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English literature and Bharatiya values: Exploring soft skills through a comparative lens

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ABSTRACT

After the World Wars, literature across the continent witnessed continental, national, regional and societal voices through diverse literary and artistic expressions. As a result of that in literary tradition such as American literature, Indian literature, Dalit literature has raised voices and artistic creativity. Over the time English literature evolved and spread across the continents. Thus in India, English language and literature had witnessed colonial past where after decolonization, the language of representation has evolved. In which Indian literature also depicted the harsh reality, pain, struggle and societal imbalances through the use of language.

In India, English literature curricula often detached from Indigenous knowledge systems. Life skills including soft skills were considered as western contribution. They were attached to human as external entities to learn and adapt. On the other hand Indian ancient knowledge system considered soft skills as integral part human personality development. Thus cultural rootedness, societal reality, decolonization, oriental voices and holistic development became the need of the time. Where Even NEP 2020 emphasized IKS with skills inculcation as moral ethical human competence rather than merely employability skills.

Thus, the paper aims to present literary analysis of selected texts and Bharatiya values which were essentially inbuilt in human nature and cannot be taught separately by detaching them from personality. The paper contributes in soft skills development through comparative lens by comprehensively understanding the soft skills through English literature and Bharatiya value system. For this the paper uses analytical, mixed, critical, demonstrative and textual methods. As in contemporary world, soft skills development is the need of the time.

KEYWORDS: English literature, Indian English Literature (IEL), Bharatiya Value System and NEP-2020, Soft Skills and IKS

1 Introduction

English literature classrooms in India already contribute to the development of soft skills. In the Eastern context, especially in India, the Bharatiya or Indian value system of ancient education considers soft skills to be a culturally, traditionally and philosophically deep-rooted system of values that cannot be separated from human personality and behavior. However, the role of Bharatiya value system is under-theorized, under-documented and often treated as incidental.

Bharatiya values such as Karuna (empathy and emotional intelligence), Dharma (ethical leadership), Samvada (communication skills), Viveka (critical thinking), Samatva (emotional regulation and stress management), Seva (teamwork and social responsibility), and Satya

(integrity and transparency) can be deeply understood through a comparative lens. English literature stimulates and develops communication and presentation skills, enhances empathy through engagement with characters, builds analytical and interpretative competence, and encourages teamwork through discussions, debates, and performances.

Hence, the role of literature is crucial in the development of soft skills. Soft skills are not merely a by-product of Western education; they are deeply rooted in the Indian value system as well. Thus, Bharatiya values provide valuable insights into soft skills and regard them as an integral part of human behavior that cannot be separated from the character. On the other hand, English literature offers a global and modern outlook towards these skills.

Hence, a comparative lens can essentially help in understanding soft skills through Bharatiya values alongside English literature. Values reflect in literature and literature serves as a mirror of society and it is shaped by experience and imagination. Hence, there is a need to fill this skills gap through Bharatiya values system and English literature.

2 Literature Review

The research focuses on soft skills' understanding through Bharatiya values and also with English literature with comparative lens. Soft skills include communication skills, empathy, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and ethical reasoning. And these all are recognized as the essential outcomes of humanities education. All these skills have encouraged through close reading, interpretation, dialogue and creative expression which was depicted by Bean (2011). He further argues that classroom teaching develops critical thinking and interpretative judgment as well which is fundamental soft skills.

Further, Robles (2012) asserts that, unlike hard skills, soft skills are related to interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies that enable learners to navigate complex social and professional contexts. However much of the literature originates from Western pedagogical frameworks with non-Western cultural contexts as asserted by Kumar (2015). This shows a clear gap, particularly for Indian educational settings where literature pedagogy must resonate with indigenous values and learners identities and social upbringing. On the other hand, Radhakrishnan (1958/2018) articulates that classical Indian philosophy showcases literature as a vehicle for moral and emotional refinement where texts considered as the lived experiences rather than merely an aesthetic object.

