

The Corrosion of Ethics in Higher Education: A Challenge of 21st Century

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Abstract

Education does not end with mastery over few languages or subjects¹. It also means opening the doors of the mind, cleansing the soul and realization of the self. We, as Indians do have a rich and huge volumes of spiritual heritage but it is a matter of regret that we are encashing on our enriched heritage. We often believe in the QUOTES of Holy books such as The Bhagwant Gita, The Quran, The Bible and The Guru Granth Sahib and various other spiritual writings enshrined in the religious Granths/Books. It is known fact that we have failed miserably when it comes to follow or implement these quotes/ teachings and their very essence in our real life.

At various levels of the Indian education system in general and the higher Technical Education in particular, the ethical considerations have lost its value and place². In real life the ethics are neither taught through text books nor preached/ advocated through any other media of learning / teaching. Hence it is very difficult to find good people with ethical flavor and very easy to find large number of Unethical managers, bureaucrats, educationists, corporate heads, politicians and elected representatives.

It is high time that to identify the causes of the decline in ethics and also identify all those who are responsible for the same and who all are going to suffer from this deterioration of ethical values.

In this paper a humble attempt is being made to identify the factors influencing the ethical process. Why ethical education is required and its importance in today's scenario and what benefits would accrue to the younger generation if ethical education is incorporated in the academic curriculum of the higher education. The main emphasis is being laid on the ethics deterioration in the higher education system. The probable domains discussed wherein rapid ethical deterioration is taking place namely are: the Regulatory Agencies such as UGC, AICTE including HRD Ministry, the higher educational institutes, state universities, the society including parents and lastly the teachers and students.

Keywords

Ethics, Measurement of ethics, Ethical process, Regulatory Agencies and Need for ethical education.

I. Introduction

At present there are 450 universities and university-level institutions in India including 30 Central Universities, 237 State Universities, 95 Deemed Universities, 8 IIT's, 7 IIM's, 20 IIT's, 2 IISc's, 5 institutions established under State Act and 13 institutes of national importance apart from around 20,000 colleges including 1800 women colleges in India.

The total enrolment of students in universities and colleges is 106 lakh while the number of teachers is 4.5 lakh³. Only seven percent of the population in the 18-24 age groups has access to higher education. India will need 1,500 universities to attain gross enrolment ratio of at least 15 per cent by 2015⁴. This is a key observation made by the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) in its note to the Prime Minister on higher education⁵. Stating that opportunities for higher education

"are simply not enough in relation to our needs," the NKC has called for a massive expansion of opportunities.

Do you think that merely expansion of educational infrastructure would produce good human being without inculcating in them the basic ethics, values and virtues as advocated by the Saints, the sufis the Gurus of our ancient society and by our rich civilization?. Do you think that we can produce effective Managers, Technocrats, Bureaucrats, Politicians and Entrepreneurs without the knowledge of ethics, values and virtues? "There is no doubt that the personal record and reputation of those who sit on judgment does shape our views of the political system" PM of India Sep 18, 2008.

The issue of Ethics and Values has been raised by The President of India, Mrs Pratibha Patil, in her first address to the Indian parliament-2008 which states that " the education system needs to strengthen the values of ethics, secularism, democracy, inclusiveness and pluralism, These are the great values enshrined in our constitution and traditionally developed by our civilization. These values give strength and sustenance not only to our diverse multi cultural society but also to our country".

Indians largely are proud of their roles & professional ethics. In spite of all adverse conditions they perform their duties with full dedication. For parenting Indian parents for software industry Indian Engineers, for patients Indian Doctors, for learners Indian Teachers are models for the globe. We have harmonious culture and healthy constellation amongst all entities⁶. However a very large numbers of aberrations and deviations in all walks of life especially in higher education sector are spoiling the professional excellence, peace and harmony amongst the youth of India today.

Now let us understand the very meaning of Ethics and related definitions of the same.

II. Ethics

The word Ethics has been derived from the Greek word 'ethos' which means character and from Latin word 'Mores' which means customs⁷. It can be defined as the moral values, rules or standards governing the conduct of a particular group, profession or culture⁸. Thus group, organization, professional and cultural ethics co-exist with one another. Together they influence the set of values. Being personally ethical means acting in accordance with one's own personal code of ethics. Ethical dilemmas arise when one's own ethical standards conflict with those who have some other entity.

Aristotle was one of the first great philosophers to study the subject. To him, ethics was more than a moral, religious or legal concept⁹. To determine what is ethically good for the individual and for the society, he said, it is necessary to possess three virtues of practical wisdom: temperance, courage and justice.

