

Examining the Relationship of Tri-guna Personality and Aggression among Young Adults

**Prashant Singh, Archita Gupta, Sushil Kumar Sah, Tarun Mishra,
Trayambak Tiwari**

Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi

Priyanka Tiwari

University of Delhi, New Delhi

The Tri-guna model of personality originated from the Indian philosophy classified human personality into three gunas that are Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. Previous researches have studied the association between personality and aggressive behavior through various models, but minimal researches have studied the association between tri-guna personality type and aggressive behavior among young adults. Therefore, the present study aimed to understand the association between tri-guna personality type and aggression among young adults. A sample of 103 young adults participated in the present study. Findings revealed that Sattva was negatively associated with all the dimensions of aggression, while Rajas and Tamas were positively associated with all the dimensions of aggression. Moreover, Rajas, and Tamas emerged as significant predictors of aggression.

Keywords: Tri-guna personality, aggression, and young adults

Assessing the levels of aggression is crucial due to significant influence on behavior and health consequences. According to Anderson and Bushman (2002), aggression is a complex construct encompassing physical, verbal and relational expression. These expressions are driven from the personal and situational factors. Broadly, human aggression is any form of behavior intended to cause immediate harm to another individual.

Different perspectives have tried to explain aggression which have evolved over time. For example, the psychoanalytic perspectives explained aggression as a drive (Pedder, 1992). Followed by the frustration-aggression hypothesis, which posits that an unfulfilled expectation of gratification leads to aggressive behaviors (Berkowitz, 1989). The cognitive neo-association theory and social learning theory emerged later, contributing to a more sophisticated

understanding of the aggression (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). The General Aggression Model (GAM) has attempted to combine the domain-limited theories, and proposed that cognition, affect and arousal mediate the effects of situational and personal variables on aggressive behavior (Anderson & Bushman, 2002).

Previous researches have offered empirical evidences showing an association between personality and aggression. For example, agreeableness was found to be negatively associated with aggression, specifically direct aggression in adolescents (Gleason et al., 2004; Singh, 2012). Moreover, neuroticism was found to be positively associated with aggression among adolescents. To sum up, agreeableness, conflict, active-recreational orientation and neuroticism emerged as significant predictors of aggression (Singh, 2012).

Researchers have identified various situational factors that influence aggression. For instance, findings in a study done by Willits (2015) suggested that provocative cues such as weapons and the presence of audience have shown to increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior in an individual. Other environmental factors such as alcohol cues, exposure to violent media and high temperature can further increase aggressive tendencies (Engelhardt & Bartholow, 2013; Krahe, 2021). Moreover, it can be seen in previous researches that there is an interplay between situational factors and organismic factors, such as personality traits and aggression-related traits in predicting aggression in individuals (Krahe, 2021).

Previous literature established that personality is the most significant predictor of aggression and other situational factors are also equally important in order to understand aggression that is why we need to empirically test those models of personality which incorporate both the factors (personality dispositions and situational factors), hence the tri-guna model of personality may provide holistic understanding of aggression.

In the Indian philosophy, Samkhya philosophy is one among the six systems. This school of thought advocates the ontological dualism of prakriti (matter) and purusha (self or pure consciousness) (Kumar & Thomas, 2013; Biswas & Prakash, 2022). It provides a holistic understanding of the human personality. According to it, personality has two mutually interdependent constituents that are, self and psychological apparatus (Karana). Personality according to this philosophy is the interaction between the matter and self. This interaction is manifested in the form of mahat i.e. consciousness. Mahat which restricts to one individualism that is the ego. This ego manifests in the mind, with five gross elements and five subtle elements of

divergent personality of Triguna's (sattva, rajas and tamas) (Kumar & Thomas, 2013). According to Balodhi (1986), gunas are the temperamental aspects of the individual. These gunas are the most precise feature of the nature that supports matter. Researches have conceptualized Sattva, as the feature of intelligence that creates balance, awakening and calmness (Uma, 1969). Rajas has been defined as the qualities of impurity, lack of control on emotions (Uma, 1969), and activity (Pathak et al., 1982). Tamas as described by Frawley (2010) is the quality of dullness, ignorance and inertia.

