

Spirituality: Realizing Youth Development in India

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Assessing Spirituality

Throughout history, we have seen evolutionary struggles of human beings. There have been multiple facets of human existence. Apart from human survival in terms of nutrition, economy, and social life and so on and so forth, spirituality has played a fundamental role in individuals' lives and overall human experience all over the world, across cultures and traditions. It is a difficult task to define the term 'spirituality'. The root word of 'spirituality' is 'spirit' which alludes to things that are unperceived directly by our senses. There has been growing interest to understand spirituality. However, the complicatedness and multidimensional nature of it has made it more difficult for a plain conceptualization. The dimensions which are shared among the scholars for dialogues related to spirituality are the actuality of a transcendent, enquiry regarding the nature, aspirations and sense of life. These dimensions include practices such as prayers, meditation or rituals etc., beliefs such as connections to the transcendent.

Many scholars have attempted to give an explanation of spirituality. One such explanation is 'spirituality refers to the human search for a sense of meaning, purpose, and morality in the context of relationships with self, others, the universe, and ultimate reality and may be associated with world views based on theism, atheism, polytheism, animism, and other possibilities' (Canda, 2008; Canda & Furman, 2010; Lerner et al., 2008; Sheridan, 2003). Another set of

scholars defined 'spirituality as a relationship with a Transcendent Being (or whatever is considered Ultimate), informed by a certain spiritual tradition, which fosters a sense of meaning, purpose, and mission in life. In turn, this relationship produces fruit, such as altruism, love, forgiveness, etc., which has a discernible effect upon one's relationship to creation, self, others, and the Ultimate' (Carroll, 1997; Musick, Koenig, Larson & Matthews, 1998; Sermabeikian, 1994; Spero, 1990). Spiritual attainment can be regarded as subjective, experiential connection to the ethereal. The experience goes beyond the limits of one's individual body and amour propre though augmented consciousness, rapport with the people and the natural world and association with the sacred. Morality, seeking connections with self and with other people, the larger world and universe, development goals, motivations are some of the intrinsic aspects of individuals and the communities. Spirituality tends to provide the orientation on those aspects and also gives a developmental push for the recognition of entirety, rectitude, a connection, robustness, and responsibility of others' well-being. The fundamental importance of spirituality is the munificence acquired from transcendence which creates the atmosphere for positive human development and thus creates a better world for all human being. Spirituality has an effect on the human spirit or soul (atman) opposing to the material or physical comforts.

When we compare western spirituality with Indian notion of spirituality, it is different from each other in some contexts. The notion of Absolute Reality is same in both but in india they contextualised the link between Atman (self) and Brahman (the Ultimate Reality). In India the saints impart their knowledge in terms of hymns and dialogue and attainment of muksha by realizing the absolute. Apart from this, Western notion of spirituality advocates the idea of absolutism as a result of worship.

Spirituality and Religion: An Observation

It is worth noting that there have been tendencies to mix up religion with spirituality. Though there has been a huge association of these two but we need to be very cautious about using one for another. There has been few aspects of both which somewhat makes

distinctions between spirituality and religion. Religion is commonly defined as a formal and organized system of values, beliefs, and behaviours related to spirituality that is organized and shared within a community and is transmitted over time (Canda & Furman, 2010). Religion can be seen as a wide realm containing both individual and institutional components. On the other hand, within or outside of the structure of institutionalised religion, spirituality means a growing profundity of consciousness, connection to the transcendent, involvement in spiritual practices. Spirituality is generally viewed as a cluster of beliefs, experiences and practices, which are defined as distinct from, although related to, religious ritual, doctrine, and orthodoxy. Elkins and his colleagues (1988) point out, developing spirituality can add meaning to the practice of religion, and conversely, the practice of religion can deepen spirituality.

The traditional practices of religion are not able to meet the requirements in the development of the desirability of spirituality among the youth; thus the spiritual connections. Modernity has changed the courses of how people desire their lifestyles, ideas, economy, religious perspectives etc. The environmental factor has to be looked into, too. The idea of divinity of the past is in the course of changing its meaning or has come up with new interpretations. Thus the religion alone is incapable of meeting the needs for the youth for the attainment of spirituality as religion claims to provide.

Connecting Youth Development and Spirituality

Discussing in terms of spirituality development and its importance among the youth, finding self or an identity within is very crucial in the adolescence period. Spirituality is a foundation which enables them to give utmost importance to inner self development, family and society. It helps them to grow in both teenage years and future adult life. The identity searching inspires the adolescents to rise above a cognitive and emotional focus on self and to try to find ways to play crucial part in adding values, justice, and virtuousness in his or her world. 'In particular, youth spirituality is regarded as young people's developmental search engine for connectedness, meaning, and being in touch with what is most vital to one's life; it

opens youth to an adult life of personal meaningfulness and social responsibility' (Lerner et al., 2008). Scholars like Benson along with few others have offered an analytical definition. They understood 'Spiritual development is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than itself, including the sacred. It is the developmental "engine" that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices' (Benson et al., 2012, p.454).

