Chapter 4

Results and Discussion
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data included qualitative as well as quantitative components. The bulk of it was qualitative in nature. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner and explored issues such as the concept of spirituality and spiritual experiences etc. The total number of participants was fifty five and each interview typically ranged from one and a half hours to two hours. Approximately one hundred and ten hours were devoted to active interaction with the participants apart from the rapport formation. The interviews were recorded with the help of a small digital recorder and later on carefully transcribed. Data included self- reports on some important variables and few standardised inventories. The data were analysed from various points of views. The results of the quantitative data have been integrated into the discussions of the qualitative data. The Tables showing quantitative data analysis are inserted wherever they enhance the understanding of the qualitative data.

4.1. Analysis of Qualitative Data

The qualitative data was first subjected to careful transcription. Hours were spent on transcribing each interview. It required going back to the parts of interview repetitively in order to avoid missing any important piece of data. After the transcription of all the interviews was done the data were analyzed using multiple stage thematic analysis.

4.1.1. Multi-Stage Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to develop an understanding of the core issues revealed in the data. The process started with observation of the patterns and issues of potential interest in the data. The analysis involved a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set. Writing formed to be an integral part of the analysis which began during the process of data collection with jotting
down of ideas and potential themes and the analysis process. The data from the 
transcribed interviews was then put on master charts by the researcher. The 
categories and themes that emerged from the master charts were further refined 
and crystallised to arrive at the major dimensions and issues which could throw 
light on the objectives laid down by the researcher. Multiple stage analysis was 
carried out in this context. The following steps were taken during the process of 
analysis.

**Step 1:** The first major step was to make master charts for each question asked in 
the interview schedule and other relevant topics that were taken up by the 
participants on their own. All the possible responses for each question were put on 
the master chart. Each response was equally important at this stage of analysis and 
was put on the master chart. Multiple responses were obtained for each question in 
the interview schedule and none of them could be ignored. So, each was retained 
for the purpose of analysis.

**Step 2:** The second major step was to categorize the responses based on their 
common content. Several responses were abstracted and put into categories to 
understand the implications of the data obtained. Each response was carefully 
analysed and put into a category. Similar to the previous stage, each response was 
equally important and was allowed its place. If it did not fall into any given 
category it was put separately on the master chart in the form of a new category. 
The categories were evolved on the basis of the commonalities and themes which 
emerged from the data which were earlier categorized according to the responses. 
It formed the second stage of thematic analysis. While the categorisation 
continued, various themes kept on emerging which helped in providing a better 
understanding of the data.

**Step 3:** The third step (third stage of thematic analysis) involved deducing 
particular abstracted/generalized themes from the categories obtained in the last 
stage. The themes were thus, further crystallized which made more consolidated
themes. This process of making categories and deriving subthemes and themes of the data were also put in the form of pictorial representations depicting the content of analysis. The categories were shown along with the number of responses in each category. As already stated, multiple responses were obtained for each question and were allowed their space in the categorization. The charts have been presented in Appendix 2.

The above mentioned stages of thematic analysis have been exemplified below with a question from the interview schedule and its final stage of analysis.

Q. What is Spirituality according to you?

All the responses to this particular question were put on the master chart in a tabular form. In this stage all the responses to each question were put together in the master chart. Then based on themes that emerged related to various dimensions of the concept highlighted by the participants, they were put into several categories. Further, the categories were refined by constant back and forth movement on the responses and higher order (at greater level of abstraction) categories or themes were extracted.

The qualitative data were then put in the form of pictorial representations depicting the stages of theme analysis for different aspects studied in the investigation. In these representations, the numbers denote the number of responses and not the respondents. An example of the pictorial representation has been given below in Box II.
Box II: The Depiction of final stage of analysis for one of the questions asked in the semi-structured Interview Schedule

- Personal connection with something bigger than themselves (Guru/Divine/Supernatural power) 38
- Engaging in Spiritual Practices 27
- Realization of Inner Self 39
- Experience and Expression of Universal Love 41
- Belief in Supreme Consciousness 28
- Seeking Answers to Existential Questions 11
- Self-Growth and transformation / Emotional Equanimity/ Not getting stuck in people, situations and desires 46
- Enhancement of qualities of true spirit such as blissfulness, positivity, happiness, simplicity, love 21
These representations clearly brought out the important themes for each question in the interview schedule. The categories could be then further abstracted and meaningful broader themes could be derived. Even if a small variation in the meaning of a response or a category was seen it was put into the separate theme. Such attempts required various levels of abstractions and merging of the categories. Depending on the responses, multiple levels of analysis was done for each question on the interview schedule. Thus, the data were primarily analysed using the qualitative technique i.e. thematic analysis. The responses were analysed and put into various themes and subthemes.

4.2. Results, Analysis and Discussion

The results below highlight the major categories of responses which have been supported by the subcategories for each of the themes explored in the semi-structured interview. A number of verbal protocols from the transcribed interviews have been quoted to reflect the derivation of themes and subthemes of categories of analysis.

Results and Discussion are presented under the following sections:

Section I: Youth’s Perception of Religion and Spirituality
Section II: Self–Perception of Participants on Variables of Significance to Youth
Section III: The Art of Living (AOL) as Perceived by Youth
Section IV: Experiences During the Art of Living Courses
Section V: Perceived Personal Enhancements due to involvement with the Art of Living
Section VI: Persona and Role of the Guru

A detailed account of the findings and the discussion has been presented in the sections below:

Section I: Youth’s Perception of Religion and Spirituality

This section unfolds the understanding of religion and spirituality by Youth and their involvement in religious/spiritual practices. The main focus of the in-depth interview was on the following aspects of their understanding:
i. Faith in Religious and Spiritual practices

ii. The Knowledge of Epics and their perceived relevance

iii. Participants’ Perception of Religion and Spirituality

i. **Faith in Religious and Spiritual Practices**

Participants’ faith in religion was studied through their indulgence in *Idol Worship* and *their Involvement in Religious and Spiritual Observances* (fasting, performing prayers and visiting religious places, yoga and meditation).

**Idol Worship**

Idol worship attains a special position in Hinduism. It consists of worshipping statue of a deity as an expression and manifestation of love, devotion and faith. In the present study, forty eight out of fifty five participants had idols at their home. Most of them had idols of all Hindu Gods including Lord Ganesha, Shiva, Rama, Hanuman, Goddess Lakshmi, Durga, Parvati etc.

Interesting responses were obtained on asking them to name the idols at home. Some of them are quoted below;

"You name it and we have it"

"We have Idols of all Gods at our place"

"It is difficult to count the number of Idols in our small temple at home"

There were eight participants who did not have idols at home. Amongst them, seven were Muslims and one was a Christian. The Muslims believe in Allah, who is considered to be formless, so they did not believe in representing him in any form of idol. Some of them observed,

"How can Allah be idolised, if he can be idolised then how is he God?? God is beyond description and human imagination, so there can be no idol of Allah. He is beyond human thought and representation”.

"Allah is a pure energy, the ultimate, the destination, which is very vast to be put into any idol or form.”
The Christian participants in the study had the picture of Jesus and Mary at their house with an exception of one Catholic woman who did not have any idol at her home. She observed;

“I come from catholic background which is very ritualistic in going to church and attending prayers, but I found myself not being able to relate to my religion at all. I didn’t find meaning in doing all that. Keeping picture of Jesus and marry also has not appealed to me ever. I never kept image of any God in my room, it is all a part of the religion.”

There was a wide variety of responses obtained in the context of idol worship. Irrespective of the fact that they had idols at home, only a few participants believed and engaged in Idol worship. Most of the participants respected the belief of others in idol worship but did not find it satisfying for themselves. Since worshipping idols did not mentally satisfy them there was no indulgence. Some even reported no belief, respect and indulgence in idol worship. Some such responses are given as follows;

“I feel God is energy, it has no form and it is beyond human intellect. God is a space which has radiating energy in abundance.”

“God is somebody who is friendly, loving, caring, and unconditionally giving without any demands of rituals and performances.”

“Idols are important, so that we can relate to them and concentrate. For instance, when a child starts to learn writing he needs a notebook with lines but gradually when he becomes an expert then no lines are needed. Similarly idols are needed when you begin your path on religion or spirituality, gradually when you find God within yourself and others, you can attain that divine state with eyes closed and no idol or object in front of you.”

“Idols just give a meaning to our thoughts and practices. They are also form of energy like Brahma is the creator, Shiva is the destroyer and Vishnu is the sustainer. It is like cos, theeta and other symbols in physics.”

It is interesting to see how the field of work of the participants influenced their thought process and understanding of the abstract concepts like idol worship, God,
religion and spirituality. The above mentioned response was stated by an engineering student who understood everything in the form of energy.

Thus, the responses indicated that very few participants indulged in idol worship themselves though most of them respected others for doing so. For themselves, they believed God to be formless and worshipped the formless energy they called God in their own ways like meditation, feeling God in self and others, and through prayers.

The participants were asked about their own and their family’s religious or spiritual practices. The involvement in religious practices (fasting, performing prayers and visiting religious place) was more common for the family members of the participants than for themselves whereas in spiritual practices, they were themselves more involved than their family members. They were regular in their spiritual practices. Their daily routine invariably comprised of a span of time devoted to these practices.

ii. The Knowledge of Epics and their Perceived Relevance

India is the land of famous epics and mythologies. Many ancient texts are available which offer a unique compilation of the wisdom of various times that has been preserved. There is robust knowledge and tools for good living available in Indian tradition and its ancient scriptures. They offer plethora of methods to enhance the quality and reliability of inner faculties and observation. The Indian conceptualizations of human nature illustrate important observations about mind, personality and self. It was considered important in the present context to know the relevance of these accounts in the life of participants. They were asked questions regarding the epics they have read and the importance of reading them in their lives.

As reported by them, the knowledge of these texts was gained through various mediums such as Reading Texts, Watching Television, Attending Discourses by Sri Sri on various Vedas and Upanishads. All the three mediums were reported to have been used by them.

The Bhagwad Gita was most widely read and understood epic by the youth. It was followed by Mahabharata and Ramayana. There were twelve participants who could
recite some shlokas from Bhagwad Gita. Most common shloka with its meaning recited by the participants is given below;

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलं प्राप्तेत

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूतं ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि।

(Karmanye Vadhirasthe, Ma phaleshou kada chana,
Ma Karmahala Hetur Bhurmatey Sangostva Akarmani)

The explanation of meaning of the shloka as given by the participants is exemplified below;

“The shloka signifies that we should be karma oriented not fruit oriented, our focus is karma and never should the fruit be the purpose of our action”

“In this shloka, Krishna tells Arjuna that no matter what is the result of the war, he should not be worried about it. His duty is to fight, he wins or loses that is not important. Even if he dies during, he will attain heaven because he has correctly performed his duty.”

A Christian participant who stayed in AOL German Ashram daily read discourses of Sri Sri on Bhagwad Gita. He reported that he knew the entire epic and could recite many shlokas with their meaning. He recited the following shloka along with its implication in his life;

“गुरूर्ब्रह्मा गुरूविश्वनामं गुरुर्वेदो महेश्वरम्।

गुरुर्वेधः परशुरामायणं प्रेमश्रीगुरुनमः।।

(Gurur-Brahmaa Gurur-Vissnnur-Gururdevo Maheshvarah

Gurureva Param Brahma Tasmai Shrii-Gurave Namah)

“This shloka was an awakening to my life. Knowing that Guru is not only the creator, sustainer but can also be the destroyer, he plays all the roles for our growth. I got speechless on listening to it for the first time. Understanding that Guru is not always pleasing but can also pour challenges in our life for our betterment”.

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The Lessons from Bhagwad Gita which the participants reportedly implemented in their life was, focusing on karma, karma as the foremost duty, not getting entangled in people and situations, always staying connected to the source which is an observer or witness to everything happening in life, knowing that atman is permanent and the body is temporary and the importance of Guru in life.

Most of the participants had seen Ramayana and Mahabharata on television, though some had read both the texts by themselves as well. It was interesting to observe that some Vedas and Upanishads which were not heard commonly were actually learnt by the participants. These were the ones on which Sri Sri has given his discourses. For instance, Ashtavakra Gita was one of those and was called as supreme knowledge by many participants. One of them observed;

“Ashtavakra is a dialogue between raja Janak and sage or the master Ashtavakra. It is actually a roadmap to enlightenment. Guruji has explained it so beautifully and directly related it to the common man, so that we can understand it. Mere reading or watching Guruji’s video on it gives high energy and lightness. It feels that there is nothing in the world we are running for, it is all so effortless and changing. It takes the consciousness to a totally different platform.”

Another text which was found to be popular among participants was Narada Bhakti Sutra, it is devoted to bhakti and love for the divine. It is also a part of discourses by Sri Sri. Some participants observed;

“Narada Bhakti Sutra: The Aphorisms of love is purely devotional. It gives a different meaning to love and bhakti. It opens us to what bhakti or love is and what we misunderstand it as.”

“Every youth should listen to Guruji’s discourse on Narada Bhakti Sutra, it gives beautiful understanding of love. There is so much lust increasing in our age group these days, this knowledge is so important.”

The other texts read by the participants were Kena Upanishads, Patanjali Yoga Sutras, and Shiv Sutra. These were also popular in the discourses by Sri Sri.
The relevance of knowledge gained from these texts was reported to be important. However, the reasons regarding its relevance varied. Many felt that they are the

Guiding tools for various life situations. A participant reported;

"Karmanye Vadhikaraste, Ma phaleshou kada chana….as “we have the right to perform action, do not let the fruit be the purpose of the action……...so when one gets stuck” in a similar situation, we immediately know what to do, we do not have to attach ourselves with the fruits of our karma”.

The Muslim participants in the study reported that the Quran was taken as the guidance for the entire course of life. One of them said,

“It tells us how to behave in our daily life, it has knowledge on marriage, sex, the way woman should be respected in family, domestic violence as a curse etc...”

Many amongst the participants believed that these epics strengthen our ‘Faith in God and Consciousness’. The other categories of responses that emerged to this question were ‘revival of Ancient Wisdom,’ ‘Tools for Good Living’ and ‘Sources of Mental Peace and Relaxation’. Some such responses are listed below;

“The ancient texts take us back to the source, to the self and give inner peace”

“Vedas have knowledge of various aspects of life like surgery, medicine, science, maths, physics etc. Modern science fails to explain what these epics explain in the form of simple stories. They give us the knowledge of entire creation in subtle and easy way”.

“When you know what is the right way prescribed by the wisdom then there is no stress, there is so much lightness that we can feel. We get energy and sacredness in our life by reading the ancient texts”.

From amongst all the sources of acquiring knowledge of epics, discourses given by Sri Sri were most preferred. Bhagwad Gita was self-read in its original form only by eleven participants but the discourse by Sri Sri was read, heard and seen as video by
Results and Discussion

thirty nine participants. Similarly, other texts like Narada Bhakti Sutras, Ashtavakra Gita, Kena Upanisadh, Patanjali Yoga Sutras and Shiv Sutras were available in the form of books or commentary by Sri Sri and, therefore these were popular among the participants. Even though none of them had been read in original by the participants, an overall importance of religious texts and epics was understood.

It is apparent from the responses that participants found epics very relevant to their contemporary lives. They viewed these texts to be of scientific rigour and used this knowledge in their daily lives. These were not only read but were also internalized by the participants as evident in their citation of related examples. These were found to be rich sources of cognitive enhancement and tools for positive living by the participants. There was respect and reverence for them as observed by the participants. Their involvement in acquiring wisdom from these texts highlight an inquisitiveness towards attaining knowledge of self and mind and consequently progress towards elevation of self to higher spiritual states.

The ancient Indian scriptures have come to the centre stage with the prominence of the field of Indian Psychology. These Vedas and Upanishads are recognized as rich sources of information regarding the nature of human mind, personality and the way of living in the Indian context. One such example is the recent work of Bhawuk (2011) in his book *Spirituality and Indian Psychology: Lessons from Bhagwad Gita*. Similarly, many other Indian philosophers and psychologist have highly acknowledged these texts to be significant sources of spiritual and positive living in the Indian context.

### III. Participants’ Perception of Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality have been a part of human psyche since the dawn of civilisation. The understanding and expression of the phenomena varies across different periods in history, cultures and age groups. These have been a topic of
extensive scientific investigation in recent years. In the present investigation, an attempt was made to understand the concepts of religion and spirituality by youth.

a. Religion

Religion of the participants was asked in the semi-structured interviews. Figure VIII presents the religious identity of the participants.

![Figure VIII: Percentage of Male and Female Participants under Different Religious Groups](image)

Many participants were not comfortable in labelling themselves as belonging to a particular religion whereas some of them considered it as being an important part of themselves. Most of the participants in the sample were Hindus (72.7%), followed by Muslims (12.7%), Christians (10.9%) and Druze (1.8%). Another 1.8% of the participants did not label themselves as affiliated to any particular religion and answered to the question as having ‘no religion’.

It is common for youth not to identify themselves with any religion. A study on Australian and Thai youth conceptualisation of religion and spirituality by Hughes et al (2008) showed that they did not identify themselves with any religion and most of them believed in the concept of ‘no religion’. Some other researches on youth have also brought out similar findings.

In the present investigation religion was considered to be traditional, inborn, and had a reference to God in the form of idols. Most of the participants had a notion of religion which emphasised the performance of rituals. Religion was seen as a set of
symbols/rituals/practices/norms/code of conduct. It was believed to be dogmatic/traditional/egocentric/orthodox and outdated. Examples of such conceptualisations have been quoted below;

“Religion is just ritualistic, performing rituals we don’t even know why we are performing”

“Religion is basically a set of norms that direct our code of conduct. But it is not much relevant in today’s time, because we want answers to everything we do and religion is too narrow to offer any answers or have any space for flexibility. It is quite rigid in its approach.”

Some participants considered it to be a compulsory identification which is inborn. Religion was seen as the knowledge of God and the ancient texts by some. For other participants it was a blind faith in God in the form of idol, without understanding the meaning behind the ritualistic practices or idols. It was interesting to observe that while discussing religion, they used ‘just’ and ‘only’ frequently which indicated that religion lacks ‘something’ which needs to be added to make it complete. Some of the interesting responses were:

“Religion is something which is only for traditional people who find happiness in abiding by the particular code of conduct”

“Religion is just having blind faith on idols of God without even knowing who the God is”

“It is just a way of showing that I am superior and my way of understanding God is better than others”

Only eight participants viewed religion in the context of spirituality. The related responses were:

“Religion is a pathway to spirituality”

“Religion is path and spirituality is the destination”

“It is the way one connects to the supreme power and in turn to self. Some connect through religion and others through spirituality.”

It is evident from the responses that religion was seen as negative, mundane, outdated and dogmatic doctrine to which youth could not relate. It was viewed positive by youth who understood it in relation with spirituality. They portrayed religion as
negative and viewed it in the light of rituals only. There was no mention of the transcendental dimension of religion by any of the participants. Only one response highlighted the goal of religion as the one connecting us to the supreme power and to the self. Religion was given a static position. The functional aspects of religion were generally found lost in the description of religion by youth. It was, however, considered as a pathway to spirituality by few.

The understanding of religion as derived from the responses of youth in the present study stands different from various definitions given by pioneers after their extensive work in the area. Box III comprises of past and present definitions of Religion given by different scholars, reproduced from Zinnbauer & Pargament (2005).

**Box III: Past and Present Definitions of Religion reproduced from Zinnbauer & Pargament (2005)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi (1975, p.1): a system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power, and practices of worship or other rituals directed towards such a power.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993, p.8): Whatever we as individuals do to come to grips personally with the question that confronts us because we are aware that we and others like us are alive and that we will die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellah (1970, p.21): A set of symbols forms and acts that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark (1958, p.22): the inner experience of the individual when he senses a Beyond, especially as evidenced by the effect of this experience on his behaviour when he actively attempts to harmonize his life with the Beyond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dollahite (1998, p.5): A covenant faith community with teachings and narratives that enhance the search for the sacred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (1902/1961, p.42): The feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as the apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The traditional conceptualisations emphasize both substantive and functional approaches to religion. Substantive approaches define religion by its substance and the functional approaches examine the purpose religiousness serves in an individual’s life.

The conceptualisation of religion obtained in the present study clearly shows difference from the earlier definitions based on traditional approaches. Youth in the study viewed it more of a compulsory ritualistic behaviour directed to particular idols which one believes in. Unlike functional approaches, the current understanding does not highlight the purpose of the performance of the ritualistic behaviour. Interestingly, it was described by two participants as rituals performed to please a particular God and avoid any punishments.

The idol of God was equated as symbol of scared but according to the participants there was much more to sacredness than only worshipping the idol in the form of religious rituals. The understanding of youth supports the contemporary conceptualizations of religion in terms of a system of organised beliefs and worship which a person practice, a belief based, objective and social phenomena, (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000), and institutional, dogmatic, and theological (Elkins, 1995).

Earlier the conceptualization of religion referred to a relation with the sacred and the experience of transcendence being an important part of that relation. The present investigation brings out that in the present times the views related to the concept of religion are significantly different and emphasize religion as a narrow concept which is limited primarily to ritualistic behaviour.

b. Spirituality

The current decade is rightly demarcated as the decade of spirituality with the mushrooming research and literature on spirituality. The definition of spirituality has ever been changing though its meaning and significance has remained the same. Empirical studies have highlighted different aspects of spirituality in various definitions put forward by them. Indeed, it is a multidimensional concept which offers immense scope for studying various dimensions of it. The current study also
explored the understanding of spirituality by youth, and youth’s experiences in relation with spirituality.

The question ‘What is Spirituality?’ was welcomed by most of the participants. They were keen on expressing their views on it.

Many youth highlighted the experiences of Realization of Inner Self as spirituality. Their responses highlighted that the essence of spirituality for them was transcendence. It was perceived as A personal connection with something bigger than themselves; Guru, Divine or the Supernatural powers. It was seen as a belief in supreme/universal or divine consciousness. Some such observations are quoted below,

“Spirituality is a feeling the connection with self, guru and entire consciousness.”
“Realising that higher power is taking care of us all the time is spirituality.
“Spirituality is letting the divine work with the master plan for the consciousness.”

Spirituality was also seen as an Experience and Expression of Universal Love by the participants. It was described as an extension of self into humanity and nature. Participants discussed in length about their feeling of connectedness with other people and desire to do social work. They were found to be extensively occupied with the AOL social service projects. Such concerns are reflected in the following quotes;

“Spirituality is the total way of living. It is being happy and making others happy, uplifting self and uplifting others to the level of spiritual living. ”
“Enhancing qualities of spirit, standing for values like love, joy, care, non-violence etc. which are directed to humanity encompassing of all living and non-living.”
“It is inner seeking, search for self, knowing that peace and happiness lies within us, discovering self beyond body mind and thoughts”.

Spirituality was also expressed as Emotional Equanimity and Non entanglement with people, desires and situations which included living at ease with Life and not getting stuck with people, situations, desires and emotions. Self-growth and
enhancement emerged as an important component of Spirituality. It was also considered as Enhancing Qualities of spirit like naturalness, love, simplicity, blissfulness and happiness. Such quotes have been given below;

“Our inner self or soul is untarnished, it very pure without any impurities of desires, emotions, entanglements, negativities. These experiences are only at a conscious level or at a mental and physical level, but our spirit it very pure. Realising that purity and ever blissful state of spirit is spirituality”.

“Working on yourself and improving upon one’s abilities is spirituality. Becoming more useful to everybody around you. Grooming oneself and excelling in all aspects of life is also spirituality.”

“Realizing that everything is just passing by and not getting stuck, living effortlessly is spirituality. When we don’t get stuck then only we can live every moment of life effectively and joyfully.”

There were a few participants who believed that the Spiritual Practices (such as asanas, yoga, meditation, Sudarshan kriya) may be called as Spirituality. For some of them, spirituality meant Seeking Answers to Existential Questions and understanding the Meaning and Purpose of Life. Seeking real purpose of life was found to be of significance to many, as revealed by the following quotes;

“When I got successes in life at a very early age, I started having those questions in my mind; what is the purpose of my life? Why am I on this planet? I got so obsessed with these, I went to Guruji to seek answers to my questions, but he very beautifully said keep these question with you, only few lucky people have these questions in life”.

“Since childhood I used to think what is ‘I’? When I used to see my body, my hand, I used to feel that I am observing all this but it is not ‘I’ through AOL and Guruji’s teaching I was able to fit the puzzles together.”

Spirituality has also been linked with Questions related to Divinity and Self. The last two responses clearly bring out the quest in mind of the youth regarding the purpose of life and existence of self beyond body and mind. In support of the current finding, Webber (2002) described that youth are actively pursuing a reason for existence which is also a search for self. Young adults are primarily in search of the purpose of life and are seeking spirituality.
It is apparent from the responses that **spirituality is viewed as an experience**. It is regarded much more than a static concept. The experience of universal love, transcendence, realisation of ‘inner self’ are perceived as the outcomes of spiritual practices. These all direct one’s attention to spirituality as a human experience beyond the materialistic view of the world.

Thus, the understanding of spirituality by youth in the current study was in line with the earlier definitions of spirituality but with some more qualifications. Similar to religion, the definitions of spirituality have also been summarised by Zinnbauer & Pargament (2005). The definitions have depicted spirituality as relationship with higher power, awareness of transcendent dimension and the emphasis on the existential questions. Such definitions are given below in Box IV.

**Box IV: Past and present Definitions of Spirituality reproduced from Zinnbauer & Pargament (2005)**

- Armstrong (1995, p.3): The presence of a relationship with a Higher Power that affects the way in which one operates in the world.
- Elkins, Henderson, Hughes, Leaf and Saunders (1988, p. 10): A way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness if a transcendent dimension and that is characterised by certain identifiable values in regard to self, life and whatever one considers to the Ultimate.
- Fahlberg and Fahlberg (1991, p.274): That which is involved in connecting the divine with the Self or self.
- Hart (1994): The way one lives out one’s faith in daily life, the way a person relates to the Ultimate conditions of existence.
- Shafranske and Gorsuch (1984,p 231): A transcendent dimension with humane experience….discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to place the self within a broader ontological context.
- Tart (1975, p.4): That vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purposes with higher entities, with God, with love, with compassion, with purpose.
The participants in the present investigation described spirituality in more or less similar terms. In their observations, there was an emphasis on the experience and expression of universal love. They were extensively involved in the social work projects. The desire for social service was seen as an expression of love and care for others emerging from feeling of belongingness for all. There was curiosity to answer questions related to divine, self and the universe. The dimensions of spirituality identified by Witmer & Sweeney (1992) such as spiritual beliefs, experiences of oneness with the universe and inner life, inner wisdom, higher consciousness or the spirit of God, purposiveness or meaning of life, hope or optimism and values supports the understanding of the construct of spirituality by youth in the current study. It is also in consonance with spirituality as a way of being that comes through awareness of a transcendent dimension and is characterised by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature and whatever is considered as ultimate (Elkins et al, 1988).

**Difference between Religion and Spirituality**

For past many decades religion and spirituality have been examined through the lens of social science. Though the definitions of both have remained inconsistent across researches, the two concepts have been central to the scholarly and scientific enquiry. Both the terms have been defined by social scientists in numerous ways over past century. Religion was traditionally regarded as a broad-band construct, (Pargament 1999), not explicitly differentiated from spirituality. It included both individual and institutional aspects in it. Now it is seen as narrow band construct which emphasises more on the institutional aspect (Zinnbauer et al, 1999). In the contemporary approaches, the understanding of religion has evolved from both experiential and institutional to institutional dogmatic and theological (Elkins, 1995). The experiential or functional side or religion has been identified with the term spirituality.

There is an enormous amount of literature available that discusses the polarisation of religion and spirituality. According to Zinnbauer & Pargament (2005) the literature can be categorised into five major headings; substantive religion versus functional spirituality, static religion versus dynamic spirituality, institutional objective religion versus personal subjective spirituality, belief based religion versus emotional/
experiential spirituality, negative religion versus positive spirituality. The enormous amount of literature implies religion/religiousness as substantive, static, institutional, objective, belief-based, ‘bad’ in opposition with functional, dynamic, personal, subjective, experience based and ‘good’ spirituality.

The current research also supports the evolved understanding of the terms religion and spirituality. Differences were obtained in viewpoints of the participants with regard to religion and spirituality. Participants were enthusiastically expressive of their conceptualisation and the differences between the two. A total number of forty one participants out of fifty five believed religion and spirituality to be different concepts. Some of them considered both as overlapping and only three participants expressed both the terms to be the same with no difference.