The tri-gunas are mutually reliant on the predominance of one guna over other two. The personality type of an individual is determined by the various temperamental predominance. Building upon this statement, it can be said that the uniqueness of individual personality is determined by the interplay of the Triguna. Because of which the individuals tend to differ in their cognitive, affective and behavioral domains. Predominance of any one of the gunas in the individual can make them either Sattvic, Rajasic or Tamasic (Kisor, 2001).

Researches have suggested that Sattva has found to be positively associated with positive personality traits such as, well-being, and creativity, whereas Tamas was found to be negatively associated with these factors (Pandey & Dubey, 2020; Kumar & Thomas, 2013). Findings from the study done by Nedugotill et al. (2022) indicated that men who were alcohol independent reported high Sattva, extraversion, conscientiousness and positive affect, while those who were alcohol dependent scored high on Tamas and neuroticism. Similarly, in the context of management researches, managers who scored high on Sattva demonstrated superior creative abilities compared to other personality types (Kumar & Thomas, 2013). While the Triguna model of personality is

gaining attention in the contemporary researches. It is important to study its role in influencing aggression.

However, studying aggression through the tri-guna model of personality is still an underexplored domain. By adopting the indigenous personality concept, this study may contribute to the researches in the field of personality and aggression. Therefore, the present study aims to empirically understand and explain how personality types influence the aggressive behavior of the individual.

Research done by Kewalramani (2016) found that tri-guna personality types (Sattva, Rajas and Tamas) was positively associated with both state and trait anger. Researchers have also tried to investigate the biological mechanism of aggressive behavior and personality. For instance, Moeller and colleagues (1996) concluded that the central serotonin levels influenced the aggression levels of normal individuals through effects on the personality.

Similarly, cross-cultural studies have suggested that novelty seeking was found to be positively correlated with aggression, on the other hand, there was a slight negative correlation between harm avoidance and novelty seeking (Chen et al., 2002).

Studies have found that trait aggressiveness and irritability are found to be related to aggression in both provoking and neutral conditions, while other traits like anger, Type A personality impact aggression mainly in provoking condition (Bethencourt et al., 2006). Similarly, the domains of antagonism and negative affectivity along with the facets like grandiosity and attention-seeking have shown a strong association between aggression (Dunne et al., 2017).

Other studies have suggested that traits related to interpersonal antagonism and impulsivity, specifically in the context of negative affect, are consistently associated

with reactive, proactive and relational aggression (Miller et al., 2012).

Similarly, in the five-factor model of personality, neuroticism has been found to be positively associated with hostility, while openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness have been found to be negatively associated aggression (Bauto et al., 2021).

In the previous researches it has been found that the Triguna model of personality has demonstrated a positive association between all the three gunas, namely Sattva, Rajas, Tamas and both state and trait anger in adolescents (Kewalramani, 2016).

These findings highlighted the multifaceted nature of aggression and its relationship across different models of personality. Existing studies have assessed the relationship between various domains of aggression such as hostility, state and trait anger, impulsivity, reactive, proactive, and relational aggression and personality. Therefore, it can be said that there are minimal researches which have attempted to assess the association of tri-guna personality type with different domains of aggression such as physical aggression, verbal aggression, feeling of anger, and cognitive aspects of hostility. Incorporating the tri-guna model of personality originating from the Samkhya philosophy, and Buss and Perry's operationalization of aggression may offer a more nuanced and enriching understanding of the relationship between personality types and aggressive behavior. Thus, to fulfill the outlined research gap, following objectives were formulated. (1) To study the association between tri-guna personality (Sattva, Rajas and Tamas) types with different dimensions of aggression namely, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility, and total aggression level among young adults. (2) To understand the role of tri-guna personality (Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas) type

in predicting total aggression level among young adults. Based on the above research objectives following hypotheses were formulated

- H1. Higher Sattva will be associated with lower levels of all the dimensions of aggression namely, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility, and total aggression level among young adults.
- H2. Higher Rajas will be associated with Higher levels of all the dimensions of aggression namely, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility, and total aggression level among young adults.
- H3. Higher Tamas will be associated with Higher levels of all the dimensions of aggression namely, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility, and total aggression level among young adults.
- H4. Tri-guna personality (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas) type will significantly predict total aggression level among young adults.

