Vedic Personality Traits, Emotional Experience, and Psychological Well-Being: A Correlational Study

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Abstract

The present study explores the relationships between Vedic personality traits (Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas) as conceptualized in Indian psychology, and their associations with emotional experience and psychological well-being. Rooted in the *Triguna* framework of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* and *Sankhya philosophy*, these personality dimensions offer a culturally grounded approach to understanding human behavior and mental health. Drawing on the Vedic Personality Inventory (VPI), Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (short version), this correlational study assessed a purposive sample of 100 healthy adults (50 males, 50 females) aged 18–65 from Jaipur city, India. Descriptive and Pearson correlation analyses revealed that Sattva was positively associated with positive emotional experience and eudaimonic well-being, while Rajas and Tamas showed negative correlations with well-being and positive affect, and positive associations with negative emotional experience. These findings align with prior cross-cultural and Indian research, affirming the relevance of *Triguna* as a psychological framework. The study underscores the value of integrating indigenous personality theories with positive psychology to promote holistic mental health.

Keywords: Triguna, Psychological Well-Being, Emotional Experience, Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Indian Psychology

1. Introduction

Contemporary psychological science increasingly recognizes the need for culturally grounded frameworks to understand personality, emotional experience, and well-being. One such indigenous psychological model is the Triguna theory, rooted in the Sankhya Darshana and elaborated in classical Indian texts like the *Bhagavad Gita*. According to this theory, human behavior and consciousness are governed by three fundamental forces or gunas: *Sattva* (purity, harmony, wisdom), *Rajas* (passion, restlessness, ambition), and *Tamas* (inertia, ignorance, delusion) (Mehling, 1998; Khanna et al., 2013). These gunas co-exist in all individuals in varying degrees and are believed to regulate affective tendencies, cognition, motivation, and behavior. The *Śrīmad Bhāgavadgītā* explains that Sattva is luminous and uplifting, Rajas arises from attachment and craving, and Tamas leads to delusion and ignorance—ultimately shaping psychological disposition and spiritual development (*Śrīmad Bhāgavadgītā*, Gita Press, 2015, Ch. 14, V. 5–8).

Modern psychological research has operationalized this ancient model using the Vedic Personality Inventory (VPI) developed by Mehling (1998), which quantifies an individual's disposition across the three gunas. Empirical studies using the VPI have consistently found that *Sattva* is associated with mindfulness, emotional regulation, and moral reasoning, while *Rajas* and *Tamas* correlate with impulsivity, distress, and poor self-regulation (Sharma et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2016). A landmark study

by Khanna et al. (2013) demonstrated that Sattva correlated positively with life satisfaction and psychological capital, while Rajas and Tamas showed negative associations with subjective well-being and purpose.

Parallel to this, the rise of positive psychology has shifted the focus of psychological inquiry from distress to strengths, meaning, and flourishing. One of the most widely accepted frameworks within this movement is Ryff's model of Psychological Well-Being (PWB) (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008), which offers a eudaimonic perspective on optimal human functioning. PWB is assessed through six domains: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. These dimensions align conceptually with *Sattva*, which promotes balance, introspection, and purpose (Khanna et al., 2013). Empirical studies have confirmed the cross-cultural relevance and psychometric robustness of the PWB scale, including within Indian samples (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Sharma et al., 2016).

In addition to personality and cognitive factors, emotional experience plays a pivotal role in psychological functioning. To assess affective well-being in diverse populations, Diener et al. (2010) developed the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), which measures the frequency of general emotional states over four weeks. It includes two subscales: SPANE-Positive (SPANE-P) and SPANE-Negative (SPANE-N). Positive emotional experiences such as joy and contentment are associated with flourishing, while negative experiences like anger and fear are linked to dysfunction and psychological distress. Studies integrating Triguna theory have found that *Sattva* is positively related to positive emotionality and emotional balance, while *Rajas* and *Tamas* predict negative affect and maladaptive emotional styles (Rao et al., 2021; Pandey & Dubey, 2020).

Despite this growing body of literature, very few studies have examined Triguna traits, emotional experience, and psychological well-being together in a single integrated model. For instance, Singh et al. (2016) reported that Sattva predicted flourishing and emotional resilience across cultures, while Tamas correlated with emotional dysfunction. Pandey and Dubey (2020) linked Sattva to all five domains of the PERMA model, further validating its role in optimal functioning. However, empirical studies using both Ryff's PWB scale and SPANE alongside VPI are lacking, especially in urban Indian settings.

