

## Sattva Guna as a Predictor of Wisdom and PWB

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### ABSTRACT

The ancient Indian Vedic text places emphasis on balanced living through a conscious strive to evolve from lower states of being to higher ones thus providing physical, spiritual and psychological wellbeing. Similarly the western thought places emphasis on working on physical and psychological well being for humans to flourish and realise their infinite potential. Hence, the present investigation is an attempt to draw a concomitance between Indian and Western Psychology on the topic of psychological well being and how wisdom and satvikta are related to this concept. For the purpose of this study a sample of 100 university students (50 males and 50 females) between the ages of 18-24 years were selected. Three scales namely- (i) PWAS (Practicing Wisdom Assessment Scale) (ii) Trigunatmak Personality Inventory, and (iii) Ryff's Psychological Well Being were used. Regression analyses was done. The results indicated that Sattva Guna significantly predicts PWB and Wisdom.

**Keywords:** *Sattva Guna, Wisdom, Psychological Well-Being*

Positive psychology is certainly not the first attempt by psychologists to study well being and the good- life. From the very beginnings of psychology, there has been an interest in studying healthy personality development and optimal states of well-being. It is because; the desire to be happier and more satisfied with life is universally human. Every human choice, ambition, vision, longing and strive is to achieve a sense of happiness or what we call a good life, and it is for this reason we must understand what is well being and what constitutes it.

An early attempt to define wellbeing was Bradburn's (1969) classic research on psychological wellbeing. Bradburn highlighted how psychological wellbeing (which he also referred to as happiness) was the variable that 'stands out as being of primary importance' He linked this to Aristotle's idea of eudemonia, which is now more commonly translated as wellbeing. Aristotle

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believed this to be the overarching goal of all human actions. The majority of Bradburn's research focused on the distinction between positive and negative affect. His model specified that:

*“An individual will be high in psychological well-being in the degree to which he has an excess of positive over negative affect and will be low in well-being in the degree to which negative affect predominates over positive (Bradburn, 1969)”*

Although Ryff (1989) criticised Bradburn's work for not defining the basic structure of psychological wellbeing, Ryff's early work (Ryff, 1989a) identified aspects that constitute wellbeing: autonomy; environmental mastery; positive relationships with others; purpose in life; realisation of potential and self-acceptance. More recent research has placed different emphases on what wellbeing is: ability to fulfil goals (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008); happiness (Pollard & Lee, 2003) and life satisfaction (Diener & Suh, 1997; Seligman, 2002).

### **Wisdom**

In the past research psychologists have tended to avoid the topic of wisdom due to its seemingly abstract nature. Nevertheless, several investigators have attempted to describe what people mean by the term.

“According to Clayton (1982) –“Wisdom is the ability that enables individuals to grasp human nature, which operates on the principal of contradiction, paradox, and change. Human nature is being use adhere to refer to understanding of self and understanding of others.” Deirdre A. Kramer (2000) in his empirical investigation, conceptualized wisdom: as an uncommon higher order ability to understand human affairs, (2) a conglomeration of personal attributes that enable an individual to be cognitively, affectively and behaviourally in tune with others needs and a high degree of open mindedness that enables such individuals to experience life in its full expression. Wisdom thus, is a higher order mental function that surpasses intellectual knowledge and helps individuals to deal with life's paradoxes and challenges, thus impacting our psychological well being.

### **Concept of well being according to the Indian Perspective**

The text of Taittiriya Upanishada has elaborated that happiness; joy and well-being are the moments when there is an unobstructed manifestation of ananda (bliss) which is our original or true nature. It is the opaqueness of our mental faculties that obstructs the manifestation and experience of ananda. The principle that is responsible for opaqueness, inertia, dullness, darkness, depression, etc. is called *tamas*. The principle that is responsible for brightness, illumination, transparency, etc. is called *sattva*. Greater is the transparency of the mental faculties, i.e., *sattva*, greater is the experience of ananda (Kiran Kumar, 2002). Thus an ideal

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state of human functioning and constitutes health and well-being as a state of mind (somewhat equivalent to the concept of subjective well-being) which is peaceful, quiet, serene, and free from the conflicts and desires.

Keeping this backdrop in mind, the concept of personality and how it predisposes us to certain qualities that affect our well being is examined in this paper. The reason being that if we do not understand what needs to be cultivated for our well being then chances of achieving it will be far less than possible.

