

Spirituality Across Belief Systems: Comparative Insights from Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Atheism

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Abstract

This study aims to develop a comparative analysis of the understanding of spirituality among followers of different faiths, including Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Atheism. For this purpose, five participants from each belief system were selected, including Muslims, Christians, and Atheists, and four participants were selected from Sikhs. Therefore, a total of 19 participants were selected for the structured interview. Structured interview questions were made from general spirituality literature. Moreover, only participants with reasonable knowledge of spirituality in their religion or atheist school of thought were paid attention. After selection, interviews were conducted through interview guides from the participants from different belief systems. After that, the interviews were transcribed, and five superordinate themes were generated from the data, such as the definition of spirituality, spirituality and religion, spirituality and nature, spirituality and lifestyle, and spirituality and well-being. It was found that Muslims and Sikhs differ in their concept of religion and spirituality from Christians and Atheists. In contrast, all the religions and, to a great extent, atheist's data resemble the theme of spirituality and nature. At the same time, Mixed responses were observed to other superordinate themes of spirituality.

Keywords: Spirituality, Comparative Analysis, Spirituality in Islam, Spirituality in Christianity, Spirituality in Sikhism, Spirituality and Atheism.

Introduction

Traces of spiritual practices can be found in different religions and philosophies over the centuries. For example, the concept of spirituality in Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Stoicism, Platonism, Confucianism, and many more (Miner et al., 2014; Kato, 2024; Bindlish & Nandram, 2024; Vende, 2024; and Larivée, 2021). In modernism, there was little distinction between religion and spirituality; however, after postmodernism, when religious affiliation declined, spirituality gained a separate identity. Many researchers explored spirituality in Atheism (the concept of spirituality without believing in God) and in different religions. This led to a variety of literature that came into existence on the subject of spirituality. Therefore, spirituality has started to have diverse definitions, and there is debate about its role in shaping different spheres of human life (Jacobs, 2013; Johannsen, 2024). For example, a search on scholarly databases like Scopus and Web of Science reveals an increasing surge of growing academic interest in understanding the multifaceted nature of spirituality. A continuous increase in web searches is related to spirituality and its importance in different spheres of life from 1993 to 2023 (Dissanayake et al., 2024).

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Furthermore, studies indicate a rising trend in individuals identifying as 'spiritual but not religious.' A Pew Research Center study (2021) showed that in the United States, 27% of adults identify as spiritual but not religious, highlighting the increasing separation of spirituality from traditional religious institutions. However, the generally acknowledged concept of spirituality is considered a phenomenon beyond organized belief systems, encompassing personal growth, moral values, and a search for meaning in life (Koç, 2024).

These developments cause the concept of spirituality in every religion and school of thought to have their distinctiveness but remain debatable among the scholars of each religion and school of thought. For example, the widely accepted concept of spirituality in Islam centers on an individual's relationship with Allah and the pursuit of inner purification. Rooted in the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), it emphasizes salah (prayer), dhikr (remembrance of God), and moral conduct (Ruhullah & Ushama, 2025). Similarly, Christianity views spirituality as a personal connection with God through Jesus Christ, focusing on faith, prayer, and devotion while emphasizing grace, salvation, and spiritual transformation (Middleton, 2020).

Sikhism, founded by Guru Nanak in the 15th century, blends spirituality with social ethics (Kaur & Kaur, 2024). It highlights devotion to Waheguru (God), selfless service (seva), and Naam Simran (continuous remembrance of the divine).

Atheists, though rejecting belief in a deity, may still engage in spiritual practices, finding meaning in nature, philosophy, art, and human connections (Peterson, 2012). Secular spirituality, often linked to mindfulness and existential inquiry, prioritizes self-reflection, ethical living, and intellectual growth (Smith, 2017). This perspective challenges traditional religious notions while affirming that wonder, purpose, and transcendence can exist beyond faith (Zuckerman, 2015).

A review of the existing gap in the comparative analysis of spirituality across different faiths underscores the need for more comprehensive research in this domain. However, this study aims to compare these perspectives on how spirituality is understood and experienced across different religious and secular contexts.