Therefore, the present study aims to address this empirical gap by investigating the relationships between Vedic personality traits (Triguna), positive and negative emotional experience, and psychological well-being among healthy adults in Jaipur. The integration of ancient Indian constructs with modern psychological metrics offers a culturally consonant and scientifically rigorous understanding of mental health and flourishing.

2. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

2.1 Objectives

The study aims to:

• Explore the correlation between Vedic personality traits (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas) and psychological well-being (as measured by Ryff's PWB Scale).

• Assess the association between Vedic personality traits and positive and negative emotional experiences.

2.2 Hypotheses

Based on prior empirical findings and the philosophical foundation of Triguna theory, the following hypotheses were formulated:

• **H1**: **Sattva** will be positively correlated with psychological well-being and positive emotional experience, and negatively correlated with negative emotional experience.

• **H2**: **Rajas** will be negatively correlated with psychological well-being and positive emotional experience, and positively correlated with negative emotional experience.

• **H3**: **Tamas** will be negatively correlated with psychological well-being and positive emotional experience, and positively correlated with negative emotional experience.

The conceptual framework aligns with previous empirical and theoretical models and is illustrated in **Figure 1**, which depicts the hypothesized relationships among Vedic personality traits, emotional experiences, and psychological well-being.
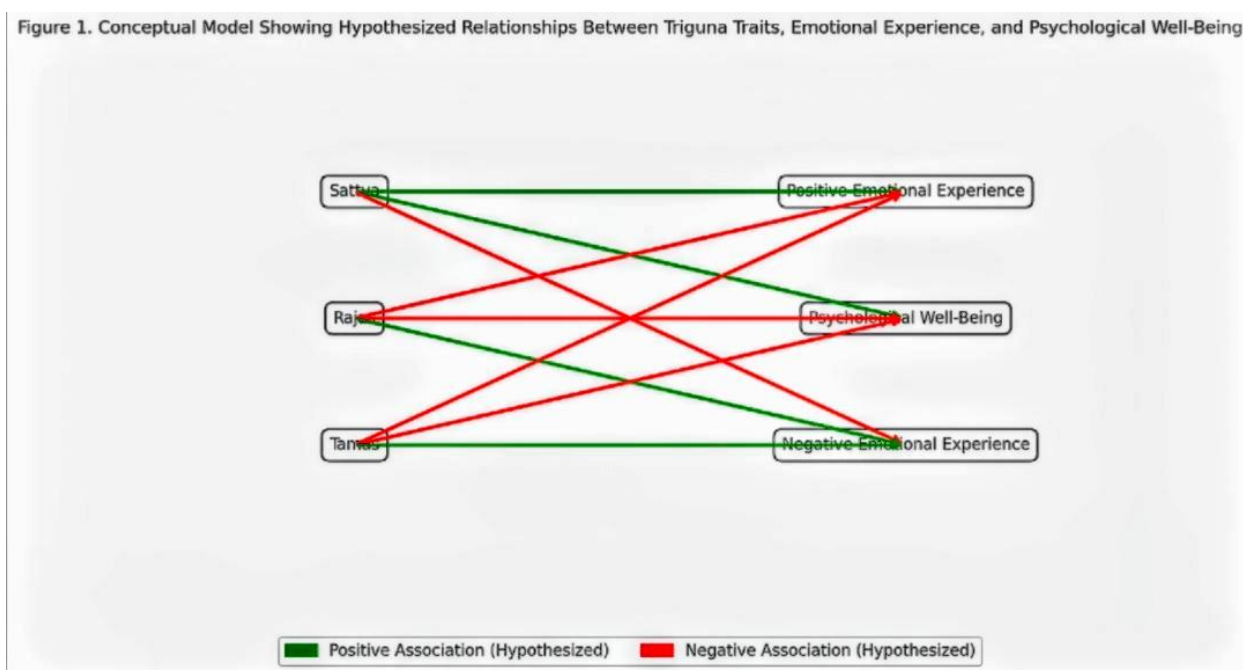

Figure 1. Conceptual Model Showing Hypothesized Relationships Between Triguna Traits, Emotional Experience, and Psychological Well-Being

Figure 1: Conceptual model showing hypothesized relationships among Vedic personality traits (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas), emotional experiences, and psychological Well-being.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design to examine the relationships among Vedic personality traits (Triguna), emotional experience (positive and negative

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affect), and psychological well-being. This non-experimental design was suitable for analyzing naturally occurring associations among psychological constructs in a healthy population.