Since psychological well being is significantly affects our physical, emotional and even economic success, it becomes imperative to understand how it is related to our personality and psychological traits.

Hence, we attempt to on investigate as to how wisdom- being a western notion, and Satvikta-an Indian notion of personality, affect our psychological well being, and to what extent these three concepts of Satvikta, wisdom and psychological well being are inter related.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of psychological well being has been investigated for decades and has found its importance due to its direct relationship with success and well-being of individuals. The relationship of wisdom and sattvicta in relation to psychological well being becomes apparent by various researches by Indian and Western scholars.

A study by *Zaidi and Singh (2001)* explored the effect of positive life events and Sattva, rajas and Tamas on psychological well being. The study revealed significant effect of Sattva and Rajas on depression, the former leading to lower depression and the latter leading to higher depression. Overall High Sattva, low Rajas and High Tamas groups reported higher psychological well being. *Singh et. al, (2013)* revealed that there exists a positive correlation between sattva guna and emotional well being, psychological well being , social well being, flourishing and positive experience. In contrast, Rajas and tamas were negatively correlated with all well being indicators except negative experience. Working with the Triguna theory *Daftuar and Sharma (1997)* found out that at a supervisory level in a public sector organization Sattva worked at “self actualization” level, Rajas at esteem needs level, where as Tamas works at only the “basic needs” level. According to *Mathew, 2004*, satvik individuals have the ability to grow from stressful situations because they possess high tolerance and high capacity for adjustment. This is probably the quality that makes them resilient and helps them evolve both, psychologically as well as emotionally. Further, *Sharma & kumar (2012 )* found out that individuals with clinical disorders (particularly those suffering from anxiety disorders) scored high on the tamas and rajasic factors and experienced lower quality of life in comparison to those who obtained high scores on the stavic factors had a better quality of life. However, as study by *Wolf & Abell, 2003*

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on 'Examining the effects of meditation techniques on Psychosocial Functioning', revealed that the quality of sattva guna could be enhanced by chanting the Hare Krishna Maha Mantra. A recent study by *Putra & Sedlmeier (2014)* linked psychological well being with spirituality. The research revealed that dominance of sattva guna is predominantly related to psychological well being in comparison to rajas and tamas guna.

According to *Scheibe et al. (2009)*. Wisdom is related to well-being through association with increased striving for the good life and greater preferences for personal growth and self-actualization.

*Baltes et al. (2008)* proposed that wise people also prefer values focused on personal- growth, insight; social engagement; and well-being of friends, as opposed to values focused mainly on pleasure and a comfortable life. Further, *Kunzmann (2004)* found out that wise people show emotional and motivational preferences thus impacting well-being. They report fewer self-centred pleasant feelings but more person oriented and environment centered emotions, such as interest and inspiration. This allows them to provide more meaning to their life view world from a larger perspective and enhancing their existential experience . Research by *Levinson, (2009)* examined that whether gender has a role to play in the construct of wisdom. His findings suggested that the construct of wisdom is independent of gender as it requires an individual to possess qualities of compassion and ethics of which both genders are equally capable. Sex does not determine or affect an individual ability to exhibit wisdom. Hence, gender does not have a role to play in wisdom.

*Ardelt (1997)* proposed that where intellectual knowledge enables elderly people to stay involved in world's affairs, wisdom-related knowledge helps them to come to terms with the physical and social decline that comes with old age and ultimately their own death. Moreover, advancement in age leads to decreased intellectual capacity, however, wisdom tends to increase with age and hence cognitive deterioration does not become pathological.

Thus, sufficient review of literature indicates that cultivating wisdom and satvikta are crucial to experiencing psychological well being.

## METHOD

### *Aim*

- The current study aims at exploring sattva guna as a predictor of wisdom and psychological well-being.

### *Objectives*

The following were the objectives of the present research:-

- (i) To study the effect of sattva guna on wisdom
- (ii) To study the effect of sattva guna on psychological well-being.

***Sample***

The study was conducted on a sample of 100 university students (50=males and 50 females) between the age group of 18-24 years. The mean age of both males and females was 20 years. The method of purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of data. Moreover, participants in formal psychotherapy or spiritual practices were excluded from the sample selection.

***Hypothesis***

For a quantitative analysis of the aforementioned objective, the following hypothesis were empirically tested-

- (i) Sattva guna will significantly predict wisdom.
- (ii) Sattva guna will significantly predict psychological well being.