Material and Methods

Initially, questions were constructed after a thorough review of the available literature on spirituality. The questions were designed with the help of experts who have good knowledge about spirituality. After forming the questions, a pilot study was conducted to check their validity. After pretesting the interview guide, a few changes were made to the questions, and then the research instrument was finalized.

Afterward, participants from Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Atheism were selected with the help of the snowball technique. The criteria for selecting participants were based on having good knowledge of spirituality based on their religion and school of thought. A total of 19 participants were selected: five from Islam, five from Christianity, four from Sikhism, and five from Atheism. From the list of five participants, three were males and two females in each group except in Sikh's group because one more female participant was not found (participants demographic is shown in Table 1). Some of the participants were from outside of Pakistan. Therefore, online interviews were conducted with them.

Table 1: Participants Demographic Information

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Education	Religion	Profession	Country
M1	33	Male	Chemical Eng, Astro physicist	Muslim	PhD enrollment	Germany
M2	43	Male	PhD Chemical Eng,	Muslim	Entrepreneur	Pakistan
M3	56	Male	PhD Islamic Studies	Muslim	Assistant Professor	Pakistan
M4	26	Female	MS Clinical Psychologist	Muslim	Clinical Psychologist	Australia
M5	29	Female	PhD Religious Studies	Muslim	Teacher	Pakistan
C1	58	Male	PhD in Theology	Christian	Pastor/teacher	Pakistan
C2	37	Male	PhD in New Testament	Christian	Teaching Theology	Pakistan
C3	40	Male	Psychiatry	Christian	Assistant Professor Psychiatry	Pakistan
C4	32	Female	Theology	Christian	Housewife	Pakistan
C5	26	Female	MS Theology	Christian	Instructor	Pakistan
S1	46	Male	BA Punjabi	Sikh	Gyani	Pakistan
S2	30	Male	M.A Punjabi	Sikh	Gyani	Pakistan
S3	46	Male	PhD Punjabi	Sikh	Lecturer	Pakistan
S4	38	Female	MS Punjabi	Sikh	Housewife	Pakistan
A1	60	Male	Industrial Management Engineering	Atheist	Business corporate secretary	Philippine
A2	48	Male	Vocational school (computer info)	Atheist	Family Business	South America
A3	33	Male	College Educated	Atheist	Unemployed	UK
A4	48	Female	BA	Atheist	Self-Employed, therapist	USA
A5	33	Female	Associate Degree	Atheist	Stay at home mother	USA

Following the completion of data collection, which consisted of open-ended questions, the researchers started a thorough process of thematic analysis. Initially, each interview transcript was read multiple times to understand as close as possible to the participants' experiences, perspectives, and the nuances within their narratives.

Subsequently, the researchers moved into the coding phase. Using a process of open coding, significant segments of the interview transcripts were identified and labeled with descriptive codes. These codes represented key ideas, concepts, and patterns that emerged from the data. This coding process was both inductive (emerging from the data itself) and deductive (informed by the research questions).

Once the initial coding was complete, the researchers were able to identify broader sub-ordinate and super-ordinate themes. This involved grouping related codes together, searching for overarching patterns, and developing a coherent framework that captured the essence of the participants' experiences. The relationships between codes and themes were thoroughly examined to ensure that the themes accurately reflected the data and were grounded in the participants' narratives.

Following the identification of themes, the researchers engaged in a process of refining and naming the sub-ordinate and then super ordinate themes. This involved carefully considering the language used to describe each theme, ensuring that it was clear, concise, and accurately captured the essence of the data. The themes were then organized in a logical and coherent manner, reflecting the relationships between them, as shown in table 2.

Finally, the researchers wrote a detailed narrative analysis of the themes, using illustrative quotes from the interviews to support their interpretations. This analysis provided a comprehensive overview of the findings, highlighting the key insights and implications of the research. This analysis was then reviewed by all researchers to ensure inter-coder reliability and agreement.

