Spiritual Well-Being: A Protective Resource Among Youth of Arunachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Modernisation of a nation, besides yieldingpositive outcomes, has also ushered in various negative constructs, one of the chief being the growth of spiritual threats. Spiritual well-being provides reasons for one's existence,increases resilience and provides stability for an overall development of a healthy, secure nation. Therefore, risk to spiritual well-being has immense negative impact on the mental state of an individual, especially, the youth. The ingrained spirituality in the culture of Arunachal Pradesh working as a protective buffer, and the status of the students being an educated class give the tribal students of the state, a powerful role in shaping the future security and progress of the society. Considering this implication, the present paper tries to explore how spiritual well-being and its two dimensions, namely, religious and existential well-being, are related to satisfaction with life, positive affect, negative affect and resilience. The Spiritual Well-being Scale, The Satisfaction With Life Scale, Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule and The Brief Resilience Scale were administered to 100 university students, age ranging from 22-28 years. Results revealed that spiritual well-being was positively related to higher satisfaction with life, positive affect and resilience and negatively with negative affect. Implications of the studyhave also been discussed.

Key words: Purpose in life; Resilience; Spiritual well-being; Satisfaction with life; Positive affect; Negative affect

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's contemporary society has been marked by waves of globalisation and modernisation. Besides ushering development and advancement of technology, it has also brought about cut throat competition, obsessive accumulation of material possession, struggle for power, status and money and various geo-political conflicts. The societies around the world today not only face global threats like ecological dangers, depletion of natural resources, financial challenges but also societal problems like inequality, racism induced violence, crime, drugs, human trafficking and corruption. Therefore, the issue of human security has many faces today and it has compelled one to question and evaluate its traditional understanding. In the modern world, the concept of security in a nation not only means the prevention of violence and crime by employing law and order, but it also endorses conditions for growth, opportunities and overall well-being. The diverse nature of challenges coupled with the pressure to "fit in" has left everyone to fend for one's own survival, impacting the overall health and well-being of individuals. As Khollievich[1] pointed out, although modernisation is identified as having many positive outcomes, it is also known to bring about a number of negative trends, one of the chief risks being – spiritual threat.

2. THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

Spiritual wellbeing has been defined as "a state of being,

reflecting positive feelings, behaviours, and cognitions of relationships with oneself, others, the transcendent and nature, that in turn provide the individual with a sense of identity, wholeness, satisfaction, joy, contentment, beauty, love, respect, positive attitudes, inner peace and harmony, and purpose and direction in life"[2]. Spirituality provides stability and security for an overall development of the individual and is vital to build a strong nation and ensure national security as an all round development and stability of a nation depends on the moral and spiritual levels of the citizens and not just economic progress. Spirituality has both protective and supportive function towards the nation as it can operate as a social and cultural filter and also provide a stable environment for economic and socio-political development1 and thus also significantly impacts one's sense of security[3]. The on-going negligence and slackening of spirituality and morality in the country can eventually lead to national depersonalisation and chaos with "a struggle for all against all"[1] as evident by the crime rates today. This further stresses the notion that threat to spirituality is a threat to national security as it deprives one of universal and national values of oneness and integrity[4]. Therefore, the revival and development of spirituality in a society is imperative to consolidate its foundations of security and provide resistance from national and international risks. A number of researches have highlighted the importance of spirituality in the mental health scenario as it provides resilience[5-8,] psychological wellbeing[9], a sense of meaning, optimism, hope, moral code[10],quality of life[11], life satisfaction[12-14],positive emotions[15-16] and reduces negative emotions[16-18]. It has also been reported to help develop an understanding of self[19], fulfil the potentialities

of one's abilities through virtues and prepare them to resolve problems creatively as well as constructively[20]. Furthermore, it has also been found to have positive outcomes for military veterans, as group interventions strengthening spirituality was reported to reduce PTSD symptoms[21] and consequently, loss of faith was associated with worse mental health outcomes[22].

3. SPIRITUALITY IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

The values of spirituality are deeply ingrained in the cultures of a tribal population and its prime goal is to bring in happiness and ensure security from all types of evils[23]. Indigenous professionals around the world view traditional culture and its inherent spirituality as the prime aid to cope with and resolve issues like trauma, suicide, alcoholism, substance abuse and addiction and other behavioural and developmental dysfunction and therefore have taken the lead in promoting it[24].The same trend can be observed amongst the tribal population residing across India, especially for the people of Arunachal Pradesh, a tribal dominated state situated in the north-eastern region of India.The cultural ideas of supernatural phenomena and indigenous spirituality form the social norm and are believed to bring in social control, conformity and solidarity. The natives view traditional spirituality, customs and rituals as a way of life and consider the material and the spiritual realms to coexist together. Peaceful coexistence with other creatures of nature is highly valued and this ideology has been highlighted in recurrent themes within folklores, traditional rituals and beliefs. The people live in a close knit interdependent relationship with nature and have their own indigenous concept of rules and rituals which cover crucial aspects of their life. One such example is the "Kebang" (tribal judiciary court), consisting of the village chief, priest and other members which is held to resolve conflicts using chicken liver, blood, eggs and bamboo idols. The spiritual nature of the whole justice system makes the process generally accepted and unopposed in the community[25].

