Chapter 2
Review of Literature
2.1. General Conceptions of Religion and Spirituality

The terms religion and spirituality have been defined by psychologists in a number of ways over the past century. There is a general agreement that both the concepts are multidimensional (Hill et al., 2000). The term religion comes from Latin *religio*, derived from *ligo* meaning ‘to bind’. William James (1902) distinguished a ‘first hand’ religion that is experiential and direct and a ‘second hand’ religion which is institutional and inherited. For many pioneers, both elements fall under the purview of religion. However, recently the meaning of religion has evolved in different modes. Religion is now commonly referred to a fixed and confined system of ideological commitments which fail to represent the dynamic personal part of human devotion (Wulff, 1996), while the term spirituality is referred to as the subjective side of religious experience. A concrete definition of spirituality, however, has confused the scholars worldwide. The word comes from Latin *spiritus*, in turn from *spirare*, i.e., to breathe (Wulff, 1997).

A polarisation of these two terms is emphasised in the recent scientific investigations. Religion is said to represent an institutional, and authoritarian belief system inhibiting free expression and spirituality as representing subjective, inward, and promoting free expression. Although some researchers may find such contrasts as useful explorations, few others mention the dangers of this bifurcation of religion and spirituality (Hill et al., 2000). Pargament (1999) pointed out these dangers in detail. First, the polarisation of religion into institutional and spirituality into individual domains ignores that all forms of spiritual expressions develop in a social context and virtually organised faith traditions exhibit an interest in ordering of personal affairs (Wuthnow, 1998). Second, these definitions implicitly endorse that spirituality is good and religion is bad which overlook the potentially harmful and helpful sides of both religion and spirituality (Pargament, 2002). This polarisation ignores the reality that most people experience spirituality in an organised religious context and fail to see the distinction between
these phenomena (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Zinnbauer et al, 1999). Finally, it may lead to needless duplication in concepts and measurements related to both.

Religion and spirituality represent related rather than independent constructs (Hill et al, 2000). Although any definition of religion and spirituality is limited and debatable, spirituality can be understood as a search for the scared. Through spirituality people seek to discover, hold on to, and when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives (Pargament, 1999). This search takes place in a larger religious context, one that may be traditional or non-traditional (Hill et al, 2000). The sacred is what distinguishes religion and spirituality from other phenomena. It refers to those special objects or events set apart from the ordinary. The sacred can include concept of God, divine, ultimate reality, and the transcendent, as well as any aspect of life which is extraordinary as elaborated by Pargament (1999). It is defined as feelings, thoughts, and behaviour that arise from the search for sacred (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Miller & Thoresen, 2003). It is a common denominator between religion and spirituality.

Spirituality has come to represent individual’s efforts at reaching a variety of sacred or existential goals in life, such a finding meaning, wholeness, inner potential, and interconnectedness with others. In contrast, religion is associated with formal belief, group practices, and institutions (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). Definitions of religion often include references to organisational practices, attendance at services, performance of rituals, commitment and adherence to organisational beliefs. In contrast, definitions of spirituality often refer to feelings or experiences of connectedness or relationship with the sacred.

Reich (1996) suggested that there are four possible relationships between religion and spirituality. The first is that religion and spirituality are identical to each other, the second that one is a sub-domain of the other, the third that they are entirely separate domains, and the fourth suggests that religion and spirituality are unique domains which potentially overlap.

Spirituality refers to the subjective experience of searching for and nourishing the relationship with divine, which may include God, higher power, or spiritual images (Wong et al, 2007). Spirituality is also defined as intrinsically based beliefs in which
personal values are used for guiding the individual in day-to-day life (Mackey & Sparling, 2000). Witmer and Sweeney (1992) have identified the dimensions of spirituality as spiritual beliefs, experiences of oneness with the universe and inner life, inner wisdom, higher consciousness or the spirit of God, meaning in life, hope, optimism and values. Piedmont (1999) suggested that spirituality may represent a sixth factor of personality independent of the Big Five Personality traits and includes components such as sense of meaning and purpose in life (universality), the degree of interrelatedness or community with others (connectedness), and satisfaction experienced through prayer and meditation (prayer fulfilment).

Psychologists emphasising religion believed that spirituality is a ‘fuzzy’ concept and is misleading. The application of the term ‘fuzzy’ to spirituality was first made by Spilka (1993) and was then supported by Zinnbauer et al (1999). However, qualitative analysis of descriptions revealed that rather than being ‘fuzzy’, spirituality is a fluid term allowing for wide range of spiritual experiences that many conservative religious traditions reject (Hood, 2003).

It is important to note here that unlike in the West, there are not many definitions of spirituality available in the East. For instance, in India, spirituality is rooted in the way of living of people and is not a concept which can be defined narrowly in different ways. The great spiritual thinkers such as Mahatama Gandhi, Tulsidas, Kabir and Swami Vivekananda etc. have given rich accounts of their teachings on the concepts of self realization, understanding the purpose of life, exploring the eternal truth, universal brotherhood, truthfulness, different ways leading to high states of awareness, rising above ignorance, importance of meditation, and various paths to attainment of pure bliss. Different themes of spirituality have been elaborated by them and further explained with various examples of teachings of sages and saints from Vedas and Upanishads. Teachings of Patanjali in yoga Sutras, Raja Janka in Ashtavakra Gita, Krishna in Bhagwad Gita have been largely used in their writings. Some of the thoughts on themes of spirituality are given below;

“All human activity is or should be directed to the realization of the self and in this self realization” (Mahatma Gandhi).
“Not everyone is destined to acquire material knowledge. But all can acquire spiritual knowledge. It is their duty to do so” (Mahtma Gandhi).

“We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature – trees, flowers, grass- grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls.” (Mother Teresa).

Swami Vivekananda’s views on religion and spirituality have been aptly put in the following verse composed by him;

“So long as religion was in the hands of a chosen few or of a body of priests, it was in the temples, it was in the churches, it was in the books, in dogmas, in ceremonials, forms, and rituals. When men have come to the real, universal, spiritual concept, then, and then alone, religion will become real and living; it will come into our very nature, live in every movement of the human being, it will penetrate every pore of society, and be infinitely more a power for good than it has ever been before”.

2.2. Religion and Spirituality as Conceptualized in Different Cultures

The conceptualizations and manifestations of Spirituality and Religion are inherently rooted in the culture of a society. The notions of faith, values, spiritual concerns, ultimate reality and paths to attainment of the ultimate are embedded in the cultural mesh of a particular society. According to Sinha (2004), culture reinforces the beliefs, norms, value systems of a society and thereby, also enables to maintain its continuity. The Indian culture is characterized by three major themes: cosmic collectivism, hierarchical order, and spiritual orientation. Cosmic collectivism refers to the viewpoint that the universe consists of diverse forms of animate and inanimate elements which are all interconnected and held together by a sense of unity derived from being parts of the ultimate reality, which is called the Brahman. Further, the whole cosmos and everything within it is arranged in a hierarchical order of being. From inanimate to animates and further, the human beings. The human body itself has five layers ranging from the gross body (the lowest) to the subtle body/ soul (atman) which is the highest and the ultimate or the five koshas starting from annamaya (the
physical body to *anadamaya* (the bliss). Spirituality is inherently built into the Indian psyche (Roland, 1988).

Human beings tend to live through different phases of life and they transcend by rising on a moral or spiritual scale which leads to a transformed, stable, calm and detached mind-set. The cultural platform of India offers germination of seeds of collectivism, non-violence, love, unity, brotherhood, service and self-realization in its people. Compared to the Western world, the East has put more emphasis on spiritual wisdom than on worldly activities and towards the latter stages of life people usually become detached from materialistic pursuits and become more spiritually and religiously devoted.

### 2.3. Understanding of Spirituality by Youth

A few studies have attempted to understand the concept of spirituality as understood by youth from different backgrounds. Faith was studied in an investigation done jointly by Christian Research Association (Australia) and Church of Christ (Thailand). In Australia, approximately 283 in-depth interviews were conducted between the age group of 13-18 years and in Thailand, 80 interviews were conducted among young people between the age group of 13-25 years. The findings of the study revealed that all Thai young people identified with religion and considered it to be important as a basis for morality. It was seen as important as a guide to moral behaviour and also as a way to feel good about life and about oneself. It was a part of moral universe dominated by the law of karma in which most young people saw themselves living. In contrast, many Australian young people neither identified with religion nor considered it important. In both contexts, many young people occasionally/never participated in public or personal religious practices. While many Thai young people were skeptical about some traditional religious beliefs, it was common among Australian young people saw beliefs as something they constructed personally using traditions as resources. In Thailand, religion was a key part of the publicly accepted culture while in Australia, it was seen as a personal lifestyle option outside of oneself. (Hughes et al, 2008).
Similarly, another study to understand the notions of spirituality and faith was done by Rich & Cinnamon (2007) on Arab and Jewish Israeli adolescents. The participants were 36 high school or college students (both males and females). The findings of the study revealed that the notion of transcendence seemed to be the defining characteristic of spirituality irrespective of cultural and gender differences. The essence of spirituality for these youth involved a personal quest, ‘a search for meaning in life’ and ‘engaging in the inner self’. Their spiritual experiences included interpersonal exchange/encounters with others, wonder and deep aesthetic appreciation when contemplating it, change in perspective about self, world and religious experiences. Spirituality was expressed in everyday lives of these youth through significant relations with others, religious beliefs or behaviours. The outcomes of spirituality for these youth were; sense of serenity with the world and peace with oneself (calmness, self-awareness and self-acceptance). Their spiritual images included either an acquaintance who is in touch with them, or a famous secular or religious figure. The notion of transcendence seemed to be the defining characteristic of spirituality irrespective of cultural and gender differences.

