CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Indian studies have mainly followed the western theories and models. Although there are few studies conducted on spiritual/religious beliefs, spiritual/religious practices and spiritual experiences independently. The present study is focusing on the relationship of spiritual/religious beliefs and spiritual/religious practices with spiritual experiences and it will contribute to the understanding of new age conceptual model.

For most of the people in India the basic source of spirituality is religion. An interesting survey conducted by Gallup (1988), showed that in India at least 98% of the total population reported that they have beliefs in the existence of the God. According to Rangaswami (1994), in India for both mental as well as physical well-being it is very common to use spiritual concepts and religious methods, and now it is also increasingly approved that a psychotherapist would do very well not only in healing mental problems but also in improving well-being as well as positive growth of the people interested in by incorporating spiritual aspects. Atharva Veda is an old sacred Indian text, Balodhi and Chowdhary (1986), argued while reviewing that in the ancient time Atharva Veda had been used as an important tool by traditional healers. According to them it may prove useful to fit within India, if modified, for healing mental disturbances. This notion is supported by Holdstock (1979), while discussing about the indigenous healing of South Africa, concluded that psychotherapy provides better results if included emotional and spiritual aspects.

Many religions of the world teach that religious practices can make people happier, healthier, more prosocial (Smith, 2009), often by way of facilitating meaning and purpose in the suffering of life. An additional mechanism of religious effects that emerges more saliently from religious doctrines and lay notions of religion is that religious activities lead to positive outcomes partly by helping people connect more with transcendence. There is much debate about intersections between religion and spirituality (Zinnbauer, & Pargament, 2005). Religion is often thought of as beliefs and behaviours associated with a particular religious affiliation, while spirituality in connection to transcendence (e.g.; God, nature, and other
people). Although the two end to be strongly related empirically, the nature of the association is unclear to both scholars and the general population (Smith, & Denton, 2005). Never the less, numerous studies report only a minority of people of all ages claim to be “spiritual but not religious” (Day, 2010). Thus, perhaps one way to understand relations between the two is that religious observances provide spiritual experiences, or opportunities to connect to something or someone larger than ourselves (Nelson, 2009; Smith, & Denton, 2005). This is supported by a recent national study where most young adults felt their spiritual experiences stemmed from or were fostered by religious involvement (Smith, & Snell, 2009). Thus, although spiritual experiences are not always tied to religious practices, such practices do often provide a context for transcendence. Perhaps such spirituality serves as one potentially important pathway by which religion has a positive impact on psychosocial functioning (Drerup, Johnson, & Bindl, 2011; Johnson, Sheets, & Kristeller., 2008; Nelson, Jacobson, Weinberger, Bhaskaran, Rosenfeld, Breitbart, & Roth., 2009).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Three dimensions of spirituality having interrelationships have been studied. They are: spiritual beliefs, spiritual practices and spiritual experiences.

**Spiritual beliefs** incorporate true self knowledge, acceptance of God, and His reflections in the form of nature to fellow human beings.

**Spiritual Practices** focus on overt behaviors such as prayer, meditation, reading scriptures, yoga, and use of imagery or visualization etc.

**Spiritual Experiences** are frequent interactions of a person with the transcendent as a fundamental part of life, an active involvement of the divine in the daily living, connecting the God, appreciation of nature or accepting self and others.

Spiritual experiences without spiritual beliefs and spiritual practices are meaningless because anybody who turns inward naturally realizes that his existence has no meaning. Spirituality essentially means an all-inclusive experience when being concerned and being caring about everything around us is very natural.
1.3 Spiritual/Religious Beliefs

Spiritual beliefs is a set of beliefs in the existence of super-natural power in this universe and also that that is greater than oneself, an awareness of the purpose and meaning of life and the development of personal, absolute values and a sense of interconnectedness with all living creatures.

- Hinduism (a way of life)

The religion of Hindus is Hinduism (Sanatana). Hinduism is derived from the experiences of unknown philosophers or seers residing on the banks of the Sindhu (indus) river. Hinduism is a recent name given to a group of religious people in which the members of that group share certain religious beliefs and practices. Hinduism is also known as Sanatana Dharma, Arya Dharma and Vedic Dharma. Sanatana Dharma is universal in nature because of its moral and ethical values. The primary source of Vedic Dharma is the Holy Scriptures called as Vedas (Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda), Upanishads, Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. It is the oldest living religion of the world and also a rich collection of many spiritual and philosophical traditions followed by almost all of the Asians since the ancient times. Hindu devotees believe in one and only universal Supreme Being (Brahma or Parmātmān in Sanskrit language) that is the infinite reality or truth and it is believed that it is beyond the understanding of undisciplined mind.

- Hindu Spiritual/Religious Beliefs

Hindus believe in the concept of the God called Brahman (either nirguna or saguna Brahman). This ultimate reality has been declared in the (Rigveda Samhita 1.164.46) as: “Ekamsatyviprabahudhavadanti– [Truth (God) is one; the wise call it by various names]” (as cited in Kashyap, 2007, p. 496) and advises us to “let good thoughts come to us from everywhere” (Kashyap, 2007, p. 496). Also in the greatest and holiest Hindu scripture Srimad Bhagavad Gita (9.23), the Lord Krishna assures the followers of all of the religions that “those who pray with devotion to another god, it is to Me that they pray” (as cited in Kashyap, 2007, p. 496). The sages called the truth (God) by Brahman. ‘Brih’ is the root of the word Brahman which means to expand (enlarge). According to Kashyap (2007), Hindus believe that the supreme power can be viewed from two aspects: Transcendent (impersonal) and Immanent (personal). The transcendent aspect is the supreme power which is called as
'Nirguna Brahman', that is without attributes. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* (II. 4) states: “Brahman is He whom speech cannot express, and whom the mind is unable to reach and, comes away baffled” (Kashyap, 2007, p. 496). *Nirguna Brahman* is an object of meditation and knowledge, not of prayer. It can be said that it is absolute existence, absolute knowledge and absolute bliss (*sat-chit-ananda*). According to Kashyap (2007), “It is unborn, self-existent, all pervading, and the essence of all things and beings in the universe. It is immeasurable, unapproachable, beyond conception, beyond birth, beyond reasoning and beyond thought” (p. 497). This point is also stated in the Bhagavad Gita: “Though I manifest myself in all things, I am identified with none of them” (Kashyap, 2007, p.497).

Hinduism constitutes a complexity of spiritual beliefs because of its traditions, doctrines, beliefs and practices are inextricably linked to the culture, ethos and demographics of India. The sources of Hindu spiritual beliefs are the *Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas*, and great as the *Shrimad-Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which guides the life of the Hindus for centuries.

According to Rao (2012, p. 3), despite its complexity of traditions, doctrines, beliefs and practices, the Hindu religion constitutes certain unique characteristics along with a common core of beliefs which distinguish it from the other religions of the world. So Hinduism can be described as an umbrella of spiritual/religious beliefs and traditions. However, some of the prominent common Hindu spiritual/religious beliefs are described in the following pages.

1. **Dharma**

The concept of *Dharma* is normally considered as the righteous way of life, but it has a very wide range of meanings and interpretation. Dharma changes with a person’s age, gender, class, conditions (contexts) and occupations etc, with a variety of meanings. *Dharma* is the way of life which is accepted by the society and when it followed properly by the man it brings peace and prosperity to all of the society. In Hinduism, *Dharmic* duties of a Hindu follower are categorized into seven categories known as *Sapta Dharma* (Rao, 2012, p. 35).

(1) **Nitya Dharma**

*Nitya dharma* consists of the duties conducted by a person in his daily life honestly and sincerely. In *Manusmriti* at two places, Manu has described the features of dharma, referred to as the laws of Manu. In *Manusmriti* (6: 92), it is described as the practiced spirituality, the
tenfold law of dharma, they are contentment, forgiveness, suppression of unjust desires (greed, anger etc.), non-stealing, mental and physical purity, self-control (control over senses), straightforwardness, and acquisition of knowledge, truthfulness (in thought, speech and action) and non-anger. In Manusmriti (chapter 10, sloka63) (Husain, Beg, & Dwivedi, 2013, p. 146), it is more precisely described that there are five paths of dharma that are applicable to all of the human beings irrespective of their gender, social classes or caste (varna) and stage of life in their daily life, also known as “samanya dharma” or “sadharana dharma”: Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Soucha, Indriya-nigraha (Rao, 2012, p. 36).

(A) Ahimsa: Ahimsa means non-violence. It means to bar the violence against all of the living beings in this world. It also refers to kindness towards all of the creatures including not only human beings but animals, trees and even the forests also. Hindus believe that one may be born even in the form of animals, so one should respect all of the living beings.

According to Swami Vivekananda

“The highest truth is this: God is present in all human beings. They are his multiple forms… the first of all worships is the worship of those around us… he also serves God who serves all other beings” (Jaisingh, 2007, p. 152).

(B) Satya: Satya means truthfulness (Brahman). The philosophic meaning pursuing the truthful path and search the ‘ultimate truth’ is also a part of nitya dharma.

(C) Asteya: Asteya means non-stealing, non-coveting and non-hoarding others wealth or property and also not acquiring illegitimate wealth. In Hinduism all of the human beings are advised to stick to asteya as a way of their nitya dharma.

(D) Soucha: Souch means purity or cleanliness both internal as well as external. If a person has to follow the path of dharma, purity is required at three levels- ‘physical levels’, ‘mental levels’ as well as ‘spiritual levels’. Physical and mental purity leads to purity in thought, speech and action. Spiritual purity leads to salvation (liberation) and realization of the self (Atman-gyan) as well as supreme divine. It is also believed that the impurities of mind can be removed by following dharma in daily life.

(E) Indriya-nigraha: Indriya-nigraha means control or mastery over the senses. There are 10 indriyas or organs: five sensory and five motor. Person’s sensual desires are the main
cause of conflicting emotions in his mind and gradually he becomes a slave of his senses and finally his mind becomes unstable. This instability of the mind has to be controlled with the help of ‘indriya-nigraha’, self-discipline, development of detachment to sensory objects and practice of renunciation.

(2) Sva dharma
Sva dharma means what is appropriate or right for an individual. There is a code of conduct for every person that is more appropriate for him or her. Sva dharma, may be translated in one’s profession or vocation. It enables a person to develop a mode of conduct of his own. It also enables a person to develop his skills/ talent capacities to the fullest extent professionally.

(3) Varna dharma
Varna means class and dharma means duties, so varna dharma literally means the duties of the particular class. Hindu society consists of four varnas- Brahman, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and sudras, and each varna can be divided into a number of jatis or castes. Hindu religion not only divides the society into four classes but also assign particular social function to each class.