4. SPIRITUALITY AMONG THE TRIBAL YOUTH

However, due to the waves of westernization and globalisation, the conventional life patterns of the tribal folk have seen a huge transformation. This has especially been so for the tribal youth as they are more prone to succumb to peer pressure and are becoming competition driven to make a mark in the society. There has been a gradual detachment from traditional culture and today, the tribal youth has only a sublimated knowledge about one's tribal rituals and beliefs. The younger generation of today are being distracted from the values of spirituality and their immunity against the ill effects of a negative environment has been compromised. As a result, many university students undergo various mental health issues like depression[26-27] stress and have self-defeating thoughts[28]. Negative coping styles and low self-efficacy levels among university students displayed as over thinking, poor problem solving skills and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness were found to be linked to depression[29-30].Ramya[31] in a study on 'Nyishi' (one of the major tribes of the state of Arunachal Pradesh) youths highlighted the psychological trauma faced

due to the ongoing unemployment in the state, which often led to feelings of insecurity, substance abuse, suicidal attempts, poverty, debt and criminal behaviour. The younger generation have more inclination to engage in risky behaviours[32] to gain social approval and acceptance (often at the expense of their society), even though they haven't completely developed the art of self-control[33]. Therefore, the youth face various threats such as substance abuse, internet addiction, unhealthy sexual practices, early pregnancy, bullying, road accidents due to rash driving, impatient behaviour leading to violence. At such a time, inculcating the ideals of spirituality amongst the youth is the need of the hour as it can work as a protective buffer from the surroundingnegative influences in the environment. The tribal students of Arunachal Pradesh have the status of being an educated class and thus, can be considered as having a tremendous impact in shaping the future security and progress of the society. This coupled with the deep rooted presence of spirituality in their culture, which significantly impacts mental health[34] can empower the young citizens to resist spiritual threats and create a harmonious, strong, productive, united and a secure society and nation. However, despite its paramount significance, there is a dearth of research on spirituality in the state. Therefore, in this understanding, the present paper aims to explore the relationship between spiritual well-being and satisfaction with life, positive affect, negative affect and resilience among the youth of Arunachal Pradesh.

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5. HYPOTHESES

- H1- Spiritual Wellbeing and its two dimensions (Religious Well-being and Existential Well-being) will be positively related to satisfaction with life.
- H2 – Spiritual Wellbeing and its two dimensions (Religious Well-being and Existential Well-being) will be positively related to positive affect.
- H3 – Spiritual Wellbeing and its two dimensions (Religious Well-being and Existential Well-being) will be negatively related to negative affect.
- H4 – Spiritual Wellbeing and its two dimensions (Religious Well-being and Existential Well-being) will be positively related to resilience.

6. MATERIAL AND METHODS

SAMPLE: The sample comprised of 100 students belonging to Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, of which 50 were male and 50 were female with an age range of 22-28 years. Rajiv Gandhi University is the only central university of the state and comprises of students belonging to all the districts and hence, was considered to be a good representative of the total student population. Students with a history of mental illness were excluded.

6.1 Tools Used
6.1.1 The Spiritual Well-being Scale
This scale, devised by Paloutzian and Ellison[35] was

used to assess spirituality. They describe spiritual well-being with two components: one's sense of relationship with God or a spiritual being and one's sense of personal satisfaction, purpose in life, and meaning. Genia[36] asserts that this scale in not based on religious or ideological orientations and hence, has a key advantage over other scales. The scale consists of 20 items with 10 items eachfor religious well-being and existential well-being. The items with even numbers measure religious well-being whereas those with odd numbers measure existential well-being. Responses are noted on a 6 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree). Approximately half of the items are negatively worded to limit possible biased responses and the negatively worded items are reversely coded i.e., "strongly disagree" receives 6 while "strongly agree" receives 1. Khan et al.[37] used it to assess spiritual wellbeing of Indian students.

