

Character Education through Religious Values: An Analysis

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Abstract

Religion plays a major role in character education that is synonymously used with character building and character development. The application of religious values in education is the prerequisite of desired characters in society. Many of us firmly believe that religion provides proper ways of living. Ignoring religious values; society may face many challenges, like increased rate of crimes, selfishness, cheating etc. This paper focuses on the linkage of religion with character, out of the various factors of character that were discussed in the interviews with 25 experts in the field of character education. Interviews were conducted to explore the religious sources of character and the discourse has been developed employing thematic analysis of the interviews.

Interview analysis was the part of qualitative phase of a mixed method study and ground level data emerged through the semi structured interviews in abundance. 'Coding- decoding method' was applied under 'thematic analysis' to identify subthemes from the data. Paper includes some of the responses in each of the subtheme to substantiate the particular subtheme.

Keywords: Religion, character education, character building, character development, religious values.

Introduction

Ignoring religious values, society may face many challenges, like increased rate of crimes, selfishness, cheating etc. For the country like India where secularism is one of the constitutional values, some argues that the constitution does not allow giving importance to religion and religious values in society. Moreover,

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education should not include the religion or religious values. It is a ruthless argument to put away the society from religious roots; an easily available treatment of severe disease of characterlessness. Even the University Education Commission of 1948-49 (University Education Commission, 1962) discusses this contradiction and critically remarks that being secular doesn't mean to be religious illiterate. Incorporating religion in education for development of character or character education for the betterment of society is not against secularism. It is application of 'goodness' of all religions in society instead of embedding to follow just one religion, which should be appreciated. India is birthplace of at least four religions Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism (although birthplace i.e. Lumbini of Lord Buddha is in Nepal, at present, but it was part of India that time and also Siddhartha got the enlightenment and became Lord Buddha, in the place i.e. Bodh Gaya, Bihar; in India) and also of the numerous faiths and believes. Other religions like Islam and Christianity also co-exist in the subcontinent.

Jhingran (1982, p.1) clarifies the need of religious comparison by saying, "In the nineteenth century there was a great urge to seek for some universal essence of all religions. The impetus for this approach came from Max Mueller who presented to the West the wealth and depth of religio-philosophic insights of the East."

Character is the Assimilation of commitment of virtues, throughout the world literature made by great protagonists of philosophy it has been found that character has been defined as the integrity of any individual of a group or of a society towards committing to follow the well concluded norms, morals, morality and ethics. Character in terms of human being is always supposed to be practice of such things or virtues which facilitates living of an individual without disturbing the survival of others, the term others include plant kind and other animal kind also.

Significance of religion as a source of character

India is believed to be the country of religious people. For majority of Indians, their daily life is mostly driven by the deep-

rooted traditions and practices of their religion. "India has been ranked the 18th most religious country in the world with over 81 percent citizens claiming to have religious sentiments, according to a latest survey. The polls result released by the Win-Gallup International Religiosity and Atheism Index showed that only 13 percent Indians considered themselves as "not religious" while 3 percent claimed themselves as "convinced atheists" (The Indian Express, 2012). Many people in India follow the religion in their everyday doings.

Indian education is successful in teaching for profit making, but it lacks in inculcating values. Education has failed to serve its main purpose of making good citizens. After education, one is involved in bribery, cheating etc. then how could we say that it is successful? At present, we have a trend that more educated means more money maker. So, education system is failed in relation to character building. Religion is more relevant to inculcate desired values.

Durkheim (1956) rightly pointed out that "religion is a social institution" (p. 77). Comparing religion with science Durkheim reiterates that "before the sciences were established, religion filled the same office; for every mythology consists of a conception, already well elaborated, of man and of universe. Science, moreover, was the heir of religion." This explanation reveals the impact of religion in social interactions and obligations. Still it affects many people around the world in character building. Discussing character through social capital and cultural life without the role of religion is not possible, especially when character is being discussed in Indian context.

Religion actually appreciates and carries the elements of character building in true sense. Western world has persuaded the whole world that the religion should be delimited to pray, to worship etc. and it should not interfere in other affairs. But if the religion is beneficial then why ignoring this and not opting to make the world better? Religion entails to understand that what type of relationship should be build up with other people.

