An empirical study of ancient wisdom: Effect of nonattachment (anasakti) and ego (ahamkara) on well-being

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Abstract

Anasakti and *ahamkara*, translated as ‘nonattachment’ and ‘ego’ in English, respectively, play a significant role in determining true happiness, according to Indian psychology. A total of 240 educated urban Indian adults (Females = 104, Males = 136) were surveyed to investigate their relationship with well-being variables. Results revealed *anasakti* as a significant factor for ensuring life satisfaction and experiencing positive emotions. Although *ahamkara* contributed significantly towards improving cognitive well-being and affective state, negative emotions were also better predicted by *ahamkara*. Findings of the current study may widen our understanding of ‘what makes us happy?’

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Introduction

Well-being is amongst the widely researched concepts and is relevant in ensuring the quality of our existence. Technological and economic development has offered all possible measures for maintaining an easier and comfortable lifestyle; however, nowadays, achieving sustainable happiness has become a challenge (Mishra, 2010; Dabas & Singh, 2018). Among many attempts for searching ways of long-lasting well-being, it has been observed that knowing the true nature of happiness has been one of the main concerns in classical Indian philosophy since ancient times (Bhawuk, 2010; Dabas & Singh, 2018; K. Singh et al., 2017). The ancient wisdom believes that joy is the basic nature of human, which does not depend on worldly modes (Srivastava & Misra, 2011; Banavathy & Choudry, 2014).

Correlates of happiness in Hindu traditions

Indian thinkers have proposed that the embodied humans seem to experience mainly two selves; metaphysical/ transcendental self and empirical self. The metaphysical self, termed as *Atman* or *Purusha*, is considered the true nature of a being. It is inherently blissful and embedded in the pure consciousness or transcendental reality (*Brahman*), and realization of this self leads to utmost happiness (Banavathy & Choudry, 2014; Chandur & Sriram, 2018; Desai & Collins, 1986; Salagame, 2014). Conversely, the empirical self indicates a self-sense that is rooted in worldly experiences. They called it *ahamkara* (ego) and advised that one should strive to go beyond this identity since it develops on one's identification with material elements and possessions (Jakubczak, 2013; Salagame et al., 2005). Therefore, it makes the person the subject of emotional fluctuations (Mishra, 2010; Salagame, 2013). Classical Hindu scriptures such as

Upanishads and *Bhagavadgita* have suggested that true happiness is attained through self-realization (Agrawal, 1982; Banavathy & Choudry, 2014; Salagame, 2013). It involves transcending empirical self by following the path of anasakti (non-attachment); removing attachments to the materialistic world, and merging individual soul with Supreme being/ Brahman (Banth & Talwar, 2012; Bhushan & Jha, 2005; Chandur & Sriram, 2018; Pande & Naidu, 1992).

Anasakti/non-attachment versus Asakti/Attachment

The idea of nonattachment seems to be encouraged among every school of thought and religion; however, it is much emphasized and widely discussed in Hindu and Buddhist scriptures (Huxley, 1941). Within Eastern knowledge traditions, *asakti* (attachment) is discouraged because it binds the self to *prakriti* (empirical world). Asakti is viewed as a “psychic cement” (Agrawal, 1982, p. 1) that keeps the one’s sense of self glued to worldly events and action, therefore, refraining one from reaching the higher consciousness or being (Bhushan & Jha, 2005).

Anasakti from Hindu perspective

Anasakti is the most standard term used for denoting the idea of nonattachment in most folk stories, phrases and among current psychological works in India (Bhushan & Jha, 2005; Banth & Talwar, 2012; Chandur & Sriram, 2018; Pande & Naidu, 1992; Singh & Raina, 2015), and carries the essence of nonattachment better than the term itself (Hoffman, 2007). In Hindu scriptures, it is inferred as a state where the mind remains a keen observer of events around without being affected by them (Banth & Talwar, 2012; Chandur & Sriram, 2018). It largely contributes to establishing a mental state free from asakti (attachment), emotional fluctuations and therefore motivates a person to be involved in worldly affairs without selfish interests (Bhushan & Jha, 2005; Pande & Naidu, 1992).

Anasakti in Buddhist teachings

As per Buddhism, nonattachment (anasakti) refers to a subjective quality involving freedom from fixation towards sensory and mental objects, urge to direct life events, and openness for them without desiring for particular experiences (Elphinstone et al., 2015; Sahdra, et al., 2010; Sahdra & Shaver, 2013). Both systems agree that anasakti requires one to transcend the egotistic tendencies and rigid beliefs regarding self, others, and life so that the individual can be free from attachments, which are the root cause of our everlasting sufferings (Bhawuk, 2000, 2008; Sahdra, et al., 2010).

