

Spiritual Intelligence and Its Social Implications on Rural Youth

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ABSTRACT

Spiritual Intelligence offers a powerful internal resource that can empower young individuals, uplift entire communities, and foster resilience, moral development, empathy, and a sense of purpose. Rural youth who face socio-economic deprivation and emotional challenges require inner psychological and moral development. In rural settings, where material resources are limited, traditional values and spiritual intelligence can play a significant role. This study explores the role of spiritual intelligence, which has profound social implications for rural youth in the promotion of empathy and compassion, mental and emotional well-being, and fostering leadership and vision. A strong sense of spiritual purpose can empower youth to overcome socio-economic limitations and envision a meaningful life path. Conceptual analysis, which involves examining key ideas, definitions, and relationships between concepts to better understand their contribution and implications, will be administered for this study. The findings highlight the potential of spiritual intelligence to encourage socially responsible behaviour, reduce antisocial tendencies, and promote personal growth among rural youth. It suggests implications for educational and community development programs. The study underscores the need to integrate spiritual education into rural youth development initiatives for holistic and sustainable social progress.

Key Words: Spiritual Intelligence, Conceptual Analysis, Resilience

INTRODUCTION

The world has experienced four waves of revolutionary civilization: first, the agrarian revolution, second, the industrial revolution, third, the information and technology revolution, and, finally, the fourth will be based on spiritual inclination (Toffler, 1980).

During an economic downturn, people get demotivated and start looking beyond conventional materialism. They start looking for the meaning and purpose of life. Merely rational and emotional intelligence is not sufficient. Today's complexities can be resolved with a stronger orientation towards meaningful existence and purpose.

Leaders of organisations have started to recognize the importance of the value of a person as a whole rather than just skills for the job. Business schools are now introducing spirituality for study and research, people want to be aware of the meaning of their life and want to make a difference in the lives of others, and thus, workplaces are becoming more humane (Tapas & Anand, 2016).

The social implications are profound: spiritually intelligent rural youth are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviours, resist negative peer pressures, and serve as catalysts for inclusive and value-based rural transformation. Therefore, cultivating spiritual intelligence is not just a personal journey, it becomes a social imperative for sustainable rural development.

Spirituality is an individual's search for ultimate meaning and purpose in life. It encompasses a belief in something beyond the self, often leading to personal growth and a connection with a higher power or the universe. Spirituality is associated with various benefits, including improved mental health, reduced anxiety and depression, and a sense of peace and contentment. It involves seeking a meaningful connection with something larger than oneself, which can foster positive emotions such as gratitude and acceptance. Overall, spirituality is a personal journey that can take many forms, including religious practices, meditation, and self-reflection (Luna, 2025).

Intelligence is the capacity for abstraction, logic, understanding, self-awareness, learning, emotional knowledge, reasoning, planning, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. It can be described as the ability to perceive or infer information and to retain it as knowledge to be applied to adaptive behaviors within an environment or context (Sharma, R. R., 2008).

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Spiritual intelligence is a higher dimension of intelligence beyond the ego, aligning with the soul's journey of learning and evolution. The term was first introduced by Danah Zohar in 1997, who described it as the foundation for more profound meaning, purpose, and ethical behaviour. Like other forms of intelligence, spiritual intelligence is innate but can be cultivated and developed through intentional practice and reflection (Charkhabi et al., 2014; Heydari et al., 2017, 2018; Hosseinpour et al., 2020).

This skill is essential for cultivating a sense of meaning and purpose in life, as well as for personal growth and development, and an ability to act wisely toward different real-life situations without losing internal and external peace, regardless of the difficulty of the situation that he/she is facing.

There is a positive and statistically significant relationship at the level ($P=0.01$) between spiritual intelligence dimensions (critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion) and personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience), Hassan (2023).

Spirituality vs Spiritual Intelligence

Spirituality is awareness of a higher power or source, while spiritual intelligence is the ability to access and embody spiritual qualities in daily life (Yugay, 2023). Spirituality is the engine, while spiritual intelligence is the steering wheel. One drives you, and the other directs you in life. Spiritual intelligence is distinct from the broader concept of spirituality, which is a search for the sacred. It emphasizes abilities that draw on spiritual themes to predict functioning and adaptation.

Spiritual Quotient and its measurement

Spiritual Quotient is a measure or score of an individual's level of spiritual intelligence, just like IQ (Intelligence Quotient) or EQ (Emotional Quotient). It quantifies spiritual awareness or development. SQ is more subjective and difficult to quantify precisely. However, several assessment tools and scales have been developed to measure aspects of spiritual intelligence.

- King's Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24)
- Spiritual Quotient Questionnaire (SQQ) by Zohar & Marshall
- Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS)

A comprehensive scale measures the four core dimensions:

- Critical existential thinking
- Personal meaning production
- Transcendental awareness
- Conscious state expansion

VARIABLES TO MEASURE SQ - A SAMPLE

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable
Spiritual Quotient	Psychological factors: Self-Awareness, Mindfulness, Coping Mechanism, Resilience, or Tolerance.
	Behavioral and Life Experience Factors: Meditation or spiritual practices, Frequency of Prayer or Reflection, Community involvement or service.
	Cognitive or Philosophical Beliefs: Moral values and ethical reasoning, Sense of life purpose or meaning.
Measures indicate that A high SQ indicates a strong sense of purpose, empathy, and inner peace. A low SQ indicates limited awareness of deeper meanings or ethical/spiritual values.	



