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REVIEW ARTICLE

Indian Spirituality: How Relevant is Pargament's Framework?

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Abstract The psychology of religion and spirituality is a topic of increasing interest in India as well as in the West. An internationally influential framework for defining religion and spirituality has been developed by US psychologist Kenneth Pargament, who conceptualizes spirituality and religion as search processes related to sacred realities. Pargament's framework has been found to resonate across multiple cultures and has guided and informed empirical research in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim populations. The present paper argues that Pargament's framework can also coherently resonate with Hinduism and other indigenous Indian religious beliefs and practices. We conclude that future studies of religion and spirituality in Indian contexts may benefit by framing their investigations with reference to Pargament's approach. Such framing need not be uncritical and would help bring Indian psychology of spirituality/religion in closer contact with psychology of spirituality/religion in other parts of the world, benefiting both India and the worldwide psychology of religion and spirituality.

Keywords Indian psychology · Religion · Spirituality · Sacred · Sanctification · Hinduism

Introduction

The psychology of religion and spirituality is a topic of increasing interest in India, in part due to the emergence of the Indian Psychology Movement (Cornelissen, 2002; Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). Much important work by the Indian Psychology Movement has focused on theoretically articulating the implications for modern psychology of traditional spiritually oriented Indian-based philosophies, such as Vedānta (Cornelissen, Misra, & Varma, 2014; Rao & Paranjpe, 2016; Rao, Paranjpe, & Dalal, 2008). At the same time and often independently, increasing numbers of empirical studies have examined various facets, correlates, and consequences of religion and spirituality in Indian samples (e.g., Duggal & Basu, 2012; Kamble, Watson, Marigoudar, & Chen, 2014; Kumari, Joshi, & Jain, 2013).

This upsurge of Indian interest in the psychology of religion/spirituality (R/S) is occurring synchronously with greatly increased interest in spirituality and religion in Western psychology (Paloutzian & Park, 2013; Pargament, 2013), which raises the question of what relevance the Western psychology of spirituality and religion may hold for India. A global exchange of ideas has proven beneficial in many scholarly and scientific fields. But Indian-based spiritual and religious traditions are distinct from the Abrahamic traditions that have shaped Western culture in general and Western psychology of R/S in particular. Can similar psychological concepts or research approaches be used to investigate the sources, features, and consequences of engagement with both Indian and Western spirituality and religion?

The present paper seeks to make an initial contribution toward addressing this question, which we suggest can ultimately be answered with a qualified yes. More specifically, we argue that a recent Western-derived approach to

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defining spirituality and religion may be useful for contextualizing, framing, or in some cases guiding studies of Indian spirituality and religion. If this is correct, then this definitional approach, which we call the Pargament Definition Framework, may be useful for fostering dialogue, constructive engagement, and perhaps partial integration of Indian and Western psychologies of R/S.

Arguing for the relevance and usefulness of the Pargament Definition Framework does not mean that we wish to deprecate other definitional frameworks, of which there are many (Oman, 2013). Nor do we wish to ignore issues arising from the differences between Western and Indian religions. Increasing numbers of social scientists now argue for instrumental and *pragmatic* approaches to defining core constructs such as spirituality and religion, suggesting that different scholarly purposes may require employing different definitions (e.g., Oman, 2013; Saler, 2008). We agree. Nonetheless, there are many advantages to employing shared definitions when feasible, such as enhanced capacity to dialogue with other fields, greater ability to develop shared interpretive frameworks and measurement instruments, and enhanced opportunity to aggregate findings through reviews and meta-analyses (Oman, 2013). In what follows, therefore, we aim only to show that the Pargament's framework is *sufficiently resonant* with Indian traditions that it can be used to direct attention to features of psychological interest and spiritual importance in Indian religious life (Rao, 2014), as well as to link Indian scholarship to Western and international psychology of R/S.

The Pargament Definitional Framework

Pargament's approaches emerged initially from his professional work in which he combined research and teaching as a professor of psychology with maintaining a clinical psychotherapy practice that exposed him to how ordinary US adults think and talk about spirituality and religion. Pargament has also had considerable exposure to the fact of religious diversity, as himself a member of a religious minority (Judaism), as a therapist, and through mentoring and often publishing with numerous psychology of religion graduate students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., Tarakeshwar, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2003).

As perhaps first enunciated by Pargament (1992, p. 204), the Pargament framework began with a broad and non-institutional definition of religion as a "search for significance in ways related to the sacred." In more recent years, a slightly narrower variant of this definition has increasingly been used. This newer variant explicitly ties religion to an *institutional* context, as in Pargament, Mahoney, Exline, Jones, and Shafranske (2013, p. 15) definition of religion as a "search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality." Each variant has advantages and may be most relevant for specific purposes. For example, the broader non-institutional variant aligns more closely with William James' (1902/1961) broad use of the term "religion," whereas the narrower institutional definition aligns more closely with the contemporary vernacular English connotations of "religion," as discussed below.

Pargament's approach also expanded over time to encompass spirituality, a construct widely acknowledged as related to but conceptually distinct from religion (Oman, 2013; Rao, 2014). In particular, Pargament (1997, p. 32) proposed that spirituality can usefully be defined simply as a "search for the sacred." This definition implies that not all goals are viewed as inherently spiritual—we shall call such goals *extra-spiritual*—a phenomenon with nuanced implications that we discuss later in greater detail.

Over the years, various publications by Pargament and others have explicated how the core terms of Pargament's definitional approach are meant to be understood (e.g., Hill et al., 2000; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005; Pargament et al., 2013; Pargament, Oman, Pomerleau, & Mahoney, 2017). For example, Pargament and his colleagues have explained that:

- In viewing spirituality and religion as *search* processes, the term "search" is understood as referring to "attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform" the searcher's understanding, relationship, or tie to what is being sought (Hill et al., 2000, p. 66).
- Each of these search processes involves the *sacred*, understandable most prototypically as referring to "a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual" (Hill et al., 2000, p. 66), or as embedded in entities possessing prototypical sacred qualities, such as *transcendence*, *ultimacy*, and/or *boundlessness* (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005).

