



# AWARENESS

*Newer Horizons in Human Excellence*



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The journal Awareness is dedicated to promoting and disseminating knowledge derived from innovative research that serves humanity, all forms of life, and their environments. It aims to foster deeper understanding by integrating empirical, experimental, experiential, and spiritual dimensions of knowledge across diverse disciplines. At its core, the journal seeks to expand the horizons of collaborative and empirical research, motivated by a love for humanity, child-like curiosity, and an unwavering commitment to truth. Awareness aims to be a publicly accessible platform for fresh, creative knowledge and shared scholarly exchange, thus embracing the principle that knowledge, like light, must be shared freely and openly to dispel ignorance and inspire the pursuit of human excellence. Only through such open exchange can the journal fulfill its commitment to the ideals of the University for Human Excellence.

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## Essay

## Connecting Hearts Globally

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In today's age of social media and greater connectedness in the internet age, our hearts still remain disconnected. True connection remains a vital yet often missing element, particularly when it is required for addressing global challenges. This is especially evident in the management of congenital heart disease (CHD), the most common congenital condition worldwide. While epidemiological studies suggest that about 1% of all live births are affected by CHD, the realistic truth in many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is far more ominous due to the significant impact of higher fertility rates, effects of social determinants on *fetal health*, relatively high rates missed diagnoses at birth, and unaccounted deaths in early life. For example, birth rates in LMICs average about 22 per 1000 population as compared to 10 per 1000 population in high-income countries<sup>1</sup>. Approximately 90% of children with CHD are born in the LMICs and they lack access to appropriate medical or surgical care<sup>2</sup>. Despite the disproportionately larger numbers of children born with CHD in underdeveloped countries, many with complex CHD tragically do not survive their first year, while others with less severe heart defects lack access to necessary treatment and chronically succumb to their disease. Although countries like Lebanon<sup>3</sup>, India<sup>4-6</sup>, Turkey<sup>7</sup>, Sri Lanka<sup>8</sup>, Ethiopia<sup>9</sup>, or Nigeria<sup>10</sup> may have achieved some degree of success in establishing specialized programs for CHD surgery, these programs appear unlikely to be scalable or sustainable<sup>2</sup>. One high-volume program currently delivering care to large numbers of children with CHD may provide a sustainable and scalable model to enable CHD surgeries in LMICs through sustained societal support, frugal innovation, standardized approaches, as well as cohesive, collaborative networks<sup>11</sup>.

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Numerous non-profit organizations around the globe are dedicated to addressing this critical need through various humanitarian efforts. However, these dedicated groups often operate independently, leading to piecemeal and duplicated efforts and an overall diminished capacity to maximize patient care delivery – a crucial aspect of our collective moral and fiscal responsibility.

To overcome this fragmentation and to foster a more unified approach, the *Global Heart Network (GHN)* was inaugurated at the *Global Congenital Heart Disease Conference: Launching The Global Heart Network* at Stanford University in November, 2024. This worldwide initiative was inspired by the vision of Professor Afksendiyos Kalangos and supported by the Kalangos Foundation. The conference featured a distinguished panel of international speakers with leading cardiac surgeons and cardiologists specializing in CHD surgery from Argentina, the African continent, Fiji Islands, Greece, Germany, India, Lebanon, Turkey, UK, and USA. Various non-profit organizations represented at this conference included not only the Kalangos Foundation (Greece), but also the German African Heart Forum (Germany), Sri Sathya Sai Health and Education Trust (India), Brave Heart Fund (Lebanon), Novick Cardiac Alliance (Memphis, TN), Children's HeartLink (Minneapolis, MN), Healing Little Hearts Fund (UK), Saloni Heart Foundation (San Jose, CA), and the Prashanthi Balamandira Trust (India).

This conference succeeded in bringing together the congenital heart disease community under a shared vision and common purpose. Coordination efforts for the GHN initiative will be spearheaded by a patient-centric, smartphone-enabled mobile application with worldwide reach (created by *Techunion Software*, Cincinnati, OH). This online platform will ultimately serve as a beacon of hope for all CHD patients and their families. The app's multilingual accessibility will further facilitate integration of piecemeal efforts across many countries within the GHN.

Beyond the technological platform, the GHN's core mission is to unite all non-governmental organizations, hospitals, healthcare networks, various kinds of specialists, and family support groups serving their precious and fragile patients in the CHD community. Whenever a family registers their child with a particular CHD lesion on this platform, a proprietary algorithm using Artificial Intelligence will map out a pathway for the family to confirm the CHD diagnosis, locate a child heart surgery center, identify and contact the cardiac surgeon, the cardiac anesthesiologist, and a nearby hospital that will come together to provide them high-quality repair of this CHD lesion without any associated financial burdens. We believe that through collaboration, we can forge stronger bonds and amplify our collective impact on the global prevalence of untreated CHD and the patients that we serve. The GHN also will also integrate adult CHD patients using the same format to take care of their own ailments.

Just as many individual rivers converge to form the vast ocean, our unified efforts within the Global Heart Network will create a more powerful voice to advocate for and treat the millions of adults and children with congenital heart disease in underserved areas worldwide. As the international *Awareness* journal completes the first year of its operation, it will serve as a scholarly forum to explore the underlying genetic and environmental causes of congenital heart disease, to expand the therapeutic options available through non-invasive, invasive, or hybrid approaches, to implement the latest advances into clinical practice, to improve the quality of care and clinical outcomes, to compare the effectiveness of different approaches, in essence, to celebrate the successes of the GHN and similar programs, while also chronicling the lived experiences of families and children as they receive the most competent and compassionate care — regardless of who they are, where they live, or whether they have the ability to pay. This is truly part of the mission that the *Awareness* journal was born to achieve!

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# Speaker Adaptation Using Deep Neural Networks For Speech Enhancement

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**Abstract:** The performance of Deep Neural Networks (DNN) based speech enhancement techniques often degrades when encountering a speaker mismatch between the training and testing conditions. The acoustic properties of speech vary significantly across different speakers. Speaker adaptation in DNNs aims to address this challenge by adapting the networks to individual speaker characteristics using smaller amounts of training data. Recent research has demonstrated that the performance of DNN-based speech enhancement techniques improves when they are adapted to specific speakers' spectral characteristics. This paper presents an overview of the current methodologies and advancements in speaker adaptation for DNNs. It also contributes to the understanding of how various adaptation strategies are employed to different DNN architectures. We highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each adaptation strategy and provide recommendations for achieving optimal performance.

**Key Words:** speaker adaptation; deep neural networks; speech enhancement.

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## 1. Introduction

Model based speech enhancement approaches, such as the hidden Markov model (HMM), codebooks and DNNs, which rely on a trained model of speech data, have demonstrated superior results compared to traditional techniques like spectral subtraction and statistically-based methods, particularly in the presence of non-stationary noise conditions [1]. Among these, DNNs have gained prominence due to their exceptional ability to handle complex noise environments and superior acoustical modeling of speech. Despite the successes of DNN-based speech enhancement techniques, they often perform poorly when encountering speakers not seen during training [2]. The “one size fits all” approach of DNN-based speech enhancement falls short when confronted with diverse acoustical speech patterns, leading to suboptimal performance.

Speaker adaptation is a technique used in speech processing to improve performance by adapting a speech model to a target speaker's characteristics. This approach is crucial since the variability in speech among different speakers significantly impacts the accuracy of speech processing systems, such as speech recognition, speaker verification, speaker identification, and speech enhancement.

Speaker adaptation in DNNs aims to adapt DNNs to individual speakers' spectral characteristics, thereby providing personalized speech enhancement.

The motivation for speaker adaptation in speech enhancement is driven by its potential impact on a wide range of applications such as mobile phones, teleconferencing systems [3], and hearing assistive devices [4], enhancing the quality and intelligibility of speech in a personalized manner, thereby improving the user experience.

The scope of this review is centered on exploring various speaker adaptation techniques in DNNs used for speech enhancement applications. This paper will assess the methodologies used for speaker adaptation, and highlight the improved speech enhancement performance results in recent research.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a discussion on general speaker adaptation techniques. Section 3 describes the recent advances in speaker adaptation techniques using DNNs for speech enhancement. The challenges are presented in Section 4. Finally, Section 5 presents the conclusions.

## 2. Traditional Speaker Adaptation Algorithms

Speaker adaptation of speech data models has been a topic of research for several decades, with speaker verification, speaker recognition, and speech recognition being the primary fields of application. The initial methods of speaker adaptation focused on Vector Quantization (VQ) models [5]. Later, the focus shifted to Maximum Likelihood Linear Regression (MLLR) and Maximum A Posteriori (MAP) methods. The early spectral models laid the groundwork for MLLR [6], which adjusts acoustical model parameters based on adaptation data to better match the spectral characteristics of the target speaker. MLLR adapts the mean vectors and covariance matrices of Gaussian components as follows:

$$\hat{\mu}_s = A_s \mu + b_s, \quad (1)$$

$$\hat{\Sigma}_s = H_s \Sigma H_s^T. \quad (2)$$

MLLR and similar approaches [7, 8] are prevalent in speaker recognition. Gauvain and Lee introduced MAP estimation for adapting HMM/Gaussian Mixture Models (GMM), merging prior knowledge from speaker independent models with new speaker data to optimize model parameters [9]. MAP estimation maximizes:

$$P(\theta|X) \propto p(X|\theta)p(\theta)^r, \quad (3)$$

where  $p(\theta)$  is the prior distribution, and  $r$  is a weighting factor. In contrast, [10] involves learning transformations specific to a speaker during training and testing phases. Cluster adaptive training, which groups speakers by acoustic characteristics to adapt models, was introduced in [11].

## 3. Recent Advances of Speaker Adaptation Techniques using DNN for Speech Enhancement

Traditional speaker adaptation techniques, outlined in the previous section, mainly focused on model parameter adjustments and transformations of models whose parameters were interpretable. However, these methods cannot be directly extended to DNN architectures, as DNN lack parameter interpretability. Thus, DNN offer new opportunities and challenges to address speaker adaptation more robustly.

Speaker adaptation in DNN refers to modifying a pre-trained DNN to enhance performance for a new speaker without the need for extensive retraining from scratch. Studies have shown that this retraining approach outperforms training DNNs from scratch for speaker adaptation tasks [12]. Various speaker adaptation techniques for DNN include fine-tuning, learning hidden unit contributions, speaker adaptive training, I-vector adaptation and embedding layer adaptation. In this section, we will explore the various speaker adaptation strategies using DNNs for speech enhancement and they are given below.

### 3.1. Speaker and Noise Embedding

This technique involves embedding distinctive features of a speaker's clean speech vectors and background noise vectors into the neural network. In [13], the authors develop a novel training framework that performs joint optimization of the speech enhancement model and the speaker embedding extraction process. Generally,

traditional approaches treat speaker embedding and speech enhancement modules as separate processes, leading to suboptimal speech enhancement performances. This paper introduces a joint learning mechanism where the speaker verification is pretrained and further adapted through a combined enhancement loss and speaker verification loss. This dynamically adapts to the speaker's identity and acoustic environment, offering personalized speech enhancement performance. In [14], another novel Speaker-Aware Speech Enhancement (SASE) method extracts speaker information from a clean reference using LSTM layers and then employs a Convolutional Recurrent Neural Network (CRN) to embed the extracted speaker information. Even in this method, a joint learning framework is utilized, which optimizes speaker extraction through LSTM and speech enhancement through CRN simultaneously. With the extended self-attention mechanism, the proposed framework performs adaptation using just a few seconds of clean reference speech.

While previous works have used speaker information to guide speech enhancement, the authors in [15] utilize additional noise conditions to guide speech enhancement for various types of noise environments. The work incorporates Noise-Aware Training (NAT), which employs voice activity detection to differentiate between speech and non-speech frames and uses these non-speech frames as additional noise information. These non-speech frames represent the characteristics of the background noise, which are termed as Dynamic Noise Embedding (DNE). The extracted DNE is concatenated with features of the input speech signal and fed into the speech enhancement module to obtain the final enhanced speech.

The work in [16] investigated the utilization of speaker embeddings, like d-vectors, to selectively enhance the speech of target speakers while suppressing the background noise and other interfering speakers. The work proposes two new models: Personalized Deep Complex Convolution Recurrent Neural Network (DCCRN) that integrates the speaker d-vector as an additional input to personalize the enhancement, and Personalized Deep Convolution Attention U-Net (PDCAAttUNet) that incorporates a self-attention mechanism to capture temporal dependencies and fine-tune the enhancement based on the target speaker's characteristics. The attention mechanisms allow the network to focus more precisely on the relevant aspects of the target speaker. The work introduces a new metric for assessing the Target Speaker OverSuppression (TSOS), thereby ensuring that enhancement does not negatively impact the intelligibility of the target speaker. Building on the speaker extraction strategy, the authors in [17] employ a real-time, low-computational PercepNet framework and adapt the PercepNet by utilizing a speaker embedding. The uniqueness of this paper is that, despite the integration of advanced features and personalization, the personalized PercepNet maintains low complexity, making it deployable to edge devices.

