



Research Paper

Title: Rediscovering Humanities in Literature And Class Room Teaching

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ABSTRACT: Humanities are the academic disciplines that study the aspects of social culture and values. Such values are disappearing from today's class rooms and literature. This paper is an attempt to rediscover the values and morals of humanity and applying the same to class room teaching. It studies the differences between the ancient and modern teaching. It also tries to find the values hidden in our literature which are ignored as our present life is very materialistic and machine like. We are busy in earning money so much that we do not feel any need to read literature for pleasure and even when we read, we do not try to learn what it teaches us.

Keywords: Humanities, class-room teaching, poems, values, rediscovering.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term 'human' derives from the mid-13th century Old French *humain* signifying 'of/belonging to man' (Online Etymology Dictionary). It signifies the positive aspects of nature and character that distinguish man from animals such as kindness, compassion, empathy and consideration for others-both humans and animals. Another term which deserves a mention here is 'humanitarian' which was initially used in theological sense in the beginning of the 19th century to refer to a person who "affirms the humanity of Christ but denies his pre-existence and divinity" (Online Etymology Dictionary). Towards the middle of the 19th century, Humanitarian referred to a person who is committed to human weal and welfare and became synonymous with 'philanthropist' who is actively involved in promoting human welfare and goodwill to his fellow men.

II. HUMANITIES AND HUMAN VALUES

Humanities comprise a cluster of academic disciplines that seek to study varied facets of the human condition and an approach that does not privilege a particular paradigm to define, interpret and analyse a particular discipline. In content and methodology, humanities differ from natural as well as social sciences and include the study of all languages and literatures, the arts, history and philosophy. Encyclopedia Britannica defines humanities as "those branches of knowledge that concern themselves with human beings and their culture or with analytic and critical methods of inquiry derived from an appreciation of human values and of the unique ability of the human spirit to express itself."

But in the present era of materialism, man is so deeply engrossed in his worldly and monetary pursuits that he tends to forget the umbilical cord that binds him to his fellow beings. The technological advances and changing human conditions are the two significant entities that attribute to the deterioration of the humanistic values in the general mankind. This has resulted in life regarded as absurd by the modern youngsters. They have started to question their very existence. This rootlessness has resulted in man's emerging as an individual and not as a member of the society. Darwin's theory of Evolution had already shattered the human beings' effort to come to terms with life but the two World Wars in the first half of the 20th century came as a bolt from the blue. The unprecedented explosion of knowledge in all spheres of human activity-sociology, anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, economics and philosophy increased man's awareness of the world within him and without. These discoveries resulted in a complete change in attitudes and values, systems and came to be reflected in diabolical terms in the Literature.

III. HUMANITIES AND LITERATURE

Literature and life have often been termed as two interlinked entities. Literature has been an everlasting source for the representation of life since the creation of this world. Since ages, man has been using literature to mirror the changes that life has undergone through. The loss of humanitarian values has been a serious concern

represented through literature. There has been felt a constant rise in the need to promote the desire for the human welfare in the modern world. Thus the education of humanitarian values is needed because of the promise and uncertainty posed by the onset of globalisation. The global forces and multicultural influences have transformed the constitution of our public and private culture. This transformation has given birth to the pressing individual and societal challenges. This has imposed new sets of expectations from the education curriculum.

In this age of World Wide Web, where teaching is also done through internet; classroom teaching still has its own value and importance. It enables the students to learn the art of interaction, ability to perform and patience to listen. It is also an inclusive attempt to instil values of humanities among the students enriching their minds and soul by making them better human beings. The primary objective of this dissemination of knowledge among students is to educate them about their commitment to the world and responsibility of being well-informed citizens. It is an age which emphasizes the utilitarian value of knowledge. Professional trainings are preferred for maximising individual competitive advantage without bothering for inspiring general education. As a result, the values of humanities are given back seat in modern job market. It is a high time for highlighting the intrinsic and extrinsic values of humanities to shape the ideas and beliefs of students to have a beautiful vision of the world around.