Fig: Model Based on Spiritual Intelligence (Source: Tapas & Anand, 2016)

Social implications

Social implications refer to the ways in which a technology, policy, or behavior affects how people live, interact, and relate to one another in society. Increased spiritual intelligence reflected in a stronger sense of purpose, empathy, and inner awareness can positively shape these social dynamics, one possible social implication of improved emotional regulation, deeper relationships, and greater ethical behaviour. However, when such growth occurs across individuals within a group, workplace, or community and is sustained over time, it can lead to a broader social impact.

Rural Youth

Youth are defined as individuals aged 15 to 29 years (National Youth Policy (India, 2014) and live in non-urban areas (villages, countryside, remote regions). They are involved in agriculture or family-based livelihoods and have limited access to higher education, healthcare, and technology. They are vulnerable to migration, unemployment, and social exclusion, and hold potential as change agents in rural innovation and sustainability.

Here is a table comparing rural youth statistics across the globe and India, focusing on key indicators:

Category	Global	India
Youth Population	~1.8 billion globally (2024)	~420 million (2024); ~29% of total population
Rural Youth Proportion	The majority in developing countries, ~90% of youth, live in developing nations	A large proportion in rural areas, especially in states like UP, Bihar
Employment Status	~1/3 of youth unemployed, out of school, or in informal work	4.5% rural youth unemployment (April 2025); 6.5% urban
Gender Distribution	3 out of 4 rural youth in developing nations are female	Female labour force participation remains low in rural areas
Job Satisfaction	High dissatisfaction due to informal, unstable jobs	70%–85% of employed rural youth want to change jobs
Educational Access	Often limited in rural areas, especially in low-income countries	6,49,491 children in 17,997 villages (ASER 2024)
Key Challenges	Poor access to education, training, employment, and digital tools	Skill gaps, lack of local opportunities, and digital divide

Migration Trend	Rural-to-urban migration is common for jobs and education	Similar trend: youth move to cities for work/study
Government/NGO Initiatives	FAO, IFAD, and OECD support rural youth globally	Programs like TCS iON, Skill India, PMKVY (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana for training & placement

There is a need to consider how the integration of the inner life of people's psycho-spiritual development can cohere with the outer life of participating in the world (Vaughan, 2002). Spiritual intelligence, the capacity to find deeper meaning, self-awareness, compassion, and ethical grounding, has emerged as a transformative tool for fostering personal growth and social responsibility. Understanding how spiritual intelligence influences their choices, relationships, and community engagement can offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and development practitioners.

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual analysis is a method used in philosophy and other disciplines to clarify and examine concepts. The approach used in this study is a conceptual analysis, which aims to break down Spiritual Intelligence concepts into simpler components, clarify their meanings, and synthesise existing theories, research, and real-world applications to better understand their contribution, implications, and relevance to overcome socio-economic limitations and envision a meaningful life path.

Spiritual Intelligence- Transpersonal Ways of Being

Zohar & Marshall's Spiritual Intelligence (SI) Model (2001) emphasised that people in earlier societies would not have asked questions about meaning. Their lives were culturally embedded in a set framework. They had living traditions, living gods, living communities, functioning moral codes, problems that had known boundaries, and fixed goals. The present society has lost this and is left with existential problems and the need to cultivate a kind of intelligence that can deal with them. Contemporary society lives in a spiritually dumb culture characterised by materialism, expediency, narrow self-centeredness, lack of meaning, and dearth of commitment. Symptoms of their meaning-deprived society manifested in their obsession with health, fear of death, morbidities, and addictions. However, with the rise of spiritual intelligence, the deepest layer of true selves and the unique music that each human being has the potential to contribute may be accessed (Danah Zohar & Ian Marshall, 2001).

David King's Spiritual Intelligence (SI) Model is a framework that conceptualises spiritual intelligence as a set of cognitive abilities that contribute to a deeper understanding of existential and transcendent aspects of life (King, 2009). King's model consists of four interrelated dimensions:

Critical Existential Thinking (CET)

- The capacity to contemplate meaning, purpose, and existential issues (e.g., life, death, reality).
- The ability to critically analyse religious or spiritual beliefs

Personal Meaning Production (PMP)

- The ability to derive personal meaning and purpose from life experiences.
- Helps individuals cope with challenges and find fulfillment.

Transcendental Awareness (TA)

- The ability to perceive a transcendent dimension of reality through spirituality, nature, or deep consciousness.
- Includes an awareness of interconnectedness beyond the material world.

Conscious State Expansion (CSE)

- The capacity to enter higher states of consciousness at will (e.g., deep meditation, flow states, mindfulness).
- Enhances personal growth and well-being.

