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The Indian Knowledge Systems: Nurturing Well-Rounded Youth

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Abstract

The modern youth of today is facing unprecedented challenges such as poor self-image or self-confidence, mental health issues, emotional turbulences, violence in neighborhoods, addiction to material substances as well as digital or cyber material, unhealthy competition, peer-pressure, excessive sensory-indulgence, instability of family relationships which lead to excessive materialism without a balancing spiritual insight. In this way, youth is bombarded with many opposing forces and conflicting influences. Due to these negative influences, achieving internal stability and heart-brain connection is difficult. Current education must address the training of the minds and hearts of teenagers and youth that will enable them to



solve their own problems and that of society with the appropriate level of consciousness. This paper aims to address not only the educational needs of today's young generation but also guide them to lead a balanced life by addressing their holistic development. Gitopadesh program will help as an intervention to bring synchronization between heart and mind which has been designed based on a superior pedagogical approach and well-defined learning outcomes to inculcate values, promote self-study and improve actionable knowledge towards designing one's destiny of a higher purpose. Gitopadesh course combines traditional wisdom with modern educational practices to create a holistic learning experience.

1. Introduction

The youth of today is facing challenges that are unprecedented: poor self-image or self-confidence, mental health, violence in neighborhoods, addiction to material substances as well as digital (social media) or cyber material (online gambling etc.), unhealthy competition, peer-pressure, excessive sensory-indulgence, instability of family relationships, excessive materialism without a balancing spiritual insight, parental pressure and bullying, gender discrimination and biases, superstitions, poverty, lack of role-models, parental guidance or mentors and coaches, among many others. To address these issues, Kamlesh D. Patel (Daaji) offers nine principles in his book "The Wisdom Bridge", to help them lead an inspired life and nourish resilient bonds in the family, community, society and nation (Kamlesh 2022).

From birth, the learning process begins. The holistic concept of education is, therefore, an education based on spiritual principles, integrating spiritual potential with practical skills for living a purpose-driven life. Holistic development of adolescents is a fundamental and a crying need for both the individual and the society at large, as youth account for more than 33% (more than 1/3rd) of India's population. If today's youth is tomorrow's citizens, then today's children are tomorrow's youth and they require the necessary training to equip them with necessary life skills both inner and outer in their human journey. Education in the modern world offers a necessary and adequate job for preparing students for the world outside. In contrast, true inner development approaches are ignored entirely.



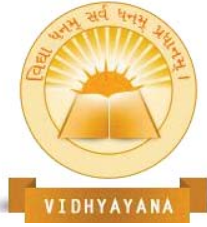
Holistic development is typically measured by the physical and mental health factors and can include contentment and happiness, material prosperity and well-being in one's day-to-day activities and individual character made up of inner attitudes and outer behaviors. Children must be trained from a very young age to serve the common cause of humanity which is beyond selfishness. The material aspect of education will have little use and will never give rise to a really practical science of education if it is not infused with spiritual values and principles that are needed for holistic development of growing adolescent children.

The problem to be addressed through this study is to train and guide the adolescents who are bombarded by so many contrary forces and conflicting influences in the modern world.

The adolescent phase brings a new set of challenges for holistic development in children. They are all experiencing many conflicting influences which cause confusion and anxiety.

This research work is undertaken by using the ancient principles from Bhagavad gita and Ashtavakra gita as one of the means for inculcating perspectives and attitudes on life and its purpose. By integrating these ancient principles with the Heartfulness practices, one can lead a heart-centered life with a balance of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual states.

To equip children with the knowledge they need to prepare for an ever-changing world, the teachings of Gitas and Patanjali Yoga Sutras from the past, as well as Heartfulness from the present, have been used. The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 deals with the literature review, highlighting the work carried out by the earlier researchers on holistic development. Section 3 deals with the Principles of Bhagavad Gita, Astavakra Gita, Patanjali Yoga Sutras and the practical Approach of Heartfulness in shaping the children for their self development. Section 4 deals with the methodology of Research and the paper is concluded in section 5.



2. Literature Review

The insights from the outcomes of various intervention programs and experiments conducted in the light of holistic education by various researchers are summarized in this section.

