



Value and Ethics in Higher Education - Learning from Traditional Indian Schools

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Abstract

Values and ethics play a vital role in the individual, social, and national realm. A child learns moral values and ethics from various formal, informal and non-formal ways of education. Traditional Indian Education system focused on holistic development of an individual. Special attention was given to teaching moral values and ideals. However, the continuous change in nations governance caused a lot of changes in the system. There was a decline in value-based education and major focus was given to subject learning. The aim of education became finding a decent job that pays you well. This shift leads to major changes in the personality and moral development of the child.

This paper focuses on drawing attention to the need for integrating Value Based education in the current education system. Learning from the ancient education system will help us build a stronger and deeper understanding of human life. The conclusion states ways in which we can integrate values and ethics into our education system.

Keywords: Values, ethics, value-based education, traditional indian education

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Introduction

Values and ethics are the fundamentals of human development and most importantly, the one of the essential pillars of a peaceful society and world. It is at the center of our lives, which acts as a standard of behavior. These can be personal values, cultural values, or work values, which are beliefs or principles that an individual uses to make major decisions in life. Aristotle, one of the first philosophers to delve into the subject defines values as “*a systematic inquiry into the beliefs we have and the judgement we make about what is morally right or wrong and morally good and evil*”. Traditionally, values and ethics have been an integral part of education. Ethics is often defined as a set of well-founded standard acts that is rooted in right and wrong, usually regarding rights, obligations, benefits to the society, justice, or specific virtues. The Ancient Indian Education System emphasized on imparting education that builds a good moral and had little to do with material progress.

India has been home to some of the renowned and world-class institutions, like Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, Vallabhi, who set the highest standards of multidisciplinary teaching and research. These institutions emphasized largely on moral and ethical values. Principally, education was supposed to provide the codes of behavior. To restore value in education, Guru Kula, which involved direct and highly individualized interactions between Guru (teacher) and Shishya (disciple), is worth exploring in modern times. Ancient traditional pedagogies focused on building curiosity, enquiry, dialogue, creative as well as critical thinking, and evidence-based approach. The system could ensure holistic development of a child to make highly skilled leaders and most importantly, a humble human being.

Education in India was different compared to the rest of the world. The state or society had no influence or interference with the curriculum or the administration. While a child now lives in the comfort and security of their home, the Gurukul system requires them to live in the home

of their guru throughout the duration of their studies. Manual labor, debates, and discussions were major aspects of the Gurukul system.

The Transition of Indian Education System

The Indian Education system has gone through several major transitions and these we made purely to suit the requirements of the ruler. The standards of teaching and learning practices saw a lot of changes from curriculums heavily influenced by religion, biased by caste, and governed by gender inequalities. The period from the 6th century BC to the 12th century AD may be considered the golden period of Indian scholarship and education. However, frequent invasions, conquests gradually led to the destruction of Indian universities.

In the Medieval Period, the country had a number of schools and higher education institutions, but these were largely built for imparting knowledge and propagation based on Islamic teachings. This was followed by the British regime where Indian knowledge systems were completely sidelined or replaced with western systems, be it science, humanities, engineering and medicine. This resulted in suppression of Sanskrit and regional languages endorsing the supremacy of English.

Value & Ethics in Education: Learning from Ancient Indian Education System

Ancient Indian education system focused on building both inner and outer perspectives, offering holistic development of an individual. The system was designed to take care of the moral, physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects of life. Developing the inner and outer self was of utmost importance. Values such as humility, truthfulness, discipline, self-reliance and respect for all creations were practiced. This helped in nurturing a responsible human who appreciates the balance between human beings and nature. Indian culture is very rich and diverse and teaches us to be tolerant to others. One of the basic yet important tenets of Indian culture has been human values and unity. Human values and ethics have been inculcated in Vedic teachings showing evidence of leading a peaceful integrated life. In ancient India, education had a heritage of being rational, achievable, and complementary to life.

Sources of Learning/Knowledge

Education in India is a tradition that emphasizes the significance of making a man, not simply for survival, but also for self-realisation and emancipation. The Ancient Education System in India is also to be understood as being ultimately the outcome of the Indian theory of knowledge as part of the corresponding scheme of life and values. The scheme takes full account of the fact that Life includes Death, and this forms the eternal truth. With this perspective, the material and the moral, the material and the spiritual, the perishable and permanent values and interests of life are clearly and strictly differentiated.

Ancient Scriptures

Traditional Indian Education Systems were primarily built on Value Based Education (VBE) and primarily focused on education of the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads and Dharmasutras. In the Hindu scriptures, there are four primordial embodiments- Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, and five practices- Satya, Ahinsha, Astaya, Aparigrah and Brahmacharya (Gupta Pallavi, 2016). The ancient education system was aimed at moulding the character of a human being and focused on the completeness of life. The teaching evolved around learning the four Vedas, Rigveda, Samveda, Yajurveda and Atharveda. Rigveda focuses on stages of life like family, forest and renunciation. Yajurveda teaches how to perform sacrifices in life. Samaveda is the study of music and Atharvaveda is the study of medical sciences. Vedas played an important role in our education system; it teaches us the meaning of life, importance of culture, and how to live and understand the good and bad.

