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Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility in the Light of the Bhagavad Gita: An Indian Knowledge System Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The growing prevalence of psychological distress, academic pressure, occupational uncertainty, and emotional instability has intensified the need for psychological resources that promote resilience and adaptive functioning. Contemporary Positive Psychology identifies Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and Psychological Flexibility as two fundamental constructs that enhance individual well-being, resilience, and optimal performance. Although these constructs have gained substantial empirical attention in Western psychology, their philosophical foundations resonate strongly with the principles embedded within the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). The Indian Knowledge System offers a holistic understanding of human consciousness, self-regulation, emotional balance, ethical living, and purposeful action through classical texts such as the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, Yoga Sutras, and other indigenous philosophical traditions.

The present conceptual paper explores Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility from the perspective of the Indian Knowledge System and proposes an integrative theoretical framework connecting ancient Indian wisdom with contemporary Positive Psychology. The paper argues that the dimensions of Psychological Capital—hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism—are inherently reflected in concepts such as Nishkama Karma (selfless action), Dharma (righteous duty), Shraddha (faith), Atma-Vishwasa (self-confidence), and Samatvam (equanimity). Similarly, Psychological Flexibility is conceptualized through the principles of mindfulness, detachment from outcomes, cognitive awareness, acceptance of life's impermanence, and adaptive action described extensively in Indian philosophical literature.

Rather than positioning ancient wisdom as an alternative to modern psychology, this paper demonstrates how both perspectives complement each other in developing sustainable psychological strengths. An original conceptual framework is proposed to explain how Indian psychological principles can strengthen Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility, thereby facilitating human flourishing, emotional well-being, and adaptive coping in educational, organizational, and clinical settings. The paper concludes by identifying future research directions for empirical validation and culturally grounded psychological interventions based on the Indian Knowledge System.

KEYWORDS

Indian Knowledge System, Psychological Capital, Psychological Flexibility, Positive Psychology, Bhagavad Gita, Human Flourishing, Resilience, Well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has witnessed remarkable scientific and technological progress; however, psychological well-being has become an increasingly significant global concern. Individuals across educational institutions, workplaces, and communities

are experiencing elevated levels of stress, anxiety, uncertainty, emotional exhaustion, and psychological burnout. These challenges have shifted the focus of psychological research from merely treating mental illness toward identifying the strengths and resources

that enable individuals to thrive despite adversity. This paradigm shift has contributed to the emergence of Positive Psychology, a field dedicated to understanding human strengths, resilience, well-being, and flourishing. Among the most influential constructs within Positive Psychology are Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and Psychological Flexibility. Psychological Capital represents an individual's positive psychological resources comprising hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. These resources facilitate adaptive functioning, effective coping, perseverance, and goal attainment. Psychological Flexibility, on the other hand, reflects the capacity to remain consciously aware of present experiences while adapting one's behaviour according to personal values and situational demands. Together, these constructs contribute significantly to mental health, academic success, occupational effectiveness, and overall life satisfaction.

Despite their growing empirical importance, these concepts are generally interpreted through Western theoretical frameworks. This reliance often overlooks the rich psychological insights embedded within indigenous knowledge traditions. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents one of the world's oldest and most comprehensive traditions of understanding the human mind, consciousness, behaviour, emotions, and self-development. Rather than separating psychological functioning from ethical and spiritual dimensions, IKS adopts a holistic perspective that integrates cognition, emotion, behaviour, morality, and consciousness into a unified framework of human flourishing.

Classical Indian texts, including the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, Patanjali Yoga Sutras, and Vedantic philosophy, provide profound insights into emotional regulation, resilience, self-awareness, detachment, purposeful action, and psychological balance. Concepts such as Nishkama Karma (selfless action), Samatvam (equanimity), Abhyasa (consistent practice), Vairagya (detachment), Shraddha (faith), and Atma-Jnana (self-knowledge) reflect sophisticated psychological principles that closely correspond to contemporary constructs of Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility.

