foods prepared with water, rice, dhal and chappatis are eaten, separated from householders, in bowls. All food for the ascetic must be ritually pure so that it may be offered to God before the meal.

Fasting as during Ekadashi is an integral part of the discipline. Generally, during fasts, no food or water is taken. The sick and elderly are exempted from fasting. There are also additional voluntary fasts. Careful intake of food is a sign of the renunciation of the world. Moreover, fasting is a primary form of penance and those who are guilty of impure thoughts and conduct undertake fasts.
4.7.3.1.2 ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR

Sadhus are expected to be guileless and straightforward in their behaviour towards other sadhus and should patiently bear abusive language and even blows from evil minded persons and shall only wish them good (SP 200). This is logical because of the attitude to violence.

They shall not undertake the work of a go between, informer or spy. They shall purge themselves of all their selfishness and have no partiality in their relationships (SP 202).

4.7.3.1.3 NISHKAMA (CONTROL OF CARNAL DESIRE)

A life of celibacy is both physical and mental. Sadhus avoid eye contact with women. They are forbidden to look at or touch a picture or a statue of a woman. From the writer’s own observations, it was noted that, in Sarangpur (the training centre), magazines and periodicals were censored so that no representation of a woman remains at the temple. The exception, as mentioned earlier, are pictures and images of Goddesses which sadhus care for in the temples.

All sadhus are bound just like brahmacharis to avoid associations with women, or men who are fond of them (SP 188). So, too, are avoided men who are fond of men. They do not relax their disposition nor allow women to enter their abodes at any time (SP 190). From the writer’s observation, is it unlikely to happen, even accidentally.

Sadhus do not communicate or talk to women on the telephone. Women are kept away and not permitted to enter areas reserved for ascetics. The sacred scripture prohibits homosexual activity, masturbation and any form of sexual contact with animals. Ascetics must overcome sexual desire by mental discipline.

Sadhus do not perform religious rituals, such as marriages or sacrifices (yajnas) where it requires the participation of husband and wife. Sadhus should avoid creating mental images of women and avoid recalling previous experiences of sexual activity.
Thus, the ascetic avoids all those activities and situations that could lead to sexual arousal. Swaminarayan prohibited those things which were thought in his time to excite the passions. Therefore, ascetics do not take baths and do not allow their bodies to be pampered with oil massages. They avoid those foods (tamsic) which they believe arouse the passions. They have to be indifferent to taste (NISHWADA).

The five senses, it is believed, enmesh the individual in the world of flux (maya) so one who renounces the world must control all senses. Regulations also require the avoiding of the sweet smell of perfume or the comfort of a soft bed. Regulations regarding eating are thought to aid the ascetic in overcoming the desire for good tasting food.

The goal is to control the body and mind to such an extent that there will no longer be any sexual desire. The Dharmarit²⁴ is scathing in the sense that it describes a woman who attracts attention as made of bones, blood vessels, spittle blood, mucus and faeces. In all such a woman is everything else but attractive (Williams, 1984:131).

It is believed that the correct understanding of the nature of women that results in overcoming sexual desire is a major step towards the understanding of the nature of reality that leads to the renunciation of the world.

4.7.3.2 NISNEHA (NON-ATTACHMENT)

Sadhus sever all ties with the family since,

"..... family ties are amongst the strongest of human attachments and therefore never return home"

(Williams, 1984:132).

Swaminarayan concedes,

"Whenever I see this scar, it reminds me of the tree from which I fell into the pond at
Chhapiya, my birth place. I remember both the tree and the pond. It is very difficult to eradicate fully attachment either to one's birth place or to one's body'" (Vachanamrit Gadhada -1-37-59). However, Swaminarayan also states,

"'As for Me, I have no attachment to My relations'" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada -1-37-60).

A similar story, concerning Pramukh Swami, was given to the writer when he visited his birth place Chansed. Umedh Bhai, a childhood friend of Swami related the incident when Swami was asked by Yogiji Maharaj to visit the little village at the time of a religious ceremony. Pramukh Swami did not refuse but was seated in the car during the entire procession, his eyes closed and chanting all the time. This was done, presumably, not to display any attachment to his birth place.

4.7.3.2.1 VOW OF POVERTY

Swaminarayan sadhus live a disciplined life of holy poverty meant to protect them from greed and avarice. Attachment to money and material possessions is viewed as a great hinderance to spiritual development. Sadhus have nothing to do with money. Lay business managers administer the financial affairs in the temples of the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha but work under the direction of a leading ascetic of the temple. Thus some ascetics are able to control large assets, while at the same time, maintaining the ideal of personal poverty.

Sadhus are not involved in money transactions or dealings. The Shikshapatri is quite clear on this in that they shall neither lay by money themselves nor make others do so for them (SP189). Sadhus are regarded as men of God, have trust in God and not in money. They are not expected to take charge of any one's deposit (SP190).

4.7.3.2.2 DRESS

Their dress is different from that of gristhashis and brahmacharis. They wear saffron robes at all times (SP192). Thus, they dress moderately with two dhotis to wrap around
the lower body, two shoulder cloths, two under cloths to cover the genitals, one shawl, one turban, one cloth to filter water and a cloth for bedding. The ascetic also carries a puja cloth, pictures of the Gods, kum-kum and sandalwood paste powder, a U shaped wire for making the tilak mark on his forehead and a copy of the Shikshapatri. All these, he carries in a single dhoti cloth. He has a complete disregard for material possessions and luxuries. On the significance of the saffron robe Jnanpurushdas Swami explained,

'Even the flag of India is the colour of renunciation or tyag. Orange is also symbolic of sacrifice, just as white signifies peace and purity.'

4.7.3.2.3 TRAVEL AND COMPANY

Except, at a time of distress, they shall never go out at night alone, nor shall they travel to any place without a companion nor stay alone (SP191).

Generally, sadhus sleep on the floor or a modest bed unless they are ill or infirm. They ride on any convenience provided by householders or the temple. They use public transport, bus or train, but avoid contact with the opposite sex.

While the Shikshapatri advises against sleeping during the day, today it is a common practice for sadhus to sleep in the afternoons. Jnanpurushdas Swami explained,

'Now it is allowed. The reason for this rule was that during the old days there were no lights. Saints did not go out for evening discourses, did not participate in the various evening activities after dark. However, the main essence of the law must not be forgotten because it discouraged laziness and attachment to sleeping in the afternoon. These days, we sleep very late at night because of our spiritual tours. We also read till very late. We get up very early in the morning. People who work and sleep in the mandirs are also allowed the afternoon sleep.'

Sadhus are not permitted to travel alone. Jnanpurushdas Swami stated,
'If a saint travels alone, it is easy to get attracted to sensual pleasures. In this way that bit of independence is curtailed. Also, there is safety in numbers in that a sadhu could get sick or he may attempt to do harm to himself.'

4.7.3.3 NIRMANA (HUMBLENESS)

Humility is the hallmark of a sadhu. Williams states,

"Swaminarayan taught that pride is caused by attachment. Their ego is the source of many sins" (Williams, 1984:135).

Retaliation is prohibited in SP 201. Anger is a sign that the ego has not been controlled and anger leads to violence. The writer met a former sadhu who gave up the order after he had a quarrel with one of his fellow sadhus. However, he continued to be a staunch lay devotee doing his seva (duty).

It is also advised that pride should be avoided since it makes it impossible for an ascetic to accept with calmness the insults, abuse and injuries they often receive. Pride leads some ascetics to abandon their basic duties on the pretext that they have attained the state of liberation.

