

## Spiritual Literature in Our Contemporary World: An Analytical Study

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### ABSTRACT

The contemporary world that we dwell in instils in us the capacity to just survive, more than live. In our quest to reach – be it our targets, goals, destinations or what not, we keep running, sometimes even a race. Thus, tests, trials and tribulations are indispensable. Our going to the malls, cinemas and the like does not really serve the purpose of finding everlasting happiness and we find ourselves in the same knotted basket of gloom. And, if people wish to practice spirituality, they often find themselves to be “*spiritually allergic*”, as Sadhguru terms it, since they believe that they have to leave everything behind and go to the mountains without understanding that spirituality is not a fruit to be plucked from the crest of a mountain but a flower that blooms within if we water and nurture our inner being. Sadhguru provides a one-line solution to the problems that we face, he says; “*Turn inward*”. Spiritual growth stands for growth that one takes inwards than in the visible world. Inward growth, that dives into *the deep within* to explore and surf to discover the real self, is the real search we all take, sooner or later in our lives. Spiritual literature, a towering genre, has been a forever companion of human beings since times immemorial and has held human beings in the palms of its hands in times of war and conflict and provided refuge in stormy times. A survey of 340 + respondents and the interview bring to the fore people’s understanding of spirituality, its need in the contemporary world, the connection between spiritual literature and spiritual growth and the future trends or directions for spiritual literature in a rapidly changing world. Most of the respondents have their own understanding of spirituality, and consider that it plays a crucial role in life as it provides meaning and purpose to life and understand that spiritual transformation is necessary as it leads one to a life that is unruffled by the ebb and flow. Majority of the respondents strongly agree that spiritual literature has the power to bring about spiritual growth and envision a convergence of ancient wisdom with contemporary issues with a notable shift in the dissemination of spiritual insights, with a surge in digital platforms such as online forums, e-books, podcasts, and apps, expanding accessibility to a diverse audience.

**Key Words:** contemporary, spirituality, world, trials, understanding, happiness, literature, spiritual

### INTRODUCTION: SPIRITUALITY AND SPIRITUAL LITERATURE

If we are hungry, we go to the kitchen, if we are thirsty, we make our way to a water source, when we want light, some brightness, we head towards the sun or just switch on a button, if we want to communicate, we generally pick up our phone, if we need cash, the Automated Tele Machine or the bank is the solution or its very source and if we need fuel to run our vehicles, we halt at a fuel station. So, in life we stop at, go to, reach out to or select and pick up various things or places to fulfil various needs, most of which are indispensable because after all we are living a life and certain life running processes cannot be denied.

*But, what do we do if we want a spring of joy in our hearts and souls?*

Some of us head to the cinema, some to the malls, some to clubs and various other ways that make us temporarily happy or joyful. However lasting this happiness or joy might be, it eventually turns out to be ephemeral, and we find ourselves in the same old basket of gloom, agony, agitation or what not; can be different for different people depending on their circumstances.

This is where Sadhguru steps in to give a one-line solution to our long-elongated problem in his book ‘*Inner Engineering – A Yogi’s Guide to Joy*’, he says, “turn inward.” In our quest to be joyful, we run, run and run, but outside... it’s time to

try the inside. That is where the fount of joy is and waits to be discovered and allowed to be bountiful, springing out streams of joyful water drops. When we shift our stance from the outside to the inside, we sense the joy we had been longing for. It is true that it is easier said than done but if done simply, it can reach a successful result which will be promising. *If we can bear the labour of our hard-earned money being spent, travelling to reach places, buying various things for a moment of joy; then it is not an inexpensive a deal at all to just sit, and take a walk inside! Who knows, what you might discover!*

