**Ph.D. SYNOPSIS**

**THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF SHIKSHAPATRI, SOCIAL, MORAL, AND CULTURAL SYNTHESIS**

**UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF**

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THE PROBLEM

The modern society is quite complex. It consists of different cultures and it is found that with so many industries, so many media of propaganda & transmission, communications, the question of conduct has become very complicated. Man is increasingly going away from his original cultural moorings, original social structure and main spiritual traditions of Indian antiquity. His life has become more perplexed. No doubt modern equipments of science & technology give him physical comforts and materialistic pleasures. But value of ethics is found to be decreasingly less dominant in their lives. As a result, it is found that society is lopsided and consists of many vices rather than so many virtues & characters.

These are the significant drawbacks of present society: the problem of pleasure-oriented and materialistic life, utility, egoism, money & property, evils in society like divorce, disharmony in families, lack of collective life, lack of gracious conduct, manners & habits, exploitation of women in society and violation of human rights.

I feel that the above problems concerning moral philosophy have been satisfactorily solved in the general religious thought of Lord Swaminarayan, and through the ethics of Śiksāpatrī in particular. I have held that moral philosophy requires support and background of religious consciousness, moral ideals manners, conduct, way of life and judgment. Without the base of religious fervour and awareness there is a danger of the deterioration of moral ideal and value of life.

I attempt to present genuine solutions for the above problems in respective chapters of this work.

Lord Swaminarayan enunciated Śiksāpatrī on the auspicious day of Vasant Pančāmi V.S. 1882 and Śrī Satānand Munī incorporated it in the holy
scripture by the name ‘Satsangi Jivan’. It has got 212 verses wherein there are classes of very significant guidelines, relationships, injunctions and prescriptions, guiding one towards maintaining relations with our human brethren, relatives and acquaintances. In my thesis I aim to present a systematic classification of these guidelines that are a landmark in the history of morals and morality of human beings.

I have arranged the main verses of Śiksāpatrī according to its emphasis on following matters: Relation with parents, Relation with relatives, Elderly people, Property, Education, Society, Ancestors, Day to day duties, Vocation and Profession.

Śiksāpatrī is book of socio-ethico-religious codes. Śiksāpatrī fulfills the urgent need of present time, for it is concise and compact in its injunction. The two hundred and twelve verses combine the truth of the Shruti and Smruti

The 6th verse of Śiksāpatrī states:

"You are the quintessence of all the nectar churned from all the oceans of scriptures and therefore those who drink nectar become fit for immortality."

Śiksāpatrī can be described as “Sarva Śāstra Hṛdayam” meaning: ‘the heart of all scriptures’. All that is true, good, beautiful and eternal is enshrined in it. It is priceless boon for mankind. This little book provides all solutions for all types of problems with its universal application. This is the reason it has attracted the interest of great personalities all over the world.

In this work, I intend to focus on the philosophy of Śiksāpatrī, and will try to concentrate on the moral philosophy as expounded in Śiksāpatrī. The real drive is to show how Lord Swaminarayan has successfully amalgamated the different aspects of moral philosophy and human nature and used it as an instrument to create a work that bequeaths absolute peace
of mind and harmony through devotion, knowledge and action towards the Supreme-Being.

This particular work which deals with the moral philosophy of Śikṣāpatrī has been classified into three major areas for the purpose of clarity, thought and different phases of metaphysical, ethical, cultural and social aspects of the work.

PART 1: METAPHYSICS OF LORD SWAMINARAYAN:
   i. Viśiṣṭādvaita principle of spiritual philosophy.
   ii. Religious experience and personality of God.
   iii. Meaning of Dharma & Religious experience
   iv. Mysticism and Rational interpretation

PART 2: ETHICS OF ŚIKṢĀPATRĪ:
   i. Examination of Śikṣāpatrī
   ii. Duty and categorical imperative
   iii. Intuitionism and Moral prescription
   iv. Description and prescription
   v. Śikṣāpatrī and its contemporary relevance

PART 3: SYNTHESIS OF MORAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF HUMAN LIFE:
   i. Moral and social value.
   ii. Significance of Guru, sainthood and holy company
   iii. Society and religious value.
   iv. Social regeneration in modern India.

