

# Asian Resonance

## Spirituality among Indian Young Adults: Gender Differences



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### Abstract

The present paper is based on empirical data of 412 Indian young adults (19-25 yrs.) belonging to urban area. The objectives are to develop a tool to measure spirituality and to determine the proclivity of young adult males and females towards spirituality. The correlation among three measurement domains: spiritual experiences, practices and beliefs for male and female young adults was positive and significant ( $P < 0.001$ ). Twelve factors emerged in these three domains. In profile analysis male adults were low on selflessness (spiritual experience), peace in religious places/ activities & dissatisfaction with religious practices (spiritual practice) and functional aspect of spiritual beliefs & beliefs in gratitude (spiritual beliefs) than females. Significant mean difference were found for all three domains as well as nine factors of spirituality for males vis-à-vis females. Thus it can be inferred that female young adults experiences, practices and believes in spirituality more than males.

**Keywords :** Spiritual Experiences, Practices and Beliefs

### Introduction

In India we have a very rich cultural heritage on spirituality. Several schools and philosophers have presented their views. We have *Vedic, Jain, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic* and Christian literature on spirituality/religiosity, but the milestones of spirituality reveal that *Vedas* are world's oldest books of knowledge. *Vedic mantras* highlight that if we aspire human beings to be spiritually developed or self - actualized, they should be brought up since childhood in such a manner so as to develop divine qualities or attributes of potentiality, resourcefulness, pervasiveness, detachment, love, immortality, purity, sacredness and positivity (Pradhan, 2013, 2014).

Spirituality and religion share some common characteristics such as: search for what is sacred or holy in life coupled with some kind of transcendent relationship with God or higher power or universal energy (Thoresen, 1998). Religion is a set of beliefs, practices and language characterizing a community that is searching for transcendent meaning in a particular way generally on the basis of belief in a deity, but spirituality is a broader concept than religion (Astrow, Puchalski, and Sulmasy 2001). It can also be said that spirituality is more psychological whereas religion is more sociological. Religion is a path and spirituality is the outcome (Bisht, 1978). Religion is extrinsic but spirituality is intrinsic. Religion is the subset of spirituality which means that religion invariably involves spirituality but that there may be non religious spirituality as well. In fact different religions have a special role to play in the awakening of spirituality (Pargament and Mahoney, 2002).

The interest of people in spirituality appears to be the result of the natural psychosocial evolution of human consciousness which marks the attainment of maturity and autonomy of the human mind. The followers of present spiritual movement are normal successful individuals from various fields like executives, lawyers, engineers, therapists and managers (Swami Bhajnananda 2011).

Spirituality is that which gives meaning to one's life and draws one to transcend one's material self. There are two paths to ultimate truth. One is the extrovert western path of pursuing physical and biological sciences that comprises intense analytical study of the nature around us. This path creates material comforts as by products but also generates internal and external turmoil in society and the environment. The other is the introvert and spiritual Indian path of intense self analysis, meditation and yoga that lays little emphasis on comforts but generates internal and external peace

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and harmony as by products. Recently **Peterson and Seligman (2004)**, contend that Spirituality is universal strength of transcendence and although the specific content of spiritual beliefs varies, all cultures have a concept of an ultimate, transcendent, sacred and divine force.

Two largest spiritual/religious traditions in Asia are Buddhism and Hinduism; of these two Buddhism have made a larger impact on western psychology. Today the Buddhist influence is seen in empirical research on both mind- body medicine and psychotherapy. The goal of psycho spiritual intervention and psychotherapy is to bring the psychic consciousness forward into the outer personality and to use it to gradually modify the normal functioning of the human ego.

According to **Swami Bhajananda (2011)** the prominent feature of spirituality of young minds is their shifting of attention from God to man. They are not interested in theological questions about God, rather in their own inner problems, especially existential problems like meaninglessness, powerlessness, unfulfillment etc. Now spirituality has become a question of personal quest for achieving lasting security, happiness and peace instead of conforming to customs, religious tradition and practices.

