

DELVING INTO THE CRITICAL REALM OF MORALITY AND RELIGION AS ASPECTS OF INCLUSION IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to delve deeper into the context of morality and religion as aspects of school curriculum. Moral and religious education starts from every child's home. Nonetheless, school is a crucial agency to foster the learnings about ethics of right or wrong doing and perpetuating the religious values among its students. Thus, the kind of moral and religious education is provided to the students serve as a strong yardstick behind creating a framework in their minds for the budding intentions, attitudes, and actions towards others and their environment. Therefore, this paper has been conceived on a panorama of exploration and critical analysis of the ongoing practices of moral and religious practices in the schools. To achieve this aim, a qualitative methodology was chosen in which data has been collected through three sample schools. Under these schools, the selected samples included 30 students and 5 teachers in total. The findings reveal that practices such as creating compartmentalized subjects and exams for imparting moral & religious education are a burden on students and are perpetuating the school's ideology through religious education. This may lead to a hatred among students for the peers and people of other religion. Thus, through this paper many measures such as integration rather than indoctrination of values, respecting all other religions, igniting critical minds rather than docile bodies, etc. have been suggested for the stakeholders of education to ponder over such critical issues of education.

INTRODUCTION

Moral Education may be understood as the process of assisting young people in creating a system of beliefs and values about what is right and wrong. The concept of understanding the ethics of right and wrong doing serve as a framework for the intentions, attitudes, and actions of students towards others and their environment. Thus, the development of children's willingness to behave in accordance with their beliefs and values is aided by moral education. Most significantly, it encourages young people to reflect on their behavior and character traits. Regarding religion, it is a system of beliefs about the origin, character, and purpose of the

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universe, particularly when viewed as the work of a superhuman agency or agencies, involving ritualistic observances and acts of devotion, and frequently containing a moral code governing how to conduct human affairs. Hence, religious education can be considered as the practice of fostering religious knowledge and beliefs among pupils in a school. Furthermore, both the aspects have different connotations. Where one is focusing on instilling moral values of right/wrong, good/bad among children, the other one focuses to imbibe the acts of devotion and through this school become a crucial agency to foster and perpetuate its ideology. Consequently, both are hotly debated areas and thus, it becomes essential to explore and delve deeper into the contexts.

The idea of conducting research and writing this research paper has got its roots from the personal experiences of the researcher and a thorough literature review. The personal experiences of the researcher made her wonder whether a particular behavior is good for both the individual and society as a whole. There were a lot of questions that were raised before going into the field for exploration. These questions formed the basis of this study, and these questions were: Why do some people behave in a certain way? Is it possible that they could have been influenced to behave differently? What factors have an impact on a person's behavior and thoughts? What impact does society have on their beliefs and actions? Is there a link between education and the development of the mind and behavior? Does education play an important role in fostering moral and religious character? Nonetheless, for getting answers to these questions, a thorough literature review was done, which has been presented here in brief.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Kohn (1997) reflects upon the discipline and character improvement of the students by saying that children's character can be improved by making them dress alike and, if adults object to students' clothing, force them to wear the same thing, rather than asking them to think about the possible solution, seems as the best course of action. Lakshimi (2009) talks about eight factors which are considered to be the key factors in the education of an individual. These are: Goals and purposes, aspirations, attitudes, interests, feelings, activities, convictions, obstacles. According to her, while creating educational materials as it is intended to impart moral and ethical ideals to pupils, these eight factors should be taken into consideration. Therefore, it is crucial to consider how education plays a part in instilling ethical principles. Stewart, (1969) emphasizes that a larger say in developing the sense of values lies with the school atmosphere, the behavior and personality of the teachers, and the facilities provided in the school. He added

that there is a need to permeate the consciousness of values through whole curriculum the related activities in the school. Bhardwaj (2016) while talking of value education mentions that *“there are two main approaches to values education. Some see it as instilling or transmitting a set of values, often derived from societal, religious, or cultural ethics, while others see it as a form of Socratic dialogue in which individuals are gradually led to recognize what is appropriate behavior for themselves and their community.”*

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the current practices of imbibing moral and religion values among students in the schools? Are these practices igniting rational minds or are just creating docile bodies? How morality and religion are set to inter-play with each other in the school curriculum?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore and analyze the current practices of imbibing moral and religious values among elementary students
2. To suggest ways for the inter-play of morality and religion in the school curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper is qualitative and descriptive in nature. Morality and Religion are two complex concepts and their inter-play can never be explored using numerical values. These concepts are majorly formed by society, which is an abstract proposition, which can be reached out through the view-points, perceptions, thoughts and opinions of the samples. Thus, this qualitative paper deals with verbatims rather than numbers, opinions of the samples rather than facts and so on.