A more recently evolved feature of the framework is an arguably somewhat heuristic acknowledgement that some sacred things are viewed as more enduringly or prototypically sacred than other things:

- In addition to the "sacred core" encompassing the most prototypically sacred things (e.g., Ultimate Reality, divinity), most cultures and many individuals recognize a "sacred ring" of other less prototypical objects that in some way have been recognized as "sanctified" due to an association with the core of the sacred (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005, p. 187; Pargament et al., 2017, pp. e13, e14).

Table 1 The Pargament definitional framework: selected features and assumptions, condensed

Feature	Condensed explanation
Spirituality	Defined as a "search for the sacred."[a]
Search process	"attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform"[a] the searcher's understanding, relationship, or tie to what is being sought
Sacred	Most prototypically "a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual"[a] or perceived in objects or people viewed as reflecting prototypical sacred qualities such as *transcendence*, *ultimacy*, and *boundlessness*
Religion	Definable as "search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality."[a,b]
Extra-spiritual goals[c]	Goals that are neither inherently spiritual nor inherently non-spiritual
Sanctification	The process by which non-sacred things come to be viewed as sacred

For fuller explanation see text section on "The Pargament Definitional Framework". The "Dharmic Interpretations" section contains additional elaboration in subsections on "Extra-Spiritual Goals " and "Sanctification".

[a] See text for citations to sources of quotations

[b] A broader definition of religion included in earlier versions of the framework was a "search for significance in ways related to the sacred".

[c] As explained in the text, the term "extra-spiritual" has been used by the present authors to describe features of the Pargament approach

Three implications of these definitions merit attention. First, in Pargament's earlier and broader non-institutional definition of religion, any search classified as "spiritual" is also classed as religious. Second, in both earlier and later definitions, Pargament views religion as encompassing some searches in which the sacred is involved in the pathway (or means) employed in the search, rather than as the destination (or goal). For example, in Pargament's earlier definition (in which context is irrelevant), any act of turning to the sacred (e.g., to a god) for help in attaining a goal such as physical health, emotional well-being, community involvement, or intimacy, can be classed as inherently religious (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005).

A third and important consequence—or more precisely a presupposition—of Pargament's definitional approach is that turning to the sacred as part of a search for goals other than the sacred can be classified as religious but is *not* classifiable as intrinsically spiritual. As discussed later in this paper, this does *not* imply that explicitly spiritual goals and other types of goals are inherently in *conflict* or cannot or do not often support each other. To the contrary: the key distinction is that seeking instrumental assistance from the sacred (e.g., from a god) does not necessarily imply seeking to draw closer to the sacred in the sense usually implied by a spiritual search. Therefore, turning to the sacred for goals such as physical health can confidently be classed as religious, but not every such act can be classed as spiritual—that is, such acts are not necessarily *inherently* spiritual. As elaborated later, Pargament's (1992, p. 204) writings reject "dichotomizing means and ends" by artificially separating spirituality from the "nitty–gritty mechanisms" involved in fostering spiritual growth. Indeed, the framework is compatible with views that spiritual questing may often benefit from or sometimes require efforts to attain various worldly goals such as health or prosperity. In this sense, the mundane and the spiritual can often overlap.

Pargament's approaches to defining spirituality and/or religion have been influential and cited in studies of populations adhering to diverse Abrahamic traditions (e.g., Blanton, 2002; Ghorbani, Watson, Geranmayepour, & Chen, 2014; Reimer, Dueck, Adelchanow, & Muto, 2009; Victory, 2014) and have occasionally also been used to guide studies of samples adhering primarily to Indian-based traditions (e.g., Argo, 2009). Pargament's framework also guided and shaped a landmark two-volume *Handbook* on psychology of religion/spirituality, comprising 75 chapters and more than 1400 pages, that was recently published by the American Psychological Association (Pargament, 2013). Several key features or assumptions of the Pargament framework are summarized in Table 1.

In comparison with previous definitional approaches in the Western psychology of R/S, the Pargament framework arguably possesses a number of advantages. For example, in the past, many social scientists have characterized religion/spirituality as largely static sets of rituals and beliefs. In contrast, the Pargament framework's goal orientation directs attention to ways that spirituality and religion can be quite dynamic. The search concept emphasizes that R/S encompasses what personality psychologists call *approach* goals, the aim of moving toward desired outcomes (e.g., "get closer to God"). In contrast to so-called avoidance goals for avoiding undesirable outcomes (e.g., "avoid God's displeasure"), a well-established body of empirical research links approach goals to improved psychological well-being (Emmons & Schnitker, 2013, p. 266). Similarly, the Pargament framework combines the strengths of defining R/S based on the functions that they perform (e.g., meaning-making, etc.), with defining R/S based on their substantive content (e.g., in some traditions, belief in a creator God) (Oman, 2013). More precisely, the framework fuses together both function (search processes) and substance (the sacred).

The framework is also flexible: In Western cultural settings, adherents to mystical as well as non-mystical and even fundamentalist forms of spirituality can all commonly affirm that their spirituality involves seeking the sacred, interpreted in various ways. Huston Smith (2001), an eminent scholar in the field of religious studies, has identified four extremely broad categories of orientation toward sacred realities that he calls atheism, polytheism, monotheism, and mysticism. Smith suggests that notwithstanding whatever official theology may predominate in a society, each orientation is historically and cross-culturally ubiquitous and appears "not only everywhere but everywhen, for we can track them as far back as historians can see" (p. 237). The connotations of the word "sacred" are sufficiently flexible that the phrase "search for the sacred" appears to resonate easily with at least Smith's latter three orientations: polytheism, monotheism, and mysticism. Perhaps this wide resonance helps explain the broad and growing utilization of Pargament's framework.

