Religion, Colonialism, Diaspora:
The Role of the Hindu Swaminarayan Sect in Indian Migration to Africa and the World

by

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ABSTRACT

A new sect of Swaminarayan Hinduism emerged in the late eightieth century. This sect rapidly grew into a global organization due their highly structuralized nature. Fascinatingly, the new sect was able to create the feeling of home away from home in multiple countries. Through the establishments of mandirs, Hindu place of worship, practitioners were able to solidify the feeling of home away from home. Through books, magazine articles and letters the evidence of the new sect creating this feeling is overwhelming. Diaspora theory is woven within the thesis due to the global nature of the sect. This thesis uses a broad definition of diaspora to encompass the change in literature due to the ability of one to maintain close ties to their old homeland. The Swaminarayan sect treaded through diaspora by assimilating to their new homeland all the while keeping a close tie with their old homeland.
DEDICATION

To M&S

Without whom nothing would be possible.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Swaminarayan tradition is a minor sect in Indian Hinduism. Its origins lie in a small village in the Indian state of Gujarat approximately two hundred years ago, when the British were establishing colonial rule over the subcontinent. The Swaminarayan sect grew slowly in Gujarat throughout the nineteenth century, while Great Britain also began establishing a colonial presence in eastern Africa. The British colonial network provided the opportunity for many practitioners of the Swaminarayan sect to migrate to East Africa, beginning in the late nineteenth century, in hopes of economic betterment. As a result, an economically thriving South Asian community emerged in the Hindu diaspora in East Africa. In the 1970s, however, many South Asians became victims of racist politics and were expelled from East Africa – most notoriously from Uganda. Some of them were given only ninety days to leave their African homes. Due to the expulsions, many South Asians decided to migrate to other countries, in particular the United Kingdom, where they continued the work of forming diaspora communities. This was the time when the small Hindu Swaminarayan sect, which thus far had been isolated in pockets of Gujarat and East Africa, became the catalyst for the emergence of a large and global diaspora organization of the South Asians across the world. The Swaminarayan religion became a common thread between many global South Asian migrants. The religion marked the center of their communities.

In this thesis I will analyze how members of BAPS, a subsection of the Swaminarayan sect, migrated to East Africa and from there into the world. I will analyze how the sect enabled the migrants to settle in their new-homeland, creating what Steven
Vertovec describes as “a home away from home” (Vertovec 8). This notion of home away from home shows the symbiotic relationship between the old and new homelands and how *mandirs* were at the center of the diasporic community. My thesis will also show the many and innovative meanings the term diaspora has in the South Asian context. Diaspora no longer only means the dispersal of a community; it has become much more complex, revealing many agencies. The term now refers to the way in which migrant communities maintain the relationship between their new and old homeland. It indicates the simultaneous operations involved in promoting integration to the new homeland and the keeping of connections with the old homeland. It shows how connections to the old homeland are maintained through memories and tangible objects.

The following four sections will trace how the Swaminarayan tradition and the BAPS sect grew into a global organization by having religion at the center of their diaspora. The first section provides a detailed history of the Swaminarayan tradition and the emergence of the BAPS sect. The second section describes the movement of the Swaminarayan tradition within the context of the Indian migration to East Africa. The third section elaborates on the structure of BAPS and how the sect became a global organization. The fourth and final section of this thesis will show how the feeling of home away from home is created and maintained by the BAPS tradition.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORY OF THE SWAMINARAYAN SECT

Sahajanand Swami, the founder of the Swaminarayan Sampraday was born on April 2, 1781 in a small village, Chhapaiya, near the town of Ayodha in northwestern India (Vivekijivandas 1). Sahajanand Swami’s childhood name was Ghanshyam, and as a child, his father taught him about the major Hindu scriptures: Shastras, Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavat Gita (ibid: 9). Ghanshyam was said to have been disinterested in worldly desires, concentrating instead on his spirituality from a young age. Every morning and evening he would go to the local mandir (a place of worship) for daily darshan¹, arti², and spiritual discourse. On June 29, 1792, at the age of eleven, Ghanshyam renounced his home to journey on a long rigorous seven-year pilgrimage throughout India, something that brought him the honorific name of Nilkanth Varni (ibid: 13). He traveled from the South Asian subcontinent from northern India to Nepal and then from eastern India to southern India, and finally settling in the western state of Gujarat.

At every stop on his pilgrimage, the local mythology reports, Nilkanth would ask in a series of questions about the nature and difference of the five eternal elements in Hindu theology: jiva (the soul), ishwar (the divine being), maya (the mundane world), brahma (the ideal devotee), and parabhrama (the supreme reality). On August 21, 1799, Swaminarayan followers say, Nilkanth received an answer to the question he had been

¹ darshan – form of worship including the ritual exchange of gaze between devotee and the image of God

² arti – form of worship including the waving of lighted wicks before the image of God
asking (ibid: 43). Upon his arrival in Log in Gujarat it was Muktanand Swami, a member of the local Hindu sect, who was finally able to answer the question, which is why Nilkanth decided to remain in Log. Muktanand Swami explained, the jiva is the soul, ishwar is the divine being, maya is thought to be the mundane world or anything keeping you from God, brahma is the ideal devotee of what one strives to become, and parabhrama is the one supreme reality. Muktanand Swami told Nilkanth that Ramanand Swami, the head of the local religious sect, was currently out of town and would return shortly. Nilkanth chose to wait for Ramanand Swami and on October 28, 1800, Nilkanth received diksha, that is, he was initiated into the sect. At this time he was given two honorific names: Sahajanand Swami and Narayan Muni. Not long after this, on December 17, 1801, Ramanand Swami passed away and appointed Sahajanand Swami the new head of the sect that later became known as the Swaminarayan Sampradaya (ibid: 53-55).

Sahajanand Swami is thought to be a reformer of tradition because of his strong stance on empowering women, fostering equality between the different castes, and other social issues. For example, Sahajanand Swami stressed the importance of stopping the practice of sati, that is, the ritual immolation of widows. Many times in-laws would force their son’s widow to commit sati because widowhood was thought to be inauspicious and an ill omen (ibid: 61). Sati was also common because many women were legally unable to own or inherit any property therefore they were seen as economically burdensome. Furthermore, the ritual of Sati had been vilified and lost of its pure intentions. Sahajanand Swami created special communities for widows, so they could live there
without social sigma, and he encouraged the widows to remarry. In this way Sahajanand Swami helped abolish the practice of sati.

Sahajanand Swami also reformed society by banning the practice dudhpiti that is female infanticide. This practice entails drowning baby girls, at birth, in a large pot of milk. Dudhpiti was commonly practiced because of the dowry system in India (ibid: 65). When young women married they were expected to bring a large dowry to her in-laws’ house. Many families were unable to afford large dowries; therefore, they opted to commit dudhpiti. Sahajanand Swami had a two-prong approach to ending the practice of dudhpiti. First, he helped the bride’s family find educated men for their daughters, who were not looking for dowries. Second, he abolished the practice of accepting and giving dowries during weddings.

Sahajanand Swami stressed the importance of equality. He taught that everyone, regardless of sex, caste, wealth, statue, and religion could obtain moksha, liberation from the cycle of birth and death (Swaminarayan.org “uplift women”). While stationed in Bombay, Sir John Malcolm, the Lt. Governor of the British East India Company, had come to hear of Sahajanand Swami’s teachings of equality. Malcolm had been working to bring equality using laws, and he sent an invitation to Sahajanand Swami asking him to come to Bombay to discuss the issue of equality. Due to illness, Sahajanand Swami was unable to travel; therefore, Malcolm traveled to Rajkot, Gujarat to visit him. When he arrived he witnessed a sabha or spiritual gathering where Sahajanand Swami was giving a sermon. To Malcolm’s surprise, the sabha consisted of members from different castes sitting together. In late February 1830, the two men met to discuss about equality in Gujarat; they came to the consensus that equality was better achieved through moral
persuasion rather than by force (Malcolm). Many years later Mahatma Gandhi, who also stressed social equality, referenced the teachings of Sahajanand Swami by highlighting that “The work which Sahajanand could do in Gujarat, the [colonial] rulers by their might could not do and would not be able to do” (Thakur 209). Sahajanand Swami fought for social reform and equality through the means of moral persuasion rather than by political force.

The works written by Sahajanand Swami and the works about him also stress the importance of social reform. In his works, Sahajanand Swami uses traditional Hindu scriptures to advocate equality. In this manner, he was able to adapt traditional text and practices into modern society (Williams 2). There are four works that are seen as important to all the Swaminarayan sects. Sahajanand Swami personally composed two of the three works, The Shikshapatri and Lekh, while the third, Vachanamurt, was composed from sermons he gave. The remaining work, Satsangijivan, is about Sahajanand Swami. All four works were written in the last ten years of his life (1819-1829). The four works, Shikshapatri, Vachanamurt, Satsangijivan, and Lekh, contain topics related to theology, codes and conducts, hagiography, and administrative rules and regulations (ibid: 185).

