

## CHALLENGES OF TEACHING MORAL AND ETHICAL VALUES IN AN AGE OF INSTANT GRATIFICATION

*Dr. Sujit R Chandak*

*Associate Professor, Department of English, Shri M.D.Shah Mahila College, Malad (West), Mumbai, India*

**Received: 21 Oct 2022**

**Accepted: 21 Oct 2022**

**Published: 25 Oct 2022**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The concept of Instant Gratification comes from Psychology and refers to the idea that human beings like to have what they want right now; they don't want to wait. Freud refers to it as the id: a primitive part of the personality that pursues only pleasure and instant gratification. Contrarily, Delayed Gratification is the ability to wait for a later, better reward. This quality is associated with the inculcation of moral values and positive outcomes such as psychological and physical health, social competence and academic success. With the information revolution and heralding of the digital world information is at the fingertips, one can do various things instantly, google has all the answers and we have come to live in a world which is hyper-connected and in 'always on' mode. The digital natives is a reality and so is the cult of the instant, immediate. This paper attempts to locate the role of values in the contemporary world of instant gratification. It will argue for the perpetual importance of values, and it suggests ways in which values can be inculcated in the digital world.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Digital natives, Instant Gratification, Covid 19, Moral values, Ethics*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this brave new world of the internet and information superhighway the power of not just all types of information but the ability to take various actions based on that information is at the fingertips of the smart-phone, tablets and computers enabled hands of the people. In fact, today we have surpassed the information revolution and the digital revolution and have entered a world of social media revolution. The students who are taking higher education are right at the forefront of this revolutionary, fast-changing world. It is a world in which various web-applications, messengers, emails, apps, simulations and website have the ability of conducting secure financial transactions, protecting personal privacy and effectively making transition to a 'digital first' world smooth. All of this has made all previously cumbersome, difficult and time-consuming task (booking a ticket, conducting all bank transactions, learning, entertainment, match-making, dating, getting all types of things delivered, shopping and so on) easy, quick and just at the fingertip.

The world-wide Covid 19 pandemic has only hastened this pace and has made it more broad-based in terms of age, geography and socio-economic status. Many such as Timoty Teo have shown how the debated term 'digital natives' has undergone a change in meaning and its focus on being born after a certain time such as the 1980s; now it is evident that many born before that use technology as if they have lived their entire lives with it. Further the coming of easily available internet on mobile, hand-held devices such as smartphones and tabs have been a real game changer in advancing the penetration of the digital world. The Covid 19 pandemic and the lock-downs imposed by government across the world proved to be an opportunity for a faster rolling out and reach of the internet-enabled digital world. Today, there is nothing

that one does not know; nothing is far away from a google search on one's smart-phone. It has become the second nature of people to 'look up' for any and everything on the internet. However, there are downsides of this; these are on the side of the values that earlier made us better human beings and how these values are being replaced by a system where there is a void in the human values. This paper finds a link between the 'instant gratification' that the 'new' world of ours brings and the vacuum of values. It explains this link by taking a cue from basic Freudian psychology and the concepts of Id, Ego and Superego by pointing out how values are getting eroded due to the availability of Instant gratification. This paper, finally points out the role that the education system and the teachers can play in this age of instant gratification.

Human mind is hardwired in such a fashion that it selects immediate pleasure over something in the future. This was an evolutionary advantage at an earlier stage of the development of human beings; if one valued the immediate one was able to survive. Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology, in his psychoanalytic theory of personality, names this as the 'Id'. This aspect of the personality is original and is present from birth leading to the development of other aspects. It is driven by the 'pleasure principle', and strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants, and needs. The Id is very important in early life, because it ensures that an infant's needs are met. However, social life will not be possible if life operates only in the way of the Id. The Ego, which develops from Id, ensures that the demands of the Id can be expressed in an acceptable way in the real world. The Ego works on the basis of the 'reality principle' assessing the costs and benefits of an action before deciding to act or abandon the urge. The Superego is the last part of the personality to develop and it brings in the ideas of morality, ideals and the sense of right and wrong. The Superego works to civilize human behaviour. It suppresses all unacceptable urges of the id and drives the individual towards moral and idealistic standards. It should, however, be noted that personality is a combination of these three, and also that the first response always is that of immediate gratification.

It is the ability to delay the immediate pleasure and wait for a bigger reward which has made many of the great human achievements possible; delayed gratification not just unlocks a bigger reward in future but also makes human values possible, as without this (if everyone was to seek instant gratification) we are no better than the beast. One of the chief roles of educational systems is to continuously keep building the ability of delaying the urge for immediate gratification. This aspect has been well documented in a famous longitudinal study conducted to research the function of instant vs delayed gratification. This modern time study in the field of human psychology was known as the Stanford Marshmallow Experiment [1972 (original), 1990 (follow-up)]. The original experiment conducted on the preschool kids established that delaying gratification was related with age; the follow up after 18 years proved that those kids who had successfully delayed gratification tended to do better in academics, social and many other parameters. The human civilizations across the world knew the importance of delayed gratification in human development and encoded this in their cultural, social and educational practices. Hence, we can find many sayings, proverbs and moral stories in various languages which prioritize the ability to wait for getting a bigger benefit, especially when something small is available instantly. This is knowledge of the various communities which has been expressed in the form of various sayings, proverbs and moral stories. Briefly, we learn many of the human values through the ability of delaying gratification.