At the same time, it is also pertinent to notice that in order to discover themselves or dive within people feel that first they need to head to the mountains or the Himalayas and only then they can make a start into this forever heard of or long-awaited journey. Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev in his book *Flowers on the Path*, (pg. no. 123) calls it, “*Spiritual Allergy*”. Sadhguru discusses why people have a sense of spiritual allergy, the reason is that they have been told to leave everything and go to the mountains if they want to be spiritual. Now, not all are ready and even if they are; Sadhguru on a witty note says that there isn’t space for everyone there. So, what is the way out? We have to make spirituality a part of us, our life... wherever we are, whatever we are doing. He says it is better if we learn how to be spiritual in the office, at home, on the streets and wherever we are. This is a practical suggestion because spirituality is not about our exterior but about our interior in its entirety. When the world within us is settled, the world outside automatically settles. He calls spirituality a science to create a conducive inner atmosphere, because the quality of our lives depends upon how and what we are within. He further adds that unless we know of the inside, we won’t experience real joy, peace and that transcendence that we wish to when we step in to become spiritual. Our five senses can only help us experience the world outside, accumulate what is outside; it’s only the inside walk that helps us sense and go beyond. It is like activating a light bulb within you that brightens the void and helps you see what lies inside, infinite possibility!

How can we reach such a stage of understanding? What can aid us in this endeavour?

When we look at the world today or talk to the people around, none has been left untouched by the ravages of time and life. Most of us have felt the need of something or someone that can help us heal and sail through the oceans of life. In our need, that we realize thus, we look up to a number of things (tangible or intangible) or people.

Though there are various ways and methods, one of them is spiritual literature that has accompanied human beings since time immemorial. Spiritual literature or books of the self-help genre have helped humankind to see through problems, solve the toughest conundrums, unknot the knots of ignorance and oblivion, and sail through the tides of time.

## **SURVEY – ‘SPIRITUAL LITERATURE AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH’**

### **➤ AIM, METHODOLOGY & DATA COLLECTION**

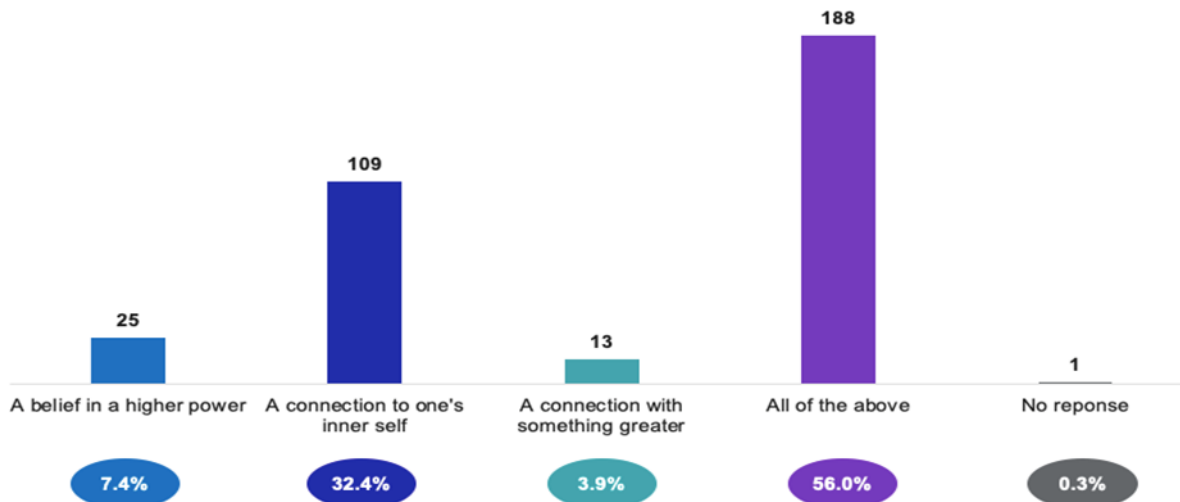
A survey titled ‘Spiritual Literature and Spiritual Growth’ was conducted with the aim to understand the impact of spiritual literature on people and their lives, its necessity, the transformation it can bring and how such literature can guide the readers towards knowledge and wisdom of the self to live a spiritual life.

In order to conduct the research (Exploratory and Casual), an Online Survey was conducted for people of all ages from all walks of life. The survey was conducted using Google Forms. The questionnaire was titled ‘*Spiritual Literature and Spiritual Growth*’. Apart from the survey, a personal interview was conducted to understand and find out the future trends or directions for spiritual literature in a rapidly changing world.