The Shikshapatri is a book of code and conduct for Sahajanand Swami’s devotees. The original text was written in Sanskrit and was later translated into Hindi, Gujarati, and English. Some of the codes and conducts are prescribed to all followers.

There are multiple Swaminarayan sects. BAPS sect will be the focus for this thesis. Many of the sectarian divides occurred because the line of succession was disputed. One of the biggest divides occurred in Vadtal. This division will be explained in detail later in this thesis.
while others are for particular classes: acharyas (leader(s) a of diocese), women, Brahmins, widows, and ascetics (ibid: 186). Sahajanand Swami stressed the importance of reading the Shikshapatri daily, or, for those who are unable to read, having it read to them. The Vachanamurt is a collection of philosophical sermons given by Sahajanand Swami in a question-and-answer format. Four sadhus originally edited the text in Gujarati. The Satsangijivan is a Sanskrit work written in five volumes and in the same rhythmic style as the Bhagavat Purana (ibid). It contains all the teachings, history, and stories from the life of Sahajanand Swami. The Hindu canons, which he learned as a child, influenced Sahajanand Swami’s written works. The written works became the literary foundation of the new sampraday (tradition or sect).

One of the sermons in The Vachanamurt explains the line of leadership succession. Sahajanand Swami explained that after he leaves his mortal body he would remain present on Earth through a sant. Sahajanand Swami is thought to have two forms: one form, which resides in Akshardham, the divine abode or heaven, and a second form, which is thought to be present on earth. The form present on earth is referred to as Akshar (Vivekijivandas 85). The divinity of Akshar is passed on to the next spiritual successor when the time comes. The successors of Sahajanand Swami are not elected or voted on. Instead they are usually a sant who has certain qualities and attributes, which are laid out in the Vachanamurt. In the Vachanamurt Sahajanand Swami states, “the attributes of the Sant – being free of lust, avarice, egotism, taste, attachment, etc – are also described in the scriptures. The Sant who possesses these attributes has a direct relationship with God. Therefore, one should develop the conviction of God based on his words. In fact, to have firm faith in the works of the Sant is itself the conviction of God” (The Vachanamurt: 85).
602). The emphasis placed on the importance of *sant* is one way the BAPS sect differs from other Swaminarayan groups, and it provides justification for their interpretation of the spiritual line of succession.

Sahajanand Swami had placed two *acharyas*, spiritual teachers, in place before leaving his mortal body on June 1, 1830. One *acharya* was in charge of the movement in Ahmadabad and the other in Vadtal (Williams 5). In both locations the lineage was later disputed. The biggest theological disagreement occurred in Vadtal in the early 1900s by Yagnapurushdas (who is seen as the third successor of Sahajanand Swami), which led to the creation of a new sect Swaminarayan, also known as Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS). According to this tradition the line of succession was given to Gunatitanand Swami, not the *acharyas*, and thereafter listed as shown in the following chart:

![Line of succession diagram](image)

Gunatitanand Swami was the first spiritual successor of Sahajanand Swami, according to members of BAPS. Ten years after meeting Sahajanand Swami for the first time
Gunatitanand Swami was given *diksha*, initiated into the fellowship, on January 3, 1810 in Dabhan, Gujarat. During the *diksha* Sahajanand Swami spoke of the Gunatitanand Swami’s ideal and eternal status as *Akshar*, “he Gunatitanand Swami is worshiped as the ideal devotee and as *Aksharbrahm* in consonance with the *Bhakta-Bhagwan* [devotee-God i.e. Gunatitanand Swami-Sahajanand Swami] Vedic tradition” (Vivekjivandas 85).

In this way BAPS believes the line of succession should be given to Gunatitanand Swami.

For the following fifty-two years, from the passing of Sahajanand Swami (1830) to the *diksha* of Shastriji Maharaj (1882), the *satsang* established by Sahajanand Swami continued without any major rifts. Shastriji Maharaj was the third spiritual successor of Sahajanand Swami. He was given *diksha* at the age of seventeen and he stayed in Vadtal. In Vadtal, Shastriji Maharaj came to know of the true teaching of Sahajanand Swami, and the relationship between *bhakta* and *bhagwan*. The relationship refers to the *bhakta* being the ideal devotee, Gunatitanand Swami, and *bhagwan* being Sahajanand Swami (baps.org). Shastriji Maharaj also came to know of the two forms of Sahajanand Swami and how Akshar would always be present on earth. Shastriji Maharaj started preaching these teachings in Vadtal, against the wishes of the *Acharya*. After much opposition, Shastriji Maharaj was forced to leave Vadtal in November 1905 (Amurtvijaydas 7). For the remainder of his life, Shastriji Maharaj placed all of his efforts in building *mandirs*, which would showcase the *murti*, images, of *bhakta-bhagwan* in the center.

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4 Satsang – The practice of spiritually associating with the fellowship.
5 Bhakta – Devotee of God
6 Bhagwan – God and in the given case Sahajanand Swami.
7 Acharya – Leader of diocese.
While Shastriji Maharaj’s was the head of the BAPS sect many of the BAPS follower migrated to East Africa for economic betterment. In East Africa they were left without their guru, therefore, Shastriji Maharaj wrote letters containing the importance of the bhakta-bhagwan relationship and established a connection with the East African satsang mandal. With the movement of satsangis to East Africa BAPS was able to migrate from Gujarat to East Africa.
CHAPTER 3
SWAMINARAYAN AND THE INDIAN MIGRATION TO THE EAST AFRICA

Prior to the nineteenth century contact between Indian traders and the indigenous peoples East Africa was relatively infrequent. However, the nature of the contact and the relationship between the two groups changed in the nineteenth century for the sake of trade. In the early nineteenth century the Sultan of Oman moved his headquarters to the island of Zanzibar, during which he appointed a Hindu family, of Bhatias caste, as his customs collectors. Bhatia(s) are a type of caste, predominately found in Panjab, Rajasthan, Sindh, and Gujarat.

It is from this point that one can observe the beginning of a permanent Hindu establishment in East Africa (Gregory 2). The Sultan of Oman used his connection with the Hindu family to expand trade further into India. Eventually, this led to the migration of Indians into East Africa. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Asian population in East Africa had reached an all time high. In 1887 there were approximately 6,000 Asians living in and around Zanzibar (ibid: 3). The early 1890s, however, saw a wave of Hindu immigrants begin to settle more inland rather than on the island of Zanzibar.

In 1890 the British employed Indian troops to establish control of East Africa, which included what would eventually become the countries of Kenya, Uganda and parts of Tanzania. Both the British and the Germans wanted control of East Africa, thus creating a tension between the two powers. The British and Germans set out to construct railways to encourage European settlement in Africa. The British-controlled railway, commonly known as the “Uganda Railway,” was set to connect the port city of Mombasa
to the inland cities of Nairobi, Malaba, and Kampala. Between 1895 and 1914, the British encouraged migration of Asians from Punjab, and approximately 37,747 Punjabis were signed to a three-year contract to help with the construction of the Uganda Railway and other public works. The Germans, however, chose to utilize more African labor and brought over less than two hundred Asians (ibid: 3).

Many of the contract laborers, approximately 7,000, chose to stay past their contract’s expiration date. Of the 7,000 that chose to stay, the majority of the migrants became artisans, merchants, and government workers, while some continued working on the railway (ibid: 3). Much of the Asian population who stayed in East Africa settled near the railway, thus populating towns such as Mombasa, Nairobi, and Kampala. As the British government grew in East Africa, more and more positions opened up for the Asians who desired to work in government. Having more migrants caused business and trade to increase for the artisans and merchants. An expanding government, along with booming business and trade, attracted many more migrants from India. From 1890 to 1920 between 10,000 to 20,000 free Asian immigrants migrated in hopes of government jobs and new business opportunities (ibid: 3-4).

South Asian Community in Kenya

In 1920 the British declared a protectorate over the colony of Kenya, which had been made out of a territory formerly known as British East Africa. A protectorate is a territory that is not conventionally ruled; instead, the conquerors control the country through treaties and other law (ibid: 192). This political shift significantly affected the immigration and settlement patterns of Asians because the protectorate also included laws that impacted the Hindu migrant community. Some of the laws bore resemblance to
the laws the British had established in India. (Derrett 396). Having similar laws in place for Hindus meant an easier transition between the old-homeland and the new-homeland.

Prior to Kenya’s independence from the British Colonial Rule in 1963, there were approximately 200,000 South Asians living there, and they heavily influenced Kenya’s economy as well as its political structure. By the 1930s, many of the Asians living in Kenya had begun putting down roots, and they intended to spend their lives in their new-homeland. More and more immigrants were continuing to arrive from India with the hope of getting employment in government, which was controlled by the British (Younger 215). Many of the immigrants arriving decided to settle in urban areas, thus making them the majority in those locations.