Dharmic Interpretations of Pargament's Terms

Understanding the Pargament framework's relevance to India requires understanding its relevance to indigenous Indian religious traditions, especially Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, which are increasingly referred to as "Dharmic religions" or "Dharmic traditions" (e.g., Monge, San Chirico, & Smith, 2016; Paranjpe, 2013, p. 1). An advantage of the "Dharmic" designation is that it collectively references these traditions by important shared content, parallel to the phrase "Abrahamic religions," which also cites important content. Sikhism may be said to combine elements from both Dharmic and Abrahamic traditions. An important caveat when using this term is that in comparison to the word "religion," the word "dharma" possesses a different and in many ways richer set of connotations, including "ethos" and "ethical guidance," and "dharma" is often *not* the best Indic language translation of "religion" (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 50).

Does Pargament's definitional framework resonate in useful ways with Dharmic traditions? Not only the term *religion* but also the term *the sacred* lack perfect analogues in Indian languages, precluding perfect matching with Indian concepts and practices. But perfection may not be required for cross-cultural usefulness and importance. Perhaps all that is needed is a moderately strong conceptual "family resemblance" of the type described by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. For example, positive psychologists Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified six major classes of character strengths and virtues that they found were widely endorsed across major human cultures in forms showing a "coherent resemblance… sharing more features than not" (p. 35).

Similarly, do components of Pargament's framework correspond in a coherent manner with key components of Indian spirituality and religion? The following subsections consider in turn the Indian relevance of each of the framework's major terms or concepts as summarized in Table 1. Several framework terms that were mentioned only briefly in the previous section are explained more fully (e.g., sanctification and the role of extra-spiritual goals in religion). Yet the number and diversity of Dharmic traditions precludes full coverage of all of them. We therefore examine most comprehensively the framework's resonance with Hinduism. Hinduism is the oldest, largest, and thereby perhaps most paradigmatic of the Dharmic traditions, which do possess many shared features (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). More suggestively than comprehensively, each of the following subsection also identifies one or more points of resonance with Buddhism, suggesting ways the Pargament framework might apply to the largest and perhaps most paradigmatic so-called non-orthodox (*nāstika*) Dharmic tradition, which exists both inside India and in diverse forms outside of India. For terminological convenience, the following sections often refer simply to "Indian" traditions rather than indigenous Dharmic traditions.

The Search Process

Regarding the goal-orientation of spirituality, Indian thought has from ancient times recognized four major classes of legitimate human goals (*puruṣārthas*), roughly translatable as duty (*dharma*), success (*artha*), gratification (*kāma*), and attainment of self-realization (e.g., *mokṣa*, liberation) (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 61). Serious spiritual aspirants, often including but by no means limited to monks and nuns, are expected to engage in spiritual practices in an effort—in Pargament's language we would call it a search—to attain the fourth *puruṣārtha*, self-realization. This fourth *puruṣārtha* has been characterized diversely as *mokṣa*, *apavarga, niḥśreyasa, kaivalya*, and *nirvāṇa*, "a set of terms… which designate variations of views concerning the highest possible state to strive for" (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 62).

Indian tradition offers numerous approaches to attaining the spiritual goal, called systems of *yoga* (e.g., "systems of spiritual development," Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 348). When pursued systematically, as under the guidance of a spiritual teacher (*guru*), this search process is often called *sādhanā* ("method of spiritual practice; path; training and practice," Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 346).

Indian traditions uniformly emphasize that fully attaining the spiritual goal involves a transformation of consciousness and one's understanding of the nature of all reality, natural and human, sacred and mundane. In Pargament's language, therefore, the middle and later stages of *sādhanā* involve a search to "transform" an aspirant's experience of the sacred from a merely cognized idea to a realized reality. Although self-effort is widely regarded by Indian traditions as necessary on the spiritual path, higher levels of realization are commonly viewed as requiring grace (*kṛpā*), especially through one's spiritual guide, or guru (*gurukṛpā*). Similarly, Pargament (2007, p. 63) notes that "the discovery of the sacred can be experienced as revelation (the sacred reveals itself to the individual), an accomplishment (the individual succeeds in finding the sacred), or both (the individual opens the door and the sacred enters)." Indian traditions such as *Advaita Vedānta* also recognize revelation-like experiences (e.g., *ātma-sākṣātkāra*) in which all dualities are transcended, from which perspective there is no agent who "does" the revealing. In this view the ultimate reality, *Brahman*, is always present, and contains all individuals. What is needed on the part of the individual is to discard the erroneous image of the self as something *other* than the ultimate reality of *ātman*/*Brahman*.

The Sacred

From ancient times, Indian traditions have recognized elevated states of consciousness that reflect many qualities, such as transcendence, ultimacy, and boundlessness, that in Pargament's framework are called "sacred." Yet the term sacred is normally translated in Sanskrit and many other Indian languages as *pavitra*, a concept that is *not* central to Hindu views of spiritual seeking regardless of its relevance in matters of ritual and ceremony. Instead, what is central in Hindu spiritual seeking is concern for self-realization, as sometimes broadly indicated by the term *adhyātma*, "pertaining to the *ātman* [Self]."

Thus, rather than tying the framework to conventional Indic translations of the word "sacred," we suggest that it may be most helpful for Indian applications of Pargament's framework to view the distinctive content of *self-realized consciousness* as a core prototype of the sacred, alongside Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*). Viewing the realized self (*ātman*) and Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*) as equally prototypical of the sacred is straightforward in Hinduism—in fact, *ātman* and *Brahman* were affirmed as identical in one ancient *Upaniṣadic* "great statement" or *mahāvākya*: "This self is *Brahman*" (*ayam ātmā brahma*, *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 1.2) (Radhakrishnan, 1994, p. 695).

