

An Analysis of Positive Psychological Constructs in the Selected Poems of Swami Vivekananda

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Abstract: This paper examines three significant poems by Swami Vivekananda “*To the Awakened India*”, “*To the Fourth of July*” and “*Hold on Yet a While, Brave Heart*” through the lens of Positive Psychology. It seeks to demonstrate how Vivekananda’s philosophical perspectives are exerted through his poetic vision. A vision that upholds inner strength, hope, resilience and freedom which in turn resonates the key concepts of Positive Psychology such as optimism, courage, meaningfulness and transcendence. Using qualitative thematic content analysis, the study reveals that these poems articulate a profound philosophy of human potential and flourishing which anticipates the qualities of Positive Psychology by more than a century ago which also lies in the age-old philosophy of Vedanta. The discussion connects Vivekananda’s poetic imagination with educational and psychological insights leading to positive education.

Keywords: Vedanta, Positive Psychology, resilience, optimism, transcendence, positive education

1. Introduction

Positive Psychology and the Poetic Vision of Swami Vivekananda

Positive Psychology, a new school of thought, established by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1998), is a scientific movement that redefined the focus of psychology from illness, maladjustment and dysfunction to human strengths, virtues and well-being. Instead of addressing psychological barriers, it delves deep into understanding what allows individuals to flourish in societies. Constructs under the PERMA model such as positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011) serves the foundation of this paradigm. Moreover, empirical studies on resilience (Masten, 2001), hope (Snyder, 2002), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and optimism (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) have provided scientific pathways for this discourse.

When one turns the pages of Swami Vivekananda’s works, it becomes evident that his philosophy anticipated many of these principles long before the advent of Positive Psychology. Vivekananda envisioned human beings as an active creator of destiny through self-effort and inner transformation. His message of self-resilience, empowerment, divine potential and pursuit of truth interestingly corresponds with the goals of Positive Psychology that

stress on enhancing self-realisation and inner strength. In his teachings, he often emphasised the divine quality in human beings that can be manifested through self-discipline, service, faith and truth which are deeply connected with modern notions of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1968) and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Swami Vivekananda's poetry is relatively lesser known than his prose but provides profound psychological and spiritual insights. His poems are not merely literary compositions but these are expressions of struggle, moral awakening, hope and resilience. In this study, the poems such as "To the Awakened India", "To the Fourth of July" and "Hold on Yet a While, Brave Heart" are taken as instances of how poetic language can embody the positive psychological traits. In "To the Awakened India", Vivekananda urges the slumbering soul of the nation to rise from inertia into action. The poem portrays collective resilience and optimism, portraying 'awakening' as both a psychological and a national process. It mirrors the Positive Psychological construct of collective efficacy which is shared belief in the power of a group to effect meaningful change. "To the Fourth of July" was written during his stay in the United States and he transformed a historical event of the American Independence Day into a symbol of universal freedom and transcendence. Here, the poet's voice rises beyond national boundaries to celebrate human liberty as a spiritual ideal. The poem captures the essence of meaning and transcendence, two central components of well-being. Vivekananda's invocation of freedom as a cosmic principle echoes Positive Psychology's recognition of purpose and self-transcendence as higher dimensions of happiness (Frankl, 1963; Wong, 2016). "Hold on Yet a While, Brave Heart" is a picture of psychological endurance amid despair. Addressing the inner self as "Brave Heart," Vivekananda turns the poetic monologue into a therapeutic dialogue of courage and perseverance. The poem articulates the Positive Psychological theme of resilience, which can be interpreted as the capacity of recovering from adversity and emerge stronger (Masten, 2001). His persuasion "Hold on yet a while" resembles the modern therapeutic strategy of cognitive reframing. In such cases individuals reinterpret struggle as an opportunity to grow.

These poems reveal Vivekananda as a psychological visionary besides his philosophical preachings. His poetic expressions translate metaphysical ideals into virtues like faith, endurance, compassion and hope. Thus, the present study interprets these poems as poetic articulations of the core constructs of Positive Psychology i.e. resilience, optimism, meaning, transcendence. Here, we can see a unique synthesis of art and psychology. The spiritual realisation becomes synonymous with human flourishing. If we shed light on Vivekananda, Positive Psychology appears not as a new discourse but as a scientific rediscovery of ancient insights into the nature of happiness, strength and the divine possibilities within man.

Hence, the following objectives of the study are taken under consideration:

- i. To analyse selected poems of Swami Vivekananda through the lens of Positive Psychology.
- ii. To identify and interpret the key constructs of Positive Psychology as embedded in Vivekananda's poetic vision.
- iii. To examine the relevance of Vivekananda's Vedantic philosophy, as reflected in his poetry, to contemporary psychological thought and positive education.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Positive Psychology: An Overview

Positive Psychology, propounded by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi deals with the scientific study of human strengths, virtues and optimal functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It seeks to understand what makes life most worth living rather than merely getting rid of suffering. Seligman's (2011) PERMA model which discusses Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment paves the path for a multidimensional framework for well-being.

