



Human values in higher education

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Abstract

Human values are the fundamental building blocks of code of conduct for the society. It has been seen that there is a visible degradation of human values in the contemporary world. The reason for this problem can be traced back to our education system and its role in developing the future of this world. We spend a very crucial time of our lives in educational institutes and hence, there is a great impact of what we learn there. Earlier, education was conceived as the over-all development of a human being as a constructive component of civilisation. However, today it has been merely brought down to employment and material benefits. This study looks into the depths of problems in teaching human values in higher levels of education i.e., diploma colleges and universities. Current work being done to improve this situation and possible solutions are also described in this study. Cultivating human values is a difficult job. But, it can be done with consistent efforts from educational institutes, families and the society as well.

Keywords: education, material benefits, society, values

1. Introduction

Value is *"a concept explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristics of a group of those desirable traits which influence the selection from available modes and ends of action."*

Values may be defined as something which are desirable and worthy of esteem for their own sake. Human values are defined as those values which help man to live in harmony in the world.

Values can be explained as below:

1. Values are not feelings, but concepts.
2. Values exist in mind, independent of public affirmation.
3. Values are the criteria for judging the degree of goodness or badness.
4. Values are based on respect for humanity dignity.
5. Values extend beyond the borders of culture and nations.
6. Values are primarily ethical, social and subjective.
7. Values influence a person's education as well as professional life^[1].

In the professional fields, these values form the work ethics which, further lead to creation of the rules and regulations. Values differ from person to person. They also go through changes in a person as he grows and gain experience.

External atmosphere and behaviour of people also affects values in a person. People with better human values are generally those who have been encouraged and appreciated in their life.

Values and ethics are thus highly dependent on morals which make us differentiate good and bad^[2].

The most basic human values are listed as below

1. **Peace:** Appreciation of peace and understanding its importance is essential in this world witnessing violence in its every part. It prevents conflict, enmity and war.

2. **Love:** It is an individual value and drives compassion for others and thus prevents conflicts and arguments.
3. **Freedom:** It is one of the most essential values. In the modern world freedom is exercised in many ways such as thought, expression and action.
4. **Respect:** Individual respect is based upon the acceptance of individuality. The realisation that everyone is different with their strengths and weaknesses.
5. **Equality:** Social value of the moral standard of equality.
6. **Justice:** It is a highly important value. Faiths on justice make people to abide by laws and thus it is the foundation of a modern civilisation.
7. **Integrity:** It is the ability to withstand enormous pressures or favours and still choose the right path.
8. **Care:** It is the feeling to nurture and protect the body of people who matter to us^[3].

Today the world is plagued by the ills of corruption, violence and exploitation. These can be traced back to the deterioration of human values in current society. "Values are socially approved desires and goals that are internalised through the process of conditioning, learning or socialisation and aspirations." Human values are the concepts rather than personal feelings which everyone is expected to follow for making a compassionate and humane society.

The education system of India is largely a reminiscence of the British system of education in India. As it became clear to the British that it required a robust government machinery to rule such a vast country, they while encouraging research based education in their homeland, intentionally designed the education system in India to create a mass of people just enough educated to perform clerical duties. Therefore the textbooks in India were designed to teach subjects such as English, local languages, essential Mathematics and Science. There was reluctance among the British rulers to create world class educational centres in India, afraid that highly educated

Indians might challenge the Raj. Therefore, the education system was aimed at producing a bunch of clerks to do desk works or assist British officers. In this process, no emphasis was thus laid on teaching essential values to the Indian students.

The educational level in the country is checked by the literacy rate, which is the percentage of people able to read and write simple sentences and solve simple math problems.

The literacy rate in India has impressively gone up from 12.2 percent at the time of independence^[4] to 74 percent in 2011^[5]. However, there is concern on the use of current methodology as a measure of educational level of an individual. The current method doesn't take into account the development of essential values needed as a human. Furthermore, enrolment ratios see a dip from 93 percent in primary level to 69 percent and 25 percent in secondary and post-secondary levels respectively. This also forms the basis of the problems in the current education system of India.

