

Chapter 5

SRI SATHYA SAI UNIVERSITY



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What exactly is education? ... It means opening wide the doors of the mind. It means cleansing the inner tools of consciousness, the mind, the senses, ego and reason.... Education, when it gets linked with egoism, loses its wider purpose. It becomes supremely purposeful only when it is directly related to spirituality.

— Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Sri Sathya Sai University, (formerly known as *Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning*) with its Headquarters in Prasanthi Nilayam (Andhra Pradesh) in India is the "crest jewel" of Sathya Sai Education. It is a visible manifestation of Sri Sathya Sai Baba's vision of education for the transformation of humanity. The Institute was recognised as a Deemed University by the Government of India in 1981. There are three campuses: the Prasanthi Nilayam campus for men at the University Headquarters, offering undergraduate and postgraduate courses with research facilities for doctoral candidates; the Anantapur campus for women, offering both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes; and the Brindavan campus for men, located at Whitefield near Bangalore, offering undergraduate courses.

The University is a non-profit, autonomous institution. The admission policy is open, based on an entry examination and admission is granted purely on merit. No consideration is given to caste, creed, income, region, religion,

or language. Students come from different states in India, and a few from other countries, creating a national and international character for the University. The medium of instruction is English. The University charges no tuition or entry fees for any of the courses offered. Besides, the University offers free medical treatment to all staff and students and provides scholarships to deserving students to meet hostel expenses.

High academic standards at the University are ensured by dedicated teachers who live on the campus. Students are provided the best opportunities and environment in and outside the classroom for achieving academic excellence. Research programmes in the University are designed keeping in view their relevance to social needs. The education at the University focuses on providing a higher order of reasoning and exploration. The University was the first in India to offer a five-year integrated course leading up to Master's degree, exposing students to rigorous thinking



Anantapur Campus



Brindavan Campus



Sri Sathya Sai Baba on Convocation Day with the Chief Guest, the President of India

"This University will not be imparting in Botany merely the knowledge of trees in nature; it will spread the knowledge of tree of true living.

"It will not be imparting the knowledge merely of Economics; the knowledge of theistic ethics too will be included.

"It will not be teaching mere Chemistry; it will also unravel the mystery of Raso Vai Sah - the Supreme Embodiment of nectarine sweetness - the Atma.

"It will teach not only the science of the material world; it will also teach the science of the non-material world. It will not differentiate the material from the non-material or treat the non-material as irrelevant to the material.

"We have decided that this shall be the uniqueness of this University. This will not be like all other universities which adopt a few faculties and burden their alumni with degrees, which they can present as begging bowls while clamouring for jobs.

"This University will confer on its alumni the courage and confidence, the knowledge and skill to shape their careers by their own efforts, relying on their strength.

"So we have proposed that spiritual education be integrated harmoniously with ethical, physical, and metaphysical teachings in this University."

— Sri Sathya Sai Baba at the Inauguration of the University

from the very first year. Reforms in syllabi are frequent and help to keep the academic programmes vigorous and dynamic. Evaluations of students' learning are conducted on an ongoing basis as also at the end of the semester.

Historical Development

In June 1966, Sri Sathya Sai Baba was at Anantapur, a town in Andhra Pradesh, 60 miles from Prasanthi Nilayam, at the invitation of a high school for girls. The plight of the girls who had to go to distant places for higher education, and also the kind of education for which they were spending much time and money, affected Sri Sathya Sai Baba. He resolved upon another step in his task of fostering righteous living for women. He announced that there would be a women's college in Anantapur soon. The Women's College was inaugurated on July 22, 1968. Sri Sathya Sai Arts and Science College for men at Brindavan, Whitefield, was inaugurated on June 9, 1969. Some years later on November 28, 1978 Sri Sathya Sai Baba laid the foundation stone of the College of Arts, Science and Commerce at Prasanthi Nilayam.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba founded the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning on November 22, 1981 and has been guiding its course as the Chancellor from its very inception. The Institute began its operation with two campuses at Prasanthi Nilayam and Anantapur. A year later, the campus at Brindavan, Whitefield, became part of the Institute. The latest addition to the constellation of colleges of the Institute, the Sri Sathya Sai Mirpuri College of Music in Prasanthi Nilayam, was inaugurated on November 20, 2000. The Institute (a deemed university) became Sri Sathya Sai University in February 2007.

