



Ancient Indian Classics: A Perennial Source of Soft Skills to the Students of Indian Universities

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ABSTRACT: Soft skills are generic and personality specific skills which are in many ways different from core subject skills. In fact, soft skills make essential value addition to the core subject skills. A student equipped with soft skills attains sustainable growth in life and proves to be a quality human capital. Such students will surely have an edge over other competitors and establish themselves distinct in any field of their choice. They will be equipped with a battery of traits and skills like communication, analytical thinking, team building, self awareness, leadership, strategic planning etc. Therefore, it is a foregone conclusion that every individual should have soft skills and they are inevitably essential for university students.

Ancient Indian classics which also include epics are time tested pieces of literature in many aspects and angles. Their high suggestive nature allows multiple interpretations suiting different needs and contexts. The round characters delineated in the works which have in built growth allow the students to notice and imbibe the positive human attributes. They have a range of stories, plots, details, characters, morals, practices, cultures, traditions etc. The present paper throws light on the relevance and significance of soft skills and how ancient Indian classics can be tapped as materials in order to impart effective training in soft skills to the students of Indian universities.

Key Words: soft skills, materials, significance, acquisition, ancient Indian classics,

I. WHAT ARE SOFT SKILLS?

It is a tricky question to answer in straightforward terms. So, let me take the help of dictionary definitions for clarity and authenticity. Oxford dictionary endorses that soft skills are personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively harmoniously with others. Wikipedia states that soft skills are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character traits, attitudes, career attributes, social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients among others that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills. The Collins English Dictionary defines the term "soft skills" as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude." So, it is obvious that soft skills are highly essential skills which refine a person and enable him or her more presentable individual.

Thus, soft skills are generic and personality specific skills which are in many ways different from core subject skills. In fact, soft skills make essential value addition to the core subject skills (John, 2009) [2]. The present paper throws light on the relevance and significance of soft skills and how ancient Indian classics can be tapped as materials in order to impart effective training in soft skills to the students of Indian universities.

II. WHY TO HAVE SOFT SKILLS?

Most of the university students are not being successful in having good careers; be it business or be it job, as they are not soft skills enabled. Soft skills play a major role in the refinement of the personality of the students

“They play an important role in the development of the students’ over all personality, thereby enhancing their career prospects (Rani S. M., 2010) [5].”

A student equipped with soft skills attains sustainable growth in life and proves to be a quality human capital. Such students will surely have an edge over other competitors and establish themselves distinct in any field of their choice. They will be equipped with a battery of traits and skills like communication, analytical thinking, team building, self awareness, leadership, strategic planning etc. Therefore, it is a foregone conclusion that every individual should have soft skills and they are inevitably essential to university students [6].

“Soft skills are imparted to fine-tune the students’ attitudes, values, beliefs, motivation, desires, feelings, eagerness to learn, willingness to share and embrace new ideas, goal orientation, flexibility, persuasion, futuristic thinking, comparison, diplomacy and various skills sets of communication, manners, and etiquette so that they will be able to deal with different situations diligently and responsibly. Soft skills or emotional intelligence skills strengthen them from within. These skills empower them to understand “Who They are” and how best they can come across as competent individuals in any given situation (Rani S. M., 2010).”

III. HOW TO IMPART SOFT SKILLS?

There is a school of thought advocates that soft skills are behavioural skills so they cannot be taught. On the other hand, another school of thought advocates that it is possible to see a perceivable positive difference in people, with the addition of soft skills, by giving them training in soft skills (Rani P., 2010) [4]. The noticeable convergence between the two schools of thought is that both acknowledge the significance of soft skills but they have differences in their points of view with regard to the imparting of soft skills. As there is empirical evidence that soft skills’ training has sometimes reasonable success and at times sizeable success, we are to be optimistic in this regard. However, we should be clear about the fact that it is behavioural so it is essentially learnt by the individual/s in question, irrespective of the training or teaching. Training or teaching is only an opportunity of learning to the participants. Therefore, one has to focus more on how best soft skills can be presented to the participants so that they find it easy to imbibe the skills. So, the question now is more of strategy specific than that of relevance or necessity.

Formal Training is one of the ways in the context of students as the students may be offered a training course in soft skills as per their prospective career requirements. Such courses should employ student centered learning methodology where in students are fully motivated and involved in the process.

“Soft Skills training includes lectures, projects, role plays, quizzes and various other participatory sessions. The emphasis will be on learning by doing. As the training should be experiential and highly interactive, the students will imbibe the skills and attributes in a gradual and subtle way and also internalize them over a period of time (Rani S. M., 2010).”

