

Impact of Bhagavad Geeta Reading on Religious Orientation and Life Satisfaction of University Students

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This study is aimed to explore the impact of *Bhagavad Geeta* on religiosity and life satisfaction, among university students. A sample of 100 participants consists of two groups, *Geeta* practicing group (n=50 students) and non-*Geeta* practicing group (n=50 students). They belonged to *Sanatan*/Hindu religion. First group comprises of students who read *Bhagavad Geeta* daily whereas second group comprises of students who do not read *Bhagavad Geeta* daily. Participants were examined through self-reported measures including religiosity orientation scale and satisfaction with life scale. Independent t-test was done to examine the significance of difference between the *Geeta* practicing and non-*Geeta* practicing groups on these variables. Results showed significant difference between the two groups on the measures of extrinsic religiosity, intrinsic religiosity as well as life satisfaction. The findings will be discussed.

Keywords: *Bhagavad Geeta*, religiosity, life satisfaction, and students

The *Bhagavad Geeta* is the best example of the philosophical fusion of *karma*, *bhakti*, and *gyan yoga* since *Krishna's* answer to *Arjuna's* predicament is all-inclusive, addressing the behavioural (*karma yoga*), emotional (*bhakti yoga*), and intellectual (*gyan yoga*) facets of human nature (*gyan yoga*). It is a never-ending source of inspiration for all the people throughout the history. The *Bhagavad Geeta's* explanation for impulse control—which includes managing one's emotions, cravings, and other bodily activities—is purely psychological (Dhakad, 2016). Involvement in the religious activity is generally linked to greater well-being. Being actively involved in any group allows one to become part of a support system that can be there for them in difficult times. Participating in religious activities for the wrong reasons may limit the positive effects that may otherwise result from such a network of people. There are right and wrong ways to practice religion (Allport, 1963; Smith, et al., 2003). Studies (Benson & Spilka 1973; Francis, et al. 2001)

reported a positive correlation between God imagery and self-esteem as well as it increases the possibility that faith in a higher power influences one's life satisfaction.

According to attachment theory, religious attachment figures like God can provide people a sense of love and security and provide support and companionship during trying times (Pargament et al., 1988; Bradshaw et al., 2010). Thus, when people are in need of direction, they can rely on their relationship with God, which fosters sentiments of optimism, power, and general peace (Bradshaw & Ellison, 2010). People may have increased self-worth and self-control as a result of prayer and divine engagement because it improves the impression that they are loved and supported by a higher power (Ellison, 1991; Maltby, et al., 1999; Akarsu, 2017).

In addition to prayer, reading religious books may help to explain why religiosity is linked to higher levels of life satisfaction because doing so might make people feel

more connected to the characters, especially if they have comparable problems to them (Ellison, 1991). By “religious role-taking,” people who identify with biblical characters may find it easier to deal with a variety of issues. People might pick up tips on how to act and think to handle their difficulties (Bradshaw & Ellison 2010, p. 198). Individuals may also feel “less alone” in addressing their problems if they view them through the lens of a biblical figure (Ellison & Levin, 1998). Religious texts’ moral precepts and rules of conduct may further aid in resolving such problems as well as assist people in avoiding ‘risky’ circumstances and actions altogether (Ellison & Levin 1998). Reading religious literature can therefore be helpful for both preventing and addressing issues as well as increasing one’s impression of control by instilling the belief that one has the “tools” to do so in the future.

Pargament, et al. (1998) introduced the terms “positive” and “negative” religious coping. Punitive religious assessment, which is based on the notion that one has sinned and is thus being punished by God, is an illustration of a negative coping strategy. This would help to explain why a person’s mental health is not always improved by believing in God. Conceptions of negative religious coping may also contribute to the explanation for why praying is negatively connected to well-being because praying is also linked to many coping mechanisms and religious orientations (Nooney & Woodrum, 2002; Singh & Bano, 2017).

Religious orientation can be defined in two ways as extrinsic and intrinsic (Allport & Ross, 1967). Intrinsic religious orientation refers to religion as an end in and of itself, while extrinsic religious orientation define religion as a means to a self-serving aim. According to Allport and Ross, those who have an extrinsic orientation perceive religion from a utilitarian standpoint, that is, as a means to an end. They practise a self-serving

religion based on social convention and comfort. They have loosely held views that are simple to alter when necessary. People who are inclined towards religion intrinsically, practice their religion and use it as their overarching goal. They put other demands into conformity with their religious ideals rather than utilising religion to further some goal. They firmly adhere to a creed that they have internalised (Feist, 2008).

