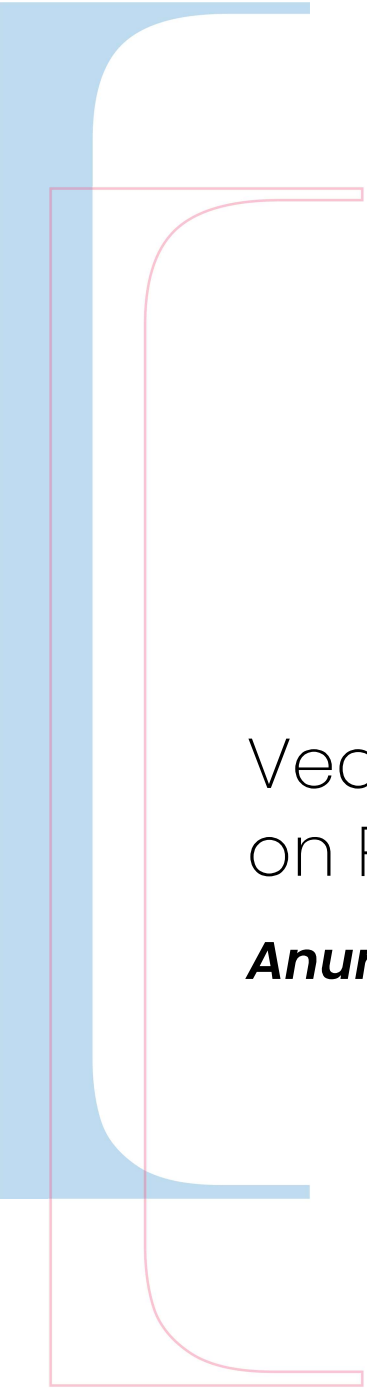




Vedantic Perspectives on Personality

Anuradha J. Bakshi

I/C Principal (Retired) & Professor, Department of Human Development,
Nirmala Niketan College of Home Science, University of Mumbai.
anustra@gmail.com

Abstract

Indian psychology has to reflect and be embedded in the Indian cultural ethos. India has an extraordinarily rich heritage of classical literature, the content of which is particularly pertinent for Indian psychology. Vedanta, one of the six orthodox schools of Indian psychology, has been identified as a foundational resource for Indian psychology, and is considered to meet the criteria for a formal theory of personality. Accordingly, the lens used in this paper is that of the nondualist *Advaita* position in Vedanta. Whereas this Indian knowledge system is ancient (with the *Upanishads* dated approximately 2000 – 600 BCE), more recent Indian Vedic scholars' commentaries of original texts, including the Bhagavad Gita, have been used as resources in this paper. Relevant Vedantic concepts are first reviewed. For example, the Vedantic Atman and the Body-Mind-Intellect, types of sheaths (i.e., Panchakosha), and types of states (e.g., the waking state). Chapter XIV of the Bhagavad Gita is the main focus of the paper, as it is in this chapter that Lord Krishna explains how Spirit when bound to Matter through the three types of attachment, yields three broad types of personality, each representing one dominant mode of material nature (i.e., the Sattva or Rajas or Tamas Guna), with the other two modes present in a less powerful form. However, the essence of this explanation is definitely not taxonomical. In the Indian classical tradition, human development is synonymous with psychospiritual development, and transcendental goals outweigh any typology. Thus, although the Sattva Guna is the most divine of the three material modes, or three types of personalities at the material level, it too represents a bondage to the material world through attachment to happiness and attachment to knowledge. In sum, a person is urged to make concerted efforts to move from Tamas to Rajas, from Rajas to Sattva, and next, beyond Sattva, to realise the Supreme Self or Brahman. Unequivocally, Self-realisation is positioned as the one true goal, the highest purpose in life. The knowledge in Chapter XIV is considered Supreme Knowledge because the Path to Self-Realisation is made visible. Recognising the tyranny and trickery of the Gunas or material modes, surrendering agency to the Lord, quietening the mind, practising equanimity, engaging in devotional service to God, acting selflessly without eyeing the fruits of one's labour, are ways to progress on this path. The Gunas or material modes regulate Vasanas, the latter being mental impressions, desires,

and tendencies that become inherent and perpetuate entanglement in the material world, veiling the Atman, the spiritual core of a person. Vasanas need to be exhausted and/or purged in the path to Self-Realisation. In a latter section of the paper, comparisons are drawn between the Vedantic personality and Allportian personality. For example, both the Vedantic personality and Allportian personality are stable; in fact, the Vedantic personality can remain stable across multiple lifetimes. However, transcendental and psychospiritual aims are unique to the Vedantic perspective on personality.

Keywords:

Indian psychology, personality, Vedanta, Guna, Vasana, psychospiritual development

“I am not this body, the bundle of elements, nor am I the senses, I
am something other than this.” (Aparokshanubhuti, Verse 13, p. 12)
(Shankaracharya, 8th–9th century CE/2011)

Introduction

Rao and Paranjpe (2016) have distinguished between Indian psychology and psychology in India. Indian psychology, they justifiably assert, “is rooted in classical Indian thought” (p. 5), whilst psychology in India is largely an “alien discipline” (p. 3), disconnected from the Indian cultural ethos. Whereas, Euro-American or Western psychology is based on more than “twenty-three centuries of Western thought” (Peters, as cited in Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 1), including religio-philosophical work (Brett, as cited in Rao & Paranjpe, 2016, p. 1), regrettably “the rich psychological tradition prevalent in India for nearly 3000 years has had little influence on what is regarded as psychology now” (p. 2) both in India and outside India (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016).

