

Spirituality and Personality: Drawing Parallels

Varun Yadav^{1*}

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to highlight parallels between the concepts of spirituality and personality theories in psychology. With an emphasis to Ancient Indian Philosophy, the following text speaks about how modern schools of psychology like Psychoanalysis and Humanism show evident similarities with Vedic and Upanishadic views. It is important to identify such similarities between old and new knowledge, and develop integrated systems for understanding ever complex human behavior. Ancient prescriptions aid modern techniques in correcting problematic behaviors and lead individuals to overall well-being.

Keywords: Spirituality, Personality, Vedas, Upanishads, Psychoanalysis, Humanism

Spirituality and Psychology have a close connection since time immemorial. Vedic and Upanishadic views influenced western philosophers, and it is possible to draw certain similarities and patterns between West and East. For example, Emile Bréhier (1928) claims that Plotinus, a Roman philosopher who traveled Asian region in 242 CE, had such influence. Schools like Psychoanalysis came close, and Humanism-Existentialism came closer to the concepts of eastern thought. Carl Jung widened the scope of human existence by introducing the concept of 'collective unconscious,' and 'super conscious,' similar to the concept of 'Brahman.' Then, Carl Rogers' 'empathy,' Abraham Maslow's 'self-actualization,' Eric Fromm's 'ultimate union' and Roberto Assagioli's 'transcending the self to achieve higher self' though not precisely identical, seem similar with oriental concepts like 'yoga', 'liberation', 'moksha', 'nirvana.' (Prabhu, 2013)

Tracing personality concepts in spiritual texts

Ancient practices in Psychology were distinct from the contemporary profession of clinical psychology. Patanjali's 195 Yoga Sutras appear as the first Psychological Treaties upon examination. Further still, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras philosophy is rooted in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Upanishads

The core themes of Upanishads' psychological material revolve around Self, Human Nature, Human Existence, and Human Experience. Mandukya and Taittiriya are essential, particularly concerning studies on consciousness and personality. As suggested in the Upanishads, the Indian Model of Personality consists of the "Five Sheaths." These are

¹Masters in Psychology, University of Lucknow, India

*Corresponding Author

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'Annamaya' (Food Sheath), 'Pranamaya' (Vital Air Sheath), 'Manomaya' (Mental Sheath), 'Vijnanamaya' (Intellectual Sheath), and 'Anandmaya' (Bliss Sheath).

These nourish by 'Anna' or Food, 'Prana' or Bioenergy, Education, Ego, and Emotions. (Srivastava, 2012). The Panch Kosh Model is explained in detail ahead.