The difference as perceived by the participants has been consolidated and presented in Box V

**Box V: Difference between Religion and Spirituality as perceived by Youth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELIGION</th>
<th>SPIRITUALITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited, having boundaries</td>
<td>Vast and limitless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional in nature</td>
<td>Has always been there and would remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set of practices followed without knowing their meaning</td>
<td>Knowledge of self, mind, body and consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boring and mundane</td>
<td>Interesting, refreshing and relaxing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection with idols and rituals</td>
<td>Connection with self, master and the divine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting stuck in practices and rituals</td>
<td>Moving to the freedom and infinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Experiential</td>
<td>Totally Experiential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims at rewards and punishments</td>
<td>Aims at Humanity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes one guilty and fearful</td>
<td>Makes one natural and blissful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatred for others sects (Egocentric)</td>
<td>Universal love and Belongingness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking outwards to the world</td>
<td>Seeking inwards to the inner peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path to spirituality</td>
<td>Itself destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana Peel (as said by Sri Sri)</td>
<td>The real Fruit (as said by Sri Sri)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conceptualisation of religion and spirituality by youth in the present investigation differed from that given in literature. These differences are given below;

a) There has been lot of reference to religion as a set of practices in the past definitions but there was specific mention of the performance of rituals without being aware of the meaning attached to it. In contrast, spirituality was seen as the knowledge of self, mind, body and consciousness. They not only designated spirituality to experiences or the relational aspect of it with self and ultimate (as the past literature does) but also understood spirituality as the knowledge of body and mind with an emphasis on attaining the coping skills necessary to prevent the mind from getting affected by the adverse situations in life. The goal of it being a connection with the ‘inner self’ and consciousness.

b) A negative connotation of religion has been maintained at maximum points of difference between religion and spirituality by the participants. For instance, the aim of religion as ‘rewards and punishments’ and the feeling of ‘fear and guilt’ portrays religion as a kind of transaction or business dealing with the ‘sacred’ or idol of God (as mostly quoted in reference to religion) who would reciprocate to the compliant or non-compliant human behaviour. This kind of interpretation of religion stands rare in the available literature on its meaning and conceptualisation. In contrast, attributions to spirituality aiming at humanity, blissfulness and naturalness offer a positive substantiation to spirituality, quite akin to the earlier viewpoints of various scholars.

c) It is interesting to note that many participants quoted Sri Sri’s reference to ‘religion as a peel of banana’ and ‘spirituality as the real fruit’. It implies religion as a pathway to spirituality. The inclusion of both the concepts together to reach the ultimate was found worth the mention by youth in the present study.

The conceptualisation and perception of spirituality was explored by Rich & Cinamon (2007) among thirty six high school and college Arab and Jewish Israeli older adolescents (both males and females) using a qualitative approach. The results of the study were similar to the current research. For most of the Arab and Jewish youth, the essence of spirituality was transcendence. For others, it involved a personal quest by
engaging in finding the inner self and a search for meaning in life. The expressions of spirituality took place through significant relations with others, religious beliefs or behaviours. Supernatural ability and the Outcomes reported by them were; sense of serenity with the world, peace with oneself, sense of calmness, self-awareness and self-acceptance. As noted above, the participants of the present study also found these to be important components of spirituality. Similar to the current study, the researchers observed an overlap in conceptions of spirituality by young men and women and no significant difference was obtained.

Youth’s conceptualization towards religion and spirituality indicated that religion and spirituality play different social roles and take different forms in different cultural contexts. Another study by Hughes et al (2008) attempted to throw light on understanding the ways young people think about spirituality and religion, and their faith among Australian and Thai youth through qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys. The findings of the study showed that all Thai youth identified with religion and considered it as an important basis for morality. In contrast, many Australian youth neither identified with religion nor considered it important. In both contexts, many young people occasionally/never participated in public or personal religious practices. In Thailand, religion was a key part of the publicly accepted culture, while in Australia, it was seen as a personal ‘lifestyle’ option. In Australia, the sense that one can have no religion was evident. People had right to choose their own religion or choose not to identify with any religion at all. The extent to which Thai youth engaged in public and private religious practices varied considerably. Religion provided ways in which people could accumulate merit for present or the next birth. For Australian young people, religion was approached very much from an individualistic perspective. Practices were engaged in if youth felt they were benefited. Many young people, at least at some point in their lives, found religion to be an appealing resource, offering direction, comfort and wellbeing, but it had no importance for many others.

It is important to note here that the stated research have considered spirituality and religion to be overlapping concepts. Interestingly, the aim of the said research was to explore conceptions of both religion and spirituality but nowhere in the research
article the term ‘spirituality’ was used. The religious attitudes of the youth in the present study were somewhat similar to the Australian youth who did not believe in religion and found it to be an obsolete concept. The commitment of the participants was found to be more towards spirituality and they found it to be more relevant to their lives compared to religion. The clear differentiation of the two concepts by the participants might have got crystallized through their experiences in the organization.

The above discussion highlights that the views and conceptualisation of religion and spirituality has gone through a lot of change from past to present. It is also apparent that culture plays a vital role in constructing the views of youth regarding these concepts.

In the present investigation, a few Muslim participants were found to be more respectful and abiding of religious rituals (namaz) than the Hindu or Christian participants. It is shown that Muslims participants in the sample were liberal in their approach to religion and spirituality which is a rare observation. The reason for this attitude can be attributed to AOL involvement needs further investigation.

As already stated in the review, in the Indian context, spirituality is understood more in terms of a way of living directed towards attainment of the Bliss or ananda. It is a broad construct which encloses the lives of people rather than lying out somewhere as a distant concept. This notion is also inherent in the perceptions of spirituality of youth in the present study. The impact of Indian culture and philosophy on the views of youth on spirituality is noticeably evident.

Section II: Self –Perception of Participants on Variables of Significance to Youth

In this section, the responses to the questions in the interview schedule that mattered significantly to youth in their personal life were qualitatively analysed. They are presented below, separately, for each of the following variables.

i. An ‘Ideal Me’

ii. Major Successes and Failures in life as reported by the youth

iii. Reported state of ‘Depression’: Frequency and Thought process during the State
Results and Discussion

i. An ‘Ideal Me’ Would be With:

The analysis of the responses related to the Ideal me state, as indicated by the participants revealed three categories;

a) **Personal Enhancement**

b) **Professional and Academic Progress**

c) **The Current State.**

The category of **Personal Enhancement** was based on three sets of responses which included social service through AOL, self-growth, and enhancing the transcendental dimension of life. Participants wanted to do more of social service through AOL to reach their Ideal state. It was expressed in responses like ‘want to be of use to society as much as it is possible’, ‘getting more involved in the AOL courses and projects’, ‘work towards Guru’s vision’ and many of them wanted to become an AOL faculty and impart spiritual knowledge to people. It is important to note here that AOL related activities were considered as social service. The underlying belief that participants commonly shared was that helping an individual become stress free and walk a spiritual path is the highest form of service to him (Discussed in detail in the next section).

Many participants expressed their desire to become happier, emotionally stable and balanced, not get entangled in attachments and desires, become peaceful and calm and attain a positive attitude towards life as their landmarks to reach the ‘Ideal Me’. Movement towards Emotional Stability and Positivity was emphasized by many participants. All these responses were put into the category of **self-growth.**

Most of the participants were keen on **Enhancing the Transcendental Dimension of their life** and considered it to be a vital ingredient of their ‘Ideal Me’ state. They wanted to devote more time to sadhana (Yoga and meditation) as they believed it would facilitate them towards self-realisation and, learn and implement, the knowledge of self and tendencies of mind which they gained in AOL courses.

The highest number of responses on the ‘Ideal Me’ question were related to Self Enhancement, Serving the Society, and Enhancing the Spiritual Dimension of life. As
described by most of them, an Ideal me would be the one who achieves greater enhancement of the self.

Only a few responses highlighted the \textit{Professional and Academic Progress} as important for their ‘Ideal Me State’ including promotion in jobs, getting better placements, and clearing various qualifying exams like IAS, CAT and GRE.

It is interesting to note that there were twelve participants who viewed their \textit{Current State} as ‘Ideal Me’. Out of the twelve, eight of them were AOL full time/part time teachers and four were core organisers. It is evident that participants who were extensively occupied with the AOL activities were content and happy with their lives and attributed it to be an ideal state for them. It implies that they could meet their goals (emotional, social, spiritual) in life through their participation in the organization.

The inclination of the participants towards self-growth is apparent in the responses obtained. Personal enhancement and growth (mental, social and spiritual) appears to be very significant to their life in order to reach the state of ‘Ideal Me’.

Only a small number of participants wanted professional gains to reach to the ‘Ideal Me’ state. It was not necessarily described as one having great materialistic gains by most of them. They were more inclined to and aimed at the transcendental enhancements in life. Even though ‘Ideal Me’ was not achieved by all there was a strong desire for increased involvement in AOL as leading to the ‘Ideal Me’ state.

\textbf{ii. Major Successes and Failures as reported by the Participants}

\textbf{Major Successes}

The variety of obtained responses could be generalised into four major categories which are as given below;

\textit{a)} \textit{Interpersonal Relationships}

\textit{b)} \textit{Changes in Personality and Increased stability}

\textit{c)} \textit{Academic/Professional achievements}

\textit{d)} \textit{Spiritual/AOL Involvement}.
In the context of success, most of the responses related to the *Interpersonal Relationships* such as *increased cordiality in family and improved relationships at workplace*.

*Changes in Personality Traits and Increased Stability* were highlighted through realization of their own potentials and talents, self-development, improvement in various Personality Traits and increased Emotional equanimity as successes. Some of the responses of this kind are quoted below:

“*Life is itself a success, an understanding relation with my spouse, my child, his upbringing. These are all successes.*”

“I have been able to attain a peaceful mind, which is much more balanced than before. I am emotionally stronger and stable, which is a big success for me.”

*Professional Successes like qualifying various competitive exams, getting good jobs and progressing in career* were also reported by many participants. A special category that emerged in this section was *Spiritual Involvement* that came up due to involvement with AOL. *Getting involved in the organisation, becoming an AOL faculty and getting a Guru in life* turned out to be a major achievement for many participants. Some participants thought that finding such a movement and a Guru like that in AOL was a success in itself. One such example is quoted below;

“When I saw the poster of my Master on a wall and below the line *The Art of Living*’ that was the biggest success and the turning point in my life*. I knew my search has ended here. I was all my life looking for a master to guide me.”

It was interesting to observe that forty responses included spiritual involvement or the AOL participation as an achievement/Major Success in their lives. This inclination throws light on the fact that, for most of the participants spiritual gains seemed to be more important than the materialistic ones. It was found to be so, inspite of the fact, that the sample in the present study comprised of youth who are considered to be more materialistically inclined. Therefore, it is important to observe that the people who got glimpse of spiritual satisfaction through AOL valued it more than any other aspect of materialistic gains in life. One of the responses of this kind is quoted below;
“When I passed out from my B-Tech, I got an extraordinary placement with a very good package. I used to party on weekend, get drunk and do all nasty things. But very soon I lost interest in everything, it became so monotonous. I was very successful with a good package, car, bank balance, smart girlfriend. I had everything a young man needs but my energy drained out completely. I started feeling depressed. Gradually I got into AOL, there when experienced my real self, it was an amazing moment. It became first success of my life. I did so many courses, lot of seva and then with my Guru’s grace became an AOL teacher which is the biggest success of my life.”

It is evident that achieving a good job, experiencing all pleasures in life was not sufficient for the participant to feel successful. It was only the involvement in AOL and consequent contentment felt by him that became a success. Similar responses were obtained by some other participants also.

It is important to note here that the youth, particularly the ones in the present sample were educated and well settled in their careers. Most of them were high academic achievers, well qualified and belonged to high socio-economic status. They were aware, rational, and scientific in their approach towards life. So for them being spiritually involved was not a part of earning money or passing their time. They found some meaning in life due to their involvement with AOL. So they considered it such an important part of their Major Successes or the ‘Ideal Me’ state.

**Major Failures**

The analyses of responses related to major failures of life indicated three categories which are as follows;

a) **Unsuccessful Interpersonal Relationships**

b) **Their own Personality Traits**

c) **Academic/Professional Failures.**

The major failures of life as reported by the participants related primarily to **Unsuccessful Interpersonal Relationships** which included **Broken Relationships, Attachment with people and Expectations from others.** Some participants reported
their Broken Marriage as a failure. They were all asked another related question, if the techniques taught in AOL and the knowledge imparted there-in helped them restore things? Interestingly, all of them believed that AOL played a vital role in helping them come out of the relationship without much harm.

“Guruji gave me strength during that time, I did the Advance course in the ashram immediately after all that mess and I got so much of strength. Earlier I felt guilty that I may be was unable to handle things, I might have gone wrong etc. But that guilt removed when I came to the ashram. Now when I look back I don’t even feel that I was ever married, but yes to the society I was therefore I can count it as a failure”

The **Personality Traits like being introvert and feeling emotionally unstable** were described by the participants as failures. It is interesting to note here that the participants who mentioned their Personality Traits like being emotionally unstable, or introvert and the ones who listed relationship failures like getting attached with others easily, having heterosexual relationship resulting in failures, were the ones who reported an improvement in them after involvement in the AOL and finally reported it as a success in life.

One participant mentioned wasting two years of life in drug addiction as a failure. He said,

“I wasted two years of my life in drinking, taking drugs, abusing people and all bad things, I wish I could have saved those years of my life and utilised them in serving the society.”

It implies that involvement with AOL had brought awareness in the participant regarding the harmful effects of addiction of drugs. His love for others that evolved through AOL made him mention those years of addiction as failure.

Out of all the reported failures, most of the responses were obtained in the category of **Academic/Professional failures such as ‘could not clear IIT, CAT exam, could ‘not get prize in a competition’, ‘did not clear job interviews’ etc.**

The participants took a long time in answering the question related to failures. They believed that all failures in life have turned out to be the pathways to successes. They
were more explicit in reporting successes, mentioned fewer failures, and expressed many failures turning into success.

The reported failures highlighted that it had been a journey from failure to success. Certain aspects were not considered as failures, only some turmoil was felt for some time which got settled down. In other cases, failures were perceived but at the same time they had a ray of hope and settlement was seen. During the time of reported failures as well they felt the strength to overcome the turmoil. There was an already existing contentment and positive outlook towards life observed in the participants.

iii. The Reported State of Depression: Frequency and Thought Process during the State

It was interesting to observe that thirty four out of fifty five participants were uncomfortable with the usage of the term ‘Depression’. According to them it was too serious a term to be used and warranted clinical diagnosis. Most of them had never reached that state. Some participants suggested usage of terms like ‘stressed’ or ‘low’ as substitutes for describing the experienced state. Nevertheless, fourteen participants mentioned that they had experienced the state ‘sometimes’. Forty one said ‘rarely’ and none of them opted for ‘all the time’, ‘daily’, and ‘frequently’ choices.

However, some participants also mentioned the kind of thoughts coming to their mind during their depressed state. These thoughts have been categorised into the following categories;

a) Obsession with the Problem
b) Overcoming Strategies

The thoughts related to Obsession with the Problem were either those referring to Inadequacy of Self or about Blaming Others. Inadequacy of self was described as self-doubt, guilt of not being able to implement Guru’s knowledge in life and the feeling of isolation. The ‘why me?’ state was described by many which included the feeling of not been understood by others and ‘why bad things happen to me only?’ thoughts. The responses of such kind are quoted below; For instance,
“Whenever I am depressed I feel that all the problems happen with me only. I try to be good to all but every time I am the one to suffer.”

“During that state there is a feeling of being incapable, low confidence, doubt on myself and my potential.”

“At times I feel I am useless. Guruji has given me so much, there is abundance of wisdom which he has given, but I still get caught up in petty things and disturb my state of mind. I feel guilty of forgetting that he is there to take care of me and I don’t have to worry.”

Financial problem was also a reason pointed out by two participants which lead to the feeling of inadequacy of self.

Very few responses indicated that they blamed others for their mental state. These primarily referred to others not doing right things or the change that others need to bring in themselves.

It is significant to note that even in the state of reported ‘depression’ there were more responses related to the overcoming strategies than those showing an obsession with the problem. This highlights a state of high awareness in the participants. They were trying to think about overcoming the negative mental state to reach a stable state. They focussed on the improvement that they needed to make in themselves. For instance, one participant said;

“I think about where I got wrong and what I should do so that I don’t get caught up in such mess again. Earlier I was very possessive for my husband. I used to behave very nasty at times even in front of others. After creating an episode out of small things and hours of not talking to anybody, just being alone I used to calm down. Gradually I started becoming more aware and promised myself that I will improve. I read Guruji’s knowledge on love, monitored my behaviour and got out of that behaviour of mine.”

Many responses were related to Increased Involvement with AOL such as doing Sudarshan Kriya, meditating, thinking about getting more involved into AOL activities, doing another course and implementing more of the knowledge of self and life taught in the courses. Some other responses are quoted below;
“Every time my mind starts complaining too much, grumbling often, sticking to negatives, I know it is an alarm bell for me to do an advance course.”

“When I don’t feel good, I open ‘celebrating silence, which is a compilation of Guruji’s knowledge on various topics in a book form and you won’t believe I just open it up randomly and I definitely get an answer to whatever is bothering me at that point of time.”

Some participants, however, also reported using Alternative Ways of Overcoming the negative state of mind such as going out for a movie, meeting friends, watching television and doing online social networking.

It was found that there was a movement from depression to a state of control and change. Moreover, most of the participants in the research were directed inward rather than outward. They referred to inadequacy of self while mentioning the obsession with problem more than blaming others. Similarly, reference was made more to the self-efforts needed to overcome negative mental state than look outwards for the solution.

AOL was found to be a strong motivating force towards positivity. The involvement with the organisation and practicing of the techniques learnt seem to have contributed highly to the coping and resilience of the participants to deal with the stressful situations and challenges in life. The major coping strategies during these situations involved meditating, doing an AOL course, doing Sudarshan Kriya and reading wisdom books by Sri Sri etc. Thus, AOL involvement offered a refuge to the participants in times of stress and also at the same time enhanced their resilience to cope with challenges in daily life.

To quantitatively measure Resilience of the participants Spirituality and Resilience Assessment Packet by Kass & Kass (2000) was utilised in the present study. The first component of the test measured Confidence in Life and Self (CLS) of an individual. The two subtests of this component are; Self Confidence during Stress (SCDS) and Life Purpose and Satisfaction (LPS).

The analysis of the scores of CLS (SCDS+LPS) revealed that the participants showed a concentration (44/55) in the range of High scores, which depicts that they were high
on Confidence in Life and Self. Out of the remaining participants most of them were placed in the range of Medium High and none was found in the range of Medium Low or Low scores on CLS. The mean scores of LPS (6.01 ± 0.90), SCDS(5.69 ± 1.01) and the CLS (5.80 ± 0.91) highlighted that the participants scored significantly high on Life Purpose and Satisfaction, Self Confidence during Stressful Situations and the total Confidence in Life and Self. Thus, they seem to be content in life as well as equipped to cope with the stressful and challenging situations.

**Section III: The Art of Living as Perceived by Youth**

The Art of Living Foundation is a non-profit, educational and humanitarian Non-Governmental Organization engaged in stress-management, spiritual and service initiatives. It was selected for the present study after realising its worldwide penetration and very high involvement of youth in the movement. The module of its programmes has a strong spiritual foundation and a unique appeal to youth. It is incorporated in many universities, multinational companies, schools and other professional platforms to enable youth in releasing their tremendous stress and pressure and also equip them with a spiritual edge in life. The structure of AOL has already been described earlier. However, it was considered important to study their perception of it in order to understand why they were attracted towards the organization.

The theoretical structure of the organisation as perceived by the youth was studied including the following aspects:

i. **The Aim of the Art of Living (AOL)**

ii. **The Conception of Three Cornerstones of AOL; Seva, Sadhana and Satsang**

i. **The Aim of the Art of Living (AOL)**

Participants were asked to state the aim of AOL. According to the responses their perception could be categorized under the following themes;

a) **Service-Orientedness**

b) **Self-Development**

c) **Perception of ‘One World family’**
**Service-Orientedness** is the most visible promising goal of the AOL. The literature on AOL websites and books depicts the social initiatives and projects by the organisation. Its areas of work cover conflict resolution, disaster and trauma relief, poverty alleviation, empowerment of women, prisoner rehabilitation, education for all, campaigns against female foeticide and child labour, and environment sustainability.

As also elaborated by Sri Sri, “*Our first and foremost commitment is to do seva in the world. When you make service your sole purpose in life, it eliminates fear, brings focus in your mind, purposefulness in action and long-term joy. When we do seva, it brings naturalness and human values back in society, it helps in building a society that is free from fear and depression*” (Art of Living, 2013).

The major goal of AOL as perceived by the participants was service to society. There were two major areas of service emphasised; **Making Stress and Violence Free Society and Service for Rural Development (education and spiritual development)**. Transformation of drug addicts, prisoners, terrorists and naxalites through the techniques learnt in AOL was also envisaged in the program. Various responses depicting such thoughts were;

“*AOL is working for spreading smiles and happiness.*”

“*The main aim of the organisation is to make the society stress and violence free*”

“*AOL is not only working with people in urban areas or the healthy population of society but also with prisoners, terrorists and naxalites which no other NGO does, Sudarshan Kriya experience transforms them completely by eliminating the stress from their system.*”

Imparting spiritual knowledge to others was considered to be a vital component of service for the participants. There was an urge to spread Sudarshan kriya and provide others a spiritual edge to make their life happy and contend.

**Self-Development** was noted that self-development which forms to be the second most common response was very much a part of the first category. **Transformation** is central theme of all AOL programmes which is induced through teaching pranayama,
Sudarshan Kriya and meditation. These techniques are key ingredients for eliminating stress in an individual and society. These programmes are conducted in more than 157 countries in the world and aim at the inner growth of a person.

Self-Development as perceived by the participants included two subcategories. The first one was *Spiritual Enhancement* and the second was *Individual Growth and Empowerment*.

The responses under *Spiritual Enhancement* highlighted the aim of AOL to be elevating self-consciousness. The *realisation of inner-self and inner-peace* were important goals of the programmes as reported by them. The practices and spiritual knowledge imparted in the courses directed the attention of an individual heavily occupied in the daily affairs of life to look deep inside and realise the existence of self- the ‘self’ that is different from all the roles performed by him in his life. The experience of being connected to the ‘inner self’ was extremely motivating for the participants to keep them involved in the teaching and activities of the organization.

Individual growth and empowerment was discussed in terms of the *enhancements (cognitive, affective, personality)* that people experience through the AOL programmes.

“*AOL aims at bringing an individual close to himself, his true nature, the inner happiness*”

“In so much of stress at office, home and other social settings one tends to loose the real essence of life, the beauty of life and the stability of life. This can be seen only if we relax for a while and go deep into ourselves, which is what AOL aims to do. Stopping us, relaxing us and taking us to our inner happiness.”

“The aim of AOL is to empower an individual from within and also the groom him from outside”

“AOL aims to nourish the talents and potentials in a person which become dormant due to day to day stress”

It was believed that *Self-Development* happened not only through practicing Sudarshan Kriya and meditations but also through implementation of wisdom
crystallized from ancient Vedas and Upanishads available in the form of books by Sri Sri. Some of these were ‘Celebrating Silence’, ‘Ashtavakara Gita’, ‘Discourses on Bhagwad Gita’, ‘Intimate Note to the Sincere Seeker’, ‘Wisdom for the New Millennium’, ‘Narada Bhakti Sutras’ etc. They also had audio CDs and Dvds of the knowledge discourses by Sri Sri. It was interesting to observe that even if one did not have access to any of these materials the AOL websites offered hundreds of wisdom sheets by the Sri Sri made available to the participants.

The wisdom books and other related texts offered the way of living or knowledge of handling various aspects of life. For instance, Celebrating Silence is a compilation of Guru’s words on topics like habits, desires, confusions, love, service, surrender etc. The participants were found to be very inclined to read these texts.

For instance, a participant reported, “Whenever I am in some problem I just read one page of ‘Intimate note to the sincere seeker’ by Guruji, I somewhere get an answer to my problem or question.”

It was also observed that two above mentioned goals of AOL were perceived to be interconnected with each other. All the social initiatives worked at the micro level by making each individual holistically healthy through the AOL techniques and spiritual knowledge. The notion that lies behind is that when an individual is stress free, he gets empowered to make others stress free and also eradicate social evils from society. At the macro level, they are provided with the AOL volunteers, funds and resources for transformation and development, for example, of the particular slum, village, prison or any other affected section of society.

**Perception of ‘One World family’**: The third major aim of AOL as perceived by the participants was to create a ‘One World Family’, ‘Vasudeva Kutumbhakam’ or ‘Universal citizenship’. AOL is an organisation which has a worldwide acceptance. The founder explicitly refers to the entire world as his family. AOL makes the efforts towards making the world unite as one.

The organisation recently celebrated its 30 years in Berlin as The World Cultural Festival where Sri Sri said “I am so happy to be here in this city (Berlin) where the
walls came down between people, it is time walls come down between cultures and civilizations. We all should remember we are a One World Family. We need to bring everyone together in the spirit of love, compassion and service.”

The participants reiterated the vision of their master as an important aim of AOL.

“AOL aims at making one world family... vasudeva kutubhakam..(in Sanskrit)”

“Wherever I go in any part of the country, I feel so much at home, everywhere I find AOL people, even when I travel for my office work I meet people in all parts of the world it feels so much taken care of.”

“When we go to attend navratri poojas in the Bangalore ashram, it seems that the entire world has come under one roof of yagya shaala where all the yagyas are done by Guruji. People from worldwide come to attend those magnificent divine days.”

It was evident from the responses that the aim of the organisation and the perception of participants lie in consonance with each other. Both acclaim the objective of the organization to develop a stress-free society, growth of an individual and to create one world family.

It can inferred from the responses of the participants that AOL aims to bring improvement in an individual and society by offering a spiritual edge (Sudarshan kriya, meditation and ancient wisdom) to people in an approachable and convenient manner which can be easily applied in the busy and complicated lives of people in the contemporary world.

ii. Perception of three cornerstones of AOL; Sadhana, Seva and Satsang

The three terms Sadhana, Seva and Satsang, the cornerstones of AOL, were perceived by the participants in various ways.

Sadhana

The generic meaning of the term ‘sadhana’ is to practice something in order to learn from it. Understanding of the term showed varied conceptualisations as reported by
the youth in the present study. The responses were classified into three major categories of description;

a) **Subtle self-related descriptions**

b) **Specific practices related descriptions**

c) **General descriptions**

**Subtle self-related descriptions** were classified into descriptions related to effects of sadhana on self and those related to the extension of self into higher forms.

The self-related descriptions primarily described the effects of sadhana on self such as **strengthening of self**, sadhana leading to **high awareness**, **disciplining oneself**, **feeling close to self** and **resting in self**. These descriptions highlighted the effects of sadhana rather than only pointing out to the composition of it. Some such responses are given below;

“Sadhana is what Guruji says, when there is no effort being put, when I am with ease, just me totally in peace and resting in myself that state is sadhana.”

“Sadhana is a state when I am hollow from inside and aware of my mind completely, like what happens in meditation. I am resting but I am also aware of thoughts in my mind and slowly the state of thoughtlessness comes where it is only awareness.”

“Sadhana is the being with self away from the tension and worries of the world”

“Sadhana means investing time in self, disciplining body to reach the inner self.

An interesting response mentioned below brought out the literal meaning of the term which was not reported by any other participant.

“Sadhana means “swa dhan” the wealth that we take along after we leave this body.”

The other descriptions related to self emphasised the extension of self into higher forms such as realisation of **strong connection of self with Guru, Divine or Supreme Consciousness**. For instance, two participants said that;
“When I do my sadhana that is the time when I feel myself connected to my Guru.”

“Sadhana is realisation that I am a part of the divine.”

The specific practices related descriptions used by the participants to describe the experience of ‘sadhana’ were the spiritual practices done by them which included yoga, Sudarshan kriya and meditation. They believed that sadhana is the investment of time into the practice of techniques they have learnt in the AOL to reach a peaceful state of mind or to experience the ‘inner self’. Two such responses were;

“Sadhana is suryanamaskaar, sudarshan kriya and sehaj Samadhi meditation. It takes me around one and half hours in doing all of this in the morning.”