The classical wisdom of Indian psychology is extraordinarily complex, prolific and diverse, yielding multiple interpretations and models which are applicable for authentic living (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). Vedanta is one of the six principal orthodox schools of Indian philosophy (Paranjpe, 1988), a cultural resource that Rao and Paranjpe (2016) have proposed as foundational to Indian psychology. The lens selected in this paper is that of the nondualist *Advaita* position in Vedanta. The origin of this Indian knowledge system dates back to the *Upanishads* (approximately 2000 – 600 BCE) and the compelling reinterpretations of Adi Shankaracharya (788 – 820 CE) (Paranjpe, 1988). The resources used to write this paper are from

(more) recent Indian Vedic scholars' commentaries and syntheses of original texts, whose work exemplifies *Advaita* philosophy (i.e., Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013; Parthasarathy, 2023; Sw. Vivekananda [1863 – 1902]/2018). Also presented in this paper are Sw. Prabhupada's (1971) insights, whilst acknowledging that there are differences in *Advaita* philosophy and the ISKON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) teachings.

The literal meaning of Vedanta is "culmination of knowledge" because Veda means knowledge and anta is end (Parthasarathy, 2020, p. 19). Paranjpe (1988) has contended that Vedanta meets the criteria for a formal theory of personality, not just because of the relevance of its content, but also due to the precision, comprehensiveness, thoroughness, and organisation of the knowledge, openness to being tested empirically or verified experientially, and applicability to life.

Overview of Relevant Vedantic Concepts

In any theory, there is a set of interwoven concepts, that simultaneously represents the key vocabulary or jargon of the theory. Accordingly in this section, a few relevant Vedantic concepts are explained briefly. Other concepts are introduced and explained in later sections.

Dualism, Qualified Monism, and Monism

Three Vedic scholars (from earlier times) have arrived at different conclusions about the relationship between a human being and God, using the same literature; these three sub-schools of Vedantic thought are dualism (*Dvaita*), qualified monism (*Vishishtadvaita*), and monism (*Advaita*) (Parthasarathy, 2020). The *Dvaita* school, with Madhvacharya (1238 – 1317 CE) as its protagonist, claims that a person is separate from God; the person is finite, and God is infinite (Parthasarathy, 2020). Thus, a person can never merge and become one with God. In comparison, the *Vishishtadvaita* school, led by Ramanujacharya (1017 – 1137 CE), maintains that God represents the whole and the person is part of this whole; and finally, the *Advaita* school, with Adi Shankaracharya (788 – 820 CE) as the protagonist, declares oneness with God as the only truth (Parthasarathy, 2020).

These seemingly incompatible positions, however, need not be considered disparate and can co-exist as portrayed in Lord Hanuman's answer to Lord Rama about the distinction between him and Lord Rama (Parthasarathy, 2020, p. 356):

When I consider my body, I am your servant.

When I consider my mind, I am part of you.

When I consider my Self, you and I are one.

Furthermore, Sw. Vivekananda (d.1902/2018) asserted that *Dvaita*, *Vishishtadvaita*, and *Advaita* represent three progressive steps in a person's development, with *Advaita* being the goal.

Vedantic Atman and BMI

Parthasarathy (2018, 2020) has diagrammed the composition of the human being, an amalgam of Spirit and Matter. The divine or spiritual core of the person, Atman, is Spirit; the Spirit enlivens the Matter, which comprises the body, mind and intellect (Vedantic BMI). The body contains the perceiver (yielding perceptions) and actor roles (yielding actions); the mind contains the feeler (generating feelings, emotions, likes, dislikes); the gross intellect, the thinker (generating thoughts, reasoning, decisions to do with the material or corporeal world); and the subtle intellect, the contemplator (transcendental knowing). Thus, Parthasarathy (2018) has outlined the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual personalities of a person (corresponding to the body, mind, gross intellect, and subtle intellect respectively). At a material level but not at a transcendental level, Vasanas (i.e., the person's inherent nature, proclivities) determine the quality of perceptions, actions, feelings/emotions, thoughts and knowledge. The Atman is and remains pure unconditioned Consciousness, universal in all beings; when viewed through Matter, it appears as if conditioned just like the sun seen in the reflection of a pink mirror will appear pink (Parthasarathy, 2020). The drastically limited experience of the Unlimited Pure Consciousness is because of identification with and attachment to the body-mind-intellect (Parthasarathy, 2020). The goal in human development is Enlightenment (i.e., Self-realisation), which entails transcending the perceptions, actions, emotions and thoughts yielded by the body-mind-intellect, thereby unshackling the conditioning and merging with Pure Consciousness (Parthasarathy, 2020).

