Chapter : iii

MEANING OF DHARMA AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

MEANING OF DHARMA

The word Dharma is oceanic in its character. It is difficult to fathom its depth and measure its territory, to plunge into its profundity and to fill it in the tiny pot of limited words.

Indian perspective of Dharma is subtler than that of the Western. Western philosophers describe religion on the ground of moral consciousness, whereas the Indian concept of Dharma is not confined to morality; it provides a broad perspective of the universal consciousness. According to Hindu view, etymological meaning of Dharma has its root in Sanskrit term Dhr, Dhāryate, i.e. one that sustains life or to uphold. Hindu view of Dharma is more significant than western idea of religion’. The English word ‘religion’ can never stand as a synonym to the Sanskrit term ‘Dharma.’

A man without religion is a man without identity. Dharma is the vivid credential of human being that gives him an exceptional seat amidst all the creatures of the planet.

Dharma is an inevitable, inherent and vital element of human nature. It is solely adhered to inner being of man. Just as oxygen is vital to sustain the physical body, Dharma is to sustain the subtle body. Just as heat is the intrinsic quality of fire, fragrance is of flower, sweetness is of sugar, Dharma is of man.
Radhakrsnan rightly says that, "True religion is not what we get from outside, from book and teachers. It is the aspiration of the human soul that which unfolds within oneself, that which is built by one’s life blood.”

Religion is not just speaking or showing but living. True religion is the religion of heart and not of head. The main purpose of religion is to unfold the divinity within.

Religion is such a thread that weaves together all the aspects of human personality. It predominantly prevails in all; you or me, theist or atheist, decoit or saint. Religion is the substratum of our activities, emotions and reasons that sustain merit of our deeds, sublimity of emotions and purity of intellect respectively.

_Dharma_ is the centre of positivity, affirmation and virtuousness of man. Practice of _Dharma_ is practice of righteousness, goodness, justice, truth, love and purity. The righteous man is truly a religious man. So, religious man never chooses immoral path deliberately. His loyalty towards religion refrains him from wrongdoing. It has the potentiality to elevate the soul from sub human level to super human level.

_Dharma_ is another name of awareness. Religious man observes and examines each and every moment and movement of his life in the light of awareness. He is an enlightened soul. _The Bhagavad Gītā_ states that a religious man is ever awake while the rest of the world is asleep.

"yā niśā sarva-bhūtānāṁ tasyāṁ jāgaṁ tasyam brahman
yasyāṁ jāgrati bhūtāṁ sa niśā paśyanto muneḥ."²

(What is night for all beings is the time of awakening for the self-controlled; and the time of awakening for all beings is night for the introspective sage.)
Religion is not a magic, a witchcraft, a quackery or a superstition to be confused with an outdated dogma, that spoils the simplicity of spiritual life. If Dharma is misinterpreted, life becomes barren, society turns chaotic and civilization collapses. Where there is religion, there is life, order and development.

The remarkable feature of Dharma is that it provides us with lofty vision to look at our life as a journey to the Supreme. Therefore Rādhākrṣṇan rightly says that, “Religion requires us to look upon life as an opportunity for self realization’ – ‘ātmanastu kāmāya.’”

The term Dharma is multi-faceted in its implications. It stands for religion, customary rituals of a community, law, social well-being, ordinances, morality, goodness, righteousness, good-will, justice, direction of conduct, right, equity, piety, propriety, character, individualism and a host of other allied connotations. Therefore, Aurobindo says that, “Dharma is all that helps us to grow into the divine purity, largeness, light, freedom, power, strength, joy, love, good, unity, beauty.”

Lord Swaminarayan has based his philosophy on the Vedic tradition and discreetly adored all the tenets of Hinduism. This is evident in the codes he has prescribed in Śiksāpatrī and spiritual principles discussed in Vaćanāmrta; the most fundamental and masterpiece scriptures of Swaminarayan faith. As Lord Swaminarayan is a practical methodologist the definition of dharma given by Him is absolutely lucid, exact, accurate, compact and worthy to be accepted and lived upon by all.

Lord Swaminarayan in Śiksāpatrī defines Dharma as:

“dharmo jñeyah sadācāraḥ śrutismṛtyupapāditaḥ”

(Dharma is the ethical code as propounded by Śrutis and Smrtis.)
Let us evaluate the term *Dharma* as described in Śrūtis and Smṛtis.

