

Factors Contributing to Eudemonic Wellbeing in Scholars of Samkhya Philosophy and Yoga in India: A Cross Sectional study

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How to cite this article:

Shirley Telles, Sachin Kumar Sharma, Babita Vishwakarma, *et al.* Factors Contributing to Eudemonic wellbeing in Scholars of Samkhya Philosophy and Yoga in India: A Cross Sectional study. *Ind J Ancient Med Yoga.* 2024;17(1): 35-40.

Abstract

Samkhya philosophy and *Yoga* both aim at ultimate liberation, along with implicit rather than explicit devotion to the Divine (Isvara), making both self-transcendence and gratitude relevant for these philosophies. The relative contribution of gratitude and self-transcendence to eudemonic wellbeing was evaluated in one hundred and forty seven scholars of these philosophies. The scholar participants' daily activities included *Yoga*, community service, self-study, lectures, non-deity specific devotional sessions and *yajna* or fire-offerings. Analysis was based on multiple regression analysis and Coefficient of Determination (R²) with alpha = 0.05. Both self-transcendence (16.2 percent) and gratitude (10.5 percent) predicted eudemonic wellbeing in scholars of these philosophies.

Keywords: Eudemonia; Gratitude; Hinduism; India; Self Transcendence; Yoga.

INTRODUCTION

Samkhya and *Yoga* are two ancient knowledge systems which have as their goal release from suffering (*duhkha*), leading to final liberation (*kaivalya*).¹ *Samkhya* recognizes two principles, *purusha* or passive conscious spirit, and *prakriti* or active unconscious nature, whereas *Yoga* represents the practical aspect of *Samkhya* philosophy as well

as principles from the *Yoga sutras* of *Patanjali*.^{2,3} These knowledge systems approach the concept of the Divine as follows: *Samkhya* is explicitly non-theistic with no mention of the Divine (*Isvara*), whereas in *Yoga* philosophy there is fleeting reference to *Isvara*, as "a distinct form of spirit (*purusha*) unaffected by the forces of corruption," which the practitioner could choose to approach with devotion.⁴ Hence these philosophies can be expected to enhance feelings of self-transcendence, whereas their effect on gratitude to the Divine and dispositional gratitude is not as clear.

Knowledge of *Samkhya* philosophy and *Yoga* is often imparted in traditional Indian educational institutions called *gurukulam*.⁵ The daily routine of the participants enrolled in the present study included lectures on *Samkhya* philosophy and on *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, *Yoga* practice, non-deity specific devotional recitations and a *yajna* or fire offering.⁶ The residents hence participated in

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Received on: 08.02.2023

Accepted on: 12.03.2024

activities which were intended to expand their individual consciousness while also implicitly glorifying the Divine.⁷

Previously there have been separate reports of increased eudemonic wellbeing with increased levels of transcendence^{8,9} or with gratitude.^{8,10} In followers of *Samkhya* philosophy and *Yoga* the principles and practice promote self-transcendence, hence the residents could be expected to demonstrate attributes of self-transcendence.^{11,12} However, in these philosophies the practices which glorify the Divine and evoke feelings of gratitude are implicit.^{12,13} Hence it was less clear whether residents would demonstrate gratitude towards the Divine. Determining both self-transcendence and gratitude simultaneously in followers of these philosophies has not been reported earlier to our knowledge.

With this background, the present study aimed to evaluate the scholar residents of *Samkhya* and *Yoga* philosophy in Indian *gurukulam* to determine the relative contribution of self-transcendence and gratitude to their eudemonic wellbeing.

STUDY DESIGN

Participants

One hundred and forty seven participants of both genders (106 male, group average age \pm S.D.; 26.48 \pm 7.94 years) were recruited from two gender specific traditional education institutions (*gurukulam*) located in north of India and were aspiring scholars of *Samkhya* philosophy and *Yoga*. Participation in the study was voluntary with no remuneration to the participants. Participants of both genders were included if they were: (i) aged sixteen years and above and (ii) were residing in the institutions for six months prior to the assessment. Participants were excluded from the trial if they had any diagnosed illness and/or were required to be on regular medication. This was determined with a semi-structured interview. None of the participants were excluded due to these criteria. Signed informed consent was obtained from each participant who was 18 years of age or older. Also, signed assent form was obtained from the participants who were younger than 18 years after taking consent from the authorities of the institution. The study had prior approval from the institutional ethics committee (Approval no: PRF/YRD/020/007) and was carried out in accordance with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki.¹⁴

Procedure

In this one time cross sectional study, the participants were asked to complete their demographic details and fill in the standard questionnaires prior to their morning *Yoga* practice session. The questionnaires used in the present study were translated into Hindi in four steps: (i) two independent bilingual experts translated the English version of each questionnaire to Hindi, (ii) discrepancies between the two translations were discussed and resolved, (iii) two independent translators back translated the Hindi version of the questionnaires to English to determine if there were any discrepancies and (iv) any discrepancy was again resolved with mutual discussion. An orientation session was conducted the day prior to the actual assessment. There was no time limitation to complete the questionnaires. The study was carried out between January and August, 2021.