The Three Yogas and BMI

Regaining one's Supreme Self is possible through dedicated practice of one or more of three paths, each a spiritual discipline: *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, and *Gnana Yoga* (Parthasarathy, 2020). Karma Yoga is a "Path of Action for the body", Bhakti Yoga is a "Path of Devotion for the mind", and Gnana Yoga is a "Path of Knowledge for the intellect" (Parthasarathy, 2020, p. 164).

Types of Sheaths, Bodies, and States

To reiterate, the Atman is the core of a person. Five material layers or sheaths (i.e., the Panchakosha) form the outer layers in an embodied being, Jiva: from innermost to outermost (and from grossest to subtlest), these are the Anandamaya Kosha, the Vignanamaya Kosha, the Manomaya Kosha, the Pranamaya Kosha, and the Annamaya Kosha (Parthasarathy, 2020). These five material layers yield three types of bodies: from inner to outer, these are the Causal Body, the Subtle Body, and the Gross Body (Parthasarathy, 2020). Each of the sheaths and bodies is experienced in one of three material states, with Pure Consciousness as the constant substratum: the waker or waking state, the dreamer or dreaming state, and the deep sleeper or sleeping state (Parthasarathy, 2020). The waking, dreaming and deep-sleep states are also known as "the three ordinary states of consciousness", distinguished from Turiya, the fourth state, which is the Self-realised state of Pure Consciousness (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013, p. 701; Parathasarathy, 2023).

The outermost layer is the Annamaya Kosha or the Food Sheath, which corresponds to the physical body in the Vedantic BMI, impacted by and requiring food for maintenance (Parthasarathy, 2020). Inner to this sheath and subtler, is the Pranamaya Kosha, the Vital-air Sheath, requiring air to breathe, with the following five functions or Pranas: perception or sensing; the physiological functions of excretion, digestion, and circulation; and, thought absorption (Parthasarathy, 2020). The Pranamaya Kosha controls the Annamaya Kosha; when the Pranas function well, the physical body is healthy (Parthasarathy, 2020).

The next two inner layers are first the Manomaya Kosha or the Mental Sheath, which corresponds to the mind in the Vedantic BMI, and second, the Vignanamaya Kosha, the intellectual sheath, which corresponds to the intellect in the Vedantic BMI (Parthasarathy, 2020). The Manomaya Kosha controls the Pranamaya and Annamaya Koshas; thus, when the mind is at peace, the Pranas function well and the physical body is healthy (Parthasarathy, 2020). However, there are two red flags: first, the mind is a cauldron of emotions, likes, aversions, attachments, impulses, desires, and passions which produce agitations and restlessness; second, the mind is also prone to anxiety and worry because it tends to dwell in the past or an imagined future rather than stay focused in the present moment (Parthasarathy, 2020). Clearly, an uncontrolled mind can wreak havoc (Parthasarathy, 2020). Here is where the subtler Vignanamaya Kosha is very important. The intellect controls the Manomaya, Pranamaya and Annamaya Koshas. Sensory indulgence of the physical body and the capriciousness of the mind can be regulated through a powerful intellect, an intellect which is distinct from intelligence that is based on academic subject-matter knowledge (Parthasarathy, 2020). Parthasarathy (2020) has distinguished between intellect and intelligence by using examples of intelligence such as that of a scientist, brilliant in his/her academic field, who is addicted to alcohol. In such a case, no doubt the person is very intelligent but has a strong mind and a weak intellect.

The innermost material layer is the subtlest material sheath and is called the Anandamaya Kosha or the bliss sheath (Parthasarathy, 2020). It is the storehouse of the unmanifest Vasanas, and therefore the seed form of the personality, also called the Causal Body (Parthasarathy, 2020). Although the Anandamaya Kosha is experienced in dreamless deep sleep, it is from this Causal Body that thoughts, desires and related actions emerge in other material states such as the dream or waking states. As the Vasanas are not manifest in this layer, it means that thoughts and desires remain latent or dormant, and therefore there are no corresponding mental agitations; this allows the person to experience relative peace, which, of course, falls well short of the absolute bliss that accompanies Self-realisation (Parthasarathy, 2020).

The Subtle Body is constituted of the subtle parts of the Pranamaya Kosha along with the Manomaya and Vignanamaya Koshas (Parthasarathy, 2020). The

unmanifest Vasanas of the Causal Body are expressed in the Subtle Body as feelings, emotions, desires and thoughts (Parthasarathy, 2020). The Annamaya Kosha and the less subtle parts of the Pranamaya Kosha comprise the Gross Body, engaging in perception and action, under the influence of the Subtle Body, which in turn is under the influence of the Causal Body (Parthasarathy, 2020).

Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita, or the “Song of the Lord” is part of the epic Mahabharata, written by the sage Vyasa (Parthasarathy, 2023). It is also referred to as Gitopanishad (Sw. Prabhupada, 1971). The Bhagavad Gita is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and the mighty warrior king, Arjuna; Lord Krishna urges the despondent Arjuna to engage in right action, aligned with his highest purpose, and fight the battle of life (which in the Mahabharata referred to Arjuna leading the Pandavas against the aggressing Kauravas in the Battle of Kurukshetra). In this dialogue, Lord Krishna presents, explains and summarises every aspect of Supreme Knowledge (i.e., Vedic knowledge), ranging from the creation of the universe to one’s deepest purpose in life. Arjuna’s questions are invited, and Lord Krishna’s answers and clarifications are immeasurably helpful and impactful, for both a scholar and a layperson.