CONCLUSION
I present a brief overview of the above named chapters:

**METAPHYSICS OF LORD SWAMINARAYAN:**

Metaphysics of *Lord Swaminarayan* is the essential background of the ethics of *Śikṣāpatrī*. Ethics requires its metaphysical implications and its background. Without the belief in the idea of the infinite, human beings can’t perform virtuous activity. Thus, there is the co-existence of morality and metaphysics in the progress of Indian thought.

Moreover, the highest ideal of ethics is ‘*summun bonum*’ (the complete goodness) or the Supreme good. But from the theistic point of view goodness is always related with God. Hence we can say that human goodness is a part of divine goodness.

In this chapter I am going to elaborate on how the ethics of *Śikṣāpatrī* is related to the metaphysics of *Lord Swaminarayan*, and how the study of metaphysics is inevitable in understanding the moral philosophy of Shikshapatri.

**VIŚISTĀDVAIT**

Rāmānujācārya propounded the ‘*Viśistādvait*’ doctrine in the 12th century. The creator of *Śikṣāpatrī*, *Lord Swaminarayan* accepted this philosophy, propounding the special principles of *Viśistādvait* (qualified non-dualism). I propose to discuss this principle as presented by *Lord Swaminarayan*, drawing comparisons from the monism of *Rgved* (Ekam sat), *Advaita Vedānta* (Absolute monism) of Shankaracharya, Śuddhādvaita of Vallabhācārya.
Lord Swaminarayan has established the entity of Akṣar as the highest among devotees. Any aspirant seeking to realize God in all His greatness and glory has to look to Akṣar. It is Akṣar who is in eternal communion with God. Where God incarnates, Akṣar also incarnates.

The essence of Viśistādvait lies in the exceptional rapport of Akṣara with Purusottam. They are united yet separate entities at the same time: Akṣar is united with the Lord, yet renders devotional service eternally to the Lord.

**RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND PERSONALITY OF GOD**

The infinite reality being incommensurable with finite intelligence, the nature of religious quest is thus "of contemplative character". Obviously, experience is the best and the only instrument.

I intend to show that Religious experience is distinct from all other experiences; because religion is basically concerned with the inner being of man and the function of religion is to reveal the glory of the spirit. Religion deals with the greatest human need, which is his quest and realization of the Ultimate Being—God. The object of religious experience is a deep relationship of human consciousness with the Ultimate Reality viz. God.

As religious experience is ineffable, it creates the need of proper means and instruments in life. Although some religions believe only in this highest form of intuitive experience, they also at the same time generally present means for ordinary people to attain this experience.

Human mind is inadequate to directly realize the Ultimate Reality. It requires a medium to focus and foster faith. This medium offers the path to the infinite panorama of the transcendental.
Lord Swaminarayan has adopted the theistic philosophy and has established the Ultimate Reality is being personal, eternal and divine. 'Saguna' aspect is connected with the Guru of the individual. But Swaminarayan as a Guru has a distinct place in Swaminarayan faith. Because He has identified Himself with Lord Kṛṣṇa who is the Supreme God; both personal and impersonal.

Lord Swaminarayan has stated that “One who knows that there is not the slightest difference between this form on the earth and that form in the Aksardhām. One who knows this truth, can be said to have realized God in real sense. He also can be said to have crossed the barriers of māyā. He can be said to be Gñāṇī bhakta or an Ekāntik devotee.”

Thus, I attempt to show the nature and place of religious experience in the metaphysics of Lord Swaminarayan and aim to show that the only way to such experience is devotion accompanied with the spiritual knowledge of Lord’s glory, offered to the personal God, who is ever incarnate on the earth.

**MEANING OF ‘DHARMA’ AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**

By the term ‘Dharma’ it is understood, according to the Bhagavad Gītā, ‘swabhāva’ i.e. character and personality, inner nature of the individual, his true temper and consciousness and ‘swadharma’ i.e. the true inner character, vocation, real surrender and relationship with ultimate nature and Reality.

