



UNDERSTANDING POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY THROUGH THE LENS OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM: INSIGHTS FROM SHRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra16776>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra16776

ABSTRACT

In today's educational landscape, where academic success shapes the future of the learners, the intense competition for excellence often pushes them into the dark realm of anxiety and depression. This struggle results in isolation, identity crisis and gives birth to various health issues such as hypertension, obesity, cardiovascular disorders and heightened aggression. Positive Psychology is a branch of psychology that emphasises on the importance of cultivating positive emotions such as joy, gratitude and contentment. It focuses on leveraging personal strengths and mental resilience to help individuals cope with life's challenges more effectively. Bhagavad Gita holds an important place in Indian knowledge system as its timeless wisdom has guided the people over centuries. What positive psychology says today was said long back by Sri Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra to bring Arjuna out of sadness and confusion and prepare him for the war. Through this paper, a humble attempt has been made to explore the ideas of positive psychology from the perspective of Bhagavad Gita.

KEYWORDS: Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Positive Psychology, Indian knowledge system, Stress Management, School Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced transformative changes in education, emphasising dynamic, personalised, technology-enhanced individualistic learning coupled with technological advancements such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), robotics etc that will explore the curiosity of the child, integrate learning with doing and prepare an environment to facilitate life-long learning. However, amidst the focus on academic excellence and high-tech teaching methods, the physical and mental well-being of learners often goes overlooked.

Similar to the caged parrot in Tagore's story 'Tota-Kahini', students are confined within the pressures of academic achievement, with little attention given to their holistic development. (Bhatia,1994) The Indian education system emphasises theoretical knowledge over practical learning, leading to a lack of creativity and critical thinking skills. Students face immense pressure from family, school and peers to excel academically, with success measured solely by grades (Rani & Rawat, 2019).

This pressure contributes to high levels of academic anxiety and mental health issues among students. The emphasis on exam results exacerbates stress and can lead to severe consequences, including suicide (Poddar, 2020). The pandemic has further intensified these challenges, exacerbating the gap in learning and increasing academic pressure on school students.

The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) Report data shows that every hour one student commits suicide in India, with about 28 suicides reported every day. Its report also shed light over the alarming rate of student's suicide over the years. 10,159 students died by suicide in the year 2018, a significant increase from 9,905 in 2017, and 9,478 in 2016. According to a 2012 *Lancet* report, suicide rates in India are highest in the 15-19 years age group, among which 40% youths are male and 60% youths are females (Garai, 2020; Mukhopadhyaya, 2019). The situation has worsened in the recent years due to advent of the pandemic. According to 2019 NCRB Report, a total number of 1, 39,123 suicides were reported in the country during 2019 showing an increase of 3.4% in comparison to 2018. The unexpected and sudden shift from the traditionally practiced classroom-based teaching to digital based education due to the pandemic has created a significant gap in learning resulted in higher levels of academic anxiety among learners (D'Souza, 2021). More than 12,500 students died by suicide in the country when pandemic hit in 2020, which was at the rate of 34 person/day, with many states reporting more than one death per day (Kumar, 2021). In 2020 alone, India witnessed a historic increase of 21% in suicide cases compared to 2019. Out of 12,526 student suicides in 2020, nearly 53% or 6,598 were from six states- Maharashtra, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Jharkhand and Karnataka, while all other states and union territories together reported 5,928 deaths (Kumar, 2021). When we look at the world scenario, India is the most depressed country in the world, followed by china and USA. A 2014 study reported in WHO, conducted for NCMH (National Care for



Mental Health), states that at least 6.5 % of the Indian population suffers from some form of serious mental disorder (India Today, 2018).

Positive psychology is a branch of psychology that focuses on the study of optimal human functioning and the factors that contribute to a fulfilling life. Unlike traditional psychology, which often focuses on treating mental illness and dysfunction, positive psychology aims to understand and promote well being and happiness. Martin Seligman is considered one of the founders of positive psychology. His book, "Authentic Happiness", published in 2002, is a seminal work in the field. In this book, Seligman explores the concept of authentic happiness and presents strategies for cultivating happiness and well being in everyday life.

In this age of cut-throat competition where a decimal point can be a deciding factor in one's career, it is crucial that we should focus on exploring our ancient texts to find out solutions that will be beneficial for our students to manage their mental stress. Bhagavad Gita can be a solution to this as it offers timeless lessons on how to lead our life, how to behave in stressful conditions and what practices we can adopt to lead a more peaceful and fulfilling life. Though Bhagavad Gita does not offer any alternative cure in serious mental health conditions but introducing our students to the teachings can be beneficial to provide them a lifestyle which will lessen the chances of serious mental stress related ailments among the students.