Mission of the University

The Chancellor has declared the Mission of the University in the following words:

"This institute has not been established just to prepare you for earning degrees. The main purpose is to help you cultivate Self-knowledge and Self-confidence, so that each one of you can learn Self-sacrifice and earn Self-realisation.

"Teaching you the university curricula, preparing you for the university examinations, and awarding you university degrees - these are only means employed for the end, namely - spiritual uplift, Self-discovery and social service through love and detachment.

"Our hope is that by your lives, you will be shining examples of spiritual awareness and its beneficial consequences to the individual and society."

Over the past twenty-five years the University is fulfilling this educational mission of Sri Sathya Sai Baba by "providing the youth with an education, which while cultivating their intelligence, also purifies their impulses and emotions and equips them with the physical and mental disciplines needed for drawing upon the springs of calmness and joy that lie in their own hearts."

Distinctive Features of the University

Sri Sathya Sai University is a unique educational institution, which is redefining tertiary education in India and elsewhere in many ways. The University is widely recognised today by eminent educationists and educational



Sri Sathya Sai International Sports Centre, Prasanthi Nilayam

authorities as a standard bearer of integral education, character building of the youth, and academic excellence combined with sports, fine arts, and social service.

What are the distinctive features that make this University stand apart from other educational institutions in the world? The spiritual ambience of peace and character that pervades the environment of the University strikes a newcomer first.

Other distinctive features noted by visiting dignitaries include: completely free education; the implicit discipline; emphasis on education in human values; a successful synthesis of spirituality with modern science and technology; the integrated five-year course; the mandatory awareness programme; commendable teacher-pupil ratio; excellent infrastructure including a Space Theatre (Planetarium) and an International Sports Centre conforming to Olympic standards.

But the most distinctive feature of this University which makes it so unique is the triangular, mutually reinforcing, learning and transformation process that the University offers to every student: Lessons learnt in the immediate proximity and through direct interaction with the revered Chancellor; integrating values with secular knowledge through curriculum and classroom teaching; and translating these lessons into practical skills through daily living in the residential environment of the hostel, sports field, and social service. This is elaborated in the following sections.

Chancellor as the Motivator

Life in the University revolves round its revered Chancellor, Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Right from the time a student enters the portals of the University, a sacred and unique relationship is developed with Sri Sathya Sai Baba which gives constant motivation to excel in every sphere of

The institute breathes an air of inner calm which is altogether unique. Such inner poise is not achieved by administrative fiat or the power of hierarchy. It is acquired by the operation of subjective forbearance. Every teacher and student, every administrator and worker here, seems to know intuitively that this Institute of Higher Learning is also a venue of Higher Behaviour and a seat of Higher Understanding.

— Sri R. Venkataraman, President of India, addressing the Ninth Convocation of the University, 1990



Sri Sathya Sai Baba with the President of India after the inauguration of the Sports Centre

secular and spiritual activities. The students enjoy a unique privilege of being personally directed by him in matters relating to their academic, co-curricular, spiritual, and personal affairs.

The strong personal bond that develops between the Chancellor and the students, his continuous loving guidance, the nurturing of values and the opportunity given to students to see those values in action through his daily life, lead to a remarkable transformation in the attitudes and behaviour patterns of students, and eventually in their perspectives towards life.

Integral Education

The deep insights gained by the students under the Chancellor's benign guidance are clarified through introspection and discussions in the classroom. The University combines spiritual with secular education in all its curricular, co-

curricular and extra-curricular activities. This integral education helps to develop all aspects of the human personality - physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual, resulting in a well-rounded personality. There is a consistent endeavour to bring out value-orientation in students through every subject taught in the University, be it a part of physical sciences, biological sciences, social sciences, commerce, or management. The teachers are chosen with extreme care to play an important role in this process. Many of them are alumni of the University, dedicated and well-versed in integral education. They take active part not only in classroom instruction but also by providing every help, guidance and general counselling to the students whenever needed.

