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Imparting Soft Skills through Teaching of Literature

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Abstract:
Literature serves two important purposes. One is to give enjoyment, and other is to instruct. That is, Art is for Art's sake as well as for society's sake. Not only the modern literature, but the ancient literature also strongly believed that literature should play key role in taking care of social welfare, social transformation and societal progress. Though the mode of transformation aspired or visualized by the ancient writers and modern writers relatively differ based on the circumstances in which they lived, fundamentally both agreed upon the utility value of literature. That is why, Nannaya, who is considered as Adi Kavi (first Poet) in Telugu, first of the trio who translated Mahabharata into Telugu said in his Andhra Sabdha Chintamani, "Viswa Sreyah Kavyam" – meaning 'Literary work's main purpose is universal welfare'. Whether it is Sanskrit, English, Telugu or any other language, the main objectives of teaching language and literature are: (i) to help the students learn and use the language; (ii) to help them relish the literature (to take pleasure in the literature); and (iii) to teach useful things for betterment in their life. This article emphasis on the third, but most important purpose, that is, to inculcate Soft Skills or Life Skills through the teaching of Literature.
Keywords: Soft skills, Literature, social transformation

Introduction:
The debate on the utility value of language and literature has been there since ages. After the emergence of specific and specialized fields of Science and Technology in the last few decades, there has been lesser importance to the study of literature. Further, there have been arguments and counter arguments over which is important – language or literature, sometimes virtually resulting in divisions among the academicians who support either of these two. But, it is important to note that the role of a Language teacher is not just to instruct but also to inspire. Compared to the teachers of other subjects, the teachers of language and literature ought to play bigger role in motivating and inspiring the pupils and transforming them into responsible citizens.

The study of literature always has two aspects – one of simple enjoyment and appreciation, the other of analysis and exact description. Behind every book is a man, behind the man is the race; and behind the race are the natural and social environments whose influence is unconsciously reflected in a work of literature. Since it is difficult to define literature in exact terms, let us look at the essential qualities of literature:

Qualities of literature:
(i) **Artistic:** The first significant thing is the essentially artistic quality of all literature. The poet can artistically present more things which may appear so common to other people. Kavi is Kranthadarshi. For example, while

others enjoyed in plucking the flowers and adorning them, one 'Karunasree – Jandhyala Papayya Sastry" only could lent his voice for their lament and thus produced the immortal 'Pushpa Vilaapam' kavyam.

(ii) **Suggestive:** The second quality of literature is its suggestiveness**.** Its appeal to our emotions rather than to our intellect.

(iii) **Permanence:** The third quality of literature is permanence i.e., time remains the most important factor in judging the popularity of a work of literature.

Tests of Literature:

There are two **tests** to identify good literature. They are:

1. Its Universal interest
2. Its personal style

Those who withstand these two tests only can remain as great poets/ great writers for generations and called "Yuga Karthas". The best examples in the world literature in this regard are: Valmiki and Kalidasa in Indian Literature and Shakespeare in English Literature.

Importance of Literature:

It is a curious and prevalent opinion that literature, like all art, is a mere play of imagination, pleasing enough, like a new novel, but without any serious or practical importance. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Literature is not just for enjoyment. It has a practical purpose and social responsibility too. Literature preserves the ideals of a people; and ideals – love, faith, duty, friendship, freedom, reverence – are the part of human life most worthy of preservation.

To understand any age or people, we must read not simply their history which records their deeds, but their literature, which records the dreams that made their deeds possible. So Aristotle was profoundly right when he said that "poetry is more serious and philosophical than history." Goethe explained literature as "the humanization of the whole world." Maxim Gorkey said that three persons build the culture – and they are the Scientist, the Artist and the worker. Thus, writer is a partner in building the culture. Hence, great writers create their works of art with specific purpose and for them; literature is not just for the sake of art. Literature is not an end itself, but a means to serve greater purpose.

While Valmiki was praised by all our poets, Errana's opinion was greater than others. In the excuse of praising Valmiki, he describes the role of literature. He narrated quite well the purpose of literary creation: Errana, one of the Kavithraya of Telugu literature tells in his Nrusimha Purana, that by writing Ramayana, Valmiki removed the animalistic characteristics from the mankind. Viewing an artist or a writer as a builder of culture means this only. Literature is the artistic form of human life. A writer plays his role in this field. Therefore, no work of art is useless or purposeless.

Dr Bajrang Korde, Professor and Head of English Department of University of Pune says that 'learning language through Literature is like taking Homoeopathy Medicine and learning language through Grammar and Communication Skills is like Allopathy'. His point was that values and emotional involvement in literary works has indirect impact on learning language and it greatly helps in learning soft skills required in all walks of life and business today. Many suggest that teaching great

literary works has quite a positive impact on our mind.