For this purpose, there should be enactment of small budgeted plays where human values should be inculcated among students. Social plays with effective presentation, using modern technologies, can educate students about their morals and ethics. Painting and drawing competitions should be held on important days which will help in training the minds of students regarding their moral and social values. The philosophical values of life merged with pragmatic approach of business and professional attitude should be educated through short stories, essays, anecdotes, group discussions, debates, creative arts and music. Our literature is replete with such values. Earlier people used to read that literature and learn a lot from them. The writers and poets tried to say and write those pieces which were for the welfare of mankind. They actually served people. Their writings were not only for the amusement but also for the moral well-being of the public. The literature helped in developing their personality which was also the aim of earlier class-room teaching.

John Milton expresses in his poem *On His Blindness* the idea of serving God. When he became blind at the age of forty, he was disturbed that he won't be able to use the gift of poetry granted to him by God. But his conscience makes him realise that God is all powerful. He does not need anyone's work as he has thousands of men at His service. It is not necessary that everyone should work for Him. They also serve Him who stand and wait for His orders. What matters is the willingness to serve. He says:

"God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts: who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait." (*On His Blindness*, 9-14)

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton has presented the war between God and Satan. Satan is against God but when he says:
"A Mind is not to be changed by place or time
The mind in its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a hell of Heaven" (*Paradise Lost*, Book I, 254-256)

These lines teach one to be satisfied with one's situation and the power of one's mind. In both these ways, he justifies the ways of God.

George Herbert belonged to the group of poets called Metaphysical poets. In his poem *Virtue*, he highlights the imperishable nature of virtue and the virtuous soul in contrast with the beauties of life and nature which perish with the course of time. Virtue stands for the high moral quality. In this poem, the poem says that a sweet day, a sweet rose, sweet spring season all perish with a course of time. But the quality of virtue stands like a seasoned timber which never gives up and stands alone and powerful. It upholds the Christian belief that fires which will rage on the Day of Judgement will destroy evil and sin but virtue will emerge purer and stronger through these fires. The quality of virtue and virtuous soul is immortal.

"Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like season'd timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
Then chiefly lives" (*Virtue*, 13-16)

Rudyard Kipling's *If* is also a didactic poem. In this poem, the poet advises his son but this advice is applicable to everyone. If all the young people act upon his advice, they can achieve anything they want on earth. The poet advises to remain calm and cool in every situation, have faith in your ability, be patient, not to practice lies, not to make your dreams your master etc. He is of the view that if one follows all this, one can have the whole earth and more important, he can be an ideal and perfect man.

In his poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, Frost conveys that death is the ultimate end of the journey of life. Sleep is the final rest in the grave. After death there is eternal sleep. He conveys all this by narrating the incident of a traveller who stops on his way to have a look at the beautiful, snowy, tempting woods. But soon he realises that he is making a mistake. He can't afford to stay there and take rest as he has a long journey to go and he has a lot many duties to perform. He can't take rest before fulfilling his promises. So he rejects the lovely woods and starts his journey again. Thus it shows that mind prevails over heart and reason prevails over impulse. He realises that he may revisit the scene but the pulls and pressures of the real world cannot be ignored.

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep." (*Stopping by woods on a Snowy Evening*, 13-16)

In his another poem, *The Road Not Taken*, Frost tries to suggest us that we should not follow the trodden path but try to find a new or the less used path. This also means that we should not look for the easy going things but work hard and achieve the new heights. Only by choosing the less trodden paths, we make a difference from the crowd and maintain ourselves as unique and rare beings.

"I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference." (*The Road Not Taken*, 15-16)

If our literature is didactic and moralistic, it can also be pessimistic and depressive. As for example, Robert Browning is an optimistic poet. He has full faith in God and almost all his poems teach us the same lesson but it depends on our minds what we gain. He is of the view that

"God's in His heaven-
All's right with the world!" (*Pippa Passes*, 25-26)

In his *The Last Ride Together*, he has presented the optimistic view of a rejected lover. The lover hopes that this could be the last night when he is travelling with his beloved and the moment of love which he has gained can be eternal or the beloved might drop the idea of rejecting his love and be his forever. And in *Porphyria's Lover*, he has made an attempt to portray the psychological study of a lover who kills his own beloved in order to make his moment of love eternal. He strangulates his beloved with her own hair. After killing her, he thinks that he has done the right thing and has made his beloved of his own forever. He considers this incident right because he is of the view that even God is with him. He says:

"and yet God has not said a word!" (*Porphyria's Lover*, 60)

He is very sure that she didn't feel any pain and she must be happy as he has fulfilled her most wanted desire. Not only he kills her but also narrates the whole incident in chilled emotions. What can one learn from this optimism? It is dehumanising.