“Sadhana is taking time out for yourself and doing the practices that Guruji has taught us. For me it includes padmsadhana, kriya, meditation and Gurupooja. I get up in the morning at 4 am to be able to finish it on time and reach my office.”

‘Padma Sadhana’ is a sequence of yoga postures which is taught in DSN (Divya Samaj ka Nirman) course of AOL. ‘Padma’ means lotus and ‘Sadhana’ is effort. According to Sri Sri, Padma Sadhana can help one blossom from within and it helps prepare the body and mind for deeper meditation which was also reported by the participants.

Some participants gave General Description of ‘sadhana’ which included union of body, mind and soul and food for mind. These responses highlighted the effects of ‘sadhana’ in a generic manner.

Most of the participants spent on an average one hour on sadhana which included yoga, Sudarshan kriya and meditation. For some, it took them one and a half to two hours. It consisted of the same practices. Except for a few, none of them had missed Sudarshan kriya for more than a day or two in approximately 6 months. Some participants had not missed it for a single day since 3-4 years. Interesting responses were obtained highlighting the consistency of sadhana. Few of them are given below;

“Doing sadhana is like brushing teeth, it can’t be missed even for a single day”

“Can you think about not attending to your natural biological call even a single day?? No because it cleanses our system and allows normal
functioning, similarly sadhana cleanses the mind and allows the daily functioning with ease”.

“Somehow I feel the day I go out of house without doing sadhana my day goes horrible”

It is apparent from the responses that ‘sadhana’ formed an important part of daily routine of youth in the present study. It was found to be an inevitable to their lives. It was considered to be a cleansing mechanism which made them ready to work through the day. It gave them strength, relaxation and realisation of connection with inner-self, Guru and the Divine.

Sadhana appears to be the term used for referring to the spiritual practices learnt in the AOL courses. These included yogic postures, Sudarshan kriya and meditation, which were considered to be important by the youth as they helped maintain centeredness, stability, restfulness, peaceful and a fresh state of mind for the entire day. The benefits of the practices have lead them to believe in the practices and also show an intense commitment for the same. Though it required investing a good amount of time before leaving for work.

Seva

As discussed earlier, seva forms one of the central themes of AOL. The courses, books, and websites highlight the seva component of AOL to a great extent. As the founder acclaims “Our first and foremost commitment to the world is to do seva, or service.”

Seva was perceived by the participants as helping others without expecting anything in return. The core of their thinking was ‘how one can contribute to society?’ It was considered to be an integral part of spiritual life.

Seva was perceived by participants in two forms;

a) Seva specific to the AOL
b) Seva in General (Good Actions)
Seva specific to AOL was more predominant. Most of the participants were involved in the AOL activities and projects which they called seva. It was interesting to note that they considered bringing people to the AOL courses also as seva. The belief behind it was that facilitating others experience their ‘inner self’ through the yoga, Sudarshan kriya and knowledge/wisdom is the highest form of service. On asking, many of them reiterated Sri Sri’s quote “when we give food to somebody we help him for few hours, when we give clothes or blankets to someone we help him for a few months, but when we bring someone to knowledge then it is the highest form of seva that helps him for life times. Therefore, it is the highest degree of service that can be done to anybody”.

Participants were involved in organising AOL courses, printing material for promotion of the courses, registering people for it, helping out with the arrangements during the courses or the other service initiatives of the organisation. They said,

“Making others realize their real happy self can be the biggest seva”.

“Bringing master and knowledge in somebody’s life is the biggest seva one can do”.

“On the last day when you see the love and smiles on peoples face after having done the course, it is the biggest blessing. They feel so grateful to you for bringing them to the course.”

The participants were also engaged in projects of AOL related to community empowerment (5H programme; Health, Hygiene, Homes, Harmony in diversity and Human values), peace movements, education in rural areas and women empowerment programmes. AOL is said to have adopted hundreds of slums all over India where 5H programme is running as reported by the participants.

The Generalised reference to Good Actions included doing good deeds or karma and developing good habits. There was mention of responses like ‘keeping your karma pure’, ‘talking politely’, ‘not engaging in bad habits like smoking and drinking’ and ‘not getting stuck in negative thoughts’, doing random acts of kindness’, ‘universal brotherhood’, ‘being available for others’ and ‘helping others without any expectation from them’.
Many participants also shared their belief and experience of abundance in life when they did seva. Various related responses were:

“When we spread happiness, we get it back in abundance”

“Nature has this law of giving back to us whatever we give, so if we spread joyfulness, peace and happiness it is increased in our lives too”

“I feel so much of Guru Grace with me when I am regular with seva, I just have to think and whatever I want happens.”

Seva was, thus, an important part of life for the participants. They managed their schedules from home and work to be available for it. There was also a sense of guilt reported by individuals who could not devote time for seva. On the other hand, it gave them a sense of fulfilment and contentment to be of use to the people in need or in general to society.

The concern for making the world stress and violence free as stated by many participants in the study can also be supported by Mickleburgh (2004), who 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, as also noted in the sample of the current study. Youth utilise spiritual and religious affiliations as a common link through which the members get together and contribute towards a larger civic cause (Verma & Maria 2006).

Seva, commonly understood as service, which forms to be an important cornerstone of the AOL courses and philosophy can be seen in the light of the expression of love for others and the extension of self to the humanity. Spiritual involvement of youth intrinsically motivated them to contribute to the society in various ways. Many researchers have highlighted the relationship of spirituality and civic engagement of youth. (eg. Lerner, 2004, Donelly et al, 2005)

Satsang

The third important cornerstone of the AOL organisation is Satsang. The word ‘satsang’ stands for the company of good (satya ka sang). Apparently, satsang is where people sing bhajans and dance in reverence of God.
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Satsang was a weekly feature in local areas of most of the participants. The participants reported that weekly satsang usually took place on Thursday (Guruvaar), the day of Guru. Gurupuja was said to be performed followed by satsang. ‘Gurupuja’ is a compilation of chants taught in the International Centre of the Art of Living in Bangalore. The chants are believed to unite mind with the tradition of Spiritual Masters. The satsangs also happen in the presence of Guru, though rarely.

Satsang was perceived by participants in the present investigation as the celebration in which bhajans are sung and people dance, clap and enjoy in a divine environment. The participants believed that by singing bhajans, the entire body gets soaked in positive energy and transformation happens.

The perception of youth broadly fell into three categories.

a) Overt expression of appreciation for the Master, God or the Divine
b) Covert appreciation and experience of the Divine
c) Company of good people (spiritually evolved)

An equal number of responses were obtained for first and the third category.

The overt expression of appreciation for the Master, God or the Divine included responses like ‘singing bhajans, ‘dancing’ and ‘expressing love and gratitude for Guru, God or the Divine’. The participants reported that AOL satsangs usually comprises of singing bhajans in praise of lord Krishna, devi bhajans, lord Shiva, praise of Guru and the Sufi bhajans. These satsangs are performed by participants from all religions.

The covert appreciation and experience of the divine included the expressions like ‘experiencing divinity’, ‘merging into infinity’ and ‘experiencing unconditional love’. Satsang was believed to be related to the experience and expression of freedom.

It was interesting to observe that youth enthusiastically expressed the enjoyment and fun they had in the satsangs. They also had some popular youth singers in the organisation who sang with their musical band. These were much more enjoyed by the participants. They become feasts where youth meet their friends, sing and dance
with them. Many participants also felt the environment to have turned into a “satvik discotheque”

Participants reported varied experiences of satsangs, as below;

“I cried so much when Krishna bhajan was going on. I felt I was in heaven, I never had that feeling before…”

“I forget all my small mind worries during satsang, it is the time when I am myself with no botheration from the outside world, I just freely sing and dance, there is nobody to judge me, just me, my Guru and love everywhere.”

The third category of responses was the conceptualisation of ‘satsang’ as the ‘company of good people’ or a platform where wisdom and knowledge are shared. It was noted that many knowledge sessions happen in AOL gatherings which are also called as satsangs. A group of people join in and attend various discourses by Guru, for example, discourses on Bhagwad Gita, Ashtavakra Gita, Shiv sutras etc. They discuss the interpretation of those discourses and the applicability of the same to their lives. Two such responses are given below;

“Satsang is whenever I am talking knowledge, it can be an informal discussion of some life sutra in between me and my friends, it is discussing good things in good company.”

“Satsang is sharing knowledge and growing in it, knowledge is the only way to lead a happy and detached life.”

Hence, satsang served several purposes for the participants. It was a social gathering for them where in they sang, danced and shared wisdom discourses of the Guru. It had improved mental, social and spiritual outcomes for the participants. It was an episode or an event they looked forward to.

These three cornerstones appeared to be related to each other. Many participants mentioned their interrelatedness with each other. For instance,

“When we are deep rested in self after doing sadhana, then there arises a need to help others or to do seva and the happiness after helping others is celebrated in satsang”
“The positive energy or the sattva gets increased while we do sadhana, in seva we use that sattva to bring difference in the lives of others and then express our gratitude to the Master for making us reach that level of being able to spread happiness.

Sadhana was a physiological and spiritual individual practice, seva was believed to be done for the society and satsang had both spiritual elevation and recreation purposes. Most of the participants were involved in these three on a daily or weekly basis. They considered them to be vital part of their lives.

Conception about the three cornerstones of AOL indicates the motivation which sustained youth’s involvement into it. The conception denotes positivity and made them firmly stick to the organisation. Thus, the structure of AOL offers a positive and healthy platform for the participants to experience positive states and progress towards a positive psychological well-being.

A closer examination of the cornerstones reflect the backdrop of Indian philosophy behind the philosophy of AOL. Seva, sadhana and satsang are the vital components of Indian thought which have been reiterated at different points in times in Upanishads and Vedas. These have been widely acknowledged and recognized as important means to spiritual living in India.

Sadhana is highlighted as essential in reaching the ultimate happiness or the real self (atman) in Indian philosophy. It includes the spiritual practices done to take oneself towards the mental and bodily purification leading to self-realisation. Sadhana has been recognized as important ingredient of spiritual living in all ancient Indian texts. The steps of sadhana or the means to the blissful state have been put forward in epics (such as Ashtanaga Yoga by Patanjali). Seva, has an inherent place in the lives of people in India since ancient times. The spiritually elevated people have devoted their lives for bringing change in the lives of other people and society. Social reformers such as Mother Teresa, B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Baba Amte, and Anna Hazaare, are few spiritual leaders who have dedicated their lives to the betterment of society. Both spirituality and service or love are inbuilt in each other and have been encouraged in the Indian context since its inception. Even, the concept of Satsang
began as an Indian philosophy and is termed from Sanskrit, meaning to be in the company of the highest truth or to be in the company of a guru that talks about and assimilates the truth. Satsang became a way to teach and reflect on ancient scriptures while bringing meaning to one’s life. Satsang also signifies singing and dancing in praise of the divine. For instance, Bhagvata puranas, mention about Rasleela, (a form of satsang) in which Gopis are mesmerized in love and praise of Lord Krishna expressed through their songs and dance. Rasleela, near Yamuna, in Vrindavan which is still known for utter devotion and Bhakti for Lord Krishna by his devotees.

**Section IV: Experiences During the AOL Courses**

The advancement in the research related to spirituality has been remarkable in the current decade, yet the experiential component of the multifaceted concept of spirituality warrants attention. A handful of researchers have focussed on the spiritual experiences of the individuals. Kass et al (1991) have emphasized the importance of core spiritual experiences in spiritual development. According to them, these experiences consist of two components: (a) a unique event accompanied by a cognitive interpretation of it that affirms the person’s belief in a higher power, and (b) a highly personal relationship between the person and a higher power.

The qualitative approach followed in the current investigation involved ample scope of collecting data related to the spiritual experiences of the participants in various contexts. Enormous data was obtained which gave deep insights into the spiritual experiences of youth during the AOL courses and even later in their day to day lives. The discussion below elucidates these experiences in the current context.

The participants enthusiastically described their experiences as they went through various courses of the AOL. The depth of experience increased with greater involvement in terms of doing more advanced level of courses. A glimpse into their experiences was obtained and analysed for various courses, separately. They are presented under the following sections;
Results and Discussion

i. The First Sudarshan kriya (SKY)

Sudarshan kriya is the cornerstone of the AOL courses. ‘Su’ means proper, ‘darshan’ means vision, and ‘Kriya’ is a purifying practice. It is taught in Part 1 course and is believed to be very powerful rhythmic breathing technique. According to Sri Sri, the rhythm of breath corresponds to our emotions and to the rhythms of earth and nature. These rhythms are often out of tune due to stress in our life. Sudarshan kriya brings them back into harmony. The technique is a rhythmic cycle of breath which has fast, medium and slow pace.

The person sits in vajrasana (yoga asana), does three stage pranayama, which is the prerequisite to the kriya. The pranayama is done in Ujjai breath (the breath of victory) which is a specific breath taken from the thorax. After the pranayama, the person sits comfortably with the body relaxed and chants ‘Om’ three times. Then the Sudarshan kriya begins. In the course, a cassette is played in Sri Sri’s voice and the participants are guided through the process. First, there are twenty slow breaths, followed by forty medium and forty fast breaths. This cycle is repeated three times. Then the person lies down and is guided through yoga nidra. He enters a state of meditation where the mind and body is deeply rested. During the course, participants are also taught short kriya which can be done at home everyday on their own.

Participants in the present study were asked to share the experiences of their first Sudarshan kriya during the course. They reported intense experiences of undergoing the kriya for the first time. Responses were put into three major categories;

a) Physiological experiences
b) Affective experiences
c) Transcendental experiences
The Physiological Experiences were primarily concerned with the ‘Mobilisation of High Energy in the Body’. They reported the flow of high energy in the entire body. Many of them felt Vibrations and Shivering in the body, flow of current in the Body and deep rest. Three participants mentioned that their ‘body got raised’ during the process. Some of them expressed that it touched every cell of their body. A few of them slept during the process which relaxed them and lead to restful state. A few participants reported healing of pains in different parts of their body, as they said;

“It was so strange that happened during my first Sudarshan kriya, my body was cold and shivering badly. I think for entire duration I was just shivering and freezing. I dint realise even for once that I am sitting with so many people. I could only feel voice of Guruji and the chillness in my body.”

“First kriya was a long peaceful sleep which did all the healing in me. It felt as if I was carrying so much of baggage in my head which dropped during the kriya.”

“During my first kriya, I was very weak because of the Tuberculosis medicines that I had taken for almost one year. It was getting heavy for me to breathe so regressively. I started crying baldy but did not miss even a single breath in the same rhythm that Guruji said. I was crying and breathing for very long I think. Then Guruji said you can lie down, I got completely blank. I could not feel my body or mind, it was such a healing I experienced”.

The tingling sensation in the feet as a result of Sudarshan kriya was reported by all the participants. It is evident from the responses that the experiences were intense at the physiological level. Apparently, the high energy produced in the body due to the process healed the pain in different parts of the body.

Interestingly, there were seventy one responses related to Affective Experiences during the process. These responses primarily included states of calmness, peacefulness and relaxation. De-stressing was a typical outcome of the process. Cathartic healing was a common experience. A state of high awareness and thoughtlessness was also reported by the participants. Two of such responses are quoted below;
“After doing first kriya my awareness got very high. For the entire day I could even hear voice of a pin dropping down, so much of instant sharpness was there.”

“I cried so much during first kriya, there was no specific reason or problem I was thinking about but I kept on crying. I don’t know when I stopped. It was I think a long sleep, when I got up the discourse had already started. I felt so refreshed and recharged.”

A few participants who had joined the AOL course because of depression and stress reported an improvement in their state with continuous practice of Sudarshan kriya. They were told in the course not to skip it for at least forty days which they followed. Their condition reportedly became better in a few months. Currently, there was no participant who was in the depressive state.

In the current decade, SKY as a breathing technique has undergone extensive research to show its empirical evidence. The reported findings of the present study reiterate the findings of the researches which have proved Sudarshan kriya as an effective tool in overcoming depression. In several studies, Sudarshan kriya has been demonstrated as leading to a high re-emergence as normal rate 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 psychiatrist measures have been used to assess the results of the practice. However, in the present study no standardised measures were used to study the effect of SKY on the participants. The conclusions are primarily based on the reported responses of the participants.

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 Letter, 2009)

The participants reported the experience of positive states, lowering of anxiety, fear, and other negative emotions with the practice of Sudarshan kriya. The intensive rhythmic breathing, followed by the meditative state actually resulted in de-stressing, calmness and a state of high awareness.


**Transcendental Experiences** formed an important domain of experience. The ‘realisation of inner self’ and ‘extension of self into humanity and nature’ were reported as resulting from the practice of SKY. Love and belongingness for all was also reported.

The common phrases used to describe the self-realisation states were; ‘I met myself’, ‘experience of inner happiness’, ‘I looked inwards’.

The extension of self into humanity and nature was observed in phrases of expression such as ‘belongingness with all’, ‘nature is so beautiful and serene’, ‘world is unconditionally loving’, ‘blissful and pure.’ A sense of belongingness and love was also felt for other people.

The entire cycle of breathing followed by deep meditation was found to elevate the participants to altered states of consciousness. The stillness after half an hour of specific concentrated breathing took them to an inner experience which was soothing and mesmerizing. Some such responses are quoted below;

“*When I did my first Sudarshan kriya, I was totally amazed that even this kind of an experience exits on this earth, which is so blissful, peaceful and full of love.*”

“*While Guruji was guiding through attention to all the body parts, I felt my body to be so beautiful. I was soaked in the entire process, it was a different world. I could feel the beauty of the world with my eyes closed.*”

The rationale of the such experiences as acclaimed by the founder was “*After kriya, many people feel so pure and so clear, so complete, because the consciousness, which was stuck in the matter, material, which is foreign to itself, got released from that and came back to its home (inner self). That is the sense of purity, feeling of purity*.”. (Art of Living, 2013)

In the same context, a study was done by Bedi et al (2010), to evaluate the effects of Sudarshan kriya on quality of life of 120 participants (48 females and 72 males) within the age range of 18-71 years. The quality of life was assessed through WHOQOL BREF (26 item questionnaire) assessing 4 domains of physical health,
psychological health, social relationships and environment. The questionnaire was administered on the first day before the starting of the courses and re-administered on the last day after the completion of the course. The Mean scores before on physical domain was 13.00 and after the course was 15.70, for psychological domain before it was 12.35 and after it was 14.86, similarly for social relationships before was 113.47 and after was 14.93 and for the environment before was 13.15 and after was 15.03 the results were significant at 0.001 level and indicated remarkable improvement in the quality of life after doing Sudarshan kriya.

The results of the present study are also in line with the findings of a very recent study on ‘The Art of Living’ by Tøllefsen (2012). She compared the reported effects of SKY on the participants in India and Norway. She noticed that both Indians and Norwegians described the remarkable effects of SKY to be not only emotional, psychological, physical as found by many studies but also spiritual.

The Art of Living organisation acclaims the empirical evidence of reduction in levels of stress, improved immune system, enhanced optimism, reduction in anxiety and depression, increased anti-oxidant protection, enhanced brain function (increased mental focus, calmness and recovery from stressful stimuli), well-being and peace of mind through the practice of SKY. The current study validates experiment results related to reduced levels of stress, relief from anxiety and depression and enhanced well-being and peace of mind. A participant reported improvement in her epileptic attacks which support enhancement of brain functioning. However, conclusions cannot be derived on the basis of one response.

It may, thus, be summarised that Sudarshan kriya was experienced as a purifying technique which releases the stress from the body and mind. It relaxed, energized and took them to the experience of transcendental states. It was one of the first exercises of its kind learnt by the participants. They experienced deep positive effects which provided them with the reinforcement they needed for their intense involvement with the organisation. Not only did it appear to be benefiting to them when it was done for the first time during the course but also the continuous practice benefited them in various physiological, affective and transcendental ways which further strengthened their faith and commitment to AOL.
ii.  **Part-1/ YES!+ Course**

Part 1 course is the introductory course of AOL. It is also called as the basic course. This is a 24 hours workshop spread over six days. The participants are taught a multitude of different forms of knowledge about self and life along with yogasanas and Sudarshan kriya. The *asanas* done with Sudarshan kriya are said to offer immense physical, mental and spiritual benefits. The basic premise of the programme is that breath is the link between body and mind, and thus is the key to handle mind and negative emotions. Therefore, the course emphasises breathing techniques to enable the participants improve their efficiency in life.

The YES!+ program is also an introductory course of AOL for the age group of 18-30yrs. It is reported to be a blend of ancient wisdom, yoga, pranayama, and meditation, fused with contemporary intellectual exchanges, music and games.

The Youth wing of the AOL is called World Alliance for Youth Empowerment. It is interesting to note that the founders of the YES!+ programme are highly educated individuals, Mr Khurshed Batliwala, postgraduate in Mathematics from IIT Mumbai and Mr. Dinesh Ghodke, B.Tech from IIT Mumbai, have been high academic scorers and all-round performers in school and college.

There were fifty three out of fifty five participants who liked the Part 1/YES!+ course for various reasons. The overall responses relating to the appreciation of the course were categorised as follows;

a)  **Content of the Course**

b)  **Personality of the Teacher**

c)  **Atmosphere during the Course**

In the context of the **Content of the Course** most of the responses indicated that *Sudarshan kriya* was the most important experience which made the course highly appreciable. Almost an equal number of responses included **Cognitive Enhancements to lead Positive and Balanced Life** that accompanied the course as AOL’s main attractive feature. The **Personality of the Teacher** was also acknowledged as influential by many participants. Some of the responses also included **Interpersonal**
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_Interaction_ which made the course interesting and valuable. The content of the course included the yoga, meditation, Sudarshan kriya and the ‘knowledge points’ to deal with various life situations. Five ‘_knowledge points_’ are taught in the course. These are said to be churned out from the ancient wisdom and made suitable to contemporary life. They are;

i. Opposite values are complimentary  
ii. Don’t be a football of others opinion  
iii. Don’t see intentions behind others mistake  
iv. The present moment is inevitable  
v. Accept people and situations as they are

As discussed in the last section, _Sudarshan kriya_ was found to have a profound effect on the participants. The benefits were described by the participants in length. The _knowledge points_ mentioned above gave them a positive outlook for life. They could relate to many of the situations at home or workplace discussed by the teachers in which people tend to loose emotional balance and react in negative ways. Solutions on the basis of these knowledge points were highlighted to them in order to maintain their calmness and balance. The sessions were quite interactive which was highly appreciated by them. They could discuss the problems related to relationships, career, academics, family, sex, addictions and other aspects of life which they found relevant to themselves. There were cognitive, affective and transcendental effects reported by the participants. Some examples are quoted below;

_“The sessions in the YES!+ were mind-blowing. We were all boys in our course and we discussed everything which was bothering in life, be it girls, sex, masturbation, attraction etc. Our teacher was very frank and yet profoundly embedded in knowledge. He answered all the questions so intelligently. After that it became so easy for me to understand myself and the events in my life.”_

_“There are so many situations in life in which we get stuck and blank. Each sutra taught in the course is so powerful. When I implement the knowledge there is immediate shift in me and of course the situation in which I am.”_
“The biggest achievement for me in the basic course was that I became positive in life. I had become so depressed and passive in life. It gave me a route to happy life.”

Along with the techniques learnt in the course, the **cognitive enhancements to lead positive and balanced life** were believed to be very significant. They proved to provide a positive approach towards life of the participants.

The second category of the responses was the ones expressing the impressive **Personality of the Teacher**. Many respondents liked the way in which the teacher conducted the course. Most of them remembered his/her **smiling face, positivity and friendliness** of the person. They found him/her very polite and calm. It was reported that the teacher seemed to implement the knowledge they spoke about in their lives as well.

“There are two people who have made a lot of contribution to my life. One is my Part 1 teacher and the other is my TTC teacher. My basic course teacher changed my life completely. Her way of taking the course was so serene and powerful. Every word she used to say had so much hidden knowledge in it. After that course also she helped me so much to overcome problems of my life.”

“My basic course teacher had such a positive aura. His face was scintillating and radiating all the time. I used to wonder what it is in him that is so catchy and positive. Gradually I felt so connected to him. He was enthusiastic like a child but also knowledgeable like a sage”.

Attachment with the AOL teacher was also shown, even if Guru himself was not present during the courses. As was also evident from the responses, the participants continued contact with them even after completion of the course. They had taken the role of guide and mentors in their lives.

Role of mentors and faculty in University students has been researched earlier as well and is found to show positive effects of the same. A study done by (Braskamp, 2008) brought out important role of faculty in life of youth. Among emerging adults who are enrolled in higher education, faculty are apt to serve as mentors. The first-year college students who were assigned randomly to a formal mentoring program with a professor
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designed to nurture spiritual development self-reported greater levels of spiritual growth compared to those in a control group without a mentor.

These spiritual role models seem to play a significant role in taking the participants ahead on the spiritual path and keeping them committed to AOL.

**Atmosphere during the Course** was another point of appreciation among the respondents. It had **High Energy**. They felt the environment to be very **Welcoming and Positive**. **Belongingness** was reportedly felt by them. They felt connected with the teacher, the volunteers and other participants. The high energy processes done in the course created for them a very peaceful, informal and congenial atmosphere.

Some of the participants observed;

“This was the first place where I saw so much of belongingness with each, the first process of the course in which we had to meet everybody and say ‘I belong to you’, took my breath away initially I was so hesitant, but immediately felt such a difference in me, felt my heart opening up and blossoming”

“The venue was full of positivity and love. There was high energy in the air.”

Some of the participants initially felt **fakeness** in the atmosphere and people’s behaviour. They observed the surroundings with suspicion, but gradually appreciated it and became a part of it. An example is quoted below;

“On the first day I was thinking why the teacher and the volunteers were smiling all the time for no reason, I felt it to be quite funny, infact their politeness looked very artificial to me, but slowly I so much became a part of the whole group that I myself became like that smiling and loving.”

However, a few exceptions were also observed. Three participants did not like the course. The reasons cited for that were as follows;

“I did not find it age appropriate, there were all oldies sitting, it appeared so boring, I did not even go for all the days”
“I did not experience anything new in the course, it is all what we already know, nothing was new and attractive.”

“I was so much soaked in my life at that point when I did the course, I could not relate to anything happening around, I was just physically there. I think I was no prepared to take it.”

The above reasons were mentioned for disliking the course which were individualistic and do not stand enough to conclude generalisations.

Nonetheless, there was a general positive appreciation for the introductory course attended by the participants. They felt high in energy, experienced an emotionally balanced state, belongingness for others, better concentration, clarity and an overall positive and happy state of mind after the course.

In this context, a research was carried out to investigate the effects of YES!+ program offered as a Physical Education credit course to the students of Cornell University, New York and arrived at similar findings. The results reported; 100% of the students felt positive and better, 94% believed that breath made them calmer, 97% reported reduced stress and 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)

Another study was done by Ram et al (2010) to assess the effect of the Introductory level course (YES!) on level of adjustment in 55 school students (28 females and 27 males) in the age range of 17-20 years. The participants were assessed on their level of life adjustment by administering Bell’s Adjustment Inventory Revised Version (1962) Student Form Booklet developed by Hugh, M. Bell. The assessment was done on the first day prior to the course and on the last day after the end of the course. The Mean Scores for the dimensions of Home, Health, Submissiveness and self-assertion, Emotionality, Hostility/friendliness, Masculinity/Feminity, before the course were 11.96,10.66,19.6,18.44,15.64, 12.17 respectively. The average Mean scores after the course for all dimensions were 9.25, 8.44, 13.78, 13.48, 12.51 and 12.98 respectively. The level of significance for Home & Health dimensions were significant at (0.05) levels and submissiveness and self-assertion, emotionality, hostility/friendliness dimensions were significant at (0.01) level of significance. The results indicated
Results and Discussion

significant changes on these dimensions of adjustment in the participants after their participation in YES course.

The Part 1 course was found to have major impact on the participants due to the breathing practice, Sudarshan kriya and other reasons mentioned above. These factors offered positive interpersonal exchanges and environment to the youth which triggered the experience of positive affective states by the participants along with the cognitive enhancements and to some extent the transcendental experiences.

iii. The Part-2/Advanced Meditation Course (AMC)

Advanced meditation course is a four days programme which is built on the experiences of the basic course. It offers long deep ‘hollow and empty’ meditation with silence for two and a half days and satsangs everyday in the evening. The four days are structured to offer a mix of sadhana, seva and satsang. Most of the participants (44 out of 55) had done the AMC. They reported intense experiences during various processes in the course especially the silence.

