Manifesting hope in despair: Exploring prosocial behavioural outcomes of COVID-19

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Abstract

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has resulted into global devastation. This study attempts to explore the positive phenomenal impact of perceived pandemic anxiety resulting in prosocial behaviour (PB) through the mechanisms of self-awareness and spiritual transformation using terror management theory (TMT). The study also examines the moderating impact of conscious state expansion (CSE) on the self-awareness and spiritual transformation relationship, and the impact of this moderation effect is further tested separately on two gender groups. The data (N = 573) for the study were collected from the Punjab state of India during the ascending phase of outbreak. The results of PLS-SEM analysis reveal the significant influence of variables under study on prosocial behavioural outcomes. Taking insights from the findings of the study it becomes clear that during dreadful situations, when people experience the possibility of loss of life, their self-awareness level increases, which in turn results in their spiritual transformation. Such mechanism is observed more in the people possessing higher spiritual consciousness. The study concludes by recognising the positive role played by spiritual transformation (ST) in the evolution of the attributes of care and compassion for others, resulting in positive social consequences. The discussion, implications, limitations, and future directions are presented and discussed.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the 2019 severe acute respiratory syndrome novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2; COVID-19) and its massive proliferation over more than 211 countries and territories has raised agony on an international level. The infectious virus that emerged from Wuhan, China, in December 2019 reached a stage where the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (WHO 2020). As per the WHO Situation Report – 152 (2020), the numbers of COVID-19-positive confirmed cases and deceased cases have surged to 8,525,042 and 456,973, respectively, around the globe. Looking at the figures from India, COVID-19

has resulted into an upsurge of more than 395,048 confirmed cases from just one case on 30 January 2020 and the numbers are still rising exorbitantly.[1]

Taking insights from a recent Indian study on COVID-19 by Sood (2020), it becomes evident that the disease can cause anxiety in people leading to psychological disturbances, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and other behavioural disorders. The study substantiated the findings of Wheaton et al. (2012), which asserted that the pandemic illness of H1N1 influenza (swine flu) led to high levels of anxiety amongst people. The outset of COVID-19 has generated fear of being infected. The illness is proving to be fatal, leading to the genesis of mental and psychological trauma amongst the people. Our study, therefore, is an attempt to answer the following research question: Are there any positive behavioural outcomes that can arise as a consequence of pandemic-led anxiety?

During the period of this international crisis, when a plethora of unfavourable impacts will certainly be observed, the authors believe that certain positive behavioural outcomes could also be expected. According to terror management theory (TMT) of social behaviour (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, 1986; Greenberg and Arndt, 2011; Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski, 1991), it is believed that during dreadful situations the cognitive abilities of the human mind bring about the self-awareness that death is inevitable and could come at any time. Such self-awareness motivates people to deeply understand their philosophy of life, which enhances their spiritual perspective and even turns the profane into the sacred. Further, it is believed that the intensity of such spiritual transformation (ST) resulting from self-awareness will be comparatively higher in persons who possess the abilities to enter higher levels of spiritual consciousness.

Having said that, the spiritually transformed individuals further develop attributes of care and compassion for others, resulting in positive social consequences. TMT also argues that in times of terror, individuals get motivated to strengthen their social connections by convincing themselves that one can feel immortal by somehow re-living their life, though symbolically, even after their inevitable death.

Past research has rarely dwelled upon the relationship of perceived anxiety (PA) during a pandemic with prosocial behavioural outcomes. Hence, the present study addresses this gap and attempts to examine the influence of perceived anxiety on prosocial behavioural outcomes through the processes of self-awareness and spiritual transformation. The study also explores the moderating role of conscious state expansion (CSE) on the relationship between situational self-awareness and spiritual transformation such that the relationship would be stronger within individuals experiencing CSE and weaker in others. Further, the study examines the role played by gender in differentiating the impact of CSE on the relationship of self-awareness and spiritual transformation.

2 | THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | Definition Of Variables

2.1.1 | Perceived anxiety (PA)

Anxiety is an emotional situation affecting the behavioural, cognitive, and psychological states of mind (Das, 2014; Putnam, 2010). It is highly individualistic in nature and is characterised by feeling of apprehension, tension, worry, and nervousness (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986). It is pertinent to note that during any pandemic outbreak, emotional states of individuals get disturbed and they start facing excessive anxiety in response to pandemic illness (Wheaton et al., 2012).