2.4. Surveys on Youth and Spirituality

Only a handful of extensive surveys have been done to get insight into the spirituality of youth. Lippman & Keith (2006) reported the World Value Survey (1999-2001), which is the most extensive survey on spirituality. It throws light on the views of 20,000 young adults (18-24 years) from 21 countries across the world, regarding the importance of religion, belief in God, and the importance of God in their life. The belief in God ranged from a low of 40% in Sweden to a high of 100% in Pakistan, and a rating of the importance of God in one’s life as ‘very’ ranged from a low of 2% in Sweden to a 100% in Pakistan. The percentage of youth who reported that religion was very important to their life ranged from a low of 0% in Japan to high of 93% in Nigeria. In Pakistan, 100% of youth reported a belief in God and that God was important in their lives, while 74% reported that religion was important in their lives. Many countries where youth reported the highest levels of belief and importance of
God and religion, were societies with large Muslim population, such as Pakistan, Nigeria, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Turkey, and Bangladesh.

North American young adults reported very high levels of belief in God but lower levels regarding religion and God as important to their lives. More than 90% of young adults in United States and Mexico reported that they believed in God, whereas about half of the sample in the United States and more than half in Mexico reported that they felt religion and God were very important to their lives. In Canada, 84% of young adults believed in God but only 21% regarded religion as very important in their lives, and only 27% reported that God was very important in their lives. Youth in Asia/Pacific were generally less likely than those in less developed regions or those in North America to believe in God, or to feel that religion and God were important, but they were more likely to believe in God and place a high value on religion than those in Western Europe. Indonesia and Philippines showed strong traditional religious cultures and are less developed than other countries in the region. Belief in God is almost in both countries, and both heavily reported God and religion to be important.

The analysis of the above survey, done by Inglehart et al (2004) revealed that, a pattern emerged across demographic grounds of age, gender and socio economic status. Young adults tended to be less likely to say that religion was very important in their lives than were older adults in advanced industrial societies suggesting that younger generations have a more secular outlook. In Islamic societies, the importance of religion was universally high for all age groups. Women were more likely to attach greater importance to religion in their lives across most countries. Youth from less economically developed countries were more spiritual, as well as religious, than those in more economically developed countries.

Some of the surveys on Indian youth were done by the daily newspaper, Hindustan Times. The results of the small survey revealed that spirituality in today’s times has not been confined solely to visiting sacred places or worshipping idols at home. It has got much more integrated into the way of living for Indian youth. They were found to imbibe and implement the messages and ideologies given by particular belief system
which they chose to follow. Incorporating the virtues and behaviors prescribed by Buddhism, imbibing the qualities of Lord Shiva of that of calmness, peacefulness as well as destruction in their daily lives was reported by youth in the survey. Meditation was seen to be important for them irrespective of their religion and belief system (Mishra, 2013).

Another detailed survey was done by Hindustan Times, i.e. the MARS Happiness Survey 2013. It investigated the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of youth. The results suggested that happiness and Godliness may not always go together. It measured the happiness of Indian citizens in their daily lives by questioning extremely religious and non-religious people (quantification of religious/non-religious people was not stated in the survey) about their relationships, self-esteem and behaviour. While two-thirds (66.1%) of religious Indians were found to be happy with themselves, three fourths (76.8%) of those who considered themselves as non-religious were also content with themselves. The happiness of individuals in relationships with families was found to be equally stable, regardless of spiritual or religious orientation. Of the sample of religious people, 77.8% were happy with their familial ties, and 78.7% of the non-religious ones shared the same opinion. In terms of abiding by a core set of values, only 22% of non-religious and 33.5% of religious Indians stuck to a code of values in their everyday interactions. An interesting finding was that, religious people took themselves more seriously than the non-religious/spiritual counterparts. Almost half (47%) of religious people, said that they regularly broke out into loud laughter while, 67.1% of non-religious people said that they did so quite often. 39.1% of religious people regularly cracked jokes often compared to the 59.1% of the sample of non-religious Indians. Religious/Spiritual people were high on peaceful sleep than their counterparts. Over half (51.8%) said that they slept without worry and of the non-religious sample, only 37.9% said the same (HT, January 2013).

Similarly, a survey reported by Lippman & Keith (2006), conducted by University of California in 2004 which shed light on spirituality of 3680 American college students, attending 46 diverse colleges and universities across the country revealed that college students reported high levels of spiritual engagement and commitment, with 58%
placing a high value on integrating spirituality in their lives, 77% believing that they were all spiritual beings and engaging in prayer, 71% stating that they gained spiritual strength by trusting in a higher power, and 76% reported that religious/spiritual beliefs had given meaning and/or purpose to their lives. Women appeared more spiritual and had a greater commitment than men.

In another similar survey of 729 adults in the United States who were a part of a religious or spiritual community, 47% strongly agreed with the statement that they were spiritually committed (Winseman, 2002). Similarly, in a survey of 1,509 adults, it was revealed that in the United States, 69% expressed a need to experience spiritual growth in their daily lives, and 40% of the people reported the presence of a profound spiritual experience that altered the direction of their lives (Gallup & Johnson, 2003).

2.5. Spiritual Experiences

The advancement in the research related to spirituality has been tremendous in the current decade, yet the experiential component of the multifaceted concept of spirituality warrants more attention. However, a handful of researchers have focussed on the spiritual experiences of the individuals. Kass et al (1991) have emphasized the importance of core spiritual experience in promoting spirituality. According to them, these experiences consist of two components, an event accompanied by a cognitive analysis of the event, which asserts an individual’s belief in supreme/higher power, and a personal relationship between the person and the supreme/higher power.

A unique study done by Mohan (1999) observed the effects of the spiritual experiences of 200 respondents in the age range of 20-70 years belonging to 13 different spiritual organizations based on Hindu Philosophy. The findings revealed that individuals having spiritual experiences were generally happy, cheerful and at peace most of the time, and were rarely depressed. The values and motivations which gave them meaning and purpose in life were basically those directed towards personal growth and maintaining close relationships with loved ones. They were satisfied with the meaning and purpose they found in their lives and also reported good health. A significant number of respondents said that spiritual experiences they had were valuable or beneficial to them. These experiences had a reference to God or the
Higher Power. They reported increased humanistic and spiritual concerns, and decreased negative feelings and beliefs.

A very comprehensive study was done by Nelson & Hart (2003) to find out the importance of spiritual experiences by assessing the frequency and variety of the ‘recalled spiritual experiences’. The participants in the study were 450 undergraduate students at the State University of West Georgia. The data were analysed under four categories of experiences; wonder, wondering, relational spirituality and wisdom, as these were considered to be inherent to the spiritual life of people. The findings of the study threw light on the diverse spiritual experiences and capacities of children which coexist with the egocentric tendencies typical to the stage of development. Nearly 80% of youth said that they ‘sometimes’ felt a sense of awe and wonderment inspired by the immediate world around them and of those, 85% reported first occurrence of such an experience before the age of 18 (Wonder). The connectedness and unity of everything in the world was also experienced by many of them. As children they had pondered on questions related to life, its purpose, meaning, knowledge, truth, justice, reality and death (Wondering). This radical questioning which the children naturally have about life is usually attained after intensive spiritual practices when one tends to look inwards and starts acknowledging the quest for searching the purpose of life. These questions themselves offer deep spiritual experiences and curiosity to unravel the mysteries of self and life. Around 61% of the sample had experience of receiving guidance from some source outside their physical world (Wisdom) and 85% of those indicated that this experience occurred before the age of 18 years. Interestingly, 70% of young adults indicated that they had experiences that fell under relational spirituality (profound sense of interconnection with everything and even the cosmos).

Nelson & Hart (2003) referred to this natural ability of children in the context of spiritual experiences as ‘absorption’. It is closely related to the concept of flow experiences given by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), in which the intensive engagement in a particular task of personal expressiveness leads to the absorption state of the person. In this state, the awareness of self and time ceases to exist and it is total engrossment in the experience of the present moment, which in itself is a spiritual experience.
The above mentioned study, uniquely throws light on two understudied aspects of spirituality; the spiritual experience, and the experiences in childhood and adolescents. Both have not received much attention of researchers till date. Although the research method focused primarily on recalling the childhood experiences by young adults and it may not be enough to tap the experiences of such an abstract and inherent phenomena. But it definitely throws light on the fact that spirituality is much deeper than thought and typical to all stages of development.