(4) Ashrama dharma
The meaning and interpretation of the dharma changes with a person’s age, gender, class and occupations etc. According to Sarma (1953) in Hinduism, Sages divided the human life into four stages known as (ashramas). Brahmacharyashrama (student life), it is believed that this is the first stage of life, age range between 8 and 20 + years. It is the stage of life of learning or the quest for knowledge. The second stage of life is known as grihasthashrama (family life). It begins after a person gets married and during this stage a true Hindu devotee is dedicated to his/ her domestic affairs, lives with their family and earns honestly their living. ‘Vanaprasthashrama’ is the third stage of life in which a person renounces all of the worldly pleasures and retreat into the forest to devote him-self to rituals. This stage of life begins when a person is wrinkled and sees his grandchildren then he should retire from all of his household duties. ‘Sanyasashrama’ in this stage a person renounce his family ties and also the world completely and lives an ascetic life and spends time in utter devotion (bhakti), japa, worship meditation , sings of psalms, hymns and bhajans, in order to realize the God, the ultimate goal is to achieve moksha.
(5) Nimitta Dharma

Nimitty means occasional. In Hinduism, nimitty dharmas are performed only on some specific occasions which occur at regular intervals: performing rituals, puja, vrata, diksha, fasting and pilgrimage, births or deaths etc.

(6) Apad Dharma

The term ‘Apad’ may be translated as emergency. Apad dharmas are performed when a person cannot perform his regular (nimitty) dharma under certain testing circumstances as killing an animal or even a person for the purpose of self-defence.

(7) Yuga Dharma

Yuga dharma literally means the dharma (duties) of a particular period-of-time and keep changes from period to period (Yuga to Yuga) for example; many orthodox rituals that were followed in the earlier period (yuga) are no longer followed in the current period of time (yuga).

2. Kama

The Sanskrit term ‘kama’ means ‘desire’. It also mean as pleasure. It drives man into the pursuit of happiness. It includes all of the natural desires of a person whether sensual desires or the desires for wealth. Desire is not only single meaning of kama but also in many different contexts it has various shades of meaning. In some context kama refers to a particular mental attitude towards an object and only by enjoying or possessing that object, these attitudes can be satisfied.

Kama is considered as one of the four human aims (purusharthas). They are dharma (righteousness), artha (worldly power especially wealth), kama, which in this context usually translated as ‘pleasure’ and moksha (liberation or salvation- release from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth).

3. Samskaras (sacraments)

According to Mc Gee (2004), the Sanskrit term ‘samskaras’ translated as ‘sacrament’, ‘rites of passage’ but these terms do not completely convey its significance. It is believed that samskaras place someone in the condition of perfection. Samskaras are more than traditional rites and ceremonies in fact they constitute a beliefs, an idea about human beings and their
development in the world. Samskaras also refers to perfect, polish, train, cultivate, refine, educate and prepare the human life cycle. They formally mark in the different stages of physical, psychological and moral development of a person.

According to Mc Gee (2004), Hindu tradition has more than forty samskaras (approximately forty eight). Many authorities agreed on a common set of sixteen samskaras of the body include: garbhadhanasamskaras, pumsavana, samskara of simantonnayana, Namakaranasamskara, Niskramanasamskara, Gannaprasanasamskara, Cudakaranasamskara, Karnavedhasamskara, samskara of simantonnayana, Namakaranasamskara, of vidyarambha, upanayanasamskara, samskara of veedarambha, kesantasamskara, Samkara of samavartana, vivahasamskara, Antyestisamskara, Śrāddha.

4. Moksha
The Sanskrit term ‘moksha’ means liberation, salvation, and total freedom from rebirth. It is one of the four aims of human life. Moksha/mukti means the liberation of one’s soul from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It also refers to the union of one’s soul with the universal supreme soul (parmātmān) or God. The union with the God (supreme soul) can be achieved through the way of true knowledge (gyan mārga), way of work (karma mārga) and the way of devotion (bhakti mārga).

5. Guru
In Hinduism it is believed that a ‘Guru’ is one who prevents one from the darkness of ignorance. He shows the pathway which leads us to the light of knowledge. Hindus believe that a Guru is absolutely necessary for the individual’s spiritual betterment as well as imparting the Vedic knowledge.

6. Karma
The term ‘karma’ is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘karman’, which means ‘action’. The belief in the law of karma is one of the common Hindu beliefs, also known as the law of moral causation. The law of karma is a moral law similar to the physical law of causation. The law of karma works in the moral world just as the law of cause and effect works in the physical world (Sarma, 1953).
In the Srimad Bhagavad Gita (3.19), Lord Krishna explained that everyone should perform his duties according to his dharma and at that time one should not be attached to the results, also the karma done regardless of any expectation, leads towards the spiritual path. In relation to the ‘law of karma’ Hindus believe in the concept of ‘paap’ and ‘punya’. The accumulation of the effect of God deeds can be described as ‘punya’ in the life of an individual.

7. **Punarjanma**

Hindus also believe in the concept of *Punarjanma*. The term ‘*punarjanma*’ means reincarnation (re-birth). Some of the philosophers also call it as the transmigration of the soul from one body to another body. Besides Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism also believe in *punarjanma*, they believe that the soul is eternal; death does not destroy the soul and also believe that the conditions of the next birth are determined by the actions in the present life.

8. **Vedanta**

According to Jitatmananda (2007, p. 37), Vedanta philosophers residing on the banks of the Sindhu river, recorded, some universal based on their personal realizations these recorded experiences called Vedas (knowledge). The major portions of the Vedas (*Rig, Sam, Yajur* and *Atharva*) focus on the power the sacred mantras to enrich our mundane (worldly) existence and at the end of these Vedas, small portion focus on the realization of the eternal. Hindus believe in the Vedanta and in the *vedantic* teachings because the spiritual aspects of Hindus derived from the Vedanta. The philosophies originating from the Vedas and Upanishads were collective called Vedanta (end of the Vedic period/end of the Vedas).

According to Jitatmananda, (2007, p. 37), the first truth discovered by the Vedic Rishis is that infinite life, bliss and knowledge (*sat-chit-ananda*) is hidden within every human being and within this finite body, the glory of that infinite (life, bliss and knowledge) can be manifested only by spiritually awakened human beings. The second truth discovered by Vedic *Rishis* is the presence of interconnectedness and essential unity behind the whole universe. Another truth the Vedic *Rishis* discovered is that God is one all-pervading consciousness which interpenetrates every single entity.
• Islam: A Religion of Peace

A Muslim is any male or female person who believes in Allah and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as His Messenger who then testifies to that belief to witnesses announcing his/her acceptance of Islam as his/her religion. "Muslim' should not be confused with "Arab"; A Muslim is a person who follows the religion of Islam.

The religion of Muslims is known as Islam. The term ‘Islam’ is an Arabic word which means “surrender”, “submission”, “obedience”. In the Arabic, the follower of Islam is not a Muslim but ‘one who completely surrenders to the almighty God and believes in the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings (PBUH) as his messenger of the God (Allah), without any doubt, is a true Islamic (Muslim). So the followers of Islam (Muslims) accept complete surrender to the almighty God (the Arabic word “Allah” is used for the God of Muslims), that is why it is called “Islam”. Another meaning of the word of ‘Islam’ is ‘Peace’, signifies that one can achieve the real peace of mind and body only through complete surrender, obedience and submission to Allah. Such an obedient life not only brings peace in the hearts of people but also establishes real peace in the society and nation at large. The religion of Islam is founded in Arabia and is based on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). According to him, one who practices Islam and surrender to the God is a true Muslim. A true follower of Islam follows the teachings of the Holy Qur’an. Islam is one of the simple and practical religions of the world. It has easily understandable, clear and established laws and beliefs that can be easily understood by any follower of the religion.

The most sacred scripture of Islam is the Holy Qur’an. The Qur’an consisted of 114 chapters (surahs). Muslims believe that Qur’an is the word of God. It is absolute, irrevocable and eternal. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) acted only as he was required to act according to Allah. The Holy Qur’an is the written revelation from the God (Allah) to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Probably no Islamic scripture has influenced Muslims more than the Qur’an. It is dutifully read by them and memorized in its entirety. In Islam, ‘spirituality’ does not viewed as separate from the activities of everyday living. Muslims believe that all of our actions must be in accordance with the pleasure of the almighty Allah, so it is believed that everything is spiritual in Islam.

Islam means to surrender completely and freely to the will and commandments of the one and only almighty God (Allah), and this surrender should come from within, conviction
and sound beliefs in *Allah* without any doubt. It should also come from affection, love and trust in the almighty *Allah*. The messenger of the *Allah*, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who received the revelation (the sacred words of *Allah*) through the Holy Spirit (the archangel Gabriel) and this revelation comprises the religion of Islam. The authentic collection of this revelation, in the form of a book, is Holy Qur’an. It is the unchanged, exact word of the almighty *Allah* to all of the mankind.

### Muslim Spiritual/Religious Beliefs

Islam affirms civilizes and decent society. Islam preaches justice, tolerance, love, truth, patience, mortality, righteous, sincerity, forgiveness, equality, peace and mercy. It is a monotheistic religion. Islam preaches about the oneness of the God, oneness of the message and oneness of the mankind. Muslims believe that the basic duty of each of the follower of the Islam is to completely and freely surrender to the almighty God and follow the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the daily living. They believe that salvation can be achieved only through good deeds in the life because at the Day of Judgment the account of each person’s deeds (both right and wrong) is opened and used to determine ones eternal fate. Islam teaches that there is the continued existence of the soul in this world and after death the soul transformed the physical existence and at the day of judgement one’s deeds decides whether he/she will go to the Heaven or Hell. Some of the basic Islamic spiritual/religious beliefs are described in the following pages.

According to Ibrahim (1997), There are six essential pillars of beliefs in Islam which includes: Beliefs in one and only God who is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. He is the creator and ruler of the entire universe. Beliefs in Angels, Beliefs in God’s revealed books, Beliefs in Prophets and Messengers of God, Beliefs in the Day of Judgment, Beliefs in *Al-Qadar*.

#### 1. Belief in God

In Islam it is believed that the entire universe and all of the creatures including mankind are created by the Almighty God, He is the only Lord of the entire universe. He created man and appointed a fixed period of time for each human being that he is to spend in this world. The
fundamental duty of each Muslim is to surrender to the *Allah* and whatever he wants for them.

The central teaching of the Islam is that there is only one All-knowing (He knows that what has happened, what is happening and also know that what will happen in future), All-powerful God (He has the unique power to do everything), All-hearing (He was, is and will be present to hear the prayers of His all of the creatures of the universe), All-seeing (He was, is and will be present to see everything whatever happens in this universe, without His will or awareness no affair can occur in the entire universe, whatever He does not will is not and will never happen, His will is above the will of all of the creatures) and this God created the entire universe. He is unique in every respect, there is nothing likeness to him. The followers of Islam (Muslims) believe that there is one and only one unique God who is the creator, sustainers, sovereign and controller of the created this entire universe. He has no partners, spouse, children or equals. He alone deserve of our worship and devout love. He knows everything, the entire universe depends on Him, and He does not need anything at all. So God should be worshiped alone because God possesses all of the perfect qualities.

We are told, in one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that God (*Allah*) is more merciful to his all of the creatures than a mother to his child (Narrated in *Saheeh Muslim*, #2754, and *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*, #5999).

