

Section

1

Introduction to Value Education

CHAPTERS

- Understanding Value Education
- Self-exploration as the Process for Value Education
- Basic Human Aspirations and their Fulfilment
- Understanding Happiness and Prosperity—Their Continuity and Programme for Fulfilment



Understanding Value Education

■ INTRODUCTION

We all aspire to live fulfilling lives, seeking happiness for ourselves and for those around us. In the past, we naturally acquired values—such as what is important in life, what is right and wrong, and how to conduct ourselves as human beings to lead meaningful lives. These values were shaped through our daily interactions within the family, the community, and society at large. However, many of these institutions have been significantly weakened. Today, we often adopt our values from sources like social media.

Reviving or strengthening family and social institutions is a gradual process. In the meantime, educational institutions can play a crucial role in fostering a comprehensive understanding of human values, promoting a holistic and humane world-view, which is essential for leading fulfilling lives.

This book introduces the subject matter for a foundational course in value education, which could become a regular part of the academic curriculum. In this course, we will explore key issues that are important to everyone—issues that directly impact our happiness, well-being, goals, aspirations, and relationships. Value education addresses matters of universal significance, contributing to both individual and collective happiness and prosperity.

Let us begin by recognising the need for such a subject, as well as its scope and implications.

■ LIVING A FULFILLING LIFE

Each of us aspires to live a fulfilling life, though we may have different visions of what that entails. For some, it may involve earning substantial wealth, gaining power or recognition, travelling the world, having a loving family, fostering harmonious relationships both within and outside the family, or maintaining good health. At the same time, we also desire a pollution-free environment, a peaceful society, free from crime, and abundant natural resources.

Take a moment to make a list of all the things you believe are essential for a fulfilling life.

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Student life is often viewed as preparation for such a life. Is it something that can be defined with certainty? Or are we destined to plan the next phase of life in an ad hoc manner, never quite clear on what we truly want? Can education help us grasp this concept? Could a formal course address these concerns, or must these issues always be tackled individually, in a piecemeal fashion? To answer these questions, let us begin by exploring what a fulfilling life really means.

As a suggestion, consider whether the following aspects contribute to your idea of a fulfilling life:

- You experience a constant sense of happiness.
- Your body is in good health.
- You have the physical resources you need and feel prosperous at all times.
- You enjoy good relationships with everyone connected to you.
- Society around you is peaceful and harmonious.
- You are able to coexist with nature and work towards an environment free from pollution and resource depletion.
- You have a deep understanding of both your own reality and the nature of existence.

Reflect on whether all your desires align with the above framework, or if there is something more you need for fulfilment. Also, consider whether any dissatisfaction you experience stems from the absence of one or more of these elements. If something seems unnecessary in the list, feel free to disregard it.

Ultimately, these are the things you have been striving for, whether or not you have succeeded in achieving them. Similarly, reflect on your actions and consider whether they have been directed towards achieving this vision of fulfilment. Look at this not only on an individual level, but also collectively—within your family, your community, your village or city, your country, and so on. You will find that this basic aspiration for a fulfilling life is common to all people. You are not alone in this pursuit; it is a shared goal.

If this is indeed a universal need for all human beings, could there be a common approach to achieving it? Think it over.

■ EDUCATION FOR A FULFILLING LIFE

To truly grasp what it means to live a fulfilling life, and to understand the path to achieving it, we need the right kind of education. Education should be a process that prepares us to lead such a life. This is why we invest nearly one-quarter to one-third of our lives in being educated. If, during this time, we are given a holistic perspective on life and existence, the choices we make will lead us towards a happy and prosperous life. As we near the completion of our formal education, it is important to gain clarity on what we really want from life and to develop the competence to make it a reality, envisioning how we want to see ourselves, say, twenty years from now and beyond.

Take, for example, relationships. A harmonious relationship is a key aspect of a happy life. However, in today's fast-paced world and with shifting social structures, maintaining such relationships has become increasingly challenging. Similarly, physical well-being and financial stability are essential components of a fulfilling life. Entering higher education often brings the important milestone of deciding on a career path and, for some, considering the choice of a life partner. Is there a programme that can help you make wise decisions in these areas? These are concerns that most of us share.

