



A New Approach to Indian Philosophy and Personality – A Study

KEYWORDS

Personality, Indian philosophy, Triguna Theory, Human Behaviour

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ABSTRACT *Bhagvad Gita is considered as a marvelous literature in the Indian context. Over the centuries, several authors have explored various dimensions of Bhagvad Gita ranging from philosophy, spirituality, politics, economics, sociology, culture, literature, language, poetry, and others. However, human behaviour does not seem to be a popular subject of analysis from the Bhagvad Gita. The author has explored Triguna theory which provides lessons for understanding personality as a dimension of human behaviour. An attempt has also been made to understand the dynamics of Gunas that is Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The Gunas inherited by an individual are liable to change due to physical, psychological and social influences and the behavior of an individual, both overt and covert is determined by the prakriti (Personality) operating at that time. As prakriti governs the perception, cognition, motivation and values of an individual, it also influences well-being. The author feels that a deep understanding in this area could go a long way in human development, which could help in understanding the relation between personality and behaviour in the Indian context.*

Introduction:

'Psyche' in different systems of Indian thought:

The well-known and revered Indian epic, The Mahabharata has also been studied for its contribution to the understanding of human behaviour and dynamics based on which there has been a tool developed (Singh, 1971), while The Bhagavad Gita which is universally acknowledged as a classical text in understanding human personality and psychology by one and all also has been the basis for a good number of tools to be developed to study personality (Das, 1991). The structure, nature and evolution of human personality are elaborated in these sources with special reference to the concept of Triguna.

The term "Trigunas" is composed of two words Tri + Guna. Sankara explains the word guna Samkhya (Bhagavad Gita, XVIII, 19) as the system of the Kapila, the subject matter of which is the exposition of the three gunas viz. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. In the Manu-smṛiti also which is a contemporary work of the Mahabharata, there is a detailed description of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas (XII. 24-52) and reference to the three pramanas. Ayurveda has used Prakriti to denote personality (Dwivedi, 2002). Prakriti comes from two Sanskrit roots, "Pra" means the beginning, commencement and source of origin and "Kruthi" means to perform or to form. Therefore, it means 'the initial creation' or alternatively this interesting word can also mean, "To come forth into creation." It represents how one initially comes into life form and further deviations take place (Singh, 2001). The Prakriti remains unchanged during the course of one's lifetime and is genetically determined.

The term personality is derived from the Greek word 'persona', or 'mask', associated with the dramatic masks worn by actors in ancient Greek comedies and tragedies. Ironically today, personality testing is designed to uncover the true personality a job candidate or employee may be masking. Personality psychology is the scientific discipline that studies the personality system. The discipline seeks to understand a person's major psychological patterns and how those patterns are expressed in an individual's life.

The theoretical expositions on Triguna and their manifestations in human nature have attracted the attention of Indian psychologists. The concept has been examined theoretically (Boss, 1966; Mishra, 2001; Rao, 1962, 1979). It is a model of personality and development of consciousness rooted in the concept of Triguna. It is the extent to which the qualities of

mind vary (sattva) called as stability; rajas called as activation and tamas called as inertia) help differentiate an individual's mind from the other minds

Objective:

- To consolidate a personality theory taking support of Ayurveda literature from the psychological perspective and Triguna theory.
- To find out whether and to what extent Indian Philosophy regarding personality closely resembles western trait psychology

Psychological Theories linkage to Triguna Theory

1. Carl Rogers – Person centered approach:

focused on self-concept theory. The 'Self' may be perceived and/or experienced either in abstract or personified form by different persons. The individual self (Jiva) depicted in the Bhagavadgita is closer to the real self in Rogers' experimental theory.

2. Abraham Maslow – Need for understanding self:

i.e. "self-actualization" for Sattvic and esteem needs "for Rajas. Tamas works only at fulfilling basic needs. He is not motivated to any higher levels of motivation as indicated by significant negative correlations with higher order

3. Sigmund Freud: Id, Ego & Super Ego & Rogers Locus of Control:

"It is the Sattva Guna that is responsible for preparing the mind to produce positive thought waves. Sattva Guna tries to bring a balance between the Rajas and Tamomanasika (Doshi, 2003).

In words of Aurobindo (1980), "all men have in them in whatever degree the rajasic impulse of desire and activity and the sattvic boon of light and happiness, some balance, some adjustment of mind to itself and its surroundings and objects, and all have their share of tamasic incapacity and ignorance". Individuals are born with certain personality patterns that gradually change as a result of interaction with the environment. Environmental factors can be broadly divided into physical, social and psychological.

