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Rich Culture, Poor Acceptance: A Case of Moribund Status of Cultural Studies in Engineering Syllabus

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Abstract

India has a rich cultural history and continues to preserve it beautifully. India has accepted gracefully the good qualities of different religions which led to the rise of many different cultures in this mystical sub-continent. Different rulers and empires came here and ruled and left behind a rich legacy of their cultural heritage. The Indian cultural history is very rich and has carved a niche of its own. It continues to inspire other cultures of the world. Every state in India has a culture of its own and even then they all stand unified and form one single culture of India.

In the backdrop of this idyllic cultural heritage of India, lies a challenge for the academicians, of disseminating and imparting this richness of our culture to the students of engineering programs. Realizing the need to establish a relationship between cultural studies and engineering profession is the need of the hour. We cannot overrule the fact that the cultural studies are incorporated in engineering syllabus of very few universities of India. Yet social studies as a subject in the engineering profession is being considered unnecessary by some of the academicians as they fail to strike a significant cord here. On the other hand the apathy on the part of the students is quite evident and they often take this subject as uncalled for and feel that the universities are imposing on engineering tracks, subjects which have no real relevance with the profession. An inimical attitude of this sort undoubtedly dampens the spirit of subject experts

and students. With such attitude as the background, the teachers are at sea when it comes to contextualizing the text. This paper, therefore examines the various ways and means to establish symbiotic relationship between cultural studies as a subject and engineering profession and its relevance for engineers.

Humanities and Social Sciences play a unique and distinctive role in a society where the ethos of science and technology prevails. It is believed that engineering and science are, by their very nature, humanistic and socially derived terms.

Hence a complete science and technology education must include liberal arts, economics, social and behavioral sciences where the students unite application of scientific principles along with human, moral and social understanding which will provide a holistic understanding of socio-economic reality and the role of technology for sustainable development. Besides, the humanities and social sciences have an important role to play in the development of critical and independent thinking. This becomes the key to a healthy and vibrant democracy.

The purpose of this paper will be to envision ways of reconciling the innovative prospects of science with its much needed social accountability, credibility and utility to produce engineering graduates who have the skills to solve real-world problems, the flexibility to adapt to changing technology and markets, and a respect for intellectual and cultural diversity.

Symbiotic relationship between engineering profession and cultural studies -

More and more researchers and educators are becoming increasingly concerned about the importance of cultural understanding in engineering profession. They believe that this level of understanding helps students make critical judgments and helps them apply their knowledge to serve social needs. These aspects further help in giving rise to considerations in the incorporation of cultural studies in the engineering curriculum. There is a need for engineers as technocrats to understand that the knowledge of their technical skills is directly correlated with the art to execute it.

The symbiotic relationship that we are talking about here helps in overcoming the various socio-economic and political barriers. It prepares global citizens in this globalized era. The

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professionals should be composite personalities who have in depth understanding of diverse socio-cultural properties of the world. Engineering studies remain incomplete without the knowledge of cultural studies. Education at different levels should strive to develop individual students' understanding of cultural elements in global and local contexts. This understanding can allow students to gain experience from the past and to become aware of the social values of present-day society and of the role they can play in its improvement. In general, cultural studies in the engineering curriculum requires students to think critically of the relationship between engineering practices and global, regional and local cultures, and then about how to apply this knowledge. It aims to allow students to explore the importance of and opportunities in considering cultural and social factors in engineering design, implementation and evaluation. Through different activities such as investigation, seminars, discussions and projects, students are able to explore and identify why and how these cultural as well as social factors should be considered in engineering practices, particularly in the local context, and then apply their learning experience to meet the needs of the ever-changing society.

Engineering as an art and a science -

An engineer needs his technical knowledge and the intuitiveness of how to apply this knowledge. His profession as a technocrat is garnered both from a scientific and an artistic perspective.

Engineering as a science may be described as a systematized body of knowledge based on proper findings and exact principles and is capable of verification. It is a reservoir of fundamental truths and its findings apply safely in all the situations.

According to George R. Terry- "Art is bringing about of a desired result through the application of skill." Art is, thus, skilful application of knowledge which entirely depends on the inherent capacity of a person and is learnt from practice and experience. In this sense, an engineer is certainly a manager with an art to use his skills, knowledge and experience in solving various problems that arise in the working of his enterprise, both complicated and non-complicated.