3.2 Participants

A total of 100 healthy adult participants (50 males and 50 females), aged between 18 and 65 years, were purposively selected from various urban localities of Jaipur city, India. Inclusion criteria required participants to be literate, fluent in either Hindi or English, and not currently undergoing psychiatric or psychological treatment. Participants with diagnosed mental illness, substance abuse issues, or chronic cognitive disorders were excluded.

3.3 Measures

Vedic Personality Inventory (VPI)

The Vedic Personality Inventory (VPI) is a 56-item self-report instrument developed by Mehling (1998) to assess the three Gunas—Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas—based on Indian philosophical texts. Respondents rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all like me* to 7 = *very much like me*). The inventory yields three subscale scores corresponding to each guna. The VPI has shown satisfactory internal consistency and construct validity in both Indian and cross-cultural populations.

Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE)

The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE), developed by Diener et al. (2010), is a 12-item instrument designed to measure affective well-being. It includes two subscales:

- **SPANE-P (Positive Experience):** Six items assess pleasant emotions such as happiness and joy.
- **SPANE-N (Negative Experience):** Six items assess unpleasant emotions such as sadness, anger, and fear.

Each item is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very rarely or never*) to 5 (*very often or always*). In the present study, only SPANE-P and SPANE-N scores were used for analysis. The balance score (SPANE-B), which represents the difference between SPANE-P and SPANE-N, was excluded to allow independent analysis of positive and negative emotional experiences.

Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (Short Version)

The Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (18-item version) is a widely used measure of eudaimonic well-being that includes six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989). Each domain consists of three items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). In this study, the total PWB score was used for analysis. The scale has been extensively validated across different cultures and age groups (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Demographic Information Sheet

A brief form collected information on participants' age, gender, educational background, and occupation.

3.4 Procedure

Participants were approached through community centers, educational institutions, and wellness workshops in Jaipur. The purpose and voluntary nature of the study were clearly explained to each participant before beginning the assessment.

Data were collected using paper-based, self-administered questionnaires presented in a bilingual format (English and Hindi) to enhance comprehension and accessibility. Each participant required approximately 25 to 30 minutes to complete the battery of measures. Responses were collected anonymously, and participant confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the study process.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were computed for all variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships among the three gunas (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas), psychological well-being (PWB), and emotional experiences (Positive and Negative). Statistical significance was set at **p < .01** to minimize Type I error due to multiple comparisons.

No regression analysis or gender comparison was performed, as the study focused solely on correlational relationships across the full sample.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed for all major variables: the three Vedic personality traits (**Sattva**, **Rajas**, **Tamas**), **positive emotional experience**, **negative emotional experience**, and **psychological well-being (PWB)**. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and observed score ranges.

Table 1:*Descriptive Statistics for Vedic Personality Traits, Emotional Experience, and Psychological Well-Being (N = 100)*

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Sattva	69.17	8.13	52.18	90.88
Rajas	50.22	9.55	27.37	72.52
Tamas	45.65	9.84	21.97	71.32
Positive Emotional Experience	26.89	2.61	18.66	30.00
Negative Emotional Experience	29.07	3.95	7.89	35.00
Pychological Well-Being (PWB)	77.19	11.24	57.89	100.22

Descriptive statistics for all major variables are presented in **Table 1**. As shown in **Figure 2**, psychological well-being and Sattva had the highest mean scores, while both emotional experience variables had relatively lower mean scores, with negative emotional experience slightly higher than positive emotional experience.
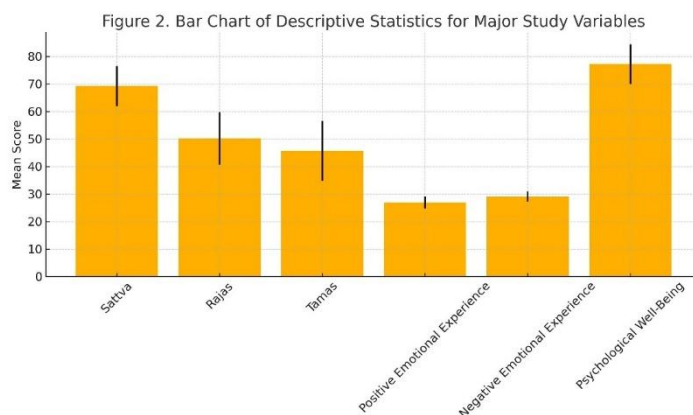
Figure 2 : Bar chart displaying the mean scores of the three Gunas (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas), positive emotional experience, negative emotional experience, and psychological well-being (PWB).