Method

Sample

For the intent of the present study, a sample of 103 young adults, age ranging from 18-26 years (M- 23.18, SD- 2.94) were selected using purposive sampling technique. Participants with any neurological diseases or psychological disorders were excluded from the study.

Tools

Triguna Personality Type: The tri-guna personality type was assessed using the Vedic Personality Inventory developed by Wolf (1999). It is a self-report measure that consists of 56 items and three sub-scales namely, Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. The

Sattva sub-scale consisted of 15 items, referring to the qualities associated with simplicity and purification. A sample item of this sub-scale was, "I am straightforward in dealing with others". The Rajas sub-scale consisted of 19 items, it refers to the attributes associated with intense activity, and materialistic mentality. A sample item of this sub-scale was, "I usually feel disconnected with life". Lastly, the Tamas sub-scales consisted of 22 items, it is associated with qualities of laziness, and mental imbalance. A sample item of this sub-scale was, "I have very little interest in spiritual understanding". Based on the seven-point Likert rating scale (1= very strongly disagree and 7= very strongly agree), the respondents rate the statements reflecting their Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic tendencies. The Cronbach's Alpha value found to be ranging from .93-.94 (Wolf, 1999).

The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) developed by (Buss & Perry, 1992) was used to assess aggression tendencies of an individual. It is a self-report measure consisting of 29 items, based on five-point Likert scale (1= extremely uncharacteristic of me and 5= extremely characteristic of me). It assesses four aspects of aggression namely, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. Physical aggression is the behavioral aspect of aggression, which refers to the overt acts of aggression this sub-scale consisted of 9 items. A sample item was, "If I have to resort violence to my rights, I will". Verbal aggression, behavioral aspect of aggression, refers to the propensity to engage in verbal arguments and confrontations, this sub-scale consisted of 5 items and a sample item, was, "I tell my friends openly when I disagree with them". Anger, the affective aspects of aggression which refers to feeling of frustration and short tempered, this sub-scale consisted of 7 items. A sample item was, "Some of my friends think I am hothead". Hostility, the cognitive

aspect of aggression which refers to the internalized feelings of lack of trust and ill will towards others. This sub-scale consisted of 8 items and sample item of this sub-scale was, "When people are especially nice to me, I wonder what they want". The Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be .84 and the test-retest reliability was found to be .86 (Christopher et al., 2024).

Procedure

An affirmative consent was taken from the participant. If the participants agreed to

participate in the study, they were briefed about the purpose of the present study in detail. Instructions were given to fill in the questions and they were told to clarify any doubts from the researcher during the study. Questionnaires were given to participants along with the demographic form. After the participants completed the questionnaire, they were thanked for their valuable contribution to the study. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the final analysis.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Sattva	103	73.56	10.40	1							
Rajas	103	51.24	10.34	-.355 **	1						
Tamas	103	48.80	11.45	-.511 **	.477 **	1					
Physical Aggression	103	24.10	6.04	-.103	.395 **	.323 **	1				
Verbal Aggression	103	15.80	3.40	-.066	.278 **	.221 *	.303 **	1			
Anger	103	18.42	5.02	-.275 **	.453 **	.473 **	.485 **	.367 **	1		
Hostility	103	23.10	6.01	-.340 **	.602 **	.616 **	.401 **	.403 **	.590 **	1	
Aggression Total	103	81.50	15.70	-.275 **	.586 **	.560 **	.759 **	.613 **	.812 **	.811 **	1

Note. **p<0.01 (1-tailed), *p<0.05 (1-tailed)

Correlation analysis shows that Sattva is negatively correlated with the two dimensions of aggression level namely, anger $r(101) = -.275$ and hostility $r(101) = -.340$ at 0.01 significance level. Although Sattva was found negatively correlated with other two dimensions namely physical aggression $r(101) = -.103$ and verbal aggression $r(101) = -.066$ but the magnitude of association was not statistically significant. Additionally, Sattva was found negatively correlated with total aggression level $r(101) = -.275$ at 0.01 significance level (see table 1).

