Socio-religious organisations as a vehicle of value education - An exploratory study on The Brahmakumaris

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Abstract: With the immense materialistic progress of human race in the form of industrialisation, technologization and modernisation, we are witnessing degrading societies with continuous decline in our value system. Revival and restoration of our core values is much needed. So far, the efforts towards value education in schools has not presented a satisfactory picture due to lack of expertise in value inculcation and assessment. Socio-religious organisations are continuously serving the society along with value promotion among the masses. The present study is an exploratory study on The Brahmakumaris and their contribution in value promulgation. The analysis of their philosophical ideals, social and educational contribution reveals that they can be a potential source of value promotion among the student class.

Keywords: Socio-religious organisations, value education. Brahmakumaris.

I. Background of the study
When today’s society is continuously reflecting societal unrest and decline in the value system, in spite of the fact that we have advanced and progressed in terms of technology, economy, agriculture, industry, etc. and shaped our society as a ‘modernised society’, a very natural question crops up that what is the root cause of this moral decline. In spite of all these amenities and advances, people are not happy. Violence, malpractices, rivalry, jealousy are reflected by majority of the individuals as if they have become a usual practice. Our core values and ethics have lost somewhere. The biggest concern is our children and youths who are the torch bearers of the next generation are also knowingly or unknowingly aping these social mishaps.

As per the various recommendations of Education commissions and committees, CBSE and NCERT have made efforts to introduce value education in the school curriculum. Following their footsteps, many states including West Bengal have also suggested to include Value education in an integrated manner in the curriculum although these are all in a very nascent stage. However, the results in CBSE affiliated schools are not very satisfactory so far. The class/subject teachers are not capable to assess the attitude and values of the children. (Kumta, 2012).

Now, the question arises that do we need experts to train our teachers to make proper assessment and evaluation of values and attitudes of children and try to ingrain the core values among the school going children? To materialise this, do we need to seek help from the experts in this field?

Religious organisations or more precisely the socio-religious organisations are the initiators and promoters of values in the Indian society. Thus, the value education initiative has been majorly spearheaded formally or informally by various socio-religious organisations like Brahmakumaris, Ramakrishna Mission, The Chinmayananda Mission, Art of Living, Sathya Sai Organization to name a few. They have been proactive in promoting values in their schools or through school visits. (Kumta, 2012). The present study has tried to explore the various activities of Brahmakumaris which may reflect the various aspects of value inculcation in the society.

The Brahmakumaris (BKs)
Brahmakumaris has been considered as a socio-religious organisation in the present study as it has its origin from a religion (Hinduism) and it has been serving the society for societal reforms.

Brahmakumaris, or Brahmakumaris Ishwariya Vidyalaya as it is formally known, is a worldwide spiritual organisation that aims to bring about individual and subsequently societal reform and a worldwide awakening. In the year 1936, Prajapita Brahma created the Brahmakumaris organisation in Hyderabad, Sindh. It has now spread to over 137 countries across five continents and has had a considerable impact on every facet of society as a result of its reach. As an international non-governmental organisation, the United Nations Department of Public Relations has recognised its affiliation with the organisation. The mission of the organisation is to guide individuals through the process of self-transformation by providing them with information about their real, spiritual identity, which is distinct from their bodily existence. During the1950s, the community received its current name, Brahmakumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, or “Brahmakumaris World Spiritual University.” (Ramsey, 2009).

The Brahmakumaris, has been run by spiritually inclined individuals and led by women power, are contributing towards the realisation of the dream of a strong, powerful, and Golden Bharat.

The present study has tried to explore the various activities of Brahmakumaris which may reflect the various aspects of value inculcation in the society.

II. Literature Review
1. Agarwal et.al (2018) conducted a study titled ‘A Comparative Study of Mindfulness Between Meditators and Non-meditators’ where the impact of Raj yoga meditation has been analysed by making a comparison between meditators and non-meditators. The result the meditators in comparison to the non-meditators.
2. Thapliyal et al. (2015) investigated the impact of value education program on secondary school students. It was an quasi-experimental study focussing on six core values. The findings of the study revealed that Value education programmes has a significant effect on the development of values among students. Extractions from the study also indicated that the such programmes can be prescribed for different levels of schooling and the impact can be assessed with the help and intervention of trained experts. The study also suggests for conduction of Proper training to the teachers of the Value Education Programme.

3. (Nesbitt and Henderson,2003) in their small-scale ethnographic study examined the contribution of three religious organisations: the Brahmakumaris Spiritual University, the devotees of Sathyai Sai Baba and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The authors report the classroom implementation of three programmes. The findings raised some issues that include the programmes’ approach to diversity, the degree to which the programs can assert the core universal values.

