

## A BRIEF REVIEW OF INDIAN SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE OF HOPE

**Dr. Neelam Rathee\***

**Abstract** - In the present times when stress and despair are rampant, the significance of being hopeful becomes imperative in our lives. Hope gives meaning to life in the most exacting times. The western psychological notion of hope comprises optimism when it entails the role of mental strength and the capability to implement. This operational definition of hope ignores the component of faith and belief, which seems to be an integral part of hope. This paper attempts to delineate a brief account of an Indian, specifically Hindu, philosophy by highlighting the role of belief and prayer in the trust healing and proposes an add-on perspective of spiritual power in hope.

**Key Words:** hope; spiritual power; spirituality; Hinduism; Indian; karma; faith, prayer.

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*\*\*Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Post Graduate Govt. College for Girls, Sector – 11, Chandigarh.*

The concept of 'Hope' is as old as the conscious memory of human beings. In one of the oldest known religions of the world, the historic reflections of Hindu philosophy, literature and way of life suggest hope to be seen in a perspective which governs day-to-day life of human beings. The land of *Vedas* and *Upanishads* has felicitated sprouting of such a way of life as is based on deep-seated mythological beliefs and legends. Hinduism supports the previous and next life theory based on Karma. When we talk of faith and belief, hope comes naturally to the concept. When one believes in something and seeks faith-healing for one's miseries, even if it be by prayers, the component of hope is essentially found ingrained in the concept and its actualization. Not to talk of only Hinduism, almost every religion propounds peace as being core to one's belief system. This peace, be it mental, physical or spiritual, has to have hope as the main ingredient of its reassurance and obtainment as a balmy agent to the believers' soul and calming agent to his bodily passions. Hope helps to keep this much-desired balance of the demands of body, mind and soul. The Hindu epics and scriptures have projections to make for ones' regulation of life in this world and most of their content shows hope as being something like a half-answered prayer, even before it is made. The concept of next life in itself is attributable to a scenario full of hope.

Though there isn't a perfect Hindi word that matches precisely with 'Hope', '*Aasha*' being the closest which has a more inclination towards expectation. There are allusions in the scriptures corroborating the fact and pinpointed terminology that finds mention as in '*Pratidhi*' or '*Apêksh*' in Sanskrit. These are associated with and discussed with the concepts of desire and wish being in sight, approachable and achievable. In *Vishnu Smriti* (scripture of learning in Hinduism), hope is represented in an image as the virtues of a man who rides in a chariot directed by his hopeful mind to his desired wishes, drawn by his five senses, who keeps the

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chariot on the path of the virtues, and thus is not distracted by the wrongs such as wrath, greed, and other vices (Bloomfield, 1919; Strickland, 2015). In Vedic philosophy, *karma* has been linked to rituals of sacrifices (*yajna*), hope and success linked to correct performance of these rituals attempted at realizable goals of fulfilment of self, in this world and in the cosmic presentation of spiritual side of things (Gyanshruti, 2006).

In the centuries that followed, the concept of *karma* changed from sacramental rituals to actual human action that builds and serves society and sustains human existence—a philosophy epitomized, propagated and emphasized as prescription in the Bhagavad Gita. Hope, in the structure of beliefs and motivation, is a long-term *karmic* concept. In Hindu belief, actions have consequences, and while one's effort and work may or may not bear near-term fruits, but it will serve the good, and will contribute to the ongoing journey of one's diligent efforts (*karma*) and for assessing and evaluation as to how one pursues the journey or life; the transaction in such ordained and prescribed manner will make one realize bliss, salvation and ultimate release called *moksha*.

Hindu scriptures are replete with mention of facts relating to hope and peace. Peace conceptualizes a hopeful wish fulfillment as an end, of which the means are prescribed in many a ritualistic, meditational, practical ways and aspects of daily cohabiting in the world we live in, and also the other ethereal, surreal and the cosmic worlds, by way of salvation, that we seek in hope and practicing peace of mind. A very popular *shloka* (mantra) exhorts human beings to seek by praying to the Almighty in leading one from ignorance to truth, from darkness to light, from death to immortality or salvation, and ultimately seeking liberation from the cycle of birth and

death<sup>†</sup>. Our own 'Om' is fascinating the western world and western philosophy in more than one ways not only in its aural rendition and its effect but also in seeking to know if 'Om' has much more wider manifestations of a spiritual indulgence. The 'Navras' soundtrack in a movie 'The Matrix Revolutions' is a fine example of the acceptance of Hindu philosophical assertions that invariably rally around and propagate hope and peace as a necessary ingredient in attaining bliss or 'Anand'

The Eastern Hope Scenario doesn't wholly betray the Western (mostly Caucasian) Model, but only in so far as 'pathways to goals' is concerned, since this cultural bloc falls back on support of emotional attributes than being purely rational as in the Western model—justifying the present-day living being of paramount importance. The Kafkan existentialist optimism in the Eastern model has enough prods in religion, interpersonal relations, community oriented conjugation, faith-healing, ritualistic reassurance of practicing societal norms, and above all not only referring to future temporal as being environment good enough, for materialistic growth, but also spiritual and the one enhancing in esteem, not only of the individual but as a collective subsistence of all encompassing in its obtainment a fertile ground for hope sustenance. The Eastern model is mutually sustaining of even cultural diversities that inspire tolerance and fortitude, which are necessary prerequisites to any optimistic dispositions besides the early childhood experiences and traumas. Nostalgic reference to past, and a life lived happily, makes the Eastern culture look up to the future with hope as in keeping with a situation dubbed as hoping against hope.