According to a previous study, having a religious affiliation often benefits our health. Regular church attendance is generally linked to feeling better and living longer (Powell, Shahabi, & Thoresen, 2003). It suggests that, intrinsic religious orientation is a natural buffer against the stresses of daily life. Although individuals who are intrinsically oriented, are likely subjected to the same stresses as everyone else, their bodies respond to stress in a different and healthier way (Feist, 2008). It was found that extrinsic religious orientation was positively connected to depression while intrinsic religious orientation was negatively related to depression (Smith, McCullough, & Poll, 2003). In other words, a person is less likely to have depressed symptoms the more intrinsically motivated they are towards religion. Nevertheless, the likelihood of someone being depressed increases with how extrinsically oriented they are (Feist, 2008). On the other hand, intrinsic religious orientation was positively associated with life satisfaction whereas extrinsic religious orientation was negatively correlated with life satisfaction (Singh & Bano, 2017).

Life satisfaction is the positive evaluation of a person’s entire life in accordance with the criteria stated by that individual (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) and can be described as how far an individual achieves the goals one has set (Koç, 2001). Life satisfaction refers to a sense of well-being brought on by happiness, a rise in morale, and the predominance of good emotions in

daily interactions (Vara, 1999; Jain, 2015). Religious believers have reported better levels of happiness than non-believers, suggesting that such a belief system positively associated to life satisfaction (e.g., Bradshaw & Ellison 2010; Ellison et al. 2001; Murphy et al. 2000). This can be explained by the ability of religion to manage the feelings of uncertainty. Through the notion that one is loved and appreciated by God and belief in God might also be related to one's sense of self-worth (Crocker et al., 2003).

Rationale

Bhagavad Geeta provides a way of life that can be practised by anyone, regardless of caste, creed, religion, or nation. There have been few qualitative and narrative researches on the text of the *Bhagavad Geeta*. To some extent, these researches have compared the cognitive, emotional, and conative functions of conduct to *Gyan*, *Bhakti*, and *Karma Yoga*. The empirical studies on the effect of *Bhagavad Geeta* in controlling one's emotions, ideas, and actions in our cultural setting are scarce. As a result, the current study was done to offer a quantitative picture of *Geeta's* impact on several psychological characteristics. This empirical study attempted to demonstrate how *Geeta* practising students differ from non-*Geeta* practising students in terms of religious orientations (i.e., extrinsic and intrinsic) as well as life satisfaction.

Method

Sample

The study was conducted on 100 male university students, age ranged 17 to 23 years. All of them are undergraduate students. For the purpose of this study, the participants were divided into 2 groups comprising of 50 students each. *Geeta* practicing students (Mean age= 19.06 years, SD=1.13) were placed in the first group.

These students are those who read *Geeta* frequently and chant the shlokas. These students were purposively selected from the Faculty of Sanskrit Vidya Dharma Vigyan (SVDV) and currently pursuing their Shastri Honours. Second group comprises of non-*Geeta* practicing students (Mean age=19.88 years, SD=1.56) who were purposively selected from the Faculty of Arts. They are currently pursuing their Bachelor of Arts in Hindi. These students have basic knowledge about the teachings of *Geeta* but do not read *Geeta* on daily basis.

Permission was taken from the respective head of the departments and then participants were approached for data collection. Their consent was taken prior to handing over the questionnaire booklet to them.

Measures

Religiosity Orientation Scale (Markel, 2012): This scale assesses two orientation of religiosity; Extrinsic religiosity and Intrinsic religiosity. This scale consists of 10 items, each orientation has 5 items and all items are keyed in positive direction and have 5 options. The participants were rated their statements on a 5-point scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometimes, 4= Often, 5=Always. The coefficient of alpha value for extrinsic religiosity is 0.70 and for intrinsic religiosity is 0.80.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985): The scale consists of 5 items that assesses satisfaction with life as a whole. This scale was administered on the participants to examine how satisfied they were with their lives. All 5 items are keyed in positive direction. The average coefficient of alpha obtained was 0.85. The participants chose the options on a 5-point scale where 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Disagree.

Procedure

Male students of Shastri Honors and B.A. Hindi were contacted in their respective classrooms after taking permission from the head of the departments. Before handing over the scales, consent was taken from each participant. They were informed about the purpose of the study. Rapport was established with them and then instructions were given to them in a peaceful environment with adequate lighting conditions and free from noise. They were assured of the confidentiality and all their queries related to the study were handled. After completing the data collection, the responses were entered in the SPSS 20th version software and thereafter based on the coding procedures analysis was done.

Results

In the present study, data was analysed using descriptive and t-test for assessing significance of difference between Geeta practicing and non-Geeta practicing groups on the measures of religious orientation and life satisfaction.

