



# People-Specific LDS Outreach Case Studies

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## Prospective LDS Outreach among the Gujarati People of India

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### Overview

The Gujarati are an Indo-Aryan people native to Gujarat State, India who traditionally speak the Gujarati language. There appear to be at least 50 million Gujarati people who reside in India. Millions of Gujarati have migrated throughout the world over the past several centuries. The estimated number of Gujarati speakers worldwide ranges from 46.6 million<sup>[1]</sup> to 58.9 million.<sup>[2]</sup> Currently Gujarati is the indigenous Indian language with the seventh most speakers in India.<sup>[3]</sup> Most Gujarati adhere to Hinduism although a sizable minority adheres to Islam. The LDS Church maintains no presence within the Gujarati homelands and appears to have few, if any, Gujarati members worldwide despite this people numbering in the tens of millions.

This case study reviews the history of the Church's administration of the Gujarati homelands. Opportunities and challenges for future growth are analyzed. The growth of the Church among other major peoples in India is reviewed and the size and growth of other missionary-focused Christian groups with a presence among the Gujarati is summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

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### LDS Background

No LDS congregations operate within the Gujarati homelands at present. The India New Delhi Mission Branch in the India New Delhi Mission has administered the Gujarati homelands for many years. There have appeared to be few, if any, Gujarati who have joined the LDS Church outside their homelands. A map displaying the Gujarati homelands and nearby LDS congregations can be found [here](#).

### Opportunities

The Gujarati number among the largest ethnolinguistic peoples in the world who do not have a single LDS congregation that operates within their traditional homelands. Many reside in modern, well-developed cities that can be easily accessed from other major cities in India such as Ahmedabad and Surat. With a population of approximately 50 million in India, this people accounts for a significant subset of the Indian population. Gujaratis have exhibited a significant influence on the development of Indian culture and national identity. Gujaratis have numbered among many famous Indians such as Vikram Sarabhai and Mahatma Gandhi.

The greatest opportunities for the Church to establish a presence among the Gujarati center on the establishment of an LDS presence within at least one major city within Gujarat State. Inhabited by 7.3 million,<sup>[4]</sup> Ahmedabad is the most populous city within the Gujarati homelands and is seventh most populous metropolitan area in India. Additionally, Ahmedabad is the metropolitan area in India with the largest population without an LDS presence. Christians comprise a tiny percentage of the population (0.7%) but nonetheless constitute a larger percentage than in some major cities in western or northern India. Missionary activity may be most effective if it targets the tiny Christian community due to greater theological similarities with Latter-day Saints than with Hindus or Muslims. The Church has established a presence in multiple Indian cities with comparable demographics and has achieved steady growth such as in New Delhi and Hyderabad. Thus, comparable results may be achieved if the Church opens a member group in Ahmedabad and assigns full-time missionaries to begin proselytism. Missionary opportunities also appear favorable in Surat and Vadodara as each of these cities have at least one million inhabitants.

The establishment of the Church among the Gujarati will begin with visits from mission and area leaders to assess conditions

and meet with any members and investigators who reside in the most populous cities of Gujarat State such as Ahmedabad or Surat. Isolated members and investigators petitioning church leaders to hold church services and assign missionaries will be key for mission and area leaders to determine the need and urgency of establishing the Church in the region. Mission and area leaders may also begin investigatory efforts on their own without appeals from members or investigators. Mission leaders can organize a member group if there are several members who indicate that they will attend church weekly and if one of these members holds the priesthood and meets worthiness standards.

Social media advertizing has tremendous potential for the Church to identify receptive individuals among an enormous target population. Church leaders, missionaries, and ordinary members can target specific locations in the Gujarati homelands by promoting LDS-themed advertisements regardless of whether there are missionaries assigned to their area or if there is an LDS unit nearby. For example, advertisements on social media platforms such as Facebook can be modified to reach individuals on a variety of demographic domains ranging from personal interests, religious background, geographical location, marital status, and education. Mission leaders can maximize their efforts to open cities to proselytism by using social media to target these locations with advertisements. Advertizing on Facebook is relatively inexpensive and provides a methodological and coordinated method to reach vast online audiences.