Closely connected to *ātman* and *Brahman* in Indic tradition is the ancient and enduring recognition of the enlightened (i.e., self-realized) human individual, who might perhaps be regarded as a third prototypical expression related to the goal of the Indic spiritual quest, and part of the "sacred core" as viewed in Indian traditions. To a much lesser degree, and with implicit caveats, spiritual aspirants who have not yet attained self-realization are viewed in a similar light. For example, to Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, "the landlord may reside in any part of his estate, but he is generally to be found in a particular drawing-room. The devotee is God's drawing-room. God loves to sport in the heart of His devotee [where] His special power is manifest…. After the realization of God, He is seen in all beings" (Ramakrishna & Gupta, 1942, pp. 320–321, from conversations on 28 November 1883).

To describe how the Pargament framework appears to meaningfully resonate with Indic R/S tradition, the remainder of this section considers points of resonance with Indic traditional views of *ātman*, *Brahman*, and the self-realized human being. The framework's notion of a "sacred ring" of a further diverse array of sanctified objects and practices receives attention in a later section on "religion."

First, let us consider Ultimate Reality, which may be represented either personally or impersonally in Indian traditions. When represented impersonally, the highest reality, usually called *Brahman* in the *Upaniṣads* and many later scriptures, is said to be experienced in high stages of self-realization such as states of pure consciousness in which subject and object are identical. The impersonal *Brahman* is often said to be *beyond* all qualities and dualities (e.g., see *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.8.8). But according to one traditional opinion, *Brahman* is said to be "not different" whether viewed as without qualities (*nirguṇa*) or with qualities (*saguṇa*) (Radhakrishnan, 1994, p. 64). When qualities are ascribed to *Brahman*, these qualities may include analogues of the prototypical sacred qualities identified in Pargament's framework: transcendence, ultimacy, and boundlessness. For example, Radhakrishnan (1994, p. 64) notes how tradition affirms that "supra-cosmic transcendence and cosmic universality are both real phases of the one Supreme [*Brahman*]."

Other traditional Indian sources, some quite ancient (e.g., *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*) represent the higher reality as a person. This supreme person, referred to by names that include *Bhagavān*, *Viṣṇu*, and many others, may be described by terms that resonate with sacred. For example, in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 11:5:33, God is described as the source or abode of all that is holy (*tīrthāspadaṃ*).

The self-realized person is viewed as having realized or become united with the higher reality, whether viewed as personal or impersonal. Although states of ultimate spiritual attainment are characterized in different ways in different Indian traditions, such states are invariably associated with exalted qualities. Such a transformed human being is typically said to reflect exalted qualities in their “character, conduct, and consciousness” (Easwaran, 2008, p. 29). Through their union with *ātman/Brahman*, such people are commonly viewed as having *experience* of qualities akin to those deemed prototypically sacred in the Pargament framework, that is, transcendence, boundlessness, and ultimacy. But tradition also suggests that many other people around them may experience the self-realized human being as *reflecting* or *channeling* such sacred qualities—perhaps, for example, by demonstrating transcendence of self-interest, boundless compassion, or unshakable confidence that what is experienced deep in the mind’s core is the ultimate truth. In the language of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, some enlightened people may be like a hole in a wall through which “one is able to see … part of the Infinite God” (Ramakrishna & Gupta, 1942, p. 839, from conversations on 28 August 1885). More generally, to Pargament and Mahoney (2005, p. 186), sacred aspects of life “point to something that goes beyond themselves.” Although traditional Indian sources make few direct claims about how others will perceive a self-realized person, they offer many evocative descriptions of such a person’s character, conduct, and consciousness.

For example, with regard to boundlessness, we are told that *Brahman*, as the inner Self (*ātman*), is formless, eternal, and without beginning or end (*arūpam, nityam, anādy anantam*, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.3.15). One who attains the spiritual goal “sees all beings in his own self and his own self in all beings,” *sarvāṇi bhūtani ātmany evānupaśyati sarvabhūteṣu cātmānaṃ*, *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 6) (Radhakrishnan, 1994, p. 572). These *Upaniṣadic* words, although ancient, correspond to numerous more recent experiential reports from self-realized people in Indian tradition. For example, Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) reported that in his experience “Finally, the individual melts into the cosmic Consciousness, the whole world is felt in oneself and oneself suffused through the world” (Ghose, 1970, p. 1605).

Similarly, with regard to ultimacy, *Brahman* has been characterized as ultimate reality, the highest universal principle that unifies all of existence (e.g., *satyaṃ jñānam anantam brahma*, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1), experienceable as the truth of truths (*satyasya satyaṃ*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.1.20; Radhakrishnan, 1994, pp. 541, 190), and such experience is said to be “self-certifying” (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 30). In response to such an experience, Mahatma Gandhi reported that “not the unanimous verdict of the whole world against me could shake me from the belief that what I heard was the true Voice of God” (Gandhi, 1999, vol. 61, pp. 219–220, from Harijan 8 July 1933, p. 4).

Transcendence is widely endorsed in Hindu tradition, and something similar to a transcendent reality was seemingly endorsed by the Buddha when he stated that “There is, O monks, an Unborn, neither become nor created nor formed… Were there not, there would be no deliverance from the formed, the made, the compounded” (Khuddaka Nikaya, 3(Udana).8.3, translation in Smith, 1991, p. 114).[1] Some have argued that transcendence may be the most fundamental of the sacred qualities, and such a position neither contradicts nor is espoused by Pargament’s approach. More specifically, in the opening chapter in *Foundations of Indian Psychology*, Rao (2014, pp. 4–5) affirms the Indian relevance of many facets of Pargament’s framework in arguing that

> There is a general consensus between the Indian and Western perspectives that the common ground between religion and spirituality is the sacred. The sacred may refer to different things such as god, divinity, ultimate reality and so on. The common denominator of all of them, it would seem, is transcendence. Transcendence implies going beyond what is given in one’s normal sensory experience. In the spiritual traditions of India, whether Hindu or Buddhist, there is an overwhelming emphasis on transcendence as a state of being that goes well beyond sensory awareness. Spiritual pursuit is an exercise for transformation of the human condition to achieve states of transcendence. Spiritual psychology is dedicated to understanding this process.