**DHARMA IN UPAṆĪSADAS**

*Dharma* of Vedas and Upaniṣadas elevates a man from worldly and heavenly desires to spiritual enlightenment, from *Karma* to *Brahma*, from rituals to realization. Initially, *Karma* is stressed for celestial enjoyments then gradually the *Upaniṣadas* describes the limitations of *Karma* and eulogizes the life of renunciation that could lead to the highest reality as prelude to imparting the knowledge of *Brahma*. The Čhāṇdogya Upaniṣada says: “Three are the branches or supports of *Dharma* (*dharmaskandhah*): Sacrificial worship (*yajña*), study of scriptures (*adhyāyana*) and charity (*dāna*) – these are the first. Austerity and concentrated effort (*tapas*) alone is second; and the celibate student of sacred knowledge (*brahmaçārī*) is the third.... All these become possessors of meritorious worlds (*punyalokah*). But he who is established firmly in *Brahma*, attains Immortality.”

All the functional occurrences in every cubic inch of the universe is not just a matter co-incidence but there is some invisible regulative force. It is the force of divinity that controls the entire functioning. This divine law is the will of God i.e. *Dharma*. It is only due to this Supreme law that there is an undisturbed and ongoing order in the universe. It is in this sense that the *Dharma* is universal in its appeal and inevitable in its application. The moral law expresses our unity with God. God is the very embodiment of the law. So we should perform all our duties as per his commands.

This truth is well defined in Upaniṣadas: “The regulative principles of the universe, which integrates it and upholds it, is generally called *Ṛta* (Right) on the plane of cosmic order, and *Dharma*, on the plane of social and individual order, and *Karma* (from the root *kru*, to do, to perform) on the plane of Action and Moral order. However, they are the three aspects of the
one comprehensive and pervasive Great law and each one of them is often used to represent the whole concept and sometimes used interchangeably.”

The social and individual aspect of Dharma in Upaniṣadas emphasizes on the cultivation of moral virtues such as self-control, charity, compassion, austerity, harmlessness and truthfulness. The performance of rituals like yajña, dāna, Upāsanā and concept of merits-demерits are emphasized to purify the soul. All the Upaniṣadas collectively stress that no knowledge of Brahma is revealed if the mind is not purified through selfless performance of Karma and cultivation of moral virtues.

Brhadārṇyaka Upaniṣada confidently asserts that there is nothing beyond Dharma. Kanada’s Vaiśeṣikā-Sūtra defines Dharma as that by which spiritual enlightenment and the Supreme-good are accomplished. In a similar way, Jaimini’s Mīmāṃsā-Sūtra has discussed this concept at length and concluded that Dharma is another name for the Supreme-good.

Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa; the four ideals of human life are remarkable features of Hinduism. In Śiksāpatrī, Lord Swaminarayan says,

“Those of my disciples who shall live in accordance with the precepts laid down here shall surely attain all the four attainments of life (Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa) on earth.”

Thus, Lord Swaminarayan blesses His disciples by showing the simplest way for the accomplishment of all the four attainments.

Dharma is the root; Artha, the branch; Kāma, the flower; and Mokṣa, the fruit of the tree of life. If the root is watered, the branches and the flowers will be healthy and will yield delicious fruits. Therefore, Vyās underlines this truth poignantly. At the end of Mahābhārata He exclaims:
“With uplifted hands I cry, and none listen to me. From Dharma flow prosperity and pleasure. Why then is Dharma not followed by all?”

In Manusmrti, four Purusørthas have been upheld and advocated for people. Out of four ideals of life Artha and Kama are having instrumental value because these Purusørthas fulfil the requirements of domestic life and bring material happiness. But almost all the Hindu philosophers consider Moksa as the cardinal value of life (Param Purusørtha). It is the state of perfection where soul becomes free from all the bondages and shines by its own light.

Lord Swaminarayan in Śikṣāpatrī also defines Moksa as:

“Being Brahma, to serve the Lord in His abode means Mukti – the liberation.”

