

Relevance of Social Consciousness As An Integral Part of Life Skills In Indian Higher Education System

#¹Anya Jamwal & #²Urja Jain

*#¹Student, (Costing) B.Com, Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune,
anyajamwal99@gmail.com*

*#²Student, (Costing) B.Com, Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune,
anyajamwal99@gmail.com*

‘We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give’ - Winston Churchill.

ABSTRACT

Social consciousness, or social awareness, is defined as consciousness shared by individuals within a society. It essentially means to be conscious or aware of the problems within a society or community. India, being a country of having a large young-adult population lacks in providing quality higher education. The need for the hour is an education system that not only promotes theoretical learning but which also makes students socially conscious. Demography the fundamental driver of all economies — is shifting the balance of power and economics in Asia, and India will be the biggest winner. India has one of the youngest populations in an aging world. By 2020, the median age in India will be just 28, compared to 37 in China and the US, 45 in Western Europe, and 49 in Japan. Demographics can change the pace and pattern of economic growth. Since India is a paradox of young population and social challenges it's important to infuse social consciousness within them. This paper aims to understand the relevance of social consciousness amongst undergraduate students (i.e. 18-21 years of age). The paper is an outcome of a review of a substantial number of primary and secondary sources.

Keywords - Social Consciousness, Higher Education, Social Work, Lower strata, Life skills, Skill enhancing, Youth

INTRODUCTION

India, a land full of youth, a country which stands 3rd largest in the world in terms of its population, seems like a country whose strength must be its youth but then, unfortunately, our weaknesses outweigh our strengths way too much. India educates approximately 10% of its

young people in higher education. That means, out of every 7 young adults, only 1 goes for higher education. What adds more is that our nation suffers not only from a crippling quantity but also from quality when it comes to higher education.

The biggest challenge that is faced by the higher education sector in India is the chronic

shortage of quality faculty. Various reports estimate that 30-40% of faculty positions are unfilled. Most faculties have had no training in teaching.

World-class institutions in India like Institutes of Technology (IITs), The Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and perhaps a few others such as The All Institute of Medical Sciences and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research enroll less than 1% of the student population. Ergo, there seems an urgent need of increasing number of high quality in higher education in India.

India spends 4.1% of its funds on research work in higher education whereas other countries like Germany spends 17.1%. 84% of our faculty in higher education is a part of affiliated colleges wherein there are 90% undergraduate students and 66% postgraduate students. As there is almost no research work in affiliated colleges, 84% of our faculty doesn't work in that field. Our higher education sector should focus and spend more on research work in order to encourage more people in affiliated colleges.

In short, we can say that India is home to the world's highest concentration of illiterate people in the world. It has made gains in human development, but challenges remain, including significant barriers to secondary schooling, low-quality public services, and gender discrimination. Keeping the present status of our educational sector in mind, the question that has been raised is whether or not

there is a need to integrate social learning into our curriculum. To understand this, one must evaluate the sensitivity or, consciousness and awareness of the students towards social issues.

In an aging world, India has the youngest population by far. It is reported that by 2020, the median age in India will be just 28, as compared to 37 in China and the US, 45 in Western Europe, and 49 in Japan. The change in the pace and pattern of economic growth is highly affected by the demographics of a country. Since India is a paradox of young population and social challenges it is important to infuse social consciousness.

India is a developing country and like every such country, it too has its fair share of issues and problems that need to be dealt with. In the current scenario with the release of various indexes by The UNO and The World Bank, we see that our country hasn't fared very well. The 2018 Human Development Index as released by the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) sees India at the 130th rank, just one rank above last year's. This is an indicator of not so satisfactory performance of India in its Socio-economic welfare. Also, while we are talking about indexes that measure social and economic development it is hard to ignore the Happiness Index which has India ranked at 133 out of 156 countries. Come 2018, there has been an increase in the per capita income of our country. The data reached an all-time high of 1,977.29 USD in March

2018 as compared with 1,751.85 USD in March 2017.

Even with the progressive development that we have seen in our country and definite reports that prove that millions have moved out of poverty there still remain glaring inequalities between the rich and poor.

Life in a world driven by competition can be often stressful and toxic for a student. Thus we believe that it is of utmost importance that students should be involved in activities that concentrate not only on their educational abilities but also help achieve holistic development. The youth of our country are tomorrow's leaders and today's asset. In India, we notice a conflict between our economic growth and social growth wherein our economy is progressing, and our society is facing a greater divide, economically, politically and socially. In order to bring about a balance between the two, our youth can play the greatest role.