4. (Haigh,2010) in his article titled ‘Education for a Sustainable Future: Strategies of the New Hindu Religious Movements’, explored the approaches to sustainability and sustainability education of some internationally-oriented Hindu religious movements viz. Gandhian Sarvodaya, ISKCON, Ananda Marg and Swami Vivekananda’s Sri Ramakrishna Order. The findings reveal that all these new Hindu Religious Movements agree that the key to achieving environmental sustainability is the spiritual awakening of the individual self and its breaking of its bonds of attachment to the objects and desires of the material world. Accordingly, they are working toward new styles of sustainability education avoiding selfish materialism of Globalised society and, instead, building upon a religiously-motivated construction of spiritual wealth through selfless service to society and nature.

III. Objectives of the study
1. To explore the socio-religious ideals of Brahmakumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalya.
2. To explore their social contribution towards value education.
3. To investigate their educational contribution for value inculcation.

IV. Research Questions
1. What are their socio-religious ideals of Brahmakumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalya?
2. What are their social contributions?
3. What are their educational contributions that lead to value propagation?

V. Methodology
The present study is based on qualitative documentary analysis. Data is of secondary in nature and has been collected from Reference Books, official websites, journals, articles, Newspapers, and blogs.

VI. Analysis and Interpretation
1. Socio-religious ideals of Brahmakumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalya
Brahmakumaris has been considered as a socio-religious organisation in the present study as it has its origin from a religion (Hinduism) and it has been serving the society for societal reforms. However, some studies have connoted it as socio-spiritual organisation (Shiveshwarkar, 2005) perhaps due to its philosophical roots in spirituality, Brahmakumaris has been described as “indigenous feminism in a contemporary Hindu sect.” (Babb,1984, pp.399). The Brahmakumaris has been categorised as a Hindu sect (Chowdhry, 1996). Whereas, some argue to place them under New Religious Movements (NRM). (Clarke,2005). Whatever be its nomenclature, it functions majorly for the upliftment of the human race and consequently the society with the help of its social and spiritual dimensions.

Soul as a point of light - BK philosophy is grounded in the notion that each individual is an eternal and indestructible soul, in the form of a tiny point of light that resides in the forehead just in between the two eyebrows. All souls have progressively lost their initial purity and the associated bliss and calm as they have taken rebirth in this material realm, which they originally embodied.

The World Drama or the world cycle – The BKs believe that our universe is an eternal cycle of five thousand years which again consists of four distinct ages called ‘Yugas’. The ‘Golden Age’ or ‘Satya Yuga’, the ‘Silver Age’ or Treta Yuga, The Copper Age or ‘Dvapara Yuga’ and ‘The Iron Age or ‘KaliYuga’’. All these four ages also signify the stages through which any soul travels in a cyclic way through joy and sorrow, victory and defeat, wisdom and ignorance and so on.

The Confluence Age or the Sangam Yuga - According to BK philosophy, we are now at the end of Kali Yuga and about to enter the Golden age or Satya Yuga. This juncture point of these two ages is termed as- ‘Confluence Age’ or the ‘Sangam Yuga’. Therefore, our utmost effort should be the remembrance of the Superpower and attain the Godly virtues so that we become free from the bondage of our past Karman and enter a stage of eternal bliss and happiness that ultimately every soul strives.

Raja yoga Meditation – They advocate Rajayoga meditation to as a means to calm the mind, build concentration, become stress free and imbibe good values and virtues. (Agarwal et.al, 2018).

2. Social Contributions
Across a wide range of issues and contexts, their work has benefited communities of all sizes—from villages to slums to children to women to the elderly—as well as individuals and societies afflicted by natural disasters. The basic tenets of Brahmakumaris revolve around the awakening of soul through spiritual awareness. This reflects in their every endeavour. Apart from doing social services themselves, they believe to empower the social workers before doing services for the mankind. According to them, in spite of the fact that social workers strive to assist the underprivileged, the disadvantaged, and the disabled, their attempts sometimes become futile; and seem to be inadequate as because they are not being able to heal the root cause or the underlying causes of the societal issues are not being resolved.
They have identified that the decline of spiritual beliefs and values in every human being is the root cause of all misery. Therefore, the only remedy is to empower each and every individual spiritually and not just providing them relief and rescue which often become temporary and are unable to bring sustainable change in peoples’ lives. BKs have a ‘social service wing’ through which it offers social service to the society and it is operational from 1989. Their major purpose is to motivate the social organisations to adopt a more spiritual approach to their work. As part of its mission, the wing also seeks to raise public awareness of stigmas and social injustices including bride burning and child marriage. Some of their remarkable social contributions are:

**Rural Development** – This includes their services related to adoption of poor and backward villages, Rehabilitation and development of tribal people. Rehabilitation and development of slums, Empowerment of farmers towards sustainable agricultural practices.

**Women Empowerment** – This envisages social support programs related to their health and safety, Training and seminars for their economic and spiritual empowerment.

**Disaster Management** – This includes every possible relief and emergency training related to all the natural catastrophes like flood, Earthquake, famine, Tsunami etc. In addition to this, they also provide the emotional and mental support through stress relief camps.

