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Spiritual Pedagogies and Transformative Learning: A Comparative Inquiry into Tagore and Sathya Sai Baba's Educational Philosophies

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Abstract

This paper presents a comparative analysis of Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Sathya Sai Baba as visionary educationists whose pedagogical innovations challenged the dominant paradigms of their respective eras. Despite differences in temporal context, worldview, and methodology, both figures offered transformative models of education rooted in moral, aesthetic, and spiritual development. Tagore's Shantiniketan emerged as a counter-colonial cultural space that prioritized imagination, ecological harmony, and artistic expression, while Baba's "Educare" framework integrated human values into contemporary educational structures to cultivate inner transformation alongside academic growth. The study explores their educational philosophies, institutional practices, and broader socio-cultural contributions, emphasizing how both Tagore and Baba redefined education as a tool for personal enlightenment and social reform. By placing them within the broader discourses of pedagogy and reform in modern India, the paper highlights their complementary roles in bridging tradition and modernity, spirituality and rationality, and individuality and collective responsibility.

Keywords: Spiritual Pedagogy, Value-based learning, Educare, holistic learning, EHV, 3HV

Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Sathya Sai Baba, though separated by time and philosophical orientation, redefined education in India by challenging colonial and postcolonial norms. Tagore, a product of the Bengal Renaissance, and Baba, a 20th-century spiritual leader, both promoted

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holistic educational models emphasizing moral development, aesthetic sensibility, and spiritual inquiry over mere utilitarian learning.

Unlike conventional educationists such as Rousseau or Montessori, neither Tagore nor Baba authored formal treatises. Their educational ideals were embedded in their literary, spiritual, and institutional work. Tagore's Shantiniketan fostered creativity, ecological awareness, and cultural integration, while Baba's "Educare" philosophy emphasized five core human values—Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love, and Non-Violence—seeking to align scientific advancement with inner growth.

Both saw education as a vehicle for social and moral transformation. Tagore rejected nationalism in favor of cosmopolitanism; Baba promoted interfaith harmony and service (seva). Their institutions, from Shantiniketan to Sathya Sai Schools, reflected a fusion of tradition and modernity, individual growth, and collective upliftment.

This paper examines how these two thinkers translated vision into action, offering complementary paradigms that continue to shape India's educational and social landscape.

Early Beginnings and Motivation:

Tagore's engagement with education began well before founding Shantiniketan in 1901. Through early works like Chutti, Dui Pakhi, and Shikshar Hepher, he criticized colonial education and imagined an Indian alternative rooted in creativity and joy. Inspired by his positive home life and negative school experiences, Tagore aimed to replicate a nurturing environment for children. Shantiniketan emerged in his father Debendranath's ashram, later evolving into Visva-Bharati University (1921) and Sriniketan for rural development.

Tagore's shift toward education was also personal—he wished to educate his son Rathindranath—and practical, following his administrative success at Shelaidah. His vision combined intellectual pursuit with grassroots engagement, aiming for cultural renewal.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba's educational mission began in 1968 with a women's college in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh. Grounded in spiritual ideals and social need, his approach emphasized access, values-based learning, and education as a path to self-realization. Inspired by his mother's wishes for a school, water supply, and dispensary in Puttaparthi, Baba launched expansive service projects, including free super-specialty hospitals and water infrastructure.

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Baba's schools and colleges, which remain tuition-free, reflect his belief that education, healthcare, and water are fundamental rights. His institutions now span 26 countries, embodying his vision of universal, service-oriented education.

Despite different origins, both Tagore and Baba sought to counter foreign educational models, advocating systems rooted in Indian ethos and spiritual-humanist values.

Imitation and Badness of Imitation: Context, Critique of Existing Systems, and Emerging Ideals

Tagore and Baba openly critiqued the 'modern' system of education, though from slightly different vantage points. For Tagore, modern education meant the colonial model provided to India by the British—a system of education that emphasized on rote learning, conformity, and the manufacture of clerks rather than creativity or critical thinking. He deplored this system that pushed learners away from their own culture, language, and natural patterns of life.

For him such institutions are nothing but a manufactory specially designed to produce uniform results ignorantly following "an imaginary line of the average in digging its channel of education" forgetting that life is not a straight line for it is very fond of playing the see-saw with the line of average. He voiced that such introduction of education is clearly not part of uniting the East and the West; instead, it is just an artificial method to produce the "carriers of the white man's burden (Tagore, 2004, 23)."

Tagore was not against foreign cultures but was disturbed by how European education in India was reduced to mere schooling, rather than fostering cultural growth. He criticized the belief that Western culture was the sole source of intellectual light, likening it to relying on a star for daylight—insufficient and misleading. Tagore saw foreign education as a force that displaced native knowledge, hindering the development of new, blended perspectives. He believed Indian culture needed to be strengthened not to resist the West, but to enable genuine and balanced cultural assimilation.

