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Spirituality as a Predictor of Compassion in Indian Youth: Direct and Indirect Effects Via Humility

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Abstract

Spirituality as a virtue has been lauded by the Indian traditions for its ability to make people realize that there is more to one's existence than just him. The present study examined the impact of spirituality on compassion (compassion for others and compassion for self) and also the mediating role of humility in this relationship. A sample of 300 emerging adults was taken to study the same. While a significant positive relationship was found between spirituality and self-compassion, compassion for others did not significantly affect it. Also, humility mediated the relationship between spirituality and self-compassion. The results indicated that emerging adults do possess the trait of compassion but are not necessarily spiritually inclined to practice it. The present study's findings emphasize the significance of the presence of virtues in the development of a better stance towards life and may also lead to the development of intervention programs that may provide the youth with a possibility to inculcate these virtues in their character.

Introduction:

In a world largely influenced and regulated by materialistic accomplishments, people inadvertently move to look for something which would give them an internal, individualized, and deeper sense of satisfaction than the worldly glories. People nowadays have been experiencing an augmented inclination towards the gratification of their spiritual needs apart from the physical ones, thus making the concept of spirituality widely researched. Spirituality has been studied and described under varying spheres, especially in the Indian Hindu culture where ancient accounts from the Vedas and Upanishads depict the importance assigned to the spiritual realm. Spirituality as a practice is firmly grounded in the belief that there exists a transcendent dimension of life that is worth knowing and exploring. The concept of spirituality encompasses several virtues such as humility, gratitude, forgiveness, compassion etc. and also affects one's actions, thoughts and emotions. Thus, spirituality is not merely a trait of personality rather it is a major force shaping one's personality and affecting other traits (Emmons, 2001; Saleem & Khan, 2015). Spirituality not only moulds a person's views about religion but also influences the ways in which people see other people, make perceptions about life situations and make attributions (Doolittle & Windish,

2015; Koenig, 2012). Spirituality is not about a superior existence nor is it a parallel reality rather, it is the relationship between our 'selves' the materialistic world and the supreme entity.

A similar positive impact on human lives can be acknowledged due to the presence of compassion. Compassion is the driving force that prompts people to make extensive efforts to facilitate the physical, mental, or emotional crisis of others and themselves. It is an emotion that is evoked as a result of seeing someone in agony. Compassion is often regarded as having sensitivity towards suffering from sound logical reasoning. Compassion involves letting oneself be moved by someone's suffering and have a genuine desire to help, or at least try to help. Compassion is not generated by the person who is suffering, instead, it depends on our perception of their situation. The sufferers most often do not indulge in and are unaware of, the process of generating compassion. A compassionate person can identify oneself with others and when he sees those people suffering, he can't stay unaffected. Since compassion is a feeling that lies at the root of humanity, it has been subjected to debates and discussions for centuries. In Greek and Roman philosophical thoughts, compassion was considered synonymous with pity and was believed to blindfold a

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person's reasoning. However, the classic Hindu literature defines compassion as a virtue that encompasses many varied facets such as a desire to mitigate the other person's sorrows, considering others, whether an unknown person, a relative or a friend as oneself and treating their problems as one's own. Hindu literature has distinguished compassion from pity stating that the latter is scarred by a feeling of superiority while the former is a result of oneness with the sufferer. It has been recognized that more spiritual individuals demonstrate greater compassion. Compassion has the potential to prompt people to surpass selfish motives and act altruistically towards strangers. The idea of being compassionate is not only about wishing to be helpful, instead, it includes the ability to make a person perform actions or behaviours aimed at reducing the agony of other people thus making it a highly desirable virtue. While it is believed that compassion makes a person sensitive to others, the advent of the concept of self-compassion has been a major breakthrough.

Self-compassion refers to bracing oneself with solicitude, understanding, warmth and consideration. Self-compassion means one is kind and understanding when dealing with personal failings instead of being harsh, judgmental and condemning oneself for various inadequacies. Having self-compassion implies that we as humans accept our proneness to mistakes. Neff (2011), a pioneer in self-compassion research, describes three components of self-compassion: Self-kindness v/s self-judgment, Common humanity v/s isolation and Mindfulness v/s over-identification.