2.6. Correlates of Spirituality

Spirituality and religion have been correlated with many aspects and dimensions of human life and behavior. Some of the studies reflecting these correlates have been mentioned below;

2.6.1. Spirituality and Physical Health

A strong body of research has brought out the potential of spirituality/religiosity in promoting and maintaining physical and mental health. The positive effects of spirituality in enhancing the mental and physical conditions of individuals have been recognized worldwide.

The ancient Indian Vedic texts propose an essential unity of mind and body and delineate various theories and practices to deal with a large number of health related issues. The emphasis on balance between physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects has always been an integral part of notions of health and well-being in a wide range of Indian scriptures. Ayurveda is recognized as traditional, natural classification of medicine in India which has been practiced worldwide as a form of unconventional medicine for more than 5,000 years. Ayurvedic therapy aims at rectifying the doshas or the imbalances of body and mind, namely vata, pitta and kapha and restoring the equilibrium (Dalal & Misra, 2006). In Ayurveda, balance or equilibrium (sama) is synonymous with health. The maintenance of equilibrium between them is equated with health and, conversely, the disturbance of the equilibrium of these three elements characterizes the state of disease. Ayurveda has given a number of medicinal preparations, surgical procedures, spiritual and yogic
practices for curing various ailments and diseases in a holistic manner. The approach is focused on prevention through correct diet, exercise, meditation and cultivation of the right attitude by being spiritual. The therapeutic techniques and natural medicines aim to restore balance and harmony in body and mind (Awasthi, 2011). The Indian Upanishads and Vedas have delineated principles to lead a happy and healthy life and gradually attain the ultimate (*moksha*). The yogic practices are integral in treating numerous physical and mental disorders. Recently, yogic postures have been brought to extensive application and practice by modern spiritual Gurus like Baba Ramdev, Bhartiya Yoga Sansthan and Art of Living, among others.

A number of correlational studies have shown that spiritual or religious affiliation is positively correlated with good physical health and stamina and inversely correlated with physical disorders and consumption of alcohol, cigarette and drugs in youth. The empirical work on investigating the relation between youth and spirituality has largely focussed on the effects of spiritual involvement on consumption and addiction of alcohol, smoke and drugs, whereas for older age-group there is enormous research evidence indicating relation between spirituality and recovery from various severe physiological disorders.

Less co-relational work on spirituality and youth is available in the Indian context, as the Western approach to the concept of spirituality is largely based on the dimensions of church attendance or assessment of spirituality through various standardized measures. Contrary to this viewpoint, Indian interpretation of spirituality is much broader and inherent in the total way of living.

A study in this area was done by Nelms et al (2007) to examine the relationship between spirituality and health risks of 221 college students by administering the College Student Appraisal of Risks Survey and the Spirituality Scale. The results indicated significant relationship between self-reported levels of spirituality and the health of college students. In the study, 17 participants reported their *current health status* as poor or fair, 95 participants reported their current health status as good and 42 participants who reported their current health status as excellent. The *overall physical health* as poor or fair was reported by 20 participants, 82 participants
reported it as good and 39 participants reported overall physical health as excellent. In the study, 73% participants indicated that they were mostly satisfied in life. Alcohol related health risk behaviour, were less reported by youth having high levels of reported spirituality. The researchers concluded that college students who regarded themselves as healthy individuals (current and overall physical health) tend to be more spiritual. The college students, who were less likely to practice risky health behaviours, were high on self-reported spirituality. Non-smoking college students, rooted in spirituality, were found to be less likely to succumb to peer pressure in regard to using tobacco and more likely to promote ones healthy behavior, practice independence and experience better physical health. Students with high level of self-reported spirituality were found to be less likely to drink alcohol and they were high on life satisfaction.

Several studies have illustrated that spiritual beliefs may change negative trajectories in various behaviours of youth into positive ones. Wills et al (2003), in a sample of 1,182 adolescents at risk, found that spiritual beliefs had a buffering effect on youth. In stressful life events, youth who were high on the religious/spiritual dimensions, were less likely to use drugs and alcohol. Larson & Larson (2003) cited significant research evidence indicating that youth who were more religious, were less likely to experiment with alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. Of 14,000 youths surveyed, researchers found that the more religiously committed, the less likely young adults were to experiment with drugs. These studies suggest that spiritual meaning offers a way to transcend the stress and even a mental storm in youth.

Boras et al (2008) assessed the role of religion in cigarette smoking with 15 schizophrenic patients through interviews and the salience of religiousness (i.e. the frequency of religious activities and the subjective importance of religion in daily life), religious coping and synergy with psychiatric care through 5 points quantification. The findings revealed that 58% of patients were smokers. It was also found that two-third of the total sample considered spirituality as very essential in their everyday lives. Most of them (82%) had a religious affiliation. More than two-third of patients reported regular private practices such as prayer, meditation, reading religious material, worship, etc and one-third reported regular religious practices in
the community such as attending church services, prayer, meditation, worship or reading religious material with others. Religion played an important role in the daily lives of about three-quarters of patients, and in coping with difficulties for more than half of them. Religiosity was associated negatively with tobacco use; there were more current smokers without religious affiliation than non-smokers (p<0.05). For the patients who were non-smokers, the support of their faith community was significantly more important and they reported more frequent group religious practices than smokers (p<0.05).

Spirituality and religiousness have invariably been shown to be associated with lower smoking rates in the general population also. Brown & Gary (1994) found that African- American men in the general population who frequently visited church were only two-third as likely to be current smokers as those who attended less frequently. Another similar study done by Francis & Mullen (1993), showed that youth who were not affiliated to any religious group but were less likely to agree that smoking behaviour was wrong compared to affiliated believers not attending (47%), believers attending occasionally (45%) and believers attending regularly (56%).

2.6.2. Social Role of Spirituality and Religion

The social role of spirituality begins with its roots in all ancient scriptures which prescribe discouraging the negative thoughts and evil feelings for others and encouraging the enhancement of qualities of true self which are joy, bliss, love, happiness and meaningfulness. The love for self usually transcends to love for others and the entire creation which is one consciousness. The biographies of Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Mother Teresa and many other Indian role models portray their life stories embedded with the essence of being spiritual and their selfless service to humanity.

The spiritual way of living enhances love, concern and sensitivity for happiness of others along with one self. The empirical work related to this aspect has largely focused on the socialization of children in particular religious/spiritual group or the
engagement of spiritual or religious people in activities of social welfare and its comparisons with the control group.

Spiritual and religious activities provide a platform for youth to form peer groups and socialise within those groups of similar age-groups. Though religious worship is primarily a feature of family participation, the extended social activities involve interaction with the age mates. Verma & Saraswathi (2002) in describing the role of religion in the lives of youth in India, pointed out that idols are present at houses in India invariably and youth engage in brief period of daily idol worship or they visit the religious sites to worship with their families.

The role of religion in the social lives of young adults was shown in a study undertaken by Welti (2002), in which Latin American youth were found to identify more with peers with whom they attended private and religious sectarian schools than other age mates. Since they got ample opportunities to interact with their peers during religious activities, they became more cohesive with them. In such a case, religion more importantly plays a social role in peer socialization.

Culture or the philosophy of faith groups has a significant effect on the socialization practices of youth. For instance, religious leaders socialize young people into belief systems, which in turn can result in behaviors that are prosocial (community work) and in some cases antisocial (terrorism) for the sake of ensuring the transmission of their beliefs to future generations (Patel, 2007). This socialization by fundamentalist groups is perceived by both Egyptian and Indian youth as a method of alienating themselves from their conservative parents (Booth, 2002; Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). Religion and spirituality offers immense opportunities to the young adults to become more socially aware and thus also become a medium of change. Youth find religion as a pathway through which they can participate in challenging an existing social order and introduce change in society (Verma & Maria, 2006). However, religion and spirituality also play an important role in making youth sensitive towards their surrounding and contributing to the society in positive ways.
2.6.3. Spirituality and Civic Engagement

Spirituality plays a vital role in facilitating positive youth development, stimulating integrated moral and civic identity of youth, and leading the individual in becoming an adult contributing integratively to self, family, community and civil society (Lerner et al, 2005). Youth involved across time in positive relations with the community, and on path of ideal adulthood are said to be thriving (Lerner et al, 2005). Spirituality stimulates the adaptive individual context relations which enable youth to contribute to the healthy development of self, family, community and civil society in productive ways.

Donelly et al (2006) gave a theory depicting the pathways between spirituality and civic engagement. According to the theory, spirituality is connected to civic engagement through two pathways. The first pathway emphasises spirituality leading to civic engagement through involvement in organised religion. The second pathway refers to civic engagement as directly connected to spirituality without any mention of the role of religion institution in between. Civic engagement allows for greater socialisation with others in the community and can, therefore, lead to an increase in ‘social capital’.

