



Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

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Imparting Ethics and Values Through Literature for Technology and Management Students: A Study of Morris West's The Big Story

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Abstract

It is misconstrued that ethics and values is an ancient thought, for the social structure is still extant because of certain righteousness prevailing even in the worst of times of war, mass annihilation and natural disasters. Righteousness is not a religious word but refers to the virtues of a human being innate in himself. It is righteousness that makes man ethical, moral and humane. We witness today, hatred, violence, professional jealousy and restlessness showing its ugly head due to the lack of moral intelligence. It is the need of the hour that we restore the lost righteousness to keep ethics and values intact. Integrating it in the Language and Literature curriculum of the technology and Management courses opportunities the teacher to discuss various real-life situations and unethical practices prevailing in the society, which in turn shall enable the holistic development of the students in work and life ultimately creating a better society. To exemplify: Morris West in his novels has helped us to see the importance of morality, ethics and values. This paper discusses several instances from Morris West's novels that deals with ethical practices in the modern times providing a solution to the prevailing restlessness in the society.

Background

In today's world morality is seen as an idea belonging to an ancient school of thought. The younger generation have slowly started to forget the importance of morality. This has the dangerous potency to corrode the society and wreak havoc in the lives of individuals and eventually the entire society. We witness various kinds of violence, corruption and social evils everyday which has almost become inevitable and part and parcel of the human existence. The desire to fight these evils has started to wane. The generations that have lived before us have also been confronted by various social problems like us. But they have fought many of the social evils and have come through triumphantly. For instance, the freedom we enjoy today as a nation is a reward of the struggle of our ancestors. In spite of various problems that human beings have faced, men and women keep living on and the social structure has not toppled because of righteousness prevailing in individuals and corporately in the society. In the *Thirukkural*, the renowned Tamil poet, Tiruvallur has stated that, the world exists because of people with good character, if not the world would have turned to dust.

"The world abides; for 'worthy' men its weight sustain.

Were it not so, 'twould fall to dust again." (*Thirukkural*, 996)

Victor Frankl in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, says that people who were selfless and thought about the good of others outlived those who were more self-centred. Even during the worst times of war, genocides and mass annihilation, some people have held onto morality and righteousness which has been a great positive influence for many who were living in hopelessness. It was not just a positive influence but also preserved the society and paved way to its existence and continuity. The Father of our nation, Gandhi ji is one such example who believed, followed and preached ahimsa or non-violence. During his period Gandhi ji's principle was a great restraining bridle on the people who wanted to use violence as a weapon.

What is righteousness?

A.P.J. Abdul Kalam avers,

"Where there is righteousness in the heart, there is beauty in the character. When there is beauty in the character, there is harmony in the home. When there is harmony in the home, there is order in the nation. When there is order in the nation, there is peace in the world." (The Righteous Life Quotes, goodreads.com)

Righteousness is synonymous with rightness, goodness. The quality of being morally right or justifiable. Moral rightness is a state of being, whereas morality is a particular system of values and principles of right conduct or behaviour.

Morality: An Inborn Attribute

Lennick and Kiel in their book, *Moral Intelligence Enhancing Business Performance and Leadership Success*, share that, morality is innate in human beings. It is found even in an infant who is a day or two days old. In the nursery where infants are cared for, when one infant begins to cry the others also join in. According to psychologists who study the behaviour of new born babies this is called 'neonate responsive crying.' The Infant cries as a response to the sorrow of another infant. Psychologists believe that this behaviour is one of the first indications of a baby's innate capacity for empathy towards another person. In order to be compassionate moral beings, people need the ability to see the world through the eyes of others. Empathy is a very important step in which infants appreciate that others exist independently of them and that others have emotions and physical needs which is totally separate from theirs. Human beings possess an innate moral disposition, right from infancy endowed with rudimentary skills such as empathy, which function as the building blocks of one's moral

intelligence. By the age of 2 years the child naturally seems to help others in distress and by the age of 4 or 5 the child has a good idea of what his parents think is right and wrong. (Lennick, Kiel, 21-23)

Therefore, a child knows to differentiate right from wrong. This ability to distinguish right from wrong which is innate in a person is called as their moral compass. But as individuals grow older, they appear to gradually lose the sense or ability to distinguish right from wrong. Instead of differentiating black from white, they find grey areas and eventually go to a place in life where they are not even able to empathize with others who are in trouble. The worst state is when a person completely loses this sense of right and wrong and is solely driven by animal instincts to devour and destroy others around him.