Anasakti and positive outcomes

It has been observed that with anasakti, an individual tends to work towards excellence without insisting on a distinct outcome or feeling and therefore increases one's productivity and satisfaction (Pande & Naidu, 1992; Mulla & Krishnan, 2008). It also involves developing emotional equanimity for different life conditions. Hence, promises less distress and better mental health during difficult life events (Banth & Talwar, 2012; Budiarto, 2019; Pande & Tewari, 2011; Wang et al., 2016). Besides, such an unattached view induces unconditional concern for others (Singh & Raina, 2015), hopefulness (Shaw, 1995), and a more optimistic view towards life (Agrawal & Jaiswal, 2013). Anasakti is also associated with wisdom (Jeste & Vahia, 2008) and other optimum psychological development such as self-actualization and self-transcendence (Whitehead et al., 2020).

Ahamkara/ego

Ahamkara, generally translated as ego, is another important concept from the Indian philosophical systems related to self and identity (Salagame et al., 2005). Ahamkara (ego) denotes the empirical self; a bodily-based identity developed from linking general consciousness

to every phenomenal experience deriving from the mind (Jakubczak, 2013; Salagame & Raj, 1999). Ahamkara works on the ‘I-making’ principle, which involves referring all acts and objects to self and adhering all feelings and cognitions with ‘me’ and ‘mine’ (Pande & Naidu, 1992; Reddy, 2014). As many Indian traditions have highlighted the transiency and changeability of this body and the material world, establishing a sense of self upon them makes us the subject of all their ups and downs (Salagame et al., 2005). Moreover, this personalized identity represents the inflated sense of self-worth, which ignores its inclusive and metaphysical quality (Desai & Collins, 1986).

Ideas of ahamkara/ ego in various Indian traditions

There are four aspects of ahamkara including a sense of uniqueness in terms of distinct characteristics (*vaishishtya*), doer-ship in terms of action and outcome (*kartatva*), identification with worldly objects in terms of me and mine (*abhimana*) and differentiation in terms of I versus not-I (*dvaita bhava*) (Salagame & Raj, 1999; Salagame et al., 2005). It was proposed that these aspects might be present in different degrees among people, giving multiple identities to them (Gaur, 2011; Salagame et al., 2005). Since every identity would require one to think, feel, and behave in a certain manner, thus cumulatively will enhance the sense of ahamkara and make us unable to experience our transcendental self.

Within Buddhism, the self is seen as transient, and believing in the static, permanent self is considered ignorance (Paranjpe, 2002). As per Buddhist psychological literature, the sense of self defends individuals by avoiding the reality of transience of this world and its objects and creating a misconception of a fixed self that remains the same (Brazier, 2003). Gradually, the person gets attached to the self and believes that fulfilling desires of such self would bring happiness. Such misperception makes a person regard everything as an extension of self, leading

to the development of egoism. With egoism, the person gets involved in self-centeredness and egocentricity (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011). Therefore, in Buddhism, developing the state of *no-self* or releasing attachment to the sense of self is suggested as the path of freedom from personal sufferings (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011; Shiah, 2016).

Ahamkara and psychological functioning

The above points clarify that ego-based identity or ahamkara has certain implications for one's psychological functioning. Over or under-emphasis on anyone or other aspects of ahamkara may lead to mental health problems such as anxiety (Rekha, 1995; Salagame & Raj, 1999) and personality disorders (Salagame et al., 2005). With ahamkara, people tend to engage in self-adoration while neglecting others, and sometimes they may put others' interests at stake for their personal benefits (Gaur, 2011).

Rationale of the study

Based on the description of these two indigenous concepts and their effects, it might be said that they are theoretically different and produce different outcomes, therefore, suggesting a potential negative relationship between them, which needs to be empirically tested. It can be observed that the self is the centre around which all experiences revolve (Mishra, 2010), and the concept of anasakti and ahamkara may be applied directly to the self. Therefore, their relation can be speculated with well-being, such as growth (Whitehead, Bates & Elphinstone, 2020), subjective well-being, job satisfaction (Banth & Talwar, 2012; Singh & Raina, 2015; Upadhyay & Vashishtha, 2014), and social harmony (Bishoyi, 2017). Exploring such association would provide insights about how these philosophical concepts could affect one's mental health and adaptive functioning. Furthermore, investigating a variety of well-being variables, which were not previously studied with anasakti and ahamkara, would help develop these philosophical

concepts based interventions for improving quality of life. Additionally, combining measures based on Indian philosophy with mainstream psychological measures would show that these indigenous measures based on centuries-old knowledge traditions have contemporary implications.