Humility is demonstrated by obedience and by acts of service to devotees. Tasks include the meanest tasks of cooking, cleaning, along with the tasks of temple priests, being a scholar and involvement in administration affairs. The words 'das' means servant. Swaminarayan taught that, in the past,

".... the great saints attained high spiritual status only when they overcame pride, offered humble service to others, and led a simple life. This remains the ideals of the ascetic life" (Williams, 1984:136).
4.7.3.3.1 WORSHIP, BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDE

The main task of life is oneness with the Lord and propagation of the name of the Lord, singing the songs of devotion to Him and narrating talks of His glory. Every minute must be dedicated in service of the Lord (SP193). Swaminarayan advises,

"There are four remedies to augment the potential force of bhakti - a sanctified place, temporal piousness, sanctified actions and the contact of a brahmanised saint" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada -1-29-45).

On the subject of gunas, Swaminarayan is explicit in the Vachanamrit,

"When the mind is under the influence of tamas and experiences store facility consciousness, one loses the facility to cognise the nature of thoughts or rather thoughts themselves. When sattva guna predominates awakened consciousness prevails which dispels undesirable thoughts. When rajas prevails consciousness turns opaque and undesirable thoughts carry their impact" (Gadhada -1-32-32).

The reason for satsang cannot be overemphazied. Swaminarayan states,

"Satsang which involves the contact of a Satpurush, listening to scriptural talks at his lotus feet, and meditational worship of God, is the only powerful Sadhana to erradicate the influence of gunas and resurgence of baneful thoughts arising from such influence" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada -11-50-455) and claims,

"I, therefore, increasingly engage myself in singing the praises of God and bid you likewise to engage in such divine activities but never for a moment feel that have over done it or simply satisfied with meditational worship" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada-1-20-41).

Swaminarayan praises his devotees in the Vachanamrit,

"When you were singing such kirtans, I was thinking only of such single minded
devotion to be offered to God” (Gadhada-1-20-41).

It is not surprising that many sadhus are accomplished musicians and singers of kirtans which are an important part of the programme at discourses, festivals and other occasions.

Swaminarayan promises,

"I would love only those..., offer devotion to God and observe the moral obligations laid down in our scriptures" (Vachanamrit, Loya-14-27).

While sadhus and devoted laymen perform the prescribed ritual of worship in the morning, usually privately in the rooms, in the case of Pramukh Swami the ritual becomes a public ceremony. The effect that this has on the devotees is tremendous.

Sadhus also travel to villages to preach and go on collection of alms (padhramani) and visit houses of followers. But Pramukh Swami’s visit and tours in India and abroad have special significance. For example, Pramukh Swami’s visit to the Mayfair temple in 1991, Johannesburg was of very special significance since he performed the installation ceremony of the idols (murthis) referred to as pranprathista.

4.7.3.3.2 ATTITUDE TO THE WORLD

Sadhus shall not indulge in any worldly tasks among themselves or hear it intentionally from others (SP 199). This has been introduced to develop detachment to the world.

At Sarangpur there is censorship not only of pictures of women but also newspapers. One of the teachers (sadhus) commented,

‘While the newspaper is not available in the library we do get the daily newspaper. But most do not read it. Yes, but in terms of Swaminarayan Bliss and other publications, saints who write articles, have to read widely to take in what goes on in the world to
4.7.3.4 TRAINING OF SADHUS

4.7.3.4.1 SADHAK STAGE

At the age of seventeen, the prescribed age, the yuvak (youth) is mature enough to take a decision for life. He has to get the written permission from his parents. A sadhak is anyone walking on a spiritual path.

The sadhak stage is the preliminary stage. No formal vows are taken, ordinary clothes are worn, but there is reduced contact with relatives, avoidance of the unnecessary contact with women and visiting of public places. They follow a regimen of fasting and avoid money and secular dramas. Some of the youths live in the temples and give full time voluntary service.

Sarangpur is the only training centre and as Vishudaswarupadas Swami put it to the writer,

‘Yes, the world is not here, it is a world on its own. When the youths are selected we do not insist on any educational background. We do not insist on anything at all. It is the person’s willingness that is important. He goes through a period of six to twelve months before he becomes a parshad. The saints (teachers) monitor the progress of the sadhak to see if he is ready enough and assist him in making the decision to become a sadhu or not. However, the final decision rests with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.’

Trainees engage themselves in numerous prescribed tasks. Vishudaswarupdas Swami affirmed,

‘The sadhaks are involved in a numbers of activities, they wake up early, attend three to five arthis, attend kirtan (singing classes), do seva (various duties of cleaning etc), attend classes for study and are present at the morning, midday and evening discourses.'
During the morning katha the main book discoursed upon is the Vachanamrit. This is read and explained. Discourses are sometimes given by Sant Swami, a very senior saint, who is the head of the Sarangpur temple.

The writer had the privilege of meeting Sant Swami. A sadhu commented,

'Sant Swami is regarded by us as having reached great spiritual heights and he is an inspiration to us all.'

Sadhaks write examinations every two weeks on aspects of the Vachanamrit. During the classes the meanings of the kirtans are discussed. Guidance is also given in every class on the practical points of a sadhu's life. Sadhaks have contact with their families as they are allowed occasional visits to their homes.

4.7.3.4.2 PARSHAD STAGE

This is also referred to as the bhagat stage. White cloths are worn and a disciplined life is observed as bhagats undertake the work and duties of the sadhus and performs all aspects of a sadhu's life. These trainees read scripture daily, especially the Vachanamrit and other Hindu books, such as the Bhagavata, Ramayana, the Bhagavat Gita, Upanishads, Gujarati literature and works on the guruparampara (episodes of the previous gurus of the Movement). Guidance is also given on how to progress spiritually. During the Sharavan month, once a year, parshads are sent to the villages to give discourses. A tradition, from Swaminarayan's time, they are sent out during the second week of January to beg for alms in the villages. Parshads are also taught to cook meals. Parshads also eat from a wooden bowl and follow the five vows of all sadhus as prescribed in the Shikshapatri and mentioned in the Satsangijivanam. They eat the same food as sadhus, that is, vegetables, rice, curries, sweet items and chappati. Seva of the physical nature comprises a variety of things. They make garlands, clean toilets, sweep the grounds, cut vegetables, learn how to clean the images but according to a sadhu, they are,
'Still not allowed where murthis are right inside the temple and every fifteen days their seva is changed.'

4.7.3.4.2.1 TRAINING

After the basic Hindu scriptures which is taught to give them an all round knowledge of Hinduism, they then learn Sanskrit. However, not all parshads are given diksha, but in one significant development, in 1981, and a breakaway from tradition and as one sadhu put it,

‘Vivekasagarswami, born a sudra, was given diksha after twenty years as a parshad. The son of a jeweller, he is an eloquent speaker. Of course, there were a few others who were also initiated by Pramukh Swami.’

Parshads are also taught English. Some trainees come from the remote part of Gujarat where the literacy level is low. Those sadhus from the United Kingdom and the United States generally come from a good educational background and are generally fluent in English. At the time of the writer’s visits it was intimated that the sadhus were studying some of the major religions of the world so as to make them more knowledgeable of these different religions. On the question of the status of trainees who could not manage the rigorous training period Vishudaswarupdas Swami revealed,

‘Not many have left. But we have advised some that it was better for them to be at home. Pramukh Swami does not make a person stay forcibly. He does all he can to help by helping the person who has left to settle down in life, arranges for his marriage, secures him a job etc.’

In a further discussion on the training of sadhus and on the question of any psychological evaluation of the initiate before it is decided that he is ready for sadhuship, Vishuddaswarupdas Swami stated,

‘Well, he should be pleased to attend discourses, pleased to do seva. We are able to see
who can make it and advise the person who is slackening. If the person continues to slacken without improvement, we wait for a few months after which, we must make sure that he improves. On rare occasions it does happen that an initiate does not improve and we are compelled to ask him to stay at home.’

Final initiation is at Pramukh Swami’s discretion. Williams affirms,

"Pramukh Swami says that he observes each person’s desire for the life of renunciation and decides when he is ready for final initiation" (Williams, 1984:97).