Table 2: Table Highlights Sub-Ordinate and Super-Ordinate Themes Derived from the Codes

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Definition of Spirituality	Meaning of Spirituality
Spirituality and Religion	Connection between religion and spirituality Differences between religious and spiritual people
Spirituality and Nature	Relation between spirituality and nature Observation in nature leads to spirituality or vice versa
Spirituality and Lifestyle	Spirituality and ethical codes Spiritualistic person's family and social life Goals of spiritual people Belief in destiny of spiritual person Worldly benefits of spiritual people
Spirituality and Well-being	Psychological and physical health of spiritual people

Results

Every superordinate theme is discussed in reference to its subordinate themes with respect to four groups. In this way, a total of five superordinate themes are mentioned in this section. These are discussed in the following section comprising of definition of spirituality, spirituality and religion, spirituality and nature, spirituality and lifestyle and spirituality and well-being.

Superordinate Theme 1: Definition of Spirituality

This superordinate theme contains the introduction of the concept of spirituality found in every group. The purpose of adding this superordinate theme is to understand the basic meaning of spirituality in each category of belief system.

Subordinate Theme

Muslim Group

Meaning of Spirituality

Muslims concept of spirituality involves that spirituality is abstract entity and yet which can be practiced and felt inside. It is something which balances human life with reference to material and non-material realities. Therefore, when a person is on the path of spirituality, he or she can observe the entire perspective of phenomenon around him and her. As that person is not only viewing the material aspect of reality, but the spiritual one also. As one of the participants said "spirituality is

the belief in non-material reality found in universe and human. It is an exercise to recognize significant reality and to establish link with it” (participant M1).

Christian Group

Meaning of Spirituality

In Christianity, if a person wants to become spiritual then he or she should adopt Christianity and follow the teachings of the Christ. As one of the participants added further. “Spirituality is like enlightenment that you receive in Christ. Mainly it is a transformation that you get enlightened...So for me spirituality is transformation in Christ, in union with Christ, being Christian” (participant C5).

Moreover, the person can become spiritual when his or her sins, especially the sin of Adam is removed. And the only method to remove that sin is that the person has to accept Christianity and follow the teachings of the Christ;

Humanity’s connection with God was broken when sin was committed by Adam. Jesus Christ reestablished that connection of humanity with God when he sacrificed himself on that cross. So therefore, when person believe in Christ only then that connection can be restored (participant C2).

Sikh Group

Meaning of Spirituality

Spirituality is to always be mindful about God and keep following His teachings. These teachings involve helping others such as provision of food and helping in some other ways. One of the participants mentioned it as “to serve others is spirituality without regarding their culture and religion” (participant S3).

Moreover, one of the Sikh participants mentioned principles of spirituality in Sikhism “spirituality is the science of adopting to change, the ability to channel five vices, kam, rodh, lobh, moh and ahankar (anger, lust, attachment, greed and ego)” (participant S1).

Atheist Group

Meaning of Spirituality

Atheists describe spirituality as feeling of relaxation and freedom from following rules and regulations of religion, “when you talked about spirituality you don’t have organized religion, you do not have any set of dogmas or rituals” (participant A1).

Superordinate Theme 2: Spirituality and Religion

This superordinate theme is related to the discussion that whether spirituality and religion are related with each other or not.

Subordinate Themes

Muslims Group

Connection between religion and spirituality

Religion is a set of rituals and spirituality is the sense of being developed inside the person after practicing the rituals. Participant described it as “religion is based upon rituals which are found in Quran and prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught us and spirituality is the internal feeling which results from following those rituals” (participant M5).

Religion can help to lead to spirituality and without religion a person can deviate from the path of spirituality. Therefore, religion is used to control and lead to spirituality, whereas spirituality increases the religious understanding among its followers. As the participant mentions it as;

Spirituality is the practice and religion is a pattern. In religion anyone can enter and start to follow the pattern. One who follows the pattern more, the more he or she will develop spirituality. Moreover, without religious guidelines person can deviate from spiritual pathway (participant M3).

Most of the participants also focused that spirituality is the vital part of the Islam. Therefore, it is important for Muslims to practice religion and spirituality. As one of the participants mentioned it as “it is very important to practice religion and spirituality in Deen e Islam” (participant M1).

Differences between religious and spiritual people

Religious people are strict in their approach and lack the deep meaning of following rituals and other aspects of Deen (the complete lifestyle according to Islam). As the participants said:

If a person's spirituality is in accordance with lifestyle of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) then he or she will be God fearing, seeks the love of God and treat others gently and if a person does not follow lifestyle of Muhammad (PBUH) then he might not have these characteristics (participant M5).

