

Importance of values and Ethics for teachers: A reality check for the Contemporary Indian Education Sector

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Abstract- Morals and good values are the building blocks of the character of a person, thereby of the society as such. Off late, there has been a rampant degradation of ethics and values, pervading all cross sections of the society in terms of age, gender and professions. However, the most potent threat to mankind stems from this degradation pervading the education sector. Teachers being the nurturers of future generations of this country, there is an immediate need to arrest this rot in the system and ensure a value based and ethical education system.

Keywords---Morals, Ethics, Ethics in Education, Ethical Conduct, Value Based Conduct.

I. INTRODUCTION

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."~ Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) [1]. Morals and values, since time immemorial, have been recognised as the bedrock of human character [2]. History has always regarded us as supreme, the men and women of honour and character. There exist, in history as well as in mythology the world over, numerous counts of persons of virtue giving up everything, including – in some cases – even their lives, to honour their word. That, alas, was history! Those were the times when even the wars were fought with respect and honour for one's enemies, in an ethical manner. It was against the warriors' creed to attack an unarmed opponent or to attack an unprepared enemy from behind. Such morality was founded upon the education of the young amidst an atmosphere of ethics and sound morals.

Today, the world is seeing a constant erosion of morals and values in a never-ending quest for material gains and the greed for power. Surprisingly, while almost every sane mind does recognise this exponential degradation of values, it is also their belief, more or less, that very little can be done to arrest this downfall. While the degradation of morality and values is evident across all sections of the society and assuming monumental proportions, no other field is affected more seriously by this problem as the education sector. The most potent threat to our future stems from the decline of ethical and value based conduct among the teacher, because teachers are the nurturers of future generations. Teaching has always been regarded as the noblest and, arguably, the most challenging profession. It is expected of a

teacher to foster in the minds of their pupils the belief in leading an ethical life, following good morals and values. In the recent years, owing to a number of incidents that have taken place, it has oft been commented that the morals, values and ethics in the profession of teaching have also severely eroded. There is an immediate requirement for introspection, to ascertain the extent of evacuation of morality and values from the education sector and also to ensure that the changes in the society notwithstanding, the education sector must be insulated from this erosion of morals and values.

II. AIM

The aim of this paper is to examine the relevance of morals and values for the higher education sector, highlight their prevailing state in India and to suggest some measures to ensure moral and ethical conduct by the *teachers and students*. “*Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character, but if you must be without one, be without the strategy[3]*” ~ *General Norman Schwarzkopf ethics originated from a value based upbringing*.

III. MORALS, VALUES AND THE TEACHER

A. Morals, Values and Ethics

Character is the most important asset for a man. Nothing describes the importance of character for a human being better than the above mentioned statement by General Norman

H. Schwarzkopf, who led the US military in the Gulf War of 1991. He emphasized that character was more important for warriors, than even military strategy. This also holds true for every other profession. Before we analyze the importance of these virtues to a teacher, it would be prudent to understand what morals, values and ethics actually mean. These words are often used as synonyms for each other. Probably, the dictionary meanings of each of these will amplify the difference and significance of these words. The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines these words as follows (bolds / italics have been added by the author for emphasis on key aspects):-

Moral [4-5]: Relating to the standards of good or bad behaviour, fairness, honesty, etc, which each person believes in, rather than to laws. Behaving in ways is considered by most people to be correct and honest. It is a standard for good or bad character and behaviour.

Values [6-7]: The beliefs people have, about what is right or wrong and what is most important in life, which controls their behaviour.

Ethics [8-9]: A system of accepted beliefs, which controls behaviour, especially such a system based on morals. The study of what is morally right and what is not.

It is evident from the aforesaid dictionary meanings, that while morals and values are largely personal traits of an individual, ethics are more related to group, society or organizational aspects. Ethics enable an action to be considered in a perspective, within the

framework of an organization or a society, and then arrive at a conclusion of that action being good or bad. For instance, in certain societies polygamy is a taboo while in another society it is an accepted norm. This is based on the ethics of those respective societies. The profession of teaching, more than any other, ought to be founded on impeccable ethics, as it shapes the future generations of the planet.

