

Concept of Guna from Sankhya

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Meaning and Theory of Guna

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The core dynamics of samkhya psychology is based on the theory of the gunas. The sanskrit word guna means qualities. There are three gunas each representing the qualities which govern the nature on macro as well as micro dimensions. Three gunas sattva (quality of effulgence, balance), rajas (quality of transformation/movement/dynamism) and tamas (quality of maintaining status quo/staticity/passivity), are the essential principles which are the constituents of nature and are instrumental in differentiation. The entire theory of gunas is very relevant. One can relate it to day to day experiences every moment without failure. On the mental plane these three gunas create various tendencies which can be classified into positive and negative categories.

Transient reality as function of Guna

The nature known as prakriti refers to the state of absolute potential before any differentiation starts. Gunas are the substance and the forces of nature. When they are in a state of equilibrium there is absoluteness and state of non-creation. Equilibrium means sattva transforms into sattva; rajas into rajas and tamas into tamas.

Once the equilibrium is broken the process of differentiation is nature (prakriti; the creatrix) starts. Then the mutual permutations of the gunas start which starts evolution and differentiation in nature. But despite these changes and transmutations and permutations the consciousness principle remains unchanged and immutable.

Influence of Guna on Human Behaviour:

- ❖ According to Samkhya, human psyche is immensely affected and influenced by interplay of gunas. As one guna becomes predominant we observe corresponding qualities of that specific guna in the personality of the individual.
- ❖ The human being and its nature, relies heavily on the combination and inter-permutation of three gunas. These gunas are the basic essences of one's personality and because of the different combinations of these gunas, we are shaped into a specific personality type.
- ❖ The three gunas are the causal sources of the various tendencies, qualities or psychological temperaments in human personality. A specific combination of gunas can give rise to a particular personality type.

- ❖ The study of the gunas is of immense importance from the view point of understanding the dynamics of human behaviour. If we see through Samkhya perspective we find that the different typologies of personality found in any part of the world could easily be reduced to the presence of a definite combination of gunas.
- ❖ We have seen that there are basically three types of personality found in the world according to Samkhya. These personality types are determined because of the presence of one predominant guna.
- ❖ Here predominance of one guna does not indicate that the other two gunas are eliminated from the personality rather it indicates that the two other gunas are present in subdued state, but in that state also they may be available in different proportions in personality which ultimately can result in shaping the individual into a specific personality type.

- ❖ Each personality type shows a range of personality traits, the clustering of these traits together mould the personality in a particular type.
- ❖ Gunas in Indian Psychology are the basic sources of all the traits known to psychology. Hence these three are considered the forces determine the personality types.
- ❖ In one personality type the traits of sattva, Rajas and Tamas might be found in varying proportion, depending on the nature of their combinations.

Types of Personality based on Guna:

1. Sattva predominant personality

- Sattva guna is the quality of effulgence, knowledge and wisdom. A person with Sattva predominant has mental clarity, mind is not deluded by any confusions, has clear intention and focused attention all the time.
- Such a person performs every action diligently, steadily and with relaxed alertness. In behaviour of such a person one may see lots of patience and moderation. Samyam (inner restraint) and Viveka (ability of discrimination) are the predominant qualities in such a person.
- According to Yoga Psychology, a Sattva dominant person has Ekagrata mind (one-pointed). This indicates that a Sattvik person has lots of control over one's lower mental tendencies and desires which are required in spiritual sadhana.

2. Rajas predominant personality

- Chief characteristic of Rajas guna is dynamism and potential to transform/change. One who has rajas guna predominantly active in their nature are very dynamic, passionate and energetic on the positive side.
- Predominance of rajas often leads one into spirals of varied emotional upheavals. Due to the quality of Rajas guna one becomes highly competitive, ambitious and at time stubborn and authoritative as well.

- Guided by intense desires to achieve something in life also at times becomes cause of frustration, disappointments, jealousy and anger once one fails to achieve.
- Person with Rajas predominance always in alert mode and often they find it very difficult to relax. They are very susceptible to heart conditions, hypertension and digestion related issues in life.
- In Yogic term mental state of a typical Rajas predominant person is of vikshipta (oscillating) mind. These people enjoy physical activities but find sitting still and meditating very challenging.

3. Tamas predominant personality

- Tamas is the quality of ignorance, inertia, status quo or staticity. This is one quality which holds one down from taking any initiative in life. Tamas is predominantly coloured by the characteristics of lethargy and languor.
- Mind is always clouded by confusion and indecisiveness. There is complete lack of control over one's speech, thought and actions.
- There is absence of Viveka as a result such a person is mostly guided by impulsive and instinctive tendencies. In Yoga, such a state of mind is defined as Mudha avastha (indolent state).