The South Asian community was able to influence the politics of East Africa during the early 1900s, due to their large numbers in urban areas, a wealthy businessman A.M. Jeevanjee, in 1900, suggested to the other influential Asians in Kenya to begin the Mombasa Indian Association. Later, in 1914 Jeevanjee took the lead in forming the East African Indian National Congress. Both the Mombasa Indian Association and the East African Indian National Congress were modeled after political parties in India and South Africa and they reinforced the norm of keeping a distance between Indian and African society and culture (ibid 216). By 1920 the Asian community had even secured space in Kenya’s Legislative Council.

Once there were representatives on the Legislative Council they quickly became aware that they had to speak for the African interests as well as their own. All of the Indian representatives had keenly picked up on this, and they helped the African population’s voice be heard. V.V. Phadke, a lawyer by profession, immediately
demanded African representation on the Legislative Council. Another influential person was J.B. Pandya who was a Brahman immigrant. He arrived in Kenya in 1915 and began work editing the *East African Chronicle* for A.M. Jeevanjee. Pandya also formed a bond with Harry Thuku, who was a Kikuyu leader. Pandya and Thuku grew close, close enough that when Thuku was arrested Pandya cared for his family. Pandya and Thuku also corroborated on the formation of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), in 1924 (ibid 216-217).

The KCA was a political organization formed to improve life under colonial rule and helped to launch the political career of Jomo Kenyatta, who became the Secretary General of the KCA in 1928. The organization petitioned the government for a number of different grievances: granting permission for Africans to grow coffee and cotton, publishing laws in Gikuyu, appointing a Gikuyu paramount chief, expanding medical facilities, and building a high school and girl’s school in Muranga. When World War II reached East Africa the KCA was banned (Thuranira 175).

In 1929 A.M. Jeevanjee and group of influential Asians (Isher Dass, V.V. Phadke, A.B. Patel) helped petition the Joint Committee of Parliament on behalf of the Kikuyu. The formal hearings were held in 1931, and during the hearing the Asian voices made it clear that they, “wholeheartedly supported the paramountcy of Native interests, and the principle that the relation of His Majesty’s Government to the African population is one of a trusteeship that cannot be devolved” (Younger 217). The Asian leaders also urged the Committee to remove crop restrictions and the identity cards that Africans were required to carry. The decision of the Joint Committee of Parliament was to make no further moves towards White self-rule, but they did not leave the country for another
thirty years. Despite the Asian and African communities working together during the hearing of the Joint Committee of Parliament, the two groups were still distant from one another (Gregory).

The distant nature of Asian and African communities was prevalent because of what was taken from the Kikuyu and the Masai during the early British colonial rule. When the British decided to build the railway between the lands of the Kikuyu and the Masai it was the Asians who did the physical labor. The British also claimed the most fertile land from the Kikuyu and the Masai, which forced them to settle elsewhere. Additionally, Africans were forced to carry identification papers, while the Asian immigrants were not. The Asians may not have been agents of oppression but they were on the forefront of receiving the hatred because they also seemed to prosper in the Kikuyu lands. To make matters worse between the two communities, in 1920 when the price of agricultural products fell, Asian shopkeepers had to tell African producers the bad news, which created further tension between the two communities (Kenyatta).

With the beginning of World War II, the British enlisted 266,000 Africans to fight the war. After the war ended the enlisted Africans came back with gumption and believed they could take charge of their destiny. This helped to create the immediate context for the emergence of the much-feared Mau Mau rebellion, which took place from 1952-1960. During the time of the rebellion many Asians were left out of the story, which focused upon Africans trying to gain independence from Great Britain. In the wake of Britain’s brutal suppression of the Mau Mau movement, Kenya moved towards independence. On December 12, 1963, Kenya became a commonwealth with Queen Elizabeth II as head of the state, and in 1964 Kenya became the Republic of Kenya, freeing itself completely
from colonial rule. Due to the deeply rooted distrust between the Africans and Asians, many of the Asians opted to leave Kenya for Great Britain after its independence in 1964 (Keith).

In the 1960s and 1970s Asian communities in East Africa went through major changes. Every country in East Africa knew they had to create legislation in order to gain control of the economy that the Asian community controlled. Even though the Asian population made up less than 2% of the total population, they comprised one third of the population of Nairobi. The Asian population of the city was evident in that their small businesses dominated Nairobi (Sowell 323-328). In Uganda, Idi Amin infamously expelled the Asian community in 1972. In Tanzania the government pursued a socialist system, thus nationalizing many of the businesses owned by the Asians. In Kenya they recognized the importance of the private sector and encouraged every entrepreneur to become a Kenyan citizen. Out of the three countries, Kenya seemed to be the most hospitable towards the Asians. Therefore, Kenya still has a high number of Asians living there today (Younger 219).

As the Hindu population increased many of the different Asian communities felt a need to remain a tight-knit community. They began to keep ties with one another and provide economic and social support, thus creating pockets of Asian communities within the larger community. In the early twentieth century as infrastructure developed further inland, many of the Asian communities traveled inland, developing community centers along the way (ibid: 202). These community centers provided a way for the Asian community to look after one another as they traveled to cities such as Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, and Kisumu. These community centers began providing the community
with any religious necessities that arose, including a place to perform rituals for marriage, death, and birth. Soon the community centers became too small to incorporate the different groups of Hindus (ibid: 203). In the early 1930s, many of the groups decided to branch out and build their own mandir, a Hindu place of worship.

*Swaminarayan Development in East Africa*

The first Swaminarayan devotees moved to East Africa from Kutch, Gujarat in order to pursue trade and business opportunities. Commerce and trade soon brought more people from different castes to East Africa (Brahmaviharidas 6). These early settlers became integral in the spread and development of the BAPS sect in East Africa. In 1927 Harmanbhai Patel, from Gaana went back to India for a short trip. While in India he received blessings for his return back to East Africa. Harmanbhai also met Purushottam Swami, who a senior sant in BAPS. Purushottam Swami spoke with Harmanbhai, in great lengths, about the theology of BAPS. In his concluding remarks Purushottam Swami gave Harmanbhai five small pictorial murtis of the Akshar-Purshottam. Harmanbhai stressed that he did not need five murtis but Purushottam Swami insisted that they would come into use. This event marked the beginning of the spread of BAPS in East Africa.

After Harmanbhai returned to East Africa he began telling everyone about BAPS’s theology. Since Harmanbhai worked on the Railway he was able to keep in contact with many people throughout Kenya and Uganda. Additionally, Nirgundas Swami, another senior sant in BAPS, wrote letters to Harmanbhai (Brahmaviharidas 6). The letters contained topics ranging from theology to words of comfort (Vivekpriyadas). Harmanbahi would make photocopies of these letters and pass them out at the Railway stations. Through these letters BAPS began spreading to the early Kutch and Luhana
groups from Gujarat. In 1928 the Kutchi settlers, in Kenya, arranged for a large discourse on the *Satsangi jivan* to be held, and approximately 1200 people were in attendance (Brahmaviharidas 5). After the *Satsangi jivan* discourse the letters from Nirgundas Swami began to spread rapidly. By 1933 these letters had spread all around Kenya and Uganda. Also, in 1928 a small canvas *murti* of the Sahajanand Swami was installed at Messrs Karsan Mulji Company on Canal Road in Nairobi (ibid: 5). This installation of the *murti* was significant because it gave the BAPS devotees a place to congregate.

In 1929 Harmanbhai was transferred to work at the Kibweji railway station, where he came across Maganbhai. Maganbhai was inspired by the theology Harmanbhai had explained to him and decided to become a devotee of the BAPS sect. Manganbhai quickly began talking extensively about the BAPS sect to whomever he encountered. In 1932 Maganbhai told Harmanbhai, “All the members of other faiths pray at their own places of worship, then we too should pray to our lord” (Brahmaviharidas 6-7). With this statement the BAPS devotees began holding regular evening prayers and discourse.

Again in 1932 Harmanbhai went back to India. On this trip he spent the majority of this time with Shastriji Maharaj and Nirgundas Swami. Harmanbhai became so engulfed in *satsang* he did not want to return to East Africa. Harmanbhai told Shastriji Maharaj, “Swami, I do not wish to return back to Africa. There is no *satsang* there and people are not inclined towards spirituality.” To which Shastriji Maharaj replied, “Go back and persevere. *Satsang* will flourish; it is a blessing of Maharaj. The *satsang* fold will multiply through your efforts” (ibid: 7). Through these words of encouragement Harmanbhai zealously began spreading *satsang*. Nirgundas Swami also aided Harmanbhai with his efforts by writing more letters, many of which, ranged from seventy
to a hundred pages (ibid: 7). The letters further elaborated on BAPS’s theology, faith, devotion, and glory. This revitalization and the spread of satsang can be seen in the building of the first mandir in Nairobi in 1945 (ibid: 10).