Unlike many modern psychological approaches that primarily address symptoms after distress emerges, Indian psychology emphasizes cultivating enduring inner strengths that prevent psychological suffering and promote sustainable well-being. This preventive orientation aligns closely with Positive Psychology's objective of enhancing human strengths rather than merely reducing pathology.

The present paper seeks to bridge these two intellectual traditions by developing a conceptual integration between Psychological Capital, Psychological

Flexibility, and the Indian Knowledge System. Rather than treating ancient wisdom as a historical philosophy alone, the paper argues that Indian psychological principles remain highly relevant for addressing contemporary psychological challenges. By synthesizing insights from classical Indian literature with modern Positive Psychology, this paper proposes a culturally grounded conceptual framework capable of enriching psychological theory, research, and practice. Furthermore, the paper contributes to the expanding discourse on decolonizing psychology by recognizing indigenous systems of knowledge as legitimate scientific resources for understanding human behaviour and psychological growth. Such integration has important implications for higher education, mental health promotion, counselling psychology, organizational behaviour, and future empirical research.

LITERATURE REVIEW:-

Positive Psychology has transformed contemporary psychological research by shifting the emphasis from psychopathology to human strengths, resilience, and optimal functioning. Since the pioneering work of Martin Seligman, researchers have increasingly explored psychological resources that enable individuals to adapt successfully to life's challenges. Among these resources, Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and Psychological Flexibility have emerged as two influential constructs associated with well-being, performance, and mental health.

Psychological Capital, introduced by Luthans and colleagues, is defined as a positive psychological state characterized by four interrelated capacities: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO). Extensive empirical research has demonstrated that individuals with higher PsyCap experience greater academic achievement, job satisfaction, emotional stability, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being while showing lower levels of stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression. Most existing studies, however, conceptualize PsyCap primarily through Western motivational and cognitive theories.

Similarly, Psychological Flexibility has become a central construct in modern behavioural science, particularly within Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). It refers to the ability to remain aware of one's present experiences while responding to internal thoughts and emotions in ways that are consistent with personal values. Individuals with greater psychological flexibility exhibit superior emotional regulation, adaptive coping, interpersonal adjustment, and resilience during stressful situations.

Although these constructs have been investigated across diverse populations, relatively few studies have examined them from the perspective of indigenous

psychological traditions. The growing movement toward culturally inclusive psychology argues that psychological theories should be interpreted within their socio-cultural and philosophical contexts rather than relying exclusively on Western frameworks. In this regard, the Indian Knowledge System provides a valuable intellectual foundation for understanding human strengths and psychological growth.

Several scholars have highlighted that Indian philosophical traditions describe sophisticated psychological processes including self-regulation, emotional balance, resilience, mindfulness, self-awareness, and value-guided behaviour centuries before these concepts were formally introduced in modern psychology. Nevertheless, systematic theoretical integration between Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility within the Indian Knowledge System remains limited. This conceptual gap provides the rationale for the present paper.

INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE:-

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) encompasses the intellectual, philosophical, scientific, educational, and spiritual traditions that evolved over several millennia in the Indian subcontinent. Rather than viewing knowledge as fragmented disciplines, IKS promotes an integrated understanding of human life where physical, psychological, social, ethical, and spiritual dimensions function as interconnected aspects of well-being.

Unlike reductionist approaches that separate mind from body, Indian psychology considers consciousness as the foundation of human functioning. Classical Indian texts—including the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Yoga Sutras, Buddhist psychology, and Jain philosophy—provide systematic explanations of cognition, emotion, motivation, behaviour, suffering, and human transformation.

A distinctive characteristic of Indian psychology is its emphasis on inner development rather than external achievement alone. Psychological growth is understood as a continuous process of cultivating self-awareness, emotional balance, ethical conduct, disciplined action, and wisdom. Consequently, mental health is viewed not merely as the absence of illness but as the harmonious integration of thoughts, emotions, behaviour, and consciousness.