Inclination of Indian Youth towards Spirituality

In India, we can observe that the fulfilment of spirituality has been heavily linked with the practices of religions customs from the ancient past. These traditions has not lost its ground at all among the people of India though modernity has made its way for the development of thinking processes among the new generation. Whatsoever, to be able to grasp the proper meaning of spirituality we need to distinguish the religious aspect and spirituality.

Spirituality connects one's soul with the universal soul. We as Indians are blessed that India is officially the land of saints where spirituality grows, is nurtured, persevered and applied in peoples' lives. Being youth of India if we do not practice spirituality in day today life then it's akin to swimming in an ocean of wisdom and not tasting a drop.

When discussing about the idea of spirituality, Rabindranath Tagore's notion of spiritual freedom is well noted. Tagore believed that freedom is not compartmental instead it is global. Tagore linked freedom with spiritual and mental phenomenon. He propounded "Real freedom is of the mind and spirit: it can never come to us from outside. He only has freedom who ideally loves freedom himself and is glad to extend it to others. He who cares to have slaves must chain himself to them; he who builds walls to create exclusion for others builds walls across his own freedom; he who distrusts freedom in others loses his moral right to it" (R. Manjula, 2014, p.66). He was

convinced that without spiritual freedom, social freedom does not exist. The importance of spiritual impact on peoples' life has been undeniably realised very much.

The youth of India are in very pitiable condition as they thrust towards a competitive rush, restless material world and void of inner peace and belief. The life of youth is stagnant only on fake smile, showoff things and their happiness depends upon only like and comments which is far from reality and actual things and peace. The aim of spirituality is to keep one's mind to focus on one thing which is very necessary for the youth, focus on high priority goals in life, study, building their character and help in the development of our nation. Meditation and a move towards spirituality are known to give amazing results to students in terms of improved concentration, focus and sharper memory. Therefore, meditation is a prime way in practice of spirituality. Besides meditation, there are other ways of practicing spirituality like detachment from selfish motive and not hurting others. Competitive studies are where the expectations are higher like never before not only from family and society but from the person himself. In such an environment it is natural to feel the nerves and get stressed. They feel they need to adapt themselves in this competition or else they will perish as long stated by Charles Darwin's theory of "Survival of the Fittest". In this competitive and an increasingly violent world it is important that we foster spirituality in youngsters. Not only young ones are going to be benefitted from the power of spirituality but in fact spirituality is finding its new meaning and dimensions as youngsters look for a scientific logic behind being spiritual. A research suggested that children who were aware of spiritual practices are also more confident and self-assured, and generally have a better sense of who they were. More evident were changes that had to do with the stage of life of the young people. Generally spiritually oriented students have a more defined understanding of their goals – from deciding on a specific profession to learning about the process required to reach their goal. In general, their goals have become more realistic.

A number of researches have highlighted the importance of spirituality in the mental health scenario as it provides resilience,

psychological well-being, a sense of meaning, optimism, hope, moral code, quality of life, life satisfaction, positive emotions and reduces negative emotions. It has also been reported to help develop an understanding of self, fulfills the potentialities of one's abilities through virtues and prepares them to resolve problems creatively as well as constructively.

They were based on the idea that everyone should develop their moral, intellectual and physical qualities so as to become an integral member of their caste. The aim of the ancient Indian education was originally laid down by the Vedas, the sacred writings, according to which the world is pervaded by divinity. They were based on the idea that everyone should develop their moral, intellectual and physical qualities so as to become an integral member of their caste. The aim of ancient Indian education was laid down by the Vedas such as Bhagwata Gita, Purana and Mahabharata laid down that the early habits made people's life better later on. One of the most important shlokas of Bhagwat Gita is "Karmenye Vadhikaraste Ma Phalesu Kadachana" which means we have got right on our deeds and not on the result of our deeds. This short message has directly influenced our practical life. The education system has witnessed vivid transformation from post-vedic period to British period in respect of knowledge development as well modern education system in India.

In that sense, the new NEP is a paradigm shift in that it focuses on learner-centric systemization of the learning process based on the biological, physical and mental development of a child with the flexibility of multiple entry and exit options as well as a Credit Bank concept of academic and vocational achievements.

One of the misconceptions regarding spiritual education is that it resembles religious education which is not completely justified as the meaning of a spiritual education encompasses more than that. Therefore, there is not such kind of academic curriculum in schools, colleges or higher studies. Recently, Yoga has become a compulsory subject in schools and other educational institutions in India. Like Columbia University, there is a need to transform public and private

education by promoting moral and spiritual development within schools. Nowadays, increased attention is given to spirituality in medical care in USA and Europe but not in India. Spirituality in education not only leads to understanding educational content, but it also reinforces the argumentation and analytical methods of thinking among learners. It should be included in school curriculum so that our children become aware of the importance of living with bonhomie with the rest of the world. A spiritual and enlightened youth would surely build a better future not only for himself but for his nation and in turn brighten the future for this world. ■

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References

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