December of 1945 marked an important time for BAPS. A canvas murti of Sahajanad Swami, Gunatitanand Swami, and Gopalanad Swami was sanctified by Shastiji Maharaj in India. The murti was then brought to Kenya and installed. The installation of this murti marked the first ever BAPS mandir to be established outside of India. The mandir was a small space, but with the establishment of the mandir in Nairobi there was dramatic growth in the number of satsangis. Satsang not only dramatically grew in Kenya but also in Uganda.

On April 25, 1955, Yogiji Maharaj performed the inauguration of a mandir in Mombasa. This mandir was significant because the murtis were not pictures but idols. The following year, 1956, BAPS organized a convention in Nairobi. Again, in 1970, Yogiji Maharaj performed another inauguration of a mandir in Nairobi (Brahmaviharidas 11). The sect quickly outgrew the mandir in Nairobi, and then in 1999 a Hindu shikarbaddh mandir (a mandir with either five or seven pinnacles) was inaugurated for the first time on African soil. The BAPS community in Kenya showed no signs of slowing down in the midst of the tumultuous politics of the late colonial and early independence eras. In Uganda satsang progressed in a similar manner as it did in Kenya, but the rise of Idi Amin’s dictatorial regime in the 1970s created a dramatic difference between the BAPS communities in Kenya and Uganda.

South Asian Community in Uganda
The history of the South Asian migration to Uganda differs from Kenya around the mid twentieth century. When South Asians first reached Uganda they found it to be a place of abundant fertile land, where cotton, sugar cane, tea and coffee were being produced and sold (Tiwani 67). The South Asian population from the beginning established the business of cultivating and export, and these new business ventures made South Asians into wealthy middle and upper class citizens. The same business ventures that made them wealthy also made them widely unpopular.

By the early-to-mid twentieth century, the Asian community mostly worked in textile and banking, and they worked directly with the British. The British employed most of the Asians in Uganda, but some owned their own businesses. The tariff system instituted by British favored the economic interests of the Asians. While the Asian community only made up 1% of the population, they received 5% of Uganda’s national income (Jamal). This favoritism and the wealth of the Asian community fueled hatred towards them.

In 1963 Uganda became a republic, with Milton Obote as its prime minister. Under Obote’s rule Indophobia became popular and the newly independent Ugandan government frequently portrayed the Asian community in a negative light. The Ugandan government believed that the Asian community was hoarding all the wealth and goods of Uganda, thus deliberately destroying Uganda in the process. In 1968 a committee on “Africanisation in Commerce and Industry” in Uganda talked extensively about Indophobia, and how to prevent South Asians from controlling Uganda’s economic wealth. Later, in 1969, a system of work permits and trade license were introduced for
the Asian population, which limited the role the Asians could play in the economic
sphere (Patel).

In 1971, Idi Amin led a coup to overthrow Obote, and the Asian community
suffered tremendously under his rule, as Amin’s government propagated the pre-existing
Indophobia. Asians were stereotyped as traders, inbred (to their profession), greedy,
conniving, without any loyalty, without any racial identity, cheating, conspiring, and
plotting to overthrow Uganda. This further fueled the hatred towards the Asian
community. In August 1972, Amin gave ninety days for the Asian community, who were
mostly Gujaratis, to leave Uganda. There is much speculation as to why Amin called for
an exodus, but it seems that economic motives played a significant role in his expulsion
of Asians: “We are determined to make the ordinary Ugandan master of his own destiny,
and above all to see that he enjoys the wealth of this country. Our deliberate policy is to
transfer the economic control of Uganda into the hands of Ugandans for the first time in
our country’s history” (Jørgensen 288-290).

During the time of the expulsion many Asians were already citizens of Great
Britain due to colonial rule. Therefore many Asians were able to return to Great Britain,
but a large percentage of Asians were also left stateless after being stripped of their
Ugandan citizenship. The refugees had no choice but to start over again in new countries.
Many countries from accepted the refugees; in the Social Origins of Violence in Uganda,
1964-1985 there is a breakdown of how many Ugandan refugees counties accepted:

- United Kingdom accepted 27,200 refugees
- Canada accepted 6,000 refugees
- India accepted 4,500 refugees
• Kenya accepted 2,500 refugees
• Malawi, Pakistan, West Germany, and the United states accepted 1,000 refugees
• Australia, Austria, Sweden, Mauritius, and New Zealand accepted small number of refugees.

(Kasozi 119)

Following the exodus, the Indian government severed all diplomatic relationships with Uganda. The exodus not only affected the Asian community but it greatly affected Ugandans.

The economic impact of the expulsion is still felt today in Uganda. After the expulsion, Amin confiscated the property of the Asian community, including businesses, firms, farms, estates, cars, houses, household goods and more. Many Asians owned large businesses, which were left without management, because Amin purged almost every Asian from Uganda’s economy. He reallocated the possessions to a total of 5,655 different entities, which are mentioned in *Uganda: A Modern History*:

• 5,443 reallocations were made to individuals
• 176 reallocations were made to government officials
• 33 reallocations were made to semi-state organizations
• 2 reallocations were made to charities
• Ugandan Development Corporation

(Jørgensen 288-290)

The Ugandan Development Corporation received the largest control over enterprises, but this sudden change in corporations left Uganda with inexperienced proprietors.
Eventually, due to instability and the lack of experience in running the corporations there was restructuring in 1974 and 1975 (ibid: 288-290).

Many BAPS *satsangis* who left Uganda settled in Great Britain. In the ninety days the Asians were given to leave Uganda some *satsangis* went to the *mandirs* and took the *murtis* to bring them to Great Britain. The *murtis* from Tororo *mandir*, for example, were brought and installed in the *mandir* in Islington, England. Amin, however, seized six BAPS *mandirs*, three of which were in Kampala, Jinja, and Tororo (Tiwani 68). Sir Charles Cunningham, a senior civil servant and chairman of the Uganda Resettlement Board stated strength of the religious network of BAPS *satsangis*,

This ability to draw strength from cultural and religious continuity can help in facing the unpredictable trails of modern life. When nearly thirty thousand people were suddenly expelled from Uganda and had to come, often penniless, to start a new life in Great Britain, their calmness and dignity, their readiness to accept hardship, the uncomplaining way in which so many of them who had known success and prosperity began again at the bottom of the ladder, impressed us greatly. They continued to practice that faith, helped by those of the same religion who were already living here (Great Britain), in remote resettlement centers and in the many areas all over the country to which they went (www.swaminarayan.org “Emotional stability”)

The BAPS refugees rebuilt their lives in Great Britain, and, in the process, BAPS was propelled into a global organization.

Amin’s rein ended in 1979 when his predecessor, Milton Obote, overthrew him.

There were several short-term presidencies between 1979-1985, and Obote was overthrown yet again in 1985 by General Tito Okello, who ruled for a short six months until Yoweri Museveni succeeded him. The Ugandan Patriotic Front, led by Yoweri Museveni, has been in control of Uganda since 1986. Under Museveni’s presidency, Uganda has seen economic growth and greater religious freedom. The present
government is considered to be secular and also claims to be supportive of all Hindu celebrations. This is a stark change from what the government was in the 1970s. In 1997 a diplomatic source stated that,

The Ugandan government is launching a major appeal aimed at Ugandan Asians settled here to return to the east African nation twenty-five years after they were thrown out by President Idi Amin. President Museveni will address a meeting at the Swaminarayan Temple in Neasden next month to offer a series of incentives to Asians to return and bring back investment, skills, and their business” (www.ugandanforum.org).

This shows how important the Asian population was to the economy of Uganda.

The Asian populations of Kenya and Uganda, therefore, have had very different political and economic histories. BAPS in both locations, despite the turmoil of the country, continued to build mandirs in order to survive in the diaspora. When the refugees built mandir in their new homelands they carried over the same mandir structure they had in place in Uganda, before the expulsion.
CHAPTER 4

SWAMINARAYAN AND THE GLOBAL DIASPORA

In her book, *A Place at the Multicultural Table*, Prema Kurein examines why Hindu American leaders are interested in transforming Hinduism into a global and universal religion. She also examines how Hindu leaders are making religion compatible with American culture and society. BAPS is unique because not only is the sect compatible with India, but it is also compatible with other countries where satsangis are located. The migrant community is able to generate deeper emotional bonds with both their old and new-homelands. Steven Vertovec, author of “The Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora’ Exemplified by South Asian Religions,” also alludes to this global network of south Asian religions. The three meanings outlined by Vertovec include 1) diaspora as a social form, 2) diaspora as a type of consciousness, and 3) diaspora as a mode of cultural production. Vertovec’s first meaning provides structure and allows the communities in the diaspora to be situated historically. His second meaning provides agency to the communities and allows for scholars to compare and contextualize a variety of experiences without watering them down. His third meaning contextualizes and situates the communities in today’s world.

