

Incorporating Human Values in Higher Education: - An Initiative by All India Council of Technical Education – Evolving Discussions

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Abstract

We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet. – Swami Vivekananda

The E-9 summit in 1993 New Delhi, issued an interesting statement, "Education is the only defence against war". Though the world has made magnificent progress towards access to education, its ability to prepare the learners to live a happy and harmonious life, has fallen short. In India, a similar trend is visible when we contextualise the growth of educational institutions in general, along with the rising incidents of unrest at social and individual levels. Policy makers, law enforcement agencies, teachers, parents, corporates all acknowledge the rising youth distress. Thus there is a need to evaluate our existing educational offerings, understand the missing gap and make efforts towards filling it. The All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE), the apex statutory body and a national-level council for technical education, under department of higher education, ministry of education since 2017, has launched an innovative education intervention on Universal Human Values (UHV), to integrate values with our day to day living. Since the corona mandated lockdown in 2020, AICTE has conducted 32 online workshops to reach out to Vice-chancellors, Directors, Faculty and students, and initiate discussions on Universal Human Values on Education in Technical Education. Each workshop has yielded a rich harvest in terms of unlearning and re-learning about the basic purpose of education and linking it with basic human aspirations. This paper is an attempt at impact assessment of the online UHV workshops on the perception of the faculty participants. The study is based on primary interviews as well as secondary resources available on AICTE online faculty workshops on Universal Human Values.

Keywords: *Universal Human Values, All India Council of Technical Education, Higher Education, Faculty, Innovative Education Intervention, Right Understanding, Harmony, Purpose of Education, Basic Human Aspirations*

Introduction

What is a value? Can education be rooted in values? What is the basic role of education? Can and should education shape an individual's life? How does education contribute towards the wellbeing of society? Rokeach (1979) defined value as "the most distinctive property or defining characteristic of a social institution".

We often tend to use the term value in economic and philosophical contexts. In economics, it pertains to its price value among the commodity while philosophy deals with its useful contribution for mankind. Home is a place which provides the first education to any child. Family is thus instrumental in inculcating ethics and morals. However, of

late, prosperity, happiness and success are primarily understood in material terms ignoring the higher pursuits of peace and harmony. While education has brought prosperity in terms of raising physical facility, it has failed to address social, emotional and moral concerns. In this context, the AICTE initiative to impart UHV courses in higher education is indeed welcome, as it advocates the need for a systematic curriculum to develop the right understanding based on natural acceptance.

Rationale of the study and Research Methodology

UHV began as a course meant to integrate engineering students within the vast body of Indian technocrats who would contribute towards nation building, keeping values

as the foundational base for all technical endeavours. In the course of time, it was realised that the core content of UHV ought to be delivered to all students as mindless pursuit of materialism was impacting the lives and choices of students across academic domains. With this objective, AICTE launched a series of faculty training workshops that yielded a rich harvest in terms of unlearning and re-learning about the basic purpose of education. The participants reported honest reflections and realisations about right understanding and their role in ensuring harmony at the four levels of individual, family, society and nature. This study is based on the primary observations, individual and group discussions that the writers were privileged to be part of, in their capacity as participants initially, and as volunteers assisting in workshop management thereafter, from May -November 2020. Extensive interviews with the UHV course designers, resource persons, faculty members as well as secondary resources available with AICTE like workshop recordings formed the base of this study.

Literature Review

Parihar, Parihar and Sharma's (2018) study opined that the decline of ethical values in the education system is likely to give rise to unethical individuals with high rates of professional success. The study further found a correlation between ethical decline and personal and social life of an individual in terms of nuclear families, broken marriages, and lesser social contacts leading to loneliness. This can be arrested by providing value based education. Gupta (2016), found that though the available academic courses make the students professionally equipped, there is lack of development of emotional and social quotient and by and large, students develop a materialistic outlook towards life. With little stress on teaching human values and lack of exposure to ancient Indian history and culture, the students are unable to look beyond packages, brand and profile. According to the author, UHV had the potential of making human life meaningful.

Kostinaa, Kretovaa, Teleshovaa, Tsepkovaa and Vezirovb (2015) undertook a cross - cultural comparative analysis on universal human values in Europe and Russia. They concluded that the process of globalization presupposes two extreme tendencies typical of all countries and cultures involved in this process: establishing contacts, sharing traditions, opinions and attitudes,

spreading the ideas of political correctness and tolerance on the one hand, and protecting national identity, struggling for cultural independence, intercultural clashes and discrepancy of historically predetermined cultural and national values on the other hand. In this connection the main reasons of misunderstanding among nations pointed out in the course of study are connected with lack of coordination in the sphere of politics, different mentalities and religious intolerance. As a result the main reasons of confrontation between Europe and Russia as viewed by the respondents include struggle for leadership in the world and different national mentalities. Russian respondents put emphasis on political and socio-cultural differences and for the most part do not support the idea of integrating into the European Union. According to the data, the main concepts nations together include cooperation, communication and kindness as the basic means of human interaction. Thus the study reinforced the important core of the current AICTE designed UHV content.