Within IKS, individuals are encouraged to develop resilience through disciplined practice (Abhyasa), detachment from uncontrollable outcomes (Vairagya), ethical responsibility (Dharma), purposeful action (Karma Yoga), and equanimity (Samatvam). These principles closely resemble contemporary constructs associated with resilience, self-regulation, psychological flexibility, and positive psychological functioning.

The Bhagavad Gita illustrates these ideas through the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. Faced with moral conflict, emotional distress, fear, and uncertainty, Arjuna initially demonstrates psychological rigidity and emotional dysregulation. Krishna's teachings gradually transform his perspective by encouraging self-awareness, acceptance, value-based action, emotional balance, and unwavering commitment to duty. This psychological transformation provides a culturally grounded model of adaptive functioning that parallels many contemporary psychological theories.

Thus, Indian psychology offers a strengths-based framework that complements Positive Psychology while extending its scope through ethical, existential, and consciousness-oriented dimensions.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM:-

Psychological Capital represents a dynamic psychological resource that enables individuals to overcome adversity, pursue meaningful goals, and maintain positive functioning under challenging circumstances. While modern psychology conceptualizes PsyCap through four dimensions—Hope, Self-efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism—each of these capacities has deep conceptual parallels within the Indian Knowledge System.

HOPE (ĀŚĀ AND SANKALPA) :-

Hope is generally defined as the motivational capacity to identify pathways toward desired goals while sustaining the determination to pursue them. Within Indian philosophy, hope is not understood merely as wishful thinking but as Sankalpa, a conscious commitment rooted in clarity of purpose, discipline, and ethical intention.

The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes purposeful action without attachment to immediate results. Such an orientation nurtures persistent motivation because individuals remain focused on their responsibilities rather than becoming discouraged by temporary setbacks. Hope, therefore, emerges from meaningful action rather than external success.

SELF-EFFICACY (ĀTMA-VIŚVĀSA) :-

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to perform successfully. Indian philosophical traditions associate this confidence with Ātma-Viśvāsa (inner confidence), which originates from self-knowledge rather than ego or external validation.

The Upanishadic understanding of the Self encourages individuals to recognize their inherent potential and inner strength. Confidence develops through disciplined learning, self-control, and continuous practice rather

than comparison with others. This perspective promotes

RESILIENCE (TITIKṢĀ) :-

Resilience reflects the capacity to recover from adversity while maintaining psychological stability. Indian philosophy introduces the concept of Titikṣā, which signifies patient endurance of life's inevitable difficulties without losing emotional balance or moral integrity.

Rather than avoiding suffering, Indian psychology encourages individuals to develop wisdom, acceptance, and perseverance through challenges. Such resilience enables long-term psychological growth instead of temporary emotional recovery.

OPTIMISM (ŚRADDHĀ AND POSITIVE EXPECTANCY):-

Optimism in Positive Psychology refers to maintaining favourable expectations regarding future outcomes. Within the Indian Knowledge System, optimism is closely associated with Śraddhā—a deep sense of faith in one's efforts, values, and the meaningful order of life. Unlike unrealistic optimism, Śraddhā combines confidence with disciplined action and ethical responsibility. It encourages individuals to remain psychologically positive while accepting uncertainty with maturity and composure. This balanced optimism prevents helplessness without promoting unrealistic expectations.

Is tarah, Indian Knowledge System Psychological Capital ko sirf behavioural competence ke roop mein nahi dekhta, balki inner consciousness, ethical living, disciplined action, and self-realization ke integrated outcome ke roop mein samajhta hai.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM:-

Psychological Flexibility refers to the capacity to remain aware of present experiences, accept difficult thoughts and emotions without unnecessary avoidance, and act in accordance with personally meaningful values despite internal or external challenges. In contemporary psychology, this construct is central to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and is regarded as a key determinant of resilience, well-being, and adaptive functioning.