As with passage of time, everything changes, so does the thinking and feelings of mind. In *Dover Beach*, Mathew Arnold discusses the loss of faith. Sadness is the dominating mood of the poem. The high tide of faith is in retreat. Arnold says that salvation can come only by being true to one another. In the world where there is neither joy, nor love, nor peace, nor help for pain, the only thing which can be done is to be true to be one another or love. Thus this poem moves from pessimistic to optimism and the need to love and believe one another.

W. B. Yeats' *The Second Coming* appear immensely significant to describe a woeful situation prevailing in our social system marked by ghastly cries of values the very basic values that are crucial to the survival of humanity on this earth. This anarchical situation vis-a-vis humanitarian value manifesting the edifice of our social structure has its ramifications in the sphere of reading of literature.

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." (*Yeats 1-4*)

Pope's Rape of the Lock presents the moral confusion prevailing in the Victorian period. It presents the coquettish Belinda who is getting ready to meet her lover. She uses all the charms of her face and beauty to win the hearts of men. She uses various gems and perfumes imported from India and Arabia. She uses combs made of tortoise shell and ivory. Her moral world is so confused that her love-letters and Bible occupy the same space on her dressing table. The inter-mingling of the sacred and the amorous reflects the hollow and hypocritical world ruled over by cosmetic and cosmic powers. By indulging in the rites of pride, Belinda and her fashionable world are guilty of moral fallibility.

Some of our literature deals with the stories delineating startling fall of human values. One such example is Tennessee Williams' A Street Car Named Desire in which the conflicting themes of love and violence define the relationship between Stella and Stanley. Blanch herself is corrupt and serves as a symbol of larger breakdown of civilisation itself. D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers also portrays coldness between Mr. and Mrs. Morel which creates a void between them and which cannot be breached and the relationship ends in psychological and physical trauma. T. S. Eliot's The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is a befitting comment on the sordid and superficial city life and its degenerating effects on the life of an individual. Shashi Tharoor's Riot shows total loss of humanitarian values in the modern society and barbarous attitude of fanatic characters.

Such literature has degraded man from his self. Even Walt Whitman considers animals better than human beings in his poem Animals. In this poem, when he compares man to animals, he finds him wanting in many of the virtues that animals possess. He admires their contentment and self-sufficiency. In contrast, men are disgruntled, grumbling and never satisfied with what they have. Men are egoistic, hypocritical and their greed is boundless.

Not only English but Punjabi literature also proves this. Nanak Singh in his novel, Pavittar Papi, presents a character named Kedar who devotes all his life for the family of Panna Lal. He not only spoils his whole life but also dies serving his family. It is because the employer of Panna Lal terminates him and appoints Kedar. Panna Lal goes leaving a suicide note. When Kedar comes to know all this and the poor condition of Panna Lal's family, he considers himself guilty and decides to serve his family. He loves his daughter Veena but he does not want to cheat Panna Lal's wife who treats him as her own son. So he suppresses his desires and feelings. He leaves their home when Veena marries and all through his life works hard and sends them money. At the end, when Panna Lal returns, Kedar apologises to him for loving his daughter and dies. Thus he dedicates all his life for their family. He takes care of that family whose head leaves his own family without caring about anything.