Mickleburgh (2004) pointed out that involvement of growing number of people in spiritual practices such as meditation and yoga suggests that many individuals are interested in optimising their spiritual potential in an effort to produce self-perfection which often includes a concern for world peace and the environment. Youth utilise spiritual and religious affiliations as common link through which the members get together and contribute towards a larger civic cause (Verma & Maria, 2006).

Several empirical investigations have found correlation between the spiritual and religious involvement with civic engagement in youth. In a study of high school students who identified themselves as religious, Metz & Youniss (2003) found that they were more likely to volunteer, participate in school organizations, and had higher grade point averages. Most of these students were females.

Several studies have also suggested that engagement of youth in social work is significantly seen to be connected to spirituality outside the context of religion. The
study done by Hart & Fegley (1995) showed that extremely compassionate and civically engaged youth were more likely than the control group to be connected to their moral principles and to a transcended self. Similarly, Matsuba & Walker (2005) studied the life narratives of a group of youth who had been involved with the social work and were nominated as moral exemplars. In comparison to the typical youth, the moral exemplars were more likely to mention empowerment themes when recalling past significant events of their lives. The past transcendent experiences of both the groups were positively correlated with the depth of current ideological beliefs which suggests that their transcendent experiences may have helped shape their ideological beliefs and hence more of such experiences may orient youth towards social service.

In another study, during interviews of young members of a Buddhist organisation, it came out that they contributed selflessly towards the Tsunami victims in southern Asia in 2004, even when it involved their own financial resources. The reason for doing so, as reported by them, was providing humanitarian relief which is taught to them in the religious/spiritual group. They believed that one cannot be truly happy if other people around are not happy and also considered the World as one Family (Ikeda, 2000).

2.6.4 Spirituality and Mental Health

2.6.4.1. Yoga and Meditation: Integral parts of Spirituality

Yoga is an entire system of concrete steps towards attaining physical and mental balance and also attaining the state of blissfulness or liberation. Its emphasis on the unity of body, mind and soul requires dedicated attention to disciplining oneself in all aspects of life. It includes all spiritual practices, asanas and also meditation. Recently, yoga is being loosely used only to refer to the set of postures or asanas which are done to attain physical and mental relief.

The Patanjali yoga sutras postulates an eight-limbed path of Yoga or the ashtanga yoga which comprises of Yama, the vows of self-restraint include refraining oneself from violence, falsehood, greed and other such tendencies, Niyamas, the vows of observances include purity, contentment, truth, surrender to a higher power, Asanas,
the physical postures important in the practice of Yoga, Pranayama, breathing patterns to direct prana to different channels of body, Pratyahara, withdrawal of senses from the objects, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi, all different levels of meditative states, Samadhi, the deepest state of pure awareness (Kapur, 2011).

Yoga is an important tool which not only serves as prevention and cure of physical disorders but also results in mental peace and higher psychic and spiritual attainments. The psychological effects of yoga are well known in reducing levels of anxiety, improving concentration, memory, learning and psychomotor performance (Selvamurthy, 1993), in managing stress (Jangid et al, 1988), bringing positive psychological changes in terms of enhancing interaction with others, locus of control, self-worth, emotional adjustment, and well-being (Rangaswami, 1996).

The impact of yoga training on the body image and moods was investigated by Rani & Rao (2005) in a group of 40 adults (23 males and 17 females) in the age range of 20-29 years who underwent a two week yoga training programme at the Institute for Yoga and Consciousness, Andhra University, Vishakhapatnam. The tools used for data collection were; Body Image Scale (Alsaker, 1992) and the Depressed mood/depressive tendencies scale by Alsaker (1992). The study pointed out the beneficial effects of the programme on body image and depression. The reasons for overcoming body dissatisfaction pointed put by the researchers were that in Yoga, the practitioners become highly aware of their body and learn to detach themselves from their body image, which gives them relief from emotional strain precipitated by the body image dissatisfaction. Another reason stated was that the novice practitioners notice the ease and flexibility with which he/she could perform postures. Observing own body during the practice sessions may have contributed to develop positive thoughts about the body. Thus, gradually negative thoughts involved in body dissatisfaction may gradually have been replaced by positive thoughts and positive body image.

The effects of meditation have also gained scientific interest during recent times. Quality research has demonstrated many mental and physical health benefits of regular meditative practices (Shapiro & Walsh, 2007). Health research has shown
meditation to be an important catalyst in recovery of patients with various physical and mental disorders. It has been linked to physical health benefits, such as reduced physiological arousal and improved outcomes among patients. (Seeman et al, 2003). Experimental studies have also confirmed some of these findings among youth as well. Compared to controls, high school students trained in meditation were found to experience improved self-esteem, lower systolic and diastolic ambulatory blood pressure, lower resting blood pressure, decreased heart rates, and reduced cardiovascular reactivity in a study by Barnes et al (2004).

Mindfulness meditation has had the best acceptance among health professionals. Benefits of regular meditative practices include stress reduction, acceptance of self and others as well as improved coping and relationships. Vipassana, one of the Buddhist Mindfulness meditation techniques, consists of mindful observation of whatever arises in consciousness. A study done by Emavardhana & Tori (1997) assessed changes in self-concept, ego defence mechanisms, and Buddhist beliefs occurring over the course of seven-day Vipassana meditation programme on teenagers. Two cohorts of meditation participants (N1 = 222, N2 = 216) who attended separate programmes were utilized for the purpose of the study. The assessment measures used were; Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (100-item multidimensional personality inventory that assesses internal and external aspects of self-representation by Roid and Fitts 1988), Life Style Index (97-item Life Style Index) by Plutchik, Kellerman, and Conte (1979) and Buddhist Beliefs and Practices Scale (11-item scale which assessed Buddhist beliefs and practices). The results indicated significant changes in the way self is perceived and defended after taking up Vipassana programme. The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale scores of meditators underwent transformation showing increase in overall self-esteem, feelings of personal worth, benevolence, and self-acceptance. The unconscious coping mechanisms of the Vipassana participants were also altered. At post-testing, they were less affected by external stimuli and sexual impulses than controls. Those in the meditation groups, were less likely to use the defences of displacement, projection, and regression with greater use of denial. Heightened belief in Buddhist precepts was associated with positive change in self-concept and less self-criticism. A greater acceptance of
nonattachment was significantly correlated with a heightened sense of personal worth and fulfillment (Emavardhana & Tori, 1997). The meditative experiences offer immense restfulness and an opportunity to the practitioners to go deep inside, realise the ‘inner self’ and, thus, become more effective in dealing with the situations in the outside world.

2.6.4.2. Spirituality: A Precursor to Happiness and Well-Being

Over the past few decades there has been growing academic interest in the field of Positive Psychology with special emphasis on happiness and well-being. There has been remarkable empirical examination of the two constructs with respect to their components, correlates and the positive effects on behavior and life of an individual. Spirituality has been found to positively contribute to both happiness and well-being.

According to the Indian nomenclature, well-being refers to the harmony of indriyas, chitta and atman. It is described as the well-being on physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of the life of an individual (Misra, 2007). According to the Indian philosophy, wellbeing and good life can be obtained by minimization of desires, self-regulation, and detachment, and striving for need fulfillment. It includes the idea of giving up and letting go rather than controlling, identifying and holding on. Tusti (contentment) is postulated to be more important than tripti (pleasure), and sukha, (happiness) in the Indian context (Kumar, 2006).

The Indian tradition in general recognizes the scheme of four goals of human life (purusartha), which are dharma (means to secure rewards of heavenly well-being), artha (political and economic success), kama (pleasures obtained through gratification of erotic needs) and moksha (liberation). Artha and dharma imply the potential to enjoy pleasure at a later time but not instantly. The Hindu philosophy emphasizes on prarabdha karma (accumulated deeds). The happiness or sorrow in present life is a cumulative result of both the actions performed by an individual in present and past life. Moksha is a state of ultimate happiness which is distinguished from the ordinary happiness. Thus, all the four goals are reduced to the attainment of happiness and avoidance of pain (Srivastava & Misra, 2003).
The ancient scriptures have explicitly emphasized the modes of attainment of happiness and well-being. The philosophy of avoidance of the extremes and maintaining balance or equilibrium between all human functioning is extensively suggested in Bhagavad Gita to be the characteristic of a person who is wise and can enjoy a state of psychological well-being (Sinha, 1965). The Taittiriya Upanishad has mentioned that happiness, joy and well-being are the moments when there is an unobstructed manifestation of ananda (bliss), which is our original or true nature. It is the opaqueness of our mental faculties that obstruct the manifestation and experience of ananda. Greater is the transparency of the mental faculties, i.e., sattva, greater is the experience of ananda. The anandmaya kosha (ananda means happy, maya means filled with) constitutes of the ultimate happiness (Kumar, 2006).