The third meaning of diaspora is important to examine for this section. Vertovec places a large emphasis on the globalization and the worldwide flow of cultural objects, images, and meanings. This flow of ideas indicates a new hybrid culture forming amongst the migrant community. The phenomenon of a new hybrid culture is mostly found among the younger members of the migrant community who are exposed to different cultures from an early age (Vertovec: 19). Technology is also fueling this new
hybrid culture through television, movies, radios, and websites. By having this new
hybrid culture there is also a sense of nostalgia coming into play. This meaning of
diaspora can be seen in the BAPS community.

The BAPS community became a transnational religious movement through
immigration from Gujarat to East Africa. They are, however, more than a transnational
movement; they can also be categorized as a global organization. The building of
mandirs in the diaspora helped to make BAPS into a global organization. In order to
become a thriving global organization, BAPS created a particularly interesting and
centralized structure, with Pramukh Swami at the head of the structure. Pramukh Swami
makes most, if not all, the major decisions for the organization. Under Pramukh Swami
there are a few selected sadhus (ascetics), known as sadguru santos (senior ascetics).
Followed by sadguru santos are a few lay leaders known as trustees (Kurien 105). It is
important to note that the trustees are all males due to the strict brahmacharya niyams
(rules of celibacy) for sadhus. Pramukh Swami, sadguru santos, and the trustees make

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8 Pramukh Swami was appointed president of BAPS in 1950. In 1971 Pramukh Swami
became the guru of BAPS, thus placing him at the head of the structure.
9 The Swaminarayan Sadhus’s follow Ashtanga Brahmacharya, which is the 8-folds of
celibacy. The 8 folds include, (1) listening to or of; (2) talking to of or; (3) frolicking
with; (4) intentionally looking at; (5) privately conversing with; (6) fantasizing about; (7)
thinking of; and (8) intercourse with the opposite gender. The rules for Ashtanga
Brahmacharya can be found in the Agni Puranam [372.9] and the Daksha Smruti [7.31-
32]

10 All satsangis are required to follow stri-purush maryada, which is a discipline that
separates men and women within sacred space. During Sahajanand Swami’s seven-year
pilgrimage he witnessed many immoral sexual exploitation in sacred space (Rudert
2004). Sahajanand Swami wanted to ensure that the path to moksha, liberation, was
purified. Thus the discipline of stri-purush maryada was prescribed to serve as a form of
protection for men and women. It minimized sexual temptation and protected women
from any form of sexual abuse (Williams 2001: 167). In the Shikshapatri Sahajanand
and provide guidance to all BAPS mandirs and centers around the world. There are over one million followers, 55,000 registered volunteers, over 880 trained sadhus, over 500 mandirs world wide, and 43 shikharbaddha mandirs, truly making BAPS a global organization (www.baps.org & www.swaminarayan.org).

There is also a detailed hierarchy for individual mandirs. Beneath the central community of the global trustees are the individual mandir santos and lay coordinators. Here it becomes important to note that there are both male and female coordinators, who work with their respective genders. Since stri-purush maryada (separation of men and women) is upheld at all levels of the hierarchy, there is usually a male liaison for the female coordinator and the santos. Under the coordinators there are different members who head the different departments in a mandir such as administrative, finance, audiovisual, security, housekeeping, and public relations (Kurien 105). This highly centralized structure can be seen in every BAPS mandir, whether it is a small hari mandir (small mandirs without pinnacles) or a big shikarabaddh mandir (a mandir with either five or seven pinnacles)\(^{11}\).

While other countries also have national headquarters, the main headquarter still remains in Gujarat (www.baps.org). Having such a highly centralized organization has helped BAPS propel into different countries while still remaining a close-knit community. There are a few key points in the history of the Swaminarayan Sampraday that helped make it a global organization. The first turning point would be the move from

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swami wrote, “All male and female devotees coming to the temples for darshan either daily or on days of religious festivals shall keep themselves aloof from the opposite sex” (Shikshapatri 40).

\(^{11}\) The significance of a shikarabaddh mandir is further explained on pages 29-30.
India to East Africa, the second being the move from East Africa to England (which were described in the previous chapter of this thesis), and the third would be the move to North America.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which opened the United States boarders for immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, dramatically changed the demographics of the U.S. (Fisher). Prior to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 there were restrictions placed on who was legally allowed to immigrate to the United States. Under the new law, organizations and corporations were legally allowed to employ foreign workers, either temporarily or permanently. After the passing of the law in 1965 many professionals migrated from Asia to the United States (www.saada.org). In 1970 Yogiji Maharaj wrote a letter to Dr. K.C Patel, a chemistry professor, who had immigrated to the United States from England.

The letter contained the names of twenty-eight satsangis (member of the Swaminarayan fellowship) from around the country who had also immigrated to United States and were told to establish satsang (fellowship) there. Along with the names of the twenty-eight followers, Yogiji Maharaj sent four sadhus to tour the United States and helped establish BAPS satsang (Kurien 105). During the same time, many East African satsangis, due to political instability or economic progress, chose to migrate to England. Satsang began in these new countries similar to the way satsang had begun in East Africa: with a small gathering of satsangis in homes every Sunday. As the numbers grew so did the need for a larger location, thus hari mandirs were constructed. This can be seen as the beginning of BAPS becoming a global organization.
Satsang in England was influenced by the satsang established in East Africa because that is where a majority of the immigrants were from. The East African immigrants brought with them the organized structure that they had developed in East Africa. A satsangi in England stated, “We inherited five presidents, ten vice-presidents, and one hundred committee members from the temples in East Africa” (Williams 217). Having members that were already part of the tradition in East Africa helped the rapid growth of satsang in England. When the expulsion of Indians from Uganda occurred, the satsangis took the murtis (images) from the mandirs before leaving. These murtis were kept at a satsangi’s house in Islington, England. After there were enough followers to build a small hari mandir in Neasden, England the murtis were installed there.

In 1995 Neasden became an important location for BAPS because it is where the first shikarabaddh mandir outside of India was constructed. Later in 2000, the Neasden Mandir was cited in Guinness World Records:

Biggest Hindu Temple outside India: The Shri Swaminarayan Temple in Neasden, London, UK, is the Largest Hindu temple outside of India. It was built by Pramukh Swami, a [now] 92-year-old Indian sadhu (holy man), and is made of 2,828 tones of Bulgarian limestone and 2,000 tones of Italian marble, which was first shipped to India to be carved by a team of 1,528 sculptors. The temple cost £12 million to build (Guinness World Records 45).

Since then it has been surpassed by other BAPS mandirs. The construction of the shikarabaddh mandir is significant because the design of the mandir is in accordance with Hindu texts and practices. The word shikharbaddha comes from the Sanskrit terms shikar (mountain peak) and baddha (bound). According to the Shilpa Shastra, a sacred Hindu text, the architecture of a shikarabaddh mandir represents the body of the Purusha (cosmic man) (Elgood 116). “The shikharbaddh mandir reflects the deep-rooted
undertones of spiritual aspirations and enlightenment. For instance, the pinnacle, which is in similar shape to a mountain, symbolizes upward aspiration” (Mukundcharandas 6-7). The significance of the Neasden shikarbaddh mandir still remains amongst the satsangis because it solidified their presence in the diaspora and marked how BAPS preserved their ideologies within the diaspora.

The satsangis from East Africa influenced the way early satsang developed in England. Later satsang in England influenced the satsang of East Africa; such is the nature of a global organization. One influence that was taken from England was the placement of sadhus abroad. After the construction of the shikarabaddh mandir in Neasden, Pramukh Swami placed fifteen sadhus to permanently reside in Neasden. Prior to this sadhus did vichran (traveled) abroad but returned back to India. Of the fifteen sadhus who now permanently resided in Neasden, nine grew up in England, one was from East Africa, one was from the United States, and four were from India (Williams 220). The background of the different sadhus shows how transnational BAPS was becoming. These sadhus were assigned different tasks of running the mandir, similar to what they would have been assigned in India. After placing fifteen sadhus in Neasden, it became customary to have sadhus permanently living and traveling in East Africa, England, and North America.

Another important influence England satsangis provided for East Africa was the conviction that a shikarabaddh mandir could be built in the diaspora. In 1994, a year before the opening of the shikarabaddh mandir in Neasden, Pramukh Swami proclaimed that a shikarabaddh mandir would be constructed on a five-acre plot in Nairobi (Brahmaviharidas 12). The following year, the BAPS community in Nairobi held a
traditional groundbreaking ceremony for a *shikarbaddh mandir*, marking the first time such a ceremony had been performed on the African continent. Mahant Swami, a *Sadguru sant*, performed the groundbreaking ceremony according to the *Shastras* (scriptures). While traditionally, only water from rivers in India is used, due to the transnational nature of BAPS, this ceremony used water from different rivers around the world including the Ganga, Yamuna, Saryu, Gondali, Ghela, Thames, Nile, Mississippi, and River Nairobi, as well as waters from Lake Victoria and the Indian Ocean. Also, coins from 151 different countries were placed in the ground. Five years later Pramukh Swami consecrated the *shikarabaddh mandir* in Nairobi (ibid: 13).