4.2 Correlational Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships among the three Gunas (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas), emotional experience, and psychological well-being. Table 2 summarizes these relationships.

Table 2: *Pearson Correlations Among Vedic Personality Traits, Emotional Experience, and Psychological Well-Being (N = 100)*

Variable	1. Sattva	2. Rajas	3. Tamas	4. Positive Exp.	5. Negative Exp.	6. PWB
1. Sattva	—	−.14	.19	**.43**	−.16	**.46**
2. Rajas		—	−.04	−.29	**.29**	**−.41**
3. Tamas			—	**−.34**	**.53**	**−.42**
4. Positive Emotional Experience				—	−.29	**.53**
5. Negative Emotional Experience					—	**−.49**
6. Psychological Well-Being (PWB)						—

Note: Correlations in **bold** are significant at *p* < .01 (2-tailed).

Table 2 summarizes these relationships, which are further illustrated in the Pearson correlation heatmap (**Figure 3**) for clearer visual interpretation.
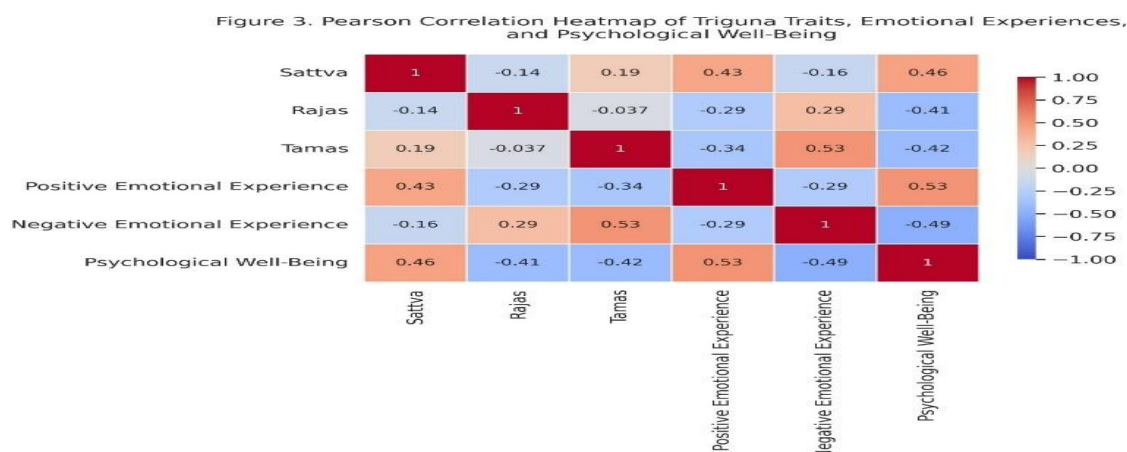
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Figure 3. Pearson Correlation Heatmap of Triguna Traits, Emotional Experiences, and Psychological Well-Being

Figure 3: Pearson correlation heatmap depicting the relationships among Triguna traits (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas), positive and negative emotional experiences, and psychological well-being. Warmer colors represent stronger positive correlations; cooler shades denote stronger negative correlations.

4.3 Summary of Findings

- **Sattva** showed significant **positive correlations** with **positive emotional experience** ($r = .43$, $p < .01$) and **PWB** ($r = .46$, $p < .01$), and a modest negative correlation with **negative emotional experience** ($r = −.16$).
- **Rajas** was negatively correlated with **PWB** ($r = −.41$, $p < .01$) and **positive emotional experience** ($r = −.29$), and positively with **negative emotional experience** ($r = .29$, $p < .01$).
- **Tamas** demonstrated the strongest negative pattern, correlating negatively with **PWB** ($r = −.42$, $p < .01$) and **positive emotional experience** ($r = −.34$, $p < .01$), and positively with **negative emotional experience** ($r = .53$, $p < .01$).