A similar real-time DNN based personalized speech enhancement technique is proposed in [18]. Tencent Ethereal Audio Personalized Speech Enhancement (TEA-PSE) incorporates a two stage speech enhancement framework combined with the state-of-the-art speaker verification architecture, ECAPA-TDNN speaker encoder, to achieve personalized speech enhancement. The Enhanced Context-Aware Predictive Attention Delay Neural Network (ECAPA-TDNN) is used as an encoder to generate the speaker embedding from a target speaker's enrollment, and these extracted embeddings are then used to condition the two-stage speech enhancement framework. This conditioning fine-tunes network weights to match the target speaker's characteristics. The Tencent-Ethereal-Audio-Lab Personalized Speech Enhancement (TEA-PSE) system ranked 1st in the ICASSP 2022 Deep Noise Suppression (DNS2022) challenge. The refined version of TEA-PSE, introduced in [19], TEA-PSE 2.0, introduces a subband processing approach that reduces computational complexity, complemented with improved speech enhancement performance. TEA-PSE 2.0 brings a 0.102 OVRL personalized DNSMOS improvement with only 21.9% multiply-accumulate operations compared with the previous TEA-PSE. An extended version of TEA-PSE 2.0, introduced in [20] as TEA-PSE 3.0, integrates key novel approaches with TEA-PSE 2.0. the novel approaches of TEA-PSE 3.0 are:

- Subband Processing: TEA-PSE 3.0 employs subband processing using Squeezed Temporal Convolution Networks (TCN).
- ResidualSTM: A residual layer is added after each S-TNC layer to improve sequence modeling capabilities.
- Local-Global Representation (LGR): It combines local and global speech features to extract speaker-specific information.

TEA-PSE 3.0 ranked 1st in both ICASSP 2023 Deep Noise Suppression Challenge DNS-Challenge Track 1 and Track 2. Authors in [21] propose a novel multistage, multi-loss training framework that performs both full-band personalized and non-personalized speech enhancement. The framework utilizes a speaker extraction network that employs speaker embeddings to adapt the DNN process for a particular speaker. The speaker extraction network consists of a 1-D convolutional layer processing the time-domain input signal. The network uses several GRU layers that are effective in modeling time-series data, capturing the temporal dynamics and dependencies within the speech signal. It also uses multiple feedforward networks and classification layers to fine-tune the network to differentiate between different speakers. Once the speaker embedding is generated, it is used by the speaker extraction network to filter out non-target speech and background noise and to enhance the target speaker.

### 3.2. Meta-Learning

Often referred to as “learning to learn”, meta-learning enables a model to quickly adapt to new tasks or speakers with minimal training data of the target speaker. A novel speaker adaptation approach termed One Shot Speaker Adaptive Meta-Learning (OSSEM) is introduced in [22]. OSSEM combines a modified transformer with a Speaker-Specific Masking (SSM) to achieve real-time personalized speech enhancement. OSSEM has mainly two components:

- **Modified Transformer:** It is responsible for the speech enhancement task, which uses a convolutional encoder in the transformer instead of the traditional positional encoder [23].
- **Speaker-Specific Masking:** This network employs speaker embeddings to create masks that adjust the input features to the speech enhancement model, making the enhancement customized to the target speaker’s spectral characteristics.

OSSEM uses a meta-learning framework for rapid adaptation to new speakers. **MetaLearning Framework:** This is achieved by structuring the training process around support and query sets:

- **Support Set:** Used to adapt the model to the target speaker’s characteristics.
- **Query Set:** Used to evaluate the model’s performance post-speaker adaptation.

In the real time application phase, the OSSEM model adapts to a new speaker using a single utterance. OSSEM has shown competitive performance with other state-of-the-art real-time causal speech enhancement techniques. Another work in [24] utilized a meta-learning framework for speaker adaptation. In this work, a U-Net architecture is used as the meta-learner. Results from the work show that speech enhancement through meta-learning outperforms traditional speech enhancement techniques in few-shot learning scenarios where only a small amount of training data is available for adaptation.

### 3.3. Multi-Task Learning

The multi-task learning approach trains the neural network on multiple related tasks simultaneously, such as speech enhancement and speaker identification. By learning these related tasks together, the network can improve its generalization capabilities and performance on individual tasks. In [3], a framework for unified real-time personalized and non-personalized speech enhancement is introduced that integrates both personalized and non-personalized speech enhancement within a single DNN architecture. This framework consists of two components:

- **Speaker Embedding Network:** This network extracts the target speaker’s features to facilitate personalized enhancement [25]. ECAPA-TDNN is used as the speaker embedder as it achieves state-of-the-art results in several speaker recognition tasks.
- **Enhancement Network:** This network performs the actual speech enhancement. It is conditioned on the output of the speaker embedding network and a frame-wise control input that directs whether the enhancement should be personalized or non-personalized. This is accomplished using a binary input that dynamically switches between personalized and non-personalized models across the frames. This multitasking unified framework provides better speech enhancement results when compared to state-of-the-art architectures.

### 3.4. Zero-Shot Learning

In [26], authors introduce a speech enhancement method based on a denoising autoencoder with multi-branched encoders (DAEME), that combines the robustness of deep learning with the flexibility of ensemble methods. The DAEME model has the following components:

- **Multi-branched Encoder:** Each branch is trained on a subset of the data characterized by certain noise types and speaker characteristics. This allows the encoder to handle different noise types and speaker characteristics effectively.
- **Dynamically Sized Decision Tree (DSDT) Framework:** The decision tree aids in partitioning the training data effectively.
- **Decoder:** After processing by the encoder branches, the outputs are fused by a decoder that consolidates the branched outputs into a single enhanced speech signal.

The DAEME model presents a novel speaker adaptation strategy where it adapts the DNN to new speakers and varying noise conditions without requiring retraining. In the work described in [27], authors perform personalized speech enhancement using zero-shot learning with a knowledge distillation framework. This approach allows for speaker adaptation without requiring speaker-specific clean speech data. In the knowledge distillation approach, a large, well-trained teacher model imparts knowledge to a smaller student model. The well-trained teacher model processes noisy speech to obtain enhanced speech outputs, which serve as pseudo-targets for training the compact student model in real-time during deployment. The authors in [28] introduce an ensemble of specialist modules through zero-shot learning to perform personalized speech enhancement. In this proposed method, an ensemble of specialist models is employed, where each specialist model is trained to handle a specific subset of training data characterized by speaker characteristics or noise types. A gating module estimates the relevance of each specialist for a given input during inference and selects the most appropriate specialist model to process the input. This approach adapts to new speaker and noise conditions without requiring retraining of the entire model. A Siamese network generates discriminative, speaker-specific embeddings that maximize or minimize the similarity of the output vectors depending on whether the input utterances are from the same speaker. These generated embeddings are used to train the set of speakers into different clusters through k-means clustering. The gating module is trained to predict to which cluster a new input belongs based on the speaker's characteristics.

After individual training, the entire ensemble method is fine-tuned to optimize coordination between the gating module and the specialist modules. This framework reduces the computational complexity compared to the baseline while maintaining the same speech enhancement performance.

A similar work was proposed in [29], presenting a novel approach to speech enhancement (SE) using zero-shot learning combined with a Quality-Net based model selection strategy.

A central element of the proposed system is Quality-Net, a deep learning based non-intrusive quality assessment model trained to predict speech quality scores. Quality-Net is utilized in two key capacities:

- **Model Training:** During the offline phase, it assesses the quality of noisy speech samples and assists in clustering the training data to effectively train specialized SE models.
- **Model Selection:** In the online phase, it evaluates incoming noisy speech to select the optimal SE model for real time enhancement.

Two strategies are employed for zero shot model selection:

- **ZMOS-QS (Quality Score based):** Utilizes the quality scores predicted by the Quality-Net to cluster the training data and select the appropriate model at test time.
- **ZMOS-QE (Quality Embedding based):** Uses embeddings from the Quality-Net for clustering and model selection, focusing on latent representations that capture more nuanced aspects of speech quality.



The proposed ZMOS approach, incorporating both the QS and QE strategies, provides superior speech enhancement performance compared to traditional and baseline systems.

In [30], authors present a self-supervised learning method to adapt speech enhancement models. The proposed method extracts speech features from unlabeled, in-the-wild noisy recordings of the target user without access to corresponding clean speech data. This addresses the privacy concerns and practical challenges associated with collecting clean speech data. The paper utilizes contrastive learning techniques that aid in refining the model to distinguish between different sounds within the noisy data. A data purification technique introduced in the paper identifies and prioritizes the cleaner parts of the noisy data during training. A novel personalization technique is proposed in [31] that uses Neural Speech Synthesis (NSS) for data augmentation. This study explores how synthetic data generated by advanced Text-To-Speech (TTS) systems can be utilized to train personalized speech enhancement when direct recordings of the target speaker are limited. In this work, two types of NSS systems are evaluated for the generation of target synthetic data:

- YourTTS: a multi-speaker, multilingual TTS system.
- AudioLM: an autoregressive speech synthesis system that does not rely on textual input.

Models are trained using a combination of real speech recordings and synthetic speech generated by YourTTS and AudioLM. The research findings suggest that better personalization of speech enhancement models is possible with the generation of high-quality synthetic data.

#### 4. Challenges

DNNs lack direct interpretation of their parameters, making speaker adaptation intricate and complex. The multilayered architecture coupled with a complex framework of parameters, makes it difficult to understand how speaker specific changes in the network or input data affect the output.

DNNs are fixed at training time [32] and cannot undergo any structural alterations during actual deployment. Acoustical conditions change in real-time applications, which complicates the adaptation of DNNs. In [33], the authors introduced a novel approach for speaker adaptation using codebook integrated deep neural networks for speech enhancement. This method is advantageous as it can be applied to any DNN architecture and facilitates the adaptation of DNNs to multiple speakers without necessitating any modifications to the network itself.

Although the data augmentation technique decreases computational complexity by training the DNN with the target speaker's synthetic data, offering some advantages, it often poses a limitation. Transitioning to another speaker requires retraining the entire DNN with the other speaker's synthetic data, presenting a challenge of excessive retraining. Speaker adaptation techniques, by introducing a speaker extraction/auxiliary network to generate speaker embeddings, add to the computational complexity and processing time of the DNN. This can be a concern for their deployment on devices like hearing aids and mobile phones.

#### 5. Conclusions

In this work, we have presented an overview of the current methodologies and techniques in speaker adaptation using DNN for speech enhancement. The study highlights the strengths of various adaptation techniques, including the use of speaker embeddings, zero-shot adaptation, few-shot learning, meta-learning approaches, and data augmentation. These methods have proven effective in adapting DNN to individual speaker characteristics. However, there are challenges related to DNN retraining when transitioning between different speakers and increased computational complexity. Despite the advancements in speaker adaptation, these challenges highlight the need for more efficient personalized models that provide better speech enhancement performance. These models should adapt to different speakers without the need to retrain the DNN for each transition and manage computational demands effectively.

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## Article

## Seva as Sadhana: Sathya Sai Baba's Vision of Leadership and Transformation

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**Abstract:** In contemporary leadership discourse, Servant Leadership has emerged as a transformative model that prioritizes humility, stewardship, and service over authority. Sathya Sai Baba's concept of Seva (selfless service), deeply rooted in Indian spiritual traditions, resonates with the principles of Servant Leadership while extending beyond it as a path to self-realization. Unlike conventional leadership models that focus on governance and organizational ethics, Seva integrates service with practical spirituality, positioning leadership as both a social responsibility and a means of inner transformation. This paper examines Seva through the lens of Servant Leadership while situating it within broader cross-cultural ethical and philosophical paradigms. By bridging spirituality with governance, this study presents Seva as a compelling framework for ethical leadership, social transformation, and comparative philosophical discourse, offering an alternative model of leadership that synthesizes action, devotion, and self-transcendence.

**Key Words:** Seva, Sadhana, Servant Leadership, Practical Spirituality, Sathya Sai Baba, Transformative Leadership

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### I. Introduction

Spirituality has been a significant theme in discussions on servant leadership. Scholars have explored the connection between the two, recognizing servant leadership as a model rooted in ethical values and selfless service. Research by Chekwa and Quasta (2018) offers a structured analysis of these concepts, emphasizing how spiritual awareness shapes leadership qualities. Ulluwishewa (2014) highlights that individuals committed to spiritual growth are characterized by unique guiding values and ethical perspectives, shaping their decisions and leadership style. Additionally, studies have categorized the defining traits of servant leadership, providing a clearer understanding of its essence. Lynch and Friedman (2013) stress the importance of identifying these characteristics, as spiritually evolved leaders naturally cultivate humility, a commitment to serving others, and detachment from personal ambition. These traits align with the broader understanding that true spirituality is not simply an abstract concept, but one that demands the integration of values and an innate feeling of sacredness [1].

Spiritual growth is not a solitary pursuit but an active engagement with the world in service to others. It must be lived and expressed in action and practice. This approach of "Practical spirituality emphasizes experience and

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realization of self, God, and world—in and through practice but at the same time nurtures humility not to reduce these only to practice” [3]. This journey of realization parallels the path of a servant leader, where true leadership emerges not from authority but from genuine service to others. This concept deeply resonates with the Indian ideal of *Seva*, or selfless service, which is grounded in the belief that true leadership is an expression of compassion and sacrifice. In this sense, *Seva* becomes both a spiritual and transformative act, bridging individual realization with collective well-being.

Sathya Sai Baba, one of the most influential spiritual figures of modern India, emphasizes *Seva* as the highest form of devotion, where selfless service is not merely a duty but an expression of divine consciousness. His teachings align closely with the principles of servant leadership, advocating that true leadership emerges not from authority but from humility, empathy, and concern for others. Similarly, Greenleaf's (1970) model of servant leadership emphasizes that leadership is not about exercising control but about nurturing and empowering those around us.

By drawing from these perspectives, this paper explores the intersections between *Seva* and Servant Leadership, examining how selfless service fosters both spiritual fulfillment and ethical leadership. It highlights how *Seva*, as a form of practical spirituality, transforms leadership into a social responsibility rooted in compassion, humility, and collective well-being.

