

Chapter II

Research Objectives, Design & Structure

Introduction to Chapter II

The research gaps found in the extant literature are enumerated below. The aims and objectives of the research are further elaborated along with the need and rationale for the study. The research design and structure of the study are further explained in detail.

2.1. Research Gaps in the Extant Literature

Based on the review of existing literature, the research gaps identified are as below:

- In the Indian context, there have been few systematic attempts to understand equanimity. The few papers from India which mention equanimity have focused on equanimity as a part of Karma Yoga, and have not been described as a distinct stand-alone construct.
- Most of the researchers have studied equanimity as synonymous or in close resemblance with mindfulness practices. However, equanimity has not been studied from the perspective of other practices such as yoga and other indigenous spiritual practices.
- Most of the scales which assess equanimity have items that assess equanimity towards experiences. To the authors' best knowledge there are very few scales or items which assess the extension of equanimity towards individuals.
- Physical, social, and psychological health has not been studied as concomitants of equanimity practices in the Indian context.
- Most of the research has focused on whether mindfulness practice leads to an increase in equanimity. There is very little understanding if the various other spiritual practices such as prayer, mantra Jaap, religious activities such as *Sewa*, *Satsang*, can help in cultivating or enhancing existing levels of equanimity.

Based on the gaps found in the literature, the research objectives of the study were defined and are presented below.

2.2. The Rationale and Need for this Study

The need for this research is discussed as below:

2.2.1. Need to Focus on Indigenous Constructs of Well-being

Western models of well-being have dominated most of the research in India and there is a lacuna of indigenous constructs being developed. Psychology in India needs to find its roots in its native wisdom and focus on the development of emic embedded constructs and theories. Equanimity is an ancient construct emphasized heavily in traditional philosophies such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Understanding equanimity and its various cultivation methods will also be useful for the development of indigenous techniques/skills which may be easily integrated and adapted in therapeutic practice.

2.2.2. Need for Equanimity with rising Prevalence of Mental Disorders in India

In a Lancet study, it was reported that in the year 2017, around 197.3 million people were suffering from mental disorders in India (Sagar et al., 2020). Another recent study published in The Lancet reported that India's contribution to global suicide deaths in 2016 was 36.6% among women, and 24.3% among men (Dandona et al., 2018). These statistics point to an urgent need for emphasis on the cultivation of balanced states of mind such as equanimity. The cultivation of equanimity increases one's distress tolerance and reduces suppression of distressing experiences (Chambers et al., 2009). Also, equanimity may lessen the physiological response to stress and anxiety as it is integrated into one's practice of responding to situations (Gard et al., 2012).

2.2.3. Adaptive Coping in a Post-pandemic World

The complex world we live in is rapidly changing and adaptation to new challenges is essential. The cultivation of equanimity may facilitate individuals to adaptively cope with the uncertainties and anxieties of living in a global pandemic. The cultivation of equanimity may also be useful in adaptively responding to instant gratification and satiation of desires. Juneau et al. (2020) found that equanimity was negatively correlated with reward sensitivity which is a core component of addictive behaviors. Studies have reported that during the global COVID-19 pandemic, internet use, substance abuse, and intake of high-calorie food are on the rise (Kiraly et al., 2020; Rolland et al., 2020). The cultivation of equanimity may thus be useful in adaptively responding to these cravings.

2.2.4. Fostering a Balanced Approach towards Well-being

Desbordes et al., (2015) suggest that the present focus on well-being appears to be on amplifying and sustaining happy feelings while alleviating the impacts of pain or suffering. However, learning

to cultivate equanimity as an effective state for responding effectively to the present moment may be more beneficial to holistic well-being.

2.2.5. Measure of Equanimity developed in the Indian Context

The findings from the qualitative studies will help develop a measure of equanimity in the Indian context. The exploration of the psycho-social health concomitants of equanimity will help in establishing the convergent validity of the developed scale and may have the potential for useful applications and implications especially in the post-pandemic world.

The next section focuses on the research questions and objectives of the study.

2.3. Research Questions

The research questions of the study are as follows:

- 1) How is *Samatva* understood as a distinct concept in the Bhagavad Gita?
- 2) How is *Upekkha* understood as a distinct concept in the Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist traditions?
- 3) What are the psychological processes underlying equanimity?
- 4) What are the various methods for the cultivation of equanimity?
- 5) What is the relationship of equanimity with psychosocial health parameters such as emotional reactivity, neuroticism, loneliness, social media addiction, well-being and perceived general health?
- 6) How are various spiritual-contemplative practices such as meditation, yoga and prayer related equanimity?

2.4. Research Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are given below:

- 1) To explore *Samatva* as a distinct construct as explicated in the Bhagavad Gita text
- 2) To understand in-depth the construct of *Upekkha* as delineated in the Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist traditions
- 3) To delineate the aspects of equanimity as a distinct psychological construct through the insights of various experts engaged in academic, research, and teaching-learning of spiritual practices and contemplative traditions

- 4) Based on the findings from the qualitative study, to develop a measure of equanimity in the Indian context
- 5) To explore the various linkages of equanimity with relevant psycho-social health parameters such as emotional reactivity, neuroticism, loneliness, social media addiction, well-being and perceived general health
- 6) To explore the effect of the level of spiritual practices on equanimity

2.5. Research Design

An Exploratory Sequential Design was employed in this study. This design is used to qualitatively explore aspects of an emergent theory or phenomenon in-depth and then measure its quantitatively. Researchers using this design, build on the results of the qualitative phase by identifying key variables and may develop scale items or instruments for testing (Cresswell & Clark, 2017).