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with morality, It may be defined 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". Morality is derived from

Latin word 'moralitas' which means manner, character, and proper behavior. It lay emphasis on the code of conduct in the matters of right or wrong whether by society, philosophy, religion or individual conscience [11]. It also refers to an ideal code of conduct which would be espoused by all rational people under specified conditions [12].

Ethics seeks to address questions such as how a moral outcome can be achieved in a specific situation [13]. The American Guru of Modern Management Peter F Drucker states that "business professionals should abide by "Principle of non-maleficence". i.e. resist from doing wrong doings or illegal acts.

III. The Beginning

Ethics and values became an important concern in the US in the 80's. In US there are about 500 courses offered in the field of Ethics by various universities¹⁴. Harvard Business School earmarked USD 30 Million in 1987 to focus on teaching Business ethics to MBAs. In India AICTE (The All India Council for Technical Education) recommended the inclusion of Business ethics as a course in MBA curriculum in 1995 [15]. IIM Lucknow has started a course that seeks to provide students with an understanding of changing relationship between business and environmental management (As per February 2007, Economic Times). The budding managers should be imparted with the knowledge of social responsibility and ethics. IIM-C is already having a Management centre for Human Values, and they are publishing a journal on Human values. They are also offering a course on Ethics and Values in Business¹⁶.

Why there is no Measurement of Ethical Parameters in Higher Education:

The following are the determinants of the quality management in higher education:

- Academic environment measured in terms of number of library books, journals national and international origin, audio-video aids, computer facilities, CD'S etc.
- Intellectual capital measured¹⁷ in terms of number of faculty, books published, seminars and conferences attended, etc.
- Physical infrastructure measured¹⁸ in terms of number of classrooms and laboratories, campus and hostel facilities.
- Industry interface measured¹⁹ in terms of number of management development programmes (MDP's) and in company programmes organized, consultancy projects handled, number of industry representatives and professional visiting the institute etc.
- Placement measured²⁰ in terms of percentage of students recruited through campus recruitment, average salary offered etc.
- Stakeholders satisfaction and percentage measured in terms of faculty satisfaction, student satisfaction, recruiter's perception and satisfaction and also of parents satisfaction.
- Innovation measured²¹ in terms of number of courses modified and updated, new and innovative courses introduced etc. However, it is to be noted with serious concern that there are no laid down yardsticks for the measurements of the ethical parameters. Ethics may be measured in terms of courses or capsules undertaken, ethical training carried out /debates/ discussions / seminars on the significance of ethical values and its implications to the future managers, establishment of ethical committees and performance of their activities in the higher educational institutions. Unfortunately there

are no guidelines laid down by any apex body on higher education to measure the same. The outcome of this lapse is that many privately owned higher education institutes are playing with the lives of thousands of Young people of our country.

First of all let us study the necessity of ethical education and some of its benefits accrued from it to the society.

IV. The Necessity

The Aim of teaching Ethics is to provide the budding youth :- to Share knowledge, build skills and develop minds of the young entrepreneurial managers of tomorrow.

to provide and clarify and insights into concepts of business so that young managers avoid business misconduct, when they go and conduct the business [22].

to create High level of integrity and moral and social awareness so that they can decide when faced with business dilemma.

The Benefits available to the society:

The ethical education to our youth is the crying need of the hour for it leads to various benefits for the youth of today. Some of them are narrated below:-

- Moral development.
- Cultural development.
- Development of healthy and balanced personality.
- Creation of good citizenship
- Resolving conflicts.
- Cooperative living.
- Maintaining peace and harmony.
- Adjustment with environment and its modification.
- National integration and national development.

V. Ethics and Value Formation

Generally ethics and value formation goes through five different phases before it is matured into worth while asset to the youth and to the entire society as such. These could be as follows:

1. Environment of value learning.
2. Raising conscious awareness.
3. Learning and exploring SELF.
4. Knowledge of values.
5. Harmony between values and behaviour.

VI. Domains of Ethics in Higher Education

We shall be discussing four probable domains where most of the aberrations in ethics, values and virtues do take place. Knowing fully well that these are taking place, sometimes even with their connivance, even then the Apex bodies of Higher education are turning a deaf ear towards these illegal activities of some of the academic players. Newspapers are flooded with the reports on the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of AICTE and UGC with respect to the unethical practices being overlooked.