Prospective LDS outreach among the Gujarati presents unique opportunities for the Church to proselyte religious groups who have received little, if any, outreach from the LDS Church. Jainism is one of the several indigenous religions of India, but there has never appeared to be any overt efforts by the Church to proselyte Jains. A sizable number of Jains are Gujarati. Ahmedabad has one of the highest percentages of Jains among metropolitan areas in India with one million or more inhabitants, presenting good opportunities to reach followers of this religion.

Many Gujarati speak English as a second language. The utilization of English translations of church materials and scriptures may adequately meet local needs among English-speaking Gujarati, especially in the most populous cities such as Ahmedabad, Surat, and Vadodara. Sizable numbers of bilingual Gujarati suggest that integration with other Indian peoples who reside in the Gujarati homeland may be appropriate.

## Challenges

The extremely small size of the LDS Church in India poses the greatest barrier to the initiation of missionary activity among the Gujarati. There are likely only a handful, if any, Latter-day Saints who reside in the Gujarati homelands. There are over one billion people who reside within the geographical boundaries of the India New Delhi Mission. No LDS presence has ever been established in Gujarat State where 60 million people reside. The extremely small size of the Indian full-time missionary force poses serious challenges for opening additional major cities to missionary activity such as Ahmedabad or Surat. The Church in India has faced chronic challenges with acquiring a sufficient number of foreign missionary visas to adequately staff its two missions. Consequently, no additional cities in western or northern India have had an initial LDS presence established since the organization of the India New Delhi Mission in 2007. Mumbai is the only city near the Gujarati homelands where there is an LDS presence, albeit this presence is limited to a single branch in a metropolitan area of over 20 million people. A missionary presence in Mumbai was only recently established and remains limited to only native Indian missionaries serving in the India New Delhi Mission. The Church has yet to establish a missionary presence in Kolkata, India where one LDS branch operates notwithstanding a metropolitan population of nearly 16 million. Thus, many other locations in India may take presence over the Gujarati homelands in regards to the expansion of LDS missionary activity.

Gujarat State is one of six Indian States that has enacted anti-conversion legislation. Local government authorities assert that these laws have been developed to protect vulnerable individuals from the conversion efforts of other religions that may be exploitive in nature.<sup>[5]</sup> However, there has been concern that these laws limited religious freedom for proselytism groups and some religious minorities. Gujarat State has experienced significant religious conflict within the past couple decades, particularly between Hindus and Muslims. The Church may avoid active proselytism tactics such as street contacting in Gujarat State due to these conditions.

Initial LDS missionary efforts among the Gujarati will require outreach to primarily target Hindus. This religious group has historically received extremely limited LDS outreach. Current LDS missionary tactics have been tailored for those with a Christian background, suggesting a need to develop Hindu-specific outreach resources in order to extend effective outreach. Few formerly Hindu converts may join the Church as Indian society has discouraged conversion from Hinduism to Christianity.

No LDS scriptures or gospel study or missionary materials have been translated into the Gujarati language. A lack of a single missionary tract in Gujarati may create significant language barriers during initial proselytism efforts. No Gujarati translations of materials or scriptures may pose challenges for the Church to convey a sense that its teachings are compatible with Gujarati culture and society. The translation of LDS materials and scriptures into other Indian languages may suggest that the Church promotes certain ethnicities in India above others.

## Comparative Growth

The Church in India has experienced steady to rapid growth among multiple ethnolinguistic groups with populations of at least one million and that have a sizable numbers of Christians. The Church operates one district and eight branches within areas of India where Hindi is traditionally spoken. Slow growth has occurred within Hindi-speaking areas of India during the past two