From the perspective of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Psychological Flexibility is not merely a coping skill but a way of living that reflects wisdom, self-regulation, and balanced action. Ancient Indian texts describe a psychologically mature person as one who remains emotionally stable in success and failure, adapts to changing circumstances, and performs duties with clarity rather than impulsive emotional reactions.

The Bhagavad Gita offers one of the earliest and most

stable self-belief even during adverse circumstances. Comprehensive descriptions of such flexibility. Arjuna initially experiences confusion, fear, guilt, and avoidance before the Kurukshetra war. His inability to act reflects psychological rigidity, where emotions dominate judgment. Through Krishna's guidance, Arjuna gradually develops self-awareness, acceptance of reality, cognitive clarity, and commitment to righteous action. This transformation closely resembles the process of developing psychological flexibility described in modern behavioural science.

SEVERAL PRINCIPLES WITHIN IKS DIRECTLY CORRESPOND TO PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY:-

Samatvam (Equanimity):-

The Bhagavad Gita emphasises maintaining emotional balance under both favourable and unfavourable circumstances. Samatvam does not imply emotional suppression; rather, it represents the ability to experience emotions without becoming controlled by them. Individuals who cultivate equanimity are better able to make thoughtful decisions, regulate stress, and sustain effective functioning during uncertainty.

Nishkama Karma (Detached Action):-

Detached action encourages individuals to focus on effort instead of becoming excessively attached to outcomes. This orientation reduces performance anxiety, fear of failure, and emotional exhaustion. In psychological terms, it promotes behavioural persistence even when external rewards remain uncertain.

Abhyasa (Consistent Practice):-

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras describe Abhyasa as disciplined and continuous practice directed toward psychological stability. Flexible behaviour develops gradually through repeated self-observation, reflection, and behavioural adjustment rather than sudden transformation.

Vairagya (Healthy Detachment):-

Vairagya refers to freedom from unhealthy attachment rather than withdrawal from life. By reducing excessive dependence on external validation, individuals become more capable of responding adaptively to changing circumstances. This principle enhances cognitive flexibility and emotional resilience.

Svadharma (Value-Based Living) :-

Modern theories define psychological flexibility as behaviour guided by personal values. Similarly, the Bhagavad Gita encourages individuals to perform their Svadharma, or authentic duty, despite emotional discomfort. Meaningful action becomes the basis of psychological strength.

Integrating Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility within the Indian Knowledge System:-

Although Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility are generally studied as separate constructs, the Indian Knowledge System suggests that both emerge from a common foundation of inner awareness, disciplined action, ethical values, and emotional balance.

Psychological Capital provides the motivational resources required to pursue meaningful goals, whereas Psychological Flexibility enables individuals to adapt effectively when obstacles arise. Together, these capacities promote sustainable well-being rather than temporary success.

For example:-

- Hope is strengthened when individuals develop Sankalpa (purposeful intention).
- Self-efficacy grows through Atma-Vishwasa (inner confidence) and disciplined practice.
- Resilience develops through Titiksha (patient endurance) and acceptance of adversity.
- Optimism becomes balanced through Shraddha (faith rooted in effort and values).

SIMILARLY:-

Psychological Flexibility develops through Samatvam (equanimity), Nishkama Karma (detached action), Vairagya (healthy detachment), Abhyasa (consistent practice), and Svadharma (value-guided action). Thus, Indian philosophy does not treat these constructs as isolated psychological skills but as interconnected dimensions of holistic human development.

The framework proposes that Indian philosophical principles function as foundational psychological resources that simultaneously strengthen Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility. Their interaction creates a positive developmental cycle in which greater inner awareness enhances adaptive functioning, while adaptive functioning further reinforces psychological strengths and well-being. Unlike many Western approaches that focus primarily on symptom reduction, the proposed framework emphasises proactive cultivation of psychological resources that enable long-term flourishing.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS:-

The integration of Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility with the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) has important implications for psychology, education, organizational behaviour, counselling, and mental health.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS:-

Higher education institutions are increasingly facing

challenges such as academic burnout, examination anxiety, emotional distress, and declining psychological well-being among students. Integrating IKS principles into student development programmes can strengthen hope, resilience, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping. Practices such as reflective learning, value-based education, mindfulness, and discussions on the Bhagavad Gita may help students cultivate both Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility.