Moreover, we all live in and are connected to society. In fact, we are interconnected with the entire world around us, and we desire fulfilling relationships with everyone. When a relationship becomes challenging, we are often left with the unpleasant options of either ignoring the other person or feeling stressed. Neither of these options brings mutual fulfilment. Can our education system help address such challenges? Many young people seek solutions through books, discussions with friends, or listening to talks, but often find that these approaches only offer piecemeal solutions, which have their limitations.

Our society is deeply important to us, as our careers, families, and well-being are intertwined with it. When we read or hear negative news—whether through newspapers, news channels, or social media—we may feel increasingly insecure and fearful. But this is not what we aspire to. Ask yourself whether you want to live in a fearful society or a fearless one. What feels natural to you? What kind of world do you desire?

Then, there is the issue of our natural environment. It causes us deep concern when we hear about rising pollution, global warming, declining water tables, rising sea levels, and contaminated food. We are constantly bombarded with such messages through our gadgets, and clearly, this situation benefits neither humanity nor the rest of nature.

It's worth noting that humans are the only species on Earth that undergo a lengthy process of education—whether within the family, through formal schooling, or in society. Formal education is considered a basic human right; parents are encouraged to send their children to schools and universities; there is ample infrastructure for learning, and teachers are in place with students attending in significant numbers. All of this has led to great progress in skills and information. Yet, it is humans who are responsible for creating many of the problems on this planet. If a person does not feel fulfilled within, they cannot contribute to the fulfilment of others. What remains inadequately addressed in the current education system is this crucial aspect—human fulfilment.

As human beings, we are faced with two fundamental questions:

- What should we do?
- How should we do it?

A truly holistic education must adequately address both these questions. The area of education that deals with “What should we do?” is known as ‘Value Education’ (VE). It provides clarity about our goals, our fundamental aspirations, and the means to fulfil these aspirations. The second area, which deals with “How should we do it?” is known as ‘Skill Development’ (SD). This helps us acquire the skills, methods, and techniques needed to implement our goals.

Both Value Education and Skill Education are essential and complementary parts of a complete education system, and they must be properly addressed to ensure a fulfilling life.

■ VALUE EDUCATION

When we consider the aspirations for a fulfilling life, it becomes clear that achieving such a life requires an understanding of ourselves and the world around us, including our relationships with everything in it. Fulfilling our relationships with other human

beings and the rest of nature defines our participation in the broader order of existence. This participation is the essence of human values.

The value of an entity lies in its contribution or role within the larger system it is a part of. For example, the value of a marker is its ability to write on a whiteboard in a classroom. The act of writing is the marker's contribution within the classroom, the larger system. As long as the marker can write, it holds value; otherwise, it loses its value.

Similarly, the value of a vegetable plant is its capacity to provide nutrition to the human body. But what, then, is the value of a human being? This question asks about a human's contribution to the larger order. For instance, if your role in education is to learn and understand what is being taught, your value is reflected in your effort to do so. **The value of a human being is their natural or expected participation in the broader system, whether at the individual, family, societal, or even nature/existence level.**

Interestingly, **we experience happiness when we fulfil our role within this larger order.** For example, if you understand what has been taught in class, you feel happy. Likewise, your teacher feels happy when you engage and grasp the material being taught.

For humans, the larger system includes other people, plants, air, water, soil, animals, and everything else in nature. A human being's value lies in their relationship and participation with all aspects of nature and existence. Therefore, to understand human values, we must study both human reality and the entirety of nature/existence, which forms the larger system. Our role is to understand and fulfil our relationships with every unit of existence.

This is where value education comes in. To truly comprehend human values, we need to explore and understand things as they are, so we can effectively fulfil our participation within the larger system. **Value education is the branch of education that helps us understand our place and role in the wider order and ensures that we live accordingly.** It forms the foundation of all other education. In fact, all education should be grounded in values. Without a value-based education, the pursuit of a fulfilling life remains incomplete. Education might provide the skills needed to earn a living or accumulate wealth, but it will not address the deeper human aspiration for a life of fulfilment.