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[1] Data as received by WHO from national authorities by 10:00 CEST, 20 June 2020 (WHO situation report-152)

2.1.2 | Situational self-awareness (SSA)

Situational self-awareness is a practice of comparing one's present actions with his/her internalised standards so as to make necessary changes in case of any inconsistency (Silvia and Duval, 2001; Sutton, 2016). It is also termed "private self-awareness", i.e., awareness of oneself from a personal perspective (Fejfar and Hoyle, 2000). Undoubtedly, such awareness leads to the path of self-development by alleviation of psychological distress amongst individuals (Sutton, 2016).

2.1.3 | Spiritual transformation (ST)

Spiritual belief involves giving thoughtful consideration to the existence of a supreme power and establishing a sense of association with it (Gall and Grant, 2005; Cattich and Knudson Cattich and Knudson-Martin, 2009). Kaye and Raghvan (Kaye and Raghavan, 2002) asserted that it can help a person to convert any kind of illness or disability into opportunity for spiritual growth. Past literature (Sandage and Moe 2014) clearly depicts that people experience a variety of spiritual changes by understanding their existential situation, which becomes instrumental in dealing with adverse situations

2.1.4 | Prosocial behaviour (PB)

Prosocial behaviour is focused on stimulating the growth of others by assisting them (Eisenberg 1982). It is concerned with eradicating undesirable behaviours and nurturing positive traits by encompassing behaviours such as sharing, caring, helping others, volunteering (Gupta and Thapliyal, 2015), cooperating, donating, helping, and comforting others (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1998; Greener and Crick, 1999).

2.1.5 | Conscious state expansion (CSE)

Conscious state expansion is when a person is able to move towards an ultimate state of consciousness (Kotnala, 2014) by being aware of their internal and external environment (Nazam, 2014) through meditation, contemplation, and prayer (King 2008). Conscious state expansion is, therefore, an ability to enter and exit higher/spiritual states of consciousness at one's own discretion (Sood, Bakhshi, and Gupta, 2012).

2.2 | HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

2.2.1 | Perceived anxiety and situational self-awareness

Although it has been established in the previous literature that a high level of anxiety leads to a lower level of self-awareness (Kurosawa and Harackiewicz, 1995), several studies also throw light on the positive outcomes of different aspects of anxiety. For example, George and Stopa (2008) found that people who are socially anxious are found to experience high self- awareness. Similarly, Stephan and Stephan (1985) revealed that a higher level of anxiety intensifies self-awareness (Van Zomeren, Fischer, and Spears, 2007). Hence, it is expected that perceived anxiety of a pandemic illness might enhance situational self-awareness, and we hypothesise that:

H1: Perceived anxiety is positively related to situational self-awareness

2.2.2 | Situational self-awareness and spiritual transformation

Wigglesworth (2004) stated that self-awareness is the foundation to initiate the process of spiritual growth. In fact, it is a circular process, because as the spiritual growth unfolds, our self-awareness also strengthens, which further supports and contributes to spiritual growth. Similarly, Vaughan (2002) stated that self-awareness is an essential requisite for unfolding the spiritual path. Therefore, based on past literature it is expected that self-awareness may enhance spiritual transformation. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

> H2: Self-awareness is positively related to spiritual transformation

2.2.3 | Spiritual transformation and prosocial behaviour

Schnitker (Schnitker et al., 2014) concluded that spiritual transformation brought a positive change in the moral sociability of adolescents. James (1961) stated that connectivity with God enables a person to shift his or her inner feelings from ego to a better understanding of life and helps to establish harmonious relations with others. This is instrumental in developing attachment with community and nature. Taking inferences from the aforementioned cases, it is hypothesised that:

> H3: Spiritual transformation is positively related to prosocial behaviour

2.2.4 | Moderating role of conscious state expansion

Torabi and Moghimi (2013) stated that CSE enables a person to attain a higher level of self-awareness. Zohar, Marshall, and Marshall (2000) and Maniago (2017) also established a close relationship between self-awareness and spiritual intelligence, resulting in CSE. Hence, it is expected that CSE is instrumental in transforming a person spiritually. Therefore, the study is focused on finding the moderating effect of CSE on the self-awareness–spiritual transformation relationship. It was therefore hypothesised that:

> *H4: Conscious state expansion moderates the relationship between spiritual self-awareness and spiritual transformation*