Key constructs within Positive Psychology include resilience which denotes the capacity to recover from adversity (Masten, 2001); self-efficacy or belief in one's ability to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1997); and hope is conceptualised as goal-directed energy and pathways thinking (Snyder, 2002). In addition, gratitude, optimism and mindfulness have been empirically linked to enhanced happiness and life satisfaction (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). This field draws philosophical and cultural similarities with ancient wisdom traditions. Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia, the Upanishadic concept of Ananda (bliss), and the Buddhist idea of Sukha resonate with Positive Psychology's concern for inner flourishing (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Thus, Positive Psychology not only represents a modern empirical movement but also rearticulates timeless spiritual insights into contemporary scientific discourse.

2.2 Swami Vivekananda and Psychological Insights

Swami Vivekananda's philosophy harmonises Vedantic spirituality with the principles of psychological self-development. His emphasis on self-knowledge (Atma-Jnana), strength and fearlessness reflects a profound understanding of human potential. Vivekananda's clarion call "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached" symbolises not only spiritual awakening but also psychological activation which addresses the awakening of intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Vivekananda's teachings call for humanistic optimism that reflects Maslow's (1968) concept of self-actualization. His vision of education as "the manifestation of the perfection already in man" aligns closely with modern theories of positive self-concept and growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). Moreover, Vivekananda's emphasis on unity of existence and service to humanity resonates with concepts of compassion and altruism which are the pathways to sustained well-being in Positive Psychology.

In the poems 'The Song of the Sannyasin', 'Light' and 'My Play is

Done' Vivekananda employs metaphorical language of struggle, illumination and transcendence. This becomes a psychological journey from despair to enlightenment. His poetic expression thus bridges spiritual transcendence and psychological resilience that can be interpreted as a holistic model of human flourishing integrating mind, spirit and action.

2.3 Poetry and Well-Being

Poetry is that art form which is both a mirror and a medicine for the human soul. Psychological research suggests that engaging with poetry can enhance emotional regulation, self-awareness and empathy (Tomasulo, 2014). Poetry allows individuals to articulate complex emotions, transform pain into meaning and cultivate reflective resilience (McCulliss, 2013). Another interesting approach is poetry therapy (Mazza, 2017), which is the intentional use of poetic expression for healing. In educational contexts, reading and interpreting poetry fosters aesthetic sensitivity, moral reflection and psychological insight (Prendergast, 2008). When these insights are applied to Swami Vivekananda's poetic corpus, it shows that his verses are not mere literary artifacts but 'psychospiritual' texts that evoke courage, hope, resilience and transcendence. His poetries are that platform where readers engage in an active dialogue with self and spirit. This echoes the goals of Positive Psychology where struggle is transformed into growth, despair into meaning and individuality into universal connectedness.

Thus, the convergence of Vivekananda's poetic vision and Positive Psychology illustrates how art, spirituality, psychology and science can collectively nurture holistic well-being and positive education.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design:

The study employs a qualitative thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to interpret the psychological dimensions of three poems: '*To the Awakened India*', '*To the Fourth of July*' and '*Hold on Yet a While, Brave Heart*'.

Each poem was read and codes related to the constructs of Positive Psychology were identified to establish the relationship. At first, themes were coded inductively following words, meanings, patterns, symbols and recurrent ideas. This phase identified psychologically and philosophically rich motifs such as struggle, awakening, devotion, liberation and human potential. Later, these derived themes were systematically aligned with core constructs of Positive Psychology where a meaningful theoretical ground is established. The theme of resilience and hope recurrently used in the poems for standing firm even in adversity. Challenges in life were viewed as opportunities where inner strength and energy can be applied. Meaning and purpose in life highlighted the quest for self-realisation. The quality of transcendence and spirituality emphasised the union of the self with the divine as the ultimate state of human flourishing. Moreover, optimism and courage were reflected in his poetic language symbolising the attitude of confidence and positivity towards life. Finally, his deep belief in the interconnectedness

of all beings i.e. Adwaita is also reflected in his expressions. It is the moral duty of ours to uplift others which itself is a theme resonant with Positive Psychology's focus on compassion, prosocial behaviour and collective well-being.

Hence, this interpretive discussion uses Vivekananda's poetic corpus as a holistic model of positive human functioning where resilience, spiritual transcendence and social responsibility are at the core highlighting the positive psychological aspects.

