Life Skills Spectrum for Sustainable Youth in Disruptive Technological Era: An Indian Outlook

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ABSTRACT

The Indian civilization has withered all the storms of time and torment. It has proved itself to be an illuminated and wise way of life through the propagation of the skills and attributes necessary to live a complete and healthy life.

The need for the enhancement and incorporation of these values is being felt with a sense of urgency and aiming at sustainability of human life in the age of technologically enabled cut throat competitiveness. The fabric of Indian traditional values has been highly accommodating towards the diversified Diasporas and enduring. Such a historic evolution gives a unique status in the global context.

The ‘Sanatan Parampara’ as envisaged in the Indian tradition is thought to be the healthy way of living which can provide adequate cushioning to the stress and anxiety laden work-home space. The present study proposes to highlight the impact of the Indian traditions and value systems, through certain models, on the Indian workforce and the youth in specific, towards inculcating the essential life skills in the era of technology ruled life.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Life Skills, Sustainability, Stress, Anxiety, Traditions, Universal Values.

INTRODUCTION

DEMOGRAPHIC NEED FOR LIFE SKILLS

The life force of any economy majorly constitutes the ‘youth’ component of the population. They represent the progress gauge and futuristic orientation of humanity world over. The age group of 10-24 years constitutes one fourth of the total population in the world. It is further divided into the two subsets of:

- Adolescents in the age group from 10 – 19 years
- Youth in the age group from 15 – 24 years (as per the international definition)
The year 2030 marks the deadline for achieving the parameters (UN SDGs) which will decide whether the mankind will sustain in the decades to come or suffer from the diseases spanning from physical, psychological and emotional. The latter ones being dreaded as the new age epidemics. The important component in the Mission 2030 is intrinsic to the physical, mental, academic and professional requirements and aspirations of the youth populace across the world. India is a young country because it has the distinction of having largest youth population among all countries. At a time when the developed world is witnessing a population decrease, the Indian blood has new spark and vibrant skill sets that can be used across the economic sectors in the world. More than 600 million Indians are under the age of 25 years which is an incomparable benefit for the nation. As per the predictions of the international agency UNFPA, India is going to be the home for one of the youngest populations in the world till the year 2030 and the “youth pulse” is going to last till 2025 according to the demographic trends.

An estimate says that by the end of the year 2022, the median age in India will be 28 years, which is much less than the countries like China, USA, Europe, and Japan. The working – age population in India has already out-numbered the non-working age population. India stands at the golden opportunity to harness the “demographic dividend” that began around the year 2004-2005 for the next five decades. The demographic benefit in terms of the comparatively younger population is going to prove useful only if the skills related to the mental, intellectual and spiritual domain are taken care of.

**NEED FOR DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS**

While the good news is that India will be working and progressing for a longer time comparatively, the point to worry is that the youth is struggling to cope with the challenges and pressure of the fast changing working environment. The world is an integration of the economies which pose their own difficulties in working and succeeding. The recent health studies conducted on the mental and psychological problems faced by the Indian youngsters has revealed some shocking statistics.

The study conducted by the competent authorities has shown that the young citizens of India are fighting hard against the problems like depression, anxiety, other problems related to the mental health.

Recently, the mental health has received the due recognition in the Indian media and policy making platforms as well. This was also described in the report of the “National Mental Health Survey (NMHS).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Manifestation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Suicide cases</td>
<td>15 people every hour,</td>
<td>Top most cause of death in the age group 15-29 years.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Mental morbidity</td>
<td>One out of every five</td>
<td>Disorders related to mood, depression, stress related problems, hyper-activity,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>adolescents</td>
<td>attention deficit syndrome</td>
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**The following table gives a brief overview of the worrisome state:**
The reasons for the above state can be attributed to multitude of factors ranging from domestic and family issues to social pressures of varying nature. The new age economy has come with its pros and cons causing many unique disorders related to the new and compulsive lifestyle.

The World Health Organization has warned India about the economic losses amounting to a huge figure of 1.03 Trillion Dollars as a result of the bleak mental health conditions of the afflicted Indians during the period 2012-2030. India is at a critical threshold where the magnificent potential of the working population surplus can quickly convert into a trauma if the life skill deficiencies are not mitigated carefully.

There is a rising awareness and demand to put in place an adequate educational policy framework which inculcates the necessary skills in the youngsters, especially the life skills.

This will enable the young population to develop the capability and imbibe the value of making informed and healthy decisions in life. Cognizance has been taken of the effectiveness, importance and value of “life skills” in creating successful personal and professional profiles. The young people today have experienced unprecedented socio-cultural and economic changes, for which the coping methodologies are still a subject of research.