The Ancient Education System aims to promote synchronized and harmonized development in a child. Achieving social happiness and peaceful living was emphasized, more in order to achieve moral well-being. The school systems were designed to make people knowledgeable and, most importantly, well cultured.

Gurukuls Settings

Traditionally, Native Indian education was given at home, in temples, pathshalas, tols, chatuspadis, and gurukuls. Villages, Homes and temples were centers of learning, and one could seek higher knowledge at viharas and gurukuls. Gurukuls were residential schools, where Guru and Shishya (teacher and student) lived together in peaceful surroundings, helping each other in day-to-day life. Gurukul system aimed for complete learning, leading a disciplined life, and realizing one's inner potential. The students only focused on achieving their goals while living away from their homes for years. The emphasis was not only on learning subjects such as history, art, law, medicine, etc., but also on enriching one's personal qualities.

Ancient Educational Institutions

India was home to a considerable number of profound institutions like Taxila (being the first university of the world established in 7th B.C.), Vikramshila University, and Nalanda University (built in 4 A.D).

Takshashila or Taxila

Takshashila is considered one of the greatest education institutes in the history of the world, producing both - thought and leaders. Chanakya was a teacher at Takshashila, and wrote '*Arthashastra*' -- which is relevant to this day. Vishnugupta is said to have composed his

masterful work '*Panchatantra*' at Takshashila. The great grammarian and information theorist Panini was also believed to be at Takshashila. Takshila or Taxila or Takshashila (now in Pakistan) in 700BC. This centre of learning was situated about 50 km west of Rawalpindi in Pakistan.

Nalanda University

Known as one of the highest centers of learning in India and the entire South Asian region, Nalanda was home to students from nations including China, Japan, and Korea. It was one of the world's first residential universities; that is, it had dormitories for its students and had around 10,000 students and 2000 teachers. As we know that **Nalanda** was a large Buddhist place in ancient Magadha (modern-day Bihar), India. This is situated about 95 kilometres southeast of Patna close to the city of Bihar Sharif.

The Indian education system evolved from ashrams, gurukuls, temples, and inventive schools. As part of the education system, maktabas and madrassas were established during the medieval period. In pre-colonial India, indigenous education was dominated by religious and spiritual teachings. Similarly, there were Tol schools in Bengal; pathshalas in western India, and chatuspadis in Bihar in other parts of India. The focus of the course was on developing both the inner and outer selves of students. By building on the rich cultural traditions of India, it contributed to the development of the physical, intellectual, spiritual, and artistic aspects of life holistically.

The Role of Education in Inculcating Values and Ethics

“Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a cleverer devil.” - C.S. Lewis

Education gives individuals the opportunity to choose their own options and make decisions. Since it has the power to change people's lives, it also gives them the ability to develop positive qualities. Therefore, all educational institutes should take greater responsibility in the learning and cultivation of values through education. The emphasis should be on values, attitudes, and behaviors that help individuals to live together in a diverse and pluralistic world. To strengthen a democratic culture, education needs to develop a knowledge and understanding of human rights and the values they represent. Value-based Education has been shown to improve the quality of education in schools and contribute to a more ethical environment. Education plays an essential role in creating a generation that helps mitigate real problems in society. Over the years, state, national and international bodies have invested in laws and policies to inculcate values through educational institutions.

The University Education Commission (1948-49) mentioned the various aspects of morality as: loyalty, courage, discipline, self-sacrifice, and spirituality. The Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) laid special emphasis on the following values in the formation of character of the students: Efficiency, Good Temper, Cooperation, Integrity, and Discipline.

Kothari Commission (1964-66) clearly stated that modern education is no longer concerned with only imparting knowledge or but with generating curiosity, developing proper interests, attitudes and values. It focuses on developing skills that will enable an individual to think independently and judge for themselves, both of which are essential to becoming a responsible member of a democratic society.

The National Policy of Education (1986) has taken note of erosion of the essential values and accordingly has stressed on “need for readjustment in the curriculum in order to make education a forceful tool for developing social and moral value in our youth.”

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2000) has also given due stress to value education in schools. It has stressed that the school curriculum must contain components that may embed essential values in the fresh and pure minds of school children.

The Five Human values are integral part of all Religions: Inter alia the 5 universal values specifically mentioned in NEP 2020, are “Truth, Peace, Non-violence, Love, Righteous conduct.