Religion as Intended to Foster Spirituality

Pargament’s framework offers definitions for both spirituality and religion. The foregoing subsections considered the Indian relevance of defining spirituality as a “search for the sacred.”

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[1] Prabhavananda (1963/1979) noted that passages in the *Upaniṣads* “give what may appear to be three separate answers” (p. 41) to the question of the relation between *Brahman* and the universe. First, that *Brahman* and the universe “are two things, not one, and both possessed of a permanent reality” (p. 41), passages on which “the great commentator Rāmānuja … based his interpretation [and] philosophy” (p. 43). Second, passages that “there is only Brahman” (p. 43) from which “Śaṃkara…drew the philosophy for which he is known” (p. 44). Third, passages that *Brahman* “escapes all definition, all description” (p. 44), raising the “possibility that [these passages], too, had an important place in later Hindu philosophy …. Who can say whether the apparent agnosticism of the Buddha … his refusal to make any affirmation whatever regarding Brahman, or God, may not have come from his attention to such passages…. For nobody doubts that the Buddha made the most thorough study of the ancient scriptures” (p. 45).

Do the framework's approaches to defining *religion* also resonate with Dharmic traditions? We believe that they do. Let us consider the narrower and more recent institutional definition of religion as a "search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality" (Pargament et al., 2013, p. 15). The phrase "established institutions" can be understood broadly as encompassing not only chartered organizations, but also established cultural customs and expectations.[2] Viewed in this light, traditional Indian culture encompasses many institutions with a primary emphasis on fostering spirituality, understood as seeking the fourth *puruṣārtha* (e.g., self-realization or *mokṣa*) or *nirvāṇa* (as in Buddhism and *Bhagavad-Gītā* 6.15). These include culturally understood roles such as spiritual teachers and preceptors (e.g., *guru*, *ācārya*), the enlightened spiritual teacher (*satguru*), the disciple (*śiṣya*), and concepts such as the spiritual lineage (*paramparā*) and spiritual school (*sampradāya*). A spiritual search that is guided or structured through such institutions may be said to be religious, according to the Pargament framework. In Buddhism, such institutions commonly affirm and teach the Buddha's Eightfold Path (*aṣṭāṅgamārga*), enunciated in his first discourse as recorded in the *Dharmacakrapravartana Sūtra*, as the means to *nirvāṇa*.

In addition, traditional and much of contemporary Indian society is permeated by other roles, facilities, and practices that inform relations to the divine, including the priest (*pujārī*), the religious scholar (*paṇḍit*), as well as the household shrine and/or community temple (*mandir*), the pilgrimage site (*tīrthakṣetra*), and activities such as ritual worship (*pūjā*) and pilgrimage (*tīrthayātrā*) (Fuller, 2004). Each of these cultural institutions is philosophically justified and derived from traditional worldviews that recognize spiritual self-realization (i.e., the fourth *puruṣārtha*) as the highest goal in life, and recognizes these roles and activities as helping individuals and communities to maintain favorable relations with the higher realities that are the goal of self-realization. In this broader sense, then, all of these roles, facilities, and activities can be viewed as a context with the ultimate purpose of supporting stability and progress toward spiritual self-realization and liberation, and thus may arguably be viewed as "religion" according to the Pargament framework's definitions of religion.

Acknowledging Both Spiritual and Extra-Spiritual Goals

Indian tradition does not, of course, embrace *all* goals or activities as inherently spiritual, either in their motives or in their effects. People are viewed as endowed with a variety of naturally conditioned drives that may be channeled or expressed in ways that are either beneficial or detrimental to a spiritual quest.

Indian traditions offer many teachings about the spiritual *effects* of different activities and goals. For example, the distinction between what is merely pleasurable (*preyas*) versus what is lastingly beneficial and "essentially good" (*śreyas*) was enunciated as early as the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.2.1–3. Similar distinctions have been affirmed by almost all subsequent Indian philosophies (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 62) and include the need to exercise discrimination (*viveka*) between what is unreal and real (*asat* versus *sat*, p. 309), or what is impermanent versus permanent (*anitya* versus *nitya*, p. 288). Importantly, Indian tradition from ancient times has affirmed that pursuit of a specific goal—for example, seeking to earn more money—may be spiritually beneficial for one individual, but spiritually detrimental to another individual, depending upon each individual's situation and individual responsibilities (*svadharma*). One step in the Buddhist Eightfold Path is right livelihood (*samyag-ājīva*), pursuing one's livelihood goal in an appropriate and ethical manner, which is distinct from pursuing wrong livelihood (*micchā-ājīva*) (see *Vanijja Sutta*, *Anguttara Nikāya* 5.177).

Most broad categories of everyday activities and goals—such as efforts to obtain wealth, health, relationships, or intimacy—can be motivated either by natural drives, or by spiritual seeking and commitment, or by a combination of such motives. The pursuit of such an everyday goal does not, therefore, usually imply a spiritual motive, nor does it imply the absence of a spiritual motive. In that sense, most everyday goals are not *inherently* spiritual, nor are they inherently devoid of spirituality. We shall therefore refer to such everyday goals and accompanying activities as *extra-spiritual*—goals/activities that may or may not be undertaken for a spiritual purpose.