Managing our negative emotions efficiently is one significant prerequisite of self-compassion with the intention that thoughts and moods are neither concealed nor overstated. This evenhanded attitude develops as a result of the skill of linking one's individual incidents to those of others who are also experiencing similar fate, thus placing one's own condition into a bigger view. Self-compassion guides an individual to become affectionate and considerate toward oneself when he/she undergoes failure or feels incapable; instead of overlooking the suffering or thrashing oneself with condemnation. The idea of being a human revolves around the actuality that one is corporeal, susceptible and lacking at some things. Self-compassion thus entails realizing that agony and insufficiency is an element of the common human experience. Self-compassion is not feeling pity for oneself, rather it is respecting and regarding oneself as a capable and fully functional individual.

In a world full of pride and acquisitive lust, another virtue worth treasuring is humility. Humility is a state of being where a person is capable of an outward expression of an appropriate inner or self-regard. Humility is not about scrutinizing oneself pessimistically, nor is it about self-denunciation, it is about the understanding that one cannot be perfect at everything and accepting one's own as

well as others' talents and flaws with equanimity. Many definitions of humility focus less on explaining what it is. Rather, they focus more on what it is not. The initial researches including humility as a variable often did not pay much attention to it. It was in the early 2000s when humility started getting attention as a key virtue. The present concept of humility believes that humility enables a person to realize that he/she has potential but is not capable of everything; has limitations but can also master certain tasks; has roles and responsibilities but so does everyone else.

Review of Literature:

There has been an intriguing association between compassion and spirituality, whether it is compassion for oneself or for others. Spirituality allows individuals to experience new perspectives to the simple human-to-human interaction. Greenwald & Harder (2003) identified that while talking about spirituality and spiritual experiences, people do acknowledge a loving connection with others and a tendency to help others. In a study conducted to examine the independent effects of spirituality and religiosity on compassion, it was found that the subjects scoring high on spirituality were more compassionate while no significant relationship was found between religiosity and compassion. Also, the participants who were found to be more spiritual responded compassionately to the situations that described someone in distress rather than showing mere sympathy (N=133), in the same study, it was also found that compassion mediated the relationship between spirituality and prosocial behaviours (N=134) (Saslow *et al.*, 2013).

Self-compassion, along with being a desirable virtue, can also assist an individual to overcome challenges and face difficulties in life. The affirmative elements of self-compassion are found to be positively correlated with spirituality while the intensity of the negative elements could be lowered by spiritual involvement. It is believed that self-compassion can enhance an individual's spiritual growth and the frequency and intensity of their spiritual experience. In a study conducted on 285 Turkish University students, it was found that self-compassion significantly predicted the spiritual experiences of the students and the students who were high on self-compassion had a better spiritual vision about people and life situations. (Akin & Akin, 2015). A similar relation was seen on 145 nursing students from NIMHANS, India where self-compassion was found to be a significant predictor of the spiritual well-being of the participants along with mindfulness and life satisfaction (Mathad *et al.*, 2017). A study conducted on 290 university students showed that there was a significant association between Spiritual Quotient (ability to acknowledge things and events beyond one's cognitive and emotional skills), and self-compassion (Zarrinabadi *et al.*, 2020).

Researchers have affirmed that humility has its roots in the ground of spirituality (Paine *et al.*, 2015; Jankowski & Sandage, 2014). Rowatt *et al.* (2006) found that high spiritual transcendence was found in the participants who reported high levels of humility. In a study conducted by Exline & Geyer (2004) on a sample of 127 undergraduates, it was found that the participants who reported themselves to be spiritual were high on humility than the participants who denied any spiritual connectedness. In a study conducted in 4 waves of interviews (2001-2008), on 718 participants all of which were above 66 years of age, it was found that people with spiritual doubts are also found to be lacking at humility as the ones who were humble were at ease when it came to the acceptance of trauma and unfair events that happened in their lives (Krause, 2012).

