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Teaching Soft Skills from Ramayana and Mahabharata

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Abstract

Teaching is a noble profession. What is taught by teachers has to be filled with moral values and not just of commercial importance. Only then what is imparted to the students will have the maximum beneficial impact. For this, the entire supply chain has to be primed and fed really well so that moral values get embedded into the system – the educational framework, the policies framed, the institutions code of conduct, the faculty discipline framework, the students' behavioural structure, in essence the entire chain. Thus, the prime objective of this article is teach moral values and soft skills through an array of classical contextual lessons from Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Keywords: Sanatan Dharma, Ramayana, Mahabharata

Introduction

Knowledge is gathered from learning and education, but Wisdom is gathered from day-to-day experiences and consistently making good decisions. The seeds of which can be sown in the education system by bringing out the oceans of knowledge from our Vedas and Upanishads, and the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata into the lives of our children, the future of our country and this world. The moral and ethical values, the humility and simple-thinking that was so evident in Rama and Krishna, as well as in Hanuman and Arjuna and his brothers from the named epics respectively are what should become the DNA of

our children. Or even more appropriate, our DNA born in this Punya Bhoomi has been imprinted already; what is needed is a cleansing so the clouds of corruption caused by intense commercialization of all things known to mankind can be erased so the real DNA can manifest in its full bloom and natural glory.

The digital era that promotes virtual living by keeping friends and relatives at distances, needs a strong juxtaposition with lessons from our rich culture and heritage. Essentially the values that uphold the Sanatana Dharma which facilitates a living for one and one for all as is expounded in our history and our Sanskrit literature as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – The World is One Family! The digital era is here to stay and will continue to evolve with the latest in technology advancements such as Artificial Intelligence, but we should not allow our age-old Sanatana Dharma to be buried underneath. Sanatana Dharma, and only Sanatana Dharma, and nothing but Sanatana Dharma should survive to lead our next generation in the path of Dharma.

With the ground set to sow the seeds, we will elicit from our famous epics which is replete with innumerable instances and examples of how the main noble characters are an epitome of soft skills in their Kaya-Vaacha-Manasa. In today's corporate world, an equal parlance suggests that the Say-to-Do ratio has to be very high implying that we should do what we say. A 100% conversion score bodes well in a society to benefit one and all.

Background of the Study

Soft skills such as communication skills – both written and verbal, collaboration, negotiation, critical thinking, analytical thinking are all very critical and well portrayed by the noble characters in our epics. In the digital age, most of these are happening in a virtual manner which does not bode well for all-round development of human beings.

When students learn human development with emphasis on nurturing healthy relationships, being aware of the self and the social environment in which the individual lives interacts with the society around, solving challenges and problems to manage daily living, taking informed and making important decisions which can be imparted into the learning process in our colleges and schools and universities make the entire experience a holistic approach.

Empathy plays an important role to look at situation from another's perspective. This gives an opportunity to understand emotions that play a huge role in driving actions. One can then clearly understand the other person's intentions, what drives them to behave the way they are behaving, what belief systems influence

their thought process, the knowledge assembled over a period of time driven by experiences in one's life, all of this helps to recognize that each individual is different and entitled to behave in that manner. Being able to grasp for a situational analysis is the best weapon one can have to make the right decisions.

Interestingly the students with greater social and soft skills as well as emotional regulation are primed to have greater success in their career. But these soft skills have to be inculcated into student at the school and college level education to help them cope with the external stress factors, and ride over them to behave in a manner that suits best in any situation. The students have to be taught that they have to always respond to situations rather than emotionally react to situations.

Reaction is filled with emotions and the actions are driven by those emotions. The negative side of emotion-driven actions lead to outcomes that are stressful for both parties – the one who is reacting and the other who is receiving those in that situation. However, when the mind goes into a 'response' situation, it has time to digest and respond rather than receive and react. During the response phase, there is ample time for making the most rationale and logical decisions that suit the conditions and the situation.

Reaction and Response are all available for individuals at any given point in time. Reaction is a spur of the moment reflex which can hurt all parties involved. Whereas, Response is a rational decision that can act to holistically assess the situation for its positives and negatives and help make a prudent decision that benefits one and all.

The same has been highlighted in medical sciences. Neurobiologically the various regions in the brain like the pre-frontal and frontal cortices, Amygdala, superior temporal sulcus are involved in the cognitive mechanism which drive emotional and behavioural functions of an individual. The Amygdala plays a very crucial role in that it acts as an information filter regulated by our emotions. When calm, this filter is wide open and information flows to the prefrontal cortex where the learning, reasoning, and thinking helps drive decision making. In essence, the calmer the mind the better the inputs to making decisions; and this is a trait that can be trained and programmed through soft skills.

Noble thoughts lead to noble actions which then leads to noble outcomes. But for each action to happen there are five (5) contributing factors, as follows:

1. Body or this Shareera is the seat of activity
2. The Self in the body is the activating agent called Karta

3. The five (5) Karmendriyas – speech (vaak), hands (paani), legs (charana/paada), excretory (paayu), and reproductive (upastha)
4. Prana – the breath that sustains and pervades the body
5. Supreme Spirit – that dwell in all of the above

Whatever we do with this Shareera (body), and mind, right or wrong but it is owing to the above 5 factors and hence Jivatma cannot lay a claim as a sole agent for his/her actions.

