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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Comparative Analysis of Triguna Theory and PERMA Model through Ruskin Bond's Selected Stories

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ABSTRACT

The present paper analyses the elements of Positive Psychology in the select short stories of Ruskin Bond, i.e. "The Blue Umbrella", "The Cherry Tree", "Boyhood Dream" and "Ranji's Wonderful Bat" by applying Triguna Theory and PERMA Model. This paper will present a comparative analysis of Triguna Theory and PERMA Model and attempt to show how Vedic theory complements the Western Psychological theory. Martin Seligman, the founder of Positive Psychology, proposed the PERMA Model of wellbeing in a lecture "Flourish: Positive Psychology and Positive Interventions" (2010). According to him, PERMA is the acronym for the elements of wellbeing which are Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment. The concept of Triguna originated in the Atharva Veda and was later included in the Samakhya Darsana founded by Sage Kapil. It was also included in the Bhagawat Gita. Heinrich Zimmer (1953) in his book Philosophies of India says that according to the traditional Indian Philosophy, there are three qualities i.e. gunas of matter (prakriti): interia (tamas), activity (rajas), and tension or harmony (sattva). Through the integration of Western and Eastern framework the study attempts to gain more comprehensive understanding of human behaviour and the personalities of the characters in Bond's select stories.

Keywords: *PERMA Model, Personality Types, Positive Psychology, Vedic Philosophy, Triguna Theory, Well-being*

INTRODUCTION

Ruskin Bond is one of the most celebrated authors of India. He has authored more than 500 books and is writing for over seven decades. His writings inspire, encourage, and heal. Besides being therapeutic, they guide readers to live life positively. Amita Aggarwal writes, "The plots of his novels and stories emerge from the silent sympathies of human soul, which he has stored up in his consciousness" (Aggarwal, 2005). Ruskin Bond himself was bombarded with bitter and turbulent experiences which could have driven him away from his writing career and made him a bitter person. Yet, he remained resilient by refusing to be bogged down by the circumstances and challenges of life and found solace through his writing ("Invaluable Lessons"). This research paper is a humble endeavour to analyse the characters of Ruskin Bond's selected stories namely, *The Blue Umbrella*, "The Cherry Tree", "Boyhood Dream" and "Ranji's Wonderful Bat" through the lens of Triguna Theory and PERMA Model. Both theories also help analyse personality and character based on *guna* or qualities.

As the components of the Triguna theory from Indian Philosophy are consistent with the PERMA Model, this paper presents a comparative study of the Triguna Theory and PERMA Model and shows

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how the ancient Vedic theory complements the recent Western Psychological theory. The PERMA Model is a Positive Psychological model presented by Martin Seligman, an American psychologist. He is the founder of Positive Psychology. As the new president of the American Psychological Association in 1998, Seligman chose Positive Psychology as the theme for his presidency. Along with him, the other key figures involved in founding the new field are Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Raymond Fowler. According to Seligman, Positive Psychology is about "positive subjective experience" such as joy, happiness, and well-being (Seligman, 2010). Positive Psychology focuses on "well-being, satisfaction, happiness, interpersonal skills, perseverance, talent, wisdom, and personal responsibility. It is concerned with understanding what makes life worth living" (Snyder & Shane, 2002). Unlike the old approach of psychology which was more focused on weaknesses, disorders, limitations and abnormalities, the recent branch of psychology, namely Positive Psychology, focuses on the strengths and virtues of a person instead of illness or weakness. In his article, "Building Human Strength: Psychology's Forgotten Mission" Seligman shares his thoughts about the new field with emphasis on promoting positive functioning and human strength. According to Seligman courage, optimism, hope and perseverance are strengths (Snyder & Lopez, 2002).

Seligman realised that his Authentic Happiness Theory (*Authentic Happiness* 2002), lacked two more important elements for wellbeing other than Positive Emotion, Engagement and Meaning, namely Positive Relationship and Accomplishment. He proposed the PERMA Model of well-being in his book *Flourish* (2011), adding Positive Relationship and Accomplishment as components of well-being. Thus, his new model, PERMA, is an acronym for the elements of well-being: positive emotion and engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2010). These elements are essential for experiencing a meaningful life. This theory integrates both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions, which refer to pleasure and meaning-based dimensions respectively (Chaves, Ballesteros, Madridejos & Charles-Leija, 2023).