Tagore also critiqued the mechanized, detached nature of Indian education, contrasting it with the West's organically evolving intellectual traditions. He argued that universities should not be limited to infrastructure and exams but must reflect and engage with the nation's broader social and intellectual life. He says,

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"Their education has its permanent vessel which is their own mind; its permanent supply which is their own living spring of culture; its permanent field for irrigation which is their own social life. This organic unity of their mind and life and culture has enabled them to seek truth from all lands and all times, and to make it vitally one with their own culture which is the basis of their civilization (Tagore, 1921, 33)."

Tagore describes the plight of Indian students, lacking a living intellectual tradition, becoming passive consumers of borrowed learning, incapable of critically interacting with what they receive. Their learning, like an artificial food, is devoid of the nourishment required for intellectual vigor. Moreover, by imitating not just foreign ideas but also foreign schemes of judgment, they become completely cut off from their intellectual and cultural heritage. This leads to an education system that is imposed from the outside and not organically grown. It is a chariot where students are prisoners and not passengers, being pulled along and not carried forward. He says,

"We forget that the same weakness in our character, or in our circumstances, which inevitably draws us on to the slippery slope of imitation, will pursue us when our independence is merely of the outside. For then our freedom will become the freedom to imitate the foreign institutions, thus bringing our evil fortune under the influence of the conjunction of two malignant planets—those of imitation and the badness of imitation—producing a machine-made University, which is made with a bad machine (Tagore, 2004, 23)."

For Tagore, education is not the mechanical acquisition of knowledge but the development of an active and critical appreciation of ideas. He says, "communication of life can only be through a living agency" and maintains that culture, which is the "life of mind," can only be communicated through significant human relationships and experienced life. Books and scriptures, he cautions, can only make pedants if not preceded by a living interaction with life itself. Here, he sets forth an image of education as mobile, natural, and intimately connected to the intellectual and cultural life of society (Tagore, 1921, 12)."

For Baba, so-called modern education was the continued shadow of that very same colonial model—a persistence of Westernized schooling that glorified material success, competition, and superficial knowledge. He worried about India's blind aping of the West, asserting that this emulation resulted in moral deterioration and disconnection from spirituality.

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Baba boldly raises voice against monetary dominance and commodification of education. He says, India had unique goals for education in the past. The true aim of education was not to earn a livelihood, but to attain wisdom, cultivate virtue, and realize the divinity within. Baba says, "education is not for living, it is for life (Baba, 2014, 87)." It was meant to refine the human being, to awaken compassion, and to prepare one for a life of selfless service.

However, Baba is concerned that modern education no longer teaches us fundamental human values like love, sympathy, and kindness. It has become a platform of competition, greed, and envy. Selfless learning has been replaced by a race for material gains. Baba laments the pitiable condition of the youth of today - many of whom, straight after graduation, hasten to get their names registered at 'employment exchanges,' motivated by fear of finding a job rather than a passion to serve or evolve inwardly.

He observes that students are trapped by "narrow loyalties and limited vision" (Baba, 2014, 92) unable to rise above personal ambitions to embrace a broader, nobler purpose. He criticizes the education system that yields degree holders but not persons of character, integrity, or compassion. The reason for this deranged situation Baba feels is because of the commodification of education. Baba says,

"The schools and colleges, once revered by the entire population as Temples of Saraswathi, the Goddess of Learning, as a means of attaining the supreme state of self-realization, have degenerated into temples for the Goddess of Wealth! For securing admission into the schools and colleges, money is demanded; contributions are sought. For the payment of a sum, the required attendance at classes will be certified as having been secured. A "pass" in the examination can also often be manipulated with the help of the purse. As a result of this decline in morality, discipline is reduced to shambles, character is devalued and the process of education has become a trade (Baba, 1981, 65)."

Tagore too resonates the same a hundred years before in his essay *Nationalism in the West*. He says,

[H]istory has come to a stage when the moral man, the complete man, is more and more giving way, almost without knowing it, to make room for the ... commercial man, the man of limited purpose. This process, aided by the wonderful progress in science, is assuming gigantic proportion

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and power, causing the upset of man's moral balance, obscuring his human side under the shadow of soul-less organization. (Tagore, 2017, 95)

In order to effectively validate and extend the concerns raised by both Tagore and Baba, it is worth mentioning that these are not singular criticisms from the past; they have powerful echoes in the words of present-day thinkers such as Terry Eagleton, Martha Nussbaum, Naom Chomsky, to name a few, who also caution against the dangers of diminishing education to a marketplace transaction based on profit and productivity instead of purpose and personhood.