Many studies have suggested a spiritual dimension to humility which lies in the belief that God being the ultimate power, has capabilities far superior to any human being indicating the finite abilities of human beings. Humility doesn't emphasize human ineptness, rather the idea that there exists a higher power and the wisdom which comes when we start accepting our limitations. A person who has achieved humility is no longer the centre of his own world and instead focuses on the larger community one is part of. Humility, as known through the existing literature, makes a person realize his true capacities and at the same time, clarifies one's limitations. The main domains of self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness, all focus on the ability of an individual to extend kindness to oneself even in the phase of failure; perceiving one's experiences as those faced by other people as well and having a balanced awareness of one's blessings and miseries. All of this is possible only when a person is completely impartial about oneself and has neither a sense of grandiose nor inferiority. Humility ensures the existence of such a state, thus facilitating the inoculation and growth of self-compassion. Humility gives an individual the ability to take complete responsibility for the actions he does and the multiple ways in which he influences himself and his surroundings. It has been found that humble people are better able to receive negative feedback and the people high on self-compassion respond to negative states with less distress (Reed & Aspinwall, 1998; Leary *et al.*, 2007).

The present study aimed at affirming the relationship between spirituality and compassion for oneself and towards others specifically in emerging adults as they are the most open to growth yet vulnerable section of the population and there is a need for protecting them from negativity by throwing light upon the astounding effect positive virtues have. It was hypothesized that spirituality and compassion- for oneself as well as others, will have a significant positive relationship and spirituality will significantly predict compassion. Also, this relationship would be mediated by humility.

Methodology:

Participants: the sample for the present study comprised of 300 emerging adults (18-25 years of age) including both, males and females. A purposive sampling technique was used for the same. It was ensured that each participant was a regular student of a recognized college or university, was unmarried and had a basic understanding of English.

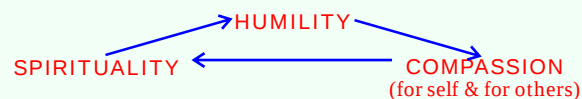
Measurements:

The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) developed by Underwood and Teresi, the DSES is a 16-item self-report measure of spiritual experience that aims to assess usual, or daily, spiritual experiences and not the supernatural ones – and how they are a daily part of the individual's life.

Compassion Scale: a 24-item compassion scale by Elizabeth Pommier has been used in the current study to determine how the participants typically act towards others particularly when they see someone suffering.

Self-Compassion Scale: a 26 item self-compassion scale by Kristin Neff was used to examine how the participants act towards themselves while they are facing low or negative events in life.

Designs and Procedure: the present study used a causal research design. The participants were asked to manually fill in the questionnaires and were duly thanked for their participation. Ethical considerations were taken care of.



Our findings

All the tables are self explanatory, explain in discussion.

Table1: Mean, Standard Deviation (SD) and Reliability Coefficients of the variables under study (N=300)

Variables	Mean	SD	Chronbach's Alpha
Spirituality	38.83	8.080	.541
Self-compassion	85.91	9.055	.569
Compassion for others	85.85	9.034	.490
Humility	42.11	5.991	.555

Table 2: Correlation between the variables under study

	Spirituality	Self-comp.	Compassion	Humility
Spirituality	1	-.284**	.019	-.401**
Self-comp.	-	.053	.320**	
Compassion	-	-	1	.019
Humility	-	-	-	1

**Significant at 0.01 level

Table-3: Linear regression with spirituality as the predictor variable and Self-compassion as the criterion variable

Model	Unstd. Coeff. B	Std. Error	Std. Coeff. Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	98.271	2.469		39.804	.000
Spirituality	-.318	.062	-.284	-5.112	.000

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Table-4: Linear regression with spirituality as the predictor variable and humility as the criterion variable

Model	Unstd. Coeff. B	Std. Error	Std. Coeff. Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	53.673	1.560		34.401	.000
Spirituality	-.298	.039	-.401	-7.567	.000

Table-5: Mediation analysis with humility as the mediating variable, spirituality as the predictor variable and self-compassion as the criterion variable

Y: self-compassion; X: spirituality; M: humility

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
humility	-.1107	.0307	-.1743	-.0526

Discussion:

The purpose of this study was to assess the levels of spirituality, compassion: both, self-compassion and compassion for others among emerging adults as well as to assess the relationship between them. The results (Table-2) revealed that spirituality and self-compassion have a significant positive correlation which indicates that the spiritual inclination of an individual does affect the solicitude one has for oneself. Regression analysis (Table-3) further revealed that spirituality significantly predicted self-compassion and was accountable for 7.8% variation in the criterion variable self-compassion. Both spirituality and self-compassion have been associated with positive emotions and virtues such as higher well-being (Daaleman *et al.*, 2001& Mathad *et al.*, 2019); resilience (Smith, 2015) as well as with lower levels of depression (Dolittle *et al.*, 2004; Krieger *et al.*, 2013) and anxiety (Werner *et al.*, 2012).