According to *Oxford Handbook of Happiness*, "Psychology has only recently turned to investigate happiness and well-being while spiritual traditions have been scrutinizing this for millennia" (Henry, 2013). The concept of Guna or Triguna originated in the Atharva Veda and was later included in the Samkhya Darsana founded by Sage Kapil. It is also included in the *Bhagawat Gita*. Heinrich Zimmer in his book *Philosophies of India* (1953) says that according to the traditional Indian philosophy, there are three qualities i.e. *gunas of* matter *(prakriti)* that constitutes the nature. These three qualities are inertia *(tamas),* activity*(rajas),* and harmony*(sattva)* (Zimmer, 1953). "Nature is the equipoise of Goodness (*sattwa*), Passion (rajas), and Darkness (*tamas*)" which means the balance among these three qualities in the matter or nature (Kapila, 1885). *Sattava* possesses goodness and purity. This *guna* leads to happiness and harmony. It is associated with virtues, compassion, and inner peace. The *guna* named *Rajas* (desire) is the cause of all desires, ambitions and activities which can be relentless. This quality is associated with the mode of ignorance. It manifests as anger, jealousy and anxiety. *Tamas* causes "indolence and inertia" as well as darkness and illusion, manifested through fear, misery and sorrow. These three qualities exist in all beings, forming each one's unique nature, called *Prakriti* in Indian Philosophy. "In Sankhya philosophy, *prakriti* is everything we experience in the world (like the wonderful diversity of matter, thoughts, forms, activities, etc.). *Prakriti* exists as the interplay of the three *gunas* (or qualities): *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (activity), and *tamas* (darkness)" (Warsi, 2025). They are "present in all beings at all times, only the combination and dominations are different." These *gunas* influence all human actions (Warsi, 2025).

From an Indian perspective, the virtues and character traits highlighted by positive psychology are referred to as sattvic characteristics. The teaching of Samkhya through Triguna theory is that "understanding one's own *Guna* constitution is essential for personal growth and spiritual evolution," which is similar to strengths according to positive psychologists (Dasji, 2010). *Sattava* is similar to the elements of well-being whereas *rajas* can be compared to PERMA elements, engagement, meaning, and accomplishment, but not as positive elements as in the PERMA Model. Unlike the theory of well-being, Triguna Theory speaks about *rajas* as a quality that is associated with unpleasant emotions and experiences such anger, jealousy, anxiety and animosity (Perrett, 2016).

Well-being has become the central focus of both ancient Indian philosophy and modern Western studies such as Positive Psychology (Dutta et al., 2025). The PERMA Model of Positive Psychology contains the components of a fulfilling life. In contrast, Indian Philosophy has Triguna Theory for analysing personality and well-being (Pandey & Dubey, 2021). Recent research has shown an increase in interest in integrating these two models (Pandey & Dubey, 2021). A research titled, "Positive Psychology and English Literature Hand in Hand" examines positive psychology elements in the writing of Ernest Hemingway, Robert Browning and John Donne. Despite being a

relatively new field of study, positive psychology is represented in the English literature according to the researchers (Salma Javed & Javed, 2016).

RESEARCH GAP

A few studies have attempted to bridge the gap between Indian and Western concepts of personality and well-being. The present studies are not without limitations, though they have theoretical implications in the field of study (Kashyap et al., 2022). Both Positive Psychology, and Indian Psychology, which is based on ancient Indian philosophy, provide a wide scope for unearthing the treasury of knowledge in these fields. Although Positive Psychology is being represented in the English literature, according to researchers (Salma Javed & Javed, 2016), it has not been sufficiently studied in conjunction with Vedic theories. The recent study of Jha and Sukhada (2025) argues for greater integration of Indian psychological concepts like Triguna into contemporary scientific psychology. This paper examines how Triguna Theory an ancient Vedic theory complements PERMA Model, a Western Psychological theory in the analysis of literary texts using comparative analysis of these two theories to have deeper understanding of the Ruskin Bond's stories, "The Cherry Tree," "Boyhood Dream," *The Blue Umbrella*, and "Ranji's Wonderful Bat". Through the integration of Western and Eastern frameworks, this study attempts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of human behaviour and the personalities of the characters in Bond's selected stories, which have not been sufficiently studied through an interdisciplinary approach.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- How does the Triguna theory of ancient Indian Philosophy align with the PERMA model of modern Western discipline?
- How does the transition from *rajasvik* to *sattvik* states take place in the characters of Ruskin Bond's fiction, and how is well-being facilitated by this transition?
- What insights does the analysis through positive psychological theory and Vedic theory reveal about the personalities of Ruskin Bond's fictional characters?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to answer how the Triguna theory of ancient Indian Philosophy align with the PERMA model of modern Western discipline. It also seeks to analyse how the transition from *rajasvik* to *sattvik* states take place in the characters of Ruskin Bond's fiction, and how is well-being facilitated by this transition. The paper aims to make a comparative analysis through positive psychological theory and Vedic theory to have deeper understanding of the personalities of Ruskin Bond's fictional characters in the selected stories.