4.7.3.4.2.2 MUSIC

Music plays an important and relevant part in the development of a trainee and sadhu. Vishudaswarupdas explained,

‘The reasons for kirtan music is simple since it is a tradition from Lord Swaminarayan’s days. It is mentioned in the Bhagavatpurana that worshipping in this kalyug (this age) it is easiest to control the mind by kirtan bhakti, devotional songs.’

4.7.3.5 RELATIONSHIP OF SADHUS WITH HOUSEHOLDERS

Sadhus are not expected to go to the house of householders unless for the purpose of asking for alms or being present at an assembly (SP193). However, they reside at a householder’s residence when Pramukh Swami is visiting an area. The writer stayed at Gordon Patel’s place in Gandhinagar with a few sadhus during Swami’s visit there. Pramukh Swami himself stays at a householders’s place on his tours in India, overseas and during his South African visits.

The last words on the sadhus are important,
"The renounced ones have to observe the sacred rules prescribed for them and the householders should act accordingly ...., The renounced ones have to observe brahmacharya which prohibits adultery and also conjugal relations with their wife's on holy days" (Vachanamrit, Gadhada -1-35-56).
FOOTNOTES

1. Pages 2 - 20 serve largely as a background to Swaminarayan ethics.

2. Discretion to identify atman as separate from the body. Jnana also consists of discriminating between the nature of the individual soul (jiva) and the external world (maya) and also discriminating rightly between the individual soul and the Supreme Being.

3. The conception of vairagya is characteristic of the sampradaya and does not consist of renouncing the world completely and turning ascetic. However, the Lord is the object of the craving. That consists of real variagya.

4. "A devotee must fulfil his moral obligations to attain akshar" (Atmaswarupdas Swami).

5. Vision of God.

6. Sikhari mandir - generally these temples have images of Swaminarayan, Krishna and Radha, Ghanashyam, several pictures depicting guruparampara from Gunatitanand Swami to Pramukh Swami. Some have Hanuman and Ganapathi (Shiva-linga is in the Ganapathi shrine).
   Hari mandir - ascetics need not be in residence in these temples which have large pictures of the deities. Temples are structured with stairs going up. This is symbolic for worshippers who enter the temples, after removing their shoes, in that their walking up is considered a spiritual ascent.

7. The images are dressed in clothing of the finest design. Ornaments of gold and costly jewels adorn the images. Special festivals and seasons require specific dress. All this to the writer was an impressively beautiful sight.
8. This singing takes the form of the arthi ceremony five times a day.

9. Twice born - are those who have received the sacred thread and thus having been born again.

10. Tulsimala - this necklace and upright mark are for Vaishnava followers. Householders do not wear malas as the twice born.


12. Kumkum - a powder which married women use for putting a mark on their foreheads.

13. The writer had occasion to visit Chansed, the birth place of Guru Pramukh Swami. The house is considered by the Movement as a sacred place.

14. Large festivals called Samaiyas, celebrated from time to time, draw very huge crowds. The writer was present at a festival in Dadar, Bombay - May, 1991.

15. The writer was part of one of the birthday celebrations of Swaminarayan held by the Durban group of the Movement. As is common practice, the finest foods were offered and devotees who chanted the Swaminarayan mantra sang devotional songs and listened to discourses. A small image was placed in a decorated cradle and at the time of the birth (of Sahajanand) the rocking of the cradle began. Birth of Hanuman - this is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the bright half of the same month of Swaminarayan’s birth. Devotees offer a special item of food at Hanuman shrines.

16. Sharavana is a very holy month. The birthday of Krishna is Janmasthami.

17. Shraadha ceremony - muktas and heroes of the past are remembered and honoured. Diwali - the festival of lights to celebrate Rama’s return from exile. It is celebrated
during Ashwina (Oct - Nov).

Annakut - this occasion is on New Year's Day and is also a day of thanksgiving. An elaborate display of food is also part of the observance. Prasad (sanctified food) is partaken by everyone who visits the temple. Devotees also gather at temples for darshan to begin the New Year. The arthi ceremony is performed, sadhus are greeted, discourses given and prasad distributed.

Devoothi - the end of Monsoon means the change of season. Since Monsoon is a period of rest Devoothi marks the celebration of the return to activity. The birthdays of each guru in guruparampara is also celebrated with a lot of vigour.

18. The writer together with Ishwarcharan Swami visited a dentist in Ahemadabad. The dentist was a devotee of the Movement.

19. Dadar Khachar was one of the great devotees of Swaminarayan mentioned in the Vachanamrit.

20. Vishesh dharma - special duties for different classes.

21. Vishwadew - this is a ritual in which are abridged the five mantras - yajnas.

22. Ekadashi - mentioned earlier by the writer, fasting during the eleventh day of the bright half and of the dark half of the month.

23. Purnima Dave, a female devotee, is a respected authoress on the teachings of the movement.

24. Dharmarit - book of rules prescribing conduct for sadhus only.
CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 INTERPRETATION

5.1.1 INTRODUCTION

The PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHOD used in this dissertation has attempted to examine the extent to which the lifestyles and religious practices of Swaminarayan adherents are permeated by the injunctions in ethical texts and has analyzed the ethical texts vis-a-vis the ethical life of the Movement. In this respect, therefore, the writer attempted at all times to "truly get to know the other" (Kruger, 1982:45).

By focusing on INTENTIONALITY and ESSENCE an attempt was made to account for the devotees experience of their world (both physical and non-physical aspects). The Phenomenological method also attempted to reach the Essence by examining the various experiences and to see clearly and describe adequately how Swaminarayan followers experience their own world.

EPOCHE has made it possible for the writer to put into 'brackets' his personal religious beliefs, prejudices and preconceptions. In this way the writer was able to be an attentive participant in the religious rites, rituals, pilgrimages, festivals and various other activities of the Movement. Insight into the ethical practices of the Movement was gained through this approach. Phenomena were allowed 'to speak for themselves' and helped to elucidate the hermeneutical concepts of BHAKTI, KARMA AND MOKSHA. As interpretive tools and aids, these concepts, guided the writer in understanding the religious phenomena of the sampradaya.

The main ethical text of the Movement, the SHIKSHAPATRI focuses on the basic teachings of Swaminarayan as it affects the daily life of the Movement. Rules are prescribed for different categories or classes of people and there are rules that are to
be observed by all of the members of the sampradaya. The VACHANAMRIT⁴, a book of discourses, complements the norms outlined in the Shikshapatri and the Vachanamrit is regarded as the quintessence of most of the Classical Hindu texts (Dave, 1974:196).

5.2 HISTORICAL DIMENSION

The doctrine and teachings of the Movement has its roots in the Visishtadvaita philosophy of Ramanuja (1017-1137). Ramanuja has presented a systematic theistic Vedanta and a line of interpretation that was opposed to that of Sankara's Advaita theory of avidya (ignorance) and maya (illusion). Moreover, Ramanuja gives us a conception of the Absolute⁶ united in a type of personal theism where Reality is a supreme, adorable, personal and loving God who is saguna (with attributes).

Swaminarayan accepts the fundamental principles of Ramanuja as the basis for his philosophy (SP 1). For Swaminarayan Parabrahman is the highest principle, the highest ontological reality and as antarayamin (inner ruler), He transcends jiva, Ishvara, maya, liberated souls and Aksharbrahman.

Apart from these fundamental philosophical teachings, both Swaminarayan's and Ramanuja's ethical ideals have a lot in common. They both agree that a person should lead a life of devotion and love to God (Bhagavan) and His bhaktas (aspirants). One's life must be God-centered and filled with truthfulness and contentment. For the devotee God must be before Him from morning when he wakes up till night when he goes to sleep. Construction of temples and worship of consecrated icons and reading of Scriptures must be done. Non-vegetarian food and intoxicating drink must be completely avoided. Love and service to all must be the goal in life (Dave et al, 1988:158).