Review of Related Literature

The Bhagavad Gita was given to Arjuna Sri Krishna at the battlefield of Kurukshetra. At the outset in 'Arjuna Visada Yoga' we observe that when Arjuna observed the warriors on both sides, including his own relatives and friends, he was filled with fear and sorrow that he will lose them in the battle. The prospect of killing his own relatives and the resulting sin weighed heavily on his conscience. This emotional turmoil led Arjuna to surrender to Sri Krishna, seeking solution to his inner conflict. Sri Krishna, much like a counsellor gradually imparted wisdom to Arjuna, explaining the nature of the field, knowledge, ignorance and the knowable. Krishna compared this process to a mother feeding her child in small portions, ensuring that Arjuna could comprehend and absorb the teachings step by step. Thus, Bhagavad Gita is a collection of teachings to achieve a state of equilibrium of the mind.

Over the years, research has increasingly highlighted the potential of the Bhagavad Gita as a valuable resource in psychotherapy and stress management. Bhatia et al. (2013) advocated for the practical integration of Gita's teachings into psychotherapeutic practices, noting its ability to enhance intervention effectiveness and augment the methods of Western psychotherapies. Verma (2014) emphasised the relevance of Gita's teachings in promoting effective stress management strategies. Ashtankar (2016) delved into the exploration of Bhagavad Gita's principles, particularly in the realm of mind management and the fostering of human capital development. Furthermore, Tayal (2019) underscored the necessity of incorporating Bhagavad Gita teachings into educational

curricula at various levels, citing its potential in nurturing well-rounded and responsible citizens.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the different dimensions of Positive Psychology from Shrimad Bhagavad Gita.

III. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In the present study, the necessary data was collected using the method of document analysis and it utilises secondary data from various writings on Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, research papers, newspaper articles, medical journals, government reports etc.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Objective 1: To explore the different dimensions of Positive Psychology from Shrimad Bhagavad Gita

1. Concept of Mind: In Sankhya philosophy, the mind is often referred to as 'Manas' which originates from Satvik Ahankara. It is described as one of the components of 'antahkarana' along with intellect (buddha) and Ego (Ahankar). It is considered as part of the subtle body. The mind, in Sankhya, is responsible for thoughts, emotions, desires and perceptions. In Yoga philosophy, the mind is also recognised as a crucial aspect of human experience and seen as a tool that can be trained and disciplined to achieve higher states of consciousness and liberation. "Yogash chitta-vritti-nirodhah" (Yoga Sutra 1:2). Yoga aims to calm the fluctuations of the mind to attain a state of inner peace and self-realisation.

In Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, importance has been given on the mind. In chapter 6, verse 6 Sri Krishna says,
बन्धुरात्मानस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः।
अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्तेतात्मैव शत्रुवत्॥ VI.6 ॥

Which means for those who have conquered the mind, it is their friend. For those who have failed to do so, the mind works like an enemy. In chapter 6, verse 34, the controlling of the mind has been compared with controlling the wind, Sri Krishna said,
चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद्दृढम्।
तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम्॥ VI.34॥

Which means, the mind is very restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate, O Krishna. It appears to me that it is more difficult to control than the wind. Further in chapter 6 verse 5 Sri Krishna says,

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत्।
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः॥ VI.5॥

which denotes, elevate yourself through the power of your mind, and not degrade yourself, for the mind can be the friend and also the enemy of the self.

2. Approaches for Cultivating Mental Stability: Shrimad Bhagavad Gita also offers various techniques through which mental stability can be achieved. In chapter 6, verse 36, Sri Krishna says,



असंयतात्मना योगो दुष्प्राप इति मे मतिः |

वश्यात्मना तु यतता शक्योऽवाप्तुमुपायतः || VI.36|

Which means, Yog is difficult to attain for one whose mind is unbridled. However, those who have learnt to control the mind, and who strive earnestly by proper means, can attain perfection in Yog. In Chapter 6 Verse 20, Sri Krishna has talked about controlling the mind through Yoga.

यत्रोपरमते चित्तं निरुद्धं योगसेवया |

यत्र चैवात्मनात्मानं पश्यन्नात्मनि तुष्यति || VI.20 ||

It means that When the mind, restrained from material activities, becomes still by the practice of Yog, then the yogi is able to behold the soul through the purified mind, and he rejoices in the inner joy.

Besides, in chapter 6 verse 17, Sri Krishna emphasises the importance of balance and moderation in various aspects of life. It states that one who is moderate in eating, recreation, work, sleep, and wakefulness can alleviate the distress and suffering in life.