A few key rationales for utilizing a mixed methods research design as outlined by Bryman (2006) which are pertinent to this study are listed below:

- i. **Completeness**- Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, would enable the researcher to attain a more holistic understanding of equanimity. Qualitative research methods would help the researcher understand equanimity (*Samatva*) from the text of the Bhagavad Gita and the concept of *Upekkha* in Buddhism. Qualitative methods such as interviews would also help the researcher understand equanimity in the present-day context through the insights of the experts.
- ii. **Illustration** –Equanimity is a higher-order abstract concept. The illustrative quotations from the interview findings make it easier to understand and relate to the construct in the present-day context.
- iii. **Instrument/ Item development** – There are a few existing scales on equanimity. The findings from the qualitative research will provide the researcher the context and depth to identify the gaps in the published scales and develop new items on equanimity. The use of quantitative methods will also be useful to explore the linkages of equanimity with relevant psycho-social health variables and to explore the effect of the level of spiritual practices on equanimity.

- iv. **Greater validity** – Using mixed methods also enables the researcher to explore the corroboration of the findings on equanimity across both the qualitative and quantitative methods and enhances the integrity of the findings.

Thus, as seen above the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods will provide for a rich description of equanimity.

2.6. Structure and Phases of the Research

This research has been conducted in three key phases.

Phase I: The first phase of the study consisted of the analysis of equanimity as conceptualized in the Bhagavad Gita and in Buddhism. In Phase A, the construct of Samatva as described in the text of Bhagavad Gita was analyzed in depth. In Phase B, the construct of Upekkha as described in the Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist traditions was examined in detail.

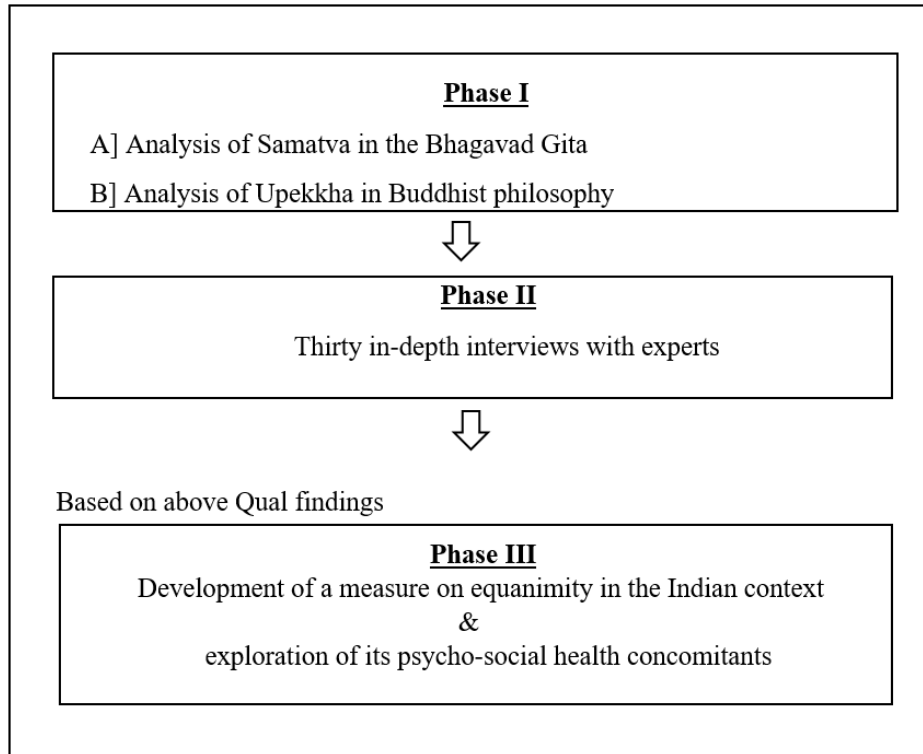
Phase II: Following this, in phase two, thirty experts from various traditions such as Buddhism, Vedic studies, meditation, and yoga were interviewed individually on their understanding and insights into equanimity.

Phase III: In phase three, the quantitative study focused on the development of a measure of equanimity in the Indian context and exploration of its linkages with relevant psycho-social health variables such as loneliness, neuroticism, emotional reactivity, well-being, and social media addiction through the survey method with a sample of 836 individuals.

The flow of the research phases is illustrated in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6

The Phases of the Research



For clarity, each of the above three phases of the research is described in separate chapters with the method and analysis of the findings. The flow of the chapters of the thesis is presented below.

The entire thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter I focuses on the introduction and review of literature. Chapter II focuses on the research objectives and research design and structure. The analysis of the equanimity from the Bhagavad Gita and in Buddhism is further elaborated in Chapter III. The The method and findings from the interviews with the experts is elaborated in-depth in Chapter IV. The method and results related to the development of a measure of equanimity in the Indian context is further elaborated in Chapter V. The exploration of the psycho-social health concomitants of equanimity is elaborated separately in Chapter VI. The findings of all the phases of the research are collectively discussed in Chapter VII. The last Chapter VIII focuses on the summary of the key findings, implications of the research and conclusions.