In contrast to Indian tradition, the Pargament framework makes almost no claims about the spiritual effects of various activities. Instead, motivations are suggested as criteria to distinguish between goals that are regarded (i.e., defined) as spiritual versus goals that are regarded as extra-spiritual. For example, Hill et al. (2000, pp. 64–65) note that people may engage in activities such as music, gardening, or vegetarianism for various motives. For such an activity to be classified as a component of a person's spiritual practice, a spiritual motive must be present. For example, people may engage in vegetarianism from various motives ranging from "the belief that modern agricultural practices are unfair [… to] the belief that meat consumption damages the human body." But "unless [the motivating belief] incorporates a sense of the sacred (e.g., the belief that all life is precious; the belief that the physical body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that consuming animal products damages that "temple"), then the… vegetarianism is not [classified as] spiritual."

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[2] Pargament's scholarship offers little guidance or restriction on how to interpret "institution." Dictionaries offer definitions unrestricted to formal organizations. For example, an influential US dictionary offers nine definitions including "1. an instituting or being instituted; establishment. 2. an established law, custom, practice, system, etc. 3. an organization having a social, educational, or religious purpose…. 8. a system of the elements or rules of any art or science [Obsolete]," and derives the word from Latin *institutio*, "a disposition, arrangement, establishment" (Webster & McKechnie, 1983, p. 951).

Pursuit of Extra-Spiritual Goals in Religious Settings

Hill et al. (2000) note that people sometimes pursue extra-spiritual goals and activities in religious settings. For example, many religious organizations in India and elsewhere sponsor various forms of community service (*sevā*), such as offering free meals to the public (see Beckerlegge, 2011). Many members of the religious community may engage in such service for spiritual motives. In an Indian context, such people may seek to engage in community service in a spirit of *karma yoga* as "selfless action [that] is altruistic and for a righteous cause that transcends the ego and the gratifications it seeks" (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 230). But community members may also engage in such service for other motives that may shift or evolve over time, such as desires for comfort, affiliation, or prestige (Oman, Thoresen, & McMahon, 1999). The people who receive the service—for example, free meals offered at a religious site—may also do so for a mixture of spiritual and extra-spiritual motives. Regardless of motivation, however, participating though a religious institution in such service or reception of service can be classified as "religious" in the Pargament framework, because it reflects "search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality" (Pargament et al., 2013, p. 15). More generally, according to Hill et al. (2000, p. 68),

> Some forms of religiousness may involve a search for non-sacred [i.e., extra-sacred] goals either 1) in addition to or 2) in place of the search for the sacred.… the search for the non-sacred [i.e., extra-sacred goals] may be conducted in a setting or context (e.g., a mosque, temple, church or synagogue) that is designed to foster the search for the sacred. For example, people whose religion is motivated by an extrinsic orientation… are said to use their religion as a means to achieve other, more external ends such as safety, personal comfort, or affiliation.

Safety, comfort, and affiliation are natural and often healthy motivations, and their presence merely reflects the fact that religious communities are composed of people. With the possible exception of a self-realized saint or sage, one may expect that over the course of a day, almost every member of a religious community will be animated by extra-spiritual motives in addition to animation by spiritual motives. But the balance of spiritual and extra-spiritual motives can be expected to differ between individuals. Indian tradition affirms that unadmirable egoistic motives may sometimes be present. For example, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa warned often that some "pundits talk big, but where is their mind fixed? On… creature comforts and money. The vulture soars very high in the sky, but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pit" (Ramakrishna & Gupta, 1942, pp. 729–730, from conversations on 11 March 1885).

Similarly, eminent American psychologist Gordon Allport (1950) also, famously, distinguished between "the extrinsically motivated person [who] uses his religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated lives his religion" (Allport and Ross quoted in Donahue, 1985, pp. 400–401). Allport's distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic religious motivation gave rise to many self-report questionnaire scales and dominated the Western empirical psychology of religion for much of the latter twentieth century and has occasionally been measured in Indian samples (Donahue, 1985; Kamble et al., 2014). Yet Allport's conception is arguably problematic and has been criticized as fostering polarized and oversimplified views of religious motivation. In particular, in initially offering his framework, Pargament (1992, pp. 203–204) argued that under the influence of Allport's distinction, the psychology of religion had set up

> a forced choice between two equally untenable alternatives: the hypocritical manipulation of a faith to achieve ends devoid of spiritual value (religion as used) or the devotion to spiritual values untainted by the nitty–gritty mechanisms it takes to realize them (religion as lived) …. In dichotomizing means and ends, we overlook the more central questions about the nature of each and how they come together in religious experience …. when these two fully interrelated processes are separated, the varied configurations of means and ends that give expression to religious life are obscured.

Such a holistic view seems compatible with the Indian ethos. Since ancient times, Indian traditions have recognized that spiritual and extra-spiritual goals can be aligned. Such recognition is arguably embedded in conceptions of the spiritual values of four traditional stages of life (*āśramas*), perhaps especially the householder stage (*gṛhastha*). Stewardship of the body—"trusteeship," in the language of Mahatma Gandhi—is compatible not only with Gandhi's teachings, but with many ancient Indic concepts, such as the Buddha's emphasis on a middle path, or teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* 6.16 that "yoga is not eating too much, nor is it not eating at all, and not the habit of sleeping too much, and not keeping awake" (*nā'tyaśnatas tu yogo'sti na cai'kāntam anaśnataḥ na cā'tisvapnaśīlasya jāgrato nai'va* ca). Similarly, in emphasizing the alignment of spiritual development with fulfilling basic human needs, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that "For a person suffering from the pangs of hunger, and desiring nothing but to fill his belly, his belly is his God" (Gandhi, 1999, vol. 35, p. 88, from Young India 20 May 1928, p. 187). Perhaps the perceived alignment of spiritual and extra-spiritual national goals was particularly evident during the Indian independence movement, when Gandhi wrote that "when I say that I prize my own salvation above everything else, above the salvation of India, it does not mean that my personal salvation requires a sacrifice of India's political or any other salvation. But it implies necessarily that the two go together" (Gandhi, 1999, vol. 26, p. 223, from Young India 23 February 1922). More recently, Rao (2014, p. 5), affirmed that

> in the Indic traditions, spirituality is the quest and religions are the tools and technologies – first, to aid in that quest and second, to apply the discoveries of the spiritual quest to life and living.