2.2.5 | Moderating role of gender in conscious state expansion

The abovementioned hypothesis is based on the assumption that a person's spiritual transformation, which is influenced by self-awareness, might get affected by his/her CSE in such a way that a self-aware person with a higher level of CSE is more likely to experience spiritual transformation as compared to a person with a low level of CSE. However, while analysing this relationship, it is equally important to study the differences in CSE of males and females. The past studies illustrate that gender plays a pertinent role in understanding the CSE of a person (Ahangar and Khan, 2015; Hamidi and Sedaghat, 2013; Heidari *et al*. 2017; Khan and Singh, 2013; Kotnala, 2014; Sidiqui Sprang and Silman, 2013). Based on the aforementioned studies, it is believed that CSE moderated by a person's gender plays a significant role transforming him/her spiritually. Thus, the following hypothesis has been formulated:
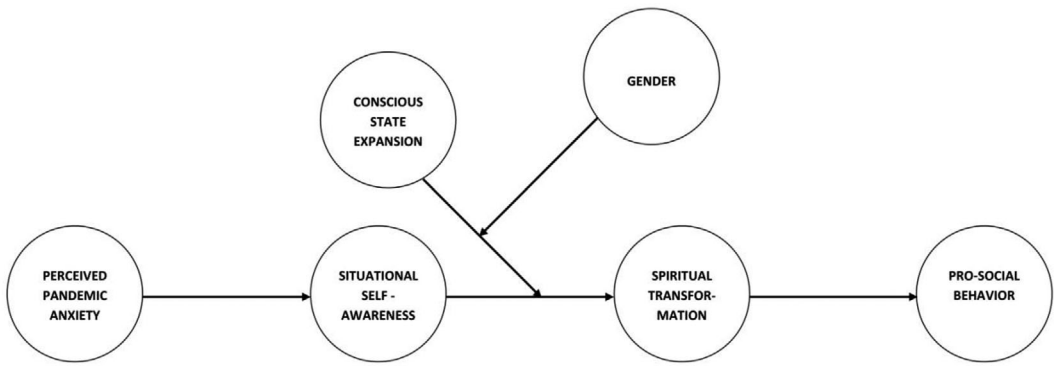
FIGURE 1 Research Model

H5: The magnitude of the moderation of conscious state expansion for the influence of situational self-awareness on spiritual transformation is contingent upon gender, such that the strength of the moderated relationship will be different for males and females

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Research model

The present study utilises terror management theory (TMT) for understanding the relationship between perceived anxiety and prosocial behavioural outcomes. The main reason for choosing TMT over other theoretical frameworks was that the framework of TMT exactly aligns with the main objective of the study, i.e., to examine if perceived pandemic anxiety influences social behaviours. Moreover, TMT has been widely applied in relevant literature for dealing with stressful events (Mann and Wolfe, 2016; Maxfield, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, 2013; Maxfield, John, and Pyszczynski, 2014; Sole, 2007).

The TMT framework states that awareness of the inevitability of death has a deep-rooted impact on the way people think, feel, and act (Maxfield, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, 2013). As individuals continued existence gets threatened and they come closer to the occurrence of death, the feeling of anxiety ascends within them. To fight this anxiety, people start relying on worldviews, social values, and self-esteem, and they are able to give meaning to their lives (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, 1986). They become more self-aware, and this results in social phenomena in the form of social human behaviours (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski, 1991). The research model of this study, based on the framework of TMT, is presented in Figure 1.

3.2 | Study participants and measurement

The participants and procedure of the study have been systematically chosen. As per the data retrieved from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (Government of India Undertaking), the first positive case of COVID-19 in India was reported in Punjab on 9 March 2020. During the month of April 2020, the pandemic spread disastrously, such that the number of positive cases rose from 46 cases on 1 April 2020 to 480 cases on 30 April 2020, which amounted to a more than 10 times increase in just one month. This proliferation in number of positive cases led to a need for conducting a study catering to the different behavioural outcomes caused by pandemic anxiety.

The latent variables were measured by the scales adapted from the previous literature. The study proceeded to pre-testing to ensure that statements were correctly worded and that the respondents

could understand the questions. (Kumar *et al*. 2013, as cited in Memon et al., 2017). Semi-structured interviews (Neuert and Lenzner, 2016) were conducted with a total of 15 people (Wills 2005), which included five India-based experts and 10 actual respondents of the study. The experts were asked to fill the questionnaire first and afterwards debrief any problem encountered or modification required in the statements. In contrast, the respondents were instructed to speak aloud any thoughts that arose in their mind while filling the questionnaire. The notes were prepared for the changes that were required in the statements. After incorporating changes, the pre-testing was done for the second time (Memon et al., 2017) with five randomly selected respondents. The interviews with newly selected respondents did not suggest any changes, which strengthened the validity of the instrument. It is only after passing this initial phase of pre-testing that the authors moved towards the next stage of pilot testing.

