CHAPTER - III

NEED OF THE STUDY

3.1 OVERVIEW AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Given the global heightened emphasis on the pursuit of happiness, along with the relative advantages happy people seem to enjoy, an important question is whether it is possible to sustainably improve an individual’s happiness. The reply lays in the roots of happiness which are reflected in many of the world’s religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and have contributed substantially on the sense of meaning in life that is required to achieve true happiness (McMahon, 2006). Positive Psychology provides a fruitful alternate answer which addresses an ardent yearning to determine how to help people live happier, healthier and meaningful lives. This newly christened approach proves to be a breadth of fresh air as it lucratively has wrapped the old ways and methods into new-fangled exercises which not only appeals but also is taken in good strides by today’s youth. Therefore the present research is an endeavor towards making a humble contribution to the positive psychology literature in India which is still in its nascent stage and attempting to find how far the exercises proposed by positive psychologists are effective and successful on the Indian youth.

Our ancestors laid great emphasis on strengths and called an appetite for virtue a “right” appetite and stressed that values must be acted upon repeatedly only then it is internalized as a constituent of a person’s character. However the present-day times are beset with a variety of significant problems and challenges - environmental, economic, inter-cultural, and political, and that many of these challenges can be constructively addressed through the exercise and development of virtues and strengths of character (Lombardo, 2008). Many, if not most of our problems are due to a lack of virtues – that is vices, such as, greed, discrimination, human suppression, selfishness, thoughtlessness, and the need for power over others. Hence, the solutions to our modern difficulties frequently are not technological or economical, but ethical
that is, through changes in the character of our behaviour and the values we aspire to. It’s with the emergence of positive psychology that proves to be a boon at a time amid high prevalence of worldwide depression, small rise in life satisfaction, and synergy between learning and positive emotion all urge that skills for happiness should be trained among youth.

Although the research is in its infancy, interest of psychologists lie in building a fulfilling life by identifying individual strengths of character and fostering them through regular activity and application in life (Seligman et al 2005). The overall research evidence to date indicates that character strengths are linked to happiness and flourishing among youth (Maltby, Day & Barber 2005; Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Froh, Kashdan, et al., 2009; Park & Peterson, 2009; Froh et al., 2011; Scheidle 2011). While the West has not only comprehensively established relationship of happiness in context to gratitude and forgiveness but also has developed programs and interventions designed to facilitate happiness. Though extensive work has been done in this area (Yadav, 2010, Tripathi 2012) but the applied part i.e. interventions and programs has not been investigated upon much in India. Thus, to fill in these gaps, we need to probe into its relevance in the Indian context.

There exist two kinds of researches on happiness in relation to gratitude and forgiveness. The first line of research highlights exploratory studies which has paved way towards action oriented researches. The ways and methods for augmenting happiness have changed in the recent times ranging from yoga and meditation to identifying and cultivating strengths. Because of blending of our Indian culture with the culture of West, a more global way of thinking has peeped into the minds of youth. Hence youth is easily and better able to accept and absorb the western demeanour. Researchers have identified a number of exercises to augment gratitude such as ‘counting blessings vs burdens’, ‘thanking your heroes’, ‘practice downward comparisons’, ‘you at your best’, ‘gratitude visit/ writing a gratitude letter’, ‘savor life’s joys’, that focus on improving well being, happiness and life satisfaction (Seligman, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder & Lopez, 2007; Lyubomirsky, 2009). Exercises to augment forgiveness proposed by researches are ‘forgiving oneself’, ‘writing an apology’, ‘following REACH’, ‘performing Naikan’ that focus
on improving well being, happiness and life satisfaction (Krech, 2002; Baskin & Enright, 2004; Tangney, Boone & Dearing, 2005; Worthington, 2006). An association between character strengths in youth and academic success, health promoting behavior, life satisfaction and happiness have been reported (Park & Peterson, 2006b; Ma et al, 2008; Lounsbury et al, 2009). The researchers have found these exercises to be highly effective in West but it is still grappling to find the same kind of niche in the Indian mindset and culture where this kind of an area is not much dwelled upon. The Indian literature wants to pay closer attention on how do these exercises contribute to an increase in gratitude and forgiveness, and how would this construct impact happiness.

Gratitude and forgiveness has recently received a great deal of attention in both the scientific and popular literature on psychology, where it is viewed as a potential remedy for many of life’s hardships as well as a means to achieve peace of mind, happiness, physical health, and more fulfilling relationships (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). From the classical philosophers, to the ancient religions, all the way to the modern self-improvement industry – gratitude has been offered as a way of increasing our basic happiness and satisfaction with life. Forgiveness is usually the most productive choice and helps to heal a broken relationship and contribute to overall happiness and well being (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerkm & Kluwer, 2003). It is in both individual interest and the interest of society as a whole to practice forgiveness as it is an important and desired transaction for psychological, physical and relational health (Lawler-Row & Piferi, 2006). The question to raise character strengths have been addressed globally and therefore creating a design for Strength Building Program (SBP), basics of which can suit to any culture to which youth can connect and hence can be a better way to approach youth. As a final factor to consider regarding virtues, the pursuit of character strengths (gratitude and forgiveness) will help individuals make more valuable and positive contributions to the improvement of human society. These two strengths of character have been studied separately quite a number of times, but jointly, they have not been investigated upon much thus, it is an initiative to fill in this gap and explore them in unison in the Indian context.
3.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Based on the focus of the study the following objectives were formulated for the present research:

❖ The first objective is to examine the distribution of gratitude, forgiveness and happiness among Indian youth.

❖ The second objective is to design Strength Building Program of gratitude and forgiveness by compiling adequate exercises proposed by positive psychologists (Miller, 1995; Krech, 2002; Seligman, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Baskin & Enright, 2004; Tangney, Boone & Dearing, 2005 Worthington, 2006; Lyubomirsky, 2009) that intend to enhance the above said strengths and to check its effect on happiness (outcome variable).

❖ The third objective is to test the efficacy of Strength Building Program of gratitude and forgiveness using pre post quasi time-series experimental design, for which the study aims to have an experimental group and a control group. Participants low on both character strengths i.e. gratitude and forgiveness would only be incorporated in the study sample. The experimental group would consist of students who would receive Strength Building Program. The control group would consist of students who would not receive Strength Building Program. The pre and post Strength Building Program scores on gratitude, forgiveness and happiness would then be compared for experimental and control groups.

3.3 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the focus of the study, theoretical conceptualizations, review of literature, and empirical evidences available following hypotheses have been formulated for the current research:
H1: Gratitude and forgiveness among youth receiving Strength Building Program in experimental group would significantly increase from pre to post-training period as compared to the control group.

H2: Happiness among youth in experimental group would significantly increase from pre to post-training period as compared to the control group.

H3: Increase in gratitude and forgiveness would be maintained in post-training sequential evaluation i.e. from time-1 to time-2.

H4: Increase in happiness would be maintained for both post-training sequential evaluation i.e. from time-1 to time-2.