The other half of the participants are with view that there is no difference between religious and spiritual people, but they are different from those who call themselves spiritual, but they do not follow religion, “in Islam it is not like this but in other spiritual ideologies like Buddhism and Confucius school of thought, spiritualists do not follow religion. Therefore, they do not have rituals but have community centers” (participant M1).

Christian Group

Connection between religion and spirituality

Nearly all of the Christian participants referred religion as the set of rules and regulation and spirituality as practicing the teachings of the Christ without necessary of following rules and regulations, “religion contains rituals and spirituality has no rituals. In spirituality you are not bound, but one do good deeds for the sake of love of God” (participant C1).

One participant said that there is no difference between religion and spirituality. The participant referred religion as practicing spirituality on human level, “religion and spirituality are same. Religion is something practicing spirituality on human level” (participant C4).

According to Christian participants, person cannot understand spirituality through religion. As religion only contains rules and regulation, “there are very less chances that religion can direct towards spirituality because spirituality involves following teachings of Christ and Christ's teachings does not contain any rituals” (participant C3).

Differences between religious and spiritual people

A religious person follows rules and regulations, rituals, focuses on get up and does not have that much intellect. Whereas spiritual people only focus on doing good deeds and do not follow rules and regulation,

Religious person offers prayer, read Holy book and do other stuff. This does not develop relation with God. Therefore, the religious person remains empty and shallow. Whereas spiritual person has good relationship with God and do all the rituals for His love (participant C5).

Sikh Group

Connection between religion and spirituality

Majority of the participants were with the view that religion and spirituality are interrelated. A person cannot follow religion without being spiritual and spirituality refers to the actions of performing rituals of religion in the best possible manner. One of them described it as;

To me spirituality is all about moral values and we derive moral values from religion. For example, every religion of the world orders its followers to fulfill the rights of parents, spouses, children and neighbors. Spirituality alone cannot guide us in this way (participant S2).

Differences between religious and spiritual people

All the participants mentioned different stances related to this subordinate theme. They are as follow, “every human has some spirituality. Some have less and others have more depending on their environment” (participant S1). The participant (S2) said “the basic difference is that religious person follow religion with fear and spiritual person follow religion with love.” The participant threes (S3) adds, “If a person follows religion, then he is spiritualist and if he does not follow religion then he is not spiritualist. A person can be religious but does not belief in spirituality. This is also one of the possibilities.”

Atheist Group

Connection between religion and spirituality

According to atheists, religion is a set of rules and regulations. Therefore, this inherits following rituals by force. It means that religion manipulates and control human whereas spirituality set the human free, “spirituality is what one experiences inside one’s mind to find meaning, love, peace and wisdom” (participant A5). “Religion is only a means to assert control extremely by use of manipulation” (participant A4).

Participants highlight that religion can only provide instructions related to spirituality whereas, spirituality will help us to understand religion, “religion does not need spirituality to be practiced but certainly a person would have better experience in religion by understanding spirituality. Some religions have guidelines on how to improve spirituality as well” (participant A5).

Differences between religious and spiritual people

Religious people follow certain rules and regulations. They have routines to follow, and they have beliefs about punishment and reward in the hereafter. Whereas spiritualists are free from such things. “When a priest practice religion, ritual, a mass for example, the spiritual bliss they get from it, for some” (participant A2). Participant A1 said “spiritual people do not need to worry about anything.”

Superordinate Theme 3: Spirituality and Nature

This superordinate theme is related to the fact that a person can reach spirituality by focusing on the nature.

Subordinate Themes

Muslim Group

Relation between spirituality and nature

Almost all the Muslim participants mentioned that there is relation between nature and spirituality. As everything in nature and human consist of spirit and spirit is the force which is moving everything in the universe. As participants sum it up as, “Allah has granted spirit to human. Also, everything in the universe has spirit too. Therefore, there is connection between spirituality and nature” (participant M2).

Observation in nature leads to spirituality or vice versa

Here also all the participants agreed to the point that if a person observes the functioning of the universe and in his own body, he or she can know that the complex universal system cannot run on its own and there is a Creator who is running the system.