The course was described as a ‘perfect vacation for body, mind and spirit.’ The responses of the participants were categorised into the following streams;

a) Orientation towards the Self
b) Relaxation and Peace
c) Altered states of Consciousness
d) A March towards Divinity and Appreciation of Nature

Orientation towards Self was the major category of obtained. The participants seemed to go deeper into themselves which lead to increased self-awareness, and realizing the specific features of their own personalities. There were thirty six such responses as given by the participants. Some of such responses are;

“I realised that I had so much of talent in me.”

“I felt more relaxed and peaceful.”

“I became aware of the self as different from my thoughts and body.”
“I realised that I exist without my family and friends and specially my mobile phone, I liked “my” company. I was so much in love with myself”.

The AMC meditations took them away from the mundane routine of life and offered directedness and attention to themselves.

Relaxation and Peace was another important generalized theme of responses. The experience of being de-stressed was common among the participants. They reportedly felt relaxed, calm, peaceful and in the present moment. Cathartic healing was reported by fifteen participants. Two such responses are stated below;

“I dropped in all my garbage of thoughts and feeling and realised what hollow and empty, meant. It is an experience in which you are totally hollow with no botheration, sadness and worries”

“I did the Advance course at the time when I was in great distress. I had worked day in and out for Miss India contest for entire one year. It was all set I filled up the form and took it to my dad for his signature and he denied, I was shattered and had thought of not forgiving him ever, my brother told me to do it, for the first day I dint like it much then second day onwards I started liking the silence and third day I was totally a new person, totally hollow and empty. I had forgotten all my distress I .had forgiven my father and was smiling. There was so much of change in just three days was mind blowing.”

Experiences highlighting Altered States of Consciousness were reported by many participants. Some of these are as follows;

“After, the birth and death meditation, it felt as if I took a new birth.”

“During the panchkosha meditation, I had a unique experience of ecstasy, joy and bliss.”

“I felt to have reached the state of Samadhi.”

The increased self-awareness was further taken to experience of unique transcendental states. There was Realization of Inner Self away from all the materialistic spheres of life. The heightened state of awareness made them to think
about the questions about the purpose of life and their birth. Many participants reported such a quest. Some such responses are;

“I was so much aware of every passing moment, the deep rest took my mind away from the botheration of day to day life and I found myself wondering about the purpose of my life and my existence.”

“During the nature walk, while looking at the beautiful nature I used to start thinking that am I made for the monotonous tasks I do in my life or is there any bigger purpose to my life.”

It is evident from the responses that the participants had frequent experiences of the thoughts about the **Existential Questions** regarding their purpose in life.

The **March towards Divinity and Appreciation of Nature** was another unique category obtained from the responses. The experience of divinity was a feature of this experience. The category included responses such as;

“I became aware of the beauty of nature during the course, could appreciate flowers, trees and the natural fragrance around me.”

“There were intense moments of appreciation of everything around me, moments of ‘wow’ were so common. It was a truly blissful state.

“Advance course was a total experience of grace of the master and the divine, there was so much gratitude for Guruji for bringing this experience into my life”.

“There was a process in the course in which we had to share our life story with the group members, while doing that I realised that in each tough moment of my life, I was taken care of by the master or the divine. Every tough moment he gave me strength and I could pass through all stressful times.”

Two participants had rather similar unique experiences. One of them was:

“During that meditation of imaginary creating a human figure and then giving life to it, it seemed that God’s power was in my hand, tears started rolling from eyes. I was so grateful to my Guru for providing this experience to me.”
An *intense connection, gratefulness and faith on the Divine/Guru* was felt by the participants. They reportedly felt *intense appreciation for the nature, surroundings and everything around in the world*.

It was apparently a positive experience which all the participants had during the course. Interestingly, many of the participants had repeated the course for as many as twenty times. Being asked why they attended it for so many times, participants generally gave the following responses;

“It is like getting a car serviced, we need to get it done after every few months, even our body and mind needs servicing and cleansing and advance course does exactly that’

“Whenever my mind starts getting stuck I know it is time to repeat an advance course.”

“I do the course every 6 months, so much of stress gets accumulated in mind every day, it is so important to get rid of it and heal our system.”

It was evident that AMC is a powerful programme which generated intense subtle experiences in the participants. The *Silence*’ was the most liked process of all. The initial difficulty in maintaining silence was expressed by the participants on two accounts, first, that they were not habitual of it and second, due to consequent bombardment of thoughts and feelings. Gradually, they moved to a positive, comfortable and happy state. Many participants said that they did not feel like speaking after the course as the state of being silent was so blissful.

Another important component of the advance course was discourses on ‘self knowledge’. Everyday few hours were spent on watching videos by Sri Sri on discourses regarding various aspects related to self, others and consciousness. These mainly comprised of the themes taken from various Indian ancient scriptures explained with their applicability in contemporary life situations. Participants reported more meaningfulness obtained from these discourses in the advance course due to sadhana and satvik food intake in the course. Some supporting examples are mentioned below;
"The significance of controlling desires as explained in Gita, never seeped inside my mind, as it did during the AMC. I think the sattva and restfulness in mind is so high, that even these difficult concepts get rooted in you so easily."

"Every knowledge video that I saw during AMC has impacted me in some way or the other. The knowledge about the untarnished and blissful self that Gurudev talked about just gave an absolute different dimension to my life."

"I still remember all Shivasutras discussed by Guruji in the AMC"

The calm and relaxed state of mind which participants gained after the processes they underwent during the course helped them understand and implement the abstract concepts related to self and happy spiritual living

The meditations were reportedly very long which initially caused bodily discomfort but gradually became deeper. These meditations were played in the Guru’s voice during the course. The ‘hollow and empty’ meditation was liked the most. They expressed the combination of silence and mediation as vital for enabling them reach the altered states of consciousness. Since they were virtually cut from the outer world, they got ample scope to connect to themselves. The other commonly cited benefits were better acceptance of self, less bothered by the external events, less frustration and anger and attaining natural state of being.

Seva also formed to be an important part of the course. The participants reported washing utensils, cleaning floor and toilets and doing other arrangements in the course venue. These tasks were understood to remove all the inhibitions from the minds of the participants. They indicated their willingness to do the assigned seva tasks in the course.

The satsang was indicated as the most enjoyable part of the course. They could sing bhajans and dance. Since, it was the only time they spoke during the course, they looked forward to it. Reportedly, they enjoyed the satsangs more during the AMC as they were already in high positive energy. Therefore, they felt directly connected to the divine by singing bhajans. The usage of word ‘mesmerizing’ and ‘dissolving’ implied the spiritual enjoyment experienced by them.
The intermix of sadhana, seva, satsang and self-knowledge in the Advanced Meditation Course was observed to offer intense transcendental experiences to the participants. They apparently highlighted the experience of Realisation of Self, the Acceptance of Self and Others, Altered States of Consciousness and an Experience of Divinity. All the processes in the course led to the Generation of Positive Energy as, was reported by the participants.

The meditations and silence seemed to be the central ingredients of the Advanced Course. A significant number of researches have highlighted the positive impact of meditation on practitioners. Quality research has demonstrated many mental and physical health benefits of regular meditative practices (Shapiro & Walsh, 2007). 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 confirmed some of these finds among adolescents. Compared to controls, high school students trained in meditation experience improved self-esteem, lower systolic and diastolic ambulatory blood pleasure, lower resting blood pressure, decreased heart rates, and reduced cardiovascular reactivity. (Barnes et al, 2004). The experience of the Advanced course in the current study articulated more of the transcendental aspects as compared with the other domains of improvements.

According to Bala & Singh (2010), meditation is creation of the special state of consciousness which differs from everyday consciousness by higher concentration and attention, with withdrawal from the outside world, and with an altered experience of oneself. Mindfulness meditation (a Buddhist meditative practice) and other meditative practices have wide acceptance among health professionals and scholars. Benefits of regular meditative practices include stress reduction, acceptance of self and others as well as improved coping and relationships. A large number of physical benefits such as lower blood pressure, recovery from various disorders and diseases and stress reduction have been highlighted (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Shapiro & Walsh, 2007).

Vipassana, which is 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 (TSCS, 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 programme was similar to the Advanced course of AOL which had long meditations, activities of high awareness, nature walk etc. Vipassana included the activities performed with heightened awareness. The 18-hour day was divided between alternating periods of sitting and walking meditations, mindfulness exercises, listening to brief dharma sermons, prayers, small-group discussion regarding the experiences, other meditations and chantings. Complete silence was maintained throughout. The structure of the programme resembled the AMC in terms of knowledge, meditations and silence. The results indicated significant changes in the way self is perceived and defended after taking up Vipassana programme. The TSCS scores of meditators underwent transformation showing increase in overall self-esteem, feelings of 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 non-attachment was significantly correlated with a heightened sense of personal worth and fulfilment. (Emavardhana & Tori, 1997)

It is important to note here, that the components of physiological, cognitive, affective and social transformations are much less reported during the AMC. It was interesting to note that with the movement from the introductory course to the advanced courses the other-directness is reducing and inner-directedness is increasing in the participants. There is a progress towards transcendence,
divinity, existential quest and spirituality. The Guru’s strength began to be realised in self by the participants. After the advanced course, they develop the desire to do it more often, the reason cited by them is generally de-stressing. Promotion of ‘belongingness’ during AMC, which is also a basic social motive of an individual kept the participants firmly stuck to AOL.

Thus, the empirical data supports that 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.

iv. The Blessing Course (BC)

The Blessing course is a three full days course. The eligibility for doing this programme is two advanced courses. It is said that very intensive cleansing processes are undertaken during these three days, with release of toxins from body and mind. It leaves the participants in a pure state so that they get the power to heal and to bless others.

There were twenty two out of fifty five participants who had done the blessing course. The overall responses were categorised as follows:

a) Experience of being connected to the Guru/Master
b) Realisation of Expansion of Self
c) Purity of Body and Thought

The first major category of responses were related to the intense experience of being connected to the Guru/Master. The participants apparently felt a close connection with the Guru during the processes in the course. They reportedly felt a Close Bonding with the Guru and Experienced Gratitude for him. The presence of his aura was reported by many participants. Some such responses are quoted below;

“During the entire Blessing course, you can feel Guruji’s presence and aura. Especially on the last day when the initiation process happened I felt Guruji inside me it was such a strong connection I felt at that point of time with my Guru.”
“The Blessing course is a total experience of Guru grace”

“Guruji cannot be everywhere, so we are able to give his blessings to others by doing the blessing course.”

“I was in silence after that beautiful experience of initiation of the power to bless. I was in so much awe with guru and full of gratitude. My connection with him got so much stronger in the blessing course and it is really magical I have seen so many people healing with my blessings or rightly said Guruji’s blessings through me”

It was believed that the power to heal and bless others is Guru’s own power which flowed to others. The participants who did the course just became the instrument of Guru’s blessing, according to them. Another study assessed the effect of ‘blessing’ course on levels of Gratitude on 87 participants (34 females and 52 males) from 25-65 years. Gratitude Questionnaire 6 item Form developed by McCullough, Emmons & Tsang (2001) was administered on the first day prior to the course and on the last day after the completion of the course. The average mean scores for gratitude, before the course was 36.71 and after the course was 38.79. The level of significance (t=0.00143) indicated that Blessing others increased the sense of gratitude in participants (Aishwarya et al, 2010).

The Realisation of Expansion of Self was another unique experience emphasised by many participants. The elevation of self included responses in the following subcategories;

- Experience of ‘Guru tattva’ in Self
- Realisation of Divinity in Self
- Experience of being a part of Supreme Consciousness

This category involves the Transcendental Experiences of the course. The expansion of self was experienced at three levels, the first one, being at the level of realisation of Guru ‘tattva’ (element) within self. The second one, being the realisation of divinity within themselves and the third one, referring to ‘self’ as an integral part of supreme consciousness. The three subcategories highlight the Self as a ‘Bigger Concept’ than
the ‘self’ commonly referred to. Knowledge of self and mind through various discourses by Guru shown during the course were reported to be immensely important in this realization. Some participants observed;

“There is a bigger mind in each one of us. It is called as the Guru element, when we connect to that Guru element than we are beyond our small worldly mind. Whatever we think at that moment comes out to be true. The blessing also works in the similar way when we are connected with bigger mind, then our blessing manifests.”

“There were meditations in the course which took me to a different level. In the open eye meditation, I felt I was a part of the sky we were looking at and a part of the supreme creation.”

There was a reiteration of the self merging and expanding into the higher transcendental states. A deep appreciation for nature and the world was also repeatedly communicated by the participants.

Some other responses by the participants indicated the **Purity of Body and Thoughts**. The purity was believed to be achieved in two ways; **Fading of all Impressions from the Mind** and **Cleansing of the Body through Intensive Processes and Meditations**. The related responses were:

“On the last day of the blessing, just before the last process of initiation of the blessing power, I was so confused that I am prepared to get this power or not. There was a Ganpati pooja happening in ashram I was sitting in front, suddenly Gurudev entered and my body started shivering, I could feel my body temperature going high, my body was not in my control...at that time I felt union with Gurudev, I could feel him inside me and me inside him. It was such a pure feeling, I felt so pure and that moment made me feel that I am ready for becoming his instrument”

“There were lot of inhibitions and fantasies in my mind related to opposite sex, sexual involvements etc...but the process we did in blessing course made me just empty....like an empty vessel which has no dirt.”
The participants who had done the blessing course seemed to have a lot of reverence for it. It was indicated that the course had deeper meditations which aim to make an individual closer to self and the higher consciousness or Guru and, therefore, they are able to bless others. The connection with the consciousness makes it manifest. In this context few responses mentioned by the participants are:

“It is beautifully explained in the movie “Secret”, the intention, attention and manifestation. Whenever we put our intention on something with the undying attention and put efforts to achieve it, then it has to definitely manifest”.

“It is all about your intention, when I am happy and content, connected to my Guru and the divine so whatever intention I have for the person I am blessing will get the attention in the form of guru grace and it has to definitely manifest”.

It was evident that **Faith in Guru was a Vital Force** in the entire phenomenon. Participants believed that it is his blessing which reaches people through them. The use of the phrase ‘instrument of guru’ mentioned earlier also conveys the same. The realisation of self and its manifestation into higher levels of consciousness formed an integral part of the experiences.

The Blessing course apparently aimed at taking an individual close to his ‘inner self’ which is away from the narrowness of the worldly preoccupations and emotions and connecting him to the vastness of the consciousness through intensive processes and discourses on self. An important element in this process formed to be increasing gratitude and faith on the Guru who had shown them the path to the spiritual experiences and way of living.

**It is apparent from the experience of participants during different courses that the elementary courses such as Part 1 and YES!+ are joined primarily for destressing, grooming personality or specific improvements in oneself. The later courses such as the AMC or the Blessing course are joined for higher order purposes like expansion of self, seeking divinity, transcendence, and relatedness with the Master. The youth who have reached these courses had already a state**
of high intrinsic motivation and fulfilment to keep themselves extensively involved in all the activities of AOL and practice the techniques learnt without requiring any extrinsic motivation.

v. The Teacher’s Training Course (TTC)

The teachers training course imparts training required to become an AOL teacher. It is either a twenty one days or fifteen days residential programme which is done either at the international centre of AOL, Bangalore or at the centre in Germany. It is also called ‘military training programme’ by those who have already done it. It has an elaborate eligibility criteria which needs to be fulfilled by the candidate. The candidate needs a recommendation from an existing AOL faculty who has taught these courses for at least 3years. The first step after submission of the form is its evaluation by the TTC desk in Bangalore, followed by the Pre TTC programme which is for two consecutive weekends. On completion of all the given tasks, with subsequent interview, a person clears for the TTC. It is a long and laborious process to clear Pre TTC. The members also call it as ‘Guru’s test,’ and a ‘chance given by the Guru for them to grow’. So, they do it happily. After the completion of the course, many participants say ‘it is all done by Guru’, ‘I could not believe I could do so much, it is also grace of Guruji’ etc. The following results are divided into two sections;

a) Reasons for undergoing TTC

b) Experiences at TTC

a) Reasons for undergoing the TTC

In the study twenty six out of fifty five participants had done the TTC. They were asked the reasons for undertaking the programme. The analysis of the responses brought out two major categories of reasons for undertaking the programme;

• Self-Motivation
• Motivation from Others
Self- Motivation was reported by most of the participants. The reasons exhibiting self motivation as the factors that triggered them to undertake the teachers training course were related to self-growth and social concern.

Self-growth included reasons like grooming their own personality, implementing knowledge better in life, living more happily, and completing their journey to the ‘self’ etc. Social concern was a stronger reason than self-growth. The participants used phrases such as ‘spreading experiences of Sudarshan kriya’, creating a ‘stress free and violence free society’ and ‘spreading smiles’.

The various responses related to self- motivation are as follows:

“ I wanted to implement the knowledge that I have gained in all the AOL courses to the full and I thought TTC would help me do that.”

“When I did my first Sudarshan kriya, the experience was so much blissful that I decided I would spread this to the entire world”

“I thought it was the best way of giving back to the society what I had got.”

The participants were very enthusiastic to facilitate others experience the effects of the AOL courses and Sudarshan kriya in specific. It formed to be the primary reason for joining the TTC course.

Another important reason which motivated them to take up the TTC was the Impressive Personality of the Existing Teachers which influenced them to attain a similar persona. A participant observed;

“My basic course teacher was charming in personality and positive. When I finished my course I decided that I have to do the TTC and become like her.”

Motivation from Others was the second category featuring the reasons for taking up the teachers training course. The predominant reason for most of them was Direct Motivation by the existing AOL faculty. The following example of reason indicates that;

“I was going through my divorce proceedings when I did the AOL course and my teacher helped me so much to walk through the hard patch smoothly. He motivated me to focus my attention on TTC and everything will happen on its own. It eventually came out to be true.
Another important reason stated was, that **Guru wanted them to undergo the TTC**. Two set of illustrations emerged from this. The first was the case in which the **indications were felt by the participant without any real communication by the Guru**. It was felt in dreams or during meditation that Guru wanted them to go for the course. The second one was that the **Guru himself communicated** to the participant to take up the Teachers Training Course. Few such responses are quoted below;

> “Guruji came in my dream once and was waving to me, I got so depressed that he is going out of my life, I discussed with my AOL teacher also, but could not find a reason...then while doing Pre TTC, a meditation happened and I immediately got an answer, Guruji was telling me to come to the ashram and do TTC...he was not going away he was coming closer...”

> “When I first saw Guruji’s picture I knew he is the one I was looking for all these years and the first day of the course I decided my way of life.”

> “After my MBA I was confused as to what next to be done in life. I asked Guruji that jobs don’t attract me I want to become an AOL full time teacher. He said come to the ashram. I went and did seva for around seven months and asked him again. Then he told me to become a teacher and travel across world to teach youth courses.

A few participants mentioned multiple reasons for taking up the TTC. These reasons included a combination of the first and second category illustrations.

**b) Experiences at the TTC**

The experiences of the Teachers Training course were shared by the participants. However, the confidentiality of the processes was maintained by the participants. They did not share any process in specific. The succinct verbalisations of the experiences made by them indicated that the participants had intense experiences during the TTC course. The responses of the participants were categorised into the following streams;

- **a) Self-Growth and Development**
- **b) Experience of Intense Connectedness with the Guru**
- **c) Extension of Self to Others and Nature**
Self-Growth and Development was reported as the major experience by most of the participants. They reportedly felt increased stability and strength in themselves. They emphasised high self-awareness, deep rest, fullness and emotional equanimity as other states commonly experienced during the course. Some of such experiences of the participants are quoted below;

“During those days for the first time I got appreciated for what originally I am, no artificiality just the natural me, I realised my potentials, I never knew I could sing, organise event. Imagine I organised Guruji’s visit to the TTC successfully and earned a lot of appreciation for it”

“I felt myself changing; something improving in me with each passing second, my vision got so much broadened.”

“I got high fever during TTC, but did not miss any process I knew I am been taken care of. I felt myself conversing with my spirit, which was telling me that I am born to serve, to serve my Master, to serve the society, to make the society stress free”.

The second category was Intense Connectedness with the Guru. He was physically present for some time during the course. The participants reported intense connection with him irrespective of his physical presence or absence. Some of such responses are as follows;

“It was a feeling of being in God’s aura, full of energy, totally liberated, not stuck in anything what so ever, I experienced immense grace, faith became unshakable, I realised whatever is happening in my life I being done by Guru for my growth and he himself is taking care of everything, even smallest of my desires and botheration.”

“Guruji could be felt with closed or open eyes. His presence was so much there during the entire course.

There was a very interesting response obtained from a teacher who was Muslim,

“Guruji saw me and told me mujhe teri zaroorat hai, abhi tak mene itna kuch kiya hai tere liye, main tuje poori duniya mein bhejna chahta hu(I need you, till now I have done so much for you, I want to send you
to the entire world) it just changed my life, it was a turning point total new birth. The earlier me had died who was tender, fragile, ill, always grumbling, it was new me smiling fresh in my Guru’s love”

The third category that emerged was **Extension of Self to Others and the Nature**. They articulated responses referring to **Intense Connection with the humanity, oneness with the nature, feeling of being at home and belongingness with all**.

Some other common phrase for describing the experiences were ‘best days of my life’, ‘it was a phenomenal experience’, and ‘I remember each and every moment of TTC’.

“The Bangalore ashram has beautiful greenery all around. In the evening when I used to take a walk I used to feel all the trees, flowers and plants to be my own. Everything used to seem very lively to me. As if there is an intense relation we share.”

“Nobody I met in the course looked different to me. I felt love, care and respect for each one alike. I tried to help everybody as much as I could.”

“I realised the purpose of my life during the TTC, which is to serve others.”

The above mentioned responses throw light on the mental state of all the participants during the TTC programme. They reported improvement in their personality. An intense connection with self, Guru, humanity and nature was experienced by them. During TTC the participants spent time away from their families. The responses show that participants took up various tasks designed for their physical, mental and spiritual growth which made a deep impact on their lives. It was reportedly a very significant time for all, and turning point in life for many. There was invariably an experience of universal love. They felt connected to the fellow participants and the world. A deep connection was felt with all and a desire to do the service for others was expressed. There was also a mention of obtaining answers to the existential questions related to the purpose of life. They were high on enthusiasm and excitement while sharing their experiences of the same.

Evidently, the TTC course was primarily **other-directed**. It was taken up as an expression of Universal love and belongingness and an inner desire to contribute to
the society. The intense spiritual experiences during various courses and techniques practiced by themselves lead to a shift in their cognitive levels of thought process. A broader perspective of life was attained manifesting itself in wanting to make others stress free and spiritual.

**Summary: Experiences in various AOL Courses**

The above sections describe the experiences of the participants in various courses of the AOL starting from the introductory course which is Part 1/YES!+ to the highest level of course which is the Teachers Training Course. Except for the TTC which cannot be done more than once, the participants had undergone each course several times. An intense commitment and involvement is evident through the descriptions of the participants discussed above. They did not undergo the programmes unwillingly, forcibly or just for the sake of doing them but were totally soaked into them. The phrases like ‘mesmerised’, ‘liberated’, ‘full of energy’, ‘did not want anything else’ express that they were completely engrossed in the processes and their experiences. They appear to have valued all the processes in various courses and therefore, these made a deep impact on their lives. The intrinsic motivation seemed to have played a vital role in their frequent participation and intense involvement in the programmes.

As already stated the higher level programmes were more related to enhancing the transcendental dimensions in the lives of the participants. These experiences seem to be highly significant to the current trend of spirituality research focusing on the experiential component of it which still lags behind in the available literature related to the construct.

Some important themes which emerge through careful observation of the collective narrated experiences of various courses done by the participants are;

i. Universal Love
ii. Realisation of self and its connectedness with humanity, Guru, Divine, Higher power and the Supreme Consciousness
iii. Existential Quest seeking answers to the questions involving the purpose of life
iv. Enhancements of Self in all domains of Development (physiological, cognitive, personality, socio-emotional and spiritual)

v. The role of the Spiritual figure (Guru) as a mentor/Guide and the importance of wisdom imparted by him

The experiences of the youth during different AOL programmes can be summarised into the above listed themes. The major point of references and the exemplary responses point out to these as the essential domains of their spiritual experiences. It is also important to note that along with the experiences of different meditations and process in various courses the self-knowledge imparted by video discourse given by Guru played an extremely important role in the gradual movement of the participants to the transcendental states. Every programme done by them not only offered calmness, transcendental experiences and happiness during the courses but also equipped them with practices and sutras they could implement in their daily lives to be able to live with the same effectiveness and happiness.

One of the very few studies exploring the experiential part of spirituality was done by Nelson & Hart (2003). They assessed the frequency and variety of the ‘recalled spiritual experiences’ in 450 undergraduate students. The data obtained was analysed under four categories of experiences; wonder, wondering, relational spirituality and wisdom. According to their study, nearly 80% of youth ‘sometimes’ felt a sense of awe and wonderment inspired by the immediate world around them and of those, out of which 85% reported first occurrence of such an experience before the age of 18, and for 12% it happened even before the age of 6 years, 27% experienced the same between 6 and 12 years, and 46% between 12 to 18 years. The connectedness of everything in the world was also experienced by them; 39% young adults indicated that they had had a moment of “unitive connection” and of those, 70% said it occurred atleast once in childhood or in adolescence. Wondering on existential questions related to life, its purpose and meaning was experienced by children as young as 7 years. The experiences of receiving guidance (wisdom) from some source that is not part of their usual physical world was answered positively by 61% and 85% of those indicated that this experience occurred before the age of 18 years. Relational spirituality (interconnectedness) was experienced by 70% of young adults out of
which 31% indicated that the first occurrence was before the age of 12 years and for 48% it was between 12 and 17 years.

The study throws light on the understudied aspect of spirituality, i.e. the experiential part of it. Though the method used by the researchers focusses 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 and typical to all stages of development rather than it being only understood as a concept seen through administering few standardised tests on adults and correlating it with different variables.

The cited experiences of youth in the present study demonstrate that spiritual experiences offer deep insights into the understanding of spirituality with its manifestations and expressions. Nonetheless, the themes of the construct seem to be common, overlapping and merging into each other. The uniqueness of the qualitative methods in analysing experiences was evident in the present investigation.

Section V: Perceived Personal Enhancements due to involvement with Art of Living

One of the major outcomes of the involvement with AOL was that the participants felt enhancements in various domains of life. A general increase in the feeling of well-being was reported by them. The areas in which participants reported improvements are physiological, cognitive, affective, personality, social and spiritual. The specific responses under each domain are described below;

a. Physiological Enhancement

The responses related to physiological enhancements fell under three broader categories enlisted below;

- General Improvement in Physical Health and Stamina
- Increased Respect and Care for Body
- Alleviation in the Symptoms of Physical Disorders
Improvement in the physical health was reported by many participants. Thirty one responses were obtained stating *General Improvement in Physical Health and Stamina* such as reduction in body weight, high energy throughout the day and Improved Food Habits.

The improvement in physical health and stamina was also reported through self-rating by the participants. They were instructed to rate themselves from 0-5 (0 being the least and 5 being the highest) on their physical health and stamina; separately for their physiological status before joining the AOL, and that for after involvement with AOL. Table V depicts the frequency scores of the participants (Males and Females) for each score (0-5) Before and After involvement with AOL on the variable.

**Table V: Frequency of Male and Female Participants on Physical Health and Stamina Before and After involvement with AOL.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>Physical Health and Stamina Before</th>
<th>Physical Health and Stamina After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (n=55)</td>
<td>Male (n=27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above Table highlights a significant improvement in Physical Health and Stamina for both Male and Female participants. The concentration (43/55) of the scores of the participants (both Males and Females) on physical health and stamina before joining...
AOL is between 2-3 whereas the scores of most of the participants (45/55) after involvement with AOL primarily lie between 4-5. This indicates a movement from average physical health and stamina to above average or good state of the participants irrespective of gender. It is also significant to note here that 19/55 participants rated themselves to be highest on their perceived state of the variable. The significance of difference was tested for which the results are given in Table VI.