Srivastava & Misra (2003) analyzed a large number of suktis related to happiness. Some of the salient features of happiness in these were: contentment (to be satisfied with what one has), control over desires, surrender (to the divine or higher power), non-attachment, equanimity in opposites (remaining stable in joy or sorrow), perseverance and hard work, relating to others, knowledge as source of happiness (about self and world to overcome ignorance) and the role of karma.

It is evident that Indian tradition treats spirituality as inherent to happiness and well-being and vice-versa. The concepts are extremely overlapping and share an intense relationship with each other. The effect of spiritual living on the experience of these states is apparent in the basic premise of Indian literature. The approach to study the effects of one on the other by narrowing down the interpretation of each of these constructs is relatively recent in the Indian context. However, the empirical demands entail these conceptual compromises to be able to generate the scientific explanations of the constructs.

The positive impact of spirituality has also been observed in various studies conducted in Indian settings. Purohit et al (2010) conducted a research to investigate the effects of two systems of meditation on adolescents’ stress, coping, locus of control and optimism. The sample consisted of 400 adolescents, 200 (100 boys, 100 girls) undergoing Vipassana meditation training, and 200 (100 boys and 100 girls)
undergoing Transcendental Meditation. Two standardised instruments were used for assessment; Coping Response Inventory developed by Rudaf, Moos and Asufa, Inventory developed by Pareek, taken as indicators of Optimism and Locus of Control. Results indicated that Transcendental Meditation had greater influence on locus of control and optimism of adolescents whereas Vipassana had greater influence on stress coping of adolescents. Study revealed that meditation techniques lower distress and enhance positive psychological aspects like coping, stress, life satisfaction, overall evaluation of life situation, and reduces negative effects like stress and depression. Thus, meditational techniques facilitate relaxation and consequently help in reducing psychological dysfunction and enhancing subjective well-being.

Similarly, in a study on 465 Hindus aged 30-50 years, Naidu and Panda (1990) concluded that those who scored low on the concept of non-attachment (integral to spirituality) were high on stress indicating that non-attachment reduces stress by eliminating negative emotions.

A number of research studies in West have also affirmed that spirituality has a vital role in contributing to the well-being of an individual. According to Edwards (2005), psychological well-being is referred to as positive mental health. Research has shown that psychological well-being is a diverse multidimensional concept (MacLeod & Moore, 2000), which develops through a combination of emotional regulation, personality characteristics, identity and life experience (Helson & Srivastava, 2001). Psychological well-being includes meaning in life, absence of somatic symptoms, self-esteem, positive affect, efficiency in daily activities, satisfaction, absence of suicidal ideas, personal control, social support, absence of tension, wellness and general efficiency. According to Witmer & Sweeney (1992), psychological well-being includes characteristics of a healthy person which are; a sense of worth, control, realistic beliefs, spontaneity, emotional responsiveness, intellectual stimulation, problem solving, creativity and sense of humour.

Elizabeth (2006) suggested that well-being to some extent depends on having a purpose in life beyond one-self, goals to pursue, or other transcendent meaning to
life’s activities. These needs can be fulfilled in both religious and existential ways. High spiritual well-being can be understood as happiness or contentment that is the by-product of attending to meanings that lie in a realm beyond self. Low spiritual well-being can be seen as distress caused by an unfulfilled need for transcendence. Spirituality and religion also appear to provide a unique form of social support, strengthen family relationship, improve personal growth and development, and encourage the meaning making through which youth can make sense of stressful events in life. Religion and spirituality offer the formation of a relationship with spiritual entity or divinity which provides a sense of security and well-being. When this relationship is perceived as caring and compassionate, then there is an experience of strength and confidence in life which facilitates coping in stressful situations (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Spirituality and religion may also promote positive well-being in at risk youth by offering important coping and social skills. Religious worship often encourages the on-going experience of positive emotions and rest, meditation, and quiet reflection, all of which are associated with good mental and physical health (Powell et al, 2003).

The effects of an intervention programme on psychological well-being of 60 unmarried females was investigated by Elizabeth (2006). They had low well-being on all dimensions; psychological, spiritual, social and physical. Half of the participants were a part of the intervention group and the other half formed the control group. The measures used for data collection were: Psychological well-being scale by Bhogle and Prakash (1995), and Spiritual Well-Being scale by Ellison and Paloutzian (1982). The intervention sessions included exercises designed to experience closeness to the inner self, initiate the experiences of different aspects of spiritual life during childhood and consequent reflections and those leading to experiences of peace, joy and security of the divine presence within themselves. In the follow up sessions, the participants reported positive attitude towards self, they felt closer to themselves, family, friends and everyone around them and witnessed an improvement in their coping skills. The stability of the psychological well-being scores in the follow up assessment stage indicated the efficacy of the intervention programme. The participants also reported hope, forgiveness, kindness, determination, confidence and a sense of belongingness.
with self and others. They gained a positive image of themselves. The findings revealed that the group exposed to the intervention programme was better than the control groups on the measure of spiritual well-being, religious well-being and existential well-being.

Another interesting study done by Kashdan & Nezlek (2012) focussed on spirituality of youth in their daily lives. The research attempted to find out if people experienced greater spirituality on some days than others, the relation of spirituality with well-being and if within person relationships between spirituality and well-being vary as a function of trait spirituality. The data was collected from 150 college students through self-report questionnaires, daily online reports for 2 weeks, and scores on Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale by Hatch, Burg, Naberhaus, & Hellmich (1998). The findings of the study revealed that daily spirituality was positively related to meaning in life, self-esteem, and positive affect. The link from daily spirituality to both self-esteem and positive affect was fully mediated by meaning in life. The within-person relationships between daily spirituality and self-esteem and meaning in life were stronger for people higher in trait spirituality. There was a positive relationship between present day spirituality and next day’s meaning in life but no evidence for meaning in life as a predictor of the next day’s spirituality was obtained in the study. When focusing on affect, for people higher in trait spirituality, greater negative affect (and lower positive affect) predicted greater spirituality the next day. The study interestingly brings out that spirituality is an inevitable part of an individual, the experiences of which are manifested in the day to day lives.

Another investigation focussing on spirituality and well-being described religion and spirituality as coping mechanisms. They were found to be important in life of urban African American male youth and resulted in development of a healthy sense of self, and self in relation with others. They reported enhanced emotional well-being being, more positive feeling about the future, feeling of being valued by others, and perceived popularity with peers (Spencer et al, 2003). Meaningful social roles are often found to lower the feelings of distress and enhance self-worth in youth. Faith communities often teach God as loving and powerful, and that all of us have a purpose to fulfil, or special deeds to perform.
Young et al (1998) demonstrated that positive moral development and a sense of meaning in life are related to spirituality of young people. Steward & Hanik (1998) found that Afro-American teenagers who reported high levels of spirituality also showed greater levels of well-being and use of constructive coping mechanisms, such as, social support. Interestingly, Mores (2000) discovered that scholastically outstanding female Latino- American students attributed much of their success to spiritual sources.

2.6.4.3 Spirituality and Other Positive Mental States

Spirituality in the framework of well-being has also been related to many positive psychological traits such as happiness, hope, optimism, forgiveness, gratitude as its outcomes. With the mushrooming of research in the field of positive psychology, the attention has been given to the happiness studies, but other positive states still warrant urgent attention of scholars.

Hill & Pargament (2003) suggested that people with a spiritual framework for life feel empowered by a sense of preserving to meet transcended goals, they tend to cope with stresses of life easily by practicing virtues such as compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, honesty, integrity and hope which have themselves been associated with better physical and mental health. Similarly, Shapiro et al (2002) put forth that as a result of prayer, meditation and other techniques, important self-regulatory skills, and mindfulness qualities such as acceptance, patience, gratitude, non-judgemental attitude, openness and surrender can be acquired and can be also used to promote healing and personal development.

The image of ‘just’ God and as the one who gives strength to overcome all obstacles in life with his grace coupled with belief that all happens for good stimulates the experience of positive states in youth. Such beliefs inspire hope that despite the adverse events that have happened as long as one follows God’s plan, nothing can deter one from achieving the ultimate goal. Thus, faith, hope and belief in God’s love, serve as motivating and inspiring factors for youth leading to positive results (Snyder et al, 2002). Religious/Spiritual involvement has been widely associated with positive
emotions, such as greater life satisfaction, well-being, hope, optimism, and meaning and purpose in life, which help to neutralize the negative emotions that underlie depression and suicide (Bonelli et al, 2012).

Religious and spiritual people are found to be happier and satisfied with life. Peterson & Seligman (2004) studied degrees of religious involvement; such as closeness to God, spiritual striving or spiritual commitment and found that higher level of commitment is related to higher level of satisfaction in life. The positive correlation of religion and happiness is stronger among the elderly. It is associated with less delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse and sexual activity in youth. Koenig et al (2001) provided an extensive review of relationship between religious/ spiritual involvement and health outcomes. Mental health outcomes included the absence of depression, suicide, anxiety disorders, martial instability, alcohol, and drug abuse.