In the above models, it was observed that the need for communication within ourselves can be achieved through meditation, poetry, going for a walk in the woods, really listening to music, and examining the mental/emotional associations that result in noticing some scene or event from the day and going over

it later, keeping a diary and reviewing each day at the end. The indications of high Spiritual Intelligence are flexibility, self-awareness, capacity to face and use suffering, capacity to face and transcend pain, quality of being inspired by vision and values, reluctance to cause unnecessary harm, the tendency to see the connection between diverse things, to ask why, what if, and to seek answers.

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Case Study 1 - SI's Contribution: Barefoot College, Tilonia, Rajasthan, founded by *Bunker Roy* in 1972, exemplifies how spiritual intelligence can be translated into ethical, inclusive, and sustainable social innovation.

Tilonia is a 50-year-old community-based grassroots organisation making the most marginalised communities sustainable and self-sufficient. Tilonia gives lessons in reading, writing, and accounting to adults and children, especially the "drop-outs, cop-outs, and wash-outs." Girls heavily outnumber boys in the night schools. Focus is on Dalits, tribal groups, and women, populations who are often excluded from formal education and the technology sectors.

Social Implications

- Empowered thousands of villages in India and globally (Africa, Latin America) with solar energy, water access, health care, and education.
- Created a model of decentralized, spiritually-rooted development.
- Reframes the idea of intelligence and capacity, valuing inner potential over formal credentials.
- A non-hierarchical structure, where all voices are valued—a reflection of spiritual egalitarianism.

Case Study 2 - SI's Contribution: BYST (Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust) was founded in 1992 with support from the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and HRH Prince Charles's Charities.

BYST is a unique organization that exemplifies spiritual intelligence through mentorship-driven entrepreneurship aimed at empowering youth from underprivileged backgrounds. Promotes a culture of collaborative problem-solving and emotional resilience. Encourages a value-based economy that is more socially and spiritually conscious.

Social Implications

- Over 7,500 businesses created, many by youth from slums, rural areas, and marginalized backgrounds.
- Job creators instead of job seekers—building economic inclusion.
- Programs in areas like Telangana, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu, especially in rural and semi-urban communities.
- Strong focus on women and minority youth, promoting social equity.

Case Study 3 - SI's Contribution: Digital Spiritual Literacy Initiatives

YUVA (Youth for Unity, Values, and Awareness programs) - Founded in 1984 in Mumbai, India by Dr. (Fr.) Francis D'Britto and other social activists. It is a non-profit development organization working with marginalized communities, especially the urban poor and youth.

YUVA Bharat – a youth-centric spiritual and service movement inspired by Indian traditions, launched on 31st Oct 2023. It is not a centralized NGO, but rather a voluntary initiative supported by organizations like Vivekananda Kendra, Ramakrishna Mission, AOL, ISKON, and other faith-based or spiritual groups in India. They Promote:

- Volunteerism, nation-building, skill development, and civic participation.
- Over 1.58 crore youth registered within the first year.
- Averaging 60,000+ new registrations daily.

Social Implications

- Helps youth connect personal growth with social responsibility.
- Promotes seva (selfless service) through community projects.
- Offers mindfulness, reflection, and moral education sessions.

- Encourages dialogue across regions, languages, and traditions.

Case Study 4 - SI's Contribution: Art of Living Youth Leadership Training Program (YLTP), founded by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. YLTP trains young leaders, especially in rural and conflict-prone areas, focusing on breathing techniques (Sudarshan Kriya), meditation, and values education.

Social Implications

- In Bihar and Jharkhand, YLTP youth facilitated inter-caste dialogues to prevent violence.
- In Assam and Kashmir, the program contributed to post-conflict healing and trauma support.
- In tribal Madhya Pradesh, youth launched literacy and solar electrification projects.

INTEGRATION OF SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Spiritual intelligence plays a crucial role in shaping not only individual behaviour but also broader social dynamics. As individuals enhance their spiritual intelligence, they tend to demonstrate greater empathy, compassion, ethical reasoning, and resilience. These qualities significantly influence how people interact, build relationships, and contribute to community well-being. There is a need to develop interventions that cultivate well-being, meaning, and spirituality at the individual and community levels.

Strategy	Social Implications
Curriculum Enrichment	Integrate SI-focused themes (e.g., compassion, self-awareness) into school subjects and vocational training.
Values-Based Workshops	Conduct community workshops involving mindfulness, storytelling, and ethical leadership training.
Peer Leadership Programs	Encourage spiritually guided peer mentoring and youth councils.
Collaborations with NGOs	Partner with organizations like SEWA, YUVA, and Art of Living to bring structured SI development to rural regions.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual Intelligence holds transformative potential for rural youth in India. In an environment where socio-economic challenges often limit growth opportunities, Spiritual Intelligence provides a deep, internal compass that nurtures self-awareness, empathy, purpose, and ethical living. Spiritual Intelligence bridges traditional values with modern aspirations, enabling young people to find meaning in their identity while embracing diversity and global interconnectedness.

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