**Richards and Bergin (1997)** outline that conducting a spiritual assessment is the only way to understand the world views of the client and develop empathic understanding to facilitate sensitive therapeutic work. There is a dearth of Indian tools to measure spirituality.

Therefore, there seems a genuine need to explore the spiritual perspective of young minds specially gender wise, which is oriented towards scientific understanding and functional value of spirituality. The research question posed for the present study is "Are Indian young female adults more inclined towards spirituality than young male adults?"

## Objectives

The present study has been conducted with two fold objectives:

1. To develop a tool to measure the three domains of spirituality, i.e. spiritual experiences, practices and beliefs
2. To compare males and females on these three domains along with their derived factors.

## Method

### Measure

A 67 items scale developed by Pradhan (2011) was used to measure spirituality of young

adults. The scale has three broad measurement domains i.e. experiences, practices and beliefs as proposed by **Miller and Thoresen (2000)**. Six and five point likert scales were used for experiences, practices and beliefs respectively. The **Spiritual experience** domain comprises of 16 items with three factors i.e. Functional aspect of spiritual experiences, Closeness with Divine and others, and Selflessness; **Spiritual practices** domain constitute 26 items with five factors i.e. Role of spiritual teacher in life, Seeking guidance in religion, Support from religious community, Peace in religious places/activities and Dissatisfaction with religious practices; **Spiritual beliefs** domain has 25 items with four factors i.e. Beliefs in Spirituality, Beliefs in Divinity, Functional aspect of spiritual beliefs, and Beliefs in gratitude. The psychometric properties of the sub-scales and overall scale were verified on the target sample. The internal consistency reliability i.e. Cronbach's alpha was 0.86, 0.84 and 0.87 for experiences, practices and beliefs respectively. Overall reliability coefficient for the scale was 0.90. Content (face and logical) validity of the scale was ascertained by the opinion of various experts of the field. There are various methods to establish construct validity of the tool. But majority of them are having limitations as role of time factor and existence of subjectivity in experts' ratings. To overcome these limitations, factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to establish the construct validity of the tool.

### Sample

Sample for this study comprised of 412 young adults (age 19-25 years) belonging to urban area. In all 196 (47.6%) and 216 (52.4%) of the adults were female and male respectively.

### Statistical Techniques

Profile analysis and t test were used to determine the gender difference in spiritual experience, practice and beliefs. Correlation coefficients among different domains were calculated. Factor analysis was done to derive the factors of spirituality.

### Results

Zero order correlations among spirituality sub-scales were calculated for males and females separately. The inter-correlation matrix: Male (Upper triangle) N=216; Female (Lower triangle) N=196 are shown in table 1.

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**Table 1: Inter-Correlation Matrix: Male (Right Upper Triangle) N=216; Female (Left Lower triangle) N=196**