**Table VI: Mean, t and p values of Male and Female Participants on Physical Health and Stamina Before and After involvement with AOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Health And Stamina</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>t score</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2.28 ±0.88</td>
<td>4.15±0.76</td>
<td>-13.811</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.70 ±0.86</td>
<td>4.24±0.75</td>
<td>-8.790</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.87 ±0.71</td>
<td>1.87±0.71</td>
<td>-11.586</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Mean score on Physical health and Stamina for the Total Sample Before involvement with AOL was 2.28 ± 0.88 and After the involvement it was 4.15 ± 0.76. For Male participants the scores Before AOL involvement were 2.70 ±0.86 and the After scores were 4.24±0.75. For the Female participants, it was 1.87 ±0.71 and 1.87 ±0.71 Before and After respectively. Thus, there was 2 point increase from before to after the involvement in AOL. The p value (<0.001) indicate significant improvement in physical health and stamina of the participants.

The second category of responses indicated **Increased Respect and Care for Body** as an achievement in Physical Well-Being. Some responses are quoted below:

“I have become more conscious of the reactions of my body to different types of food, I avoid taking the food that does not suit my body, I am conscious of the time I have my meals, the quantity of food etc.”

“I was 82 kilos when I did the course, now I am 66, which is a big achievement in itself.”

“I do my sadhana in the morning and the entire day I feel so energetic, the day I miss it I am so lethargic and drowsy”
The other responses were related to the **Alleviation in the Symptoms of Physical Disorders**. Participants reported various disorders which got cured due to their regular practice of the techniques taught in AOL. The following quotes exemplify this:

“I was diagnosed with amebiosis in 12th class. I had high intensity of loose motions, it was very chronic, even when I used to enter a mall I used to feel so nervous, and feel indigestion, sit in the washroom and go back home. It was really bad. I was on medication for 5 years. The day I finished my TTC I had decided that come what may I will not take any medicines for this and it was 4 years back till date I have not taken any medicines, it is 90% cured. It is guru’s grace and my commitment to my sadhana, seva and satsang...”

“I have had a very depressed childhood, my parents were separated, me and my mom were staying together, I used to have such bad epileptic attacks, and it was so frequent. I had lost all hopes from life. I was taking medicines regularly, it was upsetting my system badly, my food pattern, sleep, state of mind, health everything. During my first course also I had an attack during Sudarshan kriya. I cried so much after that. My frequency of attacks started decreasing considerably after that and it has been three years now I have had not more than 3-4 attacks, which is nothing less than a miracle.”

A total number of 34 out of 55 participants reported physiological improvements induced through AOL. There was an improvement in various physiological conditions of the participants after joining AOL. In the current sample, 12 participants reported consumption of alcohol and tobacco before joining AOL and 1 participant reported its consumption currently. There were 5 participants who had spondillities before joining AOL and currently 2 participants were suffering from it. Similarly, six participants reported, having stomach disorders and migraine before AOL involvement and currently 3 had stomach disorders and 1 was suffering from migraine. One participant reported consumption of drugs before but was not consuming them anymore. Thus, the regular practice of Sudarshan kriya and other AOL activities helped in improving physical conditions of the participants.
Alcohol Consumption and Cigarette Smoking: In the present investigation, twelve participants reported consumption of alcohol and seven participants used to frequently smoke earlier. From these, eleven were Males and one was Female. Four participants reported leaving alcohol and smoke during their first course whereas for three others it took them approximately one year to completely leave alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking. Four reported having continued alcohol even after about two years of AOL involvement and then gradually they had left it. Only one participant in the study still consumed alcohol and smoked cigarette. He had not liked the AOL course and did not practice after finishing it once. One participant reported the consumption of drugs before joining the AOL course, but he came out of the addiction after completion of his first course. The current consumption was nil for all the participants except one.

A number of studies have proved that spiritual or religious affiliation is inversely correlated with the consumption of alcohol, cigarette and drugs in youth. A study 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 (The CARS) and the Spirituality Scale (SS). The results indicated significant relationships 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, scored M = 3.570, on the Spirituality Scale; 95 participants who reported their current health status as good, scored M = 3.945, on the SS; and 42 participants reported their current health status as excellent, scored M = 4.18 on the SS. 20 participants reported their overall physical health as poor or fair, scored M = 3.565, on the SS; 82 participants reported their overall physical health as good, scored M = 3.962, on the SS; and 39 participants reported overall physical health as excellent, scored M = 4.182, on the SS. 73% participants indicated that they were mostly satisfied in life. In examining the relationship between a self-reported level of spirituality with regard to alcohol related health risk behaviour, 69.5% participants consumed on a weekly basis, one 1-50 alcoholic beverages (M - 13.283).

With the above findings Nelms, et al (2007) concluded that 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 healthy behavior, practice independence and experience better physical health. Students with self-reported spirituality were found to be less likely to drink alcohol.

Larson & Larson (2003) cited significant research evidence indicating that youth who were more spiritual or religious, tend to be less likely to experiment with alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. 14,000 youth were surveyed and the researchers found that more religiously committed youth, were less likely to experiment with drugs. Religious association with a group and involvement have been found to be inversely related to cigarette smoking. Another study by (Brown & Gary 1994) brought out that African-American men in the general population who frequently visited church were two thirds as likely to be current smokers as those who attended less frequently. A similar study by (Francis & Mullen, 1993) showed that unaffiliated believers in God (who were not associated with any religious group) who did not attend church were less likely to agree that smoking behaviour was wrong compared to affiliated believers (who were associated with a religious group).

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 found that two third of the total sample considered spirituality as very essential in their everyday lives. Most of them (82%) of them 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 and alcohol consumption. The present research evidence corroborates the findings of the earlier studies in demonstrating that spiritual or religious affiliation has a significant impact on general physical heath, health related risky behaviours and several physical disorders.

Thus, the involvement of participants in AOL resulted in positive impact on the overall physical health and various other physical disorders.

b. Cognitive Enhancement

Cognitive improvements due to AOL involvement were experienced by 39 out of 55 participants in the study. They attributed these attainments to the involvement with AOL. The analysis of various responses obtained regarding cognitive enhancements brought out two categories which are as follows;

- **Enhanced Intellectual Capacities**
- **Academic/ Professional Performance**

The **Enhanced Intellectual Capacities** which were considered to have been improved were; depth and duration of concentration at various tasks, clarity of thoughts and objectives, keener observation and awareness, better decision making and problem solving skills and improved time management. The various responses illustrate this;

“Since the time I have done my TTC I am able to manage my office work and AOL so much better, now I keep up with my personal interests as well as my official responsibilities.”

“As soon as I used to sit for studies all my past used to bother me so much, my break up, emotional problems etc and I was not able to concentrate in my studies in the YES course we were taught
Results and Discussion

concentration pranayama. I started doing it just before sitting to study, I actually helped me get excellent grades in my boards. I never thought getting such high marks, it was unbelievable. but now I when I reflect my concentration had really gone quite high.”

The Academic/Professional Performance included improvement in college semester grades, becoming the highest scorers and rank holders in university and college. The professional accomplishments included getting campus placements for university students, progress/ promotions in existing jobs and acquiring better jobs. Some such responses are quoted below;

“After entering college I had started consuming alcohol, I was always dozing off in class, I was not able to concentrate at all in my studies. One of my teachers whom I was getting counselled from told me to do the YES course and it changed the graph of my life. I topped in my college 1st year, came fourth in the Delhi University. In 2nd Year also I topped, came second in the university. I was such a dumb student in school I used to flunk and give my exams again and again, but just one decision changed my life. Now I am preparing for IAS and am sure I will clear it and will give you my interview again.”

“It was so amazing thing that happened with me. In my campus placement I was the one who got placed at Microsoft. I had always dreamt of Microsoft as my employee. It came out to be true. All credit to YES+. It taught me all the skills that I needed for clearing this interview.”

Undeniably, participants reported improvements in their cognitive abilities by practicing Sudarshan kriya. They attributed their professional and academic progression to ‘Guru Grace’. It is evident from the responses that various techniques they practiced sharpened their cognitive skills and consequently helped them achieve a lot more.

As seen through review of existing literature, numerous studies have also shown that spiritual practices and involvement and have a positive effect on the academic achievements of youth. A study on factors that affect academic performance for African American youth found that church attendance was significant in predicting
their positive academic outcomes. African American youth attending church had higher academic outcomes compared to their non-attending peers. (Williams et al, 2002). Another study (Walker & Dixon, 2002) found that spiritual beliefs and religious participation were positively related to academic performance. Students who participated in religious activities and/or had spiritual beliefs had better academic performance. Jeynes (2002) also found that religious schooling and religious commitment both had a positive impact on the academic performance of students and also on their school-related behaviour. Students who were committed to their religion were well behaved in school and had better academic performance.

Mindfulness, one of the most researched meditative techniques has been closely associated with cognitive and affective enhancements. One of such studies was done by Singh & Pareek, (2010), which aimed at understanding the relationship of mindfulness with cognitive needs and meta mood skills in 120 graduates in the age group of 18-2 years. Mindfulness Attention Awareness, Need for Cognition and Trait Meta Mood Scales were used to delineate the relationship between dispositional mindfulness, interest in thinking, complex problem solving and intellectual tasks and attention, clarity and repair of mood. The results of the study indicated that significant relation of mindfulness awareness with cognitive needs and meta mood skills. Mindfulness emerged out to be a self-regulatory process and mechanism for enhancement of cognitive and academic performance. A few other empirical studies that have been conducted in India have found positive effects of meditation on cognitive processes like attention, cognitive flexibility, memory and perceptual awareness Sridevi & Rao (2003).

Most of these researches emphasise the role of faith and confidence in God to be an important factor for stimulating the academic success. The present study also highlights the importance of faith on Guru/Divine or God but the cognitive enhancements were not only limited to academic achievement but they also related to the broader cognitive enhancements. The regular practicing of techniques learnt in AOL programmes helped them to enhance problem solving abilities, decision making, concentration, focus, clarity of mind, improved brain activity, reduced stress etc. All of these together played a major role in improving their overall cognitive domain of development.
c. Affective Enhancement

Affective or emotional domain was most talked about among the improvements induced by AOL. 44 out of 55 participants acknowledged the improvement in their affective states after joining the AOL. The two major categories that emerged through various responses were;

- Better handling of Negative Emotions
- Enhanced Positive Emotions

The Better handling of Negative Emotions like anger, jealousy, inferiority, hatred was reported by the participants after the intense involvement with AOL. Many participants enthusiastically reported about the changes that they have experienced in the context of handling their negative emotional states. For instance,

“Earlier I used to throw things during my blast of anger, but now I am much controlled, I withdraw myself from the situation for a while get balanced and then come back”.

“I have a very emotionally nature, earlier I used to get so much upset with high pitched voice also, I used to start crying on small things like people not giving attention to me, not being loved etc.”

The handling of impulsive outburst of emotions was professed by many of them. It was observed that AOL techniques provide what they claim to do, that is the emotional stability, handling aggression, anger and other negative affective states. However, it also appeared at times that joining AOL seemed to be a refuge to go whenever emotions went abnormally high and difficult to manage. For instance, a participant reported;

“You won’t believe in last two years I have had 3 break ups and every time my heart was broken, the best medicine during heart ache is the advance course. It provides so much of stability, three days with yourself in so much of sattva heals everything, it is an instant energiser. It makes you so much emotionally stronger”.

Attainment of emotional equanimity was found to be reported by some of the participants. The emotional extremes did not make much difference to their behaviour. It is illustrated with the example below;
“Now there are many times when there is emotional trauma and many times it is extreme happiness, I have learnt to be consistent in my approach. Neither do I get too happy nor too upset with the situations. I think and take time and handle the situation at my disposal.”

The *Enhanced Positive Emotions* were also felt by them. The shift of the focus of life from negative to positive was certainly appreciated as an important transformation. They felt that they are more happy and content in life after getting involved with the AOL. Frequent experiences of happiness, well-being and love were reported by youth. Two such responses are quoted below:

“I used to always compare myself with others, my looks, my clothes, money and everything feeling so inferior and jealous. I was not able to jell with others because of this…but now I feel belongingness with people around me and rather than comparing I try and learn from them to improve upon myself and also acknowledge the positive in me which is a big change I feel”

“The biggest reason for all the negativities and stress is doubt. We doubt ourselves, we doubt the intentions of others and we also doubt the divine for not giving us what we deserve. Sudarshan kriya makes that shift from negative to positive. We can appreciate all the good things that have happened to us and feel grateful. We can appreciate the love and bliss that divine has bestowed us with.”

Happiness and Satisfaction are important indicators of well-being of an individual. In the present investigation, they were analysed through numerical coding. The participants were asked to rate themselves separately, on both the indicators on a scale of 0-5 (0 being the least and 5 being the highest) as per their current perceived levels of Happiness and Satisfaction. Their scores were analysed through quantitative assessment. The results are presented in Table VII as frequency of scores of participants’ under each of the six ratings;
Table VII: Scores of Male and Female Participants on Current Happiness and Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratings</th>
<th>Happiness</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (n=55)</td>
<td>Male (n=27)</td>
<td>Female (n=28)</td>
<td>Total (n=55)</td>
<td>Male (n=27)</td>
<td>Female (n=28)</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt; 2.0</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean ±SD</td>
<td>4.04 ± 0.74</td>
<td>4.12±0.76</td>
<td>3.97±0.72</td>
<td>4.0±0.77</td>
<td>4.08±0.79</td>
<td>3.93±0.75</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p Value (Males vs Females)</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.564</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is apparent from the above Table that there is a concentration of the scores between 4-5. Most of the participants, 45 (22 Males and 23 Females) rate themselves on 4-5 on Happiness scale and similarly most of the participants i.e. 41 (21 Males and 20 Females) on the scores of 4-5 on satisfaction scale.

The Mean score on current levels of Happiness and Satisfaction for the Total Sample was 4.04 ± 0.74 and 4.0±0.77 respectively. For Male participants, the score was 4.12±0.76 and 4.08±0.79 and for Females participants it was 3.97±0.72 and 3.93±0.75 respectively. The p values of Males vs Females on Happiness (0.465) and Satisfaction (0.564) indicate there is no significant difference in terms of gender on the variables investigated.

The data presented highlights that Happiness and Satisfaction were perceived as overlapping for both Male and Female participants in the present study. The scores on both show many similarities.
The perception of youth in present study is similar to the general view of both the terms as overlapping. Srivastava & Misra (2011) have differentiated between these two seemingly overlapping constructs. According to them, life satisfaction may be viewed as cognitive conceptualisation of happiness, which involves judgement of fulfilment of one’s needs, goals, and wishes. Happiness is an affective construct, which involves emotions, and life satisfaction is a cognitive construct which involves evaluation of one’s life and accomplishments against some standards.

Religion and spirituality have been widely related to happiness, positivity, emotional stability, less anxiety even in previous investigations. Hettler (2004) described emotionally healthy college students to be more likely to approach life positively and responsibly. A relationship between positive emotional health and religion is shown by Frankel & Hewitt (1994). They examined the role of faith groups on a Canadian college campus. In regard to religion and well-being, the study found that groups affiliated with religious organizations on campus reportedly were happier (t = 3.27; p < .01) and more satisfied with life (t = 4.39; p < .001) than the non-affiliated student groups.

Numerous Indian studies have highlighted the positive effects of meditation and other spiritual practices on positive states and well-being of individuals regularly practicing them. Jangid et al (1988) found a reduction in anxiety levels and increased EEG alpha activity in 30 meditators, who practiced Transcendental Meditation (TM) regularly for six weeks. Jain et al, 2007 found that one month of meditation practice increased positive states of mind and decreased negative thinking in distressed students. With practice, emotional reactivity could be replaced by emotional equanimity. Sridevi et al (1996) reported that regular practice of certain yoga postures and TM for 10 months in a group of single women resulted in a significant reduction in the levels of distress associated with menstrual cycle. Sridevi & Rao (1998) reported an increase in positive personality characteristics in direct relation to the time spent in practicing Transcendental Meditation. Bhushan & Sinha (2001) reported that individual with high levels of anxiety and hostility, who engaged in yoga-nidra meditation, experienced a significant decrease in their symptoms. Chandiramani et al (1995) conducted a study in prison setting, and found that the group of prisoners who received Vipasana meditation training showed less aggression, reduced dependency,
and an enhanced sense of self on a projective drawing task immediately after practicing Vipassana meditation in contrast to prisoners who did not. Mohan et al (2004) reported that a large number of participants found a new direction in life, and expressed a desire to achieve higher states of consciousness after participating in a formal spirituality-based lifestyle program in Bangalore.

The relation between happiness and religiousness and spirituality has been observed in various age groups by a number of researches. As in a study by Holder et al (2008), the relation between spirituality and happiness in 320 children aged 8–12 from public and private faith-based schools was assessed. 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 showed 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. Another study of adolescents done by Francis et al (2000) on 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.

Scholars have recently acknowledged the effects of spirituality on enhancing positive states and experiences in youth. 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. Another study suggested that urban African American male adolescents use of religion and spirituality as coping mechanisms is important in their development of a healthy sense of self and self in relation to others. These males report better 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). High levels of intrinsic
religiousness/spirituality are associated with higher levels of optimism, which in turn are associated with satisfaction in life and less psychological distress Salsman et al (2005).

Purohit et al (2010) conducted a research to find out the effect of two systems of meditation on adolescents stress, coping, locus of control and optimism. Sample consisted of 400 adolescents 200 (100 boys, 100 girls) undergoing Vipassana and 200 (100 boys and 100 girls) undergoing Transcendental Meditation. Two standardised instruments were used for assessment; Coping Response Inventory developed by Rudaf, H. Moos and Asufa Inventory developed by Udai Pareek, which were 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 depression tec. Thus, meditational techniques facilitate relaxation and consequently help in reducing psychological dysfunction and enhancing subjective well-being.

The qualitative data and the quantitative data on happiness, satisfaction, resilience and other variables demonstrate a movement towards high self-confidence, constructive coping strategies, positivity and enhanced well-being in youth in the present investigation. The techniques and the cognitive strategies learnt by them during the courses coupled with mentors (AOL faculty and social circle) whom they could look up to for dealing with the challenges of life provided a secure base to them. These facilitated youth in progressing towards a positive image of self, meaningfulness and purpose in life and contentment of being able to fulfil their transcendental needs. Thus, the outcomes of AOL involvement lead to development of positive mental health and psychological well-being in youth.
Results and Discussion

d. Personality Enhancement

As acclaimed by the AOL, regular practices taught in the programme offer self-development and grooming of the individual’s personality. Fifty one out of fifty five participants reported immense changes and remarkable improvement in their overall personality. The responses were classified under two major categories;

- **High self-awareness and further improvement in self-perception, self-concept and self-esteem**
- **Enhanced self-confidence and realization of talents, potentialities and creativity**
- **A March towards Extroversion**

The first category of personality transformation that emerged from the responses was **high self-awareness and further improvement in self-perception, self-concept and self-esteem**. ‘Freedom’, ‘positive’, ‘confident’, ‘independent’, ‘content’, ‘self-motivated’, ‘assertive’, ‘dynamic’, ‘secure’, ‘broader approach to life’, ‘mature’, ‘flexible’, ‘committed’ etc were some of the words used by the participants to describe their current personality traits after joining the AOL. A few examples of the responses are quoted below;

“After joining AOL, I became a lion from a mouse, it is a total 360 degrees change, from being useless to useful.”

“I got so much love and appreciation in my AOL family that my self-esteem which had got shattered due to my broken marriage and comments from my in laws came back, I realised I am worthwhile, my view of myself improved a lot.”

“I was so high in inertia and fatigue earlier. I used to love relaxing, sleeping and not doing much of leg work. It was a dull routine that I had. But now it is so different I am so high on energy the entire day. I am not rigid or adamant and very open to taking challenges in life.

“Earlier I used to think only about myself and my life, but now I have obtained a broader perspective towards life. I meet different kind of people, people with different experiences and learn so much from the. So rather than just sitting and thinking now I go ahead and explore.”
The participants reportedly experienced a shift in their thought process regarding themselves and others. More energy, flexibility and positivity enabled them stand better in the outer world.

The second category of responses obtained were related to enhanced self-confidence and realization of talents, potentialities and creativity. Most of the participants realised that they could do many creative tasks apart from their profession which they could never think of earlier. Some of the supporting responses are;

“I recognised my potentials and talents, with each passing day I felt myself capable of doing much more than I had ever thought, I could sing, I could dance, I could speak fluently, my confidence increasing, people were liking me more...so it’s a complete development of the personality and enhancing all the talents that go unrecognised in us.”

“I realised that it is all in mind that I can’t do this or that. Everything is possible, when the mind is stress free. The energy is so high whatever challenge or work I take, no matter I have done it before or not, it is the best output that is delivered, in my blissful states I can write beautiful poems, I have written poems for Guruji, this creativity has just come in naturally in me, I don’t know how...”

“I always wanted to become a singer, but my parents wanted me to become an engineer, I did B-Tech, but was not happy with my job and all, I spoke to Guruji he blessed me to become a singer, I got various opportunities to sing in AOL youth concerts and my voice became better and better, gradually I left my job I started full time singing and AOL projects and I am so happy of making this decision my his grace and blessings, my family is happy to looking at my achievements and fame.”

The improvement in self-confidence of participants was also investigated through the self-rating measure similar to the one used for determination of improvement in physical health and stamina. Table VIII depicts the frequency of scores for Males and Females in this context.
Table VIII: Frequency of Scores of Male and Female Participants on Self-Confidence Before and After involvement with AOL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>Self-Confidence Before</th>
<th></th>
<th>Self-Confidence After</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (n=55)</td>
<td>Male (n=27)</td>
<td>Female (n=28)</td>
<td>Total (n=55)</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above Table depicts the frequency of the scores on Self-Confidence of the participants Before and After involvement with AOL. The difference in the self-confidence Before joining the AOL and After the involvement is clearly evident. Almost all (52) of the participants (25 Males and 27 Females) lie on the scores 1-3 in the level of confidence Before, whereas After the involvement the same number (52) of the participants rate themselves on scores 4-5 (26 Males and 26 Females) with a significant number of 25 (11 males and 14 females) rating themselves on the highest score. The significance of difference was tested for which the results are given in Table IX.

Table IX: Mean, t and p values of Male and Female Participants on Self-Confidence Before and After involvement with AOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.99 ± 0.81</td>
<td>4.41 ± 0.58</td>
<td>-19.372</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>2.09 ± 0.88</td>
<td>4.41 ± 0.55</td>
<td>-12.248</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.89 ± 0.73</td>
<td>4.41 ± 0.62</td>
<td>-15.243</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Mean score of Self-Confidence of the Total Sample Before involvement with AOL was $1.99 \pm 0.81$ and After the involvement was $4.41 \pm 0.58$. For Male participants the score Before was $2.09 \pm 0.88$ and After was $4.41 \pm 0.55$ and of Females, it was $1.89 \pm 0.73$ and $4.41 \pm 0.62$ Before and After respectively. 

Thus, there was more than 2 point increase from Before to After the involvement with AOL. The $p$ value ($<0.001$) indicates significant improvement in Self-Confidence of the participants.

Several responses involved the third category which was *march towards extroversion*. The participants reportedly improved upon their communication skills and the leadership skills. The self-confidence gained by the participants had helped them vocalise their point of view without feeling hesitant. Many participants reported getting ample opportunities of delivering introductory talks for AOL courses at different platforms like schools, colleges, offices, local markets etc. They reported enhanced leadership skills to be one of the significant improvement felt by them. These helped them in gaining confidence and shedding away the stage fright and fear of others opinions. Some responses indicating improved skills are quoted below;

“I was such a dumbo in my school, used to sweat if my teacher called up my name to stand up, but now I address hundreds of people without any fear.”

“I was very shy in my childhood years, very introvert my parents had to force me to speak even in front of my relatives, gradually I started opening up after the Yes!+ course... then I took up various youth projects of AOL, became teacher and now the recent was that I organised the entire youth event at Hindu college where thousands of youth gathered to listen to Sri Sri. It was such a big success for my team and I could head it.”

Evidently, the participants gained more confidence and improved their self-esteem and other personality characteristics. The responses provide an insight into the improvements felt by the participants in their personality traits besides other physiological and cognitive transformations described in earlier part of the section.

An improvement in Leadership skills was also deciphered through a 0-5 self-rating scale. The results are presented in Table X, in terms of the frequency of scores on leadership skills before and after the involvement with AOL.
Table X: Frequency of scores of Male and Female Participants on Leadership Skills Before and After the Involvement with AOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>Leadership Before</th>
<th>Leadership After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2.0</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above Table shows the frequency of scores on Before and After AOL Involvement of the participants on their perceived Leadership Skills. The data highlights substantial difference on the basis of their self-ratings. Most (44) of the participants lie on the score of 1-2 (17 Males, 27 Females) on Before whereas After the AOL involvement almost a similar number of participants (45), lie on the scores of 4-5. Thus, a considerable improvement is indicated by the scores. The significance of difference was tested for which the results are given in Table XI.

Table XI: Mean, t and p values of Male and Female Participants on Leadership Skills Before and After AOL involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Skills</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.69±0.92</td>
<td>4.09±0.79</td>
<td>-17.525</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.89±0.86</td>
<td>4.17±0.66</td>
<td>-10.641</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.50±0.69</td>
<td>4.01±0.91</td>
<td>-14.517</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean score on leadership skills for the Total sample Before the involvement was 1.69 ± 0.92 and After the involvement it was 4.09 ± 0.79. The score of Males Before
was 1.89±0.86 and After was 4.17±0.66) and for females it was 1.50±0.69 and After 4.01±0.91 before and After respectively.

Thus, there was more than 3 points increase in leadership skills from Before and After the involvement in AOL. The p values (<0.0001) indicate a significant improvement after AOL involvement.

The involvement with AOL clearly resulted in an improvement in the personality traits of youth in the present investigation. March towards extroversion, enhancement of leadership skills, self-confidence, acceptance and emotional equanimity demonstrates positive impact of spiritual practices on the personality traits of an individual. Numerous studies have earlier stated the positive impact of religious and spiritual commitment on personality. But the drastic shift in personality studies have put more emphasis on relation of religion and spirituality on the Eysenck’s five factor model of personality. However, it does not lie in the scope of present study.

Integral to the Indian perspective of personality is the distinction between three gunas or constituting factors, which underlie both mind and matter. These are sattva, rajas and tamas, which represent principles of illumination, energy and inertia. A satvic person has high positive energy and is a self-seeker, rajasic person is passionate, restless and has ample desires and tamasic is depressed, lethargic, arrogant and ignorant. These three gunas are present in all individuals but in different proportions. Greater is the level of sattva, higher is the experience of ananda. An interesting study done by Gopal et al (2010), investigated the effect of yoga on personality dimensions and mental problems. The experimental group comprised of 54 males and control group comprised of 54 males. Vedic Personality Inventory developed by Wolf (1998) was used to measure the personality in terms of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas and Adult Self Report (ASR), a behavioural checklist developed by Achenbach & Rescorla (2003) was used to measure mental health problems in the sample. Results indicated that compared to non-practitioners yoga practitioners were significantly high on Sattva aspect of personality and low on Rajas and Tamas aspect of personality. Further, yoga practitioners were found to be significantly low on emotional and behavioural problems measured by ASR. Sattva was negatively related to emotional
and behavioural problems while Rajas and Tamas were positively related. The finding indicated the role of yoga in nurturing Sattva aspect of personality which can be resilient factor against psychological problems. Similarly, the youth in the present study seem to be possessing more of the satvic tendencies that the other two.

e. Enhancement in Social-Concern

The enhancement in social-concern was primarily experienced through an enhanced interest of the participants in social service activities. Forty four participants were involved in voluntary work into AOL. The two major areas of voluntary work done by the participants are as follows;

- **Involvement in AOL service projects**
- **Voluntary work outside AOL**

The first category of responses related to *Involvement in AOL service project* referred to as *through 5H* (home, health care, harmony in diversity, hygiene, human values) project of AOL and *Bringing more people to AOL*. Enhanced social concern was also exhibited through involvement in service projects by AOL such as rural development, women empowerment, prison programmes, environmental care, peace projects and programmes for terrorists, naxalites, and drug addicts.

The participants headed various social awareness campaigns like ‘*India against Corruption*’ for the implementation of Janlokpal Bill by the Government of India. They conducted and participated in the rallies and marches at the Ramlila ground and other local areas.

Several groups of youth in various universities and multi-national companies were associated with AOL. During these campaigns, they used to collect all the members and organise such drives. For Instance, the Delhi Technological University had over 200 students who had undergone the AOL course and were intensively involved in such projects. Conducting these awareness campaigns was a common feature reported by them.

