

Resilience, Secular Attitude and Forgiveness Among Indian Men & Women

Mahesh Kore^{1*}, Bharat Naik²

Abstract

The present study investigates the relationship among forgiveness, resilience, and secular attitude among adults living in Pune, India. The primary objectives of the study were to examine the interrelationship between these three variables, evaluate the influence of secular attitude on forgiveness and resilience, and identify differences based on gender and region. 113 adults were selected through a simple random sampling method and were assessed using the Bharathiar University Resilience Scale (BURS), the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS), and the Secular Attitude Scale (SAS). The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis. The findings revealed that individuals with higher secular attitudes also demonstrated higher levels of forgiveness and resilience. Female participants showed comparatively greater resilience than male participants did, while participants from rural areas were found to be more resilient than those from urban regions. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of secular values in promoting forgiveness and resilience, which play a significant role in enhancing psychological well-being and maintaining social harmony. These findings further suggest that fostering secular outlooks through education and community programs may strengthen adaptive coping mechanisms, reduce interpersonal conflicts, and encourage inclusive attitudes among individuals across diverse sociocultural backgrounds in rapidly changing contemporary society in present times globally.

Keywords: Resilience, forgiveness, secular attitude, gender, adults, psychological well-being, social harmony

INTRODUCTION

Positive psychology has gained considerable importance in today's fast-paced and stressful lifestyle. India is widely recognized as a culturally diverse nation with multiple religions, traditions, and customs coexisting for centuries. History shows that whenever anyone religious ideology became dominant, social reform movements emerged to restore social balance and equality. Despite such challenges, maintaining the secular character of the nation has remained one of the core objectives of Indian society. India has successfully faced many critical situations through its spirit of tolerance,

*Author for Correspondence

Mahesh Kore

E-mail: koremahesh@gmail.com

¹Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Shivaji University, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India

²Retd. Professor, Department of Psychology, Mahavir College, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India

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forgiveness, and resilience, which has been possible due to its long-standing secular outlook. Forgiveness, resilience, and secular attitude are important characteristics of Indian society. Forgiveness refers to the ability of individuals to let go of painful emotions and negative experiences in order to maintain inner peace and promote the welfare of others. People generally develop forgiving attitudes through their life experiences and personal understanding. Resilience refers to an individual's capacity to recover and return to normal functioning after facing difficult or traumatic situations in life [1–17]. On the other hand, secular attitude refers to an

approach that treats all religions equally without favoring any particular faith; it is a social and constitutional value rather than a theological belief. Individuals with a strong secular outlook are often observed to possess a more forgiving nature, which in turn supports the development of resilience as a natural psychological strength [1].

Resilience

Psychological resilience refers to an individual's ability to recover quickly from difficult life situations such as illness, depression, emotional trauma, or relationship breakups. In recent years, resilience has gained significant attention in psychology, particularly in understanding how people respond to stress and challenges. It involves the factors and coping mechanisms that reduce the negative impact of adverse experiences and help individuals adapt successfully even in risky or stressful circumstances. Research in this area consistently suggests that people with higher levels of resilience tend to have healthier relationships, stronger emotional control, and better problem-solving abilities [2].

From the perspective of developmental psychopathology, resilience is viewed as a dynamic and continuous process of positive adaptation in the face of adversity. It is not limited to a single characteristic but can be understood as a process, personality trait, developmental pathway, and positive outcome combined. Resilience reflects successful adjustment despite experiencing hardships and challenging conditions. Although both personal qualities and environmental situations contribute to resilience, these factors become meaningful only when they result in positive outcomes after adversity. Resilience is therefore often described as a set of inner strengths or characteristics that enable individuals to overcome challenges effectively, especially among those who demonstrate determination, emotional stability, and psychological hardiness [3].

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is not only considered a religious or spiritual concept, but it is also closely connected with human emotions, mental health, and psychological stability. It involves letting go of negative emotions, resentment, or hostility toward a person who has caused harm or emotional pain [4]. Forgiveness also reflects an individual's willingness to adopt a more positive and constructive attitude in difficult situations (Rye & Pargament, [16] 2002).

Researchers have identified different forms of forgiveness based on the motives and circumstances involved. Forgiveness that arises from understanding another person's suffering or experiences similar to one's own is referred to as vengeful forgiveness. When forgiveness is influenced by the expectations or opinions of others, it is known as expectation-oriented forgiveness [5]. Forgiveness aimed at maintaining social relationships and harmony is described as forgiveness for social harmony. Similarly, forgiveness motivated by feelings of affection and compassion is called forgiveness filled with love. Finally, forgiveness that is guided by religious beliefs, moral values, or philosophical principles is termed conscientious forgiveness (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, [17] 1989).