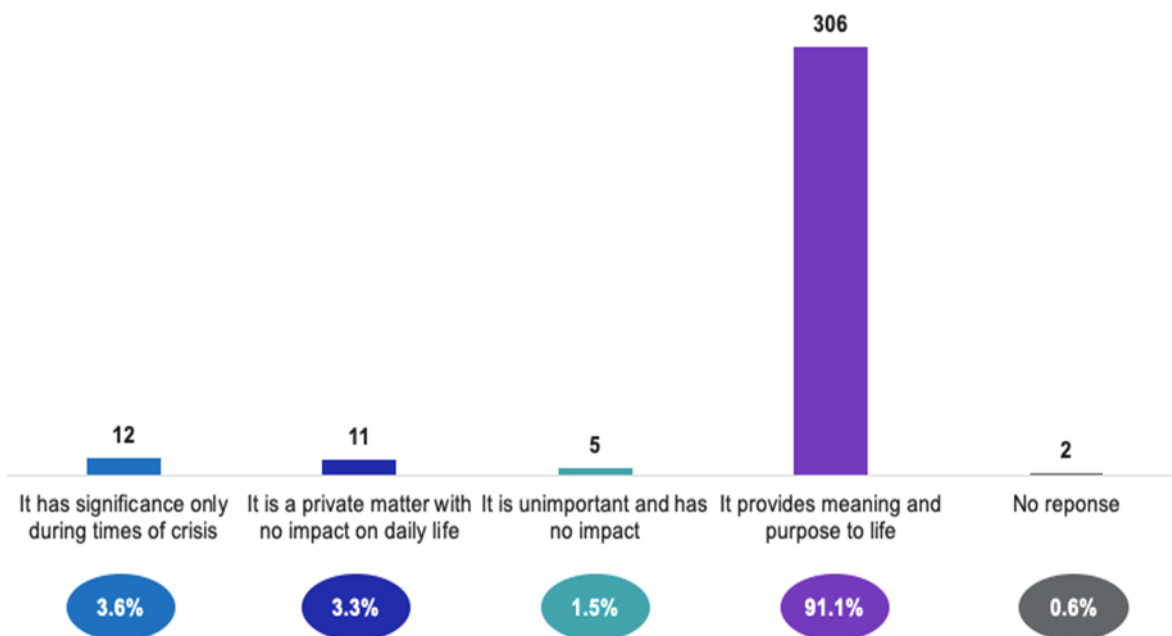
Questions, both open and close ended were designed to collect data about the awareness of spirituality, the contribution of spiritual literature in spiritual growth and its need in the contemporary society. The data collected was both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data was studied and analysed using the pie-charts and graphs on Google Forms followed by a selective study and calculation of a few variables. Qualitative data was varied, each response was carefully studied to find not only the common but also the unique points.

Responses were recorded from over 340 respondents.