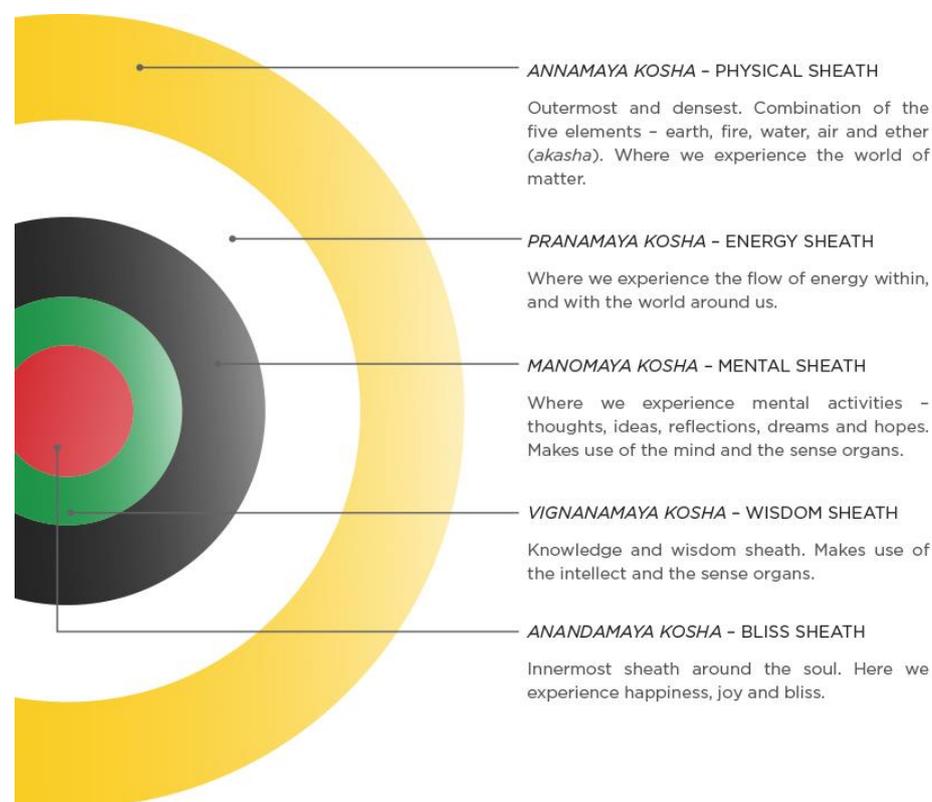


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Bhagavadgita

Bhagavadgita describes personality through the term 'Swabhaav,' which means self-becoming, equivalent to 'Para- Prakriti' or supreme nature. It is the unchanging essence of an entity independent of causal or temporal circumstances. It means "self-becoming." 'Swa' means Self, and 'bhava' means becoming. Para Prakriti (or Supreme Nature) is equivalent to Swabhava. (Aurobindo, 1918, p.502)

Buddhism

The earliest Buddhist scriptures, collectively called Tripitaka, contain discourses around psychology. Buddhism lays down methodology or a practical approach based on personal experience through introspection. Inquiry into the theories of personality brings the Concept of Self to the surface. According to Buddhism, clinging to a self-concept affects one's behavior and leads to suffering. False belief and attachment to an Ego-Identity is the primary cause of most negative emotions. (Silva, 1979)

Indian Model of Personality: Panch Kosh

Panch Kosha or Five Sheath Model appears in the Taittiriya Upanishad. It is a Vedantic Psycho-philosophical view of human personality. Analogous to the Trait perspective of

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personality, the Panch Kosha presents specific characteristics related to each Kosha. The Trait Approach to Personality assumes that relatively stable traits determine behavior. These traits are fundamental units of one's personality. It is these traits that govern behavior and predisposes one to act in a particular fashion. However, these traits are not constant throughout one's lifespan; instead, they are dynamic and are different from person to person. Allport's (1961, p.28) definition of personality seems most appropriate on this occasion, "Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristics behavior and thought."

Levels of existence

The True Self is wrapped by these five sheaths or Kosh. The goal for the True Self is to transcend through each sheath and merge with the Universal Self. This Ultimate Union or 'Yoga' shall not be perceived as an event, but rather as an ongoing process. While an individual is at a certain Kosh, they are predominated by a respective disposition. In other words, that individual can be classified as Moodha, Chanchal or Agyani. These five sheaths fall under three broad levels of existence namely,

- The Gross Body is also called Sthool-Sharir. It includes the sense organs, flesh, skin, and bones. Annamaya Kosh comes under this level.
- The Subtle Body, also called Sookshma-Sharir, is made of Mind (Manas), Intellect (Buddhi), Psyche (Chit), and Ego (Ahankar). Here are the Manomaya Kosh, and the Vijnamaya Kosh consisting of knowledge, thoughts, and intelligence.
- The third is the Karana-Sharir or the Causal Body. Made of happiness, joy, and bliss. The Anandmaya Kosh resides at this level. (Chandra, 2020).

