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1

INTRODUCTION

HUMAN ECOLOGY AND FAMILY SCIENCES

Evolution of the discipline and its relevance to quality of life

Let us begin by trying to understand the title of this subject — ‘Human Ecology and Family Sciences’ (HEFS). The dictionary explains the term ‘ecology’ in two ways. Firstly, it is referred to as a branch of Biology that deals with relations between living organisms and their environment. Secondly, it is stated to be a complex of relationships between an organism and its environment. Borrowing from biology, in our context, the ‘living organism’ is the human being, and hence the term ‘Human’ precedes ‘Ecology’.

Through this subject you will be studying about human beings in relation to their environment. Additionally, there will be a study of dynamic relationships that children, adolescents and adults have with the various physical, economic, social and psychological elements in their ecology.

The expression ‘Family Sciences’ is an equally significant segment in the title. As you would agree, the family is central in most individuals’ lives. It is within the family that children are nurtured, so that they develop and acquire independent identities as adults. While studying this subject, the students will be guided in understanding the individual in the context of the family, which in turn is a critical social unit of society. ‘Human Ecology and Family Sciences’ follows an integrated approach in the teaching-learning process. More importantly it deals with the interaction of human beings as members of their families and the society with the environment. This forms a synergistic relationship with their ecology, which amalgamates within it physical, psychological, socio-cultural and economic resources.

In the Class XI curriculum, you would notice that particular attention has been paid to the stage of adolescence, as this period is known to be a turning point in one’s life. Thus, you will study how

adolescents develop an understanding of themselves, and what role food and other resources, fabric and clothing, as well as communications play in their lives.

A subject close to HEFS, though not exactly like it, is Home Science. It has been taught under this title at both the higher secondary and university levels in different parts of the country. With changing times, many disciplines of study have taken new forms and assumed a more contemporary nomenclature; for example, Life Sciences is being used to refer to biological sciences. There was a need to modernise the content of Home Science at the school level, and give it a title that would release it from being associated mainly with the home and with the tasks traditionally done by girls and women. At the university level the University Grants Commission undertook this exercise many years ago.

Here, a brief history of the evolution of Human Ecology and Family Sciences from the field of Home Science in India would be in order. In the early 20th century there were many institutions in different parts of the country that had introduced courses in Foods and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles, as well as Extension Education. These different disciplines were brought under the rubric of Home Science in 1932, when an institution by the name of Lady Irwin College was set up in Delhi to promote women's education. This was the time before India's independence from the British rule, when very few girls attended school, and hardly any institutions for women's higher education existed.

A few eminent women were in the vanguard of the movement to liberate India. Among them were Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, stalwarts of the All India Women's Conference, who conceived of and established the Lady Irwin College. The British Viceroy in India at that time was Lord Irwin, and his wife, Lady Dorothy Irwin too supported the setting up the college. Hence, the College was set up in her name. The goal was to serve the home and society with equal resolve, so as to remove social and educational inequalities that prevented women from reaching their potential.

Thus, Home Science was not intended to be a subject only about the 'home', but to be an interdisciplinary field that would empower its students to enhance their own quality of life and that of other individuals and families. However, over time, the label Home Science (in the mind-set of lay people and non-Home Science professionals) became associated primarily with learning culinary skills, laundry and child-care. While at the higher education level an upgrading of the curricula as well as resetting of the professional standards took place several years ago, at the high school level, its gender-typing and association with 'cooking and laundry' remained. In fact, those were some of the reasons why boys were either not admitted to this area by the schools, or they themselves shied away

from studying it as it was seen as a subject only for girls. It was wrongly perceived as lacking in rigour.

The present curriculum that has guided the preparation of the textbook is contemporary in its content and approach. It is so designed and presented that you will identify with the issues discussed. The title 'Human Ecology and Family Sciences' was considered to be most appropriate to reflect the spirit of the course. As you read the chapters, you will realise that the subject is multi-disciplinary. It contains within it fields such as Human Development, Food and Nutrition, Fabric and Apparel, Communication and Extension, and Resource Management. Knowledge in these areas is essential to sustain and augment one's quality of life, whether one lives in a village or a town, and whether the person is female or male. The textbook, it is hoped, will answer some of the questions young people have about their lives, and not be perceived merely as a means to clear exams.

Key Terms

Ecology, Family, Adolescence, Home Science, Gender-typing, Contemporary, Multi-disciplinary, Quality of life.

3

■ EXERCISE

- A. Do you know about the subject Home Science? Yes No
If your answer is 'no', please ask your teacher.
List 5 terms/concepts that you associate with Home Science.
1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
- B. At the end of the year after you have studied this book 'Human Ecology and Family Sciences' list 5 areas of study that you would associate with the subject.
1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____

■ REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain the terms 'Human Ecology' and 'Family Sciences'.
2. Do you agree that adolescence is a 'turning point' in one's life?
3. Name the eminent women who conceived of starting the first Home Science college in India.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____