The linear association between Sattva and psychological well-being is further illustrated in the scatterplot with a regression line (see **Figure 4**).
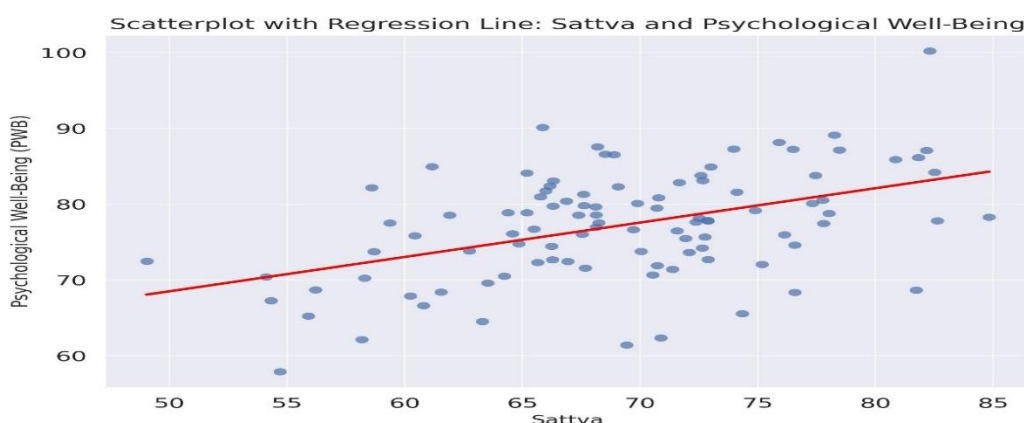

Figure 4. : *Scatterplot with regression line showing the positive linear relationship between Sattva and psychological well-being (PWB) among participants. Each point represents an individual score; the red line indicates the best fit.*

As shown in **Figure 5**, there is a clear negative linear relationship between Rajas and psychological well-being, suggesting that individuals with higher Rajasic traits tend to report lower levels of well-being.
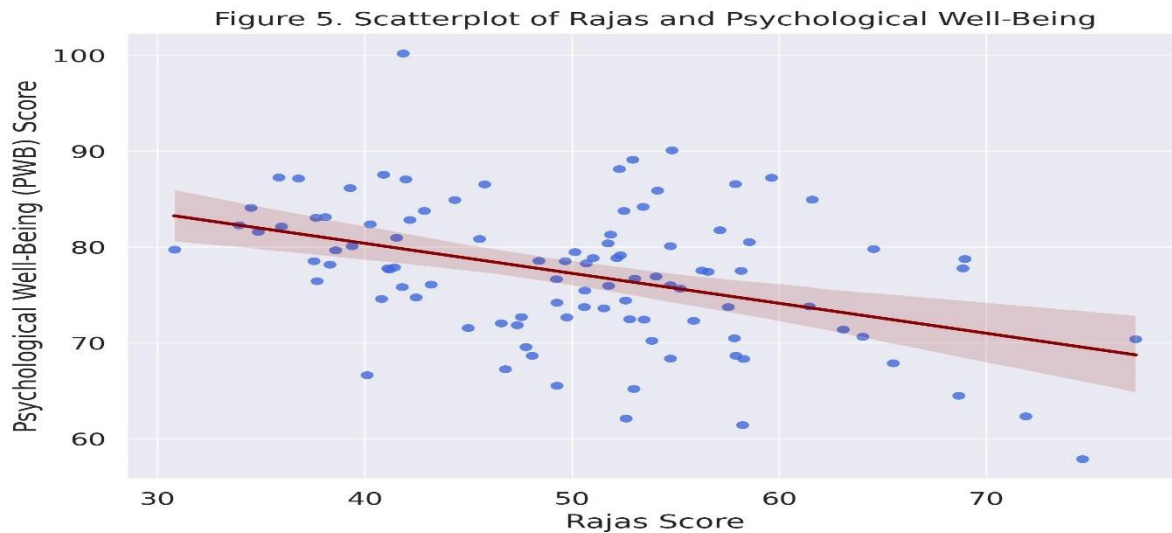