Tools & Techniques:

The present paper utilizes three tools, one of which is an observation schedule used to observe the classes in the sample schools. Observation as a tool is a quite powerful tool. The researcher observed 6-6 classes over a period of 15 days in the selected sample schools. The second tool is a Focused Group Discussion schedule which was made for the sample students in order to explore the current practices of moral and religious values in the school. This also helped to triangulate the data that was gathered through observation. The third tool is an interview schedule which was prepared for the teachers to get their ideas and notions about the current practices of morality and religion and the inter-play of both in the schools.

Research Sample:

The sample chosen for this study include three schools of Delhi NCR Region. These three schools were chosen purposively after qualifying a number of set parameters such as permission from the schools, permission of due interaction with the samples, Practice of moral and religion education in the school curriculum, and so on. From these three schools, 10-10 students of Elementary classes who voluntarily wanted to contribute to the study were selected as samples. Thus, in total a sample of 30 students was selected. Also, a total sample of 5 (2+2+1) teachers from all the sample schools who were teaching the subject of moral education or have any interest in it were selected.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The data has been analyzed through a critical lens after making certain themes from the gathered data. Thus, an objective-wise thematic analysis has been done for the study. The findings have been presented below:

Objective-1: Exploring and analyzing the current practices of imbibing moral and religious values among elementary grade students

Indoctrination of moral values: In order to instill moral principles among the students, it has been observed that a separate book, a separate class hour, and a separate exam have been created. This has led to a precarious scenario since it puts too much pressure on the child to succeed in the topic in order to advance to the next grade.

Losing essence of moral values: As it was observed that teachers were teaching moral education as a separate subject, this might lead to a situation where the subject loses both its significance and its essence as the school has created watertight compartments for each subject. Moral values thus, has become a compartmentalized subject and has lost its essence.

Not practicing what is being preached: A general observation came from all the sample schools that what was being preached was very little or negligible in the actions of teachers and stakeholders. For instance, a teacher was teaching the chapter of cleanliness based on taking inputs from the textbook and saying, “we should keep our surroundings clean; I do that and you should do this too”. However, on the very next day, she takes a newspaper from the shelf; cleans the blackboard and throws the newspaper beside the podium. The value of being truthful and honest to herself negates as the moment she did that.

Misuse of technology: In the Era of Education 4.0 where the society is generally shifting towards learning the technology, there are spaces where one can misuse it. During the classroom observation, a student stood up from his desk to ask his doubt about being right or wrong in a certain situation presented by him. Some of the students at the back tried to make fun of him as a few days ago, he has tried to hack the password of the school's Wi-Fi so that he can use his mobile phone easily inside the school premises.

Highlighting religion dominant society: This was keenly observed that all the sample schools were following one or the other religion. The prayers and other festivals have been very closely knitted and celebrated without giving any regard/opportunities to any other religion. A very common example of this is morning assembly which focuses on how to perpetuate their ideology through prayers and different chores pertaining to a specific religion.

Religious Education-not a passport to bear morality: One of the prevailing beliefs has been that religious education is the entrance to education and that moral and religious education are essential for success. This assumption is unfounded because there are so many self-described religious scholars who engage in a variety of immoral behaviors. Scholars include people who have received both academic and religious education; one can tell how moral/immoral these individuals are by looking at their behavior.

Objective-2: Suggesting ways for the inter-play of morality and religion in the school curriculum

Integration of moral values with all subjects and experiences: It is essential to integrate moral values with all the subjects, with day-to-day practices, pedagogical practices. This may induce morals among students as they learn from actions not through preaching. For instance, if a teacher were to demonstrate how to weigh chemicals on a balance, the attention would be on the process of weighing rather than any negative effects or outcomes from changing the chemical composition. Consequently, it is preferable to use an integrated approach to moral education that won't negatively impact the skills and knowledge related to a particular subject. It is important to teach the ideas in a way that develops a body of knowledge and its application, as well as a moral awakening. Learning something that is morally neutral has no means, but it increasingly depends on the teacher's ability to incorporate that hidden moral values into the content or to incorporate morality into their pedagogy and practices. It is not necessary to shout about morality; rather, it should show in the learner's actions after learning.