In Indian context religion is different from its superficial meaning. Etymologically religion has come out from a Latin word 'religare' which means 'to tie' or 'to bind'. It can be seen as the power to bind the people together in a particular system of belief. But it eventually unattached system from individual and religion as a power is somehow an outer force to bind. On the other hand, 'Dharma' is 'Dharayati Iti Dharma' which means something that is attached and indispensable part of individual. It is the bigger perspective to see that each and every deed is being counted. One of the senses is duty but again narrower than the 'Dharma.' So, to explore the character in true sense in Indian context the elements or subthemes of character had to be linked with the experts of 'Dharma' with the pervasive view of sources of character.

Instances from the data

The responses of the religious experts from all religion were taken through the semi-structured interview. The obtained data were qualitatively analyzed through the coding-decoding method under thematic analysis approach. The opinion in the interview ranges from the most scientific to the most dogmatic view regarding character education. One or two unique and opposite views were also recorded. On the basis of the responses following subthemes of character have emerged from the data. Every subtheme is substantiated by the relevant responses of the respondents that are linked with the particular subthemes:

1. Foundation Stone of Identity

X: Character makes who you are. You tried to be a man of few characters and for that you follow your roots and follow your hearts. If you find that you will be fine.

Y: Character is that who makes identity of a man. Human identity is not his 'individual self' but it is his personality (i.e. integrated including social behavior). Personality carries the special personal identity itself which is not external, but in today's circumstances the reality is that only individual self is given

importance. It is thyself, how he looks like, how he presents himself, how his behavior is, and all these are his individual self, which is superficial. But this cannot be human's character.

2. Expressing Views on the Roles and Responsibilities in Family, School, Nation & World

X: The teacher should be trained enough to make the students aware that always keep nation first. The problems and solution along with the opportunities of community and country should also be discussed.

Y: Everybody believes just to go behind crowd. Education plays a great role in this what to follow and what is not right. Something may be good for Rome and their culture, but people following blindly in Delhi needs proper education.

3. Wisdom to Consider the Positive or Multiple Perspectives

X: Even an organism can become God by the qualities of *samyak-darshhan*, *samyak-gyan* and *samyak-charitra*.

Y: In Guruvani, it has been stated as, '*Khatari, Brahmin, Shudra, Vaishya, Desh chahun varnon ka sanjha*' means, the religion is for all. Even, it is open for all different religions. Like, as our respected Guru approved and stated that an individual following his religion according to his faith praying five times a day is true religious. A true *Brahman* is that, who is theologian (*Brahmgyani*). Similarly, a true Sikh is that who has the knowledge of pious *Gurugranthsahib*. Thus, it does not condemn any religion and reiterates that if you have any shortcomings just throw them away to be a perfect individual.

4. To Hold Forever and Not to Lose the Basic Human Tendencies

X: 'Vritt' is the Sanskrit word for charitra. It has been said in Sanskrit language,

*"Vrittam Yatnen Sanrakshyet, Vittam Aayaati Yaati Cha
Aksheedo Vittatah Ksheedo Vrittastu Hato Hata:!!"*

It means, “One should always try to preserve his character because money comes and goes, but if character goes for once.... even if the person has money, he gets destroyed soon.” Thus, comparing character with money, people are running for money, but money comes and goes but, there is character which remains stable. Character is ‘*Shudha Acharan*’ (good conduct).

Y: If something is good it is good for all and no question at all for taking it as bad. Virtue is there in goodness. The elements are love, emotions, goodwill, divinity, eminence etc. One saying is there in Sanskrit, “*Gyanam Shrutva Shradhya*,” means knowledge is relevant only if it is being listen with dedication. It may not be aroused. Thus, character is subject to behavior and unaffected by miserable conditions.

5. Considering Own Life Valuable

X: The teacher should give the examples of great lives. They should be made strong by using the role models and ideals of struggle. It has been said, “*Jeevan Naro, Bhadrah Shatani Pashyet*’ It means if life will continue, you will be able to see thousands of new things.

Y: Everybody is a part of the providence. Nobody teach us that how life is valuable. If these things will come in education, students won’t commit suicide.

6. Desirable Behaviours Expressed in Daily Life

X: The child ingrained with true religion can follow any religion. The ingrained religion means the true religious values; like patience, forgiveness, repression (control over mind, psyche and senses; also to detach them from matter) and *Asteya* (not to take anything if not properly given), *Shauch* (purity and may be taken as a form of yoga to remove both internal and external impurities), *Indriya-Nigrah* (chastity), wisdom, knowledge, truthfulness, not to feel resentment, etc. (Manusmriti) are the elements of religious character. Which religion will deny that honesty should be prevailed all over?

The true religion never counts head because it is quite internal. It is the external religion and effected from politics which claims for the number of followers.