It has been noted that the major doctrines of Swaminarayan are mainly restatements of Sri Ramanuja's Visihtadvaita in their application to practical life. However, with Swaminarayan the philosophy of Ramanuja reached new dimensions doctrinally and ethically, especially in the reinterpretation of the role of the guru and its relationship to the concept of akshar. Dave R. M. is of the opinion,
"The subtle and significant distinction between Parabrahman and Aksharbrahman is not brought out and discussed in detail by any one save Swaminarayan, in the history of Indian Philosophy"
(Dave et al, 1988:189).

5.3 ETHICAL DIMENSION

The rules, mores, precept, prescriptions and norms of the Movement, as reflected in previous Chapters, has been developed and handed down for generations, for regulating the Religious Community of the Swaminarayan sampradaya. The religious ethics concerns not only with inter-relationships of devotees of the Movement (one another) but also with peoples and situations outside their sacred Community (SP 203). Evidently, ethics promises and at the same time enforces a sanction amongst the fellowship since Swaminarayan devotees have to abide by all the prescriptions and norms laid down. Absolute allegiance, especially with the sadhus, to the protocol of the Movement is observed. Followers are warned against transgressing the Shikshapatri (SP 9 and 205). Accordingly, the roles played by the guru, sadhus and devotees enhance the religiosity of all and these roles take into account the ethics, set out in the holy scriptures, which have to be explicitly complied with.

The sadhus reflect a very high moral character through their unique life of celibacy which has to be observed with strict sincerity (SP 178). It is interesting that they are not allowed to deviate from this prescription even if commanded to do otherwise by their guru (SP 80). Devotees experience moral and spiritual elevation through their untainted character, comprehensive teaching and humble service to humanity. Ascetics are given a definite place of honour and physical contact with them is thought to be auspicious.

Sadhu's vows, especially the one related to eight fold celibacy must be followed without question. They are expected to be unwavering in this respect. Shastri Shriharidas Swami referred to these vows in the Shikshapatri,
...they were instructed to renounce all forms of wealth and observe eightfold celibacy. He (Swaminarayan) went to the extent of saying that they should not obey the orders of even their preceptors if such orders tended to dislodge them from their vows.'

The vows taken by sadhus and gurus are, undoubtedly, the cornerstone of the Movement. It holds the whole fabric of the Movement together. The discipline of the sadhus is clearly evident in their relations to women (SP 178). Apart from celibacy these vows include vegetarian eating, non-violence, control of the senses (SP 15 and 18) and detachment (vairāgya)10. These vows play an important part in temperance and self-control and is also reflected in their humility (SP 188 and 189). Sadhus live a life of poverty and accept with deep faith the rigorous discipline imposed on them. Doctor Swami affirmed,

'These vows are eternal and unchangeable.'

As observed by writer, at the training school in Sarangpur and other temples, ascetics do not talk to women even for the purpose of teaching religion. Women11 pay close attention to lectures while ascetics lecture, consciously, only to men. This requires strong mental discipline and the purpose to inhibit any sexual arousal of women. Pictures of women in the library at Sarangpur were blocked out, sadhus live apart from women and seat themselves away from women when travelling by road or air transport. Williams explains,

"...because the primary human sex organ is the brain an ascetic must avoid thinking about or creating mental images of women. They try to avoid recalling previous experiences of sexual activity" (Williams, 1984:131)12.

The goal of these vows is to control the body and the mind to such an extent that there will be no longer any sexual desire and sadhus naturally avoid all those activities and situations that could lead to sexual arousal.
The Shikshapatri advises followers to constantly engage themselves in the worship of the deity (SP 193). Hence, worship for Swaminarayan devotees reflects a living expression of faith (bhakti) and religious emotions. This devotion is an expression of an inner attitude of submission, adoration and supplication. The rituals, practices and lifestyles of the devotees, an outward manifestation, is undoubtedly a reflection of the inner attitude of devotees. Moreover, bhakti is reflected in abstention, virtuous conduct and activism and is linked with love and prayer. As a consequence there is an integration between the inner and outer life of the devotee since what is inside is reflected in outward physical and moral action. During the writer’s stay in India and from his visits to local satsangs it became clear that ethical scriptures played a prominent part at these prayer gatherings. Further, the common Gujarati language plays a major role in worship and devotees relationships with each other since they share a common cultural background and mother-tongue. Devotees feel kinship with all those who worship the same Master (Parekh, 1980:18). However, a devotee pointed out,

‘One does not become a satsangi merely by being initiated. One must mould one’s life in accordance with the rules of the Shikshapatri. Every thought, word and deed must conform to them. A satsangi’s daily conduct must bear the hallmark of excellence and must reveal that he is the follower of Pramukh Swami. High moral character is most essential for spiritual progress.’

Rituals, rites and eating practices were the basis for a ‘tangible’ devotion. The idols, images of the guruparampara and akshar are objects of devotion since devotees spend a great deal of time in front of the idols and images to receive darshan (vision of God). This is also evident in the way sadhus care for the idols as if they were ‘alive’. The arthi ceremony, practised five times a day, is an act of great devotion. The writer, as mentioned earlier, personally took part in arthi and other ceremonies. Prasad and food is first offered to the Lord, if only in symbolic amounts, and is then eaten by devotees as holy food (mahaprasad). Food and sweets offered to the deities becomes sacred as an auspicious gift.

Nikhail Sharma, of the Bombay temple, commented on the arthi ceremony,
'Darkness is associated with evil, fear and ignorance. Light (arthi) dispels darkness and signifies the overcoming of ignorance through knowledge.'

After the arthi ceremony and chanting is over, worshippers prostrate themselves before the images and shrines while walking around the temple. Jnanpurushdas stated,

'Cirumlocation is symbolic of the all round presence of God. Falling prostrate involves all eight parts of the body, the limbs, the feet, the knees, the palms of the hand, the chest (head) and forehead (mind). The word shastang, mentioned in the Skikshapatri, is related to the number eight'

When discussing religious marks he explained,

'The U shaped mark and dot is applicable to all. This is a Vaishnava tradition to put a U shaped tilak. People apply it on the forehead because that is where intelligence is. The chandlo is the symbol of God. The dot is in the middle of the tilak. This signifies a devotee and the Lord. Akshar is the devotee, while the Lord is Lord Swaminarayan.'

Every morning Pramukh Swami performs the morning prayer before a small image of Swaminarayan, Thakorji, which he carries with him at all times. All garlands and gifts presented to Pramukh Swami are first presented before the image (murthi). Pramukh Swami's morning prayer, a public ceremony, is a spectacle of ethical significance since the guru sets the tone for the followers and he himself is regarded as the ideal devotee to be emulated. Furthermore this ritual confirms the relationship between the inner and outer attitudes of the followers.

When the writer spoke to Doctor Swami during his visit to Durban in September 1993, he stated,

'Praying in the morning and reading the Shikshapatri is important because in the morning the mind is fresh and alert. The morning prayer and reading sets the tone for the rest of day.'
Apart from the prostrations and circumlocations at the temples other acts of discipline and devotion include listening to discourses and singing of devotional hymns (kirtan aradhana). Purity and hygiene are also emphasized since devotees remove shoes before entering the temples, woman stay away from holy places during menses and there is separation of the sexes at satsang (religious prayer and discourses).

This purity and hygiene emphasized in the Shikshapatri is also evidenced in the eating practices of the sadhus and devotees. Devotees abstain from eating meat and do not consume alcoholic beverages.