Judicious use of technology: Through the contextual underpinnings of the study, it is essential to suggest that teachers and guardians should take necessary steps to make their children aware about cyber-bullying, cyber-crime, hacking, etc. and make them realize the repercussions of the same. This also entails making intelligent and prudent use of the resources and technologies that are already accessible so that they won't damage anyone and can be applied for societal benefit.

Establishment of a welfare society: There is a need to be awakened to that degree of morality which contribute to the establishment of a welfare society. This will happen only when we ignite rational minds who are able to think rather than accept the norms of the society. When morality comes from within, as it has been integrated with actions, it impinges upon a person to have certain beliefs, values, actions, and framework for life, which in its essence is a way to live life as it provides a vision to serve society.

Morality as the founding stone of the schools: Imbibing morals among students to prepare them for responsibilities once they grow up, should act as a foundation basis for Schools. Schools consider filling the students with titbits of knowledge and thus expect them to excel throughout their school years. However, with this whole-sole aim, they strive to create pupils of excellence; but without impinging upon the moral values being put into the practice, one can't expect them to be civic citizens. Thus, this is the responsibility of School to keep morals as a foundational step for all the students, as they are the one who are the torch-bearers of tomorrow.

Acceptance for all other religions: There is a dire need to respect all the religions to create a hatred-free and tolerant society. For creating such society, schools should focus on religions rather than religion; they should discuss the history, culture, and contributions of other religions to society rather than preaching them about their own religion. As it has been known that religion has a history of causing people to fight or go to war to demonstrate that their particular faith, it will create a drift of religions in the society.

Inhibiting critical minds: Religious knowledge discourages free inquiry and also puts you in the box of restricted thought, you can't question the fundamentals and you have to believe whatever is specified in the specific book. It encourages one to be a loyal follower, not a critical enquirer.

DISCUSSION

This paper has attempted to explore and analyze two crucial aspects of any individual's life, i.e., morality and religion. While observing the classroom practices, the researcher noticed that a separate period was allotted to teach moral education. In one of the sample schools, the teacher used to come and ask any student to read the chapter and then at last they used to discuss the pros and cons of the situation. In another school, the teacher used to ask students to tell any story and then the students used to tell moral of the story to each other. In Focused Group Discussion one of the children remarked, *"We are just told to read the story from home and the next day our ma'am mark the answers in a book and ask us to write the questions and answers in the notebook."* Another student gave her response as, *"It feels burdensome to write questions and answers in the notebook and pass the exams just for the sake of passing them."* On being asked about the rituals and functions in the school, a student stated that, *"Every year we do a Pooja in the school to celebrate functions such as Holi, Diwali, etc. in which all the children sit together and do hawan. I like sitting in the prayers, but I feel that other festivals like Eid, Gurupurab should also be celebrated in the school."*

Thus, morality and religion has lost their essence and this is the need of the hour to make these aspects inclusive of all the curricular activities and experiences.

CONCLUSION

While having a similar appearance, moral and religious education appear to differ in many ways. The core purpose of education should be the inculcation of morality. On the other hand, it shouldn't be thought of as the foundation for schools to maintain a dominating component of religion and impose that religion on all the students. On one hand, moral education shouldn't be viewed in terms of the airtight compartments or as a distinct thing or subject; rather, it should be thoroughly woven into all areas of the curriculum. On the other hand, religious education ought to be left up to the individual and shouldn't be a requirement for everyone. In conclusion, Morality & Religion Education shouldn't be limited to the subjects that must be covered in the curriculum. Instead, it's important to consider their "how," or how they are being incorporated into the curriculum. They can be included in the transactional modalities as long as they do not injure anyone, do more good than harm, do not force anyone to choose between two extremes, and assist the society spark the minds of its citizens. But if they're performing the exact reverse of what was just stated, we need to reevaluate our field procedures.

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