Indian view of Dharma is subtler than that of the western world. Western philosophers describe religion on the ground of moral consciousness, whereas the Indian concept of Dharma is not limited within morality; it provides a perspective of the universal consciousness.
Lord Swaminarayan describes the Bhāgavat Dharma or Ekāntik Dharma as being equivalent to devotion.

I attempt to elaborate on the meaning of Dharma in all its aspects given by Lord Swaminarayan through His philosophy. But my chief focus will be on its higher meaning which lies in its supernatural and trans-rational element to explain the phenomena of religious experience.

MYSTICISM AND RATIONAL INTERPRETATION

In all ‘isms’ of ethics, religion, philosophy and metaphysics, mysticism, transcends all. Mysticism is the science of a higher subjective experience, a deeper order of knowledge from within man in quest of the Supreme Reality without. Mystical experience is the communion of individual self with universal self. The very character of mystical experience is beyond reason, beyond explanation and beyond communication. But it doesn’t mean that mystical experience leads to inactivity, instead it is the source for the elevation of the moral consciousness of man.

If the experience is mystical, subjective, contemplative and direct, is it possible to interpret it rationally? All the mystics agreed that no mystical experience can be interpreted with any standard of intellect. Yet philosophy demands that the revelation (mystical experience) be defined and described through reason and logic for authentic identification. Since the experience is personal and transcendental, both the revelation and the reason are absolutely subjective.

Finally, I attempt to conclude that mystical experience can’t be interpreted through reason, hence, it is self evident and self revealing. To have glimpse of such experience one has to become devotee rather than scholar, mystic rather than logician.
It is quite clear that essence of the metaphysics of *Lord Swaminarayan* lies in His philosophy of ‘Viśistādvaita’ which is centered in 116th verse of *Śīkṣāpatrī*:

"Identifying oneself as *Brahma*, separate from the three bodies, one should always offer devotion to Śrī *Kṛṣṇa*.”

So, the metaphysical background of devotional spirit is helpful to morality, virtue, duty, responsibility, obligation, circumstances, ethos of morality. This has been established by *Lord Swaminarayan* in His *Śīkṣāpatrī* which is an ethical document of the Swaminarayan faith.

**ETHICS OF SHIKSHAPATRI**

In this part, I am going to cover the philosophy of ethics and its principles. I attempt to show why should one follow the ethical path?

Ethics is necessary:

- to develop a sense of discrimination dormant in man.
- for the purification of soul.
- to make platform for spirituality.
- to overcome imperfection of human beings.
- to release soul from the vicious grip of evil elements.

The most significant aspect of Hindu ethics is – it is based on religion. Morality is religion in practice and religion is morality in principle. Morality without religion is tree without roots.

Ethics of *Śīkṣāpatrī* is also the part of Hindu ethics. The ethics of ‘Śīkṣāpatrī’ do not advocate ritualism nor pure intellectualism; neither passivism nor total activism; neither escapism nor blind adherence to dutifulness; neither quietism nor attachment. While these teachings do not dissociate man from his society or his duties, it gives him universal moral
standards that enable him to rise above his egoistic, self-regarding
tendencies and become more harmonized with his family, society, and
environment and ultimately with His Creator.

**EXAMINATION OF ŚIKSĀPATRĪ**

Further, I attempt to examine Shikshapatri as a whole from all
dimensions and present different aspects of Śikṣāpatrī. Salient features of
Śikṣāpatrī are as follows:

➢ Epistle of Śikṣāpatrī is miniscule in size but profound in meaning.
➢ Only 212 verses give the quintessence of all scriptures.
➢ It preaches simple living and high thinking, righteous conduct and
  pious heart, pure mind and supreme devotion, knowledge and
divinization.
➢ It gives objective and universal moral standard commonly applicable
to all. The very utterances “I have written this Śikṣāpatrī for the
  greatest good of mankind (Sarvajivahitavah) mirrored its universality
  and catholicity.
➢ Teachings of Śikṣāpatrī are not impracticable. It regulates and
  enhances the inter-personal relations in our social life and dealings on
  ethical basis. It is extremely practical in the matter of expiation for it
  respects human limitations.
➢ Śikṣāpatrī skillfully amalgamates the extremely high and the simple
codes ranging from the behavioural to the devotional in a way that
  even a layman can understand and follow it easily.
➢ Such amalgamation and benedictions given in Śikṣāpatrī reflects the
  supremacy of the author.
➢ True religion is propounded in almost every word of Śikṣāpatrī