### Servant Leadership: A Brief Overview

Robert K. Greenleaf famously stated, “Leadership was bestowed upon a man who was by nature a servant” [6]. His philosophy of servant leadership challenges conventional notions of authority, arguing that true leaders emerge through selfless service rather than positional power. He contends that society needs more servant-leaders, individuals who lead by prioritizing the needs of others [6]. The concept of servant leadership was first introduced by Greenleaf (1991), drawing inspiration from Hermann Hesse's novel *Journey to the East*. The story follows a group of travelers on a mystical journey, accompanied by Leo, a seemingly humble servant. Their journey unfolds smoothly until Leo suddenly disappears, leading to disorder and the group's eventual dissolution. Later, when Leo is found and reinstated, the travelers realize that he was, in fact, their leader all along [6]. This revelation highlights Greenleaf's core message that leadership is not about dominance but service, and the most effective leaders are those who place the well-being of others before themselves. Basing this, in his foundational work, Greenleaf (1991) outlined ten key characteristics that define a servant leader. These characteristics are summarized and presented in Table 1 for clarity and reference.

Greenleaf (1991, p. 4) explains servant leadership as a concept that originates from an innate desire to serve. This desire to serve comes first, followed by a conscious decision to take on leadership. The key distinction lies in the leader's commitment to prioritizing the highest needs of others. He proposes a fundamental test: “Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” In Greenleaf's perspective, “servant leadership is leadership with two roles of servant and leader fused in one real person” (1991, p. 21).

Greenleaf's principles of servant leadership were initially applied to business organizations, where they evolved into a model focused on developing and empowering individuals to reach their highest potential (Gandolfi et al., 2017). The underlying belief is that when leaders prioritize the growth of their followers, it creates a ripple effect, enhancing not only individual well-being but also the overall success and performance of the organization (Gandolfi et al., 2017). This model shifts leadership from a hierarchical approach to a participatory and purpose-driven practice.

Similarly, Sathya Sai Baba's Seva embodies practical spirituality, where leadership is not merely about guiding others but about transforming oneself through selfless service. Unlike conventional leadership models that focus on empowerment within organizational structures, Seva nurtures both the giver and the receiver, fostering inner growth alongside social upliftment. By integrating spirituality with action, Seva transcends institutional frameworks, creating a leadership paradigm rooted in compassion, duty, and the realization of a higher purpose.

**Table 1:** Summary of Servant Leader characteristics

Trait	Description
Active Listening	Genuine listening and understanding
Ethical Use of Power	Favouring persuasion over coercion
Consensus-building	Prioritizing collective decision-making over authoritative rule
Foresight	Demonstrating strategic vision and anticipating future challenges
Inclusive Communication	Avoiding restrictive, closed-off language
Reflection and Withdrawal	Ability to step back for clarity and broader perspective
Empathy and Acceptance	Embracing others with understanding and care
Conceptual Thinking	Offering innovative and big-picture insights
Healing and Service	Fostering growth, both individually and collectively

### The Spirit of Seva: Sathya Sai's Guiding Ethos to Practical Spirituality

In Indian philosophical traditions, the inevitability of action, or *karma*, is a fundamental principle. The Bhagavad Gita affirms that even the Divine engages in action “for the maintenance of the world” (*loka sangraha*). It says, *na me pārthāsti kartavyam triṣhu lokeṣhu kiñchana nānavāptam avāptavyam varta eva cha karmaṇi* (4.18). The meaning of this is, “there is no duty for Me to do in all the three worlds, O Parth, nor do I have anything to gain or attain. Yet, I am engaged in prescribed duties, underscoring the inescapable nature of karma.” According to the doctrine of *karma*, every thought, word, and deed generates a corresponding consequence. The cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth is thus governed by *karma*, which represents the cumulative effects of an individual's actions. Each positive act inevitably yields a beneficial outcome, while negative actions lead to adverse consequences [8]. Modern thinkers such as Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, and other Hindu philosophers interpret “*karma* not so much as a way of placing blame and more as a doctrine of freedom and empowerment” [8]. If one's present circumstances are shaped by past actions, then one also possesses the agency to transform them and create a better future. Within this framework, understanding *dharma* becomes essential. To lead a fulfilling life and minimize suffering, both in the present and in future rebirths, one must discern which actions to perform and which to avoid. So what is *Dharma*? Baba says, “one should attain unity of thoughts, words, and deeds. This is the true *dharma* of every human being” [9].

Within this context, Indian philosophy delineates two primary modes of engagement with the world:

The first mode of thought—*pravṛtti*, or “world affirmation”—is traditionally the value system of the householder, who has a duty to provide support for society through economic activity. In contrast, *nivṛtti*,

or “world renunciation,” is the value system of the ascetic who renounces the lifestyle of the householder to pursue spiritual enlightenment [8].

A key philosophical bridge between these two modes is found in the doctrine of *Karma Yoga*, from Bhagavad Gita. Karma Yoga, or the path of selfless action, advocates engagement in the world without attachment to personal gain. By performing one's duties with a spirit of dedication and detachment, an individual can achieve both material and spiritual fulfillment, harmonizing the seemingly opposing values of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*.

Sathya Sai Baba reconciles these two aspects by elevating *Seva* (selfless service) as *Sadhana* (spiritual practice). In his philosophy, action is not merely a means of worldly engagement but a transformative path to self-purification and spiritual evolution. Through *Seva*, individuals transcend self-interest, cultivate universal love and oneness, and attain liberation— “not through renunciation, but through selfless service”, Baba says.

*Seva* is a small word but is filled with immense spiritual significance... *Seva* must be viewed as the highest form of *sadhana*. Serving the poor in villages is the best form of *sadhana*. In the various forms of worship of the Divine, culminating in *Atma-nivedanam* (complete surrender to the Divine), *Seva* comes before *Atma-nivedanam*. God's grace will come when *Seva* is done without expectation of reward or recognition. Sometimes *Ahamkaram* (ego) and *Abhimanam* (attachment) rear their heads during *Seva*. These should be eliminated altogether [10].

In this way, Baba synthesizes Karma Yoga and *Bhakti* (devotion), presenting selfless action as a direct path to self-realization. This aspect of *Seva* shows how “Practical spirituality is a multi-dimensional movement of transformation and quest for beauty, dignity and dialogues in self, culture and society. Practical spirituality also involves transformation of religion, science, politics, self and society. Practical spirituality seeks to transform religion in the direction of creative practice, everyday life, and struggle for justice and dignity” [11].

According to Sathya Sai Baba, man is inherently a social being. He says, “Society for man is like water for fish; if society rejects him or neglects him, he cannot survive” [9]. Baba here highlights the limitations of individualism and the transformative potential of collective action. He asserts, “What a single individual cannot accomplish, a well-knit group or society can achieve,” [9] emphasizing the power of unity and cooperation. This vision is especially important when it comes to *seva*, or selfless service. Baba sees *seva* as a key part of spiritual life—not just to help improve society, but also to go beyond the ego and come closer to one's true self.

Sathya Sai Baba emphasized on the realization of immanence and transcendence of the Divinity where Self-realization is the ultimate goal of life, and he reframed the ideal of working for the welfare of the world through the principle of *seva* (selfless service). He proclaimed, “Manava Seva Madhava Seva” (Service to Man is Service to God) and “Jana Seva Janardhana Seva” (Service to People is Service to God), underscoring that true worship lies in serving humanity with the recognition that the divine resides in all beings.

Here, “*Seva* is panegyric, that is, it constitutes an expression of the Hindu topography of the self where the prototypical act of worship is the glorification of the divine” [12]. In Baba's thought, selfless service becomes a sacred offering, elevating both the server and the served through the recognition of divinity in all beings. This makes us understand that *seva* is not charity but the recognition of divinity in all.

Baba was also in a way a critique of utilitarianism and ritualism. That's why Prime Minister Narendra Modi aptly acknowledged, “Sathya Sai Baba had done a wonderful job of freeing spirituality from rituals and connecting it to public welfare. His work in the field of education, his work in the field of health, his service towards the poor, down-trodden and deprived, still inspires us [19].” This recognition underscores the transformative impact of *seva* in shaping a leadership model that transcends personal ambition and focuses on collective well-being.



Drawing on Samta P. Pandya's (2014) analytical framework, we have adapted its structure to Baba's philosophy, given the conceptual parallels in their approaches to service. Baba's discourses on seva articulate three distinct yet interrelated dimensions:

**Normative** – expressed through the dictum *Manava Seva Madhava Seva* (service to man is service to God), which underscores the ethical imperative of selfless service.

**Ideational** – rooted in the principle *Atmano Mokshartham Jagat Hitaya Cha* (for one's own liberation and the welfare of the world), reflecting the dual objective of spiritual evolution and social responsibility.

**Epistemological** – encapsulated in a theistic existential framework, which entails:

- The given-ness of worldly existence,
- Suffering as an intrinsic aspect of life,
- The necessity of transcendence,
- The affirmation of divine reality, and
- The role of an institutional mechanism for elevating human consciousness by recognizing the inherent divinity in all beings.

Baba's understanding of *seva* is that—service—should become a doctrine of self-realization. The aim of man is not *seva*, and Baba is clear about it. The aim of man is to perceive God in all. Here Self-realisation and God Realisation are one and the same. Fundamentally it is realising the divine within oneself and in all. Therefore, only serving others out of sympathy can, at the most, make one a philanthropist. One must divinize all their actions; only then is the true meaning of *seva* realised. This act of divinising work helps one get rid of the false idea of doership. In this process of divinising action, every duty becomes a struggle towards attaining that divinity. To quote his words:

“Every Sai *sadhak* and *sevak* has to make the *Atma* the basis of all activity. He should regard himself as the embodiment of the Divine and realise that the *Atma* is present in everyone. One should have the feeling that whatever joy or sorrow others experience is equally his. Only then can one render service, conferring joy on others.”

Baba resonates Bhagavad Gita here. The Gita says:

*tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samāchara*

*asakto hyācharan karma param āpnoti pūruṣhaḥ*

Meaning: “Therefore, giving up attachment, perform actions as a matter of duty, because by working without being attached to the fruits, one attains the Supreme.” (3.19)

What the Bhagavad Gita implied, Baba made explicit. This theistic existential appropriation of Seva positions service as a transformative praxis that bridges temporal existence with spiritual transcendence, integrating ethical action with metaphysical realization.

Such an approach exemplifies Baba's vision of spirituality as practical and engaged, rather than confined to abstract contemplation. As V.K. Gokak observes, “Baba's philosophy, in one sense, is a philosophy of pragmatic transcendentalism,” where “*iha* and *para*, this world and the next, matter and spirit, are not divorced from each other” [13]. This way Baba highlighted the importance of Vedanta and *seva*. He viewed Vedanta as a mode of ‘man’ making; an all inclusive contention in three progressive stages of duality, qualified monism and non-dualism.

Baba's philosophy of Seva extends beyond traditional interpretations by offering a pragmatic model of leadership that integrates spirituality with service. His emphasis on *Seva* as a leadership ideal aligns with Robert Greenleaf's concept of Servant Leadership, which envisions ethical and transformative governance. However, while Greenleaf theorized this model, Baba embodied and institutionalized it, making selfless service the foundation of his educational, healthcare, and humanitarian initiatives. By bridging spiritual ideals with practical action, he demonstrated how leadership rooted in service can foster ethical and sustainable models of community welfare.

### Seva Through the Framework of Servant Leadership:

Baba asserts, "We require today those who take delight in selfless service, but such men are rarely seen. You who belong to the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, every one of you, must become a *sevak*, eager to help those who need it" [14]. Here, Baba establishes the foundational principle of servant leadership—leadership rooted in service rather than authority. Further he continues, "When the *sevak* (helper) becomes the *nayak* (leader) the world will prosper." The transformation from *sevak* (helper) to *nayak* (leader), as Baba describes, mirrors Greenleaf's assertion that true leaders emerge from a deep commitment to serving others. Baba further reinforces this by stating, "Only a *kinkara* (servant) can grow into a *Shankara* (Master)," (Baba, 1981, 94) emphasizing that genuine leadership arises not from power but from humility and self-effacement. This trajectory from servitude to mastery encapsulates the essence of servant leadership, wherein "a man who was by nature a servant" [6] dedicates himself to the well-being of others. In this context, Baba's insightful use of the term "Shankara" is particularly significant, as it not only signifies a leader but also embodies the divine principle. Thus, when Baba admonished, 'Grow into a Shankara,' it can be interpreted as a profound call for the individual to transcend the identity and awaken to their inherent divinity.

However, Baba cautions against ego, which can distort both spiritual practice and leadership. He warns that "even a trace of it will bring disaster," underscoring that selfless service must be free from personal pride or ambition [14]. This aligns with Greenleaf's perspective that servant leadership requires deep self-awareness and the ability to transcend personal ambition in favor of collective growth.

The cultivation of awareness gives one the basis for detachment, the ability to stand aside and see oneself in perspective in the context of one's own experience, amidst the ever present dangers, threats, and alarms. Then one sees one's own peculiar assortment of obligations and responsibilities in a way that permits one to sort out the urgent from the important and perhaps deal with the important. Awareness is not a giver of solace — it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. (Greenleaf, 1991, 27)

A critical aspect of Baba's approach to *seva* was his emphasis on transformation, both personal and societal. He repeatedly stated that service was not merely about addressing material needs but about cultivating a spirit of compassion and ethical responsibility. This resonates with the servant leadership framework articulated by Robert K. Greenleaf, which defines true leadership as a commitment to the growth and well-being of others. It is the mark of one who, as Greenleaf puts it, is concerned and asks, "What can I do about it" [6] thereby placing the needs of others at the heart of leadership.

However, while Greenleaf's model emerged within the context of corporate and institutional leadership, Baba's philosophy is rooted in the Indian spiritual tradition, making *Seva* not just a social duty but a path to self-realization. In a way, Baba's vision of social transformation carries a Nietzschean undertone—where the pursuit of salvation and the recognition of divinity in all existence parallel Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, representing a higher state of self-transcendence and spiritual evolution.