The international agencies of repute like the WHO, UNICEF, and UNFPA have duly emphasized the need of imparting the life skills in the young populace.

To exemplify, the “Life Skills Education (LSE)” as propounded by the World Health Organization, is an educational initiative that has been chalked out to cater to the development of life skills. A “skill” can be understood as a learned or absorbed competency to carry out anything properly. Therefore, the term “life skills” can be equated with the development of such cognitive, emotional, or social abilities which make the individual decipher the knowledge, values, and attitudes into empowered and robust behaviors.

**TYPES OF LIFE SKILLS**

The most differentiating factor for the young population is that they have to inculcate special 21st century skills to competently deal with the unique environmental challenges. This matter has gained special concern as the working force needs to be adequately armored with the competencies and skills required for participating efficiently in economic activities, being a socially responsible citizen, and positively coping and adapting to the new challenges posed by rapid technological changes across all spheres of life.

An amalgamation of prominent business leaders and educators as “Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21)” have put forth a blue-print of the different capabilities required for the 21st century professional and personal spheres.
ANCIENT INDIAN PRINCIPLES AND FOSTERING OF LIFE SKILLS

The human life and the associated social fabric cannot flourish without an adequate order or system of living. The life skills as promulgated by the recently formed world organizations, have long been made an integral part of the Indian life style through the ‘Gruh Shiksha’ and ‘Gurukula Shiksha’ prevalent since ages in India. The ‘Sanatana Dharma Parampara’ leads the human life towards fulfillment in all aspects of an individual’s life. India has been the cradle of many popular religions of the world, and is hailed as ‘land of religions’. Hinduism, which is originally identified as the ‘Sanatana Dharma’ or ‘Eternal Religion’ or ‘Eternal Law’ or ‘Eternal Dharma’, has withstood the test of time and established itself as the most enduring and natural ‘Way of Living’.

A deep study reveals that ‘Sanatana Dharma’, which is essentially free from any limited or factional inclinations, is the world’s most ancient culture followed by over a billion people across the globe. The inherent meaning of the word ‘Sanatana’ is “the one without any beginning” or “the one which is endless”. Besides, the foundation of “Sanatana Dharma” cannot be attributed to any single person or section of people, which aptly qualifies it as a way of living supported by a judicious, enlightened and consistent take on real world. The principles and practices as propounded by the “Sanatana Dharma” are deeply embedded in the very nature and scheme of the Universe.
The main tenets of the “Sanatan Dharma” are directly linked to the human existence in this world with a code of conduct and spiritual freedom at its core. The young population of today is plagued with more psychological and mental disorders than the physical ailments. This has become more alarming in the recent times when globalization and digitalization have taken prominence, demanding a new life style and mindset for personal and professional success.

The World Health Organization released its new estimates in March 2017 according to which depression and allied complications are the leading cause of ill-health and disorders. There has been a huge rise of more than 18% in the reported incidences worldwide between 2005 and 2015, which has put all the concerned agencies on guard and efforts are being made to tackle this problem. The whole world is talking more and more about inculcating the necessary “life skills” among the young people as one of the most effective way to deal with the new epidemic.

The Indian system of living is naturally inclined towards the eternal dharma envisaged in the tenets of Sanatana Dharma and different Indian Scriptures like Bhagwad Gita. The life principles propounded in these sacred texts have been crystallized through the experiences of the people and the wisdom of the preachers. The principles and values have stood the test of time and space since they are relevant even today and across the countries. Many academic institutions have taken up research in the area of Indian spiritual texts and their inherent value.

The ancient Indian scriptures are replete with eternal inspirations, the inherent motivation to lead lives of highest grade. The knowledge in these sacred texts has evolved from the depths of the very nature of human beings, the paths which bring solace to the existence of the individual. These scriptures have been founded on the immortal principles of human nature and these have retained their significance throughout the ages.