Let us have a look into these four domains where unethical practices are prevalent to the max extent. The absence of a coherent long term policy perspective on higher education has been the hallmark of Indian higher education in the 1990's and even in the present decade [23].

The Govt's lack of clarity on how to address the issue of privatization has led to ad hoc policies to chaos created by the several actors of higher education namely the central government, the states, the UGC, the AICTE, the national council of teachers education, universities, colleges and most

importantly the private sector [24].

Some of the ethics related issues which are having negative effects on the younger generation are being highlighted in the following domains.

1. Regulatory bodies such as AICTE, UGC, NCTE etc..
2. Institutes of Higher educations namely Engg/ Management Institutes.
3. The society and the people.
4. The teachers and the students.

VII. Regulatory bodies

1. Approval in most of the cases of new Management/ Engg institutes is being given after the lip service to the mandatory provisions.
2. Large numbers of affiliations are being given without going into the academic requirements for the particular course/discipline. eg the Chhattisgarh educational fiasco whereas 108 universities came up taking the advantage of regulatory loophole in 2002. Supreme court had to intervene to correct these anomalies and set guidelines for the future.
3. No check or a monitoring mechanism in place so far as the selection of qualified faculty is concerned. This is left to the whims and fancies of the management of the institute, thereby becoming party to exploitation of labour.
4. No check on the MOU's being signed by the private institute with foreign universities. The provisions laid down for the same are being openly flouted.
5. Provisions related to pay and allowances of the faculty are not strictly followed by the Management of the privately run institutes of Engg and Management.

VIII. Institutes of Higher Education

1. No correlation exists between the salary shown and salary disbursed to the staff of many institutes.
2. Corrupt practices used during exams and sometimes even the faculty are also involved. The famous case of Anti copying Act in UP by BJP Government which was later on abolished within one hour of Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav becoming the chief Minister.
3. While selecting the faculty, lot of pressure of top management is exerted which results in compromising the quality of teaching.
4. Increasing fee structure on one or the other pretext under the garb of development charges by the institutes.
5. No correlation between higher increment in salary and performance appraisal.
6. Not concerned with professional ethics such as punctuality, attendance of faculty and students, results achieved, overall development of student's personality, quality research work/ projects undertaken²⁵. The main concern of these institutes is to make profits by dubious means.
7. Donations accepted while giving admissions to students as capitation fees and further no accounts kept for these donations.

IX. The Society and the Parents

1. Parents allowing their wards to show off their status, wealth and prestige through unethical ways may it be cars, clothes and jewellery.
2. Non availability of parents in the Parent- teacher meets. No monitoring of the performance of the students by their parents.

3. No checks even when their wards are using the hi-tech services particularly internet as a result of which they fall prey to hacking and other cyber crimes.
4. The working parents hardly have any quality time to spare for their wards.

X. The Teachers and the Students

1. Students disobey the code of conduct during day to day life in the college.
2. Attendance and regularity issues on the rise.
3. Teacher's commitment towards their profession particularly those teachers taking private home tuitions.
4. Internal assessment of teacher is another subject of debate which is being used as double weapon for and against the students by some of our teachers.

XI. Role of a Teacher

- Help create an atmosphere of love, trust and security in the college.
- Understand the student and its development character and adopt your methods accordingly.
- Relate value education to concrete situations.
- Organize value education indirectly through a variety of co curricular activities.
- Remember teacher influence the student with her total personality.
- Example is better than precept. Teacher must be hones in her dealings with students.
- Remember mere emulation is not education. We want student eventually not to do things in blind faith, custom or traditional but after rational deliberations and thought. This is the essence of the ethical education. (Prof C. Shashadri -1988 Value oriented Education, in service teacher education package Vol. NCERT P-72-74.)

XII. Role of the Student

- Listening to others with the intention of learning with them²⁶.
- Reflecting intentionally to gain more understanding of the complexities of organizational life²⁷.
- Being open-minded and accepting that there are multiple legitimate and viable perspectives and possibilities in any situation²⁸.
- Understanding that there is no right answer or right approach in an ethical situation²⁹.
- Being proactive in anticipating potential ethical or moral dilemmas and finding different ways to learn from different perspectives about how one might address such dilemmas.

With so much of unethical chaos prevailing under the nose of these apex bodies should be we go for teaching ethics and value formation for the Youth of India.