The Bhagavad Gita, the essence of the Vedas, is considered by many (e.g., Huxley, as cited in Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013; Parthasarathy, 2023; Sw. Prabhupada, 1971) to transcend the boundaries of any one faith or religion and instead to exemplify a holistic, universally applicable way of life which is simultaneously simple and profound. Parthasarathy (2023) states that all the knowledge and tools are provided in the Bhagavad Gita to overcome the negative with the positive (within our own selves) even if the negative appears to greatly outnumber the positive at the outset. Thus, the Bhagavad Gita offers philosophical guidelines for charting, monitoring, evaluating and restructuring one’s life course, with the thought-action-consequence sequences extending prior to and beyond the current lifetime. Unapologetically, any notion of a debate over one’s purpose in life is

rejected and Self-realisation is identified as the only goal, as the true goal, whilst also declaring that (ironically) seekers are far and few between. Unquestionably in classical Indian thought, human development has been synonymous with psychospiritual development regardless of whether and how many individuals pay heed to this knowledge.

Introduction to Gunas

Chapter 14 of the Bhagavad Gita spells out the three Gunas, the threads of attachment that bind Spirit to Matter. It is through these three types of attachments, that unlimited universal Spirit, at the individual person level (i.e., at the level of Jiva), is experienced as confined, limited and separate (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). Sw. Prabhupada (1971) has referred to the Gunas as the three modes of material nature.

Together the three Gunas comprise Maya at a macrocosmic level and Avidya at a microcosmic level (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013); Maya as material nature is also called Prakriti (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013; see Sw. Prabhupada, 1971). To understand Maya/Avidya, consider an (approximate) analogy from physics: Maya/Avidya is to Brahman what naïve realism is to relativity. Brahman refers to the all-encompassing Universal Self: When the individual wave loses its sense of separateness and merges with the reality of the ocean, it realises it is the ocean, one with all the waves (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013; Parthasarathy, 2023). Similarly, our essential nature is Infinite and Divine, and we can attain and experience our “Absolute Universal Nature” (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013, p. 1035). Brahman can also be called God, the Supreme Reality and Pure Consciousness (Parthasarathy, 2023), or the Supreme Personality of Godhead Krishna (Sw. Prabhupada, 1971). Although Maya is Matter, it too is Brahman itself (but with name and form) which Parthasarathy has likened to a mirage in a desert; after all, a “mirage in the desert is nothing but sand” (Parthasarathy, 2023, p. 295). Despite appearing diametrically opposed to Brahman in nature, Maya is a projection of Brahman (Parthasarathy, 2023). Sw. Prabhupada (1971) has noted that (lower) Prakriti, or the manifestation of the material world, is the separated energy of Brahman or God; being Brahman notwithstanding it can veil Brahman, but it is not false, it is real for what it is: “a reflection of the spiritual world” which is “but a shadow of reality” (p. 45).

Avidya can be defined as “egocentric misconceptions of life” (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013, p. 1033) wherein the person, lacking the right knowledge (a-vidya), mistakenly identifies with their body, mind and intellect, rather than the Supreme Self or Brahman. Because of the workings of the Gunas, the person believes and experiences their own self as defined by the limitations of their body, mind and intellect; and, in fact, most frequently as defined by the limitations of the body and vagaries/agitations of their mind (Parthasarathy, 2011). Therefore, to reiterate, Maya and Avidya are experienced because of the Gunas. It is also important to note that Brahman, from which all originates, and the Atman, the Brahman core of the embodied being, remain unaffected by Maya or Avidya just as a piece of wood attached to a metal remains unchanged, even though the combination would now be attracted to a magnet (Parthasarathy, 2023). Likewise, Sw. Prabhupada (1971) has explained that Brahman or the Supreme Personality of Godhead is never materially contaminated (whereas the consciousness of the Jiva is materially contaminated or conditioned).

Although each of the Gunas becomes manifest through its pattern of distinctive characteristics, the Gunas are not attributes or characteristics by themselves (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). Each of the three Gunas represents a type of attachment that serves to bind us to the material or corporeal world, resulting in a typical pattern of either inactivity/underactivity (Tamasic or Tamo Guna), overactivity (Rajasic or Rajo Guna), or balanced activity (Sattvic or Sattva Guna), with the Sattva Guna also being termed as trans-active (Parthasarathy, 2023). Thus, each Guna represents and fosters a climate or conditioning, which predisposes a person towards a typical pattern of either under-action/inaction, overaction or balanced action (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). What is important to note is that the climate is fostered by the individual themselves, a consequence of the quality of their prior thoughts and actions (whether in this lifetime or in previous lifetimes); it is not thrust on the individual. Thereby, the individual is neither a victim of heredity nor a victim of circumstances but is judged to be accountable for earlier actions and reparations thereof (Law of Karma).

