



University Grants Commission
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Significance of Ethics in Education

Justice J.S. Verma



UGC Golden Jubilee Lecture Series

Chairman's Foreword



The University Grants Commission, an apex body of higher education responsible for the coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of university education in India, is celebrating its Golden Jubilee Year during 2002-2003. As part of the academic activities the UGC has conducted the 'Golden Jubilee Lecture Series' throughout the country by eminent individuals who have excelled in their respective fields and made a mark not only in India but abroad too. These Lectures have mostly been organized in Universities located in remote areas. The basic concept behind organizing these Lecture Series was to bring UGC closer to students, teachers and intelligentsia in that region. It is hoped that these luminaries including academicians, scientists, social scientists and others, with their rich and varied experiences have motivated and enabled the youth of the country to understand things in better perspective.

To reach out to a wider audience, the UGC is presenting these lectures in the form of Golden Jubilee Lecture Series Booklets. I hope students, teachers, educational administrators and the general public at large, will benefit from the vast repository of knowledge of these achievers.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Nigavekar' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Arun Nigavekar

This lecture was delivered by Justice J.S. Verma at Jamia Millia Islamia on 28 October 2003 as part of the UGC's Golden Jubilee Lecture Series.

Education is not knowledge alone, but also the capacity to utilize it. The quality of education depends on the ability it imparts to make proper use of the learning. In other words, acquiring knowledge coupled with the ability for its proper application is the real education. As such, the traits, which impart the skill of applying the acquired knowledge are of great significance; without the requisite skill of application, the knowledge is a mere treasure trove in a sealed vault. Education includes all that which completes the personality of an aware and cultured citizen.

True education must, therefore, provide also the skill for application and enable development of the traits, which nurture its future growth. The ethical component of education is an element, which caters to this need. It is in the different ethical values of the knowledge makers that we find the cause for the difference in their contribution, even though they are equipped with the same level of knowledge.

The purpose of education is to produce knowledge makers with the capacity of making the most profitable use of the acquired knowledge. In his convocation address (1922) at the Calcutta University, Sir Asutosh Mookerji, describing the aim, purpose and true functions of the University in the life of a nation, said :

“To my mind the University is a great storehouse of learning, a great bureau of standards, a great workshop of knowledge, a great laboratory for the training as well of men of thoughts as of men of action. The University is thus the instrument of the state for the conservation of knowledge, for the discovery of knowledge, for the distribution of knowledge, and above all, for the creation of knowledge-makers.”

Sir Asutosh was far ahead of his times and his vision is, indeed, striking. It is only now that we have started saying that the 21st century is going to be the century of knowledge; and that the intellectual capital of a nation, its true asset and the index of its development, would determine its level of development and ranking in the world.

A learned author speaking of the purpose of higher education, recently said :

“As society becomes more and more complex, the institutions

are pressed to assume social obligations – to train for employment, to solve social problems, to help set ethical directions for society. The purposes of higher education are several fold. They are concerned with student growth and development, the discovery and refinement of knowledge, and social impacts on the community. But all of the programmes should be oriented to a central purpose.” [A.D.Henderson and Jean Gidden Henderson in ‘Higher Education in America’] Report of the ‘International Symposium and Round Table’, UNESCO, 1990 on ‘Learning to Care: Education for the Twenty-first Century’, emphasized some aspects for a desirable education system, and stated the problem as one of participation in creating a more equitable, fairer and more livable world in the twenty-first century. This can happen only when we become more caring and humane.

The need is for each one of us to imbibe the trait of fairness and to adopt a sense of justice as our way of life. The report stressed upon the need to pay attention to many aspects of caring :

caring for onself, including one’s health; caring for the social, economic and ecological welfare of one’s society and nation; caring for human rights; caring for other species; caring for the livability of the earth; caring for truth, knowledge and learning.

Today education must fulfill the realization of the needs and ideals of the society. Government must transform itself into an agency of society from its role as an instrument of power. National institutions must catalyze the process of social change. The ideals must become the aims of education in our socialist, secular, republican democratic polity.

In this context, the constitutional philosophy must be borne in mind. The objectives mentioned in the Preamble to the Constitution have to be achieved and the education system must be geared to accelerate the social change into a welfare state assuring distributive justice envisaged in the directive principles. The fundamental rights guarantee would be honoured only with this effort of the state coupled with performance of the fundamental duties indicates the focus on ethical values, which form a significant part of the Indian ethos.

The Report (1999) of the Committee chaired by me to suggest

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the methods to operationalise the fundamental duties, has recommended inclusion thereof in the curriculum of studies commencing at the primary level and extending upwards even to the professionals. Later, the National Human Rights Commission has pursued that recommendation and involved the governments and the UGC et cetera in that process. True education required operationalisation of fundamental duties so that full human resource development is achieved and the nation's richest asset is augmented.

Thus imparting ethical values as a significant constituent of education is no longer merely persuasive but a constitutional imperative. It being essential for development and for realization of full potential of the human person, its significance need hardly be emphasized. Right to Development as an inalienable human right was recognized in the Declaration made by the UN General Assembly (1986) and reaffirmed in the Vienna Declaration (1993) asserting that 'the human person is the central subject of development'. Universal emphasis on education as the most potent tool for human development is long recognized.