**DUTY AND CATAGORICAL IMPERATIVE**

Ethics of Śikṣāpatrī is the ethics of ‘complete goodness’. Kant
differentiates between goodness and complete goodness. I propose to
elucidate the principle of hedonism and then criticize hedonism with
reference to the views of Epicures and Stoic and thereby establish the
practice of religion, custom of religion i.e. religious consciousness. Goodness is to be related with God. Human goodness is a part of divine goodness.

According to the categorical imperative, the aim of moral life is to perform duty and this is reinforced in the teachings Śiksāpatrī. In general this is a high teaching of moral philosophy that ‘duty should be performed for the sake of duty’.

Categorical imperative is a proper principle but it is to be modified in the light of divine surrender, in the light of gift to be given to divine. Just as the Bhāgavad Gītā says, your action should be a yajña, sacrifice, it is a surrender to God. So we as individuals should believe that we are the instruments of divine.

So activity should get such results which are beneficial to mankind, to our nation, to a family, to our surroundings and to the cosmic welfare. Here, I will focus on the concept of ‘Lokasamgraha’ of the Bhāgavad Gītā. So, this is the import of virtue, responsibility, moral act. It can be said also as higher type of utilitarianism, a transcendental utilitarianism.

But in a sense we appreciate the categorical imperative according to which we have to frame and act in accordance with such an imperative. Then also moral and divine imperatives because Śiksāpatrī is written as a kind of revelation, a kind of divine inspiration by one of the greatest saints of India. This inspiration is not only moral but also spiritual.

I attempt to cover all the problems such as problem of pleasure, utility, problem of conduct, freedom in action, standard of goodness and perfection in behaviour under the title of “Duty and categorical imperative” in the light of Śiksāpatrī.
Moreover, in my thesis, I am going to discuss several schools of behaviour or theory of judgment like Hedonism, Utilitarianism, Eudemonism, happiness, goodness, value, Intuitionism is one of the schools.

There are two type of Intuitionism: (1) Dogmatic intuitionism, (2) Reflexive or philosophic intuitionism. The former conservative, while the latter Intuitionism is examined by philosophy. That is called reflexive intuitionism. Philosophical intuitionism gives us the reason why we should do.

Actually, Intuitionism is the basis of ethics because intuition is always immediate, instant. It is said by one philosopher that there is a judge within - conscience. He gives us decision. There are so many organs in our personality such as emotion, will, and intelligence. But our conscience is the guiding factor.

Intuitionism is the source of action, source of behaviour. The base of intuitionism is experience. So far as intellect is helper, assistant it will give us reason.

Whereas, moral prescription is the regulator of our life. It regulates our relation with father, mother, our relation with brethren, neighbour. In morality, intuitionism is the basis of our regulation of conduct.

Ethics is the science of conduct & what is good conduct? Good conduct is the result of good decisions and how do we decide? When we properly classify our activities. Here intuition helps a lot.

In this chapter I intend to focus on ethics as a normative study. There are two sciences - normative and descriptive. Civics, ethics, aesthetics and
logic are normative sciences whereas physics, chemistry, biology are descriptive sciences. Ethics concern with normative rules such as do not take revenge, don’t commit suicide, don’t steal etc. So moral values can’t be described by science. In science, the keys and formulas are exact but it is not the case with ethics.

In ethics, by following certain prescriptions, by following certain rules of behaviour one can have a good character, one can influence people, one can have a healthy mind.

The ethics contained in the Śiksāpatrī make it a normative text, which gives us rules for healthy life, healthy relationships, healthy behaviour.

ŚIKSĀPATRĪ AND ITS CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

In 18th century, India was torn apart by power hungry state rulers. The social, economical and moral fabric of the society was in shreds. People were misled, misguided and morality was misinterpreted.