According to Sharma (2019) Indian epics such as Bhagavad Gita and Mahabharata engage learners in ethical dilemma and reflective decision making. Hence, literature in ancient period also gave the way to discuss about decision making and reflected human personality. Even Indian Knowledge System (IKS) has foregrounded pedagogical approaches that are rooted in dharma, Karuna, viveka and Samvada, which emphasis ethical development and human flourishing as asserted by National Education Policy [NEP] (2020).

Despite this rich tradition, English literature curriculum of mainstream education often **disconnects** texts and learners cultural contexts for better understanding of the texts. Hence, this gap invites comparative interdisciplinary study between Western literary pedagogy and Bharatiya value system. As in India, in higher education English studies often retain colonial legacies in text selection and pedagogical norms stated by Nayar (2015) hence, there is need to understanding the role of soft skills in comparative lens through Bharatiya value system.

Moreover, according to Damrosch (2003) comparative literature as a discipline encourages cross-cultural dialogue, enabling learners to see texts in relation to diverse worldviews. Hence, Das (2014) demonstrates that comparing English tragic literature with Indian narrative traditions reveals ethical practices which were unique to each culture thereby enrich students'

understanding of moral complexities and cultural empathy. Resonating with the views of Mukherjee (2010) argues that comparative reading cultivates critical consciousness to make reader aware about their own surroundings. Hence, this approach aligns with the goal to develop and understand soft skills through value rich culture and literary tradition.

Thus, it is evident that India academic discourse often treats literature as a linguistic skill rather than value-forming discipline as observed by Raina (2017). Thus, this gap points out the need for research that explicitly connects English literary texts with Bharatiya values to demonstrate how soft skills can be nurtured with culturally meaningful frameworks.

3 Soft Skills and its Relevance

Soft skills are human competencies; they reflect personal human traits in social existence. Soft skills are a part of life skills. Some important soft skills include - communication skills, personality development, emotional intelligence, empathy, and leadership skills. Soft skills are non-technical in nature; they are essential for human growth and professional career choices. Soft skills are different from hard skills. These skills are human-centered and can grow with time and experience. Soft skills are essential for the following:

- To understand human behavior, personality and cognitive competence.
- To make morally and ethically driven personal choices
- To make efficient use of resources, such as human capital and infrastructure
- To make social awareness deeper and stronger
- To enhance learning and achieve desired outputs

Thus, soft skills are essential to understand human life at both personal and professional level. These skills make human mind more nurtured, socially grounded and morally stronger. Soft skills are driven by global demands with respect to skilled workforce. Hence, soft skills have high relevance in both the personal life and in the professional workforce.

Soft Skills	Relevance
Communication skills	Intrapersonal and interpersonal understanding
Empathy	Socially rooted and coherent behavior
Emotional Intelligence	Values inculcation, such as kindness and compassion
Personality development	Value human dignity, respect for others perspectives
Teamwork	Healthy work culture, hence less stress
Leadership skills	Leads other, commitment for common goal and vision
Critical thinking	Balanced decision making and risk taking attitude

Fig.1: Soft skills and its Relevance

Figure 1 presents soft skills and their relevance. Soft skills are crucial for individuals in all walks of life. Soft skills such as communication skills, emotional intelligence, empathy, critical thinking, decision making are essential skills by understanding these skills and practicing these skills make human understand intrapersonal and interpersonal behavior, socially rooted and coherent behavior of human, healthy work culture etc., as illustrated in the above figure. Hence, soft skills are crucial for human behavior, through these skills, transformation in attitude and perspective takes place.

A. Soft Skills as Growth Capital

Soft skills are the strategic human assets; they function as a growth capital and are powerful assets for investment. Soft skills are crucial for human growth and its performance. Soft skills play crucial role in work culture. Soft skills are crucial for human growth and performance. These skills are crucial for inclusive growth and development of skilled workforce; hence these skills play a crucial role in shaping work culture. Soft skills work as a growth capital in such a ways:

- Individuals with soft skills handle communication well; they demonstrate impressive performance; they can persuade others.
- Individuals with soft skills show commitment to work and performance; they excel in leading teams.
- Individuals work for transformation and they work for growth.
- Individuals develop empathy and value system hence their emotional intelligence is higher in critical situations.
- Individuals with skills become more adaptive to situations; they show more resilient.
- Individual with skills handle the situation well; they become more aware about the situation.