Teacher is a Paragon of Virtue. Almost every young mind casts an image in their minds and aspires to be like either their parents, or their teachers. The teacher, as a ‘role-model’, is expected to set an example for the pupils to follow. However, the young boys and girls carry out a detailed analysis of their teachers and only when found worthy of it do they aspire to emulate them [10]. Besides the pre-requisites of good professional knowledge and acumen, a teacher ought to be a person of strong character, morally upright and honour-bound. Honesty and integrity are counted among the core values of a teacher, besides the qualities of selflessness and loyalty to the profession. Innumerable accounts of personal sacrifice for each other, from gurus and their disciples, adorn the historical texts. Swami Vivekananda paid the most befitting tribute to his teacher, Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa, when he said, “I am what I am, and what I am is always due to him; whatever in me or in my words is good and true and eternal came to me from his mouth, his heart, his soul. Sri Ramakrishna is the spring of this phase of the earth's religious life, of its impulses and activities. “If I can show the world one glimpse of my Master, I shall not have lived in vain” [11].

A teacher harnesses tremendous power in himself, bestowed upon him by his ability to nurture the thoughts and influence the minds of his pupils. But that power is accorded to him along with an unwritten undertaking of very onerous responsibility that he would do so only in extreme circumstances, when no other recourse is available. Any misuse or abuse of that power would lead to shattering of the faith of several generations, which rally behind their educators.

IV. MORALS, VALUES AND ETHICS IN INDIAN EDUCATION SECTOR – A REALITY CHECK

Over the recent few years, especially the last three decades, there have been numerous reasons cited for the rapid decline in moral standards and ethics in Indian society as a whole. Different observers have analyzed the causes for this decline in diverse manners. While some have attributed it to being a fall-out of westernization of Indian culture, others have pinned the blame on immoral conduct of political leadership while some others have done so upon the rampant corruption among government servants and service providing agencies, particularly so the over-ambitious and overtly career conscious leadership in public and private sector enterprises. All of these may, however, not be the most comprehensive and fair assessments of the problem. Among a few of the important questions that need answering is, firstly, “Have the morals and values undergone degradation in the Indian education sector?” Secondly, “If yes, who or what is responsible for it?” and thirdly, most importantly, “What can be done to arrest this decline?”

The answer to the first question is an obvious and resounding “Yes”. The morals, values and ethics have indeed taken a beating in the last few decades. The concept of ‘Student Before Self’ and ‘Self-regulated Honour Code’, which used to be the hallmark of a teacher have been reduced, by inconsiderate and reckless actions of some individuals, to mere words of insignificance. How else could one explain the several accounts reported over the years, of academic practitioners indulging in immoral actions of monetary gratification being sought for marks and question papers, sexual misconduct, focusing on private tuitions rather than institutional teaching, irregularities in conduct of examinations, etc. ? A perusal of detailed accounts of such actions, as listed above, would reveal that the affliction is not restricted to a particular level and it rather permeates all levels of academic hierarchy.

Therefore, the answer to the second question is that everyone who commits as well as those who ignore/ overlook / condone such actions being carried out, is responsible for it. While some are directly guilty of such behaviour, the balance of us is guilty of condoning the same. The unethical behaviour of a teacher has an all pervading manifestation, across the cross section of his students. Besides, this manifestation takes different forms depending upon the manner in which it affects the students. As has been observed in the recent past, the resultant behaviour may range from small acts of indiscipline of certain individuals, like disobedience of orders, thefts, smoking on campus, use of unfair means in examination halls, eve teasing, etc., to even bigger crimes like molestation, rape or murder, when the moral standards are breached repeatedly and rampantly. The problem, therefore, is more complex than just being considered as erratic or incorrect behaviour of individuals. It must be remembered that the individual under the lens is a teacher and, therefore, upon his actions hinge the dynamics of all the students who look up to their teachers. The ethical dimension, in the field of teaching, therefore, is paramount.