Spiritual beliefs can provide a basis for transcendent sense of personal worth, efficacy, mastery and purpose in life. People with strong spiritual striving reported higher levels of satisfaction, a greater sense of purpose in life and higher levels of well-being (Emmons et al, 1998).

An interesting study conducted by Salsman et al (2005) investigated whether optimism and social support mediated or facilitated the relationship between religiousness and adjustment (distress and life satisfaction) and between spirituality and adjustment. The participants in the study were 2017 students, 18-46 years in age, from the University of Kentucky attending undergraduate classes. The findings revealed that optimism fully mediated the relationship between intrinsic religiousness/spirituality and psychological distress and partially mediated the relationship between intrinsic religiousness and satisfaction with life and between prayer fulfilment and satisfaction with life. Social support fully mediated the relationship between intrinsic religiousness and psychological distress and partially mediated the relationship between intrinsic religiousness and satisfaction with life and between prayer fulfilment and satisfaction with life. Social support is an essential component of an individual’s well-being (Suri, 2010). The findings in the study suggested that social networks are associated with greater satisfaction with life. Participation in religious
services provides a mechanism for increased social contacts and improved social support.

In another study, Plante et al (2000) noted that strength of religious faith was positively associated with optimism among college students. People who were high in spirituality/religiousness tended to be high in optimism, and optimism was associated with greater life satisfaction and less psychological distress. Sethi & Seligman (1993) found that among nine Jewish, Christian and Muslim groups, the more fundamentalist the group was, the more hopeful and optimistic the participant’s outlook was in his life. A study done by Mohan & Singh (2010) aimed at exploring the relationship of forgiveness with religious coping and well-being in 120 youth (60 girls and 60 boys) in the age range of 18-22 years who were randomly selected from different colleges in Punjab. The findings depicted positive correlation between forgiveness and religious coping and forgiveness and well-being.

The relation between well-being and religiousness and spirituality has been observed in various age groups including adolescents and the elderly. For example, a study of adolescents, young adults, and older adults reported that people in all three age groups, who considered themselves to be religious, were happier than people who did not consider themselves to be religious (Francis et al. 2000). Spirituality often increases social relations (Ellison, 1991), and social relations are critical factors in happiness of children as well as adults (Holder & Coleman, 2008).

A study done by Holder & Coleman (2008) assessed the relation between spirituality and happiness in 320 children aged 8–12 years from public and private faith-based schools. Children rated their own spirituality using the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire and 11 items selected and modified from the Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality which reflected the children’s practices and beliefs. The findings revealed that children who indicated that they were more spiritual were happier based on self-reports and reports by their parents. In particular, the personal (meaning and value in one’s own life) and communal (quality and depth of inter-personal relationships) domains of spirituality were strong predictors of children’s happiness. The relationship between positive emotional health and religion
was also investigated by Frankel and Hewitt (1994) on a Canadian college campus. In regard to religion and well-being, the study found that groups which affiliated with religious organizations on campus reportedly were happier and more satisfied with life than the non-affiliated student groups.

A cross-national survey in 2004 on adults in the United States revealed that people who reported more spiritual experiences reported greater happiness, self-esteem, and optimism (Ellison & Fan, 2008). Spirituality was found to be significantly correlated with self-esteem, meaning in life, and positive affect, and other positive states (Park, 2007). Consistent with this, in a survey of 1,564 people, social connectedness was found to be substantially higher in people with stronger spiritual beliefs than for those with weaker beliefs (Greenfield et al, 2009). Spirituality and religion have been heavily related to numerous positive life outcomes for young adults, such as healthy attitudes and behaviors as well as high self-esteem (Rew & Wong, 2006; Zullig et al, 2006).

It is evident from the above stated empirical studies that most of the work on the impact of spirituality on various dimensions of life of an individual is correlational and quantitative. The review brings out the dearth of qualitative research in the area.

2.6.4.4. Spirituality and Coping

Spirituality in the Indian context is closely related to acceptance of traumatic and challenging situations in life. The notion of the present situation in life as a result of present and past deeds leads to the acceptance of the same as a step towards the path of liberation or moksha. Pranjpe (1998) elaborates the importance of karma in the Bhagwad Gita which states that one cannot find an escape from his karmas. Karma is the reason for rebirth and its effects are also manifested in successive lives. The meaning making behind the suffering results in decrease in pain related to the crisis situation. It is kind of attribution which is not connected, perhaps, with retaliatory advances from any side.

Priya (2004) studied the earthquake survivors in Gujarat, India, and found out that people often attributed tragedies to the forces and powers beyond ones control. The survivors attributed their post quake suffering to the intensity of bad karmas done by
them in their past and present lives. Their belief in Karma also resulted in hope and optimism which facilitated their healing process thinking that once they receive punishment for their bad karmas, they shall be redeemed. They also believed that following of right karmas resulted in lesser pain. Agrawal & Dalal (1993) studied patients diagnosed with myocardial infarction. They observed that the patients of different ages, education and income levels believed in the theory of karma, God, and a ‘just world’. Those who believed in karma as a cause of their condition showed high expectation for recovery.

Various ways of reaching the happiness state have been prescribed in the Indian context, which facilitate coping in stressful situations. For instance, detachment has been identified as an important virtue for attaining true happiness or the state of bliss. The results of detachment from situation, pleasures, relationships and other constituents of outer world inherently strengthens an individual to remain stable and effectively cope with the events responsible for stress and trauma. Other components of spirituality, such as prayers, meditation, yoga have also been identified as important elements facilitating the process of coping. Doing poojas, havans, offerings to the God, dana and japas are also some of the religious ways adopted to pray to God for decreasing the sufferings associated with trauma in life.

There is a large body of research which demonstrates the effects of spiritual practices on health and well-being of an individual. Spiritual practices tend to be extremely powerful in coping. The spiritual coping behaviour is a frequent response to a stressful situation and has significant relation with a wide variety of positive states, adjustment factors, including greater happiness and life satisfaction (Bergan & MConatha, 2000), social support (Simoni et al, 2002), optimism (Gall et al, 2000) and better physical health. They have also been associated with lower rates of coronary disease, lower blood pressure, reduced levels of pain in cancer patients and increased positive health habits and longevity (Seybold & Hill, 2001).

Several studies have found that spirituality plays an important role in finding meaning in a stressful event. Spiritual involvement helps an individual to find meaning of negative event that has happened in life and seeing opportunities for growth or
benefits resulting from a particular event (Park et al, 2001). The stressful event can be reframed as a spiritual opportunity that offers benefits (Pargament, 1997), and a chance to gain deep insights about life (Pryds et al, 2000). If a higher power is perceived to be working in a stressful event, then the event may be viewed as an opportunity to learn something that the higher power or supernatural power is trying to teach (Emmons, 1999).

Spirituality has been linked to a sense of sacred, connectedness to the entire creation besides its role as an important source of coping (Suzuki, 2002). A study in this context, revealed that Appalachian women’s found that their concept of spirituality was linked to their connectedness to the natural world. They derived strength and a sense of rootedness and groundedness from their interaction with nature. Their indulgence in gardening became a medium of spiritual experience for them (Burkhardt, 1994).

Research indicates that relationship with the Transcendent (God) plays an important role in the coping process (Maynard et al, 2001), especially, if the Transcendent (God) is perceived to be nurturing, loving, comforting, protective and intimate (Johnson & Spilka, 1991). Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1990) discovered that individuals who described their relationship to the transcendent or God as secure, scored significantly lower on measures of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and physical illness, and higher on general satisfaction in life. This relationship can fulfil multiple functions, such as, provision of comfort, social support, sense of belongingness, inner strength and acceptance, control, relief from emotional distress and finding meaning and purpose of life. (Gall & Comblat, 2002). A positive and accepting attachment with God can exist as an important source of emotional comfort for individuals confronting significant life stress (Siegel & Schrinshaw, 2002).

Bonelli et al (2012) in their review article on Religious and Spiritual Factors in Depression: Review and Integration of the Research, affirmed that researches on depressive symptoms and religious/spiritual (R/S) practices were widespread. The quantitative research examining relationships between R/S involvement and
depression during the last 50 years (1962 to 2011) was analysed by the authors. They found that most of the researches focused on finding relationship between level of Religious or Spiritual involvement (importance of belief, degree of commitment, and amount of time spent in religious activities) and depression rather than simply focusing on religious or spiritual affiliation. Four hundred and forty four quantitative studies examined the effects of R/S intervention on depression between 1962 and 2010. The evidence suggested that religious beliefs and practices helped people cope better with stressful life circumstances, provide meaning and hope, and surround depressed individuals with a support network. High percentage of these studies found inverse relationships between R/S and suicidal attitudes, attempts, and completed suicide. Besides helping people to cope better with life stressors, R/S involvement is found to reduce the probability that stressors will happen at the first place as it effects the daily decisions, life styles, ways of behaving with others, imbibing positive traits such as forgiveness, altruism, cooperation, hope, optimism etc and other health behaviours of an individual (Koenig, 2012). Thus, individual with religious/spiritual involvement would have fewer life stressors. A strong support system involving friends and family is a powerful resource for those facing difficult circumstances out of their control.