However, what has happened in the recent past and continues to happen now has completely changed the world in which the personality blooms. First, is the development of the 'consumer economy', which focuses not on the needs, demands and supply but on desires and consumption by individuals, who are now 'consumers'; not just that it focuses on creating newer products, the need for which was never there, and a desire and aspiration to use them. It is built to feed the

self gratification through cost reduction, accessibility and customization of products and bombardments of advertisements; it caters to whatever one wants; consumer is the king. Paul Robert, the famous American journalist and writer warns of “a dilemma that every citizen in post-industrial society will eventually confront: how to cope with a consumer culture almost too good at giving us what we want” [The American Scholar, Autumn 2014]. This kind of socio-economic system, which is slowly becoming the world order, gives rise to a culture of not just consumption but simultaneously a mindset of instant gratification, which prioritises the Id. A second phenomenon which has changed the world has been the revolution in computational science and the internet. Computers, in the 1990 and after, helped companies in cutting production and distribution costs as also enabling a huge variety of goods suited for all individual. Customization is not limited to just being a consumer choice but slowly it is becoming an approach to life. The internet has made the world more connected. Information is at the fingertips; Google has all the answers and we have come to live in a world which is hyper-connected and in an ‘always on’ mode. All of these developments together have contributed to the culture of the instant and made the world seemingly simple and easy but really extremely complex and difficult. I would like to posit that this in a way forces and facilitates the individual to return to the impulse of the ever-present Id, straying away from the bonds of morals, ideals and values.

Education at every level, including higher education, must take a note of this scenario as it has a significant role to play in inculcating values in the character of their students. The world around the students has changed in the last two decades and there is the challenge of making a case for values where things are geared for the instant and extremely temporary view of life in general. The youth of today is already there, basking in the glory of the easy, consumption driven socio-economic society and hyper-connected, ‘always on’ however superficial ‘Google world’; in some years from now we will have a new generation all born in this world. This generation will from the beginning be a part of the virtual world. Values are more critical in the virtual world as this world provides anonymity, tempting the individual to believe in a literal absence of the superego. The challenge is in making our young realise the importance of human values which are in opposition to their temporal world.

This is a real challenge that is and will confront us more and more. Teachers, at the level of higher education where the student is already an empowered individual, will have to play a crucial role in re-teaching the lessons of waiting and delaying the urge for instant gratification. Without the ability to wait and keep working for higher goals and not fall for the easily available consumption driven products and content, our youth will not be able to realize various values which are so important for the development of human beings; they will not know the value of sacrifice and hard-work which have the ability to bring long term development and happiness to them. The current paper would offer the following suggestions in the effort towards bringing human values into the world of our students:

- We must invest, institutional and personal, time into the cause of inculcation of values. Recognising the immensity of work is important. It is a big challenge. Value Education needs lot of attention. The role of teachers of all subjects in stressing upon values is crucial.
- While teaching any subject, the teacher knowingly or unknowingly, puts the moral values she/he upholds in front of the students; in selection of content, example, methods of teaching, assessment and over all behaviour; this is natural as we live surrounded by our value system. What is needed is to make the teacher aware of this which will give him/her the power of selecting the values which she projects.

- This is true also of the educational institutions; the policy, the choices, the functional aspects, of the institution influences the values of the students. We need conscious decisions to focus on sound values.
- Humanities (literature, creative writing, and language) can effectively carry the message of human values. Such subjects are part of the compulsory component at UG. We only need to prioritize the values lesson, in framing syllabi, classroom practices, and assessment.
- In the field of higher education we should embed through effective structuring sports and other activities into the credit scheme; there can be no better teaching of the importance of delayed gratification and it will bring many human values into focus.
- The message has to be delivered in the medium of the learner. Today screens of different type rule the minds of the young. The practitioner of higher education need to make an effort for delivering the message through content, stories delivered in the medium of the youth.

Human beings were not designed for a world of easy gratification, but for a world where it was difficult to get needs of survival fulfilled. The natural bias against the future, essential for our ancestors, is an Achilles' heel in today's easy-availability world. Human development was built on fighting off the urge of the immediate so as to prepare for a future. Human values were derived from this. The ability to plan for the future, an essential component in our development as adults, is under attack, pushing us to live in permanent childhood. We must educate our youth on the perpetual importance of values. We, in the field of higher education have to offer our students the perspective that life is a marathon and not a sprint.

## REFERENCES

1. Roberts, Paul. "Instant Gratification." *The American Scholar Autumn 2014: Cover Story*
2. Snowden, Ruth. *Freud - The Key Ideas: Teach Yourself*. London, Hachette, 2010
3. Henk, de Berg. *Freud's Theory and Its Use in Literary and Cultural Studies: An Introduction*. New York, Camden House, 2004
4. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford\\_marshmallow\\_experiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_marshmallow_experiment) accessed on 30th October 2014, 22:15.
5. Plowman, L., Stephen, C., & McPake, J. (2009). *Growing Up With Technology: Young Children Learning in a Digital World (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203863619>
6. Timoty Tio, 'Digital nativity': a definitional framework, *World Journal on Educational Technology: Current Issues*, (2013) pages:389-394
7. Tabish, S. A. "India's Covid-19 Crisis: Challenges & Strategies." *International Journal of General Medicine and Pharmacy (IJGMP)* 10 (2021): 69-86. *International Journal of General Medicine and Pharmacy (IJGMP)*