Thus, soft skills work as a growth capital, in society they reflect culture and values, and in the profession they represent resilient, team management and efficient handling of the situation. Hence, the role of soft skills is crucial and these skills' comparative understanding through Bharatiya value system and English literature bring more valuable insights.

4 English Literature: a Laboratory of Soft skills Formation

Mathew Arnold has said that 'literature is the criticism of life'. Human lives in society and can imagine the desired life and actions. Hence, the human experience and imagination can be reflected in the literature. Literature has spur across the globe since ancient time and past ages. It can be oral and written in form. There are various genres of literature such as poetry, novels, essay, prose, drama etc. Hence literature can be considered as the artistic expression of human life and experiences.

Aristotle has said, 'human is the social animal' as human live in society, the values and life experiences get shaped in the society. Hence, it can be considered as the society is the foundational playground for artistic expression and literature become the voice to those experience and imagination. And soft skills are on the other hand, personal traits of human behavior. These skills are qualitative aspects of human personality. These skills are essential traits of human competencies hence their understanding from literature, reflection and development can be reflected through literature very effectively. Hence, literature is the laboratory to tests and retest and develop these skills.

Moreover, English literary tradition, in India has different past and colonial trauma has shaped the literature. Thus, English language and literature was not initially an accepted choice to get adopted but the forced learning tool in the mainstream of education. With time English became the medium of mainstream of education hence English, after independence adopted by Indian authors and the glorified Indian English literature (IEL) came in reality and it has shown past trauma, brutal life experiences, partition and communal disharmony etc., through the use of language and in the form of literature. Hence, English in India was used as an official language and soon after globalization it became the language world's communication, it has connected millions of native and non-native speakers. Thus, the role of English in India initially was as Western dominance later voice to show past trauma to humanity and now language that connects the people formally or informally.

English language has also produced variety of literature from ancient to modern. Hence, during colonization, English literature has dominated with western philosophy and ideas, thus in modern time soft skills were considered as the product of English literary tradition and soft skills were considered as the employability skills to be learn to get the job and enhance career opportunities. This attitude towards skills has reflected the detachment or disconnect of literary text from real life values. Hence, it is essential to understand the role of Bharatiya values with

respect to soft skills formation and English literature as a laboratory to study these skills to meet the global demand.

5 Bharatiya Values and Soft Skills

The educational tradition in India has deep rooted behavioral, social, and cultural roots. Since ages the Indian or Bharatiya education system has reflected inclusive, value driven education system. The human behavior and value development were the part of systemic educational curriculum. The residential educational system in ancient India, such as Nalanda University, has also taught the resilient, behavior management and relationship growth. The India oral literary tradition and written documents were also seen as the evidences that have flourished value system. Later with time the growth of education, evolution of society as a complex living system and spread of education thereby literature has contributed in understanding and application of self-competencies and moral value refinement. Hence, with time and soon after the globalization the idea of skills and demand for skilled workforce became the reality.

Bharatiya values are behavioral traits enjoyed by human in the society. These values are the reflection of family values, societal learning and cultural sphere. These values work in both the individual and public domain. The Bharatiya values such as Karuna (Empathy- Emotional Intelligence), Dharma (Ethical leadership), Samvada (Communication skills), Viveka (Critical thinking), Samatva (Emotional regulation and Stress management skills), Seva (Teamwork and Social responsibility) and Satya (integrity and transparency) etc., were deeply nurtured in all walks of Indian life and education system. In life, education and society these values get reflected. Hence, comparative lens to conceptualize soft skills through the understanding of Bharatiya values along with English literature became more evident.