Vabs	Spiritual Experience				Spiritual Practices						Spiritual Beliefs				
	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10	X11	X12	X13	X14	X15
X1	1	.58	.57	.98	.37	.47	.32	.38	.54	.55	.35	.26	.32	.30	.39
X2	.38	1	.45	.69	.31	.36	.10	.30	.31	.38	.08	.06	.01	.20	.08
X3	.31	.25	1	.70	.20	.30	.21	.19	.31	.32	.31	.16	.22	.13	.29
X4	.95	.57	.54	1	.37	.48	.30	.38	.52	.55	.34	.25	.29	.29	.37
X5	.09	.04	.09	.10	1	.69	.15	.51	.31	.80	-.25	-.12	.14	.26	-.11
X6	.10	.02	.10	.11	.60	1	.28	.55	.44	.84	.04	.11	.26	.35	.16
X7	.23	.11	.15	.24	.19	.02	1	.43	.58	.57	.54	.55	.44	.23	.59
X8	.17	.19	.10	.20	.52	.42	.28	1	.56	.78	.09	.15	.29	.29	.20
X9	.29	.18	.22	.32	.05	.04	.39	.31	1	.71	.43	.39	.44	.23	.48
X10	.23	.14	.18	.26	.83	.71	.48	.75	.43	1	.15	.22	.38	.36	.28
X11	.21	.15	.18	.24	-.38	-.36	.33	-.17	.42	-.16	1	.69	.58	.30	.93
X12	.22	.15	.19	.26	-.24	-.22	.32	-.12	.42	-.04	.68	1	.55	.29	.83
X13	.23	.17	.07	.23	-.08	-.11	.33	.16	.49	.16	.54	.54	1	.37	.78
X14	.12	.11	.11	.14	.02	.04	.12	.06	.14	.10	.26	.28	.19	1	.46
X15	.25	.18	.19	.28	-.30	-.29	.37	-.08	.50	-.05	.93	.83	.74	.39	1

p-value: .05 ≤ 0.14, .01 ≤ 0.18, .001 ≤ 0.23

X1= Functional aspect of spiritual experiences, X2= Closeness with Divine and others, X3= Selflessness, X4= Spiritual Experiences Overall, X5= Role of spiritual teacher in life, X6= Seeking guidance in religion, X7= Support from religious community, X8= Peace in religious places/activities, X9= Dissatisfaction with religious practices, X10= Spiritual Practices Overall, X11= Beliefs in Spirituality, X12= Beliefs in Divinity, X13= Functional aspect of spiritual beliefs, X14= Beliefs in gratitude, X15= Spiritual Beliefs Overall

### Profile Analysis

Profile is an arrangement of test scores (expressed in comparable units of measure, such as stanine scores), which indicates the relative standing of an individual on various psychological/ attitudinal measures. The technique was used to drive an inference about gender differences in the level of spirituality: Experience, Practices and Beliefs of young adults. The profile is given in table 2.

**Table 2: Profile analysis: Spiritual Experience, Spiritual Practice and Spiritual beliefs for Male and Female**

Spirituality	Level of Spirituality (Stanine)								
	Low			Average			High		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Functional aspect of spiritual experiences					◆				
Closeness with Divine and others					◆				
Selflessness				◆	◆				
<b>Spiritual Experiences Overall</b>					◆				
Role of spiritual teacher in life					◆				
Seeking guidance in religion					◆				
Support from religious community					◆				
Peace in religious places/activities				◆	◆				
Dissatisfaction with religious practices				◆	◆				
<b>Spiritual Practices Overall</b>					◆				
Beliefs in Spirituality					◆				
Beliefs in Divinity					◆				
Functional aspect of spiritual beliefs				◆	◆				
Beliefs in gratitude				◆	◆				
<b>Spiritual Beliefs Overall</b>					◆				
	Female				Male				

Table 2 depicts the level of spiritual experience, spiritual practice and spiritual beliefs for male and female respondents. The level of spirituality for spiritual experience, spiritual practice and spiritual beliefs for male and female was just 'average'. However, it was low on selflessness (spiritual experience), Peace in religious

places/activities & dissatisfaction with religious practices (spiritual practice) and functional aspect of spiritual beliefs & Beliefs in gratitude (spiritual beliefs) in case of males when compared with female young adults.

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## t Test

The mean difference for male and female in case of spiritual experience overall and its dimensions: functional aspect of spiritual experiences and selflessness was found significant as probability to reject the hypothesis ( $p < .01$ ). No significant difference for male and female in case of closeness with divine & others was observed.

The mean difference for male and female in case of spiritual practices overall and its dimensions: role of spiritual teacher in life, peace in religious places/activities and dissatisfaction with religious practices was found significant as probability to reject the hypothesis ( $p < .01$ ). No significant difference for male and female in case of seeking guidance in religion and support from religious community was observed.

