

Values in Higher Education - Challenges and Action Initiatives

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Abstract

India has the largest network of higher education with lakhs of colleges and thousands of universities. But the irony is that it has the larger number of illiterates also. The diminishing quality in higher education in another problem. What is happening to our rich tradition and culture? Disseminating the traditional values to the youth seems to be one of the solution. The paper presents the views on this issue.

Keywords: Higher Education, Globalisation, Values, Fundamental Values, Social Values.

Indian higher education is a bewildering scenario. It is full of contradictions and paradoxes. Lakhs of colleges and thousands of universities, still growing fast in numbers. On the other, quality in higher education, both in professional and non professional colleges, is drastically diminishing.

With the largest network of higher education, India still has largest number of illiterates in the whole world. Millions of our graduates are unemployables and unskilled. Private participation in educational sector is fast growing, but the high commercialisation of education is also going on un-checked and un-abated.

Along with these problems and maladies, lack of sensitivity to values is the major casualty in Indian higher education.

In short, the picture is alarming, if not frightening. It is decadent, dismal, highly-commercial and de-humanised. Is Indian higher education creating “self-centred, socially un-concerned, de-humanised, intelligent rascals as graduates, with few great exceptions please”!? There appears to be some truth in the above observation.

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Of course, there is a overall decadence and degradation in Indian political, social and economic institutions in post-independence India.

It is but natural, educational system as a part of the political-economy is equally degraded. Corruption, everywhere and aggressive selfishness everywhere. Naturally it spreads. It is spreading like a wild-fire into educational sector too.

Why it happened? What are the reasons and causes for this overall deterioration in our way of life and in our education system?

The answer for this fundamental question should be the starting point and basis for the reforms in higher education and for launching the process of inculcation of values in higher education/graduates.

After the British left, independent India had a great vision and mission to create a democratic, equitable, socialist, liberal humane and secular nation with inclusive growth as its strategy. Of course, India's growth rate was slow, nay discouragingly slow during the first four decades of independence, say up to 1990.

With this background, the Indian Government has launched a new economic policy [1991] and welcomed private participation in investments. Opened the doors for globalisation and global investments. In short, economy is liberalised, to an extent our “permit licence and Quota Raj” is liberalised!

Since then, Indian economy has grown faster, 6 to 8 percent in the first decade 5 to 7 percent in the later years [by overall spread of growth rate]. With this fast economic growth rate, and with newly acquired wealth and employment, a new consumer class has emerged in Indian society ranging 250 to 300 million people in size.

Earning of money is a must for New political class [with a few exceptions]. No values, no human considerations. Corruption or no corruption. Marketing is the way of life. Profitability is the only Mantra. For them what they have is more important than what they are! Standard of living [consuming goods and services] is more important than quality of life!

In this process of economic globalisation, we have lost our social and

spiritual moorings. Post liberalisation generation of youth [since 1991] have grown rootless and became aliens to Indian culture, Indian heritage, Indian spirituality and Indian family values and community values. Added to this, fast emerged network technologies, along with social networks, websites and mobiles, have impersonalised the family culture. Hunt for privacy has killed the values of social living and community living. In addition to this, success-cult- success at any cost, has led to the exclusive self-centredness in the youth, few exceptions please! As a result, no values what so ever in chasing the success.

In short, the so called globalisation [in fact it is westernisation] not only in economy but in our total way of life also, has tremendously and disastrously effected the values in Indian way of life, in its culture, heritage and values.

How did we become so materialistic civilisation, so commercial and so utilitarian a nation in such a short time of few decades [after independence]?! How this transformation from our ancient civilisation based on the values of simple living, sacrifice and self-restraint on wants took place so fast and in such a short time to be so materialistic, so self-centred and such-success-chasing obsessive life!. It is an enigma even for great social scientists!

In such a scenario of no-values-society, is it possible to inculcate all the great values in higher education, which after all is a subsystem in the vast political economy of the country and that too in such a heterogeneous nation?

Before we answer this question, we have to be clear about what the real values are and the real meaning of values! Then only we can spell out the concrete strategies and action –initiatives to disseminate the values through Indian higher education.

Values

Each man may have his own values in view of his experience. Then there may be hundred thousand values for different people! We must define values precisely and clearly. These must be core-values nay fundamental values which are universal in nature. What is the source

and genesis of these values? As a nation, India had a very rich and precious heritage; we may call it “Indian ethos”. Indian way of life is based on this ethos and these values which have been practiced for past 4 to 5 thousand years in India, the Bharath.

This ethos comes from Vedas, Upanishads, Darshanas, Bhagavadgeetha, Buddha's teachings and Jain texts. What are the fundamental values emanating from these sources?