Rajas was found positively correlated with all the dimensions of aggression namely

physical aggression $r(101) = .395$, verbal aggression $r(101) = .278$, anger $r(101) = .453$ and hostility $r(101) = .602$ at 0.01 significance level. Additionally, Rajas was positively correlated with total aggression level $r(101) = .586$ at 0.01 significance level (see table 1).

Furthermore, Tamas was found positively correlated with all the dimensions of aggression namely physical aggression $r(101) = .323$, anger $r(101) = .473$, hostility $r(101) = .616$ at 0.01 significance level and verbal aggression $r(101) = .221$ at 0.05 significance level. Additionally, Tamas was found positively correlated with total

aggression level $r(101) = .560$ at 0.01 significance level (see table 1).

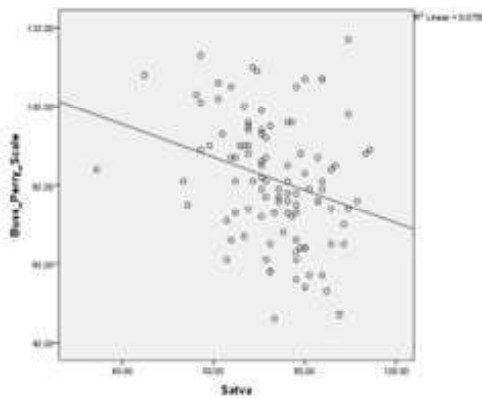


Figure 1. Scatterplot depicting the correlation between total aggression and sattva

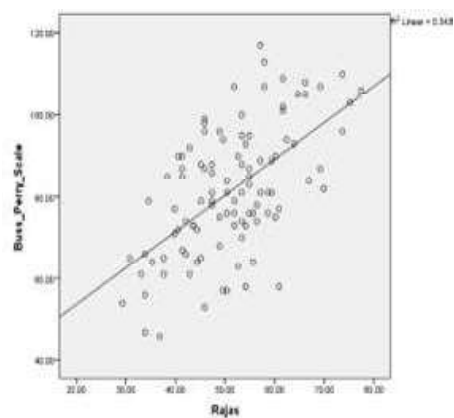


Figure 2. Scatterplot depicting the correlation between total aggression and rajjas

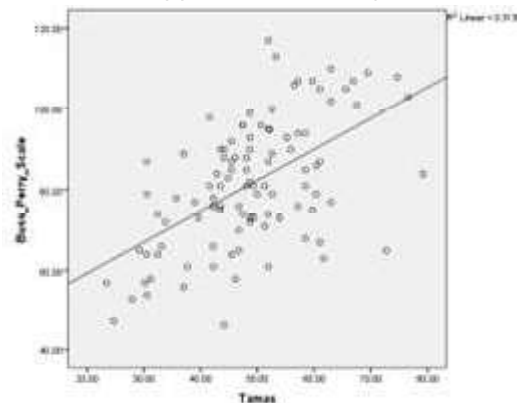


Figure 3. Scatterplot depicting the correlation between total aggression and tamas

