

Chardi Kala

ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਕਲਾ, ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਸਰਬੱਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ

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From community meaning to psychological measurement. A mixed-methods investigation.

Where this started

Culture shapes everything that we do

Experience different types
of stressors

Interpret stressors
differently

Different concepts of what
is to cope well

“There are lessons to be learned in all cultures about what makes life worth living, and no language has a monopoly on the vocabulary.”

Peterson (2008)

Many dominant stress and coping models come from Western, English-speaking research contexts, which often treat coping as an individual process

What is it?

Chardi Kala

ever-rising spirit

A word we say every day.

A word almost no one has studied psychologically.

- Recited in Ardaas every day, and used in everyday conversation
- Invoked in historical, political and community contexts
- Described in Sikh literature as a guiding principle for living (Majhail, 2010)

To our knowledge, no psychological research has examined it.

Two studies

What we did.

Study 1

What is it?

14 interviews · reflexive thematic analysis

Study 2

Can we measure it?

561 participants · scale development & validation

Meaning first. Measurement second.

What is Chardi Kala to you?

Who

14 adults
Familiar with Chardi Kala

7 women, 7 men · ages 21–59

How

Semi-structured
interviews

In English or Punjabi

Analysis

Reflexive thematic

Braun & Clarke (2019)

Open-ended bilingual interviews ranged from 30 mins to 2.5 hours

*“I had a friend who was diagnosed with terminal cancer...
I would consciously remind myself of Chardi Kala as a
source of strength.”*

People shared stories of...

Migration and adaptation

Resettlement · cultural adjustment

Loss and grief

Bereavement · serious illness

Personal injustice

*Betrayal · exploitation · unfair
treatment*

Community injustice

Discrimination · collective harm

Everyday stressors

Work · study · finances · daily anxiety

Cultural disconnection

Belonging · religious engagement

*“Balancing my Punjabi and Sikh identity... Chardi Kala is my place
without the need for strict religious adherence.”*

How participants described Chardi Kala.

01 An enduring orientation of steady uplift

Steady uplift · non-reactivity to highs and lows

“Ever, ever rising hope... within your spirit.”

02 Acceptance and reinterpretation of adversity

Hukam · sukh and dukh as temporary · reframing

*It doesn't matter if you're in dukh or sukh...
life doesn't stay constant... you understand
that there will be a tomorrow.”*

03 Persistence and active engagement

Engagement within limits · courage · self-belief

“Resignation is not a solution.”

04 Collective belonging and shared practice

Simran · sangat · shared language · belonging

*“We don't want Chardi Kala just for
ourselves... we want it for everybody.”*

Situated hardship within collective narratives of persecution, sacrifice and endurance, and not an individual challenge to be met

From interviews to a measure.

Item pool

49 items

Written from Study 1 themes

Community review

**Before administration
Language translations**

*Sikh psychologist, community
leaders, Study 1 participants*

Survey

561 participants

*English and Punjabi
Online and hard copy surveys*

Items written from participant language; reviewed by community throughout.

Two factors, woven tightly together.

Factor 1

An inner stance

Hope, acceptance, and persistence — collapsed into a single orientation.

Factor 2

The practices that hold it up

Simran, Ardas, Kirtan, sangat, Gurdwara — the communal scaffolding.

Validity at a glance, cautiously interpreted

Strong association to Sikh attitudes ($r = .87$)

Positive association with optimism ($r=.45$), mindfulness ($r=.27$), perseverance ($r=0.25$) and resilience ($r=.18$)

Adds variance beyond Sikh Attitudes in optimism, perseverance, mindfulness, and resilience

Similar across men and women

An inner stance, held up by communal practice.

“Chardi Kala is inbuilt in the sense of resilience ... when there were multiple genocides ... we will rise again like a phoenix from the ashes.”

A way of being.

What Chardi Kala appears to be

- A culturally grounded orientation to adversity (and more).
- Integrates hope, acceptance, and persistence.
- Sustained communally — through practice, language, history and community.
- Organises how adversity is interpreted, endured and responded to.

Where this takes us

- Culturally grounded constructs can be studied without losing cultural specificity.
- A starting point for a framework for culturally responsive work with Sikh and Punjabi clients.

How the research was received.

cultural pride and appreciation

“Thank you for this survey — it has touched me that someone cares so much to look into it.”

preparation and collective responsibility

“I called my grandparents [who live in India] to ask them more about it.”

self-reflection and learning

“Reading and answering questions awakened more aspects of my belief in Waheguru ji and Chardi Kala.”

seva as service to research

“It would truly be a pleasure to be involved in any way with your work in the future... I would be honored.”

Thank you.

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Thank you to the 575 participants across Studies 1 and 2.

The 22-item Chardi Kala Scale.

Factor 1 · Inner stance · 16 items

1. Chardi Kala reminds me that both happiness and sorrow are part of life.
2. Chardi Kala teaches me never to give up.
3. Chardi Kala teaches me to accept my current circumstances.
4. Even in hard times, Chardi Kala helps me stay optimistic.
5. Chardi Kala gives me strength during tough times.
6. Chardi Kala empowers me to face life's challenges with courage.
7. Inspires me to wish for Sarbat da Bhala regardless of who they are.
8. I use Chardi Kala to understand that difficulties are normal in life.
9. Chardi Kala gives me hope, no matter the circumstances.
10. I trust that if I focus on my actions, the results will take care of themselves.
11. Through Chardi Kala, I find a sense of peace and contentment with life.
12. Chardi Kala reveals to me opportunities for personal growth.
13. Chardi Kala empowers me to stand up against injustice.
14. Chardi Kala helps me accept death as a natural part of life.
15. Chardi Kala helps me stay humble and patient.
16. Helps me realise my challenges are minor compared to my ancestors and Gurus.

Factor 2 · Practices · 6 items

1. Going to the Gurdwara helps me maintain Chardi Kala.
2. Listening to or performing Kirtan keeps me in Chardi Kala.
3. Doing Simran (meditation) keeps me in Chardi Kala.
4. Ardas (prayer) helps me to stay in Chardi Kala.
5. Being part of Sadh Sangat helps me to stay in Chardi Kala.
6. Being in Chardi Kala strengthens my bond with the Sikh community.

Rated 1 (never) to 5 (always). Items reflect Study 1 language.

Sample demographics.

Study 1 · Qualitative

n = 14

Age

21–59 (M = 33.1, SD = 12.4)

Gender

50% women · 50% men

Interview language

71% English · 29% Punjabi

Country of birth

79% India · 7% Australia · 7% NZ · 7% UK

Country of residence

93% Australia · 7% UK

Study 2 · Quantitative

n = 561

Age

18–70 (M = 36.0, SD = 12.7)

Gender

59% women · 41% men

Survey language

69% English · 31% Punjabi

Survey mode

78% online · 22% paper

Migration context

12% IP resident · 52% IP diaspora · 33% SA diaspora

Psychometric Summary.

Study 2

Initial item pool: 49 items

Final scale: 22 items

EFA: two-factor solution

CFA:

CFI = .918 (acceptable)

TLI = .908 (acceptable)

SRMR = .028 (excellent)

RMSEA = .116 (poor)

Factor correlation: $r = .914$

Reliability: $\omega = .97$ and $.94$