Eagleton in his article The Slow Death of the University (2015), argues that an education system that kowtows to the hard-faced demands "of global capitalism"—that pushes subjects in the humanities "to the wall," reduces junior academics to "dogsbodies," "professors to managers," "students to consumers" and universities from "ancillaries to entrepreneurship"—is indeed on a slippery slope towards destruction. (Quayum, 2024, 105) Nussbaum too resonates in a similar tone in her work Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities (2010). She describes how an over materialistic perception of education makes us all consumers and profit-seekers or to "useless machines, instead of whole citizens who can think for themselves and grasp the importance of another person's sufferings and achievements" ("Educating for Profit, Educating for Freedom"). She maintains that education must play the role that Tagore and Baba had envisioned; it must instruct us how "to approach another person as a soul, rather than as a mere useful instrument or an obstacle to one's own plans; about what it is to talk as someone who has a soul to someone else whom one sees as similarly deep and complex (Quayum, 2024, 106)."

This shows that the crisis in education is not new. It is a recurring ailment across time. So, what is then wrong with the education system? The reason is it fails to produce the very outcomes it was meant to achieve. To quote the words of Baba, "Politics without principles, education without character, science without humanity and commerce without morality are not only useless, but positively dangerous." The reason for this alarming situation of the system is that the main purpose of life - The pursuit of *Ananda*, the eternal pure bliss and its selfless sharing with others has faded, replaced by an ever-growing material wants. Once a "yoga bhoomi" and "thyaga bhoomi," India now has become a "bhoga bhoomi"- "the land of skyscrapers, air conditioning and tinned foods, an imitative, insurgent, undisciplined mass of humanity, pulled from its roots and transplanted in other soils (Baba, 1981, 76)."

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Baba believes that one of the primary effects of the commodification of education is the deterioration of character. He laments the fact that increased self-absorption has put out love and joy, while jealousy's fire is being fueled and fanned. Man's divine spark, previously ignited by values-oriented education, is now being stifled under the burden of ambition and ego. In this transition, contemporary education has relegated the values of humility and discipline. Baba mourns a world where "science without a sense of values", "scholarship without experiential satisfaction", humanity with no involvement with humans, and "music devoid of sweet melody." Education, which was once a road to self-realization and service, has become a tool for self-aggrandizement, stripping learning of its sanctity and joy (Baba, 1981, 98). In response to this crisis, Tagore and Baba offer a transformative vision of education; one that emphasizes character over credentials, and views knowledge not merely as a tool, but as a path to inner transformation and social harmony.

Pedagogies of the Spirit: Tagore and Baba's Educational Ideas and Experiments

Tagore decided to set up his own school, an alternative to the colonial model of education. Tagore wanted to go back to the roots for setting up a school of his thought. He wanted to recreate the *tapovan* of the past. An education system that bridges the past and the present. In Mohammad A. Quayum words,

"the overall objective behind Tagore's educational mission was twofold. Firstly, he wished to reform the Indian education system, which he found in a totally decadent state, often imitative of the colonial system and cut off from the realities of Indian life and culture—a system that was "lifeless, colorless, dissociated from the context of the universe," wherein children were treated as no better than objects, or as prisoners in the hands of authoritarian pedagogues who were determined to rob their pupils of their vigour and liberty in exchange for stale, mindless mechanical learning. Secondly, he aimed to transform the system into one that would, to quote Cenkner, "bring about a happy synthesis between the individual and society and [help] to realize the essential unity of the individual with the rest of humanity (Quayum, 2024, 115)."

Tagore wanted an education that nurtures not just the intellect but also the emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of a person. According to him true education was not confined to the walls of a classroom, it was a lifelong journey, which is intrinsically tied to human experience. It was meant to foster an organic connection between the individual and society.

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For Tagore, education was not just about acquiring knowledge but about achieving the highest purpose of human life, i.e., "to grow into a full man in directions; mentally, and mainly spiritually (Tagore, 2004, 78)." He saw it as a continuous journey, beginning in childhood, continuing through adolescence and into adulthood. To a child, education should provide a stimulating environment that nurtures curiosity and creativity. For adolescents, it should encourage scientific and artistic exploration. As adults, people should recognize education as the foundation of their nation's cultural and economic progress.

Tagore drew inspiration for his brahmacharya ashrama from the Indian idea of tapovan, forest hermitage. He believed "The hermitage shines out, in all our ancient literature, as the place where the chasm between man and the rest of creation has been bridged (Tagore, 1996, 320)." According to him, learning should be shaped by a balanced integration of modern scientific developments and technological advancements alongside the traditional tapovan system of education.

Tagore said that education is not a corrective measure for ignorance, like medical treatment for a disease. Instead, it was a natural and joyful process that was essential for life's journey. Education, for him, was a means of cultivating a well-rounded human being who is self-reliant, socially responsible, and spiritually aware.