According to Enright and Fitzgibbons, forgiveness is often a gradual process rather than an immediate response. Forgiving someone does not necessarily mean approving of the harmful act, ignoring the situation, seeking reconciliation, or simply waiting for time to heal emotional pain. It also does not imply sacrificing one's own needs or verbally expressing forgiveness immediately. In general, forgiveness has been found to positively influence psychological well-being by reducing emotional distress and promoting mental peace and emotional balance [6].

Secular Attitude

A secular state is founded on the principle of treating all religions equally without giving preference to any particular religion as the state religion. Such a state remains neutral and impartial toward all faiths and ensures that individuals are free to practice the religion of their choice. The central idea of secularism is that the state should maintain neutrality in religious matters while guaranteeing equal

rights and freedom to all citizens regardless of their religious beliefs [7].

In the Indian context, however, secularism carries a broader and more distinctive meaning. It is not limited merely to the separation of religion and state but is deeply connected with the constitutional framework and social structure of the country. Indian secularism emphasizes non-interference in religious matters while ensuring equal respect and recognition for all religions. India does not have any official state religion, and the government is expected to treat all religions fairly and impartially. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the chairperson of the drafting committee of the Constitution of India, emphasized that a secular state should respect the religious sentiments of its people while maintaining neutrality [8].

Although secularism is often considered a Western concept, many scholars argue that the roots of secular thought in India can be traced back to the fifth century B.C. Philosophical traditions such as Charvak, Buddhism, and Jainism promoted rational thinking and questioned rigid religious doctrines. Gautama Buddha opposed ideas such as predestination, ritualism, and blind faith, and instead promoted *Dhamma* as a practical path of life. Therefore, he is often regarded as one of the early proponents of secular thought in India [9].

After independence, India formally adopted secularism as a guiding principle of governance. The Constitution guarantees citizens freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion. It also grants religious communities the freedom to establish and manage their own religious institutions. These constitutional provisions reflect India's commitment to maintaining secularism, equality, and social harmony in a culturally diverse society [10].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several researchers have examined the relationship between forgiveness, resilience, and psychological well-being in different populations. Uzma Parveen and Reetika Pal [9] (2024) studied the interaction between forgiveness, emotional regulation, and resilience among young adults facing challenging life situations. Their findings revealed a moderately strong positive relationship between forgiveness and resilience, suggesting that the ability to forgive significantly contributes to the development of resilience in young adults [11].

Similarly, Thomas and Kamble [11] (2023) investigated the relationship between forgiveness, social connectedness, and subjective well-being. Their study found that forgiveness was positively associated with both social connectedness and overall well-being. The researchers also identified forgiveness as an important predictor of individuals' sense of belonging and psychological wellness.

Monika and Lalita explored the relationship between forgiveness, gratitude, and psychological well-being. Their findings suggested that these relationships were comparatively stronger among female participants than males, indicating possible gender differences in emotional and psychological functioning [12].

Toussaint and colleagues [13] (2023) examined the association between forgiveness and flourishing while considering stress-and-coping perspectives related to self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. Their study concluded that flourishing is influenced by multiple factors such as mental and physical health, happiness, purpose in life, social engagement, character strengths, financial stability, and forgiveness.

In another study, Adeeb et al. [1] (2022) investigated resilience and forgiveness as protective factors for mental well-being among university students. The findings highlighted the mediating role of mindfulness in strengthening mental well-being through forgiveness and resilience.

Rahmandani and co-researchers [10] (2020) examined gender differences in the relationship

between forgiveness and resilience. Their results showed that forgiveness had a stronger relationship with resilience among men compared to women. Among various dimensions of forgiveness, situational forgiveness demonstrated the strongest association with resilience. The study further revealed that forgiveness of others was more strongly linked to resilience in men, whereas self-forgiveness showed a stronger connection with resilience in women.

Additionally, Momina Abeed and Sarwat Sultan [15] (2015) explored the predictive role of dispositional forgiveness on resilience among women. Their findings indicated a positive relationship between dispositional forgiveness and psychological resilience. They also reported that marital status significantly influenced both forgiveness and resilience.

Overall, previous research consistently demonstrates positive associations among forgiveness, resilience, and psychological well-being. However, limited studies have explored the role of secular attitude in relation to these psychological variables, particularly in the Indian context. Therefore, the present study attempts to address this research gap by examining the interrelationship between forgiveness, resilience, and secular attitude among Indian adults [14].