So, this paper tries to explore the aspects such as:

1. What is meant by 'Soft Skills'
2. The importance of learning soft skills
3. The categorization of soft skills; and
4. How the teaching life literature can be used as a medium or opportunity to inculcate Soft Skills in our students; with the help of some examples.

(i) Definition of Soft Skills:

Soft Skills can be defined as the non-technical skills, abilities, and traits required to function in a specific employment environment. They are also called employable skills, and even life-skills. Some define Soft Skills as the ability to communicate in both written and verbal forms and the ability to interact with fellow employees in a positive manner. Soft Skills are essentially people skills – the non-technical, intangible, personality-specific skills that determine your strengths as a leader, listener, negotiator and conflict mediator. "Hard Skills", on the other hand, are more along the lines of what might appear on your resume – your education, experience and level of expertise.

(ii) Importance of Soft skills:

Soft Skills are necessary to work effectively as a member of a team, to learn or acquire the technical skills necessary to perform a task, to inspire the confidence of supervisors and management, and to understand and adapt to the cultural norms of the work place.

(iii) Categorization / List of Soft Skills:

There is no one exhaustive list of soft skills that is agreed by all. But, these are said to include many personal skills such as:

1. Communication Skills – The first & foremost which further includes – Language & Communication, Verbal & Non-verbal communication; Body language; active listening; Good speaking, good reading and good writing skills; Group discussions; Presentation skills and Public speaking skills, etc.
2. Interpersonal skills
3. Anger Management skills
4. Conflict Resolution/ Conflict Management skills
5. Decision making skills – including problem solving skills, creativity & innovation in decision making, out of the box thinking, etc.
6. Goal setting
7. Time Management
8. Proper Attire & Etiquette
9. Stress Management
10. Self – confidence
11. Critical thinking / constructive criticism
12. Ability to accept & learn from criticism
13. Information gathering
14. Self-motivation & Initiative
15. Crisis Management
16. Work ethics, dependability & personal qualities
17. Tolerance skills
18. Leadership & supervisory skills
19. Team work and collaboration skills
20. Flexibility/ Adaptability
21. Positive attitude
22. Working well under pressure, etc.

The above mentioned is not an exhaustive list of soft skills but just indicates the important ones.

(iv) Inculcating Soft Skills through teaching of Literature:

Many of the classic as well as modern literary texts across the languages are helpful in inculcating certain soft skills among the student community:

1. Communication Skills:

Our ancient scriptures prescribe six basic elements of speech viz., (1) Maadhuryam (Sweetness); (2) Akshara vyakthi (Verbatim); (3) Padachchedam (Proper phrasing of words); (4) Suswara (Good tone); (5) Dhairyam (Courage); and (6) Laya (Proper stress). The Bhartruhari Subhashithas tell as: "Vagbhushanam bhushanam" i.e., the Speech is the best ornament and not any other materialistic ornaments.

Ramayana is the best source for narrating the principles and characteristics of good communication. Rama himself is seen as the embodiment of good communication skills. Valmiki describes him as 'Mitha bhashi' (Who speaks less), 'Madhura Bhashi' (who speaks sweetly); and 'Poorva Bhashi' (who initiates the communication proactively). Further, we come across an able, matured and apt communicator in Hanuma. When Hanuma meets Rama and Laxmana to convey the message from Sugreeva, his speech and communication skills were appreciated by Lord Rama.

Appreciating the communication skills of Hanuma, Rama says to Laxmana: "Nay...the non-knower of Rig Veda, or the non-rememberer of Yajur Veda, or the non-scholar of Saama Veda... can possibly or truly speak this way... [4-3-28]; "Definitely grammar is severally and comprehensively learnt by him... and though much is said by him not a single word has gone amiss of verbiage... [4-3-29]; "On his face or eyes, or on forehead or brows, or on other faculties of expression no fault is found...even at the least..." [4-3-30]; "Unexpanded, un-doubtful, un-delaying and non-dissonant is the tenor of his speech, and it comports in his chest or throat in a medium tone..."[4-3-31]; "He has orderly refinement in speech that is remarkable and un-delaying, and he speaks propitious words that are heart-pleasing..."[4-3-32]; "His speech is generated in three places is enthralling... and whose heart is it that is disenchanted, even that of an enemy after raising his sword at him, on hearing his speech..." [4-3-33] (Three places to generate speech are ***urashi*** at chest, ***shirashi*** at head, ***kanTha*** at throat. A real speqker of his mind has to generate his speech in these three areas, without rendering any lip service. Again this is the rule of Vedic *siksha* namely the training.]; "Oh, faultless Lakshmana, if this sort of envoy is not there to a king, really how can that king accomplishes his ways and means..." [4-3-34] "Should a king have this kind of work accomplishers with a variety of virtues, all his objectives will be achieved impelled by such an envoy's words..." Rama thus said to Lakshmana. [4-3-35].

Similar examples can be taken from literatures of other languages too.