Swaminarayan followers take the utmost care in their food preparations and they fast regularly. Emphasis is on purity, hygiene and self-discipline. A devotee affirmed,

'A pure heart is most essential for spiritual progress. Our body is the temple of the living God. It must not be polluted by the intake of meat, eggs, alcoholic drinks etc. As we eat so our mind becomes. Rajasic and tamasic food such as meat, stimulants and even onions and garlic, which we believe arouse passions, are avoided. Sattvic food produces tranquillity and pure thoughts. Therefore we eat only vegetarian food, fruits, dairy products etc.' A sadhu stated,

'We eat only as much as is necessary. We eat only enough to live a life of devotion and not live to eat. Over eating makes one sleepy and sluggish.'

Shri Haridas Swami in reply to one of the writer's questions on the relationship between actions of devotees and their soteriological goal he confirmed,

'Purity of food leads to purity of actions and conduct. This in turn leads to purity of the soul so that there is progress towards the goal of transformation into oneness with Brahman and then in this elevated state, the worship of Parabrahman'.

By attending festivals and going on pilgrimages devotees believe that sin is washed away at these public gatherings. They are able to listen to discourses, receive darshan and
associate with the sadhus. This helps to reaffirm their commitment to the sampradaya and its teachings, especially the Shikshapatri which emphasizes a way of life. The importance of festivals was confirmed by Doctor Swami who stated,

'Yes, these festivals do help to bring our people together so that they can remember what they have to follow and learn other things that will benefit them.'

On the question of ahimsa a devotee emphasized,

'We try never to hurt the feelings of anyone. This is a sin and it cuts at the very root of spirituality. Also we do not thrust our views on others. We attempt at all times to adopt an attitude of humility and to speak kindly. We must humble your mind and control our senses. All other desires must vanish and only the desire for serving God must remain.'

While Swaminarayan recognised distinctions in society these distinctions were not based on birth, wealth and power but on conduct, character and wisdom. In this sense, Swaminarayan teachings are progressive since it is based on ethical and humanitarian values rather than on traditional considerations. The reconciliation between inner and outer distinctions have also contributed towards a collapse of the caste system. Atmaswarupdas Swami affirmed,

'In the past, the varna (caste) system was accepted by the sadhus in that certain castes were not given the sacred cloth but with time this practice has changed. At that time (Swaminarayan's) society was such that people wanted to follow orthodox beliefs. Pramukh Swami has changed this. All are accepted willingly. People are now brought up in a modern environment where a person matters more than anything else. Birth is not the criteria for judging a person. It is actions that matter most. Last Sunday, for example, Pramukh Swami, stopped to put his hand on some people who were here at the mandir, some people who work here. He is not selective in his darshan.' Juanpurushdas Swami explained,
'We do not believe in the caste system. The caste system was so ingrained in people's lives in the old days. It was very difficult in the old days to change this. In terms of non-violence and love, Lord Swaminarayan did not want to use force to implement these changes. Swaminarayan himself, although of brahmin class, begged from lower castes. Saints at that time objected to this practice because of their ingrained and orthodox attitudes and beliefs.' Williams affirms,

"Swaminarayan's teachings did not conform to the traditional vertical divisions of the span of human life into four stations (ashrama dharma); neither did he leave unchanged the longitudinal caste divisions (varna dharma)...." (Williams, 1984:140).

Pramukh Swami has waived caste distinctions as criteria for sadhuship, since sadhus come from all castes seek and are given initiation. This reinterpretation of the caste system has resulted in a more inclusive approach for accepting devotees from all stations of life. However, there is no evidence of a large scale following from people of the lower castes in India.

The Swaminarayan Movement expresses tolerance of other religious. The rules of the sect prohibit any criticism of other Gods or religion. Moreover, the religion is not exclusive since the goal of the sect is not to convert a person to Hinduism but to make him or her a better adherent of his or her respective religion²⁷. Pramukh Swami has confirmed this,

"'It is all the same'" (Williams, 1984:202).

Traditional divisions of society have been waived, since there is only evidence of the brahamacharyas and grihastharama (householder or haribhakta) stage in the sampradaya. Householders contribute, by way of donations, to the temples which sustain the sadhus. Hence, householders indirectly support the sadhus.
While only two divisions of society exist for the Swaminarayan Movement due cognisance is given to the Bhagavad Gita’s call to perform one’s duties according to one’s life situation and thus devotees are careful not to perform duties prescribed for the sadhus and vice-versa.

Both sadhus and householders follow the righteous deed of great men and women. Some of these are Krishna, Ram and Sita. Guests and visitors to the temples are treated with the utmost respect and hospitality. The writer’s stay in India was made an enjoyable and comfortable one. However, the writer did "get in the way" of some of the Movement’s followers who could only be described as ‘over zealous’ to perform their duties.

Persons of old age are treated with love, respect and care. As for men-women relations focus is on women. Devotees dress modestly. Men and women are advised against adultery, pre-marital sex is a taboo and celibacy is emphasized, any form of illicit or extra-marital sex is prohibited. Men are advised to keep away from immoral women. All these prescriptions have had a positive effect on devotees of the Movement since divorce is rare. The writer was also witness to a marriage ceremony during a festival in Bombay when several couples joined hands in matrimony. The marriages were sanctioned by Pramukh Swami. It is expected that sanctity of the marriages will be kept, more so, because of Pramukh Swami’s blessings.

The Shikshapatri has given guidance to persons of public office. They are told how to treat and govern their subjects. However, the Movement’s guru is apolitical in his relationship with Government Ministers. In India, in particular, ministers sometimes command very little respect since they are responsible, according to one sadhu, for the turmoil in Indian politics.

Many Swaminarayan devotees live abroad and are still faithful to the Movement. It was this allegiance to the Movement that helped many of the devotees in Uganda to survive the trials and tribulations during Idi Amin’s rule. While many abroad and in India are affluent, Swaminarayan followers live simple lives. Apart from their kindness,
charity and hospitality they are thrifty and astute businessmen. As they subscribe to non-meat eating, non-drinking of alcohol beverages, they keep away from gambling, do not smoke and are not lured by the kind of entertainment that will ‘go against the grain’ Swaminarayan devotees find it easy to be thrifty.

Swaminarayan, in his Shikshapatri has sanctioned the attainment of the four goals—dharma, artha (wealth), kama (pleasure) and moksha. However, kama sought must bear in mind the tenets of the Shikshapatri which advises that wealth must be attained by the dint of hard work, by the four means (goals) and must not be sought to the exclusion of everything else.

Swaminarayan, in his ethical texts has clearly explained how activities (duties) should be carried out so that it had a wholesome effect on society. Classical texts also advocate the concept of individual responsibility for actions and its consequences where right deed has its own reward and wrong deed its punishment. A logical development of this concept meant that worldly pursuits were now guided by explicitly defined principles of karma and dharma. Soteriologically, for Swaminarayan followers, to escape the bondage of karma was through the process of living a truly religious life. This life must express a harmonious blending of morality (dharma), metaphysical understanding (jnana), intense love for God (bhakti) and non-attachment to everything except God (vairagya). This is known as to Ekantika Dharma.

Moreover, the ethical and religious life of the Movement is patterned according to a peculiar vision of the Universe. At the same time this focus on Ultimate Reality has crucial reference to Classical views of transcendence and religious doctrines. In the light of this, the discussion now relates to the transcendent dimension.

5.4 TRANSCENDENT DIMENSION

In the Swaminarayan religion, bhakti satisfies a deep religious yearning and the devotee, says Ramanuja, should be aware through the knowledge of scripture that he or she is part of the body of the Lord and enthused by this knowledge and that of the
Supreme Self's glorious perfections will create a desire to serve Him in every way he or she is able to (Lott, 1979:38). Furthermore, Ramanuja also believes that Reality is a supreme, adorable, personal and loving God (Lott, 1979:132). This is of vital importance since Ramanuja’s conception of the Supreme as a person has made the conception of bhakti easier. Through devotion Swaminarayan religion provides a revitalization of the experience of sacred person, sacred space and sacred time by associating these with the doctrine and life of Swaminarayan (Williams, 1984:66). The Shikshapatri also states quite clearly that devotion must be supplemented by righteous conduct (SP 102).