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Previous studies have investigated the relationship between forgiveness and resilience across various settings and populations. However, a review of the available literature indicates that only limited research has focused on the relationship between secular attitude and forgiveness or its association with resilience. Furthermore, much of the existing research has been conducted on non-Indian populations, leaving a significant gap in understanding these variables within the Indian socio-cultural context. Since secular values form an important part of Indian society and culture, the present study collected data from Indian participants to address this gap in the literature. Examining the relationship among secular attitude, forgiveness, and resilience may provide valuable insights for future psychological and educational research. The findings of such studies can contribute to the development of interventions and programs aimed at promoting forgiveness, strengthening resilience, and encouraging secular thinking among individuals. In addition, fostering secular values may help create a more tolerant, inclusive, and socially harmonious society. Therefore, the present study seeks to explore the interaction between secular attitude, forgiveness, and resilience among Indian adults and contribute to the limited body of Indian psychological research in this area [15].

METHOD

Participants

The study consisted of 113 adult participants, including 52 males and 61 females, who were randomly selected from the Pune district. The participants belonged to the age group of 20 to 35 years. Only those individuals who voluntarily agreed to participate were included in the data collection process.

Objectives

1. To assess the relationship between the forgiveness, secular attitude and resilience.
2. To examine the effect of secular attitude on psychological resilience and forgiveness.
3. To explore the differences among the secular attitude, forgiveness and resilience with reference to gender and region.

Hypothesis

1. Secular attitude will be having positive correlation with psychological resilience
1. Secular attitude will have significant effect on resilience and forgiveness.
2. Secular attitude and resilience will varies with respect to gender and region.

Tools Used

The data was collected with the help of following standardized psychological instruments:

Bharathiar University Resilience Scale (BURS) (Form A)

The Resilience Scale developed by Annalakshmi Narayanan [2] (2009) is a Likert-type scale consisting of 30 items designed to measure seven important dimensions of resilience. These dimensions include the ability to return to normal functioning after adversity, reactions to negative experiences, responses to risk factors arising from unfavorable environments, perceptions regarding the impact of past adverse events, problem-identification ability, confidence and hope in dealing with future challenges, and openness and flexibility toward new experiences. Participants are required to indicate the extent to which each statement applies to them using a five-point response format ranging from 1 ("Not at all appropriate") to 5 ("Most appropriate"). The scale yields a single overall resilience score, with total scores ranging from 30 to 150. Higher scores represent greater resilience, whereas lower scores indicate lower levels of resilience.

The scale has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties. It shows good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82. In addition, the scale has adequate concurrent validity, as reflected in its significant positive correlations with the Friborg Resilience Scale ($r = 0.349$) and the Bell Adjustment Scale ($r = 0.382$) [16].

Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS)

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS), developed by Thompson and colleagues [12] (2005), is designed to measure dispositional forgiveness. The scale consists of 18 items categorized into three subscales: forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of situations, with each subscale containing six items. Participants respond to each statement on a scale ranging from "Almost Always False of Me" to "Almost Always True of Me."

Each subscale produces scores ranging from six to forty-two, while the total forgiveness score ranges between 18 and 126. The overall score reflects an individual's general tendency to forgive themselves, other people, and uncontrollable life situations. Higher scores on the scale indicate a stronger tendency toward forgiveness, whereas lower scores suggest a lower inclination to forgive. The scale gives considerable importance to self-forgiveness, including items related to self-condemnation as well as understanding and compassion toward oneself. The Self and Others subscales are considered reliable and concise measures of important dimensions of dispositional forgiveness [17].

Secular Attitude Scale (SAS)

The Secular Attitude Scale, developed by Anshu Mehra and Durganand Sinha, is a 35-item instrument designed to measure an individual's secular orientation across multiple dimensions. The scale follows Likert's summated rating method and uses a five-point response format ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). The total score is obtained by summing the responses to all 35 items.

The scale assesses secular attitude through four major dimensions: secular attitude and religion, secular attitude and equality, secular attitude and rationality, and secular attitude and identity. These dimensions are further represented through six specific factors, namely socio-religious dimensions, self-definition and religion, non-religious secular code, religious morality, rational ethics, and unquestioning religiosity.

The scale possesses strong psychometric properties. It demonstrates high reliability, with a split-half reliability coefficient of 0.927 ($N = 236$) and a Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient of 0.963 ($N = 236$). The manual also reports satisfactory validity for the scale. Higher scores indicate a stronger secular attitude, whereas lower scores reflect a weaker secular orientation.