A simple reflection on today's world reveals that our lives have increasingly become focused on making money rather than ensuring a fulfilling existence. This imbalance needs to be corrected by making education more holistic and aligned with the goal of living a fulfilling life.

■ SKILL EDUCATION

Skills—whether in technology, management, medicine, or other fields—are essential in our daily lives. We have developed skills to a remarkable degree in every area, be it medicine, manufacturing, construction, transportation (from bicycles to aeroplanes), telecommunications, or television, among many others. The list of areas where skills are required is extensive, and there is no doubt that these skills are vital.

However, it is equally important to determine the purpose for which these skills are to be applied. Can you see the importance of this? Skills alone are not enough; we must also consider the intention behind their use. Without understanding the purpose,

even the most advanced skills may not lead to a truly beneficial or fulfilling outcome. Therefore, skill education must go hand in hand with clarity of purpose.

■ COMPLEMENTARITY OF VALUES AND SKILLS

Let's reflect on a few questions to better understand the complementarity between values and skills. Will you use your communication and management skills to dominate others or to foster mutual fulfilment and build friendships? Will you apply your medical skills to profit from disease or to ensure long-term health? Will your financial skills promote equitable wealth distribution or maximise profits for a few? Will you use your skills to nurture others or exploit people and nature? Will advanced communication tools like mobile phones be used for meaningful education or to promote consumerism and indulgence? While skills are important, understanding the purpose behind their use is crucial.

Skills are merely a means to achieve a given purpose. Although skills are essential for achieving that purpose effectively and efficiently, it is not the role of technology, management, or medicine to determine what the purpose should be. This decision lies beyond the scope of these fields. Therefore, it is vital to define our purpose as human beings. Without clarity of purpose, skills can become aimless, directionless, and potentially harmful—used for either constructive or destructive ends.

Take students of technology, for example. They study, create, and implement new technologies. If they are trained without a clear sense of human purpose, their technical skills could be misused to dominate, exploit, or harm others. Consider the development of nuclear energy while it has the potential for great welfare, we have also created enough nuclear weapons to destroy the Earth many times over (though, of course, once would be more than enough).

Another example is health. If we recognise that maintaining a healthy body is fundamental to a happy life, we will seek to acquire the skills necessary to keep the body in good health—understanding which foods and physical practices will help us stay well, and how to perform various tasks efficiently. These skills are essential, but we must also understand the purpose of maintaining good health, and that falls under the realm of values.

As shown above, values and skills must work together. The complementarity between them is essential for any human endeavour to be truly successful in achieving a fulfilling life.

■ PRIORITY OF VALUES OVER SKILLS

As discussed earlier, values are essential for deciding “what to do”, while skills are necessary for determining “how to do” it. When we consider the order of priority, it becomes clear that we must first decide what we want to achieve, and only then can we think about how to achieve it. It doesn't work the other way around—do you see that?

For instance, if you go to a railway station to buy a ticket, the clerk will ask where you want to go. If you keep asking for the fastest train, the most comfortable one, or the best air-conditioned carriage, without knowing your destination, will that get you anywhere? This is how many of the things we do today are being approached—focusing on going faster or more efficiently, but without clear direction. We work out ways to achieve supersonic speeds, but are we sure of our destination and whether it

will lead to our fulfilment? This is a crucial question we need to prioritise in all our actions and decisions.

Therefore, it becomes evident that values must take precedence over skills, even though both are essential for human welfare. Values guide us on the right path, while skills help us travel that path effectively.

APPRECIATING THE NEED AND IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS OF VALUE EDUCATION

Having explored the complementarity and priority of value education alongside skill education, we can now consider some key implications of value education, highlighting its necessity.

Correct Identification of Our Goals

Value education helps us identify our goals correctly. It provides answers to essential questions such as can the goal of a human being be merely to accumulate wealth, or is it to ensure a prosperous life? Is there a difference between accumulating wealth and achieving prosperity? Is the goal of life to endlessly pursue sensual pleasures, or is there a deeper form of happiness? These are questions that require authentic answers, which can only come through value education.