As mentioned, the idea of anasakti is widely covered in every school of thought, and variations could be found in definitions and interpretations of the concept within the Eastern philosophical reflections. Since generating a conclusive definition is beyond this research's scope, anasakti is defined in terms of descriptions given in the tools of anasakti used in this study. Anasakti would be conceived as non-attachment to desires and selfish action, task excellence without the concern for results, and less insistence over-controlling life events within the study. Ahamkara is also operationalized by using the description of the concept given in the ahamkara questionnaire. It would be referred to as ego, which includes a sense of separation from others, identification with worldly matters, a belief that one possesses unique characteristics and is the agent of every action.

Materials and methods

Participants

For the current study, ethical clearance was obtained through the institute's doctoral committee, and all ethical codes were adhered to. Participants in this cross-sectional study were recruited from the urban area of Patna (India). The sample included adults (136 males and 104 females) with an age range of 20-60 years (Mean age=38.17 years, SD=11.45 years). Many of them were postgraduates ($f = 132$, 55%), employed (full time = 106, 44%), 53% ($f = 127$) were married and 65% ($f = 156$) were living with their families. A majority of Hindu participants ($f =$

204, 85%), 4% Muslim, and the rest did not mention their religious affiliations [More details in Gupta & Agrawal, 2020].

The measures used in this research could be divided into three parts: measures of anasakti, measure of ahamkara/ ego, and measures of well-being. For measuring anasakti, a Test of asakti-anasakti, scale of anasakti, and nonattachment scale were used. Ahamkara questionnaire indicated the level of ahamkara. Measures like satisfaction with life scale, job satisfaction scale, mental health continuum-short form, and positive and negative affect schedule- revised were used to assess the different aspects of well-being.

Scale of anasakti (SA)

Following the philosophy of Bhagavadgita, Pande and Naidu (1992) developed a scale. Here, with 28 items, anasakti is measured on five dimensions: outcome vulnerability, attachment, effort orientation, endurance and equipoise, and physical-sensual non-identification. On SA, possible scores ranged from 28-140. Previous studies have reported adequate reliability and validity of this scale (Shaw, 1995; Pande & Tewari, 2011).

Nonattachment scale (NAS)

Elphinstone et al., (2015) developed this Buddhism based 7-item scale, a shorter version of the original 30-items Nonattachment scale (Sahdra et al., 2010). This 6-point Likert type scale has been a valid and reliable measure (Sahdra et al., 2015; Sahdra et al., 2016) in previous studies.

Test of asakti-anasakti (TAA)

Bhushan and Jha (2005) developed this 40-items test following *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, where anasakti and asakti were measured as two extremes of the same continuum. Possible scores ranged from 40-160, and high scores on TAA suggest asakti, and a low score suggests

anasakti. The test has shown adequate psychometric properties with the Indian sample in previous studies (Bhushan & Jha, 2005; Banth & Talwar, 2012; Pandey & Singh, 2015).

Ahamkara questionnaire (AQ)

In 1993, Raj developed this 18-item scale, which follows the Indian philosophical description of self. This 18-item scale is largely based on *Vedanta* philosophy and captures ahamkara (ego) on four dimensions: identification, individuality, agency, and separation. Some of the items are reversely coded, so the total score on this instrument ranges from 18-72, where a higher score reflects a higher level of ahamkara. In a previous study, AQ has demonstrated adequate reliability (Gaur, 1994).

Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS)

This well-established 5-item scale was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). It measures overall life related cognitive judgment on a 7-point Likert-type scale. For the present study, a single item, “I am satisfied with my life,” from the original scale was used to evaluate one's overall satisfaction with life. Like the full version, this version of SWLS is also a widely used measure with consistent reliability and validity (J.Agrawal et al., 2010; Cheung & Lucas, 2014; Pavot & Diener, 2008).

Job satisfaction scale (JSS)

A 3-item scale, included in the Michigan organization assessment questionnaire (Cammenn et al., 1979), was used. It is a widely used scale to assess overall job satisfaction (Aloisio et al., 2019; Bowling & Hammond, 2008; Samson & Arulraj, 2007).

Mental health continuum-Short form (MHC-SF)

Eleven items were used from MHC-SF (Keyes, 2009) to assess well-being's psychological and social aspects. It is a shorter version of Keyes's (2002) 40-items Mental

Health Continuum-Long Form. Scores were summed up separately for each subscale to indicate the respective well-being. MHC-SF is a well-established measure of well-being used in various cultural settings (Keyes, 2009; Singh, Bassi, Junnarkar & Negri, 2015).