Operational Definitions

- *Resilience*: Resilience in the present study refers to the total score obtained by participants on the Bharathiar University Resilience Scale developed by Annalakshmi Narayanan. The total score generally ranges from 70 to 110, with lower scores indicating a lower level of resilience and higher scores representing greater psychological resilience.
- *Forgiveness*: Forgiveness in the present study was assessed using the Heartland Forgiveness Scale developed by Thompson and colleagues. For each of the three subscales, a score of approximately 31 indicates an average level of forgiveness, while a score of around 93 represents an average level on the Total Forgiveness Scale. Higher scores on the scale reflect a stronger tendency toward forgiveness, whereas lower scores indicate lower levels of forgiveness.
- *Secular Attitude*: Secular attitude in the present study was measured using the Secular Attitude Scale developed by Anshu Mehra and Durganand Sinha. The scale provides total scores ranging from 35 to 175. Scores below 98 indicate a lower level of secular attitude, whereas scores above 130 reflect a stronger secular orientation.

Procedure

The questionnaires for the selected psychological scales were prepared and administered separately, with individual response sheets provided to the participants. Prior to the administration of the questionnaires, participants were given brief instructions and essential details regarding the study. The objectives and purpose of the research, along with the intended use of the collected information, were clearly explained to them. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, and they were assured that their responses would be kept strictly confidential. After the completion of data collection, the responses were systematically compiled, processed, and analyzed in accordance with the objectives of the study.

RESULTS

At the preliminary stage of data analysis, descriptive statistical measures such as mean and standard deviation (SD) were calculated for all the study variables to determine the overall levels of secular attitude, forgiveness, and resilience among the participants. Following this, Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to examine the relationships among these variables.

The descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, for Forgiveness ($M = 87.16$, $SD = 8.72$), Secular Attitude ($M = 103.34$, $SD = 20.06$), and Resilience ($M = 115.02$, $SD = 18.15$) are presented in Table 1. The obtained scores suggest that the participants demonstrated moderate levels of forgiveness, secular attitude, and resilience. The findings further indicate that forgiveness levels were almost similar among male and female participants. However, males obtained slightly higher scores in forgiveness and secular attitude, whereas females demonstrated comparatively higher resilience scores than males. (Table 1)

The descriptive statistics presented in Table-2 reveal that, among urban respondents, the mean score for Forgiveness was 85.94 ($SD = 8.30$), the mean score for Secular Attitude was 114.69 ($SD = 18.16$), and the mean score for Resilience was 100.94 ($SD = 18.38$). In comparison, rural respondents obtained a mean score of 88.06 ($SD = 8.97$) for Forgiveness, 115.26 ($SD = 18.28$) for Secular Attitude, and 105.11 ($SD = 21.17$) for Resilience. (Table 2)

Table 1. Means & SD Scores of Forgiveness, Resilience, and Secular Attitude on the Basis of Gender.

Variable	Forgiveness	Resilience	Secular attitude
Male (N=52)	88.13 (9.55)	99.00 (19.61)	122.90 (17.69)
Female (N=61)	86.33 (7.93)	108.42 (19.55)	108.29 (15.77)
Total (N=113)	87.16 (8.72)	103.34 (20.06)	115.02 (18.15)

Table 2. Means & SD Scores of Forgiveness, Resilience, and Secular Attitude on the Basis of Region (Urban / Rural).

Variable	Forgiveness	Resilience	Secular attitude
Urban (N=65)	85.94 (8.3)	100.94 (18.38)	114.69 (18.16)
Rural (N=48)	88.06 (8.97)	105.11 (21.17)	115.26 (18.28)
Total (N=113)	87.16 (8.72)	103.34 (20.06)	115.02 (18.15)

Table 3. Pearson correlation among three aspects of forgiveness.

Variable	Self-forgiveness	Others-forgiveness	Situation-forgiveness
Self-Forgiveness	1		
OthersForgiveness	0.133	1	
Situation-Forgiveness	-0.094	0.345**	1

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Table 4. Pearson correlation among forgiveness, resilience, and secular attitude.

Variable	Forgiveness	Resilience	Secular attitude
Forgiveness	1		
Resilience	0.463**	1	
Secular Attitude	0.476**	0.368*	1

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

The findings suggest that the level of forgiveness was nearly similar among both urban and rural participants. However, rural adults demonstrated comparatively higher resilience than urban adults did. The results also indicate that secular attitude remained relatively similar across both regions.