The primary religious impetus for the Movement is the experience and belief that the sacred was manifest in the person of Sahajanand Swami. The emphasis on the human form of the Supreme Person has resulted in the belief that the manifestation of the divine or sacred is primarily through a person who, though appearing ordinary, is perceived to reveal the sacred. Devotion to the Supreme Person is of vital importance, for Swaminarayan adherents, since He is worshipped with so much love and adoration. The metaphysical definition of God is Purushottam (the highest form). Ramanuja affirms that Brahman is the Transcendent cause,

"....gracious Lord is seen as the inner-Self inseperably related to his bhaktas including them with His Being" (Lott, 1979:36).

Like Ramanuja Swaminarayan emphasizes a personal God with akshar being the choicest devotee. The pivotal role of the guru as akshar in the sampradaya has the character of cosmic principle and Ramanuja emphasizes the importance of the guru in the redemption of devotees (Lott, 1979:48).

For Swaminarayan followers they come into regular contact with the sacred person, guru Pramukh Swami, at the temples, festivals and places of pilgrimages he visits. Swaminarayan devotees say that close contact with their guru will lead to spiritual growth and salvation. Sadhus, of the Movement, do not live as hermits or are removed
into isolated retreats but come into regular contact with the lay members of the fellowship since they live in temples in the cities, travel to villages and communicate freely with both members and non-members.

It is this devotion that has permeated the entire fabric of the Movement. Its vibrancy and vitality centres around the guru. This is of great ethical importance since the guru reconciles and interprets the statements of the scriptures and he himself acts accordingly and inspires his disciples to act likewise. Notwithstanding the devotion, actions and ethical precepts for a code of conduct Swaminarayan was quite clear that a failure to perceive God in human form would result in the failure to gain redemption from the bondage of the world. The goal of the Movement is to realize that the God who manifests himself of earth in the human form of Sahajanand is the highest Supreme Reality and that he is the cause of all avatars. (Williams, 1984:69).

Guru Pramukh Swami is regarded as an incarnation of akshar, the abode of God. Dave states,

"So Akshar, then, has a transcendental aspiration, ....it is personal, qualitative and determinative" (Dave et al, 1988:126).

Swaminarayan considers akshar as the mediator and the best example of emulation by all seekers. Akshar is the ideal guru, the dispeller of ignorance (maya). It is not surprising that followers yearn to please the choicest devotee of the Lord since Swaminarayan is primarily present in the guru, Pramukh Swami. The advantage to the devotee of the divine form in human form is that he is always available for worship as well as mediation. Hence, the guru acts as a cathartic agent. Dave affirms,

"The presence of such a guru enlivens the sampradaya and rejuvenates its ethics" (Dave, 1974:226).

The obvious reinterpretation of the role of guru meant that in the doctrine of the New
Branch Swaminarayan manifests through Pramukh Swami who is regarded as the model of ethical excellence. Hence the Movement's concentration on the guru has become institutionalized. He is the motivating aspect and also the instrument affecting positive changes in the devotees. Although the guru himself has renounced the world, he is able and willing to advise those who are still in it on how to pursue life to the best since he is the parent, spiritual master and archarya. He is also a teacher who gives spiritual enlightenment. The guru is the liberator of his disciples from bondage born of mundane pleasures. To attain salvation the guru must be God-realized and his disciples must have an earnest aspiration for redemption. Swaminarayan states,

"Knowledge concerning the divine from of God cannot be fully understood through reasoning of the intellect. It is only when the words are explained directly from a God communion saint and such words be fully understood." (Vachanamrit - Gadhada - 11-13).

Further if one serves the guru with the same devotion which he serves God, then the esoteric truths hidden in the scriptures will be revealed to that person (Swaminarayan Bliss - Dec 1991, p.8). It is through the guru that one is shackled from the fetters of material bondage and the doors of redemption are opened and the adherent is blessed with God-realization.

Swaminarayan's teaching's, then, are consistent with the Hindu view that the guru occupies and maintains a prime place in spirituality. The guruparampara tradition has ensured that the doctrine of the Movement is transmitted and established from one guru to the next.

The next guru (akshar) will be chosen by Guru Pramukh Swami to succeed him. Doctor Swami affirmed,

'Yes, Pramukh Swami will decide and his command will be followed and respected'. 
FOOTNOTES

1. The writer has investigated to what extent the lifestyles and religious practices of the devotees are influenced by the Shikshapatri and Vachanamrit, the two most important ethical texts mentioned in Chapter One and elaborated on in Chapter Four. A further aim was to view Swaminarayan ethics against the backdrop of the "cumulative tradition" of Hindu ethics as borne out by classical Hindu texts. A particular focus was on ethical ideals expounded by Ramanuja. The research task employed the hermeneutical concepts of bhakti, karma and moksha.

2. The writer has, in Chapter One, defined and described in detail Intentionality and Essence. In the light of this the writer attempted to interpret and evaluate the Essence of the ethical phenomena.

3. The Shikshapatri - Swaminarayan ordered that this book should be worshipped as a representative of his very self, svarupa. The booklet of instruction explains to all their various codes of conduct and the purpose and goal of life. In this way it also portrays a way of life. Narainmuni Swami told the writer, 'The unique feature of the Shikshapatri is that Lord Swaminarayan has prescribed rules accordingly for different categories or classes of people. Some rules are common to all, for example, not eating meat.'

4. The Vachanamrit is a text book of discourses by Swaminarayan which present Swaminarayan as the ideal. Extracts from the Vachanamrit are quoted by the writer in Chapter Four since these complement, to a great extent, many of the precepts in the Shikshapatri. The Vachanamrit is also regarded as the quintessence of the Vedas, six Darshanas and eight Puranas (Dave, 1986:196).

5. For Ramanuja the process of salvation is not just the elimination of avidya (ignorance) but also the product of grace and human self-sacrifice.

6. Ramanuja provides a metaphysical basis for the Great Bhakta Movement and is so
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unlike Sankara's Absolute which is lacking in positivism since according to Advaita, nothing is real apart from the Supreme Reality.

7. Brahman is saguna (with attributes), a personal God, reverently called Isvara, Vishnu. According to Visishtadvaita there are three ultimate realities, God (Isvara, Vishnu), soul (cit), and matter.

8. Swaminarayan states quite clearly in the Shikshapatri that he has adopted the Visishtadvaita philosophy of Ramanuja.

9. The concept of Akshabrahman and its implications for the Swaminarayan Movement has been adequately covered in Chapter's One, Three and Four.

10. Sadhus renounce all ties with their families and are reluctant to speak about their previous lives.

11. Separation of women - this was introduced during the time of Lord Swaminarayan. Nilakanth, still a young brahmachari, initiated total separation of men and women during religious meetings. "Thus Nilakanth brought about purity in religion and in the conduct of the sadhus in the sampradaya" (Dave, 1987:105). Parekh (1980:80) adds further that the separation according to Swaminarayan was essential so that both sexes could realize God without the distraction of the other. This principle character of his fellowship he had brought with him from his nausea for the sex side of life.

12. Sadhus must undergo a prescribed penance even if, involuntary, they have a dream in which women or any sexual activity appears.

13. Upasana, religious worship, is one of the prominent features of the religion. It involves focusing on a visible image, a murthi. Worship is also an expression of an inner attitude of submission, adoration and supplication. Devotees believe that they see in an image something concrete, something tangible to visualize and serve God
instead of thinking of Him as formless and abstract.