PRINCIPLES OF ANCIENT INDIAN TEXTS
The principle contextual guidelines propounded by the ancient Indian sources to help an individual develop the required emotional skills are the following:

- An individual, the youngsters especially, must learn to live in the ‘present’, instead of re-living the past repeatedly without any recourse, and dwelling in future with worrisome attitude. The ‘now’ is the most powerful of all the time periods and one should concentrate the energy in making the best positive use of that time.
- The 21st century occupational hazard called stress, whether emotional, physical or social, can be nipped in the bud if the young people learn the art of detachment and develop the quality of dedication by leaving all fears and anxieties.
- The situation, whether favorable or unfavorable, should be dealt with the same calm and composed demeanor or in other words should be dealt with an aplomb or “samatva or sambhava”. This is to be done for all the things, all the time and at all the places.
- The ancient Indian wisdom teaches that the basic happiness of a human being is internal and not external as widely believed. If the internal happiness is dealt with the help of the attitude of equanimity, the external aspect is automatically taken care of.
• The Supreme Power has bestowed upon the human character, the power to use one’s free will to conquer the unwanted attributes or “Vasanas” and inculcate the desirable ones.
• Therefore, the “Yoga Sadhana” or the “discipline of senses” takes precedence over the “sensual gratification”.
• The bridge between two human beings is the process of communication. The fundamental principle which is advocated to be followed in communication is “Purity”, both external as well as internal. The ancient wisdom guides the individuals to aspire for sweetness of speech which assures unity and welfare for all.
• Besides cleanliness, the purity aspect in communication skills circumscribes the important attributes like straightforwardness, frankness or honesty, decency, softness, and innocence while transmission of thoughts and complete absence of bitterness, hatred, pride, and prejudice in the entire process.
• Assertiveness, one of the components of the social life skills, comes out strong in the form of truthfulness and mutual trust. The behavioral dealings among individuals are based upon the foundation of mutual trust. If the individuals become the reasons for breaking this seal of faith, the entire social fabric can break beyond repair. Therefore, truthfulness is the undoubted foundation of human society.
• Indian scriptures vehemently believe and support the concept of “Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam”, which means that the entire earth constitutes one big family. This belief is the basis for the development of cooperation skills. The ancient Indian wisdom propounds “harmony of religions”. The development of skill needed to cooperate with the fellow beings and the natural surroundings also helps to resolve the conflict situations.
• The empathy value is very important and exhibits through the recognition of the element of “divinity” in all. The compassion, charity and non-aggression for all the creations on this earth promulgate that one should never be the initiator and enforcer of violence of any kind, but, at the same time, one should not be a mere spectator to the injustice done to self and take adequate guard against the blow.
• The problem solving skills acquire great eminence in today’s competitive world. The Indian scriptures give a wonderful way to develop this skill in the young people of 21st century. These texts say that the art of problem solving lies in understanding of a simple rule that everything in this material world is “transient” in nature and the principle of “karma yoga” directs one to discharge responsibilities and duties without any attachment to the result. The root cause of all the problems, according to the ancient Indian scriptures, is the deep involvement of the affected parties and their subsequent inability to see the whole situation without any bias. The art of problem solving envisages integration of all the above tenets.
• The spiritual texts of ancient India show the path to develop the critical thinking skills by becoming “Dhira”, meaning those individuals who are not disturbed or swayed away by the causes. The mind remains still and in such a state the critical thinking capacity is crystallized and exhibited. The individual is expected to cultivate an analytical and experimental outlook which leads to critical thinking.
• Another uniqueness of the human mind is the ability of creative thinking. The individual’s mind is one great factory of creative solutions to mundane and serious issues. The synchronization of the human mind with that of the supreme power through total surrender or “Sharanagati” paves way for creative thought process. When the human mind vibrates in
the surrender mode to the Almighty, the universe also vibrates in resonance providing out of the box solutions to the seemingly difficult problems.

- The decision making ability is highly desirable in today’s youth since the work-home apace demands such potential. Many a times, in the competitive situations, the young individuals face dilemma as to what to do in a tricky situation. The answer is given by the sacred ancient Indian scriptures, that, one has to perform the duty with detachment and self-control.
- The scriptures entail that a man is made by the quality of thoughts; therefore, the individual must dwell in pure thoughts, develop virtues and radiate goodness in the universe in order to be successful.

CONCLUSION
The personal and professional outcomes expected after adequate training in ‘Life Skills’ can be summarized as below:

- The life skill education is fundamental in accessing the basic natural education which is necessary to lead a good life.
- The life skill education fosters parity of genders, where there is equal respect and consideration for both males and females.
- The training in life skills makes a person value and practices the virtues of freedom, justice & equality.
- The individuals trained in life skills develop within themselves socially responsible behavior and give respect to all the stakeholders of the environment.
- The rights of children are appreciated and ensured by individuals who are educated in life skills.
- The overall quality of life improves because the skilled individuals act in accordance with the eternal laws governing the human existence.
- The development of life skills ensures that the education systems responsible for preparing the individuals for life is competent and meets the quality standards.
- The individuals properly trained in life skills promote, prefer, and understand the importance of continuous and life-long learning.
- The training ensures that the individuals exhibit the cardinal virtues necessary for encouraging peace.

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