Awareness Programme

A key component of integral education is the Awareness Course, which is a unique feature at the University. A mandatory course for every

Living with Swami (as the Chancellor is lovingly referred to by all students), who has touched me with his love, so selfless and genuine, I have learned that there is no joy comparable to the joy of being useful to somebody in some way. If you have helped somebody today who can never repay you, your day is made. It is very rightly said - You never know what happiness a simple act of kindness can bring.

— Bisweshwar Prusty, a Management Graduate of the University



A panoramic view of the Twenty-fifth Convocation Ceremony of the Institute held at the Sri Sathya Sai International Sports Centre, 22 November 2006

Self-confidence is the Foundation, Self-sacrifice is the Wall, Self-satisfaction is the roof and Self-realisation is life. This is the Mansion of life that one must aspire for.

— Sri Sathya Sai Baba

student, it introduces spiritual education by providing an intellectual and rational foundation for the spiritual way of life. At the undergraduate level, the course is conducted over the first six semesters in the campus and covers philosophy of education; unity of religions and faiths; ethos and values and their relevance in the current milieu; life and its quest; and the study of classical literature espousing the highest truths.

At the post-graduate level, the focus shifts to topics like Globalisation vis-à-vis

Internationalisation; Sustainable Development; Environmental Issues; and Impact of the Media. Students are encouraged to discuss ways in which the high ideals can be translated into daily reality, particularly in the chosen profession. In professional courses, the main curriculum itself includes value-based courses such as Value-based Management, Self-Awareness, Personality Development, and Leadership. The Awareness Course supplements the value inputs given in the core courses. The emphasis is on the simultaneous development of "head, heart and hand" (3HV) in the student.



The Awareness Course is multifaceted: it is interdisciplinary in that it cuts across all academic lines, it is cross-cultural as it includes the contribution of all great cultures, and it is inter-faith as it brings out the unity of the world's all great religions. Perhaps the most important contribution of the Awareness

Course is that it helps to develop Self-confidence in the students. The students learn to rely not only on the knowledge and skills acquired at the University and their physical and intellectual abilities but on the higher Self, resident in every heart, by whose Grace alone any human endeavour can bear fruit.

Four hundred and eighteen graduates from Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning are getting ready to enter into the world today. Also during the last 25 years, over 8,500 graduates have joined many organisations from this Institute in various parts of the country and the world. What is the uniqueness of these graduates? I have visited this university a number of times and interacted with students. For me, it is indeed a birth of a truth that the graduates of this Institute with the education edifice grounded in the value system of this divine campus will always shine as lifelong learners.

— H.E. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, *President of India, delivering the Convocation Address at the University on 22 November, 2006*



Prasanthi Nilayam campus with the Hill View Stadium in the foreground

In an article, *Secular and Sacred Education* (2006), Sri K. Chakravarthi, Secretary of Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust and the first Registrar of the University, succinctly sums up the learning process and character development context that extends beyond the classroom at the University.

...as many aspects of our lives are not governed by our scholastic abilities, it is necessary to provide opportunities for learning in places other than classrooms, such as hostel, sports ground, music and theatre arena, and social work in the villages. It is these fields that help the students learn the art of teamwork, mutual interdependence, sharing and caring, respect for others' talents and skills. The process of learning is continuous: sometimes conscious assimilation of ideas and sometimes semi-conscious absorption of feelings of nobility, altruism, selflessness and spirit of sacrifice, which characterise the atmosphere here. These become part of an ongoing building up of the character of the students. The more important feature of such learning is the ability to identify oneself with others' problems, resulting in a natural empathy with others. Such sensitisation is, after all, the basis of participation in communitarian activities undertaken for the welfare of a larger body than the immediate family or one's own concerns. All this builds up a nurturing and nourishing learning process. The training of the mind and the sensitisation of the heart therefore goes on simultaneously, endowing the students with the capacity to deal with problems of living and issues of life. Self-effort, active teamwork, meaningful interaction with wider groups, responsible behaviour as a member of institutions and organisations, a natural reaching out to the disempowered and underprivileged in the spirit of common spiritual brotherhood – all are to become characteristics of their evolving personality during the period of their study and stay.

