

IS SEE (SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL & ETHICAL) LEARNING APPROACH IN BUSINESS STUDIES, AN OXYMORON?

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Introduction:

As a community of machine-age 'robots', we are shaken out of our mechanical slumber, time and again by the real global Climate Disasters, fuelled by the 'systemic Moral Crisis' of the modern human society. More worrisome is the fact that political leaders, religious heads, business owners, teachers and parents are all busy treating the 'symptoms', while the underlying 'lack of basic human values and resultant ethical radars - which are conspicuous by their absence', are consistently being overlooked. At this pace and in the given direction we can only expect to walk exponentially in to our uncomfortable graves, nailing ourselves inside permanently with our 'epicurean arrogance & myopia'.

While political leaders, decision-makers in businesses and even the religious heads are products of the society and its prevalent ethical fabric, parents and teachers need to take almost all of the blame for this moral failure. This paper explores how a certain subject like Business Studies can be taught in a manner that each economic decision first runs through its social, ecological and ethical implications.

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Hypothesis:

The education in the area of **Business Studies** can be made more **comprehensive, holistic and constructive** in its role by introducing its contents to the students with an **SEE approach** leading to a class of more **socially sensitive, emotionally aware and ethically rooted economic drivers for a sustainable and wholesome future.**

Aim of the Study:

- To explore the possibility of **enriching the curriculum of Business Studies** at the secondary and higher secondary school level, to inculcate social, emotional and ethical intelligence among young minds so that the social issues of exploitation, injustice and inequality perpetuated by the modern economic world may be weeded out to give way to a more **socially just, ecologically sustainable and economically constructive world order.**
- To **counter the 'moral crisis'** and the resultant **sixth mass extinction** that has already been unleashed due to the Climate Emergency, with an effort **to rein in the 'endless greed' of businesses** reflected in their myopic and thoughtless economic actions across the world.

Theoretical Orientation (Literature Review) / References:

Business has been brutal. Evidenced by Peter Singer's classic of animal liberation, titled 'Animal Liberation'

[ISBN 978-0-06-171130-5] exposing the cruelty that goes on secretly behind the tightly shut doors of the animal agriculture and vivisection industries. The valley of death in to which all of humanity has been pushed by corporate ‘profiteering’ is exposed in the State of India’s Environment 2020 by Centre of Science & Environment and an eye-opener book ‘Confessions of an Eco-Sinner –Tracking down the source of my stuff’ by Fred Pearce [ISBN 978-08070-8595-0].

However, books like ‘Absolute Honesty’ by Larry Johnson & Bob Phillips [ISBN 978-81-203-3308-6] focus on ‘building a corporate culture that values straight talk and rewards integrity’. Another book called ‘Intentional Integrity’ by Robert Chesnut [ISBN 978-1-250-23970-9] explores ‘how smart companies can lead an ethical revolution’.

While these are positive trends, there still remains a gap between the possible inculcation of values in early life (through SEE Learning) and its actual reinforcement later in work life. This critical gap is the area of my study, strengthened by a backdrop of **Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of businesses being the ‘Trustees’ of national wealth** and **Swami Vivekananda’s strong belief that all virtue is ‘within’ the human consciousness, only waiting to be ‘drawn out’ by the appropriate inspiration from a ‘Teacher’.**

Methodology:

Qualitative study design is preferred as the topic lends itself heavily to empirical sources of information. Secondary data and interview may be useful as tools to collect needed data.

Limitations:

- The topic of research being highly qualitative in nature, the quantification of various variables was difficult.
- Time has never been on the researcher’s side. More of it is always better.
- The said subject has only a certain syllabus given by the Education Board which cannot be changed, even if it means an improvement. Adding or removing topics based on its substance / value from the SEE Learning point of view is not possible and this is a big handicap.

Arguments / Impirical Evidence:

Perception about ‘Business’:

For a teacher of Business Studies (Organisation of Commerce & Management – as it is called under the Maharashtra State Board of Education) it may seem like an **‘oxymoron’** to talk morals and ethics, as business has been popularly viewed as a greedy pursuit of private gain alone, with little or no credence given to the ‘People’ and ‘Planet’ aspect. This perception of the general public as well as the students who are fresh entrants to the Business Studies course, is not without reason.