According to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikās, Moksa means attaining the identity with the divine will (Sāmyatā or Sādharmyatā). Balbirsingh in Hindu Ethics mentions that, “Amongst differences and extremities seeking harmony, Prabhākara says that ‘if Dharma alone can be of the sole ethical motive, it alone can be logically accepted worthy of realization.’ ”

Among four ideals of life, Dharma is the coordinator right from birth to death. Dharma is that reign that does not allow Artha and Kama to exceed their respective limits, instead constantly governs them towards final goal – Moksa.

**DHARMA IN SMRTIS**

There are four Smṛtis namely, Parāśara Smṛti, Śankhalikhita Smṛti, Yājñavalkya Smṛti and Manu Smṛti. Out of these four, later two are the most significant. Lord Swaminarayan proclaims Yājñavalkya Smṛti as His religious scripture. He says: “yājñavalkya Smṛti is our religious scripture.”
Yājñāvalkya Smṛti contains social code of conduct, practical code of give and take and expiation for the mistakes committed knowingly or unknowingly. Mainly there are three parts of Yājñāvalkya Smṛti: 1. Ācāra, 2. Vyavahāra and Prāyaścīta or Vrata, 3. Kalā and Karmavipāka. These six features of Dharma are very well treated in this Smṛti for mankind. Thus, Yājñāvalkya Smṛti prescribes rules for the social life and purity of transactions in domestic life. Maharṣi Yājñāvalkya says,

“Śruti Smṛtihi Sadācāraḥ Svasya ā priyātmānaḥ
samyak sakalpajāḥ Kāmo dharmomūlāmidam smṛtam” ¹³

(Veda, Smṛti, code of conduct which is dear to soul, and the desire emerging from the best volition; are the roots of Dharma.)

The word Dharma is also variedly discussed in Manusmṛti. Manu stresses more on the practical and ethical aspects of Dharma. According to Manu, outstanding meaning of Dharma is Ācāra and Duty. The renowned definition of Dharma consisting of ten virtues, as given by Manu is:

“dhṛti ksama damosteyam śaućamīndryanigraḥ
dhirvidyā satyamākrodho dashakam dharmaḷakṣaṇam” ¹⁴

(Fortitude, forbearance, self-restraint, non-stealing, purity, control of senses, discrimination, wisdom, truthfulness and absence of anger – these are the ten characteristics of Dharma.)

Thus, for the salvation, faithful observance of duties of religion, purity of conduct and restrain over passions are inevitable. In short, by Dharma, Manu means righteousness i.e. right conduct in life as an ideal human being and a permanent consciousness of the divine. To Manu, ideal Dharma is that which the noble and the leaned follow and that too, without likes or dislikes. Thus, Dharma assumes its real, ideal character when it is sanctioned by the inner-conscience of man.¹⁵
Dharma in Bhagavad Gītā

Śankarācārya in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā explains in the very first paragraph “dvividho hi vedokto dharmah”16 - The Vedic Dharma is twofold – the Dharma of actions and the Dharma of renunciation.

The social good means material improvement and the spiritual good means inner growth of man. Towards this end, the Bhagavad Gītā endeavours to prepare man and equip him morally as well as spiritually.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, dharma means perfection of svabhāva and svadharma. Svabhāva means character and personality, inner nature of individual, his innate temper and consciousness. Svadharma means the true inner character, vocation, real surrender and relationship with ultimate nature and reality.

Every man and woman, old and young, irrespective of time and space follow certain dharma to contribute to the safety and security, peace and prosperity of society. Each one must perform his Svadharma to establish and maintain harmony and order in the society.

The Bhagavad Gītā does not negate life and its activities. On the contrary, it enriches life by providing a new perception and making it truly enjoyable and purposeful. A verse from Viṣṇu Purāṇa says that “those who give up their duties and sit down uttering the name ‘Kṛṣṇa...kṛṣṇa...’ are really the enemies of God and sinners.”17

Śrī Aurobindo’s explains, “The Gītā’s idea of Karma and its whole sense, emphasizes the inner quality and spirit which finds expression in work, function and action in understanding of Karma. But the divine is the birthright of every individual. This is where Shri Aurobindo places greater importance of Dharma and its power to change doubts and difficulties,
perplexities and perils, and convert tragedies to openings and opportunities from the emphasis on the inner truth and not the outer form to find freedom and peace in the realization of one's Svabhāva through Swadharma” \(^{18}\)

_Dharma_ directs human activity, so that each unit in society may fulfil its function effectively and contribute to the general good of the society. Where there is _Dharma_, there is no possibility of confusion arising out of competition, jealousy or malice. _Bhagavad Gītā_ says,

“_sve sve karmanyabhirataḥ sansidhim labhate narah_” \(^{19}\)

(Devoted, each to his own duty, man attains perfection.)