2. Belief in the Angels
The followers of Islam believe in the existence of the Angels they are the unseen creatures created by the *Allah* and they are the honourable creatures. Angel’s existence, descriptions, names and tasks are explained in the Holy Qur’an and in the *Sunnah* (teachings of the Prophet Muhammad). They are the faithful servants of *Allah*; they obey Him only, act only by His command and also worship Him alone. One of the angels is Gabriel; he brought down the Holy Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is believed that they have been created by the God before the creation of the humans, they are genderless and do not need sleep, food and drink. The Qur’an (66:6) says, "They do not disobey *Allah’s* commands that they receive; they do precisely what they are commanded" (cited in Huda, 2014).

The role of angels is to carrying out duties prescribed by *Allah* in both unseen and physical world. Although angels have no specific bodily shape, but it is also believed that when angels are required to communicate with the human world then they can take the
human being form. For example, the angel Gabriel appeared in the human form to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when questioning him about his message and faith, to the mother of Jesus (Marry).

3. Belief in the God’s revealed Book

Muslims believe that Allah, for guiding the mankind for righteousness, revealed books to his messengers and prophets. One of these Holy books is the Holy Qur’an which Allah revealed through an angel (Gabriel) to his Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Allah guaranteed the protection of the Holy Qur’an from any distortion and corruption. Allah, the exalted, says:

Indeed, we have sent down the Qur’an, and surely we will guard it (from corruption) (The Qur’an, 15:9).

Muslims also believe that Allah through his Prophets and Messengers revealed Holy books or scriptures from time to time for mankind and as guidance for them. They believe in the original text of these Holy books when they were revealed by the prophets and messengers of the God and also try their best to follow the teachings of these Holy books in their daily living. The four prominent Holy books are: Scrolls of Abraham, Zabur (psalms) of Prophet David, Tawrah (torah) of Prophet Moses and Qur’an revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Qur’an is the only book which remains in its unaltered and complete form. It is the Holy Book of Islam, revealed in the Arabic language to the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century C.E. It was compiled during the Prophet Muhammad’s life time and remains in its original form, contains 114 chapters described the guidance for daily living, nature of God, stories from history and their moral messages, warning for disbelievers and inspiration for believers.

4. Belief in the Prophets and Messengers of the God

The followers of Islam (Muslims) believe in the existence of prophets and messengers sent by for the welfare of mankind. They believe that everyone received a messenger from the God telling them to worship Allah alone and to shun from the false God. In the Qur’an, twenty-five prophets are mentioned by name. Most of them in the Bible have been identified as prophets. Starting with Adam (the father of mankind), and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Moses, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus (peace) upon them, but God’s final prophet to all of
the mankind, a reconfirmation of the eternal message from Allah to mankind, was revealed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). His message will have the universal relevance until the Day of Judgment. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the last Prophet sent by Allah to mankind, as Allah has said: (Qur’an, 33:40) “Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men, but he is the Messenger of God and the last of the prophets...” (cited in Ibrahim, 1997, p.48).

Jesus was the righteous servant of the God. Qur’an restores the teachings of Jesus, who said: (Qur’an 3:51) “Allah is my Lord and your Lord. So worship him. This is a straight path” (cited in Tanzil - Quran Navigator, 2014).

It is believed that God will send him into the world again before the Last day, and on the Last day of the world he will deny those people who worshipped him and will clarify that he taught only that which God authorized him to teach: (4: 159; 5: 110) “worship Allah, my Lord and yours”. http://www3.sympatico.ca/shabir.ally/new_page_4.htm

Muslims believe that all of the messengers and prophets were the created human beings, and had none of the divine qualities of the God but they are sent by Him for all of the mankind to give them to the right path of living, but people not only far away from the right path of life again and again but also lost the code of guidance that the prophets had given because of this Allah sent other prophets to restates the original message that guide the people back to the right path of living

Of these, the last Prophet was Muhammad (PBUH), he presented Allah’s message in its final form and also arranged those messages to preserve it for all time and that messages are now known as Islam and is enshrined in the life-example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and in the Holy Qur’an.

5. Belief in the Day of Judgment
Muslims believe that all of creation is journeying toward God, and the life of this universe and all of the creations that is in it will come to an end on some unknown appointed day, in the Qur’an that last day has many names including the Day of Distress, the Day of Reckoning, the Great Announcement, the Day of the Gathering, the Day of judgment and the Day of Resurrection, when each and everything in this whole universe will be destroyed.
Muslims also believe that at that day Allah resurrect all of the dead people and they will be judged directly by Allah with perfect justice according to their worldly deeds they did during their lifetimes (good and bad deeds). It is believed that each person’s deeds will be weighed in a divine balance and if the good deeds overweight the bad deeds and they leads a righteous way of life during their lifetimes then they will be rewarded by Allah in the form of entering into the Heaven (Jannah) and have an everlasting bliss but those whose bad deeds overweight the good deeds will be punished by Allah in the form of entering into the Hellfire (Jahannam). It is believed that first of all the judgement will separate between the believers and disbelievers of Allah. Disbelievers will be thrown into the fire to dwell therein eternally and for their goodness they are already rewarded in this world. In the Qur’an it has been mentioned that each person receives a book that consists of an account of all of his or her actions during life time.

Then the judgement for believers will be made according to their account of deeds they did during their life time in this world. Those who did more good deeds during their life time will be admitted into the Heaven after death. God will forgive other believers and also admit them into the Heaven. To some God will purify after punishment. Finally, all believers will enter into the Heaven forever.

6. Belief in Al-Qadar
Muslims believe in Al-Qadar, which is Divine Predestination that is each and everything is pre-decided by Allah. They believe that everything that has happened, is happening and will happening in this universe from the smallest to the greatest event is governed according to the express plan of Allah and is pre-decided by Him. Nothing happens except by the will and permission of Allah. Although from our limited human perspective things happen according to immediate causes and God is the ultimate cause.

Muslims believe that the entire universe is completely under the control and direction of Allah only. But the beliefs in this Divine Predestination does not means that human beings should not do anything or cannot make any effort to change the things and simply sit back and let things take their course in blind resignation and they have no free-will. Rather they believe that Allah has given the freewill to all of the human beings. This means that they have the right to choose right or wrong and also they are responsible for their own choices. They put their trust in Allah only however, they are required to make a sincere effort to strive and
do their best, but not simply sit back. Such beliefs give a person an excellent degree of inner confidence, certainty and peace of heart, especially in the stressful life conditions. Moreover, they live with the assurance that whatever is to come in the life of any individual, including death, cannot fail to come at its appointed time.

According to the Islamic beliefs, the belief in the Divine Predestination includes beliefs in the four things:

1) Allah is all knower, means he knows each and everything whatever happens in this universe. He knows what has happened and what will happen next.

2) Allah has recorded all of the things that has happened and all that will happen.

3) Whatever Allah wills to happen happens, and whatever He wills not to happen does not happen.

4) Allah is the Creator of each and everything that exists in this universe.

Muslims are confident of all of these six pillars of beliefs and also believe that Islam usually has a marked impact on a person’s everyday life. They are sure that this is a God-revealed system not a man-made teaching. Muslims believe that Allah is more merciful than he is wrathful. They believe that if individuals find that they have sinned, they may sincerely apologize, and through remorse, receive forgiveness. But on the day of Judgement, there are no excuses. Because to remind the human beings of their duties and to wake them up whenever they forget their dependence on Allah, He has sent many prophets.

Muslims believe that in the end God will judge humans for their terrestrial actions. Those who have done well will enter Paradise where they will have everlasting bliss. Others will be doomed to hell. The judgement will first separate between believers and disbelievers. Disbelievers will be thrown into the fire to dwell therein eternally. Their goodness is already rewarded in this world.

Believers will then be tried according to their actions. Those whose balance of good deeds weighs in their favour will be admitted into Paradise. Of the others God will forgive some and admit them to Paradise. Some, He will purify after punishment. Eventually all believers will enter into Paradise for their final abode.
The Qur’an is clear that none shall bear the sins of another. Each will carry his own burden. But God is merciful, and will forgive as He pleases.

How does one overcome the burden of sin? First, there is the sin that God will not forgive. That is the sin called *shirk*, the sin of associating another object of worship along with God. Second, there is the sin that God may forgive. Those are everything else but *shirk* the one unforgivable sin. Third, there is the sin that God will forgive. That is the sin which was followed by sincere repentance. One who repents after having sinned is like one who has not sinned. For example, entering Islam is a mark of sincere repentance from one’s past life. At that moment all of one’s previous sins are forgiven.

1.4 Spiritual/Religious Practices

Henry (2013) summarizes the spiritual practices very meaningfully as: “Spiritual practice often encourages people to go within, root out their feelings, and develop the capacity to attend others kindly. There is a greater focus in Eastern spiritual practice on acceptance and detachment from desires than the seeking and striving after goals found in many western forms of psychological development. An increasingly numbers of new interventions, such as mindfulness, compassion therapy, and reconciliation, draws our attention on spiritual practices for inspiration” (p. 421).

Spiritual/religious practices are the overt or observable behaviours that are closely related to the spirituality/religiosity, it means spiritual/religious practices are necessary for the spiritual goals (self-realization). Spiritual/religious practices or rituals performed by the devotees are based on spiritual/religious beliefs of the devotees. It may vary from person to person, culture to culture, society to society, religion to religion and even country to country. Spiritual practices are performed not only for the spiritual goals but also for overall enhancement and well-being (physical, mental, emotional, and social). Spiritual/religious practices are performed by many of us in our daily life either at particular points of time in a year or just ones in the whole life time. The spiritual/religious practices or rituals include yoga, meditation, prayer, going on pilgrimage, fasting, visiting holy shrines, observing the sacraments, reading the holy scriptures, contemplating a mountain top and or sunset view, singing or dancing for a religious purpose, chanting the sacred mantras, offerings or charity, attending *satsang, jagran* religious/spiritual seminars, workshops, lectures (*pravachana*),
remembrance of God before and after every specific work and taking the food at home etc. All are the spiritual/religious practices conducted by people.

According to Ali (2012), with the help of spiritual practices one can improve his quality of life and be able to find out the purpose of life. The major goal of spiritual practices is to develop an individual’s inner life and lead to an experience of connectivity with the universal-being. In other words, spiritual practices include the activities that one associates with cultivating spirituality. If the spiritual practices are performed with devotion help to develop compassion and individual goodness they also awake an awareness of the interconnectedness to all of the living beings (human, trees, animals and even the forests etc.) and to the Supreme being. Although this supreme reality already existed in all of us but because of the influence of original ignorance (lack of self-awareness or atman-gyan) cannot be realized.

Through spiritual knowledge one can realize his true identity (atman-gyan) with the supreme-being and it is also very important to cultivate this awareness by performing spiritual practices like meditation, yoga, prayer etc. It is also believed that in preventing or curing the illness (whether physical, mental or psychological), human-being and supreme-being both work collaboratively. If we perform spiritual practices regularly we can observe changes in our lives. We not only look at the outward changes but the inward changes that have occurred: our heart is more open, negative patterns have been released and we are closer to our true nature.