Therefore, Tagore adopted an open curriculum policy which "permitted initiative, experimentation and originality, as well as encouraged teachers and students to get involved in the process of evolving an effective curriculum" (Samuel 350). This allowed him to include varied subjects like fine arts, music, dance along with the traditional subjects like science, mathematics, literature, history. This flexibility in curriculum allowed him to incorporate peripatetic learning in his school (Quayum, 2024, 98).

The peripatetic learning method introduced by Tagore in his school has its inspiration in his childhood experience. Tagore never completed his formal education. He merely studied for seven years in formal schooling. Most of the time it was Maharshi Debendranath who homeschooled young Rabi. Young Rabi used to accompany his father on tours and through these tours he learnt his life's education. In his essay My Reminiscences, Tagore describes how his father taught him in a unique way during their travels to Santiniketan, Amritsar, and Dalhousie when Tagore was eleven years old. It was during this time that young Rabi experienced "reprieve from the claustrophobic school environment "and discovered the pleasure of learning through personal

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freedom and nature exploration. “There was no servant rule here, and the only thing which encircled me was the blue of the horizon .... Within this, I was free to move about as I chose.... I was the Livingstone of this undiscovered land. (Baba, 1999, 78).”

Tagore was against “static curriculum’. He wanted his students to be one with nature, learning from it and being nourished by it. This he believed would help the students to combine theoretical knowledge with the practical aspect. Tagore’s emphasis on practical learning aligns with Dewey’s experiential learning theory. Dewey emphasized on learning through doing and reflection. Both Tagore and Dewey viewed learning as an integral process based on actual experiences and not on abstraction. This shows that Tagore believed education should allow children to learn freely while preserving the essence of their childhood.

Tagore emphasized on promoting creativity and physical activity as major components of learning. Central among his education principles were a faith that one learns by association with one’s environment, an importance of trust among teachers and learners, and provision for times of play, delight, and introspection essential for sound mental and emotional development. He refused to adapt Western technological advancement, conventional Indian art practices, or any intricate philosophical frameworks easily. Though he honored these traditions, he was careful not to give importance to any one tradition or ideology. His method valued the past but stayed rooted in the present and receptive to change and development.

Unlike Baba who was in a way universalizing the Indian method of education, to quote the words of Babb, “Sathya Sai schools impart a purportedly nonsectarian spiritual education, but with clearly Hindu leanings” (Babb, 1983, 14) and adapting it to the needs of the time, Tagore amalgamated and borrowed ideas from around the world for his educational vision. That is why you see the,

“The various streams of culture like the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Islamic, the Sikh, the Zorastrian, and the European, that had flown through the Indian soil from the earliest to the modern times and pointed out that these streams of culture should be coordinated and studied thoroughly in centers of learning in the country. “In the length and breadth of this vast country,” he observed with regret, “there is not a single university at the present moment where any Indian or foreign student can study the best learning of India or truly realize its contribution or character (Chaudhuri, 2020, 87).”

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Tagore's "educational mission could never end in nationalism." Tagore acted as a bridge between the East and the West. While on one side you see Tagore's educational vision resonating with the gurukula system of education, on the other hand you find the parallel between Emerson's naturalism, the reformist zeal of the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and the founder of the Kindergarten movement, Friedrich Fröbel. It is also important to note that Tagore met Maria Montessori in the year 1926 and in 1927 he met German educationist Paul Geheeb and visited his school in Odenwaldschule (Quayum, 2024, 76).

Tagore saw education as a continuous journey, beginning in childhood and continuing through adolescence into adulthood. To a child, education should provide a stimulating environment that nurtures curiosity and creativity. For adolescents, it should encourage scientific and artistic exploration. As adults, people should recognize education as the foundation of their nation's cultural and economic progress.

He believed that true education nurtures an individual's ability to lead an independent and fulfilling life, fosters harmony within society, and ultimately guides one toward a deeper understanding of existence. Tagore decries the current system for not being able to foster a sense of communal responsibility and common understanding, which are the key to a unified society:

"The adjustment of our individual life to our social life, and of these two with the vast life of man, needs for its training the spirit and acceptance of mutual responsibility. In our educational institutions, training and experience in this type of adjustment hardly find a place ... Owing to this lack of training in sympathetic understanding, man suffers from the want of that true freedom in his social life, which comes from his deeper consciousness of the need for welfare and for a widespread atmosphere of mutual sympathy and co-operation (Tagore, 1961, 43)."

For Tagore, education is not a fragmented quest for knowledge but an integral process that develops the self, relates it to society, and leads it toward a higher awareness. It is in this dialectical interaction of individual refinement (Vyashti), social cohesion (Samashti), and spiritual realization (Parameshti) that education becomes truly effective in leading human beings toward a harmonious, creative, and full life.