V. POSSIBLE CAUSES FOR UNETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

While nothing in this world can justify immoral and unethical behaviour, there seem to be some factors which may have a bearing upon such behaviour by some teachers. An observing mind, over the past twenty years has noted the major ones as enumerated:-

1. **Lack of Emphasis on Morals and Ethics in Training and Early Stages of Life:** There is a definite lack of training in ethical behaviour in the formative stages in the country. Training in values and ethics is generally limited to some non-graded value education books. Unless as a child these values and ethics are ingrained into the system, their importance will never be fully realized and generations after generations will see rapid decline in values based living.
2. **Result Oriented Approach:** Today’s academics, almost like the corporate sector, have got influenced by the target or result oriented approach. The focus is primarily on achieving ‘desired results’ at all costs, usually by means of stage managing. The focus today is more on results and not on learning or knowledge sharing. This ‘results oriented approach’ is severely detrimental to the development of value based, ethical actions and a ‘humane’ psyche, which is more important for a teacher. What one must remember is that the end does not always justify the means.

3. **Lack of Resources in Institutions:** While there is a boom in the education sector, in terms of new institutions being opened up, the quality is taking a severe beating. Some of such institutions lack proper infrastructure for academic pursuits and associated co-curricular activities. It may be financial or material resources which are at a premium and teachers are asked to be ingenuous and enterprising, to manage things 'by hook or by crook'.
4. **Inadequate Avenues for Personal Aspirations:** Every man dreams and aspires to be an achiever. Such avenues in the profession of teaching are limited. This results in discontentment and resentment, prompting them to resort to unethical practices, in pursuance of their aspirations right from the early days. The means adopted may vary from resorting to promoting students to use unfair means in examinations for better student feedback and visibly better grades in comparison to other teachers, fraternizing with students for popularity, affiliations on regional or religious grounds, to paying bribes for career progression through manipulated and better appraisal reports. Resorting to private tuitions and coaching classes, for monetary gains, and favoring students who subscribe to such services is also very common.
5. **Financial Insecurity:** Teaching has long ceased to be a career of choice for the youth. Once regarded as a noble profession, they are now regarded as non-achievers by the more pragmatic and materialistic generation. Those who do join this line usually end up unsatisfied, comparing themselves to the outside world and some of them resort to unethical means in a bid to achieve competing lifestyles with their friends / counterparts in the corporate world.
6. **Decline in Respect and Social Status:** Teachers, the shapers of our future generations are not accorded the due respect, financial remuneration and social status which is their rightful due. This gives rise to discontentment and is a cause of severe stress in the teachers in our country.
7. **Personal Inadequacies:** There are certain individuals who have flaws and weaknesses in their character. It is possible that despite the stringent selection process, they have been able to make it through and are now a part of the system. Such individuals, if not weeded out of the organization in time, will destroy generations of the future.
8. **Inadequate Disposal of Identified Cases of Unethical Conduct:** Not all cases of immoral or unethical behavior in the education system have been satisfactorily disposed. Usually the education sector is being driven by big business entities and cases go unreported or are covered up. Unless the environment realizes that any violations of the moral code, irrespective of the magnitude of such violations, will attract the maximum punitive action, it is unlikely that people with such inclinations will be deterred from indulging into such behaviour.
9. **Societal Influence:** While this reason may initially appear to be as firing the cannon from someone else's shoulder, the influence of the society upon a teacher cannot be ignored. With the details of rampant corruption in the other professions and businesses in the country, there are many people in the teaching profession who feel they are being deprived of this share. At times they feel furious because it is from the taxes they have paid that some cronies are enjoying a lavish life. This resentment

and the feeling of deprivation also may lead some people down a path of unethical lifestyle.

VI. MEASURES TO PROMOTE ETHICAL AND VALUE BASED CONDUCT

Some steps that can be taken to provide an ethical environment in academic institutions and promote value based conduct are as follows:-