Table 1. Mean, SD and Significance of Differences between Geeta Practicing and Non-Geeta Practicing students on the measure of Extrinsic Religiosity

	GeetaPracticing		Non-Geeta Practicing			
	M	SD	M	SD	t(98)	p
Extrinsic Religiosity	18.36	3.71	11.92	3.88	8.474	0.000

M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the difference between Geeta Practicing and Non- Geeta Practicing students on the Extrinsic Religiosity measure. Results in the table 1 indicates that there is significant difference ($t=8.474$, $p=0.000$) between Geeta Practicing ($M=18.36$, $SD=3.71$) and Non-Geeta

Practicing ($M=11.92$, $SD=3.88$), on the extrinsic religiosity orientation.

Table 2. Mean, SD and Significance of Differences between Geeta Practicing and Non- Geeta Practicing students on the measure of Intrinsic Religiosity

	GeetaPracticing		Non-Geeta Practicing			
	M	SD	M	SD	t(98)	p
Intrinsic Religiosity	22.98	2.56	17.78	5.16	6.732	0.000

M=Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

Table 2 shows the significance of difference between Geeta Practicing and Non- Geeta Practicing students on the Intrinsic Religiosity measure. Results revealed a significant difference ($t=6.732$, $p=0.000$) between Geeta Practicing ($M=22.98$, $SD=2.56$) and Non-Geeta Practicing ($M=17.78$, $SD=5.16$), on the intrinsic religiosity orientation.

Table 3. Mean, SD and Significance of Differences between Geeta Practicing and Non- Geeta Practicing students on the measure of Life Satisfaction

	GeetaPracticing		Non-Geeta Practicing			
	M	SD	M	SD	t(98)	p
Life Satisfaction	18.06	3.96	14.72	3.24	4.608	0.000

M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

Table 3 presents the significance of difference between Geeta Practicing and Non-Geeta Practicing students on the Life Satisfaction measure. Results reported a significant difference ($t=4.608$, $p=0.000$) between Geeta Practicing ($M=18.06$, $SD=3.96$) and Non-Geeta Practicing ($M=14.72$, $SD=3.24$), on the life satisfaction measure.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the impact of *Bhagavad Geeta* on religious orientation (i.e., extrinsic and intrinsic) and life satisfaction. The findings reported significant difference between Geeta Practicing and non-Geeta Practicing students on the religious orientation and life satisfaction. It suggests that Geeta Practicing students displayed more extrinsic religious orientation, endorsed more intrinsic religious orientation and showed greater life satisfaction as compared to non-Geeta Practicing students.

Geeta Practicing students scored higher not only on intrinsic religiosity but also on extrinsic religiosity. It might explain that they belong to Hinduism and practice idol worshipping, visiting temples, chanting prayers and performing other religious discourses as a part of their life. Hence, extrinsic religious discourses are the initial step towards intrinsic religiosity which was positively associated with life satisfaction in Indian context (Singh & Bano, 2017). Another study also reported that intrinsic religiosity, regardless of gender, is positively related to the presence of meaning in one's life (Woyciechowski, 2007). It has been shown (Lewis, Maltby & Day, 2005) that religiosity was regarded to be associated to psychological well-being, which is thought to reflect human development, positive functioning, and existential life difficulties, when it is related to happiness. Catholics significantly outperform non-Catholics in terms of life satisfaction, and that the single factor contributing to this association is "belonging" (Kate, Koster, & Waal, 2017).

Strong believers are happier than non-religious people. The ideological and intellectual dimensions are mostly associated to life satisfaction in a negative way, but the consequential dimension is positively related to life satisfaction (Akarsu, 2017).

Therefore, the present study indicates the positive impact of reading *Bhagavad Geeta* frequently and routinely on the religiosity, life satisfaction, positive affect of the students. This might be explained that the *Bhagavad Geeta* encourages the individuals to stick to work that is natural to us rather than becoming enticed by other types of work. Distancing ourselves from social definitions of success becomes much easier when we have spiritual self-awareness (Dabas & Singh, 2018; Lolla, 2021). Gita course provided them with a better understanding of the scheme of human life, human nature, clarity in thought and decision-making, and, most importantly, an attitude of optimism and faith in the Divine (Lolla, 2021).

Implications

To live a happy and satisfied life, rational and logical spiritual awakening is required. The ancient Hindu scripture *Bhagavad Gita* ("The Song of God") dictates the most powerful wisdom for living a meaningful life and endows solutions to end all human suffering. Findings of the present study suggest that incorporating the teaching of *Bhagavad Gita* into our lives will provide us with everlasting life satisfaction and happiness.

Limitation

The study was conducted with a specific population thus, it requires to include a wide range of population in future.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that significant difference between Geeta practicing and non-Geeta practicing students was evident on the measures of life satisfaction, extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity. It indicates that *Bhagavad Geeta* clearly endows students with better coping strategy and overall satisfaction with life.

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