In the words of Ram Dass, “spiritual practices help us move form identifying with the ego to identifying with the soul. Old age does that for you too. It spiritualizes people naturally” (Husain, Beg, & Dwivedi, 2013, p. 120). Spiritual practices are often identified with religion and are an indispensable part of it. When we practice meditation, prayer, contemplation, study the religious literature and scriptures, seeking the company of the wise people and serve others its means that we are making our ego less confined and pure and in turn, this inspires us to move one step ahead. The purified ego gets a glimpse of the next level of awareness and aspires to reach it naturally. So the ego itself becomes a tool for expending and purifying itself, in this way the ego is transformed from the petty ego to a more purified and expanded ego. During the chanting of the sacred mantras various mudras are based on the principle of acupressure. The sitting postures of yoga help us to keep the spine erect to enforce free flow of energy. During pūjā, offering cooked foods, leaves of basil and flowers,
fruits symbolizes purity. It means that every religious practice has an underlying meaning and significance that have been forgotten over time. So it is clear that religious practices are usually the purification exercises that were designed to propel one towards refinement. Spiritual/religious practices or rituals help to reveal the regenerating powers of life movements within us that also help to enter into translates with nature’s forces (Husain, Beg, & Dwivedi, 2013, pp. 120-121).

- **Hindu Spiritual/Religious Practices**

Hinduism stresses the whole consciousness and also allows absolute freedom in beliefs and mode of practices, it is based on self-realization. It is a religion of patience and tolerance, love and gratitude giving due respect to all of the religions of the world. In Hinduism, the practice of cultivating spirituality is known as sadhna, japa, the silent or audible repetition of a mantra, is a common Hindu spiritual practice. In Hinduism, spiritual practices include prayer, sacraments, chanting the mantras, havan-yagya etc. So it can be said that in Hinduism many more spiritual/religious practices or rituals are performed, followed by spiritual/religious beliefs of Hindu religious devotees. Hinduism has translated spirituality in the daily practices. With this approach, Hinduism tried to cultivate the well-being not only of individual being but also for the entire universe including animals, trees, forests, mountains, rivers and all of the creatures of the universe. So the essence of Hindu spiritual practices is that it is concerned with the well-being of the universe with a view to experience the consciousness. The characteristic of the spiritual/religious practices of the Hindus is that it gives birth to the enormous diversity.

The followers of different cults, vaishnavas, saivas have their chosen deity or deities as the object of their worship. According to caste, Vedic and Tantric forms of rituals, there are variations in worship in the different parts of the country there are also many variations in the spiritual/religious practices, but the aim is same to connect the experience of the God. For example, a Vaishnava in southern India worship Vishnu as Narayana with Lakshmi, on the other hand a Vaishnava in northern India accepts Vishnu as Krishna with Radha. In all of the cases the chosen deity is the main object of devotion, but the images would be varied and the rituals would be different in many details. In Hinduism, there are many ways not a single narrow way for manifesting the spirituality within. Its greatest virtue is the unity in diversity. That unity may be realized by following the way of one’s own choice. Whatever be the way
of reaching that reality, the reality of the spiritual experience is that the God is the center and in the heart of all of the existence and all of the existence is in the God and the greatest self-finding is to find him. Difference in spiritual beliefs, tenets and spiritual practices are nothing but the various ways of realizing and actualizing oneself in all. Always the self-realization has been regarded as the ultimate goal of the life. The aim of Hinduism is to live in the infinite, to discover and seek eternal, to open to the inner spirit and to be in the union with the God. In support of this notion, that the spiritual/religious practices, beliefs and tenets differ from culture to culture, but the ultimate aim is to realize true self (unity with the God) that is the true identity of every one to feel connected to all of the living-beings or life in the universe and the universal power (God) in one-self, Swami Akhilananda (1948) contends that:

“Men differ in ritualism, ceremonies, and the use of symbols and forms. But these are not the essential part of religion. The essential part of religion emphasizes the understanding of the higher self, or God, or over soul and the control of the lower self, or empirical self, the selfish egocentric self. Rituals, ceremonies, creeds, doctrines and dogmas are the secondary part of religion” (pp. 203-204).

According to Husain, Beg, and Dwivedi (2013), spiritual practices bring out the best by manifesting the divinity in man that is already existed in him. One start to realize the ultimate goal of life, when spiritual practices, creeds, rituals, statues and ceremonies help him to manifest the divinity in him. So the task of the spiritual practices is to help a man in realizing the true self with the universal self. The aim of religion/spirituality is to help an individual in the realization of the God. To a natural man, it is most difficult to uplift the power of the spiritual consciousness for his mind and senses that are turned outward and never turned inward to the truth-consciousness. But through spiritual practices performed with devotion we can uplift the power of the spiritual consciousness for our mind and senses and turned them inward to the truth-consciousness. Because majority of people put the all-most whole emphasis of life on the outward and in surface consciousness live very strongly and very little effort invest in realizing their inward existence. Spiritual consciousness perceives that there is a higher power in our-self the divinity within the spirit.

According to Husain, Beg, and Dwivedi (2013) “in the Eastern tradition, spirituality is translated into daily practices, making them the essential or spiritual part of their life style resulted in the practical aspect of spirituality. The desires of prosperity and happiness to all
were more focused. Spiritual practices of Hindus are related to the enhancement of the universal well-being for developing an experience of inter-connectedness within the practitioners. One, who experiences connectedness with all of the universal living-beings that is sacred/transcendental reality, this experience of connectedness gives ultimate meaning and purpose in his/her life” (p. 197).

1. Five daily obligations

All Hindus recognize their five daily obligations. These obligations should be performed by every householder daily. These five daily obligations were prescribed right from the Vedic period, to be regularly performed by devout. According to Manusmṛti 3/70- (Husain, Beg, & Dwivedi, 2013, p. 217), to study or recite the Vedas and the parts of the Vedas (Mantras) is the Brahmayajna, offering of tarpana, shraadha, pinda-pradana etc. to one’s forefathers is the Pitryajna, and Daivayajna is related to the performance of worshipping deities, doing Havan (making offerings of sacred herbs and clarified butter in the sacrificial fire), looking after an offering of food to the aged and sick people, animals/birds (all creatures) is Bhutayajna, and Manushyayajna is to help all of the fellow human-beings when they are in need, show respect and love to all of them, feeding and entertaining guests, poor people. Every day one must perform these five rituals to attain equanimity and poise with Mother Nature.

As mentioned in ‘The Hindu Prayer Book’ (2014), that for the purpose of the spiritual growth everyone should perform these five daily obligations. By performing these sacrifices daily, one gradually learns that he/she is a part of the universal whole, not a separate unit or isolated entity. Brahma yagna should be performed because he gains invaluable knowledge by studying the holy-scriptures written by great seers or sages. He should sacrifice to God (Deva yagna) because he blessed him with oxygen and water to live the life, sacrifice to the forefathers should be performed because they blessed us and give his physical body, sacrifice to all of the creatures or the lower animals should be performed because they give him the milk, grains, vegetables and fruits etc. which nourishes his body. Manushya yagna should be performed because he gets help from his relatives, friends and other fellow-beings. Therefore, he owes five debts to the Nature, so he should pay back his five debts by performing these five yagnas on the daily basis. During walking, cooking, sweeping, grinding etc., numerous insects are unconsciously killed, that is sin and can be removed by performing these five daily sacrifices.
a) **Brahma yagna** (offerings to the Seers) as mentioned in *The Hindu Prayer Book* (2014), is that it relates to the regular study of the Holy Scriptures. Everyone should study the Holy Scriptures on the daily basis and also share its knowledge with other people, is called *Rishi yagna* or *Brahma yagna*. By doing so, he pays the debts to the Seers or Sages, the authors of the Holy Scriptures.

b) **Deva yagna** (offerings to the Gods) According to Bhattacharyya (1953), *deva yagna* is done by making offerings of the chips of wood sprinkled with clarified butter, herbs, coconut etc in the sacrificial fire of *homa havan-yagya*. It can be done by making other offerings of the daily worship consists of offerings to the deity *gandha* (sandal wood paste), dhup (frank incense), dip (a lit lamp), *pushpa* (flowers), and *naivedya* (holy sacraments).

c) **Pitru yagna** (offerings to the forefathers) According to Bhattacharyya (1953), it is done by offering water to the forefathers to provide peace to their soul and help them on their path to spiritual liberation (*Moksha*) as well as for gaining their blessings.

d) **Bhuta yagna** (offerings to the lower animals), according to Bhattacharyya (1953), it is done by offering food to all of the creatures-birds and animals such as offering to the lower animals (cows, dogs, birds, fishes etc.) is done after midday worship by giving a few mouthful food to cow’s, considered as the mother of the three worlds (Heaven, Earth, and Hell).

e) **Manushya yagna** (offerings to the guests) is performed by paying respect and love to all of the human beings and help them when they are in need (feeding the hungry or guest, clothing the naked, comforting the distressed and giving shelter to the homeless people), feeding and entertaining the guests (*Atithi yagna*) and people. *Manushya yagna* is any type of service to the suffering humanity ‘The Hindu Prayer Book’ (2014).

**Benefits of performing Panch Mahayagyas:** As it is described in *The Hindu Prayer Book* (2014), that by doing *Panch Mahayagyas* one learns that he can be happy only by making others happy, by helping others, by serving others, by sharing what one has with others and by removing the sufferings of others. By doing such activities of sympathy and kindness daily, one develops mercy and negativity decreases day by day. Gradually his heart becomes softened and expanded. He/she tries to feel his/her connectedness with all of the living beings, cultivates cosmic love and learns a connectedness with the universal-beings. So, he learns that he has not separate existence just like a pearl in a rosary; his life is a life of duties
and sacrifices. Only then he will be able to realize the supreme-being and will be free from this samsara (the cycle of birth, death and rebirth) and attain liberation (moksha).

According to Manusmriti, every day one must perform these five rituals to attain equanimity and poise with Mother Nature. In the words of Kane (1992):

“In as much as living beings of entire universe manifest the same source of their origin, it is imperative that mutual correspondence among all creatures must be observed in practice along with the principle of ‘live and left live’ the aforementioned devotion, gratitude, reverence, remembrance of the loved ones, magnanimity, and forbearance must have been the motive in the Aryans in prescribing these most important pañcamahayajna” (p. 384).

This may be the reason when in Manusmriti (2:28) Manu suggested that “by studying the Vedas and by observing various vrata, homa, yajñas and mahāyajñas one’s body becomes pious, sanctified and worthy of performing higher actions” (Husain, Beg, & Dwivedi, 2013, p. 218). A vast majority of Hindu people perform Rituals on a daily basis. These may vary from individual to individual, family to family, sect to sect and society to society, and culture to culture, depending on the levels of beliefs or faith in these practices. In relation to the Hindu Dharma rituals, Padhy, Padmina, and Hariharan (2008) discussed the importance of the Hindu Dharma rituals. They argued that “According to Hindu philosophy, in order to lead a healthy and happy life, the various rituals play a very important role such as “Japa, Tapa, Puja and Yajna” (p. 142). Daily Hindu rituals performed in home begin before sunrise.