**Service related to Health and wellbeing** – Organising blood donation camps, conducting anti-addiction projects and free health check-up camps, health related awareness programs and establishing Hospitals.

**Other Services** – This includes offering counselling services and mental support to prisoners, juveniles in detention centres, water conservation initiatives, cleanliness and environmental protection initiatives.

‘Kalp Taruh’ is an upcoming key plantation project to be launched on 5th June 2022 by Brahmakumaris to ensure land restoration and promote higher order values for building a better civilized society and support many of the UN SDGs. With this project, they aim to combine the sacred process to nurture a tree as well as the soul. The project is to provide sustenance to both the plant and the person who plants. So, the word has been clubbed together to form – Kalp Taruh.

### 3. Educational Contributions

The prevailing educational system, aims at providing knowledge and skills required for earning a mere livelihood. It has failed to build character, ethics and values in students. Consequently, the youths in our society are heading towards doom as they are becoming increasingly emotionally vulnerable and lack mental and moral strength. This state, drives them towards many unethical activities and destructive behaviour. With the belief that only through fostering value-based education can education play an important role in building a better society, the Education Wing is rising to the challenge. The following are the objectives of Education wing:

1. Providing training and refresher courses to educators for their and students’ spiritual empowerment.
2. Inspiring the educators to become effective role models.
3. Offering instructors of different schools and institutions instructions in Raj yoga meditation and moral and spiritual education.
4. Rebuilding a society on the principles of spirituality, morality, and humanism with the help of research and education.
5. Eradicating illiteracy, superstition, and other forms of societal ill by means of spiritual education.
6. Increasing awareness about the harmful consequences of alcoholism, narcotics, and smoking through educational events and counselling sessions.

Some of the major initiatives taken by the Brahmakumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya in the field of value education are hereunder:

1. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was inked in 2009 between the Brahmakumaris and the Annamalai University to begin a distance learning academic program in Value Education and Spirituality. Now it offers a cluster of courses starting from B.Sc., M.Sc., Post graduate diploma, in value education and spirituality along with MBA in self and crisis management.
2. A program started in 2016, named Rajyoga Education and Consciousness Improvement Programme for Educators and abbreviated as ‘RECIPE’, which aims to provide training related to value education to the teachers of Value Education courses. It also aims at enabling the students to apply the learnt values in practical life.
3. Seven online meditation courses were developed in collaboration with AICTE during 2017. It is available in the SWAYAM platform. The course ranges from memory management, anger and stress management, spiritual orientation and lifestyle for holistic health, core values towards excellence to managing environmental crisis through spirituality.
4. Thought Labs have been created in some prominent cities which utilises the techniques of Raj yoga meditation for generating positive thinking, reflection, self-realization trough God-realization so that individuals are able to delve deeply into their inner world of thoughts, emotions, and feelings to discern between right and wrong, and thereby empowering them to assume personal responsibility for their self-transformation.
5. Under ‘Touch the light’ project, Syllabus and workbooks related to value education have been prepared for 7th, 8th, and 9th standards, training manuals for teachers and parents have been developed.
6. Living Values Educational Program (LVEP) – It was an outreach initiative taken by Brahmakumaris religious organisation during 1995 later formalised by UNESCO. The LVEP is a unique worldwide programme which offers training in practical methodology, and experiential value activities to educators, parents, facilitators and caregivers so that they can help children and young adults to discover and develop universal values.
Objective wise interpretation

1. To explore the socio-religious ideals of Brahmakumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalya.
   The socio-religious ideals or their philosophy reveal that they are all directed towards self-realisation of a person through spirituality in a practical way with the help of Raja yoga meditation. It ultimately strives for individual excellence by imbibing virtues and discarding vices leading to societal upliftment.

2. To explore their social contribution towards value education.
   Every social service they render to the society right from disaster management, blood donation camps, women empowerment, rehabilitation services to name a few present a glorious example of a cluster of values like love, humanity, fraternity, integrity, fellow-feeling, cooperation etc. and can have a greater impact on the society.

3. To investigate their educational contribution for value inculcation.
   All their educational endeavours indicate their effort towards propagation of value education with emphasis on moral and spiritual values among the student class and youths of the society.

VII. Conclusion and Suggestion for further studies

The Brahmakumaris has been wonderfully serving the society and contributing immensely towards propagation of the Universal values and virtues among different strata of the society. In every endeavour starting from their philosophical ideologies to their social services and educational initiatives for value education reflects good virtues and values that solely aims for the upliftment of human beings from the existing misery. It strives for a better society free from vices. This indicates that they can significantly contribute to value promulgation among the masses especially to the children and youths if their resources can be channelised properly in a structured way through collaboration with the apex bodies of the academia. The impact of value education programs can be assessed by trained experts (Thapliyal, 2015). In this regard an active intervention of policy makers is much needed. This study has been delimited to only one socio-religious organisation, however, other socio-religious organisations from different religions can also be explored in further researches. As all the religious organisations have been a potential source of value promotion in the Indian society (Kumta, 2012).

References


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