Positive and negative affect schedule- Revised (PANAS-R)

This 26-item scale is the modified version of the original schedule (Barrett & Russell, 1998), which was revised by Rao and Mehrotra (2006), according to the Indian context. Thirteen items assess positive affect (PA), and 13 items measuring negative affect (NA). Further, PA and NA were sub-divided into activated and deactivated affect states. Statements like “feeling excited” showed a positively activated state, whereas “calm and relaxed” corresponded to a positively deactivated state. On the other hand, “feeling angry” suggested a negatively activated state and “feeling exhausted” negatively deactivated state. This widely used, well-validated scale has shown adequate reliability with the Indian sample (Agrawal et al., 2010; Elias, Sudhir & Mehrotra, 2016).

Procedure

All measures were compiled in a questionnaire booklet. For the Hindi version of the booklet, instruments were firstly translated in Hindi and then translated back into English. Subsequently, the reverse-translated version was compared with the original one to check for any discrepancies or distorted meanings. The distorted meanings were corrected, and discrepancies were resolved satisfactorily through discussions. The entire process was completed with two subject experts, who also had a good command of both languages. The researcher either administered in person or emailed the questionnaire (a Google-Form-based questionnaire) to the participants. Their queries were resolved personally or over the phone [More details in Gupta & Agrawal, 2020].

Results

Obtained raw data were cleaned and reverse scored wherever required before being analyzed with SPSS 20. All measures' means and standard deviations were calculated and presented in **Table 1**.

Relationship between anasakti and ahamkara (Table 2)

The relationships among variables were analyzed using Pearson's Product-moment correlation coefficient (for normally distributed scores) and Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient (for non-normally distributed scores) and are presented in **Table 2**. Only scores of TAA, PA, and PA (activated) were normally distributed in the sample. The results indicate that higher anasakti, in terms of both SA & NAS scores, are significantly correlated with lower ahamkara (AQ and its sub-scales). In contrast, higher asakti (and therefore, lower anasakti) measured by TAA was associated with higher ahamkara.

Relationships of anasakti and ahamkara with positive psychological functioning (Table 3)

In general, anasakti was positively related to greater well-being, while ahamkara had mixed results.

Anasakti and well-being

We found anasakti (SA & NAS), Effort orientation, and Endurance and equipoise subscales were moderate but positively associated with total and activated positive affect, whereas deactivated positive emotions were substantially associated with all subscales of anasakti. The negative affect total, activated, and deactivated, was negatively associated with anasakti (SA and NAS) total and all SA subscales, although the results were stronger for the outcome vulnerability and attachment sub-scales. Similarly, anasakti was modestly associated with cognitive well-being exhibited in the overall satisfaction with life (SWLS) and domain

satisfaction with one's job (JSS). Interestingly, while Physical-sensual non-identification had no significant relationship with SWLS, Attachment had none with JSS. Psychological and social well-being did not significantly correlate with total anaskti or its sub-scales, except for Effort orientation. Psychological well-being was also mildly associated with Endurance and equipoise, and social well-being was positively correlated with NAS. Asakti score (TAA) was mildly and negatively associated with deactivated positive affect and cognitive well-being (SWLS and JSS), while it was positively and moderately associated with negative affect (total, activated, and deactivated).

Ahamkara and well-being

Interestingly, total ahamkara showed mild to modest positive correlations with both positive and negative affect (total and activated), along with deactivated negative affect, psychological well-being. It had no significant correlation with Positive deactivated affect, cognitive, and social well-being. While Positive affect- activated was associated with all 4 subscales, Positive affect-deactivated was not associated with any subscales of ahamkara. The total Positive affect was only associated with individuality and agency subscales. Similarly, Negative affect (total, activated, and deactivated) were associated with the Individuality and Separation subscales. Identification subscale was also associated with total and activated Negative affect. Psychological and social well-being was associated with Individuality. Cognitive well-being (SWLS and JSS) was negatively associated with separation. All these relationships were mild to modest in strength.

Anasakti and ahamkara as predictors of positive mental health

After determining the correlation, significant correlated variables were used for calculating stepwise multiple linear regression analysis to determine if anasakti and ahamkara

may predict various mental health variables. Since NA, PA, JSS and SWLS had more relationships as compared to psychological and social well-being scale, they were used as dependent variables.

Results revealed that final regression model that explained 19 % variance in SWLS included NAS, endurance and equipoise subscale of SA and AQ's separation subscale (**Table 4**). Similarly, separation and agency subscale of AQ were found significant predictors of job satisfaction along with SA, NAS and end SA (**Table 5**). This model explained 23% variance in JSS. Interestingly, the best fitting model (21% variance explained) for PA as dependent variable included NAS, AQ, SA and TAA (**Table 6**). The regression analysis for NA revealed regression model including TAA, SA's outcome vulnerability subscale and AQ's separation, agency and individuality subscale as best fitting model (33% variance explained) (**Table 7**).