COUNSELLING AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY:-

Mental health professionals can incorporate culturally relevant concepts from IKS into counselling interventions. Principles such as Samatvam, Nishkama Karma, Abhyasa, and Vairagya may complement evidence-based therapeutic approaches by helping clients develop acceptance, resilience, and value-guided action. Such integration may also increase the cultural relevance of psychological services in India.

ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY:-

Organizations increasingly recognize Psychological Capital as a valuable resource for improving employee engagement, leadership, productivity, and well-being. Indian philosophical principles may contribute to leadership development programmes by promoting ethical decision-making, resilience, emotional intelligence, and adaptive behaviour under uncertainty.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH:-

The proposed framework expands Positive Psychology by demonstrating that indigenous knowledge traditions can enrich contemporary theories. Rather than importing psychological models without cultural adaptation, researchers can develop culturally grounded theories that better reflect Indian social and philosophical contexts.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS:-

The present paper is conceptual in nature and therefore opens several possibilities for future empirical investigation.

Future researchers may:-

Develop and validate an Indian Knowledge-Based Positive Psychological Resource Framework (IK-PPRF) measurement model. Examine the relationship between IKS practices and Psychological Capital among university students.

- Investigate whether Psychological Flexibility mediates the relationship between IKS-based practices and psychological well-being.
- Conduct comparative studies across educational, clinical, and organizational settings.

- Design and evaluate IKS-based psychoeducational interventions aimed at enhancing resilience, hope, and adaptive functioning.
- Explore cross-cultural differences between Western Positive Psychology models and indigenous Indian psychological approaches.

CONCLUSION:-

The increasing prevalence of psychological distress across educational, occupational, and social settings necessitates the development of culturally meaningful approaches that promote sustainable psychological well-being. While Positive Psychology has contributed significantly to understanding human strengths, many of its central constructs have primarily evolved within Western intellectual traditions. The Indian Knowledge System offers an equally rich yet underutilized psychological perspective that emphasizes self-awareness, ethical living, emotional balance, disciplined action, and inner transformation. This paper has demonstrated that the principles underlying Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility are deeply reflected within Indian philosophical traditions, particularly the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, and the Yoga Sutras. Concepts such as Samatvam, Nishkama Karma, Abhyasa, Vairagya, Shraddha, Titiksha, and Atma-Vishwasa collectively provide a holistic understanding of resilience, hope, adaptive functioning, and psychological growth.

An original conceptual framework—the Indian Knowledge-Based Positive Psychological Resource

- Use longitudinal research designs to understand how sustained engagement with IKS practices influences psychological development over time.
- Such research would strengthen the scientific evidence base for integrating indigenous knowledge with contemporary psychology.

Framework (IK-PPRF)—has been proposed to explain how these indigenous principles can strengthen Psychological Capital and Psychological Flexibility simultaneously. The framework suggests that cultivating inner awareness, ethical responsibility, disciplined practice, emotional balance, and value-guided action creates enduring psychological resources that support human flourishing. The significance of this integration extends beyond theoretical development. It has practical relevance for education, counselling, organizational psychology, leadership development, and mental health promotion. By bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary psychological science, researchers and practitioners can develop culturally responsive models that enhance both scientific understanding and human well-being. Ultimately, the Indian Knowledge System should not be viewed merely as a historical philosophical tradition but as a living source of psychological knowledge capable of enriching modern Positive Psychology. Future empirical studies are encouraged to validate the proposed framework and explore its application across diverse populations, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and globally relevant psychological science.

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