Further, the National Education Policy 2020 has also brought Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into reality which essentially focuses on soft skills as an integral part of human character, behavior and personality. Thus, Bharatiya values were essentially see soft skills as an integral part of human development unlike Western education system which focuses on, skills as employability traits. Hence, the role of Bharatiya values is significant to conceptually understand soft skills and implement them in real life. Bharatiya values and its role can be understood in the following way with respect to soft skills.

Bharatiya Values	Soft Skills Developed	Literary Application in real life
Karuna	Kindness, empathy and emotional intelligence	By understanding moral conflicts in dramas or fictions in real life these conflicts can be avoided
Dharma	Justice and Ethical leadership	By understanding characters stand in literature one can take inspiration and guide their own actions
Vivek	Critical thinking	Dialogues of characters, their decisions in critical situation guide humans
Satya	Truth, integrity and transparency	By following the right path which was chosen by the characters in the literary work

Samvada	Communication skills	Dialogues and intrapersonal talks of characters
Seva	Service, Teamwork and Social responsibility	By promoting attitude of togetherness, benefits of all, such acts of the characters in literature can be presented through videos and audiovisuals aids
Karma	Accountability and agency	By understanding the sufferings of marginal voices one can understand the essence of kindness and compassion through literature
Sahishnuta	Cultural sensitivity and Dignity with acceptance or adaptive skills	Through cultural sensitivity, tolerance preserved by characters and positive aspects

Fig. 2. Bharatiya Values and Soft skills: Literary Application in Real Life

Figure 2 shows Bharatiya values and soft skills formation and its literary application in real life. It also shows how Bharatiya values actually represent modern connotation of soft skills. It also highlights the significance of Bharatiya values in real life. Hence, it can be said that soft skills were the integral part of human development.

Thus, Bharatiya values highlights the key soft skills are their significance in real life.

6 Bharatiya values as Soft Skills Framework: The Comparative Lens

Love, honest and kindness are the universal values, on the other hand, there are some particular values which can be specific to cultural and regional practices. Similarly, there are some soft skills which are related to human competence. Soft skills are not completely new phenomenon but they exist from long ago since the evolution of human society. As the society is the coexistence gathering of humans; hence, it can be said that relationship management, cultural harmony, adaptability, decision making, teamwork and leadership skills human has learned throughout the ages.

Hence, soft skills reflect age old tradition and Bharatiya value system reflect the internal spirit of human mind. Some of the soft skills through Bharatiya value system can be understood in the following ways:

- Samvada is the Bharatiya value which, reflect modern communication skill. As Indian English literature reflects cultural values and characters depicting their pain in literature on the other hand in English literature communication skills give priority to individual talks and issues, such as in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) the characters reflect their own issues and misunderstanding between Elizabeth and Darcy whereas Bharatiya values show social relevance in communication, role of societal values.
- Karuna which reflects kindness, empathy and emotional intelligence. It is one of the core Bharatiya value. Karuna is considered as the core aspect of human personality. In Indian tradition it has celebrated as a valuable traits of human personality on the other hand western philosophy which primarily can be seen in English literature depicts the social reality based

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judgments of human actions. Hence karuna is reflected in kindness, empathy and emotional endeavor. Hence, it is one of the essential skills, the modern world required to bring sensitivity in real life for critical issues.

- Vivek or critical thinking which inherently reflects wisdom, is one of the core Bharatiya values. It has celebrated as key skills in the literature as well as in ancient past as well. As critical thinking reflect human tendency and values for the world to be cherished. Hence vivek is one of the key soft skills to be learned with wisdom.

Thus is it evident that Bharatiya values (represented in figure 2), has greater significance in real life and these values reflect more human nature than humanity in just words. Hence the role of Bharatiya values is also a significant milestone to understand the core aspects of soft skills as well as English literature. Thus, it is appropriate to consider Bharatiya values as foundational backbone of soft skills with evolving time in Indian cultural context. And on the other hand literature is the mirror of human life and reflection of society and human traits as well as the laboratory for soft skills.

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