It was proposed by development psychologists (Gardner 2006) that there are multiple intelligences or subject ways of learning and can include kinesthetic, visuo-spatial learning, linguistic-verbal, interpersonal, logical or abstract learnings and so on. The key insight of these studies was that a single metric such as the Intelligence Quotient (I. Q.) fails to capture the entire spectrum of cognitive ability in a developing child. The Hidden Impacts of What We Buy 2010, spiritual intelligence (Daniel Goleman 2001) and others have been proposed to capture the various facets of an individual as metrics of intelligence and cognitive ability. Most modern advocates of holistic education highlight the need for integrative approaches in the curriculum for training the children in their philosophical, psychological, social developments. They include training in not only the main subjects, but also in community, thinking or self-reflection, earth environment, body-mind and the soul (J. P. Miller, The Holistic Curriculum 2019), as well as inculcating compassion, kindness and love (J. P. Miller, Love and Compassion: Exploring Their Role in Education 2018).

Mahmoudi and others (Mahmoudi, et al. 2012) summarize the approach to holistic education for the 21st century as being dynamic, balanced and focus on *wholeness* by cultivating the relationship among the various aspects of the individual, such as intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional, social and even aesthetics, and *narrowness* as defined by basic skills.

A study on adolescence in eight regions of the world focused on the research on topics such as family and peer relationships, schooling, physical and mental health and how these vary across societies (Brown 2002). Their study ended on a note of optimism that the time of adolescence, once considered as a time of storm and stress, is now a time of challenge and potential with extraordinary implications for the future and emphasizes a new process of teaching for the teenagers to prepare them for a very uncertain world.



Based on the findings of the study conducted, the holistic development of a student occurs through extracurriculars and co-curricular activities and is heavily dependent on teachers' goodwill (J. O'Flaherty & O. McCormack 2019).

Project-based learning was used to develop students holistically. (Pratima Kulkarni, Dipali Ramdasi 2022). A set of problems was given to the students to solve in a variety of fields, including healthcare, environmental issues, and automation, among others.

Many past research investigations have been conducted to develop leadership concepts based on the Bhagavad Gita's teachings (Ananthanarayan 2016, Bhawuk 2011, D. Chatterjee 2012). Various teaching techniques have been developed using the Bhagavad Gita to develop children's curriculum, to fulfill spiritual requirements, and to enhance the current education system (Kalita 2018, Karisetty and Bhat 2019, Rajeev and Hebbani 2020, Mani, et al. 2021, Felver, et al. 2015, Ciarrochi, et al. 2020, Dabas and Singh 2018, Kaur and Kaur 2014, Singh 2016, Bhawuk 2011). Singh (Singh 2016) looked at the pedagogy of values education in the light of teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and summarized that nurturing the true (divine) nature (*swabhava*) and focusing self-driven and self-sustained orientation in action (*swadharma*). Kumar (N. Kumar 2017) looked at alternative perspectives for understanding adolescent development by analyzing 9-verses of the Bhagavad Gita on adolescents to fill in the gaps that western psychiatry has failed to address. In another study by Raina and Balodi (Raina and Balodi 2014) reported, using an emotional maturity scale, that the Bhagavad Gita reading group was better in emotional maturity and life-values when compared to the non-reading group. Another work by Rajeev and Hebbani (Rajeev and Hebbani 2020) looked at the correlation between resilience in the face of psychological distress and *anasakti* or non-attachment, as described in Bhagavad Gita. Though this study was conducted on older adults from South India, the Connor-Davidson Resilience scale indicated a positive correlation, showing evaluable empirical evidence about emotional coping practices based on the teachings of Bhagavad Gita. Jayanti (Jayanti 2020) argued about the usefulness of the Gita in everyday life for all age groups at every stage of life and analyzed life-styles and habits including food, sleep, work attitudes, excessive desire-driven life outcomes, handling failures as well as successes, equanimity of mind and coping with the death of dear ones. Through these arguments, he made a case for



answering, 'Why study Gita?' and strongly recommended teaching the principles of Gita in schools. Karisetty et al., (Karisetty and Bhat 2019) studied the problems arising due lack of self-awareness and sedentary lifestyle, erratic sleep rhythms and irregular and unhealthy food habits, from children to the elderly. They observed that the modern generation is experiencing a radical change in lifestyle as a result of rapid technological innovation, which is causing pain, unhappiness, and life-style based diseases. The objective of that study was to investigate the ancient writings on Vedanta and yoga and draw conclusions on the ideal way of living with a focus on following a systematic schedule in line with nature.

Tobin Hart (Hart 2004) makes a strong case for introducing contemplative approaches to education for students due to its importance in self-reflection, character formation and to develop deepened awareness. He highlighted that contemporary education is mostly focused on rational thinking and sensory observation which is insufficient for the holistic development of a child and summarized the impact of contemplation on learning and behavioral aspects.