The data for the study were collected from the adult residents in the Punjab state of India. As the state is divided into three main regions – Malwa, Majha, and Doaba – stratified random sampling method was used to collect the data comprising 650 residents. It is noteworthy that amongst the three regions, Malwa is the largest region (district wise) consisting of eleven districts, whereas Majha and Doaba regions comprise four districts each. A sample size of 12 per group is considered adequate to conduct a pilot study (Julious 2005). Hence a total of 36 questionnaires (12 per region) were sent to check the feasibility results of the questionnaire, which came out to be satisfactory. After conducting the pilot study, the data were finally collected during the ascending phase of outbreak in Punjab for a period of 15 days from 20 May 2020 to 5 June 2020 after obtaining informed consent from respondents. The questionnaires were sent to the residents in proportion to the number of districts in each region, i.e., 464 in the Malwa Region and 168 each in the Majha and Doaba regions. Out of the total 800 residents included, the responses of 573 respondents were complete in all aspects and hence included in the study, giving a response rate of 72 percent. The sample included 275 males and 298 females.

With a view to judge the appropriateness of items under their respective construct, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied. The general rule of thumb indicates that item loadings for each construct should be either equal to 0.708 or exceed this value. The loadings of two items (ST 2 and PB 6) were below this threshold. Therefore, these two items were not included due to their low loadings ($P < 0.05$). As all the constructs were reflective, the removal of any indicator did not affect the observed construct [Hair et al., (2014), p.43]. All the variables of the research model were measured using a five-point response scale where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree (see Table 1).

3.3 | Data analysis

PLS-SEM has been applied in the study to analyse the model. This approach helps in explaining the causality among the variables apart from determining the predictive relevance of the model (Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2017a). PLS-SEM is best suited for the exploratory study without having to consider the conditions of normality and distribution of residuals (Liu and Yang, 2014). Also, the moderation effects can be easily included in the model and analysed with the help of PLS-SEM software (Kiani and Laroche, 2019). Hence, the latest version of SmartPLS software (3.2.9) (Ringle et al., 2015) was used to examine the results due to the causal–predictive nature of the study.

4 | ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 | Analysis of measurement model

Confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) was applied for the confirmation of the measurement model (Hair Jr et al., 2020). The standardised outer loadings of the indicators were significant (t statistics > 1.96) with a value of more than 0.708 (Table 2). All the indicators were reliable as they shared

T A B L E 1 Measurement items - Mean, Standard Deviation and Factor Loadings

Latent Variables	Indicators	Indicators	Adapted from	Mean	SD	Loading
Perceived Anxiety (PA)	PA1	I am worried about this novel coronavirus	Bults et al. (2011)	3.01	1.454	.819
	PA2	I am getting fearful for this novel coronavirus		3.16	1.222	.805
	PA3	I am continuously thinking about this novel coronavirus		3.14	1.224	.835
Situational Self-awareness (SSA)	SA1	Right now, I am reflective about my life.	Govern and Marsch (2001)	3.01	1.180	.764
	SA2	Right now, I am conscious of my inner feelings.		2.94	1.165	.819
	SA3	Right now, I am aware of my innermost thoughts		2.92	1.131	.831
Conscious State Expansion (CSE)	CSE1	I am able to enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.	King and DeCicco (2009)	2.85	1.347	.763
	CSE2	I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.		2.88	1.314	.807
	CSE3	I am able to move freely between levels of consciousness or awareness.		2.93	1.318	.813
	CSE4	I often see issues and choices more clearly while in higher states of consciousness/ awareness.		2.94	1.267	.775
	CSE5	I have developed my own techniques for entering higher states of consciousness or awareness.		3.02	1.295	.798
Spiritual Transformation (ST)	ST1	I have now developed a stronger spiritual connection with nature and people around	Cole et al. (2008)	2.91	1.381	.727
	ST3	I now more often think about how blessed I am with a sense of gratitude.		2.76	1.406	.732
	ST4	I pray or meditate more often now.		2.85	1.421	.764
	ST5	I now more often look for a spiritual purpose for my life.		2.90	1.399	.759
	ST6	I have a stronger sense of the Sacred Power directing my life now		2.81	1.465	.799
Prosocial Behaviour (PB)	PB1	I will try to make sad people happier	Pastorelli et al. (1997)	2.99	1.237	.836
	PB2	I will spend time with my family in daily routine		3.03	1.239	.830
	PB3	I will not share things that I like with others		3.13	1.237	.813
	PB4	I will try to help others		3.02	1.131	.736
	PB5	I will be gentle to others		2.95	1.357	.849

