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Necessity of learning life skills – A reading of W. B. Yeats' The Ballad of Father Gilligan

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Abstract

The racing lifestyle of the mankind is in need to take a break from their digitalized world to look at something that we have forgotten long back. Such forgetfulness of the mankind has made them insensitive towards the values of human. There is a compulsion and urgency for the people to become aware of this scenario and act accordingly. This paper aims a reminding people to think about the values like responsibility, acceptance, emotional nourishment, life skills and inner peace. A twentieth century poem W. B. Yeats' The Ballad of Father Gilligan is taken to explore such values that can be adapted in everyday life. This paper helps the readers to understand the behavior of the external world and also reconcile the forgotten values.

Keywords: Life skills, inner peace, mankind, responsibility, values

1. Introduction

In the current scenario, human beings are digitalizing their life style with the temper of scientific technology. But still the racing lifestyle makes people go crazy and indulge in psychic behavior. Though people are provided with the scientific sophistication for their external world, they lag their inner peace and go haphazard. Mankind is in a compulsion and an urgency to reconcile the inner peace, which can be obtained through the individual conditioning by understanding the values of life. So people have to take a pause in their busy lifestyle and look at their inner self which is actually craving for the nourishment. That nourishment can easily be derived from the values which have been forgotten in the course of time. The forgotten values have been given different shades and names, finally has been evolved as life skills. Life skills have become one of the most important set of skills which can be learnt and taught multiple times through various sources like poetry, drama, novel and stories. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the life skills that are essential for human beings like acceptance, dedication and social responsibilities as mentioned in the poem The Ballad of Father Gilligan, which was written by the twentieth century poet W.B. Yeats.

William Butler Yeats is an Irish poet and one of the prominent poets of 20th century literature. A pillar of both the Irish and British literary establishments, in his later years he served as an Irish Senator for two terms. One of his poems is 'The Ballad of Father Gilligan' (Hereafter referred as TBFG) in which he narrates the story of a priest who worries for his people, who have died of an epidemic disease. One day he is sent for by a sick man in the village, but he dozes off in his chair as he is tired of continuous work before visiting the sick man's house. When he wakes up in the morning, he realizes that he has not done his duty. Then he rushes to the sick man's house where he is received by the man's wife. She tells him that the man has passed away peacefully and thanks the priest for his prayers that he has offered the previous night. Then the father realizes and kneels down to thank God for sending one of his angels to do his duty when he has slept of tiredness.

This poem takes up the form of a ballad which is a very traditional form used to tell a story. This poem emphasizes the village background since ballads belong to the illiterate rural folk which are transferred from one generation to the next generation by word of mouth. Even though this poem was written many years ago it can be read and re-read to understand the values it expresses. Through this poem the poet talks to his readers about the ethical values of life and social responsibilities of the mankind. This poem should be remembered by this smart world to adhere the smartness of the olden days to lead a peaceful life.

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Hence, the researchers have taken up this poetry to explore the various life skills which will help the society to lead a qualitative life.

Life skills is a term used to describe a set of basic skills acquired through learning and/or direct life experience that enable individuals and groups to effectively handle issues and problems commonly encountered in daily life. Life skills are the part of spiritual scientific temper and so much importance should be given to have progress in life. It has become an essential skill for health societies and successful individuals. It includes personal responsibility, social responsibility, ability to communicate, decision making and ultimately being with moral values. Henceforth, people have to learn and teach to make people aware of being concerned for others, to be active, sincere and to accept the daily routines without the complaints and grudges. It also helps to develop self-confidence, assertiveness and to deal with the significant life changes and challenges.

In the fast changing world, it has become very difficult to adjust and accept the reality of life for people as they have totally distracted from the temper of spirituality. In order to help ourselves we need to capitalize ourselves by the sustainable understanding of the social values though the society has the practice of being self-centered. Most of the people grumble over the work stress and always intend to dodge the work. But in earlier days people were dedicated to their job and worked selflessly. This can be noticed in the poem through the words of the priest who involves himself in working for his village people. He does his job continuously for a long period of time and out of weariness of his physique he says:

I have no rest, nor joy, nor peace,
For people die and die
And after cried he, "God forgive!
My body spake, not I". (TBFG: 12)

Being the priest it is his duty to say prayers for the people who are in the sick bed. He does his job willingly and he has no complaints about his job as it is evident from his words 'My body spake, not I'. Here, 'I' refers to his 'will' not his body, as it clearly intends that the father is always willing to do his duty. Such acceptance of the responsibilities without laziness will help to create a serene workplace atmosphere. If this is followed with determination by the individuals, it will be easier for them to take up changes and challenges in life.

In the present competitive world, people are self-inflicted by the impact of self-centeredness and remain in vulnerability. So they need a backup source to keep their internal self-alive. One of the reasons for being internally dead is that laziness. Any work it may be, if it is done with commitment and dedication, the person will become more energetic and may have the job satisfaction. That commitment will always be rewarded by some miracles to happen as it has happened in the life of priest in the poem. W.B. Yeats through his verse quotes how the father is rewarded for his duty conscious.

He who hath made the night of stars
For souls who tire and bleed,
Sent one of his great angels down
To help me in my need. (TBFG: 44)
... He who is wrapped in purple robes,

With planets in it is care,
Had pity on the least of things
Asleep upon a chair. (TBFG: 48)

Through the words of the poet it is understood that God himself descends to the earth to help the people who really deserve it and he takes care of even the minute beings of His creations. The priest wonders at the miracle of God who has sent one of his angels to say prayers for the sick man in disguise of the priest, himself. It may be difficult for a rational mind to contemplate it but it is true for the people who trust themselves and who remain aware and observe the happenings around them.

The next important thing is the sense of apologizing for the mistake committed by an individual. Nowadays, individuals are finding it hard to accept the mistake or to apologize and remain egoistic. Such nature makes the individuals to confront unusual psychic disturbances like depression, tension, anger and hatred. To come out of such problems, the person has to bring down the ego level in them to say sorry or thank you - the magical words, to become mentally and emotionally strong. Here, the poet tends the reader to comprehend the importance of the realization of the mistake committed.

"Mavrone, mavrone! The man has dies,
While I slept on the chair".
He roused his horse out of its sleep.
And rode with little care. (TBFG: 28)
... He rode now as he never rode,
By rocky lane and fen; (TBFG: 30)

The moment he wakes up from the sleep he realizes that he has slept for a long time on the chair and worries about the sick man who might have dead. He rouses the horse and rides very carelessly. The words and the actions of the father clearly showcase his dedication towards his duty.

The increased influence of technology has reduced the interface of human beings, which in turn nullifies the major factors of values of life like sharing, being complacence with others and gratitude. These qualities help to develop the cognitive skills, collaboration and be healthy competitors. This will also help to build up the team skills as it has become essential to be in a team. The poet in his poem presents the people in the village as interdependent and friendly. This scenario reminds the readers of being complacent with each other which is an important team skill. The father is also compassionate towards the villagers. He creates trust among the villagers by his nature of being grateful, humble, sincere and selfless. The same trust is imbibed in the minds of the villagers. Such an establishment of trust will always help anyone to have a comfortable society.

Hence, ethical values are very essential in our day to day life to strengthen our inner self which vice versa help the human beings to have a healthy relationship with others and a healthy society. It also enhances the various life skills of human beings. Such transition in the society will help to have inter-personal relationship among the people and act as an armor to lead a harmonious life.

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