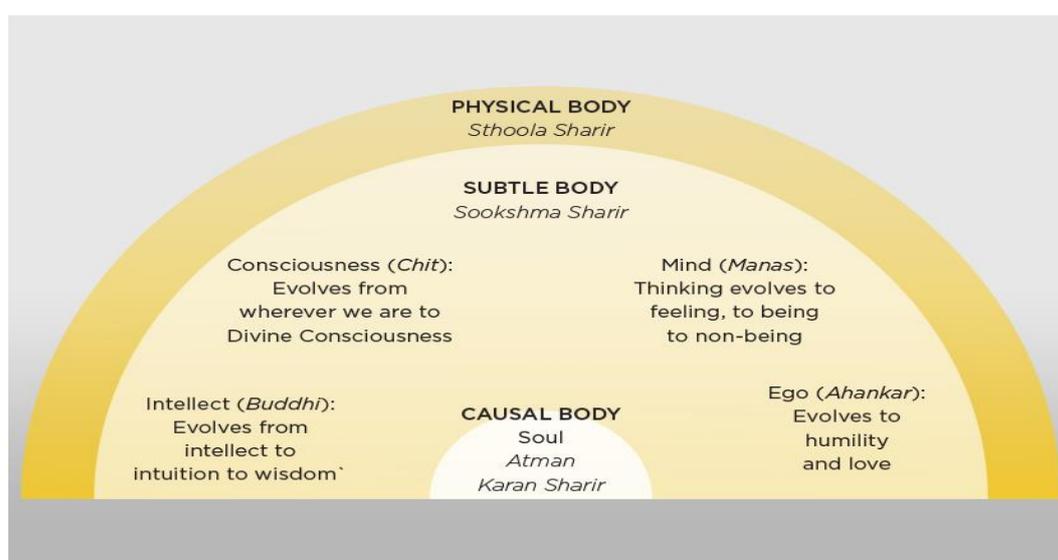


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Personality Attributes

The Panch Kosha views personality, not as an absolute but as a relative entity. A person is capable of developing through these Koshas and transform to attain eternal bliss ultimately.

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These three bodies, namely gross, subtle and causal, interact together to influence an individual's nature or personality. Hence, Humans can be called Trigunatmak or composed of three attributes. (Srivastava, 2012).

Tam is gross, Raj is subtle, and Sat is causal. The gross body is of the attribute of Tam, on account of it being gross and dense. As it has refined material, the causal body is of the attribute of Sat. The subtle body is both dense and refine, so it is Raj's attribute. The Tamsik personality shows the characteristics of being delusional, indecisive, haughty, fearful, forgetting, immature, and somewhat violent in nature among other characteristics.

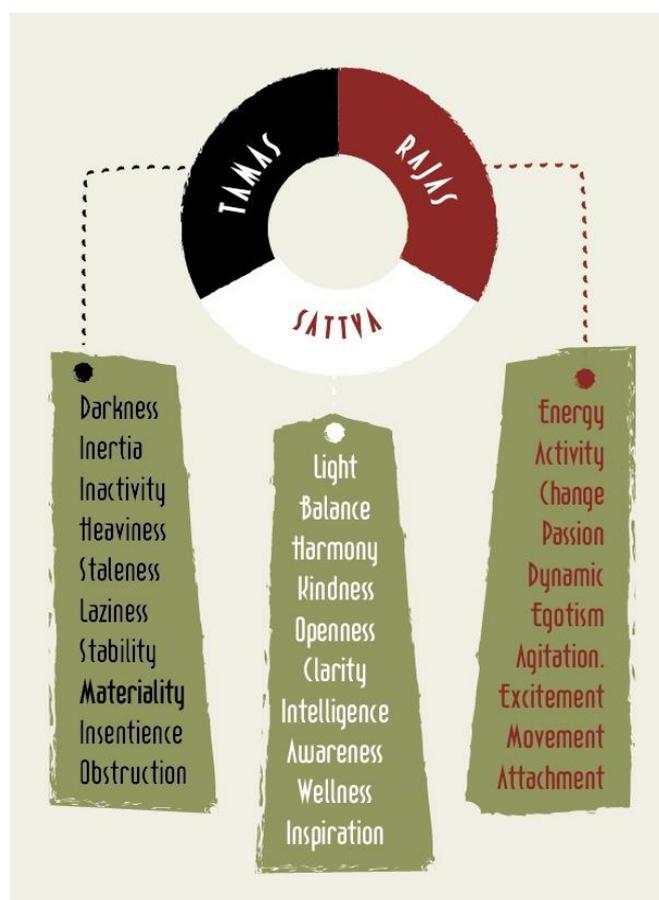


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Studying these with the Panch Kosh personality traits, it can be said that these traits may show at Annamaya Kosh. The traits of Raj, such as appreciation of beauty, pleasure, and pain; being emotionally driven; ambitiousness; unrest and pursuance of meaning may be found in people who are between Pranamaya and Manomaya Kosh. Finally, the traits of Vijnamaya Kosh and Anand Kosh can be aligned with the characteristics of Sat personality, such as kindness, goodness, contentment, nobility, joy, enlightenment; absence of fear, anger, or other ill emotions; and a general tranquility in disposition.

The three kinds of dispositions stemming from the Triguna attributes are:

- i. Silly, idiotic, (Moodha),
- ii. Fickle (Chanchal), and
- iii. Ignorant (Agyani).