Another project mentioned by many participants was ‘*Clean Delhi Drive*’ dedicated to cleaning the Yamuna water. This project was inaugurated by the founder (Sri Sri)
in Delhi. They cleaned various Ghats of Yamuna under the project. Reportedly, the current massive project taken up by the AOL is ‘Volunteer for a Better India’. The sub projects under it are; education, de-addiction, girl child and women safety, senior citizens, good governance and environment. In the awareness campaigns, the public is encouraged to give one hour for the nation volunteering for any of the above mentioned sub projects and working for it with the AOL groups. There were 36 out of 55 participants who were core heads of the project who were further handling groups of 100-300 people. Some of the responses are quoted below;

“I am handling the schools team for VFABI (volunteer for a better India), so far we have covered around 30 schools. We had an Idea competition in the schools, in which students were supposed to write their ideas of making a better India. They could use any of the 6 themes given to them. The schools took out rallies with their students and teachers, they made banners and did street plays. Now we have an event on 3 Feb 2013 with Guruji at Ramlila ground in Delhi, we are adding on the schools in daily basis, it will be a massive movement”

“If you would have seen on T.V. AOL was standing in front all through the India against corruption movement with Anna Hazare, the two singers sitting on stage and singing the patriotic songs were AOL volunteers, we were marching, helping management of crowd, did silent protest, everything we could but with peace and love, the way Guruji says. Corruption free society is our right and we will do all possible to make this society corruption free”

“I love taking Navchetna shivirs (slum AOL programme), it gives me so much satisfaction when see people doing kriya, meditation, pranayama. There is so much stress in their lives, cases of violence are innumerable when they come and do meditation, satsangs they get a different dimension of life. The amount of love they give me in return is incomparable with any kind of reward in life”

Overall, the participants reported social concern with an action oriented approach. They expressed their strong opinions about the issues they worked on. They were educated and fully aware of the social issues and the related actions needed in that context.
The second category of responses related to enhanced social concern was indulging in voluntary work outside AOL. This basically involved giving donations to other NGO at the office.

Without any exception, all the participants reported the initiation of social work after joining the AOL in some way or the other. Twenty one participants mentioned that the social concern was always there in their minds but there was no platform to execute it. Social concern was perceived to be crucial by 30 of 55 participants through AOL. A few such examples of responses are quoted below;

“When you are happy and in love with yourself, then you naturally want to pass that love to the others. After AOL so I felt a need to do something for others.”

“As Guruji says the whole world is our family, so why to only take care of issues in the family, the responsibility of the whole world is on each one of us and only spirituality is the answer to all surmounting issues.”

Apparently, the participants exhibited a high level of commitment for their participation in the social work done by AOL. Several of them were reportedly the core leaders of various projects. The extensive involvement of youth was evident irrespective of the kind of profession or their marital status.

Social concern and interconnectedness are the important characteristics of Indian society. All religions focus on peace, love and harmony of the entire society and not an individual alone. So, the interrelation between the Indian way of living which is spiritual in itself is closely related to the societal concern and an active engagement in social upliftment. Empirical work has also emphasized the social service inclination of youth who identify with a spiritual group or those who identify themselves to be spiritual. In discussions with the members of Buddhist organisation, in the city of Chandigarh, India (the Soka Gakkai International, an NGO registered with UN), it was reported that the members (adolescents and young adults) 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. Similar to
the participants in the current study, they believed in the fact that one cannot be truly happy if other people around are not happy (Ikeda, 2000).

A sufficiently large number of research papers have reported a positive relationship between spirituality /religiosity and positive outcome measures including civic engagement. The study done by Hart & Fegley (1995), showed that extremely compassionate and civically engaged youth were more likely than the control group to be spiritual and connected to their moral principles and to a transcended self. Metz & Youniss (2003) found that high school students who identified themselves as religious were more likely to volunteer for, participate in school organizations, and have higher grade point averages. In addition, religious students were more likely to have parents who had volunteered these religious, volunteering students were also more likely to be female.

Thus, involvement of participants in the current study with the social work and civic involvement was seen. The sensitivity for social issues was reported to be the result of universal love and connection felt by the participants after their engagement in the spiritual practices of AOL.

f. Spiritual/Transcendental Transformation

Spirituality is said to be the central theme of AOL. Spirituality has been discussed by the founder and his followers in length. It is available on the websites of AOL also.

As already discussed in the first section, the conceptualisation of spirituality was different from individual to individual, though the central themes were common, spiritual elevation was experienced by all the participants who underwent the AOL programmes. The structure of all the courses comprises of the processes, meditations and self knowledge which offered a dive into inner self and an experience of tranquility. This is an experience which is unusual in daily lives. In the courses, the participants were also equipped with the techniques that may be practiced at home, and which also provided glimpse of the transcendental experience.
The transcendental elevation was reported by 41 out of 55 participants in the study. They described spiritual states using various phrases in general as well as those specific to the courses. Three major categories emerged from the responses of the participants which are discussed below;

- **Realization of Connection with Self, Guru and God**
- **Experience of Universal Love**
- **Experience of Fully Living Life Every Moment**

The first category was *Realisation of Connection with Self, Guru and God*. Most of the participants expressed different self-conscious states and experiences of being taken care of by Guru, God or Divine at various AOL courses. The Advanced Meditation Course was cited most for such experiences. The silence during the course made them realise their connection with the inner self. The feeling of being taken care of by Guru, God and Divine was also akin. The following quotes illustrate such responses;

“Advance course was my first experience of realising that I am different from my body, mind and thoughts.”

“I could feel something inside me which is ever happy, blissful and constant amidst everything around me changing every second”

“AOL was the first spiritual experience that happened to me ever.”

“After I became an AOL teacher once my mother got very unwell. I was staying in ashram that time. She was paralysed, she could not eat, drink or even go to the toilet on her own. I got so shattered but had to smile every time I met her pretending being strong. At the same time, when all this was happening I got a call from ashram that Guruji had made me an advanced course teacher. It was such a blissful moment for me. It made me realise that Guruji knew my spirit was going down and wanted something to elevate it. I was so greatful to get that news. I got charged up and was better able to take care of my mother. That reassurance from Gurudev was blissful that he is taking care.

The last response is one of the many stories narrated by the participants where they felt they were being protected and taken care of by the Guru. They expressed strong faith that supernatural powers played an inevitable role in their lives.
Self-awareness appeared to be a significant part of spiritual enhancements for the participants. It formed an important component in realising the awareness of connectedness with self and higher powers. The Self-Awareness was measured through the five point self-rating scale. Table XII presents the frequency of scores of the participants on Before and After involvement with AOL on the self-awareness.

Table XII: Frequency of scores for Male and Female Participants on Self-Awareness Before and After involvement with AOL

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>Self-Awareness Before</th>
<th>Self-Awareness After</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above Table depicts the frequency of scores on Self-Awareness of the participants Before and After involvement with AOL. The scores bring out that Before the AOL involvement the participants were low on their self-awareness. A considerable number of 49 (23 Males, 26 Females) participants lie on the score from 1-2 on self-awareness Before, whereas almost the same number of 48(24 Males and 24 Females) participants lie on the score of 4-5 on the After variable. The data highlights substantial improvement on the self-awareness for both Males and Females. The significance of difference was tested for which the results are given in Table XIII.
### Table XIII: Mean, t and p values of Male and Female Participants on Self-Awareness Before and After AOL involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Awareness</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.72±0.64</td>
<td>4.12±0.71</td>
<td>-20.134</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.83±0.63</td>
<td>4.26±0.76</td>
<td>-14.611</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.61±0.63</td>
<td>3.98±0.63</td>
<td>-13.672</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Mean score for the Total sample on Self-Awareness Before the involvement with AOL was 1.72 ± 0.64 and After the involvement was 4.12 ± 0.71. For Male participants, the score Before was 1.83±0.63 and After involvement was 4.26±0.76 and of Females it was 1.61±0.63 and 3.98±0.63, Before and After respectively.

Thus, there was more than 3 points increase on Self-Awareness from Before to After the involvement in AOL. The p values (<0.0001) indicate significantly high improvement in Self-Awareness of the participants.

The second category was *Experience of Universal Love* which was expressed by expressing love for humanity and the love for nature. Participants used phrases like ‘everybody is my own’, ‘we are a part of the same consciousness, ‘all of us are connected to each other’ etc. Some of the related responses are quoted below:

> “My experience of Sudarshan kriya and guru’s grace has absolutely transformed my life and made it so beautiful. When I see others around me there is an instant feeling of helping them, bringing smiles and happiness to their lives.”

> “There is a process in the AMC, in which we are told to do ‘nature walk’. That process is magical. We are in silence in the course doing deep meditations the entire day. The nature walk is an absolute icing on the cake. I observed petals of flowers, small leaves, pebbles, earth, it all looked so beautiful. I had never observed the strength of earth, the magnanimity of sky, the freshness in the air. It is such a wonderful state. Nature has so much to offer.”

> “Since my childhood I used to feel very much connected to the animals, the nature, birds everything. After AOL I feel I am more aware of my love and connection to the nature. Though it was already there but AOL blossomed and nurtured it.”

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It is evident from the above responses that participants felt belongingness with people around them even if they did not share mutual acquaintance. It was a generalised feeling of love for the entire humanity and creation. It also included love for animals and nature. The experiences also extended to the practices they followed after the completion of the courses. The realisation of self not being only the ‘self’ (body and mind) but a concept much broader incorporating the ‘inner self’ and further extending to the entire creation was apparently felt by the participants.

The third category was the **Experience of Fully Living Every Moment of Life**. The belief that lies behind was that when the mind is stress free, the individual is totally in the present moment, which is itself a spiritual experience according to some of the participants in the study. Two such responses are quoted below;

“Spirituality is not getting stuck in past or future. It is living the present like a child just hundred per cent. This can only happen when we realise the connection with the breath, as soon as you get caught up in an emotion just change the rhythm of breath and you get back to the moment. This skill of working with the breath is taught in AOL.”

“When we are totally in the present moment with an alert mind, then our space becomes quite broad, we can even experience infinity in that moment. That is what spirituality is. Guruji lives that every moment that’s the reason his awareness is so high. He just knows what is on your mind, because his consciousness is all over the place. All the spiritual practices direct us to that state. This experience is so divine. The Bangalore ashram is best place where this experience is very common.”

The responses imply that the thoughtlessness and alertness were also considered to be transcendental experiences. When the individual is not thinking about anything related to past and future but is only engaged in the present moment of time, it is a spiritual experience according to the participants. Being totally in the present moment is one of the important characteristic of spiritual living highlighted in various Indian Upanishads and Vedas. For instance, Bhagwad Gita emphasis on the alert mind away from desires, attachments and entanglements as the meditative mind. Krisna reiterates the importance of mental integration as the only means to win the meditative quality.
of mind. Purity, Peace and subtle sensitivity is the nature of an alert meditative mind. (Menon, 1998)

It was, thus, observed that the participants had their own concept to understand spirituality. For all the participants, transcendence is an experience stimulated through the spiritual techniques which take our mind to an elevated state of opening up to those states. Some participants viewed it with a scientific explanation of the connection between the stress free state of mind and subsequent awareness to the experience of spiritual states.

Thus, the participants reported improvements and transformations experienced by them after their intense involvement with AOL. They experienced enhancements in various domains. The participants emphasised personality development as the major advantage of the AOL courses. Improvements in affective and social domains were also reported. Spiritual and cognitive transformations were reported by many participants.

Tremendous amount of research affirms that religion and spirituality have a vital role in contributing to the positive outcomes in an individual’s life. Both religion and spirituality have been related to numerous positive life outcomes for emerging adults, such as healthy attitudes and behaviors as well as high self-esteem (Rew & Wong, 2006; Zullig et al, 2006). In a 2004 cross-national survey of young adults in the United States, after adjusting for age, gender, education, marital status, income, and religious attendance and prayer, people who reported more spiritual experiences (e.g., find strength in spirituality, experience a connection to all of life) reported greater happiness, self-esteem, and optimism and other psychological benefits.(Ellison & Fan, 2008). Many researchers have suggested that religious involvement appears to help youth developed self-regulatory abilities by offering a standard for behaviour or a guide for right and wrong that may prevent them from engaging in risky behaviour (Cook, 2000)

Spiritual involvement in the present study was found to provide a unique form of social support, strengthen family relationship, improve physical health and stamina, enhance resilience, improve personality traits and encourage civic involvement in
youth. The involvement offered the formation of a relationship with spiritual entity, divinity and supreme consciousness. This relationship potentially provided a profound sense of love, security and well-being.

People who experience such a relationship with the divine, particularly in the form of a caring and compassionate figure, experience strength and confidence in life and appear to cope better in stressful situations resultantly. Individuals with a religious or spiritual framework for life feel empowered by a sense of preserving to meet transcended goals, tend to cope with stresses of life by practicing certain virtues such as compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, honesty, integrity and hope that have been associated with better physical and mental health (Hill & Pargament, 2003).

Section VI: Persona and Role of the Guru

Guru is a Sanskrit term for Master or Teacher. The two syllables in the term ‘Gu’ and ‘Ru’ denote specific meanings. ‘Gu’ denotes the darkness of ignorance and ‘Ru’ represents the radiance of knowledge that dispels the ignorance. Guru is considered to be somebody who takes us from darkness to the light. ‘Guru Shishya’ tradition has existed since the early writings related to Hinduism.

In Hindus culture, charismatic and divine Guru image continues to be a source of guidance into their inner worlds. Gurus are often seen in spotless white or saffron robes with rosary on it, with beard and eyes full of warmth and love, who is approached in awe and reverence. The guru is also the honored guardian of ancient tradition, compassionately watchful of disciples spiritual experiences and gently facilitates his sense of identity and self. (Kakar, 2011)

The forthcoming section presents participants’ perception of Guru, the founder of AOL (Sri Sri Ravi Shankar). The section is divided into the following categories according to participant responses;

a) Guru perceived as Charisma

b) Expression of Faith in Guru and his Role in their lives
a) Guru perceived as Charisma

The questions about him were welcomed by the participants. They were excited and enthusiastic while replying to those.

The participants used many phrases and words to describe the charisma of the Guru. They highlighted his ‘Godlike’ qualities, innocence, simplicity, intelligence and various other attributes reflecting his charisma. Such responses were made with reference to the following:

- **Personality Traits**
- **Emanating Unconditional Love for all without any Discrimination**
- **Possessing Divine Qualities**
- **Performing Different Roles in their Lives**

The participants were very keen to discuss the *Personality Traits* of the Guru as perceived by them. While describing his personality, they referred to two sets of traits. The first was the *attributions explicating high vibes, energy and strong aura felt in his Presence*. The supporting responses were:

> “When I met Guruji for the first time, as soon as he came close to me I started shivering. I felt a bullet of energy crossing me.”

> “Once I was in Bangalore ashram for a course, a meditation was happening. We were all eyes closed. Suddenly, I felt so much of vibrations within me and my surroundings. I felt like opening my eyes to get back to normal. But the teacher had instructed us not to open our eyes, so I did not. In a few minutes I heard Guruji’s voice. He said you may open your eyes now. It was so amazing even in closed eyes his aura and energy can be felt.”

> “When Guruji is in a hall, the total atmosphere is so different. Awareness is so high, energy is in abundance in the space where he is”.

The second set of *Personality traits were those exhibiting his Naturalness and Simplicity*. Participants referred to him as ‘ever smiling’, ‘innocent’, ‘child like’ and a ‘fountain of joy’ etc. They highlighted the stress free and smiling face of the Guru.
Intelligence with innocence in him was emphasised by many as one of the rare traits seen in anybody. The related responses were;

“Guruji travels all across the world. He does so much of work and hardly gets time to sleep. Despite such hectic schedules he looks so fresh and smiling all the time.”

“Guruji is carrying the peace initiatives to so many countries. He manages everything so beautifully. There is not even a glimpse of stress or tension on his face ever. He is always relaxed and smiling.”

The second major response category emphasised his quality of Emanating Unconditional Love for All without any discrimination. It was evident in the responses that he is considered to be welcoming to people of all sections of society with no barring of caste, creed or religion. Participants elucidated that a number of peace initiatives by AOL are carried out for terrorists, naxalites and prisoners, which indicates the fact that Guruji is considered to have unconditional love for all irrespective of barriers of any kind. He has himself been present to work for many stress relief programs in prisons and naxal areas. Some responses are quoted below;

“For Guruji there is no difference in his love for a child, an old, a terrorist or an enlightened individual. He meets everybody with same affection and love.”

“Guruji never refrains from visiting any slum and disaster struck area. He was the first one to visit at the time of Tsunami offering help. Recently in Assam there were villages burnt in fights and conflicts. But he visited the place and offered himself for help in terms of finances and other required resources”.

“For Guruji nobody is ugly, poor, diseased, culprit or bad. For him everybody is reflection of himself as he puts it. He has love in his eyes for all without any prejudices.”

Many participants spoke about Sri Sri as Possessing Divine Qualities. Most of them referred to him being Omniscient. A common phrase used by some of them was ‘Guruji has infinity in his eyes’. Various other responses given in this regard were;
“Whenever I go in front of him, he just says what I am looking for, he knows what is on my mind.”

“All the problems just vanish when Guruji is around.”

“My daughter was hospitalised and was quite ill, I all throughout had Guruji’s picture under her pillow and with myself, I knew he knows my pain and is listening to me, he gave me strength all through.”

“When he is there, I don’t even need to communicate to him verbally, it just happens through heart.”

The Guru was also perceived to **Embrace Different Roles in their Life** as and when they needed. They expressed him as embracing roles of father, brother, best friend and God depending on changing situations in their lives. In stressful times, he was considered to be giving support like a parent, friend, sometimes as a guide and at times offering wisdom like a mentor. Participants narrated various instances where he was perceived to have already done what they wanted at that point of time in life. Some of the examples are quoted below;

“*He just knows what is lacking in my life. He fulfils that gap in some or the other way.*”

“When I am in some problem I just write to him and put it near his picture, I surrender to him and he takes of everything.”

“He is best friend, I just sit in front of his photo and say whatever I want to say, I share with him everything that I can’t express to anybody else”

The Guru seemed to be a tunnel of love arousing adoration and faith of the participants. He was perceived to possess influential personality traits and divine powers. It is interesting to note that though the participants met him only occasionally, they were deeply impressed by his qualities. Meeting him was always an exceptional experience for them all.

**b) Expression of faith in Guru and his Role in their Lives**

A unique feature of AOL is the immense faith that the followers had on Sri Sri. As revealed through their responses each participant had their own way of relating to the
Results and Discussion

Guru, identifying him as a Mentor, Messenger, Prophet of God or an Avtar of God like Krishna and Rama etc. Interesting cultural differences were observed in this reference. The participants who considered him Avtar of God like Krishna and Rama were all Hindus. A very large number of them formed part of this category. The ones who considered him as prophet or messenger of God were Muslims and Catholics. It was brought out in their responses that in both the latter cultures, identifying with any form of picture or Idol as God is not appreciated. So, they could only visualise him as messenger of God that is, Prophet for Muslims and Jesus for Christians.

The participants who had comparatively lower involvement (attended fewer courses) with the movement called him as their mentor. Two of them also mentioned of still trying to explore the relation with him beyond being a mentor. The three participants who had not liked the AOL course did not consider him important to be able to label any kind of relation with him.

Besides identification with the Guru, faith was an inevitable feature. Two modes of expression of faith were as follows;

i. Faith through Cognitive Experiences
ii. Faith through Emotional Experiences

i. **Faith through Cognitive Experiences**

Faith through cognitive experiences developed either due to acknowledgement of *Significant Effects of AOL programmes on their own Lives* or through *Appreciation of the Social Initiatives Started by Sri Sri for making the Society Stress Free*.

Several participants were extremely appreciative of the *Significant Effects of AOL programmes on their own lives*. They had experienced drastic changes in their overall personality and all other aspects of life. These enhancements had directed them towards faith and belief in the Guru, and the practices taught by him. Many of them felt that their lives had completely changed after regular practicing of Sudarshan kriya and the knowledge imparted by the Guru. Some participants joined the AOL when
they were in turbulent phases of life. The appreciation of the change was deeper in
them with consequent unshakable faith in him.

“On the first day of the course I did not even bother to know who the
man was whose picture was at the front, but the time I experienced
Sudarshan kriya, I realised that gosh…. This is something so beautiful
and the man who has made this definitely has something in him.”

“The entire AOL structure and programme is so scientific, each technique,
each point makes so much sense, so of course the man who has made it has
to be God, nothing less”.

The Social Initiatives for a Stress Free Society started by Sri Sri was another area of
appreciation by the participants. Many participants were themselves involved in these
projects and were thoroughly impressed by the effect of Sudarshan kriya and other
techniques on the lives of people in slums, prisoners, terrorists and others who are
considered to be marginalised. They shared their experiences of witnessing the prison
smart programmes (AOL course for prisoners), volunteering in naxalite or terrorist
courses, and in 5H programmes (Rural project of AOL). Few interesting responses are
quoted below;

“It is unbelievable, the one whom we call hard criminals get so much
transformed with sudarshan kriya, last day of the course all of them are
in tears for getting what they experience in these few days, they regret
having done all the crimes. So much of freshness is seen in them”.

“I was volunteering in a terrorist course, and was shocked to see one of
the participants touching feet of the lady who was taking the course he
said “behen duniya mein pehli baar mene kisi k liye aadar mehsoos kiya
hai or vo aapke liye, mene apni zindagi kho di insaaniyat kho di thi, aj
esa laga sab waapas pa liya”(sister for the first time in life, I have felt
respect for somebody and that is for you .I had lost my life and
humanity, today it seems I have got back everything.)

“Guruji has transformed everybody’s life be it a common man, a child, a
rural woman, a prisoner, a terrorist, a naxalite or anybody else. He is
giving to this planet unconditionally.”
The participants had themselves witnessed the transformations in their own lives or the lives of others due to techniques taught in AOL. Their analysis of those experiences lead to immense faith in Guru.

ii. Faith through Emotional Experiences

There were many participants who had certain emotional experiences in their lives leading to faith in Guru. They spoke more about him as **personally making difference to their lives** than the techniques or practices. Many of them felt an emotional **connection with him since the first meeting**. They used phrases like ‘I get tears of gratitude whenever I meet him’, ‘Guruji has always been there during my tough times’. It is interesting to note that they also have intense spiritual experiences on meeting him which is evident in phrases like ‘when I met him for the first time I felt that I have connection with him since many lifetimes’, ‘it is not one life time that we have seen together’ or ‘God comes to save you in each life time, so has Guruji’. Few other responses are quoted below;

“We were all standing in queue and waiting for him, I had not seen him ever, he came near, I just got a glance and since that time tears started rolling and I don’t know when he went, most of the crowd was gone I was just sitting their crying, it was like a new birth for me, the entire day I was in such a high, I felt that he has been with me since don’t know how many lifetimes and I dint realise.”

“I met him for the first time in Bangalore ashram, he was meeting everybody and asking ‘kese ho?’ I just remember that he met the person on my right side, then I was just blank, I then remember that time when he had gone quite far from me, I don’t know in which world I was, till date I have that astonishing feeling with me, I was blank, thoughtless, emotionless and may be formless.”

Most of the participants had some or the other experience of this kind to relate to the investigation. They reported many instances in which they got healed in the physical or virtual presence of Guru which were called as ‘Guru stories’ or ‘miracles done by the Guru’ and were very enthusiastic to narrate them. Their voices at the time of sharing these stories was low and full of emotions, many had tears in their eyes while
narrating their experiences with him. A very intense emotional connection was evidently leading to the formation of faith in Guru.

The healing in Guru’s presence is well described by Kakkar, (2011) who suggests that these healing moments in the Guru and disciple relationship pushes the image of Guru towards that of a divine parent and of the disciple towards that of a small child. This relationship is the extension of the parent–child relationship which provides an individual with an opportunity to obtain the required nutrients for the cohesion as well as the integration of the self. This is also implicit in ancient Indian scriptures and is often explicitly stated by modern gurus. Apart from healing in stressful situations even other verbal or non verbal communication with Guru had significant impact on youth and their lives. Most of them took their important life decisions after consulting with Guru like those of getting married, finding a partner, career choice, becoming fulltime AOL faculty etc. Interesting, Menon (1998), puts forward that the psychological impact of these words of Guru is not through the literal meaning of the words but their symbolic power, the sound of the words conveys the experience of the Guru’s presence within the psyche.

The in-depth interviews conducted in the present study offered immense scope for the participants to narrate their experiences. The participants were very vocal on their relationship with the Guru and his contribution in their lives. It was seen as an intimate connection with somebody who is perceived to have brought change in their lives with varying degrees of intensity.

### 4.3. Analysis of Quantitative Data

#### 4.3.1 Analysis of scores on different Standardised Tests

Statistical testing was conducted with the statistical package for the social science system version SPSS 17.0 (Chicago, IL, USA). Results were expressed as mean ± SD, median (min-max) or numbers and percentages. The comparison of normally distributed continuous variables between the groups was performed using Student’s t test and within the groups, Paired t test was used to compare the before to after change. Nominal categorical data between the groups were compared using Chi-
squared test or Fisher’s exact test as appropriate. Pearson correlation was also performed to see the relationship between various variables. P<0.05 was considered statistically significant.

To support the rich qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, a few spirituality correlates were also measured through psychometric tests. These standardised measures facilitated the understanding of various variables considered important in the present investigation. The following standardised measures were utilised for this purpose;

ii. Levenson’s Multidimensional Locus of Control Inventory (1981)
iii. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Motivation Scale by Hodge (1972)

The analysis of the scores on these quantitative measures has been presented below;


To quantitatively measure the spirituality and the resilience of the participants, Spirituality and Resilience Assessment Packet by Kass & Kass (2000) was used. It measured the resilient worldview of an individual through the subtests given below;

a. The Inventory of Positive Psychological Attitudes that measured the resilient worldview, as Confidence in Life and Self (CLS) having two subtests; Self Confidence during Stress (SCDS) and Life Purpose and Satisfaction (LPS).
b. INSPIRIT (Index of Core of Spiritual Experiences) which measured the internalised spirituality of an individual.

The analysis of the scores has been done separately for the two subtests.

a. **The Inventory of Positive Psychological Attitudes**

**Confidence in Life and Self:** The analysis of CLS, which is the first subtest, indicates that the participants exhibited high Confidence in Life and Self and, therefore, can be considered to be high on the self-confidence during stressful situations. They are also
high on the life purpose and satisfaction. The percentage of scores on CLS for Males, Females and the Total Sample is presented in the Table XIV;

**Table XIV: Percentage of Total Sample, Male and Female Participants on Different Scores on CLS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLS</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male (n=27)</th>
<th>Female (n=28)</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High 5.51-7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium High 4-5.50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Low 2.50-4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low 1-2.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The CLS (Confidence in Life and Self) scores show a concentration of the sample in the High CLS range of 5.51-7. From the total sample, 44 participants lie in the high range of scores. Most (8) of the remaining participants lie in the range of Medium High scores (4.01-5.0) and none of them lie in the low range of CLS scores. The p value (0.854) indicates no significant difference in the variable on the basis of gender.

**b. The Index of Core of Spiritual Experiences**

The scores on INSPIRIT, which is the second subtest exhibit a high level of spiritual experiences in the participants in the present investigation. The percentage of Total Sample, Males and Females on INSPIRIT scores is presented in the Table XV;
Table XV: Percentage of Total Sample, Male and Female Participants on INSPIRIT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSPIRIT</th>
<th>Total (n=55)</th>
<th>Male (n=27)</th>
<th>Female (n=28)</th>
<th>p Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High 25-28</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium High 18-24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Low 11-17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low 7-10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to observe that the scores on INSPIRIT show exactly the same pattern as exhibited by the CLS scores. There is a concentration of sample in the high range of INSPIRIT scores which is 25-28. Forty four out of fifty participants fall in the high range of scores, which suggests that they often experience a close and intimate connection with the spirit of life and there is a deep conviction that the spirit of life is the core of their being (Kass & Kass, 2000). Most of the remaining participants (8) fall into the range of Medium High scores, (18-24), which suggests that they experience a close and intimate connection with the spirit of life (Kass & Kass, 2000). However, this experience may not take place on a regular basis. None of them fall into the low range of INSPIRIT scores. The p value (0.854) indicates no significant difference in the variable on the basis of gender.