## ➤ COMPREHENSION &amp; ANALYSIS

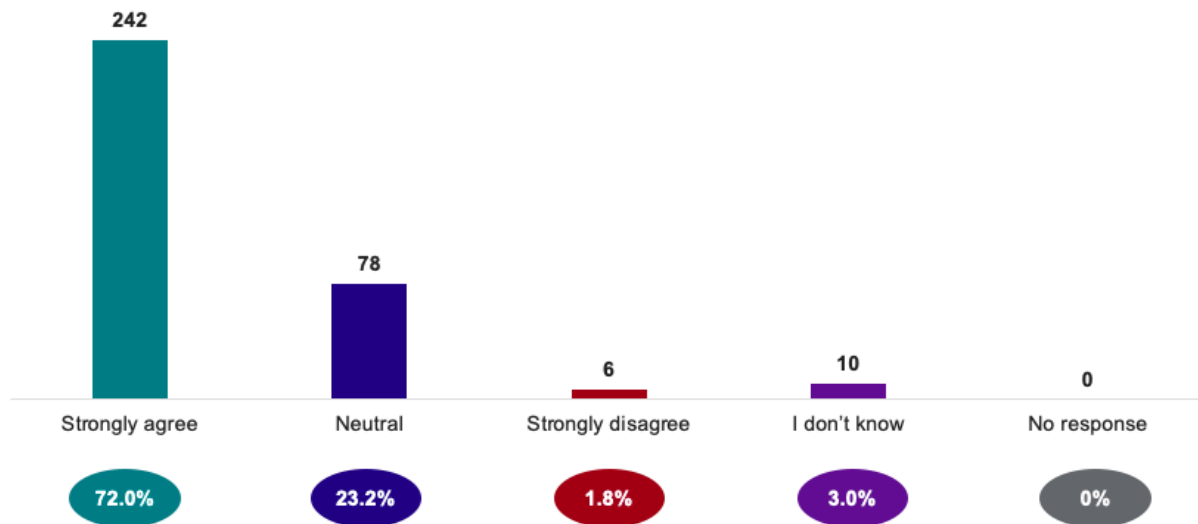


**Figure 1** highlights the respondents' *understanding and definition of spirituality* along with giving an insight into the relevance of spirituality or a spiritual living in people's lives. The response section had four options and the response was not restricted to the choice of a single option i.e., the respondents could choose any number of responses. The given figure clearly depicts that out of 344 respondents, a majority of the respondents (56%) chose the fourth option (All of the above) as they felt the element of spirituality to be present across the first, second and third options i.e., a belief and connection with the higher power and a connection with oneself. At the same time, it is pertinent to notice that about 32% of the respondents feel spirituality to be a connection with one's inner self, the core of our being.

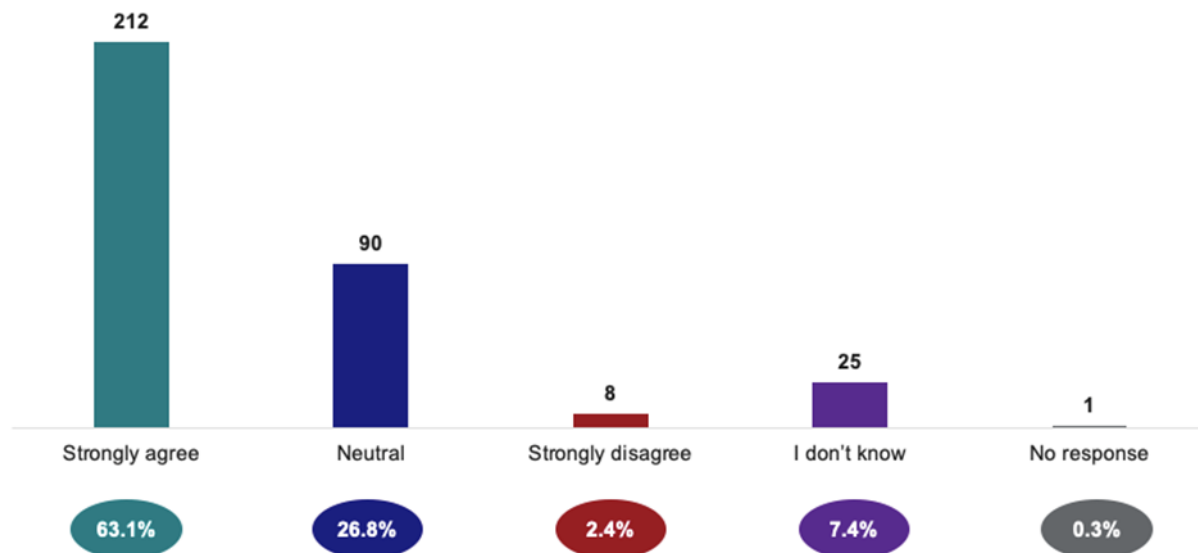


**Figure 2** highlights the respondents' response to *the role of spirituality in a person's life* in terms of a better understanding or better living or other such transformations. Out of 343 respondents, a vast majority of the respondents (91.1%) agreed to the fact that spirituality provides meaning and purpose to life, thus it's not a day long process but a life-long process. 1.5% (5) respondents consider it to be unimportant while 3.3% (11) consider it to be a private matter with no impact on one's daily life. A few respondents – 3.6% (12) also expressed that spirituality is significant only during times of crisis, which can imply that spirituality has helped them tide through tough and challenging times.