As evident in the stated empirical investigation, most of the work on spirituality is correlational and has uncovered relation between aspects of spirituality and certain psychological researches. Research has not yet expanded to get the deeper, more personal meaning of spirituality held by individuals that qualitative research strategies might be more capable of exploring. Qualitative strategies aim to describe phenomena in rich contextually embedded detail and to understand them from personal perspectives. The review of literature indicates that studies done primarily from qualitative angle were needed to probe such involvement and pursuits into the spiritual domain, particularly by youth.
2.7. The Psychosocial Impact of Involvement with Art of Living (AOL) on Youth

There has been a tremendous change in socio-cultural scene in India in the last few decades. Youth who are educated, well settled and well off are increasingly turning towards spirituality. They have rigorously understood the meaning of spirituality and are vocal about their experiences related to specific spiritual organisations that they join. They have shown great involvement with organisations which promote spirituality like Iskon, Isha Foundation, Auro Youth and the Art of Living, among others. These organisations are found to have their following not only in India but also in other parts of the world. The observation of written and electronic media related to spirituality of youth had shown that youth were attracted towards the spiritual practices under the premises of various spiritual organizations. Art of Living emerged as the most popular among those worldwide.

The Art of Living foundation was selected for the present study after realising its worldwide penetration and very high involvement of youth in it. The module of the organisation has a strong spiritual foundation and a unique appeal to youth. Regular YES!+ (Youth Empowerment and Skills) workshop of the Art Of Living which is meant for youth in the age group 18-25 years was found to take place very frequently at (Indian Institute of Technology) IITs, (Indian Institute of Management) IIMs, Howard, Stanford Universities and various other national and international educational institutions and Multinational companies. Art of Living was found to be the most attractive and fashionable amongst youth. Thus, it was selected for the current research.

The focus of the research was not only the group affiliation and assessment of spirituality through various quantitative measures but also to go into the depth of their spiritual experiences in various contexts and understand its psychosocial impact on youth. Through the review of literature, it was realised that relatively little is known about conceptions of spirituality among the youth. An important component of the present study was to understand the perception of spirituality among youth.

A brief summary of the philosophy of the Art of Living is presented below;
2.7.1. The Art of Living (AOL)

The Art of Living is an organisation founded by His Holiness Sri Sri Ravishankar in 1982. It is the largest international volunteer based (Non-Governmental Organisation) NGO. It has its penetration in more than 157 countries with its headquarters in Bangalore, India. Sri Sri Ravishankar has gained acceptance and admiration in various parts of the world. His efforts for world peace have been recognized worldwide. He has received 14 Honorary Doctorates from various parts of the World. Few of those are Doctorate of Literature from Utkal University, India in 2013, Honorary Doctorate from Gujarat Technological University, India, 2013, Doctorate of Science from Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, India, 2007, Doctor of Philosophy (Holistic Medicine), from Open International University for Complementary Medicine, Sri Lanka, 2006. Some of the other countries which have facilitated him with Doctorate are Paraguay (2012), Argentina (2012), Hungary (2009) etc. Few of the honors bestowed on him by Governments across the world are: Most Illustrious Guest Award by the Mayor of Lima, Peru, September 2012, Highest Civilian Award, Paraguay, September 2012, Vishwa Chetana Award, India, December 2011, Human of the World Award, Russia, July 2011, Phoenix Award, Atlanta, USA, 2008, Honorary Citizenship and Goodwill Ambassador, Houston, USA, 2008, Architect of World Peace Award, India, 2008, Honored by United Nations Millennium Campaign (UNMC) for his contributions towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, 2007, The Humanitarian Award by the city of Brampton, Ontario, 2006, Mongolian Prime Minister's Award, Mongolia, 2006, Global Humanitarian Award, Illinois, USA, 2005, Bharat Shiromani Award, New Delhi, India, 2004, Title of Yoga Shiromani by the President of India, 1986. Interestingly, Sri Sri Ravishankar Days are celebrated in various parts of the World. Few of which are April 25th, 2010, Hamilton County, Ohio, USA, April 23, 2010, Milwaukee, USA, October 29th, 2008, Irving, Texas, USA, July 29, 2007, Pomona, California, USA, March 28, 2007, Washington DC, USA September 13, 2006, Ottawa, Canada, September 10, 2006, Halifax, Canada, April 29, 2002, Atlanta, Georgia, USA, January 10, 2002, Austin, Texas, USA (Art of Living, 2013).
The basic philosophy of AOL has been taken from various disciplines and various perspectives of Spirituality. It derives its teaching from ancient Upanishads and Vedas. The different knowledge sutras incorporated in the course module have been taken from ancient epics like Bhagawad Gita, Narada Bhakti Sutras, Ashtavakra Gita, Patanjali Yog Sutras, Shiva Sutras and other texts of wisdom. The workshops of AOL are a judicious mix of knowledge from these epics combined with yoga, meditation and Sudarshan Kriya (a rhythmic breathing technique). Sudarshan kriya is the main cornerstone of all AOL programmes. Sadhana, Seva and satsang form to be the three main pillars of its philosophy. Emphasis is also given to physical and mental healing and spiritual elevation through Vedic chants like Om Namah Shivaya, Vishnu Sahashranam, Rudrpooja and Gurupooja etc.

The various courses of Art of Living for different age groups are:

2.7.2. Introductory Courses

- Art of Living (Part 1 course) for the age group of 18 years and above
- Art Excel (All –Round Training in Excellence) for the age-group 8-13 years
- YES! (Youth Empowerment and Skills Workshop) for the age group of 13-18 years
- YES!+ (Youth Empowerment and Skills Workshop) for the age-group of 18-30 years

Sudarshan Kriya is the cornerstone of the introductory courses along with yoga, meditation, other techniques and wisdom for efficient living which is imparted in different ways depending on the age-group of the participants.

For the Graduate courses, a person should have done an introductory course and learnt Sudarshan Kriya.

2.7.3. Graduate Courses

- Art of Meditation course (Sahaj Samadhi)
- The Art of Silence (Advanced Meditation Course)
- DSN Course (Do Something Now)
- Blessings Course
- Teachers Training Course
The other customised courses are Navchetna/Balchetna Shivirs for slum dwellers and Prison Smart programmes for prisoners.

The Art of Living Foundation is running peace initiatives across communities through diverse humanitarian projects, including conflict resolution, disaster relief, sustainable rural development, empowerment of women, prisoner rehabilitation, education for all, and environmental sustainability. (Art of Living, 2013)

2.7.4. Sister Organizations

The Art of Living has a few sister organisations which are also dedicated to the vision of a stress-free, violence-free world. The International Association for Human Values (IAHV), Ved Vignan Maha Vidya Peeth (VVMVP), Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Vidya Mandir (SSRVM) and Vyakti Vikas Kendra India (VVKI), among others, to formulate and implement humanitarian projects of Art of Living globally. (Art of Living, 2013)

The AOL programme has gained a wide acceptance across the world. The effects of the techniques learnt in AOL have been emerging as intriguing subjects of scientific exploration. Many researchers have found out the physiological as well as mental effects of the programme, especially the Sudarshan kriya. These studies have been primarily medical and physiological stating effects of kriya on various physical conditions. These studies have largely selected the sample as people with various physical disorders and have concluded the effects of practices on recovery rates of a particular disorder. For instance, in several studies, Sudarshan kriya has been demonstrated as leading to a high re-emergence rate to normalcy in the treatment of depression regardless of the severity of depression (Janakiramaiah et al, 2000), or high degree of biological brain dysfunction (Murthy et al, 1998). Standard psychiatric measures have been used to assess the results of the practice in these studies.

Similarly, Sageman & Brown (2006), in DSM-IV-TR Case Book, highlighted the importance of Sudarshan kriya on patient with psychiatric disorders in reference to the use of natural and conventional treatments in a complex case with multiple psychiatric diagnoses. Sudarshan kriya yoga (SKY) breathing was found to provide self-soothing
effect that increase the patient’s resilience. After practicing, the patient no longer became despondent when confronted by painful reminders of past trauma. So, SKY was credited with breaking the link between past trauma and negative emotions.

The National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences in Bangalore, India, conducted many researches on therapeutic benefits, neurophysiologic effects and clinical applicability of the Art of Living techniques on depression patients. The studies conducted by Meti et al (1996); Janakiramaiah et al (2000) concluded the positive psychological effects of the techniques on the patients.

The article ‘Science of Breath’ (2009) by Art of Living reported overall strengthening of the mind-body system by the practice of the techniques taught in the program. Electroencephalography, blood cortisol, and lactate levels reflect a state of relaxation, yet alertness. The medical findings suggested that regular practice may help prevent many serious diseases. Robust effects on Post-traumatic stress disorder and depression symptoms indicated that Sudarshan kriya relieves psychological distress. Measurable changes at the level of gene expression suggested that the effects of Sudarshan kriya and other practices effect all levels of physiology, from molecular to organ systems. These findings point to the powerful health restoration and promotion effects of these practices which increase wellness in healthy people.