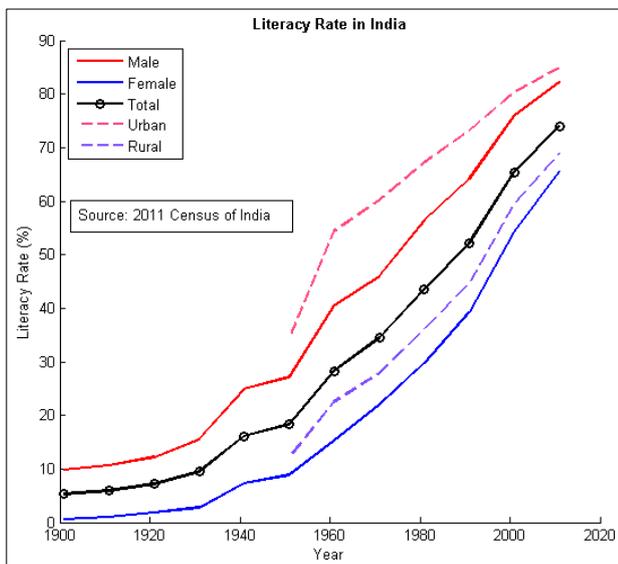


Fig 1: Literacy rate in India

2. Current Scenario

Currently, the teaching of human values in higher education such as diploma colleges and universities is inadequate. There are universities offering Human Values as a separate subject as part of their degree courses. However, this merely does a lip service to the cause. The subject can only provide theoretical knowledge and thus lack any practical application. There are broadly three major challenges to the learning and application of human values:

1. Lack of constructive atmosphere.
2. Lack of proper integration of academics and value education.
3. Lack of promotion of values in extra-curricular activities.

Lack of constructive atmosphere

The effect of rising materialism in the world can easily be seen in the higher education. No, true effort is made to make students better individuals and leaders. Instead, the prime focus on the current education pattern is towards employment. Students are promoted to pursue courses which provide better salaries, financial stability and materialistic pleasures. No emphasis is laid on inner satisfaction. Under such circumstances, students tend to go for professions such as engineering, medic, etc. This causes them to subside their

passion, creativity and curiosity towards the way of life they actually idealise.

Since, they are forced to become bread earners at the earliest; they pay no heed to learning essential social values. This is quite evident as we see rise in criminal activities amongst youth around the world.

Lack of proper integration of academics and value education

As stated above there is a lack of good value based education system. Human values are either completely ignored in institutes or not implemented seriously. Teaching human values is treated as a burden rather than a responsibility causing to further deepening of this serious problem. Human values cannot be taught as a subject and marked or graded according to the current education system. Hence, there is a need to understanding how to integrate the value education properly into academics.

Lack of promotion of values in extra-curricular activities

In the current education system extra-curricular activities are discouraged among students to make them focus on supposedly-important academics. However, the institutions tend to forget that, it is through extra-curricular activities that students learn essential values such as responsibility, leadership, team work, efficiency, etc. Even if some institutes promote extra-curricular activities such as sports, they do so only to get material benefits such as prizes and fame in return and not for the sake of sport it. In such circumstances, students lose another method of learning human values practically.

Consequences of current education system

1. **At individual level:** Most people today feel unsatisfied, dejected and a lack of hope is prevalent among the youth. Lack of enough employment opportunities and essential skills needed to secure it are one of the biggest causes of this problem. Furthermore, the modern lifestyle forces people to become solitary, making the young people feel lonely since, no one seems to be there to listen to their grievances. People lack close friendships and the values such as brotherhood among classmates or co-workers is clearly nowhere to be seen.
2. **At family level:** Individual problems lead to issues between self and others. Families are seeing inter-personal tensions and hatred more than ever. There is no real effort to care for each other. Family pressures are taking a toll on the young people, making them feel even more depressed and hopeless about themselves. As the current family expectations such as employment are monetary based, they lead to a further push for the students and youth towards materialistic approach towards life.
3. **At society level:** The problems are further amplified on the level of society. People have stopped appreciating each other's achievements. Feelings of jealousy and envy can be clearly seen. There is very less concern for the underprivileged people in the society and thus values of empathy and care have indeed taken a toll in the modern world.