TABLE 2 Outer Loadings, CR and AVE

Name of latent Variable	Indicators	Outer Loadings	Composite reliability	AVE
CSE	CSE1	0.807	0.877	0.589
	CSE2	0.720		
	CSE3	0.837		
	CSE4	0.718		
	CSE5	0.746		
PA	PA1	0.777	0.813	0.593
	PA2	0.804		
	PA3	0.727		
PB	PB1	0.829	0.901	0.645
	PB2	0.745		
	PB3	0.791		
	PB4	0.855		
	PB5	0.790		
SA	SA1	0.896	0.826	0.615
	SA2	0.733		
	SA3	0.711		
ST	ST1	0.809	0.903	0.650
	ST3	0.816		
	ST4	0.811		
	ST5	0.728		
	ST6	0.861		

TABLE 3 HTMT ratios

	CSE	PA	PB	SA
PA	0.063			
PB	0.214	0.309		
SSA	0.176	0.468	0.417	
ST	0.545	0.369	0.494	0.498

more than 50 percent of the variance with their respective construct. Further, the reliability of latent variables was measured using composite reliability (CR). The value of CR (Table 2) for all the constructs was more than 0.70 and less than 0.95 leading to internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019).

The value of average variance extracted (AVE) was used to determine the convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). AVE is the average of the squared outer loadings (Valentini and Damásio 2016). The values of AVE depicted that the latent variables accounted for more than 50 percent variance of their indicators with all the values greater than 0.50 (Table 2).

The uniqueness of the latent variables was established using HTMT ratios (Henseler et al., 2015) and FL criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The value of all the HTMT ratios (Table 3) was less than 0.85 (Hair et al., 2019). All the values were significant, which was tested using the confidence intervals (Franke and Sarstedt, 2019). FL criterion also proved the variables to be distinct as the value of square root of AVE of a variable was more than its correlation with any other variable (Table 4)

TABLE 4 FL Criterion

	CSE	PA	PB	SSA	ST
CSE	**0.767**				
PA	−0.055	**0.770**			
PB	0.215	0.310	**0.803**		
SSA	0.174	0.474	0.414	**0.784**	
ST	0.545	0.367	0.494	0.497	**0.806**

Note: The values in bold represent square root of AVE.

(Hair et al., 2019). Besides, there was no problem of cross loadings in the results. Hence, discriminant validity is sufficiently proved.

4.2 | Analysis of structural model

The inner model, i.e., the structural paths, were evaluated in line with Hair Jr et al. (2020) and Hair et al. (2019). To test the significance of path coefficient ß values for hypothesised relations, the boot-strapping technique with 4,999 subsamples (Henseler et al., 2016) was used to generate the t-statistics (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). The results were evaluated at a significance level (α) of 0.05 and corresponding t-table value was 1.96. The results were examined in three parts, i.e., Model A (without any moderator), Model B (introducing interaction effect of CSE in Model A), and Model C (introducing moderating variable of gender in Model B as proposed). There was no issue of collinearity in any of the models with VIF less than 3.

4.2.1 | Model A

The results for bootstrapping reveal that latent variable PA has a significant effect on the latent variable SSA with ß = 0.474 and r^2 = 0.225 (t statistics = 6.257). Thus, H1 is supported with PA depicting medium effect size ($f^2 > 0.15$) and blindfolding based Q^2 value (Geisser, 1974; Stone 1974) for SSA greater than zero. H2 also gets supported with SSA posing a strong impact on ST with ß = 0.498 explaining significant 24.8 percent variance in ST. Also, SSA has medium effect size with f^2 = 0.329 and the relation has predictive relevance with Q^2 more than zero. Likewise, the results provide support for H3 with strong and positive ß = 0.494 for ST→PB. The latent variable ST is able to explain the significant variance in PB with r^2 = 0.244 (t value = 6.189) and medium effect size. PB has Q^2 value of 0.141 (more than zero) indicating predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017). The detailed results are provided in Table 5.