***Instruments/ Tools***

**The Trigunatmak Personality Inventory:** The Trigunatmak Personality Inventory was developed by Dr. R R. Tripathi in 2009. The inventory is in Hindi language consisting of three subscales – Sattva guna, Rajas guna and Tamas guna. Each scale consists of 49, 50 and 37 items respectively. The coefficient alpha obtained for three subscales was found out to be .89, .85 and .81 for Sattva, Rajas and Tamas respectively. Content validity for coefficient of sattva guna has been calculated to be falling between .59 and .68, for Rajas Guna has been found to be .61 and .64 and for Tamas Guna .56 and .65. The scoring is based on computation of raw scores on each scale which are converted to T scores obtaining the relevant category.

**Practising Wisdom Assessment Scale (PWAS):** Practising Wisdom Assessment Scale by Prof. (Dr.) Abha Singh & Dr.Sakshi Mehrotra (2013) was used. The test consists 30 items which assess wisdom on different parameters like knowledge, judgment, emotional maturity, spiritual insight, social conscience, positivity, integrity, forgiveness and meaningful action. The Cronbach's co-efficient alpha value was calculated to obtain internal consistency of 0.85 and simultaneously, content validity was also calculated.

**Ryff's Psychological Well being Scale (PWB):** The present scale developed by Carol Ryff in (1995) measures the Psychological Well Being on 5 dimensions-Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations, Purpose in Life, self Acceptance. The test comprises of 45 items arranged on a likert format of 1-5 (1 being, Strongly Agree, and 5 being 'Strongly Disagree'). The Internal consistency on the dimensions of Self-acceptance, Positive Relations with others, Autonomy. Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, Personal Growth was calculated to be .93 .91 .86 .90 .90 .87. The construct validity of the tool was found out to be approximately .83.

**RESULTS**

*Table 1: Distribution of SD and Mean for Wisdom, Satticta and Psychological Wellbeing*

DIMENSION	MEAN	SD
Sattva Guna	119.6	23.5
Wisdom	115.3	15.28
PWB	162.19	30.13

The above table depicts the average performance of the sample on Wisdom, Satvikta and Psychological Wellbeing and the standard deviation of each score from the mean. The mean score for Wisdom is 115.3 with corresponding SD is 15.28, whereas the mean score on PWB is 162.19 with the corresponding SD of 30.13 and the mean score of Satvikta is 119.6 with its SD as 23.5

*Table 1.2- Difference in means between males and females on Wisdom, Psychological Wellbeing and Sattvicta.*

GENDER	SATTVA GUNA	WISDOM	PWB
MALES-FEMALES	0.01403	0.335	0.0427

*Table 1.3:- The results indicated that sattva guna (R=.062 , F=6.451 p>0.01) explained 6.2 % variance in predicting wisdom. PWB was significantly predicted by sattva guna*

VARIABLES	SE	β	t
SATTVA GUNA AND WISDOM	.064	.686	3.824
SATTVA GUNA & PWB	.113	.634	5.635

(R=.245 , F= 31.750, p< 0.01).

**DISCUSSION**

The present investigation was an attempt to utilize Indian and Western holistic approaches to understand psychological well being and its indicators and appreciate the concomitance between the two schools of thought. The triguna theory as per the Sankhya School of Indian Philosophy expounds that every non living and living specie is a varying combination of the three primordial qualities or laws, known as ‘gunas’– sattva( equilibrium, illumination) , rajas (passion, desire) and tamas (inertia). The predominant guna or quality dictates an individual’s behavioural patterns and lifestyle choices. By the means of this paper it was understood that sattva guna is significantly found to effect wisdom and PWB in youth.

**Sattva guna as a predictor of Wisdom and Psychological well-being**

As can be observed from the result Table 1.3, it is inferred that sattva gun significantly predicts wisdom. This means, that the quality of sattva guna predominantly dictates the presence of wisdom as a virtue in an individual. By reviewing the literature present on these two concepts, it becomes apparent that there are several parallels between the qualities of sattvicta and the qualities of wisdom. According to *Rangacharaya (1989)* “it is only the quality of Sattva which is

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helpful in the evolution of wisdom and internal evolution, as also in progressive achievement of moral and selflessness". Sattva guna is the "spiritual quality". A sattvic individual possesses qualities of wisdom which enables them to move forward on the path of self growth and self awareness. A sattvic individual undertakes activities without concern for personal gain. They understand the duality of nature and are able to deal with life's contradictions. They are further able to focus on the common good and view things from a larger perspective. This understanding on sattvics has been mentioned in one of the shlokas of Bhagavad Gita kāryam ity eva yat karma niyatamkriyate 'rjuna saṅgam tyaktvā phalaṁ chaiva sa tyāgaḥ sāttviko mataḥ (18:9) This allows them to look beyond their self interest and redeem themselves of feelings of guilt, jealousy and insecurity.