The mean difference for male and female in case of spiritual beliefs overall and its all dimensions: beliefs in spirituality, beliefs in divinity, functional aspect of spiritual beliefs and beliefs in gratitude was found significant as probability to reject the hypothesis ( $p < .01$ ).

## Discussion

For male adults, the correlation of spiritual experiences with spiritual practices and all its five factors and with spiritual beliefs and all its four factors was found to be significant and positive. It can be inferred that as spiritual beliefs in male adults increases the spiritual practices and experiences also increases.

For females, the correlation of spiritual experiences with spiritual practices and all its five factors, spiritual Practices overall and spiritual beliefs and all its four factors was significant and positive. Nevertheless, no significant correlation of spiritual experience with two factors of practices namely role of spiritual teacher in life and seeking guidance in religion was found. However, the correlation of spiritual practices with spiritual beliefs total is not significant whereas it is significant with only two factors of spiritual beliefs i.e. belief in spirituality and functional aspect of spiritual beliefs. These findings highlight different dynamics of relationship among three domains of spirituality among males and female young adults.

The proclivity of females over males in terms of spiritual experience overall and its two dimensions namely functional aspect of spiritual experiences and selflessness; spiritual practices and its three dimensions: role of spiritual teacher in life, peace in religious places/activities and dissatisfaction with religious practices; spiritual beliefs overall and its all dimensions: beliefs in spirituality, beliefs in divinity, functional aspect of spiritual beliefs and beliefs in gratitude, highlight that young adult females experience, practice and believe in spirituality more than male young adults.

Similar findings have been reported by **Buchko (2004)** who suggested that college women experience a strong spiritual relational component to their religious faith to a greater extent than college

men. It seems that they experience daily connection with God through prayer, seek direction from religious advisors or teaching when handling problems, feel assured that God is present and active in their lives, derive comfort and security from faith and express feelings of devotion to and respect for God.

Both males and females were found to seek guidance in religion and take support from religious community but they have been found to differ in three factors of spiritual practices and four factors of spiritual beliefs. It suggests that females might practice their spiritual beliefs as being different from males. Spiritual teacher has more important role in their lives; they derive more peace in religious places/activities. In addition, it seems that due to dissatisfaction with certain religious practices, they search for new ways for the expression of their spirituality. Several researches reveal significant gender differences in pattern of communication and characteristics related to helping and caring (**Matlin, 2008**). **Levin (1994)**, has suggested that women have been socialized to develop internalized traits and behaviors which are more congruent with religious values such as cooperation and nurturance. **Firth (1997)**, concluded on the basis of observations of *Hindus* that on the whole women are more religiously active than are men; *puja (prayer)* is often carried out at shrines in the home by women and *Hindu* temples are set to be more frequented by women than by men.

Spiritual experiences without spiritual practices and spiritual beliefs are not the cornerstone of good life because anybody who turns inward naturally realizes that his existence has no meaning. Spirituality essentially means an all-inclusive experience when being concerned and being caring about everything around us is very natural.

Findings of the study implies that females might be higher in quest religious/spiritual orientation as compared to males. Allport's original conception of intrinsic-extrinsic religious orientation has been criticized and a third dimension of quest religious orientation has been suggested (**Batson et.al., 1993**). People with quest religious orientation have tentative and flexible view of religion and spirituality. More emphasis is placed on the search for religious truths than on obtaining or accepting clear cut answers. They are skeptical and doubtful about simple or final answers to life's biggest questions. The findings of present study suggest that females might be higher in quest religious/spiritual orientation.

## Conclusion

The results of the present study depict significant gender differences in all the three domains of spirituality and its nine factors. Male young adults were low on selflessness, peace in religious places/activities & dissatisfaction with religious practices and functional aspect of spiritual beliefs and beliefs in gratitude than females. The findings of present study suggests a need to explore the gender differences in spiritual orientation by future researchers.

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