The most modern interpretation of these values and Indian ethos has come from the writings of Rajarammohan Roy [initiator of Indian renaissance in 19th century], Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, M.N.Roy, Mahatma Gandhi and J.Krishnamurthi. These values are:

Essential / Fundamental Values

1. Simple-living and High thinking' [sarala jeevana and unnatha bhavana]
2. Satyam-Vada, Dharmam-Chara' speaking the truth and practicing 'Dharma', an order of natural justice.
3. Ahimsa Paramo Dharmaha' practising non-violence in thought, speech and action.
4. Let noble thoughts come from all sides [Aana Bhadra]
'Vinayam, vivekam, vidya lakshanam' (Humility to women, the under-privileged and seniors as an index of real education and culture.)
5. Samyamana Jeevitham' (Self-restraint on wants, desires and needs in life)
6. Know thyself' Self-awareness is the highest knowledge, knowing one's emotions and instincts. [greed, jealousy, anger, lust ego etc.]
7. Santhrupti Jeevanam' Certain contentment and satisfaction in life.
8. Adopting Right means for Right ends.

Coming to Social Values

1. All fundamental rights enshrined in our great constitution are the

fundamental values which every one of us has to practice, respect and adhere.

2. Sarvey jana sukhino bhavanthu' Happiness and welfare of all, indicating inclusive growth.
3. 'Trusteeship' The privileged people acting as the guardians and custodians of the under-privileged and their interests is an implied social dictum in Upanishads. [Gandhiji readvocated it during his time]
4. Open and liberal mind-set and attitude above the caste, class creed religion and region.
5. The spirit of scientific enquiry and investigation
6. Rational and humanistic out-look beyond superstition, bigotry and prejudice.
7. Success through hard work and righteous way and not success at any cost!
8. Co-operative and communitarian approach to social-development, instead of cut-throat, competitive and unhealthy approach [coming from the west] in development.
9. Love and concern to nature, environment and ecology, not aggressive destruction of nature in the name of development!
10. Need fulfilment in life, not chasing the greed.
11. Comfortable life- not the indulgence and addiction to luxury.

There could be many more values; however by definition, the values must be for all people and for all times, universal in nature and “with natural Justice” as a goal.

How to inculcate and disseminate the values in our youth in higher education, particularly in graduates and post-graduates?

Are there any techniques, strategies and methods to disseminate the values to students/youth?.

Techniques and Action Initiatives

Of course, there are methods; if not we have to invent effective

methods for inculcating values in higher education.

In some of the states, we experimented with a method for teaching values in colleges! We have created a separate paper to teach values with an examination at the end of the year! Alas! It is a grand failure and turned to be a mockery of teaching values!

Values cannot be taught in a separate paper, that too in a classroom alone!

Values have to be taught in the families. For this, values have to be part and parcel of way of life in the families. Parents, society and community have to believe in the values and practice them! Teaching a value of integrity and non-violence in the class and student-father indulging in corruption and practicing cut throat success in life do not go together!

In this context, the “elite society” can make much impact on youth, if they practise the values, not preaching! The elite, consisting of policymakers, administrators, professionals like doctors, engineers, accountants, teachers etc. and all other highly privileged sections in society, if they practice values; they will percolate easily to youth and have lasting impact on them [practical value] [Yatha-Raja Thathapraja] What the elite practices, others follow, Bhagavadgitha]

Dissemination of values to youth, shall be a social-movement and mission. For this, second national renaissance is required to come; out of our corruption, greed, self-centred, narrow approach to humanistic, co-operative Indian way of life based on the real Indian ethos and values.

Mentoring as a process must be an integral part in higher education institutions “a mentor/teacher acting as a personal friend, philosopher and guide to 6 to 10 students”.

Personal counselling, particularly for aberrant youth and astray students, [prodigal students] will go a long way in spreading values to youth. For this, teachers/professors have to live a way of life based on values, before they teach values to youth. But how can we expect teachers alone, as a segment, to live value-based life, while all other segments of population are steeped in no-values life, decadent-life

and degraded civilisation? [what a great fall my countrymen since independence]!

Before we teach values to youth, [based on Indian ethos] they must be de-toxified and de-addicted from the internet-technology as an obsession and indulgence!

Otherwise, all the teachings of values will have no impact on the technology addicts and drug addicts, whose sole aim is success at any cost! ; no-relationships, no-values, no-humanity, no social-concern and no-empathy to anybody and to anything, including the nature and environment!

Of course technology is a great aid and help to mankind, but it should not be at the expense of humanity, destroying the human civilisation and values like epic's 'Bhasmasura hastha'.

There cannot be a greater statement on values than that of 'Gurudev' Tagore's prayer:

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high. Where knowledge is free. Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls, Where words come out from the depth of truth, Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection, Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit, Where the mind is led forward by thee, into ever-widening thought and action, into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake”.

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