- Y: Character is a very big quality that implies human's perception towards world realities. Everything has two sides. How he approaches to the particular thing depends on his character. His perception should be holistic. The individual, who is able to think holistically and rationally, perceive holistically and rationally, attracted towards the holistic element of reality, this ability culminates the character of that individual. This can be tested for any example. Holistic or rationale view is the sole criterion for the character elements of an individual. Do his perceptions towards anything recognize the universal betterment and welfare? This is the only bench mark of character element in human's personality.
7. Initiating and Actively Taking the Steps to Neutralize Misconduct
- X: If somebody develops some good and some bad then he is of mixed character. So many thoughts come in our mind. A terrorist has also such thoughts in time. To which thought we are going to lay out depends on our own habit. Previously, what you have done. Conflicting thoughts may be there, but it is the discretion of particular person that he follows what he is. Thus, showing consistent behavior in similar situations depends on the character trait he has formed on previous experiences. Now, we are not animals. Animality is for certain types of behavior and there is rationality about certain behaviours. Now, it is the human being who can change his very traits from animality to rationality.
- Y: Two things are there Period and Person. It has been said what is the cause of a particular period? As the period flows everyone is drained out with that. But in our pious scriptures it has been said that '*Raja Kalasya Karanam.*' It means king is the cause of that period. Hence, a good king can change the period. Similarly, you are the king of yourself. A family head is

the king of family. Thus a king can change the *Kalyug* (iron age) to *Satyug* (Golden age). If all are ready to fight for profit making and to put others down then the period will become a big challenge, but if you are capable enough with that strength of character that can reverse the challenges into opportunities.

8. Controlled Behaviour

X: The first thing is to control over thought and then it comes in behavior. Education should not be collecting of facts but it should be concentration of mind. We should try to focus on mastering our minds and to gain power of detachment. Sticking to particular things so much then it would be dangerous. Hence, all should try to sit together in school and pray for good things. Then try to look at some good image for developing concentration for good thoughts in mind.

Y: The persons who have the complete *self-control*, are guided to possess five great vows (*panch mahavrata*), these are non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity and non-attachment. Now, one can say that character itself is religion.

9. Theism (Believing on Consequence as Destiny)

X: There is a tough competition all over. A sort of storm is there and everybody is flying in that. Our heritage and God have given the strong foothold to ground firmly. But we are also trying to flee away and rooting up our feet. It is not the wisdom. Think yourself and follow what is genuine and appropriate. It is for the students and also for the guardians and subsistence depends on the almighty. Why are we becoming follower, although we have such strong roots?

Y: If you are doing any unfair activity and believing that I am safe because nobody is watching then certainly you are unaware of the religious fact that the almighty is watching everything all the time. Some others are, like, your all doings of life will be counted after this life and you will be punished on your

misconduct. If one is helping poor then that also, is being recorded. These things are the manifestation of religion.”

10. Spirituality through Self-Analysis

X: Another thing is spirituality through self-analysis where you should try to think for those who are waiting for your service. Being spiritual means to be ready for help a needy. Students should develop hard work tendency for all such goodness. Thoughts of great men and inspirational ideals should also be the part of classroom. Self-analysis also gives the feedback for the whole day deeds. If a person analyzing daily, he can reduce his mistakes and can move towards the what is right leaving aggressive or disgraceful behaviour. It should be both for learner and teacher.

Y: Swami ji told that we should try to work on education for character input. Actually, we should try to train some personnel as devotee and follower of character traits which we want to put among students. The major issue is that a teacher says something to students but do some other things in life. For example, one parent complained that their two children are in a very reputed school of the city. One of the children has been given very poor marks in the internal assessment because school management has some issues with his brother of some other class.

11. Valuing Other Faiths and Believes

X: Somebody claims that religious people fight with each other but it is not true. ‘My religion is good and not yours’ saying so is bad and not proper. Hence, the true religious people are there and we should identify them. Yes, there are many religions. Here I would say that the role of value inculcation should be given to all religions. The righteous act leads to the sense of satisfaction. Religion had such qualities that should be given prime importance. There are so many things in the world and religion tells you about the proper use of that. For example, if God has given you hand then would you use either

to slap somebody or to *Pranaam* or to help someone. This fact is quite relevant in 21st century too.

Y: Good conduct is the soul of every religion. That's why no one should kill another. It is just like killing all humanity and saving someone is like saving all humanity. All the religions teach you the righteous act. Now, if *Madarsas* are teaching only one religion then it's not enough. The other religions should be included and there should be opportunity for the children of other faith to study their religion.