Allah has mentioned in the Quran that, He had created human, skies and the earth. In it there are signs for you, therefore the more the person recognizes these signs, the more the person will experience spirituality in him or her (participant M5).

Christian Group

Subordinate themes: Relation between spirituality and nature

According to Christian participants, everything in nature consists of God’s spirit and that’s why we see that everything is growing or have existence. If that spirit is lifted, then everything will be destroyed, “God has created human body and make it alive after inducing spirit in it. Similarly, in this world order and peace is maintain due to God’s spirit. If that spirit is lifted, then there will be chaos everywhere” (participant C1).

Moreover, spiritual people think that there is a connection between objects of nature and with human. Without this connection people could not fulfill their needs, “spirituality teaches us that if we connect with other people and objects of nature then our survival is possible. As when we die our body is returned to earth this also highlights our connection with nature” (participant C3).

Observation in nature leads to spirituality or vice versa

If a person observes the nature with God gifted wisdom, then he or she can get to know about the spirituality. Otherwise, without wisdom one cannot reach spirituality. As wisdom indicates that this all is made by God, “according to Christianity and Islamic Ideology it is important to have God gifted wisdom to understand that this world is made by God otherwise without that wisdom person see and think about the world but could not reach to the conclusion that it is made by God” (participant C2).

Sikh Group

Relation between spirituality and nature

According to Sikh participants, God has made everything in the world, therefore, everything should be treated with care and kindness. One of the participants refer to it as the *huqam* (order) of the Creator which is based upon His mercy and kindness. It follows as, “huqam is the natural laws of the universe that never changes. Huqam is the loving will of the Creator who looks upon every potential, and not our weaknesses” (participant S1).

Observation in nature leads to spirituality or vice versa

All the Sikh participants mentioned that a person can reach to spirituality if he or she concentrate on the creation of the universe. As such harmony and beauty is made by God, “when spiritual Sikh views the beauty of this world like sceneries, flowers and birds he thinks that God will also be beautiful who had made this world so beautiful” (participant S2).

However, one of the participants deviated from this point of view. He stated his point as, “spirituality is gained through knowledge not only by observing the nature. Here I have referred knowledge which is related to ethical values not worldly knowledge” (participant S3).

Atheist Group

Relation between spirituality and nature

According to one of the participants, the relationship between spirituality and nature is very subjective. Only those who are naturalistic atheists will affirm this connection. Moreover, other participants mentioned that we are all connected with nature. As our source of origin is same. And to some nature is their best companion “It depend upon what kind of spirituality they consider” “Now there are some spiritualities and organized religions which are very close to nature and when you listen to them they are naturalists” (participant A1). “Spiritualist people will say that we are part of nature or nature itself” (participant A2).

Observation in nature leads to spirituality or vice versa

Many of the participants disagree with this point of view and focus on concentrating on oneself and then accomplish spirituality. However, one of them affirms this stance. “Yes, a person can attain spirituality just by observing the working of the world” (participant A2). “I am not sure what is working of the world, but I do not think that any formal process is necessary” (participant A5).

Superordinate Theme 4: Spirituality and Lifestyle

In this superordinate theme it is focused that what are the personality traits of spiritual people, how they interact with family and society and what are their beliefs about life.

Subordinate Themes

Muslim Group

Spirituality and ethical codes

According to participants, spiritual people are helpful to others, hopeful for the future, forgiving to others and they are also rational. As the participants mentioned these characteristics as, “Yes, spiritual people are hopeful because they think that whatever is happening with them is happening for a reason and Allah will show them the way out from every difficulty” (participant M2).

They are helpful to others because spiritual people do not value money. They value the blessings which they will receive from Allah after helping others and will remain hopeful that Allah give them better return in this life and in life after death.
(participant M1)

Participant M3 responded “Spiritual people believe in forgiving others because when they forgive others Allah will increase His blessing on them and decrease that person’s sin. So, its two-way profit of forgiving others”. “Spiritual person is rational because he is examining the signs of Allah in universe and in him” (participant M5).