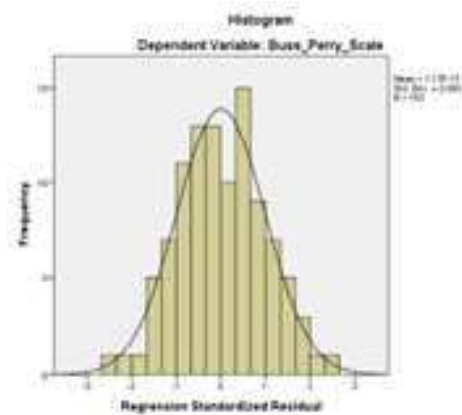


Figure 4. Histogram depicting the normality of residuals

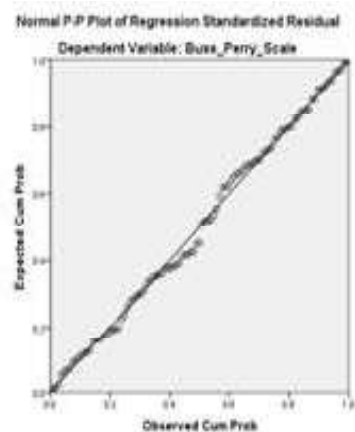


Figure 5. Normal P-P Plot of regression standardized residual

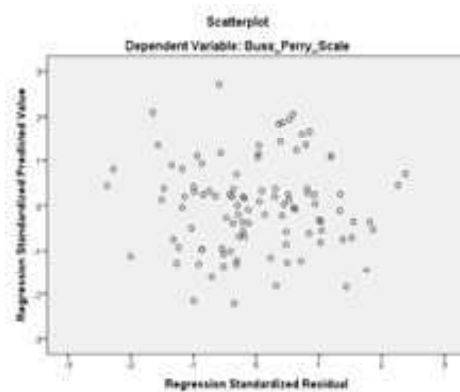


Figure 6. Scatterplot of standardized predicted value and standardized residual

Multiple regression analysis was done taking the dimensions of tri-guna personality (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas) structure as predictors and total aggression level as a criterion variable. All the assumptions of linear regression were checked. Visual inspections of histograms and scatter-plots suggested no violations of assumptions. Scatterplot revealed that the relation between all the dimensions namely Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas and total aggression level was found to be linear (as illustrated in figure 1,2,3). The values of the residuals are independent. Durbin-Watson value was close to 2 (1.64), indicating there was no auto-correlation. The values of the residuals are normally distributed. The data points in the Normal P-P plot were close to the line of best fit (see figure 4,5). Homoscedasticity assumption is not violated as no obvious pattern in scatterplot between standardized observed residuals and standardized predicted values was observed (see figure 6). Collinearity diagnostics revealed that VIF values were close to 1, indicating no multicollinearity. Further, no influential cases (outliers) biasing the regression model.

Table 2. Summary of multiple regression analysis of study variables

Variables	B	β	SE	t	Sig. (p)
Constant	2.409		6.909	.349	.728
Sattva	.078	.134	.062	1.259	.211
Rajas	.194	.332	.061	3.191	.002
Tamas	.123	.233	.060	2.058	.042

Note: N= 103, R= .670, R²= .449, F= 26.920, p= .000

Multiple regression model revealed that 44.9% (R² = .449) variance in total aggression level was explained by tri-guna personality structure (Sattva, Rajas and Tamas). The regression model was found to be significant with F (3, 99) = 26.920, p = .000 (as shown in table 2).

The standardized coefficients for Sattva obtained a value of 0.078, whose t (99) value was .0891, p = .375 which is >0.05 indicating that Sattva was not found to be a significant predictor of total aggression level. Moreover, for the Rajas, the beta value was 0.424 with a t (99) value of 4.943, p = .000, which is <0.05 indicating that Rajas was found to be a significant predictor of total aggression level. Similarly, the beta value for Tamas was found to be .397 with a t (99) value of 4.255, p = .000, which is <0.05 indicating Tamas was found to be a significant predictor was total aggression level (see table 2).