Discussion

The current study attempted to establish an empirical link between the psycho-philosophical concepts of anasakti and ahamkara and few currently popular mental health indicators. A sample of urban, educated adults was surveyed using standardized scales of all study variables. Coefficients of correlation and stepwise multiple linear regression analysis were calculated to examine their nature of relationships.

A detailed observation of correlation revealed that with AQ scores SA and NAS demonstrate a weak but significant negative correlation, and TAA indicates a moderate positive association. It seems that asakti is more likely to increase with the level of ahamkara. Thus, these findings established the theoretical proposition that being anasakt lowers the level of ahamkara. Asakti is described as a state of mind, which involves fixation on ideas, events, people, and relationship based on pleasant or unpleasant experiences (Gleig, 2016; Hoffman, 2007; Sahdra &

Shaver, 2013) and is projected through liking, disliking, and egoism (Bhushan & Jha, 2005). Results suggest that *asakti* positively relates to all dimensions of *ahamkara*, from the sense of intimate association, control, differentiation, or uniqueness. Probably, when the self tries to establish a sense of identity, it gets attached to self-relevant beliefs, such as a fondness for particular people or distaste for some experiences while assigning personal meanings to all objects in the world. By focusing on the self-related needs, people probably get fixated on satisfying those sensory cravings and psychologically link themselves with their objects of desire in forms of possessions, achievements, and identifications (Agrawal, 1982; Altobello, 2009). In this way, *asakt* tendencies boost mineness and egoism through satisfying desires in life. Moreover, clinging onto some experiences may provide a stable foundation for developing a self-structure and, therefore, fulfill the underlying need for permanence in this dynamic world (Rao, 2008). According to the Upanishadic view, *ahamkara* is the source of all human difficulties, which could be eradicated through cultivating *anasakti*.

Further, it was found that *ahamkara* and its sub-scales had mixed results and was associated with both positive and negative affect, psychological well-being. Interestingly Positive affect-deactivated, cognitive, and social well-being was not associated with *ahamkara*. While the agency was only associated with emotional well-being (PA activated), cognitive well-being (SWLS and JSS) was only associated with separation in the negative direction. Psychological and social well-being was mainly associated with individuality. The total scores on the *ahamkara* scale also showed a negative relation with various psychological processes associated with *anasakti*, such as outcome vulnerability, attachment, and physical-sensual non-identification, as indicated in Table 2. These results suggest when people are not involved in their egoistic selves, they engage even in those tasks, which do not promise any reward in return,

or even be pleasurable, but are worth doing. Moreover, they may resist their temptations and are less susceptible to social comparisons. Such an approach towards life is the core of the idea of a good life and therefore seems to provide optimal conditions for mental health and well-being (Table 3). Additionally, many interesting results were revealed in the current study. A stepwise multiple linear regression analysis revealed that with separation and agency type of ahamkara, anasakti qualities, such as emotional stability, higher tolerance for physical discomfort, and less attachment to personal ideas and beliefs, are needed to determine job and life satisfaction.

Interestingly, increased positive emotions were related to both anasakti and ahamkara. Consistent with previous research (Banth & Talwar, 2012; Salagame et al., 2005), people having asakti, intense concern for outcomes, separation, agency, and individuality type ahamkara, were more likely to experience negative emotions.

In summary, similar to previous literature, findings confirmed that the less anasakti people were more likely to experience negative emotions (Pande & Naidu, 1992), although ahamkara also contributes significantly towards improving cognitive well-being (JSS, SWLS) and affective state. However, it is important to note that negative emotions were better predicted by ahamkara than job satisfaction, positive affect, and life satisfaction.

Within society, ahamkara provides a basis of existence through individuating an individual from the common mass and acknowledging this very fact that everyone has a separate and well-defined external body (Sri Aurobindo, 1940). Such concrete and clear understanding of self may help recognize one's roles and duties in a social system and perform various associated activities (Raghuram, 2007). Through endorsing every activity to oneself, the sense of ahamkara seems to be promoting the volition, cultivation of one's optimum potential, and growth in the face of existential demands of life. Recently, few studies from the Western psychological

perspective have suggested developing a 'compassionate and regulated ego' which balances self-interest with concern for others (Bauer & Wayment, 2008). It involves perspective taking, identifying with others not similar to oneself, being less defensive, and promoting oneself and others' well-being (Wayment, Wiist, Sullivan & Warren, 2011).