Many of us grapple with these issues, leading to confusion and indecision about our goals. By exploring these questions systematically, value education enables us to define our own goals independently, rather than adopting those imposed by others. After all, if your goals are borrowed, will achieving them truly bring fulfilment? At this stage in life, it is crucial to confidently identify your own goals.

Through an understanding of human beings, nature, and harmonious relationships, we can determine our role and purpose in all areas of life. This understanding helps us set appropriate goals, guiding us towards developing a holistic perspective.

Development of a Holistic Perspective

The outcome of value education is the development of a holistic perspective. It brings clarity about the human being (the one who understands), the nature/existence of which we are an integral part, and our participation in this nature/existence (as depicted in Fig. 1.1). Our role in life becomes clear—it is our purpose, right, responsibility, and value.

In practical terms, this means we can see our role in relation to ourselves, our family, society, and nature. Fulfilment at any level brings happiness, and we begin to realise that we are interconnected and interrelated with all of existence. From the smallest unit to the vast cosmos, everything is linked in a chain of mutual fulfilment.

With this holistic perspective, we recognise that nature exists in harmony, and every unit within it, including human beings, is part of this web of relationships. Harmony and interconnectedness are the fundamental principles of existence, from atoms to the cosmos. Understanding this allows us to live in alignment with the natural order.

Clarity of Programme to Live with a Holistic Perspective

A major benefit of value education is that it provides clarity about how to live in accordance with a holistic perspective. We all face questions like what thoughts are

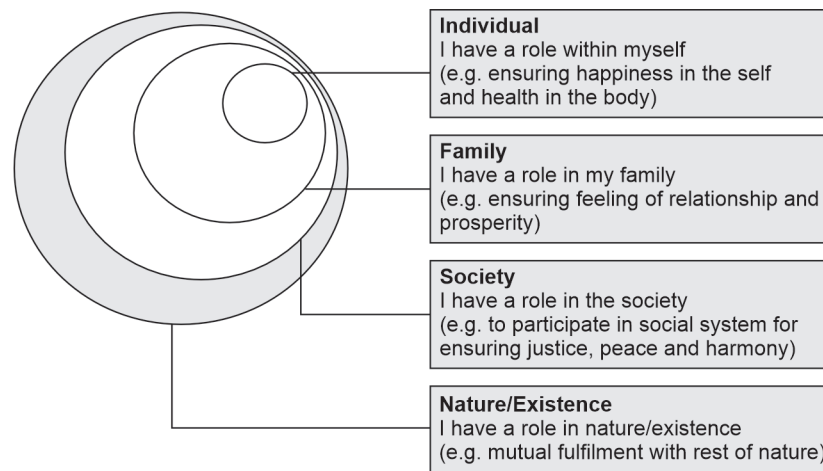


Fig. 1.1. Roles of the individual in relation to family, society, and nature

naturally acceptable to me? What food will keep my body healthy? How can I nurture my relationships with friends and family? How can I contribute to my community or society in a way that fosters mutual fulfilment? These concerns often lead to confusion, and different people may offer varying notions of what is right.

Value education offers a universal vision and programme to help answer these questions, allowing us to plan our daily lives with clarity. This understanding is essential for ensuring our own happiness and fulfilment.

Evaluation of Our Beliefs

Our actions and decisions are shaped by our beliefs about ourselves, our family, society, and nature. Value education helps us become aware of these beliefs and critically evaluate them. Much of our behaviour is based on beliefs we may not even be conscious of, yet they influence the course of our lives.

For example, if we believe that accumulating money is the ultimate goal and that sensual pleasures are the only source of happiness, we may focus solely on acquiring wealth and indulging in pleasures. Similarly, if we believe in the concept of “survival of the fittest” and see life as a struggle, we may adopt a competitive mindset, which can lead to conflict and domination. This belief can also drive us to exploit nature, leading to resource depletion and environmental degradation.

Understanding the difference between beliefs and true knowledge is critical. While beliefs are assumptions often reinforced by external influences, understanding comes from knowing things as they truly are. Value education helps us shift from unexamined beliefs to genuine understanding, leading to more conscious and fulfilling choices.