By introducing theoretical and practical learning of social issues in our education system, our youth can be made more conscious or aware of the concurrent welfare problems within the society. This gives them a medium through which they can take appropriate measures to bring about a change. In addition to this, working in such an environment, students tend to develop important life skills that prove to be beneficial for them.

OBJECTIVE

This paper's aim is to understand the extent and relevance of social consciousness among undergraduate college students (18-21 years of age) and to ascertain whether theoretical and practical learning of social issues should be made compulsory in our education system.

METHODOLOGY

The research has been carried out through information collected from both primary as well as secondary data. A survey was conducted amongst college students through Google Forms and 102 responses were collected. We used the help of graphical presentation to quantify the responses and to arrive at an educated conclusion.

ANALYSIS

To sufficiently answer the questions put forth and to tackle the objectives of this paper, we approached students to fill out a survey that would help us to effectively examine the situation and arrive at an informed conclusion.

1. Social Consciousness As An Integral Part Of Life Skills

To begin this investigation one must know what is meant by "life skills", "social consciousness" and how the two are related.

Life Skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life and Social Consciousness means to be

aware of the quandaries existing within a society. We believe that once a person is socially conscious he/she would make informed efforts to improve the conditions of those in need. Doing social work instills within individuals, qualities that assist them in life and hence will help develop their life skills.

● **INFERENCE:**

According to the students, 28.4% believe that being socially conscious is an extremely essential trait to possess, 62.7% believe that it is sufficiently essential, 5.9% think that it is not essential and 2.9% believe that it is not at all essential. This leads us to believe that students do recognize the need for social learning as an indispensable part of holistic development.

2. PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL WORK BY STUDENTS

Today's young population, especially those at college and high school levels, are subject to high levels of stress and tension due to the increasing competition in all sectors of the society. There is competition when it comes to employment, education and even when one speaks about their social standing.

Undergraduate, as well as Post-graduate colleges, have further diversified their admission criteria by giving greater preference to those who have previously participated in some sort of recognized social work or social activity (For example, colleges in most of the

foreign universities have kept 33% of their admission criteria for social service). This compels many students to engage in social and welfare projects in their societies.

● **INFERENCE:**

Through the survey, we notice that 68.6% of students have previously or are currently part of NGOs and only 31.4% are not. We believe that social service is an act that should be done voluntarily and should not be performed with the intent of getting certificates or Letters of Recommendation. Unfortunately, life in this competitive world has made students extremely materialistic. When asked the reason for participation in social work and given the options of

- a) Certificates/Credits/LOR
- b) Care and Concern for Society
- c) Both

● **INFERENCE:**

52% of students chose the option (c) which suggests that the intention to do social work was present but it was essentially motivated by the idea of receiving a certificate. 42.2% of students chose option (b) which implies that these students had an entirely moral reason for engaging in such activities and that they genuinely are concerned with the happenings around them. The remaining 5.9% of students blatantly agree that their reason for joining social service was completely driven by the

purpose of getting credit. With the inclusion of social work as a criterion of getting admission into good colleges, students recognize the need for social work to help put themselves at a level above the others.

● **INFERENCE:**

85.3% of students do believe that social involvement will help them in grabbing greater opportunities whereas 14.7% of students believe that it does not assist in getting such prospects. It is true that only recognized social work (one that can be proved by showing a certificate or Letter of Recommendation) helps in getting admission in colleges, and thus we do understand why some might consider it unhelpful if it doesn't provide a certificate. However, one should sometimes ignore the materialistic gains from a situation and should focus on the development that one receives from engaging in such situations. While it is a known fact that social work does help students conquer better prospects for themselves, we realize that it also instills them with qualities and skills that enable them to work better in a team, be better judges of character, understand problems around them and come to speedy answers and suggestions to eliminate the obstacles.

3. INCLUSION OF SOCIAL LEARNING IN CURRICULUM

When it comes to skills that can be learned by engaging in social service and being socially

Conscious, the list can be endless. From patience to selflessness, empathy to finding alternative solutions, people can learn it all. If colleges include social learning in the curriculum, students can benefit greatly starting at a young age. Also, speaking from personal experience, if students have an easier access to social service (i.e. through their college) they would be more willing to participate in these activities.