Ciarrochi and team (Ciarrochi, et al. 2020) evaluated the role of non-attachment in the development of adolescent mental health over a 3-year longitudinal study and concluded that non-attachment protects against the development of poor mental health. They strongly recommend further research into interventions that enhance non-attachment in youth.

Alaka Mani et al., (Mani, et al. 2021, Mani, et al. 2018) developed and validated a yoga module for anger management in adolescents using an Integrated Approach to Yoga Therapy (IAYT) principle. It was validated statistically to be effective in anger management in adolescents. Anger, as described in the Bhagavad Gita, is a core negative emotion in spirituality that causes behavioral reactions leading to loss of discriminative capacity and also cognitive impairment. Anger is a poison to spirituality.

There appears to be some gaps in the incorporation of moral and ethical principles along with practical aspects of techniques of relaxation, meditation in educational systems according to an exhaustive assessment and survey of current material. Gitopadesh program along with the appropriate practice of Heartfulness meditation, facilitated by yogic transmission, may surely fill these gaps. This is to summarize that awareness is the key to develop the human being



holistically. The current study is seeking to make an impact through ancient principles of Bhagavad Gita and Ashtavakra Gita as well as practice via Heartfulness methods.

In this paper, a new offering designed for the modern youth with ancient principles of Bhagavad Gita, Astavakra Gita, Patanjali Yoga Sutras combined with the practice of more recent Heartfulness *paddhati* which is based on a modified form of Sahaj Marg's Raja Yoga.

3. Holistic principles of development from Bhagavad Gita, Ashtavakra Gita and Patanjali Yoga Sutras

The Bhagavad-Gita (Song of the Lord) is a discussion between Lord Krishna, the Divine in the human form, and his companion and disciple Arjuna. This dialogue takes place in the epic Mahabharata's *Bhishma Parva*. The Gita is divided into 18 chapters and has 700 verses. It is one of India's most well-known philosophical, spiritual, and practical works in Sanskrit (Bhave 2020).

The key themes of the teachings from Bhagavad Gita are:

1. Embracing life in its wholeness – both joy and happiness – and rising about these dualities of likes and dislikes, transcending the three gunas, by creating the state of *sthithaprajna* (balance or centeredness).
2. To live a life based on *samadristhi* and *samavartin* – of equality and equity.
3. To do our duty that is natural to us (*svadharma*), to live and act, each moment in complete osmosis and remembrance of the divine without any desire, without ego (I and mine).
4. In each age, the divine descends in the human form to guide humanity to their divine destiny.
5. Selfless, desireless self-surrender to the divine and accepting all life as it comes with humility.

These key principles, which span both the aspects of the inner life and outer actions, provide an extraordinary roadmap for leading a life of joy and harmony.



Four Paths of Yoga

Yoga aims to help people progress from the lowest to the highest levels of consciousness, including physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual levels. YOGA is a set of concepts and practices utilized by many aspirants to refine their personalities by removing the inner impurities and peeling away the grosser layers of imperfections, thereby uniting them with the pure and perfect divinity within.

Spirituality offers four paths of yoga based on aspirants' inner natures, as well as suggestions for living a life that utilizes inner personality (Vivekananda, The Complete Book of Yoga : Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga 2019): These include , Karma Yoga – The path of Action, Bhakti Yoga – The path of Devotion, Jnana Yoga – The path of Knowledge , Raja Yoga – The path of Meditation.

In devotion the practice of stilling the mind is action, the stilled mind is devotion and the understanding of this is knowledge. In knowledge thinking is action, the stabilization of the condition is devotion and the result thereof is knowledge. Going to a Satsang and listening to the discourse is action, implementing the precept and doing the practice as instructed is Upasana and the Viveka and Vairagya born of the practice is knowledge.

Ashtavakra Gita

Ashtavakra Gita is a unique and short text composed of 298 verses arranged in 20 chapters (Nityaswarupananda 2001). This treatise based on Advaita Vedanta, we can find the subtle philosophical truths expounded in the form of dialogue between young and wise sage Ashtavakra and Rajarshi Janaka of Mithila city. The discussion centers around the nature of human beings and the state of consciousness of a realized being, their *vyavahara* or behavior in the world. Typically, this text has not been used for children's education and only the story of Ashtavakra is narrated. Only recently, a few spiritual organizations have been using it in children's curriculum. Therefore, this study will be one of the first ones to evaluate its influence on children's development in a systematic way.