Each of us has all three Gunas. However, the proportionate dominance of each Guna varies for each individual and this defines the person’s overall demeanour, personality and character (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). Depending on which of

the three Gunas is most prominent in the mental climate that one has fostered (up until that moment), overall one's personality is either Tamasic, Rajasic, or Sattvic.

Sattva, Rajas, Tamas

Gunas represent chains or chords that tie the Unlimited to the limited, deluding the individual in identifying with gross Matter, in experiencing a weighing down of spirit, becoming ever entangled in desires and agitations (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). The Sattvic Guna is characterised by purity, Rajasic Guna by passion, and Tamasic Guna by inertia (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.5). Sw. Prabhupada (1971) has referred to these as the three modes of Prakriti: the mode of goodness, the mode of passion, and the mode of ignorance. Although a Jiva or person is transcendental, whilst conditioned by the material world, the person acts "under the spell of the three modes of material nature", either happy (Sattva), very active (Rajas) or helpless (Tamas) (Sw. Prabhupada, 1971, p. 914).

Whereas all three Gunas are present in any person, the typical features of each Guna are visible when that Guna is most predominant in the mental climate of the person. Thus, the Sattva Guna rises when Rajas and Tamas are overpowered, Rajas when Sattva and Tamas are overpowered, and Tamas when Sattva and Rajas are overpowered (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.10). Sw. Prabhupada (1971) has termed this as differential conditioning in the material world.

Whilst the core of Sattva remains attachment to the world-of-matter, among the Gunas it is considered the most divine, fairly free as it is from rajasic agitations and tamasic indolence (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). The ever-present Light of Self, that was veiled because of ignorance (Tamas) and agitations (Rajas), now begins to shine forth (Parthasarathy, 2023). Thus, Sattva is described as stainless, thereby healthy and luminous; at the same time, Sattva binds the Infinite to the finite, sustaining Avidya through attachment to happiness and attachment to knowledge (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.6). Discernment and subtle comprehension, a keen intellect, a steady mind (not prey to emotional turmoil), astute observation, clarity, wisdom, and happiness and peace directed inward, characterise a person

under the influence of the Sattva Guna (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013; Parthasarathy, 2023). Good action results in Sattva and purity (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.16).

The relative absence of both emotional turmoil and indolence, allows the Sattvic person to be inspiring and creative, to gain vast material knowledge and build deep understanding (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.17; Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). To the extent that the person continues to desire the higher inner joys that accompany inspiring creativity and incisive knowledge, the person will effectively remain bound to the world-of-matter through the Sattva Guna (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). Here, goodness itself binds the person to the world-of-matter (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013).

Rajas is characterised by passion, and it binds through attachment to action (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.7). Thirsting for worldly acquisitions and successes, engaging in frenzied repeated action to acquire more and more, possessiveness towards what is already acquired, driven by the orientation that, “I am the doer”, lost in sense gratification, are some of the features of Rajoguna (Parthasarathy, 2023; Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013; Sw. Prabhupada, 1971). The focus is on external objects of the material world rather than a seeking inward, and chasing happiness (futilely) through incessant action to procure and possess external objects (e.g., wealth, status, property). Self-absorbed in “acquiring, aggrandising and indulging in the world” (Parthasarathy, 2023, p. 899), the mind is in a constant state of agitation rather than dynamic quietude (Sattva) or indolence (Tamas). Greed, longing, (over)activity and restlessness become the defining traits of the person (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.12 & 17). Pain, distress or sorrow is the fruit of Rajas (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.16).

Tamas is the Guna which causes the maximum delusion, with the person appearing to be in the deepest state of forgetfulness, with no apprehension of their Supreme Self (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). Born of ignorance, it binds Spirit to Matter through heedlessness, indolence and sleep (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.8). Under the influence of Tamo Guna, knowledge is shrouded, intellect is unavailable, the person fails to discriminate between right and wrong, lacks judgement, and is heedless of a higher purpose (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.9; Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). Dullness or a complete lack of luminous light, inaction and idleness, lethargy,

delusion, ignorance and heedlessness (imperviousness to a higher calling) arise when the Tamo Guna has overpowered Sattva and Rajas (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.13, 16 & 17).

Gunas and Vasanas

The Gunas direct and control the Vasanas (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013), which also shape the personality, at a much more differentiated and articulated level. Thus, two individuals under the Sattvic Guna, will have their own unique set of Sattvic-influenced Vasanas. Sw. Chinmayananda (2013) has clarified that the distinctiveness of an individual's personality is known through the "texture of the thoughts entertained" (p. 306) by the individual. Moreover, this texture of thoughts is because of an established pattern of thinking (i.e., Vasanas), based on the individual's own past. Vasanas, therefore, are defined as "pre-determined 'channels-of-thinking' created by one's own earlier ways of thinking" (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013, p. 306). Parthasarathy (2018) has referred to Vasanas as innate inclinations or tendencies. As already noted, the quality of perceptions, actions, emotions and thoughts is contingent on Vasanas (Parthasarathy, 2020), which in turn are controlled by the Gunas.