Moreover, sattvics possess clarity of thought and the ability to view the 'self' as a part of a higher existential presence. Similar are the qualities of an individual possessing the attributes of wisdom. A wise person has an openness to other possibilities; practices forgiveness; and possess humility; Like a satvik individual has a ability to reflect on things with a pure mind, similarly a wise individual has an objective understanding of the world free from personal biases and prejudices. Such individuals show emotional regulation and like satviks, possess equanimity in their thought and action. A satvik individual has the ability to control his desires and impulses akin to a wise individual who knows how to exercise restraint on their unconscious urges. Both, satviks and wise individuals have a deep interest in spirituality which helps them expand their individual potential. A characteristic trait of a satvik person is that he or she strives for personal liberation and self actualization. This aspect draws our attention towards the teachings of Bhagavad Gita which emphasises on the fact that a human being must evolve from a state of tamas (laziness, inactivity) to rajas (activity, desire) to sattva (illumination). However, once a person has attained sattvicta, he or she must strive to move beyond these three elements and enter a state of enlightenment bearing fruits of his daily spiritual practices or tapasya, and reaching the pinnacle of human consciousness. However, for a common man, making sattva guna as a predominating factor in his internal and external engagement with the world can be a daunting challenge and hence, he must first strive to move from tamas to rajas in order to attain the quality of sattvicta for achieving eternal wisdom.

Thus, through sufficient review of literature and our research findings we can safely say that our first hypothesis, which states that sattva guna, will significantly predict wisdom.

As observed from Table 1.3, Sattvicta significantly predicts psychological wellbeing. The quality of sattvicta encompasses compassion, non attachment, generosity fearlessness, self restraint, purity, and knowledge, all these being essential to live a balanced and harmonious life which is directly linked to our psychological well-being. This finding has been supported by a research conducted on by *Singh & Slezáčková (2013)* in which the study indicated that there exists significant positive relationships between Sattvikta and social, emotional and Psychological

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well-being, and negative correlation with Negative Experience. A similar study conducted by *Zaidi and Singh (2001)* explored the effect of positive life events and Sattva, rajas and Tamas on psychological well being. As review suggests, satviks are able to convert stress inducing situations into growth promoting opportunities (Mathew, 2004). Thus, they are able to withstand extreme external pressure with ease and least likely to fall into depression and developed mental and physical maladies. An equanimous mind is bound to yield peace and balance when it has the ability to see things clearly and serve for the larger good. Moreover, satviks can pursue goals larger than themselves as they view the world from a border perspective and are not driven by self interest and insecurity. When an act is performed out of ignorance and delusion, without considering the consequences of loss or violence and overlooking one's own strength, the act is said to be performed under the influence of tamas. Similarly, an act performed with a lot of stresses and strains, seeking to fulfil one's own desire, being impelled by ego sense, is an act premeditated by rajas. Furthermore, as research indicates, a human being under the dictates of rajas and tamas is likely to experience more mental disorder than the ones who follow the path of sattvicta (Singh, 1972; Laxmibai, Murthy, & Nagalakshmi, 1975) and thus lowering psychological well being. However, chanting the *Hare Krishna Mantra* is found to have significant effect on increasing sattva and decreasing rajas and tamas (Wolf & Abell, 2003). A study by Tripathi and Pandey (2002) also reported that the patients belonging to rajasic and tamasic personality were more prone to cancer. The imbalances in these three elements can create physical diseases emanating from a disturbance in the energetic field of a person. Hence, it can be clearly observed that the mental attributes or tendencies of the gunas have a significant effect on the physical and psychological well being of an individual.

Thus perhaps, we can say that human aspiration at some level must aim to walk the path of conscious evolution by striving for sattva with being fuelled by the rajas and restrained in balance by tamas in our quest for our overall wellbeing.

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### ***Conflict of Interests***

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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