Nation is not just a conglomeration of people within a geographical boundary with self-government. It is something more. Nation building is a process by which emotional integration of the people is achieved. The emotional integration can be achieved and sustained on a strong ethical, legal and material foundation, which can assure dignity of the individual, equality and equal opportunity for development of all the people. The objective of Fraternity specified in the Preamble can be achieved only when every citizen performs his duty to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India. Only a conscious and ethical people can preserve freedom and democracy, and free the society from imbalance and injustice. This is the constitutional premise. The aim of education must be to prepare each individual for this task.

Education must equip the individual to perform satisfactorily the duties of a citizen. It is indicated, thus:

What then is the duty of a citizen?

"Never to consider his particular interest, never to calculate

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as if he were an isolated individual.”

-Epictitus

“Have I done something for the society?

Then I have worked for myself, to my own advantage.

Let this truth be present to thy mind and labour without ceasing”.

-Marcus Aurelius

The significance of ethics as a constituent of education cannot be overemphasized. It is necessary not merely to achieve personal excellence, but also to enable the nation to rise to higher levels of endeavor and achievement (article 51 A).

The current dismal situation needs no elaboration. Our achievements are laudable, and they could have been more, but for the decadence in public morality. There is a crisis of character. Martin Luther King said that we have guided missiles and misguided men. This must be changed for the better by infusion of morality in private and public life.

Let us recall to our mind the caution administered by C.Rajagopalachari. He had said :

“National character is the keystone on which rests the fate and future of our public affairs, not this or that ‘ism.

National character depends on, and, in fact, is individual rectitude.

Individual honesty must be brought into being before we can hope for improvement of national affairs.

If the parched field of Indian politics and administration has to get fresh, green life and grow, we need the monsoon of purity in national character.

And the monsoon consists of little drops falling and uniting to make the rain.

Individual purity of character alone can revive the parched field, let’s regain our good character quickly and all will be well – politics, administration and economic conditions.”

This exhortation assumes greater significance with the passage of time. Ethical component of education to equip the future

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generations to meet the growing challenges is the only effective answer. All education must, therefore, be ethics oriented to equip the future nation builders for the performance of their task. The real purpose of education must be fulfilled.
Thank you

Profile

Justice J. S. Verma



Justice Jagdish Sharan Verma was born at Satna, Madhya Pradesh on 18 January 1933. He obtained his B.Sc and LLB degree from the University of Allahabad.

He started his legal practice in 1955 and later became a Judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on 12 September 1972. He rose to become the acting Chief Justice of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on 27 October 1983 and permanent Chief Justice from June 14, 1986. On 1 September 1986, he was transferred as the Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court. Mr. Justice Verma held the post of acting Governor of Rajasthan from 15 October 1987 to 20 February 1986 and again from 3 February 1989 to 20 February 1989. During 1991-92, he was the Chairman of the Verma Commission of Inquiry into the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India. He later rose to become the Chief Justice of India on 25 March 1997 a position he held till 18 January 1998.

Between July 1998 - October 1999, he was the Chairman of the High-Level Committee to operationalize the suggestions to teach Fundamental Duties [Art. 51-a of the Constitution of India] to the citizens. On 4 November 1999, he took over as the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission. A Collection of some of his speeches has been published as a book entitled "New Dimensions of Justice".

As Chief Justice of India between 25 March 1997 – 18 January 1998 Justice J. S. Verma got adopted by the Supreme Court.

- A code of Conduct for higher judiciary entitled "Restatement of Values of Judicial Life"
- Internal mechanisms for the enforcement of judicial accountability of higher judiciary.
- Resolution for declaration of assets by the higher judiciary. Through his judicial pronouncements, he sought to make governance responsible and also tried to ensure

gender justice, economic justice, social justice and justice to those who are deprived, oppressed and marginalized.

Using his judicial craftsman's skill Mr. Justice Verma

- Innovated compensatory jurisprudence,
- Widened the scope of judicial review by inventing the device of 'continuing mandamus',
- Outlined the limited scope of judicial review of action taken under Article 356 to the extent and objective scrutiny within judicial standards is possible, while foreseeing the challenges to federalism [in the famous Bommai's case] and
- Ensured delectable balance between needs of development and protection of ecology and environment

These are some of the supreme examples of not only of his vision but also of his commitment to use judicial power for servicing the cause of justice and humanity.

Besides its focus on civil and political rights, the National Human Rights Commission under his stewardship also took a number of initiatives to realize economic, social and cultural rights and group rights. The Commission organized three major Consultations on Maternal Anaemia, Human Rights and HIV/ AIDS and access to Health Care and sent recommendations to various agencies for follow-up action.

Under his leadership, the Commission widened the definition of human rights and took suo motu cognizance of the aftermath of Super Cyclone in Orissa in 1999 and the Gujarat Earthquake in 2001 and closely monitored the relief efforts in these catastrophes to ensure the human rights of the victims, particularly the marginalized sections are protected.

The Commission also took cognizance of Gujarat disturbances commencing with Godhra incident on 27 February 2002 and made comprehensive recommendations.

LLD (Honoris Causa) was conferred upon him by the Banaras Hindu University in April 2000 and by Rani Durgawati Vishwavidyalaya, Jabalpur in February 2002.