6.1.2 Satisfaction With Life Scale

This scale was devised by Diener et al.[38], who describes life satisfaction as a cognitive judgmental process and the items of the scale were global rather than particular in nature which allowed the subjects to evaluate domains of their lives in regard to their own values to arrive at a global judgment of life satisfaction. It has 5 items that has to be rated on a 7 - point Likert scale with 1 representing 'strongly disagree', 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = slightly agree, 6 = agree, and 7 = strongly agree. This scale has also been used for several Indian studies[39-40].

6.1.3 Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule

This scale is an extensively used[41-40] self-report measure invented by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen[42] which assess two relatively independent dimension of affective structure, namely positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA). High positive affect reveals a state of concentration, activeness/high energy, and pleasurable engagement while negative affect is a state of distress which includes states such as disgust, fear, anger, guilt, nervousness, and tension[42]. It has 20 items of which 10 items each for positive affect and negative affect. 5 - point rating scale is used to record the responses with 1 = 'very slightly/ not at all', 2 = 'a little', 3 = 'moderately', 4 = 'quite a bit', and 5 = 'extremely'. Total scores ranges from (10 to 50) for both PA and NA with a high score on PA representing high level of positive affect and vice versa.

6.1.4 Brief Resilience Scale

This scale is a six item scale and was created by Smith et al.[43] to assess one's ability to recover or bounce back from stress.It consists of six items, out of which three items, namely, item no. 1, 3, and 5 are positively worded which three items, namely item no. 2, 4 and 6 are negatively worded items. The negatively worded items are reverse scored. It has to be rated on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neural, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree). Thus, the score of the brief resilience scale ranged from 6 to 30. A higher score reflects higher resilience or ability to bounce back from adverse

situation in life. This is another scale which has been used in Indian studies extensively [44,45].

Detailed demographic information along with informed consent was also taken.

The data was entered into Microsoft Excel (2016 version). Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were then calculated.

Table 1. Showing mean and S.D. of the study variables

Variables	No. of subject	Mean	S.D.
Spiritual well-being	N=100	58.18	13.57
Religious well-being	N=100	29.78	9.43
Existential well-being	N=100	28.40	7.34
Satisfaction With Life	N=100	20.45	4.99
Positive Affect	N=100	31.44	7.77
Negative Affect	N=100	22.36	7.32
Resilience	N=100	18.99	3.05

Table 2. Showing correlation of the study variables

Variables	Satisfaction With Life	Positive Affect	Negative Affect	Resilience
Religious well-being	0.36**	0.05	0.78	0.38
Existential well-being	0.42**	0.43**	-0.38**	0.31**
Spiritual well-being	0.48**	0.24*	-0.15	0.20

* significant at 0.05 level
** significant at 0.01 level

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean scores and standard deviations of the study variables, namely, Satisfaction with life, Positive affect, Negative affect, Resilience, and Spiritual well-being (religious well-being and existential well-being) of the students are shown in Table 1. The mean score indicates that the students have an average level of spiritual well-being. Therefore, it may be assumed that the young adults of Arunachal Pradesh seem to have a fair introspection on the meaning of their existence, understand the importance of human life and have spiritual beliefs and ideologies. This can be attributed to the presence of similar spiritual and existential themes in the various folktales and ritualistic practices of their culture. Although, modernisation and introduction of advanced technology pushes one towards materialistic ways of life, it seems that the students of the present study understand value and aspire to achieve transcendence of the non-material realm. It can also be assumed that they participate in spiritual activities and believe that life occurrences are influenced by some divine power above. However, given their age, the average scores can also indicate an on-going quest to find true meaning and purpose of existence in life i.e. they are still exploring the spiritual connection to their inner selves. Alternatively, it may also

mean that the students give moderate importance to the issues of spirituality.

Table 2 shows the results of a detailed correlation analyses of the study variables for the participants. Correlation was found out separately for the two sub dimensions of spiritual well-being, namely, religious well-being and existential well-being. It was seen that religious well-being was positively correlated to satisfaction with life, positive affect and resilience among all the students. Interestingly, religious well-being was negatively but not significantly correlated with negative affect for the participants. This clearly indicates that students who are high on religious well-being, that is, those who believe that there is a supreme power above us and God will guide them are also better satisfied with their life, have more positive emotions, have better resilience and experience lower negative emotions than those who are lower in the same domain. In terms of existential well-being, it was found to have significantly positive correlations with positive affect and resilience and significantly negative correlation with negative affect for all the participants. The result of the sub dimensional analysis of spiritual well-being showed that higher religious well-being and existential well-being have immense positive impact on the participants especially towards their perspective of life, their emotions and ability to bounce back from adverse situations. A comparison between the two dimensions of spiritual well-being revealed that existential well-being has a much greater and powerful impact on one's satisfaction with life, positive affect, negative affect and resilience as compared to religious well-being. This indicated that the knowledge and awareness of one's purpose and meaning in life, gained through higher spiritual well-being leads to many positive outcomes as compared to the religious aspect of spirituality. Many Spiritual wellbeing studies have found existential well being to be significantly correlated with positive health and not religious wellbeing, as it has been seen that many possibly harbour religious beliefs without it having much personal relevance for the believer in actual life[46].