Value Based Education

The purpose of Values-based Education, as stated by Neil Hawkes (2006) is for “the school to think about positive, universal human values and the ways to develop and express them; inspiring pupils to live expressing positive values in their lives”. (p25)

Through value-based education, the school curriculum considers ways to develop and convey values and ethics. Students learn the meanings of words like respect, empathy, fairness, humility, and altruism, and explore methods to incorporate them into their daily lives. It allows students to internalize and act on a personal moral code. Value-based education aims to help students become civic-minded and caring citizens. They are encouraged to be genuine, self-directed, and altruistic members of society. Values education is included in both formal and informal courses.

The Need for Value based Education

Morality is not a law imposed upon an individual; its is rather a law one understands and and choose for guidance. It plays an important part in building a synthesis between people in a harmonic manner and understanding the right and wrong. However, these moral values are slowly diminishing over the years, as most of the younger generation are gradually

disregarding these ethics. These days' the younger generation promptly indulges in talk about global issues like corruption, politics, but they have no time for family, friends, and cultural festivities. The agencies of education like family, school, club, church and society, etc. play an important role in inculcating moral values among the future generation. But, unfortunately, due to several social and economic factors, many families are disoriented, disorganized and confused, and therefore have failed woefully to play this vital role.

Today we see a society that lacks love, affection, sympathy, cooperation, trust, and confidence. From industries to educational institutions, the focus on materialistic gains and growth.

Educational institutions are seen merely as means of certificate production and distribution. Teachers have a more professional approach rather than becoming an ideal guru, philosopher, guide, friend, and second guardian for the students. This has affected the quality of education and most importantly, degraded the development of students. Their lack of respect for others, be it parents, elders, and even the environment in general. They are losing basic values in their life also.

Changing times have seen a shift in the attitude of the younger generation who have gradually been inclined towards unlawful activities or criminal actions. The numbers of incidents of intolerance and radical activities are increasing day by day among the younger generation. In that very moment of human crisis, what we more importantly need is inculcation of values, value-based education and peace. We need to make the young generation more sensitive, responsible, sincere, dynamic and social so that they can take strong participation in the social cause both at local, national and international levels. All these things should be successfully possible through proper inculcation of value education.

Implication in present scenario

The combination of Virtues, Values and Validity determines a human life. Education is the right means to imbibe this philosophy. Education is not about subject learning, securing jobs or gathering expertise; it should be about developing an individual's agencies to make the right decisions and be trained in logical thinking and in the end learn to survive in the changing world.

There are several questions that arise when we think about learning from traditional Indian education systems.

- How can these values be defined in the modern world?
- Which are values and ethics that can be imparted through education?
- How can we inculcate these values into our current education system?

As the global community embarks on the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that it has committed to reach by 2030, it is important that we find ways to attain them. The first step is education. This will determine the quality of life and build a peaceful community that values and respects nature as well as other human beings. Education has a transformational role to play in addressing the development challenges that the world faces today and over the next 15 years.

Methods of incorporating value education

Arts and Culture Studies

A nation's art and culture reflect its people. Arts and culture aid to foster positive attitudes in learning spaces and beyond. It brings different people together, and culture helps to appreciate each other with their diversity. Introducing value education through arts and culture studies will bring empathy and allow learners to stay together in harmony, making schools safer, and creating excellent environments for learning.

Dedicated Classroom Learning

Introducing Value and Ethics as part of their curriculum is another way. Having dedicated classes that are used to talk about values and ethics, using theory and practical learning sessions. Expert talks, counselling, role play, presentation, discussions, reading, listening etc... such methods can be used to talk about values.

Learning in Community

The act of learning cannot take place in isolation. The influence and integration of a diverse community of people, places, and ideas is required to engage with and learn from. One must be respectful and honor the unique needs of all beings around them, including our own. Activities where students can engage with the community will help them respect themselves, others, and our surroundings.

Revisiting Teacher-Pupil Relationships

True teaching and learning in all contexts takes place when there is a deep culture of trust. This will create an atmosphere of love, trust, and security such that the teacher can understand the kind of guidance the pupil needs. Value education is based on trust, and the building a strong bond between teacher and pupil is the way to start.

Local and Global Perspectives

The world is becoming increasingly interconnected, which makes it more important than ever to consider both local and global perspectives. Students must be able to distinguish between local and global contexts, as well as how they relate to one another. They can strive to be active local and global citizens with this knowledge. Case studies from global forums, as well

as organizing exchange programs for students to understand both their countries' contexts, can be used to impart value education.

Conclusion

Nothing can be taught unless it is learned, so we need to focus on how learning is taking place.

The traditional lecture method of teaching is practically ineffective and demonstration, discussion and 'doing' holds the key to effective learning. Values and Ethics need to be incorporated in a way that it becomes part of life. The issue really is not about whether values can be taught or not. The focus should be on finding good role models who will use modern teaching methods to teach values, and help children become capable of making better choices in life.

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Paper Received : 12th December, 2021

Paper Reviewed : 26th December, 2021

Paper Published : 1st January, 2022

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