Triguna Theory and Personality linkages:

A. Psychological Factors:

According to the principle of imitation, mind absorbs the qualities of those with whom one associates because mental qualities are contagious. Thus people should mix with others with

a great deal of stability (Sattva). The personality of children gets molded in line with the personality of parents. The psychic field, which develops when people interact, is determined largely by the personality of the people involved and only to a lesser extent by the quality of their interaction.

B. Cognition:

The concept of Gunas is equally applicable to cognitive characteristics (Das, 1955). A person with a Sattvic outlook on life will have an abstract memory, realistic and appropriate perception and productive and abstract thinking. A person in whom the Rajas Guna predominates will have a concrete memory, ego involve perceptions, scattered thinking and imagination. In contrast a Tamsic person would have loss-distorted perception and confused thinking. It is generally held that Sattva at the level of the cognition is perfect knowledge, Rajas is clouded intellect and Tamas is ignorance (Das, 1955). A Sattvic person has a fully developed awareness leading to very clear perception based on direct factual knowledge. On the other hand the person high on Tamas is temperamentally unstable, his cognitive functions are disturbed and hemispheres frequently (Singh, 1971).

C. Parents:

Parents who reject children and parents who are oppressive induce Tamas in children. Parents who are punitive and encourage competition promote activation (Rajas) and democratic acceptance induces self-respect and stability (Sattva) in children. A person's personality gets shaped according to the nature of interrelations with other people at home and outside.

D. Triguna Prakriti (Personality) and Behavior: -

An individual's behavior, both at the overt as well covert (mental processes) level is determined by the personality operating (manifestation of the three Gunas) at that point of time. Behavior of Tamsic people is mainly influenced by traditions while, highly Rajasic are aggressive, adventurous and risk taking, as a result of which they take initiative and interact with all kinds of persons for various purposes. On the other hand Sattvic have awareness of the effect of interactions with different persons in different situations and their social control is affected by tradition and current group norms. Highly Tamsic are highly dependent on the group. They crave attention and approval by others. Sattvic tend to be democratic stable and cooperative and behave naturally. Some of the applications are as have been discussed below in brief.

E. Motivation and Emotion:

The highly Sattvic person shows no great fear. His main emotion is selfless love, self-sufficient and shows meta-motivation. Daftuar and Sharma (1998) conducted a study and the results reveal that Sattva works at "self-actualization" level, Rajas as esteem whereas Tamas at only the "basic needs" level.

Following hierarchical order, Sattva and Rajas show negative correlation with lower order needs. Absence of lower needs along with their prime goal, i.e. "self-actualization" for Sattvic and esteem needs "for Rajas. Tamas works only at fulfilling basic needs. He is not motivated to any higher levels of motivation as indicated by significant negative correlations with higher order needs.

F. Learning:

Irrespective of Guna, all individuals learn by contiguity. However, high Rajasic mainly learned by instrumental learning. High Sattvic people have the highest degree of awareness and control and the P (postponement) factor of intelligence associated with vicarious trial and error. They are most capable of cognitive learning single trial learning, or learning by insight. On the other hand Tamsic learn by only contiguity.

G. Intelligence:

High Tamsic have least intelligence and creativity. Rajasic have very good practical intelligence and moderate creativity; quickly solve social and practical problems. They are good in science and technology. Highly Sattvic people have high flexibility, highly creative and are intuitive. They have artistic and philosophical creativity. In terms of competitiveness, Tamas have low level of competitiveness and desire, Rajasic have moderate level of capacity and the person has enough confidence to compete and Sattvic have highest-level capacity and show self-sufficiency.

H. Morality and Religion:

Sattvic have strong, Rajasic have variable and Tamsic have weak willpower. The main Tamas value is conformity to group norms and sensuous pleasures. Power and money are valued in Rajas societies. Conformity is considered normal in Sattvic societies, competitiveness is normal in Rajasic societies and selfless creativity is normal in Sattvic societies.

Conclusion:

The contribution of Indian psycho-philosophy in understanding human psychological processes (e.g., cognition, emotion motivation, etc.), has also been explored. The Triguna perspective provides a very comprehensive and holistic perspective, which would go a long way in developing a concrete indigenous psychological theory for understanding human behavior. "It is the Sattva Guna that is responsible for preparing mind to produce positive thought waves. Sattva Guna tries to bring a balance between the Rajasic and Tamsic (Rao, 2003). By importing the knowledge systems of Ayurveda and the other ancient Indian scriptures which delineate the working of human behavior and mind in detail, psychology as a science would be enriched, and be able to provide answers to many questions which are puzzling western scientists even today to a large extent.

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