The cultural value system has also significant role in hope building. In the collectivist culture of India, a social group is valued above the individual and cooperation is accentuated by

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<sup>†</sup> 'Asato ma Sadgamaya, Tamaso ma Jyotirgamya, Mritor ma Amritamgamyā' is a Shanti Mantra (Mantra of peace), in Brihadaranyaka Upanishads (1.3.28).

way of assimilation. The socialization process seems to foster interdependence within the group. The support system of family, friends and community is considered as strength of the individual. This develops the strength to cope, to take up the challenges; as well as imbibing the faith and healing power of the religion—all this builds the resilience to overcome the hurdles.

Having been influenced by the collectivist approach, Snyder & Feldman (2000) explored the construct of *collective hope*. Collective hope reflects the level of goal-directed thinking of a large group of people. Often, such collective hope is operative when several people join together to tackle a goal that would be impossible for any one person. The notion of collective hope has been applied more generally to the topics of disarmament, preservation of environmental resources, health insurance, and government (Snyder & Feldman, 2000). Collective hope in the Indian collective psyche is best represented by the recent upsurge of emotional and active support in favour of the social activist Anna Hazare who raised a banner of protest against corruption in public life and the people all over the country seeing hope in his endeavour joined the mass movement and succeeded considerably.

Researchers have posited that happiness (whether group or individual) is a state commonly sought by Easterners and Westerners alike (Diener & Diener, 1995, 1996). However, the differences in the philosophical approaches to life make it look quite different. For example, a Westerner whose goal is happiness draws a straight line to his goal, looking carefully for obstacles and finding possible ways around them. His goal is to achieve this eternal happiness. Whereas, the easterner believes in the thought that nothing is eternal. His belief system can be explained with this aphorism that *'If winter comes, can spring be far behind'*<sup>‡</sup>. In this more circular pattern of the Eastern way of thinking, if one were to seek happiness and then achieve it,

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<sup>‡</sup> From the poem *'Ode to the West Wind'* by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1819).

this would only mean that unhappiness was close on its heels. They believe in the goal of balance, trusting the fact that, although great unhappiness or suffering may occur in one's life, it would be equally balanced by immense happiness. The Western thinking suggests the goal attainment as the hope, whereas hope lies subsequent to the overcoming goals for a believer of Eastern thinking. Hence these two different types of thinking create very different ways of forming goals and a hopeful thinking.

Snyder (1994) in his early proposition of hope defined it as “the sum total of the mental willpower and waypower that you have for your goals”. He simply put hope as –

$$\text{Hope} = \text{Mental Willpower} + \text{Waypower for Goals}$$

From an Indian perspective, I would like to suggest one more power to this equation of hope, i.e. *Spiritual power*. In Hinduism with people having faith in 330 million Gods, being hopeful cannot be isolated from spirituality. This subjective component of belief in the supreme power, mental disposition towards faith healing and the assurance they get from this trust is as significant and integral to the concept of hope as the mental willpower. Hence, I would like to propose a new hypothesis from Hinduism view of faith, which can be put to testing -

$$\text{Hope} = \text{Mental Willpower} + \text{Spiritual Power} + \text{Waypower for Goals}$$

This spiritual faith in Supreme Power might not be as helpful in the attainment of goals; but it certainly saves one from the feeling of hopelessness. The use of the phrases like ‘where there's a will, there's a way’ to impress upon the role of willpower and finding ways to overcome hurdles; but then quotes like ‘*God's in His Heaven- all's right with the world!*’<sup>§</sup> are

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<sup>§</sup> From the poem ‘*Pippa Passes*’ by Robert Browning (1841).

also used to keep the hope intact. As one state is experienced, the other is not far to follow; if hard times are occurring, easier times are on the way. They celebrate success but not overlooking the conviction of sanctity (with God's grace); also, the failures are accepted considering them as God's will (whatever happens, happens for the good). When pathways and agency thinking probably may not help after the failures, the attribution thinking associated with the spiritual power will definitely help in the sustenance of hope.

The Hindu philosophy believes in '*karma*'. The followers of this tradition think of their religion as being grounded in a way of action. The main teachings of the Hindu tradition emphasize the interconnectedness of all things. The *Upanishads* discuss two paths after death: that of '*punarjanam*' (reincarnation), or of '*mukti*' (salvation) (Radhakrishnan, 1951). Since salvation is freedom from the pangs suffered by the soul of going through the cycle of birth and death--a spiritual attainment when no hope remains unfulfilled and the soul becomes one with the super-soul thereby reassuring faith in the fulfillment in life of all things aspired and attained including hope; It is the rebirth philosophy that accounts for hopeful thinking. Previous life actions determine the course of events in the present life, and the present life would account for the life events in the next birth. The good and bad times in one's life are correlated with previous life's actions. This faith in this philosophy of correlating helps sustaining individuals from the despair during the failures in life. One passes through them terming them as a result of past life events and keeps the hope alive that success is not far away and thus keep striving for the attainment of goals.

Referring to the Boniwell & Zimbardo's (2004) balanced approach in the temporal orientation of past, present and future, that entails, "Working hard when it's time to work. Playing intensively when it's time to play. Enjoying listening to grandma's old stories while she



is still alive. Viewing children through the eyes of wonder with which they see the world. Laughing at jokes and life's absurdities. Indulging in desire and passion" – all this works more as faith-healing without being superstitious and blindfolded with irrational support systems of hope, rather a humanistic scenario which can in times to come and with due research become relevant to a universal theory of hope. The goal-directed thought process involving a hopeful fairway may be relevant to the Western Model, but the Eastern one may, naturally endowed with a free-flowing inclination, at the individual's level, give the protected environment all around.

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