Dalip Kaur Tiwana's novel, Eho Hamara Jeevna presents something opposite to the sincerity and dedication of Kedar. In this novel, the protagonist is Narayana, who is a drug addict. He forcibly marries Bhani. She changes his life style and teaches him how to behave in different situations. In other words, she makes him a human being. Narayana is impotent but Bhani is blamed for not giving birth to a child. She is a lady of sound character and does not care for the attitude and proposals of the other men. But Narayana's sister makes him marry another girl. He abandons Bhani for his second wife, who is of loose character and produces a child by developing relations with other men. This novel presents the selfishness and insincerity of a human being who abandons his sincere and devoted wife who changed him and accepted him even when he was not in a condition to be accepted.

Along with literature, the teaching in class-rooms has changed a lot. 'Gurukuls' in earlier times can be called the finest examples of valuable teaching. At that time, the students used to leave the loving environment of their homes and live in Gurukuls. There they were taught each and everything from educational lessons to code and conduct of their lives. They were made to do all their work themselves. They served their teachers whom they called 'Guru Ji'. They used to do all they were told. After living and learning in Gurukuls, the students grew up to be good human beings. They developed morally there.

In contrast to that period, in today's world, there is no such thing. There are innumerable schools, colleges and universities but no such type of education is provided there. Neither the students nor the teachers are that devoted. Students no more respect their teachers as they think that it is the duty of teachers to teach them, they are paid for it and the students pay heavy amount of fees for that. And teachers also are no more concerned about their students. They are just concerned about the prescribed syllabus and their salaries. They think that it is their duty to teach the prescribed syllabus only as they are appointed for that. They do not feel related to the moral development of the students. Nowadays only few such teachers are there who feel that they can make their students develop morally. This is the reason that even if the didactic and morally sound literature is prescribed in the syllabus, it is not taught serving the purpose of it. The teachers only tell the students the surface meaning and never make an attempt to teach the morality and humanitarian values behind that. It also means that only prescribing such literature is not enough if we do not feel our responsibility to guide our students.

Literature represents the very best of the writings of humanity. It survives even after the most sensational and the best seller books are faded from memory. It continues to thrive and is relevant to the contemporary human conditions. The literary texts- stories, poems, novels, dramas all survive long after their authors are no more. The contribution of writers like Shakespeare, Milton, Browning will continue to captivate the attention of the readers and comment upon human lives. Literature introduces us to the characters who we feel are related to us, who are familiar to us and who provide solutions to our problems. Literature is thus the mirror of life.

We can make the best use of literature if we want. It is only in our hands what we want to learn- good or bad, faith or disbelief, optimism or pessimism. It depends on us how we take it ourselves as teachers and how we teach our students such moral values in the world of globalisation. Nobody wants to be left behind in such a world of competition and technology. Because of this the life of people has become machine like. Learning and earning more and more has left emotions and feelings far behind. People are more concerned about their jobs and salaries rather than their relationships. And this factor has affected everything whether it is literature or teaching. Both of these are only a part of this drastic change that has come with the advent of globalisation. The Modern youth under the influence of the Western culture has begun to berate the Indian ways, the Indian culture, our religion and morality appearing humbug to them. The Hollywood influence brought through Bollywood has still more aggravated the situation. There were cinemas and stories in thirties and even in fifties that had something to tell, some message to convey, some social theme discussed or dwelt upon, there were songs which were poetic and meaningful. But there has gone a steady deterioration and degradation in the sense of values and their way of depiction. Violence, rape, clumsy and crude nudity are shown on the screen and leave a bad impression on the impressionable minds of the young men and the young women.

IV. CONCLUSION

Hence it can only be said that the whole system needs to be revised. Here I would say that teachers who are the real torch bearers for the student community should come forward rediscover the moral values amongst the students by precept as well as by being an example of uprightness and devotion to duty. Even the course for the class room teaching should be designed in such a way that students learn to become persons/human beings/citizens with great moral values. Media too plays a major role in influencing the youth. It should also lay stress on rediscovering human values in the youth as the need of the hour is to rediscover our strength and to move forward harmoniously with well focussed determination to instil in our youth the humanitarian values. It can be concluded that several disciplines of education like Mathematics, Science, Sociology, and Physiology might turn men into civilised persons but it is only literature that can make them human beings. Thus it becomes the duty of every educational institution to include value based education into their curriculum.

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