But to reach this state, a high degree of Surrender in Him is mandatory which can once again be inculcated from our Shaastras where examples abound that reinforce these virtuous qualities. A quick example is when Lord Krishna tells Arjuna who is tentative and disillusioned, to completely trust in his words and behave compliantly since the larger cause is a good cause which should reach a beneficial outcome.

A few illustrations as below to reinforce the same:

RAMAYANA:

- Lord Rama gave up his kingdom to which he was the legal heir. This he did only to uphold the promise of his mother and was willing to sacrifice his comforts to lead an ascetic life in the forest for the next 14 years or so. This portrays his honesty and truthfulness, in addition to being an obedient son who listened to his parents knowing fully well that they will always aspire only for his good
- Maa Sita was taken away by Ravana in a deceitful manner. He carried her away in his flying chariot and had to encounter Jatayu, a noble vulture. Jatayu before even putting up a valiant fight against Ravana, tried to convince that his abducting Maa Sita was not the right thing to do. All the logic to prevail upon Ravana with good sense proved futile and as a result put up a valiant fight to counter Ravana's attack. In the end Jatayu being old had its wings clipped by Ravana and it fell dead. This ably demonstrates that it is not violence that one needs to resort to as a first step but try to find logic in the situation
- Maa Sita was imprisoned in a forest and kept secluded from any possible human interaction. When Hanuman overcame all obstacles and flew into the forest where she was imprisoned, and he narrated Lord Rama's efforts she felt tentative as to how the army of monkeys can cross the sea. Lord Hanuman's wisdom stands out when he said, "I am the least significant in Sugriva's army, and if I could cross the ocean then the rest of the army can easily do so." This was a reassurance to Maa Sita while it displays Lord Hanuman's wisdom. Just this statement provided support to Maa

Sita to allay her fears and stay positive that help is coming, and she will be rescued

- Lord Hanuman was humility personified when he referred to himself as being inferior to the rest of the army and he is there only as a Messenger. He showed himself as insignificant being a messenger but, in his humility, lies his mighty strength and confidence

In today's world some of these qualities have been over-projected to build a pseudo personality who is then focused on furthering his image in a commercial angle. 'Greatness comes in goodness' is a virtue that students have to be taught from our puranas and Vedas and the epics, so it removes the clouding of ego and greed.

In the absence of these great virtues, the student gets trapped into the falsity of this world and its pleasures. This strong foundation of absolute clean human virtuous qualities benefit in the long run to reinstate some of the good values and principles. The only way to instil the same from our epic Ramayana is through the uncompromising highest qualities of Lord Rama, even his brother Lakshmana who is equally noble via his sacrifices, Maa Sita who is the true example of an Adarsha Naari and a beloved wife, and the true servant Lord Hanuman who exemplifies in His surrender to the Lord.

MAHABHARATHA:

- Lord Krishna himself played the role of a messenger to ultimate perfection. He himself being a Paramatma, assumed the role of a charioteer to Arjuna to be the guide and philosopher. His essaying of the Bhagavad Gita at the right time when Arjuna became weak in his knees to fight his own kith and kin, is another illustration of Lord's presence of mind to make the right decisions and act as a leader to lead good against evil
- Lord Krishna in being that messenger charioteer passed on a message to his devotees that He is always there near and close to his devotees and does not hesitate to do anything for their sake
- Lord Krishna's Sausheelya that prompts him to assume the role willingly to be the messenger for the Pandavas to be their guide and protector
- Lord Krishna was Paraavra – Para means the most superior one and Avara means the most inferior one but assumes any role to be there for his devotees

Here again what we see is Lord Krishna who assumed the guide and philosopher role for the Pandavas knowing fully well that the good brothers needed his presence to fight the evil cousins and made sure the evil ones were vanquished.

Being the Lord himself, he did not hesitate to ride Arjuna's chariot as his main charioteer but also to time-and-again reinforce the need for good to fight evil and stand up for high moral values.

His relaxed demeanour through and through when fighting the valorous but evil cousins, and the Guru as well as Bheeshma Pitamaha is a standing example of forbearance and associated characters that strengthen a person morally and mentally to stand up to any challenges and uphill tasks.

At the right time, remembering these virtues and bringing them to the forefront helps the students to undertake any situation in a calm and composed manner. It has already been discussed that a calm composed mind helps in decision making which helps produce the best citizens for the future of India.

Conclusion

Borrowing from the historic epics and the characters portrayed in there, has voluminous benefits for student of the present generation. These good pupils will then benefit the society at large which should lay the foundation to build a Rama Rajya of the future. But we can never underestimate the role those good teachers can play in schools and colleges; they need to be fully equipped with these good learnings from the historical texts which helps in building a bridge – a bridge from the today of commercialization and unhealthy competition to a tomorrow of high virtues and collaboration.

The time is now ripe to make this happen. We are at the crossroads pausing in our steps to make a right decision. With the New Education Policy that is taking shape throughout India to build a new curriculum that is both contextually and content-wise apt, we are going to facilitate the policy makers and the implementers shepherd the entire construct to navigate into what can be called as safe waters.

Safe waters where the waves, the ripples, the foam, the bubbles all merge into nothing but water; in our context nothing else but pure and pristine conduct that chisels the behaviour of our students to make huge strides in the right direction. A direction that will charter a new chapter for our motherland India that the rest of the world will be able to stand-up to take note. Only to take note but not easily replicate since the Sanatana Dharma is our virtue and our cup-of-tea. We will stand to march ahead with a greater momentum that will pivot India on to the map of highest prosperity and happiness, a true hallmark of any nation to regain all its old glory in the new digital age.