METHODOLOGY

The present study follows descriptive and qualitative methods, including close reading and analyses of Ruskin Bond's stories, "The Cherry Tree," "Boyhood Dream," "The Blue Umbrella," and "Ranji's Wonderful Bat." To make a comparative study of the selected stories, Positive Psychology theory, namely the PERMA Model by Martin Seligman, and Triguna Theory from Samkhya Philosophy are employed. The research is supported by existing research in the field of Positive Psychology and Triguna Theory, books, journals, e-journals, e-books, newspaper articles, and documentaries related to the study.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS THROUGH RUSKIN BOND'S STORIES

Ruskin Bond's stories like *The Blue Umbrella*, "The Cherry Tree", "Boyhood Dreams" and "Ranji's Wonderful Bat" incorporate the elements of Positive Psychology that focus on flourishing and well-being. These texts and their characters can also be analysed using Triguna theory. The following is a comparative analysis of the PERMA model of Positive Psychology and the Triguna theory of Samkhya philosophy with the help of the aforementioned stories.

As seen in *The Blue Umbrella,* Bond emphasises the beauty of nature, which evokes positive emotions. Binya is overjoyed in the hills and valleys of the Himalayas. She exhibits simple joy while playing in the rain and basking in bright, sunny valleys. "She scrambled barefoot over the rocks, ran over the short summer grass, up and over the brow of the hill, all the time calling "Neelu, Neelu!". Amita Aggarwal states:

> The story "The Blue Umbrella" is a dramatic presentation of good and evil forces at clash and final victory of basic goodness of man. The story highlights better than any didactic lesson that human vices are not inborn, but a result of circumstances…Blue Umbrella acts as a catalyst in the conversion of Ram Bharosa. In spite of occasional hold of devil, he returns to divine attributes. (Aggarwal, 2005)

Binya experiences joy and pride in owning the unique blue umbrella, which becomes a source of happiness for her and the villagers. Ram Bharosa's obsession with the umbrella reflects his deep *engagement*, but he is negatively motivated. This shows how a misplaced focus can disrupt well-being. Ram Bharosa's jealousy and obsession

with the umbrella presents *rajasic* traits which is driven by his desire and ego. *Tamasic* tendencies are reflected in Ram Bharosa and Rajaram, who try to steal the umbrella. Their transformation indicates a shift from *Rajas* to *Sattva*. At this juncture, all five components of PERMA, that is, *positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment*, can be seen in both Binya and Ram Bharosa. In "The Blue Umbrella," Binya is attached to her blue umbrella. She experiences *positive emotions* while enjoying her umbrella. She has a sense of contentment and is filled with joy. The story ends with a message taught by the protagonist, Binya, a message of forgiveness and selflessness. These are the qualities in which she finds the true *meaning* of life. This gives her a sense of *accomplishment or achievement.*

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi in their article, "Positive Psychology, An Introduction" (2000) describe the field of positive psychology in three levels namely subjective, individual and group levels in following words:

> The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance and work ethic. (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)

Binya's *relationship* with everyone specially Ram Bharosa move her towards better citizenship. In the end of the story, by giving her umbrella to him she repairs her social relationship.

In another story, "The Cherry Tree" also Rajesh and his grandfather find *meaning* in getting "engaged" with nature and surrounding. Seeing the growth of a tiny sapling gives them immense happiness and contentment. Binya and Rajesh's delightful experiences reflect *Sattva* that is the harmony with nature. The story "The Cherry Tree" presents the *Accomplishment(A)* and *Meaning (M)*. Rakesh the protagonist exhibits perseverance as he nurtures a cherry tree for many years in spite of facing challenges. His Accomplishment is seeing the cherry tree bloom. The quality of resilience is profoundly visible in the process of the growth of the plant and all the unfavourable circumstances it faced to survive and to eventually bloom. Rakesh also displays the spirit of resilience and patience by not giving up but nurturing the plant with hope.

"The soil was stony, and the dry cold winds stunted the growth of most plants" (Bond, 2018). These lines in the story, "Owls in the Family" highlight the unfavourable weather and surrounding for the growth of the plant. The narrator sets the background by giving the setting of the story that in the Himalaya foothills where Rakesh lived, there were not many fruit trees. "Nothing is lucky if you put it away. If you want luck, you must put it to some use". Through the character of Rakesh's grandfather, the story shuns all superstitions related to any lucky charm. The grandfather encourages Rakesh to "Plant it".