2. Prayer/Worship

Prayer is a spiritual/religious way of being touch or in communication with the transcendental reality. In the Eastern among all of the religion, it is an integral aspect of human life. In Hinduism, it is a common practice to begin daily routine or any program or function. Actually prayer connotes the surrender of personal ego to a particular deity. During the process of prayer we turn our minds and hearts to God.

According to Bhattacharyya (1953), spiritual/religious practices that are usually performed at home can be described under three heads (morning worship, midday worship and evening worship).
According to Jacobs (1992), Hinduism is a religious tradition which is rich in spiritual/religious practices; among them the main is to do daily puja. Spiritual/religious practices such as daily puja reinforce the worshiper’s relationship with divine reality.

Ameling (2000), defines prayer as “a simple act of turning our minds and heart to the sacred” (p. 42). According McCullough and Larson (1999), prayer is seen as “perhaps the most ubiquitous, essential and personal of religious experiences” (p. 86). According McCullough and Larson (1999), and Pargament (1997), when the situation becomes uncontrollable and severe particularly individuals are more willing to pray.

Worship is the expression of devotion. According to Vedanta- A Way of Life (2011), in Hinduism for worship the Sanskrit word ‘prathana’ is used, derived from two words ‘pra’ and ‘artha’ meaning pleading fervently. So ‘prathana’ means to ask the God for something with intense yearning. It includes faith, pleading, love and respect. It is an act or invocation to activate a rapport with the universal power through deliberate communication. The aim of prayer is to enable a person to gain the direct experience of the deity. If one offers prayer with spiritual emotions, the God protects him from distress. Prayer (prathana) is the essence of worship (puja). Puja is overt and prathana is covert, cannot be observed but done by the worshiper with beliefs and devotion (Bhakti Bhav) or spiritual emotion.

Spiritual Science Research Foundation (2013) considers that there are two types of prayer:

(1) Prayer with expectations (sakam prathana) for worldly benefit, and

(2) Prayer without expectations (nishkam prathana) for spiritual growth.

Sakam prathana is done for the fulfillment of worldly desires such as wealth, health, worldly pleasures and progeny etc. Nishkam prathana is done for surrendering oneself unto the God or the spiritual teacher (guru) without any expectation or objective. This type of prayer is done always in the context of spiritual progress. Sakam prathana is inferior whereas nishkam prathana is superior for spiritual upliftment. Prayer may be performed anywhere and anytime either in personal or in the group but faith is necessary in the God.

Significance of rituals performed during the worship: As mentioned in the ‘Hindu rituals and routines: Why do we follow those’ (2014), there are some significance behind performing each and every ritual and routines. They are as follows:
The light of the lamp symbolizes knowledge, just as the light removes darkness, knowledge removes ignorance. Knowledge is considered as the greatest wealth.

While doing worship, the worshiper rings the bell, conch (shankha) and other musical instruments. The ringing of the bell, conch produces an auspicious sound (‘OM’, the name of the God). The significance behind ringing the bell, conch and other musical instruments is that they help the worshiper to drown or mask the negative or irrelevant voices and comments that may disturb or upset the atmosphere or the minds of the worshiper in his prayer, inner peace and concentration on the God. So he rings the bell, conch and other musical instruments to gain the vision of the God.

**Benefits of worship:** Worship of the God purifies the heart, mind and soul. It helps the devotee to communion and sit near the God. It fills the mind with pure love and emotions (suddha bhava). By it man gradually transmutes into the divine being. It destroys egoism, anger, hatred etc. It turns the mind of the worshipper inward and eventually brings the worshipper face to face with the lord (The Hindu Prayer Book, 2014, p. 73).

### 3. Eating and Fasting

In Hinduism, there are some rules related to eating the food because food is the main factor in the preparation of the body for the physical efforts of the worship, Bhattacharyya (1953). It is believed that our diet should not cause pain to any of the living being (fowl, fish, egg, meat etc.) these items could not be taken without giving pain to others. The food must be healthy, pure and simple (sattvik) diet because this kind of diet do not excite the passions or hinder concentration. As mentioned in ‘Hindu rituals and routines: Why do we follow those (2014)’ the Bhagavad-Gita also urges us to eat appropriately yukta-aahaara means neither too much nor too less and to eat sattvik diet. Food must be taken in the midday after doing the morning and midday worship and in the evening and after doing the evening worship. Though, all of the Hindus are not vegetarian, but now days a vast majority of Hindus are vegetarian. The number of vegetarian people is increasingly by a majority of Hindus in the whole world. Because of the Hindu beliefs in karma (paapa and punya) and they respect for all of the living beings so it is common among them to practice vegetarianism. However, they are free to choose their own diet.
In Hinduism, fasting is called *upavaasa* derived from two words "*upa*" and "*vaasa*". "*upa*" means "near" and "*vaasa*" means "to stay", therefore *upavaasa* means staying near the God, the attainment of close mental and spiritual proximity with the God (Hindu rituals and routines: Why do we follow those, 2014). According to Bhattacharyya (1953), in Hinduism fasting is not encouraged for a long period of time but for a day on the eleventh day of the month and required in certain months, is encouraged. It is very good for the entire body especially for the digestive system, so sometimes it involves the regulation of the food eaten for longer periods of time. According to ‘Hindu rituals and routines: Why do we follow those’ (2014), by fasting the mind becomes alert and pure because during the fasting one may either totally abstain from taking the food or eat simple, light food (fruits or special diet). Another scientific reason behind fasting is that it helps to cultivate control over senses, guide the mind to be poised and at peace and also sublimate (purify) the desires, since it is a self-imposed form of discipline. Fasting is also undertaken at times in the fulfillment of vows and in the preparation of special religious ceremonies.

4. **Chanting the Mantras**

One of the most striking features of all Hindu ritual is the repetition of a sacred mantra usually in Sanskrit, associated with the act of worship. According to Bhattacharyya (1953), a mantra is a sacred text revealed by a Seer to men. It has the property to save the soul of one who believes in it. The efficacy of the mantra is the sound itself. The mantra should be enchanted by one who believes in it and understand it. Only then spiritual goals can be attained. It is a sin to repeat the mantra incorrectly.

According to Bhattacharyya (1953), chanting (*japa*) is the repetition of a mantra or the name of God over and over again. The purpose of chanting the mantra is to centre the attention of one’s mind on a divine object. When a mantra is properly pronounced and understood, it produces the effects for which the mantra is designed to produce.

According to Spiritual Science Research Foundation (SSRF, 2013), whether the chanting of a mantra is done with or without faith but one derives benefits from it, though that is limited to worldly benefits only. But if chanting is done with faith, added benefit is increased because when one chants with faith he feels more the presence of God, means his spiritual emotions (*bhav*) is increased.
Physical Benefits of Chanting: According to SSRF (2013), due to chanting, the mind remains peaceful, so one is free from psychosomatic illness disturbed by stress and enjoys good health. So chanting is able to cure malfunction of an organ.

Psychological Benefits of Chanting: The SSRF (2013), states that through chanting the mantra or one of the names of God, the subconscious mind gets purified, because when we chant spiritual emotions (Bhav) are increased and due to this bhav emotions like-devotion to God, love, respect and fear of wrong actions, etc. increase progressively. Through chanting we can gain the control our six internal foes (anger, greed, attachment, pride, envy and passion). Chanting is also very beneficial in the treatment of a majority of psychiatric disorders like – OCD, obsessive compulsive neurosis, anxiety disorders. Through chanting one can increase and develop his ability to concentrate on the study. It also develops introspection and introversion. Today our daily life becomes stressful and chanting leads us to a stress-free life that in turn leads us to higher productivity and increase our loving nature and also develop the ability to assist others in a calm manner and decrease our selfish nature.

Spiritual Benefits of Chanting: Due to chanting the mantra or one of the names of God, one’s spiritual emotions and spiritual growth increases (SSRF, 2013). An individual experiences the connection with God, presence of God, a calm state of mind or internal satisfaction (Ānanad) Bliss. If the cause of an organ’s malfunctioning is spirituals in nature then chanting is able to cure that. It eliminates distress and sorrow and we experience more Bliss (Ānand). In Hinduism, it is believed that through chanting one can acquire supernatural powers (siddhis) and dissolves the “ego”. It increase spiritual experiences and naturalize sins when committed unknowingly not deliberately. By chanting one gets spiritual experiences that generates and strengthen faith and devotion to the God. It also gradually reduces the attachment towards the external objects.

5. Study of the Holy Scriptures

According to Bhattacharyya (1953), the study of the scriptures or the reading of the religious literatures or writings is a part of the act of worship, it is an obligation sanctioned by the society. The most frequently reading sections of the religious literatures are the extracts from the Upanishads, The Rāmāyaṇa, The Bhagavad Gītā, The Mahābhārata, The Bhagavad purāṇa, the prayer to the Lord Siva etc. These scriptures and other religious literatures are
usually read and studied at a scheduled times, the best time for reading the scriptures is the morning after morning worship. The recitation of the sacred hymns, prayers and reading of the religious literatures or Holy Scriptures gratify the God.

Spirituality gives a new vision to consciousness by changing negative attitudes into positive. According to Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, “Gita is a book of grace. Most wondrous divine and peace giving feeling arises by it recitation. Mental stability can be attained through Gita” (Singh, & Modi, 2011, p.1).

The study of the religious literature or Holy Scriptures teaches about our ancient religion so by reading the Holy Scriptures we not only get the knowledge about our ancient religion but also about the righteous way of life.

In addition to these religious practices and daily worship in the home or in the temple, Hindus perform many other rituals in an elaborative manner that are performed only on the specific occasions and on the festivals such as conduct of havan-yagya, breaking a coconut, organize or attend katha, jagran, satsang appeasement ceremony, sacraments (sanskaras), yogic practices, meditation, pilgrimage etc. These practices are commonly performed by Hindus of India.

6. **Havan-yagya (homa)**

As mentioned in ‘The Hindu Prayer Book’ (2014), that in Hinduism it is believed that the purification of the spirit and heart is more important than the purification of the body to attain the grace of the God and this purification can be achieved through worship, yoga, meditation and other spiritual practices. Doing the Havan-yagya is one of the most significant acts of worship. It is a sacrificial fire ceremony in which an auspicious fire is lighted in the special chips of wood. A majority of Hindus conduct homa (sacrificial fire) on the daily basis at the time of midday worship. But because of the busy life style many Hindu devotees conduct the home on the festivals and on the specific occasions.

As mentioned in ‘The Hindu Prayer Book’ (2014), the significance behind conducting the ‘homa’ is that the sacred herbs, objects that are offered in the sacrificial fire are helpful to pure the germs of air so it is a Vedic method of curing air pollution because the fire of ‘havan’ disintegrates air-borne impurities, and the offering of the clarified butter is also
believed to be helpful for the spiritual purification of the environment. The ‘havan’ has a therapeutic effect on our minds and also produces some specific effects in the physical environment. Also the ash has a curative effect on certain diseases.