Empathy and acceptance form the core of Servant Leadership. Greenleaf distinguishes acceptance as the act of receiving what is offered with approbation, satisfaction, or acquiescence. It is not passive but an active embrace of the other's humanity, including its flaws. He states, "For a family to be a family, no one can ever be rejected," [6] underscoring that true leadership, much like family, is grounded in accepting imperfection. The empathic

leader, Greenleaf argues, must imaginatively project their consciousness into another's experience, thereby understanding the struggles, vulnerabilities, and needs of others.

Greenleaf goes on to explain that “anybody could lead perfect people — if there were any,” emphasizing that true leadership often involves guiding individuals who are “immature, stumbling, inept, lazy,” yet have the potential for great dedication and heroism when wisely led [6]. Such leadership requires both acceptance of imperfections and a willingness to work with human flaws, fostering growth through understanding rather than correction. This concept of acceptance and empathy finds parallels in Sathya Sai Baba's philosophy of Seva.

However, while both Greenleaf and Baba emphasize unity and acceptance of others, their underlying frameworks diverge in crucial ways. Baba's approach to service extends beyond the empathetic understanding of others to an ontological recognition of the divine in every being. Baba teaches that true Seva is not only about accepting others but seeing the divine essence in them, recognizing the interconnectedness of all. As Baba states, “Duty without love is deplorable. Duty with love is desirable. Love without duty is Divine” [15]. Here, Baba underscores that love (Prema) is the primary motivator for service, and it is this love that enables one to see beyond imperfections, recognizing the inherent divinity in all beings.

Unlike Greenleaf's model, where empathy and acceptance lead to pragmatic action, Baba's philosophy links these qualities to spiritual transcendence. For Baba, Seva becomes a sacred practice of self-realization, where serving others is both an act of love and a means of spiritual awakening. Baba's emphasis on service as a divine expression implies a cosmic interconnectedness that transcends the immediate emotional or relational exchange emphasized by Greenleaf.

Additionally, while Greenleaf acknowledges the imperfection of human beings, Baba's view incorporates a higher, universal perspective—one that sees imperfection as part of the divine play. Baba's Seva is about transcending human limitations and transforming service into a pathway for spiritual growth. While Greenleaf's leadership model fosters human growth through acceptance of flaws, Baba's Seva calls for divine love as the transformative force that elevates both the server and the served. Thus, both leaders champion empathy and acceptance, but Baba extends this to a transcendent love that goes beyond human empathy, positioning Seva as not merely a compassionate act but a spiritual awakening. Greenleaf's model, while deeply humanistic and relational, focuses on the psychological and emotional needs of the follower; Baba's concept of service calls for an experiential transcendence of the self and a recognition of the divine in all.

While empathy and acceptance form the foundation of servant leadership, Greenleaf extends this idea into the realm of persuasion over coercion as a means of inspiring ethical action. Rather than enforcing decisions through authority, he argues that true leadership cultivates voluntary transformation: “Persuading people one by one with a gentle non-judgmental argument that a wrong should be righted by individual voluntary action [6].” He further reinforces that “Leadership by persuasion has the virtue of change by conviction rather than coercion [6].” For Greenleaf, the most effective leaders are those who inspire service not through imposition but through personal example and conscious reflection.

Sathya Sai Baba echoes this principle but extends it beyond ethical leadership into the spiritual realm, emphasizing that Seva must be silent, selfless, and free from personal recognition. He warns against reactive service motivated by social validation, stating: “We do not need any publicity or advertisement. Work silently... Prachar (publicity) is not the Achar (practice) of Sai Organization [16].” Both Greenleaf and Baba reject coercion in service and leadership, advocating instead for persuasion through conviction and self-practice. However, while Greenleaf's servant-leader seeks to build ethical communities, Baba's vision of Seva transcends hierarchical structures, framing service as an act of divine love (Prema), where the distinction between giver and receiver dissolves. Thus, where Greenleaf frames service as persuasive and communal, Baba elevates it to a spiritual discipline, where Seva is not just ethical engagement but an instrument of inner and outer transformation.



In a discourse, he said, “I am only a trustee... All these are gifts from devotees” [16]. By calling himself a trustee, not an owner, Baba rejected personal credit and highlighted collective devotion. This mirrors Greenleaf’s idea of leadership as trusteeship, where leaders serve the community rather than seek authority [17]. According to Greenleaf “The mindset of a servant-leader is trusteeship with a view toward internal stakeholders as well as the larger community. [17]”. Because, Servant leadership is a centrifugal force that moves followers from a self-serving towards other-serving orientation, empowering them to be productive and prosocial catalysts who are able to make a positive difference in others’ lives and alter broken structures of the social world within which they operate Greenleaf (1991) laid the philosophical groundwork for servant leadership. While Baba’s leadership, rooted in humility, selflessness, and social responsibility, embodies these principles, making his model of Seva a compelling spiritual pathway, parallel to the servant leadership philosophy.

**Table 2.** A comparative summary of Greenleaf’s servant leadership and Sathya Sai Baba’s concept of Seva, focusing on their foundational principles and intended outcomes.

Aspect	Greenleaf	Sathya Sai Baba
Foundation	Humanistic ethics	Spiritual Philosophy (Vedanta, Bhakti)
Motivation	Ethical Service	Selfless Love (Prema)
Self-Concept	Moral Agent	Divine Self (Atma)
Goal of Service	Empower Others, build Just Society	Spiritual Growth, Unity with the Divine
Leadership Style	Serve first, Lead by example	Serve silently, dissolve Ego
Spirituality	Implicit Moral Consciousness	Explicit God-Realisation
End Goal	Ethical Transformation	Self-realisation and Universal Love

## Conclusion:

V.S. Barulin (1999) identifies the main facets of spirituality: its universality, ideality, and the subjective world. These elements encompass a variety of spiritual dimensions, including rational, emotional-affective, epistemological-cognitive, value-oriented, and worldview-related aspects. Spirituality embodies scientific concepts, moral values, religious beliefs, aesthetic categories, and common knowledge. It is believed that these factors are interconnected and collectively shape the spirituality of both individuals and society [2].

Barulin’s identification of spirituality as encompassing rational, emotional, epistemological, and value-oriented dimensions suggests that spirituality is not confined to personal belief or religious practice but is deeply interwoven with a shared life of values and connection.

Leadership, as a facet of spirituality, manifests in the ability to guide and uplift others through ethical action, wisdom, and selflessness. Swami Vivekananda’s assertion that “the highest idea of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest idea of metaphysical conception” [3] underlines this integration. True leadership is not just about governance or authority; it is about embodying and enacting spiritual ideals in ways that transform individuals and society.

Spiritual leadership, as exemplified by Sathya Sai Baba, aligns closely with the principles of practical spirituality and servant leadership. His approach was not about asserting religious or institutional authority but about transforming everyday life into a spiritual practice. This transformation, as A.K.Giri states, is rooted in “sacred

non-sovereignty, which embodies a new ethics, ethics and politics of servanthood in place of the politics of mastery” [11]. Baba’s leadership was not about control but about service—an ethical and spiritual commitment to uplifting humanity through selfless action.

Baba’s leadership rejected the divide between the sacred and the secular, demonstrating that spirituality must manifest in tangible service to society. His philosophy did not seek mastery over others but cultivated a space where individuals could awaken to their highest potential through love, education, and selfless service.

This struggle for transformation, as A.K.Giri (2010) notes, encompasses “food and freedom, universal self-realization, transformation of existing institutions, and creation of new institutions” [11]. Baba’s service initiatives—providing free healthcare, education, and water supply projects— directly embodied these goals. His leadership was not about wielding authority but about fostering dignity, ethical living, and the common good, aligning with the idea of sacred non-sovereignty.

In an era where leadership crises and ethical failures are increasingly prevalent, Baba’s Seva-based model provides a compelling alternative, demonstrating that true leadership is not about power but about purposeful service and commitment. By integrating spirituality with governance, his vision challenges conventional paradigms, urging leaders to see service as both a duty and a path to personal and societal transformation. This reframing of leadership as a spiritual discipline not only enhances ethical governance but also fosters a world where leaders lead not to rule, but to serve.

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Original Article

## The Concept and Model of a Novel Human Excellence Quotient

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**Abstract:** Sadguru Sri Madhusudan Sai founded the Sri Sathya Sai University for Human Excellence (SSSUHE) with the aim to create graduates who have realized their innate divinity through excellence in selfless action. He has ordained that Human Excellence Quotient (HEQ) would serve as a means to quantify the subtle aspects of a student's personality and integrate them into their assessment in order to rank the students in terms of their overall performance. We present the HEQ model pertaining to four domains of human excellence as envisaged in the vision of the university. The HEQ model incorporates four quotients viz Intelligence Excellence Quotient (IEQ), Emotional Excellence Quotient (EEQ), Spiritual Excellence Quotient (SpEQ) and Social Excellence Quotient (SoEQ). These quotients are concordant with the university's vision as well as the core principles of Sri Sathya Sai Loka Seva Gurukulam Group of Educational Institutions..

**Key Words:** Human Excellence Quotient (HEQ), Intelligence Excellence Quotient (IEQ), Emotional Excellence Quotient (EEQ), Spiritual Excellence Quotient (SpEQ), Social Excellence Quotient (SoEQ), Divinity.

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### 1. Introduction

Human excellence is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the highest potential of an individual in various domains. It is the pursuit of achieving the best version of oneself, characterized by unconditional selflessness cultivated by virtues like reasoning, stability, transcendence and selflessness.

Sadguru Sri Madhusudan Sai promulgated that, “If a student enters a law university he will come out as a lawyer, if a student enters an engineering college he will come out as engineer, if a student enters a medical school he will come out as a doctor, and if a student enters Sri Sathya University for Human Excellence he must come out as the Divine - nothing less than that” [1]. He has also said “Divinity is inherent in everyone. To experience that divinity and make it perceivable, selfless service is the easiest means. The human then transforms into divine.” [2] Hence by serving others without any expectations, one purifies their mind and heart, allowing one to see God in everyone and everything. [3] This realization leads to the perception that all beings and the entire universe are manifestations of the same divine essence. By embracing this view, one can achieve a state of Oneness, where actions are guided by love, compassion, and selflessness, seeing divinity in everyone and everything.[4]

## 2. Literature Review

Human Excellence has been defined by various philosophies in different ways. It has been described as those qualities that make a person outstanding, exceptional, superior, or the best in any field of human activity [5]. While Western perspectives have emphasized virtues such as courage and self-reverence, ancient Indian teachings from around 600 BCE have focused on fulfilling moral duties and upholding the social order, guided by concepts like *dharma*. The word *dharma* literally means “what holds together.” Thus, *dharma* becomes a basis for either social order or moral order. Modern literature, exemplified by authors such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy in the 19th century, highlights virtues such as genuine love for humanity and faith grounded in lived experiences [5].

In recent times, the implementation of Human Excellence extends to fields like education and leadership, with a focus on fostering qualities like innovation and ethical behavior. In Kanji's Business Excellence Model, leadership plays a prime role for the creation of excellence in an organization [6]. Organizational values, vision, mission, strategy, and key issues are critical in this model. It also demonstrates how this model can be applied to assess leadership performance. Intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, sociability are the main leadership traits in this model [6].

Hanefar et al. (2015) conducted a content analysis of two important Islamic texts (*Ihya Ulumuddin* by Imam al-Ghazali and *Manusia dan Pendidikan* by Hasan Langgung) towards the development of Spiritual Intelligence Model for Human Excellence (SIMHE) [7]. They suggested that spiritual intelligence is the ultimate intelligence, and it should be a core value for providing holistic education to students in the Malaysian National Philosophy of Education [7]. The study identified seven elements of spiritual intelligence towards the development of SIMHE. These include purpose/meaning of life, consciousness, transcendence, spiritual resources, self-determination, reflection-soul purification, and coping with obstacles [7].

Traditional philosophers and thinkers specifically in the realm of formal and non-formal education, like John Dewey quotes, “*The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative.*” He argued that education should cultivate reflective thinking, preparing students for active citizenship and meaningful contributions to society [8]. Maria Montessori says, “*The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind.*” Her methods supported the idea that education should develop intellectual, emotional, and ethical faculties through structured yet flexible learning environments [9]. Jean Piaget “*Knowledge is a system of transformations that become progressively adequate.*” He believed that intellectual development is crucial to understanding and solving complex societal issues [10].

In India, philosophers, spiritual leaders, and educators have all stressed on the significance of imparting education steeped in ancient Indian ethos. They highlight the importance of developing character, unlocking hidden potential and inherent qualities, and nurturing a well-rounded personality for the betterment of the individual and society. Swami Vivekananda was one such personality who spoke extensively on Human Excellence. He described the individual with utmost excellence in his life is a man of harmony [11]. He says, “*They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.*” This makes us understand how divinity of the soul can be realized by Selfless Action. Swami Sivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society, believes that service to humanity is a means to realize one's innate divinity. His motto is “*Serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize.*” [12] Mahatma Gandhi says, “*The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.*” [13]. Such great spiritual leaders are concrete examples of selfless action.

According to Swami Vivekananda, Human Excellence is broadly classified as social and spiritual excellence. Spiritual Excellence focuses on inner growth and self-realization. On the other hand, Social Excellence requires the individual to have the knowledge of ways to uplift mankind, capacity to put this knowledge into practice, and most importantly, strength of conviction. Swami Vivekananda was himself a perfect blend of social and spiritual excellence [11]. The HEQ model introduces two additional dimensions, namely Intelligence and Emotional Excellence to the concept of Human Excellence.