Kar (2012) felt that Universal Value education is important for students in professional and technical courses at Under-graduate and Postgraduate levels as it helps them to understand how as professionals they impact the wider social and human context.

Prabhu (2011) emphasised the importance of universal human value education and its interventions in the academic field and probed its utility. In conclusion, the paper established a valid connection between human values and education along with studying human values in education.

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation's (2005) framework for teacher education elaborated the importance of peace/value education at all levels of education and role of teachers to inculcate the universal human values in today's crises driven times. It further elaborates that to execute the value education, the concept should be defined, curriculum and pedagogy to be fixed, along with planning and development of management framework for implementation of universal human value education in schools, colleges and universities.

Gaps in Education, New Education Policy and Universal Value Education

Higher education is the key to human development, capacity building and growth. For the development of any

society in economic, social, political, cultural and technological spheres, higher education has to be accessed widely and offered in diverse settings. Higher education in India has expanded exponentially post-independence from 32 universities, 700 colleges and 0.4 million students in 1950-51 to more than 900 universities, 42,000 colleges and about 35 million students in 2017-18. There are around 1.4 million teachers in the system. Currently, India is the second largest in the world, next only to China in higher education. These numbers proved that India has registered a great success in terms of GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio). While continuous expansion of higher education during the post-independence period has contributed towards the socio-economic development of the country, policy makers felt there were some inadequacies that needed redressal. The new education policy 2020 fills this gap as it believes that higher education must enable the development of an enlightened, socially-conscious, knowledgeable, and skilled citizen capable of constructing and implementing robust solutions to national problems and augment knowledge creation and innovation. The purpose of quality higher education is, therefore, goes beyond employability and seeks to create more vibrant, socially-engaged, and cooperative communities and a happier, cohesive, cultured, productive, innovative, progressive, and prosperous nation. (9.3 p 30). It also advocates Value-based education which should include humanistic, ethical, oral and universal human values of truth (satya), peace (shanti), non-violence (ahimsa), righteous conduct (dharma) and love (prem), citizenship values and also life-skills, in personality development, teaching, learning and governance. (11.7 p 34).

Evolving Discussions

The corona mandated lockdown found AICTE seizing the opportunity to organise five day online workshops for Vice Chancellors, Deans, Directors and faculty members. Till date more than thirty such workshops have been organised with more than 28000 registrations from senior management and faculty all over the country. The workshop followed the immersive format of discussions rooted in questions pertaining to the purpose of education, developing an understanding about basic human aspirations and understanding the mechanism of ensuring harmony at levels of individual, family, society and nature.

Each day of the workshop would entail presenting the core content of Universal Human Values from 9 am to 1.30 pm, followed by in depth and exhaustive group discussions from 3 pm to 7.30 pm. These group discussions allowed the participants to chart their inner journeys and reflect on their own internalisation of the key concepts introduced.

Self-Exploration as a Pedagogical Tool

After analysing the self-reported changes in the perceptions of the participants and their voluntary conclusions about their new understanding regarding the ability of the UHV, it was found that more than 90% of the respondents accepted being unclear about the meaning of happiness. Happiness to most meant accumulation of physical facility. Participants reported having markers of happiness like professional designation, size and location of their residence, brand and number of cars owned and similar achievements. A small minority of the participants did report that happiness was abstract and a state of mind, but could not go beyond this when probed further. That happiness is a function of right understanding had not been grasped by the participants as they had never been exposed to the construct of right understanding and its fourfold characterisation namely, universality, verifiability, rationality and its ability to promote and sustain harmony. Further, almost all the participants admitted being unaware of the existence of Natural Acceptance, as an innate human quality that guides us fundamental choices and perception related to right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, desirable and undesirable states of thinking and being. As the discussions advanced and faculty participants began to use the tool of offering a proposal and verifying it against their own life experiences, there arose a near unanimous realisation that this method can actually alter the dynamics in any classroom by making the student self-empowered for his/ her understanding as against the prevailing paradigm of presenting theoretical constructs and expecting the students to accept them as given. As the understanding deepened about continuity of happiness and prosperity being the basic human aspiration, the participants began to appreciate the proposal that a human being is a coexistence of body and self. As it became more and more clear that the need for physical facility is limited to satisfying the needs of the body, the discussions veered towards how preoccupied most of us has been with the accumulation of means of

comfort. Participants shared about student's aspiration for high paying jobs at the end of their college education. It was a common experience that for most students, college education is taken as a stepping board to a job that will eventually bestow the ability to buy a house, drive a car, party lavishly and travel to exotic locations.

The Aha Moment in these discussions emerged with the gentle prodding of the resource persons who nudged the discussions back to the personal explorations of the faculty participants leading to the humbling realisation that we faculty are actually similar to our students as we too have, all this time, aspired for near similar if not identical, means of comfort, as our pathways to happiness. This re-framing of the student as someone like me, would hopefully lay the foundations for empathy based counselling by the faculty, during placement seasons in the times to come. People reported how a simple exercise of counting the clothes they own, helped to shift their perspective on prosperity. The participants explored the existence of more than needed clothes in their wardrobes, as an indicator of them actually enjoying prosperous lives. Extending this realisation to other areas of life was a proposal that seemed attractive.