4.2.2 | Model B

The latent variable CSE is introduced into Model A to examine its interaction effect with SSA on ST. The interaction variable SSA*CSE was generated with the help of an inbuilt feature of SmartPLS software (Ringle et al., 2015). CSE is found to have strong direct impact on ST with ß = 0.463 (t statistics = 12.587) and large effect size ($f^2 > 0.35$). Further, the findings of analysis support H4 with the interaction variable SSA*CSE having positive and significant impact on ST (ß = 0.228, t value = 6.135). The explained variance in ST improves by the considerable amount of 26.8 percent in Model B. The predictive relevance of ST also improved with value of Q^2 increasing from 0.133 to

T A B L E 5 Results of PLS-SEM analysis

	Hypothesised Path	ß	t value	p value	r²	Δr²	Effect Size (f²)		Q²
MODEL A	**PA → SSA**	0.474	12.505	0.000	0.225		0.290	medium	0.109
	SSA → ST	0.498	11.763	0.000	0.248		0.329	medium	0.133
	ST → PB	0.494	12.386	0.000	0.244		0.326	medium	0.141
MODEL B	**PA → SSA**	0.474	12.266	0.000	0.225		0.290	medium	0.109
	SSA → ST	0.387	10.033	0.000	0.516	0.268	0.297	medium	0.289
	CSE → ST	0.463	12.587	0.000			0.428	large	
	SA*CSE → ST	0.228	6.135	0.000			0.107	small	
	ST → PB	0.494	12.599	0.000	0.244		0.326	medium	0.141
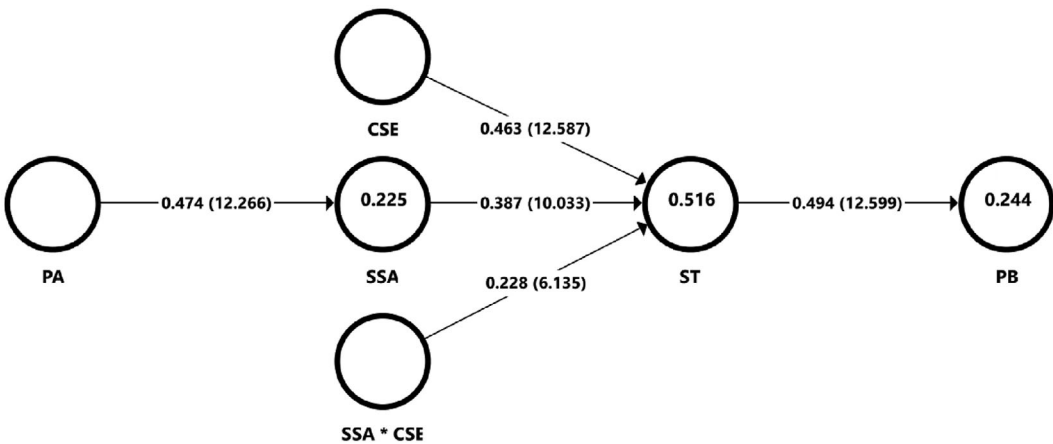
F I G U R E 2 Path Analysis (Model B)
Note: The values on arrow are in form → ß (t statistics); the values in circle represent r².

0.289, indicating medium predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2019). The overview of the findings has been presented in Figure 2 and Table 5.

Even though the interaction effect has low f² value, a look at the "simple slope analysis" generated by the software (Figure 3) clearly reveals the impact of CSE on the relation between SSA (x-axis) and ST (y-axis). The middle red line signifies the relation at average level of CSE. As the level of CSE increases, the individual tends to be more spiritually transformed at higher levels of SSA (represented by top green line). In contrast, even if situational awareness (SSA) is high, the person will not be so spiritually transformed if CSE level is low (represented by lower blue line).

4.2.3 | Model C

Further, the interaction effect SSA*CSE→ST was analysed across the two gender groups (i.e., male and female) as hypothesised in H5 using the PLS-MGA approach. The measurement invariance was established as per Henseler et al. (2016) for the result of MGA to be meaningful (Memon et al., 2019). The same set of indicators, to measure latent variables, were used for both groups along with identical

