Introduction

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.

The above problems concerning moral philosophy have been satisfactorily solved in the general religious thought of Lord Swaminarayan, and through the ethics of Śikṣāpatra in particular. Moral philosophy requires support and background of religious consciousness, moral ideals, righteous conduct and moral judgement as a way of life. Without the base of religious fervour and awareness there is a danger of the deterioration of moral ideal and value of life.

Lord Swaminarayan who enunciated Śikṣāpatra 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.

Lord Swaminarayan who is also known by the name of Swāmī Sahajānand and Śrīji Mahāraj was the Supreme Godhead and divinity incarnated in the human form.

He presented the Śiksāpatrī as a revolutionary weapon against the evils of present day society. He presented the mankind with this marvelous gift which acts as a ‘Sudarṣāna ākra’ to safeguard His devotee in this era of darkness (kaliyuga). That is the reason why in Śiksāpatrī one finds synthesis of moral, social and cultural aspects of human life.

Lord Swaminarayan enunciated Śiksāpatrī on the auspicious day of Vasant Panḍamī V.S. 1882 and Śrī Śatānand Muni incorporated it in the holy scripture by the name ‘Satsangi Jivan’. It has comprehensively covered the duties of householders, sādhus, brahmaçāries, women, widows, Ācāryas and their wives in just 212 verses. This exhibits His peerless and visionary power.

Śiksāpatrī depicts the law of eternal religion. It’s a true symbol of Hinduism. For the purity and prosperity of mankind and His devotees, Lord Swaminarayan has prescribed very simple and beautiful principles. By enunciating Śiksāpatrī, Lord Swaminarayan has bestowed the sheer compassion on human life in general and aspirant in particular.

Śiksāpatrī gives an objective and universal moral standard commonly applicable to all. Its appeal is universal, its message is global and its impact is penetrating. The very declaration by the Lord “I have written this Śiksāpatrī for the greatest good of mankind – sarvajīvahitāvaha” reflects its
universal. Since it is the voice of Supreme Personality of Godhead, the value of its precepts are absolute and eternal, unaffected by time and space.

Śikṣāpatra significantly focuses on the relationships, injunctions and prescriptions, guiding one towards maintaining relations with our human brethren, relatives and acquaintances and with the divinity too. It is a systematic classification of the principles that are a landmark in the history of morals and morality of human beings.

The main verses of Śikṣāpatra are orderly arranged according to their emphasis on following issues: Relation with parents, Relation with relatives, elderly people, education, society, day to day duties, profession, religion, devotion and spirituality.

Śikṣāpatra is a book of socio-ethico-religious codes. Śikṣāpatra fulfills the urgent need of present time, for it is concise and compact in its injunction. Merely in two hundred and twelve verses, it has not only covered the codes of various Śrutis and Smṛtis but also the quintessence of all the principle scriptures of the world. Śikṣāpatra can be described as “Sarva Śāstra Hṛdayam” meaning it contains the heart or the gist of all the scriptures.

The 6th verse of Śikṣāpatra states: “Śikṣāpatra – the quintessence and the nectar churned from all the oceans of scriptures is capable enough to bestow immortality to the mankind.”

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.

Śikṣāpatra 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 Śiksāpatra has been classified into major areas of metaphysical, ethical, cultural and social aspects of the work for the purpose of clear understanding and vision.

The first area is related to metaphysics of Lord Swaminarayan. The study of metaphysics in inevitable in understanding the moral philosophy and ethics of Śiksāpatra. 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.

The doctrine of Viṣistadvaita as propounded by Lord Swaminarayan is the essence of His metaphysics.

The object of religious experience is to perceive the relationship of human consciousness with the ultimate reality. The nature of religious experience in the metaphysics of Lord Swaminarayan emphasizes on the devotion accompanied with the pure knowledge of Lord's glory offered unto the personal God, who is ever incarnate on the earth.

Dharma is the vivid credential of human being that gives him an exceptional position amidst all the creatures of the planate. In Śiksāpatra Lord Swaminarayan describes distinctively about swadharma, ekāntik dharma and bhāgavat dharma.

Mysticism is that attitude of mind in which all relations are merged in the relation of the soul to God. It is the soul of Indian philosophy. There are various types of mystical experiences but the mysticism of Lord Swaminarayan is all embracing. It justifies soul mysticism, God mysticism,
introspective mysticism and unifying mysticism. *Lord Swaminarayan* strongly believes that mystical experiences are expressible and rationally interpreted as devotion.

The metaphysical background of devotional spirit is helpful to morality, virtue, duty, responsibility, obligation, circumstances and ethos of morality. These ethical disciplines have been incorporated by *Lord Swaminarayan* in His *Śikṣāpatrī* – an ethical document of the *Swaminarayan* faith.

The second area is related to the ethical understanding of *Śikṣāpatrī*. Ethics of *Śikṣāpatrī* is also the part of Hindu ethics. The ethics of *Śikṣāpatrī* do not advocate ritualism nor pure intellectualism; neither passivism nor total activism; neither escapist 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.

Ethics of the *Śikṣāpatrī* is the ethics of 'complete goodness'. Goodness is directly related with God. Therefore, human goodness is a part of divine goodness. According to the categorical imperative the aim of moral life is to perform duty and this principle is reinforced in the teachings of *Śikṣāpatrī*. It highlights a high teaching of moral philosophy that ‘duty should be performed for the sake of deity.

Intuitionism of *Śikṣāpatrī* is not independent of *Dharma*. According the *Śikṣāpatrī* a person whose moral sense is backed by religious strength rarely fails to discriminate between worthy and worthless, good and evil, right and wrong.
The third area is related to the synthesis of social, moral and cultural values. 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 values like moral, social and spiritual are incorporated in Śiksāpatrī for social cohesion and peaceful existence of the mankind.

To be virtuous, one should have an insight into a true relation of persons. Hence the cultivation of pure knowledge is of great importance in moral life. True knowledge implies the knowledge of divinity. Such knowledge can only be acquired from the scriptures derived directly from the divine. The mankind is therefore, fortunate enough because Śiksāpatrī is gifted by Lord Swaminarayan—a divinity incarnated in a human form.

In Śiksāpatrī, Lord Swaminarayan emphasized on inevitable need of a pure 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.

The base of successful and harmonized society is religion. Without religion a society would degenerate. Society survives not on the system of government but on religious key values like peace, harmony, equality and freedom. There is a proverb which says, “House is where the individual lives and home is where the family lives.” Śiksāpatrī lays down a strong footing for converting a house into a home and thereby enriching the social fabric.

In the later part of the 18th century, when knowledge deteriorated and ignorance prevailed in the world; social and moral fabric was torn apart, the scriptures where so misinterpreted as to justify actions which inflicted injuries on living being, Lord Swaminarayan through His Śiksāpatrī launched a revolutionary crusade against all these evils and ethical chaos.
Lord Swaminarayan, a total divinity embodied in human form through His divinity, foresightenedness and selfless service achieved what nothing or no body could have ever achieved to purify spiritualize and improvise the physical, mental, social and moral self of an individual and the society. He did all these through Śikṣāpatrī.

God has given the most precious and valuable gift of human body to be used as an instrument in achieving mokṣa – the supreme goal of life. But this goal could only be achieved when one establishes a pure and childlike innocent relationship with God. For establishing such a relationship let us embark upon the journey with the blessings of Lord Swaminarayan’s own omniscient and omnipotent voice – ŚIKŚĀPATRĪ.