"The Cherry Tree" is a narrative of resilience, hope, meaning and triumph of life. Gulnaz Fatma writes, "Ruskin Bond's characters feel a spiritual affinity with nature through a single manifestation of nature. Whether it is a cherry tree, a raindrop, a single facet serves as a symbol of harmony with nature and a transcendental vision of life" (Fatma, 2013). By mapping these qualities or *gunas*, the story becomes a metaphor for how consciousness changes from being obstructed to being illuminated. The natural interplay of the *gunas* leads to confusion (Zimmer, 1953). The concluding lines of the story, "Owls in the Family", presents a portrayal of Accomplishment and Meaning as defined in PERMA model and the *sattvic* state as described in Triguna theory. Rakesh feels the bark and the leaves of the cherry tree and experiences sattvic epiphany which he expresses in these words, "I wonder, is this what it feels to be God?" (Bond, 2018). Rakesh recognises the divine essence in himself. The story through its protagonist and his experiences displays two fundamental realities which are interconnected: *Purusha* (consciousness) and *Prakriti* (the unmanifested or matter) according to Samakhya theory. Prakriti is dynamic, creative, and represents the first principle of manifestation, which includes the three *gunas: Rajas, Tamas, and Sattva*. *Prakriti* functions as an innate force that encompasses all possible causes and effects (Warsi, 2025). The hallmark of *sattvic* personality is spiritual affinity to nature as presented by this story. Rakesh has a nurturing attitude towards the plant and treats it like his child. By this he reflects the sattvic and positive psychological traits like love, compassion and patience. *Rajas* is reflected in the plant's struggle for growth and the protagonist's struggle to protect and nurture it, "thus, goodness directed by passion produces effects, unless restrained by enveloping darkness; so, obstructed by darkness the other fails in its object; therefore, this obstruction is to be considered as the end of the [third constituent]" (Banerji, 1898). The cherry

tree also shows resilience and it is beautifully described by Ruskin Bond in his poem "Cherry Tree" describing its survival as a "miracle from green growing pain" (Bond, 2013).

The story "Boyhood Dream" delves around the narrator and his friend Kamal who sells knick-knacks on streets of Shahganj and dreams of a better life in larger cities. The story begins on an optimistic note: "You must pass your exams and go to college, but do not feel that if you fail, you will be able to do nothing" (Bond, 2019). Though suggesting hope, the speaker describes his pitiful condition in a 'very small room' in Shahganj. He goes through failure, loneliness and poverty but doesn't fail to show a ray of hope as he mentions his dream. The amalgamation of bitter-sweet emotions marks the beginning of the story in these lines:

> I had resolved that one day, when I had made some money with a book, I would throw the trunk and everything else out of the window, and leave Shahganj forever. But until then I was a prisoner. The rent was nominal, the window had a view of the bus stop and rickshaw stand, and I had nowhere else to go. (Bond, 2019)

The narrator in the above lines exhibits negative emotions like sadness, regret, escapism and lack of contentment. The narrator's words, 'I had nowhere else to go' reflect his helplessness.

With aspiration to achieve something in life balances the *tamas* or darkness in his personality and his life. The aspiring writer and his friend Kamal dream of better life in some bigger city. This emphasises the purposefulness of life. These two main characters of the story have goals and desires to achieve. Their activities and passion can be described as *rajas* according to Triguna theory. The purpose driven life led by the narrator and his friend can be assessed through the PERMA model as Meaning and Accomplishment they await. They keep striving towards their goal in other words their Engagement in all that is required to reach their dream keeps them positive and contributes towards their well-being. The narrator develops a profound Relationship with Kamal. What PERMA defines as Relationship as one of the essential components for well-being, is a *sattvic* trait which is psychological and spiritual growth as the process of moving from *tamasic* and *rajasic* state to *sattvic* state. The narrator describes their blooming friendship in these words:

I began to look forward to Kamal's presence. He dispelled some of my own loneliness. I found I could work better, knowing that I did not have to work alone. And Kamal came to me, perhaps because I was the first person to have taken a personal interest in his life, and because I saw nothing frightening in his sickness. (Bond, 2019)

