

# Walking the Righteous Path: The Shikshapatri as a Spiritual Guide in Troubled Times

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**Abstract:** *The Shikshapatri, authored by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1826, stands as one of the most remarkable contributions to Indian ethical and spiritual literature. Comprising 212 verses in Sanskrit, it provides clear guidance on personal discipline, social harmony, spiritual devotion, and universal values. Unlike many ancient scriptures, the Shikshapatri addresses not only theological aspects but also everyday concerns such as hygiene, health, financial integrity, and family duties. This paper explores the historical context of the Shikshapatri, its philosophical underpinnings, and its urgent relevance in addressing modern challenges such as moral decline, family breakdown, ecological imbalance, and mental health crises. By analyzing its teachings and comparing them with contemporary global concerns, the study argues that the Shikshapatri is not merely a religious text but a timeless manual for humanity.*

**Keywords:** Shikshapatri, personal Discipline, Social Harmony, Universal Values, Bhagwan Swaminarayan

## 1. Introduction

India's civilizational history is enriched with texts that guide not only spiritual seekers but also common people in daily life. From the *Vedas* to the *Bhagavad Gita*, Indian literature has always combined metaphysical insights with moral codes. In this lineage, the *Shikshapatri* occupies a unique place.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781–1830), the founder of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, recognized the need for a concise, accessible, and universally applicable guide to righteous living. At a time when India was struggling with social evils, superstition, and moral degeneration, he wrote the *Shikshapatri* to reform society and uplift individuals.

Two centuries later, humanity finds itself at a similar crossroads. While scientific progress has brought comfort, it has also introduced ethical dilemmas, ecological destruction, and a decline in interpersonal harmony. In this context, the *Shikshapatri* emerges as a scripture whose wisdom is not bound by time.

## 2. Historical Background

### 2.1 The Author: Bhagwan Swaminarayan

Born as Ghanshyam Pande in 1781 in Chhapaiya, Uttar Pradesh, Bhagwan Swaminarayan undertook an extraordinary spiritual journey across India before establishing his reformist movement in Gujarat. His mission was to eradicate social evils such as untouchability, female exploitation, addictions, and blind rituals.

### 2.2 Composition of the Shikshapatri

- Written in **1826 CE** at Vadtal, Gujarat.
- Comprises **212 Sanskrit verses** (shlokas).
- Covers individual duties, family ethics, worship practices, dietary guidance, financial honesty, and universal compassion.
- Not limited to devotees; one original copy was gifted to **Sir John Malcolm**, the then Governor of Bombay, to demonstrate its universal and practical nature.

## 2.3 Historical Context

In the early 19th century, Indian society was marked by:

- Social evils like sati, child marriage, and caste discrimination.
- Addiction to intoxicants.
- Lack of hygiene and health awareness.
- Superstitions and ritual excesses in religion.

The *Shikshapatri* provided reform-oriented solutions, making it not just a spiritual but also a social reform text. Lord Swaminarayan observed these evils and so he further inculcated values in his devotees and gave the code of conduct shikshapatri. Today when the world is facing value crisis shikshapatri is savior.

## 3. Philosophical Foundation of the Shikshapatri

The *Shikshapatri* combines **Vedantic philosophy** with **practical ethics**. Its core values are rooted in the principles of *Dharma* (righteous duty), *Bhakti* (devotion), and *Ahimsa* (non-violence). Unlike abstract philosophy, it focuses on actionable guidance.

- **Dharma:** Duties toward self, family, and society.
- **Bhakti:** Daily prayer, remembrance of God, and avoidance of meaningless rituals.
- **Ahimsa:** Compassion toward all beings, vegetarianism, and non-violence in thought and action.

## 4. Core Teachings of the Shikshapatri

### 4.1 Personal Discipline

- Abstain from alcohol, gambling, theft, and immoral behavior.
- Practice truthfulness and purity in speech and thought.
- Maintain hygiene, health, and a disciplined lifestyle.
- Today where every school college are facing issues of values and morals growing incidents shows us and education today is silent there Shikshapatri speaks of Basic values Discipline to be inculcated since childhood. A poor disciple of Lord Swaminarayan Saghram Vaghri One day,

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while traveling with his wife, Saghrām came across a shiny **gold ornament** lying on the road. His wife too noticed it. Knowing that such wealth could create greed and disturb their devotion, Saghrām immediately acted. He bent down, scooped up some dust and sand, and quickly covered the ornament, saying to his wife: “Do not look at it, do not think of it. For us, such wealth is like poison. Let us keep our hearts only on Bhagwan.” He didn’t even allow the thought of possessing it to linger. Instead, he moved on, his mind absorbed in God’s name.