3.2 Limitation of the study:

Interpretation is restricted to specific contexts and selected poems. The mapping of spiritual poetry to psychological constructs remains hermeneutic in nature.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 “To the Awakened India”: A call for Hope and Resilience

Swami Vivekananda's “Once More Awake!” embodies positive-psychological strengths and processes. It opens with a resilient reframing “sleep, not death” and this transforms loss into a promise of renewal sustaining hope and optimism. The call to “resume thy march” reveal a deep sense of purpose that orients behaviour toward service and contribution. Tenderness toward even “roadside dust” illustrates compassion and humility. Descriptions like “strong and steady, blissful, bold, and free” figure out courage, liberty and psychological strength. The line “‘tis but One” and instruction to let “visions melt” portray mindfulness and wisdom. Emotionally, the poem evokes hope, optimism and meaning which are the central tenets of Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being. Vivekananda transforms despair into purpose, linking national rejuvenation with moral strength. He tries to awaken the nation at both spiritual and social, personal and collective levels. The poem's emphasis on “work on with faith” mirrors learned optimism (Seligman, 1991) where individuals choose faith over despair and purpose over inertia. This is akin to the modern cognitive-behavioural framework of positive education. The poem's culmination point “Eternal Love and Service Free” advocates altruism, kindness, love and motivation. These are synthesized with the PERMA elements (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment). Thus, “*To the Awakened India*” which is a call to national flourishing through the awakening of virtues such as perseverance, faith and courage, can be interpreted as a poetic expression of collective positive psychological traits.

4.2 “To the Fourth of July”: Freedom, Transcendence and Universal Brotherhood

This is a powerful poetic celebration of light, liberty and human striving embodying several central constructs of Positive Psychology. The opening lines “*the dark clouds melt away... the world awakes*” reflects resilience and hope where darkness symbolises suffering and oppression and light is the mark of energy and life. The “magic touch” signifies a shift from helplessness to empowerment which resonates positive cognitive transfor-

mation. Use of Nature like birds singing in chorus, flowers raising their “star-like crowns,” lakes opening their “hundred thousand lotus-eyes” evoke and expand meaningful understanding enhancing connection with the larger world. These images portray the world as not just surviving but flourishing, which resonate Seligman’s vision of Positive Emotion, Engagement and Meaning.

The repeated welcoming of light and liberty draws qualities of psychological well-being. Liberty is personified as the sun and this represents autonomy which is a major component of Self-Determination Theory. The poet describes a day “*when work bore fruit, And worship, love, and sacrifice, Fulfilled*”. This upholds accomplishment which is the “A” of the PERMA model. “*Thou... rose to shed the light of Freedom on mankind*” marks the collective flourishing which aligns with the goals of community well-being and shared prosperity. The concluding call “*Move on, O Lord... Till every land reflects thy light*” expresses a vision of universal justice and human dignity. This aligns with the broader interest of positive psychology in flourishing. The image of all people standing with “uplifted head” and feeling their “shackles broken” symbolises empowerment, self-dignity and value which are psychological states associated with positivity. The phrase “*springing joy, their life renewed*” beautifully catches the essence of spiritual joy, rebirth and revitalisation.

4.3 “Hold On Yet a While, Brave Heart”: Resilience and Endurance amid Suffering

Swami Vivekananda’s poem “Hold on Yet a While, Brave Heart” reflects several characteristics of Positive Psychology such as resilience, hope, optimism, meaning and spiritual strength. The poet continuously calls for perseverance during difficult times which aligns with the Positive Psychological concept of bouncing back from hardship. “*If the sun by the cloud is hidden a bit... The victory is sure to come*” echoes hope. This suggests that obstacles are temporary and one can overcome every odd if he thinks and works with determination. The images of winter giving way to summer and “Each hollow crests the wave” reflect optimistic thinking. Vivekananda emphasises courage and determination when he urges to “plod on through the dark.”. This highlights efforts despite setbacks which is an essential strength recognised in Positive Psychology. He promotes meaningful and purposeful life in the long run rather than momentary satisfaction. This can be linked with eudaimonic wellbeing. The assurance that “no good is e'er undone” introduces the moral elevation and value. The line “heed none and gently guide” relates to positive leadership where the quality of compassion is generated. The repeated call for divine support invokes spiritual transcendence, highest form of human flourishing. The poem encapsulates psychological wellbeing by introducing resilience, moral strength, meaningful action and spiritual transcendence which are the core elements of Positive Psychology.

5. Educational Implications

Incorporating these poems into educational curricula can nurture character strengths among students such as perseverance, gratitude, hope and purpose. The poem “To the Awakened India” cultivates civic responsibility, “To the Fourth of July” can generate global empathy and universalism and “Hold on Yet a While” can teach emotional resilience. These can be instrumental in promoting Positive Education. The rhythmic affirmations and meaning of the poems can reinforce positive self-statements and the poems can be used in cultivating ethical and spiritual well-being.

6. Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda’s poetries can be seen as a confluence of philosophy, psychology and poetic imagination. The three poems analysed in this work anticipate many of the fundamental elements of modern Positive Psychology. Besides its literary beauty Vivekananda’s poetic vision offers a psychological framework for flourishing and well-being. The teachers, educators, counsellors must understand that these poems are union of the science of happiness and the art of the spirit. Vivekanand’s poems can be used in the awakening of the human soul toward light, courage and meaning.

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