Solution of Existing Problems

When we understand our participation in the larger order and live according to human values, we experience fulfilment in all areas of life—personally, within our family, in society, and in our relationship with nature. Many of today’s problems stem from a lack of understanding and insufficient effort to live by our values.

With a holistic perspective and a clear programme for living, we realise that most problems are symptoms of incorrect beliefs. Over time, we can address these issues

at the individual, family, societal, and environmental levels. By gaining a deeper understanding, we are better equipped to define our roles in different areas of life and contribute to collective well-being.

Value education enables us not only to prevent the creation of new problems but also to resolve existing ones. It equips us to design programmes—whether personal or societal—that promote fulfilment for everyone, contributing to the collective well-being of society.

■ DEVELOPMENT OF ETHICAL COMPETENCE

Ethics is the manifestation of consistent, principled human behaviour in our actions, work, and participation within the broader order of society and nature. It is clear that the core objective of value education is to cultivate ethical competence in individuals, which will naturally be reflected in all aspects of their lives. The growing issue of unethical behaviour in various professions, which has become a serious concern globally, can be effectively addressed by focusing on the development of ethical competence through human value education.

In the third section of this book, we will explore in detail the important implications of value education, specifically in relation to professional ethics.

■ GUIDELINES FOR VALUE EDUCATION

Having established the need and importance of value education, let us consider some effective and universally acceptable guidelines for integrating value education into the current academic system. Below are the broad guidelines:

Universal

Value education must be universally applicable to all human beings, true at all times and in all places. It should not vary based on factors such as sect, creed, nationality, or gender. The focus should be on universal human values that transcend these distinctions. For instance, respect in relationships is a universal concept and, therefore, can be included in value education.

Rational

Value education must be based on reason, not on dogma or blind beliefs. It should be open to questions and discussions, encouraging critical thinking. It cannot simply consist of rules, do's and don'ts, or sermons but should be logically sound and amenable to reasoning.

Natural and Verifiable

The values taught should feel natural to us, meaning they should be acceptable in an inherent and self-evident way. Living by such values should lead to mutual fulfilment—contributing to our own happiness, as well as the happiness of others and the well-being of the natural world. Furthermore, these values should be verifiable by each individual. We should not merely accept them as stated but should be able to personally verify their truth through our own experiences and by observing their outcomes in real life.

All-Encompassing

The scope of value education should cover all dimensions of human existence—our thoughts, behaviour, work, and understanding—as well as all levels of our living, including the individual, family, society, and nature. Value education should not be limited to intellectual exercises or the transfer of information; it must engage with the whole being.

Leading to Harmony

Ultimately, value education should foster harmony—both within ourselves and in our interactions with others. By living in accordance with these values, we should observe an increase in inner peace and harmony in our relationships with other people and the rest of nature.

■ CONTENT OF VALUE EDUCATION

As we have established, **the value of a human being is defined by their participation in the larger existential order.** Therefore, to truly understand human values, we must study not only the human being but also everything that exists around us. Our role is to foster relationships with every unit of existence. This means the scope of our study must be all-encompassing:

- It should cover all dimensions of the human being—thought, behaviour, work, and realisation.
- It should address all levels of human living—individual, family, society, nature, and existence.

Thus, the content of value education must include understanding the human being, human aspirations, and happiness. It should provide a comprehensive understanding of the ultimate goal of human life, as well as an understanding of other entities in nature, the inherent interconnectedness of all things, and the harmony within nature and existence. Furthermore, it must explore the role of human beings within this larger order.

Value education must encompass the understanding of harmony at multiple levels—individual, family, society, nature, and existence. Ultimately, it should guide us in living in alignment with this understanding by fostering mindfulness in our thoughts, behaviour, and actions.

■ PROCESS OF VALUE EDUCATION – SELF-EXPLORATION

Human values can be understood through a process of self-discovery, as they inherently exist within every human being. We all have a natural acceptance of values, and the task is simply to uncover or become aware of them. For instance, if you are asked whether it is naturally more acceptable to you to feel connected in a relationship or to feel opposition with your family members, you can observe your internal response. Naturally, the feeling of relationship is more acceptable. This feeling of connection is a value for us.