**Figure 3** depicts the respondents' response and perception to - *the extent to which they believe that spiritual transformation is necessary for personal growth and well-being*. The aim was to find out how far people have been touched by spiritual living or are in quest of it. Out of 345 respondents, close to three quarters of the respondents (72%) strongly agreed that personal growth and well-being are enhanced by spiritual growth and understanding. Approximately one quarter of the respondents are either neutral (23.2%) or express their unawareness about the concept. Only 1.8% of the respondents (6) strongly disagreed with the idea of spiritual understanding for personal growth and well – being.



**Figure 4** aimed at finding out *whether spiritual literature helped in spiritual growth*. While there are other means to spiritual living, the task was to comprehend the extent to which spiritual literature, which is one of the most accessible sources, has been able to lead people to a better understanding of spiritual living. From the 335 respondents who responded, 63.1% (212) strongly agreed that spiritual literature has helped and guided them in spiritual growth while 26.8% (90) of the respondents took a neutral stance. 7.4% of the respondents expressed their unawareness and a minority i.e., 2.4% (8) strongly disagreed with spiritual literature leading to spirituality.

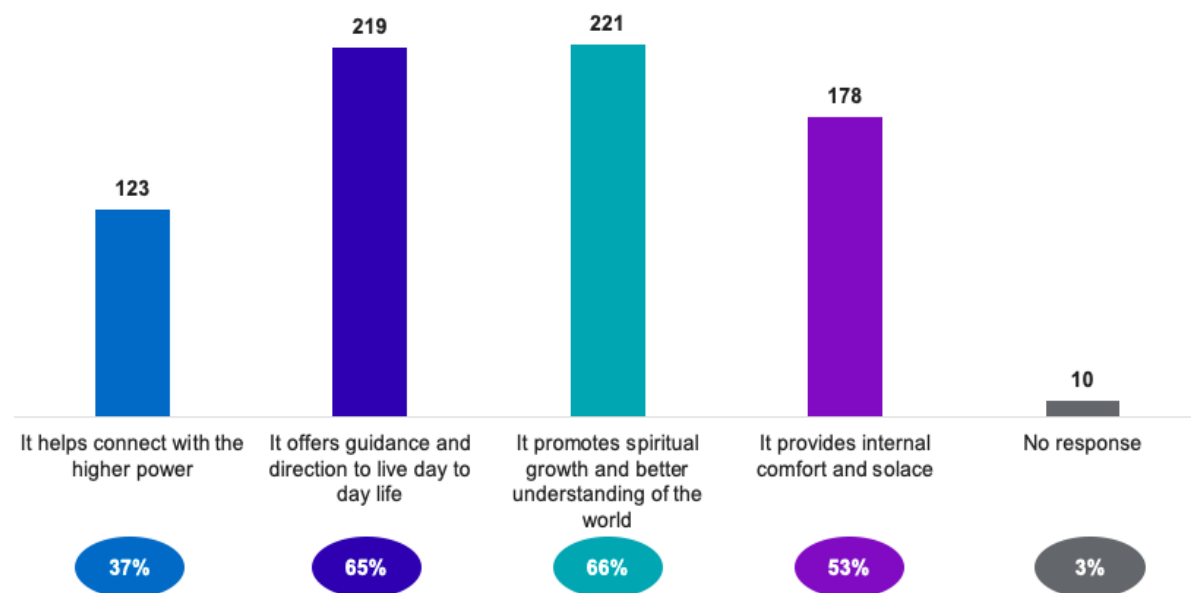


**Figure 5** portrays responses to - *the role that spirituality plays in the contemporary society; helps to dive into the present situation of the people in society in terms of their mental health and understanding of life and to seek an answer to the role*

that spirituality plays or can play. Out of 335 respondents, only a minority i.e., 3% respondents (10) did not register any response while a huge majority of the respondents chose to select various options from the checklist of answers. 65-66% of the respondents (219-221) expressed that spiritual literature guides them in their everyday lives and promotes spiritual growth and a better perspective and understanding of the world as well. Thus, it can be implied that a majority of the respondents seek guidance from spiritual literature to deal with their day to day lives and grow to be better and peaceful.