Sanctification

As noted earlier, the Pargament framework views some entities, such as a divine being or ultimate reality, and some specific qualities, such as transcendence and ultimacy, as most prototypically sacred. But each religious tradition also views certain other things as sacred because they are "able to take on sacred or divine attributes, either in character or because it is associated with the sacred or divine" (Hill et al., 2000, p. 67). For example, many religious houses of worship, such as temples, mosques, or churches, are regarded as sacred, and certain places within those buildings, such as an altar, may be regarded as particularly closely associated with the sacred. In Pargament's language, these objects have become *sanctified* (Hill et al., 2000; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005).[3] Many things may become sanctified, including not only physical objects, but words, texts, social roles, responsibilities, and goals.

The notion of sanctification as perceived close association with the sacred seems applicable to Indian traditions, where it may be understood as the perception of a close association with a god or with sacred qualities such as transcendence. Various scriptures encourage or catalogue such associations (e.g., *Bhagavad-Gītā* 10.19-41). Plants may be viewed as sacred, such as the *tulasī* plant (sacred to *Viṣṇu*) and the *bilva* tree (sacred to *Śiva*), as well as rivers (*Gaṅgā*), mountains (*Kailāsa*, *Aruṇācala*), sounds (e.g., *Auṃ*, *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*), texts (*Upaniṣads, Bhagavad-Gītā*, *Tripiṭaka*), places of pilgrimage (*Kāśī*, *Sārnāth*, *Bodh Gayā*), the shrines and images of various deities (*mandir*, *mūrti*), monasteries (*maṭha*, *vihāra*), various rites or activities such as worship (*pūjā*), sacrifice (*yajña*), the observance of specific holidays (*Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī*, *Upavasatha*, *Buddha Pūrṇimā*), or specific ceremonies such as marriage (*vivāha*) or ordination (*upasampadā*). Indian scriptures and traditions also teach that certain responsibilities (*dharmas*) are associated with various roles such as parent, child, ruler, subject, priest, student, and teacher, thereby infusing these roles with a sacred quality to the extent that these teachings are accepted. Sometimes events elevate previously ordinary activities into sanctity, as happened with the act of home spinning during the Indian independence movement.[4]

The full roster of what a religious community holds sacred changes over time, as new houses of worship are built and old ones retired, new religious images are consecrated (*puṇyīkṛ*), or new people occupy sacred roles. An important dimension of a child's religious education or of a new convert's socialization into a religious community is the sanctification in their perceptions of the various things held sacred by the religious community. This typically includes the goals and responsibilities associated with various social roles. Hill et al. (2000, p. 68) suggest that "perhaps the most central part of the religious socialization process is the 'sanctification' of seemingly non-religious goals." That the sanctification of role-related goals may be consequential is evocatively expressed by Pargament (1999, p. 12) who notes that

> A job is likely to be approached differently when it becomes [viewed as a sacred] vocation. A marriage likely takes on special power when it receives divine sanction. The search for meaning, community, self, or a better world are likely to be transformed when they are invested with sacred character. Even if beliefs in a personal God fade, other objects of significance may remain sanctified.

A growing body of research supports the proposition that the sanctification of goals, roles, and personal relationships can be consequential (Emmons & Schnitker, 2013; Pargament & Mahoney, 2005; Pargament et al., 2017). This includes the perceived sanctification of learning among college students, which has been found to predict higher levels of commitment to learning, better study strategies, and improved educational outcomes (Phillips & Kitchens, 2016).

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[3] Emmons and Crumpler (1999) advocated use of the term "sacralization" rather than "sanctification," but the latter has become standard in the psychology literature.

[4] Mahatma Gandhi stated that "Spinning has become a part and parcel of the Ashram prayer. The conception of spinning as sacrifice has been linked with the idea of God, the reason being that we believe that in the Charkha and what it stands for lies the only hope of salvation of the poor" (Gandhi, 1999, vol. 91, p. 420, also in Harijan 18 August 1946, p. 263).

The process of sanctification, which grows easily out of the Pargament framework, appears unstudied but coherent and potentially important in the Indian context. To date the Indian Psychology Movement has emphasized the important task of retrieving discursively presentable concepts from the knowledge-oriented sections of traditional scriptures (e.g., *jñāna–kāṇḍa*). Similarly, the case presented in this paper for the Pargament framework's relevance to Indian tradition has emphasized traditional Indian texts and philosophies, rather than qualitative interview data about everyday R/S practices and perceptions, which are presently largely unavailable for Indian samples. But qualitative data from Western samples have been used extensively by Pargament and his colleagues in articulating their framework (e.g., Pargament & Mahoney, 2005), and similar narrative information from Indian samples could help guide Indic application and fine-tuning of the framework.

Indeed, there are many reasons to believe that a great deal of the actual transmission of religion as a force that fosters spirituality occurs on levels of culture and life that are less discursive and philosophical. Derivative (*smṛti*) scriptures such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* contain enormous amounts of narrative material that have entered popular culture through many media ranging from songs to theater, and many will agree with Eknath Easwaran that "The Hindu tradition has a genius for conveying… profound truths through deceptively simple stories" (Easwaran, 2006, p. 45). Songs and poetry of devotional saints such as Mīrābāī and Tukārāma have also had an enormous impact on popular spirituality (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016), which is arguably an essential basis giving rise to new generations of enlightened teachers and saints. Sanctification may be a useful construct for understanding and studying the impacts on spiritual consciousness from such narratives, poems, songs, and numerous other facets of popular religious practice, perhaps essential for a psychological understanding of how a living sense of spirituality is transmitted from generation to generation.