This vision of Tagore once again establishes that his conception of education is very much a part of his wider philosophy of life, in which education is not just an exercise of the intellectual faculties but an aspirational journey for the fulfillment of one's highest self. He defines the ultimate aim of

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education as "the evolving of a luminous sphere of human mind," highlighting its function as spiritual and moral illumination.

Tagore also emphasizes India's rich tradition of spiritual wisdom and sees education as a means of preserving and sharing this heritage with the world. As he further states in *My School*:

"Let the object of our education be to open it (treasure of spiritual wisdom) out before us and to give us the power to make the true use of it in our life, and offer it to the rest of the world when the time comes, as our contribution to its eternal welfare (Tagore, 2004, 76)."

Here, he presents education as both an individual and a collective responsibility that fosters personal enlightenment while also contributing to the greater good of humanity. Through this vision, he reinforces the idea that education is not a finite endeavor but a lifelong process of self-discovery, social responsibility, and spiritual realization. This, for Tagore, is the true purpose of education, a transformative force that can bring about meaningful change. It is his call for an education that does not merely impart knowledge but awakens the mind, nurtures creativity, and shapes individuals who can lead society toward progress and harmony.

Baba too held a clear and purposeful vision of education, firmly committed to addressing the spiritual void of his time. Instead of turning to dogmatic preaching or ritualistic teaching, he envisioned education as an instrument for inner transformation. His method was in keeping with the work of a spiritual guru—not one who teaches religious dogma, but one who initiates people toward self-awareness through holistic growth.

For Baba, spirituality did not mean ritualism or blind faith, but self-knowledge, love for all, righteousness (dharma), and service. And so, education was the best means of reaching the 'unreached.' His institutions did not aim to churn out degree-holders, but people who internalized the values of truth (sathya), right conduct (dharma), peace (shanti), love (prema), and non-violence (ahimsa). According to him, education should touch the heart and change the mind, which eventually leads to the flowering of inner divinity. In the inaugural discourse of the university, Baba puts forth the purpose of opening his university. He says,

"When we fall low in education or in knowledge, our parents feel great grief. When we fall low in morals and spiritual virtues, our motherland bemoans her fate ten times more sadly…In this land revered as the treasure house of spiritual riches, dharma is declining day by day; unrighteousness, injustice, violence, anti-social acts, falsehood are running amok. They are indulging in their devil-

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dance unhindered. In this Kali era, students have to rise as lion cubs, reestablish peace and restore dharma in individual, social and national life…The solution for the problem is just one; the Light of Truth has to be fostered and spread in the field of education…The nation cannot advance through a reform of the educational system alone… Real education must be judged by the concern for others which it promotes (Baba, 1999, 87)."

The above words of Baba show that character is an important factor for individual development. Baba's assertion that "real education must be judged by the concern for others which it promotes" (Baba, 2012, 76) redefines success in education. It shifts the measure from personal achievement to social responsibility. True education, for Baba, is that which awakens an inner sensitivity to the suffering of others, a commitment to justice, and a firm adherence to truth. Knowledge that does not cultivate empathy, self-restraint, and service to society is, in his view, incomplete and dangerous. In this vision, the educational institution becomes a crucible where character is forged, not just careers; where patriotism is nurtured, not just professional ambition.

It was Thomas Lockina who said, "Character education is the deliberate effort to develop a good character based on core virtues that are good for the individual and good for society (Singh, 2019, 6)." Character education is a systematic approach to help students develop the moral virtues and values that are essential for living a good life. Its "interest is in the nonacademic side of the student—the "other side of the report card (Berkowitz & Bier, 2015, 2)." At the core, character education is about developing virtues like honesty, compassion, perseverance, courage, respect, responsibility, and self-discipline. It not only instructs students to know what is right but also to want what is right and to do what is right even when it is hard. For Baba, education should not only instruct the mind but should also transform the heart. It is this moral and spiritual transformation that gives education its true meaning. When Baba asserts that the "end of education is character," it is this spiritual and moral change that makes education worthwhile.

Thus, Baba's mission in education was an early and foundational example of what character education should be — value-based, holistic, and spiritually sound. His schools were not intended simply to produce scholarly excellence but individuals who are intellectually capable, morally correct, socially committed, and spiritually enlightened. This wider definition of education was what Baba referred to as "Educare."

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To differentiate Educare from traditional education, Baba defined: "What is education? It is of two types: The first type is collection of facts and knowledge about the external world and sharing them with students. The second type is educare. Educare involves the deep understanding of the knowledge that springs from within and imparting it to students (Baba, 2012, 78)." By this formulation, Baba places his philosophy of education in the long spiritual tradition of India, specifically in the voice of the Mundaka Upanishad, which states: "Tasmāt sa hovāca dve vidye veditavye iti ha sma yad brahmavido vadanti, parā ca aparā ca," asserting the presence of two planes of knowledge: aparā vidyā, the lower knowledge of the external, material world, and parā vidyā, the higher wisdom that brings about self-realization and freedom. (Radhakrishnan, 2016, 23).