Therefore, a lack of moral rightness does not affect just an individual but it corrodes the entire social structure. A quality which we possess as infants, how does it get diminished and reduced to nothing?

Morality and Conscience

The internal sense of right and wrong in human beings is also called as conscience. This conscience or inner voice which is the guiding light of every individual as he traverses the dark alleys of life also serves as a yardstick of a person's moral life. When individuals continually keep doing or acting against this conscience, they slowly lose their moral sensibility and their moral compass goes amiss, thereby the individual also loses his way and gropes in the dark alleys of life without the guiding light of the inner voice. When this moral compass goes wrong and the guiding voice is lost people end up in various physical and mental problems. Depression, addictions and suicide are a few outcomes of this moral degeneration. This not only causes destruction in a personal level but is also manifest in the societal level as murder, theft and various forms of abuse etc.

It is equally important to note that it is an undeniable fact that in spite of the innate moral compass there is a 'dark side' to every individual. There are moments when selfishness triumphs and other needs are important that it becomes impossible to do the right thing. The drives within human beings tend to be in conflict with each other. For example, the drive to acquire that makes us competitive is always against a desire to co-operate which is driven by the desire to bond.

Moral intelligence is about balancing competitive drives and managing the dark side of human nature. It becomes mandatory to choose among these competing desires and moral intelligence is the ability to balance these competing drives and it is what makes a person more human. (Lennick, Kiel, 32)

Introduction

In today's scenario when selfishness is prevailing, and moral sensibilities are diminishing, it is the duty of the educators to impart and inculcate the importance of ethics morals and values to the future generations. When we think of teaching morals, values and ethics we can't overlook how stories were taught to children which had beautiful morals. Literature serves as a great moral teacher. As we read the life and stories of various characters both historical and fictional, we can learn a great deal from them. Even though this is not a new endeavour, the teaching fraternity needs to put more effort and focus into this area with regard to the students of various professional courses.

Integration of Moral Values in Andragogy Through Literature:

Objective

It is the need of the hour that students who are trained for various professional courses be taught the importance of ethics, morals and values so that there would be less strife and more peace and cooperation in organisations. It can help the individual to be free off professional jealousies, attention seeking attitudes, animosities, egoistic tendencies and bring in visionary leadership skills, art of delegation skills, negotiation skills, assertive skills, conflict resolution skills, produce more successful leaders and successful organisations, etc.

Morris West

The Australian author Morris West and his work has been chosen as an example for the study. Morris West, one of the greatest but much neglected author has dealt with this theme of morals, values and ethics elaborately in most of his novels. West has authored more than 27 novels, screenplays, radio dramas and works for the stage. Some of his notable works are, *The Trilogy*, "*The Devil's Advocate*", "*Shoes of the Fisherman*." and "*Lazarus*". Other novels include, *Moon in my Pocket*, *Gallows on the Sand*, *Kunda*, *The Big Story*, *The Second Victory*, *Backlash*, *Daughter of Silence*. The Trilogy deals with the Catholic Church and the events that happen around the church. The novel chosen for the study is 'The Big Story'. (Morris L. West, goodreads.com)

The Big Story

In *The Big Story*, Richard Ashley is a journalist who is eager to make a mark in his career by writing about the Duke of Orgagna, Vittorio. He has got some scandalous news about the corruption of the Duke and Ashley is trying to collect every evidence that would build up the big story he was working on. Garofano, who offers to sell him the documents that were the evidence for his story cheats him. This kindles a brawl and it is also seen by some relevant people. As Garofano is tortured by Ashley, Cosima, the Duke's wife and Ashley's ex-lover appears on the scene. The old memories stir his heart and the two go out to a solitary place on top of the hills. There they try to relive the past memories but end up with mixed feelings. As they return back to the town, Garofano jumps from a cliff and gets killed by the car. Ashley is framed into this murder by the Duke and he walks foolishly into the trap with Cosima as his bait. Ashley is kept under custody in the Duke's house and the story evolves in such a way that finally the Duke gets killed.

Ashley is a journalist, and how his moral failure fails him is detailed. Similarly, the Duke Vittorio's moral failure and how he fails is elaborated.

A Study of Richard Ashley, the Journalist

Richard Ashley like any other journalist wants to accomplish great things and reach the pinnacle in his career. This desire to success in his profession is driving him. This is not unethical, it is good to have a desire to succeed, but it gets tainted when

the personal and professional overlap and gets confused. Total objectivity in any profession is difficult. But when selfish motives and personal gain takes the forefront morals and ethics are in for a toss. Ashley seems to be working in a manner where he even appears to be pursuing the truth. His profession demands him to share the truth about the moral failure of another. But suddenly he discovers the truth of his own moral failure and his tragic condition when he is framed to kill a person. One wrong decision lead him into more wrong actions.