History of our ‘civilisation’s economic prowess’:

We started with a benign quest for survival in the **Stone Age**, when the human race lived in caves and canopy trees and foraged for fruit, root and nuts. A period of flux ensued when the early humans started to successfully manipulate the Natural world to suit their whims and fancies.

- **Discovery of fire** was the start of the revolution in **energy** that has reached the atomic power today. Early humans watched forest fires and learnt how to harness the power of the mighty Sun. Their control on energy

gave them protection not only from the cold weather but also from most wild animals that feared fire. Here were the seeds of the infamous human ‘**Population Explosion**’.

- **Discovery of farming** allowed the early **nomad** to settle down in fertile delta regions close to fresh water sources and in and around warmer climates. This put an end to the ‘**Hunter Gatherer**’ era and ushered in the ‘**slash and burn**’ **technique** which in modern day is called ‘**deforestation**’ and is done with unbelievable speed and automation. This further improved the life expectancy of humans as now sustenance was not entirely dependent on Nature. We had learnt to manipulate the forces of Nature to our advantage.
- The **invention of money** as a medium of exchange, to help erase the problems of Barter, was another big leap for humanity. Little did we know that the leap was in to a hellish post-Industrial-Revolution era, replete with **ecological imbalances, climate crisis, toxic pollution, economic exploitation and poverty, social inequalities, starvation and disease**.

Money which was invented as a means to an end, had now taken over as the end in itself.

Impact of monetisation of all human endeavour:

- **Money was now a measure of one’s worth.** Economic wealth was the only mark of ones’ **social status**. How much money one can **hoard** became the sole focus of modern society. Preparing the human offspring to earn sinful amounts of money became the all-encompassing desire and endeavour of important institutions like family, schools and colleges in particular and the society in general. For instance, if a beggar is seeking a life insurance policy, he shall get none as his net worth is zero and this would mean his life is worth nothing more than a zero!
- This led to **thoughtless exploitation of the Natural world**. The narrative that everything that can be converted in to money **must be explored and exploited**, took over in the **Machine age**. For instance, the precious rain forest is being cleared to cultivate soy for fodder for the meat and dairy industry which is ecologically unsustainable. Also the transition from **food forests** to **mixed farming** and then to **intensive mono-cropping with chemicals** is a good example that can be discussed in context of the food security of the nation.
- **GDP (Gross Domestic Product)** was the new **definition of economic development and growth**. GDP became the only goal for national prosperity though it was evidently **lopsided and deficient**. It paid no heed to social concerns like justice and equality, ethical concerns like defiling the sanctity of the natural world, abuse and torture of animals in the animal agriculture industry, immorality of vivisection as well as human trafficking and body-shopping.
- **Consumerism was born.** The period after 1950’s was marked with rapid rise of consumer rights movements resulting in a **Buyers’ Market** where the Producers and the Distributors are at the mercy of the desires of the buyers. Though this was an apparent victory for the consumers, it meant a huge loss for the ecological world. As the **consumer** assumed the status of the ‘**King**’ of the economic kingdom, the only **planet** we have, began to be ‘**plundered and trashed up**’ at unimaginably greedy speeds. Everything that appeased the consumer was acceptable.

- **Chasm between the ‘Haves’ and the’ Have-nots’ deepened** to reveal the inequalities in the access to economic opportunities. While the Capitalist regime rewarded those with money, it pushed the poor farther in to debt and despair with a devious plan to keep them that way because if the poor were empowered there would be no one to pull levers in their factories and toil in dirt and sweat on their shop-floors. The modern monetary systems are designed to **maintain slavery of the poor under the supremacy of the rich.**
- **Escalation of crime in society** was the direct fall out of this single pointed focus on monetary gain at all costs. Yet most failed to make the connection. Social values and welfare took a back seat, ecological and climate refugees are on the rise, religious intolerance and racial discrimination is at its peak today. The same greed for power and money has also prompted terrorism in to action with far greater force than ever before.

To sum up the above, it will be fair to state that ever since the **Industrial Revolution in 1760** in Europe, which spread like **cancer** to the rest of the world within the next century, the orientation of all human activities has deteriorated drastically. This is where the shift in the attitude of man caused the perversion we face today in the form of **Profiteering** which has selfish greed as its **‘seed thought’**.

A balanced view of the three **Purposes of business i.e. Profits, People and the Planet** would be a result of an **ethical bent of mind** more than anything imposed externally. To inculcate the same in the minds of young students, the same needs to be drilled in to the curriculum of each subject rather than try to teach it as a separate subject.