When correlation analysis of the composite score of spiritual well-being was calculated with the dependent variables, that is, satisfaction with life, positive affect, negative affect and resilience, it was found to have positive relationship with satisfaction with life, positive affect, and resilience and negative correlation with negative affect among all the participants (Table 2). This goes on to highlight the fact that the students of the present study with higher spiritual well-being (having fair idea of self-awareness, purpose in life, healthy relations with God or a supreme power, and experience some level of transcendence) have more satisfaction with life, more positive emotions (for e.g. joy, excitement, active), more resilience (ability to cope and overcome adverse situation) and experience lesser negative affect (jitteriness, nervousness, guilt). A deeper look revealed that the correlation is significantly positive between spiritual well-being and satisfaction with life and positive affect but it was not significant with negative affect and resilience. The results of the present study proved H1, H2 and H4; however, for H3 a positive relation was observed between religious well-being and negative affect while a negative relation was observed in case of existential well-being and the composite score of spiritual well-being. The overall result of the present study highlights that the students of the present study are fairly aware of their inner self and purpose and meaning of life. They have close relations with their true self and experience transcendence moderately. Some students scored slightly below average to low in spiritual well-being, indicating that some of them are still struggling to explore and find meaning in life. This pattern points to a thought worthy finding that highlights the need for proper guidance from parents, teachers, and elders to achieve higher levels of spiritual well-being which in turn will impact their levels of satisfaction with life, positive emotions, and resilience and decrease levels of negative affect. In other words, it will act as a useful resource to boost their mental health and overall well-being. In a highly materialistic and competitive society of today, the youth tend to face issues of self identity, insecurity and self-doubt. Parents and educational institutes must therefore, focus on value education of the importance of spirituality as it improves psychological well-being and helps one to develop a meaning and purpose in life. Multiple strategies like supportive therapy counselling and spiritual education (presently lacking in most Indian institutions) should be applied to tackle the varied nature of problems faced by the students[47]. State policies should focus on promoting the development of spirituality and cultural awareness among the younger generation. Spiritual healing can also be provided with addiction treatment[48] and awareness programmes can be done at various schools and college levels to spread education, awareness and regarding the positive benefits of spirituality and spiritual intelligence, as spirituality can act as a useful aid to tackle the stressors which have the potential to harm both their physical and mental health[49]. There should also be opportunities for an open dialogue for the university students to promote psychological well being and build resilience. India is a country of religion and spirituality. Therefore, it is imperative to consider and promote the significance of spirituality in one's overall well being, especially on the student's morale and performance in the core curriculums of various educational institutes in India[50] right from primary school levels. As noted above, the state of Arunachal Pradesh has rich cultural practices, rituals, and folklores which highlight the importance of spirituality and emphasise one's connection with nature. These rich traditional resources can be used in the academic scenario to inculcate an understanding of the cultural and personal benefits of spiritual well-being among the youths.

The youth are considered to be the torch bearers of the future and cultivating the ideals of spirituality and enlightenment in the younger generation can help inculcate and consolidate the values of healthy patriotism and integrity which will aid in curbing the chaos, corruption and crime in the society and bring about a thriving, secure and progressive nation.

8. CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the present study that spiritual well-being and its two sub dimensions, namely, religious well-being and existential well-being showed positive correlation with satisfaction with life, positive affect and resilience while negative correlation with negative affect among the students. A deeper look revealed that the correlations were much higher for the

existential aspect than for the religious aspect of spiritual well-being indicating that it is the awareness of one's purpose and meaning in life that higher spirituality imparts which impacts the students with many positive benefits and outlook towards life. Although fast paced modernisation and competition can make one obsessed with achievement and success, the subjects have been found to maintain their touch with spirituality, value it and hence, sustain a connection with nature. This can be attributed to the cultural beliefs and traditions of the state which give utmost importance to supernatural forces, laws of nature, and coexistence with other natural beings. This ideology is well reflected in the folklores, rituals and beliefs of the society which has penetrated the psyche of the tribal folks. It would thus be a beneficial approach to use these rich traditional resources further in the academic scenario to develop more spiritual intelligence among the youth. Furthermore, awareness programmes can be done at various school and college levels to make the youths understand the positive benefits of spirituality. India being considered a country of religion and spirituality, will reap the utmost benefits by including spiritual education in the core curriculums of various educational institutes as it would ascertain the promotion of a student's morale, performance and well-being.

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