Forgiveness is measured for three factors of forgiveness in Table-3. The table represents that positive correlation for others-forgiveness and situation-forgiveness significant at 0.01 level. (Table 3)

The Pearson correlation analysis among forgiveness, resilience, and secular attitude is presented in Table-4. The results indicate a positive correlation between forgiveness, secular attitude, and resilience, which was found to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The findings further reveal that the relationship between resilience and secular attitude was also positive and significant at the 0.05 level. (Table 4)

DISCUSSIONS

Indian society has evolved through the influence of diverse cultures, rulers, historical conflicts, and social transformations. Despite these challenges, the secular outlook of Indian society, which emphasizes equal respect for all religions, has played an important role in maintaining social harmony and coexistence. Such inclusive social values appear to encourage forgiveness, tolerance, and resilience among individuals. The secular character of India, as reflected in the Constitution of India, supports democratic principles and peaceful social relations, which may contribute to psychological well-being and adaptive coping among citizens.

The present study findings revealed a positive relationship between secular attitude and forgiveness, suggesting that individuals with stronger secular values tend to demonstrate a greater tendency toward forgiving behavior. This finding is consistent with the work of Thomas and Kamble [11] (2023), who reported that forgiveness positively, contributes to social connectedness and psychological well-being. Individuals who possess inclusive and tolerant attitudes are often more capable of maintaining positive interpersonal relationships and emotional balance.

The study further identified a positive association between forgiveness and resilience. Participants who demonstrated higher forgiveness also showed greater resilience in coping with difficult life

situations. These findings support the recent study conducted by Uzma Parveen and Reetika Pal [9](2024), which found a moderately strong positive relationship between forgiveness and resilience among young adults. Similarly, Adeeb et al. [1] (2022) reported that forgiveness and resilience act as protective psychological factors that strengthen mental well-being. The findings are also in agreement with Toussaint et al. [13] (2023), who emphasized that forgiveness contributes positively to flourishing, emotional adjustment, and stress management.

Gender-wise analysis in the present study revealed no major difference between male and female participants in levels of forgiveness, indicating a similar tendency toward forgiving behavior across genders. This finding is partially supported by the study of Monika and Lalita, who found that forgiveness and psychological well-being were positively related between both genders, although the association was somewhat stronger among females. The present study also found that female participants demonstrated comparatively higher resilience than males. This observation is consistent with the findings of Momina Abeed and Sarwat Sultan [15] (2015), who reported a positive association between forgiveness and resilience among women.

The results further showed that rural participants demonstrated higher resilience compared to urban participants, while secular attitude remained relatively similar across regions. Rural individuals may develop stronger resilience due to greater exposure to social responsibilities, collective family structures, and challenging life conditions that require adaptive coping skills. Similar observations have been highlighted in resilience research, which suggests that social and cultural environments significantly influence individuals' resilience and coping capacities.

The analysis of forgiveness dimensions revealed a positive relationship between forgiveness of others and forgiveness of situations, while self-forgiveness showed weaker associations with other dimensions of forgiveness. These findings are consistent with the work of Rahmandani et al. [10] (2020), who reported variations in different dimensions of forgiveness and their relationship with resilience across genders.

Overall, the findings of the present study support earlier empirical research indicating that forgiveness, resilience, and secular attitude are positively interconnected. The study suggests that promoting secular values may encourage forgiveness and strengthen resilience among individuals. In the context of contemporary Indian society, fostering secular attitudes through education and social awareness may contribute to the development of a more tolerant, emotionally balanced, resilient, and harmonious society.

Limitations of the study

The present study serves as an initial attempt to explore the influence of gender and region on forgiveness, secular attitude, and resilience among Indian adults. The current study was limited by its relatively small sample size and restricted population coverage.

Future studies may broaden the scope of research by including participants from different religious and cultural backgrounds to develop a more comprehensive understanding of secular attitudes. Further investigation into the role of educational background may also provide deeper insights into its influence on forgiveness, secular attitude, and resilience. In addition, the present research relied mainly on quantitative methods; therefore, future researchers may incorporate qualitative approaches such as interviews or case studies to gain a more detailed understanding of these constructs.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results and discussion, the present study draws the following conclusions:

1. Secular attitude is having strong and positive correlation with psychological resilience
2. Secular attitude is significantly influence resilience and forgiveness.

3. Males are marginally high in both forgiveness and secular attitude, while females are more resilient than males.
4. Forgiveness and secular attitude is almost same among urban and rural adults. Whereas, rural respondents are more resilient than that of urban ones.

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