Western Philosophers like Martin Buber emphasizes the sacred relationship between self and others, advocating for a worldview where there is no separation between oneself and the larger universe—including flora, fauna, and inanimate objects, in the book “I and Thou”. [14] This perspective brings realization of one’s divinity. Similarly, Paulo Freire, in his works such as “The Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” “A Pedagogy of Love,” and “A Pedagogy of Hope,” which highlight the transformative power of education to liberate and empower individuals. [15] [16] [17]

In today’s education system we find that the emphasis is given only to academic/professional excellence and there is almost nothing to mold the individual’s character and instill social responsibility. There is a lack in direction of life, only sharpening their intellect without broadening their hearts, leading to problems that we face in the world. But the purpose of SSSUHE is to create individuals with character, academic/professional excellence, and social responsibility.

Student Honor Code is a set of guidelines that students are expected to follow to maintain academic integrity and professional conduct. [18] In the USA, William & Mary College established the first honor code in 1779, which was a written pledge among the students to not lie, cheat, or steal. University of Virginia adopted an honor code in 1842, about two years after the murder of law professor John A. G. Davis on the university lawns.

The Ramayana, one of the greatest epics of India, provides insightful knowledge through its narratives. In one such episode, the supreme qualities of four princes (Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha, and Shatrughna) are described to King Dasharatha as ‘*Sarve Veda Vidah Śūrāḥ Sarve Lokahite Ratāḥ || Sarve Jñānopasampannāḥ Sarve Samuditā Guṇaiḥ ||*’ (Sloka 1-18-25). All the four princes were scholars in Vedas, valiant ones, all were interested in the welfare of the world, all were intellectuals and all of them possessed an air of probity [19]. These are core principles adapted by the Sri Sathya Sai Loka Seva Gurukulam (SSSLSG) [20].

The four components of HEQ model correlate with the above Ramayana sloka and they are explained as below:

1. *Sarve Jnanopasampannah*: Knowledge of all aspects of creation, which includes the physical, and mathematical sciences, life sciences, and humanities.
2. *Sarve Samudita Gunaih*: Repositories of all the good qualities that emanate spontaneously.
3. *Sarve Vedavidah Dheeraah*: Knowledgeable about ancient Indian wisdom, the Bharathiya culture.
4. *Sarve Lokahithe Rathaah*: Ever engaged in the welfare of the world.

**2.1 Evaluation of Human Excellence:** Modern psychology has made significant contributions to the study and evaluation of Human Excellence. Researchers in Positive Psychology have contributed valuable insights and frameworks for understanding Human Excellence, character development, and personal growth. Martin Seligman has conducted extensive research on character strengths, virtues, and well-being. His framework of “PERMA” (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment) provides a comprehensive model for understanding human flourishing [21]. The study of character strengths and virtues led to the development of the Values in Action (VIA) inventory [22].

Educational theories emphasize the development of Human Excellence through learning and character education. Carol Dweck’s research on the growth mindset explores the impact of beliefs about intelligence and abilities on achievement, and personal development. Her work highlights the importance of adopting a growth mindset for learning from failure and realizing one’s full potential [23].

Contemporary discussions on Human Excellence often integrate insights from philosophy, psychology, and education to tackle modern challenges. Duckworth’s work on exploring the role of non-cognitive factors such as grit and perseverance has gained attention for its role in achieving excellence. Duckworth et al. described the construct of grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals and showed that grit predicted

achievement in challenging domains over and beyond measures of talent [24]. They developed and validated a shorter-version of the Grit questionnaire to measure the trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals. It has been widely used to assess each individuals' ability to maintain effort and interest over the years despite adversity [25]. Additionally, the role of emotional intelligence, as popularized by Daniel Goleman, highlights the importance of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills in personal and professional excellence [26].

Hussain et al. developed the Human Excellence Index (HEI) based on a survey of 500 persons from diverse backgrounds who were asked to identify the qualities of a good human being. Their responses were distributed into five parameters, including: courage/defense, etiquette, patience, service/technology/innovation, and loyalty. These five parameters were derived from integrating the Vedic principles of Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Jnana Yoga. The HEI provides a comprehensive measure of Human Excellence aimed at fostering personal and societal growth, which can be assessed over a seven-year period in any individual's life [27].

It is crucial to validate the HEQ model against established constructs to establish psychometric robustness. Concurrent validity, a key aspect of construct validity, assesses whether HEQ scores align with validated measures that tap into similar constructs. The concurrent validity will be conducted in the course of this research by identifying the well-established psychometric tools that measure similar or related constructs via data from a sample population by administering the HEQ along with other validated tools. Some of the tools such as the Grit Scale [25] and the VIA Character Strengths Inventory [22] share conceptual overlap with HEQ's dimensions of perseverance, self-regulation, and character excellence, thus making them ideal for comparison.

### 3. Need for the HEQ Model

In a rapidly evolving and interconnected society, individuals must cultivate a strong foundation of positive and noble qualities that shape their character and drive their personality. SSSUHE offers higher education to students based on the foundation of Indian culture and spirituality. The curriculum is centered around bringing forth the best in every student by giving them a plethora of options to choose from Arts and Sciences, Vedic Studies, Performing Arts, Medicine, Agriculture, Mental Health, Physical Education and Sports [28]. In addition to the mainstream subjects, all undergraduate and postgraduate students study the co-curricular subjects based on ancient Indian ethos. These consists of *Bharatha Darshan*, *Veda Parayana*, and *Adhyatmic sangeet*. The ancient Indian scriptures such as the Bhagavad-Gita, Upanishads, and others are taught to the students in *Bharatha Darshan*. *Veda Parayana* consists of students learning the deeper meaning and reciting the sacred chants like *Devi Suktam* and others. Students learn basic concepts of music in *Adhyatmic Sangeet*. This unique model helps students to not only develop a knowledge of the mainstream subjects, but they also attain a comprehensive understanding of Indian culture and knowledge in music. Extra-curricular subjects constitute sports, yoga and social services. Apart from this, a practical skill course on life skills is also integrated into the curriculum.

The Founder of SSSUHE desired to also quantify other important aspects like institutional culture, ethics and the character of the student apart from academic brilliance. Each student will be assessed through a 360-degree assessment. It includes feedback from multiple perspectives: self-assessment, peer (classmate and roommate) evaluation, input from teachers, sports instructors, and the warden. The components of life skill courses and co-curricular courses will also be included in evaluating corresponding excellence quotient. Along with curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular subjects, HEQ is also included as part of the student ranking system.

#### 4. The HEQ Model

HEQ model offers a comprehensive approach to evaluate a student's overall development that is grounded in their character. This model consists of four quotients like Intelligence Excellence Quotient (IEQ), Emotional Excellence Quotient (EEQ), Spiritual Excellence Quotient (SpEQ) and Social Excellence Quotient (SoEQ). Indicative positive and noble qualities and related activities in each quotient are defined in order to quantify each quotient.

Operational definitions of the HEQ Model are given below.

1. Intelligence excellence quotient (IEQ) focuses on intellectual qualities like reasoning, quest for truth, and critical thinking, which solves complex problems effectively.
2. Emotional excellence quotient (EEQ) emphasizes emotional qualities like equanimity, stability, and empathy, equipping students with skills to manage their emotions in any situation in life.
3. Spiritual excellence quotient (SpEQ) centers on spiritual qualities like self-awareness, devotion, and broadmindedness, fostering a sense of purpose in life, and gaining the timeless wisdom from ancient Indian ethos.
4. Social excellence quotient (SoEQ) underscores the significance of social qualities like selflessness, duty, and responsibility and contribution to the welfare of society.

#### 5. Evolution of the HEQ Model

The HEQ model is based on the university's vision and the activities students engage in, throughout their tenure at the university. Each row and column in Table I explains how this model has evolved and how they are connected to the four quotients. The column-wise flow of the table is described below:

**5.1 SSSUHE Vision:** The vision statement of our university is as follows, "To provide free of cost quality higher education of global standards of excellence based on ancient Indian ethos and contribute individuals with competent hands, brilliant head, compassionate heart for universal welfare" [28].

The four components of the HEQ model are derived from this vision. The underlined key words - brilliant head, compassionate heart, ancient Indian ethos, and competent hands form the basis of the model.

1. Brilliant head constitutes deep knowledge in various aspects and critical thinking.
2. Compassionate heart constitutes empathy, kindness, and the capacity to understand the emotions of others.
3. Ancient Indian ethos constitute a blend of spiritual wisdom and an understanding of various Indian scriptures.
4. Competent hands constitute practical skills and abilities required to effectively perform tasks and solve problems in various situations.

**5.2 The Bhagavad-Gita Verses:** Indian scriptures like the Bhagavad-Gita, Ramayana, and Upanishads offer profound insights into the nature of human existence, the pursuit of knowledge, and the cultivation of divine qualities for realizing one's true potential. These scriptures also provide wisdom that can be applied in day-to-day life. Four quotes from the Bhagavad-Gita have been chosen to illustrate the four components of this model. These teachings from the Bhagavad-Gita enhance individuals with different aspects of living with the profound meaning explained here:

1. '*Buddhih Buddhimatām Asmi* - I am the intellect of the intelligent.' This verse focuses on cognitive abilities such as reasoning, critical thinking, and holistic problem-solving skills. (Bhagavad Gita 10:32)



2. '*Samatvam Yoga Ucyate* - The essence of yoga is equanimity'. This verse emphasizes the cultivation of qualities such as stability, empathy, and equanimity. (Bhagavad Gita 2:48)
3. '*Adhyātma-Vidyā Vidyānām* - The knowledge of the spiritual self among knowledge seekers.' This highlights the focus on spiritual growth and aspects such as devotion, love, harmony, which helps in one's inner awakening. (Bhagavad Gita 10:32)
4. '*Yogaḥ Karmasu Kauśalam* - Perfection in action is yoga'. This highlights the importance of cultivating skills and expertise in one's social responsibility. (Bhagavad Gita 2:50)

The transformation from Vanar (animal tendencies) to Nar (human nature) and finally to Narayan (Divine nature) is a symbolic journey often interpreted from the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, though it is not explicitly mentioned there. The transformation from Vanar (animal tendencies) to Nar (human nature) and finally to Narayan (Divine nature) is a symbolic journey often interpreted from the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, though it is not explicitly mentioned there.

**5.3 Indicative Noble and Positive Qualities:** Central to this model are indicative noble and positive qualities that each component embodies. The qualities that are defined for each quotient in the model are designed to address specific dimensions for individual development or growth. Each quality in the quotient targets a different aspect of personality, but at the same time these are all interconnected. This ensures individual growth, balancing their intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social excellence. Qualities are defined for each quotient below:

- **IEQ** is characterized by qualities such as curiosity, reasoning, creativity, logic, holistic thinking, and other noble qualities. For instance, curiosity is defined as an active desire to learn or know, characterized by a keen interest that leads to investigation and inquiry. Reasoning is described as the ability to comprehend, infer, or think in an orderly and rational manner, allowing for discovery, formulation, or conclusion through logical processes. These constitute the intellectual aspects of an individual, so these qualities are categorized under IEQ. These qualities equip students with cognitive tools that are needed to tackle complex and critical situations with the help of these qualities.
- **EEQ** fosters empathy, stability, love, calmness, gratitude, simplicity, generosity, humility, optimism, and other noble qualities. Empathy is the capacity to understand, be aware of, be sensitive to, and vicariously experience the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another person. Stability refers to the ability to stand firm and endure, characterized by steadiness of purpose, firm resolution, steadfastness, and the capacity to remain unchanged or unfluctuating, thereby enduring over time. These constitute the emotional aspect of an individual, so these qualities are categorized under EEQ. These qualities not only enhance personal wellbeing, but these also allow individuals to manage their emotions in all situations.
- **SpEQ** comprises qualities like self-awareness, devotion, discrimination, fearlessness, sacrifice, broadmindedness, and others spiritual qualities. Awareness is the ability to perceive, understand, and be conscious of the factors that define one's individuality. Devotion is characterized by a profound dedication and loyalty, often directed towards a higher purpose or special end. These constitute the devotional aspect of an individual, so these qualities are categorized under SpEQ. These qualities help individuals to enhance their ability to lead a balanced and fulfilling life.
- **SoEQ** is characterized by qualities like duty, sincerity, drive, punctuality, benevolence, selflessness, responsibility, and other noble qualities. Duty is defined as a moral or legal obligation, characterized by a compelling force of moral commitment and respect. Sincerity is defined by its genuineness and the absence of hypocrisy, feigning, embellishment, or exaggeration. These qualities help individuals to effectively contribute to society, so these qualities are categorized under SoEQ.