Measures

(i) Demographic data sheet

The respondents were asked to fill in their age, gender and educational details.

(ii) Self-transcendence

A fifteen item self-transcendence scale (STS) was used to measure self-transcendence.¹⁵ The STS assesses self-transcendence through the identification of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal experiences that expand personal boundaries. The participants are required to respond to each of the fifteen items on a four point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much). The scores range between 15 and 60. A standard method was used for scoring the questionnaire.¹⁶

(iii) Eudemonic wellbeing

Eudemonic wellbeing was measured with the 'Questionnaire for Eudaimonic Well-Being', which consists of twenty one items presented as statements.¹⁷ The items cover a range of elements associated with eudemonic wellbeing. Fourteen of the items are affirmative sentences with high scores indicative of eudemonic wellbeing, while seven items have negative implications, implying the absence of eudemonic wellbeing, and are reverse scored. Each statement is responded to on a five point Likert scale, with possible choices ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The sum of the total items represents total eudemonic wellbeing. The scores range between 0 and 84. A standard method was used for to score the questionnaire.¹⁷

(iv) Gratitude

Gratitude was measured using the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six item Form (GQ-6) which is designed to measure the experience of gratitude in daily life.¹⁸ The questionnaire consists of six items. Participants responded on a seven point Likert scale with possible choices from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scores range between 6 and 42. A standard method was used to score the questionnaire.¹⁸

DATA ANALYSES

The data were analyzed with a multiple linear regression analysis using IBM SPSS (Version 24.0), New York, USA. In the regression model, eudemonic wellbeing scores acted as a dependent variable while self-transcendence scores and gratitude scores acted as predictor variables, 1 and 2, respectively.

Two separate linear regression models were developed to determine the relative contribution of the predictor variables. The relative contribution of the predictor variables was determined as follows: Variance of the model [the coefficient of determination (R²)] when both predictor variables were included in the model minus variance of the model [the coefficient of determination (R²)] when the first predictor variable was removed from the model. This was similarly repeated separately for the second predictor variable. The statistical significance (α) was pre set at 0.05.

RESULTS

A total of one hundred and forty seven participants of both genders (106 male; group average age \pm S.D.; 26.48 \pm 7.94 years) participated in

the study. The required sample size was 106 for the present study based on Green’s rule of thumb [i.e., $N > 104 + m$ (where m is the number of individual predictors)]. A sample size of 147 was taken, which is more than the required sample.¹⁹

The baseline characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Baseline characteristics of the participants

Characteristics	n = 147
Age (years)	
Group mean age \pm SD	26.48 \pm 7.94
Age range	16-55
Gender	
Male: Female	
Actual values	106:41
Percentage values	72.11: 27.89
Years of education (%)	
10 years and less	14.29
11-12 years	42.18
13-15 years	31.29
16 years and above	12.24
Experience of Yoga (%)	
Up to 12 months	6.80
13-60 months	48.30
60 months and above	57.83

Scores of the group as a whole as well as for each gender separately are presented in Table 2. All the scores were in the range previously reported for normal adults for the following: (i) Self-transcendence Scale,²⁰ (ii) Eudemonic Well-Being scale¹⁷ and (iii) Gratitude Questionnaire.²¹

Table 2: Group mean \pm SD scores and ranges for the variables assessed.

Variables	Whole Group (n=147)		Male (n=106)		Female (n=41)	
	Group mean \pm SD	Range	Group mean \pm SD	Range	Group mean \pm SD	Range
Eudemonic Well-Being Scores	61.03 \pm 9.01	38-80	60.26 \pm 9.16	38-80	62.73 \pm 8.43	45-77
Self-Transcendence Scores	50.88 \pm 5.81	33-60	50.13 \pm 5.65	38-60	52.80 \pm 5.83	33-60
Gratitude Questionnaire-Six item Scores	35.22 \pm 6.20	12-42	34.64 \pm 6.08	15-42	36.73 \pm 6.30	12-42

Regression analysis

Self-transcendence and gratitude scores were significant predictors of eudemonic wellbeing ($p < 0.05$). The R2 coefficient for the model was

37 percent. The regression coefficients, standard errors and p-values are presented in Table 3. The relative importance of (i) self-transcendence was equal to 16.2 percent and (ii) gratitude was equal to 10.5 percent.