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु |

युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा || VI.17 ||

Which means, those who are temperate in eating and recreation, balanced in work, and regulated in sleep, can mitigate all sorrows by practicing Yog.

3. Lessons on Positive Psychology

3.1 The Art of Detachment: The first lesson that the Bhagavad Gita teaches us regarding mental well-being is the art of detachment. The Gita emphasises the importance of detachment, guiding us to perform our duties without being overly attached to the fruits of our actions. Sri Krishna wisely states,

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन |

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि || II.47 ||

which denotes you have the right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities. This verse focuses on the effort put into our actions rather than fixating on the outcomes. The Gita teaches us that being detached allows us to stay balanced and free from the anxieties that arise from success or failure. Further he advises, क्रोधाद्भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः | स्मृतिभ्रंशाद्बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति || III.63 ||

It denotes, from anger comes delusion; from delusion, confused memory; from confused memory, the ruin of reason; and from ruin of reason, man finally perishes. Sri Krishna explains that our desire is the root cause of all sin and wrong action in the world, desire gives rise to anger and anger leads to delusion and delusion to loss of memory, which leads to the loss of discrimination between right and wrong which ultimately destroys the person. Those who are intelligent and free from material desires, who have renounced the fruits of their actions, are liberated from the cycle of birth and death and attained the

state beyond suffering (II.51; III.19), as a result the person leads a more happy and fulfilling life (II. 64,65).

3.2 Adaptation to Present Moment: The Gita teaches us about accepting life's challenges and always try to adapt to the present moment through controlling our mind. Sri Krishna says, जितात्मनः प्रशान्तस्य परमात्मा समाहितः | शीतोष्णसुखदुःखेषु तथा मानापमानयोः || VI.7 ||

Which translates as for one who has conquered the mind, the Supersoul is already reached, for he has attained tranquility. To such a person, heat and cold, happiness and distress, honour and dishonour are all the same. Often times we become restless if something does not happen as we hoped, or we are criticised for the things we have not done. Gita teaches us to approach both the situation with equal importance and not get overwhelmed by extreme joy or sadness. By practicing calmness, a person can train themselves to face difficult situations in life bravely and thus nothing will disturb the mental harmony of a person.

3.3 Surrender to Supreme Force: Through Bhagavad Gita, we come to know about the path of dharma and a person can only explore this path if he embark on a journey to the almighty and follow the path of righteousness (dharma). Sri Krishna says,

भोक्तारं यज्ञतपसां सर्वलोकमहेश्वरम् |

सुहृदं सर्वभूतानां ज्ञात्वा मां शान्तिमृच्छति || V.29 ||

It can be explained as knowing me as the ultimate purpose of all sacrifices and austerities, the supreme lord of all planets and demigods, and the benefactor and well-wisher of all living entities, one attains peace from the pangs of material miseries. Simply accepting God as our friend and protector can have a significant effect on our thinking and mental well-being. The belief that there is someone who loves us and care for us give us a sense of comfort which helps in maintaining our mental well-being.

3.4 Knowing the Self: Gita teaches us about having Atma-Jnana also known as understanding the self. Only when a person understands the self he/she can attain peace. Sri Krishna says, रागद्वेषवियुक्तैस्तु विषयानिन्द्रियैश्चरन् | आत्मवश्यैर्विधेयात्मा प्रसादमधिगच्छति || II.64 ||

Which means, the self-controlled man, moving among objects with the senses restrained and free from attraction and repulsion, attains peace. We often forget that we are not immortal, our body will be destroyed one day and we will loose all our might. Our bodily luster makes us believe that we are all powerful and it develops ego in us. The ego wants to stay in easy situations but when stressful moments comes we become uneasy. In chapter 2, verse 30, Sri Krishna says, देही नित्यमवध्योऽयं देहे सर्वस्य भारत | तस्मात्सर्वाणि भूतानि न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि || II.30 ||



Which says, the indweller in the body of everyone is ever indestructible, O Arjuna: therefore, you should not grief for any creature. He further said,

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचि न्यायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः।
 अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ II.20 ॥

Which denotes, never is this soul born; nor has it any existence after having once been. The soul is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, undying, and primeval. It is not slain when the body is slain. The understanding that we are a part of the supreme being makes us tolerant, sensible, empathetic and enable us to control our harmful and negative emotions.