**5.4 Activities:** Students' activities in this university are categorized under the four quotients. For example, the activities like library usage, paper presentation, peer teaching and other activities mentioned come under IEQ. Counselling peers, taking care of peers and other activities comes under EEQ. Bhajan/prayer/cultural activities

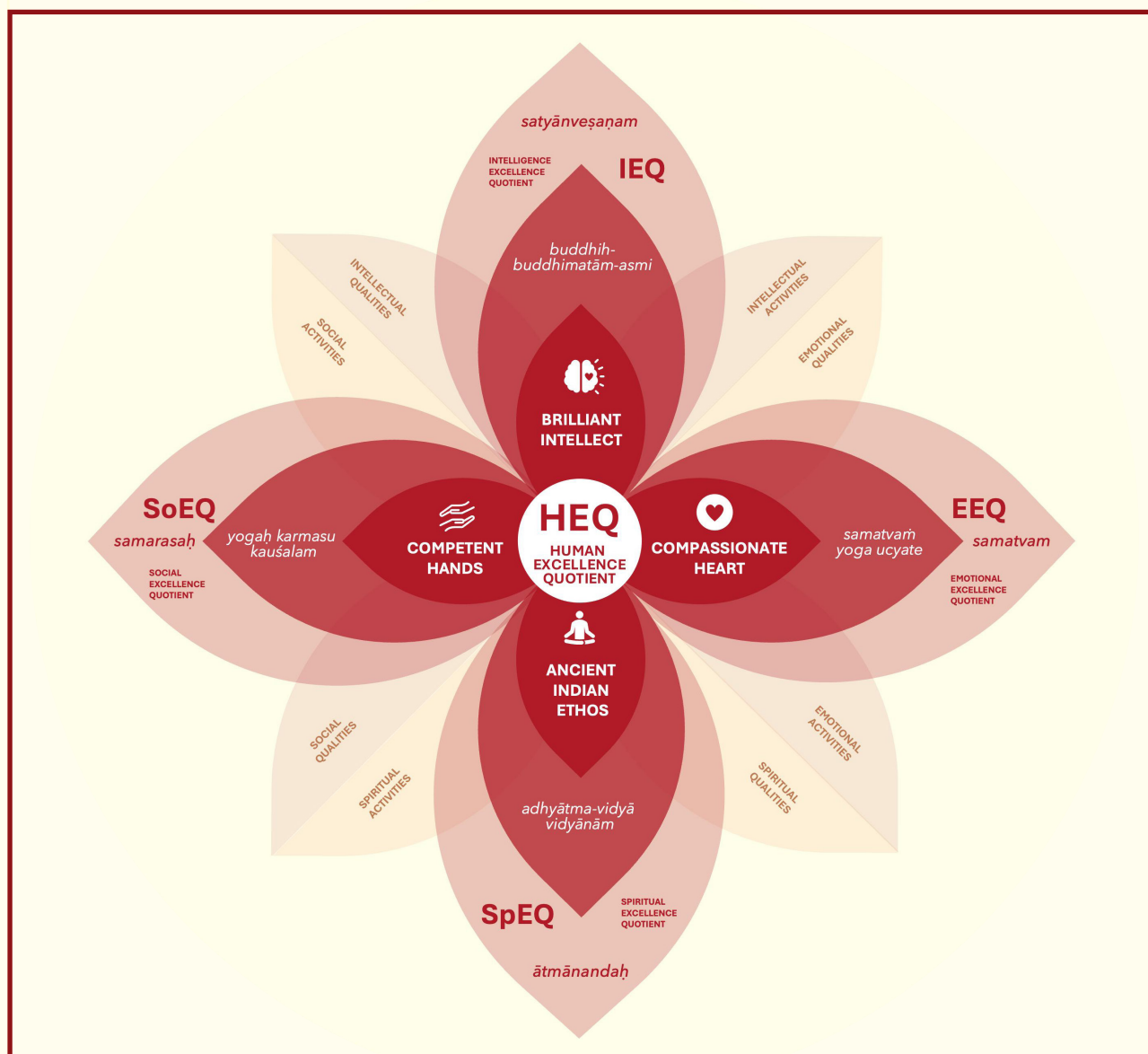
come under SpEQ. Campus service, management, coordination, outreach and similar activities come under SoEQ. These activities are based on the indicative noble and positive qualities.

**5.5 Excellence Quotients:** The four quotients IEQ, EEQ, SpEQ and SoEQ are summarized by the phrases from Indian scriptures viz. *satyānveṣaṇam* (Quest for truth), *samatvam* (Equanimity), *ātmānandaḥ* (Bliss of the Self) and *samarasaḥ* (Harmony).

Table I: A summary of the HEQ model.

SSSUHE Vision	The Bhagavad-Gita Verses	Indicative Noble and Positive Qualities		Indicative Activities	Excellence Quotients
Brilliant Intellect	<i>Buddhih buddhimatām asmi</i> (I am the intellect of the intelligent)	Curiosity Reasoning Creativity Logic Holistic Thinking	Critical Thinking Focus Knowledge Articulation Preparedness	Library usage Paper presentation Peer teaching Talks/Compering Elocution/Debates	Intelligence Excellence Quotient  ( <i>satyānveṣaṇam</i> - Quest for truth)
Compassionate Heart	<i>Samatvam yoga ucyate</i> (Essence of Yoga is Equanimity)	Stability Love Calmness Gratitude Simplicity Generosity Humility Optimism	Perseverance Morality Innocence Commitment Empathy Compassion Sensitivity Equanimity Patience	Counselling peers Taking care of peers Crisis management Teamwork Games/Yoga	Emotional Excellence Quotient  ( <i>samatvam</i> – Equanimity)
Ancient Indian Ethos	<i>Adhyātma-vidyā vidyānām</i> (Knowledge of the Self among all the branches of knowledge)	Self - Awareness Devotion Discrimination Fearlessness Sacrifice Broadmindedness	Contentment Transcendence Intuition Surrender Harmony Purity Morality	Paravidya Vedam/Stotram Bhajan/Prayer/Cultural Homa/ Festival Positive Outlook	Spiritual Excellence Quotient  ( <i>ātmānandaḥ</i> - Bliss of the Self)
Competent Hands	<i>Yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam</i> (Perfection in action is Yoga)	Selflessness Duty Drive Punctuality Benevolence Sincerity Responsibility Self-Reliance	Trust Perfection Flexibility Respect Resourcefulness Ability Tactfulness Thoughtfulness	Campus Service (Audio Visuals, Altar, maintenance, kitchen, accounts, Goshala), Management (Event, Guest), Coordination (Class, hostel), Outreach service contribution to nature	Social Excellence Quotient  ( <i>samarasaḥ</i> – Harmony)

Figure 1: A graphic representation of the HEQ model.



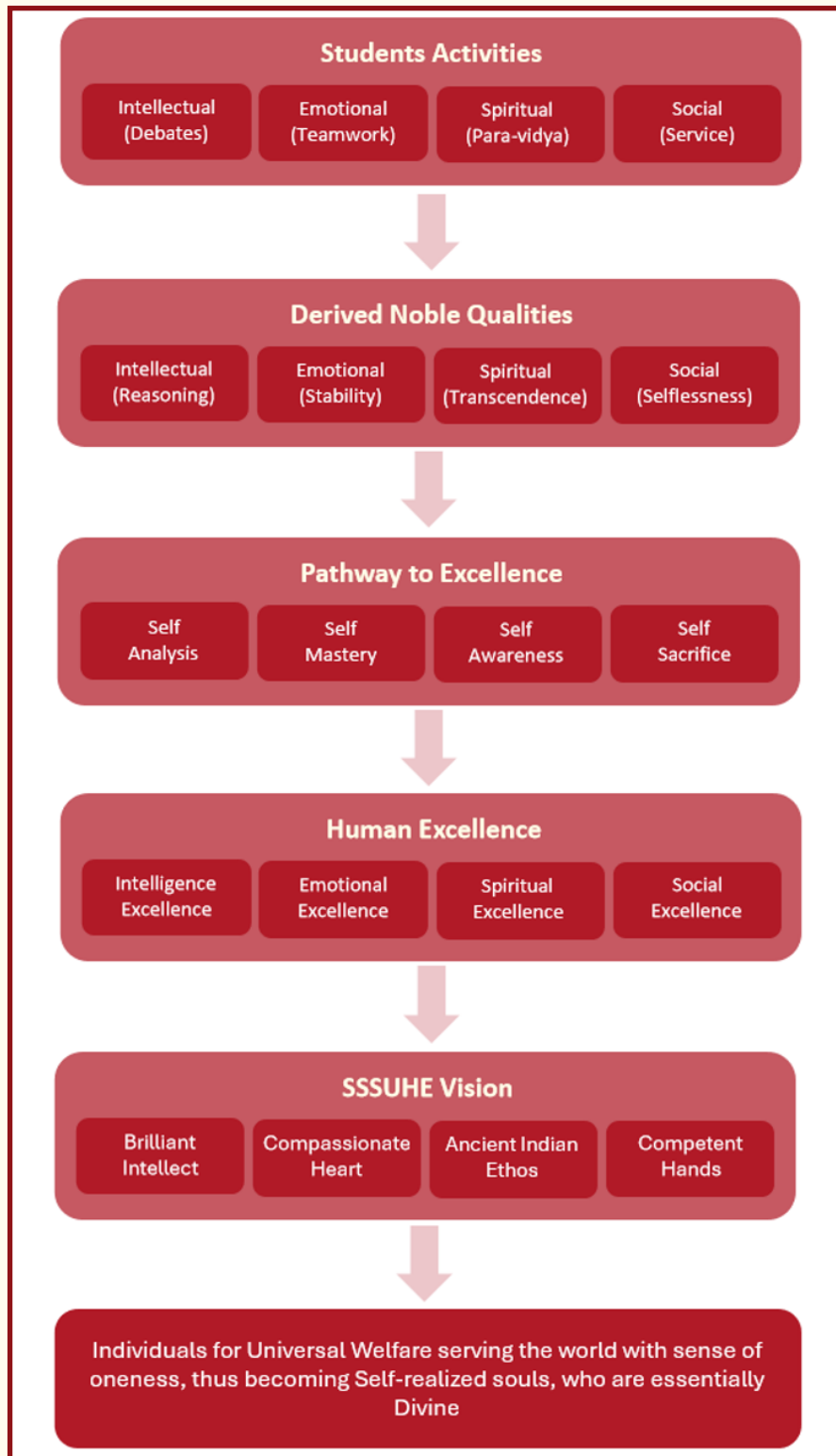
### 5.6 Divinity as Human Excellence: From Daily Activities to Divinity

Students at SSSUHE are engaged in different activities, each of which express various noble qualities. These qualities form the pathway to Human Excellence, as students strive to excel in each activity. This pathway transforms routine tasks into opportunities for one's growth towards excellence. As the students refine their activities and improvise, they move in the path of excellence leading to related Excellence. The student then achieves the related vision of SSSUHE. The student then becomes an individual for universal welfare serving the world with a sense of oneness, thus becoming a self-realized soul, who is essentially Divine.

For example, an activity like 'Debate' serves as an analytical platform for intellectual engagement. This activity promotes qualities like reasoning and critical thinking. After a debate when the student analyses his/her strengths and weaknesses and whether his/her argument was clear and logical, that reflection fosters one's

growth and leads to self-analysis. This analysis will lead to Intelligence Excellence and achieve the related vision of the university, viz. a Brilliant Intellect. Likewise, all the other activities listed in Table I also lead to Divinity, this flow from Activities to Divinity is illustrated in the flow-diagram (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Flow from Activities to Divinity.



## 6. Validation of the model

The first phase of scrutiny of the model involved reviews by experts in various fields of education, Vedic studies, philosophy, and psychology. The initial draft of the model was shared with a panel of experts and their comments were incorporated in the model. The model is now ready for further validation and implementation, promising to offer valuable insights into Human Excellence. The real validation of the model is proposed to be done through case studies of students in various intervals of HEQ like above 9, between 8 to 9 etc. This HEQ model is expected to provide an indicative quantification of Human Excellence.

## 7. Discussion

This paper presents the development of a Human Excellence Quotient (HEQ) model. The idea of Human Excellence has deep roots in philosophical traditions, where it has been explored as the embodiment of virtues and the realization of one's true potential. Sadguru Sri Madhusudan Sai defines this concept as the process to realize one's true nature as being Divine and reaching one's highest potential as a human. Based on this vision, the university imparts a unique model of higher education to all students free-of-cost. The program consists of curricular activities based on academics, co-curricular subjects based on Indian culture and spirituality, and extra-curricular activities for physical development. Excellence in these subjects is quantified through examinations. However, to assess the overall development of the student, there is a need to evaluate and quantify important aspects like character, ethics, and inculcation of institutional culture.

Evaluation of Human Excellence involves assessing the qualities, achievements, and attributes that signify an individual's superior performance and character. There has been an increased interest in recent years in measuring attributes other than cognitive ability. Duckworth and Yeager describe these diverse personal qualities as "non-cognitive" attributes that are essential for one to achieve success. These qualities collectively facilitate goal-directed effort (e.g., grit, self-control, growth mindset), healthy social relationships (e.g., gratitude, emotional intelligence, social belonging), and sound judgment and decision making (e.g., curiosity, open-mindedness) [29].

There have been many attempts to evaluate Human Excellence in the past. The Grit Scale, developed by Duckworth and colleagues, is widely used to measure individuals' sustained effort and interest despite adversity [24]. On the other hand, the Human Excellence Index (HEI) evaluates individuals across five parameters: courage/defense, etiquette, patience, service/technology/innovation, and loyalty [27]. Given the uniqueness of the curriculum at SSSUHE, no previous models were deemed appropriate to assess students' character, ethics, and inculcation of institutional culture. Therefore, the HEQ model was designed, specifically based on the university's vision and correlated with the core principles of its parent organization. Additionally, Indian scriptures form the basis of the four components of HEQ.

In our further studies, we intend to use the model to evaluate HEQ for each student in each semester, quantifying their Human Excellence. The application of the model goes beyond theory, where each student will be assessed through a 360-degree assessment as mentioned earlier. To reduce the subjectivity, we can include feedback from many people with whom they interact, to increase the accuracy of the assessment.

In the world of data analysis there is a big demand to quantify the unquantifiable in all sectors. It is perfectly acceptable, and even advantageous, to quantify points of data previously thought to be unquantifiable. Hence, our attempt to quantify Human Excellence is a similar effort. Validated questionnaires will be used to quantify each specific quotient and the composite HEQ will be quantified as a number on the scale of 0-10. This forms a tool for taking decisions on ranking graduates. The other advantages of this method of quantifying the unquantifiable are it avoids blind speculation and quantification inches toward a true value.

## 8. Limitations

Quantifying the qualities that make us Divine is inherently challenging. However, it is crucial to recognize one's shortcomings and strive to cultivate qualities that promote or reveal our divine nature. This model is based on the university's vision and activities that the students participate in throughout their tenure. The HEQ is only an indicator of how far a student has realized their divinity, and this should be correlated with other factors as deemed appropriate. The expression of divine qualities depends on each person's personality, akin to light bulbs shining brighter or dimmer based on their capacity when supplied by the same electricity.