Table 3: Regression coefficients, standard errors, variance inflation factors and p-values for the multiple regression analysis with gratitude and self-transcendence as predictors of eudemonic wellbeing

Dependent variable	Independent variables	Regression coefficient (β)	Standard error	Tolerance	Variance inflation factors	p-value
Eudemonic wellbeing	Gratitude	0.49	0.10	0.925	1.081	<0.001
	Self-transcendence	0.66	0.11	0.925	1.081	<0.001

DISCUSSION

The eudemonic wellbeing of resident scholars of *Samkhya* philosophy and *Yoga* was significantly predicted by their levels of self-transcendence and of gratitude, with the former being a marginally greater predictor of eudemonic wellbeing than the latter (16.2 and 10.5 percent, respectively).

The significant role of self-transcendence in predicting the participants' eudemonic wellbeing can be explained since progressing towards self-transcendence with a merger of the material self and the non-material self is an aim and a desired outcome of all spiritual aspiration in *Vedic* philosophy.²²

However, the significant and comparable role of gratitude in predicting eudemonic wellbeing is more recognized among followers of monotheistic philosophies.²³ The way in which followers of *Samkhya* and *Yoga* philosophies may equally feel gratitude to the Divine (and hence dispositional gratitude) is explored here.

The *Bhagwad Gita* can be considered a repository for *Samkhya* philosophy and principles of *Yoga* in addition to other sources.¹ While most practical wisdom in the *Bhagwad Gita* can be read without reference to Divinity in any form, in the last chapter it is stated: "Having freed oneself from egoism, compulsion to act, pride, desire, anger and possessiveness, one is able to become *Brahman*."²⁴

Hence *Samkhya* and *Yoga* philosophies present the Ideal Being as a human being who has attained tranquillity and, at the highest pinnacle of perfection, becomes one with the Absolute, the *Brahman*.^{24,25} The concept of *Brahman* is described in *Chandogya Upanishad* (3.14): "Verily this whole world is *Brahman*. Tranquil, let one worship It as that from which he came forth, as that into which he will be dissolved, as that in which he breathes....this is

Brahman."²⁶ Hence though *Brahman* is beyond the mind and senses and attained only through self-absorption or oneness, the concept of *Brahman* can inspire feelings of deep veneration. It is recognized that reverence can give rise to feelings of being part of a larger (possibly Divine) plan inspiring confidence and all-pervading gratitude.²⁷ Apart from this, in *Vedic* philosophy, devotional practices are permitted as aids to spiritual development. For example, the scholar-participants of the present study participated in and performed *yajnas* every day. In the *Vedic* tradition, *yajnas* were part of daily life, playing an integral in harmony with nature, social and communal prosperity.²⁸ While not intended as a devotional practice, the *yajna* can be considered to have evolved through the years so that participants in the *yajna* may consider the practice to invoke different manifestations of the one Divinity.²⁹ In addition to a daily *yajna*, the daily routine of the participants included recitation of *mantras* which can be considered universal prayers celebrating and supplicating Universal Consciousness and all pervading Divinity.³⁰ Hence feelings of gratitude could be evoked in the scholar-participants as part of their understanding of and reverence for *Brahman*, as well by participation in the *Vedic* rituals such as *yajna* and recitation of *mantras*.

The minor but relatively greater importance of self-transcendence compared with gratitude to the participants' eudemonic wellbeing, may be related to the understanding in *Vedic* philosophy that considering the self to have temporary embodiment in the body and mind, is fundamental to spiritual aspiration.³¹ Through service and spiritual discipline, the self becomes fulfilled and shares in the all-pervading Transcendence (*Brahman*).

The present results are comparable to previous reports on self-transcendence and gratitude in relation to wellbeing. Previously, achieving self-

transcendence was associated with higher levels of wellbeing, with the perception of self being more realistic and more positive.^{32,33} Separately, dispositional gratitude was also reported to incrementally contribute to subjective wellbeing.^{34,35} In a previous study, spiritual intent increased wellbeing in *Yoga* practitioners,³⁶ a finding which is compatible with the present results showing that in scholars of *Samkhya* philosophy and *Yoga*, both self-transcendence and gratitude predict eudemonic wellbeing.

LIMITATIONS

While attempting to understand factors contributing to eudemonia, individual semi-structured interviews may have yielded relevant details about the participants' spiritual beliefs and their experiences of self-transcendence and gratitude, which could have provided a deeper understanding about the relative contribution of these factors to eudemonic wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the present findings suggest that in participants seeking to progress in Vedic spirituality, self-transcendence and gratitude both predict eudemonic wellbeing with the former being a marginally greater predictor of eudemonic wellbeing than the latter (16.2 and 10.5 percent, respectively).

STATEMENTS & DECLARATIONS

Ethics approval: The study protocol was approved by the institutional ethical committee (Approval no: PRF/YRD/020/007). All procedures performed in the study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional committee.

Availability of data and material: The datasets generated during analysis for the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

All the authors critically read the initial manuscript, commented on all parts of the text, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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