Baba stressed that a balanced mixture of secular and spiritual education is necessary for the modern world. Secular education teaches the facts and techniques needed to deal with the outer world, whereas spiritual education develops the heart, teaching people to become selfless, moral, and feel a sense of universal brotherhood. Secular education is outer instruction; spiritual education is inner awakening. Without this inner awakening, Baba contended, education is incomplete.

For Baba, the aim of Educare is not only self-evolution but also serving as an example to others: "Educare means bringing out the latent divinity in a human being and setting it as an ideal to the whole world." Education here becomes a potent tool not only for personal achievement but also for awakening social and world harmony (Baba, 2012, 79).

Baba was censorious of education pursued in the absence of wisdom or moral basis. He warned, "Education without knowledge is useless and knowledge without education is foolishness (Baba, 2014, 90)." Here, he points to the insufficiency of parrot learning and information acquisition when separated from insight, thought, and correct conduct. Knowledge has to be with humility, kindness, and accountability; else, it may result in arrogance, exploitation, and harm to society. Thus, according to Baba, the proper aim of education is two-fold: academic success has to be combined with character success. Higher education, Baba demanded, has to be matched with good conduct, underlining that intellectual success without moral improvement is not just empty but also dangerous.

In this way, Baba's educational philosophy offers a corrective to the fragmentary vision of modern education, restoring an integrated vision of the human being as a spiritual being involved in the

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world for a greater cause. Based on this integration of objective and subjective knowledge, Baba perceives education as an instrument for a radical threefold transformation of the individual and society. He encapsulates this ideal in the symbolic meaning of the word SAI:

"Hence, the primary endeavour of man today should be to shed selfishness, develop spirituality and realise the Divine. Three basic changes should take place in man. That is the truth contained in the Sai principle. S" stands for Spiritual change. "A" stands for "Associational" (or National) change. "I" stands for Individual change. By this triple change the nation will prosper. Without a change in the individual, society will not change. Without a social transformation, spiritual transformation cannot take place in the heart (Baba, 2008, 89)."

Thus, Educare offers a redefinition of education — one that goes beyond conventional academic achievement and aims for the complete flowering of the human soul. It demands an education that yields not only competent professionals but virtuous human beings who live for the good of society, inspired by the highest values of truth, love, and righteousness. In this model, education must engage the whole person: nurturing the head (intellect), directing the heart (values and emotions), and empowering the hands (action). Baba summarizes this integrative vision in the principles of 3HV — the harmonious evolution of the Head, Heart, and Hands. Knowledge needs to be accompanied by wisdom, skills by compassion, and action by selflessness.

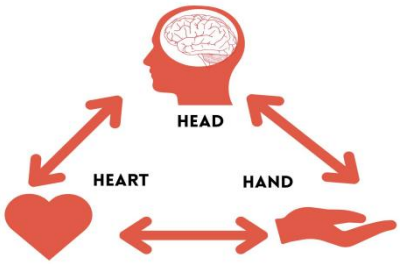

Figure 1 3HV Model

Through stressing this integration, Baba sees education not simply as a means to personal achievement, but as a transformational process towards self-realization and accountable service to the world. Baba's pedagogy of learning can be broadly categorized into two modes: formal education and informal education. While, on the one hand, Baba setup schools and universities all over India and the globe. Conversely, appreciating the necessity of developing character early in life, Baba institutionalized an informal education system through Balvikas (also referred to as

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Sathya Sai Education), the aim being the all-round development of children between the ages of 5 and 15. Balvikas was primarily meant for the development of moral values, self-discipline, and a sense of divine consciousness in the young minds. Building from this establishment, the Sri Sathya Sai Educare approach started to become more formally established in 1982 with the launch of the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values (SSEHV) program, which took a bold secular and universal approach to address a wider community beyond particular religious or cultural heritage. Baba further explained the fundamental distinction between education and Educare, noting that real education must bring out the inherent divinity in each person, as opposed to imparting mere outside information.

By 2001, the Sathya Sai Education programme was officially renamed Sathya Sai Educare, but the fundamental values had already been set decades ago with the founding of the Bal Vikas movement in 1969. So Sathya Sai Educare is not an addition but a culmination of Baba's ideal of education. In the modern age, Sathya Sai Educare is a silent but powerful spiritual revolution within the traditional school system, which is constantly endeavoring to lead young minds toward lives based on truth, righteousness, peace, love, and non-violence — the five basic human values (Pattanayak, 2015, 54).