Spiritualistic person's family and social life

Couple of the participants mentioned that prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the role model of spiritual people. They try to be kind and caring towards their family members. Honest and just with others. They are happy with simple lifestyle. "They are empathetic, caring and patience towards their family members. They fulfill their family, and occupational responsibilities keeping religious obligation under consideration" (participant M2).

Also, they are very dominant in their society and other people use to visit them for some advice and prayers, "spiritualistic have very impressive personality. People use to respect them and remain humble to them" (participant M4).

Goals of spiritual people

Goal of spiritual people is to present Islam to others and live life according to teachings of Islam. So that they can attain good status in front of God, "spiritual person had aim of worshipping Allah, to live life according to His principle and to struggle for the betterment of mankind" (participant M1).

Belief in destiny of spiritual person

Spiritual people belief in God instead of destiny. Muslims participants believe in making efforts in life. One of the participants mentioned that. "Spiritual people first put their trust in Allah and then do efforts" (participant M2).

Worldly benefits of spiritual people

They receive respect from other people for reaching the highest level of humanity, "they have direction of their life, they live relaxed life, they had a chance to reach higher intellect level" (participant M1).

Christian Group

Spirituality and ethical codes

According to participants, spiritualistic people are hopeful, they are also helpful to others, and they are forgiving. However, one of the participants mentioned that spiritual people are not rational; "Spiritual people are connected with God, God has plan for them and if they could not fulfill His plan and die, they will still have life after death" (participant C4). "Yes, they believe in forgiveness and forgiveness is must in Christianity" (participant C5). "The more the person has maturity in spirituality the more that person believes in helping others" (participant C1). "Spiritualistic are not rational because rational people are materialistic" (participant C3).

Spiritualistic person's family and social life

They are good to one's family and friends. As they are commanded by God to do good with them; "If a person proclaims to be spiritual, then he must implicate all of the ethical codes in his life so that he can be faithful husband and person in society" (participant C2). Spiritual people cannot handle difficult situations, so they do not marry, "spiritual people already have responsibility of spreading the words of God so they could not handle more responsibilities that's why they do not marry" (participant C3).

Goals of spiritual people

They do not go after the luxury of the world. Their motive is to please Jesus and God. Their goal in life is to preach. Spirituality imposes a sense of duty on them to improve the society, “spiritual person wants to contribute to the society, wants to contribute towards people for the sake of God” (participant C4).

Belief in destiny of spiritual person

Spiritual person does not believe in destiny, but believes in putting efforts. “We should do our best and we should not think that if it is in my destiny then I will have it, but we should be pointing at God’s will” (participant C1).

Worldly benefits of spiritual people

They do not benefit the world. Mostly they suffer from the torture of other people, but they used to remain relaxed as they knew the reality. As the participant mentioned, “spiritual people are used by the people, they are humiliated, and they are taken granted by the people, but they get benefit from nature in the form of joy” (participant C5).

Sikh Group**Spirituality and ethical codes**

Participants mentioned that spiritual people are helpful, they are hopeful and they are forgiving. Most of them also mentioned that spiritual people are not rational. Here is what they said “no one is perfect in term of rationality, even spiritual people” (participant S1). “Spiritual people used to think that they should continue to do their work no matter what they will have its result sooner or later” (participant S2). “Spiritual people have developed so much patience that wherever they see, they see God. Therefore, when they look at someone who had done wrong with them, they also see God in them and they forgive that person” (participant S4). “In Sikhism people used to give food to others because helping others is the essential is Shikhism” (participants S3).

Spiritualistic person’s family and social life

Spiritual people are sources of guidance, helping and kind towards their family and friends. Spiritual person believes in earning blessing of God and live a simple life. One of them mentioned that, “spiritual people educate their children so that they can manage themselves in difficult times. They also guide and guard them. They also support them in their bad decision so that they can gain confidence” (participant S1).

Goals of spiritual people

Spiritual people have goals for spreading peace, guidance and helping others. One of them added to these points as “they used to take care of nature, to fight for others right and work for peoples well fare” (participant S2).

Belief in destiny of spiritual person

Some spiritual people beliefs in destiny and some do not. Those who do not believe in destiny have trust on their own hard work. “They believe that everything is happening due to God’s will. Now sometimes they consider God’s will as destiny also” (participant S4).

