

The significance of spirituality in education

written by [Rajita Kulkarni](#) November 11, 2018 06:49 AM

Rajita Kulkarni, President of the Sri Sri University in Cuttack, shares with MAITHILI CHAKRAVARTHY the importance of spirituality in education

Integrating spirituality with education would result in helping create a younger generation that is socially aware, conscious, and spiritual, with a passion for treading the unbeaten path.

Revolutionising education

“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself,” said John Dewey. Education is what makes us ‘decent’ human beings. It arms us with information and life-skills important to live a good life. Education also promotes peace, tolerance, and compassion for others. Around the world, universities have introduced meditation on campuses teaching students how to de-stress. Top universities like Columbia and Georgetown today have dedicated sessions that introduce students to the practice. In India, the Sri Sri University, founded by Art of Living’s Sri Sri Ravi Shankar naturally aims to integrate spirituality with education, and wants to shape a set of individuals who will lay the foundations for a society where humanity has been restored.

Meditating on campus

“It’s an upcoming university. It’s just seven years since we started. There are a lot of new programmes and new plans that we have. We have close to 1700 students now. One of the foundational principles that we are embracing at Sri Sri University is holistic education. Today if you see students around the world and in India... look at the pressures they have to deal with. There is social pressure, there is pressure from social and digital media, there is environmental pressure. I really empathise with the kids. It is not easy to be students in this time. Times will get even more complex. That environment, whether it changes or how it changes, is not so much in our control. What is in our control is the way we respond to it. All our children on campus learn the Art of Living programme – the Sudarshan Kriya. They meditate every day. They have a deep interest in the wisdom of life. Sometimes you get excellent breakthroughs, sometimes you can beat your head but nothing works. But how you deal with those moments of success as well as failure really defines how you eventually live a successful life. That’s what we are preparing our students for,” says Rajita Kulkarni, president of the university.

Schooling farmers

The university, a vegetarian campus, which is drug, alcohol and smoke-free, has been designed by architects who specialise in educational architecture, and offers both undergraduate and post graduate programmes in a wide variety of subjects ranging from osteopathy (one of the few of its kind in the country) to entrepreneurship to yoga and naturopathy to good governance and public policy, to an upcoming bachelor’s in agribusiness. “We are an agrarian economy predominantly in India. Strengthening our farmers is really the foundation of our economic prosperity. The course will aim to help farmers understand and become experts in the enterprise of agriculture,” adds Kulkarni. The campus also grows around 15 – 18 types of vegetables and fruits organically for its mess on campus (a barren land 7 – 8 years ago), such as cabbage, cauliflower, pumpkin, coriander, okra, chillies, parsley and exotic fruits like persimmons.

Living the dream

Actively aspiring to motivate students to launch their own businesses, the university offers an MBA in

Entrepreneurship. “We are one of the few universities in India which offers this programme. Recently we were looking for a placement officer and the popular conversation among the students was that in a couple of days we should not need a placement officer because everyone should be able to start their own enterprise. We have in the last three years had close to 18 start-ups that have successfully been started.” Kulkarni goes on to add that across fields she wants her students to have an enterprising spirit, including in fields such as yoga, where it’s important for students to have a vision that’s viable and sustainable apart from being service-oriented, “We don’t want for our students to land up being freelance yoga tutors. We would like for them to set up their own studios, so they can train more people. These are exhaustive programmes of two and three years. If you see our yoga students, they really are yogis. They live that knowledge of yoga on a day-to-day basis.”

Srinovating

Another unconventional university initiative is an initiative called ‘Srinovation’ – a union of innovation and entrepreneurship the Sri Sri way. Equipped with state-of-the-art facilities like computers, office rooms, LCD displays, multimedia equipment and discussion tables, the centre is an “incubation” centre which aims to continually vet the appetite for entrepreneurship among students by organising lectures with successful businesspersons and offering courses in corporate social responsibility and social entrepreneurship. “Srinovation is a space for students to really express their innovative ideas, their start-up ideas. We counsel and coach students. At the Start-up India Odisha Yatra this year in February, Sri Sri University contributed close to 500 start-up ideas. The government selected totally 75 ideas out of which seven are from our university. All the start-ups that our students have launched (in the past) – of course they have to be financially sustainable – each of them has had a social impact angle to it. Service is ingrained in our students. On the campus they have experienced the joy of serving. For me, it’s a foregone conclusion that whatever they do they will find a way to suitably, positively impact the community. It is my expectation of them that they should succeed, prosper, progress, and at the same time not forget the community.”

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