Baba's Sathya Sai Educare was not a change, but the culmination of an educational vision deeply rooted in Indian philosophical and pedagogical thought. Through this setup, Baba aims to produce individuals who cross the crucible of seva as sadhana. According to Baba, an educational system is like a bank in which the nation withdraws cheques every now and then whenever it requires strong and competent leaders to lead the nation ahead. Baba's worry is that if this bank goes bankrupt it would lead to a national disaster. (Baba 209) Therefore his aim in education is that institutions must provide students who turn into leaders, must "have passed through school and college and mastered the problems of the present and the future, in the light of the past, leaders who appreciate the traditions and culture of this country." (Baba 209) By turning seva as sadhana, Baba underscores that when any public duty has been undertaken by such a person, he will "not only do it with a sense of self-involvement but with self-effacement (Gokak, 2003, 34)." Such an attitude will develop brotherhood among each other and a sense of responsibility as well as an attitude of non-doership. Baba's focus was more on the moral aspect of the students. He believed

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that it is school and colleges that can provide this moral attitude and concern for others and that was for him the culture and this cultural renaissance is what he wanted to bring out again. He says, "One can read or study at home. Why, then, should it be necessary for students to attend schools and colleges? Students have to attend then, says Baba, "in order to cultivate discipline, control emotions and canalis passions. Learning is just a small fraction of what can be gained from schools and colleges. They instill into the pupils the lessons of mutual co-operation, good manners, courtesy, compassion and comradeship, adjustment to limitations and overcoming of obstacles with calm deliberation (Baba, 2008, 45)." According to Baba each student must be guided through a four-fold path of transformation: self-confidence, self-satisfaction, self-sacrifice, and self-realization. Self-confidence can be interpreted as having confidence in the inner divine self and thereby acting with courage, clarity, and a sense of purpose. When an individual is grounded in such faith, it invariably leads to self-satisfaction. Self-satisfaction is the highest level of contentment, where yearnings are controlled, and one does not pursue unnecessary things and ambitions. Self-sacrifice springs from this feeling of inner satisfaction naturally. A self-righteous individual takes pleasure in sacrifice, in prioritizing others over self, and in committing himself to a nobler purpose above self-interest. Ultimately, as a result of this consistent effort the self achieves self-realization — an awakening to the underlying truth that one's own self is inseparably intertwined with the Divine and the whole of creation. Therefore, Baba offers a natural and organic development that converts the individual from a self-centered being to a selfless and spiritually conscious being.

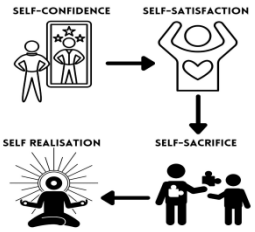

Figure 2 Baba's the Four-Fold Path of Transformation Model

Pastness of the past and its presence:

Though Tagore and Baba belonged to different historical and ideological contexts, both the thinkers saw education as a path to holistic development of the individual as well as the society. Their ideologies challenge the narrow, fragmented approach of modern education and propose a

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model that integrates knowledge with wisdom, learning with character, and intellect with compassion. By restoring education's fundamental role in shaping individuals and societies, their ideas remain highly relevant in today's rapidly changing world.

Both the thinkers were reacting to what G.N. Devy calls the "amnesia of the past" (Paranjape, 2018, 24) a collective forgetting of India's rich heritage. This amnesia, they felt, had disconnected the spirit of education from its cultural and moral roots. In recalling the spirit of traditional Indian learning, Tagore and Baba urged an education that nurtures the complete individual—mind, heart, and spirit.

In Debating the Postcondition, Makarand Paranjape interprets tradition not as a rigid or nostalgic inheritance, but as parampara—a living, evolving stream of cultural, ethical, and spiritual consciousness. As he explains, "parampara means the flowing, flowering of the spirit in present times." Tradition, in this view, is not a matter of mechanical repetition but an active, creative re-engagement with memory (smriti), guided by fresh insight or revelation (sruti). Most importantly, Paranjape views the individual not as a mere receiver but as co-creator of tradition—able to remake or even challenge what is inherited (Paranjape, 2018, 24).

This dynamic vision of tradition provides a compelling lens to analyse the educational philosophies of Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Both philosophers, in differentiated but complementary ways, recognized education as a primary vehicle through which parampara can be renewed. This revival is not only in the transmission of knowledge, but in the revitalization of moral, spiritual, and aesthetic values within a rapidly modernizing world.

Paranjape's intervention is particularly concerned with the way modernity fractures the holistic Indian worldview, separating domains that were once seen as interwoven. He notes that, "modernity seemed to enshrine a divorce between dharma and aesthetics, between morality and utility, between fact and value." As a result, the traditional framework of smriti, the moral memory that governs everyday action, has eroded, leading to a society where ethical questions are replaced by legal calculations. "We don't worry if a thing is right or wrong, only if it is legal or illegal," he observes.