Figure 5: *Scatterplot showing the negative linear relationship between Rajas and psychological well-being in the sample.*

Figure 6 further illustrates the negative linear relationship between Tamas and psychological well-being, indicating that individuals with higher Tamasic tendencies consistently report lower well-being scores.
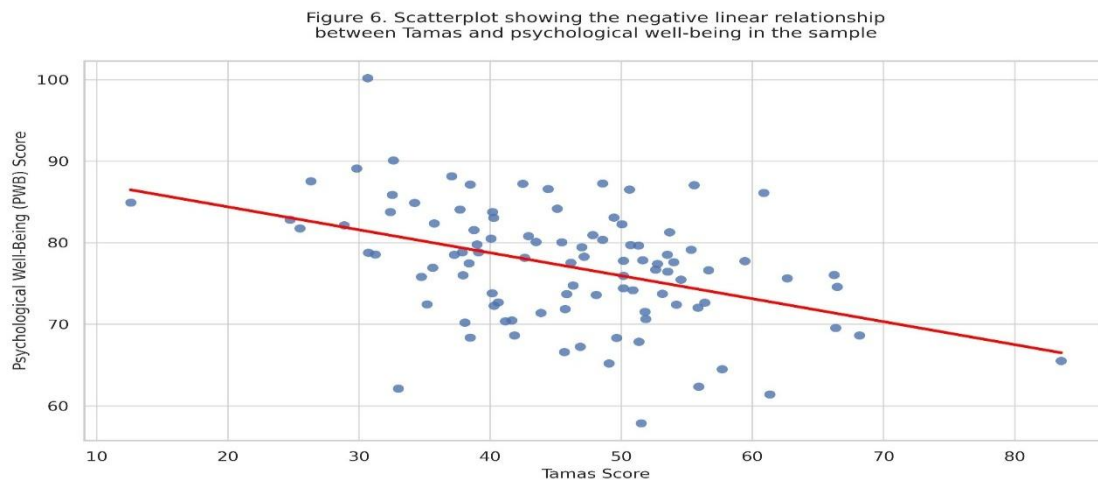

Figure 6: *Scatterplot showing the negative linear relationship between Tamas and psychological well-being in the sample.*

These results confirm the hypothesized relationships and reflect the distinct psychological profiles associated with each Guna as outlined in Indian philosophical psychology.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study affirm the predictive value of the Triguna framework from Indian psychology in understanding psychological well-being and emotional experience. As hypothesized, Sattva showed significant positive associations with both psychological well-being (PWB) and positive emotional experience, along with a weak negative association with negative emotional experience. These results are consistent with previous findings (Khanna et al., 2013; Singh et al., 2016), which identify Sattva as the most psychologically adaptive guna, linked to harmony, clarity, emotional regulation, and higher well-being.

In contrast, Rajas and Tamas displayed inverse relationships with well-being and emotional positivity. Rajas, often associated with restlessness, desire, and attachment (Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 14, Verse 7), was negatively correlated with PWB and positive emotional experience, while positively correlated with negative emotional experience. This supports the interpretation that a Rajasic temperament, although active and driven, may contribute to internal conflict and emotional dissatisfaction (Sharma & Bhardwaj, 2018).

The findings for Tamas were especially noteworthy, showing the strongest positive correlation with negative emotional experience and strong negative associations with both PWB and positive emotional experience. Tamas, representing inertia, ignorance, and delusion, has been associated with emotional suppression, withdrawal, and depressive tendencies (Kapoor & Raina, 2019; Nathawat & Shrimali, 2011). These results align with prior studies that have found Tamasic dominance to be a psychological risk factor for emotional instability and poor mental health.

Together, the data highlight a consistent and theoretically coherent pattern: Sattva enhances psychological well-being and emotional health, while Rajas and Tamas are associated with emotional dysregulation and diminished well-being.

Interestingly, the mean score for negative emotional experience (M = 29.07) was slightly higher than that of positive emotional experience (M = 26.89), which might seem inconsistent in a non-clinical adult population. However, this finding can be meaningfully interpreted through both cultural-emotional norms and the Triguṇa framework. From a psychometric perspective, the SPANE scale assesses the frequency of emotional experiences, not their intensity or valence. Thus, individuals may report common low-level negative emotions—such as tiredness or mild anxiety—without indicating psychopathology.