decades. The Church has translated the Book of Mormon and a sizable number of gospel study and missionary materials into Hindi. The Church operates two districts and 10 branches in the Tamil homelands. Slow growth has occurred within the Tamil homelands within the past decade. The Church has translated the Book of Mormon and a sizable number of gospel study and missionary materials into Tamil. The Church operates one stake, six wards, and 10 branches in the Telugu homelands. Rapid growth has occurred within the Telugu homelands during the past decade. The Church has translated the Book of Mormon and a sizable number of gospel study and missionary materials into Telugu. The Church operates one branch in Bengali-speaking areas of India and has experienced stagnant growth in this region. Select passages of the Book of Mormon and a handful of gospel study and missionary materials have been translated into Bengali. The Church operates five branches in the Kannada homelands. Slow growth has occurred in the Kannada homelands and only one church material has been translated into Kannada: the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Church operates one branch and has experienced stagnant growth in the Marathi homelands. Two church materials have been translated into Marathi: Gospel Principles (old edition) and the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Church has translated the Book of Mormon and a sizable number of gospel study and missionary materials into Urdu although most Urdu speakers reside in Indian states where there is no LDS presence. No LDS congregations currently operate in the Malayalam or Punjabi homelands although the Church has translated the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith pamphlet into both languages. The Church has translated a small number of materials into Nepali but operates no LDS congregations within the Nepali homelands in India. The Church operates one branch in the Konkani homelands but has not translated materials into the Konkani language. No LDS materials have been translated and no LDS presence operates within the homelands of the following major ethnolinguistic peoples (populations greater than five million) in India: Bhojpuri (37.8 million), Oriya (32.1 million), Maithili (30 million), Magahi (14 million), Chhattisgarhi (13.3 million), Assamese (12.8 million), Santhali (5.9 million), and Kashmiri (5.6 million). The Church has translated General Conference sessions into Hindi, Telugu, and Tamil for many years.

The size and growth trends of nontraditional Christian groups among the Gujarati significantly varies by denomination. Evangelicals note that most Gujarati peoples have no evangelical presence.<sup>[6]</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a minimal presence among the Gujarati in India. Witnesses operate five Gujarati-speaking congregations within or nearby the Gujarati homelands. Witnesses have translated their official website, jw.org, into Gujarati.<sup>[7]</sup> Witnesses extended Gujarati-specific outreach outside of India in Panama, the United Kingdom, and Zambia. The Seventh Day Adventist Church numbers among the largest Christian denominations among the Gujarati Adventists have experienced rapid growth throughout the Gujarati homeland. Adventists reported 49 churches (large or well-established congregations), 142 companies (small or recently-established congregations), 30,568 members, and approximately 2,500 baptisms within Gujarat State and Dadra and Nagar Haveli Union Territory in 2013. Adventists publications are translated into Gujarati. The Church of the Nazarene appears to maintain a minimal presence among the Gujarati. Nazarenes appear to conduct some worship services in Gujarati.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Limitations

No reports were available regarding whether any Gujarati have joined the LDS Church. The Church does not publish the number of members by language use for languages not among the 10 most commonly spoken languages among its worldwide membership. The Church does not publish the number and location of its member groups. Consequently it is unclear whether any member groups operate in the Gujarati homelands.

## Future Prospects

Prospects for the establishment of an LDS presence among the Gujarati appear poor for the foreseeable future due to no LDS congregations currently within the Gujarati homelands, no LDS materials translated into Gujarati, the extremely small size of the Church in India, and chronic shortages in the number of full-time missionaries assigned to Indian missions as a result of problems obtaining foreign missionary visas. The establishment of the Church among the Gujarati will most likely begin as a result of Latter-day Saints moving to major cities within Gujarat State such as Ahmedabad and petitioning mission and area leaders to establish a member group or branch. However, the Church in India has avoided the establishment of additional congregations in previously unreached cities for many years due to missionary shortages and safety concerns. The Gujarati present good opportunities for missionary work and church growth despite these challenges due to their sheer numbers and prominence in Indian culture. Successes achieved by other missionary-focused groups such as the Seventh-Day Adventist Church indicate that the LDS Church may experience similar results if the proper vision and resources are consistently maintained and allocated.

- [1] "Gujarati," [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com), retrieved 11 March 2015. <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/guj>
- [2] "People Cluster: Gujarati," Joshua Project, retrieved 11 March 2015. <http://joshuaproject.net/clusters/182>
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<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html>
- [4] "Major Agglomerations of the World," [www.citypopulation.de](http://www.citypopulation.de), retrieved 12 March 2015.  
<http://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html>
- [5] "India," International Religious Freedom Report for 2013, retrieved 14 March 2015.  
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222329>
- [6] "People Cluster: Gujarati," Joshua Project, retrieved 12 March 2015. <http://joshuaproject.net/clusters/182>
- [7] [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), retrieved 14 March 2015. <http://www.jw.org/gu/>
- [8] "Nazarene Church Data Search," [nazarene.org](http://nazarene.org), retrieved 14 March 2015. <http://app.nazarene.org/FindAChurch>