3.5 Balance in Thought and Action: The Gita gives emphasis on maintaining balance in life and avoid extreme thoughts and action. Sri Krishna says,
 नात्यश्रतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनश्रतः।
 न चातिस्वप्नशीलस्य जाग्रतो नैव चार्जुन ॥ VI.16 ॥

Which means, there is no possibility of one's becoming a yogi, O Arjuna, if one eats too much or eats too little, sleeps too much or does not sleep enough. This verse emphasises the importance of moderation in lifestyle choices. It encourages individuals to activities such as eating and sleeping, avoiding excesses that may disrupt mental and physical well-being. Besides, Sri Krishna says to Arjuna,
 मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः।
 आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥ II.14 ॥

Which translates as, O son of Kunti, the nonpermanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception, O Scion of Bharata, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed. This verse teaches us to view life's ups and downs with equanimity, recognising the transient nature of pleasure and pain. By maintaining a balanced perspective, one can navigate challenges without being overwhelmed.

4. Meditation for Mental Peace: The sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, 'Dhayan Yoga' provides profound insights into mind control through meditation. The practice of Meditation is presented as a powerful tool to achieve mental equilibrium and spiritual growth. Sri Krishna says,
 उद्धरेदात्मनाऽऽत्मानं नाऽत्मानमवसादयेत्।
 आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥ VI.5 ॥

Which means, a person should uplift oneself by one's own self, and should not degrade oneself. The self alone is one's friend, as well as one's enemy. This verse underscores the importance of self-discipline in controlling one's thoughts. Through meditation, individuals can elevate their consciousness and overcome mental disturbances. In 'Dhayan Yoga' one can also find guidance regarding the proper way of doing meditation. Sri Krishna says,
 तत्रैकाग्रं मनः कृत्वा यतचित्तेन्द्रियक्रियः।
 उपविश्यासने युञ्ज्याद्योगमात्मविशुद्धये ॥ VI.12 ॥
 समं कायशिरोग्रीवं धारयन्नचलं स्थिरः।

सम्प्रेक्ष्य नासिकाग्रं स्वं दिशश्चानवलोकयन् ॥ VI.13 ॥

Which translates as, one should hold one's body, neck, and head erect in a straight line and stare steadily at the tip of the nose. Thus, with an unagitated, subdued mind, devoid of fear, one should meditate upon Me within the heart. By maintaining a steady posture and focused gaze during meditation, the mind becomes concentrated, aiding in controlling wandering thoughts and achieving a tranquil state. Sri Krishna also says,
 सङ्कल्पप्रभवान्कामास्त्यक्त्वा सर्वानशेषतः।
 मनसैवेन्द्रियग्रामं विनियम्य समन्ततः ॥ VI.24 ॥
 शनैः शनैरुपरमेद्बुद्ध्या धृतिगृहीतया।
 आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत् ॥ VI.25 ॥

Which means, completely renouncing all desires arising from thoughts of the world, one should restrain the senses from all sides with the mind. Slowly and steadily, with conviction in the intellect, the mind will become fixed in God alone, and will think of nothing else. The verse emphasises the gradual process of meditation, through this one can cultivate concentration and redirect the mind towards the Self, freeing it from external distractions.

5. Emotional Resilience and Mental Strength: The profound teachings of Bhagavad Gita also focuses on the development of emotional resilience and mental strength. In the chapter 6, verse 5, we observe an emphasis on the role of self-discipline in the development of mental strength:
 उद्धरेदात्मनाऽऽत्मानं नाऽत्मानमवसादयेत्।
 आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥ VI.5 ॥

Which means, elevate yourself through the power of your mind, and not degrade yourself. The mind is your friend and also your enemy; control it with the power of the self. Sri Krishna underscores the importance of developing mental strength to overcome challenges and adversities. In chapter 18, verse 66, Sri Krishna concludes his teachings with a powerful message on surrender and mental fortitude:
 सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज।
 अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥ XVIII.66 ॥

Which translates as, abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear. This verse highlights the transformative strength that comes from surrendering to a higher purpose, cultivating resilience in the face of life's trails.