Thus, Soft skills’ training has dynamic impact on the participants depending on the motivation and involvement on their part. Soft skills’ training makes the students comfortable about their learning and prepares them for the prospective professional requirements. The educators should design the tailor made courses, in terms of matter and manner, keeping the target students in mind (Mitchell, 2008) [3]. If it is not possible to offer a separate course in soft skills, the essential aspects of the soft skills training may be embedded into the main course/s that the students have already been enrolled in. The learning of the students should be ensured through different materials and techniques. Some of them are books/texts, e-learning materials like videos and social media tools, analytical and motivating talks, topical and sure fire debates and discussions, hands on experience through tasks and activities etc.

IV. THE ROLE OF LITERATURE

It is obvious that the moment we think of any learning scenario materials come to our mind as a prerequisite and ‘literature’ is one of the components in this regard. Literature can be in any form and it can be used for any purpose.

As a matter of fact, ancient Indian literature like any other literature has been subject to different forms in the course of time, namely, oral to written and then to different media.

The major reasons for literature to play a significant role in the context of soft skills acquisition are its authenticity, universality, variety, relevance, interest, suggestive nature, identifiable culture, personal involvement etc. (Agrawal, 2010) [1]. These elements of literature have a very quick and strong appeal to human minds in general and to the participants of soft skills' training course in particular. This phenomenon of quick and strong appeal of literature is universal and unconditional.

V. ANCIENT INDIAN CLASSICS AND SOFT SKILLS

Ancient Indian classics which also include epics are time tested pieces of literature in many aspects and angles. When we talk about them in the context of soft skills' training to Indian students their value as materials is multiplied. They have the much sought after universal human appeal in terms of both the matter and the manner. Their high suggestive nature allows multiple interpretations suiting different needs and contexts (Vyas, 2010) [7]. The round characters delineated in the works which have in built growth allow the students to notice and imbibe the positive human attributes. They have a range of stories, plots, details, characters, morals, practices, cultures, traditions etc. which can be effortlessly converted into effective materials to be used in soft skills' training. In the modern Indian context, the availability of these ancient classics in (all) different forms is more assured than in the past. They are available in the form of books, electronic text, audio, video etc. as a result they offer a wide variety of choices to the modern students.

Let us focus on some broad parallels between Indian classics and some select soft skills in this section in relation to their suitability as materials in soft skills' training. To begin with, the Ramayan, the first epic, which needs no introduction, is mainly about how to lead a great and virtuous life even in the midst of extreme trying situations. It portrays the protagonist Sri Rama as the embodiment of all virtues which are straight in tune with the personality traits that are discussed under the umbrella term 'soft skills'. The other characters in the epic like Sita, Laxman, Bharat, Shatrughn, Hanuman etc. also reflect the ideal personality traits that are most sought after in the present day life in the name of soft skills. Even the anti-protagonist also has strong appeal to the students in a negative way. Thus, it is all in all a repository of materials that can be used in soft skills' training.

In the case of the Maha Bharath, the largest epic in the world which also needs no introduction has many virtuous and many wicked human attributes to reflect upon. For instance, by and large, the Pandavas have in their personal life and public life have exhibited most acceptable ways of life which are well within the purview of virtuous life. Analysis of the life of the five Pandavas in general and the life of Dharmaraj in particular makes the students learn and experience the much needed soft skills of the modern times. On the other hand, analysis of the life of the hundred Kauravas in general and the life of Duryodhan in particular makes the students to be away from the most inhuman and despicable attributes. These examples are just the tip of the iceberg. The present article which is bound to be brief cannot afford to give a detailed and exhaustive picture of the possibilities of using ancient Indian classics in soft skills' training. Thus, there is a lot of scope for research in this area that is 'ancient Indian classics as materials in soft skills' training'.

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The concept established in the above discussion is limited to the possibilities of using ancient Indian classics as materials in soft skills' training. How they are employed in training can be decided keeping the needs and demands of the students in question, the available resources to the trainer/teacher etc. For instance, the needs and demands of the students of management await a particular set of skills and the needs and demands of students of English await another set of skills as their immediate priorities are varied. Similarly, a trainer/teacher with all the electronic and

digital resources may use electronic and digitized forms of materials. Given some basic inputs, the students may be asked to work in pairs or groups and come up with the solutions to the tasks. In the case of assignments and projects they may be asked to play their roles in the lines of the characters that they are exposed to in classics so that they are made to learn and experience the soft skills in question. For example, a group of five students may be given a project to execute with a pre condition that they should take the roles of Pandavas all through the project related work. A group of four students may be asked to work on a given assignment with a precondition that they would take the roles of Sri Rama and his three brothers all through the assignment related work. Thus, the students can acquire soft skills effortlessly as skills are learnt by doing.

VI. CONCLUSION

The above discussion has thrown much light on ‘the significance of soft skills in relation to the students of higher education’. It is a well known fact, established beyond doubt in the modern times that a student with effective soft skills can face the challenges of life with sizeable ease and grace. In the case of the students who do not have soft skills, as we discussed above, every life situation including career building turns out to be a hard nut to crack. The second important concept in the above discussion, ‘possibilities and suitability of using ancient Indian classics in soft skills training as effective materials’ is reasonably established with some indicative examples.

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