FIGURE 3 Simple Slope Analysis [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
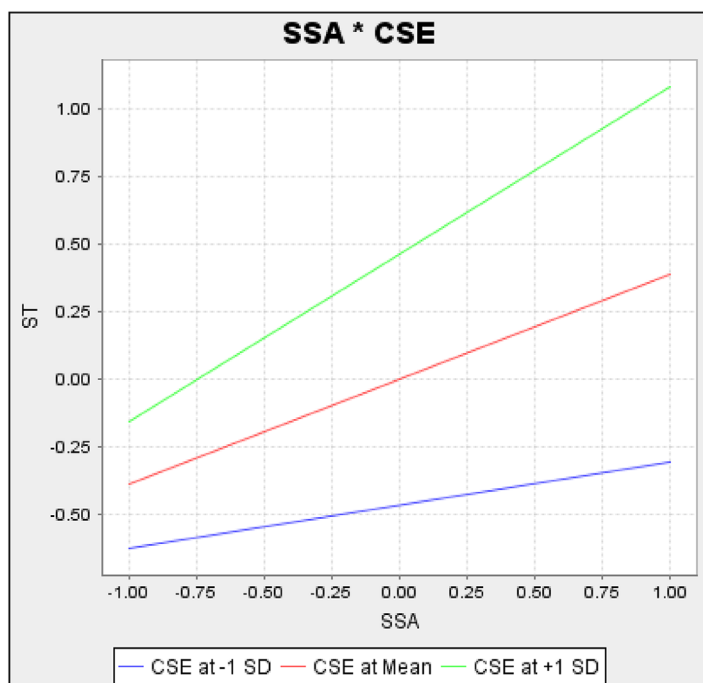

TABLE 6 PLS-MGA results

Hypothesis		H5
Proposed path contingent upon gender		SSA*CSE→ ST
Female	ß	0.263
	t statistics	5.230
Male	ß	0.195
	t statistics	3.548
Female vs Male	| ß$_{Female}$−ß$_{Male}$ |	0.068
	p-value	0.369
Decision		Not Supported

treatment to data, such as coding and settings for running algorithms. Also, the outer loadings of the indicators for all the constructs were significant across both groups.

The results of PLS-MGA (Table 6) clearly show that the interaction effect is not contingent upon gender. The p-value for the difference in path coefficients, i.e., |ß $_{Female}$ −ß $_{Male}$|, is 0.369 (> 0.05), thus rejecting H5. Although, the relation SSA*CSE→ST was significant for both female and male groups individually with ß $_{Female}$ being a little more than ß $_{Male}$, it was not significant enough to support the hypothesis.

5 | DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to model and test the influence of perceived anxiety on prosocial behavioural outcomes through situational self-awareness and spiritual transformation. The study also

attempted to explore whether the effect of situational self-awareness on spiritual transformation is moderated by CSE and if this moderating effect is further contingent upon gender.

Perceived anxiety has been found to be significantly related to situational self-awareness (H1). During the frightful times of COVID-19 exploding all around the world, people have worried as they have feared themselves or their family members getting infected and dying. The results of the study reveal that when individuals approach death very closely, their attitude towards life changes and they become reflective about their life and start focusing more upon aspects of self, particularly, their inner feelings and thoughts. This result is consistent with previous research which concludes that fear of death moves people towards transcendent function, i.e., unification of conscious and unconscious content (Jung, 1971). Chen (1997) further asserted that although it is natural for a person to feel helpless and get scared due to the fear of death, facing this situation with courage will lead to awareness of humanity and such fears further help to develop empathy or concern for other people.

H2, which suggests that situational self-awareness is positively related to spiritual transformation, is supported. The result is consistent with the findings from George (2006), Vaughan (2002), and Wigglesworth (2004), that self-awareness is a foundation and core competency towards the path of spirituality. Therefore, when people are aware of their own individuality, they start accepting the reality of living, and consequently, they experience an unprecedented faith in the divine or the supreme power.

The proposed path from spiritual transformation to prosocial behaviour is also supported (H3). The result implies that spiritually enlightened beings ultimately tend to develop feelings of empathy, compassion, kindness, and care for others resulting in prosocial behavioural outcomes. The same is reflected in their attitude of making sad people happier, being helpful and gentle to others, and spending more time with their family and friends. The result agrees with what has been found out by previous authors investigating the predictors of prosocial behaviours through dimensions of self-reflection and spirituality (Jankowski, 2005).

The findings also supported H4, which suggested a moderating role of CSE in the relationship between situational self-awareness and spiritual transformation. The study found that the influence of situational self-awareness on spiritual transformation is stronger for individuals who enter a spiritual state of conscious than those who are not able to. This is because a self-aware being, who is also able to deeply contemplate his/her inner soul by entering a higher state of consciousness will strongly be able to develop stronger spiritual connection. The current result is consistent with previous study findings that CSE, as one of the components of spiritual intelligence (King 2008), is a significant predictor of positive mental health (Hilal and Siddiqui, 2013), which ultimately influences spiritual health (Geel, 2007).