Furthermore, individuals with *ahamkara* experience a range of emotions, whether positive or negative, resulting from identifying with every event (Salagame et al., 2005; Salagame, 2013), although the individual is more likely to experience positive affect in terms of exhilarating emotions. It has been argued that *ahamkara* is predominantly *rajsik* (passionate) in nature (Reddy, 2014). The quality of *rajas* (energy), which includes intense activity and passion, and completion of work or the gratification of senses, may lead to an elated affective state (Khanna et al., 2013). Since pleasures derived from sense gratification are short-lived, the individual is less likely to experience pervasive life and work-related satisfaction. Another interesting finding was that, unlike previous studies, psychological well-being had shown a non-significant association with *anasakti* (Banth & Talwar, 2012). It appears that level of *anasakti* is less related to the actualization of one's potential and flourishing in life.

With the attitude of dispassion, emotional equipoise, and disengagement with extrinsic rewards, an individual eliminates the selfish thinking and dependence on pleasure-seeking impulses (Pande & Naidu, 1992; K. Singh & Raina, 2015). Probably, *anasakti* provides the optimum conditions to expanding one's consciousness, which goes beyond the body, material possessions, and sense of ownership. With *anasakti*, people are more likely to become aware of their identifications with personal possessions, actions, and desires (Salagame, 2014) and learn to let them go. They understand that unlike personal identity, which is surrounded by self-relevant feelings, beliefs, and mental images, the self is genuinely more inclusive and spiritual (Desai &

Collins, 1986; Mills, 2011). It reduces egocentricity and promotes openness for every experience without appropriating oneself (Salagame et al., 2005). Thus, anasakti was associated with emotional and cognitive well-being. This was especially true of effort orientation, endurance, and equipoise.

Interestingly, while Physical-sensual non-identification had no significant relationship with SWLS, Attachment had none with JSS. Low association with psychological or social well-being was present. Similarly, asakti and outcome vulnerability were associated with low emotional and cognitive well-being. Findings of the current study also aligned with previous researches and showed that less the person is asakt, more the person experiences overall satisfaction with life and positive emotions, which would instill calmness and composure (Agrawal et al., 2010; Banth & Talwar, 2012; Pande & Naidu, 1992). Many studies suggest that asakti is manifested in the form of memories or concerns for future outcomes. Hence, negative affective responses become intense when current happenings conflict with an individual's expectations (Banth & Talwar, 2012; Bhushan & Jha, 2005). With anasakti, the person may develop an insight that no event, experience, or object can be the source of pleasure or discomfort; thus, gets released from the anticipatory worries regarding the unfolding of life events (Elphinstone, Sahdra & Ciarrochi, 2015). This reduction of desires for controlling events brings unconditional acceptance for life (Agrawal & Jaiswal, 2013) and fosters wisdom for understanding human existence's deeper meanings (Whitehead et al., 2020).

With such a state of mind, people tend to experience peace of mind (Gao, 2015). Similarly, while working, people with anasakti may maintain their calmness throughout the task due to their lack of anxiety for outcomes. Moreover, they view work as one's contribution to the betterment of the world; therefore, it brings fulfillment and a sense of content regardless of its

results (Caza & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Pande & Naidu, 1992; Shaw, 1995; Upadhyay & Vashishtha, 2014). Furthermore, the social dimension of well-being has shown a significant positive correlation with NAS scores only, suggesting that being less fixated on expectations or personal beliefs may help individuals be more open to others' views even if they are counteractive. Instead of being self-critical or shunning others, the person may consider these views as self-improvement suggestions in the social context. Letting go of attachment to feelings and thoughts seems more associated with one's feeling safe and cared for in a community than engaging in selfless actions, though egocentric action (*ahamkara*) does not appear to be linked with increased social well-being.

Further, SA showed negative, and TAA showed a positive correlation with negative emotions, while for positive emotions, the correlation was the highest for NAS in a positive direction than AQ and SA. Based on these findings, it may be said that people are more likely to experience pleasant emotions such as joy or peace when they are free from a strong need to control everything in their surroundings. On the other hand, the higher level of *asakti* seems to follow negative emotions like feeling distressed or angry. According to Hindu yogic texts, *asakti* tendencies are marked by the higher level of *tamas* (quality of dullness) and the lower level of *sattva* (quality of peacefulness), which may lead to negativity, hatred, anxiety, and adjustment problems in daily life (Bhushan & Jha, 2005).

Overall, the current study's findings supported the Hindu and Buddhist philosophy that *anasakti* aligns with mental health by indicating an empirical link with the modern western indicators of positive psychological functioning. The findings have also empirically proven the nature of the theoretical relationship between *ahamkara* and *anasakti*. Additionally, using three

measures allowed multi-dimensional representation of the construct of anasakti and provided further evidence that findings are independent of types of measures.