## 9. Conclusion

The Human Excellence Quotient (HEQ) represents a transformative model for assessing and fostering holistic development in student growth. By integrating intelligence, emotional, spiritual, and social excellence quotients, the HEQ model offers a comprehensive and integrated approach to evaluate Human Excellence. Through its approach and practical implementation strategies, the HEQ helps to realize students' full potential and contributes meaningfully to society.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization of the model - Dr Thothathri Venugopal; mapping of noble qualities with the quotients and discussion - Dr Shruti Niraj; preparation of questionnaire infographic coordination, structure and flow of the paper - Sai Krishna Rachiraju. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Glossary of Sanskrit terms:

1. *Dharma*: A word with multiple meaning such as to hold or to support, righteousness, universal law, duty and justice.
2. *Sarve Jnanopasampannah*: Knowledge of all aspects of creation.
3. *Sarve Samudita Gunaih*: Repositories of all the good qualities that emanate spontaneously.
4. *Sarve Vedavidah Dheeraah*: Knowledgeable about ancient Indian wisdom, the Bharathiya culture based on vedas.



5. *Sarve Lokahithe Rathaah*: Ever engaged in the welfare of the world.
6. *Karma Yoga*: yoga of action.
7. *Bhakti Yoga*: yoga of devotion.
8. *Jnana Yoga*: yoga of knowledge.
9. *Bharatha darshan*: a comprehensive course on aspects of Indian culture.
10. *veda parayana*: the recitation of the Vedas.
11. *adhyatmic sangeet*: Spiritual Music.
12. *upanishads*: the concluding portion of the vedas dealing with the nature of brahman as different to the modes of ritualistic worship. These texts form the core of the vedantic philosophy.
13. *devi suktam*: a hymn on goddess durga.
14. *Buddhih Buddhimatām Asmi*: I am the intellect of the intelligent.
15. *Samatvam Yoga Uchyate*: The essence of yoga is equanimity.
16. *Adhyātma-Vidyā Vidyānām*: The knowledge of the spiritual self among knowledge seekers.
17. *Yogaḥ Karmasu Kauśhalam*: Perfection in action is yoga.
18. *Paravidya*: Knowledge of spiritual education among all forms of education.
19. *Vedam*: Vedas.
20. *Stotram*: hymns of praise.
21. *Bhajan*: devotional song.
22. *Homa*: fire ritual.

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Poetry

## Today, in this Temporal World

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Keywords: None

Corresponding Author: First name Last name, Email:

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### Today, in this Temporal World

What is this life so full of stress,  
We have no time for tenderness?  
No time to call the ones we love  
No time to please the Lord above  
No time to quieten down our pace  
No time to serve or win His Grace  
No time to smell roses on the way  
No time to pause, or think, or pray!

✕ This frantic life grips us in a vice,  
And each one of us will pay the price,  
For ignoring the quest of "Who am I"  
God put me here, but tell me why?  
And so many lives lived full of pain,  
No lessons are learnt, no bliss to gain.  
And this goes on till we hear the call,  
O' Lord make me "Love All Serve All"!

Only in serving all shall I realize  
That peace of mind, a precious prize  
That joy & sorrow are but the same  
And all of Life, is just a game!  
That all I can see is part of me

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And it will remain for Eternity  
Sacred and divine is our state  
Sathya Sai Baba opened the gate.

Pass thru, My love, for you are free  
Witness your own Reality!  
Life and Death shall hold no sway  
Body and mind shall melt away  
They were but embodiments of Love  
Pure and white, just like a dove  
Given to you, to reach this goal  
Becoming was not, Being is Whole.

Little Rock, Arkansas  
August 23, 1997.

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This poem is excerpted from the book titled, “*Mystic Whispers*” scheduled to be published later this year. It serves as the preface to a book section titled, “Divine Whispers” – a collection of poems that describe the stages to be crossed in one’s spiritual journey.

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## Original Article

## Mortality and Morality: Hamlet, Katha Upanishad, and Bhagavad Gita

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**Abstract:** This study examines the insightful philosophical parallels across three renowned sources —William Shakespeare's play *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, published in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century CE, the *Bhagavad Gita*, written between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, and the *Katha Upanishad* said to be from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BCE. The comparative analysis underlines the common moral themes in each of these works, such as charity, mortality, ethical integrity and existential wisdom of timeless importance. For example, Nachiketa's thoughtful discussions with his father Vajasravasa in the *Katha Upanishad*, in which he discusses superficial generosity and endorses authentic charity, is powerfully echoed in Hamlet's ethical dialogues on the virtue of generosity that transcends mere transactional actions. Shakespeare's cautious blending of humour with thoughtful philosophy, especially in the gravedigger scene, closely aligns with ancient Indian philosophical ideas, by insisting on the certainty of death, human equality and the temporary nature of worldly pleasures. Hamlet's existential soliloquies, mainly the iconic contemplation "To be or not to be," resonates with Nachiketa's questioning for existential truths and Lord Krishna's preaching concerning the immortal soul in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Comparing Shakespeare's literary ideas and the philosophical depth of the India's ancient scriptures, the study aims to offer a deeper moral awareness, genuine compassion and spiritual fulfilment. The comparative analysis reveals a shared understanding of death's inevitability, the transient nature of physical existence, and timeless spiritual wisdoms in these works. It underlines a related and transformative ethical outlook for modern society, providing advice against transactional relationships and superficial values.

**Keywords:** Genuine Generosity, Mortality, Existential Philosophy, Transactional Ethics, Immortality of the Soul, *Hamlet*, *Katha Upanishad*, *Bhagavad Gita*.

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### Introduction

The intersection of literature and philosophy frequently gives profound insights into human nature and existence, building cultural divides and ephemeral boundaries. This study examines such an intersection through a comparative analysis of Shakespeare's play, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, the ancient *Katha Upanishad* and the profound spiritual discourse found in the *Bhagavad Gita*. At the core of this study lies a pondering on the nature of charity, the inevitability of death, existential wisdom and the temporary pleasures of worldly life. Before further discussing the aims of this study, it is important to first briefly summarize the texts.

In the play *Hamlet*, Prince Hamlet seeks revenge against his uncle Claudius, who assassinated Hamlet's father to acquire the throne and marry Hamlet's mother. Engulfed by moral uncertainty and existential contemplation, Hamlet simulates madness, contemplates on death, and delays action. The *Katha Upanishad* starts when the young Nachiketa confronts his father, Vajashravas, questioning the sincerity of donating old, unproductive cattle during a ritual sacrifice. In Indian culture it was believed that earnest sacrifice would earn merit and lead to higher realms after death. Irritated by his son's questioning, Vajashravas impulsively offers Nachiketa himself to Yama, the God of Death. Nachiketa accepts this fate fearlessly, travels to the realm of death, and through insightful dialogue with Yama, gains metaphysical spiritual knowledge about the nature of the eternal Self and immortality. The *Bhagavad Gita* is advice to the warrior Arjuna who is filled with despair over the prospect of fighting against his own relatives and teachers. Lord Krishna, his charioteer and spiritual guide, counsels him regarding duty, detachment and righteous action without any expectation of rewards. Empowered by Lord Krishna's teachings on spiritual wisdom and selfless duty, Arjuna then adheres to his responsibilities and fights the war.

By examining the philosophical depth of Nachiketa's conversation with Yama and Hamlet's introspective soliloquies, this study identifies striking parallels in ethical thought and spiritual awareness across cultures. The gravedigger scene from *Hamlet* serves as an essential focus, combining humour with serious existential truths that resonate in the teachings of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*. Through this comparative study, the assessment underlines the timeless relevance of genuine generosity, ethical integrity and philosophical wisdom. The synthesis of these works aims to bring transformative thoughts that can address the problems of ethical dilemmas in contemporary societies and show pathways to deeper moral sincerity, compassion and self-fulfilment.

The aims of this study are twofold. The first aim is to explore Hamlet's existential thoughts and dialogues that pertain to morality, existence and human destiny, to connect them to the discussion of Nachiketa with his father and Yama, along with Lord Krishna's messages on the immortality of the soul and certainty of death. The second and equally important aim is to highlight the contemporary relevance and transformative value of combining Shakespeare's literary thoughts and the wisdom and teachings of *Katha Upanishad* and *Bhagavad Gita* for addressing modern societal ethical, moral and existential dilemmas.

The ideas expressed in *Hamlet*, the *Katha Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gita* may be seen concurrently as unique, universal and reflexive. Each text arises from its own philosophical and cultural heritage -- Elizabethan existentialism, Vedic metaphysics and classical Hindu dharma, in that order, marking their uniqueness. Yet the core concerns they explore -- death, moral struggle and the search for transcendence -- speak to a universal human condition that cuts across cultural boundaries. The reflexive dimension is worth exploring, particularly in the context of early Orientalist scholarship and the Renaissance's openness to classical and non-Western thought. While direct cross-cultural influence remains historically debated, the thematic convergence suggests that these works reflect parallel philosophical intuitions that recur throughout civilizations.

## Materials and Methods

This study uses a comparative analytical method to understand the philosophical similarities among Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, the *Katha Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Originally, key textual excerpts were cautiously examined based on their thematic relevance to charity, mortality, existential wisdom and transient worldly pleasures. A close textual analysis was made, focusing on philosophical dialogues, soliloquies and scene prominence in revealing ethical and existential thoughts. The textual ideas were compared to identify philosophical parallels and variations, teachings on genuine generosity, moral integrity and the transient nature of life. Scholarly interpretations and commentaries such as those by Swami Krishnanada, Swami Lokeshwaranada, Colin McGinn and other academic sources, were identified to enhance interpretative depth and contextual understanding. Comparative conclusions are integrated to articulate their contemporary meaningfulness, underlining their practical applicability for addressing modern societal and ethical dilemmas.

## Results

The *Katha Upanishad* begins with a prominent philosophical event, Nachiketa's questioning to his father's superficial charity. The narrative offers a deep philosophical discussion when Nachiketa sees his father, Vajasravasa, donating aged and infertile cows as charity with the hope of earning merit and heavenly reward. Historically, donation of cattle mentioned in *Katha Upanishad* were ritual offerings performed during significant ceremonies such as the *Rajasuya Yaga* (royal consecration), these acts symbolized wealth, prosperity, and religious devotion, highlighting social status and spiritual merit in ancient Vedic tradition. The following verse encapsulates Nachiketa's understanding beautifully.

*"Tam'ha kumāram'santaṃ dakṣiṇāsuniyamānāsu śraddhāviveśa so'manyata."* <sup>1(p6)</sup>

When the gifts had been given, with faith in his heart speaks out Nachiketa, who is still a boy. He said to himself, "joyless for sure are the worlds to which he goes who donates cows which no longer are able to drink, to eat, to give milk, or to calve." <sup>1(p6)</sup>

As portrayed eloquently in the *Upanishad*, Nachiketa being a young boy, understands the scriptural teachings with great faith, which insisted that true charity involves in giving away the best of the things. Swami Krishnananda, who was a prominent Indian spiritual teacher, philosopher, and author known for his profound interpretations of Vedanta and yogic philosophy, states in his book: "What does 'gift' mean? Charity means the giving of that which we love most. It does not mean simply giving something. If we have lost nothing by giving, we have given nothing." <sup>2(p16)</sup> The lesson to be underscored here is clear, the cultivation of genuine generosity is essential for individuals to engage meaningfully in charitable acts, superficial generosity will have negative repercussions rather than spiritual merits. The *Upanishad* especially cautions against such actions, reiterating the need of honest generosity and underlining the consequences of false charity.

Shakespeare echoed these prominent teachings through *Hamlet*, in the scene when the actors have come to the Denmark to perform a play in the presence of the Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet and other courtiers. These dialogues of Hamlet with Polonius regarding the actors display parallels in charity and generosity. Hamlet states "God's body kins, man, much better. Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?" <sup>3(p115)</sup> Through this dialogue, Shakespeare conveys a comparable philosophical thought, if one offers just what another deserves, rather than generously giving more than deserved, the giver risks lacking merit then heavenly reward. Colin McGinn, a British philosopher renowned for his work in the philosophy of mind, in his book *Shakespeare's Philosophy*, identifies the concepts in his plays, and says that "Shakespeare sees the value of generosity and charity, but he does not see them as normal acts of mere giving. For him such acts echo deeper moral truths and ethical identity, often pointed by the ability to give without expecting return." <sup>4(p111)</sup> Hamlet underlines the idea that true generosity transcends mere transactional giving, insisting abundance, benevolence in charity as an ethical need than an obligation.

Nachiketa's philosophical depth extends further as displayed by his encounter with Yama, the God of Death. The initial talk revolves around hospitality, generosity and moral duty. *Katha Upanishad* offers a different perspective on Yama, the God of Death whom everyone fears to face. After knowing that Nachiketa was there without hospitality in his absence, Yama addresses Nachiketa respectfully displaying his compassion towards the young boy, embodying perfect generosity and ethical behaviour. Yama is the epitome of humility.

*"Tisro rātrīyadavātsīrgrhe me, 'naśnan brahmannatithirnamasyaḥ , namaste'stu brahman svasti me'stu, tasmātprati trīnvarānvṛṇīṣva."* <sup>1(p15)</sup>

"Oh Brahmin, salutations to you, you are an important guest and have waited in my house for three nights without eating, therefore choose now three boons, one for each night, Oh Brahmin, may all be well with me." <sup>1(p16)</sup>

Yama acknowledging his lapse in hospitality, and gives Nachiketa three boons, exemplifying how generosity is important in maintaining social and spiritual harmony. Nachiketa is deserving yet this act of Yama stands as a

lesson to mankind that he didn't distance himself by providing other random gifts instead gave three boons which portray his generosity.