53% of the respondents (178) say that spiritual literature provides them internal comfort and solace which helps us understand that life for most of us is testing and at times ruffles us and our spirits; and spiritual literature can be a clear stream that flows and settles all that is scattered delivering peace and comfort.

37% of the respondents (123) expressed that spiritual literature helps them connect with the higher power which makes us understand that people are en route to spirituality and long to connect to the most powerful or it can be said that spiritual literature can be a route, a way that can lead people to the path of spiritual living or spiritual transformation.



## FUTURE TRENDS OR DIRECTIONS FOR SPIRITUAL LITERATURE IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD - INTERVIEW & ANALYSIS

**Interviewee 1:** The future trends in spiritual literature are blending of ancient wisdom with contemporary issues that we face, making these teachings more relevant to modern audiences. It is about contextualizing the learnings to problems and issues of modern age as well as conveying the message in a form which is understandable – e.g., anecdotes relatable to modern life. I also foresee that the usage of digital media and social platforms in sharing the learnings from spiritual literature.

**Interviewee 2:** I cannot really say for the global trends, but as a feminist global south scholar, I think there is a pertinent need to explore spirituality as a decolonial sentiment governing everyday lives and piety of the marginalized groups in the society, particularly women, Dalits and queers. I would want to see more literature produced on the idea of alternate spiritual healing; everyday negotiations by the marginalized with the oppressive social order using spiritual merit; the manifestations of belief in anti-colonial and anti-occupation revolutions (Saba Mehmood's work threw some light on this, but the literature on this has been sparse); and the feminist actions around spirituality to address intergenerational trauma.

**Interviewee 3:** The future trends for spiritual literature in a swiftly changing world are likely to be influenced by the changing needs, values, and technological advancements of modern society. The future of spiritual literature seems dignified to embrace innovation, inclusivity, and a dynamic synthesis of traditional wisdom with the evolving needs of individuals and society.

**Interviewee 4:** I think that the positive growth in the popularity of spiritual texts will continue. Because, looking at the present scenario I don't think that the deteriorating human values are experiencing a revival any soon, leading to the continued popularity of spiritual texts. However, I don't think that their effectiveness will be having any increase, as Swami Vivekananda said, "No one can make you spiritual..."

Also, with religious identities becoming rigid, I think that spiritual literature may also acquire more of religious tinge than it does today.

**Interviewee 5:** "A person can rise through the efforts of his own mind; or draw himself down, in the same manner. Because each person is his own friend or enemy." -Bhagwat Gita

**Interviewee 6:** There might be an increasing exploration of the intersection between spirituality, science, and technology. Efforts to reconcile ancient wisdom with modern scientific understanding and technological advancements may emerge. The digital era allows for wider dissemination of spiritual literature through online platforms, e-books, podcasts, and apps. Accessibility and reach may increase, reaching a broader and more diverse audience. A shift toward practices that involve the integration of the mind, body, and spirit may become more pronounced. This could include mindfulness practices, yoga, and other somatic approaches to spiritual well-being.

**Interviewee 7:** Books like the Spiritual Child with conversations and episodes are easy to comprehend and relate.

**Interviewee 8:** In a rapidly changing world, future trends in spiritual literature are likely to reflect a synthesis of ancient wisdom and contemporary challenges. As individuals seek meaning amidst technological advancements and societal shifts, spiritual literature may increasingly focus on mindfulness, resilience, and navigating the complexities of modern life. Digital platforms might play a crucial role in disseminating spiritual teachings, making wisdom more accessible to a broader audience. Additionally, there may be a growing emphasis on the intersection of spirituality with environmental consciousness and social justice, reflecting an awareness of interconnectedness and the need for collective well-being.