— K. Chakravarthi, the first Registrar of the University

Character: The End of Integral Education

The outcome of integral education is best reflected in the positive character development that takes place in the students within a remarkably short period of time after they enter the University. The University maintains a fully residential system and community living in dormitory-type hostels plays an important role in imbibing habits of sharing and caring, and the qualities of patience and perseverance among students from very early days. The warden of the campus and many teachers, some of them alumni of the University, live with the students under the same roof. They act as role models for the younger students and participate in many activities that are designed to develop an integrated personality of the students.

Physical education is greatly encouraged, and each campus is well equipped with playgrounds, gymnasium, and training facilities. The emphasis in all these activities is to develop a "healthy mind in a healthy body", imbibing a sense of cooperation rather than competition. The sports ground serves as an arena for developing courage, confidence, and togetherness. This is best demonstrated at the annual Sports Day meet when boys and girls of



The Committee members were impressed by the underlying philosophy at the campus. This reflected a combination of most modern pursuits in the area of science and technology with cultural, spiritual, and traditional values of various religious traditions of India. The Committee was also impressed by the fact that despite the emphasis on spiritual and cultural values, no emphasis on any specific religion was given. In this sense, the approach is spiritual, secular and universal.

— *Visiting Committee of the University Grants Commission of India,
after a visit to Sri Sathya Sai University in March 1997*

India



Prasanthi Nilayam Campus

the University perform most intricate aerobic feats high up in the air or perform acts of daredevilry with motorcycles after minimal practice, given their extremely busy schedule every day. The key to their Self-confidence lies in their love for the revered Chancellor and their determination to succeed to make him happy. The campus life also provides ample opportunity to nurture the talents of students in music, dance, drama, and public speaking.

A strong social conscience is also fostered in the students who are expected to share some responsibility for service in the campus and in local villages. Evaluation by the University is not merely in academic learning but also in social service activities, sports and cultural events, elocution, and discipline. The teachers at the University regard themselves as co-learners and are exemplars of unity in thought, word, and action. There is no room for cynicism.

Special Attention to Women's Education

Women have always been at the forefront in all programmes of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. He established colleges for women in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, much earlier than he started colleges for men. He sees education as extremely important for young women who will be mothers and teachers of future generations. So he wants to prepare them to be better equipped to teach and guide their children wisely in accordance with noble precepts and practices.

It is worthy of note that the former students of Anantapur College for Women have organised themselves as messengers of Sri Sathya Sai Baba and are doing commendable social service in several countries. They also meet annually at Prasanthi Nilayam.

'Crest Jewel' of University Education

A Peer Team of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council established by the University Grants Commission of India visited the University in 2002. Referring to the integral higher education provided by the University, the Peer Team said: "This made us realise that there is a way to correct our already degrading university education system in India, if we decide to do so." Based on the recommendation of the Peer Team, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council accredited the University at the highest level (A++) among the Indian universities.

The Peer Team felt that "This Institute stands out as a crest jewel among the university education system in the country and this model is worthy of emulation by the institutes of higher learning in the country and elsewhere, so that these benefits would be reaped fast and on the widest possible scale."

The University maintains a comprehensive website providing information to the public about course offerings, student life, campuses, research, admissions, annual events, calendar and other items of interest. <http://www.ssihl.edu.in/>

The Indian tradition believes that Truth or Sathya is God. As the Sai model of education affirms, the students of this university are not just students, but seekers of Truth. The divine guidance of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has thus elevated even education to the level of worship of God.

— Sri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the then Prime Minister of India, Convocation Address at Sri Sathya Sai University, 22 November 1998



Grama Seva (service to the rural poor) by the University students and teachers



Women students of the University perform on Sports Day

If you ask me what is my property, many expect the answer to be - Oh! All these buildings, all this vast area of land. But my answer is: My entire property consists of my students. I have offered myself to them.

— Sri Sathya Sai Baba

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