The workshops created a safe space for the faculty members to recognise their own human frailties and vulnerabilities. It eased their perception of themselves as a coexistence of self and body.

Charting the Inner Journeys

The proposal of experiencing harmony at the four levels of individual, family, society and nature is gradually presented with lots of in-built mechanisms like quizzes and polls to help the participants check their own preparedness. The discussions on Natural Acceptance and exploring whether most of our desires, thoughts and expectations are rooted in Natural Acceptance or preconditioning or Sensation, led to honest realisations of how preconditioning dominates our mental space and creates disharmony at the level of the self. The biggest change in participant perception was observed during the sessions that discussed about harmony in families and reinforced the prioritisation of Right Understanding, Relationship, and Physical Facility. Right from the introduction of the 9 Feeling Model, the participants began an immersive exploration that took them into the deep rooted causes of family disharmony. As trust was presented as a foundational value, the faculty began

to see their preconditioning that kept them preoccupied with the duplicity between intention and competence. Some of the deepest reflections of the participants were reported as the meaning of respect was unravelled as right evaluation. Instances of over evaluation and under evaluation were openly discussed and acknowledged, right from the usual behavioural practise of criticising food cooked at home to disrespecting students in the class by over evaluating the class topper and under evaluating the other students. What was clear henceforth was the adjustment of the lens inwards vis a vis the usual practice of rooting the problems outside, as in, one's family, students, political system, business environment etc. The other feelings elicited responses saying the participants could understand the actual meaning of the specific feeling for the first time and that they could see how affection, care, guidance, excellence, reverence, glory and gratitude were closely related to family harmony. Love as a complete value that encompassed the entire humanity was appreciated even as it was placed as a proposal to be verified individually by each participant.

Outcome of the study

The workshop achieved its basic objective of getting a buy-in from faculty participants whose initial resistance to the content began to get replaced by their natural acceptance of what was discussed and proposed. This initial exposure to the UHV content is to be reinforced through regular engagements like weekly meetings and refresher courses.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The AICTE initiative has succeeded in reaching out to the academic community across the country, across universities and across domains ranging from engineering to management. Taking advantage of the lockdown mandated work-from-home mode, the resource persons encouraged the faculty participants to invite their family members as co-participants and attend the workshop together. As spouses, parents and children joined the registered participants; AICTE effortlessly succeeded in extending the boundaries of its targeted audience and co-opted unintended bystanders as potential influencers. The workshop seeded the idea of proposal testing and self-exploration as a viable strategy for decision making in diverse life situations. Since the workshop design was exploratory as opposed to prescriptive, it helped to

assuage the participant fatigue experienced in situations that demand passive acceptance. Free from the stress of proving their understanding, the participants were free to explore the proposal at their own pace and convenience and report their experiences without the fear of judgement. This helped the participants to open out and discuss threadbare their apprehensions, confusions, prejudices and fears. The experienced resource persons were not only able to answer each question asked and offer conceptual clarity, but were also able to demonstrate the wherewithal needed to construct a class where students were active learners and not passive listeners. As faculty, the participants were mindful of a more accommodating, more inclusive teaching paradigm being laid out for them which was decisively different from the classes they had led. Student disinterest was replaced by voluntary participation and declarations of the resource persons that they were co-explorers and not teachers, had built a more equal platform where all student journeys were equally important. The faculty members realised that they couldn't become faculty teaching value education, till the time they became value practitioners. Further, the bigger realisation was that values cannot be taught but can be only explored. These realisations are bound to seep into the teacher psyche and impact the classroom dynamics as and when these faculty participants resume their classroom teaching sessions.

This is an evolving study as the online UHV workshops were started by AICTE in May 2020. By designing an online variant of the traditional 8 day in person workshops, AICTE capitalized on an unforeseen contingency and converted it into a promising opportunity. The scalability of the model coupled with its administrative viability, led the AICTE to assemble together a team of committed volunteers who helped to operationalise more than thirty workshops in a small period of seven months. The interest of the volunteers lies in their belief in the power of the UHV content to bring about a transformational change in the way education in India is understood and delivered in India. The fact that the volunteers are full time faculty with their complete academic, research and administrative workloads who have taken up an additional responsibility of helping with the management of the workshop knowing fully that there is no monetary incentive or reward for this efforts, shows the buy-in the UHV content has succeeded in getting. With this successful first step,

AICTE has begun to step up its efforts to provide a conducive ecosystem in terms of supportive college managements, university administrators and trained faculty. While the online five day workshop has proved to be cost effective and administratively manageable, it cannot be a substitute for the on-site eight day module. In keeping with the growing popularity of blended education delivery, a mechanism has to be created to support the newly trained faculty with short re-training workshops, refresher courses and even handholding during actual classroom sessions.

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