6. Mindfulness for Happy Life: Throughout Bhagavad Gita, there are several examples of how one can practice mindfulness in life. In the chapter 6 (Dhayan Yoga), verses 10-15 focuses on the practice of meditation and mindfulness. Sri Krishna describes the process of calming the mind through meditation, comparing it to the challenge of controlling the wind. Verse 14 specifically addresses the essence of mindfulness:
 प्रशान्तात्मा विगतभीर्ब्रह्मचारिव्रते स्थितः।
 मनः संयम्य मच्चित्तो युक्त आसीत मत्परः ॥ VI.14 ॥



It means, thus, with a serene, fearless, and unwavering mind, and staunch in the vow of celibacy, the vigilant yogi should meditate on Me, having Me alone as the supreme goal. Here Sri Krishna extols the mindful yogi who maintains contentment, self-discipline, and unwavering determination. In chapter 6, verse 20, the essence of mindfulness is further elucidated in the following verse:

यत्रोपरमते चित्तं निरुद्धं योगसेवया।
यत्र चैवात्मनात्मानं पश्यन्नात्मनि तुष्यति ॥ VI.20 ॥

It means, when the mind, restrained from material activities, becomes still by the practice of Yog, then the yogi is able to behold the soul through the purified mind, and he rejoices in the inner joy. This verse illustrates the pinnacle of mindfulness in samadhi, where the mind achieves profound concentration and joyous awareness. The Bhagavad Gita serves as a timeless guide for practicing mindfulness through disciplined thought, focused meditation, and unwavering devotion.

7. Fostering Compassion for positive Relationships: The teachings of Lord Krishna to Arjuna in the midst of the Kurukshetra War offers timeless wisdom on the development of compassion, empathy and kindness to foster positive relationships. In chapter 12, verse 13, Sri Krishna emphasises the significance of compassion:

अध्वेषा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च।
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी ॥ XII.13 ॥

It translates as, he who is not envious of anyone, who is friendly and compassionate, who has no material possessions, who is free from ego, who is balanced in happiness and distress and who is forgiving- such a person is very dear to Me. Here, Sri Krishna encourages the cultivation of a compassionate attitude towards everyone, transcending biases and prejudices. Further, in chapter 16, verses 1-3, Sri Krishna delineates the divine and demonic natures. Verse 3 highlights the demonic qualities, including lack of compassion: "Pride, arrogance, conceit, anger, harshness, and ignorance- these qualities belong to those of demonic nature" This underscores the importance of cultivating compassion to transcend negative tendencies. Additionally, chapter 16, verse 5, Sri Krishna said:

दैवी सम्पद्धिमोक्षाय निबन्धायासुरी मता।
मा शुचः सम्पदं दैवीमभिजातोऽसि पाण्डव ॥ XVI. 5 ॥

Which means, the divine qualities lead to liberation, while the demonic qualities are the cause for a continuing destiny of bondage. Grieve not, O Arjun, as you were born with saintly virtues. The Bhagavad Gita teaches us that compassion is the cornerstone of positive relationships. By embracing selflessness and kindness, individuals can build harmonious connections, transcending ego and fostering a sense of unity and empathy with all beings.

CONCLUSION

In an era characterised by relentless competition, where students contend with mounting mental pressures, there arises a pressing imperative to incorporate our ancient wisdom, such as the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, into the educational

paradigm. By integrating these profound texts into the teaching-learning process, we can offer learners a respite from the pervasive anxiety and stress that permeate modern life. Regular engagement with the Bhagavad Gita not only equips individuals with tools to effectively manage their stress but also furnishes them with invaluable guidance for navigating life's complexities with wisdom and purpose.

Recognising the urgent need for such holistic education, the Indian government has undertaken commendable efforts to infuse Indian knowledge systems into the school curriculum, orchestrating a comprehensive redesign aimed at fostering the holistic development of learners. In this transformative educational landscape, the inclusion of the Bhagavad Gita assumes paramount significance, serving as a cornerstone for nurturing the mental well-being of students. By grounding them in timeless principles of resilience, equanimity, and self-awareness, the Bhagavad Gita empowers learners to confront life's challenges with fortitude and grace, thereby fostering not only academic excellence but also holistic personal growth.

Moreover, by weaving the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita into the fabric of education, we embark on a journey of cultural preservation and revival, honouring the rich heritage that defines our identity as a civilisation. As students delve into the profound insights of this ancient scripture, they not only cultivate a deeper appreciation for their cultural roots but also develop a broader perspective that transcends temporal boundaries. Thus, the integration of the Bhagavad Gita into the educational landscape not only nurtures individual well-being but also contributes to the preservation and propagation of our cultural heritage, fostering a more harmonious and enlightened society.

In essence, as we embark on this transformative educational journey, let us embrace the timeless wisdom encapsulated in the Bhagavad Gita, recognising its profound potential to alleviate the mental burdens of our students and illuminate their path towards a life of fulfilment and purpose. By harnessing the transformative power of ancient wisdom, we can sculpt a future where education serves not only to enlighten the mind but also to nourish the soul, fostering a generation of resilient, compassionate, and purpose-driven individuals poised to navigate the complexities of the modern world with grace and resilience.

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