14. Satsangs - during satsangs (discourses), kirtans and bhajans are feature of the activities. The ethics of the Shikshapatri is reiterated at discourses.

15. The murthi. This is the chief means of contact with the divine and to receive darshan. Dave (1977:127) points out, "God, for the worship of His devotees gives them idols which are of eight types and in which He by His wish enters."

16. The deities are 'awakened', bathed, 'fed' and dressed. In the evening the deities (images) are prepared for rest. Before this food is offered to the deities. In the middle of the day the deities are given a rest (doors of the shrines are closed) and 'awakened' in mid-afternoon.

17. Arthi - "....Muktananda spontaneously composed a chant which he sang as he performed the waving of the ceremonial light (arthi) before Swaminarayan." (Williams, 1984:65). Worshippers enter the temples in great numbers during these arthis. Sadhus, a kothari or mahant of the temple waves the lamp before the images while the worshippers stand in appropriate space with their hands in a gesture of respect. The bell in front of the shrine and a drum are struck to create a loud noise as the worshippers chant the arthi chant, 'Hail to Sahajanand Swami.'

18. By chanting the Swaminarayan mantra, by receiving darshan of the Lord it is believed that Swaminarayan devotees lost their physical consciousness and enjoyed samadhi in which they saw the transcendent form of God (in the form of Swaminarayan) in the highest abode called akshardham.

19. The Shikshapatri must be read daily or heard daily or worshipped daily and honoured with great reverence. Besides the Shikshapatri, the Bhagavad Purana and the Vishnu Sahastra Nama must be read.

Devotees, according to a sadhu, have to face north when praying because north is the abode of Narayana - the Himalayas. The east is not considered good because
the sun rises from that direction. West and south are considered impure. This is said to be similar to the Jews having to face Jerusalem and the Muslims facing Mecca when praying.

20. Since women have more bodily discharges than men they are considered to be impure.

21. In terms of the guna theory (mentioned in Chapter Four) the body is composed of karmic impurities of the nature of rajas and tamas. To be clean (sattvic) requires that one ultimately gets rid of one’s body and impure thoughts.

22. Festivals are celebrated with great pomp and enthusiasm. The Hindu calendar is followed. This is adequately covered in Chapter Four.

23. Religion according to Yinger and as quoted by Sivananda (1977:331) is to "bind together to rehearse, to reenact." This ‘binding’ together is easily achieved in the Swaminarayan sampradaya since bhakti (love) and seva (service) to all is the aim in life.

24. The writer’s interview with Atmaswarupdas Swami (refer Chapter Four) has relevance in respect of non-injury, especially in reference to abortion and euthanasia. The Classical Hindu view is accepted that when a mother’s life is in danger, especially in childbirth abortion is allowed. Euthanasia is acceptable when life supporting machines have to be cut off. The teachings do not advocate injury to one’s self and suicide. But ahimsa is more than non-injury. It is non-injury in thought, word and deed.

25. Classical texts mentioned in Chapter Three reveal certain ideas on the caste system. While the Rig Veda is silent on the existence of a rigid caste system, the Brahmanas emphasized a caste system that led to a breakdown of ethical norms and emphasis was on sacrificial rectitude. During the Upanishadic period Vedic ceremonialism and caste duties turned to an inward understanding of Ultimate
In the Bhagavad Gita sadhrana meant varnasrama dharma (caste duties). One had to perform one’s duties in a selfless way. But for Swaminarayan followers sadhrana means non-violence and celibacy (ahimsa and brahmacharya) and this converges upon one point, bhakti. In the Bhagavad Gita caste distinctions are based on a person’s natural qualifications and functions (guna karma) and was also meant to be hereditary. The varnasrama dharma has come into disrepute as a traditional Hindu System. Swaminarayan has clearly explained in his ethical texts how activities (duties) should be carried out.

During a recent visit (September, 1993) a sadhu referred to an exchange between a person of the Christian faith and Pramukh Swami. The Swami emphasized, in response to a question about joining the Movement, that the person should concentrate on becoming a better Christian.

Krishna - apart from scriptural reading the worship of Lord Krishna is advocated for the desired objects and to attain salvation (SP 188). On the status of Krishna, Atmaswarupdas Swami stated to the writer: ‘When it comes to understanding the form of the Lord the highest words regarding the Lord must be accepted. The Vachanamrit very clearly stated that Lord Swaminarayan is the Supreme God. He is puna Purushottam. Krishna is accepted as an incarnation of the Lord just as Rama is accepted as an incarnation of the Lord’. Most followers believe that Swaminarayan is the single, complete manifestation of Narayana or the Supreme Person and as such is superior in power and efficiency to all other manifestations of God including Rama and Krishna, (Williams, 1984:84).

Rama and Sita, the Ramayana’s chief characters are the epitome of moral values, compassion and the religious tenets of the Ramayana guide people to live an ideal life.

The writer met a group of youths from London and New York who were preparing for the 1991 Cultural Festival of India. Although they spoke with Western accents,
etc, there were evidently no problems with their accepting and understanding what was going on in India in terms of the Movement's teachings. They were eager and ever ready participants.

30. The four goals of life mentioned in the Shikshapatri are established in Hindu texts (SP 105). Swaminarayan sanctioned the attainment of these four goals (purusarthas), the disciplined life (dharma), material gain (artha), pleasure (kama) and salvation (moksha). However, while the pursuit of material gain and pleasure are appropriate to the life of the householder this pursuit must be controlled by moral discipline otherwise it would lead to disaster and cause failure to attain salvation. Williams (1984:140) states: "Thus the regulation allows for and even encourages the acquisition and sober use of worldly possessions. The person who follows the precepts regarding honesty, sobriety, careful dealing in business and avoidance of extravagant and conspicuous consumption becomes a responsible person of affairs. He works hard, lives simply and shares his possessions". Clearly members in India and abroad have become successful businesspersons and industrialists and have invariably attributed this success to the grace of Swaminarayan. The moral training that has come through giving up drugs, alcohol, expensive needs, loose women and idleness devotees believe, lead to economic and social improvement and standing.

31. Roles have to be played by the guru, by the sadhus, householders and other devotees to enhance the religiosity of themselves and others. Since the time of Swaminarayan a publication division in the sampradaya has been established which produces sacred texts, commentaries, biographies, text books for religious courses and periodicals in English and Gujarat. The Movement runs schools, has hostels for youth, awards scholarships, runs libraries and centres for music and fine arts. It gives medical help in urban and rural areas. Sadhus donate blood. Hundreds of centres are run for youth welfare, for removing illiteracy, addictions, superstitions and to promote moral values. Fundamental knowledge of religion and other allied matters are imparted systematically and examinations conducted. Huge temples are built. Sadhus with brilliant academic backgrounds are continuously moving among
the masses in an attempt to regenerate religion and moral values. These various activities, many of which the writer has been witness to in India, give a vivid glimpse of what is done in terms of duties. The Movement's step towards rejuvenation has led inevitably to moral and social reforms. Service to God has become service to humanity. Bhakti is the agency for social reform.

32. Dharma has occupied an important place in Hindu thinking since the Vedas. Dharma are acts of 'good practices' that are done for the goodwill and a sense of duty. According to the teachings of Swaminarayan dharma means morality and good conduct as enjoined in the scriptures and is an integral part of a religious life. Dharma leads one to the path of salvation for inherent in this concept is the act of being righteous and committed to bhakti. Parekh (1980:184) states: "Shree Swaminarayan has made dharma an essential element in the life and discipline of the sampradaya."

The commitment of the guru, sadhus and devotees, to dharma is adequately captured in Chapter Four of this dissertation, especially as it is borne out by their social, ethical and ritual roles.

33. Ekantika dharma is ethically significant since the life of the sadhus are well regulated and they display self-sacrifice, patience, are egoless and have endurance. In all, they practice a rigid moral discipline.