The life sketches of the great men of action like Mahātma Gāndhī, Vinobā Bhāve, Lokmānyla Tilak depict the same fact how the precision with which this law of action operates in human life.

The codes of _Varṇāśram Dharma_ prescribed in _Śikṣāpatrī_ are also in consonance with the precepts of _Bhagavad Gītā_. Lord Swaminarayan has accepted _Bhagavad Gītā_ as an authoritative spiritual scripture. While explaining the importance of _varṇāśrama dharma_, Lord Swaminarayan commanded in _Śikṣāpatrī_ that:

“None of my followers shall violate the code of _Varṇāśram Dharma_ and shall never accept any code of behaviour other than that sanctioned by the scriptures.” \(^{20}\)

In Hinduism there are four _Varṇas_ namely, _Brahmin_, _Kṣatriya_, _Vaiśya_ and _Śudra_. It also has four _Āśramas_ namely, _Brahmaścarya_, _Grahastra_, _Vānaprastha_ and _Sanyāstha_. Respective duties and rules of these four _Varṇāśram_ are elaborated in scripture.

Such an intelligent classification of human beings on the basis of their physical behaviour, psychological structure and intellectual aptitude is
Meaning of Dharma and Religious Experience

applicable not only in India, but also in practically in every corner of the world. This fourfold classification is universal, both in its application and its implication in the cultural development of man. As Gerald Heard says: "The Āryan - sanskrit sociological thought that first defined and named its fourfold structure of society is as much ours as is India’s." 21

To conclude, the term Dharma in The Bhagavad Gītā, is divided in three aspects; Svadharma and Svabhāv, niṣkām karmayoga and nimittabhāva. This aspects are in turn related with social aspects, individual aspect and spiritual aspect respectively.

Dharma in Rāmāyana

The reason why after so many centuries, the ethics of Rāmāyana stands even today as a pillar of strength, inspiration as well as source of idealistic life is because the hero of this religious poetry, Lord Rāma is not only an ideal king, an ideal son, an ideal brother, an ideal husband, an ideal disciple but above all Dharma incarnated on earth. Through out this epic Vālmikī has adored Lord Rāma as Rāmo vigrahavan Dharmah - Rāma is Dharma embodied.

Lord Rāma underwent several trials and tribulations in life and in all situations his conduct was exemplary and worthy to follow. His conduct depicts how to remain undisturbed and accept every incident of life with equanimity and tremendous patience. His commitment and devotion towards his duty, his father, and his people, Sītā’s long suffering and fidelity to Lord Rāma are regarded as religious and ethical ideals for centuries. His victory over wicked Rāvana is, in essence, a victory over adharma. It shows that only virtue and moral law prevail in the personal and public life.

Rāmāyana is a beautiful presentation of the sublime virtues like tolerance, patience, reverence, loyalty, fraternity, humility, renunciation,
Satya and Dharma is reflected from almost all the characters of this scripture. The message of Rāma’s life is:

“dharmohi paramo loke dharme satyam pratiṣṭhitam”\(^{22}\)

(Dharma alone is ultimate in the world, and truth is based on Dharma.)

**Dharma as Faith & Fellowship**

Religion is the language of God and different religions are like different languages in which God has spoken to man.

The philosophy of religion is universal and therefore, it is the same everywhere but religions differ from prophet to prophet because there are many different interpretations put forward by these different masters, regarding the best manner in which their particular generation could be guided towards the final experience of the eternal and absolute goal which is singularly unique.