7. Katha, Jagran and Satsang

Rituals are occasionally performed by Hindus. There is no fixed time to conduct these rituals. Devotees occasionally conduct these rituals either to fulfill their prayers or after fulfilling their prayers or for other reasons based on their financial condition. In the jagran sacred music (bhajana) are singing because music is an essential part of many spiritual practices. According to Bhattacharyya (1953), the purpose of music in the spiritual practices is:

1) To retell the epic and purāṇic stories,
2) To express the devotion of the devotees, and also
3) To purify the atmosphere by the auspicious sound of certain traditional bhajana and kīrtana.

Satsang ceremony is the usually performed in the home to avert evils indicated by an unfavorable conjunction of the planets, or evil omens or calamities. This ceremony involves the offering of basil leaves with appropriate mantras, the recitation of some particular passage from the holy scriptures or religious literatures for ten, eighteen, twenty-eight, one hundred and eight and even a thousand times, based on the gravity of the situation. All these rituals and other special rituals are associated with the welcoming and feeding of the Brāhmans, relatives and friends also.

8. Pilgrimage

According to Williams (1988), pilgrimages to worship places can foster reflection on the liberation (ultimate aim of the human life). It can be a significant intervention and a social support. Most of the Hindus who engage in such endeavors refer to them as ‘once in a life time’ experiences.

Special sacredness is associated with the chārdhām (four sites of the lord). These chārdhām of the lord marking the boundaries of the sacred land of India, Pūri in the East, Dwārakā in the West, Badarīnāth in the North and Rameśwaram in the South. There is another chārdhām in the Himālayas, consists of Gangotri and Yamunotri (the sources of two
Holy rivers), Badarīnāth (Lord Visnu) and Kedarnath (Lord Shiva).

Kumbha- mela is held at every twelve year at Allahabad, Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain. According to Flood (2004), the biggest is held at Allahabad where the three sacred rivers Gangaes, Yāmuna and invisible Sarasvati are joined. It is believed that to bath here at an auspicious time is sacred to pilgrims. Mahakumbh-melas attract the huge crowds especially at Allahabad to bathe in the rivers.

9. Yoga

According to Rao (2012), there are three forms of yoga for attaining self-realization- Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Gyan Yoga.

(i) Karma yoga: (Path of action): According to Rao (2012), karma yoga is a path of selfless actions, means the detachment from the fruits of actions or rituals. Lord Krishna in the great epic Srimad Bhagavad Gita teaches that one should conduct his all of the actions (duties) as per his Dharma. Without being attached to the results of those actions, as an offering to the God, that could be a powerful growth for the spiritual freedom (liberation). Because conducting the selfless actions (Nishkama karam or actions without any expectation), purifies the mind of one and also leads towards the spiritual path.

When one does Karma without expectations (Nishkama-karma) beliefs and surrender himself to the God and constantly meditating upon God through mind, body and speech, is really performing the ‘Karma-Yoga’. Mahatma Gandhi preferred the Karma Yoga as a way of self-realization (atman-gyan). In this concern Gandhi writes: “this can be achieved by selfless actions, by renouncing fruits of action, and by dedicating all activities to God i.e., by surrendering oneself to Him – body and soul” (cited in Rao, 2012, p.158).

(ii) Bhakti Yoga: (path of devotion): Bhakti is a way of the worship of the God with deep devotions, where one show reverence, remembrance and love to the God. So Bhakti yoga is a path of self-forgetting love and devotion to the God to attain spiritual freedom (salvation). Many devotional schools teach that to achieve spiritual freedom, Bhakti yoga is the easiest only practical way for a devotee. Ramanuja, Chaitanya and Madhva and many other saints proposed that Bhakti yoga is as a superior way to spiritual freedom (mokshal salvation). Ramanuja advocates pure surrender and devotion to the God as the only way to spiritual
freedom.

(iii) Gyan Yoga: (path of spiritual knowledge): Gyan Yoga means spiritual knowledge. Gyan Yoga is a path of spiritual knowledge (transcendent divine knowledge) to attain spiritual realization and also to attain ‘Moksha’ or salvation. Gyan Yoga teaches the practitioner to identify and realize the Ultimate Truth through the power of discrimination between real and unreal. Here the practitioner does not need a personalized form of divine but he can meditate on a flame on emptiness and whatever.

The three paths of yoga described by the Hindu’s great scripture Srimad Bhagavad Gita, for the realization of the self with the universal-self (God) are complementary in nature. Like a Karma Yogi needed the concentration of the mind to discharge his duties effectively. In the same way, Bhakti is required to offer the fruits of his all of the actions to the God. Gyan is to understand the true nature of the God that is an important aspect of Bhakti. Although it is believed that a true is one, who exhibits his pure devotion to the God and also discharges his duties through karma without expectations (Nishkama-karma) that are necessary to acquire the spiritual knowledge. Only this is the path to liberation and realization of the God.

Apart from these paths of yoga described by the Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, according to Flood (2004), in the Upanishads the word of ‘yoga’ was used as a way of controlling the senses, the yoga Upanishads, yoga-tattava describe about four types of yoga by following any one of them one can attain liberation. These are Raja Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Laya Yoga, Hatha Yoga etc.

(iv) Raja Yoga: According to Flood (2004), in the yoga tradition, patanjali’s yoga sutra is most significant. Patanjali defines yoga as: “yoga is a cessation of mental fluctuations”. It means yoga is a state of dhyan (concentration) in which the mind is controlled and made to be single-pointed (ekāgratā). Through developing eight limbs of the patanjali’s yoga-sutra one can control his/her mind. These eight limbs are: yama (ethics or restraint), niyama (discipline), asana (body postures), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (sense-withdrawl), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), Samadhi (absorbed concentration). Raja yoga deals with the control of the senses and concentration of the mind through eight fold path of yoga. In the Dharana and Dhyan steps of the Raja Yoga kundalinies are awakened.
Raja Yoga is concerned with developing mental concentration in order to experience samādhi. According to Kaarthikeyan (2007, p. 161), the state of pure experience of the divine and transcendence is the state of ‘Samadhi’. According to Singh (2007, p. 31), in the Raja yoga breathing, asanas (specific body postures), kundalini and spiritual experiences come into the practitioner.

(v) Mantra Yoga: According to Bhattacharyya (1953), mantra yoga is also known as japa yoga. In the mantra yoga disciplines are adjusted to the intellectual abilities and to the emotional temperament of the devotee and he directs his devotion to the chosen deity and recites the appropriate mantra. According to Rao (2012), mantra yoga is a path of salvation through japa or the repetition of the appropriate mantra.

(vi) Hatha Yoga: According to Flood (2004), Hatha yoga is also known as the yoga of force. This type of yoga consists of some difficult body postures accompanied by breathing techniques. Hatha yoga must be performed under the close supervision of a guru, mastered in the Hatha yoga. The aim of the Hatha yoga is to realize liberation during life and realization can be possible through cultivating the body made divine or perfect in the ‘fire’ of yoga, because in the realization of liberation the self-awakens to its inmates identity with the absolute (sahaja). According to Rao (2012), Hatha yoga gives primary importance to better physical health and the longevity of life.

(vii) Laya Yoga: According to Bhattacharyya (1953), “Laya yoga rests on the effectiveness of practices which brings about the merging of the spirit through the annihilation of the personality of the worshiper” (p. 198).

- Muslim Spiritual/Religious Practices

A Muslim is expected to perform certain duties and these are called the “five pillars” of Islam. The five pillars of Islam are the most important aspect of Islamic practices. The individual has to observe these fundamentals with devotion, in order to be a practicing Muslim. Among the Islamic religious duties ‘ibadat’ are five and which by reason of their importance, are called ‘the five pillars of Islam’. Spiritual practices of Islam are the framework of the life of a Muslim. The five pillars of Islam are:
1. Declaration of Faith (Shahadah):
The declaration of faith is the first and most important pillar of Islam. The declaration of faith in the God (Allah) is called Shahadah. The declaration of faith is to say with conviction, ‘La ilahailla Allah, Muhammadu rasululah’. The meaning of this saying is that there is no true god (deity) but God (Allah) and Muhammad is the Messenger (prophet) of the God (Allah). The first part of ‘Shahadah’ ‘La ilahailla Allah’ (there is no true god but God) means that besides God (Allah) alone, none has the right to be worshiped, and that God (Allah) has neither any son nor any partner. This declaration of faith in the God (Allah) is a simple formula in order to become a Muslim; it should be said with devotion/ conviction. The second part of ‘Shahadah’ ‘Muhammad rasululah’ means that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the Prophet and Messenger of Allah. Muslim believe that Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet (messenger) sent by Allah to humankind. Thus, Muhammad is regarded as ‘the seal of the prophet’. So ‘Shahadah’ means to declare with devotion that there is only one God (Allah) and He is the creator, organizer, planner and sustainers of the entire universe and to accept that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the last Prophet or messenger of God to mankind. To complete the declaration of ‘Shahadah’ a true Muslim need to understand the actual meaning of the ‘Shahadah’ that is that Heaven opens only for those whose actions done in this life affirm the professed declaration. Every Muslim must pronounce it at least once after he is considered as mukallaf, i.e. subject to religious obligations.

So declaring the ‘Shahadah’ is sufficient to make one Muslim, provided that the following conditions are met.

To recite it correctly.
To repeat it aloud.
To believe it in the heart.
To understand it perfectly.
To declare it till death, and
To profess it without hesitation.

2. Prayer (Salat):
After the declaration of faith, the next pillar of the Islamic duty is praying (Salat). Islamic tradition requires that one should pray five times in a day, and these prayers are performed at
certain times of the day. At the dawn (fajr), noon (zuhr), mid-afternoon (asr), evening (maghrib) and night (isha).

When the time of prayer comes, usually ‘a call to prayer’ is made from the local Mosque (a sacred place of Muslims for prayers) and is heard in the neighborhood in the Muslim countries. Not just at the Mosque, Muslim can pray anywhere; any place that is clean is suitable—such as a classroom, an office, or even a park. Many Muslims go to the local Mosque to pray, if that is nearby them and many pray at home or at workplace. Many Muslims perform prayer five times in a day. Muslims pray only on Friday (at noon) in congregation in a mosque called congregational prayer. The prayer of Friday must be performed in the congregational group, whereas other daily prayers may be performed individually at home or anywhere. Females take no part in the Friday prayer but it is obligatory upon all adults’ males. Before performing the prayer one is expected to wash his or her hands, arms, face and feet (a ritual called wudu). It is believed that this prepares one to meet God (Allah) in a pure and clean state during the prayer. Under certain circumstances, one may have to take a bath before performing the prayer. Clothes cover the body and must be neat and clean. During the prayer it is required that females must be completely covered except for the face and hands, and males must be covered at least from the navel to knee. Usually they use a prayer mat in order to make sure that the place is neat and clean where they pray. Then worshipers face towards Makkha (qiblah/ northeast direction) and praying. If there are many persons then the prayer leader (imam) stands in front of other persons who form the rows behind him. Male and female forms separate rows.

Prayer involves a number of activities and actions: standing, bowing, prostrating, sitting, recitation of the Qur’an verses and supplication. Muslims generally follow one common format for the prayers all over the world.