34. In the Upanishads, the highest good was harmony with the will of God and maintenance of order with rita (Rig Veda). The highest for a person’s ethical endeavours was Self-knowledge. All this can be traced back to Swaminarayan’s teachings. However, of importance was the inward spiritual quest for Ultimate Reality since the sadhus of the sampradaya are devoted to such a goal.

35. The concept of dharma in the Movement is developed in the concept of ekantika bhakti. The teachings of the Movement are consistent with the teachings of the Epic age in respect of the concept of bhakti (and avatar).
Both Swaminarayan and Ramanuja have rejected Shankara’s monist, non-dualistic philosophy because of their convictions of a personal God. For both the metaphysical definition is Purushottam (the Highest Person). The Bhagavad Gita’s idea of the identity of Brahman with atman has relevance also since the quest for identity is borne out by the devotion to a Supreme Person. Like the Bhagavad Gita Swaminarayan emphasizes a personal God and perfect Self-surrender.

Ramesh Pandaya, interviewed by Hutchinson accused the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha of violating the scriptures through the introduction of akshar and guruparampara. Swaminarayan is quoted by Hutchinson: "I promise you all henceforth I will meet you all through my idols established in the temples and through my Shikshapatri" (Hutchinson, 1985:56).

The guruparampara continues through akshar in whom the Lord fully manifests. Accordingly, the present guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the currently manifest form of Aksharbrahman through whom Lord Purshottam manifests on earth and works and redeems the seekers of salvation.

Moksha - Vedic, Puranic and other sacred writings declare Self-realization to be the main aim of human life, to be reached through the pathway of one’s duties of dharma in this life. Dave affirms: "Hindu philosophy is based on the Vedas, scriptures which are recognized by inspired truths. The ultimate aim of Vedantic philosophy is to show a way of life, to inspire people to shed mundane attachments and to transmigrate into super mundane regions" (Dave, 1974:23).

Followers of the Movement explained to the writer that it was their wish to gain moksha through their guru and through following the injunctions of the scriptures and conforming to the precepts of the sacred texts, the Shikshapatri and the Vachanamrit, especially.

For Swaminarayan, released souls attain all redemptive attributes and reside in akshardham. Sadhus and devotees alike believe that the late Sant Swami, the head of the Sarangpur training school (until his death in 1991) had reached the stage of jivanmukti. No doubt, according to reports, he was such an inspiration to the
sampradaya that Pramukh Swami prostrated in front of him and he did likewise whenever they both met.

39. God-realization - Ramanuja believes that all souls are bound by karma. Satsang nullifies the effect of karma. If the believer can take care of the present, the future will take care of itself. Swaminarayan agrees with Ramanuja and the Bhagavad Gītā in that the consequences of action must be neutralized by the absence of desire for performing duties. Brahman is the goal and means of existence. Redemption is knowledge of Brahman who is the ground of all beings, is the cause not only of the world’s origin but also of the one Self (atman, purusha). Swaminarayan accepts that the jivas are bound by vasena according to their past karma (actions). However, he is against fatalism, that is, blaming destiny for all the ill's of life. While he recognized the merits of jnana and karma, Swaminarayan also attached importance to human free will in determining destiny.
CHAPTER SIX

6. CONCLUSION

The ought of ethics (dharma) is foundational for all Indian thought and includes the ideals of human life in the world, one's relation to other human beings and the various duties prescribed (duties pertaining to caste and the stages of life). In this respect the Swaminarayan sampradaya is no different.

As a modern form of Gujarati Hinduism, the Swaminarayan religion is rooted in the cultural soil of India. The language of all the ceremonies and meetings are predominantly in Gujarati and the gestures, language of all the rituals is that developed in the Vaishnava sects of that area. The Gujarati vegetarian cuisine, for example, eaten in the homes, is prepared, sang about, offered to the deities and received as sacred food in the temples. The Movement has also created a religious Community centred around the Vaishnava accepted values, expressing its faith in the common religious act of devotion to a guru, a religious specialist. The serious devotee is encouraged to mediate on and serve and love God.

The sadhus, together with the guru, are the examples, par excellence for the devotees. They set the tone for the sampradaya. Without their leadership the Movement could possibly face large scale migration to other faiths or sects and devotees would not have the ideal to look up to, follow or emulate as is typical of any Vaishnava sect. The guru and the sadhus command the respect of their followers since they are prepared to serve them by making such huge sacrifices. This is consistent with the spirit of Swaminarayan ethics which is primarily concerned with self-sacrifice. Moreover, both Guru Pramukh Swami and the sadhus are role models who reveal the high moral characteristics outlined by Swaminarayan. The strictness and discipline of the Movement induces respect since the guru and his sadhus illustrate more than anything else the application of the teaching and beliefs to life.

An interesting feature of the sampradaya is that while it is supported by the material
world, it has at the same time, decried such materiality. This ambivalent streak, however, is not exclusive to the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha. It has been part of a Hindu’s existence through the ages. Notwithstanding this, the guru, however, commands more respect than everything else and has become the symbol of all that has to be obtained and what has not. He is the living mode of ethical excellence. Satsangis, undoubtedly follow the command of the guru and sadhus. They possess a deep faith in Guru Pramukh Swami and Lord Swaminarayan. Devotees also feel a kinship with all those who worship the same personal God. Every believer appears to act in accordance with the basic tenets, namely, indomitable belief in the personal form of God, abstaining from eating meat, abstaining from all alcoholic beverages, avoidance of theft and not committing adultery. They also practice continence, truth and non-violence. The inculcation of self-discipline and of the awakening of the awareness of dietary problems related to meat eating and of the practice of fasting has been interwoven with special prayers and rituals that are performed. Functions provide the opportunity for people to get together and thus stimulate societal interaction as well as religious and social cohesion.

The doctrine of the Movement has affirmed the concept of atman (non-self) and Brahman (transcendent being and cosmic Self). For the highest to be attained is Parabrahman. Akshar, synonymous to guru, is Brahman. In this way the doctrine of the Movement fulfils its conditions for transcendence, a process of salvation which requires devotion to the personal form of God through akshar. Akshar as avatara is cosmic saviour and guru and proclaims the sayings of truth that everyone follows. As is typical of Vaishnava soteriology the Swaminarayan Movement claims the founder to be the avatar of the Deity (Purushottam).

Pramukh Swami is the driving force in the propagation of ethical, spiritual, religious and ritual practices of the Movement and Dave, correctly puts it,

"God incarnates Himself on earth to
fulfil the desires of those dedicated
devotees who intense love craves to
enjoy the company of God"
(Dave, 1977:222).

It is because of this emphasis on bhakti that the faith of the Movement is a militant one and does not brook any mixed loyalty on the part of the devotees. The single minded devotion advocated to God is called, EKANTIC BHAKTI, as enjoined by Swaminarayan, (Parekh, 1980:181).

Intense love by men, women, children and sadhus is seen in their actions. Reading of scriptures and attending satsang enhances their bhakti. They sing melodious kirtans and bhajans which are filled with love and adoration. Bhakti is the highest expression of the love of God (Yajnik, 1980:191). Religious feelings, religious striving, religious knowing and doing revealed their experience with the spiritual teachings, ethics and rituals of the Movement. All these acts of worship and devotion are directed towards the Ultimate Reality (and consequently moksha).

The moral quest for moksha in the Movement is understood to extend if necessary through several life times. One prepares one’s vessel in this life time and should moksha not be reached this lifetime it is still of value in that the next life time one benefits from the stage one has reached in the present life.

Devotees are expected to know and understand central elements of the religious doctrine and religious culture. Thus the ethics of the Movement has directed the devotees to behave and act in a certain way. The vitality of the Swaminarayan sampradaya is the influence which it exerts on the lives of the people and the type of person it forms.
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