Discussion

This study attempts to examine the role of tri-guna i.e. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas in dimensions of aggression-related behaviors. Scholars have tried to define the Sattva, Rajas and Tamas in psychological attributes manifested in human behaviors. Wolf (1999) defined Sattva as a group of psychological attributes which refer to cleanliness, truth, discipline, mental equilibrium, determination and detachment. The results of the present study have confirmed that there was a negative association between Sattva and aggression. It can be inferred that as the level of Sattva increases, the level of aggression decreases. An absence or low level of aggression indicates self-control (Uma,1969), control stability (Mathew,1995) and peace (Pathak et al.,1982) among Sattvic young adults. Further, Mathew (1995), defined Rajas as a human characteristic of activation, restlessness, over-activity, uncontrolled energy, high drive, inability to remain silent or alone, and extraverted instability. This study has shown a positive association between Rajas and physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. Also, it is evident from the results that Rajas was positively associated with total aggression on the Buss-Perry aggression scale. The results of the present study indicate that as the rajas

increases the psychological attributes restlessness, over-activity, uncontrolled energy, high drive, and inability to remain silent or alone go unchecked and could lead to aggression-related behaviour. Similarly, according to Wolf (1999), Tamas is a group of psychological attributes which consist of mental imbalance, anger, arrogance, depression, procrastination, and feelings of helplessness. Moreover, this study confirms the positive association between Tamas and aggression. It can be inferred that a high level of Tamas would increase the aggressive tendencies in an individual.

It is evident from the findings of the regression analysis that Sattva is not a significant predictor of aggression. However, Rajas and Tamas emerged as significant predictors of aggression among young adults.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The present study investigated the association between triguna personality type and aggression among young adults. The findings of the present study contribute to the growing body of literature by demonstrating a negative association between Sattva and aggression and a positive association between Rajas, Tamas and aggression. These findings underscore the importance of understanding the framework of personality derived from the Indian philosophy to better understand the behavioral tendencies in individuals. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas act together and they never exist independently. An individual's mood is a function of level of gunas at any moment of time. All the gunas interact dynamically. Tri-guna model of personality encapsulates physical, psychological, and spiritual components of personality, hence, it provides a holistic account of human nature as compared to western model of personalities which integrate only physical and psychological aspects of human personality.

This inherent flexibility of tri-guna personality gives us a huge possibility of changing the gunas to achieve desirable human behaviour. Interventions can be designed in order to increase sattvic tendencies among individuals with the help of mindfulness training. Rajasic tendencies can also be modulated in order to mitigate the aggressive tendencies of individuals using training programs to enhance emotion regulation, emotional intelligence. Tamasic tendencies can also be diminished by conducting social activities in order to enhance social connectedness, perceived social support, hence lesser frustration due to their loneliness.

Despite above-mentioned contributions, the present study has certain limitations. The reliance on self-reported measures may introduce response bias. Future researches may employ longitudinal and experimental research designs, where a causal relationship could be established. Future researches may investigate neuro-biological mechanisms in the relationship between tri-guna personality type and aggression. Moreover, incorporating diverse range of demographic groups and cross-cultural comparisons may further enhance the generalizability of the findings.

In conclusion, while the present study advances the knowledge in the association between tri-guna personality and aggression, future researches may reconceptualize the construct and develop target interventions for aggression management based on the personality typologies. Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more holistic and nuanced understanding of personality and behavioral modifications with diverse socio-cultural domains.

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Prashant Singh, Ph.D., Principal Author, Cognitive Science Laboratory, Department of Psychology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. Email: prashantsingh@bhu.ac.in

Archita Gupta, Ph.D., Corresponding Author, Cognitive Science Laboratory, Department of Psychology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. Email: architagupta@bhu.ac.in

Sushil Kumar Sah, Ph.D., Corresponding Author, Cognitive Science Laboratory, Department of Psychology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. Email: sahsushilkr@gmail.com

Tarun Mishra, Assistant Professor and Corresponding Author, Cognitive Science Laboratory, Department of Psychology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. Email: tarun.mishra@bhu.ac.in

Trayambak Tiwari, Associate Professor and Corresponding Author, Cognitive Science Laboratory, Department of Psychology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India. Email: trayambak@bhu.ac.in

Priyanka Tiwari, Assistant Professor and Corresponding Author, Department of Psychology, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India. Email: priyanka.pt@gmail.com