Illustrations:

1. FYJC Topic: Human Activities

The teacher can introduce the **Social Sector** (NGOs and Charities) among the **non-economic activities** which rests on the emotion of Compassion and the values like Justice and Equality. The Philanthropic side of the human personality can be discussed and actual hours be dedicated to volunteering with local NGOs for students to experience the pure joy and bliss of selfless service.

2. FYJC Topic: Business - Product

While discussing the features of Business, the teacher can introduce the students to the concept of **‘Products of Value’** as Philip Kotler describes in his books. It presupposes a certain basic level of quality and performance of any given product that appears on the shelf in any market for sale. The value here is Honesty delivered in the form of an honest product through honest advertising.

3. FYJC Topic: Objectives of business

While discussing the objectives of business, the teacher must introduce the three P’s i.e. **Trinity of Purpose of business**, namely, **Profits, People and Planet**. The order of priority can be reversed after adequate classroom discussion. This is because the students need to reach the conclusion by their own reasoning that if the planet survives, so will the people and if people live and thrive so will businesses. The observation that the wrong priority list followed by most of the world has brought us to the self-annihilation stage that we are in today, is of prime value. The basic balance between the **Social and Economic Objectives** of business needs to be stressed as business is a **Socio-Economic institution**.

4. FYJC Topic: Extractive industry

While every book mentions the importance of this industry to its economy, but what is missed is its impact on the ecological balance and biodiversity of this planet, plight of the Project Affected People (PAP) and the social injustice that follows from uprooting and displacing populations of both human and non-human Earthlings. Videos and pictures of ‘Before and After’ could help drive home the point. The capacity of damage and destruction that this industry holds has almost always escaped the fancy of most text book authors. Documentaries on mining, drilling and deep sea trawling are abundant, to help students get the correct perspectives about the extractive industry and the ethical controversies that surround it.

5. FYJC Topic: Genetic industry

While the use of Genetic Engineering and Genetic Science is a blessing when it comes to Forensics in crime fighting and Stem Cell Technologies in fighting abnormalities in humans, the teacher needs to bring in to discussion the ethical controversies underlying the topic. Sharpening the sense of ‘discrimination’ (Vivek Buddhi) of the students to understand where to draw the line is an important insight here. The horrors of the Animal Agriculture industry needs more in-depth discussion than the topic permits. Urging to the sense of Empathy and Compassion would be appropriate at this point to bring in the right responses to the horrid facts exposed during the course of this eye-opening discussion on the Animal Agriculture in the classroom. The only way to do this is touch the emotions of the students which can be triggered by making the deliberately hushed connections between the lives of farm animals and ourselves. The teacher needs to draw parallels between the love that each student feels for his / her / their mother and the same emotion that is felt by a calf. The repeated rape of a dairy cow, separation of the calf within hours after birth, ‘veal crates’ in which the unwanted male calf lives for those few weeks before he is slaughtered to be served on someone’s plate as a delicacy (Veal), gassing of pigs, stunning or flogging large farm animals to death for leather and the fear and torture they experience are important lessons a business teacher cannot miss teaching. Empathy and Compassion are the most vital of human values that can be inculcated here.

6. SYJC Topic: Banking & Insurance

While the finance industry boasts of ‘**inclusion**’ one needs to find out if that is played out in reality. The investigative side of the students can be encouraged to ensure social welfare through actual inclusion rather than just a policy decision.

Another virtue that needs emphasis here is the one of **open and honest disclosure of terms and conditions** from the said industry, as a lot of its business relies on misleading and misinforming clients to gain business deals. Integrity cannot be stressed enough as each one must have been aware of the banking and insurance frauds that dot our newspapers. The Sub-prime Crisis of 2008 that caused the collapse of American banking industry can be a good example of how loss of **integrity** could lead to collapse of a mammoth industry with lethal repercussions across all other industries.

7. FYJC Topic: Privatisation

While dealing with privatisation the teacher can stress on the importance of keeping in mind the **national priorities** while deciding upon the industry and the product to be made and sold. This induces the value of

Loyalty and national pride.