The reason behind such act of self control was basic discipline in him from the learning of *Shikshapatri*.

#### 4.2 Family and Social Duties

- Respect and serve parents, teachers, and elders.
- Care for spouse and children with love and responsibility.
- Avoid pride, anger, and arrogance.
- Do not harm or exploit women.

#### 4.3 Spiritual Practices

- Daily worship, prayer, and scriptural reading.
- Simplicity in rituals, focus on devotion rather than blind superstition.
- Association with saints and avoidance of corrupt influences.

#### 4.4 Universal Ethics

- Vegetarianism and compassion toward animals.
- Religious tolerance and respect for other faiths.
- Service to society through charity, honesty, and non-violence.

### 5. Contemporary Relevance: Need of Time

#### 5.1 Addressing Moral and Ethical Decline

- Rising corruption, dishonesty, and unethical practices dominate politics, business, and personal life.
- The *Shikshapatri*’s emphasis on truth, non-stealing, and fairness can restore ethical balance.

#### 5.2 Restoring Family Harmony

- Nuclear families, divorces, and generational gaps are increasing.
- Respect for parents and mutual responsibility in family life, as prescribed in the *Shikshapatri*, is a solution.

#### 5.3 Mental Health and Inner Peace

- Stress, anxiety, and depression have become global epidemics.
- The text prescribes discipline, prayer, and devotion, offering psychological strength and resilience.

#### 5.4 Ecological Sustainability

- The principle of *Ahimsa* and vegetarianism promotes sustainable consumption.

- Compassion for animals aligns with modern environmental ethics.

#### 5.5 Religious Harmony

- In an age of communal conflicts, the *Shikshapatri*’s message of respecting all religions encourages peaceful coexistence.

### 6. Case Studies of Application

- **Educational Institutions:** Many Swaminarayan schools and universities integrate the *Shikshapatri*’s principles in value-based education.
- **Social Reforms:** Campaigns against addictions, dowry, and superstitions led by followers of Swaminarayan tradition stem from these teachings.
- **Global Outreach:** Temples and communities worldwide use the *Shikshapatri* as a practical manual for family harmony and social responsibility.

### 7. Comparison with Contemporary Global Thought

The *Shikshapatri* resonates with modern frameworks such as:

- **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** – promoting health, education, gender equality, and responsible consumption.
- **Human Rights Declarations** – equality, dignity, and justice.
- **Global Ethical Movements** – vegetarianism, mindfulness, non-violence.

This demonstrates that its values are not only Hindu but universally human.

### 8. Challenges in Implementation

- Modern society’s overemphasis on materialism.
- Lack of awareness of the *Shikshapatri* outside religious communities.
- Misinterpretation of its rules as rigid rather than adaptable.

These challenges call for **contextual reinterpretation** and integration in education, governance, and social reforms.

### 9. Conclusion

The *Shikshapatri* is not just a 19th-century religious text but a **21st-century survival guide**. At a time when humanity faces moral corruption, ecological crisis, family disintegration, and mental unrest, where today we are finding increase in moral unrest, in *Madhya Pradesh*, alone between December 2023 and June 2025, there were **719 dowry-related deaths**—with **459 in 2024** and **239 in the first half of 2025** .(The Times of India) A government report reveals that nearly **50% of suicides among Indian youth (18–30 years old)** stem from **relationship stress**, including family, love, and marriage issues .(The Economic Times)

These figures indicate that dowry-related cruelty and deaths

remain tragically prevalent, reflecting deep-seated moral corruption within some family structures.

Shikshapatri verses provide practical and timeless wisdom. By embracing its principles in education, leadership, and daily living, society can achieve balance, peace, and progress.

Indeed, the *Shikshapatri* is not only relevant but the **need of our time** to solve such issues. Devotees like Jobang Pagi led a disciplined life once he accepted the learning of Lord Swaminarayan.

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