At this juncture, Lord Swaminarayan wrote Śiksāpatrī with intention to reestablish the individual, social, cultural, moral and spiritual virtues in the society. But the peerless quality of Śiksāpatrī lies in the relevance in the contemporary era. Therefore, in my humble opinion, the value of this miniscule scripture is eternal. The degeneration of youths, rise of militancy, communal disharmony, religion fanaticism etc. are due to the lack of symmetry in the society and the lack of harmony in the human psyche. The contemporary deterioration of social fabric, mental tensions, the incurable disease, spiritual degradation prevalent gives ample testimony to these. Ethics of Śiksāpatrī ultimately leads to the path of harmony, path of universal brotherhood and path of love, therefore I firmly establish that no other weapon is as valuable and effective as Śiksāpatrī to resettle the disturbed harmony in this era of darkness (Kalyuga).
In short, today’s society is ruled by Rajas and Tamas; the constituents of Prakṛti but it is to be ruled by Puruṣah; the consciousness. Ethics has the power of transformation from worst of the kind i.e. influenced by tamas to the best of the kind i.e. Puruṣa or consciousness.

Thus in this chapter I intend to indicate that how Śikṣāpatrī is invaluable and inevitable to eradicate vices and complexities of individual and social life in contemporary age although it was written nearly two hundred years ago.

SYNTHESIS OF MORAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF HUMAN LIFE

Lord Swaminarayan was neither a sentimentalist nor a doctrinaire, neither an altogether out of the world ascetic. He in fact, had deep visionary insight into the innate nature and character of the human beings. He was the most practical and active psychologist of the human nature. He was a reformer, who transformed the root basis of the culture for the best. He was a perfectionist. He has covered aspects like hygiene, moral character, economic well-being, social etiquettes and spiritual betterment thoroughly.

In this revolutionary work He presented the Śikṣāpatrī as a weapon against the evils of Kaliyuga. That is the reason why in Śikṣāpatrī one finds synthesis of moral, social and cultural aspects of human life.

MORAL AND SOCIAL VALUE:

Man is a social animal. From the onset humans have acquired the habit of staying in groups. These groups form society. Togetherness in living signified the need of the rule of laws known as values or social ethics. These values were and are important for social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.
Moral values are the real ornaments that adorn the life of human being. Without which his endeavour may lead him towards degeneration. It is also true with the social progress. Cardinal moral values incorporated in Śikṣāpatrī are: discretion, non-violence, truth, charity, chastity, penance, celibacy, moderation, self-restraint, faith, sevā (service), positive attitude, introspection, awareness, contentment, patience, human dignity and so on. Social values are: respect for parents, elders and all life, reverence for Guru, tradition of spiritual learning and education, respect for women, hospitality, humanism, cleanliness etc.

Lord Swaminarayan based social as well as ethical values on non-hatred and spiritual harmony (Ātmyatā). Moreover, these values are in accordance with three highest values of Upanisada namely Satyam (Truth), Śivam (Goodness) and Sundaram (Beauty).

Therefore, I intend to show the present and continuous preciousness of the verses of Śikṣāpatrī in keeping with the social ethics and the values.

The more one cultivate values in his life, the faster one can win over his animal existence that is a major impediment in his spiritual progress.

SIGNIFICANCE OF GURU, SAINTHOOD AND HOLY COMPANY

In 36th verse of Śikṣāpatrī, Lord says:

“....the learned should impart their learning to others and should constantly keep the company of saints.”

Lord Swaminarayan emphasized on inevitable need of a saint in human life. The best way to perform devotion is to be in the company of the saint. The company of a God realized saint is virtually the company of God
Himself. As he is the living manifestation of divinity, God speaks, walks on the face of earth, and breaths through Him.

The glory of Guru is sung in each and every scripture of all the religions of the world. I intend to show some characteristics of a real saint. A true saint is the preacher, guide, philosopher, friend and above all the imparter of the most elevated spiritual knowledge and divine selfless affection. Such a Saint is the door to eternal salvation for all souls. In essence, the Guru is the perfect spiritual master, the ideal saint with realized wisdom who dispels ignorance and liberates his disciples from bondage from the unceasing cycle of life and death.

