The Humanities and Social sciences in India today

If you were graduating from school in the 70's then there were 2 academic streams on offer – Science and Humanities (The Arts).

Following the introduction of the 10+2 system by the National Policy on Education in the mid-1970s, CBSE structured its senior secondary level (Class 11 & 12) into three main streams: Science, Commerce, and Humanities (Arts). By 1980, this structure was firmly in place in affiliated schools.

May I say at this point – that to channel students into a crucial decision about their future at 15/16 years of age is so limiting. It doesn't allow students to understand their world, understand themselves, get a sense of their strengths & aspirations – it funnels their learning experiences and is not holistic.

Philosophers and thinkers – from Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore', Viviekananda and Jiddu Krishnamurthi - taught that the intent of education must be the inner transformation of the human being rather than just preparing them to pass exams.

Holistic learning focuses not just on cognitive growth, but social and emotional growth as well. The NEP 2020 urges us to adopt an inter disciplinary approach moving away from "siloed" education to include arts and humanities within technical curricula to foster critical thinking.

There are international school leaving certifications that ensure students study Math, Science, Social Sciences and the Visual/Performing Arts/ Philosophy in Grades 11 & 12.

This holistic approach is critical for the futures our children face – Current research suggests over the next 20 years, today's students will change jobs or careers frequently due to rapid technological disruption and evolving workplace values.

We saw it happen first hand during the pandemic…

We are seeing high mobility: For Gen Z, the average job tenure in the first five years of their career is just 1.1 years. Estimates suggest Gen Z may change jobs roughly 10 times between the ages of 18 and 34 alone.

We will be seeing job obsolescence: By 2030, it is estimated that 85% of jobs that will exist have not even been invented yet, while approximately 92 million existing roles could be displaced globally by automation and AI.

And there will be Skill Shifts: By 2030, roughly 70% of the skills used in most jobs are expected to change, necessitating continuous "upskilling" and likely forcing multiple career pivots over a 20-year span.

In such a scenario an education that is restricted to siloed learning makes no sense.

And yet there is the challenge of Perception about the Humanities

Even before the introduction of Commerce – the perception amongst parents, even educators which filtered through to students was -

Science was for the intelligent, commerce for the practical, and arts-well, arts was for those who had no other choice.

There continues to be an academic hierarchy and a strong pressure from parents – for their children not to opt for humanities.

A survey conducted by NCERT in 2021, highlighted - 78% of Indian parents wanted their children to study science or commerce, as they are deemed more "prestigious".

STEM and professional courses are seen as more stable career options, while Humanities is often looked down upon due to societal bias, job market concerns, and lack of awareness.

Whilst the education system prioritises science and commerce, sidelining humanities - we live in interesting times – and we are seeing a pivot.

In spite of the Social Sciences facing significant marginalization in due to a "STEM-centric" academic culture and lower perceived job prospects, yet they are increasingly being recognized as vital for critical thinking and interdisciplinary solutions to complex societal issues.

There is a growing realization of their value in areas like psychology, mental health & counselling, social research, digital content creation, new opportunities in media, public policy and sustainability.

We're also seeing an Integration with Tech: Institutions like the IITs are increasingly incorporating humanities to foster a more holistic education, recognizing that technical skills must be balanced with ethical and social understanding, successfully integrating these subjects with technology and science to produce "future-ready" graduates.

Pedagogy

How do we, as educators develop these skills that foster critical thinking, cultural awareness, and ethical reasoning amongst students? Developing these skills are dependent on the pedagogy that responsible educators use:

• They move beyond textbooks to incorporate lived experiences, open questions, encouraging curiosity and enquiry – the disciplines naturally explore human behaviour, history and social structures – an understanding of the world around them – specially in our present context, of constant change, uncertain and complex futures, geopolitical tsunamis affecting economies, accelerated climate change, the wreckage of our environment ecology and Human rights.

• Our young students must be resilient to address the concerns of equity and diversity and it is our duty as educators and parents to ensure that we give them the space to engage in difficult discussions, to dissent, to have the conviction about the position they take on social issues.

Inspired Humanities educators follow some Core Pedagogical Strategies which are culturally responsive – they integrate students' diverse backgrounds into the curriculum.

In history, they pair standard texts with primary sources from varied ethnic or social backgrounds.

In literature, they select works by authors that reflect the identities of our students, allowing them to see themselves as protagonists.

They proactively design lessons with flexibility - Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

They Provide multiple formats for material, such as recorded lectures, transcripts, and visual aids.

They Offer flexible assessment options, such as podcasts, oral presentations, or graphic organizers, instead of only traditional essays.

We then see a shift from teacher-led lectures to student-centered engagement, which are strong signs of active and collaborative learning.

Small-group discussions to allow students to process sensitive topics in a safe environment. Students solve real-world problems collectively, undertaking projects that are relevant to their community.

The focus is on connection, communication, solving real world problems through collaboration.

While building an Inclusive Environment educators need to self reflect - evaluate their own implicit biases to ensure they do not accidentally overlook or stereotype certain groups.

Set explicit expectations for respectful discourse, especially when discussing topics like race, religion, or social justice.

What do we see as the outcomes and benefits of this pedagogy?

Students are exposed to multiple world views which challenges their preconceived notions encouraging them to challenge the status quo.

Students develop empathy by studying diverse literature and history, they "step into the shoes" of others, fostering compassion.

This prepares students for a readiness to work in teams and collaborate across cultural differences.

Finally - The intersection of the Humanities and Social Sciences with professional fields, such as medicine, law, engineering and business – is increasingly vital for addressing complex, real-world challenges. This intersection focuses on the *human* element within technical systems.

- The humanities provide the framework for moral reasoning. In medicine, this manifests as "Bioethics"; in technology, it drives the "Ethics of AI," ensuring that efficiency does not override human rights.
- It heightens contextual understanding: Social sciences (sociology, anthropology) help professionals understand the cultural and systemic environments in which they operate. A civil engineer, for instance, uses social data to ensure infrastructure serves diverse community needs rather than just solving a physics problem.
- Critically, it enriches Communication & Narrative: Professional success relies on the ability to translate complex data into persuasive narratives. Law and business depend heavily on rhetoric and linguistic precision—skills rooted in literary and linguistic studies.
- Human-Centered Design: Fields like UX (User Experience) design bridge the gap between computer science and psychology, ensuring technology is intuitive and accessible based on human behaviour patterns.

Why It Matters Today

As automation and AI handle more technical tasks, the "soft skills" of the humanities—empathy, ambiguity management, and interdisciplinary synthesis—are becoming the primary differentiators for high-level professional leadership. And To thrive across these sectors, workers will need a blend of technological literacy and the uniquely human skills of creative problem solving, resilience and emotional intelligence