Mean of Total Sample, Male and Female Participants on Subtests of Spirituality and Resilience Assessment Packet presented in Table XVI.
Table XVI: Mean of Total Sample, Male and Female Participants on Subtests of Spirituality and Resilience Assessment Packet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Test</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male (n=27)</th>
<th>Female (n=28)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean ± SD</td>
<td>Min-Max</td>
<td>Mean ± SD</td>
<td>Min – Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPS</td>
<td>6.01 ± 0.90</td>
<td>3.41 - 7.0</td>
<td>6.09 ± 0.87</td>
<td>3.7 - 7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCDS</td>
<td>5.69 ± 1.01</td>
<td>2.33 -6.93</td>
<td>5.79 ± 1.03</td>
<td>3.20 -6.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLS</td>
<td>5.80 ± 0.91</td>
<td>2.90 -6.90</td>
<td>5.91 ± 0.90</td>
<td>3.87 -6.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSPIRIT</td>
<td>26.05 ±3.30</td>
<td>13 – 28</td>
<td>26.26 ±2.84</td>
<td>17 – 28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Mean CLS scores of the participants (5.80) is higher than the average score norms of US population (4.95) mentioned in the test. Similarly, the mean scores of INSPIRIT (26.05) is above the average score norms of the test on the US population (20.5). Thus, the current sample is high on Confidence in Life and Self and they experience spirituality as an integral part of themselves in their lives.

ii. Levenson’s Multidimensional Locus of Control Inventory (1981)

The locus of control was considered to be an important variable in the present context. The Internality, Powerful Others and Chance Others scales by Levenson (1981) was used to understand the dimensions of control in their beliefs in Personal Control (Internal Scale), Powerful Others (Powerful Others scale) and Chance or fate (Chance Scale). This inventory consists of three separate scales used to measure one’s locus of control. The responses were analysed separately on each of the three scales of the test for Male and Female participants. It is given in Table XVII.
Table XVII: Mean, range and p values of Total Sample, Male and Female Participants on Internal Others, Powerful Others and Chance Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub Tests</th>
<th>Total (n=27)</th>
<th>Male (n=27)</th>
<th>Female (n=28)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean ± SD</td>
<td>Min-Max</td>
<td>Mean ± SD</td>
<td>Min-Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Others</td>
<td>32.85 ± 6.24</td>
<td>19 – 47</td>
<td>33.74 ± 7.0</td>
<td>19 – 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Others</td>
<td>12.05 ± 6.50</td>
<td>0 – 28</td>
<td>12.0 ± 6.60</td>
<td>3 – 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance Others</td>
<td>18.49 ± 8.31</td>
<td>3 – 42</td>
<td>18.74 ± 8.23</td>
<td>3 – 34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As evident, number of participants were seen to be higher on Internality or the Internal Locus of control (32.85 ± 6.24) than on the other two subtests. The Internality scores indicate participants to be high on possessing control over their own lives. Chance Control (18.49 ± 8.31) is seen as the dimension of externality. The control by Powerful Others (12.05 ± 6.50) in life was scored lower than other dimensions by the participants in the present study. Though not significant, gender difference was found to be the least for Internal Locus of Control with Males being slightly more Internal than Females.

Inter-score difference was also analysed on dimensions of Internal Others, Powerful Others and Chance Others. The mean difference and its level of significance is presented in Table XVIII.

Table XVIII: Mean Difference, and p Values Between various Dimensions of Locus of Control for the Total Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Subtests</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>p Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal Others</td>
<td>Powerful Others</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chance Others</td>
<td>19.76</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Others</td>
<td>Internal Others</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chance Others</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance Others</td>
<td>Internal Others</td>
<td>19.76</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Powerful Others</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above Table presents Mean Difference and p values between each dimension of locus of control and its subtests. The level of significance (p<0.001) indicates that participants were significantly higher on Internal Others than Chance Others or Powerful Others. Thus, youth in the study were high on Internal locus of Control than External Locus of Control (Chance or Powerful).

### iii. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Motivation (Hodge, 1972)

The Intrinsic Religious Motivation scale measures different ways of being religious; Intrinsic or Extrinsic. The analysis of the scores revealed that the participants were high on Intrinsic Motivation and low on the Extrinsic Motivation. The Mean, range and p values on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Motivation have been presented in Table XIX;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub Tests</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male (n=27)</th>
<th>Female (n=28)</th>
<th>p Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean ± SD</td>
<td>Min –Max</td>
<td>Mean ± SD</td>
<td>Min–Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Religious Motivation</td>
<td>22.27 ± 2.48</td>
<td>16 – 26</td>
<td>21.70 ± 2.41</td>
<td>16 – 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic Religious Motivation</td>
<td>5.71 ± 2.09</td>
<td>2 – 10</td>
<td>5.93 ± 2.18</td>
<td>3 – 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inter-score difference was also analysed on dimensions of Intrinsic Religious Motivation/Extrinsic Religious Motivation. The Mean Difference and its level of significance is presented in Table XX.

### Table XIX: Mean, Range and p values of Total Sample, Male and Female Participants on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtests</th>
<th>Mean ± SD</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Religious Motivation</td>
<td>22.27 ± 2.48</td>
<td>16.56</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic Religious Motivation</td>
<td>5.71 ± 2.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The scores in the above two Tables indicate that the participants are very high on Intrinsic Religious Motivation. The norms report the average intrinsic items score to be 2.00 and average standard deviation to be 1.07, whereas the participants in the present study show mean and standard deviation values as (22.27 ± 2.48) which shows a wide variation between the norms and the current sample. The participants show very low mean scores on the Extrinsic Religious Motivation. The norms report average score to be 4.11 with the average standard deviation of 1.08 whereas the participants in the present study show mean and standard deviation values as (5.714 ± 2.09). Thus, there is variation in the scores on Extrinsic Religious Motivation between norms and the current sample. Table XX presents the Mean Difference between Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Motivation and the consequent p value of the two subtests. The p value (<0.001) indicates significant difference between the two kinds of Motivation. Thus, it can be inferred from the data that the sample of the study appears to be high on Intrinsic Religious Motivation and Low on Extrinsic Religious Motivation.

It is important to note here that participants have marked the items referring to religion, taking into account their views on spirituality. In the initial stages of the study itself, participants felt uncomfortable to score the items on the basis of religion. They did not find it relevant to their lives as the religious beliefs were not thought to be significant by them (at least for themselves). On the other hand, they were found to be very keen on answering the question by turning them to spirituality, so the test was retained and they were allowed to interchange the concept of religion with spirituality.

Nonetheless, the results suggest their spiritual behaviour to be a basic motivation of life and is found to be the basic guiding force behind their way of living. As discussed earlier, they were highly intrinsically motivated for attending the AOL activities and initiating the service projects on their own. The whole philosophy of the AOL was somewhere found to influence their daily routine and activities. For instance, most of them started their day with ‘sadhana’, utilising few hours in preparing themselves for the day. They had incorporated the ‘knowledge points’ in their lives, and while encountering any situation, they reportedly applied those to handle the situations appropriately. Thursdays were found to be the day of ‘Gurupooja’ and ‘satsangs’ and weekends for most of them were heavily occupied with AOL projects. The
involvement formed to be the major preoccupation of their lives apart from their professional and personal responsibilities. Thus, the Art of Living practically came across as a way of living for the participants rather than an organisation which had been joined for spending free time. Their involvement was much deeper than simple membership of a group.

4.3.2. Inter-Correlations Between Extent and Duration of Involvement in AOL and various correlates of Spirituality

It was considered important to study inter-correlations between Extent of Involvement (EOI), Duration of Involvement (DOI) and other self-rated variables like Happiness, Satisfaction, Improvement in Physical health and Stamina, Self-awareness, Leadership Skills and Self-Confidence besides scores on the standardized measures used in the present study such as Resilience, Internality/Externality and Internal Religious Motivation/External Religious Motivation.

The Extent and Duration of involvement with AOL were quantitatively expressed as below;

a. **The Extent of Involvement (EOI)** was numerically coded as follows;

A numerical code was given to the participant depending on the number of AOL courses undergone. Five categories were made on the basis of the Extent of Involvement of the participants. The categories and assigned codes are presented in the Box VI:

**Box VI: Numerical Codes on Extent of Involvement with AOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Courses Attended</th>
<th>Numerical Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer/Organizer</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time Teacher</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Time Teacher</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Results and Discussion

**b. Duration of Involvement (DOI):** The duration was calculated on the basis of number of years they have been involved with the organisation.

Improvement in Physical Health and Stamina, Leadership Skills, Self-Awareness and Self-Confidence is quantitatively analysed through the difference between the score Before and After involvement in AOL. It was calculated as follows;

**Improved (Score):** \((\text{After State Score}) - (\text{Before State Score})\)

For example: \(\text{Improved (Physical health \& Stamina) Score} = \text{After (Physical Health \& Stamina Score)} - \text{Before (Physical Health \& Stamina Score)}\)

They are called Improved scores in the matrices.

The significant correlations form part of the discussion below;

Inter-correlation Matrices involving the above mentioned variables were generated separately for the Total Sample, Males and Females. The Inter-correlation Matrix for the Total Sample is given in Table XXI.
### Table XXI: Inter-correlation Matrix for the Total Sample

| Age | EOI | DOI | CH | CS | Improved PH | Improved SA | Improved LS | Improved SC | LPS | SCDS | CLS | INSPIRIT | Internal Others | Powerful Others | Chance Others | IRM | ERM |
|-----|-----|-----|----|----|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----|------|-----|-----------|----------------|----------------|--------------|------|-----|-----|
|     |     |     |    |    |             |             |             |             |     |      |     |           |                |                |              |      |     |     |
| P value |     |     |    |    |             |             |             |             |     |      |     |           |                |                |              |      |     |     |
| Age | 1 | 0.83 | 0.155 | 0.050 | -0.070 | -0.079 | -0.035 | -0.151 | -0.129 | -0.045 | -0.020 | -0.047 | 0.015 | 0.027 | -0.005 | 0.254 | 0.091 | 0.014 |
| EOI | 1 |             | 0.693 | 0.426 | 0.436 | 0.100 | 0.447 | 0.436 | 0.426 | 0.536 | 0.598 | 0.560 | 0.461 | 0.199 | -0.209 | -0.292 | 0.140 | 0.009 |
| DOI | 1 | 0.434 |             | 0.389 | 0.068 | 0.432 | 0.281 | 0.337 | 0.399 | 0.350 | 0.360 | 0.277 | 0.188 | 0.116 | -0.249 | 0.123 | 0.161 |
| CH  | 0.001 | 0.003 | 0.621 |             | 0.001 | 0.038 | 0.012 | 0.003 | 0.009 | 0.007 | 0.040 | 0.170 | 0.401 | 0.067 | 0.371 | 0.239 |
| CS  | 1 | 0.592 | 0.395 | 0.414 |             | 0.196 | 0.038 | 0.001 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.016 | 0.039 | 0.058 | 0.043 | 0.094 |
| Improved PH | 1 |             | 0.387 | 0.524 | 0.225 | 0.472 | 0.507 | 0.420 | 0.488 | 0.506 | 0.044 | 0.054 | 0.068 | 0.043 | 0.014 | 0.007 | 0.013 | 0.014 |
| Improved SA | 1 |             | 0.003 | 0.000 | 0.098 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.001 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.749 | 0.694 | 0.620 | 0.754 | 0.335 |
| Improved LS | 1 |             | 0.563 | 0.134 | 0.337 | 0.228 | 0.181 | 0.034 | 0.026 | 0.061 | 0.202 | 0.084 | 0.850 | 0.658 | 0.139 | 0.543 |
| Improved SC | 1 |             | 0.115 | 0.227 | 0.170 | 0.182 | 0.095 | 0.250 | 0.063 | 0.036 |
| LPS | 1 |             | 0.404 | 0.095 | 0.214 | 0.182 | 0.264 | 0.515 | 0.649 | 0.793 |
| SCDS | 1 |             | 0.832 | 0.932 | 0.693 | 0.202 | -0.226 | -0.185 | 0.097 | 0.095 |
| CLS | 1 |             | 0.946 | 0.688 | 0.223 | -0.204 | -0.235 | 0.244 | -0.058 |
| INSPIRIT | 1 |             | 0.722 | 0.219 | 0.256 | -0.220 | 0.164 | 0.054 |
| Internal Others | 1 |             | 0.000 | 0.109 | 0.059 | 0.106 | 0.230 | 0.693 |
| Powerful Others | 1 |             | 0.191 | 0.237 | 0.153 | 0.195 | 0.178 |
| Chance Others | 1 |             | 0.099 | 0.196 |
| IRM | 1 |             | 0.472 | 0.151 |
| ERM | 1 |             | 0.277 |


*and ** indicate significance at <.05 and <.01 levels, respectively.
Results and Discussion

The scores on Extent of Involvement with AOL show strong positive correlation with other indices of spirituality investigated. The Extent of Involvement with AOL was positively correlated with the components of Resilience; Confidence in Life and Self (r.56, p<.000), Life Purpose and Satisfaction (r.53, p<.000), Self-Confidence in Stressful Situations (r.59, p<.000) and the Index of Core of Spiritual Experiences (r.46, p<.001) in the Total Sample, as is evident from Table XXI. This suggests that participation in more and more AOL courses and activities resultantly increased the resilience and confidence in the participants along with an increased intensity of their spiritual experience in day to day lives. The Extent of Involvement with AOL was also negatively related to the Chance Others (r-.29, p.031). However, the Extent of Involvement with AOL does not show any correlation with Internal and Powerful Others (Locus of Control), and Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Motivation.

The Extent of Involvement with AOL was correlated also with the Self Rated variables. As may be seen from the Table XXI, it demonstrates positive correlation with Improved scores on Self-Awareness (r.44, p<.001), Leadership Skills (r.043, p<.001) and Self-Confidence (r.42, p<.001). It also shows positive correlation with Current levels of Happiness (r.42, p<.001) and Satisfaction (r.43, p<.001) in the Total Sample. It was demonstrated that more the number of courses they underwent and organized or taught, the more they gained in terms of their self-confidence, self-awareness, leadership skills which made them more Happy and content in their lives. However, no correlation was obtained between Extent of Involvement and Improved Physical Health and Stamina.

The Duration of Involvement with AOL also demonstrated that positive correlation with the variables on the standardized tests. It was positively correlated with Resilience components; Confidence in Life and Self (r.36, p.007), Life Purpose and Satisfaction (r.39, p.003), Self Confidence in Stressful Situations (r.35,p.009) and the Index of Core of Spiritual Experiences (r.27, p.040). There was no correlation between Duration of Involvement with AOL and other variables studied using the standardized tests in the Total sample.
Similar to the correlations with the Extent of Involvement, positive correlations were obtained between the Duration of Involvement with AOL and the self rated variables. Strong positive correlation was found between the Duration of involvement with AOL and Improved scores on Self Awareness (r.43, p.001), Leadership Skills (r.281, p.038) and Self-Confidence (r.33, p.012). It was positively related to the Current levels of Happiness (r.43, p.001) and Satisfaction (r.03, p.003) in the Total Sample. However, no correlation was obtained between Duration of Involvement and Physical Health and Stamina in the participants.

The data illustrates that as the period or duration of their association with AOL increased, they gradually moved towards significant improvements in their personality traits such as self-confidence and leadership skills, it improved their self awareness and also resulted in more happiness and satisfaction in their lives.

The obtained correlations highlight that the positive psychological traits (such as happiness, satisfaction, confidence, resilience etc) increased more so with Extent than Duration of involvement with AOL.

The data presented in Table XXI also lends evidence to the qualitative data obtained in the study. The Extent of Involvement (EOI) and Duration of Involvement (DOI) significantly affected their personalities and the profoundness of spiritual experiences in their lives. Some such responses are quoted below;

A participant who was involved in AOL since 7 years (DOI) and was also a Part Time Teacher (EOI) of the organisation reported,

“In the advance course I realised the purpose of my life, I have come in this world to do service and much more. Earlier I was all the time just involved in myself. The bigger picture evolved through sadhana, seva and satsang”.

Another participant involved in AOL for more that 5 years (DOI), who was an organizer (EOI) of the courses of the organisation, narrated in one of the responses;

“Now I am able to face all the challenges in life, I am not scared I just know that Guruji is taking care. So I can walk like an elephant wherever I go, not like a mouse, as I used to do before”
A young woman involved in AOL since past 4 years (DOI), who was also a part time teacher (EOI) reported;

“Earlier I used to always identify myself with my possessions, my thoughts, relations etc. but gradually getting deeper into meditation and other practices I realised that these are all just experiences that ‘self’ observes and I am different from all these”.

A full time teacher (EOI) of the AOL with 8 years (DOI) involvement into the organisation reported:

“After joining AOL, I became a lion from a mouse, it is a total 360 degrees change. from being useless to useful”.

Similarly, many responses highlighted the fact that Extent and Duration of involvement with AOL intensified the spiritual experiences of the participants. The participants reported an improvement in the areas thus investigated with their involvement in AOL activities and consistently practicing the techniques learnt during the courses.

The Inter-correlations were separately computed for Male and Female participants in the study. They are presented for Male participants in Table XXII.
### Results and Discussion

Table XXII: Inter-correlation Matrix for the Male participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>EOI</th>
<th>DOI</th>
<th>CH</th>
<th>CS</th>
<th>Improved PH</th>
<th>Improved SA</th>
<th>Improved LS</th>
<th>Improved SC</th>
<th>LPS</th>
<th>SCDS</th>
<th>CLS</th>
<th>INSPIRIT</th>
<th>Internal Others</th>
<th>Powerful Others</th>
<th>Chance Other</th>
<th>Internal Others</th>
<th>IRM</th>
<th>ERM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.315</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.248</td>
<td>-.096</td>
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<td>-.296</td>
<td>-.282</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOI</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.735</td>
<td>.326</td>
<td>.347</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>.634</td>
<td>.532</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>.483</td>
<td>.564</td>
<td>.528</td>
<td>.466</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>-.526</td>
<td>-.555</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOI</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>.346</td>
<td>.356</td>
<td>.583</td>
<td>.371</td>
<td>.330</td>
<td>.569</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>.404</td>
<td>.392</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>-.427</td>
<td>-.249</td>
<td>-.153</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CH</td>
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<td>.467</td>
<td>.391</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.671</td>
<td>.725</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>.661</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>.649</td>
<td>.317</td>
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<td>.123</td>
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</tr>
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<td>.000</td>
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<td>.004</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved PH</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.265</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.428</td>
<td>.780</td>
<td>.668</td>
<td>.829</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved SA</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.180</td>
<td>.326</td>
<td>.284</td>
<td>.311</td>
<td>.444</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPS</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.513</td>
<td>.290</td>
<td>.464</td>
<td>.588</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>.558</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.253</td>
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<td>.026</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCDS</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.612</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td>.269</td>
<td>-.052</td>
<td>-.220</td>
<td>-.231</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>-.110</td>
<td></td>
<td>.118</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLS</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.798</td>
<td>.926</td>
<td>.751</td>
<td>.527</td>
<td>.532</td>
<td>-.371</td>
<td>-.048</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>.595</td>
<td>.585</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSPIRIT</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.708</td>
<td>.512</td>
<td>.493</td>
<td>.415</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.991</td>
<td>.811</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Others</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>.512</td>
<td>.493</td>
<td>.415</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.991</td>
<td>.811</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powerful Others</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.427</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.026</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance Others</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.509</td>
<td>.026</td>
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</table>
Similar to the Total Sample, the Extent of Involvement with AOL was found to be significantly and positively correlated with Resilience components; Confidence in Life and Self ($r = 0.52, p = 0.005$), Life Purpose and Satisfaction ($r = 0.48, p = 0.011$), Self Confidence in Stressful Situations ($r = 0.56, p = 0.002$) and the Index of Core of Spiritual Experiences ($r = 0.46, p = 0.014$) for Male participants in the present investigation. As is seen in the Table XXII, there is also correlation obtained between the Extent of Involvement with AOL and two dimensions of External Locus of Control, Chance Others ($r = -0.55, p = 0.003$) as well as Powerful Others ($r = -0.52, p = 0.005$). These variables are found to be negatively correlated with the Extent of Involvement with AOL. This suggested that the increasing involvement with AOL in terms of the Extent leads to increased resilience, self-confidence, purpose in life, profoundness in spiritual experiences and decreased Externality in the Male participants.

The correlations obtained between the Extent of Involvement with AOL and the self rated variables also show significant level of difference for the Male participants. The Extent of Involvement with AOL is strongly and positively related to the Improved scores on Self-Awareness ($r = 0.63, p < 0.000$), Leadership Skills ($r = 0.53, p = 0.004$) and Self-Confidence ($r = 0.39, p = 0.041$). It demonstrated that as participants got more involved in doing the AOL courses and further organizing or teaching courses, their awareness, leadership skills and confidence get enhanced.

The Duration of Involvement with AOL is significantly related to the variables, Confidence in Life and Self ($r = 0.40, p = 0.037$), Self Confidence during Stressful Situations ($r = 0.41, p = 0.033$) and Index of Core Spiritual Experiences ($r = 0.39, p = 0.043$) for Male participants in the present study. There is also a correlation obtained between the Duration of Involvement with AOL and the Chance Others variable of External Locus of Control ($r = -0.42, p = 0.026$). They are inversely related to each other. The more the Duration of Involvement lesser is the Chance Others orientation of the Male participants. No other correlations have been obtained between the Duration of Involvement with AOL and the variables of other standardized measures.

For Male participants, the Duration of Involvement with AOL is only related to one Self-rated variable i.e. Improved Self-awareness ($r = 0.58, p = 0.001$. The two demonstrate a very significant correlation with each other. Other self rated variables do not statistically show correlation with the Duration of Involvement with AOL as was the case with the Total Sample.

Separate inter-correlations were computed for Female participants also. The Inter-correlation Matrix for Female participants is presented in Table XXIII.
### Table XXIII: Inter-correlation Matrix for the Female Participants

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<th>Age</th>
<th>EOI</th>
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<th>Improved SC</th>
<th>LPS</th>
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<th>CLS</th>
<th>INSPRIT</th>
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As evident from the Table XXIII, the Extent of Involvement with AOL is significantly correlated with the various variables of the standardized measures. It is strongly related with Confidence in Life and Self (r.57, p.001), Life Purpose and Satisfaction (r.58, p.001), Self-Confidence During Stressful Situations (r.62, p<.000), and Index of Core Spiritual Experiences (r.46, p.013) the Female participants in the present investigation. The \( r \) and \( p \) values indicate that the correlations between the Extent of Involvement with AOL and Confidence in Life and self, Life purpose and Satisfaction and Self-Confidence during Stressful situations are highly significant. This illustrates that the increasing involvement of Female participants in AOL with respect to the courses and activities increased their Resilience and intensity of Spiritual experiences. No other correlation between the Extent of Involvement with AOL and other variables of standardized tests were obtained.

Significant correlations were obtained between the Extent of Involvement with AOL and self-rated variables for the Female participants. It was found to be positively correlated with Improved scores on the Leadership Skills (r.38, p.45) and Self-Confidence (r.52, p. 004). It is also correlated with their Current levels of Happiness (r.51, p.05) and Satisfaction (r.51, p.005). The more actively the participants involved themselves in the AOL activities it lead to increased levels of Happiness and satisfaction in them and also provided them with improved Self-Confidence and Leadership Skills.

For the Female participants, the Duration of Involvement with AOL was found to be significantly correlated only with one variable from the standardized measures which was Life Purpose and Satisfaction (r.41, p.030). The Self-rated variables which showed correlation with the Duration of Involvement were, Current Levels of Happiness (r.50, p.006) and Satisfaction (r.41, p: 0.029) and the Improved scores on Self-Confidence (r.37, p.047).

The data presented clearly depicts that the increased Involvement with AOL (Extent and Duration) both for Males and Females was significantly related to the Current
Levels of Happiness and Satisfaction. They were also highly correlated with various self rated variables with small difference with respect to Gender. Both the groups showed positive correlations with the variables of Resilience tested through the standardized measure along with small variations in other tests. Thus, no major Gender difference appears in the present investigation.

**Summary of Inter-Correlations**

Age did not affect the scores on any variable. The Extent of Involvement with AOL positively affected most of the spiritual correlates studied. Youth (Total Sample, Males as well as Females) who were more involved with AOL were clearer on their purpose in life, felt more confident about themselves, and confidently dealt with stressful situations. They also had deeper spiritual experiences. For the Total Sample and the Male participants, the Extent of Involvement with AOL was negatively correlated with the Chance others. It was also negatively correlated with Powerful Others for Male participants. Males who were more involved in AOL were more Internal and did not believe in chance factors or powerful others. The Extent of Involvement was positively correlated with Current level of Happiness and Satisfaction for the Total Sample as well as the Female participants but not for the Male participants. The correlation indicated that Females who were more involved were happy and satisfied with their lives. Extent of Involvement was also related with the Improved scores on Leadership Skills and Self-Confidence for the Total Sample, Male participants as well as Female participants. The positive inter-correlation between Extent of Involvement with AOL and the Improved scores on Self awareness were found to be significant for the Total Sample and Male participants but not the Female participants.

The Duration of Involvement in AOL was significantly related to all three components of the Resilience test; Life Purpose and Satisfaction, Self Confidence during Difficult Situations, Confidence in Life and Self which indicated that youth who had been involved with AOL for longer period of time were high on resilience. It
also related with the Index of Core of Spiritual experiences for the Total Sample. For Male participants, it was positively related with Self Confidence during Stressful Situations, Confidence in Life and Self and also Index of Core of Spiritual Experiences, whereas for Females, it was only positively related with Life Purpose and satisfaction. For Male participants, Duration of Involvement with AOL was negatively correlated with Chance Others but not in the case of Total Sample or Female participants. Male participants became more Internal with increased duration of involvement with AOL. Duration of Involvement was significantly correlated with Current level of Happiness and Satisfaction for the Total Sample and Female participants but not for the Male Participants. For the Total Sample, the Duration of Involvement was significantly related with the Improved scores on Self Awareness, Leadership skills and Self-Confidence, whereas it was positively related with Improved score on Self-Confidence for Female participants and Improved score on Self Awareness for the Male participants. As the Duration of Involvement with AOL increased, the participants felt improvement in their Confidence, Self-Awareness and Leadership Skills.

Thus, the quantitative data analysis provides significant findings in terms of correlations which can be integrated with the qualitative data to obtain meaningful results.

4.4. Theoretical Framework Supporting the Present Research

The present study brings out important human phenomena related to spiritual experiences. The essence of the experiences of youth in various contexts studied indicates a movement towards enhanced positivity in various aspects of their life.

A study of experiences provided a rich understanding of the social, psychological, cognitive and affective aspects related to spirituality of youth which could not have been obtained through the available quantitative measures. Boyatzis (2005) asserted that the core of spirituality is the sense of self-transcendence and the core of religion is seeking of a relationship with the sacred. Thus, the core of both religion and spirituality is ‘experience’. He also believed that religious/spiritual experiences are
central to the study of religiousness and spirituality across life-span. Scholars have also pointed out that experiential part of religion and spirituality is the most understudied aspect of both (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Thus, the present study has focussed immensely on experiences of youth in various contexts such as of different AOL courses, various spiritual practices, relation with the Guru and involvement with other AOL activities. It also attempted to decipher the general conception of spirituality as differentiated from religion.

This sections attempts to provide theoretical basis to experiences of youth and consequently derive conclusions which can contribute to the field of spirituality.

4.4.1. Motivation behind Involvement with the AOL Movement

A closer analysis of the participants and their motivation behind intense involvement with AOL can be understood in the light of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory presented in Figure IX. It postulates that people are motivated to fulfil basic needs followed by moving on to other, more advanced needs. This hierarchy is most often displayed as a pyramid. The lowest levels of the pyramid are most basic needs, while the more complex needs are located at the top of the pyramid. Needs at the bottom of the pyramid are basic physiological needs for food, water, sleep etc. Once these lower-level needs have been met, individual progresses to the next level of needs, which are for safety, security and protection. Further up the pyramid, the needs become increasingly psychological and social. Soon, the social needs for love, belongingness and intimacy become important. Thereafter, the need for personal esteem and feelings of accomplishment take priority. The needs on the top are the needs for self-actualisation. (Maslow, 1968)

As apparent in the findings of the study, the participants were extremely motivated and involved in AOL which had become an integral part of their routine lives. Though extrinsic motivation by parents, mentors and peers played some role in encouraging them to join AOL programme, but intrinsic motivation derived from the benefits of AOL involvement became vital force to consistently stick them to the movement. It can be inferred that most of the participants seem to lie on the third and fourth level needs of Maslow’s pyramid. The participants in the present investigation possessed professional career and were well settled in their families and careers. So, for them,
physiological needs and security needs were comfortably met. Having met the first order need in the hierarchy, there was motivation to fulfil the needs of the next level and finally the higher order needs. Most of the participants were striving for self-growth, development, and improving their interpersonal relationships. They seemed to be actively working towards meeting the self-actualization needs. Though not all the participants seemed to be on the same level, many of them were working towards the same. Some of them had clear vision of high spiritual attainment, and they seemed to be striving passionately for that.