12. Believing in Equality

X: '*Sabme Jot Jot Hai Soji, Tisde Chanan Sabme Chanan Hoi'*.....
"*It is the same spirit that pervaded all. It is his light which illuminates every being.*" The seeds of spiritual democracy are being reflected in *Guruvani* quoted here.

Y: To think about others pain and sufferings, living a virtuous life not hurting anybody, behaving men or women, other than in own family, as brothers or sisters respectively etc. are the moral principles for the householders. Value signifies the importance. Give importance to all beings and never underestimate anyone as inferior. Indiscrimination should not be there and believing as I am so you are.

13. Austerity for Self but Generosity for Others

X: If you are going to execute behaviours for others comfort at the cost of your own interest then you are special or divine. It is our innate human nature that we are heading towards divinity.

Y: We need to follow renunciation, non violence, celibacy, truthfulness, etc. to the maximum possible extent. Any animal may be speechless but they are not lifeless and limbless.....*Tatvarth Sutra* is the Jain scripture and in the fifth chapter of this it has been said that "*Parasparotu Kaho Jeevanam*" means to be kind to all organisms and to think for the welfare of all.

14. Believing Self as a Part of Almighty

- X: One unique feature of Jainism is to celebrate death. They never take it as bad which results into extreme painful event. They never feel sad for the people who leaves body. They celebrate the death.
- Y: If we lack religion only then, we shall go for profit making by unfair means and vested interest. If we believe that as I am a part of the providence, so the other is; then we shall definitely think before cheating another.

Thus, Conventionally Indian system was characterized with such ethos of natural cultural sharing and strong influences of religion for character building. The society was value driven believing that values are absolute and developing character was a religious task. Character may also be linked to the spiritualism not guided by a religion however, for many people religion is the ground where the spiritual nature develops. Andrei (2010) explained the relationship as, "In a nutshell, spirituality pulsates with issues of inner beliefs and feelings, and is closely associated with religion and philosophy." Tagore, (1923) has clarified the relationship of man, love and spirit by saying, "essentially man is not a slave either of himself or of the world; but he is a lover. His freedom and fulfilment is in love, which is additional name for perfect comprehension." Gandhi ji has the same view; according to Prabhu, & Rao, (1967) he reiterated regarding the need of spiritualism against the hatred as, "when the mind is completely filled with His spirit, one cannot harbour ill-will or hatred towards anyone and, reciprocally, the enemy will shed his enmity and become a friend." Gandhi (reprinted by Desai 1993, p. 177) in his autobiography reiterates that "to develop spirit is to build character." He further explains about the development of spirit that it is to enable one about the knowledge of God and self-realization.

Conclusion

Character is incorporation of the moral values in life, through which one gets benefitted on experience and practice. Character exists with the existence of humans itself. The value is naturally attached with the religion and society. If we withdraw religion from our society then the whole society will be collapsed. Our own traditional spiritual model of giving sense and priority to character was maintained in ancient Gurukul system. But in present scenario nobody and even the great educationists and educational administration can claim that the most important, all-time favorite, ultimate and desirable goal of character development is being achieved through formal system of education in India. Ignoring religious path that can enlighten to achieve this goal is just like avoiding the best medicine to treat a prolonged social disease of characterlessness. Even after sacrificing one's own life so to maintain the sanctity of individual and social life, one should not educate the religious rituals only although these are effective in educating the ethics. But that should simultaneously update the 21st century learner by elaborating the spirituality ingrained in religious practices and rituals. Then the rituals will help to develop the culture of morality. One should elaborate or enlighten the path for the basic internal purposes of these rituals which lead to character building or practice of morality or value inculcation.

Moreover, 'how to incorporate the desired religious and cultural values even in science classrooms' was envisaged by the researcher to solve this problem of incorporating eternal values in formal education. A '*Culturally Sensitive Model*' was suggested and presented in the 'National Seminar on Science Education' (NSSE) held on 22nd November, 2017 at Regional Institute of Education (RIE), Ajmer (National Council of Educational Research and Training-NCERT). That paper was based on the suggested model of researcher and was published in the proceeding entitled as 'Science Education'. National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) seems to be the best vision document and may be the harbinger to the character development. But on the ground of the ideal,

philosophical and theoretical vision of NEP the models that are incorporating religious and cultural resources; like '*culturally sensitive model*'; can only serve as one of the best mediums to realize the ultimate goal of character development at ground level through formal educational system.

Notes & References:

*Article is based on primary data obtained through interviews of 25 experts from the field of religion and character education. Interviews were conducted in India in the year 2015 - 2016.

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