Patanjali Yoga Sutras

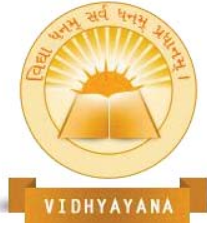
Patanjali, a great sage thousands of years ago, condensed the entire concept and practice of Yoga into a sequence of 196 Yoga Sutras. It was a remarkable effort, and he collated and codified all of the knowledge on the art and science of Yoga that existed at the time in order to produce this treatise. Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi are the eight main qualities or limbs of practice required to achieve the state of Yoga. These eight are now known as Ashtanga Yoga.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras continue to be a definitive reference today on all aspects of Yoga, presented in four chapters *Samadhi Pada* – concentration, *Sadhana Pada* – practice, *Vibhuti Pada* – experiences, *Kaivalya Pada* – absolute freedom. It is Patanjali's Yoga Sutras that provide a timeless guide for cultivating holistic wellness. One can experience deep peace and well-being by integrating these practices into their lives, unlocking their inner potential and cultivating emotional intelligence.

Heartfulness Approach

Heartfulness philosophy which is modified Raja Yoga – practices such as Yama, Niyama, asana, pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana can be taken into consideration for their emphasis on children's development. The ethical and moral principles of Yama and Niyama and the practical tools of Dhyana in the holistic growth of children are being reviewed. The **Core Practices of Heartfulness** include, Heartfulness Relaxation, Heartfulness Meditation, Heartfulness Cleaning and Heartfulness Prayer

This relaxation technique involves following a series of suggestions by sitting in a comfortable position with closed eyes. By this practice, the calmness and inner peace of the individual is restored. These few minutes of practice helps one to focus towards what is essential. Perfect calmness and inner stillness needed for giving his/her best in any pursuit (of the aspirant) can be achieved effectively.



Heartfulness Meditation

The aspirant has to sit in a comfortable position and close eyes softly. Then after a few minutes of relaxation the learner has to turn his/her attention inward with the supposition that the source of divine light is already present within the heart and it is attracting him/her from within. By practicing this Heartfulness meditation the mind will be brought into a more centered and regulated state from wandering. The learner will also go beyond thoughts to the deeper level of feeling and intuition, and then deeper still to more profound states of being, expanding the consciousness to realize one's innate potential.

Heartfulness Rejuvenation

Heartfulness Rejuvenation is to be taken up at the end of day's work. This has to be practiced in a comfortable sitting position with closed eyes, with an intention to remove all the impressions accumulated during the day. With this process, the heavier emotional burdens and complexities are removed from the heart and mind. The removal of old habits and tendencies results in greater purity, simplicity and emotional intelligence.

Heartfulness Prayer

Heartfulness prayer has to be practiced for a few minutes before meditation and at bedtime to connect and establish the connection with the higher Self or divinity. Through the practice of Heartfulness Prayer, the learner will learn to connect with the Source and listen to Heart, letting it guide life. This prayer can be practiced even by young children to develop the intuitive capacity and thereby they will know their path clearly from a very young age and conduct themselves in the world as responsible beings.

4. Methodology

An attempt has been made to infuse values and principles through a Gitopadesh course track titled 'Visva-sakshi' which is a blended program with online and offline sessions tailored for children and youth aged 10 to 14 and 15 to 21 with the course content accessible via the Heartfulness Learning Academy (HLA) portal. This program offers twice a week live online sessions accompanied by comprehensive thematic modules covering 10 value-based themes.



Participants delve into Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, selected slokas from the Bhagavad Gita, and the Ashtavakra Gita, exploring profound teachings through engaging discussions and interactive assignments.

To create a holistic learning experience, Gitopadesh combines traditional wisdom with modern educational practices. This course emphasizes interactive learning, critical thinking, and personal reflection in order to ensure that students understand and apply the teachings. By creating a supportive and inclusive environment, the course aims to foster a deep connection between the students and the timeless wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita, Ashtavakra Gita and Patanjali Yoga Sutras with Heartfulness meditation as a practical tool to establish the connection with the self.

Gitopadesh focuses on developing the creative potential of its students in line with the National Education Policy 2020. It relies on the principle that education must develop not only cognitive capabilities, but also ethical, moral, social, and emotional stability and balance. It has always been considered that knowledge (Jnana), wisdom (Prajna), and truth (Satya) are the highest goals of life in Indian philosophy. The Gitopadesh Initiative is well aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined by the United Nations. These SDGs truly resonate with the timeless teachings of the Gitas and Yoga and are an embodiment of the Concept of 'Vasudhaiva-Kutumbakam' and 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah'. These concepts and many others are conveyed to the children through guided activities, sloka recitation, insightful stories, engaging games, introspective discussions, reflective questions etc that are an integral part of Gitopadesh.