2. Oratory Skills and Public Speaking Skills:

Mark Antony's speech in 'Julius Caesar' play by Shakespeare is a marvelous example of how much influence a speaker can exercise over his listeners, by using poignant words and pun.

The speech of Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, etc., can also be used to exemplify the skills of public speaking.

Further**,** a poem written by **Nissim Ezekiel- "Good bye party to Miss Pushpa T.S."** exemplifies in a funny way how should not a be a public speech. In this poem, Ezekiel uses simple Indian' English. Here he is making gentle fun of the people who cannot speak English

properly by including in the poem common mistakes made by speakers whose mother tongue is not English. There are grammatical mistakes, strange arrangements of words and phrases and idioms which are direct translations of expressions in Indian languages - they all sound very odd in English. Hence, this piece of lesson can be used as a tool for explaining proper public speaking skills, decorum, etc.

3. Inter Personal Skills:

Ramayana exemplifies how the ideal relations should exist – among family members, i.e., between wife & husband, among brothers, between King & Ministers, Leader & followers, between friends, etc.

4. Motivation & Counseling Skills:

Bhagavadgita is the best motivating source and Lord Krishna is the first and the best Professional Motivator & Counsellor. He could transform the 'Battle field' into a counseling cell and change the totally de-motivated and emotionally wreck Arjuna into an able warrior and winner. In Ramayana also, 'Jambavantha's motivation to Hanuma exemplifies how the innate skills of a person can be brought out with positive motivation and support. The speeches of Swamy Vivekananda, Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, APJ Abdul Kalam, etc., and the biographies of Swamy Vivekananda, Mother Teresa, Helen Keller, Mahatma Gandhi, APJ Abdul Kalam, etc., can be used as tools for motivating the students and developing their personalities.

5. Etiquette:

Etiquette means – the totality of our attire, movements and behavioural aspects in the work place and professional environment. Generally, this term is used to indicate – the way in which one should behave himself in a foreign environment. All of us know the proverb 'Be a Roman while in Rome'. The advice given by Polonius to his son Laertes in the play 'Hamlet' written by Shakespeare stands as a good example for advising someone on etiquette or behavior. It shows how to conduct oneself in the world. Similarly, Kanva's advice to Shakunthala while sending her to Dushyanta also can be used for advising behavior at foreign places.

6. Decision Making Skills:

Decision making is very important not only at employment place but also at every aspect of life, particularly for a student. The cost of indecision or oscillation in decision making may be exemplified by the character of prince Hamlet in Shakespeare's play 'Hamlet – the Prince of Denmark'. His procrastination costs his valuable life.... 'To be or not to be that is the question...' He always spends time in thinking than taking concrete decision. Bhagavadgita also condemns the indecisiveness by saying 'Samshayatma vinashyathi'. In student's life decision making is important either w.r.to career options or higher studies. They have to choose the right path out of many alternatives available. The poem 'The Road Not Taken' by Robert Frost can be of good help in teaching the students the value of choosing alternatives in life and taking a right decision.

7. Leadership & Team Building Skills:

A leader is someone who can inspire/ motivate his followers and accomplish the task or achieve the goal with their support. A leader should have faith, compassion and love towards his followers to gain their support genuinely. 'Team Building' skill includes honouring equally every member of the team, and allotting the activities based on the

interests and capabilities of the team members. Rama lead the team of Vanaras to accomplish his task of bringing Sita back from Lanka. Even a small quirrel which made a little contribution in its own way, during construction of Setu, the bridge, across the sea, also got its due respect and honour from the leader – Rama.

8. Positive Attitude:

Literature is the best tool for infusing the qualities of positive attitude and hard work among the students. Here are some literary pieces which can be of help in developing positive attitude among them. Kalidasa's oem "Look to this day" (a translation from Sanskrit), and H.W. Longfellow's poem "Trust No future..." emphasise the importance of the present time and advice not to worry much about the unchangeable past and unimaginable future. This helps the students in taking their past failures as steps for success.

9. Change Management:

Change is the only constant thing in the nature. Whether the employees or students, everybody has to go along with the changing environment and must make himself accustomed to the demanding situations. Lord Byron says as follows: "Look abroad through Nature's range; Nature's mighty law is change'. Such lines help the teacher in emphasizing the inevitability of change in life and importance of managing it.

10. Anger Management:

Management of Anger, frustration, pressure and other emotions is very important for any employee. Hence, the students should be taught how to manage their emotions.

There would be many literary pieces which will help the teacher in inculcating these emotional management skills. With the help of the novel 'The Mayor of Casterbridge', one can learn how strong emotions like anger, jealousy, etc., will ruin one's own life. The 'Udamkopakhyana' chapter of Mahabharatha also exemplifies how the Brahmin student Udanka's anger invites equally powerful Shapa from the King Paushya.

As elaborated above, several important Soft skills can be inculcated among the students of undergraduate and post graduate level with the help of the literature texts whether of poetry, prose or non-detailed sections.

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