*Lord Swaminarayan* has as well propounded *dharma* in Śikṣāpatrī as *ahimsā* and *brahmaśācarya*. According to Him, these are two significant virtues, for the attainment of liberation. The codes of righteous life as explained in *Śikṣāpatrī* are in tune with the well-known Buddhist doctrine of Middle path. They are as follows:

1. Right vision (free from superstition and delusion)
2. Right conduct (peaceful, honest, pure)
3. Right determination (high and worthy of an intelligent man)
4. Right speech (Frank, truthful)
5. Right means of livelihood (inflicting no injury to living beings)
6. Right practice (self-training and self control)
7. Right memory (the active watchful mind)
8. Right meditation (*samadhi*; deep meditation on the realities of life)
The principle of *pancaśīla* is regarded as true religion in Jain philosophy. It prescribes strict ethical disciplines for the householders and ascetics. The ethical codes as prescribed in *pancaśīla* are:

a) *Ahimsā* : Non-violence and non-injury to any life.

b) *Satya* : Truth, not to resort to any falsity for one's own sake of or for the sake of others.

c) *Asteya* : Non-stealing. It is non-acceptance of a thing that belongs to others.

d) *Brahmačarya* : Chastity – cultivation of good moral character and self control.

e) *Aparigraha* : Renunciation i.e. non-attachment to worldly gains.

In Judaism too, a precise mandate of do's and don't's has been given for the Jewish way of life in the form of ten moral rules, popularly known as the Ten commandments. These ten precepts are: “1. Thou shalt have no other Gods before me (i.e. before Jehovah), 2. Thou shalt not make any graven image, 3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, 4. Remember the Sabbath day (the 7th day of the week, i.e Saturday, on which all Jews are required to refrain from all kinds of work and join the divine worship.) to keep it holy, 5. Honour thy father and thy mother, 6. Thou shalt not kill, 7. Thou shalt not commit adultery, 8. Thou shalt not steal, 9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour, and 10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s housewife, man-servant, maid-servant, ox, ass, etc.”

One can see that the ten commandments corresponds to the codes of Śikṣāpatrī. The last five commandments are similar to the *Swaminarayan* belief. They are *ahimsā, brahmačarya, asteya, satya* and *aprigraha* chronologically.
Thus, religions of the world are fundamentally identical in their principles and standpoint. They vigorously endeavour to preserve their religious and cultural heritage and try to persuade the races by reiterating the biographies of the great spiritual Heroes and imparting the wisdom hidden in scriptures thereby bequeath spiritual vision and protect Dharma through the medium of Godmen. Swaminarayan faith is one of the foremost among them.

**Dharma as Experience**

*Dharma* in its elementary aspect consists of rights, rituals, rules, regulations, responsibility and righteousness. Its higher aspect distinctively means experience or oneness. Commitment to elementary Dharma makes one a good, noble, generous human being, but to be a devotee or realized soul one has to view religion as a matter of experience and realization. *Dharma* as rituals is that *dharma* which our physical body performs and *Dharma* as experience is that *dharma* which our subtle body performs.

Rādhākrṣṇa has precisely stated that, “Spiritual truth is inwardness, not logical meditation. Truth is existential. To know it, we must live in it. It must become a part of our being, a source of personal depth.”

According to Hindu rituals a man has to pass through the three obligations namely *Mātrurīṇa, Piturīṇa* and *Gururīṇa*. All the three personalities; mother, father and Guru play a vital role in one’s character building. One who resolutely renunciates all his worldly attachments and has the only longing for salvation, surpasses all the boundaries of worldly obligations, relations, responsibilities and duties.

For a layman to understand *Dharma*, numerous volumes are written and countless debates have been arranged but for a true devotee its definition is changes. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa emphasizes *niṣkāmyoga* as the
surest way for the purification of action. It also shows the path of philanthropy and patronage. Subsequently, as the ultimate dharma, Lord Kṛṣṇa prescribes the path of total surrender. In the Bhagavad Gītā, Kṛṣṇa tells to Arjun that,

“sarvadharmaṁ parityajya, māme karm śaraṇam vraja;
aham tvāṁ sarva pāpebhyo, mokṣayisyāmi mā śucaḥ.”25

(Abandoning all Dharmas, (of the body, mind and intellect), surrender unto Me alone; I will liberate you from all sins; grieve not.)