His moral failure begins to wreak havoc the moment Cosima meets him. This is explained in the following lines, "Staring at her stupidly – the old love, out of the old forgotten time". (BG 31) Ashley's past haunts him and hunts him down. The Duke's wife Cosima was his ex-lover. And the meeting with her brings back the old ghosts. "Old times... old ghosts! But the ghosts were not laid yet and the old love was here at his side..." (BS 35) The old times or the past appears to bring two different and opposite feelings. When Ashley was with Cosima, they experience ambivalent feelings of joy and sorrow. The narrator says it as, 'the old times were the good times.' Immediately the narrator also says, "But the old days were like old kisses – cold and painful to remember. ... And the nostalgia of the lost paradise, half bitter and half sweet." (BS 38)

The word 'old' keeps occurring again and again in various phrases, the old familiar way, old memories, old times, old days, old forgotten time. As for Ashley, his old times or the past that he had not dealt with properly plunges him into ruin and despair. Duke Vittorio uses Cosima as a bait to frame Ashley in a murder. Cosima and Ashley after meeting in a lonely place return to the town. On the way, Garofano, who cheated Ashley by not selling the documents he needed is run over by their car and gets killed. This event drags Ashley into more troubled waters. Even though Cosima was Ashley's lover, it is a thing of the past or the old times. If he had acted with integrity treating Cosima as the wife of the Duke and not asked her to come out with him he would have been spared a lot of pain and even the guilt of killing a person. Integrity and reconciling with the past are few of the most important and practical values that one needs to live a peaceful life. Morris West has highlighted these universal values and principles in his story through his character Ashley.

A Study of Vittorio, Duke of Orgagna

The next character to be analysed is the Duke, Vittorio Orgagna. The character Vittorio fails morally similar to Ashley. Vittorio, the Duke of Orgagna fails his wife, by not being faithful to her and he is the one who kills Garofano. Later he also proves himself disloyal to his most loyal servant Carlo by having an illicit affair with his daughter. Vittorio was a leader, the Duke of Orgagna and his moral failure spun his own snare and set him up in his own death trap.

Lack of integrity, loyalty, responsibility and righteousness in the leader has the potential to bring disaster not only for him but also to many people. The leaders are the ones who handle a lot of power and it can be channelized positively or negatively. Power without responsibility becomes a dangerous weapon. Morris West explains this as, "...every profession has its cynics and its profiteers. There are men with the power of healing in their hands who used to kill the Unborn... there are judges who pervert justice..." (BS163). West through Orgagna shares a concept that is commonly misinterpreted. Vittorio tells Ashley, "it is an old illusion, Ashley, that good men make good rulers- that human beings can be governed with faith, hope, and charity..." and he even adds, "The virtue of the ruler has nothing to do with it..." (BS 161) People believe a false idea that, success is what matters and the way we achieve it can be by any means. And furthermore, some believe that by being good or righteous one cannot succeed easily and therefore it is cleverer to take the road that should not be taken. Captain Granforte sums up the moral failure of each character and how it had all culminated in the death of two people Garofano and Orgagna. He explains how each of them had failed morally; he pointed at Cosima and said to her that she loved a man who was not her husband and her indiscreet behaviour of secretly spending time with Ashley was the reason for the death of Garofano. And to Ashley he said he was ready to lie and bribe in the name of gathering news which had ended up in such a huge mess. And to another character named Tullio, he said, that he came around scavenging the garbage of other people's vices in the hope of getting some profit for himself from it. Through the words of Granforte, the author helps one to see that the moral failure of an individual has caused the moral degeneration of a collective group, the society culminating in death.

Conclusion

According to Lennick and Kiel, morality in the leadership and in the professional setting creates a strong, stable and successful organisation. It is an organisation that creates a win-win situation for everybody involved, both the leader and the subordinates, the employer and the employees. Universal principles of integrity, responsibility, compassion and forgiveness are the foremost principles found among effective leaders. (Lennick, Kiel, 42)

We need to fight the moral degeneration that is producing morally weak individuals who resort to addiction and suicides. Having this in mind, it is essential to teach literature to the students of Technology and Management with the purpose of inculcating ethics, values and morals. It is the duty of the teachers to produce morally sound and strong individuals. These individuals are the pillars, building blocks, and future leaders of our society. As A.P.J. Abdul Kalam has said we have to be the instruments in creating a peaceful world.

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