There are two special prayers, apart from the five daily prayers and Friday, prayers that occur during the year called Eid prayers. One is performed after the month of fasting (Ramadan) and other prayer is performed during the annual pilgrimage to Makkha. On the day of Eid Muslims gather together with their friends, relatives and neighbors in large numbers and perform the Eid prayers. After that they share food and sometimes give gifts to each other. For Muslims Eid is a very joyful time when they give charity and meet to their relatives and friends and remember the God (Allah) to thank for all of his blessings.
3. **Giving Zakat (charity/ support of the needy):**

Third pillar of the Islamic duties/spiritual practices is giving Zakat (charity) to the poor. The word Zakat means ‘purification’ indicates that such a religious payment makes the rest of one’s wealth legally and religiously pure. Zakat is an annual payment of obligatory charity on every Muslim, men or women, who possesses money or property over the last year that exceeds their minimum needs.

There are two types of giving: legal (Zakat) and voluntary (sadaqa).

*Zakat* is also considered as a religious tax because it supports the government workers who are not free to earn money from any other source. It is obligatory upon all Muslims, male or female, to give the charity if they have savings that have not gone below a certain amount for a whole year. The amount of *Zakat* is 2.5% of a person’s average annual net savings. This is done before the beginning of the month of Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar). Giving the charity is considered as a form of offering thanks to Allah for the means of material well-being that one has acquired.

In addition to the annual charity (*Zakat*), Muslims are also required to make a small amount of donation at the end of the month of fasting (Ramadan), in order to allow the poor to celebrate Ramadan (end of fasting) as well. This is called *sadaqah* (voluntary charity). Muslims may give it at any other times.

According to the Holy Qur’an (9: 60) *Zakat* or *sadaqa* may only be spent for humanitarian purpose – aid to members of the community, debtors, redemption of slaves, volunteers of the Holy war and also those whom, it is important to win over to the cause of Islam.

So *Zakat* is viewed as an act of a spiritual investment and worship. Islam teaches gratitude to the bounties received from Allah by giving 2.5% of the yearly income to charity. It not only purifies the heart of the giver from greed and selfishness but also purifies the property of the contributor. It sanctifies the heart of the recipient as well as frees him/her from jealousy and envy, instead fostering warm wishes and good will for the contributors. So *Zakat* is primarily used for aiding the needy and poor.
4. Fasting month of Ramadan (*Sowm*):

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is the fourth pillar of the Islamic duties. It is another form of offering thanks to Allah. Every year during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, fasting is observed. It is either twenty-nine or thirty days long. It is a duty to all adult Muslims to fast from just before sun rise to just after sun set. During this period of fasting they completely abstain from food, drinking, smoking, perfumes, tobacco and taking anything into the body not the sexual relations also. During the night all of these interdictions are raised. They eat a light meal before dawn then without food or drink they go full day until sunset, then after sunset they break their fast. The breaking of the fast is a joyous occasion. Fasting during the month of Ramadan or any time is recognized as spiritually rewarding but physically demanding.

According to the rules of Qur’an and prophetic traditions, fasting during the month of Ramadan is not permissible for sick, too old persons, long journey traveler, a confined woman or a menstruating woman, but to make up lost days of fasting at a later time. Pregnant women and foster/breast feeding mothers are also permitted to break their fast if fasting will harm them or their babies, but later they should compensate this fully by fasting other equal days during the month of Ramadan. Muslims are also expected to fully avoid bad deeds, thoughts and even the words also. They should spent time in prayer and meditation and also where possible to help the disadvantages in the community. It is believed that fasting is a time to forgive others for things they have done to you and make amend for your own misdeeds towards other people. When children reach religious maturity then they are expected to fast, this is the onset of puberty for boys and the beginning of menstruation for girls. In the holy month of Ramadan all Muslim adults are expected to observe fast. Fasting is an opportunity to inner reflection and self-control making the heart and soul to unite with God. It is closely interlinked with prayer. During Ramadan intensive Qur’an reading, charity, worships and behavior-purifying is hoped to achieve. These fasting are closed with ‘Eid-ul-Fitr’ (breaking the fast) when they celebrate the achievement of enhanced piety. Derivatives to fasting are values on compassion and sympathy for the weak, moral victory, forgiveness, peace and fellowship and brotherhood.

Fasting is also beneficial to health since this provide a break in the cycle of bad habits over indulgence. It has also innumerable economic hygienic and social benefits which are perceived only be those who perform fasting with sincere faith and strong beliefs.
Fasting is regarded as a method of spiritual self-purification. Even for a short period of time by cutting oneself off from worldly comforts a fasting person gains a true sympathy and compassion with those who are really hungry and also gains the growth in his or her spiritual life.

5. The pilgrimage to Makkah (Hajj):
The fifth and last pillar of the Islamic faith is going on pilgrimage to Makkah, called Hajj. The performance of the pilgrimage to Makkah is expected at least once in a lifetime of every Muslim, if he or she is physically as well as financially able to perform it. Although, Makkah is always filled-up with pilgrims. The annual pilgrimage to Makkah (Hajj) begins every year during the month of Dul Hejja. It is the 12th month of the Islamic calendar. Hajj is a spiritual journey during which Muslims forget all of the worldly problems and things and devote their attention to Allah only and spend their time in engaging the spiritual practices like prayer, giving the charity (sadaqah), enchant the names of Allah in mind, reflecting and reciting the verses of the Holy Qur’an.

Pilgrimage to Makkah is the most important of all Muslim pilgrimages, and is the largest pilgrimage for Muslims. The actual prayers and rites take place at the sacred house of Ka’ba in the Makkah and at nearby locations. Muslims associate the origin of the Hajj and the foundation of the Ka’ba with the prophet Abraham. Ka’ba is regarded as the first house of the Allah.

The city of Medina is an important place for Muslims. For them, it is the second holiest place in Saudi Arabia, where Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) rests in Al-Masjid- al-Nabawi (the Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad).

Every year nearly two million Muslims go on pilgrimage to Makkah. It takes about five days to complete the various Hajj rituals and around Makkah. Hajj is considered as the great equaliser because all male pilgrims (rich and poor) wear the special simple seamless two pieces of plain white cloth. It strips away the distinction of class and culture so that each and every one stand equal before the God. Then they enter into Makkah and walk around the Ka’ba seven times in the great Mosque then they kiss and touch the black stone (Hajar-al-Aswad) in the Ka’ba, praying twice facing towards the Ka’ba and Maqam Abraham and then they run seven times between the hillocks of Safa and Marwah, as Hagar did when she search for water. After that the pilgrims stand in Arafa together and ask Allah for his forgiveness.
and for what they wish, in what is often thought of as a preview as the Day of Judgment. The end of Hajj is marked by *Eid-Al-Adha* (Celebration of the Sacrifice of Abraham) which is celebrated with prayers. *Eid-Al-Adha* and *Eid-Al-Fitr* (a feast-day celebrated at the end of the month of fasting/Ramadan) are the two annual festivals in the calendar of Muslims. It is believed by Muslims that if their Hajj is accepted by Allah then their previous sins and misdeeds are forgiven and washed away.

The *Omra* is a lesser pilgrimage. It is not restricted to any particular time of the year. It is an optional but highly meritorious observance. Apart from the sacrifice, it comprises the same ceremonies and the same obligations. It is believed that during Hajj, realization of equality before God, generosity, humility, charity, cultivation of cooperation, patience, accomplishing decency, chastity, suppressing anger and spiritual encounter may be felt by the pilgrims. During Hajj they experience a sense of oneness with humanity because pilgrims from all corner of the world gather to worship the God.

1.5 **Spiritual/Religious Experiences**

Spiritual experience is one of the aspects of spirituality. It is the feeling of the spiritual person about the presence of the supreme power (God) every time and everywhere and also believes that the supreme power is Omnipresent (present everywhere) and Omnipotent (all powerful). People who have spiritual experiences always feel that all of the living beings (not only the human beings but also animals, trees and mountains, rivers also) of this universe are interconnected to themselves and to the supreme power (God).

According to Clark (1929) and Coe (1900), a common observation suggests that the person with a strong spiritual background has the more chances to report intense spiritual/religious experiences. Emmons (1999) suggests that some religious people refer religious support as sacred experience which they get from engaging in many rituals.

Connection with the divine or transcendent is important in Eastern and Western traditions and in peoples’ notions of spirituality in a more generic way (Underwood, 2006). Daily spiritual experience, encompassing constructs such as awe, gratitude, mercy, compassionate love, and sense of inner peace, was conceived as an indicator of spiritual experiences of connection with transcendent playing out in the experiential and emotional details of daily life; it was intended to operationalized one major aspect of spirituality, but it
does not capture the full construct (Underwood, 2006, 2011). Although it has been used as a proxy for spirituality (Underwood, 2011), in studies in which additional measures of religiousness or spirituality are also used, daily spiritual experience can function differently than religiousness or overall spirituality, such as in their association with marital satisfaction (Fincham, Ajayi, & Beach, 2011).

Spiritual experiences have been shown to enhance the lives of persons having them, having been linked to various positive outcomes in psychological state and relationships. A relationship with the transcendent appears to be enriching and important in and of itself, independent of any religious association. Hospitalized patients who reported more frequently spiritual experiences have better social support, cognitive function, and cooperation with medical staff as well as less depression and need for long-term care (Koenig, George, Titus, & Meador, 2004).

In the words of Swami Bhajanananda (2011), “for the present-day spiritual seekers any experience which transforms one’s life inwardly and gives a higher understanding of reality is a ‘spiritual experience’” (p. 89). According to Sarvabhutananda (2011), the ultimate of the human life is to experience the spirit (gaining the spiritual experience). One’s journey towards the spiritual experience indicates that the person discovers something larger within the self. According to Vedanta (cited in Sarvabhutananda, 2011), “human beings struggle to transcend the confines of the body and mind, and finally realize their identity with the Infinite Consciousness, the Spirit, the ultimate Reality” (p. 8). One, who realizes his identity with the ultimate reality, always lives in harmony. So, only human beings has the ability to experience the ultimate reality, it is also very clear in the statement of Shri Ramakrishna that (cited in Sarvabhutananda, 2011), “God no doubt dwells in all, but He manifests Himself more through man than through other beings. Is man an insignificant thing? He can think of God, He can think of the infinite, while other living beings cannot” (pp. 7-8). So now it should be clear that only human beings are able to comprehend the consciousness at the micro as well as at the macro level.

A great thinker Ray Kurzweil (cited in Ghosh, 2011), described spiritual experience as “a feeling of transcending ones everyday physical and mortal bounds to seek a deeper reality” (p. 228).

According to Singh (2007), Yoga is the philosophy and methodology of joining Atman with the Brahman. So, yoga is the process of joining the individual soul and the
Universal soul. According to Jitatmananda (2007, p. 40), yoga and meditation are another ways of realizing the transcendental reality after scriptures and epics. In the eighth step of Patanjali’s yoga sutra known as Samadhi (spiritual absorption) the atman (individual soul) feels oneness with Brahman (universal soul). Kaarthikeyan (2007, p. 161), the aim of this human life is to gain spiritual understanding. In the Eastern tradition Samadhi (eighth step of patanjali’s eight-fold path yoga) is the state of pure experience of the divine and transcendence attained through meditation and purity in thoughts, deeds and words. Throughout India, ancient hermits and sages have attained this state. Scientists have also recorded that advanced meditators have the capacity to control their heart rate, breath, brain waves and other functions of the body that are beyond the capacity of normal human. So, on the basis of this it can be said that through meditation, which is one of the spiritual practices, the state of Samadhi can be achieved, in which one can experience ones with the universal being or transcendence that is spiritual experience.