Individuals often strive for excellence and are disappointed and self-critical when faced with failure. Most people at a young age are programmed to be successful rather than satisfied, which creates great pressure on them. Spiritual experiences act as a source of solace in such conditions. The experience of oneness with a greater entity and the realization that the world comprises of several imperfect people who are all merely playing their part and there exists something more to the world than our trivial failures, leads us to a state where an individual is more accepting and embracing towards oneself and experiences fewer negative emotional states even if things don't go as expected which resembles the state of self-compassion.

In the past decade, researchers have been trying to empirically affirm a relationship between spirituality and self-compassion among the population of emerging adults and many of them have found a positive association between the two. Griffith (2019) found a positive correlation between spiritual experiences and self-compassion of the participants (collegestudents).

The results also revealed that spirituality and compassion do not have a significant correlation indicating

that the spiritual preferences of an individual do not necessarily affect the level of compassion and individual possesses indicating that compassion is a virtue that can be induced by social factors without necessarily needing a spiritual guiding force. Compassion arises when a person has kindness, morality & a strong sense of right or wrong (ethics). While reflecting upon these factors, it becomes apparent that a spiritual person also possesses similar attributes or qualities and that spirituality and compassion may share co-morbidity, but are not necessary for each others' presence.

An essential component of spirituality is the acceptance of supreme identity and that there is more to the world than oneself. Whereas, the factors that lay the foundation of compassion are kindness, empathy and a desire to get into the action with the objective of reducing another person's suffering. A person can possess kindness, empathy and a desire to act prosocially without essentially accepting a cosmic connection or experience. The simple belief that no human being deserves to suffer can make a person compassionate. A study conducted on about 1300 American adults revealed that compassion finds its roots in prosociality in individuals who do or do not follow spiritual and religious practices. However, the level of emotional stirring that was induced in people not involved in spiritual practices was significantly higher than the ones who are involved in such practices.

Upon examining the role played by humility in the relationship between spirituality, compassion for others and self-compassion, it was found that humility mediated the relationship between spirituality and self-compassion (Table-5), which indicates that humility acts as a catalyst and facilitates the relationship between spirituality and self-compassion. A person who is humble and has a correct evaluation of his strengths and limitations and also believes in the existence of identity or power beyond human control find it alright to face failure at times and is kind instead of being critical towards his flaws. Humility and spirituality have both been researched in their own domains, but their interactive effect is not much explored. Some psychologists believe that the central idea of spirituality is the acceptance of and the search for a supreme being or entity which essentially reflects the notion of humility, i.e., at the heart of spirituality lies the belief that one is not omnipotent or "know it all" rather there exists a supreme entity more powerful and capable than everyone else (Emmons, 2001). It has been found that factors that are negatively associated with spirituality have also been negatively associated with humility. In a study conducted on 162 graduates, it was found that spiritual barriers act as antagonists to humility. Participants high on any of the spiritual barriers reported low humility (Sandage, 2015).

Humility makes people avoid judgments about themselves and instead provide them with an actual picture of who they really are. The humility-honesty dimension of

the HEXACO model of personality has been found to be positively correlated with self-compassion and also significantly predicting it (Thurackal *et al.*, 2016). Humility and self-compassion have a lot in common such as an accurate self-evaluation, a stable self-regard, comparatively lower tendencies to be influenced by social comparisons and an accepting self-concept. When an individual is humble, he is aware of the shortcomings and deficiencies he possesses but these thoughts do not cause negative emotional states rather, a humble person embraces one's weaknesses with a realistic orientation and when an individual learns not to be too harsh or critical about oneself, he takes the road to self-compassion.

Conclusively, spiritual involvement can enhance the consideration an individual shows to oneself which might be further fostered by the virtue of humility. Thus, humility should not be mistaken for weakness as it takes great strength to recognize one's limitations and admit them along with the strengths. Further, the people who have surrendered to a supreme power take compassion as an obligatory duty motivated by a sense of shared identity and similar concepts; while the people not indulged in such practices have compassion that has purely stemmed out of their emotions and empathy. Compassion is found to exist in people who refrain themselves from spiritual practices thus showing that compassion does not depend on spirituality for its existence.

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