Worldly benefits of spiritual people

Spiritual people are quite famous. People want to be like them. Spiritual people experience relaxation and remain happy. “They feel relax in this world and people think of them as righteous person” (participant S3).

Atheist Group

Spirituality and ethical codes

Here participants have valued the circumstance over declaring spiritualistic people hopeful, forgiving and rational, “it would depend on the circumstances and one’s ability to remain hopeful” (participant A3). “Yes, there is no conflict between rationality and spirituality” (participant A4).

However, some of the participants also mentioned that spiritualistic people are not rational and hopeful, forgiveness and helpful, “spiritual people are always helpful. Yes, they believe in forgiveness” (participant A2). “..because depending on the type of spiritual person, they are not always rational” (participant A5).

Spiritualistic person’s family and social life

Participants mentioned that spiritual people have families like other people “cannot generalize on this. Family lives are unique to each family group” (participant A4). “Our family and social life is the same as anyone else’s” (participant A4). Spiritual people do not tolerate religion. Their family do not have any rules and regulations and every one free to do anything, “if your parents are spiritual, they will leave you alone” (participant A5).

Goals of spiritual people

Some say that spiritual people do not go after worldly goals. Whereas others say that spirituality give goals to people, “you do not necessarily need spirituality to achieve these goals” (Participant A4). “Spirituality can help give you goals of your life” (Participant A5).

Belief in destiny of spiritual person

They do not believe in destiny. Internal and external signs can be used to predict something. “Not necessarily. Some lives are mapped out and organized” (participant A4). “If one can recognize patterns then with experience it is possible to predict that how they will develop” (participant A3).

Worldly benefits of spiritual people

Spiritual people are easy going and peaceful. They do not get special benefits compared to others. “Very little benefits this world gives to spiritual people” (participant A2). “In comparison to others? It is probably not much different, except maybe feeling a bit more at peace” (participant A5).

Superordinate Theme 5: Spirituality and Well-being

This superordinate theme highlights that, “is spirituality can lead to health mental and physical health”?

Subordinate Themes

Muslim Group

Psychological and physical health of spiritual people

They sleep early, they live in “now” state, they look forward in life, have balance diet and have firm belief in God. As the participants mentioned. “They are psychologically and mentally healthy

because they live their life in accordance with nature. For example, sleep and wake up early” (participant M2). “Spiritual people do not get stuck in the past and worry about the future because they belief in Allah” (participant M3).

Christian Group

Psychological and physical health of spiritual people

Most of the participants agreed that spiritualistic people are mentally and physically healthy and gave certain reasons for that. “Yeah, that’s the beauty of spirituality. You are both physically and mentally healthy. It’s like that you have attained peace and joy of life from God’s nature.” (participant C5). However, a couple of them doubted that spirituality might not affect to mental and physical health, “spiritual people can suffer from mental and physical illness, but they have good tendency to cope through having hope in God” (participant C2).

Sikh Group

Psychological and physical health of spiritual people

They are mentally and physically health. However, some spiritual people can have physical and mental problems, but they can cope with them. “Spiritual people are neither mentally nor physical healthy. Their health is just like normal person” (participant S4). Spiritual people have positive mindset, they use to love others, have balance diet, connection with God and knowledge. One of them mentioned it as, “by helping others’, they feel relaxed and confident” (participant S3).

Atheists Group

Psychological and physical health of spiritual people

Most of the participants mentioned that spiritual people are like normal people who suffer from mental and physical illnesses, “spiritual people are no more or less mentally and physically healthy than anybody else” (participant A2). Moreover, participants think that spiritual people are mentally and psychological well and the reasons are that they are relax as compare to religious people because of conflicting family environment, “I see more conflict within religious families. Whilst atheist spiritual families are not perfect family. Life does not revolve around forced religion. There is acceptance, tolerance and embracing the difference, calmer and logical in dealing with any life’s issue” (participant A4).

One of them mentioned that some of the religious rituals are healthy practices like fasting and eating vegetables. Therefore, atheist spiritual people also follow those behaviors, “I met a religious persons who were vegetarians and they were very healthy”...“for Muslims, fasting is good and I also do intermediate fasting” (participant A1).