8. FYJC Topic: Globalisation

While there is enough praise for Globalisation, one needs to see it for what it is. Objective observation will reveal that in a world facing the **Sixth Mass Extinction due to Climate Change**, our leaders in business and politics need to start a new narrative if they are to remain relevant in a scientific fashion. **Going local rather than global, seasonal rather than for-storage and unplugging rather than super automation** are the true solutions to the evils caused due to this modern day capitalism. **Concept of De-growth and De-concretisation** need to be introduced to prepare for a new world order. Moving away from material achievements for a few (capitalists) towards larger social welfare is a virtue worth cultivating.

9. FYJC Topic: Business Environment

Among the different dimensions of the business environment, the **Natural Environment** needs special reference. An in-depth discussion guided by the teacher can reveal how the Natural world and its health is at the core of existence of businesses. There is not a single **business resource** – living or non-living – that does not have its **origin in Nature**. Conservation and Preservation of Nature is vital to not just businesses but to life in general as it is the **Life Support System of the planet**.

10. FYJC Topic: Co-operatives

While dealing with the topic of Co-operative Societies it will help if the teacher can delve in to the **Co-operation movement and its origin** due to the mass exploitation of the poor consumers and workers by the rich capitalists. Stressing on its **unique nature of balancing the economic and social objectives** sharpens the sense of moderation among them. The students will be able to appreciate the emergence of co-operatives as well as its fundamental role in a developing nation like India. Values of Equality and Social Justice are inherent in this discussion.

11. SYJC Topic: Consumer protection – Duties of consumers

While a lot of importance is always given to rights of consumers, teachers need to emphasise the duties as well. **Judicious consumption** points to **Minimalism** and **Contentment**. A sense of great responsibility needs to be created as it is the money in the pockets of the consumers that collectively drives the demand and eventually the investment and supply in any given industry. **Demanding ecologically sound, animal-friendly and cruelty-free products can change the course of entire industries**.

12. SYJC Topic: Social Responsibilities of businesses

While dealing with this topic it is important to draw the **connection between Ethics and Social Responsibilities of businesses**. The link will make students better decision-makers in the future. Any business looking to **do the right thing** will automatically end up doing its duties towards all stakeholders. A deeper discussion of **'impact management'** as per Peter Drucker can lead the students to identify **what a business 'does to the society' in its normal course can be positive or negative**. Based on this a special session needs to be dedicated to the impact of businesses on the **Natural Environment and its ethical implications**.

13. [SYJC] Marketing – Integrity of the process of marketing – Ethics in Product Development / Promotion / Advertising
14. [SYJC] Insurance – Principles – General & Specific – Ethics underlying each principle.
15. [FYJC] Small Business – Cottage & Village industry – Relevance to Social Justice and economic Equality.
16. [FYJC] Trade – Quotations & Tenders - Ethics of the trade procedure.
17. [SYJC] Management –Use of scarce Resources & its source – Nature – Sanctity of the Natural world.
18. [SYJC] Principles of Management – Equity / Scalar Chain – Communication ethics / Remuneration – dignity & reward.
19. [SYJC] Functions of Management – Directing – leadership ethics / Actuating – Maslow’s need for achievement – higher human aspirations.
20. [SYJC] E-transactions – Safety and integrity of confidential data of consumers.

Findings:

- The subject of Business Studies is designed exclusively to train students in the economic endeavours. Only flying references, if at all, are made toward the underlying ethics.
- Most topics in the said subject do lend themselves to an interesting discussion on ethical, ecological and social perspectives of each business decision, though it is primarily of economic nature.
- Bringing in the SEE aspects needs deliberate efforts on the part of the teacher handling the given syllabus, which unfortunately is not designed holistically for various reasons.
- Illustrations from real business world are the best way to drive home the point effectively. This means more reading for the teachers.
- Impact on students is likely to be mostly positive. Students will have longer attention spans and active interest in classroom discussion which may translate in to better performance in the said subject. Absenteeism and issues of indiscipline may be automatically controlled as the classroom converts in to a intellectual and emotional gymnasium during sessions of Business Studies.

Conclusion:

In a world ridden with social inequalities, economic greed and ecological plunder, the only way out is to reprogram and rewire the human mind to ‘think, feel and empathise’ before deciding upon its next Rupee of investment.

If every subject, like the one in question here (Business Studies), is handled in a holistic manner, the insights that the students will carry home can be really profound. The SEE Learning approach means that every business deliberation has to be weighed in a social, emotional and ethical context before reaching the final decision. A more holistic way to start and run any economic activity which keeps ecological sustainability and ethical clarity as the core, is the objective of SEE approach in Business Studies

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