Each experience in the material world creates mental impressions, and the ever-burgeoning storehouse of these in the mind lead to Vasanas; engaging in desire-provoked actions with an eye to the results multiplies Vasanas (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). Life after life, opportunities are provided to express and exhaust one's Vasanas through Svadharma (alignment with one's inner nature); each individual, therefore, can be viewed as a "bundle of Vasanas" (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013, p. 182). However, whilst exhausting Vasanas even through Svadharma, we run the risk of inviting and hoarding new Vasanas, which will need their own fields of expression for exhaustion. Therefore, Vasana-purging is necessary for Self-realisation (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). Material austerity (alone) will not suffice here. Rather, Vasanas can be purged, for example, through surrendering the "I" and allowing the wayward mind to be regulated by discriminative intellect, engaging in selfless activities without expectation of reward, devotedly serving God in everyday activities, reducing attachment, quietening the mind, and practising equanimity in the face of challenges (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013).

Continuity of Gunas across Lifetimes

The Gunas are not absolved at death; in other words, at death the slate is not wiped clean. The Vasanas typifying each Guna have to be exhausted in embodied form. In Verse 14, it is clarified that if Sattva is predominant at the time of death, the person attains to the higher realms such as Brahmaloaka (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.14; Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013; Sw. Prabhupada, 1971), conducive to further movement on the path to Enlightenment (Parthasarathy, 2023). However, should Rajas be predominant, the person is reborn among those attached to action; whereas if Tamas is the overpowering Guna, the person is reborn as an animal or a plant (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.15 & 18; Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). It is the Gunas and Vasanas that are carried forward past death and not material gains such as positions achieved in one's career (or in society at large) and possessions acquired (Parthasarathy, 2023). Unlike the focus of many in everyday life, neither is the yardstick a comparison with others, because it is not about getting ahead of others.

Malleability of Gunas

With each new thought and action, one is likely to continue to ingrain the dominant Guna, as the tendency is to think and act in ways aligned with the prominent Guna. The mental climate, despite arising from and being bolstered by one's own thought-action sequences, begins to serve as an inherent predisposition. And yet it is not foreordained, or a chapter closed forever. Changes in actions and/or thoughts that are sustained can restructure the mental climate and the personality can change. Multidirectional changes are possible. Ideally, the Tamasic personality can be changed to Rajasic, and the Rajasic to Sattvic. However, it is also possible to move from Sattvic to Rajasic and Rajasic to Tamasic (and Tamasic to the animal or plant kingdom).

What are some strategies to effect a positive change towards the Sattvic Guna? Sw. Chinmayananda (2013) has pointed out that it is easier to change our behaviours than our thoughts. He has recommended disciplining our external actions and practising goodness; when the practice of goodness becomes a habit, the mind becomes disciplined in due course.

The malleability of Gunas can be understood also through Sw. Prabhupada's (1971) delineation of five subject matters in the Bhagavad Gita: Ishwara or Brahman, Jiva (the living being), Prakriti (material nature), time, and karma (activity). Of these five, the first four are considered eternal: Brahman or God is eternal, and Jiva is eternal (across births and deaths and transcendentally). The cycle of Prakriti is eternal, despite each material manifestation being temporary: each expression of Prakriti manifests, stays, dissipates, only to start a new cycle of manifestation, maintenance and dissolution. Time is also eternal. However, karma is not eternal. A person can be afflicted or be benefited by the fruits of their actions for the longest time, across lifetimes; yet karma is not eternal, it can be changed through perfecting knowledge and engaging in right action and devotional service (Sw. Prabhupada, 1971). Thus, Gunas are malleable because Karma is not eternal.

Beyond the Gunas

Sw. Chinmayananda (2013) has positioned the seeker as the driver of the car and the Guna-determined personality as the car's engine: "an experienced driver, knowing the nature and behaviour of the engine...can immediately stop the car...readjust the machine, and drive on towards the goal" (p. 1031). Knowledge of Gunas can help a person understand the workings of the mind, the mental influences that trigger reactions that deter the seeker from the one true path. Knowledge of how the "tyranny" (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013, p. 1033) of these influences is created through one's own past and current thoughts and actions can provide the seeker a way to transmuting Gunas and becoming Self-realised (Bhagavad Gita, XIV.1). Thus, the ideal journey of reconstruction does not stop at Sattva, as Sattva is also characterised by attachment and bondage albeit to higher goals. The eventual goal is to renunciate all three types of attachment, and thereby renunciate desire, and be Self-realised. In this vein, Parthasarathy (2020) has stated that a human being minus desires is God.