● **INFERENCE:**

92.1% of the students stated that social learning should be made a mandatory part of their college curriculum because they believe that having it would provide them a medium through which they can help the needy. Today's youth is ready to assist but the main problem which they face is that of finding a way through which they can help. Including such practical learning in their education system would give them an opportunity of not only helping the nation fight against its devastating plight and having a better understanding of the society but will also help them in growing as a person.

4. Does It Make One A Better Human Being?

With the rapidly increasing materialistic approach of people, social work remains a haven where they can find themselves again. It is of utmost importance that we instill within ourselves a pro-social behavior (i.e. to give

without expecting anything in return). Social work helps eliminate the idea of greed from within a person, as it requires social workers to always elevate public service above self-interest and personal gains. However, there still exist some people who do not care for those around them and engage in such activities only to gain something materialistic in return (like certificates and recognition).

● INFERENCE:

In our survey, 2% of the students stand by their belief that social service does not make for a better human being. While on the other hand, 98% of the students stated yes, social work does make us a better human being. Being socially conscious and involved teaches us the value of time, relations and most importantly money. When we interact with people who have practically nothing or are struggling with getting even the basic necessities of life, it makes us appreciate what we have. It also enables us to respect people and professions of all kinds. Therefore, in short, social service is a medium through which we not only uplift others but also uplift ourselves.

SUGGESTIONS

After analyzing the situation fully, other than including social learning as a part of the Curriculum, we have arrived at the following suggestions so as to inculcate the idea of social consciousness within students at the college level:

- 1) Government as well as Private colleges can collaborate with NGOs.
- 2) Private colleges can adopt anganwadis (a type of rural child care center in India) and balwadis (an Indian pre-school run for economically weaker sections of the society)
- 3) Students should be taken to a very backward village, cut off from all luxuries for a week. So that they can understand intimately the struggles of those living there.
- 4) Colleges should provide the college infrastructure for evening classes to the poor, wherein the students can fill in the teaching positions.
- 5) Colleges should also have a functioning social service club.
- 6) Students should be motivated to take the initiative to organize small social events of their own at least once a month.
- 7) Educational institutions should invite distinguished guest lecturers who have had previous experience with social service and can motivate the students in this area.

CONCLUSION

India, even after 71 years of independence, still struggles with shortening the divide between the rich and poor. It has stupendously failed to implement its various policies effectively and bring equity within the country. Since India is defined by its young population, it is of extreme importance that they get involved in the active upliftment of the poor strata of our society. To reach and achieve our goal of national equity, the government, as

well as private institutions, must take corrective measures, starting with the inclusion of theoretical and practical learning of social service in colleges. The act of social service proves to be beneficial for people at every age as it infuses us with qualities that help us to lead a better life. As social consciousness is a trait that is an integral part of life skills, it is extremely important to give adequate attention to it. "Life skills" are defined as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

There are a lot of skills that one picks up or learns from engaging in social service. These help one to grow as a good human being and adds on to improve our life skills further. Following are the skills that we could identify in a social worker:

1) Problem-solving skills

These are the skills that enable us to identify the existing problems and reach speedy solutions.

2) Communication Skills

these are the skills wherein one learns how to effectively

Communicate with those whom we might not recognize with.

3) Listening Skills

We often say that there is a difference between hearing and listening. Listening skills mean that we properly hear what is told to us and we also make conscious efforts to understand it properly.

4) Decision Making

In social service, we might occasionally find ourselves in positions of authority wherein we have to make decisions that would be beneficial to everybody.

5) Perception Skills

These are the skills which let us understand one's perspective and the reason behind their actions

6) Emotional skills

These are the skills that help us improve our EQ or Emotional Quotient to better relate and apply ourselves in situations that are sensitive in nature.

7) Team-work Skills

Such are the skills which help us in working as a team and being a good team player. After enlisting the skills that one acquires through being socially conscious, we can say that social awareness helps us develop in every way that would be beneficial to us in our lives. Thus we can say that social consciousness is a trait through which we can develop our life skills the most efficiently. Also, the sooner we acquire these skills the better. Therefore we should inculcate these values in our children at the earliest stage possible. It is often said that our educational institutions are our second homes and thus it is the responsibility of our teachers and professors to encourage the students to actively participate in activities that make them socially conscious.

However, one institution cannot make all the difference. If all the educational institutions

make a collective effort and welcome such initiatives then the future will be in the palm of our hands. We will be able to effectively compete with other nations and achieve our dream of being a country that is equal for all.

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