Lord Swaminarayan has blessed mankind with the boons that are unparallel in the history of spirituality. The Lord has promised to be ever-present on this earth, for all time to come, through a succession of Brahmswarūp (God-realized) saint.

SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS VALUE

The base of a successful and harmonized society is religion. Without religion, a society would degenerate. Society survives not on the system of Government, but on some religious key values just as peace, progress, health, prosperity, harmony, equality and freedom. Lord Swaminarayan voiced:

“My devotees shall desist from those acts which are contrary to the scriptural tenets, however much rewarding they may be; for verily, Dharma alone yields all desired objects.”

Dharma is such a factor which disciplines, harmonizes and sustains individual, social and national life.
There is a proverb which says: "House is where the individuals live, home is where the family lives. We can certainly transform our house to a home through ‘Śiksāpatrī’.”

**SOCIAL REGENERATION IN MODERN INDIA**

Since last two hundred years, there is dawn of knowledge in India that is called renaissance. When knowledge, art, literature, drawing all these revelled. Śiksāpatrī can be considered as a part of social and cultural renaissance. Signifying regeneration, social upliftment and transformation.

In the later part of 18th century the society was undergoing a dark period; and it was at this time that Lord Swaminarayan manifested on earth. He was not merely a reformer, nor was He a social activist; He was total divinity embodied in human form. His divine deeds achieved what nothing or nobody could have achieved to purify and spiritualize the physical, mental, social and emotional self of a devotee.

But, the task of Lord Swaminarayan differs from the other contemporary social reformers such as Rājā Rāmamohan Roy, Dayānand Saraswati, Keśub Čandra Sen. While these reformers tried to decrease evils and crimes; Lord Swaminarayan demolished the evil instinct in human nature which is the motivating force that provokes man into malpractices. He not only demolished evil, but also replaced vices by virtues, swords by rosaries.

The way He transformed the society, that work made Him revolutionary and visionary too. There are innumerable instances of His revolutionary work. He changed their lives from robbery and debauchery into devotion and dedication.
The 18th century Indian society was torn fabric of culture, religion and morality. In this chapter, I intend to present a brief scenario of the degeneration prevalent in that society, and the revolutionary crusades initiated by Lord Swaminarayan to transform this degradation into a life enhanced by high cultural and social values.

His innovation affected all the stratae of the society, ranging from the lower to the royal classes and also the outcastes of the society. Lord Swaminarayan’s Śikṣāpatrī was the major defender through its teachings in the vernacular language. This was the start of the reforms. He declared the virtual war against the vices like illiteracy, superstitions, dogmas, untouchability, violence, various kinds of addictions etc. He made people aware of their duties as well as their rights.

Lord Swaminarayan did His best to remove evils from the society. By His knowledge, by His work, by His compassionate love, He successfully changed the whole scenario of the social and national culture.

**CONCLUSION**

To give a summery and synoptic conclusion I hope to show that morality and moral philosophy is the backbone of individual and society. I believe that the new age demands a change of mental attitudes, thinking, temperament and relationship with all. Without transformation of nature, Dharma and standards of judgment it is not possible to change individual and social values. Reality is not only individual but it is universal as well as transcendent. So it has got simultaneous character. This is why I believe that morality is rooted in true religious consciousness & true spirituality, Lord Swaminarayan has shown by his work and religious foundation especially in His Śikṣāpatrī that without moral character, judgment, integral personality and true consciousness it is not possible to change the fabric of society. This
is the true value of Śikṣāpatrī and in its real practice, the character of human beings and social structure are going to elevate social progress and spiritual harmony (Āmiyatā).

Spiritual harmony is the foundation on which edifice of purity, piety, devotion and ultimate happiness could be erected.

So this is Śikṣāpatrī, the do gooder of all.

This is the Śikṣāpatrī - the protector, the savior, the torchbearer, the harmonizer and the guiding path for the aspirants and devotees.

Notes & References:

1. Śikṣāpatrī, 6
2. Vaśanāṁṛta Panśālā 7
3. Śikṣāpatrī, 116
4. Śikṣāpatrī, 36