From a Triguṇa perspective, the co-existence of Rajas and Tamas alongside Sattva in varying proportions explains the prevalence of both positive and negative emotional experiences in daily life. While Sattva guna elevates clarity, balance, and joy, Rajas drives ambition, agitation, and restlessness, and Tamas contributes to lethargy and confusion (Śrīmad Bhāgavadgītā, Gita Press, 2015, Ch. 14, V. 6–8). The higher mean in SPANE-N may reflect the influence of latent Rajasic and Tamasic traits still present in the psychological makeup of individuals, despite the prominence of Sattva in well-being outcomes.

Moreover, in the Indian socio-cultural context, frequent minor stressors—academic, familial, environmental—may elevate the perception of negative emotional states. Yet, the significant positive correlations between Sattva and PWB ($r = .46$) and positive emotional experience ($r = .43$) reaffirm that Sattva facilitates resilience and flourishing, even amidst emotional turbulence. Thus, the elevated SPANE-N score does not contradict the central thesis of Triguṇa psychology but rather reinforces the dynamic interplay of all three gunas in shaping human affective experience.

These findings resonate with the ancient Indian perspective articulated in the Śrīmad Bhāgavadgītā, where Sattva is described as a mode of clarity, harmony, and wisdom that leads to enlightenment and psychological stability, while Rajas and Tamas are portrayed as causes of emotional agitation, restlessness, and delusion (Śrīmad Bhāgavadgītā, Gita Press, 2015, Ch. 14, V. 6-8). The elevated PWB and positive emotional experience scores associated with Sattva in this study mirror these scriptural descriptions.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

These findings contribute to the growing body of empirical research that validates Vedic psychological models using standardized tools and contemporary constructs. The correlation of Sattva with eudaimonic well-being, as conceptualized by Ryff, suggests a natural convergence between Indian philosophical traditions and modern positive psychology. Furthermore, the clear differentiation among the three Gunas in their emotional and psychological profiles demonstrates the utility of Triguna theory as a distinct personality framework.

5.3 Practical Implications

This research offers valuable insights for psychologists, counselors, and mental health professionals working in culturally contextualized settings. **Guna-based assessment and interventions** could inform tailored approaches in clinical counseling, life coaching, and spiritual psychology. Practices that cultivate Sattva—such as mindfulness, ethical conduct, selfless service, and introspective self-inquiry—may help enhance emotional positivity and psychological flourishing.

5.4 Limitations

Despite its strengths, this study has certain limitations. The sample was purposively drawn from an urban population in Jaipur and may not be generalizable to rural or clinical populations. The use of **self-report measures** may also have introduced response bias. Furthermore, the study's **cross-sectional design** restricts causal interpretations.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

Future research could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to investigate causal pathways between Gunas and psychological outcomes. Studies could also explore Triguna interventions and their impact on clinical populations or specific mental health conditions. Including qualitative methods or mixed-methods approaches may offer richer insights into the lived experiences of individuals with varying Guna profiles.

6. Conclusion

This study sought to explore the relationships among **Vedic personality traits (Triguna)**, **emotional experience**, and **psychological well-being (PWB)** in a sample of healthy adults from Jaipur, India. The findings offer compelling empirical support for the theoretical assumptions of the Triguna framework, a cornerstone of Indian psychological thought.

Consistent with the hypotheses and prior literature, the Sattva trait emerged as a significant positive predictor of both positive emotional experience and psychological well-being, underscoring its role in fostering inner balance, self-awareness, and holistic flourishing. In contrast, Rajas and Tamas showed negative correlations with well-being and positive emotions, and positive associations with negative emotional experience—highlighting their maladaptive psychological tendencies when dominant.

These results not only validate the psychological relevance of ancient Indian constructs but also underscore the importance of culturally rooted frameworks in contemporary mental health research. The study supports integrating indigenous knowledge systems like the Triguna theory with modern psychological science to promote more nuanced and inclusive understandings of well-being.

By offering empirical grounding for Vedic psychological concepts, this study encourages future interdisciplinary exploration and application in fields such as positive psychology, counseling, personality assessment, and contemplative practices. In an era where mental health frameworks are increasingly globalized, this research affirms the enduring significance of contextual, philosophical, and spiritual traditions in shaping psychological insights and interventions.

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