The *shikarabaddh mandir* in Nairobi is unique compared to the *mandir* in Neasden because some of the structure in the *mandir* contains wood. Wood was predominantly used to showcase the different varieties found in Africa: Elgon Teak, Mvuli, Mahogany, and White Oak. However, architects also used approximately 350 tons of yellow Jesalmer sandstone from Rajasthan, India. The stones were hand carved by 150 skilled sculptors in India over a period of two years and were then shipped from India to Mombasa and assembled like giant jigsaw puzzle in Nairobi. Likewise, wood was shipped to India from Africa for carving and twelve months later shipped back to Africa for assembly (ibid: 14). This *mandir*, therefore, was the first of its kind to be constructed in Africa.

Funding a project of this magnitude was a challenge. Volunteers preformed much of the work, with approximately eighty volunteers contributing both physically and financially to ensure the building the of the *shikharabaddh mandir*. Due to the financial hardships of the volunteers, many participated in fund raising activities. Some *satsangis*
put their musical talents to work and created the ‘Yogi Marching Band.’ The band would perform at various events to raise money and donate that to help build the mandir. There was a mass-recycling project where satsangis went around collecting materials that could be recycled. Participants collected a total of 190 tons of scrap metal, seven tons of newspaper, and sixty-six tons of waste. Female satsangis catered for events and donated the money they earned (ibid: 16). Also, donations from mandirs around the world contributed to the construction.

A four-day inauguration festival, known as mandir mahotsav, for the shikarabaddh mandir, began on August 26, 1999. The mandir mahotsav event took immense planning from the trustees down to individual volunteers. There were twenty-eight departments\(^\text{12}\) set up during the four-day event; the different departments covered every aspect of the event (ibid: 21). During the mandir mahotsav there were three specific events that also occurred. The first event was the yagna (sacrifice/offering) for world peace, which took place on August 28, 1999. There were 426 participants and the thirty-five yagna kunds (the structure which hold the fire for the yagna). During the yagna Vedic chanting and prayers took place. After which Pramukh Swami said a prayer for, “peace in the continent of Africa, in Kenya and for all the countries of the world. May all be happy and inspired with dharma because if there is dharma then one will experience happiness in life” (bid: 21).

\(^{12}\) The twenty-eight departments include: 1) kitchen, 2) accommodation, 3) transportation, 4) sabha, 5) nagaryatra, 6) security/parking, 7) sanitary, 8) decoration, 9) yagna, 10) landscape, 11) souvenir, 12) reception, 13) press/PR/inquires, 14) cultural programs, 15) immigration, 16) electrical, 17) water/plumbing, 18) volunteers, 19) communications, 20) audio-visual, 21) public address system, 22) marching band, 23) maintenance, 24) medical, 25) bookstall, 26) general stores, 27) exhibition, and 28) travels/ Pramukh Swami’s residence.
The second event that took place during mandir mahotsav was the nagaryatra (nagar- village; yatra - travel). During a nagaryatra the murtis are paraded around town and then they are brought back to the mandir where they will be inaugurated. There was a procession of murtis, which were placed on floats, and paraded on the streets in Nairobi. The procession was three kilometers long and it was comprised of floats, the ‘Yogi Marching Band’, approximately a hundred sadhus, and thousands of devotees (both male and female) (ibid: 21). The men and women walked separately to ensure stri-purush maryada was maintained. Both genders preformed traditional Indian dances and some even dressed in the traditional Hindu attire during the nagaryatra.

The final and the main event took place on August 29, 1999 at 9:15, when Pramukh Swami installed the murtis in the shikarabbh mandir. This ritual is known as murti pratishtha. This event marks the completion of the mandir because the murtis now are in their home. After the murti pratishtha was completed there was an assembly in commemoration of the murti pratishta. Many political leaders were in attendance during the assembly, including: Indian High Commissioner, High Commissioner of Bangladesh, Ambassador of Hungary, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka, Ambassador of Poland, Ambassador of Columbia, High Commissioner of Uganda, and other leading industrialist (ibid: 22). The attendance of the different High Commissioners and Ambassadors shows that the sect was not only spreading rapidly in the diaspora, but it was also impacting the communities its followers were living in.

Every BAPS mandir established in India and abroad has strong connections to the BAPS headquarters in Gujarat and to one another, making BAPS into a transnational organization, as Prema Kurien argues (Kurien 103). In an interview conducted by Kurien,
her interviewee states, “Close connections are maintained so that if members of the
temple have to go Nairobi, for example, they will be able to stay in the home of one of
the temple members. Hospitality is an important aspect of this temple. There is a close
kinship amongst these congregations. It is like one big family” (ibid: 104). Religion for
the BAPS community in the diaspora has become a way to maintain close ties with other
members in different location, thus creating a sense of a one big community.

Having intertwining global networks meant umbrella organizations had to be
efficient and highly structured. Many of these umbrella organizations dealt with sectarian
divisions. More importantly the umbrella organizations provided a sense of connection
with the old-homeland and a connection with the same sect in other locations (Brown
110). In the case of the Swaminarayan sect, it has deep rooted networks in place all
around the world. Having an umbrella organization helps sustain the migrant
communities abroad by allowing for a connection, which provides the migrants with the
sense of “home away from home.”
CHAPTER 5
HOME AWAY FROM HOME

For migrant communities it is not only vital to have a strong economic foundation but also to have a wide range of social networks, which can help provide a sense of comfort. Establishing deep emotional connections to the location and the people within the location can determine the success of a migrant community. Steven Vertovec expands further on what it means to establish a sense of community in his paper, “Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora’ Exemplified Among South Asian Religions.” Vertovec’s second meaning of diaspora marks a type of consciousness that emphasizes experiences and the migrant’s state of mind. According to Vertovec this is a type of awareness that migrant communities have and which provides them with a sense that they are in a “home away from home” or “here and there” (Vertovec 8). The awareness of their multi-locality is particularly powerful because it creates a bond, which can sometimes be artificial, with the old-homeland. This multi-locality mindset of the migrant community allows them to re-create the feeling of home in their new homeland. Vertovec also maintains that the migrant community is hyperaware of the symbiotic relationship between the old and new homeland.

In the first wave of migration, many of the indentured laborers often lived alone, rather than as a married couple (Brown 75). During the second and third waves of migration, there was an influx of nuclear families. Building families ensured support amongst the migrants, thus allowing the community to thrive. Many of the second and third generation children who grew up in proximity to one another established a further
sense of community. They chose to purchase houses near one another in order to maintain their sense of community (ibid: 80).

During the second and third waves of migration, members of the Asian diaspora built more mandirs. In East Africa, the community center served its purpose for the first wave of migrants but the second and third wave of migrants outgrew the community center (Younger 202). Therefore, many religious groups built mandirs. In the BAPS community mandirs became not only a place of religious worship but also a place to remember and experience culture. This section will show how mandirs, through their exhibition component, weekly activities, and festivals, created the feeling of being in a home away from home.

**Exhibitions**

Since the establishment of BAPS there has been an emphasis placed on building mandirs. The number of mandirs built by BAPS and the global interconnectivity of the mandirs demonstrate this foundational emphasis. BAPS built their first mandir outside of India in Nairobi in 1945 and it included an installation of a small painting of the murtis (images of the divine). The satsang in Nairobi grew from a small group of individuals; five decades later there was a need for a bigger mandir (Brahmavirahidas 8). Mandirs in the diaspora became a place where devotees were able to not only pray and offer devotion but also a place were they kept culture and tradition alive. The current guru of BAPS stated, “wherever one goes, one should keep four aspects of our culture firmly rooted in our life: our diet, our language, our dress, and our devotion” (www.swaminarayan.org). Food, language, dress, and devotion utilize the five senses, which is why these elements help to create an environment with the possibility of being
transported back to the old-homeland. Mandirs, for BAPS, became places that emphasized all four cultural aspects. Through exhibitions, the establishment of sabhas, and festivals one can see how diasporic communities cultivated the feeling of home away from home through diet, language, dress, and devotion.