According to Joshi (2007, p. 119), Shri Ramakrishna practiced many religious forms and truths, including Islam and Christianity and concluded that all of the religions correspond to the spiritual experience. Joshi (2007, p. 120), suggests that there are three stages of spiritual experience.

In practical effect, a gradation of three stages in the growing human consciousness came to be recognized and provided for:

(1). The first stage or level was that of the crude, ill-formed, still outward, still vital and physically minded;

(2). The second was more developed and capable of a much stronger and deeper psycho-spiritual experience; and

(3). The third was that of the ripest and most developed of all, ready for the spiritual heights, fit to receive or to climb towards the loftiest ultimate truth of spiritual reality.

Shri Aurobindo Ghose documented many of his spiritual experiences. Once he visited a Kali temple on the bank of Narmada. He had no faith in image worship. When he looked at the image he felt a divine presence. He wrote afterwards: “With my Europeanized mind I had no faith in image worship and I hardly believed in the presence of God... but in a moment mysteriously, unexpectedly these is instead a presence, a power, a face that looks into yours, an inner sight in you has regarded the World Mother” (Rao, 2012, p. 204).
Another such experience in his own words is reproduced below: “Above my head, a mighty head was seen, a face with the calm of immortality, and an omnipotent gaze that held the scene. In the vast circle of its sovereignty. His hair was mingled with the Sun and breeze; the world was in his heart and he was I: I housed in me the Everlasting peace. The strength of one who cannot die” (Rao, 2012, p. 204-205).

1.6 Significance of the Study

Indian culture and heritage is attached with the spirituality. Indian culture, as one of the unique Asian cultures is quite different from the Western cultures. So, spiritual/religious beliefs and practices are not the same. The present study was undertaken in order to assess the role of Indian spiritual/religious beliefs and practices in predicting daily spiritual/religious experiences among the religious devotees of two communities (Hindu and Muslim) of India. Moreover, the study will identify the age and gender differences in spiritual/religious beliefs, practices, and experiences.

The present study will provide the direction for assessing and enhancing the spiritual dimensions like spiritual/religious beliefs, practices and experiences among people. In the present investigation spiritual belief scale, spiritual practices scales for Hindu and Muslim, and daily spiritual experience scale were standardized.

1.7 Conceptual Definitions

Spiritual Beliefs
Religious beliefs – “formed within the context of practices and rituals shared by a group to provide a framework for connectedness to God” (Davies, Brenner, Orloff, Sumner, & Worden 2002).

Spiritual Practice
Spiritual Science Research Foundation (SSRF, 2013) defined spiritual practice as honest and sincere efforts done consistently on a daily basis to develop divine qualities and achieve everlasting happiness or bliss.
Spiritual Experience
Hinterkopf (1998) defines “spirituality or spiritual experience as a subtle, bodily feeling with vague meanings that brings new, clearer meaning involving a transcendent growth process” (p. 11).

Religious Devotees
The term of ‘religious devotees’ literally means that the people who are totally devoted to their religion. Religious devotees are those people, who believe in the existence of supernatural power or universal-being (God) in the universe. If they follow the religion of Hinduism for them that supernatural power or supreme-being is Brahman or, if they follow the religion of Islam for them that supernatural power or universal-being is almighty Allah. They believe that the whole universe as well as all the universal creatures is created by that supreme power. They believe that he is not only the creator of the universal creatures but also retains and destroys this universe from time to time whenever required. Religious devotees not only have some spiritual/religious beliefs related to their religion but also perform some spiritual/religious practices which are prescribed in their religion. Religious devotees generally believe that their spiritual/religious beliefs and practices help them in reducing the level of stress when they face some stressful life situations as well as guide them how to overcome with them. As a whole, for religious devotees religion/spirituality is the main part of their life.

1.8 Operational Definitions

Spiritual Beliefs:
Schaler (1996) defined spiritual beliefs in terms of “spiritual thinking which refers to any beliefs in a metaphysical power said to influence personal experience characterized by feelings of release, gratitude, tolerance and humility” (p.9).

Spiritual Practices:
Singh and Husain (2015), define spiritual practices of Hindus, in terms of practices that include any activity that one associates with cultivating spirituality. In the present study, spiritual practices scale include three dimensions: Positive Transformation (Reading scriptures, Watching or listening religious programs on T.V or radio, Doing Meditation,
Yoga, Enjoying with nature, Doing Homa (Havan-Yagya), Self-Purification (Attending religious congregation (Satsang), Going on pilgrimage (Thirthyatra), Charity (Daan), Attending jagaran), and Expanding Awareness (Praying personally apart from temple, Thanking (remembering) God, Going to the temple, Fasting, Singing or listening sacred music (including songs, hymns, psalms and devotional chant) apart from prayer).

Husain, Singh, and Khan (in press) define spiritual practices of Muslims. In present case spiritual practices include three dimensions: Individual Practices (reading scriptures, doing meditation, going on pilgrimage, and doing Tahjud prayer), Collective Practices (going to mosque, visiting dargah/khankah, fasting and attending religious congregation), and Sacred Practices (Watching or listening religious programs on T.V or radio, praying personally apart from mosque, thanking (remembering God (Allah), and enjoying nature”).

**Daily Spiritual Experience:**
Underwood and Teresi (2002), defined spiritual experiences as “the perception of the transcendent (God, the divine) and the perception of interaction with, or involvement of the transcendent in life” (p. 23).

**Religious Devotees**
Religious devotees are those people who believe in the existence of supernatural power (God or Allah) and perform prayer at least one time in a day if they are Hindus and three times out of five in a day if they are Muslims.

**1.9 Relationship between Spiritual Practices and Spiritual Experiences**

Spiritual practices means to keep alive the initial experience from which they emerged. Actually, spiritual experiences precede the spiritual practices. If the spiritual practices are separated from the spiritual experiences then they (spiritual practices) have no meaning. Spiritual practices have been developed with a great deal of spiritual thought and spiritual experiences and in order to enhance mental and physical well-being. Every religion adopts spirituality and for the benefits of people, enlists some of the easy steps of spiritual practices. With the help of spiritual practices we realize our true self. The true self is the God and the God is love.
Everyone should learn to attain the spiritual experiences because without it we cannot learn anything; our life will be waste and will not be able to achieve the ultimate aim of the life that is liberation or salvation. Spiritual experiences make us a real human being and spiritual experiences show us the true meaning of our existence or the true meaning or purpose of our life. Spiritual beliefs and practices are the ways for attaining the spiritual experiences. In other words, the goal of life is to attain the state of pure consciousness, it is experienced only in the singular where one realizes his own self with the universal self. We should involve ourselves in doing spiritual practices to feel the presence of consciousness in our daily life. The spiritual practices (yoga, meditation, prayer, etc.) develop spiritual consciousness which is the ultimate expansion of life.

1.10 Research Objectives

The present study has set the following objectives.

1. To examine the relationship of spiritual beliefs with over all spiritual practices and its dimensions (positive transformation, self-purification, & expanding awareness) among Hindus as well as male and female religious devotees.

2. To examine the relationship of spiritual beliefs with spiritual experiences among Hindus as well as male and female religious devotees.

3. To examine the relationship of overall spiritual practices and its dimensions (positive transformation, self-purification, & expanding awareness) with spiritual experiences among Hindus as well as male and female religious devotees.

4. To examine the relationship of spiritual beliefs with over all spiritual practices and its dimensions (individual practices, collective practices, & sacred practices) among Muslims as well as male and female religious devotees.

5. To examine the relationship of spiritual beliefs with spiritual experiences among Muslims as well as male and female religious devotees.

6. To examine the relationship of overall spiritual practices and its dimensions (individual practices, collective practices, & sacred practices) with spiritual experiences among Muslims as well as male and female religious devotees.
7. To examine spiritual beliefs and spiritual practices as predictors of spiritual experiences among Hindus as well as male and female religious devotees.

8. To examine spiritual beliefs and spiritual practices as predictors of spiritual experiences among Muslims as well as male and female religious devotees.

9. To examine the moderating effect of age, gender, and education in the relationship of spiritual beliefs with spiritual experiences among Hindus.

10. To examine the moderating effect of age, gender, and education in the relationship of spiritual practices with spiritual experiences among Hindus.

11. To examine the moderating effect of age, gender, and education in the relationship of spiritual beliefs with spiritual experiences among Muslims.

12. To examine the moderating effect of age, gender, and education in the relationship of spiritual practices with spiritual experiences among Muslims.

1.11 Research Hypotheses

The present study has set the following null hypotheses on the basis of the aforementioned objectives.

H_01. There will be no relationship of spiritual beliefs with over all spiritual practices and its dimensions (positive transformation, self-purification, & expanding awareness) among Hindus as well as male and female religious devotees.

H_02. There will be no relationship of spiritual beliefs with spiritual experiences among Hindus as well as male and female religious devotees.

H_03. There will be no relationship of overall spiritual practices and its dimensions (positive transformation, self-purification, & expanding awareness) with spiritual experiences among Hindus as well as male and female religious devotees.

H_04. There will be no relationship of spiritual beliefs with over all spiritual practices and its dimensions (individual practices, collective practices, & sacred practices) among Muslims as well as male and female religious devotees.
**H₀5.** There will be no relationship of spiritual beliefs with spiritual experiences among Muslims as well as male and female religious devotees.

**H₀6.** There will be no relationship of overall spiritual practices and its dimensions (individual practices, collective practices, & sacred practices) with spiritual experiences among Muslims as well as male and female religious devotees.

**H₀7.** Spiritual beliefs and spiritual practices will not significantly predict spiritual experiences among Hindus as well as male and female religious devotees.

**H₀8.** Spiritual beliefs and spiritual practices will not significantly predict spiritual experiences among Muslims as well as male and female religious devotees.

**H₀9.** Age, gender, and educational qualification will not moderate the relationship of spiritual beliefs with spiritual experiences among Hindu religious devotees.

**H₀10.** Age, gender, and educational qualification will not moderate the relationship of spiritual practices with spiritual experiences among Hindus religious devotees.

**H₀11.** Age, gender, and educational qualification will not moderate the relationship of spiritual beliefs with spiritual experiences among Muslims religious devotees.

**H₀12.** Age, gender, and educational qualification will not moderate the relationship of spiritual practices with spiritual experiences among Muslims religious devotees.
1.12 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Spiritual Beliefs

- Hindu Spiritual Beliefs
- Muslim Spiritual Beliefs

Spiritual Practices

- Hindu Spiritual Practices (Positive Transformation, Self-Purification, & Expanding Awareness)

Spiritual Experiences