Relevance of ethics and values in technical education

Engineering is the innovative use of technology to improve or ease human lives. The decisions engineers take have far

reaching consequence for the society.

Impact of human values on decisions taken by engineers can be discussed as follows:

1. **Safety:** The safety and security of public in building structures is of utmost importance for engineers. The engineer in charge must ensure that the structure has sufficient strength to house the estimated number of inmates. Accordingly, he has to give assent to only the safe structures. However, it has been seen that engineers give assent to hazardous structures in return of favours or money resulting in possible loss of life and property. This corruption persists in virtually every engineering department in India. Better value based education could have avoided this problem.
2. **Environment:** Various engineering practices impact environment in a number of ways. An engineer is responsible for measuring the impact of these practices and recommend a change if required. Here, too engineers face dilemma as passing potentially harmful projects may come with material benefits.
3. **Human rights:** Industries employing people often resort to inhuman practices and hazardous working conditions to keep their cost of operations low. This has terrible effects on its workers. Ethics in such a case will help an engineer to report the industry and improve the working condition of the people.
4. **Software piracy:** It refers to the unauthorised copying of software products such as office suits, etc. It is one of the biggest problems in computer science industry. The illegal copying of results in the producers not getting enough share for their hard work.

Various institutes and associations have given “code of conduct” for engineers. These contain list of practices which are promoted or discouraged based upon their impact. These codes are ethic driven.

IEEE Code of Ethics

The members of the IEEE, in recognition of the importance of their technologies affecting the quality of life throughout the world, and in accepting a personal obligation to their profession, its members, and the communities they serve, do hereby commit themselves to the highest ethical and professional conduct and agree.

- To accept responsibility in making engineering decisions consistent with the safety, health, and welfare of the public, and to disclose promptly factors that might endanger the public or the environment.
- To avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest whenever possible and to disclose them to the affected parties when they do exist.
- To be honest and realistic in stating claims or estimates based on available data.
- To reject bribery in all its forms.
- To improve the understanding of technology, its appropriate application, and potential consequences.
- To maintain and improve their technical competence and to undertake technological tasks for others only if qualified by training or experience, or after full disclosure of pertinent limitations.
- To seek, accept and offer honest criticism of technical work, to acknowledge and correct errors, and to credit properly the contributions of others.
- To treat fairly all persons regardless of such factors such

as religion, gender, disability, age, or national origin.

- To avoid injuring others, their property, reputation, or employment by false or malicious action.
- To assist colleagues and co-workers in their professional development and to support them in following this code of ethics.

Code of ethics of engineers

- Engineers shall hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public in the performance of their professional duties.
- Engineers shall perform services only in the areas of their competence.
- Engineers shall issue public statements only in an objective and truthful manner.
- Engineers shall act in professional matters for each employer or client as faithful agents or trustees, and shall avoid conflicts of interest.
- Engineers shall build their professional reputation on the merit of their services and shall not compete unfairly with others.
- Engineers shall act in such a manner as to uphold and enhance the honour, integrity, and dignity of the profession.
- Engineers shall continue their professional development throughout their careers and shall provide opportunities for the professional development of those engineers under their supervision.

3. Future Prospects & Conclusion

The education system of the nation needs to be revamped to cater to this ever growing problem of degrading human values among the youth of the country. The students should not only be graded on the fact based studies but on character as well. It should be taken care that the students learn essential skills and values required for them to be a valuable part of the society.

The students need to be made aware about their role and how can they help those in need. They should be given practical exposure to the real world problems such as poverty, illiteracy, etc. and be encouraged to find creative solutions to the problems. The youth of the country holds immense drive and energy which should be properly channelized to make best use of it.

Exposure to extra-curricular activities such as social works, sports and responsibilities in various events in higher educational institutes should be given so that values such as teamwork, empathy and care can be inculcated.

Therefore, our education system needs to cater to not only the learning of facts and information but, also their useful application for the society. Superficial notions of money, glamour, etc. needs to be removed and proper way of live should be taught developing their ideals.

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