The complexity of religion and culture is one of the reasons why the mandirs built by BAPS, post 1960, emphasized the preservation and understanding of Hinduism in the modern world. Hanna Kim notes mandirs built by BAPS in the west include an exhibition component in their mandirs (Kim 15). The exhibition:

[…] is a consciously created space, designed like a museum, with appropriate lighting and labels, and topical sections. The sections introduce visitors to Hinduism and its world contributions, outline the histories of the original Swaminarayan sampradaya and BAPS Swaminarayan bhakti, and provide suggestions on living a life of moral excellence…the public can see the universality of Hinduism, discover the origins of Hinduism, and understand the Hindu People and their Beliefs. Since the 1995 opening of the London mandir and its “Understanding Hinduism” Exhibition consisting of panels, dioramas, murals, handcraft artifacts and video segments, BAPS has created increasingly more sophisticated Exhibitions for its carved stone North American temples. All Exhibitions, however, put forth the same messages… The visitor learns through panels, of the history of ancient India, the philosophical concepts in “Hindu Beliefs,” and the achievements of “Vedic Civilization (Kim 15-16).

The exhibition became a useful guide to help understand the roots of Hinduism and the Swaminarayan sampradaya (ibid 17).

The Nairobi shikharabaddh mandir, which opened in 1999, also included an exhibition portion. It is important to note that all shikharabaddh mandirs have different exhibitions. The exhibition in Nairobi is titled Glorious India – Culture & Values. Thirty-five volunteers assembled the exhibition in a 6,000-square-foot room over a three-month period. Different types of media was used: panels, dioramas, photographs, audio-visual
clips, paper mache, moldings, fiber glass figures, wood carvings, paper crafts, and glass and mirror work (Brahmaviharidas 20).

“One step into the exhibition and you’re transported. Outside Nairobi, outside Africa. You land in India, 3,000 miles away and 8,000 years back in time. […] In a walk of less than 200 steps, visitors journey through the peaks of the Himalayas to the depths of Hinduism” (ibid: 17). The exhibition transports one back to the old-homeland through five key topics: understanding Hinduism, murti puja (image worship), India’s contributions, moral and spiritual Hindu values, and global values for global crises.

The purpose of the exhibition is to transport and inform attendees. To that end, there is a series of questions written on different panels that are meant to get visitors thinking (ibid: 18).

**How many languages can one country speak?**

India speaks eighteen languages, 850 dialects.

**Where is the roof of the world?**

The highest mountains, Himalayas.

**How big can a democracy be?**

As big as India, which is the world’s largest democracy.

**What are the literary contributions from India?**

The Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata.

**Oldest language of India?**

Sanskrit.

The panels on global values for global crises end with “five questions that can change the way one lives in this world” (ibid 19).
Which class does the Earth belong to?
Upper class? Lower class? Middle class?

What is the religion of water?
Hinduism? Christianity? Islam?

What nationality is the sun?

What color is the air?
Black? Brown? White? Yellow?

Which race does space belong to?
Human race?

These questions show the exhibition is not solely about Hinduism but it also includes how to live in a globalized world.

The different parts of the exhibition highlight the four aspects that are emphasized by the current guru of BAPS, diet, language, dress and devotion. Diet is shown through the explanation of why vegetarianism is important in Hinduism. Different Hindu rites and rituals explain the important of devotion and language. Finally, dress is depicted through the different images and videos and devotion shown through different Hindu rites and rituals. These four components help lead to the feeling of home away from home. One visitor stated, “This place is India on African soil,” suggesting the exhibition transported him back to the old-homeland (ibid: 17).

Establishment of Sabhas

The establishment of sabhas is credited to the fourth spiritual successor, Yogiji Maharaj. Prior to the establishment there was no set day and time for sabha to occur.
Yogiji Maharaj stressed the importance of weekly sabha at every BAPS mandir. In the diaspora and in Gujarat, Sabhas were kept on Sundays because it was a free day. Yogiji Maharaj taught instead of wasting a Sunday on mundane activities one should engage their minds with the divine (kids.baps.org [By whom, when, and why was the Bal Mandal started]). Yogiji Maharaj is also credited with establishing separate sabhas for children in 1954 (Amurtjivandas 45). The first separate sabha for children took place in Mumbai, India; other mandirs adopted the practice from this precedent (kids.baps.org).

Sabha for children became known as the Bal-Balika Mandal (Amurtijivandas 45).

Logistically, the mandir has sabha, religious discourse, from 4pm-7pm followed by dinner every Sunday. During this time there is a different sabhas for different age groups:

Ages 2-12 are referred to as Bal/ Balikas
Ages 13-22 are referred to as Kishores/ Kishories
Ages 23-35 are referred to as Yuvak/ Yuvatis
Ages 35-onward are referred to as Vadil/ Mahila

(satsang glossary)

During the sabhas the attendees are taught about their spiritual identities. Through traditional forms of dance, public speaking, skits, traditional music, and Guajarati classes, the young members of BAPS are able to grasp a better understanding of their religion and culture (Kim 21).

There are a variety of topics discussed during sabha, one being how to offer devotion through nitya puja, daily prayer. It is written in the Shikshapatri that one should begin their day by performing nitya puja:
“They should then sit at one place and brush their teeth then bathe with clean water and then put on a clean pair of clothes, duly washed and untouched” (Shikshapatri 50).

“They should then sit on an undefiled Asana (mat) in seclusion, facing either east or north, and perform Achamanam (sipping water before religious ceremonies)” (ibid: 51).

“They shall then reverently bow down to the images of Radha and Krishna and chant the holy name of the Lord in accordance with their usual and normal procedures, only after which they should start their day” (ibid: 54)

Young members of BAPS are taught correct ways of performing nitya puja in sabhas, books, and by observing parents. BAPS’s website, www.baps.org, also has a special link for children where they can find answers to different question, such as how to perform nitya puja. The site explains, in detail, how to perform puja. There are also pictures to accompany the details. The important points to remember in nitya puja:

1. To awaken around 6 am and have a shower.
2. Keep a separate set of clothes for puja,
3. Sit facing north or east. These are both auspicious directions.
4. Do tilak of sandalwood paste and red chandlo of kumkum on the forehead; use only sandalwood paste for tilak-chandlo on the chest and upper arm. (Girls should do chandlo on the forehead only).
6. Arrange murtis in their proper positions and chant the welcome shloka.

7. Do eleven malas while doing darshan of the murtis and remembering God.

8. Then stand up on one leg, raise both arms above and do one mala.

9. Then do eleven pradkshinas (walking clockwise around the murtis).

10. Then do 5 dandvats and 1 extra to ask for forgiveness if we have accidentally hurt somebody.

11. Then sit down and offer thal in mansi. This means to picture in our minds and offer our favorite foods mentally.

12. Then pray for our success in studies, for a family member who may be ill, for increasing our devotion, and for peace in our home, county and the world.

13. Do pranams to the murti. Speak the farewell mantra requesting Maharaj and Swamishri to bless us again tomorrow. Place the murtis together.

14. Read five shlokas from the Shikshapatri. Then put the puja in its proper place.

15. Do darshan of Thakorji in your ghar mandir. Then do panchang pranam to your mother and father, say, “Jay Swaminarayan” to your brothers and sisters.

(kids.baps.org [nitya puja])

The ritual of nitya puja shows how to offer devotion to God bringing ritual into daily life.

The performance of nitya puja can transport one back to the old homeland. Niyta puja
also encompasses the four aspects that were mentioned by Pramukh Swami: diet, language, dress, and devotion.

**Festivals**

A unique way BAPS is able to maintain the feeling of home away from home is through mega-festivals (Williams 2001: 178). Sahajanand Swami stressed the importance of having mega festivals in the *Vachanamrut*, which is a compilation of sermons given by Sahajanand Swami. In one such spiritual discourse Sahajanand Swami states, “That is why I perform grand Vishnu-yags; annually celebrate *Janmashtami*, *Ekadashi*, and other observances; and gather *brachmcharis*, *sadhus*, and *satsangis* on these occasions. After all, even if a sinner remembers these occasions at the time of his death he will also attain the abode of God” (*Vachanamurt* Gadhada I-3). One example of a mega festival would be the four-day long inauguration of the *shikarabaddh mandir* in Nairobi in 1999.

The four-day inauguration was not the first mega festival to take place in East Africa. Throughout the twentieth century there had been festivals occurring on a relatively large scale in East Africa. In 1945, a seven-day *sabha* was held in Jinja and Kampala. During this *sabha* the letters written by Nirgundas Swami were read and expounded upon (Vivekpriyadas 274). Five years later, in 1950, Shastriji Maharaj’s eighty-fifth birthday celebrations were held in Kampala. This festival celebrated both Shastriji Maharaj’s birthday and the anniversary of the completion of the *Shikshapatri*. Another mega festival was held in 1988 (Brahmaviharidas 10). The birthday celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was, at that time, the biggest celebration held in Nairobi, with one hundred thirty-six *sadhus* from India attending the celebration. The Vice-President of Kenya also attended the birthday celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
These festivals provided the practitioners a way to recreate the feeling of celebrating in India.