**Interviewee 9:** The future scope of spirituality will depend on the people themselves. Although we all are in the middle of great hustle and bustle which renders us with no time to pray or reflect on ourselves and also the nature of our activities and priorities leaves no scope for spirituality, there are still few people and organisations who are seeking to revive and highlight the significance spirituality can have on our lives and bring us innermost peace and solitude.

**Interviewee 10:** Try to Enjoy the Process of life...

**Interviewee 11:** The role of spiritual literature is of utmost relevance in the present fast pace changing society. In the present scenario where everything has become fake due to dominance of virtual world and advent of AI. All this has facilitated to live a comfortable materialistic life which is hollow from inside and lands individuals in a state of utter confusion and dissatisfaction. One is unable to understand the lingering insecurities despite a comfortable fast paced life.

#### **Analysis:**

The question for future trends and directions for spiritual literature was asked to the interviewees to understand their perspective about the ongoing and upcoming developments in spiritual literature in the contemporary world. Following are the themes that came to light:

- Blending Ancient Wisdom with Contemporary Issues
- Digital Dissemination of Spiritual Wisdom
- Exploration of Alternate Spiritual Healing
- (Focus on everyday negotiations by marginalized individuals with oppressive social orders using spiritual merit.)
- Interconnectedness of Spirituality, Science, and Technology
- Continued Popularity Amid Deteriorating Human Values
- Potential Religious Overtones in Spiritual Literature
- Intersection of Spirituality with Environmental Consciousness and Social Justice
- Revival Efforts in a Fast-Paced Society

## ➤ CONCLUSIONS

Spiritual growth stands for growth that one takes inwards than in the visible world that often perceives things on the face of it, from the perspective of how it looks like. Inward growth, that dives into the deep within to explore and surf to discover the real self is the real search we all take sooner or later in our lives.

Spiritual literature has been a forever companion of human beings since times immemorial, this towering genre that has umpteen books and other printed material to its credit has held human beings in the palms of its hands in times of war and conflict and provided refuge in stormy times that bring along trials and tribulations.

The survey of 340 + respondents brings to the fore people's understanding of spirituality, its need in the contemporary world and the connection between spiritual literature and spiritual growth.

- Most of the respondents have their own understanding of spirituality and consider it to be a belief and connection with the higher power along with a belief in the self, the core of one's being. They consider that spirituality plays a crucial role in one's life as it provides meaning and purpose to life. Out of their own individual life experiences, they also consider that spiritual transformation is necessary as it leads one to a life that is unruffled by the ebb and flow of life.
- A major portion of the respondents strongly agree with the point that spiritual literature has the power to bring about spiritual growth while a minority of the respondents are neutral about the nexus between spiritual literature and spiritual growth. Agreeing thus, that there is a connection between spiritual literature and spiritual growth, the respondents express that when the contemporary world that leaves individuals listless, spiritual literature guides them in their day to day lives, promotes spiritual growth and better understanding of the world, provides comfort and solace and helps them connect with the higher power.
- Envisioning the future trends for spiritual literature in our rapidly evolving world reveals a convergence of ancient wisdom with contemporary issues. The trajectory involves contextualizing profound teachings to address modern problems, employing relatable anecdotes for enhanced understanding. A notable shift is witnessed in the dissemination of spiritual insights, with a surge in digital platforms such as online forums, e-books, podcasts, and apps, expanding accessibility to a diverse audience. Anticipating a broader exploration, there is a growing inclination towards literature on alternate spiritual healing and an emphasis on how the marginalized navigate oppressive social orders through spiritual merit.
- Moreover, an intriguing intersection between spirituality, science, and technology is anticipated, aligning ancient wisdom with modern scientific understanding. Despite concerns about deteriorating human values and the rigidification of religious identities, there remains optimism about the continued popularity of spiritual texts, driven by the desire for meaning in a changing societal landscape. In the midst of the hustle and bustle of contemporary life, ongoing efforts persist to revive spirituality's significance, recognizing its potential to bring inner peace and solitude amid the dominance of the virtual world and the rise of artificial intelligence. In essence, spiritual literature emerges as a guiding force, adapting to the needs of a dynamic world, offering solace, and fostering connection in the face of unprecedented change.

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