Despite having theoretical and empirical relevance, the study suffers from some limitations. First, using a cross-sectional survey approach restrains determining any causal relationship between anasakti, ahamkara, and mental health variables. Second, the study sample included more males than females and was confined to an urban community of a particular region of India, limiting results' generalizability to other people belonging to different sections of the society or socio-cultural backgrounds and clinical population. Third, the authors did not collect any data on the sample's meditative practices, which could have a confounding effect in increasing anasakti and lowering ahamkara or improved well-being. Fourth, employing self-report measures might have lent response bias. There is a possibility that respondents could have found some scale items difficult to understand or to answer; therefore, they might have compromised with objectivity and truthfulness (Goodwin and Leech, 2006). Fifth, the measure of self (ahamkara questionnaire) is a comparatively less used scale and may have its limitations. More research is needed to make this tool more psychometrically sound, and perhaps exploring and developing other measures based on the Indian model of self is required.

Implications and future research

The results highlighting psychological insights from the philosophical concepts from Indian psychology, have justified studying Hindu-yogic and Buddhist texts deeper. Furthermore, given the possibility of maintaining dynamic harmony between the ultimate fulfillment as an individual and the materialistic requirements necessary for a balanced life, interventions could be planned from the Indian psychological perspectives, and insights from this study might come in handy. Theoretically, greater anasakti seems to result in greater well-being, and ahamkara would

reduce it. However, some of the findings diverged from this proposition in the current study, such as ahamkara being linked with positive affect, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being. Future studies investigating the effect of ahamkara and anasakti on psychological functioning, such as experimental or longitudinal studies, would help establish this causal relationship if it exists. Furthermore, replicating the present finding with more diversified samples would add to the implications of the study.

Summary and conclusion

In this cross-section study, 240 urban educated adults were surveyed using standard scales of anasakti, ahamkara, and positive psychological functioning. Results fully supported previous studies that established the role of anasakti with overall emotional well-being, life and job satisfaction, and social functioning but mildly supported the idea that greater anasakti would result in better psychological well-being. Interestingly, findings have highlighted that ahamkara may also render some unique benefits to an individual's psychological well-being and desirable state like enthusiasm or inspired. These findings have implications for interventions designed and developed from the Indian psychological perspective and indicate that future studies are required on anasakti and ahamkara concerning mental health factors.

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Table 1. Mean and standard deviation for all measures

Measures	Possible range	Obtained Range	Mean (SD)
Scale of anasakti	28-140	48-134	94.85 (13.43)
Outcome vulnerability	10-50	13-50	33.95 (6.68)
Attachment	4-20	4-20	11.72 (3.17)
Effort orientation	8-40	13-39	27.93 (4.82)
Endurance and equipoise	3-15	3-15	10.83 (2.38)
Physical-sensual non-identification	3-15	4-15	10.42 (2.46)
Nonattachment scale	7-42	7-42	31.83 (6.79)
Test of asakti-anasakti	40-160	44-138	85.29 (16.07)
Ahamkara questionnaire	18-72	22-61	44.80 (6.28)
Identification	5-20	5-20	12.80 (2.33)
Individuality	5-20	5-19	12.85 (3.10)
Agency	4-16	4-16	9.81 (2.45)
Separation	4-16	4-15	9.33 (2.33)
Satisfaction with life scale	1-7	1-7	5.37 (1.61)
Positive affect	13-65	18-65	43.08 (9.37)
Positive affect (activated)	8-40	8-40	26.27 (6.67)
Positive affect (deactivated)	5-25	6-25	16.82 (3.86)
Negative affect	13-65	13-57	25.73 (9.49)
Negative affect (activated)	7-35	8-37	15.86 (6.24)
Negative affect (deactivated)	5-25	5-22	9.87 (3.83)
Job satisfaction scale	3-21	3-21	16.63 (3.26)
MHC-SF social wellbeing	5-30	5-30	15.93 (6.91)
MHC-SF psychological wellbeing	6-36	6-36	24.50 (8.02)

Table 2. Correlation between ahamkara and anasakti using Pearson's *r* and Spearman's Rho

	1	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	2	3	4	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4
SA	--												
Outcome vulnerability#	0.83*	--											
Attachment	0.72*	0.61*	--										
Effort orientation	0.58*	0.19*	0.19*	--									
Endurance and equipoise	0.49*	0.20*	0.18*	0.39*	--								
Physical-sensual non-identification	0.59*	0.45*	0.37*	0.17*	0.27*	--							
NAS	0.47*	0.31*	0.32*	0.41*	0.26*	0.15*	--						
TAA#	0.72*	0.67*	0.67*	0.35*	0.34*	0.52*	0.44*	--					
AQ	0.27*	0.27*	0.27*	0.07	-0.11	0.17*	0.16*	0.53*	--				