Shakespeare resonates strongly with this concept through Hamlet's wise counsel "Use them after your own honour and dignity. The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty. Take them in." <sup>3(p115)</sup> Hamlet emphasizes that true generosity, especially when stretched out towards the undeserving, carries profound spiritual merit, embodying humility, dignity, and moral excellence. These thoughts, deeply echoed in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, closely parallel those elaborated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which underscores the essential human virtues needed for a spiritually enriched life. Lord Krishna describes these qualities clearly in the following quote.

"Abhayam sattva-samśuddhir jñāna-yoga-vyavasthitiḥ, Dānam damaś cha yajñāś cha svādhyāyas tapa ājīvam." <sup>5(p647)</sup>

"These virtues include compassion, purity of mind, charity, fearlessness, wisdom, gentleness and freedom from greed." <sup>5(p647)</sup>

These values echo in Shakespeare's thoughts on generosity expressed through *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* and the *Bhagavad Gita* emphasize that acts of charity should arise from purity of intention and genuine compassion. As Swami Krishnananda explains, "Actions like charity must arise from the awareness that love is the rule and that such actions become a purifying medium, and not a binding medium when done with divine consciousness." <sup>6(p58-60)</sup>

The analysis of *Hamlet*, the *Katha Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gita* together portrays charity and generosity. The synthesis of Shakespeare's literary insight and the philosophical teachings of ancient Indian scriptures like the *Katha Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches contemporary relevance. In modern times, individuals tend to accumulate excess beyond their needs, reflecting a decline in generosity and a growing inclination toward self-indulgent spending. By embracing deeper spiritual and ethical wisdom displayed clearly in Hamlet's dialogues, Nachiketa's bold stand and Lord Krishna's message, if practised, can cast aside superficial values and cultivate deeper moral awareness, genuine compassion and lasting spiritual fulfilment.

The gravedigger scene in *Hamlet* is philosophically crafted, which is pregnant with most important aspects of human life, blending humour and philosophy in a way that manifests a deeper existential truth. Initially portraying a comic relief, the scene subtly embodies powerful philosophical truths on the inevitability of the death and the fairness it brings. Carla Della Gatta is a theatre historian and scholar specializing in Latinx adaptations of Shakespeare's notes, "Hamlet's words in gravedigger scene pause the forward action of the play to inspect the border space of identity, revealing Shakespeare's intense meditation on mortality and existence through a blend of humour and philosophy." <sup>7(p110)</sup> Through the light-hearted dialogue of the grave diggers, Shakespeare emphasizes the paradox of human existence, although individuals yearn for control and possession all through their lives, finally the grave is a certain dwelling crafted by another's hands. The gravedigger humorously remarks, "Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating. And when you are asked this question next, say, 'A grave-maker.' The houses that he makes last till doomsday." <sup>3(p243)</sup> This playful dialogue weighs a thoughtful message, no matter one's status or pride, all share the same destiny in death. Harry Levin, in his influential article *Hamlet and the Grave Diggers*, explores the symbolic and philosophical significance of the graveyard scene, states that "the gravedigger acts as Hamlet's philosophical alter ego, humorously yet strongly underlining mortality and the permanence of graves against transient human endeavours." <sup>8(p631)</sup> The philosophical depth of this Shakespearean insight is eloquently in line with the teachings found in the *Katha Upanishad*. Nachiketa, appealing in a dialogue with his father before reaching Yama, the God of Death states

"Anupaśya yathā pūrve pratipaśya tathā'pare. sasyamiva martyaḥ pacyate sasyamivājāyate punaḥ." <sup>1(p6)</sup>

"Look back and check how it was with those who came earlier than us and observe how it is with those who are now with us, human ages like corn and grows like corn from the birth." <sup>1(p6)</sup>

The imagery of humans ripening and coming back like crops clearly shows the cyclical nature of life and death, underscoring humanity's temporary existence. The universal truth finds further reassurance in the *Bhagavad*



*Gita*, where in Lord Krishna in a nutshell captures the inevitability of death and rebirth in the following quote.

*“Jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur Dhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca Tasmād aparihārye’rthe Na tvaṁ śocitum arhasi.”* <sup>5(p98)</sup>

“For one who is born, death is inevitable, and for one who dies, rebirth is certain. Therefore, you should not feel sorrow over what is inevitable.” <sup>5(p98)</sup>

This deep message resonates intensely with the two gravediggers’ dialogues that humans amass possessions, power, and pride only to walk into the house called a grave, built by others. Both the scriptures also highlight that man takes birth after birth portraying the life cycle.

Shakespeare, in the same gravedigger scene subtly conveys reflective thoughts regarding the temporary nature of youth, love and worldly pleasures. Hamlet’s expression of love to Ophelia, “I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers, could not, with all their quantity of love, Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?”

<sup>3(p255)</sup> This quote from Hamlet underlines both the passion and depth of youthful affection. Correspondingly Shakespeare employs the gravedigger’s weighty song, “In youth when I did love, did love, Me thought it was very sweet, To contract—o—the time, for—to—a—my behove, Oh, methought, there—was—nothing—a—meet.” <sup>3(p243)</sup> This quote shows how youthful pleasures, seemingly permanent, inevitably fade with time. The gravedigger’s wistful reflection underlines the transitory nature of youthful longings, gently warning viewers that time ultimately changes what seems most valuable and enduring. Dr. Martina Bross specialising in early modern English literature, particularly Shakespearean drama, explains, “the gravedigger scene demonstrates how Shakespeare’s wordplay not only becomes a challenge for the characters but also for the audience, encouraging deeper contemplation of impermanence and identity.” <sup>9(p26)</sup>

This Shakespearean wisdom reflects strongly the teachings from the *Katha Upanishad*, which teaches a corresponding thought on the fleeting nature of worldly pleasures in the following quote.

*“Parācaḥ kāmānanuyanti bālā. ste mṛtyoryanti vitatasya pāśam. atha dhīrā amṛtatvaṁ viditvā dhruvamadhruveṣviha na prārthayante.”* <sup>1(p116)</sup>

“The immature humans chase external pleasures and therefore fall into the extensive net of death. But the elevated soul knowing eternal immortality, stops pursuing temporary pleasures in this transient world.” <sup>1(p117)</sup>

Yama teaches that all those who run behind the worldly attachments would fall into the trap of life and death, like Shakespeare’s text, the *Katha Upanishad* cautions humanity regarding the ephemeral nature of the youthful desires and promotes for deeper spiritual wisdom, equanimity, go beyond fleeting satisfaction. The *Bhagavad Gita* also reiterates this understanding, stating that in the following quote.

*“Ye hi saṁsparśa-jā bhogā duḥkha-yonaya eva te, Ādyanta-vantaḥ Kaunteya na teṣu ramate budhaḥ.”* <sup>5(p260)</sup>

“The enjoyments that arouse the senses are the root cause of troubles, the wise don’t find joy in them as these senses have beginning and end.” <sup>5(p260)</sup>

*Gita* also conveys that any pleasures derived from the senses would give suffering at the end, this message deeply aligns with Shakespeare and the Upanishadic insistence on the temporary nature of physical existence and external pleasures. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada was an Indian spiritual teacher and founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), who translated and commented on major Vedic texts states that “a liberated soul is not interested in anything which is temporary,” for such a person “very well aware the joys of transcendental pleasures, cannot accept to enjoy false pleasure.” <sup>5(p259)</sup> These texts motivate understanding the eternal nature of the soul to transcend life’s temporary illusions.

Further, Shakespeare’s existential thought is eloquently summarized when Hamlet ponders, “What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason...And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?” <sup>3(p102)</sup> Here, Shakespeare articulates a paradoxical truth, although human possess exceptional capacities, finally their bodies are temporary, mere dust. Colin McGinn says that “Hamlet’s speech underlines humanity as capable of noble

reason yet fundamentally brought down to a mere quintessence of dust, embodying the play's existential tension." <sup>4(p55)</sup> This echoes closely the philosophical insights in the *Bhagavad Gita* in the following quote.

*"Antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāḥ śharīraṇaḥ, Anāśhino'prameyasya tasmād yudhyasva Bhārata."* <sup>5(p88)</sup>

"Bodies are perishable, but the soul is immortal, imperishable, infinite, therefore fight, Oh descendant of Bharatha." <sup>5(p88)</sup>

Emphasizing the eternal nature of the soul amid the impermanence of the physical form, Harold Bloom was a renowned American literary critic best known for his influential work *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, in which he argued that Shakespeare's characters profoundly shaped modern conceptions of human nature. Bloom states that "Nothing of Hamlet's antic disposition lingers after the graveyard scene, and even there the madness has evolved into an intense irony directed at the gross images of death." <sup>10(p383-385)</sup>

As the gravedigger casually throws the skull from the grave, Hamlet ponders with Horatio concerning their identities, contemplating, "That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder! It might be the pate of a politician... or of a courtier." <sup>3(p244)</sup> Through these reflections, Shakespeare conveys the truth of human equality in death, regardless of societal status, everyone finally goes back to the same earth, degenerating to just skulls and bones. Hamlet's further dialogues on the skull of a landlord explores this existential contemplation, "Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases... The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box." <sup>3(p244)</sup> Shakespeare strongly says that material possessions, lands, money and titles finally value nothing beyond life. Humans leave every possession taking nothing from the world, not even the physical body itself. At the time of death, a person requires only enough land to accommodate their body, while the eternal soul leaves to continue its spiritual journey. This insightful metaphysical truth finds strong relevance with the existential teachings of the *Katha Upanishad*, where in Nachiketa says, "Oh death, all the sensory enjoyments until tomorrow, later the senses lose its futility, even the prolonged life is momentary." <sup>1(p41)</sup> This says everything is transitory in this world.

At this juncture, it's crucial to understand Hamlet's famous soliloquy, "To be, or not to be? That is the question, whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and, by opposing, end them?" <sup>3(p127)</sup> Hamlet's existential dilemma encompasses humanity's intense introspection regarding life, existence and the forces controlling one's destiny. C.C.H. Williamson, an early 20th-century scholar, in his work reflects the period's academic engagement with Shakespearean themes through philosophical and moral inquiry. He says "Hamlet as playing with the thoughts of suicide and death, showcasing a mind encompassed by pessimism as to life's value and underlining the character's deep existential questioning." <sup>11(p88)</sup> As Hamlet moves further into contemplation, he reveals his internal fear and hesitation, "Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all." <sup>3(p129)</sup> He contemplates on how death is making him a coward and also lacking the ability to act according to the need. Yet, proficiently Hamlet grows from uncertainty to an enlightened acceptance of the inevitability of death. This acceptance resonates a deeper understanding of the comic principle as Hamlet speaks, "We defy augury. There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come the readiness is all." <sup>3(p272)</sup> Hamlet concludes saying that there is some force which makes everything happen in this world, this realization is strikingly mirrored in the philosophical dialogues of the *Katha Upanishad*. Nachiketa in his earnest search for truth, asks Yama about the nature of existence after death. Yama answers Nachiketa by affirming that when the soul departs from the body, what truly remains is the Self referred to as the ultimate reality. He explains that human life is not sustained merely by physical forces like breath, but by a deeper transcendent principle. This metaphysical thought mirrors Hamlet's reflections on the transitory nature of life and the mystery beyond death. <sup>1(p142)</sup>

Likewise, Hamlet says a universal providence is moulding human destiny and fate, by controlling everything around, brought out poetically as a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. Williamson argues that

“Hamlet’s readiness to die represents inward growth and an acceptance of a larger providence guiding his fate.”<sup>11(p98)</sup> Both Shakespeare and Yama would send out a message that there is one particular entity that has pervasive and inevitable influence: Hamlet’s journey from existential sorrow to calm surrendering nature and Nachiketa’s philosophical enlightenment, high-lighting a shared understanding of life’s deeper spiritual truth. This philosophical theme is additionally explained in the *Bhagavad Gita*, underling the eternal journey of the soul and the temporary nature of physical existence, in the following quote.

“*Dehino ’smin yathā dehe kaumāraṃ yauvanaṃ jarā, Tathā dehāntara-prāptir dhīrastatra na muhyati.*”<sup>5(p80)</sup>

“As the mortal self-changes from childhood to youth to old age, in the same way, soul changes from one body to another after death, the wise remain undisturbed by these inevitable transitions.”<sup>5(p81)</sup>

Hamlet in Act I Scene 4 says that the soul is immortal and cannot be harmed, just like death itself cannot destroy what is eternal. It shows that Shakespeare always portrayed the soul as something imperishable. Thus, the *Bhagavad Gita*’s teachings closely echo with Shakespeare’s dialogues and the wisdom of *Katha Upanishad* that understanding and accepting the soul’s eternal nature and the surrender to that cosmic power would liberate one from fear and uncertainty.

## Conclusions

The contemporary relevance of this comparative study is in its strength to address present day ethical and existential problems, identified by vast materialism, shallow relationships, and a lack of heartfelt compassion. In today’s modern era, people are overwhelmed by stress, peer pressure, and daily struggles, often finding themselves trapped in cycles they cannot flee. Amid this chaos, the deeper awareness of a divine providence guiding life is frequently forgotten. The ability to surrender to this higher order is one that brings peace, purpose, and perspective, which is increasingly absent in modern lives.

In conclusion, this comparative study reiterates the timeless importance of literary and philosophical thoughts into human existence, morality and spiritual wisdom. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, with the *Katha Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, highlights the universal truths of genuine generosity, the temporary nature of worldly bondages and the inevitability of mortality. Taken together, these texts provide an everlasting ethical structure that crosses cultural boundaries and temporary limits. Understanding these teachings can guide individuals in contemporary society towards greater moral awareness, compassion, and lasting soulful fulfilment.

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