Discussion

It was found that every group differs on the concept of spirituality. This highlights the socially constructed nature of this concept. From a social constructionist perspective, spirituality is not an objective reality but rather a product of cultural, religious, and individual interpretations (Airo, 2021). As to Muslims, spirituality is all about acknowledging material (body and universe) and non-material (spirit) aspects of universe and human, to Christins and Sikhs, it’s all about believing in Christ or God and following their God’s teachings, and to atheists it is about getting free from rules and regulations (religion and cultural norms). More diversity was seen among the Atheists participants related to the concept of spirituality. This clearly highlights the presence of phenomenological thinking patterns of individuals who distinguish themselves from religious and

cultural patterns of beliefs, but rather than as individuals valuing their own perception of concepts. (Guenther, 2020; Giordan, 2016; Heidl, 2024; Almirzanah, 2023).

According to Muslims and Sikhs participants, spirituality and religion are interrelated. Each is important for the other to comprehend and follow. However, spirituality holds more importance in the end (Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020; Warsha, 2019). Whereas Christian and Atheists participants suggested that religion is set of rules and regulation and spirituality do not require such rules and regulations, therefore, spirituality has very little connection with religion. Such differentiation was seen in the post-modern era when more and more differentiation was being developed between spirituality and religion (Hill et al., 2000; Niekerk, 2018). Furthermore, according to Islam and Sikh participants there is not much difference between spiritual and religious person whereas, participants of Christianity and Atheism suggested that both are different.

According to the participants of every religion and some atheist participants, nature and spirituality are connected and spirituality can be gained by concentrating on the functioning of the universe but some atheists denied such idea. According to the frameworks of Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism, this connection is further reinforced by the belief that all creation, including humans, possesses a spiritual essence, a concept that echoes elements of transcendentalism, which emphasizes the inherent spiritual unity of humans and nature, such phenomena is known as wilderness spirituality which means that developing of spiritual tendency by staying or focusing on nature (Pocta, 2023; Shcherbak & Gerus, 2020; Allevato & Marques 2011). However, few atheists affirm with the idea that only naturalists (atheist who consider nature as spiritual entity) believe in the stance mentioned above (Oppy, 2018).

Furthermore, according to literature, when Big Five and NEO FFI personality inventories were implemented on spiritual or people believing in higher transcend power. It was found that they score low on Neuroticism and high in Agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness. This indicates that spiritual and religious people have low anxiety, anger and depressive tendencies. This also indicates that they are organized, comprehensive and have tendency of accepting diverse ideas or point of views. Such quality results in increase in hopefulness, forgiveness, helping attitudes and rationality. Moreover, such traits result in loving and caring attitude towards family members and other people. Muslims, Sikhs and to some extent by Christian participants mentioned that such traits are found in spiritual people (Nangia & Ruthven, 2025; Amrai et al., 2011). Also, these personality traits predict healthy mental and physical health (Wilt, Grubbs, Exline & Pargament, 2016).

Moreover, atheist participants mentioned that spiritual people are just simple human beings, therefore they live a normal life with their daily life goals and free from family and social pressure. According to literature, people who do not believe in higher transcend power score high in Neuroticism and low in agreeableness, openness to experience and to some extent conscientiousness. Thus, indicating that these individuals have below average emotional regulation tendencies. Some of the atheist also highlights that they feel relax when connected with nature. The religious participants and some atheists “express” a profound connection between nature and spirituality. This perspective aligns with the principles of ecopsychology, which posits that humans have an innate psychological bond with the natural world, and that spiritual and mental well-being can be fostered through interaction with nature (Thoma et al., 2021; Wilt et al., 2017; Barlow et al., 2021).

Conclusion

It was found that every group showed resemblance and differences on each super and subordinate theme. Most intra faith diversity was seen within Christian and atheist groups. Moreover, greater differences were observed between groups on religion and spirituality super-ordinate theme and least differences were found in nature and spirituality super-ordinate theme. Also, diverse responses were seen between groups in spirituality and life style super ordinate theme. Most diversities were seen between religious and atheist groups in believing in destiny and life goals among the sub-ordinate theme. Whereas, similar trend was found in spirituality and well-being superordinate theme.

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