1. **Stringent and Uncompromising Selection Norms:** The selection process for teachers has to be very rigorous and may be it needs to take a lead from the services selection board (SSB) for military officers, which is regarded as one of the most stringent and nearly fool-proof system for selection of military officer trainees. Proper psycho-analysis of prospective teachers is very important, given the influence a teacher casts on the future generations. It is better to have a deficiency in numbers, rather than have deficiency in moral and ethical standards of teachers.
2. **Ethics and Values in Training Curricula:** There can be no denying the fact that the foundation of a teacher must be based on strong values and ethics. The blasé and nonchalant approach with regard to these issues has to cease right away. Besides the subjects being included in greater details in the curricula, adequate emphasis must also be laid on ethical and value based conduct by officer cadets. Strict adherence to Honour Codes must be implemented and harsh action taken against defaulters, to instill the sense of abiding by such conduct through the life. The tendency among some quarters, to overlook infringements or award light punishments, in the name of shortage of teachers, is inappropriate and must be curbed.
3. **Emphasis on Quality of Knowledge Sharing Rather Than on Result Oriented Approach:** A teacher should be judged on the basis of his overall intellect and moral qualities and not merely on the basis of academic results or honours and awards. While professional knowledge and competence are important facets of personality of a teacher, the marks and results may not be the true reflection of his capabilities. The extent of manipulation in marks and grading, to achieve seemingly good results, has been repeatedly brought to light from different quarters. More attention, therefore, must be paid to a teacher's character and human qualities and, most importantly, on his performance in shaping the character and wholesome positive personality traits in his students.
4. **Exemplary Punitive Action:** As far as ethical and moral dimension is concerned, it is vital to note that there is either ‘white’ or ‘black’ and there are no ‘grey’ zones, therein. There cannot be, under any circumstances, partially moral or ethical behaviour. Therefore, exemplary punishments for violations of moral codes must be meted out, to drive home the importance of abiding by the standards. Long drawn trials followed by light punishments or acquittals, gained by manipulation of systems or exploiting of ‘loopholes’, encourage the fence-sitters also to take recourse to unfair practices. This must be deterred by swift execution of justice and maintaining scrupulous standards in this context.

5. **Enhancement of Social and Financial Status of Teachers:** There is an inescapable need for enhancing the social and financial status of the teachers, to augment the motivational and security needs of the teaching community. Although some corrective measures have already been instituted towards this effect, especially in government aided institutes, there still is a lot of ground to be covered – particularly in the private sector, which incidentally dominates the education market in our country. It may easily be argued that comparison with civil services or the corporate sector must not be solicited in view of different service environments and complexities of the job profiles. However, the comparison is inevitable. The disparity in financial remuneration and social status must be appropriately bridged to meet the aspirations of the teachers and keep them motivated.
6. **Address Resource Crunch:** It would be incorrect to assume that the resource crunch in terms of basic infrastructure, modern teaching aids, proper and contemporary training material, good classrooms, other ancillary facilities, etc., will not affect the psyche of teachers and, consequently, their personal conduct. All these constraints have a profound impact on the job satisfaction of teachers and the absorption quotient of students as well. In addition, the shortages lead to unscrupulous and adhoc practices which tend to get templated and accepted as the way of life. A person may, therefore, not even realize as to when he transgresses the boundaries of ethical conduct and makes a wrong decision.
7. **Value Based Conduct in Society:** This is a vital ingredient to the moral health of the society. A large segment of population today is bereft of moral values at large. In its quest for material needs and the lack of adequate opportunities for all, morality and ethics have been relegated to lowest rungs of priority. This dereliction is evident from the contents of newspapers and electronic media news every day. However, as it is said that even the longest of journeys begin with a small step, it is for each one to at least try and make a beginning.
In addition, the Governments must be urged to include these aspects in our formal education at all levels and ensure implementation of honour codes for citizens, backed by equally stringent implementation supported through legal means.

VII. CONCLUSION

Change will not take place in a day. That, however, does not imply that efforts for change must not be made in full earnest. The society looks upon the teaching fraternity as the cradle of all virtues and values. Numerous surveys by various organizations, across the cross section of population, have repeatedly indicated that the teachers do command significant respect and admiration from the people. It is noteworthy that a survey by UK based Varkey Foundation, of 2018 indicates 54% of Indian parents encourage their children to take up teaching as a profession [12]. In the same survey, India ranked eighth amongst 35 countries, with respect to social status of teachers [13]. It is prudent, therefore, to undertake immediate measures to arrest the moral decline that has lately affected some sections of the teaching community.

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