	*	*	*			*							
Identification	- 0.33* *	- 0.32* *	- 0.38* *	-0.09	- 0.14*	- 0.22* *	- 0.24* *	0.53* *	0.62* *	--			
Individuality	- 0.17*	- 0.20* *	-0.12	0.03	- 0.16*	-0.08	0.02	0.23* *	0.65* *	0.14*	--		
Agency	-0.10	- 0.14*	- 0.16*	-0.05	-0.04	-0.02	-0.09	0.27* *	0.65* *	0.27* *	0.31* *	--	
Separation	-0.05	-0.02	0.00	-0.06	0.01	-0.12	-0.02	0.18* *	0.42* *	-0.8	0.23* *	0.05	--

Note. All correlations spearman; If normally distributed the Pearson#; * (p<0.05), ** (p<0.01)

Table 3. Intercorrelations among ahamkara, anasakti and measures relevant to well-being

	Emotional WB						Cognitive WB		PsychoWB	SocialWB
	PA (Tot)#	PA(a)#	PA(d)	NA (Tot)	NA(a)	Na(d)	SWLS	JSS		
SA	0.24**	0.13*	0.34**	- 0.47**	- 0.43**	- 0.47**	0.28**	0.30**	0.06	0.06
Outcome vulnerability#	0.12	0.05	0.22**	0.43**	0.39**	0.42**	0.17**	0.21**	0.02	-0.03
Attachment	0.07	-0.02	0.19**	0.40**	0.39**	0.34**	0.18**	0.12	-0.07	0.02
Effort orientation	0.27**	0.20**	0.30**	0.19**	-0.17*	0.21**	0.25**	0.27**	0.16*	0.16*
Endurance and equipoise	0.23**	0.13*	0.32**	0.24**	0.21**	0.24**	0.32**	0.26**	0.18**	0.11
Physical-sensual non-identification	0.05	-0.02	0.14*	0.22**	0.19**	0.24**	0.06	0.18**	-0.03	-0.05
NAS	0.34**	0.26**	0.40**	0.28**	0.23**	0.24**	0.26**	0.32**	0.10	0.16*
TAA#	-0.05	0.07	0.21**	0.50**	0.48**	0.45**	0.27**	0.29**	0.02	-0.03
AQ	0.23**	0.31**	0.01	0.29**	0.29**	0.24**	-0.09	-0.08	0.17**	0.08
Identification	0.12	0.18**	-0.02	0.20**	0.19**	0.11	-0.02	0.04	0.10	-0.03
Individuality	0.16*	0.26**	-0.04	0.30**	0.27**	0.27**	-0.06	-0.06	0.15*	0.14*
Agency	0.13*	0.20**	0.03	0.02	-0.00	0.04	0.01	0.10	0.05	0.02
Separation	0.11	0.13*	0.06	0.25**	0.27**	0.20**	0.22**	0.22**	0.08	0.07

Note. All correlations spearman; If normally distributed the Pearson#; * (p<0.05), ** (p<0.01)

Table 4. Statistical findings of stepwise regression analysis on satisfaction with life scale

Predictors	R ² adjusted	B	SE	β	t
Model	.19				
Tot NAS		.860	.014	.253	4.17**
End SA		.168	.041	.249	4.10**
AQ Sep		-.118	.040	-.171	-2.92*

Constant		2.734	.687		-2.92**
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Note. **p<.001, *p<.01

Table 5. Statistical findings of stepwise regression analysis on job satisfaction scale

Predictors	R ² adjusted	B	SE	β	t
Model	.23				
Tot SA		.040	.017	.163	2.32**
Tot NAS		.110	.030	.228	3.64
AQ Sep		-.301	.080	-.215	-3.76**
AQ Age		.209	.077	.157	2.72*
End SA		.228	.090	.166	2.54
Constant		7.670	1.889		4.06**

Note. **p<.001, *p<.01

Table 6. Statistical findings of stepwise regression analysis on positive affect

Predictors	R ² adjusted	B	SE	β	t
Model	.21				
Tot NAS		.447	.090	.322	4.95**
Tot AQ		.417	.102	.279	4.08**
Tot SA		.232	.062	.332	3.72**
Tot TAA		.116	.058	.199	1.99
Constant		-21.670	10.237		-2.11

Note. **p<.001, *p<.01

Table 7. Statistical findings of stepwise regression analysis on negative affect

Predictors	R ² adjusted	B	SE	β	t
Model	.33				
Tot TAA		.196	.043	.332	4.54**
Ov SA		-.344	.103	-.238	-3.35*
AQ Sep		.561	.224	.137	2.50
AQ Age		-.743	.220	-.192	-3.37*
AQ Indi		.526	.234	.132	2.25
Constant		15.958	7.017		2.27

Note. **p<.001, *p<.01