Self-realisation

When the seeker is able to see through the Gunas, recognising that the (limiting) thought-action patterns are all an outcome of the play of the Gunas, that there is a higher reality, and (once again) knows that Supreme Self, the seeker attains

Self-realisation (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). The seeker realises that the agency previously attributed to the “I” belongs to the Gunas, and in fact above the Gunas, to the Supreme Self. The “I” is annihilated, and the Self is realised. This is articulated in Verse 19 (Chapter XIV): *When the Seer beholds no agent other than the GUNAS and knows him who is higher than the GUNAS, he attains to My Being.*

Equanimity and equipoise characterise the Self-realised or the “transcendentally situated person” as opposed to the “materially situated person” (Sw. Prabhupada, 1971, p. 939). First, attention is drawn to equanimity with regard to the three Gunas: Now the person is AWAKE to the undeniable Supreme Reality and has neither hate nor longing for light (Sattva), activity (Rajas), and delusion (Tamas) (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.22); the Gunas do not have a hold on the person any more, the workings of the Gunas no longer shatter the inner peace of the Self-realised (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.23; Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). As already noted, even a Sattvic person is attached to joyous quietude, and is uncomfortable and unhappy when this quietude is ruffled by their own or another’s lack-lustre sluggishness (Tamas) or fervency (Rajas) (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). But the Self-realised person has neither antipathy nor attachment and yearning for any of the Gunas, including the Sattva Guna; the presence or absence of any particular Guna no longer matters because one is liberated from the “thralldom of ...thought entanglements” (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013, p. 1072). Equanimity is further elaborated in Verses 24 and 25: For example, the Self-realised person is “alike in pleasure and pain” (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.24), “same in honour and dishonour”, and “same to friend and foe” (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.25). Moreover, it is not just that the transcendentally situated person is equanimous; the practice of equanimity, coupled with devotional service, can itself facilitate Self-realisation (Sw. Prabhupada, 1971).

The final verses of Chapter XIV of the Bhagawad Gita bring us back to our Ultimate Refuge—Brahman. A person who has transcended the Gunas and is selflessly devoted in everyday service to God, “is fit to become Brahman” (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.26; Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). Sw. Prabhupada (1971) has remonstrated that devotion must not and cannot be sidelined in the path to Self-realisation. As is clear in Verse 26 (Chapter XIV), devotional service, along with transcendental knowledge, is essential for Self-realisation. Devotional service allows detachment from the modes of material nature, and movement from mortality, ignorance

and misery in the material world to the sat-chit-ananda (pure eternal being—pure awareness/knowledge—pure bliss) of Brahman or Krishna Consciousness (Sw. Prabhupada, 1971). By surrendering one's thoughts, emotions and activities to the Supreme Consciousness continually, and realigning these in service of the highest, one need no longer be swayed by the three modes of material nature (Sw. Prabhupada, 1971).

Lastly, in Chapter XIV, Lord Krishna declares that He is the Abode of Brahman, the Immortal and Immutable (Bhagawad Gita, XIV.27). Thus, in the tradition of *Advaita* philosophy, once the “false identifications with the body, mind and intellect are broken down” (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013, p. 1092), the wave merges into the ocean and is the ocean (Parthasarathy, 2023). The person's consciousness becomes One with the Supreme Self, who is none other than God.

Comparison with Allportian Personality

Of the numerous positions on the personality in the Western literature, one that has a stronghold is Gordon Allport's trait theory (Bakshi, 2014). Therefore, in this section a comparison is drawn between the Allportian and Vedantic perspectives on the personality.

Is there a personality?

In Western psychology, there has been an older debate whether it is the person and their traits or whether it is the situation that determines their behaviour. Allport's perspective was that it is always the person, that traits are “determinative”: “It is not the stimulus that is the crucial determinant in behavior that expresses personality; it is the trait itself that is decisive” (Allport, 1929, p. 369). Moreover, different traits function in a coordinated, inter-related pattern rather than independently of each other (Allport, 1929). In the Vedantic perspective, there is a personality at the matter-identified level, but not at the deepest level.

Origin

Allport represents the realist position in personality psychology (Caspi & Shiner, 2006), such that it is presumed that there is a real internal structure determining the personality; this real internal structure is not directly accessible but is visible in the consistencies observed in the person's behaviours. Allport cast his traits as causal entities; in other words, traits directly cause behaviour (Zuroff, 1986). Hence, Allport's stance with regard to personality is also called the explanatory position (Caspi & Shiner, 2006).

The Vedantic personality is the outcome of the play of the Gunas (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). It is a result of the identification with Matter, namely, with the body, mind and intellect (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). The personality belongs to the waker-dreamer-sleeper, the matter-identified person (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013). The matter-identified person or the materially situated person does have an internal structure that determines the personality, namely, the unmanifest Vasanas in the Causal Body that are controlled by the Gunas.

Genetics

The Allportian personality is attributed to an inherent structure that is inherited. The Vedantic personality is not passively received (i.e., it is not a genetic endowment), the person's quality of thoughts and actions creates a mental climate that results in a personality. Depending on the quality of a person's mental climate at the time of death, the person will be reborn among better (Satva), similar (Rajas), or worse (Tamas) circumstances.

Typology

Typology for the Allportian and neo-Allportian perspectives on the personality is provided through the five-factor model of personality (also known as the Big Five), represented by the acronym OCEAN: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (Caspi & Shiner, 2006; see, for example, McCrae & Costa, 1987). In the Vedantic perspective, there are three Gunas, and therefore broadly three types of personality. However, the proportion of Sattva, Rajas and

Tamas vary for each individual, yielding much greater individual differences; also, the Vasanas under each Guna are numerous, further amplifying the uniqueness of individual personalities (Parthasarathy, 2023). Importantly, there is a hierarchy within the three broad types, or the three modes of material nature, with the Sattva Guna being the most divine, Rajas in the middle, and Tamas representing the most pronounced disconnect from one's inner divinity and true nature.