The Gitopadesh Initiative also encapsulates Universal Human Values by instilling timeless ancient Indian principles into young minds. The initiative emphasizes respect for human dignity, teaching children and youth the importance of treating everyone with kindness and fairness, as highlighted in the lessons on equality and selflessness. Compassion and empathy are fostered by encouraging children to understand and share others' feelings, mirroring the teachings on selfless love and service.



Learning Outcomes

Gitopadesh is a signature creation by Heartfulness Education Trust with specific learning outcomes and well-designed pedagogical principles where it bridges the gap between modern education and ancient education. The Learning Outcomes of the Gitopadesh Initiative are so designed to inculcate values, promote self-study and improve actionable knowledge towards designing one's destiny of a higher purpose.

Gitopadesh along with Heartfulness practices foster in children and youth an 'Inner Transformation' which helps them imbibing spiritual values which further help in collective transformation of the society.

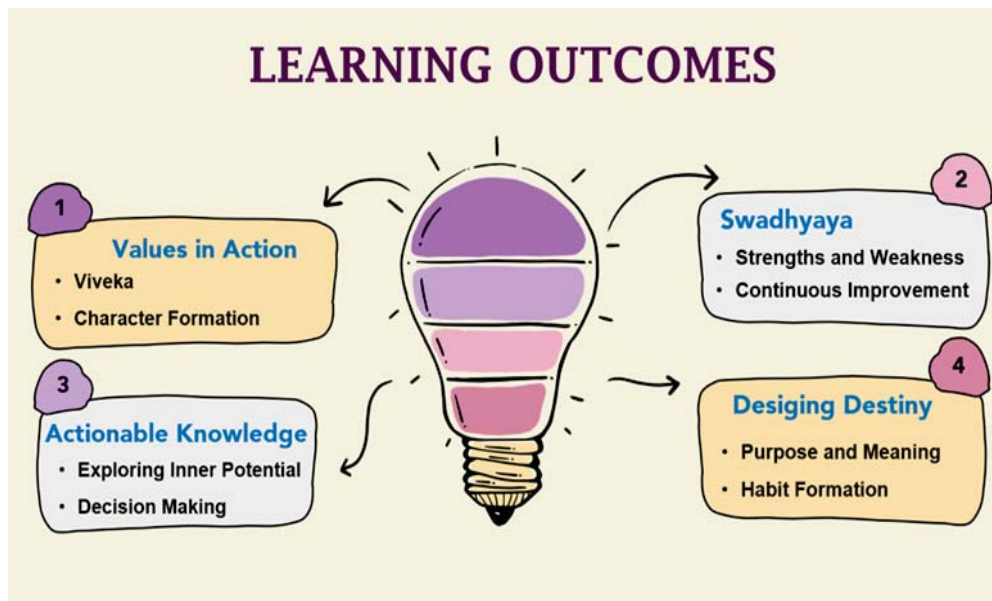


Fig. 1: Learning outcomes of Gitopadesh Course

Learning Outcomes of Gitopadesh truly fulfills the purpose of any education system, to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. It aims at producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution.



Research Design

Gitopadesh is an experimental platform which is blended with practical tools of Heartfulness, and their impact will be studied by developing: Appropriate metrics and parameters such as Self-awareness Level of Heartfulness (Awareness Atlas), Emotional Quotient and Spiritual Quotient are used to measure the holistic development.

Data Collection Plan

Data will be collected from the individuals and institutions online and onsite. Data analysis will be created on the specific impact of Gitopadesh on students' attitude, behavior and character as defined in the metrics found in the questionnaire. Their self awareness level, emotional quotient and spiritual quotient will be evaluated.

Assessment of both children and parents will be considered in quantitative and qualitative ways.

- Primary data – Participants and parents through standardized survey questionnaires, verbal feedback, interviews, observational changes.
- Secondary data – Literature survey, web resources, articles and research work done by previous scholars etc.

5. Conclusion

The focus of this paper was to talk about the impact of Gitopadesh on holistic development of adolescents by combining the ancient principles of Patanjali Yoga Sutras, Bhagavad Gita, Ashtavakra Gita through slokas recitation, through storytelling, through interactive Q&A, through self-introspection etc. Intervention of Heartfulness practical aspects such as prayer, positive affirmations, Heartful communication, ten maxims and core practices include relaxation, meditation, inner connection and cleaning would prove the efficacy of the program on the holistic development of children and youth.



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