With the above considerations in mind, let us return to Kurien’s interviewee’s statement, “Close connections are maintained so that if members of the temple have to go Nairobi, for example, they will be able to stay in the home of one of the temple members. [...] There is a close kinship amongst these congregations. It is like one big family” (Kurien 104). This family is created, in part, through mega festivals. Emotional connections are made during the festivals, which only deepen the feeling of home away from home. Charles Taylor asserts that all humans and cultures have an inner “authentic” essence, which provides them with the sense of individuality. He also maintains that humans and cultures have to be “in touch with” and “true” to their inner self, as only then can the individual or groups of people develop to their full potential (ibid: 3). The Cultural Festival of India was one way Hindus living in America were able to get in touch with their inner self. This festival exposed Hinduism to America and provided the attendees with a sense of home away from home.

The Cultural Festival of India was held in New Jersey in 1991 (Kurien 104). In total there were four Cultural Festivals of India, two of which were held in Gujarat, one in London, and the final one in New Jersey. The festival in New Jersey lasted for a total of thirty-one days. There was a showcase of many different Indian artworks, and craftsmen created miniature scale mandirs, featuring intricate carvings. Along with the artwork there was a place to showcase other talents, including dances and musical performances. Traditional Indian villages, bazaars, and fairs were recreated during the cultural festival (Shukla). It is also important to note, while BAPS was the host of the
festival, it was not a BAPS-branded Hinduism on display. Many Hindu of different Hindu traditions participated in the event. The goal of the festival was to bring India to the diaspora. This festival is noteworthy because it directly recreated a sense of home away from home. The participants, observers, and volunteers were directly transported back to their old-homeland without leaving their new-homeland.

Mandirs in the diaspora became a place where culture and tradition were kept alive. Through exhibitions, the establishment of sabhas, and festivals the feeling of home away from home is felt. Pramukh Swami’s statement, “wherever one goes, one should keep four aspects of our culture firmly rooted in our life: our diet, our language, our dress, and our devotion” helped create a particular atmosphere where devotees were able to feel a connection back to the old-homeland (www.swaminarayan.org). By establishing deep emotional connections to their new-homeland satsangis were able to become a successful and lasting community in the diaspora.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Swaminarayan Hindu tradition began approximately two hundred years ago, and the BAPS sect, which branched off from the larger Swaminarayan sect approximately a hundred years ago, has become a thriving global organization. The affirmation that the growing BAPS sect was truly a global organization came in 2000. Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the current spiritual leader of the ever-growing BAPS sect, was asked to deliver a speech during the Millennium World Peace Summit at the United Nations. The summit took place from August 28 to August 31, 2000 in New York. Over 1800 spiritual leaders and scholars were present representing more than twelve different religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism, Taoism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism and more. On the first day of the summit fifty children from BAPS welcomed the attendees with flower petals and traditional Indian dances and outfits. During the opening ceremony Sadhus, (ascetics), sang the *Shanti Paath* in Sanskrit (www.swaminarayan.org). The next day, August 29, Pramukh Swami Maharaj delivered his speech,

> Just as the unity of our followers makes our religion strong and protected, the unity of all faith will make our common future strong and protected… True progress of any religion lies in the quality of life, purity, and the spiritual awakening in the adherent… Religious leaders should not dream of establishing their religion as the one religion of the world, but dream of a world where all religions are united. Unity in diversity is the first lesson of life. Flourishing together by working together is the secret behind peace – a Beautiful Borderless World. … We must not progress at the cost of others, but sacrifice a part of ourselves for the good of others. For true religion is that which inspires love for one another (www.swaminarayan.org).
The small group that began approximately two hundred years ago managed to become a global organization and have their spiritual leader address the United Nations. This thesis analyzed how the sect became a global organization by managing to create of home away from home in the diaspora. Furthermore, the history of the BAPS sect evinces the evolution of the term diaspora.

Diaspora, in its simplest form, refers to the dispersal of people from their homelands, though in its earliest usage, it referred to the dispersal of the Jewish community from their homeland (Butler 189). Many of these communities were dispersed from their homeland due to discrimination, political instability, and war. Many times the exiled community believed “that they are not and perhaps cannot be fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it” (Safran 83). The usage of the term diaspora later evolved to encompass communities that chose to leave their old-homeland, such as the South Asian community.

The South Asian diaspora differs from other diasporas because the South Asian community was not exiled from their homeland nor did they leave due to political instability. This is one reason the definition of diaspora needed to be broadened. The more recent usage of the term departs from its early identifications of powerlessness, longing, exile, and displacement, which is strongly associated with the Jewish diaspora (ibid: 190). Diaspora now implies a potential empowerment based on a group’s ability to mobilize international support and influences in both their homeland and their new host-land (Clifford 311). Migrants no longer trade one membership card for another (Levitt 11). In order to analyze this new type of diaspora, which emerged within the context of
European imperialism in the nineteenth century, scholars have created distinct parameters to determine whether or not a community is part of a diaspora.

Determining whether or not a community is part of a diaspora depends upon how one defines the term. Scholars have developed varying definitions of diaspora, but there are some overlapping characteristics. For example, in her book *Global South Asians*, Judith Brown examines the South Asian diaspora extensively. She claims that in order to be classified as such, a community within the diaspora must complete three particular tasks: 1) establish an economic foundation, 2) form social networks, and 3) construct religious networks and institutions (Brown 29, 60, 74, 93). All three tasks presented by Brown have one essential similarity: the need for a symbiotic relationship between the new and old homelands. Butler adds an important caveat, stating, “Definitions and understandings of diaspora get modified ‘in translation’ as they are applied to new groups” (Butler 191).

The BAPS *Swaminarayan* sect is an example of a small Hindu sect that began in Gujarat, India and worked its way into a global organization. Through the speech given by Pramukh Swami at the United Nations one can see how the small sect has flourished. The speech also shows a conversational shift. The conversation within the sect was no longer only about the followers in the diaspora but now addresses them, alongside others, as global citizens. In the speech Pramukh Swami describes the making of a world without borders – a world where people, regardless of their religion or race, can flourish outside their native country. This utopian language promotes a place where different religions can live in harmony if only practitioners view themselves as global citizens first. This shift in language also shows how the term diaspora will be employed in the future. The
language will no longer be about the complete dispersal of a group, but about no matter where a group has relocated they will be able to find a home away from home.
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www.baps.org
http://kids.baps.org/thingstoknow/satsang/nityapuja.htm

www.swaminarayan.org

TIMELINE

Below is a timeline of the development and progression of *satsang* in East Africa (Swaminarayan Bliss 10-11).

1927: Harmanbhai Patel receives blessings from Shastriji Maharaj and arrives in East Africa with five copies of the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam Maharaj

1928: A discourse on the *Satsangijivan* is held in Nairobi, Kenya. On the last day of the discourse a grand procession is held with 1200 participants.

- The East African *Satsang Mandal* is established and Manibhai Patel is appointed as President

1933: Harmanbhai goes to visit Shastriji Maharaj in Rajpur, Gujarat. There Shastriji Maharaj gives him the blessing, “Make efforts in spreading *satsang*. The *satsang* fellowship will flourish because it is a blessing from God.”

- Nirgundas Swami writes long letters about the Swaminarayan philosophy and morality.
- A regular Sunday *sabha*, assembly, is launched.
- Harmanbhai, Maganbhai, and Tribhovanbhai travel to villages around East Africa to spread the Swaminarayan philosophy.
- More letters arrive from India, written by Shastriji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami, and Yogiji Maharaj. Copies of these letters were passed around to the Gujaratis of East Africa.

1945: The first mandir is instituted in Nairobi with the installation of the canvas *murtis*, sanctified by Shastriji Maharaj
1949: Devotees of East Africa attend the 84th birthday celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj in Atladra, Gujarat.

- A grand festival is held in Eldoret.

1950: the devotees in Kampala celebrate the 85th birthday of Shastriji Maharaj.

- Devotees from as far as 600 miles away participate in a satsang convention in Kampala.

1951: A satsang centre is established in Mbale, Uganda.

1953: Construction work for a mandir in Mombasa begins

1955: On April 13 Yogiji Maharaj and a few sadhus arrive in Africa for the first time.

- On April 25, Yogiji Maharaj performs the murti pratishtha ceremony of the new mandir in Mombasa – the first Akshar Purushottam Mandir outside India.


- A Youth Convention is held in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami. Yogiji Maharaj blesses the occasion, saying, “Such conventions will also take place in London, America and Japan.”

- Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami and sadhus, accompanying them, travel to all the mandirs in East Africa.
• On May 18th, Yogiji Maharaj installs a marble *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj in Nairobi.

1977-78: Pramukh Swami performs the *murti pratishta* of *mandirs* in Dar-es-Salaam and Mwanza.

1995: The groundbreaking ceremony for the *shikharbaddh mandir* is performed.

1997: The President of Uganda, Youweri Musseveni, offers his deep respects to Pramukh Swami.


1999: Pramukh Swami performs the *murti pratishta* of the *shikharbaddh mandir* in Kenya.

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