Realising the positive effects of the practice, the Harvard Health Publication in its issue of April 2009, suggested Sudarshan kriya as a beneficial treatment for people hospitalised for depression and depressive symptoms of alcohol dependent men (Harvard Mental Health Report, 2009).

The effects of the Art of living programme on people with specific conditions and profiles have also been studied. For instance, the effects of programme on Police officers, victims of natural disasters and calamities and prisoners etc have been studied.

A project was done on evaluation of the Art of Living, Introductory (Part 1) course as anti-stress program for police officers in Solvenian Police by members of Ministry of Internal Affairs, Republic of Solvenia. The results reported positive physical and mental effects on the participants. The participants reported that the cognitive
knowledge they received in the programme had a direct effect on their stress levels and they felt relaxed after using the techniques. They reported that the programme taught them *letting go of burdens*, they learnt *how to establish balance and maintain it* and the *importance of being calm, relaxed and focussed*. The programme helped them the most in harmonising situations that indirectly affect the quality of work, attitude towards co-workers and improving communication. They found it very relevant for the policemen with increased rate of stress at work (Visnikar & Mesko, 2002)

Similarly, Sharma et al (2003) studied the effects of Sudarshan kriya on Antioxidants (they protect us from free radical damage) and blood lactate (a biochemical indicator of stress) in healthy males undergoing highly stressful professional training programs (the Police Training Academy in Delhi, India). The trainees practiced SKY for 5 months, while the control group did not. At the end of 5 months, those who had practiced SKY showed significantly greater antioxidant production and significantly lower blood lactate compared to the control group. The pilot study concluded that the regular practice of Sudarshan kriya and accompanying practices leads to a better antioxidant defense and greater resilience to stress in daily life.

In another similar investigation done by Descilo et al (2006), the effects of the Art of Living techniques on the survivors after the tsunami disaster in South East Asia in 2004, who were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, were studied. In comparison with the control group, the group of participants undergoing the program showed considerably less symptoms of the post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, somatic symptoms, and the symptoms of social disfunctionality. Their overall health improved throughout the period of five weeks of monitoring.

A very interesting study done by Gootjes et al (2011) examined the neuro-physiological correlates of cognitive reappraisal in Sudarshan kriya and pranayam practitioners and controls. Participants were presented aversive pictures and were asked to cognitively change their appraisal of the affective meaning of the pictures by coming with an alternative more positive interpretation of each picture. Results indicated that while initially both groups successfully reduced their negative feelings to the aversive pictures, the effect of reappraisal persisted longer in the Sudarshan
kriya practicing group. This indicates that these practices can help regulate the emotional response and, thus, help psychological wellness.

Most of the studies have shown that those with clinical depression can benefit from the Art of Living program. Recently, the effects of the AOL programme on healthy individuals have also taken attention of the researchers. A few researchers have studied the effects of the programme on wellbeing of healthy group of individuals. The results showed decrease in the experienced anxiety, heightened optimism, reduction in stress, and an increased experience of altered states of consciousness. The other aspects of increased wellness such as feeling of peace, balance, living in the present moment, experience of a new outlook on life and better control over their feelings were also reported. The participants felt more joy and energy. They experienced the program as positive event bringing positive effects. Considering the obtained results the researchers concluded that with the participation in the program and implementation of the obtained cognitive knowledge, methods and techniques individuals improved their psycho-physical well-being (Kjellgren, 2007).

An empirical investigation was carried out by AOL itself to study the effects of YES!+(Introductory course for youth) program offered as a Physical Education credit course to the students of Cornell University, New York. The results reported that all 100% of the students felt better, 94% believed that breath made them calmer, 97% reported reduced stress, 100% reported improved mood, 91% felt an improvement in focus, 69 % had better sleep, and 88% of youth reported less anger and frustration (The Art of Living Foundation, USA, 2008).

A recent study was done on High school students (14-18 years of age) in the United States who participated in YES! Program of AOL. A total number of 788 students participated in the study (524 YES and 264 control group). The Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11; Patton et al, 1995) was used to assess students’ behavior before and after they underwent the program. The results indicated that compared to the control group, YES! participants reported less impulsive behavior after the program and promoted mental health in adolescents, potentially protecting them from harmful coping behaviors (Ghahremani et al, 2013).
The researches discussed above focus on the physiological effects, also recognizing its effects on the other domains. Two studies have been found to point out the spiritual effects of the programme. The research done by Kjellgren et al (2007) on the effects of 6 days AOL programme on the participants reported an increased experience of alternate states of consciousness during the practice of Sudarshan kriya which is further understood as an indication of deep rest and relaxation. Another recent study done by Tollefsen (2012) reported the effects of Sudarshan kriya to be spiritual along with the physical, mental and emotional effects as stated by the participants from India and Norway.

Trampuz & Trampuz (2010) have elaborately discussed and concluded the positive effects of AOL programmes based on their study and consolidation of the available literature of empirical studies exploring its effectiveness. According to the study, AOL programs are based on unique approach which takes into account special processes of social interactions, practical cognitive strategies of stress management and the use of breath as a link between human mental state and the situations they face.

The researches investigating the effects of these programs show numerous positive effects on different aspects of psycho-physical and psycho-social conditions, including psychological, psycho-social rehabilitation, neuro-physiological, biochemical and biophysical effects. The positive effect of the program is also reported in reducing the consequences of combating stress and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including social disfunctionality, a large success rate in the treatment of depressive and anxiety disorders as well as the related psychological, neurophysiologic and biochemical changes. The lowering of the levels of stress hormones or biochemical indicators of stress in the body, such as cortisol hormone and blood lactate, improvement of the body's immune system, increased mental focus and attention as well as simultaneous relaxation state. The programme has also been found to have positive effect on the sleep and waking cycles as well as better quality of sleep, positive influence on the person’s own psychophysical and general health condition, including reduced levels of mental distress, fatigue, lethargy, aggressiveness, and higher levels of satisfaction, better mood, more positive self-evaluation and better life optimism. They observed that it also helped individuals to
take more active role in the management of their psychophysical state and circumstances in day to day lives (Trampuz & Trampuz, 2010)

Two very interesting recent studies on the Art of Living have been reported. These studies looked at the organisation in totality and not just the effects of Sudarshan kriya on individuals unlike the above stated researches.

The study done by Shankar (2005) focused on AOL as an organization disseminating spirituality and ancient knowledge re-packaged to meet new demands. It reviewed few programmes of AOL and the satsangs at the International headquarters of AOL, Bangalore, India and reported interesting findings. The study brought out the fact that happiness, peace and beauty is being sold by AOL through the medium of breath. The study mentioned that AOL aims at the westerners as well as the rich, urban middle and upper middle class Indians. The researcher pointed out that the AOL programmes appeared to be a stage performance, rehearsed many times. He termed the AOL marketing as ‘Social Marketing’ where the best advertisements are the practitioners of the course, from all the age-groups, as AOL offers courses for all age groups. He observed that AOL has managed to entice teenagers, an enormously difficult crowd when it comes to spirituality and religion, in any country. In AOL ‘Rock Satsangs’, youth dance to the joy in the divine environment. The researcher affirmed that the ‘Guru of Joy’ (Sri Sri) is one of many ‘Godmen’ who have inevitably lead the life of followers especially in India, but with a perfect marketing strategy.

It is important to note here that above mentioned study primarily used participant observation and informal discussions with the available practitioners as the tools for data collection. The study was done with an entirely different dimension and no standardised measures were used to scientifically analyse the authenticity of the information obtained. It presumably shows strong subjective bias in its interpretations made by the researcher.

The study done by Tollefsen (2012) viewed Art of Living with a lens of New Religious Movements/ or New Age Movement and compared the practitioners in India and Norway on various variables. It also observed commonalities between the AOL and the Transcendental Meditation by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Both teach
techniques which help to reduce stress, both have Hindu origins and both claim they are not religious, but Non-governmental organizations.

The study found differences and similarities in practitioners in India and Norway. The Indian practitioners were found to be more ardent in their practice than Norwegians. Indians were more social with the AOL groups than people in Norway. Though the reasons concluded for the above findings were age of Indian participants which was lesser than that Norwegians, and the distance of local centres in Norway being more than in India.

The Indian respondents were concerned with the health benefits of SKY (Sudarshan kriya and Yoga) practice. Also, there seemed to be a stronger religious-spiritual connection and degree of guru veneration among the Indians. Devotion to the guru is prominent and highly emotional, expressed through bhajans as well as individual songs, poetry recital and in the love expressed in the survey responses by Indian respondents. An emphasis on Sudarshan kriya as a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual practice is seen in both the cultures. The attitude towards Guru was found to be different, Indian respondents seem to have a spiritualistic, devotional approach, as opposed to the Norwegians’ more pragmatic attitude towards Guru.