![Figure IX: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1968)](image)

It was evident in participants’ responses to the question regarding ‘Ideal Me’ state which was asked in the semi-structured interview. For many of the participants in the study, intense involvement into the AOL activities and rising high on their transcendental experiences formed to be an important ingredient of the ‘Ideal Me’. Therefore, they were moving high on the ladder of the hierarchy of needs and aimed at attaining self-actualisation. It is also evident in their responses that many of the participants were already in a high state of transcendental experiences, especially the ones who had left their job and were, traveling throughout the world for teaching the AOL programmes and facilitating others in experiencing the benefits of meditation and Sudarshan Kriya. Hence, they were attempting to reach the state of fulfilling the need of self-actualisation. These needs do not remain static and immobile. There is a...
constant back and forth movement from one level to the other level. For instance, many participants reported becoming weaker after turmoil in their lives and then gradually coming back to a stable state by continuous practicing of the techniques taught in AOL. This process involved an initial movement from a depressed state to a ‘normal’ state of mind, and then further to a healthy state. In the context of the needs model, the movement involves progression from needs of belongingness to esteem needs (bringing back the lost self-confidence) and then slowly moving to the self-actualisation needs.

The participants showed acceptance of self, and others, and the confidence to handle different situations in life was also observed in them. They exhibited problem solving behavior and an action oriented approach towards problems and issues. Their participation in the social initiatives by AOL displayed an attitude of not only solving their own problems but also being sensitive and active towards solving the broader issues of people in society. The civic engagement of the participants shows the fulfillment of social needs of an individual. It may be related to the third level needs of belongingness and love which they expected to receive from others. As evident throughout in the discussion there appeared to be universal love and an inner urge for making others stress free and happy. Many of them believed that their creativity and talents had been nurtured by the practices learnt in AOL. There was a continuous march towards personal growth and development in life. The Transcendental experiences were an integral part of their lives as reported by them. Thus, it may simply be concluded that the consistency with which they stuck to the movement, and the satisfaction derived out of it were due to the movement helping them to achieve higher level needs.

4.4.2. Spiritual Experiences Eliciting Positive States

Spiritual experiences in the study have significantly shown march towards positive states in youth. Such states have been discussed in different theoretical frameworks. Researches on positive variables such as happiness, hope, forgiveness, optimism, gratitude and well-being and their relation with spirituality have burgeoned over the past decade. The present investigation exhibits several threads in this direction.
According to Lyubomirsky (2001), happiness refers to experience of joy, contentment, positive well-being, combined with the sense of leading a good, meaningful and worthwhile life. According to the ancient Indian scripture, Bhagavad Gita, a happy state indicates larger accommodative mental space within an individual (Menon, 1998). It is also defined as the degree to which an individual evaluates positively the overall quality of his or her own present life as a whole (Srivastava & Misra, 2011).

Happiness emerged as a very significant variable in the present investigation. In the present study, the Mean Scores of participants indicated high current levels of perceived Happiness (4.04 ± 0.74) and Satisfaction (4.0 ± 0.77). Happiness of participants related closely to the ‘happiness of wise’ or ‘happiness and not pleasure’ as postulated in the Indian context. As the participants were professionally well-settled their happiness was not so much related to the materialistic benefits and achievements but to the transcendental realization in life and consequent contentment. Even their descriptions of ‘Perceived Ideal State’ and of ‘Successes and Failures in life’, revealed that enhancing the transcendental dimension in life and progress on the spiritual path were considered as important for attainment of the Ideal State, Success and Happiness. Not being able to do so was counted as a failure. Only a very few youth mentioned some kind of object gains as their successes or loss of those as failures. All the participants were not equally vocal about their perceived happiness and satisfaction but most of the participants elaborately discussed their related experiences in various contexts. Some of the responses highlighting positivity and happiness of the participants have been mentioned below;

“The biggest achievement for me in the basic course was that I became positive in life. I had become so depressed and passive in life. It gave me a route to happy life.”

“I dropped in all my garbage of thoughts and feeling and realised what hollow and empty, meant. It is an experience in which you are totally hollow with no botheration, sadness and worries”

“I love taking Navchetna shivirs (slum AOL programme), it gives me so much satisfaction when see people doing kriya, meditation, pranayama."
Results and Discussion

There is so much stress in their lives, cases of violence are innumerable when they come and do meditation, satsangs they get a different dimension of life. The amount of love they give me in return is incomparable with any kind of reward in life”

“When you are happy and in love with yourself, then you naturally want to pass that love to the others. After AOL so I felt a need to do something for others.”

The thematic analysis revealed that practicing the techniques learnt (especially Sudarshan kriya), implementation of knowledge imparted in various courses and intense involvement in other activities of AOL made them de stressed and restful and hence encouraged the state of happiness and well-being in them. The actual recorded protocols of behavior of youth, such as; emotional equanimity, increased self-confidence and self- awareness, not getting entangled in relationships, reduced expectation from others, less desires, engaging in social service, inquisitiveness to gain self-knowledge, simplicity, peace, forgiveness fall under the purview of the traits of happiness mentioned in the Indian culture as also described by Srivastava & Misra, 2011. These characteristics and themes concurrently kept on emerging in various descriptions of participants related to their lives and spiritual experiences during the in-depth interviews.

In the present study, the interpretation of happiness and well-being appeared not to be related to the hedonic view of happiness but it appeared to be more transcendental and universal in nature. Youth visibly involved themselves in practices leading to the experience of ‘altered states of consciousness’ and their vision and attitudes inherently expressed ‘other-directedness’ and ‘social-orientedness’. The analysis of their responses indicated that their happiness, contentment and wellbeing are to be related to ‘inner states’ and concern with an integrated action oriented approach towards growth and betterment of society. Such perspectives on happiness in the Indian context have been elaborated by Kumar (2006).

In the context of present study, the term ‘bliss’ was frequently used by youth while describing their spiritual experiences such as exemplified in responses below;
“When I did my first Sudarshan kriya, I was totally amazed that even this kind of an experience exits on this earth, which is so blissful, peaceful and full of love.”

“There were intense moments of appreciation of everything around me, moments of ‘wow’ were so common. It was a truly blissful state.

“I could feel something inside me which is ever happy, blissful and constant amidst everything around me changing every second”

Even being in the presence of Guru was equated with bliss by the participants. Their experiences of various courses, especially, the Advanced Meditation course and the Blessing course, in which they engaged in long periods of meditations were the ones for which repetitive mention of blissful state was reported. Various meditations such as panchkosha, birth and death, meditation in motion and hollow and empty meditation during the Advanced level of courses took them to the experience of higher transcendental states. The responses of the participants, viewed in the light of Taittiriya Upanishad concepts of koshas, indicate that during these period of silence and meditations, they experienced gradual movement from the grossest kosha, ‘annamaya kosha’ to ‘anadmaya kosha’. While describing the experiences of meditations during these courses, they expressed initial bodily discomfort which reportedly vanished after a very short span of time transcending to a blissful state as reported by most of the participants. There may be a subjective and individualistic interpretation of the term ‘blissful’ as used by the participants, which might not be exactly the same as suggested in the Upanishads. But, it clearly conveyed a positive state of mind integrated with the experiences of altered state of consciousness during the period of practice. Evidently, these courses provided glimpses of spiritual elevation to youth, which otherwise seem to be far from reality in the present fast pace world. The reference to the terms, such as, samadhi, eternal joy, deep rest, and blissfulness refer to the states of immense happiness and well-being, according to the transcendental perspective of Indian tradition. Happiness and well-being as a matter of accessing and experiencing anandamya, blissfulness, have also been elaborated by Srivastava & Misra, 2011; Kumar, 2006.
Youth in the present study exhibited more traits related to *satvic* personalities than *tamasic* or *rajasic*. Description of participants’ experiences before and after getting involved into AOL conveyed a gradual movement towards *rajasic* and *satvic* traits from the *tamasic* ones. Such traits have been described by Kumar (2003). Descriptions of some of the participants of instances of frequent high emotional vulnerability in past and general contentment and happiness in present also indicated evolution from *tamasic* to *satvic* traits. Inspite of phases in which tamasic traits, such as depression and dullness were experienced, the awareness to engage in spiritual activities and increase *sattva* in self was demonstrated by them. In-depth interviews revealed respect for and implementation of various ancient Indian scriptures. Internalization of Bhagwad Gita, as the most important emerged in the present investigation. The lessons from the epic also show integration in the knowledge imparted in the AOL courses and its philosophy in general. Jain (2010) suggested that Bhagvad Gita is a remarkable ancient journal of positive psychology, which inculcates human strengths and virtues in Arjuna or any other individual, who is a despondent warrior in a battleground, who is neither a psychopath nor a patient of mental-illness. Gita enables him to thrive in situational crises and challenges in life. She used the nomenclature for Gita as Gita-o-logy with which Krishna used to treat Arjuna similar to the contemporary psychotherapeutic approaches.

Several participants in the present study expressed eudaimonic happiness. In length, data revealed that the participants aspired for realization of self and self-actualization. Such characteristics of happiness have been described by Waterman, 1990. The intrinsic motivation was high enough so that it triggered them to negotiate all other professional and personal commitments and spend time in discourses, follow up programmes, satsangs and other activities by the AOL. The consequent happiness and positive affects experienced by the participants made the AOL platform a stimulating ground, inturn, to make participants get absorbed into AOL and its activities.

Eudiamonic well-being is defined as an intrinsic motivation and pursuing goals that are congruent with one’s core interests and values (Ryan et al, 2008) or taking part in activities that make people feel alive, engaged, and fulfilled. The AOL involvement, contributed to the well-being of the participants in this framework. Such enriching
experiences seemed to fit to the participants deeply held values and beliefs. The experience of fulfilment, meaningfulness, high energy, positivity and belongingness put together resulted in happiness, satisfaction and a positive psychological well-being in the participants. Eudaimonic well-being emphasizes meaningfulness and growth, a more enduring sort of happiness. The concept of Eudaimonic appears to be of relevance in deriving conclusions on the positive states of the sample in the present study. Several quotes from the responses of the participants presented in the results exemplify such states as experienced by them.

Subjective well-being is a person’s evaluative reaction to his or her life, either in terms of life satisfaction, a cognitive evaluations or affect, the on-going emotional reactions (Srivastava & Misra (2011). The three hallmarks of subjective well-being listed by Diener (2000) are; it resides within the experience of an individual, it includes positive measures and it involves a global assessment of all aspects of one’s life. Well-being has undergone extensive empirical and theoretical evaluation.

Ryff (1989) has given an objective view of psychological well-being with the following components; autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relation with others and self-acceptance as presented in Figure X. Each dimension articulates different challenges individuals encounter as they strive to function positively.

![Figure X: Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989)](image-url)
These dimensions of psychological well-being appear to have been demonstrated by some of the participants at various levels. Self-growth and enhancement has been repetitively reported by the participants in the interviews. An improved perception of self, personal growth, and an increased self-confidence was among the most commonly reported transformations after AOL involvement. These form important elements of autonomy. The Internality scores (32.85 ± 6.24) of the participants on the Locus of Control Inventory also indicates that participants believed in self to deal with various life situations and challenges. Families of many of them were not involved in the movement yet they independently carried out their intensive activities which suggest that the participants were autonomous and had personal authority on their lives.

There was inquisitiveness in the participants to attain knowledge regarding ‘self’ and they were also putting efforts to experience higher spiritual states. They regularly practiced the techniques and implemented the cognitive strategies learnt in AOL courses aiming at self- transformation which further facilitated their transcendental experiences. The participants in the present study exhibited personal quest for existential questions regarding life and also seemed to find answers through their spiritual journey.

The enhancements (physical, emotional, cognitive, transcendental and social) experienced by the participants equipped them with better coping skills and resilience to handle life situations without getting much stressed and bothered. In demanding situations, more effort was put to engage themselves in a spiritual activity to come out of the stressful situation and experience calmness and peacefulness. Even social support of AOL group was a major coping mechanism for them which equipped them in handling the adverse circumstances. The AOL faculty was looked upto in many such cases. Apart from the qualitative data even the quantitative analysis significantly throws light on coping and resilience of the participants in the present investigation. They could shape their environment to meet their personal needs and desires. This resilient behaviour exhibits environmental mastery which is one of the dimensions of Ryff’s model.
The youth reported having gone through certain failures in life such as relationship break ups, personal losses, emotional instability, excessive entanglement in relationships and other professional as well as personal failures. During the state of distress, they found themselves momentarily incapable of dealing with the challenging situations in life. But at the same time there was an awareness to practice techniques or to implement cognitive strategies learnt in AOL, or to get more involved through various courses to overcome the perceived state of ‘depression’. Their major successes were related to positive interpersonal relationships, and achievement of emotional equanimity. Thus, the involvement in AOL reflected a movement from stress to positive psychological well-being of the participants in the present study. The six factors described in the above model encompass the traits and behaviours observed in the participants of the present study as reported in the in-depth interviews that were carried out with the participants.

The Broaden-and Build Theory of Positive Emotions given by Fredickson (2002), throws light on the contribution of positive emotions not only to the well-being of an individual but also to the personal growth and development. They broaden momentary thought-action repertoires of an individual for building enduring personal resources that in turn offers the potential for personal growth and transformation by creating positive or adaptive spirals of emotions, cognition and action. The increased social support, artistic, scientific predictions and successful problem solving experiences are all enduring outcomes of positive emotions and contribute to transformation of self and others.

According to Fredickson (2002) positive emotions seem to open up people’s thinking to a wider array of possible actions. The theory points out that people in joy and contentment conditions are more active than people experiencing negative emotions. The broadening of thought-action possibilities, resulting from positive emotions, helps build intellectual resources for solving important life problems, as considering more options leads to effective solutions. The Figure XI presents the Broaden-and-Build theory of Positive Emotions.
In the current context, the Art of Living movement can be viewed in the light of providing a platform to the participants for experiencing positive emotions, which in turn leads to, opening up to broad mental view of self, others and life in general (broaden momentary thought-action repertoires), further leading to building up of personal resources and finally an urge to transform others. The personal resources can be understood in terms of increasing repertoires in various domains; the intellectual resources such as developing cognitive skills, physical resources such developing health and stamina, recovery from multiple disorders and allergies, social resources such as offering an available platform for making new social contacts and maintaining them and psychological resources such as developing resilience, positivity, optimism, self-awareness and other positive states promoting psychological well-being.

It is important to note here that the participants displayed an immense desire to volunteer for transforming the lives of other people. Their involvement in several campaigns like *Clean Delhi Drive*, *Volunteer for a Better India* and other service projects supports Fredickson (2002) assumption that experience of positive emotions lead to shifting focus on other people and generate novel ideas to transform them. It is difficult to ascertain if their concern was group driven and temporary or deeper but it may be considered as an effort in that direction.
The concepts of developmental systems theory (Lerner, 2002) are also useful frameworks in the current study. According to the model, spirituality stimulates integrated moral and civic identity of youth and facilitates them in becoming adults who contribute integratively to self, family, community and civil society (Lerner et al, 2005).

In development systems theories, the mutual influence between the developing person and their complex changing context is represented as individual context relations. The two important concepts pointed out by Lerner in this regard are; relative plasticity at the level of individual involving changing the self to support the context and development regulation, in which context is altered to support the self. The individual remains committed to contributing to the context and strives to develop the skills for making such contributions.

Youth involved across time in positive relations with the community are considered to be on the path of ideal adulthood and, thus, said to be thriving. In this process of regulating the individual and context relations, positive outcomes at various levels are obtained; self, family and community (Lerner, 2004). Spirituality fuels these adaptive individual context relations which enable youth to contribute in productive ways to the development of self, family, community and civil society as also reflected in the current investigation (Dowling et al, 2003; Lerner et al, 2002).

According to Lerner (2005), civic involvement helps youth enter a life path which is marked by the “five Cs” of positive youth development; Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Compassion. Youth who possess these five C’s develop the “sixth C” which is Contribution to self, family and the civil society. The in-depth interviews seem to throw light on presence of some of such youth involved in AOL.

Adaptive developmental regulation results in orientation of youth towards transcending self-interest and value commitments to the betterment of society and social systems. The sense of transcendence of self and integrated moral and civic self-identities can enhance spirituality in youth. (Benson, 2003; Dowling et al, 2003; Lerner et al, 2004). The youth’s sense of spirituality is linked to thriving and is reflected through the protocols in the present study. A few protocols in this context are reproduced from the text;
“When we spread happiness, we get it back in abundance. Nature has this law of giving back to us whatever we give, so if we spread joyfulness, peace and happiness it is increased in our lives too. We feel much more rising into spirituality and the true self”

“I am handling the schools team for VFABI (volunteer for a better India), so far we have covered around 30 schools. We had an Idea competition in the schools, in which students were supposed to write their ideas of making a better India. They could use any of the 6 themes given to them. The schools took out rallies with their students and teachers, they made banners and did street plays. I feel that working for society makes one more closer to the roots and also to one self.”

“I love taking Navchetna shivirs (slum AOL programme), it gives me so much satisfaction when see people doing kriya, meditation, pranayama. There is so much stress in their lives, cases of violence are innumerable when they come and do meditation, satsangs they get a different dimension of life. The amount of love they give me in return is incomparable with any kind of reward in life”

“When you are happy and in love with yourself, then you naturally want to pass that love to the others. Making others feel happy in turn gives back the positivity and contentment to us. So it is cycle of happiness.”

Several researches have reported that the youth who are involved in spiritual or religious groups are found to be more sensitive to other people and the welfare of society. The present study also supports Lerner’s (2002) model and indicates that the involvement of participants in AOL had enormously influenced their lives and such a ‘context’ appeared to stimulate their development as thriving youth who were proactive towards contributing to the world in making it stress and violence free. The relative plasticity which is pointed out as an important factor in catalysing the process of thriving was shown by the participants, as they were open to join the movement for various reasons already stated. They gradually committed themselves to the techniques, activities and the philosophy of AOL. The intrinsic motivation of youth lead them to significantly involve themselves in activities aiming at self-growth and development as well as contributing to the society in positive ways. The Developmental systems model of Thriving process by Lerner (2002) has been presented in Figure XII.
Figure XII: Developmental Systems Model of Thriving Process (Lerner, 2002)

The mutual influence of participants and the AOL platform indicated an enhanced growth of functionally valued behaviours, such as competence, self-confidence, belongingness with others and positive traits of care, compassion, forgiveness and concern for others. Even though every participant may not be hypothesized to have reached that level, a good number of them expressed such thoughts and feelings. The enhanced positive traits during this gradual process of self-growth and contribution towards the growth of society inherently triggers the experiences of psychological and social well-being in youth. Nonetheless, differences were observed in the participants on such traits. There was diversity apparent in the sample based on their extent and duration of involvement and also other demographic factors. Generalization cannot be made for all.

Donelly et al (2005) gave a model depicting the pathways between spirituality and civic engagement which explains the engagement of the youth in social work activities in the present study. According to the model presented in Figure XIII, spirituality is connected to civic engagement or social work activities through two pathways.
Results and Discussion

Figure XIII: Pathways between Spirituality and Civic Engagement by (Donnelly et al, 2005)

The first (left side) pathway emphasises that spirituality leads to civic engagement through involvement in organised religion. It suggests that religious institutions have an important role to play in turning an individuals’ attention towards civic problems. Youth with higher levels of religious participation are more likely to become involved in civic activities with its religious group of affiliation.

The right side of the model or the second pathway refers to civic involvement as directly connected to spirituality without mediation from any religious institution. Virtue forms to be a result of spirituality according to the given model which further results in either self-perfection or concern for others. Virtue is understood here as motivation to follow a set of spiritual principles that may lead an individual to seek self-perfection or/and become sensitive to the needs of others.

In the current context, the participants were observed to be involved in both aspects of spirituality. On one hand, they showed active involvement in putting efforts to self-growth and development by regularly practicing the techniques learnt in the AOL courses and by implementing the cognitively enriching themes in their day to day lives. On the other hand, they attempted to transcend the self towards the needs of others. The participants were highly involved in different issues prevailing in society
at various levels. They volunteered for the Art of Living courses; aiming at making others stress free and to bring smiles on their face along with other social upliftment projects, as reported by them. They offered support in social issues arising from time to time like actively participating in Corruption free India movement, Clean Delhi Drive and Volunteer for a Better India projects. This pathway is depicted on the right side of the model. Hence, it is evident that increased spirituality can lead to a number of outcomes including a deepening of beliefs and moral commitments. This spiritual elevation allows one to think beyond the self which may lead to more civic engagement. In the same vein, many responses highlighted universal love, concern for others and inner urge for emotionally and spiritually uplifting others as may be evident from the verbal protocols of the participants.

The practice of giving is universally recognised as the most basic human virtues, a quality that relates to the depth of one’s humanity and capacity for self-transcendence. The practice of ‘giving’ is a strong tenet for spiritual development. The involvement of participants in AOL seems to have kindred the virtue of ‘giving’ and altruism in youth.

The perspectives stated and discussed above provide theoretical foundations in examining and understanding the experiences and behavior of youth in the present investigation. They comprehensibly demonstrate the impact of involvement with the AOL movement not only on their happiness and well-being, but also their inclination towards social work and social upliftment.

Hope and Optimism, which became evident in the participants’ responses, as related to happiness, well-being, and general life satisfaction have been theoretically demonstrated by authors such as Koenig & Cohen (2002); Peterson & Seligman (2004); Scioli et al (2011).

A few protocols expressing hope and optimism are reproduced below;

“He is taking care, I don’t have to worry”

“During those difficult times I could feel him walking with me all throughout. I was never alone, I knew best has to happen to me.”
“If I am alive today after that scary period, it is a big success for me and it is only because Guruji was taking care, or the God was taking care. Both mean the same to me.”

“I feel when one is spiritual that faith of positive things happening to oneself automatically comes in. I feel very confident that best has to happen to me. Guruji is doing everything on his own.”

The above responses reflect that they were generally hopeful and optimistic in life. Even at the time of stress and anxiety they were hopeful to overcome those situations primarily because of their faith in the Transcendent power which they believed to be of Guru/Divine or God.

In the present investigation specific questions were not included regarding hope, optimism, forgiveness and other such concepts. However, participants’ responses amply show their manifestation in their lives.

4.4.3. Spirituality and the Tradition of Gurus

Spirituality is an Indian cultural phenomenon. The emphasis on spirituality in India has been captured by Bhawuk (2011) by consolidating a list of spiritual masters over 2,500 years using various national and international sources. According to him, Gurus who have shown the path to spiritual elevation at different points in time were not limited to any caste, religion or any particular region in India. He closely examined the contributions made by Ramakrishna Paramhans ((1836–1886), Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1917–2008) and Osho Rajneesh ((1931–1990) to illustrate that Indian culture has always produced eminent spiritual gurus of universal genre.

A careful examination of AOL movement brings out certain overlapping features salient to both AOL and Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement by Maharish Mahesh Yogi. This observation was also made by Tollefsen (2012). The AOL proclaims that Sudarshan kriya is a scientific technique, extensively researched and examined to have benefits on the physiological, psychological, affective, social and spiritual levels. The techniques and processes taught in the AOL courses are all evidenced by their scientific explanations. Similarly, (Late) Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is credited for starting the process of bridging
the gap between science and spirituality by subjecting Transcendental Meditation to Western scientific methods of examination (Bhawuk, 2003; Hagelin, 1998). The TM is a mantra meditation proposed as a method for achieving self-growth, transformation, spiritual transcendence, personal well-being and calming one’s mind, and reducing stress (Mason, 1994). It was the first effort to aggressively present meditation as valuable to the beginners for more immediate and accessible effects such as physiological relaxation and stress management. At some points in the biography of Sri Sri glimpses of his association with Maharish Mahesh Yogi are present. The AOL shares the idea of holding its courses and programmes worldwide and both charge a nominal fee for undertaking it.

The AOL has attracted people worldwide more than any other organization in recent times. The philosophy of AOL and ingredients of its courses demonstrate strong base of Indian culture and spirituality which have been repackaged in an appealing manner to suit the needs of contemporary world especially youth. The structure of Youth workshops and their processes resemble intensive corporate life skills and management programmes. A closer examination of the workshops explicate strong spiritual bases. Emphasis is on yogic practices, ancient wisdom and social service blended with life skills. It caters to the needs of young generation as is apparent in the AOL programmes.

One of the most defining features of the AOL involvement of youth in the present study was respect and reverence for their Guru, Sri Sri Ravishankar. Irrespective of the ways of initiating into AOL, or the benefits gained in their lives after their involvement, almost all the participants had immense faith, love, gratitude and respect for him. He is reported to be one of the significant reasons for their intense involvement with AOL. Though personal meetings with him were a rare phenomenon, yet it resulted in high esteem for them. They experienced intense emotions such as crying, mobilisation of high energy in the body, extreme happiness and contentment in front of him, for reasons they could not comprehend. Interestingly, most of the youth in the present study were extremely expressive about their feeling for him. The affective experiences to a great extent were visible during their narration of the instances of meeting him. They attributed most of their successes and attainment in life to him. As suggested by Goodenough (1998), gratitude is
the willingness to recognise the achievements which individuals attribute not having earned by himself. Experiences of gratitude can be religiously or spiritually based, or they may be associated with reverence towards an acknowledgement of universal power. Some of the participants’ responses highlighting such a phenomena are quoted below;

“Whatever I am today, is only because of my Guru.”

“As soon as I saw his picture, I understood that I was looking for him for life times and I finally found him.”

“I don’t know how I reached such a high position professionally. It is all the divine power, the love of my Guru bestowed on me, I have not ever worked so hard to be able to reach here.”

“Whenever I am in some problem I just write to him and put it near his picture, I surrender to him and he takes of everything.”

“He is best friend. I just sit in front of his photo and say whatever I want to say. I share with him everything that I can’t express to anybody else.”

Participants expressed their gratitude for Guru during various courses. During one of the higher level course (Blessing course), most of them expressed intense gratitude and connectedness with him. The experience of high transcendental states during the course reportedly made them feel closer to their ‘inner self’. The perspective of Emmons (2005) that religious and spiritual framework provides a backdrop for experiences and expressions of gratitude is clearly evident in the current context.

As revealed in the thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, the spiritual experiences of youth were found to facilitate the feelings of gratitude. McCullough et al (2002) suggested that gratitude as a disposition is positively correlated with nearly all measures of spirituality and religiousness, including spiritual transcendence. Spiritually or religiously inclined people have a stronger disposition to experience gratitude than their less spiritual/religious counterparts. Gratitude is also linked to affective, prosocial, psychological and spiritual variables along with the positive effects on relationships. (Emmons, 2005; Emmons & McCullogh, 2003)

McCollough et al (2002) found that people who reported higher levels of spirituality reported more gratitude in their daily moods than did people higher in religious interests, general religiousness, and intrinsic religious orientation. Presence of
gratitude may be a positive affective hallmark of religiously and spiritually engaged people, just as an absence of depressive symptoms is a negative affective hallmark of spiritually and religiously engaged people (Emmons, 2005). Several quotes from the responses of the participants presented in the results exemplify such states as experienced by them.

The above discussion indicates that the involvement of youth with AOL contributed to positive experiences in the lives of youth. It is evident that the module of AOL offers a platform to the participants which simulates positive experiences in an individual as an outcome of attending various courses. These courses comprise of the techniques such as Sudarshan kriya, meditations, social activities along with the cognitive knowledge from ancient texts, all together, catering to the physical, affective, social and spiritual needs of people. This platform caters to Maslow’s second order needs (love, security, belongingness, self-esteem) as well as the higher order needs (self-actualisation, universal love) of youth attending these programmes. Such experiences intrinsically keep them motivated to remain stuck to the organisation. This reflects a model of initiating and maintaining a journey towards ‘self’ and at the same time towards ‘others’ which leads one to reach a state of enhanced psychological well-being.