In this example, the feeling of relationship wasn't created; you already had an innate acceptance of it. It was simply revealed by directing your attention inward through the process of self-exploration. Therefore, the study of human values should

involve fostering this self-exploration. Each statement can be taken as a proposal, allowing you to investigate its truth for yourself.

Value education is not about prescribing rules or giving sermons. It is a process of self-exploration and self-investigation, encouraging you to discover the truth within yourself. This idea will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

■ KEY TAKEWAYS

The primary need for value education is to understand human aspirations and discover what is truly valuable (human values) in life. The value of any entity lies in its participation within the larger order of which it is a part. For human beings, value is found in contributing to mutual fulfilment and harmony, starting with themselves, then extending to their family, society, and nature.

The content of value education must be universal, rational, natural, verifiable, and aimed at fostering harmony. The process of value education should be one of self-exploration rather than prescriptive instruction.

■ RECAPITULATION POINTS

- All individuals strive for a fulfilling and harmonious life, which is perceived as valuable.
- The value of any entity is defined by its contribution to the larger order of which it is a part.
- A holistic perspective reveals that human beings participate at the individual, family, societal, and natural levels.
- The true value of a human being lies in fostering harmony across these interconnected levels.
- Value education focuses on understanding one's role and participation in the larger order of existence.
- Effective value education must be universal, rational, natural, verifiable, and promote harmony.
- The curriculum of value education should encompass all dimensions of human existence and levels of living.
- Value education is fundamentally a process of self-exploration, which involves self-reflection and self-discovery.
- Self-exploration entails self-verification based on natural acceptance and experiential validation.
- Ethics represent a clear expression of human conduct, influenced by an understanding of oneself in relation to nature.
- Developing ethical competence is crucial for ensuring professional ethics in various fields.
- Value education promotes awareness of our responsibilities towards ourselves and others.
- It encourages the cultivation of values that contribute to personal and societal well-being.
- Value education aids in resolving conflicts and contradictions in our aspirations and actions.
- The process fosters a sense of belonging to a larger community and environment.
- Value education supports the development of critical thinking and informed decision-making.

- It encourages individuals to assess the impact of their actions on the broader ecosystem.
- The role of educators is pivotal in facilitating value education through guidance and mentorship.
- Value education enhances emotional intelligence, empathy, and interpersonal skills.
- Ultimately, the aim of value education is to enable individuals to lead harmonious lives that benefit both themselves and the larger community.

■ ASSESS YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. What is meant by “value,” and how does it define the worth of a human being? Provide examples to illustrate.
2. Define “skill” and provide examples. How do values differ from skills, and why are both necessary?
3. What are the two fundamental questions every human being must address for a fulfilling life?
4. Explain the significance of the questions “what to do?” and “how to do?” with practical examples from daily life.
5. What are the two primary domains of education, and how do they complement each other in fostering holistic growth?
6. How does the content of value education help individuals develop professionally and ethically?
7. What are the fundamental principles guiding value education, and why are they essential?
8. Identify three key outcomes of value education and explain their relevance to your personal experiences.
9. Describe the process of value education and how it fosters self-exploration for a better understanding of oneself.
10. Define “ethics” and explain its relationship with values. Why are they interconnected?
11. Why is understanding human aspirations essential, and how does value education contribute to achieving them?
12. How can value education resolve contradictions and confusion in decision-making? Provide personal examples.
13. Explain how skill development and value education address the questions “what to do” and “how to do.”
14. How does value education help individuals understand their roles within society and nature?
15. What is the significance of experiential validation in value education? How does it strengthen right understanding?
16. Discuss the impact of prioritizing skills over values in the current education system on individuals and society.
17. How do professional ethics derive from a clear understanding of values? Explain with examples.
18. Why is balancing values and skills necessary for a fulfilling life? Provide practical examples.
19. How does value education align individual aspirations with societal and environmental well-being?
20. Why should value education adopt a universal and comprehensive approach to foster global harmony and sustainable development?