As a counter to this loss, Paranjape demands the revival of *sruti*, the inner, intuitive voice of truth as the way to revitalize smriti and sustain parampara. Notably, he is not dismissing modernity, but rather asking us to try to imagine continuity between the old and the new. As he puts it, "tradition

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and modernity need not be oppositional; rather, they can coexist in a continuum that allows for both rootedness and reinvention (Paranjape, 2018, 25)."

This open and evolving view of tradition allows us to look at Indian education in a new way. It helps us to see that both Tagore and Baba have tried to fix the gap between knowledge and values by creating education that focuses on the holistic development of a person.

Rabindranath Tagore's vision of education was influenced both by his knowledge of India's cultural-spiritual heritage as well as exposure to international humanist ideals. In his experimental school, Santiniketan, Tagore attempted to revive the spirit of the ancient Gurukula but interpreted it in contemporary terms. Tagore was critical of colonial, examination-dominated education, which, in his opinion, isolated the student from both the self and the world.

To Tagore, education was not to conform, but to awaken. He says, "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence (Paranjape, 2018, 25)." This idea of harmony, found through art, nature, self-expression and a sense of ethics, connects with what Paranjape calls sruti, a living inner truth that keeps tradition alive and renewed from within.

Tagore did not view tradition as a closed system, but rather as an open-ended movement towards becoming. This mirrors Paranjape's call to "add to [tradition], to grow beyond it, to discover our own truths (Paranjape, 2018, 26)." For Tagore, parampara lives through freedom, not fear, and its task is not only to preserve but to inspire.

In contrast to Tagore's emphasis on artistic and existential freedom, Baba approached the crisis of modernity through the restoration of dharma and spiritual discipline. He was deeply concerned about the void of value created by modern education, where success was measured by material achievement rather than inner development. His philosophy of Sathya Sai Educare emphasized the return of spiritual and ethical values to the core of education, under the five cardinal principles of Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love, and Non-violence.

For Baba, education was the means to realize the full potential of the human being, not just intellectually, but morally and spiritually. Through initiatives such as the Bal Vikas movement and the Sri Sathya Sai University system, Baba revitalized the ancient gurukula ethos, but within a modern institutional framework. His aim was to ensure that the four purusharthas—dharma, artha, kama, moksha—were held in unity, as Paranjape notes in the traditional Indian worldview.

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Baba's concern that "law has taken the place of dharma" (Paranjape, 2018,26) echoes Paranjape's critique of modern legalism. By cultivating conscience over compliance, Baba reaffirms smriti as a moral compass, and calls upon sruti—the inner voice of divine truth—to guide individual transformation.

His model was not isolated or academic, but socially integrated. Students prayed, lived, and served together, bringing spiritual practices into everyday life. This is how Baba's vision finds parallel with Tagore's idea of education through living, in which the classroom itself is a microcosm of the ideal society.

Despite their different emphases—Tagore on freedom and creativity, Baba on discipline and values—both thinkers converge in viewing education as the renewal of parampara. They resist the binary between tradition and modernity, offering instead a third path rooted in Indian wisdom yet responsive to contemporary needs.

As Paranjape reminds us, "The problem of tradition can be solved if we see it as the basis of our own realization, not if we regard it as the sole custodian of ultimate truth." (pg. 38) Tagore achieves this through a celebration of the aesthetic and the intuitive, while Baba restores the ethical and the transcendental. Both models are rooted in spiritual insight, yet aimed at concrete transformation.

Ultimately, Tagore and Baba neither blindly preserve nor dismiss tradition. Instead, they infuse it with new life, keeping open the possibility of sruti, and ensuring that smriti remains relevant and just. They represent, as Paranjape might say, two luminous embodiments of living parampara—traditions that remember, renew, and radiate.

In rethinking tradition as a dynamic and renewing force, both Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Sathya Sai Baba present education as the principal instrument for individual awakening and collective evolution. Their philosophies embody what Makarand Paranjape calls parampara—not the mere transmission of inherited forms, but their thoughtful renewal through inner illumination and lived experience. Whether through Tagore's celebration of freedom, creativity, and beauty, or Baba's call to ethical clarity, spiritual discipline, and selfless service, education becomes the fertile ground where tradition is not only remembered (*smriti*) but re-heard afresh as sruti.

In this light, education is not simply about shaping minds; it is about shaping humanity. It becomes the crucible in which character is forged, conscience awakened, and the soul called to its highest potential. It is this very process that links the transformation of the individual to the transformation

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of society. For a civilization to thrive—not just technologically, but spiritually—it must invest in educational models that nurture the whole being.

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