In agreement to this celebrated verse of The Bhagavad Gītā, Lord Swaminarayan says,

“...In Śrīmad Bhāgavat, it is predominantly mentioned that, ‘it does not matter much if the religion of Śruti and Smṛti are little abandoned, but one should never abandon the Lord’s refuge. That is the essence of all the essences.’ ”26

The final solution to the ever haunting questions of the mankind lie not outside i.e. not in temples or churches or mosques, but it is found within our heart. The essence of Dharma lies in the heart of great saints and seers where God resides. That is why in Mahābhārata it is correctly said that: “dharmasya tatvam niḥitam guhayām” - The essence of dharma resides in the cave of the heart in which the paramātman abides.

As we have mentioned above, Dharma is the intrinsic quality of our being. Naturally, it is related to the most essential and eternal aspect of our being, i.e. soul. Our body, mind and intellect are subordinate to soul. It implies that Dharma or duties pertaining to our conscience are inferior to Dharma of soul. As the soul is the spark of divine - pure bliss and pure consciousness, its Dharma is to realize or merge into that divinity. Dharma that brings unity among mind, body and soul is true religion. Soul is self-
luminous, all morality shines in the light of ultimate religion—the religion of soul.

In the panoramic view of religion where all the barriers of caste, colour, nationality, language, sect and sex extinguishes. Real aspirant looks at life as the best opportunity to liberate his soul. He is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, he is neither a Christian nor a Jain because soul has no religion except worshiping and serving the supreme divinity—the governor, the savior and the all doer who resides in him. No other religion is as great as the religion of soul.

**BHĀGAVAT DHARMA AND ŚIKṢĀPATRĪ**

The enunciator of the Śikṣāpatrī, Lord Swaminarayan was one of majestic founder, savior and guardian of Bhāgavat Dharma. It is constituted of four divine virtues; Dharma, Jnāṇa, Vairagya and Bhakti. Hinduism glorifies it as sanātan dharma—the eternal religion, the religion that never extingucts. The true meaning of ‘sanātan’ is that truth which is everlasting and a real source of religion as well as for human spirit. It leads all the religions towards religious harmony and oneness. Lord Swaminarayan accommodates the values of Vedic rituals and the path of action in his Bhāgavat dharma in its broader perspectives. He says:

> "Just as a very rich man draws a bank draft though apparently the draft seems to be a piece of paper but when exchanged, yields money, the rules of *vidhi* and *nīṣedha* sanctioned and prescribed by the great seers, if observed with due reverence, ultimately ensure redemption."²⁷

Thus, Lord Swaminarayan says that each and every code pertaining to Dharma, lower or higher if followed sincerely, leads to ultimate salvation. His philosophy of religion resembles with the supermoralism of *Veda* and
“As F. H. Bradely has said, ‘The culmination of morality lies in religious consciousness as morality consists of infinite process.’ Ultimately Ethics is a systematic expression of inward commitment of the individual towards the Supreme Reality.”

Śīksāpatri is the expression of Bhāgavat Dharma. It starts with and merges in Dharma. Śrīji Mahārāj says:

“If one wishes to please the Lord, he should have firm faith in the religion of one’s caste and stage of life, firmness of Atmanisthā i.e. self realization, aversion for all objects, except the Lord, desireless devotion alongwith the knowledge and glory of the Lord. These four means put together shall be known as Ekāntik-religion.”

Bhāgavat Dharma advocates the purest form of knowledge. It concentrates on the fact that Ātman is the basis of our existence. It can disperse the darkness of our underlying ignorance of undue attachment with the physical body. Bhāgavat Dharma is the knowledge by which all the false identifications caused due to ego comes to an end. A man of true knowledge never gets betray by false ego. Having a clear discretion of Mundane and Divine, he performs all his actions with soul consciousness.

“The religion of Ekāntik devotee as described in Vāsudev-Mahātmya is that he does not consider himself as body but absolute consciousness. He offers devotion to Lord accompanied with svadharma, jnāna and vairagya.”

The master key to rediscover Dharma is to live truly as the Atman and to express its infinite perfection through our actions and affairs. Lord Swaminarayan in Śīksāpatri defines vairāgya thus:

“Absence of attachment to any object except the Lord is vairāgya.”