Stability & Whether Innate

Stability is the cornerstone of the Allportian personality. Allport (1929) defined traits as more generalised habits. Of course, without observed consistencies in behaviour, and therefore, patterns of thinking, emoting and behaving, there can be no personality (Bakshi, 2014).

The Vedantic personality can be stable. The Vedantic personality generates inherent tendencies that endure over time, which can include multiple lifetimes. The stability is seeded through the Causal Body wherein these tendencies (i.e., Guna-regulated Vasanas) are latent; the tendencies become manifest in the Subtle Body influencing the quality of thoughts and emotions, and in the Gross Body as the quality of sensory perceptions and actions (Sw. Chinmayananda, 2013).

Malleability

In the realist position of Western personality theory, as the personality is the manifestation of an internal structure that cannot be accessed, the personality essentially remains unmodifiable. Unlike process theorists of personality such as Walter Mischel (e.g., Mischel, 2004), Allport dismissed outright any notion of the changeability of the internal structure. Instead, he contended that outer manifestations of the fixed internal structure could display some variability (Bakshi, 2014). When individual differences are conceptualised as fixed and unmodifiable, in effect one has ended up “declaring the irredeemable inequality of individuals” (Bakshi, 2014, p. 130).

In stark contrast, the Vedantic personality can be modified for the better with conscious effort (i.e., Tamas to Rajas, and Rajas to Sattva). Without conscious

effort, change need not occur, or the change can be detrimental rather than progressive. Therefore, without effort a Rajasic person can be stuck in a time warp such that the person continues to strive for worldly ambitions through overly zealous activities across current and future lifetimes. Without effort a Tamasic person invites a worsening state across current and future lifetimes.

Trans-personality

A transcendental perspective is not indigenous to the Western personality literature, whereas it is fundamental to the Vedantic perspective on personality. Transcendence is essential when the fulcrum is psychospiritual development.

The Vedantic personality is part of Avidya. The waker, dreamer and deep-sleeper states are conditioned states, whereas one's real state is Brahman or the unconditioned Consciousness (Parthasarthy, 2023). Knowledge of the Supreme Self allows a movement beyond the limitations of the waker-dreamer-sleeper personality. Self-realisation is trans-Guna and therefore trans-personality.

Conclusion

This paper was started with a verse from Adi Shankaracharya's Aparokshanubhuti. It would be fitting to end the paper with another verse from the Aparokshanubhuti, a verse which sums up the essence of this paper:

“Thus, when the Self is not known, the idea that I am the body, persists, when the Self is known, the same will dissolve in the Supreme Self.” (*Aparokshanubhuti*, Verse 87, p. 75)
(Shankaracharya, 8th–9th century CE/2011)

References

- Allport, G. W. (1929). What is a trait of personality? (pp. 368 – 372). Ninth International Congress of Psychology, New Haven, USA.
- Bakshi, A. J. (2014). Personality and self: Multiple frames of reference for career service professionals. In G. Arulmani, A. J. Bakshi, F. T. L. Leong, & A. G. Watts (Eds.), *Handbook of career development: International perspectives* (pp. 121 – 147). Springer.

- Caspi, A., & Shiner, R. L. (2006). Personality development. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Series Eds.) & N. Eisenberg (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology, Vol. 3: Social, emotional, and personality development* (6th ed., pp. 300 – 365). Wiley.
- McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1987). Validation of the Five-Factor Model of personality across instruments and observers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 81–90.
- Mischel, W. (2004). Toward an integrative science of the person (Prefatory Chapter). *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, 1–22.
- Paranjpe, A. C. (1988). Personality theory according to Vedanta. In A. C. Paranjpe, D. Y. F. Ho, & R. W. Rieber (Eds.), *Asian contributions to psychology* (pp.185 – 212). Praeger.
- Parthasarathy, A. (2018). *The fall of the human intellect* (6th ed.). Author.
- Parthasarathy, A. (2020). *Vedanta treatise: The eternities* (18th ed.). Author.
- Parthasarathy, A. (2023). *Bhagavad Gita* (4th ed.). Author.
- Rao, K. R., & Paranjpe, A. C. (2016). *Psychology in the Indian tradition*. Springer.
- Shankaracharya, A. (2011). *Aparokshanubhuti. Intimate experience of the reality. Commentary by Swami Chinmayananda. Central Chinmaya Mission Trust* (Original work published 8th/9th century CE).
- Sw. Chinmayananda. (2013). *The holy Geeta. Commentary by Swami Chinmayananda. Central Chinmaya Mission Trust*.
- Sw. Prabhupada, A. C. Bhaktivedanta. (1971) *Bhagavad-gita: As it is*. ISKON.
- Sw. Vivekananda. (2018). *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*. OPU. (Original work is dated between 1863 – 1902)
- Zuroff, D. C. (1986). Was Gordon Allport a trait theorist? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 993–1000.