Conceptualization Versus Translation

We have attempted to show that the Pargament Definition Framework coherently and usefully resonates with Indian religious and spiritual traditions. This does not mean, however, that all of its terms can be coherently translated into Indian languages. The English word "sacred," for example, is derived from Greek and Latin roots, but lacks exact cognates in other Indo-European languages (Lutzky, 1993; Oman, 2013). Similarly, although *adhyātma*—literally "pertaining to the *ātman* [Self]"—may be among the closest Sanskrit analogues to the English word "spiritual," and *puṇya* (meritorious), *pavitra* (purity), and *yajñīya* (worship-worthy) may be among the closest Sanskrit analogues to "sacred," these words also possess many connotations that diverge. One of the closer analogues to sanctification is *puṇyīkṛ*, but this word is little known and seldom used. It may therefore bear repeating that the main virtue of Pargament's framework is not that it matches precisely and conveniently with either classical or modern *language*, but that it points to important and researchable features of tradition, culture, and behavior.

In fact, the framework's terms do not all strongly match even with their popular meanings in present-day American vernacular English. For example, many people in the contemporary West—including approximately one-quarter of US adults—identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious" (Oman, 2013). Such people often possess unfavorable views of organized religion, and reject the label of "religious," despite affirming a "spirituality" that may sometimes involve a systematic search for the sacred and/or sacred qualities such as transcendence (Ammerman, 2013, p. 268; Mercadante, 2014). This can give rise to mismatches between vernacular and social scientific terminology. Whereas "spiritual but not religious" people reject the label "religious," they may still be classifiable as religious in the Pargament framework. This is clearest for the frameworks broader early non-institutional definition of religious as "a search for significance in ways related to the sacred," because all such people hold the spiritual goal as significant. Tensions between vernacular and professional language should, of course, be kept in mind when constructing survey instruments or interview protocols (Oman, 2013).

One final consideration in employing the Pargament framework is worth noting. Compared to the term "religion," the term "spirituality" lacks an observable organizational referent and has only more recently been incorporated in social scientific literature. Perhaps for such reasons, compared to "religion," the term "spirituality" is generally regarded as vaguer and subject to a wider range of definitions. Some influential researchers, such as Koenig, King, and Carson (2012), have argued that clinicians must be prepared to use multiple definitions of spirituality, employing broad and inclusive definitions when discussing spirituality with clients, and narrower, more precise definitions when conducting research. Such a multi-level approach is compatible with the instrumental and pragmatic view of definitions that underlies the present discussion, but is not required by it (Oman, 2013).

Future Directions

In science, definitions do not substitute for theories or for evidence, but they may suggest fruitful avenues for theoretical, scholarly, and empirical inquiry. The Pargament Definitional Framework is no exception. In this paper we have most extensively explored the framework's compatibility with Hinduism. We have alluded to various general ways that the framework resonates with Buddhism, but a more thorough scholarly investigation will ultimately be needed of its points of resonance and/or dissonance with Indian Navayana Buddhism[5] (Zelliot, 2016) as well as with older Buddhist traditions such as Mahāyāna, Theravāda, Vajrayāna, and Amitābha/Pure Land Buddhism, which exist primarily outside of India. Also needed is scholarly investigation of the framework's compatibility with Jainism and Sikhism. Non-Dharmic, non-indigenous Indian traditions such as Christianity and Islam have existed on Indian soil for millennia, have themselves developed specifically Indian forms, and also need investigation to produce a fully comprehensive understanding of the framework's applicability to all Indian religions.

Many topics for empirical investigations are also suggested by various components of the Pargament framework. Earlier, we alluded to the desirability of qualitative studies of sanctification in Indian samples. Oman and Singh (2016) suggested diverse topics for empirical investigation that are related to spiritual seeking and may thus benefit from the goal orientation of the Pargament framework (e.g., "Q7. What is the spiritual role of psychological attachment to the divine?", Table 1, p. e4). More immediately, the Pargament framework's emphasis on goals and search processes also suggests various qualitative interview studies, such as:

- Employing open ended interviews and other ethnographic methods to study a "religious" community associated with a temple: What are the worshipers searching for? What are their mundane and extra-spiritual goals (health, wealth, success in a court case), what are their transcendent goals, and how are these inter-related?
- Investigating spiritual aspirants (*sādhakas*) at various stages of progress in their *sādhanā* as identified by *gurus* willing to participate in a study: What are the aspirants searching for, and how?

Conclusion

In the Indian context, millennia-old teachings about the value of systematic spiritual practice (e.g., *yoga* and *sādhanā*) suggest the value of definitional approaches, such as Pargament's, that direct attention to spiritual goals and strivings. We have suggested that Pargament's framework *resonates* in coherent ways with Indian spiritual and religious beliefs and practices. If this is correct, then future studies of religion and spirituality in Indian contexts can likely benefit by framing their investigations with reference to Pargament's framework, which has been widely influential in the West and increasingly influential internationally. Such framing should not be uncritical, and would help bring Indian psychology of spirituality/religion in closer contact with psychology of R/S in other parts of the world, fostering dialogue and engagement that is likely to benefit not only India and the West, but the global community.

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[5] Navayana Buddhism is followed by millions in India today. Its founder, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, expressed his distinctive view of religion in his book *Buddha and his Dhamma*, which states that "Buddha preached that Dhamma is morality, and as Dhamma is sacred, so is morality" (Ambedkar, 1957, Book Four, Part I, Sect. 6, last sentence). As expressed in this passage, Dr. Ambedkar's views of sacredness positively resonate with the Pargament framework's emphasis on the sacred as corresponding with central religious goals and concerns.

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