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Highly effective thinking is an art that engineers and scientists can be taught to develop. By presenting actual experiences and analyzing them one can convey the developmental thought processes employed and adapt a style of thinking that leads to successful results.

The nuances of cultural studies impose upon an engineer with a style of thinking that will enhance a person's ability to function as a problem-solver of complex technical issues.

Corporate Social Responsibility of the Engineers -

It becomes the call of the hour for engineers to maintain the social fiber of the nation. Social skills learnt through cultural studies will enable them to sort out social crimes, unequal distribution of income, poverty, imbalance economy and other factors that stunt the growth of the society. Since multinational corporations that operate in more than one country operate at all levels of the societal strata, engineers should be able to develop cultural agility. They should also have affinity to cultural adaptations.

Corporate don't exist in isolation without exhibiting their share of social responsibility. They bond with the society and the various elements of the society and in doing so the corporate managers with socio-cultural settings can deliver societal benefits in a better way thereby elevating the brand image of the corporate sector. On the other hand one cannot rule out the aspects of social accountability and social audit for which each and every citizen of the country is responsible.

The prevailing dicey engineering dogma amongst the administrators has paved the way for an apparent 'not-my-job' attitude among the corporate. Therefore more importantly the removal of this engineering dogma from among the engineers is the need of the hour. Only then can we bring socio cultural studies at par with engineering studies. But for the attitudinal change among students about the scope of cultural studies in the engineering career, there is no salvation for the budding engineers to cope with the demands of the changing times. Engineering professionals who are bereft of socio-cultural sense, social accountability and corporate responsibility cannot become successful in their profession. If we seriously consider the aesthetic value of cultural studies it will not become a dry subject.

Today's engineers and code of ethics -

In dealing with the competitive world outside, engineers may develop a tendency to lack professional ethics and code of ethics because they have never considered the significance of social studies as important. Interdisciplinary amalgamation will enhance interdisciplinary ethos and this will bring about the rejuvenation of moribund social and cultural studies.

There is indisputably a "mismatch" between, what the system is producing and what the society needs. While other countries produce more science, technology, engineering, and math graduates, the U.S. might be producing "too many liberal arts graduates." All types of graduates in general lack the skills employers seek: character, interpersonal skills, motivation, and work ethic, and many come with a very undesirable quality: entitlement. Many are incapable of writing a coherent memo, of having a professional conversation, and of dressing appropriately for the workplace.

Today's youth do not want to put in the time and effort with their studies to develop the globally-competitive-skills needed to keep themselves at par with their competitors in technology and the sciences. It is work ethics that makes a person great and distinct. Many youth of today are involved in cheating, lying, stealing and drug addiction. Their propensity towards violence is also very common.

The attitudes shown by the youth of today directly shape what the world will become in the future, when we see attitudes like these it shows that the educationalists of today aren't doing their job properly. Somewhere along the way youth are feeling lost, confused, let down and alienated. Results like this don't just speak for the character of a generation; they are testimony to the way that adults and educationalists represent the world to the younger generation. It shows the sort of example being set in the society at large.

Teachers' role -

Truly enough, the teachers play a vital role in disseminating the significance of social and cultural studies in line with engineering profession. The pedagogical ambit experienced by the

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teachers of socio cultural studies gives us ample clarity about the attitude of the engineering fraternity towards this non technical subject. It is a cumbersome task for the teachers of fine arts to keep the subject alive for the right reasons and right applications. The engineering board of studies on the other hand is trying to get rid of cultural studies from the curriculum. With this callous attitude of academicians and educationalists, how can we blame the students if they lose interest in the subject and its applications, eventually? The teachers here have a dual role to play: one that hits a master stroke and other that builds up heaps of runs with great vigilance and patience. These roles can be well executed by using various techniques and parameters. They can enhance the classroom activities by doing some of the following activities:

- Use of national geographical videos & clips
- Movies on architectural monuments (Egypt and Greek civilizations)
- Importance of socio-cultural studies in Harvard and Oxford University.
- Allowing the students to engage in conducting case studies.
- Bringing out innovative lines of socio-cultural projects.
- Propose Field studies to allow students to interact with the real world

Teachers can definitely be instrumental in creating the much needed interest in the subject by introducing some innovations in teaching-learning method. Incorporation of practical components in the subjects will also function as interest-stimulating components. Students' apathy & attitude can be modified and elevated if we consider the issue seriously.