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The conformity of the dispositions Moodh, Chanchal and Agyani, with the Panch Kosh characters, also corroborates how persons with these dispositions of the Triguna attributes may transition through different Koshas. Persons who attend to the physical world only are 'Moodha.' They perform the conscious plane's activities only. Persons who are hard-working, irritable, retaliative, sane, thoughtful, or selfish are fickle or 'Chanchal.' 'Agyani' would be just, selfless, and far from being violent. They are still ignorant because they remain unaware of the actual knowledge of the soul. (Chandra, 2020)

Interesting to note is that Triguna overlaps with Eysenck's Personality Dimensions. Sattva has introversion in its fold, and Rajas has extraversion. Tamas has mental disturbances or predisposition to mental disorders in its fold. Broadly, this is what Eysenck called Neuroticism.

Self-correction and self-perfection is the goal of spirituality, as is the goal of Psychology. With years of research and scientific development in the field, psychology has emerged with several therapies. These aim at either preventing or curing mental illness. Spirituality, though not limited to just this, also has similar aspirations. Spiritual schools such as Buddhism prescribes Vipasna, Vedas and Upanishads prescribe various yoga, Meditation, health plans, and a complete life guide.

Depth Psychology and Spirituality

Jung's Perspective

It will not be possible to go without mentioning Jung's efforts to synthesize Spirituality and Psychology. Often unacknowledged, Jung had a spiritual orientation which is evident in his life and work. For instance, in Zurich, Jung had inscribed over the door at his home: 'Whether summoned or not, God will be present' ('Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit'). One can sense hints of religiousness too, but Jung differentiates between religion and spirituality. Jung believed that the healthiest spiritual aim is individuation, that is, of trying to become more and more fully and honestly who we essentially are. We could therefore translate individuation as "coming to selfhood" or "self-realization." (Carl Jung, 1928).

Hence, while drawing a parallel between Jung's Individuation and Panch Kosh, the ultimate goal appears to be the same. However, spirituality is not as limited. Instead, it goes beyond the goal of self-realization and even speaks about Universal Self, commonly understood as God.

Humanistic Psychology and Spirituality

Roger's Perspective

The therapist-client and teacher-disciple relationship is yet another parallel between psychotherapy and meditation practices. Carl Rogers (1961) suggested that any relationship characterized by warmth, acceptance, genuineness, and empathy facilitates growth in the recipient of these relational qualities. So does Bhagavadgita emphasizes the importance of a teacher or a spiritual master.

“Tad vidhi pranipatena
Pariprasna sevaya
Upadeksyanti te jnanam
jnaninas tattva-darsinah” (Bhagavadgita, 4.34)

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This verse translates into: "*Try to learn the Truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth*".

Note that the teacher's essential quality is self-realization. Carl Rogers (1961) also emphasized the mastery of the therapist's personal qualities for administration. He concluded that the training of a therapist is nothing more or less than maturation or self-actualization.

"I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self-when, I am in touch with the unknown in me-when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness in the relationship, that whatever I do seems to be fully healing. Then simply, my presence is releasing and helpful. At those moments, it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the other's inner spirit. Our relationship transcends itself and has become part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present". (Roger, 1987, p.50).

Here, Rogers' thoughts are intriguingly similar to Spiritual Transmission or Pranahuti, a technique known by spiritual masters of Raj Yoga. 'Pran' means energy, while 'ahuti' means offering.

It is natural to infer that the notion of a guru or a teacher conjures an image of an overwhelming dependency. (Cohen, 2014). However, the guru acts as an aid for the disciple in finding their true-self. The guru helps the disciple tap into that innate self-actualization tendency about which Roger, Maslow, Rollo May, Eric Fromm, and Jung spoke.

Spirituality and Assessment

These ancient Indian Models are yet to be accepted as empirical measures of personality by modern psychology. Nevertheless, few efforts indicate that these models' philosophical framework is significant in understanding personality and human behavior across cultures and traditions.

'The Vedic Personality Inventory' developed by David Wolf (1999) is among the most rigorously validated questionnaires. Another tool, the Mysore Triguna Scale developed by Shilpa et al. (2012), attempted to develop scales based on Triguna and Tridosha (an ayurvedic concept to classify people on the basis of their 'Prakriti'). (Ilavarasu, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This chapter attempts to put the concepts of Spirituality and Personality in perspective for the reader. When drawing parallels between the two, the reader must be cautious. While Psychology is a science and concerns itself with empirical knowledge of human behavior, spirituality is a much broader domain that contains psychology, sociology, politics, and even medicine. That is why we are unable to find concrete definitions or classifications of personality characteristics in spirituality. Nonetheless, spiritual texts have put forth systematic frameworks of human behavior, and therefore they must be taken into consideration during psychological inquiries.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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