The story ends again with amalgamation of discouragement and hope, sorrow of failure and joy of friendship. Kamal's dream was to pass his High School exams so that he could go to the college. In spite of poverty, sickness and hardships in life he was optimistic. More than Kamal it was his friend the narrator who was waiting for his result. He rose early morning even before Kamal and frantically checked the newspapers for the result only to feel the pain of seeing his friend's dream shatter. Here Kamal had not just the capability of not being lost in the *tamas* of that moment but he also becomes a source of encouragement to his friend leading him from *rajas* and *tamas* to the path towards *sattvic* path. The narrator writes, "I realized that I was more depressed than he was, and that he was trying to console me". Further Kamal's character proves that sattvic (peace and harmony) state can be attained even while maintaining equilibrium of desires (*rajas*) overcoming darkness (*tamas*). His positive emotions(P) were not controlled by external forces; he does not give up on his engagement (E); his relationship (R) is his strength and joy of life and he continues to be hopeful in finding meaning (M) and accomplishment(A) in his life. He inspires the narrator with the same *sattvic* approach which leads to meaningful and flourishing life and the story ends with the following profound lines:

'As long as I have your friendship, almost everything else can be tolerated, even my sickness'. And then turning to me with an expression of intense happiness, he said, 'Yesterday, I was sad, and tomorrow I may be sad again, but today I know that I am happy. I want to live on and on. I feel that life isn't long enough to satisfy me'...and I knew then that I had written my story. (Bond, 2019)

"Ranji's Wonderful Bat" is a delightful story of Ranji who is passionate about cricket. It captures the essence of childhood, passion for sports, self-confidence and importance of mentorship. Traits of *Rajas* is seen in Ranji as he is ambitious to excel at cricket and prove himself. He is guided by desire and drive for success. According to PERMA theory, this can be assessed as his engagement, search for meaning and accomplishment which contribute in experiencing positive emotions.

He overcomes his setbacks which demonstrates *accomplishment* while fostering resilience and personal growth. His doubts and fears reflect *tamasic* qualities which he overcomes with *sattvic* qualities like confidence and resilience. The story also highlights the bond with his family and friends. In other words, his relationship with

others helps him achieve success and happiness. In Guna theory, it is seen as *sattvic* quality.

The delightful story "Ranji's Wonderful Bat" captures the essence of childhood, passion for sports, self-confidence and importance of mentorship. This story is a psychological journey of the young protagonist Ranji towards wellness and flourishing. He journeys from *tamasic* discouragement, failure and despair to *sattvic* flourishing enfolded with confidence, relationships that inspire and encourage. Ranji is filled with *positive emotions* each time he plays well. He exclaims, "This is the luckiest of all my old bats. This is the bat I made a century with!" (Bond, 2018). Mr. Kumar gives his bat to Ranji which becomes a *sattvic* catalyst for him as he considers his 'lucky bat'. When Ranji lost his 'lucky bat' his *tamas* traits dominate his nature. Mr. Kumar guides him by instilling in Ranji the self- confidence he needed to overcome his despair (*tamas*) and achieve his dream. Mr. Kumar tells Ranji, "It's the batsman and not the bat that matters...A bat has magic only when the batsman has magic! What you needed was confidence, not a bat...confidence is knowing you are good". The story concludes with Ranji's 75 runs becoming the talk of the town. He experiences flourishing with the presence of all five component of PERMA i.e. positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment.

Ruskin Bond portrays the world through the eyes of children and adolescents (Sharma, 2018). As earlier research findings indicated that *sattvika* was correlated with all five components of PERMA model but *Rajasik* was negatively correlated with the components i.e. positive emotion, relationships, meaning and accomplishment and *tamasic* was negatively correlated with all five components (Pandey & Dubey, 2021; Ravindra & Babu, 2021). The stories discussed validate the common thread between Triguna theory and PERMA model.

CONCLUSION

Ruskin Bond's stories provide rich examples of how the PERMA Model's components interact with the Guna personality types. The PERMA model is a contemporary model to measure flourishing and well-being whereas Triguna theory gives an in-depth explanation to why individuals reach certain states like *sattvik, rajasvika* and *tamasika*. The PERMA framework places a strong emphasis on psychological well-being through happiness, engagement, relationships, purpose, and achievements that come from developing oneself and interacting with others. Triguna theory explores their moral changes as characters progress from *Rajasic* ambition or *Tamasic* ignorance to *Sattvic* peace. When discussed together these frameworks emphasise universal principles like forbearance, selflessness, forgiveness, resilience and connection to nature and one-another.

A balanced approach that is embracing *sattvic* qualities while managing *rajasic* ambitions and avoiding tamasic tendencies—can lead to a fulfilling life. Thus, the analyses of the characters and themes through both western and Vedic models gives deep insights into achieving well-being. The study through western and Indian theories provide a cross-cultural analysis of the characters and the texts. Thus, it can be concluded that the integration and comparative study of Western and Eastern framework with the help of Literary texts give more comprehensive understanding of human behaviour and the personality types of the characters.

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