An aspirant who treads the path of true religion and has true knowledge automatically develops a sense of indifference towards worldly
objects. His sole interest is to please God. Further elaborating the state of vairāgya, Lord Swaminarayan says:

"The man of the highest detachment is like king Janak. He may enjoy the object of senses, viz. Sound, touch, form, taste and smell, but devoid of interest and with the spirit of indifference. They neither leave any impression on his mind nor affect his renunciation. He considers them to be enemies. He always keeps the holy company of saints, religious scriptures. He always serves the Lord. This conviction does not get affected even in unfavourable circumstances and lowly company. Such devotees are said to have the highest detachment."

Lord Swaminarayan in his philosophy places bhakti at a higher level as compared to vairāgya. According to Him even an aspirant of highest detachment and purest form of knowledge cannot attain the highest bliss and tranquility if he lacks in devotion. It is only the devotion – a loving relationship with God that brings serenity. Śrīji Mahārāj says:

"A man of dharma alone can never be regarded as great because even an averse person may have dharma. He who has devotion for God accompanied with the true knowledge and glory of Lord would never fall from the path of dharma even if he possesses lesser degree of atmanisthā, and vairāgya. Because, he who knows the glory of the Lord knows that all the deities like Brahma obey the Lord then why should I disobey the Lord? With such conviction, he would always follow the codes and laws of the Lord."

Devotion accompanied with the true knowledge and glory of Lord is the essence of Bhāgvat Dharma. The implied principle of Bhāgavat dharma leads one to a God oriented life. Without it, one may be misguided to dry ritualism and may lose the real aim of life. Lord Swaminarayan skillfully co-
relates Dharma with Bhakti that is the outstanding feature of Bhāgavat Dharma. He states:

"Religion is of two types: One is the religion of inactivity, and the other is the religion of activity. Both the types of religion can either be related with the Lord, or can be devoid of relation to the God. Of this, the religion related with God is that of devotees like Nārad, Sanakādik, Shukaji, Dhruva, Prahalād, Ambaris; and this is the religion that is termed as ‘Bhāgavat Dharma’, and ‘Ekāntik Dharma’. There is no distinction between this Dharma and Bhakti; both are one. "......The Lord incarnates on earth to establish this religion. And the religion that defines caste distinctions is extremely subordinate to this Bhāgavat Dharma. And by means of Bhāgvat Dharma, the soul overcomes Māyā and attains the divine abode of Puruṣottama – the Lord. Therefore, the honour of Bhāgavat Dharma as well as of Bhakti is the same, and attainment is the same too."³⁴

Religious philosophy when coincides with theism leads to religious consciousness. As the religion propounded by Śīksāpatrī is accompanied with theism, leads towards direct and immediate experience of ultimate reality. Bhāgavat Dharma according to Lord Swaminarayan is amalgamation of the belief in God, relation to God and ultimate unification with God. Thus, encompasses the fundamental aspects of dharma.

Finally, we have come to the conclusion that Śīksāpatrī covers all the three facets of ‘Dharma’ that is philosophy, rituals and experience. The principle propounded by it lays a strong foundation on which the ultimate dharma of realizing the God, the ultimate religious experience could be attained easily.
Notes & References:

2. *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 2 / 69
5. Śiksāpātri, 103
6. Čhāndogya Upaniṣada, II.23.1
7. *Dharma For All*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1985, p. 68
8. Śiksāpātri, 206
9. *Dharma For All*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1985, pp. 9-10
10. Śiksāpātri, 121
12. Śiksāpātri, 99
13. As quoted in the book Śiksāpātri Adhyayan, By Shri Vyas Gaurishankar Tribhuvan, Shri Swaminarayan Gurukul, Rajkot, 1997, p. 42
15. R.S. Bhai, *A Reconstruction of the Original Interpretations of the Manusmṛti*, Published by Kanchanlal C. Parikh, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, 1970, p. 2
20. Śiksāpātri, 24
22. As quoted in the Book ‘Dharma for All’, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1985,
23. Exodus 20 : 3 - 17
25. *Bhagavad Gītā*, 18/66
26. Vačanāmṛta, Gadhādā Middle, 9
27. Vačanāmṛta, Kāriyānī, 6
29. Vačanāmṛta, Gadhādā First, 21
30. Vačanāmṛta, Gadhādā Middle, 22
31. Śiksāpātri, 104
32. Vačanāmṛta, Gadhādā First, 2
33. Vačanāmṛta, Vadatāl, 3
34. Vačanāmṛta, Gadhādā Last, 21

††††††††††