An examination of gender differences in spirituality through the lens of history reveals that females are more spiritual than males (Deb et al., 2016; Hunt, 1995; Kaschak 2001). However, in the present study, the results of moderating the role of gender are not consistent with the hypothesis (H5). The magnitude of the moderation of CSE for the influence of situational self-awareness on spiritual transformation is not contingent upon gender. This implies that although females appear to be more spiritual, the feeling of CSE will impact the situational self-awareness and spiritual transformation relationship in a similar manner for both males and females.

6 | IMPLICATIONS

The present study paves the way to uncover the prosocial behavioural outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic in context of the Indian demographic and cultural context, which is highly collectivist in nature (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995; Verma, 2020; Ward, 1997). Accordingly, the results of this study are also consistent with the findings of Hui (1988), Li (2017), and Moorman and Blakely (1995) which state that prosocial behaviour, defined as being gentle and helpful to others, is more prevalent in collectivist cultures than individualist ones.

The results of this study can affect clinical treatment of patients suffering from anxiety disorder. As opposed to other forms of anxiety, the pandemic anxiety is distinctive as it does not require any specific support and recovery, but an appropriate response strategy for adequately addressing the behavioural aspects (Sprang and Silman, 2013). They further stated that understanding the role of perceived anxiety in pandemic situations can help the clinicians to develop treatment plans for patients by explaining to them that it is a temporary situation and can be overcome with positive behaviour. Adding to this, Bansal et al. (2020) asserted that the clinicians and therapists can help the people suffering from anxiety (experiencing negative thoughts about self) by arousing motivation in them and redirecting their energy towards positive things (Silvia and Duval, 2001)

The results of study are also useful for counselling practitioners. The findings can be applied in dealing with the clients suffering from pandemic anxiety/post-traumatic stress disorder by bringing about a positive phenomenal change in them. It can help the counsellors to understand that anxiety does not always result in negative outcomes and that working in the direction of self-awareness can be an important route towards bringing positive behavioural outcomes. Pieterse et al. (2013) also considered self-awareness as a vital component of counselling and psychotherapy. The counsellors may also encourage their clients to explore their inner strength to overcome negativity caused by the pandemic.

Additionally, the results of the study can be used at a global level by governments, public health organisations, and NGOs to conduct awareness programmes in their respective countries. Such organisations can deal with the problem of pandemic anxiety arising amongst the masses by spreading the message that although it is difficult to control this situation, we can certainly control our behaviour and the way we deal with this pandemic. This will help to control the devastation in a positive manner at a global level.

7 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings of the study must be interpreted with reference to certain limitations. First, the results of this study reveal that perceived pandemic anxiety ultimately leads to prosocial behavioural outcomes. As such, it is quite possible that during the time of the pandemic outbreak and suffering all around the world, such behavioural outcomes are bound to occur. It is, therefore, also possible that such prosocial outcomes are a temporary phase, and such intentions might vanish in the long run. Hence, as the data is cross-sectional, causal interpretations cannot be made from this study. Future research is therefore required to examine longitudinal associations between perceived anxiety and prosocial behaviour. Secondly, perceived anxiety is one of the factors that affect prosocial behavioural outcomes. There are many other personal or social aspects that might affect prosocial behaviours such as feelings of empathy, emotional intelligence, positive attitude, and fidelity. Hence, future researchers are invited to apply and test the influence of these variables on prosocial behaviours.

8 | CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 outbreak has led to unprecedented physical and economic challenges for the whole world. People suffer from many fears, which are leading them into a state of anxiety. Prior literature has reported many adverse consequences of such pandemic-led anxiety. This study makes an incremental contribution to the socio-psychological literature by providing insight into understanding the positive phenomenal impact of pandemic-led anxiety. It has been found that when people experience death-related anxiety and become fearful of losing their life or their loved ones, their inner conscience awakens, which makes them more self-aware. The increased level of self-awareness helps in reshaping the soul by establishing connection with the divine and results in their spiritual transformation. Such spiritual transformation manifests positive behavioural changes as it helps people to

build inner strength by relating their body, mind, and soul with the supreme power, the God. This connection makes a deep-rooted impact on the behaviour of individuals by making them more considerate towards others. The study concludes by highlighting the fact that the individuals undergoing pandemic-led anxiety eventually become self-aware, resulting in their spiritual transformation. Such individuals are inclined to indulge in behaviours that are prompted by moral values, empathy, and a sense of personal responsibility to benefit others, instead of desire for personal gain.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, associated with this study.

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