Practical Aspects relating to Ethics in Institutes of Higher Education

Issues of value and ethics in the education system needs to be resolved if we want to tackle the larger challenges we face today in the education sector like total literacy, better quality of education and so on. Corruption is all pervasive and includes our education also. India is one of the most corrupt countries in the world and ranks 72. The level of corruption in any organization depend upon three factors- the individual's sense of values, the set of values upheld and cherished by the society and lastly the system itself which will punish the guilty and if it does not then the corruption flourishes.

Some of the unethical practices being followed by most of our higher education institutes are being listed below though it is not the exhaustive list:

1. How far college education has succeeded in helping students to become integral part of society. How far has the college culture changed the life of the students?
2. Why college have failed to bring in the expected standards in values and beliefs.
3. There is no education which can enrich human life, who is to ensure the quality and standard of values maintained. Is it the only Principal or the teachers?.OR some other actors of higher education?
4. Universities are awarding degrees and certificates to students without ensuring anything related to quality which is affecting the Education system in an adverse manner.
5. People purse a degree for the status it carries.
6. Teachers deliver lectures without employing proper teaching methodologies. Many a time teachers do not have time to the inclination to ensure whether the student could follow lecture. Teacher often merely dictates notes, reading out of the text book or the guide of the subject.
7. Evaluation and testing gives more stress upon rote memory. There is no genuine comprehension or critical evaluation. Curriculum design is mere a collection of topics and subjects.
8. The accumulation and presentation of data alone cannot become the criteria for quality education. Does higher education cater for or include acquisition of habit or skills?
9. The colleges are plain enrolment centers and examination bodies. They are not bothered about quality of teaching and the ethical considerations. Neither there is any procedure to check the kind of teaching that is imparted at the college.

XI. Conclusion

As it has been well said that the true philosophy of education lies in the combination of Virtues, Values and Validity of human life. It is multi dimensional implication. It also implies there is need to understand the criteria that can help in development of human beings. Education is not merely imparting knowledge in a particular faculty or subject or making one fit for securing jobs or fair well in exams, it should be training in logical thinking and should help the coming generations adjust to the available changing environment.

The big Missions, Aims and Objectives of many educational institutions with bold letters interspersed with high flown jargons remains only on the walls of these institutions in their chairmen/Directors'/Principles' offices and are seldom preached, practices or implemented in true spirits. This is true not only in case govt. aided institutions but also in case of privately owned self financial institutions as well. The institution should enable students to become contributing member of the society by providing knowledge, skills and character development opportunities [30].

Proper education process is a passport to good, comfortable and secure life. The process is transmitted through commitment and sharing of Teacher-Pupil relationship. The love and joy, values and respect, the basic ethics are getting either eliminated or getting deteriorated to the rock bottom.

In these days the educational institutions of all kinds of higher education neither cared for the community nor respect for others. No importance is given to human relations who are

much pertinent matter required for an effective education. There is no encouragement or appreciation of virtues of responsibilities and self discipline. Therefore is no projection of the college as the servant of the society.

Education without goodness ie without ethics is arrogant and dangerous. Unethical behavior thrives in darkness and can only exist when ethical leaders remain bystanders in the face of evil. If we who are in the business of educating the young want to measure and assess our efforts we need to look at how our institutions nurture human freedom in the service of humanity. Success today is all too often defined by the power of the wealth that one holds [31].

All the symbols, ranging from who occupies the best office, to the size of the pay cheque, the Rolex watch, exist side by side with mind dulling drugs, divorce, rape cases, abortions, suicides etc.etc.

While we no longer expect that the class Room teaching is enough to make a person learned, and while there has to be some academic input to fulfill course requirement. We may be tempted to forget the ULTIMATE AIM OF THE EDUCATION ie THE FOMATION OF QUALITIES TO HELP STUDENT BECOME DECENT HUMAN BEINGS [32].

Whenever we criticize the Indian education system, people point out that it is the same system which has produced brilliant people who have distinguished themselves in different fields such as Dr Rabindra Nath Tagore (Noble Prize Winner), Dr Homi J. Bhaba, Dr. Hargobind Khurana (Noble Prize Winner), Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, Dr. Manmohan Singh and Dr. S Radha Krishanan and Dr Vikram Sarabhai and Dr Amritya Sen (Noble Prize Winner) etc.But the question is that such people may be more an exception than a rule. We should design such a system in which excellent quality of education will be the norm rather than the exception.

Long term developments and improvements come by changing the mindset of the people and unless we are able to bring Ethical changes, we are not going to succeed. While it may not be possible to make a nationwide change, can't we at least try for areas of excellence and gradually increase the coverage of such areas? Need is not to change 100% in one particular area, but we should work for changing 1% in 100 different areas.

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